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CONVERSATIONS ON CONTEXT: *The Multi-headed Hydra in the (class) Room*

by Zarina Muhammad

“Reading is about ‘reading’ cultures, not just sentences.”



How much can one speak about art in 168 hours? Imagine the gamut of sounds that may result; the pronunciations, punctuations, syntax and other systems of order that shape context in communication. What if it were to be compressed in $(168 \div 24 =) 7$ whole days? What are the lines of conjecture one could take and how much coherent sound can be generated?

In the course of an academic year of 28 teaching weeks, 168 hours would approximately be the amount of time (excluding individual consultations and critique sessions) a Level 3 Fine Arts student is expected to engage in critical dialogue with his/her theory lecturer. As much as one may be led to believe that theory classes are preoccupied solely with producing luminous works of literary genius, dialogue plays as significant a role in this act and endeavour of criticality. Theory with a capital 'T' and the assumed ivory tower it occupies has long been overcharacterised by its ability to make lilliputians or somnambulists out of students. The protest that this terrible 'T-word' is irrelevant, an inconsequential chore routine and tedious and only belonging to the realm of dead dull philosophers, is missing the point altogether. As any good dictionary will tell you, theory quite simply refers to a speculation, contemplation, belief, an explanation or idea. Not quite so abstruse.

This piece of writing however, is not intended as an impassioned defense of theory's empire, but rather as a reflection on the significance of the spoken word in establishing and placing context in what we consume visually. The Praxis Press has, since its inception in 2007, taken the task of collating, documenting and archiving the events and activities that had been organised or were related to the Faculty of Fine Arts. Before reaching its textual incarnation in print, the thoughts that are imbued in some of these articles have undoubtedly passed through certain rounds of dialogue and discussion. Be it through personal contemplation or informal conversations, dialogue with the artwork or with others played a necessary role in attempting to situate meaning and context within the plethora of posts, isms and other theoretical hydras. While there is certainly a distinction between monologue and conversation, observations made, clarified, overheard or exchanged through verbal communication are not that dissimilar to snapshots; slices and wisps of space, time and memory that marks the beginning of any process of documentation and remembering. Beyond the stipulated 168 hours (of supposed compulsory criticality), conversations that occur before, during and after every exhibition, artist talk, local and/or overseas excursions are the marks and traces that shape what we speculate, contemplate, believe, explain and imagine what art might or might not be.

Speaking up/out can also be seen as a way out of confusion. While excessively and furiously translating all of one's thought-bubbles into sound may be quite a harrowing experience for others, verbal communication cannot be underestimated

in considering the interpretive strategies that may be employed in looking and 'reading' visually. As conversations are largely open-ended, whereby its structure is dependant on its participants and where speaking in itself undoubtedly requires pauses and intermissions for listening, what usually transpires does point, in varying degrees, to the perennial debates surrounding the crisis of context. As highlighted by Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson in their essay *Semiotics and Art History*, "Context is a text itself, and it thus consists of signs that require interpretation. What we take to be positive knowledge is the product of interpretive choices. The art historian is always present in the construction she or he produces."

Art historian or not, each of us who have been left with outstanding questions, residual thoughts or fire-in-the-belly responses following an exhibition, lecture, event or talk has surely engaged in further conversations to try to make sense of our (and others') interpretive choices. The exploration, examination and pursuit of meaning presumed to be imbued in works of art remains to be a widely contested area. As viewers, we are naturally inclined to visually respond to an artwork by attempting to seek its meaning, believed to be embedded in the layers, folds and crevices of the image. These questions that relate to the various methods in which meaning may be deciphered and decoded reflect the fluid nature of interpretation and understanding. The palimpsest of perspectives have often emerged from a single image point to the arbitrary quality of meaning and the symbols, ideologies, connotations and significance it thus embodies. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that quite a fair bit of what

may initially be abstruse, perplexing or absurd can be gradually illuminated through patience, pondering, engagement and an ongoing dialogue that allows for specific contextual parameters to be set.

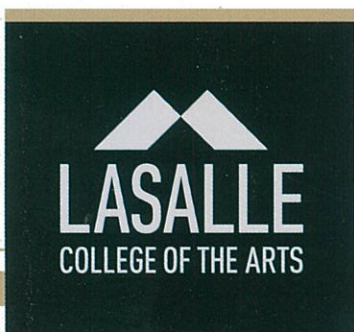
While the act/art of conversation on art and context inevitably has its own sets of challenges, the point I am certainly not raising is that theory is synonymously interchangeable with mere talk. What the significance of dialogue can address is that reading images is an active process where a prerequisite of literacy is discursiveness. The age of theory as utilitarian and prescriptive has long passed and the assumption that art history/criticism is but a quotation-dropping mish-mash of sound bites that 'substantiate' a piece of writing could not be further away from accuracy. A conversation on context is to enter a labyrinth and to take some time to meander through it. My reference to a marsh serpent in the subtext of this essay has been a reminder that I have used, perhaps far too frequently in my classes, on the easy pitfalls of contextual analysis in seeking definition. Context is indeed underpinned by competing texts that essentially question if the objective of all artwork is to become the subject of discussion?

In a recent tutorial, a Level 3 student made the observation that contemporary art appears largely and sometimes arbitrarily composed of quotations. To quote her directly, "Contemporary art is quotation." Certainly, one of many thought-provoking anecdotal quips that had emerged from this last academic year which had provided for great departure points for discussions. As rewarding or infuriating conversations on art might be, the words and language articulated by each of us marked the ever-changing circumscription of the subject's purview and the relevance of thinking critically. While perfect translations and absolute definitions may never exist, I conclude with a quotation by Jeanette Winterson that succinctly sums up what I wish to say about art and context. For now.

"To say exactly what one means, even to one's own private satisfaction is difficult. To say exactly what one means and to involve another person is harder still. Communication between you and me relies on assumptions, associations, commonalities and a kind of agreed shorthand which no-one could precisely define but which everyone would admit exists."



Zarina currently teaches Issues in Contemporary Art to the Level 3 Students in the Faculty of Fine Arts. She is intrigued by the relationship between art, text and sound and enjoys delving into the cacophonous histories of things.



MINUTES OF MEETING

page 5



STANDING AT THE CROSSROADS OF SINGAPORE ART

page 8-9



Artist Talk; RUSSEL WONG & STEPHEN MULQUEEN

page 14



A conversation with CHARLES MEREWETHER

page 15

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LASALLE College of the Arts
With its established history offering one of LASALLE'S pioneering programmes, the Faculty of Fine Arts provides the most rigorous and professional training for full-time practice as a professional artist. The Faculty emphasises reflection and self-evaluation, demanding enquiry, commitment, self-discipline and a level of collaborative work.

It houses undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Painting, Printmaking, Sculpture, Art Photography, Drawing, Graphic Novel and Time-Based Art.

LEGEND



EXHIBITION



SYMPOSIUM



ART TALK



INTERVIEW



TRAVEL



INTERNATIONAL EVENT

Aug 13-25, 2009

ALMOST ACCIDENTAL

by Betty Susiarjo



Being the first exhibition in Praxis Space for the new academic year 2009-2010, *Almost Accidental* presented a collection of assemblages created by the current Level 2 students.

The works exhibited were a result of one of the Level 1 final projects, which required the students to use found objects and materials to create compositionally exciting objects. For many, including myself, the experience of making assemblages marks a significant turning point in one's understanding in the process of art-making. It is of no surprise that even after many years, this project never fails to bring some despair and crisis among students working in the studio. Most of them were confused by the primary objective of the project and often bugged the lecturers with their perplexed question: "What exactly are we supposed to make?"

'Assemblages' as works of art have always been rather challenging to explain, especially to those who have never seen or done it before. The idea sounds simple: to take various discarded objects and construct them into a work of art by manipulating the materials. Because of the strong emphasis on discovery, this type of art is often termed as 'Found Objects' – found can be seen to be associated with the physical material/s one stumbled upon or it could also relate to a discovery of an innovative process of assembling discordant elements together. In other words, in creating Found Objects, one might need to even throw some rationality out of the window. For the process of creating an original piece of Found Object involves taking some risks, adding a good dose of adventure, impulsiveness and playfulness. In essence, one needs to thrive in letting go of control and to

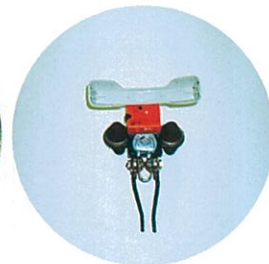
allow happy accidents to happen. However, I must also add that it is a tricky balance as the challenge also lies in a good understanding of the nature of the physical materials collected, so that one have the adequate skills to manipulate them successfully.

CHALLENGING 'JUNK'

Many students were not keen with the idea that they needed to collect 'junks' to realise the project, especially keeping in mind that most of them were so used to the convenience of going to an art shop to purchase art materials. Therefore trips to Sungei Road, Ubi Industrial Park, or local rubbish dump centres were often delayed (which becomes the common problem in progressing with such project, as without enough materials collected one cannot really experiment and make the works). After all, junks are old, broken and useless. "What is there to make out of them anyway?" complained one student.



But we sometimes forget that art is borne out of imagination, and that includes the choice of materials not necessarily convenient to us. Even the tubes of paint that we take for granted today were a result of early artists' experiments with an assortment of insects and/or minerals crushed into pigments and amalgamated with the right agents/binders. In fact, many contemporary artists' inventive use of objects



to create interesting dialogues had made us realise how new meanings and associations can be generated by the clever assemblage of materials. Herein, one just has to recall Sarah Luca's witty object *Two Fried Eggs and a Kebab* and Jompet's culturally-laden *Java Machine*.

POWER OF IMAGINATION

Thus, *Almost Accidental* is a selection of works that was a result of those weeks in pursuit of adventure, innovation and the power of imagination. Just to cite a few works that transformed the ordinary to the fantastical: a phone receiver turned into a pair of wings of a mechanical bee; a rusty mouse trap attached with giant wheels made to resemble an abandoned army tank; and an old computer keyboard from which an enchanting forest seemed to sprout from within. How about that white dragon whose skin was made of hundreds of plastic spoons that swallowed a child fed on coloured pencils? Or a giant movie ticket which no bag could contain; a fan that spun not to generate wind but nails? Once we take these objects out of their conventional contexts and emptying them from their signifiers, one began to visualise them possessing intrinsic qualities (form, colour, pattern) and as materials in which imaginative associations can be made.

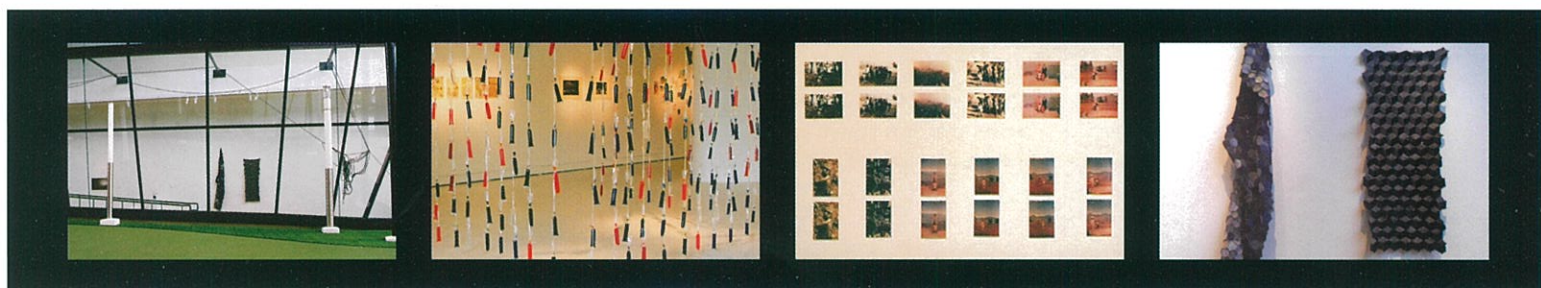
Interestingly, one observation I made of the various Found Objects that were created was that there seemed to be a common usage of machine parts such as computers, mobile phones, printers, microwaves, televisions, etc. I thought the materials picked up and found by the students were telling about the sort of things people tend to throw away. We are indeed living up to the shopping paradise reputation of Singapore, where we buy constantly, throwing out the newly obsolete regularly and creating a high turnover rate for material objects that symbolised our lifestyle. We also forget that with shopping and purchases, we also live in a culture of constant upgrading and keeping up with trends. However, as we keep 'improving' our machines, we also keep on throwing things out unthinkingly. The fact is that, in a fast-paced country, the city-dwellers often do not spare a thought about what was just discarded. In a way, this project on Found Object, not only challenged the students' capacity for spontaneity, skills and imagination, it also has a tangential objective – one that deals with the issue of material and the environment and also highlighted the role of artists in pushing their limit in creating the beautiful from the objects that had expired in their lifespan with their owners.

Sept 2 - 22, 2009

THE LONGEST DISTANCE

The 10th Anniversary of The Winston Oh Travel Award

by Jeremy Sharma



What constitutes an artwork befitting of a travelogue exhibition? - A journal? An album of photographs? Ticket stubs? Try a brick wall filled with pictures of dead people; or ropes in knots dangling from the beams of the gallery ceiling; or a piece of fabric stitched with patterns that create 3-D illusions.

Sounds perplexing? If it is anything to go by, the exhibition entitled *The Longest Distance* continues to be a trend in the ever-changing nature of *The Winston Oh Travel Award* and marked a milestone in the award's history: commemorating 10 years of travel scholarships given out to our Fine Arts students.

In a nutshell, Dr. Winston Oh, a cardiologist, initiated the travel scholarship in 1999 for diploma students and subsequently the degree students in the Faculty of Fine Arts. Dr Oh wanted to provide opportunities

for individual students to gain exposure and extend their art practices to foreign shores*, followed by a group exhibition when they return. The initial criteria of exceptional drawing grades was raised to include potential students' attitude and competency through a comprehensive evaluation by a panel of Fine Arts staff. This entailed the progressive drawing projects, which moved from graphite on paper to mixed-media works, material installations and time-based projects. Also, prior to the award selection, most diploma students would have had a chance to participate in the annual overseas field trips organized

by the faculty as part of their drawing project - a clear would-be indication of their aptitude.

