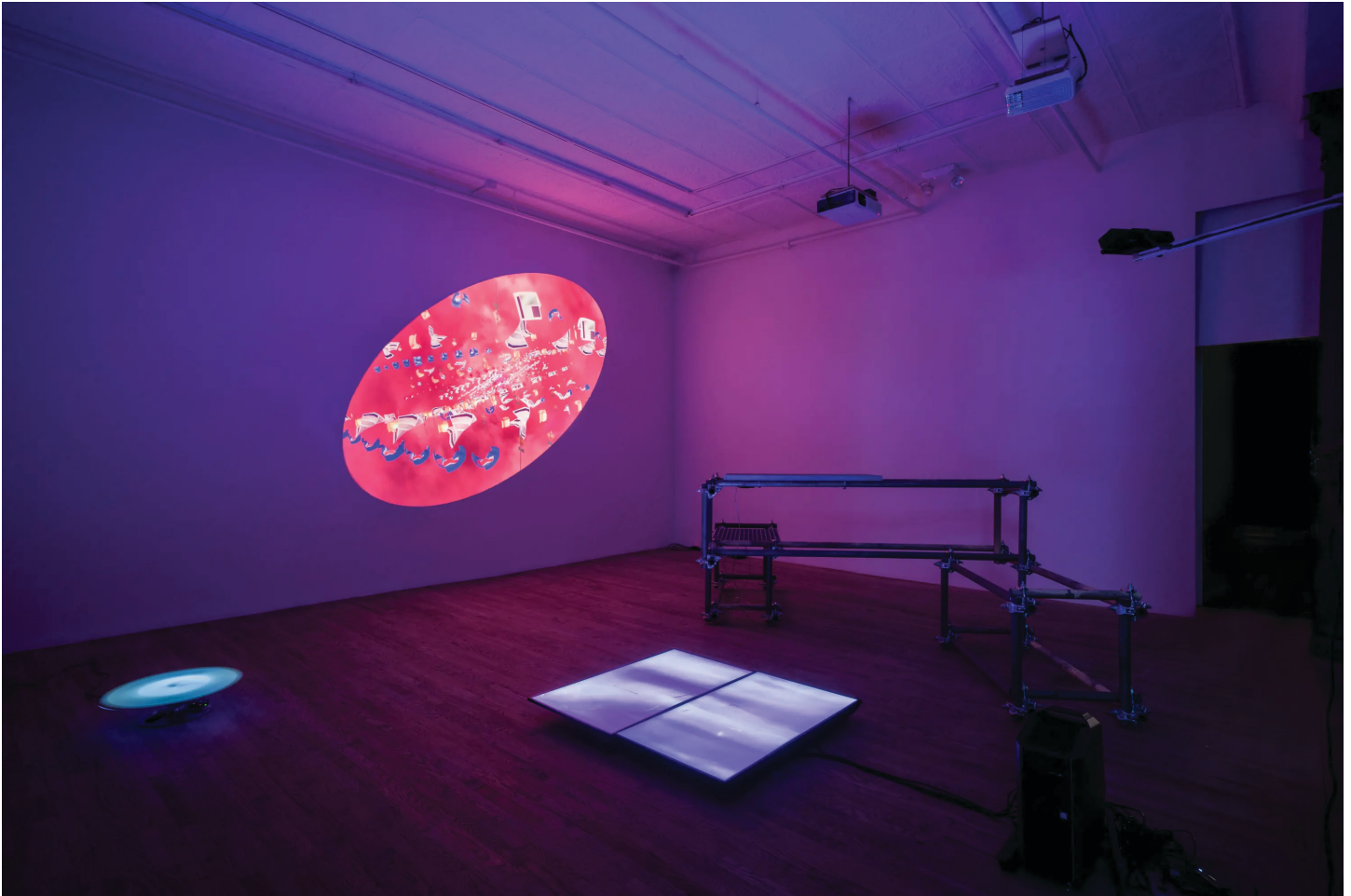


Chando Ao, Sam Ghantous, David O'Reilly, and Bjorn Sparrman

YveYANG Gallery Hosted by Postmasters Gallery

By Danni Shen

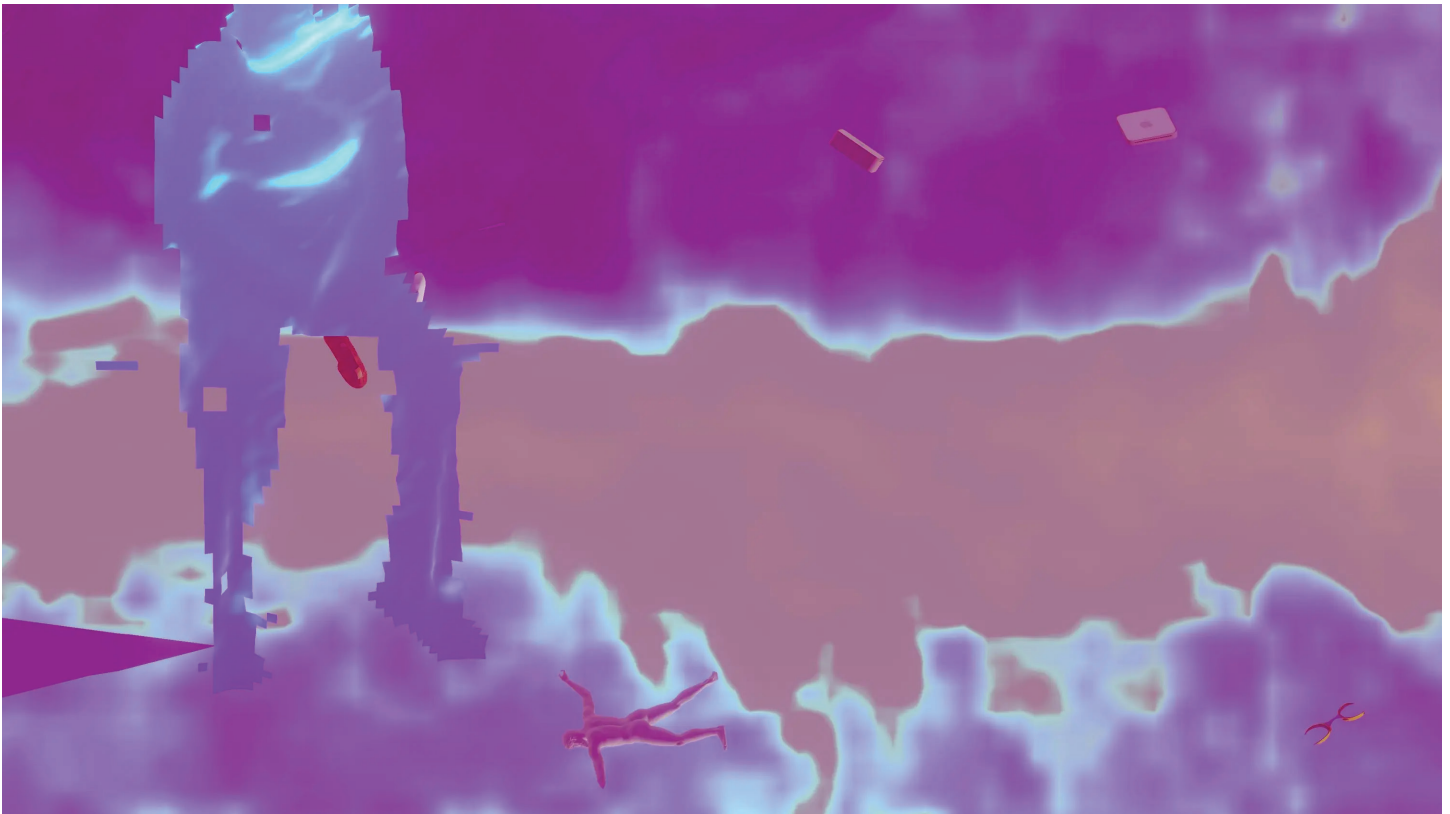


Installation view: Chando Ao, Sam Ghantous, David O'Reilly, and Bjorn Sparrman: YveYANG Gallery Hosted by Postmasters Gallery, New York, 2019. Courtesy Yve Yang Gallery.

“But it’s you! That’s what you are! That extraordinary pattern!” The voice of Alan Watts calls out from a luminous projection in the darkened interior of Postmasters Gallery. A herd of floating spheres undulate and hum in a sector of the cosmos. The vantage point pans closer; a list pops up, prompting: “3d Structure, Aircraft, Alga, Animal, Arachnid, Atom, Attire.” “Animal” is selected via controller and several spheres give way. A gorilla, goat, dog, and giraffe are suddenly hovering among the stars. The forms begin to rotate in sync, revealing that each sphere is also a larger-than-life eyeball.

This is only one encounter found within the game *Everything* (2017), by David O'Reilly. Like any sliver in time, it will never be repeated again. From microbes, dancing trashcans, an iceberg, and many singing suns, to the universe itself, the player simultaneously embodies everything within an algorithmic ecosystem. In a text *The System of Everything* (2018), Stephan Schwingeler proclaims *Everything* to be the first true “countergame,” a term coined by Alexander Galloway in 2006 to describe how artists make use of strategies of alienation via game art, subverting the game as regulated system. According to Galloway, “Only when artists develop genuine alternatives to the narratives in computer games, will the countergaming project have been fulfilled and one will be able to speak of a true avant-garde.”

