

the Ragpicker,
THE FLÂNEUR, ^ THE MEMEPLEXES

A Selection by Khim Ong




On 21 July 2012, Beijing continued to experience heavy rain. Water rose to a depth of four metres under the Guangqumen Bridge. Zhao Zhao went out on an air mattress and gallivants under the Guangqumen Bridge, amidst the flood.

Still from *Rain* (2012), HD colour video, with sound, 6:17 mins. Courtesy the artist.

cdos

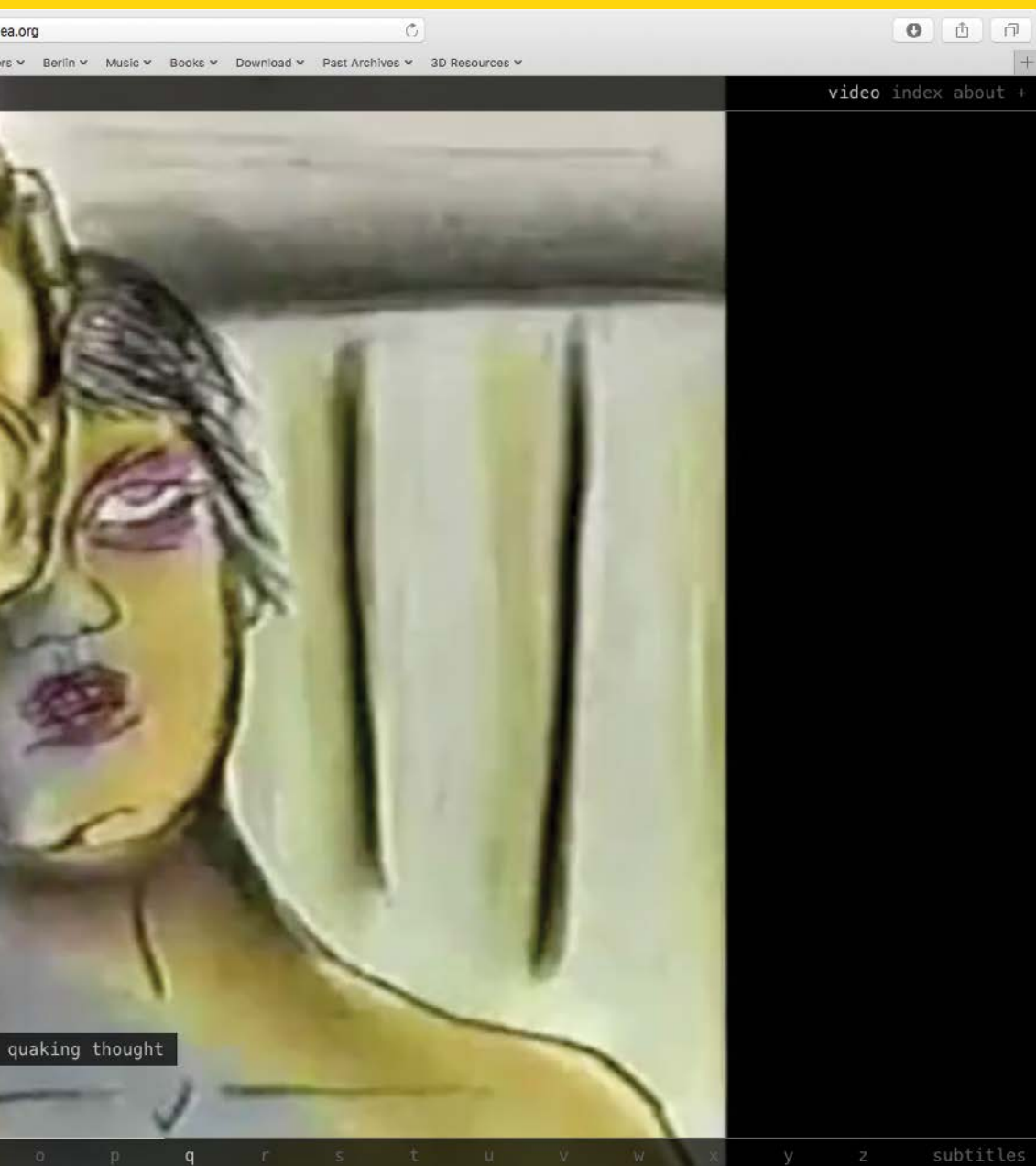
Tzu Dictionary Timelines Pandora Interests 2016 One or Several Tige

