

The 2nd Awarded Exhibition of Jimei x Arles Curatorial Award for Photography and Moving Image

The New Survivors

Curator: WANG Shuman

Artists: Harun Farocki, James T. Hong, Jazmín López, Meiro Koizumi, Ana Mendieta, Nguyễn Trinh Thi, Moe Satt, TANG Chao

Duration: May 20 - July 2, 2023 (Closed on Mondays)

Location: 155A, Caochangdi, Chaoyang District, Beijing

Organizers: Three Shadows Photography Art Centre, CHANEL

Special Co-organizer: Les Rencontres d'Arles

The exhibition starts with my quarantine experience of living and reading. In many instants, there occurred obvious divergence between the real-time and reading time; the real-time became absurd and incomprehensible as if the existence of time could only be shortly sensed during reading moments. Meanwhile, what was fading not only included my sensitivity to time but also my past smug judgment and trust in the meaning of reality.

"The New Survivors" takes video as both a display medium and research object to reflect how the memory of contemporary trauma is recorded, produced, and revised, and in turn constructs new meaning. Some trauma theorists agree with Sigmund Freud's metaphor that trauma occurs like a crystal: it never shatters haphazardly, but rather always follows a secret fault line that makes it disintegrate in a specific manner.¹ However, newer versions of trauma theory try to look beyond the presumed connection between present traumas and past sexual traumas². In her 2012 book, Catherine Malabou cites brain injury as an example of a trauma that immediately has irreversible consequences, destroying the subject's singular identity almost immediately.³ She describes it as follows: "In either case, trauma names a shock that forces open or pierces a protective barrier."⁴

This shock follows the trajectory of trauma theory towards universalisation and later lands on the hybrid reality we face today -- where man-made traumatic events such as disasters, violence, and conflict are naturally disguised, falsified, and fabricated,

1 Sigmund Freud, "Lecture XXXI-The Dissection of the Psychical Personality (1933 [1932])," in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis (Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud)*, eds & trans. James Strachey et al, (Minneapolis: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), 59.

2 Sexual traumas originated from Freud's theory that all hysterical symptoms were caused by childhood sexual "abuse or molestation" which left unconscious memories.

3 Catherine Malabou and Steven Miller, *The New Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), xviii.

4 Ibid, 6.

and become inherent structures in the new normal. Perhaps it is as Malabou says: "Trauma today is the heterogeneous mixture of nature and politics at work in all types of violence, this mixture where politics is annulled as such so that it assumes the face of nature and where nature disappears beneath the mask of politics."⁵ Traumas of different types and origins are produced and promoted by image system, resist personal subconscious cortex, and diffuse new trauma experience. The "new" corresponds with an unrecognisable state, like humans' immune system cannot find the existing antibody (and T cell) as well as recognise and deal with the new virus all along. Therefore, the exhibition firstly records the revealing wounds, then turns to the festering process of the wounds under both natural and technological times, finally leads the audience to different traumatised subjects and puts forward the question on the existential dimension: is the subject alive, and if so, in what form is it existing?

Slavoj Žižek concludes his "the living dead" thesis with the statement that the 21st century is still the century of the living dead, where the "living dead" no longer refers exclusively to the Nazi concentration camps but has become a composite image of various contemporary forms of globalized traumas. On the last day of the 2010s, people around the world counted down the arrival of the new era. However, with the arrival of the new era, there is a global public health crisis unprecedented in this century and even in modern human history. With multiple crises in politics, economy, and society, it experimented the infinite circulation of restart and pause on concrete living things. The trauma experience arose from this might find it difficult to draw on a single traumatic encounter (such as disasters, wars, or pathologies) in historical stages. It is more like a hybrid trauma, an occasional and unforeseen accidental impact, and will long stay underground of contemporary humans' life cycle. Therefore, "The New Survivors" will travel across present and historical moments to witness the whole process of trauma exposure and deterioration and the subject's survival. At the end of the exhibition, a foreshadowing will be set for the audience through a rewinding video work: if we can walk through the exhibition in reverse, can we revisit the trauma sites and their histories?

Excerpt from Curatorial Statement

⁵ Ibid, 156.