

DISSOLVING MARGINS

Gallery 1  
Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore  
LASALLE College of the Arts  
20 October 2018 – 22 January 2019

**Artists**  
Eng Kai Er  
Camille Henrot  
James T Hong  
Tara Kelton  
Darius Ou

The title of this exhibition is inspired by scenes from the novel *My brilliant friend* (2011) by Elena Ferrante. One of the novel's protagonists, Raffaella 'Lila' Cerullo, experiences multiple episodes of 'dissolving margins': psychosomatic events in which her mind and body fuse with her surroundings. In these moments of flux, Lila questions the moral integrity of her family and friends, whose violent character she sees as if for the first time.

**Curator**  
Melanie Pocock

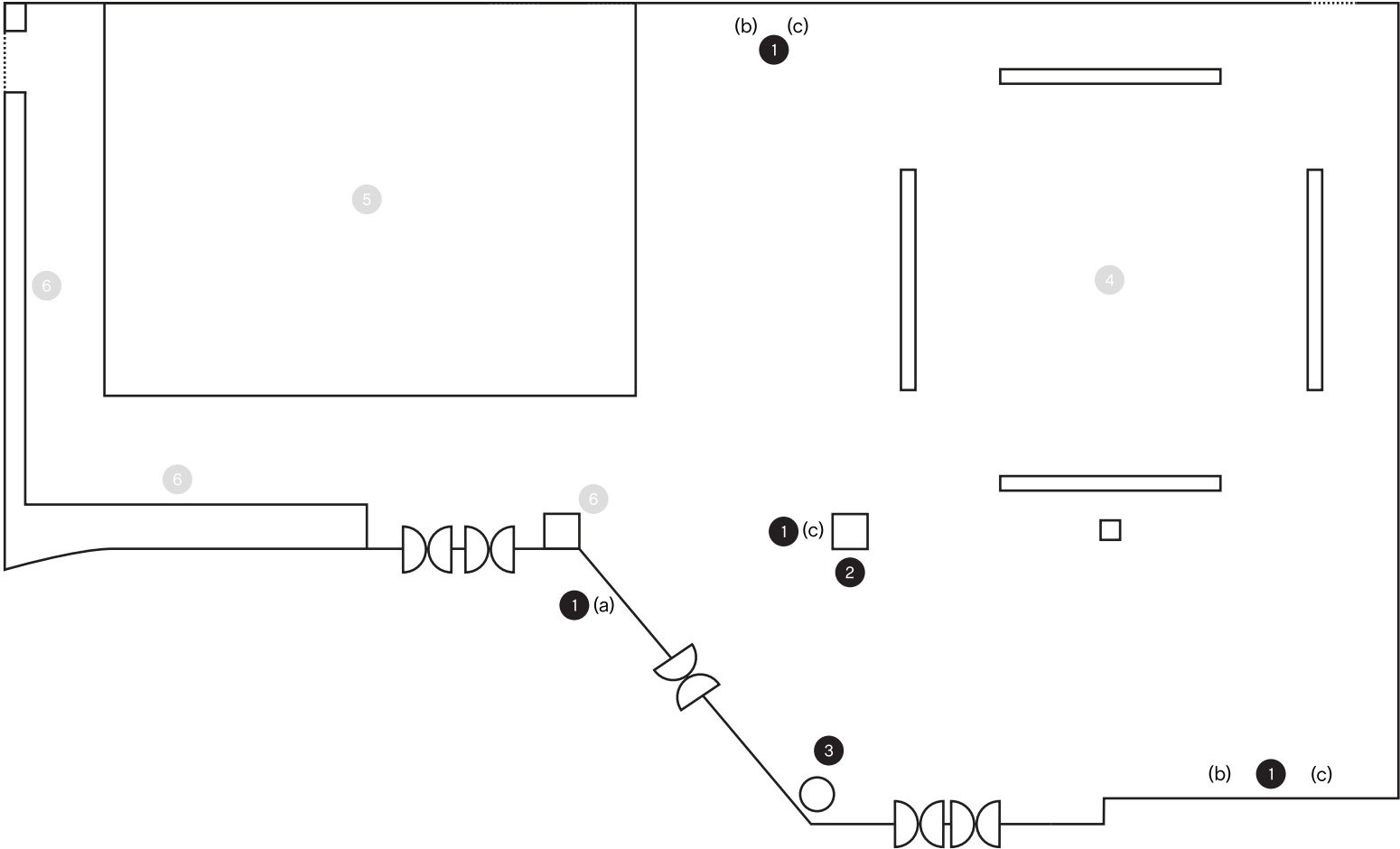
In the exhibition, large-scale installations, prints, video and performance by five international and Singaporean artists immerse viewers in experiences of dissolving margins. Bridging physical and digital formats, the works show the ways in which distinctions between people, cultures, and material and virtual worlds are disappearing—in online communication, contemporary design and philosophy. The works also explore what results from these dissolving distinctions: loss of identity, loss of agency, and variable concepts of 'right' and 'wrong'.

