

Brief Introduction to Tracing

Ni Weihua's Series of Works

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1 Overview of *Tracing*

Tracing is a publicly accessible visual intervention activity initiated by Ni Weihua, focusing on all forms of traces and textures through practices of tracking, delineation and replication, with the goal of enhancing or superimposing the visual discernibility of these traces.

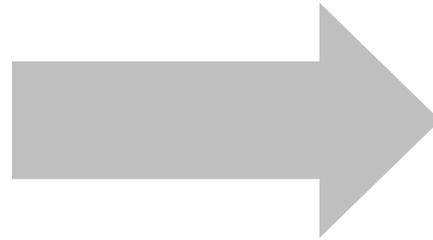
The project originated from formal experiments in easel painting. Starting from May 2018, it shifted its carriers to social public spaces—including old buildings, ruin walls, newly built roughcast houses, rocks and old wooden boards—and took superimposed traces of both natural origins (weathering, corrosion marks) and human imprints (writings and scribbles) as its image resources. By means of contrast filling with highly contrasting colors, hard-edge texture delineation to amplify visual contrast, and other trace-emphasizing techniques, the project brings to the forefront those forgotten and overlooked trace images in public spaces, transforming them into appropriated, intervened new images and visual landscapes.



2 The Version Upgrade of *Tracing*

Version 1.0

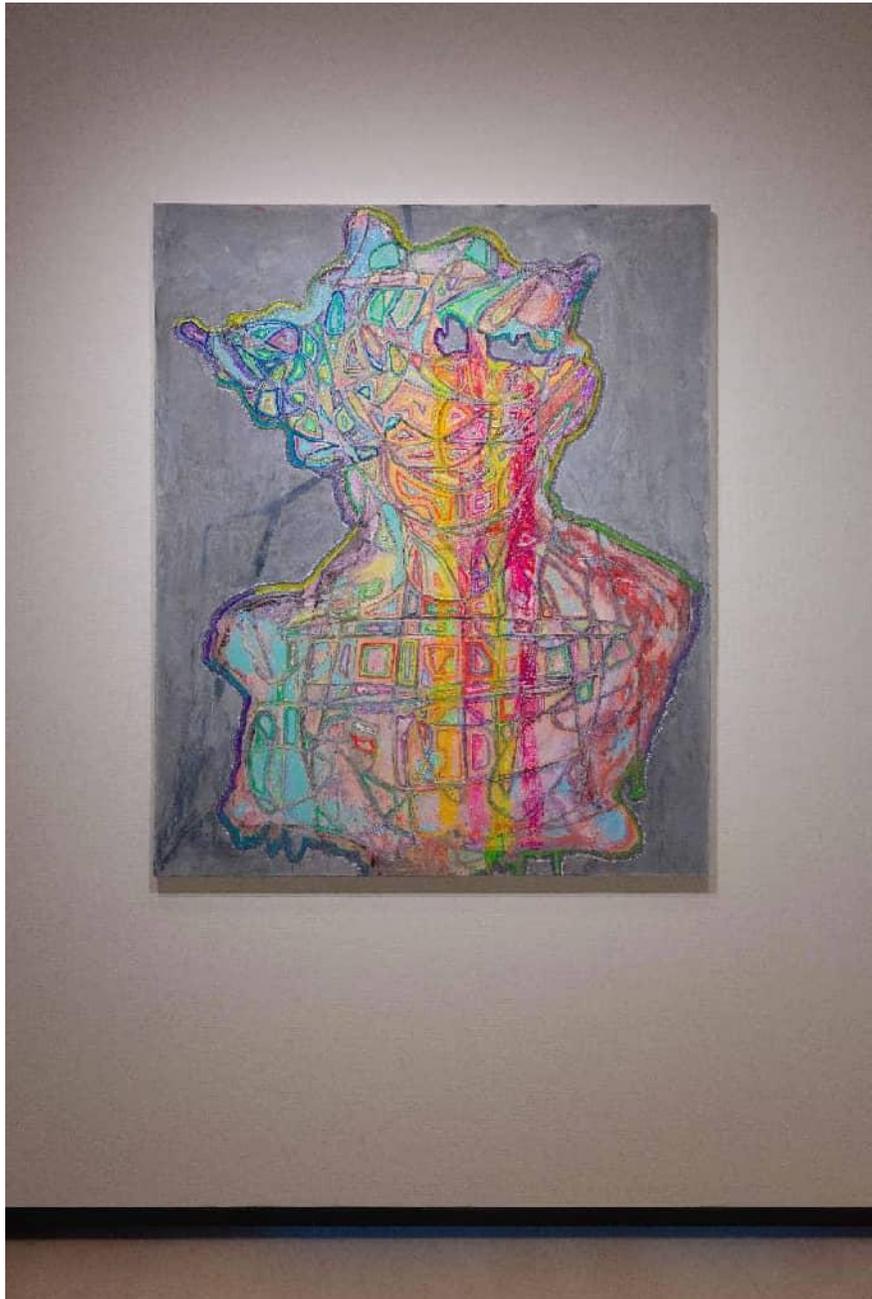
Tracing is a further extension of Ni Weihua's painting experiments on "relics". By means of edge tracing and contrast painting techniques, it subjects the traces of abstract expressionism to a pop art treatment (a combination of hot and cold abstraction), thereby contemplating a meaning that lies between wildness and tranquility, sensibility and rationality, nature and humanity, as well as transience and eternity.







