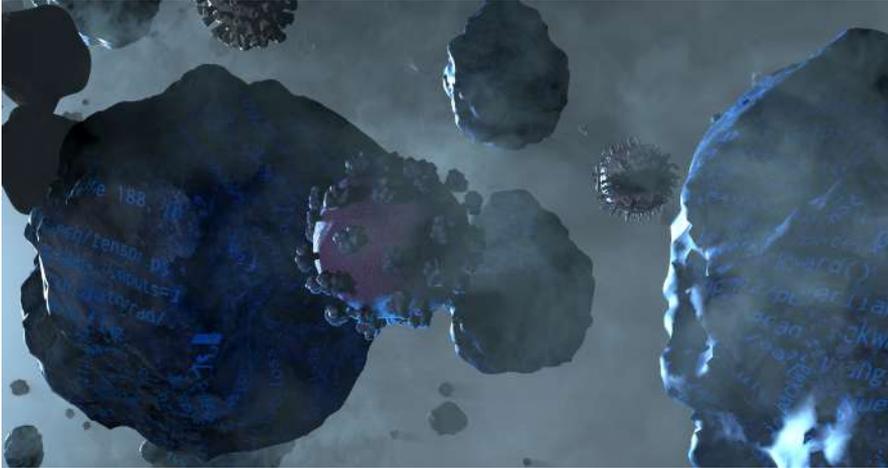


# There Are Lights That Never Go Out

Museum of Contemporary Art Taipei

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Still image from *The Lighting*, 2021. Three-channel video installation, colour, 5.1 sound. Courtesy the Artist

**U**pon entering and start interacting with the digital environment, we are required to set up a user account, for which one gets to pick one's username and select labels according to one's identity, temporarily putting aside statuses in real life. The freedom to login begins when one's account is named, which can subsequently be deleted, modified, edited, reset or left unused. We define ourselves in the virtual world, drawing up the boundaries and choosing to enter a different world.

As digital data application develops in our life, in order to speed up the complicated and labor-intensive identification processes, facial recognition systems have been introduced as an integral instrument that assists us in sending and acknowledging requests of data groups (you and I) by gaining and analyzing backend data based on operation setups to grant permissions. One must first be identified to enter, otherwise one's translated data could not be analyzed. Disregard and the right to access are interrelate—existing but unseen means one's requests are no longer important.

Inclusivity is a resistance strategy related to algorithmic prejudices as well as a crucial and fundamental work in database construction. Comparing to the circumstances today, however, as we positively create inclusivity of databases, we also need to face the reality of aggravating social discrimination, police violence, judicial injustice in the mixed environment of virtuality and reality. The key here is how to construct and deconstruct our digital environment at the same time. Collecting more Black facial recognition data is simply not the solution to the problem of discrimination as the original design and application could instead become a weapon that aids racial discrimination.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps, to deconstruct technological discriminatory by starting with the history of image could better help us identify the prejudices of image.

As a “reactive” martial art, Jeet Kune Do waits for the opponent's imminent attack to make interception by observing the opponent's ideas and attacks, making interceptive counterattacks based on reaction, suppression and the physical body. If we were to understand Jeet Kune Do as three steps – observation, reaction and action – “observation” would be the very first step that triggers a subsequent series of events. The observation perspective in Musquiqui Chihying's work seems to originate from humorous encounters, from which the artist develops intriguing games. They sometimes are revealed in his reinterpretations,

<sup>1</sup> Hill, K. “Wrongfully Accused by an Algorithm.” *The New York Times*. (August 3, 2020) <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/24/technology/facial-recognition-arrest.html>

converted through various literary tropes and schemes involving language, translation, wordplay and punning, or caught up in the frictions between image and narrative to produce a transitioning rhythm of historical narrative.

*There Are Lights That Never Go Out* is inspired by the Mandarin title of Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-Up*, which engages in the deconstruction and a dialectic process based on objects, photographic technologies, image history and the generative network of digital image apart from discussing the power relation between a photographer and his photographic subject. Objects and stories, when we see or learn about them, all carry full yet fragmented narratives. As the artist makes his observations, he also decides on his angle to carry out his research; like pulling an end of a thread strongly, the whole structure of a piece of fabric then becomes ruffled and shown. By reinterpreting images, creating drawings that imitate machine-made prints and conducting a lecture performance, the artist presents narrative remake and reconstruction through his research of image.

