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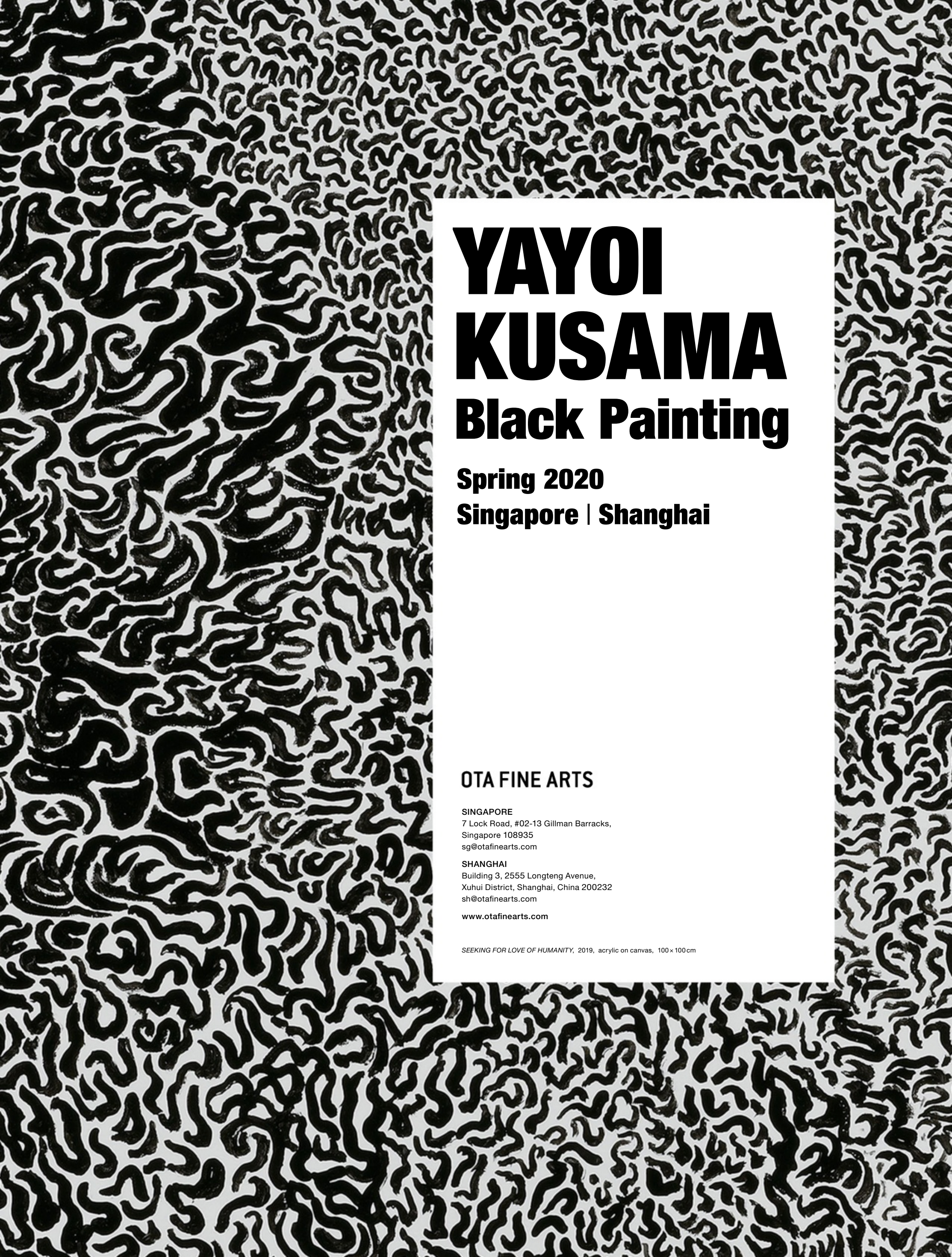
ISSUE 117 MAR/APR 2020







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YAYOI KUSAMA

Black Painting

Spring 2020

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SEEKING FOR LOVE OF HUMANITY, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 100 x 100 cm



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proportions and
facets.
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shapers, the most
well-known are
the brilliant, and
Marceline
Cuts.

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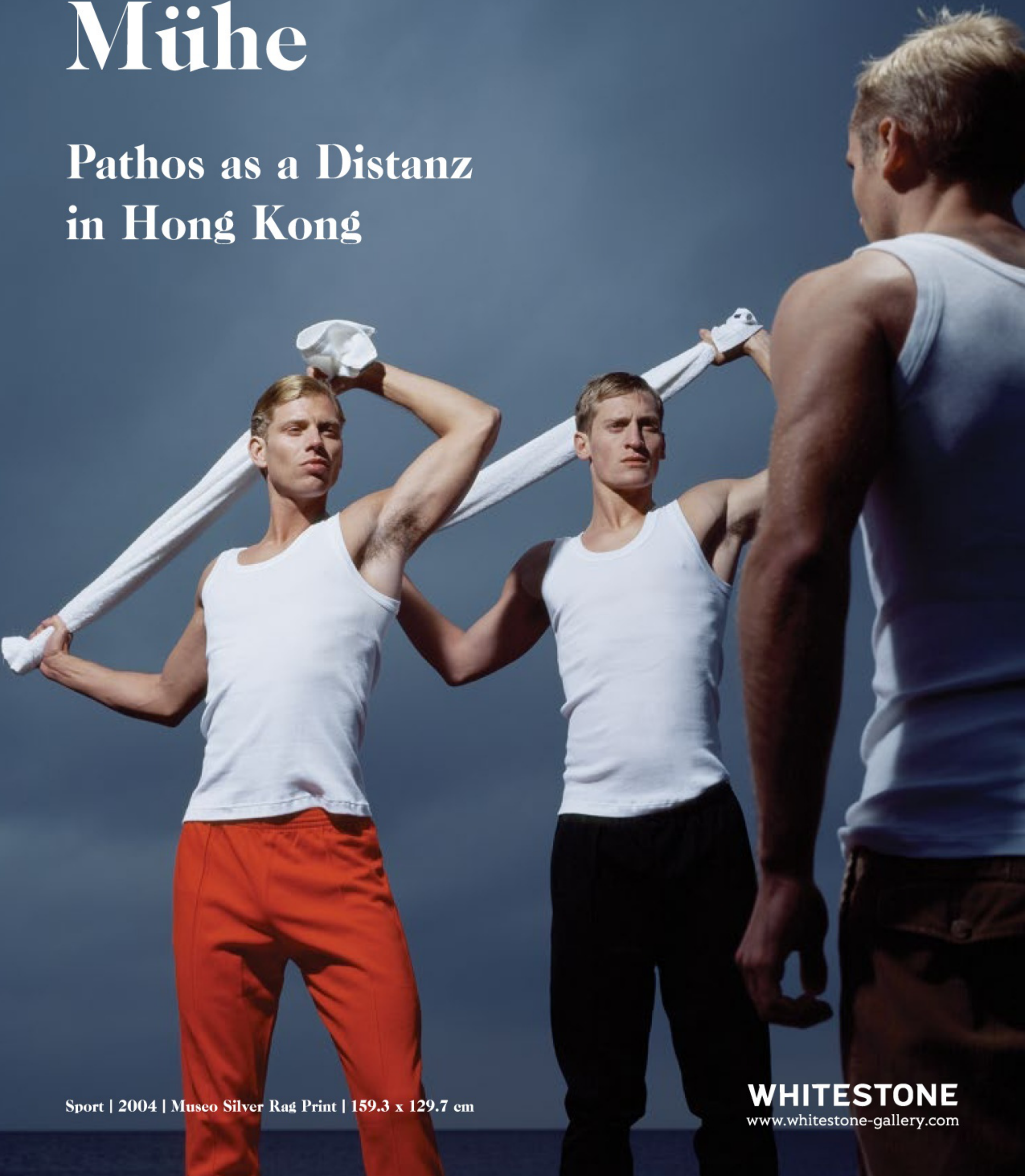
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Right: **Zhang Jian-Jun**: Flowing Water Series 19 | 2019, 178x94cm, Chinese ink, acrylic, oil paint, rice paper on canvas
Left: **Barbara Edelstein**: Green Ginkgo | 2014, 79x51.5x15cm and Pink leaf | 2014, 121x23x10cm,
Silicone rubber, stainless steel



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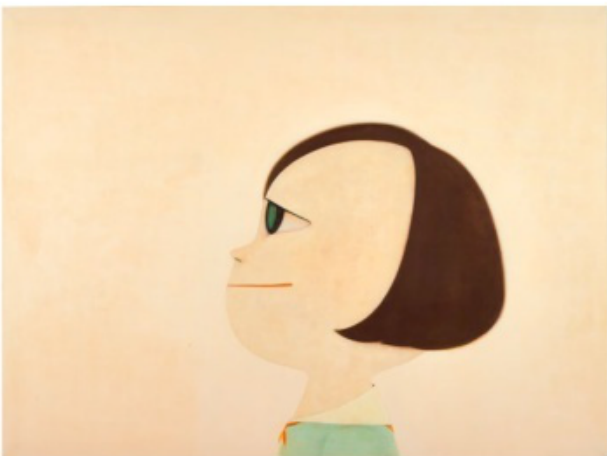
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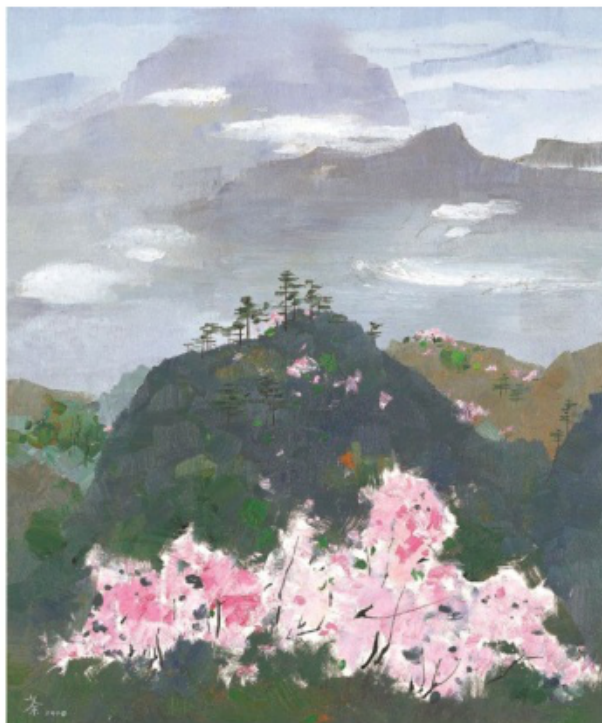
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Azade Köker, Aleppo II, 2016 (detail), Mixed media on canvas, 130x400 cm (diptych)

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On the Other Side of Fear

Often we don't appreciate something until it's gone. In the first two months of 2020, this cliché unfortunately rang true. With governments across Asia imposing quarantines and travel restrictions to contain the spread of Covid-19, and art organizations canceling events and postponing exhibitions in line with the mandates of health authorities, free movement diminished along with the usual art-world assemblies, at fairs, auctions, and exhibition openings. Now, the questions of how else we might commune and what it means to share space with others are all the more pertinent.

Our cover artist Yee I-Lann has long been engaged with these issues. Since the beginning of her career, she has examined how power shapes geographies and, in turn, how people relate to each other within a place. In late 2016, these concerns led her from Kuala Lumpur (KL) back to her birthplace in Sabah, where, through failed attempts to find the plant that her grandmother used to weave with, she rediscovered the importance of *tikar* (mats). In an interview with *ArtAsiaPacific* KL desk editor, Beverly Yong, Yee explains that mats “demarcate a space that invites communal gathering, where everyone sits together on the same level.” True to form, she has been creating *tikar* with weavers from around the Sabah region, bringing together the cultures of seafaring and inland communities. Through these collaborations, she adopted the principle of *mansau ansau*, or “to keep journeying without knowing where you're headed.”

Embracing uncertainty as a fact of life was likewise central to the practice of the late Huang Yong Ping. In remembrance of the seminal artist, who died in October 2019, in our second Feature, curator Hou Hanru traces Huang's belief that “changing is the rule” through the artist's recurring use of serpentine forms, and the motif's many varying significances, from metamorphosis to unpredictability, within his practice. Focusing on *Empires* (2016), a roughly 300-meter-long snake skeleton that wove its way among 300 shipping containers in Paris's Grand Palais for the 2016 Monumenta exhibition, Hou writes: “The serpent's continuous travel and transformation led to an ultimately spectacular representation of the contradictory forces of globalization and its impacts, by exploring and uncovering its historical roots and routes . . . Huang's serpent becomes a wake-up call for us to trace the very destiny of the world that we have created.”

The works of the three artists featured in the Up Close section echo this call to probe human ideologies and constructs. AAP associate editor Ophelia Lai examines Li Ran's two-channel video *Persona Swap* (2017–19), which muses on what constitutes an individual's identity. Ho Rui An's video-essay *Student Bodies* (2019) traces the roles of students as “the engine and antagonists of capitalist modernization in Asia—as well as the agents of imperialism

and their fierce opposition,” in the words of AAP deputy editor HG Masters. And in Jen Liu's video *Pink Slime Caesar Shift* (2018), highlighted by AAP managing editor Chloe Chu, the artist tackles the exploitation of people, on the back of which civilization is seemingly built. Elsewhere in Features, for Inside Burger Collection, curator David Ho Yeung Chan interviews Hong Kong-born artist Tsang Kin-Wah on his text-based installations and videos, which convey the artist's pessimism about “humankind and their self-destructive behavior.”

For Profiles, AAP news and web editor Lauren Long spoke to Chloe Suen, co-founder of Hong Kong's Sun Museum, which advocates for the study of Chinese arts and culture. In the section's other article, Haryanto Adikoesoemo, founder of Jakarta's Museum MACAN, explains the motivations behind his collection of modern and contemporary works by Indonesian and international artists, and the objectives of his museum.

In One on One, Tuan Andrew Nguyen writes about how artist Daniel Joseph Martinez, one of his first mentors, changed the way he thought about collectivity and political agency, and eventually led him to establish, with other artists, the Propeller Group and Ho Chi Minh City's nonprofit space Sàn Art. Elsewhere in the magazine, AAP Berlin desk editor Clara Tang files a Dispatch from the German capital, looking at the way its institutions have gradually included non-Western perspectives in their programs, allowing for the city to become a veritable global art hub. For the Point, artist and entrepreneur Sean Raspet highlights the contradictions faced by an increasing number of art initiatives on the subject of climate change—the entanglement of the creation of art in broader production systems that contribute to the crisis, and the material costs of realizing such initiatives. Finally, for Where I Work, Lauren Long visited Zhang Peili in one of his Hangzhou studios, where the multimedia artist explained his curiosity about feelings universal to all of humanity, including futility and anxiety, encapsulated in his earliest video *30×30* (1988), 1980s paintings of medical gloves, and more recent interactive installations in which visitors can become trapped. Despite his use of cultural references specific to China, Zhang's works suggest we all share agency in our responsibilities to process the shifting conditions of our world.



ELAINE W. NG

See our website for the Chinese version of this article.

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15 feb 2020 - 28 March 2020

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YEE I-LANN, *Tikar-A-Gagah* (detail), 2019,
pandanus weave and commercial chemical
dye (split bamboo weave, black natural dye,
and stitched bamboo weave on the reverse
side), created with assistance from Keningau
and Palau Omodal weavers, 2.5 m × 15 m.
Courtesy the National Gallery Singapore.

LOUIS HO

Louis Ho is an independent
curator and critic. He was
previously a curator at the
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(See **REVIEWS**)

HOU HANRU

Hou Hanru is a writer and
curator based in Rome,
Paris, and San Francisco. He
has curated more than 100
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MAXXI, and is an advisor for
numerous cultural projects,
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Family Foundation Chinese
Art Initiative at the Solomon R.
Guggenheim Museum.
(See **FEATURES**)

TUAN ANDREW NGUYEN

Through his multidisciplinary
practice, Tuan Andrew Nguyen
explores strategies of political
resistance enacted through
counter-memory and post-
memory. His works have been
featured in several international
exhibitions and festivals,
including the Asia Pacific
Triennial, Whitney Biennial,
and Sharjah Biennial. He is a
co-founder of the Propeller
Group, a platform for
collectivity that situates itself
between an art collective and an
advertising company.
(See **ONE ON ONE**)

SEAN RASPET

Sean Raspet is a flavor and
fragrance chemist and co-
founder of the algae-based
food company Nonfood. His
practice prioritizes a movement
away from the specialized art
economy in favor of endeavors
that circulate in the economy
at large, utilizing modes such
as mass-produced items
and proprietary molecular
structures. He is currently
working on a reforestation and
carbon-sequestration project.
(See **THE POINT**)

CLARA TANG

Clara Tang is a German art
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addition to freelance writing,
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(See **DISPATCH**)

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Toronto-based Ricky Varghese
is an art critic, psychotherapist,
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His writings have appeared in
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arts + opinions*, and *Peripheral
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two monographs, one on artistic
and cinematic representations of
the relationship between suicide
and melancholia, and another
on aesthetics and the history
of HIV/AIDS.
(See **REVIEWS**)

DAVE WILLIS

Dave Willis is a writer, curator,
and art advisor, based between
Ho Chi Minh City and Chiang
Mai. Willis holds a BA in
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University and an MFA in art
writing from the School of
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previously worked as a curator
at Ho Chi Minh City's MoT+++
art space, and was an advisor to
the Nguyen Art Foundation.
(See **REVIEWS**)

BEVERLY YONG

Beverly Yong is the co-founder
of RogueArt, a Kuala Lumpur-
based specialist team focusing
on art and cultural projects,
exhibitions, collections,
and publications. She has
organized over 200 shows and
initiatives, and edited a number
of publications locally and
regionally, including *Imagining
New Ecologies* (2019), published
by The Japan Foundation Asia
Center. She is *ArtAsiaPacific's*
Kuala Lumpur desk editor.
(See **FEATURES**)



4.4.2020 – 2.5.2020

Shifting Landscapes

An exhibition of art formerly intended for Art Basel Hong Kong 2020. A large-scale Encounters installation by Andrew Luk and artwork by Chu Teh-Chun.

DE SARTHE



Oil pool (2009 Bank Art NYK) ©Risaku Suzuki

√K Contemporary Opening Exhibition:

wall to wall Noriyuki Haraguchi

2020.3.7sat — 5.6wed

11:00 — 19:00 / approx 30pcs / Free admission / Closed on Sun & Mon

Noriyuki Haraguchi X √K Contemporary

A new contemporary art gallery, √K Contemporary (Root K Contemporary) in Tokyo will open its doors March 7th, 2020.

To celebrate this occasion, √K Contemporary will host the opening exhibition, "wall to wall Noriyuki Haraguchi". Exhibiting his work for the first time in two years, Noriyuki Haraguchi will challenge this new space by his display of 30 new works, including his highly acclaimed signature piece, *Oil Pool*. This exhibition will feature several large installations such as; *Ento(Round Tower)*, an installation made of polyurethane and plywood, which spans from the atrium and stairwell of the first to the second floor, and, the title piece, *wall to wall*, a canvas laid on a broken mortar. In an endeavor to create a new space for art, Haraguchi's exhibition will mark √K Contemporary's first breath towards innovation.

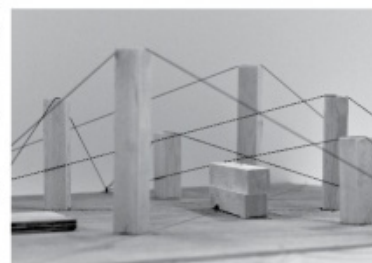
Inspired by the notion that new art springs forth from generations of refinement, √K Contemporary was born from a desire to create a place where one may experience art at its fullest. Designed to be a space that is free of spatial and temporal constraints, the gallery will hold exhibitions by post-war to present-day artists. As an ambitious but versatile space, √K Contemporary seeks to host exhibitions and events that will spur a new culture of Japanese modern art into fruition and introduce art to a wider audience.



wall to wall, 2020
Mortar wall, canvas tumbuckle
(Image of Model)



Oil Pool, 2020
Steel, oil



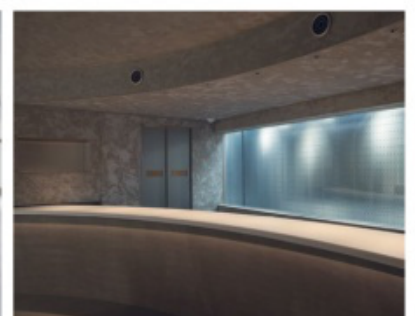
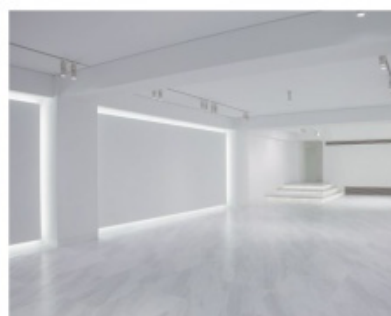
Tension, and compression, 2020
Wood, wire rope
(Image of Model)



Ento (Round Tower), 2020
Polyurethane, plywood
(Image of Model)

The Artist: Noriyuki Haraguchi

A key figure of "Mono-ha", Haraguchi (b.1946) began his career in the 1960s. In 1977, Haraguchi became the first Japanese artist to be selected for the international exhibition, "Documenta 6" (Kassel, Germany). In this, Haraguchi exhibited a giant iron container filled to its brim with dark oil. Haraguchi has since actively participated in numerous exhibitions and projects worldwide, and his works have been collected by renowned institutions like the Tate Modern and MoMA. For the past fifty years, Haraguchi has continued to create three-dimensional works and installations made from iron, oil, honeycomb, polyurethane and other industrial materials and has maintained to create works based on materiality and objectivity.



Ko Sin Tung,
'CLOSED 24 HOURS', 2016



Tuan Andrew Nguyen on Daniel Joseph Martinez

See our website for the Chinese version of this article.
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“I CAN’T IMAGINE EVER WANTING TO BE WHITE.” Daniel Joseph Martinez will forever be known for this sequence of eight words, strategically split up and printed onto a series of admission badges for the 1993 Whitney Biennial.

I consider Daniel a key mentor, who, in all his calmness, unleashed a sense of political urgency and agency that enabled me to consider what it means to have a practice invested in change. Choosing a life-path of art was one of the first transformations he effected in me.

I entered the University of California at Irvine (UCI) in 1994 as a biology major. My goal was to become a doctor. I had been in California for about three years before my enrollment. The transition from the Midwest, where I had spent my teenage years, wasn’t smooth by any means, but was a step toward a string of necessary disruptions that marked my life. In 1991, a few months after my family and I had landed, southern California saw the Rodney King incident, the killing of Latasha Harlins by a Korean-American liquor store owner, the Los Angeles Riots, and the release of the film *Boyz n the Hood*—all within 12 months. I had experienced a heavy load of racism in the Midwest, but being in California at that particular moment taught me that racism and violence in the United States was not just street fights but something that saturated every level of culture, from the media to institutions, and one would have to develop sustainable strategies to be able to confront it at each and every point effectively.

In 1995, I took my first art class at UCI, thinking it would look good for medical school applications. Quickly thereafter, I met Daniel, whose reputation as an inspiring speaker and challenging teacher preceded him. My immediate sense was that Daniel is a person who cares, even when he is trying to “spit in the face of the rich man.” Daniel’s intervention at the 1993 Whitney Biennial was one of those moments he brought fire to the institution.



DANIEL JOSEPH MARTINEZ's *Museum Tags: Second Movement (Overture); or, Overture con Claque (Overture with Hired Audience Members)*, 1993, paint and enamel on metal, 30.48 × 38.1 cm each. Photo by the artist. Courtesy the artist.

Museum Tags: Second Movement (Overture); or, Overture con Claque (Overture with Hired Audience Members) (1993) was vilified by critics and institution leaders. For others such as myself, it was seen as honest and, thus, quite revolutionary.

Though I had met Daniel, I didn’t study *Museum Tags* until it was covered by another professor in a different class. I didn’t know much about contemporary art at the time, and I knew even less about the culture wars and identity politics. Institutional critique was way beyond my framework of understanding. Yet I found myself repeating the phrase in my head, like a song lyric. I would get stuck between the words “IMAGINE” and “EVER WANTING,” bouncing between their fragile boundaries. Desire is a fascinating human trait—one that can be exploited. There is a history of desire being used as a mechanism for oppression in the many lands plagued by the colonial project. In Vietnam, this “desire” was intertwined with colonial “prestige.” Wanting to be like or liked by the colonizers was what kept subjects controllable, unable to imagine something else and wanting to be like their oppressors.

Daniel’s proclamation was also a proposal to himself. That there was an attempt to imagine, even if it was a failed attempt, was radical, because the space opened up by that imagination is where things get flipped. *Museum Tags* tried to re-envision “whiteness” and in turn the construct of the “other”—“whiteness” was put in the position of the “other.” It proposed, and as I believe, that once we look

at the ways otherness is constructed, we can more effectively approach empathy.

As I continued to study art at UCI, a few of us undergraduates, and one graduate student, developed a growing appetite for philosophical discussion through aesthetic practice. We approached Daniel to see if he would lend us his time outside of the official curriculum to head up a critique class. Daniel nicknamed us The Renegades. This was my first collective art endeavor, setting a foundation for how I would consider collectivity in my own practice.

Decades before downtown Los Angeles became the art hub that it currently is, Daniel, along with collaborators Glenn Kaino (another former student of his), Rolo Castillo, and Tracey Shiffman, had also founded an artist-run space called Deep River. Besides highlighting underrepresented artists, Daniel allowed some graduates of UCI’s MFA program to produce a group show there, which included a work by The Renegades. Daniel’s support had tremendous impact on us and the many marginalized artists in LA. More than ten years later, I co-founded an artist-initiated space in Ho Chi Minh City with collaborators Dinh Q. Lê, Tiffany Chung, and Ha Thuc Phu Nam. We called it Sàn Art, which literally translates as “a floor space for art.” Its presence, as I saw it, was political, and simultaneously disruptive and inclusive.

I am still ever wanting to imagine and create spaces that expand beyond myself—spaces that make way for a radical empathy. Thank you Daniel.

B e r l i n

Breaking Down Walls

BY CLARA TANG

Since the late 1980s, Berlin has been hailed as the artistic center of Germany. The city offers a high standard of living for its population, and, despite steady rent hikes, has been affordable compared to the rest of the country. These conditions have also attracted crowds of artists, curators, and cultural professionals from across the globe, who have, in turn, gradually cultivated platforms representing diverse communities, seeding the city's thriving international arts scene of today.

Berlin's dynamism is reflected in its many artistic centers and programs, timed chiefly around two seasons. During Berlin Gallery Weekend in April, and Berlin Art Week in September, the city brims with performances and exhibitions. Another key event is the Berlin Biennial, which typically opens in June. Since its inception in 1998, the project has fostered discussions of wide-ranging topics, reflecting the myriad interests of the local arts community. For example, beginning in September 2019, the Biennial has been hosting lead-up events for the 2020 show, including performances, conversations, and workshops led by the Feminist Health Care Research Group, which tackles body politics and women's rights.

Among the many museums in the center of Berlin, several stand out for their global approaches. Since the appointment of director Stephanie Rosenthal in

February 2018, Gropius Bau's stellar solo shows have spotlighted figures ranging from Korean installation artist Lee Bul to filmmaker and performer Wu Tsang and Pakistani video artist Bani Abidi. Similarly invested in disrupting Eurocentric conceptions of the art historical canon, Hamburger Bahnhof presented the 2018 show "Hello World," inserting works by non-Western artists alongside pieces from the national art collection. Launched in September 2019, "Micro Era" was a cross-generational dialogue between Chinese media artists at Kulturforum, featuring works by, among others, video heavyweight Cao Fei and 2019's BMW Art Journey winner Lu Yang. A major force in the local art scene, KW Contemporary—founded by Klaus Biesenbach and others in the 1990s—has mounted Mounira Al-Solh's video installation on the migration of languages, Iraq-born artist Hiwa K.'s projects on the Gulf region, and Evelyn Taocheng Wang's videos on identity politics. The Haus der Kulturen der Welt is another leading institution reframing cultural discourse beyond European perspectives, pioneering seminal shows such as "China Avantgarde" in 1993, as well as international symposiums and festivals.

Galleries and nonprofit platforms likewise strive for inclusivity. For instance, the experimental space Savvy Contemporary, founded in 2009 and directed by



Installation view of (left) **MARJETICA POTRČ**'s *Caracas: Growing Houses*, 2012, building materials and infrastructure for energy and water supply and communication, 480 × 745 × 315 cm; and (right) **SIAH ARMAJANI**'s *Glass Front Porch for Walter Benjamin*, 2001, glass, perspex, stainless steel and anodized aluminium, 326 × 388 × 543 cm, at "Hello World. Revising a Collection," Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, 2018. Copyright the artists and Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Photo by Thomas Bruns. Courtesy Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

Cameroonian curator and critic Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, is centered on the celebration of plurality. Savvy's initiatives include exhibitions, performances, publications, an archive of performative arts, research projects focused on German colonial histories, residencies, and a design research department.

Important residency programs are spearheaded by daadgalerie—which also hosts talks and exhibitions—and the renowned art center Kunstquartier Bethanien. The former was established in 1963, and brings 20 practitioners to Berlin each year. Bethanien offers studios to emerging international artists and organizes exhibitions, such as "UnWall. East to West and North to South," held in November 2019 in collaboration with the Korean embassy and SOMA Art Space, with South Korean and German artists tackling cultural and national divisions.

One of the many local galleries exploring rich, cross-boundary narratives is Zilberman Gallery, headquartered in Istanbul, and indicative of the cultural contributions of Berlin's significant Turkish community. Zilberman's Berlin branch in the Charlottenburg district has organized noteworthy shows on cultural heritage and political resistance by Ankara-born Burçak Bingöl, Berlin- and Hong Kong-based Isaac Chong Wai, and Egyptian filmmaker and artist Heba Y. Amin.

An increasing number of Chinese artists and art spaces have gained footholds in Berlin. Besides the one-year-old Times Art Center Berlin—the offshoot of Guangzhou's Guangdong Times Museum—the gallery XC.HuA, established in 2017 in Beijing and Berlin, promotes the understanding of contemporary Asian art. Its roster of artists includes Saigon-born Tomas Vu, who probed posthuman futures in his solo exhibition "Space Oddity 69/19/45." The nonprofit Migrant Bird Space showcases young Chinese artists. Meanwhile, well-established Chinese artists such as He Xiangyu and aaajiao have set up studios in the city.

The city is anticipating colossal and costly constructions, from the Museum of the 20th Century, located in the Kulturforum area, to the long-awaited Humboldt Forum, which will incorporate the renowned Museum of Asian Art. However, after news broke in December 2019 of the cancellation of the Berlin Art Fair—scheduled for the annual art week in September and symbolic of the metropolis's status as a key art hub in Germany and internationally—it became clear that the local arts community cannot become complacent. Alongside much-needed debates on the financial sustainability of the creative sector, the fair's cancellation offers opportunities to rethink the city's art infrastructure, and gives smaller, independent platforms a chance to step up.

