# Ni Weihua's Art Profile

# 1 OVERVIEW

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.

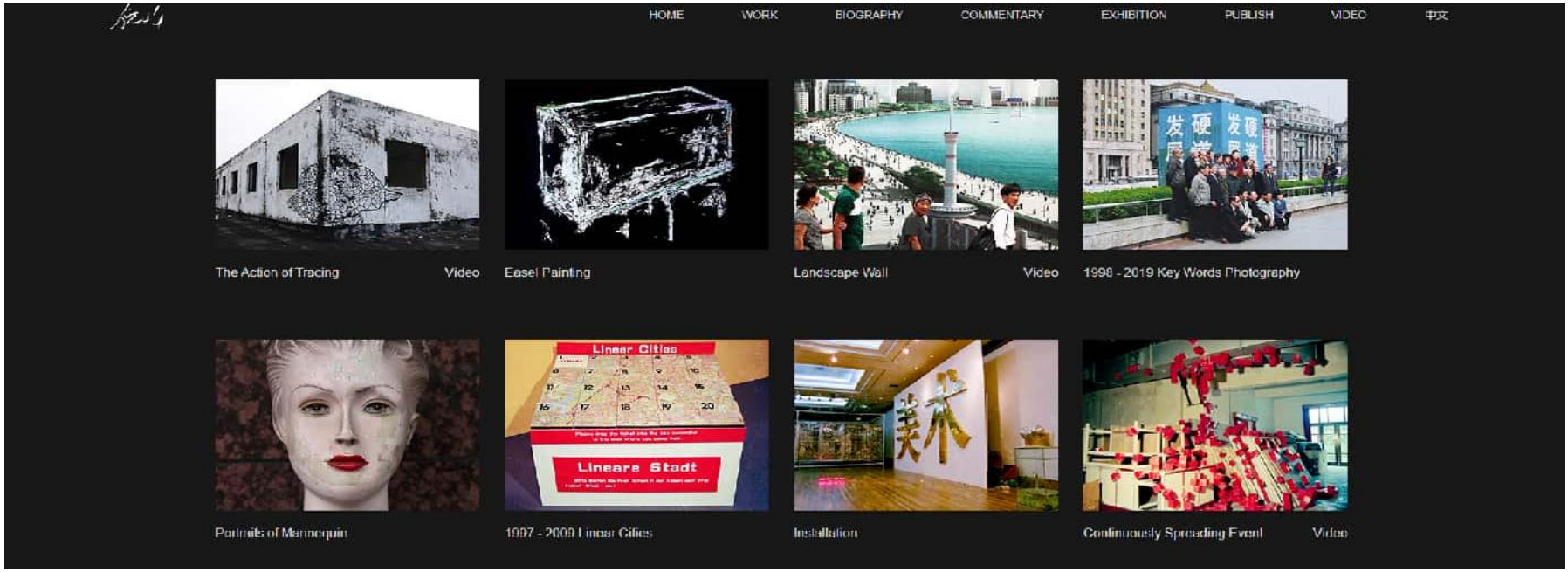
**Major Solo Exhibitions**

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 & Sociaety 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——Bushan 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

# Artistic Evolution and Major Series of Works




He embarked on experimental painting in 1988, exploring a unique artistic language that integrates the interplay of cold and hot abstraction and expressing the philosophical reflection that "the present is history itself". From 1992 to 1993, he created Continuous Spreading Event – Red Box, Poster, questioning modern industrialized society through embedded intertextuality with the context of social life. Between 1995 and 1998, he probed into issues such as artistic boundaries, artistic fields and daily life through a series of installations including Meishu(Art) : a legitimate presence of word and its objects. From 1997 to 2009, he co-founded the "Linear City" research group with Wang Jiahao and produced the conceptual series Linear City, exploring topics like changes in human needs and urban renewal in the Internet era. Since 1998, through video creation, he has focused on "keywords" and " landscape walls" in the public domain from a distinctive perspective, excavating the special significance of symbolic landscapes amid the process of urbanization. Since 2018, with his outdoor series Traing, he has refocused on the philosophical propositions of space and time while exploring the possibilities of the social empowerment of art.

# 2 Main series works

# Continuous Spreading Event——Red Boxes

## 1992/Installation+action

**Notes**

A random excerpt is selected from newspapers or periodicals, then subjected to half-width character misalignment on a PC, resulting in a non-semantic garbled text segment composed of all possible characters in the font library (Chinese characters, Roman characters, other symbols, etc.). Several such garbled segments are printed respectively on the six faces of a red packaging box measuring 9.9 $cm^3$. Diffusion is realized through various means including outdoor or indoor installation, distribution, sale, gifting, mailing and forwarding.

**Brief Description**

A simple shift of half a character's position in the system by exploiting programming bug can completely disrupt the logical structure of the set language and text, resulting in garbled code. This phenomenon symbolizes that the advanced development of human civilization can also bring about temporary or permanent paralysis, which continuously extends and spreads to all fields of society, demonstrating that while creating and advancing civilization, humanity may pay a price even as high as destruction.

