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Portfolio Jan 2026

(portfolio includes recent works and not all works)

Pp 4
Untitled (Family Slides 60s-70s)
(2019-2026)

Pp 6
Works in exhibition ***Image / Time*** (2025)

Pp 23
Works in exhibition ***Staring into Voids and Blues*** (2024)

Pp 41
Collective **Progressive Disintegrations (PD)** (2020-)

Pp 42
Works in exhibition ***The Shape of Passing Through*** (PD) (2025-2026)

Pp 52
Works in exhibition ***[im]print*** (PD) (2023)

Pp 66
Untitled (Ipoh street at night, 2/3/2010, photographed on Kodak E100VS 120mm. Selected with wax pencil. Rephotographed with iPhone in 2022 and printed on cotton rag. Sanded.) (2023)

Pp 72
View from this side (2022)

Pp 87
Works in exhibition ***Inside the Wild Cube*** (PD) (2022)

Pp 93
Works in exhibition ***Progressive Disintegrations*** (PD) (2021)

Pp 108
between leaving and arriving (2019)

Pp 116
Abridge (2019-2021)

Pp 148
Live streaming, Prince Edward, 12/11/2019, 23:35:05-6, 25 frames per second, 1920x1080 (2019)

Pp 157
Untitled (China. Pakistan) (2017-2019)

Pp163
「你就慢慢考虑，慢慢选择……」
'you think it over slowly, slow choose...' (2018)

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Portfolio Jan 2026

Pp 186
And this is the lady and her pond
(2015-2018)

pp 204
The first chapter it starts with the horses
(2017-2018)

Related printed catalogue/write ups:
Pp 208
Roger Nelson. "Fragmentation and complexity in Crossings by Wei Leng Tay," Artlink Issue 38:3, September 2018

Pp 211
Crossings catalogue, NUS Museum, 2019
Siddharta Perez. "Time Between," Crossings, solo exhibition catalogue, NUS Museum, 2019

Olivier Krischer & Wei Leng Tay. "Excerpts from a conversation," Crossings, solo exhibition catalogue, NUS Museum, 2019

Fang-Tze Hsu. "Between Not Yet and Nevermore: Wei Leng Tay's Fugitive Images," Crossings, solo exhibition catalogue, NUS Museum, 2019

Pp 245
I was a different type of man back then
(2015-2016)

Pp 259
The Other Shore 彼岸
(2014-16)

Pp 283
Convergence
(2009-13)

Related printed catalogues/Write ups:

Pp 306
Brochure for ***Discordant Symmetries*** (2010-2011)
(NUS Museum solo exhibition of ***Convergence***)
Write up:
Qinyi Lim. "Introduction," Discordant Symmetries, solo exhibition catalogue, NUS Museum, 2010
Ooi Kee Beng. "Can Cultural Identity Travel?" Discordant Symmetries, solo exhibition catalogue, NUS Museum, 2010
John Rohrbach. "Photographing Your Own," Discordant Symmetries, solo exhibition catalogue, NUS Museum, 2010

Pp 350
Write up:
Alvaro Fominaya. "Wei Leng Tay: Images of the Unfamiliar Familiarity," Punctum, Issue 1, 2011

Pp 359
Brochure for solo exhibition 'How did we get here' at ChanHampe Galleries (2015)
Robin Peckham. "Reading a photograph by Wei Leng Tay," How did we get here, solo exhibition catalogue, Chanhampe Galleries, 2015
Lisa Botos. "Out of Place," How did we get here, solo exhibition catalogue, Chanhampe Galleries, 2015

Pp 378
Write up of project ***Slow Cool Breezes***(2009):
Olivier Krischer. "Slow Cool Breezes," Photofile vol. 94, Australian Centre for Photography, 2014

Untitled (family slides 60s-70s)

How can family histories be remembered and told? How can one get close to understanding what was? What would the role of the photograph be in the retelling?

Recently recovered Kodachrome, Ektachrome and Agfa photographic slides of images that were made by my parents from the late 1960s-early 1970s are here material and beginning for a constellation of works. The slides depict territorial, personal and formal photographic transitions - from Australia to Malaysia to Singapore, from life as a returning child to spouse to parent, student to professional, and from portraiture to landscape to architectural documentation. Depicting these trajectories during a period of nation building and post-independence in Singapore and Malaysia, these source photographs parallel wider configurations of migration and displacement through education, nationhood, and racial/ economic considerations in Malaysia and Singapore.

These artworks are made with different imaging technologies - from a mirrorless camera to iPhone camera to digital microscopy. The rephotographs made are further fragmented or manually altered. Through these different modes of rephotographing and manual treatments, the different systems - chemical, digital and photographic become foregrounded. Chemistries prescribe what photographic colours become, the compression of physical layers of the slide create a juxtaposition of times and places, voids created in the fragmentations of images invite speculation.

Untitled (Family Slides 60s-70s)

(2019-2026) Includes:

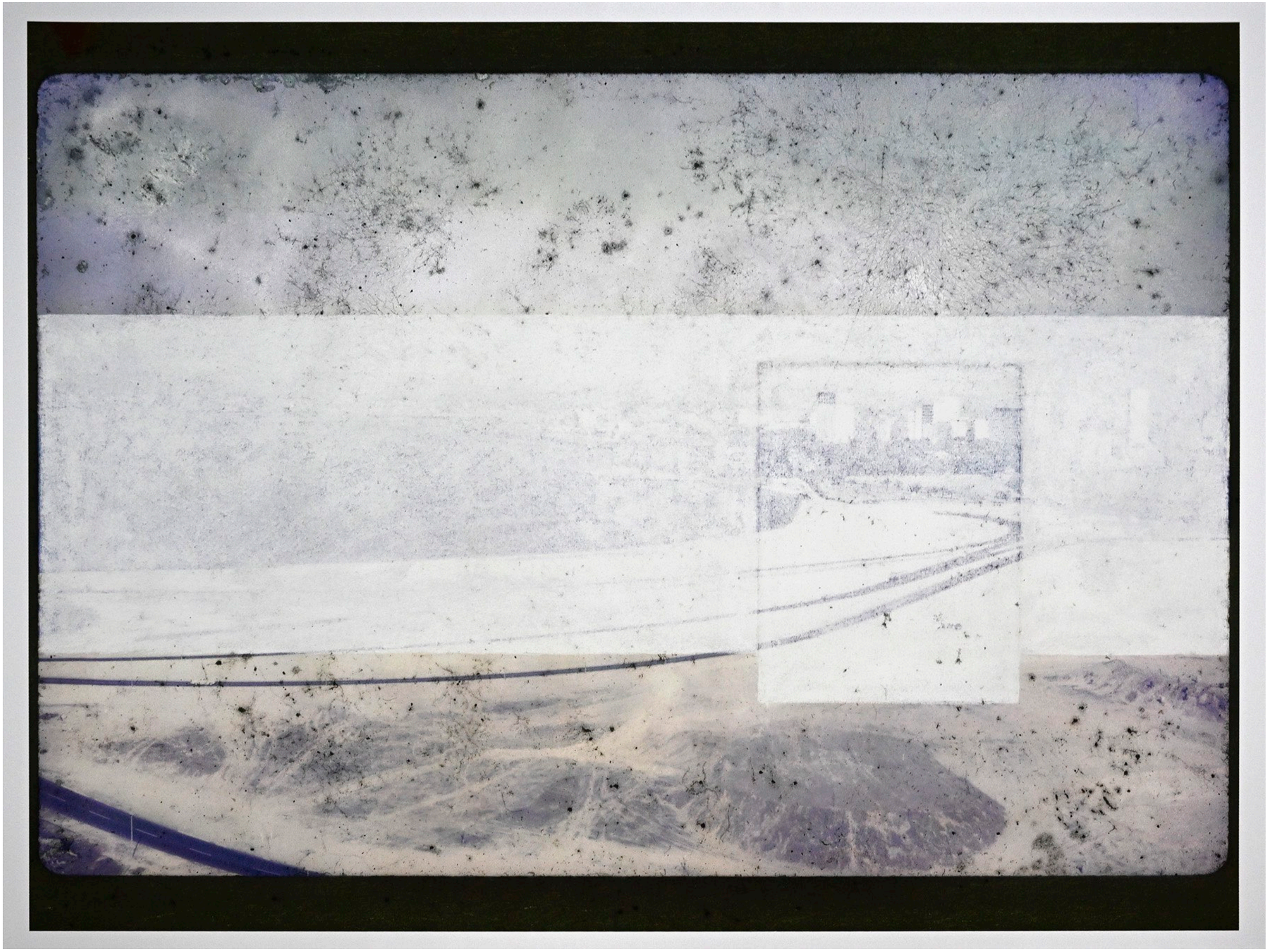
- *between leaving and arriving* (2019)
- Website: *https://surfacetensions.net* (2020)
- Works in *Progressive Disintegrations* (2020-21)
- *View from this side* (2022)
- One work in *Staring into Voids and Blues* (2024)
- Some works in *Image / Time* (2025)
- works in *The Shape of Passing Through* (25-26)

In **Image / Time**, Wei Leng Tay deconstructs photographs to consider their role in describing the world we live in. In the works, she presents archival and contemporary photographs of family that were made with different technologies including microscopy, film and digital photography. These photographs are in turn sanded, layered and fragmented to imagine different ways photographs are stories of history.

In **Sanded Penang, 600-1500**, as the persons in the photograph look forward and back, Tay creates a circular movement of erasure between the sanded rectangles that reference the dimensions of the 35mm slide, and a movement within the sanded translucencies of the rectangles. In **Layering Histories**, an overlaying of time and family ties is created in the photographic process. Here, one half-frame and a full frame 35 mm slide are put on top of each other, and photographed with a microscope. The resultant juxtaposition asks the viewer not only to consider what these layers of depiction mean, they also bring forth a more ecological presence of decay on the slides, mixing these personal histories with temporal, environmental and geographical shifts. With **Untitled (roll out #3)** and **King's Park looking towards South Perth, July '70**, the process of making the image is made apparent. In **Untitled (roll out #3)**, a cropped image of an aunt's bedroom is printed on an inkjet photo paper roll. Left on the roll, the image fragment directly references the production of images, while in **King's Park looking towards South Perth, July '70**, the system of making within which photographs find themselves is alluded to in the grid – in this instance creating an image that while complete, is never whole.

It is through these processes of fragmentation and manual alterations, that the works comment on photographic systems and substrates, questioning photography's role in influencing one's understanding of the world around us.

Wei Leng Tay
Image / Time
Presented at Arts & Rec (Osmos Station)
July 2025



Sanded Perth, 120-1500 (2025). Hand-sanded archival pigment print. 75x100cm (29.53x39.37in)(image dimensions)

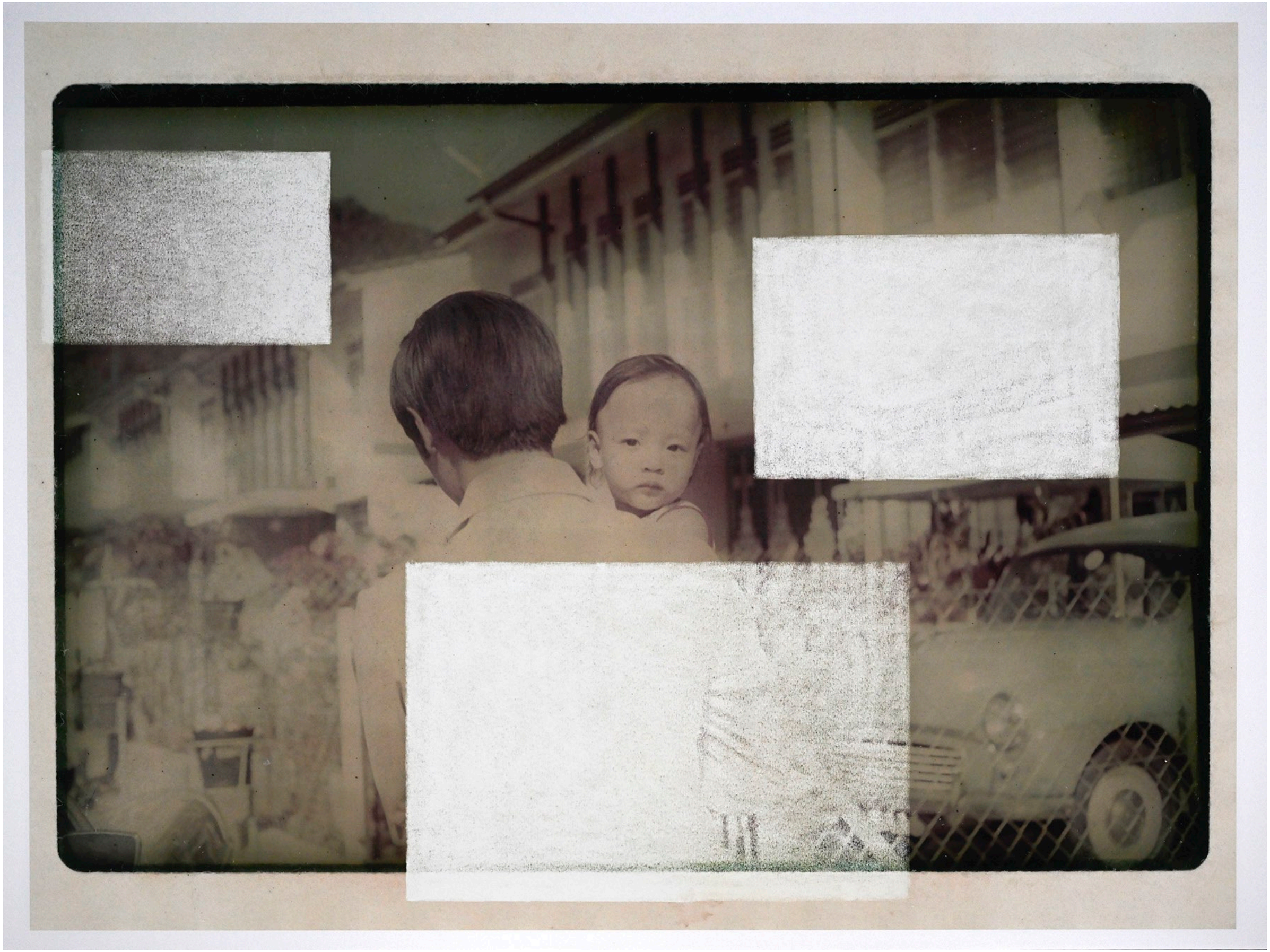
Detail. ***Sanded Perth, 120-1500*** (2025). Hand-sanded archival pigment print. 75x100cm (29.53x39.37in)(image dimensions)

