MOMENTUM
www.momentumworldwide.org
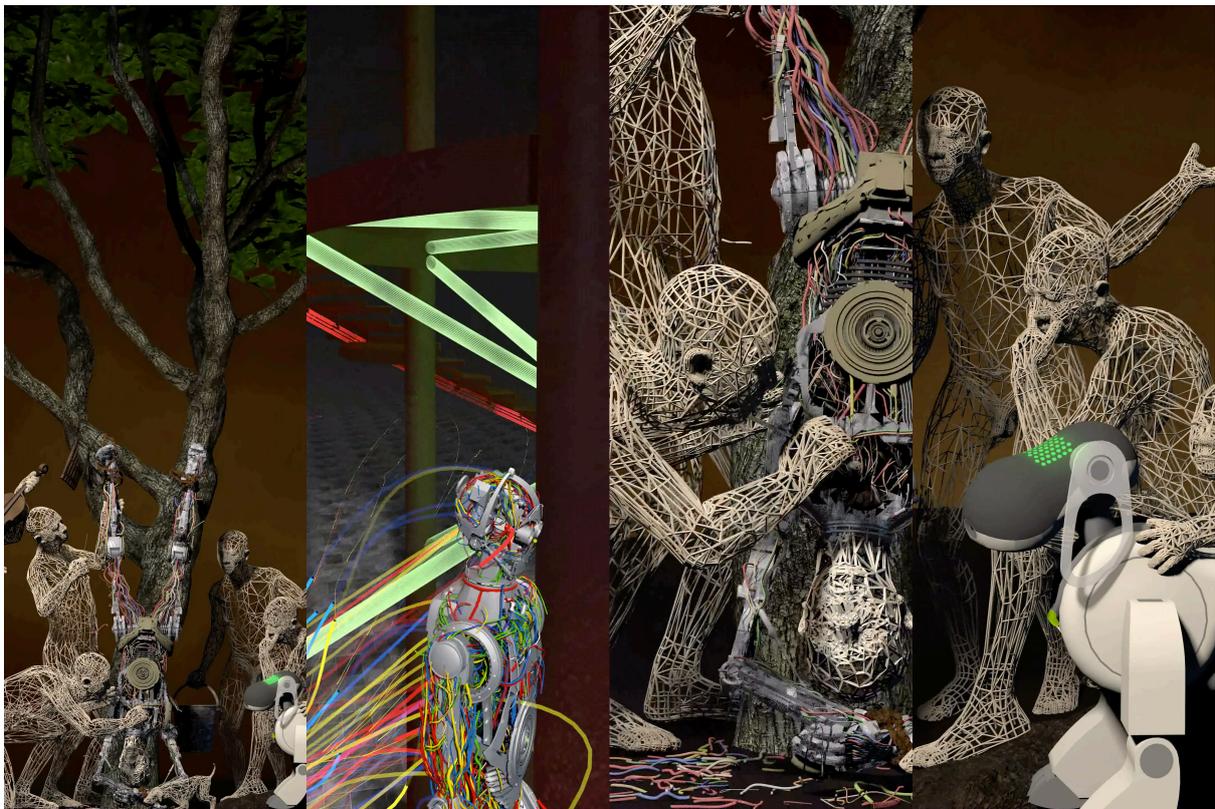The global platform for time-based art

MIAO Xiaochun

(born 1964 in Wuxi, Jiangsu Province, China. Lives and works in Beijing.)

Limitless **(2011-2012)**, 4-Channel 3D computer animation, 11:15, colour, sound

The work of Beijing-based artist Miao Xiaochun, a pioneer of digital animation in China, addresses the cycles of history, the rise and fall of civilisations, and the extinction, survival, and rebirth of cultures. His consistent quotations of a diversity of masterpieces from art history, always reimagining them through modern technologies and contexts, is a way of bringing the past, present and future together. By transposing the compositions and emotional intensity of the western canon of old master paintings and classical music into a contemporary Asian context, he creates arcs of incident and images of action that reflect how, whatever their origins, artists have always reacted to the times and places in which they live.

