



RUBEN PANG

NEW ENERGETICS:

inverting the process

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Ruben Pang Solo Exhibition
Curated by Loredana Pazzini-Paracciani

18 October - 2 November 2013

Raffles Hotel Arcade
Unit #01-20/21, 328 North Bridge Road
Singapore 188719

SOLVE ET COAGULA: CHARTING NEW POSSIBILITIES

The alchemical quest for scientific and spiritual enlightenment was one of the milestones on which Futurist theorists based their conceptual framework on the transformation of matter into an “explosion of energy”. ⁽¹⁾

While the physical transformation was envisioned in the convergence of the elements, the metaphysical dimension of this transformation was left to the alchemy of materials. The ‘coagula’ or fusion—the act of merging and transforming metals to a greater source of energy—acknowledges in Futurist manifestos the role of alchemy as a spiritual force within new artistic and cultural endeavors. ⁽²⁾

Alloyed with technical advancement, Futurism praised the formation of a new society where mechanical bodies functioned as non-human species. Alienation, rupture and disjunction were integrated elements of the new world.

New Energetics: Inverting the Process by Ruben Pang (b.1990) draws its conceptual framework from the Futurist’s vision of a new, regenerated world—a world made of light and form that is the ultimate synthesis of cosmic energy. In this latest series of works, however, Pang pushes further the alchemical relation to the artwork by inverting the technical gravity typical of the Futurists to allow chemical and accidental fluidity in his practice.

Indeed the unpredictable stasis of natural elements is paramount to the act of painting—as it is to alchemy—where solid and liquid meet, naked and pure, as partners or antagonists.

As oil and water, color and colorless, male and female: solvent and pigments struggle to emerge and solidify on Pang’s canvases, eventually materializing as liquid sculptures in the solid black space. This process, consciously or unconsciously triggered in the artist’s mind, takes over the virtuosity of the artistic execution. The forms in the paintings are not planned but are reminiscent of personal memories and historical references—the accumulated knowledge that constitutes our unconsciousness.

Largely abstract in composition, the canvases and sculptures in *New Energetics: Inverting the Process* retain a strong anthropomorphic connotation. The portraits, one may say, are not so much figurative as they are the unfolding of the form. In this process the artist’s self-as-subject and self-as-object become paint and earth matters, lumps of colors, liquid and solid material.

700 Painless Years is the first painting that greets the visitors at the gallery entrance. Majestic, yet one of the smaller pieces, this canvas emanates a state of primordial chaos that is the origin of all matter. In a gust of vibrations, like music in an acoustic room, the sparkles of fluids and incandescent light blind the beholder, while, emerging from solid black space, the reminiscently anthropomorphic figure collects its parts, reassembling limbs and thoughts in a reconstructive process. *700 Painless Years*, crucial in initiating the *New Energetics* series, led Pang to steer his practice towards an uncharted artistic dimension, that of having “raw and finished surfaces working together within a series”. ⁽³⁾

With *700 Painless Years* a number of canvases in *New Energetics* are shaped towards form, such as *Core*, *Camp Whimper is a Place in My Heart*, and *Roundabouts*, amongst others. The physical push and pull in all directions that we observe in these works is heightened by the use of synthetic hues and resin. Like solid thoughts on the aluminum surface, the color is at times combined with resin to give a textured, rough finishing to otherwise polished images. The dense black hole from where the images emerge warrants the fine line between sanity, insanity and hallucination.

Psychoanalyst Carl Jung, in his exploration of alchemy and art, refers to the artist as "... vehicle and molder to the unconscious psyche life of mankind", alluding to the neurotic quest towards 'individuation'.⁽⁴⁾ Pang's approach to the art matter corroborates this neurotic quest by fervidly negotiating the conscious and the unconscious in his works. (5)

The series of 'anti-drawings', as Pang defines them, such as the *Sky* paintings, *Supercharger* and *The Pharmacy*, feature in *New Energetics* to counterbalance and defy the pictorial frame towards an accidental order.⁽⁶⁾

Each work in this series draws the viewer in, like worshippers to medieval religious paintings, by emanating a "distilled" light or, to put it simply, by morphing the color into flashes of superior light. In each work the whole canvas is used to depict a spectacle that unfolds before the audience's and the artist's eyes—a supernatural sequence of events, which brings the sky, earth and all natural elements to meet on the aluminum plate, each plate one step away from its predecessor.

