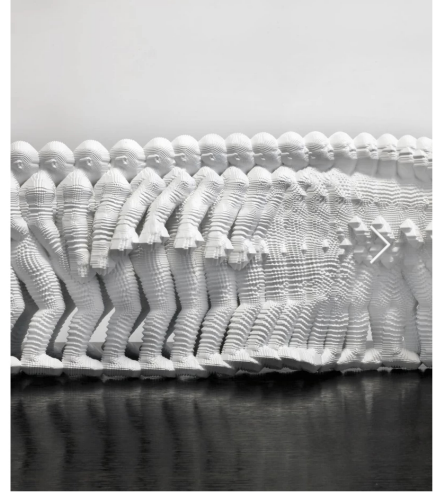


## Miao Xiaochun: Collaboration with the Future by Daniel Genis



Technology has often been perceived as the antithesis to art because of a mistaken romanticism that positions the artist as a Luddite in conflict with progress. In fact, artists have always been at the very edge of change, whether moral, political or technological. Developments like perspective in painting or casting novel materials in sculpture have driven the direction of art. Technology like photography, film, and digital rendering have opened entire new branches of art. We shouldn't be surprised to witness the next step and perhaps even the one after be taken in China, where so much that is new on this planet happens. And we can experience the results in the work of Miao Xiaochun presented by the Eli Klein Gallery.

Collaboration is itself a vibrant area for art to explore; even the artist's choice of collaborators is meaningful. Abstract Expressionists harnessed chaos and randomness to work with. Basquiat recognizes the art in graffiti. Komar and Melamid had an elephant paint with them. Miao Xiaochun took the next logical step in delegating parts of his art to software. Using a 3-D printer to render the results into sculptures that are the physical manifestations of video art was only natural - in hindsight. The resulting impression, which took the human form and movement as its subject, is a look into the future of art. The direction we are looking is east.

Miao Xiaochun lives and works between Beijing and Berlin. He is a professor of photography and digital media at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing and has taught New Media at Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design as well, being fluent in German. The artist is hardly a new face; now in his 50's, he was one of a select few to represent China at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013. The five figure prices that his works command have not stopped the Eli Klein Gallery from nearly selling out their solo exhibition. Miao Xiaochun's work is in New York's MoMA, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the M+ Sigg Collection in Hong Kong, and the private collections of savvy buyers. Across the globe there are many artists working who studied under him as well as consumers of his art like me. We experienced what's next with his guidance. Miao Xiaochun teaches New Media, practices New Media, and isn't far from being New Media.

With a little help, of course. Works created through collaboration is a hallmark of Chinese art, unlike the traditional Western model of the mad genius and individual talent. Making art together is not new to Chinese artists, but making it together with a machine is an important leap. The cognitive excellence particular to Miao is in how the priorities are set.

The technology is not subordinate to Miao. Although the figures on display are renderings of his own very human body, the humanism revealed in the frozen movements are counter-intuitively the work of software. The accompanying video work *Gyro Dance* is also an achievement impossible to imagine without a digital collaboration. And the very high resolution 3-D printer which built the sculptures seemingly atom by atom by squirting resin with a precision unthinkable for human hands also results in a deep meditation on humankind that is only partially the work of a human. This gives us a strong hint about what the art of the future will be made of, by, who and how. The implied "why" is exactly what experiencing art should achieve; wise and novel thoughts, piercing questions.

Any artist using a camera or microphone can be said to be "collaborating with technology," but there is a difference between simply exploiting a tool and practicing "algorithmic painting." To uncover the potential of the new media he teaches and practices, Miao has developed an elaborate process. His work relies on 3-D modeling, cutting plotters, hand drawing and the digital capture of movement. Collectors and curators value the new category of art he creates as "algorithmic." While Miao programs the rendering software, he doesn't use it to make an art work that he has already conceived. His digital collaborator is sophisticated enough to surprise, delight and instruct the human artist and the consumers of the art - mostly human, so far.

*Gyro Dance* has roots in the atomic theory of Greek philosophy, which proposed the existence of atoms defined as the smallest things of all things; the indivisible. Pointillism toyed with letting us see the tiny combine into pictures we recognize, and the pixels of our screens are familiar to those uninterested in what everything is built of at the smallest scale. Miao merely points out that they must exist and not just in three dimensions but four. All of his works are captured movements, frozen for us to examine. Everything is in movement relative to everything else; there is no fixed point in the universe and the nature of a thing can only be understood in relation to other things. This is difficult for us to accept. We may know that the earth is revolving but the ground below our feet feels stationary. Our world doesn't appear to work like that without someone like Miao to decipher it.

When we move, we are conscious of the hustle and bustle of reality. Using his software and machinery, Miao slows down our familiar body motion into something we can see and experience. He lets us see the pixels, or rather, Miao and his collaborators do. A 3-D printer creates an object in three dimensions the way an office desktop machine works in two. Miao works in four because movement can only happen along the arrow of time.

The European discovery of perspective once added a third dimension to flat images: the illusion of depth. Miao Xiaochun adds the quasi-dimension of time to our experience of art. He wouldn't have managed without digital help. Earlier works of his played with Bosch; the video component of this exhibit uses Beethoven. But the animating spirit behind Miao's art, the desire to reveal certain truths about seemingly obvious experiences like twirling around, is new, exciting and Chinese. What does it mean for a concept to be Chinese? I can't define it, but I know it when I see it.

Miao Xiaochun is the Professor in the Department of Photography and Digital Media at the Central Academy of Fine Arts. An influential figure in China's wave of new media art, he is primarily concerned with appropriation and East-West dialogue. For example, his photographs, assembled through a computer program, are sprawling panoramas of China's social masses.

Daniel Genis is a writer and journalist working in New York City. He has written on Chinese art for Newsweek, Vice, and the Daily Beast.

