

TWO

HOUSES

Politics and histories in the contemporary art collections of John Chia and Yeap Lam Yang

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Forewords

Yeap Lam Yang
John Chia

Some two years ago, John Chia and I first discussed the possibility of presenting a joint exhibition and we decided on a working title and theme: political connections. I had proposed this theme as I felt the very two words, political connections, were provocative enough to generate audience interest. At the same time, such a title would allow considerable latitude in the range of works we could each include. John and I agreed to contribute an equal number of works to the exhibition.

I have more than a few works that strongly reflect this theme, and had been looking for an opportunity to exhibit them. Some of the works have not been seen in public for more than 20 years, and one or two others even longer. But as I did not have a sufficient number of such works to mount an exhibition on my own, a collaboration with a serious, equally passionate collector made good sense. By that time, I had already known John for 13 years. While I am an old-school collector, fairly conservative in my tastes, John is a flag-bearer for the new generation of Singapore collectors: passionate and daring, open-minded and indulgent about what I would describe as difficult subjects. Combined, our two collections could provide a potent mix.

Earlier this year, exhibition organisers Bala Starr and Melanie Pocock proposed a change of title to *Two houses: Politics and histories in the contemporary art collections of John Chia and Yeap Lam Yang*. I was somewhat taken aback, uncertain whether to agree. On the one hand, there is a strong curatorial feel about this new title, which I wholeheartedly support. On the other, *Two houses* seems to elevate us to the rank of collectors with long-established histories and reputations—which we do not claim. Whatever the case, the exhibition and this catalogue have now successfully come to fruition.

I sincerely hope *Two houses*, small as ours are, will be worthy of the trust LASALLE's Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore has placed in the two of us. Thank you Bala and Melanie and your colleagues at LASALLE College of the Arts for this golden opportunity.

For art, always!

Yeap Lam Yang

Why collect? Why not just appreciate art in a museum? It is a question I often ask myself. I don't really know why collecting is important to me. My wife Cheryl Loh—a psychiatrist—thinks it is a compensation for some childhood lack. Perhaps a *karang guni* mentality. All I know is that collecting has become an integral part of our lives together.

I think I see art as a promise—of a world yet unborn. A proposal—recomposing traditional hierarchies. Perhaps from the reality of my day-to-day struggle, I see art as a seed planted on unproductive ground, awaiting the days of sunshine and rain. A dream of a different tomorrow, an eidetic imagery of all the exciting civilisations to come.

Perhaps it is because I feel so powerless that I am attracted to art as a mechanism of redistributive power. I like the idea of strong images sent out into the world to wage war. Perhaps, because I'm rebellious, and don't like people telling me what to think, I'm attracted to art for its ability to self-assemble communities, and constituencies. To invite and elaborate, rather than indoctrinate and dictate.

Where does the collector fit in all of this? Honestly, I don't know. Cheryl and I collect together. It is an activity we can really enjoy as a couple—or separately, with my art friends (Art Addicts Anonymous) and 'uncles', Yeap Lam Yang and Jimmy Chua. It has made my life rich and flavourful.

Buying art requires a certain suspension of reason, and blindness to economics. Sooner or later collecting hits natural limits. Mr Yeap taught me how to love art, to consider it as something priceless and rare, but also to look at it in terms of opportunity costs. He is absolutely right. Buyer's remorse comes when you have just spent a lot of money, only to see something better.

Finally I would like to thank Bala Starr, Melanie Pocock and LASALLE's Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore team, with graphic designer Vanessa Ban, for putting together a wondrously high-quality book and show. And the artists whom we admire and collect. It has been a terribly fun and wild ride.

John Chia

Preface

Bala Starr

Yeap Lam Yang and John Chia are among Singapore's most engaged and committed collectors. The catalyst for *Two houses: Politics and histories in the contemporary art collections of John Chia and Yeap Lam Yang* was the companionable relationship between the younger Dr Chia and his friend and mentor, Mr Yeap. I first met Mr Yeap in early 2014 in the lead-up to our exhibition, *Thinking of landscape: Paintings from the Yeap Lam Yang collection*, initiated in collaboration with my predecessor, Charles Merewether, and the Kuala Lumpur-based RogueArt curatorial team. *Thinking of landscape* brought together 60 artworks on the theme of landscape by Southeast Asian, Chinese, Taiwanese and Australian artists across several generations. At one level, like the current project, it traced a diagram of Mr Yeap's collection development since the early 1990s.

I likely first met Dr Chia and his wife, Cheryl Loh, while visiting galleries or attending a performance at Gillman Barracks in late 2013. Their philosophical approach to art and interest to broaden the values we bring to it still strike me as exceptional. Many Singapore gallerists, curators and artists have enjoyed a conversation with Drs Chia and Loh that starts with a work of art and extends to wide-ranging subjects from AI to ancient cartography.

In 2015 we worked with senior collector Koh Seow Chuan to celebrate Singapore's golden jubilee year with *Artists imagine a nation: SG50. Pictures of people and places from the collections of Koh Seow Chuan and friends*. These three exhibitions, *Thinking of landscape*, *Artists imagine a nation* and *Two houses*, build on a model of public-private initiative that has become increasingly important in the development of international contemporary art. In Southeast Asia, where institutions and individuals work self-consciously to deepen and diversify art-historical perspectives, their significance is arguably more pressing. The art scenes of Southeast Asia are still emerging, and art institutions across the region are unevenly distributed. In such circumstances, collaborations between public institutions and private concerns introduce different kinds of density and ambition to each other's contexts. The curatorial framework for such projects is to a large degree an open diagram of the creative partnership itself; the way that ethical decisions are negotiated, and how decision-making processes around artwork selection and installation, cataloguing and positioning, reflect both parties' interests. In my experience, public-private partnerships are served by durable, commonsense approaches that lend credence to all collaborators' interests.

Mr Yeap and Dr Chia belong to a new group of art collectors in Southeast Asia whose partnerships have enlarged the reach of contemporary artists' practices beyond the independent studio or gallery, and nurtured alternative art-historical narratives. Their collections share a focus on Southeast Asian art, but their acquisitions reflect their different personalities and interests. For *Two houses*, each has selected 20 works that explore civic life, addressing social justice, labour politics, human rights and nationhood. Thirty-five artists are represented by 40 works or groups of works made in diverse media between 1986 and 2018. This catalogue is an important parallel component of the exhibition. It has extended the community of participants—the community of perspectives—to include a group of 19 writers, curators and arts professionals who have contributed 40 texts on the artworks.

At LASALLE College of the Arts, we have had long and fruitful relationships with many of the private art collectors who have been instrumental in supporting Singapore's arts scene and championing young artists. The Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore itself began life in 1986 as the Dr Earl Lu Gallery, named in honour of the philanthropist Dr Earl Lu, who donated a generous collection of artworks to LASALLE. Today, one of our five gallery spaces bears his name. Many of Singapore's most celebrated artists have passed through our doors and we are proud of the role we have played in shaping the story of Singapore through art. At the same time, we look ahead to the artists and collectors of tomorrow, and those graduating from LASALLE today, and the prospect that they will be as instrumental as the early pioneers.

It has been a pleasure for co-organiser Melanie Pocock and me, the ICA Singapore team, and our colleagues at LASALLE, to develop this exhibition with Mr Yeap and Dr Chia over the past two years. I warmly thank them both for their commitment, and for sharing their collections with us. The artists and their representatives have generously provided advice and information, and we are grateful. The responses of our text contributors are insightful and considered, and I thank all the authors for their participation. In bringing together this catalogue, graphic designer Vanessa Ban has once again created a beautiful resource. We thank her for her consistent care and attentiveness.

Bala Starr

Director, Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore
LASALLE College of the Arts

Interview with John Chia
and Yeap Lam Yang

Bala Starr
Melanie Pocock

The interview that follows between collectors, John Chia and Yeap Lam Yang, and exhibition organisers, Bala Starr and Melanie Pocock, took place in February 2018 followed by email correspondence and further meetings. The interview model seemed a useful format to explore Dr Chia and Mr Yeap's purpose in initiating the exhibition, their 15-year friendship and its focus on exchange and mentorship, and their mutual interests in Southeast Asian art and civic life.

The interview ranges across Dr Chia's and Mr Yeap's personal histories of collecting and details their commitment to art and artists. As the exhibition title, *Two houses: Politics and histories in the contemporary art collections of John Chia and Yeap Lam Yang* proposes, Dr Chia and Mr Yeap are the custodians of discrete art 'houses'. Their shared belief in art's cosmopolitan, sociable character, and their concern with sociopolitical issues, lend the project an unusual ambition.

Bala Starr: Mr Yeap and Dr Chia, you've been pursuing art for different periods of time, Mr Yeap for 30 years and Dr Chia for almost 20 years. Collecting art is still a relatively uncommon activity, and often collectors recall seminal experiences that led them to pursue art. Can you tell us something about your earlier lives and describe the encounters that encouraged you to begin to collect art?

John Chia: My first experience of art was buying an oil painting at a gallery in Clarke Quay. It was a decorative artwork depicting a man unloading fish by the Singapore River and we (my wife, Cheryl Loh, and I) liked it a lot. Two months later we went back and bought a second artwork by the same artist. We still have both paintings but don't really consider them 'serious' artworks. They now hang in the Changi General Hospital psychiatric ward.

My first formative experience of collecting was going down to Cape of Good Hope Art Gallery almost every weekend, sitting with Terence Teo as he showed us Chinese ink paintings. Terence always emphasised the *feeling* of an artwork. For a long time, we didn't understand, but we have gradually come to appreciate what he meant.

The second point—the turning point—in our art-collecting journey was meeting Mr Yeap. For some reason he invited us to his house and there we saw a real art collection. I remember you [Yeap Lam Yang] learnt that we were very interested in Chua Ek Kay but could never get any 'good' ones; by the time we got to a show most of them had already been reserved. Then my friend Joshua bumped into Mr Yeap at Cape of Good Hope, and Mr Yeap told him, 'I'm meeting the artist and he's bringing down all his new works. Come by and I'll introduce you'. And so on that day, Joshua, Cheryl and I went down to the gallery and waited. Chua Ek Kay came in his white T-shirt, carrying a large bundle of Chinese ink works, his hands still black with ink. Mr Yeap said, 'You guys are young collectors, you go and pick first'. Ek Kay went through each of the works, explaining his ideas. Joshua bought one work, Cheryl and I bought another, and later Mr Yeap invited us to his place.

BS: All along you have collected together with Cheryl?

JC: Yes, we've always bought art together. When we went to Lam Yang's house we had our first conception of what art could be as a collection. Previously it was one artwork, and then another; we'd never considered our paintings as a collection. The second thing was that it was quite nice to walk around in a house like you do in an art gallery. It was powerful. We sensed two things; one of them was passion, and the other was a certain coherence of the artworks altogether. I also remember being stunned by the amazing quality of the works.

BS: May I come back to your first purchase? You described the painting as a decorative work. Can you say anything else about it? Was it like buying an interesting piece of furniture or was it something already—

JC: It was just beautiful, you know?

BS: About something beautiful?

JC: Yes.

BS: By this time, you and Cheryl had embarked upon your professions?

JC: Yes, I think I was a houseman [junior doctor]. We bought that first work just after graduation—one month's salary, a thousand dollars!

BS: You were already making a philosophical decision about the value of works of art and the place of art in your lives; appreciating the possibility of a personal and emotional connection with art as well as the expanded sense of time that comes with collecting.

Mr Yeap, when did you start collecting?

Yeap Lam Yang: If I trace back to the roots of my art collecting, I remember my second year as a university student in London in 1977. I lived off-campus in a somewhat shabby room. To make the room look more attractive, I bought a calendar of Picasso paintings. I must have liked his works and I don't think I knew at the time how famous Picasso was.

When I started working in 1979, my first job was at The Development Bank of Singapore (now DBS Bank). At that time, DBS supported local artists and purchased art for their offices. My good friend and colleague, David Lim, sat on the bank's art acquisition committee. He opened my eyes to art. He was always critical if a work of art failed to meet his exacting standards. I guess I learnt ways of seeing from him.

Although I started buying art in 1984, it was many years later, around 1990, that I became a serious collector. That was the time I started to aggressively collect Latiff Mohidin, Shi Hu and Chang Fee Ming, spending most of my income on art.

BS: In those early days there was that attraction to beautiful things, and you had in common the desire to bring those things into your living environment. You also met the right person or people who showed how an engagement with art was possible.

JC: You have to see a collection first. Early on I didn't know any collections or collectors. It sets a standard inside your head. Prior to that you're just fumbling around.

Melanie Pocock: Your two collections are different in terms of the kinds of art and media. Mr Yeap, as an example, you have many abstract and figurative works and an emphasis on two-dimensional works, whether painting or drawing or photography. Dr Chia, on the other hand, has a strong focus on conceptual art, and also film, video, digital media, installation, even performance. Could you tell us more about these emphases in your collections? Have they been formed deliberately or are they more casual, the result of circumstance?

YLY: I am a collector from the old school, more recently trying to learn the ways of the contemporary. Indeed, my initiation into art was all about painting, which continues to be my main focus. I still don't collect video art and have only one video. My photography collecting remains passive. After acquiring a Yee I-Lann work of a solitary house some 15 or so years ago, my next photographic acquisitions were the Robert Zhao Renhui works in this exhibition in 2010. Since that time or thereabouts, about half my purchases have been contemporary. I've recently collected artists such as Tang Dixin, Arin Dwihartanto Sunaryo, Aditya Novali, Tiffany Chung and eX de Medici.

MP: Is there a time when you've seen a video artwork you'd like to acquire, but have decided not to pursue it in order to maintain the coherency of your collection?

YLY: Collecting can be endless. We all need to focus. Last year when I was in Tokyo I saw *SUNSHOWER: Contemporary art from Southeast Asia 1980s to now*. And Ho Tzu Nyen's video *One or several tigers*. That was visually very powerful. But it is not something I felt I needed to own.

MP: And John?

JC: Yes, I'm just younger and my experiences are different in the same way that my kids might well collect an art form that's totally different. Their experience of the world, their use of technology, their sense of place, time, speed of time, all their references will be different. I'm sure that their collecting style or what draws their interest will be different.

YLY: If I may say, John is more interested in art that's intellectual, challenging, cerebral. I find myself interested in how artists execute their ideas, paying closer attention to the technical skills that underpin the ideas.

BS: Doesn't it really go back to the integrity of an artwork and the whole group? That is what seems to make most sense. Maybe it's actually about more than supposed binaries like ideas versus technique. You build your own understanding of things, and this comes into play as you create a collection. And we know that installation and photography really came into their own only in the early 1990s and towards the late '90s when they almost assumed the position that painting had, so it does make a lot of sense, doesn't it, to continue to explore painting and drawing. That changes and develops, albeit subtly, over that period, whereas you both had already begun to develop your own directions. There is often no room for compromise once the task has begun.

JC: I started off on the right footing. I remember we had breakfast or lunch once and Lam Yang said to me, 'John, you have to collect the opportunities of your own time. Don't follow what I have collected'. He said, 'I collect Latiff Mohidin. I have some of the best Chang Fee Ming works. But if I were to tell you to collect Latiff and Fee Ming, there would now be a lot of competition for key works'.

What if he had told me to collect this and that, now is a good time, you'll make a lot of money, for example? I could quite easily have been set on that road of investing in art. It would have been quite attractive.

YLY: Bala, what you have said holds much truth. But sometimes buying an artwork carries with it little or no logic as to whether it fits a collection. One responds intuitively to the work at the time of purchase. A collection evolves over time. Some works make good sense only after a few more are added. Yet others turn out to be mistakes that one later regrets. Few collectors can claim not to make mistakes.

JC: Lam Yang's advice was that if you buy 20 works with a view to sell or trim later, you'll confuse yourself. Are you a collector or a dealer? Don't muddle the roles. And that has given me a second form of freedom: not to consider the investment side of things. If you would like to buy 20 works by the same artist, you'd choose works spread out over time, rather than buying 'stock'.

BS: John, you've described mentorship such as Mr Yeap's as invaluable in helping to avoid some of the risks of collecting contemporary art, where, as you have said, 'anything can be art and mistakes are costly'—which sounds slightly tricky. You've also talked about friendly rivalry as a source of inspiration and motivation. Implicit in collecting though is following your own instinct. It's a question of identifying what you see and like and are willing to commit to. The danger of course by contrast lies in trying to emulate the taste of others. These questions are all about integrity and how best to form something that makes sense and is also sustainable over time.

YLY: Let me say that John has developed his collection very much on his own with Cheryl. I can perhaps only claim credit for advising him to collect the best art of his time. As for taste, I do not influence him in any way. If you look at the works in *Two houses*, very few works, maybe two or three, display affinities. John has travelled his own art journey. On one rare occasion, I encouraged him to buy Qiu Zhijie's *Live through all the tribulation* (2008). It's in this exhibition and a fantastic work.

JC: I think the two collections share common values. Mr Yeap passed on a lively sense of commitment to those values—buying art for art's sake, buying the best. But at the same time his approach to art gave me freedom to explore, an internal fidelity to pursue a certain vision for the collection. It is really about thinking in terms of the whole collection, such as whether a particular artwork would 'make the collection stronger', as he used to say. The art universe is very, very wide and you cannot collect everything. Without focus, a collection will not amount to much.

YLY: Another piece of advice I gave John was to see as much as possible, and travel to visit museums, galleries and art fairs. For all that we criticise art fairs as overly commercial, there is no denying that serious top-end fairs provide collectors with a bird's-eye view of what's new in art.

MP: You've talked about the reasons why you collect and what motivates you, and a part of that is about supporting artists—not just financially through buying their work, but also the encouragement that an acquisition can provide. Mr Yeap, I'm thinking here of your comments about supporting artists who are maybe going through a difficult period in their practice. As well, in acquiring a work you're supporting the ideas it represents; it's a vote of confidence in ideas.

JC: I wouldn't want the artist or anybody else to think that I'm supporting them. It's very transactional. I'm an art buyer; I get an artwork. It's just like that. I actually don't buy art to support artists.

BS: Is it that you want artists to be independent? Not motivated by your concerns or influenced by them?

JC: Not really. It may sound bad, but it's not about the artists. I buy art because the art moves me, it inspires me. I look at an artwork, and I'm blown away—by the ideas, by the creativity, and by the sheer execution. Many people think that art is easy, but I think good art is extraordinarily difficult. Bad art is easy. Good art takes commitment, a bit of genius.

YLY: In some ways I agree with John because it's very idealistic to consider otherwise, realising the universe of artists that need support. Having said that, I have supported young artists—perhaps three to five at any one time—since the early days, encouraging them and hoping to see them succeed. Some do succeed, which doubles the pleasure of collecting.

MP: What is important about having those relationships, in a more personal way, with artists whose work you've purchased? For some collectors it's very much about the work; a distance is maintained, whereas you both enjoy going to an artist's studio, having conversations.

JC: Artists are quite fun people to be with, they see the world in interesting ways. My world is somewhat conventional, by comparison.

YLY: Not every collector–artist relationship is the ideal sort of relationship; some artists become very good friends—friends for life. But there are others who also regard the buying of art as transactional. I don't develop a bond with every artist, no.

MP: I would like to hear your thoughts more specifically on the works in the exhibition and the Southeast Asian focus of your collections. I'm thinking about the politics, regional histories, cultural hybridity. What is it about this region, this place—whether we're thinking Singapore and Malaysia, Southeast Asia, Asia—that particularly interests you?

BS: Or is it just because it's your place?

YLY: It's more my place. I travel largely within Asia, I see most exhibitions within Asia. I don't go to galleries or art fairs in Europe and America. I travel to Malaysia and China frequently, so the art of those countries offers real opportunities for me. If anything, I have a tendency to build a collection of works around artists I like, sometimes to the point of obsession.

JC: I don't know how to answer here. When you look at Tang Da Wu, Lee Wen and the artists of The Artists Village, they're trying to use art to push an agenda, to prise open a society's way of thinking. Art can be a key to unlock the chains. It can be a weapon. Sometimes I feel artists see themselves as Zarathustra, coming down from the mountain, bringing sight and knowledge to the blind, getting the people to realise their human potential. Maybe at one time, there was a belief that Art could change society, bring a new consciousness. I'm not sure art has that kind of social agenda any more. A lot of art nowadays is complicit—it accepts the status quo and order of things. Maybe the world has become too big, too complex, too pluralistic. It does not really make sense to fight anymore. The artist is more likely your neighbour than a prophet or a 'voice calling out in the wilderness'. But this show has a political focus, and therefore a concentration of oppositional works. Lee Wen's *Anthropometry revision 1 and 2* (2006) is four photographs about people being crushed, oppressed by the products of capitalistic production. He is a supplicant and a slave. It is quite easy to see Lee Wen's works through the lens of Hegel's master–slave dialectic. And Marx's prophesy that one day the people will break their chains and rise up.

Recently I've been thinking about my Asian identity as a mature individual in society, and I'm surprised to find that I'm quite happy with certain unfreedoms that I have; when you're married you're unfree, in your relationship with your parents, you're also a little bit unfree. And within Confucian society there's a sense of duty towards your wider community which makes you unfree, but it's not a burdensome unfreedom, it's a happy unfreedom. If you talk about the art of Asia or Southeast Asia vis-à-vis Western art, I find Western art to be very cold where they've created this freedom for the individual that is pure intellect and it's an atomised kind of independence. And that maybe has made people free, but it's hard and it's cold. In Asia, there's still a relationship issue which makes it a bit warmer. Even though Lee Wen, Zai Kuning, Tang Da Wu, struggled to set people free, to make society more equal, they tried to do it within an Asian philosophical context. There's still a relationship aspect, a warmth, and a sense of trying to reach out to people. It's not an abstract view of society. The performance is done inside society. The artist dwells with you, there is an assumption of an existing relationship.

BS: As an extension of those comments, the term 'political connections' has been a recurring point of reference for both of you in terms of the selection of works and in developing the exhibition. Can you speak about what political connections mean to you? And then in relation to the selected works?

YLY: 'Political connections' is intended to be broadly interpreted. Significant sociopolitical issues that affect the lives of citizens or individuals is the main theme of this exhibition. Of course certain political events infuriate artists more than others and tragic political events have inspired artists to produce exceptional art. Take for example Shi Hu's innocuously titled *Summer dreams* (1991). In fact the work depicts the artist's recollection of the nightmarish events of 4 June 1989 in Beijing. And then Chang Fee Ming's *Liberté (Liberty), Égalité (Equality) and Fraternité (Brotherhood)* from the *Visage* exhibition of 2010, which were his responses to events that took place in Malaysia, his home country. Still in Malaysia, Wong Hoy Cheong's *Detention Oct. 1987* was painted two years after Operation Lalang, which saw political dissidents arrested and put in jail.

MP: There are micro-stories attached to each work so again rather than the big picture we can examine these personalised encounters, the particular artist and their—in some cases—political motivations. This is a good point to talk in detail about a couple of the works that have particular meaning for you. Can you tell us about works that represent moments of history or ideas that are important to you?

YLY: I have selected two works by Michael Lee, which I commissioned for this exhibition in 2016. Lee makes paintings of homes that were either never built or built and destroyed. These two, from his series *Dwelling*, depict two of my previous homes that were subject to Singapore's en bloc [collective real estate sale] programme. *Home of Yeap Lam Yang, 1988/90–2006, Habitat II at 2 Ardmore Park #11-02,*

Singapore (1985 – c. 2006), is my first home on my own from the mid-1980s, and *Home of Yeap Lam Yang, 2006–07, Habitat I at 3 Ardmore Park #06-02, Singapore (1984 – c. 2007)*, represents my home for a year around 2007. In antiseptic Singapore, en bloc has become a big issue affecting people's daily lives. It has attracted news headlines every other day in recent months.

