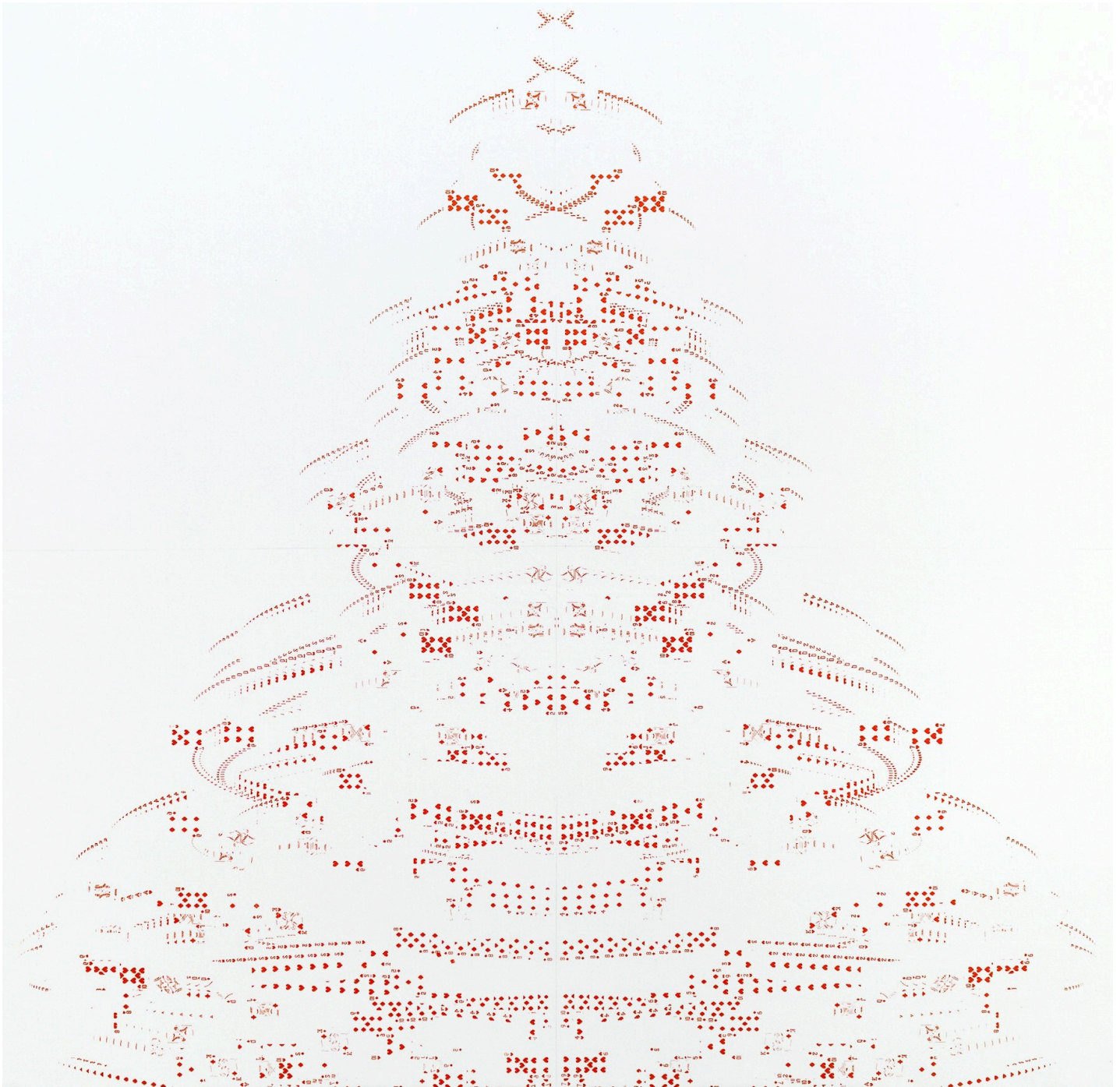


ART OCT 29 - WRITTEN BY STERLING CORUM
Are You Alone Right Now?

