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TWO THOUSAND AND FOURTEEN

VOLUME 2

GLOS

INTRODUCTION

The second volume of GLOSSARY allows us to reflect on the past year's programme and how much the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore (ICAS) has grown. In this volume, we look back on some of our exhibitions from 2012 and 2013, revisiting them to gain new perspectives. The following essays and interviews by artists, curators, academics, lecturers, researchers and film directors form a plethora of viewpoints that offer vibrant starting points and points of departures to the exhibitions. They illustrate the geographical and conceptual reach that ICAS prides itself in sharing with our visitors and readers.

In 2013, ICAS produced 54 exhibitions, including 26 faculty-based exhibitions as well as five exhibitions by emerging Singapore-based artists held in TriSpace. There was an international representation of artists including artists from China, France, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, London, South Korea, United Kingdom, and Uzbekistan.

The Bleeding Edge of Art – p. 30

We began 2013 with *Coded Transformations* at ICAS Gallery 1, a ground-breaking exhibition by artist, programmer and staff member of LASALLE College of the Arts, Andreas Schlegel. Experimenting with installations, videos, photographs, prints and objects, Schlegel collaborated with artists of varying practices. The result was a gallery installation that resembled a scientific laboratory in which libraries of code, external data conditions and DIY gadgetries are its primary catalysts. In her essay, Joleen Loh discusses the spectrum of artistic innovation, diversity and collaboration encouraged by software and technology and also considers the way technology has reshaped notions of community, distribution and authorship.

Situationist Bon Gun – p. 10

In March 2013, Tang Da Wu's solo exhibition *Situationist Bon Gun* featured his new work across Gallery 1, Gallery 2 and TriSpace. As Joleen Loh discusses in her article, Situationist Bon Gun was a reflection of Tang's artistic and personal experiences since he returned to Singapore from London in 1988, from early beginnings with The Artists Village to present day developments in the arts and arts education. *Situationist Bon Gun* was the artist's latest solo exhibition since 2011, and ICAS had some twelve hundred visitors pass through its doors over the duration of the exhibition.

The Great Game by Dana Lam – p. 50

In the essay "The Great Game", Dana Lam writes about *The Retrospectacle of S. Raoul* by Shubigi Rao. The exhibition at Earl Lu Gallery from March to April, chronicled and concluded 10 years of labour and research of S. Raoul, polymathic researcher, archaeologist, inventor and recluse. ICAS published an accompanying exhibition catalogue *History's Malcontents: The Life and Times of S. Raoul*.

A Conversation on Theo.do.lites – p. 60

The exhibition *Theo.do.lites* in April 2013 focused on the engagement with urban and rural realities by artists from both Europe and Asia, revealing a sense of

disillusionment towards the modernization of both locales. With a strong emphasis on moving image, the exhibition presented a compelling mix of documentary, pseudo-cartographic and narrative approaches by artists. It was guest curated by Kent Chan from Singapore and Silke Schmickl from Paris, and featured works by Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Raqs Media Collective, Charles Lim, Marylène Negro, Tan Pin Pin, Daniel Hui, Debbie Ding, to name a few.

Parallax Posthumously by Ulrich Lau – p. 34

PARALLAX Between Borders: Singapore–China is a response to Ulrich Lau's travels in 2012 to the Northeastern borders of China to the provinces of Jilin and Liaoning, where they were able to see the landscapes of Primorsky Krai, Russia and North Hamgyong, North Korea from the border. The documentations of this journey, which included photographs and videos, were featured in *Mirror of Otherness*, a group exhibition in Gaodi Gallery, Shenyang City. Curated by Zhang Yadong and Ulrich Lau, this exhibition explored the questions of boundaries and inter-cultural issues. *PARALLAX* was the second and conclusive exhibition, with new works based on new perspectives of the journey, reflecting and re-examining the multifarious relations and representations that occur within cross-cultural contexts. In his essay, co-curator Ulrich Lau considers cultural and cross-border interactions as he reflects upon his journey along the Northeastern parts of China.

inside the subject by Charmaine Toh – p. 42

In February 2013, Gallery 2 was transformed into a black box for *inside the subject*, an exhibition by Bani Haykal in collaboration with Mohamad Riduan and anGie Seah. Engaging with concepts of power and social order, Haykal questions the extent to which ethics and moral conduct will be re-evaluated when laws and social norms are re-written. Based on an excerpt from a new work of fiction entitled *collapse*, the work explored the psychological state and dilemma of 'the subject' before his first kill. Charmaine Toh discusses how the exhibition marked an important moment in Haykal's practice and was the first time that the artist, who works across various artistic disciplines, fused his interest in installation, sound, live performance, sound sculptures, fiction, narrative and collaboration.

Linking Cities – Visualising: The Value of the City by Yasser Suratman – p. 64

Visualising: The Value of the City was an exciting example of collaborative research-based exhibitions at ICAS led by Faculty members of the Design Communication programme. The exhibition presented work by students from the Faculty of Design in LASALLE together with students from the College of Design in Samgyung University, South Korea. Yasser Suratman elaborates on the ethnographical studies of Seoul and Singapore conducted by students, and their engagement with the two cities, which both experienced rapid shift towards industrial modernity over a short period of time, a phenomena of intense development that often characterizes developing nations. The result of this collaboration was a fantastic showcase of work that drew the connections between the history, culture and infrastructure of the two cities.

See no evil – Jeremy Sharma and Ian Woo – p. 20

This second edition of *GLOSSARY* also revisits a selection of exhibitions from 2012, featuring a number of essays, including a special interview between LASALLE lecturer and artist Jeremy Sharma and fellow colleague and artist Ian Woo. Revisiting Sharma's solo exhibition at ICAS *Apropos: Jeremy Sharma* in April 2012, the two-part interview also engages with the development of Sharma's work in his 2013 exhibition at Grey Projects.

Preliminary Encounters by Viviana Mejía – p. 38

In continuing its commitment to provide a platform for local and international art, ICAS presented *Encounter: The Royal Academy in Asia* in association with Fortune Cookie Projects in late 2012. The exhibition featured a wide variety of media by 23 Royal Academicians and 24 artists from across Asia, with over 76 works across all seven galleries, including artwork by artists such as Tony Bevan, Chen Chieh-Jen, Michael Craig-Martin, Richard Deacon, Tacita Dean, Tracey Emin, Jenny Saville, Antony Gormley, FX Harsono, Ho Tzu Nyen, Ng Joon Kiat, Lani Maestro, Liu Xiaodong, Ian Woo, Yee I-Lann, Dinh Q. Lê, and more. Viviana Mejía poses pertinent questions about the curatorial strategies undertaken when curating an exhibition that brings together works by artists from Britain and Asia. A key panel discussion, 'Abstraction in Contemporary Art', was held in conjunction with the exhibition, which centered on the work of invited speakers Michael Lin, Om Mee Ai and Ian Woo and examined abstraction as it figures in their art.

Into the Scheme of (Uneasy) Things by Lawrence Chin – p. 56

Another major highlight of 2012 was the major survey exhibition of Cultural Medallion recipient Milenko Prvacki's work from 1979 to 2012. Not only is he one of the most influential painters today, Prvacki was also Dean of Fine Arts in LASALLE for 17 years and is currently Senior Fellow at LASALLE. *Milenko Prvacki: A Survey, 1979 – 2012* featured work across various media including painting, sculpture, watercolour and installation, and offered audiences the opportunity to see the development between and within distinct bodies of work including the *Trophy Volcano*, *Fragments*, and *The Ultimate Visual Dictionary* series. Lawrence Chin discusses the forms, gestures and the many layers of meaning of Prvacki's works.

Days of Our Lives by Adele Tan – p. 6

Adele Tan discusses *Chinese Bible: Yang Zhichao*, a spectacular exhibition that featured on our gallery walls 3000 personal diaries of overlapping generations that the artist collected from second-hand shops over three years. Held in April 2012, the exhibition was a collaboration with 10 Chancery Lane Gallery in Hong Kong, realized with the support of H-Kage.

Video Art and the Markets by Yow Siew Kah – p. 46

An essay by Yow Siew Kah, a researcher and writer specializing in art and design, responds to *Videologue: Beijing – Singapore – Tokyo*, an exhibition on video art from January to February 2012. First exhibited at the Sunshine International Art Museum in Beijing in 2011, this is the second installment of the exhibition, with a third installment subsequently shown in Japan.

The Atypical Freudian Case by Grace Samboh – p. 68

In March to April 2012, we presented *REPOSITION: Art Merdeka!* by prominent Indonesian artist S. Teddy D., guest curated by Grace Samboh, Enin Supriyanto and Hendro Wiyanto. The exhibition was an outstanding presentation of the artist's pronounced and intriguing language of expression, revealed over 20 drawings, installation and performance art. In her essay, Grace Samboh writes about her conversations with Teddy D. and the tenets of his artistic practice. ICAS also presented a panel on Indonesian contemporary art with S. Teddy D., Tony Godfrey and Paul Khoo.



DAYS OF

OF

OUR LIVES

BY ADELE TAN

WRITTEN FOR THE EXHIBITION
Chinese Bible: Yang Zhichao
18 April – 11 May 2012
Praxis Space

in collaboration with 10 Chancery Lane Gallery, Hong Kong

Images courtesy of the artist

“Everyone should keep someone else’s diary”, wrote Oscar Wilde in one of his letters. The author was speaking of his experience of reading to his companion-friend the journal entries (which Wilde had kept) documenting this person’s own life. The contents of this friend’s life returned in this second instance to surprise the very man who had lived through those particularities. Keeping someone else’s diary, in this Wildean sense, refers to the act of writing down the daily observations of incidents that had happened to someone else but as if they were one’s own, a slightly disorientating activity that presumes a possible position of objectivity as well as of exceptional intimacy.



For mainland Chinese artist Yang Zhichao (b. 1963, Lanzhou, Gansu Province), the keeping of someone else’s diary is however quite a different matter; it is the literal act of possession and preservation. His work and exhibition of the same title from 2009, *Chinese Bible*, is a veritable display of a maniacal but methodical collecting over three years of more than 3,000 personal journal notebooks that span a fifty-year period from 1949 to 1999, each registering the diary entries of the Chinese everyman from overlapping generations who lived through the Maoist decades of revolution and reform in the People’s Republic of China. Yang Zhichao was looking for voices that were unmodified, dealing with unadulterated thoughts and ideas. The motivation for such a collection arose from a general distrust of historical records prior to the 1980s, where the history of the people (the proverbial Chinese *laobaixing*, or literally ‘old hundred surnames’) was a blank apart from the official bombast extolling the virtues of the peasant-proletariat. The diaries form an arguably more realistic historical record of this ‘lost period’.

As a result of Yang’s fervour, hundreds of colourful retro-looking notebooks lined one wall of the gallery from floor to ceiling, with hundreds more spilling over onto an adjacent table, neatly laid out or stacked, as if they were at a stall in one of the Beijing second-hand markets where the artist had patiently scoured for his revelatory goods. There was also a video screened at another corner, of the artist scrubbing clean each diary of its accumulated dust and dirt, the painstaking labour registered only by the close-up of his hands relentlessly purging and purifying the diaries. The cumulative arrangement appear immediately pleasing to the eye, as if a wall or sea of abstraction had unveiled itself before the viewer. The viewers were also invited to peruse the books, looking in on the pages that held views to the Chinese past in non-official and less monumental ways. Unsurprisingly, many of the book covers were red, though a fair number were of different bright hues and patterns. Many also had revolutionary exhortations such as “Developing the Motherland” (*jianshe zuguo*) and “Diary of the Labouring Class” (*laodong renmin de riji*) emblazoned on the front cover.

References to diaries have been significant mainstays of cultural life in 20th-century modern China. The most famous is of course Lu Xun’s short story “A Madman’s Diary”, an allegorical fiction that protests against Chinese feudalism and where the worst symptom of this manifested itself as the diarist-madman’s obsession and paranoia that he and his family may have committed cannibalism, a metaphor of the societal ills prevalent in an unprogressive nation. The second lesser-known but nonetheless iconic diary is that of Chinese revolutionary hero-soldier Lei Feng, a possible propagandist confection directed by the disgraced Lin Biao, a former vice-chairman of the CCP and a member of the infamous Gang of Four. Lei Feng’s diary had ostensibly contained a slew of model and infinitely quotable declarations by Lei that were once held up as virtuous ideals for the Chinese citizen during the time of the orchestrated “Learn from Lei Feng” campaign. With these canonical diaries as backdrop, it is little wonder that Yang would nurture a nub of curiosity about whether there might still be some areas of life left untouched by Communist ideology. The evidence gathering to prove or disprove his hypothesis was accomplished through the harvesting of these tiny tracts of discarded mundane minutiae, the putatively authentic emotional record of the Chinese during very trying times in the heat and long shadow of Maoist Communism.

One senses that Yang might have been more than a little disappointed to encounter in the diaries far fewer instances of existence in China untrammelled by ideological forces, which exerted political control over private realms and standardised human behaviour during the height of the Cultural Revolution, putting a different spin on the phrase “the personal is political”. Free thought and expression, it seems, could not be guaranteed even by the socially agreed-upon characteristic of a diary—that it is meant to be kept secret, away from prying eyes. “There is no country or history like China, whose private diaries written



by the general public could attempt to share the same degree of similarity and collectiveness in both political and psychological position”, writes Yang in his exhibition preface. “Thus the term ‘Chinese Bible’ is befitting. It hints at the dilemmas of a nation within a trying and complex situation and serves as a study on the state of mind during that tense period of centralisation.”

But the artist lays out the conundrum or contradiction inherent to the situation, the crux being the truth-telling function of diaristic texts. Should the artist be frustrated by the discovery of the inauthenticity of the Chinese self during the regime (because ideological pervasiveness had inhibited true individual ideas and intentions) or accept the texts as authentic moments of the Chinese self (because they reflect the extent of ideological brainwashing and interpolation)? Either way, these are two sides of the same coin, both valid portraits of a psychically wrenching period of modern China. Perhaps one should not even consider them conventional diaries. On reading the entries they appear meaningfully addressed to an external subject, already assuming that a disapproving eye might be cast over their pages and uncensored thoughts turned into incriminating evidence against the writer.

In this sense, the diaries feel closer to the Maoist practice of self-criticism, or *jiantao*. Communist cadres and comrades who strayed from the party line often had to produce written statements elaborating how they were misguided in their thoughts before reaffirming their adherence to the ‘correct’ beliefs and behaviour of the Party. These extracted confessions successfully were used (not always) for political rehabilitation and frequently read aloud by the offender. And when persons can be easily denounced and accused of being anti-revolutionary, diaries, if they were kept by individuals, had therefore to be ‘correct’, betraying no bourgeois emotions or sympathies. As to be expected, there is a “Self Criticism Form” embedded in one of the journal pages, where there are explicit segments asking for aspects related to one’s job, learning, personal behaviour,



attitude, and a substantial section to draft up a summation of what should be improved upon in the future in light of the above experiences and teachings.

In contrast to the diaries on display, Yang also showed videos of his past performance works, each one challenging the artist’s bodily limits to pain and endurance and confronting ethical boundaries and aesthetic transgressions. They manifest the cultural violence that impinges on all in China, such as when he asked for his personal ID number to be branded on his shoulder blade with a hot iron stamp. At first consideration, there seems to be a disjunction between Yang’s work as a performance artist and his foray into installation, yet there is an uncanny connection between the diaries and his corporeal interventions. Many of his performances involve a certain quotient of suffering and the embedding of a foreign object into his body, whether it be the implanting of grass saplings from Suzhou Creek into his back without anaesthesia or the insertion by a surgeon of a round object unknown to the artist (chosen by his artist-mentor Ai Weiwei, in contradistinction to the dogmatic instruction of Mao Zedong) into the right thigh of the artist. It is as if the diaries are another extension of the artist’s body, each harbouring a secret that inexorably hopes or knows itself to be eventually let out into the open. But whilst the devastation on bodily skin is ephemeral (because skin heals and regenerates) or when the ID number imprint fades from his skin, diaries are more or less permanent records of moments that cannot be so easily erased.

These diaristic secrets are also not unremitting records of a uniform tendency, despite the popular prognosis that entries documenting the decades of the 1950s to the 1970s are largely homogenous. If one had the interest and patience to examine the diaries on display, one would see that overall, each seems to exceed the bounds of its cover, with a kernel of deeply felt belief structure and a simple earnestness about the descriptions of daily preoccupations. There are the obligatory propaganda posters (an image of a steaming train hurtling ahead), photographs of people putting up *dazibao* (big letter posters), appeals to the past with popular folk art, and revolutionary operas advancing their moral dramas so that one can never give up the fight for the Socialist cause. But the notebooks are also intermittently filled with handwritten intimate tales of joy and grief, drawings and photographs of loved ones and the journals’ respective owners, rousing song lyrics, and tracts of mathematical and scientific discourses, thereby giving us an archived microcosm of Communist China’s culture. Even though we are asked in Yang’s *Chinese Bible* to reflect on the effect of the overwhelming consistency of power and control on Communist era diaries, it does seem that after all this, the diary is the article of power, condensing the spirit of a self that is capable of the highest aesthetic and ethical control as much as it is controlled. This may be why Canadian poet-songwriter Leonard Cohen proclaimed in his *Book of Longings* the diary greater than the Bible, the Conference of Birds and the Upanishads all put together.

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Adele Tan is a writer and curator. She received her PhD in art history from the Courtauld Institute of Art.



SITUATIONIST BON GUN

15 March – 10 April 2013
Gallery 1, Gallery 2 and TriSpace

(二十年目睹现象)
BY
TANG DA WU

BY JOLEEN LOH

TANG DA WU
宴 (Banquet)
2013
Steel table and chairs,
glass, tablecloth, umbrella,
rock, wine
Dimensions variable

While Tang Da Wu has long been recognised as the father of contemporary art in Singapore (though he always abstains from such distinction), he is certainly not complacent with his artistic achievements. Resisting any traditional exhibition model that presents the summation of an artistic oeuvre, Tang chose to feature new works for *Situationist Bon Gun*, his latest solo exhibition.

The exhibition title *Situationist Bon Gun* is a play on the Hainanese expression *pom gang* for foolish and is a reference to the avant-garde practices of the Situationist International, which reached their heights during the May 1968 protests in Paris when the advanced capitalist economy of France came to a dramatic standstill. The exhibition consisted of new works across four parts: *Banquet*, *Brother's Pool*, *Sembawang*, and *Revolution*. The works in the show were conceived upon Tang's reflections upon his artistic and personal experiences since returning to Singapore from London in 1988. The *Sembawang* series, which consisted of *Sembawang*, *Sembawang Man* and *Sembawang Phoenix*, revisited The Artists Village, the artist colony that Tang had founded. Yet, while his works look back to the past where it finds its criticality, they do so only to project themselves to the present and move ahead with future imaginings. The exhibition calls attention to many long-standing status quos, signaling a need for change and renewal.

In an interview with Lee Wen in 2006, Tang said, "We don't want another Van Gogh situation to happen again in our modern society where a brilliant artist goes starving. And the arts council should be doing the job to prevent another Van Gogh situation."¹ This "Van Gogh situation" refers to the artist's neglect by society, his desperation and suicide, and only posthumous recognition. Six years since the conversation between Tang and Lee Wen, these concerns manifest themselves again in the first work

presented in *Situationist Bon Gun*, a large installation titled *Banquet*.