Detail. ***Sanded Perth, 120-1500*** (2025). Hand-sanded archival pigment print. 75x100cm (29.53x39.37in)(image dimensions)

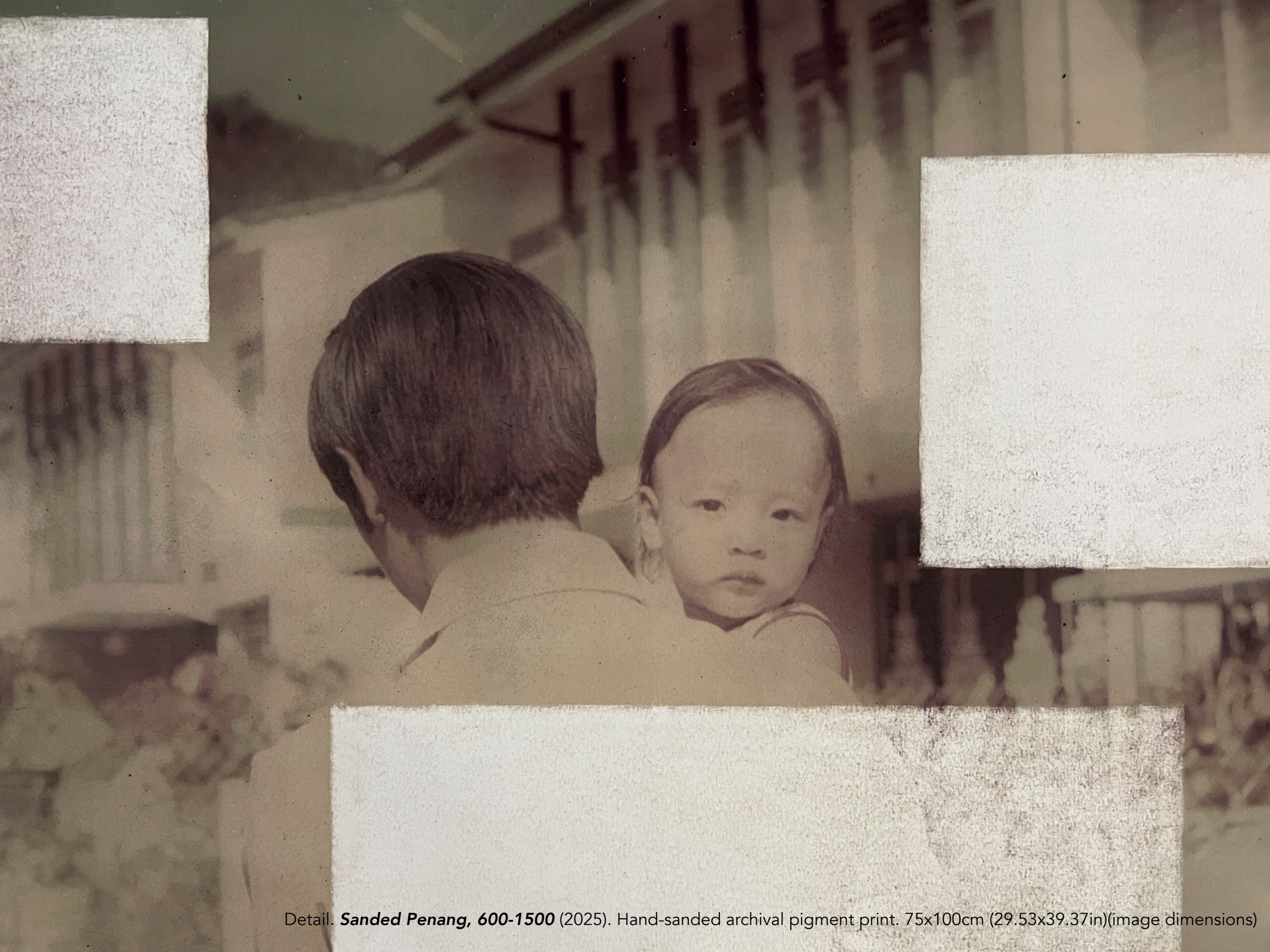
Sanded Penang, 120-400-600-1500 (2025). Hand-sanded archival pigment print. 66.66x100cm (39.37x26.25in)(image dimensions)

Detail. ***Sanded Penang, 120-400-600-1500*** (2025). Hand-sanded archival pigment print. 66.66x100cm (image dimensions)

Detail. ***Sanded Penang, 120-400-600-1500*** (2025). Hand-sanded archival pigment print. 66.66x100cm (image dimensions)



Sanded Penang, 600-1500 (2025). Hand-sanded archival pigment print. 75x100cm (29.53x39.37in)(image dimensions)



Detail. ***Sanded Penang, 600-1500*** (2025). Hand-sanded archival pigment print. 75x100cm (29.53x39.37in)(image dimensions)

Detail. ***Sanded Penang, 600-1500*** (2025). Hand-sanded archival pigment print. 75x100cm (29.53x39.37in)(image dimensions)

Installation view. From left: ***Sanded Perth, 120-1500*** (2025). Hand sanded archival pigment print. 75x100cm (image dimensions).
King's Park looking towards South Perth, July '70 (2025). Laser print on 42 letter-sized paper. 148.72x164.2cm (58.55x64.63in)

Detail. ***King's Park looking towards South Perth, July '70*** (2025).
Laser print on 42 letter-sized paper. 148.72x164.2cm (58.55x64.63in)

Installation view. ***Untitled (roll out #3)*** (2025). Archival pigment print on roll of photo paper. Dimensions variable.

Installation view. ***Layering Histories*** (2025). Archival pigment print. 100x75cm (39.37x29.53in)(image dimensions).

Layering Histories (2025). Archival pigment print. 100x75cm (39.37x29.53in)(image dimensions)

Wei Leng Tay

Staring Into Voids and Blues

14 Sep - 20 Oct 2024

Staring Into Voids and Blues is Wei Leng Tay's second solo exhibition with Yeo Workshop. Comprising photographic prints and installational forms, this exhibition continues Tay's focus on how photographic and visual documents influence memory and our perception of history.

Developed over the past year, the exhibition revisits photographs as well as documents from Tay and her family's past. The pieces rework archival images and contemplate one's relationship to an embodied past through various processes including digital imaging, historical contact printing, and the physical manipulation of images. In the course of entwining depiction and materiality in meaning-making, Tay uses processes of abstraction and fragmentation to question the configuration of memory.

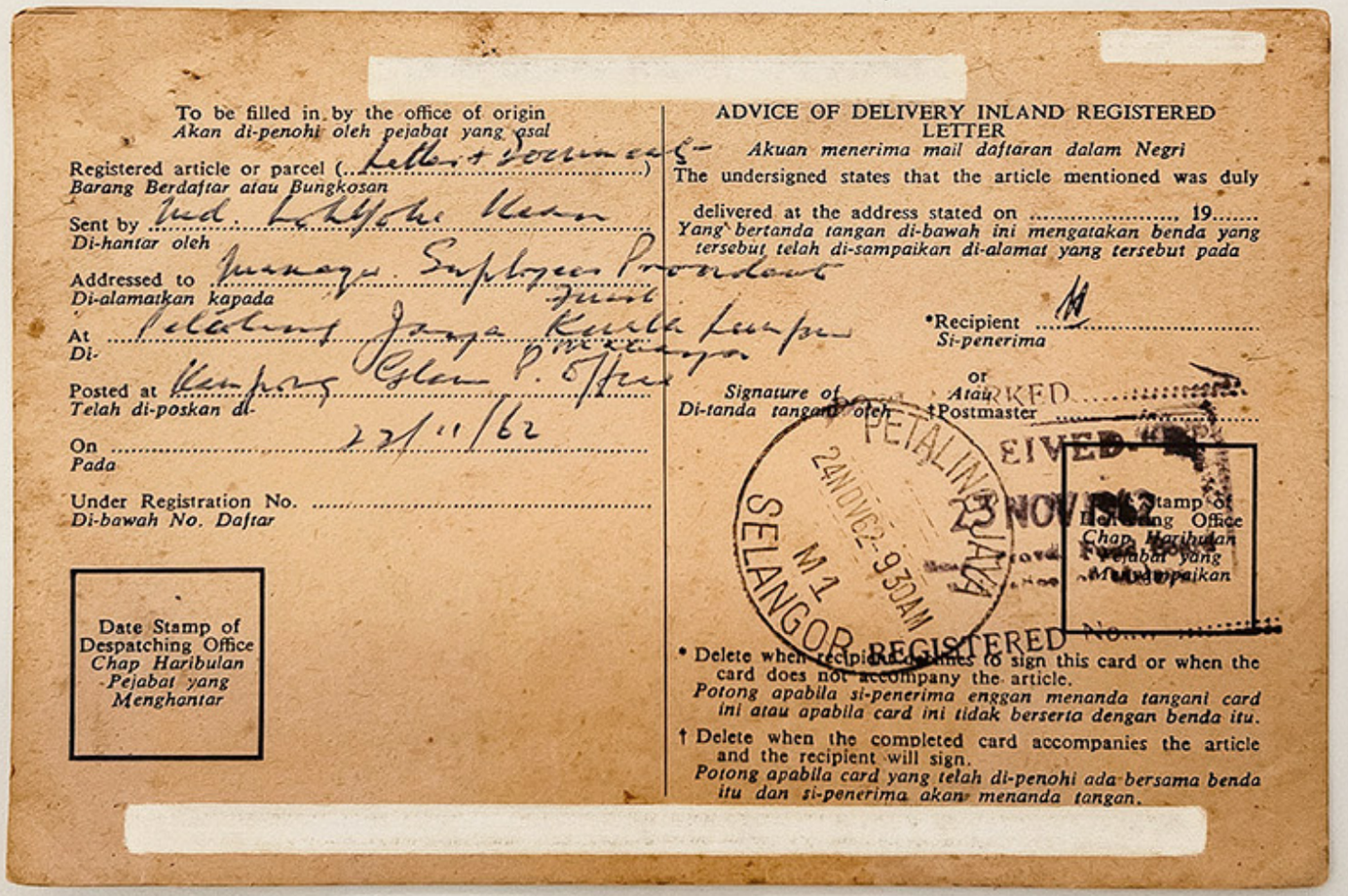
The works in **Staring Into Voids and Blues** reflect on relationships between private and public histories, and how they are embedded in the present. Linking personal archives to wider societal systems, this exhibition presents experimental and novel ways in Tay's artistic approach to consider what a photograph is and how images can be interpreted. It ponders the resonances and influences between the images we see, make and live with.

Wei Leng Tay (b.1978, Singapore) works across multiple mediums including photography, audio, installation, and video to explore themes of movement and migration, in relation to ideas of otherness, difference and identity. She focuses on how representation is used in image-making and how differences can be negotiated through perception and reception, and the materiality of photographs. Her works been exhibited widely in the region, notably at National Gallery Singapore (2022-2023); Wyng Foundation, Hong Kong (2021); NTU CCA Singapore (2019); NUS Museum, Singapore (2018-2019); Daegu Photo Biennale (2016); Asian Art Biennial, Taiwan (2013); Para Site Hong Kong (2012); and are in the collections of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Singapore Art Museum and National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, among others.