So fast forward 10 years and the nature of the artworks have evolved. Besides traditional scenery painting and snapshots, more contemporary concepts and practices have emerged. Last year's recipients were no exception. Take the installation of Michelle Lim, a current Level 3 undergraduate, for example - entitled *'Being Khmer'*, the work at the corner of Praxis Space took a cue from the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Cambodia and consisted of two brick walls literally built from scratch by Michelle. On the walls were pinned up image-transfers of her own friends, relatives and actual known prisoners. By mixing her own history with that of Cambodians who were executed en-masse under the Pol Pot regime, Michelle had created an unnerving artwork, which starkly belied the usual alacrity of a travelogue award and the artworks produced.

In the middle of the gallery and on a much lighter note, Cherin Sim's fabric pieces intrigued the viewer into going closer and observing the tedious process of stitching the pieces of cloth together; one with hexagon scales hung limply and the other with cube-patterns stretched to create a 3-D effect. Looking like a cross between a fashion design and a whimsical art piece, the result was playful and reminded one of the Bangkok markets that the undergraduate had visited.

Not far from Cherin's work, another classmate, Nur Shazwany Bte Abdul Aziz tied black rope across the ceiling beams from one end of the gallery and dangled and collected the other end in a mess of whirls and knots. Like an elusive line sculpture that negotiated the serpentine space of the gallery, Shazwany managed to ingeniously tease the viewer into believing that she had brought some of the chaos and telephone cables from Vietnam to the gallery.

The other two winners were Nah Yong Eng and Tan Jack Ying, both current undergraduates, who travelled to Indonesia and India respectively.

Elsewhere in the Earl Lu gallery, 12 past winners were invited to create or recreate artworks for the 10th Anniversary. Among the luminaries, Shubigi Rao created a discerning piece by mixing autobiography, language and memory by inscribing little anecdotes on her family's travel photographs that required one to read them with a magnifying glass. Another work from Arnewaty Bte Abdul Shokor called *Inside Out*, was an installation of stringed clear plastic tubes filled with syrup. Strangely the colourful tubes not only energized the space, but also made one reminisce about the time where kids could buy one of these homemade popsicles as an afternoon tidbit from illegal stall vendors.

If culture shapes a person's worldview and an artist's practice, then travelling has to be a re-mooring of

one's cultural perceptions and art practice. Since travelling is a rather multifarious and unquantifiable experience, then there is no one way to present a travelogue. The myriad ways one could approach this subject lies in the creativity of the student. One does not come out of the exhibition, feeling a vicarious experience of the student's travels but rather, one gets involved in the creative synapses of the students.

Perhaps Dr Oh said it best in a recent interview with our editor:

"The works that I have seen year after year have reaffirmed in my eyes, in the public's eyes, and I am sure even more so in their own eyes, that here was proof that they have arrived - that the skills imparted by the college have worked, and they will have the confidence to go forth and build on this solid foundation." **

The journey continues.

* *Travel Award Practice* is for diploma students travelling to Asia and *Travel Award Research* is for degree students travelling to Europe.

** Excerpt taken from 'An Interview with Dr. Winston Oh' from the catalogue publication 'The Longest Distance: The 10th Anniversary of The Winston Oh Travel Award'



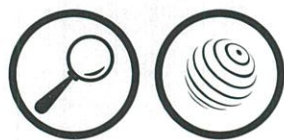
Held in the same month, an artist talk by Maria Chua and Rubin Hashim was also organised in conjunction with this event. Maria and Rubin were the recipients of The Winston Oh Travel Award 2008/09. With the award grant, they respectively travelled to Istanbul (Turkey) and Berlin (Germany) for their research.

Sept 22 - 30, 2009

TROPICAL LAB

A melting pot of artistic minds

by Gan Kwang Chuen



For the third time running, the annual workshop Tropical Lab was once again organised by the Faculty of Fine Arts in September 2009. This 10-day workshop involved various artists invited from art academies around the globe and a selection of candidates from Undergraduate and Postgraduate degree programs of LASALLE.

This year though, I personally felt, the event had expanded beyond its scope as being just a mere visit of the international artists. Tropical Lab was also a brainstorm between the participants, the student volunteers, the Lasalle students and the lecturers who organised Tropical Lab. The workshop resembled a slow boiling pot; where everyone involved brought something unique to the dish. These unique ingredients would be our different personalities, diverse experiences and knowledge. Everybody played a distinct role in the success of Tropical Lab 2009. With every word spoken, ideas were formed, glance passed and smiles exchanged. The intensity of ecstatic energy increased tenfold as Tropical Lab developed over the 10 days.



The workshop began with a short presentation of the participants' portfolios. The formal introductions were succinctly made whilst being also focused and covered a good summary of the artists' works and their chosen disciplines, ideologies and practices. From the presentation, the affirmed individuality of each of the workshop participants began to shine through. The binding element amongst all the participants was the shared enthusiasm for the ventures, which Tropical Lab's activities were bringing. After the formal presentations, the true connections began as the participants, volunteers, and lecturers engaged in a discussion of the various critical discourses highlighted during the presentations. The formalities began to dissolve and casual friendships were formed. Following that, the group were taken by the student-volunteers to take a stroll around the city, they headed first to Sculpture Square to view the exhibition on display, followed by sight-seeing around the Little India/Bugis district. Throughout the journey, we shared quirky thoughts and comments,



different points of view and good laughs. The cameras clicked as quickly as the steps were being taken. Some of these informal conversational exchanges and the thoughts that were a result of that, were later on used by the participants as relevant materials to create the artworks for an exhibition. This said exhibition is meant to be the final culmination of the entire workshop.

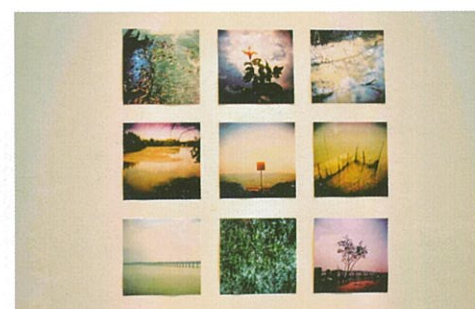
Through the interactions between all the participants, we began to discover pleasant similarities and fascinating differences. From chitchat to deep complex conversations on metaphysical theories, our conversations enabled us to discover various traits about others and ourselves. Once, a particular conversation between a participating artist, and myself involved the topic of the desire to escape. Our conversation about various theories and examples related to the topic seemed to flow endlessly. I began to wonder how two different people of diverse cultures could share a similar fascination for one specific topic. As I began to observe the rest of the conversing parties, I realized how indirectly associated we were.

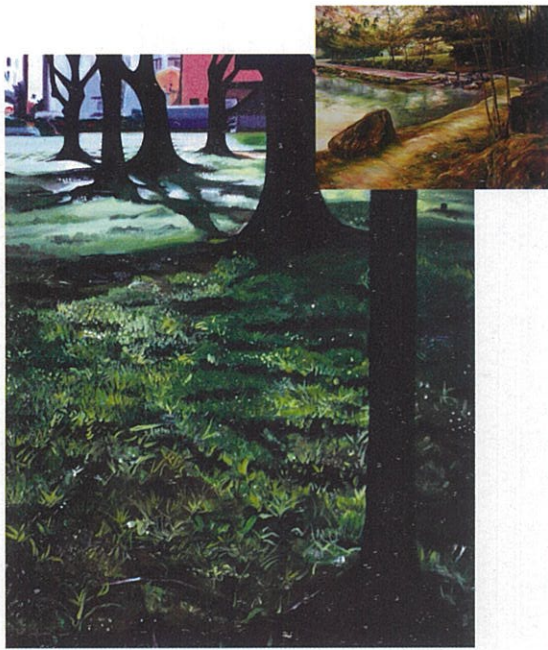
The Pulau Ubin trip was the final group outing before all the artists involved were to settle in to begin with the production of their artworks for the exhibition. The beating hot sun, rotating bicycle wheels and muddy shoes certainly made the trip an unforgettable experience. With all the research, information and

exploration made of the city-state and the various enclaves we brought them, the artists were then able to create a piece of work that would relate to the theme of *The Urban and the Constructed*. Whole new sets of barriers were then broken down as the artist challenged restrictions between medium, methods and critical discourses. The atmosphere was electrifying with curious minds and creative outlooks.

OVERWHELMING SUCCESS

The exhibition was a great success, comprising of works from the visiting artists and the LASALLE students. Despite coming from different cultural backgrounds, all the participants were able to research, explore, collaborate and create contemporary works without restrictions in regards to medium, methods or issues. The workshop was truly an intensive and brilliant accomplishment. Strong bonds and friendships were forged during the trip which I am very sure will continue to flourish, even as we parted to pursue our separate ways of life back in our own countries. The influence we had on one another, I am positive, will continue to make an impact on us. Hopefully one day, our paths might meet again and we could just reconnect and carry on from where we left off in Singapore. This Tropical Lab exchange reminded me much of an unforgettable meal, cooked with only the most unique of ingredients brought over by these lovely personalities.





Speaking for many of my classmates and myself, we had initially felt some dissatisfaction with the selection of this particularly project to be showcased as our first exhibition at the Praxis Space. That was because out of the 4 projects the Level 1 students were given, the project on artificial landscape had quite fair bit of restrictions; both in terms of subject matter and also, size and materials. One could argue that the other 3 projects possessed more room for interpretation and diversity and allowed students to have much more freedom in the exploration and discovery of subject matters that were interesting to them. Our painting lecturer, Betty Susiarjo however, explained that the practical reasons behind the decision to showcase these landscape paintings at the time slot allotted, and defended that since Level 1 would have finished their first project, they would be scheduled for an exhibition just before the college took a break from the semester. She added that curators are also assigned their respective exhibitions, and changes would create chaos for everyone. So you could say that despite our initial displeasure with the selection (because we think we would like to showcase our other projects), we were persuaded and thus showcased our first paintings made in Level 1. Practicalities aside, however, another reason Betty thought this project could be appropriate was to show a different side of LASALLE. Since I am not from Singapore, I was quite perplexed with how some people thought that "LASALLE produces Fine Arts students who cannot paint, but can only talk". So accordingly to Betty, this exhibition was meant to quell those rumours and to prove them wrong. Another point she made was that it is seldom to actually see 'pure' paintings from LASALLE Fine Arts students since many trained in oil paintings eventually went on to experiment with other materials in their research. She wanted to show that despite their eventual exploration in other mediums and conceptual ideas, their earliest art training and aesthetic sense were acquired through oil painting, and thus should be something we take pride in.

Thus, we eventually have the exhibition aptly named *Faux Green*, an exhibition which included a selection of works made by 19 of my classmates. For this exhibition, Jon Chan, a former LASALLE painting

graduate, and a current Graphic Novel lecturer was the curator for this exhibition. Let's hear what he has to say about it:

How did you feel about this project getting picked and being the curator for the exhibition? Was this your first time curating?

No it is the second time. As always, I look forward to these opportunities to look outside my own ideas of how to curate a show and to share ideas with students. In a way, I got more out of the experience than I give. Like the fact that there was also the opportunity to play around with the possible outcomes of displaying the works rather than having a fixed idea on how it should turn out.

Who came up with the name for the exhibit? And what are your personal views on 'fake' greenery in Singapore?

It was Betty who named the exhibition. In a way it was better that she was not curating the show, because I got to play around with what she intended to showcase. Although I was pretty sure I did not veer off the main theme, it was probably good enough of a shift to keep the arrangement refreshing. About the green landscape in Singapore, I had always been interested in how everything is essentially fake by plotting and planning, you see it clearly from a distance and less so in close observation. This is contrary to how we usually perceive artificiality, by close observation. So maybe there are more things than greenery that are essentially 'fake' in Singapore. We seem to be a culture that tends to assimilate into something and conform to things for general consumption. This is influenced perhaps by our strong business mindset, but you know business is not something I would base my relationships on.

How did you make the selection for this exhibition?

One of the first thing I considered was how the works would fit in with the main theme, how they tie in with one another and lastly, the quality of the works. When I speak of 'quality', I do not mean that every painting must be a realistic portrayal of nature, but it should have a balance of other aspects of painting, like composition, spatial arrangement, the way paint is applied, colour combinations, etc.

The exhibition was not announced to the students while they were painting, do you think the outcome might have been different if they knew their paintings would be picked for a show?

There is a possibility. I don't really like to assume

what would happen, it makes more sense to directly experience the difference. It is best to look at a future exhibition that students had planned for and compare it with this one. It would also differ from artist to artist, on whether they sense a difference.

This, as you know, was the very first painting project in project Level 1, where many of the students had technical difficulties because this was the first time they were using oil paint. With this in mind, how do you feel about the outcome?

Seeing that there were difficulties made the process more realistic for me. It is always going to be difficult to learn anything new. I had a tough time learning to paint as well, there were times I thought I sucked at it, but I guess this is where, as clichéd as it would sound, perseverance comes in. Somewhere along the line, you get better. Yes, talent plays a part too. You would also need a vision to start (most people do not have that), but I think sheer willpower is also important. You need these three things, talent, a unique vision and perseverance. In addition, Praxis Space is primarily a students' space so it should be seen as a space that features works-in-progress or experimental works, so you should not be too worried about how the first project might not live up to one's expectations. Sometimes we ought to learn from those errors and experiments.

Do you agree with Betty, that this exhibition showcased LASALLE students' technical painting skills?

As you said earlier, this is the first time many are using oil paint but look at the results! In such a short time, the students learned by leaps and bounds. I had always liked the idea of painting as a place to test ideas, or more than just an idea, but a vicarious vision. Something conceived in the mind and made flesh. Things never come to place in reality the way we imagine, the question is how much are we willing to compromise in a painting that separates it from our original vision. The second question is if it is a compromise in the first place? Of all the conceptual art I had seen, the ones that arrest me most were usually the ones that were not afraid to veer from what the artist intended, and allowed the work to gather a life of its own, and treasuring the accidents. That is why, painting still excites me and we should strive to be a painter who can work in a way that he/she never gets the same picture twice. So the role that technical skill brings about, is that you learn how to form things in the reality of painting and not just in your mind.