JC: Vandy Rattana's *Funeral of my father* (2018) presents the act of burying a man as a metaphor for how Vandy himself negotiates the meaning of trauma, of loss and war, which have ripped through every segment of society. His first video is about his sister, who was buried underneath the mango trees. With this last part of the trilogy, Vandy is trying to move forward and I have a suspicion that it will be a watershed moment, and from here he can go on to other things. He's doing that, he's performing the rites on behalf of the whole society to negotiate that part of history. When done, he will have drawn a line in the sand, ready to move on. And I'm interested to see what he's going to do next. Artists are a nation's conscience, its soul.

In terms of the selection, I thought Hiraki Sawa's *Lineament* (2012) and Vandy's *Funeral of my father* obliquely referenced each other through narrative. Both deal with the workings of memory. Lee Wen's *Anthropometry revision 1 and 2* and Zai Kuning's *To be a farmer* (2013) are interesting because of the changkol's status as the archetype of labour. And I thought Wong Hoy Cheong's dialectic, *'The definitive ABC of government' and 'The definitive ABC of ethnography'* (1999) related a little to Inga Svala Thorsdottir and Wu Shanzhuan's *Thing's right(s) printed 2013* (2013) and Lee Wen's *Strange fruit* (2003)—the cultural ethnography—and a little bit to FX Harsono's *Purification* (2013). The Aquilizans' sickles [*Left wing: Project another country*, 2015] relate to the Zai Kuning changkol element; Le Quang Ha's *Prison 3* (1997) to Sopheap Pich's *Valley drip (Black top)* (2012) and Vandy Rattana's *Funeral of my father*. The works stitch together.

MP: Bala and I have been thinking about the context for this exhibition in terms of the development of private art museums in the region. There are newer public institutions, whether it's collecting institutions, institutions that focus on temporary exhibitions, but also private collectors making their own spaces for showing their own collections or exhibitions that gather works from different collections.

Here at LASALLE's ICA Singapore, we experience the exchange between generations that is proper to an art school. And something else that's important for us is the emphasis on artistic and curatorial practice, as opposed to, say, the kinds of exhibitions that the National Gallery Singapore is making. Here we're interested to work with living artists, with contemporary art, and also to pursue exhibition-making as a practice. Can you comment on what it does to bring together these works in a certain configuration in this context?

YLY: I don't have an ambition to set up a private museum. At the same time, having amassed a collection, there is an obligation to show these works to the public. Some of the works, like *Summer dreams* and *The three hymns* (1990), haven't been seen for 27 years. And I don't think Hoy Cheong's *Detention Oct. 1987* has ever been shown in Singapore. It is also very interesting to do a show because John is a much younger collector with a different vision.

I remember at the opening of *Thinking of landscape: Paintings from the Yeap Lam Yang collection* I made a promise to Bala that I'd be back within five years and I'm honouring that promise four years later.

JC: The art that's shown here at LASALLE is more generative, more open-ended. It doesn't take itself so seriously, it's not a closed book but it leaves a lot of pages unwritten. It seems to be more porous to society, to change, and less prescriptive. Maybe if we don't straightjacket the art it will develop its own social life, and find its own way out of ambiguity. It's a lot more fun not taking yourself so seriously. For myself, I don't want to take on any of the responsibility of carrying the flag for the younger generation of art collectors. To each his own. It's not for me to tell people what is best. We must all find our own way to heaven.

BS: It's often said that an exhibition needs to risk something in order to be successful, to be memorable. What do you feel you are risking by presenting this exhibition? What is at stake in *Two houses*?

YLY: *Two houses: Politics and histories in the contemporary art collections of John Chia and Yeap Lam Yang* is a rather ambitious title. To me it has to carry the weight of public expectation. If the exhibition is to cover the politics and histories of Asia in one fell swoop, can two collections of just 40 works combined achieve that? I don't think so. The burden is heavy! At the same time, I hope the audience will focus on different aspects of the exhibition, seeing how two collections are woven together, each collector having travelled a different path. And that, in the end, what matters most is to build a collection that comes from one's heart.

JC: Mr Yeap invited me to do this show. I admire his collection. I admire his passion, straight-talking, and high standards. I am lucky to have met him relatively early on the journey of art collecting. There were words spoken that were very crisp. There were also a lot of things that were unspoken, but well understood.

Works in detail

Known for his socially concerned art that highlights the plight of the poor and disenfranchised, the late Indonesian artist Semsar Siahaan rose to prominence in the 1980s for his activism against the actions of then-President Suharto's authoritarian New Order regime. Art students were encouraged to pursue more generalist and aesthetically pleasing styles, which were depoliticised, and in this context Semsar's provocative paintings stood out for their bravery and boldness in addressing social issues.

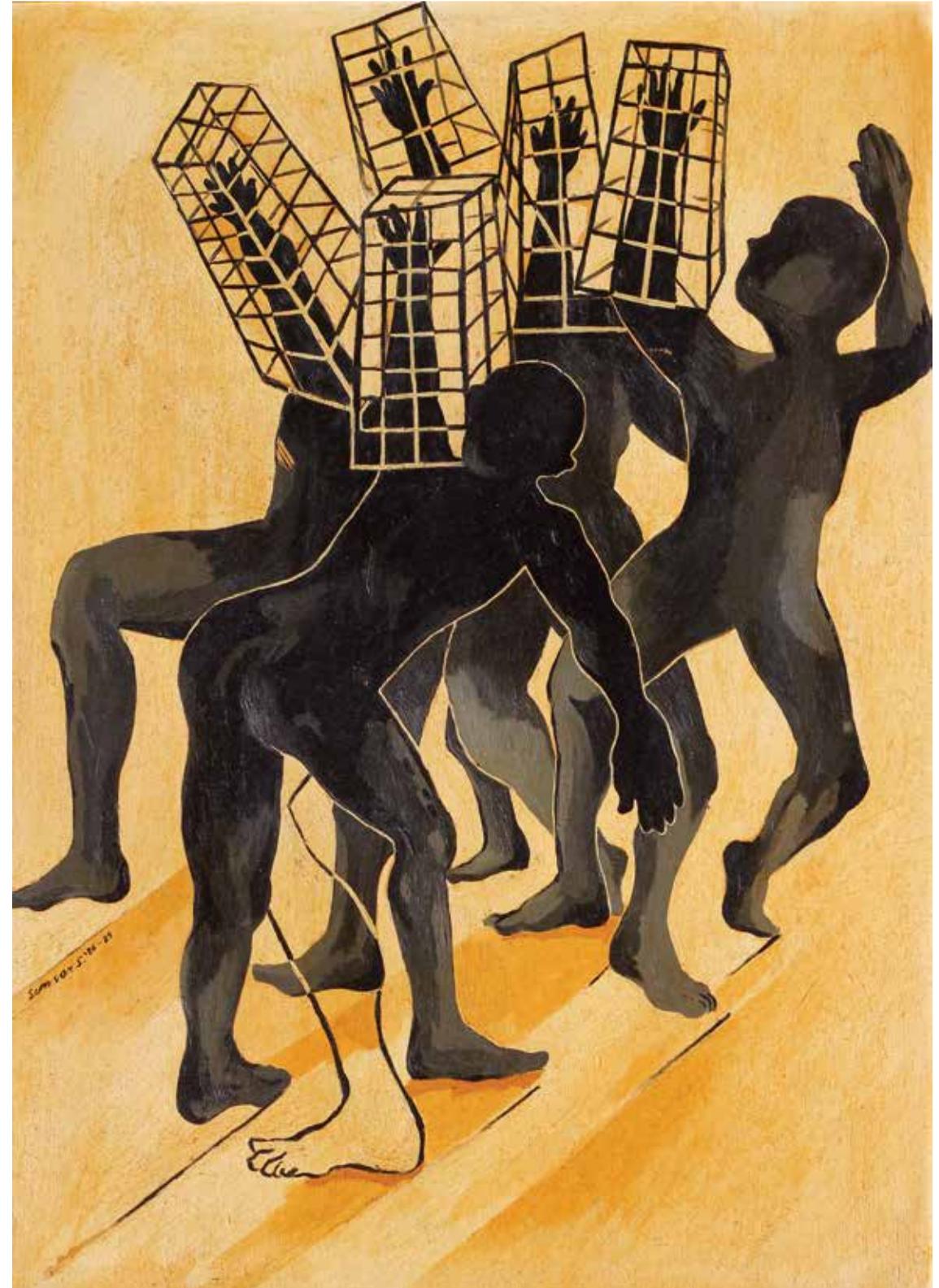
In 1981, Semsar was expelled from Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB) after he burned a sculpture made by his then-teacher Sunaryo titled *Citra Irian dalam torso* (The image of Irian in torso). Semsar burned the work as he felt that Sunaryo had unethically appropriated motifs from the people of Irian Jaya (now known as Papua), and as a statement against ITB institutional norms in the teaching and practice of art. After having been severely beaten by the police in 1994, Semsar fled Indonesia in 1999 fearing government persecution, eventually settling in Canada for a time.

This untitled painting depicts anonymous black human figures with one or both arms trapped in cages. Given Semsar's activism against the authoritarianism of the New Order government, the work suggests an Indonesian populace contorted into unnatural positions, reaching for help or seeking to be heard. The simplicity in style appears deliberate, providing social commentary in as straightforward a manner as possible so that his political messages are not lost in overly metaphorical or ornate representations.

Overlooked for a number of years in part due to his physical absence from Indonesia, Semsar has re-entered the consciousness of Indonesian contemporary artists and curators, having recently been singled out for a 'mini-retrospective' at the 2017 Jakarta Biennale (*Jiwa*). In the same year, Singapore's Gajah Gallery presented *Semsar Siahaan: Art, liberation*, a solo exhibition of Semsar's works.

Usha Chandradas

Semsar Siahaan
Untitled, 1986–89
 oil on canvas
 100 x 75 cm
 Collection of Yeap Lam Yang
 Image courtesy estate of Semsar Siahaan and Gajah Gallery, Singapore



Belonging to the postcolonial generation of artists who were born into the newly independent nation of Malaysia, Wong furthered his studies abroad. His early works were paintings in the New York abstract expressionist style, influenced by his art-school education at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, in the United States of America. Upon his return to Malaysia, however, Wong felt compelled to create art that reflected the realities of life in his home country. Turning away from abstraction, he was inspired by South American Marxist muralists like Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros, in whose works he saw radical echoes of Southeast Asian postcolonial politics. He began to paint large-scale, figurative works in vibrant colours that called attention to the contemporary social and political issues in Malaysia.

Detention Oct. 1987 typifies Wong's artistic practice during this period. An oil painting on canvas sack, the work measures more than 2 metres high and almost 1.5 metres wide. Human figures fill the space, arms raised and fists clenched as if in protest, or clutching at vertical iron bars. Two men hold up a sign containing a Bahasa Malaysia translation of articles 5, 9 and 10 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The painting depicts the 1987 incident known as Operation Lalang, which saw the arrest of 106 persons—activists, opposition politicians, intellectuals and students—who were detained without trial under Malaysia's Internal Security Act.

Although Wong was to eventually move on from painting to work in a range of media including drawing, photography, film, installation and performance, his work continues to be characterised by an active concern for and engagement with social issues, not only in his home country but also in other parts of the world.

Pauline Gan

Wong Hoy Cheong
Detention Oct. 1987, 1989
 oil on canvas sack
 213 x 147 x 3 cm (approx.)
 Collection of Yeap Lam Yang
 Photography: Joe Nair



Versed in poetry, literature, calligraphy and painting, Hebei-born Shi Hu draws inspiration from Chinese traditional arts such as stone carving, lacquer painting and paper cuttings for embroidery work, synthesising Eastern culture with Western art techniques. The result is an omnivorous oeuvre that embraces ink painting, calligraphy and the wilder, more gestural vocabularies of abstract expressionism.

This 1990 triptych, *The three hymns*, is painted on rice paper with a mix of acrylic paint and Chinese watercolour, creating strong colours of pink, green, red and yellow. Three headless figures are depicted playing instruments that are invisible in some cases, but all three are probably Chinese musicians performing traditional folk songs. The woman on the left could be a singer or a musician playing a string instrument, while the figure on the right appears to be drawing an invisible bow. The figure in the centre is shown playing the *gehu*, a hybrid between the Western cello and the Chinese *erhu*.

Engaging with China's recent political and social history is another strand of Shi Hu's practice. An interesting feature in this triptych is the use of dried flowers which alludes to the Hundred Flowers Campaign liberalisation movement and its tragic aftermath, the Cultural Revolution. The former, a Chinese Communist Party programme, was devised to encourage China's intellectuals to provide feedback, opinions and even suggestions about the regime and its policies. Launched by Mao Zedong in May 1956, the movement was named after the traditional poem 'Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend'. However, within a year, Mao abandoned the campaign and conducted a violent crackdown on intellectuals, students and leading Chinese thinkers. Against this backdrop, Shi's painting, which appears like a straightforward ode to Chinese folk music, contains darker implications of persecution and violence (as seen in the fragmented bodies)—combining both orthodoxy and dissent, tradition and innovation.

Christine Han



Shi Hu
The three hymns, 1990
 ink, synthetic polymer paint and dried flowers on rice paper
 triptych (framed): 180 x 202 cm, each 142 x 47 cm (sight)
 Collection of Yeap Lam Yang
 Photography: Joe Nair

In *Summer dreams*, Chinese artist Shi Hu imagines the tumultuous events which occurred at Tiananmen Square on 4 June 1989, when military troops opened fire on a demonstration led by student protestors following orders from the then-Chinese government. Unlike the colourful figures of a number of his narrative paintings, this painting uses a simple combination of black ink on white paper to create a striking representation of this seminal event. Details of the work, such as gestural marks in a pale hue and an inscription of Chinese text towards the top of the painting, not only convey the violent outcome of the protests but also Shi's personal feelings towards them.

Crisscrossing lines of ink capture the bodies and frantic movements of protestors. Skeletal outlines of human figures create a sense of foreboding, and could be interpreted as ghostly renderings of the people who were killed during the demonstration. While the medium is Chinese ink painting, the work's enigmatic depiction of a pivotal event also evokes genres of Western history painting, which sought to mythologise historical moments through arrangements of protagonists in mid-action. The fragmented bodies and expressionistic style of *Summer dreams*, for example, recall Pablo Picasso's monumental work *Guernica* (1937), whose depiction of fleeing and injured civilians tells a similar story of repression through the violence of the Spanish Civil War (1936–39).

After 1989, Shi Hu went to live in Macau, where he painted *Summer dreams*. An autonomous city known for its casinos, Macau is acknowledged in the work by the Chinese text's reference to 'the gambling city' (賭城). In the text, he also expresses his longing for his native country. For Shi, the protests—violently quashed by the Chinese communist regime—represented the dashed hopes of a generation, whose suppression he symbolises in the text by flipping the Chinese character for dreams (夢) upside down.

Melanie Pocock

Shi Hu
Summer dreams, 1991
 ink and synthetic polymer paint on rice paper
 188 x 123 cm
 Collection of Yeap Lam Yang
 Photography: Joe Nair



Born in Hanoi in 1963, Le Quang Ha is a member of the generation of artists who came of age in the post-*doi moi* (renovation) era in Vietnam. Started in 1986, *doi moi* was a slew of market-oriented economic and political reforms implemented by the government after decades of war and the hardships of the postwar period.

Doi moi led to significant changes in the cultural landscape of the country. Before *doi moi*, artists in Vietnam were obliged to confine themselves strictly to themes of socialist realism. The new open-door policy and climate of freedom gave more opportunities for experimentation and individual expression. Many artists, however, stuck to subjects that appealed to the growing market for Vietnamese art, creating nostalgic works that flirted with Vietnam's colonial history, its cultural traditions and the beauty of its natural landscape.

While Ha's early figurative works reflect these tendencies, they are more nuanced than those of his contemporaries, showing signs of what was to become his distinctive vision and style. His works portray the social, economic and political realities of modern-day Vietnam. Human faces and forms are often distorted and strange, even grotesque. Some take on animal-like features with larger-than-life mouths, teeth, heads and hands, while others appear to be half-man, half-machine (*Flying*, 2006, and *The dictator*, 2007). Ha offers a satirical and sometimes apocalyptic vision of Vietnam that reflects his concerns about the corrupting nature of economic wealth and power.

In *Prison 3*, however, Ha adopts a more personal and introspective stance. This three-dimensional work, an oil-on-canvas painting in a wooden box with grid-like bars at the front, depicts a lone figure, perhaps Ha himself, looking out at the viewer. Here, Ha turns upon himself the distortion he usually uses to depict politicians and government officials. The subhuman creature he depicts has a bloody, exaggerated orifice of a mouth and an outsized, lumpy arm. Confrontational and dramatic, the work is both a political as well as psychological study, revealing the tensions and anxieties that Ha feels about the threats and constraints to which he has been subjected.

Pauline Gan

Le Quang Ha
Prison 3, 1997
 oil on canvas, wood
 75 x 65 x 10 cm
 Collection of Yeap Lam Yang
 Image courtesy the artist and Thavibu Art Advisory, Bangkok
 Photography: Songgot Kondee



**'The definitive ABC
of government' and
'The definitive ABC of
ethnography'**

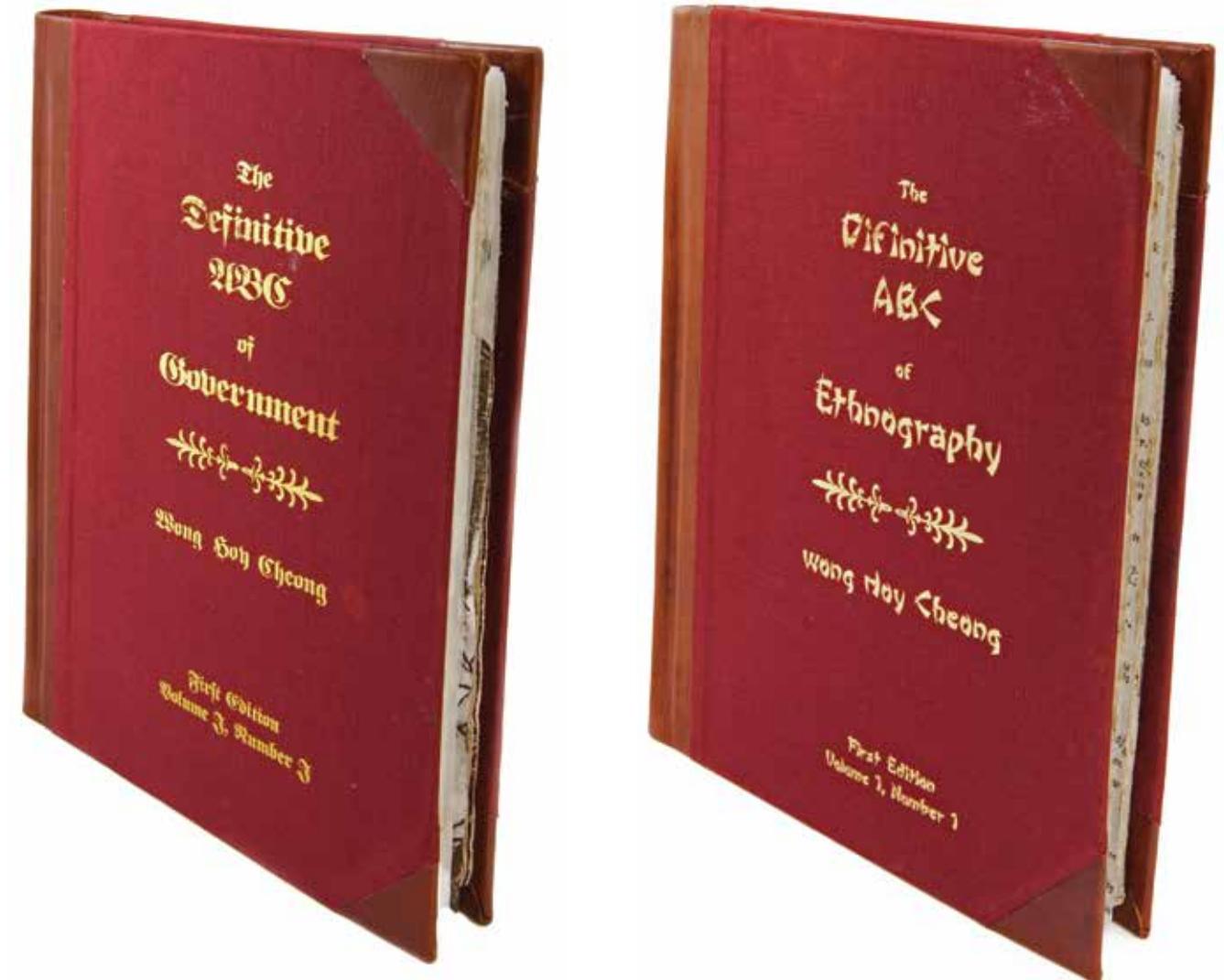
1999

The themes of migration, colonisation, history and the marginalised that inform the practice of Malaysian artist Wong Hoy Cheong come together in this two-part work, *'The definitive ABC of government' and 'The definitive ABC of ethnography'*. Taking the form of hardback, leather-bound books mimicking scholarly publications, the books are tongue-in-cheek A–Z guides to the topics described in their titles. Wong adopts a scrapbook-like approach, piecing the books together with original and quoted content, which includes over 250 illustrations, photographs, poems, graphs, paintings, musical scores, lyrics, calligraphy and texts.

Through satirical pairings of texts and images on these pages, Wong unsettles established beliefs. Under the letter 'X' in *The definitive ABC of government* is the word 'Xenophobia', which has been paired with an image of a Malaysian voting slip and words such as 'white, yellow, brown & black', referring to the skin colours of the various races in the country. In *The definitive ABC of ethnography*, 'B' is for 'Barbaric Brutes', and the accompanying page describes how the British introduced 'civilised' behaviour such as the use of 'Baths' and 'Bidets'. Here, what appears to be an objective textbook is instead filled with barbed political and social commentary.

More political critique of his country is worked into the material substance of the books. The pages for *The definitive ABC of government* were created from pulp from the books *Mein Kampf* (My battle) by Adolf Hitler and *The Malay dilemma* by Mahathir Mohamad. Both books, which lay out the political ideologies of the two leaders, share certain similarities, such as the belief that those who are native to a nation are exclusively entitled to certain privileges.

Wardah Mohamad



Wong Hoy Cheong
'The definitive ABC of government' and 'The definitive ABC of ethnography', 1999
book (a): photocopy transfer on handmade paper made from pulped books: *Mein Kampf* (1925) by Adolf Hitler and *The Malay dilemma* (1970) by Mahathir Mohamad, photocopy transfer on tracing paper, cloth, leather; book (b): photocopy transfer on handmade paper made from pulped books: *The coming of age, Samoa* by Margaret Mead (1928) and *Among the believers: An Islamic journey* by VS Naipaul (1981), photocopy transfer on tracing paper, cloth, leather
book (a): 23.9 x 17.4 x 2.4 cm (closed), book (b): 23.9 x 17.2 x 2.1 cm (closed)
Collection of John Chia and Cheryl Loh
Photography: Joe Nair

Manit Sriwanichpoom has played an instrumental role in the development of Thailand's artistic photography scene, both as a practitioner and as a curator. While most critical studies have focused on the sociopolitical intent of his works such as the *Pink man* series (1997–2008), Sriwanichpoom's portrait of the performance artist Paisan Plienbangchan points to a different dimension of his practice: his investigation of photography and its artistic potentialities in Thailand.

