

## Press Release

## Long March Independent Project | Walking Guides

Curator: Li Jia

Artists: 44 Monthly, Pak Sheung Chuen, Chen Xi, Kuang-Yu Tsui, Ge Yulu, Jason Ho, Li Nu, Li Binyuan, Go to Street with Boat towards Coop, Song Long, Wan Qing + Zhang Hanlu, Zeng Hong, Zhang Donghui, Zhao Bang, Zhou Zhang

20 May 2023 - 27 Aug 2023

Long March Independent Space, Beijing

*To the ordinary man.*

*To a common hero, an ubiquitous character, walking in countless thousands on the streets. In invoking here at the outset of my narratives the absent figure who provides both their beginning and their necessity, I inquire into the desire whose impossible object he represents. What are we asking this oracle whose voice is almost indistinguishable from the rumble of history to license us, to authorize us to say, when we dedicate to him the writing that one formerly offered in praise of the gods or the inspiring muses?*

Michel de Certeau<sup>1</sup>

A figure walks along the huge thoroughfares and tiny allies of Beijing with a wooden billboard bearing the words “Li Binyuan’s Studio” on his back, traversing the urban villages, art districts, shopping centres, hutongs, and the crowds of people casting sidelong glances his way (Li Binyuan, *Buffering*). Two young women set off from different parts of the city, filming the scenes they meet along the way, the quarantined apartment complexes, the barricaded areas under overpasses, eventually coming to the same spot where they share the footage they have recorded on their phones across the water filled barrier that still separates them (Wan Qing and Zhang Hanlu, *Bye Bye, Barrier!*). Someone drags a speaker across the uneven road, recording the music of the streets (Zhou Zhang, *The Vibrato of Life*). Someone plants vegetables at the side of a tarmac road (Cui Guangyu, *Rubbing the City: Rotting Attack*). A group of people wade through the streets of Wuhan on the first day of the Chinese New Year, carrying a canoe from Wuchang’s East Lake to the riverside in Hankou (*Go to Street with Boat towards Coop*). The bodies that make their way through the city streets combine to form a kind of rhythm, a continuous movement, each body distinct yet in a state of co-existence. They also create a series of moments during which the rules of life seem briefly suspended, rewritten or reconstructed, as though in just such an instant, our imaginations could spill over and directly reveal the reality of the present. The walking body redefines the alley, the building, the city, and space. In this sense, we have no need for a guide to walking; the act of walking is itself a guide – to creating and reinventing life, a pluralistic and shared life, the kind of free and autonomous life that we truly desire.

“When we walk we also transgress, resisting convention through the contingency, playfulness and spontaneity of the events, actions and relations we encounter.” In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau outlines a rhetoric of walking. When we walk in the city, we influence our surroundings just as our surroundings influence us. The pedestrian occupies the urban space, takes possession of it, blurring its boundaries as he or she moves from one setting to another, thereby creating his or her own stories.<sup>2</sup> The things a nameless figure sees, encounters and passes by as he or she wanders through the city become part of a spatial story, an artwork engendered by that person’s journey. Furthermore, the lives of the silent multitudes squeezed into the margins are brought back to the city’s centre stage, reminding us that art ought to be the weapon of the weak. Within the patchwork of tensions, power relations and politics that form the urban space, atomised individuals are always able to make use of “tactics”, whether consciously or unconsciously, to carry out micro-acts of resistance or rebellion. A combination of wits, tactics, struggle and poetry allows them to navigate the strictly managed and organised space of the city like a guerrilla army, adapting to the moment and their surroundings to locate and occupy a position from which they can establish their own space, social relations and scope for micro-political action.<sup>3</sup> In the exhibition “Walking Guides”, we do not confine the act of walking to the mythic expression of a romantic artistic temperament, nor do we approach walking from an “artistic research” perspective that seeks to produce knowledge by way of field research or a methodological focus. We are more concerned with walking itself as a critique and remoulding of everyday life, as action deeply embedded in the quotidian, as a form of poetic and political aesthetics.