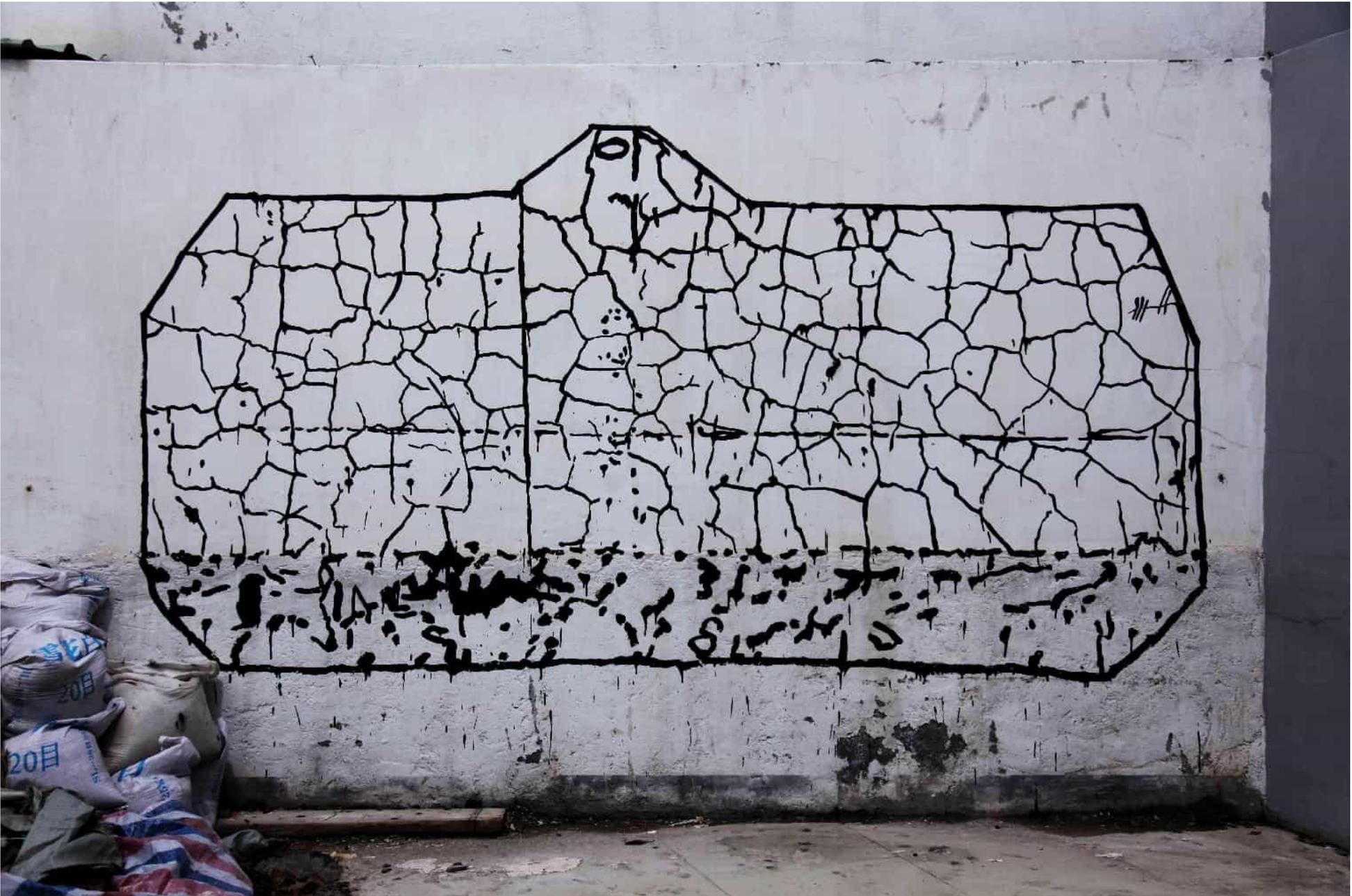




Version 2.0

This means that the *Tracing* series is not confined to studio-based creations, but also extended to behavioral practices in social public spaces. Version 2.0 was a solo public-space *Tracing* initiative implemented by me as the originator. It generally adopted monochrome pigments—primarily black, but also white, blue and other colors—as the medium for the *Tracing* practice.











Version 3.0

Version 3.0 evolved into a collective *Tracing* initiative led by me, the originator. Sites were identified either by netizens or myself, with organization coordinated through both online and offline channels. The number of participants was flexible, allowing individuals to either engage in the entire process or join for a short, casual session.















Version 4.0

Version 4.0 developed into a reproducible and scalable collective *Tracing* practice. In the absence of the originator, local participants organize volunteers to carry out Tracing in accordance with the standardized *Tracing* procedures. This version has also been jokingly referred to by netizens as the "author's retirement mode" (or "autopilot mode").





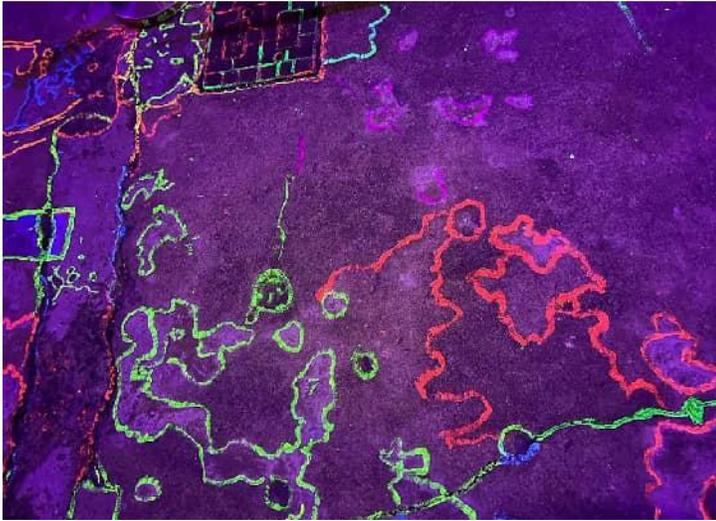
3 The Expansion of Tracing's Mediums and Objects

Plus 1

Colored *Tracing*: Departing from monochrome practice, it adopts colored pigments for the *Tracing* process. While the core tracing techniques remain unchanged, the selection and application of colors can be completely arbitrary and flexible.









Plus 2

Chiseled *Tracing*: Instead of pigments as the medium for *Tracing*, chisels are employed for the practice. The process creates indentations on the traces or along their edges, resulting in an effect resembling intaglio relief.





Plus 3

Silicone Tracing: Similarly, pigments are abandoned as the medium. Instead, silicone is extruded via a caulking gun to carry out the *Tracing* practice. This process raises the traces or their edges, resulting in an effect resembling bas-relief.





