

# LIU, DI 柳迪

born 1985 in Shanxi Province, China  
lives and works in Beijing, China  
1985年生于中国陕西省, 现生活和工作在北京



**Liu Di** believes that “by violating the rules of common sense, we can break the hypnotic trance induced by familiar reality.” Liu uses digitally manipulated photographs to investigate the friction between the natural world and urban residents in China.

His series “Animal Regulation” (2010) features a suite of exaggeratedly large and cartoon-like wild animals, like the giant rabbit in Animal Regulation No. 7, sitting in the midst of destroyed landscapes of residential neighborhoods. He explains that these works look at a mutually destructive relationship through ruins of both human and animal living spaces. Liu first conceived of the project while navigating the crowded suburbs of Beijing, where he has been based since his graduation from the Central Academy of Fine Arts.

## **EDUCATION**

*2003-2007 Graduated with a Bachelors Degree, Photography Department, Central Academy of Fine Arts, (“CAFA”), Beijing, China*

*2007-2009 Graduated with a Masters Degree, Photography Department, Central Academy of Fine Arts, (“CAFA”), Beijing, China*

## **SOLO EXHIBITIONS**

*2017 Break With Convention: Liu Di Solo Exhibition, Pékin Fine Arts Gallery, Hong Kong, China*

*2017 Break With Convention: Liu Di Solo Exhibition, Pékin Fine Arts, Beijing, China*

## **GROUP EXHIBITIONS (SELECTION)**

*2017 The 1st Fishing Town International New Media Art Festival , Hechuan, Chongqing, China 2017 Dimona Municipal Art Gallery Art Centre, Shfaram, Israel, and, The Wilfrid Israel Museum of Asian Art and Studies, Tel Aviv, Israel.*

*2016 The World of Fantasy: Thematic Photo Exhibition, The North Hall of Jacob K. Javits Centre, New York, USA*

*2015 My Generation: Young Chinese Artists, Orange County Museum Of Art, CA, USA Youth Pictorial Expression*



From pieces of the Marvel comic universe, through Soviet architecture and Turkish baths, to space exploration and to the Last Generation, the rich symbols and virtual imagery of Liu Di reveal their fluid meanings over time. Over frictions of time, that are repeated to a degree that the viewer finds himself in a momentary crisis of disillusionment. The atmosphere of science-fictional but very realistic cinematic worlds deliberately break a familiar reality, and evoke existential questions and feelings of surprise. There is always a surprising element in something familiar, that suddenly makes us question our reality, all of what we thought we already knew, and have ever experienced.

Artland had a conversation with Chinese concept and digital artist Liu Di, in the company of Migrant Bird's Space Gallery Director Lu Mei, on the occasion of their recent collaboration, inheriting the title of the multi-dimensional piece, A Stubbornly Persistent Illusion. The exhibition looks back on the past decade of Liu Di's artistic practice while showing his ongoing projects, recent motion pictures and bold aesthetic combinations.

Before accomplishing the aforementioned visions of future worlds, Liu Di explored the investigative potential of digitally manipulated photographs, departing from documentary-style photography. He graduated from the Photography Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing in 2009 and received the Lacoste Elysée Prize for photography in 2010, when the young artist first gained widespread recognition for his Animal Regulation series. It features giant, cartoon-like wild animals in the midst of deserted, decaying urban settings, creating surreal scenes as well as critiquing the dissonant relationship between nature, humanity and its widespread urbanisation. "This work is about the conflicting relationship between nature and human society, which is created by the phenomenal rate of Chinese urban development," Liu Di shared. The Animal Regulation (2010) series was developed throughout his years at the Academy, but continued to expand throughout the following years.

After growing up in the northern Chinese province of Shanxi, Liu Di moved to Beijing to study at the Art Academy. The stark contrast between his home and the burgeoning capital began to profoundly influence his early visual language. Besides the freeing feeling of living in the city and living in the center of vibrant urban arenas, he was at the same time shocked by the destroyed residential neighbourhoods and the alarming and high human cost of urban decay. Liu Di found himself surrounded by public and living spaces vandalised by endless urbanisation that went hand-in-hand with China's extraordinary economic boom, that often showed no mercy to clean air, bearable living conditions and lively architecture. He tells us that from very early on from his childhood, he has always felt closer to nature and to the animal kingdom, as opposed to the constructed human world. Combining this raw approach, with the soreness of urban life eventually led to the continuous creation of his famed series.