In *Paisan Plienbangchan*, Sriwanichpoom presents his subject in a series of poses in which he mimics hammering a nail into his head and nose. The individual shots within this series are organised in a way that suggests movement between the frames, evoking parallels with cinema. Yet, on closer examination, the photographs confound an ordered reading, with the nail unexpectedly being placed in Plienbangchan's left ear in the fourth image in the sequence. The viewer is thus confronted with a number of contradictions: between the suggestion of movement and the photograph's 'stillness', and between the temporal linearity suggested in the placement of the images and the illogic of their order.

How should such a contradiction be understood in the context of photography's status as an art form in Thailand? The tenuous position of photography in relation to discourses of fine art in this context has been based on presumptions of its objectivity. In response to this, artist-photographers in the country have often aimed to legitimise their work by adopting the qualities of other media forms, including painting, printmaking, sculpture and cinema. Sriwanichpoom's portrait of Plienbangchan engages with this history, not only through its existence as part of a series of portraits of Southeast Asian artists, but through its evocation of photography's paradoxical status as simultaneously objective and artistic; still and always moving.

Clare Veal

Manit Sriwanichpoom
Paisan Plienbangchan, 2002
 12 gelatin silver prints
 each 49 x 49 cm (image)
 Collection of John Chia and Cheryl Loh
 Images courtesy the artist



A multidisciplinary artist, Lee Wen is one of the pioneers of performance art in Singapore, best known for his yellow man performances. In these works, Lee covers his body with yellow paint to explore 'yellowness' as a signifier of racial and ethnic difference—especially the colour's association with Chinese identity—as well as the implications of yellowness in the cultures of the West and in Asia.

Lee's relentless pursuit of performance art through the 1990s despite the clampdown by the Singapore government on the art form makes him an inspirational figure in the art scene. He used the yellow man persona in performances such as the *Journey of a yellow man* series (1992–2012), *Strange fruit* (2003) and *Splash!* (2003–12). In response to the prohibitions on performance art and a funding ban by the National Arts Council Singapore at the time, Lee performed *Strange fruit* during the Chinese Lantern Festival to avoid the need for a public entertainment licence. The 2003 photographs show the top half of his body covered in Chinese red lanterns and the bottom half of his body painted yellow and left bare as he walks down the streets of Singapore, passing shophouses, a park and an underground passageway.

Red lanterns are symbols of Chinese ethnicity found in Chinatowns and Chinese restaurants all over the world. Lee, slapping yellow paint on his body that is obscured by the red lanterns, performs Chineseness to the hilt. He critiques the reductive stereotype that all Chinese people are the same, which obliterates individual identities. Lee also notes that yellowness is interpreted differently in the West and Asia, hence the yellow man is not merely a social identity in crisis, but also confirms that stereotypical codes and conventions regarding race and identity are culturally constructed.

Christine Han



Lee Wen
Strange fruit, 2003
from a series of 12 works
digital print
109.2 x 109.2 cm

Lee Wen
Strange fruit, 2003
from a series of 12 works
digital print
109.2 x 109.2 cm

Lee Wen
Strange fruit, 2003
from a series of 12 works
digital print
109.2 x 109.2 cm

Collection of John Chia
and Cheryl Loh
Images courtesy the
artist and iPreiation,
Singapore



The scale is one of a series of works revisiting and investigating José Santos's personal history through the scrapbooks of his grandmother, which contain photographs and texts from the early 1900s. In appropriating these elements, Santos III liberates them from the past and from personal history, and makes them into timeless and universal images. Here, the unmissable postmarks make the oil painting appear as if it is a postal item—perhaps a letter to a family or a package to be sent home—but the marks lack dates, making this 'parcel' less literal and time-bound.

The most commanding element in the painting is a besuited male figure wearing a simply described crown. He is holding a pair of scales balancing a suitcase on one end and a tall multistorey house on the other. In search of a correlation between these objects, one could perhaps read them as a symbol of travelling, movement and migration (the luggage) and settling in one place (the solid home), or work versus the domestic sphere. The male figure can be seen as the universal human subject, depicted as a dignified kingly image, having to weigh the pros and cons of these dichotomies.

The sepia hue in the painting evokes a sense of nostalgia, but the elements in the painting are not necessarily nostalgic or backward-looking. Rather, they allude to archetypes. In juxtaposing and collaging various everyday objects, Santos invites us to establish new meanings, relationships and associations. This is characteristic of his practice, which often makes use of ordinary objects and defamiliarises them, inviting the viewer to contemplate hidden meanings in everyday life. In this sense, his work is analogous to the mysterious parcel that is *The scale*, a painting whose contents are secret, its meanings to be unpacked only by the intended recipient.

Wardah Mohamad



José Santos III
The scale, 2005
 oil on canvas
 92 x 84 cm
 Collection of Yeap Lam Yang
 Photography: Joe Nair

**The bomb eaters (after
'The potato eaters' by
Vincent van Gogh)
The dance (after 'Dance'
by Henri Matisse)**

Jeremy Hiah completed these two large photographs from the series *Paradise terrorise* in 2006 in the context of what was already by then a five-year 'war on terror' led by the United States of America and its allies that had seen devastating conflict in many parts of the world, including Southeast Asia. The counter-terrorism campaign not only changed war rhetoric but also authorised new governmental surveillance and security regimes that dialled up the level of fear and mistrust in many communities about what could be spoken about and what kinds of behaviour were acceptable. Hiah responded to these new global sociopolitical terms by staging recreations of renowned Western artworks and propositioning the universality of the feelings evoked in those works.

In one photograph, Hiah restages Henri Matisse's celebrated painting, *Dance* (1910), which depicts dancing figures in the Garden of Eden. Using this picture of modern liberation as a compositional foundation, Hiah directs his own tableau of hooded terrorist angels. The irony is that the two images of paradise are at all related. In a second appropriation, Hiah restages Vincent van Gogh's *The potato eaters* (1885), a painting of Dutch peasants sharing a meal. Hiah's title, *The bomb eaters*, shows an empathic understanding of alternative voices. Van Gogh's painting is a nuanced image of humble fellowship; in Hiah's staged iteration, five figures wearing personalised balaclavas brandish toy weapons, pour tea, and wield forks at the ambiguous contents of their table.

Hiah is deeply aware and conceptually committed to other artists' practices. He believes that relationships between artists and within collectives are strategic to making art. The models for the angels in each scenario are friends, family members or other artists and the works are in part an account of these relationships. *The Paradise terrorise* series can be interpreted equally as a commitment to shared values and the principles of collaboration, and a comment on 21st-century conflict.

Bala Starr

Jeremy Hiah
The bomb eaters (after 'The potato eaters' by Vincent van Gogh), 2006, from the series *Paradise terrorise*, 2004–10
with (left to right) Woon Tien Wei, Lina Adam, Lim Sze Chin, Dan Yeo, Kai Lam; photography: Chua Chye Teck
digital print, ed. 1/8
82 x 122 cm (image)

Jeremy Hiah
The dance (after 'Dance' by Henri Matisse), 2006, from the series *Paradise terrorise*, 2004–10
with (left to right) Lim Sze Chin, Tang Da Wu, Dan Yeo, Kai Lam, Hoi Lit, Lee Wen; photography: Chua Chye Teck
Type C print, ed. 1/8
122 x 182 cm (image)

Collection of John Chia and Cheryl Loh
Images courtesy the artist



A multidisciplinary artist and a member of the pioneering Singapore art collective The Artists Village, Lee is well known for using his body in his practice, and particularly for his yellow man performances, in which he painted himself with bright yellow poster paint as an exaggerated symbol of his Chinese Singaporean ethnicity.

Anthropometry revision is a series of performances made from 2006 to 2008 in China and in Singapore. They explore anthropometry, which is the scientific study of the measurements and proportions of the human body. In this series, Lee also sought to engage with French artist Yves Klein's seminal 1960 performance, *Anthropometry of the blue epoch*. At an evening party, Klein presented three nude female models covered in International Klein Blue paint, a hue patented by him. The models imprinted their silhouettes on sheets of paper on a wall and on the floor.

Lee Wen's digital prints document parts of a performance made in 2006, where the artist presented his clothed and unclothed body in a series of obsessively repetitive poses. The images, which draw focus to the curvature of the artist's spine as a result of scoliosis, invite the viewer to consider the psychological and physical burdens associated with such a body. The boots on his back evoke oppression and suffering, both from Lee's physical limitations and the prejudices of society. It is worth noting that Klein's 1960 *Anthropometry* performance involved exploitative use of the nude female body. In contrast, Lee demonstrates great vulnerability through the use of his own nude male body.

Related later works by Lee, such as *Anthropometry revision: Yellow period (after Yves Klein)* (2008), saw more direct recreations of Klein's performance, with participants covering themselves in yellow paint to function as, in Lee's words on his blog *Republic of daydreams*, 'living paint brushes'.

Usha Chandradas

Lee Wen
Anthropometry revision 1 and 2, 2006
4 digital prints
3 prints each 175 x 102 cm (image), 1 print 102 x 135 cm (image)
Collection of John Chia and Cheryl Loh
Images courtesy the artist and iPreciation, Singapore





In his paintings and mixed-media sculptural installations, Indonesian artist Heri Dono creates an original visual language by combining Indonesian mythological symbols with traditional Indonesian motifs, such as *wayang kulit*, a traditional form of Javanese art and theatre. His works also investigate pressing social and political issues and question existing hierarchical norms.

The characteristic qualities of Dono's oeuvre come together in *Gulliver*, a painting that is almost life-like in scale (it measures about 1.5 metres by 2 metres) and confronting in its bold, almost lurid, use of colour. Flatly painted with no impasto, it reflects the stylistically flat influence of *wayang kulit*. The canvas is dominated by a central figure splayed akimbo and restrained by smaller figures. The title of the work refers to Jonathan Swift's satirical novel *Gulliver's travels*. At first glance, the painting recalls an iconic scene from the novel where Gulliver is restrained by a mob of 6-inch-tall Lilliputians.

While *Gulliver's travels* was written by a European author in 1726, fuelled by the fervour of the Age of Exploration, it must be remembered that Asia had her own period of exploration that predated the Europeans'. Chinese Admiral Zheng He (also known as Cheng Ho) was actively exploring the Pacific Ocean, Southeast Asia and India in the early 15th century. Indeed, historian Gavin Menzies credits Admiral Zheng's voyage from China to Italy in 1434 with sparking the Renaissance, which, following Zheng's voyage, was influenced by Chinese ideas and inventions. Where one would previously state that the Europeans conquered the oceans and the lands, one could now claim that it was Asians' exploration of the seas that led to the Europeans' imperial quest. The central figure in the painting represents Admiral Zheng, and the smaller figures in the painting represent our collective historical mindset that prevents us from seeing past the European hegemony of naval, industrial and military strength.

In the context of Indonesian history, this painting could also be read as a critique of the sociopolitical system, specifically that of the *Reformasi* movement beginning in 1998, whereby the power shifted from the Suharto dictatorship to the people. The story of Gulliver represents the superiority of human existence.

Amelia Abdullahsani

Heri Dono
Gulliver, 2007
 synthetic polymer paint on canvas
 150 x 201 cm
 Collection of Yeap Lam Yang
 Photography: Joe Nair



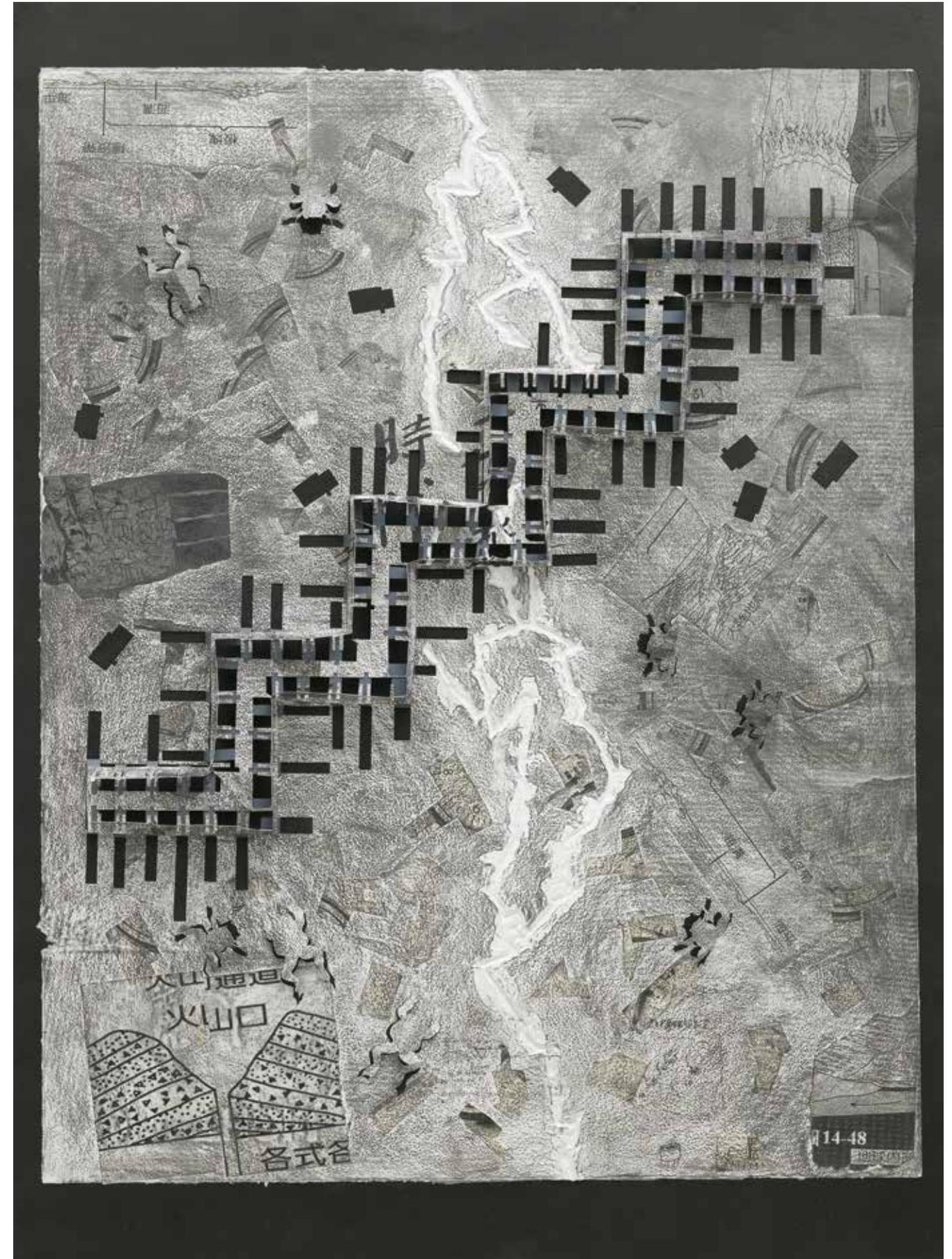
Chinese artist Qiu Zhijie, whose core conceptual practice often combines map-making and traditional Chinese art forms such as calligraphy or ink painting, addresses in this work the geopolitical and socio-historical considerations behind the narrative of China as the new 'dragon' superpower of the 21st century as well as the country's darker psychological underside.

This large-scale map work, almost 2 metres in height, is a collage of screenprinted gampi paper with pencil. It depicts an aerial topography in tonal shades of grey scored by white meandering trails resembling rivers. Superimposed on the landscape is a further collaged series of steps, or a metaphoric ladder, even perhaps a geometrical dragon, seemingly emerging from the mouth of Fire Mountain (as identified by the Mandarin characters in the bottom left). The dragon in Chinese symbology is synonymous with auspicious power and nationhood. Other collaged Chinese characters and English text such as *oceanic crust*, *continental* and *granitic batholiths*, allude to geologic features deep within the Earth, connoting how events sediment and mark the Chinese physical and collective psychological landscape. The title, *Live through all the tribulation*, emphasises the message of China on the ascendant through its progressive 'staircase' of plans and achievements.

For Qiu, however, maps don't just depict an objective cartographic reality. His works map, not so much physical spaces, but imaginary places of geopolitical and historical concerns, and our psychological attachment to them. They mine the border between reality and projection, real versus unreal, physical versus cognitive. This work draws particularly upon Qiu's 2008 residency at the Singapore Tyler Print Institute. The significance of using gampi paper, a Japanese paper derived from the inner bark of the gampi bush, has an ironic cant, given the war conflict with Japan, the chaos of the rise of communism and the hardships of the Cultural Revolution which dominate China's modern history.

Elaine Chiew

Qiu Zhijie
Live through all the tribulation, 2008
 pencil on collage of screenprinted gampi paper on handmade paper
 190.5 x 142 x 7 cm
 Image courtesy the artist and STPI—Creative Workshop & Gallery
 Collection of John Chia and Cheryl Loh
 Photography: Cher Him



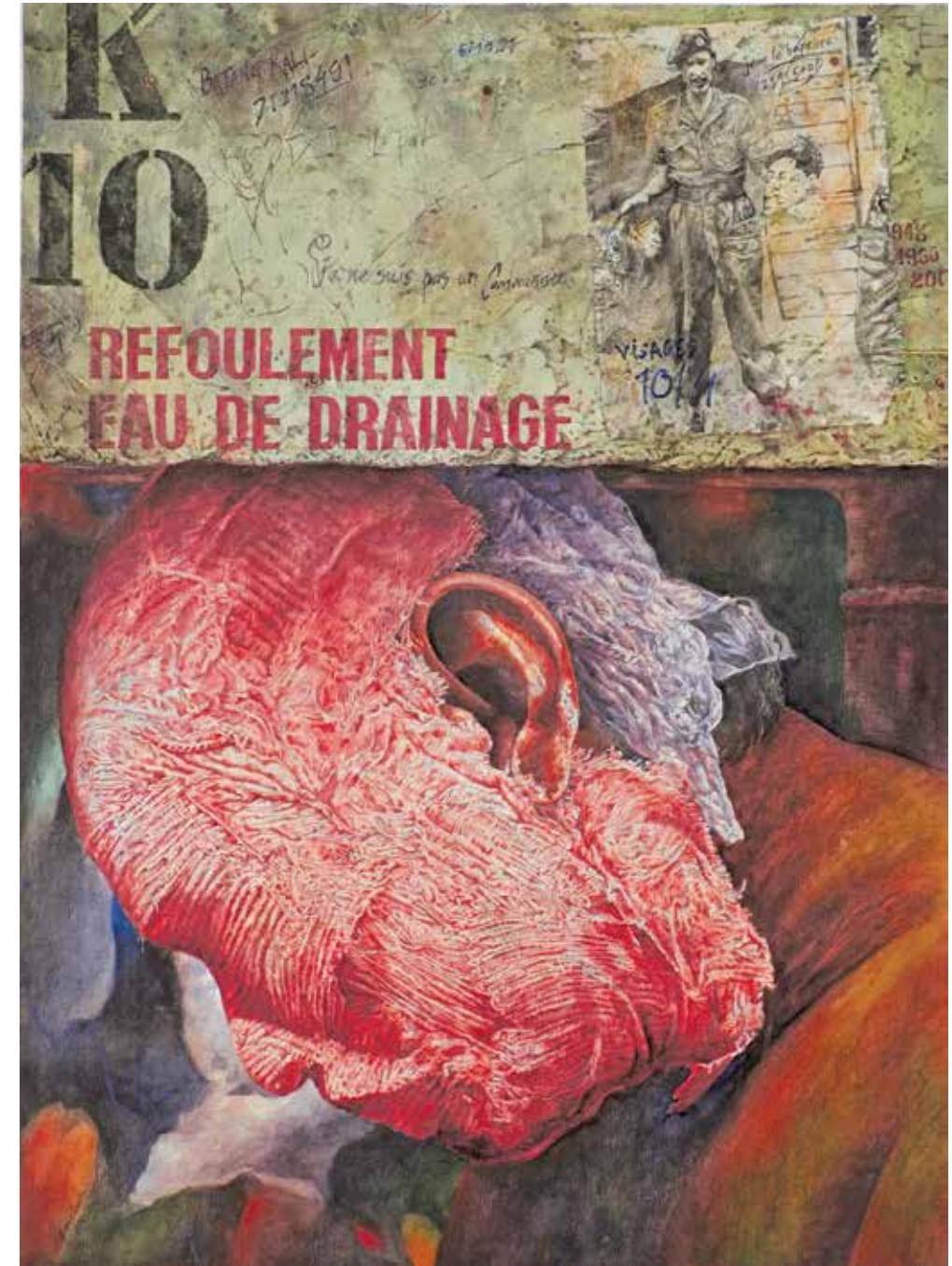
Unlike contemporary artists such as Jean-Michel Basquiat or Keith Haring, who adopted the graffiti aesthetic as a way to create a new language for contemporary painting, Chang Fee Ming's appropriation stems from a critical proposition. He considers it as a site of contestation and resistance against state-sanctioned information, tapping into its most intrinsic qualities—vandalism and provocation. *Liberté (Liberty)*, *Égalité (Equality)* and *Fraternité (Brotherhood)* form a suite of three paintings that are connected to one another through the depiction of a sole figure whose face is masked by plaster wraps of red, blue and white colours respectively. Both the colours of the masks and the titles of the three works constitute emblems of French nationalism—the national slogan and the colours of the national flag.

The scenario refers to a film location staged in the basement of the Louvre Museum.* Speaking about the location, Chang said that he felt claustrophobic underneath the basement's low ceiling and imagined what it must have felt like for the character in the film whose face was further masked by white plaster. Evoking the visual registers found on the basement's signboards, the scrawls manifest both existing graffiti writings as well as a slew of texts and numbers referring to the sociopolitical climate of Malaysia. Phrases and words such as Batang Kali, *je ne suis pas un communiste* (I am not a communist), Islam Hadhari, *une Malaisie* (one Malaysia), and *je ne suis pas le conspirateur* (I am not the conspirator) hint at the ferment of incidents and issues that are largely unresolved, left as a mystery.

*The film is a feature-length film titled *Face* (originally *Visage*) (2009) directed by Taiwanese filmmaker Tsai Ming-Liang. Chang observed the shooting of the film in the basement of the Louvre Museum in Paris in 2008.

Simon Soon

This text is an edited extract from an essay originally published in the catalogue for *Visage*, a solo exhibition by Chang Fee Ming presented at Valentine Willie Fine Art, Singapore, from 15 to 31 October 2010.



Robert Zhao
Renhui

Winner, Hiroshi Abe
New culture, Minoru Honda
Special mention, Kiichiro
Furukawa

2009

Under the auspices of the Institute of Critical Zoologists, founded in 2008, Robert Zhao Renhui's practice has braided together narratives of 'naturecultures', to use theorist Donna Haraway's non-dualistic term. Tactics of falsification underly many of his early works in photography, employed to uncover both a misplaced faith in photographs as indexes of 'truth', as well as the asymmetrical power relations behind representing nature as undemanding, stable objects of knowledge.

