

## LOVE LETTER TO SINGAPORE

By Dr. Peter Hill

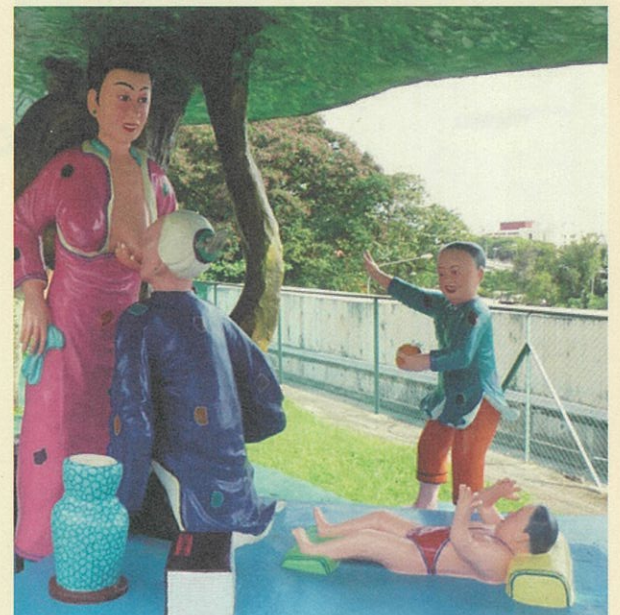
*“Try again, fail again, fail better.” It can be applied equally to biochemistry, creative writing, economics, marine biology, filmmaking, and the visual arts.*

When I first moved across the world from Scotland to Tasmania (Australia’s island state), I was perplexed by a number of things, not least the signs in department stores in the capital Hobart proclaiming “Manchester Sale”. To me, Manchester was a fairly dull Northern English city, lately energised by the band Oasis (which appropriately was originally named “Rain”). I didn’t realise that in Australia “Manchester” was a code for “linen” – sheets, pillowcases, and all such things to do with the bedroom. Apparently “linen” has the same connotation in Rhodesia and other parts of Africa. But this is what happens when you travel. For example, on my latest visit to Singapore (one of my favourite destinations) to run a Superfictions workshop at LASALLE, I kept seeing dated-looking signs for *Wall’s Ice Cream* all across the city-state. I hadn’t seen these since growing up in Glasgow in the 1950s where there was a *Wall’s Ice Cream* factory at the end of our street. In winter, the huge sign on top of the building would be covered in snow and ice, in early spring it was wreathed in fog, in autumn, brown leaves clung to its frame, and in our brief summer it would fade in the sun.

And so it was that in February 2013, heat, jetlag, humidity, and memory all collided within my head, somewhere in the middle of Little India. It was the retro logo for *Wall’s* that really transported me back to my early childhood. And then – in Singapore – there was another surprise – *Tiger Balm*, also remembered from post-War Britain. Another flashback to my childhood. “You must visit Haw Par Villa,” Adeline Kueh encourages me, in a break from our Superfiction project with the Masters students at LASALLE. “It really is a Superfiction.” And so it turned out to be, with its descent into Hell, and its dioramas of myth, superstition, and faded glamour. But what is a Superfiction?

The idea of the Superfiction is a device I have developed over the past twenty-five years. It is a way of solving problems creatively. It is a way of breaking formulaic ways of working. It is a way of freeing one’s imagination. And all the time it is a way of risking failure. In the words of the great Irish playwright Samuel Beckett, “Try again, fail again, fail better.” It can be applied equally to biochemistry, creative writing, economics, marine biology, filmmaking, and the visual arts. It is a way of thinking about your own discipline, about your own life, differently – creatively.

And so, within five days, more than a dozen very talented students created their own Superfictions. They tried working with ideas, and with materials, that were not part of their normal repertoire. One created Rubik Cubes, covered in images of great Modernist artists – Salvador Dali, Jackson Pollock and others; another, grieving for a lost parent, created a fictional undertaker’s business called “Digital Nirvana”; a third explored memory and loss through



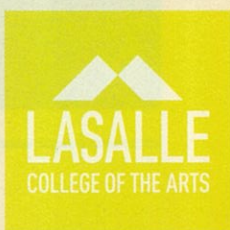
the rape and death of a female journalist, at a historic Singapore site where the Japanese and the British had their final battle.

The other works, presented on the final day of the workshop, were all equally personal and inspiring. I was so proud to work with these students. Perhaps it was a project that only lasted a week. But perhaps it will change the way some of them work – risking failure over success in terms of finding, and expressing, their own unique visual language.

A few months before this memorable visit to Singapore I wrote a feature for *The Times Higher Education* magazine on the topic of “What Makes a Great Art School?” I mentioned as great art schools, CALARTS in the US, Dusseldorf in Germany, Goldsmiths in London, RMIT in Melbourne, Halifax in Nova Scotia, the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam, and Hobart in Tasmania. I failed to mention LASALLE because I hadn’t been there. Of course, I regret this very much and plan to put it right as soon as possible. When my essay is reprinted in a book I will add a special section on LASALLE. It is one of the world’s great schools of art, fashion, theatre and film. I took many photographs of the campus, and since returning home to Australia I’ve been emailing them to friends around the world – in China, the UK, Germany and across Australia. A wonderful complex of buildings with the words “Spectacle”, “Collaboration” and “Expression” emblazoned across the angular sweep of the windows. But a great college of the arts is more than about architecture and signage. It is about people and creativity. What I remember most about my all-too-short visit to LASALLE is the people – students, faculty and friends from the greater Singapore community stretching from Gillman Barracks to the Singapore Art Museum and the National Museum.

During this memorable week I tried to construct a new Superfiction of my own based on the European model of a “European City of Culture”. Every year, a different city around Europe becomes a media focus for the arts – Glasgow, Berlin, Lyons, Rotterdam, Liverpool, Stockholm, Antwerp and Florence. The idea was initiated by the Greek Minister of Culture, Melina Mercouri, working with her French counterpart, Jack Lang. My idea is for a Pacific City of Culture, with Singapore at its heart, which would criss-cross the Pacific Rim every year from Tokyo to San Francisco, to Brisbane, Hong Kong, Vancouver, Auckland and Santiago. I’ve got 25 cities on my wish list, which should take me up to 2045 if the first one, as I hope, happens in Singapore in 2020. I look forward to seeing you then.

Yours in fiction,  
Pete



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Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore  
Singapore Art Museum

Praxis Press (7th Edition)  
ISSN 2301-3044

## About the Faculty of Fine Arts, 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.

# BIODATAS

**Aparajitha Vaasudev** is currently pursuing a Degree in Fine Art at LASALLE College of the Arts, majoring in painting. Having also studied and worked in the fields of animation and graphic design, she enjoys playing with media to create delicate effects in her work, and pays close attention to the process of making, exploring unknown materials, and working heavily with her hands.

**Dana Lam** is the author of *Days of Being Wild: Walking the Line with the Opposition*, a book on GE 2006 and writer/director of *She Shapes a Nation*, a short documentary on Singapore women. She currently lectures part time at LASALLE College of the Arts.

**Erika Norris** hails from Redmond, Washington, USA, but has lived in many other states and countries. She holds a Bachelors degree from the Gallatin School of Independent Study at New York University where her colloquium focused on visual culture in society. Her current studio practice explores crises of identity and how the internal conflict of desire and control manifest in our behaviors and habits; most recently through an in-depth look at abnormal eating behaviors.

**Hafiz B. Osman** is an artist working issues of ephemerality and time within the context of urbanity and technological phenomena. Focused on the documentation of inter-human relations, his work often employs models of sociability and formats that involve community participation. Hafiz was the winner of the UOB Painting of the Year Competition (Singapore) in 2007, and he completed his Masters degree in 2008. Most recently, he was selected for the artist-in-residence program at the Dena Foundation for Contemporary Art, Paris in 2012.

**Hazelina Oh** is a recent Fine Arts graduate from LASALLE College of the Arts. Her interests lie in the ever-perplexing themes of identity and ethnicity, and a focus on games as a medium.

**Hedda Roterud Amundsen** is a Norwegian artist based in Oslo, Norway. In 2012 she graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Hons) from LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore and is currently pursuing her Master of Fine Arts at the National Academy of the Arts, Oslo. Her work focuses on the relationship between the personal and the impersonal, and often derives from her own personal memories. Actions of archiving and collecting inform her practice and her works (and her life).

**Hilary Schwartz** is a sculptor engaged with concepts of domesticity, displacement, temporality, and queer desire. She received her MFA from San Francisco Art Institute and her BFA from California College of the Arts. She has exhibited internationally. Most recently, her work has been seen in Snapshots at Rimbun Dahan Gallery in Kuala Lumpur, Nine +/- 1 at Sabanci Gallery in Istanbul, Etiquette at the Substation Gallery in Singapore, Feeding Ghosts at Kitsch Gallery in San Francisco, and Domestic Materials at Playspace Gallery in San Francisco.

**Isabelle Desjeux** is an artist using her intimate knowledge of the scientific methodology to study objects usually not seen under the microscope. Through workshops, videos, lectures and installations, she questions how science progresses and gets diffused.

**Jeremy Sharma** is a painter and a lecturer with the Faculty of Fine Arts, LASALLE College of the Arts.

**Jessica Anne Rahardjo** is a publishing executive at the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore. She is an alumna of the Faculty of Fine Arts, LASALLE College of the Arts and will be pursuing a degree in History of Art at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

**Jodi Tan** graduated with a BA (Honours) in Fine Arts from LASALLE College of the Arts in 2011. She is a practising artist and founding member of The Collective.

**Joleen Loh** is a curator and writer. She spent her formative years in Melbourne and currently works at the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore. She is also the Visual Arts curator for Lit Up Festival 2013 at Aliwal Arts Centre.

**Kray Chen Kerui** is currently a MAFA candidate at LASALLE College of the Arts. Drawing attention to the absurdities of society in his research, he hopes to generate narratives based on the interplay of hope and futility in society. He has adopted Kosuth's 'the artist as anthropologist' stance to critically unpack how these narratives are invested in the society, perhaps wriggling out gaps and spaces of which he could (re)fit in.

**Lawrence Chin** is an occasional writer with interests in visual art, cultural theory and philosophy. He teaches part-time at LASALLE College of the Arts for the Faculty of Fine Arts and School of Arts Management.

**Melissa Tan** graduated with a BA (Honours) in Fine Arts from LASALLE College of the Arts in 2011. She is interested in the idea of the push and pull of opposites. Elements and processes that are seemingly contrasting, and discovering the harmony of the in between, that gives her work its balance.

**Peter Hill** has exhibited in some of the world's major institutions including the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, and the Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney. In 1993, he launched one of the world's first websites-as-artwork (the latest edition of which can be assessed at [www.superfictions.com](http://www.superfictions.com)). His academic research covers three main areas within the contemporary art world: studio research (the Superfiction), art writing and curating.

**Pragya Bhargava** draws her inspiration from her background in nature conservation. Through her work, she hopes to not only voice her concern for nature, but also to invoke a sense of responsibility in the viewer. Despite her strong inclination towards photography, her practice spans across a variety of mediums such as drawing, painting, sculpture and printmaking.

**Rohaya Binte Mustapha** is a graduate of the MA Asian Art Histories programme at LASALLE College of the Arts.

**Seng Yu Jin** is a Singapore-based writer and art critic. He is also an educator lecturing at LASALLE College of the Arts and curator.

**Shen Xin** obtained her BA in Fine Arts from the LASALLE College of the Arts in Singapore (2012) and is currently pursuing an MFA at the Slade School of Fine Art.



# SPOTLIGHT

Professor Yvonne Spielmann,  
Dean of Faculty of Fine Arts

*To meet the targets, we provide cutting-edge training in studio practice with subject foci in all relevant areas of future-oriented Fine Arts, such as painting, printmaking, photography, installation, video.*

Professor Yvonne Spielmann has joined LASALLE as the Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts in December 2012. She has an extensive record of internationally renowned research in contemporary arts, culture and media with a focus on dialogue between Asian/Eastern and European/Western theories and creative practices. She believes that the understanding and discussion of the diversity of aesthetics and cultures, histories and identities in the Asia-Pacific region has to be rebalanced in relation to the scope of globally networked communication. Because the global art markets and related discourses of arts and culture set the tone of our contemporaneity by equally embracing East and West, past and present, in response we need to rethink concepts of identity, tradition, and cultural practices with regard to the specific location and context wherein these works, tendencies and quotidian practices are by and large conceived and presented. When ideas, concepts and aesthetics of artworks that are rooted within a specific local, regional and ethnic context in the Asia-Pacific sphere travel to be shown and reviewed at art exhibitions, fairs, and festivals worldwide, we need to provide the artists, curators, critics and scholars with thorough understanding of the context where these cultural products come from.

In addressing these contemporary demands and challenges, the vision for education and training of students and staff in the Faculty of Fine Arts is targeting a well-balanced interplay of contextual knowledge and practical-aesthetical skills. Our aspiration in Fine Arts is to train multiple skills that bridge both: theory and practice, local and global contexts. To meet the targets, we provide cutting-edge training in studio practice with subject foci in all relevant areas of future-oriented Fine Arts, such as painting, printmaking, photography, installation, video. At the same time, we put stress on the apprehension of contextual knowledge by fostering practice-based and collaborative research and by educating students in Asian Art Histories. In this perspective, we will make our graduates fit for future careers in the constantly changing art world.

## OSLO, NORWAY

By Hedda Roterud Amundsen


2<sup>nd</sup> May 2013

Hello. How are you?

*I miss you, your father's hokkien mee and the way you used to hold my hand. Sometimes I wish you were here, it would suit you I think. It is strange how context changes everything, how my work has changed, how we have changed. You ask me how I am, and how I like it here. I don't know, I find it difficult to answer. In a way I idealise the past, remembering the tinted image of Singapore, of you, of LASALLE. Staying overnight in school during assessment, kissing in the stairs, hiding from security guards, theory lectures with Shubigi Rao and cigarette breaks after having a creative block or meltdown. However I tend to forget about censorship rules, of a difficult political situation; about the very strict structure in which we were suppose to create work. On the other hand it feels difficult to compare, at least at this point in time. I'm also unsure of how much has changed has to do with context, with geographical place and site. How the changes are related to these physical structures, and how much of this change is independent of this. I can't seem to figure that out. But what I do know, or at least what I think I know, is that art school is art school - no matter where you go.*

Yours truly,  
Hedda





# PUBLIC LECTURES SERIES: An Evening with Richard Wilson

The Singapore Airlines Theatre  
1<sup>st</sup> October 2012  
By Isabelle Desjeux

*Since 1987, the piece has been re-installed 15 times, at different locations. Although the piece is not strictly speaking site-specific, it takes a new form depending on where it is installed, as the room but also the view outside the window will make the piece what it is...*

Painters - mostly abstract painters - are often asked: "When do you know your piece is finished?" as the untrained eye tries to reconcile the title with the image. And the answer will very much depend on the process the artist uses.

As training artists, we often wonder about the state of our artworks too - as we experiment and play, take an idea and keep working on it, comes the question of which part of the process actually constitute the artwork; which part should be documented to be experienced again (and how it should be documented).

These thoughts were much in my mind as we sat in the theatre, listening to Richard Wilson, the prominent British sculptor and installation artist, as he takes us through some of his masterpieces, from the inception of the idea to how it is being experienced.

Wilson first talked about his seminal piece titled *20:50*. The piece, first created in 1987 for Matt's Gallery in London, consists of a room flooded waist-high with recycled engine oil. Except that you don't know it is engine oil. The result is a room that appears much bigger from the inside than from the outside, due to the perfectly reflective surface of the oil. A very important part of the installation is the walkway that allows you to place yourself in the middle of the room, surrounded by the oil and in the middle

of the perfectly symmetric architecture. So the piece has to be experienced from within, with the visitor being invited to walk into the room, with pools of oil on both sides. The viewer then becomes the object, part of the installation.

