

## Urban Theater: A Comedy in Four Acts

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Site-specific installations by Cao Fei, Aki Sasamoto, and Wong Ping and an outdoor installation by Erwin Wurm in a year-long outdoor exhibition set the stage for an open, fluid, interactive, and thought-provoking space for public art at UCCA Edge.

### Exhibition Period:

2021.5.22 - 2022.5.22

### Exhibition Location:

UCCA Edge  
2F, No. 88 Xizang Bei Lu  
Jing'an District, Shanghai  
China

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SHANGHAI, China — The new UCCA Edge officially opens to the public in Shanghai on May 22, 2021. Opening concurrently with the inaugural exhibition "City on the Edge: Art and Shanghai at the Turn of the Millennium," from May 22, 2021 to May 22, 2022, UCCA Edge presents the year-long outdoor exhibition "Urban Theater: A Comedy in Four Acts." The group show transforms the wraparound outdoor terrace of the museum into a thought-provoking space for public art and an open and fluid setting to stimulate new curiosity and interactions with art for the museum's new audience in Shanghai. "Urban Theater: A Comedy in Four Acts" is curated by UCCA Curator Ara Qiu.

"Urban Theater: A Comedy in Four Acts" is inspired by the outdoor theater of ancient Greece. The word "theater" first appeared in the Greek language as "theatron," translated to mean "a place for viewing." The oldest history of the theater in human civilization can be traced back to around 2,500 years ago in ancient Greece, where open-air theaters were the center of public life and gatherings. The ancient Greek dramas performed for the public at the theater reflected a range of life in society, the economy, and culture at the time, while functioning to unite its citizens and aiding in the spread of culture. Inspired by the form, practical function, and legacy of the ancient Greek theater, as well as the unique position of Shanghai as a globalized city and metropolitan center, UCCA Edge has commissioned artists Cao Fei (b. 1978, Guangzhou), Aki Sasamoto (b. 1980, Kanagawa, Japan), and Wong Ping (b. 1984, Hong Kong) for site-specific artworks in "Urban Theater: A Comedy in Four Acts," based on the architectural attributes of the wraparound outdoor terrace on the fourth floor of the museum. Together, these three site-specific installations and an outdoor installation by Erwin Wurm (b. 1954 Bruck an der Mur, Austria) present four comedic acts to the public in an elevated "urban theater," weaved into the urban fabric with the city as its backdrop. The four works in the exhibition owe themselves to the relatable comedy found in the organic connections and emotions of everyday life, at times humorous, spicy, irreverent, or satirical. Breaking outside the walls of the museum and furnishing a fresh, accessible, and distinctive encounter with art in the city, this

exhibition is designed to provide the public with new perspectives on contemporary art and to inspire reflections on questions such as the nature of public art, the relationship between humans and cities, and how public art contributes to the urban spirit.

In response to the specularization of the megacity, the four artists peel back on the humor and the philosophical lurking in daily life with four comedic acts, ranging from the cheeky to the absurd. Hung low at the street-level entrance of UCCA Edge, the mixed media car installation by Erwin Wurm appears in the shape of an UFO. The artist believes that the automobile is the perfect embodiment of contemporary society, symbolizing identity and class, speed and efficiency. Molding an iconic Porsche sports car into a futuristic vehicle in this work, *UFO* (2006) forms a playful juxtaposition with passing pedestrians and vehicles, as well as a witty metaphor for the landing of UCCA Edge in Shanghai. Following up, on the fourth floor of the museum, Cao Fei combines the view of Shanghai looking out of the east terrace with building upon her 2007 video work *The Birth of RMB City* in the interactive binocular installation *Re-enchantment: The Birth of RMB City* (2021). Looking out towards the city through the binoculars set up for the work, the familiar Shanghai skyline becomes replaced by a fantastical urban landscape. The artist's surrealistic approach to depicting the effects of rapid urbanization, taking forms of play to create utopias that blur between the real and the virtual, betrays the surrealism of the country in the era she lives in.

In Wong Ping's *Shifty Eyes Exercise* (2021) on the south terrace, the inflatable tubes extending from inside a semi-transparent acrylic structure represent the flickering gaze of urbanites. Whether curious and inquisitive, or adrift and dodgy, the expression in their eyes could be seen externalized in the various states of the inflatable tubes. In the final act, taking cue from sports bars as recreational venues for workers, Aki Sasamoto has constructed *Weather Bar* (2021) on the west terrace. In between the sports programs playing on the two TV screens at the bar are two video works by the artist featuring herself in a serious but absurd "weather forecast" that reports on internal changes in human feelings and emotional temperature. Atmospheric climate and physiological conditions become intermixed in the layers of ambiguous clues embedded within the installation, confusing the real with the false, the interior with the exterior.