The three photographs here, from the series *The great pretenders* (2009–13), purportedly document prize-winning Phylliidae, or leaf insects, hybridised and bred to achieve a virtuoso imitation of their host plants for a certain '26th Phylliidae Convention' in Tokyo. The photographs invite the viewer to make out the insect, differentiate its contours and prevent it from total dissolution into the plant—they are figure-ground optical illusions. Yet there is no way of doing so, for there are no leaf insects in these images to begin with. The photograph is a mimicry of mimicry, a mirror where the innocent gaze towards nature reflects the looker's own naivety towards authoritative science, photographic empiricism and naturecultural othering. Reactions to the work were stranger than fiction. *Winner, Hiroshi Abe* was printed in a 2011 issue of the science magazine *Discover*, circulating them within the scientific community in earnest.

In his seminal 1977 essay 'Why look at animals', John Berger critiques image-making technologies and the 'ever more arresting images' of marginalised animals, whereby 'the more we know, the further away they are'. While questions about the fraught image-making of nature are formative to Zhao's early practice, his curiosity is not jaded by a hermeneutics of suspicion. This criticality instead sits alongside his recent ventures in installation and performative tours, where diverse natureculture tales are relayed in ways both sobering and humorous.

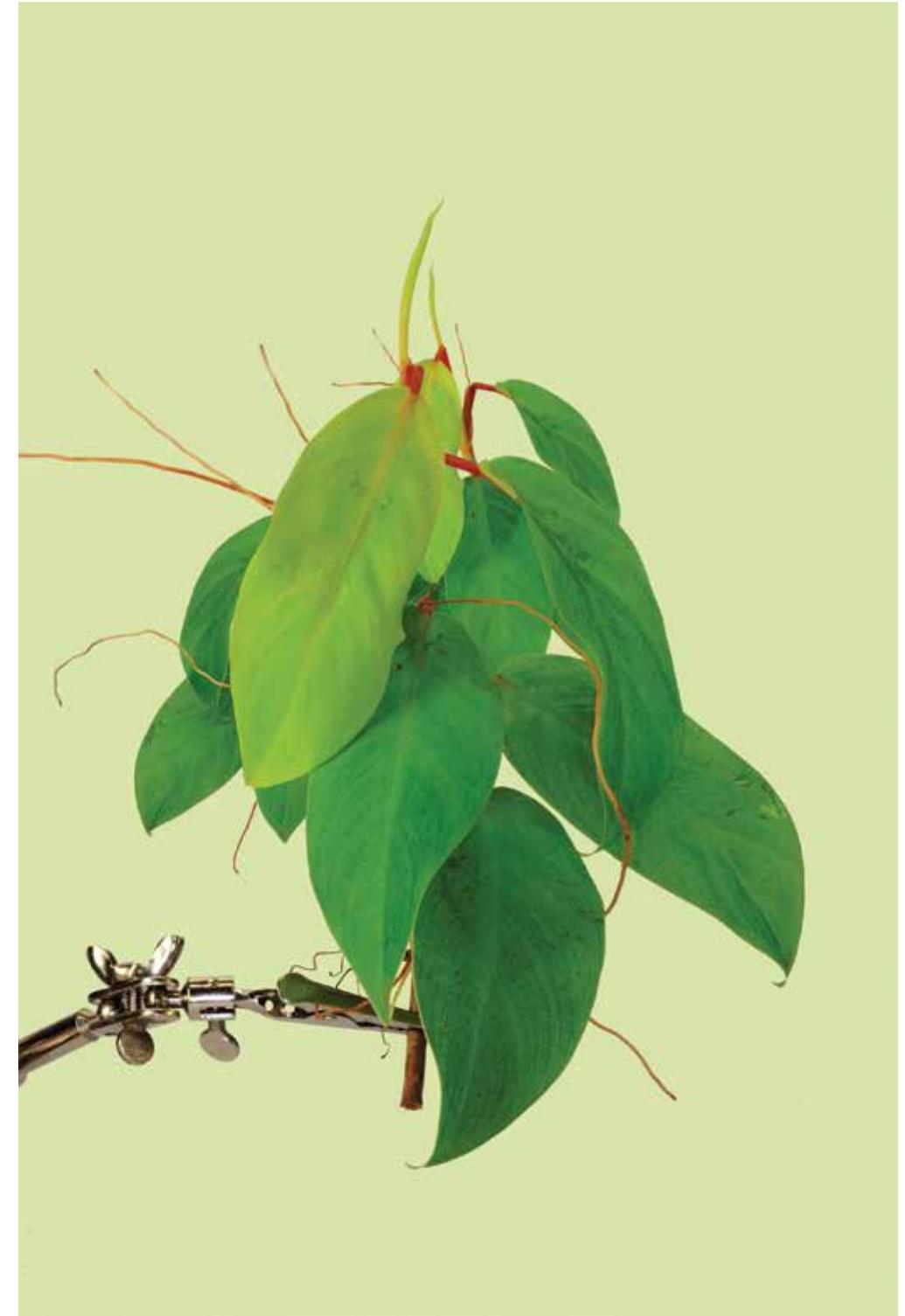
Marcus Yee

Robert Zhao Renhui
Winner, Hiroshi Abe,
2009, from the series *The
great pretenders*, 2009–13
Diasec-mounted digital
print on aluminium
composite panel
111 x 74 cm

Robert Zhao Renhui
New culture, Minoru Honda,
2009, from the series *The
great pretenders*, 2009–13
Diasec-mounted digital print
on aluminium composite
panel
111 x 74 cm

Robert Zhao Renhui
*Special mention, Kiichiro
Furukawa*, 2009, from the
series *The great pretenders*,
2009–13
Diasec-mounted digital print
on aluminium composite panel
111 x 74 cm

Collection of
Yeap Lam Yang
Images courtesy the
artist and ShanghART,
Shanghai and
Singapore





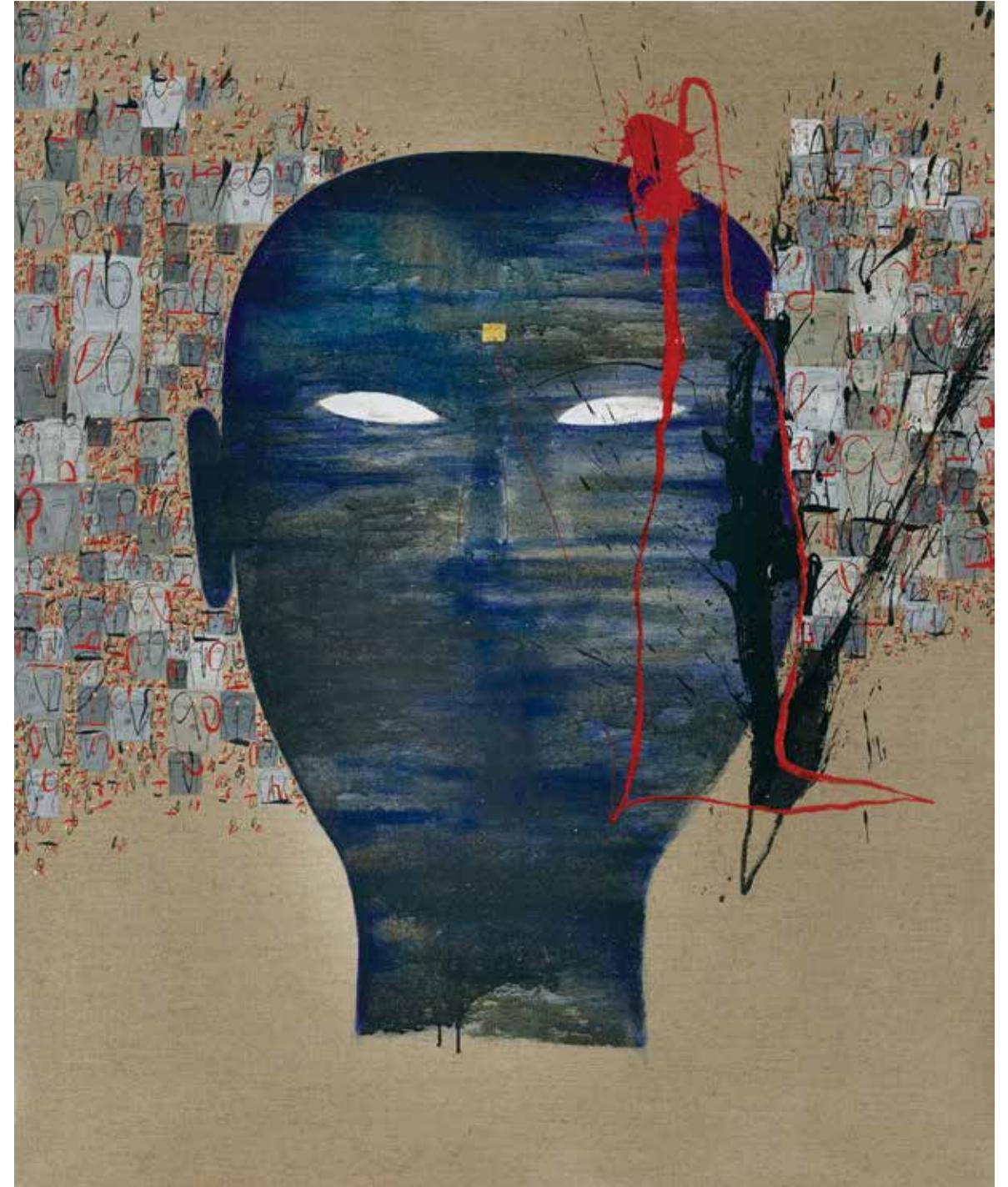
Dadang Christanto **Victim imagining victims I** 2009–10
Victim imagining victims II
Victim imagining victims III

Featuring Indonesia-born artist Dadang Christanto's recurring motif of disembodied human heads, these three paintings explore the theme of perennial violence.

At the centre of each canvas is a large human head, and to its left or right are numerous human heads rendered in smaller sizes. Semicircular black and red lines, seemingly marking the heads as targets or prey, are scrawled over these smaller heads. These scrawlings, together with the gold coloured rectangle placed at the centre of each forehead, even seem to index heads too small to be visible, perhaps lost under the mounting and uncountable number of victims. Similar streaks of red and black lines hover over each of the larger heads—the red paint looping about like an artery connecting the large head to the smaller heads, and the black paint a splattered streak reminiscent of spilt liquid.

It is no coincidence that these heads have some Buddhist characteristics—almond-shaped eyes, elongated earlobes and a dot on the forehead. They serve as markers of Chinese ethnicity. After Christanto's move to Australia in 1999, he was freer to express his identity not just as an Indonesian of Chinese descent, but also one whose father was a victim of the anti-Chinese, anti-communist 1965–66 massacre. Being privy to Christanto's biography, one can easily read the paintings as a response to not only the brutal violence of the massacre and the May 1998 riots when ethnic Chinese Indonesians were perniciously targeted, but also the burden of survivors and witnesses who in turn become victims of oppression and injustice, and are haunted by past and continuing violence. The paintings speak of a shared grief and communal suffering that transcends specificity—Christanto is concerned with suffering everywhere and dedicates his works to victims of violence without prejudice.

Kamiliah Bahdar

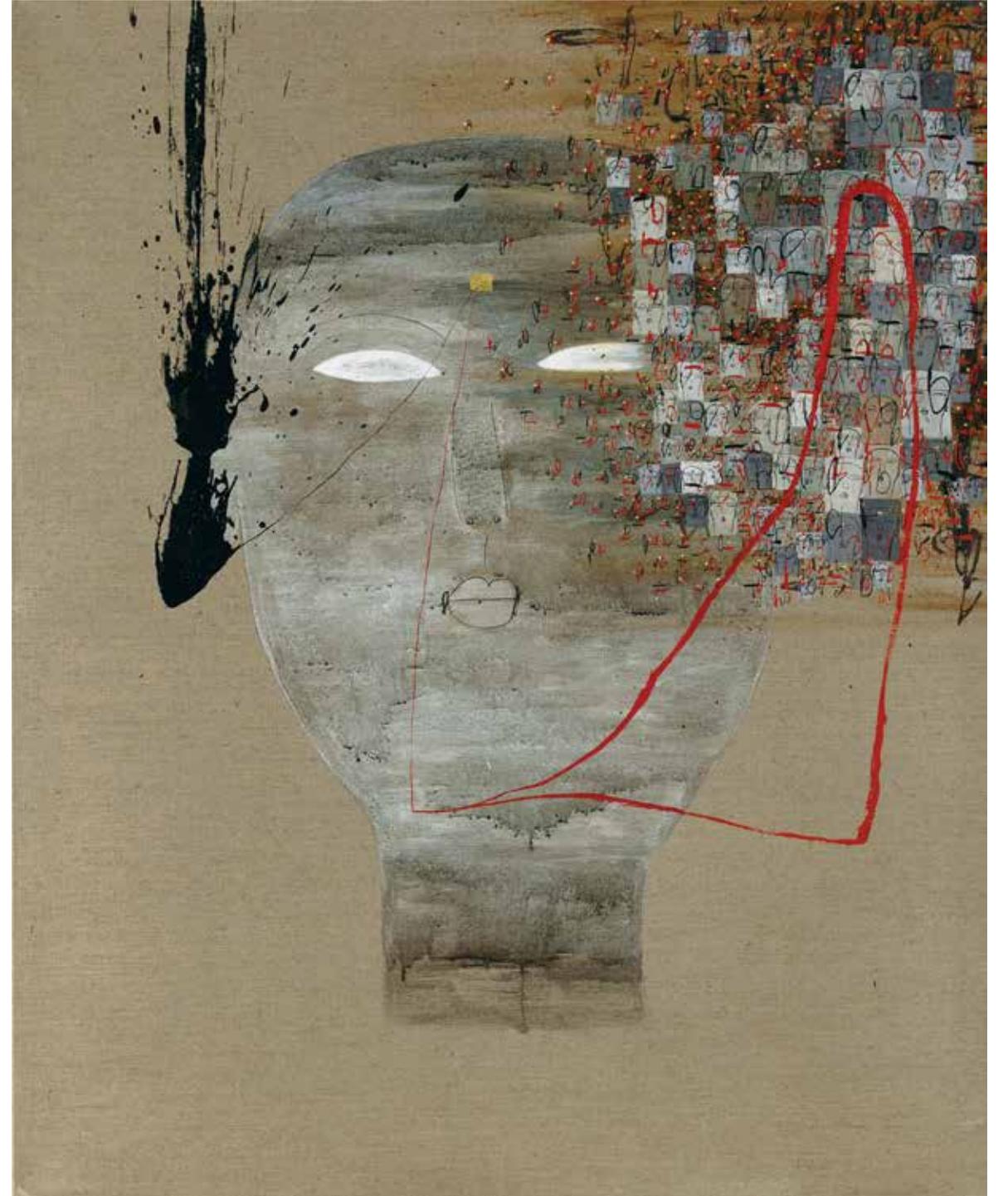
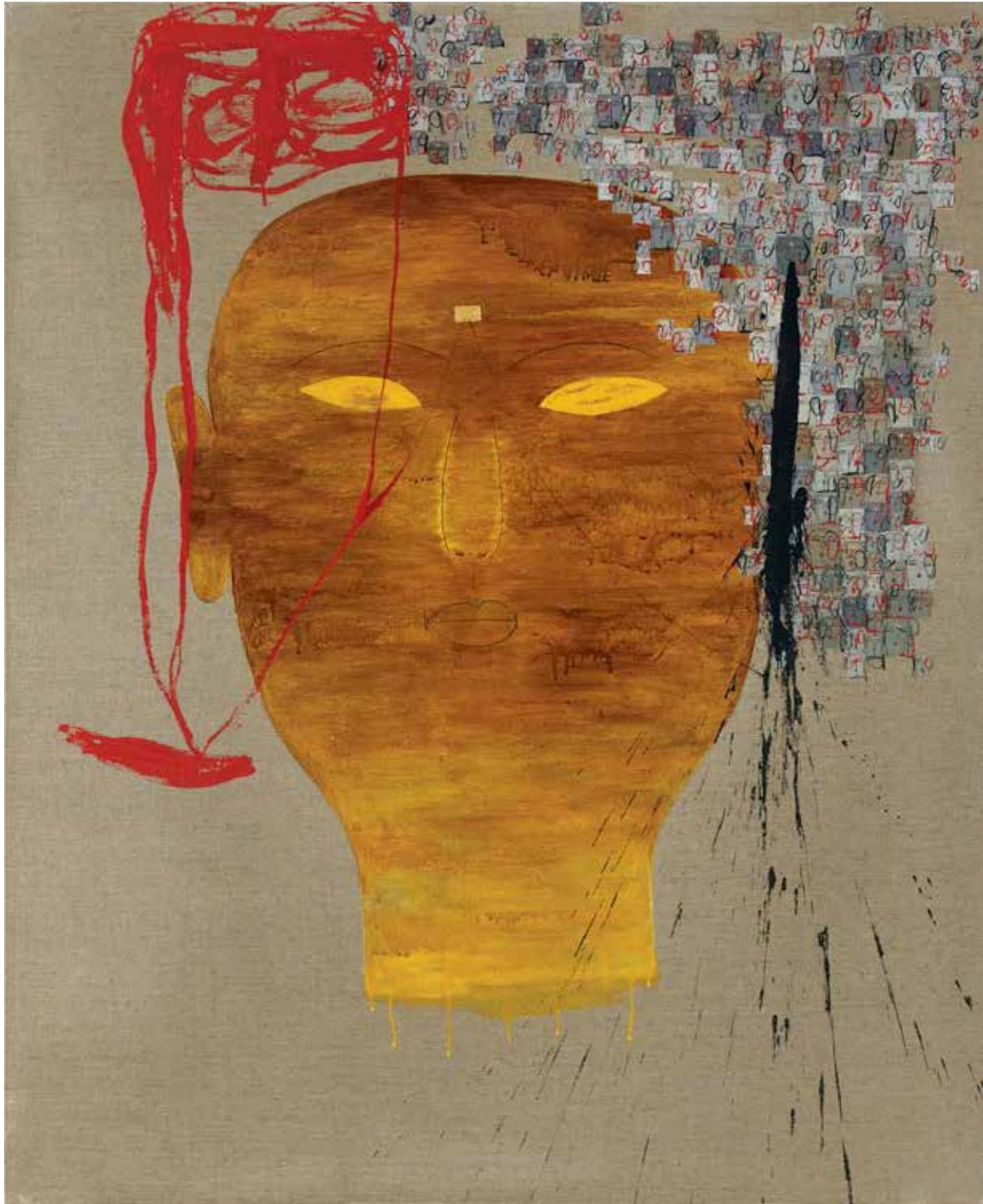


Dadang Christanto
Victim imagining victims I,
 2009–10
 synthetic polymer paint
 on canvas
 137 x 111 cm

Dadang Christanto
Victim imagining victims II,
 2009–10
 synthetic polymer paint
 on canvas
 137 x 111 cm

Dadang Christanto
Victim imagining victims III,
 2009–10
 synthetic polymer paint
 on canvas
 137 x 111 cm

Collection of
 Yeap Lam Yang
 Images courtesy the
 artist and Gallerysmith,
 Melbourne



This painting by Malaysian artist Phuan Thai Meng is part of a series of five works, each capturing a Malaysian bureaucrat or politician, with all identifying markers such as his face and skin colour blacked out, in a pose. Most of the poses involve pointing at something. In one painting, the figure is standing and pointing upwards. In another, a squatting figure is pointing to the ground. In this particular work, the subject is presenting an invisible object with hands spread open.

Phuan culled his source images from various Malaysian newspapers including *The Star*, *New Straits Times* and *Berita Harian*. Stripping away any distinguishable features of the subjects and transposing them against a plain white background, he highlights how these poses and actions are formulaic and empty. Even against this stark background, the figures are carefully lit from the left as though in a photography studio, which emphasises the staged nature of such images circulating in the media. These facile gestures are meant to look as though the faceless men, in gracing an event, campaign or project that presents a great photo opportunity, have given it due consideration and have been productive in efforts to develop and build Malaysia.

Phuan's sociopolitical works often tackle Malaysian national projects on urban and infrastructure development as well as the daily living conditions of citizens, weaving in witty and humorous commentaries on the state of the country and the absurdities of Malaysian politics. In this context, *Action 5—Spread out the hands* can be read as a jab at the ineptitude of bureaucrats and politicians to truly account for the needs of the community to improve its situation.

Kamiliah Bahdar

Phuan Thai Meng
Action 5—Spread out the hands, 2011
oil on canvas
244 x 150 cm
Collection of Yeap Lam Yang
Image courtesy the artist



Shooshie
Sulaiman

Singa pura #4 (Lion whose
life is full of pretence)
Singa pura: registered 2

2011
2011–12

Belonging to a series titled *Let's learn propaganda*, these two drawings by Shooshie Sulaiman can be interpreted as her impressions of Singapore personified in human faces. The titles—*Singa pura #4 (Lion whose life is full of pretence)* and *Singa pura: registered 2*—are translations of the texts in the drawings.

In both drawings, the faces are rendered in a freehand scrawl. Visually, their meanings remain ambiguous and open-ended, although their titles may suggest control and even duplicity. In *Singa pura: registered 2*, a face is overlapping its twin, a red silhouette with a nebulous halo shape of a lion's mane, which hints at two disparate psyches. *Singa pura #4* portrays a person with lopsided, distorted features, black rings around the eyes, and a misshapen nose and mouth. The brain area is a mottled patch of reds, purples and yellows reminiscent of the colours of a bruise, and beyond the head, a constellation of lines and dots radiates. The ambiguity of both portraits demonstrates the subtlety and idiosyncrasy of Shooshie's imagination, which eschews easy political messages.

Born in Malaysia to a mixed Chinese Malay parentage, Shooshie often explores the duality of her family background. These works about the neighbouring country of Singapore can be seen to touch on a different kind of duality. The intertwining histories of Singapore and Malaysia date back to the ancient Srivijaya Empire, which flourished between the 7th and 13th centuries. During the British colonial period, the two lands were also perceived as one domain constituted of several Malay states. In 1963, Malaysia, consisting of the Federation of Malaya, Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore, gained independence from the British. But Singapore separated from the Federation two years later, being unable to resolve differences in governing policies. In light of the historical background, these works could be honest renderings of Singapore that embody the complexity and nuance of a love-hate family relationship.

Syaheedah Iskandar

Shooshie Sulaiman
Singa pura #4 (Lion whose life is full of pretence),
2011, from the series *Let's learn propaganda*,
2011–12
charcoal, oil pastel and watercolour
24 x 24 cm

Shooshie Sulaiman
Singa pura: registered 2, 2011–12, from the series
Let's learn propaganda, 2011–12
ink on paper
24 x 24 cm

Collection of John Chia and Cheryl Loh
Photography: Joe Nair



Known for a signature style that he describes as 'figurative expressionism', Elmer Borlongan paints stories of everyday life imbued with social commentary. His works feature stylised human figures, bald heads, large asymmetrical eyes and elongated limbs. Borlongan came to prominence in the 1980s as a social-realist painter. He joined the political art collective ABAY and was one of the founding members of the Salingpusa group of activist artists and later of the artist collective Sanggawa, which specialised in sociopolitical murals. Later, his practice evolved towards a more personal investigation of values, beliefs and customs through scenes of ordinary people depicted with warm-hearted humour. Urban activity in Manila was central to his work until he moved to San Antonio, Zambales, on the west coast of Luzon, in 2002, a decision reflected in his choice of themes (rural scenes, fisherfolk) and brighter colour palette.

Amazing rat race is a painting of monumental scale that overwhelms the viewer with the dynamism of its simple composition. Two larger-than-life rat-headed young men, each armed with a briefcase (a symbol of corporate life) but dressed in shorts, are depicted as they leap over a circular labyrinth.

