

Soul Hunters

Producer: Sui Qun

Curator: Lu Mingjun

Artists: Chen Zhou, Ma Jianfeng, Manuel Mathieu, Qiu Ruixiang, Wang Tuo, Yuan Zhongtian, Zhu Changquan

Duration: March 27th - June 26th, 2022

Private View: 4pm, March 27th 2022

Address: 2nd-floor Building F, Wuhan Living Room, No.8 Hongtu Avenue, Wuhan.

"Soul Hunters" is derived from the eponymous book by Danish anthropologist Rane Willerslev. In this classic ethnography, Rane examines the subsistence structure and spiritual world of the Yukaghir, a little-known "indigenous" people living in the upper Kolyma River region of northeastern Siberia. Rane finds that "the Yukaghir seem to live in a "hall of mirrors", where humans, animals and spirits co-inhabit, and are therefore considered to be endless imitations of each other. Among them, human being is actually in an "in-between state", where their soul is both tangible and intangible. Their body and soul are one, and they are both the individual self and the regenerated other".

For us today, the "hall of mirrors" of the Yukaghir is not an isolated case, so there is no lack of universal mirror significance. The "animism" in the eyes of the Yukaghir does not confer autonomous rights and free will on things (including animals), nor is it "anti-anthropocentrism". What it contributes to us is the possibility of a mimetic coexistence between humans, animals and spirits. Rane finds that here the hunter and the prey imitate each other, and the humanity of the elk is not experienced as an attribute of the animal itself, but in a position of the relationship of the mutual imitation. The Yukaghir cannot say with certainty that the elk is human, yet he must say so because if he denies the animal's capacity for consciousness, intention and emotion, he denies himself of these capacities. There is no hunter without prey, just as there is no living without the soul of the dead. Therefore, the hunter's fear is not only from the threat of prey, but also the main god of prey. So hunters have another identity, namely, the shaman. For them, the acquisition of prey is essentially an exchange with the gods. And it is not faith, but sex, that maintains the intimacy between the gods and the hunters as shamans.

"Whenever the Yukaghir have too much luck in hunting, they suspect that they are loved by the gods, because the gods try to do them favor by giving them prey, thus finally killing themselves and bringing their souls to the gods to live with. So an extremely lucky hunter must stop in time or he will face the disaster of death." Here, people can endow animals with emotion and will, and

animals can also be regarded as gods; conversely, gods can incarnate as people, or attach themselves to animals.

The exhibition features seven artists: Chen Zhou, Ma Jianfeng, Manuel Mathieu, Qiu Ruixiang, Wang Tuo, Yuan Zhongtian, and Zhu Changquan. Chen Zhou's *Alive Game* (2017) and *In Dream* (2018) are two of his early experimental short films. In *Alive Game*, a pair of souls from a century ago are discussing what it feels like to be alive in a cemetery, and a young man is being interviewed and asked what memory is. In *In Dream*, a soul is taking pictures of a skeleton in a mountain, and a baby is sleeping. Ma Jianfeng brings a set of alien paintings where he imitates how the craftsmen as believers make and depict prayer flags. At the same time, we can also imagine them as carvers of animal images on cave walls tens of thousands of years ago. Manuel Mathieu, an artist from Haiti, has always seen himself as a son of voodoo, and for him, painting is a voodoo ritual. The dark images that Qiu Ruixiang paints are so obscure that even he is not sure whether they are human beings, objects or ghosts.

In the film *Close, Closer*, Yuan Zhongtian pieced together his mother Wang Qingli's adventure to Lugu Lake in 1993, weaving an overlapping narrative of intimacy, settlement colonialism, matriarchy, tourism, and the art market. *Tungus*, the third chapter in Wang Tuo's Northeast tetralogy, is also a multi-temporal overlapping narrative. The images present the temporal and spatial connections between multiple groups of people at different geographical coordinates on their way home. "Characters on different historical threads evoke that uncanny synchronicity across time and space in their respective struggles. It is here that they reveal their awareness of the eternal chaos of the world." In this regard, in the new work *I'm Disguised, Right in front of You*, Zhu Changquan casts his perspective on the origin of mankind - monkeys. This is more like an ultimate torture, but in fact, the "hundred-eyed monkey" in the film is a digital image. In the real world, it is just a piece of data. It is replaceable and can be a stone, a leaf, light, or no image at all. From another perspective, it actually simulates or reproduces a world in which the boundaries between human beings, objects (data) and gods are completely lost.