Plus 4

Water Tracing: Instead of using pigments as the medium, water is adopted for the *Tracing* practice. The traced patterns exist only for a fleeting moment before fading away and the surface reverting to its original state with the initial traces intact.





● Global Water Tracing Flash Mob



Global Water *Tracing* Flash Mob is a cross-border public art performance curated by Interculture and Ni Weihua during the exhibition *Tracing - Beuys*. As the inaugural attempt of *Tracing* using water instead of ink as the medium, it also marks the upgraded version of the project — *Tracing 4.0 Plus*. Simultaneously launched in December 2021, the event took place across 24 locations in 20 cities spanning 13 countries and 6 continents, including Guangzhou, Shanghai, Beijing, Shenzhen, Tianjin, Suzhou, Hangzhou, Zhuhai, Haikou, Toronto, Los Angeles, London, Berlin, Kyiv, Helsinki, Bologna, Rotterdam, Luanda, Tasmania and La Plata, with the participation of more than 100 contributors.



Water *Tracing* takes traces as the medium and triggers a renewed perception of "daily memory" through micro-awakening, functioning like "a developer for society".

Beuys pointed to the "shaping of the future" through social intervention, while *Tracing* focuses on "the neglected existences of the present". Essentially, however, both break the boundary that "art exists only in art museums" and turn art into a bridge connecting individuals and society.

Tracing Beuys

追痕·博伊斯

2021.12.12
2022.02.27



Artists

约瑟夫·博伊斯 JOSEPH BEUYS
倪卫华 NI Weihua

Curators

克劳斯·西本哈尔
往来文化策展团队
Prof. Klaus Siebenhaar
InterCulture Curatorial Team

Venue

广州市海珠区黄埔古港埠香里8号
胡氏宗祠左侧往来空间

InterCulture Space, Hu Ancestral Hall,
No. 8 Buxiangli, Huangpu Ancient Port,
Haizhu District, Guangzhou

Organizers

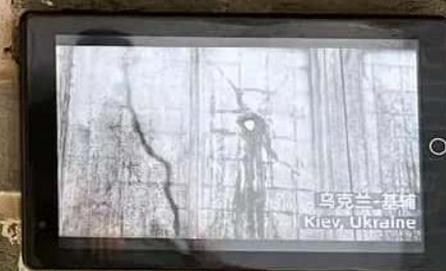


Supporters



Online Dialogue with
Chief Curator Prof. Klaus Siebenhaar





Nine-Frame Video Exhibition of the Global Water *Tracing* Flash Mob



Zero Threshold
Zero Cost
Zero Pollution
Zero Distance

Decentralization
Art Empowerment



Water Traces Left After Water Tracing (Selected Works)

Plus X

Facial *Tracing*: Following the exact same principle as wall-based *Tracing*, this practice applies the technique to human faces. Contrary to conventional beauty methods, it aims to discover and accentuate the innate marks or age-carved textures on the face.

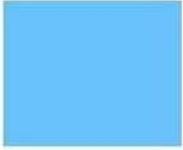
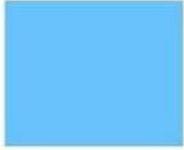
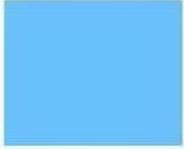
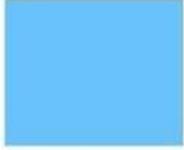






4

Tracing Evolution Chart

		Pre 1.0 痕迹绘画 Trace style painting	1.0 追痕架上绘画 Tracing painting	2.0 个体追痕 Individual Tracing	3.0 组织群体追痕 Organized Tracing	4.0 自发追痕 Spontaneous Tracing	5.0 无人化追痕 Unmanned Tracing	6.0 元宇宙追痕 Metaverse Tracing
	单色 (黑色为主) Isomochromy (Predominantly black)						自然追痕案例收集 Collection of natural tracing cases AI 追痕 AI Tracing	数字孪生游戏 Digital twin game of the Tracing
Plus 1	彩色 Colourful						AI 追痕 AI Tracing	数字孪生游戏 Digital twin game of the Tracing
Plus 2	凹形 (凿印追痕) Sunken Chisel Tracing							数字孪生游戏 Digital twin game of the Tracing
Plus 3	凸形 (硅胶追痕) Convex Silicone Tracing							数字孪生游戏 Digital twin game of the Tracing
Plus 4	水 Water Tracing						自然追痕案例收集 Collection of natural tracing cases	数字孪生游戏 Digital twin game of the Tracing
Plus X	身体追痕 Tracing on the body						AI 追痕 AI Tracing on the body	数字孪生游戏 Digital twin game of the Tracing

5 The Expansion of the *Tracing* Territory



2018年6月到2025年12月，已在
全球**34**地完成了**365**场活动，共
有**2400**人参加。

追痕发生地：

中国**20**地：北京，天津，河北阿那亚，河北石家庄，河南邙县，江苏苏州，江苏无锡，江苏嘉兴，江苏常州，安徽运槽古镇，浙江杭州，浙江横渡，浙江奉化，广东广州，广东珠海，广东佛山，深圳，海南海口，四川成都，上海（**16**个行政区）。

国际**14**地：英国伦敦，德国柏林，芬兰赫尔辛基，意大利博洛尼亚，荷兰阿姆斯特丹，乌克兰基辅，卢旺达基加利，澳大利亚塔斯马尼亚，加拿大多伦多，美国洛杉矶，阿根廷拉普拉塔，日本静冈，荷兰代夫特，荷兰海牙。

6 The Interpretation of *Tracing's* Significance

● On Traces: Tracing can elicit the numerous codes hidden within traces.

Traces are diverse and ever-changing. They pertain to both space and time, with numerous hidden codes embedded within them.

