

**ENG**

**CAO FEI  
DASH**

# THE EXHIBITION

**“Dash,” a title that refers to the high-speed movements of drones, is a multimedia project conceived especially by artist Cao Fei for Fondazione Prada.**

**The exhibition unfolds across the two floors of the Podium, the central space within Fondazione Prada’s exhibition compound, as an immersive environment combining video and virtual reality installations, documentaries, and historical archival material. The exhibition space immerses visitors in what Cao Fei describes as “a contemporary agricultural archaeological site,” where the present intertwines with the past and the future.**

**Over the last three years, Cao Fei has conducted extensive research with XAG—a leading smart agricultural technology company that works in rural regions of Southern and Northwestern China, as well as in Southeast Asia—as a central case study documenting how “smart agriculture” through data-driven systems operates in the fields and influences local communities.**

**Currently, agriculture faces significant challenges worldwide, particularly in China: water scarcity linked to climate change, rising global food demand, and a growing labor shortage driven by rural depopulation and migration to urban centers. “Dash” reflects on how extensive technology implementation—including agricultural drones, sensor systems, and artificial intelligence—enhances efficiency, reduces manual labor, and safeguards food security. At the same time, Cao Fei’s investigation considers the broader cultural and social implications of this transformation, which shapes agricultural production and redefines relationships between humans and the land. Traditional knowledge and spiritual practices are not being discarded, since farmers are creating a unique blend of ancient rituals and new technologies.**

**The project situates smart agriculture within a broader historical and geological perspective, bringing into focus its complexities and contradictions. Satellite positioning systems, artificial intelligence, and robots intersect with inherited culture and collective memory. Through this approach, “Dash” shows how technology implementation is more than a productive strategy as it actively re-**

shapes the conditions of life and labor on the land, raising questions about cultural continuity.

*Today, we depend upon—and are constrained by—hybrid networks created by humans, systems that combine immense efficiency with inherent paradoxes propelling agriculture into a new era called “intelligence.” Perhaps this is the dialectical image of contemporary farming: at once the most advanced technological testing ground and the most ancient geological script; reaching toward future farms on an interstellar scale while remaining deeply rooted in humanity’s most primordial and profound covenant with heaven and earth. We therefore ask: amid the stratigraphic upheavals of technological acceleration, how should we relate to these powerful forms of “intelligence,” which are neither pure objects nor traditional subjects? How might we establish new ethical and reciprocal relationships with them? What does true sustainability mean? And toward what kind of future are we moving?*

Cao Fei



Cao Fei, *Dash* (still), 2026. Courtesy of the artist, Vitamin Creative Space, and Sprüth Magers

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Cao Fei (b. 1978, Guangzhou) is an internationally renowned Chinese contemporary artist currently living and working in Beijing. She mixes social commentary, popular aesthetics, references to surrealism, and documentary conventions in her films and installations. Her works reflect on the rapid, developmental changes occurring in Chinese society today.

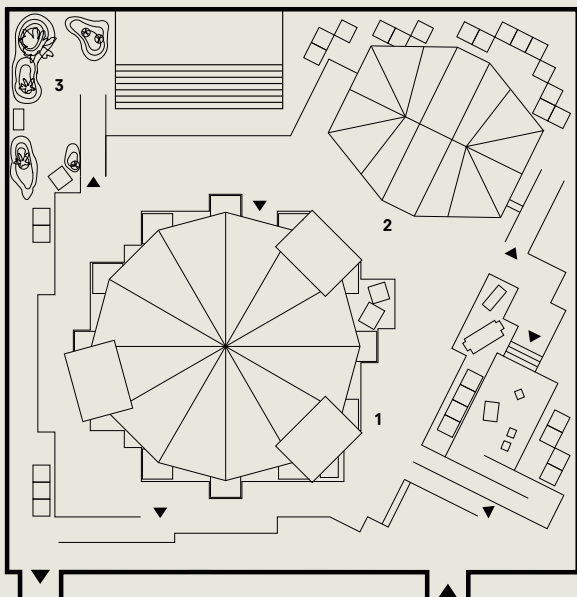
Cao Fei's works have been exhibited at numerous international biennials and triennials, as well as at major art museums, including MoMA and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, Tate Modern in London, and Centre Pompidou in Paris.

Her recent projects include a major retrospective at the UCCA Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing (2021); solo exhibitions at MAXXI, Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Rome (2021), Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen (2022), Pinacoteca Contemporânea, São Paulo (2023), Lenbachhaus, Munich (2024), SCAD Museum of Art (2024), Museum of Art Pudong, Shanghai (2024), Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney (2024), Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (2024).

