

Ni Daodao 倪島島

Selected works 2022–2024



Based in Switzerland, Ni Daodao is an artist deeply concerned with eco-friendly living and notions of care. Daodao's work is produced from the detritus of their daily consumption through rituals of cultivation and collection, accumulation and transmutation. They locate these activities, ranging from visual and tactile poetics to home gardening, within the cosmology of 'Rabbonia,' a conceptual universe named in evocation of the biologically gender fluid rabbit figure. Projects like *Dedicated to Mishu* (a local cat the artist identifies as a subconsciously reborn version of their estranged biological father) and *The Stomach Tells the Truth* take shape through long hours of exchange with repurposed objects, from printed flyers to consumer packaging, food-stuff, and wine corks. These items are meticulously cut, sewn, or layered with urushi, a tree resin lacquer with ancient roots in China, and particularly in the artist's hometown of Chongqing. Through an emphasis on material proximity and reinterpretation, Daodao invites reflections on processes of craft and a philosophy of animism, centering the reception of their work on the energetic transfer between the artist, the outcome(s) of their labor, and the audience. Their staging of sensorial encounters is intended to go beyond the faculty of sight, into other registers of feeling. In this way, Daodao's practice takes on the perspective of life itself, offering a means of navigating issues such as identity, memory, emotions, intimacy, migration, integration, and the environment via playful and permutable referents.

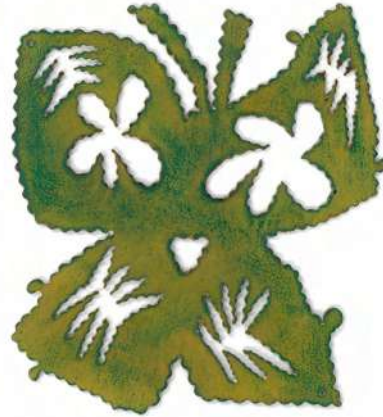
– Moselle Kleiner

RABBONIA



Brass, urushi
95 × 91 × 0.1 cm

Rabbonia represents my personal and artistic conceptual universe: a fictional planet where I explore ongoing questions and complexities in my work and broader life. As someone with a sense of dislocation concerning binaries of gender and nationality, I have been on a decade-long search for an authentic identification, seeking to answer questions about selfhood by creating a planet built by, for, and through my work.



On this planet, there are all kinds of strange species living equally: they perhaps resemble certain animals but they cannot be strictly classified. Rather, they adopt a position akin to the marginalized subjects of society, drifting to the outer edge of recognition, splitting off into an independent, self-contained world. The butterfly-like form that populates Rabbonia exists between reality and the virtual, while the rabbit-like creature is a metaphor for a blurring of gendered associations. Each form, each biscuit or wine cork that becomes part of Rabbonia is a unique piece. I draw them on metal or cut them out of paper, tracing their forms by hand and then cover them layer by layer with Urushi, lacquer made from tree resin. As is crucial for my practice, which involves only using sustainable materials, Urushi is a natural resource that has been employed by artisans in China for over seven thousand years, particularly in my home city of Chongqing. Urushi is a means of connecting in the present back to a resource from my childhood, integrating this historical technique with a world of betweenness, a world organized not around constraints, but possibilities.

Creating Rabbonia is how I materialize externally the alternate scape that exists inside me; it is where my artistic project and everyday rituals meet. As the number of creatures increases, this new world evolves with them, and as the world changes, so do the creatures in it, a symbiosis reflecting influences from my gardening and permaculture practices. Like a continuous, flowing dialogue, the cosmology of Rabbonia is a space where I anchor in an imaginary of personal expression and intimacy with nature, transcending social limitations to offer another model of being and creating.



INSTALLATION VIEW
Lost wax casting, brass, 44 × 35 × 25 mm per piece, 2022



INSTALLATION VIEW
Recycled flyers, 2023/24



THE STOMACH TELLS THE TRUTH

As an extension of the Rabbonia project, exploring worldmaking and fluid boundaries, “The Stomach tells the truth” Series is an ongoing artistic inquiry aimed at engaging in discussions on contemporary societal issues in an environmentally friendly manner.

