

# If Every Day Were a Holiday, Towns Would Be More Mysterious

April 23 until July 10, 2021  
Jiajia Zhang

Jiajia Zhang's works range from documenting reality to exploring fiction as a narrative element. Fragments of reality are surveyed for their poetic and utopian potential. Employing intertwining, repeating, emerging and disappearing of images and texts within the exhibition –and across different works and further exhibitions– Jiajia Zhang thus creates a new narrative that challenges conventional readings of images and stories. Her visual worlds remain at the same time personal and generic, referencing different spaces (private, public, imaginary) as well as the invisible transactions in the world of the visible.

*If Every Day Were a Holiday, Towns Would Be More Mysterious* examines time as a referential dimension for understanding our world. Time as a division into units, into working hours and leisure days, for instance, and time as lived experience. Especially in the light of the current pandemic, we have been caught in a perpetual state of passivity and action for over a year now. It is this ambivalent interstice that interests Jiajia Zhang: "Between going outside and withdrawing into one's own home, between entering as a guest and being rejected as a potential virus carrier, between freshening up and crumpling, between an opening and refusal". The cancelling of perceived certainties in a world in (dis-) equilibrium and the abrupt pause of an epoch of acceleration, in which we were living just a moment ago, is circled by Jiajia Zhang in her exhibition at the Coalmine, employing photography, film, and an installation setting that, besides a video and various objects, also includes the view of the large magnolia tree in the garden of the Volkarthaus.

In the first exhibition room, we encounter a series of photographs in different formats. At first glance, the images seem disparate in their choice of motifs and, at the same time, strangely familiar. Jiajia Zhang photographed the objects, people, and situations in public spaces during various trips – for example, in New York City, Shanghai, or Berlin. In the recurring motifs, which are shown partly analogous and partly cut-out in front of a coloured background, something like a photographic vocabulary becomes apparent: Fragile surfaces, individual objects, figures, and the contrast of urban space to landscape. The images enter into a dialogue with coloured text panels that revolve around the concept of time in its various facets, similar to "poetic commercial breaks": *Go Outside*, *Crisis Script*, or *After Hour*. "Time as emotional interconnection, as a crisis script, literally as after-hour. Time as an invisible thread that weaves itself into social, economic, psychological and also mysterious realms," as the artist writes.

The titles of the photographs classify the individual loose motifs into associative groups over time. *Hedonic Shift*, *Motor Mimicry*, *Emotional Contagion* refer to psychological concepts that explore empathy and emotional

contagion through imitation. As Jiajia Zhang notes, in reference to five of the portraits in *Emotional Contagion* (2021), "A doll (with obvious signs of use) as a surrogate for childlike projections, a girl adopting the pose of the thinker, a mannequin that looks like a human, a bypasser who on the other hand looks like an icon, and a copy of Auguste Rodin's thinker in front of a Chinese settlement. It is about the multiplication of illusions found all over the world. The mutual influence of these individual figures is related to each other as *emotional contagion*. It is a kind of influence that is also temporal to each other". Who influences whom and when, and is there an emotional contagion that affects a social system? To what extent can these questions be applied to the current situation of the pandemic? These are moments of reflection on what time means to our culture, individually in a person's personal development and for the society. And how this can be captured pictorially in a time when a photograph seems more real when it is manipulated.

While the photographs in the first room are in a kind of vacuum, in an isolated state that is timeless and placeless, referring only in excerpts to memories of a past or prospects of possible futures, the two video works in the cabinet, *Script (Emily)* and *Script (Allie)* (both 2021), are clearly located. They refer to the iconic feature film *Permanent Vacation*–Jim Jarmusch's portrait of a drifting teenager in 1980s New York–and to the Netflix series *Emily in Paris*, about a young marketing employee in the late capitalist world of today. Jiajia Zhang transcribed two sequences from the film and allowed the original film scenes to appear briefly in the form of pictorial echoes. In doing so, parallels in the cinematic realisation become visible, such as focusing on the two protagonists and their movements in the urban space. At the same time, the short sequences refer to different forms of production: to the independent, DIY style of *Temporary Vacation* and the calculated contemplativeness of a high-end production in the style of "ambient TV" in *Emily in Paris*. The endless loops raise questions about the consequences of gentrification, which has massively increased since the 1980s and about self-promotion, the technological dominance of our lives, and the constant media overload we are exposed to today.

