

Bright S'pore(s)

PRIMO MARELLA GALLERY

The “Little Red Dot” becoming a Red Hot Home for Art

Jim Amberson

Singapore was once referred to as nothing more than a “little red dot” by BJ Habibie, the former President of Indonesia;¹ a famous quip which became a *cause célèbre* and embraced as unique identity for this city-state that is geographically dwarfed by its big neighbour to the south, the fourth-most-populous country in the world, Indonesia, and across the causeway to the north, Malaysia, from whom it separated in 1965. Despite, or perhaps because of its diminutive size and small population, Singapore embarked upon a path to establish itself as a ‘hub’. This approach successfully establish Singapore as a regional financial centre, logistics centre, trading platform and educational centre. Thereby attracting scores of multinational enterprises, professionals, technicians, academics, financiers, thinkers, capitalists and intellectuals to its shores. Singapore is the clear regional hub for Southeast Asia in many fields with a vibrant young multi-cultural society that embraces globalization.

The Singapore Art Museum (SAM) opened in January 1996, with a mission to focus upon the modern and contemporary art of Southeast Asia² referring to the countries who are members of the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN)³. This mission is consistent with Singapore’s role as a cultural hub for the countries of Southeast Asia and differs from museums or venues in other Southeast Asian countries which tend to focus solely upon the artists or artwork produced in their own country. Ironically, my first visit to Singapore coincided with the opening of SAM, although I distinctly remember the news reports, I did not attend the events, my reason for visiting Singapore was for business, the almost single-minded business focus was pervasive at that time leaving little time for art. I was transferred to Singapore in 1998, to confront the challenges and opportunities of the time as Asian countries were emerging from the currency crisis which challenged the economic miracle of the ‘Tiger Economies’. Singapore emerged stronger and well-engaged internationally.

At this time the art market was dominated by the large international auction houses, who focused on early to mid-twentieth century art produced in Southeast Asia although not exclusively produced by Southeast Asians. There was an significant focus upon European artists who had produced work in Southeast Asia, called the ‘Indo-European’ Artists such as Rudolf Bonnet, Willem Gerard Hofker, Romualdo Frederico Locatelli, Adrien Jean Le Mayeur de Merprès and Walter Spies; as well as, the Vietnamese artists who had graduated from *École Supérieure des Beaux Arts de l’Indochine* during the French Colonial Period such as Le Pho, Vu Cao Dam and Mai Trung Thu who had emigrated to France and

produced the majority of their work in Europe. The Indo-Europeans were complemented by the early modern national masters of individual countries such as Affandi, Hendra Gunawan, Sudjojono and LEE Man Fong⁴ from Indonesia; Fernando Cueto Amorsolo, Juan Luna and Anita Magsaysay-Ho from the Philippines. The few Singapore artists that were available through the immensely-powerful auction houses were the members of the *Nanyang* style, meaning “south seas”. These were artists of Chinese background who immigrated to Singapore in the early twentieth century. Key figures were Georgette CHEN, CHEN Wen Hsi, CHEONG Soo Pieng and Liu KANG.

Contemporary artists from Southeast Asia and in particular Singapore were virtually absent in the auction market. Galleries who represented contemporary works focused upon artists from China, India and other Southeast Asian countries, it was rare to see an exhibition of Singaporean artists in the commercial galleries in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s. The few galleries who tried were shortly shuttered.

In the middle of the 2000’s, opportunities to see engaging contemporary practice became more prevalent. The first Singapore Biennial in 2006 presented contemporary art in prominent manner, not without some controversy over censorship⁵; however, contemporary artists were provided increased access to venues for exhibition. In 2008, the Singapore International Photography Festival (SIPF) commenced as a non-profit biennial, creating a platform to exhibit photographic art from across Southeast Asia as well as, creating mentorship opportunities for photographers⁶. This may be considered as the period in which the institutional infrastructure for contemporary art in Singapore was firmly established. It was an exciting yet very frustrating time to be a collector of contemporary art based in Singapore. The excitement seemed to be focused upon artists based outside of Singapore - the cutting-edge exhibitions were in Jakarta, Jogjakarta, Manila or Bangkok. Galleries in Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand exhibited artist from their own countries; whereas Singapore presented art from the region meaning its neighbours rather than home-grown artists. In order for Singaporean artists to have an opportunity to be shown at home, they already had to compete with peers from across the region. Singapore was an important venue to see Asian art; as well as additional role of being the venue for the secondary market.

In the following years, Singapore became much more exciting venue to view art produced from across Asia, as well as Singapore. In 2011, Art Stage Singapore was launched,

drawing leading galleries from across the globe, although with a strong representation of works from neighbouring countries. Provocative exhibitions were held at commercial galleries as well as, artist pop-up and university spaces. The *Singapore Survey* series were particularly memorable. This series was staged at the Singapore branch of a Malaysian-based and owned gallery. Exciting exhibitions in this series included *The Air Conditioned Recession*; *Beyond LKY*, a reference to political patriarch, the first Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Kun Yew; and, *Imagine Malaysia*, which explored the cross-straits tensions and divergent practices between Singapore and Malaysia⁷. As I toured the various venues of the 2011 Singapore Biennial, I was pleasantly surprised that, for me personally, the most compelling work was an installation with video by a young Singaporean artist: no small feat considering the quality of the participants from across the globe!⁸ Singaporean artists were establishing themselves as a unique voice.

In 2013, the National Museum of Singapore held an exhibition entitled *A Changed World*, which included a quotation from Singapore artist Liu Kang: "Where is the centre of Southeast Asian Art? Southeast Asian Art needs a centre to be the leader of the pack. Where is the art centre? I say it is Singapore."⁹ From an institutional perspective Singapore already was the centre of art for the region: SAM, SIPP, Singapore Biennale, LaSalle School of Arts Institute of Contemporary Arts, Art Stage and NTU's Centre for Contemporary Arts at Gillman Barracks.¹⁰ The more provocative question was the institutional hardware was in place but where were the Singapore Artists in the scenario?

In December 2013, selections of works from my collection were included with three other collectors in an exhibition curated by Rogue Art of Malaysia held at Helu-Trans Art Space in Singapore. During the collectors and curators panel discussion, a member of the audience queried the lack of Singapore artists in the exhibition, especially bearing in mind the comments by Liu Kang. I replied that, I did have works by Singapore Artists but they simply had not been included in the exhibition. I continued that Singapore and Art could be to a certain extent comparable to Wimbledon, which retains its position as the pre-eminent title in the tennis calendar, despite the fact that British tennis players had not won this Grand Slam event for decades up until the 2013 win by Andy Murray. The lack of British winners did not dilute the importance of the match. Similarly, Singapore benefits as venue due to the high quality of art from artists from across the region in individual and institutional collections. Therefore, when Singapore artists are added to the collections of individuals and institutions in Singapore they are joining collections of very high quali-

ty: patronage based not upon nationality but by meritocracy.¹¹

Many young Singaporean artists are engaged in new media, performance or installation-based practices which tend to be more geared toward institutional as opposed to private individual collectors; therefore, SAM's patronage has been critical for supporting this exciting work. Others have been to establishing a reputation outside of Singapore, commercial exhibitions, participating in residencies or biennales in Europe, North America or other Asia-Pacific locations developing a distinctively global language that is pervasive in the works of Singaporean artists.

Singapore has been identified as one of the new cities which are replacing traditional artistic centres as a new home for distinct innovative cutting-edge contemporary practices. The unique blend of highly educated, multi-cultural, globally-engaged, youthful, gifted artists are establishing themselves and Singapore as an exciting 'red hot' hub for art. The artists in this exhibition are a prelude to this distinctive voice.

References

¹ BJ Habibie in Asian Wall Street Journal, 4 August 1988

² Singapore Art Museum, www.singaporeartmuseum.sg/Overview

³ ASEAN, founded in 1967 with member countries Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Subsequently membership was expanded to include Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar (Burma) and Vietnam.

⁴ LEE Man Fong was born in Guangdong, China. Spent his adolescent in Singapore, as well as much of his adulthood but became an Indonesian citizen and the art advisor to Indonesia's first president Sukarno, who used art as a tool to create an Indonesian National identity following independence from the Dutch. His personal history has similarities with the Nanyang group. It is contentious whether he is considered as a Chinese, Indonesian or Singaporean artist; perhaps the contention is due to the legacy and importance of his oeuvre.

⁵ ArtAsia Pacific, Issue 76, November – December 2011. Art and Censorship in Singapore: Catch 22?

⁶ Singapore International Photography Festival, www.sipf.sg

⁷ Valentine Willie Fine Arts, Singapore. August 2009; August 2010; and August 2011, respectively. Although the 2011, exhibition was somewhat more Malaysian in orientation.

⁸ *All Lines Flow Out* (2011) was a thought-provoking video installation and by Charles Lim Yi Yong, in which he explores the drain canal (*longkang*) system in Singapore that connects the city to the sea. This work was subsequently show at the 68th Venice International Film Festival.

⁹ Enin Supriyanto, commenting upon contextualizing *Southeast Asian Art in Helu-Trans Collectors Series – Southeast Asia*, 2014, page 121.