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NICOLE COSON, *Untitled*, 2019, oil on canvas, 160h x 260w cm

AWARDS

On January 3, multimedia artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan won the 2022 Future Fields Commission in Time-Based Media, receiving a cash award of USD 125,000 for the production of a new work.



Portrait of **LAWRENCE ABU HAMDAN**. Photo by Miro Kuzmanovic. Courtesy the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg / Beirut.

In recognition of Amanda Heng's participatory walking performance *Every Step Counts* (2019), part of the 2019 Singapore Biennale, Japanese conglomerate Benesse Holdings, Inc. and Singapore Art Museum presented the artist with the 12th Benesse Prize, worth JPY 3 million (USD 27,000), on January 11.

On February 1, Asia Society India Centre honored installationist Vivan Sundaram with the Asia Arts Vanguard Award, while Tiffany Chung and Prabhakar Pachpute each received Asia Arts Future Awards for their cartographic works and charcoal drawings, respectively.

OBITUARIES

Known for his intricate kinetic installations addressing existential and humanist themes, Philippine artist Gabriel Barredo (1957–2020) died on January 6 at his home in Manila.



Portrait of **GABRIEL BARREDO**. Courtesy Silverlens Gallery, Manila.

Also on January 6, Indian modernist Akbar Padamsee (1928–2020) passed away in Coimbatore. He is renowned for his unconventional use of color and space in his paintings.

Japanese photographer Ikkō Narahara (1931–2020), critically acclaimed for his monochromatic photographs of postwar Japan, died of heart failure on January 19 in Tokyo.

Covid-19 Forces Delays and Cancellations



Art Basel Hong Kong 2020 is one of many events that has been called off due to the spread of Covid-19. Installation view of Art Basel Hong Kong, 2019. Photo by Esther Chan for *ArtAsiaPacific*.

The outbreak and spread of the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) from China's Hubei province has compelled numerous cultural organizations across Asia to postpone or delay events. Art Basel and its parent company MCH Group announced on February 6 that the region's biggest event of the season, Art Basel Hong Kong, scheduled to take place at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre (HKCEC) from March 19 to 21 with nearly 240 international galleries, was canceled. The Art Central fair, which typically runs concurrently at the Central Harbourfront with around 80 international galleries, also nixed its 2020 edition. Organizers of both events cited health and safety concerns for workers and guests, severe logistical challenges in mounting the fairs, and travel restrictions and quarantines.

In cities across China, the coronavirus outbreak caused new museums to delay their openings. In Beijing, the private X Museum pushed back its inaugural project, the X Museum Triennale, until at least May. He Art Museum, located in Foshan, in Guangdong province, postponed its launch until a later, unspecified date.

Across the country, regional governments required public and private cultural institutions to close from January 23 until at least the end of February as authorities attempted to restrict large-scale public gatherings to limit contagion.

CAFA Museum in Beijing delayed the first Techne Triennial, originally slated to open on February 20. In the 798 Art Zone, the UCCA Center for Contemporary Art halted plans for shows scheduled to open in February and March, including a solo exhibition of Yan Xing. Gallery Weekend Beijing, marked for March 13–20, was postponed. A decision about the event's rescheduling will be made in March. In Shanghai, galleries and major art institutions including Tank Shanghai, the Long Museum, the Shanghai Center of Photography, and the West Bund Art Museum were shuttered beginning in late January, with no dates planned for their reopening. Some platforms, such as Beijing's M Woods and the Power Station of Art in Shanghai, shifted to presenting virtual exhibitions and lectures.

In Hong Kong, galleries Hauser & Wirth and Massimo De Carlo, as well as Tai Kwun Contemporary art center, pushed back their March shows. Many others planned to proceed with their programs provided no new government directives are issued. Government-run facilities, including the newly refurbished Hong Kong Museum of Arts, were closed through February. Soldiering on is the nonprofit Para Site, which will open its group show on March 13. Sotheby's Hong Kong will still hold its spring auctions at the HKCEC from April 3 to 8.



The Palais de Tokyo (right) has received criticism from some members of the Parisian arts community for its partnership with Doha's Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art (left) as part of the Qatar-France Year of Culture 2020. Images via Mathaf and Coldcreation.

CONTROVERSY

The jury of the seventh Huayu Youth Award announced on December 14 at Art Sanya that none of the ten shortlisted artists would be receiving the main prize. Chairperson of the jury and M+ Sigg senior curator Pi Li explained that the ten artists' presentations for the competition still needed time "to develop and improve." Instead, Hsu Che-Yu and Pei-Hsuan Wang were both conferred a Special Jury Prize, though Hsu rejected his award on December 18. The finalists claimed that the judges' stated reasons for not choosing a winner were neither clear nor convincing enough. They were also angered by the limited timeframe and budget with which they had to produce works for the award. In response, a group calling itself United Motion, including six of the ten shortlisted artists and other practitioners, penned an open letter, stating that they hope the turn of events will prompt discussions on not just the purpose of prizes but "the fair wages of art workers, the health hazards of the work environment, [and] gender and privilege issues on a larger scale."

A guest exhibition at Paris's Palais de Tokyo by Qatar's state-run Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha, titled "Our World is Burning,"

received backlash from the art community over concerns that the exhibition is whitewashing human-rights violations by the wealthy Gulf emirate, which criminalizes homosexuality. Paris-based Azerbaijani artist and LGBTQ activist Babi Badalov proclaimed that "the gay community shall fight for the cancellation of the exhibition." On January 9, Palais de Tokyo responded saying that it has no intentions of scrapping the show, which will be on view until May 17.

In Kuala Lumpur, the National Art Gallery (Balai Seni Negara) removed four works from the midcareer survey of Ahmad Fuad Osman on February 4, three months after the show's opening, allegedly due to a complaint lodged by a museum board member. The paintings, installation, and print in question critique various aspects of Malaysian politics, from corruption to misinformation. In a statement posted to social media on February 10, the artist described the museum's decision as "arbitrary, unjustified, and an abuse of institutional power." In response, the museum argued that it has the right to remove works that infringe on the "dignity of any individual, religion, politics, race, custom, and country." Osman has demanded that the show be taken down in its entirety.

CAREER MOVES

On January 10, Cecilia Alemani was named the artistic director of the 59th Venice Biennale. Alemani is the chief curator and director of High Line Art, which commissions public art projects for the New York attraction. Previously, she curated Italy's national pavilion, titled "The Magical World," at the 57th Venice Biennale.

On January 14, the Bangkok Art Biennale announced the curatorial team for its 2020 edition, titled "Escape Routes" and slated to run from October 10 to February 21, 2021. Led by chief executive and artistic director Apinan Poshyananda, the team members include Sun Wenjie, head of exhibitions at Beijing's Red Brick Art Museum; Dow Wasiksiri, president of the Royal Photographic Society of Thailand; Wutigorn Kongka, assistant professor of the fine arts department at King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang in Bangkok; and Ong Puay Khim, former deputy director of curatorial programs at NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore.

On January 30, Independent Curators International announced Frances Wu Giarratano as its new deputy director. Giarratano will oversee the daily operations and long-term planning for the organization, which supports the work of curators. Prior to this, Giarratano was the director of exhibitions at New York's American Federation of Arts. From 2014 to '17, she served as the deputy director of the Hong Kong nonprofit Para Site.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

On January 5 and 6, the National Gallery of Australia closed its doors due to poor air quality caused by smoke from widespread bushfires around Canberra and the southeastern coast of Australia. Other venues affected by the crisis included the Murray Art Museum Albury, which served as a temporary shelter.

The K-pop group BTS surprised the art world on January 14 with the announcement of "Connect, BTS," a cross-disciplinary art project aimed at celebrating diversity. Curated by Daehyung Lee, the initiative debuted with Jakob Kudsk Steensen's forest-simulating installation *Catharsis* (2019) at London's Serpentine Galleries. The other works, subsequently presented across four different cities, included Ann Veronica Janssens' light-and-fog installation and Yiyun Kang's immersive video reimagining BTS's signature dance moves at Seoul's Dongdaemun Design Plaza.

Several temporary public artworks were unveiled across Australia. On January 15, Callum Morton's three-meter-high sculpture resembling the top portion of United States president Donald J. Trump's head was revealed at Alfred Deakin Place by the Art Gallery of Ballarat. In Sydney, the 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art presented Louise Zhang's floral-patterned *Lunar New Year Moon Gates* (2020) outside the Exchange building in Darling Square from January 25 through February 9. In the courtyard of Sydney's Hyde Park Barracks, Jonathan Jones marked the building's reopening on February 21 with an installation of white and red gravel, *untitled (maraong manaóuwi)* (2020), which features more than 2,000 repetitions of the emu footprint as well as English broad arrow symbols, alluding to Australia's colonial history.



JONATHAN JONES and his installation *untitled (maraong manaóuwi)* (2020) in the courtyard of Sydney's Hyde Park Barracks. Photo by James Horan. Courtesy the artist.

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Remember when contemporary art solved the climate crisis?

BY SEAN RASPET

In 2020, the Point examines how our cultural and sociopolitical systems are implicated in climate change, and what actions the arts industry can take. In this excerpt of an essay published online by AAP, Sean Raspet discusses art-world greenwashing.

Not every artwork needs to be about the climate crisis. Nor should it be. That being said, with a recent, sharp increase in climate change as a topic for artworks and exhibitions, it is necessary to address a sizable gap in the typical perceptions of what a climate-crisis-themed project does and what it *is* physically, chemically, and functionally—and, as a result, its material effects on the atmosphere. Climate change is, after all, a large-scale physicochemical problem. It is an accumulating flow of gaseous carbon that is immune to our individually held thoughts, beliefs, hopes, and fears. It is responsive to (and constituted by) humankind's material activities on a collective, planetary scale.

At the root of the gap between an artwork's imagined and actual effects is, perhaps, a more general tendency to confuse artworks that are about something for being the thing itself. For example, a painting that is *about* a historically effective political protest movement may become rhetorically confused with *being* an effective political protest, despite its present-day context, format, and reception. In many ways this disjuncture ultimately arises from contemporary art's tendency to imagine itself as separate from society's mode of production at large—often to the point of being unable to see its own position within that system. Slippery and imprecise language, such as in statements about how a project “tackles,” “confronts,” “addresses,” or “combats” climate change, can further muddle the divide between the perception-of and the actual material exigency of a work.

Artworks are products and features of our present-day carbon-emitting mode of production. Our “fossil capitalism” production system and economic organization of society is the source of the climate crisis, and any effective climate-related endeavor—artwork or otherwise—must act upon and affect this site. The tendency for disavowal of the material-economic-chemical conditions of an artwork in favor of its stated message allows for the art-world equivalent of greenwashing. Similar to corporate or political greenwashing, this stifles and obfuscates paths toward actually significant systemic change and points of productive intervention into material conditions (as well as, I would argue, paths toward more interesting art). We should be honest with ourselves that within the current system of material production, most artworks are net emitters by a large margin. The more “heroic” in scale an artwork is, generally the larger the source of emissions it is, and this fact cannot be offset by an encoded climate-related message.

Much has been written of the inherent contradictions of Olafur Eliasson's *Ice Watch* (2014), and while I'm not aiming to pile on,



the work is an instructive example of the perceptual gaps of our present moment. The project entailed the transportation of several heavy ice fragments from the Greenland ice sheet to three cities in Europe, where the public could watch them melt. In this process, it produced a large amount of greenhouse gas emissions—largely due to the refrigerated shipping of the ice chunks across significant distances. Probably anticipating some criticism regarding the project's resource footprint, Eliasson commissioned a carbon-accounting analysis from the London-based organization Julie's Bicycle for the project's Paris iteration. This version produced an estimated 30 tons of CO₂ equivalent: small in comparison to the world's total carbon emissions, but as a single artwork, it may have been one of

the most heavily carbon-emitting projects made during that decade, especially when counting the impact of all three of its presentations.

Ironically, I would argue that the work's primary positive contribution is in its carbon accounting—a concrete step that allowed for the registration of the physical and ecological costs that came with the conceptual gesture's realization—something that very few projects have done. However, the issue of whether the work may have effectively raised awareness of the climate crisis, reaching a public and changing minds, thus presumably also leading to actual, material action, remains debatable. There may have been a historical window where raising awareness on the issue of climate change via artworks was a relevant endeavor. However, today, the public is generally cognizant of the existence of climate change and the need for it to urgently “be addressed” (or is likely otherwise in denial and not amenable to statements coded in the format of contemporary artworks). The media already thoroughly discusses the topic. And indeed, the climate itself does a far better job at raising awareness: despite the multitude of climate-related artworks at the 2019 Venice Biennale, for example, the floods in the city were undeniably more effective in making tangible the perils of climate change than any contemporary art display.

Projects predicated on the value of raising awareness are symptoms of a present-day failure to connect the dots between the art system and our fossil-fuel-powered modes of capitalist production—the material-chemical basis from which artworks arise. They speak to a desperate desire for art to remain relevant in a time of rapidly shifting frameworks and an increasing likelihood of near-future social and ecological collapse. We can't solve the climate crisis through the same economic system that produced it. We don't need an additional quantity of art objects and exhibitions produced by the existing order. Rather, we need artists (and everyone) to help create entirely new systems.

ILLUSTRATION BY RENEE LI

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Dialogues

The David Zwirner Podcast

Believing in Miracles

BY DT

As the new coronavirus sent much of the world into a mask-wearing tizzy and a rash of self-isolation left city streets in Asia devoid of people, one particular artist was blessed with double



luck. Venice-based Japanese glass artist **Ritsue Mishima** had just finished installing a newly commissioned glass sculpture, *Cosmic Ring*, for Chinese electronics giant Xiaomi in its second headquarters in Wuhan in late December—fortunately for her, just a few weeks before Covid-19 crippled the city and all of Hubei province. Many gallerists' heavily sanitized fingers are crossed that Xiaomi will continue commissioning artworks after quarantine is lifted.

While most of the art world focused on the postponement of Art Basel Hong Kong, other important events were also wiped out by the panic caused by the epidemic. Among them included annual fundraising galas for Asia Society in Hong Kong, Mori Art Museum in Tokyo, and Singapore's Center for Contemporary Art (CCA)—the latter of which is said to be sitting on its last shrinking pile of cash given out by Nanyang Technological University and now must actively look for other sources of income. We are definitely rooting for the livelihood of CCA.

Despite the postponements, the show must go on. The only question is when. In Hong Kong, its small community of vested interests shifted into overdrive

to try to resurrect the spirit of art month, typically held in March. Some organizations and galleries see a window of opportunity with Sotheby's Hong Kong auctions, which, at the time of writing, plans to go ahead at the beginning of April right before the Easter holiday.

Meanwhile Christie's and Phillips, both of which typically hold their spring sales in Hong Kong in May, are trying to convince another camp of players to revolve all the postponed art events around these sales, under an unfortunate branding exercise called “#ARTConfidentHK.” While some naively hope that Sotheby's will still draw overseas visitors, and others pray the virus will recede with the warming weather by May, in time for Christie's and Phillips, it would be good to remember that the auction machine does not depend on the congregants' footfall or even beholding the work in person, but rather on the holy spirit that moves among overseas bidders on the phone and online.

Seasoned in dramatic acts of recovery, and eager to get everyone paying full rent again, Hong Kong's stakeholders are planning their immediate revival. Among many other plans and appointments taking root, virus or not, in addition



to being a foundation and arts platform—basically “the Silicon Valley of Culture”—now real-estate evangelist **Adrian**

Cheng's K11 is angling to create art hubs rivaling the H Queens building in Central. The aim is to attract arts organizations and PR agencies to rent office space from K11's sprawling real-estate portfolio. One of the first converts to relocate to K11 Atelier is French gallerist **Emmanuel Perrotin**, who is bravely crossing the waters from Central to Kowloon, although initial plans for a grand reopening in March in time for Art Basel were spoiled.



According to K11's marketing pitch, its locations—in Quarry Bay and Tsim Sha Tsui—are places “where you will meet freethinkers from all walks of life” and are “an ideal meeting point for international talents and local experts.” That should tick the boxes for gallery owners and dealers alike—along with the square-foot price. Now all the malls need is some of that foot traffic to return. Hallelujah!

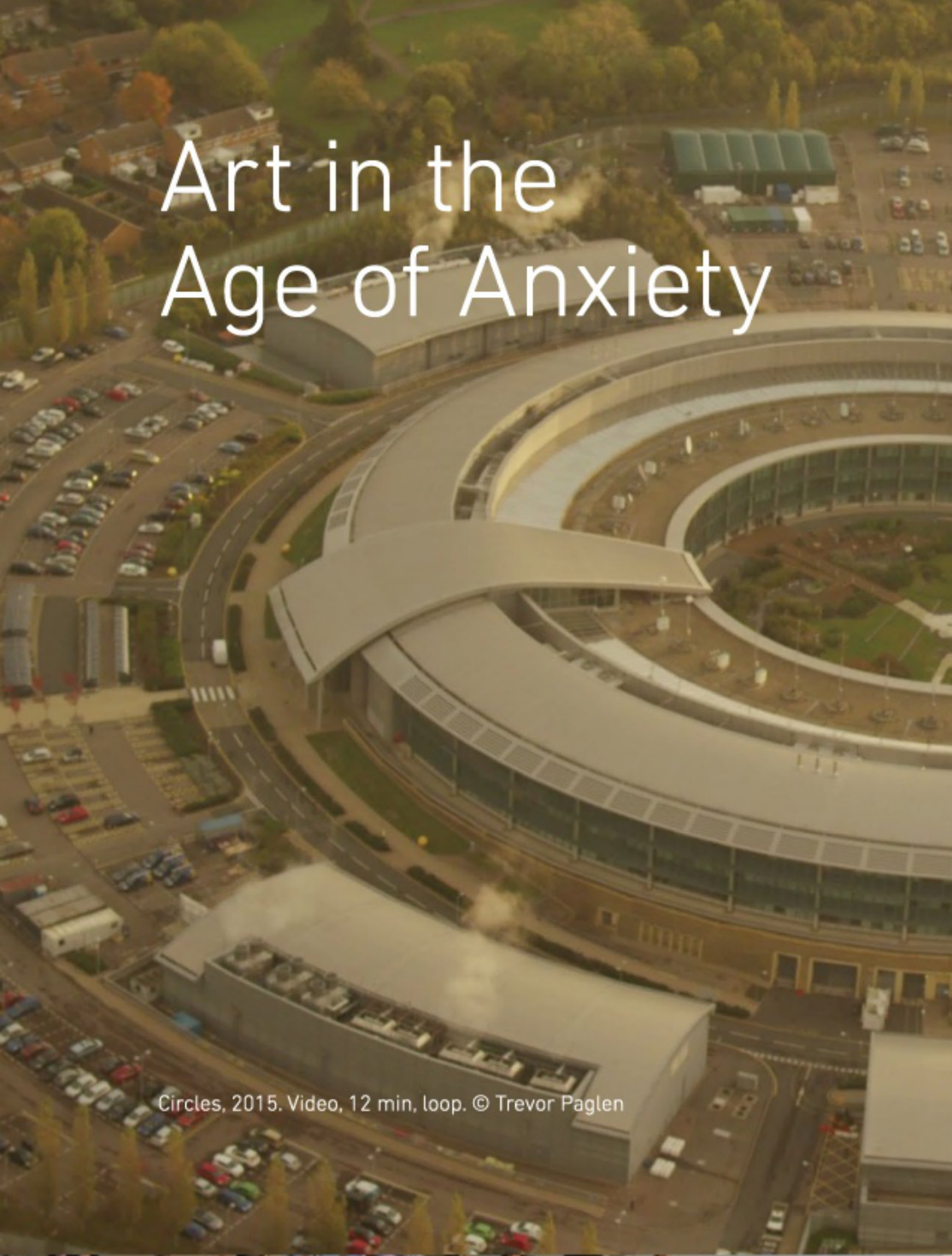
Other gallery tenants are looking to diversify their address books, this time possibly decamping from Hong Kong for a more sedate, tax-free diocese. Word in the aisles in Singapore—which was equally in the grip of a virus panic for much of February—is that some of the international heavyweights with Asian outposts in Hong Kong, such as Hauser & Wirth and White Cube, were doing site visits as early as November for Southeast Asian real-estate options because of the ongoing

protests that, prior to Covid-19, had led to a significant drop in visitors by both locals and international visitors to its Central business district. Perhaps Hong Kong's protests will be the Singapore gallery district Gillman Barrack's saving grace, as the government landlords are reportedly offering dealers up to 30 percent discounts if they sign another two-year lease.

And once again Gillman Barracks finds itself at a cross in the road, as smaller organic initiatives intersect with the agenda of central planners. While the S.E.A Focus fair in January was lauded by visitors and those who took part because it showed exciting, modestly priced work made by young artists from the region, the chattering classes are placing bets if its days are also numbered with the coming of the postponed Art SG fair, led by **Magnus Renfrew**, who birthed Dangdai two years ago in Taipei. Some say S.E.A

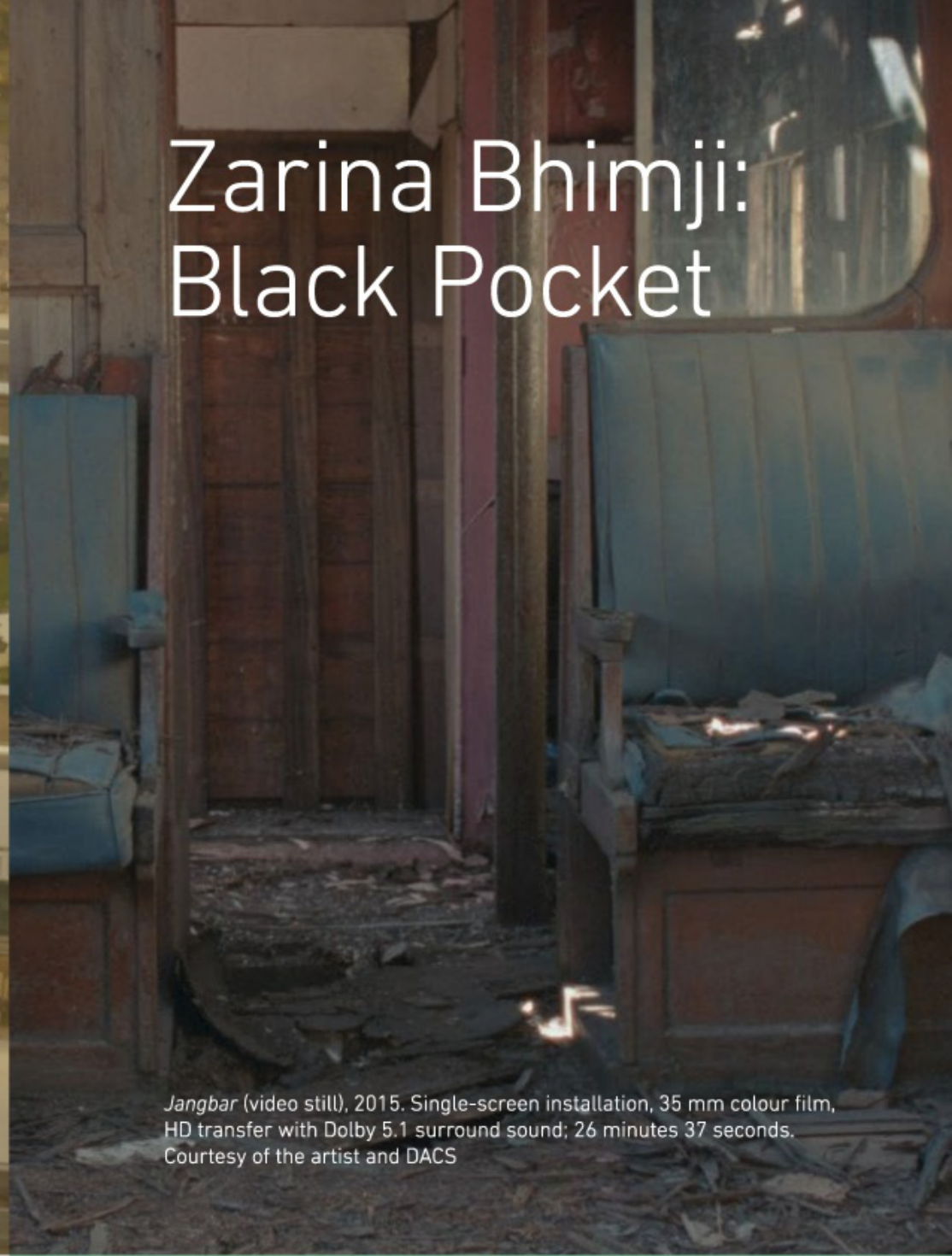


Focus's government funding will likely be cut in the near future because the bean counters see no need for two art-selling events in Singapore. This confused scenario sounds eerily like what **Lorenzo Rudolf** of Art Stage Singapore moaned about as having killed his own initiative in early 2019. Let's pray this bout of self-sabotage isn't a recurring condition in the never-ending effort by Singapore to become an art-fair destination. Amen!



Art in the Age of Anxiety

Circles, 2015. Video, 12 min, loop. © Trevor Paglen



Zarina Bhimji: Black Pocket

Jangbar (video still), 2015. Single-screen installation, 35 mm colour film, HD transfer with Dolby 5.1 surround sound; 26 minutes 37 seconds. Courtesy of the artist and DACS



Tarek Atoui: Cycles in 11

WITHIN, 2013. Performance still from the Sharjah Biennial 11 Music and Performance programme

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Where Art Thou?

SINGAPORE

Left to right: At the Singapore Biennale 2019, artist **Chang En-Man** and curator **John Tung**; and artistic director **Patrick Flores**.



HONG KONG

Left to right, top to bottom: At Booked: Hong Kong Art Book Fair, Tai Kwun Contemporary, artists **Leung Chi Wo** and **Sara Wong**; artist **Vivian Xiaoshi Qin** and curator **Jill Angel Chun**. At the opening of Tomorrow Maybe's exhibition "Give No Words but Mum": (front row) multidisciplinary artists **Lo Lai Lai Natalie** and **Bouie Choi**, and (back row) sound artist **Tse Chun Sing** and writer **Fizen Yuen**. Curator **Dai Zhuoqun** and artist **Mao Xuhui** at the opening of Mao's show "Will" presented by Tang Contemporary Art. Bangkok CityCity Gallery co-founders **Akapol "Op" Sudasna** and **Supamas "Louktan" Phahulo**, at Art Basel Hong Kong's cocktail reception in January.



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MF HUSAIN

Untitled (Tulsi)

1998, oil on canvas, diptych, 61 × 182.9 cm. Courtesy Christie's, New York.

The new decade started with global panic as the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) spread from Wuhan to the rest of China in December 2019, and across the world in January. While several cities in mainland China were placed in lockdown, many countries, including the United States, imposed restrictions on travelers who had visited China within the two weeks preceding their arrival. Virus-related disruptions affected auction houses in New York and Hong Kong, leading to postponements and cancellations of first-quarter events.

NEW YORK

Sotheby's Asia Week sales of fine art and antiques were postponed from March to June 22-27, except for the Modern and Contemporary South Asian Art auction, which will take place on March 16 as scheduled. At this event, Sotheby's hopes to rake in USD 1-1.5 million with Indian modernist VS Gaitonde's *Untitled* (1963) oil-on-canvas abstraction, featuring a horizontal band of blue and black strokes on a powdery gray background. Although works by Progressive Artists' Group luminaries such as Gaitonde have enjoyed steady popularity—and sky-high prices—recent results have been less predictable. At Sotheby's November 2019 sale in Mumbai, Gaitonde's yellow abstract composition *Untitled* (1974) had an anticipated price tag of USD 2 million but was met with little interest and went unsold.

Another big draw at the 2020 New York sale is late-19th-century painter Raja Ravi Varma's 1897 portrait of a sage, *Untitled (Swami Vishwamitra in Meditation)*. Showcasing his signature fusion of Western realism with Indian aesthetics and subjects, Varma's painting—a rare sighting on the international market—carries estimates of USD 700,000-900,000. Other highlights include pioneer abstractionist Nasreen Mohamedi's oil-on-canvas-board *Untitled* (1963), depicting broad strokes of layered blues centered on a beige background. Better known for her line drawings exploring space and perspective, this earlier work is expected to find takers for USD 200,000-300,000. A more recent work on offer with the same estimate is rising auction favorite Bhupen Khakhar's *In the Coconut Groves* (1993), an oil-on-printed-cloth rendering of nude men in intimate embrace.

amid multicolored palm trees, reflecting the artist's own queer identity. At Sotheby's Mumbai sale last November, all nine lots by Khakhar—spanning watercolor, ceramics, collage, and oil painting—were snapped up within or above estimates.

Although Sotheby's New York canceled its biannual Fine Classical Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy sale this season, Chinese paintings will be included in the Important Chinese Works of Art auction in June. The auction house declined to offer an official reason for the cancellation, but poor results from the previous dedicated sale may have played a part. In September 2019, the 68-lot sale brought in USD 3.55 million, much lower than the USD 7.26 and 5.66 million achieved at the 100-plus-lot sales in March 2019 and September 2018, respectively.

Christie's New York also postponed the majority of its Asia Art Week events to June. Among the sales that will go ahead as planned is the single-owner showcase of 150 works from Jane and

Kito de Boer's Indian art collection—one of the largest private holdings of South Asian modern art—on March 18. A highlight is the late Akbar Padamsee's painting *Paysage Urbain* (1961). The warm-toned abstraction of brown and golden blocks is expected to fetch USD 300,000–500,000, in line with prices for works of comparable format and medium at recent sales. A smaller *Untitled* (1962) canvas of similar composition sold for USD 100,000 at Christie's New York in September 2018.

Ganesh Pyne, a Bengal School painter known for his darkly surrealist style, will be represented at the March 2020 sale with *The Animal* (1972), of a tethered quadruped rendered in tempera, carrying estimates of USD 100,000–150,000. *The Last Chapter* (1982), an equally somber painting by Rameshwar Broota of a gray-toned, faceless figure lying beneath clouds, is expected to make USD 250,000–350,000.

Christie's South Asian Modern and Contemporary Art sale, also on March 18, will offer pieces by the usual

sought-after modernists. The auction house shared that—like the Sotheby's South Asian art sale—one of the predicted top pieces is an oil painting by VS Gaitonde. Christie's lot, *Untitled* (1983), features abstract shapes against a turquoise background; estimates are undisclosed. Christie's also has high hopes for Tyeb Mehta's *Untitled (Confidant)* (1962), a portrait of two embracing men rendered in rich auburn tones, estimated at USD 600,000–800,000. Other highlights are MF Husain's diptych *Untitled (Tulsi)* (1998), a colorful painted patchwork of elephants and dancing women, and FN Souza's *Untitled (Spanish Landscape)* (1958), depicting European buildings in linear perspective, expected to bring in USD 150,000–200,000 and USD 120,000–180,000, respectively.