- 1. Natural Codes:** These are the entropy increase of the universe, showing the rudimentary forms of codes in the primitive traces formed during the creation of the solar system and the Earth (such as the imprints on seashore reefs). They are also evolving slowly, and embody the codes of traces left by the evolution of flora and fauna in different eras.
- 2. Cultural and Social Codes:** These refer to the codes of traces left by the process of human evolution and various human activities; as well as the codes of traces formed by social changes and the interaction, collaboration, games or conflicts among different social strata.
- 3. Aesthetic Codes:** Returning from image creation to the act of viewing, one can perceive the aesthetic codes of traces through observation. Whether artificial traces, cracks, weathering scars, or traces formed by their mutual intersection and superimposition, they possess aesthetic qualities that lie between orderliness and unbridledness, between wholeness and textural details, and can sometimes give rise to aesthetic wonders beyond human reach.

◆ Natural Code



Tracing on the Seashore Reefs of Aranya,
May 26, 2019



The cracks on the wall are further accentuated through Tracing

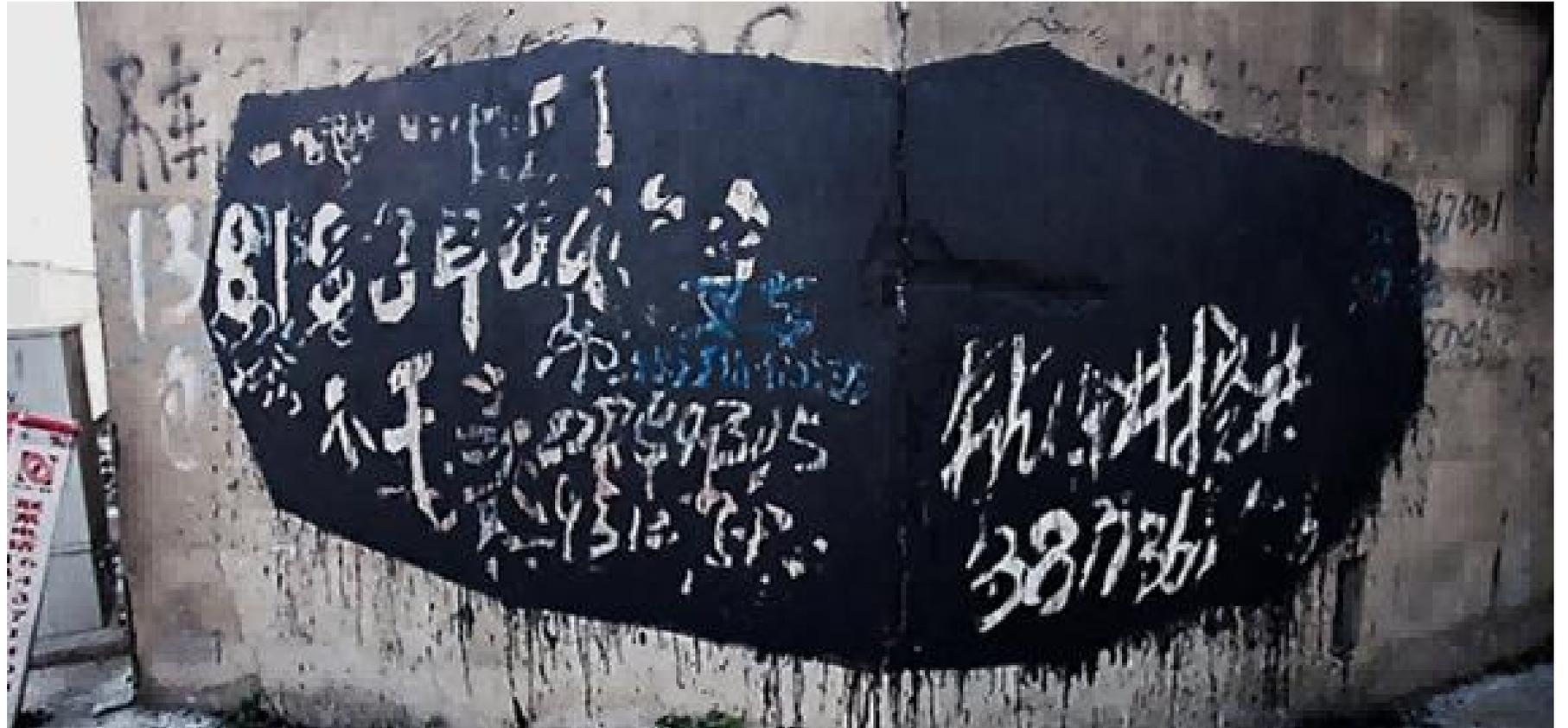


Collection of Natural Tracing Cases —
Cracks and Color Penetration on Ceramic Tiles

The changes in nature constitute a continuous process of ruination (entropy increase). In fact, symbols have been forming since the birth of the Earth and even the onset of the Big Bang, and have been evolving ever since. The surfaces of rocks, reefs, and the like all carry symbolic codes dating back hundreds of millions of years. *Tracing*, by contrast, symbolically employs a visual practice of enhancing contrast, inviting you to embark on a distant temporal journey in pursuit of primitive symbols.

Tracing resembles an "archaeological intervention": it does not directly intervene in social events, but rather renders existing traces as a medium of meaning through "developing" them, following the path of "discovery - transformation - awakening".

◆ Cultural and Social Codes



To awaken the public's attention to "the forgotten existences" in daily spaces — for traces carry individual memories, urban changes, and subtle social interactions. Through *Tracing*, these elements are transformed from "invisible" to "visible", enabling more audiences to feel, perceive, and understand the awkward situations and faint voices of marginalized groups within the mainstream spectacle society. In the urban-rural fringe areas of Chinese cities, by observing traces and engaging in the *Tracing* experience, we can perceive a vast yet often concealed group of urban landscape symbols; for symbols like flyers are also a form of spectacle, perpetually hiding in marginal and secret zones, and forming a silent field.



Elsewhere in the world, such as in Italy, many cities are home to a wealth of "symbols" embedded in graffiti, representing specific cultural extensions and memories. The *Tracing* initiative can follow these clues to seek out those anonymous traces across time and space — the superimposition of these traces reflects the entanglement and conflicts between nations, skin colors, ethnicities, and heterogeneous cultures.

