

*The
Beach
That
Never
Was*

Hirofumi Isoya

Hirofumi Isoya, *Lag 4*, 2014, framed C-print on wood and metal shelf, 71 x 120 x 16 cm. © Courtesy the artist



Joshua Callaghan, *Two Dollar Umbrella*, 2011, steel, aluminum, plastic, polyester and wastebasket, 610 x 610 x 457 cm. © Courtesy the artist



That



Hirofumi Isoya, *Raising a Gap*, 2005-2012, C-print in painted frame, 25.3 x 35.3 x 3 cm. © Courtesy the artist



Joshua Callaghan, *Keychain with Yellow Strap*, 2014, wood, metal, vehicle recovery strap, dimensions variable. © Courtesy the artist

Joshua Callaghan

What

Hirofumi Isoya makes artwork that exploits the literal and metaphorical gaps found in everyday life. In *Raising a Gap* (2005–12), Isoya nudged a fledgling strawberry flower into a plastic capsule, which set a nominal limit or end point to its growth. In his work, conditions are stipulated in a calm, rational manner, and the 'art' unravels almost predictably within these parameters.

In some cases, this art of parametric unraveling does acquire a certain nightmarish sense of entropy. Take *Palilalia* (2013), for instance, in which Isoya suspends three fluorescent light tubes in a Z-shape from the ceiling before attaching a shambolic swarm of dangling nocturnal flying insects from these lights. As if expecting flocks of moths to huddle around a flickering flame, *Palilalia* (which refers to a speech disorder involving the involuntary repetition of particular syllables) comes across as the equivalent of an artistic stutter-like gesture, in which a certain predictable behavioural result becomes amplified and reiterated to an absurd limit.

At other times, Isoya lays down certain conditions that recall the laborious rule-making of Raymond Queneau and the *Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle* (OULIPO) [Workshop of Potential Literature] as a form of creative auto-production in the field of writing. For his twelve-day solo show *Counting the Event* (2012) at Aoyama Meguro Gallery in Tokyo, Isoya exhibited 12 objects made over the course

Joshua Callaghan's work is consistently disconcerting. Eschewing a signature style or medium, preferring to let means and form follow idea, Callaghan's works seem to be defined by the sensation they evoke: something akin to the uncanny or *unheimlich*. While this concept often connotes a disturbing or even mildly sinister quality, Callaghan's work has a distinct tenderness about it. His practice tends towards levity, humour, and perhaps optimism, imbuing the everyday with deeply imaginative, surreal qualities.

Like his predecessors and peers based in the United States, particularly Tony Tasset and Mark Handforth, Callaghan plays with scale and imagery in his sculpture. He is deeply conscious of the way in which sculpture, even abstract sculpture, lends itself to anthropomorphism and can quickly become a vessel for the viewer's emotions (well-evidenced in his sculpture *White Man*, 2004, a seemingly sad, slumped figure made only from white plastic buckets). Callaghan has a deep understanding of materials and the capacity of everyday things to be transformed into evocative objects through simple gestures of accumulation and understated transfigurations. These methods are evidenced in *Lots of Future Shock* (1995–2007), comprising copies of Alvin Toffler's book *Future Shock* (1970), which the artist has collected over the course of twelve years and now presents arrayed in a linear rainbow on the floor, and *Treasure* (2006), in which yellow doodads and plastic junk spill out of a cheap plastic cooler. In these works, as in others, Callaghan is engaged with the real world and its products and detritus, as well as with language and its undeniable ability to help us see what is and is not in front of us.

Callaghan's works capitalise on the viewer's physical experience of sculpture. His large-scale piece *Two Dollar Umbrella* (2011), which was installed outdoors on Randall's Island for Frieze New York in 2012, exemplifies this approach: the viewer encounters an enormous, broken black umbrella crumpled on a lawn. Callaghan transformed this everyday object through its massive scale, rendering the familiar unfamiliar. Its obvious irreparability imbues

of 12 hours using 12 small dead insects that had haplessly wandered into his studio space. In his words, these 'heterogeneous entities have formed a relation that ties them all together through the numerical order'. Among these 'entities' were insects embalmed in orange hunks of resin that resembled chunks of amber, as well as framed photographs that documented the twelve-hour process.

Having decided on this numerical ordering trope from the get-go, Isoya's subsequent artistic meanderings, you might argue, are merely the unraveling of a predetermined process. But forcing himself to cleave to the chosen numerical constraint of 'twelve' is in fact a productive and fertile limitation that gives shape and form to his creation.

