

# CUCHIFRITOS

## GALLERY + PROJECT SPACE

— a program of ARTISTS ALLIANCE INC

artistsallianceinc.org 88 Essex Street  
New York NY 10002

Weds through Sat  
Noon - 6p or by appt.

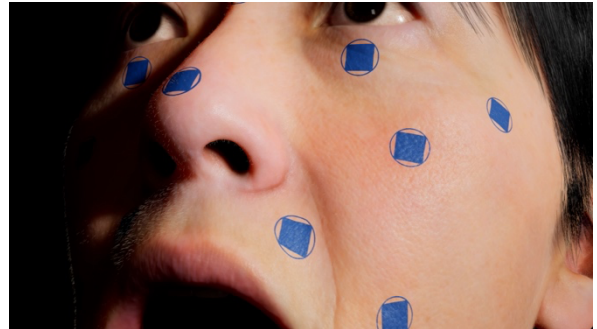
Lau Wai

### ***W.A.I. The Cast of the Invisible***

Sep 6 through Nov 2 2024

Curatorial Assistant Manavi Sinha

Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space is very pleased to present ***W.A.I. The Cast of the Invisible***, featuring new work by New York City-based artist **Lau Wai** on view from September 6 through November 2, 2024.



A response to the ever-expanding interference of the digital world, *W.A.I. The Cast of the Invisible* prods at the line between one's virtual and physical existence in the era of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Featuring three animated works by AAI LES Studio Program alum (2022-2023) Lau Wai, this exhibition introduces two short films and a single-player digital interactive work, all created using CGI (computer-generated imagery) software. Inspired by how the identities of CGI actors are lost beneath digitally imposed animation, *W.A.I. The Cast of the Invisible* stars W.A.I., a motion-capture-suit-clad virtual clone of the artist compiled over past video-based projects. While the character's genesis started in work addressing how Western blockbusters imposed orientalist depictions of East Asian people, the focus of W.A.I.'s narrative takes a thematic departure in this exhibition. Elaborating on motifs of an infinitely mutable identity in the contemporary digital context, W.A.I. now must navigate the ontological implications of being a real-world replica whose purpose is to be digitally reproduced.

*The Cast of the Invisible* (2024), a single-channel CGI-animated short film streaming at the center of the gallery, follows a day in the life of the motion-capture actor, W.A.I., as they descend into existential confusion. Plagued by the consequences of a vocation endowing them with purpose by stripping them of their individuality, W.A.I. cannot escape a fundamental demand to exist in mimetic performance as anyone but themselves. Even after leaving the film studio, W.A.I., still costumed in the black motion-capture suit, asks their robot lover "how should I act?" in a moment of intimacy. Evocative of a Goffmanian "total institution,"<sup>1</sup> W.A.I.'s ubiquitous uniform pervading their private life speaks to the metaphysical reductionism that inherently cages any digitally-reproduced being within a stunted identity. A human clone tasked with laying the unseen bones of other made-up characters in an artificial world, W.A.I. is a slice of a person designed to be everyone and no one. Thus, *The Cast of the Invisible* is a direct reference to the liminal role of motion-capture actors who symbolize being both "in-between" the real and virtual worlds yet never fully present or autonomous in either one.

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<sup>1</sup>Sociologist Erving Goffman describes a "total institution" as a torturous place where one is unable to separate their public and private lives such as a prison, military camp, or asylum. The most famous example is Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, where, under constant surveillance, one's capacity for individual identity slowly degrades and leads to insanity because they are unable to cultivate a sense of self in private.

A single-player digital interactive work accessed through a monitor in the gallery's back room, *Infinite Realm* (2024), allows audience members to explore the fictional world featured in *The Cast of the Invisible*. Navigated from the point of view of W.A.I., visitors will enter the virtual cityscape. Digitally immersed in 3D architecture, one sees what the clones see and the delineation between perception in real and virtual worlds is once again blurred.

*Decrypted Sentient* (2024), showing on a separate monitor, is a CGI-animated film of W.A.I. confronting their audience. Confined to a blacked-out space with all but two lights trained on W.A.I., the character pleads for clarity on the manner of their virtual existence. Itching at the question of whether W.A.I.'s plight might soon befall our own society, *Decrypted Sentient* is an interrogation formatted as a confession. In this looped clip, W.A.I., reduced to only their most purgatorial thoughts, invites collective reflection on the possibility of existential musings of a digital clone.

Anxiety and humor blended into a sardonic caricature of humanity's fate, the body of work presented by Lau Wai in this exhibition provides a dismal yet cheeky peek into the confounding future of human life dominated by artificial intelligence. The perils of motion-capture actor W.A.I. are not only emblematic of existing "in between," but a lugubrious prophecy that holds parallels to the abilities of today's technology. Like W.A.I., our identities have been rendered fully reproducible by artificial intelligence which can mine and copy every move made in the digital age. Panopticons in our pockets, our phones can generate our clones through our google searches and shopping lists. And yet, like W.A.I., these digital copies are neither complete nor autonomous -- they are functions of capitalism imprisoning our digital selves within our commodification. Through *The Cast of the Invisible*, Wai questions the role of humans as AI progresses. What will it mean to be human? What will it mean to be a clone? Which world will define our identities?

### **Accessibility**

*If desired, a folding chair can be provided during your visit should standing for short or long periods interfere with your viewing experience. Additionally, sound-dampening headphones and tinted glasses are available and will be provided upon request for visitors for whom the sound or lighting of the gallery space is disruptive. Baby strollers are welcome in Essex Market and Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space. Both facilities are wheelchair accessible, and service animals on a leash are permitted. W.A.I. The Cast of the Invisible does include a movable wall that narrows the available floor space while maneuvering around the space. All pathways remain ADA-accessible. If you have questions, comments, or concerns about accessing Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space or attending programs, please email [gallery@artistsallianceinc.org](mailto:gallery@artistsallianceinc.org).*

### **Supporters**

*Artists Alliance Inc. (AAI) is a 501c3 not-for-profit organization located on the Lower East Side of New York City. Programming support is provided by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council and public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts with support from the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature. Further exhibition programming is made possible by the National Endowment for the Arts. We thank the New York City Economic Development Corporation, The Clemente Soto Vélaz Cultural & Educational Center, and individual supporters of Artists Alliance Inc for their continued support. Special thanks go to our team of dedicated volunteers and interns, without whom this program would not be possible.*