But perhaps walking is more of an invitation: to accompany young people as they journey across an island in festive spirits – learning, understanding and creating together (44 Monthly); to post up on a street corner, make Spring Festival scrolls with the neighbours and project a self-made film (*Go to Street with Boat towards Coop*); to follow Pak Sheung Chuen as he explores the familiar or unfamiliar streets that have been swallowed up in the crease where opposing pages meet in a map book; or search with Song Long for “naturally” occurring slopes to slide down in the porticoes of large buildings, subway station entrances or pedestrian bridges. Perhaps these meanderings will lead you to those isolated spaces, those constricted lives, those proscribed and deprived communities – the hidden margins of city life and the fissures they contain, where you might discover the methods by which an ordinary pedestrian

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<sup>1</sup> Michel de Certeau (tr. Steven Rendall). *The Practice of Everyday Life*. University of California Press.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

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attempts to climb over a barricade, the everyday actions of a silent figure wandering through an urban village scheduled for demolition, or the techniques and knowledge implemented by street sellers to evade or even destroy the apparatus professionally designed to control them. Whether in the form of a creative moment of spontaneous intervention or a more considered and tactical personal engagement, these tiny, bodily acts of resistance forever characterise the urban space. In the most concrete and unpredictable sense, they serve to transform their conditions, to launch subversive counter-offensives, to create unforeseeable cracks in the iron wall of reality...

It is in this sense that this exhibition's task is not to present the particularity, talent and will of individual artists – even if each participant, as a featured artist, repeatedly brings the “tactics as art” outlined by de Certeau ingeniously to life by way of their “walking through the streets”. This exhibition instead seeks to present everyday life as the domain of art, not artists; a means by which ordinary people can begin to put into practice an *écriture* of their history and being. On the battlefield of life, ordinary people and artists share the same possibilities for rebellion, resistance and transgression. It is for this reason that we look forward to seeing how audiences “walk through”, explore and actively engage with the space of the gallery. We have no intention of merely providing an observational perspective or a framework of knowledge. The view of an outsider often brings with it the misconception that the abstract viewing and knowing subject can remove itself from the events, actions and people being observed, exhibited or represented. Only when the body is revealed to be a feeling and acting totality, as in the concrete and everyday act of walking, can the decentring and recentring of knowing take place.<sup>4</sup> Rather than saying that the experience of walking in the gallery is a kind of “participation”, perhaps it is better to say that it is a kind of awakening to the reality of experience, an awareness of the immediate possibility of seizing the initiative, a desire to act and experiment.

It is in order to elevate walking over seeing that we have invited the artist Li Nu to rebuild the gallery space. In consultation with the featured artists, he has incorporated their work into his spatial structure, which shares the ambiguity of our reality. This tangled edifice of fire-resistant mineral wool resembles both street and ruin and acts both as an artwork itself and the material framework for the exhibition. The work's distinctive use of both material (mineral wool is a non-flammable material formed of volcanic rock) and concept (the Chinese name for the piece is a homonym of “mineral wool” meaning “extension”) means it both stands on its own as a work of art while acting as the structure within which the exhibition is presented. By including a spatial construction that is both functional and symbolic, which acts as both reference to and co-extension of the real world, we hope to disrupt (if only partially) the static neutrality of the “white box”, to re-contextualise the presentation of art, and through such modes of interaction as contrast, encounter, conflict and resonance, to both reproduce and represent the dynamic network of force fields that constitute spatial reality.

To close, let us return to the quote that opens this text, which comes from the foreword to de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* and proposes a modest ideal that this exhibition shares. Of course, during the long revolution of the twentieth century, with its avant-garde movements and their aesthetic artifacts, its endless advocates of varying forms of realism, and its attempts to describe and critique the extent of art's democratisation, we can always catch sight of the nameless and ubiquitous “ordinary person” around whom a plethora of debates, controversies, explorations and disagreements have circulated. However, at the heart of all this has always lain a conspicuous absence, the question I have kept vaguely and awkwardly returning to in the preparations for this exhibition, as well as in this text. Echoes of the “final avant-garde”, the Situationist International, can be heard in de Certeau's attempt to call forth, in almost eulogistic terms, a form of subjectivity that has always remained in the wings, but de Certeau's text also invites us to ask ourselves if even today we still lack the language to properly describe the subjectivity of the “ordinary person”, to delineate and elucidate the cultural and artistic meaning of the nameless figure as sovereign subject. Are the resources available to us so lacking that we must draw from the language hitherto reserved for the outdated notions of gods and muses? To a large extent, radical culture and art have merely perpetuated elitism and individual mythologies in a new guise, a dispiriting state of affairs for anyone who looks around at the world in which we live. Surely the art that truly belongs to the “ordinary person” should be driven by an attempt to approach the utopian. Even today, facing a future that is almost used up, we still cannot stop dreaming, must not stop putting one foot in front of the other, even if, in so doing, what the walker is able to depart from, for the moment, is only his or herself.