O&T 20 - 30, 2009

FAUX GREEN

by Hedda Amundsen



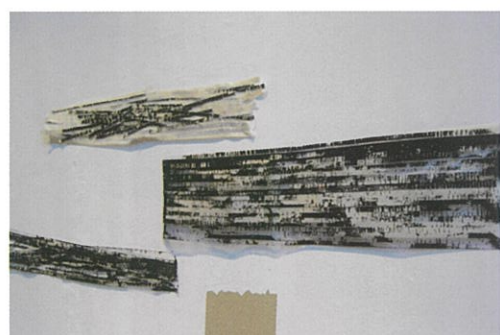
A new academic year, and a new batch of painting students; so what better way to give them some real experience than an exhibition of their earlier semester's works? On October 22, 2009, the Level One painting majors had a chance to showcase their first project in the Praxis Space Gallery. For many of us, this assignment was our first foray with oil paint, and is a project aimed at the exploration of artificial landscapes in Singapore.

Nov 5 -13, 2009

TAPE IT UP! TAPE IT DOWN!

A tape exhibition featuring Level 2 students

by Danielle Tay



Tape, according to the Oxford dictionary has six different meanings: **noun 1** light, flexible material in a narrow strip, used to hold, fasten, or mark off something. **2** (also adhesive tape) a strip of paper or plastic coated with adhesive, used to stick things together. **3** long, narrow material with magnetic properties, used for recording sound, pictures, or computer data. **4** a cassette or reel containing such material. **verb 1** record (sound or pictures) on audio or video tape. **2** fasten, attach, or mark off with tape. For one of our drawing projects, the Fine Art Level 2 students were tasked with the challenge of using tape as a medium to create an artwork. The tape being referred to here is based on the Oxford definition 1 and 2 as stated above. Tape, as most people know, is a functional object, commonly found in stationery stores or hardware shops. It comes in an assortment of colours and textures, of various types and materials to suit different functions – duct, masking, vinyl, scotch, adhesive, cloth just to name a few. *Tape it Up! Tape it Down!* showcased the works of 14 students who employed the use of an ordinary, utilitarian tool, reinventing it in manners which made them extraordinary, and thus enabling and an oft-overlooked object of everyday life to be noticed and viewed in a different light.

The selection of works for this exhibition by curator, Hazel Lim seemed to revolve around the theme of

patterns and textures. Most of the selected works dealt with concepts of space and involved the use of the elements and principles of art as main visual concerns. When asked about the intention behind the choice of works in an interview regarding this exhibition, she answered, "As I was not the lecturer teaching the Drawing module, I was quite unaware of how each of the student's works was going to turn out. This gave me an objective view of the outcome of this project. I did not have much of a plan initially as I was not sure what kind of works were being created, so when I walked around the studio to select the works, I was also sort of working intuitively in the selection process. Most of the works that were presented in the studios fell broadly into two categories: the representational works and those that were more abstract. I was drawn to the latter, for not only were they stronger works but they also challenged the quality of the tapes in more inventive ways. Thus, you could say I was inspired to showcase those works that have pushed the idea of tapes more thoroughly."

This was reflected in the work of Jodi Tan, titled *Mending* who used the tape as how one would have done with paper, employing the technique of paper folding to the same effect through the use of tape. This culminated in a continuous trail of yellow vinyl tape repeatedly folded, strung across a corner of the exhibition space, stretching from the bottom up, forming an elongated diamond shape. Another student who utilized a craft method in her work was Mandy Tan. In her work, *I Am Therefore I Knit*, she used tape as a substitute for yarn as a knitting material. The final outcome was a knitted piece of "cloth" in the primary colours of red, blue and yellow, attached to a pair of knitting needles.

Many of the works seemed to have been produced through a repetitive process of art making, as seen

in the two works mentioned above as well as Elijah Choo's *Fluid Transition*. His work involved cutting minute pieces of vinyl tape which were then meticulously stuck one by one onto the glass panel/walls of the Praxis Space. The final work reminded one of a heap of confetti thrown and landed haphazardly in the space or it could be seen as a geographical map of sorts depending on how one interpreted it visually. The splattering of these tiny cutouts invaded the space of Jodi Tan's yellow trains of folded tapes, intersecting with the work. This was one of the examples mentioned by Hazel when asked for her opinion on how the works worked together in the same space. She revealed that she "wanted some of them to interact with the nooks and crannies of the space, and not just remain as mere objects." She further elaborated by citing examples such as Frayn's ethereal hanging sculpture called *Teardrops* which were made of clear tapes that threw off light and shadow in the corner of the exhibition space; *Fragments* - the plain and unobtrusive white and black tape-works made by Nur Aqilah Johari which was so delightful with its subtle waves and rhythms; Aashna Amit Jhaveri's black and white long drawings titled *Rhythmic Distortion*; and Susanne Catterson's black, red and white tapes were juxtaposed across the corners of the space, the angular shapes softened by the circular planes protruding from the centre of the installation."

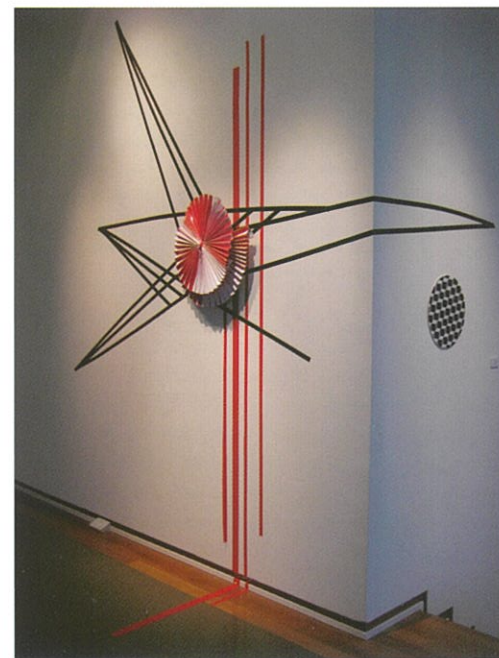
Through this project, tape as a material has to a large extent been challenged successfully, a statement agreed upon by Hazel as she proceeded to compliment the artists shown in this exhibition for their clever manipulation of the materials. She cited how creatively Tiffany Tan had managed to use simple brown tapes to create a delicate portrait collage within the interior of a vase, Shayvin Sng's painstakingly coiled masking



“Most visitors I spoke to were intrigued with the wide spectrum of ways one could manipulate the tapes, either into objects, drawings or sculptures.”

tapes to produce a small field of patterned flower bed and Aashna Amit Jhaveri's collage of stained-tape drawing.

All in all, this exhibition was indeed a success, as substantiated by Hazel's response to my last question, “How successful do you think the show was? Was the feedback/response you received about the show positive/negative?” Her reply to this question was, “Most visitors I spoke to were intrigued with the wide spectrum of ways one could manipulate the tapes, either into objects, drawings or sculptures. I think on first sight many would have thought that those works were drawings of some sort, only to be surprised at the range of things one could do with the ordinary tape. I believe each of the works offered the viewers a delightful encounter, and triggered some to think outside the box in terms of the type of material one could use in art-making.” The last line aptly summed up the effect this exhibition had on the viewers. However, in this instance, the viewers were not the only ones who had gained something. Tape, a seemingly ordinary object was rewarded with well deserved attention, gained new identities and is now viewed from a fresh perspective.



Jan 14 - 29, 2010

MINUTES OF MEETING

by Nah Yong En



A few missteps

There I was, holding a plate of food (one of the joys of openings), walking into the gallery, but alas, I could not view the artworks in their entirety without using my hands! At that point did I realize that, it was an interactive exhibition, requiring me to pick up these lovely books to peer into their pages.

Exhibited in Praxis Space were some objects on shelves on the left side of the gallery that looked beautifully packaged, and some other equally curious things on display over at the right side. Little books, I realised, were placed in acrylic holders, arranged in ascending order by size. I then tried to figure out the context of the two series of works being shown on both sides of the gallery. As it turned out, there was in fact only one series of works. How could this be? So it seemed, I missed the sign which said ‘Shop’ (pointing to the left) and ‘Exhibition’ (pointing to the right).

Artist-zines

The theme was ‘zines’, and from what I see, it was extracted from the word ‘magazines’. From the visual evidence of the exhibition, how could the word ‘zines’ be defined beyond merely describing them as ‘little booklets of stuff’? The staff in the Faculty of Fine Arts asked two Level 3 students, Tan Jack Ying and Michelle Lim, to curate and organise a show that would feature handmade artist’s-zines. In the Fine Arts Faculty – zines are made for an art exhibition (yay!). In the Design faculty, making a zine is but one of the design assignments submitted and possibly thereafter eternally stowed away in the darkness of a drawer. If the zines made for a Design Faculty project were exhibited, do they become a Fine Arts artwork?

The dematerialisation of art is not exactly a recent conception. Nevertheless, it certainly has been a concept taken up by local artists significantly in recent years. In LASALLE, it was evident in many students’ projects, but rarely overtly discussed. We would make comments such as ‘this is an interesting concept/

project’, and even contribute ideas/comments/suggestions to a fellow student’s ‘artistic’ concept, but rarely does anyone (dare to) exclaim ‘Hey, you sure you call this (fine) art?’

Unfortunately, this article is too short for a discussion on defining what art is. Nevertheless, we need to be conscious of the present development of dematerialization in art and its consequent implications, and finding a suitable framework to understand art in this context.

Ideas as work adequate?

The zines featured in the exhibition covered a wide array of topics, some were more personal, while others were more thematic/topical. But one issue (not regarding the content of the zines, but rather, of the making of the works) which stood out quite a bit for me was the technical considerations in the production of the zines. On some zines, poor paper, printing and binding choices seemed to be quite a distraction. Perhaps one may accuse me of judging the works using ‘traditional aesthetics’ and ‘technical acuity’. On this note, we then have to ask ourselves – in what ways are technical qualities irrelevant in the context of contemporary fine arts? Sometimes we try to run away from this question, but in reality, we cannot.

Works for sale

On the left side of the gallery were displayed the reproductions of originals, which exist as multiple copies, as well as originals which exist as multiple unique copies (i.e. the copies differed from each other due to their nature of being handmade). All were for sale. Personally, it kind of reminded me of *Duchamp's Box in a Valise*, in the aspect of reproduction.

This ‘shop’ set-up brought along its own ambiguities – Was it a sale of artworks? Or was it merchandising? We were not certain. But we did see a general criteria of strategic pricing that was not ‘too low’ such that the artwork’s value was compromised, nor was it



too high such that the visitors were unwilling to make purchases. Should we price ‘reproductions of originals’ lower than ‘originals which exist as multiple copies’? Which is a memento/souvenir? And which is an original artwork? These are some considerations one could consider.

Some things I did not mention above

One of the aspects I enjoyed about the show was the intimacy and interactivity of the works which allowed one to look into the pages to discover anecdotes, drawings, thoughts and ideas. It was also great to have students curating a show, may this be a first of many to come. Not only do I love looking through some of the zines, there was a bookbinding workshop on C-day (open house) to look forward to – something I thought was relevant and great (say yay to craftsmanship!).

Feb 4 - 18, 2010

SORRY FOR THE INCONVENIENCE CAUSED

by Joanna Tang



Sculptural works can never miraculously appear overnight. It requires time, energy and much attention in order to make them successful.

In the recent show, *Sorry For the Inconvenience Caused*, 13 artists, consisting of current students, a few alumni and lecturers from the Sculpture Department of the Faculty of Fine Arts, showcased a wide range of works.

In an interview with the curator of this show, Zainuddin Samsuri, he expressed that part of the title carried an apology pertaining to the delay of the show. This was due predominantly to the differences in everyone's respective schedules. He also mentioned that "this was like a gathering, or a reunion for us. While the sense of being apologetic referred to not being able to put together this show earlier, Zainuddin cheerfully commented that he was glad all the artists came together at the end to be a part of this show. He went on to elaborate that "furthermore, it is always good to be humble. Being apologetic, and being able to accept changes, development and progress in the context of art making is very important."



Sorry For The Inconvenience Caused is a sculpture exhibition that not only demonstrated traditional to modern techniques but also the varied range of materials that could be used in sculpture. Some examples of traditional materials such as clay, were used in Angela

Goh's *Monstrous!* and Wang Jie's *Bowl and Chopstick*. Zainuddin Samsuri, however, worked with mahogany wood, where through wood carving, he created a form resembling a headwear worn by Muslim males called a songkok, which was whimsically titled *Doraemon's Hat*. Zainudin commented that this work, "is conceptual, and essentially questions the role of the Malay individual in today's social context. Indeed, this work is a playful approach to thinking about what it means to be Malay, Muslim and male."

Through the wide range of materials used, this exhibition clearly demonstrated that contemporary sculpture could take on many structural forms through diverse methods. For example, Jodi Cheung's cleverly made kinetic sculpture, *The Sound of Money* which with every turn of the handle - a lever, shaped and painted to look like meat, hit the glass bottles at the base of the sculpture to create the sound made by coins. On the far left of the gallery, Juriani's work, *Inevitable*, was an innovative piece which used balloons, latex and paint to create a wall filled with colourful amoebic shaped forms.

All in all, this exhibition provided an interesting commentary on the various techniques and forms that surround sculpture today.

"Being apologetic, but being able to accept changes, development and progress in the context of art making is very important."



Mar 18 - Apr 1, 2010

SEEN-UN-SEEN

by Shen Xin



Visual works are often about seeking the relationship between what is seen and what is yet to be revealed. The exhibition *Seen-Un-Seen*, brought to us by Level 1 photography students (in Fine Arts), and Experimental Video elective students (from various levels in Fine Arts), had further explored this matter in various contexts according to their individual experiences.

