

Decentralization

O CAT Shenzhen x OCT Art & Design Gallery

O CAT 深圳 x 奥 · 美术馆

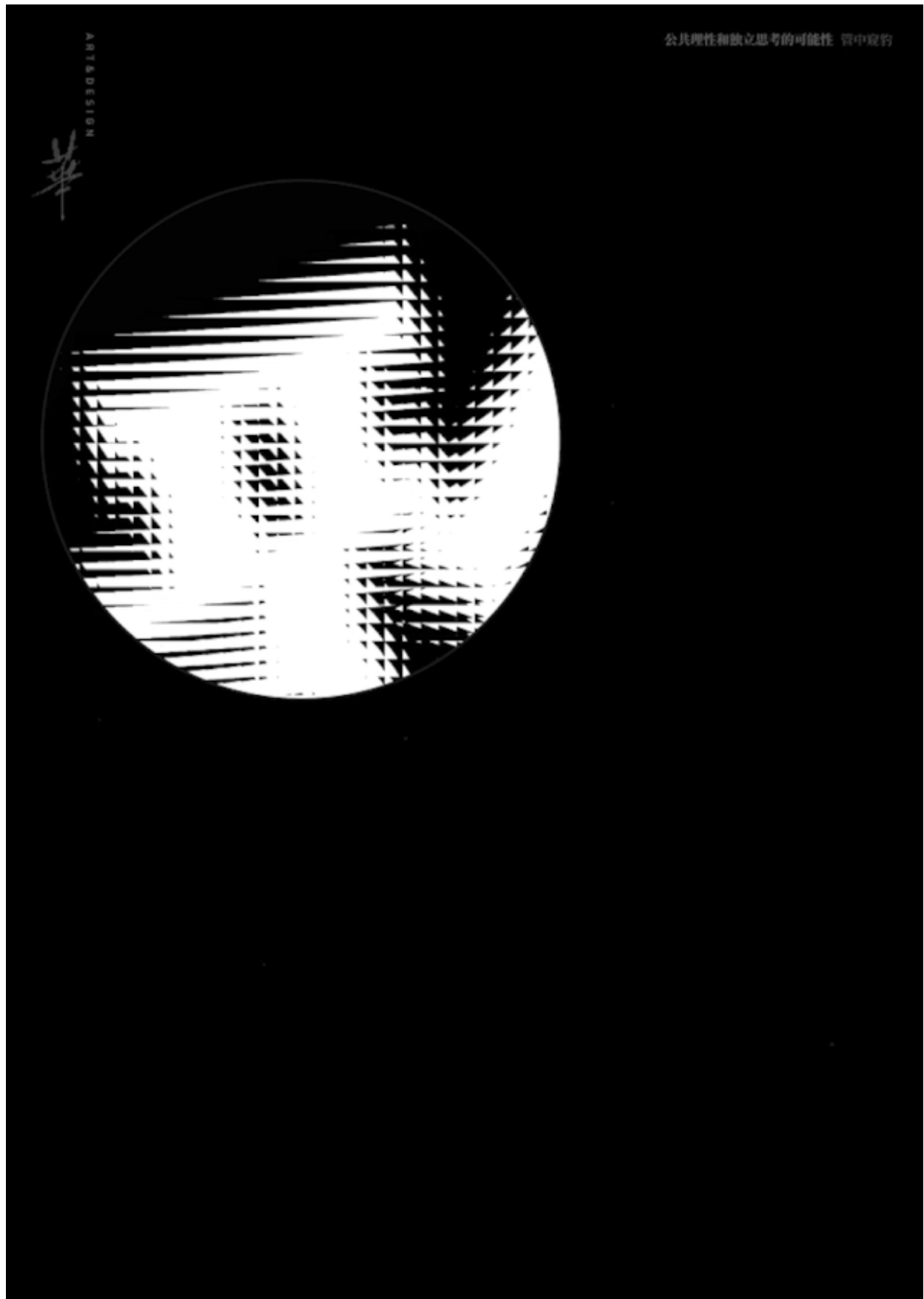
“Decentralization” is a different attempt of this project from the past. “What’s Started and What’s Ended” Series 2020 Special Public Project provides an open and empathetic platform for the public to discuss four issues related to the epidemic in the “O₂ Online Chat.” “Design Notebook” used poster design techniques to record the five keywords raised from the conversation. “Collaborative Writing” guides two groups of writers to express their ideas through relay writing freely.

