

Exhibition Catalogue



25 April - 23 May
2024



Keke Yang:
Fragments of Being

solo exhibition



Asian Contemporary Artists Alliance
www.artacaa.com





The Asian Contemporary Artists Alliance proudly presents "Keke Yang: Fragments of Being," a solo exhibition online that explores the transient and fluid nature of identity and existence. Through her diverse media including photography, video, installation, and performance, Keke Yang's artistic works focus on the boundaries of perception and materiality. This exhibition features a selective collection of Yang's works from 2021 to 2024, which utilize visual metaphors to question the stability of identity and the passage of time. "Fragments of Being" invites audiences to engage with the art dynamically, fostering a reflective space that echoes the philosophical and poststructuralist themes prevalent in Yang's creations.



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Artist Biography

Keke Yang was born and raised in China and has lived in the U.S. for nine years. Yang holds a BA in Photomedia from the University of Washington and an MFA in Photography from Parsons School of Design in New York. She is a conceptual artist whose work is a profound exploration of the fluidity of existence, challenging the boundaries of materiality and perception. Drawing inspiration from cultural experiences with the fluidity of gender identity, her work manifests these concepts through photography, video, installation, and performance. Yang's work has been showcased in several exhibitions, including the group exhibition at MC Gallery, Brooklyn Bridge Park, New York (2023); UW Photomedia Art Show, Washington (2021, 2022).

Curatorial Statements

The Asian Contemporary Artists Alliance is thrilled to present the solo exhibition "Keke Yang: Fragments of Being." This exhibition offers a selection of works that capture the transient essence of existence and identity through Keke Yang's transformative lens. Spanning photography, video, installation, and performance, Yang creates a narrative that digs into the ephemerality of the moment and the fluidity of the self. Each medium serves as a critical tool for questioning and understanding the world around us. Works such as "Flowing Roots" and "In Between" employ photography to capture transient moments and states of being, urging viewers to contemplate the fluidity of time and identity.

The exhibition explores key themes resonant with poststructuralist ideas, especially the deconstruction of authorship and the instability of meaning. Yang's series of untitled photographs and installations invite open-ended dialogue by resisting traditional interpretations. "Flowing Roots" and the "Untitled" series reflect on Gilles Deleuze's concept of the rhizome, challenging linear progression and fixed origins. Yang's material choices in her installations—rubber, water, air—are deliberate, contributing to narratives that articulate the ephemeral and fluid nature of existence. These pieces create immersive environments, encouraging active viewer participation.

Yang's video works, "Balloon and Pin" and "Balloon and High Heel," offer a visual commentary on the inevitability of collapse and the instability of structures we rely upon. These pieces challenge grand narratives of meaning, underscoring the viewer's role in creating meaning through active engagement. "Water, Bag, and Walking" reflects on temporality and transformation, while "Catching Air" depicts a series of attempts to capture the intangible, culminating in a solitary, introspective scene that prompts reflection on the solitude of the quest for meaning.

The exhibition also acknowledges feminist undercurrents within postmodern discourse. Yang's examination of gender identity and the performative nature of her work confronts traditional categorizations of identity. Aligning with theorists like Judith Butler, Yang's work provides a critical perspective on the performative and constructed nature of identity.

It is an honor for our institution to showcase "Keke Yang: Fragments of Being," an invitation to explore the conceptual depth of Yang's art. This celebration of human experience in all its impermanence is a contemplative journey through the interstitial spaces of existence. The exhibition encourages viewers to consider the narratives inscribed upon the human form and engage in silent dialogue about the essence of being. This showcase of Yang's artistic achievements initiates a complex conversation with the philosophical currents that shape contemporary thought, prompting viewers to question not only what they see but also how they perceive themselves within the flux of contemporary life.

Curatorial Committee
Asian Contemporary Artists Alliance (ACAA)



Flowing Roots
Photography
40in x 30in
2023

"Flowing Roots," a photograph by Keke Yang, poignantly captures the delicate balance between stability and the fluid, ever-changing state of existence. At first glance, the subject seems to be suspended in a moment of equilibrium, but the fragility of her supports—plastic bags filled with water—belies the transient nature of this perceived steadiness. This work can be read through the poststructuralist concept of the rhizome, as articulated by Gilles Deleuze, challenging the notion of linear progression and fixed origins.

