# Art Post-Internet

## 2014.3.1 – 2014.5.11

UCCA Ullens Center for
Contemporary Art
尤伦斯当代艺术中心

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Just as twentieth-century modernism was in large part defined by the relationship between craft and the emergent technologies of manufacturing, mass media, and lens-based imagery, the most pressing condition underlying contemporary culture today—from artistic practice and social theory to our quotidian language—may well be the omnipresence of the internet. Though the terminology with which we describe these phenomena is still nascent and not yet in widespread use, this exhibition presents a broad survey of art that is controversially defined as "post-internet," which is to say, consciously created in a milieu that assumes the centrality of the network, and that often takes everything from the physical bits to the social ramifications of the internet as fodder. From the changing nature of the image to the circulation of cultural objects, from the politics of participation to new understandings of materiality, the interventions presented under this rubric attempt nothing short of the redefinition of art for the age of the internet.

This understanding of the post-internet refers not to a time "after" the internet, but rather to an internet state of mind—to think in the fashion of the network. In the context of artistic practice, the category of the post-internet describes an art object created with a consciousness of the networks within which it exists, from conception and production to dissemination and reception. As such, much of the work presented here employs the visual rhetoric of advertising, graphic design, stock imagery, corporate branding, visual merchandising, and commercial software tools. Arranged along several thematic threads, this exhibition considers issues related to internet policy, mass clandestine surveillance and data mining, the physicality of the network, the posthuman body, radicalized information dispersion, and the open source movement. It looks at changes taking place in the age of the ubiquitous internet, from information dispersion and artwork documentation to human language and approaches to art history.

Perhaps because textual information often assumes a secondary role in the circulation of images today, including the digital milieu of the art world, many of the practices around the post-internet have not yet been sufficiently or critically introduced or interpreted; this exhibition aims to redress this imbalance by allowing for substantive commentary and conversation. Without a framework for contextualizing or identifying post-internet art, one risks grouping such work by voguish aesthetics alone. By contextualizing post-internet art within theory and art history, we hope to elude the inevitable relegation of these new positions to a fading trend. We remain committed to an inter-generational approach, convening work made in the recent past with that created decades prior. Here, unlike other positions claiming an artist's age endows them with unique, empirical knowledge, this exhibition acknowledges the agency of the artist in teaching us about the ever-changing world, these individuals often acting as consciousness-raising conduits between art and society. This tie to the outside world, and consequent shift against the hermeticism of the art world, is among the most revelatory aspects of post-internet art.

Further, it would be a disservice to the artists in "Art Post-Internet" to not qualify the term "post-internet" as one that is as complicated and deeply insufficient as it is useful, and one that rapidly, and perhaps rightfully, came under fire for its opaqueness and proximity to branding. We acknowledge that the term to describe this phenomenon could be recast, yet the strength and relevance of such work remains.

The text in this pamphlet categorizes the artwork within "Art Post-Internet" into seven subthemes: distribution, language, the posthuman body, radical identification, branding and corporate aesthetics, painting and gesture, and infrastructure. While much of the exhibition's artwork could fit into one or more categories, or even spawn new categories of their own, this text should act as a beginner's introduction to this wildly heterogeneous phenomenon. Additionally, it should be noted that the information disseminated about the exhibition was organized with a post-internet sensibility, paying keen attention to its potential international reception online and throughout China across various layers of public and private strata. An exhibition, as a collection of artworks, texts, documentation, and interpretation, might inhabit a wide variety of such spaces, and today must be designed with this intent.

—Karen Archey and Robin Peckham

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◀ Harm van den Dorpel, *Assemblage (everything vs. anything)*, 2013, UV print on hand-cut PETG, 120 x 100 x 110 cm. Courtesy the artist and Wilkinson Gallery, London.

# Distribution

In the past fifteen years, systems for the production, dissemination, circulation, and reception of new art have experienced seismic shifts and radical reimaginings. The mainstreaming of art blogs, gallery websites, online image clearinghouses, and other vehicles for digital imagery have made screens like computers and smartphones the primary mode by which contemporary art is seen by the vast majority of viewers, handily overwhelming the experiences of paging through a paper catalogue or visiting an exhibition in person. It may be that the most important art of this moment investigates how these changes have affected the status of the work of art, particularly in the tension between object and documentation, the social realities of remote participation, and the possibility of artistic practice as a network.

