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SHANSHUI

**Meta-Scape: A look at the past and
present through the spirit of the
landscape**

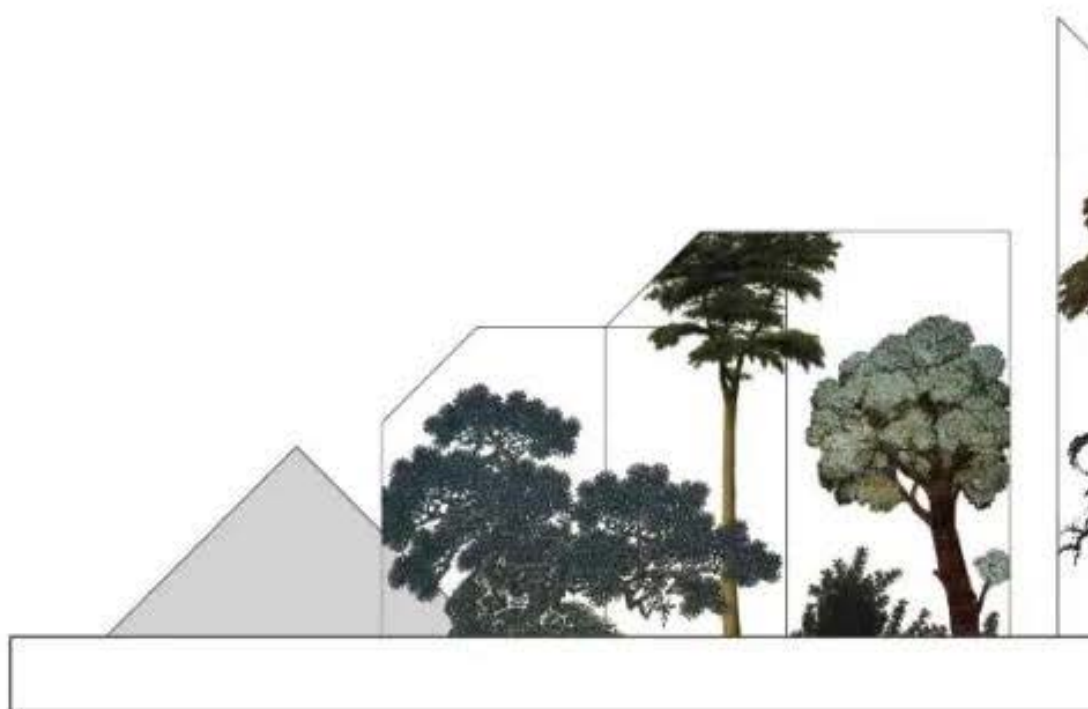
Aurora Vivenzio

Meta-Scape元境: A look at the past and present through the spirit of the landscape

By; Aurora Vivenzio

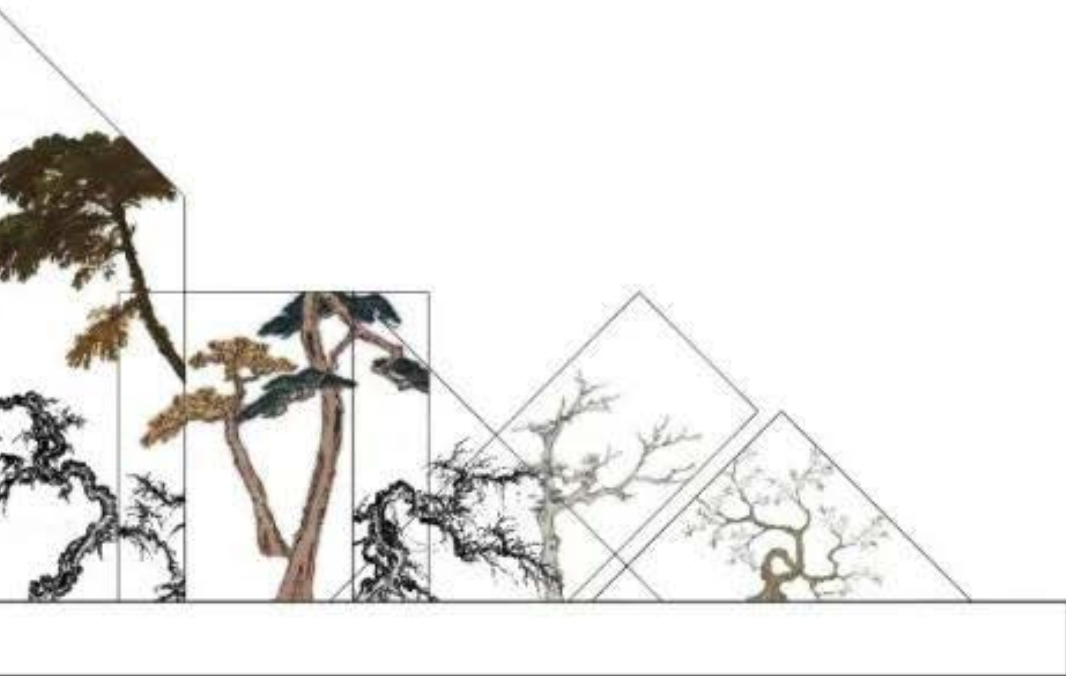
As part of the 59th International Art Exhibition opening in Venice on the 23rd April 2022, the China Pavilion answered the question posed by Italian curator Cecilia Alemanni: 'How is the definition of human changing? What are the differences that separate the plant, the animal, the human, and the non-human? What are our responsibilities towards our fellow human beings, other life forms and the planet we inhabit? And what would life be like without us?'. Again, the China Pavilion, curated

