

IN CONVERSATION WITH DR. WULAN DIRGANTORO

by Dr. S.Chandrasekaran (Lecturer, Faculty of Fine Arts)

“I am interested in a more open, inclusive understanding of feminism; that it should be in the plural, not singular.”

Dr. Wulan (W): My last research project explores the relationship between feminisms and visual arts in Indonesia. Focusing on works by Indonesian women artists produced from the 1940s until the present day, it provides a new understanding of the history of Indonesian modern and contemporary art from a feminist perspective. Its main aim is not only to analyse the actual works of Indonesian women artists historically and today, but also to illuminate the socio-cultural and political contexts in which the artists worked through a feminist reading.

Dr. Chandrasekaran (C): Can you please provide us a brief biography of yourself before you came to LaSalle?

W: I was a ceramics major from Bandung Institute of Technology, Indonesia before I went on to study MA Art Curatorship at the University of Melbourne. When I graduated from Melbourne University in 2003, I decided to stay in Australia until I moved to Singapore in June last year (2014). In the first five years I've worked in the museum and gallery scene in Melbourne, then in 2007 I was offered a position at the University of Tasmania as an associate lecturer in their Indonesian Studies program. The switch into academia felt natural because I've always been passionate about research as part of my previous works and the change also allowed me to pursue a PhD.

C: As a feminist scholar, how do you analyse works of Indonesian women artist through a feminist reading? How is this important in today's context?

W: My starting point for analysis is grounded in the discipline of art history, namely from cultural and textual productions that are produced by women artists through art works, interviews, biographies, letters, and essays. I examine how critical language can be derived from these primary sources, thus basing the primacy of the analysis on the perspective of the female artists. To some extent, my analysis can be seen as embodying a stance that I criticise in my research, namely that of valourising female creativity. Yet within these works there is a complex picture of Indonesian women artists and their sociocultural environment.

It is important because the art works are not a mere reflection of their personal stories and thoughts; their subjectivities cannot be simplified through their voice as primary sources. To balance this perspective, I look at the reception of art history and feminist-inspired works within the mainstream Indonesian art world; the role of audience and reception in the production of meaning has rarely been discussed in relation to opening up a discursive field about feminism/s in Indonesian art discourses.

C: How do you position the notion of feminisms in relation to the Asian context? Are you re-defining the notion of feminisms?

W: I am interested in a more open, inclusive understanding of feminism; that it should be in the plural, not singular. For example, many of Asian women artists' reluctance to embrace the label 'feminist artist' is also a form of critique of Western and second-wave feminism, which not only homogenised women's oppression globally but also placed the West at the centre of feminist art practices. Through their own understanding of feminisms, women artists are creating art works that can contribute to a more nuanced perspective of the local version/s of feminism. Moreover, instead of reducing women's diverse experiences into a common culture, the differences among women are as important as their cross-culturally shared common struggles.

C: How do you read Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity in the works of women artists in Indonesia? For example, women artists such as Mella Jaarsma, Arahmaiani, and Melati Suryodarmo.

W: Feminist scholars, activists and cultural workers successfully created a discursive space in the mainstream media to discuss issues which were previously taboo, such as the politics of the female body, domestic violence, sexual abuse and more.

Butler's notion of gender performativity is certainly influential in the reading of works of many artists, including women and queer artists. However, not all Indonesian performance artists strictly addresses the issues of gender in their works, with the exception of Arahmaiani's earlier works that are quite explicitly political in their content. If at all, what connects these artists with Butler's notion is that identity is free-floating and constructed, not as essence. Mella's works certainly have addressed the point that what we understand as a stable identity and the belief that everything is unchanging is constructed by a series of both subtle and blatant coercions through social conventions and taboos.

C: Within the Asian contexts, the politics of female body are constantly refrained by the patriarchal structures. As a feminist scholar, how do you read the notion of female body within the context of Asian art discourse?

W: I'm not sure if I can speak for all Asian female body in this regard but I certainly agree that the politics of the female body are constrained by patriarchal structures. From my own background and research, Indonesian women artists' use of their body differs from Western feminist performance artist in its challenge to the premise of the women's body as something sacred, as an embodiment of their *kodrat* and of patriarchal socio-cultural values. In the absence of the Humanist tradition of the female body as an art form, performance art by Indonesian women artists such as Arahmaiani is shocking and confronting. This is further underlined by the ever-present religious and social convention of Islam where physical contact between unrelated sexes in public is discouraged or even prohibited in some of the provinces.

Moreover, the high value that Indonesian society put in the role of mothers and motherhood have been subverted if you like, in the works of some of women artists. They do this by creating works that represent motherhood as not the ultimate representation of the feminine but rather as an active, speaking subject that is also compatible with the identity of the artists as the maker of images and mother as the maker of flesh.

C: Do you think Arahmaiani and Titarubi had a huge influence in establishing feminist thinking in women artists in Indonesia?



W: Certainly, as both artists have consistently raised feminist issues and criticism towards patriarchal structures in their works. It is noteworthy that Arahmaiani's label as the 'Indonesian feminist artist' by the international art world was built on her willingness to tackle difficult issues such as religion, ethnicity and sex. Titarubi's earlier body of work emphasised the positive connection between woman as artist, as a producer of text with motherhood. The artist's works situate her personal experiences within Indonesia's changing socio-political context. Moreover, the reading of her work provides an alternative to the traditional maternal depiction of domesticity and self-sacrifice.

C: Can you please further elaborate on the research methodologies that you apply in reading feminist discourse within the discourse of Indonesian art?

W: In my research I use a dual approach of strategies of correction and interrogation to critically assess the patriarchal structure of the Indonesian art world and to analyse works by Indonesian women artists. Despite the limitations inherent in the strategies of correction in Western feminist art, namely that the insertion women artists into the art history or canons, I argued that it is still necessary to apply these strategies in the Indonesian context, simply because the contribution of women artists has been largely overlooked in Indonesian art history. Similarly, strategies of interrogation are crucially important in order to conduct critical enquiry into and revisions of the already existing reading of works by Indonesian women artists. In doing so, I am obliged to critically read the writings by both male and female writers to understand how structures of patriarchy work as well as to look for alternative readings.

C: How do Indonesian women artists negotiate their feminist thinking within the patriarchal structures in Indonesian art world?

W: By looking beyond the labelling but not rejecting the term itself, many works by Indonesian women artists chart a trajectory of change in the way feminisms operates in Indonesian visual arts. As important drivers of this process of change, Indonesian women artists neither resist patriarchy in a 'politically correct' way nor revel in eroticism, but steer a course between these two positions.

Furthermore, I believe works by Indonesian women artists can include difference and absorb ambiguity within their frame of reference, thus avoiding the totalising and exclusionary practices sometimes associated with feminism.

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About Faculty of Fine Arts

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With its established history, offering one of LASALLE's pioneering programmes, the Faculty of Fine Arts provides the most rigorous and professional training for full-time practices as a professional artist. The Faculty emphasises reflection and self-evaluation, demanding enquiry, commitment, self-discipline and a level of collaborative works.

It houses undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Painting, Printmaking, Sculpture, Art Photography, Drawing, Graphic Novel and Time-Based Art.

Editor's Note

For this edition of Praxis, we introduce a students' editorial panel. The panel consists of students from BA(Hons) Fine Arts L2 and L3. At our first meeting, we recognised the potential of these students who were willing to take up the challenge that went beyond classroom teaching. For this issue, they contributed with great commitment and intellect as writers. We are so proud of their contributions.

We would like to thank the students and staff who have contributed earnestly to 9th Praxis Press Edition.

INTERVIEW WITH FARAH WARDINI

by Karina Iskandarsjah, BA(Hons) Fine Arts L3/2015



An archive seeks to preserve history and strives to be a pool of information readily available for those who desire it. With the increase of internet accessibility and use over the years, digital archiving became inevitable. The Indonesia Visual Art Archive (IVAA) was established in 2007, and it evolved from the Cemeti Art Foundation in Yogyakarta. The following is an interview with its director, Farah Wardini.

Karina: What is the IVAA and when was the IVAA established?

Farah: Indonesian Visual Art Archive (IVAA) was founded in Yogyakarta, April 2007. We are a non-profit organisation that evolved from Cemeti Art Foundation (1995-2007) following a new direction as centre for documentation and art archive provision, as well as library and research facilitator. IVAA's physical site is called Rumah IVAA which includes a Reading and Community Space where we hold forums on interdisciplinary subjects as well as explore new practices in different media.

In general, the IVAA Collection consists of photographs, audio-visual records and printed documents documenting art practices dating since pre-independence (Indonesia) till today. Printed documents include exhibition catalogues, research reports on visual art, newspaper clippings, artists' portfolios and textbooks. The collection is accessible from Rumah IVAA library as well as online at @rsipIVAA (<http://archive.ivaa-online.org>).

Since mid-2008, we have been digitising all the photographs and audio visual records as well as printed documents such as exhibition catalogues from the 1970s to early 1990s, artists' portfolios and newspaper clippings. The process of building a platform for our online archive was achieved through close cooperation with The National Archive, national and international archive institutions, artists and their families, curators, academics, art initiatives, art galleries, private collectors and cultural centres.

IVAA is a hub hosting interactions among artists, curators, academics and people working in the field of visual art. Our outreach projects include publications and organising events such as Archive/Data Showcases to promote a wider use of IVAA's art archive.

Karina: What is your own background in arts? Why did you start your career in visual arts?

Farah: I did my bachelor's degree in graphic design and continued with my MA in Goldsmiths with Art History in 2000. During my college years I frequently attended exhibitions of works by the 90s generation of Indonesian artists. The scene was so much different then. Basically, nobody thought that being an artist or art worker would turn out to be like the present situation with all the glamour and art fairs. But for me there is always something liberating in the art scene; it offers so many open-minded dialogues and ideas and is always inspiring, enriching. The way the art scene is developing now is only a bonus.

Karina: What is the most important aspect of archiving?

Farah: This is the database codification and cataloguing system to enable the searchability of the archives. It sounds simple but

it is actually the most crucial and very elaborate process in the creation of the archive structure. It took us three years to finally find the right structure of the whole database, at least the best way that we can implement currently.

Karina: What is the role of artists (particularly visual artists) in the community and what impact does the arts have on cultural identity?

Farah: This is a tough question and it is very hard to explain in a few sentences. But if I may answer, the role of artists in a community is almost similar to scholars and intellectuals though they express their roles in different forms and take on different subjects. They challenge norms, rethink values and present or past situations with creative artistic strategies that are expected to make a deep impact on the viewers/audience/community. These creative artistic strategies deal with elements of cultural identity and along the way the works of the artists contribute in defining and redefining cultural identity in a continuous process.

Karina: Who benefits from the IVAA?

Farah: The first stakeholders are still the artists whom we archive. However, the main users of IVAA are curators, researchers, students and writers who utilise the archive intensively.

Karina: Were there any obstacles to the conception or the creation of IVAA? If so, what were they and how were they overcome?

Farah: Even back then in 2006 the idea of art archiving, as well as digital archiving and online platform was considered an alien concept in Indonesia. Internet connection was still considered a luxury in mid-2000s. But everything changed so rapidly afterwards and with the help of networking and open source technology, as well as rapid progress of ICT infrastructure in Indonesia, we managed to realise the plan.

Karina: What are the difficulties of archiving such an extensive and diverse collection of art in Indonesia?

Farah: The main difficulty is identification and maintaining accuracy of the metadata. So many IVAA archives are still unidentified or incomplete that it cannot be presented in the online platform.

Karina: What exactly is Digital Content Curating and what are the benefits and disadvantages of such a format?

Farah: Digital Content Curating as a working method actually had often been employed by many popular news-gathering sites and blogs such as Mashable, Boingboing, Digg, and so forth. The use of the term 'curation' or 'curator' here is also notable. In addition to it being almost similar in application to the work of a curator, namely, selecting, analysing, and presenting context, ideas, or perspectives of a certain knowledge to the public, it proves that the term 'curator' no longer belongs exclusively to the world of art, but can be widely applied to patterns of production and distribution of knowledge.

INTERVIEW WITH ANTOINE L'HEUREUX

by Harshmeet Kaur Kohli, BA(Hons) Fine Arts L3/2015

"I speak from my perspective and the most important thing for me for the development of my art practice"

Harshmeet Kaur Kohli (HKK): What influences the making of your artworks. Does it have social or political meaning?

L'Heureux (AL): For me, asking whether my work has political meaning is like asking what is the relationship between the aesthetics and politics, and that's very challenging. So far I think that the work embodies a notion of utopia or an idea of a different landscape and I think it has political meaning but in a very non-explicit way. If it works politically, for me it needs to work through sensation. Like, what is the political implication of experiencing colours. I hope the work engages with our current landscape whilst in the sense giving sensation or feeling of another underlying landscape within that landscape. I think that is political.

HKK: Previously having worked with the photographic medium, what made you choose painting as a medium for your exhibition?

AL: I started to use painting because I thought it was the only medium that allowed me to do what I wanted to do at that point of time, which was about a year and a half ago. It's got to do with two things, telling a story and working with sensations of colours and large images. At the moment I'm interested in a mode of existence or a way to live that is embodied by the artist that needs to be expressed in some sort of a narrative that cannot be documentation. This is where I look a lot at Gauguin, Van Gogh and also Matisse. I'm interested in understanding; Gauguin's work for example, beyond everything expresses a mode of existence, a mode of life beyond the formal innovation that his work embodies. It's kind of provocative.

HKK: Why do you feel it is provocative?

AL: I think it is kind of provocative because I don't think a lot of people in the academic circle take Van Gogh very seriously. And that's because the works have been totally re-appropriated by popular culture and mass media. I think there is a need to look at their practices as one of the most important questions now is like an ethical question, which is, how should we live? And I think that their work embodies that. It seems like rather obvious but if you look at artistic practices of artists in our century, there aren't that many practices that you could say the whole of their work clearly expresses a mode of existence or a way of life.

HKK: You have described your practice as an open-ended 'ethicoartistic' experiment. Can you please explain what it means in relation to your present artworks?

AL: For me, ethics is an ethics beyond morals. It is about how to live or how should I live. And ethicoartistic because it's about both, how should I live and attempting to answer that question through my art practice. The question of merging together art and life interests me at an individual level of the artist, where there is no difference between the artist's practice and his or her life. I guess I'm interested in the collapse of art and life at the individual of the artist and inevitably this leads to the question how should I live and how do you explore that question and experiment with life through an art practice.

HKK: Do you think artists have a social responsibility to fulfil?

Antoine: Well, if artists have a social responsibility they have a responsibility to live and think differently from the democratic masses and it's only in doing that their work and life embody a kind of resistance.

HKK: Can you tell us more about the use of sound in the gallery space for this exhibition?

