



And the Difference Is

Liau Shu Juan

The writer's interest is in western oil painting and contemporary works which can range from new media art to photography and graphic design. A Year 1 student at Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences majoring in Communications and New Media, she enjoys analysing and creating art works.

Inflatable garbage bags hanging in the air, a video of seemingly nonsensical conversations and an ordinary filing cabinet. The man on the street wouldn't call them art. However, before you turn around and scoff at them, do take a moment to reflect. For such works, the concept and the experience are what matters, coupled with specific aesthetic strategies. Welcome to the world of contemporary art where modern experiences collide headon with traditional concepts of what constitutes art.

The works on display are part of the *And the Difference Is* exhibit, a collaboration between Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces (Melbourne) and the NUS Museum. Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces values creativity, risk and experimentation and this vision is reflected in the works. As I entered

the gallery, I was greeted by a surreal sight of garbage bags or more accurately, a mishmash of colourful plastic bags hanging in the air, blown up to the point that they look like a distorted molecular structure. Simon Pericich the artist has intended it to be a commentary on the wastefulness of consumerism. However, the meaning behind this artwork is not immediately apparent as I was distracted by the varying patterns and color of the plastic bags which range from your typical NTUC bags to the distinctive yellow Art Friend bags. However, the title of the work adds another dimension to its meaning. *All Together Now!* reminds me of the rubbish bags being lifted up into the air in one sweeping motion from the dumpster to the incinerator and represents the idea of a mass of plastic bags of waste being disposed of. The hot air within the plastic bags also gives the bags ample volume; literally and metaphorically adding weight to the issue of wastefulness and consumerism.

Moving further into the exhibits, I came across a favourite of mine- *The Quote Generator* by Danielle Freakley. The quote generator is not a machine. It actually refers to Freakley herself. Freakley speaks only in quotes and they are meticulously referenced verbally as the conversation progresses, making the figure of speech seem unnatural and difficult to follow.

However, I find it a really interesting and creative way of communication. As the quote generator, she devised a new form of communication with her often witty one liner referenced from pop culture, ranging from John Lennon to Snoop Dogg (who is often a source for insults). The exhibit is divided into two parts. One is a video of Freakley speaking in quotes to strangers and the other is an interactive site where viewers can be a quote generator for once by standing opposite each other and speaking only in quotes to each other from a Quote Generator book.

I find the video particularly hilarious as it shows the reactions of the people when faced with Freakley's unconventional form of communication. Their reactions ranged from playful to confused and perplexed. There was a particular incident where an elderly man in reaction to Freakley's reply of 'Yes- Optus 1991', thought she was talking nonsense and impatiently brushed her away with 'Optus? What phone company is that?' Of course, he could not get the gist of Freakley's performance where Optus actually is a reference for the word 'yes'. Cinderella, one of the characters she spoke to in Disneyland, is another humorous example. Freakley through her quote reference way of talking, wanted to seek advice on love from Cinderella, the believer of

true love herself, but instead got a cold reaction. Cinderella in turn asked Freakley if she wanted to 'take a picture instead'. Although the context of the conversations changes, Freakley always manages to find a suitable quote and accurately mentions the year of reference. Hence it speaks volumes of her amazing memory, eloquence and wit. Furthermore, it was also a feat to be applauded as she has already been speaking in this unnatural manner for the past two years and will continue for a year more.

Rounding the corner of the gallery, I came across two LCD screens placed side by side against each other. This was *Spice* by Matthew Ngui. If you are wondering why 'Spice', the answer is revealed in the interview of the people onscreen. What is most interesting about this work is its presentation. A man's face fills the left screen while a woman's face fills the right screen. The use of double TV screens to form a joint image is not new though, as seen in new media artists like Bill Viola. Speaking on gendered response, Ngui's work is a great example of how different males and females communicate. Although it may sound stereotypical, males are generally more reticent and less outspoken compared to females and this is revealed in the interviews onscreen. When I listened to the interview of the men on the left screen as they spoke in a reserved

manner, giving the impression that they did not want to reveal more. However, when I moved on to the interview of the women on the right screen, I was immediately drawn into their conversation as they peppered the interview with laughter and interesting tidbits of their lives. They also tended to reveal more of their personal history whether prompted or not, in an upbeat manner.

