

Guan Xiao explores how present ways of seeing are influenced by digital image and information circulation, which have become an increasingly dominant source of knowledge exchange. In various sculptures, videos and installations Guan expands the aesthetic and cognitive possibilities for how meanings and identities are assigned and understood. Without seeking to compartmentalise or fix definitions, her work is occupied with our incomprehension of the past, and the way in which the unknown gives rise to intriguing discussion in the present. She juxtaposes references from the past and present (or future), weaving together both appropriated and originated visual and audio material, digital rendering techniques and found objects to create distinct and evocative installations that integrate so-called primitive and high-tech elements.

At the ICA, Guan Xiao's first solo exhibition in the UK includes a new installation comprising five large printed screens, in front of which are placed sculptures made up of various materials, including muted speakers. As with previous works such as *Documentary: Geocentric Puncture*, 2012 and *Documentary: From National Geographic to BBC*, 2015, Guan optically merges the colour spectrum for the printed background screens (of the kind usually found in photographic studios) with the tonal range of the customised objects placed in front. The printed repetitive patterns are often taken from natural camouflaging phenomena such as animal or snake skins that are also reproduced artificially for clothing or accessories. Just as Guan is interested in finding formal equivalences rather than difference between the second and third dimensions in her object works, she sets out to explore the interdependent connections and flow between different ways of understanding the world and our place within it. For the first time, Guan Xiao will include text excerpts from other writers on the printed screens, such as quotes from the British anthropologist and systems theorist Gregory Bateson (1904 – 80) whose theoretical work embraced psychology, behavioural biology, evolution, systems theory, and cybernetics, as he worked toward a theoretical synthesis he referred to as “an ecology of mind.” For example, in his book *Mind and Nature* he asked, “What pattern connects the crab to the lobster and the orchid to the primrose and all the four of them to me? And me to you?”

The show also includes a recent video triptych, *Action*, 2014, that suggests open and fluid connections between sound, image and text as video clips sourced from a range of online sources including home movies, advertising and promotional videos are rhythmically juxtaposed across the three screens. Guan Xiao comments on the work, “For me, rhythm means all the intersections of sense. It's a way I understand the associations between things. It helps me to try and transfer action, see listen, think about interactions and freely build a link between them.”

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