AL: There are two sound pieces and each function differently. One is an engagement with grunge music, which is a song by Pearl Jam called *Alive*, which I have modified. I think this was



some sort of re-appropriation of an attitude from the 70s and I'm interested to see how this attitude could again be re-harnessed. It functions by reversing the track to start with peak or high intensity that slowly fades out to its origin point of low intensity. My work is kind of repetitive, hypnotic, thus the music creates a space that is somewhat annoying and confrontational for the viewer making it hard to enjoy the work. And this has to do with my interest in the idea of the emergence of a new man as embodying a new mode of existence or life. The second piece is what I call a bird soundscape. The text accompanying the work describes it as a journey that leads to the discovery of a future unknown or yet undiscovered. So I wanted to simulate the emergence of the new in the form of a bird that doesn't yet exist. I guess something that's potent about the work its possible for the viewer to workout which bird is the non-existent bird so the viewer is kind of left to wonder. The two pieces are challenging to view as when played loudly, it can be hard to enjoy. I'm interested in challenging the viewer with that. Are you going to stay or leave the exhibition space? I'm interested in a soundtrack for looking at a painting. It communicates an ambience or an attitude for looking at the painting.

HKK: Can you please explain further about your personal interpretation with symbols and colours in relation to your works?

AL: I'm not really conscious of using symbols in my work, maybe except for palm trees. However, I don't treat it as a symbol but I'm interested in them as they are quite easy to paint expressively. I'm also interested in colour intensity and use lots of bright yellows and oranges to express a landscape beyond our ordinary perception of earthy colours. And I think the world is rather dull and low intensity colours kind of express that on the experiential level, while high intensity colours express this kind of world that is hidden under or beyond the world we ordinarily see.

HKK: How do you think students can translate their theoretical investigations into aesthetic experiences for the viewers?

AL: That's the hardest question ever. Everybody struggles with that, I do too and it's normal. I think it's the condition whereby artists are expected to be conceptually strong and theoretically aware. When I did my PhD it took me four years and it completely spoilt my practice because this kind of involvement with theory was just too much and it I experienced a block where I couldn't create work anymore! For me it worked when I understood that reading so much philosophy need not influence my art practice per say but it needed to influence my life and my way of perceiving things. And then it need not be a question of how do you illustrate these things that you find kind of amazing because it gives you a new perspective, but you just need to kind of live it and inevitably somehow the work will start to be

informed by theoretical background as you go on to play with the material. Of course, what they say is that the biggest problem might occur is that the practice starts to illustrate the theory and that would be the worse case scenario because theory finds its current expression through language. The best case scenario would be to create works that are informed by theory that would push certain issues through the materials or mediums specific to the artists' practice, so that people would want to create new theories from it.

HKK: What is your understanding of painting in today's context?

AL: I think the paintings I see in Southeast Asia are very technically skilled and very well made; I try not to do that at all. Not that I try to position my paintings in the context of Southeast Asia but I think it kind of functions like that anyway. Generally, I find the paintings very heavy in Southeast Asia, and I try to paint very lightly. I have not been trained in painting but I wanted to paint because I'm interested in telling stories relating to the notion of a mode of existence. I think there is something critical about painting nowadays if you think that there isn't so much painting around but at the same time paintings are easily re-appropriated by the capitalised system. There is still a share of painting around but to me it's about how you paint, that could function critically in relation to the context in which paintings are being made.

HKK: Are you working on any upcoming shows or projects?

AL: I don't see my practice as project based. There are shows coming up but I can't say that I'm working on them *per se* because my practice is open-ended that I always keep working on. At different points when I have the opportunity to show the work I just select some of the work that I put together into an installation of paintings and sound for example. This I think is critical. A lot of requirements put on artists are to work based on projects. For example, students in academics are asked to work for projects and the idea that it should finalise itself into assessment after which is the start of another project or artists being invited or commissioned by a gallery to work, is in fact another project to be realised and finalised in time. I don't see my practice like that at all and there is some sort of criticality behind that.

HKK: As a lecturer, what sort of advice you will to give to the students?

AL: It's a very general question but I speak from my perspective and the most important thing for me for the development of my art practice was to get very involved with philosophy and that has allowed me to have slightly different perspective on things. I think the artist should embody some form of resistance. For me, it was a question of doing a lot of philosophical research and to be courageous in experimenting and playing with mediums.

KNIGHT OF ARTS AND LITERATURE

Interview with Gilles Massot

by Karina Iskandarsjah, BA(Hons) Fine Arts L3/2015

I do not do photographic work nowadays, but I'm very interested in the whole history and theory of photography and what photography did to the world.

Karina: Firstly, tell me a little bit about the award you were given and how it was related to your achievements.

Gilles: The award is one of the four official awards given by the French state. *Chevalier des Arts et Lettres* means "Knight of Arts and Literature". It's an award given for anybody with any kind of achievement in the artistic fields. There's another one specifically for academia, like Literature for example. All kinds of people get it nowadays. It's something that is given to all sorts of rock singers and those kind of things.

Karina: It's good to acknowledge these kinds of achievements.

Gilles: Yes, I was mostly happy to get it for my dad, because my dad was always very sceptical about my choice in life, about being an artist and the kind of directions I took.

Karina: Do you think, to him, winning this award means that you were successful?

Gilles: Yes, he's that kind of person. For example, when I had a show, he would not look at the art, or the artistic achievement, it was "how much did you sell?" To him that was the sign, what was the material recognition given to the work.

Karina: My parents see it the same way too: "How are you going to make money of this?"

Gilles: Exactly. But it's understandable; parents are very worried about the future of their children. At the same time my father was always proud, but without ever telling me. My mum was telling me, whenever there were visitors he would talk about what I'm doing with great pride. But this award makes it feel like there is an official stamp: maybe he did not become rich, but at least there is that recognition.

Karina: How is this award bridging the relationship between Singapore and France? Do you think it bridges some kind of relationship?

Gilles: It's something that is used in a great deal in diplomacy, in order to, as you say, "bridge" that gap and to foster the relationship. There is quite a number of Singaporeans who receives it, including Hossan Leong, because he speaks very good French. He's been a link between the two countries. So, it is something that is used by the embassy as a diplomatic means.

Karina: How do you think your first move to Singapore in the 80s changed your artistic practice?

Gilles: When I first arrived in 1981, the first couple of years I got really involved with a friend called Françoise Verlet, and we started doing a lot of events and happenings. The art scene in Singapore at that time was just opening. We organised one of the first themed-parties outside of the colonial era. The idea of parties in which you create the whole environment with decoration, sound. We started doing those kinds of things, for which I did a number of paintings. For example, one of the first ones we organised was a black and white night in a building that was going to be pulled down to make room for Dhoby Ghaut MRT station. A friend of ours had a flat there and she let us use the flat for a party... doing murals on the walls inside the flat, working with audio-visuals, which at the time were still slideshows.

Karina: That sounds very romantic.

Gilles: Yes. One of the best uses for that screen was for a children night, in a house inside a patch of jungle near Nee Soon, opposite an army camp. Inside that jungle were houses, and a friend rented a house there for a while. The screen was in the jungle and we projected a whole slideshow with photographs of children. Another use of that screen was for the very first use of Fort Canning as an art event! Singaporeans used to not go to Fort Canning because it was a haunted place. Lovers would go there to find a quiet spot because other people would not go there - it was a jungle, it was haunted.

Karina: So you helped pioneer the use of Fort Canning as an arts site!

Gilles: I don't want to boast about it, but in the 80s...

Karina: Well, when you think about Fort Canning as it is now as a sort of hub for film and theatre, it's really something. Was Singapore not much more restricted, then? In comparison to France or Europe?

Gilles: No. The 80s were actually a lot more organic and open than what you can imagine. Just to give you an example, we did the first street performance for the first Fringe Festival in 1984. The organiser of the first Fringe Festival, was a friend who was coming to our parties. She gave us a small budget to do a street performance that we put up in Toa Payoh, Ang Mo Kio and Queenstown. From there, my involvement continued. I worked in the arts festival in 1986, when I was performing. Then in 1988, I became the technical director of The Fringe Festival.

In 1987, I organised something called the Ying Yang Festival in NUS (National University of Singapore) Guild House. This was the first multidisciplinary festival. The idea was that 1987 was the last year of the millennia with four different digits inside. It was a first sign that 2000 was actually at the doorstep, so we had to do something! So, the 1987 Ying Yang Festival!

How is the age-old philosophy understood and represented in today's context? I got the Guild House to host the event and to give us a minimal budget to get the whole thing going, and as part of the whole project, I went to ask students from LASALLE and NAFA to become what I called the "angels" of the festival. The ones working backstage made it happen. Vincent Leow was still a student, doing his BA at LASALLE. He took charge, and it was one of his very first projects as an organiser, which he proved to be very good at later on.

For the 1988 Festival, I organised something called *The Art Commando*. It was a one-week workshop on Sentosa, at the end of which we had different people from different workshops, dance, music, visual, to put together a street performance. At the end of that week, everything was taken to SJI (St. Joseph's Institution) which has just been vacated, and this was the first artistic thing in what was going to become the Singapore Art Museum. There was no plan yet to make SJI the Singapore Art Museum, and we stepped in and turned it into an art space.

Karina: I am starting to get a very good idea of why this award was given to you, and how you helped to transformed the art environment here.

Gilles: That's why I'm saying that in the 80s it was an open page, it was a blank page to be written, so there was a lot of opportunities and places to do things.

Karina: Would you say it's a lot harder now?

Gilles: It's much harder now. Much more competitive, much more money-oriented. In those days you could do things spontaneously.

Karina: Is that because of the art market?

Gilles: It's the way that the art world has evolved. It's the way Singapore has evolved.

Karina: So what are some of the other main differences between the art scene then and now? For example, I assume there would be less people in art schools.

Gilles: Yes, the number of art school students was lower than it is now, of course. In 1988, LASALLE was four years old. It was always LASALLE College of the Arts, but it was in St. Patrick's School. One other thing that I think is quite relevant and meaningful is my first show is 1985, which was a body of work of blank and white painted photographs, so again in terms of technique, it was completely new (for Southeast Asia) - the idea of photographs with a painterly dimension to it.

Karina: So were you originally a painter?

Gilles: Originally, I was a dancer. Deep inside me, as a kid, I'm a dancer. But for some reason I went into visual art. During my teenage years I was going to art classes, studied



architecture and then got a little bit bored and frightened and moved into photography. But I'm not a photographer even though people always say I'm a photographer.

Karina: I think people often affiliate you with photography.

Gilles: But personally, I don't feel like a photographer. Now, in fact I hardly make images. I do not do photographic work nowadays, but I'm very interested in the whole history and theory of photography and what photography did to the world.

Karina: Lately there have been so many questions arising from photography, with the rise of social media and camera phones. What's art and what's not?

Gilles: Nowadays, that's what I'm much more interested in: all those ideas, rather than the actual images and image making.

Karina: So you enjoy the multidisciplinary approach.

Gilles: I'm very fundamentally multidisciplinary. I was more interested in working on the relationship between photography and painting than photography or painting as such. There was one work produced in 1976, which was really a turning point. The kind of founding work some artists have at least once in their life when suddenly there's a work that really gives life-long direction. I work with the space between things. I discovered when I went to Tokyo in 1986 that one of the fundamental concepts in Japanese art is precisely this concept: the space between things. That concept in Japanese is called the *ma* (negative space). Things exist by the space between them, the white of the page. What makes a great Kabuki actor is not how he takes a pose, but how he moves from one to the other. That's what I became here living in Singapore.

Karina: That concept, as I am trying to understand it, sounds very dream-like.

Gilles: People always say "Oh, how come you never lost your accent?" because I am much more Singaporean than many Singaporeans. But I am also completely French.

Karina: If you grew up learning one language, you can't expel that out of you.

Gilles: It's something I cannot expel out.

Karina: Although you are not in a traditional sense, a "photographer", you used photography as a fine art medium and you were also a travel photographer.

Gilles: Yes, a good part of my career was as a travel photographer-writer. Professionally, I've used photography extensively. I made a living out of photography for a period of about ten years, during which it was my way of life. In turn it had a very strong impact on my artistic work because when I started travelling to do all those travel photography stories, I

also started the artistic work. It started developing that kind of ethnographic, historical interest.

Karina: I'm not surprised. When you get to see the world, you get to see more perspectives. What was a place you remember which was a particularly notable experience?

Gilles: There have been many, of course, but one of the most powerful moments of all that travelling was during a trek in Nepal. Nepal is along the Himalayas and you have the high range of the Himalayas, and there is another range half-way between that very high range and the terrain in India, which is somehow the highest point between the high mountains and the vastness of the planes in India. I went to a village on that range. There was one moment, during the late afternoon when the sun set over India and, on the other side, the whole Himalayas glittering. It was powerful.

Karina: Are there any new themes that you have been working on in your most recent work?

Gilles: The most recent piece was that installation in the Monkey God Temple in Tiong Bahru, which had a very strong, ethnographic, spiritual content. Right now I'm completely immersed in research, which is very much from an academic, historical point of view and I'm developing a contemporary body of work about it as well. Which is looking very much at theory, from the daguerreotype to the digital, the evolution of the medium and the record of time and space. It's all those aspects and they are merging together. But they are not images. Maybe it will come back at some point, but right now I'm not really interested in making pictures.

Karina: There's a lot to say in non-representational art.

Gilles: The final thing will be an installation.

Karina: You've been teaching photography for a while; what do you think are the most important or interesting things you've learned from teaching?

Gilles: My first teaching experience was teaching French. I came to work in advertising, things didn't really work out and I tried to find a job in advertising to stay, nothing came up. Eventually the first work that came that would give me a visa was teaching French in a private school. That really changed my relationship to Singapore. That's what happened again in the 2000s, when by then I had started a company doing commercial work, which I can do, but the commercial work is not really mine. I can do the work but it doesn't excite or fit me, spiritually. By then, Milenko had asked me to start teaching photography for the BA(Hons) Fine Arts programme. I realised I was getting a lot more out of teaching than doing commercial work, so that's when I decided to really focus on that.

Karina: Have you ever found it difficult to balance your practice and your teaching?

Gilles: Of course it's difficult, yes. But, you get so much out of it as well. It's the opportunity of teaching in LASALLE that Milenko¹ gave me. I had all those ideas already, my work was concerned with all those theories, but somehow when I started teaching, it felt quite obvious that I had to go back to the history of photography. Which I knew a little bit of, but for my photography I did not have a proper photo-history course. In order to teach, I started learning myself! Then I realised that all those questions of theory in which I was interested in the artistic world that I have been pursuing since graduating in 1976, all this was becoming more rich and meaningful if I was putting it with that historical context. From there I started getting interested in it for myself personally. I was then given the opportunity to start the photo-history class. I had to do a one semester, 12 lesson course.

Karina: Did that make you nervous?

Gilles: It was a bit challenging. During my three-day weekends I would be preparing for that semester, I was not doing anything else during my free time. To build a foundation, especially developing the whole Asian side. When I started in 2007, there was hardly anything. There was very little about Asian photo-history.

Karina: What do you think are the responsibilities of being an artist?

Gilles: It comes down to that "to cut or not to paste" question. It's the fundamental question. It's not "to be or not to be" nowadays. Things do not exist individually; it's what you find in quantum physics as well. Things do not exist as individual, isolated entities; they only exist in relation to one another. In fact, time and space are only two sides of the same coin. The world exists through an exchange of information, which is something that I experienced, physically, as an epiphany one day. And it's not just as an artist, it's a responsibility as a human being; what do I choose to give and receive? This is "to be or not to be," the phenomenon of being is actually located in the process of exchange from one person to the next.

Karina: That sounds a lot like the teaching experience.

