

PRAXIS PRESS

Faculty of Fine Arts • LASALLE College of the Arts Singapore • Catalogue of Events 2010/11 • Fifth Edition 2011

In any discussion concerning the institution and institutional critique, the role of language in the dialectical merry go-round of art discourse is of key importance.

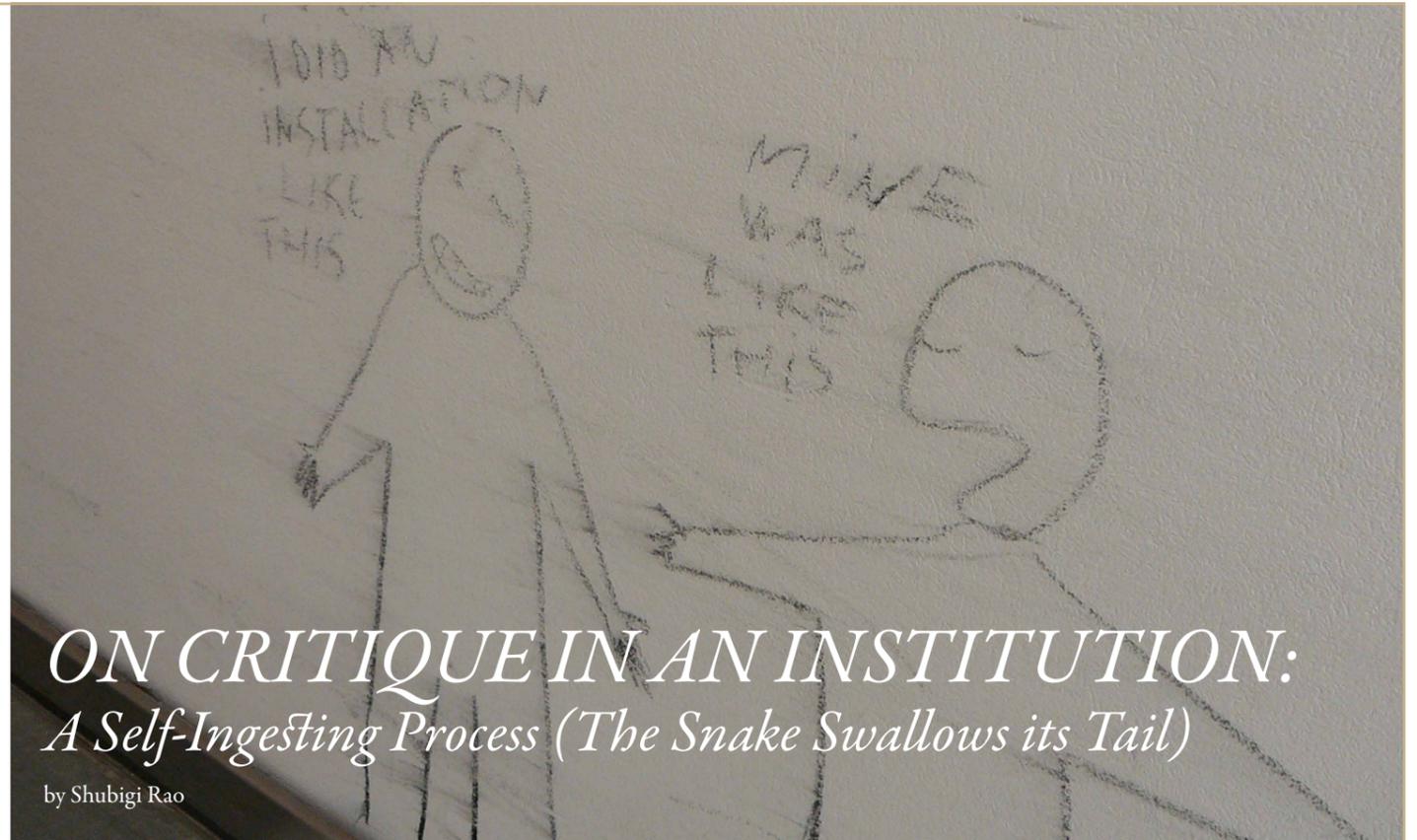
As an area of interest, the role of language forms the larger backdrop to the disappearance of art publications and periodicals in Singapore that promoted genuine discourse, and to the absorption of institutional critique by institutions of the art industry that employ the tools of intervention and subversion as aesthetic strategy. There is, of course, an ambivalent position occupied here, echoed in this incestuous article, written as it is from within the frameworks of experiences within various institutions.

We will begin with the assembly line of the discourse machine: Institutionalised Show → Printed Review → Publicity and Discourse → Canonization.

The term 'Institutionalised Show' includes gallery and museum spaces, as well as 'unconventional' art venues like warehouses, old power stations or airports, which become conventional though their continuation of the accepted norms of exhibiting art, namely curating, the politics of display, and the usual accompanying literature from wall texts to labels, invitation cards to catalogue essays that re-contextualise all the artworks shown in the newer framework of the exhibition event. It is also noteworthy that these self-consciously alternative spaces are officially sanctioned, but never co-opted through guerilla action or squatting.

As for the term 'Printed Review', I would include the obvious reviews in the 'democratic' press, even reviews on television shows, (the implication being that the script would be written by someone with adequate knowledge and critical faculty). 'Publicity and Discourse' refer to the debate that (hopefully) is engendered by Steps One and Two, and which often includes criticism of the institution showing the work! The eventual, desired result is the canonization of the artist and the work within the edifice of the institution, if it is a Museum of worth, or else in the litany of art history.

Often, in discussions that purport to critique the art establishment, one finds the bandying about of terms like 'the public', and 'the art world'. A term like 'the public' is an assumption that is faulty at best – who is 'the public' really, on whose behalf so many artists, critics, writers, politicians and curators claim to speak? Both terms imply a singular cohesive entity, but the polyglot organism that is the 'critical' art world really is in a stage of unusual actors. As artists critiquing institutions function within the parameters of said institutions, the modes of such critique too have changed hands from the artists to the artistic strategists – the curators, critics, museum officials, et al. This shift can be seen as the reassertion of the monolithic structure once weakened by critique, but I suspect such a statement may be simplistic, tempting as it is to romanticise



ON CRITIQUE IN AN INSTITUTION: *A Self-Ingesting Process (The Snake Swallows its Tail)*

by Shubigi Rao

Dan Perjovschi's wall drawings and commentaries at the 52nd International Venice Biennale, 2007.

both the critique and its exponents as coming from a stance yet unsullied and pure.

Institutional critique initially questioned these very notions of purity, objectivity and unassailable knowledge, albeit in the context of the institutional authority, so to canonize institutional critique for its supposed ideological purity seems faintly pejorative. Yet the proof of this canonization is in the absorption of all from Hans Haacke, Michael Asher, Andrea Fraser, even poor Robert Smithson, who "...despite 30 subsequent years of verbiage about institutional critique...seems quite at home in the museum setting". So the snake swallows its tail, and we are wont to ask, what is institutional critique now, and how effective is it really? Is it even valid?

The spectacles that are the art fairs, biennials and triennials are happily appropriating the critical artists' formerly effective tools of intervention and subversion to better validate their continued existence, and to keep up the pretence of a genuine dialectic between viewer, the viewed, the artist, and the institution. Formerly the artwork was the viewed object, now subversion and institutional critique has turned the Institution into the viewed work, a move that has naturally been embraced by the Institutions that cannily recognise the basic premise that they need to be viewed. Falling attendance figures a problem? Get an artist to subvert us! In the face of such a surfeit of sedulous, but fictional utopias, Institutional Critique seems essential today, especially as a means of dealing with the homogeneity that seems implicated in the globalised art market, but it has lost its teeth. From Buren to Smithson, Basquiat to Haring, and Orozco to Santiago Sierra – all are reabsorbed into the institution.

A lot of people are reaching similar conclusions; but what does it portend? Is there really a way for art to exist outside the institutionalised space? Does it still need to, now that, as Andrea Fraser put it, "we are the institution"? Since institutional critique is an Institution, and seems incapable of questioning with originality, does there remain any hope of creating viable counters to the 'culture confinement' of the institutionalised space? The very fact that Institutional Critique is worthy of its capital initials is borne out by its inclusion in the canon of art history and critical theory, and that it is actually taught in art institutions around the world. Newer than new media, Institutional Critique offers itself as the language of power to art students pouring out of art academies all over the world, believing that knee-jerk interventionist/subversive responses to perceived institutional art are an excellent way to revenge themselves on the forced rigours of education and gain a little notoriety along the way.

So how do we wrest control back from the institution, if indeed we, as Fraser's institutions, are to be trusted with the onerous task of generating genuine discourse. Is there another arena in which we can perform? It may seem that a lot can be lauded about the so-called democratic media (the Internet, for one) wresting control from the institutions, freeing art from the atmosphere of 'culture confinement' that has been the hallmark of the museum-dominated art canon. Yet to hail the Internet as the people's voice is as dangerous as blanket condemnation of the hoary institutions; the basic premise of democracy that all are equal, is fallacious, deceptive and runs the risk of forcing a middle-brow conformity to un-scrutinised 'norms'. Wading through the sheer volume of information online, the 'critical' student tends to gravitate to

the perceived anchors of institutions. More often than not, the credentials (which naturally include institution affiliations) of the author outweigh other considerations, when evaluating the content available on the Internet.

The democratic nature of the Internet paradoxically means that it is easier to disregard non-academically substantiated writing as uninformed diatribe and this is reflected in the caveats for citing from the Internet being much stronger than the criteria used for critically appraising the veracity of published matter. Of course, the implication that the book is more liable to be free from such aspersions is laughable, but the published word still holds much authority over the digital one.

In my brief but thrilling immersion in the art of institutional critique as a former student at LASALLE, I had been led to believe that, (like most critical human endeavour), such critique possesses integrity of purpose and an advanced intellectual commitment, and that this criticism is essential to the continued development of the field. Yet much critiquing later, I find myself tempted to conclude that institutional critique, (like most human endeavour), has become an exercise in futility.

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With its established history offering one of LASALLE'S pioneering programmes, the Faculty of Fine Arts provides the most rigorous and professional training for full-time practice as a professional artist. The Faculty emphasises reflection and self-evaluation, demanding enquiry, commitment, self-discipline and a level of collaborative work.

It houses undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Painting, Printmaking, Sculpture, Art Photography, Drawing, Graphic Novel and Time-Based Art.

LEGEND

-  EXHIBITION
-  WORKSHOP
-  ART TALK
-  INTERVIEW
-  TRAVEL
-  COLLABORATION
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26 Nov - 12 Dec, 2010

LESS LIKE A DICTATORSHIP

MAFA Exhibition: 4 out of 12

by Godwin Koay



I will begin simply enough. I am writing in April about the Masters of Arts Fine Arts graduation show. It was called Four Out of Twelve, sometimes stylized in lowercase or numerically as 4/12 or 4:12.

It opened on the 26th of November 2010, occupying the entirety of ICA Galleries 1 & 2. I do not usually write to publish. Somehow I was given free rein over content and direction of this piece meant for the fifth edition of Praxis Press.

I was at the opening, a well-received affair, though nothing compared to the glitzy contemporary-art-party-lifestyle-events we are seeing more of these days. This was one of those exhibitions where the work demanded (and deserved) more of my attention than the drinks and food. Granted, this was partly because I knew I had to write about it; but really, the show was captivating, with each graduating candidate presenting strong, engaging, and diverse snapshots of their individual practices.

There is a temptation to make this about writing, exposing the thoughts that run through my mind, rather than writing strictly about the show. It might just be fitting in an allegorical kind of way due to how a lot of contemporary art tends to ruminate on its own making (which is how I tend to approach my work). What do we look for in a "review" of a show as such? Opinion? Analysis? Anecdote? An authoritative voice? What should a writer try to do? Impress? Surprise? Mislead? Anger?



2 Sept, 2010

ARTIST TALK

— Vertical Submarine

by Upasna Pandey



The editor had informed me that I need not be "politically correct" nor attend to all the artists and their works with my piece. Which is just as well, because I genuinely don't know how I would otherwise provide a review of those works that I did not care much for. My opinion is that a few of the works were pretty "bleh." But is it not that everything is opinion, or at the very least laced with partiality? I would be most wary of the kind of talk that dresses itself up to be 'neutral' or 'factual.'

That is the thing about looking at art, is it not? We are told to develop opinion, and perhaps share it, generate discourse, and propel progress. In fact we probably dream of it. But dare we? Are we trained enough to share it in an honest, yet sensible and sensitive manner? And to receive in kind? Is it about training? Is it about culture? Or character even?

There is an interesting parallel to draw here with Zaki Razak's work in the show (*Ballots, Bullets or Ballets*), in which he proposed an exercise of every viewer's "equal aesthetic rights" (I paraphrase from him and Boris Groys, albeit in slightly altered usage), inviting audience participation through literally voting for one of three works which he had enacted (they are largely situational works) during his MA course. I am not sure of what he plans to do with the ballot; perhaps he would re-enact a work by popular vote, or perhaps it is simply to get people to experience a freedom of expression (as well as its limitations). But imagine if this exercise were somehow extended to the entire show to include all the works, perhaps the viewer could be made aware of how different we all are, but also how lacking our vocabulary of free expression is (or not).

I find myself questioning more and more as I finish my own course of study at LASALLE the relationships between the constructs of art, work, the exhibition, and the structures of power that govern how these things are manifested or understood.

For me, the big problem remains to be the spectacle coupled with the cult of personality; a tyranny imposed upon looker and maker: just why should someone pay attention to me? What do people stand to gain from reading something I write, looking at something I make, watching an action I perform? In this age, in this place, what do we want from contemporary art, from the exhibition, fair, biennial, etc.?

I am not asking this so that audience expectations can be fulfilled, it is a question posed to the artist and her/his imperatives. It becomes all the more relevant within the context of this MA show because purportedly, the candidates who pass through this course and graduate now have the full credentials to be professional artists.