¹⁰ Gillman Barracks is a contemporary arts cluster that is home to 16 international art galleries and the Centre for Contemporary Arts.

¹¹ *Helu-Trans Collectors Series – Southeast Asia*, 2014, page 126.

¹² Anatawan I. Byrd and Reid Shier, *Art Cities of the Future - 21st-Century Avant-Gardes*, Phaidon, 2013.

Artists

The Forest Speaks Back

Donna Ong

This is a story about the tropical forest. It is a story of the men and women who ventured from colder climates to explore, conquer and exploit the abundant resources found in these fertile new lands. It tells of how they grew to love, and hate, this place, and how their narratives, illustrations and perspectives founded the contrary views we have of the tropics today – warm and abundant, but ridden with disease and decay; fertile and lush, yet overpowering and out of control; full of exotic species that are beautiful but deadly, and natives who are friendly and sensual, yet lazy and morally lax. These assumptions also extend to the expectations surrounding the idea of a tropical aesthetic with its ubiquitous palm-trees, luxuriant forests and exotic wildlife.

Yet this is also a story told from the other side – by the locals living within the tropics. It is an account of their dissatisfaction with these assumptions and their struggle to question and defy the tropical stereotype. Eventually, some bow to the seemingly inevitable, in time even transforming their physical landscape and population to better fit the clichés. Others choose to challenge these definitions, actively making decisions to transcend the labels placed upon them.

The narrative ends with a tropical island's quest to define and construct its own

national identity. A former British colony, Singapore is a fascinating case study: with her shrewd use of tropical conventions, she has built a public image that, while leveraging upon the positive aspects of the tropical stereotype, deliberately minimises or refutes the negative. Since her independence in 1965, this small city has experienced rapid growth and her landscape has changed dramatically. Instead of the crowded slums and tropical plantations of yesteryear, the island is now home to sleek highways, soaring skyscrapers, and meticulously planned housing developments. Here, urban planning and renewal is almost a national obsession; every detail carefully considered and developed. For instance, the frequent and prominent use of tropical plants around the city stems from a request made in 1988 by then Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, for the planting of *"palm trees to distinguish us from other places... These palms will make it known that this is the Tropics, the equator, the exotic East."* The request resulted in the planting of hundreds of palm trees along the highway leading to and from the airport as well as the preferential use of tropical plants in the island's constructed landscapes.

Yet despite catering to colonial assumptions in its choice of plant species, Singapore's greening policy defies the standard readings that depict the tropics as being

somehow “untouched” and “unspoilt”. Shrubs and trees are arranged in strict geometry and require constant effort to maintain. The newest public project, Gardens by the Bay, is a good case in point. Plants are nurtured within a highly regulated greenhouse environment, nestled within structures that are themselves powerful feats of engineering. The prodigious coordination, skill and exertion required to maintain the Gardens by the Bay project – in fact, Singapore’s entire greening project – are evidence of Singapore’s endeavour to conquer unruly nature and present an identity that both refutes and rises above conventional colonial expectations.



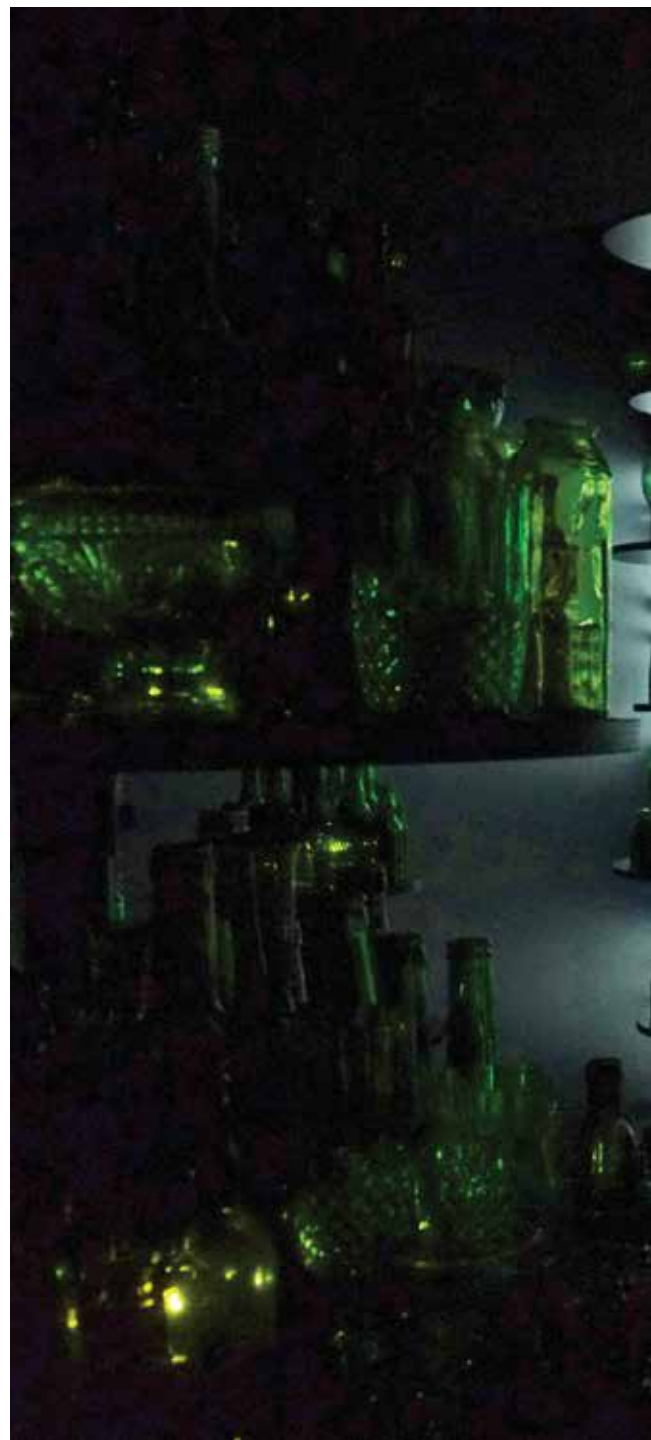
Letters From a Forest, 2014
wooden boxes, acrylic, cut illustrations,
LED lights, found objects and furniture
approx. 150 x 100 x 160 cm







The Forest Speaks Back, 2014
wooden boxes, acrylic, cut illustrations,
LED lights, found objects and furniture
Künstlerhaus Bethanien







And We Were Like Those Who Dream
(Cocoon #7), 2012-2013
paper cuts-out, wood, acrylic, LED li-
ghboxes and furniture, 51 x 81 x 46 cm



The Promise (VII), 2012-2013
paper cuts-out, 3 wooden frames,
butterflies, variable dimension





And We Were Like Those Who Dream
(Cocoon #4), 2012-2013
Paper cuts-out, wood, acrylic, LED li-
ghboxes and furniture, 52 x 65 x 33 cm

Gift #17, #19, 2012-2013
chest, paper cuts, plexiglas



The Point Outside

Michele Galletti

for the *Glacier Study Group* of the Institute of Critical Zoologists

Arctic. The term comes from the ancient Greek *αρκτος*, meaning Bear, referring to the Ursa Major (Big Dipper) and Ursa Minor (Little Dipper) constellations, the latter comprising the North Star, Polaris, or Alpha Ursae Minoris. Being so inaccessible to humans, the Arctic was named after the sky above it, not after any terrestrial feature. It is probably a coincidence that the most iconic arctic animal is actually a bear, the polar bear.

Most arctic fauna is white. Arctic colors are delicate. White ice, dark night, azure skies, blue-green sea ice pack. Delicate but never dull. The ice blocks of the sea pack synthesize the chromatic universe of the shades of blue.

Colors leave traces on the spirits of animals. The symphony of grey, blue and turquoise harmonics engenders quiet introspection, chromatic meditations in the white northern expanses.

Every physical color is a specific spectrum, an infinite combination of harmonics over the visible range of electromagnetic radiation, with wavelengths between 400 and 800 nm. A physical color is a point in an infinite dimensional vector space (known as Hilbert space).

The cones and rods in the human retina decompose the spectrum of a physical co-

lor into three discrete channels: red, yellow and blue, the primary colors. Therefore, the color perceived by a human eye is a point in a 3-dimensional Euclidean vector space (known as R^3). The red, yellow and blue channels can be combined together, yielding an infinite array of colors.

Yet, the colors obtainable from the three perceptible channels, even though infinite, are still infinitely less than all possible physical colors, all possible light spectra of the corresponding Hilbert space. In the perception of colors, animals project physical colors into their own perception of reality. Such projection misses infinite dimensions of infinity. Like looking at a single point of a photograph. Embedded in this limited perception framework, lies the reality perceived by animals.

In the photographs of the *Glacier Study Group*, this lack of sensitivity propagates to the subconscious instinct for the wild. Humans needed satellite observations to quantify shrinking Arctic ice. The Arctic ecosystem had to be monitored from the outside to comprehend its dynamics. Twentieth century science had to indicate what is in balance and what is imbalanced, like if humans had no inner eye for the ecosystems they inhabit, no subconscious connection to it.