Two references inspire and inform this painting. The title is drawn from the 1976 Bob Marley song, 'Rat race', whose lyrics might resonate with the frustrating, competitive lifestyle of people in urban Manila as observed by the artist. The figures also reference Ikabod Bubwit, the eponymous mouse character in a comic series created in the late 1970s by popular cartoonist Nonoy Marcelo, which satirised the political landscape and social problems of the Philippines.

The tension between the promise of something 'amazing' in the title and the possibility of reading it as 'a mazing' (corresponding to the painting's maze) suggests that contemporary life may translate into a race within a perplexing structure, whose pathways lead nowhere but deeper into its own centre.

Lucia Cordeschi



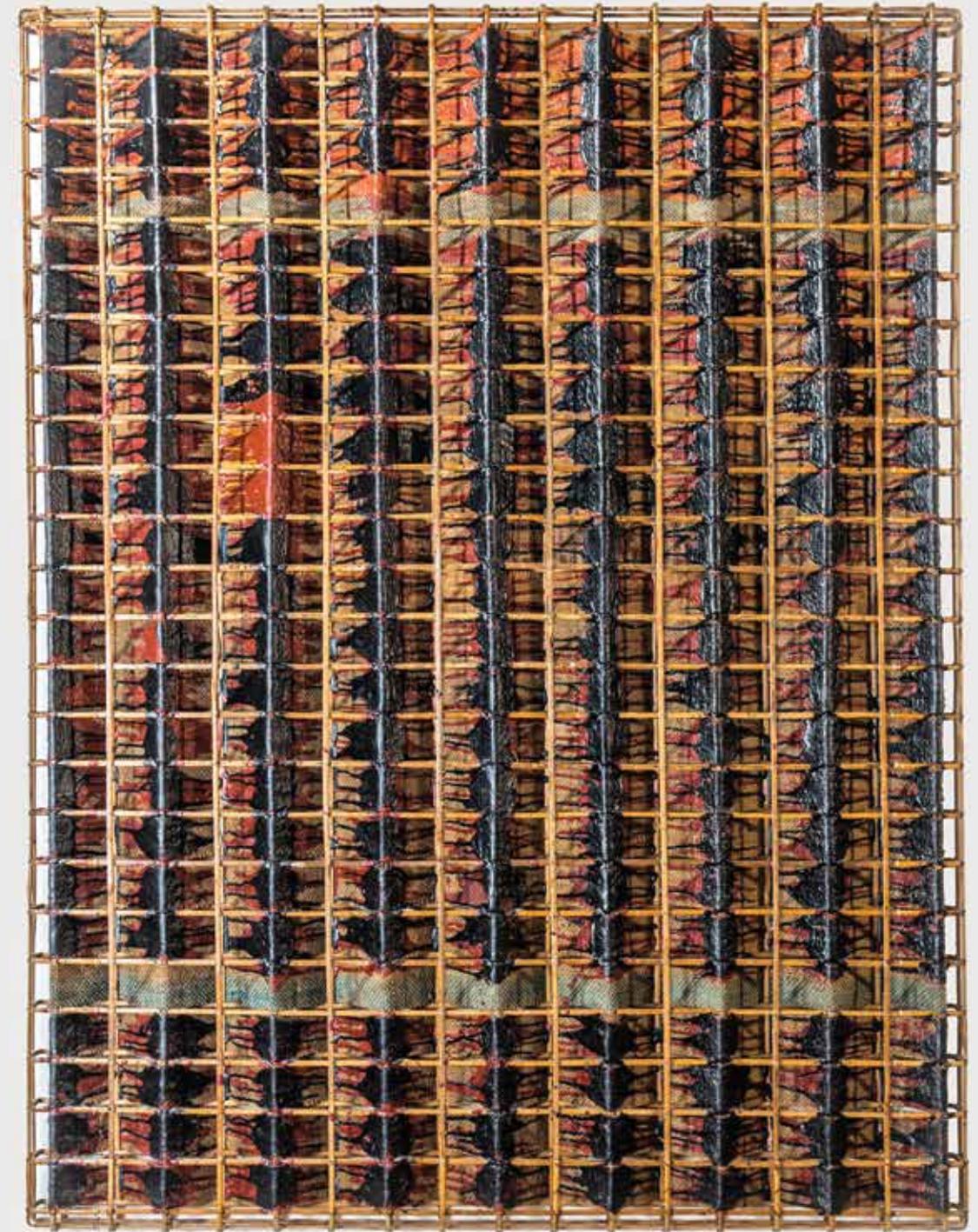
Elmer Borlongan
Amazing rat race, 2012
 synthetic polymer paint on canvas
 213 x 427 cm
 Collection of Yeap Lam Yang
 Photography: Joe Nair

Through the ingenious use of materials, this abstract sculpture-painting by prominent Cambodia-born artist Sopheap Pich paints a compelling portrait of his native country. Unlike earlier sculptural works that contain narratives of his personal memories, *Valley drip (Black top)* contains no such stories. Instead the focus is on the deft manipulation of humble materials that speak of the environment from which they came. The burlap is taken from used rice bags, the charcoal is the same as that used for cooking, the earth pigment taken from the land itself, just as the beeswax and resin are locally sourced. These commonplace materials are made visually seductive and expressive by Pich's time and attention that reveal their inherent aesthetic quality.

The work also combines both Pich's early training in painting and his later three-dimensional explorations with bamboo and rattan which have become his trademark. Born in 1971 in Battambang, he and his family fled Cambodia due to political unrest, and eventually settled in the United States of America when he was 13. There, he trained as a painter, receiving an MFA in Painting and Drawing from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, but painting came to be a medium he found insufficient.

He returned to Cambodia to practise art in 2002 and took to making large, voluminous yet porous sculptural forms with bamboo and rattan—cheap materials used widely not just in Cambodia but throughout Southeast Asia to make everything from baskets to furniture to fish traps. His many different shapes of flowers, Buddha, organs and cubes were achieved through grids interlocked with metal wires. Similarly, the bamboo, rattan and burlap in *Valley drip (Black top)* are informed by these geometric grids and built like his sculptures, while the mixture of beeswax, resin, pigment, charcoal and oil paint is applied as in painting.

Kamiliah Bahdar



Sopheap Pich
Valley drip (Black top), 2012
 bamboo, rattan, burlap, wire, beeswax, earth
 pigment, plastic, charcoal, oil paint, damar resin
 160 x 124 x 8 cm
 Collection of John Chia and Cheryl Loh
 Photography: Joe Nair

Born and raised in Japan and then relocating to London aged 18, Hiraki Sawa's moving image artworks express a profound sense of in-betweenness without verbalising or pinning down particular reminiscences in narrative form. Continuing his exploration of the subject of memory, *Lineament*, a two-channel audiovisual installation, is part of an ongoing project titled *Figment* (2009–) that was triggered by one of his friends suffering a sudden onset of amnesia. Lines and linearity feature prominently in this video, reminding viewers how memories of past events sometimes come as random threads of thought entangled with present consciousness.

The visual narrative of *Lineament* features a male protagonist carrying out indecipherable repetitive actions in an apartment setting. Surrounded by cement walls spotted in different shades of grey, the man is dressed in a white straitjacket and moves mechanically and rhythmically. The video's palette, which is mostly black and white with occasional pastel colours, evokes old photographs. Apart from the male protagonist, a vinyl record plays an equally animated role in the diegesis of the video. The grooves of the LP record mutate into a spinning wheel of thin black threads that then flow and creep into the physical space that the man occupied. By passing through concrete partition walls, the threads suggest that the boundary between consciousness and the unconscious, and between reality and memory, is porous and open.

The motif of the circle, represented by various whirling objects—the vinyl record, a clockwork mechanism and a chandelier—resonates with the palindromic musical score performed by Dale Berning and Ute Kanngiesser. The non-linear sense of time articulated through the rotating objects scattered throughout the scene replaces clock time in Sawa's dreamy portrait of our psychological terrain.

Fang-Tze Hsu

Hiraki Sawa
Lineament, 2012
 2-channel high-definition digital video projection, 16:9 aspect ratio,
 colour, sound, vinyl record, record player
 sound and video each 18:47 minutes
 Collection of John Chia and Cheryl Loh
 Image courtesy the artist and Ota Fine Arts, Singapore and Tokyo



John Clang, who since 1999 has divided his time between New York and Singapore, has commented that *Myth of the flat earth* continues his ongoing exploration of his diasporic identity. The complexities of life as a contemporary, globalised subject are viewed through his personal lens, being a by-product of what he considers a very Singaporean type of pragmatism and his immediate experience of living and working in the Big Apple as a photographer and filmmaker.

The still and moving images presented in this series contain no specific markers of Clang's cultural history but present familiar anxieties about social conformity. The installation consists of two photographs and a single-channel video arranged in a deliberate visual hierarchy. The larger photograph depicts a swimming pool with '3 FEET DEEP' stencilled at the centre-top of its three visible sides. The smaller image depicts seven fully clothed individuals in various states of repose floating in air in the same unfilled pool. Finally, the small TV monitor at the bottom, placed on the ground, shows a video of faces and bodies writhing in discomfort, like fish out of water. The paralysing effects of asphyxiation are intensified by the small size and placement of the screen.

Clang's imagery of people treading water and then drowning in a swimming pool detaches the scene from its expected context of recreation and leisure. The pool brings to mind expressions such as 'stay afloat', 'sink or swim' and 'out of one's depth', suggesting that the pool may symbolise society and its pressures. The title of this work, *Myth of the flat earth*, references Clang's childhood fascination with voyager Christopher Columbus and theories of the flat earth, and the primeval fear of falling off that at once incites and limits one's drive for adventure. Hence one could understand this work as a meditation on conformity and the self-imposed benchmarks that underline the worldly pursuit of success and its resulting anxieties.

Selene Yap

John Clang
Myth of the flat earth, 2013
 2 digital prints, single-channel high-definition digital video, 4:3 aspect ratio, black and white, sound
 print (a): 105 x 148.75 cm (image), print (b): 30.5 x 43.2 cm (image), video 45 seconds
 Collection of John Chia and Cheryl Loh
 Images courtesy the artist and FOST Gallery, Singapore



In 1975, FX Harsono alongside other art students from Yogyakarta and Bandung proclaimed in a five-point manifesto the beginnings of the Indonesian New Arts Movement (*Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia*). The artists expressed their affiliation to an artistic practice that spanned across media and could not be contained within a single medium, engaged with social issues, advanced knowledge of Indonesian art, and found its place and usefulness in society.

More than four decades since the emergence of this short-lived but radical movement, Harsono's practice encompasses all the points above. Working across painting, sculpture, video, performance and installation art, Harsono highlights acts of oppression during Suharto's authoritarian regime (1967–98) and its violent repercussions for the Chinese Indonesian community to which Harsono belongs. Often in his work, Harsono foregrounds the polarities that characterise Indonesian society, especially the tacit entanglement between religion, politics and capitalism.

Purification is an incursion into such contradictions. Comprising three videos, it shows footage of a *brai* religious ritual in Cirebon; documentation of workers in a factory making 'Haji souvenirs'; and recordings of a religious demonstration. A port city on the Indonesian island of Java, Cirebon embodies the confluence of multiple cultures, with Islamic practices intersecting with Hindu traditions. The practice of *brai* is such an example, where devotees accompanied by percussion instruments perform devotional prayers in Arabic and Javanese. Their voices overlap with those of the religious demonstrators who take part in another type of processional activity, this time a protest. The sound sporadically directs attention to the factory, where we see, among other activities, a brass kettle being dipped in yellow-water dye to give it a golden appearance. Religious commitment is commercialised, with low-priced Haji products flooding the Indonesian market, substituting for souvenirs bought during the pilgrimage to Mecca. As with the three videos running simultaneously, sharing space and time, the longing for spiritual purification in contemporary society manifests itself in contradictory ways.

Anca Rujoiu

FX Harsono
Purification, 2013
 3-channel high-definition digital video projection,
 16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound
 6:35 minutes
 Collection of John Chia and Cheryl Loh
 Image courtesy the artist



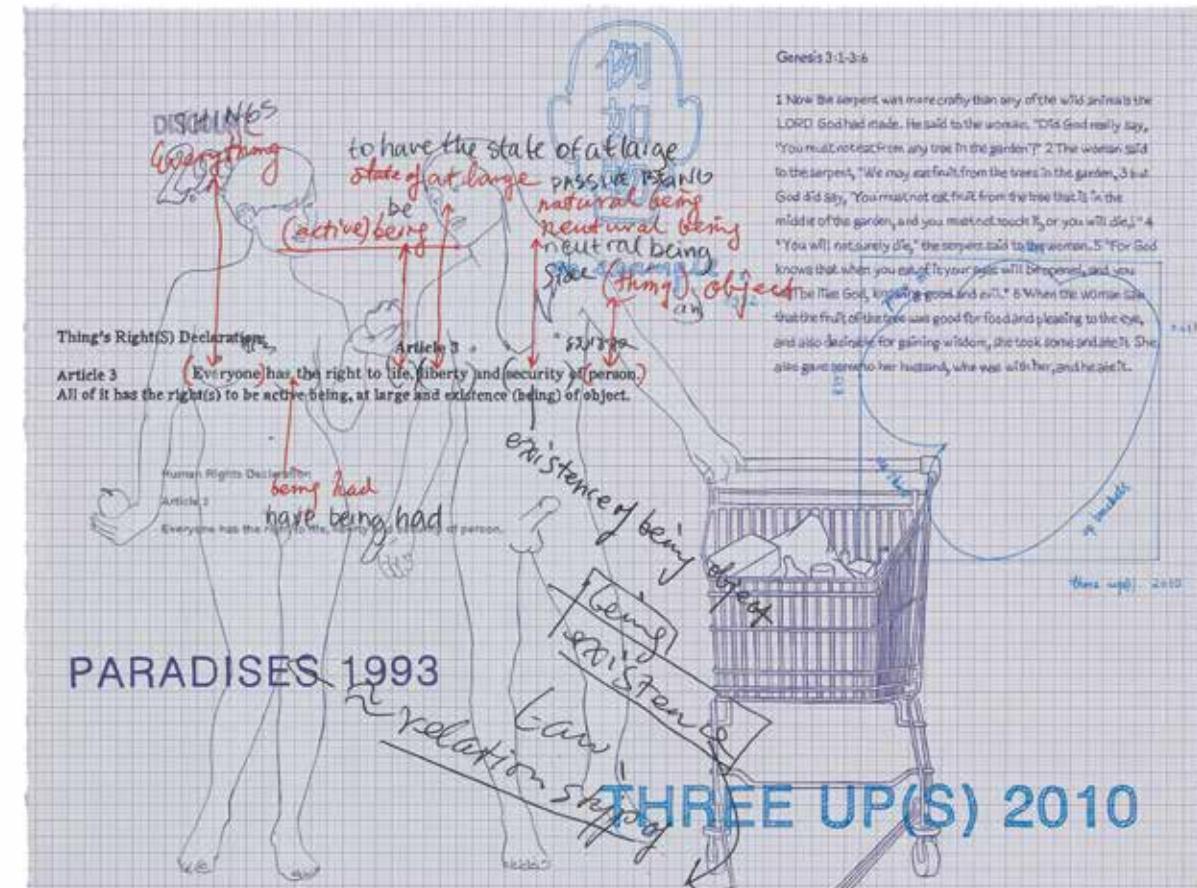
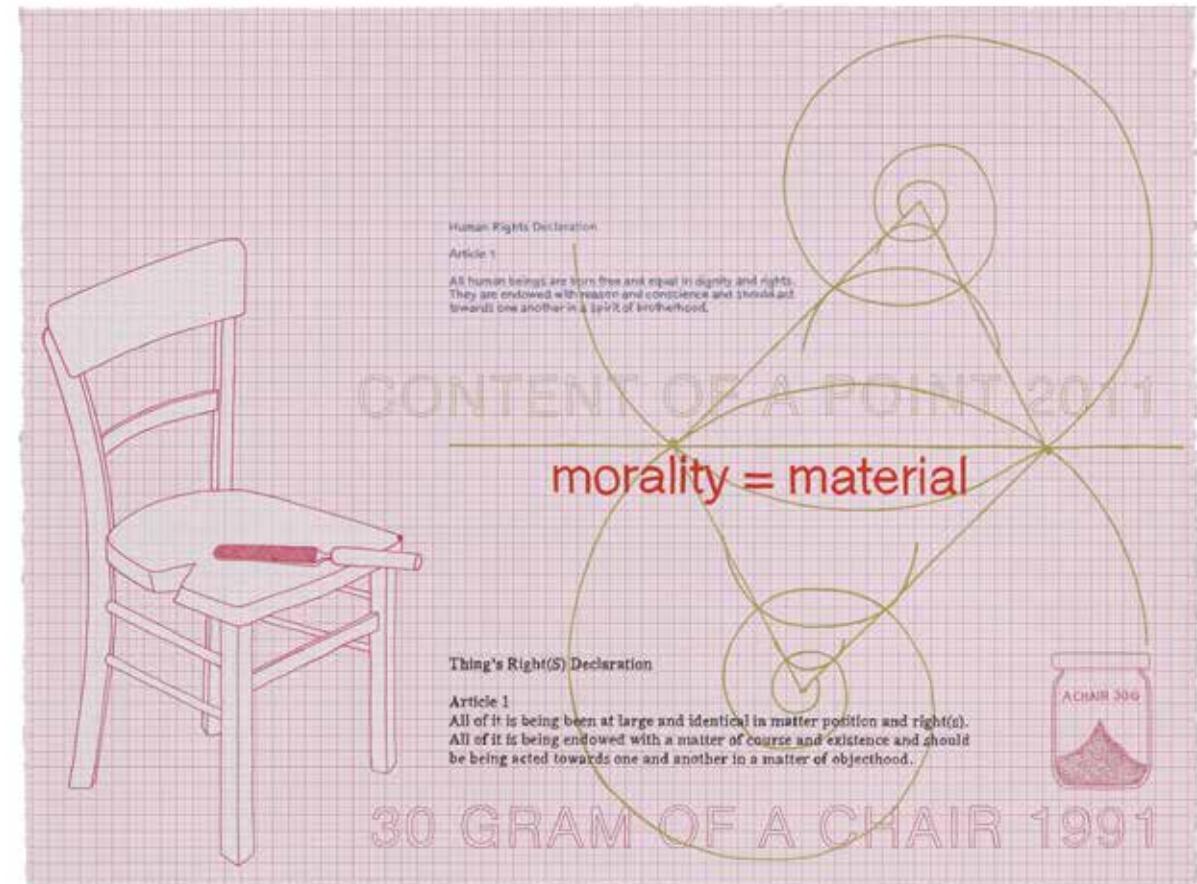
Inga Svala Thorsdottir (Iceland) and Wu Shanzhuan (China) have been making work together since 1991, when they were both art students in Hamburg, northern Germany. In their almost 30-year collaboration, the duo has honed a hybrid practice which mixes Eastern and Western methodologies, conceptual art, propaganda, mathematics and semiotics.

Thing's right(s) printed 2013 is a six-part series of lithographs and screenprints produced at Singapore Tyler Print Institute in 2013, at the time of their residency and exhibition. On certificate-size framed sheets of graph paper, Thorsdottir and Wu combined articles from the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) with those from their 1994 manifesto *Thing's right(s)*.

Graphs, headlines, sketches and annotations in English and Mandarin give the impression of a bizarre presentation script in which the point of view shifts from that of humans to things: verbs go from the active to the passive and what was 'freedom' for humans turns into 'inertia' for things. The juxtaposition of concepts borrowed from the fields of art, politics and philosophy conveys a confusion of meaning and interpretation. The prints reference works from the duo's archive and offer a visual compendium of their artistic ideology. 'No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy' (Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 12) is paired with a 1991 piece in which Wu is relieving himself inside a urinal in a gallery, after Marcel Duchamp's 1917 readymade signed 'R Mutt'. Next to it is a drawing of Thorsdottir holding a shovel, which references a performance with snow on the streets of Reykjavik. 'Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person' (Article 3) is matched with the biblical episode of Adam and Eve in paradise, portrayed here by Thorsdottir and Wu in the nude, fending off not a serpent but the consumerist temptations of a supermarket trolley.

Caterina Riva

Inga Svala Thorsdottir and Wu Shanzhuan
Thing's right(s) printed 2013, 2013
lithograph and screenprint on Stonehenge paper
6 prints, each 55.5 x 73 cm
Collection of John Chia and Cheryl Loh
Images courtesy the artist and STPI—Creative Workshop & Gallery
Photography: Cher Him



An ensemble sculpture first exhibited at Ota Fine Arts at Gillman Barracks in 2014, *To be a farmer* comprises four elements, with the objects presented as if engaged in an unfinished conversation. Three of the four main elements are immediately discernible: a wooden kitchen-style chair, a farmer's changkol, and a wire fish basket hanging from the changkol. The fourth, sitting on the chair, is more ambiguous. Unlike the others, it is organic and appears attenuated, carrying the traces and accumulations of its making. It is in fact crafted from bark, red twine, tacks and nails, with a beeswax coating. Perhaps the chair initiates conversation. It also introduces an anthropomorphism to the ensemble by implying the presence of the absent farmer. The imagined conversation between the four objects revolves around describing this person.

The sculpture continues Zai's examination of the dispossession of the maritime Orang Laut, the indigenous nomadic sea people of the Riau Islands south of Singapore. Through the work, he asks: How can the Orang Laut survive and avoid being pushed aside by the modern world? The question is personal to him as a descendent of the Bugis people; the Bugis are a diverse people with a seafaring tradition in Riau dating back to the 17th century. The plight of the Orang Laut is the plight not only of the few, but of the many.

Disenfranchisement is the legal forgetting and disrespect of cultural value and historical precedent. It is the disrespect of knowledge. In an interview with Zai Kuning in 2014, I was struck when he associated beeswax, a material he often uses, with *home* building. The medium connotes different meanings, but it was Zai's comment that bees use wax to make their homes which stayed with me. The analogy is fragile. For Zai, for the Orang Laut, the Bugis, and for many of us, *To be a farmer* weighs up the precarity of life and honestly making a home.

Bala Starr



Zai Kuning
To be a farmer, 2013
 chair, fish basket, changkol, wood, bark, string, pins, wax
 98 x 120 x 27 cm
 Collection of John Chia and Cheryl Loh
 Image courtesy the artist and Ota Fine Arts, Singapore and Tokyo

The video of a man calling
himself Japan's prime minister
making a speech at an
international assembly

2014

The consistently iconoclastic works of Aida Makoto render him a polarising figure. His works explore the underbelly of Japanese society, delving into topics from imperialist aspirations to Otaku sexuality and often treating them with grotesque and sardonic figuration. To some, the works are blithe provocations, unbridled misogyny, nationalism, bad faith. To others, including younger Japanese artists such as art collective Chim↑Pom, his unflinching social commentary is admirable, flouting the gentility of contemporary art and society in Japan.

