

艺术界
LEAP

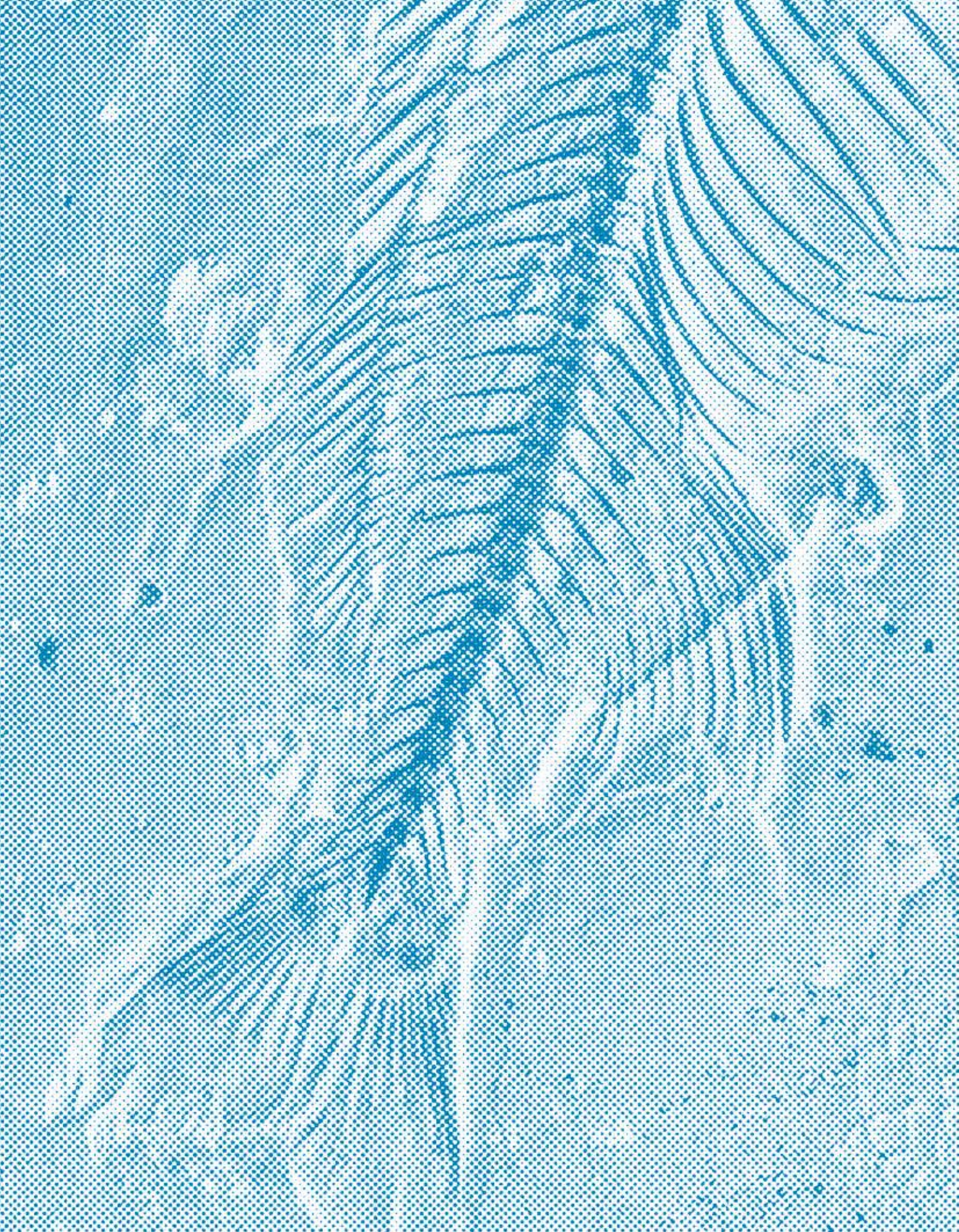
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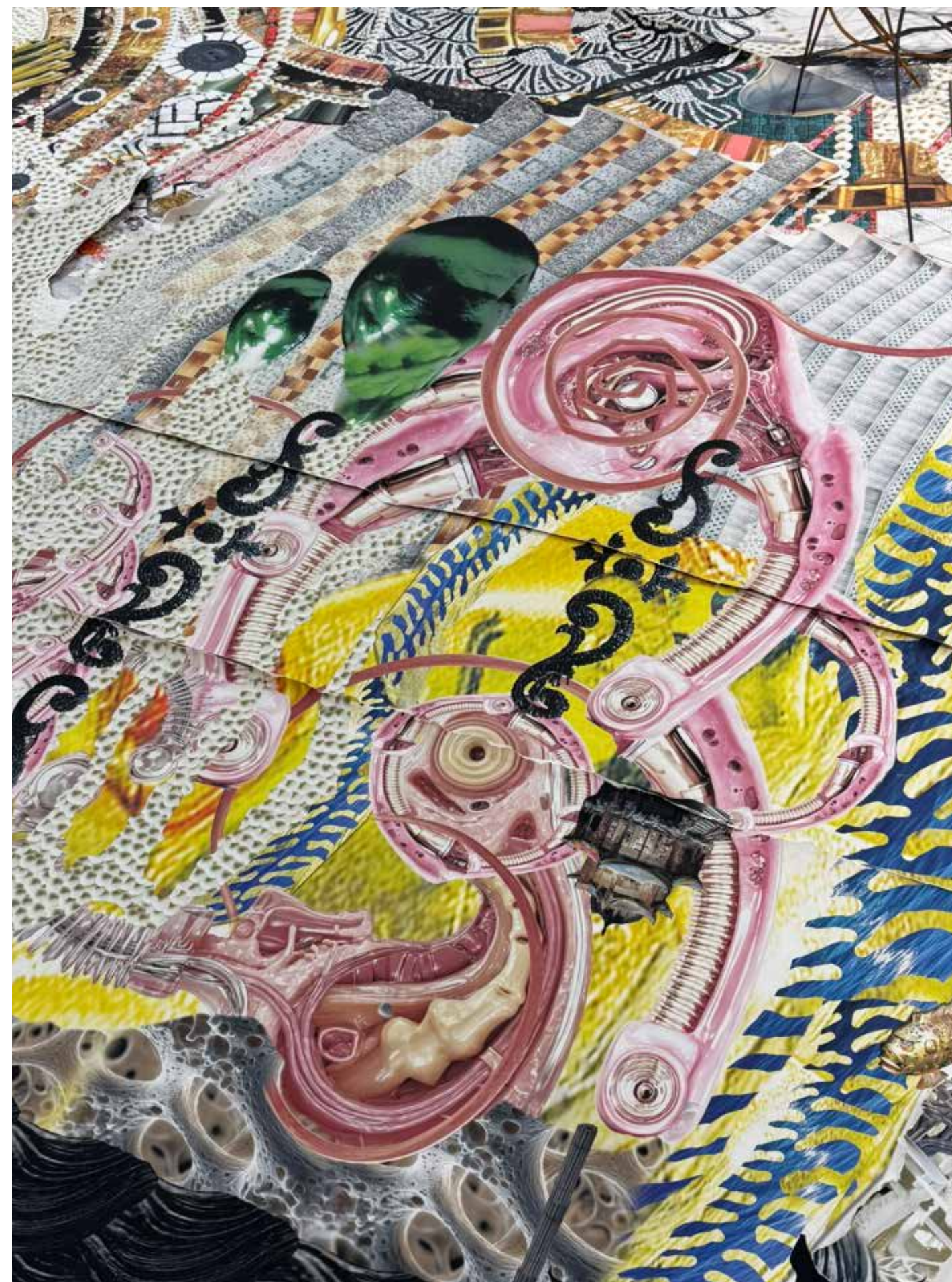
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莲 峰 镜 海，
何 必 “当 代”