Since 1987, the piece has been re-installed 15 times, at different locations. Although the piece is not strictly speaking site-specific, it takes a new form depending on where it is installed, as the room but also the view outside the window will make the piece what it is. Each installation came with its own constraints, brought by the specificity of each building. It is an interesting experience for audience the first time they see it, the work inciting confusion to their senses. What makes the piece a seminal work is that it was made at a time when most collectors in Britain were looking for object-based sculptures. Through becoming part of the Saatchi collection, it opened up the possibilities for large-scale installations as collectable artwork. *20:50* is now on permanent exhibition at the Saatchi gallery since 2003.

While taking us through his next work, *She Came in Through the Bathroom Window* (Matt's Gallery, London 1989), it became obvious that these works have to be experienced, as they are hard to describe. An architectural transformation of the building, re-positioning the window to the centre of the room, *She Came in Through the Bathroom Window* wants to perplex us and makes us question such simple acts as looking through the window. Again, major architectural changes had taken place to achieve a result that at first glance is almost imperceptible. It is this discrepancy or distortion of space that plays with our perception.

Wilson then took us through a few more of his artworks, namely *Watertable* (Matt's Gallery, London, 1994), an installation incorporating a concrete pipe into a billiard pool table; *Turbine Hall Swimming Pool* (Dilston Grove, Southwark, London, 2000) where a film of a drummer against a backdrop of an empty pool, is being powered by an electric generator that sometime switches off, switching off the film at the same time; *Set North for Japan (74 °33' 2")* (Nakasato, Japan, 2000), where Wilson reconstituted the architectural drawing of his house in England, in Japan, in the same original orientation (upside down); *A Slice of Reality* (Greenwich Peninsula, London, 2000) where the slice of a ship, complete with habitation parts, was installed on the

Greenwich Meridian, in the Thames river. As part of the Millennium celebrations, it was meant to be removed in 2001. Eleven years on, it is still there as the artist has acquired the mooring rights for it. The 'slice' is often used by Wilson himself where he can work! An interesting way of seeing an artwork as a piece of functional architecture.

Finally, Wilson shared an anecdote about the starting point for his *Butterfly* installation; he related how his inspiration came from finding a crumpled £5 note in the washing machine, and ironing it back to its flattened state. The work *Butterfly* consisted of crushing an aeroplane, and then unfurling it, bringing it back to its functional shape, before eventually just crashing it onto the floor. The process was documented by time-lapse photography. And although it was not intended as such to start with, the film (an edited form of the documentation) of the unfurling of the aeroplane became the artwork, projected in the same room as the carcass of the aeroplane. This work was exciting because again, there is a lot of energy expended in the making of the piece, from crushing to unfurling to crashing. But the object on which so much energy was expended, is only an instrument through which the art is made. Hence the film itself is a 'compressed' form (as opposed to a straightforward documenting) and it becomes the artwork by capturing the energy. What we experience as the viewer is the work done during the weeks the aeroplane was transformed.

When describing the genesis of his works, it seemed that Wilson undergoes a process of putting together a puzzle, consisting of different elements, from perceptions, to texture, context, until the final piece of the puzzle, a sudden inspiration usually in the form of everyday life outside of work, would hit him and spur him to complete the work.

At this point, I could not stay for the rest of the lecture. But what I got out of the hour or so spent in Richard Wilson's company was the strong impression that art often lies outside the exhibited object, and that this need not be a complicated idea. Wilson's masterpieces are self-explanatory by the careful crafting of the 'outside', the context in which they are placed. And as such, a harmony is created between the viewer, the artwork and the surroundings, perplexing the viewer, for the viewer's pleasure.



# SEOUL EXPOSURE

By Erika Norris

*A new and interesting experience for some was the simultaneous translation of the presentations. It posed a unique challenge for the presenter...*

In an unprecedented trip, the Master's candidates, graduating in 2013, got the chance to travel to Seoul, South Korea to give a presentation of their arts practice. In conjunction with students and lecturers from Seoul National University and RMIT, the four students: Phuong Dang, Erika Norris, Jying Tan, and Sven Stefanovic, and two of their lecturers, Dr. Ian Woo and Adeline Kueh, would get the opportunity to explain the progress, methods, and resulting artworks of their research so far. While there, they also got to explore some sights and to enjoy some delicious food.

The symposium, *Cross-Cultural Dialogues in Art and Education*, was held at the Seoul National University on Saturday, 15<sup>th</sup> September. It afforded the students a unique opportunity to introduce and present their current research-based arts practice to a wider audience of their peers. Presentations were also made by lecturers and Doctoral candidates from RMIT and SNU.

Participating in a joint symposium opened the students' work up to a new audience and allowed for different perspectives and discussions. It was a great chance to expand and engage; students from LASALLE and the other schools were able to expose their work to others as well as be exposed to new techniques, philosophies, and methods.

As Master's candidates, it was quite beneficial to hear the presentations of seasoned artists and the doctoral candidates. Their presentations offered up a wide range of mediums, references, and projects. It was useful to get a glimpse of others' processes. Each Doctoral student was also at a different point in their track, so it also showed the path of the Doctoral track as well. While the presentations were quite beneficial for the students involved, there were a few obstacles to overcome. There were several technical problems while Dr. Ian Woo and Adeline Kueh were presenting, which strained the strict time schedule.

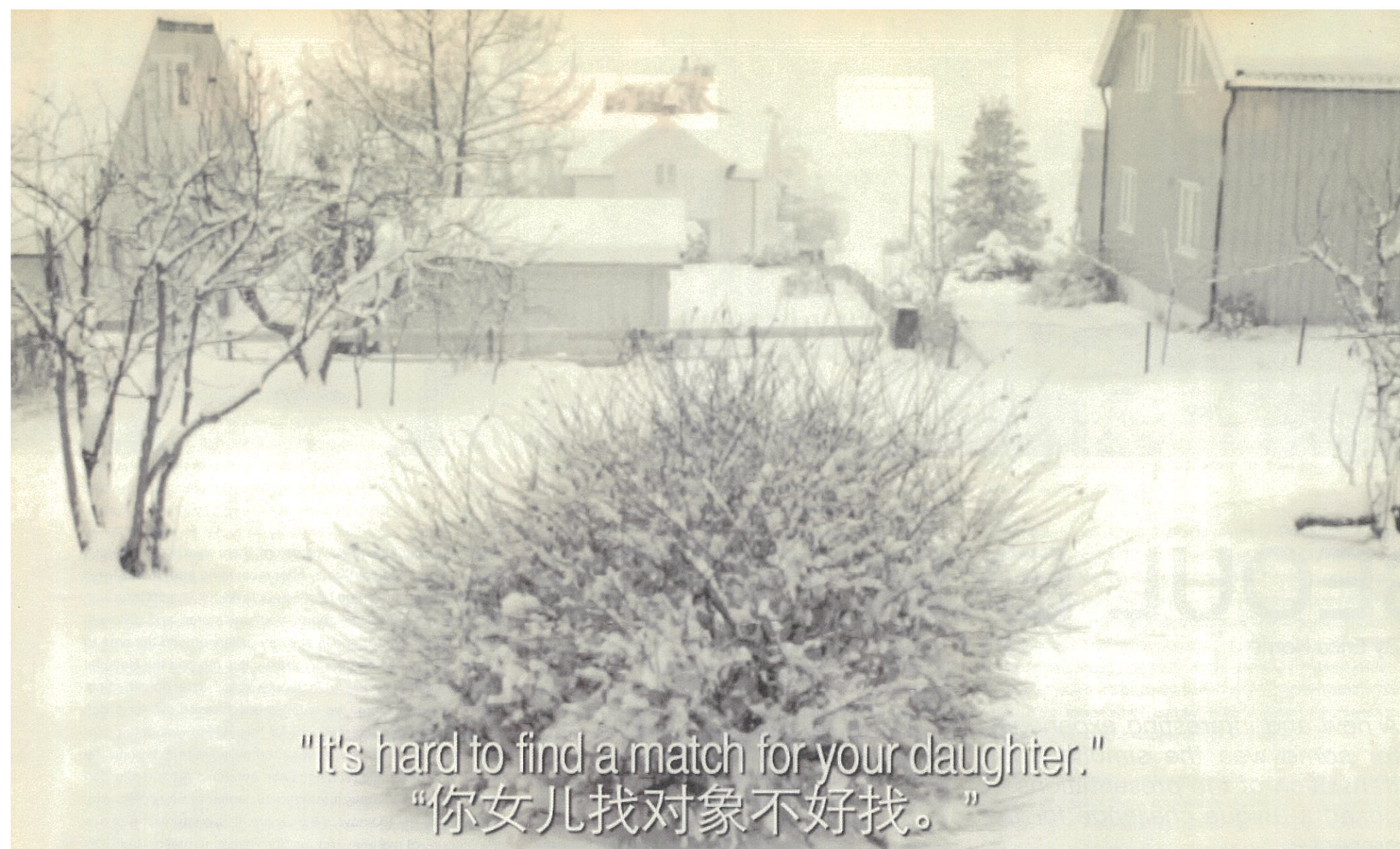
A new and interesting experience for some was the simultaneous translation of the presentations. It posed a unique challenge for the presenter. They needed to explain their research clearly enough to make sure that the audience understood their art. Audience members also needed to pay more attention to the presentations to fully grasp the research presented. It was an different experience, but one that really helped clarify and succinctly define each research project.

Both before and after the symposium, there were some chances to go out and explore Seoul. After recovering from the red-eye flight on Friday, the group headed out to Anguk; a quiet area with a lot of character, coffee shops, boutique stores, and galleries. While there they stopped in at every gallery around the area to see some local contemporary artists. It is too bad the National Museum Contemporary Art in Seoul was still under construction. After the symposium, the entire group headed out for a day to the 11<sup>th</sup> Korean International Art Fair, which was going over the same weekend. The fair featured galleries from around the world, with a specific focus on Latin American Art and afforded more exposure to many international contemporary artists who might never get to show in Singapore. It was interesting to see the amount of material and medium experimentation that was displayed by many of the South Korean based galleries.

While much of the time spent in Seoul was looking, discussing, or enjoying art, there was some time left for shopping and, of course, for food. From a bowl of hangover broth for breakfast to the traditional bibimbap and Korean Barbecue, the food in Korea was superb. And while, roasted silkworms could not be found to try, there was always something good to eat just around the corner.

The trip to Seoul afforded the Master's students many opportunities, both educational and cultural. They got to expose their artwork to a larger audience as well as engage in discussions with students from different areas. They also got to explore a bit of contemporary Korean art as well as other international artists at the Korean International Art Fair. And it instilled in them a warm affection for soju.





"It's hard to find a match for your daughter."  
“你女儿找对象不好找。”

# AFTER THEN BEFORE

By Shen Xin

I spent most of the 3-year-program of Bachelor Degree in LASALLE painting. I made a lot of stretchers, cut a decent amount of wood, consumed quite a bit of paint and the dirty rugs that I used to clean the brushes piled up could produce an illusion of another painting in representation of a garden full of flowers. The immersion into the labor of making assembled that particular structure of practice, which continue to evolve when confronted with unfamiliar structures in another institution, relocating, repositioning, reforming.

The quantity of work that was produced in those 3 years has a particular intensity, which rests well in its own autonomy. It fed itself with influences that concern what matters to the mind. Its focus, resides in materiality, endeavored in bringing out its repercussions. Such physicality was crucial in producing the aura of labor in making representational work. Such aura, then leads to questioning the autonomy of the work itself, the labor then transformed to immateriality, with the consent of the already formed structure.

In this case, moving image that adapts a self-referential approach was a starting point. *Fetish / Video Sketch* is a film I made angled at the relationship between my farther and me. The film is formed through the composition of different visual materials, photographs that projects the exotic ethnicity, dinner table involves multi-ethnic dynamics, live recordings of festival celebration that embodies the public display of the pre-assumed relations of Han as a majority in China towards the others, our trips to Tibet et cetera. The father's career as a realistic Chinese ink painter, deals with subject matter involves ethnic minorities in China. The funding of art education, and the recognition of family members' identities reveals the power dynamic in its own unit. The film aspires to reflect on a bigger geographic politics in terms of ethnicity.

My recent film, *Snow Country*, is an attempt to look at the representation of trauma through cinematic space, more

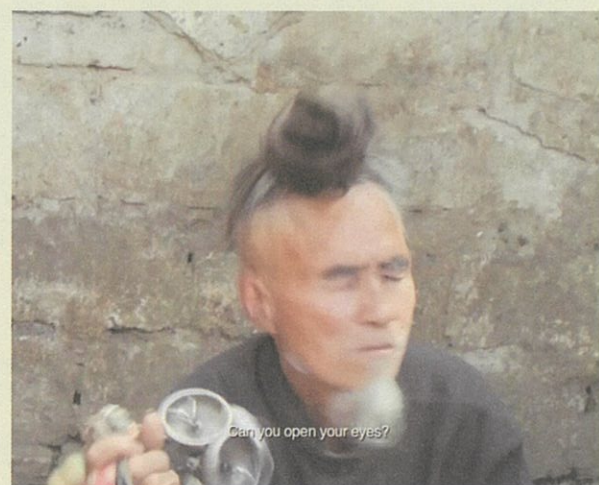
specifically, the trauma of women's bodies being violated, as individuals, and as the victims of Second World War. *Comfort women* are the term given to the women who were involved in the systematic structure of sexual slavery created by the Japanese military. The film was shot in Norway and Sweden, resonating with Yasunari Kawabata's novel with the same title. The actions carried out by me involves traveling to somewhere out of context in relation to the narrations, removing snow from trees, bushes, and architectures, filming these things before the snow being removed and after. The spaces that these actions occupied are paralleled with the voice of the women talking about their experiences taken from other government founded news and documentaries. The removal of the snow is a metaphor. The traumatic experience transcended into relations formed by looking at the changes appearing in these sceneries. The embodiment of trauma and its inaccessibility is carried out by the attempt to represent trauma itself.

The moving surface, while being documented, could be activated, subverted. It seemed to be suiting for scouting of subjectivity. In the meantime, the relationship of subjectivity and the representational regime of each individual piece are been put into test through the examination of their own autonomy, their own ethical clarity. Reflection is been incited, and questioned, because every image that couches in affect and its own availability, demands more than acknowledgment of its fabrication. While revealing the surface of subjectivity, the production of subjectivity is no longer concealed.

The language that the former structure of painting has evolved into, deals with the substantial form of what it was before. There is a prerequisite, which is the re-examination into the labor of making. In moving imageries, the origin of "reality", of "fiction" lies in the sense of construction, to forge, to build, correspond with the origin of the body in Taoism's view, a state of recognition, which has always been my reference and interest. With the

origin of our body as the metaphysical desire, the production of cinema through documentary languages deals with the ethics of representation, the configuration of materials, the gesture of expelling and welcoming, revealing and concealing at the same time. It has to embrace it's own objectness to be able to content two movements at once, then to activates the question of authenticity, veracity, truthfulness, realness instead of performing as their labor power.

In painting, I've gained whimsicality, which could blur boundaries like the one between Chuang Tzu and the butterfly. Once he woke up, and questioned whether he dreamed of the butterfly or the butterfly dreamed of him. There is no jeopardy in loyalty if the dream was about some other situations, but the structure in ways of questioning remains.



# LOOKING FOR SPACE @ 71 SULTAN GATE

By Jodi Tan

*The walls were left empty, to be filled in later with our love-letters to one another – this was the discussion wall where we established our dialogues about 'space'...*

In 2012, I was one of seven recent graduates from the Fine Arts faculty of LASALLE College of the Arts who collectively initiated a developmental incubation programme. The other six members of this collective were Singapore-based Bridget Tay, Frayn Yong, Godwin Koay, Melissa Tan, Michael Timothy, and Weixin Chong.

As a disparate collective of individuals with varying interests, working in diverse disciplines, we initiated the deliberate and shared use of a space as a temporary studio to ignite complex dialogues amongst ourselves. The artist and space, and the other artists within this space, formed a symbiotic relationship towards the building of a new body of work.

This project was the contemplation of the idea revolving around 'space'. The space that we desired can be understood as one that is intangible and psychological, as formed by interstices of our individual contexts and frames of reference; and also as physical space: a place or site where these interstices could be found and reacted to or against.

This marks where the idea for the incubation project began – where the theoretical and pragmatic collide. The project was

aply titled *Looking For Space*.

