TOM NE PHAN PLA

幽靈維面

電馭叛客在未來之年

CYBERPUNK IN THE YEAR OF THE FUTURE

幽靈維面——電馭叛客在未來之年
PHANTOM PLANE,
CYBERPUNK IN THE YEAR OF THE FUTURE

藝術家 Artists
唐納天 Nadim Abbas
Bettina von Arnim
陳偉江 Chan Wai Kwong
陳維 Chen Wei
崔潔 Cui Jie
Aria Dean
何銳安 Ho Rui An
徐梯善 Tishan Hsu
石田徹也 Tetsuya Ishida
JODI
李昢 Lee Bul
三上晴子 Seiko Mikami
中藤毅彦 Takehiko Nakafuji
大竹伸朗 Shinro Ohtake
Yuri Pattison
Sondra Perry
Seth Price
Jon Rafman
佃弘樹 Hiroki Tsukuda
Nurrachmat Widyasena
Zheng Mahler

策展人 Curators
Lauren Cornell, 陳樂明 Dawn Chan, 譚雪 Xue Tan, Tobias Berger,
以及助理策展人 with Assistant Curator, Jeppe Ugelvig

呈獻方 Co-Presenter
巴德學院藝術策展研究中心
Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College

#cyberpunk2019
@taikwuncontemporary

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FOREWORD

Tai Kwun Contemporary is proud to showcase *Phantom Plane, Cyberpunk in the Year of the Future*, co-presented with the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, New York. Curated by Lauren Cornell, Dawn Chan, Xue Tan, and Tobias Berger, along with Jeppe Ugelvig, assistant curator, this thought-provoking exhibition brings together a diverse range of international and local artists whose works consider, reflect, and question the influence of "cyberpunk" in the collective cultural and visual imagination.

2019 is the year when such iconic cyberpunk films as *Blade Runner* and *Akira* were supposed to have been set. Today, after decades of cyberpunk influence across a broad range of visual culture, *Phantom Plane* explores and revisits how the genre's aesthetics and futurisms can be seen from Hong Kong, one model of the "meta-city", a sprawling urban space just as virtual as it is real. Cyberpunk has perhaps only indirectly affected Hong Kong visual culture, but through refractions of novels, movies, and in particular anime, its influence has indeed been pervasive. And the present also offers a particular prism: how the cyber metropolis has shifted from a fantastic metaphor for life in the future into an inescapable, looping present.

Tai Kwun Contemporary is honoured to exhibit such a wonderful range of local and international artists—and that with the assistance of the guest curators Lauren Cornell, Dawn Chan, and Jeppe Ugelvig taking part in this exhibition. Lauren Cornell, now Director of the Graduate Program at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, and Chief Curator of the Hessel Museum of Art, is a renowned curator who among other endeavours was Executive Director of Rhizome, the iconic art organisation focusing on the intersection of art and technology; she also curated the third New Museum Triennial in 2015. Dawn Chan, formerly an editor at *Artforum* magazine for over ten years, is a distinguished writer who has a recent research focus on identity and digital culture. Jeppe Ugelvig, in the role of assistant curator, is an independent curator and writer who has equally contributed to the curatorial research in addition to the writing of the text descriptions for the brochure. The three join Xue Tan and Tobias Berger of Tai Kwun Contemporary in conceiving this momentous exhibition, an exhibition which fits very well with Tai Kwun Contemporary's mission of showcasing some of the best contemporary art exhibitions with artists from Hong Kong as well as around the world.

We must thank the artists and curators of *Phantom Plane* for their inventive creativity, critical knowledge, and tireless dedication, along with all the individuals and organisations who have contributed to the making of this large-scale exhibition. In the end, only with the support of artists, curators and the wider art community can Tai Kwun Contemporary fulfill its mission of contributing innovatively to cultural discourse in Hong Kong.

—Tai Kwun Contemporary

PHANTOM PLANE,
CYBERPUNK IN THE YEAR OF THE FUTURE

"global-twilight", "posthumanwanderings", "singularityblues", and "lightresist" are just a few of the many tumblrs whose names reference the spirit of cyberpunk, a science fiction genre that gained momentum in the 1980s with its depictions of "lowlife and high tech" (Bruce Sterling). From its very outset, the genre has depicted radical technological advances—plugged-in consciousness, androids indistinguishable from people—but also worlds divided by unequal access to wealth and resources, where multinational corporations, sovereign states, hackers, and criminal underworld enterprises all manoeuvre for control. Far from having become outdated, cyberpunk's dystopian scenes— its protagonists, networked and yet isolated, navigating neo-noir city streets illuminated by the glare of commerce—look like an average night on the town in 2019, whether in Hong Kong, Los Angeles, Tokyo, or Jakarta. Like so much that was once seen as "cyber" or virtual—as outside of us, a separate and distinct terrain to be explored or conquered in a neo-colonial fashion— the realms of cyberpunk have begun to seem less like an otherworldly plane, and more of a funhouse mirror of our world, lives, and histories. The more cyberpunk's futures turn into reflections of our unremarkable, quotidian daily experiences, the more the science fiction being produced now is left in an awkward relationship with the future. Instead of forward-facing narratives, contemporary science fiction has become dominated by crisis modes and fantasies of perpetual disaster.

Inspired by 2019—the year that many iconic cyberpunk futures were set or scheduled to arrive (see *Blade Runner*, *Akira*, *Running Man*, *The Island*, and more…)—this exhibition, *Phantom Plane, Cyberpunk in the Year of the Future,* considers the hold that cyberpunk retains on our collective imagination. Notably, while cyberpunk's perspectives have primarily been explored in other genres besides art—such as film and literature, as well as animation and manga, video games, and graphic novels—*Phantom Plane* examines how the genre's tropes have also bled into art and visual culture. The exhibition centres around "the meta-city", as the cyberpunk author William Gibson called the Internet: an urban space just as virtual as it is real. Whether through spectacular panoramas of virtual mega cities, buildings or urban surfaces, or through more affective or

psychological depictions of life within, the exhibition questions the ways in which the metropolis of cyberpunk has transformed from a fantastic metaphor for life in the future into an inescapable, looping present.