## About the Curator

**Li Jia** is an independent curator and author based in Beijing. She used to work as an associate director at Pace Gallery, Beijing from 2012 to 2015 and then as the senior curator at Taikang Space, a non-profit art institution in Beijing, from 2015 to 2020. Her recent curatorial projects include: *Spatial Triad* (2023), *Zhang Xiaogang: Mayflies* (2023), *Meet You at the Corner: the 1<sup>st</sup> Dangxia Young Artist Award* (2022), *In the midst of it all* (2021), *A Geography of Resistance* (2019-2020), *Other Lives of the Alternative Spaces* (2019), *Genders Engender* (2018), *Precariousness* (2018), among others. She was awarded the first Hyundai Blue Prize (Creativity) for achievement in curatorial practice in 2017. Li is the recipient of the Asian Cultural Council (ACC) Individual Grant in 2020. She is currently a visiting scholar at the Deying Curatorial Fellowship Program in Shanghai.

Li is a regular contributor to *Artforum*, *LEAP* and *Randian*. Her articles were also published in *ArtAsiaPacific*, *Flash Art*, *YISHU*, etc. She graduated from Peking University Law School and School of Economics with a double Bachelor's degree in law and economics, and from Peking University School of Arts with a Master's degree in art history.

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<sup>4</sup> Henri LeFebvre (tr. Donald Nicholson Smith). *The Production of Space*. p61.

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**Artists Biography**

**44 Monthly** is an extension of **Theater 44**, evolved from a shared post-COVID-19 experience. Theater 44 has been active since 2016 as a collaborative platform with participants located around the globe. Curators, artists, filmmakers, researchers, journalists, activists, musicians comprise Theater 44, and each project brings about different teaming-ups. Early 2020, Theater 44 initiated 44 Monthly, a self-publication and community experiment where quarantined individuals get together online and form temporary creative communities through projects of collective writing, editing, and designing. Till this day, 44 Monthly has released 9 publications, 4 short films, 1 radio drama, and two multi-media spatial installations. After the lockdown, its members went on field trips to Sanya, Yangjiang, and Shanghai which inspired more collaborative creations. 44 Monthly experiments interdependent creativity and responds to social issues via ethical organizing and everyday life practice.

**Pak Sheung Chuen** (b.1977, Fujian), grows up and receives education in Hong Kong. His creations are rooted in the life and unique social patterns in Hong Kong. In 2002 he graduated from Department of Fine Art with a minor in theology, Chinese University of Hong Kong, and completed Master of Art in Philosophy in 2017. Since 2003, he has published his nearly 20-year creation as video and text in the Sunday Ming Pao newspaper in the form of conceptual and performance art. In 2009, he represented Hong Kong at the 53rd Venice Biennale with his solo exhibition "Making (Perfect) World", and he has participated in many international exhibitions, including the Taipei Biennale 2010, 2012, Yokohama Triennial 2008, Guangzhou Triennial 2008, Liverpool Biennial 2012, Asian Triennial 2014, Busan Biennale 2006, 2016, Tate Modern Collection 2017, "China Power Station: Part 2", and so on.

**Chen Xi** (b.1985) is a multi-skilled artist who spends his life creating fictional worlds. He is an expert in painting and a maker of animation. Chen Xi's large painting series include "Single Layer Painting", "I Am Your Matters", "Spaceship Series", "Princess Series", "Animal Series", "War Series", "Ink Painting Series" and so on. Chen Xi's works have been exhibited in: Yuz Museum, Tokyo Photographic Art Museum, West Bund Art Center, Shanghai Himalayas Museum, OCAT Shanghai, CAFA Art Museum, K11 Art Museum, V Art Center, A+ Contemporary, Boers-Li Gallery, Star Gallery, etc. Chen Xi's paintings have also participated in the UCCA Gala charity auction. Chen Xi's animations have been shortlisted for the main Competition at the Annecy IAFF, Ottawa IAF, FIRST IFF, New Chitose Airport IAF, and so on. Also, Chen Xi's animations have been exhibited in the "FILM" section of Art Basel three times.

