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**Miao Ying:
A Field Guide to Ideology**

苗颖：精神实用宝典

Curated by Yan Wu

February 8–April 2, 2022
Justina M. Barnicke Gallery

Presented in partnership with
Scotiabank CONTACT Photography Festival

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Works by Miao Ying

**Art
Museum**

Miao Ying: A Field Guide to Ideology

苗颖：精神实用宝典

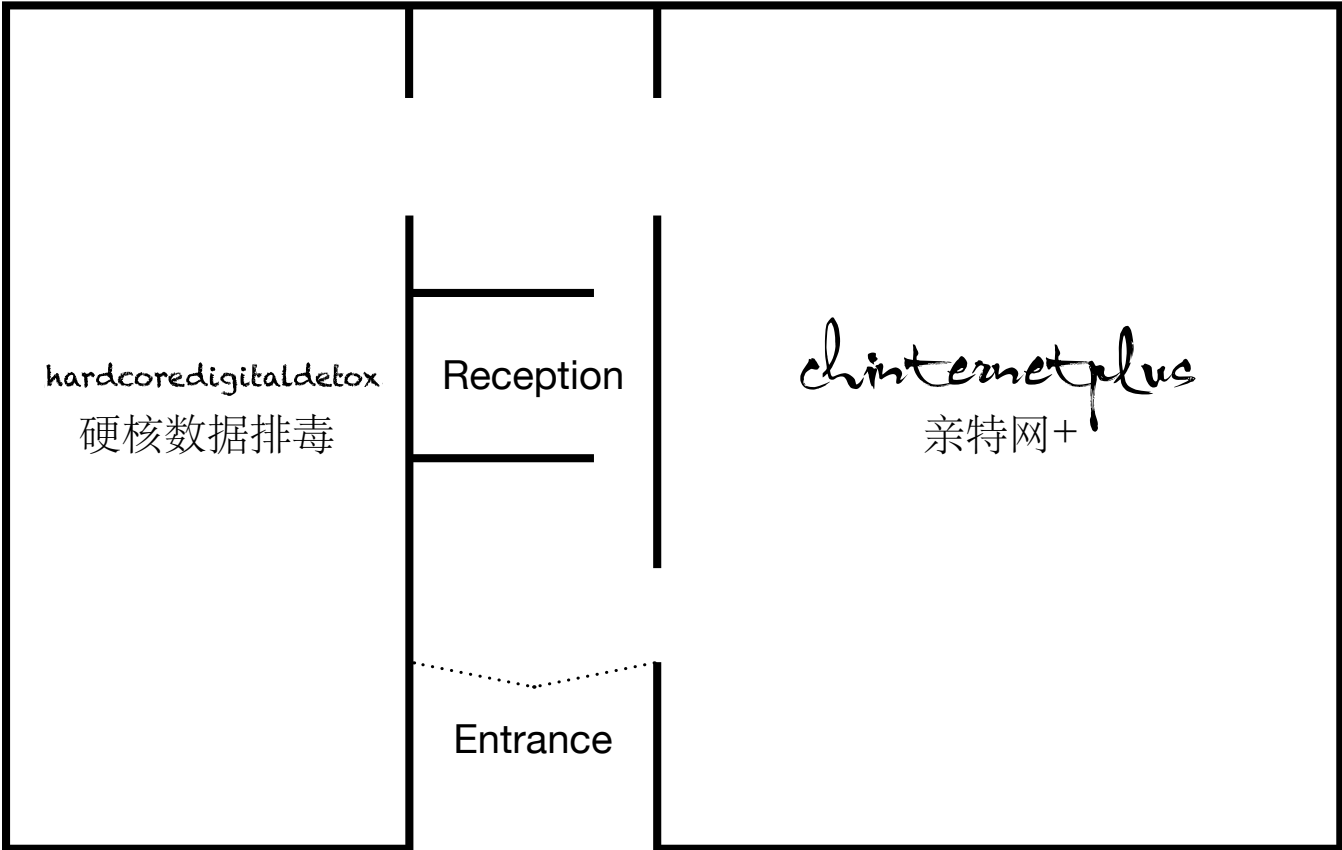
Miao Ying: A Field Guide to Ideology (苗颖: 精神实用宝典) is the first presentation of Shanghai/New York-based artist Miao Ying in Canada. The exhibition features new iterations of her two recent projects *Chinternet Plus* (亲特网+, 2016) and *Hardcore Digital Detox* (硬核数据排毒, 2018). A first-generation internet artist in China and a dual netizen of the Chinternet and the World Wide Web, Miao Ying examines official and popular Chinese internet culture thriving behind the so-called Great Firewall. Commenting on a recent Chinese economic strategy “Internet Plus”—involving the rebooting of traditional industries through cloud computing, big data, and lifestyle branding—Miao Ying’s *Chinternet Plus* is a parodic and critical take on the cultivation of a new, counterfeit ideology complete with promotional videos, seductive imagery, logo designs, wallpaper, and concept slogan. Its companion work *Hardcore Digital Detox*, a caricature of #spiritualretreatinchinternet, turns focus to the proliferation of experience economy and commodification of lifestyle in a post-materialist society.

