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ISSUE 1: LAND

Cover:

Jananne Al-Ani
Aerial III
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ISSUE: LAND

ISSUE: Art Journal Team

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Introduction

LAND continues to be an issue. It has never stopped being a subject of concern. And yet, arguably its present condition and future has become increasingly fragile, even precarious, under the pressure of development. The scale and rapidity of current urban growth and industrialisation has profoundly impacted the land and its ability to provide sustainable natural resources of food and water. At the same time, the exploration and transformation, if not destruction, of the land has exposed its history, as if laid bare in the moment prior to its disappearance. The coincidence of such forces has encouraged greater exploration and research of its history, both in its telling and as a point around which to defend its existing value.

This is the first volume in a series to be published under the title ISSUE. The journal comes into being as the publication aligned with the annual project Tropical Lab, hosted by LASALLE College of the Arts and led by artist Milenko Prvacki. Now in its sixth year, Tropical Lab has been organized as a workshop in which up to 30 postgraduate student artists from around the world come to LASALLE for two weeks. During that time, they are introduced to Singapore with visits across the country, talks, lectures and workshops. As part of the workshop, they are asked to make a work of art that is then exhibited in a special exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, which is part of and located at LASALLE.

The sixth edition of Tropical Lab in August 2012 was devoted to the subject of land. Lawrence Chin offers a reflective review of this edition entitled 'Land(scope) or what is there to see?' Chin muses over a number of works and associate seminars to cast some skepticism about the regime of visibility and knowledge production tacit to the act of looking.

This first volume of ISSUE seeks to gather a range of practices, much of which are the result of intensive research. The majority of the articles are image-based, offering different practices in the region as well as reaching out to other parallel objects in Europe and the Middle East. At face value, we may be inclined to link some of these practices to those of Land Art as it developed in the United Kingdom and North America in the late sixties and seventies. But while there are links that can be drawn, the differences are equally valuable. Most significantly perhaps, the current forms of exploration of the land are grounded on considerable research of the subject, that is, not strictly on the realisation of the artwork. In such terms, this research basis makes them more 'work in progress,' that is, we might add, as forms of artistic report.

Following this review, ISSUE offers an interview with Werner Herzog, the German filmmaker who is best known for a subject-matter that addresses highly extreme states of experience through both fiction and documentary practices. The idea of archaeology is inherent to Herzog's filming of recently discovered Paleolithic paintings in the Chauvet caves in Southern France. In a certain sense this project may be viewed as integral to land archaeology insofar as it seeks to document if not recover the layers and remnants of the past. This has also become integral to Jananne Al-Ani's work with mapping, examining historical aerial surveys in the Middle East, discovering both traces of the past and a disembodied vantage-point of human life to produce a modern science of cartography based on what can no longer be seen.

Likewise, an archaeology of the land is essential to the ongoing practice of artists in the region. From Al-Ani, we look at the current artistic practice of the Singaporean artist Choy Ka Fai. As the artist notes, an amateur historian told him of the Lan Fang Republic that had been founded by the Hakka Chinese in West Borneo in 1777 and had lasted till 1884. Choy travelled to West Borneo, to the descendants of a people who once lived there, and began his project of unearthing objects and evidence of a past time – the beginnings of research that would eventually take him into the archives of the region held far afield in the Netherlands. As a counterpoint to this project, Debbie Ding brings us back to Singapore to ask what constitutes the country's identity, what makes up its fragmented, often disparate history, what the archive reveals but, equally, what the geography of the country tells us. As she says, Singapore is "the missing artifact". The idea of the missing artifact resonates with the subject of story-telling that the artist Nigel Helyer has developed over the past several years. This story-telling recounts the nomadic and fluid histories of the sea and river-beds and the visual and sonic environments they have created.

In light of such questions, both the work of Zhao Renhui and Charles Lim bear a timely reminder of the fate of Singapore in its physical constitution. Zhao looks at an island no longer recognisable for the absence of mountains, its past mythic, almost a fiction. Alternately, Lim has researched the current edges of Singapore with regard to its land mass. In the process, he has uncovered the project whereby sand is dredged from neighboring countries (not owned by Singapore) in order to extend its land. The work of Lim has been remarked on in a powerfully lucid text by the historian Paul Rae, who points out that through this process

of 'reclamation', by 2030 the island would have increased by 25% of its land mass at independence in 1965. He writes of the importance of the sea to the land, an importance that has sublimated by an overriding ideological impulse towards nation-building. The concept of 'nation-building' is tacit to the Four Rivers project which tells of the fate of South Korean rivers and a history being lost through their inundation and control by the building of dams. Similarly, the indigenous peoples of Australia articulate their concept of land through different cultural forms of narration that have nothing to do with the idea of nation-building. Rachel Swain relates how indigenous theatre and performance work have developed powerful discourses around the land – discourses that refute those of the Western art historical notions of the land and landscape.

ISSUE ends with a recent project by Andreas Schlegel and Vladimir Todorovic who went to Mongolia on a field trip. They were interested in what could and could not be captured by information technologies. They left Mongolia recognising the impossibility of 'capturing' the land; returning home, they transformed their digital images into a three-dimensional simulacra of tourist memorabilia, which was then shown in a museum.

Werner Herzog's Cave Painting Documentary

The Birth of the Modern Human Soul

SPIEGEL ONLINE interview:
conducted by David Gordon Smith

Werner Herzog's new film "Cave of Forgotten Dreams" is a stunning 3D documentary about a cave in France that is home to the world's oldest known human art. The legendary German director talked to SPIEGEL ONLINE about his life-long fascination with Stone Age cave paintings, the birth of the human soul and why he will only stop making films when he is taken away in a straitjacket.

Werner Herzog has always had a fascination for extreme places. Whether it's the rainforests of 1972's "Aguirre, the Wrath of God" and 1982's "Fitzcarraldo," the ravaged oil fields of Kuwait in the 1992 film "Lessons of Darkness," or Antarctica as featured in the 2007 documentary "Encounters at the End of the World," the legendary German filmmaker seems happiest when he is in the kind of location that tests human endurance to the limits.

But seldom has Herzog filmed in a place as inaccessible as the location of his latest documentary. In "Cave of Forgotten Dreams," which features in the official program of the 2011 Berlin International Film Festival, Herzog visits the Chauvet Cave in southern France, which is home to unique examples of Paleolithic rock art. The cave was sealed off for dozens of millennia – and even today, no one is granted access apart from a handful of scientists.

The cave, discovered in 1994, is home to hundreds of pristine artworks. Over 30,000 years old, they are the oldest known pictures created by humans and show at least 13 different species of animals, including horses, cattle, lions and bears.

In the spring of 2010, Herzog was given a unique opportunity to film inside the cave. He and his team were only allowed access for a period of a few days, and were only able to use battery-powered equipment. High levels of radon gas and carbon dioxide in the cave meant they could only stay inside for a few hours at a time.

The director opted to make the film in 3D – the first time he has used the technology – to do justice to the cave paintings, which use the contours of the rock for dramatic effect. "I knew immediately that it was imperative to shoot in 3D," he says. The result is a visually stunning documentary that transports the viewer into the cavern and captures the artwork in all its glory.

SPIEGEL ONLINE spoke to Herzog in a telephone interview as the director prepared to visit a maximum security prison in Texas to shoot footage for a new film about inmates on death row.

SPIEGEL ONLINE: While you have certainly covered a wide range of topics in your career, a film about static cave paintings does not seem obvious at first glance. How did the film come about?

Werner Herzog: It was somehow in the air. The production company Creative Differences, with whom I had done "Grizzly Man" and "Encounters at the End of the World," approached me. They cautiously asked if I was interested, and I said: Yes, yes, yes. Paleolithic cave paintings were my first independent fascination as a child and as an adolescent. At the age of 12, I saw a book on cave paintings in the window of a bookstore. I wanted to have this book so badly that I worked as a ball boy on tennis courts to earn money, and four months later I finally bought it. I still have inside me the shudder of awe that I experienced when I saw these paintings, and I think this excitement even pervades the film.

SPIEGEL ONLINE: Still, given the fragility of the paintings inside, you surely didn't think you'd ever get the opportunity to film inside the Chauvet Cave.

Herzog: I never thought there would be a chance. Some of the most important caves, like Lascaux in the Dordogne region in France, have had to be closed down. There had been too many people allowed in, and they left a mold on the walls that is spreading and which can't really be stopped. Only a tiny handful of scientists have access to the Chauvet Cave.

SPIEGEL ONLINE: What is the world missing?

Herzog: You have to realize that, about 20,000 years ago, there was a cataclysmic event when an entire rock face collapsed and sealed off the cave. It's a completely preserved time capsule. You've got tracks of cave bears that look like they were left yesterday, and you've got the footprint of a boy who was probably eight years old next to the footprint of a wolf. Visitors can't step on anything, so you can only move around on a two foot wide metal walkway.

SPIEGEL ONLINE: It sounds like an almost overwhelming experience.

Herzog: It was always the same awe, an almost shocking experience. It's not only the paintings: You are in a place that has not been seen for tens of thousands of years, because it was so sealed off. There is such silence that when you hold your breath you can hear your own heartbeat. Everything is so fresh that you have the sensation that the painters have merely retreated deeper into the dark and that they are looking at you.

SPIEGEL ONLINE: Some people might consider cave paintings to be primitive. How do you see the works?

Herzog: This is the birth of the modern human soul. The artists are like us, not like the Neanderthals, who had no culture – and who incidentally were still roaming the landscape at the time the paintings were made. It is striking that there is a distant cultural echo that seems to reach all the way down to us, over dozens of millennia. In the Chauvet Cave, there is a painting of a bison embracing the lower part of a naked female body. Why does Pablo Picasso, who had no knowledge of the Chauvet Cave, use exactly the same motif in his series of drawings of the Minotaur and the woman? Very, very strange.

SPIEGEL ONLINE: This is the first time you've used 3D in one of your films. Why the sudden departure?

Herzog: In general, I'm skeptical about the use of 3D – it's not the perfect tool for cinema, at least for certain types of cinema. But in this case, I knew immediately that it was imperative to shoot in 3D. The paintings are not just on flat walls – you have these enormous niches, bulges and protrusions, as well as stalactites and stalagmites. The effect of the three-dimensionality is phenomenal. It's a real drama which the artists of the time understood, and they used it for the drama of their paintings.

SPIEGEL ONLINE: Can you imagine using the technology in future films?

Herzog: I am currently shooting a film about inmates on death row and obviously this is a film I am not going to do in 3D – it would only be distracting, a technical gimmick. Indeed, of the five or six projects I am currently working on, none of these films are suitable for 3D. And when you look back at the 60 or so films that I've made so far, there's not a single one which I should have done in 3D. Still, I would not completely rule it out in the future. It depends on the subject.

Replica of the painting from the Chauvet cave, in the Anthropos Pavilion, Brno, Czech Republic. Public domain image from Wikipedia.

SPIEGEL ONLINE: Given the restricted access to the Chauvet Cave, it seems surprising that the privilege was granted to a filmmaker from Bavaria rather than one from France. Why did they choose you?

Herzog: I was fortunate that Frédéric Mitterrand, the French minister of culture, has always been a great admirer of my films, as he told me during our first meeting. I proposed that I could work as an employee of the Ministry of Culture for a fee of €1 ($1.35). So the French ministry got the film delivered for €1, and they can also use the film for free for non-commercial purposes, such as in classrooms across France.

SPIEGEL ONLINE: Do you see your film as a kind of historical document?

Herzog: The historical or scientific document will be created by the scientists. I entered the cave as a filmmaker, as somebody who creates images, with my perspectives, fascinations and my instincts as a narrator. You have to activate the audience's imagination. If you are just giving them scientific results, they would forget the film in five minutes flat. But it sticks to you, as if you had been in the cave itself.

SPIEGEL ONLINE: You've been making films now for over four decades. Any plans to retire?

Herzog: One day you'll have to take me out in a straitjacket. Only then I will give up making films.

Choy Ka Fai

Lan Fang Chronicles

“History itself happens in moments when there is a possibility for a future”

The Lan Fang Chronicles[1] project was inspired by a casual conversation with an amateur historian, who related the stories about early civilizations in Southeast Asia – from the pirates of Malacca, to the sultanates of Demak Empire[2] and the democrats of the Lan Fang Republic. I became very curious about the authenticity of the Lan Fang Republic; the more I investigated, the more intrigued I became.

Why did this 18th century Chinese colony not leave a bigger imprint on the history of our times? Why did we forget? Or perhaps, why did we not want to remember?

In Singapore, histories are often commercialised and politically enhanced. We choose what we want to remember; we decide what our future generations want to remember. What alternative do we have? And what was the history before Raffles “discovered” Singapore?

The project does not set out to depict historical events, but to recollect and reflect on the representation of these narratives. Though this journey of recovery, we may find a parallel universe to the Singapore story.

Recycled gold mine, possible location of Lan Fang Republic ancient capital, Mandor, West Borneo, Indonesia
Lan Fang Chronicles 2009, Image by Vivian Lee

Dayak gold miner, Mandor, West Borneo, Indonesia
Lan Fang Chronicles 2009, Image by Vivian Lee

[1] Lan Fang Chronicles (2009 – 2012) is a project inspired by the histories and investigations of the 18th century Lan Fang Republic (1777 – 1884) founded by Hakka Chinese in West Borneo. The Republic existed for 107 years with 10 presidents until its reigns came to an end with the Dutch Occupation in 1884. The Chinese first came to Borneo as gold miners and formed various clans grouped by the area of their origins. Today it is nothing more than a fading legend for its living descendants.

[2] The Demak Sultanate (1475 – 1548) was a Javanese Muslim state located on Java's north coast in Indonesia. The sultanate was the first Muslim state in Java, and once dominated most of the northern coast of Java and southern Sumatra.

26 July 2009, Pontianak, West Borneo, Indonesia

Three years ago, I started this journey of the unknown, with research and excavation.

When I travelled to the sites of significance, there was almost nothing to be found, as if the evidence had evaporated with time. Yet, traces remain in the invisibility of our collective memories.

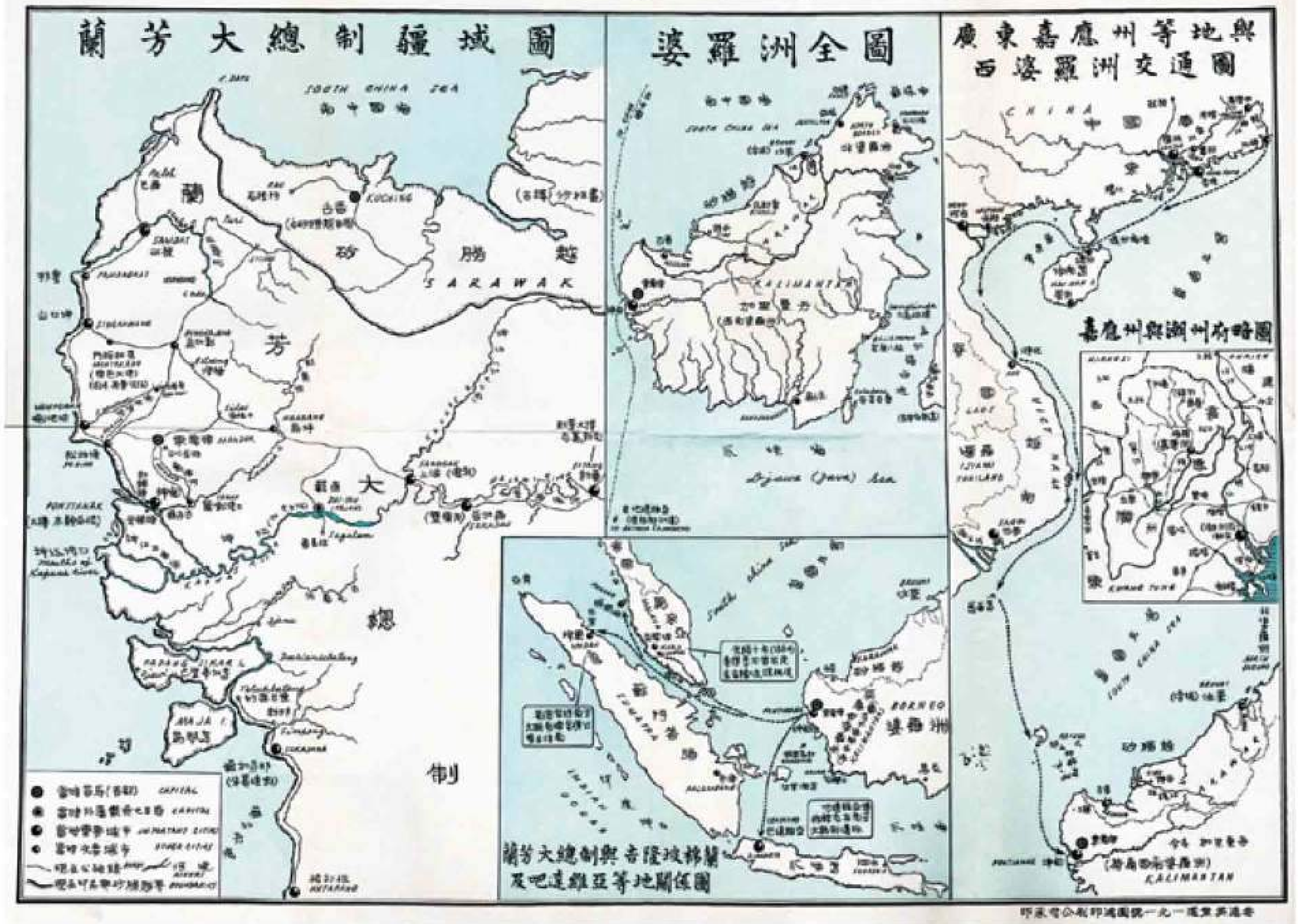
I started my first research trip locating the only surviving temple that still worships the founder of the Lan Fang Republic. There was not much to be found – except a portrait of Luo Fang Bo hanging proudly at the altar. The temple keepers and the worshippers did not know much of the histories either. All they knew was that Luo Fang Bo was some kind of a deity, and they prayed to him for peace and safety. That is when I realised that perhaps the landscape "knows" more about the stories behind this mystical republic. I wanted to document these places, the landscapes that had witnessed the historical events of the Lan Fang Republic.

Through revisiting these landscapes of events where historical significance has been eroded with the mundane passage of life, it may be possible to construct an impossible access to the past through the imaginations of our present.

Luo Fang Bo's Temple, Sungei Purun, Mandor, West Borneo, Indonesia
Insignificant Landscape Series #07, Lan Fang Chronicles 2009, Image by Choy Ka Fai

Recycled gold mine, possible location of Lan Fang Republic ancient capital, Mandor, West Borneo, Indonesia
Insignificant Landscape Series #05, Lan Fang Chronicles 2009, Image by Choy Ka Fai

Kapuas River, Central Mosque, Pontianak, West Borneo, Indonesia
Insignificant Landscape Series #03, Lan Fang Chronicles 2009, Image by Choy Ka Fai



Lan Fang Republic Map, Origin of Immigrants and Diasporic Routes
1961, Unknown Artist, Private Collection Of Luo Xiang Lin

The Last Descendant, Luo Fu Sheng, Meixian, Guangzhou, China
Lan Fang Chronicles 2010, Image by Stefen Chow

25 April 2010, Meixian, Guangzhou, China

After one year of research, having visited West Borneo and Luo Fang Bo's hometown in Meixian, I found many documents, records and "truth". While available historical records are limited, my role as an artist is not to add to these academic records. So I began to think about what I wanted to say with this story. What alternative perspectives and approaches could I bring to these historical findings that included some degree of speculation and imagination?

The myriad of historical materials and social findings fell into place when I started to connect the missing "truths" with imagined re-creations of what could have been. In a way, the "truth" becomes less important.

Interview with Luo Fu Sheng,
the last descendant of Luo Fang Bo.

He is 73. He has 3 daughters.

He has a suitcase full of laminated photocopied documents about Luo Fang Bo and the Lan Fang Republic.

He tells me stories I already know, except one.
He says that Luo Fang Bo has some special power to ride on crocodiles.

The DeGroot Collections (Speculative Artifacts)
Lan Fang Chronicles 2012, Image by Choy Ka Fai

12 August 2011, Leiden, the Netherlands

As I attempt to recover these fragments of a distant past, stories become histories, histories become myths, myths become memories, and memories sometimes become forgeries.

Leiden was the last of my research sites. For the first time, what greeted me were authentic documents and handwritten manuscripts. If there was any need of evidence of the Lan Fang Republic, this was it. I met Mr Koos Kuiper, the Dutch Sinologist who kindly showed me the pristine collection of original Chinese manuscripts, which was named after Dutch Sinologist J. J. M. De Groot who published the earliest known and most comprehensive documents (from Western perspective) on the Lan Fang Republic in 1885. Almost all the known archives could be found there and the nearby KITLV (Royal Netherlands Institute of South East Asian and Caribbean Studies).

These real documents, letters and maps depicting fragments of the Republic's histories provided the foundation to speculate on the possibility of a museum of artifacts, as physical manifestation of narratives, re-enactments and mythical recollection.

Object #001 Lan Fang Kongsi Hall Fortress Gate
The DeGroot Collections, (Speculative Artifacts)
Lan Fang Chronicles 2012, Image by Choy Ka Fai

Object #008 Luo Fang Bo's Crocodile Leash,
The DeGroot Collections (Speculative Artifacts)
Lan Fang Chronicles 2012, Image by Choy Ka Fai

Object #012 Lan Fang Kongsi Official Wax Seal,
The DeGroot (Speculative Artifacts)
Lan Fang Chronicles 2012, Image by Choy Ka Fai

Object #013 Lan Fang Kongsi Hall Altarpeice,
The DeGroot Collections (Speculative Artifacts)
Lan Fang Chronicles 2012, Image by Choy Ka Fai

Ying Fo Fui Kun's Ancestral Temple and Cemetery, Singapore
Lan Fang Chronicles 2012, Image by Law Kian Yan

Epic Poem of The Kongsi War, Installation Performance, Ying Fo Fui Kun, Singapore
Lan Fang Chronicles 2012, Image by Law Kian Yan

18 May 2012, Singapore

I am not Hakka. I am Singaporean.

Ying Fo Fui Kun was set up by Hakka Chinese immigrants in 1822, three years after Sir Stamford Raffles arrived in Singapore.

The people of Ying Fo Fui Kun were all from Jia Ying prefecture of Meixian, China.

Ying Fo Fui Kun Ancestral Hall was set up in the clan association in 1887, three years after the Lan Fang Republic was destroyed.

The people of Lan Fang Republic were all from Jia Ying prefecture of Meixian, China.

The Archivist Room, Installation Performance, Ying Fo Fui Kun, Holland Village, Singapore
Lan Fang Chronicles 2012, Image by Law Kian Yan

Memoir Of The Visitor, Installation Performance, Ying Fo Fui Kun, Holland Village, Singapore
Lan Fang Chronicles 2012, Image by Little Red Ant Creative Studio

The Lan Fang Chronicles project was presented as part of the Singapore Arts Festival 2012, in the form of a temporary museum at the unique site of Ying Fo Fui Kun (Clan Association)'s Ancestral Hall.

While the installation performance traces the path the Republic took, it also meanders into the future and a pseudo-mythical past to explore Lan Fang's potential.

Each narrative draws from fact and fiction, memories and forgeries, history and myth – all to reconstruct and tell the story of what is, what was, and what could have been the Lan Fang Republic.

From the Archives of the
Singapore Psychogeographical Society

Psychogeoforensics

Prepared for the Singapore Psychogeographical Society by Debbie Ding

Singapore is a city that constantly changes, which makes it a city hard to define. At 47 years, our nation state is young and still a kind of *tabula rasa*. Large government-operated agencies are tasked with shaping our national identity[1], and for years they have struggled to define what is "definitive", "historic" or "memorable" about this nation; many writers, poets, filmmakers and artists have also grapped with this issue. Yet for the most part, "Singapore" remains a mysterious, highly debatable concept. What is "Singapore?"[2] Where can we find the meaning of "Singapore"? Let us begin by examining the language which we use to speak about "Singapore".

The Definition and Vocabulary of Singapore

Singapore's identity crisis may stem from the problem of having little land mass, yet being made up of physically and culturally fragmented parts that have not been assembled into a whole.

Singapore – a main island and 62 smaller islands around it – occupies 714.3 square kilometres, with a population density of 7,257 per square kilometre. Even its main island is considered relatively small compared to other Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia (329,847 square kilometres) and Indonesia (1,904,569 square kilometres).

Once, in an interview with the Wall Street Journal, former Indonesian Prime Minister B. J. Habibie infamously described Singapore as a "little red dot" – which caused many Singaporeans to see red. In a conference on 3 May 2003, former Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong responded that Habibie's description of Singapore was "a vivid and valuable reminder that we are indeed very small and very vulnerable". He added that the phrase "little red dot" had since "become a permanent part of our vocabulary", a subtle nod to the Singaporean appropriation of the term, and the self-awareness of our small size.

A dot is simply a rounded speck, the smallest mark one can make on a map, and inherent in its small size is the loss of all other distinguishing features.

Singapore as "A Red Dot"

Singapore as "A Black Hole"

Figure 1. Singapore as a Red Dot

Figure 2. Singapore as a Black Hole

In 2010, the Singapore Tourism Board launched its new "destination brand" known as "YourSingapore". The main image used in its campaign featured the shape of the Singapore Island formed out of various brightly coloured cubes. Other offshoots of the campaign also featured the shape of Singapore formed out of shopping bags and food items.

This image of a generic, graphical Singapore island was accompanied by the curious tagline "What is your Singapore?" It was a peculiar question to be asking visitors, who might never have been to Singapore, and perhaps were hoping to be given a clue as to what "Singapore" might be. The shape of Singapore becomes nothing more than a blank cipher to them; it may as well be a black hole of meaning, with no answers to be found. It raises the question: how do we build an identity or tradition in a country that looks outside for cultural legitimacy and definitions, rather than attempting to answer the question from within?

Multilingualism: Trying to read more into Singapore

多讲华语，少说方言
(Speak More Mandarin, Speak Less Dialect)

Slogan for the 1979 Speak Mandarin campaign, launched on 7 September 1979

The vocabulary of Singapore is quite unusual – we have four official languages: Malay, Chinese, Tamil, and English. It is the only country apart from China where ethnic Chinese constitute the majority of the population, and the remainder of the population is racially diverse. Occasionally, there is confusion from foreigners who have never visited Singapore, who mistakenly assume that Singapore must be a province of China since Singapore is predominantly Chinese. However, it is nothing like China, as a significant percentage of young Chinese Singaporeans speak English rather than Mandarin at home, and many cannot speak the language of their forefathers after years of media restrictions on the use of dialects on television and radio.