In some of the works on view, the city—its denizens and attendant digital spaces—linger as ghosts of past futures. Certain artists look at the city's skyline from afar, whether representing it as spectacular, strange, or utterly ordinary; others get to know the people and machines that populate a metropolis, subverting or questioning stereotypical ways that Asian cities have often appeared in Western and Japanese science fiction narratives: artificial, neon-drenched, latently threatening. Some pieces explore the exploitative labour practices that get overlooked in our desire to imagine virtual space as a seamlessly equal playing field. Other artworks on view trace how intellectual capital flows from country to country, spreading the knotty ramifications of life in the digital age. Still others draw on our fascination with cyberpunk's fascination with oppositional subcultures, with shantytowns and alleyways, with punk bricoleurs repurposing the electronic waste of mass consumption into their own secret worlds of useful junk—"rains and fog blanketing trash-strewn alleyways, punk subcultures and scavengers roaming endlessly amidst the streets" (Patrick Novotny).

As Gibson once wrote, "cities can be at their experientially richest during periods of relative disjunction." Noting that "cities, to survive, must be capable of extended fugues of retrofitting", he pointed out that "relative ruin, relative desertion, is a common stage of complex and necessary urban growth. Successful (which is to say, ongoing) cities are built up in a lacquering of countless layers: of lives, of choices encountered and made." Might these growing, lacquered layers of metropolitan life—marked by ruin and desertion but also by retrofitting and renewal—parallel or even embody the metamorphosis of cyberpunk's imagined futures into the familiar patterns of our present-day lives? In seeking to answer that question, *Phantom Plane* looks to reveal the reinvention and forward movement in the most dramatic and dystopian or even just uncertain of moments.

—The curators

Lobby
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1   Lobby
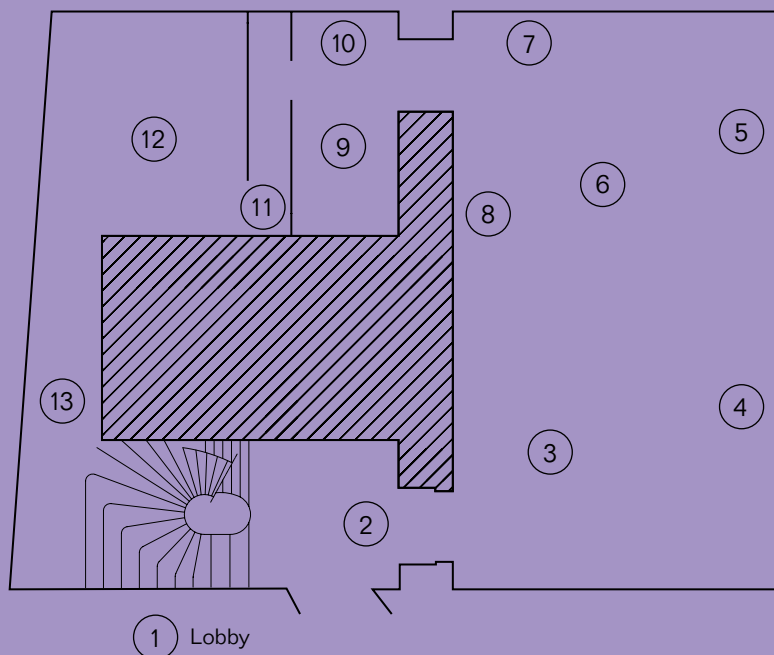
SETH PRICE (b. 1973, East Jerusalem)
Romance, 2003, single-channel video, 32', colour, silent
Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts Intermix


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Outside Grate
You are in a 20-foot depression floored
with bare dirt. Set into the dirt is a
strong steel grate mounted in concrete. A
dry streambed leads into the depression.

>look into grate
You find nothing of interest.

>listen
You hear nothing unexpected.

>s
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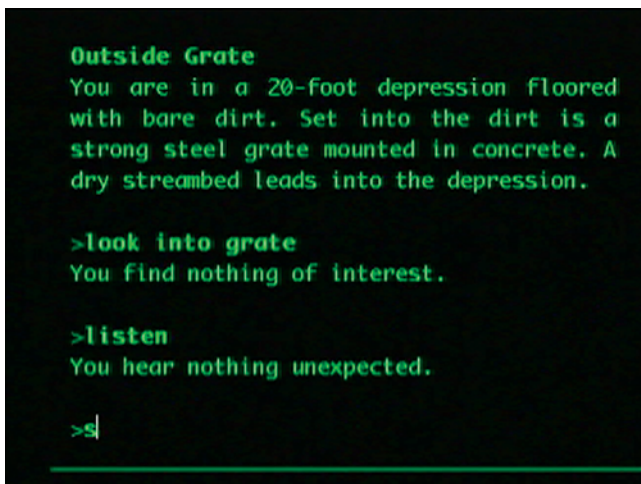
SETH PRICE

The artist Seth Price has long concerned himself with the circulation of media in society, thinking through philosophical themes such as memory, the afterlife, and subjecthood via the movement of images in culture, particularly as they relate to technology. His 2003 durational video performance *Romance* documents Price's progress through one of the earliest computer games, *Adventure*, created in the mid-1970s by programmers and engineers in their spare time. The game is structured as a series of questions and answers where the player must consistently adjust his/her responses to discover a particular locale in text form. The silent narrative brings the artist from the end of a road through a forest and into a valley, which he explores by repeated questioning of the game's all-knowing robot narrator. As the narrative unfolds, the robot continuously limits the player in his virtual actions, prohibiting him from eating berries, drinking water, and conducting more poetic activities like "listening to a slit" in a nearby rock— thus establishing an oddly strict code of conduct in the virtual game space. As a present-day expedition into a bygone virtual universe, the piece also reflects on the intimacy of language, as Price continuously tries (and fails at) forming an emotional connection with the programme, which ends up insulting the artist on numerous occasions. The lo-fi aesthetics of the video recall the interface of early internet chat rooms, an emblem of classic cyberpunk cinema and video games.
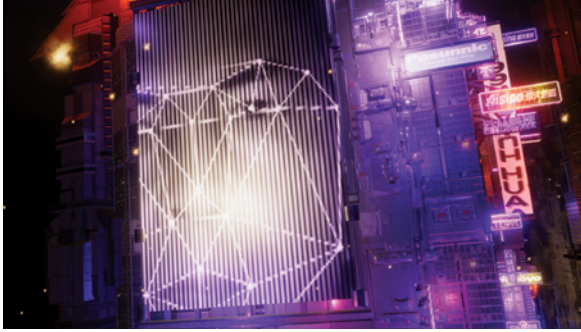
ZHENG MAHLER