His approach here, as in many of his other works, allows him to transcend the form/content divide with ease, shifting focus from a discussion of surface towards a consideration of the space, time and context that surrounds the making of a work of art.

it with a distinctive pathos. The uncertainty and strangeness that pervades this sculpture defines much of Callaghan's work and lingers in the mind of the viewer, producing an underlying sensation that calls into question our understanding of even the most quotidian objects. This slight slippage, the result of introducing out-of-place things or surprising shifts in scale or material, gives Callaghan's work lasting resonance.

For *The Beach That Never Was* Callaghan will exhibit a work from a new series of sculptures of oversized key rings. This work is made primarily from wood and metal sculpted to mimic a ring and set of varied keys, and 'decorated' with found objects such as a chair or mop head. The presence of these mass-produced objects highlights the absurd shift in scale Callaghan has employed. Keys, while powerful metaphors, are small and ordinary, as easily tucked into a pocket and slipped into a purse as dropped on a sidewalk or lost amongst the clutter of our lives. Replicating them so that a life-size chair becomes little more than a bauble, Callaghan both denies and amplifies the key's symbolic potential.

There is something wondrous and refreshing about Callaghan's investigative and broad practice. It encompasses experiences and visions as diverse as encountering a pile of dirty snow in the middle of a warm Los Angeles day; realising that a public park is pocked with sculptural photographs of itself; and watching all of your friends have a photo-op with Jay-Z. His work carefully, and almost sympathetically, unsettles our understanding of the world, disturbing our expectations and momentarily unhinging our reality.

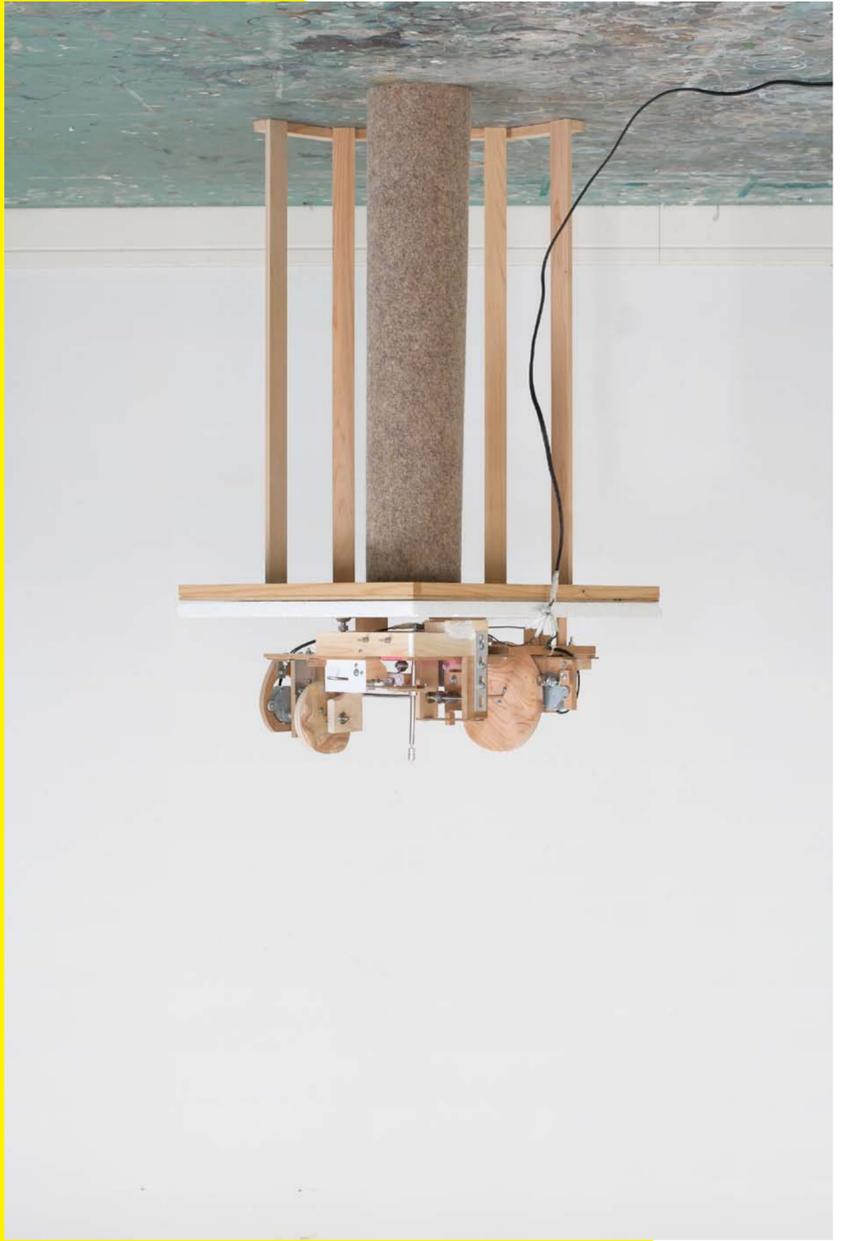
Josh Miller



Josh Miller, *Love and Boredom (5)*, 2013, oil on canvas, 130 x 130 x 7.5 cm.
© Courtesy the artist