the critical dictionary of south-east asia



a quotation is a

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n



Ho Tzu Nyen, *The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia* (2012–ongoing),
screenshot from cdosea.org. Courtesy the artist.





Ho Tzu Nyen, *The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia* (2012–ongoing), screenshot from cdosea.org. Courtesy the artist.

In 2013, Zhao Zhao grew deeply interested in the trials of Bo Xilai, a member of the Communist Politburo, and his wife Gu Kailai, accused of corruption and murder in one of the most-talked about events in the recent history of China's political struggle. "Inspired" by the stories uncovered during their trials, Zhao Zhao set up four works to "re-enact" the sex-murder scandals and family dramas revealed in the trials, which had attracted huge popular attention and public voyeurism. He "translated" the keywords: *Slap*, *Secret Love*, *Leather Shoe* and *Family* (2014) in order to elevate the improper exchange between the suspects into unlikely radical actions.

— Hou Hanru, "Zhao Zhao: Another Kind of Weiquan Art?" in *Provocateur: Zhao Zhao* (Flash Art Publishing, 2017).



Zhao Zhao, *Slap* (2013), performance, digital C-print, 100 x 150 cm. Courtesy the artist.

In the first part of the series *Slap*, *Secret Love*, *Leather Shoe* and *Family*, through an open call by Zhao Zhao, volunteer Zhao Haixing agreed to be slapped on the left and right sides of his face with the artist's right hand. Completed on 20 October 2013, at 20:20:20 hrs.



Zhao Zhao, *Secret Love* (2014), performance, digital C-print, 100 x 150 cm. Courtesy the artist.

Slap, *Secret Love* involved volunteer Sun Yuan agreeing to let Zhao Zhao, using his right hand, stab him with a knife. Completed at 9:00 p.m, on 27 November 2014 at 305 Caocangdi, Beijing.



Zhao Zhao, *Leather Shoe* (2014), performance, digital C-print, 100 x 150 cm. Courtesy the artist.

For third part of the series *Slap, Secret Love, Leather Shoe, and Family*, Zhao Zhao gifted the knife used to stab Sun Yuan in *Secret Love* to the next volunteer who managed to convince the artist to part with the knife.



Zhao Zhao, *Family* (2014), performance, digital C-print, 100 x 150 cm. Courtesy the artist.

In last of the series *Slap*, *Secret Love*, *Leather Shoe*, and *Family*, again, through the open call, Zhao Zhao was invited as a guest to the home of a family of six. The aim was to prolong the visit way past the welcome of the host. The conversations started at noon on 5 December 2014 and lasted till 2:40 a.m. the following day, when the artist was chased out by the host.







This and previous page: Yason Banal, *MIFFED BLUE RETURN* (2019), multi-channel video installation, Manila Film Center sculpture, MIFFED YouTube channel, slowed down WiFi. Installation view, 47 Canal, New York, 2019. Courtesy the artist.



