

16 Jan
– 28 Mar
2020

An Island,

as inland,

Tomorrow is

a sin land

Nicole Bachmann

Weixin Chong

Damian Christinger

Monica Ursina Jäger

Jason Wee

Marcus Yee

**A
DM** GALLERY

Tomorrow Is An Island, as inland, a sin land is an artist-led project that speculates on the future of islands, deep time, the fate of “crisis” as a frame of our predictions and conceptions of future time, and the exchanges between bodies and cities. The title deploys a sequence of anagrams that re-scrambles with each new phrase, suggesting the ways in which the next moment could retain recognisable components of the present but to disruptive effect.

Taking on a speculative premise, the exhibition puts forth the following questions: What kind of future(s) can we imagine for our current conditions of precarious migrations, securitised fears and asphyxiated commons? What cultures of care could be freshly fermented amidst the poison of racialised divisions, and what kinds of social contracts might persist between cities and their inhabitants, and between differing islands? How can the disruption of nature/culture binaries foster more-than-human entanglements?

Led by Monica Ursina Jäger and Jason Wee, *Tomorrow Is An Island* brings together four artists and two writers from Singapore and Switzerland to rethink presumptions of systemic change in the imagining of island futures. By close reading, careful citation and by counter-mapping the boundaries between epistemes and between techniques, the participants envision new forms

of assemblage among themselves. The artworks on view are the aftermaths of dialogues and responses to text exchanges among the artists and writers over the past fifteen months.

Switzerland and Singapore share notions of “island” in multiple ways: Geographically, politically and historically. The artists and writers challenge each other through a sequence of conversations and readings, about our responses to futurity, territory, and alterity. Over the course of several months, this archipelago of collaborators sustain these dynamic relations between places and bodies as fluid tropes of assemblage, mobilities and multiplicities. The *Tomorrow* that results is an exhibition of this archipelago *as inland, a sin land* as well as a handbook for traveling to that tomorrow in the now.

Exhibition Coda

Marcus Yee (MY):

Evening clouds became stippled gradients of purple to orange, the horizon was hinged on a pin. The shores crept into view, its illumination engulfing the modest constellation of ships. In place of lighthouses, the balcony lights from sea-view condominiums. A ten-year-old's piano practice labored to match the rolling of the waves.

I rehearsed in my head the sloppy genre of homecoming but homecoming was barely possible in permanent transit. What were called colonial port cities were also zones of perpetual erasure. Where the discovering was to discover the discovered, in an unforgiving loop.

It's all very familiar, actually. An estranging familiarity. Centuries ago, the shores aligned within the bubble-lens of the telescope. From the ship's deck, one could only see sonumbulant coasts.¹ Under these imperial optics, natives were unseen, unloved, unlived. Decades later, the surveying aircraft made cartographic power a reality. Flight lifted the shipbound gaze into the skies and onto swathes of territory. And from my cabin-window, the suspect visions of tropico-futurism²: canopies of concrete and glass twisting into the starless skies, clamoring for the last metre of aerial real estate.

On imperial waterfronts, the fluxes between earth and sea churned. Hills were flattened, swamps were drained, communities were displaced for the beach to continue their seaward advance, only to become lots in the auction market; finally, melting into liquidity. Make no mistake, these fluxes were powered by indentured and carceral labor³, administered by regimes of coercion, not nature's steam engine.

While at first surface winds and currents propelled world capital flows, capital eventually began to power itself. The flow was no longer mere medium as movement became capital itself, channeling into other flows. (And without irony, the freedom of circulation had to be devised through legal fictions and military might.)

The coming of flight demanded stretches of land, flat and barren. They thought these estuarine ecologies were unsanitary to begin with, and were better off flat and barren. Yes, it's all coming back to me now. Upon takeoff, the mangrove coasts were drained and lithified. There was also a third movement that drove lift and thrust into the skies, the movement downwards into the Earth's crust returning with more dead matter.

Outside the cabin the skies waded into the floodlights. I could still see a world of jet-black behind me and there was a sole spot of light, slowly diminishing.

I mistook an aircraft for a star.

Damian Christinger (DC):

Before there was anything but time there was a Mother who gave birth to two sons. Her name was Irigan, she called her sons Buguti and Bugatai. When they were grown men, she disappeared, but left them an island full of trees, fruits and animals. Buguti and Bugatai were content, but missed their mother. One day, they decided to explore their world and took a banana trunk with them, so that they wouldn't be hungry.

They walked a whole day and when night fell, they climbed a tree to sleep in safety. The next morning, they were woken by a foraging cassowary, which spotted the brothers and started to circle the tree. The brothers were afraid, naturally, but after a while Buguti said to Bugatai: "What if this is our mother, just in a different form?" Bugatai thought about this and finally said: "Let's offer it a banana, our mother loved bananas." They threw a fruit down and the large bird ate it with pleasure. This convinced the twins that it was indeed their mother, so they climbed down and hugged the cassowary, which upon this contact transformed itself into their mother again. The three of them were happy to be together again and walked hand in hand the whole day. As the two sons fell asleep on the ground upon nightfall, the mother looked upon them with love and decided to leave them a gift. When they woke up the next morning, they did so in a village, with houses, pigs and women, which they liked very much.

Next to Buguti was a drum and next to Bugatai a canoe, made from the same wood of the Garamut tree. Bugatai took to the sea at once and paddled to the next island to build a village just like the one, that Buguti lived in, with pigs and houses and women. When his first two sons were born, he made one a drum and for the other a canoe. And with time, they discovered that there were so many islands, as there are stars in the sky. But wherever their children's children went, they never forgot to thank the cassowary and talked with each other with the help of the Garamut.

