

## Temporal Embodiment, Cultural Resonance and Digital Ritual in *Lhasa Time*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24135/ijcmr.v13iApril.151>

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### Abstract

*Lhasa Time* is a three-minute multimedia loop created for a 9-meter-tall steel Buddha statue at Weland Art Center in Lhasa, Tibet, China. Its first exhibition date was March 27, 2025 and has since been in the permanent collection at the art center. The inspiration comes from the famous Tibetan painting *Tibetan Demon-Subduing Map*, which is both a topographical map and a feng shui map of Tibet. Furthermore, this artwork uses projection mapping technology to integrate seven time-lapse images of Lhasa's landforms (sunrise, sunset, snow-capped mountains, etc.), so that the Buddha statue is like wearing different dynamic Buddha clothes at different time periods. This artwork explores how digital media enables “immersive time experience” and fuses cultural heritage. By responding to the “slow tempo” philosophy of the art center with compressed time-lapse images, embodying the “causal reincarnation” in Tibetan Buddhism through a circular narrative, and deepening the audience’s sense of immersion with the help of Tibetan singing bowl soundscapes, this work creates an eco-spiritual “site-specific digital storytelling”.

**Keywords:** Site-Specific Art, Time-based multimedia art, Tibetan Cosmology, Projection Mapping

**Link to work:**

[https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1ssZvYdEso/?share\\_source=copy\\_web&vd\\_sou](https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1ssZvYdEso/?share_source=copy_web&vd_sou)

### Introduction

In March 2025, I was invited by Weland Art Center<sup>1</sup> to take part in the artist residency to create a site-specific time-based multimedia artwork as the Buddha statue’s clothes. The statue (Figure 1) is

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<sup>1</sup> Weland Art Center is the first private art center founded by Xu Yinglong in Lhasa, Tibet, China; it is a space for artistic display and a cultural hub, connecting Tibet with the world (Weland Art, 2025, p.

9 meters high and 4.2 meters wide, and four projectors have been installed opposite the statue to project pictures and digital media onto it.



Figure 1: Steel Buddha Statue, Photo taken by Lin Zhu

After two days visiting of the art center and landmarks in Lhasa, as well as reading their histories, I obtained some inspirations for the creation. The first inspiration is the art center's core spirit—"slow pace", strongly embodied in the construction process of this center (Weland Art, 2025, p. 4). Secondly, the painting called *Tibetan Demon-Subduing Map* (Figure 2), which was a symbolic representation of Tibetan cosmology and Feng Shui Chart (Ou, 1991, p. 35), inspired me to reconstruct a contemporary multi-media map of Lhasa. Thus, I proposed the following research questions as follows:

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2). On the first floor of the art center is the atrium, which is the core area designed for performance, exhibitions, and meetings.

1. How might a site-specific artwork respond to the “slow pace” feature of the art center?
2. How can this site-specific artwork respond to Lhasa and even Tibet?
3. How might the use of projectors evoke embodied connections between spirituality, landscape and temporality?
4. How might the work deepen the audience’s “immersive experience”?