For many, the decision to use English as the dominant language was a wise political decision. Our citizens speak a language that is known the world over, and this makes Singapore a welcome destination for international travellers. In the politically-correct modernity of today, it is easy to forget the racial tensions and riots of the 1960s, and the very real need back then for Singapore to have a common neutral language to bring together a racially diverse nation experiencing a clash of ways and cultures.

This however, may have come at the cost of losing parts of our cultural identity. Despite the perceived cultural "richness" and "accessibility" to both English and Chinese speaking worlds that could come with bilingualism, for most ordinary people it is very hard to become an effectively bilingual speaker without it impacting one's level of competency in one of the languages.

The language barriers that arise from a superficial multilingualism might also hamper the transmission of oral histories, traditional stories, and a deeper understanding of literature and histories in one's "native tongue". Not only are we physically separated from the land of our ancestors, we are also culturally fragmented through the differences in spoken languages, which potentially impedes our communication with the older generation of dialect-speaking Singaporeans.

So when we research a local history in a particular language, we begin to wonder if we might be missing out on other records that were written or documented in another language. It is difficult to research one's own history when one no longer really knows the language that an archive is written in. It is a pity that we are unable to be a dutiful audience to older people recounting their life stories and patiently trading old stories about old places. We have lost slang words, aphorisms, poetry and folk stories. As a result, the past is an impenetrable mystery, and even a written archive of history as we know it feels fragmented and incomplete.

Fragments and Archives in Singapore

Archives are of interest to us because the physical record and written word have the power to bring intangible things into existence. Without documentation, data or archives, it is very difficult to examine and discuss that which does not physically exist, such as events in the past, people who are no longer living, people who are transients through an area, or buildings and spaces which have changed or no longer exist. Thus, the written word, narrative or story is what brings it to life. In this way, an archive can be crucial in the process of creating a national narrative where one does not yet exist.

However, we are not always so lucky to find scholarship or pre-existing research on the more hidden or obscure parts of our own histories. So our archives may become repositories of fragments rather than repositories of complete artefacts or facts. Many of the histories in Singapore can only be pieced together in fragments, such as the story of Pulau Saigon, an island that was once in the Singapore River.

Case Study: The Mystery of "Pulau Saigon"

Figure 3. The Singapore River in 1819

We first encountered "Pulau Saigon" while independently researching the Singapore River. While tracing out the shape of early maps, it was noted that there appeared to be a sizeable island in the Singapore River. An error in the 2009 edition of Mighty Minds' Street Directory, in which "Pulau Saigon Bridge" had been mislabeled as "Saiboo Bridge" (due to its proximity to Saiboo Street), also brought the peculiar name to our attention, as no such island exists in Singapore today. When we asked around, virtually no one had heard of it.

After referring to city plans and other maps from before the 1970s, it became obvious that the largest islet in the early maps was actually "Pulau Saigon". Geographically, the meandering Singapore River separated Pulau Saigon from Magazine Road, where the Tan Si Chong Su temple still stands to this day, on its eastern side of the Singapore River's banks. It was large enough to accommodate an abattoir and railway station, and numerous warehouses. Yet mysteriously, it disappeared clean off the map by the late 1970s. We know of it today only because there was an archaeological dig done on the very spot, to dredge up and study its last remains before it was no more. A modest collection of pottery shards and small physical fragments is still housed at the National University of Singapore Museum.

Further research showed that the longest sustained piece of writing about it to date is a thesis titled "Uncovering Pulau Saigon", written in 1995 by Cheryl-Ann Low from the National University of Singapore (Geography Department). Even then, Low's research is very telling of the limitations of Singapore's official archives - that there are very few mentions of "Pulau Saigon" in the Municipal Reports (only in relation to the performance and output of the abattoir), and that Pulau Saigon's oral history informants would now be incredibly old, and eventually no one would be able to tell us about it.

Low writes that in 1890, "Pulau Saigon" appears in an annual report which states that since 1888, one portion of Pulau Saigon had been given to the municipality for an abattoir, and in return, a handsome iron bridge had been constructed to link it to the main Singapore island. This bridge stood for many years and when the Japanese bombed Singapore, one of the fire bombs landed quite close to the end of the bridge on Singapore's mainland, and the fire and flammable fluid flowed to the other side, setting parts of Pulau Saigon on fire as well – a stark reminder of how Pulau Saigon was physically still very much a part of the rest of Singapore.

In the end, the most interesting part of this aforementioned paper is Low's description, which in turn is inspired by a single line from another report from 1894. In the municipal record, the following is noted: "On Chinese New Year's Day on 1894, between 8pm and 5am, nine hundred and seven pigs were slaughtered."

In response to this single line in the municipal report, Low manages to write an admirably colourful description of what sort of scene this might have looked like:

> *Day and night, the auditory nerves were assaulted by the painful cries of cattle being slaughtered. The chugging of the trains, and for a rather brief period, the groans of incinerators could be heard. On top of that, there was also a dreadful stench to tolerate, an odour that was a mix of the smells of live cattle, raw meat, waste materials, burning refuse, and the infamous smell of the Singapore River at low tide.*

Without sufficient information or oral history records, the existence of Pulau Saigon would fade from existence completely. Few to no vestiges remain of this tiny islet that once teemed with the chaos of life and death. All we have left are a few broken shards of pottery and a few words in the national archives to mark its existence. But for a moment, with the colourful description of the sounds and smells of living and dying, we can imagine Pulau Saigon coming to life in our minds, roaring and bursting into colour. And all we need to bridge the gap is simply our imagination – that is the power of the story.

Fragments, incomplete clues and traces are of great interest to us because it appears to be the dominant manner in which information about Singapore can be found. So in 2010, the Singapore Psychogeographical Society was formed with the explicit aim of researching, collecting, and curating fragments – to attempt to stitch the fragments back into a cohesive whole.

The Formation of the Singapore Psychogeographical Society

The Singapore Psychogeographical Society is a loose association of words, devoted to promoting a better understanding of the world through ludic adventures, independent research, digital documentation, and archival activism. It is facilitated by Debbie Ding, who maintains a physical

and digital archive of writing, journey transcripts, maps, urban signs, photographic records, and other physical fragments of land.

Through "psychogeoforensics", it encourages people to construct/reconstruct their own narratives around the various physical traces, histories, and archives that may be overlooked in the fast-developing urban city of Singapore. From pottery shards, to traces of excavation, to marker scribblings on walls, it is hoped that we can write stories and histories from the clues found along the way.

In "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography" (1955), Guy Debord defined 'psychogeography' as "the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals."

"Psychogeoforensics" is an extension of that concept, a neologism coined to describe the approach taken by the Singapore Psychogeographical Society. To combine psychogeography – which is an appreciation for the geographical aspects of a city that influence the actions and lives of individuals living within it – with the domain of forensics seems almost logical.

Because of the peculiar fragmented nature of history and culture in Singapore, we could also view Singapore as a scene of mystery, or the missing artefact. We are here to solve the mystery of what and where Singapore is; we are here to reconstruct the narrative of Singapore, by going through all the possible clues of its whereabouts.

Our goal is to narrate places back into being. Let the crack in the wall tell its secrets. Let the small trees by the roadside speak to you. Let the electrical box on the street corner testify as the witness, or actor in the dramatic reconstruction of the story.

[1] "Our Mission (is) to Foster Nationhood, Identity And Creativity Through Heritage And Cultural Development". (From "National Heritage Board - Our Vision & Mission". http://www.nhb.gov.sg/NHBPortal/AboutUs/Mission&Vision (accessed October 2012)

[2] The Singapore Tourism Board slogan for 2010 was "What is your Singapore?"

The following is a description of some of the archives of the Singapore Psychogeographical Society:

Early Archives from the Singapore Psycho-geographical Society

1. Yangtze Scribbler

In 2010, various urban explorations yielded the discovery of a series of mysterious signs in the stairwell of the Yangtze Cinema. These scribblings were documented in photography and its unknown author was nicknamed the "Yangtze Scribbler". Efforts were made to locate the author, and to de-code the meaning of the numbers in the sign, but there have been no conclusive findings so far.

In 2012, similar signs were also found near Victoria Lane and Queen Street, proving that the author must still be active in Singapore. It remains a mystery, and can be considered one of the best examples of true graffiti art in Singapore.

2. Collection of Survey Markers (2009-2012)

From the years of 2009 to 2012, various urban explorations yielded a vast photographic collection of over 500 "survey markers" on the streets of Singapore and other countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Germany, United Kingdom, and South Korea. Each photograph has feet for reference to human scale, and is geotagged. Most of the survey markers found are not official land survey markers which are registered with the Integrated Land Service (ILS) in Singapore, have a strict format, numbering system and are usually made of metal. Instead, the collection focuses on the ubiquitous and more informal spray-painted signs often made in the process of land surveys and civil engineering surveys. These unofficial markings and temporary measurements made as the city is being constructed are not regulated, so their meaning is sometimes only known by the artist/writer himself. Thus, this resource remains a mystery.

New Archives in 2012

3. The Catalogue of Ethnographic Fragments

In 2012, a series of 27 fragments were retrieved from the streets of Central Singapore. These consisted of fragments of pavements, vehicular roads, drains and other spaces of urban Singapore. This collection was exhibited in "A Public Exchange of Ethnographic Fragments" at the Substation Random Room in July 2012. Members of the public were invited to look at and touch the fragments, to join in a conversation about rock collecting or geology, or even exchange rocks with us by filling out a simple form with a story about their rock. We received almost a dozen rock donations and exchanges over the month, ranging from a tear-shaped drop of about 1 centimetre in diameter, to cement cubes, to fragments from other famous pavements in Singapore.

A majority of the fragments in our archive of rocks were originally collected from sites near Sungei Road, a popular open-air street market that first emerged during the hard years of the Japanese Occupation. For years, a "Thieves Market" flourished along the banks of the Rochor Canal, where the poor and desperate could buy all sorts of cheap or second-hand household goods. To this day, the market is still running, with a certain reputation for being a distribution point for stolen goods, antiques and other curios.

But in 2011, it was announced that the land upon which the market was situated was to be taken back by the government. The new Jalan Besar MRT (Downtown Line DT22) station was to be built over the area which the Sungei Road Market has occupied for the last few decades – and construction for this station started in July 2011. As preparation for the construction started, the road was broken up into pieces and parts were excavated.

During the construction process, the fragmented material from old roads can actually be recycled. The material may be ground up to be used as the mineral aggregate that is used to make other roads and pavements in Singapore. As a result, there is the faintest possibility that we might encounter this very same particle of dirt again in the physical form of another road. However, by that point, it would be very unlikely that anyone would know of the history or significance of that particular fragment having once been part of another historic road. It would instead blend homogeneously into

Sungei Road Fragment V

the body of the brand new road until the day that that too is dug up.

Thus, to prevent the significance and existence of these roads from being completely forgotten, it was decided that some of these fragments had to be rescued and physically removed from the site in a timely fashion.

The fragments were taken from the site, wrapped in cloth for protection, and stored until an appropriate time arrived for them to be displayed as artefacts. In this process of removing it from the site, we also aimed to transform these fragments into ethnographic objects.

Ethnography refers to an area of social anthropology aimed at studying the culture of groups of people. We can glean clues about the social meanings within the ordinary activities of people through the objects used on a daily basis. At Sungei Road's "Thieves Market", we can learn many things about Singaporeans as we look through the piles of second-hand objects. Likewise, these man-made rocks, which appear in vast quantities near the numerous construction sites, can also be a telling trace in the story of Singapore and the attempts to construct a national identity.

The objects that are examined in the process of an ethnographic study are also known as "ethnographic objects". Often, some of the objects we want to study may be physically broken or too severely fragmented to be considered whole, so we have chosen to describe them as "ethnographic fragments".

Ethnographic fragments are not only "fragmented" because of their physical state of being a small part of a larger body, but also in the way that they have become objects of ethnography – particularly the manner in which they are detached, defined and made into objects, removed in time and space from their original site.

It is the narrative that transforms it into an object valuable for conservation and display – in other words, it is the story that enables it to become a "cultural artefact", rather than the mere consideration of its aesthetics.

We value these man-made rock fragments as being part of the physical fabric of Singapore. These may be man-made, and all look the same, but the fragments are still part of the physical land on which we live and walk. It is quite literally, a little piece of Singapore that we can hold on to.

Conclusion: Why we need to archive

We do not need to change the architecture to create a spatial shift – if we feel moved by the story, then the city and its architecture have already changed. These archives of signs and fragments exist not just as passive observers of histories, but also as active agents for change in Singapore – they are fertile material for our dreams of old spaces with new futures; they are the markers delineating the empty spaces where we can inscribe our own meaning and national identity into being.

Photographs from the archives of the Institution of Singapore Civil Engineers

The lost hills of Singapore

Presented by The Land Archive and Zhao Renhui

Land reclamation in Singapore started in the 19th century. Initially, soil excavated from inland hills and sand dredged from surrounding seabeds were used to reclaim the sea. Singapore gorged its hills and ridges to reclaim land. Fill material was evacuated from Bedok, Siglap, Tampines and Jurong. Most hills were flattened during the Telok Ayer Reclamation from 1879 to 1887, and the East Coast Reclamation of 1418 hectares from 1961 to 1985. By the mid-1980s, the hill-cut soil and local-dredged sand suitable for reclamation became almost exhausted and reclamation contractors started to import sand from neighboring countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia.

Tanjong Pagar
General view of Bukit Pearl, before 1945
Photographer unknown,
TLA archive

Tanjong Pagar
General view of Bukit Bedok, Temporary staging looking south, before 1945
Photographer unknown
TLA archive

Singapore Empire Dock
General view of Bukit Tampines, View of bottom showing west wall, before 1945
Photographer unknown
TLA archive

Tampines
General view of Bukit Tampines
Photographer unknown
TLA archive

Bukit Timah
General view of Rifle Range Hill
Photographer unknown
TLA archive

Unnamed Hill
Group Portrait, National Day
Photographer unknown
TLA archive

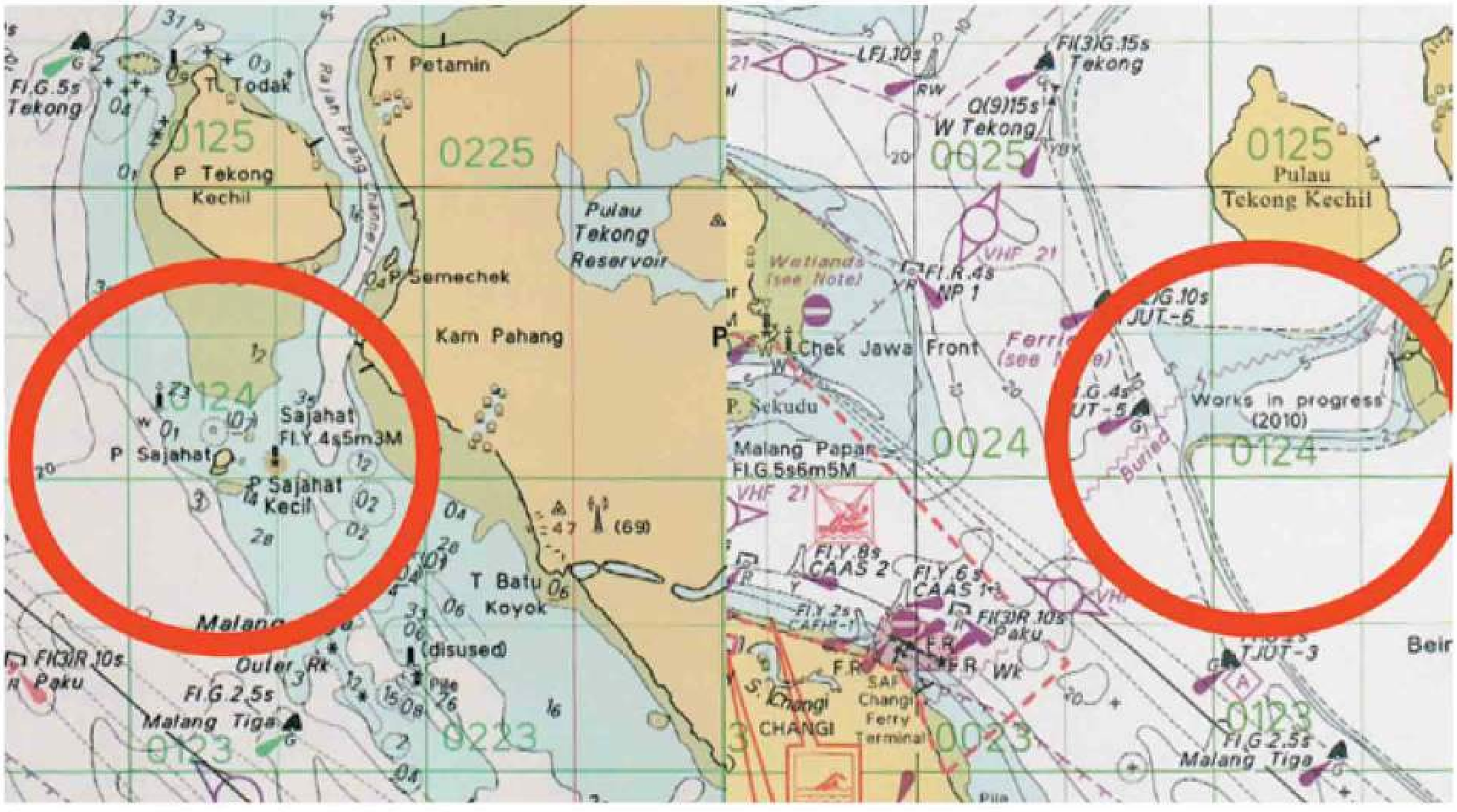
Unnamed Hill
Possibly Tampines
Photographer unknown
TLA archive

Unnamed Hill
Possibly Tampines
Photographer unknown
TLA archive

Charles Lim

SEA STATE 2:

Pulau Sajahat was an island in Singapore's waters.



Maps courtesy of Maritime and Port Authority, Singapore

It is uncertain when, between 1997 and 2007, Pulau Sajahat disappeared from Singapore's nautical charts. Above are two charts – from 1996 on the left, and 2007 on the right. Grid sector 0214 reveals that by 2007, Pulau Sajahat had become landlocked – and it continues to exist as something else.

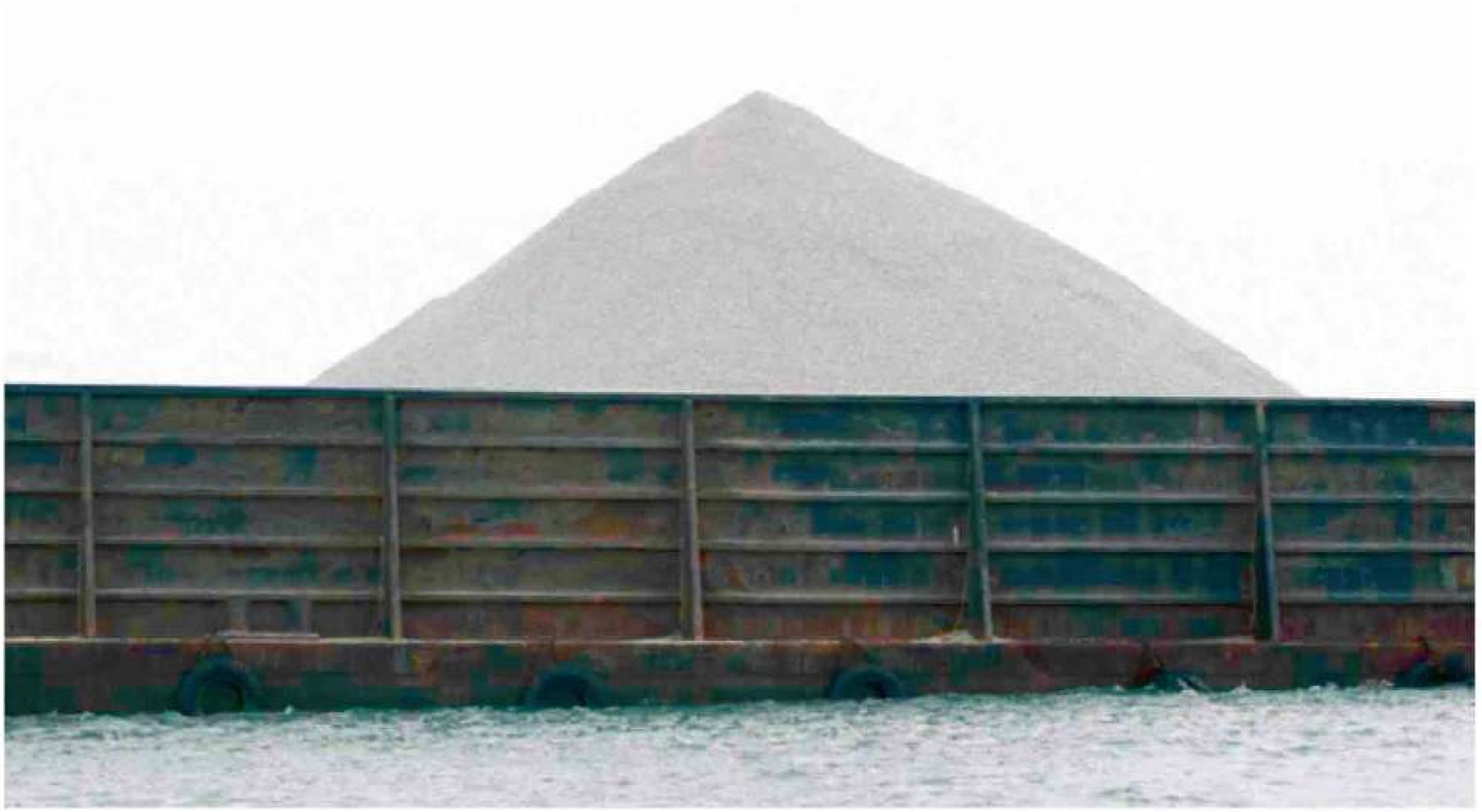
as evil disappears

The current land reclamation project began in the 1960s, mainly using material excavated from the hills of Singapore. However, this process had been in effect as early as the 1820s, when Singapore was part of the Straits Settlements.

> *They thought the matter over three days. Then it occurred to Mr Raffles that the small hill near Tangjong Singapura might be broken up and the earth used for banking on the near side of the river. The next day the two of them considered this idea and agreed to it. The people must have been amazed to see the work being carried out. The next day men under the orders of Mr Raffles and Mr Farquhar came round calling for Chinese, Malay and Indian Labourers, and some two or three hundred labourers were paid one rupee per head per day to dig and carry earth.*

Abdullah, Abdul Kadir Bin, and A. H. Hill.
The Hikayat Abdullah: The Autobiography of Abdullah Bin Abdul Kadir, 1797-1854. Singapore: Oxford UP, 1969.

Map courtesy of Maritime and Port Authority, Singapore



In 1975, this method of excavating hills to build new land elsewhere was halted; imported sand was used instead.

A fleet of tugboats tow sand barges to Singapore.

The Goryo 6 Ho Hyundai dredger was designed to suck sand from the seabed. Here, it operates near Nipah Island, Indonesia.

In the Pulau Karimun Free Trade Zone, hills are being excavated for land reclamation in Singapore.

Pulau Pelampong, Indonesia, 2008

This island, like the neighbouring Nipah Island, has borne the brunt of sand dredging.

> *In 2003, Nipah Island, which lies on the Singapore-Indonesia border, disappeared completely under the waves, "with only 3 to 4 palms trees visible to mark the island's location," according to the local NGO Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia.*
>
> *Milton, Chris. "The Sand Smugglers." Foreign Policy. The FP Group, 4 August 2010. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/08/04/the_sand_smugglers (accessed October 2012)*

Singapore land reclamation: View from the sea

1997 Malaysia bans the export of sand.
(The Straits Times, 25 January 2007)

2007 Indonesia bans the export of sand.
(Ministry of Trade of Republic of Indonesia regulation number: 02/M-DAG/PER/1/2007)

Reclamation Sea Sand Origin Cambodia

FOB Price: Get Latest Price

Mr. Darren Khoo

Offline

Contact Supplier

Add to Inquiry Cart

Product Details | Company Profile

Quick Details

Type:	Sand	Place of Origin:	Cambodia	Brand Name:	Sea Rive Sand
Natural Sand Type:	River Sand				

Specifications

River and Sea clean, quality sand for any purposes use. Sell FOB. Invite Dredger Business for Self Exploit

We are direct legal sea sand exporter from Cambodia which currently holding 2 concession areas for the river and sea sand mining in Koh Kong and Shanouk Ville. Sand meet JTC requirement.
We are selling on few option:
[1] Selling at sea bed + duty, tax, other goverment charges involve
[2] FOB
Welcome to all the genuine buyers and sellers.
We also invite Dredger Business to Co-Op.
Thanks.

Regards,
Darren Khoo
Sang & Company
office: 10 Pasir Ris Avenue, Singapore 519077
Tel: +65-65821876
Fax: +65-65820070

Product Details | Company Profile

We are legal sea sand exporter from Cambodia which currently holding 2 concession areas for the sea sand mining in Koh kong and Sihanouk Ville.

Basic Information

Product/Service (We Buy):	sand
Number of Employees:	5 - 10 People

Send your message to this supplier

Pulau Sajahat
"jahat" translates as "evil" (Malay language)

Jessica Anne Rahardjo

Conversation with Charles Lim

Charles Lim: One of the interesting things about water in Singapore is that we're at the equatorial zone, the temperature in the sea is almost the same as the body temperature, so people can stay in the water for a long time without getting hypothermia. If we're in the Western climate, they say it's something like, five minutes, and your life is in danger...

But here, the water has something very embryonic about it. The temperature of the water is sometimes actually warmer than the temperature outside. Life can be sustained for quite a long time in the water, so I was thinking, that could be one start. The gist of the project I'm doing, *SEA STATE*, is to inverse the way we look at water, and in relation to land. To see water as a territory, as a real space where people live, work, there's economy, there's culture, and things like that.