The media and techniques used in this project are multisensorial, spanning visual and tactile poetry, cultivation, collection, installations, scents, beverages, cooking, etc. As an artist, my intention through this project is to convey the following core ideas through a language of slow, thoughtful cycles of accumulation and production:

Firstly, that the main body organ, especially the stomach, possesses a unique consciousness. By communicating with my stomach and choosing food as the bridge for this interaction, the act of eating becomes a clear manifestation of this viewpoint.

Secondly, that the packaging of food involves careful selection and reflection and is processed to achieve a transformation of material forms. By working with these external materials, I not only contemplate the relationship between these objects and myself but also experience emotional changes within the relationship established between my stomach and me, seeking to understand my stomach and its dietary needs.

My relationship with my stomach is analogous to my interpersonal relationships with others – the various people we interact with daily, pass by, or never see again... diverse individuals onto whom we project ourselves. Organs are no different, and through my stomach, I aim to reach a greater understanding of my interactive and relational experiences, materialized through the application of craft and technology related to my body.

The visual/tactile poetry section of the project involves a significant amount of glass beads. This choice is influenced not only by my six-month experience with bacterial processing, leading me to recognize the unseen com-

ponents constituting our world, but also by the potent energetic force within these bacteria. The glass beads symbolize the microcosmic systems in the universe, forming a microscopic cosmos similar to the ecology of the human body itself.

Furthermore, each glass bead in the project is independent yet possesses a unifying cohering singularity, resembling individual human lives. By stitching them together with needle and thread, I intend to express that every person is not an isolated island but an interconnected part of the world.

The dimensions of the visual/tactile poetry artworks primarily adhere to A4 size, a choice made considering eco-friendliness and aligning with principles of emission reduction and sustainability.

In summary, the „The Stomach Tells the Truth” project, through various artistic forms, deeply explores the relationships between the individual and the environment, body and society, and addresses identity issues in the context of a diverse contemporary society. It interweaves themes of ecological awareness, interpersonal relationships, individual and collective experience, and cultural integration, conveying my personal worldview through the language of artmaking.



INSTALLATION VIEW AT ARTIST HOME GARDEN, USTER, CH
Visual / Touch poetry, mixed media, vegetable paper, thread, needle, textile, etc.
Dimensions Variable, 2024



Visual / Touch Poetry, mixed media, vegetable paper, thread, cotton nets, candy's papers, green aventurine beads, needle, magnets, etc.
21.7 × 29.6 × 1 cm, 2023-2024





INSTALLATION VIEW

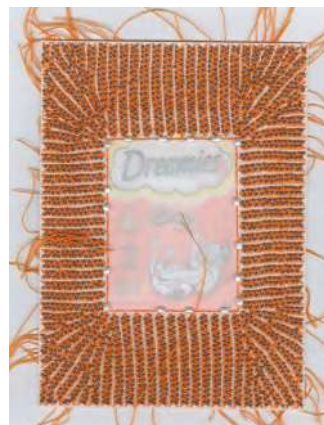
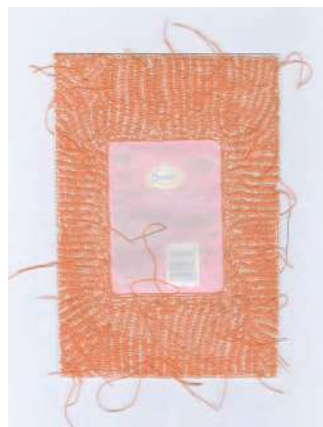
Dimensions Variable, mixed media, paper doilies with urushi, chips with urushi, plants, recycled postcards, etc., 2023/24

