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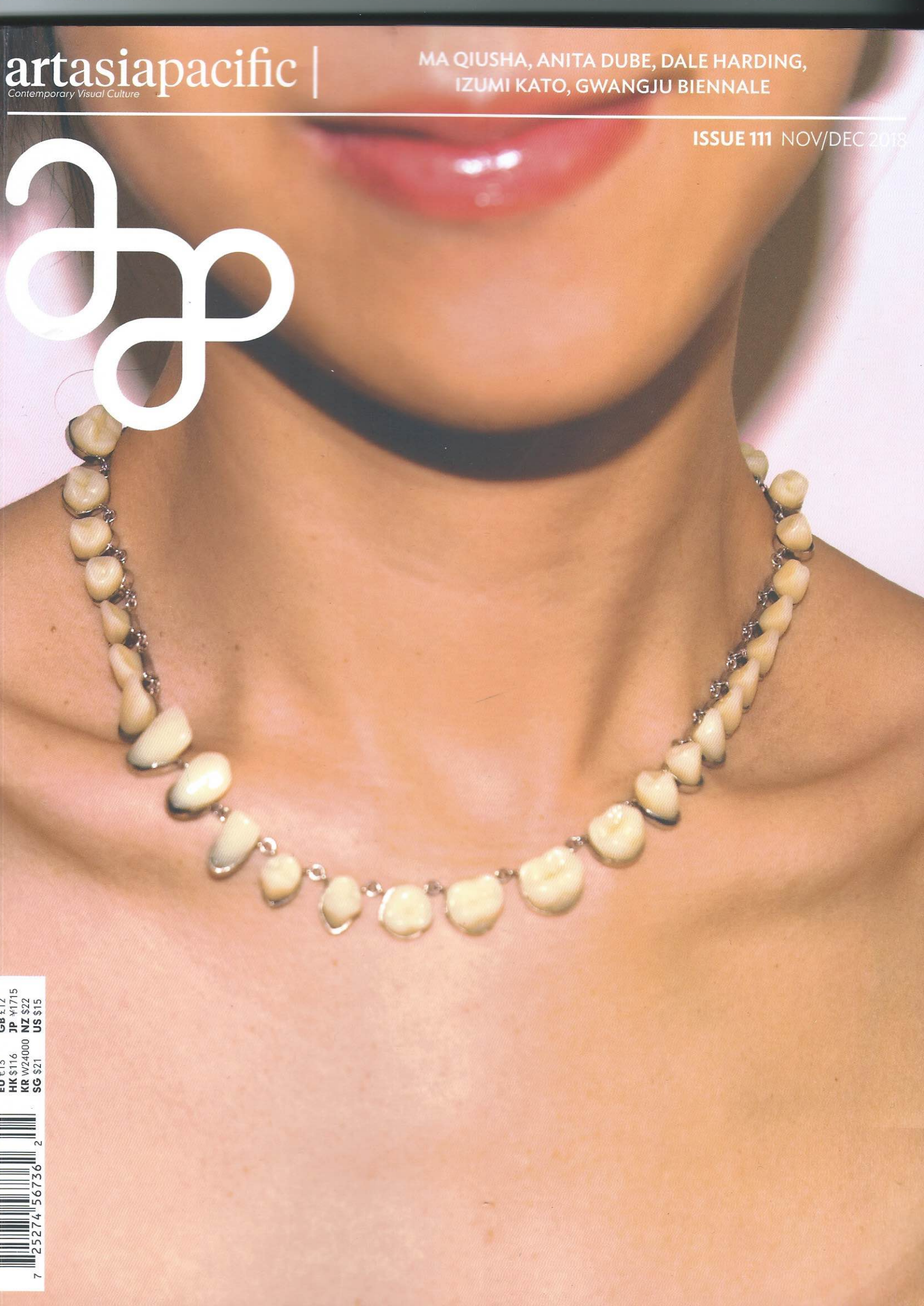
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# In Between

Three artists explore contemporary urban environments and social interactions in their installation works



1

**Xuan Ye**

*IN BETWEEN* *WE OSCILLATE*, 2018, screenshot of website, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist.



2

**Zhang Ruyi**

Installation view of *Mount*, 2018, concrete, ceramic tiles, glass and floor drain, dimensions variable, in "Walking on the Fade Out Lines" at Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai, 2018. Courtesy the artist.



3

**Sam Samiee**

*Design for a Money Note #3*, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 180 x 185 cm. Courtesy the artist.

1  
**Xuan Ye**  
TORONTO

Xuan Ye, born in 1989, is a Toronto-based artist, but she would like people to think of “Xuan Ye” as a “prototype of many objects.” This distinction borrows from object-oriented programming, a software design paradigm in which code is organized into distinct objects that can interact with one another. For Ye—one of whose “objects” is the artistic persona also known as A Pure Apparatus—this post-human, pluralist approach to the many “dynamic, networked roles” brought together in her practice opens up possibilities for navigating complexities in art as in life.

