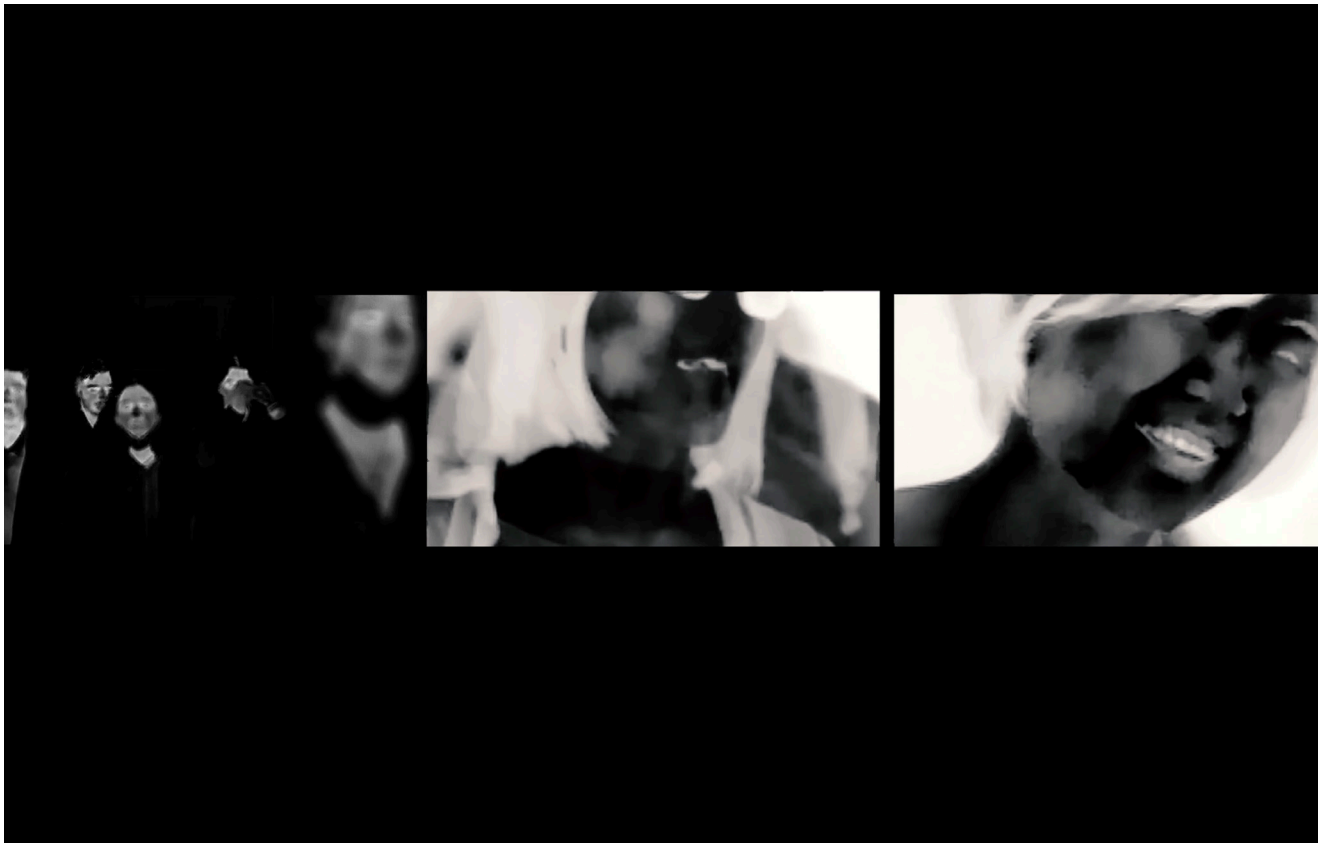


# ZIRU TANG

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2022 MFA PHOTOGRAPHY  
THESIS EXHIBITION



**DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES**

MAY 6-20, 2022

# 2022 MFA PHOTOGRAPHY THESIS EXHIBITION

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The *2022 MFA Photography Thesis Exhibition* features the thesis works of the MFA candidates in Columbia College Chicago's Photography Department. This exhibition presents photographs, installation, and video works that are representative of the culmination of research and practice these emerging artists have maintained throughout their time in the program.

Participating photographers:

Jes Farnum

Sylvie Harris

Katharine Norton

Emilie Plunkett

Ziru Tang

Fengzhao Xu

Senjie Zhu

The *2022 Photography MFA Thesis Exhibition* is presented in conjunction with the Department of Exhibitions, Performance and Student Spaces (DEPS), and the Photography Department.

# ZIRU TANG

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The flow of energy that makes up the world has always fascinated me. In a recent conversation with my father about my frustrations of living overseas, he introduced me to the *Diamond Sutra*, one of the earliest printed works in the world coming from the East. It contemplates the existence of all things in the breadth of time and space.

