

## ***Curatorial Statement***

### **From Afar, in a Flash**

A recurring theme arises when the conventional and incontrovertible framework of measuring distance in terms of every hour of the day or every kilometre of a journey is no longer applicable. This was the common situation experienced by all the artists featured in the exhibitions of season 4, *Mind the Gap* and *9,189km*. During the last three years, the world appeared to enter a trance-like state, a fleeting moment that also seemed to stretch on for an eternity. Within this global context, four artists hailing from three distinct continents and collaborating with BY ART MATTERS in Hangzhou had to rely on a range of digital tools - including endless video conferences, emails, text messages, and online documents - to communicate with one another. Despite the physical distances between them and the conceptual gaps they encountered, they had to trust in these tools to bridge the divide. Throughout the process, information technology has invaded every facet of life and work in an unprecedented manner, becoming a medium for creation, a tool for communication, an object of critique, a psychological projection tool, a digital trading platform as well as a playground for the artists' memories. Artists respond to their unique times by imbuing their artistic practices with traces of their experiences. Through their creations, they construct doorways that transcend temporal and spatial boundaries, often existing within a "tower of Babel" scenario where they must overcome linguistic barriers and delve into conceptual rabbit holes filled with enchantment. In doing so, they produce authentic responses that leave an indelible mark on the world. In response, BY ART MATTERS, as an institution, continues to evolve its role by collaborating with creative forces and exploring spaces beyond the confines of an increasingly rigid framework. Its aim is to bring together what separates and differentiates us, allowing for convergence in the present moment and sparking a flash of inspiration.

## ***Mind the Gap***

### **1F**

The story of Darren Bader and Li Ming begins with the creation of a WeChat group chat during the pandemic. Despite residing in New York and Hangzhou, respectively, the two artists, who had never met before, were invited to collaborate remotely on an exhibition centred around dialogue. In the face of this formidable task, they engaged in a prolonged cross-server dialogue, generating ideas through exchanges about each other's artistic creations. Their working model resembled a game of ping-pong, with ideas bouncing back and forth between them. As they exchanged information, Darren Bader and Li Ming discovered unexpected connections between their seemingly unrelated works of art. Their creations began to interconnect and expand, influenced by their shared temporary context. At times, they spent days contemplating ideas or deconstructing the narratives within their own works to extract fragments that would form ineffable resonances with each other. This collaboration reveals the distinct thought processes and individual senses of humour of Darren Bader and Li Ming in an authentic manner. It highlights the intersections of their broad curiosity about the world. Through their collaboration, 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 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. Through the integration of videos, installations, poetry, performances, AR, games, and even food into various functional areas of an apartment - including the entrance way, living room, dining room, bedroom, and bathroom - the environment exudes a

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homely quality. It feels as if Darren Bader and Li Ming, despite being unable to meet in person, have both lived in the space within their respective parallel universes. The artwork descriptions also differ from the conventional paradigm of exhibition labels or guides. They are transformed into clues, waiting to be explored and discovered along the way. They offer pieces of inspiration that can be picked up and taken away, requests for exchanges and gift-giving, and opportunities for collaborations between the artists and the audience.

Visiting an exhibition can be akin to being cordially invited as a guest to a party where the host is absent, leaving visitors to communicate with the walls, furniture, or floors. This experience is not unlike that of a cross-server dialogue, where communication takes place across a digital or virtual space. Throughout the exhibition, one can observe gaps in communication and comprehension that mirror the contradictions and rifts present in everyday 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.

### **9,189km 「*Playing between the map and the territory*」**

#### **6F**

9,189 kilometres marks the distance, as the crow flies, between the French village of Auberive where Spanish artists Olga Mesa and Francisco Ruiz de Infante reside and OōEli in Hangzhou. The collaboration, which began in 2020, was presented with numerous practical difficulties due to the pandemic. These challenges were reminiscent of the golden age of exploration, and they prompted the two artists to transform their collaboration into a three-year-long adventure game. This culminated in the exhibition at BY ART MATTERS.

Born in the 1960s, Francisco Ruiz de Infante and Olga Mesa began their individual creative productions in the late 1980s and early 1990s respectively.

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During a time when artistic creation exploring moving images was still in its infancy in China, the artists were experiencing the various developmental stages of web and image-making technologies through intermedia and interdisciplinary practices in Europe. Rather than relentlessly pursuing the "newness" of technology, they focused on exploring the conflict between people's linear perception of time and space and the fragmented and decentralised senses produced by the infinite clustering, folding, and expanding of time and space resulting from information technology. As a result, when the conflict was amplified by the global crisis of lockdown and people's anxiety about "stagnation or deterioration" reached its peak, the artists transformed themselves into "cartographers." They created a cognitive map for OōEli, which, although riddled with mistakes, is still inhabitable and fun to explore. It echoes their understanding of a map as "a more or less precise description that serves to orient us collectively; a story (a fiction) that is very useful when the territory slips away under our feet, but which is also often full of approximations, grey areas and errors of interpretation that are fertile when it comes to learning to learn together".

The exhibition embodies a level of richness and fluidity akin to a symphony. The exhibition consists of seven sections, including three site-specific transversal workshops and one performative conference. These "movements" are orchestrated into a complete visiting experience thanks to the intersectional audiovisual overlaps within the exhibition design. The venue on the 6th floor, the multi-functional hall on the 5th floor and the 4 elevator lobbies located at the second lower ground of OōEli are interconnected during the exhibition. In this exhibition, the boundaries between the onstage and offstage are removed, inviting visitors to immerse themselves in the artists' decade-long artistic creations and personal memories. As they navigate through the exhibition, visitors also encounter the collective memory shared by local performers from Hangzhou and images captured over the past three years by two teams working together, despite being over nine thousand kilometres apart.

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The audience will also find projections of themselves incorporated into different parts of the exhibition. This magnifies the folding and expanding of people's quotidian lives, evoking a sense of "being lost." As a result, we become more perceptive than ever in experiencing the meaning of "being in the here and now."

SUN Man

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