

Theta

Engineering For the Human Spirit: From Gentle Wind Project to I Ching Systems, 1983-2022

Organized by Nick Irvin

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The Gentle Wind Project was established in 1983 as a not-for-profit research center dedicated to the development of “healing instruments” drawing from its founders’ idiosyncratic system of beliefs. Incorporating elements of traditional Chinese medicine, electromagnetism, particle physics, color theory, homeopathy, and the I Ching, the healing instruments were intended to go beyond the banal insufficiency of mainstream therapies, and to heal the body and spirit on a material, “structural” level.

Through regular use, Gentle Wind Project’s colorful and elaborately designed rods, pucks, consoles, and cards were meant to repair and realign the body’s electromagnetic field. Their designs, however, are not mere decoration: color, line, and shape are as essential to the tools’ operation as the homeopathic materials embedded in them. According to founder Mary Miller, colors are “three-dimensional formations of subatomic particles,” and thus material. The instruments’ filigrees of vector, gradient, and curve are, by some secret language, transitive.

In the early 2000s, the group was subject to a fraud investigation by the Main Attorney General’s Office, as well as a slew of internet campaigns devoted to debunking the instruments and the group. Since then, the Gentle Wind Project has been commonly referred to as a “cult”.

In 2007 the State of Maine forced the Gentle Wind Project to disincorporate and leave the state. They quickly reformed as **Family Systems Research Group**, and later became **I Ching Systems and Artworks**, the name by which they are known today.

But it was in this middle phase, after the dissolution of their non-profit status and before incorporating the category of “Artwork” into their name, that the group had a moment of contact with the art world. In 2007 they had an exhibition at Feature Inc., the pioneering, independent-spirited commercial gallery owned and operated by the gallerist Hudson (1950-2014), who had early showings of artists such as Charles Ray, Richard Prince, Vincent Fecteau, B. Wurtz, and Takashi Murakami, among others. Holland Cotter reviewed the show favorably for the Times.

Looking at the materials from the Feature show, what has always struck me is that this presentation of the group seemed entirely **sincere**. At no point is there any wink, any suggestion of bad faith on the gallery’s part. This became all the more striking when I learned that the group’s courtroom dramas had concluded, unfavorably for the group and in public, the year before the show. Hudson’s decision to show these works, even then, seemed to convey his faith—if not in the tenets of Gentle Wind outright, at least a faith in those who seek some kind of otherwise. Utopia and art of course have a long, fabled history—so do art and

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cults—but to show this material in New York, already so secular and commercialized by 2007, seemingly in complete earnest, is to my mind remarkable.

It would be easy to insert our own sneer here, with the distance of time and non-affiliation. In fact, I think we're conditioned to it in this golden age of cult documentaries and true crime podcasts, which ask so little of their subjects, sensationalizing their stories with sociopathic glee. Their makers see themselves as too safely removed, too comfortable. This exhibition, along with the publication we've made for it, are an attempt at a more imbricated portrait, an attempt to do something other than plain advocacy or snide derision. I think of the attempt as "ambivalent"—not in the sense of indifference, but in the sense of dual valences. On the one hand, there's Hudson's sincerity—his belief in belief, and its relation to art—which I hope to hold in view, in tension, with the other, less rosy aspects of telling the history of this organization.

At bottom, this project is about art, belief, and law.

– Nick Irvin

This text derives from a longer essay published in *I think of a mustard seed as a battery. From GENTLE WIND PROJECT to I CHING SYSTEMS, 1983-2022* (Song Cycle no. 6), on the occasion of this exhibition (\$10, available at Theta).

Nick Irvin is a writer and independent curator who organizes [Song Cycle](#), a series of publications and a series of exhibitions and performances. Song Cycle's previous projects include *Whitney Clafin: Food & Spirits* (Loong Mah, New York, 2022), *Gene Beery: Transmissions from Logoscape Ranch* (Cushion Works, San Francisco, 2019 & Bodega, New York, 2020), *Bruno Pelassy* (55 Walker, New York, 2019), *HEAD Gallery: Island of the Flowers* (Bridget Donahue, 2018), and *David Lynch: The Angriest Dog in the World* (19 Monroe, 2018). Last year Irvin organized an exhibition of Tao Lin's mandala drawings at a kratom/kava bar in Williamsburg. His critical writings can be found in *May Revue*, *Frieze*, *Art in America*, and *BOMB*. He is a Ph.D. student at Princeton University.

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