In following the logic of equal aesthetic rights, it is all well and good in the context of an educational institution (in essence the academy), but how do these diverse and experimental works stand up in the market-oriented/dominated scene out there? Can they even hope to be made and shown? Make no mistake, I am not professing support for such a system; on the contrary you would find that my personal stance is an opposite that has been lambasted as "idealistic," "naive" and "unrealistic." So perhaps it is no wonder that I harbour such misgivings, and in some way I am projecting my own anxieties here.

We could see how the institution provides a kind of shelter free from the "meddling forces" of commerce and governance. This, in fact, is the ideal situation the public sphere of discourse (primarily via the arts) is usually envisaged to exist within society, but there is no sugar-coating the state of visual art practice in Singapore (especially), where already the institution is hardly in opposition to the paradigms of capital and competition. What about outside? What kind of space(s) is/are there? Do we enjoy any semblance of equality when it comes to representation of minority or dissenting voices, even amongst those producing work?

What alternative practices are tolerated, or more, given equal leverage? How much falls on personal effort? What of the inequity in who gets where/what? Of what gets seen, promoted, funded? What draws the crowds? What gets acquired by the museums? Why do we even want to be artists in a system that perpetuates dominance? Who is holding this monopoly on the word and usage of "art?" Can we reclaim it?

I had been told that *4 out of 12* alluded to the number of candidates who could "make it" as practicing artists, at least based on attitudes observed during the course. Now that strikes me as a little unfair, but in actuality, just as the statement conflates personal preference and the pressures of competition, it illustrates clearly the flaws of the system that we, individuals passing through and out from the academy, have been conditioned to believe in. But the fact is that this space of expression that art grants is still that little bit freer and more open than the public, social space that we can find. If we are to topple any dictatorial notions outside, it is in here where our quiet resistance begins.



The Italian satirist Dario Fo once said "Comedy makes the subversion of the existing state of affairs possible." And it is through humour and poking fun, that Vertical Submarine brilliantly gets its point across.

On the 2nd of September last year, the trio that form this artist collective were talking the LASALLE audience through their ideas and projects. The group, formed by Joshua Yang, Fiona Koh, and Justin Loke, says its name is a play on the word "subvert". The word has its origins in the Latin "subvertere" which literally means to turn from beneath.

Vertical Submarine's projects unquestionably deal with institutional critique and offer refreshingly bold views. Joshua presented several of their projects and showed how their visuals and text combined in a tongue-in-cheek manner to explore social norms and stereotypes. One example was *Foreign Talent* where they erected a cement statue of an immigrant worker opposite

to the pristine white statue of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles at the Raffles Landing Site so as to put them on the same plane status wise. The writing on the statue's plaque was a parody of the original writing underneath the Raffles statue pointing out how the immigrant workers built the city through their toil and should also receive their due credit. They explain, "It started off as a simple gesture to thank the migrant

workers for building our houses, maintaining our roads, clearing our plates, cleaning our drains and sewers, instead of accusing them of social crimes, for dirtying our garden city; using them as the butt of our provincial jokes; or suspecting them of homosexuality..." Another humorous work they created called *Flirting Point* consisted of a few benches outside the Singapore Art Museum topped with a sign signalling its purpose.



Here they refer to Singapore's obsessive need to have signs and designated areas for everything. *Telly Vision* was installed in an optic shop and was all about the watchful eyes of surveillance cameras. It was a commentary on the immense numbers of CCTV cameras placed all around Singapore and maybe also about how we are all made to feel like potential criminals.

They also talked about their recent show called *Analog Objects* installed in The Post Museum in which they were exploring the relationship between text and image along with linking and "drawing analogies during conversation". The installation consisted of a series of paintings and text which were all connected through conversation and were mapped out on the wall. They were inspired by Umberto Eco's novel *Foucault's Pendulum* and his notions of analogy.

With their charming and laid back personalities, their talk was well appreciated and the audience came back with the feeling that the collective was for Singapore a much needed dose of playfulness and relevance.

26 Nov - 12 Dec, 2010

LIFE IN THE STUDIO & ART PROCESSES

MAFA Exhibition: 4 out of 12

A Personal View On 1½ Years of Institutionalized Art-Making

by Isabelle Desjeux



Sometimes, you'll feel as if you're part of a social experiment. You'll wonder whether they had an ultimate purpose when they chose you and your studio mates. You'll be wondering that often if you have someone in your cohort like our Zaki Razak. You see, he made sure his art interacted with ours at all times. You might think that what you do has nothing to do with the other artists. But you'd be wrong. The moment you inhale this other guy's paint fumes, your art will never be the same. Oh, I don't mean these toxic fumes will be destroying your brain cells (which they will do, but who cares, none of your cells will be around for a long time anyway). I mean that however subtly, they will be affecting how you see your own artwork.

You'll be overwhelmed at being part of a community again. Amazed to see that when you produce something, you can have instant feedback on it. You'll be able to test your ideas and discuss. I urge you to go and see what else is happening in the school. Collaborate. There is so much expertise under this one "roof", and the best way to find it is to set yourself a problem you cannot solve yourself. That will set you knocking on doors and open new horizons.

Finally, you will put up your work. When they ask for gallery sitters, raise your hand. Be there. For your work to become really alive, you need to talk to the people who come to see it. And then the loop is looped. You'll walk out. A professional artist if you choose to be one. Alone once again, but part of a community still. Go and make now.



Dear artist,
May I call you that, or should I wait until you receive your degree? In school, they'll call you "candidate," making sure you stay on the edge of your seat until you're elected maybe.

You'll start wondering about your own work. About how you can achieve so much in so little time. And about whether any of it is relevant.

You've been an artist for a while. You've got your own practice. And then, you have your "proposal". You wrote a big, bold and wild Research Proposal, and that's how you got on the program. And now you're wondering how you're going to achieve what you set out for yourself in the proposal. You don't know if you can do any of what you propose, it's all experimental and new, and that's why they took you on. It might not work, and sometimes, that will keep you awake at night. You'll talk to your supervisors about your doubts, and they'll say it's good if you're confused. That will not make you feel better. You might be tempted to go back to your old practice. After all, you've got experience, you know what works.

But no, you're supposed to use your experience to practice new experiments. Which means you need to risk not getting there for it to be worth your time.

So you'll just start doing something, because no matter what the project, or what the research, there is nothing more fruitless than talking about what is possible rather than trying it. And it won't work. You won't be convinced that what you do has any relevance to your project. You'll be tempted to stop and try something else instead. You'll be convinced that there are all these other artists that do the same thing as you, but do it so much better. You'll probably feel shy about talking about your work to established artists for a while.

You'll wonder whether what you do is art at all.



So, you've come to see the show. Look around, take in the variety of "Fine Art" on display, and reflect. Once you've been touched by Lucinda Law's ethereal display of words and fabric, provoked by Rubin Hashim's hut praising Malay failures; once you've wondered about the content of Edith Podesta's urn long enough to know what's inside without needing to look, and gasped at Steven Lim's strings hanging from the bridge, feeling them above your head, once you've sat, discussed and voted at Zaki Razak's special booth, and been transported to the world of vampires and monsters of Igor Delic, once you've evaluated the paintings of Natasha Arena, lost yourself in the paintings of Liang Cui, seen at close range the clothes of Tim Xie Ying (no, they aren't butterflies on a map), once you've recovered from the illusion created by Rajinder Singh's pile of sand and concrete walls, prayed at Matthew Bax's shrines of sorts, and walked out of your own Laboratory of 'pataphysics, then you'll be ready. Ready to try your hand at being a student once again.





I have been working for over a year with students and lecturers from LASALLE College of the Arts on various projects, from an art workshop for autistic children, to the *Edgeworthia gardneri* paper exhibition held in August 2010, to an overseas community service expedition to Sikkim in December 2010, which resulted in a travelogue exhibition, *The Infinite Supply* of in mid-February 2011.

I must say that it was by fate and not by chance that Singapore Management University (SMU) students were linked up with LASALLE lecturers through Ms Shirley Soh, an ex-student of LASALLE and ex-staff member of SMU. She brilliantly fostered the linkage between our school community project to Sikkim, northeast India, and the artists at LASALLE. The Sikkim community project's focus was on the local village's handmade paper-making unit, which made organic paper from the barks of the Argali plant (*Edgeworthia gardneri*). The first SMU team went up in December 2007. In the 2007 project, before the collaboration, SMU students were going up simply to see how they could contribute to the village. Learning from that first project, SMU students could only contribute the business knowledge they had learned to the small village factory, but were pretty much helpless when it came to improving the actual paper products which were being made and sold, such as notebooks and paper bags. Hence, knowing that the students lacked knowledge about both art and the material, Ms Soh pulled the two institutions together and planted the seed that nobody imagined could blossom into the huge tree that it is today, bearing fruits and providing shelter for various people in Singapore and in Sikkim.

Our first collaboration was an art workshop with autistic children. With the expertise of LASALLE students Bridget Tay, Ashley Yeo and their friends, we co-conducted a workshop sharing the love and joy of art and craft and bringing out the creativity of the children. The workshop ran seamlessly, and the parents were very impressed both by the way it was conducted and the final art products made. One parent went to the extent of asking if she could replicate the materials at home so that her son could play with them. I was amazed at the simplicity of creating beautiful products from simple materials and bringing joy to others in the process.

The next collaboration was a big one, the *Edgeworthia gardneri* exhibition at Praxis Space in August 2010. Lecturers and students used the Argali paper we brought back from the village from the 2009 Sikkim expedition and created beautiful pieces of art, bringing out the essence of a basic material that most

Aug 4 - 13, 2010

EDGEWORTHIA GARDNERI

What we can learn from LASALLE artists/Students

by Lin Weijian

of us take for granted. Words alone cannot do justice to the amazing art pieces that the LASALLE artists made, because of the whole range of creativity and skill that went into the creation process. I will let the pictures of the artwork do the talking.

After the successful week-long exhibition, new works of art were created for another exhibition at SMU in October 2010, *The Sustainable Shop*. The concept behind the shop was to sell sustainable and interesting products related to a community like Sikkim and channel the funds raised back to the community. Fresh paper was flown in from Sikkim and LASALLE artists got cracking again, demonstrating their creativity and passion for art and paper through the artworks and products. Paper was transformed into many shapes, sizes and applications such as sling bags, wallets, and boxes, and attracted a lot of attention and sales from visitors, raising a substantial amount for the village in Sikkim.

By this time, we had also started to recruit members for the December 2010 Sikkim expedition, and we knew we had to get LASALLE artists on board to add more value to the paper-making unit and share the love for art and craft with the school children. These students and lecturers were very supportive and integrated well as a team as we worked on the pre-trip administrative details and planning meetings for the expedition. On the trip itself, they shared their knowledge of art and paper with the paper-making unit, exchanging information, creating new art forms, and improving the product lines which the manager Mr. Jaganath Sharma, was very thankful for.

Today, we have evangelists for the paper-making unit and Sikkim in the form of passionate LASALLE students and teachers, and through their own initiative, they shared their stories with us at the recent travelogue exhibition, *The Infinite Supply* of showcasing their experiences and feelings in Sikkim.

The whole experience of liaising and working with LASALLE artists got me to reflect on certain special traits and lessons that I felt everyone can learn from and I would like to share them here:

Here is an account of our volunteer trip that lasted a fortnight, in aid of the Borong Polok Handmade Paper Unit (PMU), based in a humble village nestling on the slopes of the Sikkim Himalayas (North-east India).

Singapore - Kolkata - Bagdogra - Sikkim

Sikkim is the second smallest state in India, which lies between the borders of Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan. Coined as India's "Last Shangri-la", Sikkim opened her doors only in the recent years to welcome more visitors to this otherwise inaccessible landlocked region. There are plans for an airport to be built in the state, but before this happens, traveling to our destination was not short of some hassles in between, for it took more than a day to get to our destination.

The team departed Singapore on the evening of Friday, 3rd of December, to transit the next afternoon from Kolkata on a two hour flight to Bagdogra Airport. It was from there that our hosts received us, secured our backpacks on the top of our respective jeeps (the main mode of transport) and then set off on a 5 hour-long journey.

The scenery changed as we hit the road from Bagdogra - it transitioned from the flat, dusty dirt roads in daylight, to another realm of heights and endless views of plunging cliffs while we ascended the slopes in a long and winding corkscrew fashion. Here, the sun kissed us goodbye by 5pm and suddenly I felt transported to a Jurassic Park-like adventure, minus the prehistoric beasts.

1) **Passion.** The courage to pursue something which they strongly believe in is one of the first things you can feel when you interact with LASALLE students. Passion exuded from every word and action when you talked to them about their art and lives. Not many of us have the courage to live passionately, and I believe that if everyone were to live their passions, there would be no sad people in this world. I really admire this special trait of theirs.

2) **Awareness.** Awareness of self, of the raw material and of the world. Be a master of yourself and you are the master of the world. LASALLE artists that I talk to have a huge awareness of themselves as human beings in this world and the world they come into contact with. Some of my peers rush through life busying themselves with everything and anything, never stopping to take a break to find their true selves - something that I too am guilty of. I think it is very important to learn to stop and reflect every once in a while so that one can really live with purpose and lead a meaningful life.

3) **Creativity.** Often, when we are confronted with a problem, we sometimes shirk and think of using solutions which are already tried and tested. LASALLE artists taught me to not only think within the box, but out of the box too to explore unique solutions that might solve the problem. A perfect example was the problem of raising funds for the expedition. In the discussions, many original ideas were suggested by LASALLE artists, and I learned that we need to think of possibilities rather than constraints and then work within the constraints to make things happen. That is truly creativity as espoused by many great artists.

In conclusion, within the short span of a year, I have been humbled and inspired through my various interactions with LASALLE artists, and I am very thankful for the lessons they have taught me. Collaborating on various projects was a joy, and I certainly hope more can happen in the future. I now know myself better and try to reflect these traits in my life through my conduct, and I must say that it has made me a better person. I hope they do the same for you too. Thank you LASALLE.