In Deleuze's philosophy, the rhizome represents an alternative model of knowledge and cultural exchange that opposes the traditional hierarchical tree structure, which insists on singular beginnings and predictable paths of growth. The rhizomatic approach, on the other hand, is non-linear, open-ended, and connects points in an unpredictable manner, much like the fluid in Yang's plastic bags, which could shift and flow in any direction upon the slightest change in pressure. Yang's physical positioning in the work, held up precariously by these water bags, speaks to the human condition in the rhizomatic worldview; it is an existence without a clear foundation, where any semblance of stability is fleeting.

The inherent tension captured in "Flowing Roots" between the momentary composure of the artist's pose and the imminent collapse alludes to the precariousness of the structures we rely upon—be they ecological, societal, or personal. Just as the plastic bags might burst at any second, so too might the constructs that underpin our identities and communities, leaving us to navigate the resultant flux. Yang's piece invites the viewer to contemplate the temporality of moments and question the sustainability of our dependencies, resonating with Deleuze's interpretation of a rhizomatic existence where any point can be connected to another, and any interruption can alter the entire structure.

Furthermore, by incorporating everyday materials in such a strikingly vulnerable performance, Yang highlights the extraordinary within the mundane. The choice of plastic—a material emblematic of our throwaway culture—filled with the life-giving substance of water creates a juxtaposition that hints at the duality of modern life. This dichotomy of the disposable and the essential, the vulnerable and the resilient, underscores the complex interplay between human beings and their environments, an interaction where balance is not a given but a momentary achievement.

"Flowing Roots" not only engages with poststructuralist thought but also transforms it into a visual and experiential reality. The viewer is confronted with a powerful representation of the human condition in the postmodern age, a condition that is as precarious as it is potent with possibilities. In this light, Yang's work is a silent yet profound dialogue with the viewer about the very nature of being—a conversation that continues long after one has left the exhibition space.



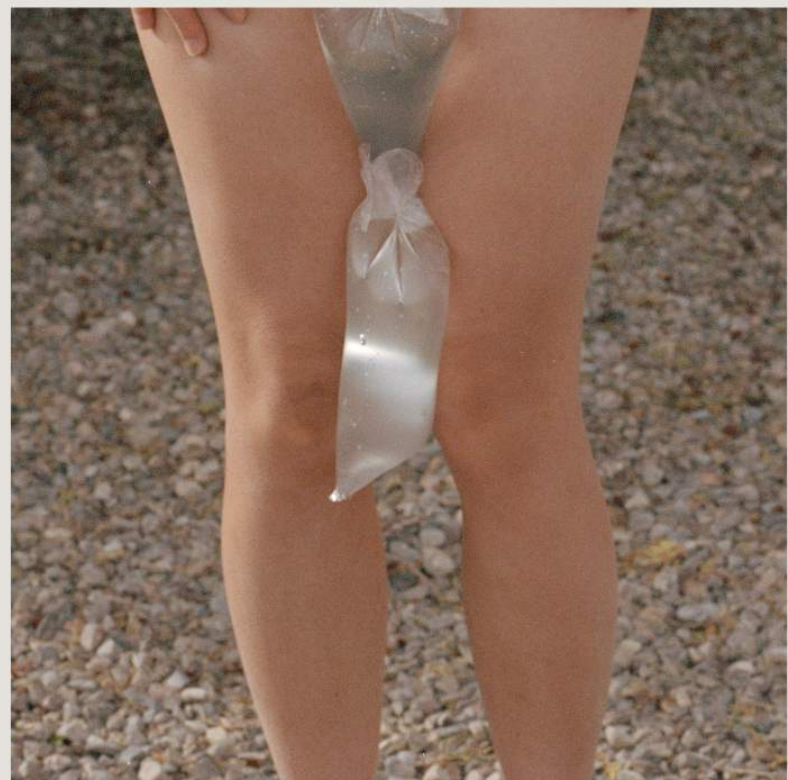
Untitled
Photography
12in x 16in
2023



Untitled
Photography
12in x 16in
2023

Yang's "Untitled" series, which captures plastic bags filled with water alongside "Flowing Roots," offers a visual and conceptual cartography of the rhizomatic web of existence, where everything is interlinked, and any point of entry is as valid as another. These pieces, unnamed yet profoundly expressive, embody the poststructuralist rejection of fixed definitions and embrace the multiplicity of meanings and interpretations.

