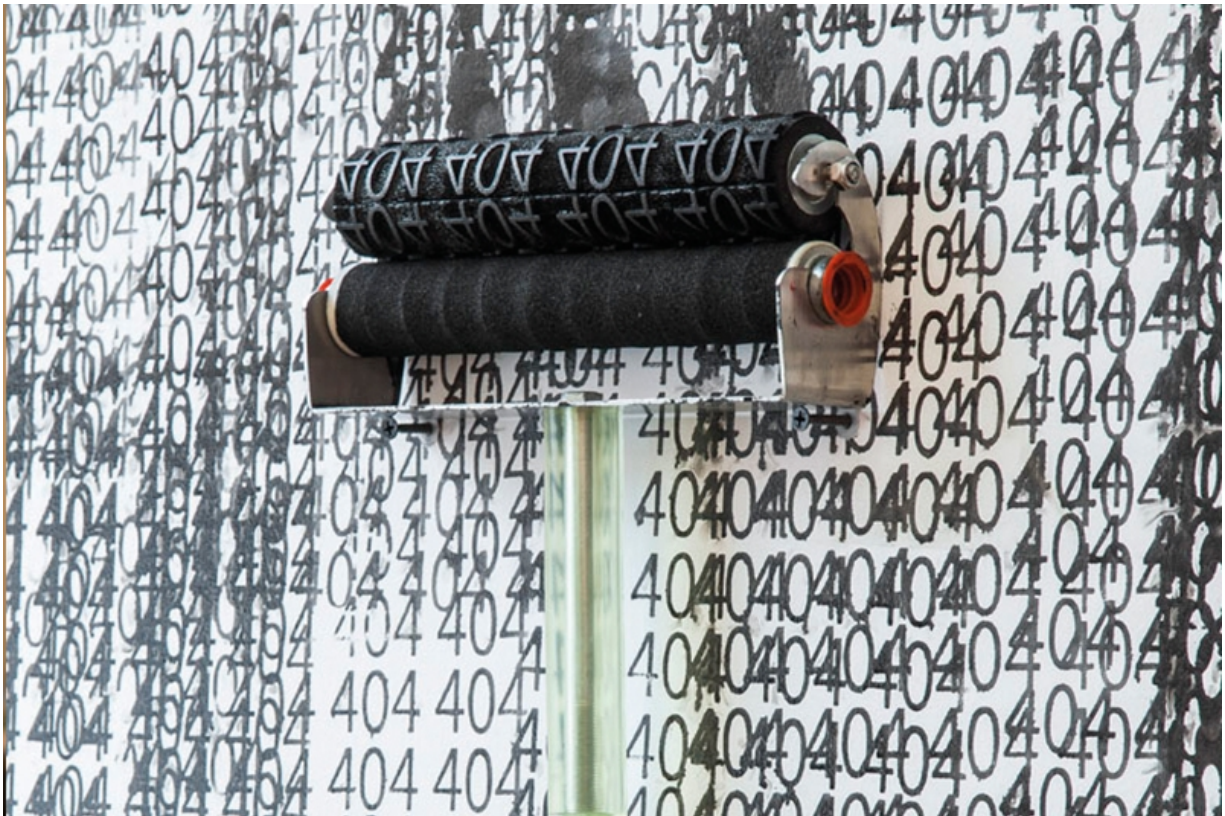


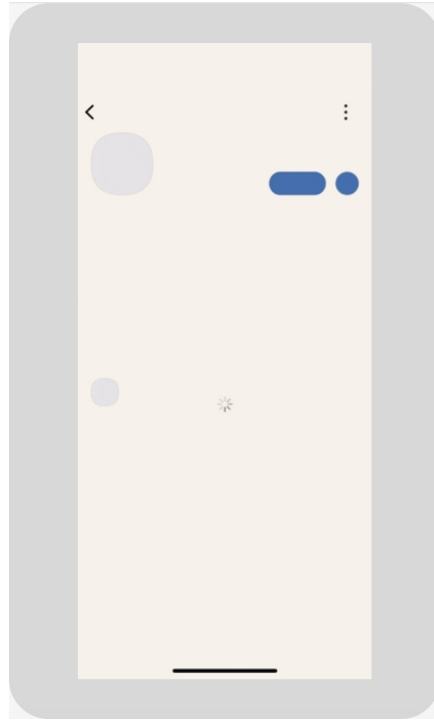
ART from ESLEWHERE: Mexico City
The MOMENTUM Collection at LAGOS

AAAJIAO



***404404404* (2017), Installation, ink & sponge roller, dimensions variable**

404 is the error message which appears on blocked websites in China and around the world – a digital language transcending alphabets and cultures to be understood everywhere. Translating the digital message back into analog form, *404404404* (2017) is aaajiao's subtle commentary on censorship and the flow of information in our digital culture. The error message is always the same, no matter the diversity of content it is covering from view. But in the artist's rendition, the work becomes entirely site-specific, taking a new form with each installation; multiplying the message 404 in a diversity of forms and contexts.



