

## I AM NOT A PERFORMANCE ARTIST: REMEMBERING LEE WEN (1957-2019)

by Ian Tee Wang Loong, BA(Hons) Alumnus (2018)

*“It is not that artists want to change the world, but the world may change us in ways that we are not willing to accept. Therein lies the need for resistance. And the purpose of our work as artists: without really trying, we change the world.”*

It has been more than three months after Lee Wen’s passing as I pen this piece. I write from the perspective of a stranger, unable to offer personal anecdotes or inside information. In the days since 3 March 2019, there were numerous moving tributes published online and on social media, by individuals on whom the artist had an impact. I write not only from a distance, but perhaps also too late?

I distinctly remember the two occasions I saw Lee in person. The first was in January 2016 at Independent Archive (IA)<sup>1</sup>, while I was attending Martin Constable’s presentation on the ‘perfect art school’, part of their series of *Monday Moot* talks. That topic had piqued my interest; it was my first year in art school too. Martin’s discussion breezed through the institution’s history from the western tradition, before ending with “a modest outline of what he believes to be the perfect art school.” Truth be told, I remember nothing of his proposition today but I do know what it entailed for me: what do you want out of art school?

In 1988, Lee Wen found his calling to be an artist, to which he responded by leaving his career in banking to enroll at LASALLE. He was already 30 years old then, imagine that! It was a time before the ‘professionalisation’ of art, where one enrolls in an art school with the intention of being an artist. Some may say it was a more idealistic time, but I can be certain that Lee believed in freedom. One only needs to engage with his work to grasp the spirit and tenacity behind this man.



Lee Wen, *Journey of A Yellow Man No. 11: Multi-Culturalism*, 1997. Inkjet print on paper, 101.6 x 144.8 cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore. Image courtesy of National Heritage Board



Lee Wen, *Ping Pong Go Round (Korea)*, 2019. Image courtesy of Satoko Lee

Speaking up and acting out (in the name of art or otherwise) takes more than just idealism, it takes sacrifice. Woon Tien Wei wrote a poignant piece in *ArtAsiaPacific*<sup>2</sup> about Lee’s commitment to keep IA alive, in spite of his failing health. Founded in 2012, IA is a platform dedicated to time-based and event-specific art, and also one of Lee’s last major projects. It comprises a reference library and a collection of archival material pertaining to art in Singapore and the region.

I recall my uncertainty if I had arrived at the right place on my first visit to IA, at its former 67 Aliwal Street location. It was a house consumed by its content, relics from Lee’s performances nested among bookshelves and stacks. There was a fragility to the space, which mirrored Lee’s body after years of battling Parkinson’s disease. However, as Tien puts it, IA was also a “social body,” which to a younger generation, is akin to an opportunity to hold hands with history. The archive has since been digitised and made accessible at the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore and the Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong<sup>3</sup>.

Even though his mobility was restricted, Lee’s mind remained sharp. Hearing him speak at the Parkview Museum’s *Acts of Voicing* artist panel left a strong impression on me. It was a testament to the strength of will, and entirely captivating. Lee was also vocal in airing his views in the digital space, through his published writings and on Facebook page. His blog, *Lucid Dreams in the Reverie of the Real*, was used as the title of his mid-career survey exhibition at the Singapore Art Museum in 2012.

Among the metaphors used to describe a dialogue, Lee’s *Ping Pong Go Round* transcended the original idea of ping-pong diplomacy into various contexts. In Lee’s version, the game is played on a doughnut shaped table with one player in the middle and the other outside. By removing the left and right borders, it gives possibilities of broader dialogue and play though the balance of power is also destabilised. *Ping Pong Go Round* was created as a reimagining of the conference table, with an invitation for the lay person to join in the conversation, or at least to consider its implications.

This reminds me of a reflection Lee wrote about performance art<sup>4</sup>, which ended on this note: “It is not that artists want to change the world, but the world may change us in ways that we are not willing to accept. Therein lies the need for resistance. And the purpose of our work as artists: without really trying, we change the world.”

What does it mean to play this game, and from which side does one play?

Is the artist holding off from the centre of the ring, against multiple opponents all at once?

How does one reject its terms or play by a different set of rules?

And is it necessarily a bad thing to drop the ball sometimes?

### LEE WEN

by Dr Venka Purushothaman,  
Vice-President [Academic] & Provost

I remember Lee Wen. His arched silhouette was uncommon and had a performative lilt. His lived body embodied art unlike any other. You cannot separate the man from his art.

Lee Wen is a pioneer of Artist Village, Singapore. His oeuvre comprising drawings, installations, videos and performances remain iconic – etched into the annals of Singaporean and SEAsia art histories. His notable works amongst many, *The Journey of a Yellow Man* (1992) *World Class Society* (1999) remain textbook – significant, cited and celebrated. He remains highly decorated and awarded. As an undergraduate (1990) and later masters (2006) student at LASALLE, he fostered an ability to take uncharted paths. He left an illustrious corporate career to study art and years later stepped back from practice to contextual his work into a master’s thesis. While I have known Lee Wen through his works, it was when he was doing his masters that I deepened my appreciation of his work.

Performance art defined Lee Wen or for that matter, he re-defined performance art in Singapore. He emerged in a period, the 1990s, where performance art was viewed to be unflattering, unhelpful and annoying. But he was judicious in pushing for an appreciation of the form. He states in his unpublished 2006 thesis, “why would artists feel motivated to work in a temporary art form, which does not result in the making of a material art object?” This lays the groundwork for his deliberation on the form and function of performance art, its place in contemporary society and its role in the organic and aesthetic systems of fine arts. His works, cannot be reduced to a mere critique of society and its governmentality. Rather, they should be viewed as an acute reminder of Singaporean society’s own multicultural and muddled journey towards formulating a new nation-state that aspires to industrialise and perfect itself. Lee Wen and his work remain soldered into this journey.

<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://www.independentarchive.sg>. Accessed 6 August 2019

<sup>2</sup> Source: <http://artasiapacific.com/Blog/LeeWensIndependentArchive>. Accessed 6 August 2019

<sup>3</sup> Source: <https://aaa.org.hk/en/collection/search/archive/lee-wen-archive>. Accessed 6 August 2019

<sup>4</sup> Source: <http://leewen.republicofdaydreams.com/how-to-change-the-world-without-really-trying.html>. Accessed 6 August 2019

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About McNally School of Fine Arts  
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The McNally School of Fine Arts offers contemporary practice and research-based programmes at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels with an innovative and interdisciplinary structure. The School focuses on redefining the milieu of artistic research in the Southeast Asia region and Singapore's position in the world of contemporary art.

### Editors' Note

Dear Readers,

Welcome to a new edition of Praxis Press, and we are officially 13 years old!

This year being the 13th year, we welcome new challenges and surprises with open arms. This is the first year that Praxis Press has brought on a team of student editors to run the newsletter! The experience has been a true eyeopener as Fine Arts students tend to take the backseat on administrative matters. Praxis Press has taken on a bold stance to welcoming new writing styles to give voice to prospective writing talents in our school.

In this issue, besides featuring exhibitions by current students and lecturers, we also direct our focus to alumni who have gone on to accomplish admirable feats in their respective fields. This has helped to show student readers the many possibilities that await them after graduation. Furthermore, we covered a huge spectrum of work across the faculties in hopes that it will inspire students who wish to pursue further education in the Arts sector.

We are very grateful to our teacher mentors, Dr Wang Ruobing and Zarina Muhammad, who were the previous editors for the newsletter. They have provided much-needed insights and guidance for our journey. Their mentorship has made it easier to take on this daunting task as student editors. Their discipline and work ethic has greatly influenced the way we execute our roles and structured our year-long project.

We hope you enjoy the read; do let us know what you would like to see in the 14th edition!

Images courtesy of Andrea Tan Shi Qi

# PRESIDENT'S YOUNG TALENTS AWARD 2018

Singapore Art Museum (SAM) at 8Q • 4 October 2018 – 27 January 2019

by Andrea Tan Shi Qi, Diploma in Fine Arts Level 3 (2019)

*"Reflection, thought and identity. This exhibition gave me some degree of reflexivity, the spaces I find myself in, to reconsider what I think I knew and what made me realise that the idea of identity is not exclusive to humans or living things, and identity may not necessarily be defined by specifics."*



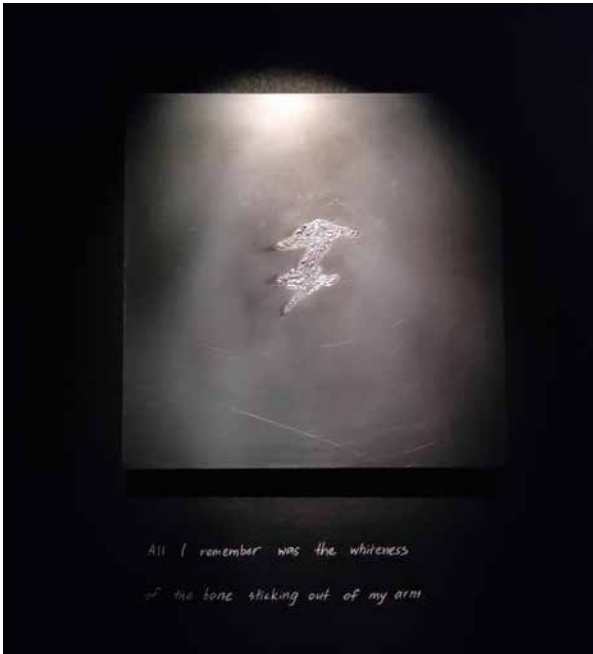
Zarina Muhammad, *Pragmatic Prayers for the Kala at the Threshold*, 2018. Bamboo, sandalwood, clay, stone, turmeric powder, sandalwood powder, saffron, nine grains and spices, rose water, incense, glass jars and paper. Dimensions variable

Reflection, thought and identity. These were the three words that subconsciously made their way to my mind when I was going through the gallery spaces for the *President's Young Talents* exhibition. I was in a state of constant reflection and thought throughout my visit, and I think that says quite a lot about the quality of work by the participating artists.

I begin with Zarina Muhammad's *Pragmatic Prayers for the Kala at the Threshold*. Although I was a little overwhelmed with all the little objects and sculptures, and the seemingly disorderly manner in which elements of the installation were placed, I felt comfortable and at ease. There was something about the space that felt familiar, and I could not quite place my finger on it, until I saw a structure that held jasmine flowers and joss sticks, and I realised it was the familiarity of scents that I grew up with during religious practices.

Now, I am neither a professional reviewer nor critic but I have to say, I was pleasantly surprised by the opening performance. The music felt alive, and if I were to describe it, it seemed like a young child playing it, which is actually strange to me, considering the videos and spatial atmosphere felt rather solemn, delicate and ritualistically sacred.

With the dimmed room, warm lights, a congregation of performers and audiences, it felt like a gathering of high importance, the sound of steady percussion and gentle gamelan resembling what I used to hear as a child during mass prayers in Buddhist temples. It was also an interesting contrast, the somewhat sombreness of the videos projected on the walls behind the performers, against the chill and friendly vibes exuded and communicated by the performers to the audience present.



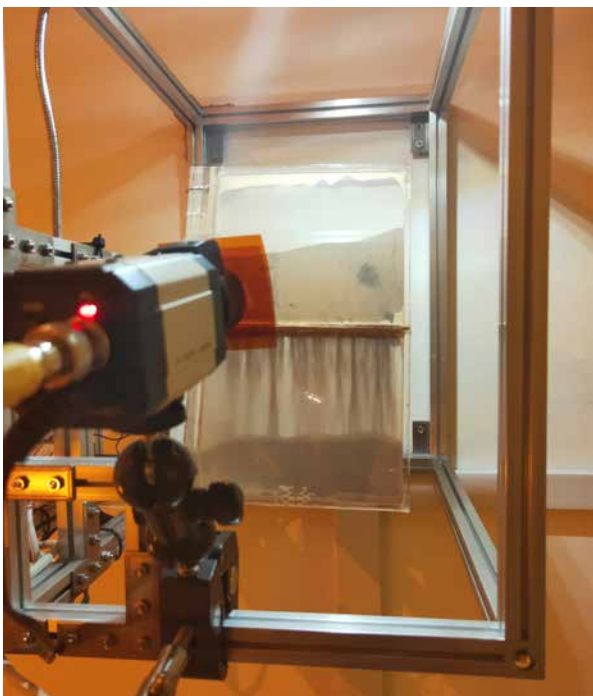
Yanyun Chen, *The scars that write us*, 2018. Charcoal, chalk, gold leaf. Steel plates, 30x30cm (set of 10), steel sheets, 180x80cm (set of 6)

In another gallery I visited exhibited *The scars that write us* by Yanyun Chen, who was also the winner of the People's Choice Awards. It was an installation in a little dark and haunting space, dedicated to all kinds of wounds, scars and trauma, bringing forth personal experiences from every individual, and for me as well, they just evoked memories and emotions.

I remember entering the space a little afraid, because of the darkness, and I was not sure what to expect. The first part was a narrow corridor, with eight drawings of scars of varying shapes and sizes mounted on the wall, with little comments written underneath them, comments on the insecurities and experiences of those who bore the scars. The second part was a series of six drawings displayed in the back of their own cubicles. They were charcoal and chalk drawings of body parts on which the scars lay, the scars gold leafed and subtly highlighted under the single spotlight of each cubicle. Lastly, at the end was a wall with short stanzas written on it, describing the scars with a poetic flair that felt more personal and thought-invoking.

I thought the installation was both emotionally and metaphorically significant, I felt the most connected to her works during my visit, and I believe members of the public did too. The space seemed to be curated to build and elevate a sense of caution and somehow a sense of privacy invasion, because such scars bear narratives that many would not be willing to share aloud, yet here they were, the scars, stories and thoughts all laid bare for anyone visiting to see, read and/or photograph.

The third artwork was Debbie Ding's, a five-part mixed-media installation titled *Soil Works* that invited visitors to perceive soil in various investigative approaches.



Debbie Ding, *Sand Weight*, 2018. Residual granite soil, LED strip, stepper motors, acrylic, aluminium profiles, micro-controller, miscellaneous electronic components, CCTV camera with varifocal lens and projection. Dimensions variable

I was overwhelmed with the warm orange lighting in the space when I first entered, then I noticed the scraping sounds, of scooping sand, soil or even cement coming from behind *Red Landscape*. It was just that vaguely familiar crumbling and crunch of a metallic shovel against any of the mentioned materials, the sounds we usually do not give much thought to as we walk past such encounters, especially past construction sites. It was ironically the most prominent element in the space that stayed with me because it was different.

It was different because while the other parts of the installation were mostly visuals, one would not normally consider the sound of crunching soil. We would usually just think of soil in terms of colour, cleanliness issues, contents and form. The space and the works were able to bring that consideration further, into the arenas of sounds, smells and progressions or changes through time.

*Home without a Shelter* comprised four grungy figures standing side by side in a line illuminated from the back by anodised aluminium alloy light stands. *Top Soil* was granite soil on acrylic and wood; *Sand Weight* consisted of a small, mechanised structure performing an action while being recorded by a CCTV camera. The regular action was then projected, magnified, onto the wall just next to it. *Soil Column* was the last part, with four transparent columns filling up with residual granite soil and water.

It could have been the lighting and the lack of human presence, but it made me feel this strange combination of calmness, eerie presage, isolation and silence associated with post-apocalyptic imagery. The first parts of the installation seemed void of life, abandoned even, whereas the later parts seemed like a reintroduction, an intentionally orderly and guarded observation of samples.

*sft crsh ctrl* by Weixin Quek Chong was the next installation which was awarded the Grand Prize. The installation explored surfaces, materiality, form and transformation with various elements in the space. The audio-visuals, which resembled the popular ASMR videos we see on social media recently, were played on small digital screens that were juxtaposed with and against different materials within the whole installation.

Drapes of different materials were suspended from the ceiling and over frames, giving off varying sensory notions. The individual components were interesting to note both wholly and individually, each of them an invitation to think about the texture and surfaces, reflecting upon materiality as we know it versus how we were perceiving them within the space though conception of the human senses.

What I found the most interesting was that the installation explored materials that I would have expected it to be a deliberate selection on account they were physically sensorial, until I read that the artist wanted to elicit a perception of uncertainty and idea of non-occurrence. It was then that the installation made sense to me. The visitors might have been familiar with the materials, but to view them in different forms, positions, lights and mediums, does make one rethink what they know of the material previously. The installation's components



Weixin Quek Chong, *Sft crsh ctrl*, 2018. Silk twill, latex, wood, silicone, vinyl, faux fur, paper, screens, aluminium and stainless steel. Dimensions variable

created a sort of rift between both memory and reality, making one try to recall distinctively the properties of each material and how they behaved under different treatments but end up a little confused about what their memory of the material was.

The last installation was *An Exposition* by the National Arts Council (NAC)'s Young Artist Award Winner, Hilmi Johandi. To me, his works had the greatest variation in terms of medium and form, from sculptural works to paintings to videos.

I understand that the works were supposed to engage the local history and collective memory of olden Singapore, and I think it was a theme that is different in the local contemporary art scene, whereby many would be addressing the more long-term yet still currently relatable ideas and issues such as identity and sexuality. It was a personal take on the artist's own interests in memories and the local cultural history that made his works relatable to his generation and those before him.

The idea of collective memory and local history seems unique to me, because there are multiple ways of perceiving the same things, whilst history and memory archival are subjective to individuals as well. It is a multifaceted notion, but for the artist to present a common ground that evokes distinctive memories of the past and creates a topic for dialogue, I think is a great accomplishment.

Reflection, thought and identity. This exhibition gave me some degree of reflexivity, the spaces I find myself in, to reconsider what I think I knew and what made me realise that the idea of identity is not exclusive to humans or living things, and identity may not necessarily be defined by specifics. What we see and know may not always be complete nor wholly right, but to some extent, it contributes to a collective experience that is irreplaceable and unique to ourselves.



Hilmi Johandi, *An Exposition*, 2018. Oil on canvas, three-channel video, digital print on vinyl sticker mounted on wood, synthetic polymer paint, plywood and mild steel. Dimensions variable

# INTERVIEW WITH CHOK SI XUAN: WHAT THE STARS ARE TELLING US

## WINSTON OH TRAVELOGUE AWARD 2018

Praxis Space, Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore (ICA) • 14 September 2018

by Atin Yeo Jin Chao, BA(Hons) Fine Arts Level 1 (2019)

Image courtesy of Weizhong Deng



*“The stars, the moon and the sun have long been used by travellers as navigational tools. Now, online apps such as GoogleMaps automatically detect geographical routes. But what would happen if we were to follow the stars as travellers once did? What would they tell us?”*

“It’s sort of like an unseen force,” Chok began. “I was interested in the dynamics at play, but I was uncertain of how to translate this into a physical form.”

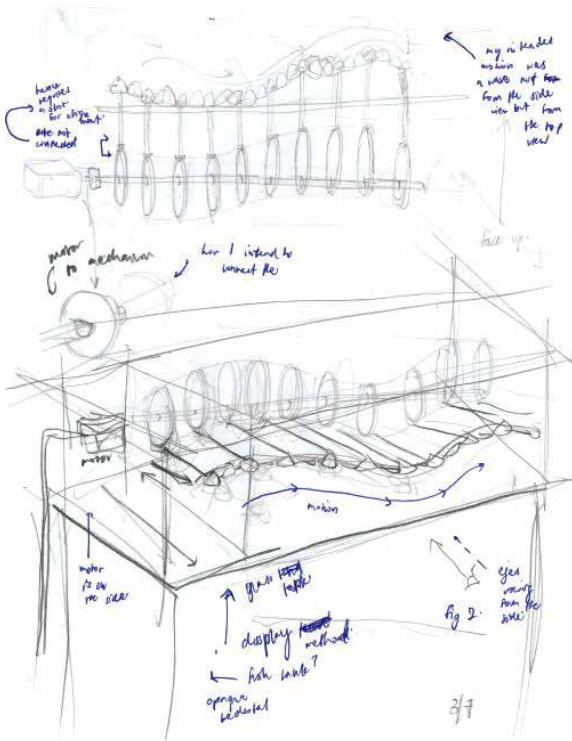
I nodded in agreement. Chok Si Xuan was giving me a run-down of her time at the sand dunes of Phan Thiết in Mũi Né Vietnam, an adventure for inspiration that was made possible with the Travelogue Award. As we continued to talk, Chok went into further detail about her proposal for her practice in 3D Printing, and her passion for what she fondly refers to as “technical things”.

