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IMAN SENGUPTA, ZUL MAHMUD

⑤

REVIEW

***Love and Death of Sentient Beings:* Taiwan Art Biennale 2022**

THNG SHALYN

Foreword

McNally School of Fine Arts is pleased to launch the 16th edition of Praxis Press, the yearly LASALLE student publication that provides a platform to think and write critically about art, explore critical perspectives and artistic practices. We thank Milenko Prvački, Senior Fellow, for initiating Praxis Press, Dr Cissie Fu, Head of McNally School of Fine Arts, for overseeing the publication and Dr S Chandrasekaran, Senior Lecturer, for his support.

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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One Night Only: *Fluid Fringes*

Review by
Luna Chang

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by **Wong Jing Wei**

Presented by BA(Hons) Fine Arts Level 2 and 3 students, *One Night Only* was held on 11 November 2022. After two years of conducting the event virtually, *One Night Only: Fluid Fringes* was back in full force as a physical event at LASALLE College of the Arts' Winstedt Campus. The exhibition showcased works and curatorial efforts by the students across six different studio electives, namely Artist as Curator, Rendering Realities (3D rendering), Fieldwork, A Mutual Tuning (sound art), Wearable Art and Performance Art.

Ummi Rahima, Nadiah Nadzirah and Nur Sabrina, student curators from the Artist as Curator elective, share more about their curatorial experience here.

Ummi, who was one of the curators who managed the programmes and hospitality, was also part of the team conducting the VIP tours and tending to the guests' needs. She explained that it was quite challenging curating a show and transitioning from the headspace of an artist to that of a curator. Sabrina, who was part of the logistics and curatorial team, expressed her sentiments on how communication was the most crucial aspect of her role. She also enjoyed talking to the visitors about the different works in the spaces and explaining the artists' interpretation of their experiences.

Every show had its fair share of ups and downs. Nadiah, from the marketing team, shared

about the tight timelines and the importance of communication as part of her role: "Being confident with the designs and how we market an event is the biggest responsibility the marketing team has. We try to think of the best solutions which I personally feel is always a challenge". Despite the stress and challenges, these young curators pulled through with dedication and teamwork, successfully putting together the show.

Throughout the night, many visitors were seen crowding around *Organic Marks*, a participatory installation by Jolyn Eng, an artist from the Fieldwork elective. *Organic Marks* comprising a set of handcrafted tools that can be used for mark-making, is an attempt at recreating a primitive crafting experience. The work aims to appreciate textures formed from nature, with raw materials generating patterns that are organic and always unique. Jolyn hopes to engage her audience with marks left from natural materials, such as leaf litter.

Aside from participatory works, there were other rather thought-provoking works. International student Supassara Ho, who focuses on crafting as an art form, created a grand piece of wearable art with an important message. *Patched* provokes discussions on consumer culture, mass production, and sustainability. Made partly with crochet, a craft only capable of being made by hand, the work aims to raise awareness about waste pollution from consumer culture.

It was indeed heartwarming to watch audiences and creatives gather in a physical space once again, and to see the art scene regain its usual bustling spirit after the long years of the pandemic. *One Night Only* has always been a top-notch experience for emerging artists to exhibit their works while being actively involved in the planning of an exhibition.

For more information and the full list of works as well as past and future editions of *One Night Only 2022*, please follow @mcnallyfinearts on Instagram.



Sabrina and Nadiah at the opening reception of *Fluid Fringes*.



Patched by Supassara Ho.



Visitors interacting with *Organic Matter* by Jolyn Eng.



The night ended with an artists' conversation, featuring an artist from each elective module.

Letters to my Past and Future Selves

Reflection by
**Alexandra
Chin Li Ping**

Dear 15-year-old Alex,

You will learn in your coming years that the deep love for art you are cultivating will be like a boat on open waters;

it will keep you afloat and save you from struggling to swim. You will learn that you need to take care of this boat;

patch its holes and not let your doubt and society's whisperings of can't-do-it flood your raft and sink it...

You came very close to drowning once, luckily you were close enough to land

so you survived, you pulled your tired body and this beat up raft to shore, only vaguely registering that you had returned

Home.

Home: a place you go to when you're in the darkroom, when you are drawing, when you are painting, you will learn that home is portable, in your heart, you can reach it with a camera or a pencil or a paintbrush, and you will populate your inner journey with chiaroscuro and colour, sharing the fruits of your

heart's labour with friends, and seeing their faces light up at your fruits, makes your heart lift and busks the home in your heart in a warm orange glow.

You will learn that speaking through shapes and lines and shadows fills your body with music you can't describe, and you will learn to seek out this music in others,

tuning into the frequencies of like hearts and sound souls, this union will be indescribable!

Only listening to your heart-song in such situations will do these unions justice,

And you will find that you have arrived at the community you have been searching for, for all of your waking life. And the boat you have built will sweep you ashore, for you have travelled and you have travelled until you have reached Home.

Love,

Alex

Dear future Alexandra,

I know the realities of this life ring louder than your home heart-song sometimes, but don't let it drown you out.

You will have to pay bills, and learn how to stand on your own two feet, and build a real-life home, but be sure this real-life home feels like the home in your heart.

I have made plans toward building this real-life home, and all it will take is for you to stick to this river that is always flowing for this home to come into existence.

You have made a promise to yourself that you will use art as a tool to spark inner revolutions within your community, for you know art is the strongest when expressing oneself. You will teach others to use art for therapy, healing their innermost darkest hurts through shadow and colour, lyrics and songs, movement and play. You will grow into your role as a healer and do what your own name trumpets; to defend mankind.

Against the emotions that cut like knives, and strike like stones to bones, you will teach self-defence against the mind and heart that can't help but hurt, illuminating the darkness with the deep love you have cultivated for art
you will light candles

This path is not an easy one, and there will be moments of doubt, but you have a home that you will always return to,
through chiaroscuro and colour;
and as you help build homes in other hearts, your real-life home will be built brick-by-brick too.
And soon, silent souls will sing songs, seeking other souls that sing too
And the community of singing souls will grow;

I can already hear the choir.

Love,

Alex

Photography: a review

Placemaking at the Moment Between Times

16 Sep. 2022–30 Oct. 2022

The Padang Creamery & Co.

Review by
Puno Rysher
Jave Sembrano

To be allowed the liberty of capturing and holding the memories of the world in your hands is, to me, a therapeutic practice. Photography archives my experiences, be they good or bad; they are records of pure moments of happiness, as well as evidence of perseverance. Perhaps this fondness for memories and nostalgia could stem from a fear of forgetting. It could also be that, in constantly telling myself that life is too short for regrets, I've fostered a sense of paranoia, creating a delusion of freedom from a rigid life structure. In times of despair, a habit of archiving experiences may be associated with a pessimistic outlook for the future. Whereas in search of hope, looking back at one's own sentiments is enough to disregard the future and remain in the present. Photography to me is a coping mechanism against reality—with each moment captured, the photographer invites the viewer into their world.

As part of our Critical Thinking module, we visited a few exhibitions from the 2022 Singapore International Photography Festival. One was a series titled *Placemaking at the moment between times*. The experience was an enlightening and reflective one, as I was at that time, caught in a creative block.

Placemaking at the moment between times was an exhibition of three site-specific photographic installations by Singapore-based artists, in which they express their subjective experiences of spaces. Presented at Peace Centre, one of Singapore's earliest

mixed development properties, the gallery is centred around the concept of *non-place*—transient spaces where social interaction is non-existent and lacks identity or cultural significance, thus disregarding it as a *place* in anthropological definitions.

Carpark is the first part in Shyue Woon's book trilogy entitled, *Dark Cities*. In this series, Shyue Woon explores the nocturnal meanderings of a multi-storey car park, portraying the scenario of a young woman running away from what seems to be danger. The photographs are composed mostly of dark shadows, often only revealing the grim textures of the car park, and occasional glimpses of the anxious woman. Curated in an investigative fashion, the series prompts the viewer to reconstruct a sequence of events, like a detective. The installation was presented in a space that was constructed with unusually sharp-angled corners—instilling a claustrophobic experience from viewing the pictures from one end to the other.

Through his series of photographs, Shyue Woon imbues the car park with an eerie character. It is a transient place where people go about their lives, remaining largely anonymous to one another. He captures its busy ambience, juxtaposing it with the piercing silence of the dark, bringing up the notion that one is never really alone in the shadows. He injects a sense of horror and entrapment in a common space.

In *Hawaii Nights*, Aik Beng Chia recreates the ambience of *Club Hawaii*—Singapore's oldest nightclub. Having been in operation for over three decades at Singapore Textile Centre in Jalan Sultan, Club Hawaii is Singapore's first Thai-Style Disco that has evaded the country's aggressive bouts of modernisation. First opened in 1977, the nightclub was first called *The Golden Dragon Nightclub* before it was changed to Club Hawaii in 1980. It was Singapore's only nightclub for the rest of the 70s.