◆ Aesthetic Code

- *Tracing* represents an evolution from the "expanded concept of art" to "everyday archaeology". It continuously breaks down the boundaries between medium and object — that is, it no longer confines art to traditional carriers such as canvas and sculpture, nor restricts the objects of creation to "man-made works". Instead, it allows art to flow within the "traces" of daily spaces, ultimately blurring the boundaries between "art and non-art" and "creation and discovery".
- The structure and texture of the images are completely original. When viewing them, many people are truly struck by the breathtaking natural beauty, beauty of imperfection, and unrestrained beauty that resonate deep within their hearts.
- A tactile engagement with traces can heighten people's sensitivity to the once-unnoticed traces of ruins, enabling them to see or comprehend more hidden mysteries and keys that escape others' attention — an experience that offers both therapeutic benefits and philosophical insights.
- "Tracing" functions as a "visual translation" of time and space, endowing abstract time with a tangible form. The traces captured by "Tracing" are precisely the physical evidence of the passage of time: traces of natural weathering are the temporal scales of wind and rain erosion, while the superimposition of man-made inscriptions constitutes the temporal accumulation of individual activities across different periods. The significance of Tracing lies in allowing us to quietly "return to the act of viewing" amid the ubiquitous creativity around us.



● On the Public Participation Mechanism: Tracing is an offline DAO with the characteristic of conceptual intervention in society.

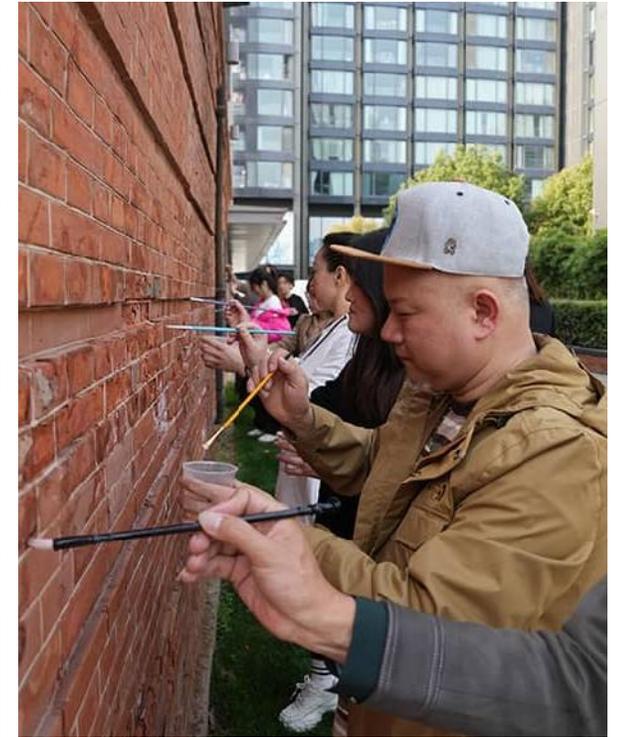
Tracing highlights a public participation mechanism. By lowering the barriers to entry — water *Tracing*, for instance, requires zero foundation and zero cost — it enables the public to join as "experiencers". No artistic skills are needed; participants only need to follow simple steps to interact with the traces, and the process itself becomes a perception of the "meaning of traces". The role of participants is that of "discoverers" and "communicators".

Tracing also constitutes an open system, a self-organizing system, and a trigger for the co-construction of meaning within a social field. It bears a resemblance to a DAO (Decentralized Autonomous Organization) in the virtual cyberspace.

History is no longer a narrative text, but a tangible, experiential process attached to concrete materials. The "invisible trajectory of time" is "imprinted" through the practice of Tracing, turning it into a memory rubbing of time and space. Thus, it forms a synchronic collection of meanings that allows individuals to experience time and space in a personal way.



On April 2, 2023 (the 16th World Autism Awareness Day), a "Tracing" event was held near the Old Photo Museum in Pudong, Shanghai, with the participation of 10 children with intellectual disabilities and 30 volunteers.



On March 17, 2024, the opening day of Shanghai's first café fully operated by deaf-mute individuals at No. 876 North Suzhou Road, Jing'an District, around 15 deaf-mute participants jointly took part in the water tracing activity.

● On the Anti-Disciplinary Nature of Aesthetics: *Tracing* is like a "new art species" and a "new maker platform".

Tracing pioneers a new disenchanting aesthetic tendency, forging a new art species that embodies the fundamental traits of "primitive code" art. As the initiator, the artist often positions himself as an audience member, while turning the audience into creators — players on this "new maker platform". Here, there is no need for intervention; instead, works are allowed to unfold freely through the reproduction of trace images. It is akin to participants collectively acting as the most primitive "human cameras".
(Gu Kaijun)



The Collective *Tracing* Activity on the Side Wall of Wuxi Cheng Ji Art Museum in 2023



2022 *Tracing* on Qinghe Road (a demolished old street) in Jiading District, Shanghai

- On the Therapeutic Function: *Tracing* serves as a demonstration template for future offline games.



On the Therapeutic Function: As a template for present and future offline games, *Tracing* offers multi-dimensional psychological healing effects, which are mainly reflected in the following aspects: emotional regulation and stress relief; reconnection with one's innate nature; exploration of inner spirituality; initiation of self-reflection; and establishment of social bonds.

On the Memory Rubbing of Time and Space: Tracing provides an experiential way to revisit residential memories.



On April 17, 2021, more than 30 local villagers and volunteers joined the "Tracing" activity in Qiaotou Village, Hengdu Town, Taizhou City, Zhejiang Province. They traced the weathered marks on the stone walls of the nearly 700-year-old village, reviving the fading residential memories.

Hengdu Qiaotou Village in Zhejiang Province is a nearly 200-year-old village. Today, the old village has been abandoned, leaving only some broken walls and dilapidated ruins—and it is on one of these large remaining walls that we carried out the *Tracing* project.

The old houses and brick walls were once the most familiar visual elements to the villagers. Yet when they took part in *Tracing*, touching the weathered traces on the brick walls up close, a subtle sense of unfamiliarity might have washed over them. Life moves forward like a speeding train, leaving people little time to notice the imprints of the past they have left behind.