Those with kinetosis popped a pill and snoozed through the bumpy ride, missing out on the panoramic magnificence of the clear night sky. Up here, the canopy of night stars spangled endlessly and became one with the silhouette of the mountain slopes, transforming the lit homes in the distance as part of the heavenly bodies. We passed through several small towns, and caught a glimpse of the houses by the side of the road through the headlights. It was queer, for they resembled small English cottages with flowerpots of Marigold hanging from the verandas and well-kept gardens. I thought to myself, "This doesn't look like the India I had envisioned", and recalled a quote: To travel is to discover that everyone is wrong about other countries.

The temperature dropped drastically as we reached the higher altitudes and it was freezing by the time we finally arrived at Sangam Academy (SA); a junior school in Borong Polok village with tiny classrooms converted to our dorms. We unloaded our backpacks with chattering teeth, carrying them down a meandering flight of stone steps whilst trying to keep our balance and fighting the cold, then headed to our makeshift kitchen for dinner.

Prabhat (Morning)

I woke up on the Sunday at 5.30am. Since breakfast would only be served later at 8.30am, I went for a solitary stroll to explore and to better navigate myself around the village. The villagers had warmly welcomed us with a banner that says "SIKKIM VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME 2010 CONDUCTED

BY TEAM VIDYALAY'S SINGAPORE", which we had missed the night before.

Orientation started after joining the rest of the team to the nearby waterfall, followed by breakfast. It began in the office, where our hosts, Nir and Anand introduced us to our cooks. It is customary in Sikkim, as the only state in India that had an ethnic Nepalese majority with strong Buddhist influence that visitors are presented with welcome gifts in the form of a traditional ceremonial scarf called the Khada, which symbolizes purity of intention and the beginning of relationships.

After lunch, we visited the local monastery, a 15-minute hike from the main road. It was under construction, and in the process of being painted with colorful Tibetan patterns. We went higher up and finally arrived at a resort right above the monastery, where we took a rest in the sitting area where hot tea was served.

Raatri (Night)

Dusk comes to Sikkim prior to 5pm, and despite the diminishing light, we managed to make our way back for dinner before it turned pitch-dark. Power shortages occurred often and it made time pass more slowly than ever. Without electricity, our activities were limited but the 'inconveniences' might just be a blessing in disguise, turning the situation into excellent times for us to just unwind from our typical Singaporean workaholic lifestyle, and engage in lighthearted chitchat with our newly acquainted snuggling around a bonfire built by the locals.

I had learnt that village life is not designed to be comfortable, but instead, to experience what it is like to be out of my comfort zone and live like them. Most of us were not suited for the cold; even Nir and Anand told us they were not prepared for the precipitous weather change in Borong. Previously, they were able to cope with just short-sleeve cotton t-shirts during the winter, but it has since changed due to the ill effects of global warming. We too were experiencing the harsh and unpredictably cold winter season as they were.

The chilly weather took some getting used to. Being unfamiliar to the temperature plunge to 4°C at nighttime, the 7 layers I had on the first night proved to be insufficient. What made it worse was that we did not have a heating system, and the walls of the classrooms were not insulated so the draft could slip through the tiny gaps of the rattan woven walls and through the slit under the wooden door.



Borong Polok Handmade Papermaking Unit

Paper has traditionally been made in Sikkim from the bark of the Argali (*Edgeworthia gardneri*) shrub; an abundantly occurring shrub and can be easily propagated. The strength and durability of the Argali paper makes it particularly suitable for monastic scriptures, governmental land records as well as decorative purposes in the form of lampshades and souvenirs. To meet this growing demand, Sikkim Development Foundation (SF) set up Borong Polok Papermaking Unit, a self sustaining unit which would also generate local employment and supplement income for the community.

The purpose of us, as LASALLE representatives, was to facilitate the workforce at the PMU with the exchange of knowledge and technical skills that will contribute to the sustainable development of the products produced. This was achieved in the 5 main workshops we conducted: Silkscreen Frame Building, Silkscreen Printing, Pulp Bead making, Paper Bead making and Book Binding Workshops.



We were privileged to work alongside the 6 employees at the PMU (all ladies except for Mr. Jagan) in its natural setting, getting to know them, as well as how the PMU operated. The ladies were shy and hardly spoke to us, as they were not fluent in the English language, however they would try to converse with us through gestures, and participated earnestly during the hands-on sessions we had. When there was time to spare, we shared our knowledge in other additional activities such as a woodblock printing session and a paper beads-making kids workshop at SA. As we interacted with Mr. Jagan, we also shared photographs of the *Edgeworthia gardneri* & *The Sustainable Shop* exhibitions held in Singapore in 2010, to inform Mr. Jagan about the success of his handmade paper amongst Singaporean artists, who had created artworks from his Argali paper.

As our work progressed at the PMU, so did the Education Team at SA. Morning exercise preceded lesson time, both of which were conducted on the courtyard with a chalkboard and 3 wooden benches. The volunteer tutors corrected and strengthened the childrens' foundation in basic English and Mathematics, taught them about other cultures and tried to raise their awareness of conserving their environment through creative activities and songs. These sessions often ended with running games to keep the children warm.

Sikkim and Singapore are both peaceful countries to grow up in, however, in my view, this 'peace' is varied in the context of the respective locality. Singaporean children might seem to be much better off being sheltered in solid foundations with a conducive learning environment fed with technology. Then again, who is to say the Borong children are not lucky when they are kept away from urbanized society, growing up in the company of nature, which encourages these Sikkimese kids to take their own time to discover and nurturing them to become independent adults of fine, good-natured temperaments. This, I find, is a wonderful value that is missing in a competitive and meritocratic society like ours. Unlike the Sikkimese, Singaporeans rush too much and sometimes fail to fully understand or appreciate what we have, resulting perhaps to a sense of complacency and taking things for granted.

Mr. Jaganath Sharma

What kept me going throughout the trip was working with Mr Jagan; he was a joker in his own way and can be unpredictable with the surprises he springs on people. As we worked closely with Mr. Jagan at the PMU, we learnt more about the humble family person that he is, his love for nature and his passion of running his factory.

On a particular day just after the bead workshop, Mr Jagan was feeling inspired by Ashley's bumblebee beads and instantaneously made a flower paper cut and sprinkled some sawdust on the flower to create a pollen-like bead. You could say that Mr Jagan was truly a creative innovator, as he also continued to experiment with ways that he could make more beads at the shortest time with his idiosyncratic techniques.

At times, Mr. Jagan would abruptly leave midway through conversations to pluck berries, hunt for flowers and twigs in order to better illustrate his intentions as he found it difficult to translate them from Nepalese. Once, he started Betty and I when we were hiking up the path from PMU, as he suddenly leapt onto a tree from the side of the slope, gathered some red fruits and threw them to us. Apparently, he had spotted some ripe fruits, called Turmate and simply wanted us to have a taste of the fruit.

He also has good knowledge of the medicinal plants of Sikkim, for he is the proud owner of the lesser-known local Wild Flower Retreat, the only 'hotel' you can book to stay at Borong Polok. This 'hotel' comprised of 6 cottages - log cabins that are nestled amidst a beautiful garden of herbs and flowers. Ayurvedic treatment is very popular in Borong, as the nearest hospital is approximately a 3-hour drive away. Sometimes the locals would pluck leaves, such as the Tittay Patti (Nepali for Common Wormwood) and put it to our noses as an instant cure to morning sinus and the flu. When Sachita found out that I was having a sore throat, she recommended shredded ginger and salt with boiling water, and it actually tasted really delicious like chicken soup!

Mr. Jagan, I discovered, is also a relentless and determined person. Over tea at his home, I found out from his wife that she had sleepless nights and lost appetite when her husband risked his life in an excruciating 9-hour ordeal on foot, to the nearest post office in town to deliver an Argali paper order to Singapore. She explained that no jeeps would take him down to the capital as it was the monsoon season where increasing possibilities of landslides made transportation extremely perilous, so the roads had to be closed. He went anyway, carrying the 30kg load on his back, covered with only a huge plastic sheet, even though everyone in the village told him not to. The delivery left Mr. Jagan hospitalized for 3 days as his both legs swelled due to water retention and the pressure exerted on them. When we found out that this particular delivery was made especially for us in Singapore for the purpose of *The Sustainable Shop* exhibition, I felt so guilty and broke down. Sometimes when he comes to mind again, tears still well up in my eyes.

Namaste!

In the "happy homeland" (Sikkim is derived from a local dialect, "Sukh-im"), we were always greeted with smiling people, most who are still innocent and unspoiled by the ways of modern life. We were puzzled at how people in Borong could remain so cheery all the time, and wondered if they ever got angry at anyone. We got our answer from Mr. Jagan who quipped that "seldom people get angry in Borong but if they do, they will be happy again in one to four hours".

This Sikkim trip was a wonderful cultural exchange experience as we went regularly for house visits, and even crashed a wedding! On some evenings, we were invited to students' homes. We were shown to their sitting rooms, where they served us tea, biscuits and home made crackers, and the ladies had henna designs applied by candlelight.

The Sikkimese are always enthusiastic to strike up conversations, and also as eager to share what they have. Once I was alone exploring when I met a farmer of the pea plantation nearby SA. Even though he could not speak English well, he tried to ask me how I was doing in Sikkim and offered me a bunch of peas freshly plucked from his crop. It was a simple gesture, but it goes a long way and I fondly remember that incident until today.

Living in Borong heals the soul, and I was rejuvenated. But now that I am back here, I am greeted by either stern stares, or we pass neighbours without looking at each other at all. People in cosmopolitan cities keep to themselves, which makes me miss meeting friendly strangers everyday in Borong who appreciates life and in turn appreciated my existence.

Jaam (Let's Go) Happiness

A thought came to mind on a train ride home, and I asked myself how and what makes me love a place. This trip was different from my other wanderlusts. Upon reflection, I realised it was the strong bonds forged with the people that make one feel different about a place. The love for the people I have met and encountered on this trip are etched in my memory and difficult to erase.

In just 2 weeks, a strange bond was forged with the villagers - it was a warm and indescribable feeling I have never experienced in my life. I came back to the fast paced Singapore feeling recharged, exceptionally happy and missing everyone from Borong.

I hope that some of the climatic problems and issues of road blockages during the season of landslides will be resolved soon. I am also confident that at the rate that Mr Jagan is working at, always on the ball with having many ideas, the PMU will be more successful than now. Only time will tell, with patience and determination. We just need to continue to be positive and support the worthy cause of promoting the PMU in whatever way we can. And I will pray on our side, that this year will be a good year for everyone, and for the years to come.

Malai Sikkim Maanparche (I love Sikkim)! It is certain that I am saving up for my plane ticket back.



Betty Susiarjo, Ashley Yeo, Mandy Tan, Chong Weixin and Michelle Lim represented LASALLE College of the Arts in Project Sikkim, under the banner of an independent youth expedition team, Team Vidyalyay (derived from a hindi word, which means Education). They were joined by an engineer, Foo Yongchang, and worked together in the local Handmade Paper-making Unit.

Dec 3 -19, 2010

MALAI SIKKIM MAANPARCHA

by Michelle Lim



It has been exactly 4 months now since my return to the land of concrete jungles, but the memories of the village of Borong Polok still haunt me till today in both my thoughts and dreams; I am definitely still having the Sikkim Withdrawal Syndrome.





"One travels to taste the unknown in the pursuit of meanings, but often the traveler returns as a witness of life's abundance."



Feb 16 - 25, 2011

THE INFINITE SUPPLY OF

by Michelle Lim



Passersby who came close to LASALLE's faux green on the evening of 16th February 2011 would have noticed the transformation of the usually pallid Praxis Space into a colorfully decorated gallery, with rectangular flags installed high up the longitudinal side in a rather haphazard manner. And then nearing the entrance, there was a hint of dramatic music of an unfamiliar language resonating through the glass windows and the opened door. Any curious individual would have been drawn to the space, to be instantly converted into one of the many guests greeted by a humble reception, with a wooden box filled with a selection of teabags and an electric kettle to fill your cup.

Was there a festivity going on?

The scene was neither a tea tasting session, nor was it a fiesta. Those flags were actually replicas of Tibetan prayer flags (without the Buddhist sutras) hung to spread goodwill and compassion to the visitors, the sounds came from Hindi-Nepali origin, and the chai, a rich mix of the essences of India. In fact, that very evening marked the opening of *The Infinite Supply of*, a travelogue exhibition inspired by a recent trip to a village on the South Sikkim Himalayas. A set of 5 jackets worn by the artists-turned-adventurers, accompanied by Khadas received during the trip, nearly hung under the hand-painted exhibition title, seen from the entrance, marked their presence.

The team of artists, which consisted of lecturer Betty Susiarjo, recent graduate, Michelle Lim, and three Undergraduate students, Ashley Yeo, Mandy Tan and Weixin Chong, from LASALLE's Faculty of Fine Arts, set off to Borong Polok village in December 2010 to work with the local Handmade Papermaking Unit. They found themselves soaked in the harsh beauty of the natural surroundings, and tasted the rugged tenacity and warmth of village life for two weeks, along with their peers who were affiliated with the Singapore Management University.

A travel to a remote place like such prepares them to live in modesty and scarcity, yet the magic of the place made these travelers, eyewitnesses of life's richness. Now that the quintet are finally back, they jointly planned the event to share about their 16-day volunteer expedition, engaging visitors from the Lion City with simulated encounters set in a homely Sikkimese flavor, as well as a series of artworks that preserved cherished memoirs from the journey – a small and finite slice of the infinite largeness they were privileged to experience.

Without a doubt, this exhibition opening was an intimate affair. We all worked together as curators, by creating a lively atmosphere of the event so as to place the viewer in an environment that imitated that of a wedding party they had attended during the



trip, enhancing the entire experience with the songs that had entertained them on the long jeep rides up and down the precarious land. At the corner of the space a video loop containing photographs that informed the viewer of the expedition's location and activities was being played. In addition to the sights and sounds, a whiff of aroma from takeaway boxes drew hungry audiences for a treat! As part of our reception, we served Momos, homemade traditional Nepalese dumplings, and this time, the exhibition was really also about the food.