Ye’s deployment of digital media technologies to investigate instability in contemporary contexts is exemplified in the website work, *IN BETWEEN () WE OSCILLATE* (2018). The work presents the titular words in flickering neon yellow over antonym pairs such as “bad/good” and “bravery/cowardice,” which are presented in color-changing font, scrolling horizontally across a black background and alternating direction at regular intervals. An accompanying looped soundtrack was created by encoding the moving pairs, visualized as a spectrogram, into audible frequencies, generating an undulating, tinny whine. The programmed, continuous fluctuation of the antonym pairs from one end of the screen to the other invalidates the fixed dichotomies that they represent, literalizing the inherent mutability of language. The source of the words, an English textbook for non-native speakers, additionally brings into sharp relief the power dynamics embedded in language, questioning another set of oppositions that have returned with a vengeance in our post-globalization era: native and foreign.

Similarly focused on language is Ye’s “EveryLetterCyborg” (2017–), a series of web-application-based installations inspired by computer-generated poetry that explores how people filter information, and, in the artist’s words, “how we perceive the topological textual reality that is mediated by systematic generative algorithms.” *V 1.2* (2017–18), an iteration of this project that was recently shown at the Goethe-Institut in Beijing, involves a printer mounted on a microphone stand that spews out texts generated by Ye’s @qletrcyborg Twitterbot. With such technological experiments, Ye is not only developing unexpected tools with which to process contemporary life, but also investigating the multifaceted nature of creativity itself.

OPHELIA LAI

2  
**Zhang Ruyi**  
SHANGHAI

In *Pause* (2016), a site-specific work by Zhang Ruyi, cement-cast electrical sockets inconspicuously dot tree trunks at Goodwood, a woodland park near the southern coast of England. Commissioned by Cass Sculpture Foundation, the work is a perfect example of how Zhang juxtaposes industrialized and organic forms, shifting the familiar into the realm of the uncanny and commenting on human’s growing alienation in the sprawl of globalization.

As a post-1980s generation Chinese artist and a witness to the meteoric reconstruction of China’s metropolitan spaces surrounding the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Zhang draws upon the vocabulary of China’s urban environment to question the country’s hasty nation-building approach and to highlight the spatial consequences of such development. In her seemingly austere installations, comprising construction materials like concrete and steel, and square ceramic tiles, she explores the mind-numbing homogeneity and translocalization of architecture that has grown alongside China’s explosive urban growth, sometimes transforming entire rooms or tunnels into an immersive Cartesian matrix that feels simultaneously placeless and curiously familiar.

In *Potted Plants* (2016), a thick, waxy cactus stands erect and immobile, sandwiched between two identical, nondescript architectural models cast in cement, and affixed to a wall of glossy white tiles—a mundane and ubiquitous object identified by the artist as a significant agent of urban transformation, and evoking local subjectivities of home. The cactus is recurrent in the artist’s practice, standing in as a self-portrait and a metaphor for a hard-boiled figure stifled within the postindustrialized society; since 2011, Zhang has sketched these plant shapes on gridded graph paper, which she draws herself. Her latest floor-to-ceiling ceramic-tiled installations, featuring door fragments cast from cement and petrified cacti, is a continuation of these seemingly limitless gridlines. Shown at the 2018 group exhibition “Walking on the Fade Out Lines” at Shanghai’s Rockbund Art Museum, the works encapsulate Zhang’s meditative and rational approach in organizing an undefined ambiguous space, underscoring the artificiality of constructed environments and providing a nuanced critique of the changing relationship between a city and its inhabitants.

JULEE WOO JIN CHUNG

**Sam Samiee**  
AMSTERDAM / TEHRAN

Sam Samiee experiments with the thresholds of painting. His treatment of two- and three-dimensional forms directly correlates to his research into the medium’s significance in our evolving understanding of human culture. The idea of art-as-currency, for example, is the focus of Samiee’s series of painting-installations, “Design for a Money Note” (2018). In these abstract paintings, which he drapes from walls, the Tehran-born artist simultaneously mocks, and attempts to revise, our crude, capitalist obsessions with object valuation, suggesting that these canvases of fuzzy-edged, peach, blush and cerulean markings on similarly pastel-hued backgrounds—which are ultimately meaningless gestures—can be stand-ins for cold, hard cash.

Based in Amsterdam, Samiee synthesizes Western and Persian art histories and cultures in his paintings, installations, essays and poems, reinventing traditions for the post-binary age. In his multipiece installation work *Bedroom Posters* (2015–16) Samiee aligned portraits of young men sleeping, sitting or standing in relaxed postures—in the style of a teenage youth’s chamber of crushes, or a hall of devotional imagery—alongside readymade objects such as a yellow couch that he painted on, as a way to explore the versatility of the medium and its art-historical use in religious representation, symbolism and abstract expressionism. A similar display of installations and paintings, titled “The Unfinished Copernican Revolution” (2018), at the 10th Berlin Biennale, featured new prints of abstract, narrative-less iPad “paintings” as an ironic, contemporary take on critic Clement Greenberg’s exultation of flatness in modern painting. As part of the same work, he re-created a ceramic-tiled shower stall, inside of which he tacked up A4-size printouts of psychoanalytic books, and images of a nude man posing in the style of a classical sculpture in front of his own abstract paintings—perhaps a tongue-in-cheek reference to closeted queer individuals as well as a further probing of art-historical tropes.

Samiee’s most recent exhibition at the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague riffs on the philosophical question of love’s relationship to intellect. By showing a mix of his early and new pieces alongside works from the museum’s collection by three artists who have inspired his practice—Constant Nieuwenhuys, Paul Thek and Emo Verkerk—Samiee attempts to demonstrate how contemporary painters are constantly contextualizing and recontextualizing past, present and future art histories.

YSABELLE CHEUNG