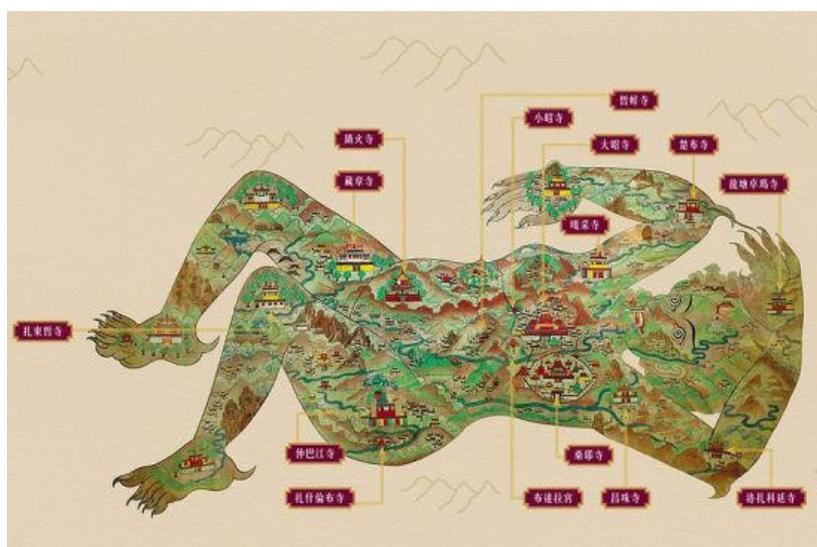


Figure 2: *Tibetan Demon-Subduing Map* (Ouyang, 1991, p. 35)

## Context

The site-specific idea of *Lhasa Time* comes from the book *One Place after Another*. In the book, Miwon Kwon (2002) systematically illustrates the evolution of site-specific art from a mere physical expression—exemplified by Robert Barry’s wire installations<sup>2</sup> in the late 1960s—to a deep response to a socio-cultural context, with the intervention of digital media. The later shift is represented by Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle’s *Tele Vecindario*<sup>3</sup> (1993) from the “Culture in Action” program issues (Kwon, 2002, pp.132–133). Kwon emphasizes the need for artists to reconstruct local historical, cultural and social relationships to activate the meaning of “site-specific”, which not only refers to

<sup>2</sup> Those installations were “made to suit the place in which it was installed” and “cannot be moved without being destroyed” (Kwon, 2002, p. 12).

<sup>3</sup> The artist worked with teenagers from Chicago’s West Town to make Street-Level Video. They recorded youth culture by using public access television and video installations, and finally transforming media spaces into a key “site” to expose community issues (Kwon, 2002, pp.132–133).

physical location, but also refers to a broader field having cultural and social connections (Kwon, 2002, p. 52-53).

The space creation concepts of *Lhasa Time* are intertwined with Lefebvre's theory of the production of space. His theory's core lies in the three-dimensional framework of "spatial practice—representations of space—representational space" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 41). My artistic work is mainly based on concepts of "representations of space" and "representational space". "Representations of space" are related to knowledge, signs, and power, and have the spatial conceptual system based on specific cultures and ideologies (Lefebvre, 1991, p.46). "Representational space" refers to the lived experience of individuals and groups, and spatial perception formed through non-verbal signs and symbols, as well as emotional experiences (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 47). In my work, the former refers to the space created by Tibetan culture, Tibetan cosmology, and the art center's core spirit; the later refers to the space created by immersive emotional experience through the coordination of singing bowl sounds as well as light and shadow of the projection.

Projection mapping technology is a key medium for cultural reconstruction in my work. Dixon states that digital projection activates the surface of an object from a static structure to a "wearable dynamic interface" (Dixon, 2007, p. 335). This transition is not just a technical revolution but also redefines the relationship between cultural installations and audiences (Dixon, 2007, p. 336). When digital projections cover the surface of cultural objects, the objects themselves are not passive display carriers but active performers conveying cultural meanings via dynamic visual changes (Dixon, 2007, p. 337).

All these provide a core framework for *Lhasa Time* to transform the Buddha statue into a dynamic space-time carrier.

### **Methodology**

The methodology of *Lhasa Time* is based on site-specific art theory, time-based media technology, and space theory. Specific implementation steps include: site analysis, time-lapse content production, projection mapping design, and multi-sensory integration.

This methodology ensures that *Lhasa Time* responds to the art center’s “slow pace” spirit (via time compression), Tibetan “causal reincarnation<sup>4</sup>” (via loop playback), and Lhasa’s locality (via cultural symbols).

### 1. Response to “Slow Pace” Spirit

Using the technique of time compression, through time-lapse photography of scenes such as Lhasa sunrise, sunlight on snow-capped mountains (two morning periods), snow-capped mountains shrouded in clouds and mist (two afternoon periods), the Potala Palace in the morning, and Lhasa sunset, the images of these different periods are compressed into three-minute video. This way of presenting compressed time is a kind of reverse contrast to the “slow pace”.

