

PENG
ZUQIANG
AFTERNOON
HEARSAY

11 October – 7 December 2025

The Common Guild
5 Florence Street, Glasgow G5 0YX

1. Afternoon Hearsay, 2025

Three-channel digital video installation
Super 8mm, 16mm and 35mm transferred
to digital with 5.1 surround sound
18 minutes

Peng Zuqiang is concerned with the ways cultural, historical and political narratives are shared, and the mechanisms through which images are deployed and circulated. 'Afternoon Hearsay' begins in motion as strips of film sway back and forth, horizontally and vertically, pacing across the screen. In some of the first frames of this three-channel film installation, a question mark momentarily appears, signalling uncertainty, doubt and suggesting critical enquiry.

The work is inspired by the story of 8.75mm film (one quarter of 35mm), which was manufactured in China as an alternative to Kodak's Super 8 film, with one significant difference: where Super 8 had a camera for recording original footage, 8.75mm did not. Produced by the State, the purpose of this narrow-gauge, lightweight film was to cheaply and easily disseminate specific content to the many remote regions of the country. 8.75mm was printed with entertainment, educational material, newsreels and propaganda, and circulated to China's rural communities via mobile projection units during the 1960s–1980's before it was phased out by newer communication technologies.

Cameraless filmmaking, in which archival 8.75mm prints are photogrammed onto 16 and 35mm colour negative prints, are at the centre of 'Afternoon Hearsay'. Peng weaves together 8.75mm 'deadstock' he has collected with contemporary Super 8 footage shot by the artist in rural locations across China. Together this footage creates a hypnotising, intimate and poetic space for illusive and open-ended narratives to unfold.

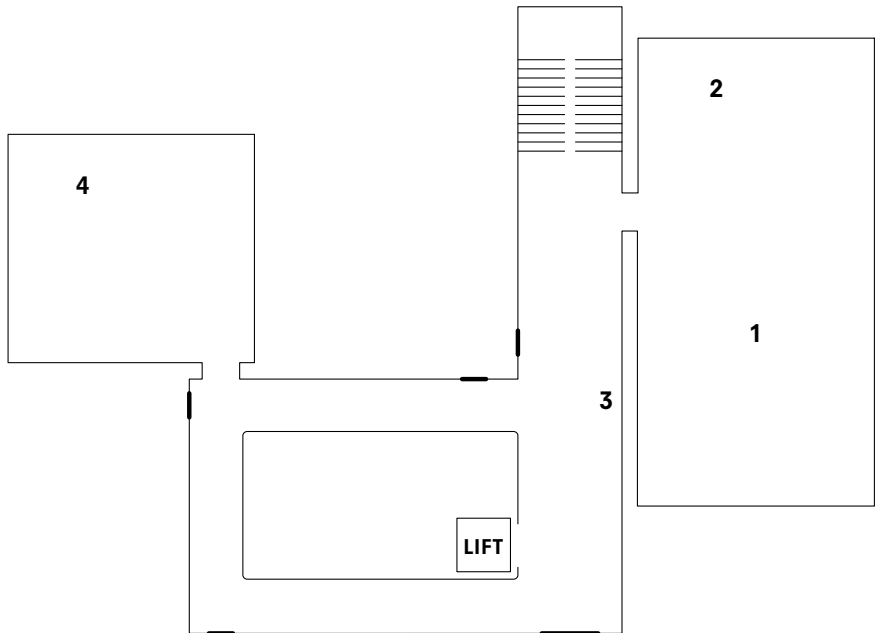
In the interlocking stories and fragmented accounts that follow, only partial memories and half-truths emerge from the unnamed interlocutors. One describes the way in which these films affected communities that saw them, from people vanishing to unexplained fires, stories that mirrored plotlines from the films shown in their villages. Others speak of modernity replacing tradition, and propaganda replacing religion. The boundaries of fact and fiction are indistinguishable, and somewhat immaterial in 'Afternoon Hearsay'.

The installation conjures an ambiguous, almost metaphysical temporal space in which the past and the present appear both unstable and synchronous, underscored by the film's soundtrack: the whirring of the projection machine evolving into car horns and traffic, or blurring with the sound of furniture dragged across the floor. Much is obscured, withheld or left unsaid. Gaps in certainty and lapses in coherence are filled with the materiality of the archive film transfers, which are worn, degraded and burnt; relics of an analogue past.

'Afternoon Hearsay' is as much a story of alternative cinema spaces as a record of significant places and people erased by history and rapid change.

Commissioned by The Common Guild, Glasgow and the Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai with support from the British Council's Connections Through Culture grant programme.

Second Floor



2. Déjà vu, 2023

16mm film, sound, clay, iron oxide

02:45 minutes

An installation combining 16mm film projection, text, sound, and a small clay sculpture, 'Déjà Vu' is a one-to-one photogram; another image made without a camera. Peng began experimenting with cameraless image-making in the wake of political protests and demonstrations, also known as the 'White Paper' Movement, which responded to tragic incidents related to China's 'zero-Covid' policy.

In 'Déjà Vu', 30 metres of metal wire, of the type commonly used by emergency services and rescue operations in high-rise buildings, is exposed directly onto 30 metres of black and white negative print film.

The film, the accompanying first-person narrative, and the cracked surface of the clay figurine (a replica of a Qing dynasty calligraphy brush rest) meditates on the sanctioned and spontaneous violence enacted on bodies; physical injury and harm experienced first-hand, or else overheard, observed and shared by communities.

The abstract imagery is soundtracked by a rhythmical beat and the noise of protest chants. The film is projected onto the gallery window, on the very boundary between inside and out.

3. Untitled (second press #2), 2025

C-print

This photographic print makes clear Peng's focus on material process. The image, a fragment of celluloid used in a film performance, captures the moment where light ignites, becomes fire, and starts to burn through film. A fleeting moment in moving image, the still captures the vulnerabilities of the present.

4. Autocorrects, 2023

Three-channel video installation

16mm film transferred to HD

03:03 minutes

Opening with a thunderclap and a ringing telephone, 'Autocorrects' takes the form of a pop music video reminiscent of the downtempo beat genre popular in the early 1990s Chinese music scene. In the brief space offered by a three-minute pop song, Peng develops multiple narrative strands: the before and after, remembering and forgetting, the individual and the collective, dignity and lies, and the implied divergences between Western and Chinese approaches to creativity.

A lone individual crosses an airport lounge, waits on a train platform, runs down a corridor and travels between floors in an elevator, occupying spaces of transit. Spoken lyrics seem to follow the familiar pattern of a typical love song through invocations of intimacy, tracing the contours of a closely-observed body, and the repeated refrain of "I into U". However, other meanings can be inferred, which suggest a more coercive or risky relationship, and an autocorrective system of forced conformity.

Both 'Autocorrects' and 'Déjà Vu' stem from the same body of research.