撰文：聂小依
Text by Nie Xiaoyi

Lotus
Peak,
Mirror
Sea:
Why
Does
It
Have
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黄咏瑶，《内经图 I：折叠、枢纽与迷宫》（局部），2025 年
铜、混凝土、纸浆（包含中葡报纸、混凝土、颜料、夯土物料等）、钢筋、咸鱼、腊肠、综合媒材，尺寸可变
摄影：聂小依

Weng-io Wong, *Chart of the Inner Landscape I: The Fold, the Hinge and the Labyrinth* (details), 2025
Bronze, papier-mâché (consists of Chinese and Portuguese newspaper, paint, ingredients of Chunambo etc.), rebar, salted fish, Chinese sausage, and mixed media, dimensions variable
Photo: Nie Xiaoyi

“我不喜欢大家总是把澳门和香港放在一起谈。”坡道很长，咏瑶和我左右躲闪着人潮。她在冷飕飕的凉气中拈取字句，词语慢慢落下来。某个瞬间，她眉头一皱，下定决心一般说：“澳门和香港是完全不同的存在。澳门有自己的故事。”

我原以为澳门回归贺礼陈列馆会冷清，没想到，旅游大巴源源不断地送来内地游客。我才意识到，初次到访澳门的自己，兜里那点知识、心中那点快感其实与眼前众人别无二致：想看看澳门恭谨的姿态。我似是为自己辩解，跟咏瑶说：“在内地这个环境里，澳门的确一直跟在香港这个名字旁边。回归和设立特区，是先香港后澳门。办港澳通行证时两个地名写在一起。这十几年，香港新闻里乱腾不休，澳门倒常常在报道里被夸……”话说到这儿，我也沉默了。心里明白，这些都不是把澳门当作香港影子的理由。

与陈列馆的喧闹相比，不远处的澳门艺术博物馆安静得多。艺博馆当下在展的，主要是“艺文荟澳：澳门国际双年展”的主展览。“澳双”今年夏天在内地很有名气。这届双年展不仅邀请了内地团队来做策展，受邀艺术家中许多也来自内地。主办双年展的澳门文化局更是邀请了许多像我这样的评论人来观展。

我到达时，恰巧一群小朋友正开始参观。他们像一群小鸭子，挤满了入口的镜屋。这间镜屋《非问非答》（2025）出自北京艺术家宋冬：铺满反光箔的房间中，设有录像与霓虹灯管，中间搭了一间保安亭——乍看起来还以为是核酸亭。亭子里的保安符合典型的男性形象。他问我生命的意义是什么，我说是为了体验，他便递给我一张盖了“pass”戳印的护照本。我和“保安”闲聊，他说自己是应聘来的，平常工作就是在展览里扮演 NPC。

宋东把微观的权力操演和人生大问交织在一起，触及争议又点到为止，算是在双年展主题“嗨，你干什么来了？”下取巧。不过我后来想法有了点改变。起初我以为他在暗指内地的日常政治，毕竟那位 NPC 穿的制服上写着“中国保安”。可走到后面的展厅，我看到展场安保人员也穿着类似的制服，胸前正挂着“中国保安”的牌子。作为一个从小被教育要有眼力见儿、敬酒时酒杯要端低一截的山东人，我自认，是自己格局低了。