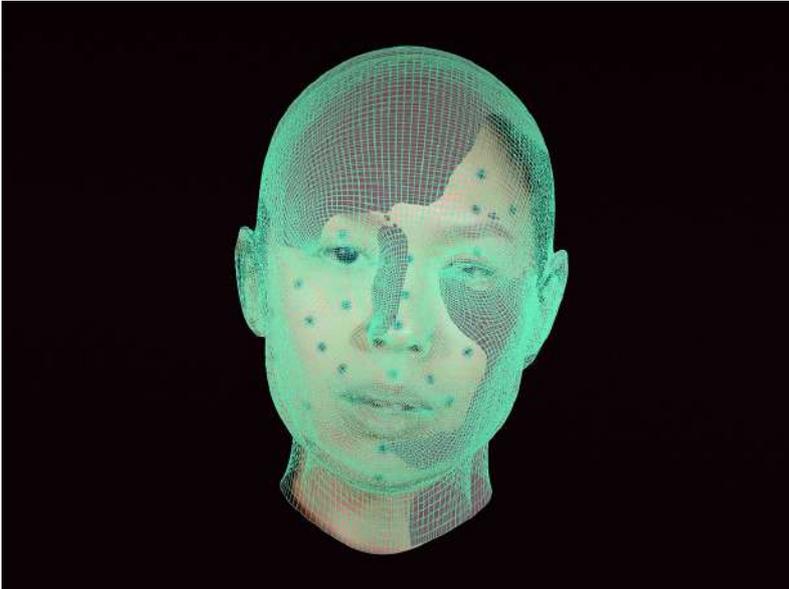
Oddities and humor in all narratives are taking place at the same time, and the decisions that everyone makes comprise the main narratives arcs. Then, the foremost question after establishing the importance of individual world-making<sup>2</sup> is: what actions will you take?

— Text by **Yen Yi Lee** / curator



Exhibition view at MoCA Taipei © 2021. Left: *The Lighting*. Right: *The Kung Flu*

<sup>2</sup> Epstein, Mikhail. "The Art of World-Making." *Philosophy Now*, 2013. ([https://philosophynow.org/issues/95/The\\_Art\\_of\\_World-Making](https://philosophynow.org/issues/95/The_Art_of_World-Making)). Comparing the history of cinematic narrative evolution and the current development of immersive virtual reality technologies, the author tells us that the distance between metaphysics and technological development has been gradually narrowing since their discussions about existence and practicality. He therefore proposes "technosophia," otherwise known as "philosophically-oriented technology," as the first principle that combines thinking and practicality in a humanmade world mixed with virtuality and reality.



Still image of *The Lighting*, 2021. Three-channel video installation, colour, 5.1 sound. Courtesy the Artist

## The Lighting

Three-channel video installation, 21 min on loop, 5.1 sound, 2021

Video Preview: <https://vimeo.com/580817549>

Password: blue

Light is the specter that hovers around photographic technologies. From analog to digital and from light-sensitive coating to computer algorithms, light always occupies an irreplaceable place in competing image-making technologies. Throughout the process of negotiating with light, however, it is now obvious that human prejudices have unknowingly and almost imperceptibly infiltrated this competition. Filmmaker Godard is one of the first people who became aware of this crisis: when he was in Mozambique assisting the African country's development of image in the 70s, he realized that Kodak films that were mainstream of the time could not be accurately exposed for portraits featuring subjects of dark skin tones. We cannot simply attribute this technical failure to inadequate equipment for the reason that even the most advanced algorithms used today still show a rather high error rate when determining certain races and skin tones.

Experimental video *The Lighting* aims to revisit and clarify the problem of discrimination rooted in technological development through an interdisciplinary exploration. The work comprises three narratives—a professional Togolese photographer explores how to use instruments to compensate insufficient exposure for dark skin tones; software engineers developing facial recognition algorithms at Taiwan's MediaTek talk about how they have created a camera algorithm that is highly popular in Africa; moreover, the artist uses Kodak's Ektachrome, a popular film in the 70s, to produce a kung fu film in the style of exploitation film, using images of famous Black martial art film star, Jim Kelly, in Bruce Lee's movies in the 70s. The work is also interlaced with an animated Bruce Lee as the narrator trained by facial motion capture and a speech recognition algorithm.