Yason Banal's jostling installation centres upon the Parthenon-inspired Manila Film Center, built to provide a venue for the first Manila International Film Festival (MIFF) in 1982, a soft power extravaganza organised at the height of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos' plunderous conjugal dictatorship in the Philippines. Scaffolding tragically collapsed during the brutalist design's hurried construction, fatally trapping a number of workers under quick-drying cement. The constellation around the failed structure and its troubling history of pageantry and power as well as its patrons' recent, dark, triumphant return is made manifest through video collage, drone painting, hyperlink research, sculpture and intermittent technology. Banal decelerates 47 Canal's WiFi made accessible to the public through the gallery's "MIFED" network (password: MIFED19)—approximating the Philippines' slow internet speed by way of the Peso to Dollar buffering exchange rate, as the WiFi transfer is now set in New York like an offshore/online account. Banal scans and extends the 'extrarchitectural craft' of MIFF and the Manila Film Center, situating these in dialogue with abstract mechanisms related to crony capitalism, post-truth, cultural patronage and neo-imperialism in the Philippines today.

— from the exhibition text of *MIFED BLUE RETURN*, 47 Canal, New York

C
for **CIRCLE /**
CORRUPTION

On the continuity of the form and logic of corruption from ancient to contemporary Southeast Asia, beginning with early cosmological system of cognatic kinship (transmission of power through maternal and paternal lineages) and endlessly proliferating circles of Kings) to the nepotism of today. Describe corruption as a physical and cosmological system, a corruption of the spirit and a spirit of corruption.

Resonating terms:
Circle (of Kings)
Cognatic Kinship
Cosmology

D
for **DECAY**

Begin with an archaeological mystery in Perak, Malaysia, where excavations uncovered what appears to be graves, except that no human remains were discovered. A recent hypothesis/speculation is that the acidity of the soil, intense rainfall and high rates of humidity in Malaysia brought about the complete decomposition of all human remains, including the bones. This term deals with both the absence of material artifacts plaguing historical research in Southeast Asia, the impossibility of forensic.

Resonating terms:
Decenter
Dispersal
Disaggregation
Dissimulation

E
for **EPIDEMIC/**
EVASION

On epidemics (both biological and ideological) and techniques of evasion.

Resonating terms:
Ecology
Efficacy

F

for FICTION/
FRICTION /
FOREST

On the friction of terrain presented by the dense, tropical forest, which shelter outlaws (bandits, communists, etc) as well as myths and magic.

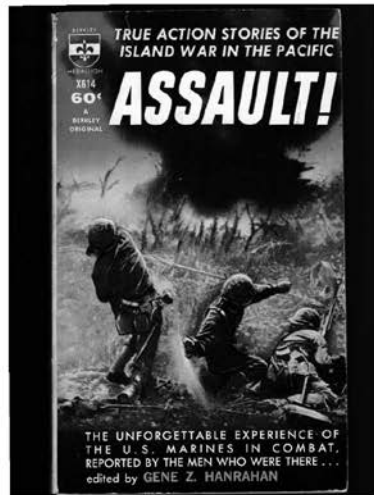
Resonating terms:
Fiction
Fluidity (ethnic and national)
Flight (from State)
Friction (in distance)
Frontier

G

for GHOST /
GHOSTWRITER/
GENE Z. HANRAHAN

On Southeast Asia as a geography of ghosts (the continuing involvement of the dead on the affairs of the living), the production of history through the work of ghostwriters and the history of Communism in Southeast Asia. To end with the figure of Gene Z. Hanrahan, the supposed 'author' of *The Communist Struggle in Malaya* (1954) – the first authoritative text on the history of the Malayan Communist Party. However, the existence of Gene Z. Hanrahan is open to question. He is an author dreamt up / produced by his books.

Resonating terms:
Geography



15

Pages extracted from *Fragments from A Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia* by Ho Tzu Nyen. Courtesy the artist.

Fallen Map is an installation of concrete rubble the artist gathered from construction sites around Metro Manila on which he painted over patterns of the ubiquitous *basahan* or *trapo* of the Philippines—circular cleaning rags made from an assortment of rejected fabric—that are disused and found scattered throughout the streets.



Above: Poklong Anading, *bandilang basahan (flag of rags)* no. 4 (2016), found rags, hooks, fastener, net, aluminum, 55" LCD flat panel display and media player, 198 x 170 x 160cm. Installation view (detail), *Cue From Life Itself*, Metropolitan Museum of Manila, 2020. Courtesy the artist.