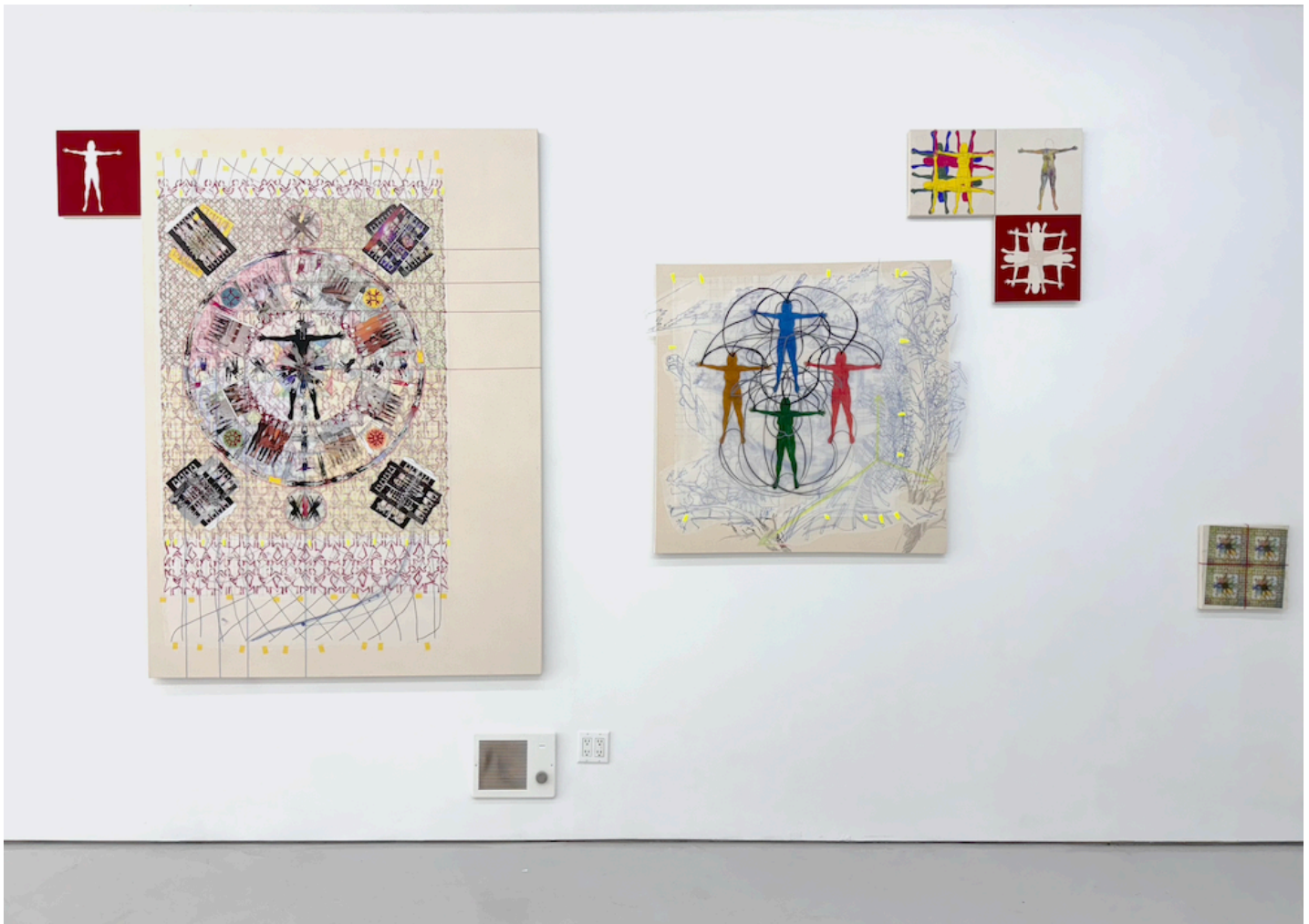


A giant green canvas is littered with playing cards that seem to go on for infinity. At [Eli Klein Gallery](#), Quan Wenfei's *Click and Win! Go* (2019) playfully examines internet archaeology, manipulating scale, color, and perspective to create the screen that users are rewarded with upon completing the Windows desktop game Solitaire.

Wenfei's work explores isolation thematically and literally through the selection of silk screens in her process. Her work in the exhibition ranges from a mountain of traditional cards, a specialty pink deck, and even a tower of just the red portions of each panel mirrored vertically across the canvas—a configuration that many visitors claim to resemble a smiling Buddha. "Every canvas for me is a computer screen," says Wenfei.