The photography works that were exhibited covered a number of significant elements, such as in *Self-portrait Untitled No.1* by Farah Ong. Farah portrayed herself posed frontally, smoking and challenging one's gaze, albeit being simultaneously covered by a transparent, plastic *tudung* (Muslim headgear for women). It is a poignant juxtaposition of playfulness with a serious



topic; it spoke about the inherent negotiations in terms of the roles and identity people take on in contemporary world. As one of the highlights in the exhibition, Farah tried to expose the contradictions and social expectations, of being a Muslim and a woman. Therein lies the quandary of what is seen or what is unseen.

Through Ariffin's stop-motion video *Daily Routine Mondays Oh Mondays*, viewers could easily relate to the work. In the video, there was a constant looping of the bike descending the staircase situated in a narrow and claustrophobic space. It evoked the familiar yet tiresome routines of most Mondays, with the pauses of the stop-motion creating a repetitive tension.

Other themes depicted include allusion to voyeurism, as seen in Azahar Rashid's work, *Voyeurism*, and Richard Chen's installation, *For Your Eyes Only*. For Azahar, he repositioned the way of reading his photographs through utilising the play of light to convey atmospheric elements contained in snapshots of events in a personal life. In Richard's work, he challenged the viewers to unveil the images hidden in a clothes bag by enticing them to undress and unzip it.



With the photography works that were exhibited, individuals took on differing/varied lenses in portraying what is seen and revealing what is unseen. For example, Rachel Tan's photography installation *Bobofettmittens* and Al Hakim Yusoff's *Freedom, Calmness and Composure Through the Human Body*, show different perspectives on a singular object or person that reveal the distinguished sides and the forgotten support behind the image.

The conceptual structure of each works was relevant but contextually, the wide-ranging and equally complex themes embodied within photography can be rather confusing for the viewer.

Furthermore, the video works in the exhibition depicted the topic in different visual forms. One of the three monitor video installations with mirrors was



named *Unseen Orientations*. Made by Eunice Ng, Jane Stephany, Nur Aqilah, Khym Nga, Nur Azam, the video works made full use of the visual system, perspectives, repetition of the image itself in different placements and positions. In another video installation *Abstracting*, students use different methods to abstract visuals from different sources such as light, portraits and film. To abstract an experience of seeing is to reveal what is beyond the images and reality, and what is not obviously so visible. The mirrors in these works provided an alternative for the viewer to watch the reflections of the original video images.

The concern of light in photography and video art is essential in this exhibition: with light being a crucial element of (seeing) reality, it can come from natural sources or via artificial lighting in a studio or even by computer software. Again, it linked back to the theme of the exhibition, *Seen-Un-Seen*, a concept that provided us with not only thoughts but new light to seeing the invisible, forgotten elements around us.



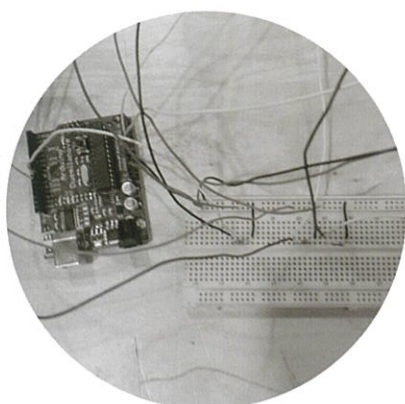
Apr 8 - 21, 2010

DRAWING CONNECTIONS

by Lucinda Foo/Chong Weixin



Kriyaworks was an art exhibition involving the collaboration of Level 1 students from the Faculty of Media Arts with Level 2 students of the Faculty of Fine Arts. It was based on a combined field trip in which students from both faculties travelled to Yogyakarta, Indonesia for a four-day research trip. This is a review of the collaboration and subsequent exhibition by Weixin Chong (Faculty of Fine Arts) and Lucinda Foo (Faculty of Media Arts).



About the Research/Collaboration By Chong Weixin

Our field trip to Yogyakarta was in many ways an experience parallel to the collaboration project. Both were a short, intense immersion of sorts. Our tour of the city resembled the mutual introductions between the worlds of Fine Arts and Media Arts: differences like the materials we worked with and the skills we were learning in order to do so, were external but still definable.

This was not to say that a clear line of demarcation must exist in the actual practice of these disciplines, but rather that in the placement of priorities when it came to works and materials, a difference in focus and perspective was definitely present at least in the process of this particular project.

I felt that the first apparent difference between us was what we worked with. The Interactive Arts students used technology in order to engage audiences. The audiences' reactions and participation were an integral part of the work. This interaction actually had a physical and material manifestation of some kind, as opposed to being a purely intellectual interaction. It is in this attribute, that I felt a sense of encountering something new in my own work processes: the consideration of interaction in the making and conceptualizing of the artwork. In practical terms, it also meant having to deal with the challenges that pertained to that interactivity.

The works had to withstand being handled by the audience, as stated. They had to function as stated, in order to facilitate the artwork. In addition, the artists

had to consider issues of safety and functionality, in the fabrication and installation of the work.

Technology employed in this exhibition was meant as a mean to engage the audience, entail knowledge and through the use of electronics, to extend the possibilities of provoking, recording, observing, and dealing with interaction could take place. In the most basic sense, one could strip the concept of interaction down to its most basic roots and construct a performative, socially-based work that would nonetheless be interactive in a similar way. But technology, like any medium, offers specific characteristics and possibilities, it unleashes a variety of means and methods and it requires particular skills and knowledge.

As a student from Fine Arts, it was intriguing to observe these differences. We basically set out with the same general aim, but as each brought their own focus to bear on the project, the specifics of each work developed as a synthesis of initially separate directions.

About the Exhibition By Lucinda Foo

Yogyakarta brought a sense of the old and the young together, where the histories of the old meet with the freshness of the young. Similarly, Fine Arts and Media Arts are like the bridging of the old and current, where new art forms like Net Art, Software engineering and electronics meet with traditional mediums like Painting, Printmaking, Sculpture and Photography.

These new and old forms were combined in various ways to create new sensory-oriented and interesting works.

Square Square, a work by Vic Lim and Wayne Lim, introduced the sense of smell where the audience was literally transported to Yogyakarta by the aroma of the city's native spice of cloves, if one would peer under the hand-built little pavilion's roof, to get a whiff of that signature scent.

The exchange in cultural experience was how Weixin and Titus aimed for in their collaborated work called *Encapsulated/Experienced/Exchanged*. Based on the concept of the capsule vending machines, the audience could insert a personal item of their own into a provided capsule in exchange for a capsule with an item that 'encapsulated' the trip.

An Indo-Singaporean Experience, created by Dorothy and myself, meanwhile, was an attempt to assimilate

the two cultures together, with fabrics and sounds that represent the two different distinct environments.

Sound Travels In A Straight Line by Marcus Goh and Melissa was another such work where a beautifully drawn and expansive abstract landscape of the city would emit sounds of Yogyakarta if one were to touch the wired surfaces with another given metallic object.

Walking Within was a batik-inspired mat constructed by Han Yuan and Nur Azam. Whilst stepping on the mat, one would be able to listen to the different recordings taken by them in Yogyakarta. This work used patterns inspired by batik to map out the audience's path of experience whilst creating an intriguing mixture of sound activated by the movements of the feet.

Yogyakarta by Frayn and Shi Xiong was a visual spectacle with an interesting synthesis of sculpture and kinetic movement. A geodesic structure constructed from photographed geographical views of the city was inserted with optical fibers which would respond with sounds when audience stepped within its boundaries.

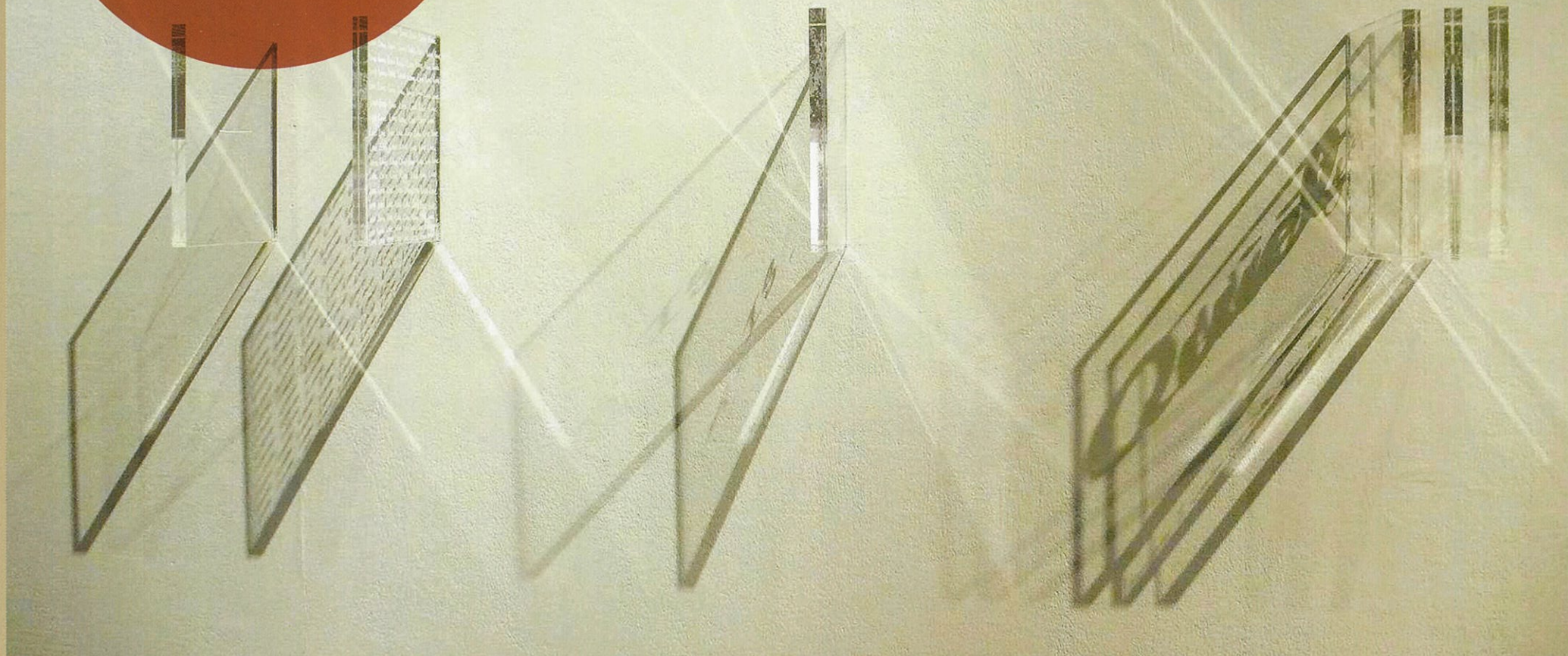
Eric and Ashley Yeo both collaborated to construct a musical instrument which comprised of Q-tips, beautifully detailed glass bottles, LED lights and visual computing which created a lustrous feast of different bright-lit forms and patterns when one interacted with it with accompanying spoons attached.

Simple mats and a model house constructed for *Pink House*, by Marcus Teh and Jodi Cheung, allowed one to peek into a provocative scenario from the red-light district of Singapore. The mats which one stepped on were sound switches that startled audience who were peering in through the tiny windows. Both Jodi and Marcus were unable to join us for the Yogyakarta trip thus they explored the streets of Singapore for inspiration for this project.

Terima Kasih by Tiffane and Vicknes, applied relational aesthetics with interactivity. The work included not just the blinking lights that greeted those who walked up the little stairs of Praxis Space, the tea and savory Indonesian snacks and cakes that were served during the opening, evoked the hospitality and warmth the artists experienced with the Yogyakarta-people.

From purely visual objects, the fusion of concepts, materials and skills from students of the two Faculties resulted in a delightful multi-sensory experience and collaboration that made up *Kriyaworks* - the first official Interactive and Fine Arts collaboration. May there be more such opportunities in the future.

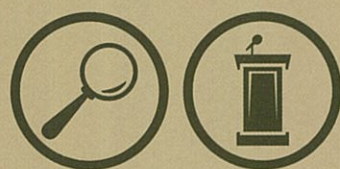
FEATURED
ARTICLE



Symposium: Mar 8 - 10, 2010 | Exhibition: Feb 25 - Mar 12, 2010

STANDING AT THE CROSSROAD OF SINGAPORE ART

by Chen Kerui



In a recent art history tutorial, we had a heated discussion on the permanence of art. A fellow classmate expressed her anger and dismay at the authorities' decision to demolish the mosaic tile mural made by artist Leo Hee Tong. Sprawled between Wisma Atria and the Wheelock Place, one could remember the mural as a historical visual marker in the Orchard Road landscape, which had to be removed in order to make way for what now stood ION shopping mall.



She was definitely not the only one who felt a strong need to safeguard such works. On the other extreme, the picture here illustrates how far an institution would go to protect an artwork. Not only is *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo Da Vinci protected by bulletproof glass, it is also barricaded so that viewers could only marvel at the painting from a distance of at least two meters away. In this instance, such an overemphasis on the permanence of art only seemed to my cynical self that she is protected for her commercial and market value rather than what she originally represents.



She was particularly insistent about protecting such iconic works, as they were physical materialization of our culture, identity and history. Much to her chagrin, she lamented that in Singapore, the intrinsic cultural value of art in this case had been deemed as less than the commercial value of a shopping mall.

In both cases cited earlier, it demonstrated how the cultural value of art had been overshadowed by economic and commercial values in two varying manners. Where art was once made for the people and a reflection of our world, it had now become merely an object valued for a commercial purpose, or worse, devalued and worth replacing by a spanking new mall. As a conclusion to our Art History class, Dr Sian Jay, anthropologist and lecturer, posed a question: "Which is more important, the people or the art?"

The answer to the above question was apparent to me – art has an inequitable relation with people; art exists for people and art can never be more important than people. This answer led me to wonder about the role of art in Singapore today. The fact is that few Singaporeans visit galleries and museums, and art in Singapore plays no more than just a recreational role. With an economic-biased approach, art can still be construed as being a frivolous activity and thus there is barely any level of art appreciation in the population. With such a mindset, Singapore art may be slow to have any sort of significant cultural impact on the nation.