Josh Miller's studio, 2014



Krister Olsson, *Pink Cosmos (after High and Low)*, 2012, mixed media, dimensions variable. © Courtesy the artist



Krister Olsson, *Clock*, 2013, MDF, gesso, motor, light fixtures, 114 x 114 x 10 cm.
© Courtesy the artist

Krister Olsson

W

Josh Miller: Love and Boredom on the Beach

Love and Boredom—the series title for the paintings by Josh Miller that I've been contemplating—sounded like the title of a Buzzcocks anthology. There's something about the band's glam/punk pairing of unironic enthusiasm and jaded ennui (particularly before Howard Devoto left) that seemed reminiscent of the dilemma of contemporary painting, so I googled it.

No cigar, but the oracular power of the Internet did turn up a lengthy exposition on these intertwined conditions by Osho, a.k.a. Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh—the Indian philosophy professor turned mystic free-love guru who set up a communal compound in Oregon in the 1980s, which imploded after an attempt to poison local voters by infecting the region's salad bars with salmonella.

Among other insights on love and boredom, Osho observes:

Children want to repeat things. They go on playing the same game again and again. You get bored. What are they doing? The same game again and again? They go on asking for the same story. They enjoy it again and again, and they say, 'Tell me that story again' ... They have a different quality of consciousness.

Nothing is repetitive for them. They enjoy it so much that the very enjoyment changes the quality, and then they enjoy it again—and they enjoy it more, because now they know the know-how. The third time they enjoy it even more, because now they are acquainted with everything. They go on enjoying; their enjoyment goes on increasing.

The guru continues:

Two lovers will go on repeating the same acts every day. They will kiss and they will hug—they are the same acts. And they would like to go on doing that ad infinitum ... They are again children ... Two lovers appear to us as if they

are repeating. To them, they are not repeating.

But to a prostitute the law of economics will apply, because for her, love is not love, it is a commodity—something to be sold, something which can be purchased. So if you go and kiss a prostitute, for her it is boredom, repetition, and some day she will say, 'This is nonsense. I am bored of being kissed and kissing the whole day. It is intolerable'. She will say that it is a repetitive act.¹

Osho, *The Book of Secrets*, first published 1974

This extended passage supports extended metaphorical application to artmaking (particularly painting and other sensually anchored practices) and to the complex dysfunctionalities of the art marketplace. Of particular interest is the mutable quality of time in these scenarios, and the suggestion that these endlessly delightful subjective, non-temporal experiences are not communicable through commodification, but are nevertheless shareable with others—though possibly only with other active participants in the game at hand.

So just what kind of game is Josh Miller playing? I would characterise it as a personal—even idiosyncratic—postmodern and syncretic rehabilitation of the histories and languages of modern painting. That's a tall order, but Miller isn't struggling alone. Such a mandate can, in fact, be traced at least as far back as the interwoven oeuvres of Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, both of whom seem to loom large in Miller's canon.

Whatever postmodernism is, it most certainly disavows the linear temporality and teleological inevitability of the most common characterisations of the modernist agenda; shifting from an historical process of purification to an ahistorical paradigm of simultaneity, rendering novelty and originality much less essential to the creative act.

But while many artists have asserted the validity of repetition, they have often

maintained the renunciative disavowal of the multi-millennial history of visual language that characterised the death throes of modernism, as it dematerialised its own art object or was shot through the wormhole in Chris Burden's bicep.² The alternate tradition in which I see Miller operating makes no such discrimination, resulting in work that—instead of embodying anesthetic object lessons in history-contingent theoretical one-liners—avails itself of every nut and bolt in the formal and conceptual toolbox; or at least whichever ones it pleases.

So these are the underpinnings of Miller's engagement with *Love and Boredom*—the assertion that painting practice is not subject to history, but the other way around; and that repetition (in the mark-making gesture; in the appropriation or influence of stylistic devices; in the structure within individual paintings and between them) can be deployed to amplify experience and pleasure. And that these broad cultural and narrow individual experiential disengagements from time are essentially the same phenomenon—just facing different directions.