HONG KONG

The spread of Covid-19 to Hong Kong has disrupted operations within the city, with schools closed until mid-March, and civil servants and some private-sector employees told to work from home. Museums and galleries in the city have remained closed or reduced opening hours. Art Basel and Art Central were canceled.

Despite this, the Spring Auction Series (April 3–8) for Sotheby's Hong Kong will take place as usual at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre. The highlight of the Modern Art Evening Sale on April 5 is Sanyu's oil-on-masonite *Quatre Nus* (c. 1950s), depicting four reclining female nudes against an emerald background. In October 2019, the artist's USD 25.2 million painting of a single nude in recline, *Nu* (1965), set an auction record for the artist at Sotheby's Hong Kong, only to be broken one month later at Christie's Hong Kong by the USD 38.7 million *Five Nudes* (1950s), which nonetheless fell short of the USD 70 million high estimate.

David Hockney's painting *30 Sunflowers* (1996), of five bouquets on a table in rich, saturated hues, will lead the Contemporary Art Evening Sale on April 6. While no official estimates are given, speculation by industry specialists places the painting's worth at USD 10.3 million. Measuring 182.9 cm on each side, the square canvas was last purchased in May 2011 at Phillips New York for the high-estimate price of USD 2.5 million. In May 2018, Christie's New York sold Hockney's *Antheriums* (1995), a similarly sized painting of a potted plant, for USD 5.6 million, well ahead of the USD 3.5 million high estimate. In November that year at Christie's New York, Hockney's *Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)* (1972) was purchased for USD 90 million—a world-record price for a living artist that explains the higher valuation of *30 Sunflowers* compared to *Antheriums*.

Another auction star, Yoshitomo Nara, will be represented at Sotheby's April sale by his large-format portrait of a girl in profile, *Keep Your Chin Up* (2001), estimated at USD 2.3–3.6 million. Nara's monumental canvases of his signature gamine motif are particularly in demand. *Knife Behind Back* (2000), depicting an angry girl, set a new auction record for the artist at Sotheby's Hong Kong in October 2019, hammering at USD 24.9 million, four times the high estimate.

Christie's Hong Kong delayed its inaugural 20th Century and Contemporary Art Evening Sale, originally scheduled to coincide with Art Basel on March 19. The auction will be folded into the May series. Poly Auction Hong Kong postponed its spring auction series to an indefinite date. Meanwhile, China Guardian Hong Kong pushed back its April sales until late May, with the exact dates yet to be announced.

All prices include buyer's premium.



SANYU
Quatre Nus

c. 1950s, oil on Masonite, 100 × 122 cm. Courtesy Sotheby's, Hong Kong.



Installation view of Perrotin's booth at Taipei Dangdai, Taipei Nangang Exhibition Center, 2020. Courtesy Perrotin, Paris / Hong Kong / New York / Seoul / Tokyo / Shanghai.

Riding the Storm

In line with projections of slowed global economic growth in 2020 amid widespread political unrest and strained international trade relations, sales at art fairs in January and February were mediocre, though blue-chip spaces at Taipei Dangdai reported more lucrative transactions.

TAIPEI

The second edition of Taipei Dangdai (January 17–19) once again took place at the Taipei Nangang Exhibition Center. Compared to the previous year, the total number of participants increased from 90 to 99, with more than 60 returnees. Among the 2020 exhibitors, 23 maintain permanent spaces in Taiwan, while a majority have bases across mainland China, Hong Kong, Japan, and South Korea.

Booths tended to eschew installations and videos in favor of wall-based works, catering to the more conservative tastes of the fair's predominantly Taiwanese collector base. Hauser & Wirth (Hong Kong/London/Los Angeles/New York/Somerset/St. Moritz/Zurich) placed Rashid Johnson's vibrantly colored *Untitled Escape Collage* (2019), Jenny Holzer's oil-on-linen abstraction *Shifting to Softer Targets* (2014–15), and Keith Tyson's painted female nude *Basic Functions* (2009) in Asian foundations for USD 475,000, USD 350,000, and USD 129,700 respectively. Perrotin (Paris/New York/Tokyo/Seoul/Hong Kong/Shanghai) sold out its solo presentation of Eddie Martinez's abstract floral

canvases, priced between USD 50,000–200,000. Kukje Gallery (Seoul/Busan) brought a roster of Korean and international artists, finding takers for Julian Opie's bronze sculpture of a woman, *Shoulder bag* (2018), priced at GBP 110,000 (USD 143,140). Noteworthy sales at White Cube (London/Hong Kong) included Darren Almond's landscape photographs from his *Fullmoon* series (1998–), and Al Held's abstract expressionist paintings, all to Taiwanese art foundations at undisclosed prices.

A fixture of Taipei's art scene, Eslite Gallery presented tech-art collective LuxuryLogico's monumental kinetic sculpture *Poetry of the Sun* (2020) as part of the fair's special sector for large-scale installations. The metal structure, priced at NTD 12 million (USD 397,300), was purchased by a Taiwanese collector. Meanwhile, Taipei's TKG+ had a mixed booth of younger and midcareer Taiwanese artists, featuring Chen Ching-Yuan's realist oil paintings and mixed-media works by Joyce Ho and Chou Yu-Cheng. The gallery reportedly sold 90 percent of the works offered.

Several galleries—both from Taiwan and abroad—have already indicated plans to return next year following respectable

sales at the 2020 edition. If the fair can continue to build confidence among participants and collectors, it may succeed in cementing its place as a significant regional art event.

SINGAPORE

Held in a tent at the Gillman Barracks arts precinct, the second edition of S.E.A. Focus (January 16–19), a platform for Southeast Asian art led by Singapore's not-for-profit STPI – Creative Workshop and Gallery, saw a reduced number of exhibitors—from 26 to 20—compared with last year's event. Most of the 2020 exhibitors had footprints in Singapore and the wider region. Among the eight new participants were regional stalwarts ROH Projects (Jakarta) and Silverlens Galleries (Manila). A decidedly intimate affair, the event, which also included a program of artist-led workshops and panel talks in a separate tent, attracted more than 5,000 total attendees.

Targeting the fair's younger clientele, many galleries continued to showcase emerging artists. Nearly all of the works at Sullivan+Strumpf's (Sydney/Singapore) solo presentation of Dawn Ng, including the Singaporean



DAWN NG, *BEAUTIFUL*, 2019, engraved marble, 103×11×11 cm. Courtesy Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney / Singapore.

artist's marble blocks engraved with text, and an abstract mixed-media painting titled *ODESSA, Ash* (2019), were purchased by Southeast Asian collectors. Yavuz Gallery (Sydney/Singapore) fared well with a solo booth of Luke Heng's abstract monochromatic canvases, also placing most of the works in regional private collections. First-timer Nova Contemporary (Bangkok) reported strong sales, including Nipan Oranniwesna's dark-blue watercolor *Silence Shout* (2019) to a Singapore-based client. Gajah Gallery (Singapore) moved seven works by emerging-artist Mahalakshmi Kannappan, whose charcoal canvases proved popular, as well as Dini Nur Aghnia's SGD 3,500 (USD 2,550) clay-on-canvas work titled *The Sun Rising* (2019), with the majority of buyers from Singapore.

The city-state's art market has been shaky, as evidenced by the unceremonious end of Art Stage Singapore in January 2019 and the postponement of Art SG's inaugural edition from last November to October 2020. S.E.A. Focus has carved a niche for itself as a boutique showcase of Southeast Asian art; time will tell if this is a winning strategy.

NEW DELHI

The 12th edition of the India Art Fair (IAF) (January 31–February 2) returned to New Delhi's NSIC exhibition complex with 81 participants—up from

75 last year—primarily from major cities across India. IAF opened amid considerable economic and sociopolitical uncertainty. In September 2019, Art Basel owner MCH Group slashed its regional fair portfolio, selling its majority stake in IAF. While IAF is now backed by Angus Montgomery Arts—which owns shares in Sydney Contemporary, Art SG, and Art Central Hong Kong (canceled this year due to the Covid-19 outbreak)—the transaction raised concerns about the financial viability of regional fairs. At the same time, India has experienced drastic declines in economic growth, alongside social unrest, with protests against the Citizen Amendment Act—a bill passed in December 2019 blocking Muslim immigrants from gaining Indian citizenship—continuing through the fair's run. The fair itself became the center of controversy when police censored an interactive installation called *The Wall: Community Art Building Mural* (2020) on the final day, citing its reference to the protests. Created by New Delhi-based design studio Post-Art Project, the work, shown at the booth of the Italian Embassy Culture Centre, was a collaboration with artists of different faiths and sexual orientations.

Despite these challenges, gallerists reported positive results, with most sales happening during the VIP preview. Vadehra Art Gallery (New Delhi) placed celebrated Indian artist Atul

Dodiya's triptych *Guernica Bouquet* (2019–20)—depicting monochromatic, mutated faces against multicolored backgrounds based on traditional Indian designs—in an institutional collection for USD 150,000. The gallery also sold sculptor Ravinder Reddy's fiberglass bust of a turquoise-skinned female, *Head with Pink Bun* (2019), to an Indian private collector for USD 75,000. Tarq (Mumbai) reported interest in emerging artists Nibha Sikander and Savia Mahajan, whose colorful paper cut-outs of insects and mixed-ceramic sculptures, respectively, went to private and institutional collections at undisclosed prices. Experimenter (Kolkata) showcased pieces by younger artists, including Prabhakar Pachpute's charcoal-and-

acrylic portrayal of figures with outstretched arms, *Prolonged Echoes* (2020), as well as Sahil Naik's gray-toned architectural study on paper, *Modernist Facades for New Nations (Proposition 8)* (2019). At Grosvenor Gallery (London), one of IAF's few Western-based participants, a private collector purchased a painting by Progressive Artists' Group co-founder FN Souza titled *The Businessman* (1961).

IAF organizers have continued to voice optimism about the future of the fair, which will move to the newly constructed exhibition hall Pragati Maidan next year. But given the rocky state of affairs in India, IAF may need more than a face-lift to attract established galleries and, more importantly, big-spending clients.



ATUL DODIYA, *Guernica Bouquet - II*, 2019–20, oil on canvas, 182.9×101.6 cm. Courtesy Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi.

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in a Long Time*
Sarah Abu Abdallah
Until April 20, 2020

*Composition for
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Hassan Khan
Until June 8, 2020

Artist's Rooms
Lawrence Abu Hamdan
Taysir Batniji
Larissa Sansour
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Artist's Garden
Asunción
Molinos Gordo
Until June 1, 2020

Metropolis
Lubna Chowdhary
Until August 1, 2020

Follies
waiwai
Until April 30, 2020



Courtesy of Michael Rakowitz. Photo by Robert Chase Heishman

Jameel Arts Centre, Jaddaf Waterfront, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Opening hours Saturday to Thursday: 10am-8pm;
Tuesday: Closed; Friday: 12pm-10pm
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GATHER AROUND

3/14–6/7

PARA SITE, HONG KONG

Garden of Six Seasons

A prelude to the 2020 Kathmandu Triennale, "Garden of Six Seasons" will explore landscaping practices and gardening traditions in connection with notions of cultural specificity and transplantation. Among

the 24 diverse practitioners represented, Naufus Ramirez Figueroa and Citra Sasmita will create new commissions. Other highlights include Vvzela Kook's animation *Columbus of Horticulture* (2019), based on the historic roles of plant hunters in shaping various ecosystems, and Andrew Thomas Huang's film *Kiss of the Rabbit God* (2019), a love story between a mortal protagonist and a deity. Additionally, maps from the 19th century will elucidate how humans have navigated the earth.

VVZELA KOOK,
Columbus of Horticulture, 2019,
3D printed objects,
glass dome, acrylic,
installation dimensions
variable; animation:
4 min 50 sec.
Courtesy the artist.



Installation view of **ANDREW REWALD's** *Alchemy Garden*, 2019–, socially engaged community collaboration, 11 × 14 m, at the National Art School, Sydney. Photo by Sebastian Goldspink. Courtesy the artist, Biennale of Sydney, and the National Art School.

3/14–6/8

MULTIPLE LOCATIONS

Biennale of Sydney: Nirin

"The urgent states of our contemporary lives are laden with unresolved past anxieties and hidden layers of the supernatural," according to Brook Andrew, artistic director of the 22nd Biennale of Sydney. Titled "Nirin," meaning "edge"

in the Wiradjuri dialect, the Biennale aims to expose and shift the perspectives that have informed the foundational systems of our world. Unfolding across the city, the event will comprise contributions by First Nation, Australian, and international artists, including Ahmed Umar, whose ceramic sarcophagus references the vulnerability of queer lives in Sudan, and Andrew Rewald, who will reveal the *Alchemy Garden* (2019–), reflecting on the relationship between plants and human history.



TAREK ATOUI,
WITHIN, 2013, photo documentation of musical performance with ten drummers and electronic musician fortissimo at Alserkal Avenue, Dubai, during Sharjah Biennial 11. Courtesy the artist and Sharjah Art Foundation.

3/21–6/21

SHARJAH ART FOUNDATION

Tarek Atoui: Cycles in 11

Over the past 11 years, sound artist Tarek Atoui has been exploring different methods for listening, composing, and performing. Stemming from his 2008 residency at the Sharjah Art Foundation and developed

through research into Deaf culture and Arabic music history, his project *WITHIN* (2013–) comprises musical instruments that he invented, as well as auditory experiences, and films that assemble variegated perceptions of sounds. "Cycles in 11" will feature live performances by Atoui and guest creators using the instruments from *WITHIN* and other projects, probing new ways of finding connections through the sonic realm.

4/23–9/6

MORI ART MUSEUM, TOKYO

Stars: Six Contemporary Artists from Japan to the World

Six of Japan's most prominent artists—Yayoi Kusama, Lee Ufan, Tatsuo Miyajima, Takashi Murakami, Yoshitomo Nara, and Hiroshi Sugimoto—will be the subjects of a Mori Art

Museum blockbuster. The exhibition promises to delight experts and the uninitiated alike, with new commissions displayed alongside some of the artists' most widely recognized works, including Miyajima's pool of LED lights flashing numbers from zero to nine, *Sea of Time '98* (1998), and Sugimoto's photograph series *Diorama* (1974–). For the historically inclined, there will also be archival materials from 50 major overseas art exhibitions that have shaped the international image of postwar Japan.



HIROSHI SUGIMOTO, *Polar Bear*, 1976, from the *Diorama* series (1974–), gelatin silver print, 42.3 × 54.6 cm. Copyright the artist. Courtesy the artist and Mori Art Museum, Tokyo.

WORLDWIDE WEB OF WOES

Cindy Ji Hye Kim NEW YORK

A woman lies naked on a table with her underwear pulled down between her legs. The pages of a book resting on her pelvis are flipped open, and other tomes are scattered on the floor. The image's high-contrast, black-and-white palette recalls the chiaroscuro lighting of film noir, creating a cinematic atmosphere. It's as if an erotic act has just taken

place. This scene from Cindy Ji Hye Kim's charcoal drawing *Interpretation* (all works 2019) evokes Romantic painter Antoine Wiertz's canvas *La Liseuse de Romans* (*The Reader of Novels*, 1853), which likewise depicts a naked woman absorbed in reading. Both figures are portrayed as objects of desire, as is emphasized by their uninvited company: in Wiertz's painting, a disembodied hand reaches stealthily toward the woman's bed. In Kim's rendering, a couple, appearing only as ghostly silhouettes, peek at the woman's private moment through a window. This voyeur-subject relationship within the composition provokes reflections on how we, as viewers, receive the work, and positions us as merely passing witnesses to an act of creativity.

In her solo exhibition "Verses from the Apocalypse" at New York's Helena Anrather gallery, Kim took revenge on her audience, making them work by hanging her sketches along wires strung across the space. Visitors had to duck and dodge, contorting their bodies to have a closer look at the miniscule pieces—many of them depicting heroine-sex slaves. Besides pointing to the often thankless role of artists, Kim refers to her experience working in an animation studio as a trained illustrator, which required her to produce art mechanically, underscoring the intermingling of suffering and pleasure in her creative process. This is encapsulated in the drawing *Creativity*, in which a girl is knelt in prayer for ideas in front of her notebook, with a pencil rammed through her palms. In *Poetry*, another girl is twisted around the corner of a table, the scrunched-up balls

of paper in front of her testifying to her struggle for inspiration.

Through these provocative illustrations, Kim reveals how creativity can converge with violence, and how this process is often overlooked, justified, or even considered an acceptable matter in the eyes of the public.

PAMELA WONG



CINDY JI HYE KIM, *Interpretation*, 2019, graphite, charcoal, pastel, and ink on paper with hair paper backing and Plexiglass framing, 30.5×23 cm. Courtesy the artist; Foxy Production Gallery, New York; and Helena Anrather gallery, New York.

Elif Saydam BERLIN

A spray of suspended cicada exuviae traced a steep upward arc from the nozzle of an aerosol can on the floor of Franz Kaka gallery in Toronto. It looked troublingly as though they were being emitted by the insecticide. "Gross," I thought, quickly scrolling past images of that work from Elif Saydam's 2019 show. Yet the line between beauty and pestilence is an unstable one in Saydam's practice, and the artist's negotiation of contradictions such as this lends her mixed-media works an abiding allure.

Take *Daily stretch* (2019), shown in her subsequent solo exhibition "What me worry" at Stadium, Berlin. On a curtain of acetate sheets held together by steel rings, cartoon worms form block letters that read *mund/hand/fuss* (mouth/hand/foot). In between the words are laminated detritus, from plastic bags and shed snakeskin to lucky four-leaf clovers. The work's non-sequitur air belies deeper considerations on the tension between the artificial and the organic, and how we ascribe symbolic worth to what's underfoot.

The question of value is articulated in terms of cultural production in *Artists* (2019), a series of Ottoman-miniature-inspired works featuring ornate fountains rendered in oil and gold leaf. In each painting, the "artists" appear to be represented by cartoon bugs. One insect is shown playing a slot machine (no



ELIF SAYDAM, *Daily stretch* (detail), 2019, laminated plastic bags, plastic net, four-leaf clovers, molted snake skin, and inkjet prints on acetate, 220 × 93 × 4.5 cm. Courtesy the artist and Stadium, Berlin.

dice), hinting that art-making is a gamble. Not one that tends to pay off, we might surmise, based on the sardonic dejection that emanates from *Hotline* (2019), inkjet transfers imitating flyers with phone numbers that begin with 555—the sign of a non-operational number reserved for use in film and television across North America. Slogans such as "Are you crushworthy???"

Find out now," illustrated with

images of pests arranged next to pennies for scale, highlight the helplessness of the insects, yet the intimations of familiar insecurities make us wonder if we are equally pathetic. Saydam's eclectic works are cryptic and dissonant, constantly playing with the allusive qualities of text and image, and tapping into ingrained fears in humorous ways. They provide no answers, only an invitation to stare, strangely fascinated, and possibly recoil.

OPHELIA LAI

Musquiqui Chihying BERLIN / TAIPEI

Something as banal as the dental hygiene products found on the shelves of a country's supermarkets can be telling of that society's perceptions of others. This is the basis of Musquiqui Chihying's pair of monochromatic photographs that make up *The Toothpaste* (2019). One half of the work depicts a dash of white toothpaste, freshly squeezed from a tube branded Darlie (known in Chinese-speaking countries as *heiren yagao*, "black person toothpaste"), with a notorious logo based on black-face performers such as Al Jolson, while the second image features a black dollop of



MUSQUIQUI CHIHying, *The Toothpaste*, 2019, c-print, 29.7 × 42 cm. Courtesy the artist.

Whiteman Toothpaste (*bairén yagao*). Through this work, Chihying points to the embedment of racial stereotypes in products that circulate within the Asian market, and the unbridled perpetuation of problematic cultural appropriations.

The Toothpaste is one of many projects by Chihying that examines, in particular, Sino-African relations. Amid continued Chinese investment in infrastructure-development initiatives throughout Africa, the artist has homed in on forms of neocolonialism, where cultural narratives are overwritten by the dominant economic power and legitimized by institutions. He tackles this in the audio installation *The Mask* (2018). Centered on a fictional art dealer, the work tells of how sculptures originating from West Africa arrived at a Beijing museum. There, the pieces took on new values as symbols of wealth and exoticism, mirroring the way the significances of African art shifted once artifacts were co-opted by European institutions during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The warping of ideas as they are transported across borders is at the core of another immersive audio installation, *The Perspective* (2019). The piece focuses on the Chinese works of art, such as porcelain vases, at the Château de Fontainebleau that were robbed from Beijing's Summer Palace by Anglo-French troops during the second Opium War (1856–60). In a factual tone, a voice narrates stories that trace the objects' evolutions from imperial treasures to looted trophies, artifacts of study, commercial commodities, and targets of political disputes. Anchoring his research to various items, Chihying traces the networks of globalization and pins down pivotal moments of cultural transmutation.

LAUREN LONG



THE SOVEREIGN FOREST

AMAR KANWAR

In collaboration with Sudhir Pattanaik/Samadrusti
and Sherna Dastur

NYUADARTGALLERY

The Art Gallery at New York University Abu Dhabi
Saadiyat Island, United Arab Emirates
nyuad.artgallery@nyu.edu | [@nyuadartgallery](https://www.nyuadartgallery.com)

January 22–May 30, 2020

In parallel with this exhibition, Amar Kanwar's *Such a Morning* will be on view at Ishara Art Foundation in Dubai from January 20–May 20, 2020.

PROFILES

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Pillar for Syncretism

**HARYANTO
ADIKOESOEMO**

BY CHLOE CHU



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Deep Roots

CHLOE SUEN

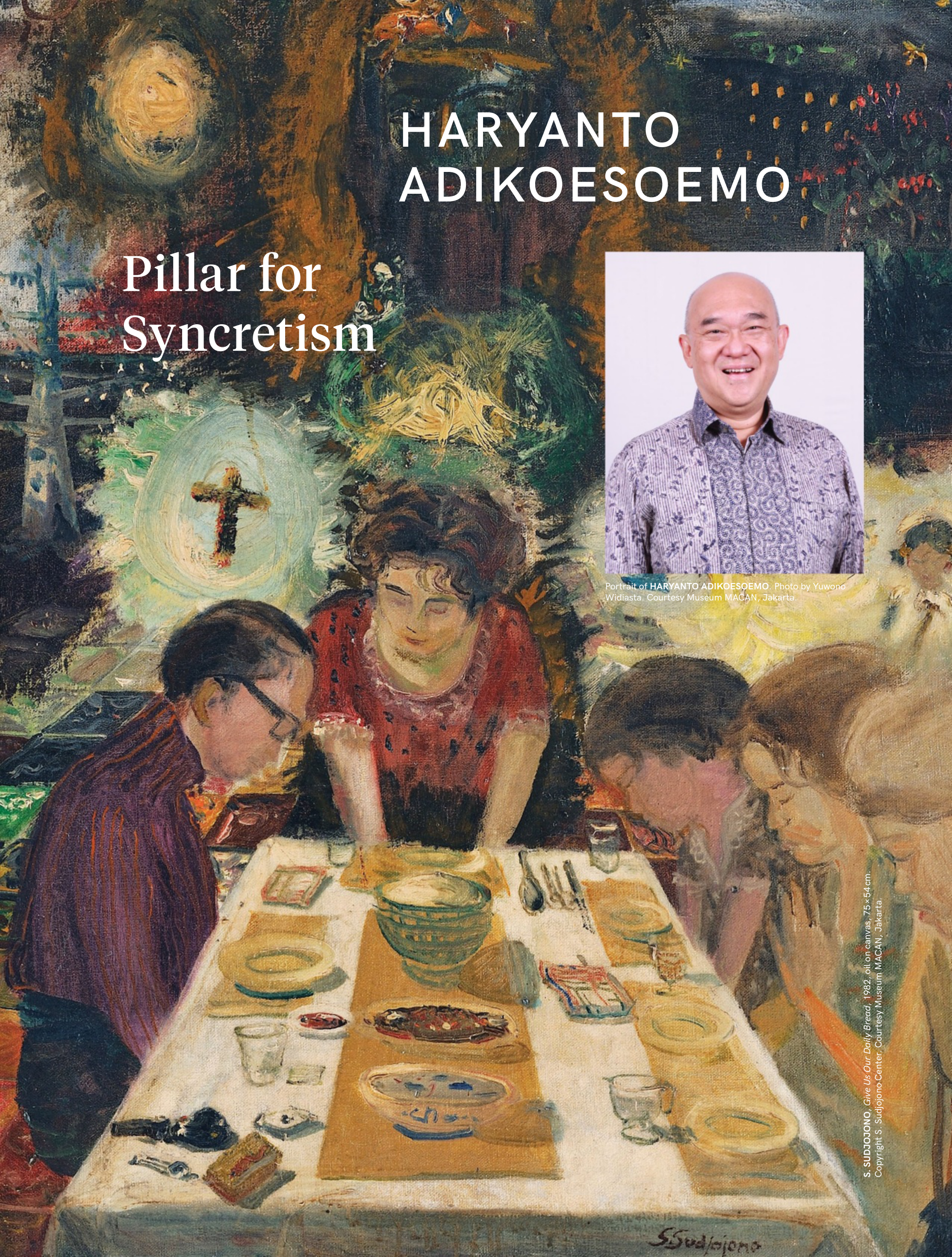
BY LAUREN LONG

HARYANTO ADIKOESOEMO

Pillar for Syncretism



Portrait of HARYANTO ADIKOESOEMO. Photo by Yuwono Widiasta. Courtesy Museum MACAN, Jakarta.



S. SUDJOJONO, *Give Us Our Daily Bread*, 1982, oil on canvas, 75 x 54 cm.
Copyright S. Sudjojono Center. Courtesy Museum MACAN, Jakarta.

BY CHLOE CHU

Outfitted in a crisp, jay-blue suit complemented with a narrow black tie and pocket square, Haryanto Adikoesoemo welcomed more than 100 guests to a darkened ballroom at Jakarta's Ritz-Carlton Pacific Place hotel. It was August 2019, and Museum MACAN was holding its first gala. Seated around candlelit tables, each festooned with a pair of dramatically arched, feathered wings, the audience included some of the capital's elite, who had been gathered for an evening of sartorial peacocking and, as the jovial chairman unabashedly emphasized during his brief welcoming remarks, fundraising. All proceeds from the night's auction were to go toward the Museum MACAN Foundation, which manages the three-year-old museum and Adikoesoemo's collection of international modern and contemporary art. Indicative of his ethos, he shared the stage with his daughter Fenessa, MACAN's chairwoman, who utilized the spotlight to detail the foundation's goals in developing art education, while the elder Adikoesoemo, a proud father, stood back.

Family plays an integral part of daily life in Indonesia, and wealth is commonly passed on along dynastic lines. Adikoesoemo himself inherited his business from his father, who had established a lucrative chemical-trading operation by the time Adikoesoemo was a teenager. He was groomed as a businessman from an early age and pursued a degree in business management from the University of Bradford in England as an undergraduate. The continued expansion of his family's venture can be credited to Adikoesoemo's gumption. Upon graduating in 1983, he joined his father's company, AKR Corporindo, and, brimming with the confidence of a young entrepreneur, convinced his father to take on loans, expanding AKR's offerings to encompass logistics and supply chains for petroleum products. In 1994, AKR became a publicly listed company. Today, Adikoesoemo is shifting his focus from fossil fuels to renewable energy.

Adikoesoemo remains first and foremost a businessman. But perseverance and an openness to different opportunities—the touchstones that he values as a CEO—are also seen in the way he conducts himself as an art patron. His journey as a collector and the future founder of a private museum began in 1992, after he had visited the home of one of his friends on the island of Bali. There, he saw walls adorned with canvases by Indonesian artists such as S. Sudjojono and Hendra Gunawan, who

created expressive figurative paintings, incorporating Indonesian traditions. Curious, Adikoesoemo asked his host why they had formulated their collection around these modern painters. He was fascinated by his companion's explanation about how Sudjojono and Gunawan had both fought for the independence of Indonesia from its Dutch colonizers, politically and culturally, marking a distinct turning point in the nation's art history through their radical works. Among Adikoesoemo's first purchases were Sudjojono's later depictions of independence fighters resting or in discussions, and families gathered around tables—scenes of daily life in the mid-20th century that Dutch artists had neglected to portray in their renderings of the *Mooi Indië* (Beautiful Indies).

Adikoesoemo's curiosity about what drives artists subsequently led him to visit galleries and museums around the world. From his contacts at galleries in the United States and Europe, he learned of significant pieces by Impressionist and modern artists such as Claude Monet and Pablo Picasso, which he folded into his holdings. When his fortunes took a turn in the 1997 Asian financial crisis, however, he had to sell these works to stay afloat. Years later, once his business had recovered, he revisited Impressionist masterworks, hoping to replenish his collection, but found that the prices had soared significantly. Disappointed, he turned his attention to contemporary art instead.

The result of these undulating trajectories is a layered and diverse collection that spans the only self-portrait created by 19th-century painter Raden Saleh—one of the first artists from the Dutch East Indies to be trained in the Netherlands—to a 1988 Keith Haring painting characteristic of the artist's bold, iconic style, and Robert Rauschenberg's subdued collage of paper fragments from magazines and instruction manuals *Rush 20 (Cloister)* (1980). Female artists are also represented in the collection. Arahmaiani's *Lingga-Yoni* (1994) depicts the titular Hindu symbol for copulation alongside calligraphic texts about the first Hindu-Javanese king. The canvas, meant to underscore Indonesia's confluence of cultures and humanity's shared origins, was one of the works that resulted in Arahmaiani's condemnation by fundamentalist Islamic groups and eventual self-imposed exile to Australia. Equally bold as celebrations of female sexuality are I Gak Murniasih's paintings of Egyptian goddesses and female figures based on images from magazines. Murniasih learned

to paint from Mondo Zanolini, an Italian artist whom she worked for as a domestic helper, and whom she later married. She was one of the few feminist artists from Indonesia practicing in the 1980s, and her art is still seldom studied or even seen.

The richness and international scope of its collection has distinguished Museum MACAN as one of a kind in Indonesia. Indeed, Adikoesoemo had first decided to build the platform as a means to share his collection, and to supplement the existing local arts ecology, which comprised mostly public museums focused on modern art. Among the challenges that he encountered while setting up the museum was the issue of space—specifically one that would allow for temperature and humidity control. The solution was to incorporate the museum within one of the buildings constructed by his company. A vision of glass and steel, the AKR Tower juts into Jakarta's skyline, reflecting in its cladding swathes of surrounding terra-cotta roofs punctuated by other spindly high-rises. Located on the fifth floor, Museum MACAN opens up with an airy lobby that leads to generously sized galleries, while upstairs are display spaces for selected pieces from the collection.

