

The Future of Imagination 3

Podungsak Kachasumrong (Thailand), Future of Imagination 2 (2004), Photo by Gilles Massot

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The Future of Imagination 3

International Performance Art Event
10-14 April 2006
at the Singapore Art Museum & The Substation

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Work title: "Untitled"
Venue: Sculpture Square, 8th - 12th Dec 2004.
Photo credits: Gilles Massot and Casandra Schultz.



The Future of Imagination 3

ideology:irony:imagination by Lee Wen

We are pleased to be able to make this festival a third time. In addition to a similar program from the last one of presenting performances by various international artists with Singapore artists, we are also coordinating with Malaysian artists. Kuala Lumpur based artists, Liew Kung Yu and Ray Langenbach will be hosting "Satu Kali", before our event so that artists invited to Singapore can also perform in Kuala Lumpur.¹

We also continue to try to address various discrepancies in the Singapore scene such as the lack of critical writing and dialogue by hosting a forum and inviting writers to give a critical response or review. In addition to the forum this year we will also have one conducted in Chinese language. According to the statistics half the literate population in Singapore actually uses Chinese as their first language. If cultural discourse is not including the Chinese language then it only has the chance to reach half the population.²

In last year's forum, Ray Langenbach observed that our press release used the word "positive" more than 7 times. Langenbach talks about how this corresponds to an alignment of the notion of the developmental ethos of art that mirrors the government's own "developmentalist" notion of the state. As artists cum organizers we must admit to the irony of working within the bureaucratic process and structure in order to secure the

approval, funding and support of the state for an international performance art festival to be held here. One stands guilty of submitting to the state apparatus and in danger of becoming mindlessly (perhaps even consciously yet inescapably) coerced into conforming to the ideological state apparatus as theorized by Louis Althusser. It would be difficult to comment on irony when one is caught in the midst of it, however it is based on a real desire to make a platform, which allows openness for critical artistic responses. We have to be aware that artists often have to work within the limitations of the social realm we find ourselves in, at the same time we must not forget to push for changes. Funding support is only one to begin with.

We recognize there remain various problems with a festival format. Artists for example are limited to present a short 30 minutes performance. Even if some artists propose to make durational, longer performances or site-specific works in public places, they would have to work within the framework given by the organizers based on the local conditions. In Singapore, another obstacle is the bureaucratic licensing process, which check flexibility, spontaneity and risk-taking, which are crucial ingredients for performance art. However one must look at the festival as a constructive channel while working under the local social conditions to enable the

presentations and interactions by and with various artists from differing backgrounds and different working processes.

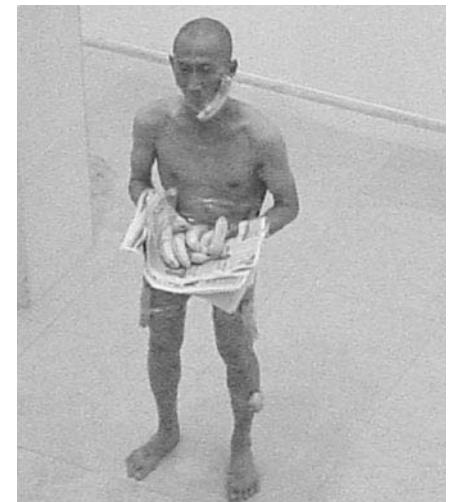
Ours is a call to uphold the role and possibilities of "imagination" which is the subject here, and not merely advocate a developmentalist approach to the "future". "The future of imagination" is a proposition to create a vehicle to take us beyond the turbulent past that put us in the present crisis of contemporary culture into the inconclusive future with artistic imagination presented through live performance art.

The role of the imagination is not answerable by the artist alone but also the spectator and their responses. Each human being is uniquely situated and embodied in time and space. We have unique responsibilities stemming from this unique position. This is not an excuse or explanation to justify our position but to offer the varied possibilities and comparison of unique perspectives available in the world. In order to reach a relationship, reciprocity and reconciliation between the individual and the "other" perspectives, based on our individual self who sees things that the "other" cannot see.

We brave to find out if this is still within the reach of a world in speedy transition, caught in a matrix of virtual reality and the ubiquitous market that threatens to destroy other more humanistic approaches. Through a questioning and discovery via live

performances, allowing social encounters, which are notwithstanding open and free. We do not wish to remain contained within the prescribed "future" of the state nor the TV commercials and a capitalist, consumerist society. We need the live manifestation, network and interaction of artists in presenting a diversity of performances in order for discourse and dialogue to be created, albeit there should be negative responses in order for the thread of dialectical discussions to continue. But without an international meeting of live performance artists and their presentations we would be poorly absorbed in theoretical conjectures by and based on the "usual suspects" of the status quo.

"Almost untitled: end of the world stories"
photo: Sandra Johnston
Blurr 5 biennial of performance art, Tel Aviv, Israel



¹ "Satu Kali" organized by Ray Langenbach and Liew Kung Yu will be held in Kuala Lumpur, 6 to 9 April 2006

² Singapore Department of Statistics (2001), *Literacy and Language* (Dec 2000)
Singapore: Government Printer.



Work title: "Untitled Collaboration" with Lee Wen.
Venue: Sculpture Square, 8th - 12th Dec 2004.
Photo credits: Gilles Massot.

Re-Imagining the Man in the Street

by Lee Wen

I'm in a double decker bus in Singapore. The mobile T.V. is blasting at me with too cold an air-conditioner vent over my head. I ignore watching the T.V. but now and then glance at it as the sound is too loud and the air-conditioner is too cold and the boobs and bobs are too much revealing on that dreaded screen. It shows a program of a beauty contest for America's most sexy. I can't believe what I am watching. How can this be? We are disallowing nudity in public performances. The public performances I am more concerned about being censored are usually done not without sensitive consideration for art, culture and poetry and for a willing, limited and thinking, discerning audience. Yet, here on a public bus we are forced to watch a most vulgar exposition of human expression. The judges openly discussed the rationale of their decisions in the contest for a prize in money for the sexiest men and women. Mostly in superficial terms of blue eyes, sharp noses, clearly defined chins and exotic, eroticized perceptions of racial differences. With bulging biceps and deep cleavages of bust lines and all the other physical bodily attributes. Where judgment of beauty and praise for the human being are reduced to a kind the most reckless and the most shallow, without regard for any discussion for character, personality and moral ethical values. I am tortured by this experience several times a day, as I have not the privilege of affording private transportation. The very few chances a bus ride seems enjoyable

these days is when the air-conditioning is mild and suitable and the program on the mobile T.V. is not blasting loudly at me with such senseless entertainment or is out of order.

This torturous experience is tolerable because it is usually less than an hour's ride at the most an hour and half between the furthest reaches of our little country in Singapore. However if one were to consider the working man, riding this bus after waking up early everyday to go to work and then tired out after a long day's work to return home again in this bus or having a job that requires commuting on a bus several times a day. One can imagine the stupor one has to evolve into in order to either resist this aggravation or submit to this shenanigan of progress and technology.

I am sure the people responsible for installing the mobile TVs and air-conditioning on the public buses in Singapore have the commuters' welfare in mind. After all we are the valued commuting workers and we need to be informed, educated and entertained while we ride in the comfort of air-conditioning in our humid, tropical climate. But this costs money. So it has to be profit making. We get cheap programs, repeat them endlessly and we get them sponsored by advertisers and perhaps may even bring in the income to help lower the price of bus rides for commuters. All these decisions were probably made with the "man in the street" in mind.



Work title: "(Toward) An Other Action In An Other's Body"
 Venue: Sculpture Square, 8th - 12th Dec 2004.
 Photo credits: Gilles Massot and Cassandra Schultz.

Often in discussing what I do as an artist not only in terms of performance art but also in contemporary visual art in general and trying to explain my work to an interested yet uninformed audience, the subject of the perception of "the man in the street" comes up. And all too often its used as a response of disapproval to what we do as being too far fetched from the reaches and understanding of the "man in the street". I am not sure if we really understand who the real "man in the street" is. I often hold statistical social studies and surveys in skeptical suspicion but not without amusement and perplexity. However one cannot ignore the "man in the street". The "man in the street" does exist though in an ambiguous way.

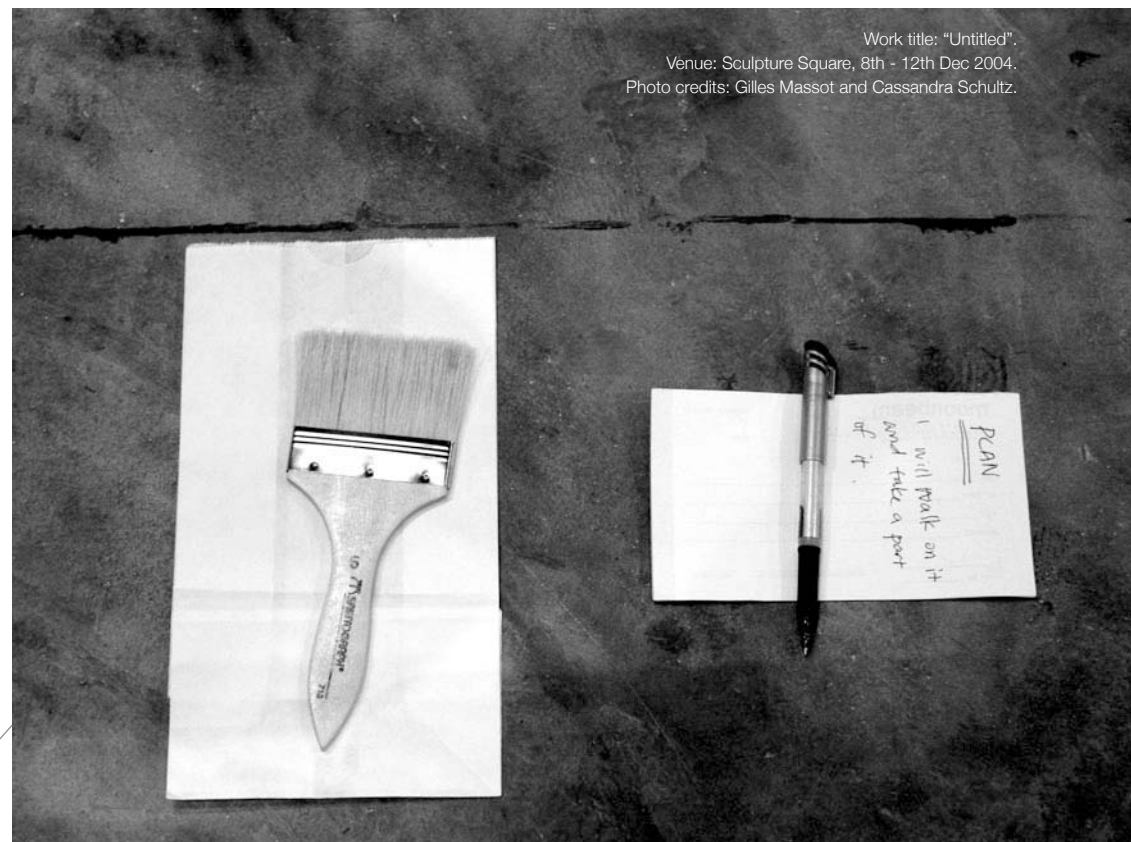
Some of the arguments against what we do in performance art in relation to the "man in the street" includes: incomprehensibility, obscenity, overly charged with sensitive political or religious issues, inciting public

disorder. All of which I would admit is true and in fact intentional for the practicing artists but with reservations as to that of conscious agitations, considerate motivations and direct poetic command of first and foremost an artist. Complacency and apathy from the mundane and overly familiar in mass culture requires that artists do a little shaking the order of the day. Chaos is our middle name. If you want an orderly survey of life go watch the six o'clock news or read the newspapers. But then again it depends which news you watch or newspapers you read. In times like these watching CNN and the Al-Jazeera network or reading Time magazine and Jihad.net may be just as confusing and unsettling. But we want to keep in touch while we live our lives. The alternative is to be a recluse, which is not an invalid option. The Chinese intellectuals and literati were known to take this option at various low points in China's turbulent history. During the Dark Ages in Europe there were some who regard the "monastic option" the

only way to remain sane and preserve the best in Western culture and human spirit in order to survive the ebb of civilization. We all need to do that from time to time. Withdrawing to our caves, sit out our 20-30 minutes of quiet time to recess from this god-forsaken world in prayer or meditation, prod and putter about in our gardens or studios in isolation, do a trip out to nowhere, in order to re-charge our tired souls. And there are artists even artists who do works that partake performances in such therapeutic solace with the audience.