Zheng Mahler is the name of the cross-disciplinary collaboration between the Chinese-Australian artist Royce Ng and Australian anthropologist Daisy Bisenieks. Testing the limits of rationality inherent in academic disciplines, their practice employs new media to visualise their research, which deals with issues of representation, social relations, and transnational objects in a globalising world— often by incorporating elements of fiction and fantasy. *Nostalgia Machines* investigates how cyberpunk and science fiction since the 1980s have used the East Asian metropolis as its de facto model of the future. A 3D-animated film depicts the year 2050, where the Hong Kong government has invented a "nostalgia machine" that can create any historically simulated reality for those who do not want to live in the present. The government has used the nostalgia machine to create an entirely simulated Hong Kong set in an eternal 1980s, as a transfixed retro-futurist vaporwave utopia. However, the contradictions between the virtual reality that the nostalgia machine creates and the analogue reality it tries to repress manifest as virtual monsters stalking the cities, devouring its citizens who are then excreted back into reality. By emulating the seductive sensuality and horror of a cyberpunk metropolis, *Nostalgia Machines* reflects on how Asian urban spaces continue to be evoked through the techno-orientalist fantasies of the West, but also in the dystopian imagining of the future in Japanese popular culture such as anime, in which the present of continental Asia becomes the imagined dystopian future of Japan.

ZHENG MAHLER
Nostalgia Machines

JON RAFMAN (b. 1981, Montreal, Canada)
Neon Parallel 1996, 2015, single-channel digital video, 11'15"
Courtesy of the artist

JON RAFMAN

Set in a futuristic, flickering metropolis, Jon Rafman's film *Neon Parallel 1996* follows the female protagonist ang3l in search of her own memory. A sombre cinematic voice-over narrates the interior monologue of ang3l as she meanders LED-lit city streets at night, guided by another internet user, sp1der_. On her way through the city, she passes through a technology trade show as well as through several types of data space—chat rooms, CCTV screens, and virtual games—as she tries to "rescue the present" from the superficiality of digital data storage. ang3l eventually meets sp1der_, who surgically removes a hard drive from her chest. As the film ends, the footage becomes increasingly degraded—suggesting that the video was in fact her own digital memory file.

Mixing live action footage filmed in Istanbul with found sequences from TV, video games, and various other forms of virtual image-making, *Neon Parallel 1996* emulates past visions of technological futures through the romantic veneer of outdated media. The represented cityscape remains unspecified but bears a strong resemblance to that of Hong Kong—its electronic markets, high rises, and never-resting streets. The video is the artist's attempt to create a "lost vaporwave classic", a reference to the internet musical micro-genre that developed around 2010 on early social media platforms like Tumblr. By fusing 1980s synth funk and smooth jazz in a loopy and glitchy fashion, the genre nostalgically employed popular motifs from obsolescent computer consoles and interfaces, and evoked a lo-fi aestheticisation of corporate dystopias similar to cyberpunk.

TISHAN HSU

Tishan Hsu's three-dimensional paintings portray unidentifiable bodily orifices and limbs, glitchy cybernetic grids, and the ergonomic curvature of office furniture. With evocative titles—*No Name*, *Terrain*, *Stripped Nude*—his early wall-based work from the 1980s suggest an ambiguous synthesis between bodies, spaces, and hardware, and attempt to approach our experience of technology through the corporeal.

Born in Boston and raised in Switzerland and the US by Shanghainese immigrant parents in the 1950s, Hsu moved to New York in the 1970s to pursue painting. There, he took a job as a word processor at one of the first office jobs involving a computer, and it is this now-ubiquitous sensation—extending one's body into cyberspace through a physical object—that spawned much of his thinking about painting and sculpture.

In *Terrain* and *No Name*, oozing sewage grills fuse with abstracted body parts, recalling a dark and cinematic urban landscape. In *Stripped Nude*, body-like blobs emerge from the painting's virtual-looking canvas, as though growing a limb or human prosthetic. Much like the cyberpunk genre, Hsu's large canvases worked to articulate anxieties and fantasies about an uncertain digital future. But while cybernetic thinking from this era imagined the digital and cyberspace as prioritising the mind and thus doing away with the body, Hsu's work insists on the emotional and bodily quality of our encounter with virtual systems. In this way, Hsu proposes an alternative way to approach the body and its politics, beyond the boundaries of what we understand as "physical" and "virtual", carbon and silicon, flesh and soul.

HIROKI TSUKUDA (b. 1978, Kagawa, Japan)
NEON DEMON, 2019, charcoal, ink and pencil on paper, c-print,
wood panel, with acrylic frame, 240×360×4.3 cm (triptych)
The Record 08, 2019, charcoal, ink and pencil on paper, c-print,
wood panel, with acrylic frame, 58×48×6.5cm
Commissioned by Tai Kwun Contemporary
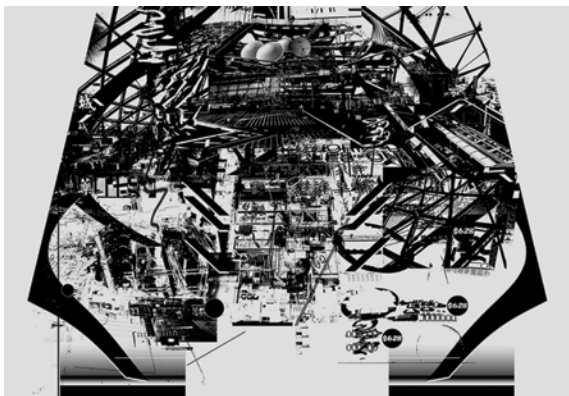
HIROKI TSUKUDA

Hiroki Tsukuda's monochromatic, kaleidoscopic cityscapes are constructed as dense collages combining both digital and printed material. A former graphic designer, he assembles his source material digitally only to draw them out by hand using ink and charcoal on a large scale. This process makes room for impromptu gestures—drips, scratches—in what otherwise appears as meticulous and perfectly geometric image prisms. Tsukuda's intricate and collapsing worlds-within-worlds draw from apocalyptic visions of the future found in films, video games, comics, and novels—often those the artist encountered in his youth, such as the sci-fi classics *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *Blade Runner* (1982) as well as the manga series *Fist of*

the North Star (1983–1988). Transforming fractures of buildings, bodies, plants, technology, and miscellaneous street signage into dizzying and abstracted imagescapes, Tsukuda reflects upon the material signifiers of technological dystopia, particularly from a Japanese perspective—and draws a parallel between a fictional apocalypse and the actual anxiety and despair of our times. For this exhibition, Tsukuda has devised a new work that specifically recalls the cityscape of Hong Kong, which so often has been riffed on in cyberpunk cinema in both Japan and the West. The result serves as a tribute to the genre, and in particular to Hong Kong's unique urban aesthetic that continues to be abstracted in the sci-fi mythos.