Gilles: It is exactly what teaching is about.

Karina: One last question. Do you have any advice for students or young artists that want to focus on their practice for a living?

Gilles: What can I say? It's about faith, it's about stamina, it's about luck. Faith, stamina and luck.

¹ Milenko Prvacki, currently Senior Fellow, LASALLE College of the Arts

TRADE LIFE

ART WALK LITTLE INDIA

by Dominic Tong Zhi Loong, BA(Hons) Fine Arts L3/2015



It is especially important for Singaporeans to remember our history because our country is rapidly changing with every old building we destroy in order to build new malls or condominiums.

For such a small district, the diversity of businesses in Little India is amazing. One can find industrial manufacturing and boutique hotels on the same street. It is this diversity of trades that I wanted to write about in *Trade Life*. The diversity gives Little India its character and soul.

When I was a child I experienced this diversity first hand whenever I visited my grandfather's factory. The factory was a shophouse that was a dirty old space filled with discarded electronics, so many that they choked the shophouse entrance and spilled out into the yard. Old Chinese men sat along the hallways of

junk, stripping old electronics of their copper wires and other recyclable materials. At the same time, more junked items were loaded onto trucks by Indian workers. That's what I remember of my grandfather's scrap metal business along Dickson Road before it moved its headquarters to a bigger building. Back then, my grandfather would sit in a tiny office slightly bigger than a toilet cubicle, maintaining his books and ensuring that the junk his workers collected was properly processed to make a profit through recycling.

In *Trade Life*, I chose to focus on hands, hands belonging to people because it is how these people earn their living. I wanted to give the hands a life of their own, changing from tools to living entities in their own right. A living creature, providing a living for the people.

In order to create this entity, I needed to take 'the hands' out their original contexts while retaining their function. I had to distort their forms. I found that I could achieve this by mirroring the image. As the 'hands' worked, quick shifting organic shapes were created that looked like alien creatures. However, it was not the effect of the mirror that gave the hands that characteristic but their movements.

Approaching people to film was a daunting experience. I did not want to affect the authenticity of the hands at work and I did not want to finish the day with shots that I could not use because it was scripted or asked to perform a certain way. The takes had to be impromptu and genuine, which meant that I had to shoot them on the go. It turned out that there was little need for worry as these people were extremely experienced in their trade and it was a joy to watch them work. There is one thing I have learnt about making art and it is that an experienced hand always makes a really difficult task look easy.

While I was filming, interesting conversations cropped up about the district itself and how it was always changing. Hearing people talk about how they picked up their trade made me wonder about my own grandfather's business and how he started from a coolie to owning his own factory. He has since passed on, and although things are always changing, histories are here to stay in the stories we share. It is especially important for Singaporeans to remember our history because our country is rapidly changing with every old building we destroy in order to build new malls or condominiums. It is only by remembering and cherishing our memories that we know how to build a better future for generations to share.



CATTLELAND ART WALK LITTLE INDIA

by Eunice Lim Wei Mon, BA(Hons) Fine Arts Graduate 2014



ART WALK LITTLE INDIA is an interesting collaboration between Singapore Tourism Board and LASALLE College of the Arts. This comprises mural, installations, video screening and performances. It was a fresh take using visual arts to invite more local Singaporeans to Little India. Large-scale artworks that reflect Little India will not only amplify the vibrancy and culture of its heritage, it will also enhance a deeper sense of belonging for its residents.

In the process of conceptualising visuals for the mural, I looked up Little India's history from the 1960s. Little India was located near the Serangoon River. Thus, it was the perfect location for cattle rearing and agriculture. As this marked Little India's pioneering days, cattle became the main subject for the mural. On these cows, various Indian motifs were stencilled to illustrate the agricultural economy in the early days of the place. Every cow was also painted in a different colour to correspond to the individuality and vibrancy of Little India. The characteristics of 'cattle' signify the strong historical heritage that is still rooted today. Cattle represents physical strength and power. Halfway across the world, in celtic symbolism, cattle signifies a strong will and uncompromising nature. This can similarly be applied to describe Little India's legacy for the past 50 years.

Creating a 10-metre tall and 13-metre wide mural was a challenge worth undertaking. There were five levels of scaffolding installed for the wall at Sri Mullai shophouse at 76

Buffalo Road. Due to the space constraint between the wall and the exit of the train station, using a projector to draw the prepared visuals was not possible. Therefore, an alternative method was to grid the entire wall with 50 cm by 50 cm squares. It was a tedious but effective method to transfer and enlarge the visuals accurately onto the wall. With assistance from LASALLE Arts Management LASALLE Fine Art students, the mural was completed within two weeks despite wet weather days.

It is vital that we do not be selective about different customs in our multicultural nation. Our individual contributions were fundamental at every milestone we achieve, not for the sake of ourselves, but for a better society.

Social engagement was an essential part of the process in creating the mural. The co-creation element was to reiterate how it was crucial for everybody in society to play a part in embracing our culture and history as whole. It is vital that we do not be selective about different customs in

our multicultural nation. Our individual contributions were fundamental at every milestone we achieve, not for the sake of ourselves, but for a better society. With this rationale in mind, I invited people from various walks in life to come and participate in placing their mark on the wall. Many who came, found it extremely meaningful to learn a little more about Little India and to be a part of a large scale mural. As a matter of fact, this has motivated some of them to visit this location more often.

Upon its completion, the scaffolding was removed as an 'unveiling' of the mural. It was also the first time I myself saw it as prior to the scaffolds' dismantling, it was impossible to obtain a complete overview. Residents and various passersby came to photograph themselves pretending to pull or hold the painted 'leash' attached to a few cows. This was to relive the old days of cattle rearing. It was also educational for children who were interested about the wall mural, as their parents would then interpret the meaning behind the work.

Besides the success of the interactive element, many residents from Little India spoke on how they were reminded of their historical vibrant culture through the mural. *Cattleland* has become a catalyst in remembering Little India's roots in Singapore. Someone once told me: "Home is where people are involved." It is essential that people in society will always need to reinvigorate their sense of belonging: through memories, conversations and art.





A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

ART WALK LITTLE INDIA

by Moses Tan Qian Yi, BA(Hons) Fine Arts L2

ART WALK LITTLE INDIA, a project coordinated by a group of Arts Management students from LASALLE College of the Arts, took place from 17th to 21st January, 2015. For the *Artwalk*, I had the chance to create a piece with two talented collaborators, Shirly Koh Li Qing and Cynthia Delaney Suwito. It was a huge learning curve not just for us aspiring art students but also for Priscilla Rui, the amazing arts management student who managed the project for us.

One of the biggest things we had to bear in mind was that the work was to be in the form of a public installation. We came up with the idea of 'connections', inspired by the crossing of paths of communities within Little India amidst its colours, atmosphere and environment.

One of the biggest things we had to bear in mind was that the work was to be in the form of a public installation. We came up with the idea of 'connections', inspired by the crossing of paths of communities within Little India amidst its colours, atmosphere and environment. Having observed the rather communal character of the place, we decided to add a little more vibrancy to the place with a series of colourful woven nets and bells.

With the idea settled on, we had to deal next with administrative work and logistical issues. The installation itself was to be hung from structures that were sponsored by TKK Facilities and which required certification by a professional engineer. It also required clearances from the Building & Construction Authority and the Singapore Tourism Board, a main sponsor for the *Artwalk*. Safety is one of the issues students usually tend not to prioritise, and we gained a great deal of experience from the regulatory procedures for obtaining these clearances, which are necessary to ensure that such installations would neither interfere with existing structures nor pose a danger to the public.

In planning the work, we learned to take the client's needs and limitations into consideration. Concerns were raised such as noise generated from the hanging bells (because the work was primarily near a housing estate), and how it, conceptually, had to make sense to an audience. An attractive visual aspect to the work was necessarily a major part of the consideration as well. For a public work as such, a lot of careful planning was required due to the size of the work and the space given, and we had to factor in the weather elements as well.

That said, I think that the lessons we managed to take away with us as art students, is that in a society like ours, we need to be aware of the legal regulations in place. It was a huge learning curve for us all. It involved some careful thought in catering to the client's needs while still making sure the work can stand on its own. Having the installation in an open public space also meant having to create an experience in which the audience can readily feel a connection to the work.

This is not to say the work had been an overall success but the rush of adrenaline from the beginning in the actual laborious weaving, to the satisfaction of having finally set up the installation had been well worth the effort. At the end of the day, this was an important experience for us, as besides something to add to our portfolios as aspiring artists, it was an honour to have the chance to create a public work.

To conclude, I thought I should list some of the regulations and the different public authorities for future use. This list is not exhaustive in any way but comprise of certain tips we picked up along the way:

1. For a public work, you need to get a Temporary Occupation License, which can be obtained from the Singapore Land Authority.
2. For any hanging required or use of public properties, such as fences and lamp posts, clearance is necessary from the Land Transport Authority.
3. If a structure of a certain height is to be constructed, clearance needs to be sought from the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore.
4. There is also a need to consider the level of noise generated, and this is dependent on the location and how near the event is to residential properties.
5. For public performances, clearance is to be sought from the Media Development Authority.





ART WALK LITTLE INDIA was an exciting endeavour. To involve myself in this amazing public art gave me the opportunity to analyse and experiment in making an artwork that drew on the traditions of the locals, and also allowed for public interaction from the foot traffic in Little India. The artwork was added to by the footprints of the passersby who walked over the artwork knowingly or unknowingly. Using colour powder as a medium in Rangoli is a metaphor for impermanence of life and *maya* (illusion).

Loads of kids dropped by to try their hands at Rangoli and often Indian men as well, who made requests about colour coding the Rangoli design. Appeasing the crowd and chatting with them were fulfilling moments. One elderly lady, who saw my meditatively slow movements, asked me to join her constituency's Rangoli competition so that I could see the maestros in their fast paced action. My experience during this six-day event was enriching and I developed a sense of bonhomie with the shopkeepers in the nearby surrounding area.

RANGOLI ART WALK LITTLE INDIA

by Tinu Verghis, BA(Hons) Fine Arts L3/2015

"To involve myself in this amazing public art gave me the opportunity to analyse and experiment in making an artwork that drew on the traditions of the locals, and also allowed for public interaction from the foot traffic in Little India."



I'M NERVOUS

Interview with Marla Bendini

by Yeo Wen Jun Jade, BA(Hons) Fine Arts L3/2015

Jade: Could you tell us about the exhibition and why it is titled *I'm Nervous*?

Marla: The show is called *I'm Nervous* because I'm always nervous. I still care about what people think, but in a slightly different fashion. I want them to think. I do care about what they're thinking, and what are they thinking about? People generally don't know how to deal with something that's so different and a lot of the interactions are often quite negative in opinion, but this is their way of trying to get in because they don't know how. I kind of present a larger-than-life perspective or appearance to the public to the point where it is as if it is just fiction.

Jade: Did taking on the name 'Marla' from the female protagonist of the novel *Fight Club* help to construct your identity?

Marla: Not really. People call me Marla, people call me Bendini. I still haven't gotten used to my name. I kind of gave myself a drag name. When I call myself Marla, it was a lot easier for people to deal with. Most people couldn't even pronounce my name. Even Marla is not an easy name for people - it's a very old school name but I guess it works. Plus, when I'm in bed with a guy, Bendini just doesn't work for them sometimes. Call me Marla! Call me Mary! Whatever sustains your erection! It's funny you know, but it works. I don't think I'm going to change it yet.

Jade: How did you start exploring your gender and identity through art?

Marla: I started off doing my pieces as self-portraits. Most of the time I function alone which is quite contradicting because I work as a drag queen, as a performer. At the same time I really value my privacy as a person and I'm not super comfortable with people. I started doing a lot of self-portraits to explore, yes gender, identity but also how do we look at the male gaze and reclaiming identities. There are not many transgendered artists in the world - there are only two in Singapore. I started thinking about how I want to present myself to the public and what there is to present. It started to deviate from gender because when I started transitioning, it was about transitioning to another gender - from male to female. I was very insecure about the whole idea that I would never look like the woman that I wanted to be and people to see. Through this process of questioning myself and observing the reactions and responses from people, I realised that it's not interesting to talk about gender that way anymore. Why are we still talking about gender? When I call myself a transgender, what do I really mean? As a performer and a performance artist, what do I do when I perform? People always come to me and say that I'm so brave to do this and that I have to give myself credit. It takes balls to go up there and be outrageous and very different.

Jade: You have mentioned that talking about gender generates discomfort, do you think it is more effective to work in or out of your comfort zone?

Marla: I'm comfortable, but there are definitely a lot of discomforts in anything I do and anywhere I go. I don't think that would change and I'm trying to make that change because not everyone is comfortable. I talk about gender a lot and I can't believe we're still talking about gender. Let's not even talk about marriage. I can't be with someone. I have had boyfriends where it didn't work out. They love me but they cannot deal with the

judgement from people. That really sucks for me and for each one of them. They lost out big time but they are going to lose out a lot more because it applies to a lot of things beyond gender. In my art, I try not to put gender as the main focus, because it is already there. If it make it my main focus I would be so bored. How many ways can you express what trans is? What is drag? What is femininity? What is masculine? I'm not discrediting any artists who talk about gender. I was classically trained in music, and I was asked to leave my orchestra because they couldn't deal with me. They said, "We don't want your kind here. What are you?", and I said, "I thought we were just playing music." They actually got together to kick me out. The week after I was kicked out, my good friend told me the conductor addressed everyone and said "Why are we doing this?". The conductor had no say because it's not just up to him, they had a team. I played the 古筝 (gu zheng) and the 琵琶 (pi pa) and these are considered feminine instruments. The masters and court musicians were all males in the past. Even with that, I was not allowed to play that at first. Music is something that transcends material itself, and yet we still have this bullshit, so I guess I have to talk about it.

"Through this process of questioning myself and observing the reactions and responses from people, I realised that it's not interesting to talk about gender that way anymore."

Jade: How do you feel about being labelled a transgendered artist?

Marla: A big part of being transgender is to be liberated from gender itself. Sure, you can still have a gender or a form of gender that you align yourself with that nobody can take away from you and nobody can put a label on it. I don't know what to call myself sometimes, but a big part of it for me is about liberation and being comfortable in my own skin. Comfort in being happy the way you are and what you have and not just physically but in life. I'm so glad I'm past that bullshit where I don't have to care about how manly I look, or how womanly I look, how tall I am or how broad I am. These are all standards set by people. And then when you experience another culture in another country, it's all thrown aside. You are are thrown into another set of values and standards. You can never keep up with these standards. Standards change all the time.

Jade: Do you think there is a goal to be attained from having gender reassignment surgery?

Marla: I don't think there is a goal. I mean, what can you achieve? To me, sex change is about the cut. It is about cutting away something, but what do you gain from it? I don't think trans people have a lot of choices when making that decision. While there is a goal, the before and after, there is an in-between. We call it the transition period. Even before I made the decision to transition, I was already transitioning. We are constantly transitioning. Yesterday, I was standing outside in cargo pants, a tank top and I had my hair in a bun, and one of my best friends who is a trans woman, came up and the first thing she said was, "Hey, where's Marla?". Why do people always want to see that woman? Why do I have to prove it?

Jade: As a performer, do you think costumes help to mediate privacy?