If you look at the land historically, when archaeologists were looking for civilisations around the Riau regions, they went to the centre and they couldn't find any kingdoms, so they thought that these people were...

Jessica Rahardjo: Primitive.

Charles Lim: But recently they found out that many of the kingdoms are along the coast, in the mangrove swamp. So it's very much coastal based.

The *SEA STATE* project is very simple – when you look at Singapore as an island, you think of the island as a territory, but I was thinking of the idea that the island is actually not the territory, [but] the static space where things don't happen. Everything that happens is in the water, there's a lot more changes there...

People in Singapore can look back at history and see that many things were happening [then], but now they are disconnected from the water because they think nothing is happening there. That's not the case at all. There's a huge industry, shipping, on the water. I think recently, the MPA[1] came up with this campaign, saying that Singaporeans form under 10% of the workforce in the marine industry, so the people in Singapore are disconnected from this world. The world of commerce does not connect to, or relate to the practical life.

The only way we connect with water is, for example, when we go to Sentosa, which is some sort of Disneyland, it's only for leisure.

Jessica Rahardjo: Yes, a kind of manufactured experience.

Charles Lim: Yes it's only a leisure kind of experience. For me, culture does not happen through leisure completely. It needs some sort of practicality and some sort of work around it, or some kind of utilitarian use.

So the project *SEA STATE* is about reversing the view of Singapore. For *SEA STATE 1 [inside outside]*, I was kind of interested in the coast of Singapore. The coast of Singapore is quite controversial – we have the land reclamation, we have the fence on the north, these are quite politically loaded, ecologically loaded subject matters. When I embarked on the *SEA STATE* project in 2000, there was a lot of self-censorship. I wanted to touch on all these subjects but I didn't want to say "we (Singaporeans) did all these bad things". But at the same time, as an artist I'm not really interested in that.

Jessica Rahardjo: Do you see yourself as an artist, though?

Charles Lim: There's a part of it that's actually activism. But to me, these things have already happened and we have to accept who we are, and that's what I'm more interested in. Looking at what we are, looking at the present, in a sense, and through that, analysing 'what does it make us?' And instead of thinking of the future, about how we can improve ourselves, I'm not interested in that.

The projects I did before was with tsunamii.net (with artist Woon Tien Wei and scientist Melvin Phua), a lot of it was bordering on activism and institutional critique. It was like we wanted to contain all these big subjects, to say all these things, but in the end the artwork couldn't sustain it. We spent all our time trying to explain the work, trying to find the point. I felt that it was not working. So for *SEA STATE 1*, I wanted to try a new way where I do a very simple act, and through the act, things will open up.

The act is looking in and out of Singapore. Through this rigorous act, I came up with images of buoys. A lot of people see *SEA STATE 1* as the work with the buoys, but it's not about the buoys, it's about the act – the act of being inside and outside. I did it three times, once with the images, which was through me going in and out of the border, and the other one was through the sound the VHF radio sent, which was put in the gallery. It was tuned to the ships that were entering the port of Singapore. Every time the ships enter the port, they have to communicate for permission. And the port will send them a pilot, somebody from the port, who will board the ship and drive the ship into the port of Singapore. It's quite interesting that you hear sounds of people from outside coming in.

The third part of the project was a day before the exhibition, when I was setting up, I was looking at a map and instinctively I just cut the map. To me I felt like that it was a lot more economical, but I kind of like the VHF set. The VHF set added some kind of random real-time element to it, because people in the gallery can interfere with what's going on.

To me, the images feel like a bit of a cop-out, actually...

Jessica Rahardjo: The images lure you in...

Charles Lim: Images of the buoys right? To me it was a tribute to the Bechers, Bernd and Hilla Becher, with their water tanks... So anyway I just did that because I couldn't come up with any other idea. I mean, I tried to put it up in a crazy way, but yeah, that's the first work I did.

The second work is the one we're talking about for this journal, *as evil disappears*. I always wanted to work on the subject of land reclamation in Singapore.

The tsunamii.net project first started with this thing called SEA-ME-WE2. SEA-ME-WE2 stands for Southeast Asia-Middle East-Western Europe 2. It is the longest cable in the world and it starts from South Korea and goes all the way to Scandinavia. The cable is underwater.

Jessica Rahardjo: What does it transmit?

Charles Lim: Internet signals. How the *SEA STATE* project is connected to tsunamii.net is through this SEA-ME-WE2 project. In 1999, around 2000, one day I found out the internet was not working. I was quite frustrated, so I called the internet company and they said the internet was just down. The next day, I did some research, and reports said that the SEA-ME-WE2 had broken. One possible reason was that a ship anchored, and there was a storm, and broke the cable. The second possibility was an earthquake, and the third one was even more interesting - [that] the cable emits some sort of a pulse which attracted some sharks, and the sharks bit and broke it.

We feel that the net is this virtual space that is not connected to the physical ground. There are many media theorists who write about the disembodiment, the flatness, the lack of gender, the lack of race, you can't see what race you are, that there's no discrimination in that space.

We started all these tsunamii projects that were testing the relationship between the physical world and the net. After that, the project stopped and Woon Tien Wei and I started p-10.

Although this was an inciting incident for this tsunamii project, I also wanted to make a project about this. I went out to the sea looking for this cable and I found out that there were many interesting things going on about this cable. There are always funny things going on in the sea in Singapore! That was when I started 'seastories'.

What I find most interesting about 'seastories' is... I have a history of working with the sea, I used to sail. And I've been looking at artists like Tacita Dean and Simon Starling, their works are about the sea. I like their works very much, but the works are very much psychological. They romanticise the sea, and I feel that there is a danger to this line of thought, because one would then see the sea as this infinite space when it really is not. The sea has been mapped out, divided and quantified.

And they always keep saying that man cannot conquer the sea, but when I go in the sea, I don't see that happening. The sea has become a political space, a very dominated space and all sorts of things are going on in there. But it's also become the non-space, but it's actually *not* non-space.

People go out to sea and they always think it's no man's land. There's something quite romantic about it, but the dominant powers of say, the U.S., dominate the sea. And they use the sea to dominate other people...

Jessica Rahardjo: In limiting travel, limiting trade...

Charles Lim: So I was thinking that I wanted to do something more rigorous. Allan Sekula is making works like that, *Fish Story*... He was in Documenta 11 (Kassel, Germany, 2002). I needed some sort of way in so I thought I should pull out my past stories. When I was learning to sail, the coach used to tell me that if you could sail out to this place in the sea, it's called a seafix... To me it's always represented this place that's really far and a kind of a milestone for me. Now, the seafix has ceased to exist because we have reclaimed the land. It's really incredible. It's like for some *towkay*[2], to have a Porsche or a Mercedes is the ultimate goal, and then the next day he finds out all the taxis are also Mercedes... And that kind of feeling happened to me.

So I emailed MPA. I wrote an email, I'm a local artist and I'm looking for this seafix and I know it doesn't exist... I was thinking that maybe they still have the seafix, I can take it and use it for an installation. That would be really nice.

Amazingly they wrote back to me, and told me that the seafix has disappeared, has been demolished. It's gone. This is related to reclamation. They showed me pictures of this seafix. When I was a kid, when I looked at the seafix it looked like a robot. Also, they provided me with maps of the area where the seafix was. When I was looking at the maps, I was thinking, what was this thing here – a straight line? So I went out to sea to look for it and I found this thing – it's actually a wall in the sea.

Jessica Rahardjo: What's the wall for?

Charles Lim: HDB[3] made this wall. They were given this space in the sea, and they made this sign. It's ridiculous. It's like, you take your boat and when you approach the border of Singapore, it becomes The Truman Show...

Jessica Rahardjo: But what purpose does it serve?

Charles Lim: It's a prime example of demarcation [of property], and people who think land-wise. HDB normally works with land, so when they were given a piece of the sea by the government – to them, they felt the need to demarcate it. So that's what they did.

[1] *Maritime and Port Authority, Singapore*

[2] *Prominent business owner; boss (Hokkien dialect)*

Jessica Rahardjo: So the wall is only on a single side...

Charles Lim: It's a very long wall. For the show, I took people up on the wall. I did a lucky draw and took some people up to see it. So this became a work.

The second one was *inside outside*, my tribute to the Bechers. Then comes the [Pulau] Sejahat project.

Here is the old map, and here is Pulau Sejahat. I've got satellite maps with the islands. What happened is, the island has been reclaimed, and the islands are not reflected in the new maps. So I looked for this island, and I found it. I did more research on these islands and I found out that Singapore has reclaimed and dredged so much that seven islands in the Riau regions disappeared.

Jessica Rahardjo: And nobody protested?

Charles Lim: Indonesia has banned the sale of sand to Singapore since 2007 because of this. I need to verify the names of the seven islands. Another interesting thing about land reclamation in Singapore is that although there are other countries like Dubai doing crazy stuff, the nature about land reclamation here is cross-border. In a way it's land-moving. Like country-moving...

I also have other thoughts. I received an email... It was from the Manifesta one actually, I was thinking of the process of cleaning. The idea of cleaning and how Singapore is quite obsessed about it. Why we're obsessed about cleaning and why we're afraid of old things. Maybe it's because things don't age very well in Singapore, in the tropics, like biscuits that go *lao hong*[4]. Things will break down and decompose very fast. The idea is we don't like old houses...

Jessica Rahardjo: Some kind of aversion to entropy?

Charles Lim: We tend to think that there's some kind of disease inside. Perhaps we connect diseases or ill health to some sort of bad experience. We associate old things with bad experiences. We don't like old things because they are historically loaded and it might transfer to us. This is superstition. I'm trying to look at our superstitions from biological...

Jessica Rahardjo: From a rational perspective?

Charles Lim: I want to see if there's some connection. The idea that we think we cannot modernise Singapore if we have all these things that are breaking down all the time... So we need this space of clean-ness, we associate clean-ness with something that has no history.

It's like when you want to put an artwork in the jungle, it's practically impossible. You need a white cube. Even artists are guilty of this, in a sense, because we need the clean context. They also talk about that in American history. I'm trying to associate this with the idea of the tropics.

I was thinking that we have this island, and this island is 'evil' (See page 34). The island's history is intertwined with the process of reclamation, and this reclamation processcan be seen as a way of cleaning history. Singaporeans are somehow afraid of land which has a history. To them, reclaimed land has no ghosts. There's no problem here as there's no history. The reclamation process is a very comforting thing for us as Singaporeans... And when you look at Robert's [Zhao Renhui's] work, this land can even be romanticised.

Jessica Rahardjo: In a way, reclaimed land is an urban utopia.

[3] *Housing and Development Board, Singapore*

[4] *Soft; stale (Hokkien dialect)*

Charles Lim: *Signs in the sea: 1*, 2008


DANGER
PROHIBITED ANCHORAGE AREA
HIGH VOLTAGE CABLES

Paul Rae

Singapore on Sea

Geographically, historically and economically, Singapore is existentially tied to the sea. From the 13th to the 18th century, it represented a strategic foothold at the tip of the hotly contested Straits of Malacca, a key trade route between East Asia (especially China) and, progressively, South and West Asia, Africa and Europe. Following the East India Company's establishment of a trading factory on the island in 1819, Singapore rose rapidly to prominence as a free port. Along with Rotterdam, Shanghai and Hong Kong, it remains one of the busiest ports in the world, while related industries – bunkering, ship repair, logistics – contribute substantially to its economy. Under numerous defence agreements, Changi Naval Base is used by the British, U.S. and other navies for re-supply. Moreover, the historical legacy of Singapore's role as a transshipment centre can be seen in everything from its refining to its financial services industries, and its reputation as a long haul stopover hub, and a 'gateway' to other parts of the region.

Over sixty islands lie in Singapore's territorial waters, with many serving specific functions in meeting the requirements of a modern nation-state, such as military training, oil refining, or leisure activities. Proximity to the Indonesian Riau islands (to the south) and peninsular Malaysia (to the north) has enabled the development of a sub-regional economic processing zone known as the SIJORI (Singapore-Johor-Riau) Growth Triangle, which synthesises the capital and expertise of the first with the natural resources and market provided by the second, and the land and low-cost labour of the third.

If the sea is integral to Singapore's economy, historical development and regional relations, it figures relatively little in the republic's contemporary self-imaging and self-imagining. Simultaneously nation, state and highly built-up city, the word 'island' is rarely used in public discourse to describe the place. Although many of its high-rise offices and apartments afford striking views beyond Singapore's shores, so many ships lie at anchor in the invariably placid sea, that it tends to be seen either as an extension of the land, as an aestheticised seascape or backdrop, or as the place from which you can, in turn, gain some striking views of the city's skyline. As an elemental factor in the lived experience of the modern Singaporean, and as cultural figure in the national imaginary, the sea is largely absent.

An important reason for the sea's relative absence is that although Singapore's economy, history and cultural make-up derive in large part from its location, a key factor in the nation-building effort has been the attempt to transcend the idea that geography is destiny. Materially, the most obvious manifestation of this is a vast project of land 'reclamation', which, by 2030, is projected to increase the island by 25% of its size at independence in 1965. Beyond this very literal version of nation-building, the effort has taken two contrasting forms. The first, exemplified by the 'Total Defence' concept, derives from the militarisation of society, and a rhetoric of selective regional isolationism. Motivated in part by the racially charged circumstances in which Singapore became, at independence, a majority Chinese state bordered by the larger, predominantly Muslim nations of Malaysia and Indonesia, 'Total Defence' is indicative of a low-level but persistent garrison mentality in Singapore (which unsurprisingly, maintains close military and diplomatic links with Israel). Coupled with a popular and political monoculture, the result is a high degree of national self-absorption (one hears and reads the word 'Singapore' in Singapore with unrelenting regularity), and a cultural insularity which, by dint of the state's small size and centralized media, can result in parochialism.

In a simultaneous rhetorical gesture, however, Singapore has successfully leapfrogged its immediate surroundings to market itself internationally as a 'world class' city that offers an attractive tourist destination; a safe, good quality environment for expatriates to set up home; and a secure, well-resourced and relatively corruption-free base from which to do business in a profitable, if volatile, region. In part, the rhetoric is justified. In terms of standards of living, infrastructure and technological development, Singapore is on par with other global cities, and its sizeable middle class is well-travelled, with many of its professionals educated at universities in the U.S., U.K. or Australia.[1]

Still, this is not to say that the sea is entirely absent from the national imaginary; rather, it tends to be confined to rather restricted aspects of it – most visibly, the port. Although the port has long been central to Singapore's *raison d'être*, its rise to global prominence was profoundly bound with the influence of the shipping container on the transport industry and its role in driving the global economy. The first container ship docked in Singapore in 1972; within a decade, it had become the world's busiest port by shipping tonnage, and by 1990, it was the world's largest container port. Today, it is the world's busiest transshipment hub, handling approximately 6% of global container throughput.[2]

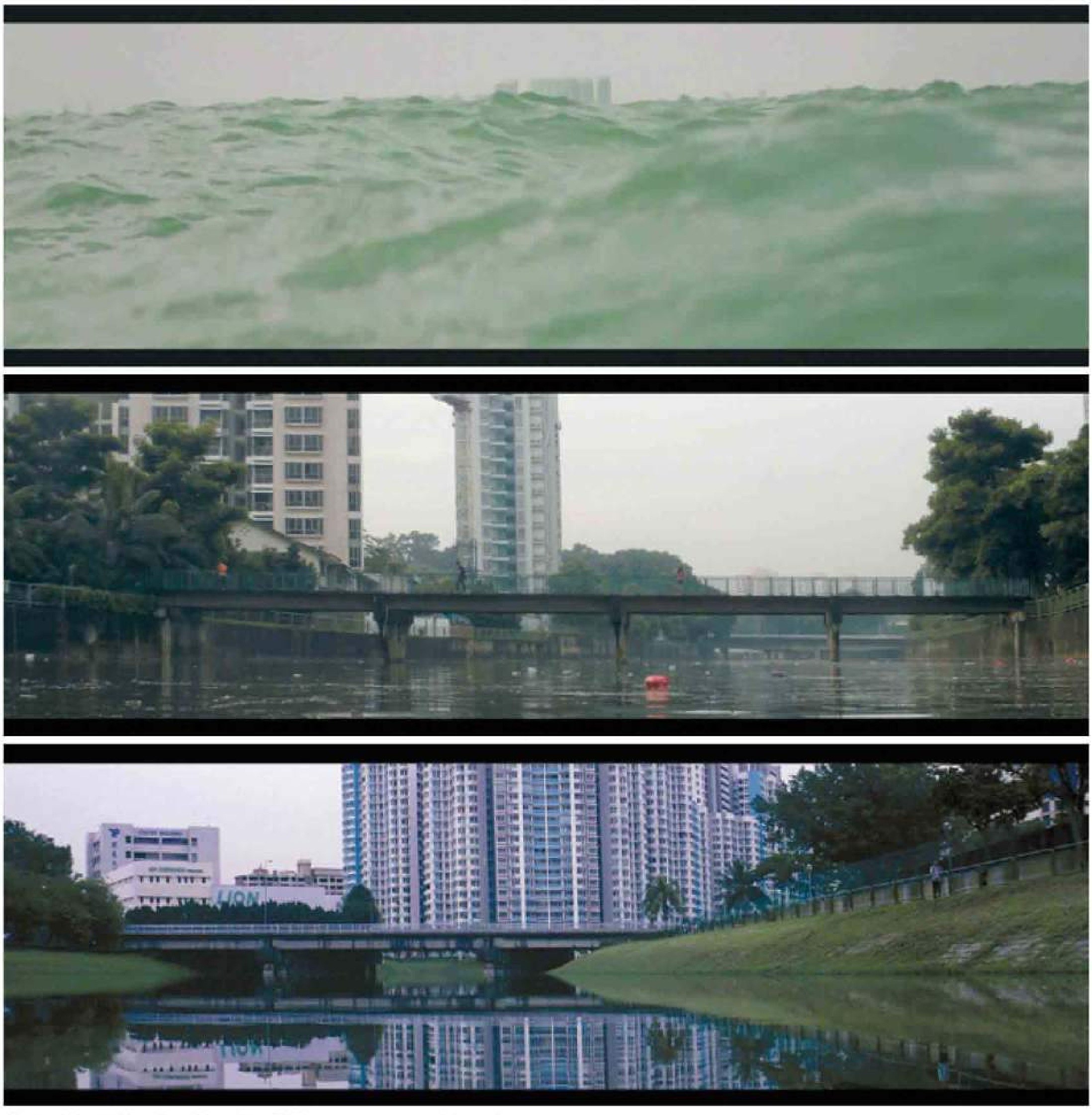
[1] Singapore routinely rates highly in expatriate quality of life league tables. In HSBC's 'Expat Explorer 2009' report, it ranked second for locations to raise a family, fourth for quality of life, and sixth as a place to save money. In a 2002 Business Times article, the Malaysian commentator Karim Raslan raised a rare dissenting voice when he wrote: "Try as it might, Singapore will never be a great global city like New York, London or Paris. Singapore is thoroughly provincial though not quite as provincial as Kuala Lumpur or Jakarta. However, the region's other capital cities enjoy the benefit of an extensive hinterland, providing a greater depth of cultural and political diversity. If you doubt my conclusion, read the city-state's newspapers and examine the cultural concerns of the citizenry: the banality is astounding" (85).

[2] These and other figures are available on the Port of Singapore Authority website at http://www.singaporepsa.com/aboutus.php

In *The Box: How the Shipping Container Made the World Smaller and the World Economy Bigger* (2006), the economist Marc Levinson argues that the importance of containerisation to the globalisation of trade has been under-appreciated because of the apparent ordinariness of the shipping container. Describing it as having "all the romance of a tin can", Levinson goes on: "The value of this utilitarian object lies not in what it is, but in how it is used. The container is at the core of a highly automated system for moving goods from anywhere, to anywhere, with a minimum of cost and complication on the way" (1-2). Levinson then tells of how a cost-saving measure implemented by an American haulier in the mid-fifties led to the world-wide integration of today's transport system and transformed where and how goods are produced. In this light, to retain an attachment – to the romance of the sea (such as the ship lines), waterfront ways of life (such as the docker's unions), localism (such as manufacturers) or regionalism (such as port authorities) – is to risk obsolescence.

By contrast, "no government anywhere was more aggressive in preparing for the container age than Singapore's" (211), with initial plans for a more conventional 'breakbulk' port development being rapidly revised when it became apparent that container shipping was on the rise. And yet, Singapore's success as a container port has also led, as the sociologist Chua Beng Huat describes it, to its 'eclipse':

> *With the highly mechanized containerisation of all cargoes, the amount of labour required by the port has been radically reduced. The remaining jobs are now part of the 3D – dirty, dangerous and degrading – jobs that are filled by foreign workers from neighbour-*



Charles Lim: *All Lines Flow Out* (stills), 2011. Image courtesy of the artist.

ing countries. Visually, the port is seen only through its brightly painted tower-cranes that lift and move the containers; it is a landscape of robots, with sparsely distributed machine operators. (2009: 191)

For this reason, suggests Chua, although the port is larger than ever before, it has never been less significant for Singaporeans. In his study, Chua goes on to survey recent developments in the cultural and creative industries, proposing "the new constellation of consumption and leisure activities as the major preoccupation of daily life and as new veins of economic development" (191).

This in turn raises the question of where else one might look for the sea 'in' Singapore, for as both Levinson and Chua indicate, beyond the sheer bulk, there is little that is of aesthetic interest or even human scale about a container port and the ships that dock there.

Sometimes, the sea comes looking for us. The results are often tragic, and, for that reason, illuminating. On 30 December 2010, the body of a man washed up on a beach on the Indonesian island of Bintan. A rucksack found on the body contained the man's passport, so he was easily identified. Mr Ng Kian Teck was one of five Singaporeans who drowned when their over-laden boat capsized between Sibu, a holiday island off the east coast of Malaysia, and the mainland. Sea currents had carried Mr Ng 150 kilometres from the site of the accident. At the time, a Malaysian coastguard said that it was unusual for a body to travel such a distance. Unfortunately, however, we are all too familiar with such phenomena. Whether it is migrants washing up on the shores of Southern Europe and North Africa; refugees in Southeast Asia and Australia; or the appalling aftermath of the tsunamis in the Indian Ocean in 2004 and, most recently, in Japan, these bodies bear mute witness to turbulent times in global geopolitics, and to roiling anxieties over our relation to – and impact on – the environment.

In comparison with the vast upheavals of which many of these bodies speak, Mr Ng's seems to tell a more modest though no less tragic tale, of a family fishing holiday gone horribly wrong. But in the 150-kilometre drift of a Singaporean from Malaysian waters to an Indonesian island, passing unchecked through fishing grounds, shipping lanes and immigration controls, there lies a salutary reminder of the limits to the borders of territory and national identity that all three nation-states work so tirelessly to protect and police. Indeed, a very similar fate had earlier befallen two Singapore Navy servicewomen while engaged in that very activity. Turning against the flow of shipping while patrolling the waters of the then-contested Pedra Branca on the night of 3 January 2003, RSS Courageous had its stern sheered off by a merchant vessel, with the loss of four lives. Two days later, the body of 1st Sergeant Heng Sock Ling washed up on the same beach as Mr Ng's would later; that of 1st Sergeant Seah Ai Leng soon emerged nearby.

In all three cases, a powerful sea current, unseen and unfelt by all except those who routinely ply these waters, came briefly to light, and reasserted the indifference with which the elements tend to greet most human endeavours, as well as a geographical reality too easily overlooked in the light of recent postcolonial histories of national self-determination, and of locality-denying global aspirations.

One of the words we can use to recover some understanding of that geographical reality is 'archipelago'. When we talk about globalisation, we often think in terms of urban world cities like Tokyo, Hong Kong, London, New York, Sydney. When we consider geopolitics, it is regions, land masses and economies of scale that dominate. But although Singapore is a global city and a nation-state, it is also a cluster of 63 islands in the largest archipelago on Earth. In English, 'archipelago' can mean a group of islands, or the sea in which they lie. This ambiguity underscores the distinctive combination of integration and differentiation that all archipelagos represent, albeit to different degrees. Joining islands to their neighbours without regard for political borders highlights geographical continuity where often there is regional or national division; commonality in the experience of island and maritime life not shared by more proximate mainland neighbours; and how a historical combination of insularity, influence, maritime trade, natural resources and colonial expansion has shaped any number of present-day territorial disputes, political alliances, economic relations, national identities and cultural practices.

Such cultural practices can vary widely, and may be as obscure to outsiders as they are meaningful to initiates, especially when they appear to bespeak an enduring, sustaining and yet precarious coexistence with the sea over many years. The results are easily romanticised, and it is tempting for contemporary urbanites – landlubbers, as the Britishism would have it – to over-simplify what it would take to reintegrate an island like Singapore back into its geohistorical surroundings. Nevertheless, given the imbalance between the region's economic importance and cultural under-representation, it makes sense to try, and in what follows I interpret two works at the Singapore Biennale 2011 as giving some indication of how one might begin.

In his short film *the meaning of style*, British artist Phil Collins explores a cultural dimension of archipelagic island life by presenting a highly aestheticised portrait of Malay skinheads on the Malaysian island of Penang. Lasting the duration of an instrumental track by the Welsh pop musician Gruff Rhys, the film shows the skinheads in mid-shot in a variety of locations around Georgetown, including a cinema showing Indian movies, and the Cheong Fatt Sze mansion, an elaborately restored 1880s house that combines Hakka, Teochew and

Zai Kuning: *From The River* (forthcoming)
Image courtesy of the artist

Victorian English design motifs. Against these culturally hybrid backdrops, Collins juxtaposes the youths' fastidious attention to sartorial detail with beautiful butterflies whose description in books like Alfred Russell Wallace's *The Malay Archipelago* (1869) exemplifies the colonial naturalist's impulse to capture, categorise and trade.

In so doing, Collins acknowledges the ethnographic undertones of his approach, but studiously avoids social commentary. Instead, we are shown the point where the globe-spanning skinhead archipelago laps at the shores of the Malay archipelago: how a style born in the working-class housing estates of post-Imperial Britain is quite literally rematerialised amongst the tropical exuberance of a postcolonial port-city several oceans distant. In a place where the swastika remains more recognisably an image of Buddhism than Nazism, skinhead style and subcultural belonging emerge in the straightening of a Ben Sherman collar, or the pre-fight shrugging-off of braces. And in the curious mixture of similarity amongst and difference between individuals, we are reminded how integration and differentiation create social archipelagos; how, while none of us is an island, we may be archipelagos unto ourselves.