HIROKI TSUKUDA
NEON DEMON, *The Record 08*

LEE BUL (b. 1964, Yeongju, South Korea)
After Bruno Taut (Beware the sweetness of things), 2007, crystal, glass
and acrylic beads on stainless-steel armature, aluminium and copper
mesh, PVC, steel and aluminium chains, 258×200×250 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac (photo: Tom Carter)

LEE BUL

The sculptural work by the Korean artist Lee Bul draws from political philosophy, cinema, and various literary genres from around the world as she reflects on how past visions of society and technology inform our present. In her research, Lee frequently returns to science fiction and other radically utopian and dystopian imaginaries, and proposes her artworks as props from these bygone, future worlds.

After Bruno Taut is a dream-like urban miniature model inspired by the futuristic architectural vision of the German architect Bruno Taut, known as "Alpine Architecture", which advocated dazzling, prismatic cities to be built entirely from crystal and glass in the Alps, in response to the destructive warfare of WWI. Taut's vision was itself inspired by the work of the architectural theorist and fantasy novelist Paul Scheerbart and his influential 1914 novel *Glasarchitektur*.

Taut's speculative project is realised as an homage on a micro-scale by Lee using crystal, glass, mosaicked mirrors, and acrylic beads to construct a spiraling city structure suspended from above. At once ancient and futuristic, the models spark wonder, but also highlight a certain ambivalence: in a time when glass has been adapted as the most popular material by corporate architecture, as seen in the shimmering skyscrapers in the financial districts of London, New York, Tokyo, and Hong Kong, material transparency has also come to connote invisible corporate power and a surveillance society where no one can hide. Like any good piece of science fiction, Lee shows that utopia and dystopia are often encapsulated in one and the same thing.
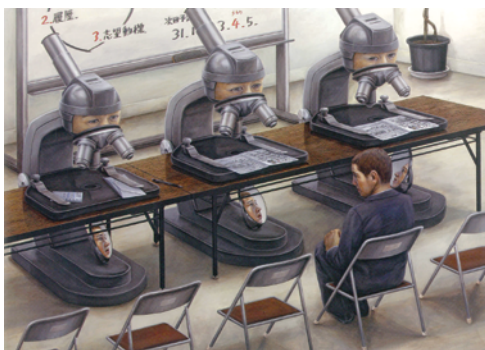
TETSUYA ISHIDA

Born in 1973 in Yaizu, Japan, Ishida came of age as a painter during Japan's so-called "lost decade" of the 1990s when the crash of the stock market and real estate sector led to a deep economic crisis throughout the country. Graduating from art school in 1996, Ishida gave representation to the deep-laden anxieties about the future of society through eerie, afflictive figurative paintings that highlighted the sense of hopelessness, claustrophobia, and emotional isolation that characterised life in sprawling metropolises like Tokyo. Imaginative and surreal, Ishida's figures are often represented half-disembodied or merging with furniture, machines, animals such as in *Winter Fan* and *Observation*, where corporate office workers seem to be morphing or disintegrating into their lifeless surroundings. He also frequently depicts dystopian visions of humanity's relationship with technology, a reflection of Japan's historically frenetic technology sector: in *Interview*, a job applicant sits in front of a row of three half-men/half-machines, seemingly in the process of interrogation. These nightmarish visions of the future of technology-driven capitalism were cornerstones of the cyberpunk genre, which developed prolifically in Japan from the late 1980s throughout the 1990s in anime, cinema, manga, and video games. While his works are both farcical and full of absurdist humour, Ishida's prolific, ten-year career (cut short when the artist died from a train accident in the early 2000s) worked to visualise the alienation of modern metropolitan life—and a bleak, imagined future where biology, technology, and consumer culture bleed into one anguished mode of crisis time.

TETSUYA ISHIDA
Interview, *Observation*, *Untitled*, *Winter Fan*

TAKEHIKO NAKAFUJI (b. 1970, Tokyo, Japan)
Nightcrawler, 1995/*Hong Kong*, 1994/*Tokyo*, 2019
Photographs, inkjet prints on archival paper
Commissioned by Tai Kwun Contemporary
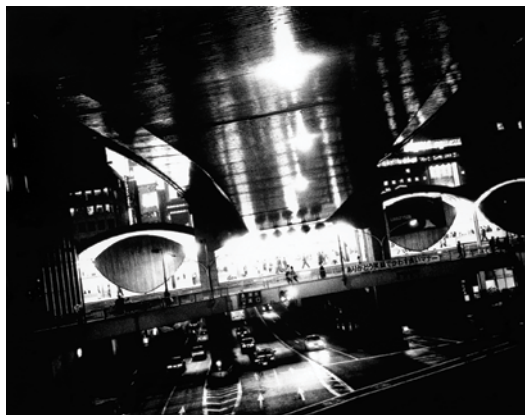
TAKEHIKO NAKAFUJI

The Japanese photographer Takehiko Nakafuji produces serial portraits of cities and urban spaces. Occasionally featuring human beings, Nakafuji's monochrome and intensely atmospheric images depict cities as entities of their own, constituted by their various sprawling mechanic, organic, and technological activities. *Nightcrawler*, on display, was his first series of photographs taken right after graduation, devoted entirely to his home city of Tokyo. Here, Nakafuji presents the Japanese capital as a chaotic near-dystopia, "an ever-transforming monster, an amoeba that continues to deform and regenerate", in the artist's own words. Dark and multi-layered, the images evoke the classic haunted urban visuality of cyberpunk where old architecture stands in ever-growing conflict with new redevelopments. *Nightcrawler* is presented alongside his *Hong Kong* series, on public display for the first time, which Nakafuji wished to depict before the return of the city to China in 1997—marking the end of a political and technological era. After many years of depicting foreign cities around the world, the artist once again began to photograph Tokyo in the wake of the explosion at the Fukushima nuclear plant in 2011, which left the Japanese capital in infrastructural chaos and partial darkness in the attempt to conserve electricity. This moment seemed to mark an overall regression of Japanese society, a dystopia realised—yet in the coming years, the city continued a persistent onwards march towards the future, namely the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. "Tokyo continues as a demon city of swirling energy, spinning out of control. Everything is nihilistic chaos," the artist reflects.

