



Qi-Yao

Selected works 2017-2023



2023

Single-channel 2k video,
color, stereo sound

07'30"

In *Spirit*, the meditative discipline of yoga is disrupted by the intrusion of domestic automation.

As a series of robotic vacuums navigate around the practitioner, their algorithmic movements clash with the organic human form. Enveloped in the sound of amplified breathing, this interaction evolves into a surreal dance of chaos and control. The work reframes the workout as a contemporary ritual, questioning the convergence of spiritual wellness and our reliance on technology.

Spirit

<https://youtu.be/ZkwVKuBYzxw>

In this work, yoga is not just a physical practice rooted in religion but also a symbol of humanity's pursuit of health and spirituality. Meanwhile, robotic vacuum cleaners, as part of the smart home trend, embody modern society's obsession with technology. These two globally popular phenomena converge in the same space, creating a layered metaphor.

The yoga sequence incorporates the classic **"Sun Salutation"** from Hindu sun worship rituals.

The robotic vacuum cleaners, acting as "disruptors of order," introduce a dynamic interplay of conflict and adaptation.

As the robots' chaotic trajectories gradually become more orderly, the practitioner's movements adapt, evolving into a subtle collaboration between human and machine.



*Script

Exhibition View



The "breathing" of humans and robots symbolizes a merging of life force and machine logic. These two distinct "**spirits**" transition from dissonance to harmony, reflecting the evolution from conflict to collaboration. In the final posture, the robotic vacuums encircle the practitioner, symbolizing reconciliation and lending the interaction a ritualistic quality.

The fervor for health and technology resonates throughout, with the sacred and the mechanical coexisting in a way that blurs the line between who is taming whom, creating a ceremonial space that transcends binaries.

→ *Survival (I)*

Chord

Tugging

The Switch

Crowded

Closing

Survival (I) (2021–2022) is a series of performance documentation created amidst the recurring COVID-19 lockdowns and strict containment measures in Mainland China. During this period of suspended social interaction, daily life was profoundly restructured. Through these recorded actions, the work investigates how individuals navigate confinement to maintain a sense of self. It explores the complex friction between external social constraints and the internal preservation of physical and mental well-being.



2022

Photography
Dimensions variable

Tugging

Set against the backdrop of a typically crowded tourist destination rendered desolate by the pandemic, *Tugging* records a playful intervention in a silent landscape. Along with three collaborators, I utilized a 50-meter-long roll of industrial caution tape not to cordon off space, but to connect bodies. The group manipulated the tape into large-scale geometric patterns reminiscent of "cat's cradle," a childhood string game. By repurposing the visual language of emergency and restriction into a tool for interaction, the work reclaims the empty public space with a gesture of intimacy and collective play.

*Co-created with Cao Wenqing, Wang yizhu, She Luyun





2022

Photography (digital composite)

Dimensions variable

Crowded

Crowded serves as a visual counter-narrative to the isolation of the pandemic era. Created at a deserted tourist landmark, the work utilizes digital compositing techniques to multiply four collaborators into a dense throng of visitors. By layering multiple exposures of the same individuals, the artists constructed a fabricated spectacle of "normalcy." The resulting image presents a bustling scene that stands in stark, ironic contrast to the actual emptiness of the site, highlighting the silence that reality had imposed.

*Co-created with Cao Wenqing, Wang yizhu, She Luyun





Chord

<https://youtu.be/-hjut2AsSvs>

2021

Single-channel video,
color, sound
00'52"

Chord captures a surreal moment of intrusion in a suspended world. Dressed in pajamas—the uniform of enforced domesticity during lockdown—I sneaked into a vacant luxury villa. In this silent, uninhabited shell of wealth, I laid my body across the keys of a grand piano. This act of "passive playing" triggers a massive, dissonant cluster of notes that echoes through the empty hall.



2021

Single-channel video,
color, sound
Continuous Loop (0'40")

The Switch is a loop of self-punishment disguised as a functional act. In a dim corridor, I use the sharp sound of slapping my own face to activate a voice-controlled light. As the timer expires and darkness returns, I am forced to repeat this violent gesture to restore illumination. The work externalizes the depressive psychological state of isolation, where the maintenance of "light"—or hope—comes at the cost of physical pain and repetitive self-injury.

The Switch

https://youtu.be/nig-pTD_Xqc



Closing

<https://youtu.be/jydOopnrd7Q>

2021

Single-channel video,
color, sound
Continuous Loop

In the video, I squat in the blind spot of an automatic door, transforming my body into a wedge that prevents the barrier from sealing shut. The continuous loop depicts a relentless struggle between the mechanism's command to isolate and the human body's persistence in the threshold. It captures the anxiety of living in limbo—caught in a perpetual "closing" that never fully resolves into closure or openness.

→ *Survival (II)*

Insomnia
Jingzhe
Piloting
Charge



This series examines the automobile as a distinct social architecture. Framed as "boxes," the vehicles serve not only as physical barriers against the outside world but as the last bastions of freedom of movement.

Survival (II) posits the car as a site of resistance: a mobile sanctuary where the private self can be preserved. Amidst the strictures of the pandemic, these confined spaces paradoxically offer the only true autonomy, transforming the driver's seat into a crucial vessel of independence.