The inflow of cultural influence explored by Collins found its corollary at the Biennale in *All Lines Flow Out*, an installation by the Singaporean artist and sailor Charles Lim. Two large nets, known as 'drain socks', hung from the ceiling, containing the detritus captured from an outflow pipe, while a video showed a series of water-level views, captured at drifting-pace in the *longkangs*[3] of Singapore's drainage system. The multi-screen video was subsequently adapted as a self-contained 21-minute film, with an ambient soundtrack of music and water sounds that varied widely in volume and intensity.

The perspective of the camera does not align with any one person, although over the course of the film, the viewer is encouraged to identify with a figure who – at least for a Singaporean audience – would appear to be a migrant labourer.[4] As such, the work raises obvious questions about the status and perceptions of migrant workers in a city built on their labour, but not always respectful of their rights. Like *the meaning of style*, though, the work does not dwell on social commentary, and instead this subaltern identification feeds the larger effect of the film, which is to present an uncanny perspective on the urban landscape.

Singapore is both small and relentlessly imaged on mass and social media, as well as by its many compulsively snapshotting inhabitants. Much of the time, Singapore-dwellers have personal knowledge and experience of the environments they see reproduced on the news, in films, or on other people's Facebook sites. *All Lines Flow Out* presents a city that is instantly recognisable to its inhabitants, yet it does so from an angle that is novel and disorientating. Singapore is notoriously clean and efficient, and key to that characterisation is the speed and thoroughness with which rainwater, detritus and effluent are swept out of sight, mind and smell. Lim's film returns parts of this system to his viewers' attention, while drawing them slowly but inexorably towards and out into the sea. One is prompted to think about the relationship between the complex network of drains and canals that play an integral role in the island's ecology, dissolving any internal distinctions we may be tempted to make between land and water, while at the same time joining it to its marine environs. In so doing, one comes to understand Singapore island as itself archipelagoed by its waterways, further fjorded every time we turn on a tap or flush the chain on the toilet, newly firthed whenever we open our mouths to drink a glass of water.

[3] As the Coxford Singlish Dictionary puts it, 'longkang' is: "The Malay word for 'drain'. It is used to describe any form of man-made water passage, from small drainholes to big canals."

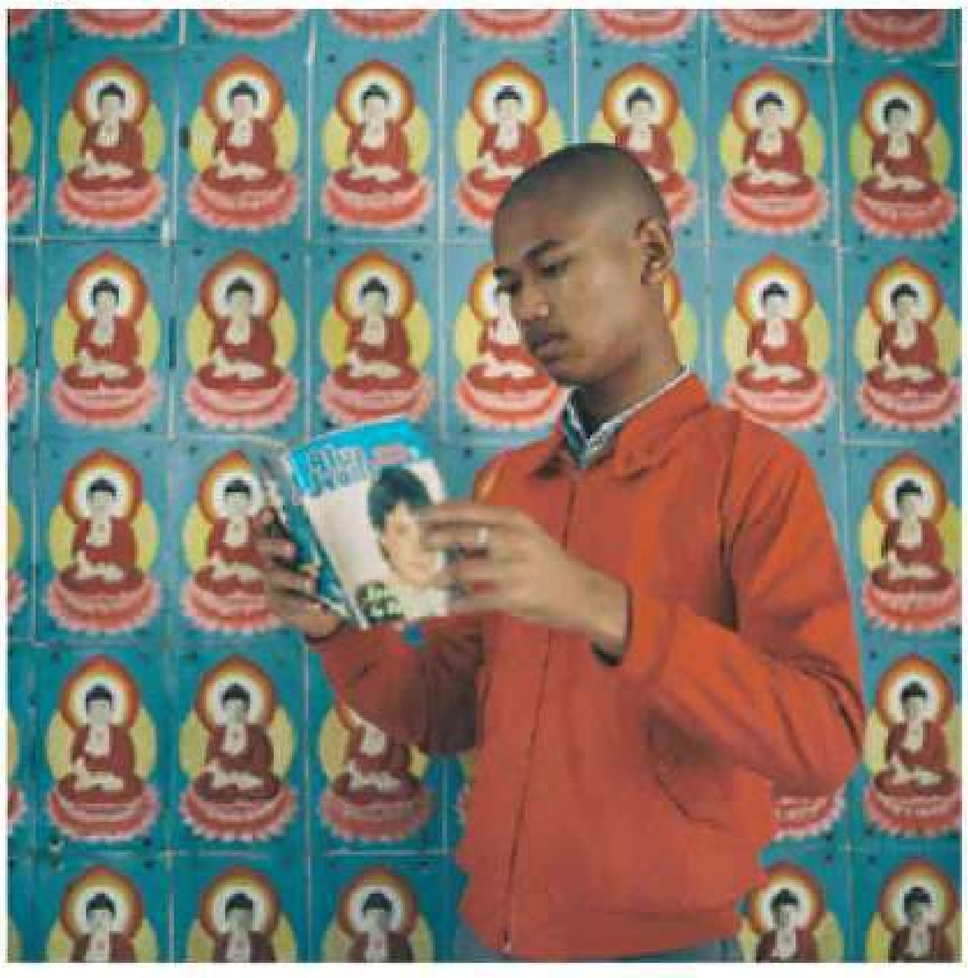
[4] The figure appears to be of indeterminate South or Southeast Asian ethnicity, and near the beginning of the film, he fashions a small fish trap out of a water bottle. In my personal experience, it is often the migrant labourers who treat as a resource features of the landscape that locals are more likely to overlook or view as ornamental. I have seen Filipinos harvesting mangoes from a tree, Bangladeshis washing clothes and casting fishing nets in a longkang, and Vietnamese plucking leaves from a roadside planting for their medicinal value.

[5] For more details see, respectively, Zai (forthcoming) and Yee (2010).

These two examples – *the meaning of style* and *All Lines Flow Out* – provide an opportunity for city-dwellers to reflect on the cultural and environmental dimensions of their maritime location. As art works presented within gallery and screening contexts, there is a clear limit to the claims that can be made for them in relation to the wider geophysical actualities that also provide, however indistinctly, the contexts of their creation and presentation. Other artists have created practices and works that reflect more directly on their archipelagic identities and life experiences. Most notably among the current generation, this includes Zai Kuning, who was born in Singapore and has travelled extensively in the Riau archipelago, and the Malaysian Yee I-Lann, whose home state of Sabah in Borneo represents a kind of hinge for looking both West, towards mainland Southeast Asia, and East, towards the Sulu archipelago of Malaysia and the Philippines, whose ownership is contested by Malaysia and the Philippines.[5] These and other territorial disputes – such as the six-way arguments over the Spratly and Paracel archipelago in the South China Sea – remind us both how peripheral artworks can be in the face of brutal *realpolitik*, but also what is at stake, in human terms, in the relations between sea and land.

The artworks I have discussed here allow those of us for whom such relations have become obscured, to begin to reimagine them, beginning not from the perspective of a romanticised vision of island life, but from where we are: in a city and a nation that views its immediate geographical surroundings through the fractured prism of both economic resource and existential threat. But this can only be a beginning. The unfortunate fates of Mr Ng Kian Teck and the servicewomen of RSS Courageous reminds us of the volatile reality of seagoing life in the archipelago. But for developing a suitably relational sense of where one lives, there can ultimately be no substitute for setting sail.

Phil Collins: *the meaning of style* (still), 2011
Image courtesy of the artist



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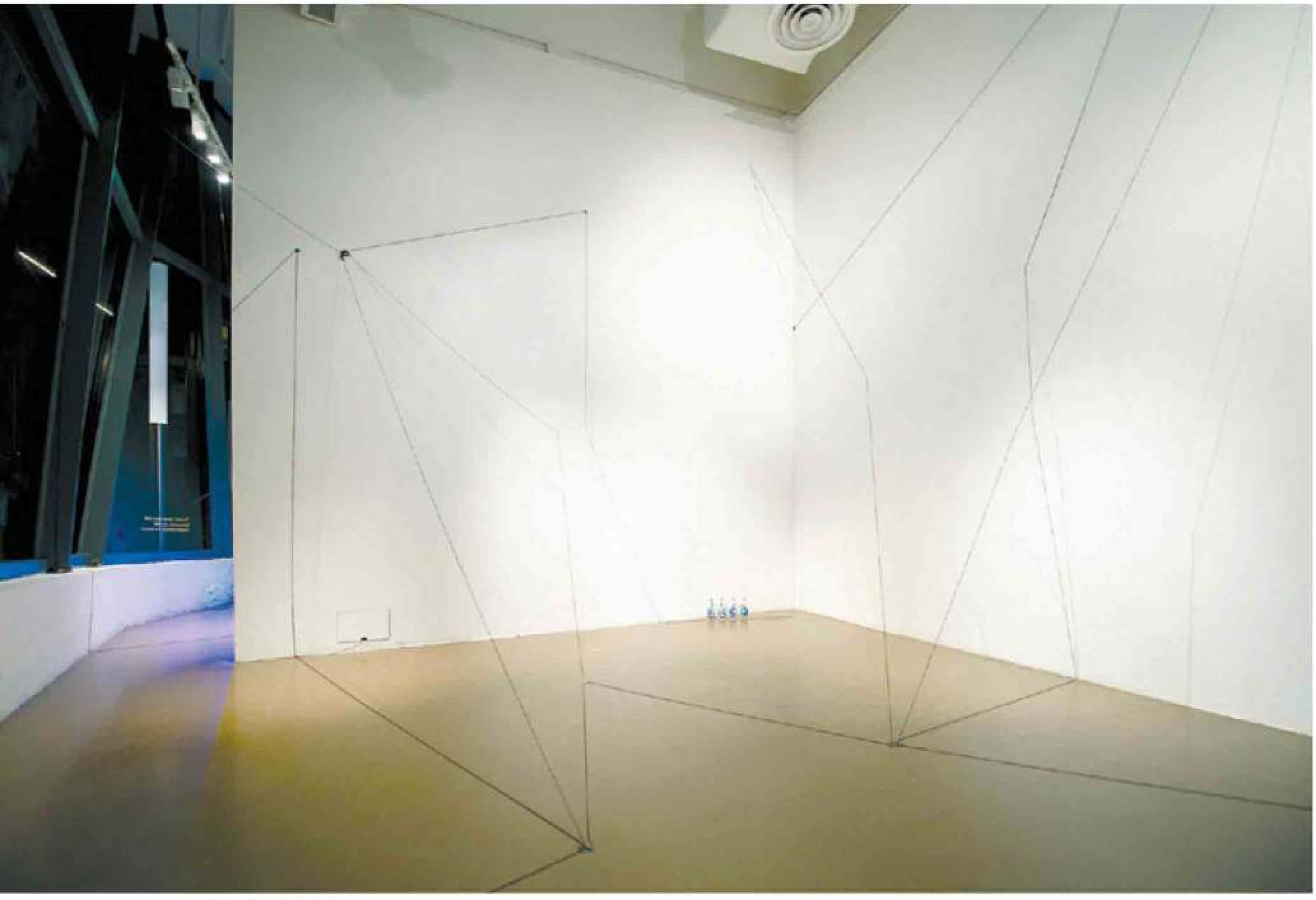
Lawrence Chin: Thoughts on Tropical Lab 6, LASALLE College of the Arts, 27 July to 15 August 2012

Land(scope), or what is there to see?

Exhibition: ICA Gallery 2, Brother Joseph McNally Gallery,
Praxis Space and Project Space
8 – 15 August 2012

Before the name: what was the place like before it was named?
(Carter xiii)



James Yakimicki: *Spatial Deviation*
String on wall, Dimensions variable, 2012

Perhaps one could be allowed a false start - even as one is reminded that the etymological root of "landscape" is less of a viewed object (as in land-scope), than one that is steeped in notions of production and mutual transformation (as in *landscipes*, derived from Old English) ("The Art Seminar" 92). Embodied in the act of looking at any tract of land is a complex mix of overlapping perceptual, psychological, emotional and conceptual registers. These registers can unfold independently of or congruently with each other – which makes the act of looking at land(scape) all the more unsettling.

Modes of looking dominate the experience of modernity, yet one's experience may be augmented and fragmented by non-ocular episodes. Following Martin Jay's schema of "the scopic regime of modernity as a contested terrain" (3), there is perhaps ample value in extending these categories of looking and thinking beyond the visual trope. Such extension and examination of categories of thought may in turn redeem one's false start and initial misapprehension by returning the passive act of looking to a more productive form of action – in thinking about things.

Billy Ward: *M.I.B.B.W*
Two moving image sequences with one illustration, Dimensions variable, 2012

Of the three modern scopic regimes that have been identified, admittedly in a simplified manner, the most decidedly hegemonic is "Cartesian perspectivalism" (Jay 4). The primary characteristic of such a manner of looking is to confirm (and conform) one's perception to a pre-existing mental model or representation. This act of conformity must in turn be derived from a symbolic order that is already in place and these perceptual acts further confirm the very same symbolic order as a useful, if not true, representative schema.

The act of naming a place or features of a landscape, such as that traced out by Paul Carter in the early colonial interventions in Australia, can be understood as a variant of "Cartesian perspectivalism". Naming unfamiliar terrain becomes an attempt to mark what is alien as already-known, hence already-understood (Carter 60). Billy Ward in his work *M.I.B.B.W.*, presented at the Tropical Lab 6 exhibition, seems to perform a similar gesture in the juxtaposition of a hasty, dyslexic scrawl: "Singabore", alongside two animated / documentary sequences with inter-changed audio channels. The slippage in naming becomes an intentional affirmation of the perception of a place that is verging on being a mistake, while the visually displaced audio tracks are jarring at times, yet cynically and effectively reinforcing the (mis)conception of a banal state of affairs already inscribed.

The ideological underpinning of a preconceived symbolic order in such representations can only be understood as *necessary* even as that representation seeks to critique the very nature and structure of the symbolic order. This leads to a strange loop of critiques as affirming the very state of affairs being criticised. In Lai Chee Kien's remarks during the introductory seminar to the Tropical Lab 6 workshop, the notion of a central void – in the form of a vacant site set aside for the purpose of a periodic enactment of shared nationalistic identity – is considered a crucial component in the ideological formation of the (Singapore) nation-state. Such a void could also be understood as akin to the notion of "lack" in the formation of desire and its manifestation. And into such a void or lack, a critique can arise, not as reversal but as affirmation.

In Valérie Wolf Gang's *Freedom 2.0*, the sense of social and ideological alienation is played out through careful visual choice of materials and reconstructions. Yet, an emerging divergent sense of resistance made possible through the execution of the presented work shows up the very irony embedded in the constraining conditions of freedom – not as the presence of coercion but its absence. The very ideological condition of such symbolic production or representation becomes its very own success – in what is represented, and demise – in what cannot be represented. And in *Freedom 2.0*, one is made aware of the instability of the larger ideological or symbolic order through the actual material configurations being presented – that things can be about something else other than what they are made out to be.

Sina Wittayawiroj: *IML*
Digital print and animation, Dimensions variable, 2012

Simply Looking At Things (Looking)

Thinking from the viewpoint of "objects", Graham Harman had surmised:

> *[...] that insofar as something is present to consciousness, it is merely present-at-hand (vorhanden). But what is present to our minds in this way is only a tiny proportion of the entities with which we are involved. (174)*

What can be apprehended sensuously is a facet of an object that does not and cannot exhaust the entire meaning and existence of that same entity. This object-oriented ontology approach brings to mind an alternate scopic regime that Martin Jay described as "suppress[ing] narrative and textual reference in favour of description and visual surface" (12) – or, more than mere description, favouring an autonomy given over to the existence and insistence of (collection of) things. Muhammad Akbar's *1000 Singapore's Cigarette Butts* and James Yakimicki's *Spatial Deviation* are such curious objects in themselves – the former as a Quixotic attempt to record, order and present, literally, a larger-than-life reality of cigarette butts; while the latter activates the intangible spatial relationships of things, space and thoughts by means of a barely-visible thread that shifts in and out of an all-too-fragile human-centered perception.

A slightly different manner of understanding objects can be discerned in Erika Norris' *The Geographer Library* which hinges upon what cannot be seen as the central conceptual underpinning of what is seen. The selective removal and paring down of a seemingly coherent collection of magazine images to a few pages of free-standing remnants points to a deep-seated desire to know images as both material and conceptual things. As Charles Merewether pointed to, in his reading of the modernist engagement of the notion of "land" through the technological advancement of aerial photography (with the increasing circulation of a disembodied view-point of large areas of land), the development of abstraction could then be realised not as detachment from reality but as a renewed means of perceiving and, hence, understanding reality. This desire of knowing is made possible by what can be seen (presently), which in turn is determined and driven by what is not seen.

Charles Lim in his introductory seminar presentation suggested a single-mindedness that drives his projects toward a manner of over-turning commonly accepted norms of discerning categories – sea / land; in / out; above / below; stasis / flow. It is a manner of working, or an ethics of art-making, which seeks to reclaim both literally and metaphorically a suppressed condition that might have been hiding in plain sight all along – or a simultaneous actualisation of the (not-)seen. The notion of "plain sight" is further taken up through Sam Rains' *it's kind of like patchwork*, in which one has to constantly switch mental registers between a tangible physicality and an intangible representation that are intimately dependent on each other. The succession of projected digital architectural models in turn elicits pangs of recognition of Singapore's urban landscape, tinged

Sam Rains: *it's kind of like patchwork*
Video projection, Dimensions variable, 2012

with the recognition that the selected sequence of vantage points, though perfectly plausible, cannot be normally experienced.

The hybrid installations of objects and video projections presented in Jying Tan's *Future Wanderland*, Ika Yulianti's *On The Land* and Alice Theobald's *New Age Lament* bring into sharp relief the ambiguity of the screen as an indeterminate object, as part-thing, part-thought, and – by extension – a tacit reclamation of things as more than thoughts, and perhaps even more necessary than thoughts. This reclamation is not to be confused for a romantic return to a prior or given meaning of things, but a tacit acknowledgment that things are, perhaps, always and already what they are, in their multi-faceted meanings and possibilities, or – despite what they are made out to be – in their singular and distorted clarity. The defiant sense of things asserting a larger existence and meaning can be glimpsed through Lizzy Sampson's *Walking (to find a food source)*; even as the objects are intentionally collected, modified, arranged, aligned, rotated, lifted, piled, scattered, weighted and bounded, they elude any final state of significance in so far as the viewer is concerned. It is as if these things are staring back and saying something else altogether beyond a human-centered intention.

"In every landscape are ongoing dialogues;
there are no 'blank slate';
the task is to join the conversation." (Spirn 45.)

In accepting a non-human-centered approach of looking at the world, one might also then accept the world as already teeming with possibilities: a fullness that is not exclusionary but inclusionary and ever-expanding. As such, the productive work to be done is to add to this proliferation and overlapping of meanings, akin to the final schema in Martin Jay's broad account of scopic regimes, that is, "[...] the baroque [connoting] the bizarre and peculiar, traits which are normally disdained by the champions of clarity and transparency of form" (16).

The resultant opacity does not stem from an intention to obscure but from a demarcation of the possibility and limits of thought. It is an admission that it is not possible to know all things; even the familiar can and will become unfamiliar. Both of Minha Park's works, *Praxis of Patriotism* and *08/09*, carry an understated awareness of the complexity of nation and land through the complex prism of identity – the acquisition of language in the former; and the displacement of language in everyday experiences in the latter. Kim Thorton's *Warrior I* performs a similar displacement in its poignant reminder that one's association with a place has significant yet invisible ties to notions of territory, labour and violence. It is an awareness that comes from an unfamiliar encounter of a familiar situation resulting in unequal bursts of sombre recognition and amusing disorientation. It is an after-effect of (not) knowing things.

This echoes Venka Purushothaman's earlier admonishment, in the introductory seminar, to be a foreigner in the internal terrain or land of ourselves, which can be construed as making anew every encounter to the point that assumptions break down and wash over as just a few more things in the larger schema. The ensuing productive work and mutual transformation would return the notion of "land" closer to *"scipe"*. Sina Wittayawiroj's *IML*, perhaps comes closest in demanding such a rethink of one's relationship with one's perception of land and the various attempts to represent it. Facing an incessant invitation, by way of an instructional animation, to add to and reconfigure cut-out cardboard pieces of what is already present, one might also face the realisation that there is land ... and then, there is land, depending on how one is looking or doing or not.

Jying Tan: *Future Wanderland*
Video projection, Dimensions variable, 2012

Note

Tropical Lab is an annual international art workshop for students, organised by LASALLE College of the Arts. For the sixth cycle in 2012, the programme started with an introductory seminar (moderated by Adeline Kueh, Senior Lecturer, LASALLE College of the Arts) on 27 July with presentations by Dr Lai Chee Kien (Assistant Professor, Department of Architecture, National University of Singapore), Dr Charles Merewether (Director, Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, LASALLE College of the Arts), Charles Lim (Artist and Cinematographer) and Venka Purushothaman (Vice President (Academic) and Provost, LASALLE College of the Arts). This was followed by visits to various venues around Singapore, interspersed with studio work, culminating in an exhibition of artworks (from 8 - 15 August) presented by the following participating artists:

Muhammad Akbar, Adi Brande, Daniel Dallabrida, Hili Greenfeld, Hua Xi Yu, Lydia Keith, Molly Lowe, Natalie Madani, Connor McIntyre, Kassia Ng, Erika Norris, Minha Park, Sam Rains, Lizzy Sampson, Emily Shanahan, Jying Tan, Alice Theobald, Kim Thornton, Tina Tomovic, Ayumi Wakita, Billy Ward, Sina Wittayawiroj, Valérie Wolf Gang, James Yakimicki, Ika Yulianti, Zhu Pei Hong.

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Alice Theobald: *New Age Lament*
Fiber optic plant, paper, shell, video; Dimensions variable, 2012

Erika Norris: *The Geographer's Library*
National Geographic magazine, tape; Dimensions variable, 2012

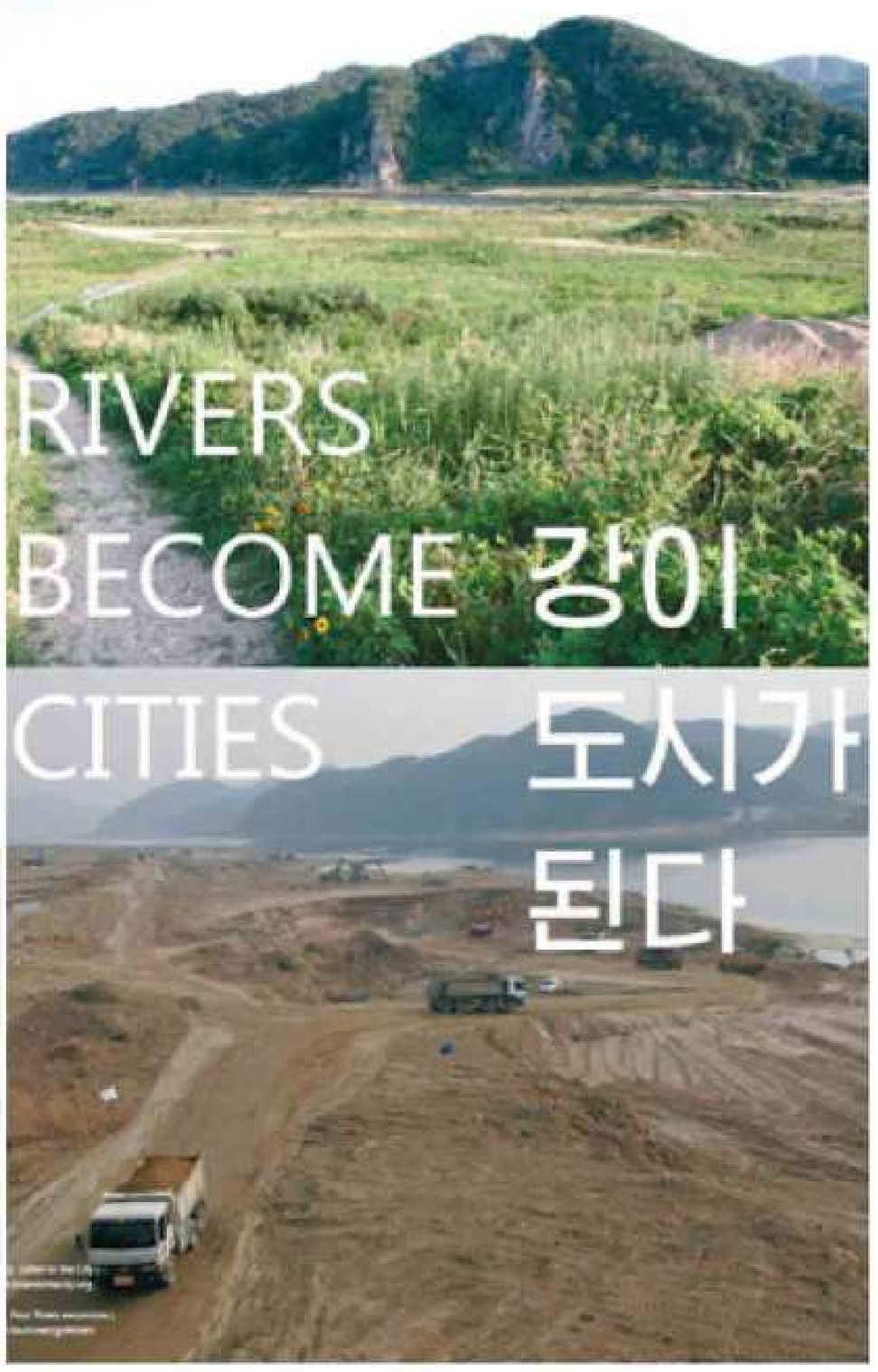
Eunseon Park and Listen to the City

South Korea's Four Rivers Project

Dredging, damming and concrete destroying the environment.

Namhan River, photographed by the anti-4river development committee, 2010

Listen to the City is an art-activist group based in Seoul, South Korea. We mainly research the urbanization of Seoul but recently we focused on sharing information on the 'Four Rivers Project'. What is currently happening to the rivers is terrible. The South Korean government continues to advertise this to other Asian countries as 'Green Growth', but we hope to let people in Asia know – this is a catastrophe.