The exhibition site creates a world like the "hall of mirrors" of the Yukaghir. However, the question here is how can one not be separated from others (including human and non-human, living and dead, etc.), while at the same time guarding one's own intention and agency?

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Chen Zhou

Chen Zhou (b. 1987, China) currently lives and works in Shanghai. Chen Zhou is a multidisciplinary artist whose practice involves cinematic language, painting and writing. He believes the act of labeling is a prison and that freedom resides in that uncertain moment before definition. Whether it is by exploring death in contemporary life, or by deconstructing our existence in a humorous way, Chen Zhou's works revolve around imprisonment and liberation. Always attempting to dismantle restrictive structures, Chen Zhou's works reveal the absurdity of labels and shed light over the uncertainty of today's world. He now lives and works in Shanghai.

His first feature, *Life Imitation* (2017), received the New: Vision Award at the CPH: DOX Film Festival, Asian Perspective Award at DMZ film festival, and has been included in the Official Selection of 61st BFI London Film Festival. He is also selected of ArtReview Future Greats 2018.

His latest project *Blue Hole* was exhibited at White Cube Hong Kong in 2018. His solo exhibitions include: *The mirror will soon disappear in the world, Chapter I: The illusion in the mirror makes me hardly see the mirror*, Cc Foundation, Shanghai, China(2020); *Stayed, 7*, Hunsand Space, Beijing, China(2019); *Kaufman*, AikeDellarco, Shanghai, China(2014); *I'm not not not* Chen Zhou, Magician Space, Beijing, China (2013); *Talk*, Platform China Contemporary Art Institute, Beijing, China (2009). Recent group exhibitions he participated include: *How Do We Begin?*, X-Museum, Beijing, China(2020) ; *Age of You*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Toronto (2019); *Emerald City*, chi K11 Art Foundation Pop-up Space, Hong Kong, China (2018); *Cold Nights*, Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing (2017); 2nd Asian Film and Video Art Forum (AFVAF), National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, Korea (2017); *After Us*, chi K11 Art Museum, Shanghai, China (2017).

Ma Jianfeng

Ma Jianfeng was born in Zhejiang in 1983, graduated from the Department of Mural Painting at China Academy of Art in 2007. He received his Meisterschüler at the University of the Arts Berlin in 2012. Currently he lives and works in Beijing, China.

Ma Jianfeng is adept at creating artworks from scrap materials found in everyday life. By configuring them into shapes, dismantling, reassembling and displaying them, the artist disrupts the order of elements intrinsic to these found materials and images. Displaying his works as painting installations, he creates chaotic and theatrical spaces brimming with ambiguity and vitality.

His major exhibitions include *Ma Jianfeng: In Time*, Sandwich Gallery, Bucharest, RO (2021); *Irreconcilable*, Magician Space, Beijing, CN (2021); *Plant Time*, 69 CAMPUS Art Center, Beijing, CN (2021); *The Memory Palace*, OCAT Shenzhen X Hua Art Museum, Shenzhen, CN (2021); *Let Painting Talk*, Taikang Space, Beijing, CN (2021); *Being of Evils*, Hive Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, CN (2020); *Garage Sale*, Sandwich Gallery, Bucharest, RO (2019); *Ghost Island, I*: project space, Beijing, CN (2019); *Extreme Mix*, Guangzhou Airport

Biennale, Guangzhou, CN (2019) ; Ma Jianfeng: Treasure Island, GAO Gallery, London, UK (2019); Asia Culture Center, Gwangju, KOR (2018); The U-Cloister, Institute for Provocation, Beijing, CN (2018); The New Normal: China, Art and 2017, UCCA, Beijing, CN (2017); MA, Ying Space, Beijing, CN (2016); Never Arriving, OCAT Xi'an, Xi'an, CN (2014); Wall, Don Gallery, Beijing, CN (2013).