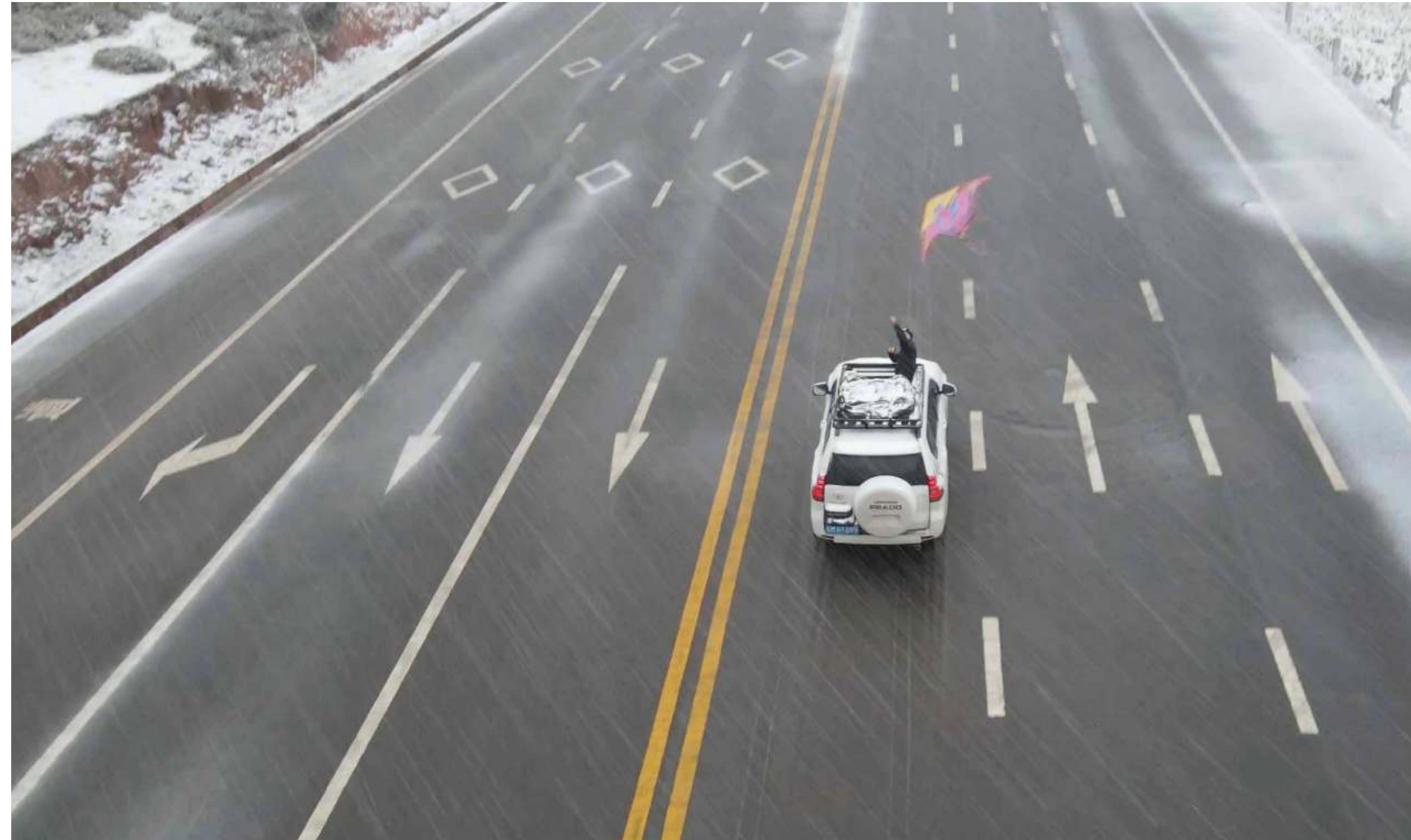
2021

Single-channel video,
color, sound
00'55"

Insomnia transforms a symbol of mobility—the car—into a site of confinement and conflict. I attempt to sleep on its hood, but the machine interprets my passive weight as a theft attempt. The cycle of "silence—movement—alarm" mirrors the psychological state of lockdown: a restless existence where any attempt to adjust one's position or regain agency is met with an immediate, screeching warning from the system.

Insomnia

<https://youtu.be/GSXdkBCrbak>



2022

Photography
Dimensions variable

Jingzhe

I use autonomous driving on a closed road while simultaneously releasing a kite through the car's sunroof.



Jingzhe (Awakening of Insects) is a traditional Chinese solar term marking the arrival of spring and the rousing of dormant life by thunder.

In this work, I rely on the car's autonomous system to navigate the road and the vehicle's motion to lift the kite, removing my own physical exertion from the equation. Performed on a closed road, this scene presents a "sterile awakening."

It reflects a state of existence where movement is permitted but controlled, and the celebration of spring is confined within the sealed safety of a moving capsule—detached from the earth, yet tethered to the sky.



2022

Single-channel video,
color, sound
oi'II"

Driving through a massive, empty tunnel—a symbol of connectivity severed by quarantine measures—I hold burning fireworks out the window.

The work serves as a metaphor for the pandemic experience: moving forward through a long, dark passage, creating one's own fleeting light to mark the passage of time in a suspended reality.