What made the issue trickier is that most Singaporeans are still rather traditional and conventional in their approach towards understanding art. Although some might be familiar with Western textbook-concept of art, many might find the contemporary artworks that are produced today to be less inviting and incomprehensible.





As a newcomer in the field of visual arts, technically speaking, I am both a lay-person and a learned artist-to-be. Standing at the junction of being ignorant and educated, perhaps I am at a good position to look at some issues that plague Singapore art. Having said that, I visited *Object - MA* work-in-progress exhibition and the Master's Symposium held in March 2010, and I was both confusingly inspired and disappointed at the same time.

When I first saw the works at the *Object - MA* work-in-progress exhibition, I could barely understand any of the works there. My lay-person self could not comprehend the works and uncontrollably, I became uninterested. I got nothing out of the short visit to the exhibition. In addition, with a Master's degree acronym slapped to the title, I could not help but to expect much more from the artists.

About two weeks after the opening of the exhibition, I attended the Master's Symposium, *The Master's Tool Will Never Dismantle The Master's House*. Held from 10 to 12 March, it was a three-day marathon of talks by invited local and international speakers as well as dialogues and sharing sessions which were aimed at providing the Master's students a chance to share their work processes and research to the audience.



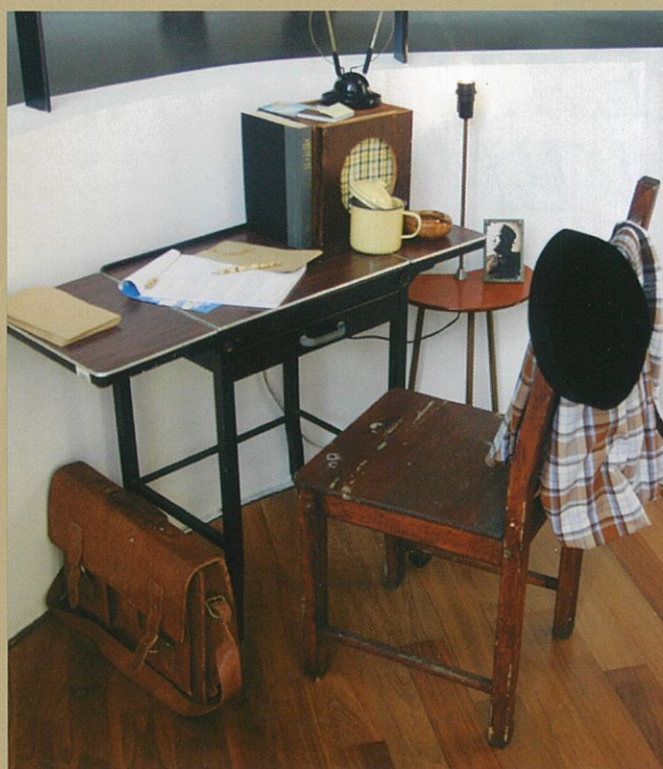
In the first two days of the symposium, local artists Shubigi Rao and Tan Guo Liang as well as international artists Lesley Duxbury, Tony Godfrey and Sand Helsel shared their recent works and approaches and how their works were informed by various stimuli around them. On the final day of the symposium, it was the Masters students' turn to speak about their postgraduate research. This dialogue session was extremely insightful as it not only clarified my misunderstandings with regard to their works, it also helped the artists to iron out some of their research methodologies. My initial cynicism with their works dissipated and was replaced with a deep sense of interest. Here, I would highlight some of the Singaporean candidates whom I paid particular attention to and could relate better to.

Steven Lim's interest in the interactions of form and space stemmed from his years of experience as a ship designer. Informed by such spatial concepts, Steven aimed to create imaginary spaces and volume through the usage of lines. In the Praxis Space, multiple nylon lines were suspended from the beams and then joined and tied to form the contours of a pyramid. This minimal approach to sculpturing a space produced a visual paradox that could have fascinated but perhaps due to the slacking lines, this piece of work was ineffective in portraying the tensions between occupied space and unoccupied space that Steven intended to illustrate. However, no doubt, it did raise certain concepts of representation, through the positive and negative spaces created by the ropes. Being just a work in progress, I look forward to how Steven ultimately solves some of the problems in the portrayal of those spaces.

Rubin Hashim's work was steeped in questioning the perception of truth within historical representation of ethnic and cultural identities. Through the invention of a fictitious character *Rush Bachtiar*, Rubin set out to challenge the process of the archiving of history by creating an alternative reality. In this alternative universe, *Rush Bachtiar* was a leader of a state whose ruling policies were nonsensical and absurd. Through the mimic of a museum-autobiographical-styled installation, the *Rush Bachtiar* universe appeared as a believable but yet futile attempt to construct a political state. Using such a parody, Rubin wished to illustrate how the narrative of history and truth are mere constructions and can thus be dangerously altered.

On a more serious tone, Zaki Razak's works were centred on Hegelian dialectic developments of the thesis and antithesis, and an eventual synthesis to resolve the tensions between them. His series of work involved social experiments, which intended to shift the power between the artist and the viewer. As one of those social experiments, he hired an *abang guard*, or security guard, to patrol the exhibition during the opening at the Praxis Space. For Zaki, the guard was a symbol of the Hegelian antithesis, for he possessed both the symbol of authority and the lowly ranked in the hierarchical system of the institution. The guard provided an imposing intrusion that exerted control over the audience. With direct instructions from Zaki through a walkie-talkie, the guard engaged exhibition visitors, interrupted their thoughts and influenced their opinions during their visit. Through such interventions, Zaki invoked one to reflect on the power structure within the state, and how such power relations affect the way art is being perceived.

The above-mentioned artists were just some of the postgraduate students, who through their works reflect a sense of confusion surrounding the Singaporean identity and a deep sense of distrust and doubt with the narrative of history and the construction of truth; yet most other Singaporeans would not be able to understand and appreciate what they were attempting to do. The irony of creating seemingly incomprehensible artwork frustrates me, especially when such critical discourses and intentions relate closely to us as Singaporeans. It was even more exasperating to realize that many would probably label such works "purposeless", "insignificant" and "uneconomical". Sadly, Singapore art seemed like it could only be another piece of work barricaded behind the bulletproof glass that had lost its intended message, whilst being permanently preserved in its economic objective, or worse, bulldozed over for other more commercially viable options. Caught in the middle, I could not resist feeling helpless, as the promising future of Singaporean artists would be compromised in more than one way or another.



“Art has an inequitable relation with people; art exists for people and art can never be more important than people.”



Oct 8, 2009

ARTIST TALK

—Ming Wong

by Isabelle Desjeux



Most students could not afford to whiz halfway across the world to Venice to see the Biennale. Luckily for us, LASALLE invited the Singapore representative of this year's Biennale (2009), Ming Wong to present his work to a packed room in the College in early October '09.

Through a lively presentation, Wong took his mesmerised audience back in time to the early days of Singapore and Malaysia cinema. In the presentation, Wong quipped that history to him is "anything that happened before I was born", so if we use this definition, his presentation which transported us back to the Golden Era of the '50s and '60s must have been like opening a Christmas present for the audience who were mostly barely over twenty years old.

The Singapore Pavilion in Venice, entitled *Life of Imitation*, he explained, had been turned into a "real" theatre: in a play between fact and fiction, it had visitors confused about whether they were entering a cinema or an art exhibition. The effect was achieved by turning the different rooms of the Pavilion into screening rooms showing his own remake of various movies. Then, the Pavilion itself displayed some real painted cinema posters (painted by the last known billboard painter of Singapore, Neo Chon Teck). On exhibit were also cinema memorabilia such as ticket stubs and old photographs. Finally, on show were also

Wong's collections of polaroids of old cinemas shot throughout Malaysia, documenting the relics of the Golden Era. As he showed these pictures, he told us of his nostalgic journey throughout Malaysia to capture these crumbling buildings.

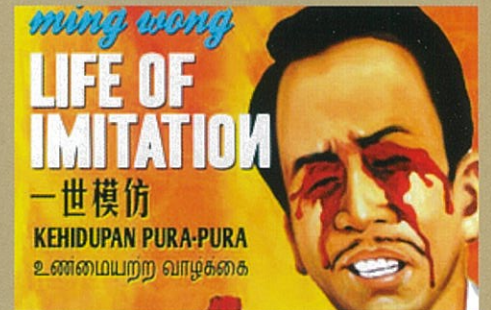
Wong's collaboration with curator, Tang Fu Kuen had resulted in him using movies as his dominant material (with all the paraphernalia attached to it, from making them to viewing them), social interactions and racial stereotypes as the frame and re-telling stories and histories of films as his methodology. These allowed him to revisit the fascinating time-space: Singapore and Malaysia during the 50's-60's and posing the visitors with culturally-specific questions. Wong, born in the 1970s, delivered a history lecture of the period, using the evolution of cinema-making, cinema-watching and associated artifacts as his perspectives. Sitting through his lecture, he shared some surprising facts which he uncovered through his research, and shared nuggets such as how the film industry of those days was managed by the Shaw Brothers, originally from Hong-Kong, who would hire Indian directors to make Malay movies (we all know P. Ramlee, actor-singer-producer-director and much more; but how many young Singaporeans have sat through any of his movies?). Another interesting discovery he shared was that in the 50s and 60s, Singaporeans were avid cinema-goers, with the highest attendance to movie theaters in the world. No doubt, you could certainly tell a lot about that culture by looking at the photographs Wong had taken of the cinemas of the past, they were evidence of a flourishing industry, which had transported many into the world within the movie screen. Before the days of flashy electronic billboards we have today, the movie posters painted for the theater billboards were all painstakingly hand-painted, and many had the inclusion of 4 languages (English, Chinese, Tamil and Jawi) for the already burgeoning multi-cultural audience.

For Wong, that period of history was also a difficult one as it marked a transition for both nations and was a sensitive period of Singapore's history where racial tensions were rife and the political relationship between Malaysia and Singapore was tense. Through this body of work, Wong wanted to transport one back in time and imagine and to recall how people of all races were crammed together into the cinemas to watch locally produced films. Despite the social and political tensions outside the movie theaters, the multi-racial and multi-lingual audience experienced a

momentary dissipation of all social tensions during the short length of the movie.

As Wong remade the movies of the past, he travelled back to the Golden Era of Cinema. In all his self-made movies, only a scene from the movie was chosen for its referential content on a potential race issue and then re-enacted. As we watched his remade movies during the lecture, one noticed instantly that something was amiss, as Wong had decidedly and purposefully cast the wrong actors to play the respective roles chosen for the scene. Excerpted from Wong Kar Wai's 2000 film *In The Mood For Love*, Ming Wong's *In the Love For Mood* introduced an awkward fragility into the scenes by casting a Caucasian actress as Maggie Cheung's character. Through the awkward casting, the actress who did not speak Cantonese had to "ape" the spoken words. In *Life of Imitation* (a reversal of *Imitation of Life* by Douglas Sirk, 1959), even if one had never watched the referenced movies before would know that the actors cast in Ming's movies were of the wrong gender and/or race. In *Four Malay Stories* (referencing P. Ramlee), the artist portrayed himself as all the different characters, taking on roles that were male, female and Malay. The displacement of the actors added an unmistakable latent fragility to all these scenes. Through the dialogue filled with racial content and the apparent 'mistakes' of the gender and stereotyping, the tensions between the actors were heightened and made palpable. One reacted to the dialogue strongly as that was the only authentic thing left from the original movie. The rest (scene, actor...) were just there to reference the dialogue.

In the Singapore Pavilion at Venice, each of these above-mentioned movies was set up in an elaborate manner. For example, there were mirrors in the room of *Life of Imitation*. The other 2 movies were played on multiple screens in their respective rooms. These elements were well planned in order to heighten the confusion and the multiplicity of characters as one entered his screening rooms. However, as many of us in the audience were not at Venice to experience the actual work, it was difficult for us to understand by virtue of his descriptions alone. Luckily, *Life of Imitation* will soon have a homecoming exhibition at SAM (Singapore Art Museum) so one can definitely experience first hand, the multiplicity of the characters and perspective of the movies. I look forward to that and to viewing his latest work, *Life and Death in Venice* (after Visconti's 1971 *Death in Venice*), showing at Hermès Liat Towers in Singapore from 1st April to 2 May 2010.



7 Jun - 22 Nov, 2009

DREAMING IN/ OF VENICE

—La Biennale di Venezia 2009

by Hafiz Bin Syed Nasir



How would you react to news that you have been selected to go for an internship in Venice, a city steeped in history and once proclaimed to be the 'most beautiful city built'?

Coupled with the fact that I had never been to Europe before, the realization of the trip did not hit me until minutes before the touch-down at Marco Polo Airport. Everything about Venice points to a glorified past, one filled with military prowess, artistic renaissance and religious underpinnings. Then it hits you as you alight from the bus and prepare to board the vaporetto (motorised waterbuses) – tourists everywhere, gift shops and hopeful buskers lining the cobbled stones walkway. Welcome to the carnival!

Perhaps to explain the carnival-esque nature of the Venice Biennale, one has to look towards the circumstances surrounding its very first edition. An idea proposed by the City Council, it was to celebrate the silver anniversary of King Umberto and Margherita of Savoy¹. Thus the inaugural International Art Exhibition of the City of Venice (later called the Biennale because it took place every two years) was launched on 30th April 1895 to much fanfare and pomp with more than 200,000 of the Venetian public gracing the exhibition. Of course, the Biennale's carnival-esque character now does not seem to be very much different than the inaugural one.

I have to admit at this point of time that I am going to wax lyrical about Venice the city than the Biennale itself in this article. Yes it is the Venice Biennale, and Singapore Pavilion which featured Ming Wong's imaginative works under Tang Fu Kuen's curatorial direction that deservedly won the Special Mention. However, many publications had featured – for better or worse – exhibitions at the Biennale, and the award-winning show. In addition, *Life of Imitation* will also be shown at the Singapore Art Museum till August 2010 so I am sure it will get its fair share of reviews and publications back in Singapore. With this note, this article is essentially going to be my musings on the encounters with Venice, the people and places that made it memorable; a cultural city perhaps Singapore can find striking similarities to.

