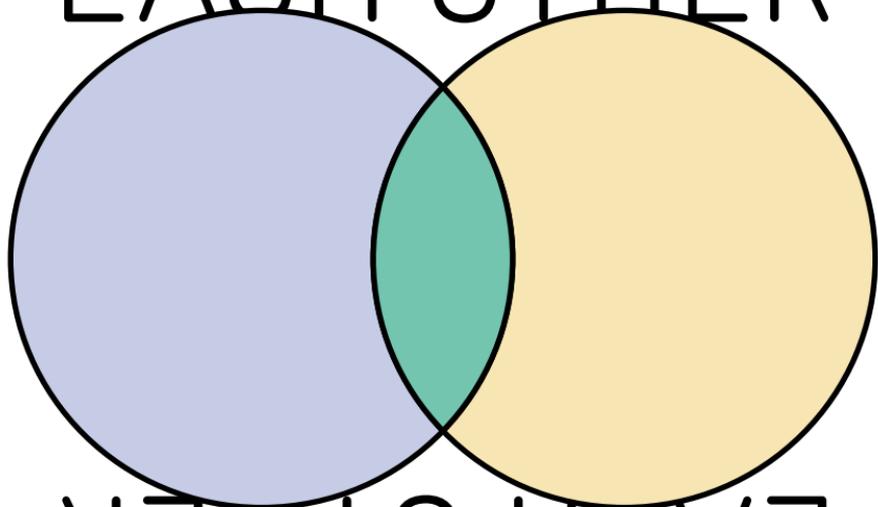


言語不通

THEY DO NOT
UNDERSTAND
EACH OTHER



EACH OTHER
UNDERSTAND
THEY DO NOT

言語不通

They Do Not Understand Each Other

Artists

Saori Akutagawa (Madokoro)
Jennifer Allora & Guillermo Calzadilla
Agnes Arellano
chi too
Heman Chong
Chua Chye Teck
Ho Tzu Nyen
Sojung Jun
Tsubasa Kato
Charles Lim
Kumi Machida
Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba
Wit Pimkanchanapong
Kohei Sekigawa
Kazuo Shiraga
Akira Takayama
Than Sok
Ming Wong

Curators

Yuka Uematsu & June Yap

Co-Presented by



#theydonotunderstandeachother2020
@taikwuncontemporary

The exhibition and its contents are independently curated by the presenting partners and do not reflect the views or opinions of The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust or Tai Kwun.

FOREWORD

TAI KWUN CONTEMPORARY

Tai Kwun Contemporary is proud to showcase *They Do Not Understand Each Other*, jointly presented by the National Museum of Art, Osaka and Singapore Art Museum. Curated by Yuka Uematsu (curator at the National Museum of Art, Osaka) and June Yap (Director, Curatorial, Collections and Programmes, at Singapore Art Museum), this group exhibition brings together a range of Asian and international artists, and sets out to tackle assumptions and expectations in our notions of understanding (and misunderstanding) within a larger field of cultural experience and exchange.

Tai Kwun Contemporary is honoured to play host to an exhibition that features works from the collections of these two major Asian museums—national-level collections, no less. By committing to collecting contemporary art in all its guises, particularly with their astute, early choice of collecting ephemeral and performative art forms, both museums have subtly redefined the ways in which institutions collect art in Asia and the world, thereby broadening our general understanding of what art is today. The museums also have their own respective strengths, with differing focuses on their regions: Northeast Asia with the National Museum of Art, Osaka, and Southeast Asia with Singapore Art Museum. Together with the newly commissioned works, this exhibition is an excellent opportunity to get a glimpse of two national collections of contemporary art—with Hong Kong as a different vantage point from which to observe.

This exhibition is not, of course, merely an encounter of institutions; alongside the talented artists, it also brought together two accomplished, devoted curators and their teams (we must thank the two museum directors too!). With their respective outlooks and visions, one comes to see art beyond the level of the object, delving into the subtleties of artistic practice and the broader implications of artistic vision in art, culture, and the world. The curators have overcome challenges with diligence and perseverance. Indeed, amid crises and emergencies, an exhibition that thinks through cultural representation, exchange, and understanding is more needed than ever.

We must thank the artists and curators of *They Do Not Understand Each Other* for their thoughtful and reflective interventions. Only thus can Tai Kwun Contemporary achieve its goal of bringing in some of the best art to Hong Kong and hopefully contributing innovatively to cultural discourse locally and beyond.

THEY DO NOT UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER

YUKA UEMATSU & JUNE YAP



Tsubasa Kato, *They Do Not Understand Each Other*, 2014. Collection of the National Museum of Art, Osaka. Photo: Keiichi Sakakura

ちょっと右に , ちょっと右にいった下さい?
Can you move to the right a bit?

응
Huh?

Two figures are seen performing a simple task together on a small island, while not comprehending a word uttered by the other. The setting for this artwork by Tsubasa Kato, from which the exhibition draws its title, is the Tsushima islands that lie halfway between the two nations of Korea and Japan. The success of the artist and his Korean collaborator in this act of cooperation appears to have been achieved, if not by virtue of their good humour and patience with each other, then by an understanding that exceeds the plane of language. However, this title in English—*They Do Not Understand Each Other*—was not its first.