Historical references mark another 'series' of paintings presented in the exhibition, which include *Are You an Empty Eye?*, *Ginger Dragon*, *I Believe in Second Chances*, and *Metabolic*. Drawing from Jung's 'collective unconscious'⁽⁷⁾, these paintings unintentionally allude to art history lessons—through Pang's spontaneous approach to paint, which escapes sequential methods of composition—as religious and cultural symbols occasionally find their way through the canvas.

In *Are You an Empty Eye?*, for instance, we find references to iconic works by Francis Bacon and Van Gogh. *Study for a Portrait of Van Gogh IV* (1955), produced by Bacon after Van Gogh's *The Painter on the Road to Tarascon* (1888), epitomizes the figure of the misunderstood artist set apart from conventional society. In both paintings the traveller casts a shadow on the ground indicating his human nature, yet faceless and obscure, he seems to float in space rather than physically touching the earth.



Hieronymus Bosch's *The Wayfarer*, 1510, oil on panel, 71 cm x 70.6 cm

While indirectly referencing these masterpieces, *Are You an Empty Eye?* bears no figurative resemblance to its historical past. Synthetic colors take over the earthy tones visible in the works of Bacon and Van Gogh, freezing the image in a chemically generated shot taken in transitional space.

Ginger Dragon too adopts the composition of the traveler figure, which in turn references Hieronymus Bosch's *The Wayfarer* (1510).

The human figure, which is believed to indicate a new path for religious awakening in Bosch's painting, becomes in Pang's work a vaguely anthropomorphic and erratic presence.

Pang's whole image is tilted, presenting to the viewer the reflection of the original composition. Lumps of artificial colors build up on the aluminum surface, crystallizing the emotions and thoughts of the artist to the extent of producing its self-portrait.

The art historian James Elkins describes the painting process as alchemy, which "...insists on the radical impossibility of distinguishing observer from observed, subject from object" adding that it is impossible for the artist, as for the adept alchemist, to discern whether he or she is in the laboratory "...watching the vessel, or inside the vessel, looking out."⁽⁸⁾

So are Pang's works. They are the melding and transmutation of paint matter, as much as of Pang's mind and body.

Loredana Pazzini-Paracciani

October 2013

NOTES

- (1) David Mather, "Energetic Excess: The Visual Structure of Movement in Early Italian Futurism, 1910–1915" (PhD diss. University of California, San Diego, 2011). Accessed October 4, 2013, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3qk939m5>.
- (2) Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "Futurist Manifesto," *La gazzetta dell'Emilia*, February 5, 1909.
- (3) Ruben Pang in conversation with curator Loredana Pazzini- Paracciani.
- (4) Carl Gustav Jung, "The Spirit in Man, Art, & Literature," in vol. 15 of *Collected Works of Jung*, par 157. In the recent Venice Biennale 2013 Carl Jung's famous *Red Book* or *Liber Novus* was disclosed to the public within a major art platform. The book, on which Jung worked for over 16 years, documents his personal cosmology, visions and interpretations, which are illustrated and depicted by Jung himself. For more refer to *Il Palazzo Enciclopedico* (Marsilio Editori S.p.A., 2013).
- (5) Individuation is the psychological process of integrating the opposites, while still maintaining their relative autonomy. See Carl Gustav Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, ed. Aniela Jaffé (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963).
- (6) Ruben Pang in conversation with curator Loredana Pazzini- Paracciani.
- (7) Carl Gustav Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious (Collected Works of C. J. Jung)* (London: Routledge, 1996).
- (8) James Elkins, *What Painting Is* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 171.

BIO

Loredana Pazzini-Paracciani has a Master degree in Asian Art Histories. She writes for several universities' journals, art magazines and symposium publications and works extensively as independent curator for commercial and institutional places in Singapore and Bangkok. Her academic and curatorial focus and continuous research revolves mostly around Contemporary Art in Thailand.