Artists such as Artie Vierkant work on problems like these directly: his *Image Objects* consist of a constellation of physical and immaterial elements, beginning with seemingly straightforward digital prints in a color palate referencing the modern CMYK printing press that are photographed, manipulated via image software techniques, and then redistributed in altered forms. In situations like these, the boundaries of the work and the practice are both brought under suspicion, suggesting that the "secondary" experience of art online has become a crucial part of aesthetic experience today. Similarly, Kari Altmann's collaborative, genre-crossing project *R-U-In?S* involves a constantly shifting stream of media appearing simultaneously on a website and in variable other temporary forms, including, in the case of this exhibition, ancillary reading materials and performative enactments. Oliver Laric, on the other hand, chooses to split his bodies of work in terms of both medium and timeline, albeit with a shared title: *Versions*. Exploring ideas of originality, authenticity, and the ungovernable nature of web-based image distribution, these pieces include videos, which are released with updated content on a periodic basis, as well as polyurethane sculptures that refer to classical sculpture, specifically the habit of the Romans to directly study, by copying, original works by Greek masters, which have often been lost or destroyed.

Others working in a parallel milieu eschew these digital modes of circulation in favor of the real-life networks that they study and, ultimately, reconfigure. Calla Henkel and Max Pitegoff, proprietors first of Times Bar and currently New Theater, both important hubs for emerging artist activity in Berlin, contribute images ever so subtly indicative of the social networks within which they operate: restaurant table surfaces cleared of plates but not crumbs, remaining host to miniscule traces of the body and its labor. With crumbs appearing similar to night-sky constellations, these work both humorously and somewhat existentially visualize the network, human or otherwise. Henkel and Pitegoff have also populated the museum with benches built from the design of their artist theater, acting as metaphorical support structures for the body and a synecdoche for their process as a whole. Similarly focused on the relationship between the body and incidental architecture, Marlie Mul makes sculptural series revolving around networks, social institutions, group identities, and gender dynamics, using cigarette smoking as a case study. In a radicalization of these sculptural ideas, Tobias Madison and Emanuel Rossetti—in a collaborative practice also involving other participants—construe their own social activity as a form of production, traveling alongside the produce crates that constitute global supply chains. In all of these cases, the objects created function as microcosms or systems in their own right, in addition to elements of other, much larger networks, to include, at times, the international art market.

Artists have also made significant theoretical and philosophical contributions to conversations around distribution and disruption. Perhaps most notably, Seth Price's essay "Dispersion" has become an incredibly widely cited source for thinking on the circulations of text and imagery both within and beyond the art world. Price himself has also incorporated the body of the essay into various facets of his own practice, including everything from printed chapbook editions to vacuum-sealed wall objects. Hito Steyerl, who has published a wide range of criticism on the transformations of digital culture, is also the author of videos including *How Not to be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Education .MOV File*, which negotiates the politics (and, ostensibly, techniques) of visibility in new frontiers of surveillance and machine perception.



▶ Calla Henkel and Max Pitegoff, *Greenish Yellow Table*, 2014, digital print, 90 x 120 cm.

# Language

In its role as a medium for communication, the internet has done as much to transform the ways we speak—and, ultimately, think—as it has to faithfully transmit our messages. Purely visual language plays a more important role than ever before, and what remains of textual culture has been abbreviated and made generic. Globalization means that English and the Latin script are now ubiquitous, albeit in an altered form, while new categories of symbols, translations, and imagery have supplanted the linear logic of alphabetic rationality. As much as new social uses of technology have changed the distribution and authorship of art, so too have they disrupted the workings of publishing and the dissemination of texts in and about art—not to mention the ways in which we consider reception.

This is immediately evident in the text inscribed into the surface of a luxurious home faucet in the collective Bernadette Corporation's work *Tooted in the Air*, which reads: "in that third pic it looks like a female hand on that ass. I hope that is not Chris' ass tooted in the air like that... And if its Rihannas whos female hand does she have on her ass." It is also inscribed within the artist collective's logo. Their practice, including everything from fashion shows to novels about the art world, is largely informed by such transformations in the communication of ideas. Jon Rafman and Rosa Aiello, in the video *Remember Carthage*, tell a highly poetic narrative story through visual conventions of machinima, but what remains is the haunting voice of a computer narrator, whose alienating solitude lends tone to the structure of the work. Also interested in the simulation of human presence and ways in which the body interfaces with devices, Tyler Coburn's *NaturallySpeaking* involves an experimental essay orated by a familiar voice actor—the woman behind Apple's infamous Siri character.