“The aim of my [exploration] was to further my studies in my technical execution of 3D printing, so I used the money to purchase a 3D printer while educating myself on 3D software so I could make [things] from scratch.”

Chok directed my attention to her sprawling online blog filled with thoughts and sketches and digital schematics of her intricate 3D printed creations, altogether more spectacular to behold once I recalled that she had single-handedly self-taught herself to work this new medium.

Needless to say, I was starstruck, marvelling at what the stars had told her.

Chok, like the other recipients of the Travelogue Award, had to propose a project idea in relation to the destination of their choice, culminating in a final result to be displayed as a body of work upon return.



Opening of Tropical Lab 12: Sense. Image Courtesy of Isabelle Lim

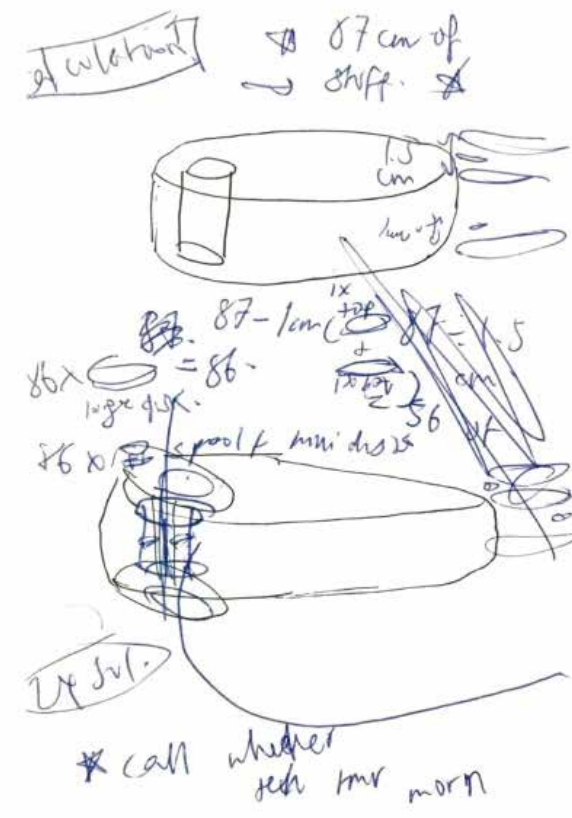
# THERE IS TROPICAL LAB 12: SENSE

Brother Joseph McNally Gallery, Praxis Space and Project Space, Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore (ICA) • 2 August 2018

by Jojo Shen Xingzhou, MA Fine Arts (2019)

“...I’m a long away from home, looking for aroha, still, getting to know you.”  
– TK, participant of Tropical Lab 12: Sense

There was a voice; only not yet a voice, not yet a voice spoken out by someone, but only typed out on a piece of paper.  
There was a piece of paper, only not yet a piece of artwork, but simply a pamphlet of the exhibition.  
There was an exhibition, which holds 24 artists’ works, but not yet his work.  
There was his work, with nothing shown in the gallery space, but only his words.  
There were his words, only not spoken by him, but simply typed out at the very end of the listed artists, on the plain piece of pamphlet of the exhibition.  
There was an exhibition, which has no space for him, no space for his words, yet he and his words fill up everywhere.  
Everywhere, we feel: words are trying to escape from the emotionless text, to find its voice.  
Everywhere, we hear: voices are vague but they keep on practicing to form its colours.  
Everywhere, we touch the colours oozing from its fragrances.  
Everywhere, we smell the fragrances dancing through the time and space.  
Everywhere, we walk, we mediate.  
Everywhere, we remember and keep remembering.  
Everywhere, we meet the eyes, we turn, we find out:  
We are a long away from home, only if there is a home,  
We are still, getting to know the truth, only if there is a truth.  
Everywhere, there is us, us, looking for something.  
Everywhere, there is us, on the way to make sense.

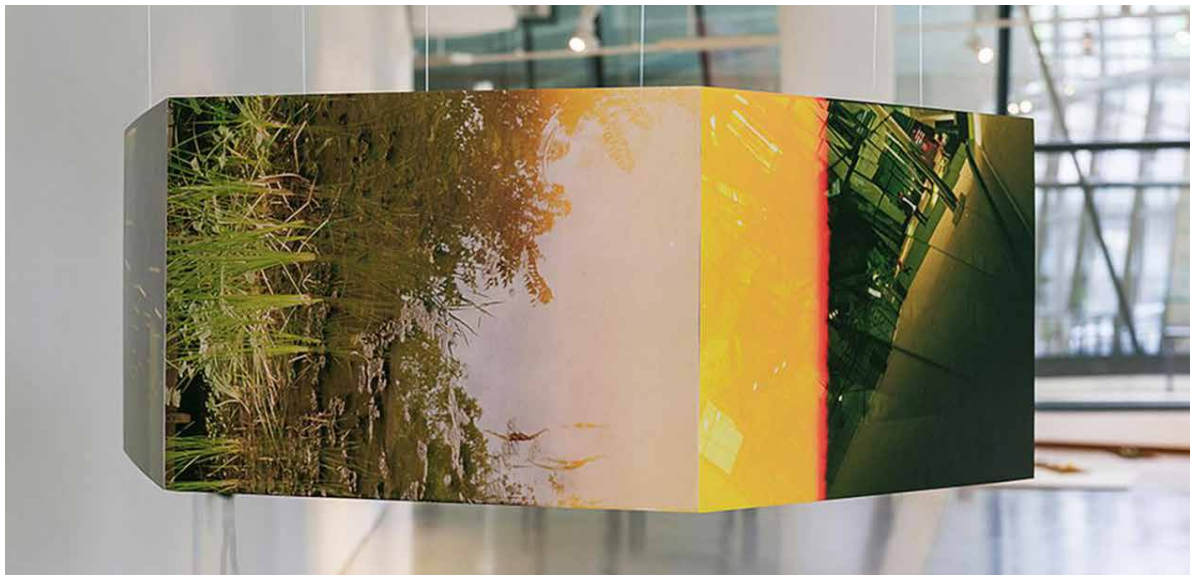


Sketches shared by Chok. Image courtesy of Chok Si Xuan

The culminating exhibition, *Winston Oh Travelogue Award: What the Stars are telling us*, was held in the Praxis Space of McNally campus, from 15 September to 25 October 2018.

Chok Si Xuan was one of the Practice Award recipients in 2018 of The Winston Oh Travelogue Award, a grant for selected students from the McNally School of Fine Arts to enrich and culminate their artistic practices from the experience of travelling overseas.

The other Practice Award recipients (with their destinations) were: Dylan Chan (Japan), Kimie Kwan (Cambodia), Ng Qi Hui (Thailand), and Joyce Tan (Bhutan). The Research Award recipients were: Tristan Lim (South Korea), Nur Liyana Binte Ali (Japan), Muhammad Masuri Bin Mazlan (Japan), Chloe Po (Japan), and Nerissa Tan (Sweden).



Tatjana Beljinac, *Sentire*, 2018, 6 digital prints, each 30 x 42 cm, installation view, Tropical Lab 12: Sense, 2018. Image courtesy of Weizhong Deng. Source: <https://www.lasalle.edu.sg/events/tropical-lab-12-sense>

*“In today’s world, there is always so much competitiveness, not to mention negativity and malignance in all sorts of environments. Perhaps it is time we realise that we are not living to compete in the rat race, but rather to find peace and satisfaction in a world full of chaos.”*

# MINDFULNESS IN MINDLESS ROUTINES

## ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE SERIES

### BY MA ART THERAPY PROGRAMME

McNally Campus, LASALLE College of the Arts • 26 September 2018

by Cynthia Wang Huiyuan, BA(Hons) Fine Arts Level 2 (2019)

Images courtesy of Cynthia Wang Huiyuan



In his talk in our humble lecture theatre at LASALLE, David Trevelyan, artist in residence for MA Art Therapy, openly shared with us his personal life story, his past as a young boy with dyslexia (learning disabilities) and ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). His struggle to perform in school was translated into an addiction to drawing, where he sought solace in a world defined and governed by himself.

David, who is from Canada, had travelled to South East Asia in the 1990s to spend some years in Bali where he set up a sculpture studio; here, he sculpts and manipulates forms increasingly over the years with the digital medium. He is inspired by the “cyber-heuristic/psychic automatism learning experience between the arts, lifestyle and technology” (LASALLE events website).



David Trevelyan sharing his illustrations.

#### **Dharma Taksu Yoga and Wabi-sabi**

David shared the practices of *Dharma Taksu Yoga* and *Wabi-sabi*. *Dharma Taksu Yoga* is a aspect of our experience that helps to “hold, maintain, keep” our momentum going and helps us transfer our ‘energy’ from one realm to another—and in David’s case, transforming his disadvantages in academic areas into passion for the arts. It is a refreshing concept, especially since repetitive, rhythmic actions such as connecting dots, colouring within the lines, weaving, etc. exploits its therapeutic powers. The emphasis on such actions lies in its ability to teach sustenance and endurance. This mindset of the Balinese is a stark contrast to Western culture, where repetition is menial, tedious, laborious, hence it is boring and should be avoided.

Another motivating factor is its alignment with the Japanese world-view *Wabi-sabi*, which celebrates a kind of beauty that is “imperfect, impermanent, incomplete.” Indeed, much of the meditative acts David shared, such as carving masks, weaving banana leaf, and batik, focus on the process of building endurance and mental stamina rather than any kind of marketable end result.

#### **Psychic Automatism**

Sharing media theorist Marshal McLuhan’s point of view, David said: “The internet has become an extension of the human nervous system.” The advent of technological devices has indeed encouraged us to shift our focus to our hand-held devices, to seek constant distraction from the task at hand, to divert our attention toward more exciting news and entertainment. He believed that this led to a global ADD (attention deficit disorder) in the age of information, and proposed that we ought to be more mindful. Despite this,

he claims that there is no inherent need for technology to be negative. Electronic stimulus to the limbic region in the brain can help to pacify the hysterical and aid in sleep hypnosis.

And how more to be mindful than to unlock our own subconscious, and listen to the quiet thoughts. There are three ways to go about it, such as *Mantra*, or verbal communication; *Yantra*, or written language and systems such as geometry; and *Tantra* or physical motion. He suggested that we do mindless drawing to turn our attention inwards, to trust our instincts and hence be more mindful of what we are doing in the present. He suggested three drawing methods to help the process, namely free-style drawing, connect-the-dots, and filling in colours.

#### **Beauty in Geometry**

Apart from advocating the meditative benefits of repetitive work, David is himself interested in crop circles, TV test images, and drawing and colouring his own geometric patterns. There is beauty in the calming effects of looking at symmetrical images, which is something apart from the obsessive pursuit of perfection in the hectic contemporary environment.

In concluding, I believe that there is much to learn from David’s can-do attitude and open-minded acceptance of mistakes and flaws. His talk was highly informative and potentially extremely beneficial when applied to Art therapy and Art education, particularly to young students with impressionable minds. I look forward to similar talks in the future and hope to see more people believing in his philosophy. In today’s world, there is always so much competitiveness, not to mention negativity and malignance in all sorts of environments. Perhaps it is time we realise that we are not living to compete in the rat race, but rather to find peace and satisfaction in a world full of chaos.

“Ellen set us on this journey by encouraging us to disconnect from our material selves and belonging as we moved toward being physically attentive and responsive to our surroundings.”

Ellen Altfest is an American painter who has devoted her practice to painting from life. She takes her visual inspiration from domestic plants, vegetables and more recently, the male figure. On a warm, sunny afternoon at Winstedt campus, she conducted a walking meditation workshop which she referred to as *The Hundred Steps*. The participants included students from the BA and Masters Fine Arts programme and this piece reflects the journey that we set out together, which turned out to be tranquil yet self-reflective. Our Winstedt campus was a the best place for this workshop; the grounds blur the lines between the man-made and natural spaces.

As a young individual who is technologically reliant and being the typical millennial that I am, my ‘phone’ was never out of sight. As her artistic practice draws on observing and experiencing her surroundings without distractions, Ellen set us on this journey by encouraging us to disconnect from our material selves and belonging as we moved toward being physically attentive and responsive to our surroundings.

# TRACING OUR PATHS WITH ELLEN ALTFEST

## WORKSHOP BY GUEST ARTIST: THE HUNDRED STEPS

Winstedt Campus, LASALLE College of the Arts • 14 January 2019

by Aneesha Shetty, BA(Hons) Fine Arts Level 2 (2019)

Ellen’s approach to this workshop really pushed me out of my comfort zone, and I would imagine for the other participants as well. Rather than focusing on the final outcome of our drawings, she encouraged us to focus on the experience of the process of drawing and the way we responded to our surroundings. An exercise that I particularly found eye-opening was the 5-minute challenge. We would take one step, pick a subject, draw it, and then subsequently keep repeating this process every five minutes for a duration of around two hours.

While this exercise may come off as undeniably demanding and strenuous, it is because of it that we were made to be constantly aware of the space when thoughts were generated: What did I wish to observe? Why was I drawn to it? What am I feeling or what do I understand more about this space that I already have a sense of familiarity towards? All these tiny, little thoughts crept into my mind as I recounted Ellen’s advice to take this experience as a way to cleanse the mind and be drawn to the present moment.

At times, even in my practice, it is easy to get caught up in the bigger, more complex issues of how I see and interpret my everyday spaces. This experience with Ellen and her way of driving us to go back to our roots, to look and see what’s present right before us and interpret those simple, yet captivating little moments that I would normally tend to overlook whether it was the way the leaves blow with the wind or the weeds that creep out of the cracks from our pipes or even the way the non-living responds to nature.

I learned how to be sensitive emotionally and physically in touch with my surroundings. Yet the most important lesson was how I learned to be more in-tune with my inner voices. It was a struggle, a battle I have not won to this day, but this experience allowed me to see drawing as more than just a sketch or a trace of what I see. It made me draw as a way to release my thoughts and solely focus on the small yet light-hearted process of experiencing art.



Tatsuo Miyajima, *Mega Death*, 1999/2016. LED, IC, electric wire and infrared sensor. Dimensions variable. Domus Collection. ©Domus Collection and Tatsuo Miyajima. Installation view, *Minimalism: Space. Light. Object*, National Gallery Singapore, 16 November 2018 to 14 April 2019

“A constant is the fact that we are always changing. In Western thought, permanency refers to a sense of constancy, without change. In Eastern and Buddhist philosophy, change is natural and consistently happening.”

# MINIMALISM: TATSUO MIYAJIMA

## A MEDITATION ON TIME

National Gallery Singapore • 12-14 April 2019

by Lim Charlotte, BA(Hons) Fine Arts Level 2 (2019)

I first encountered Tatsuo Miyajima’s work in 2016 at the Museum of Contemporary Art (Sydney), where his solo exhibition: *Connect With Everything*, forced me to confront time as both a construct and an irrefutable force of nature. I had to reexamine my perception of time in relation to human existence and have since completely recalibrated my artistic approach to my own meditations on the human condition. Three years after my romantic encounter with *Connect With Everything*, the only installation of his entire repertoire, *Mega Death*, was brought to National Gallery Singapore for the exhibition, *Minimalism: Space. Light. Object* (which ended in April 2019). I had to see it again.

*Mega Death*, the biggest installation of all his works, was an installation of floor to ceiling blue light emitting diodes (LEDs), customised digital counting devices of numbers ascending and descending at different speeds. He had found a simple yet striking formula to metaphorise life in all its certainty and volatility.

Wall to wall, floor to ceiling—the visual experience was spellbinding; except for the little to no audio of mechanical clicking sounds, a certain stillness filled the space. As you became physically engulfed by the vastness of this matrix, you experience a sublime sensory experience. I sat, for the most part, in the middle of the installation for hours, allowing my peripheral vision to flood with lights, letting my inhibitions of the ego dissipate in the face of something as large as life.

The sensibility of the numerical system speaks to larger concepts of time, the linear boundaries of our physical relationship and existence with and in time. It is a crushing sense of futility when confronted with the minute nature of your

existence, your life reduced to a single diode, a stark parallel to technology in modernity—our lives turned into statistics for arbitrary values in self-imposed systems.

Your field of vision morphed from the macro to the micro, submerging and emerging in and out of focus, travelling from lone diodes that seem stationary in its programmed scaling, to a blinding landscape of neon blue seemingly malfunctioning every time a diode reaches the end of its descent. When this happened, the light diode goes out and is unlit; it ceases to exist—the concept of zero resides inherently in the work by nature of its absence.

At intervals, a *Mega Death* occurred when all the light diodes went out at the same time without warning. Pitch black, a type of violence in creating a space so pregnant with possibility, it transverses dimensionality and leaves you tethered only to the abstract memory of the blue and situated you within the zero—*Mega Death*—a conversely peaceful experience (despite its initial shock) when contrasted with the experience of blinding lights. The uncertainty of this ‘absence’ remained for a length of time that I can no longer keep track of; the lights would start up gradually with the sporadic reappearance of single diodes across the walls. The cyclical motion of the numbers and the blackouts are cycles in relation to each scale, the singular person, the plurality of the people, birth, life, and death. I cannot claim to understand Miyajima’s work in all its beauty and depth; so I will end this very long thought with the artist’s own words: “A constant is the fact that we are always changing. In Western thought, permanency refers to a sense of constancy, without change. In Eastern and Buddhist philosophy, change is natural and consistently happening.”



## LASALLE OPEN HOUSE 2019: SEEING 'ART IN ACTION'

McNally Campus, LASALLE College of the Arts • 18-19 January 2019

by Khyati Ashutosh Mehta, BA(Hons) Fine Arts Level 2 (2019)

*"Passion and love for the arts can be turned into a passport for entry into a promising career in the growing creative industries."*



The LASALLE Open House 2019 was a much anticipated event that claimed to show how "passion and love for the arts can be turned into a passport for entry into a promising career in the growing creative industries." It was an affair during which the vibrant campus green in McNally campus teemed with activity from both the high-spirited students and visitors alike, as they mingle among the various forms of creative expression. Showcases, performances, complementary workshops and hands-on demonstrations were some of the events. There were also other works (and student journals to peek into!) on display everywhere.

As is tradition, the visitors (and some current students pretending to be visitors) received LASALLE tote bags and had the fees for their college applications waived. For the first time though, programme-specific tours of the McNally campus were conducted alongside the full-fledged ones. This newly introduced tour must have been a great opportunity for those short on time, because the full-fledged ones, as interesting and exciting as they were, could take as long as two hours long! Guided by the student ambassadors, visitors got to see the studios and classrooms with all their facilities; students were still at work inside and they were happy to share more details of what they were doing with visitors. The ambassadors also added fun facts about the different courses, along with some exciting information about notable alumni. The visitors seemed especially impressed when they were told that Lady Gaga bought one of the outfits from alumnus Josiah Chua's graduate collection! The script followed also mentioned notable guest lectures and collaborations, and even some of the perks of studying in Singapore.

There were programme talks by lecturers, students and alumni, and more talks that provided insights about making the right choices, employment opportunities, latest trends and general case studies of recent graduates, together with the international student experience. To address any further questions that the visitors might have had, some lecturers and students were available all day for consultation. Such advice also included tips on how to stand out from among all the applicants to the courses.



Both days were brimming with different kinds of performances. The music students alone flaunted their skills in the diverse genres of electronic, pop and jazz on the campus green, and classical in the more intimate setting of the recording studios.



The exhibitions put up by the different disciplines served as important parts of the event; they included award-winning works by students from animation and broadcast media.



The myriad workshops only injected more fun into the event. Among them, the hands-on activities from fine arts included screen-printing, embossing and other craft-making techniques, while those from acting and musical theatre dabbled in theatre lighting and scenic painting. The visitors were also given the opportunity to paint still life postcards and to use their 'extended arms' to draw charcoal portraits.