It is a scene that undeniably evokes destruction: there are steel chairs suspended within the space or collapsed on the floor; in the middle, it appears that a large stone has smashed into a dining table, leaving its steel frame as it supports large broken sheets of glass with a red-stained tablecloth strewn over it. This is the chaos presented in *Banquet* that confronts the viewer at the entrance of the gallery. The entire room is bathed in a dim, lurid yellow light that hauntingly casts the shadows of the upturned chairs over the gallery walls. It is unclear what has happened or who was here. It is an image constituted of ambiguities, a fraught situation.

During the installation of the exhibition, Tang tells us that it is a banquet meant for art policy makers and institutional delegates. He shared a vivid memory of a conversation during a meeting in London years ago. Prior to the setting up of the National Arts Council in Singapore, a delegation had been sent to research cultural institutions in London, and Tang had helped put these local delegates in touch with their British counterparts. During the meeting, one of the seminar staff for the arts council mentioned that the driving force and purpose behind the arts council is to ensure artists today do not face the same suffering and tragedy of Vincent Van Gogh.

The memory of that conversation and of Van Gogh himself is located significantly in the installation through the chairs and an umbrella bearing prints of the artist's famous *Starry Night* painting installed at the far ceiling of the gallery. The umbrella, a reminder of Van Gogh's suffering, was also for Tang a representation of Van Gogh's spirit watching over the chaos and corruption within the installation. The chairs, reminiscent of those in the painting *Van Gogh's Chairs*, were also seen in Tang's exhibition, *First Arts Council*, at Valentine Willie Fine Art in 2011. Yet here, the chairs are

made of excessively heavy steel, as if they have become commodified objects on which bureaucrats would sit. It is also worth noting Tang's choice of materials throughout the exhibition. The sheer size, weight and customisation of these materials, and the labour involved in their making are all calculated moves. Even his choice of materials seems pitted against the clichés of the culture industry and the 'instant' art-making of today aided by technology, offering political resistance to the digital modes that produce contemporary life.

The table felled by a large stone and the shattered glass recalls the satirical tableau of Maurizio Cattelan's *The Ninth Hour* (1999), which depicts the pope being crushed by a meteorite as he is clutching his crosier. Like Cattelan's installation, *Banquet* invites several probable readings. The celebratory atmosphere often associated with expensive banquet dinners is here disrupted, subverted and seemingly depicted as unearned privilege. For writer Paul Khoo, the table "suggests the perpetual national dialogues and policy reviews that punctuate the scene, purporting to expand spaces for the arts yet seemingly unable to address the continued frustration of the arts community with respect to restrictions and viability".² The work revisits the past and is a metaphor for the frustrations that still mark the artistic landscape of Singapore today while at the same time pointing back to the memory of Van Gogh's tragedy, signaling the need for change.

In another work, *Untitled*, a large black steel sheet rests uneasily on six white radishes, an installation that is part of the series of works in *Revolution*. With "1984" and the Penguin Books logo engraved onto it, the work undeniable references Orwell's Penguin-published satirical novel *1984*. Mounted above the work was a brush with the words "LEE" painted onto it, wedged uncomfortably in a pail. Like an extensive surveillance – or "Big Brother", "Thought Police", as Orwell would have

it – it was mounted high above, overseeing the entire exhibition.

We recall the dystopic world of *1984*, where a society is tyrannised by the ruling party and totalitarian ideology, where independent thought and critical thinking are seen as "thought crimes". It is a world of omnipresent governmental surveillance and public control of thought, misinformation, and denial of truth. It is headed by *Big Brother*, the divine leader who enjoys a cult of personality, and who justifies their rule in the name of a greater good. Represented by the heavy steel sheet, it rests upon six white radishes. Aside from being a common food used, it is said to be once used as a derogatory term for Chinese people. Here they are halved and crammed, squashed under the weight of "Orwell's world". The work draws a connection between Orwellian society of *1984*, published in 1949, and the policies practiced by modern repressive governments, pointing to mechanisms of control that repeat themselves in different permutations.

The exhibition was like an unfolding organism, changing with performances and intermittent interventions by the artist. The series *Revolution* was perhaps the most dynamic and unpredictable section in the exhibition, with work changing even on the last day of the exhibition. Tang also performed on 5 April together with students, a collaboration that responded to works in *Banquet*, *Revolution*, and *Sembawang*.

The performance started at *Banquet*, where Tang began by serving wine to the audience, after which he broke the wine bottle against the table frame. After cutting a piece of cloth from the tablecloth, he poured the next bottle of wine onto it, using the stained cloth to write on large pieces of paper laid out on the floor, with words including "毒酒" "阴谋", and "玩物丧志". A lady dressed in black with a red cloth band around her arm stood on one of the chairs and recited text about Van Gogh. Other performers dressed similarly stood on the chairs and began shouting. Noise spilled over



1

1
TANG DA WU
深疤一 (Sembawang)
2013
Mixed media installation
Dimensions variable

2
TANG DA WU
Sembawang Man and Sembawang Man
2005
Chinese ink on paper, wood
Dimensions variable

3
TANG DA WU
深疤鳳 (Sembawang Phoenix)
2013
Steel and mirror
Dimensions variable

4
TANG DA WU
Rape of Sembawang
2013
Mixed media installation
Dimensions variable



2



3



4

from the next gallery, and the crowd was re-directed to the adjacent space.

The performance continued in front of the painting *Revolution*, an ink painting caged by steel bars that renovated Eugene Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* within the local art context, replacing its characters with Singaporean artists and institutional leaders. The noise and clamor were produced by his student-performers who were repeatedly striking their bars and sticks against the steel bars of the work, singing to the chorus of the French national anthem. Dressed as characters in *Liberty Leading the People* carrying toy guns, swords, and with Liberty carrying the French flag, the group of performers made their rounds, going back and forth between *Revolution* and *Sembawang*, banging on the steel cages of the works and encouraging audiences to do the same. The cacophony carried on and it was so loud that people began to leave the space. At one point, the beating against the steel cages caused one of Tang's caged paintings to fall.

It was clear who Tang was gathering as his protestors here in his tableau of the July revolution; the performance, in some manner, positions students and artists as active participants in the construction of the social body and makers of a collective mind. If the body itself speaks, its rhythmic relationships among other bodies shape the political. And the questions surface: what is he fighting against? Are the leaders and key players in the Singapore arts landscape the leaders of artists and the champions of liberty?

Our revolutionary potential is considerable but often we forget how to recognise it especially when the domination of neo-liberal political economy blocks our ability to create collective change. Yet ultimately, the works remind us of the power of revolution: how it begins with us, with everyday life. The performance mimicked self-organised, networked, collaborative and mobile forms of action, which persists while remaining leaderless. It seemed as

if to signal a time to re-celebrate the provisional, the independent, the collectives, initiatives and contingent organisations. *Situationist Bon Gun* revisited old and new conversations and excavated history if only to dedicate itself to the present and project itself into future imaginings, interrogating the weight of institutions on artistic practices, and the capital in producing and consuming art and the need for change. Now is the prescient time to re-imagine alternatives.



1

NOTES

1 Lee Wen, 'Interview - Tang Da Wu', *The Future of Imagination* 3, 2006, p.17.

2 Paul Khoo, 'On Spaces and Ghosts', *Pipeline*, Issue 36, May/June 2013, p. 98.

1
TANG DA WU
革命 (Revolution)
2013
Mixed media installation
Dimensions variable

2
TANG DA WU
池 (Brother's Pool)
2013
Stones, mirror, lights, steel panels,
water, glass
Dimensions variable

3
TANG DA WU
Untitled
2013
Steel, radish, light, brush, glass bowl
Dimensions variable



2



3

....

Joleen Loh is a curator and writer.

3 ROOMS: OBJECT DESIGN + THE BODY

23 November – 7 December 2012

Brother Joseph McNally Gallery, Praxis Space and Project Space

Presented by Faculty of Design, LASALLE College of the Arts, and The School of Design and Art, Curtin University
Curated by Anne Farren and Emily Wills

Exhibiting designers:

Elizabeth Delfs, Jocelyn Tan, and Alister Yiap

Students of LASALLE College of the Arts:

Pathmapriya D/O Alagasan, Nalin Cherdjareewatananun, Valentina Chua, Acelyn Chuabazuan, Hu Min, Ivanna Ainora Kuswara, Hailey Lim SW, Loke Mei Yen, Shan Low, Herlianti Iskandar Setiawan, Maleka Rajul Shah, Valencia Angelina Soenoyo, Melissa Surya, and Edison Wong.

Students of Curtin University:

Celene Bridge, Ariana Davis, Stephanie Fulham, Shinead Gecas, Stephanie Kinsman, Samuel McCloy, Emily Muco, Lauren Sims, Imogene Spencer, Hannah Steens, Timothy Watson, and Katherine Young.

3 ROOMS: Object Design + the Body is a creative concept showcasing the innovative outcomes from an international collaboration involving curators, lecturers, and students from Australia and Singapore. This project asked students from Curtin University, Perth, and LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore, to consider fashion as a form of object design with reference to the body rather than redesigning existing clothing made exclusively to be worn as garment. The exciting products were showcased in an exhibition of emerging practice that spanned three galleries at the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore. The aim of the *3 ROOMS: Object Design + the Body* project was to engage students in interdisciplinary research and practice to encourage new ways of designing and making fashion. Inspired by the presentation of *Beyond Garment* as part of the 2010 Perth Fashion Festival, *3 ROOMS* extends this re-examination of the fashion object through exhibition. Co-curators Anne Farren and Emily Wills selected twenty-five students to showcase their creative fashion responses to three Australian designers: Alister Yiap, Jocelyn Tan and Elizabeth Delfs. These designer case studies similarly question the changing role of fashion and how fashion can move beyond the context of garment to challenge not only how objects can be considered fashion but also how the presentation

of objects and the interaction of audiences with these objects can facilitate new fashion concepts.

For *3 ROOMS* co-curator Anne Farren, the format of presenting the fashion outcomes in an exhibition reinforced her PhD research in redefining conceptual fashion by moving garment away from its commercial coding and into a space that vacillates between design and art. "The exhibition has emerged as a key component in the presentation of the fashion object and is providing a new perspective on both conventional and new forms of practice. It provides an opportunity for us to reassess the nature of works that emerge from a broader consideration of the relationship between garment, accessory and the body. The exhibition is an opportunity to contemplate these objects with greater focus on concept, materials, form, and structure – to examine the aesthetics of the object away from the distraction of issues of the body or wearer. While the absence of the body is argued by some fashion theorists to be inappropriate for fashion exhibition, *3 ROOMS* presents a case for the exhibition to provide the viewer with the opportunity to explore a new dialogue between viewer, object and maker." (Farren, 2012, p7)

The presentation of fashion in exhibition uses the format of installation to challenge the reading

1
LAUREN SIMS
Room 1_1

2
KATHERINE YOUNG (LEFT)
JOCELYN TAN (CENTRE & RIGHT)
Room 1_2

3
IMOGENE SPENCER
Room 1_3



1



2



3

of exhibited objects. Each of the three galleries in *3 ROOMS: Object Design + the Body* communicated a different research area, underpinned by a designer case study. Contributing designers Alister Yiap, Jocelyn Tan and Elizabeth Delfs were selected as designer case studies as their conceptual thinking and creative outcomes could not be defined by a single area of study. Yiap's work sits between jewellery, fashion, and object design. Off the body, his sculptural forms blur the boundary between design and sculpture, object and accessory. Tan has an interdisciplinary education background in fashion, textiles, product and furniture design, evinced through her multifaceted outcomes. Delfs refers to herself as an interdisciplinary artist, with the intention that her work is perceived without pre-connotations of textiles or fashion. Farren (2012) summarises in the exhibition catalogue that the resulting dialogue of ideas investigated in *3 ROOMS* was voiced by a new generation of designers who work with concepts that reflect the evolving nature of fashion.

"The immediate connection that we have to the fashion object is born out of the intimacy of the relationship we have with the worn object. [...] We have learnt what it means to wear an object of dress and have also been trained through the retail experience of viewing these forms in

the visual merchandising environment to know how to read and translate these objects into a real and very tangible experience. This knowledge and personal engagement with the fashion object is what heightens its appeal above other forms in the gallery environment. Even when not being worn we know and understand the experience of the wearer; in the gallery contemplating these objects we can project and imagine our personal experiences onto the object. The gallery installation presents a new perspective, an opportunity to contemplate the aesthetics of the fashion object away from function and commercial imperatives that surround these forms in a retail environment." (Farren, 2012, p8)

Each of the three 'rooms' was colour coded through signage on the walls and in the accompanying

catalogue, presenting the designer's and students' collective concepts within one thematic title. ROOM 1 explored the visual slippages between visual merchandising and exhibition display. Case study Jocelyn Tan's work explores the intersection between accessory and garment, exhibition and retail display. Tan's designs encourage interaction, thus allowing an exchange between the consumer and her products. Through this dialogue, accessory becomes a process that carries the self beyond adornment. "Her work questions the function, configuration and wearing of the object and challenges the definition of these forms: ...is it a bag... is it a neck piece... is it a garment...; establishing ambiguity and illustrating the potential for slippages in the definition of object through orientation on the body." (Farren, 2012, p8-11) Tan's interdisciplinary

1
IVANNA CINORA KUSWARA (LEFT)
ALISTER YIAP (RIGHT)
Room 2 1

2
EDISON POH
Room 2 2

3
STEPHANIE FULHAM (LEFT)
MELISSA SURYA (CENTRE)
ALISTER YIAP (RIGHT)
Room 2 3

4
ELIZABETH DELFS (LEFT)
EMILY MUO (RIGHT)
Room 3 2

5
MALEKA RAJUL SHAH (LEFT)
SINEAD GECAS (RIGHT)
Room 3 2

6
SAMUEL MCCOY (LEFT)
PHOTOGRAPH & WORKS BY
ELIZABETH DELFS (RIGHT)
Room 3 3

bricolage of product, furniture and fashion is interactive – suggesting altered ways of making/wearing/using. Through her exhibition format, Tan allows the prospective consumer to define the functions of the products they are interacting with.

Alister Yiap, the designer case study for ROOM 2, is a jewellery designer who explores the junction where jewelry and garment meet. Through questioning the conventions of jewelry materials and production techniques, Yiap's 'runway couture' represents the transformative potential of object design as it moves away from the body towards standalone sculpture. Yiap's designs create three-dimensional objects that carry the memory of the human form to create new design narratives. Designers who successfully cross the boundaries of their discipline are better equipped to develop expertise across disciplines because they seek alternative approaches to find new outcomes.

By using new materials and engaging in an interdisciplinary approach Yiap's work explores the creation of what Shanken (2005) refers to as "boundary objects", capable of transcending the limits of any one discipline. Student works that were selected to be exhibited alongside Yiap in ROOM 2 showed innovative explorations into non-fashion materials and construction processes, constructing new narratives which offered the exhibition viewer more complex readings of their work.

Designer case study Elizabeth Delfs, exhibited in ROOM 3, presented three "anthropomorphic figures" that reflected an absence of the body. Delfs' intricately manipulated textile forms provide a "new experience in beauty relating to fashion and design with a delicate sense of equivoque." (Schilo, 2010, p29) Delfs' work explores the interaction between the organic and the inorganic and the bodies place within the built environment. The

work she exhibited for 3 ROOMS encapsulated the more sensual elements of her vision with ethereal fabrics that vacillated between two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional sculptures. The exhibited student works that responded to Delfs' sculptural forms similarly blur the line between the conceptual polarities of object/surface, permanent/ephemeral, gender/genderless, sculpture/garment. Student responses moved beyond the casual creation of structural forms or aesthetically pleasing fashion related objects to showcase a variety of outcomes ranging from film to photography, lighting, sculpture and textiles.

The practice of the three contributing artists and participating students similarly explored the fringes of various disciplines of study from fashion and textiles, to interior, product, and interactive design; the exhibited works investigating the relationships between art and



technology, fashion and the body. 3 ROOMS: Object Design + the Body relied on contributors to draw upon their existing knowledge to integrate ideas, synthesise similarities and produce new outcomes that blur the perspective of fashion. Participating students were selected based on their ability to blur the boundaries between commercial and conceptual fashion, and finding parallels between their own perspectives and those of their chosen designer case studies. For the lecturers from Curtin University and LASALLE College of the Arts, this exciting project challenged students enrolled in their respective fashion programmes to explore fashion from an interdisciplinary

perspective that moved fashion away from its existing ties with garment, production and business to evolve new notions of what fashion is, and can be. The intention of curators and participating designers and students is that these records of personal and collective narrative will remain in future histories to be interpreted and reinterpreted through the process of continued transformation and re-examination of future fashion.

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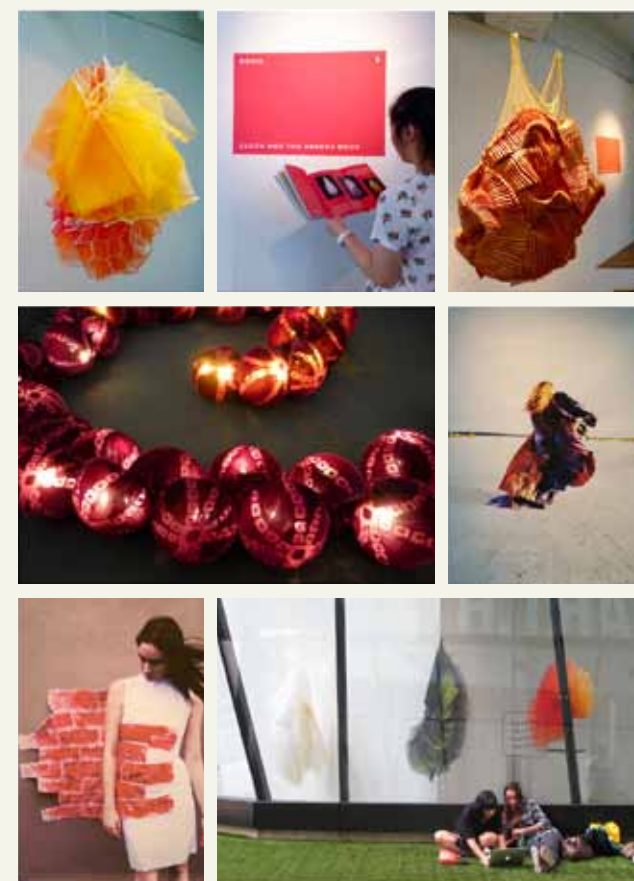
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Emily Wills co-curated 3 ROOMS: Object Design + the Body and lectures at LASALLE College of the Arts in the Fashion Design and Textiles programme. Through her company Surface 1°22, Emily explores the interdisciplinary intersection between image, surface and textiles.



1

SEE NO EVIL

Ian Woo interviews Jeremy Sharma

WRITTEN FOR THE EXHIBITION

Apropos:

Jeremy Sharma

12 April – 11 May 2012
Gallery 2

BY IAN WOO

PART ONE

IW: The word “exercises” comes to mind when I look at your new paintings and mixed media surfaces made within the last two years. I use the word “exercises” based on the serial nature of your works, where an exploration of perception and surface is repeated and varied in a spontaneous manner, making several attempts at engaging with similarities and differences from painting to painting. I will start with three questions: How do you start, and what variations do you work towards when making a series of works? What leads you to end a series and start another?