▶ **Tyler Coburn, *NaturallySpeaking*, 2013-2014, text, screensaver, dimensions variable.**

# Posthuman Body

Our current historical moment has been postulated as the dawn of the posthuman, at least in the cultural imaginary. Since the advent of the internet, theorists of new media have described the emergent possibilities of a distributed global unconscious, a "next nature" that evolves alongside human society, or an "anthropocene" geological era defined by the human accumulation of carbon. In all of these narratives, what matters is the back-and-forth relationship between ecology and the human. As our bodies are extended and perhaps supplanted by prosthetic devices that mediate our experiences of the world, new forms of being—once known as science fiction—come alive in very real, often prosaic ways.

Aleksandra Domanović, whose work often draws together strands from the political history of the former Yugoslavia and contemporary modes of media distribution, here manifests an ongoing focus on the figure of Josip Broz Tito. This iconic likeness often appears in the artist's practice with feminine features, the product of a merging in her memory of classroom portraits of the leader with one of her own teachers. Alisa Baremboym, working in a more sculptural tradition, investigates the increasing interplay between the human and other organic and artificial substances. Her objects revel in the sheer sense materiality that underpins this shared dialogue or, more precisely, interface between man and machine, skin and chemical, subject and object, without making a claim for the priority or exclusion of either side.

Katja Novitskova reconfigures this understanding of the relationship between the body and its natural milieu by focusing on questions of representation. Engaging with new discourses of photography, her "Approximation" series appropriates media imagery of animals that appear as singular objects of cultural attraction, ultimately building links between the eye of the viewer and the photographic lens on the one hand, and the sterile gallery and a lush biological habitat on the other. Timur Si-Qin, too, is interested in the discipline of evolutionary psychology. In his "Axe Effect" series, the artist plays with the marketing strategy that positions products like scents and washes as supplements to instincts for mating and seduction, combining this theory with a parallel understanding of weapons as symptoms of innate aggression—all of which fortuitously collides to collectively produce the contingent beauty of this evolutionary process. Josh Kline's *Share the Health* also makes use of personal hygiene products, but leans toward the future of the body rather than its simian past: hygiene is a lifestyle, and various technologies have already changed what it means to be human.



▲ Timur Si-Qin, *Untitled*, 2013, acrylic glass box, sword, Axe body wash, plinth, 176 x 34 x 34 cm. Courtesy the artist and Société.

# Radical Identification

For all of the possibilities in mediated communication and the extension of the body offered by ubiquitous networks, the presentation of the self through channels tied to the internet often results in a "flattened" version of subjectivity. In this updated vision of the one-dimensional man, the supposed depth of modernist subjectivity—already assailed by the postmodernist obsession with surface effects—has been transformed into an image amenable to the circulations of visual culture. While particularly evident in figures like the camgirl, this phenomenon borders on the universal, as human identities are consolidated and repackaged through social networking profiles, branding efforts, and the attempts at self-actualization inherent to youth culture.

Ed Fornieles produces vast and multivalent narratives that are realized at times through video, at times on social media platforms, and at times as theatrical participatory events. In pieces like *Pool Party*, he invents characters that seem to both parody and celebrate stereotypes of various forms of youth culture, then gives these figures enough depth to allow them to circulate throughout our universe of images—already populated with living, breathing

friends and followers. In her video *The One that Got Away*, Marisa Olson produces imagery of herself as a character developed along similar lines, following her in a mock reality television format as she auditions for the talent competition *American Idol*. Moving across media, Harm van den Dorpel builds complex yet delicate sculptural assemblages. These works manifest as objects in space aesthetically and intellectually informed by online information systems the artist developed to "data mine" his own artistic practice. Pulling aesthetic referents from canonized art history, advertising, and online folk art, such as the popular website deviantART, van den Dorpel's work conflates the social-aesthetic hierarchies usually found in the contemporary art world.

Petra Cortright often takes a conflicted approach to the gender and power dynamics of the depiction of women online, unwilling to take either an openly critical or a simplistically celebratory position. Her classic video *VVEBKAM* blurs the line between artistic and amateur performance, suggesting that both are nearly identical activities performed primarily for the self. Bunny Rogers takes this approach a step further, claiming for herself the power of elastic identity endemic to high fantasy or online role-playing games—or in the case of *Self-Portrait (Cat Urn)*, that she might be able to imagine herself even as something as morose as a deceased cat. This work also speaks to the aesthetics of kitsch on the internet, allowing it to circulate almost as if it were a form of personal identity. A bit less sardonically but nonetheless drawing on a similar dynamic, the expansive collective GCC, with members from Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain, mirrors the ritual production of state aesthetics. They first borrow the name of the Gulf Cooperation Council, and then proceed to devise imagery of "summits" and "protocols," inscribing individual artistic dynamics within institutional media.