THE FATHER MISHU

A final work related to principles of sustainability and personal impact is the Dedicated to Mishu series, with nine different versions so far, again an example of visual/tactile poetry produced from the metallic skins empty cat finger food packaging. Over the years that I have lived in Switzerland, I have been nurturing a relationship with Mishu, a local cat who often drifts into our yard at opportune moments seeking food. As I have gotten to know Mishu, I have identified his angry or aggressive personality with that of my father back in China, whose behaviors always alienated me as a child. My dynamic with the cat has been a way to remediate the power balance with my father, to bridge the physical and emotional distance between us and transform our cold relationship to one of intimacy; indeed, I now see Mishu as a sub-consciously reborn version of my biological father, who I have not communicated with since leaving China. Mishu provides me with a love that I have not been able to share with my biological father; hugging his body, as I have never hugged my father, and feeding him finger food is a means of subtle exchange that nourishes my everyday domestic life. Mishu's frequent desire to be fed is likely due to his castrated status; I, too, have castrated my father, in his absence from my current existence, and simultaneously restored his generative power through my feeding of Mishu and my Dedicated to Mishu artworks. Yet even projecting these human issues onto an animal is a critically nuanced decision. Through the visual/tactile poetry weaving of this series, I am able to consider questions around human and animal love, alongside ideas of what constitutes ownership, intimacy, and personal freedom.



Photo documentation, 2023
Mishu is waiting for the food.



Visual / Touch poetry, mixed media, vegetable paper, thread, glass beads, freshwater pearls, needles, magnets, etc.
21 × 29.7 × 0.3 cm each, 2022–2024

GARDENING

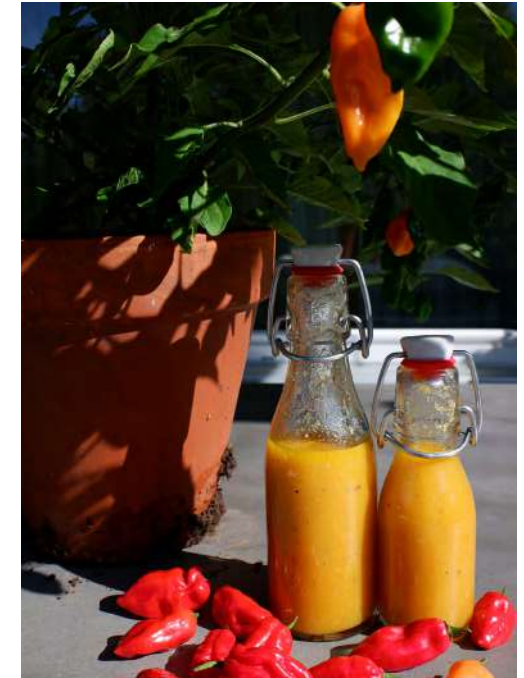
In terms of cultivation, from planting Habanero peppers in spring to harvesting their full-grown selves in autumn, this process involves collecting seeds from the fruits and vegetables I enjoy in my daily life, sowing them in the appropriate season, and cultivating them using organic planting standards. In a sense, this is an extension of my artistic life and an expression of my sustainable lifestyle.

I come from Chongqing, a place with a humid climate throughout the year. As they say, the local environment shapes the people, and in the Sichuan-Chongqing region, daily life is inevitably intertwined with chili peppers. Chili peppers play a role in dehumidifying the body in a hot, humid climate. Yet chili peppers are not originally from Chongqing but from the other end of the earth, the Americas.

In today's era of hyper-globalization, issues around agricultural indigeneity and intercultural exchange are repeatedly discussed by various groups, collectives, and individuals, mainstream and marginalized alike. Perhaps the foods, the fruits of cross-planetary interactions, like the chili pepper, can reveal something about how we communicate, and our approach to their integration should also be constantly updated in the context of the current era.

Living in Switzerland and eating the foods I loved in the past, in my hometown, with my knowledge of their plural origins, I can transform that love into a part of my body, carefully preserving the seeds of beloved fruits and vegetables, waiting for the right season to sow and nurture them in my present environment, far away from Chongqing. Unknowingly, I have been cycling through the process of photosynthesis with the chili peppers, and other familiar foods, for about four years. As Donna Haraway said, 'Make kin, not babies': as fellow travellers, moving with me between the Americas, China, Switzerland, these plants have become my kin.

Such practices are ordinary and part of my daily life. The process of interacting with the land allows me to physically experience reverence for nature. It prompts me to contemplate the relationship between humans and nature and how to maintain a balanced state between the two.