“So you should view this fleeting world—  
A star at dawn, a bubble in a stream,  
A flash of lightening in a summer cloud,  
A flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream.”  
excerpt from *Diamond Sutra*

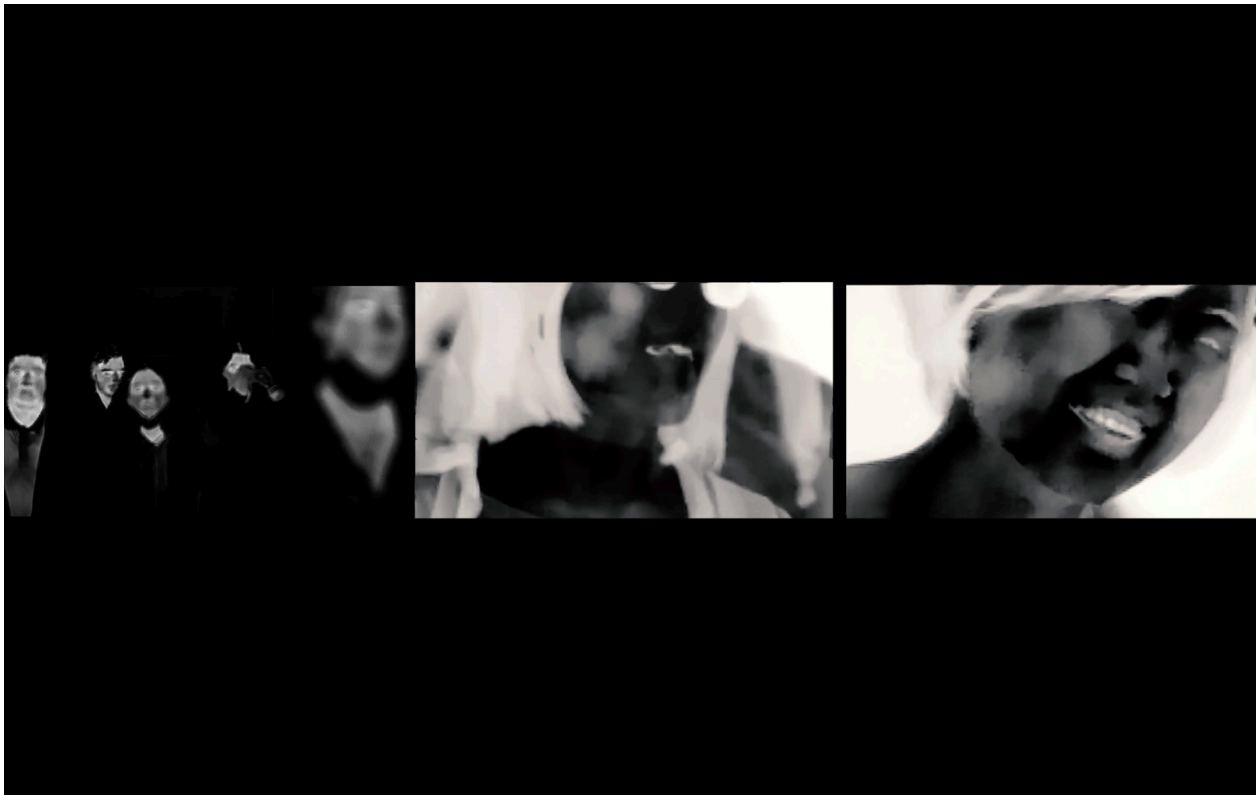
I seem to understand them, they calm me down and make me think. When I intentionally focus on my innate visual experience, I see the essence and purpose of life and soul. In the scale of cosmic time, our life is like a flash of a spark. It briefly and beautifully lights up the cold night sky.

I want to inspire the viewer to feel the fragility and sacredness of life, to reflect on the imbalance of modern rhythm, and to contemplate the meaning of our existence. Through using a thermal imager, I see a world of energy. In the visual language of the thermal imaging device, which is expressed through color as it correlates to temperature, the energy emanating from living beings illuminates the cold void of the universe. The water leaps formlessly and colorlessly, and fingers glow like flames. Things imprint themselves on people, and people imprint themselves on things. For a period of time after physical contact, the color of the two objects will show signs of the contact with the warmer, and vice versa. I believe that the anxiety and hope that I present in the work is mine and that is also everyone's.

**Ziru Tang** born 1997 in Beijing, Tang is a photographer currently based in Chicago and Beijing. He is a MFA candidate at Columbia College Chicago, the winner of Boqi Cup Creative photography Festival, First Prize Scholarship (2018) at Beijing Film Academy. His works have been exhibited at the Lishui Photo Festival, Lishui, China and Beijing Film Academy. His work can be found in publications including *Chinese Photographers Magazine* and *Strait Photography*.

