

当怪物说话时

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“当怪物说话时”展览故事的起点，源于疫情中的紧急状态给年轻一代带来的后遗症。虚拟线上生活占据大部分时间的三年里，对于“无知”的恐慌与求生欲令我们拼命与外界保持联系，试图借助线上渠道超越受限的物理空间，主动被来自世界各地的信息不断冲刷。与之相随的技术在几年时间里不断更新，线上音乐会、线上会议、线上认证... 媒介成为实践约束日常的必要组成，虚拟生活成为我们现实中的关键节点。在这个过程中，不同意识形态下信息的操控和矛盾、虚拟世界所展示的理想生活和自身现实境况之间的差异、视觉刺激外其他感官抚慰的匮乏、大量负面信息流带来的替代性创伤等等业已存在的网络症候愈发显现。我们可以随手获得如此多的事实，以致于我们失去了得出结论的能力，因为总是有其他事实支持其他的说法。

当下，关于疫情的讨论似乎渐渐进入尾声，那些自疫情前就早有端倪的症状，即快速变化的媒体环境对个人意识和行为的种种影响，并没有随着疫情实体痕迹的消失而被一并抹去。走在信息迷雾中的恐慌如模糊的怪物影子，依然弥散在我们的社交生活中。同样，武装冲突、意识形态争斗、民族主义情绪等依旧不断生产真假难辨的信息和图像，刺激我们暂且选择相信某种事实、躲入某个集体，而疑问亟待解决。

展览题目“当怪物说话时”（When the monster is speaking）受到 1818 年玛丽·雪莱的科幻小说《弗兰肯斯坦》启发。自上世纪起，多部未来主义的科幻改编电影都以令人同情的角色和哥特式戏仿的形式描绘着书中那个有人造的、压倒性力量的、寻求人类情感认同的缝合怪物，且每个版本都与那个时代的技术焦虑有关。“怪物”一词来自拉丁语 *monstrare*，翻译过来是“揭示”或“展示”。怪物常常以图像的形式折射出人类的恐惧与具像化的时代焦虑，它不仅仅由各类媒介呈现，还承载着媒介的形式：《弗兰肯斯坦》在 19 世纪打开了潘多拉的魔盒；《金刚》《哥斯拉》诞生于西方探险传统对异域世界的想象与野心、人类毁灭性暴行的灾难性后果；《生化危机》等电子游戏充斥着互动媒体催生的怪物；《野兽》则借人工智能消除人类自古以来的危机感和影响效率的情绪。怪物这一集体无意识的原始意象就成为我们寻找自己位置的坐标：它的形象变化也代表着我们对自身认知的更新。

正如意大利马克思主义理论家安东尼奥·葛兰西所言：“旧世界正在消亡，新世界尚未诞生：现在是怪物横行的时代。”时过境迁，曾经令人感到新奇、恐怖、实验逐渐发展为现代科技的一部分，而那些关于怪物的想象与未知的担忧仍然存续在我们的生活中，形成迷雾般的传说与谎言。“怪物”在当下具体化地向我们映射着那些不可见的现象和关系，以及现实和我们所知道的界限之间的空间，而它围绕着未知所发出的声音令人越发难以捉摸。

我们只能通过记忆和媒介知晓一部分的真实，包含不同目的与立场的图像自现实中被截取后经历多次传播与解读，开始与其所揭示的内容相分离。这些分离的起始点也许可以追溯到 1980 年代。批判时代的声音渐弱，关于后现代的讨论解构了一切，也解构掉了既有的价值体系，在新世纪形成了多元主义的政治正确。资本在推进现代化的进程中令其对信息的掌控大于个人，个体的判断逐渐制约于权力机构的判断。信息社会发展推动的知识唯利化，改变了人与知识的关系。科学知识经由政治权力掌控后的真理呈现，似乎比过去任何时候都更依附于权力，却无法再凭权力解决自身的合法性：谁决定知识是什么？谁知道应该决定什么？传统真相界定的权威被消解，破除权威后的现代性

又未能重建起新的合法性权威，陷入了不知什么是知识、什么是真相，更不知道该了解什么的困境之中。在现代化的进程下，在既定制度框架之间继续增殖的、被拉图尔称之为“拟客体”的怪物无法被定位，人们只得在追求精英自我的路上狂奔，生怕因过时而失去身份。

