



## PRESS RELEASE

# Shanzhai Archeology: See this collection of extraordinary Chinese counterfeit mobile phones in the UK for the first time.

**Come and see the most extraordinary mobile phones you'll have ever seen. Technological interbreeding or counterfeit creativity, this exhibition explores what happens when technology and creativity are let loose beyond the realms of regulation and standardization.**

The Chinese term shanzhai (山寨) refers to counterfeit consumer goods. This includes imitation, trademark infringement, parody, lookalikes and improved goods, particularly in the field of electronics. A shanzhai (literally shan: mountain, zhai: stronghold) denotes a remote village in the mountains where bandits had once recreated their own form of society, far from the rules of the emperor.

This new exhibition *Shanzhai Archeology* presents an extraordinary collection of mobile phones from this technological interbreeding Made in China, and seen in the UK for the first time. These are hybrid products developed at an incredible speed merging piracy, reverse engineering, unique creativity and self-taught skills.

In this collection, a Buddha Phone, becomes a virtual altar by pressing a special key. The Prisoner Phone is the smallest in the world and made of 99% plastic so is barely detectable by the authorities. There's the Taser Phone, marketed as a self-defence weapon, or the Sound System Phone, catering for China's pensioners as it can broadcast loud sound outdoors, being heard above the din of the public dances they love. There are plenty more to discover in this new exhibition.

A profitable business produced by small companies, shanzhai mainly happens out of Western sight, due to regulations that forbid most of these hybrid products to circulate legally across borders. Nevertheless, shanzhai devices fulfil a bespoke need or desire for hundreds of thousands of consumers in countries around the world, not just in China.



At a time when shanzhai might be under threat – following the Chinese government’s decision to clean up the country of its counterfeiter reputation – this project casts a critical eye at the results of unfettered technological innovation, through the relatively unknown history of the shanzhai.

### **About the artists**

The exhibition has been made by Disnovation, a working group of artists based in Paris. At the crossroads between contemporary art, research and hacking, the collective develops situations of disturbance, speculation, and debate, challenging the ideology of innovation and stimulating the emergence of alternative narratives. They recently edited *The Pirate Book*, an anthology on media piracy. Their work has been presented internationally at venues such as the Museum of Art and Design in New York City, Palais de Tokyo in Paris, transmediale, FILE and the Chaos Computer Congress.

<http://disnovation.org/shanzhai.php>

***Shanzhai Archaeology has been made possible with the support of CNC Dcream, Design Trust – Hong Kong, Institut Français de Chine, Le Cube – Art3000***

### **Listings**

**Watermans, 40 High Street, Brentford TW8 0DS**

**Watermans.org.uk**

**Box Office: 020 8232 1010**

**Nearest rail: Kew Bridge**

**Nearest tube: Gunnersbury then bus 237 or 267**

### **Shanzhai Archaeology Exhibition**

*Wed 21 March – Mon 28 May, 10am-9pm, daily. FREE.*

Artists collective Disnovation presents an intriguing collection of counterfeit mobile phones from China that show what happens when creativity and technology collide, outside the norms of standardization and regulation. See how mobiles can meet every need a customer might have...

### **Shanzhai Archaeology Public Launch Event**

*Wed 21 March, 6.30-8.30pm*

*FREE and open to all, but please book your space online as numbers are limited.*

Join the artists in a conversation from 6.45pm to 7.30pm in Watermans Studio 1 followed by drinks and a chance to see the work.

### **About Watermans**

Watermans is West London’s leading arts centre. It attracts over 230,000 visits a year to its thriving and inclusive programme of independent cinema, family and Asian theatre, regular weekend festivals, exhibitions and courses. Watermans runs a year-round programme of cutting-edge digital arts for which it receives National Portfolio Organisation funding from Arts Council England, and has



done so for many years.

Watermans also leads several other major projects outside its venue. These are primarily concerned with broadening access to high quality arts in communities that engage little, if at all, in the arts, to support community cohesion and economic regeneration:

- **Bell Square**, the outdoor arts venue in Hounslow Town Centre, now in its third year. It attracted 34k visitors to Hounslow Town Centre in 2015, just under half of whom said that these events were the primary reason for their visit and that they would go onto spend money elsewhere in Hounslow. 72% say they are more likely to return to the town centre because of these events
- **Circulate**, a London-wide outdoor arts touring network that regularly brings free events to Hounslow including to Bell Square and the Brentford Festival
- **Creative People & Places Hounslow**, Arts Council England's major investment in increasing arts capacity in underserved areas, working in Feltham, Heston and Cranford, and central Hounslow

**For more information please contact Marketing Director Erica Weston on [Erica@watermans.org.uk](mailto:Erica@watermans.org.uk)**