# Branding and Corporate Aesthetics

When the history of the web is told, its narratives often weave between the polar extremes of the corporate internet (Web 2.0, start-up culture, and the design of multinational giants like Google and Apple) and a pirate underground, even though the two are increasingly indistinguishable. While this story is not necessarily historically valid—it ignores, among many other things, the role of the military in the birth of the internet, and the continued geopolitical dramas of governmental and institutional network presence—it goes a long way to explain the visual cultures fetishized by artists working through this material. One of the most prominent visual signatures today is dominated by sterile corporate aesthetics and consulting lingo, branding exercises both online and off, a parroting or parodying of the fashion and advertising worlds, and, perhaps most durably, the stock image—that uncanny branch of photography that maximizes its situational applicability via its vacant blandness. Rachel Reupke's 2009 video *Ten Seconds or Greater* evinces the uncanniness of this mass-palatability by introducing stock vernacular to well-worn scenarios such as cooking dinner at home or having drinks with friends. Set to an unimaginative techno soundtrack, these stock gestures become so campy and inflated that their lack of realism and ridiculousness of their construction is laid bare.

▶ **Aids-3D,** *Outperformance Options ATM Partition*, **2012, UV printed images from** *Contemporary Art Daily* **on perforated window film, Solyx Ice Galaxy window film, Solyx Cut Glass Drops window film, safety glass, stainless steel, 220 x 200 x 35 cm. Photo by Nick Ash, courtesy the artists and Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin.**

Branding and corporate aesthetics have been historically consistent, reappearing at key moments to redefine the relationships between art and commerce. One of the latest archetypes to confront this dynamic is that of the glass sculpture: while screens and video installations are increasingly rare on the ground in post-internet practice in the narrowest sense of its object-laden definition, flat glass panes are increasingly prevalent as sculptural objects, suggesting that the various screen-based media have themselves become the content of cultural analysis. In *Outperformance Options ATM Partition*, Aids-3D plays up the coincidence of the glass dividers between ATM consoles and the glass of the ATM screen, repurposing the partitions as vessels for content by printing images of installation shots from the minimal art blog *Contemporary Art Daily*. This work, executed in 2012, echoes a 1992 work by Dara Birnbaum, a pioneering critic of the circulation of media imagery. In *Computer-Assisted Drawings: Proposal for Sony Corporation, NYC,*

*1992/93*, she presents technical diagrams of projection units that consider the engineering of the viewing apparatus as a site for the politics of media reception. By presenting these drawings on glass panes the size of a personal device screen and in a CMYK color palette, Birnbaum too draws on structural homologies tied to the projection or viewing surface in a way that appears incredibly contemporary. Hannah Sawtell combines a similar interest in the sculptural possibilities of the screen with techniques of media appropriation: her "Swap Meet—Optic" assemblages, consisting of multiple sheets of glass configured at various angles through display hardware, display static digital images that are intended to function as transitional moments in the ceaseless flow of the networked visual imaginary. While none of these projects connect to the web in a literal way, all are produced through conversation with the human and infrastructural networks that underpin it.

If all of these works could be said to manifest a vaguely generic aesthetics of corporate design through their adoption of the consumer screen, it is artists like Simon Denny who further develop an analysis of how the channels of capitalist production effect the circulation of contemporary culture as a form of content. For *All you need is data: The DLD 2012 Conference Redux Rerun*, Denny prints, on canvas, the minute details of the schedule of the 2012 iteration of the annual Digital Life Design conference in Munich, inserting subtle embellishments into the general flow of panels and keynotes. Notably, that conference marked the moment that the phrase "post-internet" went mainstream, including a panel entitled "Ways Beyond the Internet" that included several of the artists and one of the curators of this exhibition. Moving from the logic of branding to the life of the brand, Jordan Wolfson's notoriously enigmatic video *Con Leche* depicts animated glass Diet Coke bottles on skinny pink legs running through live action video footage of empty city streets, all of which is juxtaposed with a voiceover reading of ruminations on personal identity, suggesting, again, the unconscious but guided reinforcement of belief in sterile branded environments. In a more celebratory approach to the systems of fashion, the collective LuckyPDF presents a series of images tied to branded garments they have produced over a period of several years, which are recontextualized and distributed via local style figures in an experiment that attempts to track the life of the logo as it moves from the amateur to the professional and back again while crossing international boundaries.

