

THE group exhibition *Micro Era. Media Art from China* communicates—through artwork by Cao Fei, Fang Di, Lu Yang, and Zhang Peili—how relations between mind, body, and technology have changed over the past forty years, and not only in China. What emerges through the work of these artists—from *30x30* (1988), a performance that Zhang Peili did solely for the camera, without an audience, and that is considered to be the first video work in China, to the cineastic productions of Cao Fei, to Lu Yang's works designed in a digital anime style, to the documentary reflections of Fang Di—is a spectrum that provides an impression of the attitude towards life of several generations.

The title *Micro Era* cites the name of a short story written by Liu Cixin called 'The Micro-Era', 'Weijiyuan', '微纪元' (1999), from his book *The Wandering Earth*.<sup>1</sup> In it, Liu speculates about the cultural and ethical effects of a posthuman world without any historical awareness within the context of the cultural shift in China after 1989. 'The Micro-Era' describes a world without cares or suffering, inhabited solely by young people who will never grow up. They are actually micro-humans, whose size has been reduced genetically to roughly one trillionth the size of a normal human being. They are the survivors after the earth was set on fire by the heat of the sun. The paradisiacal present is based on a complete lack of memory of any past traumas or tragedies. The sole macro-human still alive, who has returned from a long journey in outer space, sacrifices the future of his species to this posthuman utopia of young people, with all their self-affirmation and dehumanized identity.

The list of artists reflects a dialogue that Cao Fei and Lu Yang personally selected: we asked the two artists invited by the Nationalgalerie to choose with whom they wanted to share the exhibition space. Cao Fei selected the young artist Fang Di, while Lu Yang invited her professor Zhang Peili. In the group exhibition that has thus come about, Cao Fei is showing her work *Asia One* (2018) and her documentary *11.11* (2018) for the first time in Germany. For Zhang Peili, the exhibition in Germany is the hitherto most extensive compilation of his works. With *Opposite Space* (1995), he presents a work that has previously been shown only one time. Lu Yang and Fang Di are having their first institutional appearance on such a scale.

<sup>1</sup> Liu Cixin, 'The Micro-Era', in *The Wandering Earth* (London: Head of Zeus, 2013), pp. 235–72. Original title: '微纪元 (Weijiyuan)', in *Weijiyuan* (Shenyang, 2010), pp. 85–108.

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## Micro Era Media Art from China

The exhibition illustrates exemplarily how the classical concept of genre started dissolving, and not only in China. Artists such as Cao Fei and Lu Yang, as presented in *Micro Era*, create sequels to virtual worlds and games. Their works and those of Fang Di and Zhang Peili show how film and photography are connected with visual, work-oriented arts and the performing arts, and how it was not possible to clearly classify performance art or happenings within any genre since their emergence, and still is not today. The media art mentioned in the subtitle thus merely points to the fact that film, videos, holographs, the Internet, computers, games, and similar so-called new media are used as supports, mediators, or working material.

*Micro Era* takes up the group exhibition *living in time: 29 contemporary artists from China*,<sup>2</sup> which was presented in 2001 at the Nationalgalerie at Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart – Berlin. This exhibition already included artwork by Cao Fei and Zhang Peili and was also conceived by a team of Chinese-German curators, including Pi Li. The exhibition highlighted how contemporary artists from China have reacted to the economic, political, ideological, and technical changes in China since the 1980s. *Micro Era* continues this approach in 2019.

The process of developing the exhibition was already accompanied by a broad spectrum of media in written and visual digital exchange, video conferences, and several meetings in Berlin, Beijing, and Hong Kong. I would therefore like to thank first and foremost the artists, Cao Fei, Fang Di, Lu Yang, and Zhang Peili, as well as my co-curators Victor Wang and Yang Beichen and our curatorial advisor Pi Li for the highly productive, constructive, and harmonious collaboration. Our curatorial work was enthusiastically supported by Alexander Wilmschen and Lu Yang's artistic-curatorial assistant Ida Yang.

We are most grateful to the director of the Nationalgalerie, Udo Kittelmann, who secured us space for this work. Our collective thanks also go to the Governing Mayor of the City of Berlin, Michael Müller, and the Lotto-Stiftung Berlin for their generous support, to the GeKA e. V. for taking the initiative, and to Angelika Jaros for the valuable and in this constellation indispensable organizational project coordination. Maren Eichhorn, Jörg Völlnagel, Fabian Fröhlich, Fiona Geuß, Claudia Ehgartner, and many other staff members at the Staatliche Museen assisted us with great commitment. For the patience involved in the graphic design of the exhibition and this catalogue, we thank the StudioKrimm. We are grateful to everyone for their trust and assistance in connection with this exhibition project.

<sup>2</sup> *living in time: 29 contemporary artists from China*, with works by Cao Fei, Chang Yung Ho / Atelier FCJZ, Chen Shaoxiang, Ding Yi, Feng Mengbo, Geng Jiangyi, Gu Dexin, Hu Jieming, Li Yongbing, Liu Qinghe, Lu Chunsheng, Lu Hao, Ou Ning, Qiu Zhenzhong, Shi Hui, Shi Yong, Song Dong, Wang Gongxin, Wang Jianwei, Xu Zhen, Yang Fudong, Yang Yong, Yang Zhenzhong, Yin Xiuzhen, Yu Hong, Zhang Peili, Zheng Guogu, Zhao Lin / Zhou Tiehai, Zhu Jia; curators: Hou Hanru, Fan Di'an, Gabriele Knapstein; project assistants: Nicole Hartje, Pi Li, Franciska Zólyom. Nationalgalerie at the Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart – Berlin, 2001.

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