

SUNSPOT LITERARY JOURNAL

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CHANGING THE WORLD
THROUGH WORDS AND ART

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COVER: We Are All Ignorant Creators 1 / Lauren Kohne

Archive of Small Hungers

Chidimma Ewelukwa

We folded receipts
the way other families
kept photographs.

Milk crossed out.
Bread returned.
The oil left
for another week.

By evening,
the paper already smelled
of onions and hands.

My mother never threw them away.
She tucked them
inside a cracked bowl
above the cupboard.

Sometimes,
she unfolded one
just to remember
when eggs cost less than silence.
The numbers kept climbing.

We learned
to count meals
by what stayed
off the list.

When visitors came,
the table still filled.

Only later did we notice
our own plates
had grown smaller.

Months later,
I found one faded receipt
at the bottom
of the bowl.

The ink
had almost disappeared,
but the total was still there,
waiting like a debt
that remembered us.



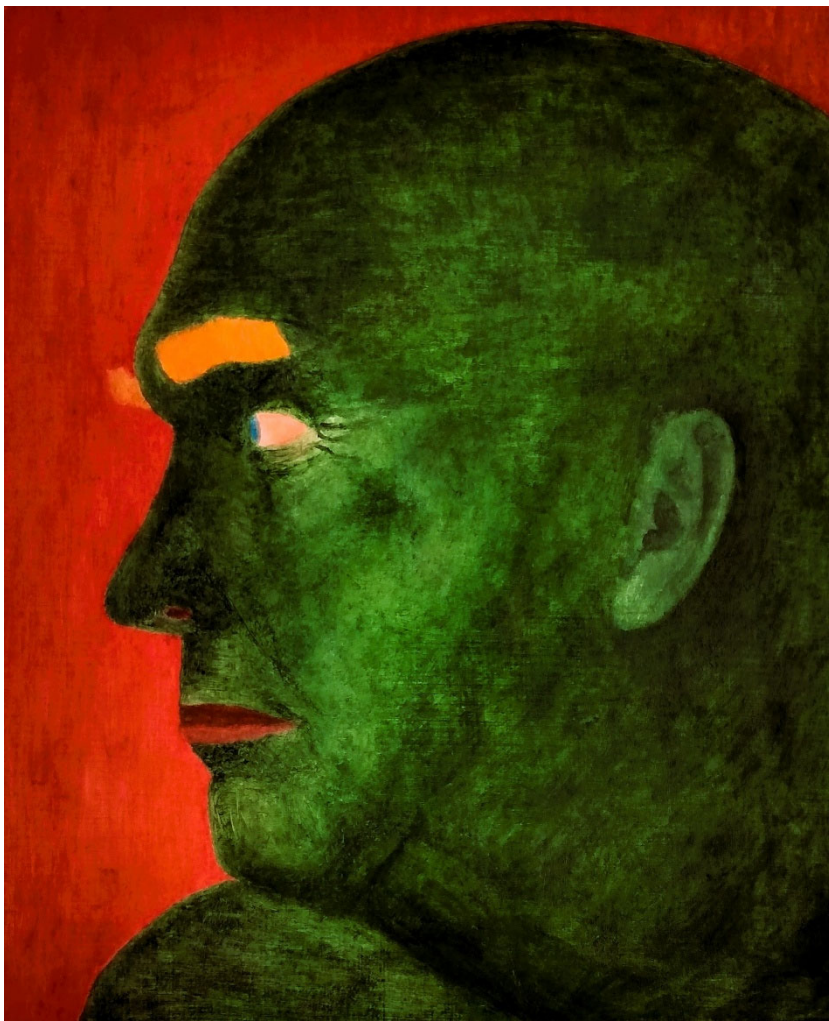
Self Portrait 1 / Bill Schulz



Self Portrait 3 / Bill Schulz



Self Portrait 4 / Bill Schulz



Algae King / bad futa

Entre Nous

Polly Conway

Because of drones, we can now see all the sharks that have always been there. Most won't get you, but one of them might. This is the whole thing. And yet. Growing up, I never drank from red cups, instead stayed home stewing in superiority. Drove my blissed-out friends baked on mushrooms to Montaña de Oro, stared with them into glowing ice plant blooms, hoping to trip somehow too. Now I take beta blockers just to get into a car. Meanwhile, my dad drives with his good hand, gripping the adaptive knob. He visits his brother at the vets' home in Ventura, two hours away. Bravery comes in all forms. Right now I can make it to Grocery Outlet around the corner. Right now I wake up three hundred times a night even with my CPAP. Right now the red polish on my nails is chipped but what remains refuses to come off. What remains is a refusal. A refusal to live for reals, relegated to a particular realm of limbo. Just do it, doc: diagnose me with excessive daytime sleepiness™ and a dearth of life force with a side of relentless dread. Despite all this, I'm still famous. Someone from the Guardian interviewed me yesterday. I'm famous. I wore a pastel plaid dress with a heart-shaped bodice to high tea. I'm famous. Once the chef came to our table and asked how everything was. I'm famous. Wiley at Grocery Outlet remembers my name. He said I have the eyes of a white wolf.



Untitled 1 from the Where She Sat Series / Yijun Yang



Untitled 2 from the Where She Sat Series / Yijun Yang



Untitled 3 from the Where She Sat Series / Yijun Yang



Untitled 4 from the Where She Sat Series / Yijun Yang



Untitled 5 from the Where She Sat Series / Yijun Yang

Dollar Bill Lover

Chloe Rodriguez

I remember the nights we chased a feeling
a reckless hope in every stolen line, each
dollar a prayer to keep the darkness at bay.
There was a time his madness felt like
salvation, a promise that we could outrun
our own shadows. Now, he drifts through
my midnight like a half-remembered dream,
a silhouette in the soft glow of neon confessions.
There's a quiet poetry in his chaos, in the way
his hands tremble like autumn leaves falling

softly onto cracked pavement, each crumpled
dollar a token of past desires. I used to love him.
Or maybe I loved the way he made me feel—
like every night was a spinning coin I could catch
on the right side if I just stayed up long enough.
He was beautiful once, or at least he knew how to
make me believe it. The way the city bent around
him, the way he could turn a gas station parking lot
into a stage, a pulpit, a fucking dream. I'd watch
him throw his head back laughing, mouth full of
moonlight, I remember a time when his wild

abandon sounded like a lullaby, a whistle of escape
from the ache of ordinary days. In his gaze,
I see the honest residue of sleepless nights and
whispered regrets, a vulnerable truth that carries
like fragile glass between fingertips. And now, as
the night yields reluctantly to dawn, there is no
graceful epilogue, only the raw, unadorned pulse
of a truth that lingers in the spaces between our
missteps: sometimes the only solace is in simply
being, unfiltered and unfinished, as the city absorbs
our quiet, that lingering ache.



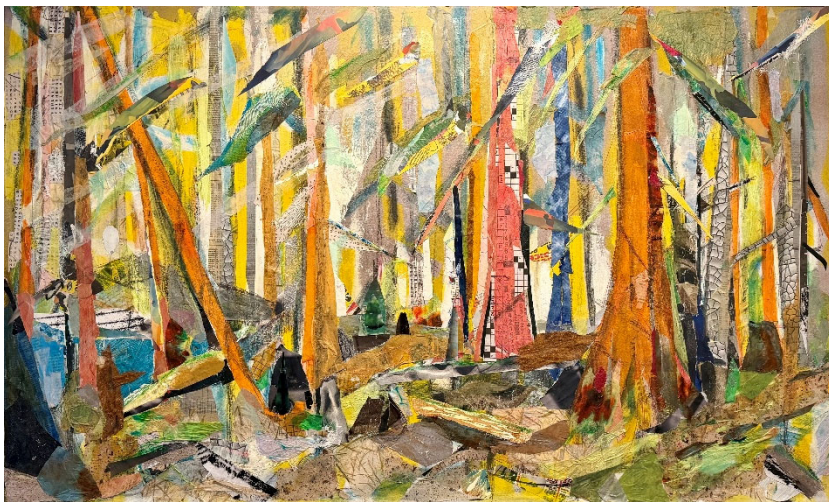
Digital Glitch / Stephen Bourque



3'\$ Company / Stephen Bourque



Syde Bern\$ / Stephen Bourque



Peaches en Regalia / GJ Gillespie



Angel Band / GJ Gillespie

Orphan

Quinn Spencer

I was smoking by the bins when I saw him: a real-life orphan. He had no identification, so I called the hotline. The operator said they'd reached capacity—a recent influx, she explained. Unsure what else to do, I invited him inside.

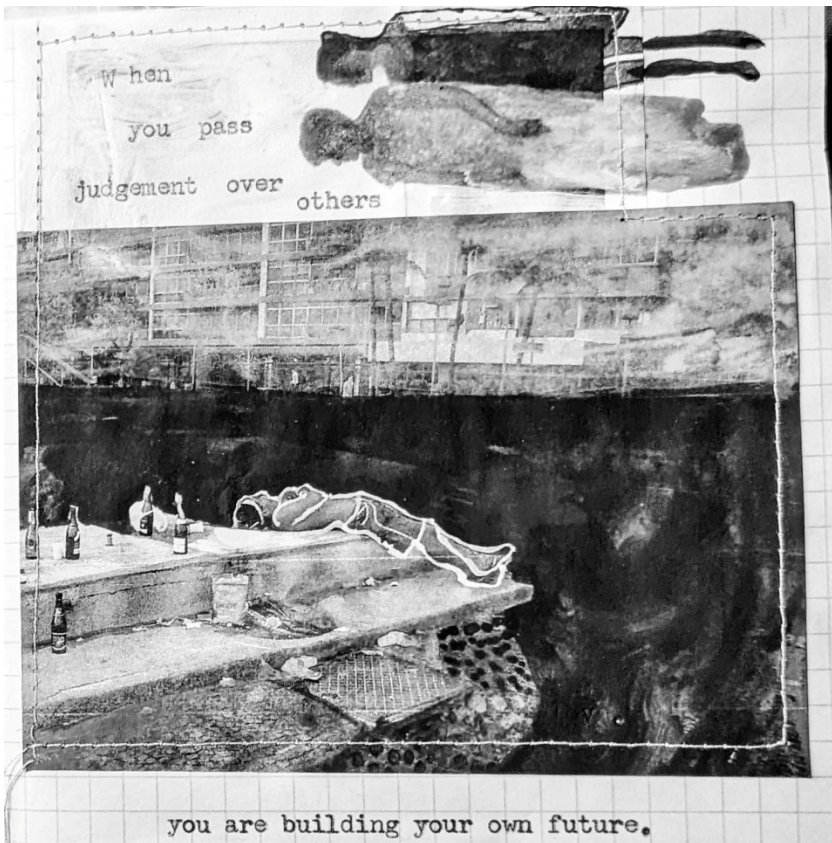
I was relieved to find he wasn't the singing kind; nor was he very plucky. His clothes were in fine condition. I made him dinner, but he didn't want any. Who ever heard of a well-fed orphan? Aside from having no parents, he hardly fit the part at all.

Between you and me, he's lucky to have gotten the whole thing out of the way. With my mom it took years. When do you stop being an orphan, and your parents are just dead the regular way? I called the hotline: she told me sixteen.

Outside there were no pickpockets in the alleys, no orphan-catchers with their big nets. He didn't want to watch TV, so we sat in silence. You'd think it would be more exciting, having an orphan around. Eventually I gave him a pillow and went to bed.

In the morning I found he'd made off with my wallet—quite a sporting gesture, but in the end too little, too late.

If I was an orphan I'd have been the free and easy kind, dancing for pennies, and how I would have danced. I'd go where I pleased, soaring over rooftops, and try as he might, the man with the net could never have caught me.



We Are All Ignorant Creators 2 / Lauren Kohne



Bus stop 11 / Vince Thomas



Bus stop 12 / Vince Thomas



Flamingo / Vince Thomas



Nightlight Parkscape / Kidus Kebede

Beltane

Michelle Kelly

She has arrived. The witch occupies a room in your home you did not know was there. You sense her immediately: your brain has never burned this way, your skin has never hummed. Knots of your hair disappear from the shower drain. The scent of resin, just a trace, sometimes in the kitchen, and sometimes in the robe. You see your husband look over his shoulder, several times. After fucking he writhes uncomfortably in his sleep. You are each stirring all foods in all pots clockwise. And once, out of the corner of your eye, you see him run a finger along the stair rail in a quiet caress.

We are all beginning.

The child comes. She is beautiful, blameless, all you ever wanted. Who knew your life could be so full? Sudocrem, mothers' group, Playgro. Babywearing, night weaning, playground connoisseurship. Tog levels, leaps and boundaries. It is Rozelle, the summer of 2012. These months will always burn bright for you, a solar flare in the life course. At home the shifting under the stairs has subsided, ears too full to heed it. Spiders no longer weave webs with your hair.

You see the witch for the first time in the mirror. You recognise her with a single glance – the only person in this world, in this life, who you will never be able to reject, or accept.

“You were under the stairs,” you say.

“I am under the stairs,” she says.

“You move along the edges,” you say.

“I move along the edges,” she agrees.

You both look towards the door as the baby's laughter nudges in from the garden.

You cannot stop kissing the baby, you cannot stop kissing her. You squeeze her to your chest as though you could integrate her into yourself. You bring her to the mirror. The witch croons. You bring your lips to the baby's hand, a little dim sum, a ball of delectable flesh shot through with bones as sharp as pins. You feel the mirror tilt toward the child, a shift that could be measured in molecules.

"Do you know that dead babies must be left in time as well as place?" the witch says.

You look up, startled.

It takes you no time at all to realise it is not a threat, and even though it she who has told of her pain her gaze is undiluted. It is yours that is shrouded by tears.

The next person to meet your eye so directly is your friend, over cups and babycinos at the table of a courtyard café. You are both evading the painful subject of *before*. The pair of you circle and circle the sinkhole, you clawing on the most instinctively. And so it is up to your friend to deliver the coup de grâce, and in the end she does it cleanly: "You can't understand until you have them." With politesse and deep reluctant understanding you find yourself nodding.

At home you find a swaddle on the stairs ripped to ribbons.