Piloting

<https://youtu.be/USBPM4zAaQw>



2021

Single-channel video,
color, sound
00'23"

As the green light appears—I blow a charge horn continuously until my breath completely runs out. In an era defined by a respiratory virus and the struggle for air, this act of using one's lungs to the point of failure becomes a poignant symbol. It depicts the forced urgency to "restart" and "charge forward," even when the biological body is drained and gasping for breath.

Charge

<https://youtu.be/jydOopnrd7Q>

→*The Politics of Resonance*

The Dog Whistle

Canon in G

This series investigates the dual mechanisms of auditory control within the sociopolitical landscape: internalized discipline and external censorship.

Canon in G and *The Dog Whistle* function as mirrored inquiries into the collective voice. The former examines what we are trained to remember, while the latter exposes what we are forced to forget. In *Canon in G*, the body acts as a vessel for ideology, where the "muscle memory" of the national anthem dissolves individual identity into a blurred, standardized composite. Conversely, *The Dog Whistle* confronts the erasure of language, where fragmented truths about a public crisis are rendered into a "frequency" that exists but remains socially unheard.

Together, these works reveal the paradox of the contemporary vocal apparatus: it is simultaneously an instrument of compliance, chanting the melodies of the state, and a site of resistance, silently hoarding the prohibited texts of reality.

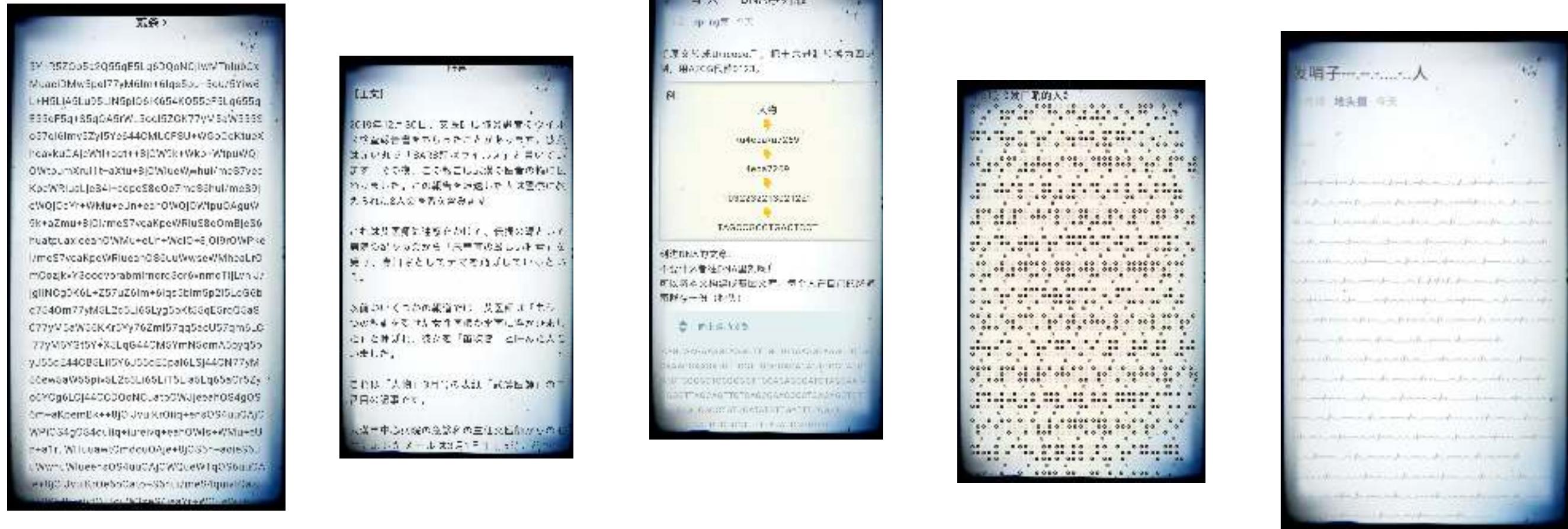
The Dog Whistle

2020

182-channel video installation
Dimensions variable
(Unexhibited project)

Initiated amidst the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, *The Dog Whistle* serves as a counter-archive to digital erasure.

On March 11, 2020, the article *The Whistleblower*—revealing undisclosed early warnings of the outbreak—circulated fervently across Chinese social media. As authorities deleted the text, netizens translated it into emojis, Morse code, and Pinyin to evade censorship.



*New versions of the article, in attempts to evade censors, have proliferated, from one partly written in emojis to another done in morse code, as well as pinyin, the romanisation system for Mandarin.

In response, I recruited 182 volunteers to preserve the text as a collective memory.



The term "dog whistle" refers to ultrasonic frequencies audible to dogs but typically undetectable by the human ear. *The Dog Whistle* appropriates this acoustic concept to critique the selective deafness of social control. The project deconstructs a censored 2020 text regarding the coronavirus outbreak, distributing its fragmented lines among 182 masked volunteers.

Intended for simultaneous playback, the work begins as a collective roar of fragmented truths, slowly fading into silence as the sentences end. This auditory decay mirrors the rapid obsolescence of information in a high-frequency information environment. The project remains a "romantic notion"—a resistance where language is deconstructed yet physically preserved within the bodies of the participants. Paradoxically, the work's continued prohibition from offline exhibition reinforces its very concept: a sound that exists, yet remains unheard.