JS: I always start off with an idea. An ideal in my head, but the idea always shifts with the reality of making a painting. One process informs the other. The spectrum paintings started off from a colour swatch on my computer which I attempted to recreate, not represent, but recreate in paint, with the analogy of paint: pixels are pixels, paint is paint. I could never quite get what I really wanted; you never get what you want, but then something interesting happens, and that chance or accident informs much more.

Similarly that led to the greys, because the colours were getting too messed up and muddy, so I pushed it the other way, similar processes pushed to different extremes. A lot happens out of what I couldn't get originally. The wax-cast magazines came out of my fascination with the nude or figure. I just cannot paint one anymore, not that I can't; I can do it quite easily, but I'm not interested in that. I'm not interested in say, seeing an apple and then painting an apple. I'm not

interested in a blank canvas. I want to work off something that already exists in the world. I think a lot about the dialogue in creating a painting. The postcards were done with the remainder of the paint from making the *Gaussian*, hence the title *Parergon*, because they exist outside what I set out to achieve. Ironically those became just as important. The Gaussians were really about extracting colour and data to create some sort of atmosphere through this mechanical striations, sort of like a 21st-century Turner but more mathematical. It didn't matter where they came from; the paintings became their own, but their titles are sort of entry points, traces if you will.

I am opposed to the idea of the masterpiece, the heroic. I don't think of style when creating a work, I prefer concepts and philosophical ideas that deal with perception. You know the filmmaker Robert Bresson, who made his actors repeat multiple takes of what they were doing until their performance was stripped to a purer language of cinema – that's how I see my paintings going, in terms of serialism. The first painting starts off very enthusiastic and such, but repeating that in the 8th or 14th painting, something happens beyond me, and I only select what is best. It's frustrating, not to mention very expensive, but I am obsessive like that.

It may look easy, but it never was. I think in terms of variations and not improvisations, so it's more classical in that sense; like in music where there are variations of a theme or chord, but the structure remains the same.

IW: You use the words “purer language” as well as “mechanical” in relation to painting. Bresson pushed the actors to an extreme in rehearsals to make them lose their sense of control so as to unlearn habits and discover another sphere of consciousness – the indeterminate. It reminds me of John Cage's idea of indeterminacy where he is obsessed with ways to remove any form of the lyrical or the beautiful associated with bodily expression so as to reach another paradigm. It is interesting to note that many of your new paintings have little or no trace of the brush as a traditional hand-rendering device. The brush marks, if apparent, always assume the form of a single sweep appearing from one edge of the surface to another. There are of course the brushless grey paintings, which remind me of windows and blocked light filters. Would you say “pure” painting is to highlight the phenomena of the physical world?

JS: I would tread carefully when saying “pure” (only in relation to Bresson), because paradoxes and contradictions loom over the paintings like a dark cloud. It was never about purity, if you know what I mean. The “indeterminate” and “a different sphere of consciousness” seem like apt descriptions. People will talk about surface, materiality and process; however, for me those are not ends in themselves. The indeterminacy is controlled and not given to entropy. I am not interested in losing control or the paint cracking up or spilling, or sagging over or out of the frame, or the painting becoming more than a painting. I like how the four sides govern the painting because I still see painting in terms of pictures, images. Only the postcards have a strong trace of the hand, or rather a knife. Someone mentioned “attack” and that's it; I attacked the postcards there and then. The grey paintings, and the Gaussians, because of the disappearance of the hand – you could even look at them through a photographic code and hence their references to (and these are comments I've gotten): X-rays, celluloid, film, the point just before a Polaroid assumes an image (my favourite!), windows, mirrors and now, blocked light filters. With the greys, it's even harder; you don't quite know what you are looking at. There are numerous phenomena here, especially in terms of light, matter, and gravity.

IW: Let's move on to the postcards, which to me, assume double readings of identities. One notices the historic image or in some instances, a found image. The way it is treated with paint on top makes the content of the image unimportant, subjected as a background, a backdrop to a colour-matched secretion of the image, viewed like a suspended action of morphing captured in time. I also feel as if the identity of the image on the postcard has been merged with the substance of paint. It is perhaps a mutation of elements, a game of parody, to cover up, yet the paint seems to pull the contents into itself (the paint). It confounds one's recognition of space, content, and matter. I have used the word



1

JEREMY SHARMA
*Enamels (vertical
grey, decalcomania)*
#1, #2, #5, #6

2012
Enamel paint on aluminium
composite
172 x 115 cm each

2

JEREMY SHARMA
Pantheon
2012
Oil, beeswax, magazine
32 x 23.5 cm

2



3

3
JEREMY SHARMA
**Parergon (landscape:
Golden Mile)**
2011
Oil on postcard
10.5 x 15 cm



4

4
JEREMY SHARMA
Gaussian (nudes)
2011
Oil on postcard
10.5 x 15 cm

5
JEREMY SHARMA
**Variations Suite 4 -
Yellow Light Achillea
(Golden) and
Variations Suite 3 -
Yellow Light Abelia**
2011
Oil on linen
each 153 x 183 cm

“negation” before, but now I am thinking more of a “possession” of image. Is the matching of paint to the colour of the image on the card an instinctive process? How is the relationship formed?

JS: Double readings, failure of representation... I have to find something in the image to respond to in the history of images – a vocabulary of portraits and landscapes – like a history of representations that I work on. I like the idea of working on reproductions. When I was applying paint or swiping it off, I wasn't really

thinking of negation or iconoclasm or revealing or concealing. It's not a game of peek-a-boo. Charles [Merewether] used a word 'dis/close' which comes close to my intention. But 'dis/closure' applies more to a reading of the work when it is finished. It is closer to something more primal, an impulse to smear, why and how we mark surfaces or images. Colour and sensuality could heighten the desired effect. They weren't meant to be serious at first; it was something done in jest. They are, in a way, photo-based paintings and again, they concern the image. I remember first seeing

Richter's overpainted photographs and thinking they were so wrong, painting on top of a photograph; it's almost taboo or even cheating! I look at this whole uneasy relationship between painting and photography – painting imitating photography, photography imitating painting. I think we have had enough of that already. I am now very comfortable with them being themselves and working together, they don't even have to integrate and merge as one. They are both indexical in how they achieve a final identity. Painting is always seen as a laboured process whereas the photograph is instantaneous; can I say I am reaching a median point here?

IW: You brought up an interesting perspective about how one can understand an artist's intentions before and after the completion of a work. In relation to the casualness in your application of paint on the photograph, there is almost desperation to block the image with the act of painting, like an impulse to remove/shift its identity, to disengage it from its function. I guess I would see that as a personal engagement, which is perhaps not necessarily related to the final outcome. I also find that your work does not deal with notions of representation as such, but rather a return to formal ideas about absolutism in art-making. I would say that you are making images that go through several stages of filters. Complex filters that you hope can restore purity. Donald Judd would be proud!

But really, it is about painting in order to restore the essence of a picture object, subjugating content to a point of flatness, in order that we return to the beginnings of the frame and surface image. You physically flatten all reference to representation to its purest form—that of surface, materiality and distortion, like in the *Variations Suites*. In those works, you give the essence of landscape and atmosphere by completely removing all content and imagery to the point of a blur, same with the *Gaussian (nudes)*

and *Gaussian (seascapes)*. The blurring creates new content. If I can use a reference to music it is akin to the use of distortion in transforming the sound production of a clean signal of a guitar to that of a completely different presence. In reference to Richter's use of blurring, how would you differentiate your use of this act? This is especially interesting when we relook at the ideals of early minimalism and even abstract expressionism. Are you wiping our everyday consumption of images so as to enable us to return to or revisit ideas of utopian endgames?

JS: I understand what you are saying and what you are getting at. How do I put this? It is not so much abstraction but what one is unable to represent by blocking, blurring and erasing. It is as much about form as it is about the content. It is sort of ideological that way. As I have said, it's not about purity or absolutism, though I may have thought of that or given the impression of that before, or maybe you and I see them differently. And it's not as cold, perfect and industrial as in Judd's brand of minimalism. I like the human endeavour and indeterminacy in creating the paintings; they are certainly imperfect and relative to

time and environment and medium, so it's not quite absolute, almost. I like “almost”. So we return to Cage again... I don't listen to a lot of Cage, but he is a good example, and the analogy of the guitar signal is interesting, and you are right, if anything it's more of sound than music, more signal than noise. The blurring is a strategy to achieve a desired state of flatness, you could call it a utopian endgame if you wish. I know Richter works on a canvas until he cannot go on, and of course I cannot compare myself with someone who has painted for almost 50 years, but the fundamental difference is I do not stay as long in the painting. I end the game a lot quicker, it cannot be overdone or too worked upon, and it's a lot more mechanical than you think. People think there are many layers in the Gaussians, but in fact there is only one. The repetition of the gesture is key to the work. Signals, filters, transformation, and repetition all point to contemporary experience. The works acknowledge the existence of computers and digitisation, multiplicity, fragmentation and technology, because I cannot see how they would exist without these experiences.

IW: I was thinking about Judd and Twombly – how both are

from opposite poles of aesthetic concerns and cannot agree. Yet, your work somehow reminds me of the characteristics that these two artists possess, the weight bearing more on Twombly's romance towards innocence. You mentioned “almost”, which brings to mind the example of an axis, where ideas between two opposites shift and adjust themselves. Do you think that contemporary painting needs to find new experiences by reconnecting the network of genres within the history of painting? To reconnect would be to unplug some links or reestablish new connections. Your concern for digital and technological aesthetics seems to also point to the way in which aspects of contemporary design have found their way into the composite of new painting. However, is the composite a mutant? Or is the engineered whole seamless? I guess this is an open question, which attempts to address our constant search for new imagery as painters involved in contemporary art practice.

JS: That's a good way to put it. Especially with Twombly, his work exists beyond technology, right from the beginning, from antiquity or



6

JEREMY SHARMA

Gaussian (seascape)

2012

Oil on aluminum composite

28 x 31.5 cm



6

even earlier, out of cave paintings. Innocence! Like a child learning to speak, write, or draw again. Opposites and shifts, ambivalence... I link this to a certain kind of doubt when you paint, that unknown that you dive into. "Almost" connotes an in-between, like a precipice, or a kind of becoming or otherness. I am thinking how painting could be more relevant in contemporary practice, or at least how it is relevant for me to continue to paint. Aren't we all already some form of mutant, cyborg or really slow computers? Yet I think what I am doing is related to something more primal. If you knew, you wouldn't paint. You can only try.

IW: Speaking of cyborgs, you mentioned at your talk that you often imagine that you are making these works for a science-fiction movie set (or something to that extent). Could you talk about the relationship between imagination and the production of artworks? Again we are referring back to the ideas about the artist's personal processes and that of the viewers. What I am interested in is the way we artists often need to psyche ourselves up to shift into another realm so as to fully zone out from the realities of life, in some kind of serious daydreaming or play-acting.

JS: Paintings for spaceships! That's what I mentioned. You know the black monolith from Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, where the apes gather around and in the future at the end of the film, it appears again. It sums up modernity in a perfect symbol; it's a mystery, a spectre. It's a kind of an unknown; it doesn't exist in any time but you have seen it happening in the past, present and [you will see it happening in the] future. It knows no culture or history. Everything is blanked out and erased and the spaceship is a vessel that is a liminal space between past and future, known and unknown, so it has got to be devoid of culture or history and has to continuously be in the present, but sometimes you have traces of humanity. Like that fantastic plant life in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* at the beginning and in the spacecraft – in fact you get that sense in all of his films, well the ones that I have watched, if memory serves me well. That is exciting for me! But back to this science fiction idea, I think it also has something to do with my recent predilection for synthetic paints and composite surfaces.

PART TWO

IW: Previously you mentioned that your work has neither history nor culture. I was just looking at your new exhibition at Grey Projects, and as I was in the brighter room, it struck me that the black resin paintings seem to work very well with the frames of the doors and the windows. The paintings seem to function like an in-between fixture of those two specific items (doors and windows) of space and time. It occurred to me that the idea of non-history and non-culture is because your paintings are reflective, always absorbing everything around them and they therefore have no constant, which pertains to their characteristics of having no sense of baggage. This is especially true with the ones that have no imagery or markings on them. Is that a fair observation?

JS: You've really opened a can of worms there! I think I said that in reference to the monolith in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The reflection is a perceptual phenomenon that perhaps suggests what you have mentioned. Grey, for me, has all the colours of the spectrum. Light waves, when

combined, will translate into pure white light, but that's not what you get with paint or physical material. They turn grey, an ambiguous colour that evokes no emotional response that you would normally get from pure intense colours. So it's not black, and it's not resin as you mentioned. It's pure enamel paint. The grey is dark like asphalt, the way I want it, or a sort of urban concrete and iron grey. They absorb light as much as they reflect and thus have a kind of effect of being continuously in the present. Don't you think they work like echoes? There is an interesting anecdote of how Theodor Adorno had the auditorium where he taught at the Goethe-Universität in Frankfurt painted grey to aid concentration.

The white walls in some parts of the exhibition space are a nice contrast against the dark theatrical drama in the grey room where the paintings have more incidental details and

textures. The blindest paintings are in the white room. I actually love daylight on my work; it's my favourite kind of light. It is natural, ever-changing, ambient light that the paintings react to. I had the windows, doorway and space in mind in regards to space, frames and structure of verticals and horizontals. In reference to what you have just said about a work that has no history and culture, I was trying to think of statements I read that somewhat relates to what I'm interested in. There are certainly many tangents on which to go off, and when your neurons are fired up, there are a billion thoughts in your head, but you end up saying nothing. But these are the ones I can remember:

1. "Art is art. Everything else is everything else." – Ad Reinhardt
2. "Science fiction films are not about science. They are about disaster, which is one of the oldest subjects

of art." – Susan Sontag.

3. "Content is a glimpse of something, an encounter like a flash. It's very tiny – very tiny, content." – Willem de Kooning
4. "I believe that the quintessential task of every painter in any time has been to concentrate on the essential." – Gerhard Richter
5. "The fondest, least plausible dream of Modernist art and literature was of a world without memory: a cultural tabula rasa from which all trace of the styles of the past had been erased. The arts of evacuation imagined by the likes of Samuel Beckett, Yves Klein and John Cage aspired to a deliberate vacuity: a vacant stage, an empty gallery, a silent orchestra." – Brian Dillon
6. "I know one thing: that I know nothing." – Socrates



All the statements above are true and at the same time paradoxical. I want to create art of the highest order that operates on many levels of consciousness. I want it to exist for itself. I think art functions as a belief system that takes the place in the absence of science, religion or ritual, or a dependency on chemicals or activities that take you to a different consciousness. However, everything else is not quite everything else and they are not quite separate, they creep into the consciousness of your making, and I also want to make work that is closer to life, or life's narrative, or the everyday, or the present, but yet I want to exalt it to a level that makes it art.

There was always a political and social dimension to what constructivism, post-war art, abstraction, minimalism, the avant-garde and conceptual art was responding to, and I guess I am responding to an environment and the generation I live in. In the short ten years or so that I've been painting, I have gone through the movements and understanding modernism through my own practice, not just where painting comes from, but where I come from and trying to exhaust every

possibility of what painting means to me. It was very important for me to discover that through exploration in the studio. I really don't know of anyone else who has worked in a more 'schizophrenic' manner as I have in such a short time, on top of my performance and sound works with KYTV [Kill Your Television] and my music and video works. I think it's symptomatic of the generation I come from, considering the rate and speed the nation was becoming modernised. We were the first to really utilise and understand the power of the Internet as a globalised entity and an information-gathering tool.

In reference to Walter Benjamin, the Internet has completely revolutionised how we look at, think about, and make art. I really believe you can transform an intangible reality from search engines and convert this information into tangible objects and artworks. The speed at which images and information proliferates is just crazy. Painting requires you to slow down, which is the hardest thing to do today despite its popularity. If you ask me, I don't necessarily need sketchbooks anymore when I have computers to help me remember, jot down notes, even construct and make drawings. The Internet knows no boundaries and is lawless and more democratic than the most democratic nations. We live in such a controlled environment in Singapore, where everything is rigorously planned, predetermined and projected to you in minute detail. Everything has a formula; it is modular, systemised and strategised. I think it's the very thing that kills and at the same time spurs creativity. We almost don't have individual voices and yet it alarms me how vocal and uncensored we are on online forums. My point is that these visible and invisible systems, structures, and, images go into my subconscious.

People have mentioned the radical shifts in my practice; galleries don't know where to place me. But if you look at what I was dealing with before in my earlier paintings, they have always come from an existential point of view, not of doom and gloom – I



have always been interested in the idea of death, catastrophe, destruction, apocalypse and end/beginning, something more primeval and now, with my renewed interests in form and material, and ideas of time, space, repetition and return. I really want to strip it down and concentrate on the basest level, and the encounter with the artwork is very important for me. I am not a fan of de Kooning, but I understand what he was saying, and he was very sporting in letting Rauschenberg, of whom I'm fond of, erase his drawings almost to the point of disappearing completely (and for that matter, it was ironic, based on what de Kooning had said). For me, Rauschenberg one-upped de Kooning with due respect. I was also thinking of Malevich's black square, which was so symbolic and reminded me of some dark matter; it's almost as symbolic as the cross. Buddhist philosophy comes to mind – it explores the void as an in-between of what is there to us; what we know as 'us' is an accumulation of

memories, knowledge, culture and history. These are only assumptions made by the mind when the foundation of consciousness lies without any pre-determined baggage, simply put, to know nothing at all.

Then there was the whole idea of the dematerialisation of the art object in the '60s: minimalism and the faceless impersonality yet fetishistic of industrially made objects à la Donald Judd that reflects capitalism and consumer culture. I wanted to make something like that but with the human hand and see what kind of dialogue that arises, something between process and product. My work is not industrial other than its support, which was custom built, and because they are not industrially painted, they cannot withstand any sort of force or violence exerted on the surface. They are extremely fragile and vulnerable and a fingernail could put a scratch on the smooth slick of paint, because they are not

sprayed in layers but poured. They are not protected by any lacquer, coating or resin. I had to create special boxes for them just to protect their surface after the hard lessons learnt. I could possibly improve the boxes in the future and perhaps the protective cover that sits just above the surface during packing and only exposing them for the first time during exhibition. The title *Exposition* was a play on that.

It is also a hidden reference to what Dan Flavin said about his fluorescent light works being an exposition instead of an installation and you'd think of that as an exhibition of manufactured products. This is the pure language I am after. Putting the paintings in a space is like putting them on stage as actors and seeing what they do; it is the audience that interprets them. I did not set out to make works like these; they came out after a lot of thought and refinement and many paintings that did not see the light of day. Painting is a practice steeped in mimesis, which is basically trying to represent what you see. It could be based on a still life, photograph, or another painting, hence the influence of past painters in your work. I guess process painting and abstraction could be seen as a way out of that, and I thought that it was important that a blank state involves the viewer and the environment much more. I don't think anyone starts out painting blank panels or monochromes. One arrives at that. And I have finally arrived at a point where I could throw out the baggage and head for somewhere new.

