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# THE SHED **Press Release**

THE **BLOOMBERG** BUILDING  
545 West 30th Street  
New York, NY 10001

**Ian Cheng's *Life After BOB*, a New Form of Narrative Animation Imagining Life With Artificial Intelligence, to Tour Internationally in 2021 – 22**

**Commissioned by The Shed, Luma Arles, and LAS**

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Image from Ian Cheng's *Life After BOB: The Chalice Study*, 2021.

**New York, NY – June 14, 2021** – The Shed, as lead commissioner, is partnering with co-commissioners Luma Arles and LAS (Light Art Space) to present an international tour of **Ian Cheng's** new work ***Life After BOB***, a new form of narrative animation that imagines how artificial intelligence will transform the archetypal scripts that guide our lives. This tour features the first episode in the miniseries, *The Chalice Study*, a 48-minute animation constructed and presented “live” using the Unity video game engine. Through this innovative approach, *Life After BOB* integrates classic authored storytelling with simulated real-time features that enrich the viewer's relationship to the characters and details of their world.

The exhibition premieres at **Luma Arles** in Arles, France, in June 2021 and then travels to **The Shed** in New York for its North American debut September 10 – December 19, 2021, followed by its presentation by **LAS** in Berlin, in 2022. The Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art in Seoul, South Korea, provided support for the dynamic features for *Life After BOB*.

*Life After BOB: The Chalice Study*, introduces the character of Chalice Wong, a 10-year-old girl whose father, Dr. Wong, installs an experimental AI named BOB (“Bag of Beliefs”) into her nervous system to guide her through the challenges of maturing in an ever-changing world. As Dr. Wong begins to favor the BOB side of Chalice, and as BOB threatens to do the job of living Chalice's life better than she can, Chalice jealously wonders: what is left for her classic human self to do?

*Life After BOB* pioneers a new form of programmable narrative media that allows the viewer to more deeply explore the narrative's world, and even influence its contents. Cheng combines Unity's suite of real-time cinematic tools with an AI-mediated “world wiki” that grants the viewer read/write permissions to play with, modify, and extend the details of the fictive world by editing the wiki. The exhibition will showcase a large-scale experience of the narrative animation that foregrounds the drama of the story, but will also double as a living presentation of edits made to the *Life After BOB* world wiki. The exhibition will also include an interactive “World Watching” presentation of the animation that allows viewers to freely explore the details of the *Life After BOB* world at their own tempo.

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“*Life After BOB* imagines new archetypal characters for our ever-weirdening times, and gives life to them through an experience that integrates authored cinematic storytelling with open-ended simulated worlding,” said **Ian Cheng**.

In his recent work, Cheng has drawn on principles of video game design, improvisation, and cognitive science to create computer simulations that explore an agent’s capacity to deal with an ever-changing environment.

“Ian Cheng is at the vanguard of art and technology, defining how the medium has shaped and continues to shape our world,” said **Emma Enderby**, Chief Curator at The Shed. “His work confronts ongoing concerns with the relationship between bodily and cognitive experience. *Life After BOB* builds on Cheng’s ongoing exploration of the nature of mutation and the capacity of humans to relate to change, both within the story and within the experience of the work itself.”

“Ian Cheng is a truly innovative artist and a thinker who has expanded with his practice the field of possibilities,” said **Maja Hoffmann**, Founder of Luma. “Ian’s future-oriented approach is a constant inspiration for us. His work is groundbreaking, and we are thrilled to be hosting the world premiere of his recent explorations at Luma Arles. The Luma Foundation, Luma Arles, and myself personally have embraced Ian’s innovative thinking from early on in his career. It is a huge privilege to work with The Shed and LAS in supporting and presenting such a remarkable new commission.”

“Artificial intelligence presents some of the most urgent and intriguing possibilities for our times. At LAS we work with artists pushing the boundaries between art and new technologies, so I’m delighted to be working with Ian Cheng on this new project which uses cutting-edge technology to describe a provoking and unsettling imagined future, one in which the line between humans and machines has become startlingly blurred,” said **Bettina Kames**, Director of LAS.

