Future of Imagination 4 . International





SINGAPO

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### INTRODUCTION

"The Future of Imagination", a time based, performance art event was first held at the Substation on 6 December 2003. Given the limited budget and other intrinsic conditions of the local art scene, we are proud to say that the event was a considerable success. We would like to reiterate our concerns and aspirations to reinvigorate a positive situation for performance art and time-based art practitioners in Singapore. Our aims remain to significantly redefine and to kindle interests as well as promote the visibility of the practice of performance art and time-based art.

We had a successful follow-up with "The Future of Imagination 2" at the Sculpture Square in December 2004. The event was named one of the ten most important art events of the year by the National Arts Council. Following that we organized "The Future of Imagination 3" with increased intensity at the Substation and Singapore Art Museum in April 2006. We hope to continue our efforts to raise a heightened sensitivity and accentuate appreciation for time-based, performance art as a legitimate art form in itself by organizing "The Future of Imagination 4".

"The Future of Imagination 4" will continue to cross-examine performance and live art practice within the international context. We would like to invite foreign artists together with artists working in Singapore. With careful consideration, the artists are invited to provide a wider spectrum in order to present a balanced program so as to reveal the open range of possibilities while working in raw explorations of body, space and time-based performances. Some will be specifically exploring performance as an intrinsic utopian universal language, yet others embark on the body as sound, audio or visual producers. Yet others address performance art in terms of social subjectivities or interventions. Ours is an age of intense globalization and we as artists organizers sincerely believe that such an event will help increase international cultural exchange and understanding as well as being a continuity of developing of our artistic practice, research and growth.

We would like to continue efforts to encourage a committed discourse by holding workshops, a forum and a catalog publication based on the writings and documentation of previous year's event. In addition to the presentation of live performances we would like to have some workshops to be conducted by some of the invited artists before or during the event. This is part of our

desire to enhance awareness as well as to make comparative studies between the different practices of performance artists.

Last year's FOI3 included a collaboration with Malaysian artists Liew Kung Yu and Ray Langenbach to help bring the international artists and some Singapore artists to participate in "Satu Kali", first performance art symposium, held in Kuala Lumpur just prior to our event. Another parallel program, "Fetter Fields" organized by Lina Adam, Jeremy Hiah and Natasha Wei showcased 10 young Singapore based artists. The performances were held during the daytime before the FOI3 program begins in the evenings. There was an attempt to use public and outdoor spaces. It was good exposure and experience to allow the young artists to present their works to an international audience. We would like to work with this similar model of collaboration with neighboring countries. FOI4 will work in collaboration with Indonesian artists, Arahmaini and Iwan Wijono to bring invited artists after our event in Singapore to Jogjakarta for another performance art event "Maju Jaya", organized by Indonesian artists in Jogjakarta.

Artistic Director Lee Wen

Co-Directors Kai Lam Khairuddin Hori



# THE FUTURE IS NOT ENOUGH, Lee Wen

This is the fourth edition of Future of Imagination, international performance art event in Singapore. Besides presenting live performances we believe that it is equally important to organize workshops as well as forums to encourage research and discourse. It is more important to reach out to a wider audience and public through education and dialogue than marketing ploys and sensationalism. Unlike last year we are unable to organize workshops due to lack of supportive working partners but we hope that our forums will be just as well received as the performances presented.

Last year, we had a conference with one forum held in Chinese language and another in English. The Chinese language forum entitled: "Performance Art in China and Hong Kong, radical practice or hype?" wherein Shu Yang, Ko Siu Lan and Thomas Berghuis presented their observations based on experience and research about China and Hong Kong performance art situations. Perhaps due to the difficulty of translation, the forum did not see as lively a discussion as the English language forum. Although the forum was held in response to the notion that almost half the literate population in Singapore actually uses Chinese as their first language, there were few in the audience who are well versed in Chinese language. Either our publicity through the media are at fault or perhaps interest in performance art or contemporary art practices are badly lacking for the Chinese literate population of Singapore.

The difficulty in organizing workshops and the restrained response in the Chinese language forums are indicative of how we are also limited by local conditions and resources. This is most unfortunate as it is equally if not more important to talk and listen to each other about the performances that artists are presenting and learn about their working methodologies. The question then becomes that of how necessary it is for us to continue and in what way, within this limited format of a festival, under the local contexts, bearing in mind the other more critical problems of relevance or obsolescence of performance art itself in contemporary art practice at large within the global framework.

The more successful English language forum entitled: "Is Performance Art today in a state of menopause?" showed a diverse representation of positions from the speakers and was followed by a lively open contribution from the floor.<sup>2</sup> Responding to the

various urgent questions, theoretical and critical provocations of the forum's moderator, Ray Langenbach, the speakers gave their own take on the topic based on their own background, practical experiences and encounters with performance art and helped to identify certain issues that we should seriously reconsider.

Ko Siu Lan started being involved in performance art from a sociological background, gave a candid personal revelation of various hard questions she is facing and that we could easily identify with, based on her struggles of a self-taught artist cum organizer of performance art events in Hong Kong. Curator Sergio Edelsztein initiated a biennial of performance art in Tel Aviv in 1997, gave thought provoking criticisms into the problematical self-contradictory relationship of performance artists making live presentations with conscious meticulous planning towards making yet another product by way of video or photography for the art market. At the same time regretfully and shamelessly neglecting the significance of "liveness" in its own sake where spectators end up watching the performance artist playing the role of a director more concerned with making the end product for the camera lenses rather than interrelate the sensitive presence of live audiences.

We saw a different departure with Nani Kahar from an architectural and urban planning perspective. She questioned the legal obstacles of using public spaces for communal use and launched suggestions of the need for interventions into assessing and reclaiming private spaces into "hybrid spaces" as an alternative strategy for performative social transformations and interactions. For curator and China performance art specialist, Thomas Berghuis, performance art seems alive and well. However there are similar problems like those Edelsztein raised concerning complicity to the art market, to the point of conspiracy by artists, perhaps even more exaggerated given the booming China art market. Berghuis gave insinuations that the form or structure of performance art events is at fault mainly for not being flexible enough to enable works, which are more process based or of longer durations and limiting it to the 30-minute formats mostly seen at festivals. Beyond that of being complicit to the art market, he also questioned if the real motivations for organizing such festivals is that of artist-organizers ulterior of wanting to be invited by reciprocal festival organizers. \*\*

During the open discussion we saw the surfacing of various tribulations and concerns such as the tyranny of the art market, diverse possibilities of reclaiming public spaces hampered by social and legal realities, the media's role beyond that of hyped sensationalism, state propaganda and money driven reports, comparative weaknesses and inadequate constituency of visual artists as an individualistic and diversified practice in comparison to theatre companies and limitations of the festival format. Before we can begin to dwell into these questions, it seems necessary to respond to the utmost critical question posed by the forum's question of whether performance art remains a relevant vital art form in the socio-political situation of our contemporary society and time.

Expectations perhaps began from performance art's initial heydays and previous stellar manifestations hailing from the infamous anti-art antics of Dada, as an iconoclastic tool of resistance and revolutionary negation of the cultural status quo and a protest against the barbarism and insanity of the First World War. The post-Second World War revival of these anti-art strategies evolved into conceptual and performance art, which played a major role in the formation of the post-modernism of today. Consequently becoming appropriated by the state and museums in the form of hyped spectacles or populist presentations in biennales and record-breaking prices in the art auctions of the global market. It is worrisome to see the phenomenon of alternative practices of art constantly being appropriated and made into yet another mere commodity for the market, or a tool for state propaganda as if that were its ultimate destined value and disregarding or dumbing down its initial humanistic motivations, utopian or intellectual ideals of radical intentions.

Within Singapore's context, performance art became increasingly a major medium for contemporary art practice since Tang Da Wu and The Artists Village began their explorations in the late '80s, Many saw performance art as an experimental medium beyond the limitations of traditional practices of painting and sculpture and making art objects for the market. The incident of losef Ng's "Brother Cane", 1993-4 performance resulted in a 10 year de facto ban on funding and proscription on performance art and forum theatre and the paranoid situation of licensing, giving performance art an image of radical edge or some may say media hype. The ban on funding was lifted in 2003 of which our first FOI event was organized soon after in response, Since then increasingly more artists have been given funding support for their work in performance art. This year's Singapore's pavilion at the 52nd Venice Biennale features Tang Da Wu, Jason Lim, Vincent Leow and Zulkiflie Mahmod. Tang Da Wu and Jason Lim are active performance artists while Vincent Leow and Zulkiflie Mahmod had worked in relationship to performance art in the past.6 There is also a high tendency of centralization of cultural directions as sponsorships tend to be funneled via the state engineered National Arts Council, which upsets the autonomy and sovereignty of the arts.<sup>7</sup>

Acquiring its present status maybe seen as "triumphant" in gaining dominance as an accepted medium of contemporary art practice as Thomas McEvilley proposed, however its ability to directly effect social changes may yet proved to be that of failure. Hence the state of performance art can be compared to that of "menopause" as signifying changes with regards to the body politic reaching a different station of growth or maturity, or perhaps a lost of innocence, radicalism or idealism, as one may perceive it and most urgent of all a shutdown of the reproductive function.

Menopause as a biological state as much as the current state of performance art if not contemporary art is still not completely understood and as some have voiced in our forum has its pros and cons. With its "triumphant" dominance or acceptance we could not continue to expect performance art to directly challenge the status quo of market capitalism or liberate us completely from state control of social behavior, as it already have submitted into docile domesticity. Recently artists who forayed into performance art may

not have the same idealistic commitment and allegiance towards social transformation, or the desire to adhere to socio-political themes as the historical avant-garde or the earlier generation. Have we not then descended into complacency and taking for granted this privileged status of acceptance? Are we merely continuing a passé tradition rather than a radical avant-garde practice capable of sprouting newer offspring and directions of protest and critique? Are the apolitically motivated explorations merely safer forays in formalism or self-indulgence and symptomatic of its impending decline, closure or death?

Many different opinions and outstanding questions still need to be confronted in response by way of actual actions by the artists of concern. Despite the inherent discrepancies of the current state of affairs, our decision to continue to organize this festival is based on the considered, comparative advantages of hosting it than not. Potentials still exist in encountering each appropriation or "recuperation" into the mainstream by yet another subversion or "détournement", using elements of an accepted practice and medium to create new possibilities of critical interventions. However it would be dubious to expect us to work in the same vein of direct oppositional confrontation or resistance as the Dadaists and Situationists. Rather than that of "biting the hand that feeds us", it is more that of "giving salt to the enemy" by working resolutely with the recognition that a conscious co-existence of mutual subversion between the artists as individual and the established powers that be, may still help contribute to a dialectical evolution of art, culture and society.

Local contexts differ due to different historical backgrounds and socio-political structures and international festivals are a chance to investigate and compare diverse works within the global framework albeit within limitations of our local conditions. It may not be possible, under present conditions for some kinds of works such as those requiring longer durations or processes or even risky interventions transgressing legality. However it is still possible to derive pertinent valuable outcome from such an interaction and meeting of artists. The continued sincere application and exploration based on its intrinsic open and diverse potential as a time-based medium, independent of material production of object making and the intensity of a live encounter or interaction between the artist and audience, performance art still has its validity as a tool of social engagement, or an ability to instill social consciousness, if art itself still has the aspiration to fulfill that function at all today.

Risky transgressions may be tolerated within other scenarios whereas strict regulations exist in our society and serious consequences await us here by way of imprisonment, hefty fines or ostracizations not to mention lost of financial support. For example, nude presentations in performance art are prevalent in various countries even though in fact they may be also illegal. However organizers willingly have taken risks of presenting them without much problems arising. Hence one of our forums this year confronts the issue of nudity in performance. Another forum will have speakers giving commentaries and critical assessments on performances seen during our event. This is done as part of our continued effort to provide a platform for dialogical investigation and seeking new directions via discussions and not only presentation of performances in order

to facilitate a gradual shift in social perspectives within the local cultural scenario.

Even within the licensing requirements of Singapore, risks of unexpected transgressions may arise due to the spontaneous nature of performance art itself. The motivation to organize such a festival limited by budget and taking risks under strict conditions in Singapore, may take inspiration from ideals of outsider artists where one ignores apparent or real social obstacles, risking the odds of success, absorbing oneself with extreme passion in order to believe that our actions can actually help to make a difference. There are hopes that the continued live presentations of a diversity of international performance art work, supplemented by platforms of dialogue and discussions could help encourage wider and tolerant perspectives as well as heighten the level of practice within our local contexts and conditions. This could help facilitate gradual social transformation less one acquiesces to accepting a future dictated by the tyrannous status quo. For complacency is the luxury of the foolish and the future is not enough.

<sup>5</sup> Langenbach, Ray, "Looking Back at Brother Cane: Performance Art and State Performance", 1995 Space, Spaces and Spacing, The Substation Conference 1995. The Substation Singapore 1996, p. 132-147

Langenbach, Ray, "Performing the Singapore State 1988 – 1995", PhD thesis, Center for Cultural Research, University of Sydney. August 2003, Ch.7, p. 207-239

http://library.uws.edu.au/adt-NUWS/uploads/approved/adt-NUWS20041027.174118/public/08Chapter7.pdf

<sup>6</sup> Vincent Leow was one of the active pioneer generation artists of The Artists Village who experimented with performance art. In 1992 he performed "Coffee Talk", where he drank his own urine and was a precedent of scandalous controversy in Singapore's conservative media prior to Josef Ng's "Brother Cane". He had over the years increasingly kept his distance from performance art and reverted to painting and sculpture.

Rajaram, G. 1993 (12 Jan.). "Drink urine? Urgh! But..." in The New Paper. Singapore. —, 1993 (12 Jan.). "How far will artists go to grab attention?" in The New Paper. Singapore.