Installation view of *The Kung Flu*, 2021. Two-channel video installation, colour, stereo sound. Courtesy the Artist

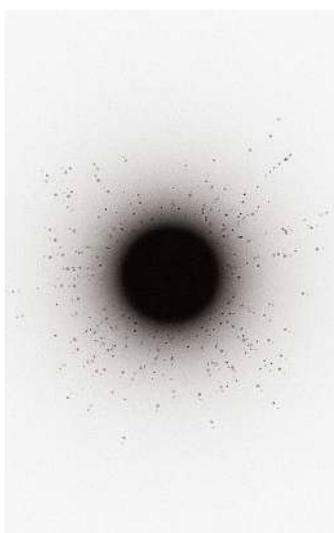
## The Kung Flu

Two-channel video installation, 21 min on loop, stereo sound, 2021

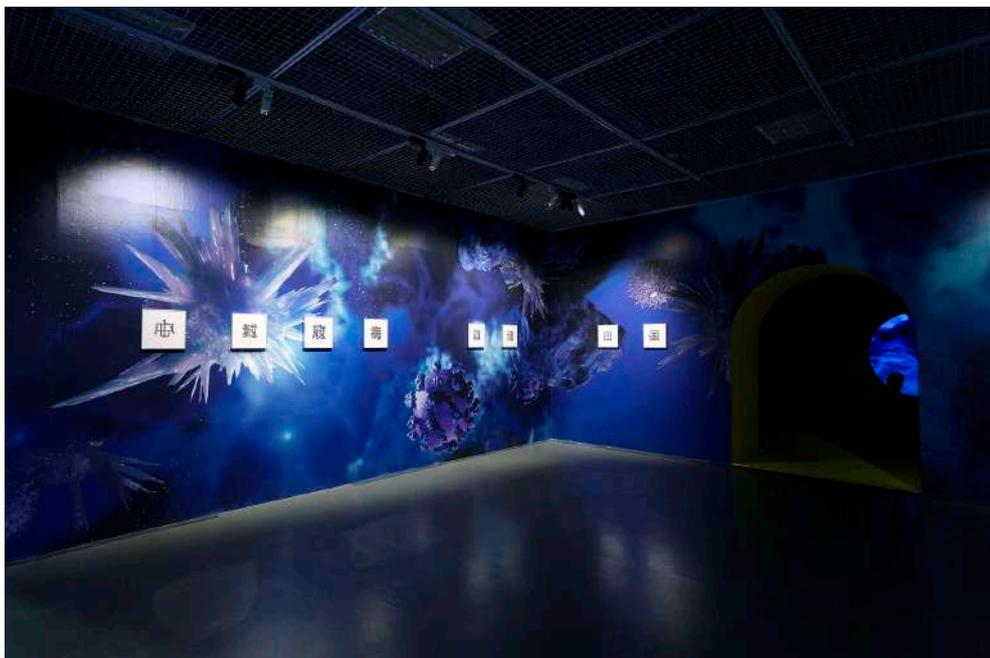
Video Preview: <https://vimeo.com/590210178>

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The title of the work is inspired by a phrase created by the then US president, Donald Trump, during his 2020 presidential campaign. A cunning blend of racial stereotyping and discrimination, the phrase became a sensation and was rapidly circulated via streaming media, deepening the Western world's prejudices against the Asian communities in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, the speculation of Asians as virus carriers. At this point, the notion of the "sick man of East Asia" has truly evolved from a politically critical phrase at its birth into a racial imagination implying innate biological flaws. *The Kung Flu* adopts the form of a lecture-performance video in the attempt to deconstruct the association between the virus, kung fu stereotype and image while further discussing the problem of racial discrimination in Asia, especially in Taiwan.



Still image of *The Kung Flu*, 2021. Two-channel video installation, colour, stereo sound. Courtesy the Artist



Installation view of *The Chat*, 2021. 8 pieces graphite on paper, colour printed wall paper, Courtesy the Artist

## The Chat

Graphite on paper, 29.6 x 29.6 cm, 8 pieces, wall paper, 2021

As ideal instruments for data management, algorithms can process massive amounts of information within a short span of time and are commonly applied to keyword search and result presentation. However, under specific circumstances, the same technology can be used in concealing and blocking information. For instance, as the COVID-19 pandemic became increasingly serious in China, mainstream Chinese social platforms also began to block words related to the pandemic. Citizen Lab, a research organization under the University of Toronto in Canada, has studied this phenomenon and listed a staggering number of 517 groups of forbidden word combinations, including “virus,” “lockdown” and so on. In this exhibition, eight vocabularies in two groups blocked or banned by algorithms are used in *The Chat* and horizontally handdrawn on paper in the manner of simulating digital prints by manual work.



“封城 / Lock Down”

Installation view of *The Chat*, 2021. 8 pieces graphite on paper, colour printed wall paper, Courtesy the Artist