Artist's home garden photo documentation, 2023



EXHIBITION VIEW AT HOTEL TIGER ZURICH
Mixed media, organic dried chili, glasswares, organic wild walnuts, vodka, various spices, etc., 2024

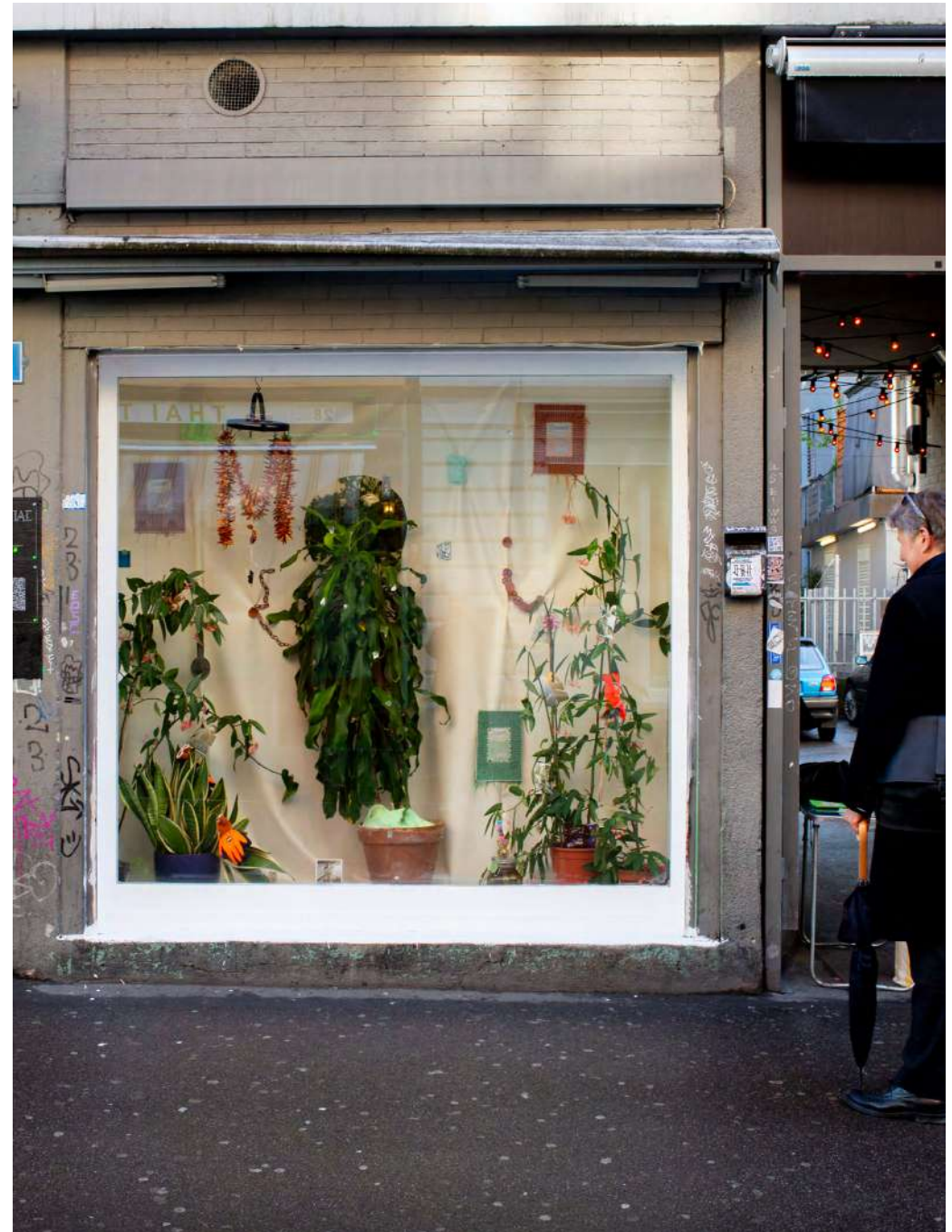


NOTES OF A CHAMELEON

For “Earth,” the first in a sequence of cyclical exhibitions, ΚΟΜΠΑΣ / Kompass presents Notes of a Chameleon, spotlighting the work of Ni Daodao, an artist deeply concerned with eco-friendly living and notions of care. Daodao’s work is produced from the detritus of their daily consumption through rituals of cultivation and collection, accumulation and transmutation. The installation at Dienerstrasse spans artwork from the series The Stomach Tells the Truth and Dedicated to Mishu (a local cat the artist identifies as a subconsciously reborn version of their estranged biological father), sited within their ‘Rabbonia’ conceptual universe. Daodao’s visual and touch poetry takes shape through long hours of exchange with repurposed objects, from printed flyers to consumer packaging, foodstuff, and wine corks that are meticulously cut, sewn, or layered with urushi, a tree resin lacquer historically rooted in China, particularly, the artist’s hometown of Chongqing.