After P. Andreas Gerstner: *Eine Schöpfungsmythe aus Neuguinea*. In: *Anthropos*, Band 28, Heft 3./4, Mai-August 1933, S. 487f

Nicole Bachmann (NB):

What if we thought through the body? Why not believe in the obscure workings of bodily exchanges, the forming of alliances, information being passed on, with all its delays and rupture, under the radar of our mind? Embodied vocabulary expanding, taking space and waves, visible and invisible expressions being shared. Gut bacterias. Our second mind.

Recognize the body as a place of knowledge and agency, producing meaning and content from within. Move, flex it again. Use your voice and melody. Vocal chords. Islands connected, a tone, a gesture. Skin on skin.

Nicole Bachmann

Nicole Bachmann is a Swiss artist based in London (UK) and Zurich (CH). She works across video, text, sound and performance. She situates the body as a site of knowledge production used to explore alternative discourses within language and form. By using movement and voice, Bachmann intends on subverting language power and political relations that she believes is attached to normative vocabulary, opening up spaces or gaps to “embody vocabulary” where new meaning can be created. In becoming other-too, Bachmann wants to question the inherent patriarchal qualities of language through her own body and those of others, as a way of providing refreshing and relevant agency. Her predominantly collaborative practice reflects this subversion, evoking a sense of togetherness and reciprocity, searching for meaning away from the prescribed set of definitions she considers language to exist within. Activating the individual as well as the group, Bachmann’s work explores the transformation of bodies for social and political change.

Personare (2018/20)

The performance examines the relationship between language, voice and power. Negotiating the materiality of speech and gestures, it investigates the power of the voice and its relationship to other bodies and finds agency in this relationality. *Personare* deals with questions surrounding the constitution of subjectivity, the creation of community and how the medium can be an active agent through language both in a political or civil sense.



Personare (2018/20)

2018/2020
Performance
20 mins
With Deborah Emmanuel
and Patricia Langa

This artwork has been supported by the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia



Weixin

Chong



Weixin Chong (b. 1988, Singapore) explores tactility and visuality, relationships between the digital and organic and processes of transformation and translation. She is interested in how systems and hierarchies of value are constructed and possibilities of change. Her work moves between image-based materiality and multi-sensorial environments.

This series of work was recently created in Grey Projects' Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Goyang residency in Korea, in which she explored the evolution of appearance and presentation styles in visual culture alongside the orchid mantis (an insect which resembles orchids in what is known as 'aggressive mimicry'), imagining possibilities of gender fluidity and post-/trans-humanness.

She is also an alumni of the Centre for Contemporary Art (Singapore) Artist Residency program, the Molten Capital Artist Residency in Museo de Arte Contemporaneo (Santiago, Chile) and a co-founder of the artist-run independent platform and space soft/WALL/studs in Singapore.

BOTH IMAGES ON LEFT
Winter mantid hybrid 2
2019
Faux fur, synthetic webbing, metal
96 x 42 cm (main body)

IMAGE ON RIGHT
Larval limbic // Mantid hybrids
2019
Faux fur, synthetic webbing, metal, glass silicon, polyurethane, sound
Dimensions variable; installation with multiple elements



Winter mantid hybrids 2019

Winter mantid hybrids 2019 is a new series of soft sculptures in the theme of morphing and transformation, with influences from fashion, evolution and body modifications, the plant-mimicking Orchid Mantis and science fiction author Octavia Butler's visions of future humanness.

Butler's trilogy *Lilith's Brood* describes a post-apocalyptic world where humanity struggles to adapt to its new environment by merging with alien species and taking on new forms. Looking at clothing as both sculptural and adaptive social tool, the series draws reference from voluminous traditional robes of the Korean Joseon dynasty, as depicted by painter Shin Yun Bok, that overpower the shape of the human body with a plant-like excess, bringing to mind Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*, in which her protagonist yearns to become a tree and subsume her humanity. Avant-garde contemporary label Blindness challenges the performance of gender, sampling from clothing past and present with a sculptural boldness, and is another point of reference in these works.

Winter mantid mixes these influences, as a hermaphroditic alien body/shell/skins that blend insect with mammal, as well as harnesses/prosthetics that hint at being worn.

Damian

Christinger

Damian Christinger (*1975, Zurich) studied Art History and Intercultural Studies. He works as an independent curator, publicist and lectures at different venues and institutions on transcultural theory and practice, the Anthropocene and the cultures of food. His main focus is on the construction of "the Other" in intercultural relations and art history. He has written extensively on transcultural issues and the Anthropocene and published on such different topics as the cultural landscapes of Singapore, the reception of the Amazon in Western art or Paulo Freire. He was the guest curator for contemporary art at the Museum Rietberg Zurich 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 for the TBA21 project "The Current". 2017 he was the co-editor of the publication "Happy Tropics 1", a book on the fast changing cultural topographies of Singapore. In 2018 he co-curated the "Assembleia MotherTree" with Daniela Zyman in the monumental installation "Gaia MotherTree" of Ernesto Neto in collaboration with the Fondation Beyeler in the Main Station of Zurich.

NewZurich 2036

The text examines, as a starting point for the collective undertaking of all the artists and writers in this exhibition, the dystopian possibilities of an archipelago, questioning our shared, non-insular futures from a poetological point of view.

NewZurich, 18th December 2036

Dear Osmond

It has been a while since my last letter was sent, please forgive me for that, the turmoil of our time leaving its mark on my schedule and prohibiting anything resembling idle musings. The fact that I am not sure if this letter reaches you at your end of the work camp, and knowing that it will be censored, doesn't encourage me to pen my ideas and hopes neither.