Installation view in ***Staring into voids and blues*** at Yeo Workshop, Sep-Oct, 2024

3 Nam Lock Street, Singapore (no.1), 2024.
Hand-sanded archival pigment print, 42 x 59.4 cm, framed 55 x 72 x 3.5 cm.

Detail of ***3 Nam Lock Street, Singapore (no.1)***, 2024.
Hand-sanded archival pigment print, 42 x 59.4 cm, framed 55 x 72 x 3.5 cm.



To be filled in by the office of origin
Akan di-penohi oleh pejabat yang asal

Registered article or parcel (Letter + Document)
Barang Berdaftar atau Bungkosan

Sent by Md. Lutfi bin Hasan
Di-hantar oleh

Addressed to Manager, Employees Provident Fund
Di-alamatkan kapada

At Petaling Jaya Kuala Lumpur
Di-

Posted at Kampung Selam P. Pinang
Telah di-poskan di-

On 22/11/62
Pada

Under Registration No. .....
Di-bawah No. Daftar

Date Stamp of Despatching Office
Chap Haribulan Pejabat yang Menghantar

ADVICE OF DELIVERY INLAND REGISTERED LETTER
Akuan menerima mail daftaran dalam Negri

The undersigned states that the article mentioned was duly delivered at the address stated on ..... 19.....
Yang bertanda tangan di-bawah ini mengatakan benda yang tersebut telah di-sampaikan di-alamat yang tersebut pada

*Recipient .....
Si-penerima

or
Atau

*Signature of .....
Di-tanda tangan oleh †Postmaster .....

PETALING JAYA 24 NOV 62 9.30AM M1 SELANGOR

REGISTERED No. .....

23 NOV 1962

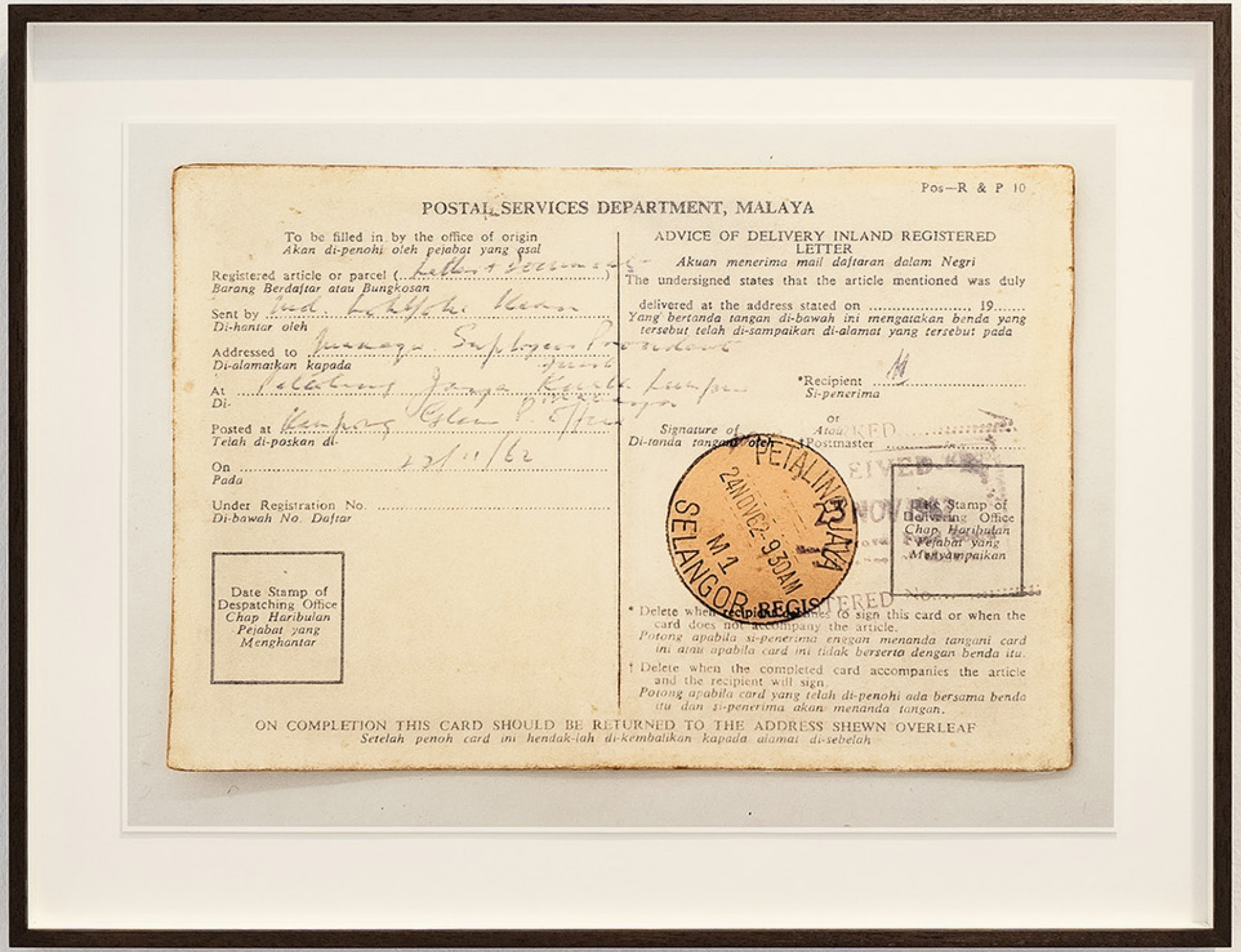
Date Stamp of Delivering Office
Chap Haribulan Pejabat yang Menyampaikan

* Delete when recipient declines to sign this card or when the card does not accompany the article.
Potong apabila si-penerima enggan menanda tangani card ini atau apabila card ini tidak berserta dengan benda itu.

† Delete when the completed card accompanies the article and the recipient will sign.
Potong apabila card yang telah di-penohi ada bersama benda itu dan si-penerima akan menanda tangan.

3 Nam Lock Street, Singapore (no.2), 2024.
Hand-sanded archival pigment print, 42 x 59.4 cm, framed 55 x 72 x 3.5 cm.

3 Nam Lock Street, Singapore (no.3), 2024.
Hand-sanded archival pigment print, 42 x 59.4 cm, framed 55 x 72 x 3.5 cm.



Pos—R & P 10

POSTAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT, MALAYA

To be filled in by the office of origin
Akan di-penohi oleh pejabat yang asal

Registered article or parcel (Letter + Document)
Barang Berdaftar atau Bungkosan

Sent by Md. Lutfi bin Kasim
Di-hantar oleh

Addressed to Puan Naraya Sri Pegawai Pemandu Jurutera
Di-alamatkan kepada

At Pelabuhan Jenga Kuala Lumpur
Di-

Posted at Kempas Kelan P. Estate
Telah di-poskan di-

On 21/11/62
Pada

Under Registration No. .....
Di-bawah No. Daftar

Date Stamp of Despatching Office
Chap Haribulan Pejabat yang Menghantar

ADVICE OF DELIVERY INLAND REGISTERED LETTER
Akuan menerima mail daftaran dalam Negri

The undersigned states that the article mentioned was duly delivered at the address stated on ..... 19.....
Yang bertanda tangan di-bawah ini mengatakan benda yang tersebut telah di-sampaikan di-alamat yang tersebut pada

*Recipient .....
Si-penerima

or
Atau

Signature of .....
Di-tanda tangan oleh

†Postmaster .....

PETALING JAYA 24 NOV 62 9.30AM M1 SELANGOR

Date Stamp of Delivering Office
Chap Haribulan Pejabat yang Menyampaikan

* Delete when recipient declines to sign this card or when the card does not accompany the article.
Potong apabila si-penerima enegan menanda tangani card ini atau apabila card ini tidak berserta dengan benda itu.

† Delete when the completed card accompanies the article and the recipient will sign.
Potong apabila card yang telah di-penohi ada bersama benda itu dan si-penerima akan menanda tangan.

ON COMPLETION THIS CARD SHOULD BE RETURNED TO THE ADDRESS SHEWN OVERLEAF
Setelah penoh card ini hendak-lah di-kembalikan kapada alamat di-sebelah

3 Nam Lock Street, Singapore (no.4), 2024.
Hand-sanded archival pigment print, 42 x 59.4 cm, framed 55 x 72 x 3.5 cm.

3 Nam Lock Street, Singapore (no.5), 2024.
Hand-sanded archival pigment print, 42 x 59.4 cm, framed 55 x 72 x 3.5 cm.

Pos—R & P 10

POSTAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT, MALAYA

To be filled in by the office of origin

Registered article or parcel (Letter & Document)

Sent by Md. Lotfi bin Hassan

Addressed to Manager, Employees Provident Fund

At Petaling Jaya, Kuala Lumpur

Posted at Kampung Glam P.O. Office

On 22/11/62

Under Registration No. .....

Date Stamp of Despatching Office

ADVICE OF DELIVERY INLAND REGISTERED LETTER

The undersigned states that the article mentioned was duly delivered at the address stated on ..... 19.....

*Recipient .....

or

Signature of ..... KED.....

†Postmaster .....

PETALING JAYA 24NOV62-930AM M1 SELANGOR

23 NOV 1962

Date Stamp of Despatching Office

REGISTERED No. .....

* Delete when recipient declines to sign this card or when the card does not accompany the article.

† Delete when the completed card accompanies the article and the recipient will sign.

ON COMPLETION THIS CARD SHOULD BE RETURNED TO THE ADDRESS SHEWN OVERLEAF

3 Nam Lock Street, Singapore (no.6), 2024.
Hand-sanded archival pigment print, 42 x 59.4 cm, framed 55 x 72 x 3.5 cm.

Installation view in ***Staring into voids and blues*** at Yeo Workshop, Sep-Oct, 2024

Absence of..., 2024.
Hand-sanded archival pigment print mounted on metal composite,
framed in wood and non reflective UV glass, 107 x 132.5 x 4 cm. Unique.

Detail of ***Absence of...***, 2024.
Hand-sanded archival pigment print mounted on metal composite, framed in wood and non reflective UV glass,
107 x 132.5 x 4 cm. Unique.

Installation view in ***Staring into voids and blues*** at Yeo Workshop, Sep-Oct, 2024

Staring into voids and blues at Yeo Workshop, Sep-Oct, 2024

Furry Monster, 2024. Archival pigment print, 20 x 15 cm,
framed in wood and non reflective UV glass, 24 x 19 x 3.5 cm.

Installation view in ***Staring into voids and blues*** at Yeo Workshop, Sep-Oct, 2024

Untitled (Tay in Five Parts), 2024.
Cyanotype on cotton rag, in 5 parts,
framed in wood and non reflective UV glass,
dimensions variable. Unique.

Progressive Disintegrations is an experimental collaboration between Chua Chye Teck, Hilmi Johandi, Wei Leng Tay and Marc Gloede. Based on common interests in the role and potential of images, this project began as an investigation into each participant's own practice in relation to images. By sharing these individual processes, the project developed into an intense exchange exploring the commonalities and differences between practices.

The first iteration *Progressive Disintegrations*, seen on pp 87, took place at Objectifs Centre for Photography and Film in 2021. The next iteration, *Inside the Wild Cube*, took place in 2022, with guest artist Brian O'Doherty, focusing more on site specificity and the form. The third iteration, *[im]print*, took place at STORAGE Art Space in Bangkok with guest artist Tanatchai Bandasak. Most recently, the group has presented an exhibition *The Shape of Passing Through* at the Esplanade Tunnel in 2025.

All installation photos of *Inside the Wild Cube* by Ken Cheong.
All installation photos of *[imprint]* by Atelier 247

The exhibition ***The Shape of Passing Through*** explores the interconnected relationship between memory, space, and time. The multi-sensory exhibition at Esplanade Tunnel utilises light, sound and visual art to reflect how spatial and architectural elements shape our perception of temporality. Here, personal and collective memories surface, overlap, and shift, reminding us that memory is not fixed, but always in motion.

In the exhibition, Tay repeatedly reworks a microscopic slide image of her cousins in Penang from the early 1970s. The different works deconstruct, fragment, and erase portions of this past, continuously reconfiguring what can be intuited, acknowledged and seen.

* Progressive Disintegrations (est. 2020) is a collaborative group formed to create a platform for sustained creative exchange between the artistic practices of Chua Chye Teck, Marc Gloede, Hilmi Johandi, and Wei Leng Tay. The project seeks to open up typically individual artistic and curatorial processes, fostering shared situations in which participants can question, reframe, and expand their own work through dialogue and collaboration.