Right: Poklong Anading, *Fallen Map* (2008), Acrylic painted on rubble from road works, water and sewage system, 200 pieces. Installation view, Mag:net Gallery, Quezon City, 2008. Courtesy the artist.



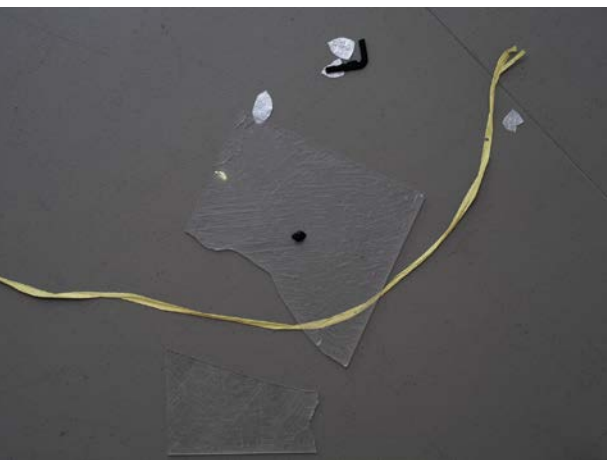


“I spend most of my time far from home and being on the street is like being in another artist’s studio where I accidentally find ideas and resources for my work.”

— Poklong Anading, excerpt from an interview with Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong, 2009.



Poklong Anading, *Fallen Map* (2008), installation view (detail), Mag:net Gallery, Quezon City, 2008. Courtesy the artist.







Under The Bodhi Tree (2019) is an installation of found objects—often discarded materials, detached or torn off from its origin—and photographs printed on paper and folded by the artist. Through his subtle manipulations of the object and the image, the relationship between the two-dimensional and the three-dimensional is blurred, creating alternative perceptions.

— From the exhibition text of *Side Affects*, Ota Fine Arts, Singapore, 2019.





This and previous pages:
Chua Chye Teck, *Under The Bodhi Tree* (2019), found objects and images printed on recycled paper, dimensions variable. Installation views, Ota Fine Arts, Singapore, 2019.
Courtesy the artist.



M *for* MANDALA

An analysis of non-Euclidean organization of space in Southeast Asia, through how ancient, pre-colonial empires of the regions understood the notion of territory, as radiating outwards from centers without physical limits. This is in contrast to the western model of empires, which are drawn inwards from clearly demarcated borders. This conceptualization of space was first theorized by Kautilya in the 2nd Century BCE, who wrote on the mandala system of governance in the Arthashastra, a Sanskrit treatise on statecraft, economic policy and military strategy.

Resonating terms:

Magic
Manpower
Map
Metempsychosis
Mimesis
Mobility

N *for* NATION/ NARRATION / NARCOSIS

On the narcosis of narration and nation

Resonating terms:

Nomadism

O *for* OCEANS / OPIUM

On the connection of Oceans and Opium: the trade that links India (production), distribution (Singapore) and consumption (China) by looking at the opium trade in the 19th Century: production in India and distribution in China, with Singapore as a nodal point for exchange, the same sea route that was central to transmission of memes across Southeast Asia – a meeting point between Indian and Chinese cultures.

Resonating terms:

Orality
Origin
Outlaw

P

for PADI /
POLITICS /
PLATEAU

Politics in pre-modern Southeast Asia is Padi politics. Its mantra: to concentrate the population and hold it in place, and its key condition: creating such state space was easiest where there was a substantial expanse of flat, fertile land, watered by perennial streams and rivers. Against the practices of swidden (slash and burn) agriculture practiced by the tribes of highland plateaus. To connect with Gregory Bateson's study of the plateaus of intensities in Balinese paintings (appropriated by Deleuze and Guattari).

Resonating terms:
Periphery
Piracy
Puppets

Q

for QUEEN

On Queens (mythical and historical) of Southeast Asia.

