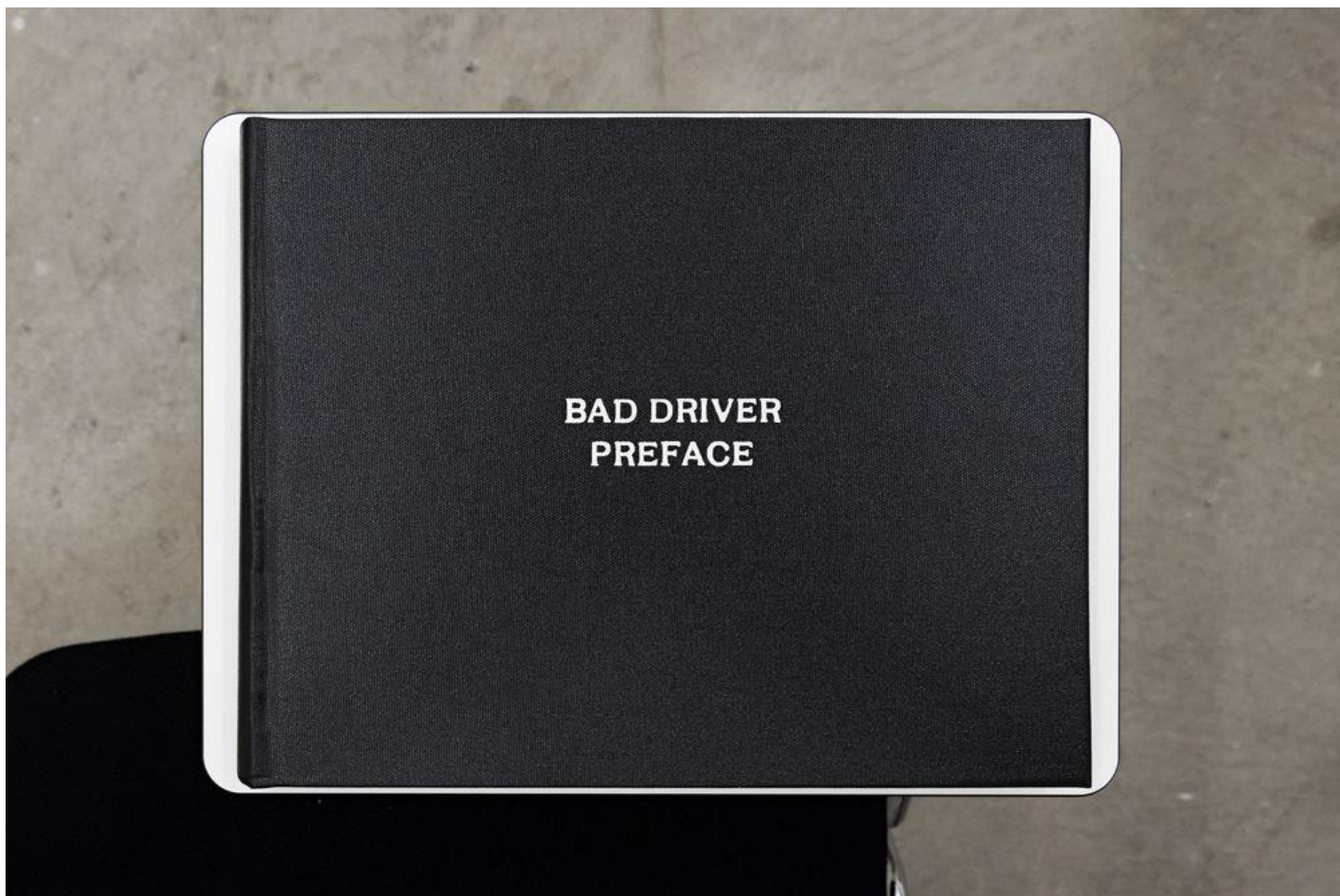


# THEGUIDE.ART

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Jay Chung and Q Takeki Maeda, *Bad Driver (Preface)*, 2021

What do you get when you combine the legs of Abraham Lincoln, the body of Colonel Sanders, the arms of the Statue of Liberty, and the head of Ronald McDonald? To illustrate the absurdity of that exercise, Jay Chung and Q Takeki Maeda, a Berlin-based artist duo, draw upon two millennia of Chinese text and culture to stitch together an unruly composite portrait that throws back the ugly and nonsensical stereotypes of Asians in the United States and the Western world at the audience that conceived it. What's more American, Chung and Maeda argue, than lumping discrete peoples from diverse regions into one monolithic stereotype?

The result of their efforts is "Bad Driver," on view now at Essex Street. As if for a driver's ed course, within the gallery space appears a grid of classroom desks. On each one sits a volume of a publication, *Bad Driver* [cover pictured], which consists of a preface and ten chapters. Drawing from the stereotype of Asians as poor drivers, the chapters range from actually discussing automobiles—through expertly weaving in the pernicious influence of America's automobile culture in China and Japan—to the subversive grassroots Chinese phenomenon of *shanzhai*, which flouts copyright rules to forge a morally ambiguous refuge from the forces of global capital. While each sentence of the text, taken on its own, is not quite objectively untrue, severed from its given original context and pieced together like a rhetorical Frankenstein, what emerges is a multi-faceted portrait of falsehood. Though ostensibly a work about Asia, "Bad Driver" alleges that it is the United States, rather, that is the main driver of the post-truth era. Maybe it should go back to school.