In Camille Henrot's installation *Office of unreplyed emails* (2016–17), viewers are invited to walk around oversized prints of hundreds of spam emails received by Henrot along with her proposed responses. Darius Ou's project, *Autotypography*

(2012–13), transforms four gallery walls into a clashing wallpaper of colours, texts, images and digital animations with 365 posters that employ 'ugly' design. In works by Tara Kelton, we see disjointed texts, portraits and visual simulations created by online workers and 3D visualisation studios based in Bengaluru, India's 'silicon plateau'. In James T Hong's four-channel video installation, *Nietzsche reincarnated as a Chinese woman and their shared lives* (2016–18), viewers encounter an epic clash between Eastern and Western moral philosophies, where scenes of multiplying cells, writhing insects and butchered animals embody contemporary herd mentalities.

A new work by Singaporean dancer and choreographer Eng Kai Er has been developed for the exhibition. In her performance, *Compressible sentiments* (2018), Eng takes the inflatable *Jurassic World* T-Rex costume—a famous Internet meme—and turns it into a projection of human anxieties.

*Dissolving margins* is the third group exhibition exploring paradoxical aesthetics and their sociopolitical implications curated by Melanie Pocock for the ICA Singapore's Gallery 1. The previous exhibitions were *Native revisions* (2017) and *Countershadows (tactics in evasion)* (2014).



List of works

Dimensions are given as height preceding width

**1 Tara Kelton**  
Born Arlington, USA, 1981; lives Bengaluru

*Still life with a curtain*, 2015  
(a) digital print on adhesive vinyl,  
(b) 3 digital prints mounted on foam board,  
(c) 4 digital prints (texts) mounted on foam board  
(a)–(b) 63 x 86 cm, (c) 23 x 30.5 cm  
Courtesy the artist and GALLERYYSKE, Bengaluru

*Still life with a curtain* presents the results of a two-stage process which began when Tara Kelton supplied online workers with a digital image of a famous painting by Paul Cezanne and paid them to write descriptions. Kelton then engaged 3D visualisation studios in Bengaluru to create digital simulations of the workers' texts.

While the texts and images describe and depict various objects of the original painting—oranges, tablecloth, a leaf-patterned curtain—the lengths of the texts and the colours and forms of the objects in the images vary. In the texts, elements of the painting are described in ways that merge foreground and background details. Where in the original Cezanne, two plates of oranges sit on a table in front of a curtain, in one of the texts, the plates are described as a 'basket of oranges' and the curtain is not mentioned. In the studios' images, coloured and neutral backdrops, and 3D-rendered objects create a surreal effect that skews perspectives and proportions in the painting.

On one wall, viewers see two of the workers' texts displayed next to two of the studios' images. The relationship between the texts and the images is a matter of speculation. On another wall, viewers see an image displayed next to the text from which it was generated.

**2 Autoportrait**, 2012  
digital video documentation of custom-made software, silent  
16:18 minutes  
Courtesy the artist and GALLERYYSKE, Bengaluru

This video presents a selection of moments captured during the running of a software developed by Tara Kelton with two software programmers. The software—which Kelton ran 15 times from 23 December 2011 to 1 January 2012 for an approximate duration of 20 minutes each time—enabled online workers on the human resource platform Amazon Mechanical Turk to make drawings via a digital interface. The digital interface was embedded into a request page set up by Kelton. In her request page, Kelton asked workers to create a self-portrait for a fee.

In the video, we see moments when workers accepted Kelton's request. The lines of the workers' drawings intersect and merge with portraits drawn by workers who accepted the task at the same time. At times, viewers see an empty screen; moments when no workers took up the task.

**3 Eng Kai Er**  
Born Singapore 1984, lives Singapore

*Compressible sentiments*, 2018

high-definition digital video, 9:16 aspect ratio,  
colour, sound  
5:02 minutes  
Filmed and edited by Lee Wong

Performance, 40 minutes (approx.)  
Saturday 20 October, 3:00 pm  
Wednesday 31 October, 1:00 pm  
Wednesday 7 November, 3:00 pm  
Saturday 17 November, 3:00 pm  
Thursday 17 January, 7:00 pm

