

## Press Release

March 10, 2021

**Chen Chieh-jen**

***Traumatized Body and Transformed Self***

March 11 – May 2, 2021

Art Sonje Center, 2, 3F

Curated by	Sunjung Kim
Exhibition Management by	Heehyun Cho (Curator, Art Sonje Center)
Organized by	Art Sonje Center
Supported by	National Culture and Arts Foundation and Department of Cultural Affairs of Taipei City Government



Chen Chieh-jen, *Star Chart*, 2017, Black & white photograph, 11 pieces, each 52.5 x 36.5 cm

Art Sonje Center proudly presents Chen Chieh-jen's first solo exhibition in Korea, *Traumatized Body and Transformed Self*, opening from March 11 to May 2, 2021. The Taiwanese artist Chen Chieh-jen has been a pioneering figure in Taiwanese art scene since 1980s. Chen employed extra-institutional underground exhibitions and guerrilla-style art actions to challenge Taiwan's dominant political

mechanisms during a period marked by the Cold War, anti-communist propaganda, and martial law (1949–1987). In 1996, Chen started collaborating with local residents, unemployed laborers, day workers, migrant workers, foreign spouses, unemployed youth and social activists. Together, they occupied factories owned by capitalists, slipped into areas cordoned off by the law, and utilized discarded materials to build sets for his video productions. In order to visualize contemporary reality and a people's history that had been obscured by neoliberalism, Chen embarked on a series of video projects in which he used strategies he calls “re-imagining, re-narrating, re-writing and re-connecting.”

Starting in 2010, Chen began actively focusing on the fact that many people around the world have been reduced to working temporary jobs due to pervasive control technology in the neoliberal, post-Internet age. Members of the corporatocracy, including transnational financial service corporations, digital and biotech giants, and the military-industrial complex, have developed a pervasive control technology that not only expands and exacerbates wealth inequality on a global scale, but also discards and alienates an increasing number of individuals from society, and has thus created a contemporary caste system.

The exhibition *Traumatized Body and Transformed Self* presents Chen Chieh-jen's seven works from different periods of the artist's career. It proposes alternative epistemologies and practical methods for reconsidering the meaning of existence for individuals suffering the insurmountable despair of being discarded and traumatized by societies in which wealth inequality continues to spread and deepen. Moreover, ways of transforming the self and imagination based on traumatic experiences are explored, so as to deconstruct the illusion that has been created by the corporatocracy's pervasive control technology.

### **About the Artist**

Born in 1960 in Taoyuan, Taiwan, Chen Chieh-jen currently lives and works in Taipei, Taiwan. Chen has held solo exhibitions at the Mudam Luxembourg; the Taipei Fine Arts Museum; the Museo Nacional Centro De Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid; the Asia Society in New York; and the Galerie nationale du Jeu de Paume in Paris. Group exhibitions include: the Venice Biennial, São Paulo Biennial, Lyon Biennial, Istanbul Biennial, Moscow Biennial, Sydney Biennial, Taipei Biennial, etc. He was also the recipient of the Award of Art China—Artist of the Year in 2018, the Taiwan National Culture and Arts Foundation's National Award for Arts in 2009, and the Gwangju Biennial Special Award in 2000.

## Works



*People Pushing, 2007- 2008*

35mm transcoded to 1080p, single-channel, color, sound, 5 minutes 19 seconds

The roofs and exterior walls of factories, illegal structures, temporary houses in disaster zones, and construction site dormitories are often fashioned from green or gray sheet metal in Taiwan. It can be said that sheet metal symbolizes society's uncertain boundaries and struggles between authority and desire, the legal and illegal, private and public, dwelling and moving, closed and open, and the visible and invisible. In the video, only the backs of a group of people can be seen as they push a sheet metal structure. Under what appears to be a relentlessly sweeping searchlight, the group struggles to move forward against a sheet metal wall symbolizing both authority and desire. A heavy, low-frequency sound is continuously emitted from the installation, which vibrates a metal structure in the exhibition venue, thus imperceptibly shifting its position.