Resonating terms:
Question
Quotation
Quaking

R

for RESONANCE

About metallurgy in Southeast Asia and the technology of gong-making (key instrument in Southeast Asian tribal rituals). The term 'resonance' also forms a model of how to think the unity of Southeast Asia.

Resonating terms:
Region
Ritual

S

for SLAVERY /
SOUL

On the connection between the concepts of Southeast Asian slavery, historical slavery in Southeast Asia and the animistic concepts of soul (and soul stuff).

Resonating terms:
Sea
State
Society
Space
Spells



Việt Lê, *untitled (Charlie's Angels of History)*, still from *lovebang!* (2012–15).
Courtesy the artist.





“The project is a time-travelling, trans-love triangle. And it’s trilingual (Vietnamese, Khmer, English). The *love bang!* trilogy comes from some of my curatorial work and also my academic work, trying to figure out what is the gap between historical trauma and pop culture, particularly pan-Asian popular culture. It seems like many people don’t talk about past wars but there is such an obsession with pop music—what is the relationship between the traumas of history and modernity, between war and pop (and agit-prop)?”

— Việt Lê, excerpt from an interview with CAAMFest, 2016

Việt Lê

Left: *untitled (Gigi!)*, still from *lovebang!* (2012–15)

Below: *lonely heARTs cluBand-Aid*, still from *heARTbreak!* (2016–19).

HD video, colour, sound, projection, 1:21 mins. Courtesy the artist.



“During the Viet Nam War, *nhac vang* or ‘golden music’—love ballads about loss was banned by the Vietnamese government for its potentially subversive content. The 1960s and 70s was dubbed as a ‘golden era’ of Cambodian rock; many of its stars disappeared during the Khmer Rouge genocide. Today, the explosion of pan-Asian youth culture and pop music obscures traces of the recent past in both countries. In contemporary Viet Nam, Japan, China, Cambodia, and Korea (among other Asian countries), there has been an



emergence of popular cultural production (music, films, soap operas) [which] questions the boundaries of community, identity and identification. How are national and consumer desires linked? The rise of bull markets may presage the rise of pop markets, including J-Pop, V-Pop, and *hallyu*.”

— Việt Lê, excerpt from an interview with diaCRITICS, 2012.
(<https://diacritics.org/2012/10/love-bang/>)



V

for **VAMPIRES /
VAGINAS**

On the Malayan myth of the vampiric pontianak – ghosts of women who die during childbirth) and the Javanese legend of Ken Dedes, the wife of a local governor whose genitals glowed with fire.

Resonating terms:

Vision

Voice

W

for **WERETIGER**

On the myth of Weretigers as embodiments of man-animal symbiosis. Such transformations take place in water – the most liminal of elements.

Resonating terms:

Water

X

for **XENO**

On the relationship to the outside/outside.

To consider:

Xenocracy (government by a body of foreigners)

Xenodochial (hospitality to strangers)

Xenagogue (guide, someone who conducts strangers)

Xenophilia (love of strangers)

Xenophobia (fear of strangers)

Xenomania (inordinate love of foreign things)

Xenogamy (cross fertilization)

Y

for **YIELDING**

On the spirit of Yielding – an attitude to things and forces, lending itself to sympathetic magi.

Resonating terms:

Yearning

Youth

Z

for **ZONE /
ZOOMORPHISM**

On the shatter Zones of refuge (forest, mountains, archipelagoes), which are also the Zones of Zoomorphicisim, against the Zone of Control (Zombies and Zoos)

Resonating terms:

