

EXHIBITION TEXT WRITTEN BY
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CACHES FROM THE LANDSCAPE CE QUE CACHENT LES MONTAGNES

风物缓存

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Mountain Memories

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The geographical features of mountains have long invited reflections on the interplay of nature and culture, where the ghostly presence of the past drifts into imaginings of the future. Cloaked in mist, they stand as silent witnesses, their contours etched with the weight of time, concealing traces of memories and transformations within their cracks and folds. How might we excavate these narratives buried deep beneath rock strata, and what insights might they reveal about the temporal entanglements that continue to shape and reshape the environment? In *Caches from the Landscape*, members of the art collective **The Nomadic Department of the Interior (NDOI)** traveled to the southwestern Chinese province of Guizhou, exploring the potential of images to uncover the layered temporalities inscribed within its mountainous terrain.

Presented through video, photographs, and printed textiles, *Caches from the Landscape* is a visual travelogue that captures a series of encounters with humans and landscapes. Moments of connection with Guizhou locals, the skeletons of desolate apartment buildings, and the relentless hum of ubiquitous construction sites—all these fragments unfold within the pervasive embrace of the province's peaks and valleys, whose enduring presence stands in quiet tension with the fleeting traces of human activity.

In the folklore of the Hmong people, an ethnic group residing in southwestern China and Southeast Asia, these mountains are revered as sacred hosts, while human presence

remains transient. Yet, their resources are tied to more recent histories. The slopes still bear the imprints of the Third Front Movement, a Cold War-era initiative to fortify the country's interior regions through the construction of military-industrial facilities. Tucked away in caves, these complexes were surrounded by housing projects built to shelter the tens of millions of workers recruited from across the country. Today, these structures lie in ruin—abandoned and eroded—and the stories of their past survive only in the memories of those who once called these spaces home.

But the mountains have not been left in peace. Where spirituality and secrecy once defined Guizhou's karst formations, the vibrations of modernization now reverberate across this land. Data centers creep into the terrain, encroaching upon its natural forms and rendering the mountains uncannily man-made. Fiber-optic communication cables snake through the earth and air, weaving a vast network of connectivity that stretches above, beneath, and beyond the surface. Flowing through this restless circuitry every second are endless words, images, and sounds—input as keystrokes and clicks, encoded into streams of zeros and ones, only to be reassembled and processed into our emotions, transactions, and relationships. All these currents then converge in the emerging tech plazas of what is called China's Big Data Valley, where a vision of progress and innovation is being shaped.

As if a portal through time has been opened, the historical moments of Guizhou's mountains collapse almost magically at the threshold of the present, in *Caches from the Landscape*. The images—edited montages of mountains, lakes, highways, plazas, town centers—evoke Walter Benjamin's *dialectical image*, forming a constellation of fragmented reflections, much like the labyrinthine Paris arcades that so captivated his imagination. This constellation, marked by the ambivalence and layering of these historical traces, resists any attempt to understand Guizhou through any singular, linear narrative. Instead, it gestures toward the unresolved raptures and tensions between nature and industry, past and present, and transformation and continuity, all of which invites us, as the audience, to reflect on the ways in which we relate to the environment we inhabit, the legacies we inherit and the futures we envision.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE EXHIBITION TEXT

Zihao Li (b. 1997, Nanchang, China) is a writer in Toronto with a master's in Film and Moving Image Studies from Concordia University. His research focuses on Chinese independent documentaries, particularly their technological developments and engagement with emerging media forms.