Since its opening in 2017, the museum has hosted blockbuster exhibitions, such as Yayoi Kusama's touring survey "Life is the Heart of the Rainbow" in 2018. Kusama is another artist whose paintings and sculptures, covered with her signature dots, figure throughout Adikoesoemo's collection. He took interest in her position as an outsider in her home country Japan and, later, in the US, noting that, "Being a woman artist is always challenging, but especially so in the 1960s." The exhibition drew around 3,000 visitors on peak days—a reassuring number for Adikoesoemo, who aims to encourage Jakarta's museum-visiting culture, which he believes is tied with the city's standard of living.

International superstars aside, it is also important to Adikoesoemo that the museum spotlights Indonesian practitioners, such as the eminent performance artist Melati Suryodarmo, a solo show of whose endurance-based actions will be on view until May 31, and political satirist and controversial multimedia artist Agus Suwage, who will present his survey in July. Through art, Adikoesoemo believes people become "more creative, calm, and tolerant, which is important in a multiethnic and religious society like Indonesia." He added: "Our programs must vary. I want to get people thinking."

CHLOE SUEN



Portrait of CHLOE SUEN. Photo by Esther Chan for ArtAsiaPacific.

Deep Roots

華山長空棧可奉
美然孝長七教區
大千市張為

ZHANG DAGUAN, Plank Trail in Mount Huashan, c. 20th century, ink and color on paper, 135 x 47 cm. Courtesy Central Academy of Fine Arts Art Museum, Beijing.

Hong Kong-born-and-based Chloe Suen is chairwoman of the Simon Suen Foundation, which advocates for sinology, and is the founder of the privately funded Sun Museum. The latter, a 12,500-square-meter hidden gem by the harbor of Kwun Tong, has been promoting Chinese arts and culture, in addition to serving as a platform for local artists, since 2015.

Suen spent most of her teens and young adulthood in the United States, where she double majored in philosophy and business administration at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, and pursued a master's degree in organizational psychology at Columbia University, in New York. Appearing every bit a businesswoman, she wore an elaborately embroidered dark blouse and a fitted red pencil skirt with heels to our meeting. With a cheery demeanor, her enthusiasm for her various causes was evident, although she was quick to say, modestly, that her experience with art began rather late.

Suen's father, whom the foundation is named after, is the CEO of the apparel branding and packaging company SML Group. In the early 2000s, he started collecting Chinese modern and contemporary paintings. Although Suen was attracted to graphic design and films as a teen, counting the vivid cinematography of Hong Kong director Wong Kar-wai among her favorites, she attributes her fine art education to Hong Kong's booming art scene, which she encountered when she returned from the US in 2009, just as the global market for Chinese art was gaining momentum. A keen learner, she accompanied her father and his collector friends to auction previews and exhibitions, adopting a hands-on approach that quickened her learning curve.

Proud of her heritage, Suen noted that her interest in Chinese art stems primarily from a fixation with how artists and the country's history have shaped each other, extending beyond the works' pure aesthetics. Her museum's focus on the early 20th-century comes from her appreciation for that period, when dynastic rule ended and the nation entered the modern era with increasing international exposure. She names Zhang Daqian, Xu Beihong, and Qi Baishi as influential figures whose art encapsulates this transition into modernity. Their ink paintings, which broke away from traditional perspectives, methods, and subject matter, were showcased in the museum's inaugural exhibition, "Dawn of a

Sunny Century." Suen's favorite artist of the moment, however, is Lin Fengmian, the pioneering, Paris-educated ink and oil painter, whom she finds inspiring because of his perseverance through the tragic events of his life.

Suen's engagement with Chinese art and history lends itself to her role at the Simon Suen Foundation, which oversees the running of Sun Museum. The foundation was set up in 2012 to promote classical Chinese learning, and was initially focused on facilitating the internationalization of sinology via scholarly exchanges and forums at tertiary institutions. However, Sun Museum was eventually conceived as Suen came to realize that academic endeavors, while crucial, appealed only to a niche audience and had little relevance for the general public. "I felt that art would be a more powerful method to help a broader group of viewers realize the importance of culture and history, and also establish a sense of national identity," she explained. "For me, the museum is such an entryway for the public. But we didn't dare use the word 'museum,' which was an uncommon concept for private institutions in Hong Kong." The solution came via Suen's chance encounter with Yeung Chun-tong in 2012, then the recently retired director of the University Museum and Art Gallery at the University of Hong Kong, and now Sun Museum's director. Yeung encouraged Suen to incorporate the museum in SML Group's newly established headquarters.

There were challenges aplenty in setting up Sun Museum given that Hong Kong is not known for its private museums. Suen recalls having trouble conveying the nature of the institution to local media. Other barriers included attracting young audiences between the ages of 25 to 45, who are not as curious about Chinese culture as their elders. "There is a disconnect between what we call traditional art forms and contemporary art forms," Suen notes. "This age group would go to Art Basel and Art Central, and other contemporary shows, but not come to us." She added: "In some ways, it has become a mission for us to showcase forgotten art forms." While the museum has held some blockbusters, such as a 2018 collaboration with Beijing's Central Academy of Fine Arts featuring Xu Beihong, there is one group show of lesser-known artists that is of particular sentimental value to Suen. In 2017, "Hong Kong Renowned Oil Painters in the Diverse World" debuted ten elderly local artists. Professionally

trained in China in the early decades of the 20th century, they moved to Hong Kong in the 1950s. Before the show, their idyllic landscapes and depictions of daily life had all but disappeared into the pages of history.

Suen's support for under-recognized artists is reflected in her personal collection. Her first purchase was a small watercolor of a floral arrangement, *Adagio in Ruby* (2014), by a personal friend, the late Chinese-Canadian artist and dealer Jenny Pat. Suen notes the importance of collecting works by female artists, sharing her perplexity about the dismal number of widely celebrated female practitioners compared to female art students. She believes this is related to the limited number of female collectors, saying: "Art is personal, and sometimes there is a preference for certain styles or topics in the work that artists of a certain gender create, maybe even on a subconscious level." Suen also hopes to play a part in encouraging the next generation. For example, emerging artist Chan Sui-ying Zaffer's *Scene in Screen* (2019), an intricately painted paper folding screen depicting several ink landscapes, was on display in the museum's meeting room. The work had attracted Suen with its unique take on the traditional medium, intermixing Chinese elements with Western ones.

Despite Hong Kong's protests, Suen remains optimistic about the city's art scene. "Culture transcends politics," she proclaims, "and they are very different things. Chinese history has undergone thousands of years of multiple dynasties with dissimilar political systems, but what remains is our literature, artwork, poetry, and music." She believes that the days of the financial center as a "cultural desert," as the city was once was labeled, are long gone. In response to this change, Suen is adamant about fostering young professionals for the industry. Through the foundation, she organizes workshops and mentorship programs for local students, who are, she has observed, generally unprepared for the practicalities of arts careers upon graduation. Speaking of Hong Kong's growing cultural focus, she said: "There will be a demand for personnel, with many exhibitions and museums needing talent, but do we have. . . enough people with the expertise? I think this is a chicken and egg situation—we need more students to attend museums to be inspired to go into these fields, but at the same time we need the infrastructure in place for them. We are known for Art Basel and our auctions, but not for our museums, yet."

John Young Spectrum Figures

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WILL IT

On *Serpent d'Océan* by Huang Yong Ping,
or, a way to remember a master of our time.

BY HOU HANRU



RETURN?

Installation view of *Serpent d'Océan*, 2012, permanent in-situ installation of aluminum and iron, 125 × 4 × 4 m, at "Estuaire Nantes<>Saint-Nazaire," Saint-Brévin-les-Pins, France, 2012. Copyright ADAGP Huang Yong Ping. Photo by Gino Maccarinelli / LVAN. Courtesy the artist; Le Voyage à Nantes; and kamel mennour, Paris / London.

There are very few contemporary artworks that have returned after their physical disappearance. Among these legendary works, Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970), in the Great Salt Lake of Utah, is certainly the most famous, and remains shrouded in mystery. A spiral of stones and mud that was covered by water for decades, it is a monument of both utopia and dystopia, a testimony to the triumph of humans over nature and our capitulation to entropy. Half a century later, and across the Atlantic, Huang Yong Ping's *Serpent d'Océan* (2012) resurrects the mystery of the return, while at the same time launching a new legend about the unstoppable power of entropy. In this case, the legend refers to both the natural world and human society. More precisely, this incarnation represents how entropic metamorphosis mingles with and transforms nature—including animals and humans—as civilization carries the planet into the Anthropocene era, leaving us speculating on what “post-human” means and what our future will bring.

Serpent d'Océan is an immense skeleton of a serpent, cast in aluminum and 130 meters long, its spindly ribs planted in the water near the beachhead of Saint-Brevin-les-Pins on the French coast. Obeying the rhythm of the tides, the gigantic snake is alternatively immersed in the Atlantic and reappears every few hours. As with the tide, it recedes and returns infinitely. When looking at the work, one can't help but ask: Where does this serpent come from? Why is it here, at the estuary where the ocean merges with the Loire? Where will it go afterward? One obvious resemblance is to the figure of the migrant, whether human or animal, or a material thing. Over time, the snake's “body,” or skeleton, is eroded while also growing a new skin of maritime species. Like a living fossil, it testifies to the formation of a new geological layer, albeit one applied to a human-made “animal.” And although it never existed as a real serpent with skin and flesh, with these processes of accumulation and abrasion, the skeleton now has its own life cycle.

Central to the project, as well as to Huang's work at large, is the belief that “changing is the rule,” emphasizing that movement, migration, transformation, and metamorphosis are the essence of existence. The serpent, constantly moving, traveling energetically but quasi-invisibly, and periodically transforming itself through molting, represents perfectly this “truth of existence.” A believer in paradox and uncertainty as the ultimate modes of understanding the world, Huang sees the boundaries separating humans and other “creatures”—animals, plants, and all natural elements—as meaningless, while the fate of existence is simply beyond our grasp. He was always deeply fascinated by the serpent's “way of living,” or life cycle, and explored the complex implications and impacts of its symbolism—often representing supernatural and magical powers, haunted by a certain quality of evil. As a motif and symbol, the snake, or serpent, has traveled through myriad cultures, times, and systems of belief, from ancient China, ancient Egypt, and Judeo-Christian religions to Indian cults, and today can be used to evoke situations ranging from particular geopolitical realities to global capitalism.

Huang's obsession with the serpent was initiated in a specific project inspired by social and geopolitical events. In 1993, for his first project realized in the United States, at the Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State University, he revealed the fate of “illegal” Chinese immigrants trafficked by human smugglers to the US with an installation featuring a giant rope-net trap. In the Fujian dialect, the artist's mother tongue, the immigrants were referred to as “human snakes” and the traffickers “snake heads.” Since then, Huang has incorporated the image of the serpent as a central figure in his work, mostly in the form of skeletons.

At least 23 works in Huang's oeuvre utilize the image of the serpent. A selected list reveals the associations he drew from the figure, beginning with the *Human Snake* (1993), which denounced the contradictory attitude of the US toward Chinese immigrants. In 1995, at the Musée National des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie in

Paris, he introduced live snakes and other reptiles in his installation *Théâtre du Monde – Le Pont* (*Theater of the World – The Bridge*), in order to demonstrate the inevitable, mutual consumption of all creatures, leading to extinction, as the truth of coexistence in the world. *Palanquin*, his 1997 sculpture of a sedan chair adorned with molted snakeskin and a pith helmet but absent of any figures, now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, pointed to the ultimate demise of colonialism. For the France Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1999, “Un Homme, Neuf Animaux” (“One Man, Nine Animals”), the serpent and other mythical animals represented in Huang's installation were derived from the classic Chinese text *Shan Hai Jing* (*The Book of Mountains and Oceans*), and predicted unending conflict as the future of the world. In 2000, *Python* introduced the Chinese idea of feng shui to “reconfigure” the natural environment of a small German town, with a wooden snake skeleton installed alongside the river. The creature's spine was reintroduced at the Walker Art Center, cutting through the spaces of Huang's midcareer retrospective, “House of Oracles,” in 2005. At Gladstone Gallery in New York, in 2009, Huang created a dystopian version of a Tower of Babel, with bamboo columns supporting a metal structure in the form of a snake skeleton on which the audience was invited to climb, for the installation *Tower Snake*. In the same year, his *Arche* at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris, re-created Noah's Ark, using the remains of naturalized animals collected from a taxidermy workshop destroyed by fire, with serpents and other animals forming a contemporary apocalyptic scene.

The giant serpent skeleton reappeared in *Ressort* (2012), at the Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, for the 7th Asia Pacific Triennial, having navigated the oceans only to emerge in the southern hemisphere and soar over the main hall of the museum. In the meantime, *Serpent d'Océan*, resonating with the fate of migrants, landed at Saint-Brevin-les-Pins for the Estuaire festival of public artworks. A couple of years later, *Mue de Serpent* (2014), shown at Galerie HAB in nearby Nantes, was the molt of the snake, recalling the continuing transformation of *Serpent d'Océan*.

Beginning in 2015, Huang's *Bâton Serpent* series became symbols for grand ideologies. *Bâton Serpent*, at MAXXI in Rome, turned Moses's miraculous staff into a huge serpent, provoking subversive readings of religious dogmas in the context of Rome as the capital of the Catholic Church. In 2016, in *Bâton Serpent II*, at the Red Brick Art Museum in Beijing, Huang made the serpent a marker of the controversial “Air Defense Identification Zone,” which China imposed over its neighbors and the region's disputed territories. In *Bâton Serpent III: Spur Track to the Left* (2016), the serpent became a symbol of the political changes in China and the world. Finally, in *Empires* (2016), part of the Monumenta installation series at the Grand Palais in Paris, the serpent served as an omnipresent image of the fate of globalization and its impact. When Huang died unexpectedly in October 2019, he left behind another massive project, *Rainbow Snake*, for the new Haga Station in Gothenburg, Sweden. Planned for completion in a couple of years, its final realization is now uncertain. But it too will certainly retain its mythical nature.

The real meaning of the serpent can never be thoroughly comprehended, since it is always moving and changing. Nevertheless, it always leads to the revelation of miracles. Commenting on his utilization of the form for his 2014–15 exhibition “Bâton Serpent” at the MAXXI, Huang evoked the Biblical legend of Exodus, in which Moses transformed his staff into a serpent to manifest the power of God:

Of course, the title of my work, just like the legend I quoted, can be seen as a trap, set intentionally, or perhaps unintentionally. This trap is for people who desire to know more. It's like asking a question; especially when the work



Installation view of *Theatre du Monde - Le Pont*, 1993-95, cages (metal, wood), bronzes from the collections of Cernuschi Museum in Paris, tortoises, snakes, insects, 10.4 x 3.2 x 1.8 m at "Galerie des Cinq Continents," Musée National des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie, Paris, 1995-96. Copyright ADAGP Huang Yong Ping. Courtesy Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.



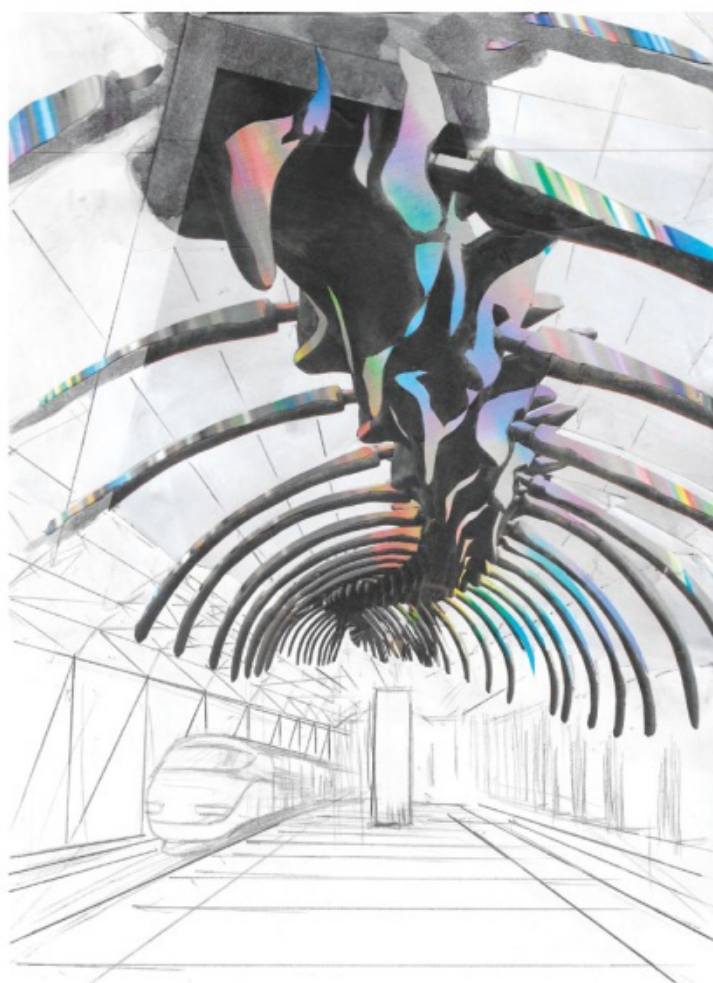
Installation view of *One Man, Nine Animals*, 1999, wood, aluminum, 23 x 17 x 8 m, at the France Pavilion, 48th Venice Biennial, 1999. Copyright ADAGP Huang Yong Ping. Photo by the artist. Courtesy the artist; FNAC; and kamel mennour, Paris / London.



Installation view of *Arche*, 2009, wood, paper, and taxidermies, 18.1 x 4.1 x 8 m, at Chapelle des Petits-Augustins, Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris, 2009. Copyright ADAGP Huang Yong Ping. Photo by Marc Damage. Courtesy the artist and kamel mennour, Paris / London.



Installation view of *Bâton Serpent*, 2014, aluminum, inox, 53 m, at “Bâton Serpent,” MAXXI, Rome, 2014–15. Copyright ADAGP Huang Yong Ping. Photo by M3 Studio. Courtesy the artist; MAXXI, Rome; Red Brick Art Museum, Beijing; and kamel mennour, Paris / London.



Sketch of *Rainbow Snake*, 2018, draft for the public commission for Haga underground station, Gothenburg, collage and pencil on paper, 21 × 29 cm. Courtesy the artist and Public Art Agency Sweden.

itself looks ambiguous, they mistake the title for a road sign. In art, the road sign often appears before the road is built; in other words, it's like erecting a road sign in a place without a road. Legends are the same. In Genesis, the first book of the Bible, and in Revelations, the final book, the image of the serpent represents “evil.” Since “evil” is indispensable in both the creation of religion and the creation of the world, we should have a new understanding of “evilness.” However, this is neither the first nor the last appearance of the “Serpent” in my work. Like time itself, it's both eternal and endless.

The gigantic serpent of *Empires*, nearly 300 meters in length, crawled over 300 shipping containers, under a giant Napoleonic bicorne hat and cut through the very axis of Paris, midway between the Champs-Élysées and Les Invalides. The serpent's continuous travel and transformation led to an ultimately spectacular representation of the contradictory forces of globalization by exploring and uncovering its historical roots and routes—revealing how revolution, colonialism, transnational capitalism, and contemporary forms of totalitarianism have come together to form a monster called the “global empire.” Echoing philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's treatise on the contemporary political order, *Empire* (2000), Huang's serpent becomes a wake-up call for us to trace the very destiny of the world that we have created. Once the Monumenta show ended, did the serpent disappear back into the ocean? When and where will it emerge again?

Huang Yong Ping departed this world a few months ago, leaving this question unanswered. But probably the best thing we can do is to not try to answer it. Instead, let's sit next to his *Serpent d'Océan*, whenever we want, and wait for the tide to retreat and then return.



Installation view of *Empires*, 2016, metal, mixed media, 28.7 × 133 × 64.3m, at Monumenta, Nave of the Grand Palais, Paris, 2016. Photo by Archives kamel mennour. Copyright ADAGP Huang Yong Ping. Courtesy the artist; Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Grand Palais, Paris; and kamel mennour, Paris / London.

Rolling out the Tikar



Tikar-A-Gagah (detail), 2019, split bamboo weave, black natural dye, and stitched bamboo weave (pandanus weave and commercial chemical dye on the reverse side), created with assistance from Keningau and Palau Omodal weavers, 2.5m × 15m. Courtesy the National Gallery Singapore.

A CONVERSATION WITH YEE I-LANN



BY BEVERLY YONG

Expanding from her own locus and cultural politics, Yee I-Lann unpacks and shifts understandings of places and histories through her artistic practice. In Kuala Lumpur, over roughly 25 years, she became an active participant in the film industry, punk rock scene, art world, as well as a vocal activist for environmental and sociopolitical issues. At the end of 2016, she returned from Kuala Lumpur to Kota Kinabalu in Sabah, her birthplace, where she began collaborating with weavers from the Sulu Sea and the Sabah interior, exploring how traditional and contemporary concepts and media might engage, expand, and change the world. In November 2019, she installed a 15-meter-long, double-sided woven mat, *Tikar-A-Gagah* (2019), at the National Gallery Singapore, and held an exhibition of weavings, “ZIGAZIG ah!,” at Silverlens Gallery in Manila. I sat down with the artist to discuss her multifarious work and her journey to “find her mat.”

How would you like to be described as an artist?

Relevant, multifaceted, a little hard to define, and engaged with the places that I’ve lived in. I’ve always liked the idea of having my finger on some kind of pulse. I hope to be part of communities as an active agent. Whatever you do as an artist helps enable and continue conversations. I don’t see the role of artists as isolated.

You’ve worked across all types of media, from drawings to text, site-specific installations, and tableware, but for the past 15 years or so you’ve been thought of as a photomedia artist. How did you come to focus on photomedia?

I studied photography and cinematography in art school but I never studied the camera itself. I was the queen of the dark room, painting with the chemical process. I love the weight of a found photograph and its baggage so I’ve also worked a lot with photographic objects, whether from an archive or a family album. Eventually I moved my photography-manipulation process from the darkroom to Photoshop.

What’s the power of the photographic object?

Archives are always laden in some manner. The act of making a collection of images in itself often illustrates something, and the image is never innocent. I enjoy the process of unearthing and trying to unpack photographs. Because there are so many images in the world, I think of it like the game Tetris, where you have these multiple components falling and you make an image or a shape with the pieces.

The black-and-white *Horizon Series* (2003) was the first instance of your transposing various components onto a landscape, creating a narrative using found images. This was further developed in *Sulu Stories* (2005). Perhaps you could talk about these early photomedia series to illustrate your approach.

Horizon was my personal reaction to the news that Mahathir Mohamad was going to retire in 2003. He was the only prime minister I, or anyone of my generation, had really known. A number of his policies and actions during his first tenure were deeply destructive. He exacerbated race politics, nurtured corruption, manipulated the social demographics of Sabah for political ends, and utilized draconian means to suppress dissent. At the same time, his Wawasan (Vision) 2020 gave young Malaysians such as myself a directive. We felt we were part of a collective movement going forward.

After hearing his retirement announcement, I happened to visit the Australian desert. I couldn’t tear my eyes away from the horizon. The work became about a new horizon, of a Malaysia post-Mahathir. We don’t see the horizon in Malaysia because we don’t have open spaces and props are used to block our view, for example the KLCC twin towers—a symbol of national prosperity and progress, lulling us into a false sense of security. So in one of the compositions, I multiplied the towers. They appear like a fence, pinning down our horizon. In another image, I incorporated a signboard for danger, “AWAS,” graffitied to say “WAWASAN,” interplaying the ideas of vision and threat.

Sulu Stories came about because I wanted to start exploring the Sulu Sea region between east Malaysia and the southern Philippines. But because it was a closed zone, I could only photograph the Sulu Sea from the coast. Then I discovered Manila’s Filipiniana



Top: *Fencing*, 2003, from the *Horizon Series*, digital C-type print, 45.5×91 cm. Bottom: *Wawasan*, 2003, from the *Horizon Series*, digital C-type print, 45.5×45.5 cm. Both courtesy the artist.

Heritage Library, and so I entered Sulu through the historic viewpoints of Spanish monks, American naval surveyors, and early anthropologists—visiting outsiders. In the resulting images of *Sulu Stories*, the horizon line lies between countries, where objects from across time are placed together, telling tales.

In recent years I've become increasingly aware of the camera as having this intrinsic colonial nature, so I've tried to decolonize the camera. For example, with my recent *tikar* (mats) project, I've given the camera to the communities I work with and they've documented the process of our collaboration. I relinquished that role to them.



How did you start working with *tikar*? It's very different from your previous work with photomedia, which is about the nature of images.

Top: *Barangay*, 2005, from the *Sulu Stories* series, digital C-type print, 61 × 183 cm. Bottom: *The Archipelago*, 2005, from the *Sulu Stories* series, digital C-type print, 61 × 183 cm. Both courtesy the artist.

For most of my adult life, I've been involved in activism and many of my friends are activists. By late 2016, in the lead-up to the 14th general election, the political noise in Kuala Lumpur had reached fever pitch and I felt myself losing the ability to think and participate. I decided to come back to Kota Kinabalu.

Despite the euphoria surrounding the change in government, the 2018 election ended up being disheartening for me because of election disputes in Sabah. I immediately felt politicking was going to get in the way of reform. It made me realize that only communities of people could lift each other up. I needed community and thought that maybe communities needed me.

I was looking at old photographs of my Kadazan grandmother, Dorothea Bungal Lunjaim, who wove mats with bundusan plants, which I can't find despite repeated attempts. In my need for community, to become grounded, I started gravitating toward the mat as a mnemonic device—a portal to stories, behavioral differences, architectural environments, and shared memories. When you roll out a mat, it demarcates a space that invites communal gathering, where everyone sits together on the same level. *Tikar* are also feminine in nature, linked with domestic economies and spaces, families, and heritage. My interest grew from there.

How did you identify the communities you collaborated with to create the *tikar*?

It was important for me to work with a land community and a sea community to represent Sabah's different Indigenous peoples, but also to reflect Southeast Asia generally.

I met the Pulau Omdal community through a conference of Sama Bajau ethnic groups in 2018. Pulau Omdal is in the Sulu Sea near Semporna. My main collaborator, Kak Roziah, is Bajau Tempatan, who are a land-based island people with Malaysian citizenship and identity cards, but we work mostly with the semi-nomadic Bajau Sama di Laut who are based in a water village off the island and don't have paper identities, though they are

rich in cultural identity. Both groups make crafts using essentially the same weave traditions and patterns.

I also work with a big craft development center run by the Sabah Foundation in Keningau, one of the main inland districts in Sabah. The weaving culture there is dominated by Dusun Murut weavers from surrounding villages. I work with the head of the department, Julitah Kulinting.

One group is physically at the border, stateless; and the other group is at the epicenter of Sabah crafts.



Tanahairku #1, 2018, split bamboo pus weave with kayu tuber black natural dye and clear PVC glue, created with assistance from Keningau weavers, 160×250 cm. Courtesy the artist.

What was the first mat you made together with the Keningau and Omdal communities?

We made two separate mats both featuring the words “Tanah & Air.” *Tanah* means “earth,” *air* means “water.” *Tanahairku* means “my homeland” and is the name of Sabah’s state anthem. In Sabah, we’ve had centuries of animosity between the land peoples and the sea peoples, which continues today. This work emphasizes that both are equally important to our homeland.

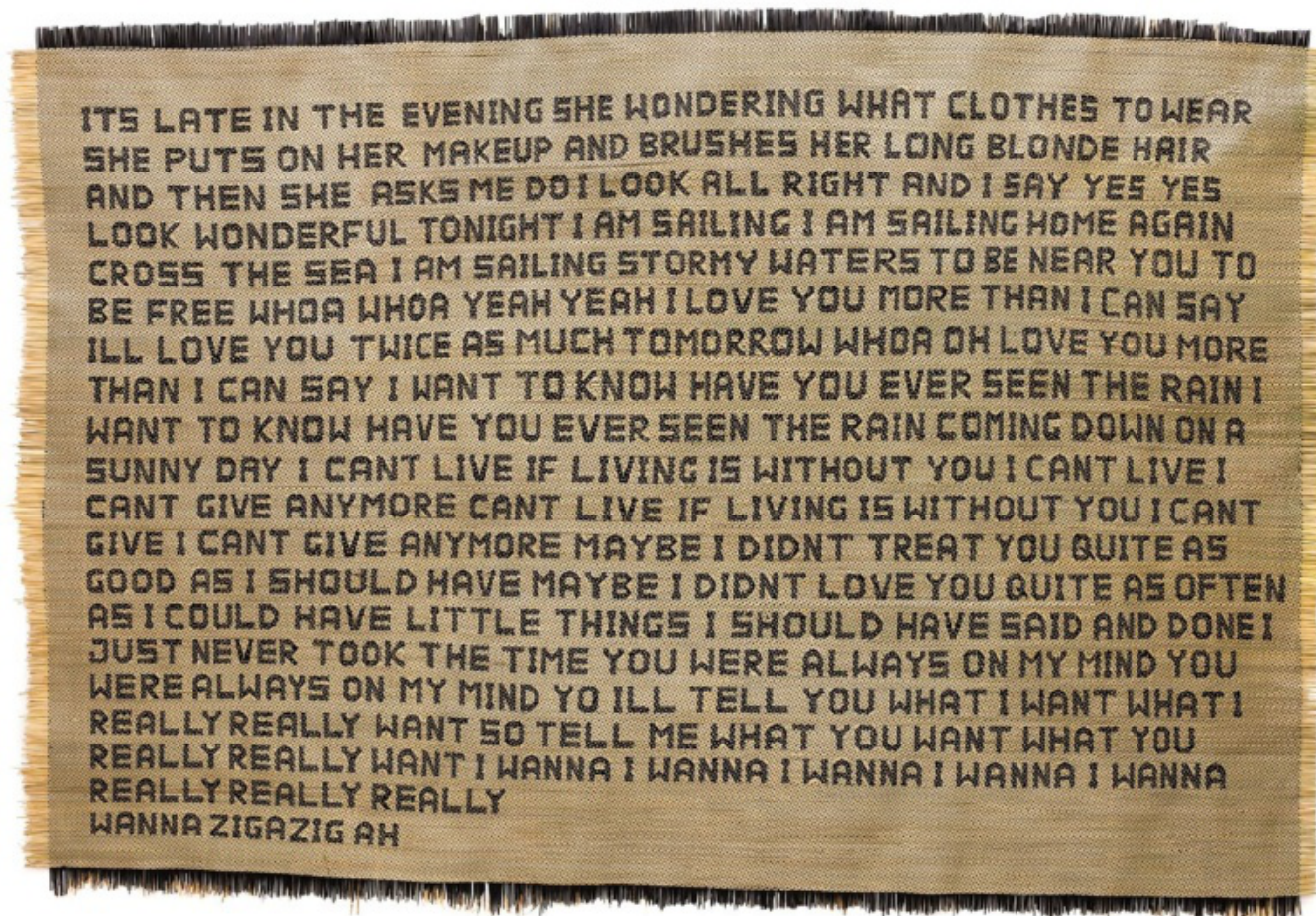
A big part of the process has been learning what weaving can or cannot do. I don’t participate in the actual weaving myself because I’m not skilled enough.

What are some of the differences between the aesthetics and processes of the two groups?