In an increasingly virtual and technologically-mediated world, when access to art, music and literature has become universally available, Miao challenges conventional notions of authenticity, authorship, and the future role of humanity. Yet, in art, repetition has often been a necessary first step to innovation, and Miao illustrates, as do the works by a number of other artists in this exhibition, how creative synergy may be derived not only from the stimulus of other art, but also from that of literature, architecture, popular culture and music. In this expanded field of references, new visions of the future take shape; hybrid, recombinant, and deeply reflective of our mediated present.

In an investigation of the relationship between art history and contemporary digital culture, with the music of Franz Schubert's romantic *Symphony No.8*, (*The Unfinished*, 1822) playing in the background, Miao's animation *Limitless* (2011-12) is composed of 18 scenes designed around compositions by the artists Giovanni Bellini (1430-15160), Caravaggio (1571-1610), Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), Francisco Goya (1746-1840), Edvard Munch (1865-1944), Titian (1488/90-1576), Paul Cézanne (1839-1906) and Bill Viola (1951-2024), in dialogue with quotations from contemporary popular culture. Opening with the bucolic idyll of livestock foraging in a wooded mountainous landscape, this timeless pastoral setting is suddenly occupied by the artist's futuristic avatars; transparent sillouettes of the artist's body, traced out of flowing energy lines, at times disintegrating, at others breakdancing. A plane flying through a reconstruction of a classical painting, a possible "Last Supper" repopulated by multiples of the artist poised over a sumptuous banquet, sprays pesticides onto the feast. Floating in a space capsule, the artist rediscovers how to make fire, while robotic avatars build more of themselves. Animals invade the digital world of the avatars, while they dream of crucifixions. Avatars made out of petroleum fly around an oil rig, while others made of translucent water gaze our over a golden sunset landscape, bringing us full circle with the beginning. Celebrating humankind's achievements and failures, hopes and threats, this strange sequence of events is multiplied through repetition. Within the nearly infinite permutations of *Limitless*, it seems, there are no boundaries between past and future, life, death, heaven, purgatory or hell where the human and the virtual soul confront each other in a world of ignorance, indifference, cruelty, pollution and threatened extinction.

Limitless uncovers an unsettled universe where infinite mutability competes with chaos in an interconnected torrent of simultaneous ideas. In four sardonic, surreal, humorous, potentially tragic, and "limitless" loops projected on adjacent vertical screens, unsynchronised images unfold in a multiplicity of sequences and viewpoints. While the videos playing on each screen are identical, the disjointed sequence in which they are played means that the images never line-up in the same way twice. Though the footage is the same, the de-synchronisation fractures linear time, creating a sense of temporal dislocation and multiplicity. This endlessly shifting configuration evokes the idea of a multiverse—a reality composed not of a single, fixed timeline but of countless parallel possibilities. These echoing timelines suggest that we do not inhabit a singular, fixed present, but rather coexist across **multiple planes of reality**—sliding between potential pasts and speculative futures. In this looping, layered installation small shifts constantly create nearly infinite permutations of new contexts and new narratives; and time, like landscape, is no

longer singular but kaleidoscopic. This work visualises the fragmentation of time and narrative in the digital age, where memory, identity, and history are no longer linear but constantly re-edited and reframed. The repetition-with-variation structure—a cycle of echo and deviation, an ever-evolving refrain—reflects the recursive nature of human attempts to understand the past or imagine the future: always revisiting, never arriving.

ARTIST BIO

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Miao Xiaochun received his bachelor's degree from Nanjing University in 1986. In 1989 he graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, and from the Kassel Academy of Fine Arts in Germany in 1999, with two master's degrees. He is currently a professor of Art Photography and Digital Media at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. His pedagogical approach integrates traditional artistic methodologies with the exploration of new media technologies, empowering a new generation of artists to blend classical techniques with contemporary innovations.