The two days of the Open House truly embodied the open concept on which the architecture of the campus is based; everyone was free to roam and explore the grounds to witness the creation of art.

# OUTSIDE MY EYE

Institute of Contemporary Arts, LASALLE College of the Arts • 19 April – 3 May 2019

by Kar-men Cheng, MA Fine Arts (2019)

In May this year, I visited my MAFA seniors' graduation show *Outside My Eye*. It was their opening night and the atmosphere felt tense with promise. After all, this show is a culmination of one and a half years of research, positioning and repositioning. Camera flashes, backslapping and questions reverberated off the shiny grey floors of Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA)'s Gallery 1. The artists' designated corners were enlivened with objects, environments, experiments, moments, and moods. Geraldine Lim tells me *Outside My Eye* was a random line

taken from a children's book. The cohort chose this title to emphasise experiences other than the visual as well as evoke the "bodily aspect" of their practices. It was also important for the artists to acknowledge that their works were in some way shaped by the audiences that experience them.

I felt the need to find out more. The following interviews with the artists may convey some of the thoughts behind their practices.



Geraldine Lim, *The Tunnel*, 2019, MA Fine Arts graduation exhibition: *Outside My Eye*, 2019. Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, LASALLE College of the Arts.

## Geraldine Lim

**K:** In your artist statement, you talk about exploring fantasy and the idealisation of the strange as a coping mechanism for confronting social anxiety. How did those feelings of anxiety inform the content of your fantasies and the aesthetic choices you make in the artwork?

**Geraldine:** Idealising the strange to me felt like a way to fight the thought of fear that is inherent in anxiety. The idea of the non-conforming is appealing to me as a form of revolt against normality and the general uncertainty of the under-represented. In that way, I think my work adopts a kind of "monstrous" feminine language that deals with horror, that seems to come naturally from thinking about the idea of not belonging. I think a lot of it comes from thinking about the body system as a metaphor for my feelings towards people, when dealing with anxiety.

**K:** In that liminal space between your inner world of comfort and the external reality to which you feel disconnected, you have found a certain idea of "strange"; for example, in *The Tunnel*, you have put the 'strange' in a physical form. Is it accurate to say that you develop your studio practice in tandem with your self-study?

**Geraldine:** Yes, my studio practice has increasingly become a way to process and confront my psychological issues and I think that in making *The Tunnel*, it seems like it has seamlessly fused together. After putting my thoughts into physicality, I felt like I was unloading the inside of my guts that have decayed, which I haven't gotten rid of for a very long time.

**K:** You have also spoken about contributing to a narrative of psychological expulsion. How has this narrative evolved in the course of working on *The Tunnel*?

**Geraldine:** Before the execution of *The Tunnel* (the actual life-size tunnel that I can hide in), the psychological expulsion referred to the many "creatures" that I made – metaphors for dispelling decayed and toxic matter in my body. *The Tunnel* was for me a way to hide from these organs that I had thrown away, but I realised they became a landscape from which I could not escape. I learned a lot over the semester as I was building this cave in my studio that I had to accept that they are never going away and that accepting them as my offspring is the only way to move forward...also, I can't keep hiding from people. Maybe, ideally, I want both people and my creatures to cohabit less violently in my mind.

**K:** When making *The Tunnel*, how did you envision the viewer interacting with it?

**Geraldine:** In the beginning, till even today, I am ambivalent about anyone touching it. It feels strangely intimate for me to watch someone touch any of the creatures or interact with *The Tunnel*. Honestly, I just left my installation as it is because I didn't think it was important to show whether I allowed touching or not...I think I just wanted to see if that strange feeling of intimacy goes away one day...I think that is the point for making this work—thinking about the audience, because I still have many uncertainties towards this idea of interaction.

**K:** Where is *Tunnel* now?

**Geraldine:** I turned the tunnel into a blanket and kept it away, I don't have enough space at home haha.

## ND Chow

**K:** I wanted to ask you something about your Instagram research into the idea of agency and exploitation. As you noted in your proposal, the current wave of feminism is about the woman's right to be a sexual object if she chooses to be. In this way, an objectified subject reclaims her agency. At the same time, however, these images feed the larger visual discourse of sex in the media.

How do you—as a man, and as a person who sometimes makes sensual images for work—think this reclaimed objectification affects the male gaze?

**Chow:** This is an interesting question. Philosophically speaking, having subjectivity of one's own objectivity is an interesting problem. In my experiences as a professional photographer, as well as a student, managing subjectivity, objectification and gazes requires a balanced understanding of the intentions of the producers and audiences. In other words—the relationships between the formal aspects of an image and the likely perceptions of the relevant viewer. However, this agency comes with the responsibility of acknowledging the role of other forms of interpretation in the wider social context, which at times can have unintended consequences.

**K:** And could you speak about your relationship with your model—how did you come to become acquainted; were there any personal boundaries that the both of you intentionally set when you began the project?

**Chow:** I contacted my collaborator on Instagram via direct message. Within a week she replied. We corresponded through messages for a time, and then met in person to discuss our expectations and intentions. Following our conversations, we formulated a collaborative contract that outlined our working relationship. I have described how this collaborative exchange developed throughout the process in my thesis. I encourage interested readers to refer to this to see how our relationship unfolded and developed.

**K:** What surprised you about yourself during the course of this work? What were some of the challenges you faced as you set out to redefine the relationships you were so used to in your other photography work?

**Chow:** Primarily, what most surprised me about myself was how my perspective on the nature of photography, as a social medium for relationships and expression, changed and deepened across time and space. I came to see photographs, not as snapshots of frozen time, but as invitations to open-ended conversation and dialogue.

**K:** You mentioned that your subject kept a journal...I was wondering if you also made a mental or physical note of your own personal exploration of the relationships in photography?

**Chow:** Yes, I kept a journal throughout my studies. My thesis writing was an excellent platform for reflecting on and reorganising my thoughts. In this sense, my writing became an invaluable tool for artistic reflection. I also made a number of sketches, which I kept and continually referred to throughout the process.

**K:** I love how you had the nude model redo the photos with clothes on...would you say this novel experience invoked a different sort of vulnerability? How did it transform the work?

**Chow:** As our artistic relationship developed, we decided not to take nudes as a way to reimagine our work. It was interesting to have her put back on her own clothes. Unlike my experiences with staged, fashion photography, having her wear her own clothes seemed to lend the images a new kind of honesty—almost like a new form of nude. Clothing is an important aspect of people's identity and her wearing her clothes gave the images a sense of time and space in which comfortable clothes brought comfortable relationships, because this is how she presents herself outside the frame in daily life.



Chloe Po, *In this labyrinth I dream of you*, 2019, MA Fine Arts graduation exhibition: *Outside My Eye*, 2019, Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, LASALLE College of the Arts.

### Chloe Po

**K:** There is a line in your proposal I found especially intriguing. You described your sculptures as exploring “a duality between a desire to dream of happiness while yearning for struggle.” Could you elaborate on the meaning of this line please?

**Chloe:** I believe there exists a duality in all things. Fantasy is something that possesses this same duality as it begins with a longing and endless search for happiness and ends with an inability to reach all that is initially dreamt or desired, resulting in a cycle of endless desires. I view this duality as a human yearning for struggle, a longing for the existence of fantasy and ability to fantasise.

**K:** In your sculptures we see fragments of a house, and it's tempting to see it as a setting for an autobiographical narrative...what kind of narrative would you wish the audience to take as they walk through your “belongings”?

**Chloe:** I wish for the audience to construct their own narratives, so in a way they are guided to form their own fantasies through their perceptions and experience of the sculptures.

**K:** Could you describe the process in creating these intricate sculptures? What kind of experiments led you to this final process?

**Chloe:** I discovered the material at a point in time when I was working with soap. I wanted a material that was more durable and yet similar to the texture and aesthetic that I was working with. In the process of constructing the material, time becomes a key focus and element as it involves a lot of patience and waiting. This became one of the key factors that I experimented with, the idea of craft and labour-intensive processes.

**K:** Your practice focuses heavily on the reverie which you defined in your proposal as “fantasised time”. Could you speak a bit about what led to your interest in reveries? Does the reverie appear to you more as a “what could have been” or a hopeful fantasy of possible futures?

**Chloe:** I am not a very happy person, and I think these disappointments drive the idea and need for fantasy or rather, reverie. I view reverie as an extension and refined quality of fantasised time. This essentially became my area of research. I investigated the reverie as a phenomenological experience, an encounter of a prolonged time within the mind. In that sense, reverie appears to me as a “could have been,” taking on a rather melancholic expression.

**K:** Could you describe your personal study “fragmentation of the self” and how you represented this concept in your work?

**Chloe:** I view the fragmentation of the self as a division and separation between the mind and body. The mind, through fantasising, transports the self and its existence into various self-constructed narratives. This is explored in my work through fragments of the house and elongated figures that are similar and yet differ from one another.

### Shane Ng

**K:** Could you give some examples of the conditions and “boundary conditions” that you are researching? What does this research process look like?

**Shane:** The conditions involved in my research are the elements of an environment—the colours, the structure as well as the assigned rules for the space. Boundary conditions are the borders of the conditions which if exceeded would cause a negative impact on the users of the space or space itself. An example of the condition and boundary conditions would be the library. In that environment the displays, colours and volume restrictions provide a suitable condition for reading; however, if the silence of the environment is not controlled, it may overwhelm and instead cause discomfort.

My research process involves a series of mind maps which starts with the desirable elements of the space, branching out to the present conditions of the space and, according to the users or ideal projection, attempts to figure out their boundaries.

**K:** Does this testing of boundaries continue outside the greenware state?

**Shane:** It could. However the distortions of clay at bisque and glaze fired state only ends up shattering to pieces so their outcome is more restricted. With these conditions in mind, and for the type of interactions that it would be subjected to, the material is more optimum in the greenware state than other fired states. One of the reasons why I worked largely with greenware clay is to test the conditions and boundary

### JoJo

**K:** In your proposal, you said that your studio practice has spanned several art forms, as you “transform text into other media by the concept of repetitions”. Was it an organic process that took you from one medium to the next? How did you decide to use a particular medium?

**JoJo:** My studio practice starts with text then goes to other media. The reason I always start with text is because I believe language is the most powerful thing in the world; if you can control language you can control the world. That's why I love language so much, that's why I became a writer, hence even now as I focus on my art practice, I still go with text first. I use my text as some kind of guideline, to ensure my later practice does not go off the track. As for what is the medium after the text, it really depends, depends on if the “right texture” can fit the mood of my text, it's a hard process, and hard to make a conclusion.

**K:** Your research into various philosophies of repetition has informed your own observations and practice with different types of repetitions. Is there something that unites all these experiences and iterations of repetitions for you?

**JoJo:** Yes there are many kinds of “repetitions”. But I think what I'm going with mostly is the “simple” repetition: repetition with the sameness, in order to view the results in the difference. What I believe is, the more simple the rule is, the more complex and beautiful results would come, in other words, repeat with the sameness is easy, but its consequences are varied and vast.

**K:** Which media translation presented you with surprising challenges? How did you overcome these challenges?

**JoJo:** I think the most challenging one is from text to video (not in the *I'm bored* video, but the ones from the first semester where I acted in my video). I didn't develop these much, as it's difficult to translate something already shown in text into a new image. I guess I still haven't overcome the challenges. Maybe it's because I know it's not my strength, that I turned to sound/voice pieces. And in sound/voice pieces, the viewer can imagine their own image, but in video works you have to rely on the image I present to you.

**K:** Your *I'm bored* video felt almost meditative to me. What was your experience as you were typing these sentences? What was going on in your head?

**JoJo:** *I'm bored* is a piece in which I kept on typing nonstop for 45 minutes in two separate pieces: one in fast speed and

conditions of the space (exhibition space, and audiences included)—I can recycle the greenware and do more tests and save cost.

**K:** Could you describe the experimental structure that allowed you to balance intent and accident?

**Shane:** I used the triaxial axis to define the core of my experimentation followed by locating the secondary axis to see if the structure made “sense”. The balance between intent and accident, in my opinion, is from giving both factors space to do what they do, be what they are, and be allowed to take their course.

**K:** What were some of the lessons (from other artists, readings, discussions, etc.) that helped you develop this experimental structure?

**Shane:** James Gibson's *Theory of Affordances*, Richard Sennet's book *The Craftsman*, as well as Lawrence Chin (my lecturer), helped me understand my experimented structures and what they can do.

**K:** How do you imagine furthering your practice now? Do you foresee continuing your current research themes in your work?

**Shane:** I see myself working on a series of fired ceramics with a different set of conditions from the ceramics that are commonly seen. I cannot say for certain how far this research would extend or whether it would stay in the realms of clay, but one thing that I am sure of is that I do not see an end to it yet.



Shen Xingzhou (JoJo), *Diapsalmata*, 2019; *I'm bored*, 2019, MA Fine Arts graduation exhibition: *Outside My Eye*, 2019, Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, LASALLE College of the Arts.

another in a slower speed. The experience of fast typing out “I'm bored” resembles “automatic writing”. I focused on typing “I'm bored” for a little while, then I lost the attention or patience, and my mind started to wander off—my typing got messed up, and my mind kept wandering. Then my typing started to follow my mind, I typed what I was thinking. It was almost “unconscious.” When I regained my “consciousness”, realising I was typing nonsense, I returned to typing “I'm bored.” The experience of slow typing is more like an experience of experiencing time. The impact was a totally different feeling of 45 minutes.

**K:** How do the different parts of *Diapsalmata IIIII*—the manifesto, the book, the sound piece—inform each other? While working on each one, were you led onto new trains of thoughts towards the others?

**JoJo:** The book came first. To make a short conclusion I made the manifesto, then the video, and last was the sound piece. The relationship between the book and the video and the sound piece is similar to a triangle relation—linked to each other, impacting each other, together forming a whole. That's the reason I set them up in the gallery in this way.

**K:** As you look back at your practice and how it developed in LASALLE, could you pinpoint one or two significant lessons, ideas or realisations that really impacted you?

**JoJo:** I think it can be the lesson that you should always be clear about what you want. Be clear about your idea. Clear enough to stay loyal to yourself.

### Wen Qing

**K: Did you take these photos with the intention of sharing them?**

**Wen Qing:** Photos have primarily been a starting point for my works. At times these photos are taken consciously and at times as a record of things/ places that interest me when I go on walks or explore places that are new to me. When I took these photos, I had the intention of using them as inspiration but never thought that they would become the main subject-matter for my work.

**K: What do you most want the audience to take away— ie. a knowledge of what you went through on those dates, a feeling you had when you experienced the events, or some trait about yourself that can be gleaned from the images?**

**Wen Qing:** I wanted my work to evoke feelings of memory and forgetting in the audience. The photos were meant to elicit feelings of nostalgia (from the viewer's perspective), to get them to recall their own memories and experiences in places and non-places. My own experiences, while important to me since I had a personal attachment to them, were not what I wanted to leave the audience with. After all, an artwork is meant to be multi-faceted and open to multiple interpretations, depending on who's viewing it and the context in which it is shown.



Kwek Wen Qing, *Non-places: Reiseroute, 行程, Journey*, 2019, MA Fine Arts graduation exhibition, *Outside My Eye*, 2019, Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, LASALLE College of the Arts.

**K: Could you talk a bit about the effects you had added into the photographs and the aesthetic you were going for?**

**Wen Qing:** The highlights were a reference to the olden-day concept of hand-coloured photographs, where colours were

painstakingly added onto the developed print. The colours were selected based on my memory of colours of these non-places rather than their actual colours.

**K: Who is on the other end of these letter and postcard correspondences? What is the experience of sharing these personal stories with your audience?**

**Wen Qing:** The photographs of postcards are photographs of actual correspondence with family and friends, sent while I was overseas on the *Transcultural Collaboration* programme. They contained the feelings I had at that particular point in time, expressed in written form, which complements the images taken. They are a written record of my emotions at that particular point in time.

**K: What are some lessons or experiences from your time in LASALLE that informed the decisions that went into this work?**

**Wen Qing:** This idea of transience gleaned from the trip helped to inform my work. My *Transcultural Collaboration* experience and what happened throughout that journey made me think intensely about what it means to journey through place to place, never residing in a particular place for long.

### Liyana

**K: The structure and materials used in *Inhabiting the Banal, Imperfect and nothingness(B.I.N)* reference those used in construction sites. Could you talk a bit about why you chose to focus on "invisible labour" in the construction industry, and the research process that informed this work?**

**Liyana:** I have been intrigued by the nature of imperfect things and the idea of the "banal"—things that usually people don't pay attention to. With this research, I study the nature of construction sites. I see the likeness of the invisible labour akin to the invisible labour of the home—the endless hard work or labour that has been spent on a space. I would say it's partly biographical as well. It's like the constant invisible labour that I invest into any task given to me, growing up. There is always this need to share that in the works that I create. Consciously or subconsciously it's there.

**K: How has this project evolved over the course of this last year? Could you describe the initial inception of the idea,**

**and the significant decisions you had to make that led to the final iteration?**

**Liyana:** How it has evolved? I would say I gave myself a set of things that I knew I wanted in the work. It's like a guideline that I will always fall on. For example, "there should not be any colour." Or "no more than two materials at a time." These sorts of guidelines in creating the work. You can even call it a "checklist" so all other mock-ups or experimentation that does not fall in the checklist are put aside. However, I don't dismiss them; I will eventually come back to them another day.

**K: In your artist statement you mentioned how the work centres on "the artist's intervention between matter and form"— could you elaborate on this please?**

**Liyana:** By the statement, "the artist's intervention between matter and form" I meant that the material that I use be allowed speak for itself to a certain extent before it begins to break or dry up. So I would place myself in that crucial moment where it is in its final stage of form.

**K: How do you envision yourself further highlighting the overlooked and in-between processes in your practice?**

**Liyana:** Looking at both the invisible labour from both the outside and the inside and merging them together. By incorporating ideas or objects found from these two areas. The construction sites of our surroundings will always be there but there are always new findings. Even if it is repeated, it's never the same.

**K: Is there anything else you'd like to address?**

**Liyana:** In creating works there is always this channel or area that the artist has created for him/herself. For me this is a safe zone in which I can shut out everything from the outside world. It's just me and the material/ process. It might sound weird but the minute I feel my back breaking and I begin to question the value of totally immersing myself in the particular process, I know I am creating the work right.

### Johann Fauzi

(In the following interview with Johann Fauzi, some of the responses to my questions had been extracted from earlier recorded interviews provided by him, with his consent.)

**K: You mentioned one of your central aims was to raise your audience's awareness of the items' provenance and the sociopolitical impact they had on the community which produced them. Did this happen – What were some of the questions or comments you received, or reactions you encountered from the viewers during the show?**

**Johann:** There was a huge variety of opinion. Because I was showcasing works from my own art collection alongside my paintings, some felt as if I was merely showing off my own wealth. I didn't know what to say to that, because that wasn't my intention at all. I have been an art collector and artist for many years, so this showcase was an amalgamation of these different facets. Some viewers said that this installation allowed them access to a body of works they otherwise wouldn't have been able to see.

I managed to have conversations with some audiences surrounding the decor and layout of the space as well. Some asked why the walls were painted red, and I pointed out that the colour red is commonly associated with ideas of bloodshed and anarchy. With colonialism, countries were plundered and lives were lost. I wanted the space to echo that history.

When I was preparing for the graduate showcase, some asked me to consider using the setting of local, Malay houses instead. Although that was a valid suggestion, I felt that using a local setting would not agree with viewers or bring out the subject matter in the same way. The discomfort that one feels from coming into such a rich and luxurious space creates, in turn, an acute awareness of the skewed and imbalanced power structures of the colonial era.

**K: Could you describe the emotional experience of creating this collection?**

**Johann:** I find the ecologies of things very interesting. With the furniture I incorporated into the space, I try to map out where all of the materials have come from. In Indonesia, for example, where the Dutch were in power for an extended period of time. In the graduate showcase, there were two ebony stools from

my own art collection that I had included in the installation. These stools were originally made in Indonesia, and I had acquired them in Amsterdam. At the time these stools were made, ebony wood was an expensive and valuable product. One ebony stool would have been sold for the equivalent of two slaves. Humans were seen as yet another commodity; you could even trade them in for furniture.