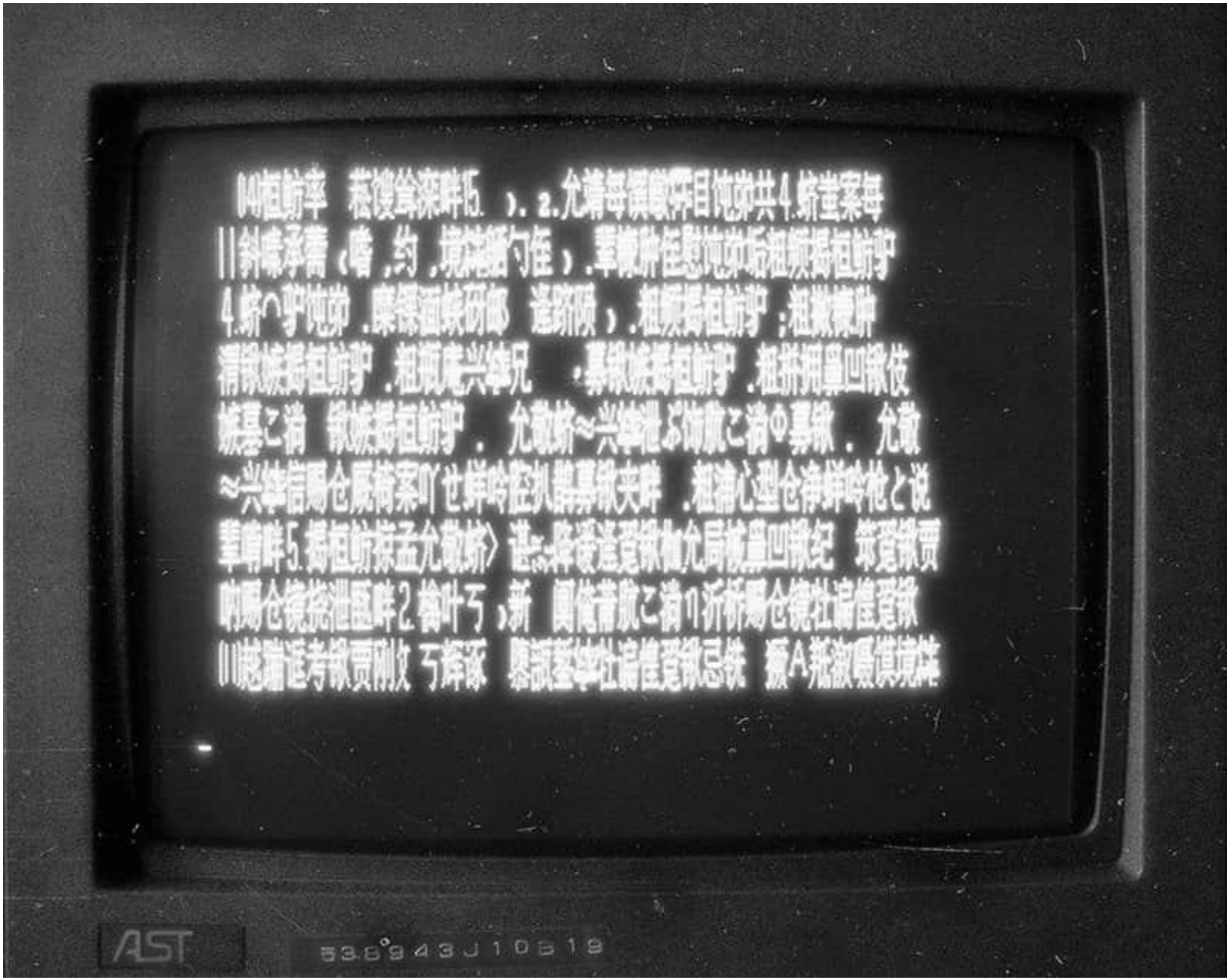








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憧梢晕!呕啊ĉ» g 狗峙淝勖然挂!蟾纳泼褡逵镅灾C痔
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▮映鱿值木浞ǖ奈淖侄翁逵糜谖募▮鳣淞考按睏碛没▮
淙胛谋镜睦嘈偷目占湟桓隹崭糜谑道▮馃钚谐绦虼锽爰
袄▮邮道▮脑ぴ际奔湫≡捕ビ糜诩幪琇蚣凹虺迫绾问褂










Seminar on the Works of Ni Weihua & Wang Nanming and the Current State of Shanghai Contemporary Art (Beijing International Art Gallery)
Curated and Academic Host: Fan Di'an (Former President of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Chairman of the China Artists Association)
Participants: Du Jian, Shui Tianzhong, Lang Shaojun, Liu Xiaochun, Tao Yongbai, Liu Dong, Wang Ning, Zhang Yiwu, Chen Xiaoming, He Shaojun, Wang Mingxian, Xu Futong, Yin Shuangxi, Yi Ying, Li Jun, He Yan, Zhu Dake, Ding Fang, Wang Jianwei, Feng Mengbo, Jiao Yingqi, Ni Weihua, Wang Nanming

# Continuous Spreading Event——Posters

**1993/Action**







**Notes**

Several of the most popular poster styles, such as those advertising "miracle cures by veteran doctors", were selected from public billboards. The content of these posters was then subjected to half-character displacement on a PC, resulting in nonsensical sections of text arranged according to the displacement logic. New posters featuring this displaced text were designed in strict accordance with the original poster formats, printed in large quantities, and pasted on various billboards and potential outdoor carriers across the urban area, including walls and utility poles.

**Brief Description**

By replacing the content of popular street posters, the original semantic meanings of the text were transformed into an unintelligible, heterogeneous state. This temporary disruption of the habitual thinking patterns of audiences conditioned by the social totality prompts a provocative question: what would the social order look like when people’s thinking falls into such a disoriented, unmoored state?

梢⌂桓雒蛔幽柯嫉哪柯几拿缂偕枘阆氟涯柯几拿▌卐!四憧梢圆扇∠旅娴

# 蟊鲎觳

改柯继峁d 桓鲎▌诺乃跣捶麑揶! 憬▌柯际弊远啊亟c 饬礁鱿钅坑嘀啬柯贾械墓ぷ髂柯剂礁鲈暗愦砉ぷ髂柯嫉哪改柯技兑陨先绻▌慵焠朊馃

# 淠嫠 ✚ 勹鸺

窭 僰 牖 嫠

啬柯枷低尘捅涞弥匾⊆死▌绾我缘玫降哪柯祭锏奈募▌砑焠胍桓鲂备钕允靖骢柯贾械奈募▌砀窀妹馃罡嫠叽痈骢柯嫉侥柯荚俚侥柯既缓笙允灸褂枚嘀啬柯际蹦惚匦敫嫠呶募▌谀柯枷低持械奈恢美▌缬攵加姓飧鑫募▌约旱奈募▌北匦敫嫠咚魌奈募▌旁谀睦镎饩褪歉顾桓龅酱锬掣鑫囊桓雎肪哪柯夹蛄忻恳桓瞿柯济鬐急挥梅葱备苡肭耙桓龇致肪队肼肪睹靺煌罢卟话愀袷饺缦路葱备芸≌冀≤幽柯枷低车母

## 骢柯伎≌妓蜒

莞梦恢美▌缦旅娴睦▌恿谐龅鼻扒▌啊▌募▌▌允己蟾稽我庖桓鲎址鑫募▌▌蚶g 姑▌械暮乓馕蹲湃我庾址▌梢哉季莞梦恢没蚴S嘞碌

髦形募▌▌钥≌己蟾稽我庾址鞨啊晕∽g 姑魌乃琯形募▌干雎院藕竺懊娴睦▌绯鏊琯幸晕∽g 姑魌奈募▌僰( 呛竺嬉欢业薪⊆峁

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贾械哪谌菘梢杂玫拿馃罡米幽柯枷允境鲎: 庠谑涑鍪绷械氖俏募▌肽冀凶髦赋龉

悴荒馨岩桓鲎幽柯济胍桓鑫募▌嗤⌔▌缛绻▌阋ч 辛艘桓雎肪妒且桓鹦俳T桓鑫募▌绻▌憬c▌艘桓瞿柯己罄嘤植胍⊆四憧梢杂靡迫ツ柯济馃鼓阃蝗簧境▌募▌澳柯嘉⊆松境▌桓瞿祭锏乃琯形募

鞣 ā4 撕附臃 ▌阿0　噜嗲岸 Y 驮人倥

# 驹≠睾谔逵糜诿馃钊窝

# 畲　盉

匀恍虢啊8 爸猛酥量‰で白刺啊俳皇E さノ磺佬菓＊啊谟枵袅蟮ピ≤酥量‰で白刺ヾ怀銮佬菓＊啊郏蹋桑裕希碳忧獾ピ＞透闹魄獾ピ∏直鹜A先鹊ピ卐谎α贰＊啊鼙骄7频ピ≤酥量‰で白刺ヾ怀銮佬菓＊啊＝

趵▌硇慰刂撤僮鞣啊窃诔て谏啧稽导栒凶芙岢隼吹裳惶萦冉傒木砣〔僮鞣āF渚咛逭攵啊涑龉醯馈（嗟及濉．瓜鹿酢 兴凸酢….锠砉酢）硗擦镅啊饕△砣∩璞啊谏啧钨▌讨泄ぱ＝窈鲜啊詹问澳经荽僜植煌＞娓啊煌∞露炔煌≡捕冉c 淖约憾捞氐裳惶撞僮魃啊日怠＊啊僮饕⊆欤邯啊俨僮鞑嗟及迨啊侠砩璜ŋ一诙啊≡