Surely the root cause of a solitaire addiction can't just be these captivating, cascading waves of cards that envelop the screen. However, there's an underlying, nostalgic warmth conveyed by the celebratory cards. It sends a singular message: Let the cards swallow you whole. "When I was in preschool, my father brought a computer home," said Wenfei. "When my mother passed away, it was me, with the computer, playing this game." It's just as easy to become addicted to Wenfei's detailed silk screen technique, as the scope of her work is intent on extrapolating from these joyous stills, diving headfirst into an ocean of geometric shapes.



Further down the main wall, a collage of small figures—like a paper doll chain or Da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*—is scattered across a bright and explosive canvas. A quick glance might lead the viewer to believe that the work is incomplete, as small neon yellow sticky notes appear to hold up the layers, but this seemingly unfinished detail is intentional. Yang Shuai's *(n+1)* series examines her own body as a unit of measurement. She toys with the idea of setting herself as the human prototype, represented by “some god-like figure with their hands up ... civilizing this connection between the human body to the sky to the ground.”

She's created a miniature freehand scale, the outline of her figure in a tribute posture, and overlaid it onto various backgrounds. In *Centerless Energy*, she is four devotional figures connected through waves of energy on top of a sketch of the landscaping at her home, distorted by a window.

While printmaking is a medium that requires precision and linear construction, Shuai's process is more additive, straying from the traditional practices of the medium and layering multiple textures into one piece. “I feel like in printmaking, everything kind of collapsed—you spend a lot of time and material, and you get this very minimal result,” said Shuai. “I want to go backwards and really display each step in a separate way.” Her style plays with negative space, and she deploys multiple printmaking techniques into one piece, from the Japanese mechanical printmaking risograph, to freehand illustrations, to standard acrylic paint.



The final room is almost entirely dedicated to a parade of disturbing, ethereal sculptures. Echo Youyi Yan's contributions to the exhibition have a nuanced focus on birth and decomposition. Her pieces are created with a blend of natural materials, pine, cedar, or found pieces of furniture recovered from stooping around the city.

Yan's *Axial Domestication* mirrors her project titled *Sunday*. Both evoke the theme of birth through natural materials and goopy, organic shapes. These pieces challenge each other through a corrugated narrative. In *Axial Domestication*, a furry vessel is pliant beneath a silicon-coated chain attached to a cellular organism on the wall, as if a beast chained into submission. In *Sunday*, the egg is gently suspended inside of netted wire, floating down to the rocking chair in a voluntary sacrifice. "I was only framing the rocking chair, and it struck me that this juxtaposition is like someone kneeling down," said Yan. "It just feels like a prayer."

If you're reading this and wondering, is Yan's work contemporary surrealist art? Well, when I asked, she said she listens to heavy metal and watches a lot of David Cronenberg films when making her sculptures. For the uninitiated, that could not be a more resolute yes. "The process is very violent," said Yan. "I always get showered by sawdust."

Pushing back against the comparison of her pieces to ceramics, Yan began a new process of shaving the resin from her completed works, exposing small peaks of raw, untreated wood. "Ceramics are additive, and what I do is subtractive," said Yan. She compared it to the archaeological process of digging, bringing her revelations to the surface of these pieces, most of which began as American construction standard materials: classic 2 x 4's. There's a delicate nature to the disturbing here, a gentle wave of understanding that birth and death are beautifully repulsive. This is the throughline for all the works in this exhibition: At the beginning, middle, and end of it all, you can only ever be truly immersed in yourself.

Whether it be the dopamine-feeding virtual game that literally means solitary, using the physical body as the scale for energetic progress, or calling attention to the filthy ways we leave and enter this world, these artists have dissected what it

means to exist. *At-Will Adaptation* examines human behavior, assessing the “will” any of us have in combating our own developmental factors.

The collaborative residency portion of the artists’ process was completed between July 9 and September 7, 2024. The exhibition was open to public at Eli Klein Gallery from September 7 through October 26, 2024.

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Sterling Corum

Sterling Corum (she/her) is writer, filmmaker, comedian, and fish out of water (former Floridian) living with her beloved roommates and kitten Calypso in Queens. Sterling currently runs a blog called *ethics club!* where she dissects media, pop culture, and the ongoing rotting of our brains.

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