7 Days A Week

The Momos being served during the opening complemented Weixin's artworks perfectly, as she displayed ceramic dumplings packed in some of the self-made take-out boxes, reminding us of the lovely friends from Borong who had taken the trouble to make the dish from scratch, in a place where the environment was harsh.

7 Days A Week is the most colourful piece from her body of works, reflecting the daily encounters of one residing in the village. You could buy Momos as well as local pastries, packed in patterned paper boxes there, which possesses a different aesthetic compared to the packaging of food in the more developed regions in the world.

There was something reassuring and friendly about the earthy handmade look that many items had and Weixin tried to interpret that in her series, which embodied the hospitality of the things that seem familiar yet different at the same time. Being fascinated by such patterns on the pastry boxes, Weixin silkscreened designs on the coloured tracing paper to reflect upon the personal touches that underscore every exchange during this trip.



Sketches and Pressed Flowers from Borong Polok

The exhibit of dried flora amongst journal pages pinned on the walls is vast but yet do not overwhelm the viewer. Instead, these entries by Ashley quietly invite one to take a step closer to peer at the tiny writings that accompany the sketches that were rendered in loose strokes.

These sketchbook extracts recorded everyday conversations capturing those memories without technology, but with the mighty pen. As you peer through the diary pages like a voyeur, unspoken words amidst these sketches made on site allows you to piece together the world that Ashley was part of in the fortnight in December.

Incidents such as the *Curse of the Strawberry Socks* (where she illustrated her belief that wearing her favourite pair of socks, was the main reason why 2 pairs of slippers snapped in consecutive episodes) and a self-portrait, which indicated a list of borrowed garments from different team mates used as part of her daily wear, conveyed a curiosity in human responses and her gratitude towards all things great and small. They reflected an intrinsic side of Ashley, which is seldom seen in her more well-known melancholic mix-media artworks that deal with fantastical characters; this time instead, Ashley was engaging with real people.

The Protection Series

A comfort object provides psychological comfort, especially in times of stress and a travel away from home. Walking through the exhibition, a security blanket is spotted, made from a combination of Sikkimese printed silk sewn between muslin. Upon closer inspection, Betty's Muslin Blanket was also embellished with ceramic buttons at one of its ends, custom made for *The Protection Series*. These irregular buttons resembled unpolished rocks in earthy tones, emulating the landscape of the rough mountainous region, and were stitched on the other comfort objects in the series.

During the period of travel, Betty had noticed that her travel companions sought comfort in different objects taken from home, and established a cause in safeguarding these items. This brought about the an interesting idea of creating handmade cases and covers for these comfort objects which interestingly enough include Mandy's Torch and Vitamin-C Case, Ashley's Cosmetic Bag, Weixin's Chickpea Bag and Michelle's Crystal Bag - each personalized and named after her respective roommates.

Dancing Men & Pocketful of Sunshine

Coming back to a busy Singaporean lifestyle, the recollections of the simple life urged Mandy and Michelle to imagine an escape back to where they had been.

This trip has certainly strengthened the willpower of an individual, and Mandy's longing to return was evident in her framed drawings, as they lie frozen in time on the wooden shelves. It also brought about an affirmative change, and the courage to take on new approaches in creating artworks as seen in *Dancing Men* where Mandy had created designs around the subject using pyrography.

Both of us translated our emotions in a set of whimsical drawings of the beings that intrigued us. In *Pocketful of Sunshine*, instead of articulating an idea, the portraits that I had drawn expressed the tender feelings I felt in Sikkim and above all, my growing fondness for the strangers in Sikkim who had now become great friends.

The envelopes were created with the thought that it will demand more than a regular sized envelope to contain the never-ending letters I will write to my new friends. These drawings were illustrated on handmade envelopes of unusual designs, with hidden quirks; *Pocketful of Sunshine #7: Hajur! I Want To Grow Old Like Amai* was an envelope that revealed the head of an elderly Sikkimese lady with a discreet septum ring (common in Sikkim), and in #2 of the series, *Mr. Jaganathan & The Freshly-picked Turmates*, I had depicted on the inside of the folder the drawing of the manager of the local Paper Making Unit holding up bright red fruits when opened.

I chose to use a palette of warm colour for this body of work as contrasted with the usual darker nature of some of my other self-exploratory works, and Mandy's series of works were also reflective of her self-discovery during her time up in the Himalayas.

All in all, we saw many developments in our recent works. Frankly, I felt the works came across as very positive artworks that were light-hearted and full of joy. The intense feelings of happiness from the village of Borong Polok were contagious, and I hope it will continue to infect everyone with high spirits as the memories of Sikkim still linger.

Nov 3 - 11, 2010

RAW

A figure drawing exhibition



by Nicole Yap



It was in early November of last year that the nude human body was exhibited in Praxis space in the form of drawings made by Level One Fine Arts Faculty students from the Figure Drawing elective.

Entitled RAW, the title was aptly chosen as portraits of models standing in various types of poses were

portrayed in each piece. Manifested through a variety of splashes, scribbles and sprawls, the exhibition ran for two hours on the opening evening on November 3rd, and consequently stayed open for the remainder of the week. The stream of drawings appeared captivatingly haphazard from afar, inviting the interest of students around the campus. Varying in size and tone, each piece evoked the individual artist's sense of calm, passion, or frustration in the drawing process.

And while the exhibited artists chattered away nervously over paper cups around the nearby snack table, a small crowd of spectators began growing outside the glass walls as passersby gawked at the various depictions of poses, some more 'raw' than others, but all in the name of art.

Nibbling on grapes and crackers, some members of the audience took a closer look inside to examine the techniques and applications used in the showcased works that hung side by side on sheets of white and brown paper. The unembellished human form, mostly faceless, though at times completely headless, incited an almost fixated sense of wonder at both the bravado of the subject in the drawings as well as the boldness in the lines that carried them.

13 Oct - 13 Nov, 2010

THE SUSTAINABLE SHOP:

Notes from the Curators

by Shirley Soh & Brendan Goh



"...the shop was not meant to be just a retail shop; it was first and foremost an art exhibition."



The idea and form of The Sustainable Shop came from an exhibition I attended while I was in Venice for an internship. One evening, while crossing the street on the way back to my apartment, instead of finding on blue plastic tarps the usual counterfeit branded bags, I found a series of postcards.

Resisting the feel-good factor

By Shirley Soh

Sustainability has become a buzzword, not just on ecological agendas, but also in business and politics. What is sustainability? Broadly defined as improving the quality of life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting eco-systems, sustainability has been described as a 'dialogue of values that defies consensual definition'. Artists have engaged with the subject as far back as the early 1970s that saw the beginnings of the environmental movement. In danger of being reduced to a feel-good mantra used too readily, the subject of sustainability bears re-visiting over and over again.

When Singapore Management University (SMU) broached the subject of sustainable development as a theme for an exhibition, I leapt at the opportunity. The brief was actually quite precise – to explore the theme of sustainable development through the social enterprise model based on three of their overseas community service projects: an ecotourism project for a fishing village in Konleng Phe, Cambodia; an economic self-reliance enterprise for the urban poor in Jakarta, Indonesia; and a community paper-making cooperative in Borong Polok, Sikkim. The communities, such as the trash pickers in urban Jakarta, the subsistence fishermen and farmers in Cambodia and Sikkim respectively, were all struggling to eke out a living. SMU students, as business and management novices, were challenged to identify sustainable means of livelihood for these people. One group the SMU students had met, the trashpickers in Jakarta, was already part of a social enterprise selling recycled plastic bags. Not surprisingly, the idea of a shop sprung immediately to mind as the physical

Information as Installation

By Brendan Goh

I remember one specifically: it had the view of the bridge connecting the island of Venice to the mainland. One of the road signs on the bridge had been altered or installed with an epigram – 'Inside only to buy'.

These postcards and their distribution at various locations on the island turned out to be part of a publicity programme for Migropolis, an exhibition of a structural forensic mapping of the city of Venice, by Wolfgang Scheppe and the class of the Politics of Representation at the Università IUAV exhibited at the Galleria di Piazza San Marco.

A unique collaboration between calm and careful compositions juxtaposed with sometimes repetitive and random markings, experimentations in medium ranged from predominantly grayscale charcoal and ink, to colorful additions in pastel and watercolor, all marking out the human body in the fluidity, or stiffness of the subject's pose.

Fellow classmates Karen Heng and Elena Lopez both had their work showcased too. Level One students majoring in both Printmaking and Painting, were so enthusiastic about the weekly classes that they planned the exhibition together with the curator, Noriko Suzuki-Bosco in the hope that it would raise interests levels and recognition in the art of figure drawing.

My mental image of what a figure drawing class experience would involve the daunting task facing a class full of awkward artists scrutinising a model standing in the center, while the students plot every flaw and freckle of his/her body on their chosen material surface. An atmosphere thick with invisible regulations broadcast by the lecturer to the students through telepathic warnings that scream "Don't Stare!", "Don't Laugh!", and heaven forbid the consequences of making eye contact!



format for the exhibition, which morphed to include the participation of LASALLE's Fine Arts and Design students and lecturers producing original works made from plastic, handmade paper and batik material.

But the shop was not meant to be just a retail shop; it was first and foremost an art exhibition. Sustainable development, social enterprise, and community engagement are all big words that easily slide into meaningless jargon or become unfocused concepts. Co-curator Brendan Goh's proposal of ethnographical interviews provided the foundation for the exhibition, a reminder of what and who sustainable development should serve. From interviews conducted by the SMU students, the stories of these people, left behind in the globalised economic system, came to life in pictures and text all around the walls of the exhibition space. Many stories were unforgettable: the principal of the only school in the Cambodian village, who uses the forest for his daily toilet, or the Jakarta slum dweller turned NGO worker who writes stories about slum life for a magazine as her source of income and working now at her first novel. These personal stories were contrasted with global data to bridge the distance between abstract statistics and human experience, in the work titled *The Global Meets the Personal*.

Another work in the exhibition consisted of a large-scale mind-map placed in the cavernous SMU concourse, entitled *Minding the Gap*. The map deconstructed the various concepts behind the terms, sustainable development and social enterprise, and reflected on the gaps often found between intended outcomes and actual results. Other works included *From Here to There*, which combined maps, satellite images and photographs to offer a glimpse into the environment of the communities featured in the exhibition, and *The River Café*, which sold water brought in from the

The most striking aspect of the project was its research and how it articulated its thesis through information design. While its depth could have rendered the project abstract and somewhat impenetrable, the use of maps, models, graphs and images, employed both wit and humour in interrogating the confluence of the forces of globalization, migration and economics on the social fabric and urban space. The product of the project was an enormous archive comprising tens of thousands of photographs, case studies and interviews, movement profiles, and statistical data compiled and published in a two-volume collection.

In my practice, one of my laments has been the sheer difficulty in bridging the distance between an idea and its impact in the wider social context.

Yet however theatrical my imaginary enactment of the circumstances may be, how does one begin to decide the route to take in portraying the human body in all its character and complexity?

For Carrie Chen, the body in front of her simply became an object and the experience was no different than that of drawing a bottle or a vase in a still life class. One simply takes a point and then allow the line to journey itself on the paper, whilst at times the gaze brings one to another part of the body, and thus the journey rejoined itself there again.

No matter the various interpretations of the human body by many of my fellow course-mates, these diverse perspectives can certainly be discerned in this exhibition. Noriko had chosen to curate all the selected pieces in a haphazard salon-like manner, thus inducing the audience to not view the drawings in the usual white-cube gallery installation, but rather to allow white-cube gallery installation, but rather to allow the multitude of bodies in an equally haphazard manner. This I would not say is a bad thing, considering that the route one takes to draw the human figure does not begin from a definite fixed starting point, but might in essence, travel from one plateau of the body to the next in a chaotic, random and haphazard fashion.

rivers of Tonle Sap in Cambodia, Ciliwung in Jakarta and the Singapore river, tested for their potability, and their results shown side by side. *The Story of the Borong Polok Handmade Paper-Making Unit*, a student-produced documentary, featured the small paper factory owned by community stakeholders in Borong Polok, the village in South Sikkim, India. Finally, *The Cost of Things* was the price tag on each and every item in the shop revealing the cost breakdown behind each product and thus, the priorities of a market-driven economic system.

Representations of poverty can easily translate to a voyeurism that becomes a perverse form of entertainment. Trying to speak from a Singapore perspective on behalf of the other, who is poor and culturally distant, is already fraught with the complicity of a privileged viewpoint. Hence, the enthusiastic response from LASALLE Fine Arts and Design students and lecturers in offering ideas and creating prototypes became, for me, the most sincere part of the exhibition; as sincere we have to be on this subject of sustainable development. *The Sustainable Shop* is thus grateful to the following, whose works appeared in *The Cost of Things*:

Lena Ah-Tune, Teresa Almeida, Veriana Aristian, Deusa Blumke, George Chin Zuo Zhi, Kray Chen Kerui, Tina Cheung, Chong Weixin, Johnson Chu, Huang Yizhan, Adeline Kueh, Hazel Lim, Javier Lim, Stanley Lim, Muhammed Andri, Nishi Norifumi, Yapp Poi Chee, Cindy Salim, Handriana Sulistiadi, Betty Susiarjo, Noriko Suzuki-Bosco, Tan Jack Ying, Melissa Tan, Tan Rui Wen, Tammy Bakri Tan, Tiffany Tan Yen Ting, Bridget Tay, Teng Kok Meng, Michael Timothy, Emily Wills, Michelle Lim, Satasha Wong, Ryan Xie, Jennifer Yen Hsiang Yun, Ashley Yeo, Vicky Riana Yeo, Nathania Zaini and Zainudin Samsuri.