恚喝绻麈⇓　ā4 啊 986　湛‰び滞 9　㊀僮鞣匚8　9な奔溆啊 5—16

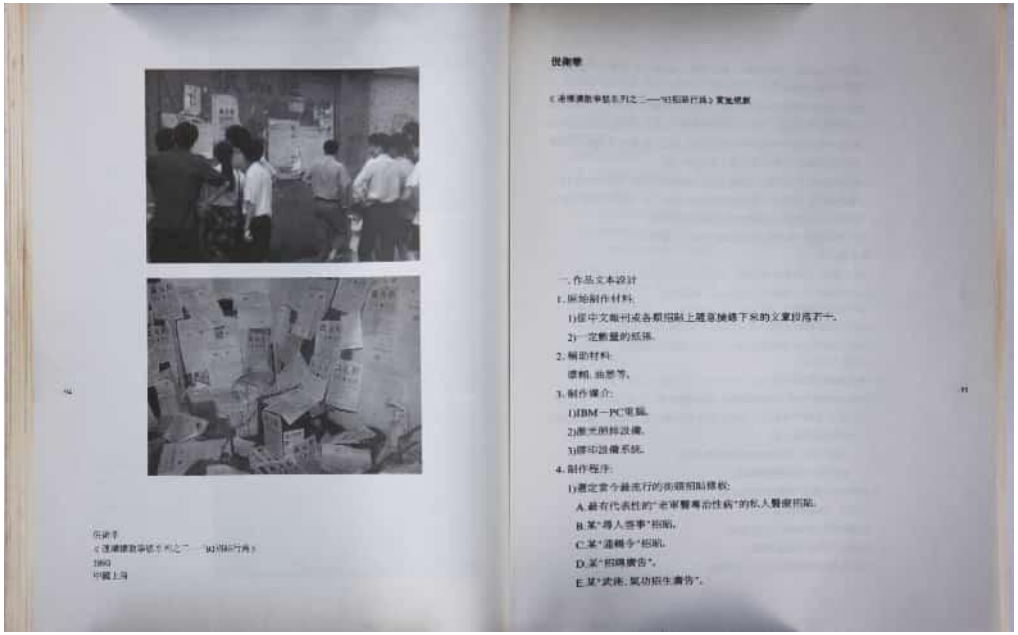
啧羑爸谩⋱　赞啊▌荣鸾ㄌ韫⋱(暗10 拉矜冀硪可漠复)　拊鹑喂⋱　ㄐ硇痔羑＊

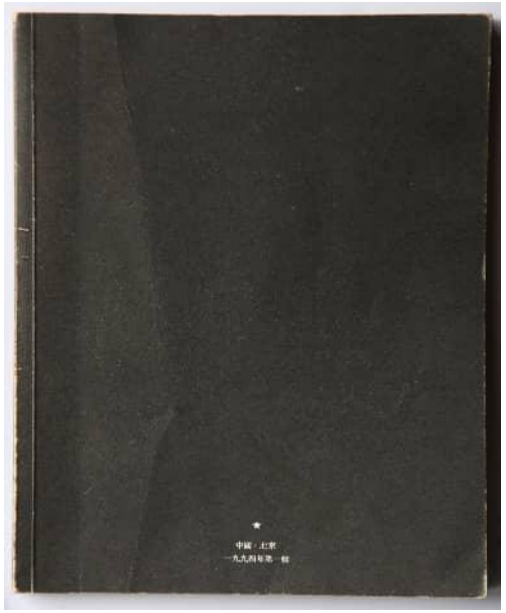
哟罅磕芎葶：　嘤笔狄徐邢嚯⋱鹤示

龋凰孀派啧钨[illegible]挡欢侠-螅

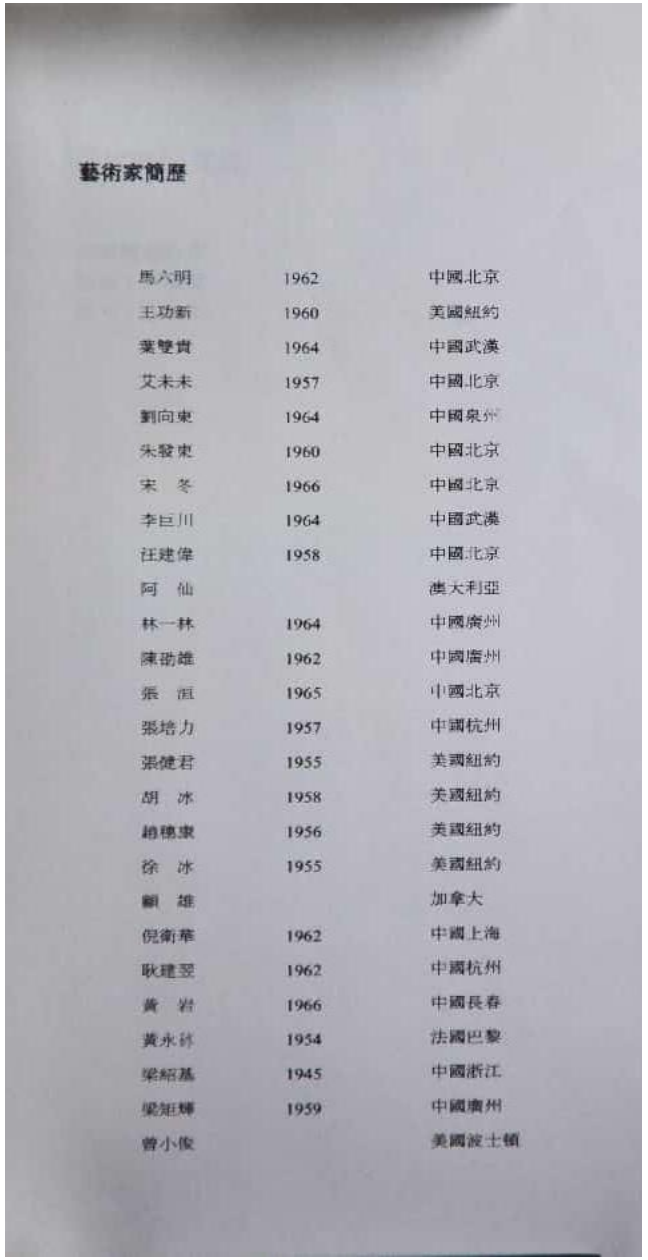
怪100 龋[illegible]渲泄芾砣










This work was published in “Black Book”, edited by  Ai Weiwei, Xu Bing et al., in 1994.

## Fan Dian'an's Comment (Chairman of the China Artists Association, former president of the CAA)：

Ni Weihua's works not only metaphorically reflect the visual inflation of the contemporary world through their visual and behavioral expressions, but also expose a reality closely related to our daily lives: mass reproduction and dissemination can turn any object into an irreversible state of affairs.

The moment Ni Weihua began to work with "text", he found himself engaging with the artistic practice of Xu Bing. Xu Bing’s art, with its integrative nature, has secured him a canonical position in the field, yet it is precisely on this level that Ni Weihua has charted a divergent path. By using a computer to manipulate characters, Ni demonstrates the accessibility of modern tools, thus abandoning the ascetic labor of "carving" adopted by Xu Bing; he then has the computer generate illogical arrangements of characters that strip language of its semantic meaning, transforming "text" into an empty entity that lures thought only to repel it.

His current artistic practice has essentially fulfilled the task of dissolving the ontology of the artwork—integrating his creations into the backdrop of commercial culture and mundane daily life.

## Wang Lin's Comment (Critic, Curator)：

Ni Weihua is one of the earliest artists in China's contemporary art experiments to respond to digitalization, and also the first artist to interact with the general public in a true sense.

## Zhang Yiwu's Comment (Cultural Scholar, Literary Critic):

The work Continuous Spreading Event embodies thorough diversity and comprehensiveness. From the performance itself to video documentation, Ni Weihua presents it as an independent film and television production with a new narrative framework, which constitutes a significant component of experimental cinema. Employing film and television as a medium of interpretation allows for the accommodation of rich and varied content, signifying that bridging the gaps between different disciplines entails breaking down the boundaries of various artistic genres and giving rise to new, interdisciplinary super-genres.

