

Chelsea College of Art, London

*COPYLEFT 2018*

13–30 November

### 3 Performances, 1 Message

*By Lili Beke*

Confined to classroom 101 on the first floor of Block E at Chelsea College of Arts in London, *COPYLEFT* is an experimental collaboration between twelve students in total, six from the Art Curation programme and six from Fine Arts. The project features a sculpture, an animation and a video installation, besides three performances which are staged once a week for three weeks and must fit the specific time framework of two hours. Redefining artistic practices and the notion of ownership in a public setting, each creative production must aid the worldwide open-source movement. Thus, artists are required to abandon their claim to copyright, enabling access to the public both in real life and online in the form of live-stream recordings, they cannot prevent others from accessing or altering their material in any way.

The means of performance suit the concept of *COPYLEFT* well, seeing that the artists provide a service that can only be theirs and the performances can never be recreated the same way twice. Moreover, the very structure of performance can be regarded as an open source seeing that every participant and observer experiences the act differently.

YaoYao Yo, aka Ember Yu, is the first to perform. Educated in New Media and Creative Media in Hong Kong and Prague, her practice involves movies, photography and bacteria art. The date is November 13 and as the clock strikes 5 pm,

the artist's eyes are covered up. Her entire face is concealed beneath the black and white tape that announces: "FRAGILE". Yu wanders around the room in a completely disorientated state at first, her every move resembling the first steps of a toddler. She's on a quest, searching for a cabinet at the far-right corner of the room, which contains a pile of dark red coloured beans and tapioca. She smiles triumphantly as she makes her way to a pedestal in the opposite end of the room, placing one seed at the time in front of the camera.

On November 15, at noon, Qiaoer Jin takes over the room. She is a recent graduate of the University of Toronto's Visual Studies and Architectural Design programme. Jin primarily works with time-based art forms such as video, sound installation and performance. She is seated at a table, holding up a piece of paper on which we can decipher the following riddle: "Pete and Repeat/ Were in a boat/ Pete fell over/ Who's left? Repeat". Jin records her voice on a phone and plays it on a blue stereo, recording its sound through a second phone and replaying it all on another black stereo. Gradually, the riddle morphs until the words are barely recognizable and echoing and booming noises fill the room.

Bo Fan, the creator of a recent movie entitled *A Requiem for a Rectum* enters the space at 4 pm on November 29, with the finale contribution and performance of *COPYLEFT*. Fan too has a degree in Visual Studies from the University of Toronto and his past work is comprised of drawings, installations, videos, participatory performances, posters, zines and podcasts.

One on one sessions unfold before our eyes, as the artist, seated at a table with a new person sitting across from him every five minutes, applies touch as means of diagnosis. Both parties' hands are

resting on a folded-up sweater in the middle of the table and Fan's fingers graze lightly against the participant's wrist and palm. They share a few minutes in contemplative silence, before the artist engages his participant in a clinical discussion concerning bowel movements.



The three performances are separate, yet they all contribute with the same message. All three require us to reconsider our responsibilities in relation to ourselves and those around us.



Ember Yu's performance, being a true voyeuristic dream, enables beholders to fetishize her all they want as they snap pictures and watch her stumble with perverse glee. Qiaoer Jin's performance too exists in a void, seeing that the devices devour her human input and suspend her further intervention. She sits passively as the distorted and shrieking narrative sequences play on a perpetual and tedious loop. Bo Fan's presence is comical at first, he holds each hand as though he is an oracle, about to predict the future. He delivers his analyses of the interior and exterior workings of each body in a hushed and monotone voice. We remain disengaged, observing the performers in their habitats through windows and screens, like visitors at the zoo.



There comes a moment however, as we watch Yu sit in the rubble, Jin cover her ears amidst a wail and Fan lean in closer, when the laughter catches in our throats. Yu's faceless figure curled up on the floor seems to scold us for our ignorance. She recovers her feet and reaches her hand out in space, embracing something in her surroundings we, although our sight is perfectly unimpaired, cannot see. Jin glares into the camera defiantly, her palms resting on the table. She appears to be signalling us to step in. We are confident we know which buttons and



commands turn the noise off but appear to have forgotten how to operate these. The skin on our forearm looks translucent at the tip of Fan's thumb, our veins beneath dark and throbbing. Our bodily strengths and weaknesses materialize through his touch and words, along with our lack of consideration for ourselves and our environments.

Each performance featured in *COPYLEFT*, staged for two whole hours, every week for three weeks, paints a clever image of our world. In classroom 101, on the first floor of Block E at Chelsea College of Arts, we are made to consider ways in which we fool ourselves into thinking that we're superior to the world around us. The three performances expose a range of social and psychological dynamics, physical and mental boundaries, sensory abilities and our human frailty; all of which cannot be improved upon through technology alone.