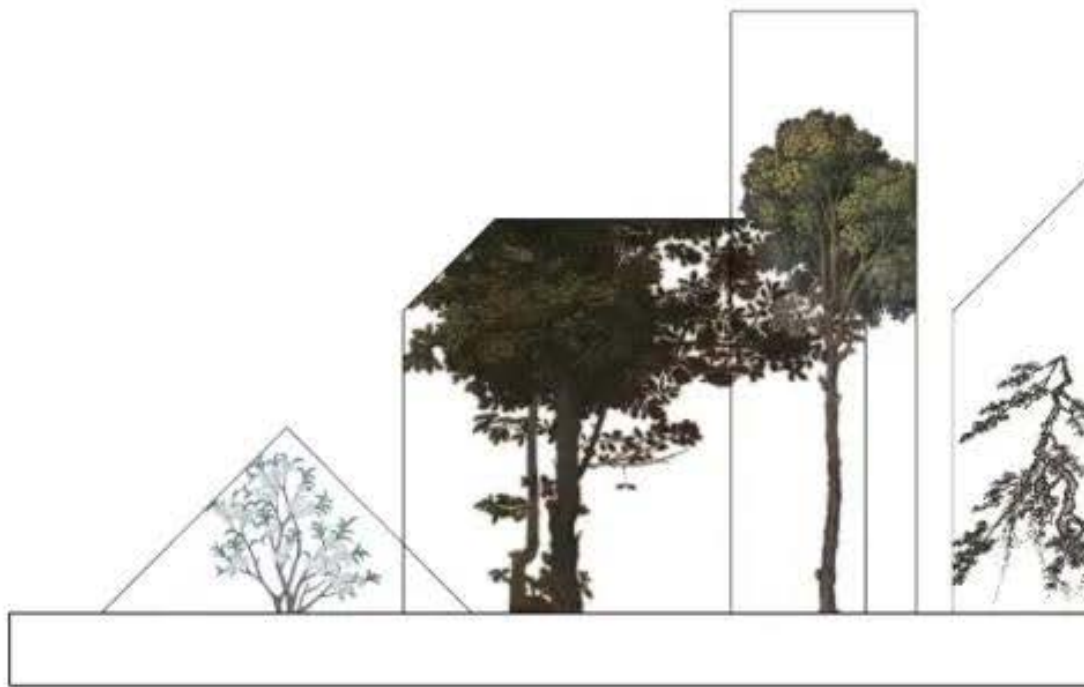
by Zhang Zikang 张子康, Director of the CAFA Art Museum, and Professor and Doctoral Supervisor of CAFA, responded by setting the natural environment, the relationship between individuals and technologies, and the intertwining links between bodies and the Earth, as the main subjects of their works. The exhibition featured three artists and an art group who presented their works in Arsenale and Giardini. In Giardini, Wang Yuyang's 王郁洋 Snowman 《雪人》 (2021) was presented, along with Jungle 丛林 (2021) by AT Group (members: Li Yan 李妍, Chen Zhi 陈治, Guan Yiming 管伊铭, Chen Houwen 陈厚闻, Lu Fei 陆飞,