Marla: I don't enjoy being looked at all the time. People are going to look at me all the time because I look different. I don't think it's just about gender expression. I don't mean to call people "walking shells", but I think we have to agree that the moment we enter a public space, you have a public persona whether you're a public figure or not. You protect yourself by retreating into a certain safe space. I don't have that safe space at all because the gaze from people is so invasive that I don't have that space anymore. The way I did it was to use costumes as armours, but at the same time it is not to block myself out from people. Sometimes I do that. When I wear a mask I am blocking myself from interacting with people. When someone can't see your eyes, when someone can't tell what you're feeling by your facial expressions, you gain back a certain power. Coming from a marginalised place in society, reclaiming that power is essential for me to even function.

Jade: The use of your body is central to both your drag performances and your performance art pieces. Where do you draw the line between these two forms of performance?

Marla: I don't draw a line between performance and life. Sure, you can call this performance and not performance. When I decided to be Marla Bendini, there is no line for me anymore. These pictures are up on Facebook, and they're up on gallery walls. Some of them are not performance per se. Some of them are just of me going out. I do go to the club like that sometimes. Life is an illusion, everything is an illusion now. I'm trying to be as real as I physically can, as I can afford to give to people and even to my loved ones. There are some things I can never share with my loved ones. When you care a lot about something, sometimes you need that distance because it destroys you. It's very tiring to be feeling that much all the time, which is why we aim to have a lot of detachment. In my art, I try not to detach - I try to engage as much as I can.

Jade: How has your journey as a transgendered individual impacted your loved ones?

Marla: I have a six-year-old foster brother. We adopted him when he was two weeks old, his parents were both heroin addicts and his mum was arrested two weeks after he was born. He grew up with me and he's in the system now. When I knew him my hair was short. He came back from school one day and asked me, "Why is your hair so long? Are you a man or a woman?". He wouldn't hold my hand in public sometimes and that hurts because he's being judged. It hurts because he has to deal with other people because of me. When I transitioned, I moved out because I didn't want my family to get involved in this. I don't apologise for it, because they are my family. But like I said, I care about how they feel.

Jade: You are recognised as the *Butter Factory's* 'Head Freak'. How comfortable are you with these labels?

Marla: I care a lot about how we use labels, at the same time I want to not care. People always ask me what I am. The most appropriate alliance I would say is that of a trans woman, because this is who I want to help. Some people can't function within the binary system. Sometimes you have to make difficult choices, but you get to have them and I think that's way more rewarding.



Something Nothing

COUNTERSHADOWS

by Moses Tan Qian Yi, BA(Hons) Fine Arts L2

In any game of hide-and-seek, you have your hider and your seeker. The space is also often confined to a certain area. *Countershadows* felt like a good game of hide-and-seek, with Melanie Pocock as a good 'hider' and the audience, the 'seekers'. Curated by Pocock at the three gallery-wide space of the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore (ICA Singapore) Gallery, the show featured the works of seven artists: Heman Chong, Tamares Goh, Ho Rui An, Sai Hua Kuan, Jeremy Sharma, Tan Peiling, and Robert Zhao Renhui.

Often it is inevitable that an artist's identity is loosely regarded as enmeshed with their work. Without an artwork caption that identifies the artist behind each work, however, the artist becomes 'hidden' and the work resonates as autonomous from the artist. Here in this exhibition, the only indication of who the artists are, appear on a piece of paper available at the exhibition's entrance, and Pocock managed to engage these works as works-as-works for the seekers to locate and identify.

Upon entering the space, you were first consumed by Heman Chong's *Monument to the people we've conveniently forgotten (I hate you)*, comprising a million black name cards strewn all over the gallery floor. As I trampled over the cards I could not help but recall the numerous name cards I have collected in life, many of them now disposed of. In his work, Chong sought to suggest the thin line between emotions of love and hate and how easily it shifts from one to another.¹

In unexpected locations throughout the gallery space, the photographic prints of Tamares Goh's *We Are Pigeons* were installed. These photographs depict pigeons in flight or otherwise; blurred images capture these birds in urban spaces, a reflection of the fleeting identities of people we meet. The photographs are printed on rice paper and on a concrete slab that seems to hint at this 'concrete jungle' we live in. Pocock's haphazard and unconventional placement of these photographs in various strategic, peculiar locations – high or low on walls, in corners – around the gallery also reminds the viewer of this.

Similarly avian in nature, Robert Zhao's *White House Crow* is a photographic mockumentation of white crows appearing in Singapore when land reclamation occurred in the 1970s to the 1990s. Adopting the 'white' crow as an allegorical fictional creature, Zhao makes the claim that this species is the result of evolution due to land reclamation having hindered the crow's natural ability to be camouflaged. This, a result of the lack of greenery, is a response to Singapore's ever changing landscape and constantly evolving identity.

As the seeker walks along the space, he or she will occasionally encounter sectional sculptures by Jeremy Sharma. Made out of a mixture of EPS foams and fibreglass in black and white, the darker of these became unwittingly camouflaged by Chong's name cards. These sculptural works sought to question, firstly, how the form and space becomes intrinsically hidden beneath a shape. The sculptures were structurally moulded from various features of vehicular models, compounding the concealment of the vacant interior from the viewer. Secondly, the artist's use of digital technology has exacerbated this characteristic – hiding the artist from the production – and explores the effects technology has on artistic processes.

Before quite possibly stumbling over the camouflaged work by Sharma, the seeker would have come across two works by Ho Rui An. The first, *Self-Reliant Girl*, featured the blurry image of a lady that discussed the distance in fleeting encounters. The second, *A Difficulty (Grey)*, was a video projection where a picture depicts a narrative approach through the experience of 'being grey'. The video talks about the sociopolitical aspects of identity through the removal of colour.

Masked as a pillar in the gallery, Tan Peiling's *The Unassuming Eavesdropper* might have been missed by the seeker if he or she walked past unaware. The sound installation of recorded

observations and comments by artists, curators and visitors emulates the conversations that might have happened during the show itself. Along that same line, the audience takes on the double role of the seeker having been caught (on the recording), and the role of a voyeur, who places his or her ears to the wall to listen intently to snippets of conversation.

Before ending this 'game', the seeker then would find himself or herself in a space that questioned the veracity of 'seeing'. A space constructed within a space, Sai Hua Kuan's *Something Nothing* was an experiential installation about literally nothing. As the seeker entered the space to find the artwork, the seeker found nothing and yet, in this nothingness, fear became real, turning into something else quite entirely. For some, a sense of displacement arose as a result of being disorientated in a purely white space with no visible lines. For others, a moment of peace or quiet reflection was achieved. In this nothingness, all senses of the seeker became heightened.

In this game of hide-and-seek curated by Pocock, the works sought to discuss sociopolitical realities by hiding away any and all direct references to them. In this hiding, the meaning could easily escape the viewer, but through experiences the meaning confronts the viewers. In this space, the artists elicited a coded response to realities and in a way, hid themselves, allowing the artworks to be found instead.



Monument to the people we've conveniently forgotten (I hate you)

¹ J. Yao, Pauline, ed. Heman Chong: *The Part In The Story Where We Lost Count Of The Days*.

NOISE SINGAPORE

by Stacy Huang Kai Lin, BA(Hons) Fine Arts L2/2015



Noise Singapore is an initiative of the National Arts Council, dedicated to nurture and showcase young creative talent in Singapore. It aims to encourage the arts among young people in Singapore. Since 2005, *Noise* has helped thousands of young people with exhibitions, concerts, mentoring programmes, award grants, onlineshowcases as well as workshops, talks and activities.

The following are excerpts of interviews with Moses Tan, Asanul Nazryn and Hyrol. All three participated in the 2014 *Noise Apprenticeship Programme* and are currently students in LASALLE College of the Arts. For the *Noise Singapore* exhibition this year, the selected artists were tasked to respond to the theme of *In Transit* – a reference to their ongoing development of their young practices.

14:27 by Moses Tan is an experiential piece in which Moses touched on the vulnerability of life and tapped on his personal struggle with grief and acceptance of a friend's passing on. It is now immortalised as an audio/visual installation under the *Noise Apprenticeship Programme*.

"I'm Moses, I am interested in the intersection of art, science and politics."

Stacy: Was there a reason for the pieces of the message to have been sewn into the current shape?

Moses: I tried different shapes and this was the last one I tried. I was sewing a few variations of triangular shapes and I reached this form that reminded me of one of my support studies from school and letters. Hence I added another layer of writing a letter onto the fabric. When writing to someone who is gone, there is no way for the message to be heard by the deceased so I wanted to think of it as a letter being shredded.

Stacy: What inspired your final artwork in terms of how it looks like now?

Moses: It was very gradual. My initial idea was to have a circular space. But because of the space restriction (two-metre wall space) I asked for a 2.5 metre fake wall to create an enclosed space. I was inspired by another artist who had a work that was made of a panel of cloths. The curators gave me a walk-through space instead. Along with the air-con vent, the space I was given became even bigger. I even had to sew more triangles to fill up the space.

Stacy: What was the kind of atmosphere were you trying to create when an audience enters your artwork?

Moses: Peace and quietness. I was focused on grieving and the last stage of acceptance, on the realisation of peace, the floating and free feeling. Feeling calm in the space with a sense of sadness.

Stacy: Is installation your preferred choice of medium?

Moses: For now, yes because I'm still not comfortable with a lot of other things. And I like installation most because you create this atmosphere for people to feel and that's what I like about it.

And indeed, it was a cathartic experience for us when we set foot in *14:27*. The whole theme on death and a personal relationship between the artist and the subject of his inspiration, was reemphasised by the inclusion of sound in the work: voices recounting the regretful letter to the deceased friend; the echoes of dripping water in the background. These added to a sense of space and solitude.

Inspired by Singapore's MRT advertisements, *Posterior Probability* by Asanul is a vinyl print that measures up to four metres in length and two-and-half metres in height. The work was intentionally mounted at the entrance of the gallery to create a different visual experience for the visitors. Asanul's work aims at creating different perspectives of the influence of mass media on its audience. He eases the tension around political topics in Singapore by incorporating wit and humour into the work.

"Hi, my name is Asanul Nazryn and I'm interested in video and media art."

Stacy: Do your works generally comment on the advertising style in Singapore or is your focus particularly on the recent transport solutions LTA has come up with?

Asanul: My work focuses more on the tool of media, advertisements in public space. They are my material.

Stacy: We noticed a hint of political commentary in your work, is that what you were trying to achieve?

Asanul: It can contain a political point of view, but I'm not a politician. In my work, I'd like to add to the discourse to make viewers think more about the purpose of these posters, hoping to let the audience see things a bit more differently. I like to use satire as a part of my work too. A little bit of humour breaks the ice in serious topics like this.

Stacy: We are interested to know how you captured so accurately the aesthetics of the transport advertisements. How did you go about copying the design?

Asanul: I started it from scratch. I took a picture of the actual poster but did much more editing to it to transform it and to make my artwork more ambiguous. Making it life size brings the audience into the artwork.

Stacy: Was it a deliberate strategy to mount your work on the entrance door?

Asanul: Yes! It was supposed to be outside but there were issues with that. I was okay with it being inside so we brought it in. When visitors walked in through the door, they did not notice the artwork at all. They mistook it for a poster instead of one of the exhibiting artwork. This was intentional so it was nice seeing their responses.

Through our interview with Asanul, it was interesting to learn how he used the elements of media and advertisement as the source of inspiration for his work. His use of graphic design elements in his artwork has successfully blurred the line between graphic design and fine art. With this approach, viewers can better access the artwork. Also, I find the approach of bringing in humour to talk about serious issues is a good way to lighten up the mood of looking at the issue. The work itself is already fun to look at.

Forever Never by Hyrol is an installation piece comprising of a crate-like cart on wheels that is accompanied with a multi-channel video. Built with discarded pieces of wood and trolley wheels, the crate-like cart had a camera affixed on top of it. Then, as the artist pushed this cart following a route from SAM at 8Q to his studio space at Winstedt campus he also recorded the entire journey. What was shown in the outcome of the artwork, however, was a video in reverse, creating a sense of the world around him moving in reversal, except for him. The audience shares in the torment of the artist trying to manoeuvre the cart around so many people, conveying a level of absurdity that was one of Hyrol's intended outcomes.

"Hi my name is Hyrol, I'm interested in the poetics of space and the use of abandoned objects in my art occupation."

Stacy: What inspired the design of the cart you had been pushing around? And why do you think this cart is so significant in this work?



Hyrol: The initial idea was to have an object that could move and contain things. The trolley, shopping carts, came up in my research. The final object was resulted from trial and error because the original wood I found was in a weird curved shape. It was a part of a bed frame. I was experimenting with the skeletal design of the object from the found. The final was my fourth or fifth attempt. It started out as something with wheels attached to it. That was not my original intention but improvisation was something I had to do. The objective was initially to only use discarded objects, but I had to buy the two front wheels in order for the project to work the way I wanted it to. By doing so, I thought it might change the integrity of my work but after much consideration I felt that I do not have to hold out too hard on this point. I felt that the work's audience would not be affected by this small detraction; they will only view the final work as it is, so I have to make the end product work. I retained the original condition of the wood.

Stacy: Was there a reason why you were walking backwards?

Hyrol: That's a good question because that was the second improvisation I had to make in the project. Originally, the intention was to carry the discarded objects and then re-abandon them. The journey from my studio to 8Q was a significant part of the concept because it summarised how we create something in studio and send it to wherever it was to be resting (in 8Q). In the end, however, the cart had to be at the gallery first to set up the technical equipment needed for

my exhibition. Time was running out then, and I had no budget to have it transported to and fro. So I decided to just playback the video I had made. And travelled the whole journey by foot. It was challenging having to manoeuvre through a lot of people to a point of it looking absurd. But for my work, absurdity is also what I wanted to help in the commentary. I wasn't really walking backwards, of course, I was walking by the side most of the time instead. It was the playback.

Stacy: Can you elaborate more on how you incorporated the concept of Interactive Media in the work?

Hyrol: Multimedia is another interest I have. I came from an interactive media design background. For the exhibition, my initial idea was for someone to sit on the cart that would start the video playing. It did not materialise because it was too complex, according to the curators. The media part of the work was to provide more contexts to the cart, as opposed to just the cart being exhibited as an object of display.

Stacy: Do you have a name for the cart you have given life to?

Hyrol: Forever Never is the title of the work, but now I will start thinking about a name for the object.

Stacy: You have been assigned mentors. Can you name some ways that your mentor has helped you greatly?

Hyrol: Yes, on the projections. I wanted three projectors with three videos playing simultaneously so he recommended a software that could play from one laptop, and it was something I wanted to learn. He even loaned me the software and the splitter to create this project; it would otherwise have cost me a lot of money to get it myself. He was also an inspiration for me.

Judging from Hyrol's experience in the Noise Mentorship Programme, the amount of improvisation was significant in his process. Especially so in the case of his artistic direction and how he dealt with discarded objects; planning in advance could have restricted his artmaking process. We are able to learn from Hyrol's experience of how it is important to respond quickly to the challenges one face, whether it takes the form of an oddly curved wooden object he found, a tight budget,

and the lack of technological equipment.