Progressive Disintegrations:
The Shape of Passing Through
Esplanade Tunnel
Sept 2025-Jan 2026

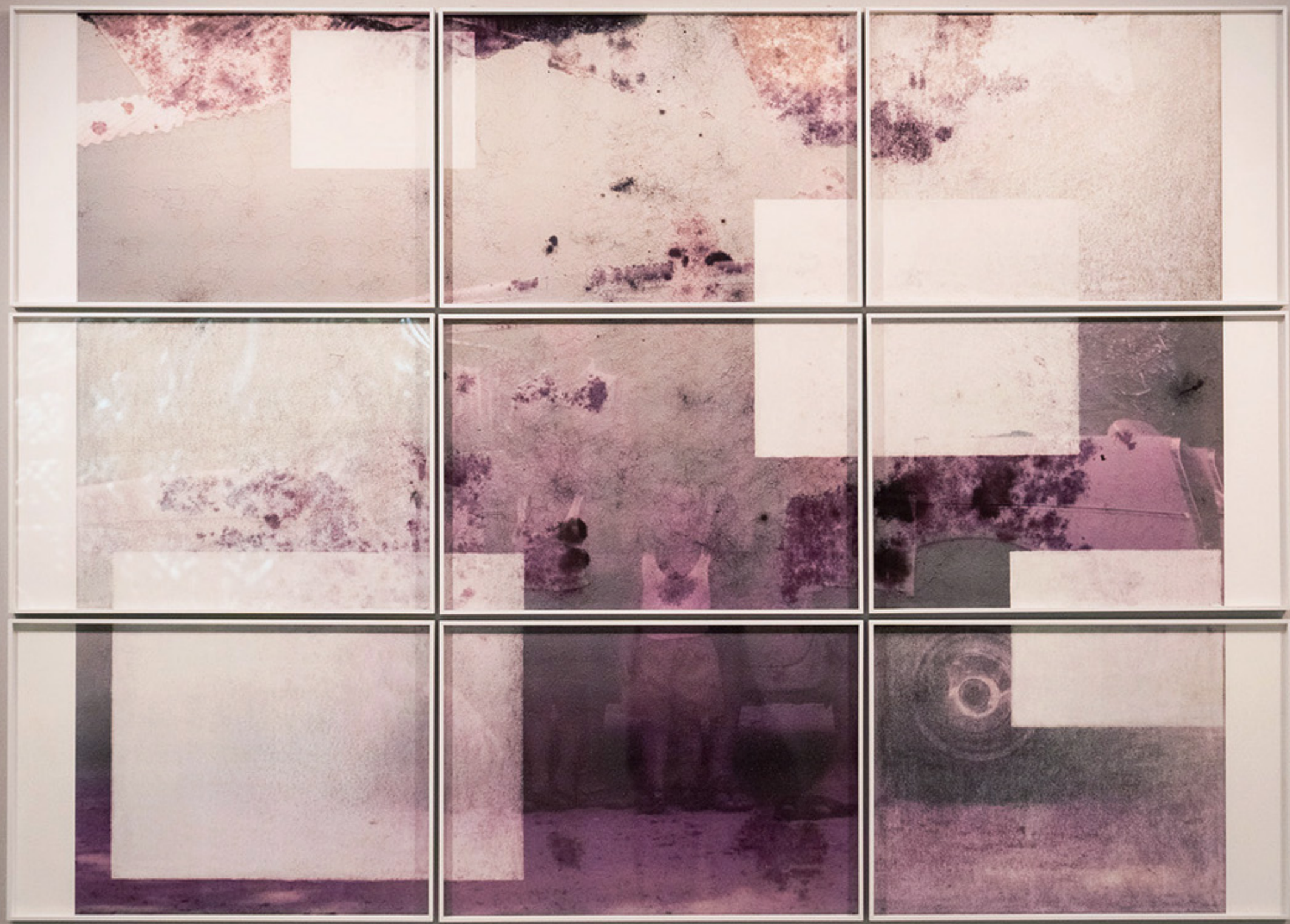
Penang kids: Kodak E6 Slide. 150x magnification. Partial coaxial and transmitted illumination. Archival pigment print. Cropped in three strokes. (2025)
Archival pigment print.
Print dimensions: 60.3 x 33.6cm; 151.8 x 42.8cm; 114.3 x 40.8cm
Installation photo by The Esplanade Co. Ltd. 2025

Detail. ***Penang kids: Kodak E6 Slide. 150x magnification. Partial coaxial and transmitted illumination. Archival pigment print. Cropped in three strokes.*** (2025)
Installation photo by The Esplanade Co. Ltd. 2025

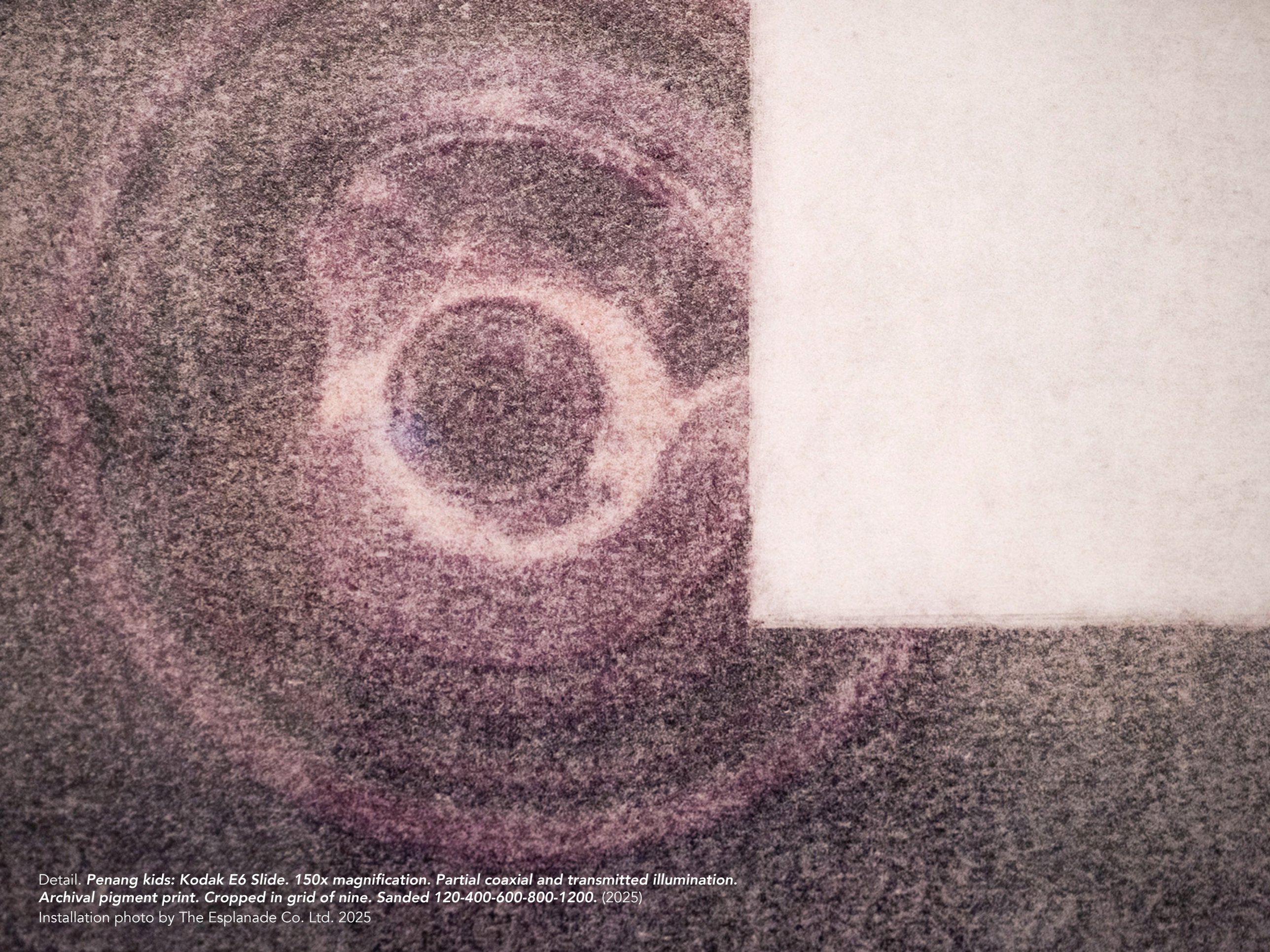
Installation view. (Right) ***Penang kids: Kodak E6 Slide. 150x magnification. Partial coaxial and transmitted illumination. Archival pigment print. Cropped in three strokes.*** (2025)

Penang kids: Kodak E6 Slide. 150x magnification. Partial coaxial and transmitted illumination. Archival pigment print. Cropped. Sanded 120-400-600-800-1200. (2025)
Sanded archival pigment print
78 x 100cm

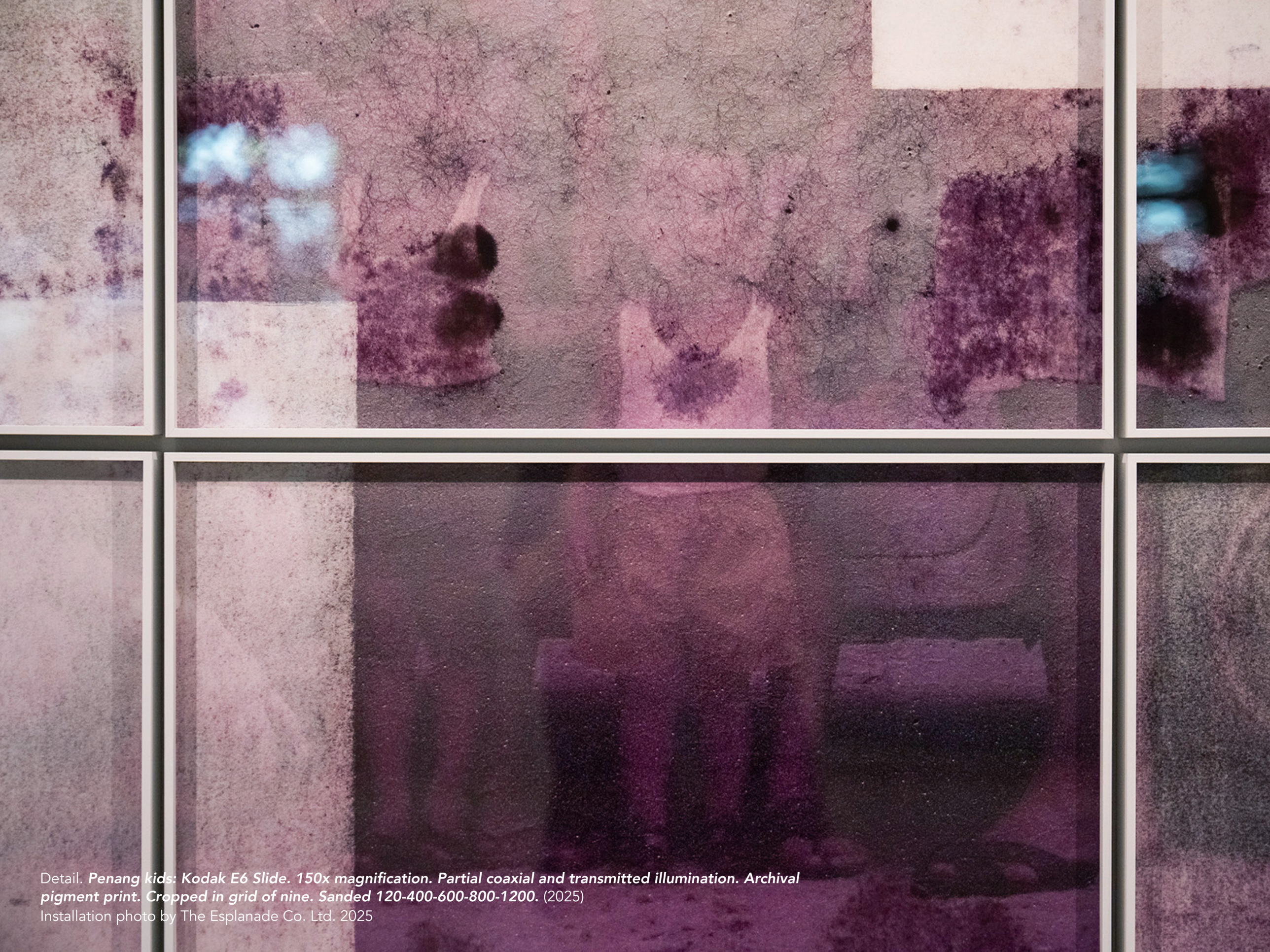
Installation view. Left: ***Penang kids: Kodak E6 Slide. 150x magnification. Partial coaxial and transmitted illumination. Archival pigment print. Cropped in grid of nine. Sanded 120-400-600-800-1200.*** (2025)



Penang kids: Kodak E6 Slide. 150x magnification. Partial coaxial and transmitted illumination. Archival pigment print. Cropped in grid of nine. Sanded 120-400-600-800-1200. (2025)
Sanded archival pigment print
42 x 59.4cm x 9 sheets
Installation photo by The Esplanade Co. Ltd. 2025



Detail. ***Penang kids: Kodak E6 Slide. 150x magnification. Partial coaxial and transmitted illumination. Archival pigment print. Cropped in grid of nine. Sanded 120-400-600-800-1200.*** (2025)
Installation photo by The Esplanade Co. Ltd. 2025



Detail. ***Penang kids: Kodak E6 Slide. 150x magnification. Partial coaxial and transmitted illumination. Archival pigment print. Cropped in grid of nine. Sanded 120-400-600-800-1200.*** (2025)
Installation photo by The Esplanade Co. Ltd. 2025

Installation view. Right: ***Penang kids: Kodak E6 Slide. 150x magnification. Partial coaxial and transmitted illumination. Archival pigment print. Cropped in grid of nine. Sanded 120-400-600-800-1200.*** (2025)

[im]print stands as the latest artistic endeavour from the Singapore art collective, Progressive Disintegrations. Marking their inaugural international collaboration, the collective partners with Thai artist Tanatchai Bandasak, whose conversation with members of Progressive Disintegrations first began during a residency in Singapore in 2019, and the Bangkok art space STORAGE.