Peng Jiayuan 彭家园, Lei Jianhao 雷剑豪, Liu Yichen 刘一晨 Yan Liangliang 闫亮亮), *Correspondances* 《兴会》 (2021) by Xu Lei 徐累, *Streaming Stillness* (2021) by Liu Jiayu 刘佳玉, and *Wang Yuyang#: A Fourth (Jie Qi)* 《王郁洋#: 四分之一 (节气)》 by Wang Yuyang王郁洋, was presented in the Arsenale area. Through a “metaphysical” vision, as a mirror of the human condition and an expression of its essence, they responded with a more “metacognitive” view of things than something that has to be perceived on a subconscious (and therefore surreal) level. Although, there are many artists in this event who have faithfully taken up themes conveyed by the Surrealist artist Leonora Carrington (1917-2011) of a vision of our magical world in which life is constantly reinvented through the prism of the imagination and in which one is

allowed to change, transform, become other than oneself. The exhibition *The Milk of Dreams* chooses Carrington's fantastical creatures, along with many other figures of transformation, as companions on an imaginary journey through the metamorphoses of bodies and definitions of the human. China, however, does not shy away from this series of other worlds, but chooses to “cross” (元) the world that exists, to reinterpret the scenario (境) in which we live, in a mode of understanding and interpretation that is innate to this country's cultural system, namely: poetry (诗) and metaphor. The desire and choice to also work on the theme of the relationship between man and technology is part of a broader discourse, in which China is a country that is now aware of the role played by new techniques and tech-

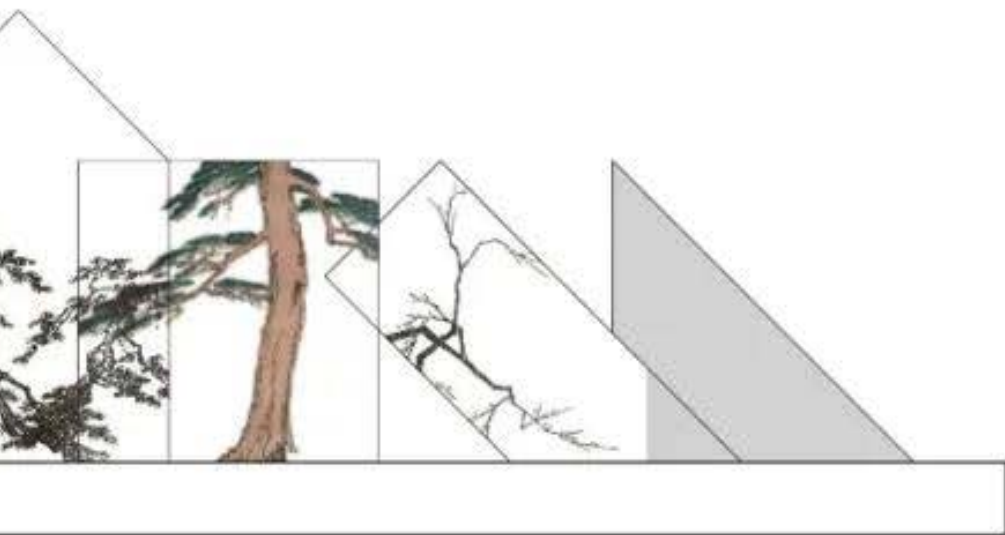




Xu Lei, *Correspondances*, 266x350x48.5cm, acrylic, metal material, electric track, 2022

nologies, which do not suppress or replace the old traditional techniques, such as *Shanshuihua* painting, *pomo* 泼墨, but on the contrary gives a new key to interpret the surrounding world, which continues to be the scenario of action and mediation of contemporary *Wenrenhua* 文人画. Technology, like poetry, makes it possible to recreate new landscapes with new aesthetic criteria and to reconfigure the role of the artist and the spectator with respect to a 'scenario' that now takes on different aesthetic forms, and whose metrics and stanzas have been replaced by binary codes and rasterization systems. In these two modes of interpretation, which mirror the old and the new China, the concept of eternal ebb and flow continues to be implied. We find this in particular in the work of media artist Jiayu Liu who presents a 21 km long 3D prototype of