Gabrielle De Vietri's *Relationship Contracts* is located in a discreet corner of the gallery, made up of a simple filing cabinet standing on a grey carpet. The artist gives me the impression that she wanted it to look as mundane as possible, from the dull filing cabinet to the conventional office accessories on top of the cabinet. However, it is this ordinariness that draws me to the work to explore its nooks and crannies, to find out what exactly is interesting about this work. Most importantly though, the key to understanding this work is the filing cabinet's opened drawer. When standing at a distance and facing the filing cabinet directly, one will be psychologically drawn to the work as the square carpet on the ground aligns the viewer's eyes towards the cabinet and the opened drawer acts like an invitation to examine its contents. Within the drawer, one will find 11 brown folders containing 11 contracts, ranging from 'one-night stand' to 'meaningful', and 'expiry date' (aka exchange student)

relationships. To satisfy my curiosity, I went through every single folder and sentence in the document. It soon became a tedious and monotonous task as the relationship contracts are made to imitate formal legal documents. However, it was not totally yawn inducing work as there were snippets of interesting and hilariously true agreements in the contracts. For example in the 'meaningful relationship' contract, in order to terminate it, you have to agree to slip into severe depression, need the aid of antidepressants or get into a one night stand relationship (presumably to temporarily heal the broken heart). However, there are also snippets of painfully true information as seen in the 'smile and nod' relationship where the relationship progresses from brief greetings to forgetting the person's name and finally to pretending not to notice the person. Flipping through all the relationship contracts, I realise that the responses are all so real and true and this implies that our responses towards relationships are actually quite uniform despite our different personality or characteristic traits. Furthermore, the work reminds viewers of our human qualities that we are flawed by nature in our emotional responses towards the different types of relationships.

And the Difference Is is not your usual exhibition of traditional paintings and sculptures. Therefore,

the viewer has to go there with an open mind and the willingness to spend some moments contemplating the meaning behind the artworks. The intentions of the artists may not be obvious but that's the fascinating thing about contemporary art where the meanings behind the works are endless. You will stand in front of the work and wonder in what way it is considered art. But with an open mind and a boundless imagination, the possibilities are endless. ■



Gabrielle de Vietri
Relationship Contracts, 2004- 2008

Artist-in-Residence Simon Pericich



Simon Pericich
All Together Now! 2008

Australian artist Simon Pericich's practice employs found or salvaged materials that are repurposed or recycled in often socially useful or revelatory ways. He was in Singapore from 24 November to 14 December 2008 for a 3 week residency at NUS Museum to work on his piece, *All Together Now!* for the *And the Difference Is* exhibition.

NL: When did you first want to be an artist?

SP: When I was really young, I soon realised my antisocial behaviour could be labelled 'creative' and that this was deemed a good thing. I also learnt if you continue doing antisocial things, like working really hard making part-time monuments and not getting paid properly for it, it was possible to become a professional artist. This was appealing because I didn't have to be a farmer like my parents and their job looked too strange and too hard. Actually if I think about it, there is a lot in common with visual art and farming.

NL: What are the most important influences that have moved you as an artist?

SP: A disposition of paranoia, with a personal ability to afford the luxury of time in a world that celebrates a climate of insanity.

NL: Do you visualize your art before creating? How does the process of creating an art object begin for you?

SP: My process is kind of like creating an ad break. I get a very clear image of the product and the pitch. The whole activity is fuelled by a cathartic and playful desire to exorcise some kind of hysterical emotional misunderstanding, usually between myself and a handful of inanimate bits of rubbish.

NL: Tell us about your experience working in Singapore preparing for this exhibition.