Rooted in the building's historical context, this collaborative venture gives rise to an exhibition wherein the essence of print takes centre stage. STORAGE, situated within a former printing press in Bangkok, becomes the focal point of this exploration. Building upon Progressive Disintegrations' prior project in Singapore which examined the concept of the White Cube and the collective's deep interest with the unique spatial configurations of exhibition sites, this exhibition project dives into the intricate layers of printing and imprinting. Individually and collectively, members of Progressive Disintegrations delve into diverse aspects of the printing process, exploring the idea of print through various mediums such as photography, painting, installation, woodblock prints, performance, and published materials.

Together with guest artist Tanatchai Bandasak, the group contemplates how the site's history and the artists' individual practices can intertwine, giving rise to a project that melds architectural inquiry, memory, relational dynamics, and cultural exchange, all through an expansive lens of printed art forms.

[im]print
STORAGE Art Space
Oct-Dec 2023

All STORAGE installation photos by Atelier 247

My works shown in STORAGE Art Space are based on two different source materials: one work takes as a starting point a historical photograph of the family that ran the printing press where STORAGE is situated. In the other three works, I re-visit my own photographic images produced 14 years ago in Bangkok's Hua Lamphong.

In both cases, the audience is invited to think about what historical photographs (one's own and that of others) mean, how photographic images age with time, and the materiality of the works. Colour becomes a photographic marker for remembering. How does colour create associations in one's mind, and extrapolate from a singular history to that of many?

Also, the four works shift away from a purely representational mode and create abstractions by processes of enlargement or sanding. Specifically, the process of sanding opens up an interesting aspect to the process of printing: while prints come to life mostly through an additive process, I reverse this idea by grinding away certain parts of the print itself and in this way allow the base material of printing (paper) to re-appear again. Further, the materiality of the photograph, as substrate and support, take on different forms - as paper, and as light, speaking to the ephemerality of this visual document of memory.

Recent Works in exhibition *[im]print*

STORAGE Art Space
Oct - Dec 2023

Mix media

All STORAGE installation photos by
Atelier 247

Untitled (Chinese opera show, Hua Lamphong, December 2009, photographed with a Mamiya RZ67 camera on Fujifilm FP-100C instant film. Rephotographed with a Sony mirrorless camera in 2023 and printed on cotton rag. Sanded.) (2023)

Hand sanded archival pigment print.
Print dimensions: 420mmx594mm

Untitled (Alleyway, Hua Lamphong, December 2009, photographed with a Mamiya RZ67 camera on Fujifilm FP-100C instant film. Rephotographed with a Sony mirrorless camera in 2023 and printed on cotton rag. Sanded.) (2023)

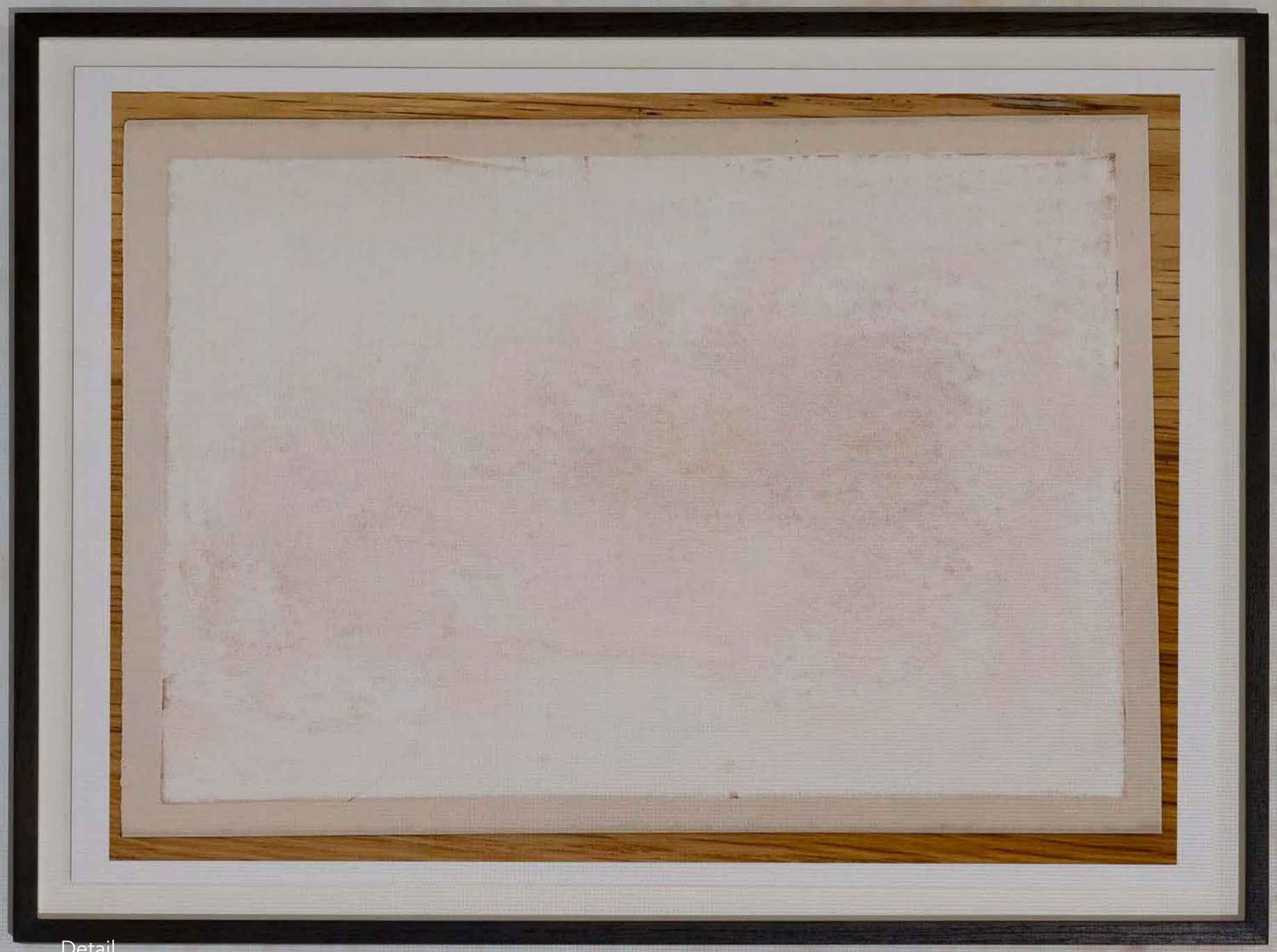
Hand sanded archival pigment print.
Print dimensions: 420mmx594mm

Untitled (A home, Hua Lamphong, December 2009, photographed with a Mamiya RZ67 camera on Fujifilm FP-100C polaroid film. Rephotographed with a Sony mirrorless camera in 2023 and printed on cotton rag. Sanded.) (2023)

Hand sanded archival pigment print.
Print dimensions: 420mmx594mm

Untitled (Chuanpim Printing Press, Phra Sumen, 1978, photograph from the estate of the family. Rephotographed with an iPhone by the family in 2023. Printed on cotton rag. Sanded. Projected) (2023)

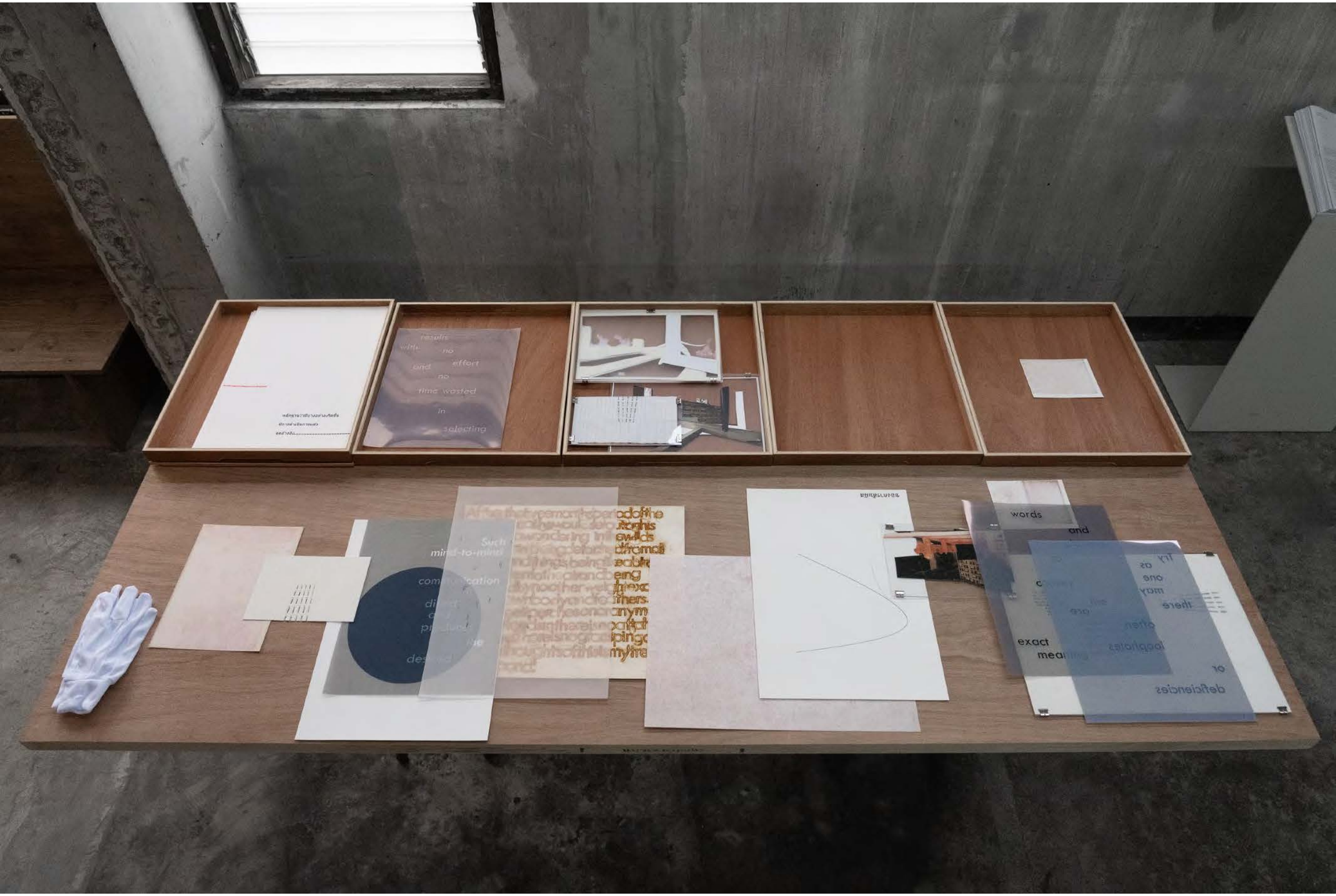
Hand sanded archival pigment print and wall projection
Print dimensions: 420mmx594mm, projection dimensions: variable



Detail.
Untitled (Chuanpim Printing Press, Phra Sumen, 1978, photograph from the estate of the family. Rephotographed with an iPhone by the family in 2023. Printed on cotton rag. Sanded. Projected) (2023)

Hand sanded archival pigment print and wall projection
Print dimensions: 420mmx594mm, projection dimensions: variable

Installation view of collaborative book, Wei Leng Tay, Tanatchai Bandasak and Marc Gloede's works in ***[im]print*** at STORAGE Art Space, Oct - Dec 2023



Installation view of collaborative book by members of Progressive Disintegrations and guest artist Tanatchai Bandasak in ***[im]print*** at STORAGE Art Space, Oct - Dec 2023

Installation view of Wei Leng Tay's work in
[im]print at STORAGE Art Space, Oct - Dec 2023

Installation view of Chua Chye Teck's gelatin silver contact prints (left), and Hilmi Johandi's painting (right) in ***[im]print*** at STORAGE Art Space, Oct - Dec 2023

Installation view of Hilmi Johandi's painting (left), and Wei Leng Tay's projection installation (right) in ***[im]print*** at STORAGE Art Space, Oct - Dec 2023

Installation view with works of Marc Gloede and Wei Leng Tay (centre) in ***[im]print*** at STORAGE Art Space, Oct - Dec 2023

This work is a hand-sanded print of a re-photographed medium format slide depicting a night scene on a street in Ipoh, Malaysia. The photograph was initially made in 2010 by Tay, as part of the project *Convergence*. The image depicts a lone human figure dissolving into the building behind it, next to a marking of a wax pencil, long used during the photo editing process. On the left half of the print, the printed image is manually sanded down so that the embedded trace of the ink and material of the substrate are made apparent. The decisive interruptions to the image, first with the earlier wax pencil marking, then with the removal of the image from the print, bring to attention the selection and context which further complicate the already layered notions and readings of the image and photography.