When I do this sort of research, it breaks my heart. I enjoy making art, and these findings got me thinking about the human cost of the art I now create. Through these maps and objects, I wanted to open up these conversations around the ecologies of manufacture and consumption.

**K: Your personal collection undoubtedly influences the art you make, and whoever purchases your art will bring forth the not-always-told narratives surrounding the provenance of these items. When these items are placed in another person's sitting room, the frame changes and a new trajectory appears in their historical provenance. Is it important for you that all the routes leading to this new purchase is somehow apparent in the new context? How will you ensure the piece is considered with all the contexts surrounding its provenance?**

**Johann:** I try to give viewers as much insight as possible into my thought process in putting an installation together. I have spoken to some viewers who have questioned my choice to depict Raffles as well. I wanted to critique the figure of Raffles against the backdrop of the Bicentennial. At the end of the day, everyone's perspective on the matter is different and there is no single way of creating works in response to this period in time. I have had collectors purchase just one or two paintings out of a series of works, but I would love for a major institution to acquire the installation in its entirety. Of course it would be great if someone were to purchase the entire series. When you view these works together, they speak to each other and connections can be made between them. But it also comes down to the storage space one has, and what is practical.

**K: How did LASALLE impact your studio practice?**

**Johann:** It was quite difficult at first. I hadn't read books for a long time. But the programme got me acquainted with research and writing again. My younger classmates have a very different way of thinking as well. They helped me see things from a very different perspective.

**K: What are some of the questions that will guide your collecting/creating now?**

**Johann:** I wanted to create awareness around the ecologies of capitalist consumerism. It is important to me that the objects I use in my installation reflect the exact time period I'm commenting on.

For example, for the graduate showcase I invited a musician to perform in the space I had created. Instead of playing a repertoire that consisted of classical music, she played local Malay music. I wanted to intrigue viewers with that contrast, and I think it worked.

I created an incredibly lavish setting in which the paintings could be viewed, and this was important to me. Some viewers have commented on how inappropriate it feels, and how out of place some of them have felt amidst this luxury. I think it is important to visualise the sort of wealth that was accumulated by the colonial masters, as a result of their exploits in places such as Singapore, Java and India. Some might not have considered the extent of the colonial plunder before until they see it before them in such an overt way.

I'm working on an installation with a gallery at the moment, where I've been given free rein over four rooms. If a client wants to purchase a work, they'd have to purchase the entire wall. That will be interesting, and I'm looking forward to working on it.

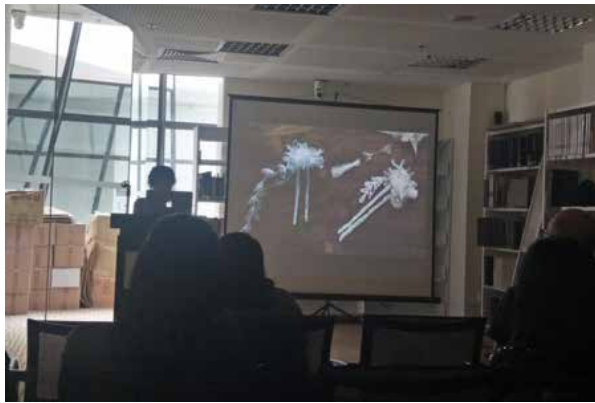


Johann Fauzi, LASALLE Exhibition: MA Fine Arts graduation exhibition, *Outside My Eye*, 2019, in-situ installation view, Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, LASALLE College of the Arts.

# BRIDGING THEORY & PRACTICE MA FINE ARTS POSTGRADUATE SYMPOSIUM 2018: AFTERTHOUGHTS

Ngee Ann Kongsi Library Study Room, LASALLE College of the Arts  
16 October 2018

by Pearl Lam Zi Yi, BA(Hons) Fine Arts Level 3 (2019) &  
Cynthia Wang Huiyuan, BA(Hons) Fine Arts Level 2 (2019)



Presentation by Chloe Po. Image courtesy of Cynthia Wang Huiyuan

Adding to the academic rigour, the MA Fine Arts symposium took place where MA postgraduate students talked about their current works with students, artists and lecturers from LASALLE. The MA students presenting were Geraldine Lim, Jojo Shen Xingzhou, Liyana Ali, ND Chow, Ng Bing Ming Shane, Chloe Po, Muhammad Fauzi bin Johann and Wen Qing. The talk was riveting with a diverse range of topics discussed.

Several issues were raised: the relationship between the self and society; the transformation of a vessel-like object; identity and the struggle of communicating that identity, isolation,

and memory. Some were particularly notable, such as Jojo's enigmatic poetry reading performance and Shane's humorous anecdotes of his journey and explorations.

The symposium jump-started with a keynote by artist James Jack, who shared about his recent experiences working in Japan and Singapore. He had been working with the villagers of rural Japan to create works out of old clubhouses. The villagers were invited to join in the effort by helping to cover up the walls, tearing down wood, etc. The aftereffect of the architectural creation contains the vigour of life, the warm memories and people, as well as the value of the unique culture and history of a place. James's willingness to step out and understand the voice of another community and to create both a dialogue and art out of the experience was an inspiring voyage we can all learn from.

A noteworthy presentation was Chloe's sharing of her work revolving around memory, in which she conceded was a "labyrinth of reveries." She was particularly interested in the process of fragmenting one's self and the notion of "fantasised time," believing that the self is an orchestrated narrative constructed by piecing together fragments of stories. She is also investigating the idea that the self has multiple versions, including the "false self," perceived past and actual past of the self, the mortal self, and the self that is situated in one's cultural history. However, throughout these variations one constant

remains: time. This was manifested in the form of Victorian-esque garments and furniture, which she constructed in minute detail and painstaking effort using a white translucent tissue-like material.

Chloe further elaborates her practice in the following transcript of an interview:

**Chloe:** I think the whiteness of my works isn't exactly tied to virginity or anything, but rather to the idea of mortality.

**Q: In Singaporean Chinese context, perhaps? Tell us a little bit more about that. Whiteness, like the colour white and its symbolism?**

**Chloe:** So, within the Chinese context, white is usually used in funerals, so it's like a way of mourning death. Whereas in a Christian context it's used as celebration. So it's actually a two-fold thing that is quite interesting that I think that my works actually both embody.

Another noteworthy presentation is from Geraldine Lim, who shared her practice stemming from "the state of excessive social isolation." She works with confusion and the manifestation of anxieties between the inner and external reality with reference to the indistinguishable between the subject and the object. Her works consists of soft sculptures which are inspired by the idea of abjection. The sculptures also ties in with metaphors of the mechanisms of the body in connection to the relationships with the self and the other.

The symposium was an opportunity for the MA students to present their practices and researches on a critical platform besides the curriculum that they have. It was a space for various discussions to happen with a fresh range of audiences, giving them new perspectives or interpretations of their focuses in their practices in relation to their researches. It was for most of them, the first time they were formally presenting their works to other academics outside of class. The symposium was, therefore, an impressionable experience which allowed them in the aftermath to put their practices into perspective and perhaps think of possible trajectories for them to explore and move forward as artists.

# ACTUALLY, PAINFULLY BEAUTIFUL... AN EXHIBITION BY STUDENTS FROM THE DIPLOMA IN FINE ARTS LEVEL 2

Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore (ICA) • 15 September – 25 October 2018

by Andrea Tan Shi Qi, Diploma in Fine Arts Level 3 (2019)

*Actually, painfully beautiful...* was an exhibition featuring the works of Level 2 students in the Diploma in Fine Arts programme (currently Level 3s) that were produced over the course of their entire second academic year. The students were given four themes, one at the beginning of each term to start off and develop their ideas: Wilderness and Domesticity; Unconscious Spaces; Notions of Flight; and Tangents and Parallels. The works showcased the six specialisms in the programme—drawing, painting, photography, printmaking, sculpture and graphic novel, and they included as well the students' explorations, studies as well as their final works. The exhibition also presented works by two Japanese students who had participated in an exchange programme between LASALLE College of the Arts and Kyoto University of Art and Design earlier this year.

Being a part of both this learning process and exhibition, I found it intriguing to observe how we were able to start with the same project themes yet come up with concepts that are vastly different. I believe it is because of this multifaceted response to the themes that we were able to show this diversity of works

in varying styles and mediums. From abstract paintings to sculptures to digital projections, each artwork is unique, and in its entirety, the curated exhibition allowed for a coherent flow from one to another without neglecting the viewing experience of the whole gallery.

As the Chinese saying goes, "Three minutes of glory on stage, 10 years of hard work off the stage." Other than the people we interact with everyday, whatever time and effort we had put into the research, with coming up with and rejecting multiple ideas, building on concepts to finally present to people our independent expressions, remains unknown to others. It is a great confidence booster, a matter of great pride for us to receive positive feedback and comments from visitors, as it is our first time to be showcase our works officially and publicly.

Of course, we also have our lecturers to thank, for they have been the ones to guide and advise us throughout the year, without whom we would not have been able to present the works that we did with such success.

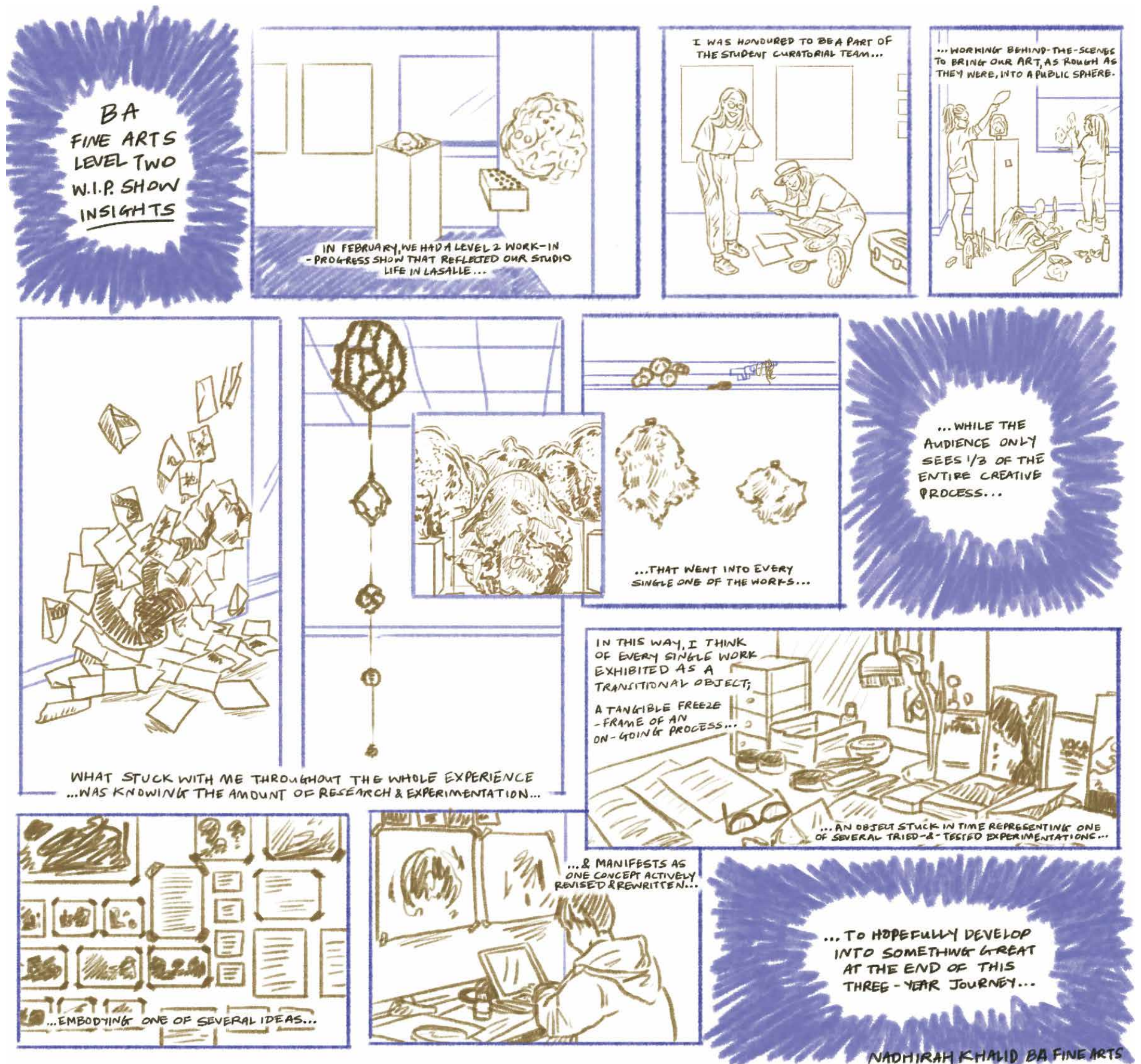


Muhammad Rusydan Bin Md Norr, *Lone Twin*, 2017. 2:03 minutes, high-resolution digital video projection on shower curtain, black and white, silent. Dimensions variable. Image courtesy of Andrea Tan Shi Qi

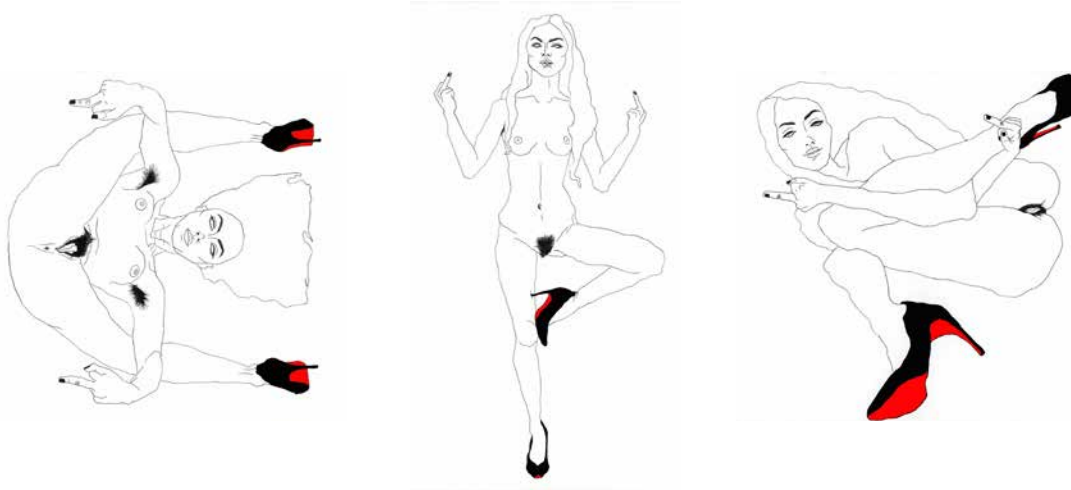
# BA(HONS) LEVEL 2 FINE ARTS WORK-IN-PROGRESS SHOW TRACKING STATUS: EXPEDITED

Alliance Française de Singapour • 14 February – 2 March 2019

by Nurul Nadhirah Binte Mohammad Khalid, BA(Hons) Fine Arts Level 2 (2019)



Images courtesy of Lim Charlotte



## IN CONVERSATION WITH LIM CHARLOTTE: ALL IS VAIN, AND IN VAIN

UltraSuperNew Gallery • 10 August – 7 September 2018

by Amanda Mok, BA(Hons) Fine Arts Level 2 (2019)



*In Vain In Vanity*, the title of Lim Charlotte's first solo exhibition that ran from 10 August to 7 September 2018 at UltraSuperNew Gallery, is a phrase that she coined when she was just fourteen. "All is vain and in vain" was something that she observed about life at that time, and is still something she believes about interrelationships and the human condition today—how the performativity of vanity is inherent in all that mankind engages in, and how everything can be perceived as vain pursuits.

In my bid as both a viewer and interviewer to understand the root of this statement and belief, which was the crux of Lim's exhibition and art practice, I adopt what the historian Norman Bryson once wrote: "The constative statement 'all is vanity,' can only be performed by an image, which, paradoxically, is itself a vanity, a bauble." If we were to go down the rabbit hole with Bryson's statement in relation to Lim's premise and exhibition, we would have to consider that *In Vain In Vanity* might be in itself a performance of Lim's vanity, and perhaps ultimately, also done in vain. But I do think Lim is not too bothered about this quagmire. Lim is not someone who situates herself far above, sitting on her high horse, making commentary about the affectation and futility of it all. Instead, she seeks to be honest and vulnerable in the acceptance that she too, is wrapped up within this warped scheme of things. And perhaps with this understanding, she is better equipped to navigate these complexities.

In conversation with Lim Charlotte:

### On her process of making work:

My work and my life has always been indistinguishable from each other and are unfortunately inherently intertwined; and so my work fluctuates a lot with my mood. Seasons, 2017, an 11-metre oil painting on chiffon was originally conceived half-heartedly and it took me about half a year to get me head on straight and when the inspiration finally came, I went at it, no holds-barred, and finished it in a week. During that time I actually slept beside the painting. I would just wake up and paint, and then I would drink, and then I would paint...it was a furious haze (I always long for these periods of losing myself to my work) and then it was finally finished. I think I sold it the day of my final assessment. There were these local art collectors who walked in, and they were looking at it for a long time, and so I approached them. They were kind enough to let me borrow it for the exhibition.

### On why the human body fascinates her and features so much in her work:

The crux of my work talks about how people cannot intersect and cannot overlap; and if or when we attempt to, we change the original individual entities, we're all like liquids with different densities, like oil and water. Some of us are miscible and can dissolve into each other and some of us float above each other...it's all about the ways and extent of how we have contact with one another, so that's why I work with bodies so much. I always paint people nude. There's just something very raw and real about it.

In the show there were fifteen illustrations of Louboutin Yoga, which is basically a character that I created. I think it was very much of a self-portrait. She wears these Louboutin heels, which, for me, is a symbol of capitalism. The objects that we own—possessions, status, money—our lives are constantly turned into statistics for arbitrary values in self-imposed systems and constructs. She was in these strange yoga poses that I actually posed for. They were really unrealistic; it's not actually possible to wear heels and do difficult yoga poses. I wanted to convey a discomfort, a very indignant kind of discomfort. An ownership of the discomfort; it's mine, not yours. I feel like this is an irrefutable human condition where a lot of us choose our discomforts. We recognise that some things are wrong, or bad for us, but we still do them. Exploring the mass cognitive dissonance of our socio-political landscape—I think I'm most proud of that—Louboutin yoga—so far.

Charlotte's second solo exhibition, *Liquid Porosity [Fire Extinguisher] garang guni buddy*, also presented by UltraSuperNew Gallery ran from 19-31 July 2019. For those of you who didn't manage to catch it, you can still read about it here – <https://gallery.ultrasupernew.com/singapore/exhibition/liquid-porosity-fire-extinguisher-garang-guni-buddy>



# ONE NIGHT ONLY

Winstedt Campus, LASALLE College of the Arts • 9 November 2018

by Nitya Jain, BA(Hons) Fine Arts Level 2 (2019)

*The planning and execution of the event brought the entire cohort closer together. From sharing all the ups and downs and resolving them together, to sharing ideas, research and critiques to support each other.*



*One Night Only* was an event that every Fine Art BA Student looks forward to: a day full of enjoyment and immense fun when not only do the artists get to display their works but also experience the dos and don'ts of an exhibition. It was LASALLE's annual showcase of works from semester-long elective modules taken up by the Years 2 and 3 of the BA(Hons) Fine Arts Course. As suggested by its name, the event lasts only a few hours. It was graced by Professor Adam Knee, Dean of Faculty of Fine Arts, Media and Creative Industries, as the guest-of-honour.

The artist-count was higher than the year before (2018), and so the variety of artworks, mediums, materials and practices was comparably greater. This year, a few new electives were introduced. One example was *Poetic Moments* elective introduced by lecturer Chen Kerui. *One Night Only* was the perfect opportunity for students to apply their conceptual skills in practice: to tactfully deal with situations and scenarios, and to finally, by working through these strategically and aesthetically, deliver their ideas to the audience.