2020

Single channel Video, color, sound

00'39"

Dimensions variable

Canon in G unfolds as an experiment in collective memory and identity. Individuals from varying generations and backgrounds were invited to sing the Chinese national anthem (*The March of the Volunteers* in G major) a cappella.

Although participants initially questioned their recollection of the lyrics, the melody triggered an ingrained response: regardless of uncertainty, the body took over, treating ideology as a form of muscle memory.

Canon in G

Canon in G

Visually, the work mirrors this auditory synchronization. I digitally superimposed the facial images of all participants into a single frame. As their voices overlap, their distinct features merge into a composite, "familiar face"—a visage that seems to belong to everyone yet no one. This ghostly portrait serves as the physical manifestation of the collective consciousness, revealing how the individual is dissolved into a unified ideological whole.



2020

Single channel Video, color, sound
00'39"
Dimensions variable

<https://youtu.be/uGMgdg6Vnzo>

→Dialogue

The Fourth Day

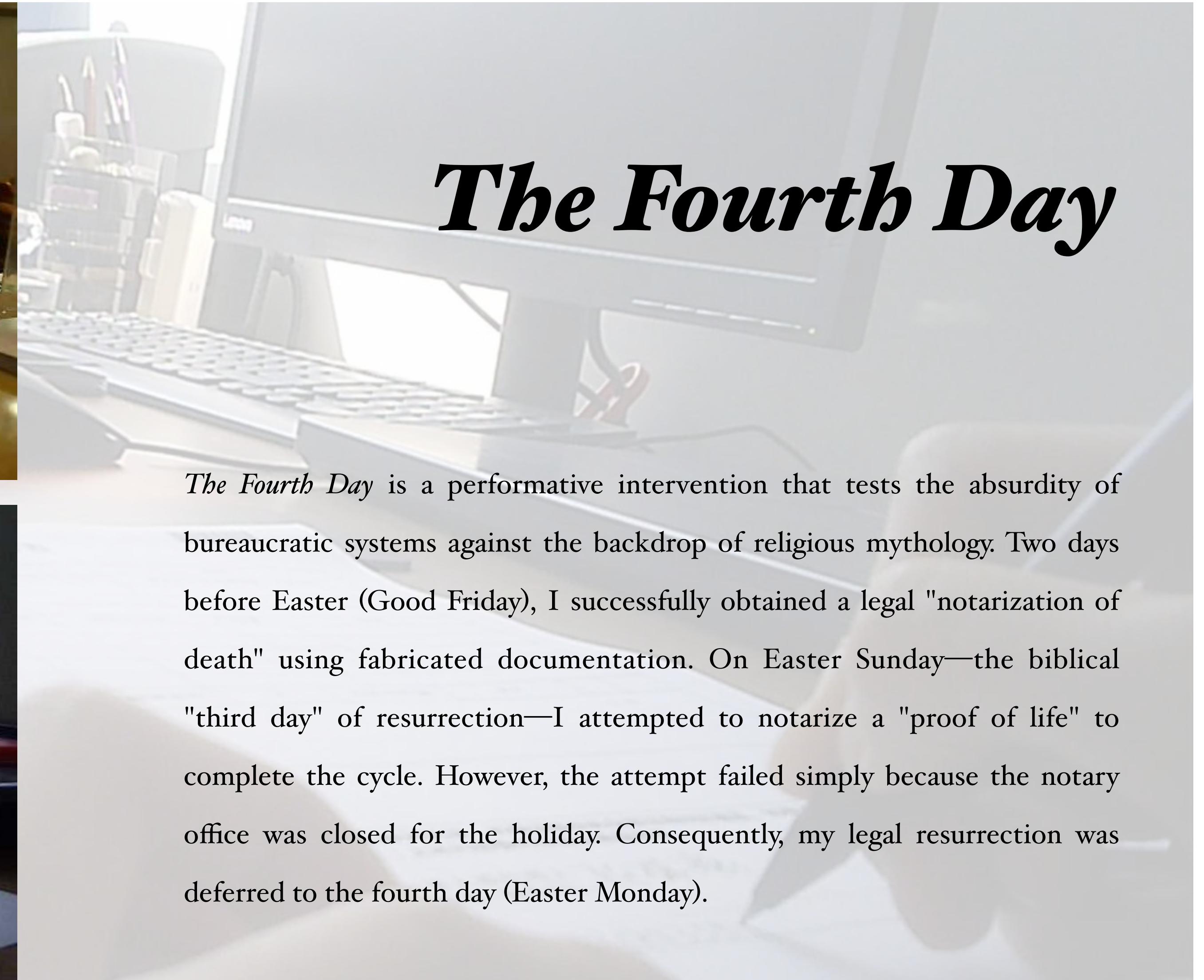
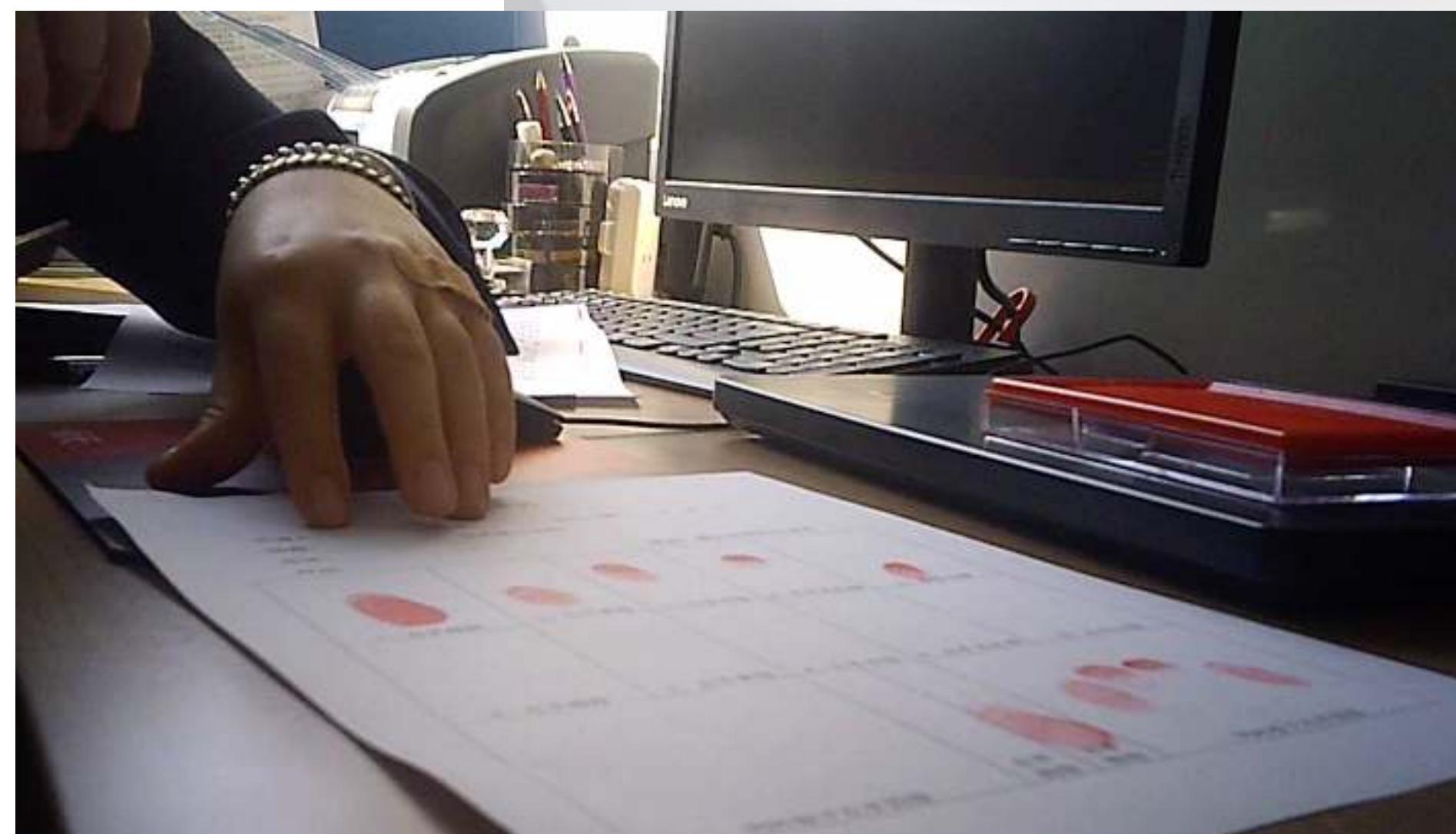
Suite No.2 For Body