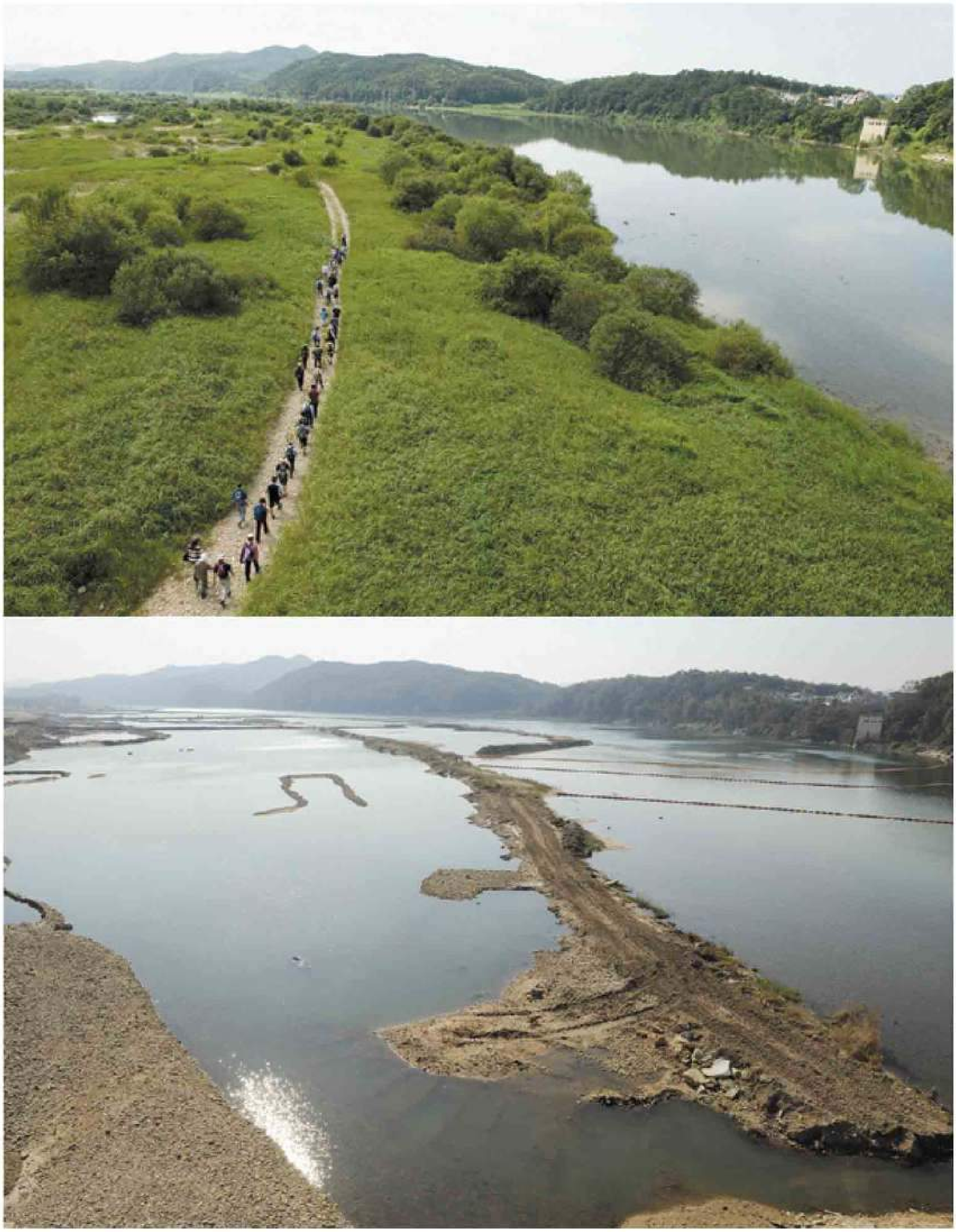


Rivers become cities, Listen to the City (printed poster), 2011

Four of South Korea's major rivers and their wetlands – a total area of 8,000 ha – have been damaged by a government project. Some 570 million cubic metres of sand and gravel from a total of 691 km of the rivers has been dredged. Sixteen dams have been created. Sand banks have been totally removed and concrete-paving laid along the banks.

The government says that the rationale behind the works is economic, enabling better navigation. However, dams are obstructing the natural flow of water, leading to the degradation of water supply. The project has failed in one of its main aims, which was to create more capacity to store the rivers' water. It was implemented prior to proper environmental evaluation and the long-term value of the wetlands have been destroyed. The wetlands are also home to many endangered species such as white-napped cranes and hooded cranes, whose numbers have declined from 3,000 to 1,000 since the Four Rivers Project started in 2009.

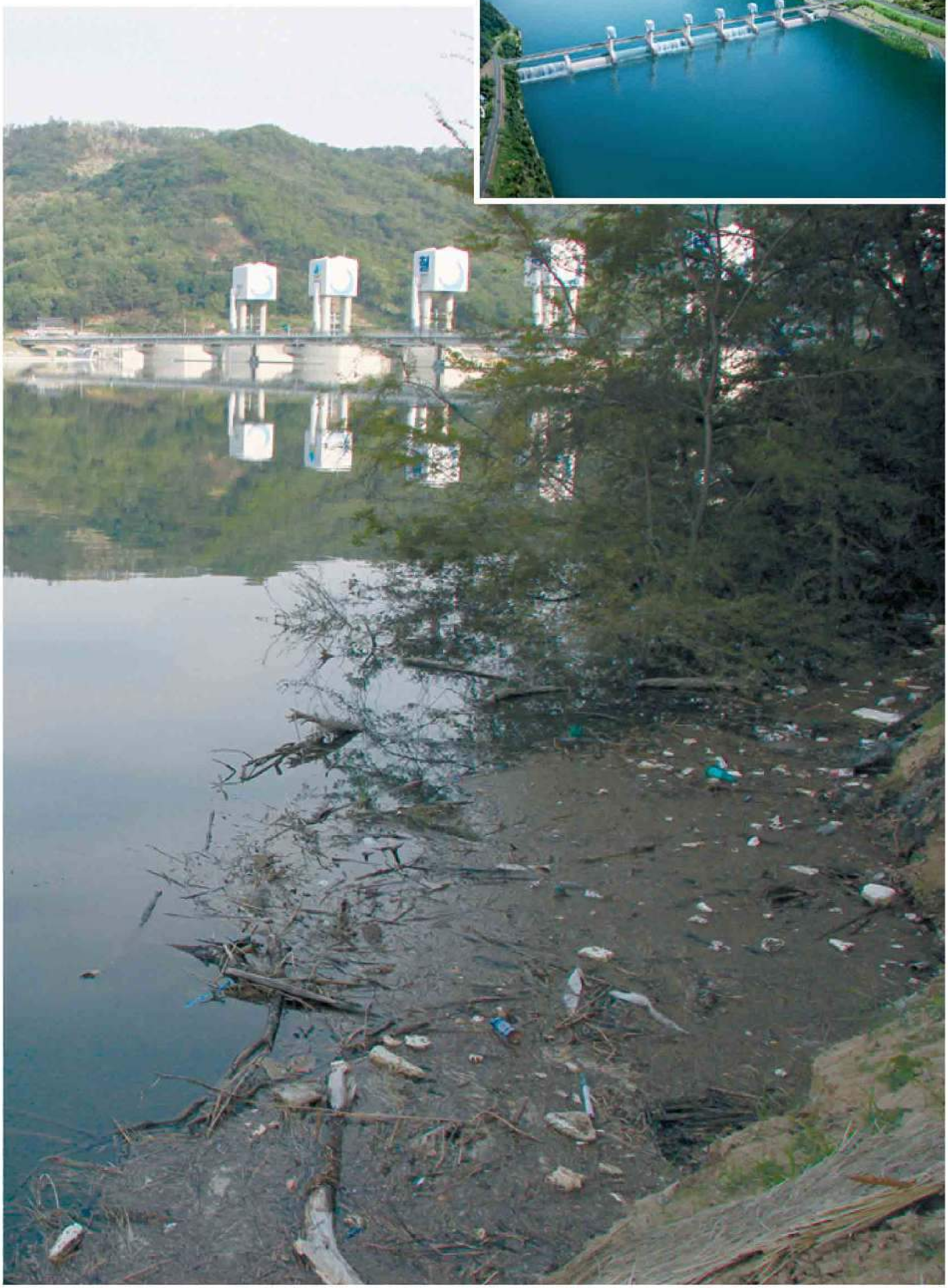
Local campaigners say that the completion of the Environmental Impact Assessment before the project plans were finalised demonstrates a lack of concern for the wetland system. They say the major rivers are already showing incredible damage and claim a natural disaster resulting from the project is inevitable. They want to prevent further engineering of the river – and wish to start restoring the habitats instead.



Namhan River, photographed by Park Young Hun, 2009/2011

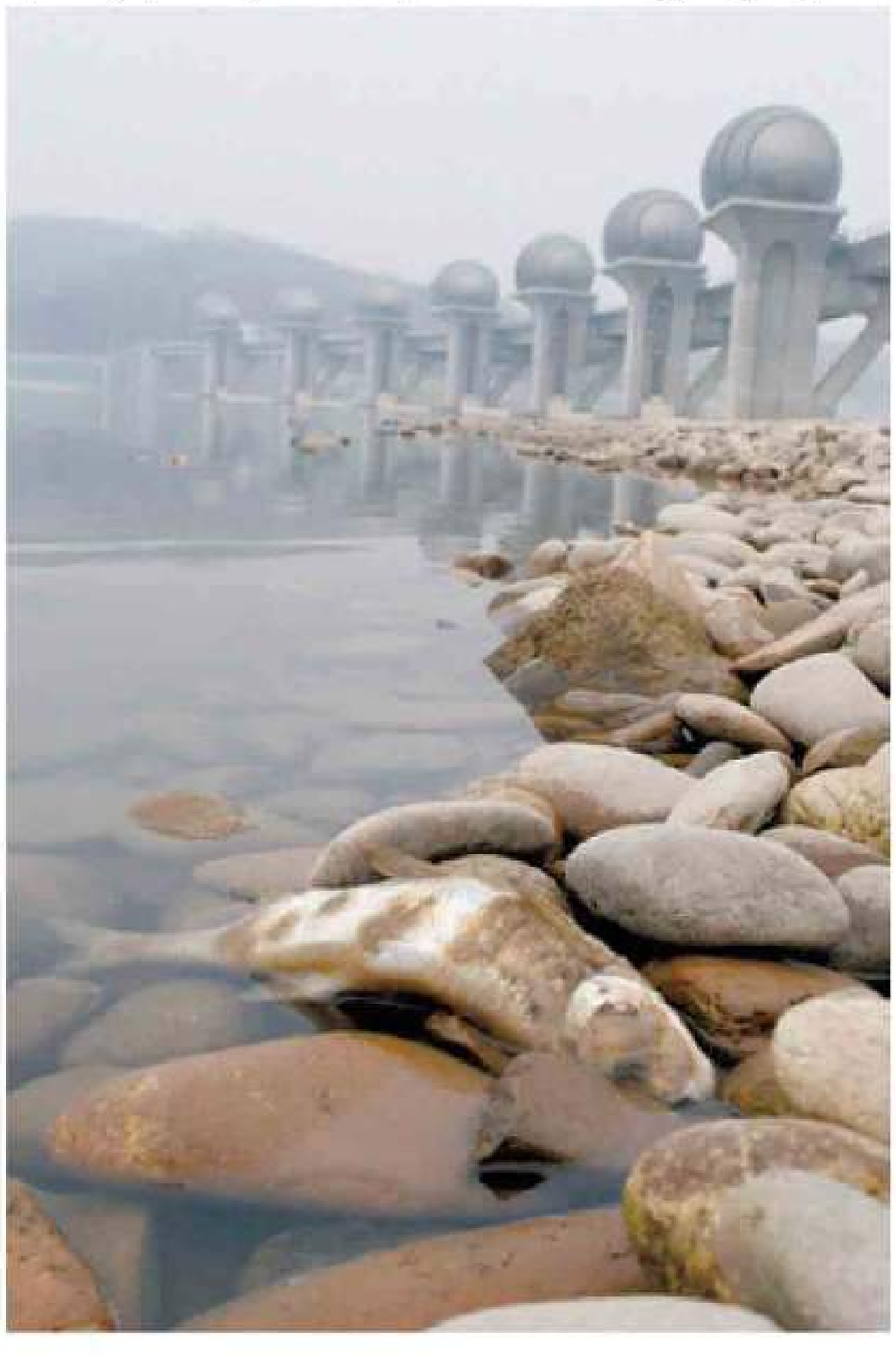
Nakdong River, Before and After, photographed by Jiyul, 2009/2011

The government's 3D picture and the reality,
photographed by Jiyul



Buddha of Koryo Dynasty holed by the construction company

Dead fish at Ipo Dam, Namhan River,
photographed by Park Young Hun and Nam Jongyoung, May 2012



Rachael Swain

Stories for Country
Contemporary Indigenous performance and land

Introduction

This essay will consider notions of 'land' and 'country' as investigated in the site-based live performance practice of the Australian intercultural-Indigenous dance theatre company Marrugeku (1994-present). This will be centrally examined through a discussion of Marrugeku's recent production *Buru* (Marrugeku 2010) and the notions of 'country' emerging in the work.

The Aboriginal English term 'Country' can be defined as an area of land formations and, at times, stories which a group or individual may have connection to or custodianship over. Indigenous leader, Professor Mick Dodson explains:

> *When we talk about traditional 'Country'... we mean something beyond the dictionary definition of the word. For Aboriginal Australians we might mean homeland, or tribal or clan area and we might mean more than just a place on the map. For us, Country is a word for all the values, places, resources, stories and cultural obligations associated with that area and its features. It describes the entirety of our ancestral domains. (2010)*

As Mike Pearson, former artistic director of the Welsh site-specific theatre company, Brith Gof, cites "Landscape is a way of seeing that has its own history" (Cosgrove 1984:1). These histories – cultural, political, social and artistic – can underpin vast differences in site-specific performance practice, yet similar 'socio-topographic' (Berndt and Berndt 1989) and multi-temporal investigations of location and performance can be identified. Pearson says:

> *The simultaneous advent of the notion of landscape as its pictorial representation, and the privileging of sight is well enough rehearsed: 'A Landscape is a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring and symbolizing surroundings' (Cosgrove and Daniels 1988:1)*

This 'cultural image' and the methods of 'representing, structuring and symbolizing' are produced from entirely different conceptual frameworks in an Australian Indigenous depiction of 'country' than one which draws on Western Art History's notions of 'Landscape'.

In this essay I will consider how these nuanced perspectives of 'Land' and 'Country' can manifest in live site-specific performance practice. I will begin by outlining some of the background to the relationship between Indigenous live performance and the country it is connected to, though a consideration of Indigenous place-paintings.

Country as it is seen — Indigenous place-paintings

Since the emergence of the now famous Papunya paintings in the 1970s, cultural representations of land, its conception in terms of landscape and its framing in Indigenous Australian visual arts have been widely considered as functioning in marked contrast to various movements in Western landscape painting.

This essay is not the place for a summary of the significant debates informing the history of the politics and aesthetics at stake in these issues of representation of land and country in an Australian or an Australian Indigenous visual art context. For a range of perspectives on this, see: Carter 1987; Bardon 1991 , 2004; Morphy 1991; Myers 1991; Carter 1996; Morphy 1998; Myers 2002; Langton 2003; Muecke 2004; Myers 2005; Morphy 2008. However, in order to articulate an Indigenous live performance developed in dialogue with custodians for country, there are aspects of the discussion of visual art forms that are transferable and salient.

In the broadest of terms the contrast in understanding representations of landscape in painting revolve around Indigenous 'place-painting artists' depiction of country in terms of its ancestral presence and from an aerial perspective, as opposed to the distancing devotion to 'the horizon' encapsulated in the 'vanishing point' of renaissance art. As cultural theorist Stephen Muecke puts it, "In any case what is certain is that European settlement is responsible for the importation of representations of the Land in this country and, specifically, of the concept of distance that informs the categories of wilderness and landscape, terms that 'occupy' our relationship with the Land" (2004).

Howard Morphy, who works at the nexus of art history and anthropology, explores visuality and representation in the bark paintings on the Yolngu of Eastern Arhnem Land. (2008) In an intercultural investigation, Morphy explores the shifting cultural and social contexts that surround the production of Aboriginal art, but also possibilities for European and Aboriginal conceptions of art to converge. He cites Richard Brettell, "Art is not so much a mode of representation as it is a mode of seeing, and that in making important representations artists present the viewer not simply with an internally consistent image, but with an entire world view." (2008)

This world view – which is the result of the 'way of seeing' applied by Indigenous artists to their practice can be extended to the cross-cultural performing arts and the representation of real-

ity encapsulated in the dramaturgy of the work. Morphy notes that as hunter gatherers, the Yolngu develop an "acuity of vision" that seems remarkable to the outsider yet they do not represent the subtleties of the landscape or the water as they paint. "Yolngu do represent such features in art, and in music and dance, but they do not represent them as they are seen" (2008).

It is the relationship between the seen and the unseen that is a critical element in Indigenous visual art. In this essay, I argue that the relationship between the seen and the unseen is also central to storytelling in Indigenous performing arts. It is not my point to set up opposition between 'ways of seeing' land in Indigenous and Western arts contexts here, and I acknowledge that there are many non-Indigenous artists who now explore 'being in place' from multiple perspectives. However the example of the perspective in Indigenous place-painting reveals an immersion *in* country, steeped in both its micro signs and its meta-narratives which is relevant to a dramaturgy which evolves 'in situ', drawn from a perspective which is not 'looking at' but 'grown' from 'sitting down' (Ab. Eng.) in country. As Muecke explains:

> *These indigenous place-paintings had their origins in ritual and thus there was no distance inserted into the process of their creation; they were created as re-enactments. Whether they continue to defy the label of representation depends on the relationship of the viewer to the place painted. Uninitiated viewers mostly understand the paintings as representations of places, since they do not share relationship with the place painted. Yet for initiates, who share substance and relationship with the particular place, the painting embodies place presented in the relation; that painting, they might say, is my country or, indeed, the painting is me. The same cannot be said of European landscape paintings, for they represent places via a quite different conceptual instrumentation. (2004)*

These place-paintings, the dot paintings of the Western and Central Desert and the bark paintings of Arnhem Land being the most famous, often contain storylines which traverse a vast area of land, the detail of which are not revealed to the un-initiated viewer. Whilst the application and function and also the permissiveness around the use of the dots (in the desert paintings) and the *raak* (Kunwinjku) or crosshatching (in the bark paintings) have changed significantly over recent decades, it is their perspective which is significant here. This perspective may, in any one moment, be describing subtle depictions of topographies, variations in land form and water ways, socio-spatial arrangements, objects of ceremony, narrative aspects of a dreaming story or the supernatural powers associated with a particular location. These story lines, revealed and concealed (depending on the knowledge of the viewer) in the work, are living presences in the landscape. In *The Speaking Land*, Berndt and Berndt describe how the stories transform into living presences in country.

> *In all of the myths collected here the land is as important as the living characters who travel it. In the Dreamtime creation, mythic, shape-changing characters moved across the countryside, leaving part of their eternal spiritual qualities in the land. Eventually, these characters and forces retreated into the living environment, where they remain today, spiritually anchored. (1989)*

This presence "spiritually anchored", and its multiple manifestations across time and place, is historically the key signifier of country in Indigenous place-paintings. In discussing how this is represented Morphy proposes that the project of Yolngu art and modernism converge:

> *For Yolngu, rather than using techniques of visual representation to imitate the reality of the seen, are more concerned with conveying the reality of the unseen, the underlying forces in the landscape. In this respect, then, Yolngu art might also be deemed more conceptual than perceptual. (2008)*

While there are of course differences in the movement of conceptual art and how it manifests in both the visual arts and performance art and how Morphy is proposing its function in Yolngu art, I would like to apply this line of inquiry into live performance created in Indigenous contexts where there is a direct dialogue with custodians of country. These relations are conceptual in nature and steeped in relationship between the seen and the unseen as they manifest in that place, for those people. This is suggested as an alternative to the considerable supply of Indigenous theatre that follows the implicit realism of the 'perspectives' applied in the British text-based theatre model (see Casey 2004). Following this alternative model, would, in turn, be a proposal for audiences to 'listen differently' to Land as it manifests in performance and to develop (after Paul Carter) a 'poetic understanding of country' (Carter 1996) in their reading of Indigenous performance and their own relationship to it.

In discussing interpretation of the Walpiri graphic system of painting and its relationship to narrative in country, art historian Fred Myers outlines how iconic elements can have multiple meanings as events, objects, landforms and dreaming stories. Furthering this Myers proposes (after Morphy 1984, 1992) that "Ambiguity (or multivocality) (V. Turner 1969) constitutes part of their aesthetic force." (2002)

Considering Indigenous live performance possessing an "innate multivocality", speaking to multiple strata of audiences furthers the argument for an Indigenous performance practice which is contemporary in nature and rendered in an interdisciplinary form capable of exploring ambiguity that functions in multi-vocal performance modes.

Indigenous storytelling – narratives of place

The nature and function of Indigenous storytelling can be considered through a number of frames – mythic, historic and contemporary. I will now outline some of the factors that contribute to how stories function and how their meanings manifest in Indigenous performance. The lens for these considerations will be examples from the recent production *Buru* (Marrugeku 2010) which I co-directed with Dalisa Pigram for our company Marrugeku.

Marrugeku is based in Broome in the far North of Western Australia. The company's large-scale outdoor and intimate indoor works are created through long-term collaborations with Indigenous elders, law men and women and practiced by a devising cast, at least half of whom come from the local community. The company utilises traditional and contemporary dance and music, circus, installation and video art in its productions, touring to remote communities, urban Australian and international arts festivals.

Buru

Buru is Marrugeku's first contemporary work for children. Buru in the language of the Yawuru, the Traditional Owners of Broome in Western Australia, can mean dirt, land or place, or alternatively time or seasons depending on its context. Buru can encompass all these things. The production follows a story sequence inspired by the six Yawuru seasons as a manifestation of buru. They are: Man-gala—wet season; Marrul—big tides, mangrove fruit time; Wirralburu—wind change, start of salmon time; Barrgana—cold time, creek fish are fat; Wirlburu—first hot wind blows, Laja—build up to the wet season, when the first thunder and lightning appears and the animals come out again.

The production Buru was the result of an intergenerational Indigenous knowledge transmission project where Yawuru elders shared stories for country with a group of local young performers. In consultation with key story holders the cast of nine young people (aged between ten and twenty years old at date of premiere) co-devised and performed the work, telling a series of stories for country - some based on the contemporary experience of the young cast, some reflecting traditional stories for Yawuru country as passed on by the elders.

In October 2010 *Buru's* premiere season was staged at the site of the *Walmanyjun* story, a red sand dune and rocks along Cable Beach in Broome. The production toured to remote Indigenous communities in the Kimberley region of Western Australia in 2011 and to venues in America and Canada in April 2012. Buru's set, designed by Indigenous visual artist Fiona Foley, juxtaposes the built and the natural environment in Broome including giant seedpods and a video screen in the shape of a turtle's breastbone.

Ann-Jeanette Phillips in Buru. Photo Rod Hartvigsen, 2010

Myth narratives

That Indigenous myth narratives have a co-presence as landform, story, dance, song and what the Yawuru call *Bugarrigarr*, (which has been thought of as 'the dreaming' in English) has been widely documented over decades of Australian ethnography. Indigenous stories in their own 'socio-topographic' context (Berndt and Berndt 1989) function as both a mapping of country and a mapping of social interactions and in both the past and a continuous present as a living interpretation of what in non-Indigenous contexts we might call 'existence'. Stories are polysemic and devolve meaning in multiple ways simultaneously to different sections of the community. They are both universal and archetypal guides to multiple aspects of daily life, good and bad, but also operate as an enigmatic and somehow shifting veil, obscuring and revealing meaning in a complex and multifaceted patterning of narrations of events, transformations and kinship ties.

In 'the dreamtime', or the 'time before time', the creator beings walked the land. Their varied activities, whether placing the first people in the landscape, or giving languages, or being caught up in some wrong-doing which resulted in retribution and shape-changing, became land formations mapping their passage and eternal presence in the landscape, where they remain "spiritually anchored". (Berndt and Berndt 1989)

> *It is, then, the land which is really speaking – offering, to those who can understand its language, an explanative discourse about how it came to be as it is now, which beings were responsible for it becoming like that, and who is, or should be, responsible for it now. The physiographic sites are like chapter headings in a book, and each one has much to say. The Speaking Land must be heard. But what it says may be understood only if we know its language. (Berndt and Berndt 1989)*

The stories themselves have no singular interpretation. Even the simplest of stories, told to children or the uninitiated, are tributaries of other more potent stories, or are framed in way that obscure the comprehension of other meanings until the listener is deemed ready to hear it. The meta-narratives of *Bugarrigarra*, or creation stories often lead to other more complex stories.

The production *Buru* blends contemporary reflections on young people's lives in the environment of Broome with traditional stories of the Broome peninsular. The performance portrays young people hunting and fishing in various seasons alongside the story of *Janyju*, the Red Lizard as told by Karajarri elder and Yawuru language specialist Doris Edgar performed in rap and contemporary dance and *Walmanyjun*, the Greedy Turtle story as told by Yawuru/Jabirr Jabirr elder Cissy Djiagween portrayed with a giant turtle on stilts and a school of stilt fish. In the prologue to the performance Buru acknowledges and presents the two custodial 'Boss Lizard' figures, caretakers of the land and the seasons, as shared with Marrugeku by senior Yawuru law man Patrick Dodson. During rehearsals each of these elders visited to pass on the stories directly to the young cast. Following is an account of the Boss Lizards as told to the young company by Patrick Dodson during rehearsals in April 2010:

> *These Lizards, they are called Lizards because we can't say their name, they are that important, they are that significant. They are very, very real. They created all this land. In Broome, along this country, Karajarri County, the Yawuru country, Nyikina County right through to the desert to Uluru. They have a big role. They are big things, bigger than anything you can imagine. They can see for miles. They also have very clear eyes. They can see the littlest things on the ground. Little foot prints, little hand marks. Any things that have been done by people – they can see it. And they have very good hearing; they can hear you whisper miles away. They know what's going on in here (points to chest), inside. They know whether you are guilty, if you have done something wrong. They know whether you*

Tian Hall as a Boss Lizard waking up country in Buru.
Photo Rod Hartvigsen 2010

are happy or sad, or whether you are doing the right thing. They know all of these things. And particularly when you live in the country – you go to the beach, you go fishing, you go hunting, you go walk in the bush, you come back home. They are still there. They can still listen to you, they still see you. They can look through these walls. Nothing can stop these things. They are all powerful. They have a magic about them. They can destroy things or they can keep things alive.