Some of the seemingly apolitical works are to me the most political. Artists return to ritualistic details, abandoned meaning, resort to abstraction, conceptualism and nature in times of despair with the social environments

and disillusioned with human relationships. Yet the strongest of such works are still from those who reserve a deep sensitivity and understanding of the social condition and political process. For those who claim their works to be simply about beauty, mythology and art and completely devoid of politics, are held in suspect either of an incomplete consciousness of our human condition or merely playing a repressed game in compliance to the powers that be. In the case of those who use social and political issues directly to create art, there is still a wide, diverse spectrum that ranges from actual acts of protests, marches and rallies, or humorous jibes of uncanny behavior, to subtle manifestations for quiet contemplation. There is a genuine desire to raise consciousness



Work title: "Untitled".
 Venue: Sculpture Square, 8th - 12th Dec 2004.
 Photo credits: Gilles Massot and Cassandra Schultz.

and awareness as well as to reflect and share one's own concern with a world gone wrong in a poetic way. However there are risks involved, dangers implicated and fears to be considered with "the man in the street" that they may verge on conflict of values, outrage of sensitivities and uncontrollable violence.

In Singapore's context we have over the years become more and more engrossed and subjected to the censorship and regulations of art. Artists have to submit incessantly to the uncomfortable policing of their creative efforts either by way of the licensing process or even blatant censure. The most commonly cited justification concerns public order, internal security and obscenity. There is an apprehension that art should not erode core moral values, subvert national security and stability and/ or create misunderstanding or conflict in our multicultural and multireligious society. Once again, all these trepidations are for the very well being and interests of the "man in the street". And yet the most ironic thing is that the performances, films and theatre productions that got caught in the controversies have always been passionate works by artists that empathetically argued for the "man in the street", those forgotten, marginalized or left behind by the larger civilization process.

The law of obscenity in Singapore is based on the Penal Code, which we inherited from the British dating back to the mid-1800. Its wide provisions encompasses annoying any

"man in the street" in any public place and even includes private spaces where public has access to, whether they have a right to do so or not. It is a criminal law which is so widely defined that it does not only include those who have intention to offend but even a simulation or even obviously fake, dramatic acts of expression may be deemed to be criminal acts of obscenity in the courts. That is to say art has no recourse to the law in the case of criminal courts of law. If there is anything incomprehensible about our work as artists it's the fact that we often have to face those who claim to speak for "the man in the street" and yet are simply refusing to open their minds to the language of art and artists who are actually speaking for "the man in the street". The last censorship review committee of 2003 has made some recommended changes and "liberalization"; however the laws that art and artists are subjected to have not actually changed since the mid-1800. If there is any serious intention to remake our society to be in step with the times, we should be reviewing these laws not just the regulations of censorship, and to re-imagine and re-invent that "man in the street".

lee wen

July 28, 2004

This essay was written for FOI2 catalogue which we did not publish. I made the opening speech for FOI2 on 8 Dec 2004 based on the contents of this text. – lee wen



Work title: "Untitled"

Venue: Sculpture Square, 8th - 12th Dec 2004.

Photo credits: Gilles Massot and Cassandra Schultz.

Interview with Tang Da Wu

November 6 2005, "Your Mother Gallery",
Singapore

Lee Wen: When you started to do performances in UK, how would you compare it to when you started to perform in Singapore? In terms of subject matter for example they were more focused on local contexts?

Tang Da Wu: In the beginning my performances were just "performance as performance", no message, no story. But...when did I start my first performance with something to say?...it was "Howard Liew"? "In the Case of Howard Liew" that was first and the second one was "Superman".

LW: What was that about?

TDW: "Howard Liew" was an art judge. And Howard Liew wears his clothes in half-half. And he wears a hat. Half one color and the other half another color. His clothes also one half one color. And he has a special brush and he points to paintings and artwork and make his judgment that they were first prize or second prize...and his brush also is half and half. So he has got both sides of the coin whatever he wants. I did that with the Singapore Art Festival fringe in 1988.

LW: You did your first performance in Singapore in 1981 or 82?

TDW: Yes I did it when I came home for holiday. I did five days of performance in NAFA, LaSalle

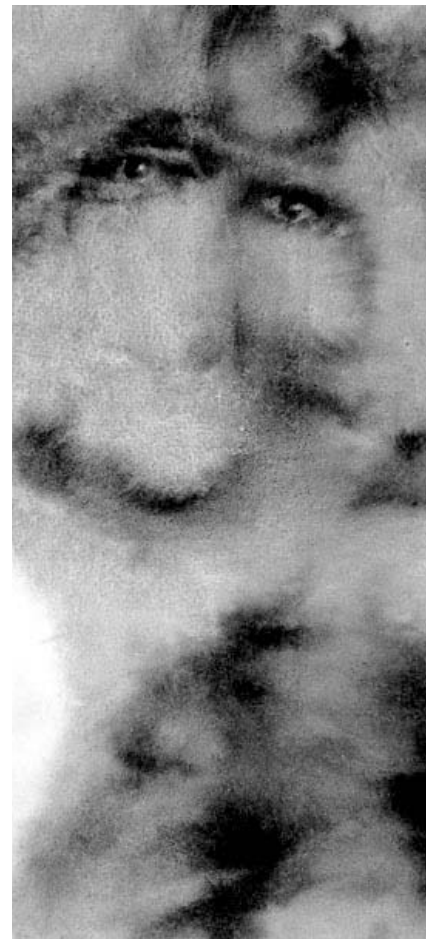
and then five days at the National Museum, National Art Gallery. It was no message, no story, improvisation, and response to audience; pick up things and objects from the immediate surroundings.

LW: In your follow-up works they were narrative, message based and you often talk about myth making. And you also often talk about skill in performance. What in performance art is the skill involved?

TDW: Yes, you are making art. You are not making a message. It's an ability to respond to audience. I would say that is the first thing. You notice they're there in front of you and you do things in front of them and you are quick enough to respond to any situation. With movement or with verbal. One must be good responding to the audience.

LW: Do you find the audience different when you worked in UK compared to that in Singapore?

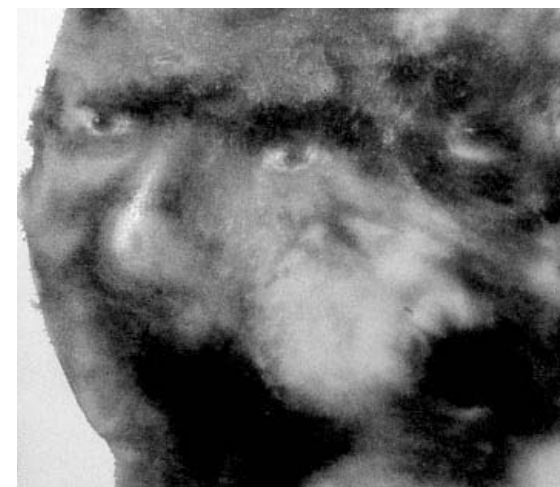
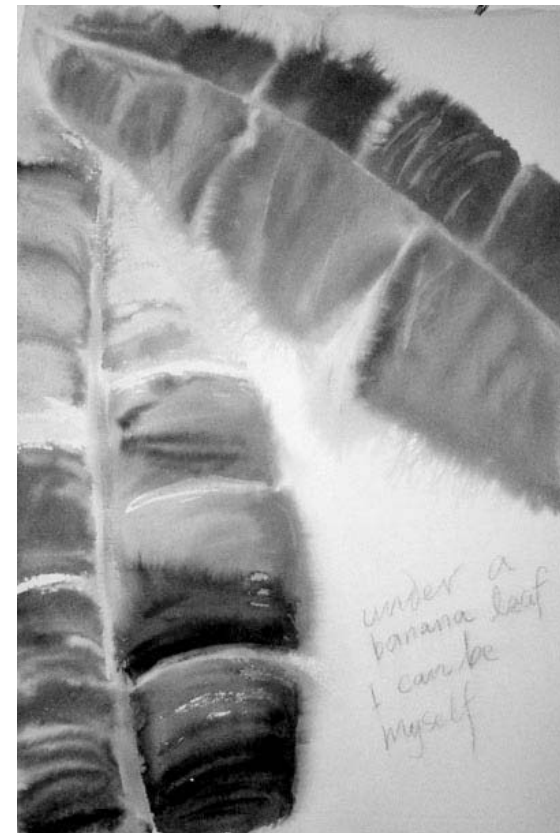
TDW: I supposed one of the differences is that they have seen performances for a long time and they get used to. And then when I did it in '82 in Singapore, maybe its something they have not seen before and they don't know how to react to or respond to. For example, both



in NAFA and National Art Gallery, the NAFA teachers and students always say things like, "Oh it's like 'tang kee'" (in Teochew Chinese dialect: medium or shaman).

LW: What was your response to that?

TDW: Yah, you can read it that way. Why not? But for me it's a very serious thing, its my art work in front of the audiences.



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LW: But in many performance art discussions and theory there is this discussion of the performance artist as a “shaman” as well. So it's not really wrong to relate your work to that of the Chinese “medium” or “tang kee”. Because this is in our tradition of the shamanic practice as a traditional kind of performances. Like in the discussion of performances of Joseph Beuys, some have identified his work as “shamanistic” as well. Do you see yourself as practicing like a shaman as well?

TDW: I haven't thought of it like that. I was quite aware of myself and the audience.

LW: You have often used the word “medium” but more in terms of the “art medium”.

TDW: Yah like watercolor as a medium, the artist body as a medium. No I have not thought about that (shamanist) way. That was Joseph Beuys, his thing. It's different. I enjoy performance because I get immediate responses. And my quick decisions I have to make spontaneously in front of people. It's very different to making a painting at your own time, lazy time. After you did your painting it's a long time to wait before your painting meet the audience. Performance it's not that way. You meet the audience straightaway. I enjoy that. And that include everything. In painting you make a mistake you can cover up. Nobody knows. You perform; you make a mistake and being stupid, silly, embarrassment, everything you cannot erase. And that is something I enjoy doing it, it's real.

LW: So to you it's the level of authenticity. It's more real because you cannot erase your mistakes in front of people.

TDW: There is a lot of enjoyment in there, quite intense.

LW: In the early days of performance in the UK there were many people who were talking about the dematerialization of art making. Were you influenced by that as well? Or what was your motivation to move in that direction? Was it also against the art market as well?

TDW: It wasn't really having something to protest against. It was a trying out of a new way of expressing which I find it very challenging and very enjoyable.

LW: Over the years you have continued in painting, sculptures and drawing as well. How do you relate to continuing your work in painting, drawing to performance?

TDW: Yah I do them all. At the same time. And I find that performance is very helpful to my other disciplines. For example, drawings and paintings. Things that I learnt from performance I can practice that on painting and drawings. For example the space or stage for a performance, they are similar to a canvas space or paper space where I can do my drawing and painting.

LW: The later works where you are doing after, the tapioca series was more a workshop situation. Do you see that as also performance art?

TDW: They are an extension. Extended discipline. I discovered that a workshop situation is a development from my performance. Again the immediate audience is there, doing things with me working with them together. There is also a certain intensity within myself and the participants. The participants also as an audience but we do things and make further developments towards an art project. For example a mythology of the banana tree. Every workshop contribute more materials into it. And when I do more workshops I collect more and more mythology into the whole project. It was beneficial to me and I am sure to the participants.

LW: When you started doing these works was it also a reaction to the problems of performance art from 1994 onwards, that of licensing of public performances.

TDW: I was not aware of that. It was a naturally developing from my performance. But talking about the “ban”. I enjoyed the “ban”. I did a few performances during the “ban” without properly getting a license to do it. I find that very enjoyable and exciting. I used extra sensitivity. Really thinking hard how to budging into a situation and do a thing.

LW: For example, the “Don’t give money to the art” incident with the President (of Singapore)?

TDW: I don’t know. If you view that one as something like that. That’s your view. If you view that as a performance.

LW: Because its kind of on the edge between performance and an everyday life situation...

TDW: That one is something quite special and sensitive. I was intended to do it as an everyday life thing, not as a performance. To deliver a message to the President, the top person of the country. I wanted him to know that artists are important and please notice us. So I did it as a real life thing but then many people saw it as a performance I cannot argue too much with that.

LW: Since 1994 to 2003 NAC has not funded performance art. The performance art event, “Future of Imagination” was a response to the lifting of the funding ban. Do you think this is a good response? As we were doing this event, many questioned whether it was a good thing to work with.

TDW: Well we must accept that NAC lifting the ban means they know what they are doing now. That they realized it’s the right thing and good thing for the future of Singapore art and international art. I think their gesture means that and so we must accept that. It’s no problem.

LW: We also realized that holding an international performance art event is quite limiting in some ways when we have to go through the licensing process and we have to limit the artists to work within the official licensed format of a festival. Do you think that there should be further changes?