One of the "Untitled" photographs captures the ephemeral installation of plastic bags filled with water placed upon the pavement. These water-filled vessels are nodes of potentiality; they could remain intact or rupture, but in their current form, they represent a pause in the ceaseless flow of transformation—a still from the continuous film of life. The other "Untitled" piece is a self-portrait of the artist adorned with the same plastic bags filled with water, positioned between limbs and body in a way that suggests both adornment and burden. Here, Yang offers a meditation on the relationship between the individual and the surrounding environment. The water bags act as extensions of the self, fluid appendages that can neither be fully controlled nor disregarded. This interplay between the artist's body and the bags of water parallels the rhizomatic concept where connections are decentralized, and hierarchies are flattened. There's a sense of symbiosis, but also tension—a commentary on the human condition within a network of relations that is constantly shifting and reforming.



By choosing not to title these works, Yang reinforces the poststructuralist notion that meaning is not fixed but rather created by the observers as they interact with the art. The absence of a title removes any preconceived notions or biases, allowing the viewers to bring their own experiences and understandings to the interpretation of the works. This untitling is a strategic withdrawal, an invitation to viewers to engage more deeply, to map their own understandings onto the work, much like a rhizome that continuously forms connections.

Together, these works suggest a fluid narrative—one that explores the weight of the transitory, the beauty of precariousness, and the interconnectedness of all things. Yang encourages us to question the permanence of our constructions and the nature of our connections. In both the solitude of the plastic bags on the pavement and the personal landscape of the artist's adorned body, we are reminded of the permeable boundaries between self and surroundings, between the ephemeral and the eternal.



Untitled
Photography
60in x 90in
2023

The diptych "Untitled" by Keke Yang is a dialogue between presence and absence, being and nothingness, form and void. In the left frame, the artist is seen using her back to support a massive rock, an act that is at once Sisyphean and deeply metaphorical. The right frame, devoid of the human element, features only the rock, now unencumbered. This juxtaposition echoes Francis Bacon's diptych paintings that Deleuze explored in "Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation," where the narrative is not linear but one of sensation and becoming.

In the context of Deleuze's thought, Yang's diptych transcends the representation of mere physical struggle. It becomes an exploration of the 'body without organs'—a concept Deleuze derives from Antonin Artaud, indicating a state of pure potentiality and fluid becoming. The rock, immutable and stoic, contrasts with the ephemeral, strained posture of the artist, reflecting the tension between the organic and the inert, the animated and the static. The work's title, or lack thereof, reinforces the theme of anonymity and universality, suggesting a shared human experience with the weight of existence.

The absence of the artist in the second frame invites contemplation on the role of the observer and the observed. It propels the viewers into the realm of the poststructural narrative where meanings are not inscribed but are made in the act of viewing. It is reminiscent of the emptiness Bacon instills in his paintings, where the absence is as communicative as presence, where the void speaks. It's a manifestation of Deleuze's observation that Bacon's work is not about representing something but about the act of emerging into being. Yang's diptych similarly does not tell a story; it evokes the visceral sensation of being tethered to something eternal and unyielding, and then the subsequent release into absence.

The juxtaposition of these two images also invokes postmodern discussions on the relationship between text and reader, or in this case, between artwork and viewer. The diptych format suggests a narrative, a before and after that is not linear but is instead cyclical or even disjointed, mirroring the non-linear structure of a rhizome. Each photograph informs and is informed by the other; the presence of the artist gives meaning to her absence, and the absence casts her previous engagement in a new light.



In between #1
Photography
40in x 30in
2021

Yang's "In between #1" and "In between #2" offer a dialogue about the space that exists in the 'in-between,' the undefined, and often unacknowledged areas that lie outside of fixed categorizations. In these works, the black-and-white monochrome palette strips away the distractions of color, reducing the images to their essential forms and contrasts. This reduction to monochrome emphasizes the temporal aspect of the captured moments, invoking the historical continuum of photography as a medium and its role in documenting the ephemeral.

In "In between #1," the blurred figure conveys a sense of motion, transience, and perhaps even a struggle for definition within the cavernous space of the empty building. The blur becomes a visual metaphor for the postmodern condition—the fragmentation and fluidity of identity in a rapidly changing world. It reflects the state of in-betweenness, a liminal space where the subject is neither one thing nor another but is in a constant process of becoming. This resonates with poststructuralist thought, particularly the works of Julia Kristeva and her explorations of the "abject," where the subject is in a state of flux, constantly negotiating the boundaries of the self.