The scary detachment from the natural

world is transfigured in the red rubber boat, a chromatic outlier, and in the naked swimming man, a thermal outlier. The red rubber boat stands out chromatically, and even though embedded in the Arctic landscape, it is fully unaware of the reality surrounding it. The incapability of perceiving the full spectrum of physical colors transduces into the terror of not knowing what the ecosystem will evolve into. Something is happening without being directly perceived. Ice is melting and glaciers recede.

An uneasy sense of quietness pervades the silent solitude of the Arctic. The eponymous animal is scarily aware that some structural inner balance of his ecosystem is broken. He does not know how or why, but is pervaded by the same fear of the unperceived, unknown, unfolding reality.

The photographs put forth outlying elements as a prayer for the expansion of the perceptive landscape, a shamanic dream of respectful ecosystem balance, lost in the flamboyant colors of the artificial.

The *Glacier Study Group* and the Institute of Critical Zoologists are fictional science institutions created by artist Robert Zhao Renhui (b. 1983) to investigate the control humans try to have on ecosystems (specifically on animals), the degree of truth of information as it propagates across the

media, and the impact that real and/or fake information ultimately does have on reality. His works often involve hyperrealist images manipulated with the introduction of fictional elements.

Michele Galletti (1978, Bologna, Italy) is a professional scientist and research engineer with focus on radar meteorology and climatology. He specializes in polarimetric radars for weather observation, including severe storms and Arctic clouds. Besides science, he collaborates with artists, galleries and institutions as a contemporary art critic, artist assistant engineer and art fabricator. He focuses on contemporary artworks at the intersections of art, science, technology and computer science. He worked with Primo Marella gallery as an art critic for the "Images du Future" and "Bright S'pore(s)" exhibitions and with the International Studio & Curatorial Program (ISCP) in Brooklyn as assistant engineer for artists in residence. Recent collaborative works include Michelle-Marie Letelier's "Offshoring Pathways" (technical assistance) and "The Prediction of Tarapaca" (critic text).

Inside the Chamber of Spectacles... Or Outside It

Louis Ho

Robert Zhao's latest project is a freak show.

There is an image of a luminous piscine presence, for one, glowing like a sliver of lime-green neon against a pitch-dark backdrop. The text notes that it is a "zebrafish encoded with a green fluorescent protein originally extracted from a jellyfish [which] was developed by a team of scientists in Singapore ... " A bunch of man-made grapes sits on a pedestal, synthetic produce developed from "gelatin, grape flavouring and artificial colours", and "passed off as real grapes in roadside markets in China." And then there is a supposedly unbreakable egg: "A company in Japan has developed a technique to create eggs that are so strong that they cannot be broken ... created by adding plant protein of a banyan tree to a chicken, thus creating an egg with a bark-like texture."

These are a small sampling of the objects featured in Zhao's (b. 1983) contemporary take on the "wunderkammer", or cabinet of curiosities, titled *A Guide to the Flora and Fauna of the World*. Located on an upper level of the Peranakan Museum, the installation assumes the form of a self-contained white cube. (It is accompanied by three standalone images on an adjacent wall, which are not considered in the present essay.) Unlike the chambers of yore, though, Zhao's "kammer" keeps the viewer at bay: our only means of access to

the objects within is through the defensive auspices of a plate-glass window — we can see, but we are certainly unable to touch. And just what do we espy?

One side of the space is given over to photographic plates: arranged in a grid are images of various forms of zoological and botanical life, ranging from the phosphorescent zebrafish, to the world's smallest man-made frog, to fake beef, to a square apple and a head of venomous cabbage. Next to the plates are several three-dimensional objects, including a remote-controlled mechanical cockroach, a banana bonsai plant, and a small pile of moon dust (the powdered remains of insects incinerated by street lamps); displayed along the other wall are the artificial grapes, a number of genetically modified eggs, as well as a peanut that purportedly does not rot.

What the viewer is confronted with, here, is a spectacle of nurtured nature: a taxonomy of fauna and flora altered by human engineering, a visual encyclopedia of the victims of human civilization and its interventions. Where the "wunderkammer" proffered a cornucopia of the unidentified, the unclassified and the downright bizarre, Zhao presents instead the evidence of our interference in the natural world, documenting the disruptions inflicted upon evolutionary and biological processes by

the needs of homo sapiens. Or does he?

The installation certainly seems informed by an aesthetic of clinical objectivity. The interior is, in the manner of a hospital or a laboratory, painted a stark, pristine shade of white and evenly lit by fluorescent lights, banishing almost all shadows from the setting and rendering the space and its contents cleanly, uniformly open to the viewer's gaze. The contents are likewise documented and depicted in ways that demonstrate an empirical approach: images are shot head-on, in a coolly impersonal manner, with the composition shorn of all extraneous elements and the only discernible aesthetic adornment provided by a pastel-hued background; objects are simply set atop plinths. For instance, a pair of the world's smallest man-made frogs — "about 0.5cm long", according to the text, and able to "leap up to a height of 10cm" — are posed against a mint-green background, and depicted life-size, at a scale so diminished that the subjects elude all but close-up scrutiny. The square apple, created by "stunting ... [its] growth in glass cubes", likewise rests blandly in the middle of its coral-pink setting, as do the eggs and the grapes, the solitary peanut and the little pile of moon dust. If, as a pair of scholars writing about the hothouses and winter gardens of the nineteenth century tell us, these highly regulated environments of exotic flora from distant lands were a

demonstration that "Nature could be controlled, and not just for immediately useful purposes", then Zhao's own little chamber of mutant spectacles represents the dystopian underside of that experiment — the subject finally, irrevocably altering to meet the desired result. It all seems perfectly dispassionate, detached, disinterested.

Yet, as is so often the case with Zhao's work, appearances are deceptive ...

... For appearances are all the viewer has to go on with. The distance enacted between the images and objects within the white cube, and the audience confined to the exterior beyond the glass window, functions as the key component of the installation. Here, physical distance translates into an epistemological obstruction: the act of keeping the viewer at arm's length, the restriction of intimate, tactile access to the contents of the chamber, correlates to the limitation of our knowledge of these objects. Like the little match girl of Hans Anderson's story, we are left out in the cold, both spatially and perceptually.

The indestructible peanut, for one, a lonely little presence on a pedestal set by the far wall, turns out to be something less than an organic entity. Zhao's text informs us that this particular plant was "injected with the DNA of a lobster to create a

peanut that will never rot”, since “lobsters, known for their relatively long lives of up to 70 years, have the telomerase enzyme in their bodies.” The actual object entombed within the structure, however, is really a clever wooden replica of a peanut, a small gewgaw, which the artist casually mentions he picked up in a souvenir shop in Hong Kong.

The unbreakable egg with “a bark-like texture” is yet another wooden imitation, while the bunch of ersatz grapes, supposedly created from gelatin in an effort to fool consumers in China, is synthetic in a whole other way here. What Zhao has put on display is really plastic fruit, the sort of ornament one finds on a trellis along with fake creepers and faux vines, passing off one form of forgery for another.

Incredibly enough, one of the few examples of an authentic specimen in the installation manages to fool the viewer into thinking it is something else altogether. What looks to be an image of three tiny, almost indiscernible organisms is in fact a trio of actual tiger mosquitoes, mounted on a board similar to the photographic plates in the series.*

In the manner of a filmic narrative, the artist’s manipulation of the gaze, allowing us only remote optical access to his images and objects — and even then set at one

remove — obliges the viewer to suspend all sense of disbelief. Zhao’s practice has always been premised on a slippage between the factual and fictive, utilising both the camera’s instrumental neutrality and the photograph’s expressive potential. The physical configurations of *A Guide to the Flora and Fauna of the World* however, with its canny insertion of a material and cognitive barrier between art and audience, hints at its own conceptual framework situated in the gap between authenticity and artifice. Where Zhao’s photographic work has tended to slyly, obliquely suggest the constructed nature of its supposed objectivity, often relying on meta-textual clues to alert the viewer, the blatant strong-arming of the gaze in *A Guide* seems nearly to amount to a declaration of intent: one will perceive only as much as the artist permits, the inhibitory glass wall suggests. The spatial distancing of viewer from viewed, and the problems of knowledge therein engendered, foreground not just the thorny issues of taxonomic ontology (are peanuts sporting crustacean enzymes still considered legumes?), but the elusive nature of photographic veracity and visual representation — one form of doubt dovetailing with the other. Is Robert Zhao, after all, finally avowing his own sleights of hand?

**In the interest of full disclosure, this author was given the opportunity to interact with the objects in the artist's studio, prior to the setting up of the installation.*

The article "Inside the Chamber of Spectacles... or Outside It" first appeared in Article: The Singapore Biennale Review, December 2013, published by AICA SG (The International Association of Art Critics, Singapore).

Louis Ho is an art historian, critic and curator. Before joining the Singapore Art Museum, he taught classes on Southeast Asian art at a number of schools in Singapore, including the National Institute of Education, where he still lectures part-time. He has contributed articles and reviews to various publications, including Modern Chinese Literature and Culture and Art AsiaPacific.

