

## CAO Yu

(born 1988 in Liaoning Province, China. Lives and works in Beijing, China.)



***Escape off the Edge of the Human World* (2021)**, short film, 4:06, colour, sound

The video work, *Escape off the Edge of the Human World*, is a poetic allegory for the human condition; a bittersweet meditation on the choice between remaining rooted in the safety of the known and being uprooted into the uncertainty of the new. Within the short space of four-minutes, this film unfolds a profound existential parable. Beginning and ending amongst the relentless waves of an ominous dark ocean, the film depicts a fish tank stranded on the threshold between land and sea. As the tide rises, the shore turns into ocean, and the tank is submerged in the sea. But what of the fish inside the tank? The only spot of bright glowing color in a grey world, translucent in its fragility, the golden fish stares straight out at us, swimming along the thin glass walls of its enclosed landscape. As the barrier between it and the outside world becomes ever more tenuous, we cannot help but be torn between a desire for the little fish's escape, and fears for its survival in the harsh realities of the stormy sea. Do we—as the saying goes—want to be

big fish in a small familiar pond, or small fish set loose in the vastness of the ocean? As the earth spins, the cycle of the tides continues, and the same dilemmas will always present themselves, time and time again.

**Courtesy the artist and Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing**

## **ARTIST BIO**

[www.galerieursmeile.com/artists/cao-yu/](http://www.galerieursmeile.com/artists/cao-yu/)

Cao Yu received her BFA & MA from the Sculpture Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing. Her sharp, provocative work spans video, performance, photography, installation, sculpture, and painting. Her interdisciplinary work is at once conceptual, subtly feminist, slightly surreal, deconstructed autobiography, minimalist yet often over the top. At the centre of her practice is her own body as both subject and tool. From the raw intensity of works made with her breast-milk after childbirth, to her neon and video declarations of desire and defiance, Cao Yu joyfully upends expectations and societal taboos. Irony and performance remain her hallmarks: through both gestures and grand visual statements, she wields art as a weapon to challenge “inferior values, aesthetics, and culture”. Cao Yu’s vision is as uncompromising as it is layered: she elevates the female body and lived experience as a front line to question gender norms, identity politics, power, and historical memory. Her incisive and bold artistic language, distinctive cross-disciplinary practice, witty and ironic expression have made her a leading figure of China’s new generation of female artists. She has also been recognized as one of the most influential emerging artists in the Chinese contemporary art scene. Cao Yu is a nominee of the Porsche Young Artist of the Year 2024 award. She has been shortlisted for The Sovereign Asia Art Prize in 2023, amongst many other awards, and has been selected as the candidate of Forbes China Most Influential Young Artist in 2023. In 2022, Cao Yu was ranked No.1 by Hi Art - The Most Influential Female Artist in China. Her works have also been collected by museums such as: M+ Museum, Hong Kong; Erlenmeyer Foundation, Basel, Switzerland; Sishang Art Museum, Beijing; CAFA Art Museum, Beijing, and the Zhuzhong Art Museum, Beijing.

A selection of her major museum exhibitions worldwide include: The Tanks Museum Shanghai (2024); One Art Museum Beijing (2024); Shanghai Jiushi Art Museum, Shanghai, China (2024); Jinyue Children’s Art Museum, Chengdu, China (2024); ASE Foundation, Shanghai, China (2024); Goethe Institut, Beijing, China (2024); Museum der Moderne Salzburg Austria (2023); Wuhan Art Museum China (2023); The Cloud Collection, Nanjing, China (2023); ONGEUN Art and Cultural Foundation, Seoul, Korea (2023); Shenzhen Artron Art Center, Shenzhen, China (2023); Guardian Art Center, Beijing, China (2023); The 7th Guangzhou Triennial, *Symphony of All the Changes*, Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, Guangzhou, China (2022); Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Germany (2022); Lillehammer Art Museum, Norway (2022); Kunstforeningen Gammel Strand, Copenhagen, Denmark (2022); Ulsan Art Museum, South Korea (2022); Shanghai DuoLun Museum of Modern Art, Shanghai, China (2021); Shanghai Gallery of Art, Shanghai,

China (2021); Shenzhen Artron Art Center, Shenzhen, China (2021); Today Art Museum, Beijing, China (2021); Museum of Contemporary Art Yinchuan, Yinchuan, China (2021); Hive Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, China (2020); MAK Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Vienna, Austria (2019); Minsheng Art Museum, Beijing, China (2018); Zhuzhong Art Museum, Beijing, China (2018); Museum of Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, Chongqing Contemporary Art Center, Chongqing, China (2018); Tongsha Ecological Park, Dongguan, China (2018); Artspace, Sydney, Australia (2017); Sishang Art Museum, Beijing, China (2017); Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France (2016); Today Art Museum, Beijing, China (2016); Jinji Lake Art Museum, Suzhou, China (2016); Luohu Art Museum, Shenzhen, China (2016); *The 1st Daojiao New New Art Festival*, XI Contemporary Art Center, Dongguan, China (2016); OCT Art and Design Gallery, Shenzhen, China (2016); Ming Contemporary Art Museum, Shanghai, China (2016), among many others.