"In between #2," with its clear depiction of a female figure, counters the indeterminacy of its counterpart. The defined, static figure stands in sharp contrast to the motion-blurred subject of the first image. Here, the body in a swimsuit is placed within an industrial, columned space, creating a sense of displacement and drawing attention to the body's relationship with its surroundings. The title "In between" speaks to the state of transition, a central theme in postmodern discourse. It captures the essence of 'being' as something that cannot be fully resolved to either side of a binary—like the columns that simultaneously divide and define space. The female figure's presence and absence in these photographs underscore the space between visibility and invisibility, between subject and object, and between clarity and ambiguity.

Yang invites viewers to contemplate the space between—the physical space between the columns, the conceptual space between presence and absence, and the temporal space between stillness and movement. By engaging with these concepts, the works encourage meditation on the fluidity of identity and the continuous negotiation and redefinition of the self within constructed environments and societal norms and pressures. The use of black-and-white also invokes the idea of binaries and the spaces that exist beyond them. The stark contrasts may initially seem to denote clear distinctions, yet they also suggest the existence of a spectrum. This aligns with postmodern critiques of binary oppositions, emphasizing instead a plurality of meanings and states of being.



In between #2
Photography
40in x 30in
2021

In the photograph titled "Untitled" by Keke Yang, a human figure is seen cringing with the naked back turned to the camera amidst the desolation of a construction site. The ambiguity of the red markings on the figure's back—a visual signifier open to interpretations ranging from paint to wax, or even tire marks. This image, capturing a body in a state of vulnerability, powerfully evokes sensations of discomfort and intrigue in equal measure. Is it pain or pleasure, violence or consent, art or accident? These unanswered questions speak to the core of postmodernism's resistance to fixed interpretations.