Installation view at The Parankam Museum
A Guide to the Flora and Fauna of the World,
Commissioned by the Singapore Biennale



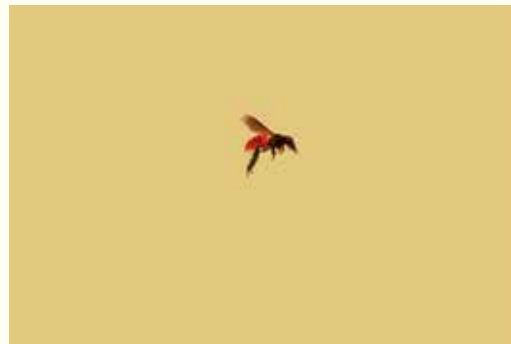


Set of Plates #9, #10, #16, #17 from
"A Guide to the Flora and Fauna of
the World", 2013
diasecs on forex, aluminum shelf,
36 x 54 cm each

Set of Plates #18, #19, #20, #21, #22
from "A Guide to the Flora and Fauna
of the World", 2013
diasecs on forex, aluminum shelf,
36 x 54 cm each

Set of Plates #2, #3, #4, #7 from
"A Guide to the Flora and Fauna of
the World", 2013
diasecs on forex, aluminum shelf,
36 x 54 cm each







Polar Bear
from "The Glacier Study Group", 2012
archival pigment print, 84 x 121 cm

Some Kind of Expedition
from "The Glacier Study Group", 2012
archival pigment print, 84 x 121 cm





Glacier Study Group #13
from "The Glacier Study Group", 2012
archival pigment print, 84 x 121 cm

Expedition #46
from "The Glacier Study Group", 2012
archival pigment print, 84 x 121 cm





Glacier Study Group #10
 from "The Glacier Study Group", 2012
 archival pigment print, 84 x 121 cm

Day 1
 from "The Glacier Study Group", 2012
 archival pigment print, 84 x 121 cm





Glacier Study Group #10
from "The Glacier Study Group", 2012
archival pigment print, 84 x 121 cm

Glacier Study Group #19
from "The Glacier Study Group", 2012
archival pigment print, 84 x 121 cm



The force of gravity: recasting modernism

Charles Merewether

Between the years 2010-2012, Jeremy Sharma worked on various approaches to painting, applying different materials including beeswax, oils, acrylic, enamel, lacquer, photographs and graphic computer-generated images. And while each path has been distinct, they resonated with the history of art and with that of painting. In many respects, this exploration has continued and yet the terms and references of engagement have dynamically changed.

The paintings of this period 2010-2012, when seen together, offered a space of exploration for their intersections, tensions and contradictions.¹ Through this work Sharma took risks, exploring, teasing, extending or pushing the boundaries of it as pure painting: turning and returning at a different angle, if only to move by virtue of layering, dis/closing and covering, scratching and erasing. At times, one material was applied and then another to erase the former. From its very beginning, the work seemed fascinated with its own negation: repetition, erasure, entropy, flirting with self-ruination as constitutive of the process of its own making, as if conditional of its foundation. You might say, this was, in other terms, a precarious form of risk management.

And yet, much of the painting by Sharma left a trace, a trace that became in turn something else. At times, we might say, the painting was itself nothing more than

a trace. This was purposeful, a recognition of imperfection, of a space resulting from that of a negotiation between the artist and the industrialization and technology of the practice, in this case, of painting. In some cases, gesture was utterly eliminated, in other cases, it was made evident to such a degree, that it disrupted the apparent purpose of the work. An example of this was Sharma's apparent monochrome paintings, painted grey or black.² Yes, monochrome at a distance. But once the viewer moved closer, she discovered irregularities in the surface, streaks, blemishes, dried drips along the edges. Like a Brice Marden painting of the Sixties, the drip serves as an indexical sign of the process. However, the difference in the work of Sharma was that this was not the purposeful result of the artist. Rather, it was the mark of a process that was evidence of the forces of gravity that defied the authorial role of the artist. Gravity ruled.

There was nothing else. And yet, while saying this, there was one constant, that is, the idea of narrative or of an external reference was denied. It was a subject whose agency is relegated to that of 'once upon a time,' a dream that is grounded by the laws of gravity. This was a kind of spirit life, nothing more or less than a trace. Running through all of this, was the idea of failure. Control cannot be entirely subject to the artist's determination. The artist comes after working with what is given. Hence,

there was a risk, always already a risk which was very real in one degree, conceptual in another.

What was important in the case of this body of work was the issue(s) or problematic of engagement. This should not be seen as foreclosing the matter of quality but, rather, of opening up the question as to how we judge the work. The question is, in part, developed with reference to the concept of variation, in a manner that recalls the music of John Cage. For Cage, each variation was a distinct work but, not in the manner of an improvisation. Rather, this variation was guided by an original score. In regard to the process Sharma initiates, it seemed that that which was painted became a marker of a variation which informed the options taken next. There was no going back but, always already forward.

The history of modernism could be rewritten in regard to both technological innovation and industrial production, alongside that of scientific discovery and research. We are reminded of the post World War Two era of Italian modernism and the work of Enrico Castellani, alongside Lucio Fontana, Piero Manzoni and Alberto Burri.³ Named 'paintings of light', Castellani explored new materials, such as the corrugated effect of industrially manufactured materials. And as with his Italian colleagues, an undervalued group of artists, they were at the forefront

of redefining contemporary practice in regards to a rapidly transforming urban and industrial modernity. This took them beyond painting. Or, comparatively, North American artists, such as Donald Judd who adopted factory-processed plastics and metals in which color was integral as distinct from hand-painted or, alternatively, John McCracken who moved away from paint on canvas to the use of fiberglass-coated wood.⁴ Both were engaged with showing the materiality of matter, its processes and language as distinct to the painterly of surface.

In 2014 Sharma exhibited a new suite of work in an exhibition at Primaes Noctis Gallery in Lugano, (Switzerland). () Some fifteen works were exhibited covering the years 2012-2014, showing a significant step had been taken. The new work included *I've Been Thinking About (forever)* (2013) and *To Here Knows When* (2013), both of which continue his engagement with the monochrome tradition. Commenting on the work, Sharma notes that it reflects "our monochromatic and automated world through their surfaces, reflections and textures."⁶ These works were generated by the employment of pre-fabrication and use of synthetic and common industrial materials, notably enamel paint, aluminum and composites. What is distinctive about the new work is the three-dimensional, almost sculptural, character of *I've Been Thinking*

About (forever) and, the incidence of black holes, disrupting the otherwise opaque, blue surface in *To Here Knows When*. These square, L-shaped or rectangular holes that appeared across the surface were based on pixel images of 'Dark matter' from the galaxy. Dark matter neither absorbs nor emits light or energy. They become the subject matter of the canvas, as if one is looking up at the azure sky at night across in which appear black holes. What we have seen is not there, what is there we do not see.

Sharma's engagement with both digital information and industrial materials broadened even further with other work of the period, notably the *Terra Sensa* series (2013) and a work *Grey/Terra Faktura (off white)* (2013) which will become the model for his later *Terra Faktura* series. The *Terra Sensa* series are made of cast polyurethane and polystyrene blocks while, the latter is made of enamel paint and ZP150 composite powder on aluminum composite. The *Terra Sensa* works are either white or a blue resembling the deep sea. As Sharma informs us, these works are a visual translation of electromagnetic radiation, emitted by pulsars or neutron dying stars recorded by satellites. In such terms, they are for Sharma about "time, light, matter, entropy and continuum."⁷ Perhaps nowhere is this connection better shown than with *Remission* (2014) and *Requiem*, (2014). Composed of high density polystyrene foam, they

an extension of the *Terra Sensa* series.⁸ The program used translates the digital information of cosmic 'pulsars' into a set of numbers, which can be printed out as a series of lines whose succession in turn create a shape over a page. This visual language - the physical forms - are then manufactured robotically. Carving a form out of the polystyrene foam, they are finally mounted and exhibited as work.⁹ As Louis Ho notes, the result resembles a "typography of elevations and depressions, of hills and hollows, ridges and ravines, rippling across the landscape alike an alien terrain or a science-fictional fantasy."¹⁰

The Lugano exhibition also showed two of Sharma's new gold enamel paintings *Proteus* (2014) and *Nereus* (2014).¹¹ Both composed of gold enamel paint, the irregularities on the surface caused as a result of removing a layer of paper that had been placed on top on a semi-dry paint on the surface. Again, Sharma continues to explore and disturb the monochrome painting through a variety of techniques. In this case, the brilliance and purity of a gold surface is disturbed by an apparently unfinished surface. Like the monochrome itself, gold has become a signifier of ancient times, the golden age of splendor and wealth. An absolute of ontological purity. Human intervention has gotten in the way of the almost mythic quality gold has come to assume.