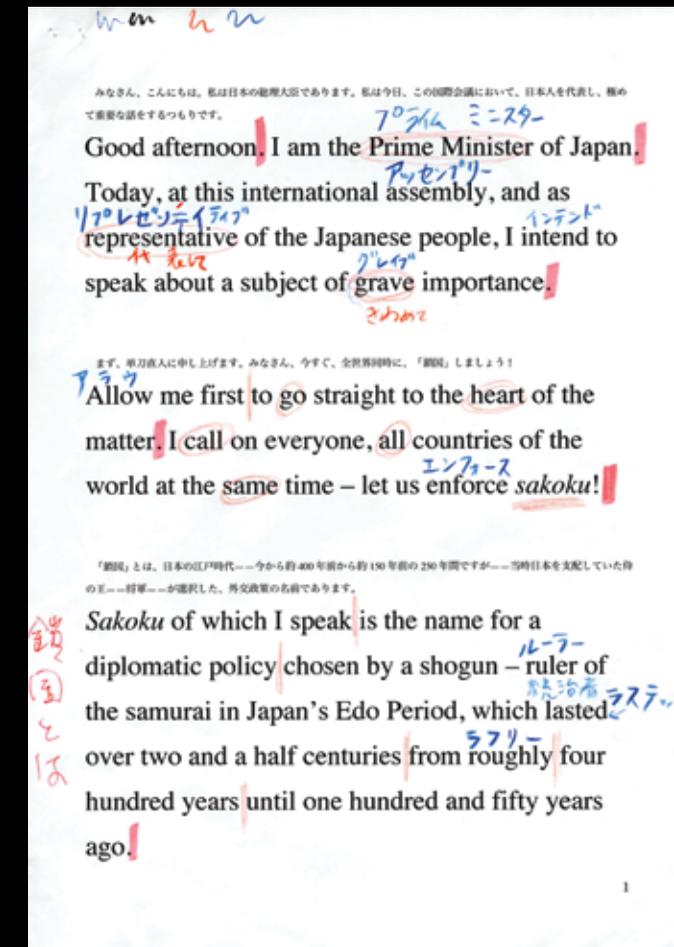
In this video work, Aida plays a fictional Japanese prime minister giving a speech that proposes a return to *sakoku*, an isolationist foreign policy from the Edo period, to counter unchecked globalism. The content plays to far-right populisms and nativisms across the globe, and his bizarre expressions ('asses covered in lion's skin') and false equivalences (comparing globalism to the Spanish conquest of the Inca Empire) are uncanny echoes of empty political rhetoric.

But this is not a one-sided portrayal of the prime minister. Ironically, his most trenchant sally at globalism comes from his speech-making in halting, thickly accented English. Displayed alongside the video is the script, which is laced with marginalia of Japanese translations and stress notations, emphasising competing regimes of intelligibility. One begins to sympathise with his criticism against the unquestioned dominance of English in international cultural exchange, which, in his own words, gives his speech 'the impression of the stupidity of a kindergarten child'. Nevertheless, sympathy runs short for the misplaced critique rooted in absolutist nationalist ideology.

Near the end of the video, the frustrated orator slips out of character, throws his script onto the ground and rambles in Japanese, 'I just wish for the world to be peaceful'. One is unsure whether it's Aida or the prime minister who's speaking, or whether this invocation of peace is equivocal or idealistic. Either way, there are no consolations between an overblown nationalist psyche and global political hegemony.

Marcus Yee

Aida Makoto
The video of a man calling himself Japan's prime minister making a speech at an international assembly, 2014
single-channel high-definition digital video, 16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound; script
installation dimensions variable; video 26:07 minutes; script 20 pages, each 29.7 x 21 cm
Collection of John Chia and Cheryl Loh
Images courtesy the artist and Mizuma Gallery, Tokyo and Singapore



Land, by Phuan Thai Meng, a Malaysian artist predominantly engaged with painting and installation, comprises 16 wood-framed topographies of various dimensions representing the individual states and federal territories of Malaysia, as well as an unframed painting on canvas, depicting cars passing underneath a circular freeway overpass, hanging like fabric on a hook. The maps of Malaysian states, each containing white shapes within a black painted surface—the perforated texture calling to mind aerial night views—are juxtaposed with the soft, buckled nature of Phuan's canvas, the buckling perhaps evoking how rapid development and infrastructure construction changes the social 'fabric' of Malaysia.

The hyperrealism of the painting gives off a newsprint quality, augmented by the canvas's frayed edges which resemble the curled pages of an old newspaper. Splotches of red splatter across the painting, as if on glass, while green-toned mildew-like spots across the overpass add a temporal remove, as if the photograph already represents a past long gone. The combination of documentary realism and the evidence of decay suggests a critical stance on the impact of Malaysia's urban development and economic progress. The work also breaks up the federal territories into individual components, a fragmentation that emphasises the sacrifice of the larger picture to the individual capitalistic pursuit in national urban planning—the sum of the parts do not make up a whole, nor tally the costs.

Tearing and cutting into his canvases is part of Phuan's gestural idiom. It expresses his spatial preoccupation with how human intervention penetrates a Malaysian sense of place and identity. His investigation into forgotten and neglected spaces due to infrastructure transformation is congruent with his role as educator and cofounder of the artist collective Rumah Air Panas (RAP), which provides an alternative space for multidisciplinary Malaysian artists, free from the dictates of market forces.

Elaine Chiew

Phuan Thai Meng
Land, 2014
 synthetic polymer paint on paper and canvas, wood, glass
 installation of 17 paintings: 187 x 479 x 9 cm (approx.)
 Collection of John Chia and Cheryl Loh
 Photography: Joe Nair



Since the early 1990s, Chinese artist Qiu Zhijie has been a key proponent of conceptual art in China. His works, which span painting, works on paper, video, installation, performance and forms of activism, often use map-making as a method to deconstruct language and systems of knowledge.

In this work, we see an aerial view of an imagined landscape with a river running through its centre. Lines of ink evoke the contour lines used in topographical maps to denote changes in altitude. Embedded in this landscape are an array of chimeras—a monkey with human-looking hands, a cockerel with a human head wearing a scholar's hat—as well as creatures considered auspicious in Chinese culture, such as tigers and dragons. Handwritten texts in Chinese and English of geographical and weather terms, as well as philosophical maxims, are interspersed among the animals. Half-way down the right-hand side of the work, next to the rear of a wolf-like animal, we see the phrase that forms the work's title: '我不是宠物亦不事劳作 (I am not a pet, and do not engage in work)'.

The anti-capitalist message in the title is obvious, but at the heart of the work is a general critique of contemporary societies' lack of humanism and concern for the natural environment. These criticisms are not directed towards human society as a whole, whose wider address is reflected in Qiu's use of rhetorical phrases drawn from Eastern and Western politics and culture. While the texts evoke a feeling of activism and urgency—'the world is facing a threat'—their random placement makes their meaning and purpose ambiguous. Read together, the texts create a philosophical cosmology that highlights the mutual relationships fundamental to natural ecosystems, such as connections between humans and animals, humans and the land, and the land and animals.

Melanie Pocock

Qiu Zhijie
我不是宠物亦不事劳作 (I am not a pet, and do not engage in work), 2014
handscroll, ink on paper
130 x 96 cm (image)
Collection of Yeap Lam Yang
Image courtesy the artist and A3



Born and raised in China, Sun Xun creates multidisciplinary works that draw on history, myths and fantasy, often using animal motifs in imaginatively constructed narratives. He grew up in the wake of the Cultural Revolution, and his parents taught him to distrust official narratives. In terms of messaging, his layered work resists immediate interpretation. Although modern Chinese history and politics are recurring themes, his pieces rise above easy polemic.

Mongolian map in the seventh of Shōwa period, which features a portrait of a man painted over a map, embodies Sun Xun's flair for powerful storytelling. This map, which was purchased from an old Japanese bookstore, depicts a region of northeastern China historically known as Manchuria. The Shōwa period in the title refers to a period of Japanese history corresponding to the reign of Emperor Hirohito (1926–89), which saw the rise of Japanese imperialism and the eventual invasion of Manchuria, a preamble to World War II. Sun has cheerfully 'vandalised' the map with a painting of a man's face. Superimposed over his nose is the suggestion of a tiger's snout, an allusion to the Manchurian tiger. Besides challenging the map's status as a historical document, Sun's playful and idiosyncratic treatment of the material can be seen as a call to imagine history and geography differently and to look again at the world around us.

Stylistically, the density of his brushstrokes and the unorthodox use of vibrant colours are unique in relation to traditional techniques of Chinese ink painting. The visual focus of Sun's paintings, be it an animal, scenery, or a person, are captured in moments that invite viewers to imagine the subject's movement. This approach can be traced to his multimedia practice, which includes acclaimed stop-motion films that are made up of thousands of hand-drawn images in woodcut prints, charcoal and ink.

Syaheedah Iskandar

Sun Xun
日本昭和七年满蒙地图 (*Mongolian map in the seventh of Shōwa period*), 2014
ink on a Japanese map of Manchuria dating from the Shōwa period (1926–89)
54 x 38 cm
Collection of John Chia and Cheryl Loh
Photography: Joe Nair



Born in Chongqing, China, in 1981, Li Shurui belongs to a generation of Chinese painters who chose to break away from traditional Chinese ink painting and social realism in favour of international abstract art. She works in the style of op art—an abstract style that uses lines and geometric forms to create optical illusions on the canvas. She uses patterns of colours to convey an abstract concept of light and depth. Inspired by urban night lights and music nightclub interiors, her sensitive renderings of light and colour evoke dynamic shimmering lights. Instead of using a brush to apply paint to canvas, Li uses an airbrush to spray synthetic polymer paint onto the canvas; her paintings are devoid of any brushstrokes.

Li's paintings are often created on a large, immersive scale and have a powerful presence in a room, enveloping the viewer with their effects. *Untitled 2014-2015-02* is 2 metres high and 3 metres long, towering over the viewer. But unlike most of her other paintings, which depict busy, kaleidoscopic arrangements reminiscent of close-ups of LED lights, the subject matter here is singular and placed centrally in the composition. The high-gloss globular shape of blue, green, beige and black, evokes a range of subjects, including a toy marble, a glass eye or a closed-circuit television that seems to follow the viewer around the room. This suggests that Li's coolly abstract creations may also have a more subversive edge, touching on ideas of surveillance and control.

Amelia Abdullahsani

Li Shurui
Untitled 2014-2015-02, 2014–15
 synthetic polymer paint on canvas
 200 x 300 cm
 Collection of Yeap Lam Yang
 Image courtesy the artist and AIKE, Shanghai
 Photography: Yang Wei



The critically acclaimed large-scale site-specific installations by Philippines-born, Australia-based husband-and-wife artist-duo Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan are often constructed using collected everyday materials sourced through projects based on community engagement. Addressing themes of diaspora, social dislocation, community, identity and memory, their works are collaborative, relational and often interactive. Works typically develop in series over several years with each iteration created with a different community and shaped by a specific cultural, temporal and geographical context.

The Aquilizans' ongoing *Left wing* project, which involves constructing wing-like sculptures from hand-forged sickles, is developed over several years in different locations. It started in Yogyakarta in 2015, in collaboration with local art students, farmers and blacksmiths, and continues in Cambodia, Vietnam and Taiwan. The version included in *Two houses* was created in Tabaco (the Philippines), a village with a knife-making tradition and history of leftist ideologies.

The artwork takes the form of a gigantic bird's wing composed of numerous hand-forged farmers' sickles, encased in a table-height vitrine that enables a close visual encounter. The title hints at the political history of the area where it was produced, further echoed by the sickle as a communist symbol. The sculpture embodies several sorts of tensions: There is a striking contrast between the freedom implied in the lightness of a wing versus the work's weighty grounded presence; additionally, the delicate texture of feathers is juxtaposed with the evident sense of danger and latent violence coming from the sharp sickle blades. Also crucial is the artwork's intangible medium: the relations built by the artists with the community that have prompted and shaped the work. The sculpture can thus be understood as a documentation of those relations, conversations and reciprocal education, reflecting the complex social realities facing agrarian communities, their collective identities and how those identities are changing in the contemporary world.

Lucia Cordeschi

Alfredo Aquilizan and Isabel Aquilizan
Left wing: Project another country, 2015
hand-forged steel sickles with wooden handles, vitrine
108.5 x 252 x 86.5 cm
Collection of John Chia and Cheryl Loh
Photography: Joe Nair



Alwin Reamillo O (Jambalambibe) 2015
 Ocho (FEM)/Ferdinand Edralin Marcos
 Ocho (IRM)/Imelda Romualdez Marcos

Alwin Reamillo is an interdisciplinary artist who creates sculptural assemblages—artworks consisting of everyday found objects that have been recombined and given new meaning and form through his interventions. Born in Manila in 1964, Reamillo migrated to Western Australia in 1995, but now lives in Manila. Themes of colonisation, migration, mobility, and globalisation are prevalent in his oeuvre, a reflection of his multiculturalism.

The installation *Ocho O Ocho* comprises three individual works arranged in a row. The two flanking works, *Ocho (FEM)/Ferdinand Edralin Marcos* and *Ocho (IRM)/Imelda Romualdez Marcos*, are made of found objects, such as a tape measure, a gun and various trinkets, attached to disused cable drums, which have been refitted in order to resemble the number eight. (The word *ocho* is Spanish for the number eight.) Images of the two eponymous political figures, infamous for their corruption and extravagance, are painted onto the drums. At first glance, the objects attached to the drum might seem innocuous, even random, but some have resonance with the life and times of the Marcos family. For example, the kidney-shaped medical bowl could be seen as a reference to the kidney surgeries that former Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos underwent before and after the assassination of Senator Benigno Aquino, a long-time political opponent, in 1983.

The central work, *O (Jambalambibe)*, takes the form of a bullseye target, with concentric circles made from shredded banknotes and pinewood shavings. The torn pieces of banknotes can be interpreted as alluding to corruption and/or collapsed financial systems, and the repeated circular forms in the entire installation evoke wider, possibly linked, cycles. It is worth noting that the word 'eight' is a homonym of the English word 'ate', which suggests a circularity in patterns of consumption and predation.

Amelia Abdullahsani

Alwin Reamillo
O (Jambalambibe), 2015
 shredded banknotes and pine wood shavings in acrylic
 117 cm (diameter)
 Image courtesy the artist and Tin-aw Art Gallery, Manila

Alwin Reamillo
Ocho (FEM)/Ferdinand Edralin Marcos, 2015
 mixed media and found objects on disused cable drums
 111 x 70 x 21.5 cm
 Image courtesy the artist and A3

Alwin Reamillo
Ocho (IRM)/Imelda Romualdez Marcos, 2015
 mixed media and found objects on disused cable drums
 106.5 x 69 x 13.5 cm
 Image courtesy the artist and A3





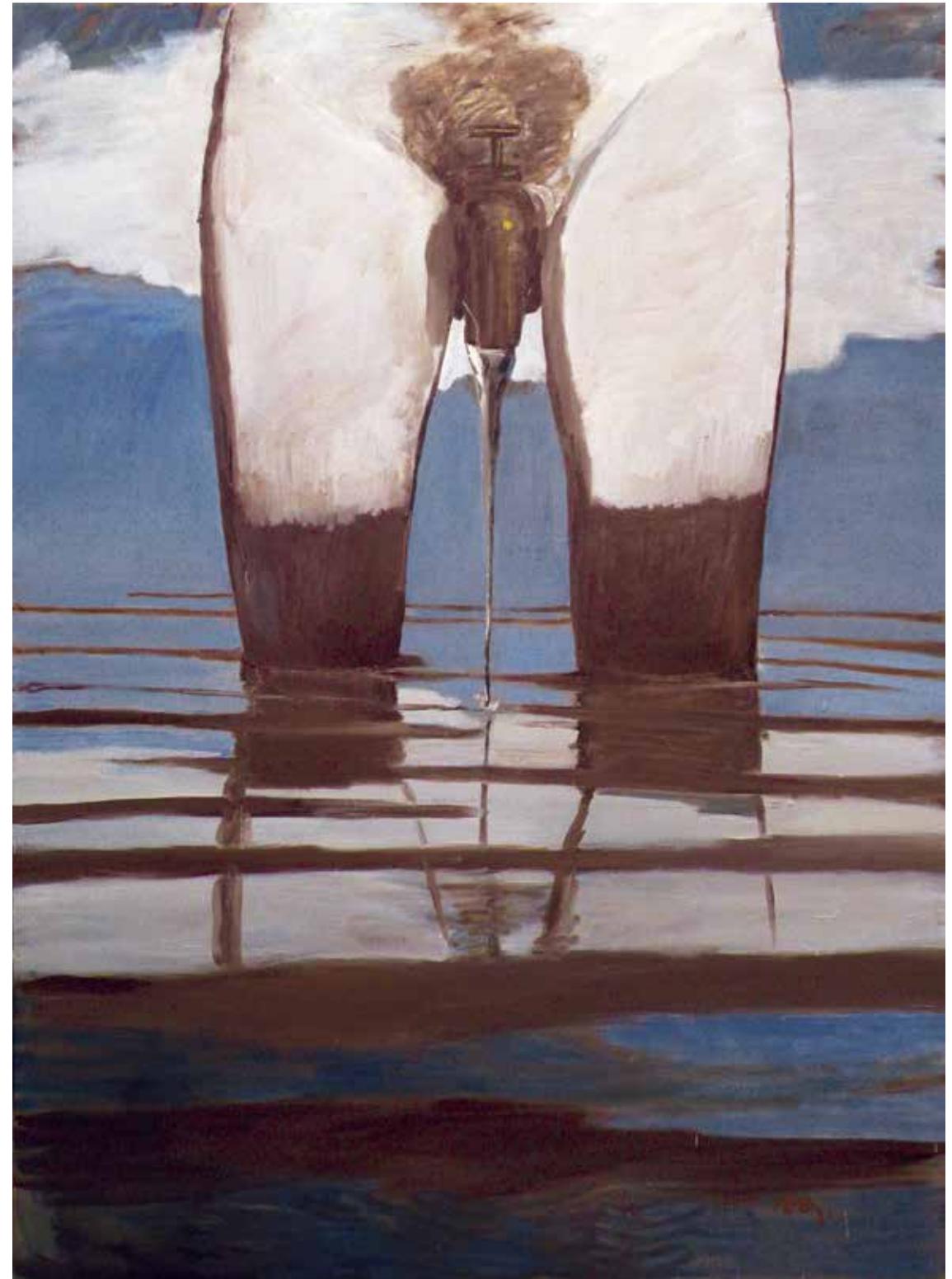
Working mostly with performance art and painting, Tang Dixin is part of the *80-hou* (post-1980s) generation of artists in China exploring tensions between liberal, communist and Confucian values. In his works, Tang also considers the influence of postmodern ideas on people's sense of individualism. Tang's whimsical treatment of these subjects is often simple, involving the use of bodily archetypes or singular gestures. In his oil paintings, Tang satirises characteristics of humans and animals, highlighting their semblance and connotations.

In *Tap water*, we see the lower half of a male body whose penis has been replaced by a tap. The equivalence between a natural 'tap' (the penis) and a mechanical one is effective, evoking a humorous association. Tang's transformation of the penis into a tap could refer to the water cycle, in which all water—regardless of its origin—eventually evaporates, condenses into clouds and falls as rain. The painting's restricted colour palette of browns, blues and pale hues enhances the circularity of the composition: the contours of the man's legs, the tap and water ripples have been rendered in the same terracotta brown; and the man's skin and the clouds in the background are painted off-white. Similar colours have been used by Tang in other paintings featuring human limbs and features, and the resonances and correspondences between these pieces form an index of visual puns.

Observing *Tap water* at eye level, the viewer is immediately confronted by the tap. This encounter provokes a range of emotions—awkwardness, aversion, laughter—which release us from the formal behaviour often associated with viewing artworks. This loosening up of aesthetic experience can also be felt in Tang's brusque application of the oil paint, which suggests the temporality of a sketch or performance.

Melanie Pocock

Tang Dixin
Tap water, 2015
 oil on canvas
 175 x 130 cm
 Collection of Yeap Lam Yang
 Image courtesy the artist and AIKE, Shanghai



Screen green takes its point of departure from the telecast of the 2014 National Day Rally speech given by the current Singaporean Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong.

In the performance lecture and its subsequent manifestation as an installation, Ho scrutinises the speech—a political instrument used to highlight and introduce imagined future directions for the island state—and green screen technology. Expanding on the technology's inherent ability to create and illustrate the speculative, Ho takes the notion of the colour green as a point where botany and cinematic history can converge to create a supposedly harmonious utopia.

In the performance, Ho moves between the present, past and future, providing insights such as the history of horticulture in Singapore, the role it played in a nascent and cohesive Singapore, and the contemporary constructivism it inhabits and espouses through projects such as Gardens by the Bay—a nature park built on reclaimed land that has been touted as a national icon.

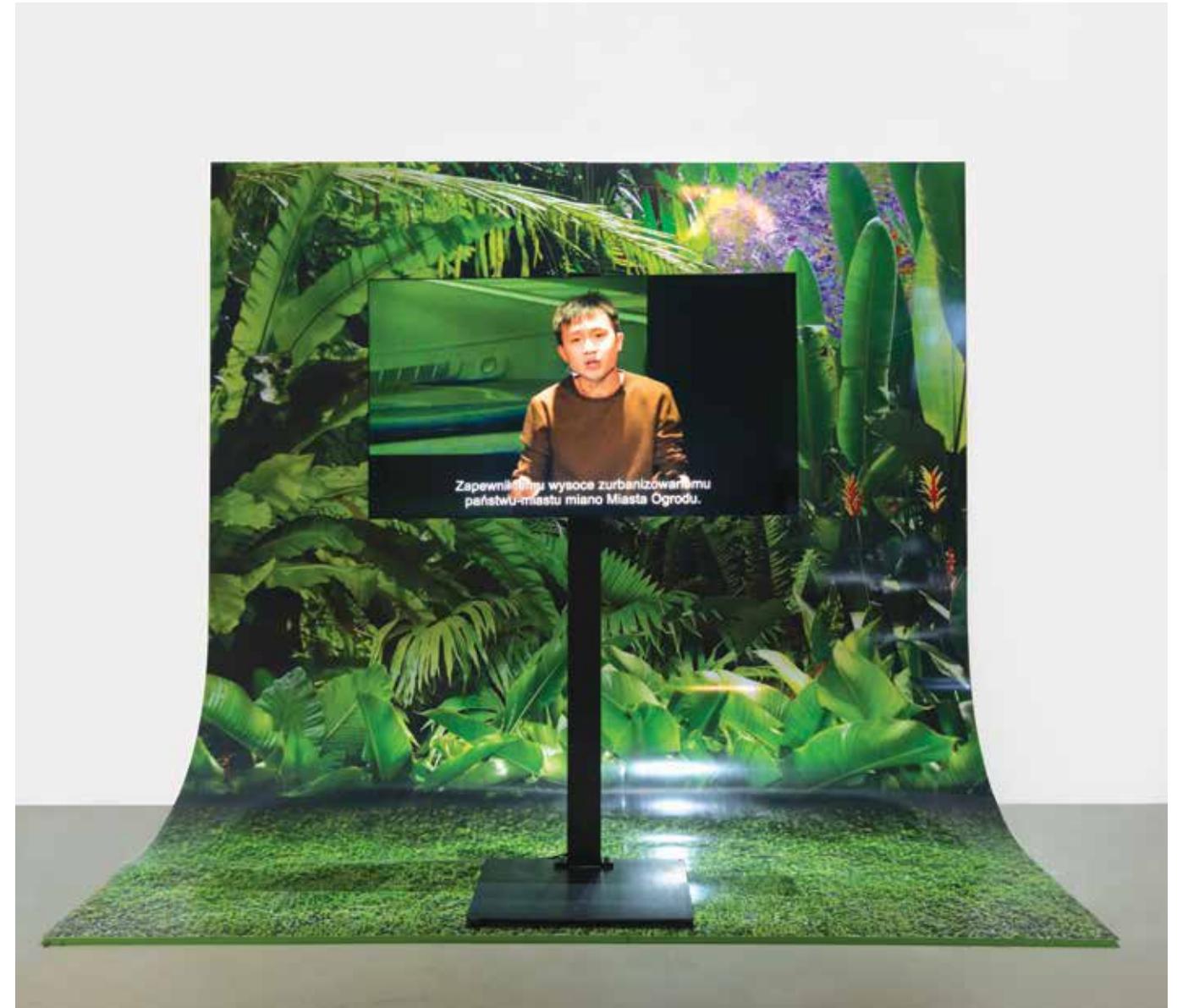
Subtly, Ho weaves in a spectre of the recent past—that of the 1987–88 Operation Spectrum, a covert security operation against an alleged Marxist conspiracy—amidst the celebratory narrative of progress, development and future. Using televised footage of an interview with Vincent Cheng, the local ringleader, and other alleged conspirators, Ho intersperses his research with first-person accounts and focuses on the use of botanical elements in the background: trees that were brought in to mask what would have been an interrogation, and gardens where the foliage creates a false sense of conviviality.