Tracing, however, offered them a chance to revisit their residential memories. Through the intimate act of touching these brick walls—the tangible carriers of memory and spirit—the fragmented narratives of the past seemed to be woven back together again. Thanks to the intervention of this art project, the ruins of the ancient village, which have witnessed centuries of changes, have regained vitality once more.

List of Participants in the Tracing Activity

Qiaotou Village, Hengdu Town
 Date: April 17, 2021

Name	Occupation	Name	Occupation
Luo Qinghua	Farmer	Wang Xiaoxiang	Farmer
Farmer Wang Xiaomei	Farmer	Li Yuxiang	Farmer
Farmer Wu Caiyu	Farmer	Wang Wu	Farmer
Zheng Xiaofeng	Farmer	Jiu Zhulai	Farmer
Farmer Wang Dongxiang	Farmer	Jin Wei	Farmer
Pan Jinfang	Farmer	Zheng Xingfeng	Farmer
Chen Minglian	Farmer	Yang Jiaofei	Farmer
Farmer Chen Yuying	Farmer	Luo Chenxuan	Farmer
Lai Hua	Farmer	Lin Ai'e	Farmer
Luo Chengyi	Farmer	Zheng Jinhua	Farmer
Luo Xiangyu	Farmer	Liu Dongxin	Farmer
Farmer Wang Meiqin	Farmer	Luo Xiqiang	Farmer
Zhang Zhaocheng	Farmer	Luo Taixiao	Farmer
Yu Sanhua	Farmer	Luo Laihua (89 years old)	Farmer
Ye Xinfeng	Farmer	Xiao Fengmei	Farmer
Li Fengji	Farmer	Yang Caifang	Farmer
Yao Hua	Retired Teacher	Geng Jing	Teacher
Wang Nanming	Art Critic	Guo Jinrong	Photographer
Lan Shan	Student	Cai Chenxi	Student
Pang Yuqian	Student	Liang Yihui	Student
Zhou Meizhen	Student	Wei Jiaqi	Student
Li Siyu	Student	Ouyang Jingyi	Student

● On Temporal Scales and Stratification: Tracing seems to uncover every temporary layer of visual archaeology.

Both the original traces and the new ones generated through Tracing are marked by temporality, standing in sharp contrast to the pursuit of "high fidelity" and "permanent collectibility" in traditional works of art.

In conventional art, the "work" is the ultimate destination of creation—a painting, for example, is completed and then exhibited in a gallery. In Tracing, however, the "work" is transient: existing traces may be covered, water-based traces will evaporate, and some forms do not even yield a physical entity at all (such as water Tracing). This thus represents a leap from the paradigm of art as a tangible work to art as a perceptual experience, prompting people to realize that every layer of daily traces holds countless "uninterpreted stories".



On December 29, 2019, the site of the Tracing project, located on Gubei Road in Baoshan District, Shanghai, was documented as it faced demolition.



On September 13, 2020, the Tracing site at Liyang Academy on Kangwu Road, Pudong New Area, Shanghai was documented.



张羽

昨天 07:52

之後工人們的覆蓋，就會使你的追痕更長時間的封存起來，雖然我們視覺上看不到，但它是存在的……



倪卫华

昨天 07:53

回复张羽: 是的 🙌 🌹 👍

A Tracing Image That Survived Less Than a Day

In the ruins at Pangu Road (Lianfeng Road), the *Tracing* work was created at 6 a.m. on August 31, 2020, only to be covered by cement and concrete by 5 p.m. the same day.

Artist Zhang Yu commented: "The workers' act of covering has sealed this Tracing away for a longer time. Though it is no longer visible to our eyes, it does exist..."

Tracing is a game of covering and re-covering along a timeline, with no predefined endpoint. A traced image might be smudged in the very next second—and of course, it can be traced again...

Ni Weihua's *Tracing* is like an NPC in an intelligent program, tasked with processing the ever-emerging urban symbols according to a certain established mechanism.(Liu Li)



The Original Traces on the Walls of Zhoujiapai Road



The first Tracing session on the walls of Zhoujiapai Road, Yangpu District on June 3, 2018.



The First Tracing Image



It was discovered on June 19, 2018 that the Tracing image had been defaced.



The second Tracing session on the same wall of Zhoujiapai Road, Yangpu District on June 11, 2018.



The Second Tracing Image



Tracing (Zhoujiapai road, Shanghai) 1st time June 3, 2018



Tracing (Zhoujiapai road, Shanghai) 2nd time June 11, 2018

● On Decentralization: Every ordinary person is endowed with the right to participate in and create art.



2020, Kangwu Road "Liyang Academy" Tracing Site: The Gatekeeper Joined in Tracing



2021, Daliwang Village, Zhongtuo Town, Jiaxian County, Henan Province: Villagers Participated in Tracing

Tracing is an act of deconstructing and re-empowering the so-called "divinity" of artists.

People from all walks of life with zero foundation in painting become as creative as artists themselves in the process of participating in the *Tracing* art project. (Gu Kaijun)

Tracing features a decentralized nature. Especially in its 4.0 version, *Tracing* can spread freely and proliferate infinitely without relying on the artist. In such activities, I act as an initiator—a role somewhat akin to Joseph Beuys' tree-planting practice. The difference lies in this: Beuys directly appropriated elements of daily life, while *Tracing* conducts a high-contrast "developing" of everyday images.

Tracing expands historical memory from "official records"—the grand framework of traditional historical narratives—to a "collective archive of the public". It takes precisely these "forgotten traces" as its subject: faded slogans on the walls of old buildings may be remnants of folk sentiments from a certain era; cracks and mottling on the walls of ruins hold the temporal imprints of urban demolition and reconstruction; even the casual symbols and carved dates left by ordinary people are intimate memories of individual interactions with space. Through *Tracing*, these traces that would otherwise fade with time are "frozen"—they are no longer meaningless mottling, but become "memory vessels" carrying specific time slices, filling the gaps of "the individual and the everyday" in traditional historical archives.