*Looking for Space* could require a bit of time. Ideas for this project begun at the end of 2011, and the collective met subsequently to discuss our progress, but it was not until six months later that things started getting on track.

We figured that, at times, you need some help looking for space. And help came in the form of financial assistance and psychological encouragement in June 2012 when we received the National Arts Council grant. We began hunting for a space. It needed to be central and accessible as our members were dispersed all over the island; it needed to be large enough for seven of us to work in; it needed to have a short-term lease. Most importantly, it needed to be affordable. Unfortunately, one can never have the best of all worlds. We found an affordable, short-term, large space (albeit not the best location), and we concluded that three out of those four conditions were sufficient. After much discussion and research to make sure this was the best deal, we were all set to rent the space – only to be informed that it was no longer available.

Sometimes, you need good timing and a bit of luck too, when looking for space. After going round in circles we eventually found 71 Sultan Gate, recommended by a mutual friend. It was not the most affordable of spaces – but we fell in love with the cosy room lined with wooden floorboards, white walls, and large glass panels that allowed brilliant sunlight to stream through. It was the start of a love story. The members went furniture shopping like newly-weds, assembled and furnished our love nest with racks of paints, brushes and other art materials. The walls were left empty, to be filled in later with our love-letters to

one another – this was the discussion wall where we established our dialogues about 'space' and updates on our individual work and research.

The studio soon became our second home. In it we did our work, we discussed our work, we critiqued (and complimented) one another's work. We ate, slept (or had sleepless nights) in it; we breathed and lived in it. In addition to our internal critique sessions, we held an open studio session where the general public was invited to learn about and comment on our work. It was an invaluable learning process and at the end of three months, we were all set for the eventual exhibition.

We realised that possessing a space, or interacting with it continuously, could result in a sentimental attachment to an inanimate entity. In transforming the space from a studio to an exhibition space, we had to clear out our belongings, paint the walls a clean white, mop the wooden floorboards, and polish the glass panels. This process of having to 'reverse' the space to its original condition made us conscious of the fact that we did not own the space, but merely paid money for the usage of it.

The exhibition consisted of drawings, paintings, mix media collages, a digital print, a screen-print papercut installation, and ink on glass panel – products of our contemplation on 'space', created during our stay in the shared studio. The eventual artworks may seem to be the outcome, but the collective's intention was focused on the process of initiating the project, looking for a space, having one, and working in it. Through this, the collective experienced the entire process of materialising such a project, made possible with some initiative, a bit of effort, that is helped on by a lot of time, assistance and luck along the way.



# THE PRESIDENT'S YOUNG TALENTS 2013: A Review

Singapore Art Museum  
25<sup>th</sup> January to 15<sup>th</sup> September 2013  
By Seng Yu Jin

*“to nurture a developmental platform for promising local artists under the age of 35 working with emerging contemporary art practices”*

The President's Young Talents (PYT), inaugurated in 2001 and organised by the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) and the Istana, can be appraised as a continuation of the 1980s UOB Painting of the Year Award and the Shell Discovery Art Exhibition that emerged in tandem with Singapore artists who began to rethink art and art-making that marked the beginnings of contemporary art here.

The annual PYT's aspiration “to nurture a developmental platform for promising local artists under the age of 35 working with emerging contemporary art practices” began to adopt a new format in 2009 by pairing members from the curatorial committee with artists who had been nominated and eventually selected. The pairing is made with the objective of mentorship of the artists as they make newly commissioned works for the art competition. This was a significant shift away from the open submission shows of Singapore's past, the artists' relationship with the jury suddenly becoming a meaningful process of critical engagement.

The curatorial committee comprised of Ahmad Abu Bakar, Shirley Soh, and Cheo Chai-Hiang, who are respected artists and art educators, and curators, Tay Swee Lin and Tan Siu Li. Each PYT artist was mentored by two members of the curatorial committee who played an instrumental role in guiding the artists by tightening the concept of the proposed works, contributing essays and interviews that illuminate on the creative processes and critical issues that the works engage with.

This year, the six PYT artists include: Boo Junfeng, Liao Jiekai, Grace Tan, Ryf Zaini, Robert Zhao Renhui and Zaki Razak. Out of the six artists shortlisted for this year's PYT, three of them are alumni of LASALLE College of the Arts. Ryf Zaini's *Unveil the curtain to the window with no ledge*, is an interactive installation of lights whereby one could sit on a chair and be basked in rhythmic flashes: Ryf uses technology to place the spotlight on the viewer, who is now being viewed and perhaps questioned about his or her understanding of contemporary art. Ryf's use of lights, switches and lamps makes visible the invisible circuits of power that operates the artworld. The potential of technology to enlighten through the dissemination of information could also mislead us by a system of too much information that obfuscates as much as it illuminates.

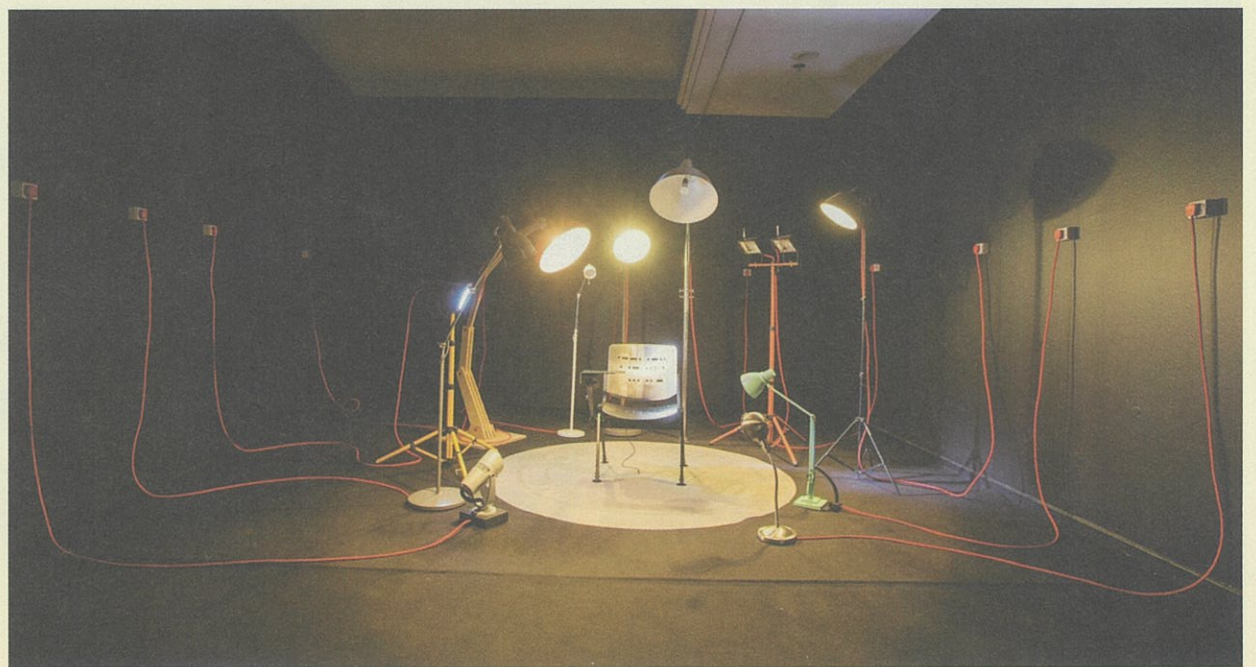
Boo Junfeng is a filmmaker. His PYT work, titled *Mirror*, uses two video screens that meet at an inclined angle to create the illusion of two worlds happening simultaneously. He sets his film in the context of the Malayan Emergency (1948-60) at the Bukit Brown cemetery, part of which has been slated by the government to be removed to build a new expressway, inciting strong responses from civil society groups. One video screen shows a current Singapore soldier while the other a Malayan communist soldier, a strategy that collapses temporalities and historical contexts. Boo's work makes a strong statement by connecting these two soldiers who are now defending Singapore for different reasons

and ideologies on a cemetery embodying their memories that is about to be redeveloped in a country that forgets its history. *Revising Art: The Ten Year Series* by Zaki Razak is the most ambitious in terms of audience engagement and interaction. This tent, displaying the work's title in bold and thus recalling Singaporeans' obsession with 10-year series compilation of



examination papers for students, succeeds in bridging the gap between art and its audiences by questioning how art is taught and communicated through academies and institutions such as SAM. Zaki's interdisciplinary, collaborative and informal way of engaging audiences through workshops and art talks is an artistic strategy to close the gap with reality that often characterises the formal, distanced, and sometimes patronising pedagogy of art institutions.

Grace Tan's *Refuge* extends from a practice that bridges mathematics, fashion design and art by linking plastic loop pins together to create a surreal cloud-like sculptural form that shifts between the optical illusion of clouds as a natural phenomenon and its artifice, a construction of man-made material; the final form yet remains distant, indeed almost cold, for the viewer.



*Brothers' Quarters* by Liao Jiekai uses 16mm film to project ghostly images on the walls of a demarcated room. It investigates the 'afterlife' of conserved buildings, making a site-specific work in SAM, playing up to the fact that it was previously a school called the Saint Joseph's Institute. It does however fall short of initiating a conversation with the audience on the double-edged sword of building conservation and why we preserve buildings in Singapore.

Robert Zhao Renhui's *The Quieting and the Alarming* is an installation that tracks the process of trapping and hunting wild boars in Singapore whose population, unchallenged by any native predators, has risen to the point of being ecologically damaging. His work questions how the authorities came to the decision to cull them based on advice by "experts" whose science might be established by facts but are actually half-truths.

As an art competition, PYT recognises the absurdity of comparing filmmakers to photographers or painters, yet it reveals current movements towards interdisciplinary practices in Singapore. Situated and judged in this expanded field, these practices reveal startling coincidences and connections that transcend form, subject, and medium. Both Junfeng and Jiekai have been awarded the President's Young Talents Credit Suisse Artist Commissioning Award. Both artists are filmmakers who have crossed over to contemporary art through their film installations. While contemporary art as a field continues to expand, other disciplines such as animation and film are included and legitimised as contemporary art through Biennales and art competitions such as PYT.

I end this essay on this note: if there is something to improve on, the mentoring aspect of PYT could have been more curatorially visible to reveal the critical engagements, disagreements, and meeting of minds in the making of the artworks, which is ultimately what sets this competition apart from others, offering a greater reward than any monetary prize could.







# METHODICALLY CURIOUS AND CURIOUSLY METHODICAL:

Being the refractions of the mind of the Artist as God,  
Critic and Self-Saboteur

**The Retrospectacle of S. Raoul**

An exhibition by Shubigi Rao (22<sup>nd</sup> March to 11<sup>th</sup> April 2013)

By Dana Lam

In *On Fictive Fact: A Circumambulation*<sup>1</sup>, artist Shubigi Rao invokes the reader/viewer as a blind bat attempting to navigate by echolocation. I must admit to no small pleasure in picturing myself one of Rao's bats, slapping noisily into pillar and post in a cloud of (un)knowing and an orgy of refracted self-image. As Rao puts it, our comprehension, our pleasure in a work depends upon how, or what, we might recognise of ourselves in it.

The "retrospectacle" then is the artist's trope and the lens through which the reader/viewer navigates slippery territory – the spectacle of the artist as godhead, critic and self-saboteur, among other things. The ambiguity of perception, its essential self-deception ("We make our eyes lie") is part of her prodigious imagination and repertoire. Truth/fiction, reality/fantasy may only be opposite ends of a continuum, at least in Rao's world. Two works in particular insinuate themselves to my mind.

*The Study of Leftovers* (2003-2004) is a carefully orchestrated collection of debris washed up by the tide, sifted and sorted, tagged and ordered into significance by the artist's hand, elevating the mundane. In this, as in the other works, Rao puts the methodology and paraphernalia of scientific inquiry to service in the production of the artwork as self-reflexive culture. The process critiques itself, and the result is a fecund propagation and proliferation of thought in copious drawings, field-notes, expositions and hypotheses. The sophistication of Rao the artist and social critic is revealed in the quiet but pointed political commentary scattered in journal entries accompanying the archaeological digs and study of the lost civilisation of Singapore, where "No flying buttress/ overarching concept/ nor vaulting ambition/ can redeem this ruin of twisted girders".

*The Tuning Fork of the Mind* (2008), the *pièce de résistance* of the show, arose as a response to the wilful persistence of ignorance in commentaries on contemporary art in the popular press. Once again drawing on her vast capacity for grasping complex theories and concepts, Rao produced an instrument for measuring the activity of a brain deranged by over-exposure to art. As with her earlier work with leftovers, here, Rao puts to

service the commonplace debris of banal assumptions on art and its conventions, in the production of her expansive theory – tongue firmly in cheek. The work is encyclopaedic in scope and clarity. Art, artist, critic and viewer are equally implicated in the neuro-scientific theory of S. Raoul's<sup>2</sup>.

That this work was also presented by invitation at the Conference of the Organisation for Human Brain Mapping (OHBM), Beijing, China, 2012, is firm testament to the rigour of the artist's research and practice, and the sophistication of her trope.

Each of the ten works in the *Retrospectacle* function as self-sufficient universes of their own, like micro-organisms. Yet all are linked by a wider theme, which is the critique of perception and knowledge. The artist's sleight of hand is achieved by her fidelity to a "methodical curiosity" in her "curious method"<sup>3</sup>.

But, what about S. Raoul, whose "retrospectacle" it is after all? In the end, he must be the artist's greatest triumph over the system she interrogates. Rao is candid about her alter ego – an obvious self-portrait sporting a pair of paper moustache ("a paper tiger", she says with a shy smile and a twinkle in the eye), a kind of good natured jibe at the institution's patriarchal remains. What she does not say is that the self-portrait appears sightless. An invocation of Blind Justice? Or, a commentary on selective blindness? Fact and fiction is put to service of one another in a sly performance of self as allegory. The reader/viewer is advised to be mindful of corruptions in the visual cortex.

- 1 Rao, Shubigi, "On Fictive Fact: A Circumambulation." *History's Malcontents: The Life and Times of S. Raoul*. Singapore: ICA Singapore. 2013. Print.
- 2 Which can also be found in *History's Malcontents: The Life and Times of S. Raoul*, a book released to coincide with the exhibition. In "How to Use This Book." *Curiosity and Method: Ten Years of Cabinet Magazine*, NY: Cabinet Books, 2012: " 'Methodical curiosity' is a pretty good definition of science as we know it; 'curious method' resumes much of what some people call art. Applying the canons of methodical curiosity to the productions of those curious methods, or applying curious methods to the productions of methodical curiosity, does not, in fact, precipitate the kind of matter-antimatter dematerialisation familiar to students of science fiction."
- 3

*Rao produced an instrument for measuring the activity of a brain deranged by over-exposure to art.*



# VISITING ARTISTS/ SPEAKERS

(August 2012 – May 2013)

Ang Sookoon	Singapore
Adele Tan	Singapore
Andrée Weschler	Singapore/ France
Chng Seok Tin	Singapore
Choi Sang Ah	USA/Korea
Chua Beng Huat	Singapore
Daniel Komala	Indonesia
David Teh	Singapore
Eitaro Ogawa	Japan
Emma Critchley	UK
Eva McGovern	Malaysia/ Philippines
Goh Beng Kwan	Singapore
Grace Tan	Singapore
Green Zeng	Singapore
Ho Tzu Nyen	Singapore
Isabel Ching	Singapore/ Philippines
Jakapan	Thailand
James Elkins	USA
Jason Wee	Singapore
Jen Webb	Australia
John Craig Freeman	USA
Jon Catappan	Australia
Jorella Andrews	UK
Ken Gonzales	USA
Lee Ming Wei	Taiwan/USA
Lim Choon Jin	Singapore
Low Sze Wee	Singapore
Mateo Lopez	Columbia
Michael Lin	Taiwan
Nora Taylor	USA
Om Mee Ai	Singapore
Patricia Chen	Singapore
Paul Huxley	UK
Peter Hill	Australia/UK
Richard Wilson	UK
Sonny Liew	Singapore
Susie Lingham	Singapore



# FIELD TRIP TO BANGKOK

(26<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY TO 1<sup>st</sup> MARCH 2013)

by Aparajitha Vaasudev and Pragya Bhargava

Our trip commenced with a visit to the Museum of Contemporary Art. The architecture was beautiful; an imposing lotus-inspired sculpture just outside the museum stood on a still sheet of water; the clean lines and curves exuding a sense of serenity and dignified calm. The sweeping halls and high ceilings inside allowed us to view even paintings that were 30 feet in height with ease, and all the artwork was well and appealingly lit. We had been quite excited about the visit, and many found the art thought-provoking and visually appealing. Great emphasis had been placed on skill and technique, showing a great variety of media and visuals – from heavily painted illustrated narratives to a field of abstract prints from South East Asia. It was interesting to note that the evolution of Thai art seemed to have been significantly independent of that in other countries – this challenged us to broaden our perspectives of what contemporary art could be. The curation of the works for each level was executed quite well, and is a great introduction to the world of Thai contemporary art and the artist's perspectives.