展厅里，讲解员给小朋友们用粤语解说。我一边听，一边想，为何策展人没用白话问一句：“嗨，你嚟做乜呀？”不过双年展没绕开“本地化”这个问题，甚至有些作品像在抢答一样强调“澳门”与“国际”。比如住在深圳的艺术家薛峰用纸壳和 3D 切割，做出澳门城景，标题直白地叫《两个澳门》（2025）——市井与传统的一面，对比赌场与消费的另一面。（可在我看来，何止两个？）香港艺术家白双全则延续他“异类旅行”的方法（打开一本地图册，沿着页面的夹缝处步行，出自他 2007 年的作品《谷之旅》），循着澳门一条公交线路反复穿行，用短视频、铁撑和硬币拼装出澳门版的“路上观察学”。

在我眼中，回应策展主题最妙的，是来自内地的丁世伟的《降维广场 No. 2》（2020）与《幽灵回响》（2024）。半透明的墙体两侧，各有 30 个竖幅屏幕在成人视平线高度环绕一圈。观众凑近时，拳头会接连从屏幕底部升起，连带着绷紧的小臂。只不过，一组拳头看起来真切可信，另一组显然由 AI 生成，包罗了不同肤色、胖瘦和对纹身的态度。对于策展人的问题“嗨，你干什么来了？”，在沉默中起起伏伏的拳头似是另一种更直截了当的应答。巧的是，澳门本地媒体《论尽》的专栏题图也画着众人之拳（甚至夹杂了一只猫爪），配文是：“以无权者的力量，记住真相。”

黄咏瑶的一组装置《内经图 I：折叠、枢纽与迷宫》（2025）在三楼的角落中，紧挨着钟正刺眼的玻璃幕墙屏幕。整组作品以道家描绘人体脏腑的《内经图》为基础展开：花纹斑斓的拼贴铺展于地面，其间可辨认出教堂的图样，而在对应人体器官方位之处，则竖立着装置。与鲜艳的图案相比，这些由陈旧纸浆和锈蚀钢筋做成的装置，化为楼阁与



薛峰，《两个澳门》（局部），2025 年
桌面装置，综合材料，244 × 244 × 6 厘米每件，共 4 件
摄影：聂小依

Xue Feng, *Two Macaos*, 2025
Installation on table, mixed media,
244 × 244 × 6 cm each, 4 pieces in total
Photo: Nie Xiaoyi



宋冬，《非问非答》（局部），2025 年
参与性装置，边检柜台、吊灯、霓虹灯、牌区、电视、护照牌等综合媒材，尺寸可变
摄影：聂小依

Song Dong, *Not a Question, Not an Answer* (detail), 2025
Participatory installation, border control counter, chandelier, neon signs, card zone, television, passport signs, and other mixed media, dimensions variable
Photo: Nie Xiaoyi



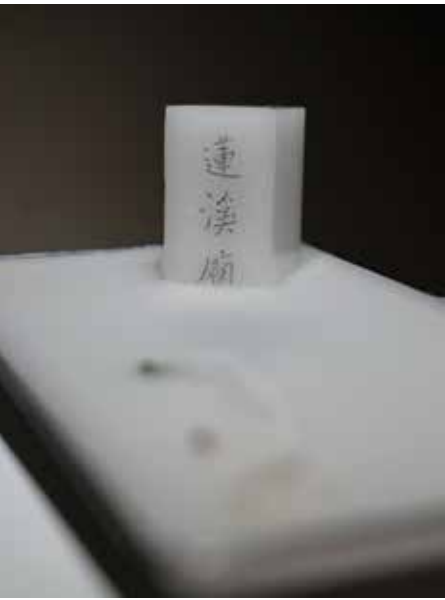
黄咏瑶,《易》, 2025 年
铜、综合媒材, 尺寸可变
摄影: 聂小依

Weng-io Wong, *Dealer*, 2025
Copper and mixed media, dimensions variable
Photo: Nie Xiaoyi



悬挂于澳门艺术博物馆主场馆的分区标志, 2025 年
摄影: 王程琛
图片致谢“艺文荟澳”及澳门艺术博物馆

Signage suspended in the main hall of the
Macao Museum of Art, 2025
Photo: Wang Chengchen
Courtesy Art Macao and the Macao Museum of Art



历历在目,《界石: 水漫庙前》, 2025 年
蜡、不锈钢、纸、烛心, 28.5 × 15 × 5 厘米
图片致谢“东方花园后”及艺术家

Vividly, *Boundary Stone: Flooded Temple Forecourt*,
2025
Wax, stainless steel, paper, and candlewick,
28.5 × 15 × 5 cm
Courtesy “After Oriental Garden” and the artist

澳门女媧庙
摄影: 刘丽娟

Macao Nuwa Temple
Photo: Lillian Lijuan Liu



澳门老城居民区中的土地庙
摄影：聂小依

A neighborhood land shrine in Macao's old town residential area
Photo: Nie Xiaoyi

骨骼之形。作品说明文字里提到，中葡报纸、童年糖果、夯土、咸鱼、腊肠等都混杂其中——澳门的生活碎片在此被炼化，却也停驻在未完成的状态。一双悬空的青铜手《 Dealer 》（ 2025 ）尤为突出：光洁、确定，双手指向不同方向。这双手是咏瑶与她父亲的合作——右手是咏瑶的，左手是父亲的。咏瑶的父亲年轻时曾在赌场里做过庄荷（也就是荷官），这只手便是庄荷坐在桌前时手心向上、迎接客人的手势。对咏瑶来说，这手势某种程度上隐喻了父母将她带到这个世界，世上之人也不断交易着生存所需。