SP: Aw, it was great fun. I haven't been to Singapore before so we spent most of our time with our mouths wide in gaping awe. It was great to meet the staff and their assistance in bringing in plastic bags to make the work was invaluable. I was so surprised by Singapore's efficient waste management system and its precarious love for procedures.

Singapore is an amazing place to experience.

NL: How have people responded to your work here and elsewhere?

SP: I think artworks are generally approached with an embarrassed apathy from the general public. My works have received everything from 'what the heck is that piece of nonsense. You're a moron' to 'that amazingly sublime masterpiece of our time has given me reason to live' (well not quite on the last one but there's always tomorrow(?)). The most flattering experience is seeing other people's work that has been directly influenced by my work. It's a funny situation because others influence my work heavily and maybe eventually all artworks will look the same and they will be exactly like daytime television programs.

NL: What do you want people to think about or take away with them when they see your work?

SP: Lots of different things...ideally I'd like to think people muse about their current position within a larger contemporary community and also an opportunity to create and participate. ■



La Libreria Book Artist

Eriko Hirashima



Book artist Eriko Hirashima runs La Libreria, a workshop space on the Top level of NUS Museum. Apart from art books which are available for sale on her website, she holds book binding workshops.

NL: Tell us about La Libreria. When did you set it up and why?

EH: La Libreria is an artists' bookshop and a space for any book arts activities. Currently, book binding workshops (one of my activities) are held regularly. Although, La libreria started on Queen Street in 2004 to promote artists' books here in Singapore, it is also one of my book projects in Singapore.

NL: What is Book Arts?

EH: Book Arts is one of the visual art fields. It treats books as a visual art form. However, it can be also said that Book Arts or Artists' Book is still controversial among some Art critics. The technical side is not viewed

like other art forms, such as painting, sculpture, photography and printing, which already have been established and are mature art fields. Some discourses consider the Artists' Book as a new hybrid art form.

NL: Describe the work of one book artist whom you admire.

EH: I admire many artists' books and respect the book artists. It is honestly impossible to choose only one person's books...

NL: How do you select the art books and where do you find them?

EH: I have friends who make books and do book arts activities so I ask them to send books here. Also sometimes I go to find books at the (Artists) Book Fairs in Europe. What interests me is the concepts found in the books, as well as the techniques employed.

NL: What is your art background?

EH: I took a long journey to reach here... My grandmother was a master printer in *Bingata*, a traditional Japanese printing technique for textiles. I was influenced by her when I was a teenager and majored in Textile Design in college. In my course of studies, students learned weaving and printing techniques. The standards that we were held to were very high. When I was a student, I started to question why technical skills alone can be considered good work. But, later

I realized how useful these skills are for taking care of the small details, which determine the final quality of a work. I learned patience through the long process of weaving. After finishing college, my idea of Textiles was slightly changed. Then I went to Britain to continue my studies in Textiles. I was interested in a more conceptual approach to using textiles in art. In college, I had a lot of problems learning in English. It was very difficult for me to deal with finding the balance between the ideas and materials in the studio practice. Therefore, I continued my studies in Fine Art, so I could expand my horizons. Luckily I found the most suitable medium to express my ideas. It was the book. Since then I have you invite to you become a book artist.

NL: Who would book binding workshop? The person could be living or dead, including fictional. Describe why this person is your choice.

EH: It's a very tough question. Since a maximum of 5 people attend my workshop – how about 3 wise monkeys? They may not be human but I assume since one can't speak, one can't see, and one can't listen, that they would work well together. ■

Check out her website at www.lalibreria.com.sg.

Email info@lalibreria.com.sg or call 6516 8797 / 6775 0602 for more information.

Meet Our Interns

Syed Muhd Hafiz bin Syed Nasir



Hafiz was a 3rd year student at LASALLE College of the Arts when he took up a research internship at NUS Museum from 22 September to 3 November 2008. He conducted research on curatorial strategies and use of museum space for a Singapore Art Gallery Guide article.