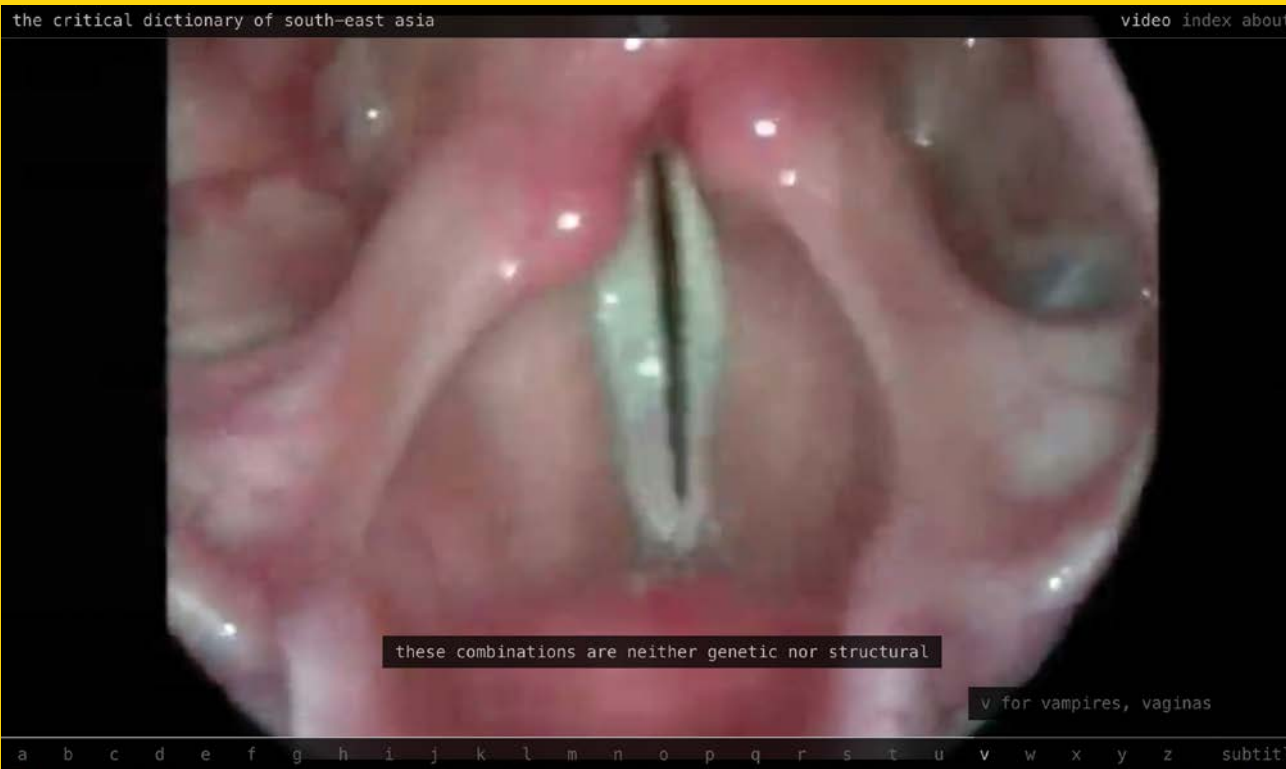
Zoography

Zoophilia

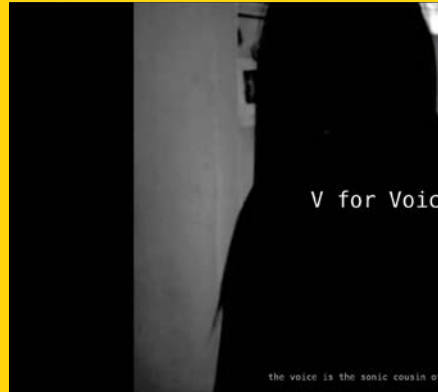
Zomia

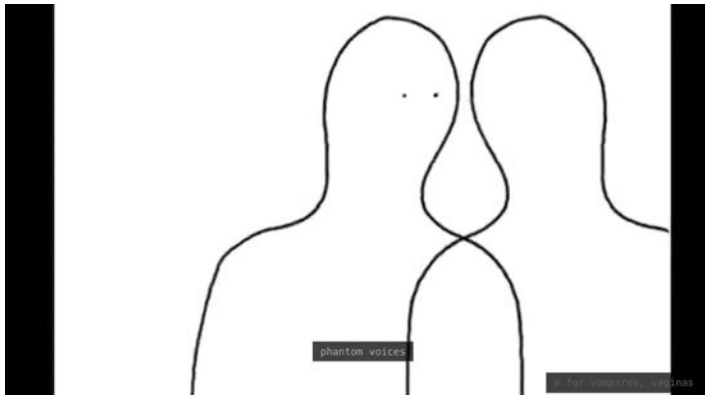
Zombies

The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia (cdosea) begins with a question: what constitutes the unity of Southeast Asia—a region never unified by language, religion or political power? *cdosea* proceeds by proposing 26 terms—one for each letter of the english / latin alphabet. Each term is a concept, a motif, or a biography, and together they are threads weaving together a torn and tattered tapestry of Southeast Asia. [...] Since 2016, Ho Tzu Nyen has been working with a group of collaborators to manifest the dictionary as a whole. With Berlin-based programmers and platform creators Jan Gerber and Sebastian Lütgert (ox262o), a platform for absorbing and annotating online audiovisual materials was created to feed an editing system endlessly composing new combinations of audio-visual materials according to the 26 terms of the dictionary. [...] *cdosea* is a platform facilitating ongoing research, a matrix for generating future projects and an oracular montage machine. <https://cdosea.org/#video/a>



Ho Tzu Nyen, *The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia* (2012–ongoing), screenshot from cdosea.org. Courtesy the artist.





Ho Tzu Nyen, *The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia* (2012–ongoing),
screenshot from cdosea.org. Courtesy the artist.

Artists' Bios

Poklong Anading's (Philippines) work ranges from video, installation, photography, to drawing and painting. A keen observer and explorer of a mutating ecology, his practice is marked with an investigative character and an interactive approach. Many of his projects are based on the notion of deductive research—collecting as an act: a method to extract the essential but then portray the