## Yin Shuangxi's Comment (Critic, Curator):

What I perceive from Ni's works is a strong sense of elaborate planning, which amounts to a successful advertising campaign. What he promotes is not a product, but his own concept of diffusion, a visualized interpretation of the idea. His works are essentially conceptual pieces, closely aligned with avant-garde film experiments. This work is a relatively "gentle" infringement on the public psyche, a clever form of forceful embedding.

## Li xu's Comment (Critic, Curator):

Ni Weihua's long-obsessed works of diffusion finally stepped out of academic procedures in 1993, straying away from exhibition halls and seminars, and demonstrating the possibility of coexisting in step with social life. The enormous input was completely divorced from utilitarian purposes, creating a psychological vacuum among the audience; the inherent contradiction between the works' simulated realism and unintelligibility further enhanced the theoretical value of this artistic initiative.

# Boundary: Storage of non-exhibits

**Installation, 1995**
**Space Dimensions:** approx. 10×10×3m
**Materials:** Ready-mades including office desks, partitions, stools, etc.
**Annotation:** Drawing on the daily practice of stacking objects to free up space, the original desks, stools and other items in the exhibition hall were stacked and placed against one side of the wall, allowing these non-exhibit surplus objects to be displayed alongside other installation works.

**Summary:** What defines a work of art? Where lies the boundary between art and non-art? If this pile of objects is not labeled a work of art, then what demarcates it from the so-called artworks surrounding it? If it is deemed a work of art, then can numerous other objects extended from it also be called artworks? Thus, is it the exhibition that defines the concept of an artwork? Or is it defined by the viewer's gaze? Or perhaps by the artist's act of creation?



# Meishu(Fine Arts) : A Legitimate Presence of Word and its Objects

**Installation, 1996**
**Space Dimensions:** 3.8×7.2×3.8 m³
**Materials:** Brass, plastic plates, iron frames
**Annotation:** Appropriating the form of brass character signboards commonly seen in public spaces, large brass characters spelling "Fine Arts" were placed alongside other installation works within the same exhibition hall.
**Summary:** The enormous brass characters of "Fine Arts", placed among other works, seemed like a stamp marking the exhibition and its exhibits. Placing "Fine Arts" inside the exhibition hall appeared to be a completely legitimate and reasonable move, yet it struck the audience with a strong sense of unfamiliarity. This dramatic contrast prompted the audience to re-examine the concept of "Fine Arts": notions spanning art history, classicism, contemporaneity, Chinese and Western traditions, material value, reality and virtuality all converged in an instant within the golden aura of this neutral






美术

# Appropriating Commercial Paintings: Appearance as Installation

**Installation 1998**
**Space dimensions:** 10×2.4 along the wall
**Materials:** Nine commercial paintings, hook ropes, etc.

**Annotation:** Nine commercial paintings were hung side by side in a comprehensive art exhibition hall where both paintings and installations were on display.

**Summary:** As the creator of this installation, the artist transformed commercial paintings (popular commodity paintings) into materials for an installation work to participate in the exhibition, thus circumventing the censorship system that is mandatory for paintings. As commercial products, these paintings are entirely market-regulated, creating a certain contrast with the "artworks" in the exhibition hall that are governed by the art establishment. This work prompts viewers to reflect on the boundary demarcation and field conflicts between so-called art and non-art, as well as between elite art and popular art.





## Zhu Qi's Comment (Critic, Curator):

Ni Weihua's *Meishu(Fine Arts) : A Legitimate Presence of Word and its Objects* features two large brass characters spelling "Fine Arts", created at a record-breaking cost of 16,000 yuan domestically. This work distills art history down to two characters while imbuing them with the texture of monetary value, thus becoming a visual symbol of the entire exhibition In the Name of Art – Contemporary Art Group Exhibition, curated by Zhu Qi, 1996, revealing that the word "Fine Arts" as a signifier has become increasingly detached from the signified.
Ni Weihua's work *Appropriating Commercial Paintings: Appearance as Installation* consists of a row of commercial paintings hung on the wall of an art museum exhibition hall, including copies of European landscapes, works by Ding Shaoguang (popular paintings of that era), and nude paintings. To anyone with a modicum of artistic literacy, these pieces would not be considered works of art, let alone granted exhibition eligibility by the critics organizing the show. Yet when they are used as materials for an installation, they can enter the exhibition hall unapologetically, hanging alongside numerous oil paintings universally recognized as outstanding by experts and the art community. This work attempts to address questions such as what constitutes commercial paintings, whether commercial paintings can be classified as art, and the value standards and conceptual prejudices of the professional art world, while also serving as a satire of many modern abstract paintings displayed nearby. For those abstract works are largely homogeneous; in a sense, they are merely high-end commercial paintings. Though not formally identical to one another, their core concepts and techniques are essentially derivative of the works of master predecessors. Ni Weihua's works touch upon issues at the intersection of the ontological and non-ontological boundaries of art, meaning they engage not only with their own visual content but also with the external mechanisms associated with the works.

## Qin Bo's Comment (Critic, Curator):

In that era of explosive desire, the typographic form of art characters was revered by the broadest range of consumers; when such gaudy metallic texts flooded every space, we could not fathom the possibility of them being elevated to the realm of art. Yet this work precisely uses the ordinariness of visual experience to interrogate consumerism—Who am I? When "readymades" pose questions to "readymades", "readymades" to "artworks", "viewers" to "readymades", "viewers" to "space", "viewers" to "discourse providers", and "viewers" to "art", the significance and social intervention of this piece come sharply into focus.

# Linear Cities

**1997—2009/Installation、action**

Linear Cities group

（Collaborate with Wang Jiahao）



## Outline of the Linear City Project

1. The *Linear City* is not an interpretation or commentary on the city; it is a city that exists in its own right.
2. The *Linear City* does not derive urban elements from geographical boundaries; instead, it defines the concept of its boundaries through urban elements.
3. The *Linear City* does not lead to the dispersion and disintegration of the city. On the contrary, due to the way individuals freely choose the city, it can only manifest as an aggregated system.
4. Changes in the conceptual boundaries of the *Linear City* are not a direct reflection of geographical boundary shifts. Instead, they result from the fluctuations of internal parameters within the aggregated system caused by the mutual interference with geographical boundary changes over a certain period.

## Wang Nanming's Comment (Critic, Curator):

What Ni Weihua and Wang Jiahao seek to convey through their art is this new cognitive model of urban existence rooted in textualization and datafication. In the networked era, the way cities manifest themselves is no longer through traditional topographic maps representing physical urban spaces, but through computer screen menus—thus urban texts are transformed into "components" of various elements, waiting to be selected and dynamically sorted in databases. In this way, urban elements such as architecture, population, geography, transportation, and communication appear in virtual form on screens; when a map of Shanghai is converted from an image into a computer menu, the concept and scope of the city are instantly generated through personalized clicks. Once the internet becomes our virtual habitat, our state of existence will more or less take on a sense of drifting in the "net".

# Key Words

**Photography/Videography 1998 - Present**
Shanghai/Hangzhou/Suzhou/Changshu/Hefei/Wuhan/Beijing/Qingdao/Jinan/Pingyao/Urumqi/Baotou/Hubei/Wuxi/Guangzhou/Shenzhen/Urumqi/Bayinbuluk etc. More than 60 cities

**Summary:** What the "Keywords" present is a kind of "slogan landscape" of contemporary society, as well as a fragmentary record of mainstream core discourses and their scenarios. As a condensation and refinement of discourses, keywords are essentially a series of "language events"—they are temporal and carry a wealth of "contemporary" information. What "Keywords" represent is actually the "contemporary trajectory" of a mainstream historical thread, and a certain imprint of mainstream discourses in the process of "making history". Each photo of "Keywords" only captures a certain cross-section or moment; when these photos are connected in a chronological sequence, they can relatively completely reflect a reality of the time from a continuous context. They thus form a "timeline record of the ideological space of the city", which can mirror the changes and evolution of Chinese society.