The installation, *Hawaii Nights* exhibited a series of photographs taken by Aik Beng himself. It was titled *The Night We Never Met*—a collaborative

project with filmmaker Nicky Loh, who was filming a documentary of the nightclub at the same time that Aik Beng had been there, but both had never crossed paths. Upon discovering that they were both documenting the same subject, they decided to share their resources. This encounter—or lack thereof—inspired the title of Aik Beng’s series.

The atmosphere of the nightclub was recreated in a vacant space unit, filled with festive decor, neon lighting, and confetti—scattered all over the floor and tables, where empty bottles of liquor and beer buckets were deliberately placed. This depiction of what appeared to be the 2000 new year’s eve, is accompanied by a festive Chinese soundtrack that, when combined with a lack of celebrants, further accentuates the melancholic aura, instilling in us a numbing sense of isolation.

The series of pictures mounted on the walls acts as a window to Club Hawaii in present times—empty tables and chairs, singers performing to a non-existent audience and patrons idling, often alone and unbothered. One of the photographs showed the nightclub’s orange sofas surrounded by coloured lights. At the centre of this shot, an old man—one eyebrow raised, decades of life marked by his heavy eyelids—gazes with a bristling expression over his shoulder, past the camera. The burst of colours left in the space only serves to exacerbate the hollow shell of the paradise it once was. The once dazzling establishment of liberation declines into a space of isolation where life is unbothered.

Peace Agency, an interactive installation by Geraldine Kang, Cynthia Delaney Suwito and Woong Soak Teng, is inspired by Peace Centre’s impending disappearance as well as the unforeseen lockdowns and economic uncertainties faced by Singapore during the early waves of the pandemic. “These large external events reminded us of the lack of control we often default to while waiting.” explains Geraldine Kang.

For this installation, the three artists

transformed a commercial unit in the Peace Centre into a simulation of a wellness service: a mock receptionist handed us a queue number and ushered us into a waiting area and the act of waiting became central to the concept. Displayed in newspapers, or over the walls, photographs of textures and glimpses of other units in the building, discreetly buried out-of-sight in our surroundings, became increasingly apparent to us as our minds kill time. We were introduced to mindfulness, a practice that reintroduces us to ourselves, momentarily breaking from the reality that we are constantly trying to evade.

Photography allows us to reimagine or re-evaluate our memories. We look back at a photograph from decades back and we process our experience based on that photograph. The series of installations invites us to question our sense of identity through the transient surroundings. Each artist in this series conveys their distinct perspective through immersive installation, bringing the viewer closer into their world through a shared experience. Their artworks are centred around formulating a certain identity or significance in places that offer none. By digressing from reality, each artist transports us to their own universe.

Shyue Woon crafts a grotesque identity for car parks in his trilogy, *Dark Cities*. Fostered by imagination, he accentuates the commonly perceived nature of car parks as a sinister place that houses transgression. His photographs engulfs you into a mystery that disconnects us from reality. In *Hawaii Nights*, Aik Beng Chia immerses us into the decline of Club Hawaii, a place that was once rich with festivity and jollification, and its inevitable decay into a non-place, absorbing us into the bleak actuality of the nightclub in present times. The series of photographs in *The Night We Never Met* are surrounded by a gloomy air but we will never feel the sense of liberation that was felt by the youthful 70s. Deviating from the conventional presentations of photography

as a spectacle, *Peace Agency* instead facilitates an embodied experience. It is an homage to environments around us that go unnoticed and coax us into taking our well-deserved break from reality.

Peace Centre, the multi-use shopping complex, a non-place for decades until now, is briefly redefined as a space for artists. The Festival's curator, John Tung, writes: "By way of each artwork's reoccupation of vacant shop units for presentation, *Placemaking at the moment between times* makes apparent the lifecycle of places in urbanised environments." This series brings into focus the transient non-places that exist within and around buildings here in Singapore.

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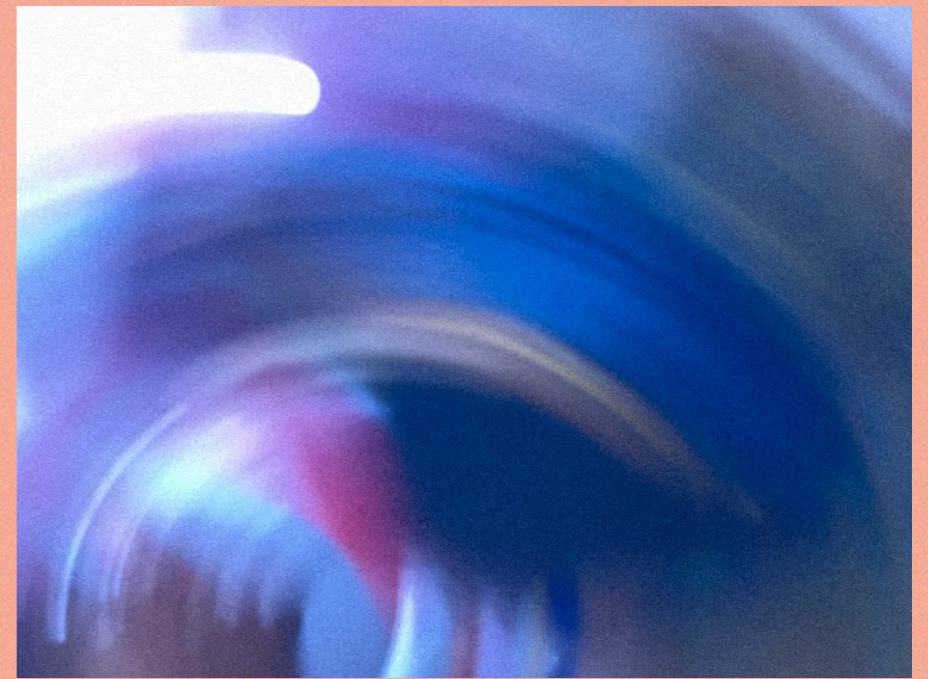
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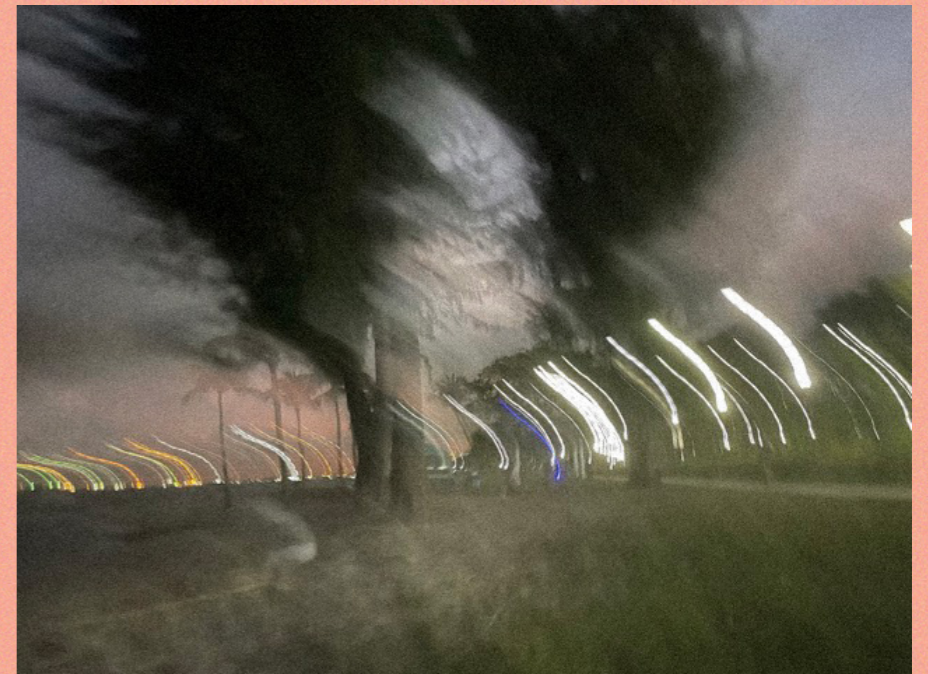
Reflection by
Thirishaa Selvaraj

I think, as a person and even as a society, we strive for perfection in every little thing we do. I would often feel so frustrated not having mastered a skill I just picked up, the feeling of failure that comes with messing up, or when I do not live up to the expectations. I was raised by people who would give praise like candy when presented with achievements; they would shame and compare with others when met with failure. The habit of wanting to impress others stuck until today, but I'm learning to allow myself to experiment and fail. I'm learning to accept that whatever I make is not something to be embarrassed about, no matter how it looks. I do not consider myself a photographer, I take pictures for myself, to capture happiness in the moment. These are pictures that were taken by chance, by accident, or just simply did not turn out right. For this series, I selected pictures that have some kind of warped lighting. I liked how the light captured the movement of the camera.