TDW: The lifting of the ban is not quite complete. For example there are two artists banned for life. Josef Ng and Shannon Tham. They are not allowed to have exhibitions in the public still. I hope that one would be lifted quite soon.

That is the follow-up thing that NAC should address and consider. It’s not right to ban an artist for life.

LW: But there has never been a ban. Its just that they will not give them funding.

TDW: (laughs) OK then I hope NAC will give the funding to Shannon and Josef Ng... Whatever way you want to put it...And the writing and submitting of script and things in order for a license it’s not right. Its not art anymore. If it’s “National Arts Council” it should be for the “art”. You are making conditions for the art... that’s very funny. I hope they consider that and make some changes. The forming of arts council is to promote the kind of art that is an important part of the country’s humanity and civility to live as a human. And art that is commercial and making a lot of money, they don’t need to help. And we hope that arts council will consider that. We don’t want another Van Gogh situation to happen again in our modern society where a brilliant artist goes starving. And the arts council should be doing the job to prevent another Van Gogh situation.

LW: What are you working on recently?

TDW: I am doing many projects. My myth making method is still going on strongly. One of the things I spend a lot of time is myth making in the city. I study people in their environment. I draw them and I hope by drawing them would let this drawing speak for these person in his or her environment. Until now I have made drawings of more than a hundred persons in my collection and still going on.

LW: Are these the same drawings you are showing at “Your Mother’s Gallery” now?

TDW: Yes these are some of them.

LW: Why do you put this book, “Why artists are poor?”¹ in your exhibition.

TDW: This is by a Dutch scholar artist, who studies the society about “why artists are poor?” and he laid out his studies, which I think the arts council especially, should read. Every arts council official should read it. First thing to understand the importance of art in the whole building of a nation. It’s important to its contribution. Artists are not anything like a commercial institution, supermarket or like a decorative profession. Artists are philosophers and thinkers. They are important to the development of a country and I think the book list out a few things and made a good study of to how a country should address this. In the end the country benefit.

LW: What do you think are the basics of art education?

TDW: I think four disciplines are very important, drawing, printmaking, filmmaking and photography and performance. Filmmaking and photography are together. I like to put performance first because from performance you can learn a lot of useful things and they are good for drawings for painting, for film and photography, printmaking. And the other disciplines can follow up but these four are the basics.



LW: Recently you have been teaching again at NAFA and La Salle. How have they changed from the past and what do you see lacking?

TDW: I think the facilities have improved tremendously. But I think we have to think about the teaching. Some of the teachers try to teach too much. In the first place you accepted the students through an entrance test. Which means they are already an artist and they come to learn the methods of doing things, the research method. There isn't really teaching art as such when they are already an artist. The school needs to re-consider what to teach. It's a waste when you teach something, which is not useful to them. It's wasting both parties time. For example when a person is not working well with ceramics but you insist that the student must learn it as a compulsory subject. So you must respect your student and help them to research what they want and not to impose what you think is needed. The art school must respect the student and help them to research what they want. Yah the facilities are one thing but the teaching of too much unwanted things could be changed.

Kai: What do you think of the students?

TDW: It must be getting more popular. There are more art students these days. More than before. I am sure if art schools give them more freedom and respect them and help them with what they want to research there will be more good artists.

¹ Hans Abbing, "Why are artists poor? : The exceptional economy of the arts", Amsterdam University Press (2004)

Interview with Ray Langenbach

August 10 2005, Singapore

Lee Wen: First of all I would like to ask you, what are your impressions of “The Future of Imagination” as an event? Maybe you can first talk about your general impression based on your presentation in our forum, which nobody was really happy about.

Ray Langenbach: They weren't happy about my presentation or weren't happy about the forum?

LW: I think it's just that there was not much interaction between the speakers; everybody was speaking on their own agenda and focus. Maybe you would like to reiterate some of the issues that were brought out on that day as well.

RL: I think there were some issues about the title of the event, “The Future of Imagination”. Maybe I heard you wrong, but I felt that your criticisms were too much focused on the subject of “future” rather than that of “imagination”. No one seemed to catch on why we coined this title. We understand your critical analysis of our using the word ‘positive’ seven or eight times in our publicity statement. But our real intention was to get a more positive response from our very conservative audience in Singapore towards performance art. And this is not easy due to the incident in 1994. In comparison, performance art in Singapore before 1994 was quite a vibrant form of art.

Until end of 1993, right? (Laughs) Yeah, I think you're right. I focused my critique on the developmentalist aspect of the term “The Future of...”. I was interested in the alignment of this developmental ethos in art with the government's own developmentalist notion of the state and of the nation. So I wondered whether you were using developmentalism to give performance art legitimacy in the eyes of the state. That is, were performance artists actually modeling their own ideology on the developmental concept that the state has adopted from the very beginning of the nation?

Take the theme of this “Ours to Make”. One of the things he said in his National Day speech was that the next five years will be better than the last. Governments throughout the world will always say the next five years will be better than the last five. The idea of constant improvement is very common political propaganda. So the question I had was whether performance artists, in order to legitimise their art form in the eyes of not just the state, but also the people, the general populace, feel they too must adopt the same ideological position.

Work title: “A furiously green idea of colorless sleep”
Venue: Sculpture Square, 8th - 12th Dec 2004.
Photo credits: Gilles Massot.

LW: First of all I would like to ask you, what are your impressions of “The Future of Imagination” as an event? Maybe you can first talk about your general impression based on your presentation in our forum, which nobody was really happy about.

RL: They weren't happy about my presentation or weren't happy about the forum?

LW: I think it's just that there was not much interaction between the speakers; everybody was speaking on their own agenda and focus. Maybe you would like to reiterate some of the issues that were brought out on that day as well.

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Take the theme of this year's National Day Parade under Lee Hsien Loong: “The Future is Ours to Make”. One of the things he said in his National Day speech was that the next five years will be better than the last. Governments throughout the world will always say the next five years will be better than the last five. The idea of constant improvement is very common political propaganda. So the question I had was whether performance artists, in order to legitimise their art form in the eyes of not



just the state, but also the people, the general populace, feel they too must adopt the same ideological position.

Historically, a developmentalist position would of course be ironical, because performance art has such a strong anti-developmental streak, from Dada on forward. So I wondered whether that anti-developmental aspect, that is, performance art as a form of resistance to mainstream bourgeois modernism was being jettisoned... even at a time when it has already been quasi-legitimated in the eyes of the government: ‘It is ok as long it's held behind closed doors in a room with no windows and the doors locked!’ (Laughs) Seriously, as long as it is not in a public space, it can supposedly

now be performed without a licence (although the guidelines are vague). But it still has the aura of illegitimacy and therefore requires this kind of thick rhetoric surrounding it. So that was my question. Does that make sense?

LW: It makes a lot of sense. I feel that this calls for a response. At this point your answers make more sense than when I heard it in the conference that we had last year. In some ways I was put on the spot when Alfian pointed the question at me: "Why are we doing this?" I was made to answer it. I responded about how we have to be strategic about what we're doing, based on the conditions in Singapore where the main funding is coming through state institutions like the National Art Council, and where private institutions are not willing to directly support such events, as they fear that such events may be against the ethos of the powers that be. We did try to balance our agenda with the state's agenda because we need the support now and in the future as we want to make it an international event that requires much more funding.

RL: What happened in that forum was that it fell into an old rut. I felt bad about it because the forum was not able to get out of the narrow bandwidth of our arguing over the regimens of the state. But on another level, I am interested in the event as a performance that takes on the context of its place -- the soci-political and environmental site. So in one sense we can be critical about how performance art is presented here, but on the other hand, there's the sense of these adversarial conditions are part and parcel of the national ethos. It's this kind of tension between civil society groups which are trying to find a place in the sun, and the state's view of culture. It is inevitable that there would be

conflict and collision -- a slow motion car crash that we are forced to watch again and again. So there might be a tendency of art groups to steer to the right just before the crash, hoping to avoid it, or hoping that the whole car won't be destroyed this time, as happened in 1987-88 and 1994.

LW: One of the things that FOI has been trying to do is to invite people to come as official scribes. We feel that there's a lack of critical writing on performance art in terms of contemporary art. Can you give us some impressions of what you saw and some feedback on some of the performances?

RL: One of the things that I brought up in the forum, which relates to this issue, is the muteness of performance artists. This is perhaps due to the lack of translation, which is of course extremely expensive. The history of performance art does not involve sending the pre-prepared artwork across the border in the cargo-hold of an airplane. The artist is the work being transported. So, instead of an artwork interfacing with the other cultures in a pre-determined kind of way, there's this spontaneity of the artist responding to foreign cultures. But translation is often impossible; not just difficult but sometimes actually impossible in the case of poetry or dense theoretical language. And sometimes mis-translation becomes the only available translation, and ersatz meaning comes to stand in for the artist's intended meaning. As a result, artists now often avoid verbal discourse when they go across borders. And this is on top of the fact that many artists are not comfortable with linguistic expression to begin with. In the case of someone like Seiji Shimoda, who was a poet before, the artist may try to create a kind of mute poetry, a new gestural syntax. I find the repetition of Seiji's works over and over without

concern for the local context a bit problematic, but at least he has creatively addressed the problem of verbal translation.

LW: Which is also developing another kind of language?

RL: Yes and I think the possibility of the development of other languages and non verbal languages is a really important aspect of performance art. But a kind of the de-contextualized gesture which can be performed anywhere in the same way has taken the place of speech. We all know how difficult it is to arrive in a place and within two days to come up with something that relates to that cultural context.

LW: And sometimes in less than 24 hours.

RL: Yes and half of that time we spend drunk, hanging out with the other artists anyway. Recently in Myanmar I did a piece that I was very uncomfortable with afterwards, because I felt that it suffered from a half-baked analysis, even though I had been there twice before and I was able to suss things out. But this sort of contextual analysis is extremely complex and difficult work, requiring intense concentration and usually some on-site research. I did my performance in a nightclub in drag, but I didn't carry the logic embedded in that site and the workers there all the way.

When I used to do a lot of installation works, I would go to the exhibition space, sleep in it, get stoned in it, eat in it and just sit in it until I had a clear notion of the dynamics of the space. I haven't been doing this with performance lately. It often has to do with the economics, with this dynamic of being invited in one day before and doing something and then leaving. The analysis is always incomplete, very partial, very surface. As a result of that we never get cultural and

critical dialogue going on in and around the performances.

LW: Is this happening to all to your experiences when you perform in a foreign country?

RL: Usually, unless there is the availability of quality translation. In Germany I found it more available than elsewhere as there are a lot of highly literate bilingual artists. Much of my work is often intensively verbal, so my critique is partly determined by the kind of work I do.

Anyway, there is this tendency to not use language in performance art, but to find visual analogies to replace it. But what appears to get left out of the performances first are public discourses, such as the subtleties of ideology, the critical dialogue between state and the individual, or between cultures and sub-cultures or the critical dialogue between diverse identities. Sometimes you see a performance and you go, "Ah! What a beautiful visual analogy!" "What a perfect gesture!" But at other times the gestures appear to be empty shells. The meaning has been evacuated because the meaning requires the subtleties of verbal discourse. When words have been suppressed what remains is the gestural shell.

LW: Can you give me some examples?

RL: Seiji's gestural poetry, for all its potential as a proto-linguistic form, is, I think, an empty artifact. But, you see I am about to get caught in my own trap, because the empty gesture is in fact the fundamental prop from the beginnings of what we call "performance art". When the Dada poet, Hugo Ball used to recite nonsensical verse at Cabaret Voltaire, he would accompany it with equally nonsensical gestures. It is possible that one characteristic of one particular lineage of performance art is



Photo credits: Gilles Massot.

"Silent Logistics", Julie Andree T. and Dominic Gagnon.
FOI2, Singapore, 2004.

this very evacuation of meaning of the sort that we demand in other performing arts, replacing it with empty signifiers.

I thought the work by the couple, Julie Andree and Dominic Gagnon was interesting in this regard on a number of levels. First, they performed a series of gestural movements, a series of acts, which they linked together and which they seemed almost complete in themselves. At some point they used a durian, and I thought it actually became interesting then, as they strayed from their own cultural framework and got into trouble with double meanings that they didn't even know were there. Basically they only interpreted the durian in a culturally limited way as a fruit that is slimy and emits a powerful odor. They attempted to gather a local trope within a short period of time and their analysis fitted precisely the tourists' stereotype of the durian.

Kai Lam: I thought Julie Andree was not aware of the intensity of the smell... that's why she puked after the performance.