“奥美术馆”是“What’s Started and What’s Ended”系列2020特别公共项目提供一个开放和共情的平台，让公众就与疫情相关的四个问题在“O₂在线聊天”中进行讨论。“设计笔记本”使用海报设计技巧来记录从对话中提出的五个关键词。“协作写作”引导两个写作小组通过接力写作自由地表达他们的想法。

From a macro perspective, the digital tendency of our world might be the most apparent turn involved in all walks of life, including public education. Therefore, R-Lab invited the members working in the same field of public education but from different popular institutions in China. They would like to share their Pivot-related thoughts from dimensions of individuals, project creators, and Art partitioners of the industry. This would include: the personal pivot as art practitioners, the context of the project, how to balance its publicity and professional, the relation between physical and digital, and suggestions for young people who aimed to engage in public education.

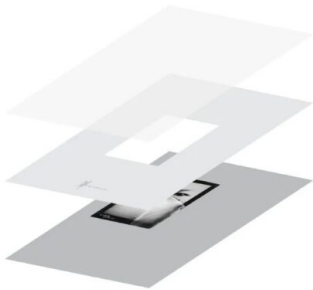
从宏观角度来看，我们世界的数字倾向可能是生活中所有领域中最明显的转变，包括公共教育。因此，R-Lab邀请了在中国不同流行机构中从事同一公共教育领域的成员。他们希望从个人、项目创作者和艺术行业划分者的维度分享他们的Pivot相关想法。这包括：作为艺术从业者的个人转折点，项目的背景，如何平衡其宣传和专业性，物理和数字之间的关系，以及对旨在参与公共教育的年轻人的建议。

The posters from 'Design Notebook'

