

## Press Release

### Long March Independent Project

#### Chongqing Drift

19 October 2024–29 December 2024

Long March Independent Space, 798 Art District, 4 Jiuxianqiao Rd, Chaoyang District, Beijing

Curated by Shi Qing

Artists: Bao Dachen, Dong Xun, Li Bo, Shi Qing, Yu Guo, Yao Mengxi, Yang Guangying, Wu Jianping

**Adapt to local circumstances, remain flexible, focus on the bigger picture, and prioritize practical action.**

#### Chongqing: A City as A Field Site

Located in the southwestern hinterland, Chongqing is one of the birthplaces of early modern industry in China. Over the last century, through the industrial relocation during the War of Resistance, the Third Front Movement, and the industrial transformation and upgrading following the Reform and Opening-up, Chongqing has firmly established itself as an industrial powerhouse. Nowadays, it has become a key base for global production and manufacturing. In recent years, high-tech industries such as new energy vehicles, robotics, artificial intelligence, and quantum information have also made their entry into the city. In the pre-industrial period, the confluence of the Yangtze and Jialing rivers made Chongqing the main gateway into Sichuan, and the construction of the Three Gorges Dam once again placed the city in the global spotlight. The mountainous terrain and transportation system imbue the city with a “cyberpunk” aura, while the fusion of historical development and immigration has formed a layered, mosaic-like cultural landscape. This makes Chongqing a unique and captivating urban field subject.

From the perspective of Urban Studies, the city has become a crucial area of inquiry into the complex forms of modern society. Chongqing’s growth is naturally tied to the evolution of various urbanization theories over the past century. Since the birth of cities, they have served as centers for human gathering and social construction. From *The Culture of Cities* by Lewis Mumford, *The Production of Space* by Henri Lefebvre, to Manuel Castells’s idea of “network society”, and David Harvey’s “urban revolution”, cities have been key focal points in portraying societal shifts. Today, digital technologies and media have also entered the realm of urban transformation, from “media city,” “node city,” and “smart city” to “planetary urbanization”. The massive changes in spatial scale and media technology compel art practitioners, who excel in coordinating perception and movement, to adapt and reinvent themselves. Traditional urban art practices have typically emerged from embedded observation, organization,

wandering, and everyday life within the city, often drawing on the roles of urban society as advocated by figures like Charles Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin, and Michel de Certeau. “Body” and “presence” have long been two primary ways that artists gather energy within the city. However, as Paul Virilio’s exploration of “dromology” in modern cities reveals, the bodies within urban space have experienced inevitable ruptures. “The stranger’s encounter in the city”, as described by Georg Simmel, has been replaced by the “instantaneous location-sensing” and “real-time tracking” enabled by smart wearable devices in the “media city”, as discussed by Scott McQuire. Both the city itself and the bodies within it have become part of data engineering. As Neil Brenner’s concept of “planetary urbanization” suggests, when the atmosphere, deserts, mountains, rivers, and polar regions all become part of the urban fabric, how should artists respond? What mindset and techniques should they adopt to carry out their work?

### **Work: Media, Research, and Writing**

Indeed, the once fluid and wandering poetics of the artist’s body and actions have now been integrated into the urban management framework, where perception and behavior are constrained by both administrative and data-driven commands in the “digital city”. At this point, the artistic value of media and working methods has been re-invoked, along with various archival documents, being included in the artist’s work. This can be seen as a consequence of the era of knowledge and data production. The experimental visual and formal aesthetics of modernism stemmed from the legacy of pre-industrial society. However, current artistic forms are returning to a more textualized mode of discourse and research, closely tied to contemporary knowledge production models and academic institutionalization, even at the expense of the visual being further diminished. From another perspective, this may not be entirely new for art—it is reminiscent of the holistic, primitive qualities found in early natural history. In recent times, these aspects of art production have reemerged in the form of “essay film” and “research-based art”, both are imbued with the technical elements of media. This is not viewed as a clear or inevitable stylistic progression, but rather something that coincides with the “database steering” in contemporary cultural studies.

The “writing” emphasized by the Chongqing Work Institute is clearly not a literary practice, but rather an endeavour to adopt a strategy that can deeply engage with its subject. This necessitates the use of media technologies such as live performative lectures and online streaming for output. While maintaining the “first field” of the site-specific fieldwork and the “second field” of media, artists continue their work in the “third field” shaped by visual writing. Examples include *Mountain City Defense System* by Bao Dachen, Dong Xun, and Wu Jianping; Li Bo’s concept of “landscaping techniques of urban folk”; the observation on “spatial production in the Wulong Mountain area” by Yu Guo; “urban Sci-Fi”, in which Shi Qing combines urban biology and mobile ecosystems; Yao Mengxi’s rewriting of personal “historical slices”; and the reflection on urban “informal spaces” and “marginalized survival” by Yang Guangying. Each of these perspectives reflects a unique methodology of writing to analyse and reflect on Chongqing.

## Institute: Self-Organization and Collaborative Work

It can be said that, compared to other cities, Chongqing possesses a closer disposition as to connect with its folks, which sharply differs from the “rational” and “functional” atmosphere of megacities. The development of contemporary art in China also occurred in a unique historical period and spatial context, with the most significant scenes unfolding during the “turbulent” process of urban modernity. In the early stages of this process, Chongqing was also one of the most active cities in terms of cultural and artistic self-organization. Today, the disappearance or decline of much of this historical ecology is likely attributed to factors such as the art market, exhibition resources, and cultural management, which have diluted or closed off multiple avenues for artistic development. This stands in marked contrast to earlier times, when, despite differing professional aspirations, practitioners were still forced to compete in the same arena.

This raises important questions: what does it mean for artists to discuss “organization” today? Is it necessary? And how should such organization be approached? These issues seem to have resurfaced as a “new” topic once again. What is undeniable is that, the demands for “organization” today are higher and perhaps more challenging. Artistic work differs from the transactional principles of capitalist society—at least to a certain extent, the motivation is driven by shared or similar artistic projects, ideals, and commitments, forming a kind of “collaborative work”. However, these collaborations are extremely sensitive and fragile, prone to rupture and disagreement. Therefore, the frequent disbandment of “self-organization” seems to be a “normal” phenomenon. Reflecting on past organizational dilemmas, the “subtraction” strategy cautiously adopted by the Chongqing Work Institute has become a pragmatic solution: at the very least, artistic “self-organization” should not be overly institutionalized or become a rigid “slave” to power or management structures. The Chongqing Work Institute attempts to manage through tacit understanding, with minimal administrative function. This leaves participants with time and energy for creation, teaching, and life; the personnel can be changed at any time, and naturally, participants are expected to arrange their own funding. At its inception, the Chongqing Work Institute leased a civil residence as an online live-streaming venue or exhibition space; but later concluded that site-specific live-streaming alone was more appropriate, later the place was returned. Some may question whether such an institution differs from “non-existence”. In fact, the connections between artists still persist, but they are more inclined to manifest through “collaborative work” centered around practice itself. For example, Bao Dachen, Dong Xun, and Wu Jianping have a life-and-work style in small groups; Yu Guo invites friends to join his worksite and co-create with him—such can both be seen as different forms of “collaborative work”. The Chongqing Work Institute has never denied the value and achievements of artistic organization. Under specific temporal and economic conditions, it emphasizes that artistic work should focus on productive activities (in any form), while avoiding entanglement and internal friction arising from organizational relationships.

Text by Shi Qing