But for once my inner chaos matches that of the outside world, so I write to you in the hope to get some clearance and maybe absolution. To say, that I woke up in a state not unlike Gregor Samsa this morning, would be an understatement, as I found myself in a dream so real and absurd that I still can't grasp the enormity of it. I was always proud that I hail from a long lineage of sailors and adventurers, starting, as far as we know, with Lemuel Gulliver, who wrote the famously gripping account of "Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World (in Four Parts)", but in the light of today, this might be a curse.

Last night upon "falling asleep" on my cot, I found myself in the most absurd situation possible, that is, in two places at once. How could I be and not be at the same time, how did I find myself at two beaches? The sand under my feet at both locations felt roughly the same, the sky was a brilliant blue and my eyes were blinded under the same glaring sun. But still, instinctively, I knew with absolute certainty, that the places were of a different make-up, despite the many intrinsic similarities. Glancing to my right and left I felt elated and terrified to see just sand and a line of tropical vegetation instead of the urban maze I am normally entrapped in. This must be what nature feels like, the wind full of salt, a slightly rotten musk and the absence of the perpetual noise, we are so used to, I thought. It wasn't silent, mind you, the screeching of seagulls and the constant breaking rhythm of the surf playing like music in my ear.

It is hard to describe the utter confusion I felt, to find myself looking from two perspectives simultaneously up into the sky, shielding my eyes from the sun and gazing upon a phenomenon I previously only read about, "when all on a sudden it (the sun) became obscured, as I thought, in a manner very different from what happens by the Interposition of a Cloud. I turned back, and perceived a vast Opaque Body between my and the Sun, moving forwards towards the Island(s): It seemed to be about two Miles high, and hid the Sun six or seven Minutes, but I did not observe the Air to be much colder, or the Sky more darkened, than if I had stood under the shade of a Mountain. As it approached nearer over the Place where I was, it appeared to be a firm substance, the Bottom flat, smooth, and shining very bright from the Reflection of the Sea below."

At this exact moment I realised, that I wasn't only in two locations at the same time, but also existing in two separate moments, in the terrifying blackness of my existence here in this "Gulag Archipelago" (this expression will be plencened when you read it) and hundreds of years ago when my seafaring ancestor wrote about his travels. And although it should be impossible for us to imagine the kind of freedom someone like him might once have had, I felt a deep connection to the spirit of adventure he came to embody for the generations to follow. I realized that in my dream I had the same possibilities he once had, as well as the same equipment that he was carrying when he found himself stranded on these beaches so long ago.

"I stood upon a Hight about two Hundred Yards from the shore(s), and saw this vast Body descending almost to a parallel with me, at less than an English Mile distance. I took out my Pocket-Perspective, and could plainly discover Numbers of People moving up and down the Sides of it, which appeared to be sloping, but what those people were doing, I was not able to distinguish. The natural Love of Life gave me some inward Motions of Joy, and I was ready to entertain a Hope, that this Adventure might some way or other help to deliver me from the desolate Place and Condition I was in. But at the same time the Reader (you) can hardly conceive my Astonishment, to behold an Island in the Air, inhabited by Man, who were able (as it should seem) to raise, or sink, or put into a Progressive Motion, as they pleased. But not being at that time in a disposition to philosophize upon this Phenomenon, I rather chose to observe what Course the Island would take, because it seemed for a while to stand still. Yet soon after it advanced nearer, and I could see the Sides of it, encompassed with several Gradations of Galleries, and Stairs, at certain Intervals, to descend from one to the other. In the lowest Gallery, I beheld some People fishing with long Angling Rods, and others looking on. I waved my cap (for my Hat was long since worn out) and my Handkerchief towards the Island; and upon its nearer approach, I called and shouted with the utmost strength of my Voice; and the looking circumspectly, I beheld a Crowd gathered to that side which was most in my View. They made Signs for me to come down from the Rock, and to go towards the Shore(s), which I accordingly did; and the flying Island being raised to a convenient Height, The Verge directly over me, a Chain was let down from the lowest Gallery, with a Seat fastened to the Bottom to which I fixed myself, and was drawn up by Pulleys." While being lifted up I felt very much elated, imagining life up in the clouds, on a floating island. But then I woke up, so to speak, finding myself again in one space. If its true, what Deleuze once construed, he himself probably just a product of my feverish dreams, and there are a thousand plateaus from which to dream, then I guess there are also a thousand ravines, where we toil.

And although I am far away from understanding the subtleties of my "dream" – my hands are still shaking while I write this – I think that I draw solace in the coming weeks from having had this experience, and so might you, I hope, not sure if you'll read this.

But I remain, nonetheless, faithfully, yours.