IW: Your idea of Singapore as a controlled environment makes me think that it is a psychological war zone. This war zone makes Singapore an apt location for interesting art to happen. I like the idea of no-memory because it is impossible but yet contradictory. The reason for this is that we live in times where virtual memories are compressed and at the same speed which cancellation occurs. What you mentioned about the Internet as a possible utopia, a kind of fictional democracy, is the

exact thing which could collapse in relation to the inability of our body to cope, to match the speed of a machine's perfect memory. So your paintings and objects seem to signal a seemingly perfect end, an endgame with the trace of humankind. I have been interested in the relation between the machine and the body in my own work. I see the history of the perfect machine and humans as an endless relation, in search for systems, knowledge, the unknown, the map of which we made, destroyed and remade: our endgames. Do you see your work as one of our endgames?

JS: Maybe not. Recently I read an article on provisional painting being a response to the lofty ideals of modernism and end paintings like Reinhardt's and others'. Provisional painters were not interested in completing their paintings and their gestures are contingent on the moment of making, and they weren't so much concerned with the whole baggage of history and as such were freer to do whatever they wanted. End painters like Rodchenko and the Constructivists were serious and saw painting as a kind of death and worked towards reduction and the monochrome, towards a logical conclusion. I am not too comfortable with the idea of provisional painting, neither do I consider myself an end painter. I think painting has so much more to offer if we possibly just stop seeing them as paintings but seeing them as art. I like what the future holds and I like the object, production and matter of painting. I see myself more as a conceptual painter who responds to the current milieu. I see my works as extensions of machines, culture and memory. They are tied to a vision of a personal utopia, one that starts as a desire for that space, but it becomes less individualistic, which is opposed to what most painters build their identity on. The purity and perfection strive for the ideal form in painting but yet at times you want to disturb them. I always liken it to a slow computer. Take for example Glenn Gould's rendition of J.S. Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. He played them to a mechanical perfection as a child

prodigy, and when he played them again as an old man, they became slower and more thoughtful. He summarised it well when he said, "The purpose of art is not the release of a momentary ejection of adrenaline but is, rather, the gradual lifelong construction of a state of wonder and serenity." At the end of the day when the viewer steps into the gallery to look at a painting of mine, they could be moved or fascinated by it or regard it as a blank, dull object and pass by it in two seconds. I am beginning to care less about these things.

IW: I was told that you have been asked to do a work for the upcoming Singapore Biennale. Congratulations! What are you planning to make? What kind of space are you being asked to consider? Since it's difficult or perhaps challenging to foresee conditions at this early stage of planning, I would like you to consider this question as an imaginary press release.

JS: Without divulging too much, I am making something at the intersection of print, drawing, sculpture and painting. In a nutshell, it's basically turning the transmissions of dead stars into large slabs, like slices of eternity. They will be pairing me with a little-known Indonesian artist, whose work I'm also excited about. We will be exhibiting in the same gallery at the Singapore Art Museum. It's very different but yet is tied to the same interests and concerns that have occupied me for years. It is tied to my belief of making works that make themselves, and to my practice as a reflection of the age of mechanical, industrial and digital reproduction and interconnectivity.

....

Ian Woo is a painter working in the language of abstraction with an interest in painting's inherent ability to suggest modes of representation. He is senior lecturer with the Postgraduate Programme in the Faculty of Fine Arts at LASALLE College of the Arts.

Coded Transformations
11 January – 3 February 2013
Gallery 1

Exhibition by Andreas Schlegel,
in Collaboration with Dhiya Muhammad,
Vladimir Todorovic, Mohamad Riduan,
Mithru Vigneshwara and Judith Lee



**THE
BLEEDING**

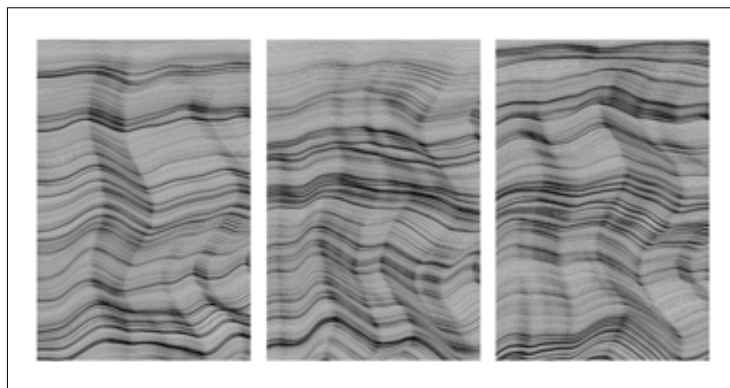
BY JOLEEN LOH

EDGE

OF ART¹

While software has too often been undermined as merely an instrument for executing pre-existing neutrally formulated tasks, there is certainly more to the significance of software art than the argument that these tools brought about by digital technology are what makes it relevant to contemporary society. There is an extended potential of software for contemporary artistic thought, which artists have continually demonstrated in their forms of cultural expression through the usage of software and new technologies. At the same time these works and their driving principles, to varying degrees, have art historical precedents or are informed by conceptual practices.

New media artist Andreas Schlegel's practice traverses the shifting and blurry terrains of art and new technologies, playing a significant role in the shaping of media art in Singapore. Born in Germany and based in Singapore, his artistic practice extends the use of emerging and open source technology simultaneously on several fronts, often seeking to generate new forms of audio, visual and physical output. His latest solo exhibition, *Coded Transformations*, at Gallery 1 in January 2013 brought together a number of works that explore software and emerging technologies as a cultural form in order to create a dialogue between the digital and physical domains of art. Through a series of clever experiments, new computing and manufacturing technologies are used to transform physical input to produce new forms of cultural objects or formats. The methods and technologies employed here, despite being used by artists or within the digital domain for years, have not yet attained mainstream status in contemporary art today.



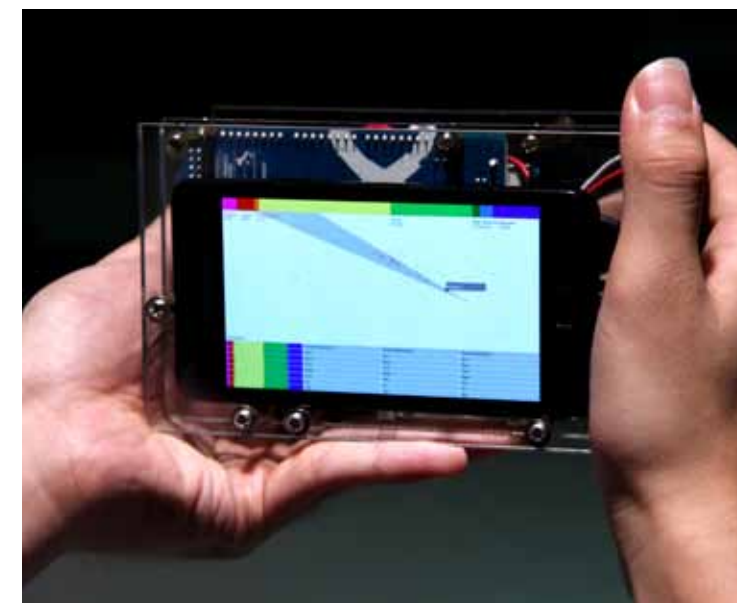
In *RandomNoiseFlow*, Schlegel explores aesthetics and forms of natural hazards through the mediation of computer software. The work, a triptych of large black and white prints, consists of an immense traffic of tiny rectangular particles generated by the program. At a distance, they simulate and aestheticise the flow within natural structures, from lava to rock strata. Upon closer inspection, we see the particle is a tiny white rectangle with a one-pixel black outline. What is apparent in these reproductions is a unique computer-generated image, which is given by algorithms and inscribed in the language of prototyping machines. On the one hand, there is interplay between an active setting of parameters and defining of algorithms by Andreas and his collaborators on the other, the active 'participation' of the computer, the medium. The work examined the subliminal aspects of natural phenomena, converting physical input into an aesthetic experience mediated by the

ANDREAS SCHLEGEL
RandomNoiseFlow
2010
Custom software and print
Dimensions variable

prototyping by machines and custom software. The imagistic, beautiful and invented mutations of natural phenomena position the work on an artistic borderline between abstraction and custom software programming.

Discussions surrounding the historical precursors for software or generative art have often focused upon Fluxus art and Happenings, both of which rely on instructions or a set of rules.² As with many Fluxus projects, Schlegel's work problematises notions of authenticity and uniqueness by removing or blurring the artist's role in artwork production. Even if the physical and visual manifestations of digital art conceal the layer of data and code, any 'digital image' is essentially produced by instructions and the software that was used to manipulate it. In *RandomNoiseFlow*, the algorithms are used to position a set of particles in a 2D-space over time, and parameters are set to determine the aesthetics of the outcome. It is these layers of 'code' and set of determined parameters that form a conceptual level of the work, connecting it to previous conceptual experiments by artists who share the same strategies – of instructions, dematerialisation, appropriation, for example – such as Marcel Duchamp, John Cage and Sol LeWitt, whose works are based on the execution of instructions.³

MITHRU VIGNESHWARA
Aleph of Emotions
2012
Custom software, custom
hardware, Arduino, compass,
potentiometer, smart phone



Schlegel's concerns with human-computer interactions in the context of the everyday unfolded through works like *Aleph of Emotions*, a project by Mithru Vigneshwara.⁴ As an attempt to archive emotions, data is collected from Twitter's public feeds over one month based on keywords defining emotions. It is presented together with an interactive camera-like interface that reacts to a particular direction and focuses on a particular city. The information collected is then color-coded according to Robert Plutchik's *Wheel of Emotions* and linked to specific geolocations. Once all the data was collected, it is visualized into a graph according to countries. The work treated custom software and hardware as fodder for experimentation to explore the relationship between Internet space and geographical organisation and to suggest the possible observable patterns of 'global emotions'. It transformed physical data taken from social networking platforms, processing it through custom software and hardware, before its eventual physical output, that allowing us to contemplate the way in which these applied technologies can affect the way we express or archive ourselves today.

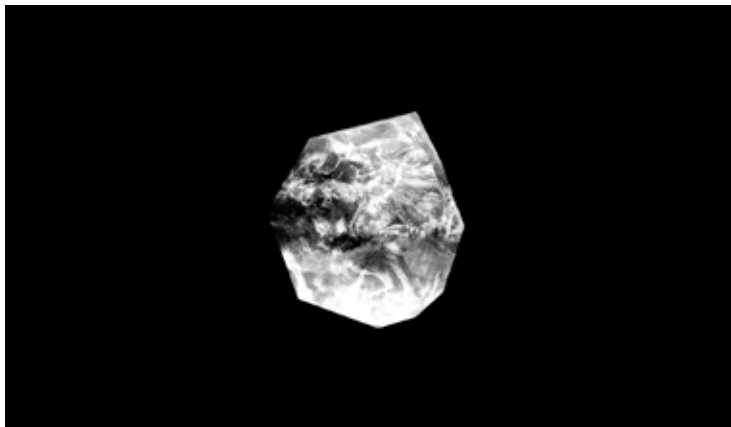
ANDREAS SCHLEGEL,
VLADIMIR TODOROVIC

Formations

2011

Custom software Processing,
OpenGL, Finalcut Pro,
cloud textures

Dimensions variable



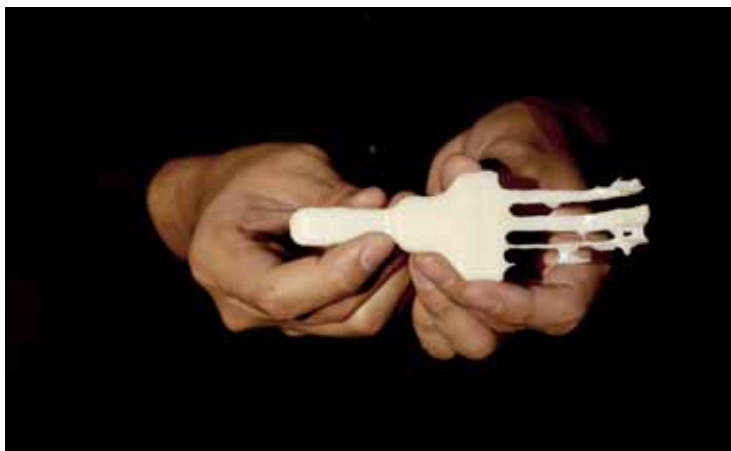
ANDREAS SCHLEGEL,
VLADIMIR TODOROVIC

Syntboutique

2008

VeroWhite Polyjet Resin,
Meshlab software,
custom software

Dimensions variable



This strong focus on the process of transformation is what all of the works in the exhibition share. As with *RandomNoiseFlow*, works like *Formations* and *Syntboutique* all begin with physical input in the form of samples or data sets and undergo a digital process performed by a computer and custom software to be transformed into physical output. It has, as its drive, the need for dialogue about the boundaries between digital and the physical registers.

Another layer to *Coded Transformations* is the reference to politics and commerce. Andreas' use of open source software, DIY process and his display of the assembled parts adhere to an aesthetic and philosophy of resistance to capitalist monopoly of technology, a critique against the assumptions of existing computer and information technologies and its limited set of commands that inhibits autonomy. Unlike proprietary software which does not allow alterations and is expensive, open source systems allow for experimentation, innovation and collaboration. In fact, it is common that the open-source technologies and its users often have communities that organize and share libraries of codes. Open source software has been described as a 'bottom-up' system, rather than 'top-down' systems such as proprietary software (such as those developed by Microsoft Corporation) in which its basis of capitalist monopoly relies heavily on the secrecy of its source code.⁵ Politics and commerce, as Greene suggests, are "often referred to with internet art as it is no straightforward complement to dot.com era capitalism" but is somewhat a counterbalance to its excess and injustices, developing actual alternatives. Schlegel's assembly of parts on the 'DIY Table' such as electronic components, batteries, screws and wires are a deliberate gesture. The equipment laid here, inexpensive and easily obtainable, are enough to assemble various forms of electrical devices, which elsewhere in the commercial market would be expensive and have pre-designed functions.

Coded Transformations demonstrated the significance of the role of software and new media technologies in cultural expression today. Rather than simply a tool to process preset tasks, the works in the exhibition demonstrated the conceptual strategies and the malleability of new technologies that Andreas and his collaborators take advantage of in their artistic processes. Through creating a dialogue between the digital domains and physical formats in art through producing new forms of cultural objects, we are invited to observe the way technology can change the way we produce, consume, collect and memorise today.

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Joleen Loh is a curator and writer.

NOTES

¹ Bleeding edge refers to technology that has been released but is still not ready for or not adopted by the general public due to the fact that it has not been reliably tested. The term 'bleeding edge' was an allusion to the similar terms 'leading edge' and 'cutting edge'.

² Rachel Greene, *Internet Art*, Thames & Hudson, London, 2004, p. 152.

³ *Ibid.*, p.152.

⁴ The Aleph, according to author Jorge Luis Borges refers to a point in the Universe where all other points exist. Therefore, anyone looking at the Aleph could see everything in the Universe at once. Andreas Schlegel, *Coded Transformations* exhibition notes, 2013.

⁵ Greene, 2004, p. 152.

PARALLAX POSTHUMOUSLY

BY URICH LAU



WRITTEN FOR THE EXHIBITION

PARALLAX Between_Borders: Singapore_China 15 – 27 February 2013 Gallery 1

PARALLAX is a visual art exhibition following an expedition-project by five Singaporeans with four invited Chinese artists to respond and create multi-media artworks to the cross-border/cultural thematic approach. The idea of the project was to journey to the Sino-Korean Friendship Bridge, also nicknamed “The Broken Bridge”. It is situated in Dandong City in the province of Liaoning China and sits on the Yalu River that divides China and North Korea. The Bridge is the physical link between the two countries and from where one can see the shores of North Korea and its quiet city of Sinuiji.

For over a week in the month of June 2012, the group of Singaporean artists—Urich Lau, Jeremy Hiah, Lim Shengen, Sai Hua Kuan and Teow Yue Han, accompanied by Chinese artist Cheng Guangfeng and two Singaporean artist-assistants Marcel Gaspar and Victoria Tan—embarked on the journey to explore various destinations on their way to their final destination, the Broken Bridge in Dandong City. The other Chinese

artists invited to respond to the theme were Lin Dong, Yan Shi and Shen Shaomin. Artworks created for this project were later presented in the exhibition *Mirror of Otherness* at Gaodi Gallery in Shenyang City, co-curated by Lau and Chinese writer Zhang Yadong in July.

PARALLAX was the following and final exchange-exhibition in Singapore curated by Lau and Zhang at the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore in February 2013, to reflect on what was found, seen or experienced from the various locations on the journey. It was also an attempt to realise some of the universal but somewhat clichéd ‘artistic ideals’—art by process, by research and the creation of original works of art. The exhibition was also coming from a series of exchanges conceptualised and curated by Cheng and Lau that began with *Videologue* at the Sunshine International Art Museum in Beijing in March 2011, and the second *Videologue* at the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore in February 2012.

PARALLAX is art by process and research: to make sense of the methods and demonstrations employed by the artists. Concept is intangible and a product from the stages or levels of process. To investigate and question cultural diversities, differences and impacts

with the outside world was not that easy. Then unusual things started to unfold. For instance, while ordering our food, the Korean waitress persistently attempted to push for certain dishes. It was not because these were more expensive nor were specials; she was just pushing it. Another extraordinary instance

was to be based on individual viewpoints and assimilations of the context and environment.

To state an example, one of the Singaporean artists, Lim Shengen, bought a vintage looking telescope (almost a rip-off from a pirate movie) from an antique shop while on

one would find in a society with cross-border interactions from two or more nations. There is no culture but only the context to which one is bound. The only ‘cultural’ significance that surfaces is when people from different contexts meet. It would either arouse curiosity, intrigue, questions or create friction.

We gained a very different perspective when we reached our final destination of Dandong City, where the artists went for dinner at a particular North Korean restaurant that was immediately recognisable with its distinctive national flag at the entrance.

The restaurant was a spacious dining space with large round tables that could easily accommodate a small banquet, and only one table was occupied by patrons. The interior was sparsely decorated and adorned with golden and jade-like ornaments, and there was a television hung on the wall showing an old Russian film. It felt like we were back in the pre-Internet age when communication

was when Cheng made a dare to Jeremy Hiah that there were no other channels than the channel showing the old Russian film. Cheng claimed that the TV has only one channel. A disbelieving Hiah called out to the waitress and asked her to change the channel, to which he got an unapologetic response, “There are no other channels!” from the waitress. The food was fantastic, but we ate quickly and left the restaurant.

PARALLAX is art for originality: to create new and original works based on the experiences during this trip. But the underlying approach that was rationalised as the need to travel on such a road trip to the Northeastern parts of China along the border of North Korea came initially from Cheng who suggested making the trip to create original works based on the relations of the bordering landscapes between two nations and in the Singaporean artists’ perspectives, reflect on how it might correlate to the Singapore-Malaysia bordering landscapes. The perspective

the trip. He used it to record short videos on his iPhone, zooming into the opposite shores of North Korea from the side of the Broken Bridge. Those videos became the exhibits for the show as ‘peek-holes’ depicting unsettling scenes of the other side.

And for Cheng, whose idea it was to bring the Singaporean artists to visit the Broken Bridge, was to relook the subject matter of his performance video piece *Bridge*, where he played a tune of ‘Auld Lang Syne’ on the violin with the strings attached onto his hands with fishhooks. It was shown in the collaborative exhibition *Videologue* in 2012 at the ICAS, and the video became the catalyst for the journey.