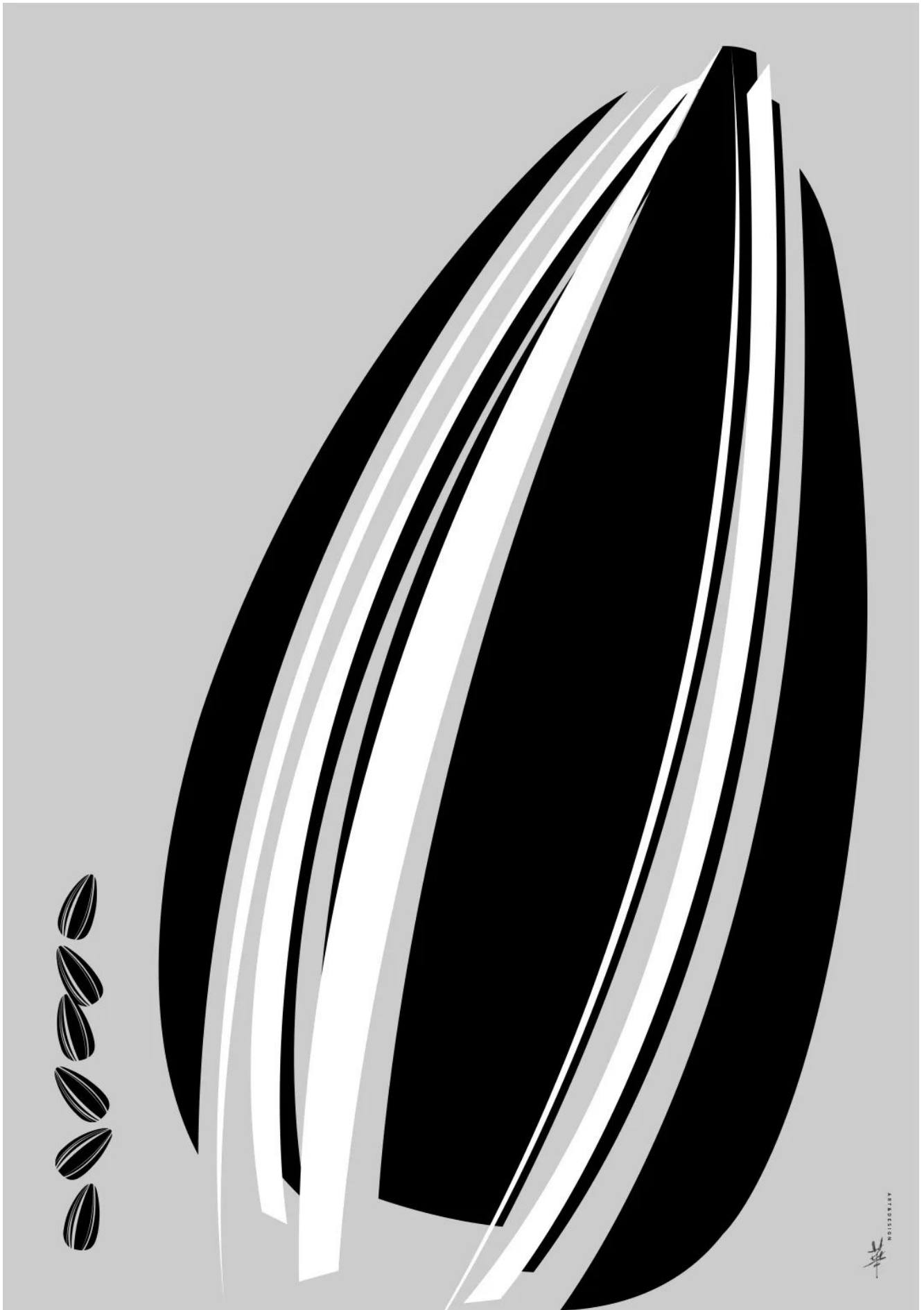


管中窥豹, 2020





□□□□, INFUTURE□□, 2020



ARTIST'S EDITION, 1/1, 2020



00, 000, 2020



五, 十, 2020

We only exhibited a part of the project; the original public project link is here in Chinese.

“What’s Started and What’s Ended” Series 2020 Special Public Project

02 Online Chat 项目(2020.4)

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Design Notebook 项目

2020项目 “项目项目项目项目” | 项目项目

2020项目 “项目项目项目项目” | 项目项目

Collaborative Writing 项目(2020.6.7-8.7)

2020项目 | “项目项目”A项目

2020项目 “项目项目”B项目

Biography

OCT Contemporary Art Terminal (OCAT Shenzhen) and OCT Art & Design Gallery are famous contemporary art museums in Shenzhen, operated by Overseas Chinese Town Group (OCT). OCAT Shenzhen was established in 2005. It is located in Shenzhen OCT-LOFT. It is the earliest institution in the OCAT art

museums that also opened in Beijing, Shanghai, Wuhan, and Xian. OCT Art & Design Gallery, established in 2008, adjacent to He Xiangning Art Museum, is the first art museum focus on design and experimental art in China.

“OCT”和“OCAT”是两个不同的品牌。OCAT成立于2005年，是一个专注于当代艺术的非营利组织。OCT成立于2008年，是一个专注于设计实验艺术的非营利组织。

Interview

The names would be abbreviated as “Cleo” (Cleo CHEN), “LIU” (Yang LIU), “CHEN” (Hang CHEN) and “WU” (Yueqin WU).

(“Cleo”“LIU”“CHEN”“WU”)

Cleo: Since the outbreak last February in China, our work and lives changed a lot. Therefore, as an art practitioner, how did you arrange your work and life during this period? Has anything changed?

2020年2月，疫情爆发，我们的工作和生活都发生了很大的变化。作为艺术从业者，在这段时间里，你是如何安排工作和生活？有什么变化吗？

LIU: I did not want to work (Laugh).

不想工作。

CHEN: At that time, we had to embrace the internet to express various emotions and attend events. On account of that, we felt like the project should be transformed to make room for the public, like giving a place for people to speak. There was nothing special, we were in a constricted state at that point in time.

在那时候，我们不得不拥抱互联网来表达各种情绪和参加活动。因为这样，我们觉得项目应该转变，为公众留出空间，比如给人们一个说话的地方。没有什么特别的，我们当时处于一种受限的状态。

LIU: I felt like everything was nonsense at that moment.

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WU: As it was the time for Chinese New Year, but everyone was staying at home with only few tasks to do. My mind felt a little bit scattered because I was being faced with too many intense news updates everyday.