You take up the rags and wipe the mirror with them, clockwise, but you cannot appease her.

"Not mother," she calls you.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry," you say.

"Mummer, mummer, mummer," she hisses. "I am the one."

You are weeping softly because you do not want to wake the baby.

"Please," you say.

"You cannot be forgiven in the midst of doing harm," she tells you, and the thorns stab you inside where it hurts, and you smell vinegar.

You still try to make amends. Next time, in the same courtyard, over cups and tables and stones, you tell your friend: "The women who don't have children, they understand things we will never know."

It is one of the most-true things you will ever realise or express. Later at home you attempt to press your advantage with blandishment, addressing the mirror lightly.

"I do not know why my friend spoke so cruelly and unambiguously," you say. "It is wrong to take such a strong line."

This infuriates the witch.

"Perhaps you judge judgement because you know you have done wrong," she seethes. The mirror blazes like a furnace; you flinch as the flare licks your face and you remember as though you had never forgotten it, the cool lunar lull of the first phase of waiting, the sweet expectant coitus, evenings together at the gym and then cooking together for two, and you are weeping.

"I want you to go," you tell her after a time, after the convulsion has left you, when you are lying still on your side on the carpet on the floor. "You must go."

Your abjectness has dispelled the witch's anger. She is quiet. She understands the things you will never know.

You feared it was the witch who brought calamity but calamity had already broken over your home. It could not have been disguised more cunningly—that astringent stretch of waiting following those dulcet early moments, an interval when philosophising was all that you could do.

It is an experience you will never reconcile. The glimpses you've caught of cursedness; the things that you now know.

Even as you spoke up to the mirror from the floor you both knew that your desire to expel her could never be realised. It was only ever something to be expressed.

You must bear the calamity together, all.

For now, the child grows and moves between you.

The child's name is May Eve.

She moves in love.



Secrets / D. Lee Beauchamp



The Autumn House / D Lee Beauchamp



Escape / J.R. Mues



Come One Come All / J.R. Mues

The Eastern Wisdom in a Cup of Tea

Wang Jie

Translated from Mandarin

China is the birthplace of the tea plant. Every tea bush in the world traces its roots to the highlands of Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan, the mountainous crossroads of southwest China where tea began its journey with humanity.

Tea's long evolution followed a distinct path from medicine to food to beverage.



I. The Medicinal Phase (Pre-Qin to Western Han)

In its earliest use, tea was valued primarily as medicine. Ancient peoples discovered that chewing fresh tea leaves could counteract toxins.

The Shennong Bencao Jing (The Classic of Herbal

Medicine) records: “Shennong tasted a hundred herbs; in a single day he encountered seventy-two poisons, and tea dissolved them all.”

At this stage, tea was not a beverage but a herbal remedy. Chewed raw for detoxification and cooling, tea was classified among medicinal plants rather than consumed as a refreshment.

II. The Culinary Phase (Eastern Han to Wei-Jin Period)

Gradually, tea moved from the pharmacy to the kitchen. Leaves were harvested and boiled into a thick broth, cooked with scallions, ginger, Sichuan pepper, and grains to make “tea porridge” or “tea gruel.” This dish served as sustenance or as an accompaniment to the entree.

During this period, tea was food rather than a beverage: a nourishing, therapeutic accompaniment when healing and eating were not yet separated.

III. The Proto-Beverage Phase (Wei-Jin to Southern and Northern Dynasties)

Tea drinking began to emerge as a social practice. Grains and spices were gradually reduced; the thick “tea gruel” gave way to a simpler “tea broth.” Scholars and aristocrats started drinking tea during philosophical conversations. In this transitional stage, salt and seasonings still lingered.

IV. The Mature Beverage Phase (Tang Dynasty)

Tea came into its own as an independent drink, and the art of tea took shape.

Tang-style tea took the form of steamed pressed cakes, which were then ground to powder and boiled with a pinch of salt. Lu Yu’s philosophical monograph “The Classic of Tea (Cha Jing)” systematically codified tea culture, finally separating tea from medicine and food. Tea became a daily beverage at all levels of society.



V. Refinements Through the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties

The Song Dynasty gave us powdered whipped tea; the Ming and Qing introduced loose-leaf steeping. Processing techniques evolved continuously, with white tea and oolong both emerging in the Qing. By then, tea had fully shed its medicinal and culinary origins. It existed purely for drinking and appreciation.

The Humanistic Philosophy of Contemporary Chinese Tea

Today, tea retains echoes of its medicinal and culinary past, but its core function is now cultural and spiritual. The drink nourishes the mind as much as the body.

Over millennia, a simple leaf has become a culture, a philosophy, and a way of life. “Firewood, rice, oil, salt, sauce, vinegar, and tea” are the seven necessities of daily existence. “Lute, chess,

calligraphy, painting, poetry, wine, and tea” are the seven arts of cultivated living.

Chinese tea practice weaves together Confucian ritual (li), Daoist spontaneity (ziran), and Buddhist stillness and awakening (jingwu). One who serves tea is not merely a brewer but an attendant to the leaf ... and a practitioner of the Way (Dao).



Toward tea: Show reverence. Know where every leaf comes from, understand its nature. Brew without flourishes ... simply follow tea's inherent character.

Toward the tea table: Show restraint. Know what to include and what to leave out. Utensils are not decor; they are extensions of the hands. Empty space is not absence; it is breathing room.

Toward flowers: Listen. The arrangement is not merely blossoms but nature itself. Allow for wilting and imperfection. Though made by human hands, the flowers should feel as if they grew there.

Toward water: Be patient. Do not rush. Still the mind as the water comes to a boil. Trust what is happening inside the covered vessel, and pour at the precise moment. Patience is the server's deepest skill.

Toward oneself: Enact acceptance. A bitter infusion should not result in regret. A fragrant one should not result in pride. Simply see the results clearly, and try again next time.

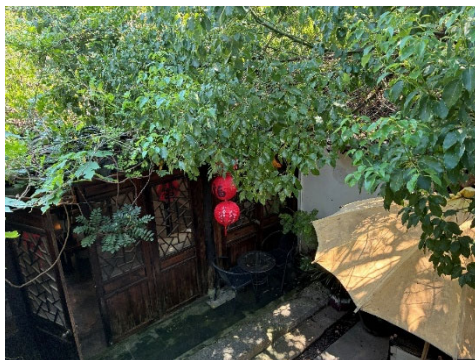


Chinese tea practice is not “a person brewing tea” ... it is “tea brewing the person.” Warmth tempers restlessness, while flavor teaches the meaning of perfect measures.

This ancient wisdom is not sealed away inside history books. In the ancient water town of Liantang, Qingpu District, Shanghai, tea culture breathes still. Cha Yu 1946 (Tea at 1946) is a restored traditional teahouse, the

oldest in that town. Its white-walled, grey-tiled courtyard was built in 1946. Inside this living space, traditional tea culture meets the arts. Since 2019, it has been recognized as a Qingpu District Science Education Base. In 2023 and 2024, Cha Yu 1946 was listed in Shanghai's "Top 100 Distinguished Shanghai-Style Tea Spaces." Here, tea, pastries, hand-painted ceramics, Chinese ink painting, architecture, classical furniture, and curator Xu Qin's personal collection of antique teaware converge. The teahouse is a showcase of traditional Chinese aesthetics.

The soul of Cha Yu 1946 is Xu Qin—Council Member, Deputy Secretary-General, Tea Culture Committee Director for the Shanghai Tea Society, and founder of the Qingpu District Tea Culture Association (2013). Over the past decade, Xu and her team have organized more than



300 tea-culture exchange events, reaching over 50,000 people. They developed a popular-science curriculum, "Tea—A Plant That Changed the World," for local primary and secondary schools. She has brought tea identification, brewing techniques, tea etiquette, and health knowledge to teachers, children, and community residents. She once said, "Across the vast land of China, fifty-six ethnic groups shine like brilliant stars. It is the convergence of these fifty-six kinds of lives that creates the richly varied tapestry of Chinese tea culture."

Xu Qin represents a new generation of tea-culture guardians—rather than lock traditions in glass cases, she enables living bridges who carry ancient wisdom into the present. She doesn't treat tea as an artifact to be worshipped. Instead, she champions it as a living language to be spoken. Through her space, she shows that perfection and performance do not define tea culture; it is about presence. Being fully present with the tea, with others, with this very moment.



In China, tea is far more than a beverage. Tea is perhaps the finest testament to how the Chinese infuse daily life with flavor. As the old saying goes: “Open the door, and seven things greet you—firewood, rice, oil, salt, sauce, vinegar, and tea.” Tea is not elevated above life; it lives within it. Tea is history steeped in water, philosophy fired in clay, aesthetics poured into a cup. It is a way of life that teaches patience, humility, and harmony. It embodies the Chinese aesthetic sensibility to strive

for perfection yet accept imperfection; be unafraid of empty space by understanding the need to breathe; seeking not to conquer nature but to converse with it.

When you sit at a tea table in China, what you drink is not a mere beverage. You drink human warmth. You drink a stolen half-day of leisure. You drink the vastness of heaven and earth. You taste millennia of civilization. You experience a worldview that honors balance over excess, stillness over noise, presence over performance. You participate in a ritual that has continued for over a thousand years, one that reminds an ever-accelerating world to stop, to breathe, and to be.

The tea is here. The table is set. We are present.
This is the Eastern wisdom in a cup of tea.

杯茶的东方智慧中国是茶树的原产地

Wang Jie

一杯茶的东方智慧中国是茶树的原产地。世界上的茶树都起源于中国的云贵高原——

——即云南、贵州、四川三省交界的山区。



茶从药用→食用→饮用演变过程

一、药用阶段（先秦—西汉）

最早利用茶，以药用为主。上古时期先民发现茶树鲜叶，嚼食叶片解毒。

《神农本草》记载：“神农尝百草，日遇七十二毒，得荼而解之”。

用法：直接生嚼鲜叶，作为解毒、清热的草药，归本草，不以饮品看待。

二、食用阶段（两汉—魏晋）

茶慢慢从单纯入药，进入食用时期。

把茶叶采下，煮成羹汤，和葱、姜、茱萸、米等调料同煮，做成茶粥、茶羹，当作食物充饥、佐餐。

此时茶是菜食、辅食，不是独立饮品，药食不分，既补身体又做疗愈。

三、 饮用萌芽（魏晋南北朝）

饮茶风气兴起，慢慢减少米粮，逐步去掉大量佐料，由“吃茶羹”转向喝茶汤。

文人、士族开始饮茶，清谈之时以茶助兴，但还保留盐、香料调味，属于过渡阶段。



四、 饮用成熟（唐代）

茶正式确立饮品属性，茶道成型。

唐代煮茶：蒸青制茶，碾末煮饮，加盐调味。陆羽《茶经》系统总结饮茶，茶脱离药、食本位，成为独立的日常饮品，饮茶走向民间。

五、 宋、元、明、清不断完善

宋代点茶、明清泡茶，制茶工艺也在持续变化，白茶和乌龙茶就诞生于清代。茶彻底从药、食剥离，主要用于品饮。

当代中国茶道的人文哲学

现代茶仍然保留药食同源属性，但其核心功能为饮品、精神品鉴。几千年来，茶从一片树叶，升华为一种文化、一种哲学和一种生活方式。“柴米油盐酱醋茶”是生活，“琴棋书画诗酒茶”是艺术。中国茶道融合了儒家的“礼”、道家的“自然”和佛家的“静悟”。“事茶者”不仅仅是“泡茶的人”，更是茶的侍者，是道的行人。



对茶，是敬畏——知道每一片叶子如何而来，懂得它的脾气。泡茶不炫技，只顺其天性而泡。

对席，是节制——知道什么该放、什么该收。器物不是摆设，是手的延伸；留白不是空缺，是呼吸。

对花，是倾听——插的不止是花，是大自然，允许枯败和残缺，虽为人造，宛成天然。

对水，是等待——不急。水沸心止，知道闷泡的茶在发生什么，在最好的时间出汤。耐心，是事茶者最深的功夫。

对己，是接纳——泡出苦涩，不懊恼；泡出香醇，不骄矜。只是如实看见，下次再来。

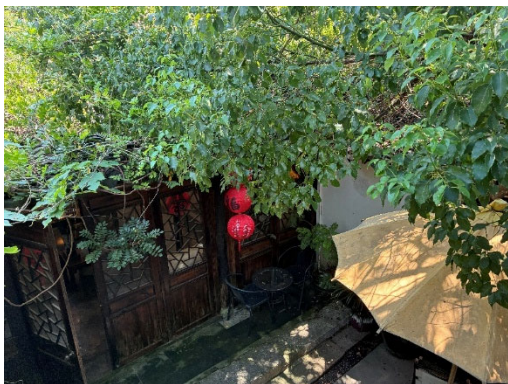
中国茶道不是“人在泡茶”，而是“茶在泡人”。茶用温度抚平人的浮躁，茶用味道告诉我们何为恰好的分寸。

这份古老的智慧并非尘封于史书之中。在上海青浦区的千年古镇——练塘，有一处地方，茶文化至今仍在鲜活地呼吸。茶于·1946 是由古镇上最古老的老茶馆修复而来——一座白墙黛瓦的中式院落，始建于



1946 年。它不仅仅是一间茶馆，更是中国传统茶文化与艺术交融的空间。自 2019 年起，它被认定为青浦区科普基地，并在 2023 年和 2024 年连续入选上海市“百佳海派特色茶空间”。在这里，茶

、茶点、手绘瓷器、中国水墨画、建筑空间、中式家具以及空间主理人徐琴——个人历年收藏的各式茶具……中国传统文化的美学元素汇集于一堂。



茶于1946 的灵魂人物徐琴，她是上海市茶叶学会理事、副秘书长兼茶文化工委主任，也是2013 年青浦区茶文化协会创始人。徐琴和她的团队在近十多年组织了三百多场茶文化交流活动，惠及五万余人。她们为当地中小学开发了“茶—影响世界的植物”

科普课程。她把茶叶鉴别、冲泡技巧、茶道礼仪和茶的健康知识，带给了老师、孩子和社区居民。她曾说过：“在中华民族的广袤大地上，五十六个民族如同璀璨的星辰，各自散发着独特的光芒。正是五十六种生命的汇聚，才构成了中国丰富多彩的茶文化图景。”徐琴代表了中国新一代茶文化守护者——她们不是将传统锁在玻璃柜里的守旧者，而是将古老智慧带入当下的活态桥梁。她并不把茶当作一件需要膜拜的文物，而是一种需要开口言说的鲜活语言。通过她的空间，她让人们看到：茶文化无关完美或表演，而在于“在场”——全然于此，与茶同在，与人同在，与此刻同在。在中国，茶远不止是一种饮品，是中国人把日子过出滋味的最好见证。中国有句谚语：“开门七件事，柴米油盐酱醋茶”，茶不在天上，就在日常里。是浸泡在水中的历史，是烧制在陶土里的哲学，是倾注在杯中的美学。它是一种教会人耐心、谦逊与和谐的生活方式。它体现了中国人的审美观——追求完美，但接纳不完美；不畏惧留白，懂得呼吸的空间；不试图征服自然，而与之对话。

当你坐在中国的茶席前，你喝的不仅是茶，是人情冷暖，是浮生半日，是天地万物，你在品尝数千年的文明，你在体验一种崇尚平衡而非过度、宁静而非喧嚣、在场而非表演的世界观。你在参与一项延续千年的仪式——它提醒着永不停歇的世界：停下来，呼吸，存在。

茶在，席在，人在，这就是一杯茶的东方智慧。



Food is the Heaven of the People

Wang Jie

Translated from Mandarin

Chinese cuisine is the gentlest yet most powerful social passport in global exchange. The life philosophy of the Chinese people echoes in every simple meal and every act of cooking.