Untitled (Ipoh street at night, 2/3/2010, photographed on Kodak E100VS 120mm. Selected with wax pencil. Rephotographed with iPhone in 2022 and printed on cotton rag. Sanded.)

2023

42x56cm

Archival pigment print (framed in wood and nonreflective UV glass)

Untitled (Ipoh street at night, 2/3/2010, photographed on Kodak E100VS 120mm. Selected with wax pencil. Rephotographed with iPhone in 2022 and printed on cotton rag. Sanded.) (2023)

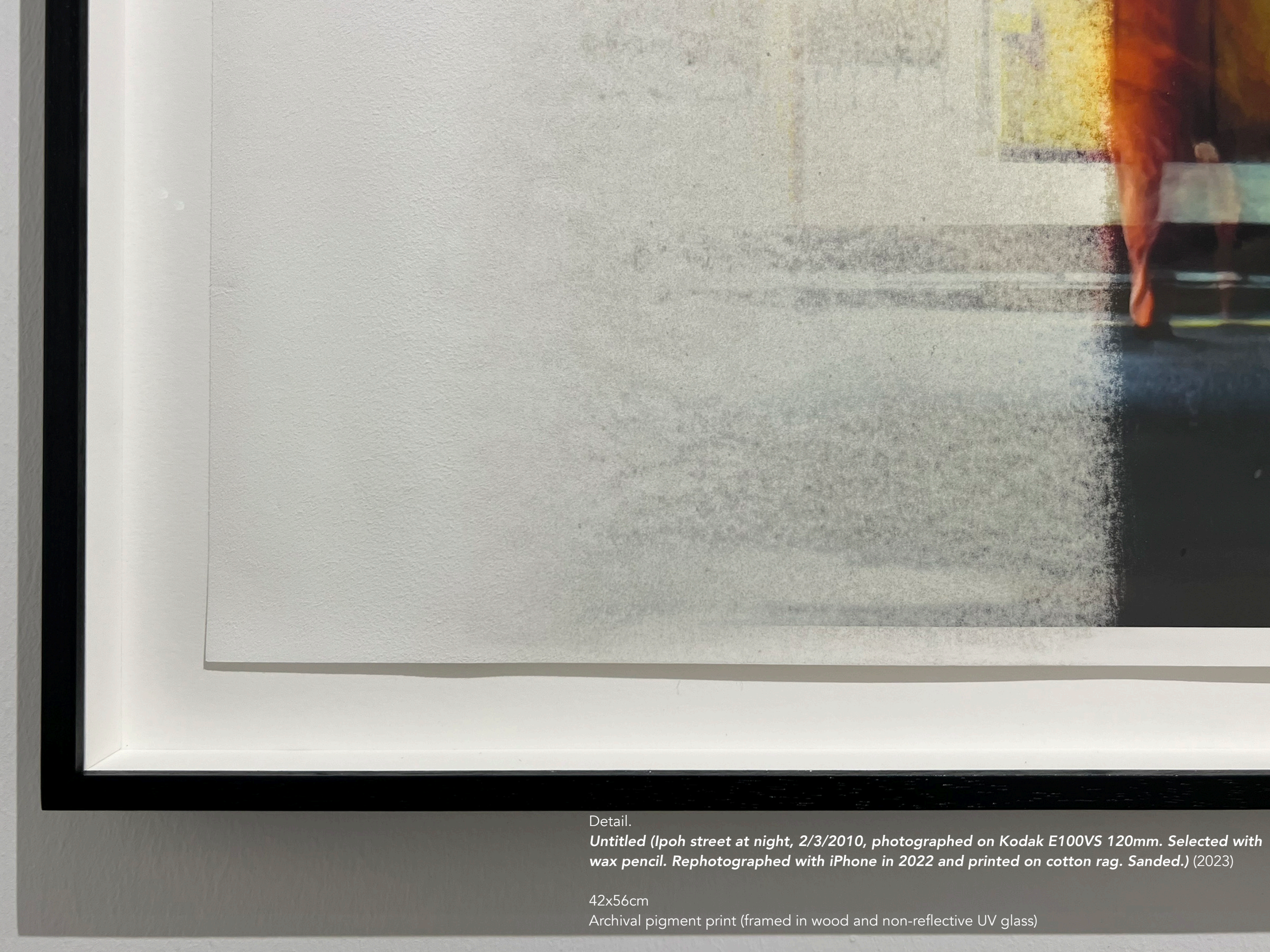
42x56cm
Archival pigment print (framed in wood and nonreflective UV glass)

Detail.
Untitled (Ipoh street at night, 2/3/2010, photographed on Kodak E100VS 120mm. Selected with wax pencil. Rephotographed with iPhone in 2022 and printed on cotton rag. Sanded.) (2023)

42x56cm
Archival pigment print

Detail.
Untitled (Ipoh street at night, 2/3/2010, photographed on Kodak E100VS 120mm. Selected with wax pencil. Rephotographed with iPhone in 2022 and printed on cotton rag. Sanded.) (2023)

42x56cm
Archival pigment print



Detail.
Untitled (Ipoh street at night, 2/3/2010, photographed on Kodak E100VS 120mm. Selected with wax pencil. Rephotographed with iPhone in 2022 and printed on cotton rag. Sanded.) (2023)

42x56cm
Archival pigment print (framed in wood and non-reflective UV glass)

Installation view of ***View from this side*** at Yeo Workshop, Sept-Oct 2022

View From This Side(2022) takes its name from words printed on the cardboard slide mount of source photographs, where this instruction was placed to help viewers look at images in the way and direction the maker intended. In these works, I use this instruction as a starting point to take a closer look at materials and processes surrounding these slides. From here, several questions arise: Is there a wrong way, or a right way, to look at images of the past? To remember one's own history, or one that is communal? Does this way of looking symbolise a broader schema, one that influences how one sees, what one values? What is this side from which to look?

The presentation of *View From This Side* continues to add to a constellation of works that began with the bag of family slides from the late 1960s to 70s, mostly taken by my parents. The slides depict a coming-of-age, through a migratory path through Australia, Malaysia and Singapore. While earlier bodies of work in this constellation consider and depict how geography and history are imprinted into the slides over time, here, with the use of digital microscopy, the works' own making enters the image, surfacing the processuality of meaning-making that is embedded. They also mediate aspects of nostalgia that are deeply coded in these old photographs, through colour, technological abstraction and surface.

Through these modes, they expand upon systems and grids that seem to dictate ways of being and looking, and also present opportunities for novel ways of looking forward, and remembering. In visualising the aesthetics of their making, the works seek to rationalise and address what is often emotionally uploaded, nostalgic, and affects us in ways sometimes unfathomable. At the same time, they create a space for looking, and projecting, between abstraction and nostalgia.

Conversation with Lee Weng Choy about material and process: The Micro-History and the Photograph

Photos of installation views of exhibition courtesy Yeo Workshop.

Installation view of ***View from this side*** at Yeo Workshop, Sept-Oct 2022

Installation view of ***View from this side*** at Yeo Workshop, Sept-Oct 2022

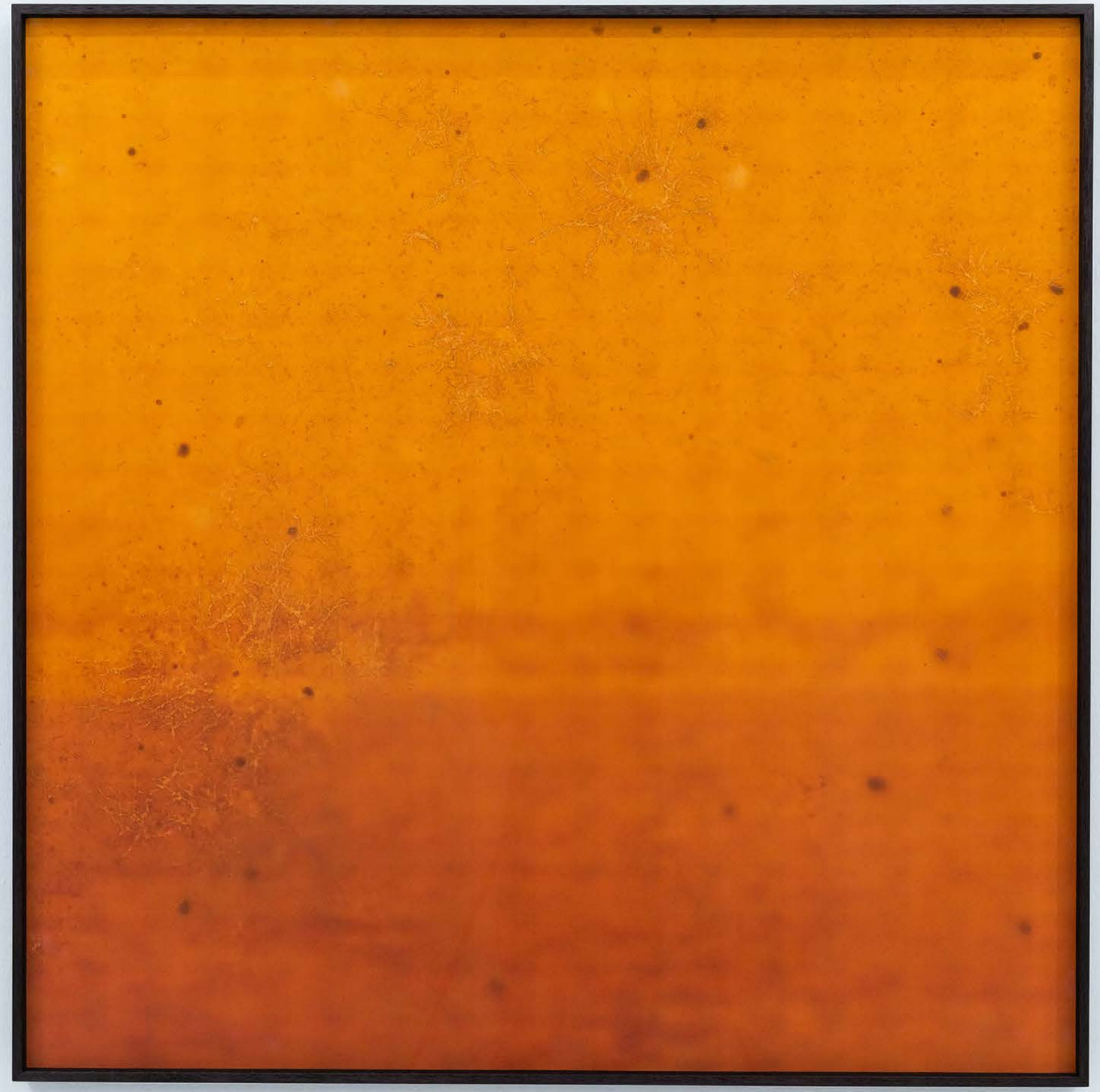
Installation view of ***View from this side*** at Yeo Workshop, Sept-Oct 2022

Installation view of ***View from this side*** at Yeo Workshop, Sept-Oct 2022

Untitled (sister) (2022)

Dimensions: variable

Medium: wallpaper + archival pigment print



Untitled (seascape) (2022)

