12.23 Tiffany Sia
Scroll Figure #3, Scroll Figure #4
15.1.–14.3.23
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Tiffany Sia is an artist, filmmaker, and writer with an art practice rooted in rigorous writing and research. She is interested in using multidisciplinary forms to challenge persistent, hard-wired notions of geography, genre and time. Her most recent output—a body of work spanning films, videos, photographs, and artist books—explores the politics and relations inherent to both media-circulated images and the histories of (port) cities.

Both *Scroll Figure #3* and *Scroll Figure #4* belong to part of a four-part series of videos. They analyze the tension between image and text intermittently and across eras and cultures. Each video tackles a specific topic such as time and warfare, the network-based dissemination of images through new media, the riddle of cities, or the enigma of the landscape. The same formal structure appears in each work in the series: videos play on a small-format screen with a 4:3 aspect ratio, though each screen is covered with a dark security foil that ensures that only one person—i.e., whoever is standing directly in front of the video—can watch it at a time. The effect is an intimate art-viewing experience not unlike reading a book.

Scroll Figure #3 references one of China's best-known ancient artworks, a piece known as *Along the River During the Qingming Festival*. The handscroll painting measures 24.8 x 528.7 cm. Rendered by Song dynasty painter Zhang Zeduan (1085–1145), it shows various scenes of everyday life in the northern capital of the Song Dynasty (present-day Kaifeng) during Qingming, a Chinese festival commemorating the dead. Its central motif, apart from rural vignettes, is its depiction of a bustling cityscape complete with detailed premodern urban street scenes. The visual images in *Scroll Figure #3* are a direct reference to the painting, except the city views here were captured on film in the 1960s and '70s. The video essay takes the celebrated scroll painting as a starting point for exploring the invisible souls of the deceased wandering through the city; for pondering the medial analogy between Chinese scroll paintings and the film reel; for contemplating a quote from the Italian writer Italo Calvino (1923–1985) and his 1972 novel Invisible Cities (Italian: Le città invisibili) and describing both high-rise facades that reflect the sky and the dominance of reflections, displays, and screens in the modern-day urban landscape.

Scroll Figure #4 finds the artist exploring both the motif of the waterfall in the landscape and the culturally-coded perception of the sublime as it relates to views of nature. Its featured footage shows waterfalls from different perspectives, though each shot only hints at the powerful spectacle of nature. Some clips allow us to make out sections of the surroundings, others confuse the eye with rushing, blurred volumes of water that ultimately flatten into abstract color fields. The text in *Scroll Figure #4* operates predominantly at a media-reflexive meta-level, primarily with regard to the analogy between waterfall and film. It begins with a discussion of the significance of the viewer's perspective, followed by a quote from the French philosopher and media theorist Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007). The artist seizes on Baudrillard's observations about the Iguazú Falls and his description of human intervention to reflect on the ways natural phenomena of this kind are presented in media. The video essay ends with commentary discussing the centuries-long, historically-conditioned process of perceiving landscape through the Western concept of the sublime in nature, with the artist noting, "There is a lot of meaning you can project onto such enigmas of landscape."

Tiffany Sia's combining of text and image fragments from various different media contexts creates new intermedial and intercultural narratives, more specifically ones that challenge Western-centered modes of perception and visual interpretation of any kind. She interrogates the limits of visual media, expanding the Western-centric interpretive horizon with references from the East Asian cultural sphere.

Nevertheless, the connective link is ultimately the viewers themselves. The role of interpreter falls to them as well (mostly as individuals), since it is their culturally-informed perception that lends them both temporality and physical presence, especially in public space. The simultaneousness superimposition of text and image is sometimes deliberately meant to overwhelm the viewer with

the act of reading and seeing, effectively forcing a kind of self-reflection. As the text and images reverberate like an echo, revising/re-visiting one's own modes of perception and cultural appropriations seems all the more urgent—particularly in a global world coursing with visual media and narratives.

Tiffany Sia (b. 1988 in Hong Kong, lives and works in New York) studied at Bard College (US) and Qingdao University (CN). Recent solo exhibitions include those at the Vienna-based gallery FELIX GAUDLITZ (2022) and Artists Space, New York (2021). Her work has featured in a number of group exhibitions and screenings, including those at MoMA, New York, (to come in 2023); Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul (2022); Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf (2022); Hordaland Kunstsenter, Bergen (2021); The Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin (2021); Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong (2020). She has also screened films at a number of festivals, among others at the New York Film Festival, Toronto International Film Festival, MoMA Documentary Fortnight, Flaherty Film Seminar, and the Open City Documentary Film Festival. Films and video works by Sia Tiffany include *What Rules The Invisible*, 2022; *Scroll Figure #1–#4*, 2022; *Do Not Circulate*, 2021; *A Wet Finger in the Air*, 2021; *A Road Movie is Impossible in Hong Kong*, 2021; *SEA – SHIPPING – SUN*, 2021; and *Never Rest/Unrest*, 2020.

Scroll Figure #3 / Scroll Figure #4, 2022
Video, color, no sound
03:51 min. / 03:01 min.
Courtesy of the artist and FELIX GAUDLITZ, Vienna
Text Cynthia Krell
Translation Amy Patton