The intervention of the artist and the process of faktura or of making of the works are no longer in alignment or absolute. In point of fact, the very concept of faktura, that had been so essential to modernism - from the Russian/Soviet Constructivist and Productivist artists to the Post-war era of Italian artists and North American artists - is redefined and hence reevaluated by Sharma. This is captured in the range of work exhibited in the **Mode Change** exhibition. One may also note the almost inadvertent slip with a reproduction of a Grey painting in the exhibition's accompanying catalogue.¹² The reproduction shows the glimmer of reflections - maybe of people in a gallery space - cast onto the surface of the painting. This is in fact a record of the flash of the camera. It reminds us of one of Walter Benjamin's reflections on seeing a photograph in which the reflection of the street is caught in an oil slick left behind by a passing car on a city road. This for him was a paradigmatic sign of modernity.

While we can track to some degree the development of Sharma's work over the past five years, what is distinctive about this more recent body of work is a radical shift in the nature of Sharma's practice and as a consequence, the way an audience responds to it. For now, we are addressing what is, in essence, a sculptural, installational and object-based practice. By definition the work calls upon an audience to be more

engaged if only to consider their relation to the work. The work shown in the **Terra Sensa** series demands both a distant view and a close viewing, in part drawn from curiosity. The surface is composed of undulating folds, as if capturing the movement and swell of the sea that early photography sought to capture as in Gustave Le Gray's wonderful series produced in the Eighteen Fifties, or the aerial photography of rolling hills and plains that inspired Malevich. However, Sharma's work is another step. It is no longer about flatness or soaring forms and diagonals that appear boundless nor the industrially-based or phenomenological minimalism of the postwar era.

In Sharma, the surfaces, if not forms, are three dimensional. They go beyond painting but, not to morph into sculpture so much as anonymous objects. This is emphatically demonstrated in three works shown in a recent exhibition **Countershadows (tactics in evasion)** that are related to the **Terra Sensa** series¹³ As Pocock notes the three works are composed of plugs or moulds, used originally for marine, civil and aviation vehicles. And yet their status as objects is at best ambivalent. The audience walks around the work, to follow and perceptually unify the work, seeking to make sense of them. Liner is perhaps the clearest. Made of an engineered wood product MDF (Medium-density fibreboard) painted over with automotive paint, the object lies there

inert, disengaged if you will. An obsolete object, it refuses signification whether as art object or critique of a commodity object.

The most recent series of Sharma's practice are some ten works of three sizes are entitled *Terra Faktura* (2014). They entail the combination of a monochrome panel adjacent or alongside a block made of a synthetic polymer used for the making of nylon. The process is additive, as distinct from the *Terra Sensa* work that is carved. The block is the result of an accumulative process, built up with the use of a 3D printer. The block remains white, while the monochrome panels vary in five colors: blue, red, black, yellow and grey. The panel is poured and the block is printed or generated automatically: two distinctive processes, recalling the history of manual labour from the age of industrialization onwards. In this manner, the work combine two previous series but now combined, in juxtaposition with one another. We are made aware of their dual foundation, a *faktura* that foregrounds its materiality and its making.

Terra Faktura comes as result of Sharma's willingness to explore and produce work that may or may not succeed. He returns time and again to work initiated earlier if only to move forward further. Unlike any other artist in Singapore or the region, he has opened a dialogue between painting and an object-based practice, between the

artisanal and industrial, between artistic control and the forces of gravity. He is recasting modernism.

References

¹ This was reflected in *Apropos ICA*, Lasalle College of the Arts, Singapore (2012) that showed some a large body of work produced over a two-year period. For an elaboration of this work and the seven different types of painting, see my catalogue essay: 'A Modest Proposal: Apropos Painting,' pp.4-7.

² Seven of these Black paintings were shown *Erasure* at Osage Gallery, curated by me. (Hong Kong) in 2013.

³ Fontana's black neon lights and Burri's burlap series of paintings and incorporation of plastic cements, PVC adhesives and other industrial materials, Manzoni's use of fabricated materials in his 'Achromes' and other work of the period.

⁴ See James Meyer, 'Another Minimalism' in *A Minimal Future? Art as Object 1958-1968*, edited by Ann Goldstein, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2004. (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press), 2004, p.47.

⁵ See *Jeremy Sharma: Factum*, Primae Noctis Gallery, (Lugano, Switzerland), 2014. Curated by Loredana Pazzini-Paracciani, the catalogue has a brief introduction, 'Jeremy SHARMA, SURFACES and BODY.'

⁶ Sharma, cited in *Departure*. Ipreciation Galley, Singapore (2014), p.19. Curated by Milenko Prvacki. The exhibition also included a number of paintings from this series.

⁷ *op.cit.* Sharma, 2014, p.19.

⁸ see *Jeremy Sharma Mode Change* exhibition at Michael Janssens Gallery in Singapore, (2014), unpaginated.

⁹ Such programming is used for the making of civil, aviation and marine vehicles and technology.

¹⁰ Louis Ho, see *Mode Change*, *op.cit.*, unpaginated. Two later works were made in 2014 entitled *Ubuntu* and *Tiktaalik*. Sharma notes "I wanted suitable titles that were untranslatable in English yet expressed ideas I was interested philosophically. 'Ubuntu' referred to both 'human-ness' in an African language and an operating system. 'Tiktaalik' is an ancient fish with resemblance of limbs instead of fins and is a component in our evolutionary transition from sea to land. Email with author 29 September 2014.

¹¹ Five gold paintings were made: 3 for Volta Art Fair, and 2 for Lugano exhibition.

¹² Some of this series of Grey and Black paintings were shown in conjunction with the *Terra Sensa* work at Michael Janssens Gallery, *op.cit.*

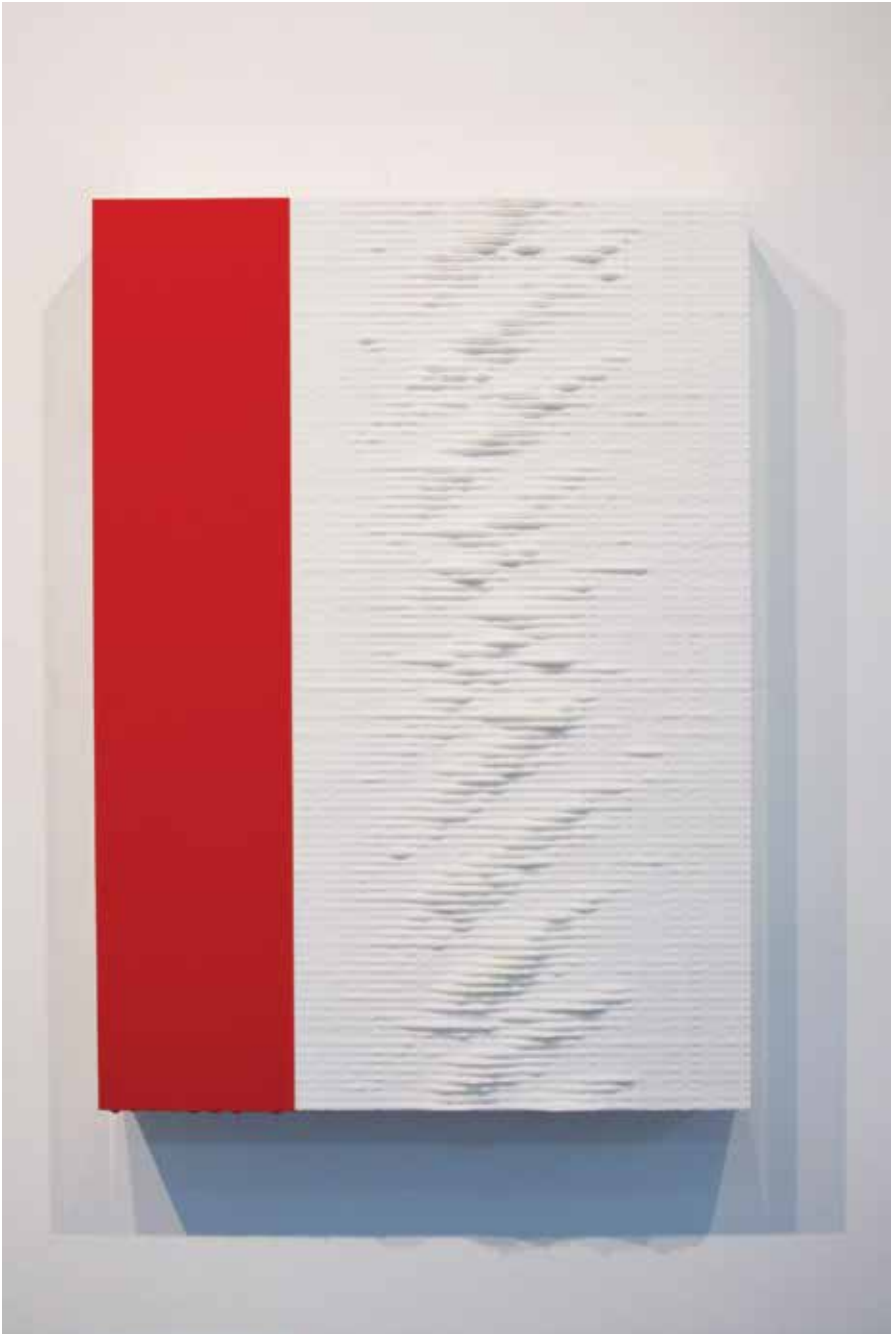
¹³ *Countershadows*, Curated by Melanie Pocock, ICA, Singapore 2014

Charles Merewether received his PhD in art history after studying literature, philosophy and art history. He subsequently taught European modernism art the University of Sydney before leaving to live in Colombia and then Mexico. He taught at Universidad Iberoamericana, then at the Universidad Autonoma in Barcelona. In 1991 he moved to New York and received a research fellowship from Yale University and worked as the Inaugural Curator for the Museo de Arte Contemporaneo de Monterrey, Mexico (MARCO) between 1991-1994. Subsequently he was a Curator at the Research Institute at the Getty Center in Los Angeles for (1994-2003) and gave courses at the University of Southern California (USC). He was Artistic Director of the Sydney Biennale between 2004-2006. Between 2007-8, he was Deputy Director of the Cultural District, Saadiyat Island, Abu Dhabi and Director of the Institute of Contemporary arts, Singapore from 2010-2013. He is currently Visiting Professor at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore.