TAKEHIKO NAKAFUJI
Nightcrawler, Hong Kong, Tokyo

CUI JIE (b. 1983, Shanghai)
Cell Tower, 2019, acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 200×150 cm
Cell Tree 2, 2019, acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 150×200 cm
Cell Tower 2, 2019, acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 150×200 cm
The above are commissioned by Tai Kwun Contemporary
Shanghai Light Building 2, 2019, 3D printing, 13.9×12.2×45 cm
Shanghai East China Electric Power Building, 2019,
3D printing, 26.5×23.7×45 cm
Tianjin Book Building, 2019, 3D printing, 34.1×24.7×34 cm

CUI JIE

Cui Jie explores the circuitous history of modernist architecture in the Mainland. Her work focuses on Chinese public monuments and large-scale urban building projects from the twentieth century—many of which are already or will soon be demolished—which through an abstract play with space, dimensionality, movement, and perspective she renders in the futuristic way they were often imagined. This architectural idiom—often informed by Soviet architectural styles—is heavily symbolic, often communicating national unity as well as economic and technological progress. A new series of paintings looks specifically at technology in urban spaces, portraying notable early data centres and telecommunication infrastructure embedded into the developing Chinese cityscapes of the 1980s—such as the towering post-modernist Shanghai East China Electric Power Building, built in 1987. Fantastical and sweeping, Cui's models, however, recall idealist architectural visions in alienated urban settings. Thirty some years after their construction, Cui considers the politics of architectural preservation and the "aging" of national futurisms. By monumentalising these derelict or demolished buildings that have come of age during the nation's rapid urbanisation, Cui offers a complex aesthetic commentary on the historical relationship between politics, urban space, and aesthetics in the Mainland.

BETTINA VON ARNIM (b. 1940, Zernikow, Germany)
Kyborg, 1970, oil on canvas, 138×112 cm
Verkehrswesen, 1971, oil on canvas, 150×130 cm
Flammenwerfer, 1973, oil on canvas, 130×150 cm
Private collection, Germany

BETTINA VON ARNIM

Bettina von Arnim's large-scale oil paintings from the 1970s depict the alarming fusion of human bodies, war machines, and cities in an age of advanced, technology-enhanced capitalism. Born in 1940 in Nazi Germany, von Arnim trained as a painter and graphic designer before settling in West Berlin, where she became associated with the New Realism movement as well as German Pop. In the late 1960s, von Arnim started vocally critiquing the rise of technocratic power in Western society, and developed a deep concern for the industrialisation of agriculture as well as the race among nation-states to conquer outer space. Her paintings from this time speak to the anxiety of technological advancement under industrial capitalism by developing a visual universe devoid of nature as well as human relations. *Flammenwerfer,* German

for "flamethrower", depicts a desert-like wasteland where a geometrically designed landscape leads to an enormous factory looming on the rainbow horizons. In *Kyborg*, the future post-human is imagined as a towering half-human/half-machine, with tubes and funnels replacing natural organs, making it appear as a spaceship or factory in his own right. This vision extends into *Verkehrswesen* (German for "transportation") where an astronaut-like cyborg figure poses alongside various future transport methods—suggesting that soon enough, space travel will not only be normalised but managed by robotic labour. By incorporating elements from industry, technology, and space travel into one totalising visual universe, von Arnim produces a striking vision of a dystopian future, years before the emergence of cyberpunk.

CHAN WAI KWONG

Chan Wai Kwong was born in Hong Kong in 1976, his father a news photographer and his mother an employee at the casinos in Macau. Dropping out of high school early, he drifted in and out of odd jobs for many years before starting to take photographs as a young man. Over the years, Chan developed—completely self-taught—his distinct high-contrast style shot entirely on film. He began self-publishing his work in 2010, and is known for his hand-bound photo books, each devoted to a particular Hong Kong neighborhood: Sham Shui Po, Yau Ma Tei, Wan Chai, and Admiralty. In Chan's journal-like photographs, Hong Kong is the key protagonist, depicted as a sprawling metropolis with its famously crowded avenues, winding pathways, and endless high-rises.

Focusing particularly on Kowloon, the photos portray the city's denizens as at one with their urban environment, poised in corner stores, subway cars, and roadside eateries. Rather than staging motifs, the artist renders himself as a mere documentarian, shooting ephemeral scenes between the city and the subjects, which imparts the images with something personal and diaristic. In his work, there is particular attention to spaces of commerce and consumption, advertising, waste, and random passersby caught in fleeting moments. This works to produce a romantic myth of the forever unknowable metropolis of Hong Kong—akin to much cyberpunk cinema and anime, which despite being made in Japan or the West often used the city as a go-to urban setting.

YURI PATTISON (b. 1986, Dublin, Ireland)
False Memory, 2019, video installation
Commissioned by Tai Kwun Contemporary
Courtesy of the artist and mother's tankstation, London and Dublin

YURI PATTISON

Yuri Pattison's video installation *False Memory*, commissioned by Tai Kwun Contemporary, is a meditation on time and memory in the network age. An autonomous structure within the gallery is fitted with several screens connected by a custom networked playback system that plays a variety of video footage shot by the artists over several years. The footage juxtaposes various ghost towns—urban spaces abandoned due to gentrification and government regulation—with a replica of one of Hong Kong's most notorious quarters, the Kowloon Walled City, situated inside a gaming arcade in Kawasaki, Japan. The Kowloon Walled City—a former Chinese military fort and veritable free zone during British rule characterised by its dense population and improvised, networked architecture—holds a central place not only in the history of Hong Kong, but in the cyberpunk genre, which employed it as cinematic setting and as spatial metaphor for the dark web. Demolished in 1994, the district now only exists as a virtual ghost in photographs and through its various romanticised renditions across cinema, comics, and video games. By assembling these representations of past and present ghostly urban spaces, Pattison reflects on how our relationship to a historical past is constantly informed by their simulation as images circulating in culture. Retreating into lost futures (or future pasts) through replicas, simulations, and staged ruins, such images depict a sense of *anemoia*—an alternative view of history where various media temporalities haunt each other in complex, networked ways.