I. “Food is the Heaven of the People”

The five characters that make up this saying (民以食为天, mín yǐ shí wéi tiān) come from *The Book of Han*’s biography of scholar Li Yiji. Literally, they mean “the common people regard food as heaven.” The connotations they carry go far beyond the fact that people need to eat.

II. The Bottom Line of Survival – “Heaven” as Life Itself

In the ancient Chinese understanding, “Heaven” (Tian) was the supreme, ultimate existence. Comparing “food” to “Heaven” means it is indispensable – it is the very bottom line of survival. When Emperor Shun commanded minister Houji, he proclaimed that “food is the foremost matter of governance.”

Throughout Chinese history, wise rulers prioritized agriculture, stored grain, and protected farming as the foundation of the state. They recognized that a stable rice bowl is the starting point of all order.



The Great Way of Statecraft – “Heaven” as Natural Law

The philosopher Guanzi said, “When the granaries are full, the people learn manners; when food and clothing are sufficient, the people learn honor and shame.” This reveals a simple social law: any civilization, ideal, or art must be built upon the foundation of “a bowl of rice in the pot.” Physical survival ensures spiritual stability. Once food becomes unstable, the very foundation of society trembles.

Cultural DNA – “Heaven” as Faith

In China, food has long transcended calories and nutritional indicators. It is a carrier of emotion (“mother’s cooking”), a philosophical metaphor (“governing a great state is like cooking a small fish”), a principle of wellness (“medicine and food share the same origin”), and an indispensable ritual that accompanies seasonal festivals. In China, the act of eating is secular life’s unifying religion and its most sincere faith. Every major life occasion – New Year celebrations, weddings and funerals, ancestor worship, and offerings to the gods – revolves around a table of food. Food carries our full reverence for heaven and earth, our ancestors, and human relationships.

A Contemporary Warning – “Heaven” as Reverence

In an age of material abundance, “food as heaven” takes on new meaning through reverence for nature and maintenance of health. It reminds us to recall the sacredness of food even though we can eat our fill. Food safety issues cut deep precisely because they violate that “heaven”-like bottom line. When we eat healthily and seasonally, we return to the original meaning of “heaven” by aligning with the seasons, respecting life, and maintaining a gentle yet cleareyed balance between humanity and nature.



III. Eating in China: More Than Flavor – A Living Civilization and China’s “Social Operating System”

In the West, eating is often a backdrop to socializing. In China, eating is socializing itself. Most major life decisions, like those made during business deals, reunions, celebrations, and conflict resolution, happen around a dining table. “Have you eaten?” is the equivalent of “hello,” a warm, simple greeting from the heart of everyday life. As long as humans need connection, Chinese food culture will forever be the liveliest and most

irreplaceable medium of communication.

The Inclusiveness and Vitality of “Infinite Variables”

China claims ultimate diversity within “one place, one flavor.” The Eight Great Cuisines formalized in the late Qing and early Republican era are merely a prologue to Chinese food’s grand repertoire. The categories evolved according to regional terroir, cooking techniques, and local produce. Shandong cuisine is rich and savory; Sichuan is known as numbingly spicy and bold; Cantonese produces fresh and light flavors that remain true to their sources; Jiangsu is elegant and balanced; Fujian produces masters of broth; Zhejiang offers refined and delicate dishes; Hunan’s boldness is fragrant and robust; and Anhui options are deeply savory and infused with flavor.

The ancient dietary philosophy of “eating with the seasons” is a living algorithm that follows natural annual rhythms, regional waters and soils, and the dynamic abundance of local produce. The logic of eating in harmony with the season is etched into country’s food culture. Even more fascinating is the inclusiveness of Chinese flavors. No matter where Chinese cuisine travels across the world, local ingredients can be utilized to create a “Chinese taste.” This quality of “adapting to local ways while holding fast to its soul” allows it to flow like living water, always generating fresh conversations.

The Life Wisdom of “Governing a Great State Is Like Cooking a Small Fish”

The Chinese have merged philosophy, medicine, and aesthetic sensibility in a single pot.

- Philosophy: “The harmony of five flavors” – sour, bitter, sweet, pungent, and salty—correspond to the balance of the Five Elements. The art of cooking is also the art of navigating human relationships.
- Medicine: “Food and medicine share the same origin.” A bowl of ginger soup drives away cold; mung bean soup relieves summer heat. The functional view of food as daily medicine stands out as unique in the world.
- Aesthetics:
 - The beauty of knifework (form) is like painting within a square inch. Chinese aesthetics does not pursue the three-dimensionality of Western sculpture, but the rhythm and flow of lines.
 - The beauty of vessels focuses on presentation. Confucius said, “One could not be too particular about food, nor too precise about cutting.” Therefore, even the serving vessels are of utmost refinement. Food and the vessels used to present it complement each other like red flowers and green leaves.
 - The beauty of artistic conception turns to meaning. This is the highest realm of Chinese culinary aesthetics, wherein participants are “eating the scenery.” Dish names and plating often utilize the concepts of negative space and borrowed scenery from poetry, calligraphy, and painting. You eat what is on the plate, but you taste poetry and distant horizons.
 - The beauty of seasons plays with color. Chinese aesthetics rejects off-season mismatches. Spring brings the tender green of shepherd’s purse and

bamboo shoots; summer, the cool jade hue of lotus-leaf porridge. Autumn trumpets the golden harvest of crab roe and chrysanthemums; winter, the pure white elegance of yam paste and lotus-root starch. This is the uniquely Chinese way of perceiving heaven and earth's four seasons through the tip of the tongue.

IV. Everyday Life: The Common People's "Food Philosophy" and the Warmth of Living



The Common People's "Food Philosophy": The Ultimate Romance of Pragmatism

For ordinary Chinese, the core of eating boils down to nourishing the body. A dish need not look exquisite, but it must be "luowei" – it should settle comfortably in the stomach and make you feel good.

"Eating with the Seasons" Is the Body's Instinct

Ordinary people don't speak of "sustainable eating" in abstract terms. Their diet follows the rhythms of the four seasons, consuming what heaven and earth offer in the present moment. In spring, they eat sprouts and leaves to become invigorated; in summer, fresh melons to dispel heat; in autumn, fruits to harvest and conserve; in winter, rich flavors to ward off cold. They do not force rare ingredients to appear out of season. Instead, they adjust their tables to the turning of the seasons.

“Tastes Like Home” Is the Highest Praise

A foreigner might praise a restaurant by calling it “Michelin three-star.” For a Chinese person, the most moving compliment is, “This tastes just like my mother’s cooking.” What heals a day’s exhaustion is never rare delicacies, but that sweet bowl of plain congee or a steaming bowl of noodle soup.

“Fireworks Atmosphere” (Yanhua Qi) – The Background Hum of Humanity

Yanhua qi is hard to translate. It is found in the ambiance of everyday life in moments instantly felt:

- The puff of white steam that bursts upward when a breakfast stall’s steamer basket is opened at dawn;
- The flame that roars up from the wok as a street-food chef tosses ingredients;
- The slurping of people huddled on plastic stools at a roadside stall late at night, eating noodles without a care for appearances.

Yanhua qi is the warmest touch of human feeling amid a city’s cold steel and concrete. It means you are not alone, and you don’t have to put on airs. As long as the night market lights are on and the oil sizzles, life is still hot and alive.

Regional “Code Words:” Dialect Phrases Reflect Dietary Philosophy

People across China never recite from textbooks. Their own culinary expressions are vivid and full of character.

- Northeast’s “Hard Dish” (Yingcai)

Hosting a meal without a “hard dish,” a large portion of pure meat, displays a lack of sincerity. Behind this sparks the boldness forged in

the bitter cold. The food must be substantial enough to stand against the elements.

- Sichuan's "Bashi" (Comfortably Satisfying)

Eating hotpot or maocai isn't hailed as delicious – it's "bashi de ban!" This phrase indicates satisfaction with the taste as well as a feeling of ease that relaxes every pore. No matter how big the problem is, one round of numbing heat and spice irons everything out.

- Cantonese "Wok Hei" (Huo Qi – Breath of the Wok)

A stir-fried dish must have soul, and that soul is wok hei. Under fierce heat, a faintly charred aroma imbues the edges of the ingredients, and results from the common people's pursuit of the "instant art" of cooking.

- Nationwide: "Eat It While It's Hot" (Chenre Chi)

This is the most common and most heartwarming urging in China. In our hearts, food has a "life." Once it cools, its spirit disperses. Behind this is respect for the food's peak moment of flavor ... as well as the unspoken sentiment, "Don't stand on ceremony. I consider you family."

V. A "Cultural Passport" Going Global

In the era of globalization, Chinese food is becoming the gentlest of "cultural passports." In a world increasingly focused on health, sustainability, and "slow living," the wok hei, the kung fu (skill and craft), and the seasonally attuned wisdom rooted in the 24 Solar Terms of Chinese



cuisine are gaining new recognition in the international culinary scene.

More importantly, Chinese cuisine is one of the few cultural traditions that allows foreigners to participate hands-on and enjoy themselves thoroughly by making dumplings together or gathering around a shared hotpot. Meals are not museum exhibits to be viewed from a distance. Everyone can touch this “living civilization” with their hands and taste it on their tongues. As long as humanity cares about happiness, this steaming, flavorful, vibrant Chinese *yanhuo qi*—this firework atmosphere of life—will never fade from the stage.

民以食为天中国美食

Wang Jie

民以食为天中国美食，是世界交流中最柔和、也最有力量的一张社交名片。中国

人的生活哲学，几乎总能在一粥一饭、一烹一煮中找到回响。

一、“民以食为天”

这五个字，出自《汉书·酈食其传》，文字的字面意思是“百姓把粮食看作天”。但它所承载的内涵和深义，远远超出了“人要吃饭”这一基本事实。

生存的底线——“天”即生命

在中国古人的认知里，“天”是至高无上的存在。把“食”比作“天”，意味着它是不可或缺的，是生存底线。舜帝给大臣后稷的命令：“食为政首。”“食”是政治上的第一件大事。中国历代明君将重农、储粮、保障耕稼视为国本，是因为他们深谙：一只稳定的饭碗，才是一切秩序的起点。



治国的大道——“天”即规律

管子说：“仓廩足，知礼节，衣食足，知荣辱。”这揭示了一条朴素的社会规律：任何文明、理想、艺术，都必须先安放在“锅里有一碗饭”的基础之上。这既是物质层面的活着，也是精神层面的安稳，一旦“食”被动摇，整个社会的根基都将随之震颤。

文化的基因——“天”即信仰

在中国，食物早已超越了卡路里与营养指标，它是情感的载体——妈妈的味道，是哲学的隐喻——“治大国若烹小鲜”，是养生智慧——

——“药食同源”，更是岁时节令中不可或缺的仪式感。在中国，但“吃”本身，就是世俗生活里统一的宗教和最真诚的信仰。逢年过节、婚丧嫁娶、祭祖敬神，所有重大的人生场景，都是围绕着一桌饭菜展开——食物承载着我们对于天地、祖先与人情的全部敬意。

当代的警示——“天”即敬畏

当物质极大丰富，“食为天”又被赋予了新的时代意义：对自然的敬畏，对健康的珍视。它提醒我们，不要因为能吃饱，就遗忘食物的神圣性。食品安全问题之所以刺痛人心，正是因为它触犯了那份“天”一样的底线；而当我们开始追求吃得健康、吃得时令，其实是在回归“天”的本意——顺应节气，尊重生命，在人与自然之间保持温柔而清醒的平衡。

二、食在中国：不只是美味，更是文明的活态表达

它是中国人的“社交操作系统”

在西方，吃饭常常是社交的背景；在中国，吃饭就是社交本身。谈生意、叙旧情、办喜事、解恩怨——绝大多数重大人生决策，都发生在餐桌之上。“吃了吗”从来不是一句真正的问话，它等同于“你好”，是一份烟火人间里朴素的温暖问候。只要人类还需要联结，中国饮食文化就永远是最热闹、最不可替代的沟通媒介。



它拥有“无限变量”的包容与生命力

中国有“一地一食”的极致多样性，八大菜系不过是中华饮食宏大谱系的序章，成型于清末民初。它依据地域风土、烹饪技法与本土物产逐步划分定型，鲁菜厚重咸鲜，川菜麻辣浓烈，粤菜清鲜本味，苏菜雅致平和，闽菜善制汤羹，浙菜清润淡雅，湘菜浓香劲爽，徽菜醇厚入味。