Damian

NewZurich 2036
2020
Vinyl text on wall

Monica Ursina

Jäger

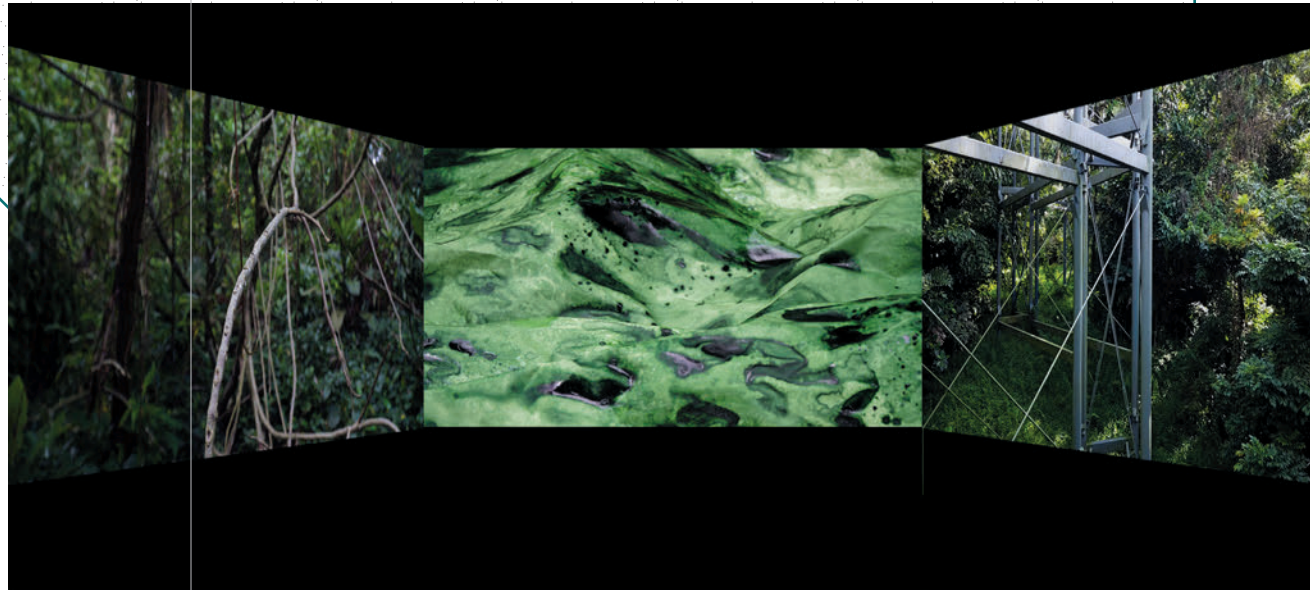
Working with drawing, sculpture and installation, the practise of Monica Ursina Jäger (Switzerland and UK) unfolds through a multidisciplinary reflection on concepts of space, landscape, and architecture that investigate the relationship between the natural and the constructed environment. Fluctuating between the intuitive, narrative and factual Jäger scrutinizes processes of transformation, re-arrangement and mediation by unfixing the boundaries between artistic and scientific knowledge production. Recent works address the ambiguities connected to post-natural landscapes and the uncertainties related to geopolitics, natural resources and the Anthropocene. Connected to Singapore through family, education and research, the artist spent several months at the NTU CCA Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, where she developed a new body of work, which will in part be presented in this exhibition.

Forest Tales and Emerald Fictions

A narrator – he calls himself Revenant – leads the viewer from the dense skylines of a metropolis deep into the networks of the primeval forest and back into a hybrid world of urban and natural structures. As a « Returner » he has experienced many conditions, times and places, and recounts the forest from the multi-perspective of an anthropologist, biologist and poet.

These narrations are interwoven with stories of a Singaporean Chinese woman recalling past times and her childhood memories of specific places and animistic parallel worlds. The complex image-text collage combines images from urban and natural spaces, painting and animation and continuously alludes to various forms of co-existence, collaboration and co-habitation of human and non-human entities.

Forest Tales and Emerald Fictions 2019 approaches the forest as a spatially complex structure, as a place of multi-layered contexts and inter-dependencies, as well as a place of imagination, narration and memory. Centuries of colonisation have shaped natural habitats: from imperialist territorial claims to scientific systematization and taxonomic classification practices. The installation however shows the forest not only as a resource, infrastructure and service provider, but also as an ecosystem of transtemporal and translocal character.



The forest is shown as an inherently ambivalent setting of matter and knowledge, as a rationalised environment, but also as a place of irrational stories. The installation ultimately poses the question of to what extent the forest can serve as a model for sustainable urban development in the future.

Forest Tales and Emerald Fictions 2019

3 channel video installation
19.18 min, looped

This artwork has been supported by the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia and by the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, a national research centre of the Nanyang Technological University

