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Foreword

We are pleased to launch the 14th edition of Praxis Press. Praxis Press was launched to provide our students with more opportunities to think and write critically about art, pushing them to explore critical perspectives beyond their artistic practice. For this edition, I would like to thank the following students who have contributed as writers: Level 3 students John Marie Mabale Andrada, Theresa Goh, Nathan Mark Kimbel and Noyona Biswas; Level 2 student Shree Suvarna; as well as Level 1 students Desnando Sarlim, Chin Li Ping Alexandra, Shakira Zulaikha Binte Zaibaktian and Tang Kafai. Lastly, I would like to thank lecturers Zarina Binte Muhammad, Dr Wang Ruobing and Erzan Adam for overseeing the success of this latest issue.

About McNally School of Fine Arts LASALLE College of the Arts

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.



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Maybe We Read Too Much Into Things

72-13

21-30 January 2021

A review by
Shakira Zulaikha
Binte Zaibaktian

Diploma in Fine Arts
Level 1

In collaboration with Singapore Art Week, *Maybe we read too much into things* is an exhibition that explores and questions the materialities of everyday objects. Curated by artist/curator Berny Tan, it features the works of six young artists under the age of 30 who scrutinise and create new meanings out of the mundane. Tan elaborates: “A close reading is not a closed reading. Meanings diffuse; meanings tether.”

Prior to the exhibition, I avidly followed all the updates and previews on social media platforms, especially Instagram (@maybewereadtoomuchintothings). The posts offered deeper insights and statements from the six artists on their works. As a student specialising in sculpting, it was really enlightening to see how the different artists produced their sculptures and site-specific installations. It made me consider a different aspect and approach to my specialisation, which I wish to apply in the upcoming years of my diploma.

On entering the exhibition space, I was greeted by a series of collectable bookmarks featuring the names of the artists, the title of their artworks and the motifs used in their artworks placed neatly on a display table. Above it on the wall, texts boasting the title of the exhibition and information were arranged. Seeing as this was one of my first visits to exhibitions outside of usual art spaces such as the National Gallery Singapore or National Museum, I had utmost admiration for the immense amount of effort and work



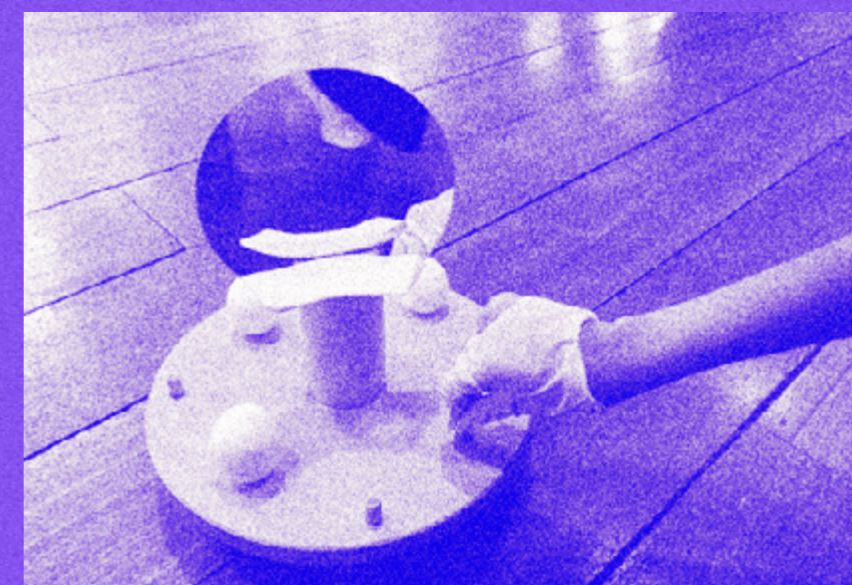
put into publicising the exhibition, and the design of the bookmarks and wall text.

Tamper, gently by Genevieve Leong consists of ten sculptural assemblages which invite viewers to change their positions and, in theory, tamper gently with the artworks. Interestingly, the assemblages were installed in the absence of the artist, yet she attempts to communicate with her viewers through the titles of her artwork, which serve as a set of instructions or suggestions, further intriguing the audience into making the decisions on the artist's behalf.

One of my favourite installations in this series is titled *evaporation*, which comprises a pedestal and a stack of gloves “gradually depleting”—as stated in the booklet—and which doubled as a display area where viewers are free to take the mini booklets. When I first went up to view Leong's works, I was directed to this very pedestal, not knowing it was considered a part of the artwork. This piece really made me question the fragility and materiality of everyday items where they are in constant motion, waiting to be picked up, rotated, wheeled, shuffled and moved. I had fun testing out each assemblage, moving different parts and witnessing the artworks in motion.

Absurd Intimacies by Daniel Chong was the second series of work that I viewed. The series featured four artworks that explore the errors of attempting to create past relationships. Using everyday items such as biscuits, cereals, jeans and rugs, the artist replicates the traces of a person's presence signified in a bite or a spill, preserving it in unique scenes. Daniel Chong expresses a mix of desire, anxiety and hope in the journey of overcoming past intimacies.

One reason I thoroughly enjoyed this series was due to the fact that I have been learning the art of mould making and slip casting, and was even working with different types of snacks myself. On top of that, I was motivated to find a proper narrative much like the artist had. I admire the way he conceptualised this series, as the placement of each biscuit, cereal



and the like each held its own distinctive meaning and message.

For example, my favourite piece from Daniel Chong is the pair of jeans preserved in a storage box, with the replica of spilt milk and Lucky Charms cereal. Fascinatingly, the cereal bits were placed in the formation of the constellation Argo Navis—or Ship Argo, the largest constellation which is no longer recognised by modern astronomers, who have broken it into three smaller constellations. With this, he reiterates the idea of saving past intimacies, even poetically thinking it as a “vessel on a vessel within a vessel”—the Argo Navis on the discarded jeans (symbolically a husk left in the absence of a body) within the storage box.

Aki Hassan's *A Tired Holder, Held and Holding* consists of five sculptures made out of metal and workshop tools. The work is based on a series of studies, the outcome of Aki Hassan's close examination of the gestures of security on the human body, as well as the sequence of movements between waking, stretching and resting.

Their metal sculptures are bent to mimic these movements and the addition of colourfully painted workshop tools recreate the points at which the body is secure and ‘held’ in place. I had a wonderful time viewing the sculptures from many different angles, admiring and understanding each placement of the holders—the tools—with each sculpture. I perceive each ‘holder’ as the core muscles activated within each movement. For example, the arms being the core points when we are in a push-up position and so on.

Always Better With Flowers is a ten-minute video installation by Kevin Fee. The artist challenges the perception of viewers and explores the idea of viewing things through the lens of a constructed set. Turning wood into a boxed setup, Kevin Fee constructs an entirely new world where viewers are invited to watch a sequence of strange scenes where he interacts with everyday items such as a banana, but diverting it away from its conventional application.



Absurd Intimacies
Daniel Chong, 2020–21



A Tired Holder, Held and Holding
Aki Hassan, 2020–21

The boxed setup directs you to see the work from two peepholes or viewing points—eye-level and slightly below. The videos are played over a screen behind stalks of perfumed flowers. The artist manages to put me, the viewer, in a position where I feel that the scenes become irrational and unconventional—in spite of the overlaying field of flowers bringing a sense of serenity and calm—altogether evoking a new mix of emotions.

The hand-drawn animation *Break* by Ryan Benjamin Lee was the last artwork that I viewed. Placed in the centre of the exhibition space, the artist used five fabric panels to create a makeshift film-screening area. Centred on the subject of hawker centres, the artist combines the objects, environments and sounds of hawker centres/coffeeshops and orchestrates an atmospheric narrative of these spaces.

He approaches this work with basic drawings, sketching over photos and scans of scenes from real life. Pieced frame by frame, the final outcome has a strobe-like effect and collage sequences, suggesting the idea of fragmented memories of everyday life in Singapore. The fabric panels provide further context to Lee's choice of object and scenes, showcasing all the reference and process images used in the full audiovisual work.

All in all, I found the exhibition an enlightening experience. It gave me new insights and generated ideas that I can incorporate in my own art practice. I am honoured to have been given the opportunity to also write about this wonderful display of creativity.



Always better with Flowers
Kevin Fee, 2020–21.



Break
Ryan Benjamin Lee, 2020–21.

This Is Water

By **Nonoya Biswas**

Diploma in Fine Arts
Level 3

As artists, our hands and mediums of choice are the vehicles that carry and guide the raw creative force that comes from inspiration and imagination.

Like water, this creative force can be molded, channelled and used as a great tool for self-reflection. Self-reflection, as the term suggests, is looking at the world and using it as a 360-degree mirror, so that we may know ourselves. The mirror illuminates. It is by peering through this mirror that we see the form that we inhabit. But what else can be reflected, except for the self? Is there anything that lies outside of this self?

When we look upon the world, what do we see? We see ourselves. There is nothing that is ultimately separate from us. Thus, our external realities hold powerful truths about our internal reality. This is also the case when we look upon the art we create, for it hints at our core nature. If there is nothing outside of the self, all events, places, people and objects are constantly informing our identity in relation to the world. The word 'information' suggests the process of forming or building from within. Art is one of the most powerful tools for world building.