It is uplifting to see that young artists in Singapore are given a chance to exhibit their works in a museum. The Noise Mentorship Programme 2014 provided more learning points with the exhibition being held at SAM at 8Q. Not only were the apprentices able to benefit from their experienced mentors, they were also exposed to advisors from the art industry like the museum curators who provided valuable feedback for the final artworks. While having an end in mind is always a good start, at some point, we as artists eventually have to learn how to think on our own feet and respond to changing circumstances. These young bloods have proved to be ready and by participating in the apprenticeship programme with Noise this time, they are able to provide a refreshing take on the art and design scene of Singapore. Nonetheless, even for students experiencing art education for the first time, the programme provides a nurturing environment to grow with your art practice. In this way, the Noise Mentorship Programme offers a holistic learning experience both in the personal space of the artist's studio and also in the professional field of being an artist.

ART STAGE SINGAPORE 2015

STUDENT ART COMPETITION

by Stacy Huang Kai Lin, BA(Hons) Fine Arts L2/ 2015

It is true to a certain extent that there are restrictions that come with art competitions, but we should still always stay true to our art practice and we should not allow restrictions to compromise it.

Stacy: Tell us a bit about yourself as an artist/art student as well as your art practice.

Jia Yu: My work, *The Underground*, deals with urban spaces in Singapore, focusing on the architecture. I'm moving towards capturing spaces without people. I'm interested in the human traces that are left in these spaces, which allows me to interpret their presence even in their absence.

There is a blurry effect in my work because of placing many photos one on top of the other into a single composition. I am trying to combine the different time elements in one picture. As more pictures are layered on top of another, there is the element of erasure with addition and this is something that I'm also working with.

Stacy: Can you share with us about *The Underground* and what inspired you in creating it?

Jia Yu: That was actually one of the studies I did for Studio Practice. I did not intentionally choose the carpark space, but when I was there incidentally, I started to feel interested in the idea of a carpark being a space where people come and go. The cars in the space were empty, and yet they were representative of the presence of whom the car belongs to, indicating their presence.

Stacy: What do you think about this year's theme for the Student Art Competition, *We are Asia. We are Singapore. We are Home*?

Jia Yu: I think they wanted something more local and what the notion of Home is. I personally feel that the theme is pretty broad, because in whatever we do, the country we live in would surely influence us.

Stacy: For you in particular, being half Malaysian, do you feel any sense of detachment/belonging with regards to the theme?

Jia Yu: I was born in Singapore. So I don't feel as attached to Malaysia as I do towards Singapore. However for my work, it's a more general kind of space that need not relate to the country I'm in.

Stacy: I personally feel that art competitions sometimes can indirectly impose certain restrictions in terms of the artmaking process and the outcome of the work. Do you think taking part in art competitions like this (or in general) influences your artmaking process in anyway? And if so, how do you handle them [the 'restrictions']?

Jia Yu: I think there are two ways to go about it: for some people, works are created to respond to the theme, but for me, I just chose an existing work that could be relevant to the theme.

It is true to a certain extent that there are restrictions that come with art competitions, but we should still always stay true to our art practice and we should not allow restrictions to

compromise it.

Stacy: What kind of learning experiences do you think the *Student Art Competition* provides for art students like yourself?

Jia Yu: It was good exposure, even though we were not engaged in the installation of our works. As students, we should have taken the initiative to work together with the organiser.

Stacy: Is there any form of advice or encouragement for the new students who have joined LASALLE?

Jia Yu: We definitely should keep a lookout for such competitions, and if you feel any of your past works can be relevant to the theme of the competition, then go for it!

Chan Jia Yu is currently a student of the BA(Hons) Fine Arts / BFA4C



Underground, 70cm x 100cm, 2015



Contained

PROTOCOLS OF A PORT OF CALL

by Warren Khong Kwok Hou (Participant of Tropical Lab: Port of Call/ MA Fine Arts 2015)

When I was asked to write an article about the recently concluded 8th edition of the annual *Tropical Lab* with this year's theme being *Port of Call*, I wondered what or which aspect of it I could put down on paper. Should I talk about some of the artworks presented in the concluding exhibition, the nights of drunken revelry, the serious discussions that were had between the participants, the new friendships formed, or all of the above? Not having a clear direction in the writing of this article, I decided to go with the famous quote so often mistakenly attributed to Ernest Hemmingway:

'Write drunk, edit sober.'

Consequently, I came up with the title of this article midway through writing, and what you the readers are perusing is the aftermath of editing sober. As I wrote, I realised that there were many aspects of the Lab to cover in this article, yet each of the many activities completed during the course of the Lab loosely fit into several agendas necessary for the success of the programme. Thus, each agenda becomes a sort of protocol that the participants observed during this port of call and what is more apt than the necessity for visitors to follow protocols when visiting an international port of call? Unofficially, the protocols that we participants abided by are as follows:

1. You, the participant, shall arrive at the port of call.
2. You, the participant, shall be introduced to the port of call itself.
3. You, the participant, shall be introduced to your fellow travellers.
4. You, the participant, shall be introduced to the LASALLE College of the Arts.
5. You, the participant, shall be introduced to the country of the port of call.
6. You, the participant, shall on an official basis, eat, drink and be merry.
7. You, the participant, shall on an unofficial basis, eat, drink and be merry.

8. You, the participant, shall reflect on your practice and how it applies to this port of call.
9. You, the participant, shall think on the work that you will create for this port of call.
10. You, the participant, shall create the work mentioned in (9).
11. You, the participant, shall continue to eat, drink and be merry, officially or unofficially.
12. You, the participant, shall leave the port of call.
13. You, the participant, may keep in contact with your fellow travellers if you so wish.

The following essay shall, in small measure, extrapolate on the above protocols and like many (but not all) other articles, it shall start at the beginning.

When I first received a call from Dr. Ian Woo, the programme leader of the LASALLE College of the Arts MA Fine Arts Programme, asking if I would like to take part in this year's Tropical Lab, I agreed and it wasn't long after the commencing of the Lab that I realised that I had signed up for something exciting.

In a nutshell, I had the pleasure and privilege of meeting and getting to know 23 different artists from various countries around the world. The participants were fellow artists and MA FA/ MFA candidates from nearby Southeast Asia, to East Asia, Australasia, Europe and North America. I also had the happiness to know the various volunteers from LASALLE's student body as well as members of the College's staff. Thanks to the wonderful planning of the Lab's organising team (the Tropical King and his Royal Court), the 24 of us participants were brought for an intense two-week long journey, including a whirlwind tour of Singapore before the planning, making and installing of our individual artworks. All throughout, we happy few were hosted at several lovely dinners as well as many impromptu after-dinner parties. A location we were brought to that I wanted to make particular mention of was the tour of the Port of Singapore Authority (PSA). An eye opener for many of us, myself included, I saw with great pride a front stage view of the legendary Singaporean efficiency in action,

"In a nutshell, I had the pleasure and privilege of meeting and getting to know 23 different artists from various countries around the world."

saw how daily some 80,000 containers moved in and out of PSA without delay or loss. It was amazing. But I shall stop myself from waxing lyrical about the various tours and dinners, except that these allowed us participants time to interact with one another, to share our viewpoints, concerns and practices – which I suppose was the point of it all.

I am unable to write about every single experience or conversation, nor am I able to write about every participant and their work(s) presented at the exhibition of their practice, but I can and shall attempt to relate a couple in the later part of this little article.

Before I go on to write about several of the exhibited works, I shall relate some personal experiences during the two weeks. As the only born and bred Singaporean participant, I found myself surrounded for two weeks by 22 artists (Homa Shojaie, the other LASALLE participant being the exception as she has adopted Singapore as her current home) who were all curious about and interested in Singapore, and who later brought with them fresh perspectives and insights into Singapore. As a result, I found myself repositioning myself as a Singaporean artist and how this innate fact, something which I was barely conscious before, began shaping my practice.

I remember Isabella Ng from Hong Kong being amazed that Singaporeans had not much to truly protest against, such as perennial urban issues like housing and homelessness, and that our civil society was sufficiently developed that we could be discussing LGBT issues. I remember Elizabeth Webb from the United States wondering at or questioning the moral correctness of Singapore's land reclamation practices, especially in our purchasing sand and soil used for reclamation. Her subsequent works, in collaboration with Elena Lavellés of Spain, exhibited at the ICA Singapore galleries, encapsulates this issue.

Another common conversation topic revolved around Singapore being an obviously and decidedly controlled nation – not just through governmental policies, rules and regulations, but even from the participants' own observations of social behaviour, for

example, how trashbags waiting to be collected by the garbage collection truck were neatly stacked in a single pile, or how unused pins on the notice board were placed neatly at a corner.

Yet, although Singapore appeared as a highly controlled environment, the participants observed that Singaporeans generally appeared happy, contented, and also exercised social restraint and were polite. The question of how Singaporeans and Singaporean artists practiced self-censorship was also raised and in some quarters also understood. There were also the predictable gripes over the price of alcohol sold here in Singapore, not that it stopped any of us!

Throughout all this, I also found myself attempting to be an adequate host to the participants since I was a 'native', and but along the way, I also discovered how this self-imposed appointment sets me in a different mental frame, in how I repositioned myself behaviourally merely through the basis of my nationality and locality.

Predictably, I found myself spending more time with some individuals over others and as it is with these that I had more conversations with, I feel more confident to write about them and their practices.

One such individual is Hokuto Narikiyo of Japan. Thoroughly jovial with a blatant love of alcohol and singing, Hokuto told me that his surname, Narikiyo, was a rare one in Japan as it was a samurai family's name, and that Hokuto is a descendent of a samurai family in ages long past, which led to me calling him 'o-samurai-sama' for a while in jest. Hokuto's practice involves very much an attempt to understand moments in time and actions taken within history. For his work exhibited at the ICA Singapore gallery entitled *Syonan*, Hokuto had conducted some research to locate the site at MacRitchie Reservoir of what had once been a Japanese shrine built during the years when Singapore was known as Syonan-to¹. This shrine was built by the Japanese before it was subsequently burnt down and destroyed by the Japanese themselves when Syonan-to reverted to being known as Singapore.

At the outset, Hokuto confronts a politically sensitive question regarding Japan's role and actions during a difficult period of history regarding Teutonic and Japanese mass migration, which remains a prickly issue with the Japanese. However, his work here – which he believes is still a work-in-progress – focuses on something far less intimidating and more fundamental, that of experiencing and attempting to understand a single action taken during a single point in time, now relegated to the history books and the historians that write them with their own partial or impartial motives. On a cultural level, Hokuto understands the why behind the building and destroying of the shrine, and does not deny that such an action took place nor does he question the morals and impetuses of this action. Rather, he (and I cannot say 'merely') wishes to put himself through the same events that happened and through this forced experience

¹ During the Japanese Occupation in the years 1942 to 1945, Singapore was renamed Syonan-to.



Syonan

acknowledges the action itself – that it happened – and opens up to unfolding what the people who built and destroyed the shrine felt as they followed through with those actions. *Syonan* directs the significance of these actions towards the people who acted, rather than towards the history books and their narrative. He focuses on the singular action in that singular moment rather than the ramifications (or lack thereof) of the action as reviewed through the lens of time and history.

Towards that end, Hokuto trekked (with some difficulty – he got very lost – or *hor lan* as we say in the army) to the site of the shrine, where no trace of the structure remains. There he constructed a miniature of the shrine, placed it in the soil and burned it down, saving the ashes of the remnants. The entire action was recorded through video and displayed at the ICA Singapore gallery together with the ashes.

Another artist is Tuguldur Yondonjamts from Mongolia. Responding to the theme *Port of Call*, Yondonjamts's work marks on a drawing of the world map the journey of 'Dragon's Blood'. Dragon's Blood is the exotic name of a red paint pigment that he employs in his practice. In his work entitled *Venture*, Yondonjamts traces the journey of Dragon's Blood from its place of origin at Skull Island to where it ends while in his possession and its subsequent use, as Yondonjamts carries along with him in his travels. The work also observes that as the Dragon's Blood makes and continues its journey, more and more of it is used – or left behind – and as such its weight becomes reduced along its journeys. An extract from Yondonjamts's write up on *Venture*: "Yondonjamts first purchased a 100g bag of Dragon's Blood ink in New York in 2012. Since then, the bag has travelled with him to the Arctic, Mongolia and Singapore. The bag now weighs 37g."

The other participant from the LASALLE College of the Arts is my fellow cohort mate Homa Shojaie. Iranian by birth, her practice deals in part with markmaking and with this in mind, while responding to the theme *Port of Call*, she very nicely ordered the rest of the participants to do an exquisite corpse. Entitled *Container (Exquisite Corpse)*, the exquisite corpse serves as the location itself, the site where visitors who, through various different circumstances, gather at the same time, interact with each other, and leave their marks and traces behind. The work is a response to the theme, *Port of Call*, succinctly expressed in her write-up: "Each artist was given a space of 19.5 x 46 cm. on the paper, an area that is proportional to the dimensions of a 20-foot shipping container." Thus, this exquisite corpse comes with a twist in the usual rules of the making of one – there would be none of the usual rules to the making of this body of work. However, we participants were still constrained, not through rules but through the space allocated, a space that alludes to a shipping container so often found at a port.

In a quick interview, Homa further explained her work: "I feel that we come to the port of call with our baggage. Sometimes, the newness of encounters (at the port of call) wipes out the contents of our containers; at other times, we keep those contents. At the edges of these baggage-containers, the boundaries could either dissolve and merge or remain defined and separate. My work was an effort to record a moment of (inter-personal, baggage/container boundaries) exposure through mark making. The participants were asked to think about the border that they shared with the person before and after them while doing the exquisite corpse, remembering that when the work was finally unfurled, it would be akin to a group portrait."

Haryo Seno Agus Subayo of Indonesia is not very proficient in the English language, commonly considered the *lingua franca* of the world, and thus had some difficulties in communicating with the other participants. As such, his video work entitled *I'm confused, are you?* deals with the notion of miscommunication, the inability to converse through a common tongue and the confusion that oft times arises in such situations. Seemingly simple and direct, his work very aptly and charmingly highlights a frustrating situation common to a port of call where peoples of all races and languages converse, trade and attempt to exchange information.

The last artwork, that I shall briefly mention here, is *Contained* by Mia Mala McDonald of Australia. Comprising 32 digital prints, each print shows a Singaporean whom Mia had met and who had agreed to be photographed while wearing an 'I love SG' T-shirt. Mia explains her cheeky work: "*Contained* explores nationalism



Container

and its relationship to control, identity and belonging... (The 'I love SG' T-shirt) was made in China, imported into Singapore and purchased with Australian dollars." Mia's work also looks at the relationship between nationalism and ignorance, as well as trade, and the greatest irony is that these T-shirts were never made for Singaporean consumption but as souvenirs for tourists.

Whereas there is a lot more that I could continue to write about, I suppose I shall wrap up this piece by saying that this year's edition of *Tropical Lab 8: Port of Call* has been a singularly enriching experience as well as a wondrous site for us participants and volunteers alike – as well as the college – to build up a new artistic network that will undoubtedly bear fruit in the future. The friendships and contacts formed through discussions both serious and flippant, through food, drinks and revelry and through the central medium of art will not be so soon or easily forgotten.