Terra Faktura (red band no.1), 2014
poured enamel paint on double dibond
and synthetic polymer, mounted on
aluminium channel, 45 x 32 x 7.62 cm

Terra Faktura (red band), 2014
poured enamel paint on double dibond
and synthetic polymer, mounted on
aluminium channel, 60 x 43 x 10.16cm





Terra Faktura (blue band), 2014
poured enamel paint on double dibond
and synthetic polymer, mounted on
aluminium channel, 24 x 17 x 5.08 cm

Terra Faktura (black band no.2), 2014
poured enamel paint on double dibond
and synthetic polymer, mounted on
aluminium channel, 45 x 32 x 7.62 cm

Jeremy Sharma





Terra Faktura (grey band), 2014
poured enamel paint on double dibond
and synthetic polymer, mounted on
aluminium channel, 60 x 43 x 10.16 cm

Terra Faktura (black band), 2014
poured enamel paint on double dibond
and synthetic polymer, mounted on
aluminium channel, 24 x 17 x 5.08 cm



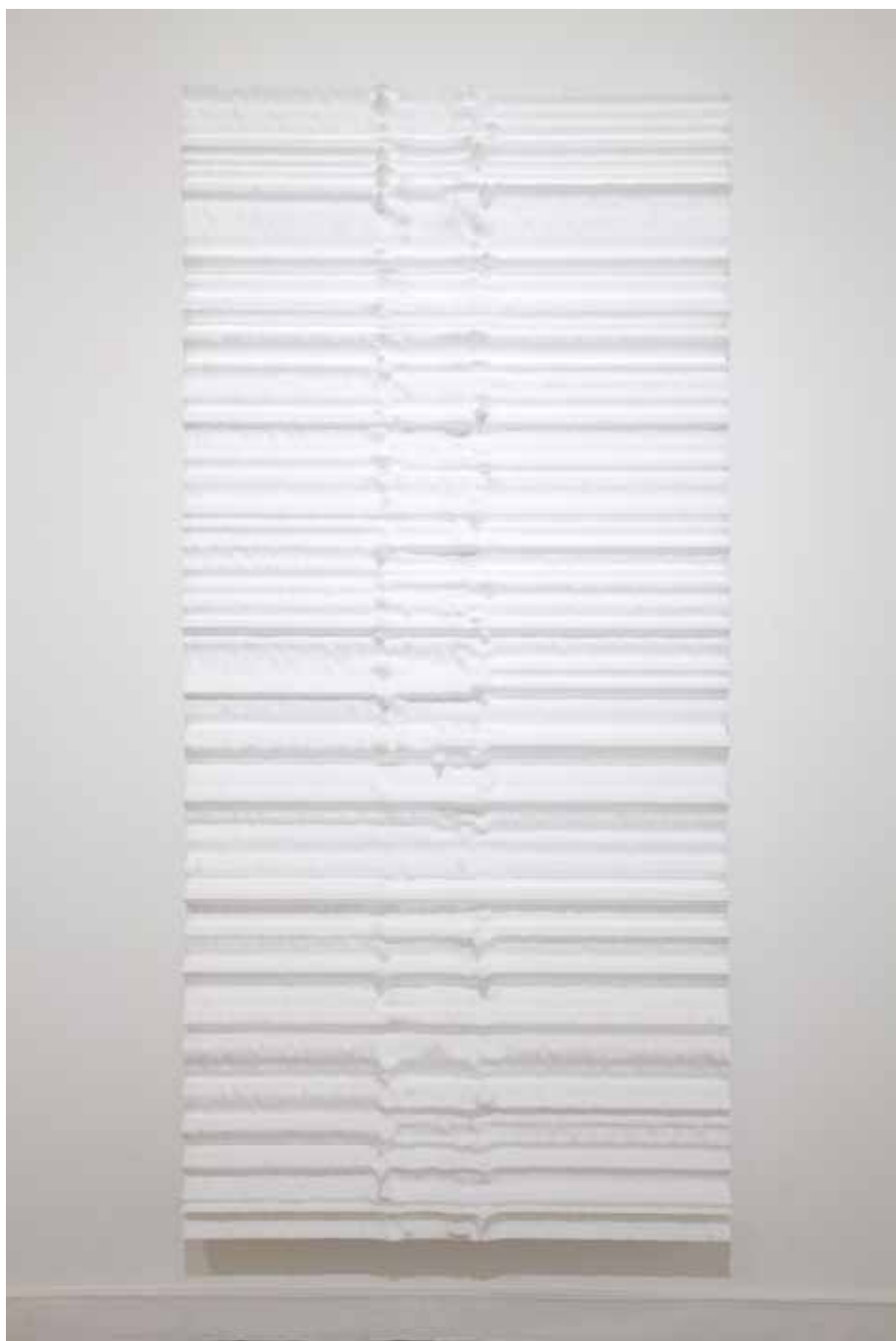


Terra Faktura (yellow band), 2014
poured enamel paint on double dibond
and synthetic polymer, mounted on
aluminium channel, 24 x 17 x 5.08 cm

Terra Faktura (yellow band), 2014
poured enamel paint on double dibond
and synthetic polymer, mounted on
aluminium channel, 60 x 43 x 10.16 cm