How do I see this operating specifically in Miller's recent work? Formally, with his masterful use of color, his subtle nuanced spectrum of (oil) paint application, and the modulation of compositional strategies between the gridded architecture of his overall structures and the intricacies of the figurative events they support. All of these elements are highly accomplished, but subtly familiar—bits of Johns, Rauschenberg, Kitaj, Hockney, Guston—and early moderns like Gauguin, Ensor, the Fauves and the Impressionists—flicker in and out of focus.

The same is true conceptually, with Monet's painting *Haystacks* (1890–91) as a particular prominent association. It takes a bit of time before one realises that Miller's grids are inhabited by multiple renditions of the same object or set of objects—observed and rendered under different conditions, then arranged into an impossible simultaneity in a shallow, and highly specific, illusionistic depth of field. The objects depicted are themselves often contradictory, seeming to exist at one position and dematerialise at

the next, oscillating between the figurative and the abstract. When figurative, they manifest as both exquisite antiquities and thrift store kitsch.

This indeterminacy fluctuates as well, with formal and semiotic fragments slipping loose from their appropriate containers, hovering like clouds, coalescing into identifiable representational passages, then drifting on. Some transitions between repetitions are barely noticeable, while others are abrupt to the point of discontinuity, and the connections in the virtual display area have to be forged by the viewer.

There is a painterly utopianism to all this, a feeling of ease that comes with the absence of deadlines—the kind of autonomy that has been ascribed to artmaking since Gauguin's retreat from industrialised western culture (and time). When I queried the artist about his thoughts on the exhibition theme referencing an 'archetypal tropical beach town', he responded that, 'My sister and I [presumably while growing up on a communal religious compound—though not Rajneeshpuram] honed our childhood drawing skills by drawing sunsets, with single palm tree islands. Seriously drew them for years; still draw them every now and then. In Colorado, I fell for a Gauguin bio and almost moved to India. But plans fell through. So I decided I could make paintings as if I had gone, and no one would know the difference'.³ In other words, it's all the same, but different.

1 Osho, *The Book of Secrets, Discourses on the Vignyan Bhairav Tantra, the Book of 112 Meditation Techniques*, viewed 1 June 2014, <<http://innertraditions.blogspot.com/2010/04/osho-on-love-and-boredom.html>>.

2 In *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object* (1973), Lucy Lippard characterises the period between 1966 to 1972 as one in which the art object was dematerialised through the new artistic practices of conceptual art. Chris Burden began to work in performance art in the early 1970s. During this time, he made a series of controversial performances in which the idea of personal danger as artistic expression was central. His most well-known act is perhaps the 1971 performance piece *Shoot*, in which he was shot in his left arm by an assistant from a distance of about five meters with a .22 rifle.

3 Josh Miller, email corresp., 2014.

HOMAGE TO THE SQUARE

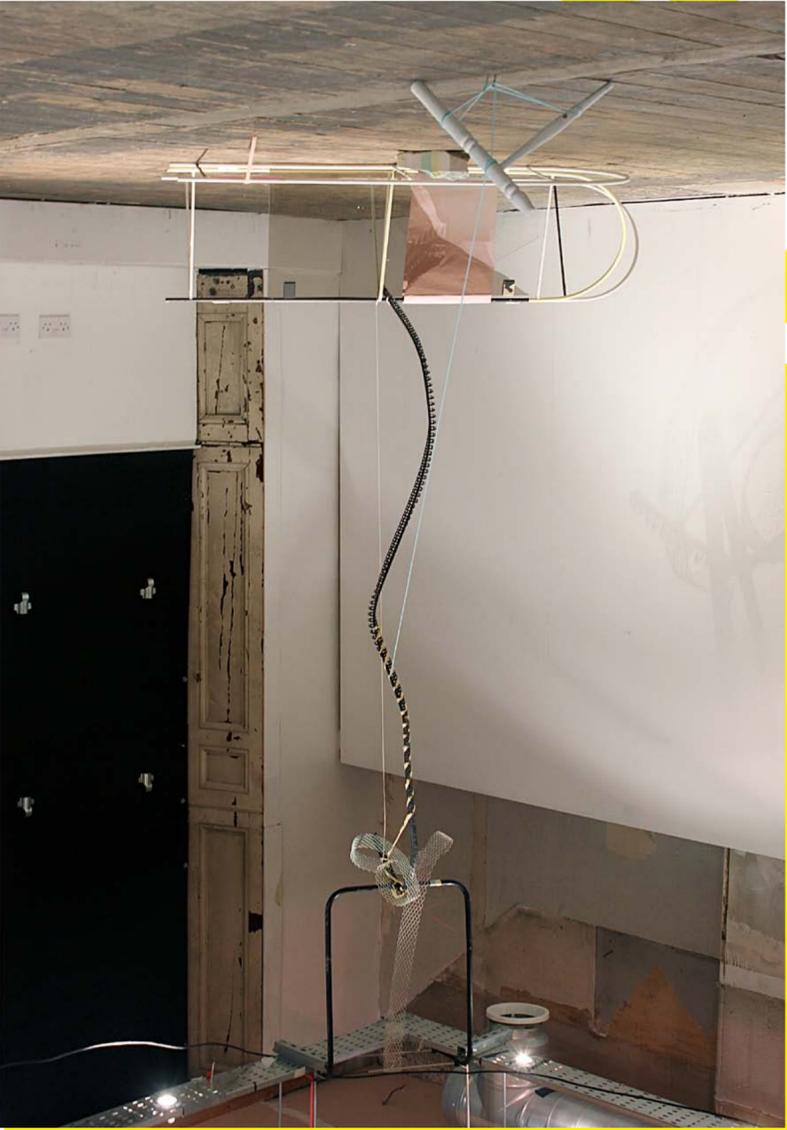
The galleries are huge
and white and open
all night. You've seen
this before, my polished
teeth, my tongue
beveling circles, drawing
the word you want
to hear until it's a scorch
mark. Paint your lipstick
on again, slip out to buy
something, as the river
oozes by.