◄ **Dara Birnbaum, *Computer Assisted Drawings: Proposal for Sony Corporation, NYC, 1992/93*, 1992-1993, 16 drawings, plexiglass and custom aluminum frames, 150 x 35 x 2 cm (4 pieces). Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.**

# Painting and Gesture

precisely, the age-old discourse of painting has been interpreted via software engineering. Curious as to the possible afterlives of the painterly, his project "Nu Painting" involves prints of compositions created through these digital moves. Aude Pariset brings a sense of politicized critique and a more fully material dimension to this conversation: in the body of work "FX Tridacna," she prints files of digital paintings produced by the all-male collective PaintFX on the rather vulvar surface of clam shells; in "Learning from Development," seaweed and photographic prints are submerged together in glass tubes. In both cases, the image—understood as immaterial and yet somehow static or fixed—is dissolved, focusing attention on both its impermanence and its ability to be transformed across media.

Almost as visible as the logic of branding, the web folklore of the personal internet has tracked a very different trajectory, tied to everything from the nostalgic afterlives of platforms like Geocities and AOL, which we can see in media as mainstream as Rihanna and Azealia Banks music videos, to the integration of screen buttons into the physical world of so-called "meatspace." For art history, this dynamic is perhaps most efficiently visible in the exchanges of digital painting: the history of how software engineers modeled the movements of paint has become a touchstone for a generation of artists interested in drawing these models off of the screen and onto paper or canvas, exploring the boundaries of painting—that sometimes-hackneyed goal for so much of art after modernism—in a changing digital world.

Artists like Cory Arcangel bring a humorous approach to this task, drafting a consumer-grade plotter to bring together the recent resurgence of interest in gesture with the history of new media art as a circumscribed discourse, the origins of which belong at least in part to the experimentations with computer drawing that took place in the 1960s. This is a notion of art aside from the easy nostalgia that the use of outmoded technology might easily call up, inserting it instead into the realm of the gesture. Jaakko Pallasvuo takes an alternative approach, using fully digital painting methods to explore how,



▶ Aude Pariset, *FX Tridacna (tumblr_lelsnbYMai1qcwgja.jpg)*, 2011-2013, Inkjet print on rice paper wrappers, Untitled Paint FX, sport mesh fabric, archival mat varnish, 25 X 35 X 12 cm (3 pieces). Courtesy the artist.

But if the deconstruction of painting on a physical level is a marker of post-internet engagement with its specific nature, the traditional notion of painting as the application of oil or acrylic to a stretched canvas also plays a symbolic role. Juliette Bonneviot, whose experiments often transform the conditions of the experience of viewing painting as a genre through her reconfigurations of the specific painting as an object, here presents the work *Ed Ruscha Things Oriental 3X-I*. Distinct from more prosaic references to the copy painting services so common in south China, Bonneviot here chose to appropriate the Ruscha painting based on its resemblance to her own style—a nod to the universality of the language of painting and to the fluid circulation of images, in the process of production even more than in reception. The work was also originally exhibited in the context of an exhibition for which Bonneviot imagined herself in the position of a Chinese artist—a position that may not translate. Jon Rafman is also concerned with the transformation of received viewing conventions. In addition to being a member of the aforementioned now-defunct group PaintFX, he is known for the series "Nine Eyes of Google Street View," for which he combs the seemingly endless photographic database of roadside images mapped by Google for moments poetic, novel, or otherwise with some claim to relevance as a photograph. Tellingly, Rafman frames these images as if they were large-format photographs in a highly traditional way, suggesting that, as much as ways of seeing are being transformed, their cultures of circulation will always bear some legacy of the past.

◄  Juliette Bonneviot, *Ed Ruscha Things Oriental 3X-I*, 2011, oil on canvas, 220 x 150 cm. Courtesy the artist and Wilkinson Gallery.