[illegible]

What's more, as we were with our family, we would watch the news on TV a lot. The updates on pandemic situation and the statistical figures appeared on all the different channels all the time. There were not just announcements about the spread of infection, there were also some reports of improvements we had made. For instance, doctors from hospitals all over the country went to Wuhan (the city which suffered the most from the pandemic) to give assistance, or the people in Shandong who delivered tons of food to Wuhan. This kind of solidarity provided us with warm and positive new updates.

[illegible]

At the same time, various independent sources exploded with negative information on Weibo or WeChat (digital social platforms in China). They were saying that the reports on TV were fake, that the reality was the complete opposite. So, when I read these two opposing pieces of information, I was very confused and felt split when thinking: "What was the truth? How reliable are these reports?" Then I became a little anxious and struggled during that period of time. However, this wasn't that obvious when it came to work.

[illegible]

LIU: In fact, everyone was on vacation in those days, and we didn't know when we could get back to work. We could get the news through digital platforms which always kept updating every day. Gradually, there were some institutions or individuals trying to do something through their official accounts online. For example, PSA (The Power Station of Art) began a project about morning reading. Whereas, from my position, things like morning reading was just an adjustment for everyone. In addition to receiving news everyday, we received other content but what else could be given to the public to comfort them in this pandemic?

PSA
Power Station of Art

Actually, during that time, many people read more books. For example, readings about philosophy, history or even the plague. It seemed that everyone was pursuing something. Not just reading, there were also people learn to cook, etc. There were too many aspects of our lives that we had no time to pursue and enjoy during the normal, busy time and, so, these things were brought back to us as part of our adjustment to the pandemic pause, even in the very limited indoor space.

[illegible]

At this time, no one specifically said that we should keep working. This might be because we could not all handle our own situation well at that moment but what could we do to overcome these problems? And how? We could only leave a blank space after these questions. The only thing that might be a reliable solution was keeping calm and thinking, not rushing to act, probably most people were thinking this same thing. Many artists felt that art could not play a practical role within

this situation. They had no idea how to respond to that.

[illegible]

I think for arts organisations, some of them were trying to do something. But things of the same kind as before the pandemic were meaningless. And if it acts as merely a calming effect, it can actually be replaced easily.

[illegible]

WU: There were some art institutions which started to publish information online to continue their work at the very beginning of the pandemic. The **PSA** was one of these institutions which has done quite well and attracted a lot of attention. The project they kept publishing was called the ***Pandemic Prevention Plan***. Some of the content was readings, while other parts involved learning about collections and collaborating with designers. Therefore, when we came to think of our project, maybe just like what Liu said before, we needed to think about how to deal with this kind of new situation and what we could do more effectively because everyone has just experienced a a major disruption or only a small portion of restored reality.

It was the end of March last year when we all returned to Shenzhen to meet up. We sat together face-to-face, had a brainstorm and then communicated together. Our method was to gather all of our feelings and thoughts during the pandemic, and then sort them out. In order to do this, we have held several meetings, some lasting a whole afternoon and, during these meetings, we started to recall and organise those thoughts and memories.

PSA

The **PSA** Series project of ***Storing Electricity, Smiling, and Getting Together again-from Valentine's Day to Arbor Day*** online activities (including the morning reading and the PSD of ***Pandemic Prevention Plan*** mentioned above)

Cleo: China has basically returned to normal now, so what have you found as the main change in your personal experience or discovery in this period?

CHEN: Do you mean to say what kind of feelings did we have in the process of returning from the previous online state to the physical world, yes?

Cleo: Exactly.

CHEN: In fact, I don't think we have completely returned to normal but have partially transformed into a hybrid form. I say this because, when we were doing public projects, we would still first consider online spaces and platforms. For instance, what are the advantages of doing things online and what new things it could link us to. In terms of the physical world, we would pay more attention to what kind of projects were more suitable for developing in person. Now we had another channel of digital approach, and it was quite convenient for cross-domain or cross-regional programmes.

Accordingly, there was already a little part of the physical world which had already been transformed into a digital medium.