Cao Fei was nominated for the Hugo Boss Prize and the Future Generation Art Prize in 2010. She received the Best Young Artist award at the China Contemporary Art Award (CCAA) in 2006 and the Best Artist award in 2016. In 2021, she won the Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation Prize and in 2024, she was awarded the SCAD deFINE ART Award. Cao Fei was named as an Established Artist Medalist at the 2025 inaugural Art Basel Awards.

The Kunstmuseum Basel | Gegenwart in Basel is devoting an extensive solo presentation to Cao Fei titled "Testimonies to the Near Future" in 2026.

# THE EXHIBITION



THE EXHIBITION  
CONTINUES  
UPSTAIRS

ENTRANCE/EXIT

1. *DASH*
2. *THE BIRTH*
3. *DASH-180C*

On the ground floor, visitors are welcomed into an immersive landscape composed of several interconnected structures and themed areas, including a rice granary tent, a new farmer station, a temple, a paddy, and a small banana plantation. These real-scale settings are combined with agricultural devices, solar panels, aerial imagery, screens, and drones, connecting technological infrastructure and symbolic space in a future archaeological site.

Upon entering the Podium, the structure modeled on a rice granary tent is the centerpiece of the project. This houses *Dash* (2026), a new film produced by Fondazione Prada. The film examines the evolving relationship between humans and the land through the millennial history of agriculture, now-reshaped by accelerating technological transfor-

mation. Agricultural drones play a central role in this narrative, as they embody a new form of “gaze” over the landscape, extending and empowering human perception. In the film, their movements inhabit the rhythm of the agricultural cycle, from sowing to harvesting, drawing attention to the growing interdependence between human labor and automated intelligence.

On the right, a workstation exemplifies how specialized technicians today remotely monitor agricultural drones with a central table documenting precision landing tests and technical demonstrations.

At the center of the Podium, a tent woven from fertilizer bags forms a temple-like structure titled *The Birth* (2026). It hosts a three-channel looping video on drone production processes, accompanied by harvest-related props. Inspired by field research conducted in Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam, this installation shows how farmers incorporate drones into local ritual frameworks, venerating them alongside traditional deities in prayers for abundance.

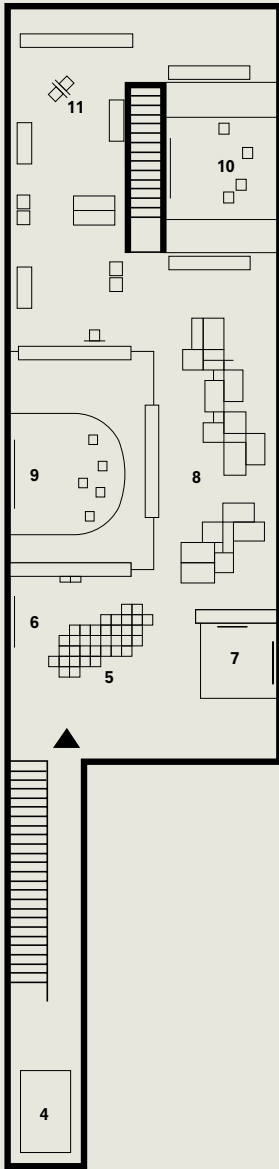
An area surrounded by artificial banana trees hosts *Dash-180c* (2026), a virtual reality game installation. By wearing a headset, visitors adopt the perspective of a discarded agricultural drone within a speculative future where technological revolution has profoundly changed farming and human culture. The experience unfolds from the flying drone’s point of view, moving across futuristic landscapes, altered geographies, and ruined temples, and reflecting on cycles of innovation and technological aging. Through this immersive scenario, the work invites consideration on how agency and perception may be redistributed in an increasingly automated world.

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The film *Dash* includes images and loud noises that some visitors might find disturbing.

Visitors who are prone to dizziness, have heart conditions, acrophobia, or other relevant health concerns are advised not to take part in the VR experience of the installation *Dash-180c*.

# FIRST FLOOR



- 4. LAND CEREMONY
- 5. PRECISION AGRICULTURE
- 6. COSMOS, HUMAN, TECHNICS
- 7. LAND OF PLENTY
- 8. LAND EVOLUTION
- 9. SUPER FARMS
- 10. SOUTHWARD JOURNEY
- 11. LAND DEBATE

On the first floor, the exhibition shifts into a research platform. Photographs, films, interviews, and historical archival materials are arranged within spaces conceived as reading rooms and screening areas, engaging visitors in a thoughtful reflection.

