



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

# (In)directions: Queerness in Chinese Contemporary Photography

398 West Street, New York, NY 10014

November 18, 2023 – January 31, 2024

Opening Reception with the Artists: November 18, 5–8 PM

Curated by Phil Zheng Cai and Douglas Ray

## Artists:

Mengwen Cao

Chi Peng

Whiskey Chow

Alec Dai

Fang Daqi

Tommy Kha

Amiko Li

Liao Jiaming

Pixy Liao

Lin Zhipeng (No.223)

Ren Light Pan

Beatrix Pang

Kanthy Peng

Ren Hang

Shen Wei

Leonard Suryajaya

Tseng Kwong Chi

Xu Guanyu

Yang Bowei

Zhang Zhidong

William Zou

Eli Klein Gallery is honored to present “(In)directions: Queerness in Chinese Contemporary Photography” a group exhibition of 21 artists who see queerness as a possibility, embracing the imaginative even when the status quo might otherwise be limiting. The title acknowledges that the means through which each artist expresses this notion takes a variety of modes in the photographic medium, at times boldly and directly celebrating the beauty of queer bodies and at other times obliquely gesturing, winking, or suggesting that another reality is at play. This range of photographic expressions of queerness is similar to common understandings of discursive approaches in Chinese culture, from the artfully indirect to the abundantly explicit. The show brings together the present and future, a spectrum of genders and sexualities, questions and expressions of identities and beliefs, assertions about kinship and belonging, and complications and affirmations about cultural sensibilities into a critical conversation facilitated by photographic images that document, celebrate, complicate, invite, expose, question, and destabilize.

With a diverse group of artists showcasing a broad reach of works in the exhibition, we wish to entice our viewers to “queer” any one of the following terms: Queerness, Chinese, Contemporary, and Photography -

*What is queer photography?*

*What is Chinese queerness?*

*What would a queered contemporary look like?*

With works that embody their consciousness and explore the journey of self-discovery, Chi Peng, Mengwen Cao, and Leonard Suryajaya invite the audience to peer into the metamorphosis of fluid identities. William Zou, Xu Guanyu, and Tommy Kha, on the other hand, unveil pockets of

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belonging and becoming by capturing fragmented and layered moments within spatial and temporal contexts, while Tseng Kwong Chi explores the playful juxtaposition of truth, fiction, and identity through his persona of a Chinese "Ambiguous Ambassador" merged with the natural landscape to queer the boundaries between self and environment.

The body is likewise explored as a site of performance (and performativity), as works by Whiskey Chow and Pixy Liao investigate, by challenging traditional gender norms and negotiating with art history in the context of media and sexual expression. Lin Zhipeng (No.223) and Shen Wei also capture the diversified nature of desire and memory through intimate portrayals of the body. The variety of bodies depicted reminds us that queerness is lived, inhabited, created, and celebrated by queer people, that bodies inspire wonder and challenge limiting regimes of the normal.

Meanwhile, Zhang Zhidong and Amiko Li evoke vivid sensations in their work to illustrate the liminal spaces of intimacy and construct rich narratives for the overlooked, eroticized, or politicized. The works of Kanthy Peng and Ren Light Pan too, provide a sensual glimpse into queerness in all its contradiction - tender, yet tense; concealed, yet revealing.

Queerness resists definition. It embraces associations and overpasses boundaries. It reaches rather than posits; joins instead of announcing; seduces without a prerequisite RSVP. The unique queer experiences are documented and highlighted in the works of Yang Bowei, Fang Daqi and Beatrix Peng, giving form to personal, illustrative perspectives. Works by Ren Hang and Alec Dai present the intersection of queer and Asian-American identities as well as sexuality and beauty, challenging the traditional conservative artistic expression existing in contemporary Chinese culture. Liao Jiaming's works also record the queer experience; his photobook recounts his personal thoughts and experience as a gay man through visual narratives and is tailored specifically for the exhibition.

Curated by Phil Zheng Cai and Douglas Ray at Eli Klein Gallery, this exhibition hopes to intrigue the audience to consider how a queered topographic approach could bend what appeared to be "Queerness in Chinese Contemporary Photography" into a mesh of "Queerness, Chinese, Contemporary, and Photography," indirectionally.

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalog with an essay by Phil Zheng Cai and an essay by Douglas Ray. The exhibition catalog also features Tommy Kha's interview with Ren Hang in 2016.

Inquiries:

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