

Xu Zhen: Ecosystem as Medium

A new century is roaming the world.

By the late 1990s, Shenzhen has reembarked on a path of rapid development. This was also when Xu Zhen began to gain global recognition as an artist. Following “Xu Zhen: A Madeln Company Production” in the 2010s, “Xu Zhen: Ecosystem as Medium” in the 2020s will once again comprehensively present the artist’s career and practice over nearly three decades. Against a backdrop of the current dynamic urban scene, the exhibition expresses, assembles, and presents a sub-ecological reality created by the artist.

The exhibition sets to affirm the core of the artist’s extensive artistic practice: ecosystem as medium.

Epochal changes, ideological iterations, and contemporary art practices together constitute an ecological reality, which Xu Zhen creatively transforms into the medium of his practice. By appropriating objects from different civilizations for contemporary reassembly and activation, the artist raises the issues of originality and innovation, conformity and confrontation, value re-assessment and cultural transformation, etc. within globalization. This includes the assembly, iteration, and self-consistent clustering of works that have always been part of his paradigm, which constitute a layer in the media phenomenon of the artist's ecosystem as a medium for his creations.

In the ultimate sense of the real, ecosystem as medium is an ultra-media practice of the artist. The contemporary media theories and practices that have come to the fore with today's intensifying eco-political and techno-cultural realities are increasingly updated, internalized, and modulated in Xu Zhen's work to create an outstandingly deep and vast media space that can be deployed, combined, and navigated. A highly adept art game thus unfolds in between all para-media including the artwork, the artist, the viewer, critics, market, culture, economy, history, and reality, as well as the overlapping and mutual speculation on the surfaces and depths of such media.

“Ecosystem as Medium” is an artist's practice theory capable of in-situ ecological infection. By superimposing and connecting different art systems — those of art making, curation, operation of gallery, art museum, and art media, Xu Zhen pioneers a path of artists’ self-ecologicalization, refreshing and redefining their meaning of work and scope of creation. In the global contemporary art scene, he demonstrates the possibility of a universal contemporary art with Chinese characteristics and primal vitality.

This exhibition will be a both sleek and deep artistic spectacle of our time, but even more so, it will be a solid wall of social reality, a sort of evidence and firsthand reality of the new century's realist art practice theory. As an assembly of more than 100 pieces of work, as a display of today's artworks, as a Stonehenge art of the present, it is in itself the terminal cultural testimony to Xu Zhen's aforementioned practice. However, it clearly comes with ulterior motives. Is a culture-as-art enterprise mediated by an “hyper-artist” ecology a positively Romanticist utopian action unique to the 21st century? What if such an action belongs to the peculiar and necessary art economy of the 21st century? What if this economy belongs to the peculiar and necessary art of the 21st century?

Hello and welcome to “Xu Zhen: Ecosystem as Medium”!

Wang Yamin, March 13, 2024