**Kuang-Yu Tsui** was born in Taipei, Taiwan in 1974. In 1997 he graduated from National Institute of the Arts and has exhibited internationally since then, including Venice Biennale, Liverpool Biennale, Werkleitz Biennial, Reina Sofia Museum, ZKM Center for Art and Media, Contour Biennial, Chelsea Art Museum, Mori Museum, OK Centrum. Kuang-Yu Tsui has been trying to respond to the adaptation relation between human and the society from a biological point of view. He also attempts to redefine or question the matrix of the institution we inhabit through different actions and experiments that ignore the accustomed norm. His repetitive body experiments accent the absurdity of the social values and reality that people have grown accustomed to.

**Ge Yulu** (b. 1990, Wuhan) graduated from the Media Art Department of Hubei Institute of Fine Arts in 2013, and received a MFA. from the Experimental Art Department at Central Academy of Fine Arts in 2018. He now works and lives on the outskirts of Beijing. Ge Yulu's interests lie in the witty expressions in public urban space. Through his art, Ge Yulu strives to mock up the hidden paradox in life. By intervening and negotiating with the public space using his body, Ge Yulu aims to create new dynamic relationships. He held solo exhibitions at Beijing Commune, Beijing and Fei Art Museum, Guangzhou. His recent group exhibitions include "Aichi Triennale 2019 -- Taming Y/Our Passion", Nagoya, Japan (2019); the 1st Borderless Art Season, Fei Art Museum, Guangzhou, China (2018); "Altering Home", 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, Japan (2018); the Exhibition of Annual of Contemporary Art of China", Beijing Minsheng Art Museum, Beijing, China, (2018); "Stress Field: the 4th Documentary Exhibition of Fine Arts", Hubei Art Museum, Wuhan, China (2017); "Antibody Fresh Vision 2017", OCT Loft, Shenzhen, China (2017); "CAFAM Biennial: Negotiating Space", CAFA Museum, Beijing, China (2017), and etc. He was nominated for Art 8 Prize Youth Finalist Award and the 13<sup>th</sup> AAC Art China Young Artist Finalist Award in 2019. His eponymous solo exhibition "Ge Yulu" won Gallery Weekend Beijing 2020's "Best Exhibition Award-Innovation Prize".

**Jason Ho** is a curator, urbanist and educator. He is the founder of Mapping Workshop. Jason has taught at a large number of universities across the globe, including RMIT University, The University of Hong Kong, The University of Pennsylvania, and so on. Jason has participated in many international exhibitions including Venice Biennale, Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism and Shenzhen & Hong Kong Architecture|Urbanism Bio-City Biennale. Jason is currently the adjunct professor at the School of Architecture and Urban Design at RMIT University, Melbourne, and also holding an associate professor position at the School of Architecture at South China University of Technology, Guangzhou.

**Li Binyuan** (b.1985, Yongzhou) graduated from the Sculpture Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 2011, and now lives and works in Yongzhou. Li Binyuan has expanded the engagement and visibility of contemporary art in Chinese society with a great deal of bodily practice. At the same time, he also recognized the uniqueness of his own paradigm and the way of paradigm transfer through large-scale trial-and-error behavior. The motivation for his artistic practice is to understand his own space and physical environment through bodily interaction, so that to question and transcend the norms and ideologies that we impose on the environment. As he puts it, the body is not only inseparable from its surroundings, but also "the first stage where things happen".

**Li Nu** graduated with an MA in Sculpture from Royal College of Art. He won the 2015 RBS (Royal British Society of Sculptors) Bursary Awards, and as a member of RBS, lives and works in Beijing. Li Nu roots in everyday life. He

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subverts the perceived boundaries between documentary and fiction, representation and abstraction to explore and achieve a poetic language in art. Through capturing the details of everyday life, he aims to reflect the individual's mood swings and the menial state of population in the evolution of macro-society. The apparently unpromising materials of everyday life are transformed into something metaphorical, poignant, humorous, poetic and dramatic, challenging us to question our received experiences about life and see the world afresh. The concept that he wants to express is never what you have seen. It is always wandering between void and solid.