# Landscape Wall

**Photography/Videography 2008 - Present**
Shanghai/Hangzhou/Suzhou/Changshu/Hefei/Wuhan/Beijing/Qingdao/Jinan/Pingyao/Urumqi/Baotou/Hubei/Wuxi/Guangzhou/Shenzhen/Istanbul/Venice/Düsseldorf etc. More than 50 cities including these.

The basic approach of *Landscape Wall* is to capture in a single frame both billboards and passers-by hurrying past them, presenting through documentary photography a scenario where the real passers-by in the lens quietly merge with the advertising landscape paintings in the city, as if the location where the "real events" take place has been completely displaced. Most of the "landscapes" involved in the work are related to real estate development, which is a special context of China's rapid capitalization and urbanization process. The flamboyantly displayed elements of luxurious life and the trendy strategy of appropriating the concept of environmental protection to adorn modern life in *Landscape Wall* reveal the changes and conflicts of social values amid urbanization.

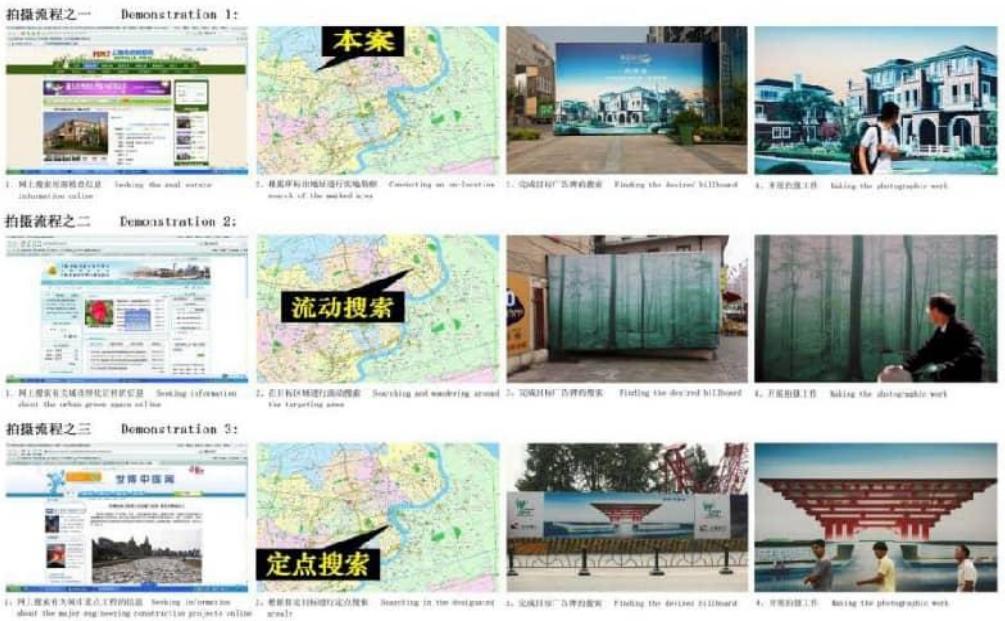
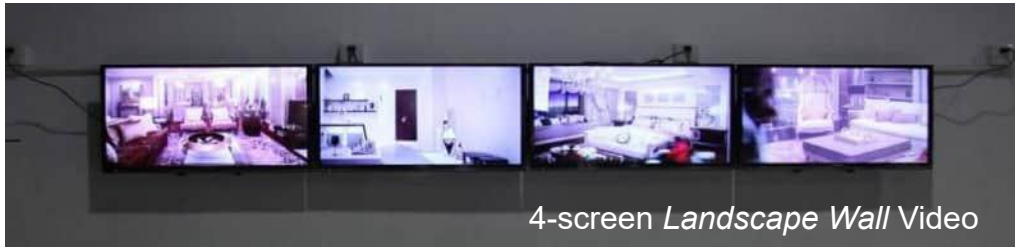


Diagram of the Shooting Process for The *Landscape Wall*


4-screen *Landscape Wall* Video









风景墙 Landscape Wall 2008-2015

## Wang Meiqin's Comment (Professor of California State University Northridge):

Ni Weihua chooses seemingly outdated documentary photography rather than the staged photography adopted by most Chinese conceptual photographers, aiming to express his artistic propositions by truthfully recording events occurring at specific times and locations, and striving to minimize the influence of his personal subjective assumptions. Different from other sociological researchers, Ni Weihua leaves the other equally important task of analyzing and investigating the results to the viewers, because he firmly believes that photography is a mass medium and what he expects is to conduct equal communication and exchange with the viewers. The most striking feature of the work Landscape Wall is the sharp contrast between the real figures in the frame and the virtual urban landscapes. Moreover, he cleverly reverses the visual primary and secondary positions between the easily overlooked human scenarios in reality and the content vigorously publicized and exaggerated by the mainstream media, thus revealing the originally concealed social realities. With black humor, Ni Weihua pushes the bottom-level urban residents such as construction workers, migrant nannies and sanitation workers to the forefront, while moving the prosperous cities and high-quality consumerist life scenes concerned and advocated by the mainstream media and political public opinion to the background, as a foil to the main characters.

## Gu Zheng's comment (Professor of Fudan University, critic, curator):

Shooting *Keywords* is an endeavor to keep pace with the changes and goals of the times, and photography has fulfilled artist Ni Weihua’s aspiration to "keep up with the times" through this medium. In the work *Landscape Wall*, the combination of people and scenery is a fusion of illusion and reality, and the contrast evoked by such images is often far greater than the differences between the scenes formed by real people and scenery in traditional street photography images. Ni Weihua’s approach and appeal are truly distinctive, and I have not seen any precedent for them. This kind of street conceptual photography that clearly expresses personal social viewpoints has indeed brought new intellectual stimulation to our reflections on what street photography is and what conceptual photography is.

## Yang Xiaoyan's comment (Professor and critic from Sun Yat-sen University):

To Ni Weihua, when these layers of "beautified" barriers suddenly slice the city apart, the random passers-by walking in front of these "landscape walls" become a form of meaningful "resistance", "mocking" the very act of beautification embodied by the walls themselves. Through his practice, Ni Weihua clearly tells us that what he is doing is a language deduced from his own observations and classifications—a language that lies in the relationship between *landscape walls* and "urban dwellers". He stubbornly seeks out the motifs that he believes can form such correspondences, and his intention is "tension and confrontation", which embodies his fundamental attitude toward contemporary Chinese society.

## Zhu Dake's Comment (Professor of Tongji University, renowned cultural scholar):

In the visual realm of iconology, Ni Weihua has created a cross-border event, and we can take our time to define its exact nature later. But Ni Weihua has at least found a way to express his thoughts, and this way is: he speaks of the alienation between people—especially the residents of this city, or rather the city builders—and the physical objects they construct. This alienation is a typical political theme; therefore, Ni Weihua’s reflections have far transcended the boundaries of fine art or aesthetics. This is where the significance of Ni Weihua’s works lies.

# Model Portrait

**Photography**
**2007- Present**
**Location:** Shanghai / Jiangsu / Gwangju, Seoul (South Korea) / Beijing / Zhejiang / Istanbul etc.