Bukit Mertajam,
1 May 2022, 10:28pm



Siglap, 13 May 2022, 7:27pm

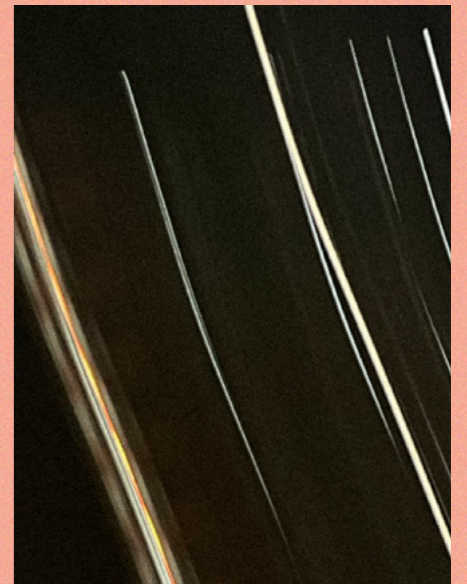


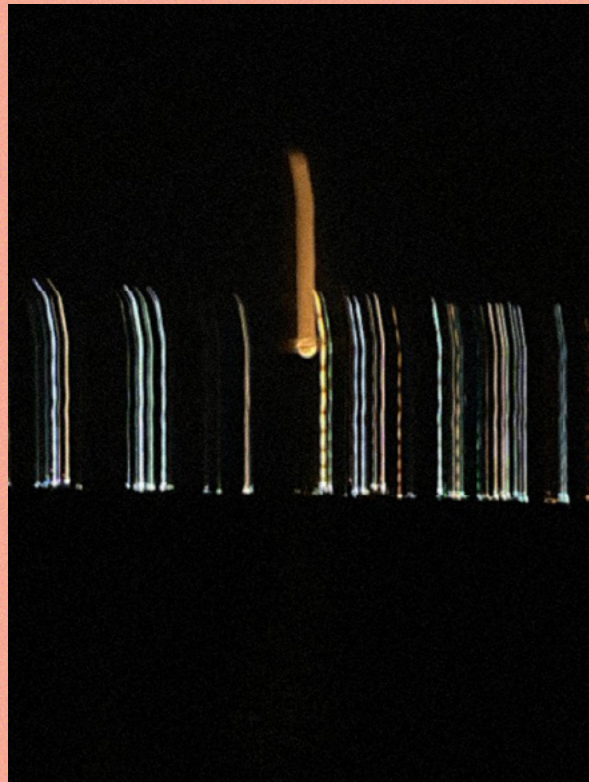
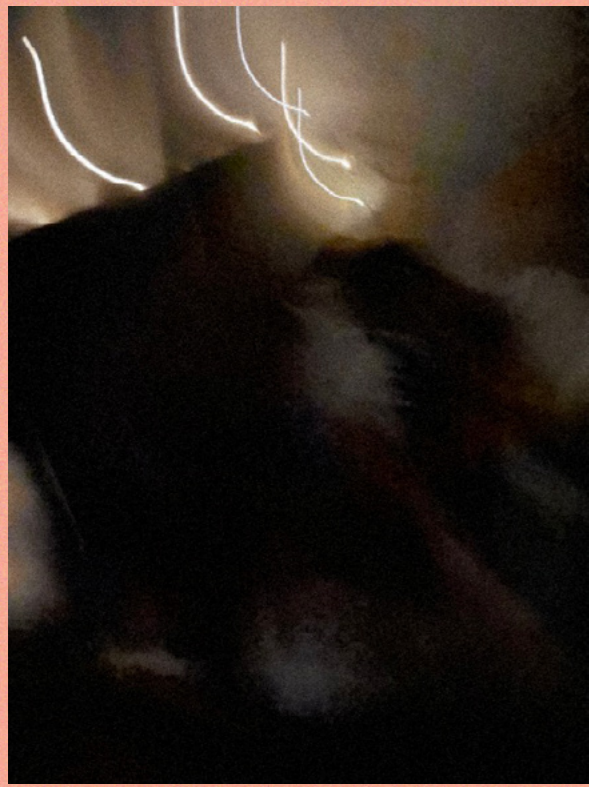
LEFT