Originally captioned 言葉が通じない (*kotoba ga tsūjinai*) in Japanese, the artist's intent was to mark a lack of communication, which was then translated into English—*They Do Not Understand Each Other*—for a broader reflection on an absence of dialogue, in the context of the geographical location that is the subject of the artwork (discoverable via the QR code found within). Its subsequent translation into Chinese for purposes of an exhibition in Tai Kwun Contemporary—言語不通 (Cantonese: *yihnyúh bāt tūng*; Mandarin: *yányǔ bütōng*)—is meant to build upon and extend its reference of exchange to the subject of culture (within which language is central), with this succession of translations also speaking to the commutability of culture and the possibility of its obverse—understanding.

As an exhibition, *They Do Not Understand Each Other* presents commissions and artworks from the collections of the National Museum of Art, Osaka (NMAO) and Singapore Art Museum (SAM) which consider the negotiations and expectations of culture. After all, if the premise of culture is representation, then the promise of cultural exchange—as one might reasonably suppose—is understanding. But what underlies this promise of understanding? What is understood of its assumptions and expectations, and what is performed by and through these artworks?

In its restricted sense, the term "culture" is used to designate and encompass the spheres of the arts, aesthetic practices, language and expressions, identity and belief systems emerging from tradition and custom, and other modes of representational shorthand, including stereotypes. However, within a broader reading, this could stretch to include the more indeterminate and abstract aspects of social life, community, and even ideology. At a personal level, one might also add the specificities of subjectivities, interpersonal and object relations, and the sense of being and experience within the world.

It is this expanded understanding of culture and its exchange, encompassing all these definitions, that the exhibition is developed to contemplate. That is to say, although set within a cultural institution in a display of cultural objects—some sanctified in national collections—the subject of culture is far from concluded. Instead, a crucial role is played by artworks and aesthetic expressions in examining culture itself and in furthering its potential. Going beyond a representation of cultures in display, they augment, amplify, and challenge our understanding of what culture does and can do.

Through these artworks, a range of connections—and thus the possibilities of understanding—are manifest, in various forms as well as intensities. But they also speak to boundaries, borders, gaps, spaces, surfaces, interfaces, and divisions that are around us. These interstices exist because, for lack of a better word, of an unevenness in encounters between individuals, peoples, and things. An unevenness occurring in absence, deficiency, uncertainty, difference, and unequal conditions that become, unexpectedly, generative. Such unevenness is inevitable, and from this unevenness, curiosity in the unfamiliar and the new springs forth, along with the impulse to discover.

In fact, one might even say that cultural experience is couched in this encounter and the disclosure that follows. These are the enigmas and mysteries, even from within the everyday, that rouse the human spirit; the mundane, magical, and sublime moments that mark and transform the human condition. Yet, this moment of fascination and longing can, just as quickly, turn around and be the cause of anguish or vexation, in a confrontation of how much we are different—of all that sets us apart, and that which gives rise to suspicion and confirms our fears.

Perhaps the paradox is less the unevenness than our response—a desire to concur (and find connections and solidarities) as much as to conquer (to absorb, defend, present, and demonstrate one's difference and exception).

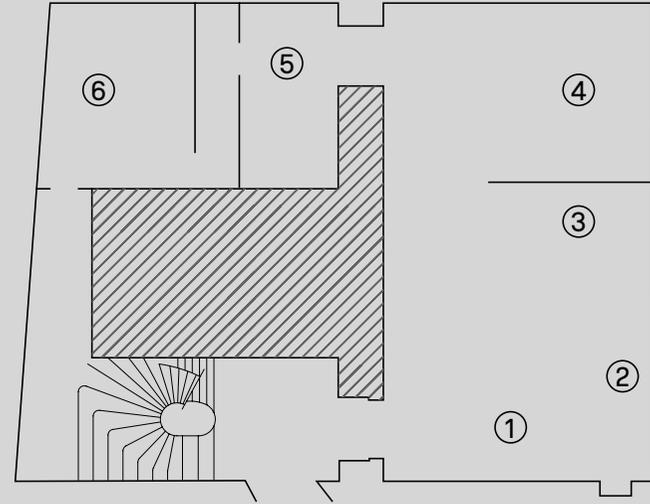
Here, the artists appear as mediators, even as they perform for and from within the frame of cultural presentation and exchange. Advantageously, too, in observing culture and the nature of culture, these artworks reinforce the agency of art and its power to represent. In this respect, the artworks may be said to be actants, in "doing" things for their artists as much as for the rest of us, in acting to intercede, to reconcile, and to act as go-between. Extending from this, one might even consider

all things in the world as actants, including those beyond the world as we know. Furthermore, in their performance, these artworks do not stand separate from us—as cool and distant observers of artistic things. Instead, in having been realised and in taking their place here, they form continuities between us, and are imbricated with us, even as we observe them.

From this perspective, a certainly “creatureliness” pervades, and a continuity extends from one to another, with edges meeting and becoming indistinct—just as language, once grasped, turns disjointed sounds into a continuous stream of meaning. These connections and pathways to comprehension are not limited to language and constituent vibrations or markings of symbolic script, but may be found in forms and flows across all senses, as well as in the movements and variations of mind and body. One might even say they make us part of each other.