整体而言，策展人在展场布置上颇为用心，比如仿澳门街道花砖路牌样式的展区标识。但作品之间大多各自为政，缺乏对话。观展时，我有时更像是在辨认每个艺术家的代表作——比如新加坡艺术家赵仁辉的《 为气候而来，为混乱而驻 》（ 2025 ）是将澳门的“外来物种”做成模型。在展览现场，远远就能看到一行大字“澳门自然历史博物馆”。你只能说一句，“当然，他就得做这个！”整场展览看下来，作品件件都很符合“当代艺术”的类型，也不算无趣，但彼此之间并无默契。对“嗨，你做什么来了”，我想到了最无聊的一种答案：我看双年展来了。或者另一种更无聊的：我看当代艺术来了。此时又想起宋冬让 NPC 问我的人生意义，我突然打了个哆嗦：难道我的人生是为了来看一个个双年展？！

咏瑶后来带我去的莲花艺术空间，正在展出“信奉一条河流”，这也是双年展的“平行展”单元的一部分。莲花艺术空间栖身于设有娱乐场的励宫酒店，算是一处非政府运营的独立艺术空间。展出的六件作品，大致可以用展览副标题“亚洲数码艺术”来概括。但策展人并没要去抓什么技术前沿，所选作品都有关人的境况。台湾艺术家李亦凡在《难忘的形状》（ 2023 ）里，喋喋不休着影像创作者和软件服务之间的关系，这正是艺术家的反思：“好像我看似拥有无所不能的能力，但最终仍需符合他们生产条件下的规则。”¹

李亦凡在软件的虚拟空间里发病、发癫，让人觉得痛快。这精神状态，说实在的，和澳门太不一样了。我和咏瑶都觉得澳门有时候像座 NPC 之城。这座温和的城市，这里繁琐细致的公务流程，这里各司其职、文明守礼的市民，似乎在认真扮演着外部系统给予的角色——很平静、不抱怨、不发病，更不会越轨而出、自找麻烦。规则，即便摸不着、看不见、无人提及，也坚实影响着众人行事。

说到规则，我其实一直没搞懂赌博游戏：老虎机、轮盘、21 点……我在“巴黎人”的赌场里围观，看了半天只觉得头晕（顺便说一句，澳门赌场只收港币现金）。规则能帮助赌场赚钱，而按照赔率，赌场永远不会输。玩家呢，会输，但还是前赴后继地下注。这就透露出一点荒谬：正像嘲笑我不敢进赌场的朋友说的，赌场才是最“安全”的地方——规则是固定的，赌场是稳赢的，风险全部给了赌客。那赌场里的艺术呢？是要选最安全的，还是选好玩但有风险的？

这个盛夏，澳门六大博彩企业，从美高梅到金沙中国，一个不落地做了展览，也为这次的澳门双年展贡献了“！特展”单元。只不过这些展览——毕加索、蔡国强的 AI、多巴胺配色的“芝麻街”玩偶——看起来都和主场馆没有什么关系。本来，在赌场里做展览会多有意思啊！比如在赌场中讨论澳门为什么要做“伦敦人”“巴黎人”而不做“蒙古人”“上海人”，或者用作品来回应“随机”“金钱”“风险”和“运气”，都算是妙事一桩……但赌场，是不会自己上牌桌的。跟自己有关的事情，即便是艺术，也要计算成本、降低风险。这几日的道听途说中，有人讲，赌场做展览是因为，想要继续获得博彩业经营权（赌牌），就得拿出利润支持公共事业；也有人说，招待豪客的贵宾厅这几年没什么生意，所以空置着。我倒更想问：说到底，赌场有胆量和魄力，把艺术家请进来，观察、创作，甚至搅动规则吗？

在我的观察里，本质上，双年展是澳门政府对内向市民提供文化服务、对外提升城市形象的嘉年华。它制造多巴胺，逃避痛苦与危险。赌场也配合这一决策。而在主场馆，虽

其实，何必执着于把既定范式中的“当代艺术”从四面八方拿来？澳门双年展，应该有澳门的故事。

然内地团队策展人用问题统领展览，但那个问题更像是个引子，引出的是包罗万象的“当代艺术”，而非与此时此地交织的深度思辨或感受。我想起一位画家跟我倒的苦水：澳门看起来很多艺术盛会，但人们就是看看展、拍拍照，其实没什么真正的交流。画家说：“澳门本身强调自己是一个‘国际娱乐城市’，大部分艺术活动靠的是政府和赌场资金。但是这样的体系对艺术和艺术语言的理解，太保守了。”

我和这位水墨画家是在东方基金会（ Fundação Oriente ）的开幕上遇到的。基金会坐落于白鸽巢公园内，一栋 18 世纪的葡式老宅。东方基金会最早设立于葡萄牙，是推动葡国与亚洲文化交流的非营利机构，在澳门的这栋办事处经常被租作展览空间。那天晚上开幕的“东方花园后”也不例外。这场展览属于双年展的重点单元之一“本地策展计划”。当地策展人可以向双年展评审委员会提交自己的策展计划，获选者不仅可以获得经费支持、在双年展期间举办展览，也会同步获得代表澳门参加明年威尼斯双年展的候选资格。²“东方花园后”这场展览邀请了不同地区和文化背景的艺术家居应澳门的历史地理与殖民经验，重头戏是一系列围绕早已被填埋的“莲溪河”的装置，由“历历在目”小组（李淑雯、李沛荣）创作。根据“澳门记忆”网站上的查证，莲溪大约于 1914 年左右被填平。虽然不过一百余年，却已“慢慢消散在居民的记忆之中”。³

澳门许多地名里都有“莲”与“镜”。近代实业家郑观应的宗族世居澳门，郑家大屋就有一副楹联“前迎镜海，后枕莲峰”。“莲”因澳门填海前地形似莲，“镜”则源自澳门别称“濠镜澳”：既指澳门曾盛极一时的养蚝业，也将澳门的平静海湾喻作抛光后的贝母。“澳”的本意是港湾，除却前面所提的“濠镜澳”，澳门又称“濠江”“莲岛”“香山澳”“妈阁”——据考证，“Macao”这一称呼，便是葡人对妈阁庙前的水域阿妈港（ Amagao ）的简称。⁴