Manuel Mathieu

Born in Haiti in 1986, Manuel Mathieu has already been widely exhibited. He enjoyed solo presentations of his work at the Power Plant in Toronto as well as at the Museum of Fine Arts Montreal. More recently, he participated in group exhibitions at Paul Kasmin Gallery New York and Gagosian Gallery London and at Song Museum Beijing. A major new exhibition of his works will be held in the summer of 2022 at Longlati Foundation in Shanghai.

Qiu Ruixiang

Qiu Ruixiang, born in Shanxi, China, 1980. Graduated from Xi'an Academy of Fine arts, Oil Painting Department in 2003. Currently living and working in Xi'an, China. Qiu Ruixiang continues to work diligently within the painting, and continues to unfold his imagination within traditional formal linguistic elements and historical mechanisms. Qiu Ruixiang's subject matter is derived from everyday memories and moments from life. Where Qiu Ruixiang differs is that he does not rely on some specific base image or motif to translate that subject matter onto the canvas. Instead, he relies on a certain awareness or sense to clip, warp and reposition different images and signs into paintings that are perhaps far removed from the original memories or images to construct a Wagnerian stage with a certain mystique and symbolism.

Selected solo exhibitions: "Contact", Platform China Contemporary Art Institute, Beijing, China (2021); "Groping in the dark", OCAT Contemporary Art Center Museum in Xi'an, Xi'an, China (2018); "Rabbit, Den and Barn", Platform China Contemporary Art Institute, Beijing, China (2017); "Qiu Ruixiang", Platform China Contemporary Art Institute, Hongkong, China (2015); "Portrait Of Self", Platform China Contemporary Art Institute, Beijing, China (2014); "Untitled", Fun Art Space, Beijing, China (2010).

Selected group exhibitions: "Carefree Days", Platform China Contemporary Art Institute, Beijing, China (2022); "Spring Fever", Platform China Contemporary Art Institute, Beijing, China (2021); "Sign, Secret Realm, World Center", QIANHULIU ART SPACE, Xi'an, China (2021); "15th Anniversary Special Exhibition", Platform China Contemporary Art Institute, Beijing, China (2020); "Being of Evils", Hive center for contemporary art, Beijing, China (2020); "Jungle III - Common", Platform China Contemporary Art Institute, Beijing, China (2017); "Each to His Own - Li Wendong & Wei Xingye Collection", OCAT Contemporary Art Xi'an, Xi'an (2016); "Ivy Art 2015 Chinese Young Artists Annual Exhibition", Today Art Museum, Beijing, China (2015); "Painting Show — Part Two", Galerie Rudiger Schoettle, Munich, Germany (2015); "About Painting", OCAT Contemporary Art Center Museum in Xi'an, Xi'an, China (2014).

Wang Tuo

Born and raised in Changchun, China, Wang Tuo currently lives and works in Beijing. Wang Tuo employs various mediums and a process that combined interview, reality show and the theatre of absurd to construct a maze of melodrama. Through his performative manipulation on individuals' lived experiences and intervention in intellectual legacies such as literature, film, theatre and art history, Wang's practice attempts to examine the unreliable relationship between the contemporary human status, myth and cultural archive. In the self-referential environments that he constructs, dramatic, often humorous as well as absurd aspects of the concept of society are exposed. Wang's practice also seeks to develop a discourse on how present ideology is derived from its historical context continues to adapt to changing condition.

Wang has recent solo shows at UCCA, Beijing; Present Company, New York; Salt Project, Beijing; Taikang Space, Beijing, and recent group shows at National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul; Julia Stoschek Collection, Düsseldorf; Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, Baden-Baden; Queens Museum, New York; Zarya Center for Contemporary Art, Vladivostok; PSA, Shanghai; OCAT, Shenzhen & Shanghai; How Art Museum, Shanghai; Times Museum, Guangzhou; National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taichung. Wang Tuo was an Artist in Residence at the Queens Museum, New York from 2015 to 2017. He won the China Top Shorts Award and the Outstanding Art Exploration Award for Chinese Short Films in Beijing International Short Film Festival 2018. Wang Tuo is the winner of the Three Shadows Photography Award 2018 and the Youth Contemporary Art Wuzhen Award 2019. He was awarded a research residency at KADIST San Francisco as part of the OCAT x KADIST Emerging Media Artist Residency Program 2020.