As a maritime superpower in the early Medieval period, Venice was known to be a playground for the rich and influential who transited there from other parts of Europe. It still maintained that reputation today and the legacy of its past continues to be much alive where art aficionados, cultural buffs and celebrities made pilgrimages to the city every two years. Very few native Venetians really live there, with many making pit stops during the summer only. I doubt I had met any local Venetians during my 2-month stay in the city. I suppose it would be safe to say that the locals made up only a quarter of the population, compared to a comparatively large number of temporary residents – tourists and foreigners, that inhabit the small city. This is not to say that it is a negative trait; in fact, there lies the strength and character of the city. Perhaps this is not surprising looking at Venice's place in history. A leading maritime power in the Adriatic, Venetian merchants during the period between 11th – 14th centuries saw increased trade with the Mediterranean region, especially after being granted trading concessions within the Byzantine Empire. Venice's power and influence extended into the religious domain when they funded the Crusades, either through providing soldiers or their renowned fleet of ships.

Through this exchange of cultures, which might include 'conquest loot' and trading, Venice became a cultural melting pot. This was evident from the architecture of the buildings as one walked through

the various narrow walkways (yes, walking is the best way to encounter Venice if one does not want to get 'ripped off' by the gondolas). Traces of Byzantine mosaics exist alongside European frescoes in what could be best described as, visually arresting. Every trip to a museum required an extended coffee and cigarette session afterwards, necessary for the fresh graduate whose previous encounters with classical European artworks, had only been through his required reading lists.

Amidst artworks by the Venetian school of the 16th century which includes Giorgione, Titian, Veronese and Tintoretto, pockets of modernity also exist alongside what is sometimes also known as the 'City of Museums'. An example is the Peggy Guggenheim museum. A larger-than-life figure in the post-war art scene, Peggy's collection features a who's who of the modern art movements, from Cubism to Pop Art. Previously only encountering European artworks as images on the page, nothing beats confronting the real works like *Kandinsky's Upward (Emperor)*, *Mondrian's Composition No.1 With Grey and Red* and *Duchamp's Nude (Study)*. What began as Peggy's residence along the Grand Canal, the Palazzo Venier dei Leoni now stands as a legacy to her contribution to Venice's cultural tourism.

Another example of Venice's lucrative cultural tourism is the most powerful person in modern art, the billionaire Francois Pinault. Founder of PPR, a

French multinational holding company specializing in retail shops and luxury brands, he is widely known as the owner of Gucci and the auction house Christies. He launched his second museum in June 2009, Punta della Dogana, where he showed more than 200 works by 60 artists in a 2-venue exhibition called *Mapping the Studio*, the former customs house is now the permanent site for his collection display.

The above examples were just some examples of the bewildering array of Venice's cultural power-play. Does this make Venice a cultural haven or is it just a cultural tourism enterprise which will have its expiry date? No one knows. Just like the water levels of the city, no one knows for sure how long it would take for Venice to be submerged by water. In the meantime, this enchanting city, despite all its cliches continues to wield its smokescreen over tourists and sojourners alike.

What about Venice did I like most? I am not sure. My memories of it are hazy but I remembered visiting it sometime last year.

¹ Supposedly the pizza Margherita, with its red tomatoes, green basil and white cheese, representing the Italian flag, was named after this ardent supporter of the arts and culture.

² Francois Pinault was listed no.1 in ArtReview Magazine's Power 100 for 2 years running, 2006-07.

Mar 1 - 5, 2010

TRIP TO JOGYAKARTA

by Hana Nicole Borlos



The experience of traveling to a new country, in a way, never really bring anything else new. There are the same old pitfalls of adjusting to new time zones, having to live out of a suitcase for the projected duration, the challenges of digesting perhaps new types of food (both literally and figuratively). In a bit of a U-turn fashion, the Level 2 Fine Arts class trip to Yogyakarta, together with Level 1 Media Arts students gave way to experiences that were extremely memorable.

Day one was off to a frenetic start and certainly draining as we transferred from plane to bus with only a few minutes to freshen up and set our bags down in our hotel rooms. However in retrospect I felt like it was one of the more significant parts of the journey. Despite being sleep-deprived, our minds were teeming with excitement and curiosity as to what we might be doing in the course of the next few days. It was not long before we grew accustomed to the journeys travelling in the bus, staring out the window and taking in the vast new scenery.

At our first stop, we went to a traditional batik factory, we found ourselves pleasantly bombarded by an array of colors and textures. Of course, this was no industrial, metal lined 'factory' with whirring machines at work, but rather in this space were three quiet women immersed in their craft. In case one is unfamiliar with batik artwork, it's a Javanese technique where wax is used to create patterns on a fabric base, and wax-

resistant dye can then create layers of colours whilst being contained by the wax. This was my first proper encounter with the process of batik and I immediately found it an intriguing process, watching the three women chit chat in what was to me a foreign tongue as they gracefully dripped wax and created lines and patterns on the fabric.

When we reached our next destination, the sky was getting dark and it was almost time for dinner. A few feet away from where we were to dine, was a grassy field and far off in the horizon were the mystical and enchanting Prambanan temples sitting monumentally yet silently under the sky. After playing our parts as tourists snapping photos of the temples, we sat and enjoyed our dinner as a group. Having lived in Singapore for about 3 years now, I have had a taste of Indonesian food at the hawker centers and food courts. Yet nothing could ever really compare to food straight from the source, where the taste can be said to be incredibly authentic.

After dinner we were free to explore on our own while also being reminded that the next day would begin early. A group of us walked to the nearby mall and loaded up on souvenirs and even tried our luck at bargaining. Crossing the street from the hotel was a precarious yet interesting experience since there were no traffic lights and we had to dance with the speeding scooters as we dashed to return to the hotel.

On day two we were brought to go on a tour of the Sultan's palace, where we strolled through rooms of historical artifacts and cultural treasures. As we were told we could not step onto certain parts of the palace grounds in respect of the Sultan, I felt that restrictions such as these somehow played a part in adding to the richness of the sacred grounds.



Our next stop led us to one of the more memorable events: hiking up the Borobudur monument. In contrast to the Prambanan temples, which we were limited to looking from afar, we were able to trek up the stairs and corridors of the monument to the very top. The winding tiers and steep stairs filled with multiple relief carvings were certainly worth paying close attention to, and as we reached the summit we were rewarded with a gorgeous view of the entire site.

The rich experience of this trip was certainly well complemented by the local people. Their graciousness and kindness made an impact on all of us and the memory of their helpfulness and friendliness as they helped guide us from the markets back to our buses will always remain.

On the final day of the trip, we visited an *ISI, Indonesia Institute of the Arts*. During the visit, it was interesting to note that the works we saw in the college were very detailed and technically skilled and seemed to focus especially on craftsmanship. As this trip was like a small vacation from our classes and lectures in college, it was interesting to experience how other arts schools conduct their own classes and use different artistic approaches. The facility was abundant with students' work, and though not as

sleek a building as opposed to LASALLE's architecture, it was a very serene, humble and personable place to hone one's craft and skill.

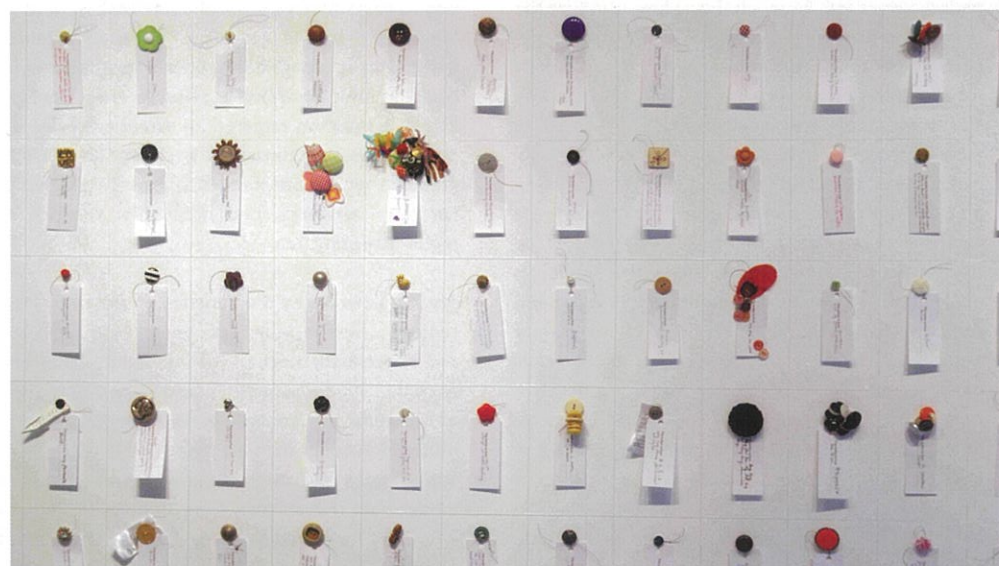
For some students, this trip to Indonesia literally meant visiting home, as many of our classmates are Indonesians, but in a way there was a tangible sense of home for all of us, even for an international student such as myself. It could be said that the reason for this lies in the welcoming personality of the locals, or maybe the humble yet breathtaking nature of places we visited. Either way, whether the trip was really a trip home or a new experience, we were all still visitors to a humble yet culturally rich part of Indonesia.



Jan 21- Feb 10, 2010

THE BUTTON PROJECT

by Bridget Tay



Adeline Kueh's latest solo exhibition, *The Button Project*, sat in a quiet corner of Lasalle at the TriSpace gallery. Emanating a comfortable ambience as one walked in, one was faced with myriad buttons which were donated mostly by strangers and arranged in an invisible periodic table, hung apart from each other. The buttons were accompanied with tags, which narrated the different histories of its past owners. On the left side of the gallery, one encountered an assortment of buttons piled in a poetic fashion at the corner, calling one's attention to Adeline's homage to Felix Gonzalez Torres, and especially his work named *Untitled (Public Opinion)*.

In the middle of the exhibition was a quaint green button-making machine aged and woken from its sleepy retirement, which Adeline made buttons in exchange for anyone who offered their own button for the installation. Often, one can spot Adeline in TriSpace bent over in casual comfort making buttons.

At times when she was not there, a video played on loop of the artist herself making the buttons.

The buttons installed in the TriSpace were donated from the public as Adeline placed donation jars calling for used buttons in public such as cafes like 15 Minutes. With such an intervention with the public for their contributions, the project was executed in this manner to create awareness and to also involve the community in the creation of the installation. For Adeline, the exhibition acted as an initial platform for her to carry out the second phase of the project. As a follow up to this show, she plans to develop this endeavor further by evolving the button project from a simple installation artwork to larger one where general public or corporate companies can get involve through pledging a token sum for a button. She is hoping that this pledge could reach out and benefit the arts community in the form of subsidies and bursary to art students.

Whilst in the TriSpace one afternoon, I started to ponder about the ideas that surround *The Button Project*. The button is an item which most people would consider as a gadget crucial to most clothing, either through its functional purpose of holding up the trousers or as a decoration to adorn the blouse. Because of its smallness (in relative to the rest of the clothes) and its unassuming function, hardly anyone would stop to consider the type of meaning one could attach to a humble button. However, as opposed to viewing the button as any other everyday readymade functional object, the button in this context is significant to Adeline as it reminded her of her childhood where she used to admire and help her seamstress mother with her sewing. For Adeline, the button bears special significance and is the connection that she had forged in relation to her childhood.

We must not also forget that the nature of the buttons in the TriSpace were also a contribution of peoples' personal buttons, which were given as a form of exchange for the ones which Adeline made. Herein, the buttons are more than just an object of memory, it also celebrates the act of giving. The buttons become the object through which the exchange could take place. *The Button Project* also questioned the relationship of readymade objects used in the ritual of everyday dressing and art. It invoked one to reconsider the idea of possession and acquisition whilst at the same time, explored the subverted functionality of mass produced objects. *The Button Project* challenged the individual's notion of certainties in the interactive conceptual installation involving ready-mades. The invoking of the poetics in this exhibition allowed one to truly bear witness to a very literal sense of the term "meaningful exchanges".

Feb 05, 2010

ART TALK

—An interview with artist
Lim Shing Ee

by Rajinder Jit Singh



We had a wonderful addition to our annual calendar of events at LASALLE this quarter. Artist Lim Shing Ee returned home to her alma mater to tell us a little about her art and to open her solo exhibition, *Drawing Circus* at the Sculpture Square. I managed to snatch a few moments with her for a quick chat.

Shing Ee did her Bachelor's Degree in painting at LASALLE College of Arts in Singapore before going to Japan to complete her Postgraduate studies at Musashino Art University, Tokyo, on a JCCI Art scholarship. She had exhibited widely in Singapore, Japan and countries such as Philippines and Bangladesh. I remembered first seeing her work at the superb *Fiction@Love* show at the Singapore Art Museum in 2006. Shing Ee's work ranged from drawings to large 3-dimensional sculptures/installations and she had this quiet way about her which manifested itself in her work. You can see some of her work at www.kazu-shing.com

R: Hello Shing Ee. Could you help me chart your journey from your LASALLE days to where you are today in terms of your art? Were you already working with "small furry creatures" and "shadows" even then?

S: During the first three years, I was painting and drawing with a style that was surrealistic (an influence of Rene Magritte) and sometimes abstract. I had a series of 'happy' paintings with organic forms (shaped like sausages) that were all striped. At that time I was inspired by Daniel Buren and Yayoi Kusama as well.

Towards the end of the third year at LASALLE, I started making puffy wall works. I stretched fabrics over canvas stretchers and stuffed them with cotton wool or poly-fiber so they looked like pillows. The corners were sewn such that they were long and pointed. I was into the idea of fetish then.

In the final undergraduate year, I made more objects than paintings. I was into the idea of temporality. I made lots and lots of tiny objects by layering balloons and stuffing them with cotton. The whole process of making multiples by hand has got to do with fetish as well. Everything was brightly colored and blobby.