They have very different weaving styles. The pandanus used by the Omdal community is soft, the bamboo used in Keningau is stiffer. Neither group can weave with the other’s material.

On Omdal, they use a counting process, and patterns for traditional designs are passed on from mother to daughter. They start the weave from the center and work outward toward an overall pattern. In order for them to weave a design that I invent, I have to derive the counting systems from existing formats. They’re drawn to these really vibrant colors they’ve been using since the 1960s, created with a commercial chemical dye. You very rarely see natural dyes in the Bajau mats.

In Keningau, they usually use the natural color of the split bamboo, or a black pigment, made from a mixture of tree sap and soot. The Dusun Murut use the + and x weave type, like most land-based Indigenous communities. Typically, there is a repeated motif that begins at the edge.



whoa whoa yeah yeah, 2019, split bamboo pus weave, black natural dye, and matt sealant, created with assistance from Keningau weavers, 221×317.5 cm. Courtesy Silverlens Gallery, Manila.

Can you tell us more about the motifs and designs you have used on the mats you've made so far?

Beyond exploring domestic space, elements such as the common ceiling fan or louver window speak of sensory conditions that locate memories and stories, and act as signifiers for shared experience. This notion of the familiar is important to me, and is connected, in my mind, with political kitsch. Two influential texts in my life have been Milan Kundera's novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984) and Ursula K. Le Guin's essay "The Carrier-Bag Theory of Fiction" (1986). Kundera argues that political kitsch is a way to emotionally move a mass of people toward a direction. Vision 2020 is a kind of political kitsch. But how does an artist use such tools for their own ends? I'm drawing on this idea of political kitsch alongside personal memories, mnemonic devices, space, and architecture.

There are two bamboo mats woven with song lyrics, *hello from the outside* (2019), and *whoa whoa yeah yeah* (2019), which is where the title of my solo show "ZIGAZIG ah!" came from. The lyrics are from a survey of the English-language karaoke favorites you hear on the jetty, over rice wine, all over the place in Sabah. When reading this text, you can't help but sing them in your mind, thus providing a musical soundtrack. As much as these works are derived from Indigenous cultures, the weavers and weavings exist on a global plane alongside everything else, not in some isolated sanctum.

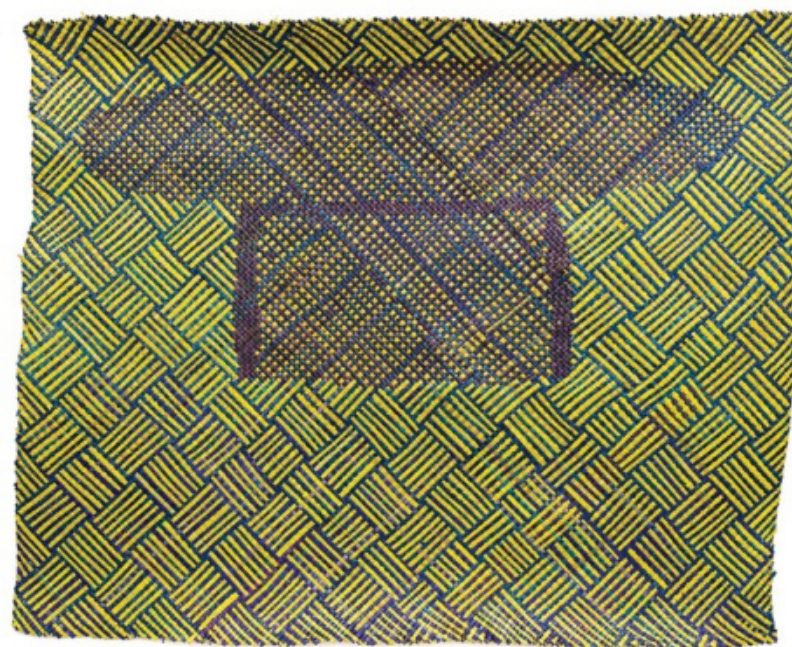
The *Nantuapan* motif is one of the few traditional motifs I've used. The circle in the middle represents the Dusun Murut rice-wine jar with people from all directions meeting around it. It describes the act of *aramaitii*, a social concept in Dusun Murut thinking, where people are invited to come together over rice wine as a form of collective therapy. It's seen under the fan in the center of *Tikar-A-Gagah* on the bamboo side of the work.

Kak Julitah, Lilli, Shahrizan, and I also invented an entirely new weave together. It's not a repeated motif or pattern, but a kind of serialized action—you keep going. No two square inches are going to be the same. It meanders. We named it *mansau ansau* in the Dusun language, which means to walk and walk, or to keep journeying without knowing where you're headed. This is being used as the base background for many of the bamboo works.

Tikar-A-Gagah's pandanus side is bookended with Sama di Laut motifs used by the Omadal weavers—the *nikeutan* (*udang besar* or lobster) and the *sambulayang* (the *lepa lepa*, or houseboat, sail). In the middle is my design of lines representing movements to match the *mansau ansau*—they're like the planks between stilt houses, or sea routes, traveling, fluid, multidimensional, and also about the *tikar* as a portal.



Tikar Meja 32, 2018–19, Bajau Sama di Laut pandanus weave with commercial chemical dye and matt sealant, created with assistance from Pulau Omadal weavers, 122 × 147 cm. Courtesy Silverlens Gallery, Manila.



Tikar Meja 25, 2018–19, Bajau Sama di Laut pandanus weave with commercial chemical dye and matt sealant, created with assistance from Pulau Omadal weavers, 87 × 106 cm. Courtesy Silverlens Gallery, Manila.

With the Omadal weavers, you've made *Tikar Meja* (2019), a series of mats featuring images of tables. Why the table?

We need to go back to two works, *Picturing Power* and *Tabled* (both 2013). *Picturing Power* came about during a workshop led by critic Alex Supartono at Yogyakarta's Langgeng Art Foundation, when we were looking at old photographs of the sugarcane industry in Java under colonial rule. I homed in on general colonial representations of administration—map-making, surveying, photography, and the table. *Picturing Power* is about the violence of administration—I tell you what your land is, I tell you what your history is, I tell you who you are. The series ends with a native looking at another native through a theodolite, evoking how we impose learned colonial ways on ourselves.

At around the same time I was invited to take part in the show "Suspended Histories" curated by Thomas Berghuis at Amsterdam's Museum Van Loon, which was formerly the family home of the Dutch East India Trading Company's founders. I was interested in the table in the dining room because heads of state and corporate powerbrokers still hire this venue for private functions, which all happen under the gaze of the family's portraits.

These paintings and the surrounding blue-and-white porcelain period pieces were like ghosts, and it made me think of us as zombies today—products of history. For *Tabled*, I made blue-and-white ceramic plates showing images of people I photographed walking around the streets of Indonesia and Malaysia. The zombies of the now meet the ghosts of the past at the table.

The table in *Tikar Meja* represents colonial and contemporary powers, official histories, education systems, censuses, trade treaties, passports, and administrative governments. The word for table in Malay is *meja*, in Tagalog it's *mesa*, both from the Portuguese and Spanish *mesa*—that's a neat etymological illustration of colonial power. I also associate the symbol with patriarchal power, which either invites or excludes you from the table. The mat, by comparison, is egalitarian, democratic. It's referred to in different languages by a range of names with various roots—*tikar*, *tikam*, *tepo*, *banig*. The motifs found in the woven mat also contain vernacular meanings. In precolonial Southeast Asia, we did not have tables. Only sultans sat on table-like elevated platforms. People communed on the ground, on the woven mat. I am interested in this behavioral and architectural difference.

In "The Carrier-Bag Theory of Fiction," Ursula K. Le Guin builds on writer Elizabeth Fisher's idea that humanity's first tools weren't weapons but rather containers, suggesting that, to address the Anthropocene, we must "carrier-bag" on a mat together to find solutions—not at the patriarchal table. *Tikar Meja* juxtaposes colonial, patriarchal power with feminine Indigenous power.

I'd like to understand more about your process with the weavers. How much did you control the image and design of the mats for *Tikar Meja*?

Initially, I issued instructions to the weavers—this kind of shape, this table. But I realized I wasn't being collaborative, not trusting their instincts and not learning what I might find through them, so I let go. When they were making their own choices, it became easier and more enjoyable, and they would come up with interesting ideas.

I asked the kids if they'd like to do a survey of the tables on the island, and their drawings provided some of the table designs for the mats. They are about to make a documentary about the tables they found.

Was it a similar situation in Keningau?

Keningau is different in that many of the weavers have their own private businesses and are used to people commissioning large orders for the tourist market. My feeling is that, because they're so professional, they're also bored. I wanted to know what would happen if we really tried to innovate with their amazing skills. At every single test, they thought we couldn't do it, and I would say, come, let's just play and see what happens. And it happens. We're still finding out what we might be able to do.

Pulau Omdal weavers with the in-progress *Tikar-A-Gagah* (2019) at Sama di Laut water village. Courtesy the artist.



So then what happens to these craft aesthetics and materials when they are shown in contemporary art contexts?

I hope they join conversations. In the last few months, two of the oldest cave paintings in the world have been discovered in Sulawesi, and Kalimantan on Borneo. The 44,000-year-old cave paintings depict *kerbau* (water buffalo). My project company is called Kerbauworks, and I celebrate the *kerbau* in my own practice. I see the significance of the buffalo in our society while 44,000 years ago someone else did too. Does that not illustrate a continuity in what is important? How do we use that in the age of climate change? People who are not at the table but on the mat need to start directing and be listened to, especially in tipping-point geographies. The Coral Triangle is home to 76 percent of the world's coral species, and Borneo has the oldest rainforest in the world. Issues of ecology and sustainable incomes are linked. When a woman can make a good livelihood from her weaving, she doesn't need to fish in the Coral Triangle. I think art can change the world—specifically through these means of engaging and empowering communities, improving perceived self-worth, changing attitudes, and valuing the natural world and ancient storytelling.

We haven't given due regard to what we can learn from traditional media, aesthetics, concepts, and the communities that they come from. We have to engage with people, look at knowledge production with broader perspectives, and find common languages.

What's the difference between an emoji and a motif? Some motifs really are sacred and shouldn't be used, but other ancient, traditional motifs functioned like emojis and are as precious as emojis are to us. Which is why I place all of this in contemporary art. I'm hoping to piece together different vocabularies that encourage issues to speak for themselves.



Yee I-Lann (center) with her collaborators (left to right, back to front): Kak Runggu, Kak Ebbuh, Kak Nurbaya, Makcik Bilung, Kak Sulman, Kak Budi, Kak Bagai, Makcik Burah, Kak Sanah, Kak Roziah, Kak Endik. Courtesy the artist.

Tell us about *Tikar-A-Gagah* at the National Gallery Singapore. How did you approach this commission?

I wanted the work to locate the National Gallery Singapore in Southeast Asia. The goal was to highlight an Indigenous medium such that the Indigenous histories of the region were reflected. Hence the two-sided *Tikar-A-Gagah*, made with the Keningau inland weavers on one side, and the Pulau Omdal sea-based weavers on the other.

At the gallery, there is a cleaner from Semporna who I'm told almost cried when she saw herself represented via the work. Among a group of visiting Good Shepherd sisters were a number who used to be weavers in Keningau. To me that's key. You're reflected. You're important. Your people add to our visual culture, knowledge, and languages. We need to recognize that it is (perceived) peripheries that give shape to political and cultural centers.

Gagah in Malay means "valiant." It is about a masculine bigness. I'm sharing this word with female crafters working in a traditional medium. Can't a woman be valiant?

Your practice has made quite a turn. In your photomedia works there is always a certain antagonism. For example, in *Sulu Stories* and *Picturing Power*, you use a deliberately ethnographic or colonial gaze in a political way. Has working with weaving communities changed your own way of working?

There's a lot of letting other important things come into play beyond the final art product. For example, working with Sabah Parks on replanting pandanus plants along denuded coastlines, or the female weavers no longer having to fish at sea, or bringing innovation to a tired craft industry that has pandered to tourists. All these things make the project bigger and that's become an important consideration in my art-making.

In *Sulu Stories* and other earlier works, the image stems from my position and is constructed based on a particular perspective: the vanishing point is on the horizon line. With these collaborative works, I am no longer the center. The point of view does not come just from me. It has also become about letting go and no longer trying to pin down the teasing horizon line. *Mansau ansau*—we're on a new journey exploring and working together, freed from bound perspectives, going with the flow, ready to roll out and share our *tikar*.



Persona Swap, 2017-19, stills from synchronous dual-channel video with sound: 15 min 30sec. Courtesy the artist and Aike Gallery, Shanghai.

"The features of the human skeleton vary from person to person while the skeletal structure reveals similar objective patterns," Li Ran narrates at the beginning of *Persona Swap* (2017–19), as a black-and-white photograph of a face painted to resemble a skull fades into view, swiftly joined by its mirror image in the video's second channel. In the lilting voice-over of midcentury film dubbers, Li relates the teachings of Soviet dramaturge V. V. Terevtzov, who in 1958 arrived at the Shanghai Theatre Academy as a makeup coach. Reeling through archival photographs of costumed actors, Li explains Terevtzov's precept of "thinking in front of the mirror," or conjuring the character from one's maquillaged reflection. As Li expounds on the "class attitude" signaled by the beards of revolutionaries, and later warns of "unsevered feudal thoughts" to an image of a servant plotting against a "gentle princess," *Persona Swap* gestures at the superficial refashioning of heroes and villains across ideological discourses. Eventually, we learn, the Sino-Soviet split sends Terevtzov packing and heralds a slew of Chinese espionage films in the 1960s featuring actors in whiteface as the enemy.

At this point, *Persona Swap* shifts temporal and narrative gears. Li introduces his cast of actors, who perform in unscripted scenes styled after cinematic tropes and genres. In one, Li-as-director interrupts a take of soldiers writhing in pain; entering the shot, he comically demonstrates the overwrought suffering he wants from his actors.

Li's subjects are endlessly malleable, trapped in a cycle of mirroring and mimicry. An archival film sequence of drunken sailors appears next to footage of Li's sailor-suited actors chuckling as they view stills of that scene in a book. "Besides the inextinguishable illusion, who the hell are you?" reads a line of on-screen text. *Persona Swap* wonders at the character *under* the skin—is identity definable, or merely a nebula of externally mediated traits, constantly performed and reimagined?

OPHELIA LAI

Though the threats of disease, natural disasters, and widespread dissent have drawn attention to the fragile foundations of organized societies, we still prize civilization's fruits, including the cutting-edge technologies that prolong and improve our lives. In her suite of videos, paintings, installations, and performances, *Pink Slime Caesar Shift* (2015–19), Jen Liu proposes one of humanity's greatest scientific advancements, our ability to manipulate DNA, as a solution to one of civilization's age-old problems: the exploitation of people.

The project's premise is to facilitate communication to and from the migrant workers in China's many Special Economic Zones, where increasingly frequent protests against dismal working conditions have been snuffed out and censored by authorities. Liu's scheme piggybacks on China's expanding synthetic-meat industry. Her suggestion is for workers to encode texts about laborers' legal rights and protest histories onto DNA strands, bind these cells to microscopic gold particles, and inject them into meat products that are then distributed worldwide. In the project's video component, an absurd sequence alludes to this process: as a rousing electronic rendition of "The Internationale" plays, two figures dressed in white hazmat suits assist a female worker with putting on gloves, lip gloss, and a face-slimming contraption. Once suitably attired, the worker begins injecting pink ersatz-meat patties with a solution. Later, a voice-over relays the story of an actual worker whose job caused leukemia. Her employer had arranged a health check but refused to let her see the results because she "should not touch the privileges," prioritizing business-as-usual over workers' health, and illustrating access to information as a decisive factor in class stratification.

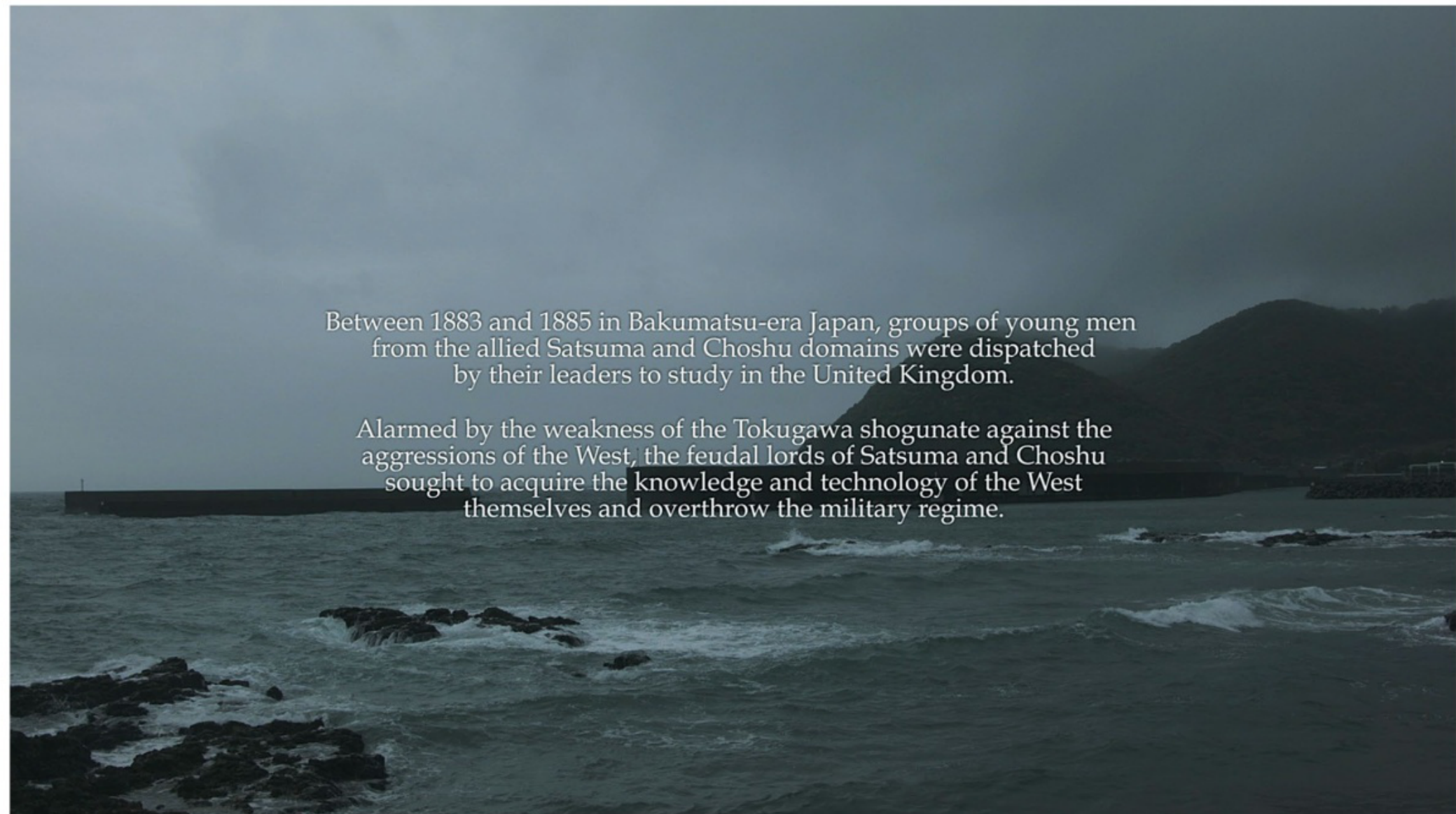
Equally farcical is the video's final, animated clip showing a pair of sneakers stamping on flies. Eventually, swirling tides appear, swallowing the flies as well as cars, tables, chairs, and refrigerators—symbols of civilization. For the majority of our species' history, we have lived outside the bounds of states, and, as becomes clear in *Pink Slime Caesar Shift*, we have much to learn about coexistence.

CHLOE CHU





JEN LIU, *Pink Slime Caesar Shift*, 2018, still from video installation: 24 min 21 sec. Courtesy the artist.



Between 1883 and 1885 in Bakumatsu-era Japan, groups of young men from the allied Satsuma and Choshu domains were dispatched by their leaders to study in the United Kingdom.

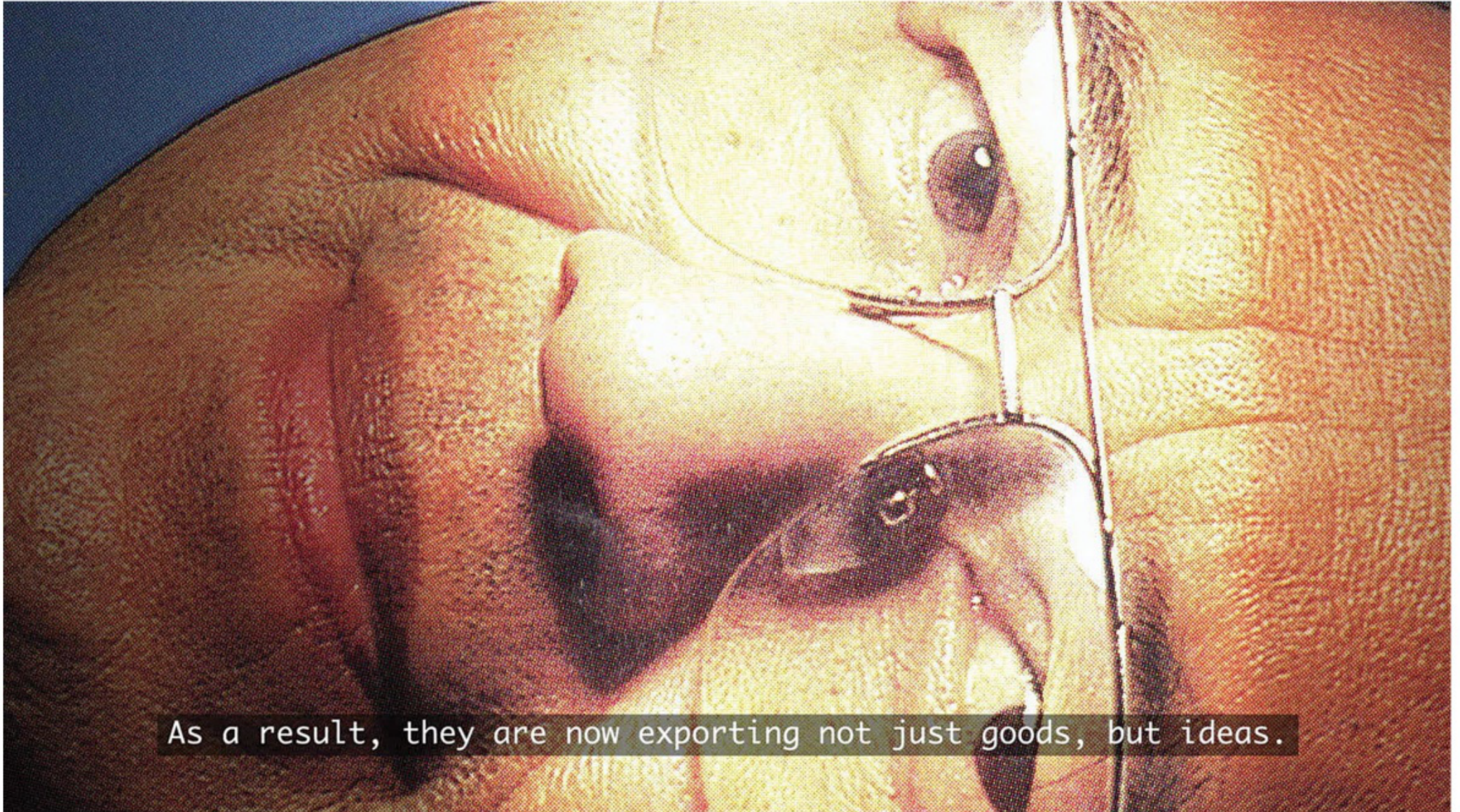
Alarmed by the weakness of the Tokugawa shogunate against the aggressions of the West, the feudal lords of Satsuma and Choshu sought to acquire the knowledge and technology of the West themselves and overthrow the military regime.

HO RUI AN, *Student Bodies*, 2019, stills from HD video: 26 min 30 sec. Courtesy the artist.

Since the 19th century, students have been the engine and antagonists of capitalist modernization in Asia—as well as the agents of imperialism and their fierce opposition. In the episodic video-essay *Student Bodies* (2019), Ho Rui An furthers his ongoing interest in Asia's economic development by tracing the many paradoxical roles played by educated youths. The work begins with a backdrop of the Kagoshima coast bombed by British warships in 1863, and the story of young men who were smuggled out of shogunate-era Japan to London to study the technology of the West. This generation would later return and become elite

figures in the Meiji government, which ushered in Japan's ambitions for military and commercial supremacy in the region.

Ho's narrative spans the 1968 university uprisings in Japan, the anti-dictatorship protesters massacred at Bangkok's Thammasat University in 1976, Malaysia's boycott of British imports in 1982, and the Asian currency crisis of 1997, which ultimately led a new generation of Western-educated economists to guide the nations of Southeast Asia through IMF-mandated, neoliberal reforms. Throughout, the words of radical figures like Japanese student-leader Katsuyuki Akiyama, and economists such as



As a result, they are now exporting not just goods, but ideas.

Lawrence Summers, appear as inaudibly distorted voices, the subtitles functioning as translations of their ghostly messages—a nod to Jacques Derrida’s concept of “hauntology,” the persistent recurrence of historical ideologies, from *Spectres of Marx* (1993).

Ho expands the student-teacher metaphor to encompass the postwar United States-Japan relationship, then South Korea’s protégé dynamic of the late 1970s with Japanese industry. American fears of rising Asian economic superpowers are illustrated with filmed scenes of magazine covers bearing sensationalist headlines put under a

scanner—like materials pulled from a university library—while historical footage plays on Asian-made hardware from televisions to laptops. By 2002, Ho notes that the Asian economy recovered with the expansion of the entertainment industry—specifically with the genres of “student-themed idol dramas and horror films”—bringing the artist’s self-described work of “pedagogical horror” full-circle into the millennium, as youths again power a regional economy still riven by the “invisible hand” of the free market and the heavy hand of the patriarchal state.

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A Conversation with Tsang Kin-Wah

Installation view of **TSANG KIN-WAH's** *The Fourth Seal - HE Is To No Purpose And HE Wants To Die For The Second Time*, 2010, digital video and sound installation with color, stereo sounds, dimensions variable: 6 min 25 sec, at Aichi Triennale, Aichi Arts Center, 2010. All images copyright and courtesy the artist.



INSIDE BURGER COLLECTION

BY DAVID HO YEUNG CHAN

Having known Tsang Kin-Wah for almost a decade, I would liken him to a devoted monk who has deserted the confines of organized religion and believes in wandering as the best way to sharpen his consciousness. Well versed in Eastern and Western philosophies and postmodern discourse, Tsang nevertheless maintains a critical distance with such intellectual enterprises, and spends time sifting through different ideas before devising the concepts for his work. Once he has locked on an idea, he begins to create in his studio in the Hong Kong suburb of Fotan, meticulously composing his haunting videos and designing spectacular floral wall-based works, all without the help of assistants.

Tsang seldom talks about the meaning behind his work, preferring to let his art speak for itself. In this interview, Tsang sheds light on the formal development of his oeuvre and his preoccupation with spirituality. Contrary to the reading of Tsang's art as an ongoing study of darkness and nihilism, I find his practice reminiscent of Samuel Beckett's 1957 play *Endgame*. To come to terms with the end is to become more honest with our physical and mental limitations as humans, and rethinking the meaning of "the terminal" is timely in the context of an increasingly unpredictable world order.

What inspired you to become an artist?

I liked drawing and painting when I was in primary school. Art was the only thing that interested me at the time, and I already wanted to become an artist as a student.

Two key moments affected my art practice. The year I spent studying in London made me realize the importance of developing a concept in the making of art. During late 2008 and early 2009, I shifted the focus of my work from addressing social issues to investigating personal, religious, and philosophical understandings of human nature, and I began to make video projections to expand the field for exploration.

Could you elaborate on the theme of human nature, which recurs throughout your work?

I have been troubled by existential issues for a long time, since going through both Confucian and Christian educations. While many believe that humans are fundamentally good in nature, I used to believe humans are inherently evil and selfish. Presently, I do not think there is a common nature to characterize humans. Some people have no conscience. People exist without a particular virtue. Some exist like animals in nature, while others take the form of human beings that are neither different nor superior to others.

During your undergraduate studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, you received training in Chinese painting, calligraphy, printmaking, and ceramics. How did you go from these disciplines to working almost exclusively with text-based and video installations?

When I started to make art, I wanted to use elements such as characters in my work. I began to write short stories and pseudo-histories, and presented them in a traditional way by means of woodblock prints, rubbings, books in Japanese-style binding. I realized gradually that creating a narrative would become my main interest. After many years of experimentation, I finally settled on using video and moving texts to create an environment for the viewer to experience.

Tell me about your early reliefs, *Super Magic Kung Fu* (2000) and *Clay . Soil . Earth & Its Spiritual Relationship with Man* (2000–02).

Super Magic Kung Fu is about the weird skills that people have to adopt for survival in society. Like Chinese kung fu, these skills are not something we are born with. We have to spend time and effort to learn them. My other ceramic works from around 2000 to 2002 deal with the spiritual and religious meanings of clay and earth, and refer to issues of life and death in the aftermath of the attacks of September 11, 2001.

You write in your statement for *Clay . Soil . Earth & Its Spiritual Relationship with Man* that "the earth is the opposite of heaven and is also the home of the dead." The work *aNYbody* (2002) is presented like a tomb, with childlike figures aligned within a wooden casket. Could you elaborate on the significance of using clay and the theme of mortality?

I carved the human figures from blocks of clay. For *aNYbody*, I pressed the carved blocks of clay onto plain ones in order to transfer the images onto a new relief surface. These two elements are presented as one with numerous figures being trapped inside. Even though the dead are buried, we can still see traces of their existence in the earth. The two wooden caskets referred to the collapse of the Twin Towers at the time I was making this work. The letters N and Y in the title imply New York. This work pays tribute to the dead from this horrible attack. It was presented as an archaeological site where the remains of the dead were to be found. This reference is not something that I want to reveal to the audience explicitly, but I invite them to ponder on the relationship between life and death on an existential level.

Your earliest text-based installation, *Untitled No.1* (2003), uses painting and printing techniques on actual wallpaper. What was the process for making this work?

This piece reflects my experience of studying in London. I was hoping to create a space that would be elegant at first sight, but in fact would express frustration, anger, and other negative emotions. I first found a pattern designed by William Morris, and then scanned it as a reference. The image was made into silkscreens by hand and then printed onto actual wallpaper that I bought. I experimented with different color combinations, but in the end I only used black to make the work less heavy.

What is the link between language and William Morris's highly decorative pattern? And why did you include foul language in this work?

As a child, I used to study the *Analects* [of Confucius]. When I was trying to write short stories, I didn't want to use classical Chinese. I wrote in another style close to it. After writing a bit, I started to question the use of this type of language, which pointed me to use more vulgar language that reflected the true emotions of normal people.