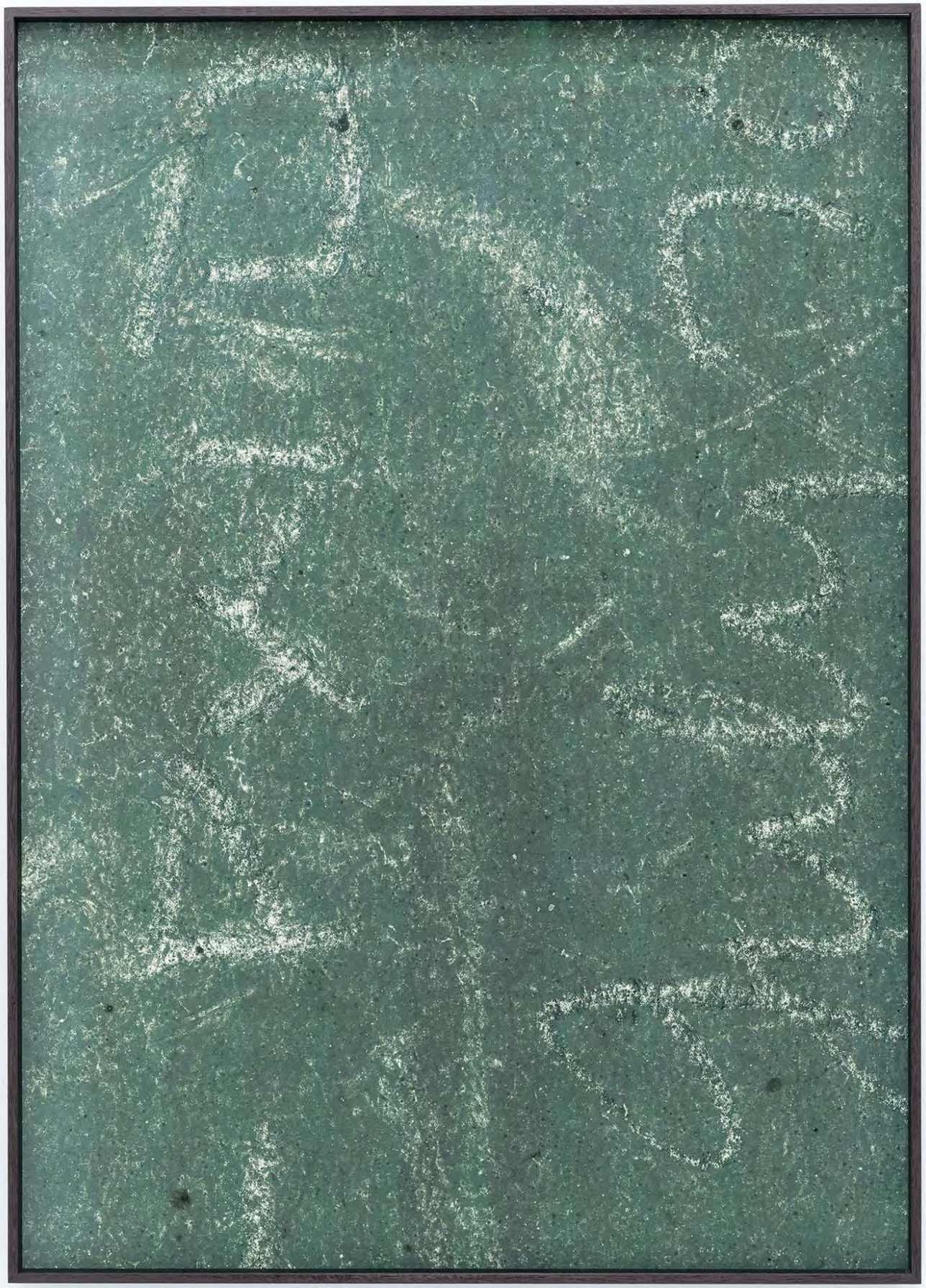
Dimensions: 110x110cm

Medium: Archival Pigment Print

Untitled (Office) (2022)

Dimensions: 80x80cm

Medium: Archival Pigment Print



Untitled (PWD July 70) (2022)

Dimensions: 130X92.85cm

Medium: Archival Pigment Print

Untitled (ink residue) (2022)

Dimensions: 45x60 cm

Medium: Archival Pigment Print

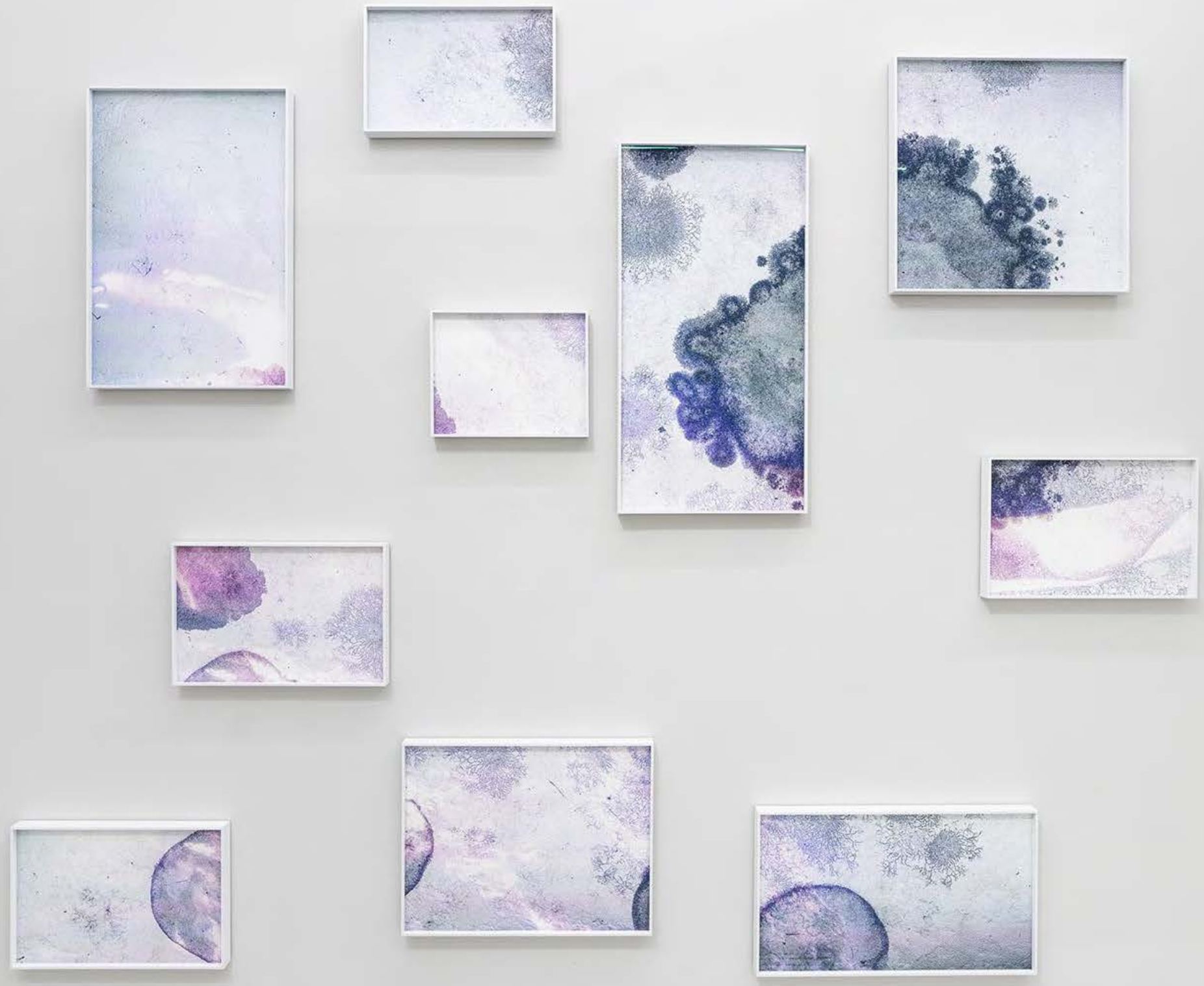
Untitled (city grid from the sky) (2022)

Dimensions: 100X67.23cm

Medium: Archival Pigment Print

Untitled (cousins and relatives) (2022)

Dimensions: 60x45cm
Medium: Archival pigment print



One full frame 135mm colour reversal film slide. "National Parks Board Of W.A." and "18 The Shawl" printed on one side, and "KODACHROME DUPLICATE" and '"MADE BY Kodak" on the other, of a heat-sealed cardboard slide mount. In a yellow plastic slide box // 150x magnification. Full coaxial episcopic, and transmitted illumination. Fragmented. // 10 variable sizes on archival pigment print. (2022)

Dimensions: Variable Medium: 10 archival pigment prints

PROGRESSIVE
DISINTEGRATIONS

CHUA CHYE TECK
MARC GLOEDE
HILMI JOHANDI
WEI LENG TAY
with
BRIAN O'DOHERTY

INSIDE THE WILD CUBE

9 LOCK ROAD
#03-21
GILLMAN
BARRACKS
(S) 108937

11AM–7PM
TUE–SUN
13 JAN–
26 FEB 2022

Inside the Wild Cube is an art exhibition purposefully positioned outside the museum and gallery space. It addresses the architectural implications, economic structures and institutional expectations that significantly impact creative labour.

Conceptualised by the collaborative group Progressive Disintegrations, this exhibition asks how one can become aware of one's surroundings, and how these environments shape ways of seeing. Through photography, painting, and installation, the exhibition steps away from the classical independent art space environment and embraces white cube aesthetics, which in this instance are the remains of a former gallery. The works presented in the project investigate how the group's own history co-mingled with that of the space, can create structures that deeply influence the creative outcomes.

Through the exhibition, the project reconsiders the spatial implications and impact on art production that Brian O'Doherty addressed in his groundbreaking book "Inside the White Cube". Together with the work of Chua, Gloede, Johandi, and Tay, one of O'Doherty's seminal rope drawings that impacted his ideas formulated later in his book will be shown. In this way, the exhibition asks what it means to actively create a zone that questions the immediate demands of an art industry, to create a structure of criticality.

Progressive Disintegrations began in early 2020 out of the need to create a format that provides a space to exchange creative and artistic practices between Chua Chye Teck , Marc Gloede, Hilmi Johandi and Wei Leng Tay. The project aimed to open normally individual artistic and curatorial practices up to those of others, creating situations to explore and expand the participants' notions of their own practices.

PANEL DISCUSSION:
SUNDAY, 16 JAN 2022, 2PM

INSIDE THE WILD CUBE: ARTISTS AND CURATOR IN DIALOGUE

FOR MORE INFORMATION
AND REGISTRATION:
PROGRESSIVEDISINTEGRATIONS.COM

SUPPORTED BY

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SG CULTURE ANYWHERE

Inside the Wild Cube exhibition installation view. ***"Desmond, 2005," without Desmond.*** Dimensions variable, archival pigment print, cardboard roll, metal clips, screws, 2021. (right)

Inside the Wild Cube exhibition installation view

Inside the Wild Cube exhibition installation view. ***"Son, 2008," without son.*** Dimensions variable, archival pigment print, painted wood, 2021. (center)

Inside the Wild Cube exhibition installation view. *"Kitty, 2015," without Kitty*. Dimensions variable, archival pigment print mounted on metal composite, painted wood, anti-reflective glass, wall paint, 2021. (center)

In these works seen within the exhibition ***Progressive Disintegrations***, I re-photograph, re-compose, and re-imagine the slides with a microscope. The microscope digitally renders layers of plastic, organic material, dirt, and the represented image in the analogue photographic slide from three dimensional space into a two dimensional space. And in this way presents markers of history, time, nature in the photograph through its materiality, translocation, and temporal shifts. Included are 7 photo prints and 1 looped 8 min video.

Video excerpt: https://vimeo.com/628293614/de87293dff
Video Title: *One half frame 135mm colour reversal film slide. "I-71" hand-written on Agfacolor-branded heatsealed cardboard slide mount. In Agfacolor-branded orange plastic slide box labelled "TITLE Perth people DATE Sept. '70." // 500x magnification. Full ring episcopic and transmitted illumination. Cropped. // Recording at 1080p of image in Keyence WHX_5000 digital microscope HD LCD monitor with Sony A7rii camera and 24-70mm G-Master lens. // 8 min HD colour video, stereo sound.*

Duration: 8min, looped
Medium: HD colour video, stereo sound, flatscreen TV

Reviews and additional readings:
Riley Yuen: Review of Progressive Disintegrations at Objectifs in Art and Market

Seet Yun Teng: Progressive Disintegrations, Collective Accumulations in Plural Art Mag

Exhibited with collective ***Progressive Disintegrations*** in exhibition of the same name at Objectifs Centre for Photography and Film from Dec 2020-Feb 2021.

Progressive Disintegrations installation views at Objectifs by Ken Cheong

Installation view of group presentation ***Progressive Disintegrations*** at Objectifs Centre for Photography and Film, Singapore, 2020-21.