[illegible]

WU: If you look at this offline and online problem after more than a year, it is really just a formal problem. At the beginning, everyone might pay more attention to offline activities or exhibitions that are closed, so is that art activity is stagnant, or it has become necessary to use online methods, which is a substituted method, to achieve part of the programme or exhibition.

At the beginning, there were some concerns as well as some technical and platform related problems which needed to be solved. Looking back now after more than a year, it is just a formal channel. It depends on what the project is about, and then you have to decide whether to do it online or offline. Many programmes or exhibitions are now combined online and offline. If you are offline, you will have a sense of presence. You can notice the expressions and movements of the guest, and you can communicate with them more directly. This is the advantage of the physical, real world scene. I think online has its benefits, and I find that online audiences are more willing to be more expressive. They may be more willing to ask questions that are not easy to ask offline because there is only one screen-name online, or I can't see the face of the person or hear their voice, so I would be more willing to throw out my own questions and communicate with guests. This is a very good point that I recently discovered.

[illegible]

LIU: Thoughts and changes brought about by the pandemic still exist now. It has proven to be very hard to gain a consensus from the public. However, after this period, our sense of some problems or phenomena have become more and more intensified. This has also continued until now. When we are talking with the public about some of these issues, this is actually a bit of a minefield that was easy to make mistakes with, so we should pay more attention to these issues. Consequently, there is a phenomenon that things which used to be easily set aside have become intensified and can create ambiguity. It is more difficult for people to have a rational discussion during the current situation.

Another thought is our role as the art museum. Actually, there was a very crucial point in the process of creating this new project. During our preparation, we always felt that the pandemic was about to pass, but we never knew what was going to happen the next day. This was the reason we did not act quickly, and in fact, our actions to it were not prioritized. I felt that I didn't see it clearly at the time, so when we came back to work, there was a realistic question: how do you reappear as an art institution to the public now?

I don't think we can act as if no pandemic happened and reopen an exhibition that had been closed just like we're back to

normal, as well as restarting the other related activities. Ignoring it seems to cover up too much from this specific period and it doesn't empathise with the public. So, this was one of our motivations to create this public project. Even until now, what we have in common in doing public projects is that after some things happen, it is difficult to argue with each other from different positions; if something has been experienced together, there will be a common understanding or overview. I may not need to say anything in fact, everyone can already understand.

[illegible]

When we were doing this project, we took an empathetic view of what the people might need. Therefore, we have made the project have a change of focus. As a result of being over saturated with information, this may stop people from thinking their own thoughts on it. What appeared most from the public were the voices of different people, leaders, or other artists and designers, telling everyone how they were thinking and living. In fact, it was nothing different from others, and I couldn't see anything particularly unique. As a result, we wanted to give the right to narration and communication to ordinary people. Actually, with so much emphasis on sharing these thoughts, the desire to talk about them gets weaker, but it doesn't disappear completely. Even in this state, it exists and just needs an opportunity to be expressed. That is how this project started.

[illegible]

When it was completed, we gained much more confidence. I felt

that we all could have some discussions restrainedly, and people did want to express their perspectives. This also reflected that the young people nowadays were getting more interested in being vocal and it is something they need to do. A project like this was new for us, a kind of test. Consequently, when we do projects later, we would consider about how could normal people be involved and whether they might need a space of participation. I think the project was affecting all of us simultaneously more or less.

[illegible]

Cleo: As the project was a platform of decentralised discussion, which part of it do you like the best? Is there anything else you want to share with the audience?

[illegible]

WU: When I was preparing for this interview, I also liked this “decentralisation” idea the most. In fact, this was also reflected by the following question 5 (Question 5-Have you ever thought about what effect or impact this project was trying to achieve?). The OCAT Shenzhen Pavilion has rarely done such activities before. Previously, we used to do more like professional forums or lectures which were academic, rather than some activities closely connected with the audience. In this term, holding the “02 chat room” last year was also a beginning. Because as usual, whether we were generating reports, exhibitions, or listening to some lectures and forums in the library, it was all knowledge-based sharing with the unidirectional outputting method. The role of the audiences was always very passive, even the section of mutual communication was also around the theme set by the speaker, or the content mentioned before.