Before entering the main section, visitors are greeted by *Land Ceremony* (2026), an installation inspired by the Chinese rice-blessing ritual to invoke a prosperous harvest. The rice dragon is a symbol of the cyclical temporality of sowing and harvesting. Cao Fei reinterprets this ritual form, interweaving it with folk decorative materials and drones with agricultural components and solar panels.

Technological systems enter and transform existing cosmologies, becoming embedded within long-standing symbolic structures.

A reading corner, titled *Precision Agriculture* (2026), presents a curated selection of publications dedicated to research and emerging developments in AI-driven agricultural technologies worldwide, framing the exhibition within current global debates. The conceptual diagram *Cosmos, Human, Technics* (2026) further articulates this inquiry. Developed by the artist for this project, it proposes a reflection on the interrelation between cosmic order, human activity, and technology.

The *Land of Plenty* (2026) screening area presents a selection of scientific and educational slides and documents produced during China's Reform and Opening-up era, beginning in 1978. Innovative for their time and instrumental in spreading official positions, these materials illustrate how rural transformation was framed as both an economic necessity and an ideological project.

The section titled *Land Evolution* (2026) gathers archival documents—including historical photographs, propaganda posters and documentaries, film excerpts, and literary material—spanning from the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 through the 1980s. These documents trace shifting narratives of agriculture across different political and social contexts.

The documentaries *Super Farms* (2026) and *Southward Journey* (2026) extend this reflection into the present, portraying technology as not neutral and demonstrating how smart farming reshapes agricultural labor, perception, and land management. The spread of drone technology across China and Southeast Asia emerges as a transformation of cul-

tural habits, social structures, and everyday farming practices.

*Super Farms* functions as a visual archive of contemporary agricultural technologies. The artist tracked and documented smart agricultural practices implemented by XAG, a leading smart agricultural technology company operating in various regions of China. *Southward Journey* follows the gradual integration of drone technology into agricultural practices in Southeast Asia, observing how processes such as fertilization and crop protection are restructured through automation.

The final section, *Land Debate*, gathers interviews with scholars, researchers, and experts from diverse fields, ranging from anthropology to agronomy. These dialogues address the economic and environmental impact of smart agriculture while re-considering social equity and sustainability amid accelerating technological change.

**PRACTICAL INFORMATION  
FONDAZIONE PRADA, MILAN**

Largo Isarco 2, 20139 Milan

M3 Underground  
Lodi T.I.B.B. stop  
Tram 24 via Ripamonti / via  
Lorenzini stop  
Bus 65 Largo Isarco stop

Free parking for visitors  
Largo Isarco 1

Opening days and hours  
Monday–Sunday: 10 am–7 pm  
Closed on Tuesday  
Last access at 6 pm  
Exhibition spaces close  
at 6:45 pm

Information  
info@fondazioneprada.org  
fondazioneprada.org

Reservations of guided and  
group visits  
visit@fondazioneprada.org

**TECHNICAL SPONSOR**



**2026 PROGRAM**

Hito Steyerl: The Island  
Osservatorio Fondazione  
Prada, Milan  
Until 30.10.2026

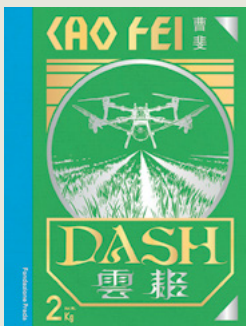
Mona Hatoum:  
Over, under and in between  
Fondazione Prada, Milan  
Until 9.11.2026

Arthur Jafa and Richard  
Prince: Helter Skelter  
Fondazione Prada, Venice  
9.5–23.11.2026

Global Antiquity  
Fondazione Prada, Milan  
5.11.2026–1.3.2027

Cyprien Gaillard  
Osservatorio Fondazione  
Prada, Milan  
12.2026–10.2027

**PUBLICATION**



**DASH – CAO FEI**

An illustrated book, conceived by graphic designer and artist Evi O, explores the project's themes. It features an introduction by Miuccia Prada, President and Director of Fondazione Prada; a conversation between Cao Fei and OMA founder Rem Koolhaas; a science-fiction story by the artist; and a series of interviews and essays by scholars, curators, and experts. Published by Fondazione Prada  
660 pages, 90€

The book *Dash* is available in the new "Dispense" series, which features a selection of Fondazione Prada's catalogues reprinted in a medium format and in black and white. 664 pages, 25€

Both publications are available at Fondazione Prada's bookshop and on [fondazioneprada.org](http://fondazioneprada.org).