

ECO-LAB

23.05.2024 — 06.10.2024

GALLERIA CONTINUA Beijing is proud to announce the opening of Qiu Zhijie's solo exhibition "**Eco-Lab**".

This exhibition challenges our perceptions of interconnectedness and transformation within the natural world. The artist's solo show opens on May 23rd and showcases a fusion of art and science, reflecting the intricate relationships between the biosphere, lithosphere, atmosphere, and geosphere.

"Eco-Lab" invites visitors to explore a higher dimension of consciousness and an acute awareness to our surroundings. The exhibition also highlights the profound interconnectedness of events and their simultaneous influences. The exhibition features a multitude of transformations happening simultaneously: organic growth and decay, geological and cosmic changes, and various human and natural processes. Visitors can witness plants growing through the artwork "The garden of Forking Paths" but also wood decaying, mold spreading, mushrooms flourishing, and silkworms spinning silk. They can observe stones weathering, crystals forming, stalactites taking shape, and cosmic rays penetrating everything. Seawater evaporates into salt, soil becomes ceramics, and concrete solidifies. The work "From sand to Glass" perfectly chronicles these transformations.

Additionally, "Eco Lab" blurs the boundary between organic and inorganic materials, illustrating how cattle and sheep consume Himalayan salt bricks, mealworms digest polystyrene foam ("We are bugs"), coral polyps build reefs, and plastic waste infiltrates our bodies.

The exhibition explores four themes. One theme is "drying," showcasing the drying process of various materials, where fermentation, decay, and growth occur. Another theme is "transformation": the work "Glass Transformation" showcases four sets of experiments on the glass transformation, including the glass jellyfish sculptures coated with an electrochromic film, which change color upon the approach of a spectator; a pane of electro-controlled frosted glass that intermittently reveals the phrase, "The last thing an animal can understand is glass"; glass imaging using the phenomenon of caustics; and four glass-cleaning robots that execute repeated horizontal and diagonal movements, propelling the water into a visual semblance of ocean waves.

The work "The Cosmic Ray Igloo: A Tribute to Mario Merz" features a frame resembling a Mario Merz-style igloo with a transparent display screen installed above it, cosmic ray detection chips transmit images to the screen, while stone slabs beneath the igloo's frame connect to a meter that displays their radiation value. Lastly, the theme of "morphology" reveals the intrinsic mechanisms of form production in sea snails, zebras, and the natural additive manufacturing process akin to 3D printing. "The Architect" brings together various "architectural structures" found in Mother Nature, including nests of various animals, plant fruits, ore clusters, and so on. The artist emphasizes that this exhibition is not a call for extreme environmentalism or primitive farming methods. Instead, it celebrates the role of farmers and bakers as natural transformers and microbiologists. The

artist aligns with Laozi's philosophy, viewing nature as impartial and treating all things without preference. "Eco Lab" also critiques exaggerated claims of "plant intelligence" in bio-art, recognizing humans as significant creators on par with natural forces like volcanoes and viruses.

"Eco Lab" is a result of extensive collaboration with scientists and laborers from various fields. The exhibition embraces the essence of a laboratory, accepting experimental failures and fostering innovation. Contributions from scientists, research institutions, and graduate students are meticulously acknowledged, creating an ecosystem of collaboration that mirrors the material and energy exchanges in nature.

About the artist:

Qiu Zhijie was born in 1969 in Zhangzhou, Fujian Province, China. He is a leading figure in conceptual art and new media. The artist, writer, curator and teacher has earned critical recognition worldwide for his thought and practice of "total art", which forges new cultural meanings from various philosophies and systems of thought from all time and everywhere. Qiu's first investigations gave shape to multimedia installations using organic material, ancient and found objects, photography and video, often with interventions and performances.

Since about 2010, Qiu has been mapping the imaginary networks of his sociological, philosophical, cultural, political and epistemological research. A virtuoso calligrapher, ink painter and landscape cartographer, Qiu was commissioned to create Map of Theatre of the World (2017) for the exhibition "Art and China after 1989" at Guggenheim Museum in New York. In the work 'Map of China - Arabia', currently present in our Beijing gallery, Qiu Zhijie continues his 'Mapping the World Project'. This is a project that sees the artist literally "map the world" through large, detailed and beautiful maps. Topics such as politics, religion, mythology and society as well as ideas, relationships, objects, and cultures are interconnected in these maps, offering a different way to understand their relationship to one another, and eventually our relationship to each other. Qiu Zhijie is also a well-known and published art-writer as well as a curator, for which he has curated important events such as the 2012 Shanghai Biennale and the 2017 Venice Biennale. He is the Dean and professor of the School of Experimental Art at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing and professor of the School of Intermedia Art at China Academy of Art.

About the gallery:

Founded in 1990 in San Gimignano, Italy, GALLERIA CONTINUA has expanded its locations to Beijing, Les Moulins, Havana, São Paulo, Rome, Paris, and Dubai. Remaining faithful to the spirit of perpetual evolution, and committed to engaging the widest possible audiences in contemporary art, GALLERIA CONTINUA has built a strong identity through its bonds and experiences, thriving away from the conventional urban centres, in completely unexpected yet timeless locations.

GALLERIA CONTINUA / Beijing

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