Not inert like how we might conventionally view a rock or, for that matter, a small island, distinct and separated. Rather, they act to entangle us, as much as they, too, are entangled together with us—a promise of understanding delivered in a continuous entwining of material, being, space, and time.

1/F



¹ TSUBASA KATO

² KUMI MACHIDA

³ MING WONG

⁴ WIT PIMKANCHANAPONG

⁵ AKIRA TAKAYAMA

⁶ JUN NGUYEN-HATSUSHIBA

TSUBASA KATO

They Do Not Understand Each Other

2014
Video, lambda print
50 x 85 cm
5'14"
Dimensions variable
Collection of the National Museum of Art, Osaka



Photo: Keiichi Sakakura

On a disputed island between the Korean peninsula and the Japanese archipelago, two men—one Japanese and the other Korean—find themselves marooned on this hapless stretch of land. Despite not understanding the words uttered by one another, they are somehow able to collaborate, thanks to their patience and good humour. With the Japanese man sitting balanced atop the Korean man's shoulders, they together attempt to drive a post bearing nothing but a QR code into the sand.

For this absurdist work, Tsubasa Kato employed the surrealist technique of "exquisite corpse", whereby a narrative is composed through the fragmented contributions of different participants with none having knowledge of what has already been said. The resulting non-linear work forms a satirical remark on the incommensurability and fabricated nature of nationhood, as the two men are made to temporarily set aside inherited belief systems in order to achieve their shared goals. Within the gaps of communication they discover that empathy may be the best means of overcoming boundaries.

KUMI MACHIDA

Snow Day

2008
Sumi (blue), mineral pigments, pigments, coloured pencil and pencil on kumohada linen paper
194 x 162 cm
Collection of the National Museum of Art, Osaka



Trained in the tradition of Japanese ink painting, Kumi Machida reinterprets recognisable pop cultural icons in the austere lines of the ink brush. With an infallible hand, all at once her supple and tense strokes exude the antithetical and often contradictory emotions of kindness and coldness, intimacy and alienation. From these simple lines Machida has created countless works, more recently applying this technique to the human form.

With no sign of the snow mentioned in the title, *Snow Day* evokes the viewer's imagination. A biomorphic, childlike character gazes down at something removed from the breast pocket of a shirt with nothing visibly inscribed upon it. Encapsulated in this moment, Machida touches upon an innate anxiety espoused by our present modes of communication. In her typically muted tones, the only colour represented in the composition is in the figure's eyes whose rendering in red has made the downward glance of the figure seemingly and mysteriously significant.

MING WONG

In Love for the Mood

2009
3-channel HD video
4'
Collection of Singapore Art Museum



Image courtesy of the artist

Reenactment and language are often used as transformative devices in Ming Wong's oeuvre, where references accumulate and conjure new meanings. This can be seen from his early recreation of scenes from the films of P. Ramlee in *Four Malay Stories* (2005), the reconstruction of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's 1973 film *Angst essen Seele auf* in *Angst Essen/Eat Fear* (2008), as well as in this work, commissioned for the 53rd Venice Biennale, *In Love for the Mood*.

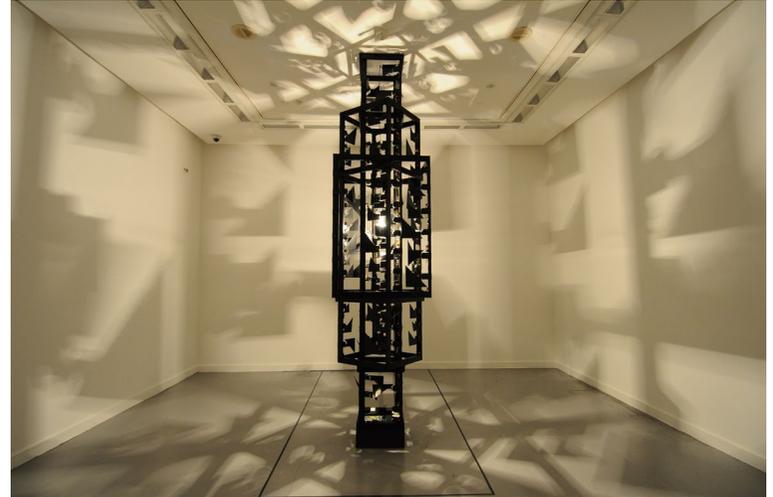
The artwork is based on Wong Kar Wai's Hong Kong romantic drama from 2000, *In the Mood for Love*, in which a couple whose spouses are having an extramarital affair commiserate and find themselves also falling in love. Creating a parallel yet reflexive reenactment, Ming Wong returns to the scene where the couple rehearses responses in preparation for an imagined confrontation between the woman and her adulterous husband. In the artist's reinterpretation, this rehearsal of the moment of reckoning is undertaken by a Caucasian actress who plays both characters, and who is prompted by the artist to repeat the lines of the scene in a language foreign to her. This exercise is presented in three parts where gradually she becomes more at ease with the lines in Cantonese, just as the characters of the film, too, would find themselves slipping into the roles of their unfaithful lovers, falling for one another.