Conceived for Dienerstrasse’s vitrine format, Notes of a Chameleon evokes the immersive, porous atmosphere of the artist’s garden studio in Uster, Switzerland, where the elusive ‘Rabbonia’ “blooms” year-round through the interaction of flora, fauna, and form. Somewhere between an overgrown moon gate, a portal and a peephole, with nods to Hélio Oiticica and Petra Blaisse, the exhibition suggests the multisensorial quality of Daodao’s practice while locating it along a horizon line of windowed potential; befitting the springtime debut of the Kompass programme, and equally, its anticipated denouement, amid planned renovations in the Langstrasse district. Small in scale and ambitious in scope, Daodao’s works respond to such a context with the peppery flair of a chameleon, or even the artist’s beloved “chameleon plant” (*Houttuynia cordata*, indigenous in Southeast Asia): as fluid, nomadic referents across registers of ornamentation and play.

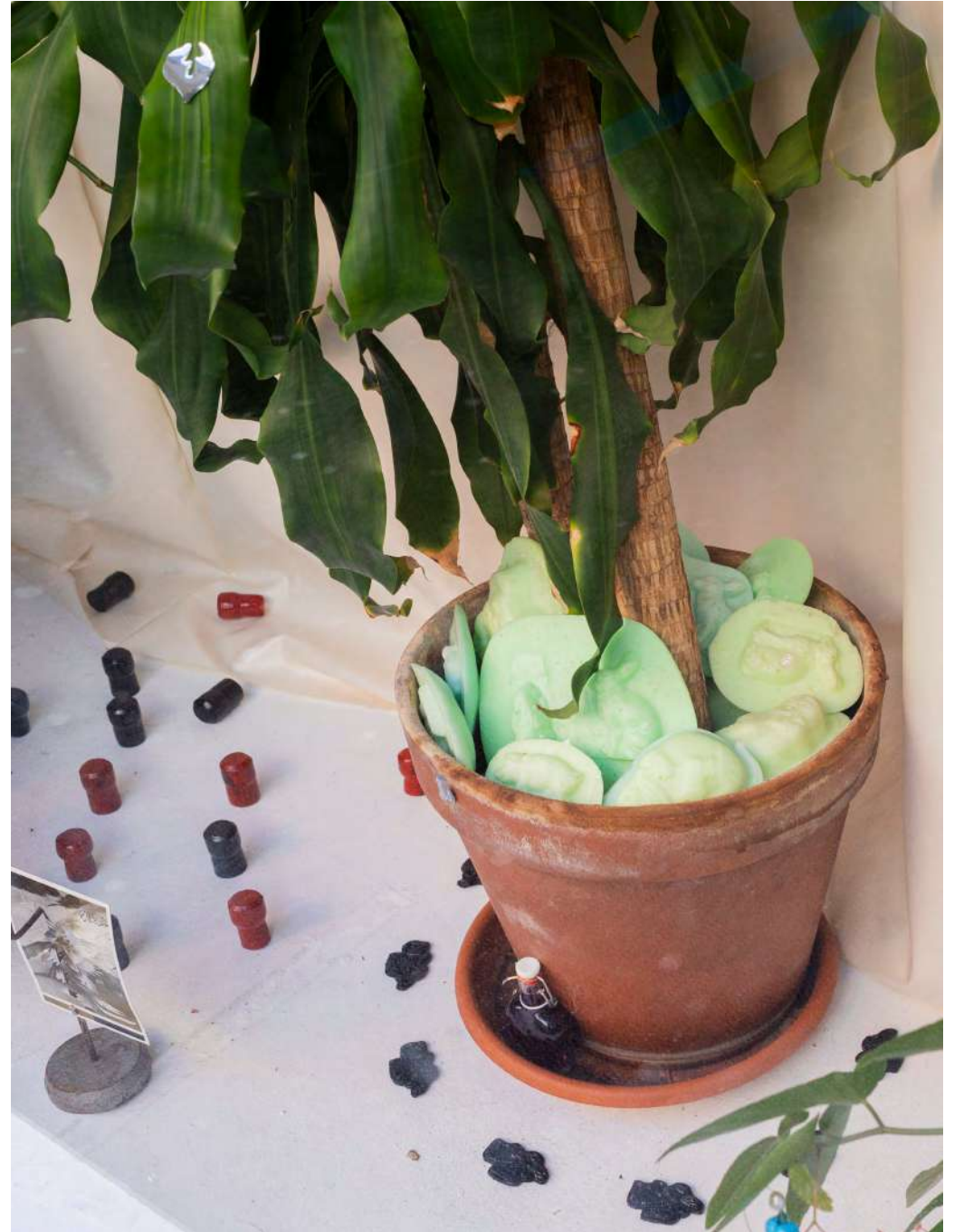
EXHIBITION VIEW AT KOMPASS SPACE ZURICH, 2024
Mixed Media, artist home's plants, copper, urushi (Chinese lacquer) etc.