East Coast Park,
13 May 2022, 7:36pm

RIGHT

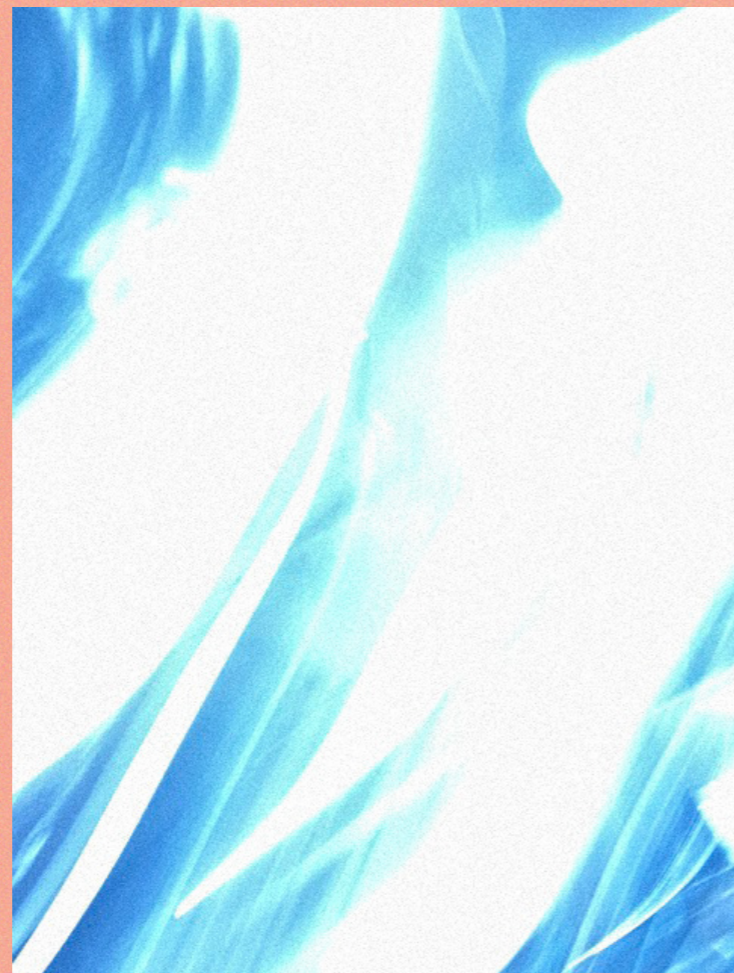
Kampung Batu 8/12,
15 May 2022, 10:04pm



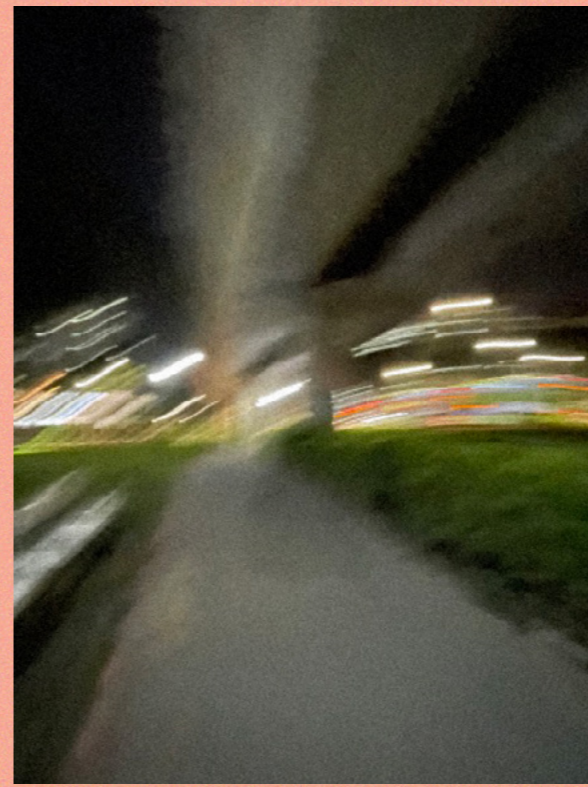


TOP
Fragrant Wood, 6 June 2022,
12:47am

BOTTOM
East Coast Park, 15 July 2022,
9:24pm

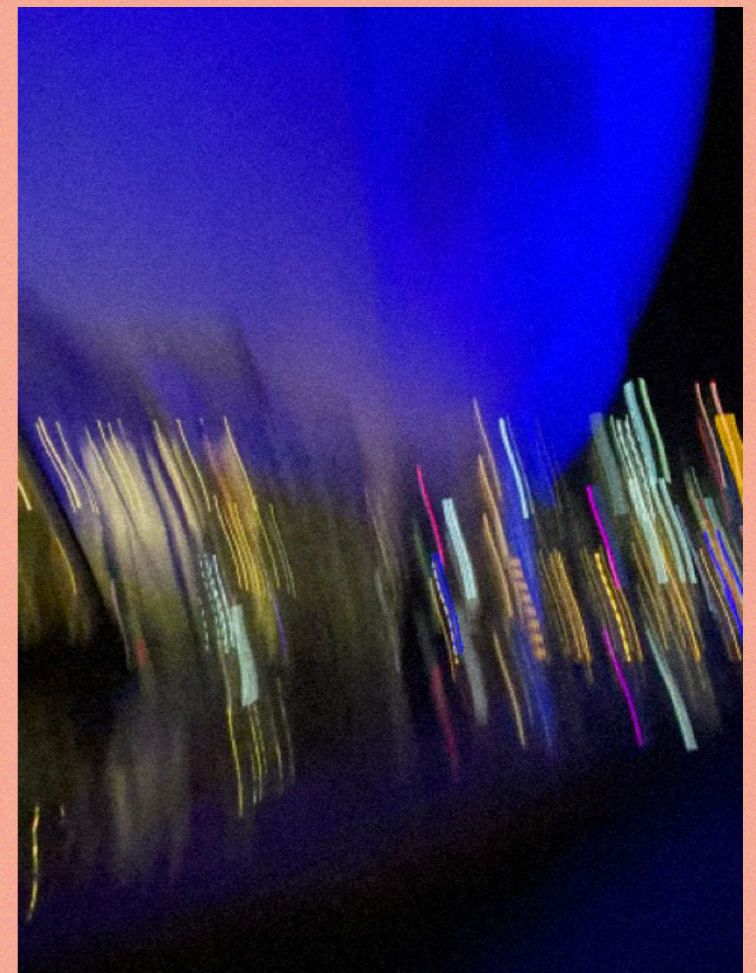


Mount Elizabeth Hospital, 5 August 2022,
2:49pm



TOP
Woodlands East, 15 August 2022,
8:42pm

BOTTOM
Orchard, 21 September 2022,
10:54pm



Marina Bay Sands, 22 March 2023,
10:03pm

Love and Death of Sentient Beings: Taiwan Art Biennale 2022

Review by
Thng Shalyn

Over the term break in March, a group of 19 BA(Hons) Fine Arts Level 2 students, accompanied by LASALLE lecturer, Jeremy Sharma and Head of McNally School of Fine Arts, Dr Cissie Fu visited the 2022 Taiwan Art Biennale titled *Love and Death of Sentient Beings*. The Biennale, which took place from 5 November 2022 to 5 March 2023, was in the spotlight and garnered attention within Taiwan and abroad, especially with most of the COVID-19 measures being lifted just a few months before. At the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts (NTMoFA) in Taichung, we met the curators, Manray Hsu and I-Wen Chang who brought us on an insightful tour around the exhibition.

Weeks before, we had the opportunity to attend a sharing by I-Wen, where she briefly introduced us to the biennale, the curatorial methodologies undertaken and the challenges faced during the process of putting the show together. Little did we expect to have the privilege of meeting I-Wen and Manray in person, and to see and hear about the works from them at the Biennale.

The title of the Biennale was inspired by *Yanqiu Ci* (Poem for the Wild Ducks' Burial Mound) by 12th-century poet Yuan Haowen. The oft-quoted lines, “ask of the world, what is love that makes one devote to each other in life and death” became a negative interrogative, transforming its popular meaning of romantic love into an investigation of the nature of “sentient existence” in the age of digital technology.



BA(Hons) Fine Arts Level 2 students, Jeremy Sharma and Dr Cissie Fu at the 2022 Taiwan Art Biennale in March 2022.

Spread across several galleries, the biennale featured a total of 32 Taiwanese artists. The artworks ranged from traditional media, performances channelled through video installations to sound installations. The show was organised under four broad themes, namely:

1. *The Ecology of Modern Technology—
The Lost Space as Metaphor*
2. *Re-Weaving the Cosmos—Presence of
Contemporary Indigeneity*
3. *Body as Battleground—The Discipline
of History*
4. *Love and Death of Sentient Beings—
The Return of Animism*

It was an eye-opening experience approaching a multitude of artworks with topics that we seldom come into contact with. There were photographic documentations of indigenous tribes in Taiwan and works exploring materials and cultural practices such as the history of ethnic dance. On the other hand, there were also artists working with microorganisms engaging in all sorts of installations. Every artist displayed a profound passion for their research, as evident in their work.

I would like to share some artworks in this article:

Located in the main space of the museum, the artwork *BiOfilm.net: Resist like bacteria* (2022) embodies the do-it-yourself philosophy and spirit as advocated by the contemporary art scene. The artwork examined bacterial technologies and biological behaviours to formulate possible means of resistance against central systems. Learning from these microbes, the artist believes that it offers a possibility of co-creating a technology of independent connection and communication. The artist's research and processes were consolidated into a short video which made it very accessible for viewers to enter and understand the work. The prototype, a yellow umbrella

adapted into a parabolic Wi-Fi antenna suspended upside down in the air, definitely drew much attention, making it inviting for viewers to come up close to examine.

Another work is *Land Dug Up from the Margin of Error in Cadaster* (2022) by Cai Guo-Jie. The almost 9-minute long video explores national governance from the angle of cartography. Through his work, Cai investigates land contention and controversial boundaries, uncovering the struggles for power and resource therein. In the video Cai is seen using instruments of measurement and vacuum to collect and deposit the dust and soil on the edges of the premises of various public organisations. The artist's intention is to highlight the 'narrow area' or 'lost space' created as a result of 'surplus' produced by the differences of technologies and margins of measurement. He references today's brief modern history, where modern laws have converted land inhabited by indigenous peoples around the world into 'terra nullius' (nobody's land), to be subsequently measured and turned into usable modern land 'resource.'

Reflecting on both artworks shared in this article, I noticed some similarities and connections about the issues addressed in their works and the society we live in, here in Singapore. It is also interesting to see the contrast in the methods of approaching and addressing these issues. The openness and artistic freedom possessed by artists working in Taiwan's art scene intrigues me and is admirable.

Last but not least, curators Manray and I-Wen also shared with us *The Lost Space Project*. These spaces often refer to narrow lot or crook shaped spaces that do not legally conform to the minimum square footage. Due to the history of NTMoFA, its building underwent a series of repairs, refurbishments and expansions over the years which inadvertently resulted in pockets of 'lost spaces' around. The



Image courtesy of Thng Shalyn (Left) and *BiOfilm.net*, NTMoFA (Right)

curators seized the opportunity to explore the potential in these lost spaces, by inviting six sound artists to create site-specific sound installations. These artists are independent practitioners who work extensively in different urban spaces around Taiwan. Their practices draw concerns and attention towards materiality, liveness, ecology and even the connection between sound and the nervous systems. The works created by these artists can consequently be viewed as a practice of 'artistic acupuncture' on lost spaces. As an attempt to 'open the meridians' of the museum as a body constructed by modern technology and an institution.

In conclusion, the visit to the Taiwan Art Biennale was a fruitful learning experience. The conversations and discussions we had with Manray and I-Wen gave us a peek into the curatorial rationales and challenges. Seeing and experiencing the artworks in person has definitely broadened our horizons and left us with inspirations to better shape our own artistic practices.

Apart from visiting the NTMoFA, we also visited a few other local art galleries and areas of interest around Taichung. Finally, what is important above all, is that we had fostered closer bonds with each other in our cohort through this learning expedition, and of course, through having fun together.



Image courtesy of Cai Guo-Jie, NTMoFA

YPMP Petualangan di Kota Gurindam

Reflection by
Desnando Sarlim

Youth Photographers' Mentorship Programme or YPMP (2023) is a programme that aims to nurture talents of young photographers in Singapore, creating a community of like-minded people with a passion for photography. It was formerly known as Shooting Home Youth Awards, which has a more overarching theme of having the idea of *Home* as a theme. With this new rebrand, creative agendas are freer and more fluid.

The project that I embarked on did force me to question my idea of home. I am a Riau Islander, born and raised in Tanjung Pinang. I came here to Singapore for the purpose of studying art and for a better life that may suit me more. It was very difficult to live in a society with conservative values and norms, especially as a queer person. Singapore is a lot more accepting.

Tanjung Pinang, or Pinang, as locals and surrounding islanders call it, is a city on Bintan Island, one of the many islands that makes up the Riau Islands Province. It is quite close to Singapore actually, it's only a two-hour ferry ride away. Although the island itself is much bigger than Singapore, most of it isn't developed. Pinang is one of the more developed cities. As we go further north, we can find endless stretches of forests with trees and greenery and come across occasional houses, small towns or communities. Go further and that is where the beaches and touristy areas are located. This is where most foreigners tend to go, places mostly featured on advertisements for Bintan.

