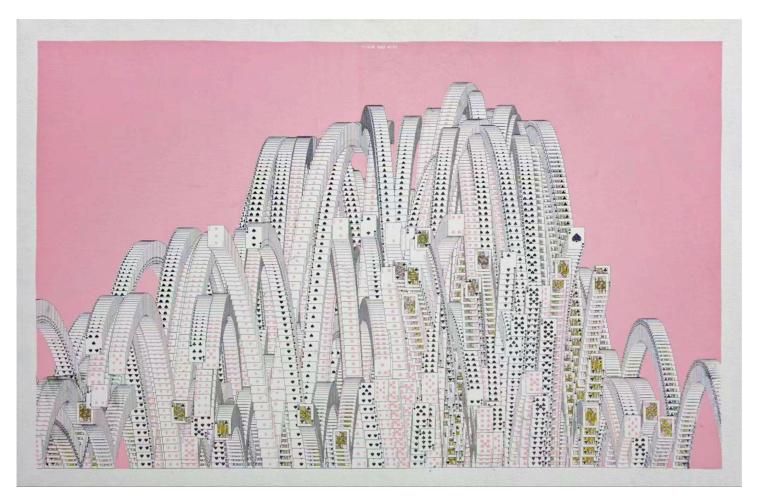
Criticism (Https://Cultbytes.Com/Category/Acriticism/)

CAPTCHA-22 Quan Wenfei's Cyber Excavation

<u>Colleen Dalusong (Https://Cultbytes.Com/Author/Colleendalusong/)</u> September 21, 2025

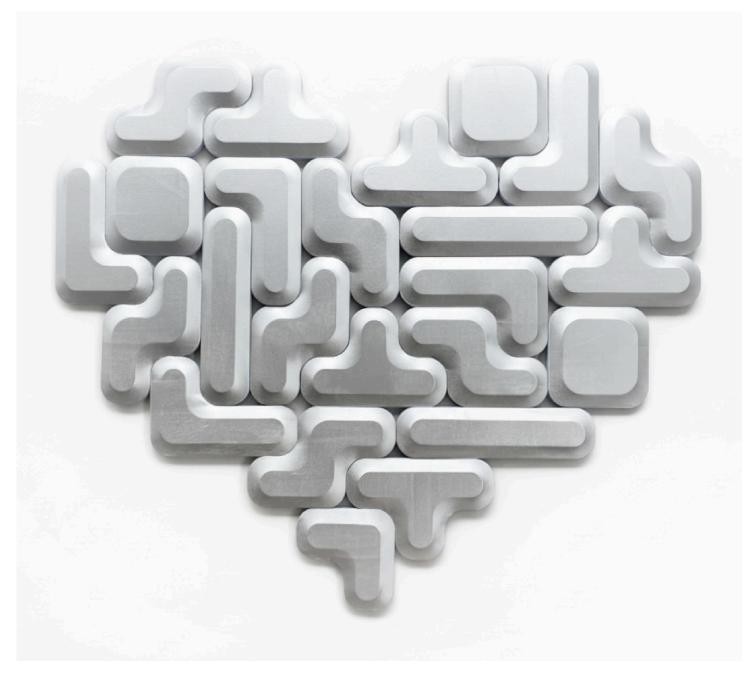


Quan Wenfei. "Click and Win! Pink 4," 2025. Oil and silkscreen on canvas. 39 1/8 x 60 1/8 in. All images courtesy of Eli Klein Gallery.

uan Wenfei's solo exhibition *Internet Archaeology*, curated by Phil Z. Cai at Eli Klein Gallery, explores the nature of humans' relationship to technology from the retro card games of the 1990s to the ubiquitous CAPTCHAs of today's digital world. The title of the exhibition is derived from Quan's own artistic practice, which is grounded in her personal experiences and online encounters, and her desire to archive a single transient moment amidst the never-ending onslaught of images that we encounter in cyberspace.

Drawing upon the aesthetics of Microsoft's Solitaire game, Quan's *Click and Win!* print series features mesmerizing freeze-frames of cascading cards which greets victorious players once they make the winning move. Originally conceived by Microsoft as a way to "soothe people intimidated by the operating system," Solitaire quickly became a useful tool in helping users familiarize themselves with graphical user interfaces and the drag-and-drop mouse technique. However, in Quan's quest to excavate the origins of contemporary digital culture, *Click and Win!* reminds us that the nostalgic victory screen is also considered a prototypical element that would soon become popular in dopamine-driven games such as *Candy Crush* or *Bubble Shooter* that we now play on our phones. Although these mobile games are visually

stimulating and an undeniably entertaining way to pass the time during a long subway commute, the phrase *Click and Win!* suddenly rings as darkly sardonic — we have successfully solved a level, but what next? None of us are ever going to reclaim the time we spent hunched over our phones, obsessively matching sugary-hued tiles while ignoring the world outside of our screens. If we're not careful, hours of our lives can easily be siphoned away in pursuit of the hollow victories epitomized by *Click and Win!*'s hypnotic deluge of cards.



Quan Wenfei. "Tetris Remix 1 - Silver," 2023-2025. Acrylic on shaped canvases, wood, metal. 47 1/4 x 53 1/4 in.

In today's internet landscape, it is as easy to assume another identity as it is to reproduce an image, but it is even easier for data brokers and conglomerates to track your habits and preferences to construct a profile based on your activity. We are currently in a stage of the internet which has abandoned the myth of cyberspace as a utopian meeting place of the minds, and has now veered into the path of obnoxious pop-up ads, deepfakes, and the lingering suspicion that half of the accounts we encounter online might just be bots posing as humans. Quan's *Tetris Remix* sculptures further call online collectivity into question. The two pieces are nearly identical, with interlocking tetromino blocks forming a heart-shaped whole, yet Quan keeps the silver *Tetris Remix 1* intact while breaking apart the lavender *Tetris Remix 2*. According to Quan, these two sculptures mimic the gameplay within Tetris: disparate individuals (tetrominoes) come together to form a collective (horizontal line of blocks), yet once total homogenization is achieved (there are no gaps in between each block), this community disappears (the line is cleared) and a new one will soon take its place.





Internet Archaeology with Quan Wenfei and curated by Phil Z. Cai at ELI KLEIN GALLERY, 398 West Street, New York, NY 10014 is on view September 13 – November 29, 2025.

in the hopes of making more profit. At the very least, like any good archaeologist, Quan Wenfei has managed to capture this moment in

history, hopefully offering a guiding light to future historians who may be wondering what the state of the internet was in 2025.