

## Compass for the Soul

About the *Sakya* (2011) project

*Sakya* is a new media art project from Zhang Xiaotao's studio, produced in collaboration with Professor Xu Tianjin from the Center of Archaeology and Art for the General Public (CAAGP) at Peking University and Professor Zhang Jianlin, an archaeologist from the Shaanxi Academy of Archaeology from 2006 to 2011. *Sakya* crosses domains, media, and disciplines in its intensive engagement with Tibetan Buddhism.

The Sakya School has played a significant role in the history of Tibetan Buddhism. The *Sakya* project combines methods from archaeology and digital art to investigate the historical evolution of Tibetan Buddhism and its value in a secular world. *Sakya* is a microcosm of Tibetan Buddhism; Tibetan Buddhism may be the plateau of the last spiritual world of mankind and a reflection of the afterglow of human civilization. I myself travel far and wide through thousands of rivers and mountains in the name of spiritual pilgrimage. Today we are facing the collapse of the spiritual world and the material world is closing in around us. People are in a vortex of intense conflicts and the contradictions of the times. How can digital art be used as an artistic tool to reconstruct the spiritual and the material, the global and the local, the individual and the world, and their interconnectedness? This is my most pressing concern for this project. During the five years that I spent completing *Sakya*, I walked through the vast and infinite world of Tibetan Buddhism. For me, it was a process of relearning and understanding Buddhism. This process is not only about faith, but also the cultivation of the flesh. The world today is facing a major challenge after the pandemic. The tremendous changes in technology and information technology are profoundly changing our time. We cannot know where the world is going. At this moment, discussing the connection between Buddhist beliefs and the secular world is an act of caring for our souls. Where can we find our souls? The flesh is mortal, but the spirit is immortal. In a turbulent world, do we still need a “navigator” for the soul?

# W.MING 蓮藝

Buddhism reveals to us the path of “wisdom” and “enlightenment.” I want to transfer the insights found in Buddhism into my art. Over the past ten years, the *Sakya* project has shown at many important international institutions and exhibition spaces. I hope that the *Sakya* project’s public presence will contribute a kind of “returning” power that can help spread Buddhism further. The Buddhist scriptures are as vast as the mist-clouded ocean. “The five scriptures are multi-flavored, and the ten thousand teachings are one word.” In the end, the artist still needs to use the “physical body” of art to measure this imaginary and absurd world. Art is the artist’s personal religion and personal beliefs. In this project, as an artist’s personal faith meets Buddhism, what is important is the encounter of a spiritual force of “religious ritual,” a charged connection between the individual and our contemporary era. This is the ultimate act of questioning life and death, awakening to “dependent origination” and the realization of “emptiness,” and traveling the road to Nirvana and deathless rebirth...