As we approach the point of information overload, where we are constantly assailed by minutiae through our connection with the media and Internet, how do we make sense of it all? That was the driving question throughout the making of this show—how could we highlight shadowed relationships between conditions of localities, flows of money aided by commerce, and the producers and consumers? The Sustainable Shop was the result – an installation that appropriated the form of a retail shop at one of the unutilized commercial spaces in SMU.

The Sustainable Shop exhibition is now archived at http://www.secd.sg/repository/the_sustainable_shop. More information about Migropolis is available at www.migropolis.com.

FEATURED
ARTICLE



Feb 8 - 18, 2011

A CONVERSATION WITH BETH HARLAND ON THE CULTURE OF THE FRAGMENT

by Ian Woo

“I think that chance procedures lead to a totally different view of individual elements and gestures within a piece”

Beth Harland studied at The Ruskin School of Art, Oxford University, and Royal College of Art, London. She is currently Director of the Graduate School, Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton.

IW: You have from time to time spoken about the influence of Proust's in your work. Would you consider that the idea of fragments was pivotal in influencing your art making processes? Or were there other influences that prompted you in this approach to thinking about time as a visual device?

BH: I first read Proust's *Remembrance of things past* when I was a student but it was only much later that I started to make connections between that text and my own interests in thinking about painting's temporality. But when I look back to my student work, I'm surprised to see how central the use of fragmentation and a collage aesthetic (sometimes actual collage, sometimes painted collage) was even then. I was interested in the fact that a picture plane could hold so many different spaces and temporalities simultaneously; that the elements could be facets of a singular experience (as with Cubism) or multiple experiences (now so vastly expanded by digital imaging).

I was always drawn to works that attempted to articulate the complexities of time and memory, whether through writing or visual art. Proust's work has also led me to Bergson and Deleuze whose writings have been influential in my practice. I'm still working through this longstanding preoccupation with the fragment and am thinking about how fragmentation has changed as a concept within writing and pictorial practice through Romanticism, Modernism, Postmodernism; how do we view it now in the time of the digital?

IW: When I think about the visual creation of deconstructed cities in digital CGI movies, then Cornelia Parker's sculptural explosions and Julie Neruto's dispersed cityscape drawings came to mind. I guess there is an increasing acceptance of fragmentation as physical realisations in this day and age that is unlike that of early modernism, whilst Cezanne's fragmentation of light seems more of a conceptual approach than in suggesting broken perspectives. Do you feel then that technology has allowed us to better appreciate fragmentation as a major influence of our everyday life?

BH: My first reaction to your mention of CGI movies is to think about the way in which this use of fragmentation implies that however much we might think we are now used to the fragment as a force in life, we are still afraid of it. These kinds of terrors coexist with, or underlie, an element of pleasure in the image of 'disaster' inherent in such cinematic scenes of catastrophic breakdown. Of course the apocalypse is an ancient theme, and there is a way of connecting Leonardo's fantastic drawings of deluge with the contemporary artists you mention; the digital version of these disaster scenarios perhaps also leads to a reflection upon man-made aspects of current threats to stability in everyday life.

I think my interest in the fragment has at certain points overlapped with an engagement with the subject of disaster, first sparked by

Maurice Blanchot's text *Writing the Disaster* which is written as a series of fragments to address trauma but also representation and the very task of writing. The fragmented format allows the text to exist as an in-between form of writing, neither philosophical text nor literature, and this sense of refusing a 'coherence' becomes a way of rethinking traditional ideas around history and representation. I find this very interesting as an approach to visual practice in the sense that fragmentation can open up familiar forms, genres etc. to others, and enable an image to address otherwise unrepresentable ideas.

IW: I like that you use the equivalent of fear and pleasure as a range of emotional responses of the body, perhaps referring to an axis that sweeps to and fro, refusing to suggest an answer, thus resulting in uncertainty, even anxiety. Do you feel that the density of our current network in relation to the city and electronic life actually intensifies juxtapositions of such fragments and whether the body is actually able to keep up with these new forms of languages? One example I can think of is the fear of a kind of static identity, thus, an electronic avatar would create further permutations, fracturing the self. I see this very much like what you mentioned about reaching for the unrepresentable. Can you comment on fragmentation in relation to our notions of self, since you mentioned examples of trauma/fear and pleasure?

BH: I find it hard to imagine such a thing as a static identity. It seems to me that our essence is the temporal relationship we have towards ourselves: we don't remain the same over time; the process of being ourselves is an active construction. The sense that we have different aspects to our 'self' (and conflicting desires) might seem to be confusing at times, contradictory and difficult to make into a coherent narrative, but isn't that what we're constantly doing as 'author' of our self-narrative? As to how contemporary technology impacts upon that process, that's a really huge question. For me, instant access to so much information is fantastic, but inevitably seems to require an enormous filtering effort, and the kind of work I make is part of that. For example, this is where I'd position my interest in thinking about what happens when painting's physicality and (potentially slow) temporality meet 'new forms of language' as you put it. The kind of open, tentative and currently relevant space I'm looking for connects with ideas about art as the wish for selfhood, it's ability to permit us 'presentness to ourselves' as Stanley Cavell puts it in *The World Viewed*. It's inevitably a space of multiple perspectives and histories, and like the on-going construction of self-identity, one that doesn't quite 'settle' in one place.

IW: Lets discuss about your workshop with our group of students at LASALLE. I understand one of the objectives of this project was the idea of collaboration. There was a situation in your workshop where the students each made a piece of imagery and had to find a way to

'fragmentise' it. So in a sense, this act is a bit reflective of the idea of unsettling one's perspectives of the self. Was it difficult to convince this group of 15 individuals to just go ahead and 'tear it up'?

BH: The students were great to work with, they took the project on board and worked really hard to realise it. Initially the idea of cutting up their work was challenging, but quite quickly the idea was accepted and that seemed to be the first step towards collaboration because it meant thinking about the piece collectively rather than as a singular act of authorship. We photographed each student's image, so we did keep a record of each person's response, then the process took over and chance determined how much of each image remained visible in the final work. I think that chance procedures lead to a totally different view of individual elements and gestures within a piece. I've been interested in John Cage's procedures for a long time and the drawings he made using the I Ching are relevant here. Each mark/form has a particular character but these are put into unexpected relations through chance operation and in this way the subject of 'relation' is highlighted, between things; between the maker, the work and the viewer. This project investigates ideas about fragmentation, but the underlying subject of relation is important.

IW: Chance within a scheme? I find the use of instruction very critical in allowing a work like this to grow interestingly. I believe Cage always had very poetic haiku-like words as directions to the making of his music/art. How did you divide between very specific directions and some which were very much 'play by ear', in a sense improvised reactions?

BH: Previously I'd used chance as one element in the *Cut Scatter* series; the compositional element. I had though selected the images I used, so this was an idea of exploring an oscillation between chance - total contingency - and the deliberate intervention of decision. Working with the students on this project brought a higher level of chance occurrence, from my point of view, because I had no hand in the selection/making of the images. The schematic was of course still in place, the template if you like, in the process I had developed; this frames and shapes the flow of contingent actions.

IW: Can you talk about the relationship of fragments? The wall project seems to change depending on the group dynamics you get from its appearance in different spaces to that of people involved. Perhaps the pieces on the wall seem to reflect a gathering of diverse languages and a reflection of the body's temporal condition?

BH: Fragments of images existing alongside each other combine different temporalities; time as a loop of interwoven moments, both actual and virtual. The fragment may present itself as spatial in form, but its character is essentially temporal; the fragment evokes an experience of the present's 'incompletion'. I also wanted to introduce questions about the 'address' that a painting makes to the spectator, to engage with questions of relationality on a material level - 'How do we stand in relation to each other?' The collaborative aspect of this project, the participation of a group in the making of the piece, emphasises this aspect of the process and I think it is also imprinted in the finished work.

IW: The issue of address of an image touches on the way we would like to recognise and to give a name to something or that we would like to locate its origins. So in a sense, by way of fragmentation, the embracing of the unknown is critical, establishing the element of visual curiosity as a kind of first love. The final work is like a map that allows the viewer to participate in - a map that has its own visual signs and cues that provoke imaginary structures in each of us. The painting also challenges the viewer to take liberties in putting one to another, instead of the usual idea of finding representation in forms and structures. Can you comment on the appreciation of this sense of formlessness?

BH: It's interesting that you associate the work with a map, I think that's very appropriate because of the fact that a map has to be interpreted, it doesn't tell us which way to go so much as provide options which we then have to negotiate. In terms of reading an image, this is connected for me with the way in which multiplicity (and the fragment) involves the viewer; and links with the Deleuzian notion of the rhizome, a non-linear structure that emphasises notions of 'connection' from all directions. I agree with you that this approach asks something of the viewer and I think that the idea of mapping is one which we can associate with making something new as opposed to what you call 'the usual idea' of representation. Deleuze and Guattari comment on this with the advice to 'Make a map, not a tracing' (*A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*); the piece we've made together aims to do that.

IW: Making new maps since all existing ones have been discovered? I think we talked about getting this project to travel round the world and seeing how it just extends and contracts or even link up. Could this be a new world order?

BH: The project is one that I think would be interesting to take to other sites; it would obviously change with different participants and site parameters. Maybe there'll be opportunities for further collaborations of this kind, we'll see!



The word 'fragment' suggests a part that has been separated from its original whole, but not merely so; it suggests that a breakage has occurred, usually that of a brittle substance.

Beth Harland, a London-based artist, is interested in such issues of the fragment. How is fragmentation experienced in the contemporary society? How does technology affect or impact this experience?

For a period of twelve days (from 7-18 February 2011), we were privileged to have Harland as a visiting professor at our college. She held an artist talk as well as a workshop with fifteen BA and MA students from the Fine Arts Faculty. A wall painting was produced through the workshop, in collaboration with the students, as part of Harland's ongoing research project.

In the first phase of the workshop, Harland had a discussion session with the students. She had prepared a handful of relevant quotes and questions ranging from various disciplines and time periods to trigger thoughts. The students' responses were jotted down on post-its, which were stuck on the wall of Block E, Level 2, producing a large mind-map of thoughts. This wall of thoughts was then open to contribution by the public, or the rest of the LASALLE community, to gather a wider range of response.

For the second phase of the workshop, after being fully charged with ideas on fragmentation, the students proceeded to work together with Harland on a wall painting at Block C, Level 2, directly opposite the wall of post-its that we had created. The idea for the wall painting was basically similar to that of Harland's *Cut Scatter* series, where she took several images from various sources, cut them up, scattered them, and photographed the "mess" created. This photographed image will then be projected onto her chosen ground and painted out by hand.

For the Singapore version, Harland sourced the initial images from the students. Each student created their own A3-sized artwork, some double-sided and some single. The option of having it double-sided was so that if the image fell on its reverse, it would not be blank, containing an alternative image. There was a variety of drawings, paintings, photographs and digital images. These artworks were then put into envelopes to be cut. It was suggested by some students that the envelopes be exchanged to allow more of a chance element, and that was agreed on. With somebody else's envelope in hand, the students cut away in random shapes and sizes. Most of the envelope pieces were removed from the "litter" of paper, which were gathered, ready to be scattered.

A rectangular frame was marked out on the floor, and the scattering began. Each time, a different number of students took part in the scattering, from different positions, with a different set of "litter" in their hands. The compositions produced were very much dictated by chance, each one photographed to take part in the eventual selection. With a system of voting by the group, the image to be used was finally decided upon.

With the help of a projector, the students marked out shapes on the designated wall, equipped with their pencils. Then they went on to paint a grey background and, consequently, the various colourful pieces which they had cut up. It was decided that each student would work on his or her own "fragments", to maintain a certain extent of accuracy as well as to adhere to a simple system of distributing the workload. The students dropped by in between classes during the week to work on the mural, with the help and supervision of Harland, who was equally enthusiastic to lay her paintbrush on the wall.

The team successfully completed the mural, and a private view of the installation was held on 18 February 2011. Titled *Cut Scatter: Singapore*, this piece, along with documentation of the collaborative process, will be reproduced and installed at the Dhoby Ghaut MRT station later in the year.



Feb 8 - 18, 2011

CULTURE OF THE FRAGMENT

Workshop with Beth Harland

by Jodi Tan



“fragment
(noun) | frægmənt |
a small part broken or
separated off something”



Trip: Oct 11 - 21, 2010 | Exhibition: 18 Oct - 5 Nov, 2010

TAKEN AWAY: From LASALLE to Sabanci, a Kind-of Memoir

by Chong Weixin



The gallery is a glass panel-enclosed space and at the time of our arrival, was still occupied by the remnants of a previous show. It was unlike any other exhibition space I had seen, with narrow vertical partitions that were attached to the ceiling along metal treads that made any re-arrangement into a kind of math puzzle. Fortunately, our artworks shipped over earlier in the month had arrived intact. We deposited the rest of the artworks, which had been couriered over with the rest of our personal effects in our hand luggage as well as fitted in a large trunk strategically packed by Salleh.

The air is cool, clear and crisp and silk-dry. It's around 10°C in Istanbul, as if the air-conditioning from Singapore has somehow flown over with us, extending itself into the natural environment of Turkey.

This is right in the middle of the school term - a pretty strange time to find myself in unfamiliar, gold-lit surroundings with my mother and my lecturer, Salleh Japar. Functioning on sleep deprivation mode for the past few months kind of enhanced the surreal feeling. Out of the plane, I inhaled the clear air, and it seemed as if we were still in transit.

It was a long flight, and through the plane-bound hours I tried to remind myself what we were coming over for. I was going as a student representative with my lecturer Salleh Japar (Faculty of Fine Arts program leader) to Sabanci University in Tuzla, Istanbul. This trip was arranged by Fine Arts Faculty Dean, Milenko Prvacki, as part of an ongoing interaction between Sabanci and LASALLE, and was confirmed with the support of our president Alastair Pearce.

It was an event planned between the two schools to showcase a selection of works from LASALLE's Fine Arts Faculty. The exhibition was held in Sabanci University and was preceded by 2 seminars about LASALLE's Fine Arts program and the artists involved in this exhibition.

