

April 2019
Artforum
"Tao Hui - Edouard Malingue Gallery"



HONG KONG

Tao Hui

EDOUARD MALINGUE GALLERY

In “Rhythm and Senses,” a four-part treatise divided into three rooms, Tao Hui ruminated on the relationship between the individual and the collective, as mediated through digital-display infrastructures designed to reflect the physical world. The show opened with two small holograms, *Untitled (Holographic Building 01)* and *Untitled (Holographic Building 02)* (all works 2019), depicting po-mo apartment-block facades that appear to float on black glass. Positioned on the floor nearby was *Screen as Display Body*, 2019, a trolley with four LED screens racked up in succession, each broadcasting a single color, starting with red, then blue, green, and finally white. These are the key tones that make up electronic displays. In the physical world, this palette would mix to an eventual black, but in televisions and on screens, the same combination produces white. That this group of colors can yield opposite effects, white or black, recalls the duality of holographic images, which are generated when a laser beam projected onto an object meets up with its reference beam; the resulting image is thus a product of the encounter between apparent opposites, the real and the virtual.

The artist set up an oscillation between the particular and the general in the second room, where a single fourteen-minute HD video, *Pulsating Atom*, 2019, was installed vertically on a screen that spanned floor to ceiling, like a monumental twenty-first-century

Tao Hui, *Pulsating Atom*, 2019, HD video, color, sound, 14 minutes 12 seconds. Installation view. Photo: Kwan Sheung Chi.



REVIEWS

scroll. Amid moving images edited to evoke clips found on the Vine-like Chinese social networking site TikTok, a middle-aged singer dressed like a pink flower shares observations on life and loneliness. “Behind every mighty order of things,” she tells us, “there’s also a self.” She mentions a nightclub “where everyone’s movement was dictated by rhythm,” before the image cuts to two blacksmiths hammering at an anvil, in a scene reminiscent of Goya’s *The Forge*, ca. 1815–20, as the singer describes a near-extinct handicraft that “elicits interaction between two people.” As the footage jumps from two club kids dancing on a *hutong* street to a line of chefs chopping in a kitchen and a child drumming, the physical act of beating is revealed as both a gesture of ordered connection and “an objection to the established order.” This vacillation of meaning—in which a collective body has the potential to manifest a condition and its opposite—highlights the abstractions at play when a group of individuals forms a critical mass. Particulate matter accumulates to a point of general distillation. Or, to quote the solitary singer, “Eventually, the speckled dirty walls become clean—a closed white cube.”

“Rhythm and Senses” concluded in the third room with *White Building*, 2019, which offered another diagram of a closed loop, this time addressing reality and its representation, as it relates to history. A sleek white futuristic control panel housed four screens showcasing footage of the so-called Huanghe waist-drum dance, an ancient folk dance that originated in China’s Ansai County, alongside clips of the region’s natural landscape. This final gesture recalled the visual mechanisms behind the holograms in the first gallery, locating the production of history within the architectures of imagemaking. Holograms are a product of reality’s encounter with its reflection, just as notions of self and community are generated through the interaction of bodies in both physical and virtual space, and the representations they leave in their wake. All of which returned us to *Pulsating Atom*, and one individual’s longing to connect with a multitude that is easier sensed than seen.

—Stephanie Bailey