《七子之歌》中有一句歌词，“你可知 Macao，不是我真姓”。其实，澳门的姓名重重叠叠，何止“Macao”。在澳门的这几日，我在烈日下躲进国父纪念馆，台风天在妈祖阁掷筊，黄昏时跋涉去海岛边缘，拜访由旅澳意大利建筑师夏刚志（ Oseo Acconci ）为麻风病人设计的七苦圣母小教堂……从这丰富的肌理里，与澳门有关的故事翻涌而出。正因种种痕迹承载着千百年来普通人的际遇，澳门的那些街巷庙宇才细腻动人。

但在“当代艺术”上，澳门政府却是种工程式思维。双年展似乎是为了当代而当代，有澳门视角的整体叙事和思考却在此缺席。其实，何必执着于把既定范式中的“当代艺术”从四面八方拿来？本地四方交融的文化艺术史，仍旧鲜活的旧时风土，长期耕耘的艺术社群（比如澳门酷儿影展、风盒子社区艺术发展协会等等），哪一项不是澳门之光？澳门双年展，应该有澳门的故事。

若澳门双年展能放下执念，不再一味追求打造最“当代艺术”的双年展，而是让外来的委任创作拥有更多时间与在地连结，让在地的艺术史展现与当下的脉络，那么双年展或许才会长出血肉。正如没有哪个活人天生是 NPC，打动人心的艺术也不会仅仅有“当代”这一个标签——在莲峰镜海之间，艺术自有其根。

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¹ 周安曼、施维麟（ William Smith ），《“小世界”访谈集——李亦凡》，小世界线上志，2024 年 3 月 22 日。

² 林翊捷，《新桥莲溪的消失》，澳门特别行政区政府文化局，

³ 徐春伟，《从古地图看早期西方人对中国城市的命名方式》，《地图史研究：理论与实践》，王家耀、徐永清主编，社会科学文献出版社，2023 年 12 月。网络发表于澎湃新闻。

⁴ 徐春伟，《从古地图看早期西方人对中国城市的命名方式》，《地图史研究：理论与实践》，王家耀、徐永清主编，社会科学文献出版社，2023 年 12 月。网络发表于澎湃新闻。



宋冬,《非问非答》(局部), 2025 年
参与性装置, 边检柜台、吊灯、霓虹灯、牌区、电视、
护照牌等综合媒材, 尺寸可变
摄影: 王程琛
图片致谢“艺文荟澳”与艺术家

Song Dong, *Not a Question, Not an Answer* (detail),
2025
Participatory installation, border control counter,
chandelier, neon signs, card zone, television,
passport signs, and other mixed media,
dimensions variable
Photo: Wang Chengchen
Courtesy Art Macao and the artist

“I don’t like it when people always talk about Macao and Hong Kong together.” The slope was long, and Weng-io and I were navigating our way through the crowds. In the sharp chill of the air, she picked her words carefully, each one falling slowly into place. At a certain moment, she frowned, as if making up her mind, and said: “Macao and Hong Kong are entirely different entities. Macao has its own story.”

I had assumed the Handover Gifts Museum of Macao would be quiet, but to my surprise, tour buses kept arriving with visitors from mainland China. Only then did I realize that, as a first-time visitor to Macao, the little knowledge I carried and the thrill I felt were no different from those of the people around me: we all came to see Macao’s courteous, well-behaved façade towards the central authorities. I tried to explain a bit, saying to Weng-io: “In the mainland, Macao has indeed always appeared next to Hong Kong as a pair. The handovers and the establishment of the Special Administrative Regions happened first in Hong Kong and then in Macao. When you apply for the Hong Kong–Macao travel permit, the two names are printed side by side. Over the past decade or so, while Hong Kong has been constantly turbulent in the news, Macao is often praised...” At this point, I fell silent. Deep down I knew that none of this justified treating Macao as Hong Kong’s shadow.

Compared with the bustle of the Handover Gifts Museum, the Macao Museum of Art nearby was far quieter. The museum was presenting the main exhibition of “Art Macao: Macao International Art Biennale,” commonly known as Art Macao. This year’s edition had gained considerable visibility in mainland China over the summer. Not only was a curatorial team from mainland China invited, but many of the participating artists were also based there. The Macao Cultural Affairs Bureau, which organizes the Biennale, had additionally invited many critics like myself to visit.

When I arrived, a group of children happened to be beginning their tour. Like a cluster of ducklings, they crowded into the mirrored room at the entrance. This mirrored installation, *Not a Question, Not an Answer* (2025), is by the Beijing-based artist Song Dong. The room is covered entirely with reflective foil and features video projections and neon tubes, with a security booth erected at its center—at first glance, it even resembles a COVID-19 testing kiosk. Inside the booth sits a guard who conforms to a stereotypically masculine figure. He asked me what the meaning of life was; when I replied that it was “to experience,” he handed me a passport stamped with “pass.” I chatted a little with the “guard.” He told me he had been hired for the role, and that his job was to act as an NPC (non-player character) within exhibitions.

Song patches together micro-performances of authority with life’s big questions—touching on controversy but never pushing too far. It’s a clever maneuver under the Biennale’s theme, “Hey, what brings you here?” Though later, my view shifted a little. At first, I assumed Song was alluding to everyday politics (especially during COVID-19) in mainland China; after all, the NPC’s uniform was emblazoned with “China Security.” But when I walked into the next gallery, I noticed that the actual security staff on site were wearing similar uniforms, complete with real badges reading “China Security.” Having grown up in Shandong, taught to sense the air and to hold my glass lower when toasting elders, I had to admit: it was my own frame of reference that was too narrow.