This constant play on the use of botany and green screens as suppressive elements persists in the post-performance installation, where a curved stage is designed specifically to create a backdrop for the television screen showing the documentation of the performance. Surrounded by images of horticulture specific to Singapore, viewers are invited to partake in the lecture as though it is a pastiche of the National Day Rally speech, both insidiously distant and speculative.

Qinyi Lim

This text is an edited version of a text originally published in the guide to the group exhibition, *Public spirits*, curated by Meiya Cheng and presented at the Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw, from 22 September 2016 to 8 January 2017.

Ho Rui An
Screen green, 2015–16
 digital video documentation of performance lecture (high-definition, 16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound), digital print on adhesive vinyl on freestanding wall
 video 52:35 minutes, wall 236 x 275 x 120 cm (variable)
 Collection of John Chia and Cheryl Loh
 Image courtesy the artist
 Photography: Bartosz Gorka



Tiffany Chung **Local history book—Asahi-cho, 2016**
1921; Asahi-cho, 1926–1929;
Asahi-cho, 1929–1932; Asahi-cho,
1935

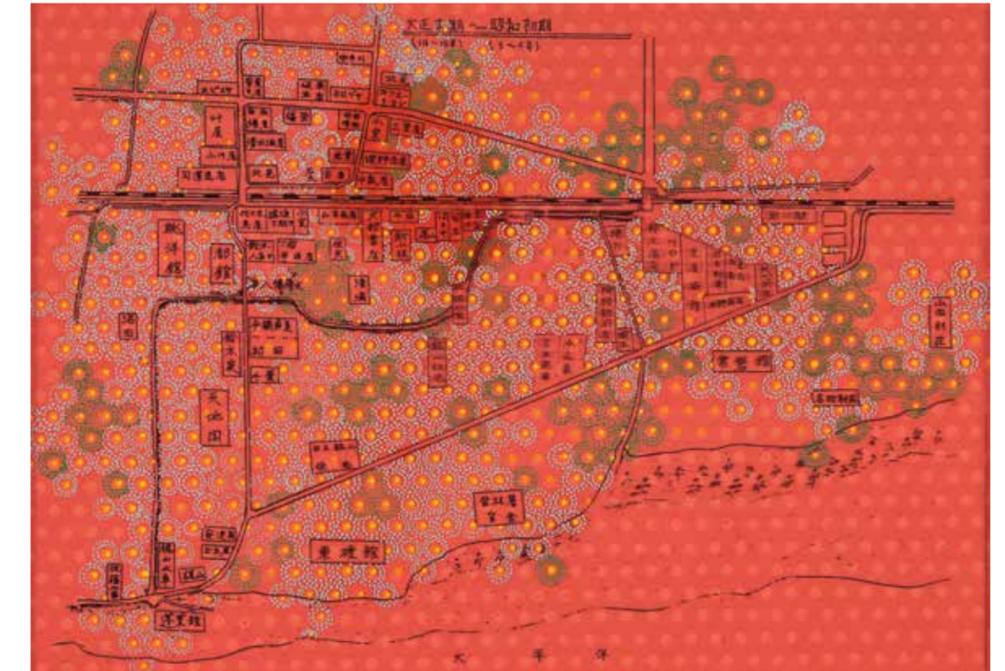
Local history book comprises four colourful maps of Asahi-cho, the downtown area of Hitachi within Ibaraki Prefecture in Japan's Kantō region. The maps are based on a local history book presented to Tiffany Chung by an old man while she was conducting fieldwork in Hitachi. They track four different periods for Asahi-cho within the interregnum between two world wars, during which Japan underwent economic and social upheaval followed by an increasingly industrial and military expansionist period.

The microdots and concentric swirls on the maps evoke intricate patterns and colour schemes of Japanese fabric and paper, an association at once innocuous and deceptive. Chung has maintained a labelling system of different buildings and architectural features from map to map, identified by Japanese kanji characters, but a quick comparison will show the flux created by new blocks of development as we transition from the 1921 map to the 1935 map. Chung does not provide a legend to decode her microdots, even though her coding system is complex. This adds a layer of abstraction upon a map's already abstract qualities, a deliberate strategy to avoid didacticism and to emphasise a map's ability to distort ground-level realities and obscure geopolitical manoeuvrings. The seductive aesthetic qualities also trigger an emotive response before the cognitive 'hit' of social issues Chung seeks to spotlight.

Chung, an acclaimed Vietnamese American artist, frequently examines through multimedia works, most notably maps, geographical shifts in a particular locale due to conflicts, war or natural disaster. Her maps are doorways into issues surrounding migration and urban transformation in relation to history and cultural memory. These Asahi-cho maps draw on her research into Japanese early modern history and postwar development. The Asahi-cho maps were first exhibited at the Hitachi City Museum as part of the Kenpoku Art 2016 festival. Within the context of Hitachi, Chung intends for these maps to function in the manner of Foucault's heterotopia, as interstitial spaces that layer onto official histories specific social meanings regarding the development, decline and depopulation changes experienced within Hitachi and other localities in Japan.

Elaine Chiew

Tiffany Chung
Local history book—Asahi-cho, 1921; Asahi-cho, 1926–1929; Asahi-cho, 1929–1932; Asahi-cho, 1935, 2016
 synthetic polymer paint, ink and oil marker on acetate and paper
 4 drawings, each 20 x 28 cm
 Collection of Yeap Lam Yang
 Images courtesy the artist and Gallery Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City
 Photography: Bui The Trung Nam



eX de Medici is a Canberra-based multimedia artist who grew up in the city's local punk scene, studied painting, practised tattooing, and was an Australian official war artist in the Solomon Islands in 2009. Her interest in environmental issues led to a long-term study of unclassified micro-moth specimens at the Australian National Insect Collection, and the anatomical details of these insects have become part of her visual language. Her early practice privileged idea over form but later progressed into large-scale, complex watercolours of emblems of destruction such as weapons, helmets, skulls and swastikas, informed by natural history illustrations and tattooing. De Medici's work examines the allure of power, the construct of authority, and the agents of dominance and control, while revisiting tropes of the vanitas genre.

In *Ruger Blackhawk*, a large watercolour of miniature precision, she portrays an iconic American revolver. Launched in the United States of America in 1955, the revolver is a collector's item and a best-selling gun worldwide due to its reliable and efficient design. It embodies human creativity and ingenuity at the service of annihilation rather than construction.

The revolver is presented as a symphony of brightly coloured botanical and entomological motifs. The tapestry of beauty and death embodies the tension between seductive aesthetics and confronting subject matter: the pernicious force of power in human society. Lush Australian flora such as banksias and grass trees, as well as pollen, stamens and pistils, embellish and obscure the deadly tool's surface. Moth pelt motifs veil the parts of the gun that activate its destructive mission: sight, trigger and hammer. Appropriating the template of traditional botanical illustrations, de Medici presents the bullets as seeds in initial form, in cross section and spent, with the connection between seed and bullet suggesting that the human desire for power has the potential for creation but also for perversion and violence.

Lucia Cordeschi



eX de Medici
Ruger Blackhawk, 2016
 watercolour
 84 x 110 cm
 Collection of Yeap Lam Yang
 Image courtesy the artist and Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney and Singapore

37 Michael Lee **Home of Yeap Lam Yang, 1988/90–2006, Habitat II at 2 Ardmore Park #11-02, Singapore (1985 – c. 2006)** 2016
Home of Yeap Lam Yang, 2006–07, Habitat I at 3 Ardmore Park #06-02, Singapore (1984 – c. 2007)

At first glance, *Home of Yeap Lam Yang, 1988/90–2006, Habitat II at 2 Ardmore Park #11-02, Singapore (1985 – c. 2006)* and *Home of Yeap Lam Yang, 2006–07, Habitat I at 3 Ardmore Park #06-02, Singapore (1984 – c. 2007)* evoke the language of architectural blueprints: diagrammatic layouts presented at a consistent 1:50 scale. Yet, contrary to the absolute conception of space in such floor plans, Michael Lee's paintings consider space as the expression of interiorised subjectivity.

These works are part of the *Dwelling* series, which was begun in 2012 and surveys buildings ranging from demolished commercial complexes to extant residential properties. The series is less concerned with depictions of schematic information about spatial arrangements than with conveying a more ambiguous and slippery sense of space in relation to lived experience and memory.

These two paintings depict the confines of two apartments in Ardmore Park previously occupied by collector Yeap Lam Yang. Only for *Home of Yeap Lam Yang, 1988/90–2006* did Lee consult a floor plan; to recreate the other unit, he interviewed Mr Yeap, noting down his recollections, habits and routines, and eventually transposing these fragments into a plan. In the painting, he omitted details of fixtures, elevations and perspectives. Excised of their informational contexts, the original function of the floor plans becomes unmoored.

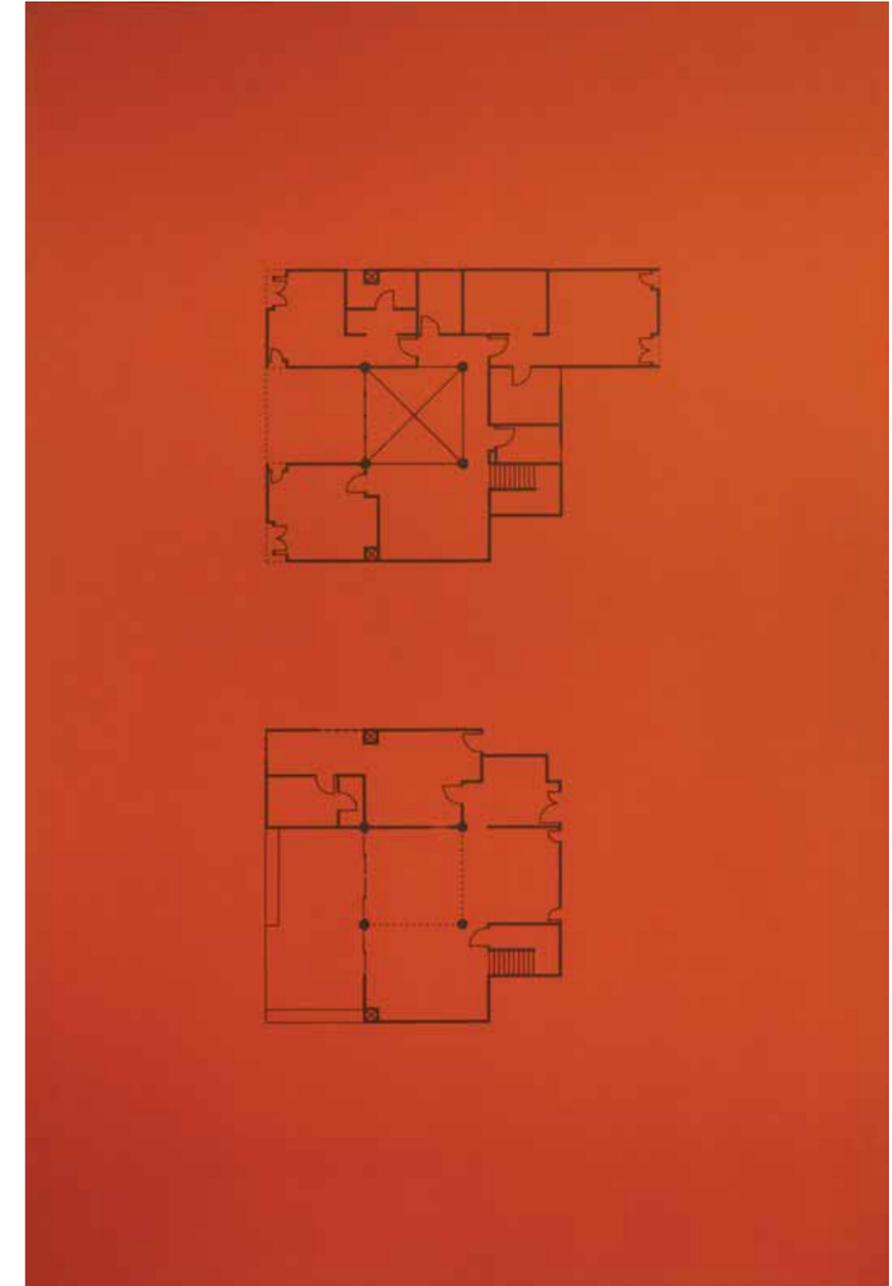
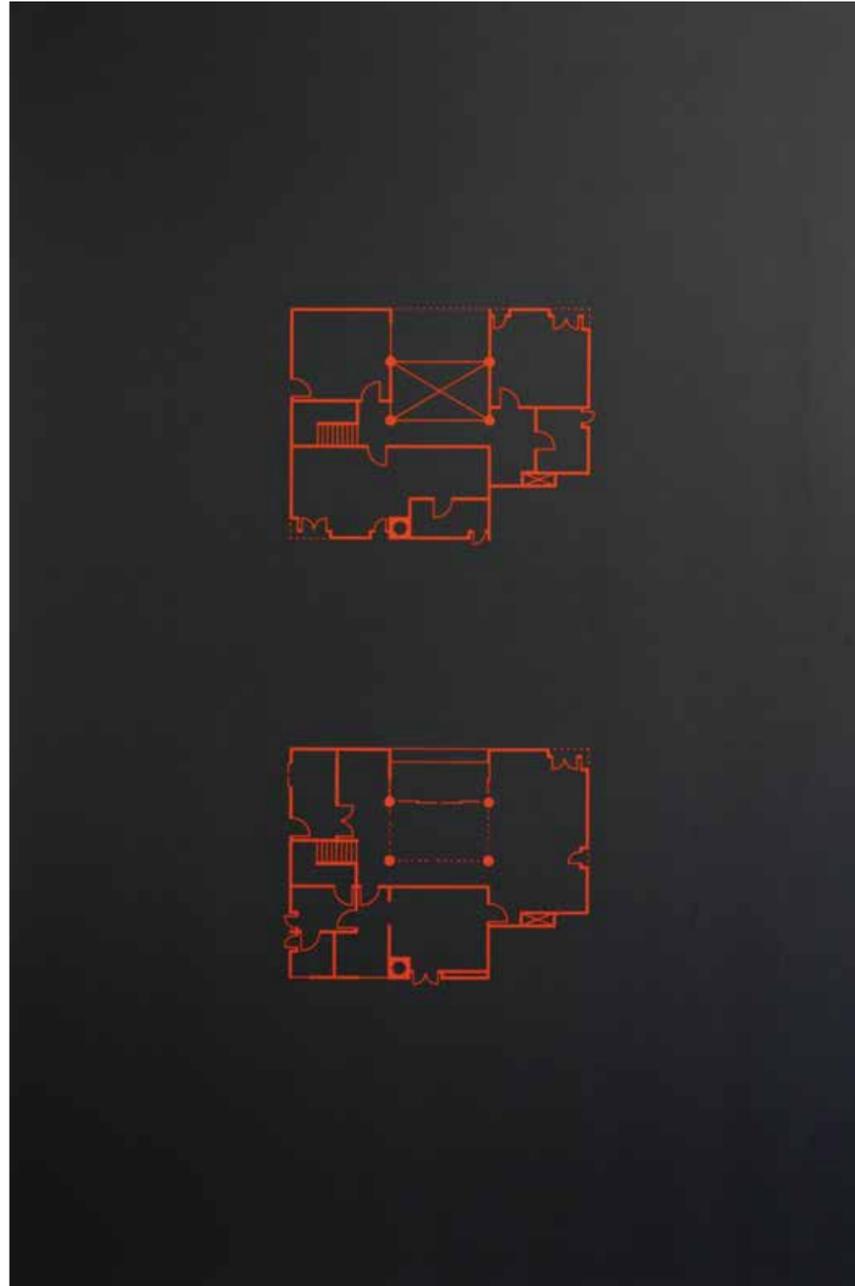
What the plans reveal are the relationships and movement patterns recalled by the apartments' inhabitants, as opposed to an incontrovertible blueprint that mimics reality. In mapping these spaces, Lee produces an autobiographical impression of the occupant and the space inhabited by their body over an extended period of time. The floor plan thus becomes an affective portrait of a home ironically visualised through technical abstraction. It is through this contingent quality that architecture comes into being in Lee's painted plans: we are invited to partake in the quiet reading of a dwelling through its use and occupation while negotiating our own gaze upon it.

Selene Yap

Michael Lee
Home of Yeap Lam Yang, 1988/90–2006, Habitat II at 2 Ardmore Park #11-02, Singapore (1985 – c. 2006), 2016, from the series *Dwelling*, 2012–
 synthetic polymer paint on canvas
 120.5 x 80 cm

Michael Lee
Home of Yeap Lam Yang, 2006–07, Habitat I at 3 Ardmore Park #06-02, Singapore (1984 – c. 2007), 2016, from the series *Dwelling*, 2012–
 synthetic polymer paint on canvas
 120.5 x 80 cm

Collection of Yeap Lam Yang
 Images courtesy the artist



Silenced, a monumental drawing in ballpoint pen and ink by Australian artist Chanelle Rose, depicts a luminous skull on top of which sits a spiky crown. A muzzle-like mask secured by buckles and straps conceals the nose and mouth cavity of the skull.

The detail of *Silenced*, as is characteristic of Rose's art, is achieved through the use of multiple black ballpoint pens and their ink. Rose describes this work as paying tribute to historical leaders who have been silenced or suppressed. The crown represents a great individual's inherent power, and the mask stands for the repression of their voice and thoughts. Viewing the work, one could imagine the Statue of Liberty in a dystopic or very near future, where she is prevented from speaking by a mask, stripped of her flesh and left only with a crowned hollow-eyed skull. The crown nevertheless signals the triumph of authentic greatness over injustice.

Rose envisions for her mostly female subjects a trajectory from vulnerability to empowerment. The black-and-white palette of the characters in her drawings brings to mind the aesthetic of *Sin city*, a 2005 Hollywood neo-noir film based on a graphic novel, in which the protagonists navigate a Manichaeian world where illegality prevails.

The virtual image of one of Rose's works circulated internationally through social media when prominent American rapper and music producer, Swizz Beatz, shared it to over a million followers on his Instagram account in 2016. The scale of an artwork is often misrepresented when it appears online, where most international art browsing likely occurs today. Standing in front of *Silenced*, one is absorbed by the drawing's meticulously described detail and imposing scale—the skull is in fact approximately 11 times the size of a human skull.

Caterina Riva

Chanelle Rose
Silenced, 2016
 ballpoint pen and ink
 150 x 115 cm
 Collection of Yeap Lam Yang
 Photography: Joe Nair



With a career spanning twenty years, Thai artist Natee Utarit combines motifs, methodologies and interpretations of Eastern and Western origin, and makes paintings which blend past and present. Utarit trained at Silpakorn University in Bangkok, founded by Tuscan-born sculptor Silpa Bhirasri (born Corrado Feroci), where the curriculum was shaped by Bhirasri's knowledge and mastery of the artistic techniques of the Italian Renaissance. As a student at Silpakorn, Utarit learnt the idiom of Western oil painting—realistic representation, symbolic meanings—to which he began to add his own awareness of Thai society as well as Buddhist beliefs.

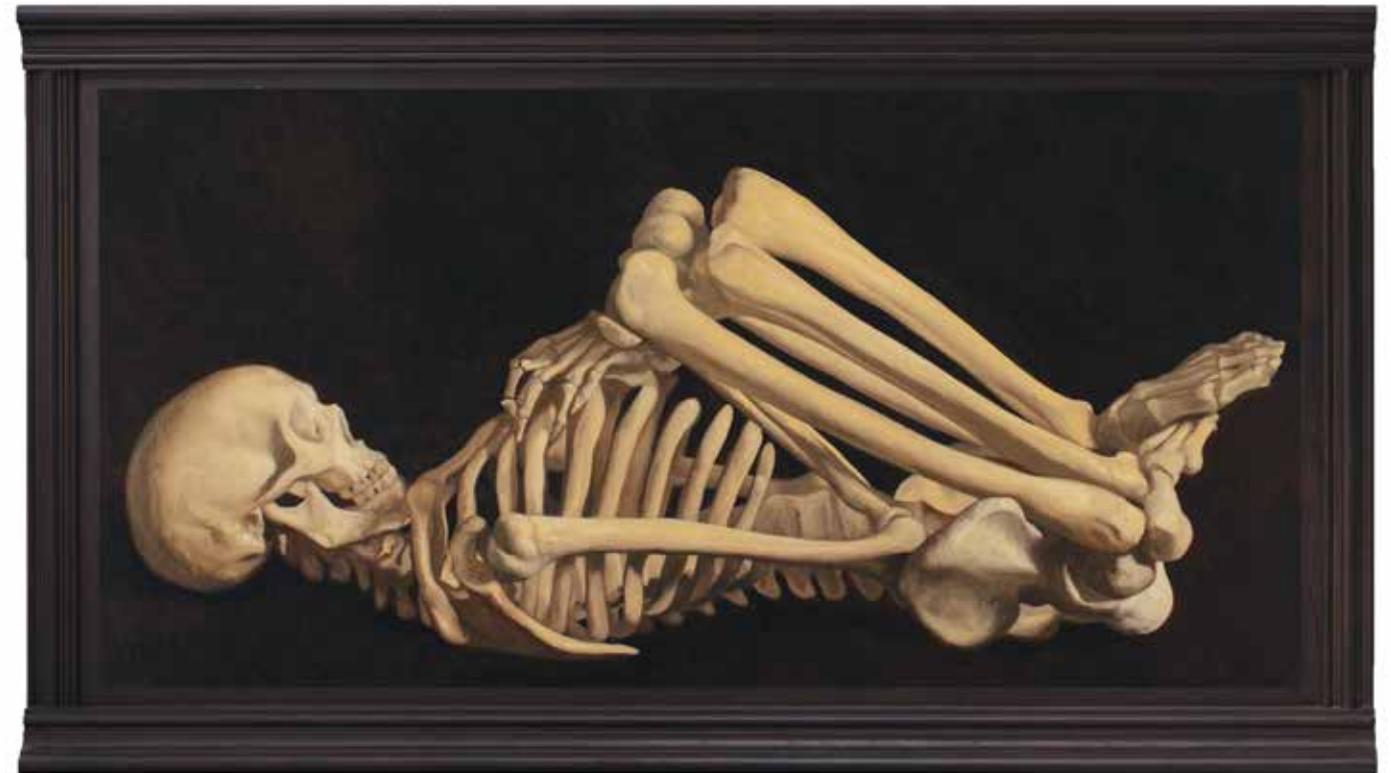
Contemplation of death—suffering is an oil painting from 2016 in which the frame and the background are both black; Utarit has painted with photographic precision the white bones of an adult human skeleton, supine, legs and arms curled over the ribcage. Such a posture recalls a foetal position or a body confined to the restricted space of a coffin by the canvas's frame.