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Urich Lau is the co-curator of *PARALLAX*. He is a video artist and a lecturer at the Faculty for the Creative Industries, LASALLE College of the Arts.

CURATED BY URICH LAU
AND ZHANG YADONG

Exhibiting artists:

Cheng Guangfeng, Jeremy Hiah, Urich Lau, Lim Shengen, Lin Dong, Sai Hua Kuan, Shen Shaomin, Teow Yue Han, and Yan Shi

PRELIMINARY



WRITTEN FOR THE EXHIBITION

Encounter: The Royal Academy in Asia

14 September – 21 October 2012

Gallery 1, Gallery 2, TriSpace, Praxis Space,
Project Space and Brother Joseph McNally Gallery

ENCOUNTERS

BY VIVIANA MEJÍA

Encounter: The Royal Academy in Asia, presented at the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore in association with Fortune Cookie Projects, featured 75 works of art by 23 Royal Academicians and 24 artists from across Asia. The exhibition featured art created in an extensive array of media and genres: from painting, sculpture and installation, to video and photography. The curatorial team comprised of a convergence of both regions: Paul Huxley, Michael Craig-Martin, Richard Wilson, Lisa Milroy, Charles Merewether and Josef Ng. For the first time since its launch in 1769 and after 244 editions, the Royal Academy's annual Summer Exhibition was shown in Asia, with the intent to not only create an encounter but to initiate a dialogue between the artists, works and local audiences. Traditionally, the artworks shown in the annual exhibition are selected through an open submission; for this occasion, however, participating artists were invited by members of the Royal Academy to present their creations.

The Royal Academicians selected for the exhibition are discernable representatives of the legacy of British modern and contemporary art. Paul Huxley is part of the generation of artists influenced by post-Cubism, exploring painting beyond abstract formalism. Albert Irwin made his way through the intensity of visceral emotion and colour of Abstract Expressionism. Richard Long, in addition to creating art out of walks into the landscapes, created archetypal shapes that allude to organic forms and materials. Jenny Saville's depictions of oversized bodies are graphic, raw and intense images that complicate traditional paradigms of female beauty and femininity, while Tacita Dean's work translates contemplative instances into 16mm colour anamorphic film and optical sound. These are just some punctuated instances of the history of British art, which have been brought to Singapore with the aim of engaging local audiences. Audiences may well be aware of these famous artworks and artists, though only a few have had the chance to experience what the German critic Walter Benjamin would refer to as their 'aura'.

Eleven countries were chosen from Asia: Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, South Korea, Vietnam, China, Taiwan, Japan, Philippines, Cambodia and Thailand. The 24 artists from the region have established regional and international presence, and they explore diverse genres and media in their practices. Among the more well-known artists in the group are Sopheap Pich (Cambodia), Lani Maestro (Philippines), Tiffany Chung (Vietnam), Chen Chieh-Jen (Taiwan), and Ho Tzu Nyen (Singapore). In his curatorial essay *An Encounter*, Charles Merewether explains, "What is distinctive about the region and the artists chosen is the degree of both or either a historical consciousness and conceptual reflexivity about their practice." These artists were selected, because their work is reflective of an intellectual and critical engagement that often resonates into political, social and cultural spheres. While there are artists in the exhibition who contemplate and dissect issues such as oppression, dictatorship and violence, other artists explore aesthetic languages that are more removed from overt political stances. However, one might generalise and say that there is a predominantly strong post-colonial tone – sometimes more vocal, other times more subtle. The juxtaposition of these diverse works from the region in the exhibition helps to demystify certain Western attitudes towards Asia, an issue Merewether consciously wanted to avoid in the curation: "there is, by and large, a lack of knowledge and appreciation of the texture and depth of contemporary urban cultures in Asian countries. Not least is the lingering perception in the West that Asia is homogenous and therefore undifferentiated when it comes to a specificity of understanding cultural characteristics and differences."

The Royal Academy of the Arts' Summer Exhibition is traditionally shown at Burlington House, a building whose architectural heritage contributes to the solemnity of the event. One of the interesting aspects of the Singapore show is

the contrast of exhibition venues and what happens with the translation from one physical space to the other. The design of the LASALLE College of the Arts campus is suggestive of the Singaporean ideal of modernity and constant transformation. Conceptualising the layout for this show was undoubtedly a challenge, but it also presented a curatorial opportunity. *Encounter* was shown in all seven galleries of LASALLE and was a departure from the more conventional spatial configurations offered by the white-cube like spaces at Burlington. The display allowed visitors to view the exhibition in a non-linear way.

The presentation of Asian and British instances of modernity and contemporaneity in one exhibition will inevitably be haunted by the spectres of centre and periphery. How can a curatorial team create a dialogue where the artworks can converse with one another, and without one cultural discourse imposing itself upon the other? For this to happen, there has to be a highly self-reflexive consciousness of interaction and conversation, and intention and context, where there are multiple points of entry for audiences to engage with the artworks. The *Encounter* exhibition appears to approach these issues not as obstacles but as unresolved curatorial challenges. It is seldom that local and regional audiences have the opportunity to see such an impressive collection, and all presented within a single exhibition. But in some ways the whole exhibition seems more like a survey show, a smorgasbord where seminal pieces from the 'West' are juxtaposed with those from the 'East'. The immediate proximity of the works can confound the viewer or can suggest a divide between cultures. Yet these juxtapositions can also suggest a sense of reciprocity and of tacit understanding between diverse cultural visions and practices. In trying to understand the contrasts within the exhibition, two works came



RUDI MANTOFANI
The Earth and The World
 2009 – 12
 Painted aluminium
 71 x 150 x 80 cm



into mind: Rudi Mantofani's *The Earth and The World* (2012) and Tracey Emin's *Trust Me* (2011) and *Trust Yourself* (2012). Mantofani's *The Earth and The World* seems like an apropos metaphor to reflect on the anxiety of overcoming the stereotypical conjunction of East and West. The tautology in Mantofani's title plays with the two notions that define the planet we live in—they are often used synonymously—but his conjoining the two creates a tension. The artwork is a painted aluminum sculpture of the world composed of two opposing terrestrial globes stretching the latitudes of the planet. It is as if opposing forces were pulling the planet in two different directions or as if there were a dilating angst over the expansion of Asia in the 21st century. Borders are slowly banished and reconfigured.

Tracey Emin is known for her polarising artistic persona and her cross-media works, such as the controversial pieces *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963–1995* (1995) and *My Bed* (1998). She is one of the first female professors of the Royal Academy of Arts. For this exhibition, she presented *Trust Me* and *Trust Yourself*, two neon calligraphic works. Their simple and yet glaring fluorescence seems to evoke a message of solace and comfort. Almost like a declaration of love and palpable emotion that invokes faith and belief in one's own judgment. These texts appear to be the basic premises to establish any type of relationship between two counterparts. Could they be persuasion tactics to overcome an unrequited love? Her day-glo scriptures distinctively replicate her handwriting and offer emotional and personal gestures for everyone to see.

Emin represents a confluence of art and personality, where the latter becomes a definitive characteristic of the former. The borders between her private and personal life have translated into pivotal instances of her artistic practice. The *Encounter* exhibition presents artists from Britain that combine art and persona, but it does not have clear examples of such representations from Asia. While this artistic strategy is not unusual in the West, and may not be as common in Asia, it does not mean that there are no artists with larger than life personalities

TRACEY EMIN
Trust Yourself
2012
Neon (Coral Pink)
29 x 116.5 cm

TRACEY EMIN
Trust Me
2012
Neon (Super Turquoise)
22.8 x 81.3 cm

in the region. Ai Wei Wei comes readily to mind as an artist whose practice has, among its many dimensions, the amalgam of political stance, dramatic gesture, art rhetoric and fascinating enigma. But should the curators have included an artist like Ai? (Ai is an honorary member of RA) Is it necessary to pursue such symmetries in the exhibition to reveal as many parallels between West and East as possible?

These are just some of the questions the exhibition provokes. One does not expect *Encounter* to provide resolutions to these kinds of curatorial challenges that arise from the encounters between the artworks on display. Today, the art world is very eager to engage in conversations about cultural differences and comparison. As an experiment, the exhibition may offer a promising start, but the partner institutions have a responsibility to sustain and pursue these conversations. Very likely these pursuits may have to take place on a smaller scale rather than in another grand exhibition, but they will be no less important.



....

Viviana Mejía is a writer and curator from Colombia currently based in Singapore. She has an M.A. in Contemporary Art from the Sotheby's Institute of Art and an M.A. in Modern and Contemporary Art History and Theory from Los Andes University, Bogotá.

INSIDE



THE

SUBJECT

BY BANI HAYKAL, IN COLLABORATION WITH
ANGIE SEAH AND MOHAMAD RIDUAN

Photos by Joleen Loh

8 – 24 February 2013
Gallery 2

BY CHARMAINE TOH

**“Text or sound?
Literature or
visual arts?”
I asked the artist.**

**“I don’t suppose
I actively seek to
categorise my work
in any way. It’s all
part of it. The text is
as important as the
physical imagery or
sonic expression.
It’s just as weighted,
and they are active
ingredients in
narrating an idea.
How any person
experiences it and
calls it into being
is a completely
uncontrollable
experience/
translation/exercise
of consciousness
which I submit to.”¹**

Writing this essay was problematic for me, because I found it difficult to reconcile approaching inside the subject as text vs. sound vs. sculpture. Writer, musician and artist Bani Haykal’s practice spans a wide range of disciplines and *inside the subject* brought these elements together for the first time in a single exhibition. A collaborative effort with Angie Seah and Mohamad Riduan, the presentation took several forms—text, installation, sound and performance—and was itself part of a larger research project with The Substation. It subsequently culminated in a play, *collapse*, presented at The Substation Theatre in March 2013. It thus seemed as though I would be missing the bigger picture if I took a straightforward formal approach to the exhibition.



Bani is perhaps best known for his music, with several albums and numerous performances under his belt. He is a founding member of B-QUARTET, a local indie group that started in 1999, for which he was the main songwriter and vocalist. More recently, he joined THE OBSERVATORY in 2012, where he has been experimenting with various types of instruments within the band’s own style of electronic music. Bani has also performed with artists such as Kuik Swee Boon (*Silences We Are Familiar With*, Dans Fest, Singapore, 2012), Ho Tzu Nyen (*The Cloud of Unknowing*, Singapore, 2012), Song-Ming Ang (*Sonic Visions*, Singapore 2011) and George Chua (*He is not an Impostor*, Singapore, 2008).

Less known are Bani’s literary efforts. In mid-2005, several members of B-QUARTET were enlisted into National Service. With the band in hiatus, Bani started exploring different interests, which included poetry, prose and spoken word. This continued even as

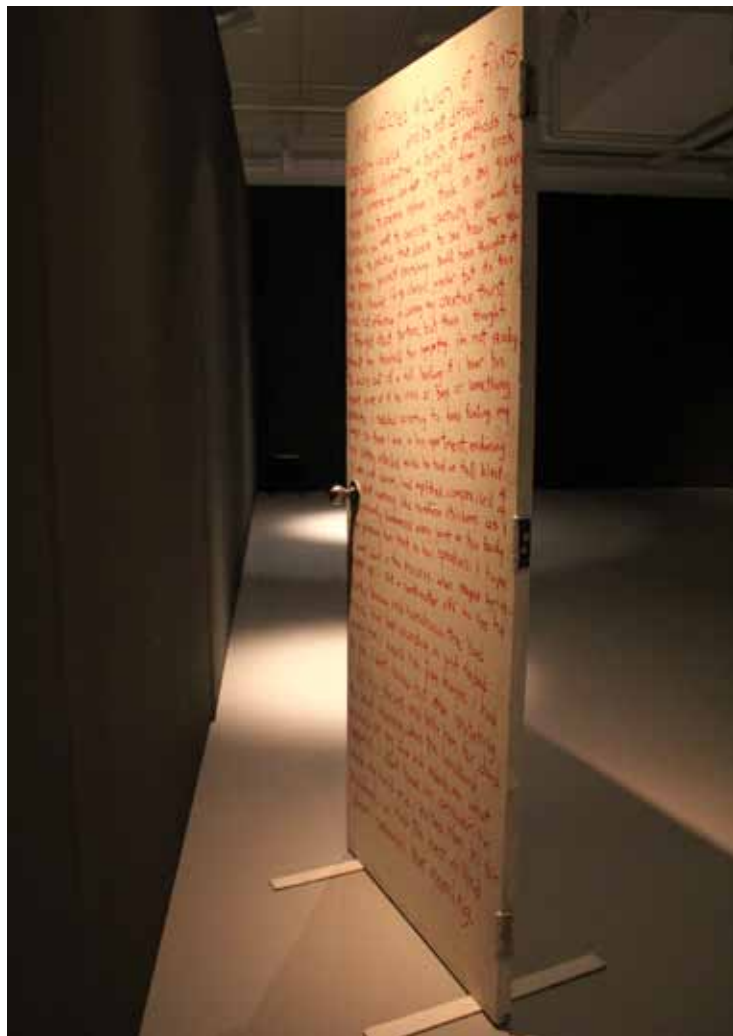
COLLAPSE
The Substation Theatre,
16 March 2013.
Image courtesy of
Mish’aal Syed Nasar.

he himself was enlisted into National Service in 2006. It was a very prolific time for his writing, and in 2007 he published a book of poetry *Sit Quietly in the Flood* with Word Forward, and also had his writing included in several other publications. Writing was a natural extension of his earlier work as a lyricist and allowed him more space to work as an individual rather than in a collective. It was also the easiest outlet for his thoughts during the years of National Service, and he used his writing to explore diverse themes ranging from fear, love and isolation.

All these prior projects tended to keep to their discrete literary or sonic forms, which is what makes *inside the subject* interesting and at the same time difficult to pin down. The exhibition comprises a mixed media installation with objects, sound and performance. The starting point for the exhibition is text; a play that examines a hypothetical future where criminals charged with the death penalty are allowed back into

society on two conditions: the first condition is that they must wear orange jumpsuits for the rest of their lives and the second condition is that civilians are allowed to openly execute these criminals without penalty. The installation is based on the first scene of this play, which represented the living quarters of the protagonist of the play, otherwise known as 'the subject', and his depleting tolerance for his next-door neighbour, a criminal who has opted to accept the two conditions for returning to society. The exhibition is not merely a theatre set for the play. Instead, it is an exploration of the mental and physical space of the subject. Within the gallery are three key objects and three soundtracks. The centerpiece of the room is a large metal bed-frame with a chair suspended above it, and at the far end of the gallery is a wooden door, scribbled with text. The space is filled with a wordless sound composition, while two directional speakers continually project two separate monologues. The first monologue consists of the subject's thoughts over three separate periods of time: when he first moves into the apartment, when his calm is disrupted by his neighbour's music, and just before he kills his neighbour. The second monologue, audible only at the other end of the gallery, consists of two confrontations between the subject and his neighbour, the first warning that he gives his neighbour and the taunts just before the killing.

At first glance, the installation appears minimal, with just three objects and the soundscape in a dimly lit room, representing the physical space of the subject. However, as the viewer wanders around the gallery, he/she also encounters the mental wonderings of the subject. The use of the directional speakers creates pockets of space where the viewer can stumble across the thoughts of



the subject in an invisible psy-scape. There is also a sense of time as the subject moves from his initial pleasure at moving into the new apartment – “This is it. This is the beginning of everything... This is mine. This is mine. This is perfect.” – to his rage at his neighbour – “fuck you, fuck you, fuck you, I hate your music, I hate your face, I hate your guts because you remind me of every other brainless shitfuck human that walks this earth.”²

When asked about the choice of medium, Bani replied that he “felt one medium wasn't enough. Text was powerful but too limited by physical space. Sound, too, is limiting

in relation to time, and so I needed something physical, something visual to encompass the reality. A static display is necessary but just as important is the movement of time, something which is performed. It is how the idea, as an abstract or abstracts, can exist in various spaces or forms.”³ To this end, Bani also chose to present a performance with his two collaborators, anGie seah and Mohamad Riduan, on the opening night of the exhibition in a different manifestation of ‘the subject’. The live aspect of performing the sound work from the installation was important for the artists in order to provide a different experience for the audience.



The turning point in Bani's practice came from his participation in The Substation's Associate Artist Research Program and The Art Incubator's residency program between 2011 and 2013 where he was able to experiment with objects and different ways of presenting his ideas beyond that of performance or text. Bani notes, “I'm finding more grounds for my work; I find it too restricted for an idea to exist on just a single medium or plane. But even in that aspect it is unimportant. It's more important to think about how to create a work which allows the experiencer (sic) to navigate through the system and formulate their interpretation and perspective.”⁴

Just as Bani shifts between objects, sound, performance, and text to enter the mind of the protagonist and explore how consciousness is exercised, *inside the subject* toggles between the two meanings of the word ‘subject’ – (a) a self-awareness or conscious mind and (b) to be placed under authority or control – to explore systems of power in this imaginary setting. *inside the subject* is essentially a Foucauldian exercise in examining power relations within a society and how it affects one's actions. “Power exists only when it is put into action. [It is a] mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others.

Instead it acts upon their actions.”⁵

By offering a simple premise—the ability to kill certain individuals without legal repercussions—Bani considers how social norms and values might shift together with empathy and apathy. From the individual's standpoint, how does our desire to secure legitimacy within the existing social order constrain our actions?

Another very significant aspect of this exhibition is the collaboration with Seah and Riduan. While Bani formulated the concept and direction for the installation as well as the text used as the starting point, each artist gave input in developing the sound work and in setting up the spatial presentation to express the psyche of the subject. Each artist selected one object and worked together to place them within the exhibition to create a certain narrative. This process of collaboration is not only typical of Bani's wider practice but also echoes the exhibition's concerns about giving power back to individuals and how that affects the collective. “Writing the work was just as tricky as collaborating with other artists. Every ingredient is an active element in narrating the work, and this for me is an example of a system that might work on a larger level from a societal perspective. I think of it as a body of work that is

built on a system of thought, and it's a philosophy I hope to develop.”⁶ The collective aspect of the show also points to Bani's increasing desire to create work that allows multiple experiences and interpretations.

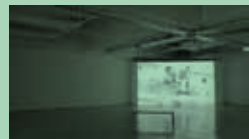
inside the subject is an important step in Bani's developing practice as it is the first time he is given the opportunity to articulate his many varied concerns in one exhibition. From concept to presentation, it brings together different strands of thoughts in both process and outcome. It is also the first time the artist employs objects and space in addition to sound and text to convey a more complex and layered artwork. Compared to the script and the play, the exhibition is a richer experience in exploring the psyche of an individual exercising his power over another within a state-sanctioned order.

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Charmaine Toh is the programme director at Objectifs and director and founder of The Art Incubator, where Bani Haykal completed his residency in 2012. She will be working with him again for an upcoming exhibition *Media/Art Kitchen* that will tour to Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur and Manila.

NOTES

- 1 Bani Haykal, in an email exchange with the author, 28 April 2013.
- 2 Excerpts from the monologues in the exhibition.
- 3 Bani Haykal, op. cit., 28 April 2013.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Foucault, Michel, “The Subject and Power”, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol 8, No 4 (Summer 1982), The University of Chicago Press, pp. 788-989.
- 6 Bani Haykal, op. cit., 28 April 2013.