Jason Wee

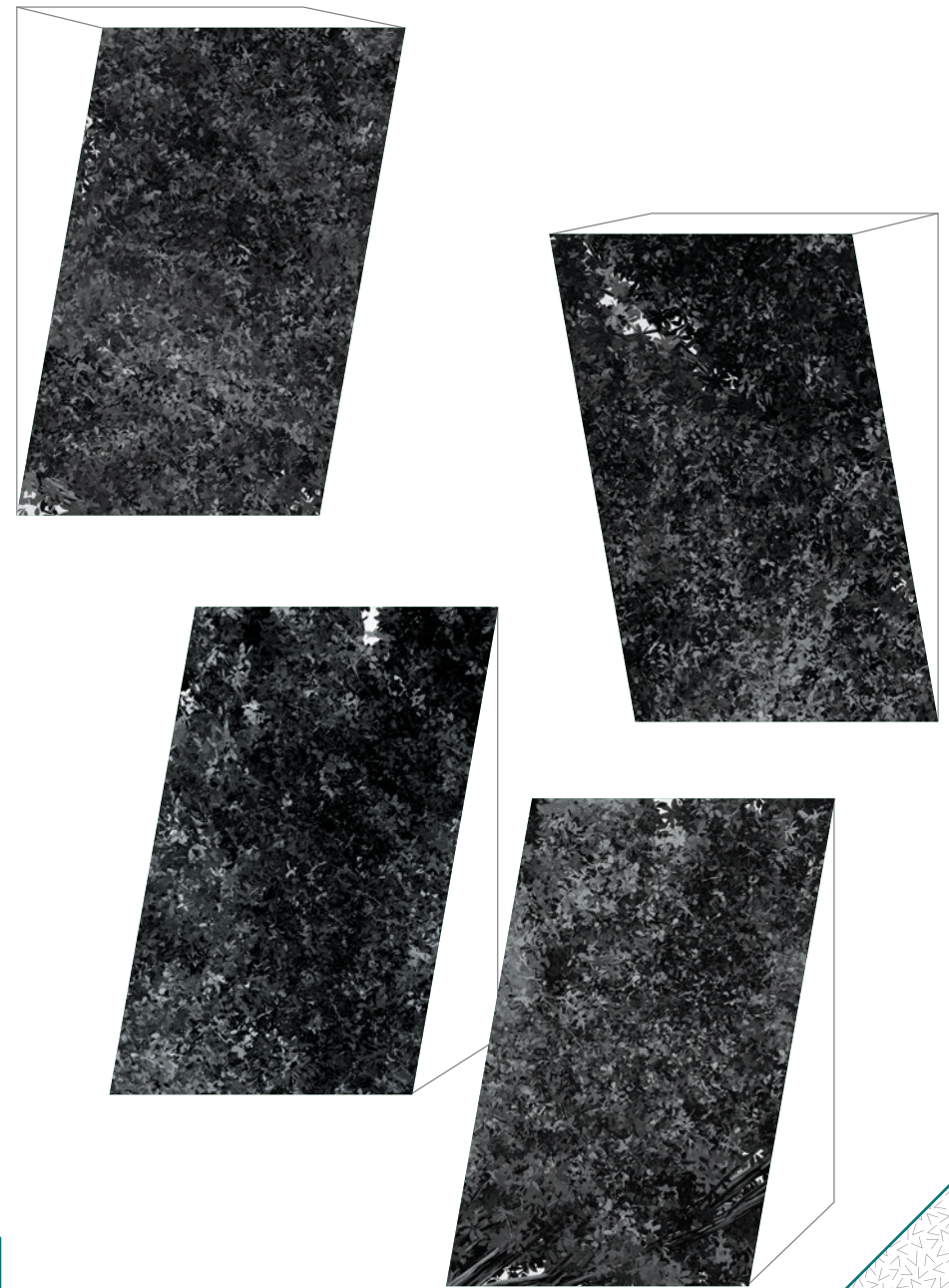
Jason Wee is an artist and a writer working between contemporary art, architecture, poetry and photography. He has two collections of poetry, *An Epic of Durable Departures* (2018) and *The Monsters Between Us* (2013), and was the editor of *Boring Donkey Songs* (2017) by the late Lee Wen. His writings are included in numerous anthologies and art publications, including *Love Gathers All* (2002), *Line Spark Code* (2017), *Unfree Verse* (2017), *Singapore Eye* (2015) and *Place.Labour.Capital* (2018).

In 2019, he curated *Stories We Tell To Scare Ourselves With* at Taipei MOCA. In 2015, he curated *Singapur Unheimlich* at ifa galerie Berlin, and in 2010, co-created *The Future of Exhibition* at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Singapore. Other curatorial projects include *Beyond LKY* (2010), *Useful Fictions* by Shubigi Rao (2013), *Mirrors in the Dark* by Lee Wen (2014), *When You Get Closer To The Heart, You May Find Cracks* by the Migrant Ecologies Project (NUS Museum, 2014). His artist-initiated projects include *Tomorrow Is An Island* (Villa Vassilieff, 2016), *ART OPENINGS: The Expanded Field of Art Writing* (CCA Singapore, 2018) and *PostSuperFutureAsia* (Taipei Contemporary Art Center 2017, Ilmin Museum, 2019).

Since 2008, Wee directs Grey Projects, an artists' space, library and residency in Tiong Bahru.

Constellation Hawkins Road

Hawkins Road and Subang Raya are areas in Singapore and Malaysia respectively, where refugee camps, official and illegal, were and are located. The foliage, algorithmically derived from a Malayan banyan, is both a visual protocol for generating shelter, shade and camouflage, as well as an wayfinding sign.



Constellation Hawkins Road
2020
Triptych, C-print on gold and silver dibond, watercolor
353x250mm each

Marcus Yee



Installation Plan

Ashore: A Drift
2020
Audio, text on paper

Marcus Yee is an artist and writer from Singapore, based in Hong Kong. His practice works with the tangled strands and scales of histories, flitting between the geomorphological and the modern, while learning to embrace anachronism somewhere in the middle. He is a satellite within the cosmology, soft/WALL/studs and presented his first show, *Altars for Four Silly Planets*, there. His writings have appeared in *Arts Equator*, *ArtAsiaPacific*, *Global Performance Studies Journal*, *art-agenda*, among others.