#### Time-lapse project

Location: 4th Floor of the Art Center

Tool: Panasonic S5 camera; tripod

Time-lapse parameters : every 2 sec/frame

#### 1) Sunrise segment :

Day 1: 07:30-08:20 (Landscape orientation ; footage compressed to 25 seconds, see Figure 3)



Figure 3: Sunrise segment, Photo taken by Lin Zhu

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4 It means that the good or evil action in the present life will in turn determines the state of the next cycle of life; it is a cyclic causal relationship of birth, death, and rebirth (Gangla, 2012, p. 178).

2) Sunlight on snow-capped mountains :

Day 2: 08:30-9:30 (Portrait orientation ; footage compressed to 24 seconds, see Figure 4)



Figure 4: Sunlight on snow-capped mountains (1). Photo taken by Lin Zhu

Day 3: 08:00-09:00 (Landscape orientation; footage compressed to 16 seconds, see Figure 5)



Figure 5: Sunlight on Snow-capped Mountains (2), Photo taken by Lin Zhu

3) Snow-capped mountains shrouded in clouds and mist :

Day 2:15:00-16:30 (Landscape orientation ; footage compressed to 37 seconds, see Figure 6)



Figure 6: Snow-capped mountains shrouded in clouds and mist (1). Photo taken by Lin Zhu

Day 3: 15:30-17:30 (Portrait orientation ; footage compressed to 42 seconds, see Figure 7)



Figure 7: Snow-capped mountains shrouded in clouds and mist (2), Photo taken by Lin Zhu

4) The Potala Palace in the morning :

Day 4:08:30-09:30 (Portrait orientation ; footage compressed to 18 seconds, see Figure 8)



Figure 8: The Potala Palace in the morning. Photo taken by Lin Zhu

5) Lhasa sunset :

Day 4: 19:30-20:30 (Portrait orientation ; footage compressed to 18 seconds, see Figure 9)



Figure 9: Lhasa sunset. Photo taken by Lin Zhu

## 2. Response to Tibetan Culture “Causal Reincarnation”

The concept of “causal reincarnation” plays an important role in Tibetan Buddhism and has a profound impact on the daily life and moral concepts of the Tibetan people (Wang, 1991, p. 2). It is expressed by the video looping feature, sunrise and sunset video clips. The philosophical thinking of the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth is integrated into this artwork, and the looping feature

triggers the audience's deep thinking about fate, behaviour and consequences, so as to resonate with Tibetan culture at the spiritual level.

### 3. Response to the Locality of Lhasa

The snow mountains, as representative natural landscape in Lhasa, are like white ceremonial scarf called khata, meaning sincere and pure goodwill (China Tibet Information Center, 2005). The Potala Palace is the political, religious and cultural landmark of Lhasa (Pengcuo, 2010, p. 10). Thus, five videos clips were created capturing snow mountains and the Potala Palace to represent the art center's connection with Lhasa.

### 4. Spiritual Connection by Projection

I adjusted the video according to the ratio of the Buddha statue (9 m\*4.2 m). I positioned the sun at the heart of the Buddha statue, and placed the sunrise at the beginning of the video and the sunset at the end of the video, conveying the idea of waking up at sunrise and resting at sunset. In addition, I duplicated the horizontal video and adjusted it into two or three vertical segments to form the Buddha's head, robe, and pants (see Figures 10 and 11), so it appeared as if wearing dynamic Buddha garments. This enhances the spirituality and visual impact of the artwork.