Miao Xiaochun is considered one of the most representative and influential artists in the domain of China's new media art, known for his innovative use of digital technology to explore themes of time, history, and the cultural implications of globalization. Since the 1990s he has been consistently exploring the interface between the real and the virtual. His extensive body of work includes photography, painting, CGI digital animation, 3D modelling and 3D printing – techniques which are often interwoven to inform one another. Throughout his practice, Miao investigates the relationship between art history and contemporary digital culture. By reimagining canonical Western masterpieces through modern technology—photographing himself into CGI re-creations of Michelangelo, Bosch, Cranach, Caspar David Friedrich, and countless other icons of art history—he explores multiple-viewpoint perception, the fluidity of virtual space, and our digital re-contextualization of the past and future. Miao Xiaochun is a visionary artist whose work telescopes across eras, fusing historical allegory with futuristic narratives in expanded, immersive formats. Melding Renaissance iconography with digital simulation and self-portraiture, he questions authenticity, perception, and our place within technologically constructed realities - transforming historical and religious imagery into a narrative space that bridges the past with the present. Through his intricate re-imaginings of historical and religious imagery, Miao offers a contemporary commentary on the fusion of East and West, the transformation of historical narratives, and the tension between tradition and modernity. Through both monumental digitally animated works, acrylic-on-linen paintings, and 3D printed sculpture, he questions authenticity, authorship, and humanity's role in a machine-mediated world. Through Miao's idiosyncratic imagination about history and future, his works add an important voice to contemporary negotiations with art history.

Major Biennales include: Ennova Art Biennale vol.01, Langfang, China (2024); Chengdu Biennale, Chengdu Art Museum, China (2023); 55th Venice Biennale, Chinese Pavilion, Italy (2013); 7th Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia (2012); 1st Kiev International Biennial of Contemporary Art, Ukraine (2012); 4th Guangzhou Triennial, Guangdong Museum of Art, China (2012); Busan Biennale, Busan MoMA, Korea (2008); Seoul Media Art Biennale, Korea (2006); Shanghai Biennale, Shanghai Art Museum, China (2002).

Miao Xiaochun's recent solo exhibitions include: *Digital Reimagining: New Dimensions*, *Shanghai Museum of Contemporary Art*, Shanghai, China (2023); *Future Memories, UCCA Center for Contemporary Art*, Beijing, China (2020); Miao Xiaochun: Gyro Dance, Eli Klein Gallery, New York (2019); 01 Variable Cycle: Miao Xiaochun 2006-2018, OCT Art & Design Gallery, Shenzhen, China (2019); *A Temporal World, The Ullens Center for Contemporary Art*, Beijing, China (2017); Echo, Galerie Paris-Beijing, Paris (2016); Metamorphosis, Klein Sun Gallery, New York (2016); Miao Xiaochun: Save As, White Box Art Center, Beijing (2015); Miao Xiaochun 2015, Art Museum of Nanjing University of the Arts, Nanjing, China (2015). *The Garden of Earthly Delights: Digital Reinterpretations, Yuz Museum*, Shanghai, China (2015); amongst many others.

Miao Xiaochun's work is included in important private and museum Public Collections: MoMA, New York, USA; The Metropolitan Museumof Art, New York, USA; The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA, USA; The Smart Museum of Art, Chicago, USA; Pacific Asia Museum, Pasadena, CA, USA; Broad Art Museum, East Lansing, MI, USA; Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna, Austria; Fondation Nationale d'Art Contemporain (FNAC), Paris, France; Singapore Art Museum, Singapore; Shanghai Art Museum, China; M+ Museum Hong Kong, China; Borusan Contemporary, Istanbul, Turkey; Goetz Collection, Munich, Germany; Zabludowicz Collection, London, UK; DSL Collection, Paris, France.