

Childhood Scenes, 2023  
16mm film transferred to HD video, colour  
6 minutes 15 seconds

Wild Acts: Act I, 2024  
16mm film transferred to HD video, black and white,  
sound  
15 minutes 48 seconds

Punk Footage, 1998  
VHS transferred to digital video, colour, sound

Childhood Set #1, 2024  
Mixed media  
Variable dimensions

Childhood Set #2, 2024  
Mixed media  
Variable dimensions

Childhood Set #3, 2024  
Mixed media  
Variable dimensions

Childhood Set #4, 2024  
Mixed media  
Variable dimensions

## Chris Zhongtian Yuan Childhood Scenes

ON VIEW

January 25 – February 2, 2025

OPENING

January 25, 2024

Theatre of San Luca  
Viale Trento e Trieste, 1  
26100 Cremona (CR)

Chris Zhongtian Yuan: Childhood Scenes  
Curated by Claire Shiying Li

Wuhan, where artist Chris Zhongtian Yuan grew up as a child, nourishes one of most interesting urban subcultural scenes in China.

These dissonant voices rise from artists community, grassroots organizations, and the marginalized youths who find themselves completely lost in the urban machines after their college graduation. "Wuhan Punk" is a process of remembering those individuals from artist's studio in London during the lockdown.

What Yuan is searching for was more than punk - it is rather a forgotten legacy of socially engaged artists, punk musicians, anarchists and bohemians, resonating what many years later Beijing would cruelly categorize as "low end population" and forcefully purged them out of sight from the modernizing city. Whereas in Wuhan, some of the remaining members of this community sought for refuge in the local art academy, where Yuan's parents work and raise him as a child.

"Childhood Scenes" originated from his speculation on the 90s visual cultures in China.

When the the artist discovered that the Chinese animations he watched were influenced by Czech experimental animations, which were also playing on TV in the 90s, he began adopting the visual language of 16mm stop motion animation in his own film, while maintaining a sense of improvisation on set. "Childhood Scenes" depicts school nursery rhymes, living room décor, and a construction crane Yuan saw during a family trip, all of which collapse and drift away in the film. Yuan is enthusiastic about romanticizing failures, foregrounding playfulness and cutifying representations. He insists on the subtle gestures as opposed to the camp genres because he believes that a contemporary sense of queerness should reject any fixated positions in aesthetics. It was during the making of "Childhood Scenes", Yuan started experimenting with puppet theatre as his main narrative vehicle to avoid direct confrontation and turn to satirical and absurdist storylines instead. "Wild Act I" is the first part of Chris Zhongtian Yuan's semi-autographical trilogy.

The puppet protagonist is an ex-artist from China recalling his disrupted art career due to the cultural revolution in the 70s, transforming his social frustration into a sexual obsession for Yě rén, then popular Chinese big foot legend.

In this video, Yuan combined puppetry, CGI and musicals to unfold a strange tale of an ex-artist meeting Yě rén in the forest and becoming forbidden lovers in the dark age of humanity.

In the first scene, we see the distraught artist arguing with his family member about the gossips around them, highlighting the familial tensions which reflect the familial constraints upon artists.

Later, we continue discovering other constraints from economics, politics, and emotional estrangement from within the cultural industry.

Through the puppet's monologues and the claustrophobic stage designs, it becomes obvious that the resurgence of the popular myth of Yě rén was also part of the psychological trauma rippling on multiple social layers after the cultural revolution.

In Yuan's case, the control from the family, institution and politics forces him to look beyond and invent fictions. Taking inspirations from Mike Kelley and Andrea Fraser, he interrogates the constructed ideals with the puppet, his alter-ego character.

Tapping into a sentimental abstraction of childhood trauma, Yuan's films provide psychological succor and healing that transcends cultural specificity.

The puppet theatre becomes a requiem for collective memories, interconnecting the lyrical, psychological, metaphorical and representational visual materials in this fictional continuum, which also plays discontinuously in reality.

Claire Shiying Li

Chris Zhongtian Yuan (b. 1988, China) is an artist based in London, working with video, sound, performance, sculpture and installation.

His work builds around the notion of 'Punk filmmaking', building upon and queering the use of technology in experimental animations, while considering space, relation and context.

Yuan's practice comes from a materialist lineage and uses institutionally responsive strategies which playfully blur the boundaries amongst critique, care and imagination. Recent solo exhibitions include: Surplus Space, Wuhan (2024); Reading International, Reading (2023); Macalline Art Center, Beijing (2023); V.O Curations, London (2022); The Courtauld Institute of Art, London (2021); 1815, K11, Wuhan (2020). Recent and forthcoming group exhibitions and screenings include: Kunsthall Rotterdam (2025); Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen (2025); Guangdong Times Museum, Guangzhou (2024); Somerset House, London (2024); International Film Festival Rotterdam (2023); Whitechapel Gallery, London (2022); Somerset House, London (2022); OCAT Institute, Beijing (2021); Power Station of Art, Shanghai (2021); Videoex, Zurich (2021); Hubei Museum of Art (2020); York Art Gallery, York (2020); Venice Architecture Biennale Greek Pavilion, Venice (2018) among others. Yuan received AA Diploma from the Architectural Association in London, B.S Architecture from University of Minnesota, Twin Cities and is currently a PhD candidate at Kingston School of Art.