LEO XU PROJECTS

THERE IS NO THERE, *aaajiao: Turritopsis Nutricula and Cloud.data*, HUNTER BRAITHWAITE, Nov.19, 2011

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Miami-based. Internationally-sourced. Contemporary art site. Primary Documents. Local Explication.

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aaajiao: Turritopsis Nutricula and Cloud.data

by HUNTER BRAITHWAITE *on* Nov 19, 2011 • 1:16 pm   No Comments
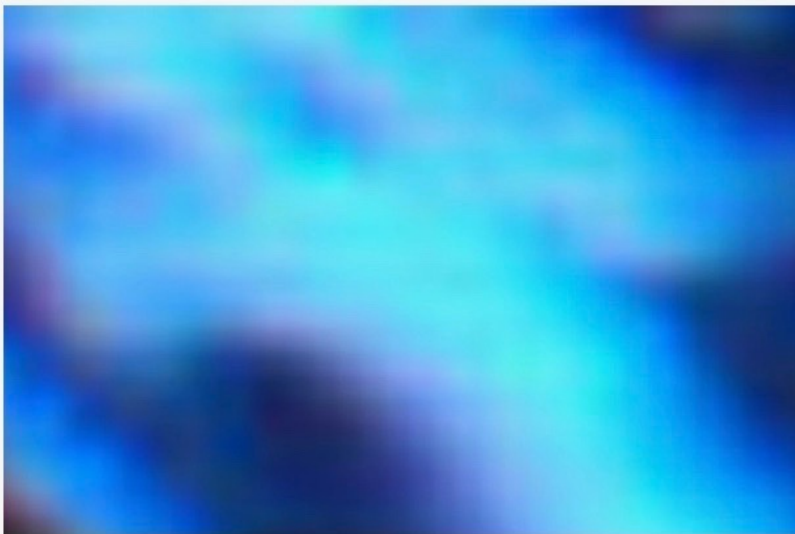
Aaajiao (Xu Wenkai) is one of China's most popular digital artists. Rather than attending art school, the 27 year old studied engineering before going into a career of software development. This unlikely progression and his use of digital media makes aaajiao an unlikely heir to the long history of traditional Chinese art. However, his work does not break with the past. It seeks to continue lineages, even as they are constantly redefined. The internet, for all the changes it has brought to China, also has helped perpetuate existing power structures and modes of perception. Just as a generation of stateside post-internet artists recreate the visual terrain of Duck Hunt and Dancing Baby, aaajiao updates literati landscape painting with faint pixels and fields of negative cyberspace. He has contributed two series to TINT.
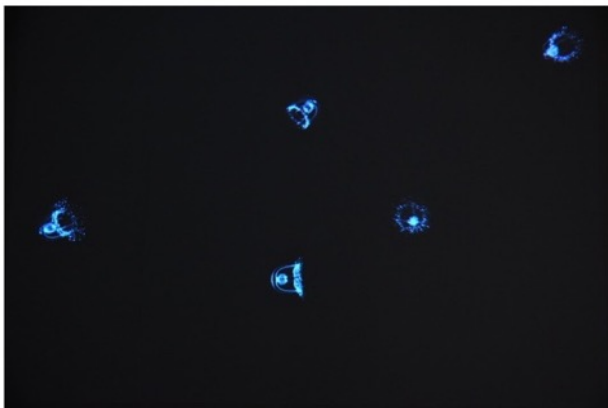
I. Turritopsis Nutricula

First discovered in the Mediterranean in 1883, the *Turritopsis Nutricula* is a hydrozoan, whose Medusa (jellyfish) is effectively immortal. When threatened, the Medusa's cells can age backwards from sexual maturity to those halcyon days of jellyfish childhood. From there, they age again, then regress again, *ad infinitum*. This happens through a process called transdifferentiation, in which one type of cell switches to another type. For this piece, aaajiao created an algorithmically generated swarm of these creatures. As the pixelated bloom floats by, one thinks about how the digital age confounds the linear march of time. The two poles of *Turritopsis*'s existence–youth and sexual maturity–find parallel in our division between the virtual world and the physical.

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II. Cloud.data

Again using computer algorithms to recreate natural processes, aaajiao created a series of clouds floating on LCD screens. The portability of the medium (liquid crystal display being the new scroll painting, as it were) is negated by either fastening the screens to suspended girders, or placing them on concrete plinths. These pieces simultaneously engage the massive construction projects going on across China (and with that, the wanton destruction of traditional neighborhoods) and the peaceful contemplation seen in traditional Chinese painting and writing. They also represent the exciting modes of cultural transmission in the contemporary world. At once, these pieces evoke Alfred Stieglitz's *Equivalents* and sculptural Minimalism. Liam Gillick, in describing the work of Donald Judd, puts it nicely. "You are not supposed to fixate on the structures in isolation or to over rationalise them within the late modernist tendency towards reduction. The work functions best when it is allowed to hover between its connection to its given location and the rest of the relative experience we bring to the room."
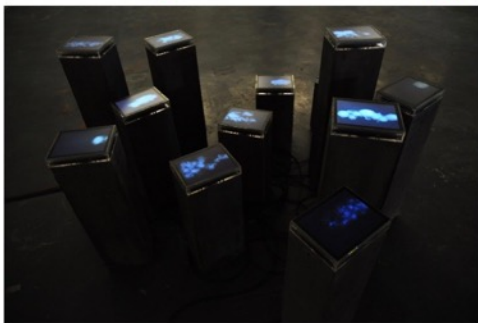
Read his catalogue here

Also, Cloud.data has been made into an iPhone app. You can buy it ($2.99) here. Here is a demonstration:

Cloud Data from hunter braithwaite on Vimeo.

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