VIDEO ART AND THE MARKETS

BY YOW SIEW KAH



WRITTEN FOR THE EXHIBITION

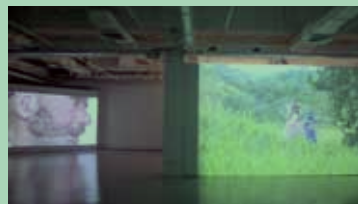
Videologue: Beijing – Singapore – Tokyo

20 January – 19 February 2012

Gallery 2

CURATED BY CHENG GUANGFENG AND URICH LAU

Exhibiting artists: Cheng Guangfeng, Han Tao, Tetsugo Hyakutake, Urich Lau, Li Ning, Lim Shengen, Shen Shaomin and Teow Yue Han



We often think of art and the financial markets to have little in common; an artwork is usually considered distinctive and unique, while financial instruments are understood as homogenised and standardised commodities. However, trading in the financial markets and creating art may not be as different as they appear. At least since the 1980s, the concept of the markets has been given an esteemed position in our society and has shaped a wide variety of institutions, including finance and art. This essay is about how the financial market informs *Videologue*, a video art exhibition of 8 international artists.

In the last three decades or so, the markets have been touted by business and political elites the world over as a solution to a wide variety of problems brought about by social and political processes that are seemingly disorganised and inefficient. According to this belief, the best way to advance the health of human society is to create a system in which the entrepreneurial skills of the individual are set free. Such a system emphasises property rights and free trade, and is based largely on the belief that the markets are unquestionably good and must be protected at all costs. In areas where markets do not exist, such as education and healthcare, they must be created, with state involvement if necessary.¹ The thinking that the markets are inviolable has penetrated deep in society, becoming, among

other things, “an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide to all human action, and substituting for all previous held ethical beliefs”.² The global financial markets are no doubt shaped by this philosophy.³ So is art, including its creation, display and distribution.⁴ The idea of “markets”, however, is abstract, and the way that we experience it is primarily through interaction with the various ways in which it manifests itself materially.⁵ The following paragraphs will discuss how the conceptualisation and design of *Videologue* offer a material expression of the notion of the markets.

Videologue at the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore is the second leg of a two-part exhibition. The first was held at the Sunshine International Art Museum in Beijing in March – April 2011. Although it was not the curators’ intention, the logic of the markets is fundamental to the exhibition’s conception.

The word ‘*Videologue*’ comes from the words ‘video’ and ‘dialogue’. It is envisioned as a series of video art exhibitions that are also interchanged where ideas are shared. The term ‘dialogue’ is to be understood generally: it can take place between the exhibiting artists, the observers, or more broadly between the countries and cities where the artists are located. Based on this concept, idea swapping is to be the focus of the exhibitions; the format of shows, as well as the types of artists and

artworks featured, remains fluid. The concept of ‘dialogue’, however, is also related to that of ‘exchange’, a term that suggests trading and the markets. As we will see, the idea of ‘exchange’, together with related ones such as ‘standardisation’ and ‘homogenisation’, are central to this exhibition.

The notion of ‘exchange’ is key to how the exhibition is set up. The gallery is divided into two parts with large white partitions, which are also the surfaces on which the videos are projected. There are no isolated spaces for an observer to contemplate the works individually. Instead, the videos appear on facing walls, an arrangement meant to create the impression that the works are, and by implication the artists who made them, engaged in a conversation and are exchanging views.

This setup of displaying moving images as large projections in dimly lit surroundings is related to prior examples of exhibiting video art as painting and as film. It is derived in part from how video art gained legitimacy as ‘mainstream’ art, suitable for display in museums and galleries in the last third of the 20th century.⁶ As some scholars have argued, in order for newer visual forms to be understood by the public, they often have to be presented in ways that show affinities to older media.⁷ Such examples include showing the works of photographers Jeff Wall and



Andreas Gursky as large, visually impressive paintings, and the change in the method of displaying video art from small TV monitors in the 1970s to film-like projections in the darkened environments of 21st century art spaces.⁸

Presenting video art as painting or film also has the potential of making it more collectible. From the 1970s to 1990s, artists, museums and galleries came up with various ways to turn video art into distinct ‘products’. These include presenting it as sculpture or installation art – packaging it in limited quantities as DVD boxed sets, displaying it together with ‘portable’ components such as still photographs, and putting contractual restrictions on how it can be displayed. These methods are aimed at making the video artworks appear unique and thus tradable, similar to paintings and sculptures – art that museums, galleries, and private individuals are used to collecting.⁹ While participating artists in *Videologue* are unlikely to be consciously making their art more collectible; the way the videos are displayed is clearly rooted in how art created in this newer medium sought to be comparable and exchangeable with older, more ‘mainstream’ genres of art.

What I have discussed so far about *Videologue* relates to ‘liquidity’, one of the virtues of the free markets, which refers to how “[standardised] products can be bought and sold

continuously at a price that everyone in the market can know, and that products are not normally sold at a price that diverges substantially from the market price”¹⁰. In order for some degree of liquidity to occur, homogenisation and standardisation of the entities to be traded need to take place.¹¹ Making video art look and feel less distinguishable from older art forms suggests both of these operations at work.

Standardisation and homogenisation also take place between the artworks at *Videologue*. The screen is an important part of displaying any video art. Although often thought of as transparent, it is made of physical materials and can fundamentally shape how the artwork is experienced.¹² As mentioned earlier, the videos at the ICAS exhibition are projected onto panels of similar dimensions. The panels are not perfectly smooth – they are ‘recycled’ from other exhibitions, and the brushstrokes from repainting are clearly visible. Had the gallery been brightly lit, the surface imperfections could have been visible, increasing the likelihood that they are viewed as screens with distinctive features. But in the darkened surroundings, the projection surfaces seem transparent, making the artworks look similar. The similar brightness and sound levels also contribute to the artworks appearing to be fully interchangeable.

Displaying videos as large projections in a dimly lit environment is often

meant to create an immersive experience for the observer. If such is the intention in *Videologue*, it may have worked if the art works were allocated semi-enclosed spaces for more contemplative viewing. But such an idea would likely have been rejected as it goes against the idea of ‘exchange’. As the exhibition is curated, for an observer standing in the space surrounded by the large projections, the idea of exchange does not immediately come to mind. Rather, the observer is confronted with a cacophony of sounds and sights, much like how one may experience a retail space installed with advertisements competing for her attention. As designer Sze Tsung Leong has argued, shopping is one of the most important social activities of the 21st century. The mall has become a model for the design of a wide variety of public and private spaces, including museums and galleries; such a phenomenon is the “material outcome of the degree to which the market economy has shaped our surroundings”¹³. Although the show was meant to express the idea of a conversation, the outcome approaches a space of commercial transactions, the kind of market that an observer is most familiar with.

Within this space, the attention economy is at work – the artworks fight for the observer’s consideration with various visual devices associated with commercial television and cinema, including quick edits and scenes of violence and nudity.

Art historian Malcolm Bull has contended that a significant amount of contemporary art functions in a space that is distinct from what we traditionally understand as ‘art market’. The success of the artists and their art are measured not so much by sales, but by the amount of exposure they get from prominent galleries, museums and international art exhibitions.¹⁴ Although this art is not directly exchanged for money, it is traded for human attention, another scarce resource. Not only does it compete to be noticed with other art, it also battles with the non-art audiovisual forms that have proliferated our public spaces for observers’ consideration. The way the artworks are curated in *Videologue* foregrounds this market of attention.

We have seen how the design of *Videologue* offers a material expression of certain abstract ideals of the markets. This was not the curators’ intention, and it likely resulted from the artists, the curators and the gallery staff working together to address the practical, day-to-day issues of setting up an exhibition. Such is the power of the markets. It can be given material shape by a network of individuals working on a seemingly unrelated set of issues.¹⁵

....

Yow Siew Kah is a researcher and writer in art and design. He teaches at the School of Design, Nanyang Polytechnic.

NOTES

- 1 David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5-9.
- 2 Paul Treanor, “Neoliberalism: Origins, Theory, Definition” (2 December 2005), <<http://web.inter.nl.net/users/Paul.Treanor/neoliberalism.html>> (11 May 2012).
- 3 Gerald A. Epstein, “Introduction: Financialisation and the World Economy”, in *Financialisation and the World Economy* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2006), 1-16.
- 4 Noah Horowitz, *Art of the Deal: Contemporary Art in a Global Financial Market* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 1-25; William N. Goetzmann, “Accounting for Taste: Art and the Financial Markets Over Three Centuries”, *The American Economic Review* 83 no.5 (1993), 1370–1376; Mark C. Taylor, “Financialisation of Art”, *Capitalism and Society* 6 no. 2 (2011), 1-19, <http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2208046> (13 February 2012).
- 5 Caitlin Zaloom, *Out of the Pits: Traders and Technology from Chicago to London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 15-50.
- 6 Horowitz, 40-72.
- 7 Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000).
- 8 Horowitz, 53-72; Julian Stallabrass, “Museum Photography and Museum Prose”, *New Left Review* 65, (2012), <<http://newleftreview.org/II/65/julian-stallabrass-museum-photography-and-museum-prose>> (6 May 2012).
- 9 Horowitz, 40-72.
- 10 Bruce G. Carruthers and Arther L. Stinchcombe, “The Social Structure of

Liquidity: Flexibility, Markets and States”, *Theory and Society* 28, no. 3 (1999), 344.

11 Ibid.

12 Sean Cubitt, “Current Screens”, in *Imagery in the 21st Century*, ed. Oliver Grau with Thomas Veigl (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2011), 21.

13 Sze Tsung Leong, “...And Then There Was Shopping”, in Chuihua Judy Chung et al, *The Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping* (Cologne: Taschen, 2002), 129.

14 Julian Stallabrass, “In Conversation with Malcolm Bull, ‘Money and Attention on the Global Art Scene’”, *Immediations: the Courtauld of Art Journal of Postgraduate Research* 2 no. 3, (2010), 1, <http://www.courtauld.ac.uk/people/stallabrass_julian/2011-additions/Bull.pdf> (13 May 2013).

15 Zaloom, 2006

THE



GREAT

The Retrospectacle of S. Raoul by Shubigi Rao

22 March – 11 April 2013

Earl Lu Gallery

BY DANA LAM

GAME

The ‘retrospectacle’ is of typical Raolian construction. It is both instrument and performance; at once the fogged glass¹ through which the reader/viewer is invited to look – to look back on to be exact – and the spectacle of both the act and the thing. Debord is invoked to undo the whole enterprise even before it gets off the ground, albeit tongue-in-cheek and not a little self-referencing.

Shubigi Rao is a gamer, a proclivity to which she readily confesses with the cheeky relish of someone spilling over with a tale to tell. With Rao, the telling is nearly as much fun as the game. This is abundantly evident in her rampant notes and ruminations spilling over from book to exhibits. Needless to say, Rao knows her terrain like no other and speaks to a presumably interested, if not equally knowing, audience. The artist book accompanying the spectacle is the rulebook signposting the play for willing gamers in the guise of a retrospective sketch². Rao is happy to take one by the hand, fully expecting one to know better than being led! Skip the rulebook at your own peril! Guise is the name of the game and S. Raoul is equally indebted to Rose Sélavy, Borges and Sherlock Holmes.

The literary conceit and near universal reception of the fictional Holmes as historical figure is an inspiration. This fuels Rao’s exploration of the fact and fiction, truth and falsehood (On Fictive Fact: A Circumambulation). The recent installment at the ICAS brings into play the artist’s ambulation of a decade, one from every year of her practice from 2002, the year she arrived in Singapore, to the present. Wearing the guise of the “prickly pedant with the squishy innards of the romantic,”³ Rao roams a “wide-ranging (rambling)” intellectual playing field of choice; “circumambulating”, darting in and out and around “the merry

go-round of art discourse” and art world conceits. Picking at and appropriating at will to feed a lively inventiveness that allows her to play along, play back, and play out what she regards self-reflexively as futile enterprise with the ease of a habitué. She is an avowed adherent of “Borgesian” thought (“To speak is to commit tautologies”) and relishes in the labyrinthine passages and meanderings of the game she has built in which she is both narrator and narrated.

A knowing self-deprecating wit and clever word play are Raolian conceits employed to mask, or sharpen, as the case may be, a rambling critique made the merrier through the ‘artifice’ of the iconoclastic S. Raoul, believer in obscure scholarship, subscriber to knowledge for knowledge’s sake. Free from economic and other normative imperatives, the iconoclast is free to think and has a field day espousing, exposing, and reconstructing the very sense of the world around.

In *The Study of Leftovers* (2003–4), fragments brought in by the tide off the Pasir Ris coast near where Rao lives are accrued, organised and studied with meticulous care, as evident in cataloguing and display, as well as the drawings accompanying the copious field notes. Rao puts her knowledge of scientific methods and print-making skills to play here, borrowing and mimicking the language and the posturing of science and scholarship to effect a critique of power and received knowledge. The exalted posture of scientific inquiry is exposed as a banal activity in the titling. Yet, it is clearly in the study of the banal that knowledge of civilisations is derived. Put another way, our exalted civilisations are built upon leftovers. A final commentary is slipped in with some of the notations on the studies. “Notes and Observations: Where one can observe much in these notes” and “More Notes: Where one can deduce much from the tiniest observation.”⁴ Elsewhere, in *Singapore: A Prehistory Reconstructed Notes from a Reconstruction*, the sophistication of Rao the artist and social critic



can be gleaned in the quiet but pointed political commentary scattered in journal entries accompanying the archaeological digs and study of the lost civilisation of Singapore, where “No flying buttress/ overarching concept/ nor vaulting ambition/ can redeem this ruin of twisted girders”.

The Tuning Fork of the Mind (2008), the *pièce de résistance* of the show, arose as a response to the wilful persistence of ignorance in commentaries on contemporary art in the popular press. Once again drawing on her vast capacity for grasping complex theories and concepts, Rao produced an instrument that purportedly measured the activity of a brain deranged by over-exposure to art. As with her earlier work with leftovers, Rao puts to service the commonplace debris of banal assumptions on art and its conventions, in the production of her expansive theory, again with tongue firmly in cheek. The work is encyclopaedic in scope and clarity. Art, artist, critic, and viewer are equally implicated in the neuroscientific theory by S. Raoul⁵.

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

Among other things, the artist’s sleight of hand is achieved by her fidelity to a “methodical curiosity” and a “curious method”⁶. However, after all is said, one suspects Rao’s greater reward is in effecting a laugh within the texts. And Rao has the last laugh in laughing at herself.

But there is one other thing—the symbol of the Ouroboros, the serpent that swallows its own tail. Evoked on more than one occasion in the many Rao papers, the serpent gives life to itself even as it devours its own tail in an infinity of making and unmaking; the one act negating the other by turn so that the acts are rendered both futile and infinite.

Rao’s strategies involve a kind of self-negation. She is wont to attempt to destroy her own contentions and arguments from the onset in mimicry of the circular reasoning she critiques but with which is very much at home. Her aesthetics insisting on investing equal measure on the written text and the image, requiring the viewer to tarry and to read, have been pointed out as self-defeating.

In the final denouement of the Retrospectacle, Rao emerges from behind the smoke screen looking paradoxically like her own doppelgänger. Rao the artist appears similarly sprung from the slippery throat of self-devouring.

....
Dana Lam is the author of *Days of Being Wild: Walking the Line with the Opposition* (Ethos Books, 2006) on the Singapore General Elections of 2006, and writer/director of *She Shapes a Nation*, a short documentary on the nuances of women’s choices and women’s lives in eight decades of the nation-building project. She is a self-appointed Raolian scholar and lectures part time at LASALLE College of the Arts.

NOTES

¹ “That cloudy glass through which we peer, hoping for comprehension is paradoxically fogged over by the heavy breathing of our own earnest attempt.” In *On Fictive Fact: A Circumambulation*, Shubigi Rao 2008.

² *History’s Malcontents: The Life and Times of S. Raoul*, released in conjunction with the exhibition.

³ in *Being a Biographical Sketch of S. Raoul – Inventor, Theorist, Writer, Iconoclast and Eccentric Polymath. History’s Malcontents: The Life and Times of S. Raoul*. P 6.

⁴ From *Letters and Ephemera in History’s Malcontents: The Life and Times of S. Raoul* by Shubigi Rao. p. LXXXII.

⁵ Which can also be found in *History’s Malcontents: The Life and Times of S. Raoul*, a book released to coincide with the exhibition.

⁶ In ‘How to Use This Book’, *Curiosity and Method: Ten Years of Cabinet Magazine*, NY: Cabinet Books 2012. “Methodical curiosity” is a pretty good definition of science as we know it; “curious method” resumes much of what some people call art. Applying the canons of methodical curiosity to the productions of those curious methods, or applying curious methods to the productions of methodical curiosity, does not, in fact, precipitate the kind of matter-antimatter dematerialisation familiar to students of science fiction.”

INTO THE SCHEME OF

An abstract painting by Milenko Prvacki. The composition is dominated by a large, dark, textured shape in the upper half, rendered in black and dark grey with some internal color variations like blue and pink. Below this, the background is a mix of light grey, white, and pale yellow, with some darker, more vibrant colors like blue, red, and purple appearing in the lower right quadrant. The brushstrokes are visible and expressive, creating a sense of movement and depth.

WRITTEN FOR THE EXHIBITION

Milenko Prvacki: A Survey, 1979 – 2012

2 November – 5 December 2012

ICA Gallery 1, Gallery 2 and TriSpace

CURATED BY DR. CHARLES MEREWETHER

(UNEASY) THINGS

BY LAWRENCE CHIN

Walking through the exhibition *Milenko Prvacki: A Survey, 1979 – 2012*, one cannot help but be intrigued by the diversity of visual forms and marks that seem to peer back at one's attempt to make sense. Lines are smeared into patches of colour, overlaid with lightly touched stains, reemphasised with energetic strokes of paint, dissolving into their adjacent forms, and yet retaining a semblance to something that is almost familiar. Before long, one gets a sense that these visual forms must be understood as something more than just themselves.

Giorgio Agamben, an Italian political philosopher, argued in his essay *Notes on Gesture* that:

"Every image, in fact, is animated by an antinomic polarity: on the one hand, images are the reification and obliteration of a gesture (it is the *imago* as death mask or as symbol); on the other hand, they preserve the *dynamis* intact (as in Muybridge's snapshots or in any sports photograph)." [55]

Characterising images as both dead and alive, as both absent and present, Agamben opened up a line of thought that re-centred the tension between the materiality of the image and what it purports to represent, without overtly privileging either. In a way, it is to say that this is a project to de-centre meaning-making away from a purely symbolic or semantic enterprise and to shift it towards the realm of materials, traces, gestures and experiences. Perhaps the same could be said of Milenko Prvacki's *oeuvre*.