YURI PATTISON
False Memory

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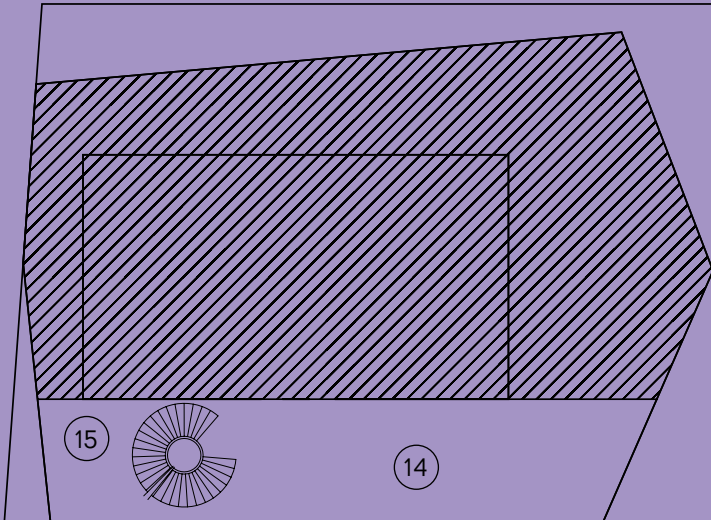
NADIM ABBAS (b. 1980, Hong Kong)
Fake Present Eons (After Posenenske), 2019,
mixed media installation with durational performance
Commissioned by Tai Kwun Contemporary
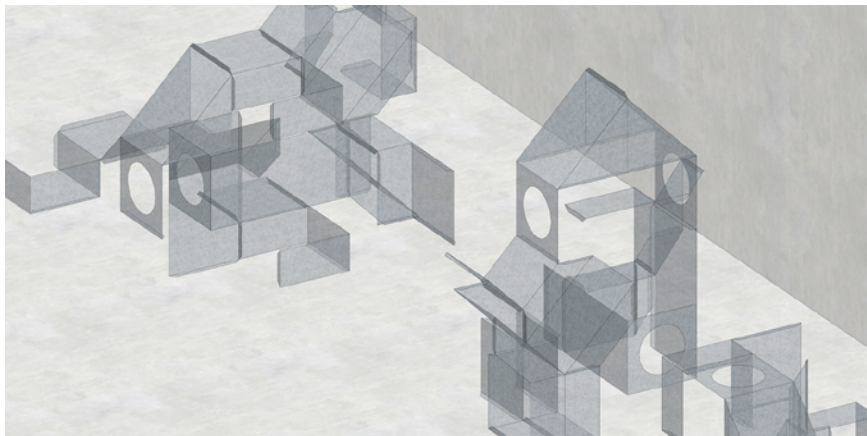
NADIM ABBAS

Hong Kong artist Nadim Abbas explores technologies of perception and the status of the image in a hyper-connected era, where the border between the real and the virtual begins to dissolve. His new work *Fake Present Eons (After Posenenske)*, commissioned by Tai Kwun Contemporary, comprises a maze-like interior tessellation constructed out of folded galvanised steel sheet modules. Evoking the panicky architectures of video games like Pacman and first-person shooters, it also takes cues from functional ventilation shafts as well as from the utopian geometric explorations of Charlotte Posenenske, the German minimalist artist who famously abandoned the art world in the wake of the global social movement uprisings of 1968.

Evoking Posenenske's method of producing sculptures that could be endlessly combined and reconfigured, each of Abbas' modules works towards forming mutant architectural entities, which he likens to newfangled techno-monsters from cyberpunk classics such as *Akira* (1988) and *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* (1989). Solitary costumed individuals quietly occupy the air-conditioned parameters without any seeming motive, a mask obfuscating their identity. An anagram of "After Posenenske", *Fake Present Eons* is a kind of immersive simulation that connects the psychological tensions of cyberpunk's multiple cultural reference points (from corporate architecture to kitsch video games) through the allegorical medium of contemporary art.

NADIM ABBAS
Fake Present Eons (After Posenenske)

JODI (founded in 1993, Netherlands/Belgium)
SOD, 1999, video game installation; software:
"Wolfenstein game engine", "C++ Borland Compiler", "CSS", "HTML"
Courtesy of the artists
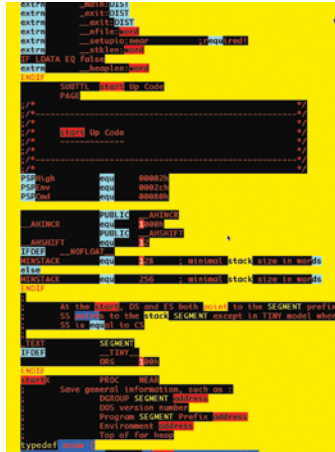
JODI

The collective JODI are early pioneers of the net.art movement and have since the mid-1990s employed the internet as a space for artistic and technological experimentation. Their works span browser-based HTML artworks to immersive installations, and often embrace elements of retrofitting, hacking, or purposeful misuse of software and hardware alike—much like the transgressive tech-savvy anti-heroes of classic cyberpunk literature. In 1999, they started the practice of modifying old video games to make so-called "art mods" that repurposed the games for artistic purposes. In *SOD*, the early video game

Wolfenstein 3D (1992), in which the goal was to escape from a Nazi dungeon, is heavily deconstructed into a near-abstract maze of pure geometrical forms and pixelated patterns in black, white, and gray. This broken-down game space remains only vaguely architectural and thus highly disorienting, as viewers are asked to immerse themselves in the game as real players within the exhibition. *SOD* is a hallucinatory journey through virtual imagespace, and a testament to the early vision of the internet as a spatial construct.

JODI
SOD

3F
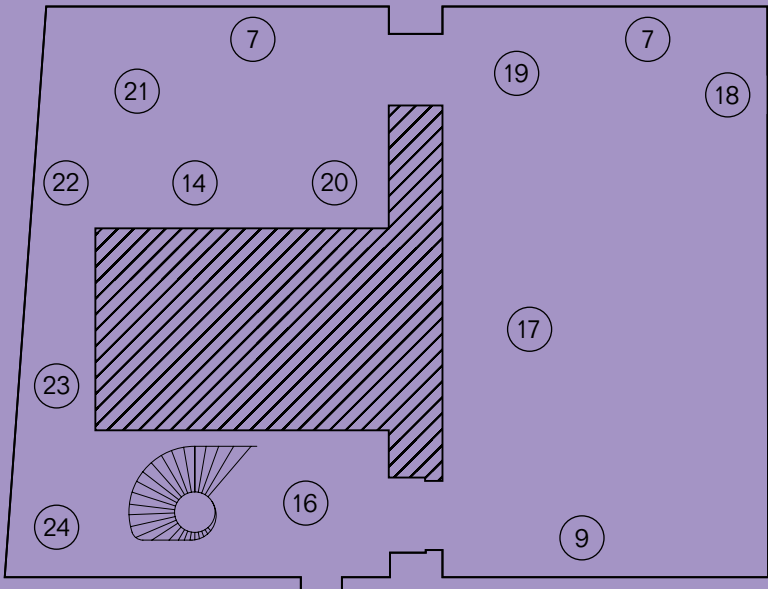
ZHENG MAHLER (founded 2015, Hong Kong)
The Master Algorithm, 2019, hologram installation
In collaboration with You Mi
Musical score by John Bartley and Gordon Mathews
Commissioned by Tai Kwun Contemporary

