

# Xi Li: The Transcendence Labyrinth of Idols

*The Idol Reveal* (2021-ongoing) is an ambitious, interdisciplinary project drawing upon the artist's treatise "The Subject Exploration and Artistic Practice in Idol Worship." Within this research, Xi Li questions how cultures are arguably becoming more mythical within contemporary society because of the status and devotion to pop icons and celebrity figures. Li uses symbolism- the use of signs to represent something beyond literal meaning- to understand how we construct our sense of self in the digital and virtual landscape.

Li uses the term "idol worship" to encompass the practice of spiritual devotion as a means of understanding your own identity. Throughout the exhibition, idol worship serves as a frontier that crosses over onto our ideas of the "self" with our desire for spiritual belief to give meaning to our physical lives but often interfaces through a digital platform.

The installation comprises 11 posters which hang from the ceiling, encompassing the viewer in a circumambulation, framing the central video work on the gallery's back wall. Flowery, ornate, and detailed surfaces combine with figures seemingly unrelated to any pre-existing culture and are ambivalently all-encompassing. The mythological "idols" are

towering and totem-like, presiding over a meditative, introspective, beautiful utopia. Li bridges classically depicted divine bodies with new figures of worship drawn from contemporary celebrity culture.

On the floor, two more projections use a circular diagram motif drawing upon French psychoanalyst Jaques Lacan's illustration of the "object petit a," defined as any object which sets desire in motion. Li frequently draws from the theoretical frameworks of Lacan, who became known for his ideas about linguistics and intersubjective relations. Alongside the video projections, three 3D-printed sculptures are raised on podiums – which could arguably be interpreted as altars. Together, they create an immersive spectacle that envelops and swallows the viewer into a world of "surreal dream utopia." *The Idol Reveal* is a digital visualisation of the artist's idea of "a critical process of self-inquiry on Idol worship," which is an externalisation of her "inner consciousness and inner strength."

Li deconstructs how we use symbols to create our world to escape what she calls the "symbolic order," meaning that we are making our realities through symbols and the imaginary rather than only being driven by the material real world.

## **Video work abstract**

*The Idol Reveal: From Infatuation to Mysterious* is a set of spiritual field maps informed by ideas of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Lacan wrote extensively on the relationship between the “self” and the “imaginary” to deconstruct the boundaries between fantasy and reality.

The *Idol Reveal: From Infatuation to the Mysterious* consists of three scenes: “Absolute infatuation”, “Relative infatuation”, and “Mysterious order”. These scenes are filled with revelatory mythological imagery, such as intricately rendered totems, poetic idols, majestic sculptures and otherworldly plants that symbolise energy. Li has constructed a transcendent universe where the material is borrowed from the “real world” yet transcends far beyond it into a subconscious “id” – which psychoanalysts have described as the realm driven by desire and intuitive impulses.

# Poems from *The Idol Reveal*

## Idol I

“The essence of nature came out of the sky and the earth, and there are daytime meteors in the eyes. That mighty beam of light is gathering and shining on the fighters who are daring to the other side. He kills and decides, and he is full of love. Facing the endless boulder valley and cliffs, he gave birth to a vigorous bonfire in pain, illuminating the entire abyss. Dear warrior, are you facing a common feast with me, can you join hands with me and rush to the new era without boundaries.”

“天地间化出来的自然精华，眼中蕴藏着白昼流星。那有力的束光正聚拢照耀着勇猛前往彼方的斗士。他杀伐决断，他爱意充盈。面对着一望无际的巨石山谷，悬崖峭壁，他在痛感中生出了旺盛的篝火，照亮了整个万丈深渊。亲爱的勇士，你是否与我面对着共同的狂宴，是否能与我携手，冲向那无界限的新纪元。”

## Idol II

“He is a fateful midsummer dream, a blurry night with immortal air. He sits on the mountains, rivers and seas, leaps over the plains and forests, and swims with silent waves. He can change shape with any container, sometimes vast Boundless, deep and boundless; sometimes flying and swaying. I stood on the lake where the still water was deep and the water was flowing, and the moist aroma came to my nostrils, watching another story where dreams and reality are mysteriously intertwined.”

“他是命运般的仲夏之梦，是飘荡着仙气的迷离之夜。他坐拥山川河海，跃过平畴的山林，游动着寂静海浪。他能随着任何容器改变形态，时而广阔无边，深邃无际；时而纷飞飘散，摇曳生姿。我站在那静水流深，流觞曲水的湖面之上，潮湿的香气扑鼻而来，遥望着另一个梦境与现实神秘交错的故事。”

### Idol III

“The sacred earth with a spirit inside, exudes a dazzling brilliance in the border area. You actually contain the sun, moon, stars, rivers, land, mountains and rivers, and the bridge of all things. Growing freely in your arms is adorned with soft spring light and eternity of life, there is such a soft and fluffy life force. Whether it is a hurricane or a dazzling star, I only wish to entrust that romantic spirit to you, but I find that you have already given me all your love.”

“内部有灵的神圣之大地，在畛域散发着夺目光彩，你的身上竟包含着日月星辰、河流、土地、山川、万物弥合。在你怀中自在成长缀着柔软的春光和生的永恒，竟存在着如此柔软蓬松的生命之力。无论是飓风狂浪还是耀眼星芒，我只愿将那浪漫的精神寄托于你，却发现你早已给予我全部的爱意。”

## 从迷到谜 From Infatuation to the Mysterious

在符号的海洋中肆意挥洒心灵感应

看着生命的神秘 漩涡和川流彼此相遇

若是在万物之中去寻找谎言

也许是又一个失望的奇迹

这沉醉的幻想

这世俗的顶点

这无限的神话

# About the artist

Xi Li (李曦) is an interdisciplinary artist from Harbin, China, based in Tāmaki Makaurau, New Zealand. She received a Bachelor of Photo Media from Whitecliffe College of Arts and Design in 2019 and was awarded the 2019 Whitecliffe Photo Media Prize. In 2021 she received Master of Fine Arts with first class honours at Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland. In the same year, 2021, Li was awarded Te Tuhi's Iris Fisher Scholarship.

Xi Li's creative practice includes film, digital image, photography, installation, performance, 3D animation, VR, game design, music, and multidisciplinary fields. She explores various experimental concepts through Eastern and Western philosophical frameworks, with topics covering identity, ideology, subjectivity, subculture, popular culture, globalization, and more. Li is dedicated to capturing visual imagery in macroscopic thinking and subjective perception, constituting the expression of and challenge to that links theoretical research to artistic practice.



Principal funders



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