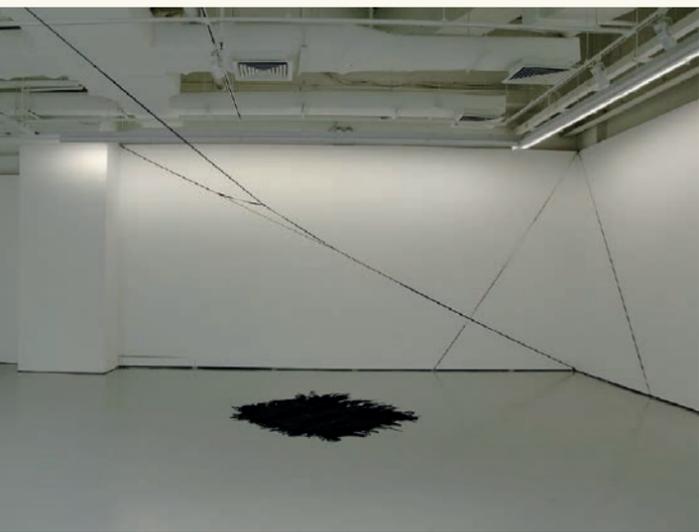
I would like to end this article with a little self-indulgence by naming and thanking every single one of the wonderful people that took part in *Tropical Lab 8: Port of Call*, participants, volunteers and organisers alike. I ask that you bear with me but a little longer for this list of acknowledgements. To Milenko, for your vision that started the Lab and the joyful perseverance in continuing it right up to this latest edition, may there be many more to come! To Linda who was like a surrogate mother to us all, to Vanessa and Marilyn, you princesses were amazing and tireless in seeing to the success of the programme. To Steven for the Ubin tour and to the folks at ICA Singapore – Bala, Melanie, Hafiz and Ramesh, for making the exhibition a success.

To the volunteers, Amelia the 'timekeeper', Kel Win for imparting local knowledge and slangs to the participants, Victoria for both planning and joining us for drinks even though you don't drink, Pragya, Jem, Ziggy, Chand, Nashrah, Jade, Jerlynn, Kathlyn and Terry, thank you for taking time off to help us. Your efforts were invaluable!

To my fellow participants, Hokuto who went back to Japan but left his heart behind, Yukari who didn't drink as much as I thought, thank you both for the delicious sushi party at my place, Tugul who helped me hack apart four kilos of frozen pork belly (another story for another time), milady Elena, Charlie with his signature laughter and who came partly because he is such a big fan of Ian Woo, Veronica with the coolest fashion sense, Isabella with her beautiful articulation and cadence of speech, Mia who is always up for a party, Jonathan – your beard feels really weird (it was a drinking game), Haryo – I'm glad you enjoyed your first time eating sushi. To Elizabeth, thanks for the ginger candy! To Kie and Sumie, Limor, Yuning, the very tall Joel, Lousia, Jude, David, Christine, Milena and of course, to Homa whom I've gotten to know so much better and to Eakchayong the boss, it has been a genuine pleasure and may our paths cross again in the future. Till then, I wish us all fair winds and following seas!

SINGAPORE REFLECTIONS

By Jude Robertson (Participant of Tropical Lab : Port of Call)



It may sound cliché, but the steamy tropical heat is definitely the first sensation that hit me when I stepped onto Singaporean soil and warmth is the quality I associate with *Tropical Lab* and its theme last year, *Port of Call*. As a postgraduate art student from Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand, I was immersed in this two-week intensive programme where I was able to connect and exchange ideas with a diverse range of people from around the world, including the amazingly generous and talented staff and students from LASALLE. It is difficult to summarise my time at *Tropical Lab* as it was so full and rich with experiences, but I would liken it to suddenly looking outside my habitual frame of the world, and feeling it shift, expand and open up. There's also a sense of not being quite the same person as I was before.

"I felt Tropical Lab was just as much about connecting with people and place as it was about making art, although many creative ideas were planted and I am curious to see in which direction they grow."

Singapore is not the same island city I remember either. I had first visited Singapore with my grandmother when I was ten some years ago, and ever since then, it has held special significance for me. Now as an adult, I noticed the cityscape has grown up too; it's taller and bolder than I remembered it, with its distinctive and eclectic mix of historical and futuristic buildings. I really enjoyed the pockets of local flavour, Little India, Chinatown and Arab Street all momentarily transporting me to a different place and time. I was especially interested

in the vertical greening taking place and wondered whether this could extend into vertical edible gardens, which could potentially transform this garden city into an urban food forest.

Personally, I felt *Tropical Lab* was just as much about connecting with people and place as it was about making art, although many creative ideas were planted and I am curious to see in which direction they grow. As an artist who habitually takes several months to make an artwork, it was highly challenging to create something in just five or so days! So I arrived prepared with both ideas and materials, but then felt compelled to respond creatively to what was present locally, rather than continuing to work with a preconceived idea. This decision presented both challenges and possibilities, as I was faced with extra time pressure and some uncharacteristic indecision, but it also allowed a space to open up where I could invite new ideas in. I found that rather than producing a resolved work, I gathered visual and aural information, tested out different ideas and discovered a new material - recycled bicycle tubes - that resonates strongly with me! I also conducted numerous audio recordings during our bike ride tour on Pulau Ubin, including the sound of small waves gently meeting the shore. The sound brings forth the all pervasive quality of water and I would like to leave you on this note:

Boundaries dissolve
As seas circulate,
We are water.

A big, heartfelt thanks to Milenko Prvacki and the lovely *Tropical Lab* team, and all the *Tropical Lab* friends who made this unique experience possible. I hope to see you all again soon!

THE FLEETING WORLD OF DAPUNTA HYANG

by Nurhayati Binte Abdul Rahim, BA(Hons) Fine Arts L3/2015

Jailani Zai Kuning aims to introduce these almost forgotten history and culture to the contemporary world before they are enveloped in time.

Jailani Zai Kuning (b.1964, Singapore) is a multidisciplinary artist. He has pioneered and redefined an art practice in Singapore that engages in multi-cultural and multi-disciplinary art forms. He often attributes his endeavours in art to his childhood. Zai grew up with Ghazal Music by his father and dance performances by his mother. As a child, he travelled and performed in the Riau Islands in Indonesia. Well immersed in culture and tradition, Zai's works are often intertwined with his lineage and history. In the *Fleeting World of Dapunta Hyang*, he embraces his Bugis Malay Lineage. Bugis Malays are traditionally known in the Riau Archipelago to be warriors. In line with this, he dates his research to pre-Islamic History and looks into the voyages of conqueror Dapunta Hyang Sri Jayanasa.

Dapunta Hyang Sri Jayanasa was the first Maharaja of Srivijaya and the first king of the Malay empire, known for conquering areas in Riau from the late seventh to the early eighth centuries. Zai explains his research as one which requires travel and he slowly collects remnants of evidence to prove the existence of Dapunta Hyang. Drawing on this history and research, he exhibits a sculpture of a boat inspired by the legend of Dapunta Hyang's fleet of twenty thousand. *The Fleeting World of Dapunta Hyang* was done in collaboration with Mohamed Riduan and

Lee Pheng Guan. It is made of rattan, waxed thread, pebbles and wax. The sculpture looks like a skeleton of a ship with clusters of pebbles tied together in red thread and hung on the lower parts of the skeleton. He made an instrument of rattan which he uses for his performance. In his performance on the opening night of his exhibition in the gallery, he picked up his instrument, played a rhythm on it as he wielded it up and down and started chanting a mantra. He walked around the sculpture, whilst the cluster of pebbles hung by red threads moved in a clockwise and anticlockwise direction. There was movement, rhythm and sound as he performed. Children present intuitively followed him as he walked round the sculpture. It ended when he finally let go of his instrument with a loud thud on the floor. According to Zai, his performances are almost always based on a sort of ritual. These ritualistic elements were evident.

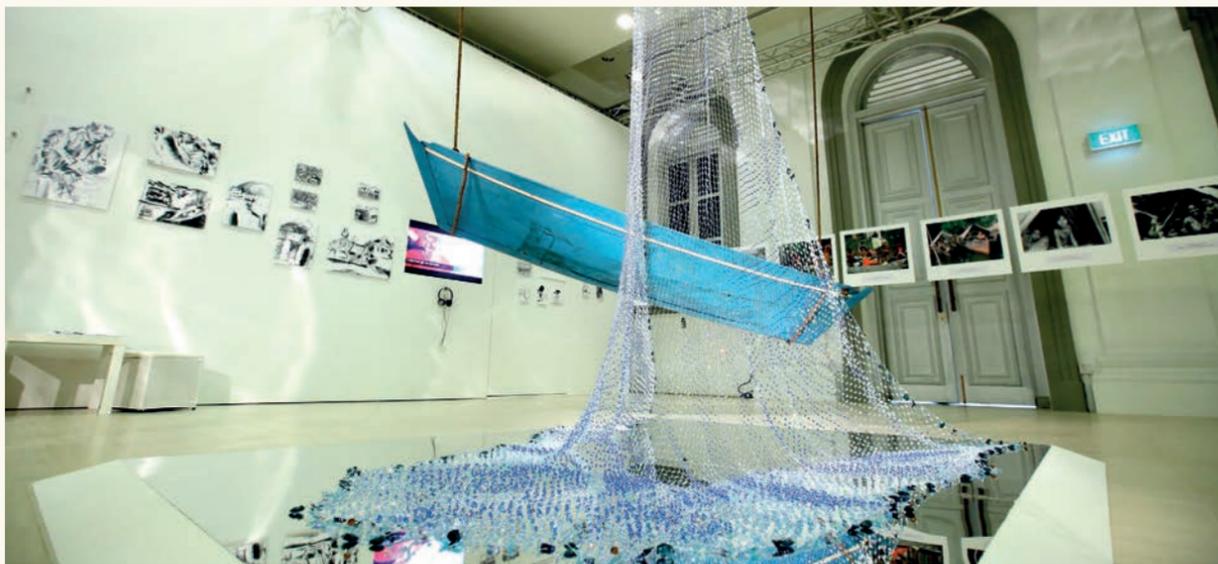
In the gallery, Jailani Zai Kuning also exhibited a second work, a video documentation of Mak Yong Opera by a Mak Yong troupe from the Mantang Island. The video documentation consists of several plays by the Mak Yong Troupe totalling three hours of footage in digital video, colour and sound as they performed in front of a live audience in 2014. Mak Yong Opera was known to have originated before the spread of Islam. Due to the animistic characters and attributes, Mak Yong was turned away by the growing number of Muslims. Zai considers the ban on the art form to be a loss of culture. Though this documentation might not be of the original Mak Yong Opera centuries ago, it documents what is left of Mak Yong Opera today.

In creating the two works, Jailani Zai Kuning aims to introduce these almost forgotten history and culture to the contemporary world before they are enveloped in time.



REACHING OUT FOR THE OTHER SIDE OF THE LITTLE RED DOT'S HORIZON

by Gilles Massot, Lecturer, Faculty of Fine Arts



On the 24th November 2014, a group of nine students from BA(Hons) Level 2 and Diploma level 3 crossed the Straits of Singapore in search of another world on the other side of the Little Red Dot's horizon. For most of them this was the first visit to Bintan Island, better known for the luxurious resorts lining up its north coast. But this trip organised in collaboration with the Island Foundation and Swarovski was nothing like a holiday. The students were meant to put their artistic expertise at the service of a meaningful cause and, in the process of doing so, revive the connection between two worlds that recent history has seen drifting apart from one another.

The destination for this one-day field trip was Panglong Village in the north-eastern tip of the island, home to families of Orang Suku Laut. The students were to meet the people there, get acquainted, even if briefly, with their way of life, and record these impressions and experiences in the form of charcoal drawings. These drawings would then be part of an exhibition hosted by the National Museum in which a magnificent fishing net made of Swarovski crystals beads and woven by a group of women from the village will be presented. The net was to be sold in an auction, and the resulting funds used by the Island Foundation to provide clean water to the village. The students were also meant to share their artistic passion and knowledge with the local children through impromptu drawing sessions. This exchange and transfer of skills was a reflection of the approach taken by the Island Foundation to improve people's life in this village as well as a few other similar communities in Bintan.

The Orang Suku Laut (People of the Sea) are the original inhabitants of Indonesia's Riau Archipelago. They were

originally nomadic fishing families who moved as they needed to, living on the water in their sampan, sheltered by a rooftop made from pandan or palm leaves, and trading or foraging on land for fresh water, food and natural materials. There were Orang Suku Laut families living in Singapore, the northernmost Riau Island as recent as the 1990s. In the 1960s, their way of life was interrupted as maritime boundaries were divided between Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore and their access to the sea became limited. Furthermore, Bintan and Batam Islands became the focus for large development – mining,

manufacturing and tourism - by the Singapore and Indonesian governments, all things strongly impacting the natural environment on which the nomadic life of the Orang Suku Laut was based. Today, many of them have become sedentary in villages built by the Indonesian government. They find themselves more land-based but without

the relevant skills to ensure a sustainable future. The Island Foundation was registered as a charity in both Singapore and Indonesia to address this situation.

The programme of the Island Foundation is conducted in six villages along the northern and eastern coast of Bintan Island and include education (teaching English and IT), health and nutrition, sports, and eco-tourism with an emphasis on design and innovation to encourage the use of traditional and contemporary crafts to develop unique Riau artisans. Panglong occupies a special place among these villages because the Bintan government plans to open a brand new international ferry terminal right next to it, consequently turning the village into a tourist attraction. The community welcomes tourism but realise that without relevant skills, they will not be able to participate or benefit from this tourism.

Even though they have become sedentary, the lifestyle of the people in Panglong is still very much based on an intimate intuitive knowledge of the sea and natural elements such as the monsoon cycles. Most importantly, they live in symbiosis with the mangrove environment found all around the village. The Suku Laut like to live close to a mangrove area because of its spiritual, medicinal and food value. They make juice from a kind of mangrove called *glokap* for fever. The sprout of *glokap* and *rakit* is for diarrhoea, and *nyirih* can be used for skin irritation. They also use mangrove wood to make charcoal to grill fish. The production of charcoal was until recently a significant source of revenue for the community, a situation materialised in the landscape of the village by a number of large round brick kilns. But restrictions on these activities have been implemented by the government for environmental reasons, thus bringing an end to this means of income, and the kilns were eventually dismantled. However, two of them have been preserved for the growing tourism culture that is slowly but inexorably changing the area. The function of these kilns has not been quite decided yet, but during our visit, they turned out to offer a convenient sheltered open space for the students to interact with the children and familiarise themselves with village life.

Charcoal was chosen as a medium of choice for the drawings as it relates to its former importance in the local economy. The novelty of the environment took many of the students by surprise, and the first hour was mostly spent around the kiln, drawing the different points of view, interacting with the children, or simply getting use to the rhythm of things. But after a while, the urge to discover slowly made them more adventurous. One group left for a boat trip in the mangrove, another went to visit the women waving the net made of crystal beads, while others started venturing out on their own on the boardwalks over the water. Soon enough, it was lunchtime and by the time activity resumed in the afternoon, a certain sense of familiarity led the group into deeper probing observations. By the end of the day, we could browse through a good collection of drawings. It displayed a large range of topics and styles that illustrated the village life in its various aspects. The visit had been short but rich in experiences and sensations that had left their marks on the paper.