Langenbach, Ray, "Performing the Singapore State 1988 – 1995", PhD thesis, Center for Cultural Research, University of Sydney, August 2003, p.191-194 http://library.uws.edu.au/adt-NUWS/public/adt-NUWS20041027.174118/

- <sup>7</sup> However it would be unfair to say that performance art only proliferated recently with state funding support as artists already initiated it in the '80s. Nearly half of the artists listed in the recently published "Contemporary Art In Singapore" had some involvement with performance art. Gunalan Nadarajan, Russell Storer, Eugene Tan, Contemporary Art In Singapore, Institute of Contemporary Art, Singapore, 2007.
- <sup>8</sup> McEvilley, Thomas, The Triumph of Anti-Art: Conceptual and Performance Art in the Formation of Post-Modernism, McPherson & Co., 2005 p.351-352
- <sup>9</sup> As forum titles are phrased to captivate and arouse response and debate, "menopause" was chosen over other words such as "buggy whip" or "andropause" without any derogatory intention in reference to the female sexuality. "Menopause" is most apt in common usage and parlance as a metaphorical indication of performance art's current uncertain state of anxiety.
- <sup>10</sup> Détournement is a word in French for diversion, subversion, turning something aside from its normal expected course or purpose. As described by Guy Debord and the Situationists, "recuperation" and "détournement" are two sides of the same coin. The recuperated radical ideals made safe by institutionalization and commoditization may by way of détournement be altered and subverted into another oppositional meaning. Plant, Sadie, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International and After*, Routledge, 1992. p.86-87, p. 104-105.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Singapore Department of Statistics (2001), *Literacy and Language (Dec 2000)* Singapore: Government Printer:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Future of Imagination 3, Forum: "Is Performance Art today in a state of 'menopause?" 14 April 2006, Singapore Art Museum. Speakers: Sergio Edelsztein (Israel); Nani Kahar (Malaysia); Ko Siu Lan (Hong Kong); Thomas Berghuis (Netherlands/Australia). Moderator: Ray Langenbach (US/ Malaysia) Full transcript of the forum can be downloaded from www.foi.sg

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> If one were to do a more thorough research of some of the artists who were presented in our festival series, such as Alastair MacLennan, Pascal Grau, He Cheng Yao, Mideo M. Cruz or our very own Tang Da Wu for example, one will find that their range of practice goes beyond that of the 30-minute format or at the most of 3 hours durations usually presented in our festivals. However it is also up to the pluck and experience of the artists to be able, under the given conditions, to still offer something representative of their larger extent. At the same time the audience should acquire a more active learning and investigative role rather than being presumptuous that what they see is all there is to it.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Although such attitude prevails, from my experience, most artists are organizing out of expediency and an eagerness to help fulfill a disparity in the art scenario where established institutions do not bother to provide a platform for such interactions. More often than not artists as organizers already have their solo artistic careers before embarking on such a task.



### CURATORS ON ACID Khairuddin Hori

"In the play with limits, both discourses and practices call for the abolition of borders, territorial expansion, the permeability of fields and hybridization.\!"

Tables were turned, roles reversed and reputations, at least temporarily, were "laid bare". Earlier this year, I invited five curators to collectively surrender their curatorial powers to myself (the artist) and *perform*, complement and complete the settings for a series of paintings and installations for *Trading Craft*<sup>2</sup>, my solo exhibition. With exceptions of Chumpon Apisuk and Wong Hoy Cheong, both artists-curators (the former recognized as pioneering the practice of performance art in Thailand while the latter last executed a piece of performance artwork eight years before); none of the other curators<sup>2</sup> have actually attempted personal productions of performance art as artists.

These curators (often doubling as critics and consultants) are the very same kind of powerful persons usually attributed to the making and breaking of artists, art festivals, biennales, exhibitions, theories and, even the construct of cultural policies at governmental levels. Dr Thomas J. Berghuis for instance, is the author of Performance Art in China<sup>4</sup> and an Associate Curator of the 6th International Sharjah Biennale (2003); Mikke Susanto who was one of the curators of the 8th Jogia Biennale (2005) is also curator at logia Gallery in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, which was only recently set-up under the auspices of none other than Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono X, the Sultan and governor of The Special Province of Yogyakarta; Adeline Ooi, is affiliated to and regularly curates exhibitions at Valentine Willy Fine Art "the art institution" of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, notorious partly for plunging young artistic prodigies from Southeast Asia into the commercial spectacle. The whip these curators bear is as heavy as it is powerful, hence, I would think that not unless reasonable, to submit, to "displace" themselves at the uncertainty of the receiving end, to attempt and execute an act most uncharacteristic of themselves, is definitely not something that they most likely look forward to.

So what did these curators conjure when given the opportunity to shine as artists, *performance artists* in particular you might ask?

The exhibition which opened at the Substation Gallery in Singapore sees  ${\sf DrThomas}$  J. Berghuis start off with a series of

actions dressed in an all-black outfit (par for the course of curators the world over) and started writing two pieces of texts on either sides of the gallery wall flanking a large, appropriated black and white reproduction of Francesco Goya's etching from 1810, *Great Deeds Against the Dead!*. Thomas' scribbles, executed coarse and brisk with charcoal exclaims, 'Who said painting is dead?' on one side and 'Art is not important' on the other. After this piece of action, he left the gallery only to return dressed in an orange painter's overalls, complete with a cheap face-towel covering his head, respiratory mask, a large tub of white paint and other house painting paraphernalia. He then embarked on an attempt to whitewash the texts he had written earlier only to create grey, smudged paint marks with the charcoal scribbling still visible and legible underneath. He then proceeded to paint over a glass tabletop, part of an installation made up of appropriated Roy Lichtenstein paintings. To end this series of actions, he roll-painted the 3 x 4 meters Goya piece with the same white paint, almost whitewashing it in its entirety!

While Thomas made a physically flamboyant appearance, Wong Hoy Cheong, although present in the same building, opted for the esoteric. On the other end of the same gallery, underneath a green tent, spectators engaged in an online conversation via a preset cyber alias as *Burqah* with one *Tuan Mahaguru* visible on screen only as a black cerebral penumbra. Such is a sample conversation:

**Tuan Mahaguru:** I am not here to answer your questions, but to help you find the true path.

**Burgah:** What is the true path?

Tuan Mahaguru: Go pour your soul into abstract paintings.

Burgah: How do I do so? I am not liquid.

**Tuan Mahaguru:** Buy paint, stretch a canvas, stare at it, and find the inner space.

In the middle of these two *performances*, Mikke Susanto, in black t-shirt and jeans, was busy scouting for the 'next big thing' through conducting a contest of drawings to be inspired from a set of aluminum scaffolding present in the gallery. At the top of this scaffolding, two television monitors display loops of my appropriated version of John Baldessari's *Teaching a Plant the Alphabets* (1972) video. Mikke's series of *performative* actions were so ordinary that even though he was physically present, his performance piece was almost indeterminable. An ambiguous reading of art history from atop the scaffolding commenced as the number of exhibition attendees faded away, followed by the eventual announcement of a winner (which coincidentally, was one of the executives of The Substation) simultaneously signaling the end of his performance.

At the exhibition in Bangkok, Adeline Ooi pegged every single artwork on exhibit with titles she made up on a whim along with corresponding price tags. She then approached spectators, dressed in a brand new all-black outfit, playing the persona of an art dealer, attempting to trade the artworks on display. She succeeded, selling a series of seven black and white watercolours appropriating the works of Duchamp, Judd, Picasso, Manzoni, Warhol and Malevich within five minutes of the exhibition's opening; only for us to realize later that night that the transaction was made at one-tenth its intended price!

With austerity, Chumpon also dressed in black and somehow looking almost like a fisherman back with a day's catch at sea, stood on a low, square table with two plastic net sacks filled with colourful plastic balls hanging from his neck. He lobbed these balls in random directions towards the spectators. A piece of yellow A4 sized paper printed with instructions attached to the sacks asks spectators to look around and affix these balls to corresponding numbers found on the balls onto numbered yellow stickers mounted around the gallery walls prior to the gallery's opening. These plastic balls also had axioms handwritten in Thai with English translation on them. One such ball says 'Just do what you are told', something for the participating spectator to indulge their thoughts into while searching for the corresponding number on the walls to paste them to.

This series of performances by curators responding to my brief as "interim curator" did provoke mixed reactions from the spectators. The performance by Mikke Susanto for example, feels very sedated, probably even failed in its bureaucratic attempt. Before and even during the duration of his performance, Mikke tirelessly solicited a piece of drawing out of me. Sensing a nasty plot at play, I resisted. I had the uneasy feeling that if I had made a piece of drawing and participated in his search for 'the next big thing', my drawing, regardless of how good or bad it might have been, would be chosen as the winner. This 'scandal' could add drama and give power to his otherwise uneventful performance. Adeline Ooi was floating around, looking almost helpless while trying to chat spectators up individually in order to sell art. She seemed to recognize some of the people in the audience and paid specific attention to those. Others seemed confused with her fleeting presence and could have thought of her as 'a gallery assistant hired to pitch sales' which is a definite boo hoo for an institutional gallery like The Art Center due to the fact that it belongs to one of Thailand's national university. Wong Hoy Cheong, whose intention from the beginning was to cancel his physical being from view probably got what he wanted albeit some technical hiccups that delayed the opening of the exhibition for almost a good half-hour. Chumpon's piece flashed security and wisdom typical of a seasoned performer and veteran artist. His presence and stature while standing on top of the table (which was about forty centimeters high) alone was almost enough to sate the spectators' need for art. Thomas', probably the most elaborately planned and propped performance drew numerous ireful responses. People around the gallery were overheard exclaiming, "Oh my God! How could he disrespect Goya like that?" forgetting that the piece of Goya they spoke about was my blatant, enlarged copy of the original!

Understandably, spectators throughout both opening nights came primarily to see these curators perform 'live' and witness the much touted exhibition concept verily

manifested. The event had an air not dissimilar to that of a regular performance art festival night. Many seemingly forgot that three out of five of this all-star line up of *artists* presenting performance art are, in their regular and professional lives, curators. Expectations of 'good' and 'professional' performance presentations were abound. The paradox of it is that even if the performances pieces presented were all bad, it was good!

I had never anticipated this fragment of the Trading Craft project to convert into an incidental and almost experimental outing of performance art. Some moments, as an artist, I have to admit that I did feel good looking at these curators fumble...

"Art. There's the catch. At this stage of consciousness, the sociology of Culture emerges as an in-group "dumb-show." Its sole audience is a roster of the creative and performing professions watching itself, as if in a mirror, enact a struggle between self-anointed priests and a cadre of self-appointed commandos, jokers, guttersnipes, and triple agents who seem to be attempting to destroy the priests' church. But everybody knows how it all ends: in church, of course, with the whole club bowing their heads and muttering prayers. They pray for themselves and their religion."

Allan Kaprow<sup>5</sup>

'Birgit Pelzer, "Cache-toi, object! – The Unattainable Revolution", Behind The Facts. Interfunktionen 1968-1975, Gloria Moure et all, Ediciones Poligrafica, Barcelona, 2004. p.68

<sup>2</sup>Curated by June Yap, Trading Craft is a project under the Article series initiated by the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, of commissioned projects that form part of the institute's curatorial research. Each project functions as an experimental platform where the institute collaborates with an artist towards the development of a new artwork. Trading Craft took place from 23 April to 4 May at The Substation Gallery, Singapore and from 28 June to 21 July at The Art Center, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand.

 $^3\mathrm{Dr}$  Thomas J. Berghuis (Netherlands/China/Australia), Mikke Susanto (Indonesia) and Adeline Ooi (Malaysia).

<sup>4</sup>Berghuis, Thomas J., Performance Art in China, Timezone 8, Hong Kong, 2006.

<sup>5</sup>Sven Lutticken, "The Worst Audience", Secret Publicity: Essays on Contemporary Art, NAi Publishers, Rotterdam, 2005. p.55



# OBSERVATIONS ON ARTIST COLLECTIVES WORK IN SINGAPORE (1999-2007). Kai Lam

I will relate my experiences working as an artist based in Singapore, and what I mention here does not necessarily reflect the opinions of my mentioned art colleagues, it is just an account of my personal experience working as an artist organizer here. When I was beginning to take an interest in performance art practice just after I left my art studies in 1998, I started to meet and got involved in art projects that was organized by my predecessors, artists like Tang Dawu, Lee Wen and Jason Lim. Through these artists meetings, I had learned that art-making is not just to 'make', but the organization of it and putting an exhibition or event is a important part of the whole. I had learned from these artists, not so much of art making as a 'career' path, but more about the spirit of independence and creating the platforms for our own art practice. This had led me to self-organize art, and work independently as an artist / organizer and how to compromise with the situations outside of the art arena. What I had learned from them is what it takes to be an art worker?



**TheArtistsVillage** 

I had started to work as an artist since 1995, and in the following years had discovered that there is a need for artists to self-organize themselves because there are simply not enough platforms to show contemporary art during this period. At this time, even art tertiary, discourages their students from making performances and installations, as these art forms did not exist in the school's syllabus, so the school did not know how to 'grade' such kind of artworks during those times. In 1999, I was beginning to travel as an artist to present my works and at this time, I was also collaborating with

# **POST-MUSEUM**

my art colleagues, Woon Tien Wei (p-10) and Jeremy Hiah (Your Mother Gallery), as The Artists Village, we were co-organizing and self-curating many public-orientated art events and activities, due

to the lack of such activities that platforms contemporary art during those times. These projects include "Post-Ulu – 1999", "Artists Investigating Monuments - 2000", "Ubin Art Camp - 2001", "Public Art Library - 2003" and various others. At that time, we were setting a sort of precedence among the artist peers of our generations, by raising questions on the way how artists work in the local context through out collective activities. Our exploration had also led us to the grey area of Performance Art, as no one at that point in time was sure about this situation and the re-percussions of organizing such events again after the 1994 'Josef Ng' performance incident. Josef Ng had since stopped his practice in performance, and had gone into art writing and art-agency business based n Bangkok. When we were beginning to organize our own things, we started from scratch like our predecessors, looking for support in kind from institutions for our projects, sometimes



rejected because they find what we are doing too 'obscure' or we belong to the same art group (The Artists Village) that is 'responsible' for the 1994 incident. We were organizing the projects without any fundings and paying through our own pockets sometimes, but luckily we had good support from a private foundation, by recommendation of one of our artist friend, Chng Seok Tin. The company sort of became our group's unofficial corporate sponsor for the next few years to come. In our quest to organize public art events, we had encountered many contradicting bureaucratic processes, and found out that it was indeed more difficult to put a event together then just working as an artist individually, because we had to go through different state institutions like the police for licenses to perform (now licenses are applied from Media Development Authorities) and permission from various land authorities for the events to take place in particular locations, as well as permissions from the local community where the art take place. These are things we found that we have to negotiate as independent art workers, and art making to me was never the same anymore ever since.