*Lingchi – Echoes of a Historical Photograph, 2002*

Super 16mm transferred to DVD, three-channel, black & white, silent, 21 minutes 4 seconds

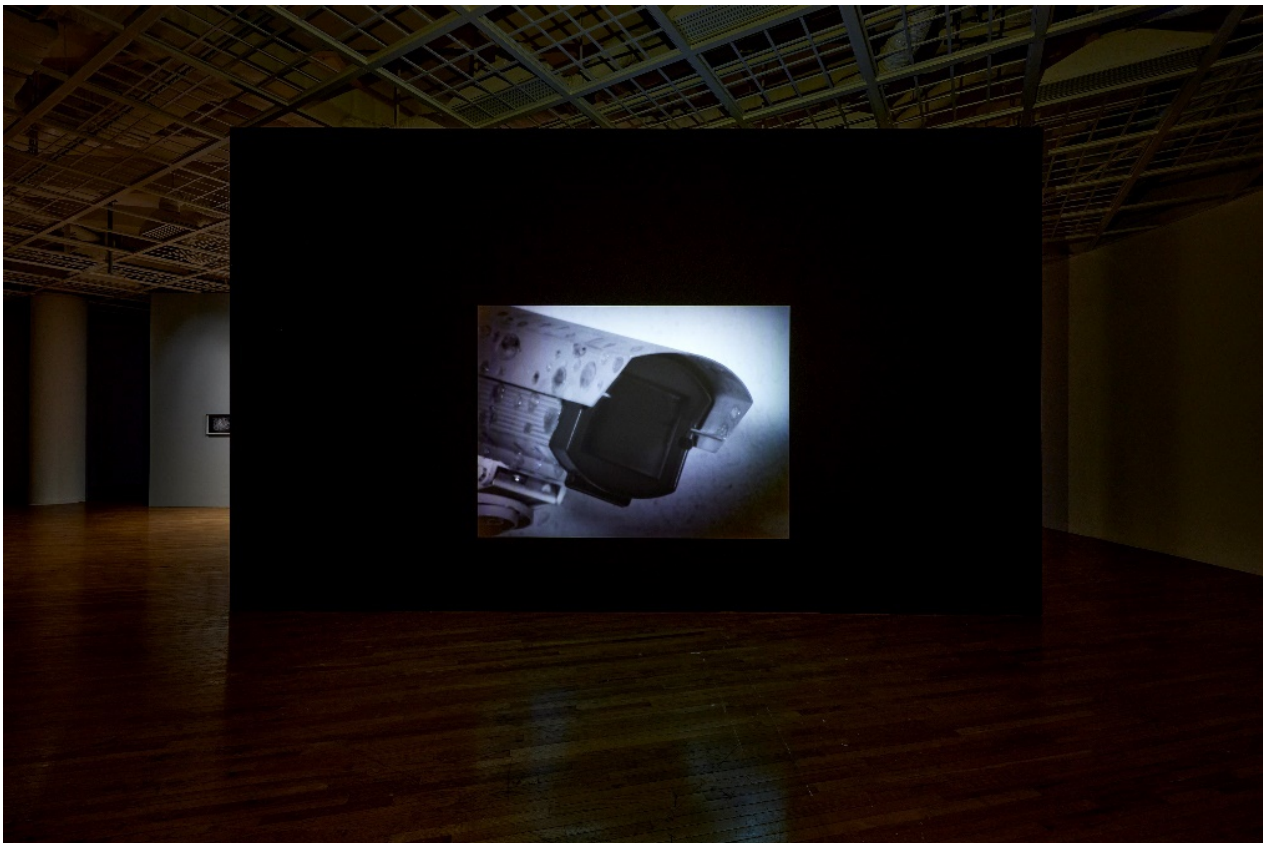
In 2002, Chen Chieh-jen used the video art form to explore the complexity of a photograph taken by a French soldier in China in the early twentieth century of a prisoner being executed by *lingchi* (death by a thousand cuts). The camera enters two dark wounds in the chest of the torture victim, where images of abandoned and destroyed buildings from various times in the past until the present appear. The camera then turns to look out from the wounds, showing contemporary unemployed laborers to suggest that, in a broad sense, *lingchi* has never really ended. The victim in the video has no way of escaping torture, but faintly smiles while gazing at the horizon. This has not only confused viewers, but also caused them to interpret this gesture while imagining the many possible and impossible reasons for his smile. This desire to understand has ensured that his minute gesture, a faint smile, has not died with the victim or will ever be erased by time.