薛峰,《两个澳门》(局部), 2025 年
桌面装置, 综合材料, 244 × 244 × 6 厘米每件,
共 4 件
摄影: 王程琛
图片致谢“艺文荟澳”与艺术家

Xue Feng, *Two Macaos*, 2025
Installation on table, mixed media,
244 × 244 × 6 cm each, 4 pieces in total
Photo: Wang Chengchen
Courtesy Art Macao and the artist

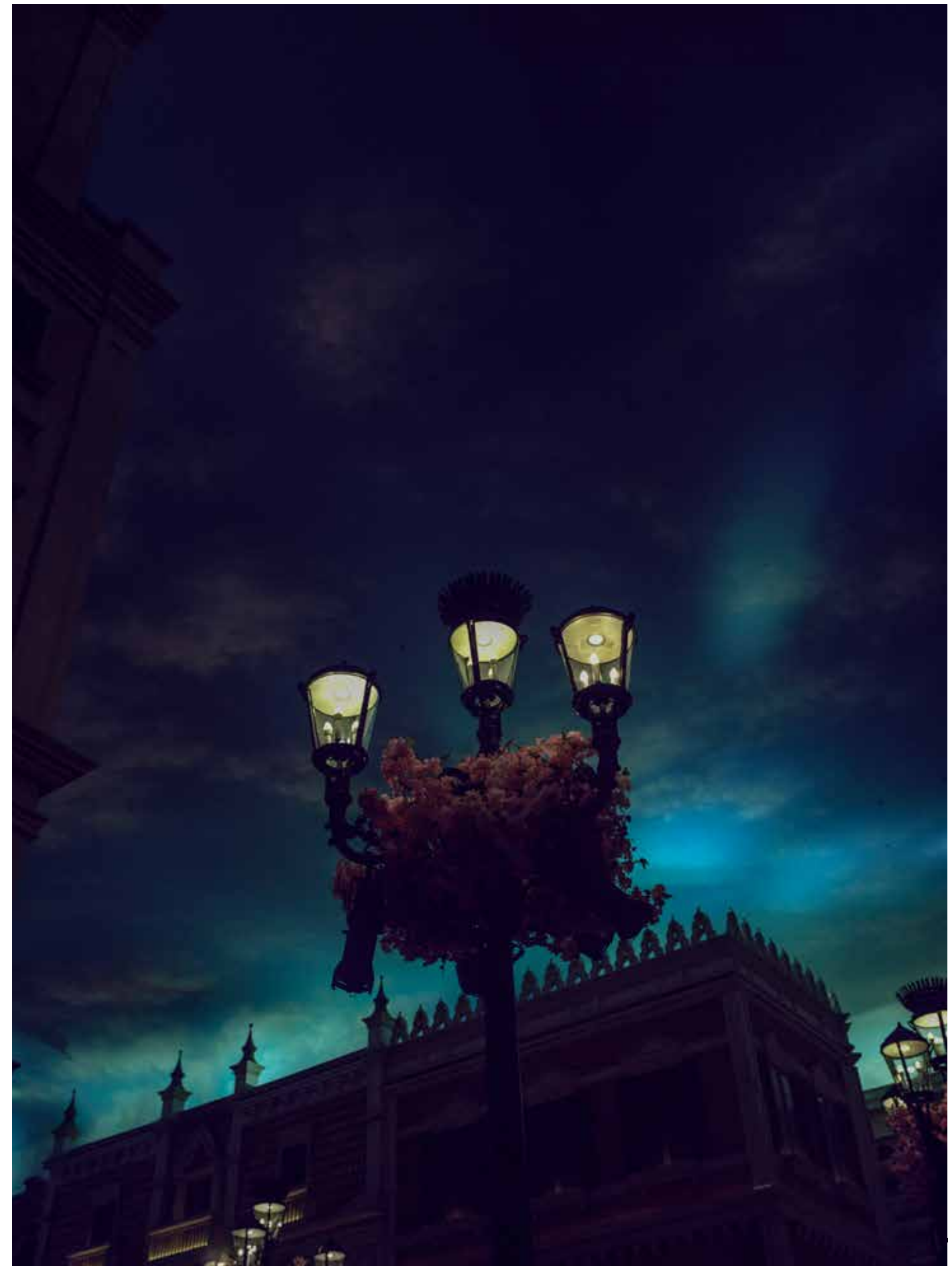
In the gallery, a guide was explaining the works to the children in Cantonese. As I listened, I found myself wondering why the curators hadn't simply used the local language: “*Hi, nei lai zou mat aa?*” Yet the Biennale certainly didn't sidestep the question of “locality.” Some works even seemed to rush to assert both “Macao” and “internationalism.” For instance, the Shenzhen-based artist Xue Feng created a cardboard-and-3D-cut reconstruction of Macao's cityscape, bluntly titled *Two Macaos* (2025)—one side capturing the everyday and the traditional, the other the casinos and consumerism. (To my mind, of course, there are more than just two.) Hong Kong artist Pak Sheung Chuen extended his long-standing method of “deviant travel”—opening an atlas and walking along the creases between its pages, originating from his 2007 work *A Travel Without Visual Experience*. Following a local bus route in Macao over and over, he pieced together a Macao-style *rojo kansatsu* (roadway observation) using short videos, metal supports, and coins.

