Wang Tuo: Empty-handed into History

Released June 6, 2021

Wang Tuo's first institutional solo exhibition collects eight of the artist's early-career video works and presents for the first time in its complete form the focus of the artist's work for the past four years: "The Northeast Tetralogy."

BEIJING, China — From June 6, 2021 to September 5, 2021, UCCA Center for Contemporary Art presents "Wang Tuo: Empty-handed into History." As Wang Tuo's (b. 1984, Changchun) first institutional solo show, this exhibition collects eight of the artist's single- and multi-channel video works, including, in its complete form for the first time, "The Northeast Tetralogy," as well as related archival materials and sketches from the artist, presenting an overview of the artist's early-career works. The exhibition's title alludes to a view of history described by Japanese historian Yuzo Mizoguchi, in which one "enters history in a state of unconsciousness" and thereby discovers its original form. This notion outlines the core of Wang's creative methodology, as well as the critical role the artist has played in processes of deconstructing the past and imagining alternative, speculative histories. "Wang Tuo: Empty-handed into History" is curated by UCCA Curator Luan Shixuan and organized by Wang Ziwei and Shi Yao. The exhibition space is designed by Anna Yang.

The reappropriation and analysis of historical texts have long been the cornerstone of Wang's artistic practice, which places in an unspecified present pre-conditioned events that are based on the past, thereby gesturing towards the future through these hybrid, multi-dimensional narratives, guiding the viewer along both conspicuous and hidden clues to reach for truths behind historical events and their underlying historical and cultural forces. A long-term series that began in 2018 and completed in 2021, "The Northeast Tetralogy" is an important milestone in Wang's early career, comprised of four video works: *Smoke and Fire* (2018), *Distorting Words* (2019), *Tungus* (2021), and *Wailing Requiem* (2021). The works look to China's Northeast (Dongbei) region and a series of widely known incidents of violence in Chinese society in recent years, beginning with the May 4th Movement and continuing on to historical moments in recent Chinese history and in greater Northeast Asia, including the Chinese Civil War, the Jeju Uprising, and the contemporary plight of migrant workers. From the New Democracy movement in the first half of the twentieth century, to current events, to an imagined near

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future, major incidents from different eras, ancient supernatural tales, and fragments of history from both its grand narratives and obscured corners are interspersed among one another in a new narrative text that blurs the confines of time and space. In reconstructing and rearranging historical texts and connecting archetypal narratives and characters from different eras, Wang presents a visual narrative matrix with pieces that appear to exist independently yet echo each other in context. In "The Northeast Tetralogy," Wang's interpretation and analysis of different key moments from the Northeast's journey towards modernity open up new ways of thinking about a number of questions in China's recent history. In the same series, Wang also proposes the concept of "pan-shamanization," based on the artist's in-depth study of shamanistic rituals and the potentiality of bodies, by entering into an unconscious state, to become a medium of historical reincarnation during tumultuous times of societal changes.

Four additional works in the exhibition follow the diversity of other recent threads in Wang's artistic vision and interests: *Symptomatic Silence of Complicit Forgetting* (2019), *Meditation on Disappointing Reading* (2016), *Obsessions* (2019), and *Roleplay* (2016). Departing from the regional in "The Northeast Tetralogy," the artist explores in these four works in various ways subjects such as architecture, psychoanalysis, social constructs, and the scars of history. The fictional memories of a single individual provide the core text of *Symptomatic Silence of Complicit Forgetting*, which, in the contradictions between historical trauma and real life, condense together the collective memories of an entire generation. *Meditation on Disappointing Reading* retells a story found in Pearl S. Buck's banned-in-China 1969 novel *Three Daughters of Madame Liang*, as a metaphor for histories of migration and the challenges faced by immigrants in estranged cultural contexts. *Obsessions* grew out of Wang's interest in a missing person case and the details of the incident that sparked his inquiry into human desire, obsessions, architectural structures, and psychoanalysis. Lastly, *Roleplay* is a performance-based short film that delves into how constructed concepts seeps into the collective unconscious and become activated through the use of language. The sense of detachment heightened by the two reenactments in two spaces emphasizes the unsteady relationship between assumed social concepts and reality.

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About the Artist

Wang Tuo (b. 1984, Changchun, lives and works in Beijing) graduated from Tsinghua University in 2012 and the School of Visual Arts, Boston University, in 2014 with MFAs in painting. His major solo exhibitions include "Standing at the Crossroads" (WHITE SPACE, Beijing, 2020); "Wang Tuo: Smoke and Fire" (Present Company, New York, 2019); "Monkey Grammarians" (Salt Projects, Beijing, 2017); and "A Little Violence of Organized Forgetting" (Taikang Space, Beijing, 2016). Major group exhibitions include the 13th Shanghai Biennale (2021), "MMCA Asia Project – Looking for Another Family" (National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, 2020); "Psyche and Politics" (Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, 2019); "New Metallurgists" (Julia Stoschek Collection, Düsseldorf, 2018); "One Northeast" (Zarya Center of Contemporary Art, Vladivostok, 2018); and "Nine" (Queens Museum, New York, 2017).

Exhibition Catalogue

Wang Tuo's first-ever catalogue will be released by UCCA on the occasion of "Empty-handed into History." The catalogue reproduces the artist's video works through still images and excerpts of his scripts. Essays by exhibition curator Luan Shixuan and critics Fu Liaoliao and Zian Chen contextualize the artist's oeuvre through the perspectives of history, literary theory, Chinese traditional beliefs, and other frameworks. The catalogue is published by Zhejiang Photography Press and designed by loof.design.

Sponsorship and Support

Exclusive sustainable wall solutions support for this exhibition is provided by UCCA Strategic Partner Dulux.

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 across three locations. 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

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seaside enclave of Aranya in Beidaihe. UCCA Edge, designed by New York-based architecture firm SO – IL, opened 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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