These people, these big Lizards, they are the people that made all of these things. They brought them into life because when the world first started it was flat like this thing you are walking on (points to acrobatic mats). And gradually it started to get some shapes, a little bit of a hill, bit of a gully, some grass starting to grow, some creeks starting to run, some water holes being formed. And then these figures started to emerge, they couldn't talk. They had a mouth but they couldn't talk. So these Lizards came through the country. They walked through the country. They could see for miles. And for the Yawuru people they came from this place down south, came from there and they followed walks through all this country, travelled through, put all those landmarks there, all that coastline, all those rocks, all that beach. All the tide that comes in and out, all them trees all the fruit all the things that fly, bats and birds and snakes and lizards and insects all those things. These are the people that put them there. Then they see these human beings, but they had no mouth they had no voice so they give them the language; this mob here – this is the Yawuru language. For this part of the country. From there (points), right up there, half way to Nimalarragan, to Willy Creek. Then out to the desert, between here and Dampier Downs. All of that, that's the Yawuru people's country. Coast and the sea. (2010)

After explaining the presence of the Boss Lizards Patrick went on to acknowledge the connection between the public aspects of the story which we might make manifest in the live performance and the more secret sacred aspects which the cast might learn as they grow older and earn the right for more cultural responsibility:

> *But you are involved with this now, you are involved with this Bugarrigarra business. You are getting involved with this in a very public way and that's good because you are allowed that. In a public way, you are allowed to do that. And these two lizards will say: yeah that's ok,*

Crystal Stacey, Madelyn Bin Swani and Emma Sibosado as Gudirr Gudirr (snipe shore birds) in Buru. Photo Rod Hartvigsen 2010

> *we'll let these young fellas play because they have to learn and understand, but later on we might want them to go in more deep and learn more of what the real story is underneath some of this. And these two lizards they will teach you this. But this is the beginning and they might say we are happy now because we see our young people here playing and trying to explain to this public over there that there is a rich culture, rich belief here, living, still alive. (Ibid)*

Exemplified in Patrick's telling of the Boss Lizard creation story to the young cast of Buru are the notions of the seen and the unseen, multi-temporal realities and interpenetrating relationships between story, landform and cultural obligation which I identified earlier in discussion of Indigenous contemporary place paintings. As the Yawuru Native Title Owners state in their cultural management plan:

> *From Bugarrigarra, our country is imbued with a life force from which all living things arise. Within the country our rayi (spirits) and our ancestors live. It is from the country that our people, our language, our stories and our Law arise.*
>
> *Bugarrigarra is often glossed in English as 'Dreamtime', and bugarri does mean 'dream'. However the term bugarri and Bugarrigarra is the world-creating epoch and the supernatural beings active in that time. These beings are responsible not only for the formation of the world and its contents, but also for the introduction of social laws and principles governing human existence. Bugarrigarra is also created with the introduction of the various regional languages, the seasons and their cycles, the nature of our topography and the biodiversity. (2011)*

In order to engage in culture-making at this level with the development of our productions *Burning Daylight (Marrugeku 2006)* and *Buru* and the current work *Gudirr Gudirr,* it has been critical for the company to steep our process 'deeply' in local perceptions of 'being in place and time'.

Indigenous notions of time and conceptions of history underpin causation and effect in story structures and their place in a community's collective understanding. Patternings of occurrences interconnected with others, and intersections of mythic time and historic time can present a reality radically different from non-Indigenous understandings. These perceptions of time have a specific impact on the narrative structures we are considering.

Through these understandings I seek to identify a range of elements in Indigenous myth narratives and their relationships to place, time and history which can significantly inform how reality could be perceived and by extension how performance can function in a contemporary Indigenous context.

For *The Speaking Land* to be heard what it says may be understood only if we know its language (after Berndt and Berndt 1989). I acknowledge the vast 'inside' knowledge not accessible to arts workers, who are not cultural custodians, and that often a story we have been told is only a piece of a multifaceted puzzle. Yet I believe it is possible to identify significant features which can help define pathways to create contemporary Indigenous performance. A number of signature elements that reflect Indigenous approaches to meaning, place and story have begun to crystallise through Marrugeku's body of work in a set of propositions which begin, in my mind, to form an Indigenous dramaturgical model. Core elements include:

Considering the simultaneous co-presence of what the Yawuru call *Bugarrigarra*, or 'Dreaming', with contemporary life and historical stories. That the logic of the relationships between these 'stories' may come from a causality foreign to non-Indigenous audiences

The polysemic story structures which hide as well as reveal meaning to different sectors of the audience and even to many or most of the artists engaged in creating the work

The assumption that place has a much more significant impact on narrative structure than a chronological approach to time and that a 'socio-topographical' landscape may dictate significant elements of a work's structure as it is devised.

> Understanding that comes from 'feeling', specifically when audiences can be brought into a cross-cultural mode of perception where they experience meaning from another way of 'being in time'

This initial articulation of a dramaturgical model is distilled out of the contexts surrounding Indigenous experience of place and art making, where there is an ongoing deeply held connection to country, as in the case of Marrugeku's early work in Western Arnhem Land and current work in Broome.

The Host, the Ghost and the Witness

In an example which is resonant with Marrugeku's work, the Welsh company Brith Gof took notions of site specificity, as they emerged in the 1980s in both visual arts and live performance contexts, and extended them past the physical traces of current or previous occupations apparent in a site and into both an aesthetic and culturally negotiated 'density of signs' in their multi-art form theatrical language. The company's use of multiple and interpenetrating narratives is certainly aligned with Marrugeku's own and not uncommon in contemporary and postmodern performance.

In discussing the multivocality of the 'reading' of a site in Brith Gof, McLucas, Morgan and Pearson

state "Rather than present a specific or single reading of site, such a fractured work disperses the site, constituting 'different groups of audience in different places' such that every single member of the audience is going to have a different reading of the piece." (1995) Considering this in relation to Marrugeku's work brings me to a greater understanding of how spectators might participate in an experience of contemporary Indigenous performance work. That is, that whilst a performance may reveal and conceal meanings from its audience, it simultaneously allows spectators to negotiate their own relationship to the seen and unseen knowledge embedded in the performance and to an experience of relationship to country that is 'en process' and 'becoming'. This is, I would argue, an essential experience for Australian audiences and a critical aspect of the 'dramaturgy of the spectator' in contemporary Indigenous performance.

In documentation of the production *Tri Bywyd*, co-artistic director of Brith Gof, Clifford McLucas states:

> *The Host site is haunted for a brief time by a Ghost that the theatre makers create. Like all ghosts, it is transparent and Host can be seen through Ghost. Add into this a third term — the Witness — i.e., the audience, and we have a kind of a Trinity that constitutes The Work. It is the mobilization of this Trinity that is important – not simply the creation of the Ghost. All three are active components in the bid to make site-specific work. The Host, the Ghost and the Witness. (McLucas in Kaye 2000)*

Brith Gof go further in their discussion of the relationship between The Ghost and The Host in ways that are relevant here.

> *There's always a mismatch between the 'host' and the 'ghost', and from the beginning of the work it's fractured, it's deeply deeply fractured [...] it actually leads you to techniques which are of multiple fracture [...] we are dealing with a field of elements, and with symphonic relationships which can sometimes be made to work, and sometimes can't [...] they are more discursive and have gaps in them- you can see other things through. (McLucas , Morgan et al. 1995)*

It is in the 'gaps' and the 'seeing things through' that the potential for a performance practice developed in an investigation of Land/Country exists. It can draw on the potentials latent in a 'place-event' and in a negotiation with an audience, whose presence completes the trinity to engage in the kind of 'seeing' or 'listening' required for the 'Speaking Land' (Berndt and Berndt) to be heard. The audience's role of listening brings the stories into being, as they are mutually arising and require perception, participation and knowledge of country and story. But this 'work' of listening also requires acknowledgment of the gaps and the 'not knowing' in order for the witness to participate in the renewal of culture. Leading an audience into a 'mode of perception' where it can 'feel' this perception required, yet not be alienated by the 'gaps' in their knowledge is one of the more subtle and complex demands of Marrugeku's dramaturgy. In Australia, the audience's participation in 'keeping things alive in their place" (after Muecke) is critical to sustaining the way contemporary Indigenous performance can contribute to the present and future culture-making and culture-mapping.

Summary

This 'work' of listening to country requires commitment and attention, This is a challenging national project currently being undertaken, with varying degrees of success, across many disciplines and many areas of social, political and cultural life in Australia. Marrugeku's work of salvaging stories in contemporary forms and bringing them into focus in open public settings has a small part to play in this project.

This is a long-term project with potential to contribute to the survival, preservation and growth of specific cultural knowledge systems and knowledge transmission for young Indigenous community members.

At opening of the Papuna Tula exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 2000, Art Historian Fred Myers outlined what the paintings themselves have achieved.

> *The hopes of the Yarnangu painters at Papunya, Yayayi, Yinyilingki and beyond for new levels of connection and recognition, the expectation of renewed value for their own cultural forms, this is all part of what the paintings have achieved. Equivalence has not been easy to work out, but in the long view it is clear that the original insistence on the power of their paintings has borne out. The effects of the painting movement have been remarkable, far beyond what my early literal translations had imagined. I understood what the painters said, of course, but I would never have anticipated the effects they had in producing a recognition of their value and power across cultural boundaries. They have contributed to the accomplishment of land tenure security, of establishing significant identity for those whose Dreamings they are, and that they have made a kind of Aboriginality knowable to those who view them. In this way they have evidenced the power they were said 'traditionally' to have. (2005)*

Finally, after considering the contexts which surround the creation of contemporary intercultural-Indigenous dance-theatre, I would like to project to a near future and imagine the kinds of results productions with a similar genesis and sense of ethics could 'achieve', for their specific communities. If the 'power' the dance, song and story

where "traditionally said to have had" (after Myers above) is maintained as they are transferred into a contemporary process and outcome then perhaps these results these could parallel those of the Pintupi paintings. 'Achievements' could include acknowledgment of the significance of indigeneity in the nation's past and future and of the 'libraries of knowledge' embodied in the dance form. There could be comprehension by a wider audience of Indigenous understandings of 'being in place and time' along with forms for the sustainability of open public storytelling. In addition these dance-theatre productions could function as evidence towards achieving native title, exemplifying living traditions in contemporary intercultural lifeworlds.

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Nigel Helyer

An Atlas of small voyages

LAND, a sure footing, a Terra Firma, our groundedness. But my story is somewhat different, nomadic and fluid. Like Odysseus, who, after all that hard travel and the spat with the suitors, was told to shoulder a ship's oar and walk inland until he found a place where no-one could recognise the oar – at last he was becalmed and landlocked, finally at anchor.

Here, the navigational directions, a *Rutter*[1] to my Ultima Thule, as a small atlas of aqueous morphologies. In these narratives, land is always in sight, within earshot; it can be sensed on the breeze, appearing as a haze above the meniscus of the horizon, glimpsed sliding under the keel during landfall at a temporary safe haven.

Toll installed as part of the Innenseit project during Documenta10, Kassel
Photo Credit – The Artist

And God said, Let the waters vnder the heauen be gathered together vnto one place and let the dry land appeare: and it was so.

And God called the drie land, Earth, and the gathering together of the waters called hee, Seas: and God saw that it was good.

Genesis, 1611 King James Bible.

Cushioned in a sac of amniotic fluid the foetus rehearses evolution, the proto-gills and proto-tail a reprise of all cordate development. Much detested by the creationists, Re-capitulation Theory was first conceptualised in the seventh century BCE, not in biological but in linguistic terms when the Egyptian Pharaoh *Psamtik*[2] experimented with young children to discover the origins of language, raising them without conversation to determine their first pure utterances (supposedly the Ur-tongue).

Somewhere deep in the primitive reptilian part of our brain stem we hold mnemonic traces of our original Mezozoic environment – *Pangea*[3] the vast swampy island continent surrounded by a warm global sea, long before the single landmass broke up into separate continents. Somewhere between then and now.....

An Atlas and Rutter.

Saltmarsh ~ *Toll*

River ~ *Vox Aura*

Archipelago ~ *CrayVox*

Island ~ *Run Silent Run Deep*

Lake ~ *Weeping Willow*

Ice shelf ~ *Bio_Logging and Under the IceCap*

Inundation ~ *Deluge*

1. Saltmarsh ~ Toll

My point of departure is a compact of folk-tales told about one of the Sussex villages[4] where I spent much of my childhood. The narrative concerns a virtual bell which has become emblematic for me – in as much as I consider all sound to be simultaneously *real* and *virtual*, simultaneously a phenomena and a sign.

The helmsman sweeps the steering oar across the ship's stern. The bow describes a slow arc bringing the village squarely into the wooden gaze of the dragon's head. The hull glides between the dwarf oaks that line the salt marsh and the crew trim the sail for landfall. At one nautical mile from shore the gaze of the figurehead is acknowledged by a clamour of bells, sounding the alarm from the octagonal tower of the church. This is all that is happening today, a fierce prow staring at ringing bells. Beyond, dark silent forests stretch over the coastal hills to nowhere.

Bell, Bellum, Bellow, English resounds with memories of havoc. Every bell-rope straining in chaotic peal, every inhabitant scrambling for the protection of the underground crypt, hollowed out in the sixth century by Irish Monks. But out on the marsh the Norse leader is hearing something new – a sweet harmony singing above the normal tones of the church tower – he will have this phantom bell as his prize[5].

This southern littoral is poor pickings, the raiders work it every four years, leaving sufficient on each occasion to allow the peasants to reestablish their livelihood. Normally the church is passed by, acknowledged as a refuge in this cycle of brutality but this time the Norse storm the tower to take the new, sweet singing bell.

They manhandle it out of the belfry, hauling it across the water meadow and down to the hard-standing where the ship is beached. They heave its mass over the gunwhale and secure it amidships behind the spruce mast.

When havoc subsides, the crew returns, with pigs, sheep and chattels in tow; the ship is cast off and the prow shouldered from the hard. The oars are unshipped and the vessel turned into the southwesterly breeze blowing from the channel. Quietly now, the long-ship eases away from shore into deep water, the commander gazing happily at his bronze prize.

But as the vessel reaches the dwarf oak forest, the captive bell sounds out a single tone and melts through the hull of the ship – they say that the raiders never visited again.

Many years later the villagers attempted to retrieve the bell, from its resting place – the *Bell Hole*. They employed a white witch who insisted on working with a team of pure white oxen, hauling a snow-white hair rope. The bell was located by a diver, the rope attached and the bell mostly surfaced before the rope snapped, revealing a single strand of black hair[6] in its weave. The bell remains in its bell hole to this day.

Two hundred years after the Norse raiders first listened to the harmonics of this virtual bell, King Knut laid his eight-year old daughter to rest in the crypt that had sheltered the villagers. He was ruler over the short-lived Northern Empire – and regarded by his chiefs as omnipotent.

Knut, a pragmatist, found this acclaim to be irksome and so arranged a spectacle for his chiefs to demonstrate his fallibility. Setting a wooden throne on the hardstanding so frequently scored by Norse keels, Knut calmly sat eying the flooding tide, commanding it, in full earnestness, to ebb. The brackish waters however would have none of it and so Knut was eventually obliged to wade from his throne. Knut reestablished his position within the hierarchy of nature, as a mere King of men. Knut's Empire was to survive for some eighty years on Northern Europe's icy fringes.

The sound installation *Toll*[7] develops the idea that sound is simultaneously real and virtual. In the installation a matrix of sixty-four primitive Leyden Jars, with anodes and cathodes formed from Zinc and Copper bells create power to excite small resonators attached to a large church bell suspended in the bunker, which hums imperceptibly with a virtual sound memory.

[1] Rutter, a guide that leads the way through an unknown course, a navigational guide carried on Medieval ships before marine charts were commonly available.

[2] Herodotus mentions in his Histories (Vol 2) an experiment conducted on two children by Psamtik, who reputedly gave two newborn children to a shepherd who was charged with raising them without speaking to them. The shepherd was to listen to their first utterances in an attempt to discern the root of language. According to Herodotus one of the children uttered the work bekos which the Shepherd interpreted as the Phrygian word for bread, thus forming the conclusion that Phrygian was the original language of men.

2. River ~ Vox Aura; the River is Singing[8]

Vox Aura four channel sound work installed in the River Aura, Turku, Finland as part of European Capital of Culture 2011

Our blood has the same salinity as the Ocean – a reminder of the origin of all life on the planet, and a warning that we share our well-being with our vast and indifferent mother.

As terrestrial dwellers, it is easy to overlook the fact that we inhabit an essentially two dimensional space which has surface area but scant depth.

By contrast the marine world is three-dimensional, its depths accounting for 99% of the biosphere and its surface accounting for 70% of the planet's area. The ocean forms the principal interface of chemical exchange with the atmosphere, absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen - it is the pump that drives the climate and regulates the air we breathe.

Like other semi-enclosed bodies of water, the Baltic is brackish, its waters less saline than our tears. The River Aura flows through the port city of Turku, past the maze of low granite islands that form the Finnish archipelago and into the Baltic, carrying with it a mixture of chemical nutrients and effluents that simultaneously drive the annual algal bloom and degrade the complexity and fecundity of marine ecosystems. Simply put, the Baltic has lost its clarity and its fish but has gained the reputation as the most polluted sea in the world.

Vox Aura; the River is Singing suggests that we pay attention to these complex issues that ultimately control our destiny, by listening to the chemical composition of the Baltic whilst we also listen to our own stories and histories.

[3] *Pangaea, Pan = entire and Gaia = Earth coined in 1927 during a symposium discussion of Alfred Wegener's theory of continental drift and his concept of the UrKontinent.*

[4] *Bosham, West Sussex – a village in Chichester harbour, elements of this narrative appear in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles.*

[5] *The narrative presumes the tone to be an harmonic artifact*

[6] *A Devil's tail, or Rogue's Yarn as it is known in rope-making.*

The project consists of two vessels, moored on each side of Turku's Theatre Bridge, equipped with speakers which broadcast a soundscape. The first of these plays material from a large archive of sound recordings which evoke the maritime traditions and the marine environment of the Baltic; the second transforms this material, allowing us to listen to water quality data that is constantly collected by two trans-Baltic ships and downloaded to the work.

The project's computer system takes variables from this data, such as position, depth, temperature, salinity, turbidity and pH, using them as musical parameters to transform the source audio (which is playing simultaneously from the first vessel) producing an ethereal *datamusic* as a metaphor for, or analogue of the chemical composition of the sea.

3. Archipelago ~ CrayVox

Eight channel sound sculpture installed at the Space(D) Biennale 2012, Fremantle Arts Centre WA. Photo Credit ~ The Artist.

This is the old Hessle Road
The home of Bear Island Cod
Where the Husdsons speak only to the Helyers
And the Helyers speak only to God

Many years ago I found this verse pinned to a bulkhead of a Sidewinder trawler in Hull on the cold North Sea. The saying "Salt is in the Blood" speaks not only of my family history but to our collective origins and reminder of our evolutionary prehistory.

The *CrayVox* project, commissioned by the Space(D) Biennale[9] allowed me to reconnect with memories from early childhood, growing up in a small Sussex fishing village, the fisherfolk using open wooden boats and tarred wicker Lobster pots. The Lobsters of course were destined, then as now, for the wealthier members of the community, but we fared well enough by collecting small sweet Mussels, Periwinkles and Sea Lettuce

in rock pools with Sea Kale garnered from the shingle banks.

The dazzling bleached coral islands and brightly coloured shacks of the Houtman Abrolhos Islands, which became my home for several months during 2011, were simultaneously otherworldly but strangely familiar.

I had come with an open mind but also with many questions concerning the ecology and economy of Cray-fishing, curious about this isolated community and idiosyncratic lifestyle; my job in this situation, I decided, was to look and learn – but also to discuss and debate the future viability and sustainability of our marine ecologies and marine economies with my hardworking and generous host families.

The Abrolhos fishery is promoted as the world's first environmentally sustainable fishery[10] and is heavily monitored and controlled by the department of fisheries. This however has driven considerable changes in both the fishing techniques, vessel size and economic risk, not to mention the fact that the catch is almost exclusively for export and therefore disconnected from the local food cycle, operating as a resource extraction industry not dissimilar to iron ore mining.

My task has been to develop a suitable metaphor to support and communicate the broad raft of ideas, images and information that accumulated during my sojourn on the Islands. The form of the Cray boat was chosen as a vessel to contain an audio-portrait of both the islands and my subsequent travels to Southeast Asia, following the export trail to seafood importers, restaurants and cooks. The skeletal vessel in the exhibition itself became a resonant object projecting the energy and complexity of the Abrolhos and its people.

Atoll.

The Island, a cemetery exhaled by the sea.
The tree of life,
calcinated to a bleached white clinker raft.
Whilst all around,
submerged beneath the endless sheet of water.
Fronds branch and entwine,
filament and fan, knoll and star.
Electric pink jostles acid green,
fading to sombre blue where the sharks sleep.

Nigel Helyer, IASKA CrayVox Blog

Post Office Island, Houtman Abrolhos WA
Photo Credit ~ The Artist

Stone.

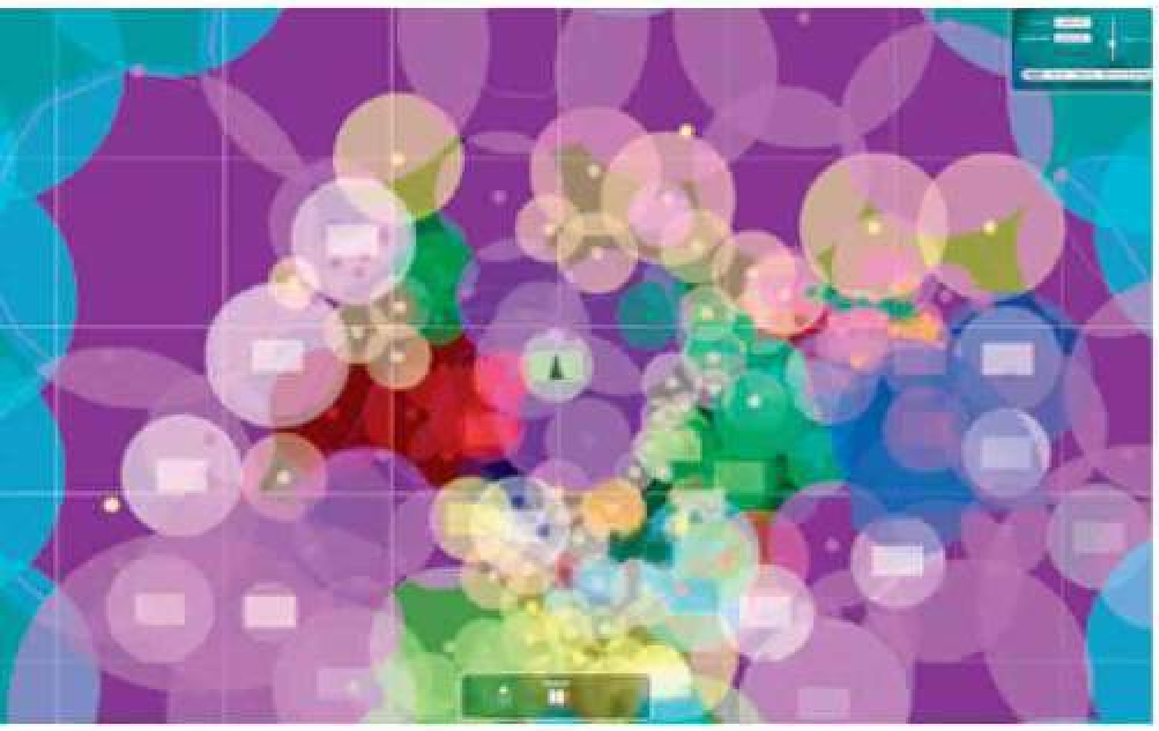
Maria, Basile Island, Houtman Abrolhos WA
Photo Credit ~ The Artist

A stone shown as a curio – for there are no stones on this island, only coral, loose brittle and resonant, bearing the imprint of life that thrives in the waters hard by the strand. One skims over acres of it en route to the nearby Basile Island, named for a family of Italian fishermen; or perhaps they are named for the Island, with lives and livelihoods so entwined with place it is hard to tell.

In the cul-de-sac of a cement path named Cathedral Street stands a miniature Catholic church, furnished with a neat array of small wooden school chairs, a series of ceramic tiles which illustrate the stations of the cross and two Madonnas, one a faded, framed print on the Altar, the other a plaster statuette balancing on a corner shelf; both gaze at wilted candles, a testament to passion past.

Basile is all neatness, its shacks painted in electric rainbow colours, the floats and ropes ordered as if by the compulsions of a Mediterranean matriarch with little else to do in a sleepy coastal village. The rock, likewise a transposition, arriving as ballast on a sailing vessel, which either floundered here or jettisoned this lode in lieu of a cargo, lies alongside a whale vertebrae and pearl nacre, a conduit to other worlds.

4. Island ~ Run Silent Run Deep



Interactive sound installation screen shot
Photo Credit ~ The Artist

Be not afeared; this isle is full of noises,
Sounds and sweet airs that give delight
and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments'
Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices
That, if I then had waked after long sleep,
Will make me sleep again; and then, in dreaming,
The clouds methought would open
and show riches
Ready to drop upon me, that, when I waked,
I cried to dream again.

Caliban in "The Tempest" by William Shakespeare.

The cruiser drifts idly on the oily swells close to some small islands six nautical miles off the Singapore coast, engines off and all electronics cut. She is, as the submariners would say, *Running Silent, Running Deep*[11]. A single blue cable snakes down into the opaque waters twenty metres below the hull, its hydrophone sensor recording the roar of biological static erupting from the claws of millions of Snapping Shrimp. Buried within this powerful foreground the occasional grunts and coughs of reef fish are set against the low frequency pulsing rumble of freighter props that form an ever-present sonic horizon.