As a child, Liu Di was deeply interested in painting and obsessed with finding and developing his own visual language. However, at first he dreamed of becoming a doctor, as he spent nights and days at the hospital, where his mother worked as a nurse, flipping through medical books and examining encyclopaedias of human anatomy. He was mesmerised by the detailed illustrations that offered a complicated but elaborate look into the human body structure, hospital appliances, and equipment for special treatments. Many of these anatomical elements appear in the surreal company of robotic surgical machines with taxidermied wild animals surrounding a sentinel protagonist centred on a floating island in the artists' latest series titled LEM (2019). This series continues on the path of Animal Regulation, and expands its horizons to the investigation of macro and micro-worlds. The visual language of the LEM series draws on both traditional images of Chinese Buddhism and classic science fiction literature, expressing the Buddhist concept of the existence of sentient beings by gathering together while vivifying a character displaying clairvoyance and telekinetic powers from the Last Generation of Arthur C. Clarke's novel Childhood's End.

As a teenager Liu Di became interested in reading about planets and studying the universe beyond Earth's atmosphere. At high school he would pick up books from sci-fi authors like Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, Stanisław Lem or Douglas Adams, at a time when Chinese novelists were actively reimagining science fiction and authors like Liu Cixin, Han Song and Wang Jinkang came into prominence. Inspired by the lasting impressions of these great authors, Liu Di began to build his own visions, crafting these influences into novel universes grappling with philosophical and spiritual themes. His visual language and distinctive cinematic style emerge from the essence of sci-fi cinema classics like Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey and Andrei Tarkovsky's Solaris. Besides reminiscences of hard science fiction, Liu Di's worlds are told as soulful poetry, with a slow flow of enigmatic imagery and a sense of quest. To realise his vision, buckled down by elaborate post-production processes, in 2017 Liu Di started developing a 3D animation-triptych, a three-part video series, from which currently two videos, The Weight of Oneself (2017) and A Stubbornly Persistent Illusion (2017) are complete, with the third one under production. The artist refers to this series as "three sentences with the same grammatical structure."

Each piece of the trilogy follows a similar pace, structure and dramaturgy. As Liu Di explains, they all use the same kind of language, but each of the films highlight a different idea. All of the videos are based on a different story, each of them simultaneously being a visual interpretation of a particular existential philosophy. The Weight of Oneself is inspired by a philosophical insight from Witold Gombrowicz, who also influenced Milan Kundera's exploration of the concept of Lightness by the novel titled The Unbearable Lightness of Being. "The weight of each of our selves," Gombrowicz mused, "depends on the size of the population on the planet. If humanity's weight is constant, then each individual's weight is equal to one divided by the number of people living at that time."

The second part of the video-series, A Stubbornly Persistent Illusion, on the other hand, is his personal interpretation of Albert Einstein's quote: "The distinction between past, present, and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion." Each video opens with a still life in an almost meditative state, without a particular beginning, spanning ten minutes, building a slow rhythm with panning up then down or zooming out and back in before fading into the possibility of re-entering the narrative from the very beginning. "If you constantly repeat this structure, but keep changing the actual story, it enhances the meaning of the piece," Liu Di tells us. "On one hand there is change, and on the other hand there is a solid, static foundation. A feeling of completion. It is an entire work, but each piece is unique, but still part of the same world. Once the third piece is done, the series will be complete, it will be a whole body of work."

"The final episode will be about the Moon. Asimov wrote an article before the landing of the Moon, joining a scientific debate and predicting that the Moon would have hundreds of meters of dust on its surface, therefore space crafts would sink in the dust if they landed." Liu Di revisited this concept and found it thrilling as it shows one of many forecasts by the human race that proved to be wrong. "Needless to say, this scientific prediction was false, because we eventually found out that the Moon has no atmosphere and dust particles do not have air pockets in between them, therefore our spaceships landed on solid ground. This revelation prompted me to conclude the series with a film about the surface of the Moon and Moon dust."

Liu Di continues to build magically realistic worlds, creating mosaics of futuristic but familiar universes. On the contrary to his animation-triptych, his short videos are fast paced with exaggerated, fantastic elements. To the question of whether these are depictions of ideal worlds or possible dystopian societies, Liu Di wisely steps back. "For me, the most important thing is to evoke strong feelings in the viewers. I also want them to receive a different kind of view and information that has never been seen before, like creating a new space that is derived from imagination but is still realistic. I feel that I have no position to go into what a perfect world could be or judge the worlds I create whether they are good or bad worlds, whether you want to live in it or not. It is more about not being able to define what is good or bad that is interesting, as us as human beings are not able to decide whether something is genuinely good or bad shows how complex this and also imagined worlds can be. Even though we cannot define these worlds that we are looking at, it does not mean that in theory, they can't exist. There is a possibility that they could, even if only in our minds. They seem so realistic, that you think that there is a possibility for them to actually be out there."