RL: Perhaps, but rather than a fruit of intense pleasure as it is for many people here, it became for her a fruit of repugnance. She was stuck at the border. Although she attempted to gather a local trope, she could not appreciate its meaning for a local audience. Her attempts

to fill her gestures with meaning actually was read locally as a reduction of meaning, an evacuation of significance to the discernment level of the typical tourist.

But, returning to the idea I mentioned before that performance art really is about meaninglessness, I am going to contradict my demand for linguistic density, translation and meaning in performance art. One of the issues in performance art that interests me is the issue of 'realness' and its lack. Historically, performance art came into being as something 'not real/real'. And this has to do with its reaction to 19th century and 20th century theatrical conventions in Europe. Performance Art usually does not entertain the Stanislavskian technique of taking on the experience of a character and attaching it to the performer's own history to produce an appropriate and authentic (rather than simply simulated) emotional response on stage. This theatrical methodology of 'translocation' was being introduced at the beginning of the 20th century when Dada, Surrealism and Futurism, the precursors of performance art were in their heyday. Both of these forms—the theatrical and the cabaret performance—offered critiques and alternatives to 19th century melodramatic theatrical conventions. The Stanislavskian "Method" was embraced by film and television as the new canon for acting.

I am foreshortening this history drastically, but around mid-century, performance art emerged out of Art Brute, Fluxus, and Gutai in Japan, and presented itself as the new real "real". Performance artists didn't translocate characters, they translocated their own persona/presence. The translocation of your own persona isn't you ... and it is you...the self as a sign. So, performance art presented itself as the art-form of the body and the concrete real with a Marxist overlay. The physical body is in an ideological space which is also an immediate concrete space, performing in the "now" of the material moment. And its 'apotheosis' is found in the spontaneous, unscripted act in response to whatever is happening in the room or in the space at this instantaneous present moment.

So, that instantaneous temporal materiality of responding to the present moment stands against the Stanislavskian notion of translocating the real. Performance art is not real, but it is concrete. As a result, some performance art actions present a false (and sometimes ironical) shell of 'realness' without the Stanislavskian interiority to it. So performance art historically carries with it a historical materialist critique of translocation, theatricality, including the Stanislavskian method, which brings us back to my argument with Ho Tzu Nyen's claim for theatrical immersion in performance art. Sure, it is there, but it is there as vestige, as pentimenti. Applying it as a template for the analysis of diverse performance art works, I think it transmutes performance art's 'irony' into melodramatic 'absorption'.

Take for example that pentimento in Andree Weschler's performance of painting on the lipstick which becomes greater and greater until she becomes the traumatized clown, then extending it to cover her face, until it signifies race. Her white face in Singapore became the 'colored' face of her ethnic "other", and the

instrument of her transformation was the also othering instrument of the feminine-yet-phallic lipstick, used to mark and adorn the body's orifice of public (rather than pubic) intercourse.

LW: I would agree with you and disagree with you too. There is this search for authenticity. The only thing real is life itself and once we do something called "art" it's already not real. But there is always this search for authenticity in terms of how we play within this project of art and how real it is as a reflection of life itself. For example in relation to Andree Weschler's lipstick performance I recall seeing another performance by an artist, Martin Zet, from Czech Republic, who did a similar action. He was wearing a Che Guevara beret at the same time. With his beard the beret made him a Che look-a-like. And he was doing almost the same actions as Andree, but being from a former communist country there were different significances. I think there is a level of authenticity based on who the artist is that is doing the action. They were both very powerful images and yet due to its different context, the authenticity is based on the two artists' physical bodies, resulting in different significances, even though the actions were similar.

Rather than presenting a sign of 'authenticity', I think performance art more successfully communicates an anxiety around the issue of authenticity. The way I experience it is as the shell of the authentic act, and the false emotions around or desire for the authentic. Rather than presenting authentic acts, performance art presents the signifying shell which is left over following its critique of method acting. The critique of translocation results in this sign on top of a sign on top of a sign which, to carry my metaphor, coagulates into a shell around an emptiness. The 'real' emotions are no longer there, but their signifiers remain as pentimenti, like 'ghosts in the shell'.

LW: Isn't this the same question where people differentiate between theatre and performance art? Where the performance artists who claim to do a more real performance would dismiss some theatrical performances and say they are not "acting" but doing something else in "performance"? On the other hand theatre people would usually dismiss performance artists as bad actors.

RL: Yes exactly. I think that it is at the moment of bad acting (or more precisely, 'bad faith' between the actor and the audience) when performance art actually begins. It is a moment of high irony.

LW: What about someone like Tehching Hsieh who did the One Year Performances. Would that be arriving at something closer to the real?

When I met him in New York at the time when he was doing the time-clock piece, it completely changed my notions of performance art. His idea seemed to me to be that 'this is not a performance; this is daily life and yet it's a performance'. No effects; nothing added to the physical actions. That solidness and materiality made a big impression on me then in the early 1980s. He presented the materiality of the simple act and its underlying social contract. The contract that he made with the public (such as "I will punch a time-clock every hour, 24 hours a day for a year.") became the stage for the act of punching the time clock.

Hsieh forms the contract and carries out the contract to the letter. He will try to punch the time clock every hour on the hour, and when he fails due to physical exhaustion, he will show you exactly when he failed with a circle on the time-card. When he was living outside on the streets he was arrested once and was dragged inside by the police, despite his resistance, thereby also breaking the contract. It was the

materialism of that 'pop' repetition everyday under a contract that made the work, along the lines of his contemporary, Sol Lewitt's famous dictum that more or less goes: "The idea is a machine that creates art." But this sort of contract is not sufficient for artists anymore, especially after reality tv, which relies so stupidly on contracts and on rituals of inclusion and exclusion based on slavish adherence to the contract. Hsieh's work under the self-determined contract must be acknowledged as part of the tradition of performance art, but we can't leave it at that any more. There now has to be an ironical narrative not only built into the act of the doing (the existential absurdity which is poignantly present in Hsieh's work), but also around the contract, because I don't think anyone believes in the narrative of the contract as 'real' anymore.

LW: Sometimes I have a problem with this search for authenticity in art when we know that art is not life. That equation of art equals life equals art equals life just doesn't work. Even when Tehching Hsieh puts out a contract like that, it already separates art from life because in real life we don't do things like living according to a contract for a year, imprisoned in your own home or living out on the streets. To be real about it is to know the context that we are artists and we are making something which is different from life itself. There is this liminality where the authenticity comes in actually at the point that the police arrested Hsieh for vagrancy and brought him indoors, which he actually doesn't want to do, and that is the unplanned part of the performance.

"the life and wandering times of arnolfo tikb-ang",
Alwin Reamillo
FOI2, Singapore, 2004.



Photo credits: Gilles Massot.

RL: And I think sometimes we are too harsh on the performance artist. Artists may not do a one year contract but say for 20 minutes they will do a performance. And they will carry out some planned actions. But sometimes the accidents within the performance makes the real performance. For example the durian experience in Julie Andree's performance. She probably picked this fruit because she knows this is the local "king of fruits" in Singapore that she can never find in Canada.



"A Furious Green Idea of Colourless Sleep", Ray Langenbach
FOI2, Singapore, 2004.
Photo credits: Gilles Massot.

Local...she was trying to find the local hinge for a globalised performance.

LW: And her nausea makes it real because that's the foreigner in her where she had not yet acquired the taste of the durian.

RL: This is why "bad acting" and "bad faith" between the performer and the audience is for me is where performance art begins. When I don't see a moment of collapse in a performance then I actually come away a bit suspicious. Like in Alastair MacLennan's performance, I thought he had developed a sign system with layers of

clothing to a degree of absolute armour against the contingency of the present moment. There was no access except through his sign system, and the possibility of collapse was not there. He could not fail, because he was moving at that measured pace in a closed room, surrounded with pre-determined signs to such a degree that there was no possibility of a miscue.

But I may be wrong because I wasn't there all the time, and in his own experience there were undoubtedly errors and problems that were not visible to others. Or, perhaps the whole performance was a compensatory metaphor for a collapse that had already taken place beforehand. But it was the removal of the possibility of 'visible crisis' that was a problem for me at the time.

I found the same problem in the work of Marilyn Arsem, who presented over-determined signs. In the classic mode of New Age-ism, she then felt compelled to tell us, without an ounce of irony or poetry, exactly what they all meant (as if it wasn't already obvious), and what we are supposed to feel about them. The contingent moment was engineered out of the work, leaving us with a totalised ideological fetishization of the act. If one of her glass orbs had accidentally fallen or been smashed...well then, for me, the performance would have begun.

LW: However, performance art has that kind of unpredictability that when you have this way of judging it then it becomes a preconceived expectation. There is a possibility that there are different kinds of performances that search for different kinds of access.

RL: I can't argue with that. Take any sign system and we may read it differently. But I am arguing here for a kind of material logic within the work. For example, one of the highlights for me last year was Alwin Reamillo's performance.

Nadiah Bamadhaj, the Malaysian artist who was here for the Flying Circus Project, whose work focuses on Indonesian politics of resistance and self-determination, told me she did it because she was offended by Alwin's constant deference, his shuffling walk and mumbling, which she read as signs of (post-colonial) obsequiousness. He seemed to be constantly apologising for his presence. But for me all this was both true and precisely what Alwin was tactically representing, and he was not trying to do so from a heroic standpoint. He was deferring to his family and cultural history, his paternity and the family piano factory. Alwin was the deferential son, maybe even a bit of a prodigal son. He was kow-towing to his history and his father's spirit, bringing this history into the very uncontrolled and spasmodic moment of the performative 'situation', with things working and not working, including a rooster that refused to be caged, and a piano at various stages of de/construction, all demanding equal time of the present moment.

In Kai Lam's work, I had a problem with the end of it. In the work he constructed the Singapore flag from an American flag. This was a feisty, risky and critical act. But by bringing in signs of Christmas and the commodity economy at the end, and changing the 'discussion' to Singapore as the 'zone of the commodity' (commodification being the ur-ideology that supplants all ideologies), he moved from a position pregnant with ideological risk, to one of no risk. Even though his gestures made sense, they became progressively more detached and empty. The performance looked like a critique but it wasn't, because what Kai was critiquing was itself already a cliché. How do you critique a cliché and not become absorbed by it?

I totally understand the need of younger Singaporean artists to subvert and lampoon both state and anti-state ideologies, and the

Civil Society vs State binary that has held sway for forty years. It was the power of this binary that made mincemeat out of our FOI forum last year. But it takes tactics. You can say anything about the commodity in Singapore because everybody already knows that the commodity rules here. When he invited people to spray him with the white decoration snow, Kai's body had already gone out of a position of risk. Until that point his body was capable of manifesting a critique, but the 'pregnant moment' of unpredictability was lost, because the body of the artist was no longer placing itself at political risk.

Or take my performance, which begins with a video text that muses about the anxiety associated with falling asleep. It asks whether "it is just the fear of death intervening in the little performances of daily life?" I was planning to read my script and perform my actions and exit by the back door. But when I walked to the door it was locked. (laughs) After a moment of panic, I thought "This is beautiful. This is exquisite". And you asked if you should open the door and I replied "It's OK. Don't open the door". Then I had to turn back and face the audience. I just looked at them and they looked back at me. This was the moment when my whole plan for the performance collapsed, leaving nothing behind but the shell, and the possibility for the audience of catching a glimpse of the 'real' real through the layers. They caught the momentary glimpse of the performer's panic of being locked in with them, in society, the fear of having no script, no idea, of having nothing more to do, of just being nakedly alive, which is right next to the moment of death. And this is what the performance was really about. The death of my performance was the locked door. OK fine, nothing to do about it. I slowly put on my clothes and then left by the other door through the audience.

Interview with Ho Tzu Nyen

August 14 2005, Singapore

Lee Wen: Mr Ho Tzu Nyen, you have written an essay for our first event of FOI, reviewing some of it, or maybe it is not a review, but in a way, you gave a very nice outline of the way to look at different performances, pointing out a kind of vocabulary for watching performance art. You had some discussions with Mr Ray Langenbach in last year's forum as well. Unfortunately during the forum, we did not follow up the presentations of the panellists; there was not much exchange during the forum itself, so would you like to make some comments following up on your last essay.

Tzu Nyen: The essay that I wrote for FOI was really my first serious (writing) engagement with performance art as a practice, so in many ways the piece was my own way of figuring out for myself a vocabulary by which I can discuss, evaluate, analyse performance art and to discover for myself what in performance art interests me. That was pretty much how the essay was formed, which also explains why it has very little to do with the more typical kind of vocabulary that might be used in discussing performance art.

In other words I was basically making up my own system of trying to understand performance art. I had an interesting exchange with Ray. He was quite critical about certain aspects of the essay and I should add that he has a coherent point of

view of what were the problems with that piece. In hindsight, that piece of writing is definitely very problematic, although I don't agree with Ray over what the problems were exactly.