The exhibition opened in the National Museum on the 16th December and ran for a month during which 5,800 people visited it. The dazzling net of Swarovski crystal beads hung in the centre of the room, together with a traditional wooden boat, their respective contrasting simplicity and luxury reflected in a large mirror on the floor. On the walls, photographs, videos, and of course, drawings provided the context for these objects and the people behind them. The auction, attended by 150 people, eventually raised over \$30,000, a substantial amount that will be put to good use by the Island Foundation to improve the quality of life and to provide clean water to the village. This first collaboration of LASALLE with the Island Foundation had resulted in a meaningful contribution, one that had clearly benefited all people involved. It will certainly not be the last.

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ELEVATOR

Hong Kong South Island Art Night

by Susanna Tan Kher Wei, BA(Hons) Fine Arts L2/2015



A group photo taken together with Alison at City University of Hong Kong.

Hong Kong was a good place for an insight to the art ecosystem, especially during the week when Art Basel Hong Kong was held (I can relate many of the trip's experiences to the chapters in *Seven Days in the Art World*, a book with seven distinctive aspects of the art world by Sarah Thornton). Like any major art fair, many other collateral activities can be spotted at Art Basel that weekend. I must say we were in for a treat.

With many thanks to Alison Hung from Artist Pension Trust, we had a remarkably well-planned itinerary for our five-day trip. We visited a good mixture of art fair, gallery openings, institutional art shows, archival art centres and independent art-spaces. Our full itinerary includes visits to the renowned galleries in the Pedder Building like Gagolian, Lehmann Maupin, Pearl Lam and Ben Brown, Art Basel Hong Kong,

City University Run Run Shaw School of Creative Media, Videotage Cattle Depot in To Kwa Wan, Osage, Parasite and Asia Art Archive(AAA). I have so much appreciation for the artists, curators, institutions, liaison officers, volunteers and officials who had hosted us with so much hospitality. It was an invaluable and inspirational experience for myself in that short five days in Hong Kong.

I particularly enjoyed my fourth night in the southern part of this gem island. As a group, we took part in the South Island Art Night event where our experiences got a little more exciting and adventurous. The event was held in the vicinity of Southern District in the Hong Kong Island, namely at Wong Chuk Hang, Tin Wan and Ap Lei Chau. The area is all about industrial factory buildings that housed many large empty warehouse lots within. Various art spaces have injected new

"I have enjoyed myself a lot on this Art Night initiative sponsored by the Southern District Council of Hong Kong mainly because it was refreshing and provided a cultural sense of how Hong Kong is uniquely providing for these thriving art spaces."

life into these forgotten spaces. It is easy to recount and appreciate these integrated spaces now but it was definitely a rush of disorientation when we first alighted from our chartered mini bus (our bus driver assured us we were at the right location and promptly drove away). I remember feeling really out of place, it was almost like we were too colourful and chirpy for the district.

We walk into the seemingly dubious car park of an old building and spotted the stationed security guard of the building. After a few exchanges of broken Chinese Cantonese and unhelpful gestures, he directed us to another dubious-looking cargo lift and pressed the button for level three (he must have taken some hints from our out-of-place dress codes). The lift door closes, we closed our eyes (I exaggerate slightly) as we took the leap of faith. The lift door opened at level three and the crisp, clean tasteful sign of *Spring* welcomed us warmly. What a pleasant surprise!

Spring Workshop on Wong Chuk Hang Road is a non-profit arts space where international artists and curators can exchange ideas through residencies, exhibitions, music, film and talk. We were at the opening weekend of the eight-week long exhibition: *Days push off into nights*.

After an extensive tour at Spring Workshop, we grabbed a map of the event night and continued our little adventure in the hood. Although equipped with a map and Google navigation on our smart phones, it was not easy to find one's way. We spotted a couple of youngsters whom I immediately identified them as hipsters in my own term. They looked as displaced as us in this grey industrial setting but they seemed to know their way. We followed, of course.

That brings us to another cargo lift lobby and another security guard, like a sense of déjà vu. As we explored more of the galleries, I got familiar with the security guard plus cargo lift (sometimes weird smell too) format and like Alice, but instead of the rabbit hole, I wondered what wonderland awaits on the other side of the lift door every time we visit a new gallery in the district. We only managed to visit about six to seven galleries/art spaces out of the 21 listed in the brochure and ended our South Island Art Night at Genevieve Chua's show, which was held at Gallery EXIT in Tin Wan (a group of us took a free shuttle bus from Wong Chuk Hang to Tin Wan).

That was the last night of our trip in Hong Kong but the Art Night definitely wrapped up the trip well for me. I have enjoyed myself a lot on this Art Night initiative that was sponsored by the Southern District Council of Hong Kong mainly because it was refreshing and provided a cultural sense of how Hong Kong is uniquely providing for these thriving art spaces. It was an experience more than I have bargained for, not only did I check out an array of approaches these art spaces took up – some commercial, some more experimental and some multi-functional; I met with curators, spoke to artists, discussed ideas with my peers and had lots of fun at all the opening receptions. The Art Night was too short-lived and I want to go back for more!



Rooftop opening reception at Spring Workshop

WINSTON OH TRAVEL SCHOLARSHIP

by Moses Tan Qian Yi, BA(Hons) Fine Arts L2/2015

The Winston Oh Travel Award has been giving grants to help promising talents to gain exposure by travelling out of Singapore. In 2014, eight students from LASALLE College of the Arts travelled to seven different countries. *The Grass is Always Greener on The Other Side* showcased the works from these eight recipients.

Split into two galleries, the exhibition was segregated into the Winston Oh Travel Award recipients and the Research Grant recipients, and the respective works presented had offered different approaches.

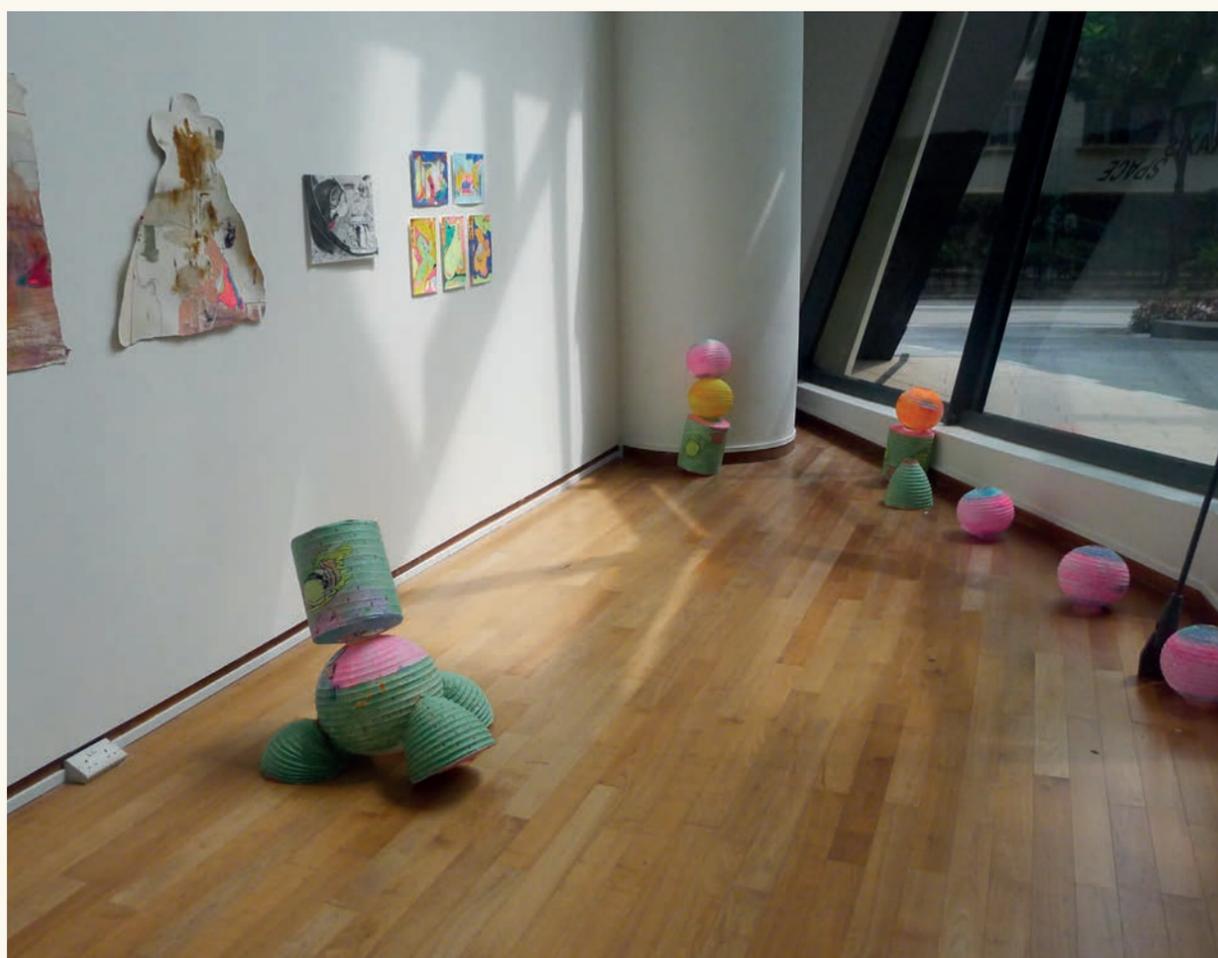
The Research Grant recipients, Terry Ong, Jacqueline Sim and Khairulddin Bin Abdul Wahab, travelled to Thailand, the United States, and England respectively whereas the Travel Award students, Joel Chin, Cassandra Koh, Gabrielle Wai, Tang Wei Jun and Rifqi Amirul went to Myanmar, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Thailand and Indonesia respectively.

Interestingly, the Research Grant artists shared a common theme of a socio-political nature, revealed in their works that were installed in the Project Space. Placed side by side, the manner of display made the transition for the audience one that was interesting.

As you enter the gallery, you first encounter Jacqueline Sim's wittily titled *I Think I Screwed Up My Research*, which featured two installation works of videos. Through the creation of a 'tightrope' by using a wheelbarrow on a flight of stairs, Sim has



Gabriella Wai, *Forgotten Island*, 2014 Monotype on canvas



Cassandra Koh Ling Wei, *Strawberry Installation*, 2014 Mixed Media

created a visual representation of how the media portrays the art world. The industrial feel of the work itself seemingly draws back and becomes a lovely tribute to Alejandro Almanza Pereda. Khairulddin Wahab exhibited two paintings that sought to reflect the missing holes in history. One of them, *Thomas Bingley*, is a portrait of Raffles juxtaposed with text. The paintings overlay images of black-and-white photographs that seek to overlap and represent Singapore history from another point of view. *Hey Joe* is an eight-channel video installation by Terry Ong. By presenting this work in a manner that occurs by chance, the artist sought to explore parallel themes.

In the other gallery the Travel Award recipients' works were visually interesting and it was very nice to notice how each artist had employed different aesthetics in their works.

Gabrielle's works, inspired by her travel to Hong Kong, adopted colours that expressed a certain form of tranquillity, making it visually poetic. On the right of these works, Joel Chin's oil paintings exuded the same tranquillity and peace, but the texture however revealed a certain chaos within a sense of calmness.

At the other end of the gallery, the works that included Tang Wei Jun's installation, Rifqi's prints and Cassandra's drawings, can only be described as visually chaotic. Cassandra's drawings evoked a certain child-like appeal but with a dark twist. Layered with highlighters, the drawings resembled her past works that defined her characteristic style. Wei Jun's installation, a visually fragile work exuded a sense of fragility, whereas Rifqi's prints brought life to images of temples and touched on diaspora in a vibrant manner.

GENENG STREET ART PROJECT #2 OR GSAP#2 (Pendukuhan Geneng, Sewon, Bantul, Yogyakarta, Indonesia)

by Naufal Abshar BA(Hons) Fine Arts L3/2015



Geneng Street Art Project or Seni Jalanan desa Geneng (in Indonesian), is followed by many Javanese and International artists. This project was initiated by a group called Ruangkelas SD, which consists of several undergraduate and postgraduate students from Indonesian Institute of art (ISI). The project is intended to highlight the concerns of the village urban life around Yogyakarta.

Various issues exist in the village life, from the economic burden in the rural areas, due to the slump in the agricultural economy, to social issues due to adoption of modern attitudes which tend to be emphasise the individual over the community, and also competitive-driven consumer culture eroding traditional culture. Through art, I try to understand the issues and aspirations of the village people and give expression to their concerns.

I learnt about the Javanese philosophy of life, a sublime practice of understanding and being aware of others, not thinking of oneself but adopting the willingness to share and to be useful for others.



This project was supported by various other events in order to establish a festive spirit in the local neighbourhoods and to encourage the creation of art in public spaces.

Geneng Street Art Project #2 is the second consecutive project initiated by Ruangkelas SD artists' collective in collaboration with the students of Indonesian Institute of Art (ISI) and the community of Street Art of Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The project aims to brighten and inspire the surrounding areas and villages with various art works. Artists come together to leave their creative marks, to heartily discover to find the real meaning of art and the role of art that does not separate from the real life and society, through street art. The project uses street art techniques such as graffiti, murals, stencilling, wheat paste, sculpture and visual installations.

This project was supported by various other events in order to establish a festive spirit in the local neighbourhoods and to encourage the creation of art in public spaces. There was both local and international participation in the project and the growing support and visibility both locally and internationally strengthens and empowers the art community. It also encourages confidence that art can be practiced in the everyday life.

To sum up, this project taught me that art need not be separate from life; it may not be confined to a sterile cold gallery who co-opts the market and by the same token, artists, on their work process, isolated in their studio on producing works that can be enjoyed with a few elite people. The Geneng street art project wards off the mindset that art is exclusive and elite, and shows instead that art could be enjoyed as a living form.



STUDY TRIP TO TAIPEI: DELVING INTO RELATIONAL AESTHETICS

by Stéphanie Xatart and Samantha Segar, MA Asian Art Histories 2015

The much anticipated study trip of the MA Asian Art Histories 2014/15 Programme took us to Taipei, Taiwan. The trip was from 9 December to 13 December 2014. (It was with immense relief that the trip was conveniently scheduled once five term papers had been submitted!)

There we were delighted to explore many facets of Taipei's vibrant and edgy art scene. The first stage of our cultural journey took us to the Taipei Biennale where we attempted to come to terms with relational aesthetics. Curated by the man behind the theory himself, Nicolas Bourriaud, the Biennale sparked a number of discussions throughout our stay but also offered a great playground, or a phenomenological approach to art through experimentation. We complied with the many exhibition invitations and partook of the communal tea drinking / hammock lounging in *Formosa Decelator* by art collective Opavivará! (fig. 1), and a most memorable session amidst a spectacular accumulation of coloured hanks of wool in *Golden Ghost (Reality Called, So I Woke Up)* by Surasi Kusolwong (b.1965) (fig. 2). Spurred by a sense of playfulness and wit, the artist had hidden golden necklaces within the installation, which proved to be, unsurprisingly, an excellent incentive to literally dig in. We also marvelled at the sculpture, *Faciathérapie (Mina Hebbaz)* by Camille Henrot (b. 1978), which left us yearning for a long satisfying back-massage.