Yuan Zhongtian

Guided by an immersive period of research and performative component, Chris Zhongtian Yuan's recent work recomposes sound, archival images, and narratives to build new collective myths. These include: a mutated species born out of the messy web of ecology, human construction, and migration; a musical medium's supernatural channelling of colonial narratives; the search for memory and resistance encompassing a disappeared Wuhan punk musician. Through sensorial and emotive ways of making and knowing, Yuan's practices aim to re-imagine, challenge, and thus dismantle the established classifications of identity, linear time as well as power structures.

Yuan graduated from the Architectural Association and the University of Minnesota. Forthcoming exhibitions include: Follow the Feelings, Times Museum, Guangzhou (2022); V.O Curations, London (Solo, 2022). Recent works have shown at: Power Station of Art (2021); Somerset House, London(2021); ArtReview, London (2021); OCAT Institute, Beijing (2020); Hubei

Museum of Art, Wuhan (2020); K11, Wuhan (2020); Venice Architectural Biennale Greek Pavilion (2018) among others. They are the recipient of the 2021 FLAMIN Fellowship with Film London, K11 Wuhan Art 11 Prize, Huayu Youth Award Finalist, OCAT Institute Curatorial Award, 2020 Aesthetica Art Prize. They have lectured extensively at the Courtauld Institute of Art, Architectural Association, OCAT Institute among others. They were recently the visiting artist and lecturer at Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD).

Zhu Changquan

Zhu Changquan's creation came from the analysis of people's daily lives. He wants to analyze the influence of a variety of potential factors in daily behaviors to reveal the rules underneath. He believes that the effectiveness of image does not originate from its significance carried, but due to their potential strength, which can release the audiences' own experience. Also, it can work more consciously in this big social machine. He thinks development of anything is not single linear, "full-factor narrative" is the artist's understanding of image creation, which is to generate a new narrative form with images and everyday objects in the space through drama, animation, installations and painting.

Zhu Changquan was born in Shandong in 1989. He graduated from the Experimental Image Studio, School of Inter-media Art, China Art Academy in 2014. He won the Special Award of the 5th Huayu Youth Award in 2017. Zhu currently lives and works in Hangzhou and Shanghai. His recent solo exhibitions include: "WILD CURSIVE", Zhejiang Art Museum, Hangzhou, China (2020); "Zhu Changquan: A History of an Action, 2019", Avenida da Nave Desportiva, Cotai, Macau (2019); "A History of an Action", OCAT Shanghai, Shanghai, China (2018); "A Head without a Brain", Vanguard Gallery, Shanghai, China (2017). The recent group exhibitions he attended include: "Durational", Vanguard Gallery, Shanghai, China (2021); "Audiovisual Obstructions", PPPP Space, Beijing, China (2019); "The exhibition of annual of contemporary art of China 2018", Minsheng Art Museum, Beijing, China (2019); "New Video in China—New Attitude since 2010", Chengdu, China (2018); "The Post Southern Song Dyansty", KWM Art Center, Beijing, China (2018); "PITY PARTY", Sleepcenter, New York, USA (2018); The 5th Huayu Youth Award, Huayu Art Center, Sanya, China (2017); "The New Normal: China, Art, and 2017", UCCA, Beijing, China (2017).

#1

Yuan Zhongtian

1815

single channel HD video(colour, sound)

8'35"

Commissioned by K11 Wuhan

2019-2020

Even as we exhaust ourselves battling the narratives of the current ecological crisis, many myths live on in our world. Indonesian volcano Tambora's eruption in 1815 changed both local and

global history. At the core of its original account written by colonial officer Stamford Raffles, lies a pseudo-scientific narrative mixed with anecdotes. The video reconstructs the eruption and its aftermath through the musical medium Rosemary Brown. As Brown describes her collaboration with Beethoven, the film travels to various places: CGI reconstructing Tambora Eruption based on Sir Stamford Raffles' s official account; a Yunnan-based American missionary' s poem accompanied by images of war, famine and opium; Mary Shelley drowning in Lake Geneva during the gloomy summer; and finally, a hypnotic session of Brown channelling Beethoven' s life and music in the volcanic darkness.