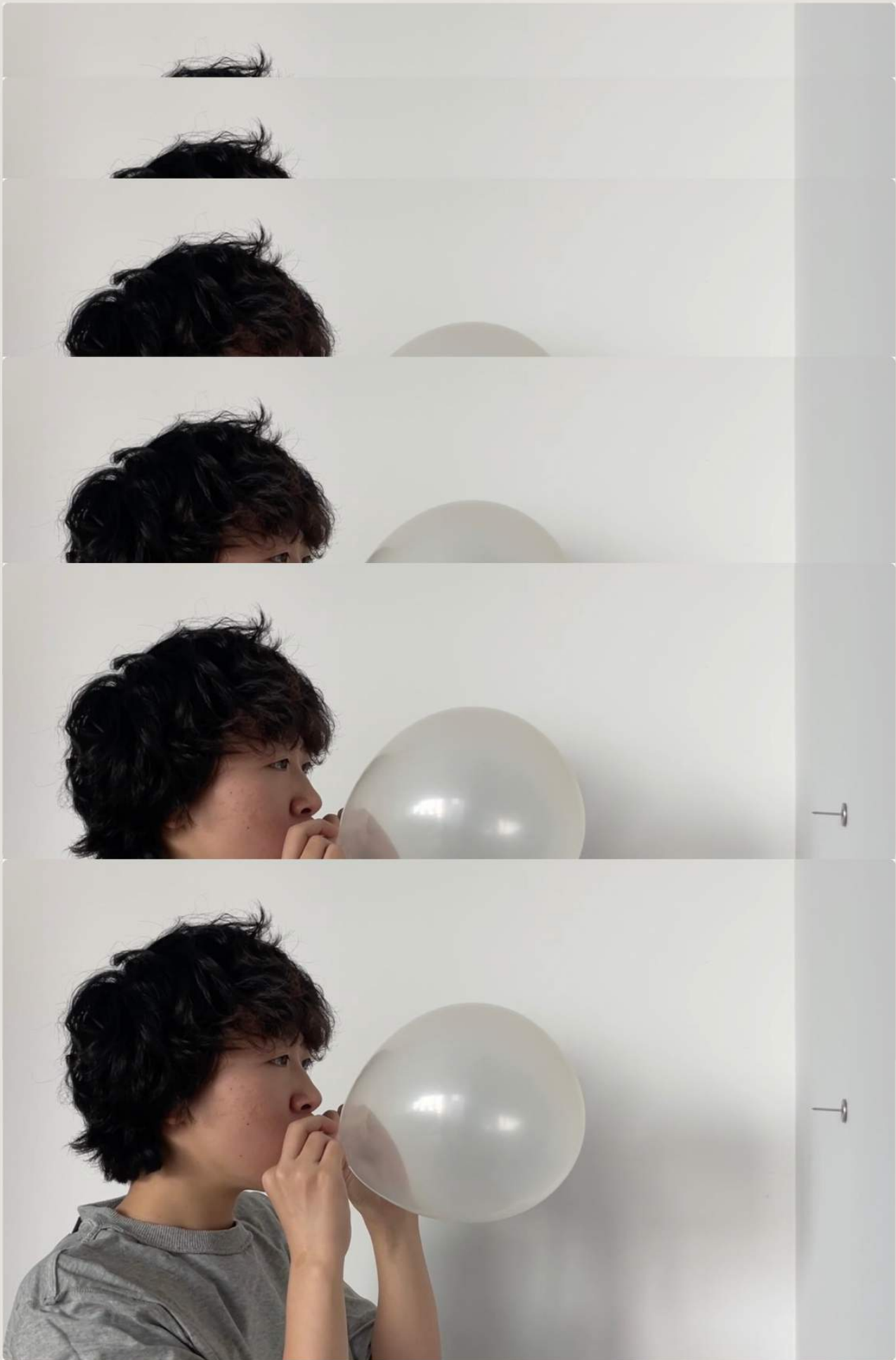
Untitled
Photography
40in x 30in
2021



The setting further accentuates this resistance—a construction site, a place of transformation and transition, now abandoned. This once-functional space has become a void, mirroring the in-between status of the figure. In this desolate context, the figure's exposed skin becomes a canvas for the unseen events that have transpired, suggesting a history that the viewer can only guess at. The construction site, with its raw materials and skeletal structures, is reminiscent of a body itself, both in the process of becoming and unbecoming, reflecting the ongoing negotiations of identity in postmodern society.

The marks on the body, evocative of wounds or perhaps chosen markings, bring forward a discussion on the agency over one's body. They suggest a narrative of resistance and resilience—the body as a site of protest, bearing the traces of its experiences. The imprints could represent the societal expectations, pressures, and 'scars' that come with inhabiting a female body within a patriarchal framework. Yet, their undetermined nature leaves room for empowerment, signaling a reclaiming of one's narrative and history, no matter how marred.

In "Untitled," Yang offers no resolution, instead presenting a tableau that defies singular interpretation. It is an image that challenges viewers to confront their assumptions, to recognize the plurality of stories written upon the human form, and to consider the potent silence that speaks volumes in the absence of a clear narrative. This photograph is a profound exploration of the interplay between body, space, and identity, and a testament to the enduring complexities of human existence as interpreted through the lens of contemporary art.



Yang's "Balloon and Pin," a 49-second performative video piece, encapsulates a profound yet simple narrative—a balloon being inflated towards an inevitable burst upon contact with a wall-mounted nail. Spanning a brief but intense 49 seconds, the act of blowing a balloon towards a wall-mounted pin is charged with a sense of foreboding and anticipation. The viewer is immediately made aware of the balloon's fate; it is not a question of if, but when the balloon will meet its end.

In "Balloon and Pin," the tension that Yang builds over the 47 seconds of inflation is laden with anticipation, knowing from the outset that the balloon's fate is sealed by the awaiting pin. This performance speaks volumes about the human condition, particularly the Sisyphean efforts we engage in, fully aware of the futility that awaits. It's a visual and conceptual enactment of the inevitable cycles of buildup and release, creation and destruction, that characterize our existence. The viewer is held captive by the suspense, the awareness of the inevitable outcome, paralleling the existential dread and anticipation experienced in life's endeavors.

The work could also be interpreted through the lens of Jean Baudrillard's concepts of hyperreality and the precession of simulacra, where the representation precedes and determines the real. In this piece, the anticipation of the event (the popping of the balloon) is almost more significant than the event itself. The audience is caught in a hyperreal state, the suspense of the inevitable that overshadows the physical occurrence.





Balloon and Pin
Video
(00:49)
2023