而“顺时而食”这一古老饮食哲学，更是一套依循节令流转、地域水土与物产禀赋动态迭代的生活算法，应季而食，则是

刻在饮食文化里的底层逻辑。

更有趣的是中国味的包容性——无论中餐走到世界哪个角落，都能用当地的食材烹出“中国味”。这种“入乡随俗却又固守灵魂”的特质，让它如活水般奔涌，永远有新鲜的话题。

它承载着“治大国若烹小鲜”的处世智慧。

中国人将哲学、医理与审美意趣，尽数熔于一口锅釜之中。

· 哲学：“五味调和”——酸、甘、苦、辛、咸五味对应五行平衡，烹饪之道，亦是为人处世之道。。

· 医学：“药食同源”——一碗姜汤驱寒，一碗绿豆汤解暑。食物即日常之药，这种功能性的饮食观，在全世界独树一帜。

· 美学：

- 刀工之美（形）：于方寸之间作画，中国美学追求的不是西方雕塑般的立体感，而是线条的韵律与流动。
- 器皿之美（器）：孔子说“食不厌精，脍不厌细”，连盛放的器物也极为讲究。食物与器皿，恰如红花与绿叶，相得益彰。
- 意境之美（意）：这是中国美食美学的最高境界——“吃景”。菜名与摆盘，往往借用诗词书画中的“留白”与“借景”，吃的是盘中餐，品的是诗和远方。
- 季节之美（色）：中国美学拒绝反季节的拼凑。春天是荠菜、春笋的嫩绿，夏天是荷叶粥的清凉碧色，秋天是蟹粉、菊花的丰收金黄，冬天是山药泥、藕粉的素雅洁白。这是中国人用舌尖感知天地四时的独特方式。

三、烟火人间：老百姓的“吃理”与生活温度

老百姓的“吃理”：实用主义的终极浪漫

中国百姓对吃的理解，核心只有两个字：“养人”。卖相可以不那么精致，但一定要“落胃”——吃着舒服。

“应季而食”是身体的本能

老百姓不懂“可持续饮食”这些大道理，百姓饮食遵从四时节律，吃天地当下馈赠的物产，春食芽叶以升发，夏食鲜瓜清暑热，秋食果物补收敛，冬食厚味御寒凉。不逆时节强求稀有食材，顺着节气更替调整餐桌上的滋味。



“家的味道”是最高赞誉

对外国人来说，夸一家餐厅好，可能说它是“米其林三星”。但中国人最动情的表达，是“吃出了我妈做的味儿”。治愈一天疲惫的，从来不是山珍海味，而是那一碗香甜的白粥，或是一碗热腾腾的汤面。

什么是“烟火气”？——那是人间的底噪

“烟火气”很难翻译，它更像是一瞬间被感知到的画面：是清晨早餐摊蒸笼掀开时，“噗”地腾起的那一团白雾；是大排档师傅颠勺时，锅里“轰”地窜起的那一道火光；是深夜路边摊上，大家缩在塑料凳上，不顾形象吸溜面条的“吸溜”声。

烟火气，就是城市冰冷钢筋水泥中，最温暖的那一抹人情味。它意味着不孤单、不端着。只要夜市灯火亮起，油锅滋啦作响，你就知道——

——这日子，还热乎着呢。

地方“暗号”：一句方言，就是一部饮食哲学

各地老百姓从不照本宣科，他们的饮食表达活色生香，自带性格：

· 东北的“硬菜”

请客没有“硬菜”——大块的纯肉，就等于没有诚意。这背后是严寒地带养出的豪爽：食物必须足够扎实，才能对抗天地。

· 四川的“巴适”

吃火锅冒菜，不叫“好吃”，叫“巴适得板”！这不只是味觉的满足，更是全身毛孔舒张的安逸感——天大的事，一顿麻辣滚烫下去，就“熨帖”了。

· 广东的“镬气”

炒菜要有灵魂，这灵魂就是“镬气”。猛火快攻之下，食材边缘那一丝微焦的焦香，是百姓对烹饪“瞬时艺术”的极致追求。



· 全国通用的“趁热吃”

这是中国人最常说、也最暖心的一句催促。因为在我们的心里，食物是有“命”的，一旦凉了，魂就散了。这背后，既是对食物最佳赏味期的尊重，更是那句没说出口的“别客气，我拿你当自己人”。

四、走向世界的“文化护照”

在全球化时代，中国饮食正成为一张最温柔的“文化护照”。随着世界对健康、可持续与“慢生活”的关注升温，中餐里的“锅气”、“功夫”以及根植于二十四节气的顺时饮食智慧，正逐渐成为国际美食界的新视野。

更重要的是，中餐是极少数能让外国人亲手参与、并乐在其中的文化——一起包饺子、围坐涮火锅。它不是博物馆里仅供远观的展品，而是每个人都能用手触碰、用舌尖感受的“活态文明”。只要人类还在乎幸福感，这份热气腾腾、有滋有味的中国烟火气，就永远不会退场。

The Empowerment Paradox and Paradigm Shift Inherent in “Trace-Chasing” Art

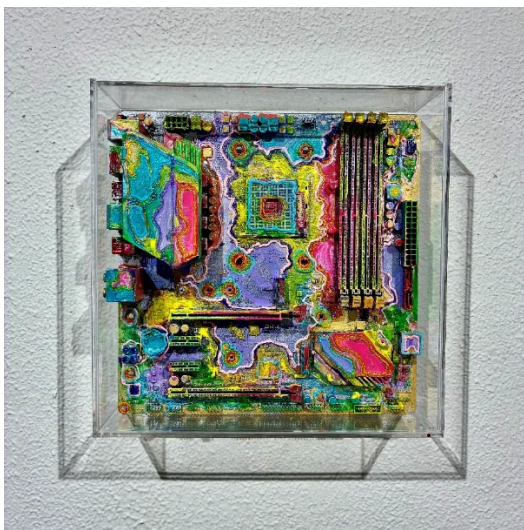
Gu Kaijun

Art by Ni Weihua

Translated from Mandarin

A Triple Perspective Based on Empowerment Theory, Art Genesis, and Biolinguistics

Introduction to Trace-Chasing



“Trace-Chasing” is a visual intervention activity (tracking, copying) initiated by artist Ni Weihua. The process targets all types of trace textures to enhance or superimpose the visual differentiation of traces.

Trace-Chasing began as an easel painting method experiment. Since 2018, it has taken old buildings in public spaces, ruined walls, new roughcast walls, rocks, aged wooden

boards and similar surfaces as carriers. Natural traces left by weathering and corrosion are superimposed with human-made traces as image resources. Through “operations” or activities such as filling with extreme contrasting colors, hard-edge drawing of textures to exaggerate contrast, and highlighting other features, the approach brings forgotten and neglected trace images to the forefront of social

public spaces. These surfaces display new images and new visual landscapes that have been appropriated and intervened upon.

Trace-Chasing has developed specific forms including monochrome trace-chasing (black ink, white paint, blue paint, etc.), color trace-chasing, water trace-chasing, three-dimensional relief trace-chasing (including chisel-print trace-chasing and silicone trace-chasing), object-surface trace-chasing (e.g., walls, rocks), and human skin trace-chasing (face trace-chasing).

Trace-Chasing evolved from Ni Weihua's studio creation (version 1.0) to his own activity in public spaces (version 2.0), expanding to group trace-chasing led by him as initiator (version 3.0), and finally to version 4.0. In the latest iteration, the author-withdrawal mode, the initiator withdraws. Remote netizens discover sites for Trace-Chasing activity, and local people organize volunteers to trace-chase according to the operating procedures given by the initiator.

From June 2018 to August 2026, 389 activities have been completed in 34 locations globally, with a total of 2,570 participants.

The "Global Water Trace-Chasing Flash Mob" debuted the use of water instead of ink for trace-chasing. The Mob occurred simultaneously in multiple locations in December 2021. Nearly a hundred people across twenty cities and twenty-four sites participated, involving thirteen countries on six continents.

I. Trace-Chasing Art: An Experiment in Artistic Democratization in the Postmodern Context

Roland Barthes's prophecy of the "death of the author" and the "birth of the reader" in his 1967 essay, "The Death of the Author," finds material confirmation in a practice developed by artist Ni Weihua called Trace-Chasing. By transforming urban ruins into public canvases, Trace-Chasing creates a decentralized field of artistic production. While deconstructing Joseph Beuys's utopian ideal that "everyone is an artist," the practice, by applying topological operations to biological traces, also realizes a paradigm shift from semiotic empowerment to material empowerment.

II. The Triple Construction of the Empowerment Mechanism

1. Participatory Empowerment: The Democratized Production of Source-Code IP

The core of Trace-Chasing art lies in the open architecture of its source-code IP (intellectual property). The zero-baseline participation model designed by Ni Weihua essentially constitutes a “deskilling” system for artistic production. When ordinary participants replicate natural traces on ruined walls with pigments, they simultaneously undergo three identity transformations: from art consumer to producer, from spatial bystander to co-creator, and from symbol receiver to meaning-giver. This transformation is reinforced by the randomness of the visual blind box—each participant obtains an unreproducible “artistic fingerprint.” As Roland Barthes said, “The birth of the reader (participant) must be at the cost of the death of the Author, but more importantly, it means the rebirth of a new subject.”

2. Spatial Political Empowerment: The Topological Rebirth of Ruins

Urban ruins, as the primary sites of Trace-Chasing, have their temporality recoded. While the linear time of the city crushes individual existence, Trace-Chasing constructs a non-Euclidean space on the surface of ruins through topological operations on biological traces. This spatial production has a dual political character: on the one hand, the superimposition of traces dissolves the power hierarchy of urban space; on the other, the infusion of individual warmth turns cold concrete walls into carriers of memory. As Henri Lefebvre, a French Marxist philosopher and sociologist, said, “space is political; above all, it is an instrument of power.” Trace-Chasing, through the democratic distribution of traces, precisely achieves a reverse domestication of spatial power.

3. Paradigm Shift of the Pop Spirit

Ni Weihua’s early Pop Art appropriation of readymades was transformed through Trace-Chasing and its direct topology of natural forms. This shift was not simply a change of medium but a deepening of art’s interrogative spirit. If Andy Warhol used silkscreen to dissolve the sacredness of art, Ni Weihua, through the literal copying of natural and biological traces, turns his questioning toward the art production

mechanism itself. His principle of “only following traces, not creating traces” forms a mirror relationship with Pop Art’s “readymade cult.” The former achieves empowerment by negating creative sovereignty, while the latter completes deconstruction through the consumption of readymades.

III. The Ontological Subversion of Art Genesis

1. Contemporary Translation of the Shared Origin of Calligraphy and Painting

Trace-Chasing’s exploration of the problem of traces (jixiang) is a contemporary activation of the shared origins of calligraphy and painting in Chinese tradition. While traditional literati pursued “rhythmic vitality” (qiyun shengdong) through brush and ink, Ni Weihua uses the principle of “only following traces, not creating traces” to replicate natural textures, thereby deconstructing this metaphysical pursuit. Its operational logic resonates with Buddhist monk and calligrapher Shi Tao’s ontology of the “One-Stroke Method” (yihuafa); at the same time, Ni Weihua’s approach pushes the idea that “brush and ink should follow the times” to the material level of ruin aesthetics. This translation is not a simple formal imitation. Instead, through the randomness and contingency of living organisms who replicate natural forms, it subverts the creative view that “intention precedes the brush.”

2. Anti-Painting Painting Practice

The paradox of Trace-Chasing lies in how it dissolves painting through the act of painting. When participants cover walls with pigments, they construct traces on the material level while dissolving traces on the symbolic level. This reflexive practice enters a transhistorical dialogue with artist Yves Klein’s *The Void*. However, while the latter remains trapped in the elitist framework of conceptual art, Trace-Chasing democratizes anti-painting through mass participation.

3. Traces Becoming “Simulacra of Simulacra”

Ni Weihua’s Trace-Chasing series on canvas is by no means a simple visual game; it carries out a radical operation of “trace politics” through the medium of oil paint. Through the violent juxtaposition of extreme contrasting colors and hard-edge tracing, the initial smearing traces are deconstructed into a paradoxical symbiosis of materiality and semiotics. At the moment when the biological body’s brushstrokes “domesticate” natural cracks, they complete a fatal parody of modernist painting’s cybernetics: artistic production is alienated from the free creation of subjectivity into a passive ritual of copying predetermined traces. This “reverse simulacrum” makes traces a “simulacra of simulacra,” not only dismembering Modernism’s “myth of originality,” but also pushing Pop Art’s readymade logic into the abyss of democratization. Every participant is reduced to a porter of traces and a usurper of meaning, and the subjectivity of painting completely collapses in collective tracing.

While oil on canvas declares that art is dead, Ni Weihua proves, with the most refined pictorial grammar, that critical production itself has long become an exquisitely recycled specimen within the institutional cycle. Fissures intensified by extreme colors ultimately become tradable cognitive commodities under the logic of capital ... which might be the most sardonic paradoxical footnote to the “end of art” thesis.

IV. The Future Orientation of Biolinguistics

1. Traces as a Source-Code Language

According to Freud, all living organisms have an impulse to return to the inorganic state; i.e., the death drive. Swiss psychiatrist Silvio Fanti further proposed a “life-death co-impulse,” which is accomplished through the innumerable repetitive attempts of the life instinct. When confronted with natural traces, the artist’s repetitive impulse precisely and instinctually realizes the life-death co-impulse, which supplements the inadequacies of biosemiotic theory. Participants who approach trace-chasing so they “should dwell nowhere and give rise to the mind” (ying wu suo zhu er sheng qi xin), they make natural traces visible

through the temperature of the human body as a source-code language. Each rubbing contains the participant's biological information (such as fingerprint pressure or movement trajectory). This information, through the materialization of pigment, forms an anti-linguistic, non-semantic communication system. This language system differs from French philosopher of technology Bernard Stiegler's technical memory; through the direct intervention of the human body as a biological organism—removing the camera and turning the body itself into a camera—it truly realizes French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's material expression of the “body without organs.”