In the exhibition spaces at the back, Jiajia Zhang deepens her research on the abstract dimension of time into an installation setting. The large projected video work *Is Sun Still Or Moving?* (2021) is arranged as a diary covering a period of one month and follows a fictional movement around the sun. Here too, the artist uses collected film footage from her numerous travels and edits it associatively with a video game soundtrack from the 1980s as well as quotes from advertising and science literature, to create a poetic reflection on motion, progress, and technology: motion as a circular loop, but also as the linear development of the notion of progress, culminating in

artificially real humans. The exemplary physical presence of balls of different materials and dimensions simultaneously refers to the banality of everyday life in the home office and cosmic constellations in space. In contrast, the bed frame refers to another parallel form of temporality: the state of sleep that produces dreams whose length we cannot remember. The view on the garden then shows the actual change of the landscape, a live event (22.4.–10.7.2021 Live Event) that moves independently of us, just as the earth moves around the sun.

The video is mirrored by a continuous collection of notes about various aspects of time, running on a monitor in the third exhibition room. *Is Sun Moving or Still?* (2021) explores video as a format for collective thinking. Video images of round objects in motion (a teacup, a lamp, and again the sun and moon in all their manifestations) are the blueprint for various text excerpts from scientific articles and personal narratives on the subject of time and its implications, which are continuously complemented throughout the exhibition.

Jiajia Zhang lives and works in Zurich. From 2001–2008 she studied Architecture at ETH in Zurich. She holds a Master degree from the Department of Fine Arts at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK). Exhibitions include a.o. *Almusibli Panorama*, Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève; *Follow You Follow Me*, Haus Wien with Cherish, Geneva; *Sommer des Zögerns*, Kunsthalle Zürich (2020); *Unreal Estate*, Hamlet; *Product Placement*, Coalmine, Winterthur (both 2019).