Basically Ray thinks that I have imported a conceptual framework from 18th Century French painting developed by the American theorist, Michael Fried in his great book, "Absorption and Theatricality" as a 'master text' to look at performance art. Ray's problem was that I had used that kind of framework to talk about contemporary performance art. I think we understand – or rather misunderstand Fried's pair of concepts very differently. For me, Fried's art-historical work is intricately tied to his art-critical engagements with minimalism and its 'objecthood, or theatricality' – which forms a direct link for me to post-minimalist practices involving the body – ie performance art.

But more fundamentally, I understand "absorption/theatricality" through the lens of everyday life. Let's say if you go for a social gathering and you meet a big group of people, you feel very uncomfortable. You feel your own body, your gestures and your facial expressions – everything goes into a mode of slow-motion brought about by the paralysis of self-reflection. Then you start to behave 'theatrically' because you feel that everything you do is unnatural. But in good company sometimes, we are absorbed – we lose and forget ourselves – perhaps this is what alcohol does for some people at

"Bali project, Two by the Waterfall", 2001

photos courtesy of the artists, Jeremy Hiah, Kai Lam, Tien Woon, Agnes Yit

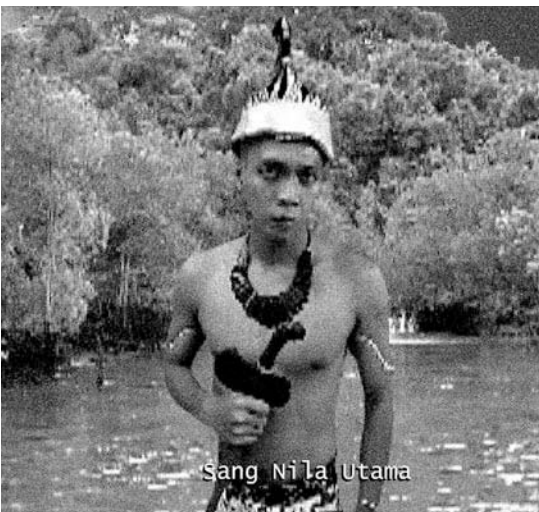


That's what really interests me when I look at performance art. Is there a self-consciousness of being, when he is in front of the gaze of other people or is he not really 'there'? Are people watching also removed from themselves - lost in the performance?

LW: That's one of the things that Ray was saying that he found it problematic - to use this as a template to look at performance art. Basically, I think that a lot of times, performance artists want to differentiate between performance art in terms of a kind of authenticity, or seek a higher level of authenticity compared to acting or the actor on a theatrical stage. Of course

there is a degree of differences in opinions between different performance artists. For example UK artists have a tendency for theatre-based live art performances, which sometimes the rest of the Europeans find it too dramatic or theatrical. Maybe, I'm just conjecturing here that in Ray's perspective that it's kind of limited to see performance art through this kind of template, leaving out other different possibilities of looking at performance art.

HTN: I actually think the opposite. For me, I don't read a lot of performance art literature. But absorption/theatricality struck me as a pretty fresh way to look at performance art. I



have great respect for people who write within a tradition, and engage with it. But this shouldn't restrict us from other transversal possibilities, crossings – as long as the piece of writing doesn't pretend to do more than that.

LW: FOI invited you to write as we see some of your works as performative. Although you may not describe yourself as a performance artist and seeing that you are not really involved in the performance art directly. Your work, “Utama” has recently been shown around, not only in Singapore. After showing it as a solo exhibition in The Substation, you’ve been invited to present it in different places and in some ways, it has become a kind of performative lecture that goes with it as well. Would you like to talk a little bit about the project? Has it changed or whether you’ve changed with perspective after you presented it in different places?

HTN: “Utama” first started out as a film and a set of 20 paintings in an installation but when I

made “Utama”, I was very conscious that the two parts could be separated. The installation could be split into a set of 20 paintings and the film can stand alone as a film. Both components can travel separately. The film has also travelled to some film festivals. I also wrote an article at the same time that came out in “ISH” about Sang Nila Utama. In retrospect, I understand now that when I did the project, I was not just interested in “Utama” as a film, as paintings or an installation. I was more interested in manufacturing some sort of event revolving around the figure of Utama – as a way to open up a discourse on problems of ontology, origin, authenticity – the violence of the One. And the desperate need for this discourse logically determines that I should try to use as many mediums as possible. So you have writings, paintings, a film and an installation – all of which folds back not only upon the subject of Utama, but also a coherent way of looking at this problem of “One”.

In other words, I was (and still am not) interested in producing discrete objects (although the making each of the components of the “Utama” project undeniably held great interest for me). I was more interested in the possibility of generating an event, in which these components all played a part.

I was also asked to present “Utama” in different schools and it was of course not feasible to bring along 20 paintings to schools. It occurred to me that there was no longer a difference (to me) between a projected PowerPoint image of a painting and a ‘real’ painting. If anything, because the paintings were digitally produced, it made more sense to simply project them as digital files on a vertical screen. That’s how I started presenting Utama as a lecture. I had to give the lecture a few times and soon I found that slowly a script had developed. Once you start repeating jokes, you know that you have a script.

There’s also a certain amount of dramaturgy involved - reversals and twists, asides, etc. I would show the slides in a particular order to create the sensations of walking through the installation. It really is a form of storytelling, and now I go around telling this little story about the mythical founder of Singapore, in the hope of starting little discussions about the “One”.

LW: There are a lot of performance artists who work that way also, lectures and scripted.

HTN: I never thought of myself as doing a performance art – it was a label that the lecture for “Utama” was increasingly labeled under. During that time, I was teaching. I prepare my slides quite meticulously and I realized that some kind of dramaturgy is involved in the way one presents information, sustain attention, and pushes forward a perspective. Gradually, teaching became too much of a performance, which is maybe one of the reasons why I stopped teaching. It is rather tiring to prepare for so many lectures and performances all the time. Going back to the earlier point you mention about authenticity in performance. You know, I’m not too interested in authenticity. I just like a good story.

LW: But actually, it’s a shame that you didn’t hear Ray talk about a similar thing, the other side of Stanislavski theory. And like sometimes, although performance artists claim to be more authentic than the dramatic actors of the theatre, they are actually less authentic in some ways in trying to achieve or attempting that authenticity; it became another act as well. There’s a lot of problem in that when I think about how I go to a lot of these performance events where you tend to see the same artists, sometimes coming to the festival that you attend. And you see them

re-producing their same performances in different places and it’s quite hard to achieve that same level of authenticity again and again. That’s one of the problematic of performance artists who repeat their performances. But sometimes I feel that to me, that search (for authenticity) may not be what it seems. Sometimes when you do the so-called same performance, it’s quite different each time you do it because it’s impossible to repeat exactly the same actions anyway. Sometimes, it depends on the form of the artist. Even in theatre, in performance theatre, like that in Ong Keng Sen’s or Richard Shechner’s, although you are doing the same play nightly over a period of one week or one month, and the actors have to go on stage to repeat the same lines. Each night is actually a very different performance.

HTN: Yes - repetition is a generator of difference. To try to repeat something, inevitably, you produce difference. So no matter how you try to repeat something, you are actually producing difference. It is a kind of paradox, and for me, one that suspends the question of some kind of authenticity – that tiresome search for the grail, the One....

LW: But besides the fact that you have to prepare each of these talks that makes you do less teaching now. What I’m wondering is that perhaps the more you do it; the less you like to do that? Or are you more absorbed with other things and issues that make you reject this type of work. In terms of it being a more performative nature because in the past, you used to tell me that you rather do something in the studio as a painter than to go out there in front of people and perform? Based on a personal preference in choosing the medium to develop your own work.

HTN: I remember Emerson once said that we should be solitary in a crowd, and be surrounded by company when alone. I seem unable to quite live up to this beautiful notion (laughs) - I long for the solitude of a studio when I work with a lot of people and then I miss company when I'm reading or painting alone in the studio.

About my practice – performance or a lecture, making a film, researching, painting or writing - these categories are ceasing to matter to me. Or rather I try very hard to formulate a practice where these categories can cease. On the micro-level, I think of the work I produce as thought-sensations, almost synapses... On a macro-level, I'm interested in simply the notion of my practice as 'projects', that hopefully have an internal rigor, but unfettered by loyalties to medium.

I think this is how we can describe my next project, "4 X 4: Episodes of Singapore art" where I re-enacted 4 works by 4 Singaporean artists over 4 weeks in 4 short films, to be broadcasted over 4 weeks on Singapore's art channel. I see every episode like a short film where I was trying to do art criticism in dramatic, audio-visual form. I was also given a slot at the Substation where I will organize a conference where all the people I invite will be talking about these four artists. The only physical aspect of the work is the "publicity materials" that I produced for it, an oversized brochure, foldable into a cube, which functions as advertisements for the four episodes, the forum and the works. I distributed these post-cards in as many different sites as possible. These post-cards contain diagrams that sum up key points from each of the episode in a diagrammatic format. "4 x 4" is a 'project' to create a discursive event revolving around the four works of art. I use whatever medium at that moment which is open to me, that I have access to or that I

am in interested in investigating. I was very interested in experiencing how the industry of the moving image works - how the executives of the TV world operates, behaves, functions. I was interested to learn how they make money – and see if I can get some of this money myself. (laughs). The budget I'm getting for this is actually peanuts in TV industry but if you compare it to what the visual artists gets its actually quite princely (relative to our average Visual Arts budgets). Shifting our economies of scale from visual arts to the broadcast industry allows me to benefit economically from it. In the next step, I will probably re-present this project in the form of lectures. I like the form of lecture performance because I can present my ideas clearly and directly. I get the immediate response of a live audience, immediate feedback, criticism and discussion. I also think of what I'm doing as experimentations with new channels for distributing information.

LW: Tzu Nyen you have put me in a position like that of an old Chinese brush painter. (laughs) When performance art came out in the 60s and 70s, probably the old generation of painters may have felt threatened that a new form had arrived which might kill the old form. In terms of relevance, now that you are talking about TV. This is not to look at it from a sentimental point of view like when "TV killed the Radio Star" that kind of thing. Do you see that there's a danger that based on the need to be economically viable, that will push artists to do things like TV at a commercial level or acceptance level where old forms of practices like performance art will become irrelevant?

HTN: First, I like to add that I think working with new medium is not simply commercially motivated. I like to think that some artists are naturally drawn to the fresh air of possibilities

different medium promises. Second, I actually sometimes think old forms never go away...

LW: They just don't make enough money. (laughs)

HTN: (Laughs) Not that I'm making a lot in this project. In trying to push this project, in dealing with the executives in the industry of the moving image, I sometimes do feel like I have to be a performance artist, to put on a mask – or else I'm like a lamb in a pack of wolves, Daniel in the lions' den (laughs). There are many different levels to this project, for example - all the different species of human types I've to deal with during the various stages of production. How do I manage these people?

LW: Ultimately isn't it the concern of you as an artist is not really that, but rather the end result with that program on TV, the discussion and the dissemination. These other management points about fund-raising, publicity is in every project, but as an artist, the main concern is not that, is it?

HTN: I disagree. I feel that the process and the product should not be separated. It's not that the TV programs I make, the forum or the postcards that is the 'real' thing – the 'real' art, while the bureaucratic and management aspects are something I've to make myself go through in order for that to the work to be realized. The whole process is what for me constitutes the "project" – how to have TV people involved in making art, and having art people watch TV. I choose the word "project" to describe what I'm doing precisely because it's such a loose term – and it reminds me of "school projects", which nicely suggests both learning and making at the same time. I think that the great advantage of locating oneself in the visual arts today is that it

is rather an entropic classification, a strategic position to adopt so that I can get my projects made and circulated. In a sense, I'm interested in producing a mode or a kind of practice as my 'art' in the same way that another artist is interested in producing an action, gesture, a painting, a sculpture. How I operate, and survive - that is the work.

LW: Working in this way reminds me of people who are critical of the form of painting by doing something within painting itself. In a way, it re-empowers rather than dis-empowers the form of painting which they want to criticize. Somehow the artist will have to think about what that project means to one as a creative artist. You are trying to inject the creativity as a serious artist into a form, which is actually based on the kind of global capitalist society that we are increasingly being, forced to practice within. Either you work with it or die.

HTN: Yes, I am concerned with how I can survive intact without getting locked into a circle of negativity in relation to the world and how can I continue producing effectively, efficiently without being determined by the market?