The experiences of working in a collective somehow molded us into artists / organizers over the years, and it had widened my scope of what an artist's work is about. Artist has to take a pro-active role to engage and connect with our immediate society, to bring the art to the public. We became public campaigners of art, and begin to see art as a way to strategize events and on the local audience ship of art. During these times, there is a need for artists to fill up the gaps of what larger art institution could not achieve, the connection of art with the public, through the activities of these artists initiative, it brings about a sense of integration as a whole. What we were trying to do is to bring art out of the usual art spaces closer to the public domain, rather than depending on the limitations

of the art space and bureaucratic process of larger institutions. Some of our artists peers see us as a quasi-resistance towards the 'legitimate' art entities of the day, there wasn't any conscious 'resistance' but rather we were only exploring the ways to make activities to make art more accessible to the public and thus widen the scope of art. I guess at that time, we could not agree with things that are happening around us, so we decided to create the situation for ourselves rather than waiting for it to happen. Looking back,

# Your MOTHER gallery

we are compelled to organize and curate our own show because there was not enough curators interested in contemporary art practice, most of them seemed too busy to attend exhibitions or talks, even meeting with the artists. Will the "real curators" please stand up? Many times, when an artist put a project together, one had to write about his / her own works because there were not many writers engaging in critical writing who has interests in contemporary art practices. Although we are still very much involved with governmental endorsed projects, we still preferred to do things our own ways. We started to organize our own art as we could not agree with the way of how art is being managed by the state apparatus in Singapore but the irony is that performance events we had organized were more welcomed by the public then certain established institutions of art, All these took place without much support from the arts council as our activities did not fit into the agenda of the politics-of-the-day, and what we are organizing were deemed as 'illegitimate' art activities due to some parts of the program that includes performance art, Sometimes we are even requested by grants official to 'change the names' in the program of the projects or even not include certain pieces or artists in our projects' programs just to secure the particular funding. Mostly we responded by sending them back our feedbacks to justify why we feel these projects needed to be supported by the existing art funding programs. At that time, it was incomprehensible to me that such a policy can exist and that the Singapore authorities can curb certain mode expressions through their vast institutional networks. Despite this, we had embarked on many projects, in the public as well as in many local art venues, which have performance art element in it. We found out that it is still possible to do so, although there was no financial support from the arts council, we had good support in from some galleries spaces and other organizations.



Since 2003, right after the signing of the free-trade agreement between the Singapore and United States government, the NAC announced that it will start funding performance art projects again, Lee Wen and myself initiated the first FOI, as a respond to the positive move of the NAC towards the local art situation. Jason Lim (whom had initiated various performance projects like Waterloo Arts Alive - 2000, Stopover - 2005) and Khairuddin Hori (Wunderspaze) had also joined us later as the core group in organizing the festivals of FOI. Since the removal of the 'ban' on performance art in

Singapore, artists are encouraged by the authorities' efforts to promoting the art, yet with a biased funding structure, artists receiving the grants still has to adhere to the politically-correct agendas of the authorities. Since the beginning of Singapore performance art's 'legitimate' status, produces an emerging situation worthy of observations, that is how does the authorities here deal with performance and the local art situation? At the other end, artists are still organizing the independent events, what are we actually making, besides the art? Although performance festivals are organized momentarily, it is still an important and valid platform for art experimentation, and exploring the relations of performance have around it's surrounding. This creates opportunity for artists to maintain critical dialogue among each other, it also forms a loose network of artists disseminating information, form exchange and engage in performance activities.



Performance art practice has no universal techniques or methods like traditional art form, and the practices' discipline is developed within the artist's understanding of his own strategies and ways in their own productions. It is in this spirit of experimentation, that performance meetings are necessary platforms that can be use constantly to re-evaluate performance practice and its relations to the surrounding social transformation. Performance based activities in the form of festivals; workshops, exchanges and exhibitions are evident in spaces and galleries in the region of Southeast Asia. There are many groups of collective who organizes events and festivals like Dadao and Open (China), NIPAF (Japan), BIPAF (S.Korea), PIPAF and Tupada (Philippines), Asiatopia (Thailand) and Perfurbance (Indonesia). Performance organizers have to constantly touch base with the ground, to understand work and stay connected to the local community while maintaining as the alternative to politically correct activities of art driven by quasi-art institutions or establishments. The organization of performance or live arts is thriving because of its 'alternative' process that differs to other visual arts practices, and in doing so the community can maintain a vibrant arts community. Artists-initiated projects here then become barometers of contemporary art practices that gauge the arts and cultural climate of that particular society. The artists from this region is starting to collaborate in the organizations of project further extend their performative activities. Within this artist-movement network, each of the artistcollective work in different ways to interact with their own institutionalized art system and the larger social condition and cultural sensibilities. As independent collectives, we need to support each other and grow together, which will pave the way for understanding and relevance of performance practice towards our immediate social environment. In the midst of this, we must not forget what we are fighting as an individual first, then as a collective to make the agenda and goals more effective. We also have to question ourselves constantly, about what does it means when the artist take up roles outside of his or her usual scope of work, multi-tasking as a writer, quasi-curator or organizer? In solidarity to the people who are pro-actively pushing the boundaries of performance practice in their own societies, and the artists who are about to embark on this route of self-initiated art practice, here is a quote by Ernest Hemingway for you, "Never mistake motion for action". Bring It On!

# A PUNCH IN THE GUT: EMPATHY & MEANING IN PERFORMANCE ART. Lynn Charlotte Lu

When I was about three years old, my mother one day took me with her to a department store. While she shopped, I wandered around until I discovered the escalator bringing people up from the lower level. Fascinated by the black rubber handrail endlessly running down towards me then disappearing into the mysterious gap at the bottom, I placed my hands on it and let them be transported downward. Next thing I know, my hand is caught in the escalator's dark mouth. It is a snug fit and my fingers are sucked inward harder than I am able to pull them out. It is very hot inside this monster's mouth; I shriek, By the time someone yanked my hand out, enormous blisters had risen on my palm and fingers.

Back home that evening, soothed and bandaged, I watched my brother try to set kindling alight with flints. As he began to rub the stones against each other, I knew with great certainty what the heat building up between the two surfaces felt like. Still at the age where my worldview was unquestionably animistic, I cried out, "Ow ow ow!", for the voiceless stones in pain. And a few years later, when we came to the chapter on friction in science class, I thought, 'You don't have to tell me what this is about, I know what it is.'

\* \* \*

The radical empiricist philosopher William James called this mode of knowing 'knowledge by acquaintance'. He distinguished this experiential mode from conceptual knowing which he called 'knowledge *about*', stating emphatically that 'knowledge lives in the tissue of experience.' Neither the first nor the last to wrestle with this idea, James is in the company of thinkers – from the ancient Greeks to the historical Buddha, from medieval saints to contemporary philosophers, linguists and psychologists – who have distinguished this form of knowledge from others.

The Buddha distinguished experiential knowledge (*Bhavana-maya panna*) from knowledge received from others and adopted as one's own based on faith or on logical inference.<sup>3</sup> In his quest for personal enlightenment, he found *Bhavana-maya panna* to be the only mode of wisdom that could lead to spiritual emancipation. Thus, in his lifetime he developed and taught various techniques to cultivate this manner of knowing.<sup>4</sup> A similar distinction between different forms of wisdom is found in the ancient

Hindu text, Bhagavat Purana.<sup>5</sup> Verse 11.19.17<sup>6</sup> between the different ways by which we gain knowledge, that together make the sum of our whole understanding: Sruti (vedic wisdom straight from the horse's – God's – mouth), and aitihyam (traditional wisdom) are knowledge received from others and adopted based on faith, while anumanam is knowledge received from others and accepted to be true based on analytical reasoning. The last, pratyaknam (direct experience), is knowledge gained via the personal experience of something.

Just as I got right into the "tissue" of friction in my escalator encounter, I know what the creamy rich taste of chocolate is by having it dissolve in my mouth, what the cottony softness of a rabbit is by having run my fingers over its back, and what the sour, vomity pain of loss is by having lost someone I care about.

\* \* \*

What is interesting about knowing something through the direct experience of it, is not only that we know it so well that we never forget it, but that the knowledge is so concrete to us that when we see someone eating a piece of chocolate, stroking a rabbit, or losing a loved one, we spontaneously think, "I know what that tastes/feels like." Although there is no way for us to know precisely another person's experience, we know well enough what we tasted or felt in those situations to be able to recall vividly those sensations. On top of that, we recognize the other person as a creature that is fundamentally like us, and so infer that they are probably experiencing something sweet, soft, or painful.

This involuntary recognition of things we know from our past experiences and the subsequent identification with others in similar situations, is grounded in physical and psychological sensation, and is reciprocal and interactive. This primitive and pre-reflective capacity for resonance with others is called empathy. Empathy is defined as an unconscious ability to relate to others as a projection of our own conscious recollections of similar experiences. 8

This relatively neutral projection of our own feelings onto another person's experience is sometimes accompanied by sympathy. Sympathy means "stepping into the shoes" of another person and implies being personally affected by their experience.

Scottish philosopher Adam Smith based his moral system on "innate human faculties", notably pity and sympathy. Of sympathy between people, mediated through the body's instinctual movements. he wrote:

When we see a stroke aimed, and just ready to fall upon the leg or arm of another person, we naturally shrink and draw back our own

leg or our own arm; and when it does fall, we feel it in some measure, and are hurt by it as well as the sufferer. The mob, when they are gazing at a dancer on a slack rope, naturally writhe and twist and balance their own bodies as they see him do, and as they feel that they themselves must do if in his situation. <sup>10</sup>

An acute observer of the deep ambiguities in social attitudes towards bodies, Smith saw that people sympathize with pain experienced by others, especially when accompanied by danger.<sup>11</sup>

This capacity for recognizing and vicariously living the experience of another person cultivates a certain connection - on a very basic human level - between people.

\* \* \*

A genre of performance art which uses the body just as it is — as vulnerable/ resilient/sensitive as it is in everyday life — relies on empathy between people to create meaning that is not merely conceptual but also haptic and visceral. As the nature of this innate faculty is primarily somatic, the work not only tickles our brains but can quite literally leave us feeling like we've been punched in the gut as well. $^{12}$ 

Using ordinary human experiences as raw material for the work, this 'gutty' form of performance generally employs no artifice as a surrogate for the "real thing". The artist's body, presented as one not so different than our own, possesses a measure of authority to communicate some very basic things about our bodily existence by pointing to certain common understandings of certain embodied experiences. The boundaries between life and art, private and public, become ambiguous and fluid, and we find ourselves – by default – empathizing/sympathizing participants of an experience rather than passive and incidental spectators.

The artists I will discuss create resonant relationships with their audience by subjecting their bodies to familiar physical experiences which we identify with involuntarily. Prickling with recognition, we project onto the artist our own remembered similar experiences.

\* \* \*

Arai Shinichi<sup>14</sup> has performed *Happy Japan!* many times over the years around the world.<sup>15</sup> The first time I experienced the work live<sup>16</sup>, it jolted my whole body.

Holding up a comic book, Arai explained that it was nationalistic manga called "'What is a Patriotic War?" which glorifies the Japanese emperor-system while systematically denying the Imperial Army's war crimes. Half a million people bought this book, Arai said, and most of them under thirty years of age.

Arai undressed and squatted on a large piece of white paper. Simulating the use of an enema, he squashed his passport against his anus then proceeded to excrete a viscous red substance upon the white surface, all the while hollering the Japanese National Anthem. Then sitting his ass down on the wet lump, he spun his body around on the pivot of his butt, until an eloquent Hinomaru<sup>17</sup> was achieved. Mounting this painting on the wall, he began reading aloud from the manga. After each proclamation, he would rip out that page and jam it in his mouth. Then raising both arms in Banzai-form, he would shout "Happy Japan!". Arai repeated this series of actions until his mouth was tightly crammed with balled-up pages and his speech unintelligible. He began to gag; tears, mucus, saliva and sweat dribbled freely from his heaving body as he kept at it for the next twenty minutes<sup>18</sup>.

My own gorge rising and my stomach knotted in tension, I felt as sick as Arai looked. It seemed that Arai would choke himself to death if no one stopped him. Finally, he heaved hard and desperately clawed the massive lump of soggy pulp from his mouth. Then he raised his limp arms and broken voice for a final and untriumphant "Happy Japan!". The room was entirely silent save for Arai's ragged breathing, and although the tension was broken, the atmosphere remained oppressive. A woman was crying, and others, stunned, clutched at their throats or stomachs.

Regardless of how we may feel about the Emperor or about Arai himself, his self-inflicted violence – coupled with a sense of real danger – draws us in and affects us vicariously. We identify with him as a human being, not unlike ourselves, experiencing a sensation we recognize from personal acquaintance. An empathic bond is forged between us via projection: we fear for him and to some degree share his suffering.

In a similarly physical – albeit less confrontational – manner, Shimoda Seiji<sup>19</sup> makes a empathic connection with his audience by tapping into the collectively familiar experience of pitting the body against gravity.

First conceived in 1990, On the Table is a work which Shimoda has committed to for seventeen years. Using nothing more than his nude body and a small table, Shimoda attempts to climb all around it without touching the ground. Adhering to a strict choreography, Shimoda reveals the subtle transformations of the body as it ages over the years in this physically demanding work.

I saw Shimoda perform this piece several times over a period of two years (2004 and 2005) in Japan and in Poland. He uses any table he finds on the premises: sometimes it is a heavy piece of wood furniture, and other times it is a flimsier piece of aluminum and formica. Maintaining a snail's pace throughout the performance, Shimoda moves around the table top, straining to explore it with various surfaces of his body. His thorough investigation leads him under the table where, at some point, we find him hanging from its underbelly, the way a baby monkey clings to its ambling mother.

Quivering from exertion, he attempts to get back up on top without touching any part of his body to the ground. Sometimes he makes it, if the table is heavy enough to support him and he is able to haul the bulk of his body over the tabletop before becoming too fatigued. Other times his strength fails him and he clutches onto the edge until the table tips over, falling on him.

While *Table* was a little different each time I saw it, the changes depended more on the particular table he happened to be using, than on his bodily condition that day. However, because this action has a seventeen-year history, I see it as less about pushing the body's muscular limits in relation to a piece of furniture, than about observing how gravity pulls more strongly on a body as it ages and weakens. Continually touching the edge where the flesh can no longer obey the will, *Table* opens up a subtle introspection of our shared bodily condition as it deteriorates over time. The meaning of this work, communicated via the plain vocabulary of his body moving through time and against gravity, hits home.