A Vast Estate

It took a considerably long time for our taxi to trundle its way to Sabanci - a university founded not too long ago by a highly influential Turkish family of the same name, in realization of their vision for tertiary education. Modelled after American private schools, the campus grounds were overwhelmingly huge to my Singapore-attuned senses. Alex Wong, the program leader at Sabanci with whom we had mainly been liaising, met us and helped us to accommodation kindly provided by the school.

Besides showing us the vast campus precinct that comprised of the Faculty blocks, libraries, canteens, lake and performance areas, he took us as a last stop to the gallery where the exhibition would be held.

My mom occupied herself with studying in the library next door. She had paid for her own trip in order to travel along, and contrary to Alex's expectations, was happy soaking up the 'un-touristy' environment of Sabanci. Between Greek philosophy and classical literature, she thoroughly enjoyed quiet reading times, punctuated with visits to the supermarket.

Meanwhile, Salleh and I spent the first few days dealing with various challenges. First to be settled were the partitions, which two Turkish students assisted Salleh and me in arranging. I was worried that the inconsistent wall surface and narrowness would affect presentation of the artworks, especially the paintings, and decided to mask the gaps with tape.

Because of the language barriers with many of the staff in facilities, it was unexpectedly challenging to obtain masking tape. To my surprise, there was not an art supply store on the entire campus, and the nearest shops were a considerable drive away. Sabanci staff was most helpful, however, and managed to procure two rolls from various departments for our use. I used the tape to conceal gaps between the partitions and covered all wall surfaces with multiple layers of paint in order to create a smooth surface for the works. It took 2 days of painting to achieve sufficient coverage, but when all the partitions had been arranged and painted, it finally began to feel like we were going to have a show.

A lack of vintage slide projectors with an automated function affected one of our artist's works. He had about 40 analogue slides and a Sabanci technician and I tried a variety of methods to scan them for digital projection. As the available scanners could not accept that particular slide format, we eventually found some librarians in charge of Sabanci slide archives to assist in scanning each slide. Alex secured another digital projector and the artwork was adjusted accordingly.

Another work, a sculptural installation by Juriani Mansor, was made up of many pieces that needed to be individually inflated and pinned to the wall, a meticulous job which Salleh worked on by hand.

Despite the glitches during set-up, all problems were eventually resolved. We had a lot of assistance from Alex, who kindly came to our rescue to resolve the logistics problems and helped us to install the heavier works and adjust the lighting.

Each night, walking back to the hostels with my mom and Salleh, I would pass brightly-lit cafes cheerfully filled with Sabanci students staying up late - burning the midnight oil, perhaps, or just enjoying their student life. My head was filled with thoughts of the two presentations that Salleh and I would be giving after *Takeaways* opened. Salleh was to share LASALLE's history and facts, as well as his own practice as an established Singaporean artist.

On my part, I was to present mostly about the Faculty of Fine Arts students in LASALLE and those involved in the exhibition. At the same time, I also wanted to mention about the works that could not be shipped over, and to bring across to the audience the vibrant diversity of my course-mates through the slides.

Curtains Up

The opening on 18 October turned out to be a great success. The Director and the Dean of Sabanci's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, including many of the faculty members and students, were present and many favourable comments were conveyed from them.

It was extremely gratifying to see the finished show, and even more to witness responses to the artworks from our peers in such a different cultural background and environment. I felt a new level of confidence for our Faculty of Fine Arts, and a reaffirmation of my belief in the boundary-crossing potentials of effectively executed artworks.

After the opening of *Takeaways*, the seminars were delivered to two separate groups of students under the direction of Sabanci lecturers Alex Wong and Wieslav Zarembo.

Averaging between 1 to 2 hours each, they were, happily, quite well-received. Feedback from the students and their lecturers was very encouraging, and Alex told us that his group felt inspired by the variety and diversity of mediums and concepts which they saw in our Fine Arts Faculty students' works. All in all, the talks were a favourable extension to the exhibition, and cemented the depth and impact of this exchange between our schools.

Tesekkürler, which means 'Thanks'

In the remaining days before we had to return, Salleh, my mom and I had a quick run through the Istanbul sights closest to our lodgings, trying to squeeze in as much as we could. It is most definitely a place I hope to be able to visit again, just to spend more time in its unique, history-steeped surroundings.

On our return home, the clear Istanbul air I had grown accustomed to recede as I walked into air-conditioned mustiness, and I shelved my thoughts of the pre-assessment that would await me on my return home. Those few days in Istanbul had gone by in a whirl, and it seemed as if the multiple impressions were still trying to settle themselves into my mind.

Despite our tight schedules and numerous commitments, it was invigorating to have gone through the challenges of carrying out the exhibition in a foreign environment. I love having the chance to explore another institution, especially one such as Sabanci, with its well-endowed campus and enthusiastic investment in its students.

Perhaps most of all, I enjoyed working with Salleh and Alex during the course of the project, and observing their methods of dealing with situations and problems which sometimes call for improvisations. It was great to have the chance to listen to them talking about work and students, or even life in general. Getting a sense of how they worked and how art and education coexisted in their individual practices was really invaluable.

I am thankful for the support of my Dean and Faculty, including my course-mates without whom this exchange project would not be possible. *Takeaways* represented a sample of our Fine Arts Faculty - the labour of both students and staff, and a composite of each of our journeys in artistic discoveries.

I hope *Takeaways* will mark the beginning of a fruitful and mutually inspiring relationship between the colleges. Though May will mark the end of my education in LASALLE, I look forward to more inter-institutional activities in the coming years. I also look forward to the upcoming batches of Fine Arts students initiating projects and pushing for opportunities, exchanges and further development of the Faculty and its programme. There is so much to look forward to in this new stage of LASALLE's endeavour, so I hope students and lecturers reap the rewards of their thoughtful involvement as part of this school.

Sept 21 - 30, 2010

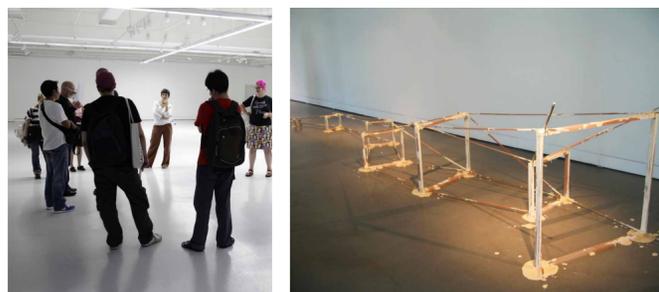
TROPICAL LAB

Thoughts on the 4th Tropical Lab

by Shen Xin



“These are direct visual representations of narratives, yet distant from reflections of quality”



1 Feb, 2011

CHRISTOPHER COOK WORKSHOP

by Melissa Tan



Christopher Cook uses graphite combined with linseed oil and turpentine to create drawings captured on glossy paper. He explained how the use of graphite stems from his experience in India. On one of his visits, while sitting along the banks of the Ganges River he began drawing, describing it as an instinctive automatic response to creating marks on a canvas of sand.

It was early morning and the sun's beam created a stark contrast in his drawing, highlighting and casting shadows emphasizing the spiral patterns he made. He was attracted to the mineral quality of the sand in the Ganges as it glittered under the light, and as the use of graphite powder imitated the sand found at the Ganges, he began experimenting more with this medium.

During the workshop, Christopher Cook presented his past works showing his shift from representational surreal landscapes to his current graphite drawings. He described his process of using turpentine mixed with graphite to create a fluid material that was easy to



Eighteen artists from all over the world were introduced to this year's theme of Urban Mythologies with a symposium by four speakers (Lawrence Chin, Adeline Kueh, Gilles Massot and Charles Merewether). The lectures touched on various concerns including the ways Singapore has been imaged and imagined in relation to its rich repertoire of myths, legends and cultural histories. For Gilles, history is an element that contributes to the origin of a country is itself vulnerable, and this applies not only to Singapore, but everywhere else in this "known" world. Another element that appears to be extraordinary and often over-stressed here in this context: the garden.

In Lawrence's segment, the garden was an imagery constructed by the British for her colony, and it has persisted within its present-day national preoccupation. And for an introduction on the obvious sides of what can be considered myths, Adeline suggested how ghost stories and urban legends serve as counter-memory to official narratives.

These lectures were eye-openers and provide a good prelude for our excursion to the Haw Par Villa, a residence constructed in 1937 by the "Tiger Balm King" Aw Boon Haw. The Villa can be seen as an overtly pictorial attempt to preserve what is commonly perceived to be Chinese values. Compared to the other two Haw Par Villas in Hongkong and at Yongding, the one situated in Singapore contains the most emphasis on tales. There are the direct visual representations of narratives, yet distant from reflections of reality. I thought that this was an excellent choice of venue, considering the result of the art project itself shared a comparable quality to the pictorial forms of these tales.

Apart from that, what were stimulating were the seminars and presentations where artists

exchanged ideas and experiences from their practices and the evolving inspirations of the project itself. As an assistant of the project, it was a great opportunity to be involved and to be able to share the experiences with so many others.

The works that were shown in the exhibition clearly manifested a combination of the artists' own practices with the sights, sounds and other sensibilities absorbed during the 10-day camp in this part of the tropics. All that remains in between are part of the myth-making process.

The theme for this year's Tropical Lab is Urban Mythologies. Urban Mythologies aims to provide a platform to explore, complicate and unravel the ways Singapore has been imaged and imagined in relation to its rich repertoire of myths, legends and cultural histories. This theme also facilitates observations of the collision between the physical metropolis and the underlying beliefs.

TROPICAL LAB is an intensive and highly engaging ten-day event, bringing together more than 20 students from various art colleges and institutions around the world. The event will include a series of workshops, talks and seminars, culminating in a curated exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, Singapore.

The participating artists/students at Tropical Lab are:

Marissa Benedict, Rosalie Schweiker, Rachael House, Monica Rodriguez Medina, Robini Kapil, Laura Grillo, Yusuf Ismail, Heidi Kristina Lampenius, Ming Qiang, Cagri Kucuksayrac, Steph Bolt, Kate Geck, Matthew Sleeth, Isabelle Desjeux, Michael Timothy, Shi Qing, Aiko Miyayaga, Shinji Ohmaki.

we began experimenting with more techniques. The use of our fingers created rather different marks to the brushes and we constantly walked around viewing each other's work, seeing how various people manipulated the medium. Some tried dripping the mixture off the paper; some used the paper to balance the mixture and shifted it from one side to the other, even folding the paper to make a different pattern. Though it is easy to create powerful gestural marks, it is rather difficult to capture fine intricate lines as the marks keep getting 'diffused' in the fluid mixture. I realized that with this medium it is difficult to control as there is also an element of luck and chance that affects the work.

The workshop was an interesting opportunity to try various methods of mark making, and that there are not one but many ways to draw. What I liked from this workshop was how Christopher Cook took a medium that is normally used for smudging and shading and combined it with linseed and turpentine, thereby producing an entirely new way for drawing. In addition the process seemed very much like a painting so that is hard to discern between the two. At the end of the workshop, from my point of view, it seemed that everyone's work looked like a mono-print or a surreal grey-scaled landscape and the beauty is that not any of the works produced looked the same. I feel that the reinvention of materials is important and with just a little bit of pixie dust our works can develop a lot more.



Oct 20 - 31, 2010

ADDITIONS

A Printmaking Exhibition curated by Lim Bee Ling

by Karen Heng Shang Li Gonzales



Aptly named to describe the nature of making multiple prints from a single matrix, this printmaking exhibition was one that expanded the often erroneous assumption of print as just carbon copies. The exhibition also highlighted prints that demonstrated excellent technical skill, control and versatility using the art of printmaking.

Looking through the plexiglass of Praxis space, one would naturally squint and attempt to comprehend what was being exhibited inside. Enclosed in soft pine wooden frames and displayed on small wooden shelves coupled with paper pinned delicately on the walls, curiosity is inevitable.

The prints presented in the *Additions* exhibition showcased a range of intaglio prints that were made by students from the printmaking elective. The extensive range of works exemplify the interest, creativity and enthusiasm of this batch of students in learning a traditional yet contemporary form of art, printmaking.



Intaglio prints are distinctly characterized by fine lines and embossed edges created from the ink transfer from copper plate to paper. The word intaglio literally means 'carve' in Italian. Naturally, the image is etched onto the copper plate using a sharp metal point, or with acid. The ink is then applied on the surface of the plate and forced into the grooves of the delicate etched lines. The paper is prepared by briefly soaking it in water and placed on an etching press with the copper plate below. The wheel of the press is turned and an intaglio print rolls out. Intaglio printing has an inherent ability of producing a high level of fine details. Often, an embossed image is created when the paper is pressed into the grooves of the plate, creating a special texture and appearance.

In addition, different tonal values can be achieved by the addition of rosin on the copper plate. Rosin is composed of small particles that can be heated and melted onto the plate, forming a grainy texture. Varying the exposure time of the copper plate and acid creates a subtle tonal variation. The longer it is in the acid bath, the darker and richer the tone of the printed image. This technique of creating a gradation on an etched copper plate is called aquatint.

Printmaking part-time lecturer Lim Bee Ling, curated and assembled the exhibition with great anticipation

towards showcasing the compelling works of this group of elective students. The selected works were chosen not only based on technical precision but also creativity and intriguing ways of exploration. Each artist presented a different facet of printmaking from the combination of different techniques and effects that was done with careful manipulation of the inks, paper and printing.

One of prints presented shown during the exhibition was *Cold Feet* by Devi Seetharam. This print showed great control and execution with the use of the aquatint technique. Contrasting the dark and light areas of the image brought out the dramatic focus of the feet appearing out of the darkened background. Although the range of tonal values used were minimal, Devi's instinctive calculation and careful timing of the sensitive acid-bite on the copper plate demonstrated the simplicity of the visual image that emerged from the numerous complex steps involved in creating an intaglio print.