**Instagram:** [@zirutang\\_photography](https://www.instagram.com/zirutang_photography)

**Website:** [zirutang.art](http://zirutang.art)



*Me, You and Illusion* (screenshot), five minutes, three-channel 2K video



*Me, You and Illusion* (screenshot), five minutes, three-channel 2K video



*Me, You and Illusion* (screenshot), five minutes, three-channel 2K video



*Me, You and Illusion* (screenshot), five minutes, three-channel 2K video

# INTERVIEW WITH ZIRU TANG

Conducted by Kaylee Fowler

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**Kaylee Fowler:** You talk about your interest in the flow of energy that makes up the world and how it inspired this piece. Where does this concept come from/when did you first become interested in this concept? And what exactly intrigues you about this?

**Ziru Tang:** In my work, objects take on a very different appearance from the real world; I make the figures emit a halo of light and turn the background dark. Unlike traditional images, my works record the flow of life energy, the flow of energy in water, the flow of urban energy. Under the macro perspective of the universe, each of us is like a candle light that illuminates the silent everything in the world. When I was a child, I liked to look at the stars from my balcony with an astronomical telescope. It was a dialogue between a young living individual and the ancient universe that created him. That deep, dark sky holds all the secrets of mankind, and the stars in the sky tell the story of our life existence in a unique way. We are the children of the universe, but we are also its witnesses. We love to share and communicate with other individuals because the world we observe is different for each of us. One of the things that fascinates me about photography is that it gives us the ability to visually share our observations. I am excited that the world I see can be presented to the public in an exhibition, and I enjoy the process of communicating with them. I believe that the process of viewing by the audience gives more meaning and value to my work.

**KF:** What is the link between photography and installation for you? Your work for this exhibition is very immersive and interactive, something not usually thought of for photography, and I would love to know more about your thoughts behind that.

**ZT:** Since its invention, photography has existed in an interdisciplinary way. The relationship between photography and painting continues to be debated by numerous philosophers and critics, especially as to whether photography is high art or popular art. Regardless of the way the artist presents it, the image is a medium of visual communication, and the overall “stimulation” of the viewer’s mind is the soul of the work of art. No matter what kind of equipment is used to create art, the viewer, that is, the audience, must ultimately be considered. In the history of photography, when portable cameras first appeared, photographers began to focus on society. And when media photography emerged, this job was taken up by media photography. So now, non-professional freelance photographers are more concerned with the self that is in the midst of society. Just like in the Renaissance, art creation started to be human-centered. I also think that people have a psychology of peeking into the mystery of the world. Just like the film *Rear Window*, the audience likes to dig, hoping to see what a photographer is thinking and whether he has made something as interesting as his inner self. This is one of the reasons why contemporary photography can become a trend. My choice to present my work in a three-monitor installation also comes from the viewer’s demand, and the communication of photography is the final piece and the most important. I think such an installation is the best choice for presenting my work.



# INTERVIEW WITH ZIRU TANG continued...

Conducted by Kaylee Fowler

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**KF:** What does photography do for your life, and what do you hope to inspire in viewers regarding your work?

**ZT:** The two years I spent studying in an MFA photography program at a professional art school were most important for me to gradually refine the construction of my identity. In each critique, my professors and classmates helped me dig deeper into myself and push my work in a more distant direction. I admire Allan Sekula and Jeff Wall, whose photography is grounded in a certain (or multiple) theory and discipline, such as sociology and anthropology, using images as a tool to complete their designed projects, and constructing their self-identity as scholars and artists. The work of the academics has a sense of interdependence, is rational, and demands an academic level of viewership. I, on the other hand, prefer my work to resonate emotionally with most people. The art cannot and does not want to directly control the viewer's mind, but I believe that everyone will find some connection with them in my work, and the photographer Terry Evans said after viewing it that the anxiety in my work is not only personal to me, but also to human society as a whole. Anxiety is a very common state of mind, and I hope that in these short time of viewing, the audience can enjoy at least five minutes of peace and meditation, just like me, the teenager who likes to look up at the night sky from the balcony. This will make me very satisfied.



## THE DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

The DEPS Artist Profile Series presented by Columbia College Chicago's Department of Exhibitions, Performance and Student Spaces (DEPS), is a virtual publication on select artists involved with the DEPS Galleries and the Columbia College Chicago community. Our goal with this series is to connect artist and viewer on a deeper level, and to highlight the amazing works and thoughts of our featured artists through interviews, artist biographies, and catalogs of work. Art has always been a way to connect with others, no matter where one may physically be. We hope by presenting the creativity and insights of the people involved in the DEPS Artist Profile Series that viewers may have one more way to stay in touch with, and support the arts community. The DEPS Artist Profile Series is managed by Fine Arts major and DEPS Exhibitions Assistants Kaylee Fowler and Sierra Delamarter. Graphic design is managed by DEPS Exhibitions Assistant Gray Beyer. This program is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.

Learn more at: [colum.edu/deps](http://colum.edu/deps)

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