#2

Yuan Zhongtian

Close, Closer

single channel HD video(color, sound)

10'00''

Commissioned by OCAT Institute Beijing

2020-2021

Drawing from the artist's mother Wang Qingli's 1993 expedition to Lugu Lake in Yunnan, China, *Close, Closer* overlays original drawings, archival images, historical paintings, texts and sounds to reimagine Wang's Lugu Lake Paintings (1994) that were later sold and unable to be found. Structured as an intimate conversation between the artist and their mother, the film weaves together narratives around intimacy, settler colonialism, patriarchy, tourism and the art market. As the video tries to turn Wang's paintings from low-res JPEGs to livingness, the audiences will experience an uneasy interrogation of the complex notion of motherhood and motherland, both personal and collective.

#3

Ma Jianfeng

X Y Z

acrylic on pvc

25.2x600cmx7pcs

2022

In the connection between the line and the letter, the images carry a significant meaning. It is these images that cause letters to lose their neutral meaning. In a similar way, the shapes of the sutras or prayer flags symbolize a power, from bottom to the top, although by moving further away, we alter the spirits, by either rising or sinking.

#4

Chen Zhou

Alive Game

HD 1080P

12'50"

Special thanks: Asia New Zealand Foundation, Blue Oyster Art Project Space

2017

In a graveyard, a ghost couple from a hundred years ago, talk about their time being alive. Next to them, a young man is interviewed and gets asked what is memory?

In Dream

HD 1080p

5'57"

2018

A ghost is taking photos of a skeleton at a graveyard while a baby is soundly asleep.

#5

Qiu Ruixiang

Slides

oil on canvas

30x35cm

2011

Lair 2

acrylic on canvas

100x120cm

2014-2015

Fixation

oil on canvas

27.5x35.5cm

2011-2012

Untitled No.3

oil on canvas

29.5x25cm

2015

Untitled

acrylic on canvas

40x30cm

2012

Untitled

oil on canvas
30x30cm
2017-2018

Untitled

acrylic on canvas
27x35cm
2010

“...while his preferred palette of tones tends towards dark – sometimes very dark, making for a sobriety that is not always easy on the eye or the senses – his content, what is it that he aims to convey, is approached with honesty, instincts that are unfettered by a conscious striving for this or that style, to dovetail with this or that trend. He neither clings to any traditional seam of painting history, nor creates with the goal of being ground-breaking. On the surface, nothing obvious about the figures he depicts places them in our time now – in fact, the garments in which they are attired are apt to infer a reference to historic, or folk costume. What makes the figures contemporary is their psychological state, which is the work’s most precious, perceptive and dynamic asset. Its exploration of base humanness, with all its fragility and ambiguity laid bare. This is its quality of timelessness. This body of painting is thus the singular expression of a genuinely dedicated artist. The viewer simply needs to look, to engage, and let their imagination/experience do the reading. The work remains nonetheless difficult to contextualise and explain.”

——Karen Smith(art critic, curator)

#6

Manuel Mathieu

Genesis

mixed media on canvas
180x150cm
2019

The Witness

pencil, watercolour and charcoal on paper
13x14cm
2018

Head

pencil, watercolour and charcoal on paper
22.9x21.6cm
2019

Ebony

mixed media on paper
16.5x20.32cm
2018

Ekur(Study on Wols)

mixed media on paper
15.2x17.7cm
2018

An artist who works primarily as a painter, Manuel Mathieu draws from both his formal art education and his interest in traditional Haitian artistic customs, mythology and history. Haitian art is itself a complex of traditions, reflecting its African roots with Indigenous American and European aesthetics and influences. One school of painting, the Saint-Soleil School, is characterised by abstracted human forms and incorporates Vodou symbolism. Mathieu's paintings are an inquiring amalgam of figuration underpinned by abstraction, with something of the intensity of the indefinite forms that Francis Bacon is most celebrated for. Exploring the deep rifts of historical violence and erasure rooted in Haitian socio-political history, the artist is particularly interested in probing the verity of events under the Duvalier dynasty, the autocratic family dictatorship in Haiti that lasted from 1957 until 1986 (the year of his birth), spanning the rule of father and son: Francois and Jean- Claude Duvalier.