R: Tell us about some of what you remember of LASALLE. How did it nurture you into becoming the artist that you are today?

S: I have many fond memories of LASALLE. I joined LASALLE after Junior College - so it was a bit of a culture shock for me. I was inspired by Milenko who was my drawing teacher during my first year. I remember that he used to play his guitar in class while we were drawing. At LASALLE, it was wonderful because I could be around people with the same artistic interest. I found my identity as an artist during my days at LASALLE.

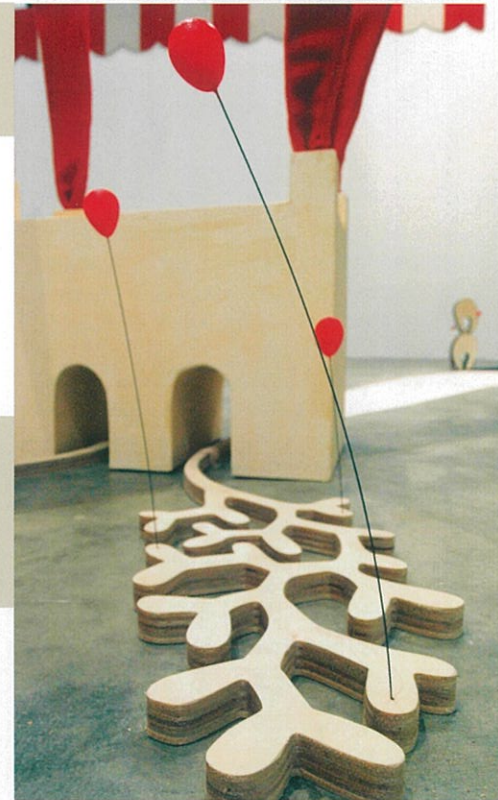
R: Upon discovering your associations with Japan, your audience tends to associate your work with Japanese preoccupation with daintiness, pop and fetish. Are they wrong in making these associations? Are there any strong influences that shaped your art to what it is today?

S: They are not wrong to associate my work with the fetish and pop culture of Japan. Even though I do not consciously adopt specific traits in my work, living in Japan makes its influence inevitable.

At the beginning, I was entranced by Surrealist painters especially Rene Magritte. And when I started to make installation work, I loved and still like to look at works of Jessica Stockholder and Mark Manders. I think Mark Manders' work is very intriguing. The visual and tactility of his work is remarkable.

R: Sometime I think of your work as being the work of a surrealist artist involved in something like "character design"? Some of the shapes in your sculptures, your installations, your drawing seem to deserve a name, a family and a history? Your characters might appear in a circus or a freak show and might inspire someone like Tim Burton to make a superb surreal animation movie with you as the puppeteer? Can you comment?

S: I love Tim Burton! I have watched all his movies and I love his animated characters and the colours he employs. I hope someday to be involved in a stop motion animation production. I have even dreamt of working in a studio making Muppets.



However, within the realm of art, I prefer my objects to remain nameless and ambiguous. I like them being 'in-between' - something undefinable.

R: How far are you concerned with making your art seductive? Your work is generally quite pretty and is difficult to miss. Do you consciously engineer this seductive quality?

S: I do not intentionally make my work look pretty. However, I enjoy looking at attractive things, so my work has a certain appearance or style developed in the sense of what is attractive to me. I had tried making messy or grotesque works but it did not make sense to me and no matter how much I tried, it always appeared forced. I felt like I was lying to myself and to my audience. I think when it comes to making a good piece of work, honesty is important.



“We tend to forget that we have our own time”

– A reminder for us from Krisna Murti

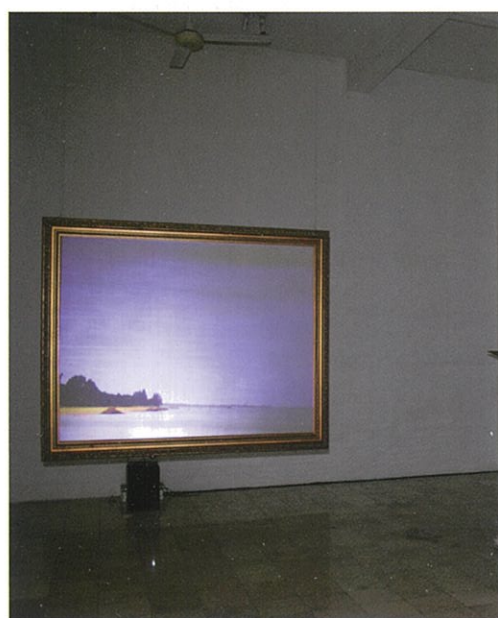


Mar 23, 2010

ART TALK

—Krisna Murti

by Muhd Zaki Bin
Abdul Razak/Cui Liang



The airplanes flew in from the right side of the screen repeatedly and disappeared... a line of dancers moved at an extremely slow speed...

These were the apparent visual cues of Krisna Murti's video works that explored the idea of time. The repetitive flight of the airplanes and the deliberate slow movement of the dancers might agitate viewers to boredom or probably remind the viewers of the pace of time that we neglect. In a fast-paced society, time is designed or structured to maintain or boost the economy – the 'rise and shine', the 9 to 5 working regime, the shopping hours, the 'trim and fit' program, the sports arena and the sleeping curfew. All these according to Krisna are traits of our 'industrial' time. We seem to have forgotten 'the time' for ourselves – the time to question and reflect. Perhaps, this is the basis of his artistic practice to provide an anti-thesis of the constructed time we are indulging and his choice of using video as a tool to capture and empower the viewers towards participation rather than passivity.

Krisna, an Indonesian/Javanese of Balinese descent, is fortunate to have an artistic lineage whereby he has a family who is very supportive of his artistic career. His mother, an artist herself who has exhibited internationally, has been an influential figure in his life as an artist. However, what motivated and inspired Krisna to become an artist besides the influence of his family is a search for self-identity. Just like

our sentiments with regards to 'identity crisis', it is unsettling for him to pigeonhole his root culture of either Javanese or Balinese. Therefore, for Krisna, art paved the way of an attempt in defining his identity. And, along the way, as if it was 'love at first sight', he found the video camera – a powerful device not only to document reality but also to capture and project his 'impressionistic' yet antidotal vision.

'Video Art is flexible...Video Art substitutes conventional media...'. These, respectively, were rhetoric from Krisna which affirmed the choice of medium that he would undertake for his artistic career. Krisna centralized it as a major vehicle to his artistic practice, as it was not commonly practiced in Indonesia when he first started using it in 1990 and also due to the short history of Video Art both within the local and global contexts. He saw the phenomenon – in technical as well as conceptual terms, as possessing the ability to capture the visibility and invisibility of the subject and object. Video Art to him, could trigger memories or experiences in the mind. He felt that Video Art is strongly related to particular elements of Asian philosophy as he compared the idea of visible and invisible with the notion of Yin and Yang – the acceptance of differences which blur the borders of different art forms such as music, painting, performance or architecture. He emphasized this point to the idea of shadow – referencing the history of *Wayang Kulit* (Shadow Puppet), a traditional form of art which is common in Indonesia. As he further asserted, what is significant is not the craft or the intricate visuals of the 2-dimensional puppets, but the essence that lies in the shadows, gestures and the story-telling process which is both intangible and invisible.

Practicing as a multimedia artist for many years, Krisna has his own ideals – to react to the phenomenon of manufactured media by 'national bodies' worldwide. In some of his art works that were presented such as *Airplane, 2007* and *Empty Time, 2002*, he used the idea of spa treatments to counter the media indoctrination that had been pervading the public minds. It seemed that his role as a facilitator in most of his artwork is to pamper or neutralize the minds of the audience and sooth their eyes from the piercing propaganda of the media. However, the above-mentioned artworks that he presented seemed to lack the socio-political ideals that he was interested in – the degree of engagement was not that effective. Could it be that the artworks were deliberately designed in such a way that its socio-

political ideals were embedded under the therapeutic trance? Perhaps the coherence of the artworks could be more relevant to his ingenious comparative study of Impressionist paintings and the video camera.

Krisna's amalgamation of the painting and the video camera postulated an interesting comparison, that of a study of Impressionist paintings and Video Art. The traits of impressionist paintings specifically Monet's *Impression, Soleil Levant (Impression, Sunrise)* which emphasized light and its changing qualities and the inclusion of the experience of movement seem to match the function of video's ability to capture real-time moving images and then to have them recorded for archiving or for post-artistic reproductions. He asserted that what is secondary is to preserve and display an image whereas what is important is to relay its content with reference to its context. This without doubt captured the spirit and projected the credo in Krisna's artistic practice.

That brought us to the question that we tend to pose to most artists - "What is the nature of your art practice?" Krisna believed that artists who do not engage the public and encourage any degree of participation are not fulfilling their role as artists. As an advocate of New-Media Art particularly Video Art, he also directs his interest and looks forward to an optimistic attitude towards the phenomenon of the internet. For him, the internet because of its accessibility, presents a new possibility – where the public can take part in the process of breaking the conventions of video technologies. It might create a new ideology or an 'art of persuasion' that could distract the audience with an influx of entertainment. Through this spirit of subversion in video technologies, artist as well as the public can express or represent the other side of life.

Having lived in Bali for many years, where the people offer prayers to their gods as an everyday ritual, Krisna's sensibility with art had been built through those routine since he was young. The offerings resonate his artistic practice as 'a way of life'. He searches for 'a way of life' through art. He believes that Video Art would most likely be his lifelong companion throughout his artistic journey. This is perhaps the best way to represent Krisna's reminder for us just as how he often referred to the works and words of Bill Viola:

“Video is not what you see, but something you have to construct in your own mind.”



Faculty of Fine Arts' artist talks was lucky to receive a number of eminent speakers throughout the 2009-2010 program. Among the many interesting talks, two captured more specifically my attention.

The closing talk for semester 1 was by Stephen Mulqueen, an artist from New Zealand who made a transit through Singapore whilst on his way back home from Europe. The explanations and reasons for him making this stopover

were weaved into a compelling presentation that highlighted his multi-layered practice dealing with the negotiation of an array of intersecting cultural histories; whilst standing at the crossroad of jewellery design, sculpture, ethnology, language, history, archaeology and geography.

A smith by training, Mulqueen saw his initial jewellery practice evolved into sculptures when he began creating works and installations often made up of aluminium. The reason for his use of such a metal, usually atypical of fine arts practices, is to be found in his birthplace, the little town of Invercargill in the southernmost part of New Zealand. In Invercargill, a giant smelter which processed aluminium began operating in 1971 during his youth. The smelter was established over an archaeological site where for hundreds of years, a sophisticated Neolithic Maori manufacturing economy had thrived.

At the time of colonisation and construction of Invercargill, all the Maori names that designated the different features and sites of the surrounding landscape were erased from the map to be replaced by British names. Mulqueen then embarked on a historical/linguistic research to trace back those names

that were related to Maori culture or indigenous animals and vegetation. From this research, the 'artist as archaeologist' then created objects and installations giving forms to those forgotten names through the use of aluminium – the metal that had taken over the space where they were originally located.

As for the reason for his stopover in Singapore, Mulqueen let on that the British surveyor who had laid the plan of Invercargill and drawn the map of the region and its new names was none other than John Turnbull Thomson, who around the 1850s played an equally decisive role in the early urban development of Singapore. Thus, by visiting Singapore, Mulqueen was hoping to make some important contacts that would allow him to come back here for further investigation and research on the man who had played such a pivotal role in his hometown. Lets hope that the few contacts that could be made during this brief stay here will result in a future visit and a new powerful body of works.

I had a direct hand in the organisation of another talk which featured Russel Wong, whose visit to LASALLE was part of the workshop held by the renowned photographer for the photography major Fine Arts students. At times described as a 'The Richard Avedon of Asia' for the stark yet powerful simplicity of his portrait shots, Wong's high profile career had seen him photograph celebrities around the world.

Although his personal work as a fine art photographer included large format Asian landscapes imbued with a peaceful atmosphere, there is no doubt that Wong

is first and foremost a 'people' photographer. The congenial artist and his personable character allowed him to connect easily with people, which explained how he could capture personal expressions such as his famous portrait of a laughing Lee Kuan Yew. Working most often with a simple set of lighting, the art of Wong stood largely with him striking up and establishing contact with the person in front of the camera that made us forget about the mechanics vital in the production of the image.

Maybe the most interesting part of the talk was his explanation on how a simple Singapore boy who grew up in East Coast could have ended up photographing Hollywood celebrities without having really made any plans of doing so in the beginning. His somewhat accidental career took off whilst photographing sports activities on the campus of the University of Oregon where he had gone to study business, capturing luminaries such as Carl Lewis, Mary Decker and John McEnroe before they had even began making a name for themselves in the international sports arena.

Most telling could be the fact that his very first published photograph was selected and printed on the cover of an international magazine, a shot of Sebastian Coe, famous British runner now turned politician, taken during a conference given on a campus. This particular photograph, which bore the hallmark of Wong's highly contrasted lighting and strong shadows, was taken with small flash and cheap camera. Given the opportunity to present it to the publicity team of Nike, then a rising brand, the shot had won him a pair of fancy sports shoes - a fantastic fee for the then-student that he was. When Coe was named "1981 Athlete of the Year", the magazine *Track and Field News* selected Wong's photograph to be printed on its cover, the first of many he would shoot in his career. Being at the right place at the right time, there is after all not other simpler secrets to the art of Wong.

