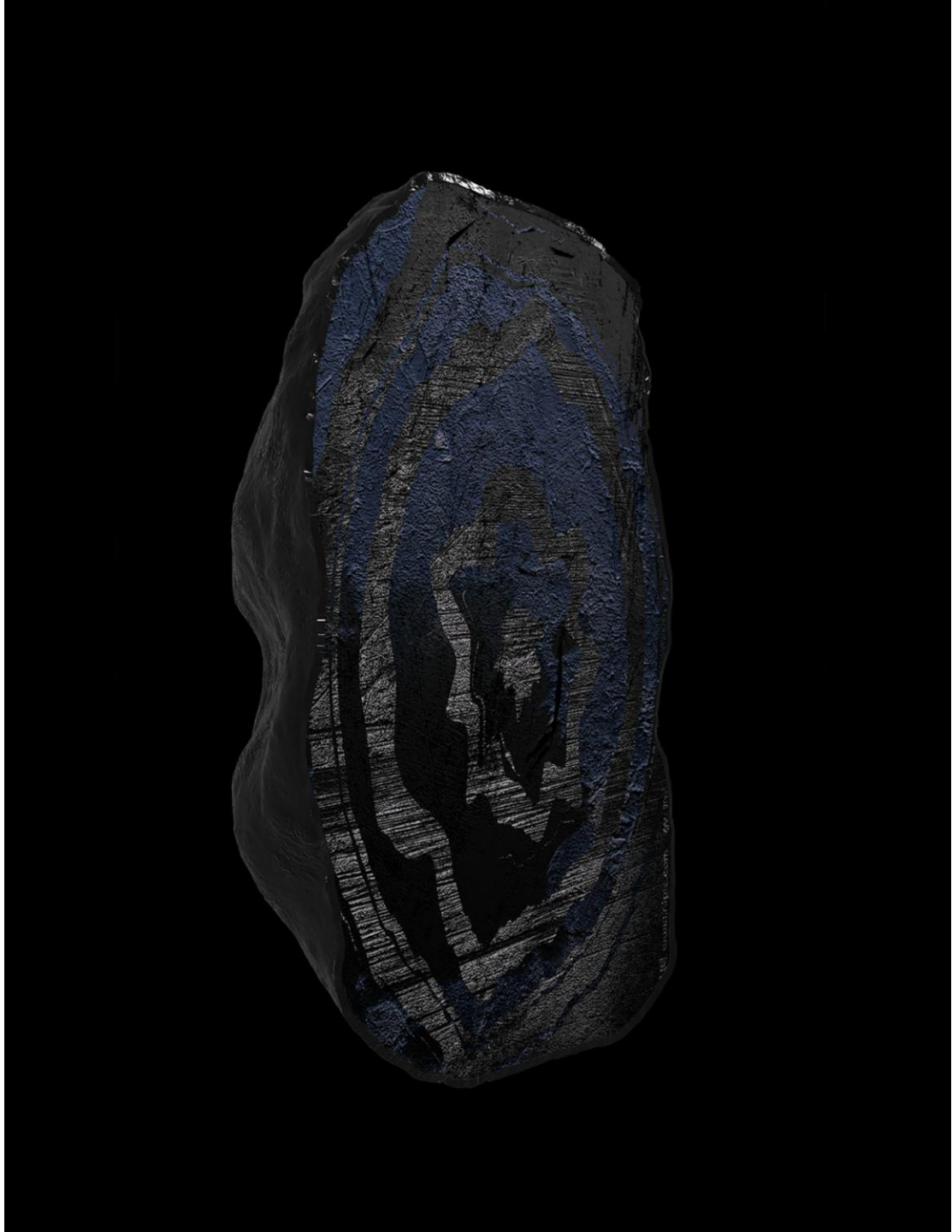


# LEO XU PROJECTS

**Kaleidoscope**, *aaajiao*, text/ Leo Xu, P36-38, January 2015

## KALEIDOSCOPE



The so-called notorious “Great Fire Wall” of China produces parallel versions of mediated reality for the thirteen billion people behind it and for those browsing beyond its reach. The past fifteen years of Internet censorship in China have yielded the highly underestimated practices of Chinese artists working with the Internet as a medium and construct. Some prominent examples include Ai Weiwei’s ardent use of social media to challenge state policymaking and the idea of democracy, Cao Fei’s forays into role playing and online gaming, and the efforts of a collective of Shanghai-based artists to create internet communities (i.e., [www.art-ba-ba.com](http://www.art-ba-ba.com) a collection of translations of artists profiles and a forum). However, flowing beneath this undercurrent are the art practices of a younger generation that utilize the Internet as their primary domain. Among those who work and live within this 21st century matrix, the phantom avatar aaajiao is most notable.

Aaajiao is the Internet alias of Shanghai-based media artist Xu Wenkai, whose offline persona includes the roles of celebrated entrepreneur of the coworking community XINDANWEI and inspiring teacher of New Media art. Born in 1984 in China’s first ancient capital Xi’an, aaajiao’s artworks are marked by both a strong dystopian awareness—his year of birth shares the title of Orwell’s classic—and a spirit of literati sophistication. In his critically acclaimed installation “GFWlist” (2010), he positions a tiny printer in the middle of a sleek black monument fabricated out of Corian in the shape of the enigmatic monolith from Kubrick’s “2001: A Space Odyssey.” The printer spits out rolls of papers that document the domains of websites blocked by China’s “Great Fire Wall.” As the artist’s response to the decades-long translation and blockade of in-

Aaajiao (Chinese, b. 1984) lives and works in Shanghai. She is represented by Leo Xu Projects, Shanghai.

Leo Xu is the founder and director of Leo Xu Projects and a writer and curator based in Shanghai.

Image:  
Obj. 4, 2014  
Courtesy of the artist  
and Leo Xu Projects,  
Shanghai

formation and data, each domain is rendered in hexadecimal codes. In his *blog Archaeological* (2010), aaajiao created a museum vitrine display which featured a set of digital scales weighing SD memory cards—each stored with one year’s worth of content from “Robot Wisdom,” the Internet’s first blog. In this quasi-archaeological and punk-ish gesture, aaajiao revisits the beta progenitors of today’s larger than life social media networks.

Arguably China’s foremost young media artist, blogger and Internet activist, aaajiao was inspired to begin his practice by the music sharing application Soulseek—a platform in which he found the cycle of piracy-bootlegging-sharing-reinventing generated a new circle of creation. He then established his sound art website: [cornersound.com](http://cornersound.com), and in 2006 he founded the Chinese take on the blog *We Make Money Not Art: We Need Money Not Art*. Many of his early works are aesthetically indebted to the abstract beauty of minimal ambient electronic music—forging relationships between audio and visual, space and perception, through the manipulation of software and programming. Having worked with curators, musicians and architects in many interdisciplinary projects that transplant spaces, aaajiao now focuses on experiments that imagine new possibilities for classic forms; by processing physical still lifes and landscapes through his digital algorithms, and by rendering the resultant mutation as three-dimensional forms in architectural spaces. On view in Shanghai’s Minsheng Art Museum’s inaugural exhibition “Cosmo” are his sprawling black sculptures, like numerous mutant limbs placed about the gallery’s floor; an unsettling scene that is heavily reminiscent of many contemporary Sci-fi films. ☺

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HIGHLIGHTS 亮点