When we peer into the depths of our imagination as if we are peering into a still lake, we find our soul mirrored back to us. Sometimes we find that the depths contain aspects of us that we could not otherwise see; it is only when we step outside of ourselves that we are able to discover new truths and

layers to our identity. Therefore, self-reflection poses a need for objectivity.

Art is an extension of the artist and is thus a product and reflection of our perception of the world, our identity, our past experiences, our ideals and values, our environment as well as our mental and emotional state at the time of its creation. Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung once said, "People don't have ideas; ideas have people."

The ideas that dawn upon us from seemingly nowhere, the images we become possessed by and the subject-matter and themes that interest us, take a hold of us and demand a great deal of mental, emotional and even physical labour on our part. To struggle with abstractions is a necessary step in order to realise their place within our body of work. It is almost like a compulsion to channel such intangible forces from the realm of the immaterial (that is, our mind's eye) into reality.

Like alchemists in the business of transmuting lead into gold, we are as artists transmuting visions, emotions and thoughts into the physical dimension. This is no easy task as it requires a clear channel through which creativity can flow: a focused mind, an understanding of our self in relation to such ideas and an ability to be able to zoom in and out from the process when necessary.

Let's call the act of 'zooming in' a subjective perspective and the act of 'zooming out' an objective perspective. A subjective perspective is an immersive and individual point of view. It is a valuable angle from which to create because it gives us the ability to see into, feel into and become the work itself; we are able to take that which we create as a part of us that is then inseparable from our physical, mental and emotional self.

On the other hand, an objective perspective is the totality of all subjective perspectives, sort of like a bird's eye view. The Egyptian god Horus had the head of a falcon for this reason; a higher perspective suggests a

greater intellect. Objectivity is the process of expanding one's awareness wide enough to unify seemingly contradicting truths and perspectives. As artists, it helps us dis-identify with our core self-concept so as to look at the artwork from a multitude of angles that ultimately alter the meaning and message of the work. This is a valuable angle from which to self-reflect because we are able to look upon the body of work as a separate entity that is imbued with its own life and its own form. Thus by extension, the work is justified in itself, simply because it is an extension of the artist and once it is brought to life, largely operates like a living creature full of layers, mystery and a right to be here and a right to be whatever it wants to be. It is also open to interpretation by definition because that's just what art is! My peers and I have grappled with ways in which to define our work and to succeed in being able to communicate our ideas through it in a manner that the viewer can comprehend. But regardless of whether others are willing and able to join us and share our ideas and intentions, our work should not be devalued; it succeeds by just being. However, this sentiment is not always applicable in art school and I can see why.

In art school, theoretical self-reflection is the only tether between our mental factory and the product it creates. It is the word that binds what we do in some sort of conceptual grounding.

The phrase, 'The Art of Bullshitting,' is a common phrase in art school because of our tendency to defend and justify our work with a conceptual backbone that we may not necessarily resonate with. 'The Art of Bullshitting' is seen as the trait and practice of a fraud artist or a desperate art student, but I disagree with this sentiment. In my experience, exercising 'The Art of Bullshitting' is an extremely valuable tool in order to gain objectivity regarding what we have created. It also forces us to make free associations after the process of creating. It is a great cognitive ability to look upon one's work or even that of another and allow our mind to connect it all together

concisely, to make sense of images and to find layered and contradictory meanings in something that does not actually suggest those meanings. To allow the mind to make sense of our external world and show us what it means to be is a valuable life skill because it sharpens our perspective and exposes hidden aspects of our selves.

Our subconscious mind operates in the shadows and relies on images and metaphors to communicate with our conscious minds. When we consume any piece of art, the images go down into the depths of our psyche and from it, rise (often absurd) meanings, messages and associations. Instead of invalidating what an aspect of us truly does see, it would be far more interesting and rewarding to grapple with these images and the sensations they create within. Whatever rises up from the depths exposes some core value, belief and perspective that we have internalised (although perhaps not fully integrated into our conscious minds).

The politics of self-reflection is a messy process of struggling to find the highest resonating truth with the version we are at that time. Naturally, this is subject to change. And this is also the beauty of perceiving one's own or another's work. I do not subscribe to the view that our idea can be lost in translation during the creative process; it can only be unfurled to expose the multiple layers that are working behind the curtains simultaneously. We think of ourselves as separate from 'reality' by a thin layer of skin, but in truth, we are much more porous than we realise. There is a continuous process of creative, emotional and intellectual osmosis taking place with everything around us. This is part of cognitive function and helps place us in the world by helping us clarify who we are in relation to the otherness that we face every day. But can this otherness be objective when looking into someone else's reality? Are galleries, curators, lecturers and peers, potential clients or buyers and critics

necessarily objective when looking at our work?

A critic has control over shaping one's perception. They reveal the intangible connections between art and its context, art and the artist, art and time and art and itself. This layered analysis is powerful because it situates a piece of work in reality, it gives it a body and a name and a purpose. The artwork then becomes a gateway to talking about other matters that are related, whether social, political, philosophical, religious etc.

However, when we look upon the world, we are wearing glasses that colour and distort 'reality' based on the filters of our experiences, preferences, upbringing, values, culture etc. With this in mind, is it possible for a critic to remove themselves from their core identity?

And why is it that we must become our own critics when it comes to our own work? We shake our heads when art does not obey us or dismiss it for not being imbued with the message that we so desperately want to fill it with.

In our studio practice, the line between artist and critic is blurred and perhaps the reason for this is to hone the skill of being able to find clarity within ourselves in relation to our own work or our peers'. Whether we love, hate or are indifferent to a piece of art, it sheds light on who we are: the higher the contrast, the better! Self-reflection is an endless process of clarifying who we are in relation to our external reality. It's taking something as a part of us or rejecting it. Either way, we know what we like and what we dislike better by the end of it.

Artists often feel stuck trying to justify their work. This is an outdated practice, yet one that is still operating because we have as art students, internalised traditional ideas of what art should be in order to be 'good'. Whether we accept the traditional way of going about artmaking or whether we reject it entirely are just two extremes of a spectrum—two sides of the same coin. Adopting this attitude, this

belief, strengthens the notion that art 'belongs' to the artist and needs to be seen and interpreted as such in order to be 'successful'. This robs art of its essence! The most magical thing about art is that it can be anything to anyone—reproduced and reborn a thousand times when seen by a thousand eyes.

#NEVERBEFORESG

neverbefore.sg
5 Oct 2020 – 31 Jan 2021

A review by
Tang Kafai

Diploma in Fine Arts
Level 1

The unforeseen coronavirus pandemic caused a wave of change across the globe. The crisis is an impetus towards rethinking the way we live and work, which many were unprepared for. Likewise, Singapore suffered during the pandemic, with restricted mobility and social distancing directly impacting the culture of work and leisure across the country, as individuals slowly transitioned into the new norm.

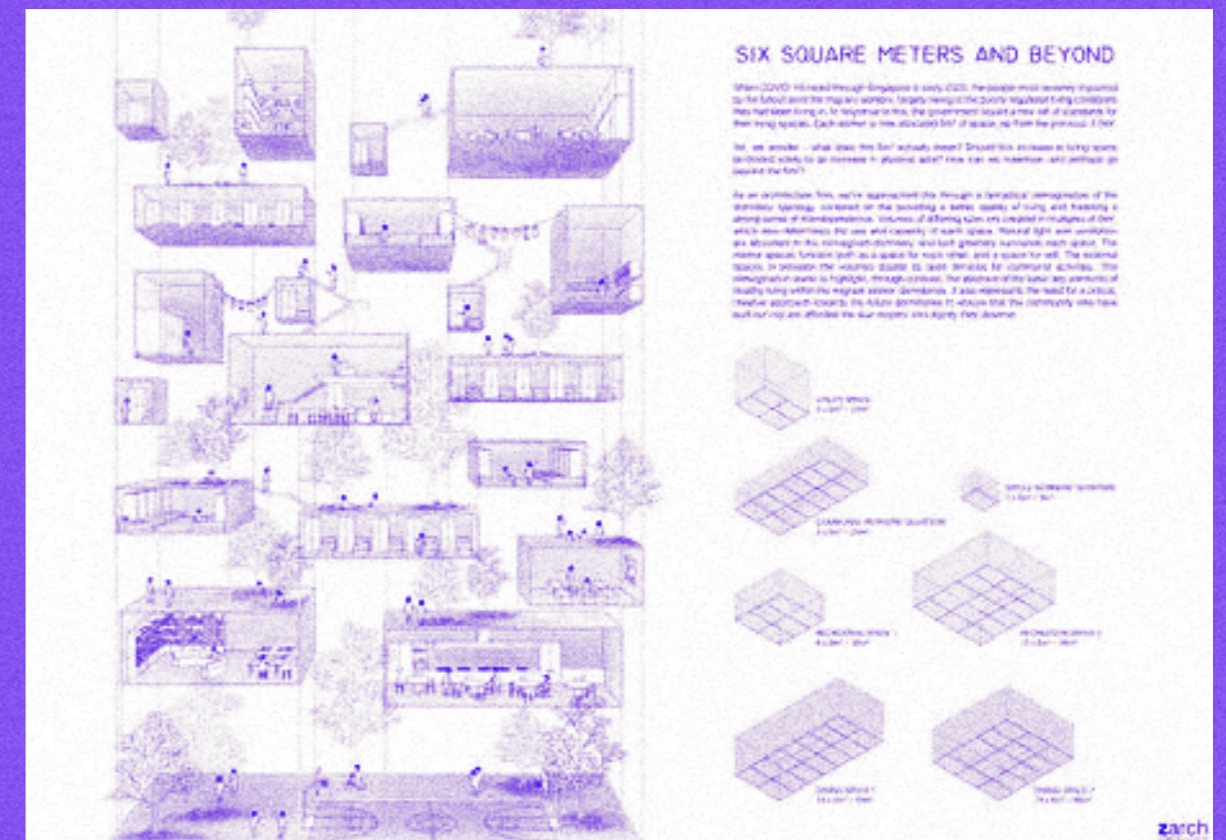
#NEVERBEFORESG, curated by fashion designer Yang Derong, explores the impact of COVID-19 in Singapore, as 87 creatives depict and document the state and processes of our transition as a collective. Spanning nine categories—architecture, video essays, drawings, photography, lyrical verse, Instagramable, Covidigital media, fashion/industrial design and Covidigital games—the artworks reflect the disposition of our nation and its people, as we traverse the three phases of the COVID-19 outbreak, starting from the first local circuit breaker period. Here is a brief glance at some of the categories and highlights of the works:

#01 | Architecture explores the immediate impacts on our living spaces following the circuit breaker period. Architects proposed future scenarios and designs for spaces such as dormitories which made use of architectural innovations. The works include graphics, models, or even more creative and abstract ideas, as a platform to explore their ideas.