1500 Grit

Buddha Jumps Over the Wall

Dialogue is an art series consisting of four works. Through a series of experimental performances involving sound, installation, and video, I engage in a dialogue between the self, society, and the body. Starting from an investigation into individual identity and the physical characteristics of the human body, the series creates a passage where sensory experiences and conceptual ideas coexist. It invites reflection on how the body is deconstructed and reshaped under social norms.

(This series was created as my undergraduate graduation project.)



The Fourth Day is a performative intervention that tests the absurdity of bureaucratic systems against the backdrop of religious mythology. Two days before Easter (Good Friday), I successfully obtained a legal "notarization of death" using fabricated documentation. On Easter Sunday—the biblical "third day" of resurrection—I attempted to notarize a "proof of life" to complete the cycle. However, the attempt failed simply because the notary office was closed for the holiday. Consequently, my legal resurrection was deferred to the fourth day (Easter Monday).

* Filming with a pinhole camera

我能在周五死去，
却不能在周日活过来。

因为我不是耶稣，
而且公证处周日不上班。



2019

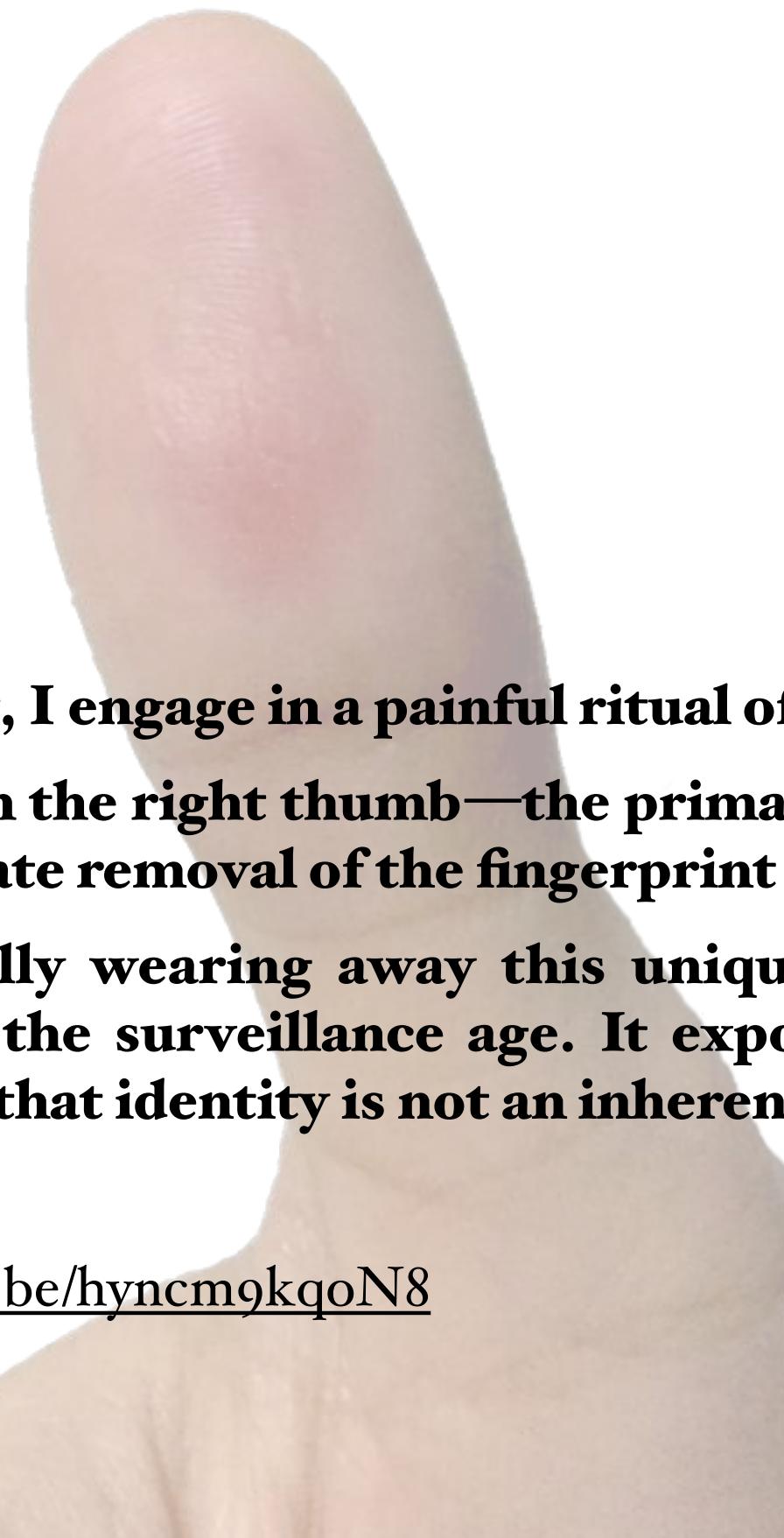
Notarized documents, vinyl text

Dimensions variable

The installation presents the official documents alongside the conclusion:

**"I can die on Friday,
but I cannot come back to life on Sunday.
Because I am not Jesus,
and the notary office is closed."**

1500 Grit



2019

In *1500 Grit*, I engage in a painful ritual of self-erasure.

Focusing on the right thumb—the primary digit used for biometric identification—the video documents the deliberate removal of the fingerprint through continuous sanding.

By physically wearing away this unique biological marker, the work questions the construction of identity in the surveillance age. It exposes the fragility of the "self" as defined by data and systems, suggesting that identity is not an inherent truth, but a surface that can be abraded and dissolved.

Video (color, sound)
16:9
38'00"

<https://youtu.be/hyncm9kqoN8>

Suite No.2 For Body



2019

<https://youtu.be/3a-HKrJ6Py4>

9-channel video installation, color, stereo sound

00'03"

Dimensions variable

In *Suite No.2 For Body*, I orchestrate a rhythm of bone and cartilage. Through a rigorous editing process, the act of joint-cracking is amplified into a rapid, chain-reaction composition.

The resulting soundscape—sharp, rhythmic, and explosive—evokes the texture of pyrotechnics, yet remains intimately human. Installed as a corridor, the work envelops the viewer in a sonic passage where the "pop" of the joints dictates the rhythm of movement. The installation asserts that the scale of sound is inherently "bodily," bridging the gap between internal physiological mechanics and external acoustic space.

Buddha Jumps Over the Wall



2019
4-channel Video (color, sound)
01'00"
Dimensions variable

Appropriating the title of the luxurious dish "Buddha Jumps Over the Wall," this work interrogates the primal nature of appetite beneath cultural refinement. I filmed myself eating voraciously in extreme close-up, utilizing contact microphones to record the sounds of mastication and swallowing as they reverberate through the skull (bone conduction).

By externalizing these internal physiological sounds, the installation exposes the grotesque yet mesmerizing mechanics of the human body. It blurs the boundary between the "self" and the "meat," presenting consumption not as a social act, but as a rhythmic, biological compulsion.