*Fiction and Narrative*, conducted by lecturer Donna Ong, allowed students to explore art along with genre, form and narrative techniques. In sharp contrast to these, the art in *Kinetic Structures* conducted by lecturers Dhiya Rahman and Andreas Schlegel, which was presented in a room, and although 'caged,' was all about movement. Here, students were given the opportunity to explore strategies of transforming physical objects into movement using technology as their support. More technology comes into play in *Video Art* by lecturer Ulrich Lau, and *Sound-A Mutual Tuning* by lecturer Chong Li-Chuan. Both these electives exploited the potentialities of technology and combined it with the students' accumulative knowledge and observations in order to produce different images and sounds as a response to movement, performance, space, text and narratives.

*Gardening as Praxis* supervised by lecturer Shirley Soh was a way for the students to connect with nature and organic materials. Similarly, *Welcome To The Jungle*, managed by lecturer Woon Tien Wei, delved into knowing how to respond to being an artist in Singapore and how one's practice affects/effects his or her surroundings. Not forgetting the *Performative Body* conducted by lecturers Elizabeth De Roza and Susan Sentler which was yet another hit among students as this elective allowed them to use their bodies as material to explore



their own inhibitions. And finally, the *Artists as Curators* elective curated by Wang Ruobing that oversaw and managed all the electives' artworks, including looking after the logistics and marketing of the show.

Preparations for the event started three months earlier. But it was not until end September, when our planning, as curators of the show, really began. Choosing our electives was not the difficult part, it was the assigning and allotment of the places that proved to be a truckload of work for us. It would have been a mistake to think it was easy, if we had simply worked on a first-come-first-serve basis. We did not focus on giving each elective a specified location for exhibiting. In fact, we allowed the artists to choose their preferred location around the campus, suggesting and advising them to take into account every aspect of using the space, from the audience's point of view to their modes of exhibiting.

Even despite encountering various obstacles, we made sure to overcome them all as a team. Apart from the allocation of spaces, there were various other aspects of the curatorial process, including logistics, marketing and the reception. Logistics, which was handled by a team of three members, included accountability of various technical support and other small issues. Marketing required posters, invites, information to be produced for the event, as well as social networking issues to be tackled. Reception was the part where we were all involved. Setting up and arranging the entire place for the guests and making it aesthetically impactful was a tough exercise in our hands.

We provided a map, showing each work's location and the schedule for the performances, and which was accessible to anyone who could scan the QR code provided. Spread around the entire campus, the indoor works were allocated three separate classrooms. The outdoor displays spread out from the corridors, to the open field, courtyards and the hangout area. Even the back of the campus was occupied. The garden area was mostly occupied by the *Gardening as Praxis* elective; the indoors were mostly assigned to the ones who either needed a projection or whose artworks were site-specific. Since most of the students' studios were on the second and third floor of both the blocks, the show was mostly held on the first floor. Where an exception was made, we used partitions to secure the hallways, not allowing anyone to enter the studios.



The Winstedt campus is such that it allows one to exploit all formats. The openness of the campus allows an artist to secure their individuality. At the same time, it offers the perfect options for displaying.

As the event was held in the late evening, the artists had to choose their environment very carefully. With little or no light present for the outdoor works, we had to consider the installation of lights. The corridors were well lit, and the garden was equipped with floodlights. The courtyard in the middle of the two blocks served as the reception area, where the main stage for announcements and the food kiosks were placed. A few performances also commenced in the area. Couches and a few other seating alternatives were arranged for anyone who wanted to settle comfortably down for the evening.

To give a behind-the-scenes account, here are some excerpts from an interview with the head curator of the show, Yashini Renganathan:

**Q: What were your expectations before you started this event's curation? What were you hoping to get from the team and yourself?**

**A:** For myself, well, I took *Fiction and Narrative* the last time, and *Artists as Curators* was one elective that I did not want to take; it was my last choice. So this year I thought: why not challenge myself with something I do not want to do, stretch myself and learn new things. Besides, I don't have much experience in curation and it will be teamwork; so I thought I will meet different people and work with people and work around it. That was for me. For the team, I was aware that we were going to work with a group of people but I didn't expect that I will be given the opportunity to lead. But in any case, I think that was a very good experience in the sense that I learnt how to work around challenges and obstacles according to different individuals. I think that's a big plus point. And what Ruobing said: "it is a people's project, not a solo performance." So I think that was the entire object for the team.

**Q: As you said, it was your last choice. But if you had the opportunity to choose it again, would you?**

**A:** Yes, yes I definitely would. And I would do it much better this time...hahaha. Because it is an experience that taught me that we can't please everyone—that is one thing I learnt from this, because it's not about curating six or seven works, it is about curating 100 works. So miscommunications are bound to happen and challenges, and flexibility through compromises. So I would definitely face again all these areas for improvement, and the same team again to work with and to produce better things in the next round.

**Q: Looking at last year's *One Night Only*, how do you think we have worked this year? In terms of curation.**

**A:** That's a tough question actually...But I do think I would still give notable commendation for last year's curation because I think the dynamics of how the curation worked last year was very different from ours. Last year's was well curated in the sense that different works were placed around one another, and they sort of created a conversation within that space. But for this year, we worked slightly different. In a sense, I still think that curatorial-

wise they did a very good job last year. I can say at least for my elective, we did a very good job. From the feedback we received, I think we did a pretty good job. It was very organised, well curated. So yes, probably on the same page.

**Q: If you had to change something in this year's curation, what would that be? The way we worked, the outcomes?**

**A:** Change something... I think if we had sort of collated what the school houses in terms of equipment, partitions, etc, I think it would have changed the whole dynamics of how this event would have been structured. If the artists knew that this is the number of things we have and we have to work around it, then it would be more helpful and we would be able to buy more time. This time since we had one week less, to tell them three or four weeks later that we have this amount of equipment and if they have already done the work which requires extra on top of normal then I think it is a bit challenging to meet everyone's expectation.

The outcome, I think we can't change the outcome. It's probably just the structure which changes the outcome.

**Q: What do you have to say about the problems and obstacles we all faced?**

**A:** Okay, let's be honest, I think we all know that we faced a lot of obstacles but I think the most common one is always communication. If communication is not done efficiently and in a timely manner and then it kind of just accumulates and it sort of affects the working structure. Then it's not only you but people working around you, because it's not a solo project, get affected. And facing that problem, I guess this whole process taught me not to be so anxious and panicked over any problem that comes. Deal with one thing at a time, and it's always important to put myself in the shoes of the artist to see where they are coming from. And always have, as I mentioned in my speech also, compassion. Instead of always getting angry and pissed off at everything that's coming, just sit down, put yourself in their shoes, see how you can work around and solve the matter. Instead of pointing fingers, work on how can we move around it. So I think that's one thing I learnt. When some of the artists saw me wanting to work around the problems, they were more than willing to work and move forward to resolve the matter and I think that's one of the things that I got out of this whole process.



**Q: There is always a debate about whether it is the artist or the curator who should be more understanding. Who according to you should take the downfall for the situations taking place?**

**A:** Hmm, this is a tough question... Anyway, instead of putting that burden on one person, I think it's a two-way street. Both of them have to take equal responsibility. So it's communication both ways. If anything goes wrong or anything suddenly crops up, it's not always the curator's fault or the artist's fault. If there is something wrong, both of them have to put in the effort and time to resolve it. So, I don't see only one bearing the burden. As long as curation and exhibition is teamwork. The moment you separate the artists as artists and curators as curators—that's where the problem arises. Communication as a barrier. So ya, communicating properly and working together is very crucial.

**Q: In terms of our module being called *Artists as Curators*, do you think the curator should also play more of a role as an artist because we always get lost in the act of curation and forget the artist part. Though we are artists we don't pay attention to it. So do you think we should pay more attention to it? And how should the future artist-as-curator group go about it?**

**A:** Yes, I think that is one important aspect. When I was reflecting back on it, I felt that I could have curated my elective better. Once you are set in this curator position, and especially the lead curator position there are so many things that you need to oversee. I need to stretch myself across. Sometimes I do realise that I missed out placing myself in their shoes. I think to empathise and realise how we really need to help them in their work. So yes, I think we really need to concentrate on that part of the title. It's not just about plotting works for space allocation but also about understanding the work and what the work means. What does the artist want out of the work and can our curation help them in achieving whatever elements are desired?

**Q: Do you have any advice for the future curators of *One Night Only*?**

**A:** haha...I think to just have fun. Have fun and learn a lot. And don't take things personally. Sometimes it's not about you or anyone else, it's just about the situation. I mean, if it's not going to matter in five weeks' time then don't waste time, it's not worth worrying over.

Overall, the event was an immense success not only because of the high number of guests who attended but also because at the end of the day each artist was able to display his or her work smoothly and successfully. The planning and execution of the event brought the entire cohort closer together. From sharing all the ups and downs and resolving them together, to sharing ideas, research and critiques to support each other. The team of curators worked closely together with the LASALLE's support staff to bring all these together. Lecturers and the students all had to work closely in order to bring it to success, and they did. The entire event gave students the opportunity to learn, understand and overcome their drawbacks and strengths, and also gave them an insight into how important it is for one to understand the idea of collaboration and compromise at the same time.



# SCULPTURE WEEK: FLOATING ISLAND

McNally Campus, LASALLE College of the Arts • 8-18 March 2019

by Rozells Stacey Gabrielle and Muhammad Rusydan Bin Md Norr, Diploma in Fine Arts Level 2 (2019)

*“It is estimated that 1.15 to 2.41 million tonnes of plastic are entering the ocean each year from rivers. More than half of this plastic is less dense than water, meaning that it will not sink once it encounters the sea.”*

*Floating Island* is a reference to what is known as the Great Pacific garbage patch—gigantic floating islands of waste in the Pacific oceans. Participating students were given this as a contextual departure point for them to expand on and examine current similar issues in Singapore, and the surrounding region.

Over the course of less than a week of intensive workshops, students were mentored by James L. Hayes and Kathryn Kng, an alumnus of LASALLE, who worked extensively with James in his iron casting project known as *Iron Project*.

This Sculpture Week brought students from Diploma Level 3, BA and MA Fine Arts, working collectively, in pairs or individually, to develop a series of sculptural works, drawing from an array of found, gathered and manufactured materials.

Preliminary ideas that were proposed prior to the workshops, evolved and culminated in different outcomes for the exhibition that opened on 8 March 2019. Nonetheless, the four days was productive and students involved learned an invaluable skill in casting and sculpting. The few who were not from a sculpture discipline during their specialism year, learnt to work with tools and materials that they would not have otherwise. The road beyond has been laid with more possibilities for them, as young artists and students to explore the potential of their respective interests in materials for sculpting.

At the end of Sculpture Week, we asked the participating students to contribute a succinct statement of their works, how they explored the materials and what are the thought processes behind them. What follows here are documentation of their works and the artists' responses:



Shane Ng Bing Ming, *Shall We Change?* Mixed media. Dimensions variable.

## Shane Ng Bing Ming, MA Fine Arts

My work uses the shape of the sea turtle shell as the visual representation of the marine life that was affected by the trash human produced. I used mainly bamboos for the structure and also the trash I collected during the project. The concept behind the material for the husk suggests the light-weighted shell that would no longer grow.

The title, *Shall We Change?* presses the viewer to question if it was perhaps time to change, or to act while we can.



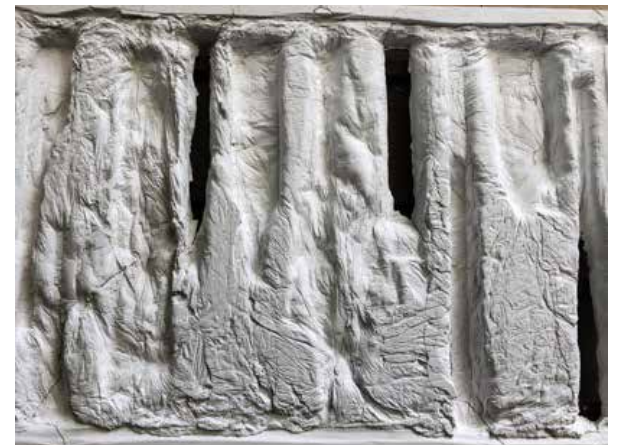
## Nur Liyana Binte Ali, MA Fine Arts

*Of Stratification and Heedlessness* was inspired by the layers of the earth, namely land, sea and sky which I find akin to the layers of trash in the sea and the sense of suffocation between buildings that are within close proximity.

As time passes, we demolish and reconstruct so as to modernise our landscapes, but what happens to the rubble and debris?

The plaster piece in this work is the 'white elephant' that represents the amount of rubbish that we do not see. We are delusional to think that the amount of waste we produce does not have an impact on the environment or ourselves; it gets overlooked as many of us take the environment for granted thereby causing it to accumulate.

*Of Stratification and Heedlessness* is a commentary on the mould and cast, in this case, that it belies the questions, which came first? or where it does it come from? in relation to the theme of floating islands.



Nur Liyana Bte Ali, *Of Stratification and Heedlessness*. Mixed media. Dimensions variable

## Lewis Choo Li Wei, BA(Hons) Fine Arts

Home, the connection between humans comes with different stories. Home is not only place of comfort but within there are rules and orders. My father's teaching plays a big part in my practice.

My work is an examination of different Chinese/Japanese folktales and cultures, and the thinking behind those tales. People might lost the sense of tradition but we can manipulate it into the topic of modernity by altering them in a way of questioning the norms which have formed the environment and our behaviour.



Lewis Choo Li Wei, *Melancholy Blues*. Plaster cast. Dimensions variable



Andrea Tan Shi Qi, Sharifah Zahra, Saidhaveettil Anas Ansari, *Untitled*. Steel, Plastic, Zip ties, cotton threads. Dimensions variable.

### Andrea Tan Shi Qi, Diploma in Fine Arts

*Untitled* is a two-piece sculptural installation comprised of steel frames, collected plastic bottles and found objects. Our group wanted to focus on the idea of marine debris and movement of plastics through the ecosystem, and we came up with this wave- and appendage-like form. We wanted to keep the work abstract and up to individualistic interpretations, but for us, we felt that the forms represented the ocean, the textures of the plastics from the hanging piece represents all the different organisms affected by marine pollution, while the suspended objects in the standing piece represented human interference within the marine ecosystem.

### Azirah Jamal, Diploma in Fine Arts

*Industrial Reproduction* was a portrayal of a mutated animal from the ocean due to contamination. All sewage, harmful synthetic concoctions from ventures, atomic waste, thermal pollution, plastics, corrosive downpour, and oil spillage have driven a wide variety of marine creatures to suffer malignancy, failure in the reproductive system, behavioural changes, and mainly death. As years pass, researchers found that the poisons and radiation cause transformations on the cellular level which is extremely detrimental to the natural world.

The three sculptures were a portrayal of a mother with her two kids. Cable ties were attached on each individual sculpture to represent their being ambushed and trapped. Melted black glue seen on arbitrary pieces of its body imitates as tar and toxic.



Azirah Jamal, *Industrial Reproduction*. Plywood, Cable ties, Black glue. Dimensions Variable.



Benedict Yeo Jun Sin, *Floating Body*. Plaster Cast. Dimension variable

### Benedict Yeo Jun Sin, Diploma in Fine Arts

I have actually been doing casting for quite a while, however, *Floating Body* was the first time I got to use alja-safe and to execute a full body cast. The work is about how when we dispose of rubbish and it gets into the sea, the rubbish as microplastic returns to us through the seafood we consume, slowly poisoning and killing us.



Muhammad Rusydan, *Beyond Our Thirst*, Plaster, Crystal Soil, Recycled straws, audio. Dimensions variable.

### Muhammad Rusydan, Diploma in Fine Arts

Partially overlapping what I was doing before for my practice, which was repurposing plastic straws and water babies as a sculptural material, here, I incorporated the sound of myself sipping out of a straw, among other actions, that was played during the opening. The initial idea was to have water itself in the installation, but due to safety reasons, I was discouraged from doing so. So, the alternative idea was to have water sounds instead. At the same time, it got me to start thinking about, consumerism or more specifically, our insatiable thirst, how we constantly depend on these materials that we know to have had irreversible damage on marine life. Hence the title, *Beyond Our Thirst*.

### Sarah Lin, Diploma in Fine Arts

One thing that I enjoy immensely is nature, especially sitting under a shady tree during a hot and humid afternoon and listening to the leaves whispering with a breeze. I noticed that the crash of an ocean wave is similar to the sound trees produce when a strong wind hits them, and thus wanted to bring this sound into the school for Sculpture Week. Traditionally a 2D visual person, sculpture is something new in my arena, and I have been lately obsessed with the household item of brightly coloured raffia strings. As the natural element of the wind activates the artwork, onlookers are treated to the 'shaah shaah' of the shredded raffia string dancing with the wind.



Sarah Lin, *Siren's Song*. Raffia Strings, Canvas frame, Wood, Bamboo, Plaster Cast. Dimensions variable.



# TRANS/MISSION 2019

The Ngee Ann Kongsi Library, LASALLE College of the Arts • 22 February 2019

by Ivan Ong, BA(Hons) Fine Arts Level 2 (2019)

Last February (2019), we were given the opportunity to hear five of our graduating cohort of 2019 Level 3 students from the Fine Arts (BA) share their dissertations in a public talk. *Trans/Mission 2019* was an informative and insightful platform that has engaged both the students and the public to think more deeply about the topics presented: topics range from topics of identity, history, consumption and institutional system and structures. The students, who had been asked to share their dissertations this year, reflected that this experience of having to present their studio practice/personal journeys through the various forms of research, has forced them to step out of their comfort zones. Throughout their presentations, the audience learnt how the students had progressively turned their vulnerability and curiosity into questions that propelled their research throughout the year. Both students and audience alike mutually shared a sense of excitement and knowing.

Lai Yu Tong shared about his views on the consumption of images both by the individual and by society, and commented on how artists and thinkers are affected by the overproduction and consumption of images. This acknowledgement, urges us as active participants to be aware of how we should consume and produce images in this day and age.

Tanak Bajaj expounded on how stringency and repetition, especially through religious traditions, have seeped into our male and female identities. Her paper explores and compares archival content against Hindu scriptures, setting them against the everyday reality and the role of women in society.

Vidhi Gupta discussed the role of gender and the relevance of rituals in today's context. In her paper, she aimed to deconstruct myths and examine them deeper. She also followed up by sharing both a general observation on human behaviour and a personal account of how she reflected on her family's insistence in following these religious practices and rituals.

Building on the recent archaeological excavations of Empress Place, Fazleen Karlan grappled with the phenomenon of commemorating historiographies of Singapore. In regarding the Bicentennial 2019, her paper critically argues for a deeper engagement with Singapore's history through different frames instead of the conventional top-down approach initiated by the State.

Pooja Kanade's paper rationalises the predicament of existing institutional systems and structures while exploring ground-up initiatives to provide alternative voices in the art scene and society as a whole.

After hearing about how layered and complex the ideas and concepts within specific nodes of histories and culture were, that instigated such research and examination in their dissertations, one cannot leave without taking away an understanding of the value of writing a dissertation.





## THE TRANS/MISSION EXPERIENCE

*After hearing about how layered and complex the ideas and concepts within specific nodes of histories and culture were, that instigated such research and examination in their dissertations, one cannot leave without taking away an understanding of the value of writing a dissertation.*

### **Bajaj Tanak, BA(Hons) Fine Arts Level 3 (2019)**

For a long time, stringency and repetition have been deep-seated in male and female identities but in the shadows of these social structures may lie something more primitive. This dissertation critically analyses and uncovers, through contemporary art practices, the implicit misogyny in a patriarchal society. To develop a methodology that examines traditions that have been passed on, reinterpreted and re-executed in the name of religion, this paper explores and compares the archives in forms of newspaper articles, books, television programs against Hindu scriptures in which are prescribed the everyday realities of women and their roles in society. The research deepened my studio practice that negotiates a fresh dialogue between logic and mythology.

