

NEWS



Still from Zach Blas and Jemima Wyman's video installation *im here to learn so :))))))*, which was cut from the Guangzhou Triennial. Photo: Zach Blas and Jemima Wyman.
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GUANGZHOU TRIENNIAL PULLS WORKS ON BIOTECHNOLOGY AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Several artworks have been removed from the Guangzhou Triennial, which is set to open at the state-backed Guangdong Museum of Art in southern China on December 21, for unknown reasons. Huang Yaquin, the deputy director of academic affairs at the institution, told the *New York Times* that the decision to pull the pieces, which address artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and other scientific advancements, was in part made because of their “incompatibility with the Guangdong people’s taste and cultural habits.”

While censorship is not uncommon in China, some were surprised by the move since the works deemed unsuitable for the exhibition did not touch on any of the usual taboo topics, such as controversial political issues ranging from the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests to Taiwan’s independence movement. However, for Angelique Spaninks, director of the

Eindhoven-based contemporary arts space MU and one of the curators of the triennial, any work that creates discomfort “makes officials here nervous.”

Among the works the cultural authorities banned from the show, titled “As We May Think: Feedforward,” is American artist Heater Dewey-Hagborg’s *T3511*, a four-channel video installation that explores the world of biobanking and the commodification of human biological material. The piece follows a biohacker who becomes increasingly obsessed with the identity of an anonymous donor whose saliva she purchases online. Other works—such as Dutch artist Floris Kaayk’s *The Modular Body* and Zach Blas and Jemima Wyman’s four-channel video *im here to learn so :))))))*—focus on the 3-D printing of human organs and Tay, Microsoft’s artificial intelligence bot, which was shut down in 2016 after users trained it to be a Holocaust denier and a racist in less than a day.

The news comes on the heels of reports that the fourteenth edition of the Lianzhou Foto festival, which opened at the publicly funded Lianzhou Museum of Photography on December 1, was heavily censored. Works singled out as problematic included fashion photographer Erwin Blumenfeld’s black-and-white diptychs and Dutch photographer Henk Wildsschut’s images on the impact of food production. “All exhibiting artists are subject to an approval process, and since 2016, the rules have been more strictly applied,” festival founder Duan Yuting told *The Guardian*. “There is no issue with the majority of the work—and certainly improved communication with officials helps the process—but censorship is just something we have to accept.”