*Factory*, 2003

Super 16mm transferred to DVD, single-channel, color, silent, 31 minutes 9 seconds

Investors closed the Lien Fu Garment Factory in 1996, withholding pension, severance pay and wages owed to its workers. For his video *Factory*, Chen Chieh-jen asked these same workers to return to this same factory abandoned seven years before, but still belonging to the investors, and reenact their duties. The video focuses on the expressions and gestures of these women as they work, which is juxtaposed with clips from a government-produced, early black-and-white film promoting Taiwan's flourishing industrial sector. The video reflects the life experiences of countless factory workers around the world who are discarded as investors keep moving their manufacturing operations to other regions in pursuit of low-cost labor. These unemployed workers are left behind, as they cannot move to the other region.



*Notes on the Twelve Karmas*, 1999 – 2000, re-edited 2018

DV transferred to digital, single-channel, black & white, 8 minutes 16 seconds

On the eve of a new millennium, two visually impaired people closed in a space filled with surveillance cameras imagine a future world shaped by accelerated technological development. In this world, a pregnant woman dreams that her baby is born during a pandemic. Also, a group of posthumans connected with network cables are lost in trance after they become disconnected from their host computer. All of this is recorded by the surveillance cameras and uploaded to the host computer, which is in an unknown location. Living under surveillance and control has already become a reality. Can the problems brought by new forms of biopolitics all be traced back to technology, or do they come from humanity's unlimited desire for progress?



*Star Chart, 2017*

Black & white photograph, 11 pieces, each 52.5 x 36.5 cm

The Asian Financial Crisis in 1997 brought mass unemployment to Taiwan's middle-aged workers, which was the second such wave of job losses after many traditional industries moved offshore in the late 1980s. On one day in 2008, Chen's brother slit his wrists because he was suffering from severe depression related to long-term unemployment after losing his job in the 1997 crisis. Not long after returning home from the hospital, Chen's brother, who rarely goes out, started converting his leaky apartment into an archive for alternative knowledge images and text. However, he left one room, in which he never installed electric lighting, untouched. The day Chen took these photographs was the only time that this dark room saw light.



*A Field of Non-Field, 2017*

4K transcoded to 1080p, single-channel, black & white, color, sound, 61 minutes 7 seconds

The complete integration of financial capitalism and technology into the financial-technological capitalist system has created a pervasive control technology that is more powerful than any previous administrative form. This has made it possible for the corporatocracy to manipulate contemporary society and the perceptions, desire, and thinking of its individuals. Is there a way for people to get out from under this situation? In this video, a group of people perform what seems to be a funeral in the darkness of night for Chen's brother, who is still alive. The group is composed of people with different identities and carrying different objects, and the significance of the juxtaposition of these people and objects keeps changing in this fluid group. Under pervasive control technology, various confrontational, dialectical movements are launched against the corporatocracy.





*A Song*, 2017

Video, single-channel, black & white, silent, 3 minutes 15 seconds.

**■ Outlines, Chen Chieh-jen: *Traumatized Body and Transformed Self***

<b>Artist</b>	Chen Chieh-jen
<b>Dates</b>	March 11 – May 2, 2021
<b>Venues</b>	Art Sonje Center, 2, 3F
<b>Curated by</b>	Sunjung Kim
<b>Exhibition Management by</b>	Heehyun Cho (Curator, Art Sonje Center)
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**Hours** Tuesday–Sunday 12–7pm

**Admissions** General 5,000 KRW  
Students 3,000 KRW

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