organic appropriateness of dissimilarity. He has participated in exhibitions at the Asian Art Museum (San Francisco, California, United States); Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (Karlsruhe, Germany); Yokohama Museum of Art (Japan); Singapore Art Museum; Asia Society Museum (New York, United States); and Minsheng Art Museum (Shanghai, China). His work was shown in the *5th Asian Art Biennale* (Taichung, Taiwan); and twice in the *Gwangju Biennale*, South Korea (2002 and 2012). Anading's work is in the collection of Singapore Art Museum, Mori Art Museum (Tokyo, Japan) and Guggenheim Foundation (New York, United States). He has received several notable awards in the Philippines including the *Ateneo Art Awards* in 2006 and 2008, the *Thirteen Artists Awards* in 2006, and the *12th Gawad CCP for Experimental Video* in 2000.

Yason Banal (Philippines) is an artist whose work moves between installation, photography, video, performance, text, curating, and pedagogy, exploring myriad forms and conceptual strategies in order to research and experiment with associations and refractions among seemingly divergent systems. He was in residencies at the Rijksakademie (Amsterdam, Netherlands) and Arts Initiative Tokyo (Japan), and has held visiting lectureships at London Metropolitan University and Tokyo National University of Fine Art and Music. His works have been exhibited widely including at the Tate Modern, Frieze, Vargas Museum, Christie's, Singapore Biennale, Shanghai Biennale, Asia Pacific Triennial, and more recently at National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Asia Film Archive and Venice Architecture Biennale. Banal obtained a BA Film at the University of the Philippines, MA Fine Art at Goldsmiths, University of London. He currently teaches at the University of the Philippines Film Institute and heads its Film Center.