# Infrastructure

Early digital art and net art often relished the immateriality or virtuality of its platform, but with the focus on objecthood and physicality that accompanies the rise of the post-internet, the tangible and institutional infrastructures of the internet and its cultures have come back into play with a vengeance. From the ecological repercussions of massive server farms and fiber optic cables euphemistically understood as residing "in the cloud" to the conditions of transparency and access to information, the issues that define this moment in art cannot be reduced to the purely aesthetic or theoretical; the space beyond digital dualism is inhabited by a holistic view of the networked world.

Ben Schumacher, whose training as an architect allows him to position installation projects both in relation to the labor conditions of the knowledge economy and with reference to the increasing incidence of digital imagery in design practice, is an exemplary figure in this respect. His work is distributed in ways that reflect its liminal status, often appearing differently in images and in person. In the installation *A Seasonal Hunt for Morels*, the sculptural use of glass panes makes yet another appearance, albeit here grounded in the technical language of engineering and structure and juxtaposed against the similarly engineered vocabulary of constructed language. Nicolas Ceccaldi, in the series exhibited here, similarly includes electronic components in order to place virtual imagery alongside very concrete and often surprising hardware elements. Here, surveillance cameras embedded in objects like stuffed toys are spread around the exhibition space, making reference to current conversations about surveillance but tying them to the more poignant aspects of childhood.

The Bernadette Corporation also makes a play to the affective and sensual with *The Earth's Tarry Dreams of Insurrection against the Sun*, a video installation making sculptural use of two flatscreen monitors that loop news footage of BP's calamitous Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Taken alongside the collective's installation of spigots spouting the celebrity-driven language of the social media, the project offers a convincing argument for a mediated but extremely physical and emotional understanding of the internet. Moving into a less metaphorical territory, Lance Wakeling draws related conclusions about the physicality and geopoliticization of the internet. In his video investigation *Field Visits for Chelsea Manning*, the artist visited all sites at which Private Chelsea Manning was detained for her leaking of diplomatic cables to WikiLeaks—in order to visualize and, perhaps more importantly, materialize the networked spaces and places often understood purely in the abstract. In

a humanizing intervention and a nod to the Lumiere Brothers' 1895 film of workers exiting a factory, Andrew Norman Wilson's video *Workers Leaving the Googleplex* draws attention to the labor that powers these networks, and opens questions as to the forms of labor and power that remain invisible even after this task has been completed. Most notably, the corporate hierarchy of new media conglomerates suggests a tension between the values of the network and the realities of the capitalist system that inscribes them as marketing slogans rather than codes of ethics.



▲  **Ben Schumacher, *A Seasonal Hunt for Morels*, 2013, tempered glass, hardware, inkjet on perforated vinyl, interview with auxiliary language specialists, drain hair, positioning targets, 153.7 x 241.3 x 38.1 cm. Courtesy the artist and Bortolami Gallery, New York.**

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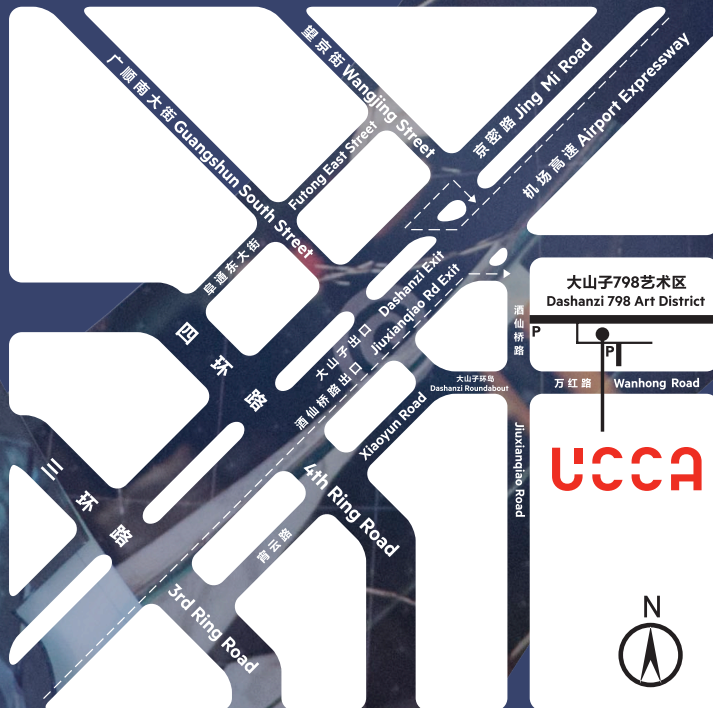
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