I grew up eating the local food, a lot of



Untitled photograph, 2023

Chinese influenced cuisines as well as Indonesian ones. The local Chinese speaks a Teochew dialect which I myself grew up speaking with my family. The Teochew we speak is a unique language, having influences from bahasa Indonesian as well as some other local languages adapted into it. As the generations go on, I find that this language tends to be forgotten or neglected. Some of the younger Chinese-Indos, which is how we describe ourselves, tend to stick to just bahasa Indonesian; it is more universal after all.

Potong Lembu (Fig. 2) is a place where I used to go often with my family to have breakfast and even dinner. In the morning, the parking lot serves its usual purpose, but at night, it turns into a *Pujasera*: a food street, crowded with stalls that sell amazing food. The smell of grilled sotong and satay wafts in the air at dusk. And at dawn, the scent of rain and musk emerge from the wet market.

One morning during my trip back home, I returned there for breakfast with my parents. The fish soup lady did not seem to have aged one bit. Even now, she can remember my order and that I don't like coriander with my soup. She is nice.

The food in these streets are common breakfast foods for my brother and I; my mum usually gets them for us. When I was in primary school, my mum used to wake up early to get fresh bread from a bakery van that stops in that neighbourhood, just so we can pack bread for lunchtime. I didn't know at the time how much effort it took to get them.

A lot of the photos I took in Pinang are related to my daily life and things that I usually like to document for nostalgic reasons. Just like the photos you see here, most of these were taken using my phone since it seems to be more relevant to the concept of mundanity.

I learned to use a DSLR camera for this project. It was my first time using one so there was a bit of a learning curve, but I think I got the hang of it.



FIG. 2. Inside Potong Lembu, a popular food street for the locals, containing coffee shops, markets, and kueh stalls. It was Lunar New Year, so lanterns were hung from roof to roof to brighten up the streets.



FIG. 3. A nostalgic bowl of fish soup Indomie, one of my childhood favourites, and the *kali peng* (curry rice) my family ordered as a sharing dish.

A lot of it really relied on instinct and experimentation, what is important is not losing the moment or initial desire to capture the moment. I usually try to adjust the ISO and focus to better represent the scene. Having an eye for composition is also really helpful; this is where my drawing and painting skills become useful.

I use the camera for more planned shots, like when I go to the coastal area to shoot.

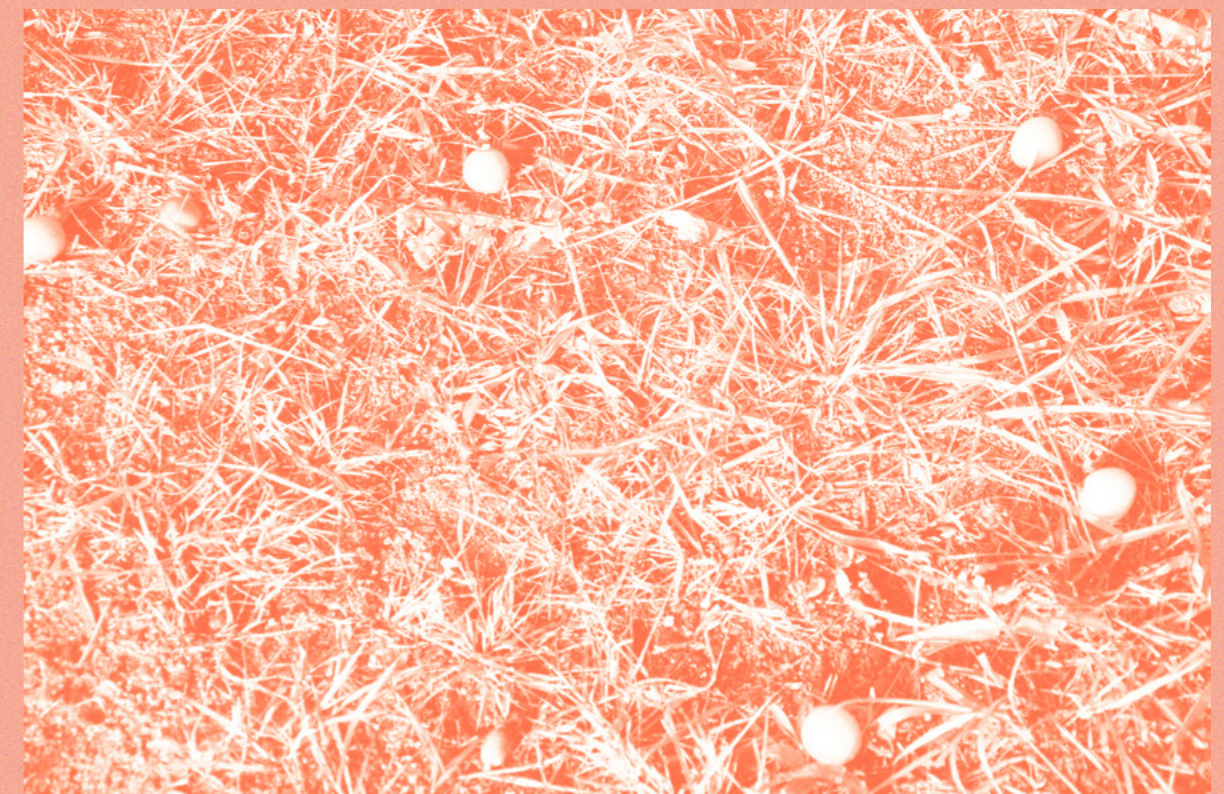
Let me share some pictures that didn't make the cut.

In a way, this project was a chance for me to reflect on the different experiences I have had living in these two countries. Both carry different cultures and values; and both are influential conditions that affect how you live in a certain space. I never really felt like I belonged in Tanjung Pinang; Singapore fits me much more. Yet, even though I don't live there anymore, it is where my roots are. Whatever happens I will always have this place to return to. I appreciate my roots and experiences, the good and even the not so pleasant memories, because after all, they made me who I am today.

Many thanks to Ming Rui and the Objectifs team for making the exhibition possible and for providing a platform to showcase my creations. Thanks to my friends as well for supporting me. :)



Untitled photograph, 2023



Untitled photograph, 2023



Untitled photograph, 2023



Untitled photograph, 2023

MA Asian Art Histories: Bangkok 2023

Review by
Lim Yijia Adeline

With the reopening of borders after a long COVID-19 hiatus, the choices available to our cohort were significantly greater than those of the past two years. Ultimately, the decision was made to travel to Bangkok, Thailand, to coincide with the Bangkok Art Biennale (BAB). The theme for this edition of the BAB, *Chaos:Calm*, is a fitting response to the uncertainty we experienced in the last two years. Apart from COVID-19, we have witnessed an increase in extreme weather events worldwide, a surge in hate crimes, and growing political polarisation. Chaos reflects the worldwide state of affairs, but in spite of that, there is also a search for peace and tranquillity, a calm respite from the madness. Although these two concepts may appear to be in binary opposition, the artworks showcased in the BAB often explored the serenity that arises amidst chaos or seek calm and serenity within chaos.

Our first encounter with the BAB took place at the Bangkok Arts and Cultural Centre, a sprawling, multi-leveled art complex that spirals upwards many stories. Upon entering, we were greeted by Jan Kath's large-scale tapestries called *Ice People*, bearing imagery of war. From the narrow walkway, we looked up at guns, tanks, fighter jets, and bombs that were motifs in Kath's artworks. However, rather than being an homage to war, Kath's pieces take a personalised approach to war, specifically its effects on people. The combination of traditional patterns and colours

in block shapes harkens back to traditional craft from Persia, which at its peak covered present-day Iran, Egypt, Türkiye, and parts of Afghanistan, countries that are presently recognized as sites of war and violence.

We slowly made our way around the spiral, winding upwards from the 7th to 9th floors. From a distance, we saw Vasan Sitthiket's Nan Talung puppets hanging on the walls. Titled *Vladimir Putin*, these puppets were massive effigies of recognizable, real-life political figures in various states of undress or tomfoolery. Intermingled with these figures were literal dickheads dressed in military gear, holding onto bags labelled with dollar signs or grabbing onto bombs and other weapons of mass destruction. Vasan Sitthiket's critique is clear—these men are puppets of violence and their capitalist desires, at the expense of the rest of the world.

Off to the sides on the 7th to 9th floors were annexes that encircled the building. These spaces were pockets of peace and calm amidst the noise in the central atrium. Taking on a more contemplative and meditative approach, these works were often interactive pieces that encouraged visitors to the space to engage with the construction of meaning—taking time to touch, move, play with and just experience these works in very visceral ways.