Emotive portrayals rather than objective descriptions, Mathieu's paintings extract elements of nature and religious symbolism in reference to Haitian artistic convention. Twisted figures communicate trauma and memory, solitude and vulnerability, in a poignant and emotionally confrontational manner. They 'take us along a journey that brings pleasure and purpose in being vulnerable and ever-changing'. Employing the technique of frottage, where paint is applied to canvas before being methodically scraped off in layers and a fresh coat applied, the physicality of his process provides another discordant reminder of painting's potential to evoke the corporeal. Mirroring political divisions and the unrest and violence they have caused, his compositions carve out space for their viewers to reflect on Haiti's turbulent history, while inviting us to consider the different futures an act of remembering can generate.

#7

Zhu Changquan

Nails are also Monkeys

Sculpture

Resin (material varies, also in iron, copper, etc)

dimension varies

Ed. 5+1AP

2021

Monkeys are also Nails

Sculpture

Tin-bismuth alloy

dimension varies

Ed. 1

2021

I'm the Visitor

Sculpture

Tin-bismuth alloy

dimension varies

Ed. 5+1AP

2021

I've Never Seen Anything Get Lost

Digital simulation video

dual channel

3840x2160p

8'00"

50F

Ed. 5+1 AP

2021

I'm Disguised, Right in front of You

Video

dual channel

3840x2160p HD

10'00"

Ed. 5+1 AP

2021

Garden Swaying

Performance

Color, sound

1920x1080p

10'00"

Ed. 5+1 AP

2021

Apart from the 3D-rendered moving images, the components with physical presence constitute a new phase of Zhu Changquan's "All-factors Image Narratives". The cast metal plates and sculptures reflect the iconography manifested in the videos, while materializing and anchoring the corresponding concept into the physical realm. The artist further employs the notion of nails and the action of the explosive as a gesture to hack into our reality.

The video contains a computer-generated garden, a test site for cognitive formation, in which symbolic and allegorical items such as apple, snake, raven, or monkey take the role of "guides" or

points of reference. These items lead the viewers to explore the garden so as to formulate their individual cognitions through diverse dimensions and perspectives endowed by the guides' narration, action or shifting angles. Throughout the exhibition, the videos and sculptures become carriers of the variable, pivotal code embedded by the artist, taking form of symbols, stories, imagery, Morse code, and music sheet. The viewer's perception and interpretation of the variable would inform the topology of the entire garden. The collective of Zhu's works tends to dissolve the time-based linear narrative, with the contextualization of components and individual elements serving as potential entrances to the cognitive realm.

#8

Wang Tuo

Tungus

single channel 4K video (color, sound)

66'00"

2021

One of the primary historical contexts for *Tungus* is the "Siege of Changchun", a hidden history of the 1948 Kuomintang-Communist Civil War that neither side would like to recall. In this quiet war without fire and smoke, hundreds of thousands of civilians, caught in the middle ground of beliefs and ideologies created by the military encirclement of the two armies, vanished in a primitive way - by starvation. In this film, as two soldiers from the Korean Independent Division of the Chinese People's Liberation Army try to flee Changchun, they gradually realise that they are in an overlapping time and space with that of Jeju Island, where the "Jeju uprising" has just occurred in the shadow of the Korean War. At the same time, a middle-aged scholar who refuses to flee the city of Changchun returns to the May 4th Movement of 1919 in an illusion caused by extreme hunger and subsequently makes new resolutions. In these forgotten historical narratives, Wang Tuo illustrates how hunger-led hallucinations from a shared mass experience lead to a collective conversion to "pan-shamanism." In this conversion, he sees the Northeast Asian reality being reshaped by the power of the psyche mired in historical trauma.

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