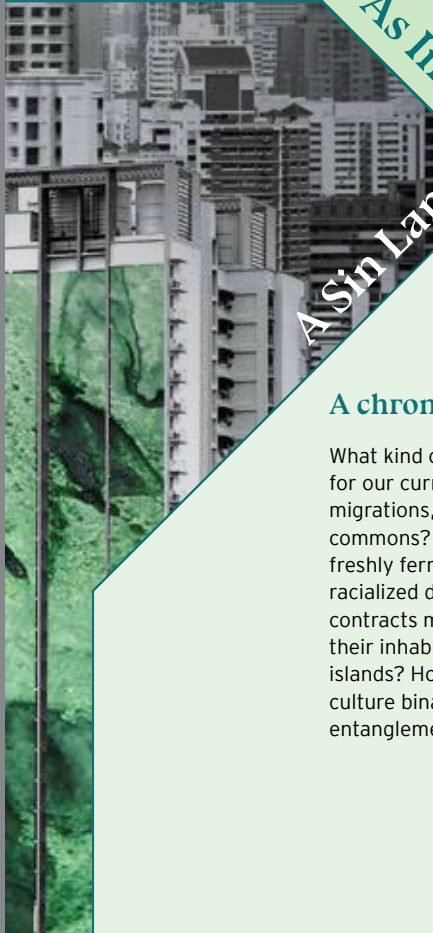
Ashore: A Drift

Ashore: A Drift (2020) is an audio- and text-based work that considers histories along the continental shelf: nearshores as amorphous stretches of exchange between sea and sediment; offshore as both the high seas (considered horizontally) and atmospheres (considered vertically). Coastal histories from the early 20th century, encompassing the development of colonial airports, 'swamp' draining, and the journey of *Komagata Maru*, are the currents and countercurrents of imperialism traced through a series of primary documents. Audio streams branch out from several text-islands, comprising of field-recordings, sounds, and readings.

An Island,

As Inland,

A Sin Land



A chronic text

What kind of future(s) can we imagine for our current conditions of precarious migrations, securitized fears and asphyxiated commons? What cultures of care could be freshly fermented amidst the poison of racialized divisions, and what kinds of social contracts might persist between cities and their inhabitants, and between differing islands? How can the disruption of nature/culture binaries foster more-than-human entanglements?

1

Reading order ↶

Jason Wee (JW):

Switzerland is a colonial without colonies. It is an apex country, the mountainous peak territorially demarcated from the oceanic and the plains, the temperate zone set in counter-distinction from the tropical, once the tropical has been located through the apparatuses of empire. Singapore is a colony idealized by any colonial.

Tomorrow is an anagram. It is a root worm, burrowing us into the soil unsalted by the encroaching seas, into the depths of the future that lies in wait, a bioindicator that tells us if that ground is polluted, ruined and toxic, or living. It is a motor row in our glass cities, where the shiny new transports are waiting for the flood-prone poor to drive and the dry rich to drive in. It is a non-identical repetition, like the past returning but in different, barely recognizable form, like dead King Duncan back as a knocking on Lady Macbeth's door, a revenant that is both embedded in its past and an escapee from it.

Nicole Bachmann (NB):

Tomorrow is an anagram of what? Of past histories? Of past movements? Tomorrow consists of overlaying space-time-islands.

JW:

The scrambling of spatial and temporal coordinates is certain, less so how exactly do these islands overlay. Is the relationship one of a spatial or temporal palimpsest, like the twinned territories in China Mieville's *The City, The City*, cohabitants of the same geography but each temporally out of phase with the other? Or a kind of bricolage, that hammers the plantation logic, slavery and indentured labor of the colonial economy, shared across seas by several islands, onto the alloy of different languages, settlements, governments, rebellions, religions and customs, shaping these materialities into an entangled, if not common, future?

Damian Christinger (DC):

Hermeneutic thinkers like Canadian philosopher Charles Margrave Taylor argue that modernity created a cultural consciousness, that has been shaped in such a way that we imagine ourselves as islands of awareness floating in the great ocean of life, being mere visitors on this spaceship called earth. This specious self-consciousness can be understood as a disengaged-self. Artists, like the ones speaking in this publication, or at least their art, could be read as non-nostalgic, engaged hermeneuts, working - maybe unconsciously, but dedicated - from within the legacy of Paulo Freire, who wrote 1968 in the "Pedagogy of the Oppressed": "The more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into a dialogue with them. This person does not consider himself or herself the proprietor of history or of all people, or the liberator of the oppressed; but he or she does commit himself or herself, within history, to fight at their side." [1] Artistic practice is archipelago thinking.

Monica Ursina Jäger (MUJ):

Are you suggesting an artistic practice as archipelagic, entangled engagement?

2

An Island,

As Inland,

A Sin Land

A chronic text

What kind of future(s) can we imagine for our current conditions of precarious migrations, securitized fears and asphyxiated commons? What cultures of care could be freshly fermented amidst the poison of racialized divisions, and what kinds of social contracts might persist between cities and their inhabitants, and between differing islands? How can the disruption of nature/culture binaries foster more-than-human entanglements?

1

JW:
Another approach to smallness – islanding as an endemism, the way subjectivities closely embody adaptations to their islandic locality. To see, half-seriously, in the high prevalence of myopia, eczema, and dementia in Singapore bodies the symptomatic indications of short-sightedness, amnesiac, allergens in its body politic.

WX:
There's also *Malassezia*, the skin-dwelling yeast found on 90% of adult populations, which when nurtured blooms into *pityriasis versicolor*, an occasional fine scaling of the skin, rounded patterns of discoloration with distinct borders... Common in hot, humid climates when warm bodies are in almost constant sweat, passed through contact with surfaces, aggravated and nursed through restrictive clothing. Covering one's skin slowly, the hypo/hyperpigmented patches of *Malassezia's* growth creep along subtly raised, velvety soft like fine fur to the touch. Plant-like skin residents, perhaps they dream of flowering over tropical bodies unrestrained, forging an endemic camouflage– human organisms under siege–symbiosis...

JW:
...at some tipping point, we are no longer the extinction-generating swarm, the voracious machine turning biomateriality into resource, but the most abundant host and food source. *Malassezia* has a pathogenic role in various manifestations of atopic dermatitis and eczema. Imagine a fungi bequeathed with this terra derma and the blessing to go forth and multiply. Imagine ourselves not as the homed but the housing, not individuals in search of dwelling and shelter but as the surface the bacterial/fungal parts of the world will live off and live on.