#02 | Video Essays explores the effect the pandemic has had on the economy, travel and our daily



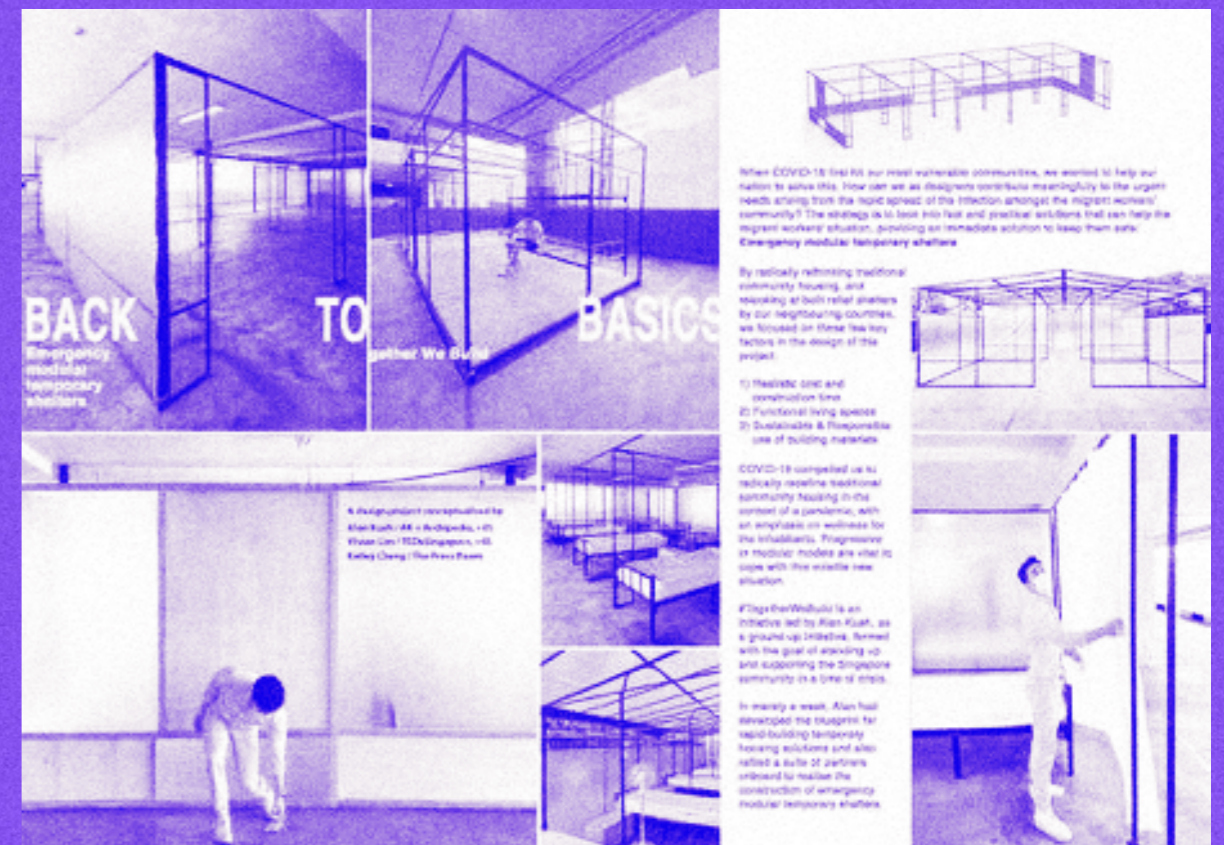
The Puzzle Box
Kenneth Koh, 2020.



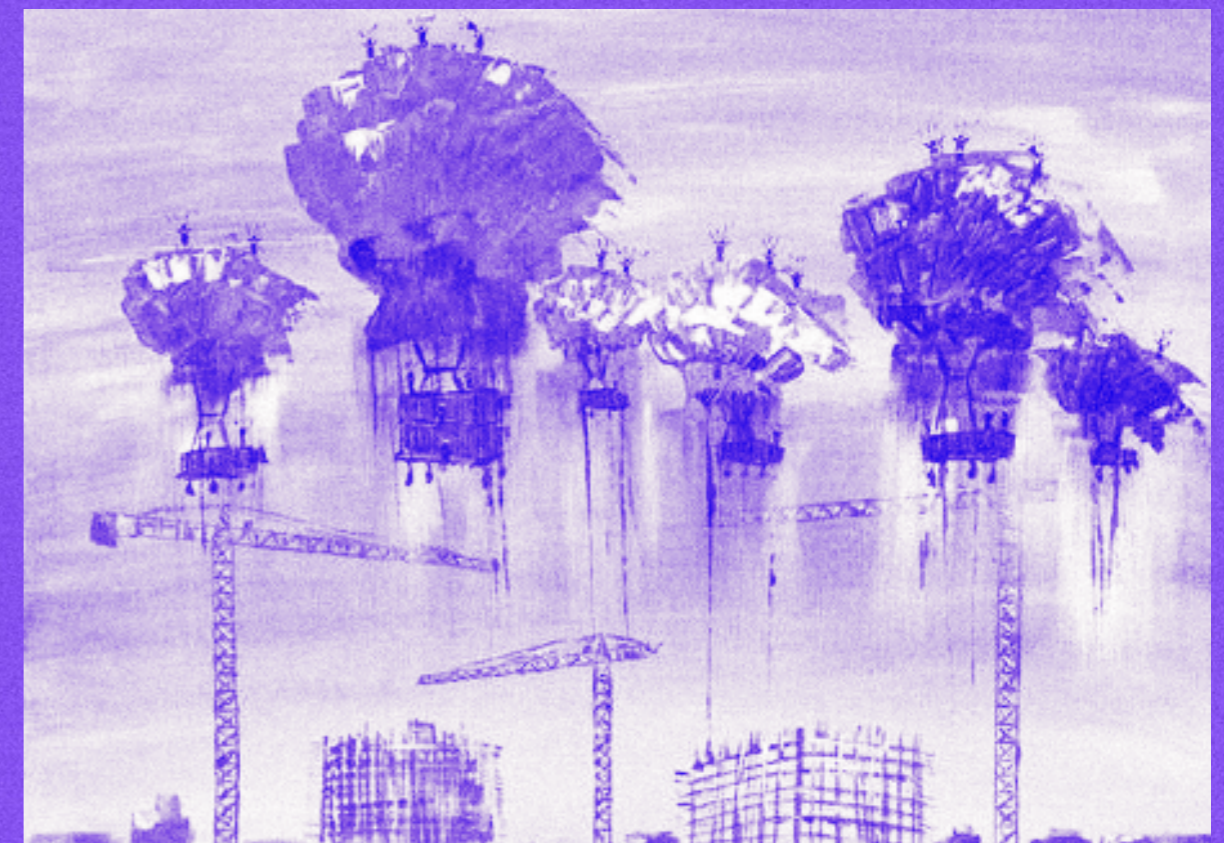
Six Square Meters and Beyond
Randy Chan and Kenneth Chen, Zarch Collaboratives, 2020.



2050, An Integrated Plug-In Community. A Post Covid-19 Society.
Melvin Keng, Erica Ang, Tan Hong Xi, Clarence Tan,
Kaizen Architecture, 2020.



Togetherwebuild: Emergency Modular Temporary
Alan Kuey, AK+ARCHIPEDIA, Vivian Lim, TEDXSINGAPORE, Kelly
Cheng, THE PRESS ROOM, 2020.



lives. These video essays chronicle the lives of different people during through these desperate times, while depicting the fragility and unpredictability of life.

In *56*, Chia Aik Beng documents a series of texts and images, collected over 56 days, consisting of many expressions, voices and perspectives of contributors during the circuit breaker. In *The Space Between Us*, he explores the concept of space in photographs and how through the documentation of life captured in photographs, the circuit breaker becomes a part of our life stories.