Weeks of these recording trips to islands, to floating fish farms and the wetlands on the North coast gradually define an acoustic image of the island's complex marine environment. Plotted into an interactive sonic cartography using AudioNomad systems[12] the recordings form an acoustic halo around the Singapore shoreline. Satisfying as this might be, the island itself remains to be voiced and so the maritime recordings are gradually complimented by day upon day of recording work in this city state. Markets, temples, mosques, shopping malls and transitory phone conversations on the MRT jostle against blue comedians, karaoke, street ambience, Buddhist chanting and thunderstorms. The sonic cartography of Singapore finally takes form, installed in the National Museum, its interactive control surface navigated to form powerful immersive 3D sound mixes that retrieve the intimacies of the Straits as well as the hubbub of Little India.

5. Lake ~ Weeping Willow

Blue Willow interview, HangZhou 2011
Photo Credit ~ The Artist

And truly a trip on this Lake is a much more charming recreation than can be enjoyed on land. For on the one side lies the city in its entire length, so that the spectators in the barges, from the distance at which they stand, take in the whole prospect in its full beauty and grandeur, with its numberless palaces, temples, monasteries, and gardens, full of lofty trees, sloping to the shore.

And the Lake is never without a number of other such boats, laden with pleasure parties; for it is the great delight of the citizens here, after they have disposed of the day's business, to pass the afternoon in enjoyment with the ladies of their families, or perhaps with others less reputable, either in these barges or in driving about the city in carriages.

Marco Polo on the lake at Kinsay (Hangzhou)

Yan Ping, my assistant, leads me by the arm into a small lakeside pagoda; she is clutching a Wedgewood Willow Pattern plate (made in China) and I a camera and audio recorder. Yan Ping addresses the seated couple who eye me with obvious suspicion and proffers the decorative plate, asking them to identify its provenance and the narrative it portrays. Foreign, they say, nothing to do with China, but looks like a fake Ming period! They are of course correct, but even so I am surprised that they fail to make the connection between the cobalt blue image of the lake and the serene view they are contemplating.

Weeping Willow addresses the cultural and ideological relationship between two Empires,

[7] *Toll was installed in an Atomic fallout shelter in Kassel, Germany as part of the Innenseit Projekt, during Documenta10.*

[8] *Vox Aura; The River is Singing was commissioned by the Turku is Listening programme as part of Turku 2011, European Capital of Culture.*

Detail of installation, ISEA, Istanbul 2011
Photo Credit – The Artist

Britannia and Cathay (China), both of which regarded themselves as the hub of the Universe. Eurocentrism demands that the Orient play a secondary role in the Arts and Sciences, obscuring the real source of much Occidental *Ars et Inventio* by relegating the Orient to the source of exotica, myth and superstition.

Underpinned by a long history of trade routes and sea-lanes, the two imperial centres engaged in a curious but problematic dialogue which ended ultimately in the Opium wars and semi-colonisation by European powers in the mid-nineteenth century, that established an axis of power which we are only now seeing reversed!

European commercial interests were matched at every turn by a fascination with Eastern Arts and Culture, with its complexity and historical depth which predated and overshadowed that of Europe's. Textile and ceramic wares in particular formed the basis for huge trade, carrying with it a range of iconography which shuffled across the cultural divide, to eventually hybridise in both the Occident and the Orient.

The Blue Willow, or Willow Pattern ceramic design is a perfect example of this process and forms the basis for *Weeping Willow*. Blue Willow was designed by Minton, an Englishman, and was initially produced by the Spode pottery in Staffordshire. The design is based upon the longstanding tradition of Ming porcelain blue-ware, with specific imagery drawn from the lakes and gardens in Hangzhou, notably the West Lake which has a deep-rooted and popular place in Chinese cultural history and is well-documented in the *Travels of Marco Polo*.

The European image proposes a narrative, reputed to be based upon a traditional Chinese tale of unrequited love; however re-cast in the vein of Romeo and Juliet it becomes a European fiction, which only loosely follows a much more interesting Chinese mythic tale relating a love story between white and blue snake deities.

The vagaries of orientalism aside, to judge from the ubiquity of the design, Blue Willow is possibly the most widespread example of Chinoiserie, with production quickly being taken up in China and Japan as exports to Europe reversing, or perhaps amplifying the original orientalist trend. Even today Wedgewood's Blue Willow plates are manufactured in China by workers to whom the pattern is apparently without meaning.

Weeping Willow explores the vestiges of cultural memory invested in the design by asking locals in the Hangzhou area to identify and describe the stories embedded in the Blue Willow plate. These narratives are combined with narrations of the original love stories, both traditional and European and in turn mixed with early European accounts of China (for example Marco Polo's descriptions of exotic life in Hangzhou, which he identifies as Kinsay).

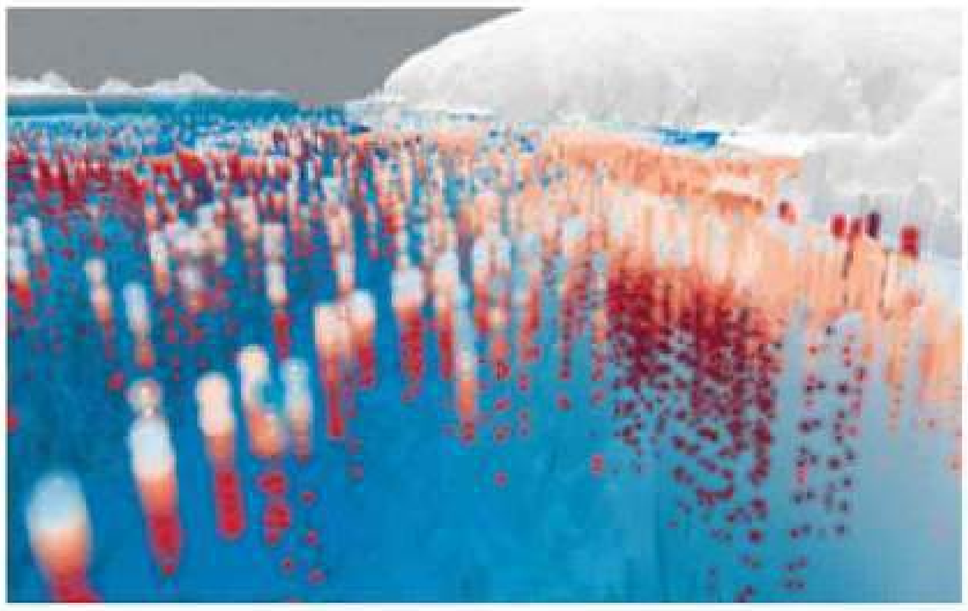
The work is presented as an interactive audio sculpture in the form of a dinner table, set with twelve Willow Pattern plates. Each plate treated to show only a fragment of the original pattern, in such a manner that the entire set combines to form the complete image. In turn each plate is mounted on an audio actuator rendering it in effect as a speaker allowing the dinner setting to manifest a multichannel, fragmentary audio narrative.

> *The position of the city is such that it has on one side a lake of fresh and exquisitely clear water, and on the other a very large river. The*

waters of the latter fill a number of canals of all sizes which run through the different quarters of the city, carry away all impurities, and then enter the Lake; whence they issue again and flow to the Ocean, thus producing a most excellent atmosphere.

Marco Polo on Kinsay (Hangzhou)

6. Ice shelf ~ Bio_Logging and Under the Icecap



Screen shot of data generated bio-logging data showing Elephant Seal dive patterns. Photo Credit ~ Dr. Mary-Anne Lea IMAS

Land and Water are chalk and cheese. Apart from sleeping in a mud wallow, land can be big trouble, females to keep an eye on, a regular harem, with all their attendant demands. Then there is the fighting, a constant stream of young studs trying their luck and it gets nasty, blood everywhere, females injured and pups crushed – that's land for you!

On the water it's different, solo, quiet. Surface alongside the sheet ice, re-breathing for a couple of minutes, one big exhalation and then slipping slowly down. Heartbeat restrained to eight beats a minute, down and down to a thermal vent two thousand metres below the surface, a four thousand kilogramme, six metre body gliding into a frigid, inky darkness, bespeckled with the photophores of lantern fish and bioluminescent medusae.

Under the IceCap is an Art + Science collaboration between myself and Marine Scientist Dr. Mary-Ann Lea[13] at the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies of the University of Tasmania, which visualises and sonifies complex bio-logging telemetry data collected by Elephant Seals[14] on their deep dives under the Antarctic Ice shelves and long Southern Ocean transits. The project explores novel ways to make these data-sets palpable, by manifesting them as a series of interactive sonic cartographies and experimental music concerts. Each concert in the series is designed to test the hypothesis that musical training is particularly well adapted to negotiate complex streams of data unfolding in real-time. The work experiments with ways for musicians to respond to data generated 3D mappings, visual scores and direct data sonifications.

We are listening for the potential resonances and confluences that bridge the data and the sonic response with the aim to extend the conceptual and intuitive grasp of otherwise extremely abstract data. Through a process of iteration we hope to locate a *sweetspot* that connects traditional scientific approaches with a creative sensibility, searching for a form that combines cultural *affect* with scientific *utility*, thus opening an enormous range of human enquiry into the natural world to a wider public.

7. Inundation ~ Deluge

Southern Elephant Seals showing bio-logging device
Photo Credit ~ Ben Arthur IMAS

All day long the South wind blew rapidly and the water overwhelmed the people like an attack. No one could see his fellows. They could not recognize each other in the torrent. The gods were frightened by the flood, and retreated up to the Anu heaven. They cowered like dogs lying by the outer wall. Ishtar shrieked like a woman in childbirth.

The Mistress of the Gods wailed that the old days had turned to clay because she said evil things in the Assembly of the Gods, ordering a catastrophe to destroy the people who fill the sea like fish. The other gods were weeping with her and sat sobbing with grief, their lips burning, parched with thirst.

The flood and wind lasted six days and seven nights, flattening the land. On the seventh day, the storm was pounding like a woman in labour.

The sea calmed and the whirlwind and flood stopped. All day long there was quiet. All humans had turned to clay. The terrain was as flat as a roof top. Utnapishtim opened a window and felt fresh air on his face. He fell to his knees and sat weeping, tears streaming down his face. He looked for coastlines at the horizon and saw a region of land. The boat lodged firmly on Mount Nimush which held the boat for several days, allowing no swaying.

On the seventh day he released a dove which flew away, but came back to him. He released a swallow, but it also came back to him. He released a raven which was able to eat and scratch, and did not circle back to the boat. He then sent his livestock out in various directions.

Gilgamesh Tablet eleven (XI)

Odysseus scanned his crew as they pulled against the oars of their galley. Forewarned by tales of Jason's voyage in the Argos, Odysseus moulded wax into the ears of his crew and then lashed himself to the vessel's mast to resist the Siren's fatal song. The men rowed in silence, their waxen plugs reproducing the labyrinth of their pinnae, prefiguring the spirals of Edison's phonography inscribed into his wax cylinders. In the silence each man replaying the rhythms of his pulse to evade the deadly intoxication of song. Danger past, Odysseus scowls at his men who had steadfastly refused to release him to follow the Siren's hypnotic call.

Fifteene cubits vpward, did the waters preuaile; and the mountaines were couered.

And all flesh died, that mooued vpon the earth, both of fowle, and of cattell, and of beast, and of euery creeping thing that creepeth vpon the earth, and euery man.

All in whose nosethrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died.

And euery liuing substance was destroyed, which was vpon the face of the ground, both man and cattell, and the creeping things, and the foule of the heauen; and they were destroyed from the earth: and Noah onely remained aliue, and they that were with him in the Arke.

Genesis, 1611 King James Bible

These ancient narratives of the Deluge represent the earliest human collective memory of the cataclysmic flooding of the Black Sea region which occurred some seven thousand years ago. It is thought that rising sea levels, fed by the melt waters at the thaw of the last Ice Age, scientifically known as "Meltwater Pulse 1", broke through the land formations surrounding the original fresh water lake that we now know as the Black Sea, admitting a massive flood[15] that inundated the ancient agricultural societies and searing the disaster permanently into human collective memory.

The aim of *Deluge* is to seek out traces of these deep memories – the earliest to recount an environmental disaster, locating them in folk tales, song, images and objects and to link these mnemonic objects with contemporary awareness and debate concerning our current environmental conditions, climate change and increased sea levels.

The metaphor of the *Deluge* will bridge the various ethnic, faith and generational sections in selected communities along the shores of the Black Sea coupling biological memory with contemporary life.

Whilst art cannot easily solve the problems of a participatory democracy, it can act to build bridges and engender new approaches to intransigent issues. The Deluge project is designed to fit (or float) in the interstitial spaces between science, the environment, economic and social interests, acting as a catalyst to generate social engagement with an understanding of ecological issues and the competing interests of economics and ecology.

We cast off sometime in the near future!

Concert at the Hobart Conservatorium of Music (UTAS) 2012 with the iCon group responding to data generated graphical scores and dynamic maps. Photo Credit ~ The Artist

[9] Space(D) Biennale, Fremantle Arts Centre, Western Australia, February – March 2012. Curator Marco Marcon of IASKA.

[10] The Abrolhos Islands are protected as an A-Class Nature Reserve – it is interesting to reflect that only 4% of Australian waters are protected as marine parks and reserves and globally only 0.36% of the oceans (which account for 70% of the planets surface area) are afforded protection.

[11] Run Silent Run Deep was commissioned by ISEA (International Symposium of Electronic Arts) and undertaken during a three-month Artist-in-Residency at the Tropical Marine Institute of the National University of Singapore. The resulting interactive sonic cartography work was shown at the Singapore National Museum 2008.

[12] AudioNomad is an art and science research programme co-founded by Dr Nigel Helyer (creative director) and Dr Daniel Woo (scientific director). The collaboration develops location-aware virtual and augmented audio-reality for mobile users. AudioNomad has exhibited surround-sound installations on ships; mobile devices for individual pedestrian use; and interactive surround- sound installations for museum exhibition.

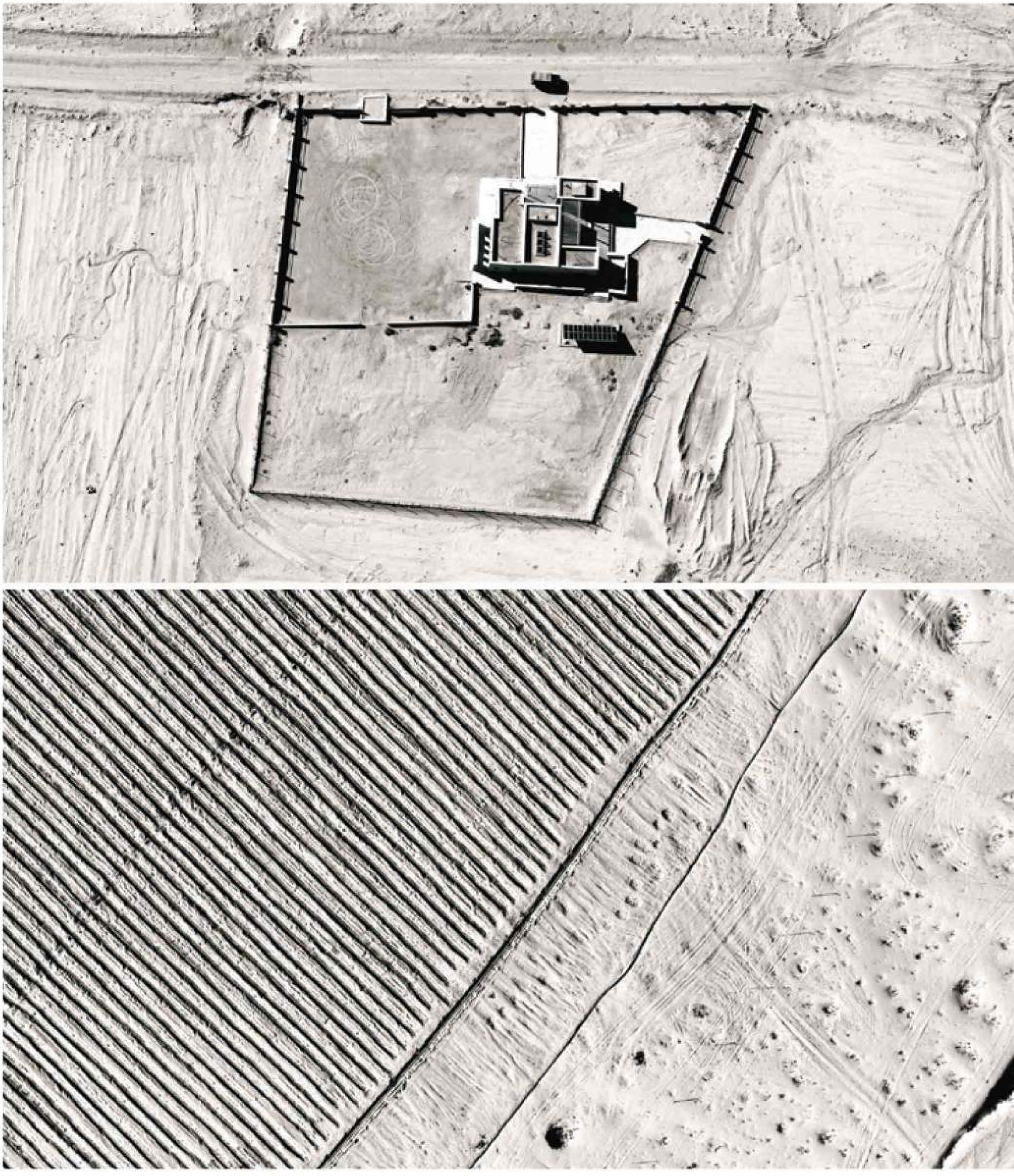
[13] This project is supported by The Australian Network for Art and Technology (ANAT) and the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

[14] Some facts and figures: The Southern Elephant Seal is the largest pinniped and exhibits strong sexual dimorphism, the males being significantly larger than the females. Males have been recorded to weigh up to 4000Kg with a length of 6.85 m. The smaller females forage mainly in the pelagic zone whilst the males will forage in both pelagic and benthic zones, diving to depths of up to 2000 m with the ability to remain submerged for two hours. There are three main sub-populations, the South Atlantic, the Indian Ocean and the sub-Antarctic islands of the Pacific Ocean. Bio-logging devices are attached once the animal has moulted and with luck can remain in-situ for up to a year. The device transmits a range of data to a satellite each time the seal surfaces providing information about location, temperature, salinity, pH and other water qualities etc. Because of their capacity to dive deep in the water column and their habit of foraging under the Antarctic ice shelves Elephant Seals have provided information otherwise unobtainable about Polynyas, ice free areas associated with the production of ocean currents (thermohaline circulation) vital indicators of global climate change.

Dr Charles Merewether

Abstraction: Jananne Al-Ani

Clockwise from top left:
Aerials II, IV, V and III
2011
Production Stills from *Shadow Sites II*
Single channel digital video
Courtesy the Artist and Abraaj Capital Art Prize
Photography Adrian Warren



Noski Deville
Location stills from the production of *Shadow Sites II*, 2010

Integral to the history of European modernism is the rise of modernisation stemming from the mid-nineteenth century. Part of that history entails the discovery and development of both photography and then cinema. For modernism, such developments contributed to the formation of both abstraction and the abstract in the visual arts, and to the separation of the sign from the signifier. In the modernist engagement of the notion of "land" through the technological advancement of aerial photography, with the increasing circulation of a disembodied view-point of large areas of land, the development of abstraction could then be realised not as detachment from reality but as a renewed means of perceiving and, hence, understanding reality. This desire of knowing is made possible by what can be seen (presently) which, in turn, is determined and driven by what is not seen.

The Russian artist Kazemir Malevich discovered the power of photography to either abstract the subject or see it abstractly. This discovery was made on seeing aerial photographs of landscape and as we review again the extraordinary accomplishment of his Suprematist paintings, we might view some of them not only vertically but as two-dimensional renderings of the landscape looking down from above. These years were, of course, those of World War One (1914-1918) during which aerial photography advanced dramatically with the development of faster film and lens. This allowed for the formation of aerial reconnaissance missions that hence were able to survey land and the location or movement of peoples and military hardware. As a result, they produced both a general and specific cartography for aerial warfare.

Over the past one hundred years, aerial photography has been put to valuable social and economic use. This, for example, can be instanced by the formation of an archive of geographical changes to the land as a result of land use and pollution, or by the creation of historical surveys that register specific land occupancy or the location of archaeological and historic sites.

Jananne Al-Ani, a London–based Iraqi-born artist, has returned to this area of consideration. Of course, there is an intervening history both in regard to modernism and aerial photography as much, of course, as that of modernisation and the camera. However, the more recent work of Al-Ani returns to this earlier history and the critical impact it had on our perception. In particular, she has been exploring the way aerial photography changed our view of the world, at once both appearing to reveal more to the human eye while, equally, abstracting it from the real.

Al-Ani's earlier work focused on Orientalist representations of the Middle East in Western visual culture and in particular, enduring myths and fantasies surrounding women and the veil. The idea of human exposure has always been an important one in the region and the artist's work seeks to bridge the divisions between cultures that have led to misunderstandings and conflicts of views and values. A number of pieces focused on the veil and the idea of what you see and what you do not, a play of misrecognition that nineteenth century European photography had used to create an erotic subject of the gaze.

Since this relatively early body of work, Al-Ani has developed a research-based visual exploration of aerial photography of the land. Examining different records from various libraries and archival resources, her research has led to a discovery of how the land had been photographed, especially at the time of World War One. This was intrinsically tied

Noski Deville
Location stills from the production of *Shadow Sites II*, 2010

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Location stills from the production of *Shadow Sites II*, 2010

to the development of aerial photography in relation to its use for reconnaissance missions and the documentation of its results, that is, of bombing.

In this process of research, the artist also recognised the way aerial photography documented, to a greater degree, the landscape and both its occupancy and use. In fact, as evident from the various records, one of the great values of aerial photography was its use as an armature for archaeology. With its use, one could conduct surveys of the land and identify potential historical sites. Secondly, socio-geographical surveys were enhanced greatly by the use of aerial photography to document land usage and population. This approach extended also to water with the development of the camera lens that could be used under water.

However, one of the most striking aspects of Al-Ani's work was the focus given to the historical record. What she discovered was the level of abstraction in the photographs. Many of the photographs appeared the polar opposites of forensic photography (with its attention to detail), although we may argue that a form of abstraction was also produced from the focus on detail once separated from the general view. Through the taking of aerial photography, Al-Ani then began to explore the Middle East, especially areas she was familiar with in terms of its social history and that of her family's. There is here an autobiographical anecdote valuable to capturing a dimension of this relationship to the land. In the summer of 1980, Al-Ani left Iraq with her sisters and mother

on a holiday to the United Kingdom. Soon after in September, war between Iran and Iraq broke out and the family never returned; Al-Ani then started schooling in England. One dimension captured by some of these photographs is that of familiarity and estrangement, of a sense in which one may see one's own country at a distance that is unrecognisable and yet somehow familiar. In many respects, Al-Ani's photographs capture the sense of what was, a buried social history. It may be images of a land once inhabited now forcibly abandoned, or a landscape that covers over layers of time and history or one in which the human figure is made invisible by aerial photography's technical abstraction. There is an unexpected pathos to this photography. Abstraction can be used to signify history, as we see in one of William Kentridge's powerful rendering of the South African landscape, laid bare in the light of Apartheid history.

In the film *Shadow Sites II* made in 2011, Al-Ani explores the land from the air for evidence of traces of life. It is part of a larger project called *The Aesthetics of Disappearance: A Land without People*. The film reveals, especially as the sun dips low, evidence of archaeological sites, of small active or past human settlements, of military training and mining excavation locations and industrial farming. Of course, this has changed with the development of satellite navigation and observation but the level of abstraction remains, whereupon signs of human life are merely an interruption in the scanning and description or classification of images.

Al-Ani's work follows these histories of abstraction, its traces and erasure.