MY:
Earthly emplotments are fragile, ambiguous affairs. Considering the history of the nascent atmosphere, oxygen is an event, rather than mere substance. Traces of the Great Oxygenation Event that happened 2.4 billion years ago are imprinted in stromatolites, fossils of layered microbial fabric. They line the hems of hypersaline bays. With this nutrient-rich conditions of fine sediment, tides, and photosynthetic cyanobacteria, oxygen was first released into the seas as iron oxides.
But the rise of cyanobacteria also saw the first mass extinction of anaerobic life-forms, the Oxygenation Catastrophe. For these anaerobic ancestors, oxygen was toxic. Stromatolites were the warehouses and workhouses for poison. If we turned Jameson's injunction on its head, "always historicize!", the planetary is temporal: a branching bush of contingencies. Rather than a Huttonian steady-state system held together by eternalist cycles, planetary plots are motile, recursive, and contradictory.

5

DC:
As an opposing model of bodies we could come back to the proposed "phytophilosophy," of Monica and argue that plants are the medium through which we perceive and experience the world. They form their own political bodies. On a chemical level, they are the creators of the world we live in, generate its oxygenic atmosphere, live from CO₂ emissions, and use processes of photosynthesis to exploit the energies of the sun. Plants transformed life into an atmospheric condition, a space where everything mixes with everything else, and where everything is literally inside other subjects than their selves. Thinking – and the production of knowledge – is thus the breath of being, and not merely individual expression; it is a thinking with the universal that exists everywhere and in all possible forms. Might this be one role model for a certain agency within the arts? And how radically have we to incorporate it as artists and curators, as practitioners of an archipelago state of mind?

JW:
A micro-practice: to inhale, not with a thought of emptying the self, or an infilling of a transcendent spirit, but as a recognition of the oxygen-giving plantworld, a first step in a communication protocol.

A thought experiment: if we speak and see through the plantworld, it is a means of slowed if universal communication, resistant to accelerants and cycles of rapid obsolescence (the affliction of every access point we currently have to the Internet). Would this produce useful delays, productive expectancies as we wait to receive and transmit our thoughts, or will this only be a weak interaction between sentients? The comics writer Jonathan Hickman in his 'House of X' and 'Dawn of X' works, imagines newly evolved humans living entirely on a plant-based biomass that is both their habitat as well as their means of communicating with each other. This not only changes what they consider speech and writing, but also new collective agreements. Will plantmedia consciousness ever change the patterns and syntax of our speech and writing? Which is another way of asking if another universalism is the counter to the current proliferation of shipwrecked nationalisms. If this, what social contact will be produced between humans and between the plant- and human world?

MUJ:
I wish we could stand in the salty water and produce our own land. With our feet submerged in deliciously oozy mud, we could – just like the Samphire plant – collect deposits and minerals from the sea and transform fragile coastal strips into cultivable land. Over time, it would become a place of imagination, narration and memory, a lively archipelago of matter and knowledge, a multi-layered place of resistance and resilience. Stories of entire civilizations would become re-inscribed in its strata, memories deposited between sand and gravel. But – as it goes with the counter-intuitive life of the Samphire plant: by creating solid land the territory becomes untenable for oneself, but gives way to other creatures to inhabit the land.

6

NB:
open your mind
daydream
loose associations
filter in
evaporate
contaminate
or
pollinate
come back round
in a different dress
add your rhythm
tone
and
hesitation
pump
blood in your veins
ideas circulated
rub my fingers
tingle
tap
shake it up
insides
or
rather
inner thoughts?
float
change position
into the dark
testing ground
huddle together
not one
but a many
many others
bend lines
dent the structure
do you want it
to fall?
or
adapt?

Jason Wee (JW):
Switzerland is a colonial without colonies. It is an apex country, the mountainous peak territorially demarcated from the oceanic and the plains, the temperate zone set in counter-distinction from the tropical, once the tropical has been located through the apparatuses of empire. Singapore is a colony idealized by any colonial.
Tomorrow is an anagram. It is a root worm, burrowing us into the soil unsalted by the encroaching seas, into the depths of the future that lies in wait, a bioindicator that tells us if that ground is polluted, ruined and toxic, or living. It is a motor row in our glass cities, where the shiny new transports are waiting for the flood-prone poor to drive and the dry rich to drive in. It is a non-identical repetition, like the past returning but in different, barely recognizable form, like dead King Duncan back as a knocking on Lady Macbeth's door, a revenant that is both embedded in its past and an escapee from it.

Damian Christinger (DC):
Hermeneutic thinkers like Canadian philosopher Charles Margrave Taylor argue that modernity created a cultural consciousness, that has been shaped in such a way that we imagine ourselves as islands of awareness floating in the great ocean of life, being mere visitors on this spaceship called earth. This specious self-consciousness can be understood as a disengaged-self. Artists, like the ones speaking in this publication, or at least their art, could be read as non-nostalgic, engaged hermeneuts, working – maybe unconsciously, but dedicated – from within the legacy of Paulo Freire, who wrote 1968 in the "Pedagogy of the Oppressed": "The more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into a dialogue with them. This person does not consider himself or herself the proprietor of history or of all people, or the liberator of the oppressed; but he or she does commit himself or herself, within history, to fight at their side." [1] Artistic practice is archipelago thinking.

2

Nicole Bachmann (NB):
Tomorrow is an anagram of what? Of past histories? Of past movements? Tomorrow consists of overlaying space-time-islands.