If Shimoda's performances can be described as 'austere', Julie Andrée T.'s are 'juicy' with sights, sounds and substances, combined in poignant configurations. I saw her perform *Not Waterproof Series* in Piotrkow Trybunalski and Krakow in 2006 during the Polish festival, Interakcje. This work is composed of several actions. In one, T. applied blobs of red paint to her elbows and knees, then inserted each of those joints into four waterfilled glass jars. Elevated off the ground, she tenuously balanced herself upon the four unlikely points.

I held my breath in tense anticipation of the jars shattering and brutally wounding her. However, as she stabilized her body and made no further movements, I saw that the jars supported her weight. With palpable relief, I distanced myself from my instinctive concern for this stranger's body based on the concern I have for my own similar body. Somewhat insulated by this psychological space, I began to find the image of the artist - awkwardly immobile with her joints in jars and her ass in the air - rather comical.

As the minutes dragged on, however, I couldn't help but begin to imagine the extreme physical discomfort of that position, and wonder if the suction would allow her to remove her joints from the jars later. Meanwhile, the red pigment slowly dispersed in the water, drifting downward like smoke. Although I knew perfectly well that it was paint, the scarlet substance trickling from precisely those body parts in pain had a suggestibility stronger than logic.

By the time she gingerly removed herself from the jars – with surprising ease, albeit marked with deep red circular indentations – I had envisioned so many horrifying scenarios for her that the uneventful conclusion to my ten minutes of tension seemed like an anti-climax.

In her next action, T. pulled discordant tunes from a violin by drawing a bow across its strings while a tape recorder picked up the sounds. From two opposite ends of the ceiling, she attached a length of the black elastic which stretched to its limit at the height of her

crotch. To the violin sounds playing back on the tape recorder, she pulled off her pants and panties, straddled the very taut line directly between her legs, and proceeded to walk forward slowly.

Cringing inwardly with the intimate knowledge of how that would feel on my own female form, I listened to the sounds pulled from the body of her violin by a bow drawn across its strings, as she dragged that most delicate cleft of her body along the taut black line.

While our bodies each have their own particular histories, T. feels that our shared physiological form serves as a base for our rudimentary similarities in perceiving sensory experiences.<sup>21</sup> Using the human body as a starting point, T. develops a common language between herself and her audience.

\* \* \*

When we get our fingers right into the "tissue" of an experience, the knowledge we have of it is concrete, and remains intimate to our bodies. I never needed to put my hand into the escalator's mouth a second time to refresh my understanding of what friction is. Furthermore, my memory of that experience is so thoroughly embedded in my being that I instinctively empathize with others (even stones) in any kind of contact with friction. Also evident when spectators, lifted on one leg and straining with the pole vaulter as he tries to clear the bar above their heads, 22 empathy is an innate human capacity to pre-reflexively relate to others by projecting onto them our recollections of similar experiences.

This spontaneous faculty is a vital element in the genre of performance art which uses the body in a "real" (versus "stage/fictional") context to create meaning that is both cerebral and somatic. These artists rely upon empathy to establish a tacit and affective resonance with their audience by tapping into collectively familiar corporal experiences such as pain or fatigue.

While we may never have gagged on manga, hung from the underbelly of a table, or stuck our joints in jars, we have had sufficient similar experiences of our bodies in contact with objects in the world to have some sense of the artists' sensations. Our firsthand cognition of pain, for instance, is so vivid that we recall it in its sensory wholeness when we witness them experiencing it.

Uninvited, empathy pushes our appreciation for *Happy Japan!* from the 'aloof' end of the spectrum directly into the zone of 'stomach upset'.

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- <sup>1</sup> "Radical empiricism is a term coined by James to distinguish his views from other forms of empiricism in his 1904 essay "A World of Pure Experience", in James, William. *Pragmatism and Other Writings*, New York, London, Victoria, Ontario, Auckland: Penguin Books, 2000. p. 315.
- <sup>2</sup> James, William. "A World of Pure Experience" (1904), *Pragmatism and Other Writings*, New York, London, Victoria, Ontario, Auckland: Penguin Books, 2000, p. 320.
- <sup>3</sup> Anguttara Nikaya Sutta 8:2, IV151-155, IX,2 discusses Panna ('wisdom' in *Pali*). Panna is the third of the three trainings (sila/morality, samadhi/concentration, panna/wisdom) by which the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path (ariya atthangika magga) is practiced. The three wisdoms are (i) suta-maya panna, literally 'wisdom gained from listening to others'; (ii) cinta-maya panna, wisdom gained by intellectual analysis, and (iii) bhavana-maya panna, wisdom developing from direct, personal experience. (Bhikkhu Bodhi (ed. & trans.) In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon, Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2005, p. 322-323.)
- \* Vipassana (or insight meditation) is one such technique: a meditative practice to "see reality as it is" that is, to see the nature of reality as annica (or impermanence) via praxis on top of the theoretical understanding of it. The Buddha observed that our profound and stubborn ignorance of the nature of reality, that is, the impermanence of all phenomena, was the main cause of human suffering. Although the concept of annica is not a difficult one to grasp in theory, we nevertheless expend all our energy ineffectually chasing after some things while trying our darnedest to avoid other things. Vipassana is the practice of mindfully observing our physical sensations arising within the body, and seeing for ourselves what happens when we don't give in to the compulsive reaction of clinging to or loathing of pleasant and unpleasant sensations: a practical application of our understanding of the not-unknown but well-neglected theory of annica, that is, to realize by praxis that the only rational response to it is equanimity. (I learned this technique via oral instruction, as taught by S.N. Goenka, at an intensive ten-day meditation course at the Vipassana Center in Kyoto, Japan in the summer of 2005.)
- <sup>5</sup>The *Bhagavat Purana* is a commentary on the Vedanta-sutra, and is seen as the essence of all sacred Vedic literature. Also known as *Srimad Bhagavatam*, it is the most celebrated text of all the *bhakti* (loving devotion to God) literature in the Hindu tradition. (Bhaktivedanta, A.C. Swami Prabhupada (translator and commentator). *Srimad Bhagavatam*, *First Canto*, *Part One*, Los Angeles, London, Stockholm, Bombay, Sydney:The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1988, p. xvi.)
- <sup>6</sup> Bhaktivedanta, A.C. Swami Prabhupada (translator and commentator). *Srimad Bhagavatam, Eleventh Canto*, Los Angeles, London, Stockholm, Bombay, Sydney: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1988, p. 553.
- <sup>7</sup> Shlien, J., Empathy in Psychotherapy: A vital mechanism? Yes. Therapist's conceit? All too often. By itself enough? No., (Eds.) Bohart A.C. & Greenberg L.S., Empathy Reconsidered: New Directions in Psychotherapy, Washington D.C. & London: American Psychological Association, 1997. p. 63-80.
- <sup>8</sup> Bennett, M.J.. The Empathetic Healer: An Endangered Species? San Diego, New York, Boston, London, Sydney, Tokyo, Toronto: Academic Press, 2001. p. 33.
- <sup>9</sup> Bohart, A.C. & Greenberg L.S., *Empathy: Where are we and where do we go from here?* (Eds.) Bohart A.C. & Greenberg L.S., *Empathy Reconsidered: New Directions in Psychotherapy*, Washington D.C. & London: American Psychological Association, 1997. p. 436.
- <sup>10</sup> Smith, Adam. The Theory of Moral Sentiments (1759), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. p. 12.

- <sup>11</sup> Smith, Adam. The Theory of Moral Sentiments (1759), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. p. 15.
- <sup>12</sup>We speak of "gut feelings" to refer to our intuitive sense of things, and wonder at our spontaneous "gut reactions" to certain scenarios. These references to the "gut" are not random expressions. A part of the neural tube connecting to the lower cavity via the vagus nerve, is known as the "enteric nervous system". Thus the brain is not only that grey noodle encased in the skull, but a part of it is actually in the abdomen. (Blakeslee, S. "Complex and hidden brain in the gut makes cramps, butterflies and valium". The New York Times, January 23, 1996. pp. 85, 810.)
- <sup>13</sup> Sobchack, Vivian. Carnal Thoughts, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004. p. 2.
- <sup>14</sup> Born in 1959, Japan. Lives and works in Tokyo, Japan.
- <sup>15</sup> "Happy Japan" was first performed at the Japan-Korea Dance festival at West End Studio in Tokyo on 17 November 1999.
- 16 At New World Maps exhibition and event at Benisanpit in Tokyo, curated by Takahashi Tomoko (a.k.a. Anticool) and Takahashi Makoto, on 12 November 2005.
- <sup>17</sup>The 'Rising Sun' of the Japanese flag.
- <sup>18</sup> The vigorous physical interaction of body and material in Arai's performances recall the strategies of Japanese avant-garde groups of the 1950s and 1960s, in particular of Gutai and the Neo-Dada Organizers. The Gutai group was formed in 1955 by a group of young artists based in Osaka, led by Yoshihara Jiro (1905-1972). And the Neo-Dada Organizers was founded in 1960 by Yoshimura Masunobu (b. 1932) and Ushio Shinohara (b. 1933). (Munroe, Alexandra (ed.) Japanese Art after 1945: Scream Against the Sky, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994. p. 83-91, p. 215.)
- <sup>19</sup> Born in 1953, Japan. Lives and works in Nagano, Japan. In 1993, Shimoda organized the first Nippon International Performance Art Festival (NIPAF) in Japan. Twice a year, NIPAF brings Japanese and international artists together to perform in a variety of spaces including the streets. The street performances take place unannounced right alongside pedestrians on the go. (Information gathered from participation in NIPAF events over a period of two years.)
- This way of bringing art into the 'space of daily activities' is reminiscent of Hi Red Center's strategies. Hi Red Center was a Tokyo avant-garde group formed in 1963 by Takamatsu Jiro (b. 1936), Akasegawa Genpei (b. 1937), and Nakanishi Natsuyuki (b. 1935). The group performed in many public spaces including on the busiest trainline in Tokyo (*Yamanote Line Event*). (Schimmel, Paul, Kristine Stiles, Russell Ferguson. (eds.) *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949-1979*, Los Angeles:Thames and Hudson, 1998, p. 142.)
- <sup>20</sup> Born in 1972, Canada. Lives and works in Quebec, Canada.
- <sup>21</sup> From an email interview with the artist on 17 December 2006.
- <sup>22</sup> Shlien, J., Empathy in Psychotherapy: A vital mechanism? Yes. Therapist's conceit? All too often. By itself enough? No., (Eds.) Bohart A.C. & Greenberg L.S., Empathy Reconsidered: New Directions in Psychotherapy, Washington D.C. & London: American Psychological Association, 1997. p 69.



### ART OF THE EARTH AND OF GRAVES, Arahmaiani

Internationally ranking festivals of performance art are seldom held. But such a festival becomes something special when it is staged in a village and the participating artists come from the provinces, the city, and abroad and are supported by activists, clergy, and bureaucrats. Such an event was offered at the end of April this year in the village of Gemblangan, in the special district of Yogyakarta. The festival "Pembaharuan Spiritual", Perfurbance #3 (which could translate as "Spiritual Renewal", Perfurbance #3 — Performance Art Urban Festival) invited participants from the United States, Canada, France, Australia, Japan, China, Taiwan, Singapore, Burma, and such Indonesian cities as Bandung, Surabaya, Solo, Jakarta, and Yogyakarta.

The organization and financing of the festival was realized through an alliance of all participants. Thus, this art and culture event not only examined the functions of art and religion in life, but also underscored the significance of working together. Along with the presentations of traditional and modern performance pieces and religious rituals, seminars were also held during the festival from April 25 to 29, 2007. These were devoted to a wide range of issues including alternative education, organic farming, wholesome nutrition, alternative medicine, garbage processing, alternative energy, and a new discussion of cultural and spiritual values that serve the development of society.

Gemblangan lies in the community of Bantul and is one of the villages that were almost completely destroyed by the earthquake on May 27, 2006. More than 6,000 people died in the disaster: Bantul has 130 pesantras (Koran boarding schools) with a total of 33,000 pupils. The performance artists who have joined together in the "Performans Klub" under the chairmanship of Iwan Wijono have actively supported the earthquake's victims since the day after it hit. Acquaintanceships between the artists and other groups developed into friendships and led to ideas and common projects. Dreams and hopes for a better future thereby developed – for a future in which collectivity and mutual respect despite all difference will take on greater significance in the era of globalization.

Accompanied by a prayer honoring Almighty God, recited by the Zikir Saman group from the pesantra Amumarta in the village of Jejeran, the viewers witnessed the ritual of Wali Kutub from the village of Canden. The group offered prayers and

venerations to the Wali or Aulia of all the directions of the compass (note: Wali are Islamic scholars or spiritual leaders; Aulia are saints). Also carried out were the Jathilan and Dholalak rituals, which are characterized by the element of trance. Gejok Lesung, a group of older women from the village of Pandes, and the group Sholawatan from Gemblangan itself also performed. Community leader Idham Samawi promised there would be no shopping mall built in the district of Bantul and that primary pupils would be exempted from paying school fees.

The performers appeared in a number of places in and around the village: on conventional stages, in residential buildings where participants were housed, on intersections, in fields, beside the river, in cattle stalls, or in the underbrush. Even the cemetery was integrated in the work of the artists. The latter aimed to make their art measures something "not detached from life". And indeed this is the core of a stance of performance art that rejects what is established. The medium is viewed as a catalyst for developing vital power. This is not only a question of courage and determination to present a different form of expression or a sensation. Rather, performance is a "verb" arising from the harmony of the mind, the heart, and action. Such a viewpoint no longer needs to distinguish between traditional and contemporary performance. For each performance indeed has its own standard of aesthetics and its own specific rules of presentation. There is no reason to judge one performance better than another. Each performance has its own function.

Some of the works drew particular attention during the festival, for example the piece by Bruno Mercet, of France, which focuses on objects. With the motions of his body, the artist responds to the physical qualities as well as the form of an object. An object in the form of a small sculpture made of pliable material can thereby become a matrix of movement and pose. It initially seems silly and funny, but a closer look conveys the artist's consideration of the degree to which the objects in our lives have enslaved and manipulated us.