Jeremy Sharma

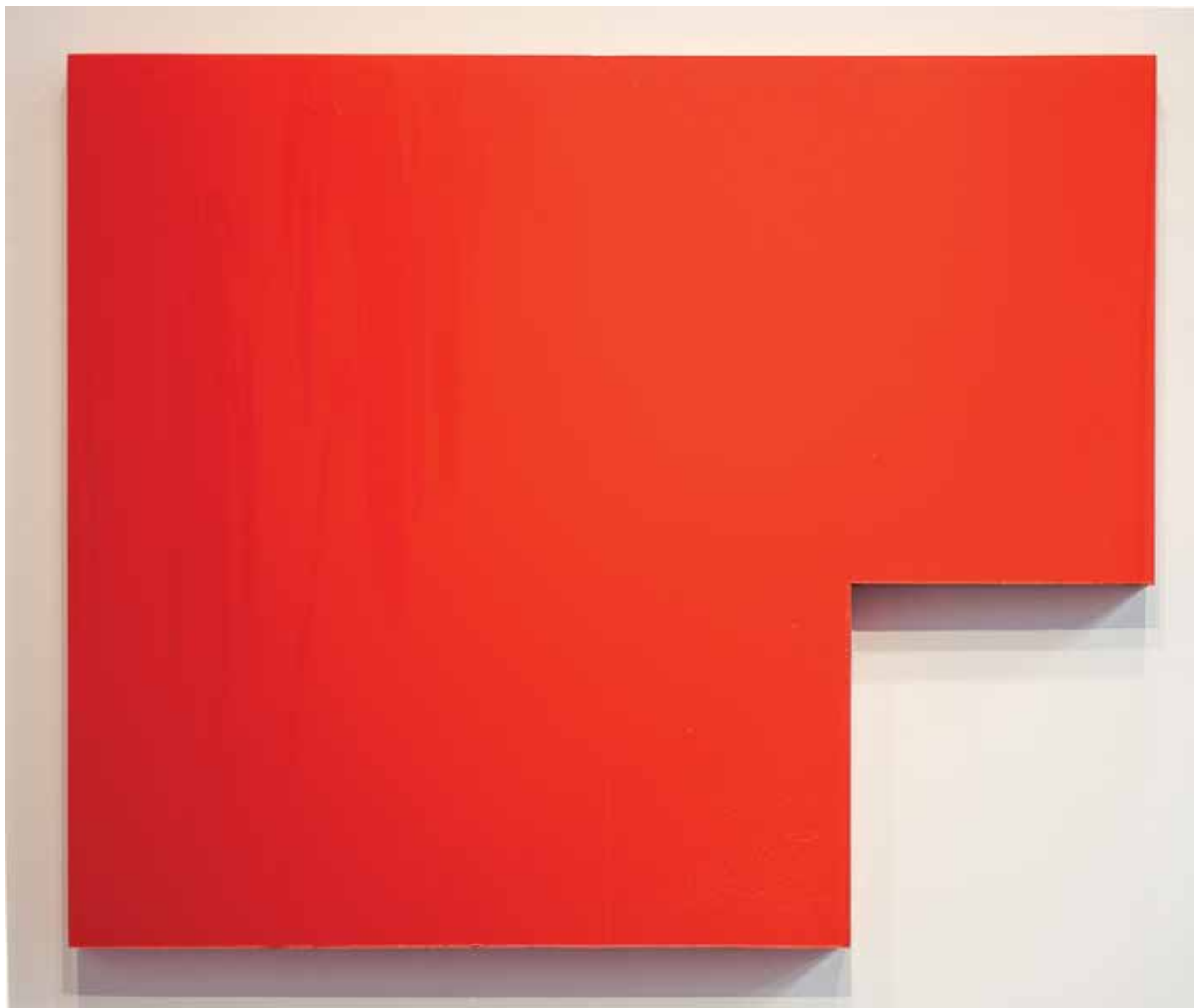




Terra Sensa – Parkes, 2013
high density polystyrene foam
225 x 112 x 25 cm

Terra Sensa – Lovell, 2013
high density polystyrene foam
225 x 112 x 25 cm





I've Been Thinking About (forever), 2013
poured enamel paint on dibond with
aluminium channel, 98 x 120 x 5 cm

Untitled (Nereus), 2014
poured enamel paint on dibond
140 x 86 x 5 cm



Instead Of Looking At Them

Amanda Lee Koe

If you join the club—if we let you join the club—there are rules.

Once you are in one of these suits, you can feel the person, instead of looking at them.

Nylon-spandex, head to toe.

Over the hands, over the feet, over the face.

No gaps for the mouth, no slits for the eyes.

We call ourselves the Tokyo Zentai Club, we meet on weekends, just hang out in our suits, but I don't always want to be with the group, sometimes I just put my suit on and go to a bar. I order a drink but I can't drink it through the suit—I order a drink just to be polite—so I can sit in the bar alone, so I can be seen without being seen.

For me, in my life I have always been told that I look soft, cute, gentle. Feminine. Something to take home, someone who'll do the dishes, who wears baby blue lacey camisoles to bed, who spreads blueberry puree over her morning oats as she reads the Tokyo Shimbun, who has plushie Hello Kitty bedroom sandals.

It's all laid out in front of me, does it matter which is true or false? You can already pi-

cture it all, and if you can picture it all, then it might as well be real. You'll make me up, in your image of me.

But I'm sure you One of those things.
know what I mean.

There must be a Something like that.
reason as to why
you came to us.

You were tired of being you.

You're looking for meaning when life is about desiring and desiring is in fact so far from meaning.

It is its own beast.

With the suit, I can be anything or anyone. I like to touch and stroke others in their suits and to be touched and stroked like this. Feeling more than looking, looking at the feeling.

I am not a lesbian, but I wouldn't mind being with a woman like this.

I am not a bar hostess or a teacher or an office lady, but I could be any which one. Or none.

Everything is all still up in the air, I've era-

sed my own marks.

No I wouldn't disagree, there is something counterintuitive to the practice of zentai, yes. The public private. The anonymity of colourful suits that conceal even as they show. But there is something counterintuitive to being Japanese, no?

In Utsubo Monogatari's *The Tale of the Hollow Tree*, there's a passage: "A tree that is left growing in its natural state is a crude thing. It is only when it is kept close to human beings who fashion it with loving care that its shape and style acquire the ability to move one."

Natural beauty becomes true beauty only when it is moulded in accordance with a human ideal.

Ikebana is something I do when the kids are out and I need my own peace of mind. Giving life to flowers—as if they weren't alive. As if it weren't that they needed to die because of our need to arrange them by our design. As if it weren't our yearning that turned them to stone.

There is the sense of us calling attention to ourselves whilst purporting to remain faceless. But you see isn't that the point. To be free in private is to not have your freedom contextualized. To be free in public is to be understood as being free.

Touch this.

Touch me.

And here.

No, not there.

Here.

Here.

Tell me what you see—don't tell me what you think you see—tell me what you see when you look at me.

The first reaction—when someone "sees" a "face"—is always said out of fear.

Fear—for meaning, or lack thereof.

Look at me—look at you touching me—can you know anything about me?

Abstraction is key.

Seeing is believing.

We erase the marks we've painted ourselves into.

Nylon is tailored to restrict access but allow freedom of movement.

Isn't that life?

Amanda Lee Koo is the fiction editor of *Esquire* (Singapore). She was the 2013 Honorary Fellow of the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa, and her first book of short stories, *Ministry of Moral Panic*, was longlisted for the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award.



Swivel #1, Discretion, 2014
 acrylic and screenprint with enamel
 on shaped canvas, steel bracket
 42 x 31 x 4,5 cm

Swivel #2, Discretion, 2014
 acrylic and screenprint with enamel
 on shaped canvas, steel bracket
 42 x 31 x 4,5 cm





Swivel#3, Discretion, 2014
 acrylic and screenprint with enamel
 on shaped canvas, steel bracket
 54 x 45 x 4,5 cm

Swivel #4, First Positon, 2014
 acrylic and screenprint with enamel
 on shaped canvas, steel bracket
 179 x 65 x 4,5 cm





Cicadas #13, Metronome H, 2014
TBC, acrylic and screenprint with enamel on damar and linen

Cicadas #12, Metronome U, 2014
TBC, acrylic and screenprint with enamel on damar and linen



Repose in The Works of Ruben Pang

Jennifer Anne Champion

The subjects in this series by Ruben Pang (b. 1990) cannot be said to be either alive or dead. Rather, these four works depict figures in various states of repose. By repose one means rest but also a re-posing of states of rest. In each of these paintings, elements of sleep are coupled with multiple subconscious drives to create visual metaphors. There is a stillness which is also a conservation of energy (*Sylvan*). Theft which is also safe-keeping (*Prowler*). Protection through duplicity and exposure (*Auto-Pilot*). Death which is also suspended animation (*Ophelia*).

Made while on residency in Lugano, Switzerland, these works reflect a continued exploration into figuration from Pang's most recent solo exhibition 'Intravenous Picture Show' at Primae Noctis Art Gallery. Two paintings in this series (*Ophelia* and *Auto-Pilot*) are also the biggest paintings Pang has attempted to-date.

Along with figuration is Pang's stylistic inclusion of creepers and plant life – a motif first seen in *My Fat Baby* ('Intravenous Picture Show'). According to Pang, this motif comes from recalling a visit to a Buddhist temple as a child where he was advised to "grow like a creeper – slowly, sideways, not necessarily joining the race towards sunlight. Also to be flexible." Yet this childhood advice deviates from the Dhammapada teaching. Indeed, the

chapter in which this advice is found warns that if one does not focus on enlightenment (nirvana), one becomes vulnerable to self-centered desires and cravings that 'grow like a creeper' (Kupperman 39).

The painting *Sylvan* most reflects Pang's ideas about the fundamentals of meditation and growth. It portrays a subject meditating horizontally on a dark background overlaid with green contouring. This amorphous green on black indicates creative fertility and prospect, literally a good ground to rest and build upon. Yet the subject with its stiff mask of blue overgrown with creepers, features red flower accents barely in bloom.

Pang states "For me [these flowers] symbolize exercising restraint, not letting the passions [completely] rule over my actions... the discipline of maintaining stillness is difficult, and I want to show there is a resistance even when trying to slip into a dreamlike state."

The exaggerated yet anatomically detailed aesthetic in *Sylvan* and these three works is a hallmark of Pang's move into deeper narrative. Blue skin, which Pang insists is not symbolic of death is followed by an over-sized heart in *Prowler*. Pang explains, "I consider [the subject in *Prowler*] a sort of thief who has captured a very foreign-looking heart. It is not its own. It's a reflection on the desires of wanting to pos-

sess the talents and abilities of other[s].”

The simultaneous act of envy, theft and safekeeping has also been portrayed in literature and art as a means to creativity and derives from the Greek myth of Prometheus (Dougherty 19). Pang’s narrative of envy recalls this classic story in which highly-prized, illicit knowledge is stolen from the Gods by plucky Prometheus and given to mankind. The subject with its self-satisfied, curiously simian visage and again suffused with creepers barely discernible through the red glaze could be seen as Promethean in a moment of calm, just after his victorious acquisition of fire and before his retributive punishment.

Auto-Pilot and *Ophelia* are impressive in terms of scale. Both are studies in composition with figures painted within rooms. For Pang, this room detail was a pragmatic method of dealing with the confines of painting at a large scale indoors. In this way, the paintings can be seen as windows – an access into an architectural psyche. Of *Auto-Pilot*, Pang notes: “This is a portrait of a phantasmal advocate holding up a Stephen Hawkingesque figure – a man who has been taken apart and put back together and reconfigured so many times – and he holds his mind by the brain stem. The flesh and nerve looks weak... Having it separated from the body – and extended out to the tail bone – makes the brain

easier to see as an object, someone else’s design, God’s design, evolutionary design. We think about the word “thought”, “thinking”, “philosophy” yet look at the house of these ‘thoughts’ and you will see [the] architecture is not pretty.”