Photographer: Massimiliano Rossetto



EXHIBITION VIEW AT KOMPASS SPACE ZURICH, 2024
Mixed Media, artist home's plants, copper, urushi (Chinese lacquer) etc.



Photographer: Massimiliano Rossetto



ACTIVATION PERFORMANCE, 60 MINUTES, 2024
Mixed Media, Laoying Cha Tea (from artist's hometown Chongqing)
Home-Fermentation alcohol, etc.

Photographer: Massimiliano Rossetto

GENDER FLUID · BLUE

This piece is my response to and protest against the Swiss Parliament's refusal to recognize the third gender. Gender fluidity symbolizes the pursuit of ultimate freedom, the unrestricted flow of gender. As articulated by the British writer Virginia Woolf in her theory of androgyny, this goes beyond distinctions of male or female; it is a profound indication of self-awareness and a willingness to face the ambiguities of reality. To strive beyond the constraints of gender requires an understanding of historical context and personal freedom, paving the way towards a more tolerant, higher perspective. While none of us can choose the era, nation, or social class of our birth, we can, at the very least, make specific judgments and engage in practices that intervene in the conditions of the things around us. To deeply understand oneself is a beginning and the central principle of my work.

ACTIVATION PERFORMANCE, 20 MINUTES, 2023
Vegetable paper, textile, glass beads, balloon, etc.
Dimensions Variable



Photographer: Dietmar Gunne

SEASONS IN TIBET

*When the iron bird flies,
And horses run on wheels,
The Tibetan people will be scattered like ants across the world,
and the Dharma will come to the land of the Red Man.*

– Prediction attributed to Padmasambhava, 8th century

According to Swiss media reports, when „exiled Tibetans“ apply for residence permits and passports in Switzerland, their „Tibetan nationality“ or „statelessness“ is no longer recognized. The field for „country of birth“ can only be filled in as „China,“ and identity documents can only be marked as „Chinese citizens.“ After the change of nationality, „exiled Tibetans“ are treated as Chinese citizens for management purposes. When engaging in business, tourism, and other activities in Switzerland, they also need to apply for relevant documents through the Chinese embassy. Due to the long-standing refugee issues troubling Europe, the Swiss government has repeatedly tightened its refugee acceptance policies.

Since I first visited Tibet in 2010, I have been to the region countless times. I have developed a deep connection with the Tibetan land. Again and again during my travels, I listened to stories of displacement from my Tibetan friends and witnessed brutal acts of repression in the region, reading books on the socio-political history of modern and contemporary Tibet, such as re-

