

Esther Schipper

CHRISTOPH KELLER

HITO STEYERL

TAO HUI

June 27 – August 17, 2019

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Esther Schipper is pleased to bring together works by **Christoph Keller**, **Hito Steyerl** and **Tao Hui**. Christoph Keller has been with the gallery since 1997; Hito Steyerl and Tao Hui joined our program recently.

If the works presented here are characterized by a variety of forms, they all address issues of identity, belongings and migration. While Christoph Keller's body of work reflects upon the traces left by history and politics on our urban landscape, Hito Steyerl makes visible our society's political contradictions and hypocrisies through a system of cultural references. Tao Hui's immersive multimedia installations bend the boundaries of fiction and reality to address cultural and identity related issues.

In his installations frequently resembling experimental configurations, Keller uses the discursive possibilities of art to investigate the themes of science and its utopias. In **Ceppo sradicato (uprooted tree)**, 2018, the artist reflects on the concepts of origin, identity and migration, as described among others, by Gilles Clément in his writings on landscape theory. For this work, Keller translocated the stump of a maritime pine tree, which had fallen down on the Via Tiburtina in Rome, right in front of the Campo Verano cemetery, to the exhibition space. The root of the sawn pine, resting on the sterile floor of the exhibition space, recalls the evanescent connection of life with the earth, as well as with history: the pine tree, an iconic symbol of antiquity in Rome's urban landscape, was planted during the Mussolini era. The process of its translocation is presented alongside the installation in a series of black and white photographs.

In the video **Storni Morti**, 2018, Keller filmed the dramatic flight pattern of thousands of starlings at dusk, while accidentally locked at night in the Campo Verano cemetery. Here, the artist delves into animal-human perspectives, as their natural habitats are increasingly constricted by human settlement and climate change. A series of experimental photogravures on paper, printed in collaboration with master craftsmen at the Istituto centrale per la grafica in Rome are presented in the same room.

In her practice, Hito Steyerl focuses on the role of media, technology and the circulation of images in the era of digital nativism. **The Tower**, 2015, which premiered at the 9th Berlin Biennial, consists of a three-channel video in an environment. The video combines CGI and filmed footage of an abandoned observatory. The title of the installation refers to a computer game of the same name developed by Program-Ace, a software design company based in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, in close proximity to Russia. While the tower's graphic is based on the architecture of Great Mosque of Samarra, the narration references the Ziggurat of Ur—both in present-day Iraq—,

an Antique temple partially reconstructed in the 1980s under Saddam Hussein with the idea of recreating the legendary Tower of Babel. In a narration by Ukrainian software designer and Program-Ace CEO Oleg Fonarov, the development of computer games, architectural and luxury office space simulations, and contemporary political events are interwoven. During the whole narrative, the video blends simulations of luxury condos and first-person shooters with improvised tents and barricades, set by paramilitary groups in Kharkiv during the 2014 pro-Russian unrest. A suite of related collages is also presented.

Tao Hui's practice echoes Steyerl's in the way that he "probes the relationship between the media landscape and the social body and reflects on the fraught ethics of belonging in a hyper-mediatized reality" (Alvin Li, "Tao Hui's Politics of Sentimentality", in *Frieze*, Issue 197, August 2018). In **The Tangible Ones**, 2018, Tao has created a holographic projection where two young women address their respective lover— through the means of an internal monologue or a lament—in French and Chinese. Each woman recalls memories while recounting day-to-day lives, their postmodern soliloquy alternating with fragments of a song. The sound and image are out of sync, leaving the spectators unsure of who is speaking. Tao's works are visceral and provocative, yet enlightening and always imbued with a strong emotional power and a sense of displacement, inviting the viewers to confront themselves with their own cultural history, ways of living and identities. **The Tangible Ones** is paired with the 2019 installation **Screen as Display Body**, where four freestanding LED screens on a trolley each broadcasts a single color: red, blue, green, and white. The work refers to the RGB color model, used for image display in TVs, in which red, green and blue are combined in various ways to reproduce a wide array of colors.