Other artists who had given talks in the Faculty within the 2009/10 academic year also include:

- Slobodan Trajkovic (SERBIA)
- Jann Rosen-Queralt (US)
- Raimundas Malasaukas (US)
- Heman Chong (SINGAPORE)
- Patrick Storey (SINGAPORE/US)
- Henry Lydiate (UK)
- Sam Durant (US)



O&T 22, 2009 / Mar 24, 2010

ART TALK

—Russel Wong & Stephen Mulqueen

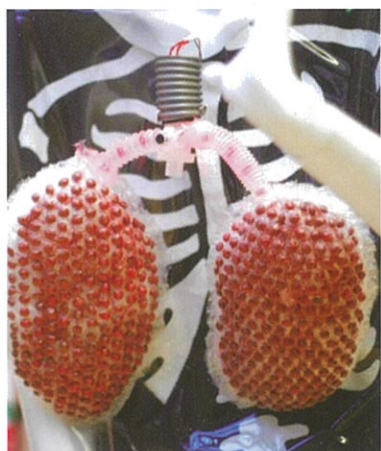
by Gilles Massot



Mar 22 - 29, 2010

MOMENT OF TRUTH

by Ruben Pang



Part 1. The Boring Intro

Moments was part of a series of events put together by the 3rd year Arts Management students from LASALLE. These students were graded according to the success of these events and the grades were a part of their final year project's score.

Part 2. The Unstoppable Team

Playing the role of eager young talents waiting to be discovered are the fortunate students from the Faculty of Fine Arts. Under the supervision and guidance of our Fine Arts lecturer Betty Susiarjo, these young artists worked with the Arts Management students to put together an exhibition. And in the course, probably also found out why they needed each other so much.

Part 3. Tension Builds

Together, the team of students understood that an exhibition really was as easy as putting a painting up on a wall and then turning on the lights. But what if there were no walls? What if there were no lights?

Enter contractors. They will solve everything for approximately \$20,000. Life is simple, just click 'buy it now'. But what if there exists in the dystopian reality, a concept called the budget? This, ladies and gentlemen, is what the students of today are prepared for – the challenges of life.

The collective put their heads together, and prayed.

Part 4. A Series of Unfortunate Events, and the Dilemma that ensued ...

1. The people in charge of the venue decided that they were going to lease out the spaces where the exhibition was supposed to be held.
2. A compromise was reached and a new venue was selected.
3. However, a group of workers punched a toilet-sized hole in one of the walls in the newly designated space.
4. There was poor lighting and adjustments were forbidden by the venue.
5. Venue management requested that electric circuits had to be drawn out by professionals should any adjustments be attempted.
6. That could have cost about \$7,000.
7. The delivery people damaged the equipment they were supposed to deliver.
8. And they also stuffed paintings (meant for the exhibition) alongside heavy equipment.
9. The budget blew itself up.
10. Too many people did not speak English.
11. Arts Management students suffered in silence.

It seemed, this time, incompetence had prevailed.

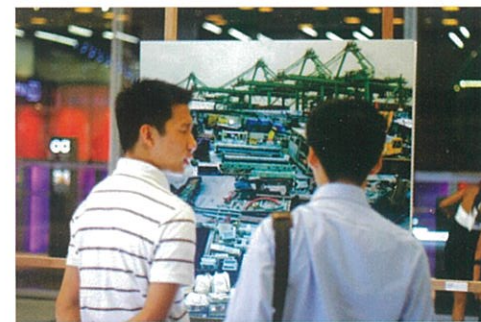
Part 5. An Unexpected Twist

Everything seemed to be back to square one...

The good news was that since nothing had been done yet, the team could now look for a venue that actually had walls and lights! That way, the original idiot-proof plan of putting a painting on a wall and switching on the lights could be adhered to. Not this time. This story took on an unexpected turn. Students these days, audacious beings they are. When the going gets tough...

So they stuck to the venue and prayed some more. The following events proved that collective prayers were more effective than rational problem solving, especially in an art school.

Miracle man Frayn Yong, a fellow classmate, came to the rescue. He designed and fabricated the entire set-up. His contractors were affordable. Lights had to be adjusted, but that would mean breaking the venue's rules. They prayed and it magically adjusted itself. Why had they not thought of this from the start?



Part 6. The Moral of the Story

The exhibition essentially set itself up all the time, every time. Such is the omnipotent power of art. *Moments* was a success, the buffet table gathered a crowd that worried the Fire Safety Department and a picture of everyone eating expensive sponsored crackers was taken. Ladies and gentlemen, gather around the Guest-of-Honor for the opening speech, this is the moment of truth. He said, "I have always believed that art is only as strong as its patrons and supporters."

End.



H: Charles, you have a wealth of experience with some very important artistic and curatorial projects in Abu Dhabi, Europe, parts of Asia, Australia and America, so why this decision to come to Singapore and to LASALLE?

C: I have always been interested in this region, and I also knew about The Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) when Eugene Tan was the director, and had always admired what it was able to do. If you look at the neighboring South-east Asia countries such as Indonesia, Vietnam, Burma, Cambodia and Thailand, there are not many art spaces in their major cities. What are active, however, are their commercial art spaces. So for Singapore, ICA represents something important for that reason, for it is a space that is dedicated to contemporary art practice. It should focus primarily on Singapore, whilst providing points of reference or comparative points of participation for artists in the region and internationally.

At the same time, what also drew me to LASALLE is the President's vision for the college and ICA, which are very positive. I am inspired by his view for a larger discourse to take place here. This ambition is important for the continuity and expansion of the college and ICA, where both aspire to be engaged in a broader appreciation in the scope of contemporary practice.

You can say that I am attracted to that potential of LASALLE to develop its projects in sync with those aspirations and ambitions. As an arts college, the contexts of which those projects emerged are very different from that which developed in the museums. Thus, in that sense, the theory and praxis of art within this context have a stronger dialogue. With that, I think LASALLE ought to strengthen its Art History education and have it better integrated into the programmes. ICA will be the space that sees the kind of practice that is different and distinct, and at the same time, witness the new artistic approaches in Southeast Asia. I would like it to be an artistic laboratory whilst art history would be the toolbox.

That said, I relish the idea that LASALLE have such aspirations and acknowledges a commitment to experimentation, innovation and exploration for it to grow as a dynamic art centre and college.

H: Are there any aspects of Singapore art that are intriguing enough for you to write and comment about?

C: That is too early for me to say. I am sure that there are and I am hopeful about it, so let's see.

H: Singapore is a pretty young country with a relatively short history, and an even shorter history of the arts. Do you think this lack of history is a liability?

C: I do not think there is a lack of history in Singapore. What I think many people here are experiencing is a sense of displacement, as there are many people coming from various countries to this island state. It is true that Singapore have a relatively short history

as a nation state; but this so-called lack should not be the goal of artistic practices, as art is not just about national identities.

H: I agree with you on that. However, I cannot help but notice that there seemed to be a trend that some students have an overwhelming desire to raise the issue of national identities. These issues invariably influenced the way they make their art. What do you think about that?

C: Well, I think the issue of national identity can be the underlying concern for some artists' works, but it need not necessarily be the driving artistic practice. Just look at Russia. In 1989, it was reconstituted as a country and no longer the Soviet Union, but when you look at the art produced in the past 20 years, those issues of national identity and what it had gone through as a country does not define its strength in their practice now.

H: We spoke about artistic styles during our luncheon, and we can recognize say, a Japanese aesthetic, Scandinavian style and Chinese Style, do you think there is a distinctive Singapore style? And if there is a lack of it, do you think we ought to have a Singapore artistic identity or could this lack be an asset?

C: I think this question is quite similar to the one before. What you are saying here is that the artistic identity should be tied into national identity for it to be meaningful. Again I think that it is not important. What is more important, however, is the quality of the practice. When you put things together, there is a mixture of the separate components that are different and diverse, but when joined together they are the same as the others. The distinction thus, is the different ways one put things together.

From 1984 to 2000, China experienced a tremendous creative moment. There were primarily 3 generation of artists: Experimental and performance art dominated the scene in the early 80s; a revival in Paintings which look critically at China in the late 80s; and video, film and media based works in the 90s. However, after 2000, the market played an increasing pivotal role in the artistic landscape in the country, and that market wants national identity. The Chinese artworks we see flooding into the market today is due to that. The stereotype of a national identity is detrimental to creative practice.

The same case can be seen for Japan too. From 1951 to 1970, Japan was extremely experimental in its arts. The 1970 Expo in Osaka changed all that. It was disastrous to the art. In both China and Japan cases, national identity imposes itself and banishes the experimental.

H: The issue of the national identity in Singapore is always going to be a challenge here. With Singapore and art having an uneasy relationship, where do you think LASALLE - a place of education and experimentation can position itself within this context?

C: LASALLE should ideally have the liberty to explore with guidance. What is attractive about the college is the possibilities and potentiality that it possesses, which I feel is inhibited in the museum context. LASALLE

as an education centre should be the backbone for those creative aspiration and possibilities. Much like what Bauhaus, or Black Mountains were which stressed upon the deep understanding of materials, but leaving enough freedom for the individual to manipulate them.

H: That's great hearing all that from you, Charles. I would like to ask, since you are the new director of ICA, what are some of your plans for the coming years for the galleries?

C: I will like to stay true to ICA's mandate to respond closely to the needs of the various faculties in the college. So, for ICA Galleries 1 and 2, there will be predominantly an expansive programme where major exhibitions will be held. Essentially, the programme aims at capturing exploratory and experimental works at local, regional and international level that includes also contemporary music, design, fashion and performing arts.

As for the remaining 4 spaces - Brother Joseph McNally Space, Project Space, Praxis Space and Earl Lu Gallery, they will be more measured towards the needs of the college, as well as exhibiting the collection of LASALLE. I think Earl Lu Gallery has great potential to be really expansive as the audience traffic for this gallery is also good. For ICA Galleries 1 and 2, we would think of better ways to make them more visible.

One of the other things that we are planning for ICA is to better engage the media and to assist them in understanding the missions and vision of LASALLE and ICA. The press here can be stronger and better informed about the arts. They need to realize that art is a space of imagination and values engagement and critical support, and that it is also a very different field from sports or crime. Thus, I would like to communicate to the media that art is the essential cornerstone in the growth of society in its ability to exercise our imagination and thereby nourish our creative wellbeing. I also hope to highlight that ICA's mission is different from the museums and commercial galleries, so we would need to engage them on that and have an open dialogue. The upcoming LASALLE Graduation Show will be a very opportune time for us to do that, and perhaps we will organize a press conference to communicate those aspirations.

H: I am certainly looking forward to ICA engaging closely with the media to communicate our ideologies. Speaking of plans, since ICA used to have a small publication and publishing wing in the old campus at Goodman Road, are there anything like that in the pipeline?

C: There are plans to improve ICA's public programme as well as the publications. However, these will take some time. We had made some initial plans to make publishing as an important part of ICA. For that matter, LASALLE should encourage readership so I think Praxis Press is an important initiative. What is currently underway is a publication for Tri Space, a small exhibition area nestled between ICA 1 and ICA 2. In the near future, significant exhibitions featured at the galleries will also have catalogues.

A conversation with CHARLES MEREWETHER

by Hazel Lim



I met up with Charles Merewether, the new director for Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), who arrived here since late March this year for a chat on art, national identities and his plans for ICA.

7 - 14 Feb, 2010

BON JOUR, BON SOIR, BONNE NUIT

—Le Weekend de Sept Jours (The Seven Day Weekend)

Galleries D'Exposition De L'Ecole Nationale Supérieure Des Beaux-Arts, Paris, France
Exhibition featuring ALUMNI from LASALLE's 2009 MA Fine Arts program

by Patrick Storey



“The energy that moves the world, especially in culture and in art, is evolving dramatically towards an expression of the invisible.”



The Seven Day Weekend is the second part of the collaborative exchange between LASALLE, La Seine (Paris) and Royal College of Arts (London).

The first exhibition, The LALA Triangle happened in February 2009 in Singapore with the final leg scheduled to take place in London next year.

This exhibition curated by Clare Carolin featured LASALLE MA graduates together with students from the La Seine research program at the Ecole des Beaux Arts and the Research and Curating Contemporary Art Departments at the Royal College of Art in London. Held at the gallery of L'Ecole Superior Des Beaux Art De Paris, alumni from LASALLE's Masters of Fine Arts who were featured in this exhibition were Alan Butler, Lucas Jodogne, Patrick Storey, Sima Salehi Rahni, and Susan Olij. The show was held in one of the main

exhibition halls of the school - a massive and ornate room with the weight of history bearing down on the contemporary works of art in the show. With Homer, Phidias, Titian, Reubens and other notable historical figures of Western art and philosophy decoratively painted on the ceiling murals, it was impossible not to be confronted by the firmly established historical context of Beaux-Art. Directly across the Seine from the gallery is the Musee de Louvre, another reminder of not only the length and breadth of art and human history, but also of our place in time as practicing artists in this fast changing era. Instead of being dwarfed by the history surrounding the show, the exhibition pointed out how different the featured contemporary artists perceive and operate now, liberally and freely availing multiple options of concept and media, motivation and perspective.

To quote Clare Carolin, "As one of the artists (Susan Olij) included in the exhibition suggests, 'the energy that moves the world, especially in culture and in art, is evolving dramatically towards an expression of the invisible'. In accordance with this thought, *The Seven Day Weekend* set out to make visible and explicit the current condition of art as a pastime for the leisured classes, and the contingent status of successful artists and culture industry professionals whose perspectives are shaped by circumstances that permit creative contemplation and investigation, travel, and in the case of some participants in this exhibition, even temporary withdrawal from society"

As mentioned in the previous statement - the "expression of the invisible" in this case struck me as wholly different than the ones typically predominating the historical-cultural landscape of Paris. Instead of expressing the invisible nature of god or the wealth of colonial power as evident in the grandiose architecture and much of the historically significant art in Paris, the artists in this exhibition have in common a somewhat playful and dissonant response to the current condition that they encounter today. That response spoke of the adaptations made in a period of swift changing cultural and technological outlooks with a vastly different yet palpable sense of omnipotence. Indeed, the world seemed far smaller than it did just 20

years ago. Most of the world's capitals are increasingly becoming populated with people moving from one city to the next, and this exhibition was a testament to that trend with artists from Australia, Belgium, China, Brazil, England, Equador, France, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Romania, Switzerland, Taiwan, and the United States exhibiting together in a place with an esteemed, if dusty, history.

The artists from LASALLE who traveled to France for the exhibition would like to thank the *Lee Foundation* for its generous support of our travel for this exhibition.