I like William Morris's emphasis on using our hands in the process of making arts and crafts. This injects the maker's own emotions into the work, something that mechanical reproductions cannot match. On one level, this runs parallel to my idea of using foul language to express my frustration and anger while I was living in the United Kingdom.

What was your earliest video work?

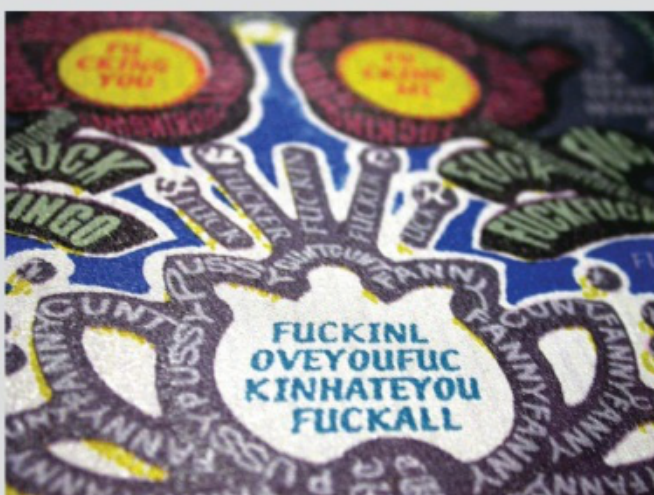
It was a video about distorting the original images and then transforming the copies of the original through non-digital means. The two main elements of the video are color blocks as the backdrop, and the text, which states the name of the color that



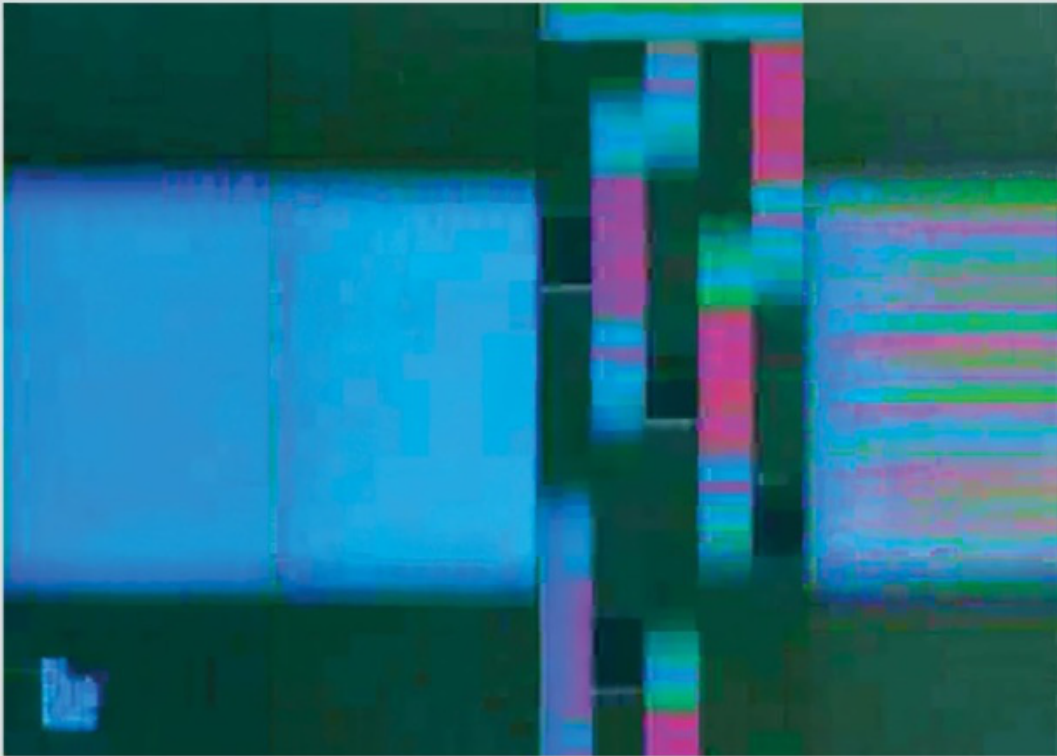
Installation view of **TSANG KIN-WAH's** *Super Magic Kung Fu*, 2000, inked stoneware plaque, 553.5×59×6.5 cm with frame, at Art Museum, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2000.



Installation view of **TSANG KIN-WAH's** *aNYbody*, 2002, inked stoneware plaque, 528×25.7×11.8 cm with frame, at the Hong Kong Visual Arts Centre, 2002.



Detailed installation view of **TSANG KIN-WAH's** *Untitled No. 1*, 2003, silkscreen and acrylic on paper, 300×300 cm, at the Hong Kong Museum of Art, Hong Kong, 2003.



TSANG KIN-WAH, *Colour>Color>Col.*, 2001, still from VHS and DV with color, no sound: 5 min 10 sec.



Installation view of TSANG KIN-WAH's *Ecce Homo Trilogy I*, 2012, multichannel video with sound and text installation, dimensions variable, at Pearl Lam Galleries, Hong Kong, 2012.

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moves slowly from one side to another at the bottom of the video. I first made this video on the computer and thereafter created a copy by recording it with a DV camera. The copy was then recorded and duplicated again until the final copy became completely illegible and was full of noise. Then I superimposed those copies onto one screen in order to alter the way we read the text. I made this work around 2001 when I was first exposed to video art while working at a local video art organization. I was quite eager to try something new at that time, though I did not take video art very seriously, not until *The First Seal* was made in 2009.

You made a fascinating piece titled *In the dark in the darkness* (2006), which used vinyl floor text in an enclosed space with changing light conditions. Can you elaborate on this?

This work contains only two components. First, transparent glossy vinyl texts are installed on the floor. Two spotlights that are turned on and off intermittently are placed at the corners of the room. Upon entering the space, the texts are hardly visible at first. But they emerge slowly with the light that also reflects on the entire space at the same time. It's as if the whole interior space is breathing and emotions are being revealed bit by bit to the audience. The impetus of this work has to do with a personal matter that happened in Japan that has troubled me for years. That is why this piece was shown in Japan in 2006. This work reflects my pessimistic thoughts on life in general. I had no idea what came over me, it might be related to the feeling of not being wanted as a teenager.

Tell me about *The Seven Seals* (2009–). You have already completed six of the works in this series and are working on the seventh. With reference to religion, metaphysics, and politics, the *Seals* collectively reveal different emotions and human nature as we approach the apocalypse.

The first of *The Seven Seals* is about my pessimistic view on life. This serves as the starting point and the basis for the whole series. The rest are elaborations and my personal views on life and death, past and current events from around the world, and my negative feelings toward humankind and their self-destructive behavior. In this work, the world will end, and we will be annihilated.

What was the process for making the different *Seals*? How has this work evolved?

The starting point is always texts that are partially extracted from the Book of Revelation. From that point on I expand my research into different areas, collecting and editing short phrases, sentences, and keywords, which are later formatted to create the final text for the videos. The series initially focused on social and political issues, and later shifts back to my personal memories, experiences, and thoughts on similar topics in the *Fourth* (2010), *Fifth* (2011), and *Sixth* (2014).

How do you manipulate the way in which audiences read the narrative? Can you also comment on the use of sound? Is there a particular stasis you want to achieve visually?

The areas for projection are from the ceiling to the walls and they vary with different *Seals*. I take into consideration the bodily experience of the audience in order to avoid repetition. I like to let the audience read the texts and understand the works, but also achieve a certain atmosphere that is not too flat. I make the texts flow rather slowly in the beginning. The audience can then read and discover the work in the space and understand the keywords and structure of the content for themselves. Afterward, I can then focus more on building up a tense atmosphere by accelerating the speed

of the flowing texts by adding more layers of texts to the work. The gentle sound at the beginning also helps to suggest a subdued atmosphere at first, which then develops into a cacophony of sounds to complement the overall movement of the projected texts.

The texts displayed in the different *Seals* are meant to address issues of war, terrorism, self-denial, and death, and collectively to express Nietzsche's idea of eternal recurrence. What is your view on fate? Is there a moral lesson after all?

Some *Seals* are more politically and socially driven than others. Individual *Seals* are filled with historical references, such as protests, slogans, and speeches by different politicians, ideas of capitalism and communism, etcetera. But these fragments are often mixed with my own writings, with which audiences may be familiar. With the idea of eternal recurrence, I believe things will just happen repeatedly in a slightly different way. I feel that we will never learn anything from this process. Even though we know what we should be doing, in the end, we behave differently and just follow our greed, desire, and selfishness.

How do you envision the final presentation of *The Seven Seals* in its entirety?

I can imagine two ways for presenting the whole series: to show the work using a single space, or with multiple spaces. In the former case, all seven will be played one after another, exhibited as one work. With multiple spaces, it would be like my *Ecce Homo Trilogy* (2011–12) or my exhibition at the 56th Venice Biennale (2015). Different projections will be displayed in different spaces. Enclosed areas will be built with connecting pathways for viewing the different *Seals* as a coherent narrative. This would be like a journey for the audience to engage the entire series without inhibiting their involvement and exploration. I see this as the more ideal option.

In 2012, I worked with you on the *Ecce Homo Trilogy 1*, which questions the notion of judgment and also deals with the trauma of a historical event. What was the shift from the text-based *Seven Seals* to using found footage from the internet for *Ecce Homo*?

While making one of the *Seals* back in 2010–11, there was an opportunity for a solo exhibition. I was working on footage related to [Romanian communist leader] Nicolae Ceaușescu. I thought it would be interesting to work with the space and to create a site-specific video installation. *Ecce Homo* focuses on the last moments of a dictator who was tried and executed in a brutal way. After this piece, I worked on Saddam Hussein and the footage related to his last days. The videos were shown in a monastery in Switzerland. Now, I am working on the last part of the trilogy, which focuses on Muammar Gaddafi.

***Ecce Homo Trilogy 1* addresses the tension between subjective and objective experiences, and reverses the gaze back at the viewers. In particular, the white tunnel with stationary wall texts express your personal thoughts on the matter of judgment. Moving to the other half of the gallery, the audience enters a dark sphere and bears witness to a trial, execution, and burial. Is the trilogy a critique on institutional power and its effects on how we live in society?**

This is one of the areas I like to critique. Institutional power and its enforcement of set ideologies are on the surface, while human nature is at the core.

For your participation at the Venice Biennale in 2015, why did you title your presentation *The Infinite Nothing*?



Installation view of **TSANG KIN-WAH's** *The Infinite Nothing*, 2015, multichannel video and sound installation, dimension variable, at the Hong Kong Pavilion, 56th Venice Biennale, 2015. Commissioned by M+ Museum, Hong Kong.

Based on Friedrich Nietzsche's idea of eternal recurrence and other references, *The Infinite Nothing* is a work composed of four parts that form a cycle. It talks about the evolution of different stages in life. There are two rooms and a courtyard in the Hong Kong pavilion. I decided to cover the open courtyard, and to build a structure to create a singular space. The four spaces symbolize four stages, from a state of emptiness and ignorance, to a state of addressing our desire to acquire anything we are taught to acquire, and the need for social bonding. The fourth stage is where people try to overcome themselves to become better. The setup echoes the idea of eternal recurrence, that we constantly have to overcome ourselves, but without being able to reach a final destination in the end.

Nietzsche's aim was for a more ideal species of human, the overman. I long to become a better man but "better" really means nothing. Quite often I look at myself and study my behavior like an outsider. Confucius suggested that we review ourselves three times a day, which influences me a lot. It is also like Hegelian dialectics—there is another antithetical me watching me, acting against myself. Somehow the two relate to each other. It is quite difficult to translate this idea to the audience, but the loop in the work is intended to create a surrealistic spectacle. I not only want to convey a sense of loss, but also try to short-circuit our rational faculty in order to make the audience become more aware of their immediate environment.

The late Romanian philosopher Emil Cioran has also influenced you. He wrote: "When all the current reasons—moral, aesthetic, religious, social, and so on—no longer guide one's life, how can one sustain life without succumbing to nothingness? Only by a connection with the absurd, by love of absolute uselessness." Is "Nothing," a restaging of your Venice Biennale presentation at Hong Kong's M+ Pavilion, an exercise in the absurd?

I felt pretty meaningless after the Venice Biennale. In the end, it was just another exhibition. I was not too optimistic or proactive. So I slipped back into "absurdity." I read Cioran afterward and reread Arthur Schopenhauer. That is the reason I altered the Venice Biennale exhibition at the M+ Pavilion, to express my conviction on nothingness and the absurdity of life. Cioran once said, "Having no reason to live, why would they have any to die?" But at the same time, we can kill ourselves whenever we want, so actually we do not have to rush to do that but just live and see how it turns out. That is the absurdity of life to me.

In your view, what is the function of art?

I did ask myself what art can do under the current circumstances, but frankly I cannot suggest any. I feel like art has no function even though it may still be able to help a little in "decorating" society and altering its appearance. Or maybe its function is like what Schopenhauer suggests, as a way to escape the Will and forget our own existence, nothing else.

Born in 1976 in Shantou, Tsang Kin-Wah is a graduate of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Camberwell College of Arts in London. Tsang represented Hong Kong in the 56th Venice Biennale (2015), and has also participated in the Istanbul Biennial (2017), the Aichi Triennale (2010), and the Biennale of Sydney (2010). Recent solo presentations have been held at the Vancouver Art Gallery (2017); M+ Pavilion, Hong Kong (2016); and Kunstmuseum Thurgau in Switzerland (2015).

David Ho Yeung Chan is a Hong Kong-based curator. He was the director of the Shanghai Gallery of Art at Three on the Bund from 2007 to 2009, and subsequently the director of Hong Kong's Osage Gallery until 2011. Chan holds a master's degree from the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, New York.

Garden of Six Seasons

一園六季

14 March – 7 June, 2020

Garden of Six Seasons
is a precursor to the 2020
Kathmandu Triennale

Artistic Director: Cosmin Costinaş
Curators: Sheelasha Rajbhandari
and Hit Man Gurung

展覽「一園六季」為2020年
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三年展藝術總監：康喆明
策展人：Sheelasha Rajbhandari
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BEIJING COMMUNE

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Art Zone, No.4 Jiuxianqiao Road,
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UPCOMING

MAR 4–MAY 17

Cao Fei: Blueprints
Serpentine Galleries
London

MAR 7–MAY 24

Wang Hsiang Lin
Taipei Fine Art Museum
Taipei

MAR 10–AUG 2

Next Act
Asia Society
Hong Kong

MAR 11–AUG 8

Michael Rakowitz
Jameel Arts Centre
Dubai

MAR 13–JUN 28

Jitish Kallat: Return to Sender
Frist Art Museum
Nashville

MAR 14–MAY 17

Art Sights 2020
Multiple locations
Saitama

MAR 14–JUN 7

Garden of Six Seasons
Para Site
Hong Kong

MAR 14–JUN 8

Biennale of Sydney: Niri
Multiple locations
Sydney

MAR 14–JUN 14

Things Entangling
Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo
Tokyo

MAR 14–SEP 13

XU ZHEN®: Eternity vs Evolution
National Gallery of Australia
Canberra

MAR 19–JUN 2

Ahmet Ögüt: No Poem Loves Its Poet
Yarat Contemporary Art Centre
Baku

MAR 20–JUL 5

Salman Toor: How Will I Know?
Whitney Museum of American Art
New York

MAR 21–JUN 14

Hiroshi Sugimoto: Post Vitam
Kyocera Museum of Art
Kyoto

MAR 21–JUN 14

**Unconstrained Textiles:
Stitching Methods, Crossing Ideas**
Centre for Heritage, Arts and Textile
Hong Kong

MAR 21–JUN 21

Tarek Atoui: Cycles in 11
Sharjah Art Foundation
Sharjah

MAR 27–JUN 7

Lee Mingwei
Gropius Bau
Berlin

MAR 27–SEP 27

Latiff Mohidin: Pago Pago
National Gallery Singapore
Singapore

APR 1–JUL 1

**2020 Asia Project:
Looking For Another Family**
National Museum of Modern
and Contemporary Art
Seoul

APR 3–JUN 7

Yu Ji
Chisenhale Gallery
London

APR 4–JUN 14

Danh Võ
National Museum of Art
Osaka

APR 5–AUG 23

Yoshitomo Nara
Los Angeles County Museum of Art
Los Angeles

APR 9–JUL 26

Chen Zhen: Short-circuits
Pirelli HangarBicocca
Milan

APR 23–SEP 6

**Stars: Six Contemporary Artists
from Japan to the World**
Mori Art Museum
Tokyo

APR 24–JUL 12

**Will Pham:
Record, Retrieve, Reactivate**
Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art
Manchester

APR 25–JUN 7

Time Flows: Reflections by Five Artists
Hara Museum of Art
Tokyo

ONGOING

NOV 22, 2019–MAR 22

**Singapore Biennale:
Every Step in the Right Direction**
Multiple locations
Singapore

NOV 27, 2019–MAY 25

Chiura Obata: American Modern
Smithsonian American Art Museum
Washington, DC

DEC 7, 2019–APR 13

Sigg Prize Exhibition 2019
M+
Hong Kong

JAN 4–MAR 15

**Saad Qureshi:
Something About Paradise**
Yorkshire Sculpture Park
West Bretton

JAN 18–MAR 31

**Emerging Artscape:
The State of Our Collection**
Artizon Museum
Tokyo

JAN 22–MAY 30

Amar Kanwar: The Sovereign Forest
NYU Abu Dhabi Art Gallery
Abu Dhabi

JAN 24–APR 12

Rae-Yen Song: *May-May Songuu*
Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art
Manchester

JAN 26–APR 19

Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit
Hammer Museum
Los Angeles

JAN 30–SEP 28

Liu Ye: Storytelling
Fondazione Prada
Milan

FEB 7–APR 12

Christine Sun Kim: Off the Charts
MIT List Visual Arts Center
Cambridge

FEB 27–AUG 9

Cevdet Ereğ: Bergama Stereotip
Arter
Istanbul

FEB 28–MAY 31

**Melati Suryodarmo:
Why Let the Chicken Run?**
Museum MACAN
Jakarta

FEB 28–OCT 4

Japanese Modernism
National Gallery of Victoria
Melbourne

FEB 29–MAY 3

**Hassan Sharif:
I Am The Single Work Artist**
KW
Berlin

FEB 29–JUN 8

**Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art:
Monster Theatres**
Multiple locations
Adelaide

Ann Veronica Janssens, *Rose*, 2007, 7 light projectors, artificial haze, pink filters
Courtesy the artist; Institut d'Art Contemporain, Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes, France; Esther Schipper, Berlin
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Singapore Biennale 2019: Every Step in the Right Direction



ALFONSO OSSORIO, *Male and Female from Congregations*, 1965, mixed media on panel, 210.8×78.7×31.8cm. Courtesy the Robert U. Ossorio Foundation and Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, New York.

The world today is rife with complexity. And so, it seems, is the act of reimagining it. In the words of Patrick D. Flores, artistic director of the 6th Singapore Biennale: “As the world makes the art, so does the art make the world. This world has previously been mapped for us. The Biennale would like

to revisit that map and carry out new steps to draw it anew.” Perhaps nowhere in this latest edition of the Biennale, boasting works by 77 artists and collectives located across 11 sites, was that step toward remapping the macrocosm we inhabit more manifest than in a nondescript corner of the National Gallery Singapore, the event’s main venue. In a section dedicated to the Filipino-American artist Alfonso Ossorio sat several modest examples of the artist’s “congregations,” medleys of found objects that he enfolded into rich, haptic repertoires of quotidian materiality. Ossorio’s works are historically significant yet little remembered, though it is worth noting that the seminal 1961 survey “The Art of Assemblage,” at New York’s Museum of Modern Art, featured one of his pieces, *Excelsior* (1960). These congregations are reminders of a rapidly diversifying art historiography, of the need to re-world our sense of both chronologies and geographies, and to recuperate a figure such as Ossorio—migrant, biracial, Southeast Asian, queer, and, admittedly, privileged.

Yet the gallery contained but a slim handful of actual artworks. Pride of place

seemed given over instead to the mission statement of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). This odd fact was explained by Flores in his curatorial essay: “To ship a work of art from New York to Singapore would be a matter of genomics, subject to the hefty manual of the US Department of Fish and Wildlife Service on endangered species.” What transpired, then, seems to have been a regulatory objection to certain forms of bio-organic material in Ossorio’s work and hence their export; the CITES text, in other words, deliberately marked an absence. It was a timely gesture. In an era when major institutions and their ways are being held up to greater scrutiny, admitting into the rarefied realm of exhibition-making the difficulties of institutional bureaucracy seems, indeed, a step in the right direction. Here, however isolated an instance, was the phenomenon of the exhibition itself reflexively contextualized by its own historical moment.

In a show that was markedly short on spectacle, both the most and the least spectacular works provided microcosmic reflections of the broader macrocosmos, of points in the map—places, people, peregrinations—unimagined or unglimped. On the steps of the National Gallery complex sat Indonesian-born, Singapore-based Boedi Widjaja’s massive *Black – Hut, Black – Hut* (2019). Composed of stepped concrete and petrified-wood structures that borrow from, and deconstruct, formal elements of the *pendapa* (a traditional Javanese home), such as the columns and column bases, the installation is premised on the symbolic significance of the mandala,

a pictorial representation of the metaphysical cosmos that underpins the spatio-conceptual contours of vernacular Javanese architecture. Mapped onto Widjaja’s piece, the heart of the mandala is located in the central alcove where the viewer experiences a sonic abstraction of some of the earliest recordings of a gamelan orchestra, with instruments from the collection of the Surakarta Hadiningrat royal palace in Solo. Rendering the forms and symbols of Widjaja’s hometown unrecognizable, the defamiliarized sounds and shapes suggest the alienation and loss effected by displacement. On the other end of the scale was Marie Voignier’s quietly engaging video, *Na China* (2019). Purposefully poised between fiction and documentary, it introduces the viewer to the African community in the province of Guangzhou, focusing on the daily travails of women from countries such as Cameroon and Biafra who operate as small-time traders. The emotional textures of the narrative, despite the veneer of sociological interest, are surprisingly heartfelt and intimate. Like Widjaja’s installation, at the core of Voignier’s piece, too, is an expression of estrangement and distance.

Redrawing the map of the world, however, falls short of revolutionizing it. The exhibition’s title comes from Salud Algabre, a peasant rebel who was at the forefront of the Sakdal mutiny in the Philippines in the 1930s; she reportedly declared that no uprising fails, rather “each one is a step in the right direction.” Given that the show derived its driving impulse from a revolutionary, one wished that



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MARIE VOIGNIER, *Na China*, 2019, still image from single-channel video: 70 min. Courtesy the artist.

it too had been, well, more revolutionary. Singapore as a polity is not known for risk-taking, so it was perhaps no surprise that the ethos of a national exercise such as the Singapore Biennale, which boasted official funding and organizational support, remained fairly conservative. Particular moments in the exhibition alluded to a wider world of shifting sociopolitical norms and cultural values, yet stopped shy of making outright claims.

The specter of the bitter protests in Hong Kong, for one, which has overshadowed almost all other developments in Asia in the past year, was spotted only fleetingly. A book of photo collages by the late Hong Kong artist Ha Bik Chuen, presented as part of Céline Condorelli's project on artists' archives, was open to a page featuring images of people in face masks when this reviewer visited. The facemask has become one of the defining sartorial symbols of the protests, and an unconstitutional government-imposed ban has had little effect; the association here seemed suggestive. Elsewhere, an interactive installation by Hong Kong husband-and-wife duo C&G (Clara Cheung and Gum Cheng) titled *Am I A Ghost?* (2019) invites audiences to test their status as the titular entity—which, in popular Cantonese parlance, means “spy”—through a checklist, with questions such as “If you were

an undercover police officer infiltrating a protest, what would you wear or take along for the operation?” This speaks to an increasingly frequent and well-documented scenario in Hong Kong, yet the protests were not openly referred to in the corresponding texts.

The continuing struggle for LGBTQ rights, happily, has made advances in Asia. Taiwan legalized same-sex marriage last year and India's Supreme Court unanimously ruled to decriminalize homosexuality in 2018. It is a pity, then, that aspects of Ossorio's biography—he lived openly with a long-term male partner—were largely glossed over; it would have been interesting to excavate those dimensions of his life, given what we know of other queer artists of the period, such as Robert Rauschenberg and Ellsworth Kelly. Khairullah Rahim, in collaboration with Taufiq Rahman, worked with communities in Singapore, including marginalized groups, to interrogate realities of public and private space in the city-state. *Intimate Apparitions* and *Intimate Apparitions (Sightings)* (both 2019) evince the artist's reputation for gorgeous sculptural reconfigurations of everyday objects, coupled with teasingly allusive hints at the veiled lives of his subjects, who necessarily remain anonymous in the work. A kayak, for instance, points to a park where gay men occasionally cruise, whereas

a disco ball refers to drag queens working in local clubs. While homosexual acts remain outlawed in Singapore, the licit existence of increasingly visible LGBTQ events such as Pink Dot and IndigNation has proven a delicate balancing act for the government, and the Biennale's inclusion of a project like Khairullah's, which foregrounds the gray areas between permissibility and negotiation, public and private, prompts discussion on what Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has referred to as “an uneasy compromise.”

If, in Flores's words, the Biennale aimed to “deepen the conversation on the need for an ethical gesture in our time and in history,” then here, however circumscribed, was a small step toward the longed-for utopia.

LOUIS HO



Installation view of **KHAIRULLAH RAHIM's** *Intimate Apparitions*, 2019, mixed-media installation, dimensions variable, at Singapore Biennale, Singapore Art Museum, 2019. Courtesy Singapore Art Museum.

Taka Ishii Gallery

The evolution of ikebana (the Japanese art of flower arranging), from its 7th-century application as religious offerings to the secularized decorative practice of the early 20th century, was subtle. Successive schools approached ikebana with unique aesthetic goals while retaining its fundamental expressive elegance.

Sofu Teshigahara

Working as a young ikebana artist in the 1920s, Sofu Teshigahara began to find the practice stale, out of touch with the rapidly modernizing world. Sensing this disconnect, he founded the Sogetsu School in 1927, which expanded the art form beyond the realm of flowers and traditional pottery. Applying constructive materials such as wood, stone, and steel, Teshigahara produced balanced, sculptural compositions, some teeming with botanical elements, others eschewing flora altogether.

Now remembered as the founder of modern ikebana, Teshigahara also worked in sculpture and calligraphy until his death in 1979. The range of his oeuvre was represented through a limited solo presentation at Taka Ishii Gallery in Tokyo, focusing primarily on postwar pieces that

cemented Teshigahara's place in the global understanding of ikebana. The artist's radicalism, passion, and vigor appeared in full force through works that transformed the gallery space into a garden of industrial amalgamations underscored by balance and harmony.

Commanding attention in the center of the gallery was Teshigahara's *Kikansha (Locomotive)* (1951), which encapsulates the artist's modern approach of combining the mechanized and the organic. Towering above the other displays, *Kikansha's* graceful streams of steel connect slender wheels with a balance that indicates a skilled eye for form. These abstracted circles and lines are interrupted by an imposing chimney set in the center of the work, much like the exhaust pipes seen on cargo trucks today. A thick black coating is reminiscent of airborne pollutants, the detrimental byproducts of industrialization. Furthering this representation of pollution are three traditional ikebana arrangements. On one end of the structure, a small steel vase of bright yellow flowers and the beige-colored pampas grass held in a larger receptacle below it bring an element of fresh beauty to the work. Set directly below the opening of the smokestack is another flower arrangement, though one of considerably less vitality. The plant is a muted brown-black shade, as if the flowers have been blasted by exhaust from a coal-burning engine, symbolizing the devastation wrought by industrial pollution on nature. Teshigahara thus repurposes traditional ikebana to express worrying predictions on the threats posed by industrialization.

Among the calligraphic works affixed to the surrounding walls was *Yo yo* (undated), which makes use of aggressive brushstrokes performed

with a loose hand to convey a sense of dire urgency in an otherwise subtle presentation. Translated into English, the characters connote darkness, blurriness, or the unknown, gesturing at the same obfuscated sense of danger implied in the characters' form. The allusion of entering into the unknown with darkness overhead echoes sober contemplations on Japan's industrial postwar landscape found in Teshigahara's other works on display.

Tucked away in the rear corner of the space was *Inochi (Life)* (1956), a large sculpture fabricated from wisteria vines and brass that appears to depict an explosion frozen in time. Jagged spikes impulsively protrude from one another, a random and instantaneous reaction solidified and dropped on the ground for closer inspection. It alerts viewers to a sense of threat, but in time, the illusive qualities of destruction dissipate, allowing the sculpture's texture to come to the fore. Evoking tree bark with its rough and irregular surface, and sections of oxidized metal resembling fungus, the piece reveals a biomorphic quality. This is disturbed by simulated rivets punched throughout the surface of the work, suggesting industrialization as a stepping-stone from organic to artificial, productive to destructive. These elements encompass major themes Teshigahara sought to explore in his postwar career—the equilibrium of nature and the spectacle of humanity's disruption thereof.

Taka Ishii Gallery offered reconsiderations of the artist's postwar preoccupations in a contemporary light, with works articulating environmental concerns that prove Teshigahara's insightfulness and lasting relevance.

MICHAEL RASNIC

Installation view of SOFU TESHIGAHARA's *Kikansha (Locomotive)*, 1951, iron, palms, chrysanthemum, pampas grass, 211 × 275 × 92 cm, at Taka Ishii Gallery, Tokyo, 2019. Courtesy the artist and Taka Ishii Gallery.



Heecheon Kim *Deep in the Forking Tanks*



HEECHEON KIM, *Deep in the Forking Tanks*, 2019, still from video installation with color and stereo: 41 min. Courtesy the artist.

The work of Heecheon Kim has experienced a steep critical ascent since the artist's 2015 trilogy—*Lifting Barbells*, *Soulseek/Pegging/Air-twerking*, and *Wall Rally Drill*—enthralled audiences at major presentations at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art and the Seoul Mediacity Biennale. It's no surprise: Kim's cheeky yet introspective videos seem refreshingly relevant, for they evince the ways in which reality and simulacra have collapsed by exploiting the aesthetic potential of virtual-reality technology, face-swap applications, and GPS tracking devices. But if his practice appears similar to those of many millennial wunderkinds who are churning out hyper-saturated moving images built around digital interfaces, Kim's solo exhibition at Art Sonje Center suggested otherwise. With his newest video, *Deep in the Forking Tanks* (2019), Kim signals the beginning of an unexplored phase within his practice by counterintuitively locating his investigations of a technologically mediated world

within physical situations that generate unique perceptual experiences.