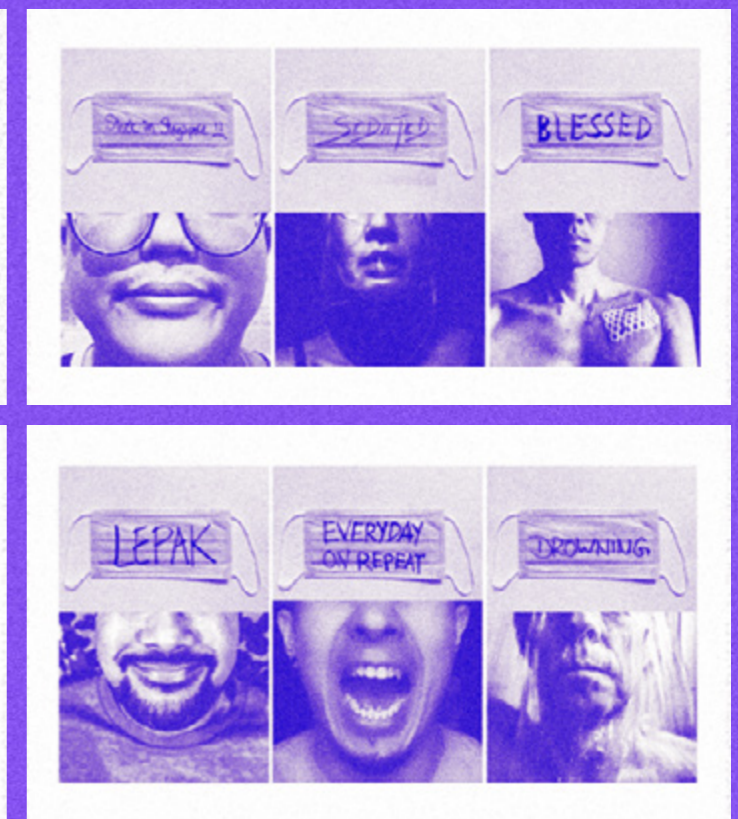
#03 | Drawings explores the private, intimate and emotional state of illustrators during COVID-19. Their pictorial essays reveal their feelings and sentiments and may help to reassure the young and their parents alike in uncertain times.

In *APRIL TO JULY – ILLUSTRATED MOMENTS OF CIRCUIT BREAKER*, Lee Kow Fong a.k.a. Ah Guo 阿果, created a series of 15 watercolour paintings, paintings which depict national efforts to curb COVID-19 from a child's perspective.

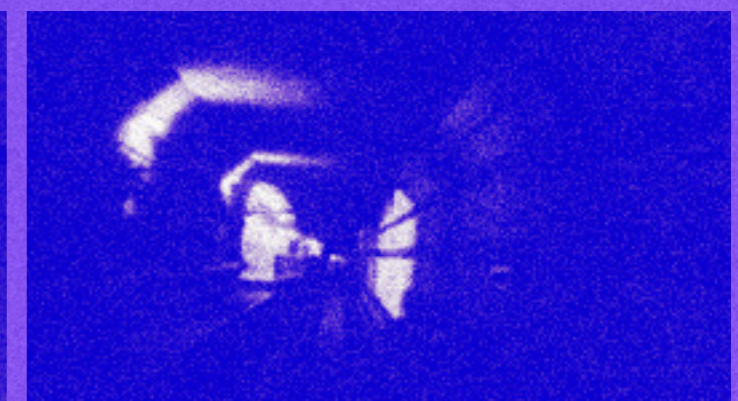
Dick Lee, on the other hand, turned his gaze inward and documented the lack of contact with his family. These drawings, referenced from old photographs and possessions, acted as surrogates for time spent with his parents and family and they brought him back to his days as a youth.

#04 | Photography explores the phone-camera as the documentary medium of the contributors' time at home during the circuit breaker. Over 19 days, contributors were to take square photographs of the same spot at four different times of the day, using only their mobile phones, giving the audience a glimpse into the worlds and spaces they live in. Contributions include:

Spacing Out by David Chan, a commercial photography producer and avid Instagrammer, uses social media as a form of connection to the rest of the world. With COVID-19, he was physically disconnected with others and Instagram became his virtual escape.



56
Aik Beng Chia, 2020.



23

The Space Between Us
Aik Beng Chia, 2020



An Ever-changing Landscape by Ryan Loh, a still-life photographer based in Singapore, plays on the landscape genre, with a twist. In the light of the new normal of being confined at home, he turns his dining table into an ever-changing landscape.

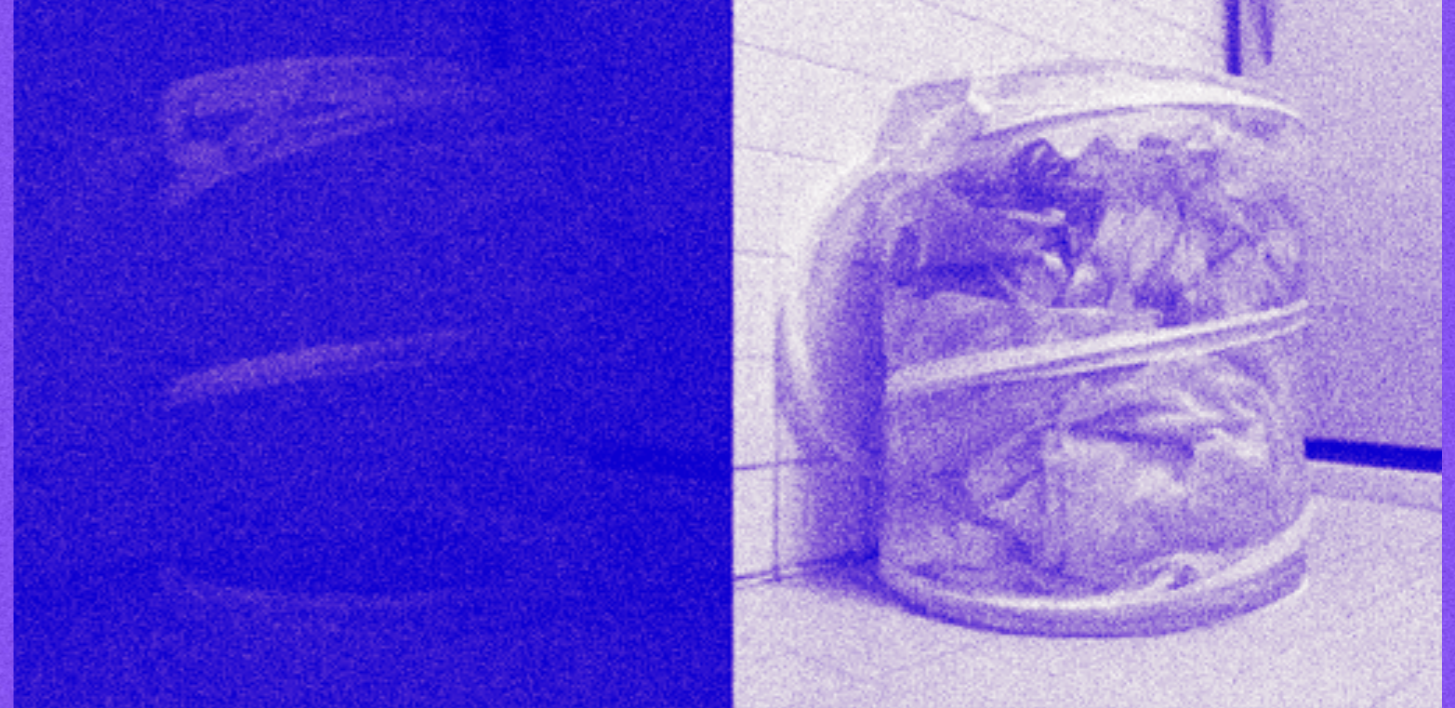
Isabelle Lim, in *Inside the Box*, turned to binge-watching dramas on Netflix to cope with the increasing chaos, loss of income and cancelled photography assignments.

Jet Ho, under the impact of pandemic restrictions, was stuck at home when he created his series of photographs. To combat boredom, he added dramatic skies and stormy weather in his photos during the post-production process, resulting in *Skies are Made out of Boredom*.

In *the Laundry Basket*, Rex Teo, a photographer based in Singapore, believes in translating emotions into visuals. He chose the laundry basket as a reflection of a day's worth of activities; although reduced in terms of usage due to the pandemic, he aptly said of his choice: "The acts of adding and removing items from the laundry basket are reminiscent of our lifestyle during the pandemic: life goes on even when the world outside is at a standstill."







