

Cao Shuyi: *Undercurrent Softness*

Hive Center for Contemporary Art is honoured to announce the presentation of New York-based post-90s Chinese artist Cao Shuyi's exhibition at Hive Becoming in Shanghai's Bund area. *Undercurrent Softness* is the inaugural exhibition of Hive Becoming and the artist's first solo gallery show in mainland China. This exhibition is curated by Yang Jian and presents two videos and over thirty sculptures in ceramic, glass, 3D printing, and other mixed materials from the artist's recent practice.

In the present contemporary art world, artists, either out of instinct or driven by an awareness of the issues at stake, tend to incorporate more diverse and complex cultural and social motifs into their artistic identity while zealously exploring cross-cultural or inter-historical universal experiences, subsequently making these experiences a fundamental dimension and immanent motive in their creative structure through the synergy of artistic forms and aesthetic languages. Cao Shuyi received her education from School of International Relations and Public Affairs at Fudan University and Parsons School of Design, New York, and has taught in the field of ecological art and design at several New York colleges. Her interdisciplinary background, combined with her liberal artistic training, has helped Cao to consciously resist over-intellectualised paraphrasing and over-specialised information editing in her intersectional practice. With this reversed approach to such notion, Cao attempts to decontextualise the often-praised research background through the spatial context of Hive Becoming, focusing on the form-based, prior sensory experiences as the core of this project, and considering the more intuitive visual features and aesthetic nature of the work as a prerequisite and cognitive portal for a comprehensive understanding of her art.

The Chinese title of this exhibition, *Undercurrent Softness*, is borrowed from the geological term 'asthenosphere', which refers to a deformable and ductile physical environment consisting of a mixture of solids and melting at an average depth of between 70 and 220 km below ground. The boundaries of the asthenosphere are not well defined and not clearly separated from the lithosphere with a gradual transition. This indeterminate stratigraphic state implicitly reflects some of the pivotal elements of the artist's work, namely the alchemical integration and synthesis of different materials and the reorganisation and reconstruction of incompatible temporal and spatial scales. These traces of deviation and overlap between geological allegory and supposedly real events manifest the contingency and stochastic nature of the recorded history. Their ambiguous forms in the works very often represent deliberately framed transitory states, temporary appearances and eternal moments in the midst of certain changes. The artist captures and embraces the natural and technological objects that move between the extreme macroscopic

and microscopic scales with poetic fossils and relics. The moment of birth and death appears slow and imminent in this solidified sculptural state, indicating a further entanglement between time, history and living creatures.

Both sculpture and video, Cao Shuyi's work exudes a distinctive poetic aestheticisation of the physical object inherent in the viewing of objects in Eastern culture. The artist's dedication to the language of sculpture reveals a commitment to the medium, allowing it to be perceived in a classically humanistic aesthetic manner. Yet the ecological science fiction narratives that these objects embody suggest a non-human planetary context, where evolution, infection, parasitism and mutation are central to the narrative, and the metaphors of decay that emerge from the ever-changing materiality of the creative process are a projection of the complex relationship between human society and technology as it evolves. The artist is fascinated by time, and by examining the multiple trajectories of the co-evolution of animals, plants, fungi and minerals, she seeks to resituate human existence from a historical future on the scale of deep time, whereby she explores the pluralistic relationship between the self and the material world.