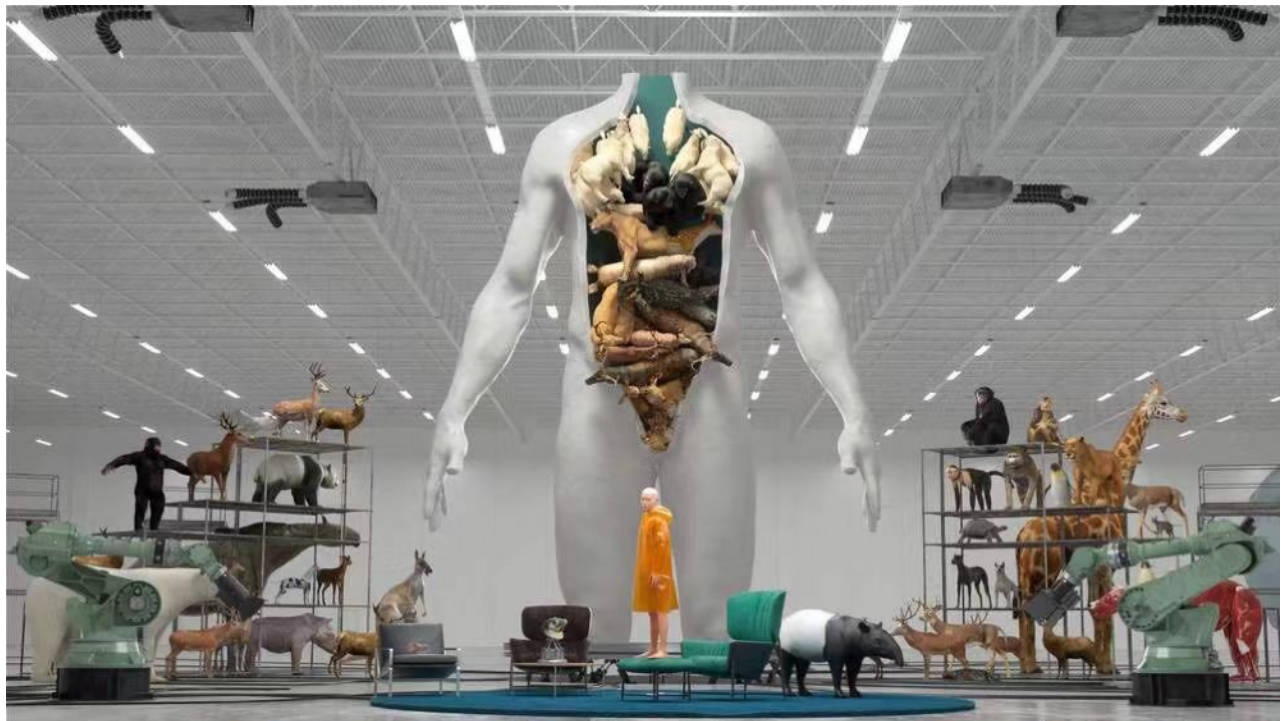














自我的重量. / *The Weight of Oneself*  
2017, 3D Animation Video, 20'25"  
5+1AP, 1/5





柳迪：荒岛巨人的臆想与失序

文 / 李泊岩

1651年，托马斯·霍布斯（Thomas Hobbes）的《教会国家和市民国家的实质、形式和权力》出版，他借用“巨人”形象，概括了权利意志控制下的社会病症。在初版封面上，巨人的身体由无数民众构成，左手持宝剑，右手持权杖。这暗示了从人类自然的生存法则开始，一直到政治和宗教信仰的权力与斗争。事实上，古往今来巨人的形象都是人性的放大，也是社会权利的化身，在柳迪的作品中，硕大的动物、巨人、金刚力士……同样引人深思，且透露出悲凉的情调和调侃的语汇，这是社会意识的折射？还是艺术家的个体经验对于未知世界的臆想？

如果说对于未知世界的臆想，是驱动艺术变革的动力，那么柳迪的艺术证明了在这样的动力之下，仍对本土化的信仰进行反思。他没有将新技术完全浸泡于欧洲实验艺术的语境中，而是直面世界（或宇宙）对人类固有的强大吸引力。柳迪是一个观点很宏大的艺术家，他关心城市化、生存状态、技术等一些和我们当下生活很紧密并且很重要的问题。他很清楚，那些在历史上断定未来的道德准则，都不再是判断今天和未来的唯一标准。正是对于判断价值体系的不确定，在他的作品中，才释放出来某种由不稳定感所引发出来的忧伤和悲观。同时，他的作品中又时常透露出悲悯的上帝视野，这是一种同情和疗愈。比如，在作品《自我的重量》中，海洋背景和金属质地的巨人，表明复古未来主义的美感，以及突如其来的现实幻灭感，叫人在不安中寻找着摆脱的出路。这正是基于当下的数字化竞争的慌乱而提出的。正如未来学的诞生，是基于悲观主义的基础之上，也是人类怀着战争阴影，和“早晚会自我毁灭”的心理下催生出来结果。柳迪的作品正是面对科技不断加速，人类竞争的步伐不断加速，以及社会景观不断变化所做出的反馈。