Progressive Disintegrations

Objectifs: Centre for Photography and Film
10 Dec 2020 – 21 Jan 2021

A review by
Desnando Sarlim

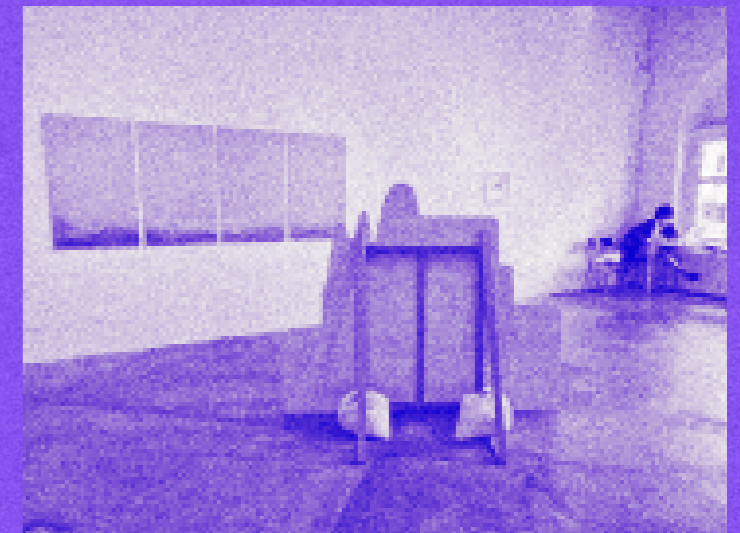
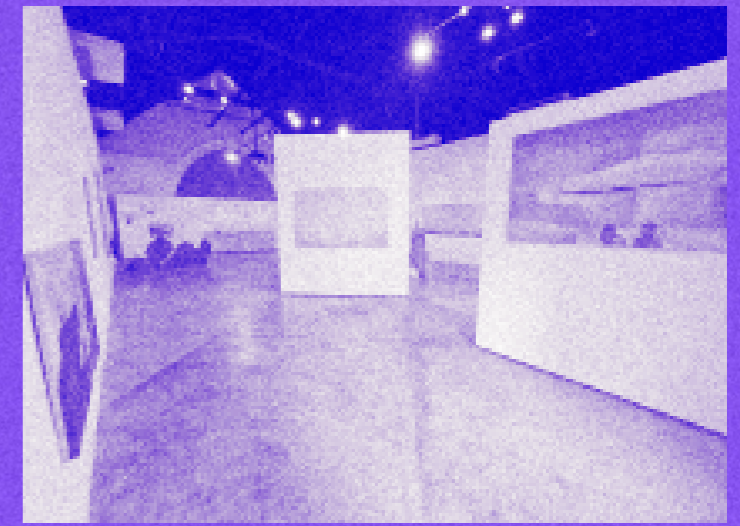
Diploma in Fine Arts
Level 1

The work I looked forward to as I reviewed *Progressive Disintegrations* was Hilmi Johandi's as I have always found his oeuvre quite engaging. My interest in Johandi's work (he was one of my lecturers at LASALLE) was first fueled when I saw his work in another group exhibition titled *Intersections* in 2020, at Jendela at the Esplanade.

This exhibition of artworks by Chua Chye Teck, Hilmi Johandi and Wei Leng Tay, was part of the *Singapore Art Week 2021*. Going to an exhibition with the intention to review it felt very different from going to exhibitions just for the sole purpose of enjoyment. For some reason it felt quite nerve-wracking, knowing that I'll have to verbalise my thought process. I braced myself before I stepped inside. As I walked into the Chapel Gallery of Objectifs, two words came to mind—'rustic' and 'store'. The yellowing walls and aged industrial flooring reminded me of the shophouse in which I used to live.

One notable thing about this exhibition was that the map of the exhibition and the list and descriptions of the works were presented in a file. Alternatively, there was a barcode for visitors to scan so we could view the entire layout and descriptions of each work with our phone. As a result the walls look emptier than what you'd usually expect and there was more empty space that gave the place a minimalist feel.

This exhibition transports us to precious times of people in the past, retelling a segment of their lives in an unconventional way. Each artist's practice



and style informs his or her aesthetic, with the mix of aesthetics cohering to help the exhibition shine.

Hilmi's paintings have a light and mellow feel to them. Friends point out that his works have an unfinished look. Some of the artworks deliberately bear missing parts and portions of the painting are left to the viewer's interpretation. I like it when art encourages the viewer to visualise, imagine and become engaged in the process of completing the work. The theme of these paintings are tourism scenes from Singapore in the 1980s, with the monochromatic imagery complemented by pops of collages.

The sandbags used as weight to stabilise the wooden board actually count as a part of the installation. Colours flow and intermingle with each other. The concentrated shades of ultramarine blue and touches of lilac here and there resemble an inverted colour palette. To me it looks like a view of a tree as seen from a low angle as it shoots upwards to the sky. The organic shapes of the installations complement the squarish and angular nature of all the other works very nicely.

There are several components in *Attractions and Sceneries (Fountain Gardens)*. In the foremost painting, several photographs or prints appear stacked on top of one another, with the topmost being that of a fountain. Behind, a linen canvas leans on a larger blue painting over a wooden support that is cut into an irregular shape. This blue painting echoes water shooting upwards—serving as an extension of the fountain in the smaller painting. The muted aqua blue creates a contrast with the bottom portion coloured white. If viewed from a low angle it appears to blend in with the walls of the venue.

In Wei Leng's work, "*Celtic club under construction, May '70*" we can discern through the burns and scratches a half-constructed building and silhouettes of two people. The past, even if not so distant, seems lost to us, pointing towards the irreversible nature of time and human nature. It's



Landscapes & Paradise: Attractions and Sceneries, 2020
Hilmi Johandi



Landscapes & Paradise: Attractions and Sceneries (Fountain Gardens)
2020, Hilmi Johandi

terrifying yet reassuring all at once.

These images are undeniably enchanting, the strong colours and the prominence of textural elements are what sticks in my mind. Even to someone like me who's next to clueless about photography, these works still succeed in conveying the emotion and dedication the artist has for his or her work. The detail and specificity of the description entails such intimacy and hence makes it more convincing that this was truly a fragment of the past reimagined.

In "I-71", the colours of red copper and the adjacent grey—like fire and a void respectively—consumes each other. This image to me represents abnormality and the struggle to break out of one's cage. Out of this void, a man's head is vaguely visible. My take from this work is that everything will eventually dissolve into nothingness.

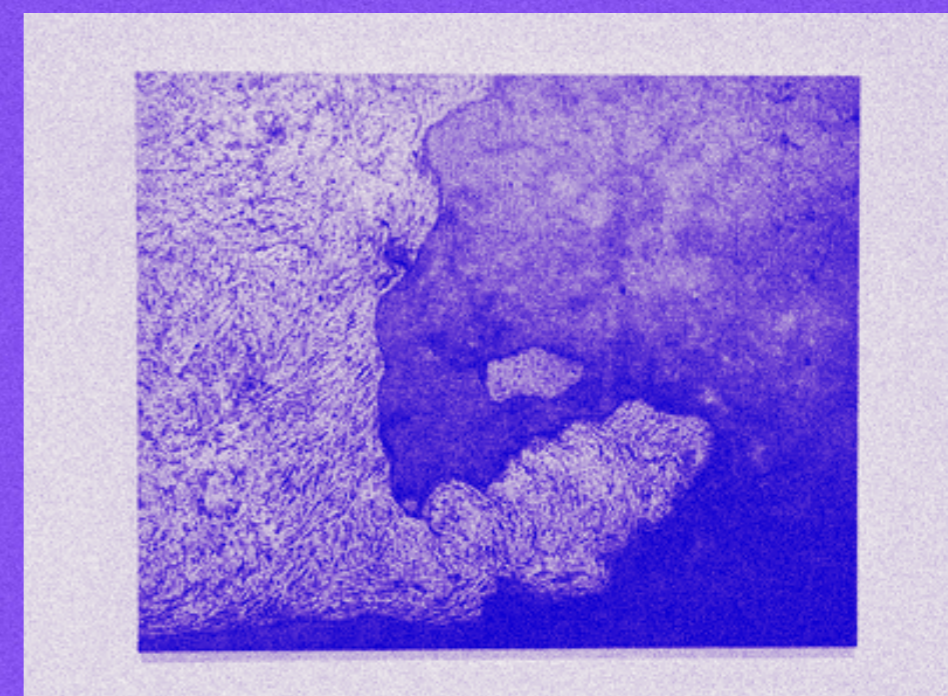
Hilmi's *Attractions and Sceneries (Poolscapes)* appears as a straightforward painting of a young man reclining on a bench by the pool, one finger held up to his chin as he stared, lost in thought, at the grey-blue sky. The use of goldish hues and clean shapes give off a luxurious aura, emphasised by the sheer size of the painting. The harsher earthier tones of the man and chair contrast well with the overall pastel colours. In contrast to his other works, this painting does not play (sculpturally) with organic shapes, everything feels very sharp and fewer things are left open to interpretation.

Despite the aura of lavishness, there is also a sense of remoteness and isolation. That doesn't automatically equate to loneliness or sadness, but I find that there's a certain kind of charm in solitude.

