

Hao Jingban: I Witness

October 23, 2026 – February 28, 2027

Reference Gallery



MIT List Visual
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Blending documentary sensibility with poetic construction, Hao Jingban makes evocative, formally experimental moving-image installations.

For Hao, film offers a way to understand others, and much of her process unfolds before and after filming. She has described how, when she began her *Beijing Ballroom* series (2013–16), she noticed the ways in which her sense of other people was shaped largely by the films she had watched. The often-romantic convention of imagining others through cinema shaped Hao's own sense of empathy and compelled her to work with moving images. At the same time, her projects have been largely rooted in archival research and fieldwork, with subjects ranging from ballroom dancers, whose pastime resurfaced after the Cultural Revolution, to the afterlife of films produced under Japanese occupation in Northeast China (in her *Manchukuo Film Project* [2018–21]).

Hao's ongoing interest in how a shared trauma in the past endures in the present often informs her use of the language of cinema: Voiceover, slow motion, and outtakes visualize histories that cannot be directly represented or tell stories that might otherwise not be conveyed. Working slowly, she treads carefully around histories that have been obscured, forgotten, or actively suppressed—often those shaped by political rupture, cultural transition, or

generational silence. As she builds trust with her subjects over months or years, she also allows room for refusal, anonymity, and fragmentation. For Hao, these formal choices complement the relationships behind them: The trust she builds with her subjects shapes what can appear on screen, and her cinematic strategies register, with equal care, what cannot.

An evocative three-screen montage, *I Witness* (2025) follows various people in Beijing living in the wake of different kinds of loss. The work dwells in the register of affect and largely outside of language. One channel observes an older woman in the rhythms of her daily routine: sleeping, eating, cleaning.

Another channel follows a group of people pacing back and forth along a grassy park area near a river in Beijing. As they move, some pause and remain in place, crouch, or lie on the ground; others continue to amble as a loose collective pacing an open field. Text surfaces across this channel, functioning as a poetic voiceover. For Hao, who had not previously worked with people in public space, this scene offers a study in collective movement. The participants proceed quietly and with evident care,

Front cover and above:

I Witness, 2025 (still). Three-channel video installation, 54:41 min. Commissioned jointly by the Han Nefkens Foundation, Mori Art Museum, M+, and Singapore Art Museum. Image: Courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery



I Witness, 2025. Installation view: Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, 2026.
Photo: Kato Ken. Image courtesy Mori Art Museum and Blindspot Gallery

connected in a subtle, particular way through the simple act of walking together.

The third channel features eight participants engaged in a somatic practice inspired by Authentic Movement, a therapeutic practice in which one person moves with their eyes closed while a partner observes as a witness. Working in pairs, they give form to loss through their bodies and movement; and their voices, as they share what surfaced, are the only ones heard in the work. Observing these self-organized groups of bereaved individuals, Hao reflects on how grief can fold inward, severing one from the outside world. Even as the world moves on, she observes, grief is a powerful tether to loss.

I Witness also marks a turning point in the artist's practice. During the pandemic, and in the years following as she became a parent, Hao began to question the rational frameworks that informed her research and

sought other ways of making sense of the world and our experience within it. With *I Witness*, she set aside the documentary impulse of her practice to approach history through feeling and intuition and as something constantly present, unfolding, and unresolved. *I Witness* considers how deeply history, and grief, can inform physical embodiment and movement.

The work's soundtrack gathers breath, murmurs, weeping, coughs, and the low hum and hiss of electronics. Paradoxically, it is the silence surrounding these sounds that resonates most, raising a question at the heart of the work: Can witnessing be silent, too? "Shall we try to truly see and feel others' grief," Hao has asked, rather than "claiming to understand from a safe distance?"¹ *I Witness* attempts to open a space in which that kind of empathy might occur, suggesting that witnessing, and bearing witness, may take place beyond language.

04 1 Hao Jingban, artist talk, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, December 3, 2025.

LEARN MORE

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

Hao Jingban lives and works between Yunnan Province, China, and Berlin, Germany. She received a BA from Goldsmiths, University of London, and an MA from the University of London. Recent solo exhibitions have taken place at Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2025); Matadero Madrid (2020); and OCT Contemporary Art Terminal, Xi'an, China (2019). Recent group exhibitions have taken place at venues including the 36th Bienal de São Paulo (2025); Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai (2025); TANK Shanghai (2024); West Bund Museum, Shanghai (2023); and Seoul Mediacity Biennale (2021); among others. Hao's works are in the collections of M+, Hong Kong; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Frac Bretagne, Rennes, France; the Power Station of Art, Shanghai; and Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona.

Hao Jingban: I Witness is organized by Natalie Bell, Chief Curator.

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