在柳迪的作品《动物规则》中，那些巨大的动物，貌似巨大，却保留了人们希望的乖巧和温顺——那种在动物园中看到被隔离、被驯化的弱势神情。这是他作品中诙谐的一面。当我们以“都市人”的优越感去审视时，这种诙谐骤然变成一种对都市欲望不满足的危险情绪。这是柳迪作品中，较早出现的不可调和的“处境”问题，它关系到各种不同“秩序”的产生。这些由某种变异、进化而引发的象征，侵蚀着人们对于其它事物结构的分析。

在另一组名为《LEM》的作品中，围着少女的动物，在一个圆形的孤岛上旋转。奇怪的是，艺术家所做的“动画”，只是景观的旋转与镜头的拉伸，作为主体的形象，如同雕塑一般，彼此之间没有太多的动作、语言……没有任何交流。它们让荒岛更加荒凉。当然，可以说这是因为艺术家特有的置景观念决定的，这样的手法，显然不是为了“再现”，而是某种为了表达“失序”的处理。这是被更大的宇宙观所驾驭的结果，其中那位虚拟的少女，并不具有任何实在的意义，她只是一个为了创造而创造出来的“人”，她处于一个被规定的姿态，她揉合了自然和虚拟世界中的美与丑。在此，这位被称为“The last earthman”的人，既模糊了性别，也模糊了身份，与那些被机械手臂打造，和被陈列在货架上的动物是一样的被动、无辜、茫然。尽管，她处于一个核心的位置，但她的属性“最后一个人类”，决定了她的悲剧。

同样，这件作品暗示了当下难以归类社会状态，“LEM”的所指其实很宽泛，这个单词就像虚拟的形象一样，都是一种为了创造而创造出来的“物种”，它具有引发式作用，却没有一个终极结论。在整个作品的空间塑造上也难以辨明到底指向何处，虽然艺术家声称受到亚瑟·克拉克（Arthur Charles Clarke）的《童年的终结》中对于“宇宙展厅”的概念，但科幻小说仍然有别于图像作品，在图像中“展厅”更为多变和模棱两可，就好像同样有可能变异的某种生命体。

柳迪通过制造一种舞台感，让人凝视于那些突如其来的降临，他希望艺术家在诸多想象中找到与自身焦虑的契合点。在另一件名为《顽固而持久的幻觉》中，一方面体现出社会主义的美学经验，以及对于过往想象力的认可；另一方面，结合了人类本身周而复始的生命规律，找到既定规则与无限想象的结合。这种结合还体现在艺术家多维度的审美趣味，那些来自“漫威”漫画、苏维埃建筑、阿拉伯浴池、太空探索等符号，模糊了“处境”的不可复制性。在此，任何时代的艺术状态都因为社会状态的不确定，也变得模糊不定。今天的世界，快速建起的建筑、移民（难民）、文化交融……都刺激着艺术标准的变化。虽然这个作品并不是直接探讨未来艺术是什么样的，但是生活在当下的人，都在持续面对这种加速背后的“末日情结”。

不论从变大的动物，到虚拟的人类，再到金属质地的巨人……还是从旋转的孤岛，到茂密的丛林，再到太空感的空间架构……形象与空间的对峙，是柳迪作品最吸引人的地方。他搭建出一个持续“较量”的基座，借用日常的空旷环境，将巨型的“模型”植入。这些巨型形象被聚集，被凝视，即使这些周而复始的形象，好似不速之客，但他们与现实的民众仍有交流，因为社会奇观也正如这些不速之客一样，随时改变着我们的周遭。柳迪的做法是暴力的，因为“巨人”反证了我们的渺小，以及现实的荒芜与无序。

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**Migrant Bird Space** is a Berlin- & Beijing-based art foundation and gallery, providing a showcase for artists as well as art-agency services in China and Europe. Working out of the gallery space at Koppenplatz in the heart of Berlin, the foundation offers a professional platform for cross-cultural communication between China and Europe with a focus on contemporary Chinese art. Promoting both established and emerging artists, Migrant Birds provides gallery spaces for exhibitions in Beijing, Berlin and Shenzhen, an artist-in-residence program, regular talks and lectures, as well as support in liaising with museums, universities, private institutions and more.

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