2. Artistic Pre-Enactment in the Posthuman Era

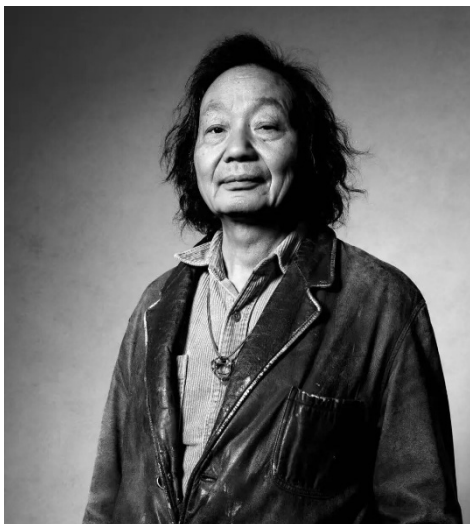
The principle of “only following traces, not creating traces” in Trace-Chasing heralds a fundamental turn in artistic production in the posthuman era. While AI painting generates images through algorithms, Trace-Chasing constructs an anti-algorithmic artistic ecology through the literal copying of human biological traces using the body's “repetition-trying instinct” (Silvio Fanti). This ecology is not a negation of technology. Instead, by returning to the most primordial trace production at the critical point between organic and inorganic matter, it redefines the essence of art: Art is not innovation, but the material testimony of corporeal existence.

V. Conclusion: Trace-Chasing as a Paradigm Revolution in New Painting Aesthetics

Ni Weihua's Trace-Chasing art, through the triple deconstruction of empowerment mechanisms, art genesis, and biolinguistics, has completed a silent aesthetic revolution. Its zero-threshold participation model deconstructs the power structure of artistic production; its topological operation on ruins reconstructs spatial politics; and its biological trace language prefigures the artistic form of the posthuman era. While traditional painting remains trapped in the binary framework of “creation-appreciation,” Trace-Chasing has opened a new epoch of artistic production through the source-code methodology of “trace-following.” This revolution doesn't repair the

existing paradigm; by returning to the flesh and to the most authentic materiality of art, it points out a new direction for future painting generated through a bio-technological symbiosis.

About the Artist



Ni Weihua

Born in 1962, contemporary artist Ni Weihua currently lives and works in Shanghai.

His works encompass various media including painting, installation, performance and video. He was one of the early practitioners who promoted the development of contemporary art in Shanghai. He is also one of the first Chinese artists to engage in “art intervention in society” and to “respond to digital-

ization.” His representative series include Continuous Diffusion Event—Red Box, Poster, Fine Arts: The Legitimized Presence of Words and Objects, Linear City, Scenery Wall, and Trace-Chasing. All received widespread attention for their multidimensional linguistic experimentation and social intervention themes. His works have been exhibited in dozens of important domestic and international exhibitions, including the China Contemporary Art Documentation Exhibition, Marrakech Biennale, Danish National Biennale, Venice Biennale, Chinese Art in Brazil, AVIFF (Cannes Art Film Shorts Festival), and Jeonju Photo Festival in Korea. Solo exhibitions have been held in Shanghai, Beijing, Los Angeles, and elsewhere.

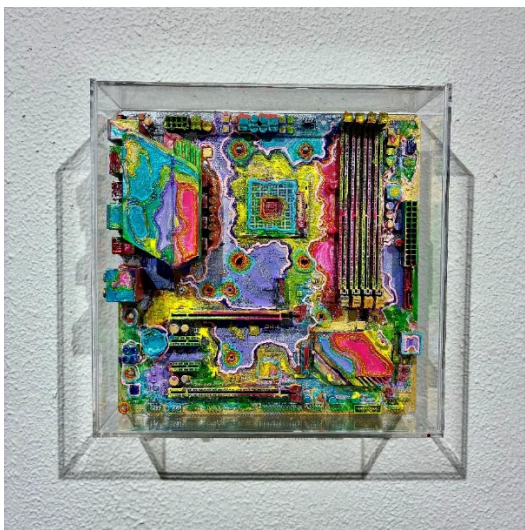
“追痕艺术”的赋权悖论及其范式跃迁

Gu Kaijun

“追痕”简介

“追痕”是以倪卫华作为发起人的、针对一切痕迹肌理的视觉干预（追踪，复写）活动，其结果是加强或叠加痕迹的视觉分辨效果。

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“追痕”以架上绘画作为最初的方法实验。2018 年起，以社会公共空间的老建筑、废墟墙、新建毛坯房、岩石、旧木板等为载体对象，以自然的（风化、腐蚀后的痕迹）和人为涂写的叠加痕迹为图像资源，通过极限对比色的反衬填色、纹理硬边描画式的拉大反差和突出痕迹的其他”操作”，

将社会公共空间那些被遗忘和忽略的痕迹图像凸现出来，成为一个被挪用和干预过的新图像和新视觉景观。

“追痕”共开发出单色追痕（黑墨及白色、蓝色颜料等）、彩色追痕、水追痕、立体的浮雕式凹凸追痕（目前已开发出凿印追痕和硅胶追痕），物体表面追痕（如墙体、岩石等）和人体皮肤表面追痕（脸部追痕）等形式。

“追痕”从倪卫华工作室的创作(1.0 版本)拓展到他个人在社会公共空间的行为实践(2.0 版本),进而发展到由他作为发起人带领的群体追痕行为(3.0 版本),而之后又演变为 4.0 版(作者退隐模式:在发起人缺席的情况下,由异地网友发现地址,并由在地的人士按照发起人给予的操作程序组织志愿者追痕)。从 2018 年 6 月到 2026 年 8 月,已在全球 34 地完成了 389 场活动,共有 2570 人参加。

“全球水追痕快闪”是以水为媒材替代墨进行追痕的首发,水追痕同时(2021 年 12 月)在多处地点发生,涉及 6 大洲 13 国 20 城 24 地近 100 人参与。

“追痕艺术”的赋权悖论及其范式跃迁——基于赋权理论、艺术发生学与生物语言学的三重透视一、追痕艺术：后现代语境下的艺术民主化实验

罗兰·巴特在《作者之死》中预言的“作者消解”与“读者诞生”,在倪卫华的“追痕”实践中得到了物质性印证。“追痕”通过将城市废墟转化为公共画布,构建了一个去中心化的艺术生产场域。这种实践不仅解构了波依斯“人人都是艺术家”的乌托邦想象,更以生物痕迹的拓扑学操作,实现了从符号赋权到物质赋权的范式跃迁。

二、赋权机制的三重建构

1. 参与性赋权：原始码 IP 的民主化生产

“追痕”艺术的核心在于其原始码 IP 的开放架构。倪卫华设计的零基础参与模式,实质上是构建了一个艺术生产的“去技能化”系统。当普通参与者用颜料在废墟墙面复刻自然痕迹时,他们同时完成了三重身份转换:从艺术消费者转变为生产者,从空间旁观者转变为共建者,从符号接收者转变为意义赋予者。这种转换通过视觉盲盒的随机性得到强化——每个参与者都获得了一个不可复

制的“艺术指纹”，正如罗兰·巴特所言：“读者（参与者）的诞生意味着作者的死亡，但更意味着新主体的重生。”

2. 空间政治赋权：废墟的拓扑学重生城市废墟作为“追痕”的主要场域，其时间性被重新编码。当城市的线性时间碾压个体存在时，“追痕”通过生物痕迹的拓扑学操作，在废墟表面构建了一个非欧几里得空间。这种空间生产具有双重政治性：一方面，它通过痕迹的叠加消解了城市空间的权力等级；另一方面，个体温度的注入使冰冷的水泥墙转化为记忆载体。正如列斐伏尔所言：

“空间是政治的，首先它是权力的工具。”而“追痕”恰恰通过痕迹的民主化分布，实现了对空间权力的反向驯化。

3. 波普精神的范式转换

倪卫华早期波普艺术对现成品的挪用，在“追痕”中转化为对自然形式的直接拓扑。这种转变并非简单的媒介更替，而是艺术质询精神的深化。当安迪·沃霍尔用丝网印刷消解艺术的神圣性时，倪卫华则通过自然和生物痕迹的原始复制，将质询对象转向艺术生产机制本身。其“只跟迹，不创迹”的原则，与波普艺术的“现成品崇拜”形成镜像关系——前者通过否定创作主权实现赋权，后者则通过消费现成品完成解构。

三、艺术发生学的本体论颠覆

1. 书画同源的当代转译

“追痕”对迹象问题的探讨，实质上是对中国书画同源传统的当代激活。当传统文人通过笔墨追求“气韵生动”时，倪卫华则用“只跟迹，不创迹”的原则复刻自然肌理，从而解构了这种形而上学追求。其操作逻辑暗合石涛“一画法”的本体论，但将“笔墨当随时代”推进到废墟美学的物质层面。这种转译并非简单的形式模仿，而是通过生命体的随机性和偶然性来复刻自然形式，完成了对“意在笔先”创作观的颠覆。

2. 反绘画的绘画实践

“追痕”的悖论性在于其通过绘画行为消解了绘画本身。当参与者用颜料覆盖墙面时，他们同时在进行着双重操作：在物质层面构建痕迹，在符号层面消解痕迹。这种自反性实践与克莱因的《空》形成跨时空对话，但后者仍困守于观念艺术的精英框架，而“追痕”则通过全民参与实现了反绘画的民主化。

3. 痕迹成为“拟像的拟像”

倪卫华的“追痕”系列架上创作，绝非简单的视觉游戏，而是一场以油彩为媒介的“痕迹政治学”激进手术。其通过极限对比色与硬边描摹的暴力性并置，将初始涂抹痕迹解构为物质性与符号性的悖论共生体——当生物学的身体笔触“驯化”自然裂痕的瞬间，实则完成了对现代主义绘画控制论的致命戏仿：艺术生产从主体性的自由创造，异化为对既定痕迹的被动复写仪式。这种“反向拟像”，实则使痕迹成为“拟像的拟像”，不仅肢解了现代主义的“原创性神话”，更将波普艺术的现成品逻辑推入民主化深渊——每个参与者都沦为痕迹的搬运工与意义的篡改者，绘画的主体性在集体描摹中彻底崩解。当油彩在画布上复述“艺术已死”的宣言时，倪卫华恰恰用最精致的绘画语法证明：批判性生产本身早已成为体制内循环再生的精致标本。那些被极限色彩强化的裂隙，终将成为资本逻辑下可交易的认知商品

——这或许是对“艺术终结论”最辛辣的悖论式注脚。

四、生物语言学的未来指向

1. 痕迹作为原始码语言

根据弗洛伊德的观点，所有的生命体都有回归到无机物的冲动，即死亡冲动。方迪又提出了“生命——死亡共冲动”，这种共冲动是在生命本能的无数次重复尝试中完成的。艺术家面对自然痕迹产生的重复冲动，正好契合了这种生命体通过重复本能来实现”

生命——死亡共冲动”，而这也正好补充了生物符号学理论的不足。体验者用“应无所住而生其心”的追痕行为，使自然痕迹通过人体的温度显像为一种可视的原始码语言。每一次拓印都包含着参与者的生物信息（如指纹压力、动作轨迹），这些信息通过颜料的物质化呈现，形成一个反语言学的，非语义的交流系统。这种语言系统不同于斯蒂格勒所述的技术记忆，而是通过人体这个生物体的直接介入，把相机拿掉，把人体直接变成相机，真正实现了德勒兹所谓的“无器官身体”的物质表达。

2. 后人类时代的艺术预演

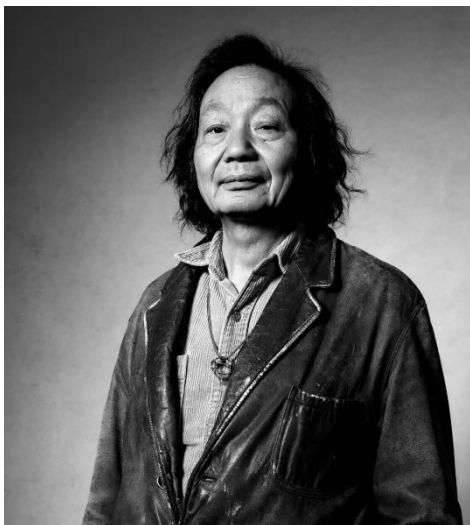
“追痕”的“只跟迹不创迹”原则，预示着后人类时代艺术生产的根本转向。当 AI 绘画通过算法生成图像时，“追痕”则通过人类生物痕迹的原始复制，利用肉身的“重复尝试本能”（方迪）构建了一个反算法的艺术生态。这种生态不是对技术的否定，而是通过回归到有机物和无机物临界点处的最原始的痕迹生产，重新定义艺术的本质——

——艺术不是创新，而是对肉身存在的物质见证。

五、结论：“追痕”是新绘画美学的范式革命

倪卫华的“追痕”艺术，通过赋权机制、艺术发生学与生物语言学的三重解构，完成了一场静默的美学革命。其零门槛参与模式解构了艺术生产的权力结构，其废墟拓扑学操作重构了空间政治，其生物痕迹语言预示了后人类时代的艺术形态。当传统绘画仍困守于“创作-欣赏”的二元框架时，“追痕”已通过“痕迹-跟随”的原始码方法论，开辟了艺术生产的新纪元。这场革命不是对既有范式的修补，而是通过回归肉身，回归艺术最本真的物质性，为未来绘画指明了一个生物

-技术共生的新方向。



关于艺术家

倪卫华

NI WEIHUA 1962 年生，当代艺术家，现生活工作于上海。

作品涉及绘画、装置、行为、影像等多种媒介，是早期推动上海当代艺术发展的重要实践者之一，也是中国最早进行“艺术介入社会”和对“数字化作出反应”的艺术家之一。代表作

《连续扩散事态—红盒、招贴》、《美术：词与物的合法化在场》、《线性城市》、《风景墙》、《追痕》等系列作品以其多维度语言实验性和“社会介入”等话题得到广泛关注。作品曾参加中国当代艺术文献展、马拉喀什双年展、丹麦国家双年展、威尼斯双年展、中国艺术在巴西、法国戛纳艺术短片展（AVIFF）、韩国全州摄影节等几十项国内外重要展览，并在上海、北京、洛杉矶等地举办个展。

When Art Enters the Village, Who Is Empowering Whom?

