

Micro Era | ARTFORUM Exhibition Review

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Fang Di, *The Magic Flute*, 2009, dual-frequency video installation, color, sound, 4 minutes 33 seconds.

The exhibition, titled *Micro Era* showcased the video works of artists Cao Fei, Fang Di, Lu Yang and Zhang Peili - *Micro Era* is extracted from Liu Cixin's science fiction novels, referring to the disaster, The living beings who survived lose their sense of history. There is an interesting dialogue between Cao Fei and Fang Di, both of which respond to the current reality of high population flow and rapid changes in technology and material space. Fang Di has worked in Papua New Guinea (PNG) for three years. After work, he is a curious anthropological research enthusiast. In the video work "Minister" (2019), Fang Di tells the story of Justin, a descendant of Ukrainian immigrants from Melbourne who came to PNG because of his love for plants and eventually became the only purebred white minister. Fang Di collected a lot of historical images and official media propaganda materials and also interviewed Justin and his friends and colleagues. Instead of voiceover comment, the film directly reproduces Justin's identity, role, power and expression changes from 1994 to 2019 through specific scenarios. Another video, "The Magic Flute" (2019) shows dance of Bamboo Band, the ceremonial life of an indigenous tribe on the island of Bougainville, on the edge of Papua New Guinea's new territory, during an independence referendum. One side of the dual-screen video shows a global perspective of singing and dancing, and the other side is a part of the sturdy body of the singer and dancer moving following the rhythm. The audience needs to sit in front of tables and chairs similar to the layout of the conference room, alluding to the institutionalized relationship between seeing and being seen between audiences in the north of the world and tribal groups.

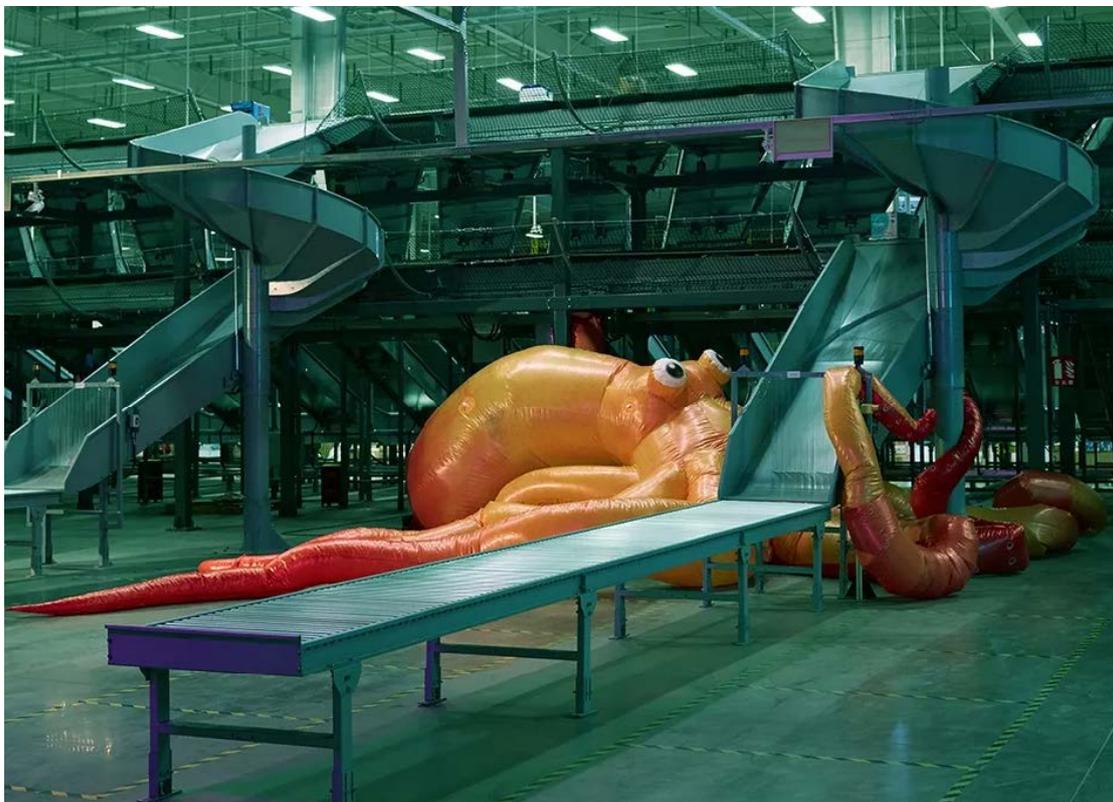


Fang Di, *Minister*, 2009, single-channel video installation, color, sound, 59 minutes and 33 seconds.

Fang Di does not symbolize his two groups of objects of concern — politicians and aboriginals — nor does he intentionally stand aside, placing the objects on opposite sides for analysis. He bluntly pointed out that the tribe's filming rights were obtained by giving residents a little financial compensation. At the same time, he also obtained Justin's interview and filming rights through establishing personal friendship. This in turn made the artist need to protect Justin's privacy and filter and control the content. Although the working method violates the operation of the classic anthropological field ethics, the relationship between Fang Di and the observed is embodied in the real care and interaction, hidden between the images—perhaps in a foreign country, complete self-assimilation and value identification can only be the self-sanctification of the viewer or the rhetoric written in the official report.

Cao Fei's video works focus on another group of homeless people in the context of globalization. "Asia One" (2018) expands the three-time dimensions of the future, the past and the present inside and outside JD's "Asia One" unmanned express warehouse in Kunshan. When the image opens in the future, the new humans discover an unmanned warehouse that has been deserted for a long time. And the mainline of the narrative unfolds in the present. The narrative thread unfolds at the moment, as the only two human employees in the unmanned warehouse discover each other's existence through surveillance cameras and try to connect through the confinement and isolation imposed on them by pipes, conveyor belts and sorters. At the same time, an ideological dance advocating industrialization to liberate human labour force during

the Cultural Revolution is playing on a large screen in the workshop. Their bodies are operated as objects in the face of cold, programmed machinery -- an equally absurd reflection of the two ages. Cao Fei's surreal treatment of the scene and his iterative application of time and space make the viewer reflect on the dialectical relationship between sensory cognitive space, constructed space and reproduced space in his own living experience. "11.11" (2018) adopts a realistic approach. The camera follows the deliverymen who work in Beijing to their workplaces that permeate all corners of the city, showing their normal interaction and "weak connection" with customers and their rented homes, showing their present or absent family members. The question is hidden behind the camera: "Are you worried about automation, artificial intelligence will replace your work?" The answers to these individuals are not entirely negative. It is based on the film's representation and interpretation of their daily lives that the viewer can understand the source of their imagination and expectations.



Cao Fei, *Asia One*, 2018, single-channel video installation, color, sound, 63 minutes 20 seconds.

In the images of the two artists, the place is not reduced to a general formula of global non-place, but presented as a relational space, participating in the emergent events that are involved or triggered by the artist. Their approach to work echoes Ulrich Beck's "Cosmopolitan empathy", allowing viewers to experience empathy through perception rather than concept.



Cao Fei, Asia One, 2018, single-channel video installation, color, sound, 63 minutes 20 seconds.