On day two of the Biennale, we headed to the Queen Sirikit National Convention Centre. The atmosphere was calm, and the halls seemed endless, with the gold finishing reflecting brightly in the morning light. This was in stark contrast to the chaotic hustle and bustle of APEC 2022 the previous month. As we entered the exhibition hall, we were greeted by Pinaree Sanpitak's *Temporary Insanity*, a collection of stuffed fabric sculptures in warm, vivid hues of silk, commonly referred to as breast stupas. These dome-shaped forms came in various sizes and shapes, and as we approached them, we were encouraged to applaud. The more enthusiastic our applause, the

more rapidly the sculptures vibrated. It was unclear if they were excited by our presence or stress-trembling in response. Nonetheless, these breast stupas swayed back and forth, performing vigorously as we clapped along. We became performers ourselves, reciprocating the dance that the sculptures were showing us.

Not all the works were loud and performative; some were quiet and contemplative, providing pockets of calm. For instance, *Map of Memories* by Qi Zhijie was a 7-panelled painting made with Chinese ink and pencil, resembling a map. This map attempted to document uncharted terrain—our memories. It identified the peaks of recollection and the valleys of amnesia and illness, giving tangible form to the landscape of our memory.

Even works that we expected to be chaotic, such as the dioramas *Disasters of War IV* by Jake and Dinos Chapman, were surprisingly calm as they were displayed in numerous smaller vitrines from various angles. Although the subject matter and violence in each work were chaotic, the bite-sized divisions somehow created a sense of tranquillity in the room.

In the afternoon, we went to the Jim Thompson Arts Centre to see the Mit Jai Inn exhibition *Dreamday*, which was just a stone's throw away from our hotel but still a considerable distance from our previous location. As is typical in Bangkok, we got caught in traffic and arrived embarrassingly late. Nonetheless, our curator-host Kittima was unfazed, accustomed to such delays. She took us through *Dreamday* and its two exhibition spaces. The first was a walk-through installation composed of long, painted strips of paper and canvas hung on walls or draped over a frame. We had encountered Mit Jai Inn's work in Singapore during Singapore Art Week 2022, but with Kittima's insight, we experienced his artwork in a completely different way. The second space displayed a series of painted rock-like forms and furniture scattered on a large table in the center of the room. These pieces could be taken home for

continued display, creating an exhibition outside of the traditional gallery space. In homes, these works would take on new meanings and foster new conversations and unpredictable interactions with random visitors in a post-COVID world. We would have taken one ourselves, but the catch was that the artwork had to be displayed in a Bangkok-based home, and we weren't sure if they would fit in our luggage.

On our third day, we set off early to Ayutthaya Historical Park, a long ride. We made a detour to Bang Pa-In Palace first, however, where we were told that our dress code was inappropriate for the space, causing chaos. We were unsure of what exactly the issue was—was it our ankles, knees, or legs in general? It seemed like a very flexible definition, made more arbitrary because the only suggested solution was to visit the shops selling quick-fix garments that would allow us to enter the palace grounds. We declined and instead roamed around the grounds surrounding the palace, enjoying the riverside scenery and architecture of the houses facing us.

This turned out to be an excellent warm-up for the historic city of Ayutthaya. It was the second capital of the Siamese kingdom and was in its prime during the 14th to 18th centuries, at one point a cosmopolitan urban area and a center for diplomacy and commerce. However, by the end of 2022, the monumental architectural structures are now in ruin, having been beset by many wars and sieges. We arrived around 10 a.m. and spent the better part of the morning wandering around the site. It was interesting to visualise what the place might have looked like in its heyday, though the reddish brick structures offered us no clues to their original surface finishing. As we wandered around the set paths, we were mindful not to trample on the conservation areas and tried to imagine ourselves walking the same paths as the Siamese people in the past.

We ended our day at the Museum of Contemporary Art, which was privately owned and

featured the personal collection of eminent Thai businessman Boonchai Bencharongkul, showcasing his interests. Our visit coincided with a Banksy exhibition, though the wanton display of naked bodies on show stole the limelight for us. This divided our opinions—some of us were alienated by the lascivious nature of the works, while others found it a fascinating insight into the collector's mind. Many works could be viewed through a sexual lens: lotus and bud-like forms were often viewed as breasts (perhaps encouraged by Pinaree's work on day two). This permanent collection generated vigorous conversation regarding the nature of the works. One of the more interesting pieces was tucked away in one of the building annexes—a retelling of the Thai folk story Khun Chang Khun Phaen from two different artistic perspectives. A popular story, the character in the middle of the love triangle bears an uncanny likeness to Boonchai Bencharongkul's sixth and most recent wife, actress Bongkoj Khongmalai, perhaps as a cautionary reminder of what happens to women who are undecided about where their true affections lie.

On day four, we had a more peaceful and intimate experience. We visited Pinaree Sanpitak at her charming home and studio space, where she was working on a forthcoming collaboration with Valentino that would be presented at The Warehouse Hotel in Singapore. We chatted about various topics, and it was fascinating to learn how her experience as a mother greatly influenced her artistic practice. Rather than being objectified or representative of gender, as we had discussed on day two, her breast stupas were more like life-giving forms that provided sustenance, nourishment, and care.

Later in the day, we had tea with Manit Sriwanichpoom, also known as the *Pink Man*, at his studio filled with walls painted vivid shades of pink, blue, and green. He spoke about art, politics, consumerism, and what it meant to be a contemporary Thai artist. What was intended to be a brief visit ended

up lasting all afternoon, and we lost track of time as we enjoyed tea and biscuits on the top floor of his studio, only noticing the changing light as the day passed.

On our last day, we only had time for a quick morning visit to the JWD Art Space, where we saw a small exhibition. One of the works was by Jompet Kuswidananto, titled *The Prelude*. It was a chandelier that had been dramatically smashed on the ground, its pieces scattered around in disarray. The chandelier was balanced at an angle, as if it had been cut down and abandoned on the floor, a victim of rioting and looting. It was a relic of a history that suggested the impact of Euramerican traditions and influences.

We were particularly drawn to an interactive work by Vadim Zakharov titled *Scream... Scream.. Sing*, which responded to the noise levels inside the gallery space. The louder the sound, the brighter the flower in the middle would glow, illuminating works on the walls. However, like the dog from Aesop's fables, yelling at the flower and running to the walls proved to be fruitless as the light would fade before we arrived, and any glimpses of the works were lost to us. Only after some futile attempts, problem-solving and teamwork were we able to create enough illumination to view the images within the space, though we could not be both producing the sound and viewing the images. Our knowledge of the images—chimney chambers of the German concentration camp of Sachsenhausen—was only through second-hand knowledge, which functioned as a tidy allegory for the fractured nature of research, information, and history surrounding the war.

In conclusion, our time at the Bangkok Art Biennale was a whirlwind of fascinating and diverse experiences. We had the chance to explore the works of both established and emerging artists, and gain a deeper understanding of the local art scene in Thailand. The visit to BAB was particularly unique as the artists were selected through open call application, which allowed for a wider range of styles,

practices, and ideologies to be showcased. It was truly a refreshing change from the typical invite-only exhibitions that can often become exclusive clubs. As we boarded our plane, we were left with a sense of awe and inspiration (and unease, anticipating the expectations for our thesis) for this dynamic and ever-evolving art scene.



View of Bangkok Arts and Cultural Centre, 2023
PHOTOGRAPH BY ADELINE LIM



Qi Zhijie, *Map of Memories*, 2022



Photograph of Mit Jai Inn exhibition *Dreamday*
PHOTOGRAPH BY ADELINE LIM



Sketch of Pinaree Sanpitak created during the studio visit
ARTWORK BY ADELIN LIM



Group photograph at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Bangkok
PHOTOGRAPH BY FAUSTA TAN



Sketch of Manit Sriwanichpoom created during the studio visit
ARTWORK BY ADELIN LIM



Jompet Kuswidananto, *The Prelude*, 2022

My trip to Athens, Greece for Shared Campus Summer Schools

Reflection by
Danielle Doctor

All photos by
Danielle Doctor

For a long time, I have sought opportunities to go abroad and explore other art forms and broaden my art style. The recent pandemic had constrained me in pursuing this. There are lots of art forms in Singapore, but they are not as appreciated as in other countries. Fortunately in 2022, when the COVID restrictions improved, I applied for the Shared Campus Summer School Programme that I saw on LASALLE's learning portal. Applying for it was not as easy as I thought. There were questions like "What will you benefit from this?" and "Why should we consider you?". Another challenge I had with the application was that only bachelor's degree students could apply and since I was not, I was hesitant. I went ahead and applied anyway and focused on two programmes: one in Bangkok and another one in Melbourne, Taipei, and Athens, thinking that going to Greece was a chance that I couldn't miss.