被操纵的媒介在消费价值观的领导下，在更庞大的系统中运作着。伴随人工智能科技的跨越式发展，许多我们曾难以想象的变化已悄无声息地发生，也加速形成一块块技术的过期废墟，带来一种虚拟的空洞乡愁。社交媒体的爆炸式发展继续改变政治和原有的全球媒体格局，大众自身的传播能力，属于个人的突发事件成为了属于大家的突发事件，从而再次引来了漂浮的假象——个人成为假新闻和剧本的演绎者。事件带来的差异性力量早已被营销部门，广告公司、金融界专家和媒体集团发现，就像新浪潮曾经非常前卫、刺激的电影技术早已被吸收到霸权美学的武器库中。那些看似爆发但实际上是人为设计的事件，今天也被广泛拿来为服务和商品做有效宣传，到处都充斥着坚信数据和概率的决定论信徒。技术的发展仅仅让业已存在的现象暴露得更加明显：不需要想象更远更新的技术，就能看到机器学习工具已经在复制社会的不平等，虽然这往往是无意的。

当怪物说话时，它的声音和我们自己的声音重叠。本次展览中“怪物”所指向的，不仅是那些尚未可知的新事物和被客体化的阴谋和集团，也指技术更新带来的信息污染、媒介操控、集体沉默、社会趋同等时代症候背后，深藏于我们心中的欲望、焦虑、沮丧和缺乏认知所带来的偏见。技术迭代所导向的工具理性式的价值观赤裸裸排斥着人性中的不稳定因素，引发着一轮又一轮的生存焦虑和人与机器之间的比较，它源于对不可控制和不准确性的恐惧。在这里，技术本身不能，甚至不能作为主要的解决方案。展览由“真实的故事”“怪物质疑”两个章节组成，从我们口耳相传时所听到的第一句话：这是一个真实的故事....开始，逐步分解图像等媒介背后的生产逻辑，在一片片拼图中认真辨别那些噪音，独立质疑呈现于面前的表象，意识到怪物的虚幻本质，并更深层次地触及这一主题——当我们遇到难以理解的事物，并拒绝理解时，怪物就会诞生。

基于我们当前的背景，这次讨论是紧迫的，也与目之所及的未来息息相关：本次展览集合了来自中国、韩国、波黑、挪威、约旦、越南、智利等 10 个国家的 16 件影像和装置作品，他们在实践中展示着来自不同层级的多重视角。各地的艺术工作者们面对不同的地缘政治、个人或集体遭遇的事件，尝试用影像、文字等多种媒介分析怪物的声音，或钻入现实与时间的缝隙，尝试以新的方式、综合的手段来寻找我们面对的真正问题：我们淹没在影像海洋中，却没有经历生活，也没有用我们的身体感受感官的意义。重塑这些“真相”，在这一过程中进一步确认我们认知的局限，补充我们因学科和文化等界限而零碎不整的知识地图。这些作品给予我们一种社会学的想象力，去恢复我们的人性尊严和异化的价值准绳，同时努力创造一种更有弹性的“新常态”，共享一个积极、多样的公正梦想。同时，他们的作品在展厅中也再次展示我们消失的生活并成为怪物、幽灵的墓碑。

文字：那荣锟、王佳怡

When the Monster is Speaking

Dates: 2024.5.23 - 2024.9.01

Venue: 1F, 2F Inside-Out Art Museum, No.50 Xingshikou Road, Haidian District, Beijing

