

# ARTS CATALYST

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PRESS RELEASE

Gary Zhexi Zhang

***fud***

Commissioned by Arts Catalyst and Bloc Projects  
In partnership with Medialab Prado

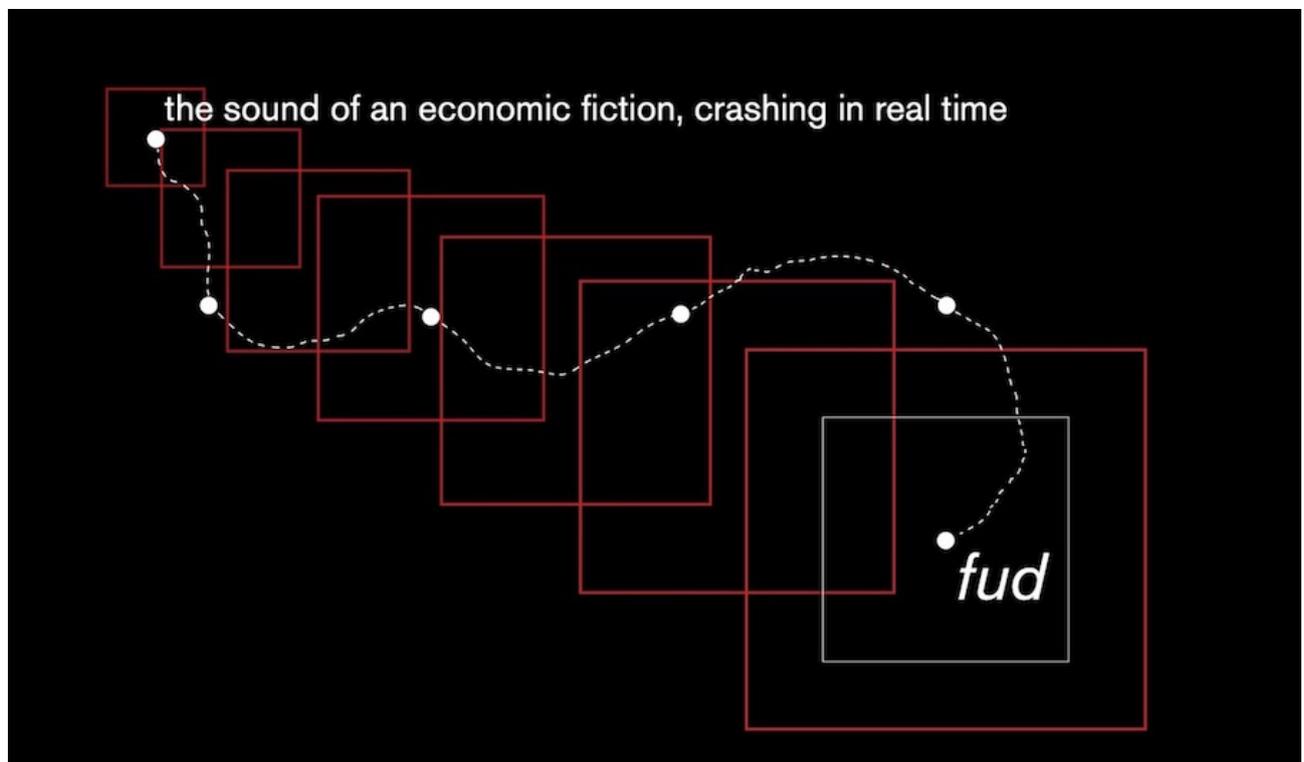


Image courtesy Gary Zhexi Zhang

*fud* is a new body of work by Gary Zhexi Zhang, drawn from the artist's research into the role of insurance in shaping the times and spaces we inhabit. Insurance has long been practiced as a form of protection from individual life and loss. However, in today's era of deep financialisation, insurers and reinsurers manage hazards at a planetary scale, connecting storm surges in Florida to nuclear reactors in Asia through global capital markets, hungry for risk. What were once "acts of God" become calculable, exchangeable resources to be mined from an uncertain future.

Over the past year, Zhang has been researching the "catastrophe industry", the billion-dollar market for insurance against hurricanes, earthquakes and droughts, priced through climate simulations and financial modelling. Over three episodes, *fud* explores the catastrophe industry

as an elaborate work of science fiction, in which the business of underwriting the earth begins to resemble the shaping of possible worlds.

This 18-month project comprises a digital commission (launching online 16 October 2020), an exhibition at Bloc Projects in Sheffield (April 2021), a residency at Medialab Prado in Madrid (2021) and an accompanying publication. A public programme (online and in person) will accompany the project throughout its development, engaging audiences through study groups, workshops and talks.