Western Christian art history is filled with memento mori (from the Latin 'remember that you have to die'), a religious genre of painting and sculpture employed since the Middle Ages, in which a skeleton provides the visual warning of the futility and transient nature of human pursuits and earthly possessions in favour of a metaphysical fulfilment.

Italian art critic Demetrio Paparoni, who worked on Natee Utarit's monograph *Optimism is ridiculous* (2017), links *Contemplation of death—suffering* to Hans Holbein the Younger's painting *The body of the dead Christ in the tomb* (1521). While in Holbein's painting the figure of Christ has flesh and arms and legs in alignment, Utarit depicts a skeleton compressed, its lower leg bones folded against the upper body.

Caterina Riva

Natee Utarit
Contemplation of death—suffering, 2016
oil on canvas, wood
56.5 x 99.5 x 8 cm
Collection of Yeap Lam Yang
Image courtesy the artist and Richard Koh Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur



Born in Cambodia in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge and having grown up in Phnom Penh, Vandy Rattana portrays episodes of historical violence through understated and tranquil images. Since *Bomb ponds* (2009), in which his photos of bomb craters articulate the psychological wounds of Cambodians who survived American carpet bombing between 1964 and 1973, Vandy has been scanning the idyllic Cambodian countryside with his viewfinders and revealing its traumatic past.

Funeral of my father (2018) is a single-channel video installation and the concluding work of Vandy's *Monologue trilogy*, following *Landscape of time* (a work-in-progress begun in 2016) and *Monologue* (2015). Driven by the collective silence of his parents' generation, and his realisation of the number of graveyards being turned into rice fields, Vandy uses the natural landscape in Cambodia to reflect how nature has become an embodiment of death. As with the earlier two pieces in the trilogy, *Funeral of my father* features his poetry, with the verse determining how he shoots and edits the film. The video depicts a funeral procession of a man, led by his two children, and their encounters with people on their way to the crematorium. A more poetic form of the essay film, *Funeral of my father* contains tensions between sound and visuals. There is neither a single line of dialogue nor any attempt at conversation between characters. Instead, in each scene, a narrator's non-diegetic poetic lines reveal moments of internal monologue or reflexive commentary.

The asynchronicity between the on-screen image and the off-screen narration enables the audience to make sense of the audio-visual correlations in terms of their own experiences. Deriving from Vandy's own family's story, *Funeral of my father* speaks of a shared contemporaneity of Southeast Asia that oscillates between the dreamy presence of unfinished history and the unbearable certainty of violence in its immediate reality.

Fang-Tze Hsu

Vandy Rattana
Funeral of my father, 2018
 high-definition digital video projection,
 16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound
 45:09 minutes
 Collection of John Chia and Cheryl Loh
 Image courtesy the artist



Catalogue of works
in the exhibition

Catalogue of works from the collection of John Chia and Cheryl Loh

Dimensions are given as height preceding width (followed, where applicable, by depth)

- Wong Hoy Cheong**
'The definitive ABC of government' and *'The definitive ABC of ethnography'*, 1999 book (a): photocopy transfer on handmade paper made from pulped books: *Mein Kampf* (1925) by Adolf Hitler and *The Malay dilemma* (1970) by Mahathir Mohamad, photocopy transfer on tracing paper, cloth, leather; book (b): photocopy transfer on handmade paper made from pulped books: *The coming of age, Samoa* by Margaret Mead (1928) and *Among the believers: An Islamic journey by VS Naipaul* (1981), photocopy transfer on tracing paper, cloth, leather book (a): 23.9 x 17.4 x 2.4 cm (closed), book (b): 23.9 x 17.2 x 2.1 cm (closed)
- Manit Sriwanichpoom**
Paisan Plienbangchan, 2002*
12 gelatin silver prints
each 49 x 49 cm (image), 60 x 50 cm (sheet)
- Lee Wen**
Strange fruit, 2003, printed 2014[†]
from a series of 12 works
digital print
109.2 x 109.2 cm
- Lee Wen**
Strange fruit, 2003, printed 2014[†]
from a series of 12 works
digital print
109.2 x 109.2 cm
- Lee Wen**
Strange fruit, 2003, printed 2014[†]
from a series of 12 works
digital print
109.2 x 109.2 cm
- Jeremy Hiah**
The bomb eaters (after 'The potato eaters' by Vincent van Gogh), 2006, from the series *Paradise terrorise*, 2004–10 with (left to right) Woon Tien Wei, Lina Adam, Lim Sze Chin, Dan Yeo, Kai Lam; photography: Chua Chye Teck
digital print, ed. 1/8
82 x 122 cm (image)
- Jeremy Hiah**
The dance (after 'Dance' by Henri Matisse), 2006, from the series *Paradise terrorise*, 2004–10 with (left to right) Lim Sze Chin, Tang Da Wu, Dan Yeo, Kai Lam, Hoi Lit, Lee Wen; photography: Chua Chye Teck
Type C print, ed. 1/8
122 x 182 cm (image)
- Lee Wen**
Anthropometry revision 1 and 2, 2006[†]
4 digital prints
3 prints each 175 x 102 cm (image),
1 print 102 x 135 cm (image)
- Qiu Zhijie**
Live through all the tribulation, 2008
pencil on collage of screenprinted gampi paper on handmade paper
190.5 x 142 x 7 cm
- Shooshie Sulaiman**
Singa pura #4 (Lion whose life is full of pretence), 2011, from the series *Let's learn propaganda*, 2011–12
charcoal, oil pastel and watercolour
24 x 24 cm
- Shooshie Sulaiman**
Singa pura: registered 2, 2011–12, from the series *Let's learn propaganda*, 2011–12
ink on paper
24 x 24 cm
- Sopheap Pich**
Valley drip (Black top), 2012
bamboo, rattan, burlap, wire, beeswax, earth pigment, plastic, charcoal, oil paint, damar resin
160 x 124 x 8 cm
- Hiraki Sawa**
Lineament, 2012
2-channel high-definition digital video projection, 16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound, vinyl record, record player
sound and video each 18:47 minutes
- John Clang**
Myth of the flat earth, 2013
2 digital prints, single-channel high-definition digital video, 4:3 aspect ratio, black and white, sound
print (a): 105 x 148.75 cm (image),
print (b): 30.5 x 43.2 cm (image),
video 45 seconds
- FX Harsono**
Purification, 2013
3-channel high-definition digital video projection, 16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound
6:35 minutes
- Inga Svala Thorsdottir and Wu Shanzhuan**
Thing's right(s) printed 2013, 2013
lithograph and screenprint on Stonehenge paper
6 prints, each 55.5 x 73 cm
- Zai Kuning**
To be a farmer, 2013
chair, fish basket, changkol, wood, bark, string, pins, wax
98 x 120 x 27 cm

- Aida Makoto**
The video of a man calling himself Japan's prime minister making a speech at an international assembly, 2014[†]
single-channel high-definition digital video, 16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound; script
installation dimensions variable; video
26:07 minutes; script 20 pages, each
29.7 x 21 cm
- Phuan Thai Meng**
Land, 2014
synthetic polymer paint on paper and canvas, wood, glass
installation of 17 paintings:
187 x 479 x 9 cm (approx.)
- Sun Xun**
日本昭和七年满蒙地图 (Mongolian map in the seventh of Shōwa period), 2014
ink on a Japanese map of Manchuria
dating from the Shōwa period (1926–89)
54 x 38 cm
- Alfredo Aquilizan and Isabel Aquilizan**
Left wing: Project another country, 2015
hand-forged steel sickles with wooden handles, vitrine
108.5 x 252 x 86.5 cm
- Alwin Reamillo**
Ocho (FEM)/Ferdinand Edralin Marcos, 2015
mixed media and found objects on disused cable drums
111 x 70 x 21.5 cm
- Alwin Reamillo**
Ocho (IRM)/Imelda Romualdez Marcos, 2015
mixed media and found objects on disused cable drums
106.5 x 69 x 13.5 cm
- Alwin Reamillo**
O (Jambalambibe), 2015
shredded banknotes and pine wood shavings in acrylic
117 cm (diameter)
- Ho Rui An**
Screen green, 2015–16
digital video documentation of performance lecture (high-definition, 16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound), digital print on adhesive vinyl on freestanding wall
video 52:35 minutes, wall 236 x 275 x 120 cm (variable)
- Vandy Rattana**
Funeral of my father, 2018
high-definition digital video projection, 16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound
45:09 minutes

Catalogue of works from the collection of Yeap Lam Yang

Dimensions are given as height preceding width (followed, where applicable, by depth)

- Semsar Siahaan**
Untitled, 1986–89
oil on canvas
100 x 75 cm
- Wong Hoy Cheong**
Detention Oct. 1987, 1989
oil on canvas sack
213 x 147 x 3 cm (approx.)
- Shi Hu**
The three hymns, 1990
ink, synthetic polymer paint and dried flowers on rice paper
triptych (framed): 180 x 202 cm,
each 142 x 47 cm (sight)
- Shi Hu**
Summer dreams, 1991
ink and synthetic polymer paint on rice paper
188 x 123 cm
- Le Quang Ha**
Prison 3, 1997
oil on canvas, wood
75 x 65 x 10 cm
- José Santos III**
The scale, 2005
oil on canvas
92 x 84 cm
- Heri Dono**
Gulliver, 2007
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
150 x 201 cm
- Chang Fee Ming**
Égalité (Equality), 2009
watercolour
56 x 76 cm
- Chang Fee Ming**
Fraternité (Brotherhood), 2009
watercolour
76 x 56 cm
- Chang Fee Ming**
Liberté (Liberty), 2009
watercolour
76 x 56 cm
- Robert Zhao Renhui**
New culture, Minoru Honda, 2009, from the series *The great pretenders*, 2009–13
Diasec-mounted digital print on aluminium composite panel
111 x 74 cm
- Robert Zhao Renhui**
Special mention, Kiichiro Furukawa, 2009, from the series *The great pretenders*, 2009–13
Diasec-mounted digital print on aluminium composite panel
111 x 74 cm
- Robert Zhao Renhui**
Winner, Hiroshi Abe, 2009, from the series *The great pretenders*, 2009–13
Diasec-mounted digital print on aluminium composite panel
111 x 74 cm
- Dadang Christanto**
Victim imagining victims I, 2009–10
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
137 x 111 cm
- Dadang Christanto**
Victim imagining victims II, 2009–10
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
137 x 111 cm
- Dadang Christanto**
Victim imagining victims III, 2009–10
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
137 x 111 cm
- Phuan Thai Meng**
Action 5—Spread out the hands, 2011
oil on canvas
244 x 150 cm
- Elmer Borlongan**
Amazing rat race, 2012
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
213 x 427 cm
- Qiu Zhijie**
我不是宠物亦不事劳作 (I am not a pet, and do not engage in work), 2014
handscroll, ink on paper
130 x 96 cm (image)
- Li Shurui**
Untitled 2014-2015-02, 2014–15
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
200 x 300 cm
- Tang Dixin**
Tap water, 2015
oil on canvas
175 x 130 cm
- Tiffany Chung**
Local history book—Asahi-cho, 1921; Asahi-cho, 1926–1929; Asahi-cho, 1929–1932; Asahi-cho, 1935, 2016
synthetic polymer paint, ink and oil marker on acetate and paper
4 drawings, each 20 x 28 cm
- eX de Medici**
Ruger Blackhawk, 2016
watercolour
84 x 110 cm

- Michael Lee**
Home of Yeap Lam Yang, 1988/90–2006, Habitat II at 2 Ardmore Park #11-02, Singapore (1985 – c. 2006), 2016, from the series *Dwelling*, 2012–
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
120.5 x 80 cm
- Michael Lee**
Home of Yeap Lam Yang, 2006–07, Habitat I at 3 Ardmore Park #06-02, Singapore (1984 – c. 2007), 2016, from the series *Dwelling*, 2012–
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
120.5 x 80 cm
- Chanelle Rose**
Silenced, 2016
ballpoint pen and ink
150 x 115 cm
- Natee Utarit**
Contemplation of death—suffering, 2016
oil on canvas, wood
56.5 x 99.5 x 8 cm

Notes
* Represented in the exhibition by a copy courtesy of Manit Sriwanichpoom

† Represented in the exhibition by a copy courtesy of Lee Wen and iPrecision, Singapore

‡ The script component of this work is represented in the exhibition by a copy courtesy of Aida Makoto and Mizuma Gallery, Tokyo and Singapore

Brief artists' biographies

Shi Hu

Born Xushui, Hebei Province, China, 1942. Lives and works Beijing.

In 1978, Shi Hu was an art director at the People's Fine Arts Publishing House, Beijing, when he was asked to join an official Chinese delegation to thirteen African countries. It was upon his return and the presentation of his 'African sketches' that Shi began his career as a professional artist. His paintings blend the materials and skills of traditional Chinese calligraphy and ink painting with the styles of Western modernism. Shi has presented recent solo exhibitions at the National Art Museum of China, Beijing (2013), Shenzhen Art Museum (2005), and National Museum, Jakarta (2004). He has participated in recent group exhibitions with Alisan Fine Arts at Art Basel Hong Kong (2018), Fine Art Asia (2014), and Wan Fung Art Gallery (2009). Shi has also exhibited in major international surveys such as the 1st Beijing International Art Biennale (2003).

Shooshie Sulaiman

Born Muar, Johor, Malaysia, 1973. Lives and works Kuala Lumpur.

Shooshie Sulaiman's practice includes drawing, installation and performance, as well as the creation of archives and libraries, writing projects, situations, and collective, community-building endeavours. Her work explores relationships between cultural identities, the political and personal, and tradition and progress within Southeast Asia. Shooshie has presented recent solo exhibitions at Kadist Art Foundation, Paris (2016), and Tomio Koyama Gallery, Singapore (2013). She has participated in recent group exhibitions at Art Gallery Miyauchi, Hiroshima (2017), Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2017), Bétonsalon, Paris (2016), Kadist Art Foundation, San Francisco (2015), and Para Site, Hong Kong (2015). Shooshie has recently exhibited in major international surveys including the 10th Gwangju Biennale (2014), 6th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Brisbane (2009), and documenta 12, Kassel (2007). She was awarded the National Art Award (Young Curator) by the Ministry of Information, Communication and Culture Malaysia in 2009.

Manit Sriwanichpoom

Born Bangkok 1961. Lives and works Bangkok.

An artist-activist, Manit Sriwanichpoom works primarily with photography. In his work, Sriwanichpoom playfully explores the photographic image and its relationship with objective truth, which he undermines through the staging of fictional scenes and the insertion of his alter ego 'the pink man' into archival photographs. Sriwanichpoom has presented recent solo exhibitions at Singapore Art Museum (2010) and Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne (2008). He has participated in group exhibitions at The Art Center, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok (2017), KA 10 | Arthena Foundation, Düsseldorf (2017), KINDL—Zentrum für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Berlin (2017), and Cemeti Art House, Yogyakarta (2016). He has also exhibited at major international surveys including the World Visual Arts Biennale, Musée du quai Branly, Paris (2007), and 57th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia (2003), where he represented Thailand. In 2014, he was awarded the Chevalier de l'ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Ministry of Culture.

Sun Xun

Born Fuxin, Liaoning Province, China, 1980. Lives and works Beijing.

Sun Xun's practice encompasses drawing, painting, animation, video and printmaking. He is well known for large-scale, monochrome drawings, as well as richly coloured ink paintings and animations made from thousands of hand-drawn frames. In these works, Sun explores the interplay of time, the construction of historical narratives, and mythology. Sun has presented recent solo exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney (2018), Yuz Museum, Shanghai (2016), Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art, Manchester (2015), and Hayward Gallery, London (2014). He has participated in group exhibitions at Macao Museum of Art (2017), Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo (2017), Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei (2017), Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York (2016), and Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2014). Sun has recently exhibited in major international film festivals including the 62nd International Short Film Festival, Oberhausen (2016), 17th Holland Animation Film Festival, Utrecht (2015), and 54th Annecy International Animated Film Festival.

Tang Dixin

Born Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, China, 1982. Lives and works Shanghai.

Tang Dixin's practice encompasses painting, video and performance. He is most often associated with physically challenging, often risky performances. These include lying down on subway tracks in Shanghai before dashing to safety, and scaling the walls of a gallery using mountain climbing equipment. Tang's oil paintings often depict a puzzle of body parts in absurd positions. He has presented recent solo exhibitions at AIKE, Shanghai (2017), and Ota Fine Arts, Singapore (2015) and Tokyo (2014). He has participated in group exhibitions in Shanghai at Rockbund Art Museum (2017), chi K11 Art Museum (2016), and SPSI Art Museum (2015), and elsewhere at PAC (Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea), Milan (2015), Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing (2013), and Kunsthalle Faust, Hanover (2012). Tang has exhibited in major international surveys including the 10th Gwangju Biennale (2014) and 10th Baltic Triennial of International Art, Vilnius (2009).

Inga Svala Thorsdottir and Wu Shanzhuan

Born Iceland 1966 and Zhoushan, Zhejiang Province, China, 1960, respectively. Live and work Hamburg, Shanghai and Reykjavík.

Inga Svala Thorsdottir and Wu Shanzhuan have been collaborating as artists since 1991. They have created various conceptual projects including mathematical drawings, architecturally inspired sculptures and process-based works in which objects are pulverised. The duo's 'perfect bracket' (devised 1992) is an iconographical symbol that represents both infinite inclusion and exclusion. Thorsdottir and Wu have presented recent solo exhibitions at Singapore Tyler Print Institute (2014), OCT Contemporary Art Terminal, Shenzhen (2013), and Guangdong Museum of Art (2008). They have participated in recent group exhibitions at Shanghai Gallery of Art (2015), Witte de With, Rotterdam (2012), and Long March Space, Beijing (2011). They have also exhibited at major international surveys including the 53rd International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia (2009) and 3rd Mercosul Biennial, Porto Alegre (2001).

Natee Utarit

Born Bangkok 1970. Lives and works Bangkok.

Natee Utarit's paintings portray objects and animals in symbolic narratives of the social and interior lives of the Thai people. Utarit's interest in imbuing objects with metaphoric meaning is extended in his elaborate multipanelled works, which are often framed in the style of religious masterpieces of the Renaissance. In lieu of saints and supplicants, Utarit's works contain motifs from Western art, Thai culture and Buddhist systems of belief, grouped together with human and animal skeletons symbolising memento mori. Utarit has presented recent solo exhibitions at Ayala Museum, Manila (2017), Bangkok University Gallery (2013), Singapore Art Museum (2010), and The Art Center, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok (2007). He has participated in group exhibitions at Bangkok Art and Culture Centre (2016), Saatchi Gallery, London (2015), Bank Negara Malaysia Museum and Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur (2015), Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo (2015), and Singapore Art Museum (2011). Utarit has exhibited in major international surveys including the 4th Asian Art Biennale, Taichung (2013) and 6th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Brisbane (1999).

Vandy Rattana

Born Phnom Penh 1980. Lives and works Phnom Penh and Paris.

A self-taught photographer, Vandy Rattana's images and video works examine the lingering impact of natural and human-made disasters and historical traumas on the land and its people. In 2007, Vandy helped found the Stiev Selapak artist collective in Phnom Penh, and then Sa Sa Art Gallery in 2009, now a resource centre for Cambodia's emerging artists. Vandy has presented recent solo exhibitions at Jeu de Paume, Paris (2015), CAPC (Centre d'arts plastiques contemporains), Bordeaux (2015), and Asia Society Museum, New York (2013). He has participated in group exhibitions at Galerie Faux Mouvement, Metz (2017), Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2017), Taipei Fine Arts Museum (2017), Center for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw (2016), and Akademie der Künste, Berlin (2015). Vandy has exhibited at major international surveys including documenta 13, Kassel (2012), the 1st Kiev International Biennale of Contemporary Art (2012), 2nd Asia Triennial, Manchester (2011), and 2nd Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Brisbane (2009).

Wong Hoy Cheong

Born Georgetown, Penang, 1960. Lives and works Kuala Lumpur.

Wong Hoy Cheong's practice includes painting, drawing, photography, video, installation and performance. His works examine the colonial power structures underlying the region's historical narratives. His photographic works appropriate compositions and character tropes from Western art and popular culture to depict migrant populations from former British colonies, Malaysia in particular. Wong has presented recent solo exhibitions at OUR ArtProjects, Kuala Lumpur (2017), Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York (2013), and NUS Museum, Singapore (2008). He has participated in group exhibitions at the Goethe Institute, Zurich (2010), Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius (2009), and Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne (2008). Wong has also exhibited in major international surveys including the 21st Biennale of Sydney (2018), 4th Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale (2009), 10th Biennale de Lyon (2009), 6th Taipei Biennial (2008), 10th International Istanbul Biennial (2007), and 50th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia (2003).

Zai Kuning

Born Singapore 1964. Lives and works Singapore.

Zai Kuning's practice encompasses painting, sculpture, photography and film, music, dance and theatre, as well as poetry and writing. His work often explores the role and meaning of art in society, as well as the histories of Southeast Asian peoples. In 2017, he represented Singapore at the 57th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia with *Dapunta Hyang: Transmission of knowledge*. In this work, Zai displayed the results of over two decades of research into the history and culture of the Orang Laut, one of the first peoples to inhabit the region. The work returned to Singapore in 2018 and was exhibited at TheatreWorks. Zai has presented recent solo exhibitions at Esplanade, Singapore (2015 and 2009), Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, LASALLE College of the Arts (2014), and The Substation Gallery, Singapore (2011). He has participated in recent group exhibitions at National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur (2017), Art Printing Works (APW), Kuala Lumpur (2017), Bangkok Art and Culture Centre (2017), NUS Museum, Singapore (2016), 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Ishikawa (2015), and Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2015).

Robert Zhao Renhui

Born Singapore 1983. Lives and works Singapore.

Robert Zhao Renhui's photographic and installation work results from research into elements of the natural world and their relationship with humanity. In his art, Zhao works with the blurred division between fact and fiction, creating imaginary sites and species of flora and fauna. In doing so, his works explore ways in which images and information are produced and consumed. Zhao has presented recent solo exhibitions at Onassis Cultural Centre, Athens (2018), NTU Singapore Centre for Contemporary Art (2018), National Museum of Singapore (2017), Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne (2015), Kadist Art Foundation, San Francisco (2014), and Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, LASALLE College of the Arts (2011). He has participated in group exhibitions at National Gallery Singapore (2017), Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai (2017), Musée du quai Branly, Paris (2013), and Zabłudowicz Collection, London (2012). Zhao has also recently exhibited in major international surveys including the 19th Jakarta Biennale (2017), 7th Moscow Biennale (2017), 13th Arles Discovery Award Exhibition (2015), 9th Busan Biennale (2014), 5th Daegu Photo Biennale (2014), and 4th Singapore Biennale (2013).

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TWO HOUSES: POLITICS AND HISTORIES IN THE CONTEMPORARY ART COLLECTIONS OF JOHN CHIA AND YEAP LAM YANG

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Alwin Reamillo
Ocho (FEM)/Ferdinand Edralin Marcos (detail), 2015
mixed media and found objects on disused cable drums
111 x 70 x 21.5 cm
Collection of John Chia and Cheryl Loh
Image courtesy the artist and A3

Wong Hoy Cheong
Detention Oct. 1987 (detail), 1989
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Collection of Yeap Lam Yang
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