Or the piece by Lewis Gesner, of America. For two hours, he walked around the village, collecting rubbish, attaching pieces of it to his legs, and dragging it along after him. More and more pieces of garbage collected, until he could no longer pull it all. Perhaps this is a critique of us, who are accustomed to discarding waste everywhere. But perhaps he wants to express the weight of life that burdens the Americans because they have already created all too much "garbage of life" on the surface of the earth.

Another piece that also deals with rubbish and has an interesting approach was the performance by Rachel Saraswati, of Yogyakarta. She covered her body completely with all kinds of thrown-away things and then got into a large tub filled with water. While singing the Indonesian national anthem, Indonesia Raya, in a respectful stance in front of a flagpole, two of her partners raised the American flag on it. The effect was an uncompromising and pointed irony and parody.

Another interesting piece was "Ketahanan Tubuh dan Mental" (translatable as: "Stamina of Body and Mind") by Kristiawan, of Bandung. The artist, clothed from hips to knees solely in a piece of cloth, lay down on a kind of metal tray on a table. He asked the viewers to light small candles and to set them up on the tray around his body. The mere visual impression was very artistic. But then the viewers could imagine how hot the metal under the artist's body was becoming — without even counting the hot, melted wax! The many flies that alighted nearby died immediately. But Kristiawan completed his performance with grace and without injury.

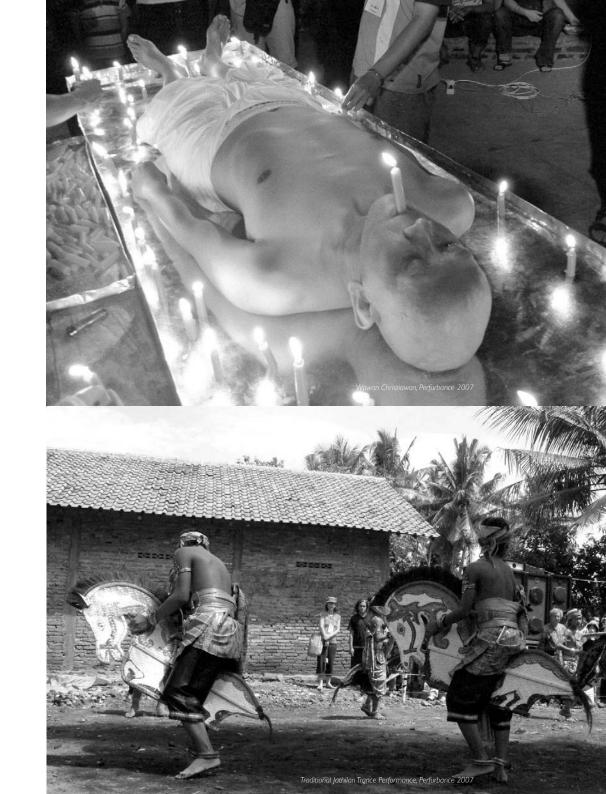
The greater part of the population in Bantul lives from farming, especially rice cultivation. Perhaps that is why many of the viewers followed the piece by Made Surya Darma, of Bali, so meditatively. He arranged pieces of brushwood on whose ends he mounted plastic war toys like tanks and bombers into a kind of bouquet. He then "planted" the sticks individually in a rice field. A friend standing beside me was completely astonished and spontaneously commented: "This is surely the title "Planting the Military in our Rice Fields"."

Almost all the pieces to be seen at this event convey a clear concept. It appears that all the participants worked very seriously on making a conceptual contribution to the process of rebuilding the community of Bantul. Thus also the piece by Yosie Bhaba, of Japan, which shows an artist asking the viewers to applaud his every movement and action. Until he is completely exhausted, the person on the stage seems to display the futility of the life of an artist who is only after applause and praise.

The festival was indeed a celebration of contemporary art – and that in a village whose external appearance is one of total chaos. But this village has an astonishing drive and passion for mutual aid and community. No differences exist there anymore that exclude members of any specific group, whether in terms of generation, cultural, ethnic background, or class. Perhaps that is the future direction of our art, in which artists resolutely represent the values of straightforwardness, loyalty, and solidarity, even if they are not the Aulia.

**Arahmaiani** is a performance artist, also working in various media, born in Bandung, West Java and now lives and works in Jogjakarta. She is a key figure in the current art scene in Indonesia.

Above article originally appeared in Indonesian in "Kompas", 20th May 2007. Translated from the German version by Mitch Cohen.



## INTERVIEW WITH KENNY MCBRIDE. Lee Wen

Lee Wen (LW):

You have the reputation of doing durational performances that often incorporates creating an environmental installation within specific spaces. How do the performances you create relate to the installation?

Kenny McBride (KM):

On a very simple level they serve to heighten the effect of a series of actions over a period of time and space, and how these visually relate one to the other. More fully they offer a space of contemplation and personal meeting with events that have occurred in the world, in history. I mean that some events really trouble me, that I have difficulty getting beyond them and have a great need to 'meet' them. Often these become material discourse in my works, for example the body of works 'I Want to Experience What I Understand. I-IV' that focused on two histories of very recent mass murder — that of the schoolchildren and teachers in Beslan, and of the Bosnian Muslims at Srebrenica.

I don't think any of this is particularly obvious to the viewer of the work, and it's not really something I want to continually refer them to although I might employ media images that represent them. I feel it's possible to be moved by such events but to open up the whole question of compassion beyond any one particular instance. Also during that time I was really enquiring into whether the mediated image of violence and suffering brings us closer to an understanding and a compassionate relation to the subject or whether they serve as some kind of distancing screen (and here I refer to Susan Sontag) through which we manage a relationship to suffering.

So by using elements and processes of both performance and installation I am able to translate different experiences — the lived and the mediated - and receptions of occurrences into actions and visual phenomena, and introduce them together, slowly and precisely, over time so as to create an environment that can best be understood as a site of being and becoming. To move forward in such a way is in fact a process of emergence. I like to think of the works as 'manifest Actions'

LW:

It seems that you do not care for presenting the 20-30 minutes performances that other artists often do at festivals. Can you let us know why it is important to make long durational performances? KM:

I have made a number of works within the 20-30 minute frame. In fact just before FOI I will present one in Krakow. In the past they were self-contained pieces but now I approach them as 'test' performances for the longer pieces, to see how something might work, or not, in a 'live' environment. Then I will broaden and incorporate these within the durational works having had the opportunity to try them out. That's how the passing of breath onto the fish heads appeared in the piece 'Meant Lament'. Originally in the test performance the action lasted about 15 minutes but this was later extended to one hour.

That town, Piotrkow Tribunalska, is the site of the first Nazi ghetto in Poland. I walked in circles on top of a ring of soil, stopping now and again to retrieve gloves from the earth. I would place these on the edge of the table and then dig out twigs and leaves and other foreign objects from the soil and lay them on the gloves until they took the appearance of veins and bruises and lifelines. In the centre of the table, banked by earth and the two fish heads, I had a small fountain. The act of passing my breath to these heads, so close to water, was a very simple way for me to remember those who had gone and the subsequent generations that would never be with us.

But essentially I began to feel that I wasn't able to fully explore the materials – physical and mental and spiritual - I was working with within such a limited timeframe (of 20-30 minutes). I began to approach duration as a means to be with the work in such a way that I could engage certain elements of its discourse in a lived, experiential way that gets close to an inhabitation, rather than another representation.

Also I am very interested in repeating particular actions within a piece as a way to intensify my relationship to a particular material discourse. Because I live with the work for quite a while before I actually present it in a performed context I find this method helps in forming some kind of community to my relationship with the subject. Of course it doesn't always work that way but certainly I always approach duration as a meditative and encountering space.

LW:

Are you satisfied with the durational done under the limitations of festivals or do you have any comments about working within different festival formats?

KM:

The greatest difficulty often is the lack of an audience because generally I have the experience that I am programmed beyond the core event that will be made up of a number of 20-30 minute pieces and so I may be working in the daytime before the evening's main event. Although I have to say that working in such a way takes me beyond the art audience as such and facilitates a remote dialogue with the other workers in the town or city where I am. It demands a different kind of engagement than the shorter, more audience-accessible pieces. It's also hard for the programmers and the audience. I am always very surprised when someone stays, for example stays in the site for the entire 4 hours or however long it is. It's really something special when that happens, and it changes the

dynamic significantly. It truly becomes not mine, not theirs, but our dialogue. But on saying that I'm interested mostly in how meaning is constructed through the fragmentary experience of viewing, and in the multiplicity of context that arises from it. Occasionally I present work beyond the festival event where I am the sole artist but the issues essentially remain the same.

I had a fantastic experience in Toronto last year at 7a\*IId event where I was programmed between two weekends of performances. I was offered a significant space for three days to make work in and so I made the work 'Past Now Present' over these days. It was really interesting and valuable for me to see the relational dynamics of performance and installation operating over that breadth of time. I was able to significantly slow things down.

N: As the focus of your research is in Eastern European performance art, could you share with us briefly what drove you in that direction and perhaps also what you have found out since you began (when) until now?

Well really the focus is on East and South East European time-based production so it also incorporates video and installation practices, and I include contributions from elsewhere in the fields of culture to sharpen the focus – critical texts, and so on.

But it stemmed from my own participation in performance meetings in these regions and through this I became aware that a lot of work, pre- and post-1989, was somehow 'invisible'. It seemed that the earlier works had in many ways been put into some cultural basement through the eagerness of governments and culture industries to embrace a speedy exit from their Socialist past. It's a big problem of course because these regions are so rich in their own particular histories of avant-garde and radical art practices. And the institutions were seldom supportive in the sense of collecting these works as they were seen to be subversive and not follow the Party line of Socialist Realism. But this is pertinent also to work post-1989 because the problem always exists for artists – how and where to show work and who is going to show it beyond its immediate context.

As a way to disseminate a lot of my research, which has been collected from personal contact with the artists, I started the online magazine <a href="http://www.agora8.org">http://www.agora8.org</a> as a digital curation and preservation project holding examples of contemporary art practices. It aims to provide access to past events through

adoption of a particular behavior towards archival culture that generates a re-animation and examination of time-based and contextual art practices. So it engages with works that happened in other places in other times while simultaneously providing access to an audience that could not be physically present in the space and time of production.

LW: Could you talk about your work or experiences working in Eastern Europe in relationship to some Eastern European artists you have encountered?

KM: The biggest problem I have found is that there is a lack of critical writing, most acutely in the historical works. This is probably due primarily to conditions under which work was produced, its clandestine or underground nature, but also because access to contemporary theoretical texts just wasn't available as it had been in the west, or in translation. And it seems to me that, with a few vanguard exceptions, critical writing wasn't held to be terribly important. Although to some extent it's being redressed now. Also there was also the tendency by the system to take a fairly traditional and conservative approach to the art academy. But I certainly don't mean to generalize. But always I find I walk a thin line between presenting artists' works accurately within their own time and space and not over theorizing them simply because of this lack of critical writings. It's a question of curation and how much the curator is a facilitator or seeks to lead by their own voice. I like to think that the artists I'm working with see the project as an act of protest and resistance to the new cultural dictators.

5 August 2007

Kenny McBride (UK) is known for his durational performances. He occasionally curates retrospectives and live events, and is editor of online magazine www.agora8.org - survey of East and South East European Performance and time-based art practices. He is a PhD research candidate with a Doctoral award from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

All works cited can be viewed online at, www.agora8.org/kmb



# INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS J. BERGHUIS. Lee Wen

Lee Wen (LW):

What made you want to specialize your research in China performance art?

Thomas J.Berghuis (TJB):

The choice of focusing my research on performance art in China comes from an interest in art as practice. Part of this interest lies in my personal background. Being the son of an artist, I was always confronted with the levels of practice that many members of the art world are not able to experience in such detail. During my childhood I had the opportunity to be engaged with artistic practice on a daily basis; following discussions between artists, visiting numerous museums, galleries, and building up a strong visual awareness. As I described in the introduction to my book of *Performance Art in China*: 'It established an interest in the laboratories of art, in the foundry of experimentalism, the place were art is made, or to put more precisely, performed.'

My first introduction to Chinese contemporary art came between 1997 and 1999, whilst I was conducting my M.A. Degree in Chinese Studies. At the time I was already conducting some research on pre-modern Chinese art, but now my attention caught onto contemporary art; mainly during a brief visit to Beijing in mid-1997, and followed by an exhibition in Breda, titled "Another Long March". In 1999, during another major event of Chinese contemporary art, theatre, film, and performance (this time held in Amsterdam and Eindhoven), I was able to meet a number of Chinese artists and have more profound discussions about their work. During these discussions I noticed how they were often talking about their artistic practices as a way of confronting their take on the 'conditions of existence' in a rapidly changing social and physical environment. What's more, they were frequently using the term experimental art to describe their multifarious set of new artistic practices their work, as opposed to the term Chinese avant-garde; which proved increasingly difficult in its projection of a hegemonic, universalistic movement that comes from the West. Combined with my interest in art as practice and the way that selfrepresentation and the sublation of personal existence by Chinese artists is more pronounced than perhaps anywhere else, I became increasingly interested in performance art in China, without realizing yet that it would prove such a challenging topic.

One of the main challenges that I faced in my research came with the realization that discourses and practices performance are often treated as being separate from the rest of the visual art world; despite the fact that they are having such an important historical role in the advent of modern and contemporary art throughout the world; including in China. In addition, I came to realize that performance art practices in China were surrounded by much controversy, and had been forced to the margins of artistic practice in general discussions of Chinese art, by art institutions, and by the market. Hence, from 1999 and 2001, I came to realize that I was the only foreign researcher who was examining Chinese performance art; making it one of the primary tasks to write down the history of Chinese performance art in order to show it's important links to the overall development of contemporary art in China. This led me to write my PhD dissertation in such a way that combines the historical discourse of performance art in China with a more theoretical discourse of performance art in relation to visual art, which is addressed through the notion of the 'role of the mediated subject of the acting body in art' and grounded in the idea that the body is always present in art practices, as well as their subsequent secondary representations.

LW: In our FOI3 "Is Performance Art today in a state of 'menopause'?" forum last year you showed optimism that performance art is very much alive and well in China. Can you elaborate why you think that this is so in China today?