ZHENG MAHLER

The Master Algorithm is a companion work to Zheng Mahler's *Nostalgia Machines*, a part of an ongoing body of research and exhibitions on the political economy of the so-called fourth industrial revolution in the Mainland, where the boundaries between physical, digital, and biological worlds are blurred. The work speculates on ways to read recent and future technological progress as well as ways to interpret the algorithmic development of the Asian city. The work features a hologram projection of Qiu Hao, the Mainland's first AI newsreader developed through a complex combination of facial recognition, face modelling, speech synthesis, and deep learning, modelled after the real life newsreader Qiu Hao. The virtual AI doppelgänger mutates, grows, and disappears into clouds of data that re-materialise as techno-orientalist nightmares and Asian algorithmic utopias and cityscapes. All the while, he conveys the fictional story of a future "master algorithm"—developed from the largest imagined data set on the planet—that will ensure the next evolutionary leap for mankind. In this sci-fi future, narrated through vignettes moving backwards in time, many of cyberpunk's darkest predictions have come alive: an era where data is the new oil and surveillance is a total condition. By aggressively evoking cyberpunk and vaporwave tropes, the work highlights how narratives of real technological development in the Mainland are still ridden with the Western techno-orientalist imaginary of the East, generated in the first wave of so-called "Japan panic" in the 1980s. The seductive and utopian quality of this aesthetic fogs the real dangers and unrealised potentials of this coming industrial revolution.

ZHENG MAHLER
The Master Algorithm

SHINRO OHTAKE (b. 1955, Tokyo, Japan)
MON CHERI: A Self-Portrait as a Scrapped Shed, 2012, mixed media,
timber, electronics, sound, steam, dimensions variable
(photo: Masahito Yamamoto) Commissioned and produced by
dOCUMENTA (13) with support of Take Ninagawa, Tokyo; Naoshima
Fukutake Art Museum Foundation, Kagawa, Japan; Japan Foundation,
Japan. Courtesy of Take Ninagawa, Tokyo © Shinro Ohtake

SHINRO OHTAKE

Shinro Ohtake is known for his multimedia collages and assemblages, made by sourcing extraordinary amounts of material to produce laboured and chaotic pastiches of a society through its own consumer detritus. Ohtake's particular method of collage, mostly frequently presented in his famous oversized "scrapbooks", is amplified in *MON CHERI: A Self-Portrait as a Scrapped Shed*, a large-scale installation first presented in a park in Kassel, Germany during dOCUMENTA (13) in 2012. Taking its name from an out-of-business snack bar, the neon sign of which Ohtake discovered and installed onto a prefab shed, the work figures as an immersive installation inviting viewers to behold one of his scrapbooks that the artist completed in Tokyo. Plastering the shed with pop-cultural imagery, kitschy objects, and various consumer debris sourced from Kassel and around the world, *MON CHERI* can be understood as an altar or monument to the artist's own artistic process and life, informed by the intense and constant flow of mass media and consumer commodities. A dissonant soundtrack composed of urban field recordings evokes memories of changing urban environments like markets and train stations. Ohtake's scrappy, DIY-approach to architecture through urban detritus recalls the defiant architectural visions of both the steampunk and cyberpunk genres, which similarly emphasised the inventive use of found material in the sprawling twenty-first century metropolis.

NURRACHMAT "ITO" WIDYASENA

Since 2014, the Indonesian artist Nurrachmat Widyasena has worked under the corporate moniker PT Besok Jaya ("Tomorrow Victorious"), a fictional tech company that tries to solve societal issues through new, hyper-innovative products. PT Besok Jaya's pieces capture the pride and optimism of the developing South East Asian nation, but also the misguided decisions and absurdist outcomes behind its embrace of technology in its hopes of occupying prominent roles on a future world stage. *Juru Bisik Metafisika* is a personal "guru" in the form of a Chinese porcelain sculpture, affixed in an infinity mirror case. Meant to be kept by the bedside, the product holds out promises that the prosperous guru will appear in

your dreams and teach you everything you would want to learn, in perpetuity. A small speaker under the case mutters formulae in maths, physics, and history to further enhance learning while sleeping— a total solution for the aspiring student who uses both magic and discipline to realise greater futures. In his satirical takes on corporate offerings, Widyasena looks at ways in which both individuals and states often place their hopes—and funding—in high-tech ventures that wield the seductive promise of easy solutions (even if such ventures sometimes deliver questionable results)—and how folklore, pop culture, and regional geopolitics end up shaping such innovations in surprising and bizarre ways.

ARIA DEAN

The artist and critic Aria Dean is concerned with identity as it relates to the internet and emergent image technologies. In her sculptural practice, she often employs everyday and seemingly mundane objects fraught with cultural significance, thus forcing a moment of reflection on the material politics of our increasingly digital world. The sculpture *Dead Zone (copy)* encases a single preserved cotton branch inside a bell jar. Cotton looms large in the American cultural imaginary, evoking for many the grave injustices that historically underpinned American economic prosperity—the theft and forced enslavement of hundreds of thousands of people from Africa. However, the plant is also used to a wide variety of mundane ends in manufacturing and decor. Though extremely generic in its present life, the cotton branch carries a massive symbolic charge. As such, in *Dead Zone*, the cotton branch appears as a haunted relic of a violent and traumatic past, but also as an aestheticised object inviting viewers to capture and disseminate it as an image— and therefore a commodity— online. However, concealed in the base of the bell jar is a signal jammer, which scrambles the signal of cell phones and other transmitting devices in its vicinity, effectively creating a communication "dead zone" around the sculpture, prohibiting it from being circulated online. Yet public policy in Hong Kong (as well as in New York and Los Angeles, where the work had previously been shown) does not allow for the use or possession of signal jammers, and effectively *Dead Zone (copy)* must be disabled when on public display—a testament to the fact that in this age, being interconnected is no longer an option but a total condition, and visibility is a mandate.