My first brush with the NUS Museum was during a field trip organised by my LASALLE lecturer back in 2006. Then the museum struck me as a 'cold' institution and I remembered getting bored going through all the galleries.

However, since my knowledge of art increased through these few years, coupled with the 'sudden increase' of activities happening within the Museum, my interest was piqued. I began to see that NUS Museum offers an alternative narrative to curating exhibitions compared to our national museums (Singapore Art Museum, National Museum of Singapore, etc.)

My 6 week research internship confirmed my changed perceptions of the Museum. As I delved deeper into the realm of museology and curatorial studies, the experience of talking to curators like Mustafa and Qinyi, with regard to curatorial ideas and strategies, have proved invaluable.

The research internship has given me the opportunity to acquire knowledge at my own time and pace. Also, the access to information and archives of past activities within the NUS museum, has given me a deeper insight into the different collections owned by the museum.

On another note, the structure of my internship did sound ambiguous. As it was my first 'research internship' and coupled with the fact that I was in an unfamiliar environment, I admit that I felt 'lost' on a few occasions. However my supervisor, Mustafa has been a more than helpful advisor, considering his busy schedule.

To conclude, the research internship has been a generally positive experience for me. I have been exposed to a different kind of museum practice and I look forward to future collaborations with the institution. ■

Grace Kng



Grace was a Year 6 student from NUS High School who did her internship with NUS Museum from July to November 2008. This stint provided her with an overview of Museum work - programmes, newsletter writing, marketing and publicity, collections management and exhibition setup.

I was worried yet happy at the prospect of doing an internship at an art museum. I like art, and had even taken several art courses in school. However, due to my busy school timetable, I had been unable to have anything to do with art for the past 2 years. I did not even have time to visit an art museum. This and the fact that I was never very skilled in art class made me worry about what I could contribute to the Museum. Yet, this uneasiness about myself left me with a determination to at least give my best. I kept my eyes and ears peeled determined to learn everything I could. I found out about a number of things.

First, unless one is in a very high position, one is generally expected to do your own photocopying and such. This confirms my suspicion that certain young people these days are very foolish in thinking that a university degree, even from an ivy league university would automatically grant one an office with a secretary. Second, I learned the importance of public opinion to institutes like the Museum. Viewership seems to be a top priority with numerous surveys to get the public's opinion and an emphasis on knowing the daily visitorship. I was surprised since the Museum is free and its income does not seem to be directly connected with the number of visitors. However, it seems that it is. Third, I picked up useful information about the workings in the art world. Despite their reputation for being temperamental people, most artists in general seem to act and dress like perfectly normal people. They do not go around wearing berets, drinking coffee and having long conversations about their inspiration all the time. The curator must often work with the artist to help bring out his/her vision.

At the end, I feel what is most important is not so much the skills I have gained but that I had the opportunity to experience office life. It's this intangible experience of the social interactions, the spoken and unspoken rules and how teamwork is like in the working world which is most valuable. All in all, I liked it here. ■

Exhibitions & Events

Constructed Landscapes: Singapore in Southeast Asia Till Dec 2009



Cheong Soo Pieng
St Andrew's Cathedral, 1955

The University Art Museum (precursor of NUS Museum) was inaugurated in 1955 at the University of Malaya in Singapore. The collection was instrumental in the teaching and study of Art History. Its holding of acquired paintings served as a vital archive and resource to interpret landscapes and themes in Singapore and Southeast Asia.

Presented in three sections - Engagement/Memory/Imagination - the exhibition explores artistic interactions with the land, personal and collective memory, as well as relationships with physical space, cultural imagination and practice. Through paintings, drawings, photographs, textiles and video documentations, the landscape observations convey, construct and represent aspects of such landscapes, as well as offer presentations and interpretations.

The exhibition forms the framework for reconnections with teaching and learning of architecture and urban history, through modules developed by the Department of Architecture, NUS, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. In conjunction with the exhibition, two forums will be organised at the NUS Museum alongside four walking tours at Kampong Glam, Padang, Telok Ayer and Tiong Bahru to encourage the public's interest in and appreciation of the Singapore landscape.