some of the most famous mountains reproduced in many works by artists of the Song dynasty, entitled *Streaming Stillness*, a poetic field of floating motion graphics fuelled by technology reproduces that energy, qi, the soul of these places and which manifests itself as a slow flow of light that reproduces in its rays the terrain data catalogued in Yu's *Tribute*, considered the oldest geography book in China. The viewer is fully immersed and must physically rotate around the work in order to flow with the power and majesty of the mountains, but the combination of the ancient cartographies recreates a new topographical understanding relevant to the 21st century. Inasmuch as the displacements and changes of land are indicative of how strong and transformative man's action has been on places. "It comes from the real world yet



doesn't exist in it. Instead, it's a natural prototype existing beyond human experience and reaches transcendence," Liu concludes. The discourse on nature, in the productions of these artists, also plays very much around the themes of ecology (understood as biosphere), and its relationship to tradition and modernity. Although the landscape remains a place of interpretation, it is its coexistence with man that drives the Chinese artists to question how they can readjust their civilisation and, on the basis of this, find a way to coexist. For this reason, curator Zhang Zikang, in an interview with CAA, explains that the Meta-Jing (元境) theme of the exhibition is nothing other than a way of self-questioning about the structures of understanding, from an external and 'transcendental' point of view, but one that is overbearingly part of reality.

In an exhibition on technology, curator Qian Xuesen translated the concept of "virtual reality" into "Ling Jing" (i.e., "the realm of the spiritual", CN. "灵境"). Hence, virtual reality is understood as that spirit of man inhabiting these places and thus the notion of "Yuan Jing" (CN. 元境), i.e. "Meta-Scape": in the Chinese cultural context, the word "Yuan" refers to origin and infinity, while "Jing" has overlapping meanings, which can be multiplied and interpreted with the evolution of time. From the most ancient meaning of the boundary to the artistic conception and state of mind of the literati, the notion of 'Jing' generally refers to a realm of spiritual perception, which contains the ideal of the literati. This can be found in Xu Lei's 徐累 work installed, Correspondances 《兴会》, which interprets the adjective "meta" by linking it to the concept of time,





Wang Yuyang, *Wang Yuyang#: A Fourth (Jie Qi)*



Wang Yuyang, Snowman, 265x190x28



which is linked to that of a perspective view of the world. In this form, the artist can observe, through a double objective view of perspective and subjective view of the time of vision and exploration, how the two worlds of East and West have developed and unified their interpretative modes of the Jing (landscape, scenery) and thus of the world, which are totally discordant but also substantially similar. Here time, also understood as the Daoist concept of “life” and the West as “dasein”, is linked to tradition, to the stylistic revival, the comparison of which does not take place by juxtaposition or mixing, but by overlapping transparencies that well manifest and concretise that concept of continuity and fluidity. Xu Lei has played a lot on the notion of “temporal courses and recurrences” and the eternal becoming (时间的回光), or the reincarnation of time (时间的轮回) understood as the development from the past to the future. His installation work, in fact, consists of transparent slides reproducing trees taken from Song dynasty painting, the age of poetry, from Ukiyo-e (a pictorial movement derived from the Chinese xylos and which greatly influenced Impressionist productions) from some of the most famous trees portrayed in Renaissance paintings, from Pollaiuolo, Benozzo Gozzoli, Verrocchio, to Leonardo da Vinci and Friedrich. This overlap allows us to see how our visual condition today is greatly influenced by all these stylistic mixtures. His artistic creation considers traditional Chinese art, Western art and their connections based on the principle of temporal origin, thus forming a cross-cultural transplant. The 'transplant' itself is a reconstructed concept. Through transplantation, a new world can be built, and this is the wish and hope of all these artists of different ages and backgrounds.



Xu Lei, *Interact Mountains No.1 and No.2*, 208 x 62cm, ink on paper, 2017