黃漢明

WIT PIMKANCHANAPONG

Not Quite A Total Eclipse

2009
Mixed-media installation with motorised parts of wood,
metal, electronic circuit board, and electric cable
Dimensions variable
Collection of Singapore Art Museum



The inspiration for the kinetic sculpture *Not Quite A Total Eclipse* came from an earlier work by the artist titled *My-ya-rab* (2009), the name of a species of mimosa plant that responds to touch in a temporary folding of its leaves. Observing the shadows that the rhythmically moving fins of the artwork had cast during an evening installation at Bangkok Art and Culture Centre, Wit Pimkanchanapong endeavoured to recreate this effect mechanically and in reference to the astronomical event of an eclipse.

A total eclipse occurs when the moon covers the sun, in a moment of celestial obscurity that has historically been cause for great fascination, anticipation, and fear, with numerous myths and beliefs associated with this disappearance of the sun from one's view. Even as scientists and astronomers have since debunked claims of omens and superstition, nevertheless, in experiencing an eclipse, a feeling of mystery and awe remains. In Pimkanchanapong's artwork, the shadow created is produced mechanically; the chatter of the whirring blades reminds one of that. Yet its mechanism may not be so different from that of a cosmic occurrence, in that the light experienced varies with motion over time—until, unexpectedly, a moment of alignment occurs.

WIT PIMKANCHANAPONG

AKIRA TAKAYAMA

McDonald's Radio University (Hong Kong edition)

2020
Site-specific interactive installation
New commission by Tai Kwun Contemporary



Akira Takayama, *McDonald's Radio University*, 2017, Frankfurt
Photo: Jörg Baumann

McDonald's Radio University is a roving lecture programme that takes place at various branches of McDonald's fast food restaurants or their replicas around the world. Initiated by the artist and theatre director Akira Takayama, the project thinks through the restaurant chain's democratic potential as an oasis for individuals living on the margins of society—often literally, for instance tolerating refugees to stay and meet up at restaurants, despite McDonald's being a for-profit enterprise. The restaurants thus serve as a haven and meeting place for those lacking a secure space.

For the lecture series, Takayama has invited a group of "professors"—all individuals considered to be "refugees" or "migrants" in their host countries—to engage in a collaborative process of writing and composing scripts based on their life experiences. Visitors may scan a QR code on the syllabus in order to stream the lectures on their mobile phones. The work serves to highlight the experiences and narratives of those considered to be "others" within mainstream culture, and explores liminal spaces, both public and private, that unite different strata of society.

JUN NGUYEN-HATSUSHIBA

*Memorial Project Nha Trang, Vietnam: Towards the Complex—
For the Courageous, the Curious and the Cowards*

2001
Single-channel video
13'
Collection of Singapore Art Museum

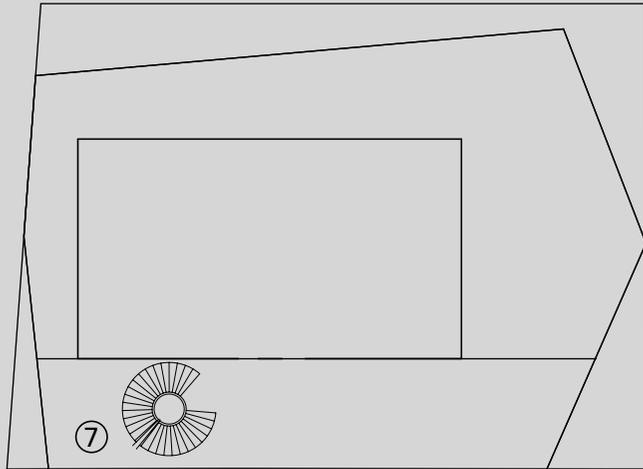


Image courtesy of the artist

Filmed on the coast of Vietnam, *Memorial Project Nha Trang, Vietnam: Towards the Complex—For the Courageous, the Curious and the Cowards* is an early video work by the artist, who is of Japanese and Vietnamese descent. It is also his first underwater work—though the ideas and visual concept may be said to have emerged in earlier installations: of suspended nets and oars in *Memorial for the Courageous* (1997) in Hanoi, and of mosquito nets in *Water in the Sky* (1998) in Ho Chi Minh City, with both installations viewed from below.

Commissioned by the Yokohama Triennale in 2001, the artist had already been tracing the history of the cyclo (or rickshaw) and interviewing cyclo drivers. Noticing that the cyclo had not transformed much in shape and design over the years, its form was to become, within this new film, a reference to unchanging and ever-present pasts. The underwater performance by fishermen struggling to pull the cyclos across a seabed presents a vivid and empathetic recollection of the "boat people" of Vietnam, striving to find new futures across uncertain waters. Also surfacing palpably within the film is the fight for breath, particularly as the cyclos are pulled deeper into the sea. For the "boat people", however, returning to shore was not an option. To survive, they had to venture forward, even if it meant further into the unknown and, perhaps, the new.