When I got to Athens in the first week of the programme, being not familiar with the capital city, I had to ask around. The locals were kind and directed me to where I wanted to go. The culture shock did not seep in yet because Athens felt sort of similar to home in the Philippines, where I am from. I met a group of amazing aspiring artists who applied for the same programme; I grew particularly close to a graduating student from London. She was like my sister in Greece and since she has travelled around Europe before, she helped guide me throughout the trip. It was a

relief to know that I was not alone. Of course, the first place and the only place that stood out to us was the Athenian Acropolis. It was worth the walk up the hill in the summer heat of 38°C; the ruins were beautiful, as was the whole of Greece. After our little outing, we joined the rest of the undergrads and headed to the flea market. That was when I felt the culture shock. I imagined the flea market to look similar to Thailand, the Philippines, or Indonesia. I bought a beautiful butterfly necklace as a gift from an Indian immigrant, who also warned me to be careful and not walk in Athens alone, as it was not safe. I did not enjoy the flea market as much as I expected, but I did enjoy the city's art. There were so many graffiti artworks around the city; it was hard to miss them.

The first week in Athens was mostly artists' talks. They were educational, but did not pique my curiosity, as I was more interested in mythology, architecture, graffiti, and public artworks. I enjoyed myself more in the second week, when we headed to Elefsina, the city of goddess Demeter on the Athenian Acropolis. There, I learned about the city's history and about how factories built in Elefsina caused major air pollution problems in the past, and also that sunken ships caused water pollution. We were even warned not to swim in the ocean as it was still polluted with oil from the ships and that only the Romanis would swim in the ocean. On the first night in Elefsina, there was a festival for the goddess Demeter that went on until 3 a.m. There was folk music, dancing and a lot of cheering. We learned that the ruins area around Demeter's church was still being used, and that only cisgendered women could go into the church to pray or give offerings to Demeter. The festival was magical like a fantasy from that dancing scene in Disney's *Tangled* movie. It was wonderful.

We then focused more on the art in Elefsina. We walked around the city with an artist and continued learning about different art forms and the history of the city. For an activity using coloured permanent markers,



The Parthenon on the Athenian Acropolis, 8 July 2022



The Parthenon on the Athenian Acropolis, 8 July 2022



Athens (view from the Parthenon)

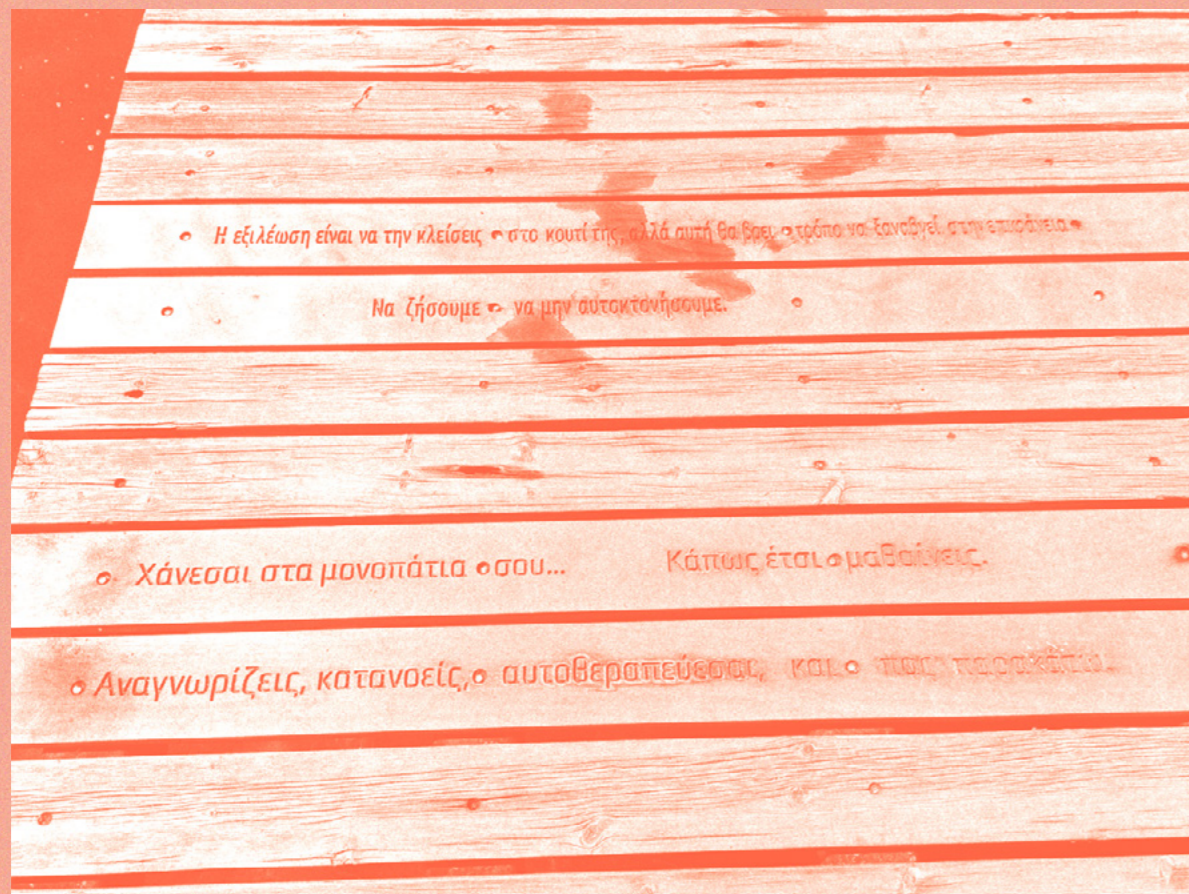


The Parthenon on the Athenian Acropolis (close-up)



Graffiti art in Athens, July 2022

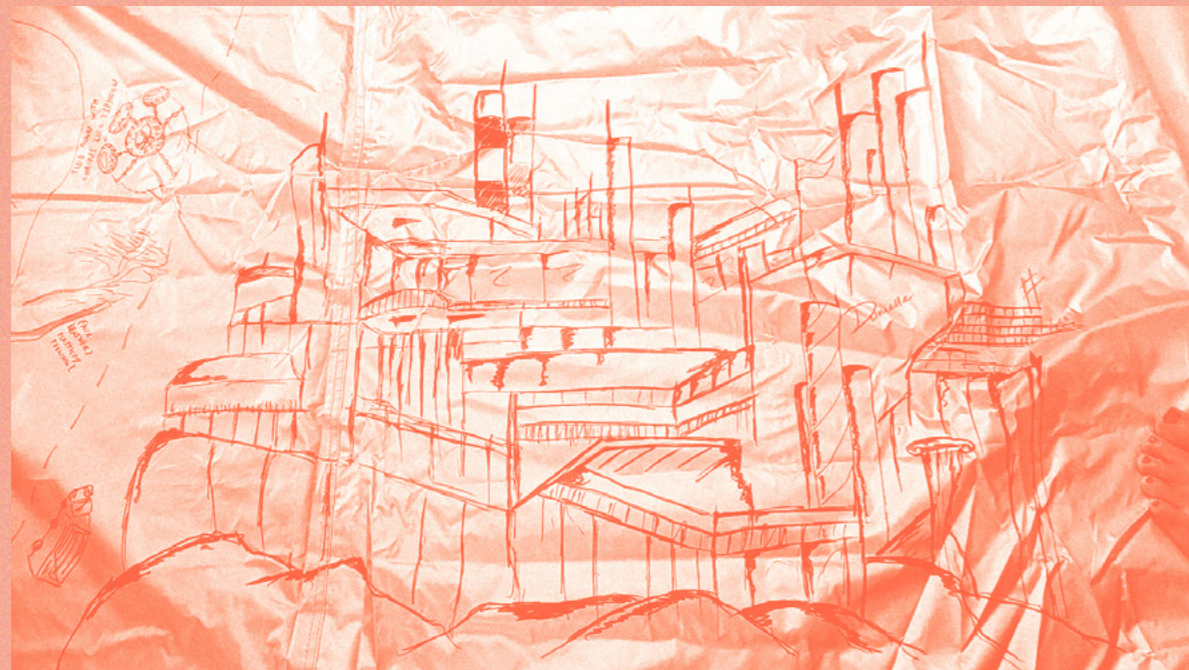




Incidents (of travel) Artwork, Xenia Kalpaktsoglou & Peggy Zali

we were told to draw up a map showing the areas that we had gone to in the city in a tent. I had drawn one of the factories, or my interpretation of the factory, and only focused on the architecture. I got carried away drawing the factory, while the others were drawing and mapping out the areas we went to.

My experience in Greece has been unforgettable. The people, the places and the art were all I was looking for and wanted to learn about. I guess the downside of Greece was the safety issue; I was so used to Singapore that I always had to remind myself during that entire trip that Greece was nothing like home. And the food was not up to my expectations. Goodness me, I missed chicken rice and was glad I had the taste of it again when I touched down in Singapore. However, since then, my art practice changed: Greek mythology and its stories influenced the way I see art now with a new perspective on gender issues.



