

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## At-Will Adaptation

A residency-then-exhibition

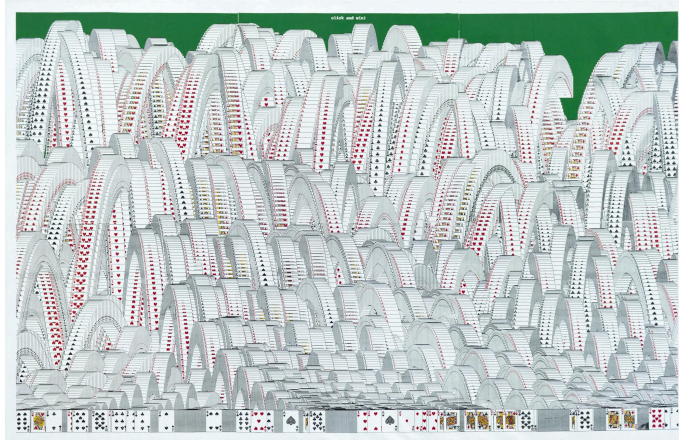
Artists: Quan Wenfei, Yang Shuai, and Echo Youyi Yan

398 West Street, New York, NY 10014

Residency: July 9 - September 7, 2024

Exhibition: September 7 - October 26, 2024

Opening Reception with the artists: Saturday, Sep 7, 2024 | 6-8 PM



Quan Wenfei, *Click and win - Pause*, 2018. Oil and silkscreen on canvas. 78 x 118 1/8 inches (196 x 300 cm).  
Courtesy of the artist and Eli Klein Gallery © Quan Wenfei

New York, NY, June 30, 2024 - Eli Klein Gallery is thrilled to present “At-Will Adaptation,” a residency-then-exhibition featuring artists Quan Wenfei (b. 1992, lives and works in New York), Yang Shuai (b. 1998, lives and works in New York), and Echo Youyi Yan (b. 2000, lives and works in New York).

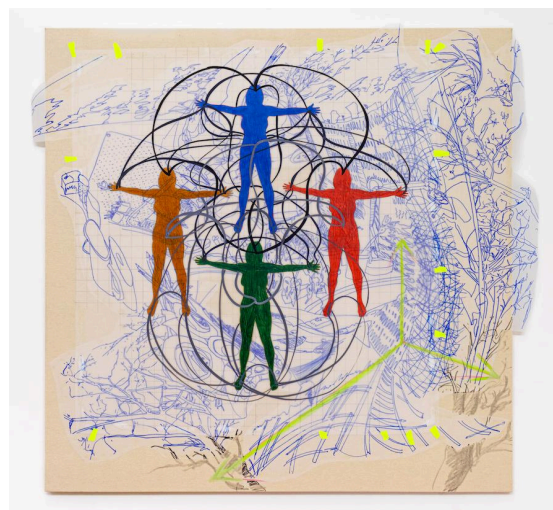
The three artists, working in various mediums such as sculpture, painting, drawing, printmaking, collage, woodwork, metalwork, glasswork, performance, among others, will create entirely new artworks using Eli Klein gallery as their studio. The Gallery will be open to the public during normal business hours throughout the duration of the residency. In addition to demonstrating their creative processes, the artists will also display their existing works that exemplify their practices. The project runs from July 9th and will culminate in a three-artist exhibition opening on Saturday, September 7th, highlighting their newest creations.

“At-will,” a term commonly associated with employment status, endows equal rights for the employer to fire and the employees to quit at any time. However, this concept often hides the inherent power

imbalances between the "masters" and "servants". On a social level, we are supposedly empowered with an absolute liberty in thinking and freedom in acting. But are we truly liberal-thinkers and free-actors? In reality, we are constantly adapting against our will. AI aids social media algorithms more effectively, curtailing original thought. Some political factions demand absolute loyalty, suppressing all other opposing viewpoints. We are becoming smarter in becoming senseless. As Herbert Marcuse poignantly pointed out, "The total mobilization of all media for defense of the established reality has coordinated the means of expression to the point where communication of transcending contents becomes technically impossible."

Artists are the first to recognize this struggle, as contemporary art themes have shifted from a 'human-nature' dichotomy in the 2010s to a 'subjectively human - objectively human' focus, which identifies forced adaptation as a more pressing threat in the 2020s. As recent graduates, Quan Wenfei, Yang Shuai, and Echo Youyi Yan are at the forefront of this battle, working at the intersection of anthropology, sociology, and behavioral studies.

Quan Wenfei, a self-proclaimed "internet archeologist," is a highly skilled printmaker. Using oil and silkscreen on canvas (a printmaking method popularized by Andy Warhol), Wenfei creates unique works based on retro computer games in the 90s from Solitaire to Minesweeper. These witty images comment on how our aesthetics were trained digitally, and document the brief history of the dopamine-feeding machine. With a unique curiosity in the understudied history of the internet, Wenfei continues to dig in the graveyard of 90s aesthetics, arguing for their importance in contemporary behavioral studies. Wenfei wants to be the ultimate "sky-cam," who observes the observers (the internet).



Yang Shuai, *Centerless Energy*, 2024. Mixed media on canvas. 41 x 46 inches (104.1 x 116.8 cm).  
Courtesy of the artist and Eli Klein Gallery © Yang Shuai

Similarly, Yang Shuai's mastery in printmaking enables her to apply the principles of "multiplicity"—the very core of printmaking—onto other mediums. Her practice is centered around a prototype "figure" which represents herself, any individual human being, and the aggregation of humans altogether. This Trinitarian figure (whose contour curiously resembles a more feminine Da Vinci's Vitruvian Man) is then duplicated, layered, organized, colored, arranged, re-arranged into specific scenarios on each canvas. As a single print, the figure seems susceptible to being manipulated and influenced. But once placed in different environments, these figures become groups, associations, and societies, reminiscent of individuals functioning in our world. In "At-Will Adaptation," these figures will continue to adapt - or perhaps - they might refuse to do so voluntarily?

Finally, Echo Youyi Yan's works present the metamorphosis of bodies in different contexts. Inspired by figures such as Pierre Huyghe, she creates research-driven works that are based on a myriad of fields including zoology, anthropology, and eroticism. Echo's lexicon consists of a "Cabinet of Curiosity," as she imagines alternative paths of evolutions: a humanoid compressed into both a top and a bottom drawer from a cabinet, like a can of sardine; a turtle carries around a metal cage as an extra shell. These curious, eerie and sometimes alarming progressions of life forms apply to the human bodies as much as to the animals: a prolonged tongue gaining the ability to drill and poke; an umbilical cord providing nutrition from the true exterior. These lively forms will continue to mutate at the residency, infesting the gallery space over the summer. The audiences are advised to venture with caution.



Echo Yan, *Please Do Not Touch* 2022  
Stainless steel, pine, resin, PVA glue, ten white tall glasses, casters, metal hook, stainless steel, pencil on panels.  
Sculpture: 30 x 84 x 48 inches (76.2 x 213.4 x 121.9 cm)  
Drawings: 10 x 8 inches (25.4 x 20.3 cm) EACH  
Courtesy of the artist and Eli Klein Gallery © Echo Yan

With their fluency across numerous mediums, the three artists raise important questions at the residency-then-exhibition: Is true at-will evolution possible? Can we recognize when our adaptations are involuntary? What are the possible means we can consciously use to fight against the omnipresent mechanism in behavior training?

Updates on this exhibition will be posted on our website and social media platforms as the artists progress and finalize new works.

**Inquiries:**

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