Why haven't you written?
I sleep in the dark, knees
bumping the radiator's
skeleton, watching the clock
with no hands, the galleries
huge and white and open
all night in my dreams.

I miss the sight and sound
of your coming. The bartender
keeps my place, my own
metal exoskeleton. I can see
from his face
the show bores him.

Tomorrow, I will fix my teeth.
The river will swell,
the gallery lights will
shut down with a thunk,
then knees and radiator,
and morning. Banging
I've heard before. Write me
one last time
and tell me it bores you.

Stephanie Jane Burt



Stephanie Jane Burt, *The Whale and the Rabbit*, 2013, mixed media, dimensions variable. © Courtesy the artist



Mark Thia, *Untitled*, 2014, archival inkjet print, 42 x 58 cm. © Courtesy the artist



Mark Thia, *Untitled*, 2014, archival inkjet print, 42 x 58 cm. © Courtesy the artist



Juka Araiakawa, *St10 K*, 2013, gouache on bed sheet, 52 x 43 x 3 cm. © Courtesy the artist

Juka Araiakawa, Mark Thia, Mike HJ Chang



Mike HJ Chang, *Untitled Notes 3*, 2013, mixed media, 45 x 60 x 3 cm. © Courtesy the artist



To Stephanie with Love: On Nesting and Invagination (or Fucking on Our Own Terms)

In considering your practice and us I realise there is no other way to conduct this essay, this introduction of your work to a new audience—who in reading this has visited the exhibition, *The Beach That Never Was* and by now has seen your work—but to deny their presence and speak exclusively to you. I realise in speaking about you that I don't know how to address anyone else but you. It is fitting in a sense because your work is tyrannically intimate. It absorbs the viewer's whole body and calls for a possessive, parasitic and liberating form of love between artwork and viewer as much as it does for you and a space—and perhaps further still between you and me, this essay and your work. I begin this essay feeling like I am about to commit a transgression, as if I am about to be unfaithful in divulging the very intimate details of the mechanics of your work, which feel secret, private and as exclusive to us as any love affair would. Love is a process of nesting, making a home and developing a dialogue with another (whether it be a space, a person, a people, an idea, a history or simply an atmosphere). It is about inhabiting as much as co-habiting, eating alive as much as being eaten alive. It is a process of taking in, spitting out, of regurgitation—like a bird that builds a nest with spit, blood and rubble, in a process to birth more birds and build more nests.

On Beginnings and Nesting

In a sense your site-specific sculptural installations began with your drawings and paintings, which were gestural and intuitive expressions. They are an oeuvre that you no longer seem to include in your portfolio. They were intensely personal, drawing from the landscape of your life. They were made for friends or lovers, and expressed a personal and enigmatic narrative. The page was a space that you dominated through texture and color. You felt it out physically, marked and conquered it with your tools. Your forms took over the page as much as they co-existed with the page. The weight and presence of the paper was always present—not something just marked upon but a part of the image. When you painted and drew on the paper that would become the image for the poster of the film, *In the House of Straw* (2009), the image was tangential to the film, not really referring to it as much as it looped back

and referred to its own creation. All of them individual yet co-existing as one: the paper, the page, the film, your image. The background was a painted seam that ran down the page, giving birth to three menacing pigs frantically scribbled over the cut that bore them, with equally frantic lines in blue, red and white stretching and encircling them. It was as if these pigs sprang forth from within the page and spread out, using the textures and materials around them to make a home upon the page, a nest.