Wang Jie

Translated from Mandarin

On an afternoon in 2026, in Xianfeng Village, Zhujiajiao, Shanghai, at the Chuangi Wuyu courtyard, Ni Weihua's "Trace-Chasing" was once again practiced in a rural, site-specific context. The mix of participants were rather interesting: local villagers, three sisters from Cameroon in Africa, a writer from North Carolina in the United States, the courtyard's manager Tu Yihang, and me. People, place, wall, traces—these different carriers intertwined over the course of that afternoon. As they came together, they seeped into and influenced each other, generating an unpredictable result. I found myself returning to an old question: What exactly is the relationship between art and the countryside?

We are used to a certain narrative: when art enters the countryside, it is "empowerment," it is "revitalization," it is bringing something advanced from the city to a backward place. This narrative presupposes a hierarchy—art above, the countryside below; the artist as giver, the villager as receiver.



But the fact is, the villagers do not know what "contemporary art" is, nor do they know whether what they have painted counts as a "work." To them, those cracks on the wall are just cracks—old, broken, something sooner or later to be painted over. If you tell them that "Trace-Chasing is creating a sense of ritual for the traces of anonymous people," that sentence itself is like a wall, shutting them out. Between contemporary art and the countryside there is a real and unavoidable gulf. It is not that the villagers "do not understand"; rather, that language never grew in this soil to begin with. You cannot cross it by explaining.

Does the countryside have its own art?

Of course it does. It simply does not exist in the form of “works.” It exists in the cracks of old walls, in the shapes of farm tools, in the patterns of weaving, in the rituals of festivals, the rules of weddings and funerals, the stories passed down orally, in the texture of the fields, the colors of the seasons, the shapes of chimney smoke. This is a complete aesthetic system, only it has never been named, displayed, or “artified.” The villagers live inside this system every day, but they do not call it art. They call it life.

What contemporary artists truly ought to do when they come to the countryside is perhaps not to “teach” villagers what art is, but to use certain methods to make this hidden system visible. Trace-Chasing is exactly this: it creates nothing new; it merely “pursues” the traces already on the wall, bringing them from background to foreground, from the everyday to the visible. When villagers see it, they say, “Ah, this was already there.” Yes. It was already there. It was just that no one had looked before.



But here there is an awkward and unavoidable fact that must be faced: what you think is art may, to the villagers, be nothing but a pile of useless things.

This is not the villagers’ limitation; it is the truth of art. Contemporary art, in many cases, is indeed useless. It does not increase income, solve practical problems, or improve living conditions. If you talk to them about “concept,” “intervention,” “social participation,” they will only ask: Can this be eaten as food?

For villagers to understand contemporary art requires a process. And this process cannot rely on explanation; it can only rely on seeing. Explaining a hundred times that “Trace-Chasing is creating a sense of ritual for the traces of anonymous people” is not as good as letting them personally take a brush and draw a line on the wall, then step back three paces and see that the wall has suddenly become different. In that moment, they do not need to understand the theory;

they only need to see the result. This result is often a visual sense of “looking good.” And this “looking good” is precisely the moment when divergence begins to unify. Each participant may have a completely different understanding of “what art is,” but when a wall becomes rhythmic, layered, and powerful after Trace-Chasing, everyone will say: looks good. This “looks good” is not beauty defined by the artist; it is beauty that villagers and participants alike can feel, beauty that requires no translation. Divergence does not disappear, but before “looks good” it is temporarily suspended. And suspension itself is a kind of invisible unity.

This makes me think of “Global Water Trace.” In 2021, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Beuys’s birth, people in 13 countries and 20 cities across six continents simultaneously traced walls with water. Under London’s Thames Bridge, in Kyiv, La Plata, Hobart, Zhuhai—people of different skin colors and languages did the same thing at the same moment. Water evaporates. Water traces disappear. To trace with “water” is not to pursue a permanent material mark, but the spiritual resonance of a moment of shared participation.

This may be one of the most promising possibilities for art in the countryside: it does not try to leave anything behind; it merely creates a moment in which different people meet before the same wall. This moment will pass, just as water traces dry. But the encounter itself has already left a trace on the participants—an invisible but genuinely existing trace. The relationship between the countryside and the world also changes in this moment. Villagers suddenly discover that the wall of their village has entered into a relationship with the walls of London and Kyiv. This connection is not economic; it is spiritual. It makes villagers feel: we are not isolated; we are also part of the world.

So what exactly is art for rural revitalization? What does it mean for the villagers?

I think there is no answer. Because any definite answer will become invalid as time, people, and scenes change. What works today may not work tomorrow. What is recognized today may be overturned tomorrow.

But I am willing to offer several observed possibilities.

Art may be a rediscovery of rural value. Rural revitalization is not only economic revitalization; it is also value revitalization. The

countryside has so much overlooked beauty, memory, and traces, and art allows these things to be seen again. Villagers thereby gain a sense of dignity—my life is not backward; it is valuable.

Art may be a channel for villagers' self-expression. Villagers have long occupied the position of "being expressed" — expressed by policy, by the media, by artists. But art can give them a chance to speak for themselves. Trace-Chasing is not the artist painting for the villagers to see; it is the villagers painting themselves. This act of "painting themselves" matters more than the result painted.

Art may be a temporary unifying field for divergence. There are all kinds of divisions in the countryside—between old and new, between officials and the people, between locals and outsiders. Art does not solve divisions, but it can create a temporary space in which different people find



consensus within the same action. This consensus may only be "this wall looks good," but it is already enough to let each see the other.

Art may also change nothing at all. The event ends, people disperse, the water traces on the wall dry, the ink traces fade. Villagers return to daily life, artists return to the city. Everything is as usual. But this itself is also an answer—art is not omnipotent; it is merely one of many ways of intervening in society.

Finally, I want to offer a more fundamental reflection.

The universe follows the law of entropy. Everything moves from order to disorder, from gathering to dispersal. Stars will go out, life will end, civilizations will perish. From this perspective, everything humans do — building, creating, recording, expressing— is nothing but a resistance to entropy. We know everything will eventually disappear, yet we still paint a trace on the wall. This trace is meaningless on the scale of the universe. But it is precisely this "meaninglessness" that constitutes the reason human beings find life interesting.

Art is perhaps the gentlest form of this resistance. It does not try to stop disappearance; it merely says: before disappearing, let me look at you one more time.

Trace-Chasing does not pursue the trace itself. It pursues the moment of time. These moments are insignificant on the scale of the universe, but on the human scale, they are everything.

Art in the countryside may be nothing at all. But perhaps, precisely because it is nothing at all, it can be anything.

This answer, I leave to time.

当艺术走进乡村，谁在给谁赋能

Wang Jie

2026 年的一个下午，在上海朱家角先锋村，船祈物屿小院。倪卫华的“追痕”又一次在乡村在地实践。参加这次活动的人比较有意思，在地村民们、非洲喀麦隆三姊妹、美国北卡罗来纳州的作家 Laine 以及小院主理人屠一航以及我。人、地、墙、痕迹，这些不同的载体在这个下午交织在一起。它们并非简单相加，而是彼此渗透、彼此触发，最终生成了一种无法预测的结果。这个结果把我重新推回一个旧问题：艺术和乡村之间，到底是一种什么关系？

我们习惯了一种叙事：艺术走进乡村，是“赋能”，是“振兴”，是把城市里高级的东西带到落后的地方去。这个叙事预设了一个等级——

——艺术在上，乡村在下；艺术家是给予者，村民是接受者。



而事实是，村民们不知道“当代艺术”是什么，也不知道自己画出来的东西算不算“作品”，对他们来说，墙上那些裂痕就是裂痕，是旧，是破，是迟早要粉刷掉的东西。你跟他们讲“追痕是在给无名者的痕迹制造仪式感”——这句话本身就像一道墙，把他们挡在外面。当代艺术和乡村之间，存在一道真实的、不可回避的鸿沟。不是村民“不懂”，而是那套语言本来就不在这个土壤里生长。你无法通过解释来跨越它。

那乡村有没有自己的艺术？

当然有。只是它不以“作品”的形式存在。它存在于老墙的裂痕里，存在于农具的造型里，存在于编织的纹样里，存在于节庆的仪式、婚丧的规矩、口传的故事里，存在于田野的肌理、四季的颜色、炊烟的形状里。这是一套完整的审美体系，只是它没有被命名，没有被展示，没有被“艺术化”。村民天天生活在这个体系里，但他们不叫它艺术。

他们叫它日子。



当代艺术家来到乡村，真正应该做的，或许不是“教”村民什么是艺术，而是用一些手法，让这套隐藏的体系被看见。追痕就是这样：它没有创造任何新东西，它只是把墙上已有的痕迹“追”出来，让它们从背景变成前景，从日常变成可见。村民看到之

后会说：“哎，这本来就在那儿啊。”对。本来就在。只是以前没有人看。

但这里有一个尴尬的、必须直面的事实：你以为的艺术，于村民而言，可能只是一堆无用之物。

这不是村民的局限，这是艺术的真相。当代艺术在很多时候，确实没用。它不增加收入，不解决实际问题，不改善生活条件。你跟他讲“观念”“介入”“社会参与”，他只会问：这能当饭吃吗？让村民理解当代艺术，需要一个过程。而且这个过程不能靠解释，只能靠看见。你跟他解释一百遍“追痕是在给无名者的痕迹制造仪式感”，不如让他亲自拿笔在墙上画一道，然后退后三步，看见那面墙突然变得不一样了。那一刻，他不需要理解理论，他只需要看见结果。这个结果，往往是一个视觉上的“好看”。而这个“好看”，恰恰是分歧开始统一的时刻。每一个参与者，对“什么是艺

术”的理解可能完全不同，但当一面墙被追痕之后变得有节奏、有层次、有力量，所有人都会说：好看。这个“好看”不是艺术家定义的美，是村民以及参与者都能感受到的、不需要翻译的美。分歧不会消失，但会在“好看”面前暂时搁置。而搁置本身，就是一种无形的统一。

这让我想到“全球水追痕”。2021年，为纪念博伊斯诞辰100周年，全球六大洲13个国家20座城市的人，同时用水在墙上追痕。伦敦泰晤士桥下、基辅、拉普拉塔、霍巴特、珠海——不同肤色、不同语言的人，在同一时刻做同一件事。水会蒸发。水痕会消失。用“水”去追，追的不是永恒的物质印记，而是那一刻共同参与的精神共鸣。

这或许是艺术在乡村最值得期待的一种可能：它不试图留下什么，它只是创造一个时刻，让不同的人在同一面墙前相遇。这个时刻会过去，正如水痕会干。但相遇本身，已经在参与者身上留下了痕迹——一种看不见的、但真实存在的痕迹。乡村和世界的关系，也在这一刻发生了变化。村民突然发现，自己村庄的墙，和伦敦的墙、基辅的墙，发生了关系。这种连接不是经济上的，是精神上的。它让村民觉得：我们不孤立，我们也是世界的一部分。

那艺术于乡村振兴，到底是什么？对于村民，意义何在？

我觉得没有答案。因为任何确定的答案，都会随着时间、人物、场景的变化而失效。今天有效的，明天可能就无效了。今天被认可的，明天可能被推翻。

但我愿意提供几种观察到的可能。

艺术可能是乡村价值的再发现。乡村振兴不只是经济振兴，更是价值振兴。乡村有那么多被忽略的美、记忆、痕迹，艺术让这些东西重新被看见。村民因此获得一种尊严感——我的生活不是落后的，它是有价值的。

艺术可能是村民自我表达的通道。村民长期处于“被表达”的位置——被政策表达、被媒体表达、被艺术家表达。但艺术可以给他们一个自己说话的机会。追痕不是艺术家画给村民看，是村民自己画。这个

“自己画”的动作，比画出来的结果更重要。

艺术可能是分歧的临时统一场。乡村里有各种分歧——新旧之间、干群之间、本地与外来之间。艺术不解决分歧，但它可以创造一个临时空间，让不同的人在同一个行动里找到共识。这个共识可能只是“这面墙好看”，但它已经足够让彼此看见对方。



艺术也可能什么都没改变。活动结束后，人散去，墙上的水痕干了，墨痕淡了。村民回到日常生活，艺术家回到城市。一切如常。但这本身也是一种答案——艺术不是万能的，它只是众多介入社会的方式之一。

最后，我想说一个更根本的思考。

宇宙遵循熵增定律。一切都在从有序走向无序，从聚集走向消散。恒星会熄灭，生命会终结，文明会消亡。从这个角度看，人类所做的一切——建造、创造、记录、表达——都不过是在对抗熵增。我们明知一切终将消失，却仍然在墙上画下一道痕迹。这道痕迹，在宇宙尺度上毫无意义。但正是这种“毫无意义”，构成了人活得有意思的理由。

艺术，或许就是这种对抗中最温柔的一种。它不试图阻止消亡，它只是说：在消亡之前，让我再看你一眼。

追痕，追的不是痕迹本身。追的是时间的瞬间，这些瞬间，在宇宙的尺度上微不足道，但在人的尺度上，它们就是全部。艺术于乡村，或许什么都不是。但也或许，正因为什么都不是，它才可能是任何东西。

这个答案，我留给时间。

Zhujiajiao: Cat's Forest International Humanities & Arts Residency Program

Wang Jie

Translated from Mandarin

Why a Cat?

A folktale from the Lanlugang waterway in Zhujiajiao centers on a wild cat from the Broken Road Cave, a tale of everyday life passed down through oral traditions maintained in the water towns of Jiangnan. Today, we invoke this cat not to retell a legend, but to speak of a choice made by a group of young people.

What is a cat? In our eyes, this animal serves not as a pet but as a metaphor of the union of wildness and home.

A cat can freely come and go. It remains keenly attuned to its environment while maintaining a deep knowledge of its own territory — where to return, whom to trust. While a cat never fully submits to external rules, it is willing to genuinely bond with a place.