To my mind, the most incisive response to the Biennale's theme came from the mainland artist Ding Shiwei, with *The Jokers' Revolution No.2* (2020) and *Echoes of Specters* (2024). Along both sides of a translucent wall, thirty vertical screens encircle the space at adult eye level. As viewers approach, fists rise one after another from the bottom of the screens, forearms tensed. Yet one set of fists appears entirely lifelike, while the other is clearly generated by AI, encompassing a range of skin tones, body types, and attitudes toward tattoos. In answer to the curators' question—“Hey, what brings you here?”—these silently rising and falling fists feel like a more direct reply. Fittingly, the Macao outlet *All About Macau* recently used an illustration of raised fists (with a cat paw slipped in among them) for a column header, captioned: “With the strength of the powerless, remember the truth.”

Weng-io Wong's installation *Chart of the Inner Landscape I: The Fold, the Hinge and the Labyrinth* (2025) occupies a corner on the third floor, pressed against the glare of the building's glass curtain wall. The work draws from the Daoist anatomical chart *Inner Classic Diagram*: a vivid, patterned collage unfurls across the floor, where one can make out the shapes of church architecture. At the positions corresponding to human organs, the artist has placed sculptural structures—aged pulp and rusted rebar forming miniature towers and skeletal frames. According to the wall text, Chinese-Portuguese newspapers, childhood candies, rammed earth, salted fish, and cured sausages are all mixed into the materials—fragments of Macao life smelted together, yet preserved at a deliberately unfinished stage.

Suspended above the floor, a pair of bronze hands titled *Dealer* (2025) stands out for its clarity and poise: gleaming, decisive, with each hand pointing in a different direction. The work is a collaboration between Weng-io and her father—the right hand belongs to her, the left to him. In his youth, her father worked in a casino as a *zōngthòh* (dealer), and the gesture is the open-palmed motion a dealer makes when seated at the gaming table to welcome players. For Weng-io, this gesture metaphorically traces the way her parents brought her into the world, and how people everywhere continually negotiate the transactions required to live.

Overall, the curators clearly put effort into the exhibition's spatial design—such as the gallery signage styled after Macao's patterned street-name tiles. Yet most works operated in isolation, with little dialogue among them. At times, I felt as if I were simply identifying each artist's signature piece. For instance, Singa-



porean artist Robert Zhao Renhui’s *Came for the Climate, Stayed for the Chaos* (2025) presents models of Macao’s “invasive species.” From a distance, you can already see the bold lettering: “Macao Museum of Natural History.” One can only mutter, “Of course—this is exactly what he would make.” Seen as a whole, the exhibition ticks every box of “contemporary art”—not dull, but lacking any shared rhythm. In response to “Hey, what brings you here?”, the most tedious answer I could think of was: “I’m here to see the Biennale.” Or an even duller one: “I’m here to see contemporary art.” Then I recalled the NPC in Song Dong’s installation asking me about the meaning of life, and I felt a chill: is my life really meant to be spent going from one Biennale to the next?

Weng-io later took me to Lotus Art Space, where the exhibition “Believe in a River”—part of the Biennale’s “parallel program”—was on view. The space is housed inside the Legend Palace Hotel, which also contains a casino, and functions as an independently run, nongovernmental art venue. The six works on display could be loosely grouped under the exhibition’s subtitle, “Asian Digital Art,” though the curator clearly did not intend to chase technological frontiers. Each work addressed human conditions rather than technical prowess. In *What Is Your Favorite Primitive?* (2023), Taiwanese artist Li Yi-Fan riffs endlessly on the relationship between image-makers and software services—a form of self-reflection: “I seem to have all-powerful abilities, but in the end I still must comply with the rules of their production conditions.”¹

Watching Li spiral into delirium within the software’s virtual space is exhilarating. But the mental state he embodies is, frankly, worlds away from Macao. Both Weng-io and I felt that Macao sometimes resembles a city of NPCs. This gentle city—with its meticulous administrative procedures and its courteous, rule-abiding citizens—seems to be earnestly performing the roles assigned by external systems. Calm, compliant, never complaining, never acting out or stepping beyond the lines. Rules, though intangible and rarely spoken aloud, nonetheless firmly shape how everyone moves.

Speaking of rules, I’ve never truly grasped gambling games: slots, roulette, blackjack... I watched the action at The Parisian casino for a long time and only felt dizzy (on a side note, Macao casinos only accept Hong Kong dollar cash). The rules are designed to help the casino profit; by setting the odds, the house can never lose. Yet players—though they are bound to lose—continue to place bets, one after another. This reveals a touch of the absurd: as a friend who mocked me for not daring to enter the casino once said, the casino is the most “secure” place—the rules are fixed, the house always wins, and all the risk is borne by the gamblers. So, what about the art within the casino context? Should one choose the safest option, or the one that is entertaining but risky?

This summer, all six of Macao’s major gaming concessionaires—from MGM to Sands China—contributed exhibits, forming the “!Special Exhibition” unit for this year’s Macao Biennale. However, these exhibitions—featuring Picasso, Cai Guo-Qiang’s AI, and dopamine-hued *Sesame Street* puppets—seem entirely disconnected from the main venue’s themes. It would have been fascinating to host exhibitions *within* the casinos! For instance, commissioning works that critically discuss why Macao opts to build “Londoner” and “Parisian” resorts instead of “Mongolian” or “Shanghainese” ones, or using art to directly respond to concepts

If the Macao Biennale could abandon its rigid pursuit of being “contemporary,” if it could allow international commissions more time to foster genuine local connections...

like “randomness,” “money,” “risk,” and “luck.” Such projects would have been remarkable feats.