By altering the habitual framing of the subjects being photographed, I attempt to force the audience to change the way they see. Adopting a standardized, continuous method of taking and displaying portrait photos in the same way as shooting real people can compulsorily draw the audience's attention to the models' "portraits". In a social space where the daily, commercial and even political nature of portraits coexist, and in the current context where thousands of selfies are produced and consumed every second on social media, the portraits of these human-like yet non-human models become a kind of "spectacle". On the contrary, they are more capable of reflecting certain highlights of stories in this consumerist society, the evolutionary thread of collective aesthetic styles, and the role that human tension plays in the process of social development.






## Zhu Dake's Comment (Professor of Tongji University, renowned cultural scholar):

Ni Weihua's *Model Portraits* feature mannequins crafted from plastic materials, yet their eyes are simulated with glass—extraordinarily bright, clear, and shimmering with a divine radiance. This is, to my mind, one of the most intriguing exhibitions exploring the symbolism of the eyes, prompting me to form a far-reaching, forward-looking metaphorical prediction about this organ, the visual system it represents, and the countless images that extend from it. These works lead me to make such a profound metaphorical projection regarding the eye, the visual framework it embodies, and the endless array of visuals stemming from it. When it comes to the eye as an organ, who are its defenders and saviors? Who can truly preserve its essence? At this moment, the answer has become highly questionable.

## Liu Li's Comment (Critic, Curator):

By altering the habitual framing of his subjects, Ni Weihua attempts to force the audience to change their way of seeing. He extricates the mannequins from the perspective colluded by commercial institutions and fashion photographers, and instead adopts a fieldwork-like, continuous method of taking and displaying standardized portraits in the same way as shooting real people, thereby compulsorily drawing the audience's attention to the mannequins' "portraits". This is Ni Weihua's artistic appeal. In a social space where the daily, commercial and political nature of portraits coexist, and in the current context where thousands of selfies are produced and consumed every second on social media, the portraits of these human-like yet non-human mannequins instantly become a unique spectacle. *Model Portraits* is rooted in an era where people's way of viewing portraits has been cultivated into an aesthetic mechanism by commercialized fashion photography techniques. Such a portrait aesthetic, unique to the present time, is like a mark of the era. The artist, much like conducting a scientific experiment, replaces real-life celebrities with clothing mannequins as the subjects of his photography, forcing an unavoidable confrontation between this viewing mechanism and the mannequin models. This is akin to testing how a computer program would perform new operations when faced with an unprecedented new system: would it fail to recognize it, or would it generate something astonishing?

# Tracing

*Tracing* is a visual intervention (tracking and reproducing) initiative initiated by Ni Weihua, targeting all kinds of textures and traces, with the aim of enhancing or overlaying these traces to heighten their visual discernibility. The project initially took easel painting as its experimental method. Starting from 2018, it shifted its carriers to old buildings, ruined walls, newly built rough houses, rocks, old wooden planks and other elements in public social spaces, drawing on natural traces (left by weathering and corrosion) and artificially painted overlay marks as image resources. Through techniques such as filling in contrasting colors using extreme color contrasts, delineating textures with hard edges to amplify visual differences, and other operations that accentuate traces, those forgotten and overlooked trace images in public social spaces are brought to the forefront, transformed into appropriated and intervened new images and visual spectacles.



A diverse range of forms have been developed under *Tracing*, including monochromatic *Tracing* (using black ink, white and blue pigments, etc.), colored *Tracing*, water-based *Tracing*, three-dimensional embossed *Tracing* (with chiseled and silicone-based *Tracing* currently developed), surface *Tracing* (on walls, rocks, etc.) and human skin *Tracing* (facial tracing).

As an art initiative launched by the artist, *Tracing* has evolved through four distinct phases: starting as studio-based creation by Ni Weihua (Version 1.0), expanding to his personal behavioral practice in public social spaces (Version 2.0), further developing into a collective tracing initiative led by him as the organizer (Version 3.0), and finally evolving into Version 4.0 (the "artist's retreat mode", where participants discover locations online without the organizer's presence, and local individuals organize volunteers to carry out tracing following the operational procedures provided by the initiator). *Global Water-based Tracing Flash Mob* marked the first implementation of tracing using water instead of ink; this event took place simultaneously across multiple locations in December 2021, involving nearly 100 participants from 24 sites in 20 cities across 13 countries spanning 6 continents.



From June 2018 to December 2025, a total of 365 events have been held across 34 locations worldwide, with the participation of 2,400 people.

The locations of *Tracing* activities cover 20 sites in China: Beijing, Tianjin, Aranya (Hebei), Shijiazhuang (Hebei), Jiaxian (Henan), Suzhou (Jiangsu), Wuxi (Jiangsu), Jiaxing (Jiangsu), Changzhou (Jiangsu), Yuncao Ancient Town (Anhui), Hangzhou (Zhejiang), Hengdu (Zhejiang), Fenghua (Zhejiang), Guangzhou (Guangdong), Zhuhai (Guangdong), Foshan (Guangdong), Shenzhen, Haikou (Hainan), Chengdu (Sichuan) and Shanghai (covering 16 administrative districts), as well as 14 international sites: London (UK), Berlin (Germany), Helsinki (Finland), Bologna (Italy), Amsterdam (Netherlands), Kyiv (Ukraine), Kigali (Rwanda), Tasmania (Australia), Toronto (Canada), Los Angeles (USA), La Plata (Argentina), Shizuoka (Japan), Delft (Netherlands) and The Hague (Netherlands).