Artistic Director: Carol Yinghua Lu

Curators: Na Rongkun, Wang Jiayi

Exhibition Coordinator: Rory Guan

Curatorial Assistants: Li Huiyi, Sining Zhu

The exhibition “When the Monster is Speaking” tells a story originating from the lingering aftermath of pandemic-induced state of emergency and its impact on the younger generation. Over the three years mostly spent on virtual life online, the fear of “ignorance” and a primal urge to

survive have fueled a desperate need to maintain ongoing connections with the outside world at all costs. We have sought to transcend the constraints of physical space through online channels, willingly being inundated by information from around the globe. It was a period when technologies rapidly advanced to meet growing needs—online concerts, virtual meetings, and digital certifications.... The mediums thus became an essential part in enforcing everyday limitations, while virtual life emerged as a critical juncture in our reality. Various long-standing internet syndromes resurfaced during this process: information manipulation and contradictions under different ideologies, the gap between the ideal life portrayed by the virtual world and our lived realities, the dearth of sensory gratification beyond visual stimulation, and the vicarious trauma caused by the onslaught of negative information, among others. We can now readily obtain so much factual information that we lose the ability to draw conclusions, as there always seems to be alternative facts supporting different claims.

Although discussions about the pandemic are gradually winding down, the social syndromes that predated the virus have not dissipated alongside the physical evidence of COVID-19. In other words, the various impacts of the rapidly shifting media environment on individual consciousness and behavior persist. The fear that once spread through the fog of excessive information still permeates our social lives, like the phantom of a monster looming in the dark mist. Similarly, issues such as armed conflicts, ideological clashes, rising nationalism continue to generate information and imagery that cloud our judgments in discerning what is true or false, driving us to temporarily settle on a speculative truth or hide in a certain group. But still, the underlying problems remain painfully unsolved.

The title of the exhibition, “When the Monster is Speaking,” draws inspiration from the renowned science fiction *Frankenstein* written by English author Mary Shelley in 1818. Since the last century, several film adaptations of futurist science fictions have depicted this manmade, overwhelmingly powerful, cobbled-together monster who seeks humanistic feelings as a character evoking our strong sympathy. Each version of the adaptation, though all in the style of a Gothic parody, repeats the technological anxieties peculiar to its respective time. The word “monster” finds its etymological origin in the Latin term “monstrare,” which can be literally translated as “to reveal” or “to display.” Monsters, while taking form through visual representation, often reflect human fears and materialize into embodied anxieties of their times. They are not only presented through all sorts of mediums, but also embodies the form of media: *Frankenstein* opened Pandora’s box in the 19th century; *King Kong* and *Godzilla* were born from imagination and ambition of the Western adventurous tradition towards exotic worlds; game series like the *Resident Evil* are rife with monsters bred by interactive media; *La Bête*, with the assistance of artificial intelligence, tries to deprive humans of their inherent sense of crisis and other emotions that hinder their productivity. Monsters—this primordial image of the collective unconscious—become the coordinates with which we can correctly posit ourselves. The transformation of their images then represents the constant refreshing of our own self-identification.

Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci famously observed, “The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters.” Time has rendered once groundbreaking or appalling experiments part of modern science and technology. However, the imaginations about monsters and worries towards the unknown still persist in our lives, gathering into mists of lores and lies. Today’s “monsters” manifest as concrete demonstrations, reflecting unseen phenomena, hidden connections, as well as the rift between reality and the limits of our knowledge. Meanwhile, the sound it emits around the unknown grows increasingly elusive.

We are only able to grasp partial truths through memories and mediums. Once images serving distinct agendas and stances are extracted from reality, they undergo dissemination and

interpretation countless times, slowly being detached from their original content. This detachment began as early as the 1980s. Voices from the era of critiques were subdued. Post-modern discussions deconstructed everything, including existing value systems. A new pluralistic political correctness was subsequently established in the following century. Capitals, the driving engine of modernization, have tightened their grip on information, giving them greater control than individuals, so much so that individual judgments became inevitably subjected to influence of authoritative bodies. The development of information society has further prioritized the pursuit of profit in knowledge utilitarianism. This has fundamentally altered the relationship between individuals and knowledge itself. Scientific knowledge is now shown in a particular form of truth sanctioned by political power, seemingly growing more dependent on power than ever before. But power alone can no longer grant its legitimacy: who determines what constitutes knowledge? Who has the authority to determine what needs to be known? Authorities defined by truths in the traditional sense have dissolved, yet post-authoritative modernity has not been able to re-build a legitimate one anew. Instead, we fall into a predicament where we do not know what knowledge is, what truth is, or even what we should know. In the process of modernization, the monsters of what Bruce Latour calls “quasi-objects” proliferate within pre-existing institutional frameworks. Their traces, however, elude precise tracking. As a result, people are compelled to frantically race toward elitist self-fulfillment, for fear of falling behind the times and thus losing their identities.