In Between Gestures

A discernible tension that could be said to run through Prvacki's work is that of between visuality and materiality. Images are made in a manner that give equal credence to what they are as well as how that is achieved. Not only are marks left as visible traces across the paper or canvas, even as these same marks attempt to describe a perceived reality, but textual content is introduced to both augment and dismantle that perception. A multitude of textual insertions—such as 'But sa slaninom' (Leg with bacon fat), 'Šunka–dokument iz Ecka' (Ham – document from Ecka), 'Trofejni Predeo' (Trophy Landscape), 'Paradise', 'Crkva, Kisa' (Church, Rain), 'Trophy Painting', 'Home', 'Fontanes', 'Red', 'The Ultimate Visual Dictionary', 'Fur', 'The New Visual Dictionary', 'Collection', 'Visual Dictionary', 'Corridor', 'Dictionary', 'Brickyard', 'Leaf', 'Bee-hive', 'Construction Site', 'Fragments', 'Fragmented', 'Building', 'Recollection', 'Structure', 'About Building', 'Now You See It, Now You Don't', 'In Transit', 'Overlapping',



2

1



3

'Fire', 'Construction', 'In', 'Out', 'Too Much, Too Little', 'Island', 'Porcelain Factory', 'Covered Up', 'Covered Again', 'Rusted'—believe their usefulness. Though there may be a very tenuous link between each incorporated text and the image (or images), the very representative prowess of each textual label become suspect eventually. Is it really this? These labels declare a flash of coherent meaning briefly and then seem to fade in the face of an overwhelming context in which words can be more meaningful *not* as words. Words become visual material—*imago*—almost obliterated but not quite. The very nature of the painted surface erupts into view as a distinct skin of meaning in itself—the very material and manipulation of paint, or ink, or mark-making implements, must mean something more, even if they do not mean just one thing.

This suspension of the finitude of meaning had been identified by Agamben as that which characterises a gesture: "The gesture is the exhibition of a mediality; it is the process of making a means visible as such." (58) It is recognising that means and processes have to be reckoned on their own terms and not just for an end or *telos*. It is also allowing the gesture to shift the work from the register of *representation* as absolute meaning to that of *process* as indeterminately meaningful, or allowing for a gesture towards the meaningful in between other things.

As Things as Thoughts as Things

Agamben's schema of the gesture could be compared to what Levi Bryant, a key philosopher in the field of object-oriented ontology, argued as the first and proper question to ask when encountering any artwork: "What does it invent through and with its medium?" (7) This is an understanding of artwork as being meaningful beyond a convenient recourse to an original point of intention nor final meaning outside of its own materiality.

Artworks are meaningful in relation to both external and internal realities. It is not so much an attempt to discredit the notion of representation or *telos*, even if that is remotely possible, but to understand artworks or even gestures as objects that must also exist independent of what they mean or represent. Or as Bryant put it:

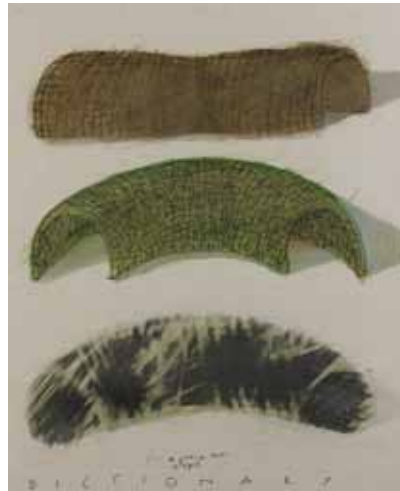
"[...] every object is both *irreducible* to whatever relations it might currently have to other entities and contains the possibility of rupture with whatever relations it happens to entertain at a particular moment." [8; emphasis original]

It is a rupture that makes new meanings possible and even necessary.

1
MILENKO PRVACKI
Fur
1998
Oil on linen
152.5 x 158 cm
Image courtesy of the artist
Private collection

2
MILENKO PRVACKI
Fragments
2004
Oil on canvas
96 x 183 cm
Image courtesy of the artist
Private collection

3
MILENKO PRVACKI
In Transit
2008
Mixed media on paper
33 x 42 cm
Image courtesy of the artist
Private collection



4

5

4
MILENKO PRVACKI
Visual Dictionary
2000
Oil on linen
59.5 x 59.5 cm

The reductive nature of a denotative meaning allows for identification and definition, such as word entries in a dictionary. It is what it is by virtue of its difference from other discernible entities. Yet, the same denoted meaning must depend on the meaning and difference of other entities used in its definition. It is a recursive process of meaning depending on (being different from) other meanings *ad infinitum*. And in this recursive chain of relationships, one must then find meaning not just in fixed points but in the flux and related points. Much like looking at Prvacki's discontinuous but somewhat coherent (*The Ultimate/New*) *Visual Dictionary* series, or even for the different 'word' entries: building; construction; corridor; fire; fragment; home; in; island; leaf; out; paradise; red; structure ...

Prvacki's amalgamation of disparate visual forms in all their complex and varied manifestations is a prolonged attempt to bring forth a semblance of meaning. But it is a very different meaning from a denotative one, in that forms resemble but do not necessarily coincide entirely with what it is supposed to be. It is a slippage of meaning because of the attention being paid to the very materials and processes of painting or art-making. A painted form cannot substitute or represent the original reference or being in exactitude. Hence, the notion of a dictionary, with its assumed denotative meanings, is a broken one, not as a refusal of meaning but as an extension of meaning by way of thinking *through* connotation. And one could also say by way of gesturing towards meaning.

If S(ch)emantics Could Move

This movement towards meaning implies that meaning is not solely inherent but also contextual as well.

"[Art]works, like all objects, *fall* into contexts or fields of relations, yet can never be exhausted by these relations. Alternatively, there is no entity that is so saturated with its context that it contains nothing in reserve that could flee or rupture with this context." (Bryant 12; emphasis original)

Meanings must be both given and implied—both denoted and connoted, both innate and referential—and yet cannot be reduced to just any one aspect. The artwork will always mean something other than its intended.

6
MILENKO PRVACKI
Island
1984
Oil on canvas
150 x 185 cm

7
MILENKO PRVACKI
Island
2010
Oil on linen
124.5 x 100 cm

The ability of artwork to tear away from its existing fabric of signification to mean something else makes for an uneasy relationship between the viewer and the work. This mild anxiety is apparent when viewing Prvacki's works. The question "what does it mean?" not only becomes irrelevant but stands as an impediment to the very experience of the work. In order to move beyond that initial uncertain sense of not knowing, one has to begin to accept that Prvacki's works are (painted) things encapsulated in a sense of *meaningfulness*, without having to always mean something specific, which is their significance.

That sense of *meaningfulness* could also be discerned in Agamben's schema of the gesture as a "communication of a communicability" after "the Kantian expression 'purposiveness without purpose'" (59). As the gesture is fragmented and resists total resolution, its value lies in not what is said through the gesture but what is possible to say through that same gesture. The gesture becomes a work of meaning-making in between its temporal and material states. It is meaningful both in time and in place without recourse to a singular fixity. And as Bryant pointed out "objects have the capacity to move, breaking with relations to other entities they currently entertain, thereby entering into new relations with other objects". (8) Perhaps this breaking and re-making of relations of meaning is best intuited through two of Prvacki's work, *Island* (1984) and *Island* (2010).



6

7

And even as meanings break and remake, one must continue to gesture, rethink, mend, walk, collect, sort, peer, rummage, try, abandon, show, repeat ... to no end but slightly differently than before. As in Prvacki's *praxis*.

....

Lawrence Chin is an occasional writer with interests in visual art, cultural studies and philosophy. His own practice centres on art conservation and restoration, in addition to part-time teaching at LASALLE College of the Arts for the Faculty of Fine Arts and School of Arts Management.

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A theodolite is an optical instrument consisting of a small mounted telescope rotatable in horizontal and vertical planes, used to measure angles in surveying, astronomy, meteorology and navigation.

A CONVERSATION ON THEO.DO.LITES

WRITTEN FOR THE EXHIBITION

Theo.do.lites

18 April – 12 May 2013
Gallery 1

CURATED BY KENT CHAN
and SILKE SCHMICKL

Exhibiting artists:

Apichatpong Weerasethakul
Raqs Media Collective
Uriel Orlow
Alexander Schellow
Charles Lim
Romain Kronenberg &
Benjamin Graindorge
Marylène Negro
Tan Pin Pin
Daniel Hui
Masayo Kajimura
Massimilian & Nina Breeder
Debbie Ding

BY KENT CHAN and
SILKE SCHMICKL

KENT CHAN: Silke, now that *Theo.do.lites* has ended, I'm interested to hear your thoughts about the exhibition.

SILKE SCHMICKL: For me, the exhibition is a great example of how an intuitive, personal and observant approach by two curators, in close collaboration with the artists, can lead to an exhibition that forms a sort of a complete work of art.

I like how the works engage a dialogue and how they unfold aspects that I haven't seen before. Unexpected sub-themes emerged through the juxtaposition of the various works in the open exhibition setup, notably in the first part of the exhibition where the fluid element of water created a link between the works of Masayo Kajimura, Charles Lim, Alexander Schellow, and Raqs Media Collective. I also appreciate how the different artistic strategies of mapping a territory illustrate the idea of a theodolite surveying, as was suggested in the title of the exhibition. This aspect appeared particularly strong in regards to the Singaporean works where Daniel Hui, Charles Lim and Tan Pin Pin exhibit various approaches in portraying a common territory.



The time and labour spent in the elaboration of the works is another aspect that becomes tangible in the exhibition. Debbie Ding's and Alexander Schellow's drawings, Romain Kronenberg and Benjamin Graindorge's thoroughly elaborated film-objects, Marylène Negro's particular editing process, Masayo Kajimura's systematic recordings, Uriel Orlow's subtle observations are evident of the attention to the presence of time. It takes a remarkable intensity and concentration, which contrasts with the current production habits that tend to focus on speed in the communication of an idea.

What was your impression when seeing *Theo.do.lites* installed in the gallery?

KC: Well, I think you've pretty much covered most of it. I suppose I was rather surprised how the exhibition turned out eventually from an aesthetic standpoint. I think it was interesting that for a 'video' show, there were relatively few projections within the space. We had of course planned for this, but nonetheless, it was a pleasant surprise to see it come together physically within the space. Masayo Kajimura's set up was particularly interesting for me and similarly for many of the viewers. I like how she imbued a materiality using floating transparent paper to a medium that basically exist solely as light. She had spent hours creating patterns on the paper with many tiny punctures.



1
MASAYO KAJIMURA
traveling time series:
Ahrenshoop #01
Video installation
Dimensions variable

2
DANIEL HUI
Syzgy
16mm to DVD
12 mins

Daniel Hui's set up of *Syzgy*, as many people had commented, was particularly sculptural. Similarly, both Romain Kronenberg & Benjamin Graindorge's and Alexander Schellow's works had many physical components to it. Along with Charles Lim's presentation, these vid Glossary Vol.2 eos were very much curated as objects. There was a particularly physical element to the exhibition, which I very much liked.

What are your opinions on the thematic explorations of the exhibition?
I suppose some perspectives would have changed?

SS: I appreciated how all the works exhibited the idea of portraying a space in different ways and through various techniques and how they opened up spaces that are often invisible or imperceptible in such a poetic and reflective way. In this sense, their investigational and experimental character beautifully illustrated the theme of the theodolite. I felt that the research aspect in form and content was an important element in bringing together works from different continents without creating an East-West dichotomy. The confrontation of urban Asian and rural European realities that served as a starting point for our research didn't seem as significant in the end. It was the particular time-space relationship that the artists explored in their productions rather than the purely filmic objects that gave strength to the exhibition. The fact that every piece was strongly connected to a specific

contemporary reality through a clear documentary yet imaginary approach subtly reflects upon the notion of modernity that we were investigating, even if I am not sure if this was perceived by the viewers.

I am curious to hear your thoughts on the deployment of the theme, possible ideas and developments for the next edition of *Theo.do.lites*.

KC: The history of moving images is comparatively shorter and more universal than that of visual arts. It came at a time when the world was already well connected. It was by no means as well connected as we are today and at the same time, these connections were a lot more physical and much more time-consuming. However, as this project suggests, this physical nature might not be such a bad thing after all.

Few modern art forms can claim to be as ubiquitous, maybe with the exception of architecture. Stripped of its inhabitants, I suppose we were in fact working on an aspect of modernity that is far more pervasive than we had realised. Despite picking the works from Asia and Europe, *Theo.do.lites* and the theodolite are after all not about the collision of people and their culture so much as it is about putting different spaces together to look upon as a continuous terrain. It didn't matter so much as to where the art works were from; the reality was global to begin with.

Having said that, I think a direction that I would like to explore for the next edition of *Theo.do.lites* would be to look at particular aspects of modernity relating to people. To look at spaces but to also examine these spaces in relation to its inhabitants. I think when and if we do that, the distinctions that exist between Asia and Europe might begin to surface, don't you think? I think it's interesting that way – to explore more and more aspects of modernity as the project continues to develop.

SS: I agree that it would be interesting now to connect these spaces to people and their cultures, if we were to explore this idea of modernity further. On a personal level I was surprised that after having worked for almost 3 years on an Asian-European project called *Human Frames* where the human being and his/her emotions were the focus, I moved on to *Theo.do.lites* where most of the works were either emptied of the human presence or showed it in an alienated way. It is as if humanity had no entitlement yet to enter the new territories that the artists created with their works. I feel a fragility in these conceived spaces and an uncertainty about how humanly inhabitable they can be. I am referring more so to the natural and less to the urbanized spaces, of course.

I read in an announcement of a colloquium, 'Thinking the Contemporary Landscape – Positions & Oppositions' taking place in Hanover, Germany in June this year: "[...] landscape is the belaboured making of humans, and has nothing to do with the ideal of an untouched wilderness. [...] It is essentially by questioning and bringing symbolic expressions of nature back into focus that landscape will resolve the inherent contradiction of its being, namely that of offering the promise of a wilderness where there is none. In contrast is the great spatial disparity and dispersion prevailing in today's landscape. This can be attributed to the multitude of actors and factors shaping the land. [...] The conference is looking for a critical debate about the contemporary intelligence of landscape at a time of relentless conceptual oscillation and uncertainty."

My attention was drawn to the expression, "contemporary intelligence of landscape"...

KC: So what it is saying is that landscapes, as we know them, are invariably a form of man-made construct? Admittedly, my connections to landscapes are not particularly deep, so I am not sure how well I could



comment directly on the topic set out by the colloquium. I am after all, born and bred within a city, within a country that no longer possess any natural landscapes. But in regards to the "contemporary intelligence of landscape" that you've highlighted, let me talk about it in a somewhat roundabout manner.

A couple of years ago, when I was in film school I remember watching Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* during one of our weekly film screenings on European cinema. While this may sound rather sacrilegious, I could never quite understand what the fascination with the film was about. I enjoyed the film and thought it was a good film, but I wouldn't have thought of it as a masterpiece. Now, after being fortunate enough to have travelled since graduating and with the beauty of hindsight since completing the first leg of *Theo.do.lites*, I am again reminded of Vertov's film by Dr. Charles Merewether's text in the exhibition catalogue.

Let me explain. I've since realised that the city and the life within it that came to be during that period of modernity was a relatively new phenomenon. Vertov's hyper-kineticism in *Man with a Movie Camera* was very much a crystallisation of the exuberance of the new and rapid city life then. I guess I have a newfound appreciation for the film. I still wouldn't think of it as a masterpiece, but if I were asked if I would consider it a masterpiece in the history of filmmaking, the answer would be very much yes. Amongst many things, the film was very much a reflection of its time.

In a similar way, the works in *Theo.do.lites* are a reaction to our time. Within these works is an appeal for slowness, and it asks of us to not so much as spend time on them but rather to take up time with them in the here and now. It opens up in us a moment of contemplation. It's like within Milan Kundera's novel *Slowness* where the movements of the characters in the novel slow down whenever they wish to reflect and remember but speed up when they choose to forget.

Within this idea of a "contemporary intelligence to landscape", the contemporary is nonetheless always historical.

....

Silke Schmickl is the co-curator of *Theo.do.lites*, an art historian and the founding director of Paris-based curatorial platform Lowave.

Kent Chan is the co-curator of *Theo.do.lites*. He is an artist, a filmmaker, a curator, and the founding editor of *Locale*, a soon-to-be launched online art journal and platform on Southeast Asian contemporary arts.

LINKING

CITIES

VISUALISING:
THE VALUE OF THE CITY

22 February – 1 March 2013

Earl Lu Gallery

**Presented by Faculty of Design,
LASALLE College of the Arts,
and College of Design, Sangmyung
University, South Korea.**

CURATED BY YASSER SURATMAN
AND MIKE CHEN

**Students of LASALLE
College of the Arts:**
Meidiana Agita
Donovan Auyong
Nicholas Mitchell Brasali
Lani Diana
Katherina Er Zong Lin
Melissa Gan Chian Yi
Lee Yun Ying
Li Si Yang
Luke Lim Kok Yong
Martha Margaretha
Natasha Pradjanata
Martin Tey Chee Hong
Thein Zaw
Yao Qiong
Margaret Yap

**Students of
Sangmyung University:**
Gang Minjeong
Jung Yootaek
Kang Jina
Kim Daiea
Kim Minkyung
Kim Yebin
Kim Youngwoo
Lee Jeongjae
Lee Nayeong
Oh Teaseong
Park Miyeon
Ryu Jinho

BY YASSER SURATMAN

**“The most meaningful
character of the metropolis
lies in this multiplicity
beyond physical borders.”**
Kenny Cupers & Markus Miessen,
‘Spaces of Uncertainty’ (2003)

Seoul and Singapore, two archetypal sites of the industrialised world, displayed incredible rates of economic growth in the last decade. Urbanisation has led the way for rapid development outside the West. Both cities have rich history, culture and infrastructure. The comparison between the two becomes inevitable.

Weaving together urbanism, sociology and visual culture, *Linking Cities – Visualising: The Value of the City* aimed to study the convergence between the two cities. By documenting the ‘space in-between’, this research project sought to address the micro-politics of the exclusive space and explore the rhetoric of the city as a medium. This joint endeavour was a collaborative project between Faculty of Design, LASALLE College of the Arts and College of Design, Sangmyung University, Seoul, South Korea. The project is an engagement in cross-cultural design collaboration involving two groups of students with diverse backgrounds and different specialist design disciplines. Students worked together to develop design proposals that encapsulate the merging of both cities; they drew similarities and differences in social and cultural contexts, which acted as litmus for examining cross-cultural collaboration and the understanding of global and local discourses. The collaborative experience hopes to enable critical reflection on the relationship between culture and space based on an ethnographic study of both cities.

The research project was dual-pronged. Participants from both institutions collected images from their respective countries. Images were in the form of visual narratives, from vernacular flora and fauna to cartography and indigenous artifacts. Other responses came in the abstract

forms of social encounters and traces of the multifaceted dynamics of their cities. Images were then curated and archived in the groups’ journals, which became a travel compendium. The journals were kept in the host city and updated regularly until the start of the exhibition. The second leg of the project required the participants to pick images that best demonstrate the pairing of visuals, textual or cultural readings of both cities. The selected images were then collated and the visual keys were then extracted, deconstructed and re-mapped into different contexts to create new meanings. Participants then developed appropriate forms of design, which carried and translated their concepts.

Through experimentation of different materials, techniques and processes, the project aimed to explore the shift of industrial modernity and the specific processes of urban renewal that have characterised the developing nations. Acute observations of globalisation and the expansion of technology are expressed through relief works and paper installations that looked at the redefined roles of cities and regions across national and geographical boundaries.