“”55 – OCAT02

When designing the **02 chat room**, we intended to only provide a platform and topics that everyone could discuss. Our role was to lead and connect. Just focusing on encouraging the audience to share, tell, and discuss with each other. We had also found the results amazing during the course of four games. Every scene there would be audiences sharing spontaneously, especially during the last two games. Although they didn't know each other and could only talk through the audios, they still discussed a lot. With regard to the common experiences and feelings between everyone, they did give each other some opinions or suggestions. In conclusion, it was an incredible experience.

02

CHEN: Every stage the audience participated in was great, including the overall investment and their attention to the public issues. Since it was during the pandemic, it would cause everyone's thinking to pay more attention to their surrounding environment and the wider context. Because the pandemic contained so many different factors, we've selected four main directions that we thought were suitable... (The directions mentioned above were the four themes of the **02 chat room**: 1 . When the Internet has become the only thing we have. 2. Public communicating space and independent thinking; 3. Another eye; 4. Tearing and Recovering)

021. 2. 3. 4.

WU: Actually, there were a few great topics that everyone wanted to talk about.

CHEN: They effected everyone’s thoughts, that is, everyone could have something to add. Correspondingly, Consequently, we had a space that didn’t call on anyone specifically, but focused on public discussion. The guests involved were happy to participate by sharing and discussing these with each other. As a consequence of this virtual and online status, everyone could express it even more. The physical social pressure had gone, which could let them be more relaxed.

LIU: I totally agreed with selecting these themes for the chat room and we’ve paid a lot of attention to them. It’s not only about empathizing with audiences, but also about the problems exposed during this and the experience of this current situation that is the focus of our institution. The four themes formed an organic combination, all of them were necessary and representative. Regarding these arrangements, WU is being modest. We’ve made lots of arrangements of the context, it isn’t necessarily about finding only the right guests, you also have to make sure the form of dialogue and communication is right.

I remember at the time we considered which theme should come

first, how to cut into the topic suitably, gently, influentially, and effectively, in a way that had the potential to be expanded on, or even which part to talk about at which point, etc. The project was actually arranged by considering about emotion and rhythm.

[illegible]

In addition, if you wanted to mobilize everyone to discuss actively, it's actually not that simple to facilitate the chat. We've even made an Excel form for prearrangement which everyone signed up to, this helped to understand everyone's situation or what they might want to express, etc. The preparation that everyone can participate in this project, and discussion can cover everyone, when to introduce what kind of topic, who is next to respond, who is the one to share their stories. These are all related. When you ask a question, many Chinese audiences don't answer it immediately or in detail. So we need to guide them to offer more details in the project and to help them to express their thoughts.

Excel

It's also not enough just to let everyone discuss with each other, because the audience actually came to learn something. Thus, where this might come from? On the one hand, we did have very insightful audiences, on the other hand, we actually had done a lot of research. We also needed to prepare the propositions, to provide everyone with something to expand on, or create space to think more about the topics. We even interviewed different people about the questions of "Public Space and Independent Thinking", some things were not easy to discuss, and some people knew a lot but they wouldn't like to speak out. We also found someone in the press and communicated

with them behind the scenes, and then went to analyze with everyone at the site of the project to let audiences realize how would people with that backgrounds face these problems with their judgments and so on. In fact, there were still a lot of things we didn't cover.

“The joint writing” was a very interesting experience. It was a process where everyone could erase and overthrow each other more dynamically. It was a process where everyone could express their own thoughts and feelings. It was a process where everyone could learn from each other. It was a process where everyone could grow together. It was a process where everyone could create something new. It was a process where everyone could make a difference. It was a process where everyone could change the world.

And I was quite satisfied with the “joint writing”. In fact, it had already been done by others before, but it was really suited to our context, like everyone could erase and overthrow each other more dynamically.

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But the rule we made at the time was that everyone could not change what the former said, but they could create their own space freely. It could be treated as a mirror image of the real society, like how would we express our opinions on the basis of respecting the thoughts of others. We should still have our own attitude.