Questioned on whether this painting constitutes an empathetic gesture between two figures, Pang states that the painting is about survivalism through the splitting of a single self. “The very modern man... is capable of imagining himself in third rather than first person. [And] this person doesn’t seek the enlightenment of Buddhism. For him, this is what the modern world has shaped him into.”

Pang’s Buddhist and Catholic upbringing show greater presence in his move towards figuration which is also, by its representational nature, a move away from the abstract. Of the movement, Pang’s *Ophelia* is perhaps the most direct reposing of a historically prevalent trope in art – in painting, Sir John Everett Millais’s *Ophelia*, in literature William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, and in film Lars Von Trier’s *Melancholia* come to mind.

Pang states, “In terms of composition, green leaves and pink flesh naturally called for yellow. The pink and yellow line symbolises the breaking point of a person, here at an angle coming out from her core. The

position of the figure in a circe-de-arc is a stress position experienced during sleep or an episode – almost like a seizure... I have a dark curiosity for a subject matter experiencing stress, it is almost voyeuristic. A common aspect of beauty is a certain fragility."

Ophelia while impressive in its scale, graphic nature and technicality, is perhaps the most polarizing of Pang's works displayed in this series with Primo Marella Gallery, not least because Pang sees the painting as a self-portrait.

Pang explains, "In my delusional psychotic states, I fantasize my corpse as thin, frail but delicate, beautiful and sensationalized. Somehow the sheer spectacle of my death would override rational judgement. People would overlook the fact that I was flawed. As if I could be redeemed by a spectacle. I imagined it might be somewhat sexually and perversely pleasurable for some people. There are at least two different type of audiences, generally those who empathize and those that I assume such a spectacle could induce very different feelings. There is a possibility that this exercise for me is emotional displacement."

One feels a sense of weightlessness when standing in front of *Ophelia* – of not being dragged down by water as in the origin story popularized by Shakespeare but rather of floating upward. The flowers that

burst from her cavity are not funereally placed on her body. They grow from within constituting a kind of agency in the subject even in that most final of repose – Death.

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Kupperman, Joel. *Classic Asian Philosophy: A Guide to the Essential Texts*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. Print.
Dougherty, Carol. *Gods and Heroes of The Ancient World: Prometheus*. New York: Routledge Press, 2006. Print.

My Fat Baby, 2014
oil and alkyd on aluminum composite panel
99 x 77 cm





Faith Healer, 2014
oil and alkyd on aluminum
composite panel, 115 x 90 cm

Auto-Pilot, 2014
oil, alkyd, acrylic and retouching
varnish on aluminum composite panel, 170 x 140 cm

Ruben Pang





Sylvan, 2014
oil, alkyd, acrylic and retouching
varnish on aluminum composite panel,
60 x 75 cm

Ophelia, 2014
oil, alkyd, acrylic and retouching
varnish on aluminum composite panel,
150 x 200 cm

Ruben Pang





Anodyne, 2014
acrylic and retouching varnish on aluminum composite panel, 75 x 60 cm

Prowler, 2014
acrylic and retouching varnish on aluminum composite panel, 99 x 77 cm

Ruben Pang





The Sermon, 2014
acrylic and retouching varnish on aluminum composite panel, 99 x 77 cm

Scott's Wings, 2014
acrylic and retouching varnish on aluminum composite panel, 145 x 94 cm

Ruben Pang



Biographies

DONNA ONG (1978)

Selected exhibitions

2014 The Forest Speaks Back , (solo exhibition) Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, Germany
Moscow Internation Biennale for Young Art, Moscow, Russia
Unearthed, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore
2013 And We Were Like Those Who Dream, (solo exhibition) Primae Noctis Art Gallery, Lugano, Switzerland
Movement No.2 - Moving on Asia: Towards a New Art Network 2004-2013, Wellington City Gallery, Wellington, New Zeland
Move on Asia - Videokunst in Asien 2002 bis 2012 - ZKM | Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe, Karlsruhe, Germany
2012 Deep S.E.A. Contemporary Art From South East Asia, Primo Marella Gallery, Milan, Italy
Home Again: 10 Artists Who Have Experienced Japan, Hara Museum, Japan
Encounter: The Royal Academy in Asia, Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, Singapore
Come Away With Me, Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, Singapore
The Singapore Show: Future Proof, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore
The Collectors Show: Chimera, Singapore Art Museum, , Singapore
2011 Dust on the Mirror, (solo exhibition) Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, Singapore
2009 Photographer Unknown, Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne, Australia
Fluid Zones, Jakarta Biennale, Jarkarta Indonesia
BMW Young Artists, Singapore Tyler Print Institute, Singapore
2008 Kwandu Biennale, Kwandu Museum, Namibia
11. International Architecture Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia, Venice, Italy

ROBERT ZHAO RENHUI (1983)

Selected exhibitions

2014 Busan Biennale, Inhabiting the World, South Korea
Noorderlicht Photofestival 2014, An Ocean of Possi-

bilities, Fries Museum, Leeuwarden, NL
Moscow Internation Biennale for Young Art, Moscow, Russia
A Guide to the Flora and Fauna of the world, 11th Singapore Short Cuts, National Museum of Singapore, Singapore
The Possibility of Knowing, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore
A Guide to the Flora and Fauna of the World, (solo exhibition) Primo Marella Gallery, Milan, Italy
Unearthed, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore
2013 Adapting to the Anthropocene, Unesco House, Paris, France
If the world changed, Singapore Biennale, Singapore
2012 Living Proof, (solo exhibition) Bangkok University Gallery, Thailand
Future Proof, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore
FutureMap, Zabudowicz Collection, London, UK
2011 The Land Archive, (solo exhibition) Institute of Contemporary Art, Singapore
A Guide to the Flora and Fauna of the World, (solo exhibition) Primo Marella Gallery, Milan, Italy
2010 The Whiteness of Whales, (solo exhibition) Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Japan
Emerging Wave, Seoul Arts Center & GoEun Museum of Photography, Korea
Haven't You Heard?, The Hong Kong Arts Centre, Hong Kong
2008 We decided to go to the zoo but it was raining, Photo-Levallois Festival, Paris, France

JEREMY SHARMA (1983)

Selected exhibitions

2014 Busan Biennale, Inhabiting the World, South Korea
Factum, (solo exhibition) Primae Noctis, Lugano, Switzerland
2013 Side-Glance, Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, Singapore
A History of Curating in Singapore, Curating Lab: Phase 3, Goodman Art Centre, Singapore
2012 Lyrical Abstraction: Works by Jeremy Sharma & Yeo Shih Yun, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore
Panorama: Recent Art from Southeast Asia, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore

The Same Rain, The Same Wind, Chiang Mai University Art Center, Thailand
2011 Nine. ICAS Galleries, Institute of Contemporary Art Singapore, Singapore
2010 14th Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh 2010 Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy
Centre to Periphery, Japan Creative Centre, Singapore
2008 The Protection Paintings –Of Sensations and Superscriptions, The Jendela Gallery (solo exhibition), Esplanade Mall, Singapore

GENEVIEVE CHUA (1984)

Selected exhibitions

2014 Afterimage, SAM 8Q, Singapore
Unearthed, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore
2013 Side-Glance, Institute of Contemporary Arts, Singapore
Encountering the Unknown, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Japan
Disappearing Moon, Institute of Contemporary Arts, Singapore
2012 DiverseCities, 8Q, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore
The Singapore Show: Future Proof, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore
2011 BMW Young Asian Artist Series, Singapore Tyler Print Institute, Singapore
Cross-scape, Kumho Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea; Jeonbuk Museum of Art, Jeonju, Korea; Goeun Museum of Art, Busan, Korea
House of Incest, Post Museum, Singapore
Selamatan Digital, Langgeng Art Foundation, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
Singapore Biennale, Old Kallang Airport, Singapore
2009 Lost in the City: Full Moon & Foxes, National Museum of Singapore, Singapore

RUBEN PANG (1990)

Selected exhibitions

2014 Intravenous Pictures Show, (solo exhibition) Primae Noctis, Lugano, Switzerland
2013 Futureproof, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore
Aetheric Portraiture, (solo exhibition) Primae Noctis

Art Gallery, Lugano, Switzerland
2012 Deep S.E.A. Contemporary Art From South East Asia, Primo Marella Gallery, Milan, Italy
The Singapore Show: Future Proof, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore
2011 Sovereign Asian Art Prize Exhibition, Marina Bay Sands, Singapore; The Rotunda Hong Kong
Angels (Solo Exhibition), Chan Hampe Galleries, Singapore
2010 Take-Aways, Sambanci University Istanbul, Turkey
Is that a Temple?, EvilEmpire, Singapore
Winston Oh Travelogue Award Exhibition, Praxis Space, Lasalle College of the Arts, Singapore
Music and Video Art Performance, Strobe like a Butterfly, The Substation Theater, Singapore
2009 Art Buffet, Singapore Art Show, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore

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