

## Mind the Gap

The story of Darren Bader and Li Ming begins with a WeChat group chat created during the pandemic. Based in New York and Hangzhou respectively, the two artists who had never met before were invited to collaborate remotely on an exhibition about dialogue. In the face of such a challenge, they embarked on a prolonged cross-server dialogue with ideas being generated through exchanges about each other's artistic creations, a working model resembling a ping-pong game. During the exchange of information, their seemingly unrelated works of art started to interconnect and expand according to their shared temporary context. There were times when they mulled over ideas for days or deconstructed the integrity of the narratives within their own works to extract fragments, often finding and forming ineffable resonances. The collaboration authentically reveals their divergent ways of thinking and unique sense of humour highlighting where the broad range of their curiosity about the world intersects. Six sets of mutually referential keywords were distilled from their ideas: animal/metaphor, value/vacuum, coincidence/mistranslation, game/trade, digital/physical, and absurd/fun.

Drawing inspiration from their dialogue, the two artists have constructed a living space called Apartment 401 on the ground floor of BY ART MATTERS where around 70 artworks (I use the word 'around' as, at the time of publication, the artists are still adding works) created by both artists over the past decade, along with their latest collaborations, are on display. The exhibition attempts to defy the usually solemn atmosphere prevalent in art museums. By linking videos, installations, poetry, performances, AR, games, and even food with various functional areas of an apartment including the entranceway, living room, dining room, bedroom, and bathroom, the environment exudes a homelike quality, as if Darren Bader and Li Ming, though unable to meet each other in person, have both lived in the space in their respective parallel universes. The artwork descriptions also differ from the conventional paradigm of exhibition labels or guides. They are

transformed into clues that await exploration along the way, pieces of inspiration that can be picked up and taken away, requests of exchanges and gift-giving, or collaborations among the artists and the audience.

For visitors, going to any exhibition is like being cordially invited as guests to a party where they are unable to meet the host, leaving them communicating with the walls, furniture, or floors not dissimilar to the experience of a cross-server dialogue. Scattered throughout the space it is possible to witness these gaps in communication and comprehension, mirroring the contradictions and rifts that pervade reality. Despite this, wisdom is also present and adaptable in the real world, and it is this that may guide people to find ingenious ways to discover the sincerity and the charm of the exchange.

SUN Man

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