

For Immediate Release

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Miao Xiaochun, *Restart*, 2020

Re-start

Curated by Julie Walsh

Oct. 24th-30th, 2020

In Mozilla Hubs as part of the Mediantage Festival in Munich, direct link to exhibition: <https://xrhubspace.de/4Rtitw7/re-start>

Artists: Claudia Hart, Tamiko Thiel, Nancy Baker Cahill, Vivan Sundaram, Zhou Xiaohu, Miao Xiaochun, Tim Deussen, Shi Zheng, and Martina Menegon

Re-start is an international artistic reaction to the global pandemic, created in a virtual realm. The exhibition features seminal pioneers in Digital art from 3 continents as well as emerging artists. The creators, from Shanghai, Berlin, Vienna, New York and Los Angeles, examine in a digital form what unites and affects us all across borders.

Re-start is a return to look anew at issues of ecology, failed empires, and questions of identity in a rapidly changing reality. The exhibition will take place in Mozilla Hubs. It is accessible by PC, VR and mobile devices.

Identity

Since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, our faces and bodies are on display in unprecedented ways. Tamiko Thiel and Martina Menegon explore questions of identity and our obsession with redefining the self.

Legendary digital artist Tamiko Thiel exhibits a deepfake A.I. work called Lend Me Your Face. In the AI installation,

artists Tamiko Thiel and /p rendered deepfake videos from single photos of participants. The visitors' faces were mapped to videos of prominent public figures and then displayed on a variety of video screens. The visitor is confronted with a very personal encounter of how the most intimate and yet public part of the self, the face and the emotions it expresses, can easily be manipulated and placed in contexts out of their control.

Vienna based artist Martina Menegon's work challenges conceptions of identity and the fragility of our bodies, or as she puts it, "synthetic corporality" in her piece all alone together. The work shows virtual clones of the artist's 3D-scanned body which move in irregular and bizarre ways as a result of an algorithmic anomaly. The clones are in a liminal state between anxiety and ecstasy. The viewer can move surrounded by a full immersion with the clones, sensing their discomfort in their own bodies and in turn escalating our own in this alternate reality.

Ecology

Artists Vivan Sundaram, one of the seminal pioneers of media art (Delhi) and Shi Zheng (Shanghai and NY) playfully challenge us to rethink our assumptions about our place in relation to the natural world. The artists examine the effects of urbanization on ecology, through the eyes of latent learning with AI's and computers in Mr. Shi's work, and through the experiences of Indian waste pickers in Mr. Sundaram's. Both works prompt the viewer to reflect on questions of nature and natural beauty.

Mr. Sundaram assembled a trash city hiring waste pickers to help him in his studio. He then created a series of photos and videos based on the work.

As Mr. Sundaram says: "It's a huge industry that is part of our landscape. You can't wish it away, just as you can't wish away the poor. The urban middle upper class, rather than turn away from the garbage they generate, must face the reality of the people outside their gated colonies."

Shi Zheng took photos of individual trees on an island near Shanghai. He then transformed them using AI software and gaming technology to help turn the individual trees into 3 dimensional images of a forest and other natural elements. Mr. Zheng also designed a computer vision system to observe the virtual environment, for example calculating how many pixels were in "a tree". As the artist says, "The main structure with the four screens

in the installation can be considered a metaphor for the "tree" which supports the constant exchange and transfer of matter and energy in the environment. In this parallel simulated reality, the screens hanging in different directions perform the role of mirrors, reflecting the visual landscape shared by both humans and machines."

Failed Empires

Digital artists Miao Xiaochun, Zhou Xiaohu, Claudia Hart and Tim Deussen look at the passages of time and history through the lens of the canon of western art history and literature. These reflections pose dark questions about why history repeats itself and whether humanity can learn from its repeated mistakes.

Nancy Baker Cahill's augmented reality piece draws further attention to the inequalities of historical notions of the concept of liberty. Although Ms. Baker Cahill's artwork lives at the vibrant intersection of public art, social consciousness and tech, she creates in her AR piece Liberty Bell a sonic landscape gathered from a diverse array of historical moments and locations. Ms. Baker Cahill's work examines the evolution and transformation of liberty over time into the complex reality we face today.

Tim Deussen gives voice to the German poet Jurgen Fuchs, whose personal history was interrupted by being imprisoned in solitary confinement by the Stasi. This live VR reading in the poet's virtual prison celebrates the resiliency of the human spirit in the face of (now failed) repressive regimes.



Zhou Xiaohu, *THE GARDEN OF FORKING PATHS*, 2020



Claudia Hart, *A Doll's House XR*, 2020

Miao Xiaochun, an innovator of new media in Beijing, presents the video *Restart* which explores the passage of time in human history with the score of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*. As Mr. Miao references the canon of western art history, he also explores concepts of the role of cultural and intercultural memory. He has replaced all the people in iconic paintings in western art history with a nude 3D model of himself. These figures cross time and space through history in a search for meaning.

Zhou Xiaohu is a pioneer of new media art based in Shanghai. Mr. Zhou's 3D animation "The Garden of Forking Paths" pays tribute to the analysis of the passage of history made by the great Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges.

"The Garden of Forking Paths" is about the history of information transmission in geographical conflicts. The videos, which are presented as an installation, also explore the history of people's endless failure to succeed in navigating the maze of time.

Claudia Hart is considered an early innovator in virtual imaging, using 3D animation to make media installations and projections, then later as they were invented, other forms of VR, and AR. *A Doll's House XR*, produced for this exhibition, is based on the philosophical idea of the "eternal return" – the notion that history endlessly renews itself through a process of decadence, decay and rebirth. The setting of the artwork takes place in the Paulwall House.

This 19th century home of a Detroit industrialist now standing in ruins. Ms. Hart creates a new type of visual language for decay by repurposing mathematical cycles. Signs and symbols of fallen empires and corporations are fused into a personified flickering wallpaper. These images are further combined with short aphorisms inspired by Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*. The effects of these flashing animations is a visual cacophony at once disorienting and paradoxically trance inducing. The music was composed by Kurt Hentschlaeger.