2/F



7 HEMAN CHONG

HEMAN CHONG

A Short, Performing, Story

2018

Durational performance involving an
instructor and a participant

Dimensions variable

Collection of the National Museum of Art, Osaka



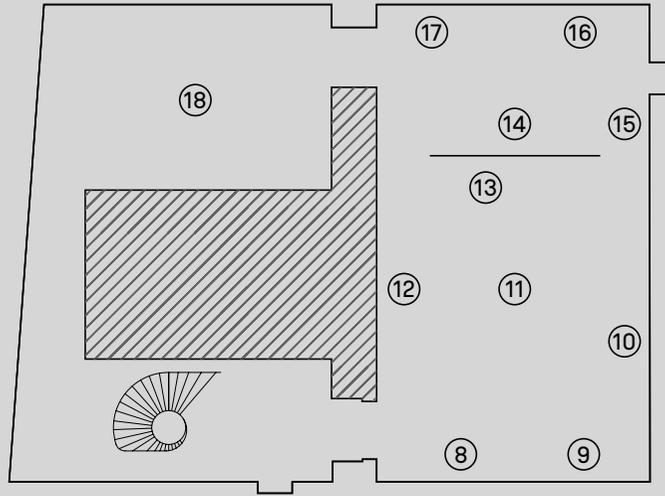
Photo: Kazuo Fukunaga

A Short, Performing, Story asks participants to memorise an approximately 500-word-long story written by the artist. With verbal coaching from an instructor in the gallery, they must remain until the task is complete. This story will not be published in the future, and only the artist, the instructors, and willing participants will know its content. Once memorisation is achieved, the performance is over.

The work proceeds from Chong's interest in the notion of performance as a mode of exchange. The story, written with the intention of being performed in a museum, feeds the assertion that art exists not solely as a container of content but as a tacit agreement between the artist and audience. In *A Short, Performing, Story*, those who want to know the story must become active participants in the performance's creation, devoting several hours of their day in order to bear witness to the work in return. Chong's work hints at issues relating to accessibility, censorship, exclusivity, and sharing—dynamics that are not unique to art, but which in fact permeate contemporary society.

張奕滿

3/F



- 8 KAZUO SHIRAGA
9 CHARLES LIM
10 CHUA CHYE TECK
11 JENNIFER ALLORA &
GUILLERMO CALZADILLA
12 SOJUNG JUN
13 THAN SOK
14 AGNES ARELLANO
15 KOHEI SEKIGAWA
16 chi too
17 SAORI AKUTAGAWA
(MADOKORO)
18 HO TZU NYEN

KAZUO SHIRAGA

Chishousei Kakoko

1961
Oil on canvas
162 × 131 cm
Collection of the National Museum
of Art, Osaka

Chikeisei Soutoki

1962
Oil on canvas
161.5 × 130.5 cm
Collection of the National Museum
of Art, Osaka



Kazuo Shiraga, *Chishousei Kakoko*, 1961

A member of the spirited Japanese postwar avant-garde Gutai group, Kazuo Shiraga continuously experimented with painting using all parts of his body. Inspired by the gestures of American Abstract Expressionists, Shiraga began by gradually pushing oil paint with his fingers to create patterns; then, finding that vertical canvases had the tendency to drip, began laying out compositions on the floor. With larger canvases, he had no choice but to walk on to them and started to paint with his feet, fashioning a unique apparatus for self-suspension from the ceiling with a rope in order to prevent himself from slipping.

Members of the Gutai movement were known for rejecting traditional styles in favour of performative immediacy, exploring the role of matter and the body in achieving originality. This work from the *Water Margin* series, named after one of the heroes of the Chinese classical novel *Water Margin*, a favourite of Shiraga's, features the artist's iconic wild and aggressive bodily strokes.

CHARLES LIM

Sea State 9: Proclamation (drag), Sea State 9: Proclamation (drop), and Sea State 9: Proclamation (pour)

2018
3 single-channel HD videos

13'30"

6'34"

2'30"

Collection of Singapore Art Museum



Images: *Sea State 9: Proclamation (pour)* [Composite of video stills].
Courtesy of the artist

What does it truly mean to live on an island? As a series, *Sea State* compiles Charles Lim's expansive, decade-long exploration of the conjunction of sea and land as well as their relationship to statehood and state-making. Combining the physical with the geographical, historical, psychological, and metaphysical, each project within *Sea State* examines a different facet of the sea that surrounds the island of Singapore. Relying on historical records and maps, anecdotes and conversations, scientific study and material observation, Lim deconstructs and lays bare the complex and intertwined relationship that the state has with the sea.

The series culminates in *Sea State 9: Proclamation*, with a focus on the activity and metaphysics of land reclamation. No longer an act of nature or ecology—where land is produced through sedimentation and erosion—reclamation is a decisive undertaking, requiring both resources and political will, creating solid land where water once reigned. Likewise, as charts and maps create borders where before there were none, official legislation and recognition create states. *Sea State 9: Proclamation* distills this remarkable transformation into three acts, which are presented in stunning and abstracted view via drone footage. Yet the ultimate transformation, as the work implies, is not physical but cultural—since upon proclamation, the symbol of the state as conferred upon the land becomes real, and it is upon this new reality that cultural claims and identities are staked.