LW: So are you winning? (laughs)

HTN: (laughs) I never think about winning or losing. I just do what I can. I try to create a new relation to the market. Doing TV is very interesting for me. I get paid when we have a certain agreement with the authorities – they buy the program before it is made, so the money is already in – like a commission. I don't have to make the product and put it out there for the museums or galleries or people to buy your works. As far as possible, I like to escape the indignity of having, of needing to sell...

LW: Tell it to me!

HTN: So “4 x 4” is interesting because it allows me to experiment with a slightly different kind of financial relationship. I made this project with an agreed upon income. If that program manages to sell to other stations, then I can continue making money out of it. Theoretically, it is infinitely reproducible - which means I can theoretically earn endlessly from it!

Lee Wen: So you are not really doing it as a critique of that economic system that we have to work under but rather trying to work with it? Tzu Nyen: I don't think what I've done so far can amount to any kind of effectual critique. So given the binary choice offered by you in your question, I am someone working “with it”. But hopefully, my practice can be a small mutant, a strange sore, or a mushroom within the system.

LW: How are your writings, your projects, and your research related?

HTN: Right now, I'm doing my MA thesis and I'm researching on a concept of influence (a term much denigrated today), as well as notions of difference and repetition which we spoke about earlier.

LW: Which is also related to your TV project?

HTN: In fact my TV project sprang out from my master's dissertation. Midway in writing about these artists and artworks, I began dramatizing and visualizing my arguments – almost dreaming of a way whereby the one can think about images by using other images. I always thought of writing essays as diagrammatic exercises, while presentations and lectures are the representation of these diagrams in time,

translated as a rhythmic shape. This is close to film (which I suppose is one of my great passions), where the structure of the narrative, cuts, the arabesque shapes of camera movements are what the Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky so beautifully described as being a “sculpture in time”. I thought of “Utama” and the four films from “4x4” very much as diagrammatic emblems that unfold in time. Rhythm, or a vital breath is crucial to the way I put my films together. I was trying to do a lot with these films (and I'm not sure if I succeeded on all counts) – but I'd like to add that they are first and foremost rhythmic compositions that make manifest what Chinese painters might call a ‘vital breath’.

In a different register, I was also very concerned with now is the lack of public for art criticism and art history. Art theory and criticism has never been more sophisticated, but all this forms of intelligences are not being disseminated to the public sphere. Especially in Singapore where we don't even have an academic discipline for art history. One aspect of my project was to try to use TV to disseminate art critical intelligences.

LW: Would you like to give us a rundown of the main things or chapters of your thesis?

HTN: I've presented most of the chapters actually in different places. Part of Chapter 2 was presented in the last FOI conference, which was “Two South Seas”. It was about the south seas of Liu Kang and 3 other pioneer “Nanyang” painters, which was revisited by The Artists Village. This was the same South Seas, because they both went to Bali. Nanyang means “South Seas”, and this journey was itself a repetition (and differentiation) of Gauguin's own journey to the South Seas. (Episode one of “4 x 4”, which was about Cheong Soo Pieng's excellent painting, “Tropical Life” was

a spin-off of this) The next chapter was “Three Chairs”. The first was about Joseph Kosuth famous “1 and 3 chairs”. This was repeated by the conceptual Malaysian artist, Piyadasa, who had this real obsession with chairs. And the last of the 3 chairs is Matthew Ngui's anamorphic chair, which is one chair, but not really because it's all split up. Episode three of “4 x 4”, which was about Da Wu's performance “Don't Give Money to the Arts” came from chapter four of my dissertation, called “Four Suits”, which has Joseph Buey's very famous felt suit, Vincent Leow's “Money Suit”, Da Wu's “Don't give money to the art” suit and Lee Wen's Birthday suit, or absence of the suit.

LW: The Yellow Man suit...

HTN: Chapter 5 is about all the thousands of painterly repetitions of Singapore Rivers we have in our art history, and this is where Episode Two of “4 x 4”, on Cheo Chai Hiang's “5 x 5 ft (Singapore River)” came from. All these chapters have been presented separately in various conferences, symposiums and forums, in both academic and artistic contexts.

LW: Isn't it different to present them to an art audience who are more informed than to a TV audience? Does it affect your creative process?

HTN: Yes for sure, when I do it for TV, I try to keep in mind the specific rules, or what I would call habits of television and to systematically play with these as much as possible. The way that one speaks has of course to be constantly modulated in relation to contexts. For example, when I'm doing “4 x 4”, I'm very consciously erasing all art historical and theoretical language, meaning I don't quote any theories, and when I do, I try to dramatize these histories or references (hence, for example, the appearance of Marcel Duchamp in the episode on Cheo Chai Hiang).

That's pretty much what I did for “Utama” as well. “Utama” was shaped by certain lines of philosophical inquiries but I made it a point not to quote philosophers, but rather to dramatize their thought (hence its constant ‘digressions’ into Julius Caesar, Diana and Actaeon, etc). In any case, the philosophers I'm most interested in are theatrical thinkers – for example, Deleuze and above all, Nietzsche. For me, the audio-visual medium is a crystallization of thought as an image.

At the same time, I was concerned with a host of other things, like the problem of what I would call “the mode of address”. How could one address a television viewer in a way that is not condescending, and not cloaked in authority (the authority of the TV presenter, the expert, the specialist, the lecturer...)? This pretty much explains why I had two contradicting hosts for each of the episodes, addressing each other all the time, even when they are facing directly into the camera. The viewer thus takes on aspects of the two hosts from time to time...

Another problem that I engaged with is the historical division of high art from mass culture - a rather old problem of course - but one which I am nonetheless concerned with. I do feel a slight degree of embarrassment whenever someone complains that my work is too difficult. But I also think that this failure to communicate should cause embarrassment on both parties, and that this embarrassment can be productively channeled into an attempt to communicate, to understand and to think. Unfortunately, the complacent anti-intellectual currents of our time has encouraged many people to take on the badge of the ‘laymen’, as a way by which they can refuse to think beyond their habitual bubble, and worse, to use this position to mock and denigrate things

they cannot (or refuse to) understand. You meet these 'laymen' everywhere – they abound in the TV industry, and the art industry alike.

LW: When you focus your writing based on repetition and difference, and it's kind of like based on Michael Fried's writing?

HTN: In my own system of reading, I 'draw' connections between these concepts. And I mean 'draw' literally – in the sense of plotting lines to construct a new theoretical object, as one will prepare the sketch for a new sculpture. Repetition and difference is actually a title of a book by Deleuze, and its miles away from Michael Fried. But I see my engagements with theory as attempts to make little assemblages where these coordinates can connect. For example, when one of Singapore's so-called pioneer generation of painters travel 'down south' to Bali, in search of new motifs, and a new style to differentiate themselves from the post-impressionism of Paris – to what extent do they repeat the journey by Gauguin to the 'south seas' of Tahiti? What is their mode when they repeat the journey? Were they self-conscious about their repetition or were they convinced of their own 'originality'? And most importantly how did this self-consciousness (or lack of) manifest itself in their paintings and their painting's mode of addressing their viewers?

LW: Looking from the performance art point of view, there's always the play with the liminal space, where something unplanned can happen, where sometimes you find something within that space. This is something very special in performance art. If we use this kind of research, which is based on theatricality, then it becomes all too very planned and doesn't allow for that liminal space to operate does it?

HTN: This worship of accident, or addiction for reacting without "pre-conceived planning" sounds too much like a Holy Grail to me. You know, chance – as the 'Outside' is important to me – but to connect with this 'Outside' through the accidental seems weak to me. I think our positions are not that different, but I'm very skeptical about the abuse of spontaneity and the fetishization of accidents, that often accompanies a lot of discussions about performance art.

LW: ...It brings to mind the question of documentation in performance art; some artists are actually against video documentation. One of the reasons cited that people watching a performance on video often mistaken that they've actually watched the live performances because it's a medium that's quite close to life. And there are some who allow photographs. To them, photographs are still pictures and not time based so it makes a difference that we are more aware of it as documentation and not the real thing. But the recent works of Tino Sehgal completely disallows any pictures taken. Not even photographs of himself. All the writings on Tino Sehgal are just text, unaccompanied by photographs. It's really something when you look at an art magazine; usually it's filled with photographs and visual representation of artworks. But when you come to the essay on Tino Sehgal, it'll be text alone and to me, it's a strong anti-visual statement or it's anti-documentation. What do you think of documentation in performances?

HTN: It relates to what we had discussed earlier. Do you sometimes stage a performance knowing that the camera is placed at a certain position? And how does that affect your performance?



So when you plan your performance, does the presence of the camera constitute some kind of a script? I mean, I don't think there should be a yes or no to documentation. They are just different strategies on how you disseminate your works.

For example, one of my favorite performances is by Tang Da Wu, "Don't give money to the arts". The only thing we know of the performance is through the photographs. When I look at the photographs, they remind me of heroic French paintings of the 18th century. In these photographs, we see Da Wu shaking the President's hands, his jacket suspended across the shoulders – it is what we call the "pregnant moment" – a singular moment that encapsulates the entire story. So I do think about that Da Wu's 'Don't Give Money to the arts' as being more photography than performance, although I should add that to Da

Wu, it is neither performance nor photography – he says it is 'real life'. I absolutely believe Da Wu to mean this, but I also absolutely disagree with him.

LW: That's because you didn't see it live.

HTN: I didn't see the performance live, but the very fact is that he did plant a few photographers.

LW: I think we have our faithful, Mr. Koh Nguang How.

HTN: He wasn't there. Da Wu planted Chua Chye Teck there. Chye Teck already knew what was going to happen and was thus positioned strategically to capture that "pregnant moment" – and this to me constitutes a script. So this whole problem with documentation

leads us back to the mode of being whether you are self-conscious or not in the midst of your performance.

LW: I guess this discussion of achieve and documentation is quite a different discussion altogether. You made me want to question you more about your obsession with this “mode of being”. Can you say something about that or elaborate on that?

HTN: Maybe because I’ve always been a self-conscious person (Laugh) so modes of being (comfortable and uncomfortable) have always been an obsession for me. I like to observe how people behave in front of the camera. That’s why I’m very fascinated with actors.

LW: It makes me wonder because I’m an artist who uses my own body in performance itself. I wonder sometimes the way you work, or the way Tino works. Of all his works, he only performed one of them himself. I guess there are different reasons for that. For your case, for your work, you’ve this obsession with this “mode of being” and to observe other actors perform, you will not do it yourself. Are you conscious of the fact that you’re also avoiding it or are you thinking that you need more bodies? That’s why you need to use other people or is it something you just don’t want to get involved in yourself other than the performance lectures on your other works.

HTN: I think that getting other people involved or getting people working on one’s own project requires some serious performances... its just sort of quotidian performance, without stage, gallery or name. I used to, and still do think that I’m too self-conscious to do ‘proper’ performance art.

LW: Should go to my workshop.

HTN: (laughs) I think so... You know, even when I’m doing a performance lecture, I like to have a lot of slides, the slide transitions are a rhythmic exercise, how they move into each other, how they go with my voice and I’m always in the dark, with the screen much bigger than I am. I think that’s more a mode that I feel comfortable in.

LW: You are doing your performance in the dark. That’s how a lot of performance artists start.

HTN: Long ago in the early period of cinema, whenever they showed a film, they usually have a lecturer to accompany the film. It was a new medium and people couldn’t understand the cinematic language, so the lecturer will always have to explain the images. It seemed strange that with my “Utama” lecture-screenings, I’m in fact going back to an old mode of cinematic presentation, where the lecturer provides contexts to the film he accompanies.... And in “4 x 4”, I have presenters, hosts, celebrities and actors, uttering what I have written - they are really (split and contradictory) manifestations of my own presence as lecturer, surrogate embodiments of my thought.

Ho Tzu Nyen is a visual artist, filmmaker and writer and has written extensively on Singapore’s recent contemporary art and film. He participated in the 3rd Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale 2005. He is a Research Scholar at the National University of Singapore, Southeast Asian Studies Programme, writing a dissertation on the anxieties of influence in postwar Singaporean art history.

Artists’ Biographies



“Future of Imagination 3”

intendstocross-examineperformance and live art practice within the international context. Featured this year are guest artists from Germany, United States of America, Canada, Finland, Switzerland, Japan, China, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, The Philippines, Malaysia, and Turkey as well as Singapore artists.

It is a curated performance art gathering of artists whose work has questioned or attempt to share a continuing interest in the cultural constructs of identity in the global situation and current trends of contemporary art practice. In the present age of intense globalization we as artists organizers sincerely believe that such an event will help increase international cultural exchange and understanding as well as being an accentuation of our artistic practice, research and development.

The artists will make live presentations each evening to articulate ideas and engage the audience in a sincere, revelatory and immediate form. We also hope to stimulate discussion by holding forums to question the status of performance art in our rapidly changing society.