My own practice adopts a critical perspective of self through the lens of my ancestral heritage and the eyes of the present male. Experiencing transformation over a twenty-three days framework is to critique the disadvantaged limitations of women's age prescribed in Indian culture. This conceptual framework provides me with space to negotiate between history's logical approaches to womanhood that have now become ineffective mythical traditions/rituals that underlines a misogynistic existence, and the need to decipher them to create a language of my own, which I do through fabric manipulation.

Before the presentation, I was a little unsure about how successfully I could present my ideas to the audience because it did not seem that the time given was enough to be able to communicate cultural issues to a group of people who are not aware of the practices of my culture. While I was giving my presentation I realised that it was not necessary for people to understand the issues as much as how my artistic practice was tackling these issues. It had been a great experience to be able to present, and listening to other presenters sharing the same transformative process gave me a certain sense of excitement and relief.

### **Vidhi Gupta, BA(Hons) Fine Arts Level 3 (2019)**

Presenting at *Trans/Mission* was an altogether comprehensive experience. Preparing for the seminar not only helped me resolve my thoughts for my dissertation, but also gave me an opportunity to seek feedback before finishing it up. My paper discussed the relevance of rituals in today's time while discussing the role of gender. My practice is inspired by the compulsive need people have in following rituals, and centres around texts from my journals. I apply ephemeral materials found in almost all Hindu rituals and used daily in my household—that consists mainly turmeric, vermilion and camphor. My methodology included adopting traditional materials in a contemporary manner and to relook the links between the traditional with the modern. The point of this paper was to deconstruct myths, and to re-examine religious rituals, starting with at a personal level, to understand my family's insistence of following these rituals and to question their relevance in today's context. Since my topic was a blend of both personal and general human behaviour towards rituals, my audience at the seminar was able to relate to the topic well. The questions that came up helped me look at the same topic in new light and helped me add more character to my paper.

### **Fazleen Karlan, BA(Hons) Fine Arts Level 3 (2019)**

My dissertation analyses how contemporary artistic practice in Singapore decentres commemorations of history. Using the recent archaeological excavations at Empress Place as a departure point, my own artistic practice grapples with the phenomenon of commemorating historiographies related to Raffles and other 'founding' stories of Singapore, in lieu of the Bicentennial 2019. It juxtaposes the labour of digging for historical knowledge with constructs pertaining to Singapore's history. Using different frames to examine the current context, this paper argues for a deeper engagement with Singapore's history, in contrast to the top-down approach of commemorations initiated by the State.

Participating in *Trans/Mission* provided an opportunity for me to share the research that was still in progress and to listen to students from other faculties and their research interests. Additionally, questions from the audience uncovered some areas in my dissertation that could be strengthened, and which I could then seek to address. It further strengthened my resolve in finishing this paper. It was a fruitful experience.

### **Lai Yu Tong, BA(Hons) Fine Arts Level 3 (2019)**

*Too much? Art-making in an age of image saturation*

My dissertation investigates the consequences of overproduction and consumption of images by examining artists and thinkers whose works have addressed and framed our discourses around this contemporary condition. In particular, it attempted to draw parallels between Nicolas Bourriaud's notion of postproduction, Jan Verwoert's notion of appropriation and the study of media archaeology with environmental models of production and consumption in the age of the Anthropocene. These theories were discussed through the artworks of Thomas Hirschhorn, Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Erik Kessels. In so doing, it sought to



question the role and responsibility of the artist, as an active participant within a wider mediascape, addressing and shifting the collective consciousness about how we should continue consuming and producing images in this day and age.

I am not so sure what kind of an experience it was for me. It was a good opportunity both to share the research with an audience through a presentation format and organise my thoughts more clearly and concisely as I was still in the midst of writing the paper then.

### **Pooja Kanade, BA(Hons) Fine Arts Level 3 (2019)**

*Grey Spaces: Inclusivity and Artist-initiated projects*

"The museum is one truth, and this truth is surrounded by many truths which are worth being explored." (Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Ways of Curating*, 2016, p. 96)

*Trans/Mission 2019* provided a space for me to ground my raw almost naive thoughts on inclusivity and ground-up initiatives. As an educator prior to my undergraduate studies, having experienced a culture where initiatives were lacking or were not encouraged/cultivated, it became a priority to conceive *Grey Spaces: Inclusivity and Artist-initiated projects*. *Grey Spaces* focused on rationalising the predicament of existing institutional systems and structures while exploring ground-up initiatives to provide an alternative voice in the art scene, or society as a whole.

And yet, the experience of writing that had been a double-edged sword. This admission seeks urgency and continuation. It is also made in the hopes that someone else will carry forward or provide a further argument. Nonetheless, I still wish to continue expanding my ideas and argument(s).

Presenting at *Trans/Mission*, or more accurately verbalising the summary of something I am really passionate about was not easy. Regardless, it was an enthralling experience; it did teach me to be better prepared next time, instead of taking a more spontaneous and intuitive approach as everyone's time is valuable.

In praise, *Trans/Mission* is a charming approach that presents graduating students with the opportunity to share their research with the public. I am truly humbled to have taken part in it. I would like to extend my gratitude to Michael Lee for nominating me to be part of *Trans/Mission 2019*.



# MESHMINDS X LASALLE: ART X TECH FOR GOOD 2019

Roger&Sons Jalan Besar • October 2018 – January 2019

by Chok Si Xuan, BA(Hons) Fine Arts Level 2 (2019)

Last year, I had the opportunity to be part of the second edition of Meshminds x LASALLE collaboration! Other participants included my peers from Fine Arts, Odelia Yen, Guyrence Tan, R. Yashini, Denise Yap and Desiree Tham, and many other students from Broadcast Media and Music.

Meshminds ([www. Meshminds.com](http://www.Meshminds.com)) is a creative technology studio, and through the non-for-profit arts organisation, Meshminds Foundation worked with LASALLE students to create, through technology, an awareness of sustainable development.

Over the course of three months, we attended workshops held by Meshminds' partners, various lecturers and tech partners such as Apple, Autodesk, HTC and Google. For our faculty, we got the chance to learn Autodesk Fusion360, Recap, Google Blocks and Tilt Brush. The instructors were extremely helpful and were able to advise us on how to approach making our works as well as potential technical difficulties.

In these workshops, we were taught how to use the respective software as well as to rethink the manner in which these applications have been used and how we can adopt them in our work. Additionally, most of us had little to no experience in the various areas, hence this was a great opportunity to explore new potential mediums that we could eventually apply in our own practices. The addition of technology in art presents new ways of conveying messages, whether it is through

added interactivity or reintroducing familiar tech that we see (QR Codes, Snapchat filters), or even the ability for complete immersion in Virtual Reality.

However, in approaching any new medium, there are bound to be some technical difficulties. For example, while 3D printing, my peers and I faced unforeseen issues with working with the new media such as structural problems with 3D designing, or glitches. Through figuring out the issues were tricky, it was a great learning experience nonetheless!

In the spirit of Art and Tech for Good, as well as with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) in mind, we conceptualised our works to align with one of the 17 causes we wanted to explore, such as Reduced Inequality, Responsible Consumption and Production, and Good Health and Well-being.

Odelia used VR (virtual reality) to create awareness for schizophrenia, while Guyrence and Denise talked about wage inequality and healthy work-life balance through actions respectively through AR (augmented reality) and 3D printed objects. Yashini used black light and glow in the dark filament as a conversation starter about light pollution in Singapore, and Desiree used AR and 3D printed objects as a humorous way to explore chiromancy and its system of inequalities. For myself, I 3D-printed an articulating rib which was suspended by motors that would move when it sensed an audience.

During Singapore Art Week 2019, our exhibition opened at Roger&Sons, an ethical woodworking bespoke company. The turnout at their premises was overwhelming, with a throng of people turning up on the opening night, having our works exhibited with the IOT based works by the Music students, and the VR dystopian Singapore landscape by the Broadcast Media students.

Throughout the week, Meshminds also had speakers who shared their approaches to using technology, and who conducted programmes such as networking nights and workshops. We also had the opportunity to give tours to the media and the public, introducing our work and its contexts, and to initiate conversations about the supportive technology, as well as sustainable development.

As the eventful Singapore Art Week ended, so did our exhibition at Roger&Sons. It was an eye opener to see people coming together for a good cause, having discussions about how technology could engage the community and how accessible it was. To see people being excited about the merging of arts and technology was really inspiring, and I was really glad to be a part of it. I am impatient to see how the next edition will turn out to be!

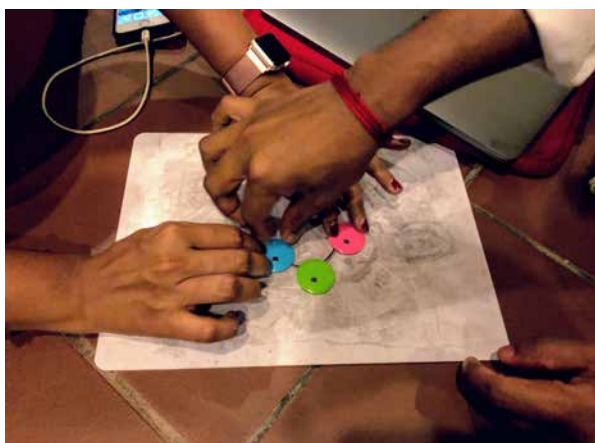


# ARTWALK LITTLE INDIA

Little India  
18 January – 2 February 2019

by Soo Mei Fei, BA(Hons) Fine Arts  
Level 2 (2019)

*The mridangam workshop saw a variety of people—all ages and ethnicity—who were curious to learn more about the percussion. We were also given a crash course on the basic Carnatic rhythmic structure, which was insightful and an eye opening experience for all of us.*



This year, I was fortunate to be part of *ARTWALK Little India*. Together with Soumee De and Davindran s/o Krishnamurthi, we presented *River Ramble*, a 20 minute Odissi-inspired<sup>1</sup> performance about the Singapore River in an organised dance programme that was one of the many activities and events in this year's *ARTWALK Little India*. It was held at the open space at Sate Kelinci Pak.

*ARTWALK Little India* is an arts initiative organised by LASALLE College of the Arts and the Singapore Tourism Board. This year's *ARTWALK* marks the fifth year of its running. Since 2015, the public art project has aimed to portray the cultural presence of Little India through various forms of art—music, film, artworks, performances and various fringe events. When it first began, *ARTWALK* was held over five days, featuring only a handful of works; this year, *ARTWALK* took place over three weekends, and has grown to include an even greater variety of works, performances and workshops.

Beyond showcasing artworks, films and putting up performances, this year's *ARTWALK* included a Live Painting session at Gayatri Restaurant along Race Course road, as well as Dinner Theatre Storytelling at CreatureS along 120 Desker Road. Combining artmaking and performance with the dining experience was not only innovative and engaging, but also apt, given that this year's theme for *ARTWALK* was *Image and Sound of Fragrance*.

Our dance performance, *River Ramble*, traced the river's history from a time when it was a source of livelihood for those living on its banks, to its ruinous plight from the encroaching industrialisation and resulting pollution, up to 1977 when the then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew called for the cleanup of the Singapore River. Today, the Singapore River is part of the Singapore skyline, as it runs through some of the most iconic and buzzing locations in Singapore.

The initial stages of our choreography saw us imagining possible scenarios and narratives that could have taken place along the Singapore River. Bearing in mind the theme for this year, we worked on the quality of the movements to expressively depict the river. Referencing the movement vocabulary of Odissi was apt; the movements never really quite ended in Odissi, it is continual and evolving, just like the Singapore River that flows on and on, ceaselessly, through the ages.

We performed at the open space at Sate Kelinci Pak, alongside other performers in their respective acts that featured other classical dance forms of India—Bharatanatyam, Kathak and Kuchipudi. Despite the audience mainly consisting of friends and family of the performers, the initiative to bring in different classical dance forms of India was both commendable and encouraging as it gave the audience an exposure to the variety of Indian dance forms.

*ARTWALK Little India* also included several mural works, inspired by the imagery and smells of Little India, and installation works, as well as other performances. The programme lineup was a good mix of contemporary works inspired by Indian culture, as well as Indian artforms, catering to a spectrum of audience. The works were well spread out throughout the entire precinct of Little India—from Ultrasupernew Gallery along Rowell Road, all the way to performances put up at the Singapore Indian Fine Arts Society (SIFAS) along Starlight Road.

Beyond variety, this year's edition also brought workshops that further engaged and educated the audience through participation. I was thrilled to see workshops on Bharatanatyam (an Indian classical dance form from Tamil Nadu) and Mridangam (an Indian percussion instrument) on the lineup, as these were (great and possibly, rare) opportunities to learn more about Indian artforms. The mridangam workshop saw a variety of people—all ages and ethnicity—who were curious to learn more about the percussion. We were also given a crash course on the basic Carnatic rhythmic structure, which was insightful and an eye opening experience for all of us.

While the projects based in some of the minor roads in the precinct did not garner a huge crowd, efforts were made for greater outreach, such as having workshop registrations done on Peatix. Signages were also placed strategically to provide directions to the different locations. Active updates on the event's Instagram page helped with publicity and ease of navigation as well. At such a large scale, the event could not have been possible without the help from the volunteers, as well as the capable team of BA Arts Management students.

Little India is one of Singapore's most vibrant and bustling precincts, and *ARTWALK Little India* is definitely a great success in drawing greater interests to the area, to enjoy its sensory experiences.

<sup>1</sup> Odissi is an Indian classical dance form that originates in the state of Odisha.

# CHIMERA'S CONTEMPORARY: RETAINING CHILD-LIKE CURIOSITY IN THE MIDST OF GROWTH

## AN AFTERTHOUGHT ON GELAM GALLERY'S MUSCAT STREET PROJECT

Gelam Gallery • 6 June 2019

by Cynthia Wang and Bianca Goetz, BA(Hons) Fine Arts Level 2 (2019)

*"Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up" — Pablo Picasso*

Gelam Gallery is Singapore's first permanent outdoor art gallery. Located at the back alley of Muscat Street, within Kampong Glam, it is supported by Singapore Tourism Board and One Kampong Gelam. The project involved 30 local artists and art students, among them are various LASALLE alumni and current students. The aim of the project aligns with One Kampong Glam's agenda to conserve and enhance Kampong Glam's rich cultural and business history. It also seeks to give voice to local artists, both established and previously unknown, and to renew tourists' interests in Singaporean arts scene.

The project hopes to reinvent the previously untouched back walls of Muscat Street, where shophouses leave their garbage bins along the back alleys and which is frequently ignored. Each artist chooses a wall to work on which to bring their designs to life. Among the rules, artists have to print sticker reproductions of their paintings, and design the walls to interact with the paintings with either 2D means (painting, spray painting, drawing) or 3D (interactive installations, relief sculptures etc). The walls are then exhibited to the public starting from 6 July 2019, where tour routes are organised to bring the public to explore Kampong Glam, including Arab Street, Haji Lane, Sultan Mosque, as well as the open art gallery.

### Cynthia shares her experience:

I first knew about this project from one of my BA(Hons) tutors, Woon Tien Wei. He had sent me a poster for the open call for participants for Gelam Gallery's newest project. Having freshly entered the June holidays, I was on the lookout for fresh tasks and part-time jobs daily. This was the perfect opportunity to challenge myself, having never worked with a huge wall or public space before. I instantly expressed my interest to him, and was put in touch with Jun, an illustrator and graphic designer who had graduated from NAFA and is working with Gelam Gallery.

After some correspondence with Jun, I decided to create my designs first before adapting them to whichever wall I was assigned to/chose in the end. I immediately set to work brainstorming ideas, and came up with four designs with the intention of complementing the structure, size and height of the wall. After feedback from Jun who encouraged me to proceed with my design of females gazing from the frames at peacocks on the walls, I decided to settle on one of the remaining walls which, as it turned out, was one of the highest.

This necessitated the use of a cherry picker, a huge machine typically used by construction workers to ascend to high places such as walls of buildings. Due to the huge demand for this machine, given the condition of the walls provided to us, the company was very accommodating and even provided a cherry picker course with an operating certificate for each of us at the end.

We all attended the cherry picker course in mid-June, a full-day condensed training session with both a practical and theoretical part to teach us the function of each button and lever of the machine as well as basic safety procedures and harnesses. At the end we were all to take a multiple choice question test to assess our understanding, passing which will earn us our operational certificate.



Artists working on their respective walls. Image courtesy of Monster Day Tours.

Through the course of the project, all participants took turns using the cherry picker based on a pre-arranged schedule. I had managed to complete most of my work within a week. It was a strenuous, nerve-wrecking week of scaling up and down the tall wall to spray paint using my own stencils. It was a truly mind-opening experience, not because it was my first time doing graffiti or using a cherry picker for my work, but also because I had never taken part in anything of such a grand scale, both literally and figuratively. Tourists and passers-by were constantly taken by curiosity and snapped photos of me working, or simply ignored me and posed against a part of the wall. Kinder strangers approached me to ask if I needed help.

Throughout this whole journey my biggest insight was from observing how mutual cooperation from people around us was vital in any project. I did not collaborate with anyone on my wall, but I did take time to help my senior, Victor, with his. While he was sometimes at work, I agreed to help him paint a small part of his wall. The tenants of a nearby shophouse, Mr Shyam, and his wife were both extremely humble and friendly, and for the convenience of the participants, even agreed to let us park the cherry picker at the entrance of their house for safekeeping and recharging overnight. The overall experience taught me the valuable lesson of how working on a project in a public space sometimes requires compromising, understanding, and sacrificing. With this new addition in my schedule of my otherwise bland June holidays, I am ever more grateful to have had this opportunity to work with One Kampong Gelam for this refreshing project.

What added more enjoyment was that a fellow classmate and artist, Bianca, was also a part of this project and who worked on the wall diagonally across from mine.



Cynthia Wang's mural. Image courtesy of Cynthia Wang.





Mr Shyam, a friendly resident of Muscat Street, looking up at Bianca's work on his wall. Image courtesy of Bianca Goetz

On the day of the opening, there are other concurrent events around Arab Street, such as the So Gelam market, which sells trinkets, drinks, hand-made bags and bowls. The kampong vibes are further enhanced by the buskers in the middle of the stalls, heartily belting out songs. There was also a fashion show, projeKGlamway, in an elongated tent in the middle of the streets, showcasing garments inspired by traditional Malay fabric to pay homage to Arab Street's traditional textile business. It featured the works of five designers, each of whom had a different interpretation of Kampong Glam.

In all, this project has helped bring to our attention and that of others about the bustling, lively, extraordinary streets of Bugis and the lives of the people and shops within it. It is indeed a refreshing change from the rigidity of school life and an alternative to working away in one's studio. This experience has made us much more appreciative of the places in Singapore which still preserve its traditional businesses and is thriving because of/despite it. We sincerely recommend trying out new projects such as this to anyone who is looking for anything fun to fill their holidays with, and we all should constantly keep a lookout for such interesting opportunities.