Christoph Keller was born in 1967 in Freiburg, Germany. He lives and works in Berlin. Keller has received numerous awards and grants, among them the artist fellowship at Bibliotheca Hertziana in Rome, in 2018–19, the Rom-Preis at the Deutsche Akademie Villa Massimo in Rome in 2017–18, the Capacete Residency São Paulo in 2012, the Studio Grant at the Couvent des Récollets awarded by the city of Paris in 2007, the Bremen Video Art Award in 2006, the MoMa PS1 Studio Program in New York in 2002, and Ars Viva Art Award in 2000. Selected institutional exhibitions include: **Die Villa Massimo zu Gast im Martin Gropius Bau**, Gropius Bau, Berlin (2019); **Il Mondo in Fine**, Galleria Nazionale, Rome (2018); **EKSTASE**, Kunstmuseum Stuttgart (2018); **Giant Steps are what you take – Conversation Piece, Part IV**, Fondazione Memmo, Rome (2017); **Anarchéologie**, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2017); **SH13: Tamawuj**, Sharjah-Biennale with contributions in Dakar, Sharjah and Beirut (2017); **L'Institut des archives sauvages**, Villa Arson, Nice (2012); **Aether – De la Cosmologie à la Conscience**, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2011); **A Terrible Beauty Is Born**, Biennale de Lyon (2011); **Bienal del Fin del Mundo**, Ushuaia, Argentina (2009); **7th Bienal do Mercosul**, Porto Alegre (2009); **Observatorium**, Kunstverein Braunschweig (2008); **Cloudbuster-Project**, MoMA PS1, New York (2003), and **Encyclopaedia Cinematographica**, KW-Berlin (2001).

Hito Steyerl was born in 1966 in Munich, Germany. She currently lives and works in Berlin. Steyerl is the recipient of the 2019 Käthe Kollwitz Prize from Akademie der Künste in Berlin. In 2015, the artist was awarded the EYE Prize from the EYE Film Institute Netherlands and the Paddy & Joan Leigh Fermor Arts Fund. In 2010, she received the New:Vision Award from the Copenhagen International Documentary Festival. The artist represented Germany at the 56th Venice Biennale, and is currently participating in **May You Live In Interesting Times – 58th Venice Biennale** until November 24, 2019. Steyerl's recent solo exhibitions include: **Hito Steyerl: Drill**, Park Avenue Armory, New York (2019); **Power Plants**, Serpentine Galleries, London (2019); **Käthe Kollwitz Prize 2019: Hito Steyerl**, Akademie der Künste, Berlin (2019); **The City of Broken Windows**, Castello di Rivoli, Turin (2018–19); **Liquidity Inc.**, The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2017); **Factory of the Sun**, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2016); **The Distributed Image**, LUMA Foundation, Arles (2016); **Duty-Free Art**, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid (2015); **Liquidity Inc.**, Tensta Konsthall, Spånga (2015); **Too Much World**, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane (2016); **Hito Steyerl**, Artists Space, New York (2015); **Hito Steyerl**, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (2014), and **Hito Steyerl**, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (2014).

Tao Hui was born in 1987 in Yunyang, Chongqing, China. He currently lives and works in Beijing. The artist received his BFA from Sichuan Fine Arts Institute in 2010. In 2015, Tao Hui was awarded The Grand Prize at the 19th Contemporary Art Festival Sesc_ Videobrasil: Southern Panoramas, São Paulo, and the Art Sanya & Huayu Youth Award, Sanya, China. His institutional solo exhibitions include: **New Directions: Tao Hui**, UCCA, Beijing (2015), as well as the group exhibitions **Saudade: Unmemorable Place in Time**, Berardo Collection Museum, Lisbon (2018–2019); **Frontier: Reassessment of Post-Globalisational Politics**, OCAT Institute, Beijing (2018); **How Little You Know About Me**, The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul (2018); **Simultaneous Eidos**: Guangzhou Image Triennial 2017, Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou (2017); **Why Not Ask Again? Arguments, Counter-arguments and Stories**, 11th Shanghai Biennale, Shanghai (2017), and **Bentu Chinese artists in a time of turbulence and transformation**, Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris (2016).

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