Our Supporters

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Gallery Map



Exhibition Essay

(Printed in the 2021 CONTACT Catalogue. Chinese translation to follow.)

Miao Ying is a self-claimed dual netizen of the Chinternet (the restricted Chinese internet, a.k.a. the “Great Firewall”) and the World Wide Web. For the artist’s first offline show in Canada, two of her browser-based online projects are refashioned into multimedia viewing stations. Together, they promote Miao’s vision of Chinternet ideology, her dialectic attachment to the phenomenon of internet censorship in China, and act as an unapologetic celebration of the resilience and ingenuity of Chinese internet users.

Born in the 1980s and now based in Shanghai and New York, Miao calls her relationship with China’s hyper-regulated online sphere a form of “Stockholm Syndrome,” a condition in which hostages develop a psychological alliance with their captors—a traumatic bonding, in her words. In *A Field Guide to Ideology*, Miao humorously unpacks the architecture of this paradoxical condition by presenting two fictional strategies: *Chinternet Plus* (亲特网+, commissioned by the New Museum in 2016 as part of *First Look: New Art Online*) and *Hardcore Digital Detox* (硬核数据排毒, commissioned by M+ Museum in Hong Kong in 2018 for the M+ stories online platform). Both projects combine internet slang, stock photos, popular memes, and viral videos sourced online, and are accompanied by computer animations made by the artist.

In Chinese, the English word “paradox” translates into the two-character compound word “矛盾” (máo dùn), in which “矛” means spear and “盾” means shield, a literal confrontation between attack and protection. Miao reads the flourishing popular culture on the Chinternet as a field of “矛盾”—with official acts of censorship as “盾,” and the modes of resistance they inspire, carried out by the netizens and seen by Miao as positive self-censorship, being “矛.” Collecting and restaging interplays between the two occupies the central stage of her practice.

Commenting on a recent Chinese economic strategy, “Internet Plus”—involving the rebooting of traditional industries through cloud computing, big data, and lifestyle branding—Miao’s *Chinternet Plus* project is a parodic and critical take on the cultivation of a new, counterfeit ideology complete with media elements that she recognizes as “矛.” Its companion piece, *Hardcore Digital Detox (HDD)*, is packaged as a caricature of the Western commodification of “well-being,” which Miao describes as a “raw, healthy, hipster detox aesthetic.” In *HDD*, Miao expands the notion of “盾” beyond the “Great Firewall” and redirects her criticism toward the phenomenon of internet filter bubbles—a state of intellectual isolation that results from the personalized results of search algorithms. Miao borrows a concept from traditional Chinese medicine, “以毒攻毒” (literally translated as counteracting one toxin with another), to juxtapose China’s online censorship with the information filtering technology deployed by the billion dollar “unicorn” businesses that are banned on the Chinternet, such as Google, Facebook, and Twitter. Through these two

projects, *A Field Guide to Ideology* exposes the internet as a complex space of hyperconnectivity where individual ingenuity provides a path of resistance against its pervasive corporate branding, global capitalism, political propaganda, and information censorship.

苗颖自称是个双籍网民，往返于中国互联网（局域的中国英特网，又名“防火长城”，也是苗颖所说的亲特网）和万维网之间。“苗颖：精神实用宝典”是艺术家首次在加拿大的线下展出，早先以浏览器为媒介的两个线上项目扩展成美术馆展厅内的多媒体装置，成为发布线上精神的线下体验——一边包在墙内，只能透过墙孔窥入；另一边结构开放，鼓励流通和参与。两件作品相辅相成，携手传达苗颖眼中的亲特网精神，换言之，她对中国英特网审查现象的辩证情感，以及她对中国网民的抵抗力和创造力的全心颂扬。

苗颖出生于上世纪八十年代，现居上海和纽约。她认为自己与高度监管的中国网界之间是种“斯德哥尔摩综合症”的关系，症状表现为人质对劫持者产生心理依赖，用她自己的话说就是一种创伤情结。通过两套虚构的精神指导：《亲特网+》（2016年受纽约新美术馆委约为“第一眼：新艺术上线”而创作）和《硬核数据排毒》（香港M+于2018年为美术馆新开辟的数码项目平台委约的首件作品），苗颖的“精神实用宝典”以戏虐的方式剖析了这种矛盾情结的组织构成，网络流行语、库存图片、爆红的迷因和视频配以自创的电脑动画，都成了服务于精神的修辞手法。