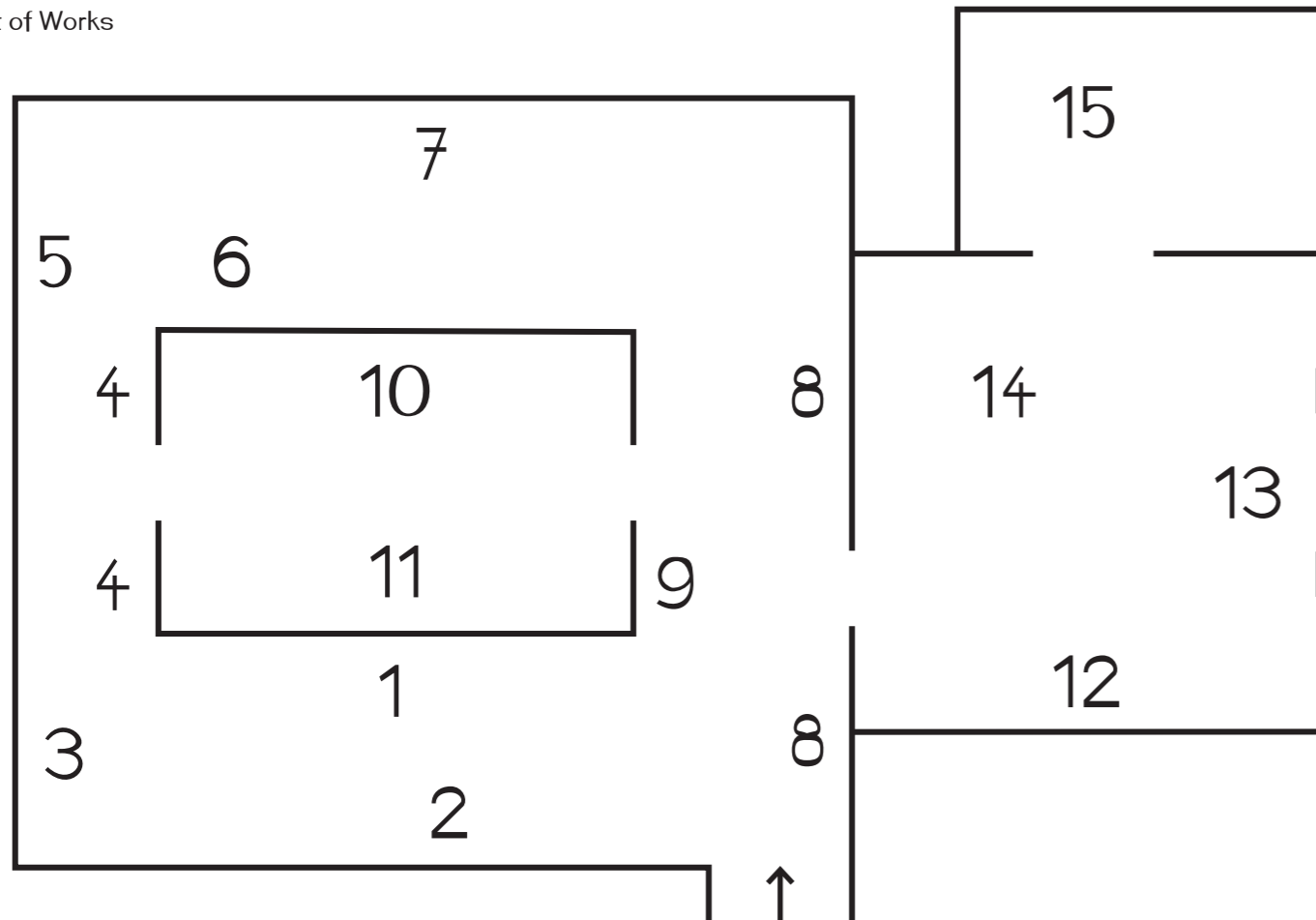
## Events

Thursday, May 20 and June 17, 2021, 6.30pm  
Public guided tour upon registration  
info@coalmine.ch

Saturday, July 10, 2021

Finissage: Presentation of the publication *Is Sun Still or Moving?* by Jiajia Zhang in collaboration with Jungle Books. More information under [fotografie.coalmine.ch](mailto:fotografie.coalmine.ch)

List of Works



Unless otherwise noted,  
all works C-Print on Aluminum

- 1** From left to right:
- *Hedonic Shift (Beach)*, 2021  
50x70 cm
  - *Untitled (Go Outside)*, 2021  
30x40 cm
  - *Hedonic Shift (Starlet)*, 2021  
50x70 cm

- 2** From left to right:
- *The Scammer Shows Just Keep On Coming or Emotional Contagion (Deception)*, 2021  
75x50 cm
  - *Untitled (Going Home)*, 2021  
60x40 cm
  - *Emotional Contagion (Doll)*, 2021
  - *Emotional Contagion (Imitation)*, 2021
  - *Emotional Contagion (Mannequin)*, 2021
  - *Emotional Contagion (Passerby)*, 2021
  - *Emotional Contagion (Copy)*, 2021  
75x50 cm

- 3** From left to right:
- Pen Series*, 2012-ongoing
- *Performance (Pawn Shop)*
  - *Performance (Notary)*
  - *Performance (Insurance)*
  - *Performance (Border)*
- C-Print, each 40x30 cm, framed

- *Untitled (Stars)*, 2021  
60x40 cm

- 4** From left to right:
- *Untitled (Peels)*, 2021  
60x40 cm
  - *Motor Mimicry (Chair)*, 2021  
50x70 cm

- 5** From left to right:
- *Untitled (After Hours)*, 2021  
30x40 cm
  - *Hedonic Shift (Appearance)*, 2021  
50x70 cm

- 6** From left to right:
- *Motor Mimicry (Ribbon)*, 2021  
50x70 cm
  - *Untitled (Crisis Script)*, 2021  
30x40 cm

- 7** From left to right:
- Pen Series*, 2012 – ongoing
- *Performance (Real Estate)*  
C-Print, 40x30 cm, framed
  - *Motor Mimicry (Power)*, 2021  
75x50 cm
  - *Emotional Contagion (Idol)*, 2021  
75x50 cm
- Pen Series*, 2012 – ongoing
- *Performance (City Council)*
  - *Performance (Citi Bank)*
  - *Performance (Police)*
- C-Print, each 40x30 cm, framed
- *Stimulation (Touch)*, 2021  
105x75 cm

- 8** From left to right:
- *Untitled (Simulate Tonight)*, 2021  
30x40cm
  - *News From Home*, 2021  
50x75cm
  - *Untitled (Cracks)*, 2021  
40x60cm
  - *Simulation (Park)*, 2021  
105 x 75cm
  - *Untitled (Hole)*, 2021  
60x40 cm

- 9** *Emotional Contagion (Group)*, 2021  
50x70cm

- 10** *Script (Emily)*, 2021  
Video, color, no sound, 3'30",  
loop, synchronized

- 11** *Script (Allie)*, 2021  
Video, color, no sound, 3'30", loop,  
synchronized

- 12** *Is Sun Still or Moving?*, 2021  
HD video, color, sound, 11'34", loop  
Soundtrack from the record album *Game Heaven*  
with the permission of Seth Price Studios, NYC

- 13** *22.04.2021 - 10.07.2021 (Garden)*  
Live event through ND filter

- 14** *Bed for a restless sleeper*  
Enzo Mari bed frame, 87x207 cm  
Courtesy Postmodern & Brutalist  
Cipriani Collection

*Props*  
Various Balls of different weights,  
condition and materials  
Chairs

- 15** *Is Sun Moving or Still?*, 2021  
HD Video, color, no sound, variable duration  
Ongoing collection of notes and discussions on  
different aspects of time that will be updated  
during the exhibition on a regular basis.

All works Courtesy the artist