This mirrors the people of Cat's Forest, and it mirrors what we want to do in Zhujiajiao.

Who We Are: The Four Positions of a Boat

We are four people—Xiaoyezi, Yufeng, Tu Yihang, and Wang Jie — with three courtyards coming together to form a complete vessel.

Xiaoyezi's courtyard is called Casa YE. Casa is Italian for "home," so Casa YE is simply Xiaoyezi's home.

Xiaoyezi studied tourism management in the UK. She loves outdoor sports and the physical exhaustion that comes from being truly immersed in nature. She leads "Village walking," an activity in which others walk and she paddles a boat. Gliding along the village's waterways, she passes corners unknown to other explorers: the back door of a house, an old tree leaning over the water, a nameless little bridge. Rather than lecture on history or architectural styles, she simply rows, letting you see for yourself. She reveals why one travels to distant places, and how one finds their place in the unfamiliar.

Yufeng's courtyard is called Tianluo Xianguan, the Celestial Snail Palace.

"In this instance, "palace" is stripped of any aloof grandeur. Have you seen a snail? It sits quietly in the mud, making no sound, yet it works ceaselessly, filtering impurities and cleansing its surroundings. In Chinese folklore, the Snail Maiden is the embodiment of diligence as she works silently and tirelessly. Yufeng is like that because she performs all the work associated with beauty: spatial arrangement, lighting, and scenography that makes people gasp. None of this springs from thin air; beneath it lies immense, unglamorous, invisible labor. She is a celestial snail, a diligent fairy who dwells a little higher, so that what we see from afar are the luminous things she has made.

Tu Yihang's courtyard is called Chuanqi Wuyu — Boat of Wishes, Isle of Anchorage.

A boat that prays for all things, an island where one can moor.

Yihang studied game design in Japan. Game design should not be mistaken with coding or conceptual art. The process crafts a world's rules: what players see upon entry, what they can do, why they would want to stay. Yihang has been trained to seek meaning first, and uses that to guide how he builds the structure. He asks, "For whom does this truly exist?" and only then considers its form.

When he named his courtyard, those who know him weren't surprised. Since childhood, Yihang has wondered, "Why am I alive?" While he has never fully answered that question, he has never stopped asking. Chuanqi Wuyu is not a space that reveals itself at a glance. Instead, it carries the air of something in progress.

Wang Jie is Tu Yihang's mother.

Her work cannot be captured by a single job description. She serves as logistics chief, head chef, and the emotionally grounded adult of the group.

But if you ask, "What do you do?" she would likely say, "Me? I just cook for these kids."

Wang Jie is a bearer of traditional Chinese culture. Rather than transmit knowledge through lectures, she makes a bowl of noodles, steeps a pot of tea, tends the vegetable patch. Then, in the moment you lift the bowl, you feel it for yourself: Eastern wisdom is not in books; it is in that bowl of rice. She believes that everyone can

grasp these things in their own lives ... not through instruction, but through feeling.

In her presence, you need not prove who you are. You are simply someone who has sat down to eat. And eating is something everyone knows how to do.

In the Cat's Forest structure, Xiaoyezi is the anchor, Yufeng is the sail, Yihang is the compass, and Wang Jie is the hull. We are not a team in the conventional sense in which leaders manage members. Rather, we form an organism that confirms each other's positions. Like driftwood found alongside the water, each piece having floated in from somewhere else, we discovered that our mortises and tenons fit. And so we came together.

Why We Do This—From Crushed by Rules to Belonging with Ties

Most of us have lived within the efficiency, identity, and rules of the city. By coming to Zhujiajiao, we do not intend to escape society or retreat into a pastoral idyll.

We are attempting a transformation.



Image Credit: Tu Yihang

First step: away from a life pressed down by rules, and toward the recovery of instinct (wildness).

We want life to regain its agency: the freedom to choose, curiosity, the ability to know what feels right or wrong.

Second step: away from the isolated free individual, and toward a belonging woven with relationships and bonds (home).

Home is not merely a house ... it is a place that welcomes you, where people remember you and await your return, where you can let down your guard, where you need not prove your worth. Home is a place where you can belong without losing your freedom.

What we do can therefore be summed up in one word: Guilai, or returning.

Guilai is not homecoming—the destination is not one's birthplace or the past. It is returning to the life one willingly chooses, generated through a person's active decision to re-root and reclaim a genuine relationship with a piece of land. Whether you are an original villager, a new resident, or a passing visitor, as long as you are willing, you can find your place along these waters.

What We Will Accomplish as An International Humanities & Arts Residency

Cat's Forest has leased several small courtyards in Zhujiajiao in order to transform them into:

- A physical place where wildness and home coexist. Here, you can grow freely, and you can care for one another;
- A creative site where Truth, Goodness, Beauty, and Meaning work synergistically as direction (Truth), warmth (Goodness), expression (Beauty), and significance (Meaning) unfold together;
- An international humanities and arts residency where people from diverse backgrounds come not merely to “produce work,” but to experience a complete state of being;
- A time-based art space that is itself a special medium perpetually in progress.

What Meaning Do We Want to Bring?

We want the world to see that young people in China are not limited to neijuan (involution) or tangping (lying flat).

We are exploring a third possibility:

One can remain sharp and wild while forming deep connections with others; one can flow freely while having a place to return to.

This cat of Zhujiajiao guided us onto a path elevated far beyond a geographical migration from “bad city” to “good village.” We move toward a transformation of being ... from being defined to self-definition, from isolation to coexistence.

The Cat’s Forest welcomes creators, thinkers, and doers from across the world — not to observe a “sample of rural China” embedded in Shanghai’s megatropolis, but to participate in a collective experiment on reclaiming sovereignty over one’s own life.

The cat is in Xianfeng Village, Zhujiajiao. The boat has set sail.

We await you. Come, and return with us.

Apply for the Residency

If you are interested in participating, please contact Wang Jie for more information and application details.

Email: 741033460@qq.com

朱家角·猫的森林——国际人文艺术交流驻地计划

Wang Jie

为什么是一只猫？

在朱家角拦路港，流传着烂路洞野猫的故事，那是江南水乡口口相传的人间烟火气。今天我们借这只猫，要说的不是传说，而是一群年轻人的选择。

猫是什么？在我们眼里，它不是宠物，而是一个隐喻——“野性”与

“家园”的统一体。

一只猫，既能自由地选择去留，对环境保持敏锐；又能认出自己的地盘，知道哪里可以回去、谁值得信赖。它不完全服从外部规则，却愿意与一个地方建立真实的牵绊。

这恰好映照了我们，也映照了我们在朱家角想做的事。

我们是谁？——一艘船的四个位置

我们四个人，三个院子，恰好构成一艘完整的船。

小叶子的院子叫 Casa YE，Casa 是意大利语，家的意思，所以，Casa YE 就是小叶子的家。

小叶子英国留学，学旅游管理，她喜欢户外运动，喜欢身体在自然里真实消耗的感觉。她带大家“Village walking”——只不过别人用脚，她用船。沿着村里的水路慢慢划，经过那些探寻者不知道的角落：某户人家的后门、一棵探出水面的老树、一座没有名字的小桥。她不讲解历史或建筑风格，只是划着船，让你自己看。她告诉你：人为什么要去远方，以及如何在陌生的地方找到自己的位置。

御风的院子叫田螺仙宫。

仙宫不是高高在上的意思。你见过田螺吗？它安安静静待在泥土里，不声不响，却一直在过滤杂质，让周围变干净。民间故事里的田螺姑娘，勤劳、默默付出。御风就是这样的人——她做“美”的所有工作：空间布置、光线处理、场景设计，让人走进来就“哇”一声。但这些都不是凭空而来的灵感，底下有大量笨拙、看不见的劳动撑着。她像住在天宫里的田螺，勤劳的仙女，只是住得高了一点，我们远远看见的，是她做出来的那些闪闪发光的东西。

屠一航的院子叫船祈物屿——一艘船，祈愿万物，停泊的岛屿。

一航在日本学游戏策划。游戏策划不是写代码或画原画，而是设计一个世界的规则：玩家进入后能看到什么、能做什么、为什么愿意继续待下去。一航被训练成这样的人：先问意义，再构结构。他不会先做个东西再找理由，而是先想清楚“这个东西到底为了谁而存在”，再考虑它长什么样。

院子的名字是他自己起的。熟悉他的人不意外——他从小就在想“我到底为什么活着”，至今没完全想明白，但从未停止。船祈物屿不是一眼就能看懂的院子，它有“正在进行中”的气息。

王姐是屠一航的妈妈。

她的工作无法写进任何职位描述——后勤总管、大厨、情绪稳定的那个大人。但如果问她“你是做什么的”，她会说：“我啊，就是给这几个孩子做饭的。”

王姐是中国传统文化的传播者，但她的方式不是讲课。她做一碗面、泡一壶茶、在菜地里种菜，然后让你在端起碗的那一刻，感受到——东方智慧不在书里，就在那碗饭里。她相信每个人都可以在自己的生活里体悟这些，不是被教导，而是自己感受到。

在她面前，你不需要证明你是谁——你只是一个坐下来吃饭的人。而吃饭这件事，每个人都会。

在我们的结构里，小叶子是锚，御风是帆，一航是罗盘，王姐是船体。我们不是“领导者管理成员”的团队，而是互相确认彼此位置的有机体——像在水边找到各自漂来的木板，发现彼此的榫卯刚好对得上，就拼在了一起。

--我们为什么做这件事？——从“被规则压住”到“有牵挂的归属”

我们大多曾身处城市的效率、身份和规则之中。但我们来朱家角，不是为了逃避社会，也不是退回田园牧歌的幻想。

我们在尝试一种转换——



Image Credit: Tu Yihang

第一步：从被规则压住的生命，走向重新恢复本能（野性）。

让生活重新拥有主体性：能自由选择、有好奇心、知道什么让自己舒服或不舒服。

第二步：从孤立自由的个体，走向有关系、有牵挂的归属（家园）。

家园不只是一栋房子，而是有地方愿意接纳你、有人记得你等你回来、可以放下警惕、不需要证明自己价值——既有归属，又不失去自由。

所以我们做的事，可以用一个词概括：“归来”。

但“归来”不是返乡——不是回到出生地、不是回到过去。“归来”是回到自己愿意过的生活，是一个人主动选择与一片土地建立真实的关系。无论你是原住民、新村民，还是短暂驻足的访客，只要你愿意，都可以在这片水域找到自己的位置。

我们要做什么？——国际人文艺术交流驻地

我们在朱家角租下几个小院，想把它们变成这样一个地方：

- 一个“野性”与“家园”并存的物理空间：你可以自由生长，也可以彼此照应；
- 一个 真、善、美、意协同运作的创作现场：方向（真）、温度（善）、表达（美）、意义（意）同时发生；
- 一个 国际人文艺术交流驻地：让不同背景的人来到这里，不只“产出作品”，而是体验一种完整的生命状态；
- 一个 基于时间的艺术空间：一个持续进行中的特殊媒介。

我们想带来什么样的意义？

我们想让世界看到，中国的年轻人不是只有“内卷”或“躺平”两种选择。

我们在探索第三种可能：

一个人可以在保持敏锐和野性的同时，与他人建立深刻的联结；可以在自由流动的同时，有一个可以回去的地方。这只朱家角的

猫，引导我们完成的，不是从“坏的城市”到“好的乡村”的地理迁移，而是从“被定义”到“自我定义”、从“孤立”到

“共生”的生命转换。

我们欢迎世界各地的创作者、思考者、行动者来到这里——不是来观看一个“中国乡村样本”，而是来参与一场关于如何重新拥有生活主权的共同实验。

猫在朱家角先锋村，船已起锚。我们等你来，一起归来。

申请驻地

如您有意参与驻地计划，欢迎联系本文作者，获取更多信息及申请方式。

邮箱：741033460@qq.com



Watching the Road — Rathambore 2015 / William Winston



Waiting for the Light — Agra 2015 / William Winston



Shopgirl, St. George's Market — Belfast, 2019 /
William Lewis Winston



Rachel Emerging — 2022 / William Lewis Winston



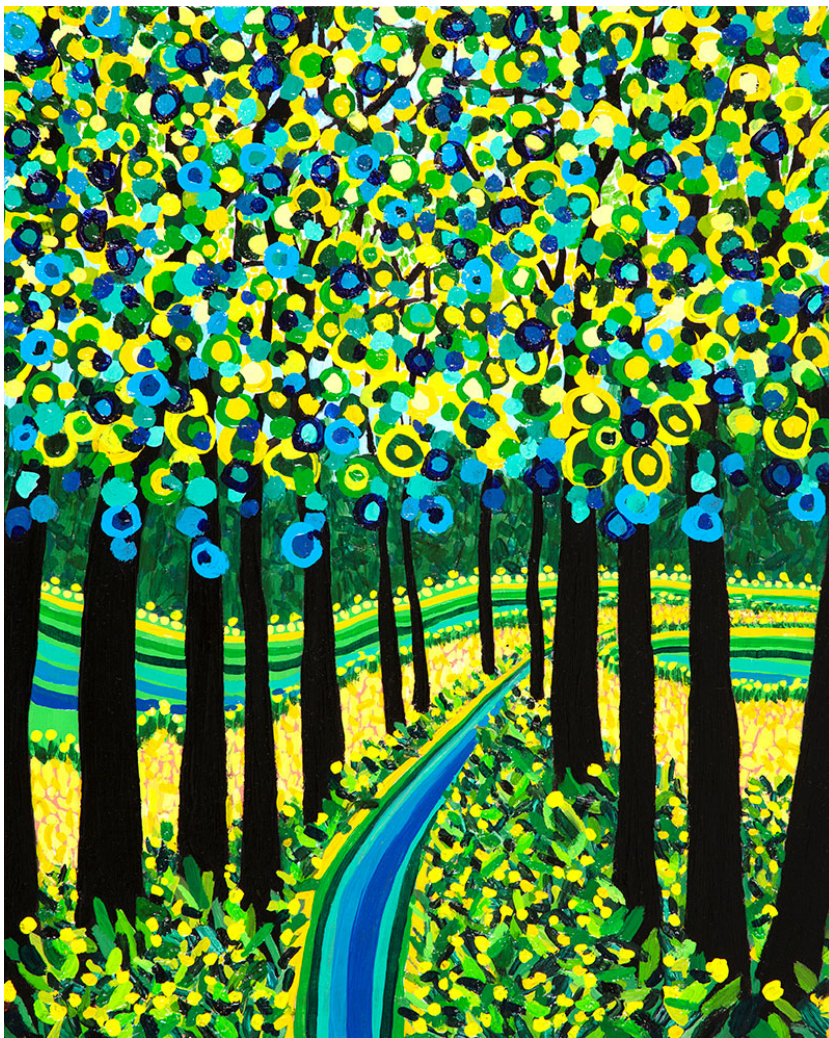
Rachel Alight — 2022 / William Lewis Winston



Rachel Waiting At The Doorway To Nowhere, Before — 2013 /
William Lewis Winston



Rachel Waiting At The Doorway To Nowhere, After — 2013 /
William Lewis Winston



Happiness Hides in the Trees / Annika Connor



Elementally I / Michael C. Roberts



Untitled / Sasha Brons

Love as a Portal

Aspen Pleasant

Inception 2026 Finalist

The first time I met Ayden, he appeared as if out of nowhere and I could tell immediately that he wasn't a 'show up with a garbage bag' case. There was an older girl with him, dragging his hand into the outdated, 70's style living room. Their matching suitcases were brand-new, as were the shoes on their feet. Standing side-by-side, the resemblance between Ayden and his sister was uncanny. Both with translucent pale skin and light-colored eyes. Blue with hints of light green and rings around them like the sun shining onto their pupils, intense with their eye contact like their mama never told them to stop staring. Ayden's insane red hair is now more of a strawberry blonde. One of many things that's changed.

