ARTFORUM

Yifan Jiang, *One Sunday Morning*, 2021, digital animation, color, sound, 13 minutes 14 seconds. From "To Your Eternity."

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"To Your Eternity"

Today Art Museum 今日美术馆

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In 1947, following the nuclear atrocities of World War II, Isamu Noguchi proposed a monument for a posthuman world. *Sculpture to Be Seen from Mars* is an abstract rendering of a human face (with a nose measuring one mile) that is visible only from outer space. Reproduced on a two-story-high panel in the atrium of Today Art Museum, Noguchi's *Sculpture* embodies the balance that "To Your Eternity," an art-and-technology-themed biennial curated by Xin Wang, strikes between the romance of synthetic appendages—an antenna stretched toward the cosmos, waiting for a signal—and the capitalist extraction, labor exploitation, and political subjugation that are often technology's precondition and purpose. Rather than rehearse the tiresome drama pitching humanism against technological singularity, the biennial's thirty artists understand artmaking, too, as a technical activity—one that stretches as far back as the days of stone carvings and lacquer work and creates glitches in structures of power as much as it is implicated in them. Ziyang Wu and Mark Ramos encourage decentralized decision-making and user ambivalence about being included in a networked society in their live simulation and collective world-building game *Future_Forecast*, 2022–. Designed with Rodrigo Duterte's Build! Build! Build! program in the Philippines and the Chinese Digital Silk Road initiatives in mind, the game reflects the pandemic's exacerbation of Chinese electronic colonialism in the Philippines and serves as a training ground for political agency. Offering players a series of decisions that permanently alter the game's landscape—the choice between assembling more local sari-sari markets or erecting more cyberpunk buildings, planting more trees or installing more signal towers—Wu and Ramos give players impetus to choose against the condition of the game's operation: the internet it runs on. Looking for an escape hatch within the totality of planetary-scale computation, Wu and Ramos created a meta-platform of counterindustrialization.

If Wu and Ramos take game design as the link between the world we have and the world we want, in Yifan Jiang's film *One Sunday Morning*, 2021, animation is the shimmering go-between. In Jiang's short, which juxtaposes 3D models with oil-painted interiors, humanity suddenly loses language. Communication occurs only through

touch. At the moment of contact, people relive each other's unique experiences in real time and arrive at interpersonal understanding through sameness. At the end of the film, the two protagonists, each from opposite ends of the world, embrace, communicating a lifetime of differences—the mitosis of incommensurable cells. Their memories fall like atoms, swirling with the splendor of a winning screen in Microsoft Solitaire. For Jiang, software objects expand the scope of communicability; the errant pixels produced from the lossy and frictional translation of oil paintings into Photoshop scans and figures in Adobe After Effects afford the same pleasures as words' jagged and irregular effusions.

What if language is renounced altogether as the vehicle of humanity's meaning-making project? In *Tongues of Verglas / Les Langues de Verglas*, 2022, a twenty-four-minute digital simulation of the Arolla Glacier in Switzerland, Jakob Kudsk Steensen uses photogrammetry and macro photography to take viewers on a journey from the stomach of an ice cave to the wolf lichen trapped inside a droplet of Arolla pine sap. With the psychedelia of life-forms as his descriptors, Steensen evokes luminous envelopes of resin teeming with microscopic cells, and the bristle of lichen's arms against pine bark's tissues. Pan Caoyuan's ectoplasmic *Cavity (Not a Certain Object)*, 2021, speaks in a similar tongue, conveying the miracle of biological transformations through the materiality of lacquer—a substance produced via the refinement and polymerization of the sap of Chinese varnish trees. For Pan and Steensen, technologies are carriers of an ecological consciousness that bypasses human systems of semiosis. The works in "To Your Eternity" show technology as a means of ecstatic communion with a great outside and as a condition of human fungibility, a mode of political control with pockets of concealment from mass surveillance: informer and witness, android dream and wish machine.