

Serial Surrogates (Absolutely USB)
Oct 10 - Dec 13 2025
Nicoletta Fiorucci Foundation

Ivan Cheng

Curated by Vittoria de Franchis

Serial Surrogates (Absolutely USB) is Ivan Cheng's first solo exhibition in the United Kingdom, presented in the Library at the Nicoletta Fiorucci Foundation and curated by Vittoria de Franchis. The show inaugurates a new series of commissions for the Library, inviting artists whose practices address and challenge modes of archiving and categorisation.

For more than a decade, Ivan Cheng (b. 1991, Sydney) has developed a practice as intermedia as it is interpersonal. Spanning performance, writing, video, sound, and installation, his work is shaped by collaboration, letting transactions, and encounters inform both method and material. An excessive and almost comic performativity permeates his presentations, whether live or installative, creating space for roles and expectations to be enacted (and eventually questioned), whether by the spectator, an intervention, or the site itself.

Stemming from Cheng's ever-present consideration of the suggestions and constraints of the context, *Serial Surrogates (Absolutely USB)* engages with the physical and conceptual framework of Library to delve in the ways attention and the flow of information are translated, at what pace. The exhibition extends Cheng's proposal of the USB as both metaphor and device (with a nod to the functional charm of acronyms), drawing a parallel between the Universal Serial Bus—a device for condensing and transporting data—and the bus as a high-occupancy vehicle moving and compressing bodies, reflecting the flow of cultural and entertainment content.

The Library's architecture is extended via a cardboard replica, its theatricality and willfully temporary nature echoing motifs present across Cheng's work. Shelves vanish to make room for new paintings realised during his residency at the Mondrian Initiative in Laren. Hinting at views from bus windows, the works avoid declaring their subjects outright, allowing images to operate as carriers of content, mood, and memory. These reflect Cheng's ongoing concern with "the privilege and ability of abstracting and simplifying form," while working in the studio of Piet Mondrian, asking how "erasure, reduction, and simplification might still shape the way we see".

Cheng's emblematic "live situations for camera" unfold in *Hard Drive 1* across a battery of flatscreens in different sizes, their rhythm punctuated by a countdown at the edge "as though anticipating perpetual arrival. The piece proposes a route through documentation from nine performances and premieres his most recent work *Autobiography*, filmed in September at his residency studio and the Rietveld Schröder House in Utrecht. Through headphones, spectators can hear the sound of the films, sometimes one, sometimes multiple simultaneously, creating a layered, radio-like effect.

A model of a bus, first realised for the performance-exhibition *NP* at MUMA in Melbourne in 2024 by Cheng, inspired on Jean Prouvé's pre-fabrication proposals and modernist experiments, functions as part toy, part teatrino, part architectural fragment. On the ceiling, a convex traffic mirror reflects the entire room, summarising the exhibition's images much like an AI might condense and reinterpret data. Typically employed for security, the mirror evokes the gaze of a camera, suggesting how content and people are indexed, and made legible within systems of circulation and compression.

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