

odyssey



Singaporean visual artist and lecturer Shubigi Rao's home-cum-studio (left), and her work, titled *The Tuning Fork of the Mind 2008* (above).

fickle one. You may end up just making videos and only require a desktop, so you don't really want to be tied down to a physical space anyway." And Kai Qun has been making more video works of late. Last year, he created *If Only the World Had a Reset Button*, a video

piece that was filmed and edited in increments, depending on how much electricity he got out of the one pound he fed into the electricity meter of the Glaswegian flat he was living in as a postgraduate student.

Shubigi Rao, a visual artist and lecturer who recently mounted her 10-years-in-the-making "retrospectacle", agrees that it's "definitely tougher to rent spaces suitable for a studio at market rates".

"I've known artists who've had to work to be able to pay rent then found themselves unable to find the time or energy to use the space productively and have had to give it up," says Rao, who is sub-letting a Goodman Arts Centre studio for a year from another artist who is spending time abroad.

If you had met Rao at her retrospective at the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore more than a month ago, amid the lovingly archived found objects that made up her installation *The Study of Leftovers* (which she describes as "an archaeological reconstruction of Singapore as an extinct civilisation"), she would have joked that she had to "recreate the garbage" – she had discarded almost all the work she made from 2003 to 2006, simply because she had run out of space to store them at home.

Over the years, Rao has had to make fewer large-scale installations,

as well as restrict the size of her paper-based works, so that she can store them under the mattress of her box-bed. Commenting on how not having a studio has influenced the way she creates her art, she says: "I've learnt to break every large work down into composites and to make sure that I can easily disassemble every part for easy storage in cardboard cartons once the exhibition is over.

"I've also adapted to doing large paper works on the floor of my kitchen, using my bathroom tub to soak a hundred books in ink, etching a copper plate in a planter in my garden and then carrying it dripping through the house – not recommended – using common household objects to troubleshoot mechanical issues; all this stems from having to work at home."

Next month, the 38-year-old will finally get a proper studio of her own: "It isn't an exaggeration to say that I feel liberated from a limitation that has definitely hobbled my work. It also means I can work on projects simultaneously without having to repeatedly pack and unpack every time I switch between them, as I've had to do over the last decade."

Meanwhile, Ye Shufang, who had been making perishable art since 1997, recently announced she would not be making any more of her installations using the Asian jelly

agar-agar, after her solo exhibition at The Private Museum, titled "The Loss Index: Perishables And Other Miscellanea", which ended last week. Ye had started exploring ephemeral works – often things she cooked or baked, which often decayed over the course of their display and were discarded after the show – after the lack of studio and storage space forced her to throw away some of the steel sculptures she did as an art undergraduate. "I did not want to be in a position where I lacked specialised equipment to make my work," says the 42-year-old artist, who then conducted a series of experiments at home using cooking equipment, when access to art workshop equipment proved hard to come by.

These days, Ye creates art at the

dining table of her family's three-bedroom apartment, storing her new drawings at home. An arts educator who had led the master's programme at Lasalle College of the Arts from 2002 to 2007 and headed the School of the Arts (Sota) visual arts faculty between 2007 and 2010, Ye says her teenage students experience the relationship between art-making and studio space very differently from the postgraduates she taught six years ago.

Using social media platforms such as Instagram, creating short videos and posting them online came naturally to the younger, more recent cohorts at Sota. Ye says they evaluate their own posts as intensely as they conceptualise and execute paintings or sculptures.

"For this generation of young artists, the options are very wide. They engage with art-making and different mediums with great agility, and I think their creative process would adapt seamlessly within and without a studio space."

As for herself, having a larger social space would mean having "lots more physical space to explore scale, size, mediums, materials", Ye says.

"The artworks would develop differently. Not necessarily better, but definitely different."

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