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## About The Artist

Ian Cheng (born Los Angeles, 1984) is an artist living and working in New York. He has exhibited widely including solo presentations at MoMA PS1, New York; Serpentine Galleries, London; and Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh and group presentations at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art; New York; the 2019 Venice Biennale; Hirshhorn Museum; Washington, D.C.; Tate Modern, London; Louisiana Museum, Copenhagen; and Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris.

Since 2012, Cheng has produced a series of simulations exploring an agent’s capacity to deal with an ever-changing environment. These works culminated in the “Emissaries” trilogy, which introduced a narrative agent whose motivation to enact a story was set into conflict with the open-ended chaos of the simulation. Most recently, he has developed BOB (Bag of Beliefs), an AI creature whose personality, body, and life story evolve across exhibitions, what Cheng calls “art with a nervous system.” In 2015, Cheng founded Metis Suns, a production company dedicated to worlding and worlding literacy.

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## Co-Commissioners

LAS (Light Art Space) is a Berlin-based nonprofit art foundation working at the intersection of art, science, and new technologies. Championing new exhibition formats and experimental projects, LAS is committed to commissioning and presenting engaging experiences that are relevant to our local and international communities. Light is a leitmotif for the program, which fosters a future-led approach, challenging our perception of the present and stimulating future possibilities. [Lightartspace.org](http://Lightartspace.org)

A project of Luma Foundation, Luma Arles is a creative campus located at the Parc des Ateliers (Arles, France). It is home to seven former railway factories, four of which have been renovated by Selldorf Architects as exhibition and performance spaces alongside a 15,000 square meters tower designed by Frank Gehry. As a center of research, production and experimentation, Luma Arles is an ecosystem where artists, thinkers, scientists and civil society stakeholders work together on advancing environmental issues, human rights, creative productions and education. Each year, a programme of exhibitions and cross-disciplinary projects is presented in the renovated galleries of the Grande Halle, the Forges, the Mécanique Générale and the Formation. On June 26th, 2021, the opening of the Luma Tower, the surrounding gardens and public park designed with landscape architect Bas Smets, will complete the transformation of the Parc des Ateliers.

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## ***Life After BOB credits***

*Life After BOB* is produced by Veronica So; with animation producer Nicholas Sung; technical producer Ivaylo Getov; editor Jess Fulton; cinematography by Eric Yue; animation supervisor Valerie Scheiber; sound design by Akritchalem Kalayanamitr; and composer Brian Reitzell.

Featuring the voices of Poonam Basu, Cherami Leigh, Dana Lee, Gwendoline Yeo, Aly Mawji, Jennifer Swanner, and Sean Patton.

Research developed with The Transformations of the Human at the Berggruen Institute.

Production developed with Gladstone Gallery (New York) and Pilar Corrias Gallery (London).

Organized at The Shed by Emma Enderby, Chief Curator, with Alessandra Gómez, Assistant Curator. Production and exhibition support for *Life After BOB* at The Shed provided in part by the VIA Art Fund.

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## Current Programming

### **Open Call**

June 4 through August 1, 2021

Launched as part of The Shed's opening year program, *Open Call* is a large-scale commissioning program for early-career NYC-based artists. For its second iteration, 27 new artists will present new works in The Shed's Level 2 Gallery and The McCourt.

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Each artist was selected by interdisciplinary leaders and professionals in their fields, including other artists and members of The Shed's staff, to present work in 2021 and 2022. Selected artists received a commissioning fee of up to \$15,000 depending on the scope of their projects, robust production support, and resources to further nurture their practices and expand their audiences.

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## **Support**

The creation of new work at The Shed is generously supported by the Lizzie and Jonathan Tisch Commissioning Fund and the Shed Commissioners.

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## **About The Shed**

The Shed is a new cultural institution of and for the 21st century. We produce and welcome innovative art and ideas, across all forms of creativity, to build a shared understanding of our rapidly changing world and a more equitable society. In our highly adaptable building on Manhattan's west side, The Shed brings together established and emerging artists to create new work in fields ranging from pop to classical music, painting to digital media, theater to literature, and sculpture to dance. We seek opportunities to collaborate with cultural peers and community organizations, work with like-minded partners, and provide unique spaces for private events. As an independent nonprofit that values invention, equity, and generosity, we are committed to advancing art forms, addressing the urgent issues of our time, and making our work impactful, sustainable, and relevant to the local community, the cultural sector, New York City, and beyond.

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