O'Reilly's single-player game operates as an infinite video generator with no finite boundaries or timeline. When the controller is unused, the game goes into self-generative mode, its entropy increasing endlessly. Containing hours of Alan Watts lecture recordings, *Everything* is also a virtually embodied rendering of Zen Buddhist and Daoist philosophies, schools of thought that the philosopher helped popularize in the West. Leaving the game is like exiting many surreal life cycles and worlds; it remains long in contemplative memory.



Sam Ghantous, *Reflecting Pool*, 2019. Courtesy Yve Yang Gallery.

This group exhibition of works by Chando Ao, Sam Ghantous, David O'Reilly, and Bjorn Sparrman marks the first time Postmasters has hosted another gallery: the three-year old YveYANG Gallery, which first opened in Boston, before moving to New York at its new Midtown location. Though it bears no formal title, the exhibition provides an encompassing text that reads, in a caption, “We create art with tech, promiscuous tech-spawning art. Technology that is accessible, learnable, observable, trackable, appreciable, and critiquable with which we fight and play.” It is this spirit in which other Easter eggs are embedded in the show.

Central to the space is Björn Sparrman's *Image of the City (cricket)* (2019), part of the artist's continuous installation series, which is composed of recycled scaffolding and inspired by Kevin Lynch's book *The Image of the City* (1960). The work also serves as an elevated viewing platform for the exhibition. Visitors are invited to climb onto these rational forms, into which audio recordings of crickets are amplified through low frequency transducers, serving as "conductors of the energies that flavor the tectonic landscape of the city," according to the artist. Spinning on the floor below is *Mirror* (2016), a monitor that comes to a still when touched. The work is not broken, but its true mechanism is revealed here in the video itself—featuring a fluctuating distortion of the artist gazing into the camera—spinning in reverse. Sparrman, also project lead at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Self Assembly Lab, thus addresses the chasm between faculties of perception and reason by restaging how the bodily experience of space conflicts with a fundamental human understanding of abstract, geometric, and topological space.

Most clear from this vantage point atop Sparrman's structure is Sam Ghantous's *Reflecting Pool (displacement)* (2019), which employs an infrared camera that "displaces" any bodies in its line of vision as shimmering apparitions into the digital reflecting pool below. 3D scans of various detritus concurrently rise to its surface. As Ghantous, also a fellow at MIT, describes it, "the software re-renders you, giving you a new sort of skin, and unifying your material presence with all your neighbors." Placed together, these works by Sparrman and Ghantous complicate the layers of synthetic worlds in a navigable, recursive, and reflecting manner. In the background, O'Reilly's *Eye of the Dream* (2018) rises like a cosmic portal, featuring a recording of everything in *Everything* placed through a dense generator. The off-kilter ellipse imagines a universe that starts with the Big Bang and ends with a dance.

Back on the ground level, *Profile* (2019) by Chando Ao, is a prototype for the future of 360-degree digital mirrors and a humorous example of what the artist calls "fictional utilitarian." Near the gallery entrance is a work that can be easily mistaken as two Germstar hand-sanitizer dispensers. Yet the Ao™ *Hydrophobilizer* (2018), with colored-pencil drawn instructions posted adjacent, operates more like a science experiment. The first discharges what appears to be solidified smoke, but which is in fact an aerogel insulator, 99.6 percent air, originally invented by NASA. Water from the second dispenser balls up on contact into a droplet on the palm, as if on a lotus leaf. It is a mystifying yet lucid experience. As Ao concludes, "So much art using the newest technology is like a magic trick; you fool people with something they've never seen before. But technology, for me, is a natural tool to deliver a direct sensation already packaged within a certain logic or common sense. I like the word 'use' because we share sensory receptors and similar horizons due to this flat internet infrastructure. It's about discovering how to appreciate art in contemporary possibilities."

As this exhibition utilizes specific knowledge, processing its works correspondingly requires its own technical information. This further challenges expected encounters with the interface and resultantly, corporeal experience. Technology is neither superfluous nor mere spectacle for the practices of Ao, Ghantous, O'Reilly, and Sparrman. Beyond cross-disciplinary collaborations, this selection of works complicates the very notion of interdisciplinary practice, as a deliberate engagement into the mechanisms of sensory and existential experience, while empowering the audience as user.