CHUA CHYE TECK

Wonderland

2007
C-prints, set of 500
12.7 × 17.8 cm (each)
Collection of Singapore Art Museum



Images: *Wonderland* (detail)

500 photographs of ornaments are assembled in Chua Chye Teck's *Wonderland*. Composed to resemble a retail display (which was the context of its commission), the wall-spanning artwork invites the viewer to observe the uniqueness of each object, much as it suggests a world beyond, from where they had been obtained. It is not, however, the thrill of the newly minted that these objects embody. Instead, they represent the world of the abandoned and left behind, having been discovered by the artist over a period of three months in Salvation Army thrift shops and flea markets, or else contributed by friends. Being ornaments, these are not objects of necessary utility; having been discarded, they serve as relics of affective or attractive value after their appeal has passed.

Chua's interest and focus since the early 2000s have been on found objects and environments that are largely overlooked or neglected. He treats them with sensual effect while simultaneously registering their immediacy in his tactful capture. Attended to with great care, as though they were museum objects, these ornaments are photographed against a green backdrop, recovering and enhancing their features to seductive effect. Furthermore, with each object scaled to commensurable size, none are lesser than the others. Instead, the viewer is compelled to observe the merits of each ornament, connecting with them through sensations of nostalgia and reverie.

JENNIFER ALLORA & GUILLERMO CALZADILLA

Lifespan

2014
Performance (Hadean period rock sample, 3 vocalists)
15' approx
Collection of the National Museum of Art, Osaka



Photo: Kazuo Fukunaga

Three vocalists use whistling and breathing to communicate with a small rock originating from the Hadean period (a geological epoch over four billion years ago). Led by the score's composer, David Lang, this vocal interaction comprises of erratic tones at varying degrees of strength, modulating over the duration of the performance. The result, articulated through sounds and movements, imagines what communication might have been like before the emergence of speech.

The Puerto Rico-based artist duo Allora & Calzadilla regards music as a connective force that governs the lived environment, with the potential to cross both cultural and species divides. Tracing the origins of language in music, *Lifespan* contributes to an ongoing thread of inquiry into the possibility of symbiosis between human beings and the natural world. In considering the role of music in mediating early humans' relationship to the environment, the artists continue to challenge and ask questions about the centrality of human subjectivity in contemporary thought.

GUILLERMO CALZADILLA
&
JENNIFER ALLORA

SOJUNG JUN

A Day of a Tailor

2012
Single-channel video installation
(HD, colour, sound)
8'55"
Collection of the National Museum of Art, Osaka



Image courtesy of the artist

In *A Day of a Tailor*, Sojung Jun observes the life of the character Mr. Gubo, a machine embroidery designer who has worked in the same ten-metre-long shop for over four decades. Set against the constant hum of the sewing machine, the isolated and methodical nature of the tailor's work, and the spools of thread forming a castle around him, reveals its own microcosm.

A Day of a Tailor is emblematic of the multiple idiosyncratic worlds created under the demands of contemporary production. The title of this work is inspired by the novel *A Day in the Life of Novelist Gubo*, a novel by the South Korean author Park Tae-won, depicting the changes wrought by a modernising South Korea of the 1930s. The main character, Mr. Gubo, wanders through a series of shops, coffee houses, and malls, tracing an emerging architecture of commerce. Executed through a variety of media—predominantly video—Jun applies a microscopic lens to contemporary currents with particular attention to the perspectives of the marginal or liminal figure. This work forms part of her ongoing series looking at individuals engaged in diverse occupations.

全昭俊

SOJUNG JUN

Last Pleasure

2012
Single-channel video installation
(HD, colour, sound)
6'58"
Collection of the National Museum of Art, Osaka



Image courtesy of the artist

Last Pleasure observes the life of a tightrope walker, continuing the video artist Sojung Jun's series depicting people engaged in a diverse range of occupations. In contrast to other countries, the tradition of tightrope-walking in Jun's native Korea is a composite art that involves witty conversation, dance, as well as live music.

Shot over a six-month period during which Jun tailed her main subject, *Last Pleasure* alludes to the contradictory nature of the tightrope artist who must be committed to the itinerant lifestyle while exercising extreme endurance in order to hone the skill set required. At the same time, performing demands extreme extroversion and performativity in the act of walking across a trembling rope. The work's title is formulated as the opposite of Franz Kafka's short story "First Sorrow" in his novel *The Hunger Artist* (1921), which recounts the parable of a trapeze artist who does not wish to return to the ground, preferring instead to remain suspended above reality. *Last Pleasure* positions the tightrope walker as one who straddles the different realms, at once high- and low-brow, spiritual and earthly, balancing on the precipice of the real and the ideal, both physically and metaphorically.

SOJUNG JUN

Sun and Star: Record of the Words

2012
Single-channel video installation
(HD, colour, sound)
6'03"
Collection of the National Museum of Art, Osaka



Image courtesy of the artist

Centring around the figure of a traditional letterpress worker in Taipei, the video artist Sojung Jun's *Sun and Star: Record of the Words* tells the tale of a society grappling with the changes brought about by modernisation. The typesetter, an anachronistic figure whose trade has largely lost out to newer printing technologies, works in the hope that by passing his knowledge down, some of this tradition might be retained. Jun finds this resolute mentality to be analogous to that of the artist who must keep a clear outlook on one's vision, adhering steadfastly to one's own philosophy and beliefs regardless of currents or trends.