Featuring a single, monolithic screen with the video projected onto its center, the exhibition commenced with a disorienting, pitch-black corridor illuminated by a sparse row of minute lightbulbs on the ground. Such immersive darkness was hardly unprecedented or inventive, but

it was a remarkably well-executed formal device that served as an apt prelude to Kim's submarine forays. The video introduces sensory-deprivation tanks—pod-shaped structures that are impervious to external stimuli and filled with body-temperature

saltwater that allows the supine user inside to float effortlessly—as sites where multiple registers of sensory confusion are possible. In his characteristically juvenile voice, Kim reads from a Spanish text outlining the effects of these tanks on the human body: Blinking extremely slowly within the tank can induce a disjunction between the sense of sight and movements of the eye. A diver deep in the ocean might have a similar experience should her lights start to malfunction.

And yet such sensory entanglements are not merely hypothetical. The narrator's initial monologue is followed by his own account of searching for the remains of a colleague who went missing in the ocean. During a simulated underwater training scenario constructed from the day she disappeared, Kim experiences acute physical trauma as his body presumes that the situation is real. In another sequence, Kim confesses to a friend that portions of the training session that he cannot recall feel as if they are his actual experienced

past. Interspersed throughout the video are a series of digitally feminized, pixelated video selfies of the artist standing in a bathroom and roaming around parks, further complicating the already porous boundaries between the real and the virtual. Jumbled perception deep in the tanks therefore extends into a metaphor for the human experience in the age of manipulable reality.

Halfway through the video, Kim introduces a devoted group of Mexican K-pop fans, for whom re-enacting the regimented, synchronized choreography of Korean bands offers an opportunity to “leave their bodies.” The fan club declares a “Day of Automation,” involving an uncanny, flash-mob-style performance in which the amateur troupe replicates the slick, quasi-militaristic moves of their idols in front of a Pizza Hut during a hail storm in Mexico City. Their fanatic movements are an attempt to push the sensations of the body to the point where reality and representation can no longer be distinguished, as if merging with the digitally mediated world of their favorite K-pop videos. To trace the validity of such extreme physical conditions is a tricky endeavor, as few would be able to attest to the experience of perceptual disorder in a sensory-deprivation tank, let alone the near-impossible task of utterly losing bodily sensations through mirroring the impeccable moves of K-pop stars. And yet by grounding his work in the perceptual realm, Kim reminds us that our experiences of technology are still decidedly physical, despite the recurrent focus on the virtual sphere in recent artistic production. After all, even at the onset of the new decade, we still touch, swipe, and scroll through our screens.

HARRY C. H. CHOI



Martha Atienza *Equation of State*

Known for its white-sand beaches and marine life, Bantayan Island in Cebu, like many coastal settlements, has borne the brunt of the global climate crisis. Rising sea levels have led to significant coastal land erosion, while warmer sea-surface temperatures contribute to increasingly destructive storms such as Typhoon Yolanda, which battered Bantayan in 2013. “Equation of State,” Martha Atienza’s third solo exhibition at Silverlens, revolved around Bantayan, documenting the impact of climate change on her hometown through video works and kinetic installations.

At the center of the first exhibition space was *Equation of State II – Rhizophora stylosa* (all works 2019), an installation of 24 mangrove shrubs tied to a mechanized pulley system that lifts the plants in and out of a steel-and-plywood trough, mimicking the rhythm of the tide. Common in the Philippines, mangroves have been reintroduced to coastal areas as a natural means to absorb greenhouse gases, protect against floods, and provide habitats for aquatic animals. Atienza’s intricate installation features natural elements including water, aquatic plants, and a variety of live fish, but also utilizes human-made materials to generate the mangrove’s artificial movement, such as microcontrollers, water pumps, and filters, signifying human interference into organic processes.

The coastal plant was also the inspiration for *Equation*

of State I – Rhizophora stylosa. In a separate, dimly lit room, a single, spotlighted mangrove shrub hung above a rectangular pool of water. As the light hit the water’s surface, it reflected onto the gallery wall the ripples produced by water droplets from the mangrove’s stalk. Like a holy icon, the plant was positioned high above one’s natural gaze, while the rhythmic reverberations of dripping water created a mesmerizing atmosphere. However, the extended caption on the wall belied the elevated stature of the mangrove as implied in the work—the species displayed is not appropriate for planting in certain habitats, especially those with sea grass. The installation thus points to the limits of environmental management, which may have unintended detrimental ripple effects.

“Equation of State” closed with two video installations foregrounding humanity’s struggle against climate change. The 79-minute, three-channel *Tarong 11°16'12.0"N 123°45'23.4"E 2019-08-06 Tue 2:27 PM PST 1.50 Meters High Tide, Kaongkod 11°16'12.0"N 123°45'23.4"E 2019-08-03 Sat 12:14 PM PST 2.03 Meters High Tide* shows three fishermen bobbing in the undulating sea, alternately sinking and rising above water. The camera mirrors their movements above and below the surface, the shot oscillating between sink or swim. This work alludes to the difficulties faced by these coastal-dwelling fisherfolk, whose livelihoods—and lives—are threatened by flooding

and changes to the marine ecology. Yet the work also connotes human stoicism in the face of environmental crisis and existential threat.

In the adjacent room nearest to the gallery’s exit, Atienza’s *Panangatan 11°09'53.3"N 123°42'40.5"E, 2019-10-24 Thu 6:42 AM PST 1.29 Meters High Tide, 2019-10-12 Sat 10:26 AM PST 1.40 Meters High Tide* was projected on a large wall. At 307 minutes long, the video consists of a black-and-white, horizontal tracking shot of the island’s coast. Traversing the physical line where human and ocean meet, the artwork records sea walls, houses, churches, and other infrastructure in various states of abandonment and decay, and the sea water closing in on land. Rendering the boundary between land and sea in black and white, the video heightens the sense of proximity and contrast between human and nature.

Atienza’s documentation of Bantayan revealed more than just the visible effects of climate change on an island. A personal and poetic endeavor, “Equation of State” also probed universal themes of human resilience and ingenuity, and provided insight into how humans and the environment adjust to one another. The continuous juxtaposition of artificial and natural elements in the show inspired viewers to think about the inextricable connection between humanity and the fragile planet we call home: we have to make do with what we have.

JOHN ALEXIS BALAGUER

MARTHA ATIENZA, *Tarong 11°16'12.0"N 123°45'23.4"E 2019-08-06 Tue 2:27 PM PST 1.50 Meters High Tide, Kaongkod 11°16'12.0"N 123°45'23.4"E 2019-08-03 Sat 12:14 PM PST 2.03 Meters High Tide*, 2019, still from three-channel HD video installation: 79 min. Courtesy the artist and Silverlens Gallery, Manila.

Phantom Plane: Cyberpunk in the Year of the Future

When cyberpunk emerged in the final decades of the 20th century, the genre reflected contemporary anxieties about radical social and technological change. Today, as governments and corporations mask ever more sophisticated data-mining and surveillance technologies behind deceptively benign interfaces, the world seems well on its way to fulfilling dystopian cyberpunk prophecies. “Phantom Plane: Cyberpunk in the Year of the Future” interrogated the ways

in which the genre’s hallmarks have manifested in existing sociocultural imaginaries, with works that dissected, to varying degrees of success, the line it treads between astuteness and cliché.

Among the touchstones of cyberpunk is the Asian metropolis,

a meeting of glass-and-steel facades and rundown shanties under Western eyes. Projected onto the entrance of the gallery, Zheng Mahler’s *Nostalgia Machines* (2019)—which leads viewers through a neon-lit, video-game version of 2050 Hong Kong where people escape reality via simulations of idealized pasts—adopts the trappings of cyberpunk while pushing back on its techno-orientalism. A solemn, incongruously Japanese voice-over (either an homage to Japan’s influence on the genre or, less charitably, a dig at White writers’ pick-and-mix attitude

to Asian cultural references) recites such hackneyed lines as “The city is erotic and dreary,” but continues with a cogent examination of Hong Kong as a site where competing colonial powers have fought for influence. Set three years after the city will actually be incorporated into China’s communist regime, the video portrays a cityscape in which local imagery has been obliterated by signs for mainland corporations. Zheng Mahler resists demonizing any past or future hegemon, but rather teases out the complexities of how Hong Kong is viewed and views itself, reclaiming it from occidental fantasy.

Some works were less adept in their engagement with the exhibition’s themes. Chan Wai Kwong’s pink-lit stairway plastered with high-contrast, black-and-white images of Hong Kong’s seedy bars and street scenes doubled down on an eroticized portrayal of the city. The orientalist spell was broken by the phrase “Hong Kong add oil,” stamped onto the work by the artist in response to the escalating anti-extradition-bill protests at the time—a superficial injection of realism.

The show could be faulted for a reliance on surface-level connections to cyberpunk, but the loose remit allowed unexpected dialogues to arise between disparate works. In the third-floor gallery, Cui Jie’s *Cell Tower* (2019) canvases of glinting, semi-abstracted buildings hung on the wall opposite Tetsuya Ishida’s grotesque painting *Observation* (1999), depicting human heads attached to rusty cylinders and bent solar panels. Shinro Ohtake’s life-size shed, fashioned after a Japanese snack kiosk and filled with knickknacks, pop-culture memorabilia, magazines, and a giant collaged scrapbook, occupied the center of the

space. Repurposing items from different countries, Ohtake’s 2012 installation reflects the chaos of the consumerist, media-saturated landscape. Considered together, Cui’s sleek modernist studies, Ishida’s post-apocalyptic scene, and Ohtake’s ramshackle shed revealed a coherent, layered, and thematically relevant narrative of double-edged modernity—one that accounted for its inescapable allure while reckoning with its devastating potential to reduce the world to a junkyard.

Nowhere was this ambivalence more resonant than in Lee Bul’s *After Bruno Taut (Beware the sweetness of things)* (2007). Resembling a lopsided chandelier, the suspended sculpture is in fact a model of a speculative city, inspired by the German architect’s idea for an Alpine utopia built of glass. A fantasy conjured in the wake of World War I, Taut’s opalescent metropolis was never realized. Lee’s structure materializes the stunning idea, but the crystal edifice looks too fragile, too likely to collapse under its own weight. The addition of mirrors beneath Lee’s work was a literal but visually arresting means of capturing the illusion of the futuristic ideal, which perpetually teeters on the brink of vanity and obsolescence. Again, while ostensibly un-cyberpunk, Lee’s sculpture made sense within an exhibition that distilled the genre’s essential aesthetic and intellectual concerns for a wider consideration of their artistic expressions. “Phantom Plane,” with its calculated complexity and internal contradictions, acknowledged that the worlds we envisage, in hope or in fear, are imprints of reality observed through a glass darkly: inevitably, and hopelessly incomplete.

OPHELIA LAI



Installation view of ZHENG MAHLER’s *Nostalgia Machines*, 2019, video installation: 15 min, in collaboration with REIJIRO AOYAMA, at “Phantom Plane: Cyberpunk in the Year of the Future,” Tai Kwun Contemporary, Hong Kong, 2019–20.

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Chu Yun

The Mind of Things

Chu Yun's latest project at Vitamin Creative Space's Mirrored Gardens was more than a mere exhibition; it was a holistic experience, one of uncertainty, opaqueness, and subtlety. Titled "The Mind of Things," the exhibition didn't elaborate much on the "things"; rather, the four assembled works pointed to an elusive "mind" pleasantly distant from fraught reality. The exhibition prompted an introspective look at seemingly mundane visual and bodily experiences that the artist detached from standardized ways of being.

The gallery's first room gave the impression of a set in which the idea of normality was simultaneously being constructed and deconstructed. Greeted with a punch clock and a stack of white cards adjacent to the gallery entrance, one could engage a time and space of one's own by "clocking in" as if at the office. This piece, *An Ordinary Moment* (2018), set the tone of the exhibition by re-enacting but also interrogating a daily routine. The time stamp punched on the card marked a unique moment during a given individual's visit to the show. Yet, removed from the context

of labor, where recorded time translates to remuneration, the act of punching a time card in *An Ordinary Moment* was also arbitrary—the numbers registered a useless temporal parameter.

A Realistic Circle (2018–19), a gigantic black vinyl decal on a white wall, was hosted in an adjacent, otherwise empty room. Compelling in size, the black halo inspired a kind of spiritual awe; indeed, there was a certain hushed reverence and curiosity in the air as viewers considered the shape. The circle in question is unidentifiable and undefinable: it does not explicitly reference an object, an event, or an experience. Here, Chu brilliantly plays on the projection of meaning, and prompts the question: "Can a circle just be a circle?"

Composed of four speakers set up in the four corners of a rectangular space further into the gallery, *The Image of Numbers* (2018–19) married spatiality and sensation. The sound work radiated a slight anxiety engulfed in the emptiness of the space. Chu's monotonous yet spellbinding countdown from ten to zero, repeated on loop, enclosed a

mental landscape of order that was not actually grounded in any particular organizing principle. Viewers were given the freedom to make up their own minds about what the numbers might connote as the numbers continued their hypnotic progression.

Right outside the exhibition complex and visible from the window of the space for *The Image of Numbers*

was *Unspeakable Happiness 3* (2003/19). A dozen strings of colorful bunting stretched from the gallery's rooftop to the trees nearby. The work's celebratory tone and aesthetic jarred with the visually restrained presentation inside the building, and there was no indication of what was being celebrated. Portrayed as an empty festivity, *Unspeakable Happiness 3* did, however, elicit a surprising touch of sheer pleasure. While the work leverages the materiality of the lightweight, brightly hued bunting in evoking a sense of carefree joy, the physical distance between the viewer and the work resulted in a response that felt less visceral compared to the impact of materially minimal yet intellectually demanding exhibits such as *The Image of Numbers* and *A Realistic Circle*. This further separated the concepts of "mind" and "things," in keeping with the show's ontological explorations.

Employing a restrained visual vocabulary, the exhibition left much to the imagination. Perhaps an aesthetic departure from Chu's earlier practice, which incorporated a more diverse selection of visual signifiers, "The Mind of Things" pointed to an unexpected new direction. What has remained the same is the artist's ongoing investigation into the personal dimension of life, shown in the exhibition's focus on creating intimate spaces for contemplation. The artist's delicate rejection of a materialist approach in favor of an emphasis on the invisible realities of subjective experience constituted the non-aesthetic of the exhibition, and gave his projects room to speak so much on many levels.

HENRY HENG LU

Installation view of CHU YUN's *A Realistic Circle*, 2018–19, circle, dimensions variable, at Mirrored Gardens, Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou, 2019–20. Photo by Wen Peng. Courtesy Vitamin Creative Space.



Bangkok Art and Culture Centre

Spectrosynthesis II: Exposure of Tolerance

A massive exhibition of LGBTQ art, “Spectrosynthesis II: Exposure of Tolerance” was the sequel to the 2017 iteration staged by the Hong Kong-based Sunpride Foundation at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Taipei. Featuring 58 artists working in a range of media, “Spectrosynthesis II” was loose and inclusive in its purview. Although it purported



Installation view of **ANNE SAMAT's** *Conundrum Ka Sorga (To Heaven)*, 2019, rattan sticks, yarns, washers, rakes, PVC chains, home and fashion accessories, kitchen and garden utensils, and stationery items, dimensions variable, at “Spectrosynthesis II: Exposure of Tolerance,” Bangkok Art and Cultural Centre (BACC), 2019. Courtesy BACC and Sunpride Foundation.

to be about queerness in Asian contexts, it sometimes felt more like a roll call of queer Asian artists, since the exhibition included works ostensibly unrelated to queerness, such as a minimal brick painting by Maria Taniguchi that seemed out of place in the often hyper-flamboyant presentation. Further confusing the matter was the inclusion of heteronormative painter Angkrit Ajchariyasophon, whose rainbow-colored polyptychs hung prominently in the spiral rotunda of the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre. Titled *Celebrated Phenomenal of Colors* (2010–19), the work was inspired not by the pride flag but by Isaac Newton's light spectrum experiments—evidence that even a coincidental connection with queer culture was sufficient to merit inclusion.

Curatorial quibbles aside, the show captivated with a mixture

of established figures alongside younger artists. Of the former, Dinh Q. Lê presented a pair of his signature woven photo-paintings and a giant cascading photo-print incorporating images from Vietnamese popular media and gay porn. These are part of the artist's recent project exploring explicit depictions of homosexuality in the visual landscape of Vietnam, where pornography is officially forbidden yet remains accessible online. Nearby, renowned textile artist Anne Samat's colorful mixed-media installation evokes an androgynous figure under a veil, hinting at the issue of same-sex marriage, which among Asian territories is legal only in Taiwan. The assemblage is embedded with the names of notable queer individuals, such as trans model Amanda Lepore, and the late emerging photographer Ren Hang, whose sensual portraits were also in the exhibition.

Other notable works included Ramesh Mario Nithiyendran's playfully garish ceramic sculptures, full of phallic symbolism and vagina dentata, and Su Hui-Yu's video installation *Nue Quan* (2015), inspired by the lurid media scandal that gripped Taiwan in 2001 after a gay BDSM encounter resulted in a man's accidental death. While Nithiyendran taps into his Tamil heritage with his hermaphroditic idols (a feature in Hindu iconography for millennia), Su's darkly mesmerizing video speaks more directly to contemporary representations of queer sexuality, prompting us to consider the prejudices underlying the sensational reporting of the incident, not least the long-standing belief that non-normative sexual behavior is inherently risky.

The show's standout work was undoubtedly Thai artist Arin Rungjang's new commission, *Welcome To My World, 'Tee'* (2019). Five gigantic video projections depict a nude trans woman reclining majestically like Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (c. 1538), her male genitalia conspicuously on display. The videos are accompanied by a lengthy text component, in which Rungjang recounts his own formative experiences of racism and sexual abuse, before sharing the life story of his model, detailing the intersectionally aggravated struggles of a lower-class *katoei* (a derogative term for gender-non-conforming people in Thailand).

It was the inclusion of works such as Rungjang's, which document the daily challenges faced by queer Thais, that made this show an important milestone for the representation of queerness in its local context. Sudaporn Teja's film, for instance, tells the tale of a young comatose patient whose partner lacks the legal right to withdraw life support as same-sex unions are unrecognized in Thailand. Meanwhile, Ohm Phanphiroj's documentary features boys as young as nine recounting how they were entrapped in prostitution in Bangkok, yet they also describe their dreams, such as buying a house or becoming a break-dancer. In this manner, “Spectrosynthesis II” not only celebrated queer art and artists, but also emphasized that despite Thailand's superficial reputation among foreign vacationers for being a “queer friendly” society, when it comes to the rights and representation of all sexualities and genders, there is still a long way to go.

DAVID WILLIS

Phantom Limb

How does one cope with the existential rupture of losing one's identity? This question was the departure point for Jameel Art Centre's group show "Phantom Limb," which explored the persistence of memory and practices of memorializing despite the destruction of cultural heritage and other touchstones of selfhood.

Engaging with the theme in a literal sense was Kader Attia's documentary *Reflecting Memory* (2016), in which doctors and amputees describe phantom limb syndrome, where patients experience sensation in a body part that no longer exists. Attia attempts to repair the loss in his afflicted subjects through strategically placed mirrors that reflect extant limbs, only revealing the visual trick at the end of the film. Known as mirror therapy, this technique is an established way for patients to reconcile physical and psychic pain.

The metaphor of phantom pain for collective grief surfaced in subtly poignant ways throughout the exhibition.

Many of the works mourned the loss—or appropriation—of tangible heritage. Ali Cherri's *Graftings* (2018–) comprises sculptural assemblages of culturally disparate artifacts. The act of transplanting speaks to the Western colonial practice of removing "exotic" artifacts from their native contexts and displaying them as decorative trophies. Théo Mercier's *Massacre* (2019), a vitrine containing

a pile of West African wooden masks, similarly critiques Anglo-European museological display for fetishizing the heritage of colonized cultures without acknowledging the violent campaigns that facilitated the acquisitions.

Elsewhere, Jumana Manna's *Amulet* and *Shoulder* (2016), sculpted in plaster and bone, echo the vernacular interiors of the Saadian-era El Badi Palace in Marrakech as a study of architectural preservation, which is often used to manipulate historical memory by reshaping a place to fit shifting narratives of power. The palace, which was stripped and left derelict by the Alaouite royal family after the fall of the Saadians, has since undergone restoration and is a popular tourist destination, exemplifying how monuments symbolizing past grandeur serve as foundations of constructed national identity.

Several projects probed the cultural impact of contemporary conflicts. Rand Abdul Jabbar's installation *...and the river washing its feet* (2019) traces the history of an 11th-century minaret in the ancient Iraqi town of 'Anah. The structure was destroyed and reconstructed multiple times—first because the town was submerged during the damming of the Euphrates River, and most recently due to damage sustained from bombings by ISIL. The work features eight life-size gypsum casts made by Iraqi craftsmen of the minaret's architectural niches. Videos of 'Anah flooding during the dam's construction were projected onto the casts, illustrating the persistence of cultural memory despite disaster and conflict. ISIL's destruction of Iraqi heritage was again explored in Forensic Architecture's

installation *Maps of Defiance* (2018), in which sites of cultural and religious significance to the persecuted Yazidi minority are digitally salvaged by piecing together images from archives and aerial surveillance.

Palestine loomed large in the exhibition. Khalil Rabah's *Untitled (All is Well)* (2017) depicts a studio with a facsimile of modernist Suleiman Mansour's painting *Jamal Al Mahamel* (1973), in which an elderly man carries a sack bearing a view of Jerusalem on his back. In Rabah's version of this painting, the city disappears, signifying the Palestinian struggle for statehood as Israel exerts increasing control over contested land, seen in the latter's unilateral declaration of Jerusalem as its capital, recognized by United States president Donald J. Trump in 2017.

The notion of erasure was echoed in the collective Decolonizing Architecture's research project *Refugee Heritage* (2015–), which presents the Palestinian Dheisheh Refugee Camp for UNESCO recognition as a world heritage site. Through video and photographs, scenes from the camp are juxtaposed with images of empty landscapes razed by Israeli settlers. *Refugee Heritage* challenges Western-centric, institutional methodologies for determining cultural and aesthetic value based on colonial frameworks, and instead posits the camp as a site where narratives of displacement may be reclaimed and remembered. As "Phantom Limb" showed, the pain of losing one's culture never retreats, but is only temporarily managed.

LESLEY ANN GRAY

Detailed installation view of ALI CHERRI's *Graftings (I)*, 2019, Apollon woman's head, carved stone statue representing a bishop of Normandy, polyurethane foam, metal nails, 110×50×30 cm, at "Phantom Limb," Jameel Arts Centre, Dubai, 2019–20. Photo by Dani Baptista. Courtesy Jameel Arts Centre.



Nam June Paik



NAM JUNE PAIK, *Bye Bye Kipling*, 1986, still from single-channel video with color and sound: 30 min 32 sec. Courtesy the Estate of Nam June Paik and Electronic Arts Intermix, New York.

Retrospectives of artists working primarily with contemporary technology offer a unique opportunity to say with some conviction whether or not the oeuvre on display has genuine artistic merit. By the time of its showing, the novelty of a new technology will have been stripped away, enabling a clear-eyed judgment of the work as either nostalgic kitsch, or something more engaged, universal, and timeless.

Sook-Kyung Lee, the curator of Nam June Paik's retrospective at the Tate Modern, may have had this in mind while putting together this exhibition of the late video-art pioneer, because it opened with two works that are aesthetically enduring, if technologically, and perhaps conceptually, outdated. In the first gallery was *TV Buddha* (1974), in which an 18th-century wooden sculpture of the spiritual figure sits facing an equally rotund TV set, showing a closed-circuit image of the statue. The Buddha is intended to be both "the viewer and the viewed image," says the adjacent caption—a statement that seems as conceptually rudimentary as the small, low-quality screen is redundant. Yet, while most conceptual or technology-based art arguably won't stand the test of time,

TV Buddha does because it maintains the fundamentals of symmetry, simplicity, and harmony; for all of these things, it is ultimately beautiful. One finds a similar example in *TV Garden* (1974–77/2002), composed of differently sized monitors scattered at a variety of angles among live plants. Here, the contrast of rich, dark green with the neon colors on-screen achieves a composition that again, regardless of medium or concept, has an enduring aesthetic value.

This is not to say that the exhibition did not have plenty of historical background—necessary for a show on the progenitor of video art—but it maintained a healthy balance between objects and documents kept in glass cases, and more engaging pieces. While kowtowing to the demands of the experience economy is a growing problem with blockbuster exhibitions (not least the Tate Modern's concurrent, excessively Instagrammable Olafur Eliasson show), here, interactive moments were generally considered and contextual. The reconstructed *Random Access* (1963/2000), for instance, invited viewers to run a cassette player head over magnetic tape stuck to the gallery wall, playing a magnetic instrument that has lost none of its novelty since its invention. Likewise, there were opportunities to interact with installations such as *Three Camera Participation/Participation TV* (1969/2001)—in which three CCTV cameras feed to a screen in the three primary colors and project visitors' images onto the gallery wall—and *Foot Switch Experiment* (1963/1995), where visitors can manipulate the image of a cathode-ray tube with a button the floor. Crucially, these moments of engagement were not

gratuitous, but rather reflective of Paik's well-established philosophies on democratizing art and technology.

Not all of the artist's ideas have aged quite so well. The video *Bye Bye Kipling* (1986) challenges Mumbai-born British writer Rudyard Kipling's statement that "East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet" with a satellite broadcast that linked artists in New York, Seoul, and Tokyo during the 1986 Asian Games. While the problems in Kipling's colonial beliefs hardly need pointing out, there is also something naive about Paik's idea that technology can meaningfully unite the world in our era of online extremism and transnational electoral meddling.

"The real issue implied in Art and Technology," Paik said in 1969, "is not to make another scientific toy, but how to humanize the technology." In retrospect, we might say that the humanization of technology has alienated us from it. Easily accessible interfaces make our devices seem ever simpler while their inner workings become increasingly complex and opaque. This is perhaps an irrevocable process, but in light of recent troubling abuses of technology, one may argue that we do not need to humanize technology, but rather expose its lack of humanity.

We can hardly hold it against Paik, though, that some of his early optimism might have been misplaced, and Tate Modern's show did well to show this in balance with all the wise, pioneering, and beautiful things he did using technologies with artistic potential others were yet to see.

NED CARTER MILES

Nicolas Moufarrege

Recognize My Sign



NICOLAS MOUFARREGE, *The First Time Ever I Saw the Volcano*, 1979, thread and pigment on needlepoint canvas, 114.3 × 146 cm. Courtesy Nabil Moufarrej and Gulnar "Nouna" Mufarrij.

Like many outliers of the 1980s, Nicolas Moufarrege challenged the boundaries of taste and tradition. A master appropriator who came to be admired for his eccentric woven tapestries clashing pop art with classical aesthetics, Moufarrege was as much an artist of his time as he was one who transcended it. Thirty-four years after his death from AIDS in 1985, his long-overdue institutional solo “Recognize My Sign,” which debuted at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston in November 2018, landed at New York’s Queens Museum.

For the itinerant Egyptian-born Lebanese artist, large embroidered panoramas made on needlepoint canvas became his métier. From his earliest works in the exhibition, such as *Une Île (An Island)* and *Le Chemin (The Way)* (both 1975), Moufarrege experimented by weaving tapestries with a combination of silk, cotton, and wool to portray abstract landscapes with perspectival depth and texture. Breathtakingly refreshing for their tonal variation and conception of spare geometric shapes, Moufarrege’s works made use of traditional craftsmanship from the beginning of his artistic career.

Moufarrege’s identity as a queer artist began to emerge in Paris, where he sought refuge in 1975 during the Lebanese Civil War. Naked, statuesque male figures seen from the back inhabit *Laocoön Quest* (1980) and *The First Time Ever I Saw the Volcano* (1979), from a series of colorful works that Moufarrege began referring to as “paintings,” with embroidered and painted surfaces depicting vistas of vast landscapes. Deeply immersed in the exploration of what he termed his “hyper-hybridized” identity, Moufarrege combined images from European paintings with Middle Eastern motifs such as the sphinx, pyramids, Islamic designs, and Greek and Arabic text in these pieces. In *The Importance of Being Evergreen* (1979–80), for instance, a supine male silhouette is seen looking out onto a tree in a meadow reminiscent of a 17th-century French painting, alongside symbols representing the eternal presence of God, and embroidered Arabic text translating to “the secrets of a man like me cannot be spoken” incorporated in the border of the composition. Here, Moufarrege’s allusion to his gay identity, and his self-referential homoerotic figure, which appears in all the works made in Paris on view at this show, eclipse the East-West imagery he assiduously incorporates in these paintings, and brings agency—much like Robert Mapplethorpe’s photographs of nude men—to the queer male body.

Yet it was only in the last four years of his life, spent in New York’s East Village, that Moufarrege’s offbeat imagination would reach its zenith. Lengthy scroll-like paintings that recall the richness of Chinese narratives are striking for the way he included ornate materials

such as beads, brooches, and minerals on his embroidered surfaces. Pop-cultural icons like comic-book superheroes collide with art-historical references, collapsing distinctions of high and low art. Take *The Weather Last Tuesday* (1983), in which Santa Claus holds a list of cities destroyed by wars in the 20th century as an action figure blasts a stream of fire in the background, and a Roman soldier, an African tribal warrior, Spiderman, and figures from Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica* (1937), among others, gear up for battle in a background embellished with glitter. Kitschy yet surprisingly relevant for its political potency, the works demonstrate Moufarrege’s canon-fracturing style.

In a series of embroidered works made in 1984–85, whose titles are unknown, the infusion of imagery that combines replicas of Roy Lichtenstein’s comic-book-style paintings, as well as works by Edvard Munch, Jean-Honoré Fragonard, and Pierre-Auguste Renoir reveal not only how much Moufarrege was influenced by the postmodern tactic of appropriation, but also how he constantly confronted the hegemony of Euro-American art practices. The disparate mash-ups of various traditions, often fused with queer references, create their own friction and irony. Marvelous juxtapositions, such as that of Hokusai’s iconic wave with a Lichtenstein-esque woman lamenting, “I don’t care! I’d rather sink than call Brad for help,” are laced with playful wit. Indelibly impressed on viewers’ minds is how Moufarrege’s brazen expressions of cultural and sexual alterity defied the heteronormative and Western-centric codes of his time in ways that remain refreshingly relatable today.

BANSIE VASVANI

Hajra Waheed *Hold Everything Dear*

Hajra Waheed's "Hold Everything Dear" at the Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery in Toronto, lived up to its prodigious name in a sensitive and delicate way. The exhibition was an intrepid aesthetic response to the most urgent of our contemporary political and ecological concerns. Essayistic in tenor—like critic John Berger's 2007 collection of writings, from which the show borrowed its title—"Hold Everything Dear" presented a redemptive visage of a world in crisis.

Traversing familiar themes of environmental ruin, technological surveillance, and migration, Waheed appeared attuned to all that denotes existence as pained under the aegis of modernity. The show initially appeared sparse in the Power Plant's cavernous space, though on closer examination one found a rigorous if understated display of media, techniques, and aesthetic choices that showcased Waheed's thematic and technical breadth. Trained in drawing and photography, Waheed moved effortlessly here between media. Take, for instance, the dialogue between

Flight in Form (2019), abstract tangles of wire mapping out aerial routes of surveillance planes, and the figurative miniature ceramic sculptures of *Walls, Ladders and Roads* (2019); the two projects signify the profound tenuousness and violence of cross-border travel that is so tightly monitored and controlled by the state, attending to the present-day global migrant crisis.