7 Comments Related to *Tracing*

● Reflections from Selected Tracing Participants

As the years roll by, when we grow into adults, we lose the right to seek childhood joys among the ruins. We can no longer play hide-and-seek or water gun fights with dust-covered faces; nor can we easily convince ourselves to dig for treasures among broken walls and debris. Yet, we can trace the marks of memory in another way.

— Wang Jing (Zijing Culture)

This art project is both an elegy and an ode to derelict urban spaces, as well as an exploration and pursuit of cities as symbolic signs of the new era. Hence, I have gained profound insights from this artistic event, especially when conducting such artistic practices in a city far from my hometown. During the event, we were able to discuss various artistic styles and genres, share our reflections on our own works, and exchange ideas about the creative concepts for future pieces—it felt much like an artistic party.

— Xia Zhangfeng (Male, 25, Master of Museology)

Ni Weihua has broken many boundaries in artistic creation, enabling people of different ages, genders, occupations and even regional cultures to participate, and allowing participants to experience the joy of collective artistic creation. It presents itself in a form that is both unified and varied, integrating painting, graffiti with the natural cracks of the walls.

— Xue Chujin (Master of Tongji University, Architect)

Ni Weihua and I used to work together. He would share his creative ideas and show us his works without reservation. I have also been keeping an eye on his creative trends. On August 15 this year, I finally got the chance to participate in this very meaningful event. The scene was fantastic—apart from painting, there was joy everywhere, with music and bursts of laughter interspersed throughout the activity.

— Chen Yong (Male, born in the 1970s, Graphic & Spatial Designer)

Tracing is a systematic art activity: we pursue the past and leave new traces behind. What's more, we can get to know more new friends during the event.

— Li Xiu'er (Female, 37, Interior Designer)

The process of *Tracing* is more than just interaction among participants—owing to its location in the suburbs, it feels like a space unshackled by time and reality, making interactions and exchanges simpler and more genuine. During *Tracing* events, the most common feedback Ni Weihua receives is that the experience is "therapeutic"; *Tracing* allows participants to forget the troubles of daily life.

"Secondly, the general public no longer feels that art is distant and inaccessible—it isn't confined to art galleries, but exists right beside them. Furthermore, this practice also prompts people to reflect on urban development and class disparities. Once you actually pick up the brush and paint, you can personally feel that kind of conflict."

— He Qingyu (Female, 19, Art History Student)

The *Tracing* project is truly fascinating and highly extensible. Every generation touches history in a different way, and *Tracing* offers young people more possibilities. I think what we all have in common is a strong focus on the experiential aspect. At the same time, we also agree that the development of art should not be confined to obedience to the commodity economy; instead, it needs to find a breakthrough to intervene in society and daily life.

— Qin Yexuan (Female, 30, Master of Arts from France, Independent Artist)

Going back to the places where I used to live is quite appealing. The feeling that things remain but people have changed weaves all kinds of memories together. This was indeed my first time engaging in artistic creation in a place filled with memories, traces, and footprints. In that once-thriving spot—where crowds surged, vehicles streamed by, and relatives and fellow villagers gathered—it is now suddenly overgrown with weeds. The illegal constructions have been demolished, and new building facades have been painted over. That sense of familiarity mixed with strangeness often leaves me disoriented, creating a sense of dislocation; there are parts that feel recognizable, yet others that are completely unfamiliar.

— Zhang Dawei (Male, born in the 1990s, Designer)

● 全球水追痕参与者感语



● Partial Critics' Comments

Liu Li (Curator,Critic) :

Tracing is a dialogue game oriented at the city—in this relationship, the creator acts like an intelligent NPC, responsible for processing the constantly emerging urban symbols according to a certain established mechanism. Evolving from a highly conceptual program, *Tracing* has further developed into an executable procedure endowed with the capacity for self-expansion and proliferation.

Pei Manyi (Curator,Critic,Poet) :

Tracing is like a photographic scene that is "constantly intervening" yet "on the verge of disappearing". Thus, the Tracing series has formed a multi-layered interaction between the logic of individualized concepts and the conceptualization of logic; it is a means of capturing the pain points of the times, social landscapes and self-criticism, with problem awareness as its point of departure.

Guo Yaxi (Critic) :

I think beyond the "trace aesthetics" mentioned in your writing, there is also an element of "traceology" embedded in it—namely, the traces of the impending disappearance of physical entities (walls), the traces of the fading away of social information (both tangible and intangible), the behavioral traces of different participants, and the traces of the subjective psychology of each participant, among others. One can perceive an immense wealth of information lying beneath these rich visual images.

Hao Qinsong (Curator,Critic) :

Ni Weihua has breathed new life into ruins in his own unique way. The core code lies in the genetics of artistic emergence—where does art (within the ruins) originate? I am more inclined to view it as a form of restoration and governance. Tracing serves as a mending process for the fissures and flaws of civilization. Acknowledging these flaws and original sins also marks a new starting point for us to define the ideal civilized order.

Wang Meiqin (Scholar of California State University,Northridge, Expert in East Asian Art Studies) :

Tracing creates equal opportunities for participation for all, allowing people to develop a new sense of public awareness while engaging in a fairly simple artistic creation process.

Gu Kaijun (Curator,Critic) :

Tracing takes art out of the ivory tower of traditional "spiritual archetypes" and returns it to the original "life archetypes" and "vitality archetypes" that are closely bound up with every individual. The inclusiveness and interactivity embodied in Ni Weihua's *Tracing* practice have broken the boundaries of art. While building a mutual interpretive relationship between the audience and contemporary art, it also stands as an experimental exploration and exchange on how contemporary art can integrate into a post-commercial (post-materialistic) society.

The core of the *Tracing* art project lies in the open architecture of its original IP. The zero-based participation model designed by Ni Weihua essentially constructs a "de-skilling" system for artistic production. When ordinary participants use pigments to reproduce natural traces on the walls of ruins, they simultaneously accomplish a triple identity transformation: from art consumers to producers, from spatial onlookers to co-constructors, and from symbol recipients to meaning-givers. This transformation is reinforced by the randomness of visual blind boxes—each participant obtains an irreplicable "artistic fingerprint". As Roland Barthes put it, "The birth of the reader (participant) must be at the cost of the death of the author, but more importantly, it signifies the rebirth of a new subject."