On the morning of 27<sup>th</sup> February, we visited the Numthong Gallery. We were graciously received by the founder and director of the gallery and were given a short and informative introduction to the gallery's origin and activities. We found many of the video works were poignant and moving – some were bold and blatant, providing very strong critique of the everyday culture within Thai context. It was enlightening to see the trend of political commentary in Thai contemporary art. After our visit, we were taken to a market nearby via tuk-tuk-like vans, called song thiao, which was great fun. Being

able to explore a local market in all its rustic glory – and for most, to try the local delicacies – was a real treat.

Next we visited Tadu-Thaiyarnon Contemporary Art, at the Bangkok Art and Cultural Centre. We were all, again, struck by the beauty of the architecture of the building and the effective use of space within. The imposing atmosphere and creative design of this particular building held such appeal that we revisited it several times. The building itself also contained interesting boutique-café and unique art stores, which we were delighted to find all under one roof. The building promises to become a real hub for contemporary art and craft in the next few years. We were given a very heartfelt and enthusiastic introduction to the gallery and its work since inception by the Director of the gallery, Apisak Sonjod, who also handed us all printed information which we could absorb at our leisure. The gallery was showing a collaborative exhibition of Raj Loesuang and the young Somboon Hormtientong, which was interesting in visual character and presentation. We were surprised and pleased to note that the artist, Somboon Hormtientong, was present, and were able to garner information about his work and ideas right then and there which really took our experience there up a notch.

We then visited Bangkok University Gallery, BUG, whose curator (Ark Fongsmut) and his team were very hospitable and forthcoming about the current art scene in Bangkok, and their University's contribution. They showed us around the different galleries within the building, and gave us plenty of background information on each of the works we saw. We had the pleasure of meeting one of the visiting

artists, a Filipino, Poklong Anading, who was doing a two-month residency in BUG. However, our time constraints did not allow us to meet the students and lecturers from the Fine Arts Department of the University. It would have been useful to visit their studios and learn more about their methods and practice firsthand.

Our visit to the Grand Palace and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, as well as the National Museum was also an awesome experience that passed in a blur of activity. We enjoyed exploring the National Museum that had an impressive collection of beautiful historical relics. It is definitely worth another visit, in our opinion.

On the last the day of the trip we visited the Art Centre of Chulalongkorn University and were able to view two of their student exhibitions which gave us an insight into the approach being taken by the university in training future Thai artists. It seemed that great emphasis was placed on the development of skill and the honing of technique. It was fascinating to see these works displayed in a gallery, framed and installed in a permanent exhibition.

One of the more intriguing aspects of the trip was the juxtaposition of the old and new, traditional and modern, transient and eternal. Our four days in Bangkok seemed to pass so quickly that we felt we had not done justice to what this rich and vibrant city had to offer us. Our interaction with students from the MA and Diploma was an engaging and enriching experience as well. Also, our interaction with our lectures, discussions, reflections and exchange of views was invaluable. We are extremely grateful for having had the opportunity to benefit from this experience.





# ART OF FORGETTING - THE LEAVENING OF MILENKO'S PAINTINGS (1979-2012) AND OTHER NOTES ON ABSTRACTION

By Jeremy Sharma

[The following is an excerpt of a longer essay on Milenko Prvacki.]

## Corneliu Baba and The Studio

When I visited his studio in a warehouse at the far end of our island, I saw a man consumed by his love and pride of his practice—rows of paintings stacked neatly against one another or displayed systematically in a specially created device where you can slide them in and out like drawers. Everything was labeled and categorized—paints, pigments, solvents, tools, brushes, books, catalogues, research, supports etc. I also read somewhere about Willem de Kooning being obsessed about keeping his studio in a neat and pristine condition, even to the point of cleaning his skylight regularly. Milenko also had a small office on the mezzanine floor. It's hard to imagine he painted there, seeing that the walls and floors were so clean and white.

It was a studio that could pass off as a gallery. He was as neat and organized in his practice as he was always punctual. He made it a point to paint every week, if not weekend even when he was a full-time dean. This is enough to testify to the man's clarity of mind, discipline and rigour.

In his studio he described how he was as a student. Before Milenko was Milenko, he was a long-haired student known by his nickname Buki in Bucharest, Romania, under the influence of his own mentor Corneliu Baba. Baba was over six feet tall and intimidating. He had a very strong personality and painted in the academic style of that period. Students copied the professor's style for his approval. In Milenko's words, he was fighting him and was lucky to have survived him. Out of his class of twelve, perhaps he is the only one to still be practicing. Milenko had a good early academic foundation that served him well and thought

him what to do with paintings. Baba was a strong academic and practitioner, but not necessarily the best of teachers, which brings to Milenko's theory in point: that good artists might not necessarily be good teachers. With this experience, Milenko as an educator was able to pick out potential students who will go on to practice and could also teach. In this respect, I would also put across that great students might not necessarily be good artists and that a bad student may potentially be a good artist when he or she leaves school. I've seen his works, Baba's, in a monograph Milenko keeps in his office and it's true he is an excellent painter. I couldn't help but make the connections to Baba's richly layered still lifes done in the opaque technique, thick with paint and somberness and Milenko's work about a table with still life, a recurring domestic motif he would repeat for some fifteen years. Milenko's table had a tilted perspective and the forms on it were light, playful and mischievous but still

evoked substance and weight. I saw another incarnation as an installation in Chiang Mai where we did a group show together. After helping other artists first, his set up was then done with sheer confidence and speed. Rubbish and detritus were picked up after other artists and assembled on the wall with a collapsed table in his typical vocabulary.

In anyone's studio, being so personal, you could pick out the artist's vulnerability. What lies behind the scenes of an isolated practice is really an artist's obsessions and his belief. A practice, as opposed to proposals, is basically what it is—years of practicing—working, preparation and dealing with paint, supports, methods, materials, composition and subject in the studio. Milenko started making paintings that engaged politically and figuratively, but slowly after his dislocation, became more interested in the paintings themselves.

Few would know the backstory of the paintings. For example the Construction Site paintings were not really referencing, though they resonated with the ubiquitous sight of buildings in progress in Singapore. They spoke not only about the weight, texture and tonality of painting but of destruction and construction. They have links to Milenko's travelogue to historical civilizations, which were destroyed one after another in Cappadocia and Troy in Turkey. They bear a connection to his country ravaged by war and destruction. Then there were the brickyards of Rajasthan in India, which reminded him of the ones in Serbia. Blocks of cast clay from a mould formed a brickyard and then a fire was built inside that went on for a week. To think I read the paintings wrongly and saw it as a form of destruction and the burning of buildings or walls! Milenko also came from a family of beekeepers and the beehive is seen as a fitting metaphor as the first building before humans started building. There is a popular theory that if bees became extinct, the human species will also perish in four years. His paintings suggested excavation, recovering and remembering. There were hidden stories and an emotional attachment.

#### Mentor

In the years that I was finding myself as an artist, there was an event I remembered when I won my first painting prize. It was for a competition about taking action and highlighting the stigma of AIDS and its victims and I painted a small semi-abstract piece called "5 Bookmarks in Mortality". It was done shortly after my Diploma year and I remember being so impressed by Milenko's paintings that I practically used the same strategy and titling as him. I was looking for a visual vocabulary of my own, and instead of using "Visual Dictionary", I decided to go for "Bookmarks" instead, which featured among others - a book, a milk bottle, a condom and the AIDS ribbon, all done in the layers, tone and gestures à la Milenko.

My mentor encouraged me to come back for my BA studies even though I had absolutely no idea how to pay for my school fees. He said just enroll and we will find a way, it will sort itself out. It was not practical but it was certainly in character of an artist and educator who must have seen something in a scrawny, diffident kid. Like the advertising guru Paul Arden would say if you don't have the degrees or fees to go to university, just turn up. I don't think any dean would do that today.

A few weeks later into the semester, all the walls were taken up. Armed with just some boot polish from my days in National Service and photocopies of images, and some sheets of paper, I proceeded to tear a hole in the middle of the studio near where my pals were and worked from the floor and did my thing. And things sorted themselves out. That ethos has never left me since. Ironically, because I couldn't afford to buy canvases and paints, I didn't make any paintings. I made drawings, videos and did performances. I was taught to think out of painting not by any intellectualism or criticality but out of sheer necessity. I never really had much contact hours with him, but just studying his paintings in detail and hearing him speak animatedly at critiques were lessons enough. Milenko also recommended me my first job as a gallery manager upon my graduation to slowly pay off my fees. It was a job I absolutely came to hate and told myself it was the last time I was going to be behind paintings.

Milenko built a lot of bridges that benefitted the college with the connections he made and has become synonymous with

LASALLE after Brother Joseph McNally. The legacy he has created in Fine Arts is a pedagogy that is open-ended, discursive and stressed on methodologies and the processes of making and working with materials. He introduced critiques and tutorials at a time when there was no dialogue with art making other than to finish projects. As an artist dean, he didn't micro-manage, made snap decisions and was not too bothered by administration. Meetings were light-hearted and filled with food and jokes. As students, it wasn't just painters who benefitted; others were always encouraged to get out of painting and try something different to find their strengths if lecturers saw that as a dead end. He identified good artists and potential educators in his first and later generation of students like Ye Shufang, Khiew Huey Chien, Saraswati Gramich, Sia Joo Hiang, Luis Lee and Tan Wee Lit. Together with Ian Woo, they have encouraged and influenced, whether directly or through practice, a new breed of exciting painters like Ruben Pang, Deusa Blumke, Kanchana Gupta, Filip Gudovic, Bridget Tay, Jodi Tan, Lee Young Rim and Luke Heng. Abstract painting has also seen a resurgence in LASALLE especially with women painters taking up the mantle on the forefront like Om Mee Ai and Jane Lee.

There was something that Milenko did and enjoyed, which I have not encountered with other lecturers. He liked to take breaks and visit the studios in a leisurely stroll and have a chat with any student who needed advice. He liked looking at work and dropping references. When I visited him in his own studio, he lamented that in Singapore, unlike Europe, everyone keeps to themselves and do not visit other studios. He finds that very much lacking—the animated conversations and heated debate in the studio, or over drinks and food about art. I would agree, especially for a lone profession.

#### Notes on Abstraction

Before I even start to talk about abstraction in painting, let me quote at best the aporia of writing about an isolated discipline and a self-referential medium and activity called painting. The French philosopher Jean Luc Nancy states that the absolute gap between painting and writing allows ten incoherent or contradictory texts to be written about the same work, each of which is nonetheless convincing, and none of which is more appropriate than the other.

The crux of Milenko's paintings deals with construction in all its manifestations. There is always a kind of clarity in his works even in their abstraction and ambiguity. Objects and elements from the real world like brick, island, fire, shadow, trophy, game and all other manifestations of his visual dictionary remain grounded but they have lately been rising. In the leavening of bread, yeast is used as an agent to cause the dough to rise. The result is a soft, light, fluffy texture that resembles a sponge because of the air pockets produced by the mix. In his latest paintings, Milenko has discovered a way to make his pigments move with great ease and lightness. These paintings are not particularly large by his standards, let alone monumental. It is as if he doesn't need to be re-assured by scale anymore. They are freer, much looser and more fluid; less brick and more water but still building, still excavating. Their compositions are stripped to washes and layers; the byzantine and cobbled textures are still there, but there is more syncopation and they are more aleatory, less formulaic and more provisional and unpredictable. There is less use of the brush and a lot of pigments. I suspect he works horizontal first and adds the last touches after he has stretched the paintings. It was the delicious tropics back in the work but yet a lightness that had a profound elegy that burnt at the back of your head.

Perhaps leaving the dean's post must have alleviated the weight of the living and the quotidian routine of management and stress, to some lightness of being. He would have had more time in the studio to struggle with the work, not struggle with LASALLE. I asked him a difficult question, because he dedicated so much time to LASALLE, whether he would have been a better artist if he didn't. Maybe, maybe not he said. If he weren't in the institution, he would have missed the dialogue and environment, criticality and company, students to help and inspire. I feel the change in Fine Arts echoes that of his paintings. Moving to a different direction. Maybe there were no bad paintings before Milenko. I could think of important abstract painters or paintings that exist without Milenko—Chen Wen Hsi's brand of modernism, Goh Beng Kwan's wild colourful brush dabs, Anthony

Poon's geometric waves, Chua Ek Kay's minimalist ink strokes, idiosyncratic painter Yeh Chi Wei. But when Milenko adopted Singapore, LASALLE adopted Milenko and the rest followed.

Make no mistake, these are not lightweight paintings. When you look at the newer work, you are looking at 33 years of work. In the famous Ruskin trial between post impressionist painter James Abbott McNeill Whistler and art critic John Ruskin, the painter sued Ruskin for libel after the critic condemned his marvelous painting "Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket" as flinging a pot of paint on the public's face. When Ruskin's lawyer Sir John Holker cross-examined Whistler, this was what transpired:

*Holker: The labour of two days is that for which you ask two hundred guineas?*

*Whistler: No, I ask it for the knowledge I have gained in the work of a lifetime.*

Lightness belies the weight of memory, I would argue to say that his paintings really are about the art of forgetting and this is a wonderful turn. They are covered up and exposed, baring themselves vulnerable, recovered and forgotten and what remains is the detritus of what you leave behind, much like his earlier installation with the tilted table. On never settling for one kind of work and moving in another direction, Milenko says:

*I think only mediocre artists are happy artists, because they think they achieve something final and that it's fantastic.*

*Whatever I want, it's impossible to fully achieve, and that keeps me moving on.*

Gone are the ghosts of Baba and history of his war torn birth country. In place is an unbearable lightness. Let's see where he goes from here.

*In anyone's studio, being so personal, you could pick out the artist's vulnerability. What lies behind the scenes of an isolated practice is really an artist's obsessions and his belief.*



# ARTIST TALK WITH EMMA CRITCHLEY:

## The Body Submerged

LASALLE College of the Arts  
30<sup>th</sup> August 2012  
By Aparajitha Vaasudev

*“My work comes from my passion for diving. It deals with the underwater world...”*

Soft, and lilting, her voice is reminiscent of the very medium she works with: water. She tells us of the inspiration behind every image she has taken, and I was enthralled. Her pictures are haunting, a little confusing, and stunningly beautiful. When I entered the lecture theatre (I was late, you see), I couldn't really tell what was so very special about the picture. It was just a pretty picture of a woman in a gown. By and by, I noticed that there was something 'off' about the photograph. It was too still, too ... held in. And then, it hit me. The shot of the entire scene had been taken underwater. I was speechless. I was struck by amazement at how much time and precision it must have taken to set up a shot like that. Also, by its premise. What a stunningly simple and primeval thing. The breath.