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However, there were still regrets. It was something we discussed after the text was finished, it was because of the rules we laid down that the audiences were not allowed to change the prior person's opinion. Despite not being able to change what the previous person had said, if someone was very good at observing the relationship in society, people's way of thinking, and human nature from the perspective of writing, then he could also see the relationship between people in the process of self-expression. Therefore I always thought: could we tell what everyone was trying to do from the text? They

were always trying to confirm the previous one. Hence, it's not just about a confirmation of the relationship between the front and back ends. It could have been that the second-to-last person disagreed with the person in the middle, so had taken over an answer. Then how could he use his own way to connect several previous stories to complete the whole round? There would be a lot of identities and disagreements involved, and also recognition of others' expression. I thought that if someone could do this kind of research or analysis, it must be quite interesting. The disappointment was that we did not have time to explore this during that time.

[illegible]

Cleo: The project was still very close to the audience, which was not the same as the previous lectures and forums. In your opinion, how could you balance the popularization and professionalism of public projects?

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WU: We need both.

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CHEN: We could neither purely allow one way of doing something that the audience must accept, nor could be completely without guidance and clues. The two states must occur simultaneously, including the interaction and the later status of audiences' participation which could actually form feedback. It may affect your future plans, or the directions you want to explore.

it was about the problem itself, or the ideas and the Art world, you should always have professional requirements for yourself.

[illegible]

I don't think that it is a service relationship with the curator of the exhibition, or what you need to do is to explain or make efforts in simple terms. You have to consider a complex issue first, and then consider how to present this for different levels of understanding. We all should have this ability to adjust to their abilities.

ok

CHEN: I don't think I can be included in that. (Laughs) I feel that everyone's demands are still very different. When they were complaining about things whether from the institutional or structural constraints, or the direction and philosophy of their work, they didn't actually understand it. At that time, it was obvious that everyone was doing various things, including inside of the institutions and outside. At that time, many of the people who participated were from the National Art Gallery or local museums. In fact, everyone did much of the same. It seems that I didn't want to break through the siege, or to have a new direction of exploration.

[illegible]

We shared the project *(In)finite Museum Night* at the time. Everyone thought it was good and we did a good job by exploring that direction. However, things like this do happen relatively rarely in art museums and institutions. No one has

output, and also consider the diversity of the public and what they can accept. Although what we do is to contact the public community more, we would also collect professional concepts and ideas to support it, and we would still throw out some content and information. As for whether the audience could accept or realise these points or not, it's also a point that we shouldn't ignore when planning or considering projects.

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Cleo: What kind of changes have taken place in the domestic public education industry or the entire art museum group during the pandemic?

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WU: Obviously, we've all turned our attentions and work online.

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Cleo: Exactly.

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CHEN: And at that time, many people were discussing issues around the pandemic, whether to do exhibitions or not. The pandemic topic was even included in the official needs. Despite the pandemic period I wanted to meet the situation head on and I wanted to make things happen quickly, this needed to be done effectively. The entire art museum industry actually had devices and mechanisms for this. It has completely turned to cope with the conditions of the pandemic. However, we still chose the topics we were most concerned about and put them into practice.

[illegible][illegible]

education system staff were fired from outside. In fact, when I heard this news, I was very sad. It seemed that the channel facing the audience was the first to be targeted, we seemed to be seen as the dispensable ones. It was like a crisis of survival and at the end of the world, you were the first group of people to be left behind. This was what I thought, I don't know, maybe from the view of the public, they might not even know what we were doing. Then I interviewed many interns and talked about that position. The first thing they talked about was exhibition, and the thing they wanted to contact most was curation. Besides those, they didn't think about anything else in this field. I also asked them what was the role of the public in the art gallery? Or what did they know about it? They would directly say about the curation or exhibition. At present, there were still too many misunderstandings about this field in China. We are always in a marginal position.

MOMA
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LIU: This was more obvious before the epidemic, but it has changed after the period. In fact, the space of the “white box” (a name of the the Art institutions that hold exhibitions) has expired during the period, because there was no way for everyone to enter the space of the white box. Another experimental site during this period of time, was that everyone would find the charm of their experiments in other places, or place art back into the social scene. The vitality and possibility of this was more anticipated and more promising than the white box. Some things that couldn’t be anticipated could even inspire more new possibilities. This was being accepted in the art world, and its charm was renewed.