Besides etching and adding aquatint to a copper plate, the medium it would be printed on plays a significant role in printmaking, that is, the paper. The paper used in printmaking has to be at least 200gsm to ensure that the ink transfers fully onto the paper and also to capture details and embossing from the fine grooves

of the etched copper plate. However, printing on craft or tissue paper often gives an unexpected effect, which builds up on the uncertain nature of printmaking. This technique of printing on delicate coloured paper layered upon a heavier paper is termed chine-collé.

Resembling a collage, chine-collé is a simple technique that introduces a different colour and composition to the whole print. As seen in Wong Kel-Win's prints, craft paper and newspaper were incorporated to add dimension to his printed image. The layering of the tissue paper and coloured paper together created a background composition, which reinforced his idea of connecting the intaglio print with the chine-collé technique.

Printmaking obviously holds more than meets the eye. Anyone who has stepped into a printmaking workshop and made a print would understand the multitude of techniques and skills that printmaking encompasses. From the selection of paper, handling of the paper, adjusting of the press, inking the plate and printing of the etched image, to the evolution from idea to final image, there is much complexity in the methods involved. The fact that there are a multitude of steps makes printmaking not only a test of one's patience but also one's focus and concentration. From there, a print evolves to become something that embodies the artists' personal character and creativity.



A housewife's work is never done...Peter Jackson directs yet another episode of *The Hobbit*...it's a never ending story. The Praxis Space presents 19 artists (selected from a cohort of Level 2 students work in progress), each with a tale to tell. I will mention just a few.

Rachel Tan contributes a group of small etchings on plywood, magnificently holy, connecting us to the past and present in a whimsical way about religious fanaticism and tolerance. There are the high-spirited, rather funny miniature sculptures by Kray Chen, crafted in yellow epoxy, expressing concern over today's ever-demanding expectations from society.

Right at the narrow end of the gallery, Richard Chen's oddly suspenseful single-channel video projection



onto 12 glass bowls filled with water, created rhythmic patterns amidst dry ice vapor, seems to tell an ominous tale of a strange alien logic at work.

Questal Tay's reworking of the Straits Times image is doubled with a scrim hand-sewed with colored threads, almost suggesting a sinister undercurrent. Cindy Salim opted for charm and wit, with a highly friable dinner table setting made entirely out of recycled paper pulp. Her work speaks of fragility and the transitory nature of human existence, or perhaps it yearns for the missing person who did not show up for last year's reunion dinner.

The nineteen works in this show are not shaped by a single concern dictating either content or form; rather, they occupy a space between social narrative and personal expression. This exhibition is compelling because the message chosen by the artists is a point of departure rather than a punch line.

27 Jan - 11 Feb, 2011

THAT'S ANOTHER STORY

An Exhibition showcasing a selection of Level 2 Diploma Students' works

by Derek Tay



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Aug 16 -30, 2010

THE VALUE OF CONVERSATIONS:

NAFA - LASALLE Staff Show

— Learning That Which Could Not Be Taught

by Lawrence Chin



Picture a typical encounter between an art student and her tutor. The usual conversation can be imagined to be centered round practices and ideas — usually that of the student, but often times, that of others, too. It is a conversation which might consist of a series of questions and answers, or a stretch of monologue, with interjections and disruptions here and there. It might be relaxed, tensed, enlightened, harried, heated, considered, happy, anxious or just nonchalant — or a combination of a variety of other emotional responses. It comes in as many flavours as there are students and tutors, in as many permutations and combinations towards that singular over-riding objective: to explore, discuss, converse, argue about art.

Conversations can often be stress-filled encounters, as one must tread a fine line between disclosure and exchange. Disclosures can be venerable, exposing more than what is personally bearable. Exchanges can be futile when ideas fall flat or appear uninteresting and disconnected. We cannot help but begin to sense an ambivalence somewhere in between the words and pauses of such a conversation. One is not sure if the correct terms were used, or if these will be misunderstood. There is only so much room for mistakes in expressing an intangible idea which is nascent yet urgent. One strains to listen but often hears something else; saying one thing but meant another.

Such an ambivalence is bound by the sheer task of talking about art — how is that even remotely

possible? Or it could be a result of that anxiety which attempts — but would likely fail — to bridge that chasm between disparate experiences. Perhaps, such ambivalence is a projection and extension of a general sense of that impossibility of talking adequately about the intangible. Yet one still tries, by one means or another, and in a variety of guises: for the necessity of continuing that conversation.

And it is in this context of carrying on a conversation that we can calibrate our appreciation and understanding of the range of practices being presented in the joint LASALLE-NAFA Fine Art Staff Show. It is a conversation between seemingly divergent styles; between distinctive school of thoughts; between clearly delineated references. But it is also, above all, a conversation between students and those who are committed to imparting a semblance of their thinking and knowledge to those who are willing to listen.

A conversation must also, at some point, come upon its own limits. A conversation cannot possibly encompass everything there is to say or know. It is often true that what defines a good conversation is contingent upon that which has been scrupulously left unsaid. There are also disparate and differing languages — and idiolects — which cannot be truly or adequately translated. The limits of direct translation must also spill over into that dichotomy of roles that an art tutor plays — that of an educator and a practising artist. One's practice does not always lend itself to be used as a simple example of what could be done.

The complexity of artistic practice comes not from just doing but also through an informed act of seeing and critical thinking that goes with it. Herein lies a possible motivation of why educators are sometimes

motivated to organise staff exhibitions — that of leading by example. It is always the struggle of art educators to clearly state that intangible aspects of their decision-making process. Yet the context of an institution for learning demands that such articulations be unambiguous and readily expressed — often at odds with the practice. It is a balance between seeking resolution and maintaining open-endedness. It is also a mismatch which points to a primary inadequacy that haunts all conversations, and not only just those between art students and their tutors.

This inadequacy, or lack, is also a condition which makes conversations possible and necessary, even. If communication can fully achieve the feat of transmitting a message completely without distortion, then our language would be less colourful and less nuanced — in short, less poetic or artful. Communication becomes functional and perfunctory; conversations become cumbersome, unwieldy and, probably, unnecessary. We would be living in uninteresting times, then.

Arising from that inherent failure in all conversations, we can find, instead of despair, a curious compulsion to seek further clarifications. We repeat what we hear or said in order to be sure and in that process, we must become more receptive, less self-centered. Conversations are entered into, not as ends in themselves, but as a journey of opening up ideas and testing possibilities. It is a compulsion borne out of an insatiable need to know, on the one hand, and the tacit realisation of the complexities and richness of the world out there, on the other.

That compulsion becomes a bridge between the self and the world; between the speaker and the listener — much akin to the role of an artwork that acts between

the artist and the audience; or that conversation between the student and the tutor. And in repeating parts of an earlier conversation slightly differently, a polyphony of voices becomes discernible. It is not for lack of ideas, but that we just cannot help repeating ourselves. And if we stop long enough to listen, we would become more aware of a multi-layered reality that speaks in varying tones; carries slightly different inflections; and contains unspoken corners.

In that process of learning to listen to what is unsaid — what is unsayable, or that which eludes representation — one can then begin the real process of understanding. Knowledge without understanding is static, at best. And a process of understanding can only begin with and through a good many conversations — like that between an art student and a multitude of tutors; of that between an artist and a varied audience; of that between peers and colleagues with seemingly divergent approaches — and the best parts are often not taught or said, but intuited and learned, forming the unspoken nexus of the next conversation.

Lawrence Chin studied for a short stint at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts before graduating from the UK. He now teaches part-time at LASALLE College of the Arts with the Faculty of Fine Arts and the School of Integrated Studies. In between his teaching work, Lawrence Chin runs an art conservation practice.

Editor's Note: This article was originally published in the NAFA-LASALLE catalogue and is reproduced here in Praxis Press with the consent of the writer.

Sept 8 - 22, 2010

AT THE BORDERLANDS OF TRAVEL AND ART

by Chen Kerui



I was intrigued by the collaboration between Zaki Razak and Roy Payamal called *Borderland*, which was showcased at the Winston Oh Travelogue Show 2010. *Borderland* was a concept inspired by Zaki's trip to the Czech Republic and Slovakia, which was the unified nation known as Czechoslovakia until 1992.

He described his crossing from the Czech Republic over to Slovakia as surreal, as there was neither natural nor man-made indications at the border to differentiate either countries. The absence of immigration authorities and the homogeneity of culture and landscape at the borderlands only further poked at the idea of nationhood. Zaki then channeled this curiosity into his work, which talked about the contrasting beliefs of national borders as an ideological conception within the sociopolitical landscape, versus its peripheral character in the context of cultural and natural landscape. He was also interested in the heroic public sculptures in the Czech Republic and how these sculptures transformed into monuments.

Zaki painted a large wall text and constructed a lectern to recreate the symbols of monumentality. His lectern served not just as a speaker's platform, but also a monument. He combined this with the idea of the border: a line that is drawn to differentiate one sovereign nation from another, an official speaker to a floor listener, a decorated Hero from a mere citizen. Whoever stepped up to the lectern became part of the monumentality and part of a bordered sociopolitical structure. He then allowed Roy - an invited performer/collaborator, whom with no prior arrangement, disrupt, intrude and reinforce his idea of monumentality through a performance.

On a side note, since the collaboration was supposed to be a travelogue, I ask myself this rhetorical question: What is the significance of travel in one's artistic practice? Personally, I believe the idea of being displaced geographically brings about a greater significance, as such displacement transcends beyond

physically to emotional and spiritual remoteness. This remoteness makes for a certain degree of disinterest and detachment away from the strange environment, thus providing a cozy freedom for dialogue to take place. It presents an opportunity for lateral thinking, for creative impulses and for reflections to brew, which is crucial to art making yet sometimes a rare luxury amidst the current busy lifestyle.

Back to Roy's performance, it was a stunner and it shook me up deep within. His biographical performance saw him walk on railings, smear paint all over the wall text and give strange speeches and gestures at the lectern. He produced this overwhelming tension in the gallery that forcefully grabbed your notice. This tension was unbearable for me and I felt uneasy, to the extent of indignant, and I could not align myself with him.

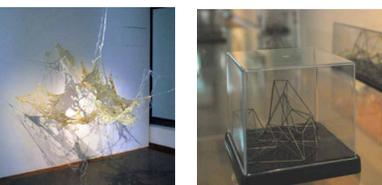
This uneasiness did not stop me from inquiring more, and I tried to see beyond its obvious controversies. The body in performance art becomes a site that contains the bodies' identity, memory, social and religious background, as well as its geographical locality. Roy with his antics, weird murmurs and random shouting further added layers to the body medium, and his performance went beyond mere sensory stimulus. As I held dialogues with fellow studio mates about the performance, I saw that I had missed the most important point. Maybe I misunderstood Roy's intentions. Maybe I was not supposed to understand anything. Rather his portrayal as the "Unwelcomed" serves as a comparison to my own ideologies. He breached my sense of border and he showed that there is a need for me to rethink my position in art and society at large. He pointed out the fragility within

my defense and that I too could easily succumb to differing politics.

Interestingly, the psychological remoteness one experiences during travel could also be seen as a border, which distinguishes the foreign from the local, the strange experiences from the familiar, a private space from a public space and also an ideology from another. This ran fascinatingly parallel to the central ideas of the politics of the border and of the monument. Zaki wittily brought down the complexity of the Czech Slovak border to more familiar issues of everyday, such as personal privacy. This point further illustrates the success of their collaboration in context of the travelogue project as an attempt to widen the artist's perspective and research through travel.

Zaki Razak (MA in Fine Arts) and Eunice Ng (BA in Fine Arts) won the prestigious Winston Oh Travelogue Research Award 2010/2011 and were given a grant to travel to a choice location. Working on the theme of Borderland, Zaki's proposal brought him to Czechoslovakia whilst Eunice made her way to the Nevada desert in the United States for her research.

Five Diploma Students (Frayn Yong, Ruben Pang, Ashley Yeo, Chong Weixin and Michael Timothy) also showcased their works in this exhibition. They were awarded the Winston Oh Drawing Award and together with Zaki and Eunice, had created works based also on their travel reflections.



12 Apr, 2011

ARTIST TALK

— Paul Huxley

by Simon Ng



“Please do not understand me too quickly”,

warned Paul Huxley as he opened his address to the audience. Quoting on the words of early 20th century French writer André Gide, Huxley reflected on the common sentiments shared by many artists pertaining to the understanding of their art. “Though we are a little bit more profound than we seem at first glance, we like to say that let’s hope it could be true.” as he presented to the surprisingly and encouraging large audience turnout, especially from students whose assessments were drawing close.

Touching on the art historical development of abstraction in painting, Huxley’s lecture was a subjective discourse on the thoughts about abstract art and the possible opportunities in subject matter. Drawing from various sources and existing aesthetics of modern painting such as Picasso, Salvador Dali to Mondrian and Barnett Newman, Huxley shared about his thought processes of art-making, often elaborating on the formalistic properties of painting.

Like systematic diagrams for a model, his preparatory drawings are meticulously planned and measured. He worked on layout papers like how a graphic designer would - in a manner of “Thinking Out Loud” as he casually remarked. He let on that this is an approach for him to test out the good and bad ideas so as to exhaust the various possible configurations before he could decide on one absolute that will inform the final work.

The motivation, one may suspect, is an attempt to avoid interpretation, as abstract painting has historically tried - to have no content. Since there is no content, logically there can be no interpretation. As Susan Sontag wrote, ‘to interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the world’. Perhaps the reason for Huxley to plead us at first hand was to refrain from our contemporary manner of understanding that tended to excavate, destroy and impoverish art.

This does not necessary imply the paintings have no subject matter. According to Huxley, the geometrical shapes in his earlier works took on a sort of behavioral pattern, moving within the pictorial space either through means of spatial ambiguity or implied perspective.