From the aesthetic point of view, Wei Leng Tay's *Sept. 70* resembles old yellowed paper, like a page of an old book that's ready to crumble at any given moment. The striking dark brown spot accompanied by the light ochre edges creates a burnt image that is at the point of dissolving. Beneath, barely visible, is a man and woman walking together side by side. The



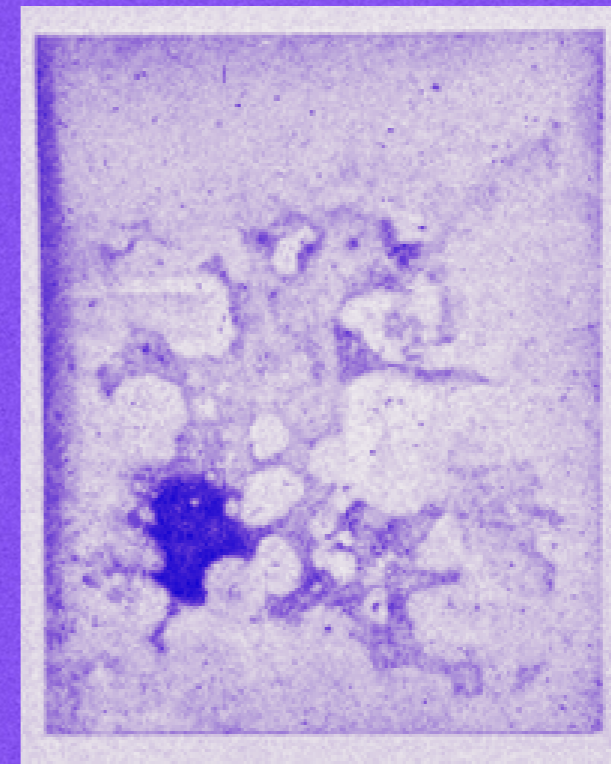
One full frame 135mm colour reversal film slide. "Celtic club under construction, May '70" hand-written and "17 NOV69M3 MADE IN AUSTRALIA" printed on 'Kodachrome transparency processed by Kodak'-branded heat-sealed cardboard slide mount. In Agfacolor branded orange plastic slide box labelled "TITLE Perth people DATE Sept. '70." // 150x magnification. Wei Leng Tay, 2020



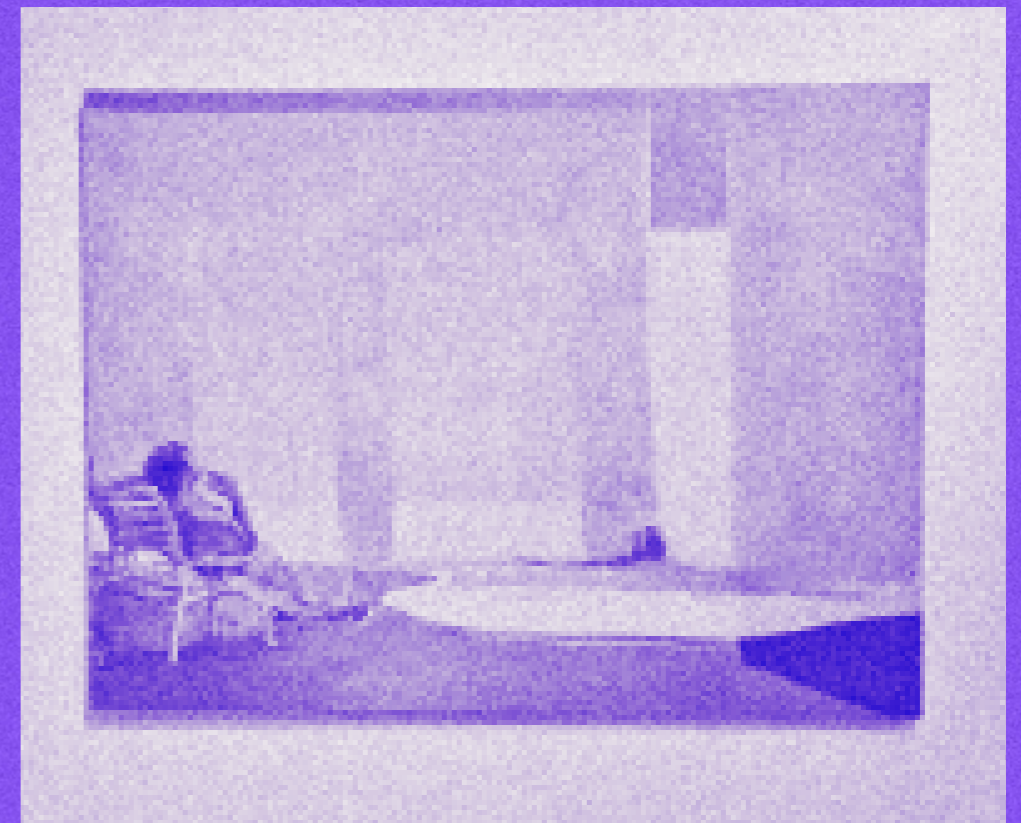
One half frame 135mm colour reversal film slide. "I-71" hand-written on Agfacolor-branded heat sealed cardboard slide mount. In Agfacolor-branded orange plastic slide box labelled "TITLE Perth people DATES ept. '70." // 150x magnification. Wei Leng Tay, 2020.

woman dons a distinguishable nyonya hairstyle with her head facing slightly left, looking at the man. The couple seems to be in conversation. The beauty and seeming simplicity of olden times... it's bewitching.

Overall the exhibition was well curated. The design and layout was professionally accomplished—the artworks were organised in a sensitive and considered way, every work balancing and complementing each other, heightening the experience. It was an amazing experience to be able to witness all these works first-hand. Yet again it broadened my perception of art and made me question my relationship with art.



One half frame 135mm colour reversal film slide. "Sept. 70" handwritten on Agfacolor branded heat-sealed cardboard slide mount. In Agfacolor-brand orange plastic slide box containing a torn piece of yellow lined paper with the word "Everybody" written in cursive. // Emulsion side up. 150x magnification. Wei Leng Tay, 2020.



Landscapes & Paradise: Attractions and Sceneries (Poolscapes)
Hilmi Johandi, 2020.

Blueprints for the Forest: an exploration into tropical aesthetics

Earl Lu Gallery

Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore (ICAS)

LASALLE College of the Arts

5 Feb – 30 Mar 2021

A review by
Theresa Goh

Diploma in Fine Arts
Level 3

Imagine containing the assumed dangers of the rainforest and portraying it in systematic alignment in a once barren glass room. Guest curated by Khim Ong, Donna Ong's *Blueprint For The Forest: An Exploration Into Tropical Aesthetics* was presented at Earl Lu Gallery. Here, Southeast Asia's rainforest is portrayed in a series of images strewn around the gallery to evoke an intimate installation.

Stepping onto the cool floor, you are comforted by the magnificent sight of a virtual rainforest. You observe Donna's personal studies of the rainforest consisting of up-scaled photography and illustrative imagery. These images invite you to reflect on your perceptions of the rainforest, ranging from a realistic portrayal of a magnificent waterfall to an illustrative pen and ink of rocky paths leading to ominous-lit trees. You will find yourself engulfed in the constant interchange of images in the corner of the gallery.

The projected large-scaled photograph on the wall prefaces a dynamic slideshow that reveals more illustrative imagery inspired by nature. Adjacent to this, a projector screen unveils caricatures of wildlife found in a tropical rainforest. The two screens combined elicit a sense of refuge despite the geographical vastness of the rainforest.

I contemplate how the screens are set up to both instigate fear and spark wonder in my sense of being. Seeing nature framed in an enclosed space feels unsettling, but also begs the question: how does

one perceive the aesthetic appeal of nature when it is a fabricated virtual display?

Donna herself wishes to address how the technicalities of topography in a scientific context has reduced the forest to database climates, geographical conclusions and statistical findings—factual conclusions that usurp the romance one might uncover in the vastness of a forest.

Subsequently, Donna emphasises allure of the rainforest discovered during her travels. Several pedestals are embellished with sculptural souvenirs of tropical wildlife, and framed photographs of Southeast Asian natives, inviting you to perceive its aesthetic reinterpretations.

I am tempted to pick up each of these trinkets but stop to admire the wondrous monkeys, parrots and tropical plants from a distance. Clearly, Donna is reducing everything to scale in order that the inhabitants of the rainforest are easily viewed. The added height of each pedestal conveys the importance of each of her finds.

In addition, the constructed landscape manifests itself in jigsaw-looking panels. The wall art reveals, at a closer look, to be made up of at least 700 individual, exploratory photographs of the forest.

With deliberation, Donna fragments each piece to demonstrate how the rainforest remains a blurred landscape. Invoking a military context, the work becomes simply camouflage, a refuge denoting safety.

In conclusion, the exhibition fragments the rainforest into disparate and diverse contexts, encouraging viewers to broaden their experience and understanding of a rainforest. The exhibition exhorts us to step into this reimagined rainforest and reflect about the lost spaces of wilderness.

Shooting Home Youth Awards (SHYA) 2020

Objectifs: Centre for Photography and Film
16 Feb - 12 Mar 2021

By **Chin Li Ping**
Alexandra

Diploma in Fine Arts
Level 1

About Shooting Home Youth Awards

SHYA is a mentorship programme that gives young photographers aged 15 to 23 an opportunity to learn from some of the most exciting talents in the industry and to refine their visual voice. This year's mentors were Grace Baey, Joseph Nair, Marvin Tang and Nurul Huda Rashid.

What is home to you? To me, home is a feeling, a state of mind. Something that you only know through lived experience. What does it mean to capture home visually? Is it even possible? How can you capture in a photograph a feeling, a state of mind? This question, amongst other questions of ethics and identity, was something I grappled with while shooting for the *Shooting Home Youth Awards 2020* programme.

Three words I would use to describe this programme are: interrogative, existential and identity-crisis inducing. Tears were shed during the programme.

I wish a little bit that I suffered a full-on crisis, but yours truly went through the programme relatively unscathed. Nevertheless, I found it fruitful and I felt my practice grow during this programme. I came to learn about my strengths and my weaknesses as a photographer through critique sessions, and found myself becoming aware of some of my blind spots while shooting after each critique.

My project was to document international students growing new roots in Singapore, as well as their experience in making a home away from home. I found myself outside of my comfort zone, having to capture rather candid portraits as opposed to pictures that were posed for, or as I have been shooting recently, still life pictures. I found it even more challenging that I was shooting my friends. I was shooting people who are special to me and whom I wanted to capture in the best possible light.