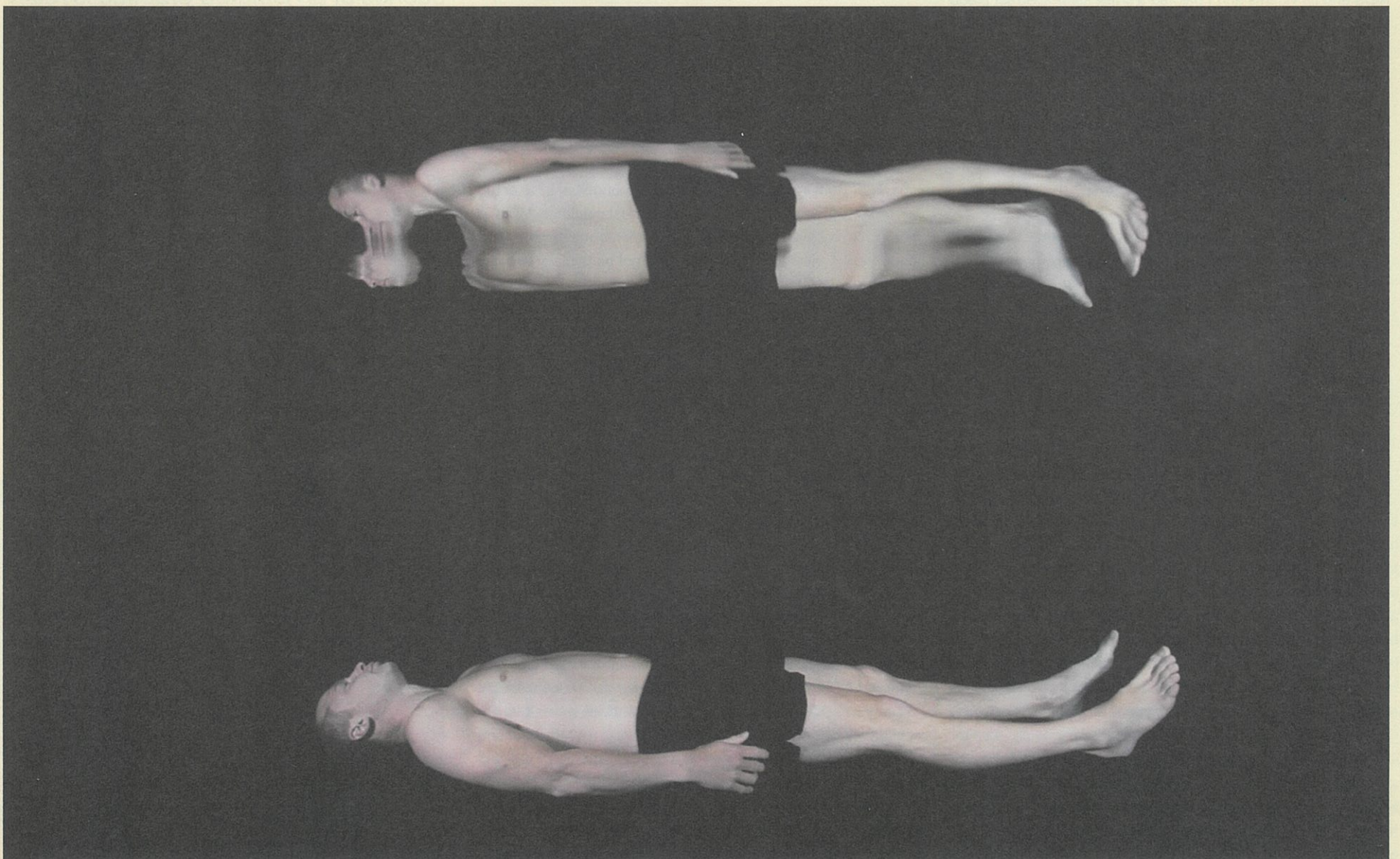
As a swimmer who loves the experience, I can completely understand her preoccupation with submergence and the breath. It is a sensation I revel in: “The threshold state that the body enters between breathing in and breathing out.”

Meeting her in person, I was struck by her clarity of thought – the kind of clarity that I associate, strangely, with soundlessness – the soundlessness you hear when submerged in water. There was complete harmony here – harmony between the medium she had chosen, the kind of affect it had on the viewer, and her subject. I was inspired by the directness with which she answered the questions put to her on her choice of medium, her process, and her inspirations. The experience of watching her videos,

hearing the sound of being underwater, in *Waters Meet: Breath* literally left me breathless with recognition of the sensation of being underwater, feeling the push and pull of moving waters.

All these sensations were explained in her concise statement: “My work comes from my passion for diving. It deals with the underwater world: the threshold state that the body enters between breathing in and breathing out, and when you hold your breath. I'm interested in the way water changes the relationship we have with our bodies, the way we see and hear things, and the difference in gravity.”

All these things about water are the very qualities I love, so her work spoke to me directly. Her talk, I'd have to say, had been a transporting experience.



*Reflection* (2010)  
© 2009-13, Emma Critchley.

# 2013 KSDT MALAYSIA INTERNATIONAL DESIGN EXHIBITION

By Melissa Tan

*This series of presentations highlighted the importance of team effort over than an individual in the execution of a project.*

In early April, Renjana Widyakirana, Nathania Raisa Zaini and I participated in the **2013 KSDT Malaysia International Design Exhibition**, a collaboration project between Korean Society Design Trend (KSDT) and the School of the Arts (PPS), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), held in Penang. As the theme was the role of evolving design and craft, the exhibition presented high-resolution images of artworks from various parts of Asia rather than the actual artworks, an unorthodox exhibition that proved to be effective as a "travelling" exhibition. This collaboration project was organised by the managing director of KSDT, Ms. Jang Namsook, who invited our participation through our programme leader Mr Salleh Japar of LASALLE College of the Arts from Singapore. As alumni of LASALLE, we were more than happy to be part of the creative exchange exhibitions that we sorely miss since graduating from the college.

While Renjana participated in the exhibition of contributed works by professionals in various art fields within Asia, Nathania and I participated in the seminar in which we presented our recent work to art organizations and collectives respectively, and discussed art practice after graduation, as part of the seminar held in conjunction with the exhibition.

Nathania is a member of *Popin*, a non-profit organisation conceived by staff of LASALLE, Ms. Betty Susiarjo and Ms. Noriko Suzuki-Bosco. *Popin* focuses on community outreach craft-based works. This craft community has already held numerous events and exhibitions in public spaces in Singapore such as the National and Regional Libraries and parks. For their project at the National Library, *Popin* engaged with members of the public to join in the project of creating handmade cloth birds for a large installation. It was heartening to witness the sharing of the creative art process that also encourages the tradition of craftmaking.

In a different setting, I was part of *The Collective*, brought together by friendship and a shared sentiment of forging a space to share our creative process. Driven by the desire for a studio space, we, as young artists and recent art graduates, namely Bridget Tay, Frayn Yong, Godwin Koay, Jodi Tan, Michael Timothy, Wei Xin Chong and I, set out in search of a space where we would be able to make artworks and subsequently curate an exhibition. The difficulties we faced served as relevant discussion points during the presentation in USM on sustaining art practice following graduation.

Upon arrival at USM for the seminar, it was daunting to face a large audience, as this was Nathania's and my first seminar. There were several topics on the agenda. The programme began with a presentation by Mr. Woon Hyung Lee from KSDT on interactive design for smartphone applications. He showed how he used his application to educate children on basic theories of science such as gravity, where children were required to shake the smartphone so that apples on trees would fall to the ground. Dr. Mumtaz Begum Aboo Backer from the department



of Drama & Theatre in USM talked about her recent project, "Tree of Dreams and Hope – An artistic journey with children!", where she taught children with disabilities to express themselves. Her project aspired to give confidence to children and improve social skills. She emphasized the value of teamwork in performance, inculcating the importance of responsibility.

Being a specialist in typography of road signs, Assistant Prof. Sang Kim from the Department of Visual Design in Incheon Catholic University presented his project, "Design system of street-name traffic signs". He showed the differences in typography between old traffic signs and those he and his team created specially for road users. The aim is to increase efficiency and safety for drivers through creating clearer and better spaced typography.

Dr. Muhizam Mustafa from the Department of Graphic Communication in USM centred his presentation on "Looking back at the past-traditional food packaging in Malaysia". The importance of recycling was emphasised due to the escalation of mass consumed food products. For this reason, Dr Muhizam Mustafa and his students embarked on a project to bring back biodegradable traditional food packaging that is aesthetically pleasing as well. The use of banana leaves and husks to package certain traditional Malay desserts was a starting point for Dr. Muhizam and his group.

This series of presentations highlighted the importance of team effort over than an individual in the execution of a project. The shared ideas and the pulling together of resources enable a project to be spurred on even further. The exhibition organised by KSDT and USM is a good illustration of group effort with a shared ideal that made this trip entirely possible.

The KSDT exhibition was held at the Muzium & Galeri Tuanku Fauziah at USM. The exhibition featured mostly prints of the

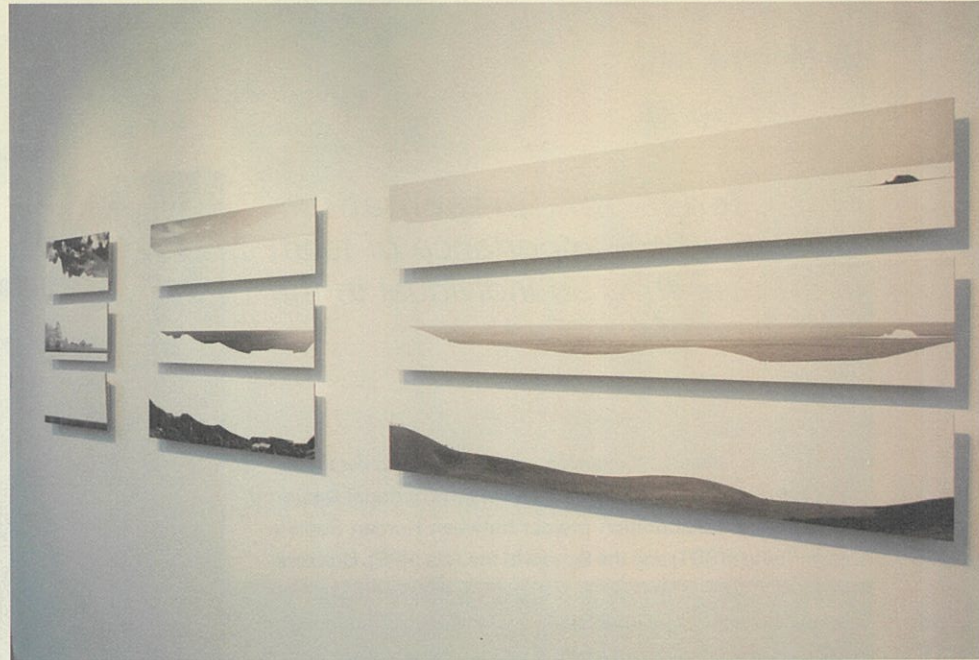
works of designers and artists from Korea, Turkey, Malaysia and Singapore along with a number of ceramic works. The turnout at the opening of the event is a scene familiar to what I usually see back home, the gallery brimming with students. It was satisfying to see everyone happy with the presentations and the exhibition. On our last day, our wonderful hosts, Prof. A. Rahman Mohamed and Assoc. Prof. Shamsu Mohamad from USM, brought us on a tour of the art scene in Penang. We visited the Penang State Museum and Art Gallery, and the Heritage Trail; we also took an unpremeditated trip to the café, China House where we had the privilege of watching music graduates from USM perform. The trip has created many opportunities and ties, in hope of establishing relationships between colleges and organisations alike. Just recently, Mr. Salleh Japar invited Ms. Jang Namsook to Singapore to conduct ceramic classes and to create works at LASALLE. The sharing of skills and the forging of friendships do not end and I look forward to the future projects LASALLE has in store.



# THE WINSTON OH TRAVEL RESEARCH AWARD 2012

Praxis Space and Project Space  
25<sup>th</sup> August to 7<sup>th</sup> September 2012  
By Hilary Schwartz

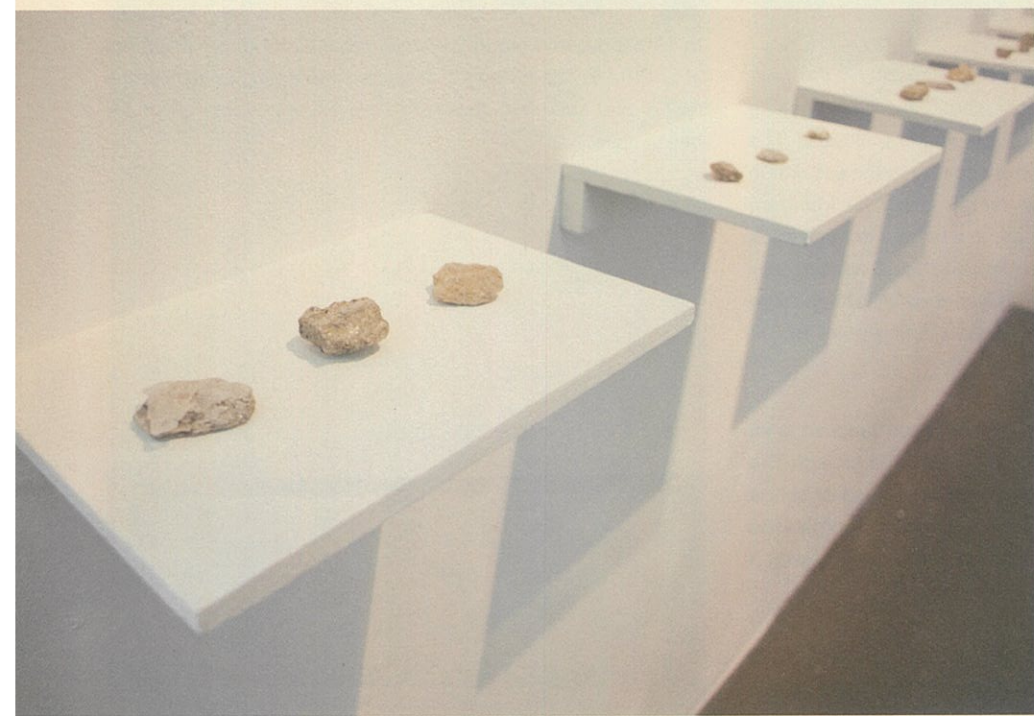
There is a thin line between wandering and being lost. When traveling alone, both in a foreign country and within one's own art practice, one moves between the two. Moments of fascination, fear, excitement, and hunger exist concurrently. The two artists in this exhibition found ways of negotiating new landscapes. Joshua Lui Chan got lost in Japan. Upon returning, he dissected and reconfigured the landscape that he saw into a series of black and white photographs. Slicing the sky from the mountains and the mountains from the ocean, he forces the viewer to map the terrain in his or her mind. The photographs evoke a sense of both presence and detachment that one experiences in a new location.



Initiated by Dr Winston Oh to help young artists travel abroad to expand their artistic experience, The Winston Oh Travel Award is an annual grant given to selected students from the Faculty of Fine Arts. This overseas experience, now in its 13<sup>th</sup> year, aims to support students in their formative years of art education by offering the opportunity to immerse themselves in a different environment and culture. To test their observational skills as they learn to assimilate new sensations and experiences, the students headed to various parts of Asia, Europe and America of choice.

Hedda Roterud Amundsen got lost in Nepal. Along the way she picked up pieces of the landscape. The rocks that she carried with her became a physical archive of her own memories. Taken out of their context, these fragments of land forfeit one history in order to contain another. She says of her process that she was "trying to teach [her]self how to experience something". The accompanying text, part diary entry, part scientific notation, function as clues to reconstruct her experience. "Piece of a brick. Dirty. Made my purse smell like urine. Kept it." Hedda's frank honesty paired with each object transforms the mundane into something magical.

In receiving the Winston Oh Travel Research Award 2012, both Joshua and Hedda were given the opportunity to wander, get lost, and resituate their practice in a new landscape.





*We were housed together with artists and designers but also with professionals, researchers and their families. It was homely.*

I received news from National Art Council that I was selected for my art residency with Dena Foundation in Paris, two weeks after I got a job as an exhibition officer with Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore in LASALLE. I felt I needed to make the right decision. It was easy finally, thanks to Charles Merewether, my director, who put his faith in me and said, "You shouldn't miss the boat." So my adventure began for my first ever residency overseas.