<https://youtu.be/SXSNIoQfhb4>

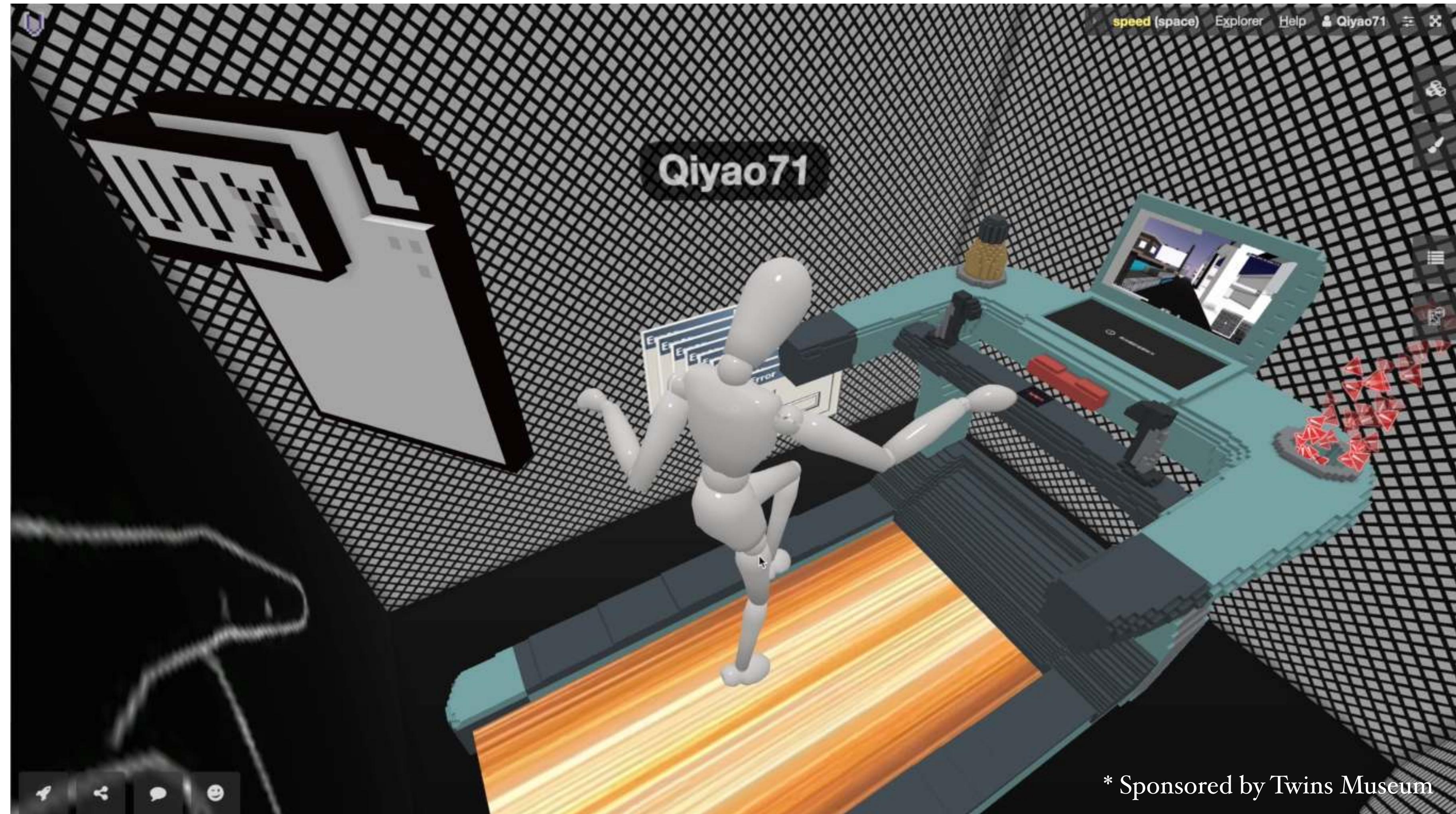
→Residency Projects

33.27Mbps

Hello, Welcome

Sound Ashes

Sponsored by various institutions and organizations, these works are either site-specific or aligned with designated themes. Each residency provides an opportunity to deeply engage with the local environment and cultural context, allowing me to tailor my artistic response to reflect the unique settings and themes provided by the sponsors. This approach fosters a dialogue between my artistic expression and the local narratives, creating a meaningful exploration of place and identity within the broader spectrum of contemporary challenges.