With the group of us kids standing around Ayden and his sister took up the hallway, like they were used to taking up space, but maybe my perception is warped by what I know about them now.

Halfway in, halfway out, they stood there staring like orphaned kids in a *Madea* movie, but white as ghosts. Never have I ever seen a pair of kids look so scared. What made it worse is Ayden looked like a boy, dressed in girl's clothes. Uncomfortable as hell wearing them too. Ridiculous they had him wearing that shit.

Look at Me

Aisling Lee

Inception 2026 Finalist

Neil McKinley had a name and a face which were recognised widely throughout Gleaneen. He was popular with many; others considered him vaguely suspect, but no one could justify their hunches. He was just one of those characters, perfectly talkative and even charming, but with an indefinable quality—an air he had—about him, which seemed to render such charisma imposing and excessive. Overbearing. But only to some. Many liked him.

Me, well.... That divisive reputation was all I really knew about him. I had never met him, had no first impression or gut instinct to determine which camp I belonged in.

But then he stopped by my stall one Saturday.

His hulking form caught my eye from across the street as he passed in front of Harten's butchers, his baggy jeans tucked into a pair of boots which were neither wellingtons nor Doc Martens, but strangely resembled both. He walked like a bear. Then he stopped and made a smooth miniature swerve to his right, glancing up and down the street for a break in the traffic, almost like an actor exaggerating his movements for the camera. Confident. Showy. *Look at me*. But he didn't look at anyone else. Of course, that's not how it works. Until a driver slowed and waved him across. Then, he took a wide stride out and raised the driver a self-righteous thumb's-up with a sideways smile and a prolonged wink. Over he crossed. To me.

The Hydra

Meredith Tavani

Inception 2026 Best of Poetry

If I am graced with one hundred years, I will be battered by
the shards of seven broken mirrors.

Winter in Cairo

Rebecca Burton

Inception 2026 Best of Novel

The year my husband brought Cairo back to me, I took up running again. This was in the first year of the pandemic, those early weeks when everything closed down, the shops and bars and schools. I ran in the mornings along the roads near my house, vineyards stretching out to one side, almond orchards and olive groves to the other. Where I live now, in a little pocket of land that's not quite suburban but also not rural, there are no footpaths, and so I ran on the road itself, hard to the left, beside the grassy verges that stretch beyond the property fence lines. It was early autumn, the sky a soft blue, the leaves on the vines turning brown and then as the weeks passed falling. There wasn't much traffic, just the occasional car pulling out of a driveway and heading towards the main road: sound of tires on gravel, an engine accelerating and then fading away. Rarely, the buzz of an airplane above. But that was a dreamlike sound, barely real.

My friend Niamh, who ran marathons, had told me once that she listened to audiobooks while she ran. She said, You know those big novels that you feel like you should read but you never do? They're perfect for listening to on a long run. Joyce, she meant, Proust, George Eliot. Knausgård even. And so I tried it for myself, taking my phone with me, wearing earbuds, but I couldn't get anything to work ...



Swimmer, from the Women in Trouble Series / Cliff Tisdell

Inception 2026 Runner-up

Missing Parts

Gina Nobile

Inception 2026 Winner

They ride the escalator together.

They're not holding hands. That was against the rules, but her great-grandmother made the rules, so she assumes they cancel each other out. She stands close enough to feel her great-grandmother's heartbeat settle into something steady. Something survivable.

There aren't many people there.

There never are.

But anyone else feels like an audience. Watching. Quiet. Expectant.

"Hold on," her great-grandmother says, not turning.

The escalator growls beneath them.

Metal teeth catch, release, catch again.

At the landing below, the steps press together so tightly they spark—small, bright embers that flicker and disappear before they can be called anything else.

The girl notices how pretty they are.

More than how dangerous.

Then—

a resistance.

Not enough to stop it.

Just enough to slow it.

She looks down.

At first, her brain refuses to name it.

Then it settles.

A shoe.

Still inside it.

A foot.

Bloodless. Clean in a way that doesn't make sense.

People ahead step over it. Carefully. Without pause.

Her great-grandmother's arm tightens, pulling her closer.

"There is no one to tell you what not to do," she says. "You learn by watching. Then doing."

The girl looks up.

“No one stops the machine,” she continues. “It only slows it down.”

Now she turns.

“You don’t want to be the reason everyone else has to slow down, do you?”

The girl shakes her head before she knows she’s decided.

Behind them, the escalator keeps moving.

It always does.



Memory / Youshi Zeng



The Farewell Park / Youshi Zeng



Spark4 / Youshi Zeng



Secret Realm / Youshi Zeng



Fit Wars / Youshi Zeng

Contributors

bad futa is a self-taught lgbtq artist residing in the US. She has been published in *River Styx*, *Kitchen Table Quarterly*, *Chestnut Review*, and *Flyway Journal*, among others. She works primarily in oil, inks and clay, but dabbles in whatever materials are available. Her focus is to find images that arise unprompted from the subconscious.

D. Lee Beauchamp creates photographic art that has a sense of purpose but elements of surprise. She resides in a rural area of Canada that allows her to scope out nature and things of interest at leisure.

Stephen Bourque (“Krafty Kutz”) is an award-winning mixed-media contemporary collage artist based out of Castro Valley, California. He is most known for his large-scale mosaic-style collages crafted meticulously out of thousands of used, cut-up instant-win scratch-off lottery tickets.

Sasha Brons has been a photographer for the past ten years. Alongside his main work in the fashion industry and editorial shoots for magazines, Brons keeps developing his own artistic vision.

Rebecca Burton’s novella, *Ravenous Girls*, won the 20/40 Publishing Prize and was named one of the 25 Best Australian Books 2023 by *Guardian Australia*. The author of two young adult novels and several anthologized short stories, she blogs about books, birds and words at twenty-one-words.com and on IG (@twenty.one.words).

Annika Connor’s paintings bridge classical references with modern psychological narratives, offering a compelling perspective on femininity, nature, and space. See more at <https://www.annikaconnor.com/>; Instagram @annikaconnorart; Artsy: <https://www.artsy.net/artist/annika-connor>

Polly Conway is a writer based in Alameda, CA. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *One Art*, *Wildscape*, *MEMEZINE*, *Catamaran Literary Reader*, *Pictura*, and more. She is the Poetry Editor at Nulla. Polly and holds an MFA in Poetry from California College of the Arts.

Chidimma Ewelukwa is a Nigerian writer whose work explores memory, belonging, identity, and the quiet tensions of everyday life. She has been published in *Writer Monk Literary Magazine*, *Polis Magazine*, *Almanar Journal*, *World Inkers Writing and Publishing*, *The Raft of Dreams Literary Magazine*, *Usawa Literary Review*, *Echoes of World Poetry*, and *European Poetry*.

GJ Gillespie is a mixed media collage artist working in the Northwest Mystics and midcentury abstract expressionist traditions. His work has

appeared in over two hundred literary and art journals. He lives on Whidbey Island, Washington, where he maintains his studio practice.

Gu Kaijun is an artist, critic, and curator. He formerly served as a visiting professor in the Department of Art History at Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts.

Kidus Kebede is an Ethiopian residing in Minnesota. He is an oil painter whose work explores serene, atmospheric landscapes. He focuses on capturing natural light, shadow, and quiet, open moments through textured brushwork and fine detail.

Michelle Kelly is a writer and researcher living on unceded Awabakal country (Newcastle, Australia). She has published fiction and creative nonfiction in *TEXT*, *Sydney Review of Books*, *The Newcastle Herald*, *Writer's Bloc* and edited collections including *Literature and Pedagogy* (2025), *Resilience* (2022), *Intermissions* (2021) and *The Incompleteness Book* (2020). <https://linktr.ee/shellkellyx>

Lauren Kohne is a multimedia artist with a background in fine art, theater, movement and film who grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her work encompasses mixed media assemblage, bookmaking, collage, and video. This issue features an excerpt from her collaged art book *Retrospection You Amelioration*.

Aisling Lee hails from County Longford in the midlands of Ireland. A graduate of the University of Galway's M.A. in Writing, she has had short stories longlisted for a few competitions in recent years, and published by outlets including *The Letter Review*, *Sparks Literary Journal*, and *Island Lit*.

J.R. Mues was born July 9, 1978, in Tarrytown NY and lives in Louisville KY. J.R. is an award-winning visual artist and an avid runner, biker, and historian. J.R. enjoys cooking and hunting, fishing and bowling, dance and travel.

Contemporary artist **Ni Weihua** lives in Shanghai. His works encompass painting, installation, performance and video. He was one of the early practitioners who promoted the development of contemporary art in Shanghai, and one of the first Chinese artists to champion “art intervention in society.” His works have been exhibited in dozens of domestic and international exhibitions.

Gina Nobile's work often explores structured environments, behavioral expectations, and the quiet ways individuals adapt to them. “Missing Parts” reflects that approach through a contained moment that introduces a larger logic at play.

How can we deeply connect to others when people don't fit cleanly into the boxes we're meant to subscribe to? How can we find belonging if we're meant to find it inside these boxes? **Aspen Pleasant** seeks to answer these questions through their writing process, especially through *Love as a Portal*, which placed as a finalist in the 2026 *Sunspot Lit* Inception Contest.

Michael C. Roberts's film and digital images have been published in *The Canary*, *FERAL*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Door is a Jar*, *The Alchemy Spoon*, *Lunch Ticket*, *Cholla Needles*, *Cantos*, and others. In his recent photography, he has been exploring minimalism as projection and abstraction to reveal the essential beauty in structure and form.

Chloe Rodriguez, poet, writer, translator, and instructor, is a double Pushcart Prize nominee with work in various literary journals. Her debut chapbook, *Ruin Me Before the Party Ends*, arrives courtesy of Finishing Line Press. She is currently tending to a poetry collection and a memoir while yearning for a swamp hermitage deep in the Everglades.

Bill Schulz lives in Maine, not far from the farm where his ancestors settled in the late 1700s. He received a Master's degree from the poetry program at The University of New Hampshire in 1976 and a Master's in Theological Studies from The Franciscan School of Theology in Berkeley, CA thirty years later.

Quinn Spencer lives in Brooklyn. He has work published or forthcoming in the *San Pedro River Review*, *Burner Phone*, *Beyond Words*, *Half and One*, *Phase Zero*, and the *Reed College Creative Review*. He was also shortlisted for the 2025 Bridport Prize.

Meredith Tavani, Ph.D. is a licensed psychologist with undergraduate degrees in psychology and linguistics. Her work reflects a deep appreciation for language, both its structure and its power, and the ways it shapes human experience. Dr. Tavani lives in Wilmington, Delaware with her husband and daughter.

Vince Thomas lives and works in Columbus Ohio. His observations of people on the street started as a photographic exercise to capture unposed figures and document everyday life.

The art of **Cliff Tisdell** draws on painting, sculpture, cinema, literature, and illustration, and is in private collections in the US, Europe, and Canada. Venues include the Edward Hopper House Museum, Carnegie Hall, Eric Fischl's America Here and Now Project, and the Village Voice. His paintings have appeared in literary journals, including: *Blackbird*, *Curlew New York*, and *Hayden's Ferry*.

Tu Yihang, a game designer who studied in Japan, founded the Chuanqi Wuyu space in Xianfeng Village, Zhujiyajiao. From this personal island created, he uses a mechanical cat as an NPC (non-player character) observer. Born in the electronic age, the observer retains a cat's keenness, moves between code and people, and documents the shifting mindset of young Chinese today.

Wang Jie, a Shanghai native, actively promotes traditional Chinese culture. Through her writing, she interprets China and helps the world understand her country.

William Lewis Winston, teacher of writing, lives in Oakland, California. His poems appear in various literary journals nationally. His story *The Sound of Snow Not Falling* appears in *Litro*. Behind a camera since age ten, until publishing in *Sunspot*, his street photography, in distant lands, he had kept to himself.

Yijun Yang (she/her) is an interdisciplinary artist working in installation, film, and theater, based in New York City. She has an MFA in Scenic Design from Carnegie Mellon, and received the George Kimberly Award for Set Design. Selected design credits include *Rain*, *Tender Down*, *Show Trial*; *These Women*, and others.

Youshi Zeng is a New York-based visual artist holding an MFA in Fine Art from the Maryland Institute College of Art. Working primarily in oil and acrylic, her practice explores emotion, abstraction, and intuitive expression.

WRITING A NEW WORLD

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