ARTWORKS



700 Painless Years
60 x 75 cm | oil and alkyd on aluminum | 2013



Supercharger
60 x 75 cm | oil and alkyd on aluminum | 2013



Sky II
100 x 121 cm | oil and alkyd on aluminum | 2013



Sky III
119 x 152 cm | oil and alkyd on aluminum | 2013



Sky I
60 x 75 cm | oil and alkyd on aluminum | 2013



Fire in the Hive
60 x 75 cm | oil and alkyd on aluminum | 2013



The Love Cobra
60 x 75 cm | oil and alkyd on aluminum | 2013



Camp Whimper is a Place in My Heart
60 x 75 cm | oil and alkyd on aluminum | 2013



The Night Sees Nothing
60 x 75 cm | oil and alkyd on aluminum | 2013



Core
60 x 75 cm | oil and alkyd on aluminum | 2013



Metabolic
86.5 x 128 cm | oil and alkyd on aluminum | 2013



Ginger Dragon
91 x 121 cm | oil and alkyd on aluminum | 2013



Are You an Empty Eye? (After Francis Bacon,
Study for a Portrait of van Gogh VI, 1957)
91 x 145 cm | oil and alkyd on aluminum | 2013



I Believe in Second Chances
91 x 145 cm | oil and alkyd on aluminum | 2013



Peace Penguin
60 x 75 cm | oil and alkyd on aluminum | 2013



Roundabouts
60 x 75 cm | oil and alkyd on aluminum | 2013



The Pharmacy
99 x 145 cm | oil and alkyd on aluminum | 2013



Head of Goliath
33 x 28 x 21 cm | stoneware | 2013



Punk Onion
36 x 26 x 19 cm | stoneware | 2013



Vanilla
40 x 18 x 16 cm | stoneware | 2013

ARTIST STATEMENT

Ruben Pang's paintings are a chronological record of thought. He believes in experimentation, saturation and exhausting ideas to the last drop—the circulation within the studio. He uses oil and alkyd resin on aluminium, a ground which supports a combination of subtle and aggressive surface treatment.

Through the process of layering and sanding, compositions are extended and redacted arbitrarily. Pang is convinced that in the mechanics of painting, like in reality, there is an equal and opposite force working against each stroke. In this sense, a painting's narrative, its driving force, is determined by dialogue, manipulating reverberation—the painter talking to himself.

The series of work produced in 2013 are binary explorations between color and form. Visually, the paintings clearly take sides, there are formless and figurative paintings. Pang uses this divergence to create counterpoints between his own paintings. Over the months of studio-time, he looks for sparks; accidents and missed opportunities to resurrect within unsuccessful compositions as annexes for new ideas. The work presented here are a selection of paintings from this regenerative series.

Ruben Pang

Born 1990

Diploma in Fine Art, Lasalle College of the Arts, 2010

Selected Individual Exhibitions

2013 Aetheric Portraiture, Primae Noctis Art Gallery, Lugano, Switzerland

2011 Angels, Chan Hampe Galleries, Singapore

Selected Group Exhibitions

2013

Masterpieces Digital Art Exhibition, Curated by Iola Lenzi, National Museum of Singapore

Southeast Asian Pavillion, Beirut Art Fair, Lebanon

2012

Deep SEA – 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 Finalist's Exhibition, Marina Bay Sands, Singapore; The Rotunda Hong Kong

2010

Take-Aways, Sambanci University Istanbul, Turkey

Sovereign Asian Art Prize Finalist's Exhibition, Helutrans Arts Space, Singapore

Is that a Temple?, EvilEmpire, Singapore

A Persistent Illusion, Forest Rain Gallery, 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

Accent on Art, Accenture, Raffles City, Singapore

Moments, Orchard Central, Singapore

2009

Art Buffet, Singapore Art Show, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore

2008

The Artificial Landscape, Lasalle College of the Arts, Singapore

Such a Lovely Place, Such a Lovely Face, Project Space, Lasalle College of the Arts, Singapore

"Floccinaucinihilipilification," Homeclub, Singapore

Awards

2011

Sovereign Asian Art Prize Finalist for the painting, Across the Universe

2010

Sovereign Asian Art Prize Finalist for the painting, First Born

Lasalle Award for Academic Excellence

Full venue sponsorship by The Substation for "Strobe like a Butterfly"

Winston Oh Travelogue Award

2009

Georgette Chen Arts Scholarship (Local)

2008

Creative Community Singapore Ideas@Work (1st Prize)

Singapore Youth Festival Arts and Craft Exhibition Gold Award

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