I feel that it is important to point at the value that international performance art festivals have had in opening up new opportunities for international exchanges between Chinese performance artists and performance artists from other parts of the world. These days, performance art festivals provide key platforms for young, emerging artists to become involved in performance practices, and to be introduced to more established artists who have been involved in performance art for a long time. This is particularly important for artists in China, by allowing them an introduction into of a field of art practice that is still not taught at art schools and even considered to be a taboo. At the same time, we have to realize that some of the most significant developments of performance art in China have taken place outside the realm of these festivals. In fact, many of the most significant performance works in China have been produced at site-specific locations and amidst specific social conditions, which doesn't involve staging performances in front of a live audience at performance art festivals. Instead, it links closer to the notion of performance remediation through photography and video. Hence, the discourse of performance art should be opened up, in order to pay attention to these works. I am starting to feel that many performance art festivals these days place too much emphasis on the performance event; on the showcasing of performance in front of an audience, which I see in danger of confining performance art to the domain of public entertainment.

The art market boom in China makes one suspicious that artists there are merely playing to the demand. How do you think artists are actually responding as the works comes across as rather sensational or exotic for the sake of media hype? How relevant are they to the real state of social changes there and can you give some examples?

To what extend is the way artists are working on demand in China different from artists who are doing the same in other parts of the world, including in Europe and North America? Many of the recent critiques about the overwhelming attention for Chinese art by the international market seem to arrive out of feelings of frustration by artists and art professionals who are working in other parts of the world, particularly in Asia. Somehow they feel that nobody is paying attention to their work; leading to speculations that Chinese artists have managed to take over demand by deliberately producing works that are considered to be 'sensational or exotic for the sake of creating a media hype.

It should become clear that Chinese art is thriving because of the way it has managed to tap into the realm of the international art market; by opening up a wide range of incentives for promotion. This include taking notice of the way that, from the early 1990s onwards, international attention for Chinese art has risen together with a tremendous increase in investment in the Chinese economy. Hence, part of the boom that we witness today the art market, has to be linked to the economic boom that has seen China rise to become the fourth largest economy in the world; with the potential to become the first largest economy of the world by 2020. It should also not be forgotten that one fifth of the world's population is Chinese, and this includes an important group of overseas Chinese, who, aside from offering investment in business, have also helped in promoting the investment in Chinese cultural production; including in Chinese contemporary art. Finally, there have been important local incentives as well, which can be seen in the great number of art districts, galleries and museums that are being established across China.

The media also plays by this economy of supply and demand. Hence, an article about Chinese artists that are exhibited and sold around the world ensures a much greater readership than an article on artists say from Singapore who does not attract half as much demand from the market.

The problem facing Chinese art today is that it lacks a proper understanding of the value of setting up a profound critical discourse, including allocating investment to art historical research that allows artists and their work to be reviewed on their durable output and long-term engagements with inventive artistic production. The lack of more profound critical discourses of Chinese contemporary art creates a situation that allows artists to reproduce the same work over and over again; backed by writers who have limited understanding of Chinese art and who often repeat the same story. The fact that Chinese art becomes treated as a hype need not only to be addressed by the way certain artists have started to follow the demand of the art market or produce works that are easily being picked up by the media. Instead, it also needs to be linked to the lack of indepth, sustainable, and critical writing about the developments of Chinese contemporary art.

It is not hard to find examples of works that are relevant to the real state of social changes in China, as they continue to feature in alternative art exhibitions in China. However, they are not always noticed by the international art world, probably because they need a more profound understanding of Chinese art. Hence, it is increasingly difficult

to identify which artists continue to be truly innovative in their work and which artists are reproducing their work out of popular demand. My advice is to look for works that demand compound layers of contact, rather than be drawn by the cleverly designed surface of the work. Much of today's artists are producing what I call 'clever art', which allows audiences to become simply attracted to its smart look, use of stereotypical images of China, or just trying to be entertaining. Personally, I feel that art should hit you in the guts, especially when you least expect it.

LW

There have been many artists like Zhang Huan, Ma Liuming who were arrested and jailed for performance art activities during the early 90s and are now doing very well in terms of financial success and acceptance. What do you think about their changed status and are they still working in performance art or how are they developing their work now in comparison to the past?

TJB:

The arrest of Ma Liuming, Zhang Huan, and Zhu Ming has to be examined in the specific context of a series of performances that were held at the Beijing East Village on 10 July 1994. These performances were done during a visit of a television crew from Hong Kong, who were drawn by the story that performances were being held at the Beijing East Village. They were accompanied by a group of local critics, and several artists from Beijing. After Zhang Huan performed his work 65 Kilograms, the audience moved to the main courtyard of the village, where Ma Liuming started his performance Fen-Ma Liuming's Lunch II. Towards the end of Ma Liuming's piece the police arrived (rumor is that they were informed by one of the audience members). Naturally, the police officers were startled by what they saw. Ma Liuming was completely naked making 'lunch' on a stove in a courtyard. They immediately stopped the performance and started searching the artists' studios. The police confiscated most of the works they found there, interrogated the artists, and arrested Ma Liuming and Zhu Ming, who spent 3 and 4 months, respectively, in a local prison cell. They were charged with producing and distributing pornography. Although Zhu Ming had not yet performed, he had been caught with photographs of earlier performances in which he was naked. Both Zhu Ming and Ma Liuming were also charged for not having a valid ID-card to reside in Beijing, Zhang Huan was also arrested, but was soon released when he showed the police his student ID from the Central Academy of Fine Arts, where he was registered as a graduate student.

The context of the arrest is important to notice, rather than to speculate on whether they have led to increased













attention to their work by the international art market on the basis that they caused so much controversy and therefore became part of the spectacle of performance art in conservative artistic environments. Looking at the developments that follow the success of certain artists who were living and working at the East Village, it is also necessary to look at the way they clearly brought Chinese performance art to a new level; both in terms of the way in which they involved artists who started to focus their work on new types of compound embodied practices and how these artists started to place emphasis on the way their performances could be propagated through professional photographs taken of the live event.

These days it is true that an artist like Ma Liuming is capable of making success out of his earlier works by producing a series of paintings and sculptures based on his past performances of Fen/Ma Liuming. I can understand that there are lot of people disappointed with the way Ma Liuming is no longer producing performance art; particularly from the perspective that performance artists should always stay true to their performance art practices and therefore continue to strive to produce live art. Yet, at the same time we have to realize that Ma Liuming has been trained as an oil painter and he is choosing to use his acquired skills to produce works that are highly successful on the international art market. This allows him an opportunity to ensure a sustainable career as an independent artist; including from the demand for his performances. The problem that I have seen unfolding in his performance practices is that he became increasingly trapped by the demand to showcase his most popular performance Fen/Ma Liuming. Even when he started to grow older and his physical appearance started to change, people were still expecting to see his earlier performances reenacted in the same way as before.

This is also the case with the performances by Zhu Ming, whereby now that he has finally become recognized for his performance work, he is expected to showcase his performance with the bubble at any odd festival, exhibition, or art fair; without paying proper attention to the site-specificity of his most important performance works, which often are produced outside the context of the festival. The problem that I see arising from the emphasis on performance festivals is that performance artists are being treated as public entertainers; inviting them to stage their most popular act in front of a live audience to draw in the crowds, but not giving adequate support to create more sustainable performance works that may involve remediation of performance into other media.

LW: What about the extremities of Zhu Yu's performances? Do you think the media is over-sensationalizing his work or are they being ignored by the art world for the controversial issues he is raising?

playing on important issues in arts and society; including questions of morality, the state of experimental art in China, and even the question of what art is. Often, there is the distorted assumption that art is somehow capable of being produced outside the context of media. One thing that we have to realize is that media operates on the basis of publicity, and hence conforms to the public demand for sensation. I have started to argue that Zhu Yu has been deliberately playing on the quest for sensationalism by the media, combined with the social function of art through public discussion. Hence, in my view the performance "Eating People" is ongoing; at least so long as people are having discussions about the performance. What's more, I feel that that Zhu Yu deliberately intended the work to cause so many public discussions, including discussions about art; hence, pointing out that the discussion of "what is art?" is ultimately located in the general public domain.

In my book of Performance Art in China I deliberately choose to set the discussion of Zhu Yu's work in relation to the art system in China; in order to argue that works such as *Eating People* illuminate the fact that art has many faces, and that the judgment of aesthetic taste is but one aspect in a multifaceted discussion of art. Hence, following Lyotard quoting Thierry de Duve (1986) we may have to confront the fact that: The question of modern aesthetics should not be, "what is beautiful?" but rather, "what is art to be?" <sup>3</sup>

LW: Are there any artists responding or questioning the contradictory situation of working in communist China blatantly embracing global market capitalism today?

Of course. Nearly all of the Chinese artists that have emerged since the 1980s, and especially from the 1990s, are producing works that are responding to this contradictory situation. However, the fact is that a large majority of Chinese artists are just using these contradictions as a mere trademark to attract popular international attention for their work; without understanding the need to address some of the more compound discourses about the way these contradictions have an impact on the conditions of existence in contemporary Chinese society. These days it is common for artists to take a few photographs of high rise buildings, to paint an estranged or distorted figure holding a coca-cola bottle, or to stage a performance that involves a few migrant workers carrying a Chinese flag; without actually thinking through new ways in which their work is responding or questioning the bizarre contradictions that exist in China today. These days, only a few artists are capable of producing works that address these contradictions from a broad range of perspectives and are capable of offering multiple layers of contact in visualizing these contradictions.

As an example of a work that was capable of addressing these contradictions in a multifaceted way, I would like to point at the performance "It Doesn't Count as

Waste" by Liu Xianjie, during the 2nd Dadao Live Art Festival in Beijing. As you may recall, Liu asked members of the audience to place gold leaves in the begging tin can of a blind musician, who was invited by Liu to play his erhu (Chinese violin) inside the SOHO business complex. The performance caused great controversy with the investment group that owns SOHO, and they immediately called in their private security guards to stop the performance. It was striking to see their sensitivity about the performance unfold; as they became aware of the way the performance commented on the contradictory situation of operating a business in communist China blatantly embracing global market capitalism, I was somewhat disappointed that none of the other participating artists were able to produce a work that made use of the space, time, and wider social context of the festival. Instead, many artists chose to opt in staging a more familiar work inside one of the gallery spaces, which seems to enhance the notion that these festivals have become too focused on artists showcasing performances, rather than inviting artists to confront the specific conditions of time, space and social-political context of the embodied practices trough compound practices of performance art.

9 August 2007



# 吃人公告

一个问题,人类的问题,一直困扰着我们——那就是 人为什麽不可以吃人?

有哪一个民族的宗教在教义中明文不可吃人?又有哪一个国家的法律有不可吃人的条文?只有道德,而道德是什麽呢?道德无非是人类发展中根据自身所谓人性需要可以随意改变的东西。

从这一事实可以得出两个结论:

只要是用非犯罪手段的吃人行为是完全不受人类社会 中宗教、法律的约束的。

现在是我们向全世界公开说明自己的观点、自己的目的、自己的意图并拿我自己的吃人行为来对抗关于不可吃 人的人类道德观念的时候了。

> 朱 昱 2000/10/17

Thomas J. Berghuis is Senior Curator/ Senior Researcher with the Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre and the Centre for Contemporary Art and Politics, College of Fine Arts (UNSW), Sydney and holds a PhD in Art History & Theory from the University of Sydney. He has published and curated on experimental art and performance art, since 2001.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Lyotard, Jean-François, *The Postmodern Explained to Children - Correspondence* 1982-1985, translated by Don Barry, Bernadette Maher, Julian Pefanis, Virginia Spate, and Morgan Thomas, Sydney: Power Publications, 1986.



Berghuis, Thomas L. Performance Art in China, Hong Kong; Timezone 8, 2006.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Future of Imagination 3, Forum: "Is Performance Art today in a state of 'menopause?" 14 April 2006, Singapore Art Museum. Speakers: Sergio Edelsztein (Israel); Nani Kahar (Malaysia); Ko Siu Lan (Hong Kong); Thomas Berghuis (Netherlands/Australia). Moderator: Ray Langenbach (US/ Malaysia) Full transcript of the forum can be downloaded from www.foi.sg

## MAKING A FUTURE. Audrey Wong

Probably my most vivid memory of the previous edition of The Future of Imagination, was what Zai Kuning said to the assembled artists at the end of the conference. He said that he had watched a lot of the performance art at the festival, even the works he did not like; the reason for his attendance, he said, was that he felt that such gatherings of artists were important

Why was it important? Why was I there too, when I could have attended other arts events or done something else? While the creation of art is important, and the critical discussion of these works is important, what such gatherings seem to affirm is a human dimension, a human spirit, to the act of art-making and art-presenting. Such events and gatherings are critical for their symbolic resonance as much as for the physical manifestations of artistic work. Our presence at FOI was a statement of faith and an affirmation that a community of artists existed, and that this community support is vital. The community doesn't just ensure the continuity of art - it also functions as a repository of memories and history, a system of checks and balances, a set of practices and beliefs that help to shape identities (sometimes through contesting these practices and beliefts), an ethical and aesthetic barometer. What's more, the community can and should fight for what is important to them.

Art can be a lonely business, and even more so in Singapore if one practices an 'unsaleable' form of art such as performance art, which since the mid-1990s, had been in a marginalized state - or at least, there is a common perception that it is marginalized - due to the withdrawal of state funding following the Josef Ng controversy at Fifth Passage on New Year's Eve 1993-1994. Artists feed off ideas, fresh images, new experiences, provocations, disagreements, and often find a community (however fractious it might be) a source of inspiration and motivation. Even negative comments and disagreements can be a stimulus for work. As we all must have learnt in primary school science, all organisms live in specific habitats comprising of diverse other organisms and plants. In other words, in communities. In Singapore, where artists often feel they are speaking to a vacuum because of the lack of critical discourse or wide public interest in intellectual thinking and philosophical reflection, the 'barometer' of the arts community plays a crucial role

The face-to-face meeting and gathering of artists or indeed, of any other interest group, perhaps has a greater significance in these times where many of us 'live' half our lives online. Most of us still value physical meetings and human contact — perhaps it's because of the effort it takes to set up a date, time, and place to meet, and the actual physical act of getting to the meeting-place. Add to this the act of interchange and communication between people, being able to see the other's gestures, expressions, hear the tone of their voice, and to look into their eyes.