Arahmaiani

b. 1961 Bandung, Indonesia



"Lapen Wedding" 2004

Arahmaiani is a prominent figure in the contemporary art scene of Indonesia. She exhibits regularly locally as well as internationally, representing Indonesian pavilion at the 50th Venice Biennale 2003. Her repertoire of works goes beyond performances, frequently producing paintings, drawing, installation, poetry, dance, and music. Arahmaiani has often questioned traditional expectations of being a woman amidst the tensions, disruptions and volatility of Indonesian society in transition. She considers that her natural inclination is to play the role of a mediator between worlds anchored in her origins. Neither within her own

family, nor in her homeland is communication between cultures free of conflict. Her awareness of belonging to "another" culture, however, developed most particularly with trips to the "West", first to Australia, and later to Europe. Only when confronted with western art and philosophy, did she realize how different these were from her own.

Arai Shinichi

b. 1959 Toyama, Japan

Arai lives and works in Tokyo. He studied his B.A. in Chinese modern literature at Tokyo Metropolitan University under Mr. Ikura Shohei. Later he majored in printmaking from 1981 to 1987. He began experimenting in sound, voice and language performance actions since 1982. As a Japan Overseas Cooperative Volunteer he taught at Nyumba ya Sanaa Art school in Zanzibar, Tanzania 1992-94 where he experienced various insights into the relationship between culture and politics in contemporary society. This led to his radical social-political performances today. In his raw and direct style, Arai's body appears as a site of social tension presented with humor yet biting criticism. Often exposing the conservative and xenophobic cultural tendencies and contradictions in global and local situations. Besides performing regularly in Japan, Arai has also presented his works internationally and especially in China such as Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Xian, Chengdu, Changchun, and Beijing.

<http://www.araiart.jp/>

"Viva! Globalisation"
for memory of
Tainan private middle school of
Presbyterian Church

Reach Outlying 2005 TIPALive,
Taipei, Taiwan July.2005



Chumpon Apisuk

b. 1948, Nan, Thailand

Chumpon Apisuk had been continuously promoting performance art in Thailand since the 80's. He founded the Concrete House in 1993, an art and community space that was a unique and well-known performance art venue in Thailand. He is also recognized for his involvement in AIDS and Human Rights activism, working closely with his partner Chantawipa (Noi) Apisuk, who founded EMPOWER Foundation in 1985, an organization advocating for the rights of sex workers in Thailand. In 1998 he initiated "Asiatopia", an international performance art festival in Bangkok and extending to Chiangmai later. His performance work is often

an assemblage of eventful interaction led by his political commitment, showing conflicts of the ideal world and reality. Chumpon Apisuk's performances are often multi-faceted, informed by his prolific writings of poetry, short fiction and essays on politics, the arts and society.

"Hearts"

Reach Outlying 2005 TIPALive
in Taipei, Taiwan July 2005



Paul Couillard

b. 1961, Toronto, Canada

"The Weight of the Dead"
Future Factory
Nottingham, UK
March 2005



"THRESH / HOLD"

Interakcje 7
Piotrkow Trybunalski, Poland
May 2005

Since 1985 Paul Couillard has been an artist, curator, producer and writer primarily working in performance art often with installation and video elements. His work seeks to build community through explorations of our bodies as vessels of sensation, experience, knowledge and spirit, looking for the moment of shared engagement and relationship with the audience. He has a particular interest in considering the shared borders of our separate existences, searching for a language that can convey the complex layers of personal history, cultural/social specificity and the notion of shared or universal experience. He has been the performance art curator for Fado, an artist-run centre for performance art, since its inception in 1993, and is also a founding co-curator of the 7a*11d International Performance Art Festival, both based in Toronto, Canada. He is currently editing Canadian Performance Art Legends, a series of books on senior Canadian performance artists.

<http://www.performanceart.ca/index.html>

Mideo M. Cruz

b. 1973, The Philippines

Mideo M. Cruz is an active cross-disciplinary artist-organizer in Southeast Asia. In 1992 he initiated "UGATLahi", an art collective that is oriented towards nationalistic social causes asserting artistic production as a tool of socio-political significance to facilitate the uplifting of human conditions. Later he was one of the prime movers of the multi media event "Tupada". Since 2002 he had been preoccupied with the open international artists' network "new world disorder" initiating art events and interventions to interrogate capitalistic and imperialist globalization. He was one of the artists central to the revival of performance art in Manila in the 90's. Equally competent in using new media as well as streets actions, resourcefully working collectively or individually, Mideo M. Cruz seeks to expand and explore art as a communicative language to stimulate interaction and critical perspectives. He is a recipient of the 2003 Cultural Center of the Philippines thirteen artists award.

<http://www.mideo.tk/>



"Sanctification"
Reach Outlying 2005 TIPALive
Taipei, Taiwan July. 2005

Nezaket Ekici

b. 1970 Kirsehir, Turkey

Nezaket Ekici has lived in Germany since 1973. She is an artist with roots in two cultures and lives and works in Berlin. She completed her Master in Art history and Art pedagogy in 2000 and went to study with Marina Abramovic at the HBK Braunschweig. She had worked with international artists like Ilya Kabakov and Tania Bruguera and has been presenting her work in international exhibitions since 2000. Nezaket Ekici uses social and cultural every day life experiences in her work. That context is absorbed to create a performance that uses the body as symbol, in

interaction with technology and the audience. In her performances Ekici places the most ordinary everyday kind of experiences into a new context, which invites the audience to make new associations. Seemingly commonplace elements are juxtaposed together to form a whole new experience as a work of art (Gesamtkunstwerk).

<http://www.ekici-art.de/>

Titel: Performance/Installation "Emotion in Motion"
Presented at: Galerie Valeria Belvedere, Mailand 2002
Duration of the Performance: 3 days
Photo by Roberto Marossi



Pascale Grau

b.1960 St. Gallen, Switzerland



Performance enhanced by King Kong copyright
Pascale Grau, Foto: Ruedi Steiner,
Kunsthalle Bern 2000

Pascale Grau graduated in fine art and film from School of Fine Arts Hamburg (Hochschule für Bildende Künste Hamburg) and did her MA with Marina Abramovic in 1992/94. In 2001 she focused on the theory of archive, documentation and organization at art HGKZ. She has been involved with co-organizing and curating of performance art events at "Kaskadenkondensator", an independent artspace in Basel Switzerland since 1998. Grau sees performance as the transformation of message, time and shape

into sign language within the immediacy of the event. In using her body as an instrument and embodiment of image of the world she also confronts suppositions, preconceived roles and projections. Performance is then considered as the non-linear process of creating a language. The video and multi-media virtual reality versions is seen as living depositories or a means for the further development of the signs of this language to create vocabulary for the image of a new reality.

<http://www.pascalegrau.ch/>
<http://www.kasko.ch/>

Katak Kudung

singapore



STOPOVER Japan Singapore
performance art meeting 2005
Front room gallery Singapore 1999

Noor Effendy Ibrahim now practices theatre and performance under the name Katak Kudung (Maimed Frog). He has worked prolifically in Malay Theatre with Teater Kami, Teater Ekamatra and Teater Artistik since 1991. Effendy expanded into performance art and body-based performances since 1994. He initiated and co-founded a Chicago-based performance collective "Broken Cello"(1998-2000) while studying at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Currently, Effendy is the Artistic Director and Executive Producer of Teater Ekamatra. Through Katak Kudung, the

works evoked imageries of punishment of the physical body to impel the sub-conscious strains. In collaboration with sculptor, Ranger Mills his installations are like torture machines of the psyche. Three of his plays are published in Bisik - Antologi Drama Melayu Singapura, a co-publication of Teater Ekamatra and Pustaka Cipta (Malaysia) and he is also featured in People at the Peak 2002 and 2003.

Essi Kausalainen

b.1979, Helsinki, Finland

Essi Kausalainen graduated in interdisciplinary arts, performance and live art in Turku and in Helsinki. She works with interdisciplinary medias, performance art and installation. In her work Kausalainen uses her physical presence and creates different social and visual structures to explore the issues of intimacy, identity and sexuality, creating encounters with the self in socially intimate spaces. Essi Kausalainen wants to explore the spaces and variances between people and creates unusual situations to make psychological



or emotional associations. She is able to do this with poetic vision, kindness and tenderness, which seduce us all into submission. Besides consistently presenting her works in Finland Essi has also shown in Dartington in UK; Montreal, Canada; Glasgow, Scotland; Moscow, Russia, Beijing and Chengdu in China.



Kai Lam

b. 1974, Singapore

Kai Lam was trained in sculpture in 1993, practices installation, video, and sound art and has started making performance art since 1999. In 2005, He started performing as "Singlish Punk". His work is a respond to the identity of being a 'global citizen' in the city where he lives and work as a visual artist.

"Singlish Punk" is a critical inquiry into the ideas of cultural appropriation and the assimilated 'global' identity. This work is a manifestation of the artist's intent to understand the various ways of presenting performance art as well as a contradictory analogy of the artist's role towards his immediate social environment. Art making is an approach for Kai to understand the human conditions surrounding him and through his personal experiences, realized as a social commentary and a creative exploration of the urban pluralistic society. Kai is one of the co-organizers of critical artists-initiated



Title: Performasi - The Body Is Political.
July 2005, Neon Hall, Nagano, Japan.
10th NIPAF Asian Performance Art Series '05
Photo credits: Sam Penaso

projects like "Artists Investigating Monuments", a public art project and "Future Of Imagination", International Performance Art Festival and an active member of The Artists Village and Sculpture Society, Singapore.

http://www.geocities.com/singlish_punk
http://www.geocities.com/op_out74

Khairuddin Hori

b. 1974, Singapore



45 Armenian (performance), 2004,
The Substation Gallery, Singapore

Khairuddin Hori graduated with a Diploma in Fine Art (Sculpture) from the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts in 1995 and has since explored and presented works and concepts through various mediums and across diverse disciplines such as theatre, painting, sculpture, installation and performance art. His multifarious practice has seen him in several incarnations. As Associate Director of Teater Ekamatra, a local Malay-language theatre company, he was known to direct and create daring productions including *Die Faustus Die!*, which was staged on the façade of The Substation building. Khairuddin is an Associate

Artist (Visual Arts) of The Substation and has also organized and curated several shows including Thai-Singapore collaborative project, *One On Other* (About Studio, Bangkok, 2005). He recently initiated "Wunderspaze" as a platform for experimentation in contemporary art practice and development of young artists and curators living and working in Southeast Asia. He also co-organizes "Future Of Imagination 3", International Performance Art Festival in Singapore.

Ray Langenbach

b. 1948, USA/Malaysia

Originally from Boston, living and working in Kuala Lumpur, Ray Langenbach "performs theory", focusing on cognitive phenomena and propaganda. His video works, installations and performances have been presented in the Singapore Film Festival, Philippines Film Festival, Film Festival of the South, Norway; Cultural Center of the Philippines, the Singapore Art Museum, the National Art Gallery of Malaysia, Whitney Museum of Art (New York), Museum of Neon Art (Los Angeles), LACE (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions), Nevada Museum of Art (Reno), National Centre for the Arts (Mumbai), Artspace (Sydney), 3rd Werkleitz Biennial-Germany, Asia Pacific Triennale, Gwangju Biennale and others. Langenbach also curates and writes cultural theory. He has published in *Art Asia Pacific*,

Artlink, and *Asian Art News*, *Afterimage*. He served as Singapore Editorial Consultant for *World Art*, and appears in several collections including *House of Glass: Culture, Modernity and the State in Southeast Asia*, *Oxford Dictionary of Performance* (2004). His 2003 PhD thesis at the University of Western Sydney was "Performing the Singapore State 1988-1995" a critique that parallels Singapore performance art history to the performance of the State.

<http://library.uws.edu.au/>



Performance
Dresden 2000



Lee Wen

b.1957, Singapore



"Almost untitled:
end of the world stories"
Ugnayan '05, Manila,
The Philippines, 2005

Lee Wen's performances and installations often expose and question the ideologies and value systems of individuals as well as social structures. His work attempts to combine Southeast Asian contexts with international currents in contemporary art. His early practice was associated with the Artists Village, an alternative art group in Singapore and later forged a more individuated artistic career. Lee has been represented at the Busan Biennale (2004), the 3rd Asia Pacific Triennial in Brisbane (1999), the Sexta Bienal de La Habana, (1997), the Kwang Ju Biennial (1995), the 4th Asian Art Show, Fukuoka (1994) Sea Art Festival, Busan Biennale (S.Korea,

2004), National Review of Live Art (Scotland, 2004 & 2005). In 2003 Lee initiated, with the support of the Artists Village, "The Future of Imagination", an international performance art event that includes forum, documentation and presentation of performance art in Singapore. Since 1999 Lee has also worked with Black Market International performance art collective comprising artists from various countries and cultural backgrounds. Lee was awarded Singapore's Cultural Medallion in 2005.