Cities are hallmarks of the material developments in human civilization and where the flourishing of cultures crystallizes. From the city-states of Ancient Greece to

the globalized metropolis of Shanghai, along with the rapid developments as a result of urbanization since the last century, the theater that used to be emblematic of the public and the spectacle has transposed from the open-air city center to within the walls of skyscrapers. Setting the scene for the new explorations of a new major museum in Shanghai, the year-long "Urban Theater: A Comedy of Four Acts" can be experienced as an experimental ground that animates its surrounding urban space with public art. The exhibition departs from more conventional, one-way exhibition formats and enables open-ended possibilities of encounters with the artworks depending on the viewing time, angle, and perspective of the audience. Situating these works in a shared commons, this exhibition revives the spirit of the ancient Greek theater and encourages open, interactive exploration with its urban surroundings and their inhabitants, allowing for the direct intervention of art into daily life and stimulating new reflections on the relationship between humans and cities, urbanites and their environment, art and life.

### **About the Artists**

#### **Cao Fei**

Cao Fei (b. 1978, Guangzhou, lives and works in Beijing) blends social commentary, pop culture aesthetics, references to Surrealism, and documentary filmmaking conventions in her works, which consider the rapid and chaotic changes of contemporary Chinese society. Her work has been exhibited in many major international exhibitions, including the Shanghai Biennale, Moscow Biennale, Taipei Biennial, 15th and 17th Biennale of Sydney, Istanbul Biennial, Yokohama Triennale, and 50th, 52nd, and 56th Venice Biennales. She has exhibited her works and projects at museums such as the Serpentine Gallery (London); Tate Modern (London); New Museum (New York); Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York); Museum of Modern Art (New York); Palais de Tokyo (Paris); and more. She has held solo exhibitions at Centre Pompidou (Paris) and MoMA PS1 (New York). In 2020, her large-scale exhibition "Blueprints" was shown at the Serpentine Gallery. Cao Fei was nominated for the Hugo Boss Asia Art Award in 2010. She has received both the Best Young Artist Award (2006) and the Best Artist Award (2016) from the Chinese Contemporary Art Awards.

#### **Aki Sasamoto**

Aki Sasamoto (b. 1980, Kanagawa, Japan, lives and works in Brooklyn) works in sculpture, performance, video, and whatever medium it takes to get her ideas

across. In her installation and performance works, Aki Sasamoto often moves and talks inside careful arrangements of sculpturally altered objects, activating bizarre emotions behind daily life. She has collaborated with musicians, choreographers, mathematicians, and engineers. Donuts, grapefruits, potatoes, coffee, and well drinks appear in some of her works.

Her installation and performance works appear in gallery spaces, theater spaces, as well as in odd sites. Her work has been shown at Sculpture Center (New York), The Kitchen (New York), The Chocolate Factory Theater (New York), the Whitney Biennial (2010), Greater New York 2010 at MoMA PS1 (New York), National Museum of Art (Osaka), 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art (Kanazawa), Yokohama Triennale (2008), Gwangju Biennial (2012), Shanghai Biennale (2016), Kochi-Muziris Biennale (2016), and numerous other international venues.

Aki Sasamoto has received grants from the Guggenheim Foundation, Pollack-Krasner Foundation, United States Artists, Foundation for Contemporary Arts, New York Foundation for the Arts, New York Community Trust, Rema Hort Mann Foundation, the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs, and more. She is an assistant professor at the sculpture department of Yale School of Art.

### **Wong Ping**

Flashing, pop-like imagery; visual and auditory narrations that explicitly touch upon sex, politics and social relations; vibrant installations that extend into the three dimensions of the artist's fantastical animation world—these are but cornerstones of Wong Ping's (b. 1984, Hong Kong, lives and works in Hong Kong) practice. Discussing his observations of society, from teenage to adulthood, his works combine the crass and the colourful to mount a discourse around repressed sexuality, personal sentiments, and political limitations. As one of Hong Kong's most exciting emerging artists, Wong Ping has been commissioned to create works by significant institutions including Institute of Contemporary Art (Miami), Kunsthalle Basel, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York), M+ (Hong Kong), and Nowness.

