

SMOOTH 丝滑

0 · Welcome

Hello, and thank you all for being here.

(Acknowledge live: the curator Gu Zhenqing, the exhibition director Liu Ke, the project coordinator Echo Can Luo, the museum team, our partners Pro Helvetia and the Austrian Federal Ministry, and our guests and friends.)

Our name is UBERMORGEN. Here in Dongguan, we are Billie Bernhard and Luzius Bernhard, representing the team. We will walk you through the show. It takes about fifteen minutes. After that, the rooms are yours.

1 · The idea: SMOOTH

This exhibition is called SMOOTH. In Chinese, 丝滑.

SMOOTH is the feeling of a world with no friction. No waiting. No rough edges. You want something, and it arrives.

Your phone is smooth. Your feed is smooth. Your face in the camera is smooth. The products you use every day are smooth.

This is the great promise of our time. Everything optimized. Everything easy. Everything handled.

But every smooth surface has a back side. Someone built it. Something is hidden under it. This show is about what is hidden.

One sentence holds the whole exhibition: you already wanted this. We did not arrive here by force. We asked for it.

2 · The world we work in

We live inside optimization. Software decides what we see. Algorithms decide what reaches us. And now AI makes the images, the text, and the faces.

The machine is very good at making things smooth. Maybe too good.

Here is the problem. Feeling lives in friction. Anger needs an obstacle. Joy needs a surprise. Even sadness needs something rough to hold on to.

When everything is smooth, the feelings have nowhere to land. So where do they go?

That question is the heart of this exhibition.

3 · Who we are: UBERMORGEN

UBERMORGEN means the day after tomorrow. We are an art team from Vienna, thirty years old, and among the first artists to use the Internet as a material. People called us net.art pioneers, and media hackers.

We do not paint pictures of the world. We work inside the systems that run it: networks, companies, algorithms, markets, and institutions. In the year 2000 our project Voteauction, a fake marketplace for selling votes in the United States election, reached 500 million people and worried the FBI, the CIA, and the NSA.

Our work has shown at the Centre Pompidou, the Whitney, SFMOMA, the Serpentine, and the Biennale of Sydney. Last week one of our early works was at Art Basel, in its new section for digital art, Zero 10. So last week we were in Basel, and this week we are with you in Dongguan.

We also lead the Digital Art department at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna. We teach, and many of you study, the

same question: what are the infrastructures and the hidden layers that make the world the way it is now. SMOOTH is our first solo exhibition in mainland China. So this is partly your show too.

[Walk into Hall 1]

4 · Hall 1 · Suspended Servers

Every smooth experience runs on real machines. Servers. Cables. Cooling. Heat. They sit in large grey buildings far away, and we are built to forget them.

In this room we bring the real machines back. These are retired blade servers, the kind that used to run the cloud. We hang them in the air on white ropes.

Then we pour white paint over them. The paint is still wet. It drips.

White is the color of smooth. Clean, calm, finished. But the paint is uneven. It cannot fully cover the machine. The roughness shows through.

For the thinkers, the artists, the curators, and the designers here, this is simple and important. This is the back of every product anyone will ever make. The hardware, the labor, the waste, the heat. The smooth surface always sits on top of something heavy.

The machine is painted over and quieted so fast that, by the time you look up, it is already all white. And very calm. You almost cannot tell anything was ever there.

[Walk into Hall 2]

5 · Hall 2 · Bed of Sound

Smoothness is not only screens. It is also the body. Sleep, recovery, wellness, the best version of yourself. Be calm. Feel good.

In this room there is a bed. You can lie on it. Inside it there are speakers, light, and very low sound.

The sound is already inside the bed. It moves through your body and finds the places you cannot reach by yourself.

The sound in this room is also connected to the servers in the first hall. But it is in the wrong place. Does that make sense? We do not know. But it creates some friction.

It is gentle. It takes care of you. The room rests you.

But notice one thing. This is the only room in the show that is really about feeling. That low sound is a body trying to feel something again.

And the surface is so perfect that you leave no trace on it, and it leaves no mark on you. You lie down, you stand up, and nothing has changed. The white does not take a mark.

So this is also the most hopeful room. It is a place that still wants you to feel.

[Walk into Hall 4]

6 · Hall 4 · The Social Screening

This is the smoothness of the feed, of the timeline, of the face we show online.

It is a ridge of soft white mountains. Not a carpet, but you can sit on it and take selfies, or you can watch. It is the same thing. Because you are looking at people who are looking at themselves, and they do not know that you are looking.

Low along the walls there are many screens. Each screen holds one person.

These are the residents of SMOOTH. They are calm, polished, endlessly pleasant. They keep smiling. They keep performing.

Each one makes a small gesture of connection. A kiss. A hello. Offering a cake. A hand near the cheek that says, I am thinking of you.

But there is no one to receive it. No name on the cake. No reply to the hello. They send love and attention into an empty room, and they keep doing it long after anyone stopped watching.

Sometimes a face slips into the wrong color for half a second, then corrects itself. Sometimes it is left unfixed, on purpose. That is the roughness coming up through the smooth.

They have no story behind them and no one beside them. Nothing behind them, nothing after them. They are perfectly connected and completely alone.

[Return to the center, or the entrance]

7 • Closing

So we end with the question we started with. In a world this smooth, where do all the emotions go?

Our answer is not that smooth is bad. Smooth is comfortable. We all wanted it.

The point is to see it. To see the back of the surface. The cost under the calm. The feeling that leaks out at the edges.

And especially for all the artists, the curators, the designers, and the students here: we are building, and we will build, the next smooth surfaces. We get to decide what they hide, and what they let us feel.

Thank you. Please take your time in the rooms. We are happy to answer your questions.