

Press Release

CAO FEI: BLUEPRINTS

Serpentine Gallery

Reopens 4 August – 13 September 2020

HER FIRST LARGE-SCALE INSTITUTIONAL SOLO SHOW IN THE UK INCLUDES
INSTALLATION, FILM AND NEW AUGMENTED REALITY WORK

BLUEPRINTS EXPLORES CAO FEI'S ABILITY TO CREATE MULTIPLE WORLDS, NAVIGATE
PHYSICAL AND VIRTUAL SPACES AND CONSIDERS THE CHANGING LANDSCAPES OF CITIES
IN CHINA AND BEYOND



Cao Fei, *Blueprints* (Installation view, March 2020, Serpentine Gallery) Photo credit: Gautier Deblonde

Cao Fei (born 1978, Guangzhou) is a multi-media artist and filmmaker based in Beijing. Video, digital media, photography and installation all play a role in the artist's engagement with an age of rapid technological development. Cao Fei's work is underpinned by an ongoing exploration of virtuality, how it has radically altered our perception of self and changed the way we understand reality.



This project at the Serpentine Galleries is Cao Fei's first large-scale institutional solo exhibition in the UK, and is the third time that she has participated in the Galleries' artistic programme: firstly, as part of 'China Power Station: Part 1', an offsite Serpentine exhibition at Battersea Power Station in 2006, where the artist presented her film, *Whose Utopia?*, and then in 2008, with the installation of *RMB City* in the Gallery's entrance space, where visitors could access a fictional city constructed in the online virtual world of Second Life. Outside the UK, the Serpentine has worked with some of the region's most exciting practitioners with presentations in China and Hong Kong; group exhibition Hack Space (2016), featuring work by Cao Fei, and the Beijing Pavilion (2018), designed by JIAKUN Architects.

"For me virtuality is a means to express myself, to understand reality, which is what I'm interested in. I use writing and film too, but we are living in an age of rapid technology and in this context, we need to know that virtuality has changed the way reality works. And to do this we need to be part of it." Cao Fei

This slippage between the physical and the virtual is always present in her work; from the utopic and dystopic potentials of our modern-day cities, the escapism of users via the virtual platform, Second Life, to the alienating effects of mechanised labour in China, Cao Fei often addresses these topics through the creation of surreal encounters and with a subtle sense of play. Although each of Cao Fei's worlds appear to teeter on the edge of apocalyptic uncertainty, her characters navigate these complex and chaotic realities with vigour and agency, harnessing the unique possibilities of technology in order to shape a collective future. The Serpentine Galleries exhibition brings together new and existing works by Cao Fei in an immersive, site-specific installation, expanding the themes of automation, virtuality and technology that she continuously draws upon.

Blueprints originally included the world premiere of the virtual reality work *The Eternal Wave*, produced in collaboration with Acute Art. In response to the current situation, Acute Art has developed an augmented reality version of the kitchen space in which *The Eternal Wave* begins, visible on visitors' smartphones and available only within the Serpentine Gallery.

In addition, Acute has produced *The Eternal Wave AR: Li Nova*, an extension of *The Eternal Wave* project. The eponymous Li Nova, a small boy looking for his father, also appears in Cao Fei's feature film *Nova*. This augmented reality work can be experienced on compatible smartphones anywhere in the world. Both AR works are accessed via the Acute Art app.

Continuing the artist's exploration of virtual possibilities, these works respond to the current moment by shifting from the VR headset to the smartphone screen, an experimentation with technology that reflects a changed reality to the one in which the exhibition opened.

This new AR work sits alongside a site-specific installation bringing together collected archival material and furniture that is based on elements of Cao Fei's Beijing studio and her latest film, *Nova*. These three interconnected works mark the culmination of Cao Fei's extensive research in Beijing over the last five years, examining the social history and urban transformation of the city's Jiuxianqiao ('Hong Xia') district where she lives and works. This new body of work will be presented within an installation that brings together a selection of the artist's previous film works to expand the themes of automation, virtuality and technology, giving visitors an introduction to her wider practice.