JW:
The scrambling of spatial and temporal coordinates is certain, less so how exactly do these islands overlay. Is the relationship one of a spatial or temporal palimpsest, like the twinned territories in China Mieville's *The City, The City*, cohabitants of the same geography but each temporally out of phase with the other? Or a kind of bricolage, that hammers the plantation logic, slavery and indentured labor of the colonial economy, shared across seas by several islands, onto the alloy of different languages, settlements, governments, rebellions, religions and customs, shaping these materialities into an entangled, if not common, future?

Monica Ursina Jäger (MUJ):
Are you suggesting an artistic practice as archipelagic, entangled engagement?

Reading order ↷





JW:
The declarative statement is enticing (see, I just did it!) but I am skeptical about claiming the archipelagic for all artistic practices. In my reading, Taylor's individualist self tends towards atomism, suggesting that any collective entanglements, any everyday participation in and development of the social is an accidental externality. To rework your words in the light of Monica's question, is an archipelagic artistic practice a recurring engagement, of entering a dialogue with the people, wherever and however they are gathered, but also forming these dialogues with other such hermeneuts, other such persons, such as another island, cohabited by the hermeneuts, might form?

More questions – How can we think of islanding as a philosophy or theorizing of smallness? Islanding as a scale of urban design, to focus on the neighbour rather than the skyscraper. Islanding as a vector, a non-constant speed that both accelerates and decelerates, in a non-random but irrational sequence, a horizontality that moves towards infinity as an ever-so-tiny downward curvature. Islanding as thinking at the level of sentence and verse, rather than in systems and organization. Islanding as a recognition protocol for communication, transformation and symbiosis, with the clarity of faces and hand signs, rather than the obscurity of deep code.

Marcus Yee (MY):
Atmospheric ambitions ("where sky meets sea", as the promotional literature goes) weighs down upon the marshes. Think of the dizzying, twisting condominiums that pierce through the clouds, lithifying fluvial ecologies into real estate, beach and desert. Allan Sekula once wrote that the fetishization of waterfronts, promenades, beach holidays, and sea-views are but symptoms of an alienation from the sea. Alienation from the idea that the sea, apropos Glissant, cannot be used. All the names of private estates the garrison Singapore's shores: Silversea, Pebble Bay, Water Place, The Seafont, Rivergate. Winds no longer carry you into the ocean, but rather, access cards of high-security condominiums. Bhattacharya on Kolkata: Memories of soaking ecologies are drained by dizzying verticality of developmentalist playgrounds. Architects of the atmosphere find more quick-fixes for dry land, sealing up the pores with cement.

Tides continue to advance onto borrowed shores, finding intimacies with every granule of sand. Under the new moon, they steal away.

MUJ:
Mountains migrate towards lowlands load after load, barges travel up and down
what once was a solid hill is drifting transient in any direction, mountains become granular.
The territory is shape-shifting by man-made erosion
Excavation re-draws the horizon of elevation and depression; the geological contours slowly erase
Skyscrapers compensate for the loss of reliefs.
Sand solidifies in verticality
the song of a shepherd echoes in narrow corridors
the land's ground: multiplied in the sky
A concrete crust extends in all directions.
The landscape stiffens, calcifies, petrifies, it loses its breath.

DC:
In "Writing Culture" Stephen A. Taylor argues: "A post-modern ethnography is a cooperatively evolved text consisting of fragments of discourse intended to evoke in the minds of both reader and writer an emergent fantasy of a possible world of commonsense reality, and thus to provoke an aesthetic integration that will have a therapeutic effect. It is, in a word, poetry – not in its textual form, but in its return to the original context and function of poetry, which by means of its performative break with everyday speech, evoked memories of the ethos of the community;"[1]

JW:
Nils Bubandt recently wrote, "the strangest monster in the forest is a Westerner", it is that person trained in anthropology, steeped in the history of conceptual art practices, equipped with narratology and every apparatus necessary to turn ecology into economy. The question is implied, "who is the monster familiar to the forest?"

Weixin Chong (WX):
Or we could dive into this world, zooming into microcosm – with a spectrometer you could measure colours on the dorsal surfaces of a *hymenopus coronatus*, rare and tiny predators resembling orchids to attract their pollinator prey. Moving in time with the orchid stems; swaying in a breeze; swaying and then striking.
Some attempt to analyse their floral mimicry; find logic behind the contrasts, the swell of the petal-like femoral lobes. Each single plant in this thick humidity, home base to constant cross-species struggle, is an arena of survival; one minute life for another every second of the day.

MUJ:
With epiphytes resting on the trees, such as Bromeliads. They are collectors of water. They are harvesters of moisture, condensing mist and collecting the rain trickling onto their leaves. Their pools are not inert bodies of water, far from it, they are habitats in themselves: miniature ecosystems, with resident aquatic plants and animals. The pool absorbs any debris that falls inside, and as this decays it feeds the Bromeliad in turn.
A community of orchids, fungi, mosses, lichen, bacteria, other epiphytes has built up small caches of humus formed from minute particles of soil carried by the wind and rain. Entities growing on top of entities. Storeys upon storeys. The entire canopy is an interconnected membrane, endlessly recycling the energy harvested by the leaves through networks of aerial roots and moving water.
Here, the ceiling of the world becomes its floor.
The strata of the forest remind me of the city. Signalling molecules move along the interconnecting sky-walks, minute organisms like airborne plankton. Below lies a quieter, sombre world of colonised hollows, inhabited dens, leaves, faeces and corpses. The trees bridge it all, shifting the organic matter back into their crowns as soon as it becomes available to their roots.

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