The idea of three months in Paris might have not set in fully for me when I arrived at my studio in Recolet, not far away from Gare de Lest metro station in 10 Arrondissement. I met Debbie Ding, the other Singaporean artist that was selected for this program and Elio Germani from Italy. We were housed together with artists and designers but also with professionals, researchers and their families. It was homely.

Madame Setari, the director of Dena Foundation has invited Madame Valentine Meyer to be our curator to oversee this program. Madame Valentine was of great help and I for one would have been overwhelmed by the massive movement of art events, exhibitions and museums that were taking place almost everyday. She understood my works through my proposal and provided me with direct links to places I should visit or attend. We worked closely together towards the exhibition of our group show at Immanence gallery in Montparnasse.

Every Monday, we would have an open studio. Visitors like professional practitioners of artists, creative director, gallery owners would exchange and share opinions and thoughts of our art development and process. This was an important part of the residency I felt, as it opened up various perspectives even though through casual conversation.

Openings, or *vernissage*, were plenty as we attended Nuit Blanche, a one-night art exhibition; FIAC, Foire Internationale D'Art Contemporain, an art fair; and visited Pompidou Centre, Maison Rouge gallery and Mac/Val museum for exhibitions and talks.

As December came, my residency was at its end. I felt the art residency was over before I was prepared to leave. Despite that feeling of attachment, I understood I needed to get home to start my work. This residency taught me to be more independent and definitely instilled a sense of belief in my practice. I am looking forward to visit Paris again, hopefully after mastering a good grasp of French language...as the French would say, *A toothlater!*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> à tout à l'heure, French phrase for "see you later".



# A DIARY OF MY RESIDENCY IN PARIS

By Hafiz Osman



[Originally printed in ISSUE 1: LAND, Annual Art Journal 2012]

# LAND(SCOPE), OR WHAT IS THERE TO SEE?

Thoughts on Tropical Lab 6,  
LASALLE College of the Arts,  
27<sup>th</sup> July to 15<sup>th</sup> August 2012

Exhibition: ICA Gallery 2, Brother Joseph McNally Gallery,  
Praxis Space and Project Space  
8<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> August 2012

By Lawrence Chin

*"Before the name: what was the place like  
before it was named?" (Carter xiii)*

If one could be allowed a false start - even as one is reminded that the etymological root of "landscape" is less of a viewed object, as in *land-scope*, than as one that is steeped in notions of production and mutual transformation, as in *land-scipe*, derived from Old English ("The Art Seminar" 92.). Embodied in the act of looking at a tract, or any tract, of land is a complex mix of overlapping perceptual, psychological, emotional and conceptual registers. These registers can unfold independently of or congruently with each other - which makes the act of looking at *land(scape)* all the more unsettling.

Modes of looking dominates the experience of modernity, yet one's experience may be augmented and fragmented by non-ocular episodes. Following Martin Jay's understanding and schema of "the scopic regime of modernity as a contested terrain" (3), there is perhaps ample value in extending these categories of looking and thinking beyond the visual trope. Such extension and examination of categories of thought may in turn redeem one's false start and initial misapprehension by returning the passive act of looking to a more productive form of action - in thinking about things.

Of the three modern scopic regimes that has been identified, admittedly in a simplified manner, the decidedly most hegemonic is "Cartesian perspectivalism" (Jay 4). The primary characteristic of such a manner of looking is to confirm (and conform) one's perception to a pre-existing mental model or representation. This act of conformity must in turn be derived from a symbolic order that is already in place and these perceptual acts further confirm the very same symbolic order as a useful, if not true, representative schema.

The act of naming a place or features of a landscape, such as that traced out by Paul Carter in the early colonial interventions in Australia, can be understood as a variant of such "Cartesian perspectivalism". Naming an unfamiliar terrain becomes an attempt to mark what is alien as already-known, hence already-understood (Carter 60). **Billy Ward** in his work "*M.I.B.B.W.*", presented at the Tropical Lab 6 exhibition, seems to perform a similar gesture in the juxtaposition of a hasty and dyslexical scrawl: "Singapore", along side two animated / documentary sequences with inter-changed audio channels. The slippage in naming becomes an intentional affirmation of the perception of a place that is verging on being a mistake, while the visually

displaced audio tracks are jarring at times yet cynically and effectively reinforcing the (mis)conception of a banal state of affairs already inscribed.

The ideological underpinning of a pre-conceived symbolic order in such representations can only be understood as *necessary* even as that representation seeks to critique the very nature and structure of the symbolic order. This leads to a strange loop of critiques as affirming the very state of affairs being criticised. In **Lai Chee Kien's** remarks during the introductory seminar to the Tropical Lab 6 workshop, the notion of a central void - in the form of a vacant site set aside for the purpose of a periodical enactment of shared nationalistic identity - is considered as a crucial component in the ideological formation of the (Singapore) nation-state. Such a void could also be understood as akin to the notion of "lack" in the formation of desire and its manifestation. And into such a void or lack, a critique can arise, not as reversal but as affirmation, even.

In **Valérie Wolf Gang's** "*Freedom 2.0*", the sense of social and ideological alienation is played out through careful visual choice of materials and reconstructions. Yet, an emerging divergent sense of resistance made possible through the very execution and existence of the presented work shows up the very irony embedded in the constraining conditions of freedom - not as the presence of coercion but the absence or lack of.

The very ideological condition of such symbolic production or representation becomes its very own success, in what is represented, and demise, in what cannot be represented. And in "*Freedom 2.0*", one is made aware of the instability of the larger ideological or symbolic order through the actual material configurations being presented - that things can be about something else other than what they are made out to be.

## Simply Looking At Things (Looking)

Graham Harman in his approach in thinking from the viewpoint of "objects" had surmised:

"[...] that insofar as something is present to consciousness, it is merely present-at-hand (*vorhanden*). But what is present to our minds in this way is only a tiny proportion of the entities with which we are involved." (174)

What can be apprehended sensuously is a facet of an object that does not and cannot exhaust the entire meaning and existence of that same entity. This object-oriented ontology approach brings to mind an alternate scopic regime, that Martin Jay contended as one which "suppresses narrative and textual reference in favor of description and visual surface." (12) And perhaps more than mere description but an autonomy given over to the existence and insistence of (collection of) things. **Muhammad Akbar's** "*1000 Singapore's Cigarette Butts*" and **James Yakimicki's** "*Spatial Deviation*" are such curious objects in themselves - the former as a Quixotic attempt to record, order and present, literally, a larger-than-life reality (of cigarette butts); while the latter activates the intangible spatial relationships of things, space and thoughts by means of a just-barely-visible thread that shifts in and out of an all-too-fragile human-centered perception.

A slightly different manner of understanding objects can be discerned in **Erika Norris's** "*The Geographer Library*" which hinges upon what cannot be seen as the central conceptual underpin of what is seen. The selective removal and paring down of a seemingly coherent collection of magazine images to a few pages of free-standing remnant points to a deep-seated desire to know images as both material and conceptual things. As **Charles Merewether** pointed to in his reading of the modernist engagement of the notion of "land" through the technological advancement of aerial photography, with the increasing circulation of a disembodied view-point of large areas of land, the development of abstraction could then be realised not as detachment from reality but as a renewed means of perceiving and, hence, understanding reality. This desire of knowing is made possible by what can be seen (presently), which in turn is determined and driven by what is not seen.

**Charles Lim** in his introductory seminar presentation suggested a single-mindedness that is driving his projects toward a manner of over-turning commonly accepted norms of discerning categories - sea / land; in / out; above / below; stasis / flow. It is a manner of working, or an ethics of art-making, which seeks to reclaim both literally and metaphorically a suppressed condition that might have been hiding in plain sight all along - or a simultaneous actualisation of the (not-)seen. The notion of "plain sight" is further taken up through **Sam Rains's** "*it's kind of like patchwork*",



in which one has to constantly switch mental registers between a tangible physicality and an intangible representation that are intimately dependent on each other. The succession of projected digital architectural models in turn elicits pangs of recognition of Singapore's urban landscape tinged with the recognition that the selected sequence of vantage points, though perfectly plausible, cannot be normally experienced - much as in Lim's work.

The hybrid installations of objects and video projections presented in **Jying Tan's** "Future Wanderland", **Ika Yulianti's** "On The Land" and **Alice Theobald's** "New Age Lament" bring into sharp relief the ambiguity of the screen as an indeterminate object, as part-thing and part-thought. And by extension, a tacit reclamation of things as more than thoughts, and perhaps even more necessary than thoughts. This reclamation is not to be confused for a romantic return to a prior or given meaning of things but a tacit acknowledgement that things are, perhaps, always and already what they are - in their multi-faceted meanings and possibilities - despite of what they are made out to be - in their singular and distorted clarity. The defiant sense of things asserting a larger existence and meaning can be glimpsed through **Lizzy Sampson's** "Walking (to find a food source)", even as the objects are intentionally collected, modified, arranged, aligned, rotated, lifted, piled, scattered, weighted and bounded, they elude any final state of significance in so far as the viewer is concerned. It is as if these things are staring back and saying something else altogether beyond a human-centered intention.

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"In every landscape are ongoing dialogues; there are no 'blank slate'; the task is to join the conversation." (Spirn 45.)

In accepting a non-human-centered approach of looking at the world, one might also then accept the world as already teeming with possibilities: a fullness that is not exclusionary but inclusionary and ever-expanding. As such, the productive work to be done is to add to this proliferation and overlapping of meanings, much akin to the final schema in Martin Jay's broad account of scopic regimes, which is:

"[...] the baroque [connoting] the bizarre and peculiar, traits which are normally disdained by the champions of clarity and transparency of form." (16)

The resultant opacity does not stem from an intention to obscure but from a demarcation of the possibility and limits of thought. It is an admission that it is not possible to know all things; even the familiar can and will become unfamiliar. Both of **Minha Park's** works, "Praxis of Patriotism" and "08/09", carry an understated awareness of the complexity of nation and land through the complex prism of identity - the acquisition of language in the former; and the displacement of language in everyday experiences in the latter. **Kim Thornton's** "Warrior I" performs a similar displacement in its poignant reminder that one's association with a place has significant yet invisible ties to notions of territory, labour and violence. It is an awareness that comes from an unfamiliar encounter of a familiar situation resulting in unequal bursts of somber recognition and amusing disorientation. It is an after-effect of (not) knowing things.

This echoes **Venka Purushothaman's** earlier admonishment, in the introductory seminar, to be a foreigner in the internal terrain or land of ourselves, which can be construed as making anew each and every encounter to the point that assumptions break down and wash over as just a few more things in the larger schema. The ensuing productive work and mutual transformation would return the notion of "land" closer to "scipe". **Sina Wittayawiroj's** "IML", perhaps come closest in demanding such a rethink of one's relationship with one's perception of land and the various attempts to represent it. Facing an incessant invitation, by way of an instructional animation, to partake of adding and reconfiguring cut-out cardboard remnants of what are already present, one might also face the realisation that there is land ... and then, there is land, depending on how one is looking or doing or not.

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#### Note

Tropical Lab is an annual international art workshop for students organised by LASALLE College of the Arts. For the 6th cycle in 2012, the programme started with an introductory seminar (moderated by Adeline Kueh, Senior Lecturer, LASALLE College of the Arts) on 27th July with presentations by Dr Lai Chee Kien (Assistant Professor, Department of Architecture, National University of Singapore), Dr Charles Merewether (Director, Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, LASALLE College of the Arts), Charles Lim (Artist and Cinematographer) and Venka Purushothaman (Vice President (Academic) and Provost, LASALLE College of the Arts). This is followed by visits to various venues around Singapore intersperse with studio work culminating in an exhibition of artworks (from 8th - 15th August) presented by the following participating artists: Muhammad Akbar, Adi Brande, Daniel Dallabrida, Hili Greenfeld, Hua Xi Yu, Lydia Keith, Molly Lowe, Natalie Madani, Connor McIntyre, Kassia Ng, Erika Norris, Minha Park, Sam Rains, Lizzy Sampson, Emily Shanahan, Jying Tan, Alice Theobald, Kim Thornton, Tina Tomovic, Ayumi Wakita, Billy Ward, Sina Wittayawiroj, Valérie Wolf Gang, James Yakimicki, Ika Yulianti, Zhu Pei Hong.



# SINISTER TERRAINS

By Joleen Loh

There is a work by Genevieve that I often think about. *After the Flood* was presented at the exhibition, *Future Proof*, at 8Q, not for the first time, but it was where I had first seen the work. It is a series of hand-coloured photographs of secondary forests (known as Adinandra Belukar) in Singapore. They capture weeds and vines that have carpeted an expanse of trees and plants. As Genevieve wrote, when these weeds are given an expanse of space, they can grow rapidly, colonizing trees and shrubberies, stifling the growth of other vegetation. In a country like Singapore where space for nature is hyper-managed and 'over-curated', the photographs are like a nightmare to the sleek, clean and orderly city: of wilderness being wilderness – uncultivated, uncontrollable, disorderly and inhospitable. In Genevieve's work, these scenes are hypothesised as an expansive natural landscape that has settled after the 50<sup>th</sup> flood; they are scenes that reveal an ominous side of nature, hinting at the sinister and uncanny. The impression lingers.

Scanning the topography of local contemporary art practices, the role of nature, or the natural environment, appears in a variety of different ways. It presents itself as an intervened space that hosts Ang Song Nian's (or Abraham Cammers', depending on how you first encountered the work) reinvented cocoons of mass-produced objects; as a site of uncertainty and doubt that tests our assumptions about nature in the works of Robert Zhao; it is also an energetically-charged physical and sonic site for adaptation and movement of the performing body in Yuzuru Maeda's performance videos. Also consider Mike Chang's drawings during his Pulau Ubin Residency in which he explores the connection between forest and temporary living space, as well as its sonic representations in the works of Mike Cooper.

In the works of Genevieve Chua, the wilderness appears frequently. The sculptor Auguste Rodin once described the unknown forces in nature as one in which "our watching eyes do not see, which our intelligence does not understand or suspect".<sup>1</sup> It is this sense of mystery of the natural world that intensifies its dark beauty and terror, making it a potent terrain to examine notions of fear, paranoia and irrationality. We can recall its significance in *Raised as a Pack of Wolves*, *Full Moon and Foxes*, *She was here before*, and *Tillandsia Usneoides*. It is often a setting in which Genevieve's fictional narratives are built, and have appeared in her work both physically as medium and intangibly as a site alluded to.

For this purpose of this essay, the three bodies of work may be loosely described as trilogistic: *After the Flood*, *It Eludes Me, but I'm Trying to Describe it to You* and *Ultrasound*. These three series follow Genevieve's projection of a situation in which the natural world has transgressed the barriers that divide it from our sanitary built environment and overwhelms it. The reality of human civilisation expanding and pushing further and further into nature is reversed. When photographing the land for *After the Flood*, Genevieve was standing behind the railings that we commonly see dividing urban and natural space, distanced from the natural settings she sought to capture. Eventually, these railings that divide city from nature – a cultural construct that feeds the urban imagination – became a boundary that she wanted to overcome.

In discussing *After the Flood*, artist and writer Ho Rui An wrote that it is from this series that we observe Genevieve moving to the border between the forest and the city.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, in *It Eludes Me, but I'm Trying to Describe it to You*, the narrative is set within urban space – in a gallery in Gillman Barracks – where she used common ivy and branches, over which ivy was wound, as her materials. Moving away from photography, the works here no longer stem from the 'decisive' photographic moment, and pushes aside the question of the author or observer.

In the room, at Gillman, Genevieve's materials for the installation included tangles of branches over which weeds have formed a web; a branchlet with a very young ivy tendrils strewn over it; and a branch with weeds that were strangling it, lying slumped the way it was found. On yet another branch, weeds had left a trace in the shape of the frond of a palm tree (one assumes which had been there, but had been cut off or removed later over time), leaving behind what Genevieve calls a 'phantom frond'.

If the sense of eeriness, fatigue and decay had been intensified by the sickly slime green in *After the Flood*, it is echoed here in their physicality and form. Re-contextualized as it is sited now within a concrete room, the branches in *It Eludes Me* lay awaiting decay with no explanation as to their displacement.