Shadow Sites II is currently on show in the exhibitions Shadow Sites: Recent Work by Jananne Al-Ani at the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC and Light from the Middle East: New Photography at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

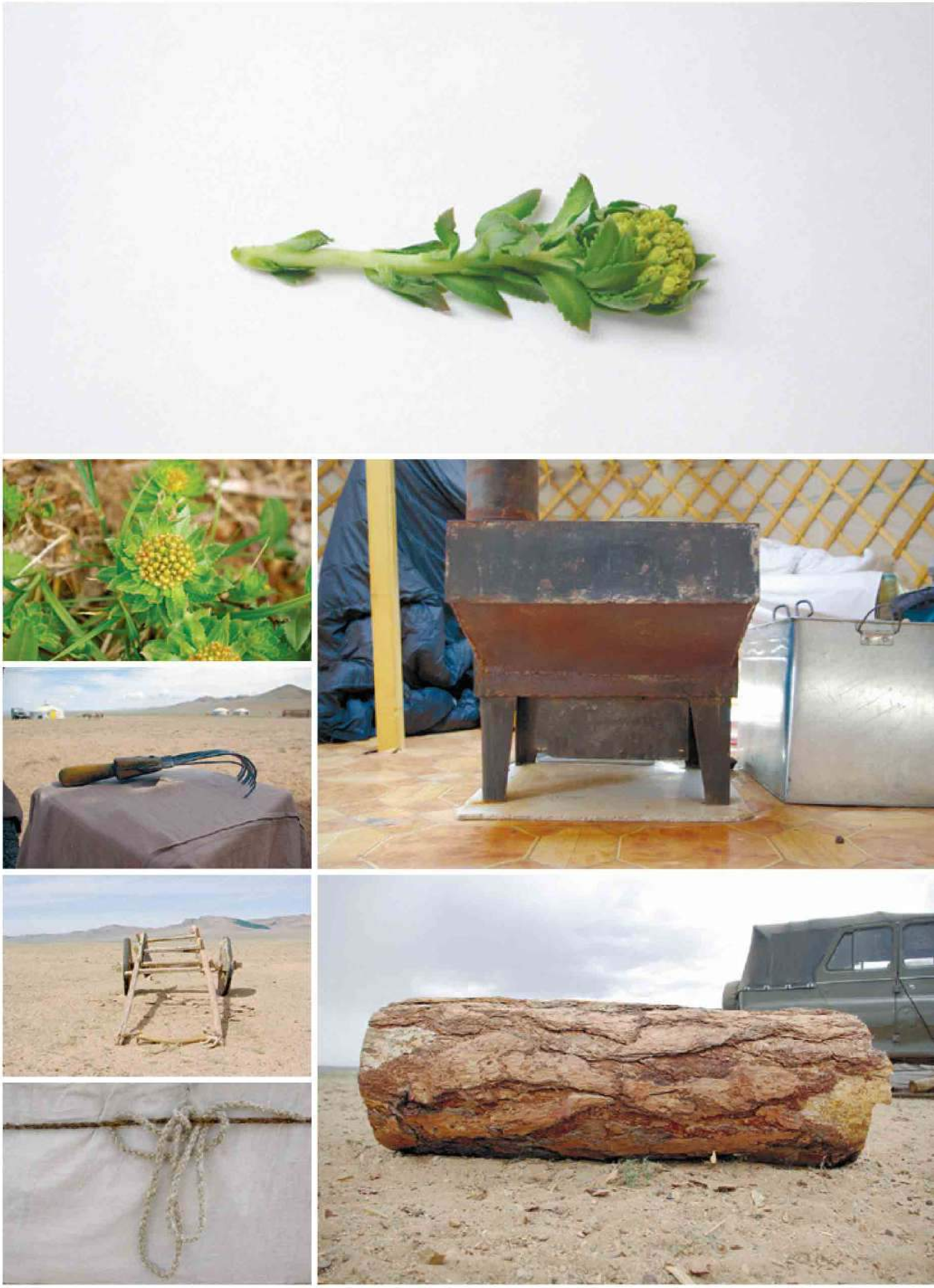
Noski Deville
Location stills from the production of *Shadow Sites II*, 2010

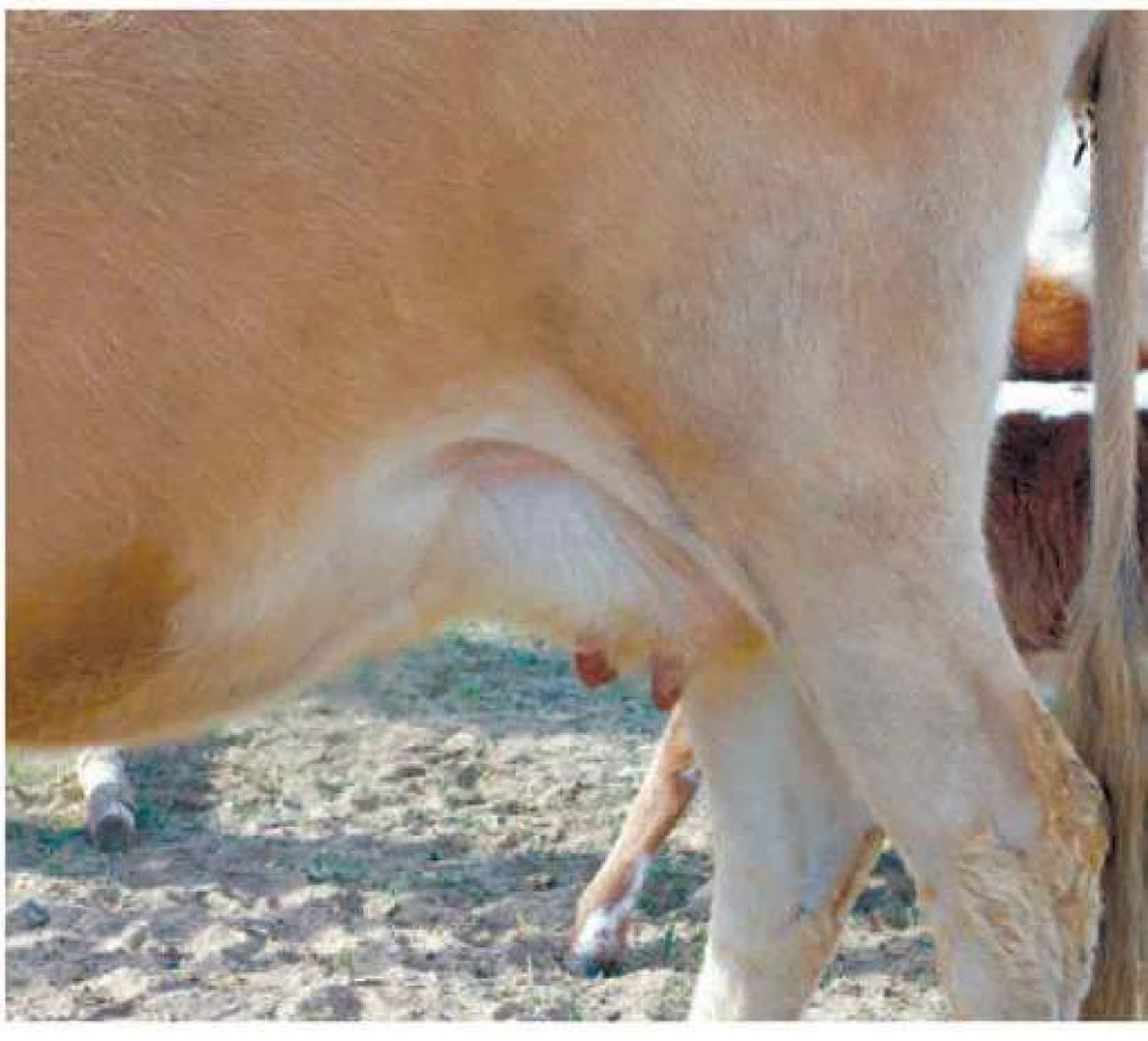
Syntfarm

Syntboutique

We went on a trip to Mongolia searching for things that are independent from information technologies, electric energy and consumerism.

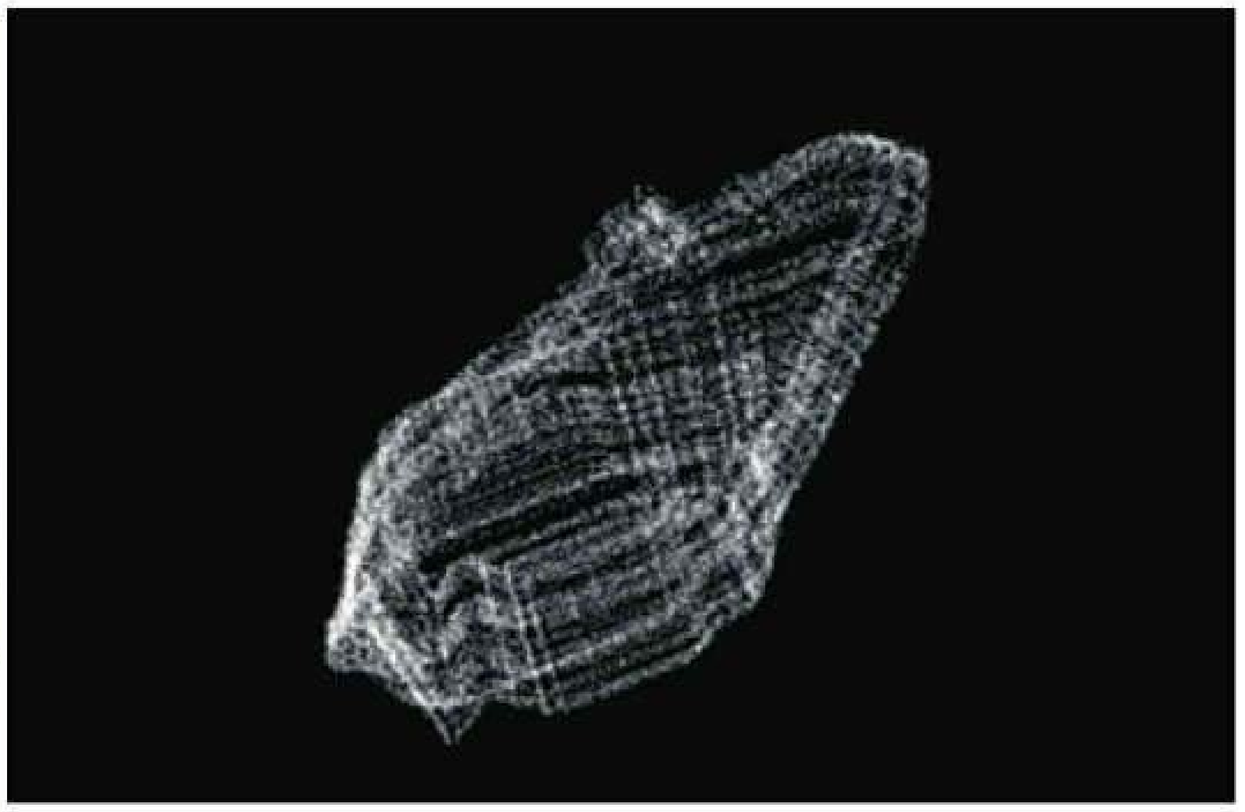
We found textures,

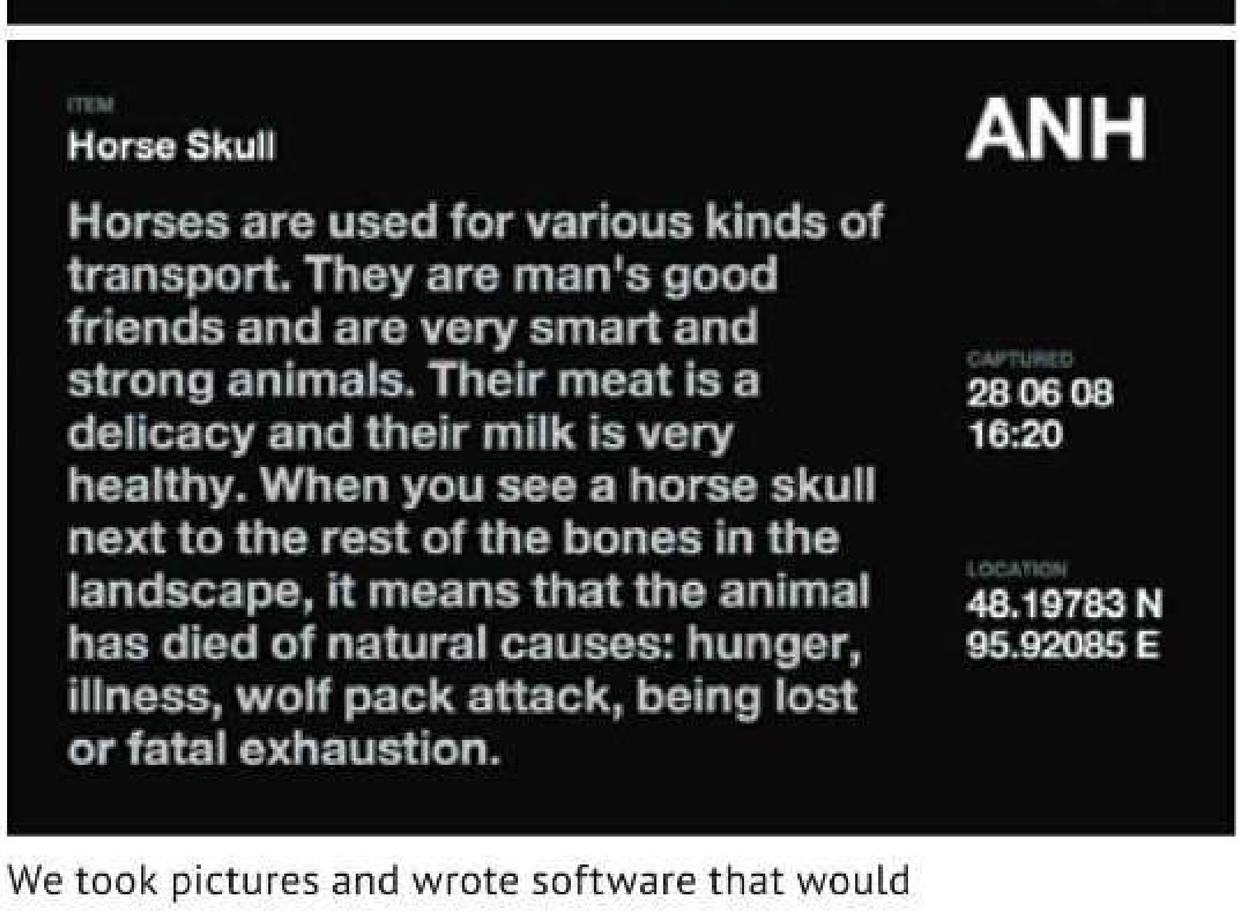




animals,

and other things.





ITEM
Horse Skull

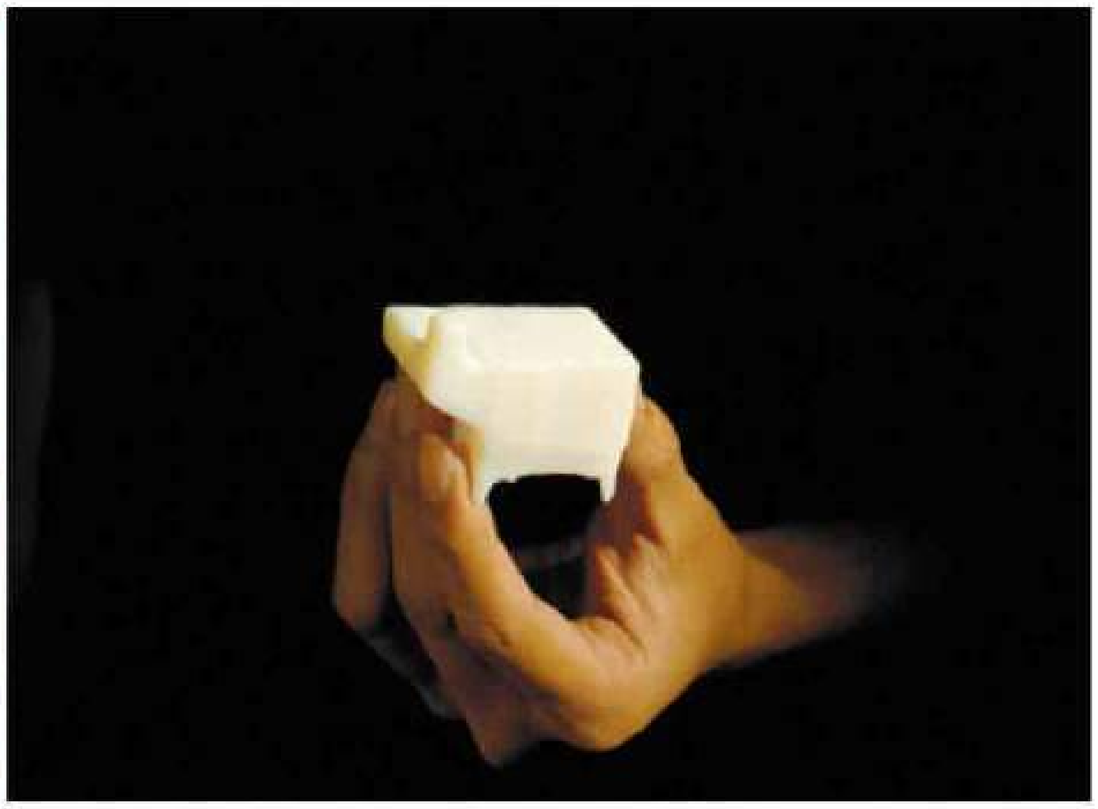
ANH

Horses are used for various kinds of transport. They are man's good friends and are very smart and strong animals. Their meat is a delicacy and their milk is very healthy. When you see a horse skull next to the rest of the bones in the landscape, it means that the animal has died of natural causes: hunger, illness, wolf pack attack, being lost or fatal exhaustion.

CAPTURED
28 06 08
16:20

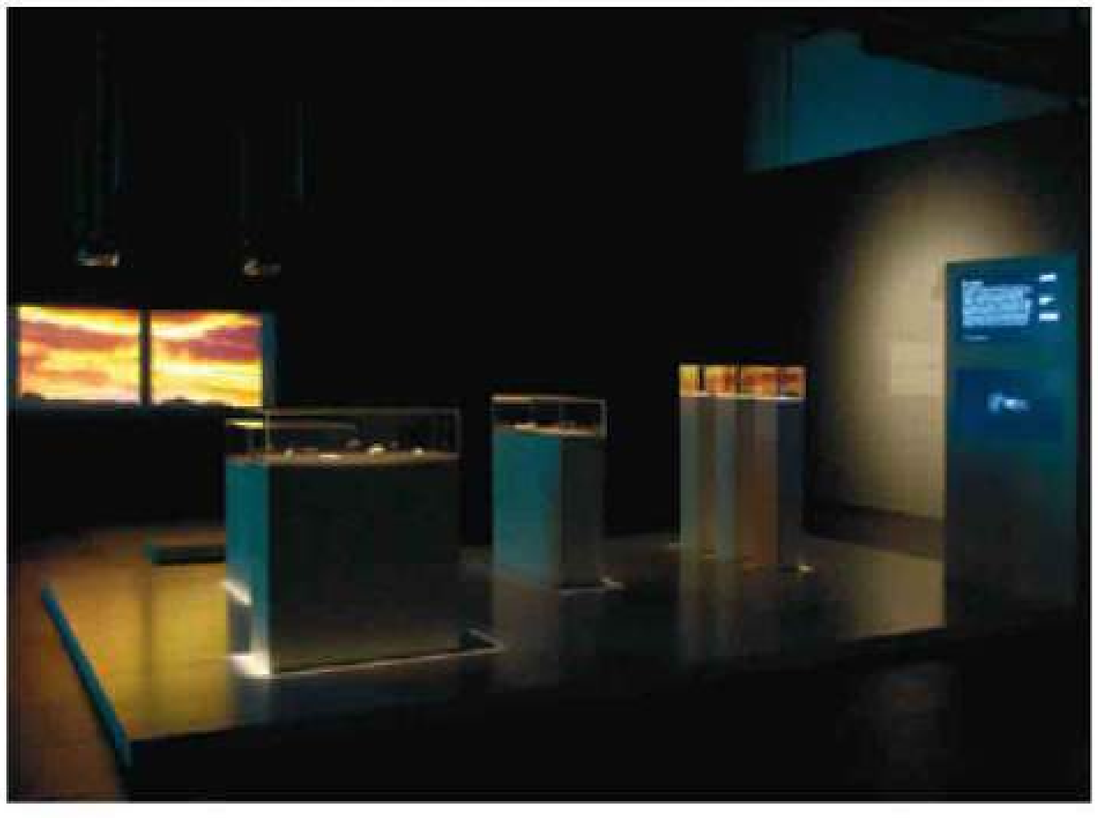
LOCATION
48.19783 N
95.92085 E

We took pictures and wrote software that would transform our photographs into 3D models.







92 We printed these objects with a 3D printer, and installed them in a museum. People came to see our installation.

What we did not capture was the landscape.

Contributor Bios

Jananne Al-Ani studied Fine Art at the Byam Shaw School of Art and graduated with an MA in Photography from the Royal College of Art. She is currently Senior Research Fellow at the University of the Arts London.

Al-Ani has had solo shows at the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington DC (2012); Darat al Funun, Amman (2010); Tate Britain, London (2005); and the Imperial War Museum, London (1999). Selected group exhibitions include all our relations, the 18th Biennale of Sydney (2012); Arab Express, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2012); Topographies de la Guerre, Le Bal, Paris (2011); The Future of a Promise, Magazzini del Sale, 54th Venice Biennale (2011) and Closer, Beirut Art Center (2009). She has also co-curated exhibitions including Veil (2003-4) and Fair Play (2001-2).

Recipient of many awards including the Abraaj Capital Art Prize (2011); the East International Award (2001); and the John Kobal Photographic Portrait Award (1996), her work can be found in public collections, among them the Tate Gallery and Arts Council England, London; the Pompidou Centre, Paris; the Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC; Museum Moderner Kunst, Vienna; and Darat al Funun, Amman.

Lawrence Chin currently teaches part-time at the Faculty of Fine Arts and Faculty of Creative Industries at LASALLE College of the Arts. His other preoccupations include working as a freelance art conservator and researching on the historical development of artists' materials. He is an occasional writer.

Choy Ka Fai is an artist, performance maker and speculative designer. He is inspired by the stories of history and speculations of the future, and his research often stems from a desire to understand the conditions of the human body. These conceptions would coalesce into intricate narratives at the intersection of art, design and technology.

Ka Fai graduated from the Royal College Of Art London (Design Interaction) under the National Arts Council Singapore Overseas Scholarship and was conferred the Singapore Young Artist Award in 2010. His work has been presented worldwide, including Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin; Whitechapel Gallery, London; and the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

Debbie Ding is an artist, designer, and cartographer who likes mapping and visualising spaces whether they be real, imaginary, or dream spaces.

She graduated with a B.A (Hons) in English Literature from National University of Singapore in 2007, but alongside her writing, she pursued her interest in the visual arts and interactive media.

She currently works as an interactive designer, and she likes investigating how people are influenced by the built environment and how it affects the patterns of human interaction with the urban public spaces in cities such as Singapore and London.

Nigel Helyer (a.k.a. Dr Sonique) is a Sydney-based sculptor and sound artist with an international reputation for his large-scale sonic installations, environmental sculpture works and new media projects.

His practice is actively inter-disciplinary, linking creative practice with scientific research and development. Recent activities include the development of a 'Virtual Audio Reality' system in collaboration with Lake Technology (Sydney) and the ongoing 'AudioNomad' research project in location sensitive Environmental Audio at the School of Computer Science and Engineering at the University of New South Wales.

He is an honorary faculty member in Architectural Acoustics at the University of Sydney and maintains active research links with the "SymbioticA" bio-technology lab at the University of Western Australia. He has recently been a visiting Professor at Stanford University and an Artist in Residence at the Paul Scherrer Institut in Switzerland as part of the Artists in Labs programme.

Werner Herzog (real name Werner H. Stipetic) was born in Munich on September 5, 1942. He grew up in a remote mountain village in Bavaria and never saw any films, television, or telephones as a child.

He started travelling on foot from the age of 14. He made his first phone call at the age of 17. During high school he worked the nightshift as a welder in a steel factory to produce his first films and made his first film in 1961 at the age of 19. Since then he has produced, written, and directed more than fifty films, published more than a dozen books of prose, and directed as many operas.

Charles Lim Yi Yong was a former national sailor who competed in the 1996 Olympics representing Singapore and Team China in the 2007 America's Cup. In 2000, Charles graduated from the Central Saint Martins School of Art and Design with a first class honours BA in Fine Art. Immediately after school, Charles went on to found a net collective art group called tsunamii.net which exhibited in the prestigious Documenta11. Combing his knowledge of the sea and love for making images, he embarked on the SEA STATE series of artwork, which went on to exhibit round the world at Manifesta7, the Shanghai Biennale and most recently the Singapore Biennale.

Dr Charles Merewether is an art historian, writer and curator who has worked in Australia, Europe, Asia, the Americas and Middle East. He was Collections Curator at the Getty Center in Los Angeles from 1994–2004. Between 2004–2006, he was Artistic Director and Curator of the 2006 Biennale of Sydney and Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Cross Cultural Research, Australian National University. In October 2007, he was appointed Deputy Director, Cultural District for the Tourist Development and Investment Company, Abu Dhabi. He has taught at the University of Sydney, Universitat Autònoma in Barcelona, the Ibero-Americana in Mexico City and the University of Southern California, and has lectured at the Beijing Academy of Art, Lingnan University in Hong Kong and the Asia Research Centre at the National University of Singapore. Merewether has published and been translated extensively while also curating over 20 major shows in Europe, USA, Latin America and Australia, as well as serving on the advisory boards of a number of biennales including Johannesburg, Istanbul and São Paulo. He is the Director of the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore at LASALLE College of the Arts.

Eunseon Park is the Director of Listen to the City, a commune of artists and designers consisting of 4 members and 3 collaborators. Studying the roles of artists in a capitalistic society, Listen to the City's aim is to bridge the gaps between art and society, realizing that art and design can be really helpful to understand what's going on in today's world. Listen to the City consider themselves as a device to break Spectacles of the City, and be on the line between activism and art. Against the notion of art as a product, Listen to the City began developing a new role for art in this capitalistic society; a new concept of art.
www.listentothecity.org

Paul Rae teaches on the Theatre Studies Programme at the National University of Singapore, and is co-director, with Kaylene Tan, of spell#7 performance (www.spell7.net). He is the author of Theatre and Human Rights (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), Associate Editor of the journal Theatre Research International, and has published widely on contemporary theatre and performance. His current projects include a monograph entitled Real Theatre, and a co-edited volume, It Starts Now: Performance Avant-Gardes in East and Southeast Asia (with Peter Eckersall).

Rachael Swain is a Director with Stalker Theatre and Co-Artistic Director of Marrugeku, with Dalisa Pigram. She has pioneered challenging new approaches to Australian physical theatre and intercultural-Indigenous performance drawing on experimental dance and multi media practices and processes, often incorporating large scale installations in a variety of alternative locations nationally and internationally. Marrugeku is an intercultural and interdisciplinary company working with remote community-based Indigenous dancers, musicians, and story keepers and urban Indigenous and non-Indigenous dancers. Rachael co-devised and performed in each of Stalker's early ground breaking street theatre productions, which toured extensively throughout Australia, Europe, Asia and Latin America from 1989 to 1995. In 1995 Rachael began conceiving, directing and co choreographing Stalker and Marrugekus's large scale, interdisciplinary dance theatre productions including Mimi (1996), Blood Vessel (1998), Crying Baby (2000), Incognita (2003), Burning Daylight (2006), Shanghai Lady Killer (2010) and Buru (2010) co-directed with Dalisa Pigram. Her productions have toured widely nationally and internationally.

Syntfarm was founded by Andreas Schlegel and Vladimir Todorovic in 2007. This initiative is undertaken as a collaborative effort to investigate the development and evolution of different synthetic forms and spaces. Here, synthetic forms are created by transcoding various phenomena from natural environments into artistic expressions.
www.syntfarm.org

Zhao Renhui received his BA (Photography) from Camberwell College of Arts and his MA (Photography) from London College of Communication. He has had exhibitions at Singapore Art Museum; The Substation Gallery, Singapore; Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Japan; Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, Singapore; Chapter Gallery, Wales; Photo-Levallois Festival, Paris; GoEun Museum of Photography, Korea; The Zabludowicz Collection, London; Shanghart, Shanghai; Noorderlicht Photography Festival, Netherlands; PPOW Gallery, New York and The Bangkok University Gallery. Renhui is the recipient of the Deutsche Bank Award in Photography (London, 2011) and The United Overseas Bank Painting of the Year Award (2009). In 2010, he was awarded The Young Artist Award by the Singapore National Arts Council along with the Noise Singapore Photography Prize.

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