The first episode, a web-based artwork developed in collaboration with Agnes Cameron, will be launched online on 16 October. Zhang describes the work as a “simulation play”, a computer-generated narrative to be performed over the total duration of *fud*. On a website imagined as a catastrophe market observatory, human and software participants argue, speculate and negotiate over the value of emerging planetary disturbances. The moods and desires of the characters in Zhang’s generative narrative respond to live climatological activity and market signals. Over an anonymous chat server, their drama invokes the dynamics of online prediction markets, where bets are placed, contracts are exchanged and debts are underwritten over future scenarios. Over several months, their interactions veer from the banal to the prescient to the absurd, as each player seeks new ways to game the market in the face of global uncertainty.

The second episode, an exhibition taking place at Bloc Projects, Sheffield, will bring together a selection of real and fictional artefacts gathered over the course of Zhang’s research and interviews with simulation engineers, existential risk analysts, loss adjusters and financial astrologists. Through encounters with its materials and practitioners, the exhibition will engage with the making and shaping of catastrophic time.

While *fud* was originally conceived in late 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought the fragility of global infrastructures into plain sight. In the third episode, a residency at Medialab Prado, the artist will explore risk in relation to locality and statehood from a Southern European perspective. If insurance is a form of mutual security, how can its operation shift towards one of planetary accountability? And what will become of the anthropocene’s uninsurable hinterlands, cities and communities that find themselves beyond the calculus of financialised time and space?

*fud* forms part of the programme for *Ungovernable Machines*, Arts Catalyst’s ongoing strand of research investigating the social, political, economic and ecological implications of the intangible networks and systems that govern our daily lives, and the structures of power which underlie them.

*fud* is supported by the Elephant Trust, the Henry Moore Foundation and Arts Council England.

For further information, images or interviews, please contact Poppy Cockburn, Communications and Creative Digital Strategist via [poppy.cockburn@artscatalyst.org](mailto:poppy.cockburn@artscatalyst.org).

## PROGRAMME EVENTS

Two study groups led by the artist on the theme of “Catastrophe Time!”, exploring the temporality of global uncertainty and finance, will be held on 25 September and 2 October, both at 6 – 8pm UK

time. If you are interested in joining, please send an email to [admin@artscatalyst.org](mailto:admin@artscatalyst.org) outlining in one paragraph your interests and why you would like to join. Participation is free.

## NOTES TO EDITORS

**Gary Zhexi Zhang** is an artist interested in concepts that interface between concrete and abstract worlds, such as ecology, finance and information. Recent group exhibitions and screenings include Participation Mystique at Ming Contemporary Art Museum, Shanghai; the Swamp School at the Venice Architecture Biennale; Cross-feed at Glasgow International 2018, [vdrome.org](http://vdrome.org) (online) and All Channels Open at Wysing Arts Centre. Recent residencies include Delfina Foundation, [Schloss Web](http://Schloss Web) (with Agnes Cameron), SPACE Art & Technology, Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Praksis Oslo, CCA Glasgow and Wysing Arts Centre.

**Arts Catalyst** works across art, science and technology to produce ambitious new projects that critically engage with our changing world. It programmes exhibitions, events, residencies, performances and publications, often working in collaboration with national and international partner organisations from the fields of art, science and academia. Public programming is intrinsic to the organisation's work, creating space for conversation, debate and fresh thinking. Since 1994, Arts Catalyst has commissioned more than 170 artists' projects, including major new works by the Otolith Group, Agnes Meyer Brandis, Tomás Saraceno, Aleksandra Mir, Larry Achiampong and David Blandy, and Susan Schuppli. In late 2020 Arts Catalyst is relocating to Sheffield where it will continue its national programme and research strands.

Established in 2002, **Bloc Projects** is a contemporary arts organisation in the centre of Sheffield focusing on the support and development of contemporary artists at pivotal points of their careers. Bloc Projects provide a safe and stimulating environment that is free for the public to explore ideas and creative practices and regularly works closely with other local art organisations, universities and charities to ensure that their activities welcome a diverse and intergenerational demographic. An expansive programme provides opportunities for cross-disciplinary and participatory learning, meaningful arts engagement, and skill development for creative practitioners as well as wider publics. Over the past two decades, Bloc Projects has developed a range of pivotal projects led by artists such as Beatrice Gibson, Joy Labinjo, Joey Holder, Rachel Adams, Ben Jeans Houghton and Alex Farrar.

Based in Madrid, Spain, **Medialab Prado** is a laboratory for experimentation and cultural diffusion promoted by the Government Department of Culture and Sports of the Madrid City Council. It is a space that favours the encounter and the collaboration around open cultural projects. Activities are structured around work groups, open calls for the production of projects, collaborative research and learning communities that address a very wide range of topics.

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