Jason Lim

b.1966, Singapore



Jason Lim graduated from the Central-St.Martins School of Art in London and LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts, specializing in ceramics. He had always worked in a conceptual way when dealing with clay as a medium. He continues to experiment in non-conventional treatment of clay. From a conceptual framework he moved into the performative and had now clearly made a characteristic commitment in performance art parallel to his sculptural work in clay. Jason Lim also has interests in organizing alternative possibilities such as the UTOPIA gallery in 1996-7 as well as various other collaborations and was also Co-Artistic Director of The Future of Imagination 2, 2004. Jason Lim exhibits and presents his works regularly in Singapore

as well as internationally, such as Asiatopia, Bangkok, Chiangmai (1999, 2002); New Faces of Art in Asia, Lublin, Sopot, Warsaw, Poland (1999); Asian Art Festival, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan (2000); 11th Nippon International Performance Art Festival (2005). He also have been performing together with "Wolves in Winter" an international collective of performance artists since 2004.

Jamie McMurry

b. 1971, Los Angeles, USA

LIVE Biennial of Performance Art
Vancouver, Canada Oct 2003



Jamie McMurry has been working in performance art for more than 10 years. His works often include intensely visceral activities, densely packed series of actions referencing the pacing and behavior of young children at confused and often mischievous play. The materials and actions come from a place of memory and nostalgia, quintessentially suburban Americana. These endeavors call attention to the body as the archive of one's past and physical or emotional pain transcending traditional reaction and becoming a means of unification with the observer. He co-founded and directed the Rite! Performance Art Troupe (Seattle) and Powderkeg Contemporary Performance (Seattle and Los Angeles) from

1992-1997 and has also organized and produced extensively, participating in major regional and international performance art exhibitions including the world-renowned Full Nelson Festival 2003. He was recently working as a full time visiting faculty member in the Performance Area at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (through Spring 2005) and has also had visiting artist/guest lecturer positions at the University of Northern Iowa and the Turku Art Academy, Finland.

<http://www.mcmurryperformance.com/>

Helge Meyer

b. 1969 Woltwiesche, Germany



special kind of body-wisdom relating to action, image and the body. System HM2T showed their duo-performances at different festivals internationally (2001: Exit Festival, Finland 2nd Open Art Platform, China! Aozora Art Project, Japan; 2002: PIPAF 2 Saluhan, Philippines A.K.T.3, Czech Republic). Since 2000 Teubner and Meyer associated with the international meetings of Black Market International (in Germany, Switzerland, 2000, Italy, 2001, Canada, 2002).

<http://www.performance-art-research.de/Home.htm>

Taschlich,
4th counter of performance,
Yucatan

Helge Meyer studied fine art at the HBK Braunschweig and cultural science at the University of Hildesheim, Germany (diploma 1999). His PHD thesis focused on "Performance Art and Pain", at the Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste, Stuttgart. Working with simple structures to create spontaneous images Meyer's performances explores systems of social interactions, exposing cultural prejudices. Together with Marco Teubner, Helge Meyer co-founded "System HM2T" a performance duo founded in 1998. Marco Teubner and Helge Meyer's performances are experiences in real time, translating time into an image and making human behavior visible. The performance actions are always new experiences that have a



Boris Nieslony

b.1945, Germany



Bone 8, , Schlachthaus Theater,
Bern, SWITZERLAND

As a multidisciplinary artist Boris has dedicated himself to painting, photography, installation, performance, intervention, and art actions. Founder member of Black Market International, considered as an important conceptual association in international performance art circles. The concept is an investigation into art as organization, meeting and encounter between artists through action in order to generate a species and situation of mythical dimensions in the production of ideas and actions into reality. While Nieslony is also actively producing his own work, from 1985, he initiated ASA-EUROPEAN, which focuses as an international project of services in the Art of Performance, an extensive archival bank of information dedicated to curation, organization and investigation in the field of performance art and time based art. It has helped managed and organized various series of performance art conferences and forums in various countries.

<http://www.asa.de/>

Rizman Putra

b.1978 Singapore



Since 1997, Rizman Putra has been actively working in performative experimentation, crossing between different genres, including poetry, photography, video, music, burlesque, and dance. Rizman has made his name as a performer both in his solo work as well as various collaborations. Putra's work engages with issues of identity and stereotyping. He created the alter-ego Manic Jango to explore the complexities that underlie his multiple identities as a young Singaporean, Malay Muslim, contemporary artist. He is also a founding member of a multi-disciplinary art group KYTV (Kill Your Television), and front man of local music group, Tiramisu. As the founding member of KYTV, he

is the main creative source of the performance elements and interdisciplinary project. Rizman had performed in all the KYTV performance, short films and interactive project. He received the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology's (RMIT) Most Outstanding Award 2002-2003. Recently, he was awarded the President's Young Talents Award 2005 and participated in the 3rd Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale 2005.

<http://www.tiramisuiism.blogspot.com/>

<http://www.killyourtelevision.info/>

Shu Yang

b. 1969 Xian, China

"Flag in Taib(p)ei" – Shu Yang
Reach Outlying TIPALive 05
Taipei, Taiwan 29 July. 2005



Shu Yang is a theater practitioner, artist, writer, editor and independent curator based in Beijing. In 2000 he helped initiate and organized Open Art Festival and has been directing the DaDao Live Art Festival since 2003. He was a guest lecturer on art history in Art & Design Academy of North China University of Technology in Beijing from 2000 to 2003. He worked as executive editor of Chinese contemporary art magazine Next Wave in 2001. Participated as independent curator of China-UK Arts Management Placement Programme at Visiting Art in London and Chapter Art Centre in Cardiff in 2003. He has been a member of

Independent Chinese Pen Centre since 2004. His performances often use iconic Chinese objects to draw audiences into explorations of communism, socialism and the current social situation in China. In 2004 he undertook an artist residency programme "Breathe" at Chinese Arts Centre in Manchester. He co-curated "China Live 2005" presenting Chinese performance artists in various cities in UK.

Tang Da Wu

b. 1943, Singapore

Upon his return from studying, working and living in England for 20 years in 1988, Tang helped established the Artists Village, an alternative art group in Singapore. He participated in various international events

since 1989 such as 3rd Asia Art Show, Fukuoka Art Museum, "Creativity in Asian Art Now", Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art. Since 1988 Tang began to experiment in combining mixed-media, installations with performance. Tang's work provided a stimulus to take Singaporean art in new directions, infusing a shot of energy into the somewhat lackluster Singapore arts scene together with other young motivated artists. He played a leading role in the search for new forms of expression. Tang often made observations of the everyday world around him in order to include viewers to help in the creative process. Tang has used his works to bring to the surface critiques of everyday life, provoking questions about the society and civilization that exist in quotidian ways all around us. Tang Dawu was awarded the 10th Fukuoka Asian Cultural Prize in 1999.



Interakcje 2004,
Piotrkow Trybunalski, Poland

Tran Luong

b.1960 Hanoi, Vietnam



Steam Rice Man - Oct. 2001
Mao Khe coal mine , Quang Ninh prov Vietnam



Tran Luong graduated from the Hanoi Fine Arts Institute in 1983. Tran Luong's formative years, during which the country was at war, were spent in the countryside. Like many artists of his generation, he learned the values of traditional Vietnamese life in the countryside. Living there he also had a chance to explore nature with a keen sense of observation he watched and absorbed the patterns of nature. Tran Luong is considered one of the forerunners of contemporary art in Vietnam and was one of the first to explore installation and performance art. Luong's most recent work is based on performance and multi-media installation art.

His works evolved into showing the pressing concerns of rapidly changing post-war society. The future generations face a loss of traditional cultural values and history while confronting the encroaching consumerist culture. He is also actively organizing alternative contemporary art events in Vietnam and initiated Lim Dim an international performance art event held in Hanoi in 2004.

Forum Synopsis

"The Future of Imagination # 3"

Forums:

10 AM to 1Pm, 14 April, Venue: Singapore Art Museum

Forum: **"Performance Art in China and Hong Kong, radical practice or hype?"**

(In Mandarin)

Speakers: Shu Yang (China), Ko Siu Lan (Hong Kong); Thomas Berghuis (Netherlands)

Moderator: Richard Chua (Singapore)

Recent years have seen various news about the surges of performance art practice in China and Hong Kong. The forum sets out to unravel fact from fiction. The invited speakers include both practitioners and scholars of performance who have an insider's view of the reality of the unraveling history of performance art in China and Hong Kong.

From the humble beginnings of East Village artists in Beijing where performance art was an "underground" activity, some artists have gone on to become luminaries in various international exhibitions. Since it's handing over in 1997 there have been various developments in Hong Kong, which seems to show heightened interests in performance art, wherein a relationship with social currents is evident. The rapid developments beg the question whether it has been over-exposed, fetishized and commoditized. We hope this forum will throw some light on the actual state of affairs.

2 to 5 PM Friday, 14 April, Venue: Singapore Art Museum

Forum: **"Is Performance Art today in a state of 'menopause'?"**

(In English)

Speakers:

Sergio Edelsztein (Israel); Nani Kahar (Malaysia); Ko Siu Lan (Hong Kong); Thomas Berghuis (Netherlands)

Moderator: Ray Langenbach (US/ Malaysia)

The history of performance art is often traced to the turbulent 60's when a politicized art scene resulted in artists making social statements and breaking taboos and social conventions through the deployment of the body in performance. From the beginning of the last century, we have seen successive movements, such as Futurism, Surrealism, Dada, post-war Fluxus, Gutai, and Situationism. More recently we have seen the post-modern practices of 'relational aesthetics' and a rising populist desire to entertain, engage and interact with the "non-art" audiences and public. Have we also witnessed a decline of conscientization and socio-political relevance in the practice of performance art?

Forum Speakers

Nani Kahar is an architect and through labDNA seeks to extend the possibilities of architectural design practice through engagement with fine art, popular culture and communication technology. Media projects produced/curated include urban art events and installations, theatre, videos, and publications. Currently divides her time between Malaysia and the USA. <http://www.labdna.com/>

Sergio Edelsztein was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1956. He studied at the Tel Aviv University (1976-85). Founded and directed Artifact Gallery in Tel Aviv (1987-1995). In 1995 founded The Center for Contemporary Art in Tel Aviv in this framework he curated five Performance Art Biennials (BLURRR 1-5, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2005) and Video Zone, The first International Video Art Biennial (2002). Since 1995 he curated numerous video art screenings, retrospectives, performances events and biennials and also lectured, presented video programs and published writings in many countries. He was the curator for the Israeli Pavilion at the 51st Venice Biennale 2005. <http://www.cca.org.il/>

Thomas J. Berghuis has recently completed his PhD dissertation on Performance Art in China at the University of Sydney (Australia), following an MA in Sinology at Leiden University (The Netherlands). During the past 10 years he has frequently traveled to China for his research, and from 2003 to 2004 he was a visiting scholar at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. Next to his studies he has also been involved in several curatorial projects, including Associate Curator for the 6th Sharjah International Biennale, U.A.E (2003), Curator for the 1st Dashanzi International Arts Festival at the 798

Factory in Beijing (2004), and Co-organizer for the 2nd Dadao Live Art Festival in Beijing (2004) and the 5th Open Art Platform – International Performance Art Festival in Beijing (2004). His writings have been published in various magazines and art publications, including in Artlink, Mesh and positions.

Ko Siu Lan is an artist/ cultural/development worker. She works on community development and cultural action projects. She has participated in performance art events both locally and overseas. She is one of the organizers and curators of various Hong Kong performance art events such as the recent Hong Kong On the Move project in 2005-2006. <http://www.hongkongperformanceart.com/>

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Moderators:

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Richard Chua works primarily in Singapore Chinese Language Theatre. As a performer, he has worked on pieces directed by Kuo and many other directors, both local and abroad. As a writer, dramaturg and director, he has been working in collaboration with artists from Taiwan, China, Hong Kong, Macau and Malaysia. His efforts in promoting Singapore Chinese Language theatre to the region has resulted in the establishment of the Chinese Performing Arts Theatre Exchange Network, a network collective of artists using Chinese Language as a medium of performance (<http://www.theatrex.org>).

Credits

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Assistant Directors: Khairuddin Hori, Kai Lam

Design, Publications: Khairuddin Hori

Logistics, Technical: Kai Lam, Dan Lim, Warren Benedict Kong

Websites, Forums: Richard Chua

Public relations: Juliana Yasin, Annabelle Felise Aw

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