On the other hand, it's about whether public projects are equivalent to curation. This is what we practitioners need to show in the creativity of public projects, and the the benefits are not less than those exhibitions at all, and could also impress the public and promote the Art creation. If this is done, everyone would realize that there are many things that could be done in this field. In the past, as CHEN said, in many organizations, there was not enough space for public projects to work independently. We are in a relatively good situation now, including the era we are in, there is also room for full absorption, including the positioning between professionalism and the public, and you can also define it through your own vision and methods. However, how to let it affect more people and get rid of stereotypes? It may depend on something that we do.

The huge difference from the West is that the West would not say that publicity is not only important, but a very important part in the entire system and social fundraising. Actually, when discussing the concept of "public" in China, it is actually more about getting close to the meaning of Western society. However, there are many differences within the inner logic between public education in Western countries and China, so there must be some bluntness to this. Therefore, we still need to combine our own background and situation, and have our own ideas and identification for specific goals.

Cleo: I also followed some activities of art museums, and I really feel that they have shifted from physical artworks to the spread of online artistic thoughts. It feels that public education has become more important. Then I would like to ask what do you think of the relationship between online platforms and physical space?

LIU: They are not a relationship of reflection either. That is, online is the digital community, and offline is the physical space. Facing with different dimensions, there must be different goals and different methods. Advantages WU and CHEN have mentioned are that they could be connected to a wider network, and cross the physical distance to achieve exchanges within a wider coverage. To a certain extent, it has returned to the blueprint that the Internet originally gave to the world— we could achieve an unhindered communication. In fact, it is true that there are some issues that are not easy to implement physically, but if they are online, there will be a digital space, and then more people from different regions could have the opportunity to participate remotely.

CHEN: It is not only about real-time state, but also the state of knowledge sharing. Just like the contribution and knowledge-sharing status emphasized by the early founders of the World Wide Web, comparing with this, offline might be a bit more conservative. Whereas, they are not in an antagonistic relationship.

LIU: Neither opposing, nor mirroring.

CHEN: Right. It depends on it and what field the object needs. There is choice to make or it may be a combination of online and offline.

LIU: Current blockchain, digital art.

CHEN: About decentralisation.

LIU: Yes, as a financial investment approach, a brand-new product has been made with the help of online platforms. It's about how you use the line as a space or parallel world, in which many possibilities might occur. Regardless of whether this thing is being used as art or as an investment, just on its own, it shows how you understand online channels, which is another field of your work, and a world in which art may emerge. If you want to go deeper, there are lots of things worth exploring.

CHEN: This is what happens from using a certain medium, but it's like that when it comes to relationships.

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Cleo: The last question, do you have any suggestions for young people who aim to work in the field of public education?

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CHEN: Firstly, figure out what you want to do. (Laughs) It's really important. And you need to prepare to be an all-rounder, because you need to do everything, from beginning to end, from scratch to establishing.

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LIU: Exactly. To make yourself worthy of lofty ideals, but also to be able to stand on the ground. It is also necessary to work hard.

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CHEN: Nonetheless, now more and more people realized there is still a position like this which is a good trend.

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LIU: In terms of the direction we are doing now, the requirements of comprehensive abilities are still very strict. At the same time, it may not be as simple as the exhibition department producing several exhibitions during the year. You need to have ability of both dealing with extended issues and working with ideas and specific goals. And everyone is also interspersed with each other, so you have to deal various things simultaneously with flexibility. To ensure these, the personal professional ability is still needed.

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In terms of this point, if you want to achieve flexibility in public projects, you not only need to have related knowledge, but also need to have the ability to transform the project. If

you only stay at the surface level, or you couldn't go deep into the artistic dialogue, or you just only take it as social services, these are all treated as limitations to public projects. You may prevent other possibilities of the social elements to art.

[illegible]

But having said that, this is still very ideal. It does not mean that there are all the same cases in every organization. You have to look at it according to the needs of the institution, and also the needs of your own position. It is also helpful to do audience surveys and research. The core is still to have the ability of promoting and innovating. This is required regardless of the career.

[illegible]

CHEN: The work of public education is also changing as time goes by. Including the things you care about, or whether you are in contact with the exhibition, or the exploration in the network of your own development, no matter the medium of expression, the topics being discussed, or the people involved, they are always changing. Public education is changing along with the change of perception of society.

[illegible]

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