Like the pigs' occupation of the page, your recent site-specific works employ the same strategy of nesting. Your process is simple: You choose a space, you enter it, you feel out the architecture. You are present in it, you sense the way light falls in it, the history and textures that define it, the roughness of brick, its past narratives. Then you find the materials that you feel speak to it, materials that come from the building and space itself or the neighbourhood in which it is situated: a ribbon, yarn, some bit of plastic from a store. You bring these materials to the space and build an image layer by layer until you have a navigable assemblage. The work is of your sweat, time, intuition and history; the films you've watched, the literature you've read. The blood of the everyday builds a nest.

Each work is unique and temporal, a product of the space it inhabits as much as it is a product of your intuition and experiences. A work is only activated by a viewer moving through it and only exists as long as it can nest or house someone. It can only breathe in the presence of another. A communion of sorts is necessary, in that each work creates a symbiosis between viewer and space, consuming viewers and reassembling them within some mutually constructed logic that the viewer, work and space seem to agree on. It's an agreement born out of love and mutual faith. It is a relationship that has meaning. The consumption of the work by the viewer is not mindless or merely instinctual.

I feel that you have a similarly symbiotic relationship with the spaces in which you work. Each space eats you. As you work to mould a space through your installations, you leave behind fragments of yourself. This communion with the space is an obsessive and isolating relationship, both for you and the viewer. The relationship does not privilege one over another: not the individual or the space or you. Rather it is

After the performance, I had a conversation with Mark. 'I want lightness', he said. 'That is why I am moving towards performance. With drawing, painting and sculpture, I put time and effort into objects that are separate from me. I want to get rid of unnecessary weight. If I can express something with my body, then everything else is extra. I want to be present in the work, and I want to be physical. I want to move'. That particular tension that a performer often feels when he steps in front of an audience is what I believe propelled Mark's movements. I asked Mark what his motivations as a performer were, and he replied, 'This is my way of saying, 'Come closer'. As Mark danced and stumbled down the staircase during the performance, his vulnerability showed. He invited the viewer in. It was sexy.

The relationship between the audience and the artist is a sort of cat and mouse game. It is the job of both the audience and artist to test the other's patience, skills, conviction and desire. The cat and mouse are bound to each other by their primal instincts to engage the other player. Removing one player would upset the balance within this ecology.

When I first moved to Singapore, my practice came to a strange halt for reasons I could not grasp. I continued to make inviting gestures, but I didn't know to whom I was directing them. Perhaps I was using the wrong language or the wrong accent. My jokes never seemed to work (which was definitely *not sexy*). Everything burned up like empty calories while my audience gradually disappeared from sight. Presumptuously thinking myself a host, I kept putting a chair out there. No response. This made me think: To what degree do I make art for the audience that I want? And by extension, to what degree does the audience I have (or not have) affect the art I set out to make? Should I be conscious of this audience? How do I find the right ingredients without using

a minor universe with bodies in orbit that avoid, meet and are in dialogue with each other. It is a precarious relationship of taut lines and strings, broken glass and bodies in space.

On Nesting and Invagination

Keeping in mind the orbiting universes that are your site-specific sculptural installations, I am reminded of an image by John Isaacs in his book *In Advance of the Institution, Give Birth to Your Own God ... And Bury Your Own Demons* (2008): an image of a vagina as idyllic landscape. It is an image that you loved. Your installations work similarly to the image—they invaginate, which means to infold, to form a hollow space within a previously solid structure and to enclose upon or be enclosed. The installations are the landscape within the vagina. They are the nests inside (or that are) the womb to house and carry another. Invagination is the perfect concept with which to describe your work. First used by phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), Merleau-Ponty considered the body to be the primary site of knowledge, forever entangled with what the body perceived. Invagination was a kind of metanarrative that Merleau-Ponty used to describe the dynamic self-differentiation of the body, of the flesh with which it was entangled.¹ For Derrida, invagination was a narrative that folded upon itself, '... endlessly swapping outside for inside and thereby producing structure *en abyme*'.² In your installations, through the process of invagination, both inside and outside are denied stable identities. Rather, you form nests, wombs that self-construct, giving birth to themselves. Your installations are experiences as much as they are objects in space. They demand an investment in space and materials and an acceptance of multiple subjectivities. This is a form of love—a moment of coming together and building a 'one'.