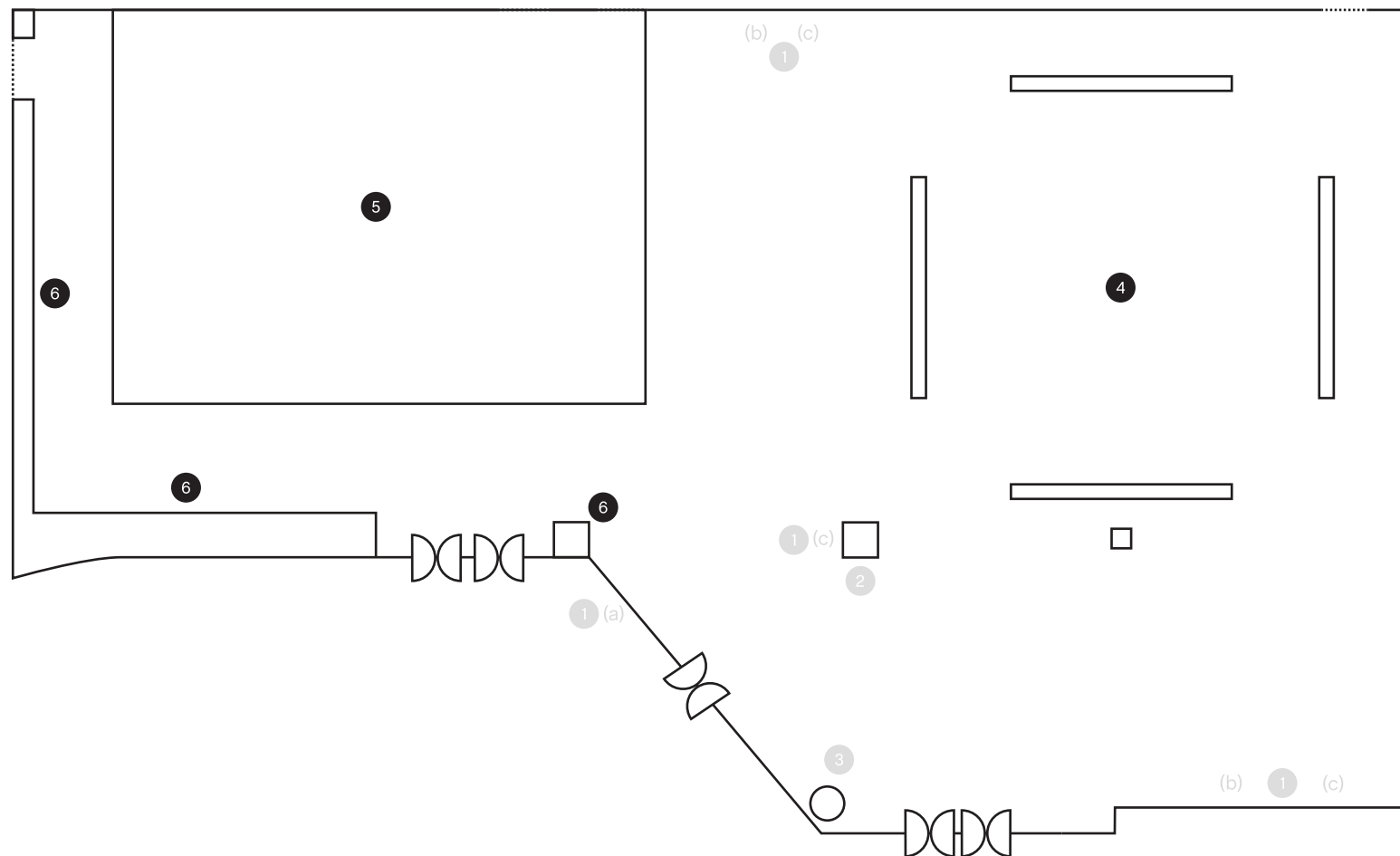
Courtesy the artist

*Compressible sentiments* is a video and performance in which Eng Kai Er explores the identity of a T-Rex costume featured in hundreds of videos on the Internet.

The costume was created by costume company Rubie's to promote the release of the film *Jurassic World* in 2015. When worn, the costume has a hilarious effect: its limited width causes wearers to waddle and the costume's huge, inflated head to sway from side to side. These funny effects of the costume inspired a number of people to record themselves doing stunts while wearing it, and posting the videos online. While some of the videos show people doing everyday tasks, other videos feature ambitious gymnastic feats or sinister acts like slamming the boot of a car onto the head of the costume.

In her performance, Eng demonstrates the effects of the costume through movements that engage with the architecture of the gallery and its glass façade. She also highlights the anthropomorphic quality of the costume and its online identity in gestures mimicking human feelings and actions. A text displayed on a laptop communicates the 'voice' of the T-Rex and the latter's 'abuse' in videos.

In the video, we see Eng performing with and without the costume in cafes, streets and bus stations in Singapore, and in her community-run studio, Make It Share It. In her performance Eng shows the awkward movements required to manoeuvre the costume that are usually invisible to viewers.