The exploration of the issue of traces in *Tracing* is essentially a contemporary activation of the traditional Chinese concept of the "unity of calligraphy and painting". While traditional literati pursued "vital rhythm" through brush and ink, Ni Weihua reproduces natural textures by adhering to the principle of "only following traces, not creating them", thus deconstructing such metaphysical pursuits. Its operational logic implicitly aligns with the ontology of Shi Tao's "single-brush method", yet advances the notion of "brush and ink must follow the times" to the material dimension of ruin aesthetics. This translation is not a simple formal imitation; instead, it reproduces natural forms through the randomness and contingency of living entities, subverting the creative concept of "intention precedes the brush".

The principle of "only following traces, not creating them" in *Tracing* indicates a fundamental shift in artistic production in the post-human era. While AI painting generates images through algorithms, *Tracing* constructs an anti-algorithmic artistic ecosystem by leveraging the "instinct of repeated attempts of the human body" (Fang Di) to conduct primitive replication of human biological traces. This ecosystem does not negate technology; instead, by returning to the most primitive trace production at the critical point between organic and inorganic matter, it redefines the essence of art—art is not about innovation, but a material testimony to the existence of the human body.

Ni Weihua's works cover various media such as painting, installation, action and video. He is one of the important practitioners who promoted the development of Shanghai's contemporary art in the early stage, and also one of the earliest artists in China to carry out "art intervention in society" and respond to "digitalization". His representative works including the series "Continuously spreading event — Red Box and Poster", "Meishu(Fine Arts): The Legitimate Presence of Words and Objects", "Linear City", "Landscape Wall" and "Tracing" have attracted wide attention for their multi-dimensional language experimentation and topics such as "social intervention". His works have been exhibited in dozens of important domestic and foreign exhibitions, including the Chinese Contemporary Art Documentary Exhibition, Marrakech Biennale, Photo Biennale Odense, Venice Biennale, Chinese Art in Brazil, Cannes AVIFF Art Film and Jeonju International Photography Festival. He has also held solo exhibitions in Shanghai, Beijing, Los Angeles and other places.



Born in 1962, Ni Weuhua graduated from Shanghai Light Industry Institute in 1983 and currently lives and works in Shanghai.

Major Solo Exhibitions

- 1989 Neo-expression — 1989 Ni Weihua's Solo Painting Exhibition, Shanghai, China
- 2008 Keywords -"Development" and "Harmony" Solo Photography Exhibition, Beijing, China
- 2012 Landscape Wall: The Chinese Reality Through Different Angle of View – Ni Weihua's Solo Photography Exhibition Shanghai,China
- 2013 Landscape Wall——Ni Weihua's solo exhibition Beijing,China
- 2015 Shadow of the Spectacle: Urban China in Ni Weihua's Conceptual Photography Los Angeles, USA
- 2017 Ongoing Dual Landscape——Ni Weihua & Fan Shisan Joint Solo Exhibition Shanghai, China
- 2020 Graphic Society——Landscape Wall and Ni Weihua's Practice Documentary of Art
- 2021 The Original Code-The Tracing——Ni Weihua's solo exhibition Shanghai,China
- 2021 Tracing Beuys/Global Flash Mob of Water Tracing Guangzhou,China
- 2025 Now and Here: Language Practice Based on Traces, Shanghai, China
- 2025 Tracing: Freezing Time and Space Memories/Shanghai United Art Space Shanghai,China

Major Group Exhibition

- 1992 Ni Weihua & Wang Nanming Works Exhibition and Seminar on the Current Situation of Shanghai Contemporary Art, Beijing,China
- 1993 The 2nd China Contemporary Art Documents Exhibition Guangzhou,China
- 1995 Installation: the Dimension of Language Shanghai,China
- 1996 In the Name of Art—Chinese Contemporary Art Exchange Exhibition Shanghai, China
- 1999 In/from China:Art+Architecture" Berlin,Germany
- 1999 The Intervention in Media Hongkong,China
- 2000 Individual & Society in Art—A Collection of Works of Art by 11 Chinese Artists Guangzhou,China
- 2002 The 1st Guangzhou Triennial Guangzhou,China
- 2005 Inward Gazes—Documentaries of Chinese Performance Art Macau, China
- 2009 History in the Making Shanghai 1979-2009 Shanghai,China
- 2010 The 6th Lianzhou International Photography Festival (A total of 5 times) Lianzhou,China
- 2012 Jeonju Photo Festival Jeonju,Korea
- 2013 1st Beijing Photo Biennial Beijing,China
- 2013 5th Bi-City Biennial of Urbanism\Architecture(A total of 2 times) Shenzhen,China
- 2014 5th Marrakech Biennial Marrakech,Morocco
- 2014 China Art in Brasil Sao Paulo, Brasil
- 2014 AVIFF in Cannes France Cannes ,France
- 2014 Contemporary Photography in China 2009-2014 Shanghai, China
- 2015 56th Venice Biennale (Collateral Events) Venice, Italy
- 2016 Cities and Memory——Photo Biennale Odense, Denmark
- 2017 Living in the City——Busan International Architectural Culture Festival Pusan, Korea
- 2018 Avant-garde • Shanghai——30-Years Shanghai Contemporary Art Document Exhibition Shanghai, China
- 2021 Ways of Seeing: The Reflection of History in Contemporary Photography Changsha,China
- 2021 Almost Paradise: Mis/Perceptions of Leisure and Labor in the Asia-Pacific Shanghai,China
- 2022 We How Create Art: Post Experimental Ink Nanjing,China
- 2023 Facing the Scene - Chinese Contemporary Art Criticism Documentary Exhibition of the 1990s, Shanghai, China
- 2024 ART & Go - China-Japan-Netherlands Art Group Exhibition Tokyo/ Shizuoka, Japan
- 2024 12 th UP-ON International Live Art Festival Chengdu, China
- 2025 Beyond the Location: The Walking Man on the Shanghai Grand Stage, Shanghai, China

www.niweihua.com

Email:whni222@vip.sina.com