In *Ultrasound*, presented as part of the exhibition, *Birth Ground Not a Sound*, at Valentine Willie Fine Art, Singapore, in late 2012, Genevieve shifts her attention toward subterranean spaces. The narrative develops and we are offered images resembling ultrasound scans of an ongoing flood as it washes down large

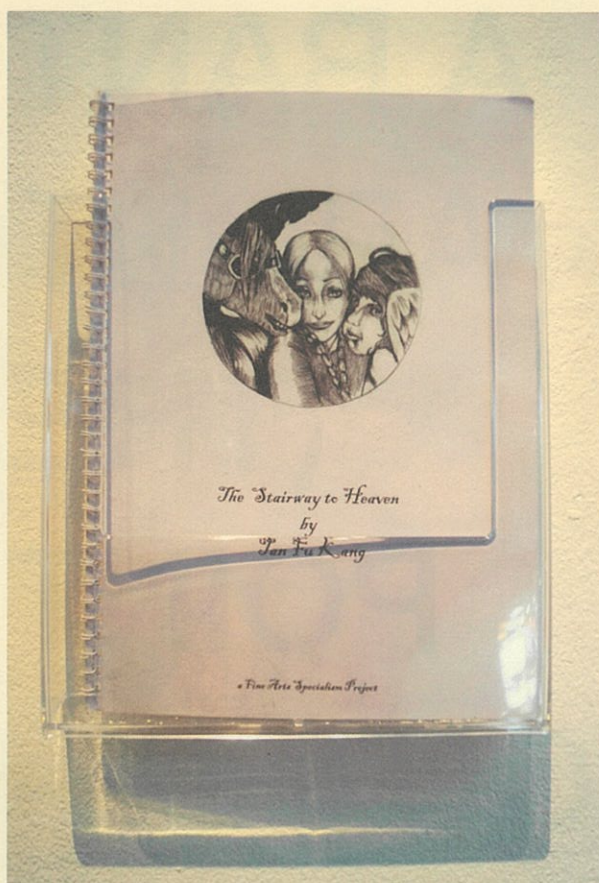
quantities of earth and water from surrounding forests into an anonymous shopping mall. The sense of catastrophe and the ominous within her imagery are intensified by the tension in which it suspends itself, which seem to drag the work itself through a dark force.

Yet, in this series, more than her previous works, Genevieve ushers in, or allows for, an imagining of what may next occur and emerge after the flood. The depicted flood here plunges down the shopping mall's levels into an unknown point of origin or 'birthing ground' that anticipates a rebirth of something new and unknown. This hypothesising of the future will continue in her upcoming work, which will be presented at Art Basel in June 2013. Genevieve will be constructing a 360-degree hypothetical observation tower, which can serve as "a device for viewers to enter and plot various futures and possibilities ..."<sup>3</sup>.

Genevieve's tendency is toward 'embeddedness' of narrative structures rather than excessive narration. This resolute minimalism of her narratives allows us to evolve richness in interpretation, leaving us to speculate both the sequences of events and their relationship to one another. Often, they are not necessarily plausible in the 'real world' but are reasonable enough in our own terms. Her works appeal to our intuitive capacity for narrative structure, asking for us to be open enough to accept fictional imaginings – there is a deep sense of unnatural death or decay that has happened in these scenes, one that is never completely subject to reason since it is not rooted concretely in reality, physics or psychology. The natural world in Genevieve's works is both sublime and sinister. In making sense of these phenomena hitherto unknown to us, we are impelled to fill these narrative structures with fears that are our own and, if we allow it, to furnish it with the most frightening.

- 1 Albert Elsen, Auguste Rodin, Readings on His Life and Work, 1965, p. 161.
- 2 Ho Rui An, 'Structures, Narratives and Meditations: A Conversation between Genevieve Chua and Ho Rui An', in *Disappearing Moon* by Emma Critchley and Genevieve
- 3 Ho Rui An, 'Structures, Narratives and Meditations: A Conversation between Genevieve Chua and Ho Rui An', in *Disappearing Moon* by Emma Critchley and Genevieve Chua, 2012, pp. 62 – 64.



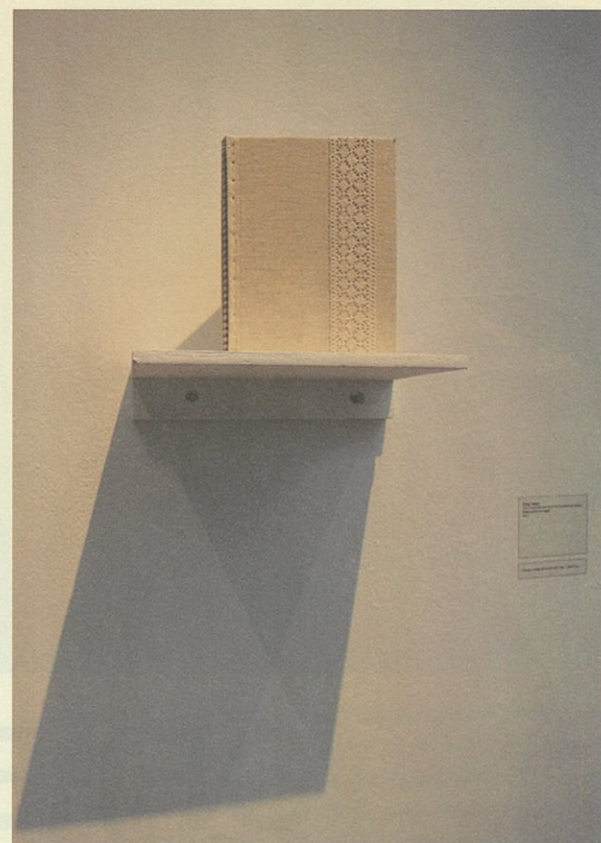


I remember the very first comic I came across: a small horizontal section at the bottom right corner of a newspaper comprising three rectangular columns in which appear two cartoon characters drawn in scrawny lines, and only a sentence appearing at the end. Then I understood; the punch line hit me and I laughed. I was then eight. When I recalled my first encounter with comics, I found it to be a nice getaway from the conventional reading of books or the engulfing effects of cartoons on television.

Sequential drawings, they call it. Comics, they call it. Graphic Novels, they call it. Despite different connotations and definitions, Life Carnival was described as such, for the rollercoasters and carousel rides of 12 stories, told through drawings and photography. The 12 stories featured in the exhibition were illustrated from memory, experience and emotion; each with a unique personal voice, and a warm dose of familiarity.

Jem Magbanua's text conversation epitomises the state of our communication where a physical conversation is replaced by a messaging service on our phones; texting has become a norm. And we've all done it; texted our friends and families while going about our daily routines, so much so that texting becomes a daily routine in itself. Her story is reflective of our human connection, a distanced yet indiscreet irony.

Divaagar's quiet visual illustrations were moving; the very personal emotion of longing, yearning and inevitable loneliness told through his bedroom, resonating Felix Gonzalez-Torres' *Untitled* Billboards. It was comforting to look at, and opening up sensitively to each frame and each page, acknowledging its familiarity but still unable to fully describe this familiarity into words. That was perhaps his intention of not using words, relying on the visual work itself to make a better connection with the viewer.



*It was my first time taking part in a comics exhibition, unsure of what to expect and a little nervous about what visitors would think of my story.*

# LIFE CARNIVAL

Praxis Space  
11<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> January 2013  
By Hazelina Oh

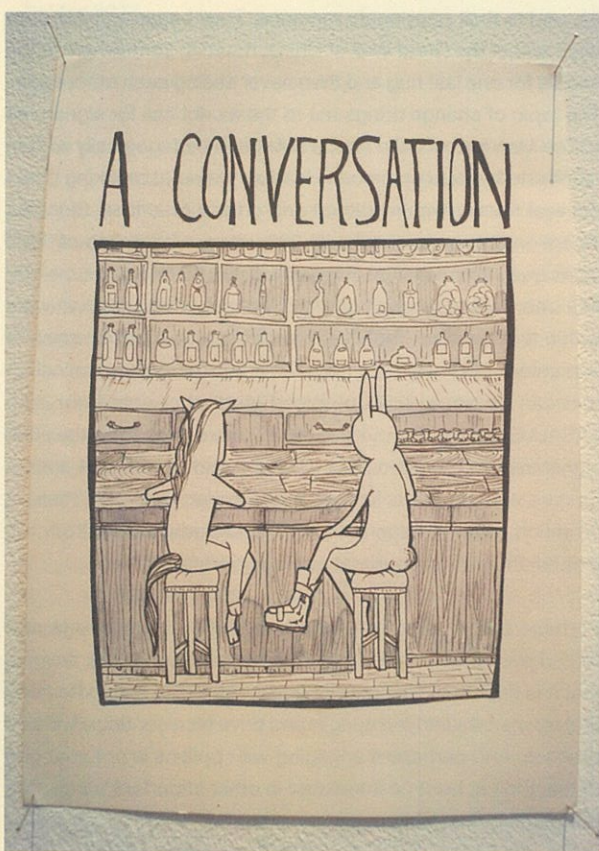
It was my first time taking part in a comics exhibition, unsure of what to expect and a little nervous about what visitors would think of my story. But during the official opening day an incident occurred that led to my writing this piece. That day, I was on gallery duty. As I walked into the gallery, there was a flurry of commotion and a small crowd had gathered: a cluster of visitors, most of whom were attending the college's open house, and a few of my classmates and staff lecturer, Betty Susiarjo, who were visibly agitated. Divaagar then broke the news to me that someone had attacked my work, landed a shoe print on one of the pages after attempting a couple of Bruce Lee kicks, all minutes before I arrived.

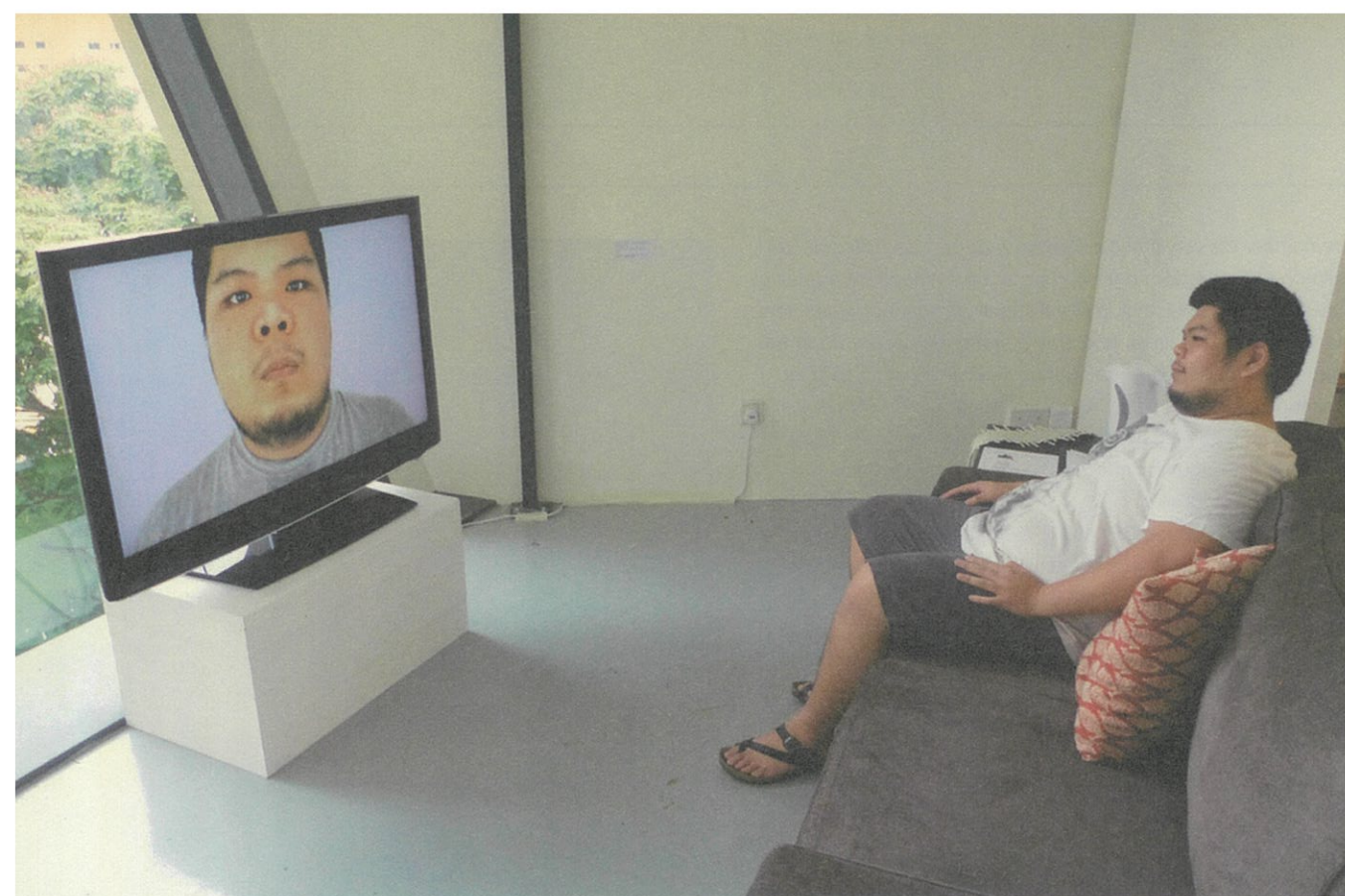
I didn't know how to react; shocked, hurt, with my ego slightly bruised, I was angry and amazed all at once. According to those who witnessed the incident, the visitor was a young teenage boy who had taken offence at my illustration of a teacher in the comic, whom he had assumed was his own teacher. That incident made me realize and understand what comics can do: it had the power to create immediate familiar connections.

In Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*, Art was described "...as a state of encounter, (where) an exhibition will give rise to a specific 'arena of exchange' " (17-19).<sup>1</sup> The incident lives up to Bourriaud's description, though not entirely in context. The ability of comics to surpass this 'state of encounter' to create an immediate connection with viewers was as subtle as Divaagar's illustrations and as discernible as Jem's story. When Bourriaud discussed the participatory degree of viewers when looking at artworks, he emphasises the shift from being passive, distanced viewers, to active, inclusive participants; viewers of comics fall in-between the two categories.

As I look back at my very first premature 'controversy' during this exhibition, I came to learn the effectiveness of simple storytelling that is stripped down to its gist, and that connections are what gives comics its life. This familiarity, and the way it connects to a reader, is the endearing quality of comics.

1 Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics*. France: les presses du reel, 2002. Print.





# A RANT ABOUT (THE POINT

# OF) BEING AN OUT-OF- SCHOOL ARTIST

By Kray Chen Kerui

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*As an artist and more importantly as an intelligent living being, I find our situation unbelievable and dire.*

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On 14<sup>th</sup> March earlier this year, physicists presented a gift to humanity – the existence of Higgs boson was finally confirmed as a scientific fact. Scientists from all over the world have heaped praise on the confirmation; some claimed it is one of the biggest findings in science, comparable to Copernicus and Darwin. Higgs boson is a sub-atomic particle, the last to be confirmed on the Standard Model of Particle Physics, and has been sensationally called the ‘God Particle’ because it is *the* thing that gives mass to matter. Without such a particle, the universe would be radically different; there will be no stars, no Sun, no Earth and no people. The finding of the boson has to be attributed to large teams of hardworking scientists at CERN, the European Centre for Nuclear Research. Using the most expensive scientific equipment ever created – the Large Hadron Collider – these scientists managed to smash protons at 99.99% the speed of light just to catch a glimpse of its extremely short existence. The boson is infamously hard to find, it has taken 40 years, 10 billion dollars and 40 million trillion smashes to accumulate enough statistical evidence to prove its existence. The importance of this finding does not stop here; because of its confirmation, scientists could now focus on the next big thing in particle physics and cosmology – the truth behind the elusive Dark Matter and Dark Energy. They make up 25% and 70% of the universe respectively with all other observable matter in the universe – all the stars, planets, dust et cetera - makes up only 5%!

It has been an honour to witness such an event in one’s lifetime and extremely exciting to know what more could happen, although I am really not certain how many people share my honour and excitement. How many people actually care about the important things that are happening?

