

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Andrea K. Scott, "Goings on About Town: Ian Cheng," *The New Yorker*, March 2019

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ART GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Ian Cheng

Meet BOB, a "Bag of Beliefs," just like you. Unlike you, BOB is a serpent, whose existence plays out in real time (this is a live simulation, not a video loop), on a twelve-foot-high screen. An unpredictable number of heads emerge from its inconstant skin, which shifts, depending on the day, from pale orange to crimson. This chimeric demon is made up of "demons," A.I. lingo for programs that kick in under specific conditions. In Cheng's show, the condition is you, making offerings via a free iOS app. Offered a mushroom or a piece of fruit, BOB might eat it; offered a bomb, BOB might escape or be killed. Has our hero learned anything during its weeks-long saga of death and rebirth? Hard to tell, but thrilling to ponder. The entertainment industry employs technology to numb minds; this brilliant young philosopher-artist uses it to spelunk consciousness.