#### Bianca shares her experience:

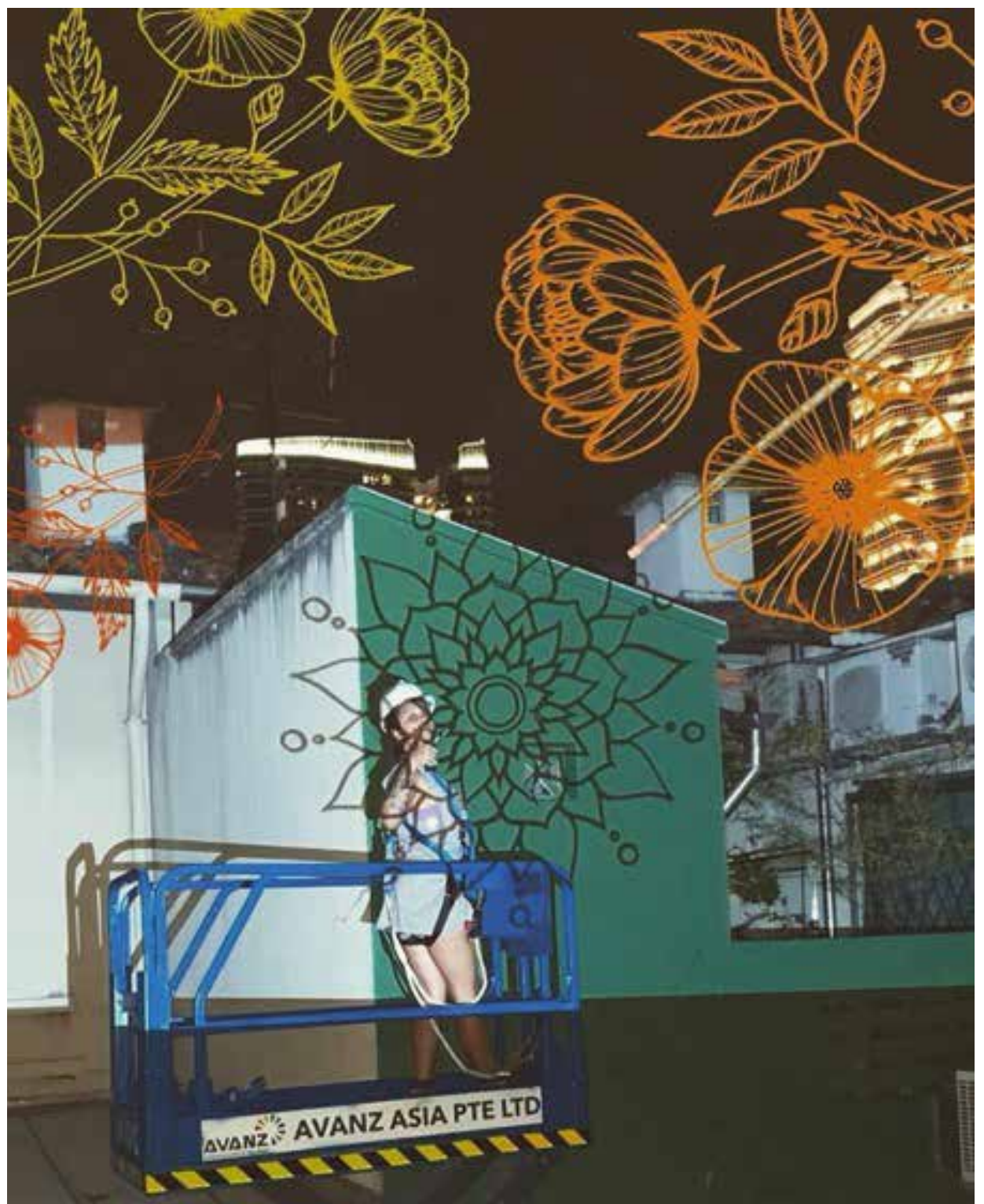
I too also had the pleasure of finding out about Gelam Gallery through my advisor, Woon Tien Wei. I was fresh out of year 2 and was eager to take on a challenge. I have done a few murals in the past but none quite as big as the one I was about to tackle. After sending in my proposal and receiving a positive go ahead I was ready to start!

My artwork heavily involved a lot of pattern making, symmetry and geometry especially through the forms of mandalas. It was what first got me into the art world and has ever since been a constant in my art practices. I truly believe that I do art to brighten up a space, as corny as it may sound, I like to see the happiness it may bring to people. My idea was simple, I would create multiple mandalas of various sizes. For my 3D aspect I chose to create a mosaic watering can that stuck out of the wall, something a little bit interactive, that would appear to 'water' a flower just below.

Like Cynthia, I also had one of the highest walls which demanded the use of the cherry picker. Like Cynthia, I had never used one before, which added to the excitement of this project. As soon as I got my license I was ready to go! I had never painted before, so my body ached for days after, but it was a good kind of ache! I felt very accomplished and proud of the final outcome. Even though there were slight complications, like heavy rain, it all came together wonderfully.

As Cynthia mentioned, although this was not a collaboration, we most definitely had a great support system. I was fortunate to be painting the house of Mr. Shyam and his wife, Mrs. Jyotshna. They were immensely helpful throughout the entire process and were there every step of the way. Their hospitality and kindness made this whole journey a whole lot easier and for that I will be forever grateful. I remember one night when I was attempting to project my designs on the wall I underestimated how much work would actually go into doing a seemingly simple task, but much to my delight I was surrounded by so many helping hands. Mr. Shyam, his neighbours, and my family all played a part in getting it done. I am grateful especially to my grandma who was such a champion for keeping me company and helping me everyday I was painting! I could not have pulled this off without any of them.

I think I can speak on behalf of Cynthia as well, when I say that it was an experience we will both cherish for a long time; we are very happy as artists to have been a part of a beautiful project.



Bianca operating the cherry picker, working into the night. Image courtesy of Bianca Goetz.

# INTERVIEW WITH ZULKHAIRI ZULKIFLEE, NORAH LEA AND FARIZI NOORFAUZI

## MALAIS-A-TROIS EXHIBITION

233 Joo Chiat Road • 10-11 September 2018

by Zulkhairi Zulkiflee, BA(Hons) Fine Arts Level 2 (2019)

*Malais-a-trois (Mat)* was a visual arts exhibition organised by Sobandwine (and Sikap) as a part of the former's multi-artist, five short-termed shows named 2 3 3\_j o o\_c h i a t, aptly located at a rented 550 sq ft space in 233 Joo Chiat Road.

*Malais-a-trois* was conceived by myself, with the collaborative synergy of artists, Norah Lea and Farizi Noorfauzi. Here, the exhibition leveraged on Malayness as a loose point of departure.

The exhibition title plays with the term, *Menage-a-trois*, understood as "a domestic arrangement in which three people have romantic or sexual relations with each other, typically occupying the same household." This was easily translated to a situation of three artists. Similarly, the title had a coincidental acronym of MAT, which is also a term, mat usually derogatory, describing a Malay male characterised as delinquent, unrefined and usually of lower education.

While the term 'Mat' may also be a neutral term reserved for Malay males in general, the term in the context of the exhibition seeks to serve as a self-deprecating and mostly, tongue-in-cheek reflection of the three artists.

The conversation below briefly captures the practices of Norah Lea, Farizi Noorfauzi and myself, which presents convenient affinities and nuanced differences.

**Zulkhairi:** Norah and Farizi, what are some personal impressions you have of *Malais-a-trois*?

**Norah:** I thought it was a fascinating introduction as to who we consider the Mat to be! In the society's eyes we are all mats but then within this microcosm, we see the different layers, subtexts and identities! I find Zul's use of repetition for his image intriguing in the sense we search for something different within each photo, but actually it's really just the same image. And I think that in itself could be a powerful move in response to the lack of representative images within the Malay community. At times maybe the act of representative images beyond the 4R and 5R print might even be taboo (family portraits aside) to the point of being accused of *riak* (arrogance) just because it is not in line with the idea of humility, or *merendah diri*.



Maybe, Malay people can afford to have a little less humility and start taking ownership of our own images.

Farizi's work I think, is proof in the pudding of the next generation of visual artists. The idea is simple and powerful and it plays into the pun of "kurung" referring to baju kurung as well as to the meaning "to restrict". There is a tongue-in-cheek approach to Farizi's works that I think is rather refreshing, especially in this current wave of artists tapping identity politics for their works. There are a lot of works based on trauma which are absolutely valid and I believe is the first step to healing, but to constantly be reminded of the pain can take a toll and maybe being to laugh at the pain once in a while will help us heal in ways we least expect.



**Zulkhairi:** I was really thinking about the tension of visibility and invisibility, the latter being the work on the wall in which I had partially erased the word 'Melayu'. Specifically, at that moment of time, I was interested in the idea of self-erasure (this extends beyond the making of the work) and how beyond one's agency, it's also a matter of choice of wanting to be seen (or not).



**Farizi:** I felt that *Malais-a-trois* was an intimate sharing of different ideas and meanings of what it's like to be part of a minority community. I was most fond of how our works brought diverse interpretations to the forefront of the struggles in growing up as a Malay: Zul with the tension between visibility and invisibility; Norah with the politics of gender; and myself with questioning modern cultural relevancy.

Though I was at first sceptical of how the show would be received, within its short span of two days there were many interesting dialogues with people who came to see the show, all of which revealed to me that people do try to understand what we have to say about racial politics that is often too controversial for people to confront as a discourse. This was a pleasant surprise to me as the show was a revelation of the potential of more traction and visibility for the issues we were dealing with, such as the different 'minority experiences'. I also feel that the heterogeneity that comes with the diversity in issues each of us dealt with in our works fights against the general stereotype that 'most Malay artists just deal with what it means to be Malay' and in some sense the show allowed us to delve into a deeper discussion of the topic for which I am glad because the Malay culture has become easy to homogenous, generalise and stereotype.



**Zulkhairi:** Norah, with the work you showed, I feel you were also trying to reveal something not often spoken about, due to it being taboo. What was some impetus in making the work?

**Norah:** I'm really intrigued and I think more than anything, charmed by ethnographic portraits in the early history of photography. Despite most of these images being used for scientific documents, you really cannot take away the bias of colonial photographers behind the lens of the camera. Subjects in ethnographic portraits are more or less portrayed in a very exoticised manner.

That being said, I am aware of Kassian Cephas' body of work and I absolutely adore his work. He is Java's first photographer and that's really powerful!



Similarly with *Ethnographic Portrait of a Bugis Calabai*, I wanted to imagine myself being a person like Cephas who in his time assert myself and my own existence within the history of the region. My grandfather is of Bugis ancestry but he is very much Malay-nised. All I know of Bugis people is from my Javanese grandmother's tales of how they were fierce "lanun" people, or pirates. Nobody told me that the Bugis people accepted up to five gender variations and that despite colonisation and Islamisation of the region, this tradition persists till today.

Bugis history is very much part of Singapore's history having a place called Bugis Street itself, once notorious for gay sailors and trans sex workers. It goes to show that queerness is inherent in the fabric of our society and it is not a coincidence that the people the street is named after had a more inclusive understanding of gender(s).

I would say that the portrait in itself is an exercise of resistance, that you cannot silence something that has always been there. What you try to hide in the dark will come to light, one way or another.

**Zulkhairi:** Farizi, is humour an important aspect in your work?

**Farizi:** In my works, humour is definitely a real approach but has never been super intentional. I try to approach my works in both absurd yet subtle/neutral ways, so it encourages a sense of irony and humour in the audiences interpretation, which to me has become quite significant. Dealing with the matrix of identity and in ideas like whether culture is important is a touchy subject and I've always been afraid to confront it directly, so humour is an indirect confrontation with the issues I deal with, and is valuable as it encourages viewers to engage with (the issues in) my works.

**Zulkhairi:** With the dialogues you mentioned Farizi, do both of you feel that with difference, a sense of engagement with a wider audience can be limited sometimes? What are some of your strategies in ensuring there are enough entry points for people of other worldviews and lived experiences?

**Norah:** I think I'm not interested in acceptance or understanding of a "wider" view, what I'm interested is making content/conversation that is accessible to my primary audience (mainly marginalised folks i.e queer/brown/Malay/queer and brown/queer and Malay) and empowering ourselves with images that they can feel like "Hey I can be that! I can do that!" I say accessibility because not everyone from the intersections of communities that I address are on the same page, are well acquainted with ideas that I consider myself to be privileged enough to have access to because of academia.

Sometimes we tend to make art with a lot of theories rooted in academic thought, but we forget who it is for. It is important for me especially, because I'm riding on the wave of identity politics to empower myself and to see more of myself, but if people who look like me or live lives like me can't relate, then I guess my work is more or less indulgent and I would even dare say narcissistic.

**Zulkhairi:** Farizi, do you feel the same? Are you concerned with having a wider audience?

**Farizi:** I feel the same as Norah on this, because my interest is in making the conversation accessible; but because my works deal with the idea of being people and communal and overcoming polarising ideas such as culture and race, I feel like I want to make my works accessible to as many people as possible. In that regard I'm not interested in a wider audience, but I am primarily interested in making my works as accessible as possible, such that an audience becomes secondary. Hence when I am making my works I am not so concerned about having a larger audience, but more about how do I make sure that every person who views my works leave questioning the same things I question in my works.

**Norah:** Would you almost say that there is an element of universality with regards to the subjects you work on?

**Farizi:** I do acknowledge that when dealing with identity politics it can be very foreign and strange for a viewer because they engage in issues they don't usually concern themselves with. I wouldn't say for sure but I try to universalise the subjects I work on without straying too far from the issue, because while I work on issues that deal with the Malay identity, my body of work in general engages with the idea of cultural relevance, so while some of my works can be 'Malay-centric', I am still questioning the relevance of culture but only by using the Malay culture as a point of departure.

**Norah:** Yes! I thought that the idea of "performing" a cultural identity would with resonant, even with people of different cultural identities, especially for people of our time.

**Zulkhairi:** I think I would like to comment on the idea of universality as put forth by Norah. Even though our pursuits often involve issues of identity/ ethnicity, no matter how intersectional this may be, we also adopt visual codes and signifiers that are identifiable from a visual language point of view. Thus to some extent, even though I may speak of a unique experience, I leverage on art historical references as a form of 'levelling field' especially to those who are not privy to my full experience.

If I may, echoing Farizi's interest in questioning the relevance of culture and I suppose, the Malay identity, we often hear people question the relevance of identity in a postmodern sense. What are your opinions on this? Is there a need to talk about identity at all, or at least in the context of Singapore?

**Farizi:** I think the need for an identity is important in the socio-cultural matrix of Singapore, which ironically has a lack of a national identity even within its diasporic intersections. But as such the Singaporean identity is a kind of transformative space that embraces the development of different individual identities. The keyword here is individuality; we see the liberalisation of selves within the general younger generations, but not enough people exploit the potential of individualism in this country. Hence while our sense of identity started with the idea of 'CMIO', it is always important to question where we came from, i.e. our cultural traditions, instead of blindly accepting them as our sense of identity (we are people, not sheep). We realise that Singapore is more progressive and more liberal, and hence our tropes of self understanding should progress from multiculturalism to multi-individualism.



**Norah:** I think my sentiments more or less echo what Farizi feels! To summarise, I feel that there is room for multiple narratives instead of one-faceted identities.

**Zulkhairi:** Farizi, it's interesting how you see a transformative quality with identity and how this similarly possesses a potentiality for a more complex sense of individualism. If I may, you mentioned tropes and how this have obviously limited one's self-understanding (and the need to expand it), yet I do wonder how one constructs a liberal sense of individualism?

In this exhibition for instance, the idea of 'mat' is put forth in a self-deprecating manner. While a general understanding of what 'mat' means may have already been established, it has become a knee jerk reaction to prove one is otherwise due to its associations with certain attributes. Thus, it's quite natural to discount such aspects in the process of one's individuation. But with such things that we choose to stay away from, can we extrapolate the transformative potential you alluded to as a way to reclaim a form of mat-ness?

**Norah:** Zul, do you think it's possible to "appropriate" Mat culture?'

**Zulkhairi:** I think there may be various understanding of what a mat is but naturally, it's a layman term that denotes quite a hypermasculine delinquent (or at least, mischievous) who is working-class in nature. Yet, while this may seem quite simple, I think even the mat often breaks away from traditional codes of masculinity, for instance, being expressive (i. e. emotion) through music and singing, or even adopting certain beauty regimes like eyebrow trimming.

What I really mean to say is, even something seemingly 'simple' like the 'mat' possesses multiple dimensions. And if we add a subcultural layer to this, it really depends whether we are interpreting the mat based a a semiotic lens (how the group looks like collectively), the group's argot (the way they speak) or even demeanour (the way they behave). It's basically in the mode of becoming so to speak! And with technology mediating their (or rather, our) visibility, we are seeing a synthesis of identity signifiers that can be seen as intercultural! So to answer you Norah, perhaps, we are already appropriating such a 'culture' (whatever this entails!). Based on the three categories outlined above, I think it's just a matter of performance, transformation and perhaps, even queering.

**Norah:** I really like the idea of synthesis of identity signifiers! I mean, the Malay identity in itself is a synthesis of so many influences constantly packaged and repackaged. I guess to wrap things up Zul, how would you package and repack future renditions of *Malais-a-trois* (if you do intend to do future renditions someday!)?

Or rather, what are other things you would hope to explore and expand on should there be a future rendition of *Malais-a-trois*?

**Zulkhairi:** I think that's a great question! Firstly of course, I hope the second iteration could last more than two days! Also, I would really like to consider for a more formal venue just so the works can be properly contextualised with in-depth analysis made. I think it will be interesting to retain some of the original works with additions of new developments. Essentially, I hope the show was able to act as an extension to all our practices where respective works were able to value add and contribute certain complexities beyond an individuated reading. And finally, thank you both for being part of the show!

Also, thank you Sobandwine (<https://www.sobandwine.com>) for the generosity in hosting us!

*Malais-a-trois* (Mat) was recently developed as MAT for the Curator Open Call as initiated by Objectifs, Centre for Photography & Film. The exhibition ran from 2 August to 15 September 2019.

**NORAH LEA** (b. 1993, Singapore)

An artist whose works investigate the performative aspects of our identities. Her work is rooted in self-portraiture, exploring themes such as gender, sexuality and ethnicity through photography, film and performance. She is currently in her final year of studies in Photography and Digital Imaging and will be graduating from a Bachelor of Fine Arts in the NTU's School of Art, Design and Media by 2019.

<http://www.norahlea.com>

**FARIZI NOORFAUZI** (b. 1998, Singapore)

A multi-disciplinary artist in Singapore who works predominantly with media and performance art. He is interested in investigating the relevance of culture, specifically within the unique socio-cultural context of Singapore as an intersection of diasporic cultures.

<http://www.cargocollective.com/farizi>

**ZULKHAIRI ZULKIFLEE** (b. 1991, Singapore)

A visual artist and exhibition-maker based in Singapore. His practice explores the notion of Malayness in relation to knowledge production, the social agency and distinction/ taste.

<http://www.cargocollective.com/zulkhairizulkiflee>  
<https://www.facebook.com/sikapgroup>



# MONOTONIC SYMPHONIES

by Arora Aryan, BA(Hons) Fine Arts Level 2 (2019)

I had always used painting as my choice of mode of artistic expression. It was always my comfortable medium, but recently, for the first time in LASALLE, I took up performance as a medium to convey my thoughts.

Initially I never thought of incorporating performance in my artwork, it was only when I came across the performance artist, Tony Orrico using the limits of his body when drawing life-size figures that I thought it would be a good idea to perform. I was looking at the themes of restriction, where how I felt restricted as an artist coming from India, where other professions are given much higher value than artists. This was the time I was considering the impact of being bound by the laws of the Indian society, and it was the time I chose performance as a medium in which I can engage these ideas.

For the performance, I planned to 'cage' myself in an open space and to leave traces of my steps as I walk around that space. To prepare for this I covered the floor and walls with white A3-size sheets. I began the performance by covering

myself in charcoal powder and then slowly walking over the sheets. Marking my traces, I sat on the floor, walked and smudged charcoal all over using my body to make the prints. The whole idea was to capture myself both mentally and physically in an open space, and to capture my traces, so that even after the completion of the performance one could see human traces in that space.

Initially I had planned on finishing the performance in about thirty minutes but it went on for an hour and a half hour. It struck me how completely engaged I had become while acting out a piece.

The scariest moment for me would have to be at the beginning when I started putting charcoal on myself and start walking semi-naked in front of the audience. Initially I was not even sure if I could perform it for 30 minutes. Everyone staring at me made me extremely nervous. I was not sure of my body, hence the first twenty minutes was just my being very conscious but as time passed, I felt something else. I felt numb. Suddenly

all the staring did not faze or trouble me; suddenly I was sure about what I am doing, I could see everyone but could not hear a thing. It was as if I am in my own space, my own world, completely zoned out, simply performing the piece, overlapping the traces. And finally I had captured myself mentally in that space, where nothing else mattered. Performance made me realise how, in life, its important to numb a few things out; how we should go on in life, how to mentally envision your inner self. It made me so confident that despite everyone looking or even when no one was there, I continued doing what I wanted, continued it without any fear.

