

## Miao Ying *Content-Aware*

MadeIn Gallery, Shanghai 4 June – 23 July

Shortly before *Chinternet Plus* – Miao Ying's online exhibition featured in *First Look: New Art Online* at New York's New Museum – went live, *Content-Aware: Half-Assed Aesthetics in the Age of the Sub-Amateur*, her first gallery solo show in China, opened at MadeIn Gallery. Although 4 June was not chosen for any political reason, it nonetheless was a meaningful date to celebrate the work of this Shanghai-born, Beijing-based post-1985 New Wave generation artist who has always paid close attention to politically sensitive issues on the Internet (that being the Chinese Internet, behind the Great Fire Wall) and mobile networks. Since 2007, when Miao made *The Blind Spot* (a full, printed dictionary of words censored from google.cn) as her graduation project, censorship and self-censorship have been key focuses of her practice.

Curated by Michael Connor, the show presents a set of digital images, GIFs and videos. On a square, marble-textured platform, large-scale versions of common computer-generated Windows-style desktop images wrap around five large pillars ('the five pillars of awareness') to form one undulating backdrop. This installation is named after an auto-clone fill function in Photoshop: 'Content Aware' (all works 2016). On one side of the backdrop is the slogan

'Reclaiming Ownership of Your Mind, Body and Future'. A lack of aesthetic quality, and a visual culture in which images are produced as quickly and easily as possible, with intentional flaws, in order to be cool and become popular on social media, is now, according to the wall text, an aesthetic.

In the opposite corner of the room are three black, shopping-centre-style scrolling-advert lightboxes. *Golden formula, edge of footage* continues the discussion around image manipulation, but rather than having been badly photoshopped, here the images remain untouched, invoked only as footage. Flatscreens are installed on the surface of the lightboxes, showing best-selling stock images and videos of recognisable subjects (nature, happy families, successful businessmen, pets). But instead of showing the images themselves, one sees the seams between them, and a repeated, madeup formula: 'A +  $\Sigma b(c) \log b(c) = \infty(?)$ ', which can be interpreted as 'footage (a) plus footage (b) plus footage (c) equals infinity (?)'. A mix of bestselling tracks from 'Audio Jungle' (a stock-audio brand) lends a soundtrack. The visitor may arrive at their own equation: 'unedited or edited are both edited'.

Other works are also displayed as if in a poor-quality retail environment. In *Fresh*

*Images*, a pollution-removal filter from photo-editing app MeituPic is applied to photos of Tiananmen Square and Chairman Mao statues in urban landscapes; these are shown as 'before' and 'after' versions and juxtaposed with stock imagery of scientists at work. Repeated semi-transparent watermarks read 'Fresh Images'. In the installation *God, Goddess, and Godfather*, a video clip of Alibaba founder Ma Yun in conversation with President Obama at the 2015 APEC CEO Summit is covered with horizontally-scrolling waves of real-time 'bullet-comment' texts as seen on Chinese video-sharing websites such as Bilibili. This summit is interrupted by random wolf-howling clips playing on neighbouring iPad screens.

These formats – badly photoshopped images, GIFs, found footage, bullet comments – are constantly-developing creative forms of self-expression for netizens. By formatting visual language born on the Internet and showcasing it in a gallery, Miao Ying makes us more aware of content whose meanings and multiple realities are dissolved in its self-invented aesthetics, and hints that the role played by artists today is more akin to that of an editor, one that manipulates and demonstrates the relationships within that aesthetics. *Gu Ling*



*Content-Aware, The Five Pillars of Awareness: Reclaiming Ownership of Your Mind, Body and Future*, 2016, pop-up stand, print on fabric, UV print on PVC, 350 × 350 × 225 cm.  
Courtesy the artist and MadeIn Gallery, Shanghai