In another room, *Tidal Turn 1-2* (2019), two miniature glazed-stoneware sculptures of the moon, were juxtaposed with *Studies from Coordinates 1-4* (2014), lunar-like renderings on paper of rocky textures. Both allude to monumental change, symbolized by the tides in bodies of water, which make up 70 percent of the earth's surface. As the ice caps melt and sea levels continue to rise indeterminately, as weather patterns shift to bring violent cyclones and floods, the cool stillness of these works attend to the paradoxical simultaneity of sweeping planetary machinations and the uncanny fragility, even cold indifference, of life.

A little further away in the same room was *Khwabgah 1-9* (2019), a set of miniature paintings that form a gridded image of blue skies. Befitting the romantic title—Urdu for "House of Dreams"—the work presents a fantasy of an unpolluted sky. In an adjacent, darkened room was the final work of the exhibition: *The Spiral* (2019), a video installation depicting a night sky sprinkled with stars that peek through the leaves of overhanging trees, re-creating the view of someone reclining on a boat as it moves lazily downstream. The video is accompanied by voice-

over narration of Waheed's haunting poem "The Spiral," which considers the shape as a representation of the unity and totality of the material universe, and humanity's place within its expanse. The poet recites: "The spiral / is much more than just a form / Its motion can be centrifugal and centripetal / it can denote both growth and decay / ascent and descent / evolution and involution / accumulation and dissolution." This duality represented by the spiral registers that the pain of the world signifies a necessary component within the larger cosmology of balanced existence, a component we must endure.

The air of sparseness played to the thematic and formal diversity of Waheed's practice, allowing the works to stand on their own rather than consigning each to a supporting role in some grander, singular narrative. Yet a thread of pain was evident in how Waheed strung together ostensibly disparate works. In *Hold Everything Dear*, Berger's concerns were global, his writings a clarion call for justice in the midst of human suffering. Similarly, Waheed's desire to render a sufficient critique of our contemporary experiences with violence, in all its permutations—of war, displacement, environmental disaster—was actualized in a manner that took seriously the woundedness of our planetary existence. Everything appeared to be held dear, between the daily struggle for survival and the possibility of earthly life fading into obsolescence.

RICKY VARGHESE

Installation view of **HAJRA WAHEED's** *Khwabgah 1-9*, 2019, oil paint on tin, nine pieces, 12.7 × 17.8 cm each, at "Hold Everything Dear," the Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Toronto, 2019-20. Courtesy the artist.



Soft Power

Coined by political scientist Joseph Nye in the late-1980s, the term “soft power” came to define an American foreign policy that emphasized cultural, institutional, and ideological persuasion over military might. In a 1990 article in *Foreign Policy*, Nye wrote: “If a state can make its power seem legitimate in the eyes of others, it will encounter less resistance to its wishes. If its culture and ideology are attractive, others will more willingly follow.” Curated by Eungie Joo at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), “Soft Power,” featuring 20 artists based in 12 different countries, untethered the concept from American doctrine, examining how art can exert cultural and sociopolitical influence across contexts.

Many of the artists used their platforms to make visible the invisible. Tuan Andrew Nguyen’s installation *The Specter of Ancestors Becoming* (2019) illuminated the little-known history of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, West African colonial soldiers sent by France to fight anticolonial uprisings in Indochina in the 1940s and ’50s. After they were demobilized, many soldiers returned to West Africa with Vietnamese wives and children. The four-channel video imagines the fraught secrets and stories that might

be shared or occluded between Senegalese-Vietnamese progeny and their forebears, untangling complex racial and postcolonial identities in Senegal today.

Elsewhere, Tavares Strachan’s *Henrietta Lacks* (2013) is a transparent glass sculpture of the eponymous African-American woman, whose cancer cells contributed significantly to modern medical research, from the development of the polio vaccine to in-vitro fertilization. The figure resembles an apparition, simultaneously there but not there, echoing the way Henrietta Lacks’s life story was largely ignored by medical historiographers even as her harvested cells were credited for enabling scientific breakthroughs. Likewise, Strachan’s *Encyclopedia of Invisibility* (2018)—an epic compilation of some 15,000 entries about marginalized and obscure people, places, objects, and phenomena—is a challenge to the hegemonic, predominantly white, male gatekeepers of history.

LaToya Ruby Frazier’s series of gelatin silver prints *Flint is Family, Part II* (2017–19) continues the saga of the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, where more than 100,000 mostly black residents were exposed to dangerously contaminated water as a result of the local government’s cost-cutting measures, leading to allegations of environmental racism. A heartening story of self-determination and renewal, *Flint is Family* follows activist Shea Cobb’s departure from Flint, back to her childhood home in Newton, Mississippi, where she thrives off the land and its fresh water.

Tackling visibility in a more literal

sense, Pratchaya Phinthong’s 16mm film *A proposal to set CH₄*5.75H₂O on fire (work in process)* (2016) ponders the natural gas methane hydrate, an untapped energy source that has stirred debate over its potential impact on global warming. The simple film projection of a flickering flame—rendering the colorless gas observable to the naked eye—belies complicated themes of climate change, energy politics, and dwindling resources.

Some works spoke with urgency on the threat of civilizational decline. First Nations artist Duane Linklater’s floral-patterned, wall-hung, unfurled teepees at once honor and dismantle an Indigenous cultural symbol. The grand scale and vibrancy of these linen canvases are in direct contrast to the dwindling numbers of First Nations people following centuries of white-colonial encroachment upon their territories and lifestyles. Haig Aivazian’s stylized, primordial tableau *Rome Is Not in Rome (Part II: Mythology to Abattoirs)* (2019) appears to be a dizzying, esoteric origin story of a past civilization. However, familiar contemporary touches—pool loungers, curtains—are eerie reminders that no way of life, including our own, is guaranteed.

Many of the works on display in “Soft Power” were commissioned by SFMOMA for this show. And while each of the artist’s contributions was compelling and important, what was on full display was the soft power of the museum itself, a major institution in the progressive city of San Francisco. “Soft Power” was a refined through line in the city’s extensive history of idealism, counterculture, and activism.

JENNIFER S. LI

TUAN ANDREW NGUYEN, *The Specter of Ancestors Becoming*, 2019, still from four-channel video installation with color and surround sound: 28 min. Courtesy the artist and James Cohan, New York.



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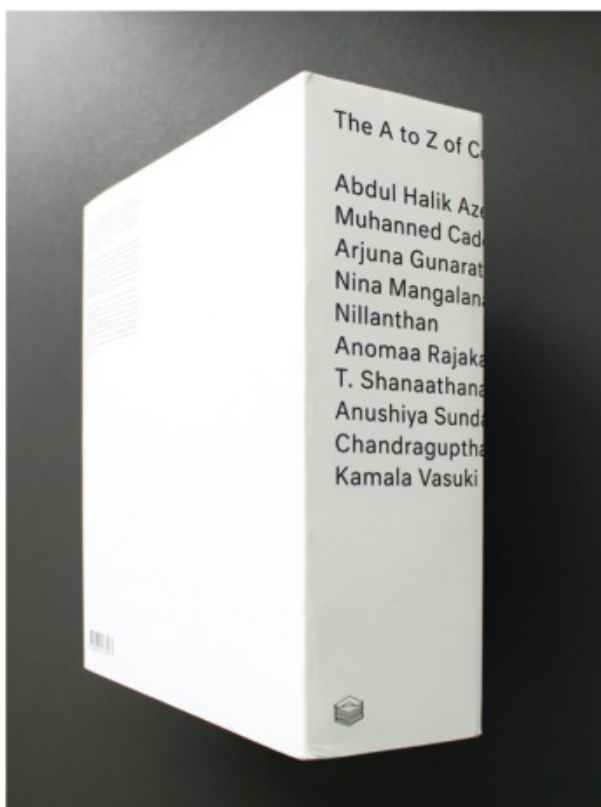
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Critical Conditions

THE A TO Z OF CONFLICT

By Abdul Halik Azeez, Muhanned Cader, Arjuna Gunarathne, Nina Mangalanayagam, Nillanthan, Anomaa Rajakaruna, T. Shanaathanan, Anushiya Sundaralingam, Chandraguptha Thenuwara, and Kamala Vasuki
Commissioned and published by Raking Leaves, Colombo, 2019



Discoveries and paradigmatic shifts call forth new terminology for describing what was previously never, or differently, conceived—changes assiduously preserved in lexica, from ancient Sumerian-Akkadian cuneiform tablets to today's Dictionary.com.

The role of language in indexing social, political, and conceptual realities is the basis of Sri Lankan nonprofit Raking Leaves' *The A to Z of Conflict*, a compendium of words pertaining to violent strife for every letter of the Sinhala, Tamil, and English alphabets. Over the course of five years, the publisher invited ten Sri Lankan artists to produce illustrated entries inspired by the format of children's alphabet books. Each script takes up a section of the book, which comes in six versions, spanning all chapter permutations, to avoid any inference of linguistic hierarchy. This remains a sensitive issue in Sri Lanka, where the brutal civil war (1983–2009) between minority Tamil insurgents and the Sinhalese-Buddhist ruling majority casts a long shadow.

What *A to Z* brings to the fore is how ordinary terms become inflected with violence in conflict situations. The Sinhala word *arinna* (open), for instance, is defined as an order given by military personnel during routine searches, as in "open the bag/trunk/door." T. Shanaathanan captures the word's connotation of invasiveness in a drawing of a featureless figure tearing open its rib cage, with entrails pouring out. The artist's entry for *pottu*, the Tamil term for the red dot applied between the brows of Hindu and Tamil women, features an outline of a head in profile with a bullet entering the forehead, portraying how certain cultural markers can become a death sentence in times of ethnic strife.

Anomaa Rajakaruna's haunting black-and-white photographs of Sri Lanka's scarred post-civil-war landscape captivate with grave poeticism alongside seemingly banal terms. A derelict building with crumbling doorways accompanies the entry for *uluvahu* (Sinhala: doorframes), which clarifies that "missing doorframes were a noticeable feature of abandoned houses" during the war. By contrast, Nina Mangalanayagam's photographs of nature are decoupled from the Sri Lankan context and invite non-anthropocentric readings, evidenced by the image of a cleared forest ironically representing "civilization."

Additional explanatory notes would have been helpful for images bearing text, such as Kamala Vasuki's cartoon of a woman conversing with the Buddha for the "Gautama" entry, which I sadly did not understand. Sidestepping the language barrier, Anushiya Sundaralingam's abstractions stood out for their allusive power among the profuse literal representations. "Johnny Batta," a colloquial term in Sri Lanka for a landmine, is illustrated with a spray of light-toned blotches on an inky background—a beautiful print made disturbing by its context.

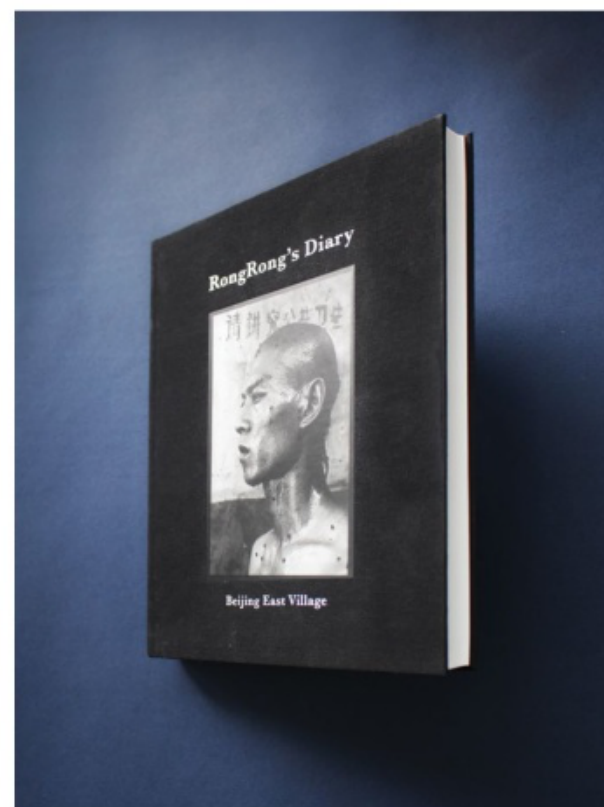
A to Z asserts that context is everything, and that the ugliness of a context seeps into the vernacular, encoded for as long as the lexical records we keep.

OPHELIA LAI

RONGRONG'S DIARY:

BEIJING EAST VILLAGE

Photographs by RongRong
Texts by RongRong, Silvia Fok, and Artur Walther
Published by Steidl, Göttingen, 2019



In the 1990s and early 2000s, young artists, musicians, and writers moved from all over China to Beijing, then a hotbed for underground culture. One of these "Beijing drifters," RongRong relocated to the capital in 1993 from his hometown in Fujian province. At the time, he was a student about to embark on the study of photography. Unable to afford a proper apartment in town, he and a group of artists resided on the capital's eastern fringes, in an impoverished suburban area, where they shared cigarettes, cheap beer, and inspirations.

For almost a decade, members of the village's artist community—including performance pioneers Zhang Huan, Ma Liuming, Cang Xin, and Zhu Ming—were the subjects on which RongRong trained his lens. His photos from this period form one of his best-known series. Assembled roughly chronologically in the monograph *RongRong's Diary* alongside his personal journal entries, letters to his sister Lu Yali between 1993 and 1998, and his reflection

penned in 2002, after the village was demolished, the images provide an account of the development of performance and conceptual art in China at the end of the 20th century.

Printed on the book's cover is a photo of Zhang's performance *12 Square Meters* (1994), which took place at the village's public toilet. Coating himself with honey and fish sauce, Zhang quickly became covered in flies—an iconic moment captured by RongRong that alludes to the difficult living conditions and the perseverance of the artists in the East Village. RongRong struggled himself, writing in his diary: "Photography, my heart—why can't I abandon it? . . . What are you doing, RongRong? Why?"

Despite questioning himself about his decision to pursue the arts, RongRong was unrelenting with his camera, just as his neighbors forged on with some of China's earliest, most significant conceptual performances, including Zhang's *65 Kilograms* (1994), where the artist chained himself to the ceiling and drew 250 milliliters of blood from his body. In another shot, Ma Liuming is seen adopting his female persona, cooking naked, with makeup on his face, in *Fen-Ma Liuming's Lunch* (1994)—an act that led to his arrest. There are also blurry snapshots taken at the birthday party of critic Karen Smith, portraits of Stars Group artists Huang Rui and Ai Weiwei, and many more who frequented the hub.

RongRong's Diary preserves the courage of the avant-garde in the late 1990s, which thrived in a liminal realm between ruins and accelerated economic development, and the wayward spirit that it continues to inspire.

PAMELA WONG

THE BOOK OF THE THING: REMARKS ON POLITICS, ART, MORALITY, AND TAIWAN

By James T. Hong

Published by Theory of the Partisan and Empty Gallery, Hong Kong, 2019



John Carpenter's 1982 film *The Thing* uses science fiction and horror to unpack many themes relevant to America during that decade, from the AIDS epidemic and an insurgent counterculture, to more abstract ideas about the paranoidias that are entrenched in our minds, at the time heightened by the Cold War with the Soviet Union.

Taiwanese-American filmmaker and artist James T. Hong references Carpenter's film and loads its disquiet into a pocket-size monograph. *The Book of the Thing: Remarks on Politics, Art, Morality, and Taiwan* was published to accompany "The Thing," an exhibition at Hong Kong's Empty Gallery in which the artist explored how objects and concepts are interpreted and exist in our consciousness, tying into the present age of rampant misinformation and disinformation.

With gold-rimmed pages bound between embossed dark-blue covers, the book comprises nine sections—"Thingness," "Status Artis," "Res Moralia," "Omnium-

gatherum," and more—in which Hong grates readers with his observations, "some possibly of wisdom, some probably of total shit," he admits. He begins by dunking on democracy, riffing off the idea that democracy is at the root of the world's misery, put forth by controversial film director Hans-Jürgen Syberberg.

Fair enough. Recent democratic elections have placed nativists, authoritarians, nationalists, and fearmongers in top political office. Even the internet, which was once talked up as a democratic realm, has failed to live up to the hype; now, digital natives must constantly slog neck-deep through a swamp of mendacity.

With the ken and instincts of a news junkie, Hong proceeds to question other foundational concepts that formulate our political, economic, cultural, and egoist systems. Joining a constellation of thinkers spanning millennia and civilizations, the artist construes the "thing" and "thingness," which has been imbued with shifting meanings according to varied interests and purposes. Follow Hong's train of thought and we arrive at Carpenter's Thing, an alien that, perhaps merely to survive, consumes living organic matter to create new bodies for itself, never taking the same appearance twice.

Hong applies that line of thinking to artists, curators, critics, collectors, and gallerists: could there be a Thing that lurks in the art world's collective cognition? Are art professionals merely going through the motions to maintain someone or something else's interests? Hong throws shade at art world celebrity, the unhindered flow of bent money, the biennial glut, and the unbridled self-aggrandizement found in the scene.

The Book of the Thing is salty. Anyone who picks it up will likely be guilty of a moral fault that Hong points his finger at. But the artist isn't hostile in his words; he's compelling. The text is Hong's attempt to rectify inconsistencies in the systems we drift in. We're left with dour and ambiguous direction, just like the ending of Carpenter's greatest film.

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ZHANG PEILI

Meditations on anxiety, mortality,
and human paradoxes

PHOTOGRAPHS AND TEXT BY LAUREN LONG



ZHANG PEILI and one of his Hangzhou studios.



Zhang activating one of 12 mattresses that comprise *Audible Mattress* (2018). The work's sound component is a recording of a list of names, including those of missing children and wanted criminals.



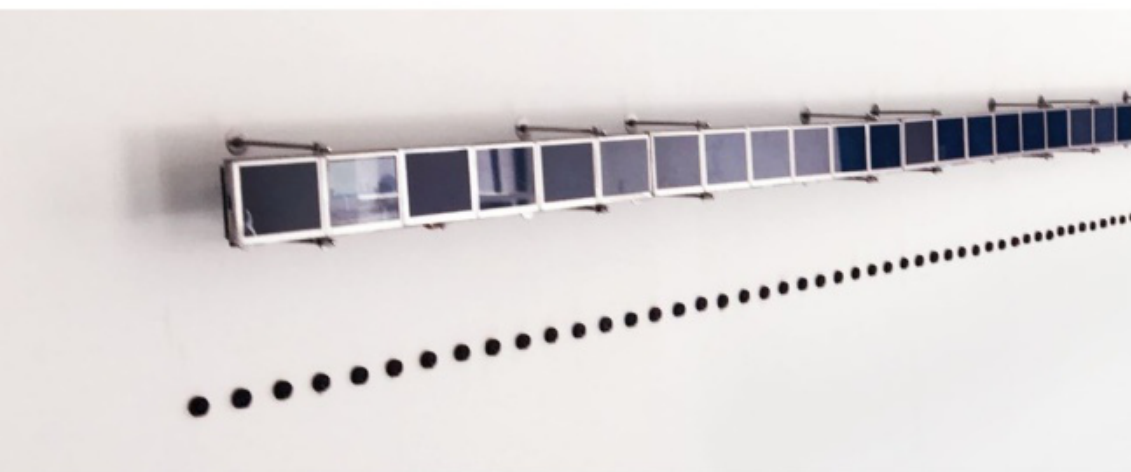
A prototype for Zhang's installation *The Only Access* (2018), which was exhibited at the 2018 group exhibition "This is Shanghai" at Liverpool's Cunard Building.

For centuries, scenic Hangzhou, once the capital of the Southern Song dynasty, and the calm waters of nearby West Lake, have served as muses for artists and poets. China's first fine-arts university, the China Academy of Art, was established there in 1928. The institution's graduates include some of the nation's best-known artists today. Among them is Zhang Peili.

Born in Hangzhou in 1957, Zhang's relationship with the city is long and storied. As an oil-painting student at the Academy, Zhang met fellow artist Geng Jianyi, with whom he collaborated on the radical "New Space '85" show at the school, displaying some of the country's earliest installation art, inspired by Marcel Duchamp, a departure from the then widely endorsed socialist realism style. Shortly thereafter, the duo cofounded the short-lived collective *Chi She* (Pond Society), staging artworks throughout Hangzhou's public spaces to critique the bureaucratization of art. Today, Zhang has embraced a multidimensional approach where he participates both within and outside of the institutional system. He serves as the director of the OCAT Shanghai museum and teaches at the Academy, where he helped establish a new-media department in 2003. He maintains two permanent studios in Hangzhou, one dedicated to paper works and conceptualizing designs, and the other to videos and projects in their final stages.

I arrived at the latter studio, near the Academy, on a crisp, sunny morning, just as the leaves on the trees surrounding the quiet residential area were turning auburn. Dressed in a loose-fitting blue shirt and black trousers, the artist greeted me at the entrance—he had just arrived by train from Shanghai himself, where he was swamped with preparations for exhibitions—and warmly ushered me indoors.

The 300-square-meter premises, which Zhang moved into in 2014, consists of two capacious rooms, both with concrete floors and ground-to-ceiling windows letting in abundant natural light. One of the areas looked out onto a park. Equipped with a full



The small screens of *Landscape with Round Building* (2008) are activated by motion sensors, and lined one wall in Zhang's studio.



Work-in-progress for *Live Report: Hard Evidence No. 2* (2019), later installed with hidden cameras and exhibited at Shanghai's How Art Museum for the group exhibition "Move on China 2019."

kitchen and a vintage Italian coffee machine, this portion, the artist explained, is "for leisure and meetings with friends." On the opposite side was his work area, which was mostly empty, save for a wall lined with shelves, and various mock-ups for his projects. One model, standing in a corner, caught my immediate attention. Comprising a single door, the prototype was created to test the mechanics for the immersive installation *The Only Access* (2018), which was included in the 2018 group show "This is Shanghai" at Liverpool's historic Cunard Building. There, in the basement, visitors were funneled through an antechamber, fenced off with iron bars from the rest of the exhibition space. Guests could exit through doors on the left or right, which only opened periodically according to an algorithm, "so that at times you become trapped," said Zhang, "unsure of when you will be released."

The sense of anxiety that comes with being confined in unfamiliar places is also explored in Zhang's boxy, three-meter-tall structure fitted on its sides with electronic rolling shutters that open and close seemingly arbitrarily, *XL Chamber* (2017-18). At the time of my late October visit, he was further developing the piece for Rén Space's presentation at the Shanghai art fair Art021. The erratic elements of these works allude to the random nature of tragedies, while visitors' experience of being held in captivity highlights the limitations of social systems in which one can be trapped, and as with imprisonment, lose control of one's surroundings and sense of time.

Anxiety and other universal human experiences, behaviors, and psychological states have been of interest to Zhang throughout his career. The artist traveled extensively in the 1990s, spending time in the United States, where he considered immigrating at one point, and various places in Europe when he participated in exhibitions. Influenced by these cross-cultural experiences, he says he prefers his works to communicate across nations. "I don't want to parade a sense of 'other-ness,'" he remarked. "Each culture has its distinctiveness, but there is also a shared commonality." The broadly relatable feeling of futility, for example, is the subject of Zhang's video *30x30* (1988), featuring the artist repeatedly breaking and gluing together a mirror for three hours. This work, recognized as the first piece of video art in China, earned Zhang his reputation as the "father of Chinese video art." However, he dislikes such grand titles, saying: "It is difficult to truly trace the origin of an artistic movement; artists develop upon what was done before."

Several projects in his studio were evidence of his continued experimental approach to new media. Along a wall was *Landscape with Round Building* (2008), a horizontal line of small-size monitors, which, when activated by the viewer's movement, detected by sensors, reveal photographs of spherical architectural structures. There was an interactive element in another video installation by a corner, *Phrases* (2006), comprising two screens simultaneously playing a clip from the well-known propaganda film *Sentinels under the Neon Light* (1964). The videos respectively speed up or slow down in response to the viewer's position between the two monitors. The soldier on screen, speaking to an American diplomat who threatened to make a complaint to the United Nations regarding the disruptions of a celebratory parade, exclaims: "The UN? It knows me, but I do not know them!" Although seemingly laden with political connotations, especially given the increasingly strained Sino-US relations of today, Zhang makes no mention of them. For him, once the sequences have been extracted, they have been removed from their original narratives and temporal contexts. This line in *Sentinels*, Zhang clarifies, refers to his own ignorance of

the UN when he watched the film as a child. By isolating this clip, he accentuates the changes that have occurred in China within his own lifetime, including the nation's opening up to foreign organizations.

Elsewhere, buried in cardboard boxes and piled onto the studio's shelves, were old monitors and media devices, which Zhang collects. In the center of the room was a heap of burned television and computer screens, modems, and keyboards, which were assembled into *Live Report: Hard Evidence No. 2* (2019), an installation emphasizing the prevalence of surveillance, later displayed in his show "Move on China 2019," in December 2019, at Shanghai's How Art Museum. Evoking a dystopian world, the work builds on the installation *No. 1* (2009), a scorched van equipped with hidden cameras that transmits live video-feeds of viewers to a nearby screen.

The topic of what is visible and invisible was also key to Zhang's exhibition "The Annual Report of OCD" at Shanghai's Rén Space. In his studio, he showed me tests for the show's central installation, comprising hand-carved models of human organs and bones—exact replicas of those in the artist's body. The exhibition follows his long-standing interest in medicine, stemming from a childhood illness and parents who were medical practitioners. Its titular reference to obsessive compulsive disorder relates not just to Zhang's personal reflection on his need for control, but his examination of a common social phenomenon. "People can see other's conditions," Zhang explained, "but it is hard for them to assess themselves. Society has become negligent of abnormal issues that they have grown accustomed to."

The lengthy preparation process for this series of works—each piece of which is titled after a respective body part, such as *Intestine*, *Brain*, and *Heart* (all 2019)—began with a body scan, which allowed Zhang to gather the necessary data for the

scale and forms of the sculptures. His obsession over the perfect craftsmanship for the project took him from China to the US, Italy, and back over the course of two years. When asked if this persistence is a form of OCD, he laughed: "In that case, you can trace it as far back as my glove paintings [X? (1985–87)]: I have an idea in my head and continuously try to reach that goal." Those oil paintings all depict the same iconography: medical gloves, which simultaneously symbolize protection and isolation, evoking a paradoxical perspective of the world.

On the day of our meeting, the installation of Zhang's show at Rén Space had halted due to malfunctioning hardware, and the artist had to return to Shanghai to attend to the emergency. A few days later, I walked into the gallery. There, across the three floors, Zhang had laid out the facsimiles of his internal organs, meticulously sculpted from different materials, including a full, Carrara-marble skeleton. While eerily resembling specimens of an anatomy class, the works were a compelling self-portrait by an artist contemplating his own mortality. Despite the pieces' specificity to Zhang's body, they also asserted that under our skins, all of us, as humans, share commonalities.



Prototypes for Zhang's exhibition "The Annual Report of OCD" at Shanghai's Rén Space.

Visit our Digital Library at library.artasiapacific.com for more articles on Zhang Peili.

melbourneartfair.com.au

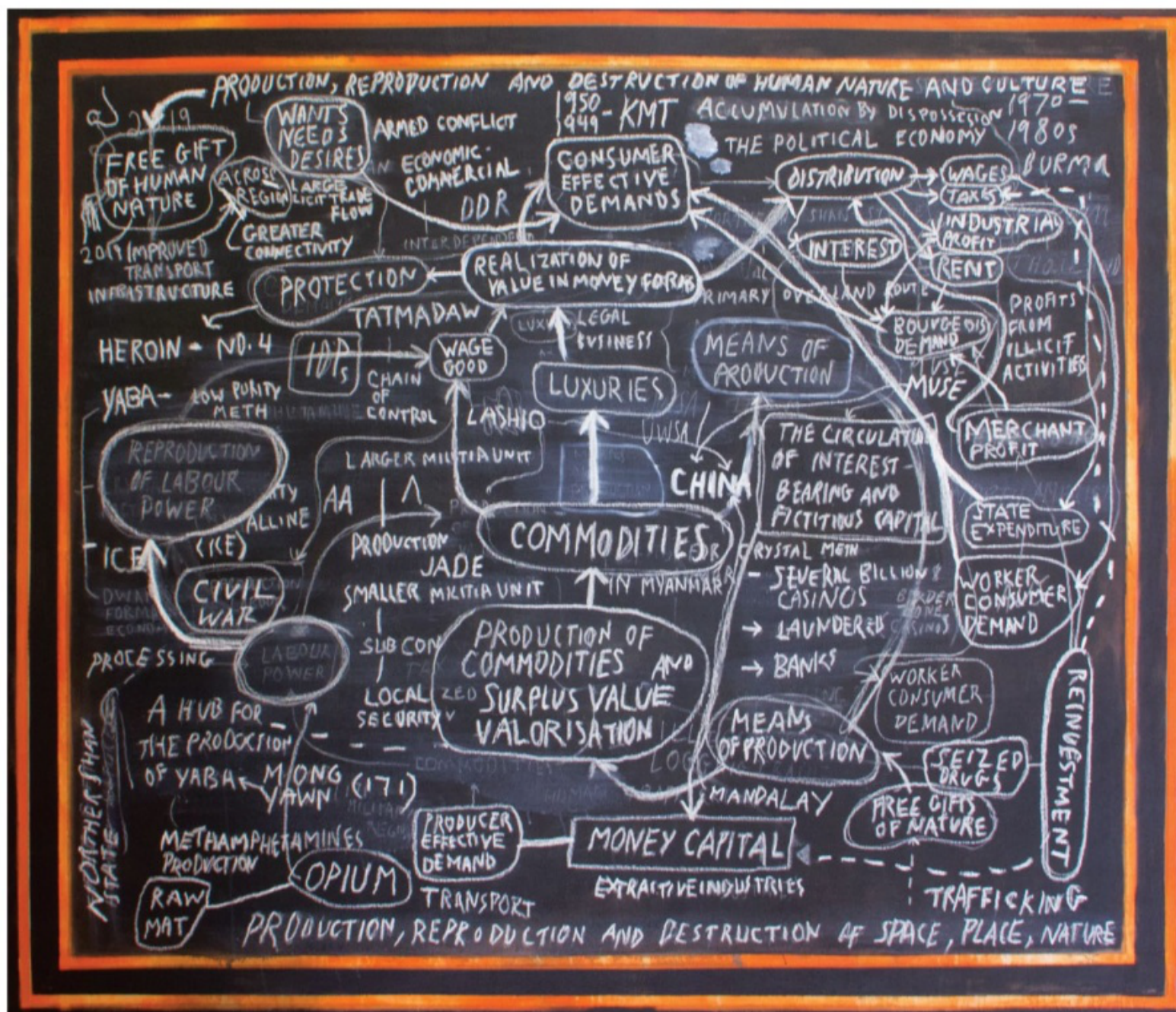
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