ARIA DEAN
Dead Zone (copy)

HO RUI AN (b. 1990, Singapore)
Student Bodies, 2019, single-channel video, 26'30''
Courtesy of the artist

HO
RUI AN

Ho Rui An's research focuses on the geopolitics of East and South East Asia, particularly as it relates to capitalist modernity. In several earlier works, he investigated the myth of a "miraculous" Asia spawned by the region's intense economic and technological acceleration after World War II, which came to a sudden halt with the regional financial crisis of 1997. This leap led to the proliferation of several "Asian futurisms" in popular culture, as vividly depicted in the cyberpunk genre, which often used the tech-driven Asian metropolis as its de facto context. In *Student Bodies*, Ho considers the history of the region's capitalist development through the figure of the student body,

approaching it as both a literal embodiment and metaphor for ideological advancement, regression, and resistance. Mixing archival and filmed footage, the video tracks the student body from the earliest Japanese university students in the West onwards. Describing it as a work of "pedagogical horror", the artist employs tropes from horror films to recount a monstrous and often fraught geopolitical history, particularly through its disconcerting sound design, where the narration is provided by unseen "ghosts" whose guttural utterances are comprehensible only through the subtitles.

SONDRA PERRY (b. 1986, New Jersey, USA)
Graft and Ash for a Three Monitor Workstation, 2016, video installation
Marieluise Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial
Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

SONDRA PERRY

Sondra Perry's *Graft and Ash for a Three Monitor Workstation* disrupts the neutrality and objectivity of technology, and explores how processes of virtual embodiment and disembodiment—classic themes of the cyberpunk genre—collude with racialised violence. In the work, a video is installed within a bicycle "workstation"— a real piece of equipment designed to help office workers get physical exercise while at work. Here, across a triptych of screens, a disembodied 3D avatar face appears on a chroma key blue background, floating in space to the sound of generic relaxation/meditation music found on YouTube. The avatar, we learn, is modelled after the artist using a standard rendering software which failed to replicate her

accurately as her body did not fit its pre-existing templates. On the work, the critic Margaret Kross wrote in *Artforum*: "The automaton, Perry's avatar, is exhausted by the risks of being itself and by running hardware beyond its specifications. It's a potent metaphor for projections that white norms graft onto black culture, corrupting the flesh of physiological health with symptoms in perception and behavior." As the video progresses, the avatar notes that the exercise bike has become outmoded, but leaves "incredible exhaustion, looping, running daily" in its wake—a comment on the way allegedly innovative technologies can double as tools of enforcement for long-running systems of power and injustice.

SONDRA PERRY
Graft and Ash for a Three Monitor Workstation

SEIKO MIKAMI (b. 1961, Shizuoka, Japan. d. 2015)
The World Memorable: Suitcase, 1993, mixed media
Courtesy of Galerie Hubert Winter, Vienna

SEIKO MIKAMI

Seiko Mikami was one of the early pioneers of new media art in Japan. In the mid-1980s, she became known for her large-scale digital installations that related the emergent "information society" with the human body, a theme she continued to elaborate and expand on during her tenure as professor of Information Design at Tama Art University in Tokyo until her premature death from illness in 2015. Much of her work situates the human at the interface of physical and virtual systems, as she experiments with the limits of interactivity and human perception. Throughout her career, Mikami also produced sculptural objects from junk and scrap material, including *The World Memorable*, a series of suitcases filled with various forms of waste such as syringes, radioactive and biohazardous material, laboratory animals, toxic liquids, and air pollutants. Closed with zips but fully transparent, the objects play on classic themes of contamination paranoia found in both the cyber- and biopunk genres, where the leakage of toxic or dangerous materials threatens human safety in dense metropolitan areas. Sometimes presented on a conveyor belt as found in airports, the suitcases also speak to the politics of movement and migration, and how both commodities and people are subject to strict control and regulation in a globalised world.

CHEN WEI (b. 1980, Zhejiang Province, China)
In the Waves, 2013, photograph on lightbox, 100×80.5×12 cm
Courtesy of the artist

CHEN WEI

Chen Wei's cinematic photographs capture nightclub-goers in a collective reverie, seemingly transfixed on a smoke-filled dancefloor, making them appear at once alone and united. For several years, the Chinese artist conducted deep research into the early club culture of 1990s China, when the government restricted most forms of spontaneous gathering. Nightclubs, however, still allowed this possibility, and this freedom offered by the dancefloor was cherished by intellectuals and artists in particular, who formed subcultures in resistance to mainstream ideologies while congregating around music, dance, and pleasure. Chen meticulously recreates these historical sanctuary interiors as photographic sets, thus mixing reality, dream, and fiction. These neon-lit and deeply romantic images pay homage to the freedoms once offered by nightlife in Chinese cities before their intense commercialisation, spaces that inspired countless artists, writers, and film directors in their time. Still, their dream-like melancholy speaks to the uncertainty of collective gathering.

CHEN WEI
In the Waves

SETH PRICE (b. 1973, East Jerusalem)
Rejected or Unused Clips, Arranged in Order of Importance, 2003,
colour, sound, 10'38"
Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts Intermix
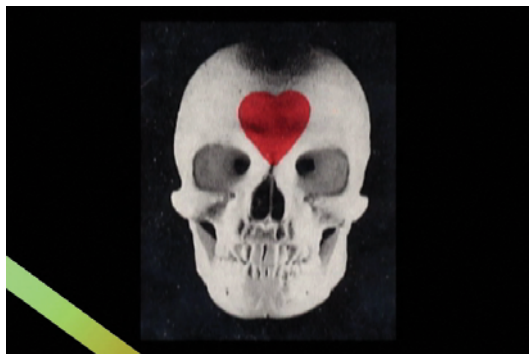
SETH PRICE

In *Rejected or Unused Clips, Arranged in Order of Importance*, Seth Price gathers unused video and audio clips left over from the production of other works. Snippets of advertisements, corporate reels, video games, documentaries, and home videos produce a kaleidoscopic journey through twentieth-century media, forming a seemingly never-ending stream of moving image entertainment. *Rejected or Unused Clips* was made only two years before the launch of the first video streaming platform Youtube, which smoothed the experience of consuming moving images as a digital open-source archive accessible by all.

The artist's voice-over discusses religion, technology, and the omnipotence of the internet in a mock-sober voice, while several themes—the history of experimental cinema, animation, and the spectacular mediatisation of violence—slowly emerge. The suggestive titles trigger the viewer to look for cohesion and narrative in Price's personal moving image junkspace, but left without any clues, the video becomes a hallucinatory monument of the many stylistic currents and image flows that constitute the modern world—most of them long forgotten, long lost.

SETH PRICE
Rejected or Unused Clips, Arranged in Order of Importance

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