Wong Ping was awarded Camden Arts Centre Emerging Arts Prize at Frieze, Huayu Youth Award Jury Prize, Young Artist Award by Hong Kong Arts Development Awards, and more. He has held solo exhibitions at major institutions including Centre Pompidou (Paris), Institute of Contemporary Art (Miami), Camden Arts Centre (London), Kunsthalle Basel; and participated in exhibitions

internationally at Mudam Luxembourg, OGR Torino (Turin), Guggenheim (New York), the New Museum Triennial, the Ural Industrial Biennial, amongst others. His work is held in several permanent collections including M+ (Hong Kong), Kadist, Guggenheim (New York), MOCA Busan, amongst others. His animation films have been presented at numerous film festivals worldwide, including International Film Festival Rotterdam, Sundance Film Festival, London Short Film Festival, and Kino der Kunst. In 2019, his film *Wong Ping's Fables 1* was the winner of the Ammodo Tiger Short Competition at the International Film Festival Rotterdam, which gave a special mention to its sequel *Wong Ping's Fables 2* in the following year.

### **Erwin Wurm**

Erwin Wurm (b. 1954 Bruck an der Mur, Austria, lives and works in Vienna and Limberg, Austria) has redefined the ways we understand and look at absurdity in his sculptural, performative, and engaging works. The artist came to prominence with his One Minute sculptures, a project that he began in 1996/1997. While Wurm considers humor an important tool in his work, there is always an underlying social critique of contemporary culture, particularly in response to the capitalist influences and resulting societal pressures that the artist sees as contrary to our internal ideals. Wurm emphasizes this dichotomy by working within the liminal space between high and low and merging genres to explore what he views as a farcical and invented reality.

Solo exhibitions of Wurm's work have been organized at venues such as the Vancouver Art Gallery, The Albertina Museum, Austria, Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil (Sao Paolo), Museum Küppersmühle für Moderne Kunst (Duisburg, Germany), and Schindler House at MAK Center for Art and Architecture (Los Angeles). He represented Austria at the Venice Biennale in 2017. His works have been acquired by numerous art museums, including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York), Vancouver Art Gallery, Kunsthalle Bremen, Kunsthaus Zürich, Centre Pompidou (Paris), and the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in New York.

### **About UCCA Edge**

Opening May 2021, UCCA Edge occupies 5,500 square meters over three levels of the new EDGE tower in Shanghai's Jing'an District. Designed by New York-based architecture practice SO – IL, the museum includes 1,700 square meters of gallery space as well as a wraparound outdoor terrace and public spaces including a lobby and auditorium. As an integral part of the UCCA constellation, UCCA Edge

will mount exhibitions of leading Chinese and international artists, some developed exclusively for the Shanghai audience, some touring from other UCCA locations. In 2021, UCCA Edge will feature an opening show reflecting on the globalization of the Chinese art world through the prism of Shanghai, curated by UCCA Director Philip Tinari, a solo show of new paintings and archival materials by renowned artist Liu Xiaodong, and an Andy Warhol retrospective presented in collaboration with The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh. It will also host a bistrot, New Wave by Da Vittorio, developed by the Michelin- starred team of Da Vittorio Shanghai, as well as an outpost of UCCA Store. Situated just north of People's Square and Suzhou Creek, and directly above the Qufu Lu station of the Shanghai Metro in a bustling revitalized neighborhood, UCCA Edge will quickly become an essential destination and an integral part of Shanghai's vibrant cultural fabric.

#### **About UCCA**

UCCA Center for Contemporary Art is China's leading contemporary art institution. Committed to the belief that art can deepen lives and transcend boundaries, UCCA presents a wide range of exhibitions, public programs, and research initiatives to a public of more than one million visitors each year. UCCA Beijing sits at the heart of the 798 Art District, occupying 10,000 square meters of factory chambers built in 1957 and regenerated in 2019 by OMA. UCCA Dune, designed by Open Architecture, lies beneath the sand in the seaside enclave of Aranya in Beidaihe. UCCA Edge, designed by architecture firm SO - IL, opens in Shanghai in May 2021. Formally accredited as a museum by the Beijing Cultural Bureau in 2018, UCCA also operates non-profit foundations, licensed by the Beijing Bureau of Civil Affairs and the Hong Kong government. UCCA's commercial ventures include the retail platform UCCA Store, the children's education initiative UCCA Kids, and collaborations and projects under the rubric UCCA Lab. Opened in 2007 and revived by a committed group of Chinese and international patrons in 2017, UCCA works to bring China into global dialogue through contemporary art.

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