In my opinion, art is something that we do for ourselves and not for others, and performance was something that made me realise that. It helped me overcome my fear, fear of what people will say and think. It was a great experience for me and I feel the personal touch that is sometimes left out in paintings can be easily filled with performance art.



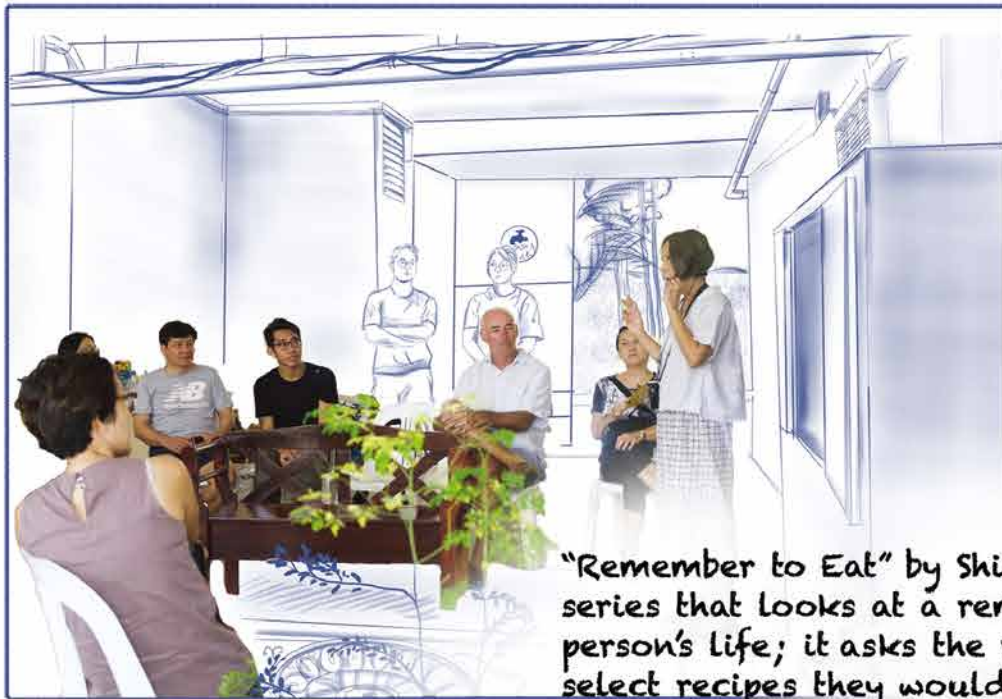
# INTERNSHIP WITH BOTH SIDES, NOW

7 Telok Blangah Crescent • 13 March – 8 July 2019

by Clara Lim Hsiu Ying and Peng Ting,  
BA(Hons) Fine Arts Level 2 (2019)



Workshops spearheaded by Alecia were conducted with the residents each week for discussion on their individual artistic vision under the theme, "Restore".



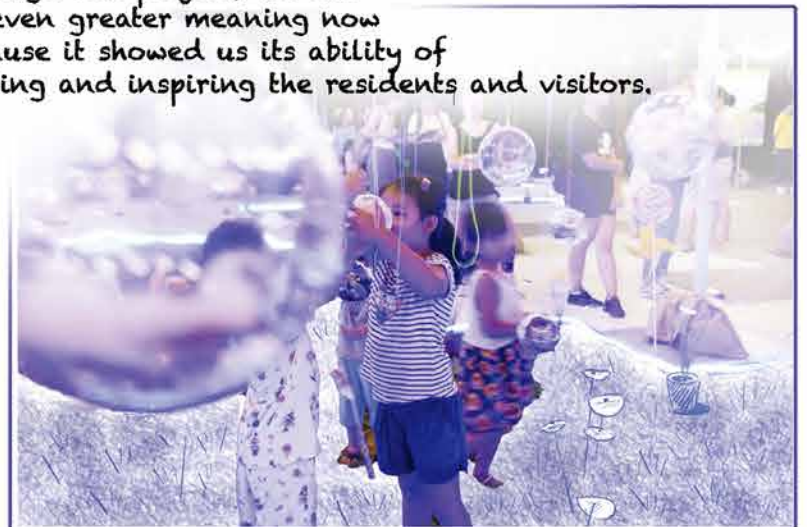
"Remember to Eat" by Shirley is a cooking series that looks at a remembrance of a person's life; it asks the residents to select recipes they would like to be remembered by.



Through this project, art has an even greater meaning now because it showed us its ability of healing and inspiring the residents and visitors.



Cooking and sharing sessions were conducted to foster long term relationships among participating residents.



Through the engagement process, the residents became more outgoing and willing to be in contact with others.



# OBJECT OF DESIRE

Brother Joseph McNally Gallery, Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore (ICA)  
22 June – 24 July 2019

by Soo Pei Chia, BA(Hons) Fine Arts Level 1 (2019)

Two things captured my attention as I entered the exhibition space: one, the tangibility of the silence that permeates it and two, the diversity of works which runs the gamut from prints, installations, to film and performance.

For *Object of Desire*, each artist had been invited to create a work that “explores the values and hierarchies associated with “being an object or image”” (Curatorial statement). The curatorial arrangement of the works, described as engendering an “interdependent constellation,” would stimulate readings of the “art objects” by their mere juxtapositions.

The title of the exhibition can be attributed to an essay *A thing like you and me* by artist-writer-filmmaker, Hito Steyerl. In the essay, she writes that our participation in images blurs the distinctions between subjects and objects and consequently, human subjectivity as well. Like images, what is human subjectivity has become more objectified. Images are seen as fragments of the real world: like any other “a thing like you and me.” The extent of involvement of humans in the formation and operations of images was felt in the exhibition.

The art object is seen as an object which becomes germane through cultural institutions, where they are being recognised, documented and appropriated. More than simply just material objects, art objects are addressed as objects of desire, equipped with exceptional attention and connotation. The materiality of the art object allows us to create ideologies that reflect human ideals. The process of registering art objects with human desires becomes a mechanism for fortifying the notions of value that support current hierarchies, obfuscating the artists’ original intentions. The ideals behind our desires, is often more sinister than the loss of any actual object.

*Object of Desire* investigates the very notion of objects as subjects of desires and instigates the audience to question what validates objects and what is the value behind it.

The works curated produced were slightly disconcerting and beguiling, playing subtle games with what we see and what we want to see. Through an inquisitive inclination, the works portrayed the nature of publicness and intimacy, of hiding and exposing through the ambiguities of human desires. Through the suggestive ways, the works also serve as a reminder that art objects are seen as something more than material objects. The works hint and suggest that art objects are viewed as objects of desire, enriched with hidden connotation. Because of how the exhibition was being installed, the way one group of works led into another possessed a clarity that revealed an intimate and quiet appeal.

Yet it is Guo Liang’s *Figure* series which opened the show, looking back at me, questioning my very presence in the room. How did I perceive this work?

Emblazoned across the wall is Guo Liang’s ephemeral and dactylic fabric series.

Photographs which were taken from the media were digitally printed and concealed with a layer of fabric gauze, giving it an ephemeral impression. In some of the works, pieces of wire and metal hook is attached to the surface of the fabric gauze. In this series of work, the painterly and textual surfaces act as surfaces for performing affect. The tension between the phenomenological and the psychological are played out in the process of staging congruences and slippages that occurs within material and language. Projections and disruptions may be used to map out territories of desire.

Intrigued by the sensual materiality of the work, I felt a strong urge to reach out and feel the texture of the work.

An object assumes a social role that is established through generations of repeated activity or use. Could an art object’s participation in this social construction of desires be something



*Objects of Desire*, 2019, in-situ installation view, Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, LASALLE College of the Arts. Images courtesy of Wong Jing Wei

to consider? Could recognising the principle of objects allow us to see ourselves as things acting upon other things?

Perhaps we are at a brink of a realisation of a new, interactive materiality. Instead of mourning after the loss of the fantasy notion of objects, a potential future could be seen with it.



*Emotional Things*, 2018. Esplanade Tunnel. Acrylic, wood and guitar music. Images courtesy of Ken Cheong

# RECOLLECTING EMOTIONAL THINGS BY IAN WOO

Esplanade Tunnel, Esplanade Theatres by the Bay • 20 April – 8 July 2018

by Lai Yu Tong, BA(Hons) Fine Arts Level 3 (2019)

I’m trying to remember this feeling. We had this argument about something petty, something about an ex-girlfriend. We were walking towards The Esplanade through the route that we usually take by foot walking from the train station. It’s quite long and it seems every time we take that path we’re always rushing for something. That day was no different, we were going to be late for a play. It was some overseas theatre troupe’s version of *1984* or *Fahrenheit 451* brought in by some local art festival. I really can’t recall properly. Along this route we would pass by The Esplanade Tunnel, or perhaps we took some detour to pass by it on purpose. Again I can’t quite recall properly.

The work jumps into my memory at strange times. I think the first recollection of it since I had first saw it was when a friend who was about to go away for a while, asked if there were any exhibitions he should catch before he leaves for Frankfurt the following day. He took my advice and went to see Ian Woo’s installation, *Emotional Things*, at the Esplanade Tunnel. Come to think of it, he probably encountered the work in a similar state of mind that I was in. We were both in a rush and slightly troubled about different things.

The next time that I recalled the work I honestly can’t remember. It popped up several other times when asked about what show or artwork had left an impression on me in 2018. I haven’t left Singapore much in and so that’s a difficult question to answer. It is strange that *Emotional Things* left an impression because I can’t actually say that I remember much of it. I can’t exactly remember what I had seen saw or heard. Or it didn’t

leave a clear image in my head. It’s unlike the spectacles we are familiar with in Singapore that one can easily say was “memorable.” I don’t think Ian Woo would have liked if I called the work memorable anyway.

It’s been a year now since I saw the work. I’ll try to talk about it purely from memory: there were sounds playing in the background softly. Slow guitar strums? There were some shapes. But what shapes? They weren’t exactly circles or semi-circles, nor perfect triangles and rectangles. Maybe ovals? I’m not sure. It’s partly because things were drowned in reverb and washed out hues. The edges were rounded off and visibly hand-treated. Part of this colouration and fading must have also been done by my memory over time.

Part of the reason why I like the work is because I also like to use the word ‘things.’ I feel it’s often used as a tactic of evasion, some kind of a scapegoat or filler word so that the user can get away with not putting an exact word to things. Also that there is a degree intentionality placed on not knowing. It’s one of the earliest words that I remember learning, but yet was slowly taught not to use because of its vagueness (which I think is completely ridiculous). It goes nicely as a title to Woo’s installation, considering his dedication to abstraction. As if abstraction can take us back to kindergarten and back to the practice of learning again: learning simple words, learning to look and to listen to things. I like it when art requires me to learn or to try. I’m trying to remember this feeling again.

# MEDIATED REALITIES

Esplanade Tunnel, Esplanade Theatres by the Bay • 18 April – 14 July 2019

by Vaishnashri Meynon S,  
BA(Hons) Fine Arts Level 2 (2019)

*Mediated Realities* made me feel like I was in a time warp, finding my way through past memories that were captured and conveyed artistically with the use of materials and mediums. All four, that took place in various spaces of Esplanade, twisted one's perception of reality, invoked a sense of nostalgia, giving the viewer an experience of an energy that was once present, unfolding its own story.



Jeremy Sharma, *Say Ocean*, 2019. Installation of sumi ink on paper and audio. Dimensions variable

The exhibition in the Tunnel was Jeremy Sharma's *Say Ocean*. Comprising 24 gestural ink drawings, the work was accompanied by 24 recordings in local dialects that are not commonly spoken in Singapore. Using the recordings as material, he edited his recordings to disrupt their natural flow to create a unique musical auditory experience.

Each recording contained a participant speaking in his or her own language about a personal experience growing up, a favourite food and colour followed by the memories of the sea. I was one of the participants; I spoke Malayalam. It is one of the 22 languages that is spoken in India. I recall feeling calm during the recording despite a rush of a sea of emotions as I spoke in a language that reminded me of my late grandmother. However, after listening to all the remade recordings live in the Esplanade Tunnel, I was aware that every recording carried a different tone expressive of the personal emotions that came with the individual memories. The recordings were played one after another, reminding me of waves building up gradually before they hit the shore. These sounds stopped people who passed through the Esplanade Tunnel to listen to what they perceive as the familiar strains of the waves, and to also discover where the sounds came from. The 24 drawings accompanying the voice recordings gave a visual cue to the sounds that wove together as they echoed through the tunnel.



Torlap Larjaroensook, *Insignificant Meaningful*, 2019. Ceramic, enamel, wood and brass. Dimensions variable

My trail continued to level 1 Concourse of the Esplanade where Torlap Larjaroensook's *Insignificant Meaningful* stood tall. This piece was impossible not to notice due to its large scale.

Torlap utilises everyday ordinary objects that carries symbolic meanings in different Asian countries and culture to remind us of the interweaving nature of our societies. Lunch boxes, thermos flasks, vases, plates and bowls, made from different materials such as enamel, wood and ceramic were put together to create a huge assemblage piece. These everyday objects reflected the Chinese, Indian, Thai, Malay and Peranakan culture.

The whole installation had different components to it. The longer I looked at it the more I felt like I was travelling through time. Torlap's installation consisted of found objects that induced a sense of nostalgia; I could not help but notice the reoccurring lightbulbs throughout the assemblage, that had lit every piece in the installation, creating a warm ambience. As a whole, the structure looked like a time machine of memories sailing through time with the assembled objects hanging like a sail from the body of the brass sculpture of two rotatory propellers.



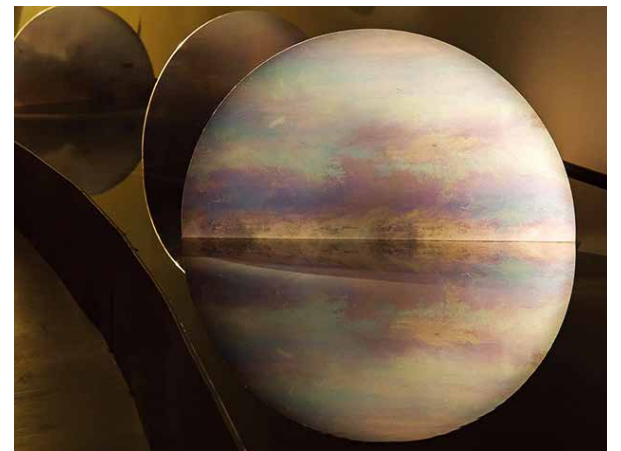
Danielle Tay, *This tree sees*, 2019. Mix media, collage. Dimensions Variable

Danielle Tay's *This tree sees* was about trees witnessing the movement of time through generations. Trees have the ability to adapt to urban development and the changes in our living environment. Her installation was a mixed-media collage exploring the idea of flux from a tree's perspective. Danielle believes that trees are collectors of memories and keepers of moments that change as the world evolves. Throughout her wall installation, her work flowed and broke up into smaller fragments, building up on layers and textures.

The idea of flux/flow was visually present in her collages as they were shaped in a whimsical manner swishing you from one piece to another. With the immediate surroundings being well air-conditioned, I enjoyed the work in the still and quiet space

Moving to level 2 of Esplanade Mall, in the Jendela (Visual Arts Space), I found Zen Teh's *Mirror of Water*.

Zen Teh investigates the effects of water pollution in Singapore, focusing on the oil-like residue that is found in our canals. Even though this is an environmental concern which affects the health of the mangrove forests and coastal ecosystems in Singapore, the oil-like residue visually creates a iridescent quality in Teh's work which was extremely captivating. I learned that this happens due to light reflecting off the surface of the water.



Zen Teh, *Mirror of Water*, 2019, Mirror, water and oil. Dimensions Variable

In my opinion, the mirror sculptures reflecting off the oil residue held a spitting image of the sky. Here, I was reminded of Nature's 'five elements,' but I had no time to develop that thought at the time as I continued my journey to level 3 of the Esplanade's community wall.

as night came and the busy commuters gone. Looking at her installation gave me a surreal experience of a summer breeze.

The four commissioned artworks looked at our everyday happenings, memories and the environmental effects on our earth. Again I cannot help but dwell on Nature's 'five elements.' Being part of the Indian culture the 'five elements' are called the *Panjaboortha*, which consists of water, fire, sky, air and land. The *Panjaboortha* holds a great significance in my tradition; therefore it was with a sense of familiarity that I began to appreciate all four works, like I was decoding a part of this exhibition. I was amazed and wonder at how the artworks through 'the five elements,' shifted my perception of reality and consequently, also shifted the way I perceived the world.

# O HER! A SOLO EXHIBITION BY BA FINE ART ALUMNI DIPALI GUPTA

## STILL LIFE AND LITTLE DEATHS

### PRESENTED AS PART OF THE CHAN-DAVIES ART PRIZE

Chan+Hori Contemporary • 28 July – 19 August 2018

by Ian Tee Wang Loong, BA(Hons) alumnus (2018)



*“For the uninitiated, assemblage theory provides a framework of thinking through the relationships of a body’s component parts, which are constantly shifting in response to the exterior. As such, it opens up possibilities for new formations and identities within and among other bodies.”*

In Donna Haraway’s *A Cyborg Manifesto*, she declared that: “The cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self. This is the self feminists must code.”<sup>1</sup> This notion of an assemblage is central to Dipali Gupta’s exploration of female sexuality and its place in contemporary society. For the uninitiated, assemblage theory provides a framework of thinking through the relationships of a body’s component parts, which are constantly shifting in response to the exterior. As such, it opens up possibilities for new formations and identities within and among other bodies.

For her solo exhibition *O Her!* as part of the Chan-Davies Art Prize, Dipali Gupta presented an installation of four video works which were choreographed to come on/off and jump screens. They came from two series of videos which were shot in still life setups and domestic spaces. In these scenarios, the contemplative serenity of an ornate still life or the mundane interior of a home is disturbed by an off-the-screen sound of buzzing. The source of the buzzing, the hidden activity, gives itself away when jolts of ringing pierce the silence, ranging from what sounds like alarm clocks to full on pounding from construction sites. In other moments, one might catch a gentle hum in the background or an escaped growl.

These sounds were produced by activated vibrators placed in vessels. What Gupta affectionately calls “pleasure bullets,” a befitting name for their abstract shape and also the illicit cyborg union they form with the body. While the vibrators perform in her videos, they act less as a subject than rather, as the device through which Gupta interrogates our relationships with our bodies (or to use the Foucauldian term “biopolitics”).<sup>2</sup> What this cyborg relationship calls into question are the normative connections and power dynamics in the andocentric model of sexuality, entailing a new imagination of roles one can play and desire.

Yet while it deals with female sexual pleasure, the female form or indeed any representation of the body is absent in the videos. In a way, the videos contend with the privacy of these non-procreative sexual activities, often stigmatised with the burden of shame and guilt. Hence, unseen and unspoken. This connection between visual-audio presence in *O Her!* reminds me of the cheeky quote: “Women should be obscene (seen) and not heard” (attributed to the comedian Groucho Marx, Oscar Wilde or John Lennon depending on your source). At its most crass, I think the work plays with this patriarchal notion by inverting its injunction in a gesture that allows one to have her cake and eat it too.

One too needs to acknowledge the patriarchy that exists in art history. By appropriating the imagery of still life painting, *Moving Still Life* and *The Little Death* nod to the fact it is a genre that women painters in history were limited to (it is also a genre ascribed with less significance as compared to religious and historical painting). Still Life also reflected the conditions under which these works were produced, often in a domestic setting. Above all, it is a painting of objects, not subjects.

Responding to this history, Gupta played on the theme of death, by evoking the imagery of a traditional vanitas still life, with symbols showing the transience of life and futility of pleasure in the face of certain death. However, its stillness is broken as objects are animated by vibrations, causing them to roll, dance and fall over in the scene. *The Little Death* is also a reference to *la petite mort*, a French expression which alludes to the sensation of orgasm as likened to death. The idea of an assemblage surfaces again through this historical disassembling and reassembling, a recoding of meanings and relationships that rejects binaries—indeed, even of life and death.



<sup>1</sup> For more, refer to: Haraway, Donna. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> For more, refer to: Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*. New York: Random House, 1978.