Past-Present: Craft Communities of Modern and Contemporary India Till 26 Apr 2009



Kalamkari Temple Hanging
circa 1960s

Making sense of the contemporary nature of craftwork on the Indian Subcontinent, the exhibition traces changes and continuity in practices, ideas and concerns in the livelihoods of craft communities and the politics of heritage management in postcolonial societies. Exhibited artifacts are drawn from the NUS Museum's South Asian Collection and from a recent field trip by a group of students from the University Scholars Programme, NUS

Jendela A play of the ordinary Till 19 Apr 2009



Yunizar, *Untitled*, 2009

The meteoric rise of Jendela that began in the mid 1990s is both fascinating and confounding. Starting from the mundane, Handiwirman Saputra, Jumaldi Alfi,

Yusra Martunus, Rudi Mantofani and Yunizar produce works that are visually seductive and clinical in their articulation, absent of the strident social imageries typical of Yogyakarta art. Is this a reaction against political art? A turn towards formalism? Or can we release them from the burden of reductive interpretations? This exhibition stages an encounter with Jendela's play of the ordinary, invoking a crisis of signification, one that oscillates between irrational fascination and context.

NUS Arts Festival 2009 Open Art Show Nature, Man Included Till 26 Apr 2009



Lee Guan Wei Daniel
You are not alone (photo essay), 2008

How do we contemplate Nature and Man's place in it - be it apart from or a part of Nature? What are the issues in the representations of Nature reflecting contemporary social and cultural values, economic and ethical issues? Are there iconography and popular imagery that are pervasive or examples of commodification of Nature? Should we highlight spatial domination or explore the boundaries between the natural and cultural, the urban and the undeveloped? Or can we reflect on the philosophical ideas on Human Nature? Drawing from the diverse intellectual disciplines and interests within the University, the photography exhibition which is held in conjunction with NUS Arts Festival 2009, hopes to present a range of perspectives by NUS students, staff and alumni

Exhibitions & Events

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
Peranakan Chinese in Globalising
Southeast Asia: The Cases of
Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia
Fri, 22 May 2009, 9am-5pm

Possibility Room
National Library Building
100 Victoria Street
\$30 per person
\$15 for NUS & NUS students

To register, email
babahouse@nus.edu.sg

The conference will address issues on Peranakan communities and their hybrid culture focusing on general trends and developments, case studies from three countries, and discussion on their material culture. The Keynote Address will be given by Prof Wang Gungwu. For details, visit www.nus.edu.sg/museum/2009.

Watercolor Painting on Landscapes
by Janice Chin



Charles Dyce
Government Hill from the New Harbour Road, Singapore, 1816 - 1853

8 lessons
4 April to 30 May 2009 (Saturdays)
4.30 - 6.30pm
NUS Museum and various sites
\$280 (excludes course materials)
Max 12 participants (16 yrs & above)

To register, email
museum@nus.edu.sg

This course introduces the basic techniques in watercolor painting. Students will learn techniques such as painting with volume, perspective, composition and expression. The instructor will use watercolor paintings on exhibition such as works by Eng Tow, Lim Cheng Hoe and Charles Dyce as reference for teaching the different techniques. Students will also experience having classes in an outdoor setting. For details, visit www.nus.edu.sg/museum/2009.

Topics in Contemporary Art
Programme by June Yap

8 sessions
7 June - 26 July 2009 (Sundays)
NUS Museum
\$400 per person
\$360 (NUS staff & students)
Min 10 & Max 25 participants

To register, email
museum@nus.edu.sg

The programme explores topics and issues related to contemporary art practices today. Through surveying international artist practices while focusing on Southeast Asian artists and artworks, the programme will introduce an aspect of contemporary art practice and the issues arising from it. In investigating these aspects, participants will have the opportunity to examine and discuss concerns of artists, institutions, curators and audiences in relation to the practice of art today.