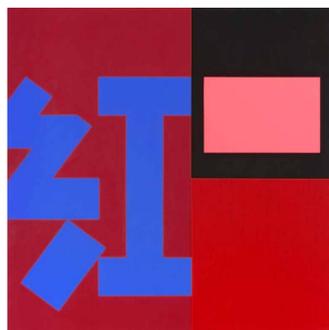
As he develops a manner to devise a language for subject, the works took on a more dialogical format

when he starts to split the canvases into two sections that have characterized his work ever since.

The divided space forms a confronting dialogue in 2 parts, whilst the audience exists as ‘desire’ to take up the position of a third-party interlocutor.

As part of Huxley’s ‘Asia Tour’ where he is exhibiting 20 of his paintings from his last 10 years of art ranging from ‘Anima, Animus Series (1998) to the ‘Chinese Letter Series’ (2008), his visit in Singapore also included giving a public lecture and a tutorial session to the candidates of Master of Fine Art Faculty at LASALLE College of the Arts.

Born in London in 1938, Huxley studied at the Harrow School of Art from 1951 until 1956, and was admitted to the Royal Academy Schools where he graduated in 1960. He was Professor of Painting at the Royal College of Art from 1986 until 1998 after which he was elected Honorary Fellow and Professor Emeritus. Many of his students from these years such as Dinos Chapman, Nigel Cook, Dexter Dalwood, Andrew Grassie, Tracey Emin, Chantal Joffe and Chris Ofili are now established artists contributing to the new British Art which has been so widely acclaimed.



18 Apr, 2011

AN INTERVIEW WITH RHETT D’COSTA

by Milenko Prvacki



MP: How does it feel being in Singapore and LASALLE again after so many years?

RC: It was fantastic to see just how far LASALLE has come, since I left so many years ago. To see such a fantastic piece of architecture dedicated to art was great. I must admit it was quite emotional to see and be at the new LASALLE campus. When I stood at McNally St., I was thinking how pleased and proud Brother Joseph McNally would be to see his vision realized. He had such a profound influence on all of us in the early days of LASALLE.

MP: Can you tell us more about your practice now?

RC: The practice is going well. I am currently enrolled in a PhD programme with RMIT University so it is really helping me to focus on my research and practice. The practice continues to evolve and I am allowing it to become more inclusive of varying materials and processes. I guess that has been the most significant shift, that even though I am trained as a painter, I think about painting beyond the medium.

MP: Having been away for so long, what changes have you observed at LASALLE?

RC: Well there are so many! Seeing the library grow under Malar’s direction is amazing! The facilities are amazing! The galleries wow! LASALLE looks great!!!

It is bigger! But despite all these changes, when I saw familiar faces, I felt like I never left! The warmth, support, dedication and conviction of the Fine Arts staff is still alive.

MP: As an art educator in LASALLE previously, what was most important for you?

RC: It is all about the students! That is why we do what we do. It is so easy to lose sight of this particularly when you get involved in administration. It is so easy to get caught up in policies and processes and administration. But there is no substitute for working in the studio with students. That is why we choose to do what we do. I love LASALLE students. They are so keen to learn and so appreciative of the interaction and engagement. I’ve taught in the US, Australia, Hong Kong and Singapore. When students are engaged and want to learn, there is no better experience. I learn as much as I teach. I never forget this, even after all these years.

MP: How do you feel about the atmosphere in LASALLE?

RC: You know, I was standing on a balcony and watching Dahlia Osman working with her Foundation students on the grass area between the buildings. I then turned around to see the Gamelan ensemble all set up, there were students rehearsing dance. The place felt so creative. I was smiling thinking it felt like exciting stuff are going on everywhere. It was great!

MP: Do you have any recommendations for improvement?

RC: Well it looks pretty good to me. If I were to give any advice, it would be to not forget why you are here – it is about ART PRACTICE. It is and should be about making art. Value this and don’t let it NOT be the priority.

MP: Anything else you would like to mention?

RC: Yes, I really want to thank Ian Woo and yourself for extending the invitation for me to visit LASALLE as a visiting lecturer to work with the Masters students in Fine Arts. It was such a pleasure talking with each of the students and I wish them every success in their studies and future as artists.

Born in Bombay, India, Rhett D’Costa studied a Bachelor of Arts [Fine Art, Painting] and a Master of Arts [by Research] at RMIT University in Melbourne. D’Costa is currently lecturing in Painting at RMIT University. D’Costa has participated in many solo and group exhibitions including; Carte Blanche - A Drawing Exhibition, Alliance Francaise, Singapore, 1999; Works on Paper, Sungshin Museum, Seoul, Korea 2000; Possible Worlds, Switchback Gallery, Monash University, Gippsland, 2007 and; Drawing Of The World/World of Drawing, Museum of Art, Seoul National University, 2009.



26 Feb - 2 Mar, 2011

A DRAWING TRIP TO BALI

by Filip Gudovic



“Most of all, I would also remember Bali as a place and a time where everyone gets to share old memories of traveling and make new ones together.”

On 26th of February, diploma students along with the Fine Arts staff went on a 5-day trip to Bali. I think we might have been the only ones after the Singapore pioneer artists who went to Bali with the reason of reacting to the environment and its culture.

1. What I enjoyed the most was being on a trip with my lecturers - Ian, Hazel and Betty, Zai and Salleh. It was really fun to be sharing travel experiences with teachers whom I usually just talk about my work. Bali was an experience for everyone to get to know each other’s habits and personalities that we do not normally encounter or see in school. That was what Bali was all about for me.

2. Bali spoils its visitors with its assortment of delicious food. Meal times in Bali were always something we all looked forward to, especially since they were times when we had to make crucial choices, like the one in MADE restaurant choosing between “Nasi Goreng Ala Made and Nasi Goreng Ala Made Spesial”. Special is the one with extra egg.

3. This Bali trip was not purely for pleasure of course. We have a drawing assignment that asks us to reflect about the passage of journey and what we could take away as experiences or adventures during this getaway from the familiarity of home. What I discovered from this trip is that tourists simply just love taking pictures in front of beautiful rivers and natural landscapes. It makes us feel how proud we actually are for having experienced “true nature” – a nature we cannot find in cosmopolitan Singapore. We keep these photographs as evidence of our existence within such an idealized place. We also think its beautiful. This is not a cliché.



4. There were also times when we just needed some rest, we found it quite comfortable in this position. Guess Bali also did bring back some of the childhood memories like being in a playpen of coloured rubber balls. Remember?



5. On one of the days, we visited ISI Denpasar (Institute of the Arts Denpasar). There was Goodie Bag Exchange, some delicious local delicacies for us to snack on and here is Selamat Bapak Salleh! Clap clap clap... Many quick friendships were made, and hospitable student and staff guides brought us around the magnificent architecture/school, showing us galleries, workshops, classrooms and studios.

6. Surprisingly, we found out that the guys at the entrance to the Balinese temple had a terrific sense of complimentary colors, dressing us up in coordinated sarongs.

7. Last but not least, Zai – our beloved lecturer who made sure this trip to the exotic island of Bali became a reality for us - had a lot of fun with his new masked friend at the Bali Cultural Centre.

If I had more space for this article I would love to share more with you. There were definitely good times, great times and I can barely remember any bad times. We had a memorable time crooning along with a singer who was performing whilst we ate dinner at one of the restaurants. I was tickled by the never-ending battle between Pak Timbang (our driver) and Mas Safrie (our fellow coursemate) and overwhelmed by the constant bargaining on the busy streets of Legian. Most of all, I would also remember Bali as a place and a time where everyone gets to share old memories of traveling and make new ones together.

We all wished it had lasted longer and not have to return... Perhaps Pak Govind summed up the returning-home feeling quite succinctly when he said “going back to Singapore is like having a snake around my neck”.

Other art talks by the Faculty of Fine Arts from August 2010 to April 2011 include:

Jason Wee
Zhang Wubin
Tom Carr
Noor Effendy Bin Ibrahim
Debbie Ding
Sommy Liew
Wee Keng Li
Stephanie Fong
Lee Weng Choy
Tan Zi Xi
James Paul
S. Chandrasekaran
Iwan Wijono Putro
Tan Wee Lit
Alex Wong
Joyce Fan

- Singapore/USA
- Singapore
- Spain
- Singapore
- Singapore
- Singapore
- Singapore
- Singapore/Hong Kong
- Singapore
- Singapore/UK
- Singapore/Australia
- Indonesia
- Singapore
- Turkey
- Singapore



27 Jan, 2011

ARTIST TALK

— Gwendoline Robin

by Angie Seah



Gwendoline Robin associates the object with the body in space to create complex installations and performances, in which object responds to space, movement to fire, light to the sound of the explosion, and in which the artist’s body can explore, perform and dance with the danger and the poetry of fire.

There is immediacy in Gwendoline Robin’s work, a relationship with the present moment with the suddenness of the explosion, the essence of fire, the evanescence of smoke. It confronts us with surprise, fear, danger, relief, with wonder, and with humour.

During her artist talk, Gwendoline Robin showed us works from the past few years, expanded on the full spectrum of her performances, her collaborations with musician Garrett List, choreographer Marian Del Valle and discursive performer Alexandre Wajnberg, and how these multidisciplinary associations have nourished and enriched her language. She performs internationally in festivals of performance, drama and dance, and further explores her dialogue with fire through drawings, installations, video work, books, and the art of movement.

Fire and explosives can be seen as the body and material of her work. It was a very natural thing for her to do, as she told us that she always had a firecracker or two in her pocket ever since she was a child. She spoke about how the experience evokes fear and at the same time exercise control over her “fery situation”. Interestingly I asked her if there was anything that she would like to do but have a fear of making. Her reply, “I wish I can sing, or make voice pieces but I can never do that as it’s so personal to let it out”, is an illuminating comment on the idea of fear.



Debbie Ding



Sonny Liew



Mar 10 - 31, 2011

NINE

A celebration of the quintessence of artistic process and its endless possibilities

Curated by the director of ICAS, Charles Merewether, this exhibition showcased the works of Milenko Prvacki, Ian Woo, Adeline Kueh, Salleh Japar, Zainudin Samsuri, Hazel Lim, Betty Susiarjo, Gilles Massot and Jeremy Sharma.

by Jessica Gabrielli



“Simply put,
the voyage is
much more
important
than the
destination”

Many inspiring words have already been dedicated to the much-appraised exhibition *NINE* which brought together the works of the current academic staff of the Faculty of Fine Arts at LASALLE in March 2011. Formulating different accounts upon the show, Alastair Pearce, president of LASALLE College of the Arts, Milenko Prvacki, the Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts, and Charles Merewether, director of the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, all helped to pin down the essential aspects that emerged from this artistic union. The exposure to these accomplished and engaged reflections has left me somewhat intimidated towards attempting to devote my own words to the matter. Nevertheless, these reports have led me to venture a student's perspective, as this is an event that has surely made its mark on learning minds and the quest of students here to find individual purpose within the arts.

As I am writing from the standpoint of a first-year student, one could say that much of the charm of an exhibition such as *NINE* lies in the fact that it allowed one to unravel some intimate aspects of the creative processes and the ingenuity of artists that students consider crucial figures in their learning experience. Whether the works met personal tastes is not much of a concern in this commentary. Rather, it is seeking to look at the potency radiating from a faculty show and its deeper impact on an apprentice audience; in this case shedding light on fundamental matters, notably the limitless possibilities within artistic practice and the importance of process.

At first glance, *NINE* has the potential to inspire students by opening the doors to the many different facets of artistic practice. At an initial learning stage, many of us do not realize and do not know our own potential, doubting the tensions between what we feel the need to express and what is expected from our lecturers and our peers. The exhibition in question

could be seen as having embodied the message that anything is achievable if one really believes in it. Ranging from photojournalistic reflections, mixed media installations and video works, to the more conventional medium of painting, the Fine Arts Faculty members explored varied, yet all equally fascinating themes. Wandering through the three galleries that surround LASALLE's Campus Green could be compared to an engaging journey across themes including temporality, the tensions between space and matter, the mundane and the ethereal or even the exploration of travel and reconstruction; going as far as questioning the boundaries of representation itself. Surely one common and valuable declaration conveyed by the union of these different concerns is that the artwork - which initially sparks from the artistic mind and hand - eventually acquires a life of its own. Thus as an entity, it is subject to an independent growth that is free to emerge out of as many or as few of the inspirational sources shaping our existence.

In addition to offering a glimpse of the rich variety in aesthetic responses towards contemporary issues, *NINE* essentially revealed the foremost importance of the creative process itself. To a certain extent, personal observation and experience allow me to say that, as artists-in-training, many students begin their formation with a distorted perception of artistic practice. The idea that whichever formal embodiment presented in the gallery is the artwork in its entirety, is a dominant conviction that seems undeniable and which unrightfully undermines the growth process that leads to an end product. This view could possibly account for the tendency of students to start their course addressing assigned projects as finite products, thinking that the creation can be accomplished in a mere few days of work. However, learning to cherish the primordial undertaking of an idea or a concern - and its resolution from a conceptual state to a



visual aesthetic form - is the fundamental lesson in becoming a good art practitioner. Simply put, the voyage is much more important than the destination. Then again, even without the physical presence of process, the exhibition *NINE* still displayed a strong attention to the criticality of methodology in the work of the hosted artists. Thus, as the works exhibited strongly exemplify the holistic experience of making, it became a powerful and extremely successful way to incite the student eye to uncover this truth for itself.

In visual terms, the ensemble of works united a colorful range of artistic devotions involving creative medium, and the crucial process of making and personal perceptions in a most effective manner. Despite each artist showing differing affinities towards contemporary issues and how to address them, they spoke with sincerity and passion of diverse existential perceptions as well as the multifaceted aspects of the creative endeavour. Without a doubt, the orchestration of the exhibition showed dedication, skill and conscientious attention in presenting a selection of pieces that successfully encompassed the challenges of variety. The result was a finely attuned harmony of aesthetic approaches that portrayed how the Faculty of Fine Arts dedicates its knowledge and expertise to guide LASALLE students towards becoming independent arts practitioners.