I initially wanted to capture in my project the emotional rollercoaster one experiences when one is away from home. I discovered that in the process of shooting, I did not want to capture them while they were sad or depressed, as I did not want them to have pictures reminding them of negative times. So I focused on the good and warm moments spent with friends as well as sentimental objects that reminded them of home. Through the selection of pictures that were finally exhibited, I hoped for this warm mood to come through. All in all, I felt I had succeeded.

During the programme, I was asked important questions like, how did I feel in the making of this project, and what exactly was I aiming to capture? I was asked questions that I would face if I was shooting professionally. Many of the mentors had photojournalism backgrounds, so it was interesting to have my works critiqued in a photojournalistic context. As I was from a fine arts background myself, I was introduced to new shooting vocabulary and perspectives of seeing. I was challenged to tell a story with my pictures and to let the gaze of the subject be expressed through the pictures.

Throughout the programme, I saw my peers' concepts and works grow and develop. I found this process thoroughly exhilarating. It was enlightening to be privy to the thought processes of the other participants and to explore so many topics. I felt that my eyes have been opened to the many possibilities of photography, both technically and thematically.

This programme was a great learning experience. I was exposed to so many different styles of photography and I got to see my works through the lens of photojournalists. I was challenged and pushed out of my comfort zone in the process of making works, and my practice has grown throughout this programme. I find myself shooting better technically and am able to capture more emotional and evocative images. I am excited to make more works following this venture.

An acknowledgment of thanks to Ming Rui and Objectifs for allowing me to be a part of this programme!

I am a CON Artist: Continuous Contemplations of Justin Lee

The Private Museum
19 Jan – 21 March 2021

A review by
**Han Rosli &
Shree Survana**

Diploma in Fine Arts
Level 2

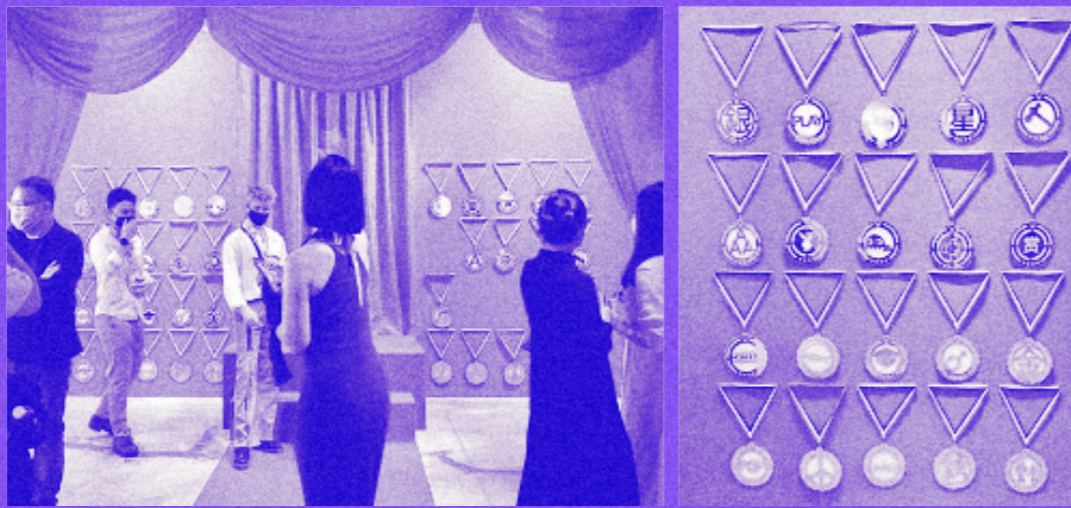
I am a CON Artist: Continuous Contemplations of Justin Lee presents Justin Lee's own perspectives on society in relation to the themes of capitalism, westernisation, globalisation and social media. This contemporary exhibition began with a premiere showcase at the 222 Arts Club, followed by a main exhibition at The Private Museum. This four-day showcase featured his past oeuvre of multimedia and interactive art such as *Game of Life* (2019), *I am a Product of Upbringing* (2015) and *Double Happiness* (2004). The premier showcase was a nice addition to the grand opening and was connected to the main exhibition through repeated motifs and themes. For instance, *I am a Product of Upbringing* is an interesting piece that consists of cardboard boxes with prints of various logos and symbols on them, connecting to the artist's personal life but also to local and international perspectives. The main exhibition also featured The Teng Collection, which was founded by Teng Jee Hum and June Ong, presenting a selection of Asian art with a focus on art history.

One installation from the main exhibition that was striking and stood out is *Last Chance For Love* (2020). *Last Chance For Love* is an interactive installation staged to give the audience a five-minute chance at fame. Anyone may don a medal and pose with it. An introduction, written by the artist himself, states that this installation is to let the audience claim their fame, even if it is temporary. Just as it is in

society, one may get famous quickly, but fame does not necessarily last. This grand stage installation spoke to me as people are constantly fighting for fame, especially on social media. This installation is a satirical fragment of society, mocking social influencer culture. It is a lighthearted artwork that will entertain the audience, but at the same time offer a reflection of our society.

There were two works that stood out in the main exhibition as they were the only monochromatic cool blue acrylic paintings contrasting against a red wall. *The First Meal For Autumn* (2020) piece depicts a mother and son with a McDonald's meal on their dining table. What provokes a contrast is that the people wear traditional Chinese clothing whereas the meal is fairly modern and western; it seems to be commenting on how far western influence has encroached, such that McDonald's has become a common meal even in the seemingly rural places. In addition, another hint at western influence is the young boy's shoes that resemble Adidas sneakers which also contrast his traditional appearance. The *Poster Kids For Happy Meal* (2020) has three children reminiscent of cherubs surrounding a giant realistic burger, another motif that is prominent and a symbol of westernisation; the hamburger also appears in other works at the exhibition. It is interesting to wonder why he chose such a vibrant blue for these two monochromatic paintings even though he is known for often utilising the colour red in his other works. As a result, it attracts our attention and stands out from the rest of the exhibition.

Overall, the exhibition and showcase were a commentary on the influence of westernisation as well as the increase of hyper-digitalisation. This exhibition confronts the individual's perception of himself or herself in the context of the digital world and the increased glorifying of mundane everyday life on digital platforms. Lee being a Singaporean Chinese, *I am a CON Artist* also speaks to the local Chinese community by invoking familiar cultural contexts and language. Although his work is interesting to viewers from an international



Last Chance for Love
Justin Lee, 2020.



Poster Kids For Happy Meal
Justin Lee, 2020.



The First Meal For Autumn
Justin Lee, 2020.



I am A Product of Upbringing
Justin Lee, 2015.

perspective, it may resonate more with people who share the same culture for a deeper connection and understanding to some of the works.

Times Passes

Objectifs: Centre for Photography and Film
16 Feb - 12 Mar 2021

A review by
**John Marie M.
Andrada**

Diploma in Fine Arts
Level 3

If you haven't been graced with the pleasure of reading Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, you should know that *Time Passes*, guest-curated by Samantha Yap, references the middle section of the book. Featuring works conceived during a time of isolation, the opening of this exhibition parallels the moment in the book when members of society depart from their humble abode to gradually return to once public spaces. In conjunction with the overarching initiative of the local visual arts community, *Proposals for Novel Ways of Being*¹, the exhibition is increasingly relevant to the present condition in which caution, care and compromise are needful in these precarious times.

Likened to a corridor wherein a movement in time and feeling is encapsulated, visitors are greeted at the entrance of the exhibition with the quote, "Whatever else may perish and disappear what lies here is steadfast" (Woolf 138). Viewers then encounter *Passage Moist Beings* by Yeyoon Avis Ann which presents the artist's measure of care through the habitual repositioning of snails at risk by lifting and transferring them to a secure area. As the movement of these creatures are documented, along with the sensitivity and consideration in the work, I find that it sets the tone for the exhibit.

1. This is partnered by local institutions as well as local collectives and art spaces, to assert the presence of visual art exhibitions both virtual and physical during COVID-19, and "serves as a reminder that we need new ways of being as we grapple with a new reality brought about by this pandemic." <https://www.novelwaysofbeing.sg/#about>

Apropos of the holiday house in the novel, Victor Paul Brang Tun's *Frame(works) series* follows, composed of sculptures with parts reconstructed from that of an old rattan chair. Through the artist's formation of the works as well as the composition of the objects in the space, it bears some semblance to windows. The regenerated and adaptive nature of these structures brings to mind ideas of conforming to new ways of inhabiting a space. The structures are stripped of their initial identity and purpose as they take on new forms, despite retaining their intrinsic qualities.

Progressing further into the exhibition, Ashley Yeo's *Drop of Light (Pyramid)*, Stephanie Jane Burt's *Dressing a Window*, Chong Lii and Christian Kingo's *Blue Trapezium*, as well as Jon Chan's *Concrete Movements* profoundly capture the transitional space that the passage of time inherently is. Throughout the exhibition, the artists, by installing a work over a mirror, or looping a video sequence of constant transition with no clear destination, or refashioning materials from previous works, or conveying movement that lies in embedded concrete, place an emphasis on the continuity of time and the flow thereof. Situated at the end of this section beside *Concrete Movements* is Divaagar's *Render Tender*. Enclosed in curtains of soft fabric, one has to enter through a short passage to experience the installation—a fictional reiki studio that channels remote healing through the aid of projected visuals on the ceiling and a calming soundscape. The intimacy and privacy created within the atmosphere highlight the fact that time with oneself is necessary in the process of healing and rejuvenation, placing ideas of isolation—a word that often carries a negative connotation, in a different light. I find that the placement of the benches marked with a red x on each side—although possibly added as a social distancing measure—adds to the reality that time alone is of necessity for an individual to process certain matters.