It is the political rub of your work really, the intuitive selection of material to make a constitutive whole that consumes in earnest. The work demands to be loved by the viewer as much as it portrays your love for the space and your own communion with materials: found, lost and recovered again. It necessitates a supreme empathy to feel space, to feel materials and to feel the orbits of bodies, to be of the moment and to allow oneself to be objectified and

a formula? I began thinking about the audience a lot. I sketched out the outline of this contingent, vacant space as it mediates between what is welcome and what is not.

During the early 2000s, Juka Araikawa and I spent a lot of time driving around the desert that surrounds Los Angeles. We found a certain affinity with it: the untamable nature, the endless horizon and the ruins of human artefacts sparsely scattered all over. The desert spoke to us. This was during our formative years studying art. We were exposed to a wide variety of strategies and histories—Fluxus, Chris Burden, Bruce Nauman, Marina Abramović, Peter Fischli and David Weiss, and High Desert Test Sites were all major influences during our student days. Inspired by them, we started creating performance works.

For our first collaborative piece, titled *House* (2004), we temporarily moved into an abandoned lot in the middle of Westwood, a residential area located just outside our school campus. Over the course of the three days we spent inside the lot, we built furniture out of scrap materials. As performers, we took on the roles of uninvited guests who were trying to make the space a place—in other words, to infiltrate an anonymous location and turn it into something inhabited. We saw potential within an empty lot sitting in the middle of a dense suburban area. The void drew us in like the great desert had. The disjointed sense of how this plot of land had gone through different, successive phases, the signs of decay, and the potential of space itself as a material were all very inviting. In many of our later collaborations, Juka and I focused on using our bodies to activate various spaces. We answered their invitations, responded to their calls—and then occupied them and made them our own.

Recently, Mark Thia had an exhibition titled *Night Throwing* (2014). The show

transformed into assemblage. It is feminist without a language of femininity because it takes female biological processes and lays them bare. It mirrors the woman who houses a foreign creature within her, bringing it forth as an assemblage of her diet for nine months, her genes and her grappling desire to fuse with another.

In *La Folie du Jour* [The Madness of the Day], (1973), Maurice Blanchot writes: 'But, I have encountered beings who never told life to be quiet and death to go away—usually women, beautiful creatures ...'.³ The quote reminds me of your work and its violent demands for love without restraint, its invagination of all in its orbit, our early discussions about being 'woman' and our early idealising of femininity's rawness, that it was a vivid energy, a type of absolutism, a complete autonomy that was sexual and young and free—really the stuff that only a child can paint when tackling the complexities of being woman. Do you remember how much we wanted to be woman—to be consumed within that meta-identity, that meta-force of a romantic idea? You were inherently woman, demanding love in the same way your work now demands love while simultaneously nurturing. You build a nest that consumes your viewer, like a lover consumes. It is an exclusive and also inclusive subjectivity. It is tyrannical and egalitarian. It is temporal yet it resonates through the specific history of a space. It is an object but it elides commodity. It is a way of fucking, but it is also really a kind of love. It is far from a quiet communion, and even after demystifying love and laying its manipulations and strategies bare, love's constitutive parts—the spittle and blood of your everyday that builds your nest—still demand to be loved and to be allowed to consume. In your work our orbits seem to collapse onto each other, and we are left with nothing but the suspended condition of being in a space, in an experience, in love, somewhere between the taut ropes and bricks that bind us.

- 1 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*. Boston: Northwestern University Press, 1968, p. 152.
- 2 Susan Chaplin, *Law, Sensibility, and the Sublime in Eighteenth-Century Women's Fiction: Speaking of Dread*, Burlington: Ashgate, 2008, p. 23.
- 3 Jacques Derrida, *The Law of Genre*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1980, p. 223.

was made up of a series of photographs depicting a domestic space mostly in the dark. One of the photographs shows a silhouetted figure raising a papier-mâché puppet. The puppet can be seen as a surrogate acting on behalf of the darkened figure. The darkened figure itself can also be taken to be a surrogate. It stands in not for Mark, the actual artist, but rather for the figure of the artist. It is a vacant shape that invites the audience to project onto it. This artist figure is an empty sign that mediates between art and audience. It waves us in.

The artist is the medium through which art can be transmitted to audience. This same figure is also the means by which the audience's desire is communicated to art. Like an empty chair waiting to be occupied, the artist resembles an incomplete gesture that asks to be supplemented. The artist points the audience to contemporaneity, to beauty, to risk and to exception. For that to happen, the artist must be a beautiful invitation with a suggestive outline. It must appear empty because emptiness never fails to lure. But may I then ask: What must art ask of the audience? What demands on each other must be made for a meaningful exchange?