Drawing of Factory (Based on Elefsina's history) by Danielle Doctor, 12 July 2022

Rationale for Fables: MA Fine Arts exquisite corpse project

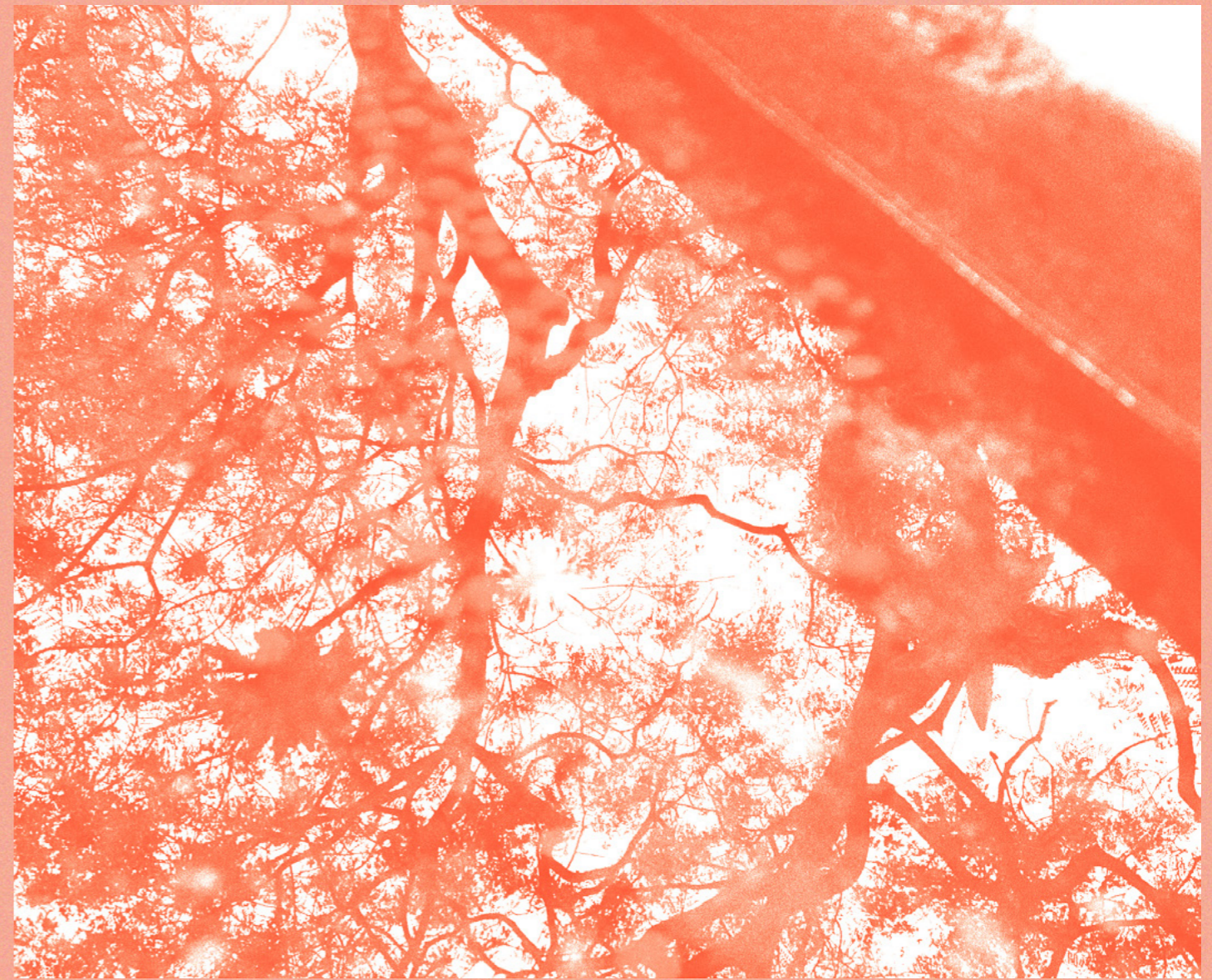
Reflection by
Solomzi Moleketi,
Adeline Kueh,
Isa Pengskul,
Ha Chau Bao Nhi,
Carmen Ceniga Prado,
Oindrila Sen, Ian Woo,
Joanna George,
Li Szu Tan,
Iman Sengupta,
Zul Mahmud

The journey is beautiful. Soon, I'll have to fit my life in bags and boxes again; but for now, it's all good. Things remain splayed out, occupying all the space they need. Breathing.

When consolidated, objects can fit into impressively small little rectangles. Sometimes there are so many rectangles, like when we visited Seoul. We had so many bags that they barely fit into a trolley. In terms of ideas, I have definitely had too many to fit into this one-and-a-half-year box.



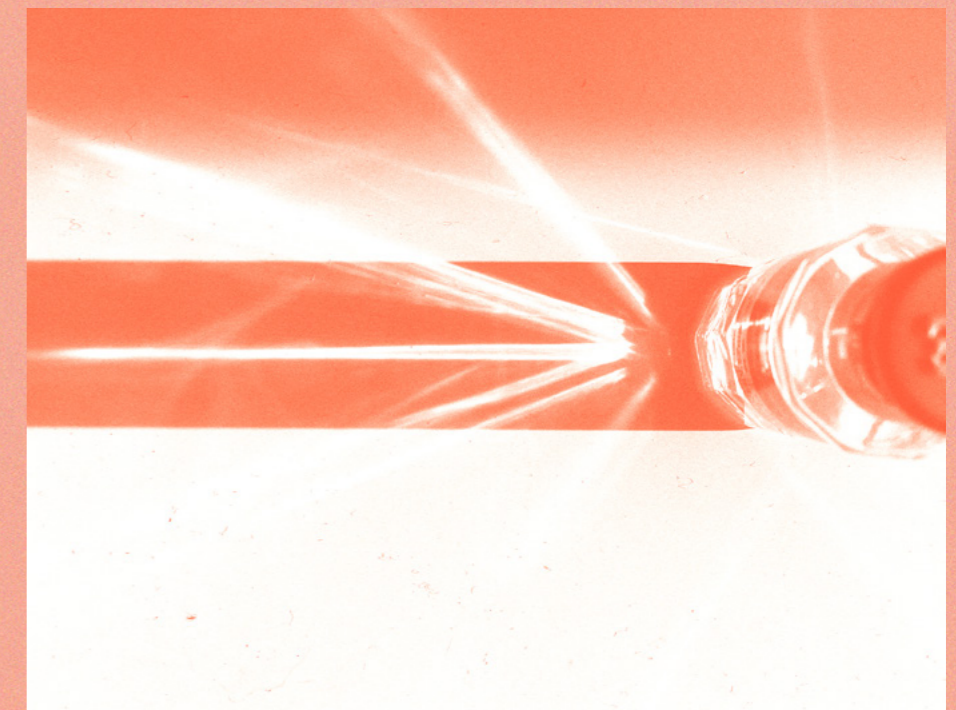
Throughout this time, ideas morphed, expanded, grew and often gave birth to new ones, which exceeded our intentions and reasoning, providing imaginary fuel to the way we experience the world. Sometimes I have become confused after discussing my ideas with others. Yet, what has become clear in these conversations is that trying to become a decent artist takes time. I have learned a lot, but I realise the more you know, the less you know.



This time has been shared with great companions. In only one year and a half, I shared so many precious moments with wonderful people, little moments, big moments, little sharing of food, big debates and adventures, all adding up to a symphony of unforgettable experiences. The learning is two-way.



I will remember lying on floors or sofas complaining to other classmates, saying something along the lines of “oh, tough be the artist’s life” while eating fresh fruit, chocolates, sipping wine, playing water pong, charades and other games that tickle the spirit and draw memorable imprints like diamonds and dew in the sky.



Alone, one can only achieve so many things, but together we did a lot—a lot more laughing, definitely. I also think my brain metaphorically grew. My practice has been shaped by so many wonderful artists and humans throughout this time. I am going to miss the feeling of being utterly confused by in-depth conversations, only to have these insights suddenly make sense a month later, thinking “that prof knows me better than I know myself!” As we set up for our final show, these insights crystallise. In my body, I can feel ideas taking shape and guiding my decisions. With my words, I grow confident and willing to share. The bags and boxes are now metaphors for what I will carry with me in the next phase of my life. The memories, ideas and encounters will be what I slowly unpack. Who knows? They may inspire me and make me look back critically when I wake at 3 a.m. thinking about my next work.

The rays from the sky are beautiful and make us stop and enjoy, even just for a moment. This journey has been like that. Smile. Everything is going to be fine.