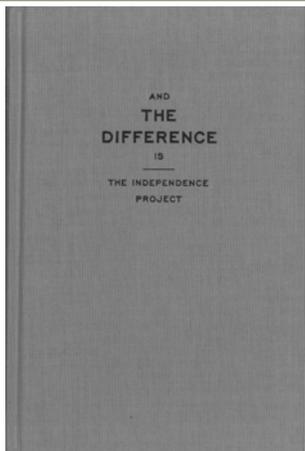
The programme is designed for participation by art students (post secondary / tertiary level) and members of the public and is not on artistic techniques. Art experience is not required. Topics include the following:

- Art Historical Readings
- Making History – Southeast Asia and Nation building
- Postmodernism, politics and society
- Methods and ways of thinking - death of painting, rise of installation
- Media – photography, video and film
- Performance art and performativity
- The art of Curating
- Market, circulation and exhibitionary systems

Publications

More titles are available at www.nus.edu.sg/museum/publications.htm. You can purchase the publications using the order form on the website or approach the counter staff at NUS Museum.

And the Difference Is THE INDEPENDENCE PROJECT



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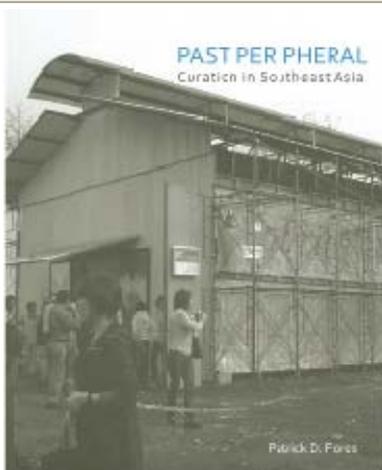
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ISBN 978-981-08-1281-2

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Past Peripheral Curation in Southeast Asia



ISBN 978-981-08-0663-7

Retail Price S\$30.00
Mail Order Price S\$40.00



Patrick Flores at the book signing session during the launch on 9 January. Following was a panel discussion by Prof John Clark from University of Sydney; C.J. Wee Wan-ling, Associate Professor of English at National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University and the author.

Past Peripheral: Curation in Southeast Asia by Patrick Flores, Professor of Art Studies at University of Philippines, traces the history of curation in Indonesia and Thailand, situating it within a broad framework of the emergence of contemporary art in Southeast Asia and the global interest in art production in the region.



Karen Lim, co curator of *Constructed Landscapes: Singapore in Southeast Asia* exhibition conducts docent training for NUS Boulevard.

NUS Boulevard

boul.e.vard (abbr.: **blvd**)
noun
a wide street in a city or town, typically one lined with trees

NUS Boulevard was formed in May 2008 by a group of NUS students who were keen to promote visual arts appreciation.

Members can organize activities, volunteer as docents at NUS Museum, write articles on art and culture, receive training and conduct art appreciation classes. Boulevard also merges an interest in art with volunteerism through the sharing of art with school going children. Through such activities, members are exposed to a range of artworks and learn to appreciate art better.

NUS Boulevard may be small for now but it's certainly big on ideas and welcomes anyone with an interest in art.

NUS Boulevard is managed by NUS Museum, NUS Centre For the Arts.

Boulevard – an avenue to the arts.

To join, please contact:
Fidelia or Sarah at
nusboulevard@gmail.com

Volunteering at NUS Museum

Are you interested in guiding at the Museum, organizing events or contributing articles to this newsletter? There is a wide range of volunteer opportunities for you. All you need is interest, commitment and enthusiasm. If you are keen, please complete the form at www.nus.edu.sg/museum/outreach_volunteer.htm and send it to museum@nus.edu.sg

Check out internship opportunities at www.nus.edu.sg/museum/internship.html

facebook

NUS Museum Groups found on Facebook

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NUS MUSEUM

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Website: www.nus.edu.sg/museum
Email: museum@nus.edu.sg

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10am – 7.30pm (Tuesdays – Saturdays)
10am – 6pm (Sundays)
Closed on Mondays & Public Holidays