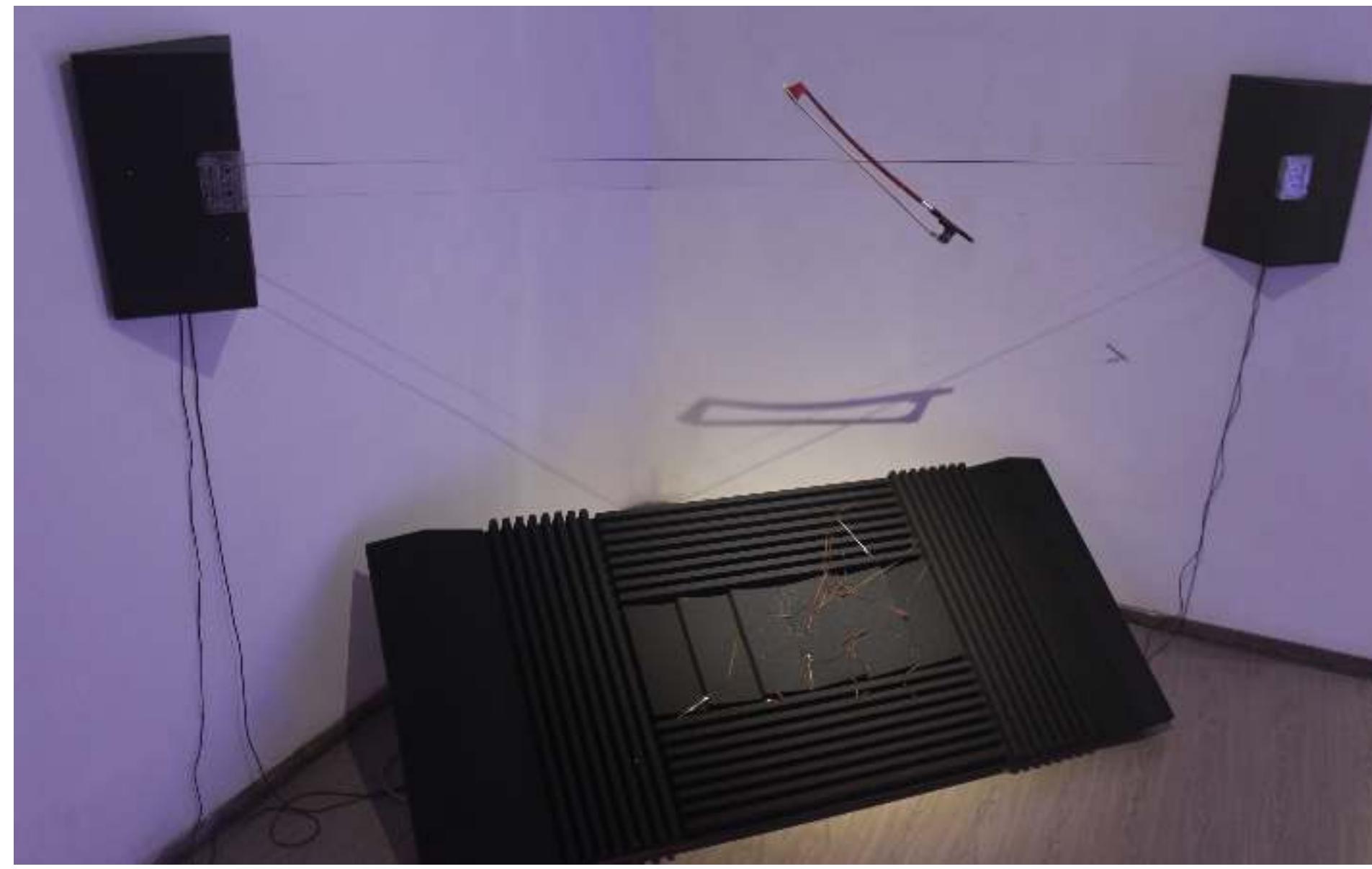
33.27Mbps

<https://youtu.be/km3HovofIUc>

2022

Single-channel video,
color, sound
1'21"

Recorded in Cryptovoxels, the video features an avatar sprinting at a speed that exceeds the network's processing limit of 33.27 Mbps. As the data stream lags behind the user's movement, the virtual architecture collapses into glitches and voids. The work visualizes the gap between user agency and technological constraint, ending as the protagonist sinks into a fragmented, loading abyss—an ocean surfacing from the errors of the system.



2023

Whale recordings, original composition,
acousitc foam, tape recorders, cassette tapes,
double bass bow, rosin
Dimensions variable
00'30" (sound)

Sound Ashes

Sound Ashes is a kinetic sound installation that physically erodes a conversation between species. The 6-meter tape loop features a composite soundscape: underwater recordings of whale songs intertwined with a guitar composition performed by the artist. This melody is written specifically to match the lowered frequencies whales use to survive ocean noise.

As the tape circulates against a rosin-coated double bass bow, the friction grinds both the whale's voice and the artist's musical response into dust. The accumulation of black debris on the acoustic foam below visualizes the silence left behind by this destruction.

* Sponsored by Nordic Contemporary Art Center



2017

Motion-activated door chimes
Dimensions variable

Hello, Welcome intervenes in the transition from industrial history to commercial spectacle. The work was created in the wake of a localized trauma: an engineering ship had sunk, displacing the workers who lived on board, clearing the way for the site's transformation into a trendy riverside promenade.

By embedding thirty cheap proximity sensors into the demolition site, I introduced a primitive, repetitive commercial soundscape. The cheerful, electronic refrain of "Hello, welcome" acts as an ironic overlay, juxtaposing the site's present reality of displacement and decay with its impending commodification.

Hello, Welcome

* Sponsored by Dimensions Art Center



Installation View

Qi-Yao is an artist-researcher working across performance, sound, video, and installation.

Her practice centres on the lived experience of individuals navigating social realities and structures of institutional power. Across her artistic trajectory, she has been concerned with how bodies endure, adapt to, and reflect upon conditions of constraint. In earlier works, this attention manifested through examinations of embodied survival and everyday negotiation; more recently, it has evolved into an investigation of individual agency within data-driven and monitored environments.

Through performative and embodied actions, Qi-Yao introduces disruption, friction, and moments of misalignment into normative systems of order. Often employing subtle provocation and understated humour, her work treats the body as an active site of interference—capable of unsettling established logics of control within contemporary societies.



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