searcher Li Jianglin's *When the Iron Bird Flies: China's Secret War in Tibet*. As I continue to learn more about Tibet's suffering and grief, I feel deeply that the history of Tibet needs to be known. As an artist and a person who values ideas of universal freedom, beyond national boundaries, I resonate with the Tibetan people's struggle for liberation and believe my artistic practice can be a means to communicate their pain to the world. Tibetan prayer flags are small square flags with printed religious texts and images used by Tibetan people to connect human world, nature, and the world of the gods. I have collected many of these flags upon my past trips to Tibet. They have accompanied me along my own migration from mainland China to Europe, and then to Switzerland where I have settled. Due to historical migration policies that made Switzerland accessible to the Tibetan community, there are thousands of overseas Tibetans living here, mostly in the Alpine region, where the environmental condition is similar to Tibet. The Linzhi region in Tibet is even known as the Little Switzerland of the East. Having grown up in mainland China that absorbed Tibet into its borders, and now, as a Swiss resident, I feel it is important to create works that tell the story of Tibet's evolution for audiences (Chinese, Swiss, international) who may not be aware of its history due to censorship and political limitations. Tibetans are constantly surveilled by China's government and are often unable to share what they are subject to with the outside world, and there is even unwillingness to do so while in exile, as in Switzerland. I see it as my responsibility, being a Chinese national and an artist who has visited Tibet's land and developed an emotional relationship to its people, to work as a messenger for their experiences, but for many years I did not know how to. In December 2022, when Zurich had its first snowfall of the year, reminding me of the Tibetan landscape, I decided to create visual and tactile poems and combine them with performance and video installation. Through my artistic practice, I hope to evoke the history and heritage of Tibet, for broader public awareness, in Switzerland and beyond.



WINTER IN TIBET
Visual / Touch Poetry



Mixed media, Tibetan prayer flags, vegetable paper, thread, glass beads, freshwater pearls needles, magnets, etc.
21 × 29.7 × 0.3 cm



SPRING IN TIBET
Performance photo documentation, 2023



Photographer: Dietmar Gunne

Ni Daodao 倪島島

Living and working in Switzerland

EDUCATION

Master of Fine Arts, Zurich University of the Arts
Sep. 2022–Jun. 2024

Jewellery and Object, Goldschmiedeschule Pforzheim (DE)
Sep. 2020–Jul. 2022

Contemporary Jewellery Ar.Co, Centro de Arte e Comunicação Visual
Lisbon (PT), 2019–2020

Bachelor Degree, Chinese Painting Department, Chengdu Academy of
Fine Arts & Sichuan Conservatory of Music, Chengdu (CN)
Sep. 2008–Jul. 2012

CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION

Lacquer & Design Training Program, Tsinghua University Academy of Arts
& Design, “Sulwhasoo Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding Project”,
Beijing (CN)
May–Oct. 2018

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITION

Apr.–May. 2024 “Notes of a Chameleon”, Kompass Space, Zürich (CH)
Jun.–Aug. 2022 “Ren Ren”, Doppelpunkt Buchhandlung, Uster (CH)
Jul.–Sep. 2020 “To Be Continued”, Doppelpunkt Buchhandlung, Uster (CH)

COLLECTIVE EXHIBITION

Feb. 2024 “What is the Earth had multiple suns”, Hotel Tiger, Zürich (CH)
Dec. 2023 “GIFT”, ZHdk, Zürich (CH)
Nov. 2023 “Language is the accumulation of connections where there were
no such connections” Istituto Svizzero, Milano (IT)
Apr. 2023 “Poles Royce”, ZHdk, Zürich (CH)
Dec. 2021–Jan. 2022 Galeria Reverso Lisbon (PT)
Dec. 2021 “Dialog der Kulturen”, Schmuckmuseum Pforzheim (DE)
Jan.–Feb. 2021 “DLUG-DLOG”, Udstillingssted for Tekstil, Copenhagen (DK)
Dec. 2020–Apr. 2021 “HOPE”, Galeria Reverso Lisbon (PT)
Nov. 2019 Evolution 1st International Wearable Art Exhibition,
Hubei Institute of Fine Arts, Wuhan (CN)
2018 Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding Project,
Tsinghua University Sulwhasoo, Yongle Palace, Ruicheng (CN)

ART RESIDENCY

Mar. 2019 TraditioNOW Chinese Handicrafts Residence Nanjing (CN)

AWARDS

ZHdk Fund for International and Intercultural Student Projects 2023

WORK EXPERIENCE

May 2016–May 2018 Director of QingYun Art Center Residency Programs (CN)
Sep. 2013–Jun. 2015 Curator Assistant and Coordinator, Organhaus
ChongQing (CN)