The earliest work in the exhibition, *Whose Utopia?* (2006), is paired with her recent film, *Asia One* (2018) in an installation that considers the significance of automation on the human body and its labouring self, whilst the 2014 work, *La Town*, presents a post-apocalyptic cityscape pictured through a cinematic stop-motion animation. Connecting back to the Serpentine's 2008 project with Cao Fei, her work *RMB City: A Second Life City Planning* will be re-presented in the Serpentine Gallery lobby. Together, these works further the layering of virtual, physical and cinematic spaces that are encountered in the first part of the exhibition, leading visitors through alternative realities and multiple frames of experience.

Born in the same year that China's economic reform and opening up policies began, Cao Fei is a leading voice in a generation that has come of age concurrent to the country's rise to prominence and accelerated urban and consumerist development. By mixing social commentary, popular aesthetics, references to Surrealism and documentary conventions in her films and installations, she considers the changes that are occurring in Chinese society today and the ensuing transformation of the individual's everyday experience of their environment.

Cao Fei's works have been exhibited at a number of international biennales and triennales, including Shanghai Biennale (2004), Moscow Biennale (2005), Taipei Biennale (2006), the 15th & 17th Biennale of Sydney (2006 and 2010), Istanbul Biennial (2007), Yokohama Triennale (2008), and the 50th, 52nd & 56th Venice Biennale (2003, 2007 and 2015). Exhibitions and screenings of her work have taken place at Serpentine Gallery (2006 and 2008) and Tate Modern in London (2002, 2013 and 2014); New Museum (2009), Guggenheim Museum (2011 and 2018), and MoMA in New York (2016 and 2015); Fondation Louis Vuitton (2016), Palais de Tokyo (2005 and 2017), and Centre Pompidou in Paris (2019, 2014, 2003).

Cao Fei's recent projects include the Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Chinese Art Initiative at Guggenheim Museum New York, a solo show at Tai Kwun Contemporary in Hong Kong (2018), a retrospective at K21 Düsseldorf (2018), and in 2019 she was the first Chinese artist to have a solo exhibition at Centre Pompidou, Paris.

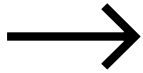
She was a nominee for the Future Generation Art Prize 2010 and the finalist of Hugo Boss Prize 2010. She received the Chinese Contemporary Art Award (CCAA) Best Young Artist Award in 2006 and Best Artist Award in 2016. She was also the recipient of Piedra de Sal Award at Cuenca Biennale in 2016.

Blueprints is generously supported by Luma Foundation and Muse, The Rolls-Royce Art Programme.

For press information please contact:

Nadja Coyne / nadjac@serpentinegalleries.org / +44 (0) 7775 792 894

Press images at serpentinegalleries.org/press



Notes to Editors

All visitors to Cao Fei: Blueprints must book a FREE timed ticket via the [Serpentine website](#).

Visitors to *Blueprints* can view *The Eternal Wave AR*, a new geolocated augmented reality work, on their smartphones at the Serpentine Gallery, via the Acute Art App.

Download the Art app on the App Store or Google Play. The devices supported are iPhone X or above, and Samsung Galaxy S8 or equivalent. The app requires a phone with a minimum of 4GB of memory and Apple iOS 11 or Android 8.0 Oreo (API 24) operating system.

CAO FEI EXHIBITION SUPPORTED BY

**L U M A
F O U N D A T I O N**

SUPPORTING PARTNER



VIRTUAL REALITY PRODUCED BY

**Acute
Art**

EXHIBITION CIRCLE

Yongsoo Huh
Max and Monique Burger with the TOY Family
Asymmetry Art Foundation

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FROM



DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT SUPPORTED BY

**Bloomberg
Philanthropies**

ADVISORS

AECOM

Weil

SERPENTINE GALLERIES SUPPORTED BY



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**