**Go to Street with Boat towards Coop** is an action of celebrating Spring Festival at street, launched by jamming workshop, Pangolin Art Space, fuyin info and other friends during the Spring Festival in 2022. They took a boat to the streets of Hankou for a tour.

**Song Long** (b.1998, Xuzhou, Jiangsu), currently works and lives in Xi'an. In 2020 she graduated with a BA from Experimental Arts Department, Xi'an Academy of Fine Art. Song Long's practice focus on the relationship between man and the space they live in. She enters into a variety of realistic scenes, leverages the everyday experience through the alienation of the last branches of lives, disturbs and reorganizes the daily regulations, and output the ideas with carefully created sense of questioning and detachment, or playfully, or poetically.

**Wan Qing** mainly shuttles between Guangzhou and Wuling Mountains area. She works mostly in the medium of video (2015-), and is interested in transforming her own encounters and stirring the air. She is also an astrological apprentice (2018-), a long-term participant of Theatre 44 (2017-) and Energy Waving Collective (2020-), and the initiator of Limilink (2023-). Life-creation-collective practice, this triple mechanism of interaction with reality is stimulated and shaped by each other through her bodily field, which continues to nourish a composite and subtle landform.

**Zhang Hanlu** is an independent curator, writer, and editor interested in art as social practice. She worked at artforum.com.cn and Guangdong Times Museum. In 2020 Hanlu founded Social Practice Lab (SPL), an initiative which supports, co-creates, and curates socially engaged art and trans-disciplinary collaborations. She is also a member of Theater 44, a platform exploring collective creativity. Hanlu has organized events or exhibition at Pearl River Delta, Shenyang, Paris, Manchester, Qiongdongnan, New York and beyond.

**Zeng Hong** (b. 1974, Ziyang) graduated from Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts and now lives in Beijing. From his early depictions of workers' dormitories, Zeng Hong's use of ruler seemed to represent a break with traditional painting language. In his following work, he lingered between painting's evolution of images and today's reality, so the cracks between abstraction and realism often appeared in the thread of his works. The artist believes that the cracks are the projection of history on the individual, and the work is the product of space and history. Its meaning is not fixed, but generated by the mutual stimulative relationship between space and display.

**Zhang Donghui** (b. 1992, Shijiazhuang) graduated from the Sculpture Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 2017. Now he lives and works in Beijing. Solo exhibition: 2022 "A Man, WeChat moments and Ruined port", Hunsand Center for Contemporary Art, Shijiazhuang.

**Zhao Bang** (b.1989, Luoyang) studied at the China Academy of Art, and now lives and works in Beijing. Zhao Bang's works reconceive and reimagine the relationship between everyday objects, art systems, and people's interfaced lives in a humorous, endearing, and inspiring way. The artist invites the viewer to use new meanings and interpretations to challenge human logic and common sense. His works organize and structure "language-image" in a broader concept, trying to explore the ways in which the ideology that rooted in the contemporary technical life landscape is constructed and subverted, and to provide an inner logical experience that might be considered absurd.

**Zhou Zhang** (b.1992, Anhui) graduated from Hubei Institute of Fine Arts (HIFA) with a Bachelor of New Media in 2016. Now he is studying in the art direction of ENSA Bourges (France), and is currently engaged in video, performance and photography. His work *The Eighth Episode* was selected into the "VIA Art Channel, special session for the video arts of Chinese artists" and was exhibited in the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France (2016), and qualified for the Golden Shuan ma zhuang Awards and won the Shuan ma zhuang Awards. Xi'an, China (2016). His graduation work was selected into the "Journey of thousand miles" 2016 Excellent Works Exhibition for the eight Institute of Fine Arts; Wuhan, China. He has participated in exhibitions including: "Thrive Like Rising Wind And Water", Jun'an Experimental Arts Education Centre Beijing, China (2017); "Do something", Cui Zhenkuan Art Museum, Xi'an, China (2017); "Wuhan Hotline", Wuhan, China (2019); "Heart to Heart Experimental Video", Macao, China (2020); "Double Sided Landscape—Ice and Fire", Wuhan, China (2021); "TRANSDUCTION", Le château d'eau, Bourges, France (2022); *Whistle* (2020) was selected into Première Fenêtre pour la 44e édition du Cinéma du réel, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France (2022); "Windows on the city", No.1 Wufu Road, Meilian, Wuhan (2022).

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