At the next juncture is *Rendezvous* by Khairullah Rahim, which hints at the gradual return to

shared spaces, serving as a transition from works that contemplate the passage of time in confinement to the cautious departure from that state. As its title suggests, *Rendezvous* beautifully illustrates the potential that public spaces hold through the interaction between diverse communities, manifested by the reimagined habitat that the artist has created using peculiar objects embellished with rhinestones. In like manner, the final section of the gallery starts off with Diana Rahim's series of photographs entitled *Interventions* which portray the artist's attempt to reclaim areas with restrictive architectural traits that modulate and affect how the general public manoeuvres through these shared spaces, by way of reshaping such areas with hospitable and harmonious conciliation.

Quite similarly, Mengju Lin's *New Radio series* and Fazleen Karlan's *#sgbyecentennial* resonate with *Interventions* as they acknowledge, prompt and anticipate the imminent and inevitable change that comes with the passage of time. Respectively, these works implore viewers to shift their perspectives by observing familiar objects from a different angle—not to mention a different timeline, as it displays objects at present, appearing to be of old, which in turn imagines the future. In retrospect, *Time Passes* implies and reiterates the need for *Proposals for Novel Ways of Being* as one cannot, or rather—should not exist without the other. Because of the times, it suggests and almost embraces the exploration of what constitutes the “new normal”.

On Winstedt Campus's History

By **Nathan Mark Kimbel**

Diploma in Fine Arts
Level 3

edited by
Annjee Teo

LASALLE's iconic Winstedt Campus is known among students as a humble place with classrooms, workshops, and familiar haunts for students majoring in Fine Arts, Fashion and Product Design, among other disciplines. The campus was first inaugurated in 2013 as a new campus to supplement the growing interest for contemporary arts education in Singapore, and support the need for art-creative environments alongside its sister campus located on McNally St. Although many students have stepped foot into and attended classes at the sylvan campus, only a select few know of the rich history and origins behind the row of buildings along 9 Winstedt Rd.

Before LASALLE students started to occupy its premises, primary school children throughout the 1940s to the 1980s would attend classes there at its former address of Monk's Hill Primary School. The origin of the name 'Monk's Hill' remains a topic of debate. However, it is widely believed that 'Monk's Hill' was derived from the land it stood on, once the site of a former Chinese monastery. Monk's Hill Secondary School was a stone's throw away, a short walk from the primary school.

During the Japanese Occupation (1942-45), when Singapore was known as Syonan-To, Monk's Hill Primary School had teachers conduct Japanese lessons to the students as a mandatory class. This changed after the war, when language classes were converted back to the more familiar English and Malay.

The two same long buildings now that we affectionately refer to as Winstedt retain the same rustic charm they boasted of during the reign of the Japanese Occupation. Although the primary school closed in 1985 due to a dwindling number of students, the youthful rambunctious spirit of a primary school lives on nearby as Anglo-Chinese Junior School.

Why 'Winstedt'?

LASALLE's Winstedt campus derives its namesake from the road it is located on, Winstedt Road, a road named after Sir Richard Olaf Winstedt (1878-1966), an accomplished British colonial administrator who advocated for the educational development of Malayan education in the 1920s. He is remembered for his contributions to the study of Malayan folklore, history and language. From 1921 to 1931, Sir Winstedt became the first president of Raffles College, a college for higher education in the arts and sciences. This evolved today into the National University of Singapore.

Winstedt and stories of the supernatural

Winstedt campus has a fair share of supernatural anecdotes commonly circulated among students and lecturers. One story tells of a past student who brought in a cursed item onto campus as part of a project—a traditional holy piece that conjures spirits from the underworld. After the project concluded, the student abandoned the object on campus since it was no longer of use. Thereafter, students on campus report experiencing odd things—mostly seeing black figures lurking along the corridors during closing time at 6:30pm. Not only were figures seen, but the presence of spirits were also reportedly felt when walking alone. Some also felt watched by a curious, lurking being. The origin of those spirits wandering around, it is speculated, could be from that one cursed item that the past student didn't remove from the premises, or it could be from a dark history before

Winstedt campus was even established. So far there isn't any documented information on the dark history of Winstedt Road but who knows...?

My own journey at Winstedt

As for me, Winstedt is a place I have grown to frequent countless times. This is due to the complexity of the sculpture works I enjoy creating as part of my prior assignments, which require the use of power tools and specialised machines found in Winstedt's workshop. When I first arrived at the woodsy, rustic campus, I instantly grew quite fond of the place. Its appearance of an old-school charm was a blast from the past. Although Winstedt campus was recently renovated—still retaining the two long stretches of blocks that were occupied before—its combination of nature and the manmade landscape is evident. The contrasting environments give off an aura of a quiet countryside village, unlike the hustle and bustle of the city we currently inhabit.

My fondness of the place is not the only reason why I find time to visit whenever I can. The technician of the Fine Arts workshop, a bespectacled easygoing man known as Kwang Wei, is someone I highly respect and whose company I enjoy. Always forthcoming with his smiles and light-hearted jokes, he welcomes me every time I make my way to the workshop to use his facilities (read: bother him). He is a helpful man who never fails to help me out with my projects whenever I find myself stuck in a rut. The stories he tells of the people who have been in and out of Winstedt continue to fuel my interest in the place to this day.

Overall, Winstedt campus will always be a beautiful place in its own ways, both dark and bright. The faculty members and the security are such wonderful people—stepping through the gates feels like stepping into a whole new environment—a quiet home that marries artmaking with nature. Hopefully it stays this way for a long time to come.

On effects of Technology in art and artmaking + how it is perceived and received (somewhere along these lines)

By **John Marie M. Andrada**

Diploma in Fine Arts
Level 3

We've heard it all before: for every cause, there is a definite effect. Even as we go through a pandemic crisis and periods of enforced isolation, because nothing can ever truly be isolated, we mull shifts in our everyday and the expense at which change comes about. Mankind might have come a long way with technological advancements and urban development, but we simply cannot ignore the fact that in our gain, we may have lost just as much. And so, if the prerequisite to progress is destruction, can it really be associated with advancement? Living in a timeline where things are rapidly shifting, it is necessary to constantly ask ourselves: where are we heading—or is there a destination at all?

Although progress may not be intrinsic to the nature of art and the practice, history can attest to the fact that art is capable of forging a path for change. Consequently, the notion between art for art's sake and art advocating for social change comes into contention. In the age of technology where documentation, communication and a plethora of information is accessible within arms' reach, it is irrefutable that technology has made a substantial impact on the way we perceive and approach art and art-making. Now don't get me wrong, I am not explicitly for or against the entry of technology into art spaces and its integration in artmaking. However, I strongly believe that we must always try to examine both sides of the debate to arrive at a better understanding of the matter.

Having the world at our fingertips—or the World Wide Web at the very least—the internet equips us with access to a surplus of whatever we choose to search. Overabundance may not always equate to a good thing, as value accorded to something may be inversely proportional to the abundance of it. The wide-ranging variety of content available for consumption may leave viewers spoilt for choice. Moreover, with the increasingly fast pace of information circulation, focus shifts quickly and what's viral is skimmed over, leaving little room for digesting that of deeper significance. Isn't it funny how memes, or at one point, Vines, circulate the net far quicker than the more pressing issues that we face? Be that as it may, today Instagram posts and even TikToks are being used to address issues and raise awareness of current events.

With a vast majority of the population on social media platforms, artists now have a new dimension in which to navigate and engage with their audience. Because the “social” part of social media is measured by the level of activity, there is an underlying and unspoken obligation for creatives to produce content consistently, failing which engagement levels decrease, indirectly affecting their career. Having said that, I can't help but consider how artists in the past would not have to deal with the public eye as much as we have to today, to a certain extent. Take a moment to imagine being able to focus on your practice without having to race against time, delving deeper into ideas, and producing at your own pace without the constraints implemented by deadlines or strict timelines, let alone the fear of becoming irrelevant with social media inactivity.

On the other hand, keeping up with the times pushes individuals to be consistent and produce works at a faster pace. In the context of school, working in a time crunch tends to bring forth a kind of miracle as students—myself included—do whatever it takes to meet them and somehow always do so as productivity levels peak with approaching deadlines. Furthermore, distance is irrelevant as social media platforms are

accessible to numerous people from all walks of life. This allows artworks, both in-progress and exhibited, to be disseminated to a greater audience of social media users. With a virtually accessible space that remains regardless of one's physical location, works of art as well as art events can be conducted, shared and viewed through handheld screens without the limitations of having to travel long distances. The ability that we now possess to document these events, exhibitions and even our works, has paved a way for these happenings to be preserved and frozen in time, enabling viewers to easily revisit them, albeit via screens and two-dimensionally. This enables art practitioners to discover new ways to present and materialise their vision and ideas, utilising technology as a medium in their process.

Between the boons and banes of technological advancements when it comes to art, I would say that technology has opened new doors and continues to do so despite the challenges that it may bring. Although the level of interaction is relatively advantageous in both dimensions, there is no doubt that the physical and the virtual worlds can in no way replace each other entirely. Technology is double-edged, and because nothing can ever truly be isolated—it's all relative.