Fig. 1. Opavivará!, *Formosa Decelator*, 2014



Fig. 2. Surasi Kusolwong, *Golden Ghost (Reality Called, So I Woke Up)*, 2014

We paid a visit to the Museum of Contemporary Art. There we toured the Second Pulima Art Award exhibition and found ourselves enthralled by George Nuku's *Bottled Ocean 2114*.

Pulima's focus is the discussion of cultural and environmental issues via the production of artists with Austronesian heritage. On the way back to our hotel/lodgings, our fabulously inquisitive guide asked for a definition of contemporary art; sadly, we were not able to provide him with one definite answer, although the exercise kept us busy on our bus rides throughout the stay.

Literally meaning "city in northern Taiwan", Taipei is the cultural, political and economic capital of ROC (Republic of China). At first glance, the city has a confused look that reflects its history marked by six colonial occupations. Indeed, there has been no coherent architectural development especially at the beginning of the Kuomintang. Later, an attempt to set up a mode of urban planning with a typical grid did not succeed. One commentator reasoned, "People have built what they wanted to build, what they needed."

This bottom-up development is somewhat reflected in the contemporary art scene. While the government now supports local artists and international art initiatives (Venice Biennale, Taipei Biennale), Taiwanese artist groups have been running their own alternative spaces since the 1980s. IT Park, one of the longest-running alternative art spaces in the region, was one of our stops. We also visited VT Artsalon where its current director, Yao Jui-Chung, welcomed us. Yao was one of the eight founding artists of this well-known art incubator (fig. 3). Another of the founders, Wu Dar-Kuen, is currently curator of the Kuandu Museum of Fine Arts at the National Taipei University of the Arts, and by a sheer stroke of luck we were able to catch the Kuandu Biennale.



Fig. 3. VT Artsalon

Entitled *Recognition System*, this small biennale featured ten pairs of artists and curators from different countries in Asia. It employed various strategies to engage the viewers with participatory installations as well as stimulating the somatosensory system (which was also recently explored back home with *Sensorium 360°* at the Singapore Art Museum). We were particularly wowed at *Relative Perception N°1[0°-N°]* by Chang Yung-Ta (b. 1981) (fig. 4) and *Ruins: Re-Deconstruction of Li Gang's Ink* by Li Gang (b. 1962), but nothing stunned us more than the exceptional shooting skills of Dr. Wulan Dirgantoro in Kwan Sheung-Chi's participatory installation Night Market. By way of extending the experience, fermented tofu and bubble tea prevailed that evening as we regrouped at the Ningxia Night Market.

We particularly enjoyed hiking up and down narrow outdoor stairs, peeking in and out of studios, and admiring the local vegetable gardens.



Fig. 4. Chang Yung-Ta, *Relative Perception N.1[0°-N°]*, 2014

Arguably the golden moments of the study trip were our visits to cultural centres and artist villages. Taipei is located in a basin surrounded by hills; on the slope of one of these sits Treasure Hill Artist Village (fig. 5). Formerly private homes, these charming hillside spaces now offer an artist-in-residence programme and welcome art practitioners from around the globe. We particularly enjoyed hiking up and down narrow outdoor stairs, peeking in and out of studios, and admiring the local vegetable gardens. Our last morning found us at Bamboo Curtain Studio where we were greeted by Ping-Chi Hung and met with Margaret Shiu, the rather impressive director and founder. Some of us were so inspired that we decided we should go next for an MA in Fine Arts just so we can apply to their residency programme!

Calling the study strip a highlight of the programme is no euphemism. Sadly, we still haven't fully figured out relational aesthetics and more particularly how it applies to our field... or does it?



Fig. 5. Treasure Hill Artist Village

TIGA MALAM EXHIBITION

by Karina Iskandarsjah, BA(Hons) Fine Arts L3/2015

All three artists offered a simple piece of advice in three words to future artists and current students: determination, passion and hard work.



Tiga Malam (Three Nights in Malay) was an exhibition by three Singapore-born artists, Rosihan Dahim, Sunar Sugiyou and Adi Yadoni. The three artists who have long been active in various artistic practices in Southeast Asia, came together in 2014 for their third collaboration. Consistent with their reputations as multiple award winners and patrons of the Singapore art scene, the works of each artist display vastly different styles and practices. As painters as well as sculptors, Dahim is loyal to the tradition of surrealism, while Sunar is devoted to the exploration of his roots and Javanese culture. The work of Adi, on the other hand, is an amalgamation of draughtsmanship, experimental stylistic installation and videography.

Nevertheless, what brought these artists together is their friendship and the love of artistic expression itself. This bond is most explicitly evident in the videowork created by Adi entitled *Tiga Malam*, which provided the title for the exhibition. Based on the song performed by Lilis Suryani, whom the three artists had unabashedly confessed to admire, *Tiga Malam* (the exhibition) embodied the spirit and enthusiasm of artistic expression that Dahim, Sunar and Adi exemplifies through their diverse practices.

Located in the Alliance Francaise de Singapour, the exhibition overflowed with artistic energy, partly due to an almost overwhelming number of artworks on display. Although one cannot deny that the viewer is spoilt for choice, the close proximity of artworks may prove a detriment to the enjoyment of the exhibition. With paintings as culturally and contextually charged as Sunar's or as breathtaking in technique as Dahim's, one would find it difficult to focus on a piece without being distracted by the other works around them. There is little allowance for a space for contemplation. In my opinion, poor curatorial decision is to be blamed. Moreover, it was quite strange to find Dahim's work confined to and isolated within a small, designated rectangular area, while Adi's and Sunar's pieces sporadically filled the rest of the exhibition space. This, as Dahim explained, was to avoid his own overtly surrealist paintings "overpowering" the other pieces.

Despite the flaws in the curatorial set-up, the exhibition is nonetheless a fantastic example of the culmination of talent and passion. Such traits became clear, as I was fortunate to have a conversation with each of the artists. I learned of their relationship

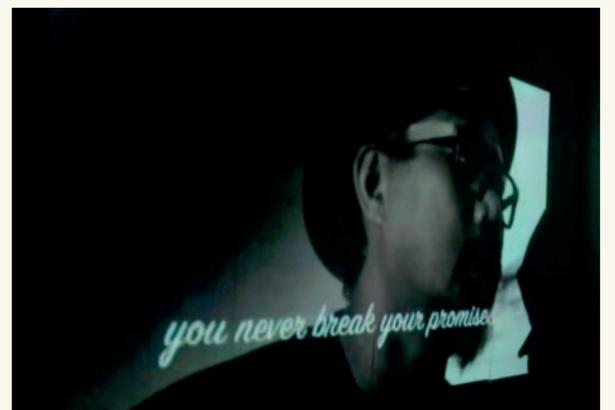
with each other, the history of their journeys as artists as well as their tireless work ethics and undeniable affection for artistic expression. For example, Adi and Sunar share the trait of being able to create visually impactful works using inexpensive materials both in two-dimensional and three-dimensional spheres. Although Adi has been working for film and television through the years, he feels more empowered and relieved whenever he returns to his roots as a visual artist. While his talents as a videographer was evident in the work *Tiga Malam*, his expressive and playful gestures in drawing and assemblage would catch the attention of any casual observer of the exhibition.

On the other hand, within Dahim's isolated space, we are presented with a concoction of poetically and technically driven works. Faithful to the surrealist practice, Dahim derives inspiration and meaning for his work from his own dreams and psyche. The topic of our conversation was about the relevance of such traditions as surrealism and formal skills in painting, which he claimed to be of great importance to preserve. What cannot be denied is Dahim's extensive portfolio of paintings and sculptures that showcases great formal talent, something to be appreciated, and refreshing in the face of the pressure in contemporary art to abandon such principles.

Sunar's paintings, that were conceived using mixed media (from batik to Chinese ink) and which alluded to Javanese culture, demonstrate the modernist energy of Southeast Asia. His culturally thought-provoking and visually dynamic works, which can be found in the National Heritage Board Collection, speaks of his own exploration of locational and ethnic identity. Sunar spoke of his interest in materiality and manual labour in art and through this, shares his belief that even if you are less privileged, artmaking is possible and should be pursued.

At the conclusion of the interviews, all three artists offered a simple piece of advice in three words to future artists and current students: determination, passion and hard work. Though rather clichéd and more easily said than done, dedication is the key to becoming a successful practising artist.

Tiga Malam was exhibited at Alliance Francaise from 4th to 20th September 2015



WORKSHOP WITH TINTIN WULIA

by Christabel Ngoi Jean Rou, BA(Hons) Fine Arts L2/2015



“as many of us had to walk such long distances in the execution of the project, but also learnt insights on the concept of walking, the language of the walk, the naming of places and mapping places in the form of words. It is indeed language that creates the topography of a place.”

In his essay on *Geographies of poetry/poetries of geography*, Tim Cresswell reflects on how geography and poetry writing could traverse in-between each other to generate forms of creative writing which is what he engaged as being a “cultural geographer...to write about place, landscape, betweenness, belonging and not belonging, travel.”¹ The Indonesian-Australian-based artist Tintin Wulia introduced an initial framework for a collaborative project with the title, *Three Walks for Singapore*, closely following her previous project called the *Three Etudes for Mexico City*. Nine students, including myself, from BA Fine Art levels two and three joined in the collaborative process in a three-day workshop at LASALLE in January this year; we were tasked to be active actors in putting together our individual images of Singapore, and deliberately creating a group representation for each walk and experience.

Tintin conducted three games for each day of the workshop that was held at the Winstedt campus: *Boal's Columbian Hypnosis* for the first day, *Boal's Bombs and Shields* for the second day, and *Boal's Tangles and Knots* in the concluding day. The games were based on Bruno Latour's *Actor-Network-Theory* (ANT). *Boal's Columbian Hypnosis* required us to move while focused on another individual's selected body part of our choice; if the hand is your choice, you move accordingly to where the hand goes. The individual's actions thus form a pattern of gestures which influences how the group in formation, gathers and moves around. It was a constant performative group effort, and I began to understand how this collaborative work fell into place when the group explored the different routes together, sometimes forming into sub-groups, and leading or being led. While *Boal's Bombs and Shields* informs us of the uncertainty of who are acting as bombs or shields, for or against you. *Tangles and Knots*, too, shows that “action is not done under the full control of consciousness; action should rather be felt as a node, a knot, and a conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies that have to be slowly disentangled.”²

The concept behind this collaborative work stems from Tintin's interest in treating the city as her studio. Her proposal for the workshop is to generate practices that “function as an unconventional tour guide to the city – a stimulus for an act

of experiencing and wandering through the city”. Throughout the discussion, we were provoked to share what is iconic to us in Singapore and what are the places that could summarise a general idea of this city. Our suggestions varied from signboards to ‘tissue lady’, routes from the cultural sites to the central business district at the different times of the day. All of this made us ponder on how a city works and how a city could prompt us to think of a particular shape, a monument, or probably just a map of its own.

By taking into consideration how the character of a walk could bring out the essence of a place, how actions take over or manipulate a space, we selected three routes. The first route focused on the central business district (CBD) from Raffles Place towards Marina Bay Sands; the second walk started from Little India towards Chinatown; and the third walk took place at the far outskirts of the city-state from Changi Village towards Pulau Ubin. All of us agreed that how and where people walk reflects the city's structure and urban spaces, which at a subconsciously level show the unseen degrees of either freedom or restraint that impact the living bodies in the city.

We identified a different objective from that when providing a historical/touristic walk for diverse groups of people. Rather than setting out fixed instructions or routes, we randomly applied two methods: experience and decision-making. We had a long list of different ideas derived from a pre-walk session, such as walking horizontally or vertically in the city, inaccessible dead ends, asking for directions, playing with accidental encounters or chance, and we concluded by categorising them under the two methods. We consciously incorporated all of these performative acts into all three walks, not without its conflicts, and we regularly brainstormed on what other ways we could walk in relation to the site and places we were in.

The text from the first walk to the third walk altered in different ways. We had divided ourselves into three groups to draft the outline on our project's facebook page named *Three Walks for Singapore*. Due to the differing tones and rhythms of the writing, all of us amended the text repeatedly to ensure the three walks resonate with each other. The textual representation of the walk was intended to not limit the experience for the viewers, but to allow them to explore not just the place as a physical site, but also to pay attention to the form of writing about geography, following Tim Cresswell's insights. By reading the text, one is not informed formally on

how or where to go, but it influences the character of the walk, which may generate a more unusual experience than a conventional sight-seeing tour.

We all concur that this workshop benefited us not just physically, as many of us had to walk such long distances in the execution of the project, but also learnt insights on the concept of walking, the language of the walk, the naming of places and mapping places in the form of words. It is indeed language that creates the topography of a place. The place was characterised and portrayed, by signs of our encounters and our actions, not yet a song or a poem, but in our case, a text guideline for three walks for Singapore.

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Latour, Bruno. “Reassembling the Social.” *An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005: 1-311.



¹ (Cresswell 2013, 142)

² (Latour 2005, 44)

WORKSHOPS AT WINSTEDT CAMPUS

Drawing. After Drawing Workshop with Shooshie Sulaiman 25th Sept to 26th Sept 2014 Winstedt Campus.

Susyilawati Sulaiman, or Shooshie Sulaiman, is a Malaysian artist. Her work is highly conceptual and often causes controversy, as it pushes boundaries of sensitive issues through the use of found objects. The works she produced are also mostly site-specific. Exploring cultural, social and the spiritual, she is one of Malaysia's most prominent contemporary artists.

This workshop drew the participation of twelve students from BA(Hons) levels 2 and 3, and MA students. On the first day, students were invited to prime and paint pieces of wood while thinking of differences and conjunctions between real and false memories. On the second day, students burned the paintings in order to cook food that they then ate.

Considering Drawing: drawing cats Workshop with Sherman Sam 11th Sept to 12th Sept 2014 Winstedt Campus

Sherman Sam is an artist, writer and curator. He is known for exhibiting his drawings and paintings together. He is based in both Singapore and London.

Twelve students from BA(Hons) levels 2 and 3, and MA students, participated in the workshop.

What took place during the workshop was that the students were greeted with two cats in the studio space; they proceeded to do what cats do: walking, jumping, resting, around the studio. A film was playing on a large screen, a film about Johnny Cash. Students were invited to draw, whatever they wanted in terms of subject, and however they wanted to, to fulfil what they understood "drawing" to mean.

Eriko Hirashima's Bookbinding Workshop 9th Oct to 10th Oct 2014

Students were introduced to the history and culture of bookbinding through an artist's talk by Eriko Hirashima. Each book's writings, binding or building technique reflects on the era. Eriko also touched on books' development as an art form, and bookbinding as a form of study.

Selected students attended her workshop, which introduced the steps of French binding.

When asked which is better, hand-binding or machine-binding, Eriko pointed out there is no "better" method, but rather it depends on what type of binding method the book is best suited for. To manually bind allows for more complex and intricate ways of customisation and binding. Manual way of binding also has a handicraft/personal aesthetic to it.

Attending the workshop made me able to appreciate the art of bookbinding. It was fascinating to learn how books are bound and reinforced.