**4 James T Hong**  
Born USA 1970, lives Taipei

*Nietzsche reincarnated as a Chinese woman and their shared lives*, 2016–18  
4-channel high-definition digital video installation, 16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound  
video duration: 28:32 minutes, pause: 1:28 minutes  
Adapted from a live performance first presented at the 10th Taipei Biennial in 2016  
Courtesy the artist

In *Nietzsche reincarnated as a Chinese woman and their shared lives*, filmmaker James T Hong imagines multiple reincarnations of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. In the work, viewers encounter the various souls and beings in which Nietzsche has been reincarnated following his death—a single-cell organism, invertebrate, insect, worm and a Chinese woman. These entities and reincarnations are represented in footage filmed by Hong of Nietzsche's grave in Germany, microscopic views of cells and writhing insects, and scenes of urban life in contemporary China. A female Chinese voiceover accompanies the images, and summarises Nietzsche's moral philosophy and its conflicting relationship to East Asian morals. Alongside the voiceover viewers hear music from Giuseppe Verdi's

opera *Don Carlos* (1867), which binds the images and voiceover into a flowing sequence.

The four video channels—projected onto four perpendicular screens—enclose viewers, and give them a feeling of being surrounded by their images and the voiceover. The rectangular arrangement of the screens prevents viewers inside the installation from seeing more than two of the four videos at any one time.

**5 Camille Henrot**  
Born Paris 1978, lives New York

*Office of unreplyed emails*, 2016–17  
digital prints on silicone, wooden racks, rubber floor covering  
digital prints: various dimensions, wooden racks: each 23.2 x 10.2 x 56 cm, rubber floor covering: 1194 x 1615 cm  
installation dimensions variable  
Courtesy the artist and KÖNIG GALERIE, Berlin

*Office of unreplyed emails* comprises hundreds of oversized prints of spam emails received by Camille Henrot along with her proposed responses written in collaboration with poet Jacob Bromberg. These unsent replies are each printed

twice: once on white silicone and once on translucent silicone. Positioned near each set of responses is the spam email to which they correspond, printed in colour on white silicone. The remaining spam emails are draped over a succession of wooden racks affixed to a wall over 8 metres long.

The installation confronts viewers with masses of text that is usually only read online. The enlarged scale of each printed message emphasises the insistent nature of spam. These emails—the majority of which come from organisations and NGOs to which Henrot is subscribed—trigger various responses: empathy, desire, and feelings of bombardment. Their superficially personal tone—created through the use of subscribers' private data—also provokes mixed feelings of engagement and remove.

These diverse reactions are expressed in Henrot's responses, which are written in an elaborate calligraphy that has been digitally scanned and printed. While questioning the integrity of the spam, the replies also contain witticisms, anecdotes and philosophical reflections. Their many and various tones reflect the confusion created by auto-generated spam emails, in which—to quote Henrot—'personal problems and global and collective concerns become enmeshed'. Their author—'Camille'—is a fictional character inspired by the meticulous protagonist of Paul Valéry's novel *Monsieur Teste* (1896) and O'Molloy, a figure in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) who, while passive, possesses a genuine desire to act upon injustice.

**6 Darius Ou**  
Born Singapore 1993, lives Singapore

*Autotypography*, 2012–13  
348 digital prints on wallpaper, 17 digital animations screened on 12 iPads  
various dimensions and durations  
Preparation of print files assisted by Yvonn Ong  
Courtesy the artist

*Autotypography* presents 365 posters created over a year by graphic designer Darius Ou. The posters originate from a brief that Ou set himself—to design a poster every single day for a year. The posters use various techniques of 'ugly' design: the misalignment of images and text, 'incorrect' visualisations of dimensions, and the stretching of text to the point of illegibility. Many of the posters have phrases that critique tendencies of mainstream design ('the important thing is not necessarily pretty'). Other posters contain maxims exploring ethical quandaries ('crossing the line is never fine'). The sheer variety of aesthetics and texts across the posters creates a feeling of conceptual chaos that collapses forms and dimensions.

348 of the posters are digital images printed in various sizes from A4 to A1. The sizes of the posters mostly reflect their original formats: the majority of the smaller posters are pixel-based images (with a limited resolution), while the larger posters were made using a scalable vector graphics format. Their different sizes also reflect aesthetic decisions by Ou to increase or decrease the size of the posters according to the effect of their designs. Seventeen of the posters are digital animations, which are displayed on iPads. The display of the posters mirrors the multiple layers of advertising hoardings. The posters are arranged across four walls in a loose chronological sequence, which begins on the wall closest to the gallery's main entrance.

The *Dissolving margins* e-catalogue can be downloaded from the ICA Singapore's publication page:  
<http://www.lasalle.edu.sg/institute-of-contemporary-arts-sg/publications/>

Supported by

CULTURAL  
MATCHING  
FUND

Camille Henrot's work is supported by

INSTITUT  
FRANÇAIS  
SINGAPOUR



NPE

KÖNIG GALERIE



Printed by HP Latex 360 using HP PVC-free wallpaper

Darius Ou's work is supported by