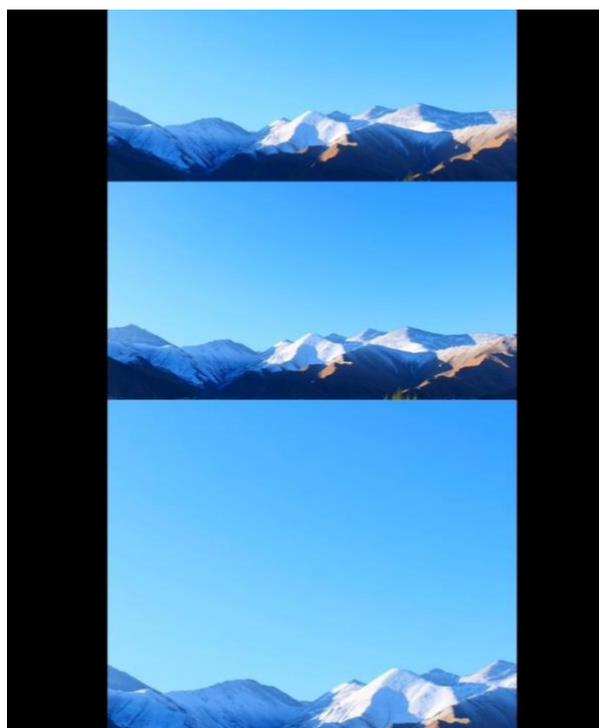


Figure 10 Three Vertical Segments

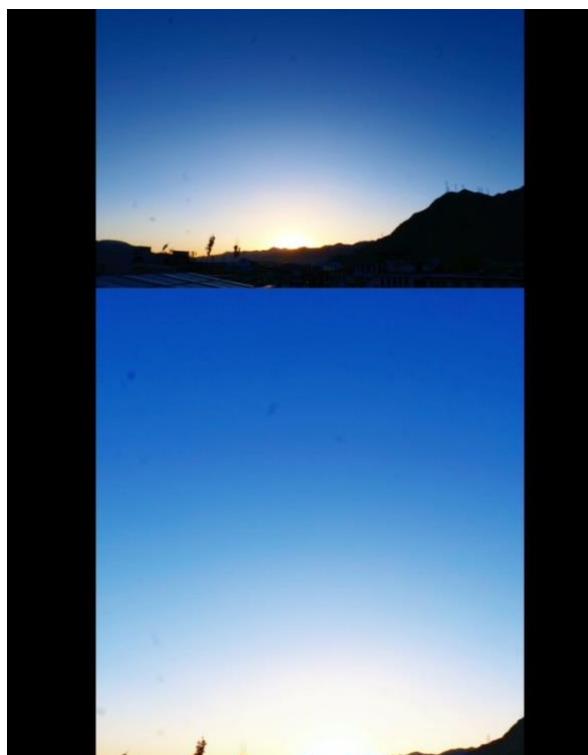


Figure 11 Three Vertical Segments

### 5. Immersive experience

The sounds of Himalaya bowl were chosen as the background music, facilitating a spiritual connection between the audience and the artwork. The Tibetan bowl helps the audience to forget the hustle and bustle of the work, and feel the spiritual connotation of the unity of heaven and earth and all things conveyed by the artwork. The deep and long-lasting sonorous sound of the singing bowl seems to make people enter the Tibetan Buddhist field with knocks on the bowl (Feng, 2012, p.19).

### Conclusion

*Lhasa Time* was exhibited at the Weland Art Center in Lhasa on March 27, 2025, and has been in the permanent collection at the art center. As a time-based multimedia artwork, *Lhasa Time* combines traditional time-lapse photography with the Buddha statute to create a unique visual effect and artistic experience, bringing a new aesthetic experience to the audience. The philosophical concept of the unity of heaven, earth and human, conveyed by the artwork, provokes

the audience to reflect on the relationship between humans and nature, and to further understand the importance of protecting nature.

In terms of knowledge contributions, this work expands the practical dimensions of site-specific art: instead of following the traditional single response of site-specific art to physical space, it constructs a site-specific expression of intertwined time, culture and space through time compression and circular narrative. Secondly, it verifies new possibilities for the combination of digital technology with Tibetan cultural symbols, offering a contemporary interpretation of traditional Tibetan cosmology and life aesthetics in a digital context.

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