***Free Will, Open Mic, GFW, Confessions* (2021), Video installation, LCD screen, acrylic fittings, 16 x 24 x 3.8cm, 00'10" on loop, on loan from the artist**

Free Will, Open Mic, GFW, Confessions is part of a series of four video installations made by aaajiao for his solo exhibition in Shanghai, *I was dead on the Internet*, in September of 2021. Reflecting on aaajiao's existential experience of the pandemic lockdowns in his studio in Berlin, these minimalistic video works are also a subtle, yet striking, commentary on China's increasingly stringent censorship of artistic expression and communication platforms. As a media artist, blogger, activist and programmer, aaajiao has for many years throughout his practice addressed the issue of China's Great Firewall – the policy of restrictions on internet content begun in 2000, blocking websites which would enable unfettered access to media and information. His 2017 work *404404404*, held by the MOMENTUM Collection, is an analog installation of the universal online code signifying a blocked website. In the work shown in this exhibition, aaajiao inscribes the Great Firewall (GFW) into the very title of the work. As a Chinese artist, aaajiao's work is necessarily subtle, if he is to have any hope of showing it in his home country. In the series of video installations made for *I was dead on the Internet*, aaajiao recreates the interfaces of various mobile communications apps (twitter,

facebook, ins, and clubhouse), as empty outlines, largely devoid of content, simply tracking the passage of time.

Our increasing reliance on the internet was proven time and again during the pandemic, when, for most people trapped at home, it proved to be our only way to communicate – personally and professionally – with the outside world. Yet what if this communication ceases to exist? *Free Will, Open Mic, GFW, Confessions* depicts the online discussion platform Clubhouse, which was launched during the first pandemic lockdown as a new type of audio social network to enable people to come together to talk, listen, and learn. Yet the app is empty. Only a perpetually looping refresh symbol shows that we are looking at a moving image. Clubhouse was a revelation for younger generations in China, who used this platform to speak with one another and exchange ideas across this vast country. Yet after only two months, Clubhouse was shut down in China.

In this series of work, aaajiao also responds to his own experience of having his Weibo (the Chinese equivalent of Facebook) account blocked earlier this year, and to the ongoing erasure from the internet (and hence from popular historical record) of important cultural figures in China: filmmakers, artists, writers. Such ‘death on the internet’ has a far less metaphoric equivalent in a time of crisis, when the content of the Internet was largely devoted to pandemic death tolls, while we all know people who died from the virus. *Free Will, Open Mic, GFW, Confessions* from *I was dead on the Internet*, comingles aaajiao’s felt experience of the COVID pandemic – the frustration and isolation of lockdown, the depression over the death of loved ones, the stasis of perpetual uncertainties – with the threat of digital death; the possibility of being silenced and erased from cyberspace.

aaajiao (b. 1984, Xi’an, China. Lives and works in Shanghai, China and Berlin, Germany.)

www.eventstructure.com/aaajiao

Active online as a media artist, blogger, activist and programmer, aaajiao is the virtual persona of Shanghai- and Berlin-based artist Xu Wenkai. Born in 1984 — the title of



George Orwell's classic allegorical novel — in one of China's oldest cities, Xi'an, aaajiao's art and works are marked by a strong dystopian awareness, literati spirit and sophistication. Many of aaajiao's works speak to new thinking, controversies and phenomenon around the Internet, with specific projects focusing on the processing of data, the blogosphere and China's Great Firewall. aaajiao's work is interdisciplinary, extending from post-internet art to architecture, topography, design, and beyond to capture the pulse of the young generations consuming cyber technology and living in social media.

aaajiao's work has been featured in numerous exhibitions around the world. Recent shows include: "Deep Simulator" Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Turin (2019-2021); "Art in the Age of the Internet, 1989 to Today", The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, USA (2018); "unREAL", Haus der elektronischen Künste, Basel, Switzerland (2017); "Shanghai Project Part II", Shanghai, China (2017); "Remnants of an Electronic Past", Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art, Manchester, UK (2016); OCAT Contemporary Art Terminal Xi'an, China (2016), "Temporal Turn: Art and Speculation in Contemporary Asia", Spencer Museum of Art, Kansas, USA (2016); "Take Me (I'm Yours)" (curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist, Jens Hoffmann and Kelly Taxter), Jewish Museum, New York, USA (2016); "Overpop", Yuz Museum, Shanghai, China (2016); "Hack Space" (curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Amira Gad), K11 Art Foundation Pop-up Space, Shanghai, and K11 Art Museum, Hong Kong, China (2016); "Globale: Global Control and Censorship", ZKM | Centre for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, Germany (2015); "Thingworld International Triennial of New Media Art", The National Art Museum of China, Beijing, China (2014); Transmediale Festival of Digital Art, Berlin, Germany (2010). aaajiao was awarded the Illy Present Future Prize in 2019, the Art Sanya Awards Jury Prize in 2014, and was nominated for the first edition of OCAT-Pierre Huber Art Prize in 2014.