

# bitforms gallery

## ***Outside the Palace of Heavenly Purity***

June 7 – July 22, 2018

**Opening reception:** Thursday June 7, 6 – 8 PM

**Gallery hours:** Wednesday – Saturday, 11 AM – 6 PM & Sunday, 12 – 6 PM

bitforms gallery is pleased to announce *Outside the Palace of Heavenly Purity*<sup>1</sup>, a group exhibition curated by research collective EST. Featuring work by Ho Rui An, Jen Liu, Ingrid Zhuang, Zheng Bo, and O Zhang, *Outside the Palace of Heavenly Purity* presents narratives that complicate the prevailing idea of globalization as a force emanating directly from privileged Western centers. Engaging with a variety of speculative models, these works explore the dynamics of emergent networks of power within the global landscape and its local permutations.

Ho Rui An's lecture and video installation, *DASH*, dissects the obfuscating metaphors of crisis management favored by government agencies and corporate bodies. By examining the conditions of a vehicular accident captured by dashcam footage, the lecture unravels the broader logic of "horizon scanning" that underpins the foresight programs of the Singapore government. Singapore has come to be a crucial node in the circuits of global finance as well as in the regional routes traversed by migrant laborers, and the city-state is presented within the lecture as the site of a fantastic speculative economy that affirms some narratives—often those of the ethnic Chinese majority—while foreclosing others.

Jen Liu integrates live action and animation in *Pink Slime Caesar Shift*, a video that presents four proposals to transform the DNA of mass-produced in-vitro hamburgers into carriers of secret messages of labor insurrection on behalf of Special Economic Zone factory workers in China. By instrumentalizing the production of synthetic meat for new methods of grassroots communication, Liu follows a real-world development to its (il)logical end. The video itself acts as a message carrier, bridging the lived realities of workers and the global industrial pipeline that seeks to conceal them.

In the fictive biological evolution of Ingrid Zhuang's six-channel video installation, *Natural Tasting*, humans inhabit a food chain somewhere between fish, broccoli, roast chicken, and piglets. Alternately jeering or headless, consuming or consumed, the human figure exists within a larger system of relations in which all matter is subject to the flux that governs Zhuang's green-screen world. *Natural Tasting* contests visions of anthropocentric futurity and serves as a reminder that human singularity is a tenuous fiction masking the violences of our unrelenting pursuit of biological advancement.

Zheng Bo's *A Chinese Communist Garden in Paris* is a multifaceted, ongoing research project presented in this exhibition as a photograph and accompanying risograph publication. The photograph depicts a proposal for a garden in Paris based on the 1921 cover of *La Jeunesse (New Youth)*, an influential magazine that popularized the idea of communism in China. *A Chinese Communist Garden in Paris* asks the seemingly absurd question: What role did plants play in the establishment of the Young Chinese Communist Party in France? Zheng seeks to complicate the canonical histories of the Chinese Communist Party, tying it to its often-forgotten international origins, and to provide historical context for the roots of contemporary ecological crisis in China and beyond.

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<sup>1</sup>*Outside the Palace of Heavenly Purity* refers to the former location of a controversial Starbucks franchise within the Forbidden City. First opened in 2000, the cafe closed in 2007 in the wake of an online campaign spearheaded by TV anchor Rui Chenggang, who argued that its presence was a neo-colonial intrusion of Western "coffee culture" into Chinese cultural heritage.

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O Zhang's monumental, propaganda-style photograph, *Salute to the Patriot*, features a young girl in front of Tiananmen Gate Tower, which bears a portrait of Chairman Mao alongside the exaltation "Long Live The People's Republic of China." The text on her "Engrish" t-shirt could be read either as straightforward patriotism or as chilling commentary on the Chinese government's success in precluding the knowledge of the June 1989 protests from the new generation. The work is a part of the series *The World Is Yours (But Also Ours)*, which exposes the anxiety underlying the utopian promises espoused by the Chinese government in the months leading up to the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.

As new economies infiltrate the global marketplace, they disrupt the previously one-sided injection of language, culture, and goods from Western industrial powers into the rest of the world. Balances of power are re-negotiated, as the processes of globalization adopt local characteristics to create unique structures of influence that re-shape both international and domestic relationships. In light of Western anxieties around its rising economic power, *Outside the Palace of Heavenly Purity* examines China—its government, bounds, inhabitants, and diaspora—as a case study. The presented works comment both directly and indirectly on China's challenge to the assumed linearity of globalization, calling attention to labor, citizenship, ecology, and the fleshy materiality of the state within an artificial vision of frictionless growth.

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EST (Eastern Standard Time) is a research collective co-founded by Celine Wong Katzman, Son Kit, and Diane Zhou. EST questions the Western imaginary of Asia as a monolithic entity. While overly-expansive, orientalist definitions make it impossible to ascribe cultural, political, or geographical unity to Asia, EST is interested in its potential as a call to organize across a spectrum of experience. EST is based in New York, NY.

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Founded in 2001, bitforms gallery represents established, mid-career, and emerging artists critically engaged with new technologies. Spanning the rich history of media art through its current developments, the gallery's program offers an incisive perspective on the fields of digital, internet, time-based, and new media art forms.

For images and more information on the exhibit, please visit [www.bitforms.art](http://www.bitforms.art).

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