This work forms a part of a larger series examining the conditions of individuals engaged in various occupations through which Jun explores the terms of contemporary life. Told through the lens of a subject whose livelihood is slowly being eclipsed, *Sun and Star: Record of the Words* cautions how under the guise of improvement much traditional wisdom is lost. The work furthers the artist's exploration of the effects of modernity on individual lives.

SOJUNG JUN

Time Regained

2012
Single-channel video installation
(HD, colour, sound)
9'06"
Collection of the National Museum of Art, Osaka



Image courtesy of the artist

Time Regained makes an unlikely protagonist of the Gwangju Movie Theater's last sign painter. In the work, the sign board—thickened with many layers of past movie poster images overlaid one on top of another—features as a leitmotif for the passage of time as well as the erasure of memory. The sign painter's own life traces an arc that highlights the changes in South Korea during the democratisation movement. Attending art school in Gwangju at the time of the uprising, when democracy activists and university students clashed with the army resulting in a large number of casualties, unceremoniously launched the painter's career, as he began painting pro-democracy signs. Over the years, he gradually came to do work for movie theatres, before the outsourcing of labour and the onset of new technologies rendered such tasks obsolete.

This work is part of Sojung Jun's larger series featuring individuals engaged in disparate occupations, many of whose paths in life are challenged by current economic and technological innovations. In this work, the attention to a painting vernacular and to trade attempts to resolve the antagonisms between high and low art, recognising the capacity of both to express the finite and temporal.

SOJUNG JUN

My Fair Boy

2012
Single-channel video installation
(HD, colour, sound)
5'25"
Collection of the National Museum of Art, Osaka



Image courtesy of the artist

Loosely channeling the Greek myth of Pygmalion—where a sculptor falls in love with his statue—*My Fair Boy* depicts a master puppeteer in Taiwan as he lovingly attempts to carve the ideal figure from a piece of wood. Sojung Jun's work parses out the effects of modernisation on contemporary society, collating interviews and assembled materials to bring forth the overlooked narratives of those on the periphery. In *My Fair Boy* the puppeteer exhibits a tenderness and affection for his creation that Jun finds emblematic of the dynamic many artists assume with their work. This work continues Jun's project of depicting professionals in a diverse range of occupations in which she identifies an allegory for the never-ending pursuit of the artist seeking an ideal.

THAN SOK

Srie Bun II

2016
Five clerical garments
231 × 89 cm (each)
Collection of Singapore Art Museum



Photo: Prum Ero

The colours of the five clerical garments (or robes of monks) in Than Sok's *Srie Bun II* are familiar for those in Cambodia and much of Asia. Associated with different sects and ranks within Theravada Buddhist practice—the first three from the Maha Nikaya, the other two from the Thammayut—their symbolic meaning when worn is nevertheless the same, signalling a commitment to an enlightened path. Devotion is an honourable decision, and one that is open to all, with these garments easily available at markets in Phnom Penh, often sold alongside other religious and ritual objects. But these robes also have moral and economic value, elevating the wearer in social contexts and providing access to funds or services that may seem incongruous with their ethical roots and intents.

Srie bun, which translates to “fields of merit”, offers a corporeal and worldly perspective, suggesting that these garments merely clothe, rather than transform, the individual they adorn. This revelation appears on the robes themselves, with areas of their material deliberately removed and the gaps displayed. Besides falling short of providing full cover, the square-shaped cutouts also resemble the grid of rice fields, with associations of almsgiving and the rewards of honest labour. Even as transcendental aspirations are commendable, the result, it would appear, can be all too human.

THAN SOK

AGNES ARELLANO

Haliya Bathing

1983
Coldcast marble sculpture and crushed marble stones
Dimensions variable
Collection of Singapore Art Museum



Haliya Bathing features the alluring Philippine moon goddess from Bicol mythology that has held a central place in Agnes Arellano's exploration of the intersection of the feminine and the sacred. Cast from parts of the artist's own body, the artwork was first shown in 1983 as part of her first “inscape” (or personal landscape), *Temple to the Moon Goddess*, at the “Six Artists” exhibition curated by Roberto Chabet, a pioneer of Philippine conceptual art.

Haliya is amongst a circle of religious and mythological female figures referred to within the artist's practice, which includes Isis, Tantra, Aphrodite, and Kali, as she taps into alternatives to male-dominated creeds and social hierarchies. In the story, Haliya descends to earth to bathe in a sacred spring that is depicted using crushed white marble stones raked to resemble rippling water, a method that recalls Zen stone gardens. As the myth goes, Haliya is wooed by a mortal woodsman and is left stranded on earth. In Arellano's work, Haliya is seen pregnant and poised to usher into the world a demigod whose fate she contemplates. In addition to its mythic vision, the artwork's life-giving form and symbolism also calls attention to our relationship to the moon and its sway over oceanic tides and the growth of crops.

AGNES ARELLANO

KOHEI SEKIGAWA

One-Minute Events (Humming)

2020
Performance
New commission by Tai Kwun Contemporary



Courtesy of SPIRAL / Wacoal Art Center
Photo: Mito Ikeda

Kohei Sekigawa is an artist who examines the transmission of meaning generated via his variety of works, including performances, installations, and illustrations. For *One-Minute Events*, which was firstly performed in Tokyo in 2016, he ordinarily executes a series of one-minute performances in an art space employing minimal props and settings. Comprising of seemingly insignificant actions, each of these brief events might easily be overlooked, yet the entire series unfolds according to a strict schedule forming the basis of a durational performance and overall exercise in bodily discipline. In a way, the work contributes to a sustained practice of recontextualising everyday actions within institutional space, prompting a re-encounter with the quotidian through prescribed constraints.