Growing up in a family of carpenters, **Chua Chye Teck** (Singapore) has always had an affinity with wood and the three-dimensional form but had chosen instead to challenge himself by working with photography as a medium. His photographic series, *Beyond Wilderness* (Singapore: Epigram Books, 2016) is the culmination of a decade in photography practice where he has explored different ways of presenting his views on found objects, spaces, and nature. Both sculpture and photography have their respective technicalities and Chua's recent interest in returning to sculpture follows an urge to focus on creating from scratch rather than reacting to a given scenario. In his recent work, shown as part of *Side Affects* at Ota Fine Arts Singapore, Chua works between photography and found objects and "treats the printed image almost sculpturally, paying special attention to its materiality and its interaction with light and space" (curator Tan Guo Liang, exhibition text of *Side Affects*, Ota Fine Arts, Singapore, 2019). He has participated in a one-year residency at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien (Berlin, Germany) in 2009 and his work is in the collection of Singapore Art Museum.

Premised on complex sets of references, the artistic production of **Ho Tzu Nyen** (Singapore) harnesses film, video, performance, and installation. His richly layered and technically challenging works weave together fact and myth to mobilise different understandings of Southeast Asia's history, politics, and belief systems. His ongoing multi-part work, the *Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia* has, since its inception in 2012, generated a number of filmic, theatrical and installation works including *One or Several Tigers* (2017), *Timelines* (2017), *The Name* (2015), *The Nameless* (2015), *2 or 3 Tigers* (2015), and *Ten Thousand Tigers* (2014). Recent solo exhibitions were held at Edith-Russ-Haus For Media Art, Oldenburg, Germany (2019); Kunstverein in Hamburg, Germany (2018); Shanghai Ming Contemporary Art Museum, China (2018); Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong (2017) amongst others. His works have also been included in major group exhibitions such as: *Aichi Triennale*, Japan (2019); *Sharjah Biennial 14*, United Arab Emirates (2019); *Gwangju Biennale*, South Korea (2018); *Dhaka Art Summit*, Bangladesh (2018) among many others. He is co-curator of the *7th Asian Art Biennial*, Taichung, Taipei (2019). Ho represented Singapore at the *54th Venice Biennale* (2011).

Việt Lê (Vietnam) is an artist, writer, curator, and academic based in California, United States. His recent projects have been collaborative and based on working with other cultural producers such as artists, designers and cinematographers. Transversing the disciplines of visual studies, ethnography, queer theory and diasporas histories, his works have employed the vocabulary of popular music videos and fashion to speak of the overlaps of historical and personal traumas as they manifest in representations of identity, spirituality and sexuality. Lê has recently presented his work at Pitzer College Art Galleries, Claremont, United States (2018); and Bangkok Art and Culture Center (BACC), Thailand (2013); and in the solo exhibition *lovebang!* at Kellogg University Art Gallery, Los Angeles, United States (2016). He is a co-founder of *The Diasporic Vietnamese Artists Network* (DVAN) and is Associate Professor in Visual Studies at California College of the Arts, San Francisco, United States. He is also a board member of the Queer Culture Center and has been a panellist for Art Matters, Camargo Foundation, amongst others. His writing has been translated into Chinese, German, Khmer, and Vietnamese.

Manifest in the works of **Zhao Zhao** (China) is a persistent interest in Chinese history, tradition, craft, culture and a keen observation of life. Subtle expressions of individualism figure strongly throughout his artistic practice: from obscure acts that playfully challenge the regulated social and ideological sphere, absurd representations of social phenomena, to witty commentary on the economy of (ethical and cultural) values. Recent solo exhibitions were held at Mizuma Gallery, Singapore (2019); Roberts Project, California, United States (2019); and Tang Contemporary Art, Hong Kong (2018). Zhao Zhao has participated in numerous exhibitions in China, United States, United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, Ukraine, Spain, Belgium, Thailand, Hong Kong, Japan, and Australia. His works are in the public collections of Daimler Art Collection, Berlin, Germany; DSL Collection, Paris, France; The Guy & Myriam Ullens Foundation, Switzerland; Tiroche DeLeon Collection, Frankfurt, Germany; and White Rabbit Collection, Sydney, Australia. In 2019, he won the *Artist of the Year Award* in the 13th Annual Award of Art China (AAC) and in 2017, he was shortlisted for the Young Artist of the Year Award in the 11th AAC.