But the casino does not play at its own table. When it comes to matters concerning itself, even art, the cost must be calculated, and risk must be mitigated. Anecdotally, I’ve heard that the casinos stage these exhibitions either because supporting public welfare with a portion of their profits is a prerequisite for renewing their gaming concessions, or because the VIP halls reserved for high-rollers have seen little business recently and are thus standing empty. Ultimately, I am left wondering: does the casino possess the daring and fortitude to invite artists in to observe, create, and perhaps even disrupt the rules?

In essence, my observation is that the Biennale functions primarily as a carnival—a mechanism for the Macao government to provide internal cultural services to its citizens and externally enhance the city’s image. It is designed to generate dopamine and escape from pain and risk; the casinos merely align with this municipal strategy. Furthermore, while the curatorial team from mainland China used a central question to govern the main venue’s exhibition, that question functions more as a pretext for showcasing a vast and all-encompassing array of “contemporary art,” rather than generating deep, localized reflection or sentiment interwoven with the immediate place and time. I recall the frustration vented by a painter: while Macao appears to host numerous art extravaganzas, people merely look at the exhibitions, take photos, and engage in little actual exchange. The painter lamented: “Macao emphasizes its identity as an ‘international entertainment city,’ and most artistic activities rely on government and casino funding. However, this system’s understanding of art and artistic language is far too conservative.”

I met this ink painter at the opening of an exhibition hosted by the Fundação Oriente (Orient Foundation). The foundation’s office is located within Camões Garden, housed in an 18th-century Portuguese heritage building. The Fundação Oriente, originally established in Portugal, is a non-profit institution dedicated to promoting cultural exchange between Portugal and Asia, and its Macao office is frequently rented as an exhibition space. The exhibition opening that night, titled “After Oriental Garden,” was no exception. This exhibition belonged to the Biennale’s key segment, the “Local Curatorial Project” program. Local curators may submit their proposals to the Biennale’s selection committee; those chosen receive funding support to stage their exhibitions during the Biennale and are simultaneously put forward as candidates to represent Macao at the following year’s Venice Biennale.² “After Oriental Garden” invited artists from diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds to respond to Macao’s historical geography and colonial experience. The centerpiece was a series of installations centered on the Lin Kai River, which was filled in long ago, created by the group Vividly (Jay Lee & Jay Lei). According to research conducted on the Memória de Macau website, the Lin Kai River was reclaimed around 1914. Though barely a century has passed, it has already “slowly vanished from the memory of residents.”³

Many place names in Macao contain the characters for “lotus” and “mirror.” The clan of the modern industrialist Zheng Guanying was permanently settled in Macao, and their family residence, the Zheng Family House, features a couplet reading: “Facing the mirror sea in front, leaning against the lotus peak



历历在目，《石敢当：365724, 2025》，2025
水磨石、陶砖、木、铁皮、灯箱，
34 × 34 × 48.5 厘米
图片致谢 “东方花园后” 及艺术家

Vividly, *Seak Kam Tong*: 365724, 2025
Terrazzo, terracotta tile, wood, tin sheet, lightbox,
34 × 34 × 48.5 cm
Courtesy “After Oriental Garden” and the artist



卢廉若公园
摄影：聂小依

Lou Lim Ioc Garden
Photo: Nie Xiaoyi

behind.” The “lotus” originates from Macao’s topography, which resembled a lotus flower before land reclamation, while “mirror” derives from Macao’s older appellation, Houh Ging Ou (濠镜澳 , Oyster Mirror Bay): this name refers both to the once-flourishing local oyster farming industry and metaphorically likens Macao’s calm bay to a polished mother-of-pearl mirror. The character “ 澳 ” itself fundamentally means bay or harbor. Aside from the aforementioned Houh Ging Ou, Macao has also been known as Houh Gong (濠江 , Oyster River), Lihn Dou (莲岛 , Lotus Island), Heung Saan Ou (香山澳), and Ma Gok (妈阁 , A-Ma’s Pavilion). It has been historically established that the name “Macao” is a Portuguese abbreviation of Amagao, the waterway in front of the A-Ma Temple.⁴

There is a line in the patriotic poem *The Song of Seven Sons* that states: “Do you know Macao has never been my real name?” In fact, Macao’s nomenclature is a deep and complex palimpsest, extending far beyond the name “Macao.” During my days in Macao, I sought refuge from the scorching sun inside the Sun Yat Sen Memorial House, cast divination blocks (*jiao*) at the A-Ma Temple during a typhoon, and journeyed to the edge of the island at dusk to visit the Chapel of Our Lady of Sorrows, designed for lepers by the resident Italian architect Oseo Acconci. From this rich texture, stories related to Macao surged forth. It is precisely because these traces carry the destinies of ordinary people across centuries that Macao’s streets, temples, and alleys are so delicately moving.

Yet, when it comes to “contemporary art,” the Macao government operates with an engineering-based mindset. The Biennale appears to pursue contemporaneity for its own sake, resulting in a conspicuous absence of an integrated, Macao-centric narrative and critical perspective. In truth, why insist on importing “contemporary art” defined by predetermined global paradigms? The region’s history of cross-cultural artistic exchange, its still-vibrant traditional local culture, and its dedicated, long-standing art communities (such as the Macao International Queer Film Festival and the Artistry of Wind Box Community Development) are, individually, already sources of Macao’s distinction. The Macao Biennale should tell Macao’s story.

If the Macao Biennale could abandon its rigid pursuit of being “contemporary,” if it could allow international commissions more time to foster genuine local connections, and if it permitted its indigenous art history to exhibit its relevance to the current context, only then might the Biennale acquire substance and vitality. Just as no living person is born merely to be an NPC, art that genuinely moves people will never be confined by the single label of “contemporary.” Between the lotus peak and the mirror sea, art possesses its own enduring roots.

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¹
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