

## Qiu Zhijie, Making Maps Against the Madness of the World

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Courtesy Spring Workshop

Detail of "Playground 1" installation at the upcoming "The Universe of Naming" exhibition by Qiu Zhijie.

by Zoe Li

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Qiu Zhijie

HONG KONG — Chinese contemporary artist **Qiu Zhijie** is currently setting up an installation of a map that encourages the audience to play god. The exhibition titled "The Universe of Naming" will officially open on May 23 at non-profit art space **Spring**.

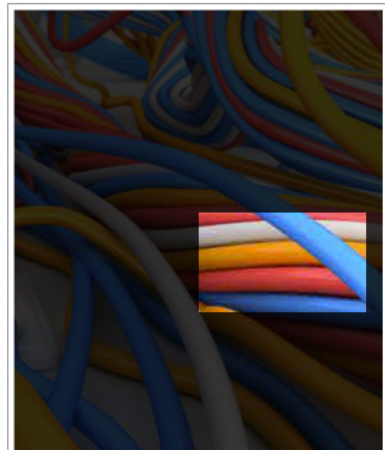
The exhibition will feature an installation within an installation. "Playground 1" is a map that sprawls across the more than 1,000-square-meters of floor space at Spring. It depicts geographical and conceptual territories placed according to the artist's own categorization. On top of the map will be mobile globes of different sizes, the largest of which is 15cm in diameter. The globes are made of wood, glass, stone, and other materials, and each is marked with a word corresponding to an emotion, an identity, a natural disaster, an action, and other categories.

The artist encourages the audience to roll the globes around the floor to create random, unexpected combinations of words, ideas, and territories in a game of human fate.

"You can imagine the globe marked with 'earthquake' may roll to the map of 'utopia' or this ball for 'revolution' will end up with 'bedroom,' or 'party' ends up with 'revolution,'" says Qiu, giving examples of results from his playful map.

This installation extends from the floor onto one of the walls at Spring to become "Playground 2." This second piece will be created with Hong Kong art students who have been asked to contribute everyday objects that can be used as markers on this map. The artist also contributes his own everyday objects, including 600 different brands of Chinese cigarettes. The brand names on the packaging of these consumer products become double entendres that demarcate territories.

Both installations are extensions of Qiu's series of map sketches, such as "Map of Reactivation" which served as a departure point for the **9th Shanghai Biennale**. The artist has also created a series of ink paintings based on the idea of mapping that will be exhibited at **Hanart TZ Gallery** from May 21 to June 29.



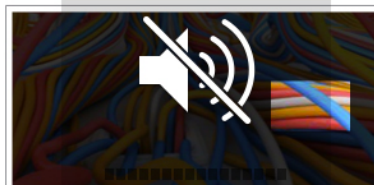
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We chat with Qiu Zhijie about the importance of mapping and how it empowers us to “resist the madness of the world.”

### What is the meaning of the title “Universe of Naming”?

We can give a name to everything. After we give names to things, relationships form. Like these two pens [indicates to pens on the table] we can call one “Queen” and the other one “King” and they immediately have a relationship to each other. This game of naming is a way to give meaning to the world and to control the world.

### So the whole installation is a big game?

Yes, the installation is a Dada-esque game, but it also makes sense in reality. Maybe the globe for “heavy snow” and “kindergarten” will come together or “revolution” and “bedroom” will come together, or it’s going to be “farm” and “revolution.” These relationships are happening in the real world and it gives a feeling of fate.

### It feels like you're asking the audience to play god. Like a crazy god playing with the fate of humans.

Well, all the gods are crazy of course. For me to make a map is to try to reorder the world and try to understand the world. The bird’s-eye-view of a map is indeed quite God-like. That perspective gives the feeling of reading the world as a text, like you are sitting in front of a table and the world is a book open in front of you.

The game is about organizing chaos. When you are looking down to the earth from an airplane flying across Siberia, you see that it is all wilderness and suddenly there appears a road or a village. Amidst the chaos, you suddenly sense organization. This is a rare and short glimpse of order. That is the feeling — the feeling of fate, the feeling that most of the time the outside world is totally chaotic with short intervals of order.

### In “Playground 1,” you include many places of conflict, whether it is from history, such as the Falkland Islands, or currently contentious territories, such as the Diaoyu Islands. Why is it important to choose places of conflict for this map?

Nowadays China and Japan are fighting for Diaoyu Islands, but how about 30,000 years before and 30,000 years later? This conflict only occupies a very short amount of time in the history of the natural world. People are busy fighting for nothing. They are happy to play these games of politics, of control and anti-control, to struggle with war and peace. They [the people in power] try to design the perfect system and tell people that it will be forever, that this is the end of history. When communist or capitalist say this is the end of history I think it is all very funny. You know they forgot the history of nature.

### Tell us why you extended the larger installation to become “Playground 2.”

The first piece is more about human fate, while the second piece is more about everyday life and how we can remap it. We take objects from everyday life related to people’s bodies, such as tea, cigarettes, toothpaste, and each have a brandname, a text that refers to something, like the cigarette brands Zhongnanhai (headquarters for Chinese government), or Tianzhi (Heaven), or Diaoyutai (Diaoyu Island). These objects have ideology hidden inside them. Making a map using these objects is to organize the relationship between thing, ideologies, and everyday life.

### Maps are also used for finding your way when you’re lost, aren’t they?


You get lost because you’ve lost the relationships between things. You can’t remember what is in front or behind, left and right. When we feel helpless it’s because we have lost our grasp on relationships between objects, ideas, space, and time. Mapping is useful because we should not just experience the world in a sensory way, we cannot just feel this world, we should also try to understand this world.


### So do you feel that we are all lost in some way?


I find it is difficult to make sense of this world. Creating maps is my way of resisting the madness of the world. We live in a world that makes us lost.


Everyone has a map, or maps, that they carry within themselves and we should continuously create and recreate those maps. It is a proactive way of creating meaning, instead of passively accepting the meaning created by other people. The best result from my installation is for everyone to go and draw their own maps, perhaps of their interpersonal relationships, or just for the books and movies that they’ve read and seen. Draw a map and create a meaningful world for yourself.


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