It's also important for artists to gather as a group or community is because of the way that contemporary art is now yoked to the forces of global capitalism and the brave new world of the 'creative industries' driving the new economies of both east and west. As government becomes increasingly corporatised, including in Singapore, art is seen by government as a component of the country's 'brand', serving a higher national or economic purpose. Art too, has become corporatised and increasingly subjected to the state's monopolizing tendencies. It often appears as if art and artists are there to serve the agendas of institutions, the state or a notion of a nation. The Singapore Biennale, for instance, was strategically planned to be a signature event of Singapore's 'national project' of 2006: the meetings of the board of governors of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank held in Singapore in September 2006. This strategy ensured the Biennale's access to the full funding and promotional machinery of the state.<sup>2</sup>

It is commonly accepted among art circles now that the reason for the proliferation of biennales around the world in cities and countries, especially those that are newly prosperous and not historically known for their artistic output, is to enhance the desirability of the city or country - to make it an object of desire for potential investors and tourists. Yet, as Reuben Keehan notes, even within a biennale, there still exists the "possibility of finding ways and means to resist the movement of capital and the monopolization of contemporary art by the state"<sup>3</sup>. Keehan cites the Long March project and Tsuyoshi Ozawa's "Nasubi gallery" project, both shown at the Asia-Pacific Triennial last year. The Long March project gives voice to the diverse and complex forces impacting on China's people as China embraces the market economy, while Ozawa's project drew attention to the existing hierarchies in the art world and "reminded audiences that cheap, simple alternatives to million-dollar structures are indeed possible".<sup>4</sup>

And how are these alternatives possible? By the efforts of artists and individuals. But to start with, the individual has to be aware of the need for an alternative, and then to imagine what this could be.

In the Singapore Biennale, one of the works by a Singapore artist, Amanda Heng's Worthy Tour Co. (Singapore) Ltd, managed to critique Singaporean cultural policy, pointing out certain areas of neglect. The work gently reminds us that, even as we stage a biennale to announce our 'arrival' in the global contemporary art circuit, some of our

cultural treasures are being lost. These included collections of painting, a collection of unusual bonsai, and scripts from old Chinese movies. They are now almost forgotten, having been given away to museums and archives outside of Singapore because of an apparent lack of interest by Singaporeans in these aspects of their folk cultural heritage. At the same time, Worthy Tour Co. (Singapore) Ltd asserts the importance of individual passion, drawing our attention to the commitment and sheer eccentric gumption of these collectors who amassed things whose cultural and historical value were not always apparent.

It's this type of dogged individual passion that makes art interesting. This passion is an essential building-block of a dynamic community. It's this individuality & specificity of the voice that is often lost in the huge international spectacle of biennales, festivals and national events. The direction of the event is dictated by other hands and forces beyond the artist's control. Hence the significance of artist-run or artist-initiated events like FOI, where we are less distracted by the spectacle and the sale, and the anxious desire to be 'tasteful' according to some perceived generic international standard.

Ground-up initiatives are important to a thriving art scene; they promise an authentic expression of culture that is meaningful to those who produce it and those who view it, even if they don't always manage to achieve it – but the point is to try.<sup>5</sup> These initiatives also promise an alternative point of view to the mainstream and to state-run art events. They may even hold the promise of potential anarchy or chaos, because they are not necessarily constrained by mainstream standards of behaviour and order. Performance art, which has historically offered alternative forms and political and social perspectives, the unexpected and spontaneous, lends itself well to playing the foil to more mainstream views. Hence, in Singapore, FOI for me is a welcome respite from the parade of spectacle-aspiring, nationally-ambitious festivals and events that now marks our arts calendar.

The recent announcement of the closure of Plastique Kinetic Worms elicited little impassioned response from the arts community. There seemed to be a kind of resignation, even fatigue, from the arts community upon receiving the news — whether from the artists knowing the financial and structural difficulties of running such a space, or for some other reason, I do not know. I believe it is time for other committed artists to take up the cudgels and make a new space. As far as Singapore independent art spaces go, there remains just the newly-opened Post Museum by p-10, Your Mother Gallery (which is not a formal art space), Sculpture Square (more of a formal institution) and The Substation (which is perhaps best characterized as a cross between an arts institution and an artists' space).

Of these, The Substation is the oldest and longest-surviving. I've often said that I believe Singapore needs more Substations – it needs more spaces driven by the urge to make room for alternative voices. There is such demand for The Substation to take up one cause or another and numerous worthy projects, but we simply do not have the capacity and resources to meet everyone's demand. It would take a longer article to analyse the reasons why there aren't more Substations here, but one of my speculations is that as art practice is becoming more structured in Singapore, there is less need for

individuals to get themselves organized – that is, to initiate their own structures. As resources are made available for big art events, more artists are commissioned to make work for larger institutions and event organizers, and these institutions and organizers need more 'content'. There is little need for artists to make their own opportunities when these are being handed out to them. And artists often get too busy with these projects to get down to doing the other things that matter to them. I'm not saying that it's easy to be an artist, of course – it still isn't easy. But with schools, the Esplanade, the museums, the arts council, all looking for content, young savvy artists are finding footholds to hoist themselves up the art career ladder.

Ah, the career ladder. Another influential element in Singapore contemporary art today. The young Singapore artist now has a career model which their counterparts from a decade ago did not: start in art school (preferably on a scholarship to a prestigious university overseas); submit works to art competitions; network with influential curators, arts managers, senior artists or funders (not too difficult in a small scene like Singapore's); get selected for a regional or international festival; sell work or set up a small business that taps into the state's interest in developing the nascent creative industries (eg. interior design); go overseas again. The ambitious young artist certainly has more options today than 10 years ago. Demand meets supply: young artists are being selected quickly by arts event organizers needing to fill their programmes. As opportunities increase, there is less hunger for a 'room of one's own'

Yet, in Singapore, it is the artists, not the state's agencies, that have always driven movements and stimulated developments. Russell Storer comments on this, quoting TK Sabapathy's observations as well: "The tendency for artists and artist groups to set the agenda for shifts in artistic practice has not only been strong in Singapore, but elsewhere in Asia... Often led by a charismatic indivdual, avantgarde artist groups in a small art scene have the capacity to make a major impact on the development of local practices very quickly." Such charismatic figure would include names like Tang Da Wu and Kuo Pao Kun.

Why have the artists managed to make such a difference? A large part, I believe, lies in the individual artist's desire to do something, to speak out, to organize. It is about individual agency. We all make choices in our lives, and the artist chooses how he/she wants to make his/her art and how he/she wishes to live.

After 10 years organizing art projects, I now understand that people are the key to making things happen. All the funding in the world would lead to nothing if there isn't anyone to lead the charge to use it. I have lost count of the number of times people have approached me good ideas which did not eventually materialize because there was no-one to execute it. Sometimes, the person with the good idea did not have the energy or will to make it happen. To effect change requires effort. That's why we make the effort to go to SAM, to attend FOI, to attend other artists' opening events, to speak at conferences, to initiate projects that address our needs and to fight for what matters to us. We can choose the easy way, or the hard way. And the right thing to do, as we know, isn't always to take the smooth path. How hard are we willing to work to build an arts community that supports and inspires? How much do we want such a community and the various spaces that provide air and light for it to take root?

September 2007

**Audrey Wong** is Artistic Co-director of The Substation, Singapore's first independent non-profit arts centre. She has organised festivals, independent theatre productions, exhibitions, artists' exchanges and networking, and written on theatre, film and arts policy issues. She was involved in the curatorial committee of The Substation's 2001 documentation exhibition & publication of Singapore performance art, Open Ends.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> I bring up this incident as it seems almost impossible to avoid it when discussing performance art in Singapore, and also because performance art practice and its reception as a legitimate art form by the public and even art audiences was deeply marked by it for a number of years.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> As Wee Wan-ling has noted, "This first Biennale was part of an exercise to rebrand the City-State, to announce its globalised urban status, to present a hip, high cultural dimension presumably leading to creativity that global capitalism is now supposed to require." Global Art, Globalised Art, Art and 'Belief', *Broadsheet*, Vol 35 No. 4, Dec 2006 – Feb 2007, p. 216.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Reuben Keehan, Brisbane, So Much to Answer For, Broadsheet, Vol 36 No. 1, March 2007, p. 40.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Keehan, ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup>This is not to say that every artwork or project that characterizes itself as a 'community' event is authentic. The process of connecting with 'community' or 'the people' is complicated, involving deep listening and real dialogue where the interlocutors on either side are open to having their opinions challenged or changed.

 $<sup>^6</sup>$  Russell Storer, Making Space: Historical contexts of contemporary art in Singapore, Contemporary Art in Singapore, ed. Gunalan Nadarajan, Eugene Tan, Russell Storer, Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, 2007.

### FESTIVAL PROGRAM.

#### 27- 29 September 2007 'LIVE' Performances

Venue:

TheatreWorks (Singapore) Ltd 72-13 Mohamed Sultan Road Singapore 239007

# Day 1, Thursday, 27 September 2007 6pm to late

Kai Lam (Singapore) durational performance Kim Youn Hoan (S.Korea) Monika Günther & Ruedi Schill (Switzerland) Vasan Sitthiket (Thailand) Khairuddin Hori (Singapore)

# Day 2, Friday, 28 September 2007 6pm till late

Kenny McBride (UK) durational performance Jason Lim (Singapore) Angkrit Ajchariyasophon (Thailand) Kim Kang (S.Korea) Zhou Bin (China)

# Day 3, Saturday 29 September 2007 2pm to 5pm

Lynn Lu (Singapore) durational performance Ferial Affif (Indonesia) Juliana Yasin (Singapore) Kim Kang & Kim Youn Hoan (S.Korea) Nicola Frangione (Italy) Rich Streitmatter-Tran (Vietnam)

#### 6pm to late

Ruark Lewis (Australia) Bartolomé Ferrando (Spain) Herma Auguste Wittstock (Germany) Lee Wen (Singapore)

#### Day 4, Sunday, 30 September 2007

2pm to late

#### **FOI4 Conference**

Venue:

Post-Museum 107+109 Rowell Road, Singapore 208033

#### 2 to 5.30pm

#### Conference Session 1:

Concerning the performances of...

Speakers will make commentaries on performances seen and respond to each other. Speakers: Ang Song Ming, Noor Effendy Ibrahim, Lam Yi Shan & Michael Tan Moderators: Lee Weng Choy & Khairuddin Hori

#### 7 to 9pm

#### Conference Session 2:

Judging the nude body in performance: context and legality Speakers: Kenny McBride & Dr Kevin Tan Moderator: Lee Wen

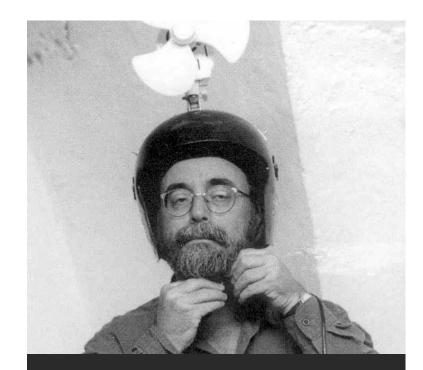


## ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES



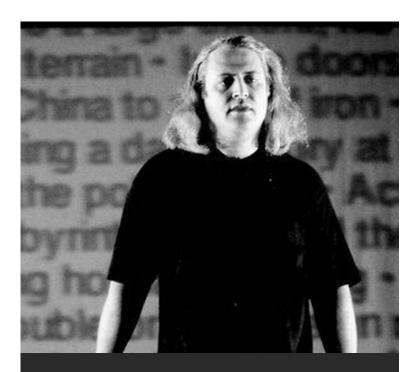
Herma Auguste Wittstock (Germany) lives and works in Berlin, Germany. She is an active member of the *Independent Performance Group* (IPG), a collective curated by Marina Abramovic. Wittstock has presented performances at the Avignon Theatre Festival (France, 2005), PSI (New York, 2003), the Venice Biennale (Italy, 2003) and the Museum of Modern Art (Dublin, 2001). Wittstock's main interest is to explore limits; the mental limits of the audience and the limits between her own strength and torture. Her body is the instrument and the centre of each work. Wittstock sees herself as a performance, as well as seeing that every person, every space and every object has its inner logic. Every situation can be a performance.

http://www.hermaauguste.de/



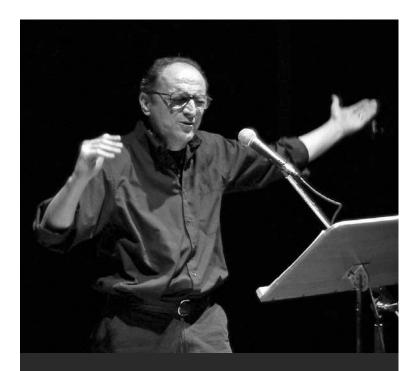
Bartolomé Ferrando (Spain) lives in Valencia is a visual poet, performer and professor of intermedia and performance art at Valencia Faculty of Fine Arts of Valencia. He founded the magazine Texto Poético. He has presented visual art exhibitions and concrete poetry performances in various cities in Spain, France, Italy, Canada, USA, Mexico, Argentina, Chile Japan and Korea. He participated in collaborative groups Flatus Vocis Trio, Taller de Música Mundana and Rojo, undertaking interdisciplinary practices in music, poetry and action art. A prolific writer, apart from Texto Poético he also published critical essays in Hacia una poesía del hacer (Towards a Poetry of Doing), El arte intermedia and La mirada móvil (The Mobile Gaze).

http://www.bferrando.net/



Ruark Lewis (Australia) is a visual artist and writer producing in a wide range of media such as painting, drawing, installation, artists-books, public art, theatre, performances, audio and video works. His art tends toward conceptual language, exploring the poetics of spatial history, involves chance procedures and architectural strategies of improvisation. He often collaborates in a method he calls transcription (drawing), with other poets, experimental and radiophonic composers, choreographers, anthropologists, language artists and writers. He has made significant projects in partnership with writer Paul Carter, Nathalie Sarraute, Angelika Fremd & Ingaborg Bachamann, Rainer Linz, Jutta Hell & Dieter Baumann and Jonathan Jones. He recently worked with the choreographer Alan Schacher on The Babel Project in Sydney. In 2006 he participated in the Biennale of Sydney. He is currently working on a sight specific installation called An Index of Kindness (with Jonathan Jones) at p-10 during September-October.