In the context of COVID-19, however, with travel restrictions and quarantine requirements, the artist has as yet been unable to travel to Hong Kong in order to perform live on site. Instead, every day at 3 pm Hong Kong time, the artist will be humming; no live streaming will be provided, however, with the result that the work opens up a space for visitors to imagine the performance and bring trust in the artist—echoing the experience of isolation at a physical remove.

chi too

Like Someone in Love #10

2014
Three bubble sheets filled with acrylic paint
100 × 100 cm (each)
Collection of Singapore Art Museum

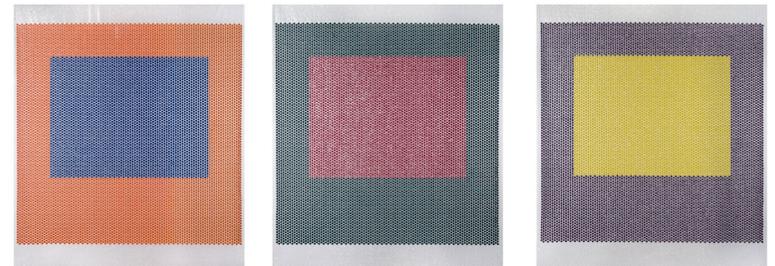


Image courtesy of the artist

Like Someone in Love #10 is a triptych of bubble-wrap paintings that appears less politically oriented than other works by the artist and filmmaker. First having entered production lines as packing material in the 1950s, bubble wrap has since become ubiquitous and provides protection for the transportation of goods necessary in global markets. Given chi too's penchant for humour and satire, the medium of the artwork might be read as a playful comment on the packing material equally used in the delivery and shipment of artworks, employed in lieu of the conventional support of painting—the canvas. However, when considered from the perspective of its title, the artwork assumes deeper meaning.

As a by-product, bubble wrap has also served as a somewhat addictive source of stress relief and mechanical entertainment, titillating the senses when the bubbles are popped. In essence, bubble wrap is made of trapped air, and it is into these spaces or voids that the artist painstakingly fills, injecting paint in a time-consuming "love of labour" that also speaks to the labour of love. At the same time, in colouring in these extruded sheets in binaries of complementary colour, the bubble wrap loses its usefulness as protective barrier—and is now made vulnerable, a bit like someone in love.

SAORI AKUTAGAWA (MADOKORO)

From a Myth "The Birth of Gods"

1956
Batik on cotton cloth
194 × 130.3 cm
Collection of the National Museum of Art, Osaka



Closely associated with the 20th-century Japanese avant-garde who lived and worked in the US in the 1960s—most notably Tatsuo Ikeda, Shigeo Ishii, and On Kawara—Saori Akutagawa received acclaim for a series of works re-examining archetypes in Japanese folklore and mythology. In *From a Myth "The Birth of Gods"*, a strange monster glares out with bloodshot eyes, its hair standing on end, knife in hand, and a bird-like body. An unstable form in the background threatens to chase the viewer away, but its wild, almost primitivist brushstrokes simultaneously evince the possibility to confront and rebel against any constraints in the situation. Made with Akutagawa's unique batik textile-dyeing method, the lines and colours in the picture are absorbed into the thin fabric without any visible lustre.

織紗 (間所) 川 芥

HO TZU NYEN

EARTH

2009–2017
Single-channel HD video with sound
42'
Collection of Singapore Art Museum



Image courtesy of the artist

Art history is a recurring subject in Ho Tzu Nyen's practice, partly as homage and partly in inspiration. In earlier works such as *4x4—Episodes of Singapore Art* (2005) and *The Cloud of Unknowing* (2011), the artist is observed delving into the subjects of art historical canon-making and discourse—debating the significance of artworks across successive generations and investigating the form of the cloud in Renaissance, Baroque, Surrealist, and Chinese landscape paintings respectively. Within *EARTH*, Ho's interest is likewise art historical and yet it takes an aesthetic turn, applying a contemporary interpretation and motion to the narrative genre of history painting. Or, as the artist describes, "doing painting with video".

Filed in three long, uninterrupted takes, *EARTH* is inspired by Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby's *Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-Revolutionary France* (2002). Panning across the dimly lit and sprawling tableau of figures, *EARTH* makes visual reference to grisly but iconic scenes found in seminal artworks such as Delacroix's *Massacre at Chios* (1824), Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa* (1818–19), Girodet's *The Sleep of Endymion* (1791), Caravaggio's *Doubting Thomas* (1602–03) and *David and Goliath* (1599), and Antoine-Jean Gros's *Bonaparte Visiting the Plague-Stricken at Jaffa* (1804). Brought to life and accompanied by a contemporary soundtrack by Black to Comm, the world in *EARTH* may appear dramatically post-apocalyptic, but it is also where the past serves as a source of lineage and influence as much as it offers a contemplation of the possibilities of the present and future.

何子彦

They Do Not Understand Each Other

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