英文中的paradox译成中文就是“矛盾”，矛意为攻，盾代表守，字面上就直接进入了相互抗衡的对峙状态。苗颖认为亲特网上热火朝天的流行文化就是一个“矛盾”场——“盾”是官方的审查行为，而由此激发的各种网民反抗手段就是“矛”，苗颖将后者

看成一种积极的自我审查。收集、再现这组对峙间的互动关系占据了苗颖的创作核心。

针对2015年的中国经济策略“互联网+”——通过云计算、大数据和生活方式的品牌化重塑传统产业——苗颖的《亲特网+》里挂满了她认为足够“矛”的媒体元素，试图以戏仿的语气培育一种崭新的冒牌精神。而在配套作品《硬核数据排毒》中，西方社会对“幸福”概念的商品化被包装成了一场荒诞剧，苗颖对于这种“幸福”的理解就是“原生、养生、具有文艺青年范儿的排毒美学”。《硬核数据排毒》里的“盾”被苗颖扩张到“防火长城”之外，此时的批判对象变成了互联网上的过滤泡——一种由搜索算法的个性化结果导致的智能隔离状态。苗颖套用传统中医里所说的“以毒攻毒”，将中国的在线审查与“独角兽”企业调用的信息过滤技术并置呈现，这些“独角兽”们市值上亿却被亲特网屏蔽，其中的代表就有社交媒体巨头谷歌、脸书和推特。总而言之，苗颖的“精神实用宝典”向我们揭示了互联网作为超连通性空间的错综复杂，充斥着企业品牌、全球资本主义、政治宣传和信息审查，正是穿行其中的个人创造力，踩出了一条反攻之路。

About the Artist

Miao Ying is part of the first generation of Chinese contemporary artists who grew up with the internet, one-child policy, and Chinese economic reform, and who were educated in both China and the West. She is best known for her projects and writings around Chinese online culture and her Stockholm Syndrome in relation to authoritarianism. Her practice juxtaposes Western technology and ideologies with contemporary China, highlighting the new modes of politics, aesthetics, and consciousness created by the representation of reality through technology. Her works inhabit multiple forms including websites, machine learning software, VR, installations, and paintings. She is based in New York and Shanghai.

Miao's most recent solo exhibitions include: *Pilgrimage into Walden XII* (OVR:Pioneers, Art Basel, 2021), *Hardcore Digital Detox* (M+ Museum, Hong Kong, 2018), *Miao Ying: Chinternet Plus* (New Museum, New York, 2016), and *Holding a Kitchen Knife to Cut the Internet Cable* (Chinese Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2015). Her works have also been part of various group exhibitions including *Facing the collector* (Castello di Rivoli, Turin, Italy, 2020), *The Art Happens Here: Net Art's Archival Poetics* (New Museum, New York, 2019), *The 12th Gwangju Biennale* (Gwangju, South Korea, 2018), *.com/.cn* (MoMA PS1, New York; KAF, Beirut, Lebanon; 2017), *The New Normal—Art and China in 2017* (UCCA For Contemporary Art, Beijing, 2017), and *Secret Surface* (Kunst-Werke Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, 2016). She is the 2018–2019 winner of Porsche Young Chinese Artist of the Year.

Public Programming

Curatorial Tour with Yan Wu

Saturday, February 12, 2pm

Justina M. Barnicke Gallery

Artist Talk with Miao Ying (in-person and online)

Tuesday, March 8, 6pm ET

Daniels Building, University of Toronto

1 Spadina Crescent

Presented in partnership with the John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design

Gallery Tour with Miao Ying and Yan Wu

Wednesday, March 9, 2pm

Justina M. Barnicke Gallery

All programs are free. For more information and to register, visit artmuseum.utoronto.ca/programs/

Visiting the Art Museum

Justina M. Barnicke Gallery

7 Hart House Circle
Toronto, Ontario M5S 3H3
416-978-8398

University of Toronto Art Centre

15 King's College Circle
Toronto, Ontario M5S 3H7
416-978-1838

Hours

Tuesday	Noon–5pm
Wednesday	Noon–8pm
Thursday	Noon–5pm
Friday	Noon–5pm
Saturday	Noon–5pm
Sunday	Closed
Monday	Closed

Closed on statutory holidays. For information about class tours and group bookings, contact artmuseum@utoronto.ca

Admission is FREE.

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