

CURA.

Zhou Siwei

I Sold What I Grow

Secession, Wien

21 June – 8 September 2024

Review by Giulia Colletti







In 1970, Alvin Toffler defined ‘future shock’ as a state of disorientation resulting from rapid and excessive change, arguing that the accelerated pace of technological and social transformations can overwhelm people’s ability to adapt, leading to significant distress. As societies evolve, new norms and values often emerge, sometimes conflicting with previous ones. This conflict can lead to cultural discomfort and moral uncertainty, contributing to the feeling of shock.

In the context of the exhibition *I Sold What I Grow* at the Vienna Secession, Zhou Siwei translates the complexities and contradictions of contemporary life, particularly in China, into whimsical and fragmented artworks. These pieces delve into the ambivalence of the digital age, the rampant flow of trade, and the relentless pace of late capitalism. Zhou's works merge together visual and cultural references, making everyday objects and symbols appear both familiar and uncanny, thus inviting diverse interpretations.

What Aby Warburg referred to as *Bildwege und Themen* is represented by Zhou's mark-making. Warburg explored how images and symbols from antiquity are transmitted, transformed, and reinterpreted through history; Zhou employs the apple [*APPLE (EV SLEEP naked)*, 2021–2023] as a central symbol in his recent works. The apple, with its ubiquitous presence — including as a subject that Chinese art students were required to copy from still life paintings by European artists — embodies a range of

cultural connotations, from its historical artistic depiction to its iconic status in the digital economy.

While Toffler suggested strategies for managing future shock through adaptive techniques, Zhou playfully challenges this urgency. He creates painted objects resembling mobile phone and iPad cases, using organic materials like corn starch and inscribing personal messages or slogans on them. By marking these surfaces as if they were human skin, Zhou underscores the seemingly intimate interaction between electronic devices and their users, and the standardized forms of personalization through changing designs. Echoing Yuk Hui's perspective, Zhou critiques technological determinism — the notion that technology develops independently and shapes society unidirectionally. Instead, he examines the interplay between technology and culture, emphasizing that technology is intricately intertwined with social contexts and vice versa [*Tattoo (Drifting Flame Malevich)*, 2023].

Just as Georgina Voss's recent work aims to uncover and examine the often-overlooked infrastructures and systems in everyday life, Zhou seeks to reveal these hidden elements, encouraging a deeper understanding of what the 'a.w.f.k.' condition truly entails. His work invites viewers to critically assess the systems that shape our lives, even as we believe we have control over them.

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**AI images:
Installation view, Secession 2024, photo: Iris Ranzinger
Courtesy: the artist**

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