BELOW
MELISSA GAN CHIAN YI & TEAM
Suffocation
2013

Melissa Gan Chian Yi and her team’s *Suffocation* framed the cities extension as a conglomerate of different entities, each growing upon the other, creating a bewildering organic form. Ensnared between rapid development and encroaching personal space, Gan recounted her experience through the small crevices of space left between people and structures of the expansive cities, a malevolent crochet necklace rose over the miniaturised buildings to create a sense of urban asphyxiation.

The monolithic skyline of Singapore and the low-lying houses of Seoul accounted for one of the top most densely populated cities in Asia.



The inspiration for the video installation *Vertical Lines* by Yasser Suratman and Mike Chen was derived from the bus journey in Seoul and the Singapore highway. The interlaced images were placed side by side to generate a live dialogue between the two places. Both opposing footages became synchronised at some juncture of the video. The project was sought to capture the intersections that were no longer demarcated, a commentary on the need of cross-cultural understanding at both macro and micro scales.



1



2

1
YASSER SURATMAN & MIKE CHEN
Vertical Lines
2013

2
LUKE LIM & TEAM
The Heart of the City
2013

In *The Heart of the City*, Luke Lim's group explored the interlacing of the elaborate subway systems from both cities into a metasis of grids that mirrored the structural ferment that was part biology and part architecture. As the city's metro system functioned very much like its central nervous system, the intertwining of the transportation systems became a transplant to an anatomical structure. Using delicately cut compressed foams, this project subsisted to demonstrate how modernisation brought the culture of Seoul and Singapore closer through a harmonious fusion of both the cities train systems. The work was a poignant study of the cultural connection between these two cities.

Martha Margaretha's group collaborative piece *Service Design Application* focused on how the cities of Seoul and Singapore could be connected digitally through a travel companion application. The application allowed direct access for visitors to find information about both cities through crowd source recommendations and mediations. This was intended to create a more meaningful and efficient travel experience of the 'New Asian City' by means of studying the expansion as well as the connection and contrast of both metropolitan modernities.

3
Memory of a City

4
Korean Singlish

The boundaries of language were explored in Nicholas Mitchell Brasali's collaborative effort *Korean Singlish*, the installation focused on the unique aspect of Singapore's culture through the examination of the creole Singlish. The project scrutinised the pidgin Korean rendition in synthesis with Singlish, producing a hybrid form of diction. The playful dialogue generated through simplistic exchanges in turn questioned the role of language in the formation of a culture.

Extending the premise of branding a city, *Memory of a City* by Martin Tey Chee Hong's team was an installation piece made from laser-cut acrylics sheets of skylines and landmarks of both cityscapes. While comparing elements from both cities, what stood out was how the skylines metonymically represented each other as they both lacked a cogent landmark. The silhouettes of these landmarks were arranged in a pattern, creating a unison [one structure] 'S&S' logotype, representing both Seoul and Singapore.



3



4

The project was intended to study the intricacies and equivalence of the cities through etymological research and visual culture but much more was established during the short exchange. There was a healthy blend of competition and professional camaraderie amongst the participants and academics alike. Despite the occasional language barrier and interdisciplinary complexities, the projects were done together with mutual respect and cooperation.

....
Yasser Suratman co-curated *Linking Cities – Visualising: The Value of the City* and is a lecturer from the Faculty of Design, LASALLE College of the Arts. He was awarded The Creative Industries Scholarship by DesignSingapore to read MFA at Yale University in 2007.

30 March – 26 April 2012,
ICA Gallery 1
in collaboration with
Langgeng Art Foundation, Indonesia

THE ATYPICAL

FREUDIAN



CURATED BY GRACE SAMBOH,
ENIN SUPRIYANTO AND HENDRO WIYANTO

CASE

BY GRACE SAMBOH



1

1
S. TEDDY D
Head House Series
1998
Screenprint on paper
Dimensions variable
Private collection



2

2
S. TEDDY D
Headscream Seller
1999
Oil on canvas
130 x 110 cm
Private collection



3

3
S. TEDDY D
1997
1998
Oil on printed textile
(military uniform)
130 x 110 cm
Private collection

Try pointing out one or two old works by an artist and ask the creator the following questions: “What’s the title of this work? When did you make it?” Most artists would stop and think hard to answer these questions, especially if the works are not their ‘top works’. S. Teddy D., however, is often able to give immediate answers. He can even describe the situations surrounding these works—his feelings, his anxieties, and other issues during their creation.

Below are three extreme examples that we can use as a reference when talking about Teddy and his recollections about his works:

Head House Series

“These are truly sick works. Literally sick. I was afraid to go out of the house for three months. At first I made drawings on paper every single day. I really made a lot of them. I was indeed crazy at the time. Sick. The drawings are quite sick too. I wasn’t the one who made the prints, really. I was afraid of my drawings, so I just had them transferred to another medium. I burnt some of the original drawings and discarded some others. I was truly scared. Bonyong [Munny Ardhie] said that these drawing works are dangerous for my mental well-being. I felt that I had to transfer those drawings to another medium. Producing the series was a bit like menstruation—I just had to let it all out.”

Headscream Seller

“At the time, Wall’s ice-cream sellers started to come around on their bikes, you see. [chuckling] This is actually an ice-cream seller. This is the ice-cream, but the ice-cream is in the form of human heads. It’s head ice-cream, so we’ll lick the heads. [chuckling]”

1997

“People had been really afraid to use such [military] camouflage material to joke around, much less to make insults. But well, this was in 1997. People were demonstrating, protesting. Apart from being involved

in the demonstrations, I was doing it in my works too.”¹

Teddy thoroughly documented his anger and love about things, along with all his thoughts and feelings, be it social and political discourses, scientific theories, or the banalities of his neighbours’ affairs. It has been said that it would be very difficult for humans to learn about things with no meaning, much less to remember them, as to remember them is to incorporate them into a section of the brain that psychologists have identified as storage for long-term memories. All of Teddy’s strong recollections about his works immediately tell us how significant his life experiences, thoughts, and freedom are for him. In an essay written for Teddy’s retrospective exhibition at Langgeng Art Foundation, the curator Hendro Wiyanto pronounced him “a thinker in art”. Hendro uses as his basis a pronouncement by Teddy’s fellow artist, Ugo Untoro: “Teddy is an artist who creates all of his works using his head”.²

In Teddy’s artistic journey, consciousness is everything. He describes his awareness about his conditions (his experience and feelings) when he is at work as ‘mindscape’, a term borrowed from the late Omi Intan Naomi, a writer and one of his closest friends.³

Whether we use psychology (one of the oldest branches of science) or neuroscience (one of the latest), we have yet to come to an agreement about that which we call ‘consciousness’. “Consciousness remains the last unexplored frontier of psychology, and arguably one of the greatest mysteries of life itself”, wrote psychologist David Groome.⁴ The most prominent figure in the discourse about consciousness is Sigmund Freud. Freud’s entire work builds on the consciousness trichotomy, which in turn is very much influenced by the ambiguity in the use of the term ‘unconscious’. In Teddy’s context, the consciousness (or awareness) that we are talking about is the Freudian ‘conscious awareness’.

“My father was a soldier, so when I was a child, I moved around quite a bit, from one city to another, depending on where he was posted. There was a constant change of atmosphere and I kept having new friends.” This is, more or less, how Teddy begins his stories (to anyone who asks) about the theme of violence in his works. Even with his keen sense of ‘conscious awareness’, Teddy is not immediately free from the ‘curse’ of being a romantic. Indeed, more often than not, Indonesian artists are a romantic bunch (or perhaps it’s us who often accuse them of being romantic!). I suspect that this is a chronic illness which might have even been here for centuries. It started from the time when the modern lifestyle and all its trappings were being introduced to the Indies, or Indonesia of the Dutch colonial era, and found in the awkwardness among Indonesians in using the ‘water closet’ and in their acquaintance with asphalt roads and motor vehicles, etc. Then there was S. Sudjojono who tried to assert the philosophy of Indonesian modern art with his concept of *jiva ketok* [revealed soul] from the thirties onward, to challenge the exoticism of the *Mooi Indie* [beautiful Indies] found in the paintings of his predecessors. It is still true in contemporary living, in this archipelago where there are pockets of lands that remain

untouched by modernity. To be a romantic, or in other words to lay greater emphasis on imaginations and emotions, seems to be a simpler way of survival, easier than to observe the changes of the time, which might take place in a matter of minutes. It would be much easier to say, “This is my expression”, than to explain where the ‘collage’ of thoughts originates from in the artist’s mind.

On another occasion, however, Teddy could also begin his stories about the theme of violence in his works by talking about different aspects of power (by Foucault’s, Nietzsche’s, or Machiavelli’s definition) or about *homo homini lupus*. He can also tell us about the ‘collage’ of his thoughts that formed the conceptual basis of *The Temple (Love Tank)* (2009), while laughingly explaining the symbols. “You see, if it had been only four tanks colliding into one another in the middle of the Rotunda, it would seem too trivial. So, it seemed apt to play around with my own codes. I did away with the violent image of tanks. I used plywood, pink colour, with lotus images. Then when I was taking a walk in the city, in Singapore, I found there were so many temples in different corners of the city. That gave me the idea to make the tanks look like a temple. Offering, the ceremonial dishes... It’s the rituals. It’s still about hope, I think. War is still not the right thing to do; it has no use,” explained Teddy about his installation of seven tanks, arranged to appear like a pagoda.⁵ Although he does not try to reject the curse of being a romantic, Teddy can still trace the origins of his ideas and at the end of the day come up with statements that in no way romanticizes different aspects of his works. According to the Freudian structural model⁶, Teddy’s conscious awareness is a part of the Ego that one can train to summon the preconscious and unconscious elements.

The tank prototypes installed at the National Museum of Singapore was not Teddy’s first attempt to ‘kill’ violence; *Ha Na Ca Ra Ka (Keluar, Masuk)* [Getting Out, Coming In] (2003) also did exactly that. In the



1

latter work, two similar swords (or, to use Teddy’s words: the two swords are similarly powerful) perish in one ‘home’. The complete set of Javanese alphabets have been inscribed on the swords: *Ha Na Ca Ra Ka, Da Ta Sa Wa La, Pa Dha Ja Ya Nya, Ma Ga Ba Ta Nga* – which form a poem saying: “There [were] two messengers, having animosity [among each other], [they were] equally powerful [in fight], here are the corpses.” Teddy has used a variety of approaches to talk about violence, apart from ‘killing’ it. He might, for example, employ mockery. There are at least two of his works that I strongly remember as having to do with mockery: *Paduan Suara Tidak Bisa Berkata Tidak* [The Choir that Cannot Say No] (1997) and *Chicken Molotov* (2003). Observe the simplicity in the elements that Teddy used there to convey his ideas. Both works ‘mutilate’ chickens to talk about followers, cowards, ‘scaredy-cats’, and a variety of key words that might be associated with ‘chicken’. The colours used in the works immediately say something too – yellow, the color of the dominant party at the time that tended to exert repressive power; and green, which we often associate with Islam or Islamic

1
S. TEDDY D
The Temple (Love Tank)
2009
Plywood and spray paint finishing
240 x 560 x 790 cm
Commissioned by National Museum of Singapore

2
S. TEDDY D
Ha Na Ca Ra Ka (Keluar, Masuk) [Getting Out, Coming In]
2003
Handmade iron sword and glass box
Dimensions variable
Private collection

3
S. TEDDY D
Paduan Suara Tidak Bisa Berkata Tidak [The Choir that Cannot Say No]
1997
Mixed media installation
Dimensions variable

4
S. TEDDY D
Chicken Molotov
2007
Aluminum, wood and oil paint
28.5 x 26 x 18.5 cm
Private collection



2



3



4

political parties. Teddy’s choice of language of expression that he uses in his works tends to be genuinely authentic, simple, and effective.

Ever since he felt certain and resolute about his choice to become a professional artist, which he used as the main idea for his first solo show at Cemeti Contemporary Art Gallery, 1996, Teddy has been constructing his visual vocabulary. Today it would seem as if Teddy has his own visual dictionary. Virtually all the images that one often finds today in his works have been used previously in the 1995–2000 period, images of heads, feet, hands, phallus, houses, bridges, peanuts, tanks, and AK-47, for example. Teddy’s collection of images appear with a variety of stories. Before I began writing this essay, I had the chance to ask him, “When and how do you decide which images to use in your works?” Teddy answered, “I’m neither original nor a genius. Those elements seem to pop up, like records of what I have seen. From the myriad of events, some have been recorded clearly in my minds and frequently appear in my mind.

It seems as if there are corrections of the images that I’ve stored in my mind, all of a sudden popping up in my head and conducting internal dialogues with my being. As soon as a new image appears, this process takes place. I think it’s because of the accumulation of the many other things that I’ve seen and experienced, which then transform the original form of the image.”⁷ During our discussion to prepare for this exhibition, Teddy decided to stop using images of tanks. He has taken such decisions before with the chicken-head image, which he then ‘imprisoned’ in a resin cube. To him, such ‘imprisonment’ is a symbol of his stance. Obviously, this time he would not be freezing his 7.5 metre-high tank pagoda, but we should not be surprised if he ends up ‘freezing’ one of his tank merchandises as a symbolic act. That is what he does—he reinforces his convictions through his acts upon his works.

The phallus images, as well as his noisy motorbike that keeps reoccurring in Teddy’s works intrigued me to write this essay using

the almost ancient Freudian theory of Id, Ego, and Super-ego.⁸ In short, the ‘Super-ego’ according to Freud is the moral element of a human being, growing and developing in line with the agreements (and constructions) of ethics around him, arising at the end of that which Freud called the ‘Phallic Stage’ (before adolescent). Super-ego is human consciousness that enables one to determine whether something is right or wrong. I position Super-ego as the representative of humanity, which according to Teddy we humans have outwitted through wars. To Teddy, the war is masculine, phallus is masculine, war is wrong, and masculinity disturbs him. It is classic and clichéd, just as Teddy’s stance is toward his works. Just as how Freud had cursed the phallus, the symbol of human potency, as ancient libido.

Let us ask Teddy when he first used the images of phallus, tanks, clenched fist, etc. He remembers (virtually) everything. One thing is certain: he remembers the mindscape – *his* mindscape. Some memory theorists believe that historical memories about what one is doing/seeing/

experiencing are often imprecise (Neisser and Harsch, 1991). In one of their experiments, Neisser and Harsch interviewed a group of students one day after an event of natural disaster struck their campus. Three years later, they interviewed the same group of people about the disaster, and a third of them gave inaccurate answers, all the while fully believing that they had been accurate. Neisser (1967) delineated in an entire chapter how memory can be reconstructive and not reproductive at all. Teddy said that the phallus image first came up in his work when he was going out with a feminist. When he was younger, he felt that he suffered from a trauma of ‘oppressive masculinity’ and the phallus to him was the symbol of masculinity. I wonder why the image keeps on appearing to this day. Doesn’t human memory automatically try to repress bad experiences?

In the era where artists tend to ‘take cover’ in such arguments as “this is my experience” or “this is my diary”, Teddy is one of the few artists, at least in Indonesia, who no longer need to use such arguments. Each work by an artist will in any case result from that artist’s idea and is therefore based on his or her experience. The father of cognitive psychology, Ulric Neisser, offers an interesting statement about human memory. Neisser explained how the process of remembering in human’s brain is the same with the process of problem solving.⁹ To remember is not actually to explore in all accuracy the events as recorded in our mind but rather to reconstruct the recollected event, mixed with our experiences and the wish to see that what is being remembered is in accordance with our current condition. When we apply Neisser’s explanation in the case of Teddy’s recollection about the image of phallus, we can say that Teddy seems to want to experience a trauma. He wants to use trauma as the reason – his reason. It is a straightforward process, but at the same time is also complex. The human mind (and consciousness) is a complicated thing. Teddy’s works, more often than not, succeed in appearing

simple but with extraordinary visual strength and message, presented in very simple forms that might seem messy, rough, or wild.

“Teddy always creates his works using such basic media as oil paints, charcoal, and woodcut,” said Nindityo Adipurnomo, Teddy’s colleague and fellow artist.¹⁰ The media that Teddy has used so far play an important part in almost all his works. The simplicity of the media in Teddy’s works (as well as his straightforward treatment of them) reflect how the ideas that he wishes to convey are more important than anything else. Teddy only draws what he needs to draw. This is clearly not the first time for Teddy to find a distinct expression—visually and verbally. His tattoo of “Art Merdeka!” (or, literally, “Art Freedom!”) that now also serves as the name of his studio is not without significance; Teddy’s statements regarding his art—such as “My two-dimensional works are my breath, and the three-dimensional works are my soul”¹¹ and “painting is a picture made simple or complex”¹² and his “ideology” to draw only that which is necessary to draw¹³—really mean something to him. So, when we see only a clenched fist, without the arm or the elbow that means the fist is enough for him to tell the story he wants to convey. Let us observe again the series of clenched fists. Won’t the key words that arise in your brain be the following: demonstration, the crowd, workers? Teddy’s freedom from the pretense of conveying lofty messages, annoying sermons, and extravagant comments has been achieved through extraordinary self-discipline. It does not come automatically.

Whoever said freedom means free?

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Grace Samboh co-curated *REPOSITION: Art Merdeka!* by S. Teddy D. She graduated with a Master’s degree from the Visual Art Studies program at Gadjah Mada University’s Graduate School, co-founded an office for arts researches and development, Hyphen, and works as an independent curator.

NOTES

1 In 1998, Indonesia was undergoing a reform period. The government with its “guided democracy” style, led by a “smiling dictator” who had ruled the country for 32 years, went down after a tide of demonstrations and protests initiated by university students all over the country.

2 Wiyanto, Hendro. “Someone Who Is Afraid to Lose His Head”, from the monograph on S. Teddy D., *REPOSITION: Art Merdeka!*. Yogyakarta, Indonesia: Langgeng Art Foundation, 2011.

3 It is difficult to trace when Omi Intan Naomi first used the term ‘mindscape’ when talking about S. Teddy D.’s art. See compilation of her writing on Ugo Untoro (*The Sound of Silence and the Colors of the Wind: Between the Tip of a Cigarette and Fire of the Lighter [17 Years of Ugo Untoro’s Fine Art, 1989 – 2006]*, Yogyakarta, Indonesia: Museum Tanah Liat, 2008.) and one can find a fragment that talks about Teddy and his ‘mindscape’.

4 Groome, David. *An Introduction to Cognitive Psychology: Processes and Disorders*. London: Psychology, 1999

5 *The Temple (The Stories)*, 29”, 2011. DVD interview between S. Teddy D. and Jaya Limas.

6 Freud, Sigmund. *The Ego and the Id*, London: Hogarth Press, 1949.

7 Interview with S. Teddy D., September 10, 2011.

8 Freud, Sigmund. *The Ego and the Id*.

9 Neisser, Ulric. *Cognitive Psychology*, New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967.

10 The record of the discussion during S. Teddy D.’s artist talk, with Agung Kurniawan, Nindityo Adipurnomo, Ugo Untoro, and Yustoni Volunteero can be accessed on www.langgengfoundation.org

11 Tan, Boon Hui. “On S. Teddy D.’s Love Tank (The Temple) at the National Museum of Singapore”, exhibition catalogue. Yogyakarta: Art Merdeka, 2009.

12 BOAT, exhibition catalogue. Jakarta: Nadi Gallery, 2001.

13 Interview with S. Teddy D., April 14, 2011.

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