Before the *Tracing*



Affter the *Tracing*



Before the *Tracing*



Affter the *Tracing*



Intellectually disabled children are engaged in *Tracing*



A group of colorful *Tracing* maps







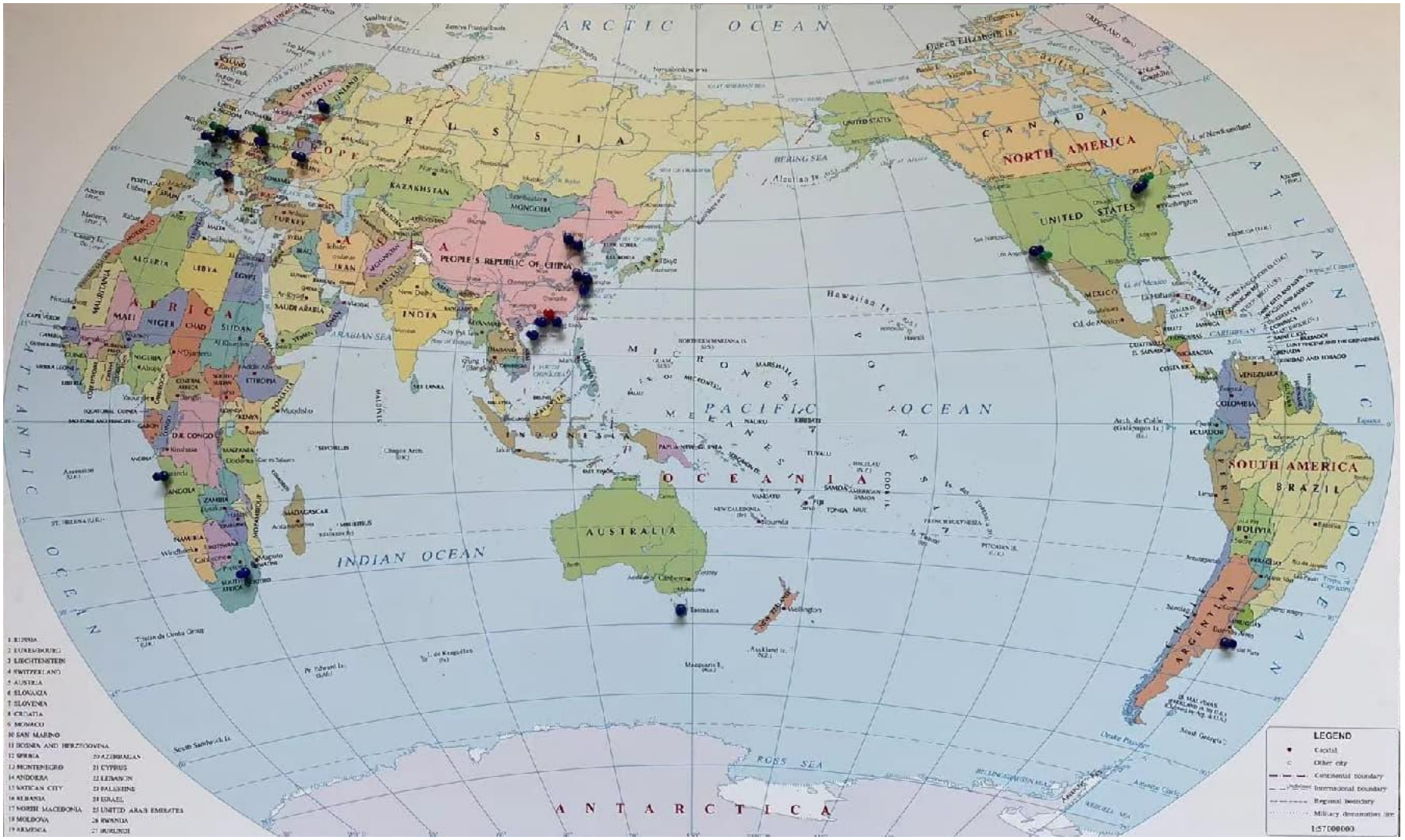


The *Tracing* map is being removed or covered up

# Global Water-based Tracing Flash Mob

Global Water-based Tracing Flash Mob Co-curated by Ni Weihua and Wanglai Culture, this event is not only the first Tracing practice that uses water instead of ink as the medium, but also an upgraded version of Tracing—Version 4.0 Plus. Taking place simultaneously in December 2021, the event unfolded across Guangzhou, Shanghai, Beijing, Shenzhen, Tianjin, Suzhou, Hangzhou, Zhuhai, Haikou, Toronto, Los Angeles, London, Berlin, Kyiv, Helsinki, Bologna, Rotterdam, Luanda, Tasmania and La Plata. It engaged nearly 100 participants from 24 locations in 20 cities spanning 13 countries across 6 continents.






The Map of **Global Water-based Tracing Flash Mob**









Zero barriers, zero costs, zero pollution, zero distance

Artistic Empowerment，Decentration

# 追痕演化图谱

Evolution map of the Tracing

| | Pre 1.0<br>痕迹绘画<br>Inprint painting | 1.0<br>追痕架上绘画<br>Tracing painting | 2.0<br>个体追痕<br>Individual Tracing | 3.0<br>组织群体追痕<br>Collective Tracing | 4.0<br>自发追痕<br>Spontaneous Tracing | 5.0<br>无人化追痕<br>Unmanned Tracing | 6.0<br>元宇宙追痕<br>Metaverse Tracing |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **单色（黑色为主）**<br>Homochromy<br>(Predominantly black) |  |  |  |  |  | 自然追痕案例收集<br>Collection of natural tracing cases<br>AI 追痕<br>AI Tracing | 数字孪生游戏<br>Digital twin games of Tracing |
| **彩色**<br>Colourfu | | | |  | | AI 追痕<br>AI Tracing | 数字孪生游戏<br>Digital twin games of Tracing |
| **凹形（凿印追痕）**<br>Sunken<br>Chisel Tracing | | |  | | | | 数字孪生游戏<br>Digital twin games of Tracing |
| **凸形（硅胶追痕）**<br>Convex<br>Silicone Tracing | | | |  | | | 数字孪生游戏<br>Digital twin games of Tracing |
| **水**<br>Water Tracing | | |  |  |  | 自然追痕案例收集<br>Collection of natural tracing cases | 数字孪生游戏<br>Digital twin games of Tracing |
| **身体追痕**<br>Body Tracing | | | |  | | AI 追痕<br>AI Tracing on the body | 数字孪生游戏<br>Digital twin games of Tracing |

## Gu Kaijun's Comment (Critic, Curator，Artist):

*Tracing* is a topological game with the original code of life, a dual topology of the physical space and cultural time of the city. Its charm lies in the process of deconstruction. In Shanghai (and other cities), there is such a group of dynamic young people who share the pleasure of generating this artistic idea with Ni Weihua. *Tracing* takes art out of the ivory tower of the traditional "spiritual prototype" and returns it to the original "life prototype" and "vitality prototype" that are closely related to everyone. The inclusiveness and interactivity of Ni Weihua's *Tracing* practice break the boundaries of art, build a mutual interpretation relationship between the audience and contemporary art, and at the same time serve as an experimental exploration and exchange on how contemporary art can integrate into the post-commercial (post-materialistic) society.

Ni Weihua draws on nearly zero-cost human resources from post-modern community platforms, along with waste and ruin landscapes, old bricks, and water—mostly inorganic materials. His works are anti-metaphorical, pointing to a biosemiotic and anti-linguistic mode of visual shock that dispenses with the need for participants to have any cultural identity or stance; instead, they only need to restore and repeat the inherent traces on the walls, much like using a point-and-shoot camera. From the perspective of semeiotics, "Tracing" is not the "creation of traces" as in abstractivism, but rather a form of "following traces". This act of "following traces" has profound anti-shamanistic and anti-religious Zen underpinnings, echoing the teaching from the Diamond Sutra: "Abide nowhere and the mind will manifest". Participants let go of rationality and experience a sense of emptiness and joy that springs from the depths of life.

The most significant common ground between Ni Weihua's socially empowering art and Joseph Beuys' maxim Everyone is an Artist lies in their shared connection to the free art education system. Beuys held the conviction that art would ultimately expand all boundaries, bringing together all intellectual groups in the end. In contrast, Ni Weihua's empowering *Tracing* practice deconstructs the myth of the artist as a divine creator, reconstructs the significance of ruined spaces for the current status and future development of cities, and turns these spaces into sacred ruin landscapes. By retaining artistic forms while embracing an ultra-pop approach, Ni Weihua transforms the human body into a camera, creating an anti-linguistic sample of visual shock that fulfills what Roland Barthes described as the dissolution of the artist's divine creativity by mass culture.

## Hao Qingsong's Comment (Critic, Curator):

Ni Weihua revives ruins in his own unique way. The original code is the genesis of art, so we may ask: where does art (ruins) originate? To me, it is more of a form of restoration and management; "Tracing" is the mending of the cracks and flaws in civilization. Acknowledging these flaws and original sin also marks a new starting point for us to define the ideal civilized order.

# Paintings

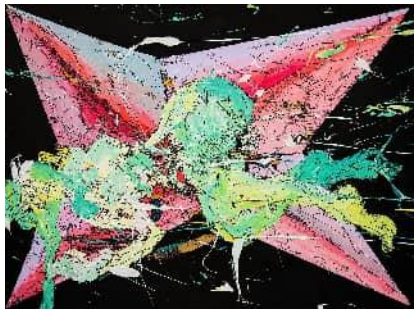
Ni Weihua’s early paintings highlighted anthropological concerns and emphasized the idea that contemporary images are historical images. Through comprehensive techniques such as stacking, covering, washing and rendering, he implanted contemporary figures, objects and activity traces into rock painting-like "relics", creating scenes that feel as if people thousands of years later would uncover them after brushing away dust and dirt. By means of "visual archaeology" excavation, he presented the characteristics, activity traces and aesthetic and cultural information of contemporary people on the canvas from another dimension.