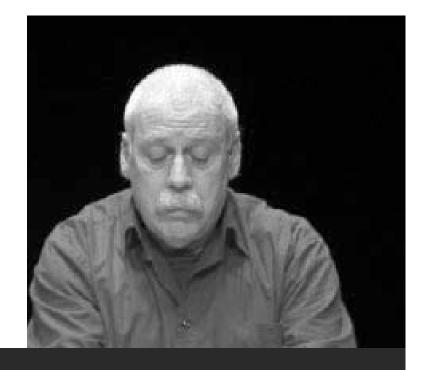
http://www.ruarklewis.com/



**Nicola Frangione** (Italy) born in Forenza (PZ) lives and works in Monza. An interdisciplinary artist experimenting with visual and graphic art as well as music and sound poetry, video and theatre production, visual poetry and mail art. Frangione's sound poetry and concerts are oriented towards what some artists define as "art dramaturgy". Gestures as a key form of expression are a distinguishing feature of his work. His vocalism takes an active part in the performances of the body, playing the same role as the other linguistic elements. It also stands out thoroughly, in a sound-focused dimension connected with both texts and music according to interdisciplinary approaches, harmonizing with the main orientation of "sound poetry".

http://www.nicolafrangione.it/inglese\_testo.htm





Monika Günther and Ruedi Schill (Switzerland) works and lives in Essen and Lucerne; both have long, separate histories as performance artists, and since 1995 making collaborations as a duo in workshops and performances. Monika Günther started performance art while continuing her painting since 1982, wrangling with nature, mythology as well as human relationships. As with her design and paintings, her performances reveal extreme economy and restrain images with humans and nature taking center place, with concentration on reduction and simplicity of the means, which applies also to the spectator and listener. Ruedi Schill experimented in various interdisciplinary media since 1972, working in photography, film, mail art, music, audio, land art and body art. Monica and Ruedi's workshops and performances with Apropos and Bureau de Performance were exemplary of independent art collectives which helped propagated performance art in Switzerland during the 1980s and 90s. In the silence and the special attraction of their collaborative performances is appropriate for the minimum movement and small accent. It is opened only for the sensitive and attentive observer and listener.

http://www.kunst-forum.ch/html/detail.asp?PersonID=221



Kenny McBride (UK) originally from Scotland, generates contextually engaged manifestations through Performance Art and Installations (Install-Actions) that operate within the architectonics and pathology of mediated and lived experience. In experiential space dialogic encounters are explored that inhabit alienation, hallucination, being and becoming visual phenomena. He is author of many unique and intensely charged manifestations, presenting in many diverse locations and contexts in many countries. He occasionally curates chronotopic retrospectives and live events, and is editor of online magazine www.agora8.org - a contextualised survey of East and South East European Performance and time-based art practices. He holds various awards including a Doctoral award from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

http://www.agora8.org/kmb/



Angkrit Ajchariyasophon (Thailand) lives and works in Chiang Rai, believes what we call art is far beyond mere paintings, sculptures, or any objects we see and call them 'artwork.' Rather, art is any 'activity' that expands cultural understanding, and foster learning and independence of every participant. For Angkrit, art will be meaningless without social (human) engagement since it is the society that dictates its value and makes art by creating activities. Creating activities that call for community's involvement leading to the nurturing of learning and overcoming of any challenges as a community, and to understand life, society, and nature as a whole.

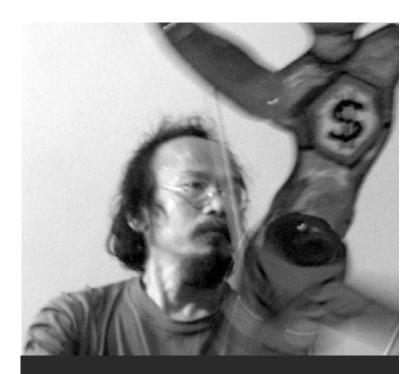
http://www.rama9art.org/angkrit/



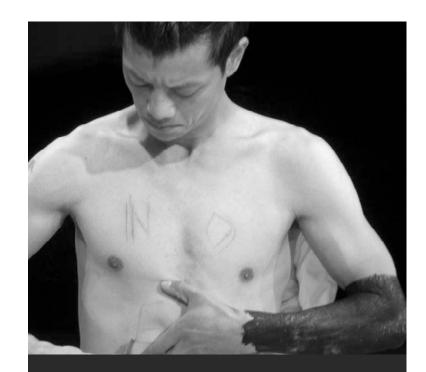


Kim Kang and Kim Youn Hoan (S.Korea) based in Seoul working in various media such as painting, text, video, installation and performance, are founders of Oasis, an artists' squat project. Oasis introduced "squatting" to Korea and worked actively to rejuvenate abandoned or decommissioned buildings. They also co-organized with Berlin based alternative art Gallery SoToDo, the "10th Congress for Performance Art'' 2004, Seoul. They tried to occupy the Korean Federation of Art Organizations (KFAO) building in winter 2004. This near completed building was left unfinished for 7 years despite receiving enormous funds from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MCT) and the Korean Culture and Art Foundation (KCAF). The group's activities differentiated themselves by the complexity and diversity in their programming as well as administration efficiency during the office space distribution performance. The level of organization and efficiency has been compared to standards executed by larger-scaled NGOs, staging many art related rallies and cultural demonstrations against the KCAF and MCT. This has shown their focus on their activities as cultural activism that urged reforms of cultural administration practices.

http://www.sauartist.org/

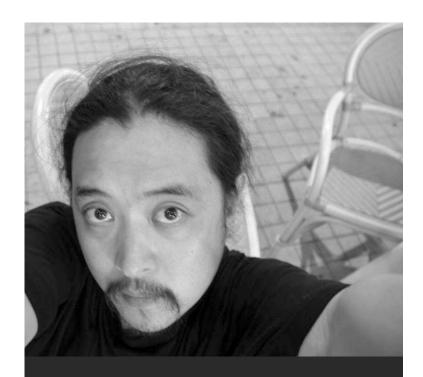


Vasan Sittiket (Thailand), based in Bangkok, the enfant terrible of contemporary art in Thailand is also a painter, playwright, poet, singer- songwriter and author. Vasan's art reflects very versatile themes and styles. Trained at the College of Fine Arts, Bangkok, his paintings are related to nature or erotic motifs based on Thai traditions, though his mind and most works are preoccupied with problems and issues, such as the exploitation of the poor by the rich and the corruption among politicians and bureaucrats. His performance work verges on activism with a concerned for everyday manifestation of social-political engendering. He founded the critically provocative U-Kabat group, which comprises other performance artists, Paisan and Mongkol Plienbangchang, Sompong Tawee and Jittima Pholsawek, among others.



Rich Streitmatter-Tran (Vietnam) born in Bien Hoa, living and working in Ho Chi Minh City, graduated from Massachusetts College of Art, Boston. He exhibited widely, including Singapore Biennale 2006, 2005 Pocheon Asian Art Festival, the 2004 Gwangju Biennale, the Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin, 7th Asiatopia, Bangkok, Art Tech Media 06, Barcelona. He was awarded the 2005 Martell Contemporary Asian Art Research Grant, His "Mediating the Mekong" research project focuses on media and cultural production spanning the Mekong River nations, explored memory, popular media, war & tourism, exile and transition, language, and narrative. He is also contributing editor for Contemporary Magazine and a correspondent for the Madrid-based magazine, Art.Es. He was Teaching Fellow at Harvard University (2000-2004), conducted media arts research at the MIT Media Lab (2000), Visiting Lecturer at Ho Chi Minh Fine Arts University in 2003, currently Lecturer at RMIT Vietnam.

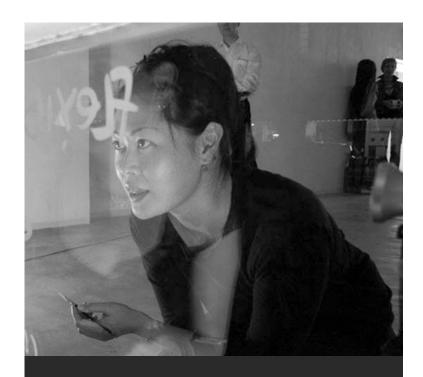
http://www.diacritic.org/blog/about.htm



Zhou Bin (China) is originally from Xi-An and specialized in oil painting, until he moved to live and work in Chengdu in 1997. He began experimenting and working in live performance art or action art since 1994. His creation process frequently involves using the limits of the body's physiological function to express a conceptual or artificial hypothesis. Strong and significant impressions are aroused by the conditions enacted. Zhou Bin believed that performance or action art is an artistic and critical language in its own and has the freedom of exploratory and risks qualities, which, simultaneously, are related to the rapid changes in China's contemporary society. He is in collaboration with Liu Cheng Yin to initiate "Pu" Live Art Space, a space dedicated to live art practice in Chengdu, Szechuan since



Ferial Afiff (Indonesia), born in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, now lives and works in Jogjakarta. She studied and graduated in sculpture from STISI, Indonesia Academy of Visual Art and Design, Bandung. She became increasingly working in performance art since 2000. She presented regularly in various local events in Indonesia as well as internationally and has been an active member of Performance Klub, a performance collective and artists' initiative based in Jogjakarta. Her performances give a light touch to various urgent social questions on human rights, identity, and conditions of human existence with poignant observations and exceptional irony.



Lynn Lu (Singapore/Tokyo) received her MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute, and is currently a Ph.D candidate at Musashino Art University in Tokyo. Since 1997, Lynn has exhibited and performed extensively in North America, Asia, and Europe. The physical body is seen as the main medium for perceiving and presenting meaning rather than message, through direct sensory experience. Familiar objects and ordinary human activities are specifically re-contextualized to allow for new meanings and understandings to emerge from the collective embodied foundation of our subjective consciousness. These new perceptions take place as the body receives raw information via the sense organs, preceding the intellectual processing and abstraction of that experience. Thus her work is also an investigation of meaning that is found between the gaps of verbal communication.

http://www.lynnlu.info/



Juliana Yasin (Singapore) studied at LaSalle College of the Arts, Singapore from 1989-1990. She left the college to pursue further studies in Claremont Art School (T.A.F.E) and Curtin University in Perth, Western Australia in 1993. An active member of alternative art groups, The Artists Village and Plastique Kinetic Worms, she was also the Singapore based researcher with Asia Art Archive in Hong Kong. She has worked with Plastique Kinetic Worms as a gallery administrator and taught at Central Saint Martins (The London Institute) based at Kolej Bandar Utama in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. She has also organized numerous collaborations and events such as "Fusion Strength" locally and internationally. Her performances often highlight the tensions of her female Islamic Chinese Malay heritage, identity and position within multi-cultural and global contexts of contemporary society.

http://jy1970.blogspot.com/



Jason Lim's (Singapore) practice transverses ceramics, sculpture and performance art and is regarded as a maverick in the ceramics field, Lim has radically shifted assumptions about ceramics as a discipline, pushing its potential as a media in installation and performance art. Lim's performances often play on boundaries of risky precarious situations, teasing the audiences with a cheeky use of the materials and spaces. He participated in various international performance festivals and had taken up residency programs in Japan, The Netherlands, Australia and U.S.A. In 2006, he was awarded the Freeman Fellowship artist residency at the Vermont Studio Center in Vermont, U.S.A. Lim was involved in initiating "UTOPIA", an alternative art gallery in 1996 and was co-Artistic Director of Future of Imagination 2, in 2004. In 2005, he organized StopOver -Singapore/Japan performance art meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Singapore. He was one of the artists in the Singapore Pavilion for the 52nd Venice Biennale 2007.



Kai Lam (Singapore) has proved an active innovator since his artistic involvements in 1995. Versatile and prolific skills in drawing, painting, sculpture, mixed-media installation and performance, Lam also collaborate in theater productions and coorganize art events. As President of alternative art group, Artists Village he helped initiate "Artists Investigating Monuments", in 2000, presenting installations and performances in various public sites. This was later presented again in Singapore Art Museum, 2004 and Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney and House of World Culture, Berlin, 2005. Lam shows leadership to involve others in Singapore as well as international arts community. Art-making to Kai Lam is a tool for a better understanding of the environment where he lives in and an exploration of life and social human conditions. His artworks are created as a social commentary and creative response to urban pluralistic society.

http://www.geocities.com/op\_out74



Khairuddin Hori (Singapore) has explored and presented works and concepts through various mediums and across diverse disciplines such as theatre, painting, sculpture, installation and performance art since 1992. His multifarious practice has seen him in several incarnations, from being the Creative Director of Wunderpark, a mini-festival focusing on disenfranchised youths at the Singapore Art Museum, to a regional advisor for Asiatopia 7/2005, an International Performance Art Festival and the first Southeast Asian Performance Art Symposium in Bangkok, Thailand. He recently organised a performance of Asia-based curators through Trading Craft, a project commissioned by Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, presented at The Substation (Singapore) and Chulalongkorn University (Bangkok). Khai has been an Associate Artist of The Substation since 2002 and is founder/director of local contemporary arts collective Wunderspaze.

http://khaihori.blogspot.com/



Lee Wen's (Singapore) 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 an innovative, groundbreaking, utopian performance art collective comprising artists from various countries and cultural backgrounds. Lee was awarded Singapore's Cultural Medallion in 2005.

http://www.artsingapore.org/leewen/

## LINKS

# To FOI website http://www.foi.sg/

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#### National Arts Council

140 Hill Street, #03-01 MICA Building, Singapore 179369 Tel: +65 6746 4622

Fax: +65 6837 3010 http://www.nac.gov.sg

#### TheatreWorks (Singapore) Ltd

72-13 Mohamed Sultan Road, Singapore 239007

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Fax: +65 6737 7013

tworks@singnet.com.sg

http://www.theatreworks.org.sg/the\_company/index.htm http://www.72-13.com

#### The Substation

45 Armenian Street, Singapore 179936

Tel: +65 6337 7535

Fax: +65 6337 2729

http://www.substation.org

#### The Artists Village

91A Hindoo Road, Singapore 209126

Tel/Fax: +65 6296 8707

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http://www.tav.org.sg

#### p-10

10 Perumal Road, Singapore 218777 Tel: +65 6294 0021

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# Post Museum

107+109 Rowell Road, Singapore 208033

#### Wunderspaze

23 Tay Lian Teck Drive, Singapore 455654 wunderspaze@gmail.com http://wunderspaze.blogspot.com/