Amid the ever-advancing information phenomena, we are not just

simple passive consumers. We choose what we want to consume actively, but sadly, sometimes we are no longer interested in what is important but what entertains. I wonder how many people know gossips about celebrities that know the impacts of, for example, climate change. Like the sciences, art has also fallen into this system of interpassivity. The most entertaining art attracts the most viewers, but the real issue is amplified when entertainability becomes the driving factor behind art production. That is not to say that all art that entertains are problematic, but those charged with intentions to merely entertain, sensationalize and spectacularise are. Like sitcoms with their canned laughter, art can become a self-receptive act, especially when it is disengaged from people and from the world.

As an artist and more importantly as an intelligent living being, I find our situation unbelievable and dire. Many people are no longer connected to the world, ironic, given how much connectivity is in our hands. As much as the consumers are to be faulted, the failure to communicate and educate by the people within their various fields also contributed to the ever-increasing gap between everyone. This includes artists like ourselves – how often have we shared with people around us what we do as artists? How often have we brushed off conversations about what we are doing just because it is too difficult to elaborate? Since the release of this Praxis Press is coordinated with graduation, I thought it would be apt to talk about this in regards to post-grad practices. Perhaps at this point in time, many of my peers may come across this question I have always asked myself: What is my contribution to the society? Or, how can my artistic contributions facilitate progress or change in the immediate environment?

I like to think that ‘change’ cannot be done unless you connect to

the environment. In a society like Singapore, ‘change’ is too often associated with a certain utilitarian notion, overriding its intrinsic quality with a verifiable, quantifiable end destination dotted in a four dimensional spacetime. But I think change is not about an end point, but a midpoint or a compromised intersection relative to two unknown positions. I would like to refer to *The Great Wall Walk*, a performance by Marina Abramovich and Ulay that marked the end to their passionate romance. They began walking from each end of the Great Wall of China, meeting somewhere in the middle for one last hug and then never seeing each other again. The topic of change brings me to the recent call for signatures to *The Manifesto for the Arts*, a two-page pedagogically written manifesto by local community leaders aimed at breaking down political frames within cultural and artistic practices. Since its inception, it has garnered only 930 votes, a huge gap of 8070 votes away from its target. It is sad to know that Korean superstar Psy’s new post-Gangnam-Style video broke 100 million viewers within four days on YouTube. Nevermind the attractiveness of superstars, I believe that there is so much more communication that can be done. The combined student counts from both LASALLE and NAFA would be more than enough to hit the 9000 signatures target, although I am reminded myself that such a gesture sounds like a familiar authoritarian tale. Still, there is so much more engagement with, and participation from the immediate environment that can be anticipated.

Perhaps being released of the academic commitments and forced out of the comforting confines of the school is a signal that it is time to make some connections to the world. Perhaps that is when we find the hunger and drive for a continued artistic practice. And perhaps if engaging with politics is not your cup of tea, then at least be interested in other important things, like the Higgs boson *lah!*

# UNRESOLVED PROBLEMS IN GLOBAL ART HISTORY

(A lecture by Professor James Elkins)

The Second MA Asian Art Histories  
Annual Lecture  
17<sup>th</sup> April 2013

By Rohaya Binte Mustapha

It takes someone with heavyweight credentials like world-renowned art historian and prolific author, Professor James Elkins from the Art Institute of Chicago to talk about the unresolved problems regarding the practice and theorising of art history worldwide. It is provocative to deal with something called "Global Art History" when the definition of the term "global art" remains unresolved although widely used in contemporary art discourses. But the phenomenon of global art has awakened the discipline of art history and its practitioners cannot escape having to deal with the daunting question of whether a global art history can actually be tenable.

Indeed, the main question posed by Elkins is whether there could possibly be a global art history. He forewarned the audience that his lecture is speculative and his approach is heuristic. This, however, can be easily forgotten as his lecture was delivered with lists, tables and figures, which make the qualitative nature of his argument less apparent. Fundamental to this pondering of possibility is a need to understand what makes up western art history. Elkins applied the term "working definition", suggesting that western art history's definition can also be tenuous.

The first sense of the "western-ness" of art history is its institutional links, which recognise it as a discipline with its place in the universities. The second sense of its "western-ness" is focused on Modernism, and involves the dissemination of such introductory narratives found in textbooks that students of art history have to acquaint themselves. With this in mind he then posed the question: is there anything viable as art history outside modes originating in the Euro-American zone? His personal answer to this is that there is no clarity as yet based on his study of the problem.

Elkins presented a rather interesting geographical survey of art history. His survey involved charting where art history departments and centres are located across the world. He also surveyed the number of refereed art journals against the population of a country and revealed with amusement how the Netherlands came up tops in this respect. The survey, which he qualified as not up to date and is likely not to have covered the ground completely, shows that statistically, art history is a discipline practised mainly in Western Europe and North America, a not unexpected conclusion. However, he qualified that this did not mean that there is little art history outside of this zone because basically we are still trapped in what we understand to be art history. The surveys conducted are also reflections of what is recognised as art history according to western ideas and does not take into consideration what may lie outside of it.

The desire to discover other non-western discourses of art history is definitely there but the act of discovery is fraught with the inability to escape western art history as comparison. This 'trap' manifests itself in three ways. Firstly, the privileging of oppositional and cultural practices in art history; secondly, the

worldwide institutional resistance to the adoption of non-western interpretive methods; and thirdly, the lack of named art historical practices that are different from Euro-American practices. If these can be overcome, then unfamiliar practices of art history when encountered may get a chance of not being considered as partial, provincial or belated.

Another problem raised by Elkins is that many practices of art history are framed by the definition and elaboration of a national and regional tradition rather than one with a global focus. He recommended a reading of the book "The Germans and their Art" by Hans Belting, which he sees as an allegory for other nations' scholarships. He brought up yet another of his survey-based observations that although many journals have an international reach, far more journals are resolutely tied to the discussion of national art. In his usual style, he took the same observation and turned it around and suggested the possibility that the tendency to privilege national art be considered an integral part of global art history.

At the core of the impasse of having a global art history is the inability of language to transcend cultures. Elkins gave examples of terms that are specific in their own cultures with many more that are simply not translatable into the English language. Thus practices in places like Tbilisi and Beijing are apt to be misconstrued as partial versions of western art history. Although attention to local discourses can ameliorate problems of cultural representation, there still remains the problem of interpretive approaches in other cultures being enclosed by western scholarship in some way or another.

His survey on events and conversations on art history has revealed that there remains a desire to understand art history in other regions. He brought up the example of the Clark Art

Institute's Mellon project to study world art histories. Despite itself, there remains a tendency to identify only with those that can be co-opted into western ways of thinking in art history. He said that the Institute tended to visit places that have practices that they can understand, which means that the western art history frame is still being applied leaving those outside of it occluded from study. Elkins also brought up his own experiences with conversations in China during which he discovered that art history as practised there is fundamentally different from the west. The discussions were so problematic that the misunderstandings arising from differences in practice prevents him from writing and publishing books about these conferences.

Elkins provided a sliver of hope when he said that perhaps we must look at the literary tradition that lies outside of art history which can offer a model for global art history. In the literary field, other traditions of research and scholarship that are different are just accepted as different. Unfortunately, he did not go on to elaborate as to how we can use this model. He does not, however, believe that we should just dispense with everything we know of art history as that will be stepping out of art history altogether. In response to the question as to whether this anxiety about art history's limitations arose from the construction of a problem that is not really there, Elkins good humouredly applied a Freudian perspective and said that those who do not feel this anxiety in art history "must be repressing a lot".

(This seminar has its roots in *The Art Seminar*, James Elkin's series of conversations on art and visual studies, specifically the volumes entitled *Is Art History Global?* and *Art and Globalization*)

Rohaya Binte Mustapha is a graduate of the MA Asian Art Histories programme at LASALLE College of the Arts.



# WEAVING NARRATIVES

## 100% Linen (Edition 1)

Brother Joseph McNally Gallery  
29<sup>th</sup> March to 9<sup>th</sup> April 2013

By Jessica Anne Rahardjo

**100% Linen** sought to “examine all things linen”<sup>1</sup>, unpacking what linen means, historically as well as socially. Featuring works by practitioners of various mediums, this exhibition showcased varying levels of engagement with linen – from the elemental to the abstract. It unequivocally reveals our age-old infatuation with linen. Linen has had a long history – in existence as early as the Neolithic Age, attaining the status of nonpareil luxury during the Renaissance, and has now become a somewhat impersonal manufactured product, having been supplanted by cotton and synthetic fibres. Nevertheless, linen – may it refer to the textile spun from flax or even other non-flax fibres, or everyday domestic woven and knitted items – is inextricably bound to our quotidian existence.

**Hazel Lim** explores the basic material quality of linen in her work, *Pastures* (2013). The title hints at a visual association with grassy lands, made manifest in Lim’s delightful manipulation of the material. The flat material is fashioned into quasi-sculptural forms. Textures are constructed: threads sewn, knotted, cloths cut, folded and weaved into permutations of patterns and undulating contours. Linen is conventionally related to textile crafts, and for this reason, it would have been easy for this exhibition to confine itself to mere material discourse. However, **100% Linen** extends beyond this. Indeed, as Lawrence Chin remarked in the exhibition pamphlet: “The materials and configurations must be understood as neither incidental nor didactic – but as attempt to balance of [sic] (conceptual) content and (material) form; of what is intended and what is made.”<sup>2</sup>

This attempt at balancing the conceptual and material is demonstrated in **Hilary Schwartz’s** xxx (2006). Vintage handkerchiefs are delicately embroidered in a manner associated with traditionally feminine crafts. Less orthodox, however, are the images depicted on these handkerchiefs: scenes of queer pornography culled from the Internet. Schwartz’s approach is reminiscent of Ghada Amer’s erotic embroidered paintings, in its play with the paradox between the domestic, docile craft and the stark, unadulterated pornographic images. Pornography, commonly framed through the male gaze, is upended by being depicted in a consciously feminine context and is transformed into something tangible. The depersonalising and objectifying effects of pornography are diminished through the medium in which it is reproduced. Yet, the resulting image is anything but meek – the handkerchiefs are not immaculately folded and tucked away, but are pinned and stretched at their corners, splayed open, confronting the viewer.



**Betty Susiarjo’s** interpretation of ‘linen’ is much more reticent in tenor. In *Wrapped in Linen I* (2013), Susiarjo seals letters into hand-sewn cloth envelopes and places them in an open box, available for the viewer to pry open and read. These letters had been given to her in the past, by people with whom she no longer has a relationship. Similarly in *Wrapped in Linen II* (2013), objects, reminders of events to which she wishes to put a closure, are swathed in thin strips of linen, muting them, their forms vaguely revealed. These mummified objects are shelved away in compartmentalised spaces, not unlike cinerary urns in a columbarium. Next to each, where the deceased’s photograph is customarily placed, is an image of an unidentifiable landscape (possibly an identifier of the origin of the objects). Linen as material has a reference to its historical use in Egyptian mummification, where it is believed to be a symbol of purity and light – most fitting for sending the dead to the afterlife. In shrouding these objects, the artist wishes to put memories of them to rest, and yet simultaneously, preserve them and crystallise them, perhaps to be sent to the realm of the subliminal. Irrevocably, the material is both complicit in the artist’s attempt at closure and resolution, and yet, at the same time, acquiescent in its resistance to complete amnesia.

Prior to the age of boundless consumerism, used linen would be reclaimed: mended or darned, cut and used in a patchwork, recycled into paper pulp, or repurposed into other uses, for example as bandages. Toy maker, **Weng Pixin**, is no stranger to this practice, constructing handmade objects with secondhand material. Her work *Hope* (2013) is an exclamation “come back Brinsley!” shaped from strips of linen bed sheets and accompanied by graphic novel panels. The title above the letter ‘i’ is replaced with the image of a head, which one can infer from the panels as the character Brinsley. *Hope* was derived from the graphic novel *Goodbye Jennifer*, based on writer/musician Kelvin Tan’s play of the same name. To the artist, the character Brinsley Bivouac, who is an antithesis to the cynical and hard-hearted Jennifer, represents the idea of hope. Shredded used bedsheets would seem an unlikely choice of material to illustrate this idea, given the emotionally charged tearing, shredding and destruction that the work necessitates. Nonetheless, it is here that the potency of the work lies. Both the use of the bedsheets, evoking anonymous souls that once lay on them, and the exclamation in slightly cursive font that suggests a bittersweet, pleading tone, speak of a universal yearning for, for lack of a better word, hope.

**Adeline Kueh** uses similar material in her work, *The Distance between My Bed and Yours* (2013). The used linen sheet was hers, which after over fifteen years of use, are remade into a robe and a pair of *geta* (traditional Japanese slippers). The robe drapes over a hanger, with the *geta* placed underneath, and above them, a flashing ‘Vacancy’ neon sign. The ‘bed’ referred to in the title is a metaphor of the refashioned linen sheet, which bore traces of the body. The spatial configuration of the installation was



unsettling – the sign, usually hung on the exterior of a hotel, was adjacent to what would be found within the interior of the hotel room. Indubitably, it is an allusion to a physical space: a hotel. However, this disposition of the elements reminds the viewer that it speaks of an intangible space. Seen within the context of Kueh’s opus *Love Hotel*, this work expresses a desire for connection in the midst of alienation in urban life. More significantly, this work suggests what is present as much as what is not: the spectre, or the ghost, of the absent body. The state of waiting and anticipation is constant, as ‘Vacancy’ flashes persistently to no end. What, or more specifically to whom does this vacancy refer? Items of clothing waiting to be worn, the void longing to be filled, ergo, the distance to be brought closer.

**Gisli Snaer’s** works, on the other hand, are primarily overt references to linen as a support medium for painting. *Jasmine, On the beach, East Coast Park* (2013) comprised two identically titled and sized photographs on canvas, whereas *The Beach* (2013) was a video projection on unstretched linen. At a glance, the works bore some visual resemblance to those of artist Jason Salavon’s – in particular, his “amalgamations” series, where images were constructed using the mean or median average from sets of photographs sharing common characteristics. Similarly, Snaer’s works were created by superimposing hundreds of layers of the same image, blurring the lines and borders, foreground and background – replicating the sfumato painting effect. In the two ‘Jasmine’ portraits, features of the subject fade into a haze, creating atmospheric, misty meta-portraits. They were perplexing – they ostensibly depict the same subject given the selfsame description, but the ‘Jasmines’ do not appear to be the same person. With a similar pictorial treatment, the landscape in *The Beach*, shot in Reykjanes, Iceland, becomes an indeterminate, phantasmal one; the painterly image barely changed over time. The work reflects the ambiguity of representation of images, be it in painting or film, and at the same time, demonstrates the artist’s adroitness in appropriating historical models (of painting) in new media.

The final piece in this exhibition, *Video Poem* (2011 – 2013) by **Krisna Murti** in collaboration with **Adeline Kueh**, necessitated a conceptual leap in contextualising it within the exhibition. The original video piece depicts a man performing various yoga postures with a waterfall in the background. Through Kueh’s intervention, the viewing experience was displaced. The video was projected onto a horizontal table setting, over linen in the form and dimensions of a placemat. The resulting effect was a tranquil one, where the viewer was enticed to pause and contemplate, akin to the act of reflecting prior to tucking into a meal. Here, linen is emblematic to the idea of domesticity and consumption, seamlessly juxtaposed with the act of meditative cogitation.

A common thread that ran throughout this exhibition was the presence of personal narratives or anecdotes. It is little wonder that **100% Linen** was fraught with traces of personal histories: allusion, diffusion and collision of histories, given its complex intertwinement with our daily lives. Curators Adeline Kueh and Betty Susiarjo intend to develop this theme in forthcoming editions of 100% Linen, where issues of sustainability, in addition to fibre arts, will be examined. In a post-dematerialisation era in contemporary art, a return to the ‘material’ and the ‘elemental’ is heartening, if not, invaluable.

1 Adeline Kueh and Betty Susiarjo, in exhibition text (2013).

2 Lawrence Chin, “In Excess of a Remainder: Thoughts on 100% Linen” in *100% Linen (Edition 1)*. LASALLE, Singapore 2013.