



Shuang Li
I'm Not
May 1 – August 25, 2024

Swiss Institute (SI) presents *I'm Not*, the first institutional solo exhibition by artist Shuang Li, featuring newly commissioned sculpture and video installations. Li's work explores how language, relationships and identities are formed and mediated through screens and the internet. For *I'm Not*, Li delves into her own life as a fan to ruminate on how these technologies inform the social bonds and materiality of fandom, and the complexities of building a world predicated on a fervent love of something distant. Growing up in a small town in Southeast China, Li became (and remains) an ardent fan of My Chemical Romance, a band that introduced the possibility of subcultural belonging as well as the English language into the artist's life. MCR fandom unfolds as a case study in the exhibition for an examination of distant bodies and displaced desires.

The ground floor at SI features a large-scale reimagining of an architectural model, akin to those Li would see as a child on weekend visits to real estate showrooms with her parents. Coming of age during the market economy reform of the 1990s and the rapid development of real estate concurrent with the urbanization of China in the 2000s, Li witnessed the growing and bursting of the country's real estate bubble. The gleaming towers, seemingly erected overnight, promised a future that never arrived. Left half-built and deserted when the market crumbled, their skeletons stand here as abstracted visions of home.

Embedded in one building, *Déjà Vu* (2022) is a silent video, composed of documentation from a performance Li made during the Covid-19 pandemic, when she was kept from entering her home country for three years due to travel restrictions, and footage from a GoPro camera worn by a duck in an animal rescue center in Geneva, where she relocated for two of those years. In subtitles, a short story describes a town where people started mixing up words, then forgetting grammar, and ultimately, lost the ability to speak. The featured performance, *Lord of the Flies* (2022), was a result of Li's not being able to attend her own opening in Shanghai due to her displacement. Outfitted as Shuang Li clones with her signature My Chemical Romance t-shirt, bangs and platform loafers, 20 performers were locally trained to be her avatars. They were given a choreography, personalized scripts with which to talk to audience members, and goodbye letters handwritten by the artist to deliver to her close friends who attended. At SI, the shoes worn by the performers populate the gallery as vessels of Li's absence, her existence and her multiplicity as a fan. "There are no more copies, when there's no more original...I can also be you," states the silent narrator in *Déjà Vu*.

Fandom thrives on distance, as the chasm between an idol and its devotee enacts both yearning and creative fantasy. For the newly commissioned video *I'm Not* (2024), Li rewrote the lyrics to the My Chemical Romance song "I'm Not OK" in Mandarin Chinese and English, which was then covered by an a cappella group. In the resulting music video, a troupe dressed as an army choir conducted by a young girl melodically recites Li's version of the emo anthem. Here, the artist, who taught herself English from MCR lyrics, gives shape and tribute to the formative years in which her teen angst was echoed in a language she did not yet speak by a band of four young men thousands of miles away. Filtered through bleachers composed of shimmering panels of colored resin, the installation is itself a work of fan art.

On the second floor sits *Heart is a Broken Record* (2023), a heart-shaped fountain evocative of wishing wells in courtyards and public plazas. Found footage is projected from above into its rippling reflection. Interspersed with stock imagery of dripping blood and pumping veins is a montage of shots of crowds at My Chemical Romance concerts awaiting the performers. Stringing together an endless anticlimax, Li cuts each recording just before the band takes the stage.

Mapping a personal history across this memoryscape of wants and aspirations, language remains elusive and ever-shifting, as if, like an idol, it can never be truly known.

Shuang Li: I'm Not is organized by Swiss Institute, New York in partnership with the Aspen Art Museum.

On the occasion of the exhibition, Swiss Institute, Aspen Art Museum and Lenz Press will publish Li's first monograph in November 2024. The book includes newly commissioned contributions by the artist along with Sophia Al-Maria, Olivia Kan-Sperling, Jeppe Ugelvig and Hanlu Zhang, with an introductory text by editors Alison Coplan and Daniel Merritt.

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This exhibition is organized by Alison Coplan, Chief Curator at Swiss Institute, and Daniel Merritt, Director of Curatorial Affairs at Aspen Art Museum.

About Shuang Li

Shuang Li (b. 1990 in Wuyi Mountains, China, lives and works in Berlin and Geneva) received her MA in media studies from New York University in 2014. Li's recent solo and group exhibitions include *Biennale de l'Image en Mouvement*, Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, Geneva (2024), *Paraventi: Folding Screens from the 17th to 21st Centuries*, Fondazione Prada, Milan and Prada Rong Zhai, Shanghai (2023-24), 14th Shanghai Biennale (2023-24), *Zurich Biennial*, Kunsthalle Zürich, Zürich (2023-24), *Kunsthal Charlottenborg Biennale*, Copenhagen (2023), *Field of Vision*, Zuzeum Art Centre, Riga (2023), *Inner Voices and Exterior Visions*, Tate Modern, London (2023), 59th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, Venice (2022), *Deep Thought*, Berlinische Galerie, Berlin (2022), *Double Vision*, Tai Kwun Contemporary, Hong Kong (2022), *Cherish*, Geneva (2021), *How Do We Begin*, X Museum, Beijing (2020) and *Callie's*, Berlin (2020).

About Swiss Institute

Founded in 1986, Swiss Institute (SI) is an independent non-profit contemporary art institution dedicated to promoting forward-thinking and experimental art making through innovative exhibitions, education, and programs. Committed to the highest standards of curatorial and educational excellence, SI serves as a platform for emerging artists, catalyzes new perspectives on celebrated work, and fosters appreciation for under-recognized positions. SI is committed to being an organization that is diverse, equitable, accessible, and environmentally conscious in its work, structure, and programming. Open to the public free-of-charge, Swiss Institute seeks to explore how a Swiss context can be the starting point for international conversations in the fields of visual and performing arts, design, and architecture.

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