The manipulated mediums continue to operate within an even grander system guided by consumerist values. The technological leaps of artificial intelligence have stimulated many changes that were previously unimaginable. Along with these changes come accelerated cascades of obsolete technological ruins, evoking a hollow nostalgia for virtuality. The explosive evolution of social media continuously affects politics, reshapes the original global media structure, and regulates the public’s ability to disseminate information. The emergencies of an individual are now naturally ones that belong to everyone and anyone. This situation then again induces a false impression that hovers above facts—individuals become enactors of fake news and scripts. Marketing departments, advertising agencies, financial experts, and media corporations have discovered the intensity of differentiation brought about by events and incidents. History rewrites itself once again, just as the avant-garde cinematic techniques of the La Nouvelle Vague movement were weaponized into the armory of hegemonic aesthetics. These perceived explosions are, in fact, artificially designed plots extensively used for achieving effective promotion of services and products today. Eager acolytes of data and probabilistic determinism are ubiquitous. Technological development exposes long-existing phenomena even more clearly: it no longer requires a vision of more advanced or future technologies to see that machine learning tools, albeit unintentionally, are reproducing social inequalities.

When the monster is speaking, its voice overlaps with our own. The “monster” in this exhibition symbolizes not just newfound objects and events, nor solely objectified conspiracies and cliques. It also represents our deepest desires, anxieties, despondency, and the biases rooted in our inadequate understanding. These feelings are concealed beneath the syndromes intrinsic to our times, which will emerge alongside technological updates, such as information contamination, media manipulation, collective silence, and the homogenization of societies. The instrumental rationality driven by technological iterations unabashedly severs all unstable factors in humanistic relations, unleashing lasting anxieties for survival and continued rivalry between humans and machines. Ultimately, it is embedded in the fear of uncontrollability and uncertainty. In this context, technology alone cannot be, or even should not be, the primary solution. Composed of two chapters, “Real Stories” and “Questioning the Monster,” the exhibition begins with the very first words we often hear in the recounting of an allegory: “This is based on a true story....” It gradually deconstructs the logic of production for mediums like images, meticulously sifting through the noise in piecemeal puzzles, independently questioning the presented appearances, seeing through

the deceptive nature of the monster, and deeply engaging with the underlying theme: when we encounter things we cannot comprehend and refuse to understand, monsters are born.

Our current condition necessitates this discussion as urgent and relevant for any impending future. This exhibition showcases a collection of 16 video and installation works by artists from a total of 10 countries, including China, South Korea, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Norway, Jordan, Vietnam, and Chile. In these works, artists from around the world offer their diversified perspectives across all layers and levels. Responding to a range of geopolitical issues and personal or collective encountering, they employ video, text, and other media to examine the “voices” of these monsters. Alternatively speaking, they dig into the chasm between reality and time, exploring the actual pressing issues with unique means and comprehensive measures: we are submerged in an ocean of videos and images, but have never fully experienced life or embodied the essence of sensations. Here, we reconstruct the “truths” and further probe the limits of our cognition, charting and piecing together a map of knowledge that remains fragmented and scattered due to disciplinary and cultural disjunctions. The works featured in this exhibition cultivate a sociological imagination which can help us reclaim lost standard values of dignity and recognize the impact of alienation. Simultaneously, they strive to create a “new normal”—one marked by resilience, with a positive, diverse dream for justice. These artistic creations, displayed in museum, resurrect our bygone lives, becoming immortal memorials for the “monsters” and “ghosts” of our past.

Text: Na Rongkun, Wang Jiayi

参展艺术家

阿尔弗雷多·贾尔、敖乾栢、达米尔·阿夫达吉奇、大卫·杜阿尔、埃德·阿特金斯、劳伦斯·阿布·哈姆丹、李明、乔纳斯·本迪克森、阮纯诗、武子杨、伊娃和弗朗哥·马特斯、朱利安·夏利耶、朱利叶斯·冯·裨斯麦、张硕尹、张英海重工业、郑源

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