Last December, I exhibited a photograph of a half-folded chair in *Motherland*, a group show curated by Christina Arum Sok at Chan Hampe Gallery. On the photograph, I had scribbled in black marker: 'Is it my chair to offer? And I thought about it ... it took a complete stranger to make me realise, yes, it would be mine to offer'. Although seemingly abstruse, it was essentially an inner dialogue. It described how the notion of personal identity depends solely on the existence of another being, like a *tabula rasa* waiting to be filled.

To put it simply, it was a quick take on relativism, in terms of host and guest (*I am only this because of that. My existence is only possible by others observing me*). To me, this work sums up a narrative that unfolded when I moved my practice from Los Angeles to Singapore five years ago. My transition has been fluid, albeit sometimes uneasy, against the backdrop of this fragile relationship. Sometimes I assume the role of the host, offering a seat to whomever finds him or herself in the position of the guest. The act of performing or dramatising this relationship—however temporarily—consolidates the foundations on which my practice often depends.

The empty chair is a silent but loaded gesture. It serves as a mediating object with the power to assume, to probe and to hypothesise. It is therefore seductive.

Fast forward to the present day. I had just participated in a collaborative exhibition titled *Superposition(s)* (2014). The show was conceptualised by Kent Chan and held at the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore. At the end of it, Mark Thia, Zai Tang, Liao Jiekai and I presented *Near to Love*, a performance combining sculpture, film, sound, spoken word and movement. Mark had wanted to walk down a staircase rhythmically during the performance. I had designed and built a wooden staircase for him to do just that.

Pimeriko

Beachmat



Pimeriko, *Just the Two of Us* (detail), 2012, mixed media, dimensions variable. © Courtesy the artist



Pimeriko, *Just the Two of Us*, 2012, mixed media, dimensions variable. © Courtesy the artist



Ryo Shimizu, *Rooms*, 2013, mixed media, dimensions variable. © Courtesy the artist



Ryo Shimizu, *Right, Left or What*, 2009, synchronised video displayed on two monitors, silent, dimensions variable. © Courtesy the artist

Ryo Shimizu

Rooms

The elderly woman was looking at the land next to her house from her back door, as always. It was her daily habit to look out over the ordinary plot of country land, always standing in the exact same position. The elderly man did not pay much attention to her and kept himself busy with the housework and gardening. They spent each day in the same way, always without conversation. They were neither happy nor unhappy.

The elderly woman was looking at the land next to her house from her back door, as always. One day, a couple in their mid-thirties came to visit the land, accompanied by a real estate agent. They were asking about the site and its borders, about its history, about its sun and its wind. The elderly woman was eavesdropping from her back door. When the couple walked near her house, she quickly shut the door, then opened it again slowly. The couple came to notice her existence.

The elderly woman was looking at the land next to her house from her back door, as always. The couple periodically returned to look at the land. Sometimes only one of them came. The elderly woman watched the couple carefully from the back door, which she repeatedly opened and closed. The couple came to feel unsettled by her behaviour.

The elderly woman was looking at the land next to her house from her back door, as always. Half a year later, the couple bought the land. Six months later, they finished building their house on the land. The elderly woman's view was lost. She looked at the brand new house, square in shape, completely white with feelings of irritation, envy and nostalgia.

The elderly woman was looking at the land next to her house from her back door, as always. She focused on the new house and pricked her ears, listening for conversations and the sounds of doors and windows opening and closing. After one month, she learned the couple's habits: during the week the man stayed at home and the woman went to work. On weekends, she heard the sounds of their friends being introduced to the new house.

The elderly woman was looking at the land next to her house from her back door, as always. One morning, she couldn't bear it

anymore. She stepped out the door and walked to the new house. The man was surprised to see her walking across his property but he did not think much of it. He ignored her, not wishing to cause trouble so soon after moving to the neighbourhood.

The elderly woman was looking at the land next to her house from her back door, as always. That night, after the woman came back from work, the man told her about his encounter with the elderly woman. She was surprised, but the couple agreed to remain calm and not confront the woman, hoping that her behaviour would change with time. But despite their hope, the elderly woman's behavior became more erratic: they heard her trying to open the front door of their house and they caught her peeping through the small gap between their curtains and the window frame. The man finally confronted the elderly woman, but she denied everything.

The elderly woman was looking at the land next to her house from her back door, as always. The couple was discussing what to do about the elderly woman. They did not have any evidence to bring to the police and they were unsure of how to broach the subject with their other neighbours. They were disappointed that their new life has been marred by their unexpected encounters with the elderly woman. Eventually, their conversations died out and a depressed mood settled on the house.

Thirty years later

She was looking at the land next to her house from her back door, as always.