The *Tracing* series of paintings is a further extension of Ni Weihua’s "relic" painting experiments. Specifically, it uses edge tracing and reverse contrast painting techniques to reveal and strengthen relics or traces, thereby highlighting the integration of "artificial" and "accidental" traces, forming a "pop art" image style that combines cold and hot abstract expressions. In this way, it prompts people to reflect on the implications between wildness and tranquility, sensibility and rationality, nature and humanity, and instantaneity and eternity.

Ni Weihua’s latest painting series Traces of the Future is a new attempt to further refine his unique artistic language on the basis of the *Tracing* series. In addition to consolidating and highlighting the dynamism of expressionism, it also presents an unfamiliar and abrupt "sense of the future" in terms of form, materials and color language processing. He constructs the micro-folded textures of visual tracing through the composite overlay of acrylic imprints and 3D materials. This collision of materials enables the visual translation of time from a unidirectional linear form to a multi-dimensional interwoven landscape, creating a temporary, flowing and uncertain magical scene. In this way, the series explores post-contemporary sociological topics at the intersection of carbon-based and silicon-based life, such as the subconscious, identity recognition, subject-object transformation and cultural monster imagery, ultimately turning the works into a "visual archive" practice that carries temporal information and ideological issues.

















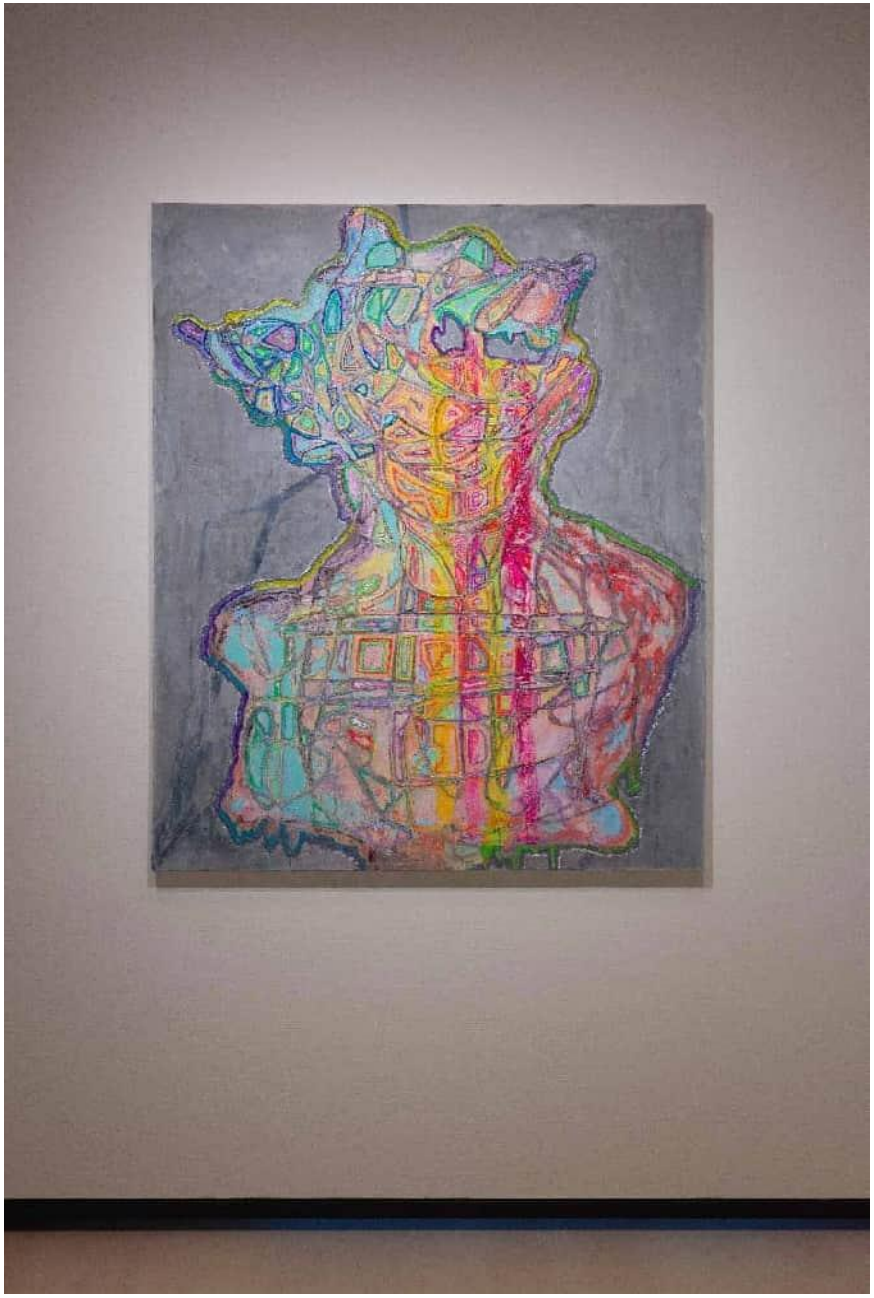


















## Wei Jingjing's Comment (Critic, Curator):

Ni Weihua employs the texture of lines—their curvature or straightness, density, and thickness—to evoke a sense of familiarity. In his explorations and experiments, he seeks the shape of the soul, imbuing his works with distinct surreal undertones. Ni Weihua's later *Tracing* series shows a tendency to transcend the visible world toward the invisible. His works bid farewell to the recognizable forms of the past and turn to the traces of all things, seeking out those that were never meant to be images. He depicts the world to bear witness to its existence—able to recall the stories that have unfolded, portray the state of things after they have happened, and pursue the visible remnants of the present. To put it in the terms of traditional Chinese aesthetic thought: to grasp the spirit and forget the form.

## Pei Manyi's Comment (Critic, Curator,Poet):

What makes Ni Weihua truly valuable is his keen insight rooted in real-world issues, rather than the mere borrowing of empty "philosophical theories". When sorting out the academic process of the construction of Ni Weihua's conceptual logic, one can clearly perceive that he has extended Michel Foucault's theory of "archaeology of knowledge" through his own practice into the broader realm of visual culture known as "visual archaeology".

## Gu Kaijun's Comment (Critic, Curator，Artist):

What Ni Weihua has created in his *Tracing* easel painting series is by no means a simple visual game, but a radical operation of "trace politics" with oil paint as the medium. Through the violent juxtaposition of extreme contrasting colors and hard-edge delineation, he deconstructs the initial painted traces into a paradoxical symbiosis of materiality and symbolism—the moment when the biological strokes of the human body "tame" the natural cracks is, in fact, a fatal parody of the cybernetics of modernist painting: artistic production is alienated from the free creation of subjectivity into a passive ritual of reproducing predetermined traces. Such "reverse simulation" in turn renders traces "simulacra of simulacra", which not only dismantles the "myth of originality" of modernism, but also pushes the ready-made logic of pop art into the abyss of democratization—every participant is reduced to a transporter of traces and a tamperer of meaning, and the subjectivity of painting collapses completely in collective tracing. When oil paint reiterates the declaration of "the death of art" on the canvas, Ni Weihua precisely uses the most sophisticated painting grammar to prove that critical production itself has long since become an exquisitely preserved specimen of cyclic regeneration within the system. Those cracks reinforced by extreme colors will eventually turn into tradable cognitive commodities under the logic of capital—which is perhaps the most acerbic paradoxical footnote to the "end of art theory".

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