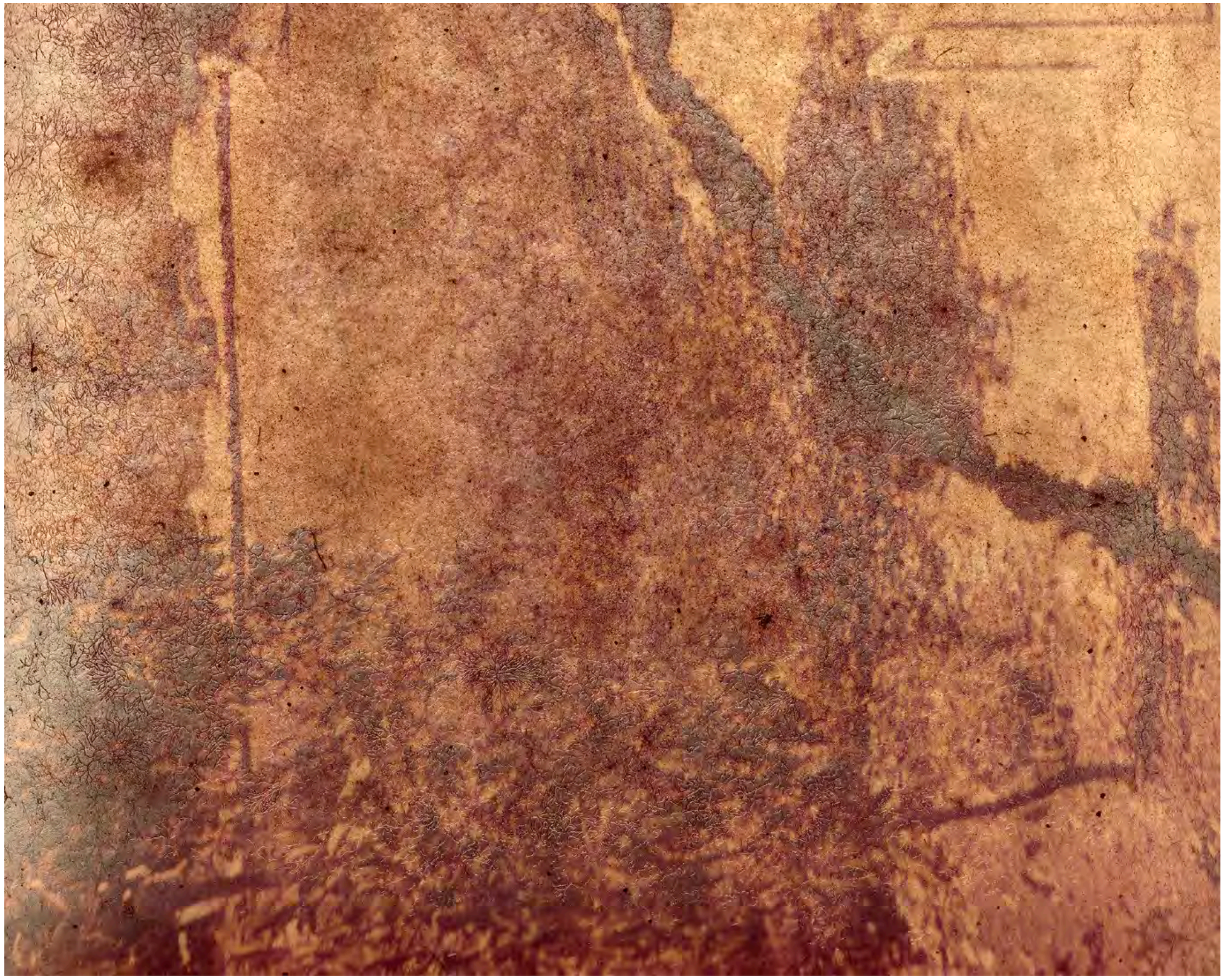
Installation view of group presentation *Progressive Disintegrations* at Objectifs Centre for Photography and Film, Singapore, 2020-21.

Installation view of group presentation Progressive Disintegrations at Objectifs Centre for Photography and Film, Singapore, 2020-21.

Installation view of group presentation Progressive Disintegrations at Objectifs Centre for Photography and Film, Singapore, 2020-21.

One half frame 135mm colour reversal film slide. "Sept. 70" hand-written on Agfacolor branded heat-sealed cardboard slide mount. In Agfacolor-brand orange plastic slide box containing a torn piece of yellow lined paper with the word "Everybody" written in cursive. // Emulsion side up. 150x magnification. Partial coaxial episcopic and transmitted illumination. Cropped. // 100x80cm archival pigment print on Ilford Galerie Smooth Cotton Rag paper. (2020)

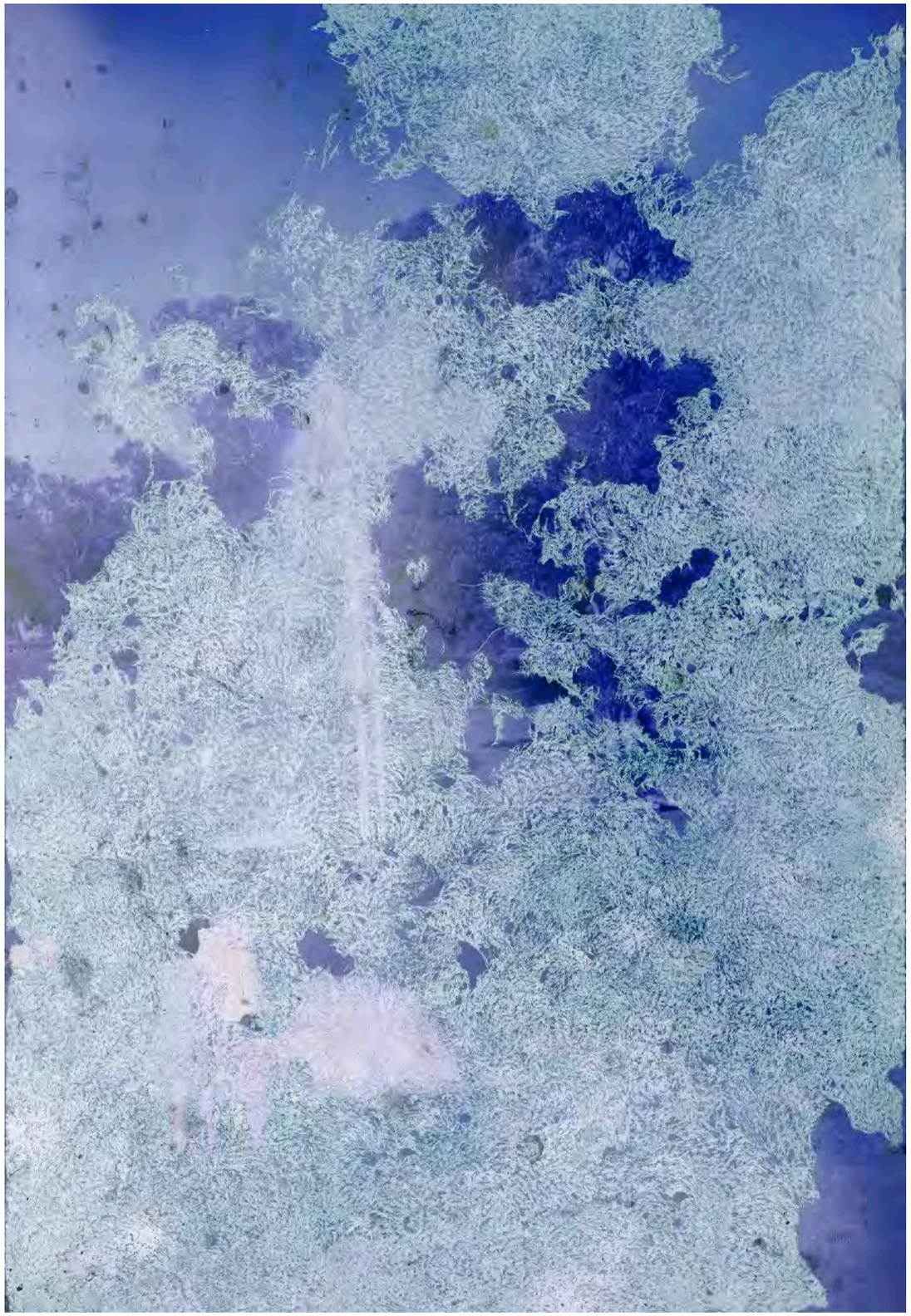
Dimensions: 100x80cm
Medium: archival pigment print on Ilford Galerie Smooth Cotton Rag paper



One half frame 135mm colour reversal film slide. "I-71" hand-written on Agfacolor-branded heat-sealed cardboard slide mount. In Agfacolor-branded orange plastic slide box labelled "TITLE Bldg PERTH DATE 1970 JULY." // Emulsion side up. 100x magnification. Partial coaxial episcopic and transmitted illumination. Cropped. // 56x70cm archival pigment print on Ilford Galerie Smooth Cotton Rag paper. (2020)

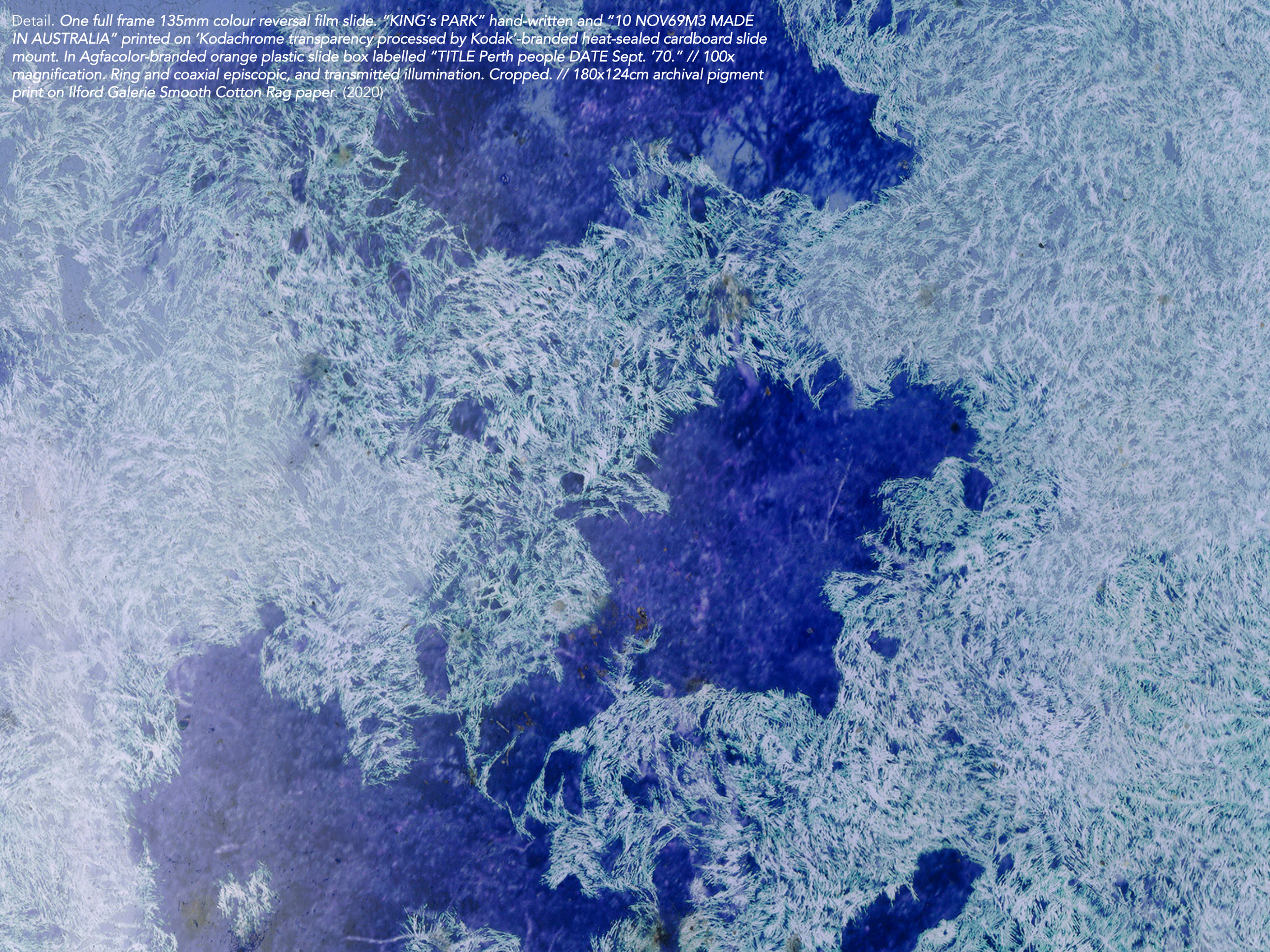
Dimensions: 56x70cm
Medium: archival pigment print on Ilford Galerie Smooth Cotton Rag paper

Detail. *One half frame 135mm colour reversal film slide. "I-71" hand-written on Agfacolor-branded heat-sealed cardboard slide mount. In Agfacolor-branded orange plastic slide box labelled "TITLE Bldg PERTH DATE 1970 JULY." // Emulsion side up. 100x magnification. Partial coaxial episcopic and transmitted illumination. Cropped. // 56x70cm archival pigment print on Ilford Galerie Smooth Cotton Rag paper.* (2020)

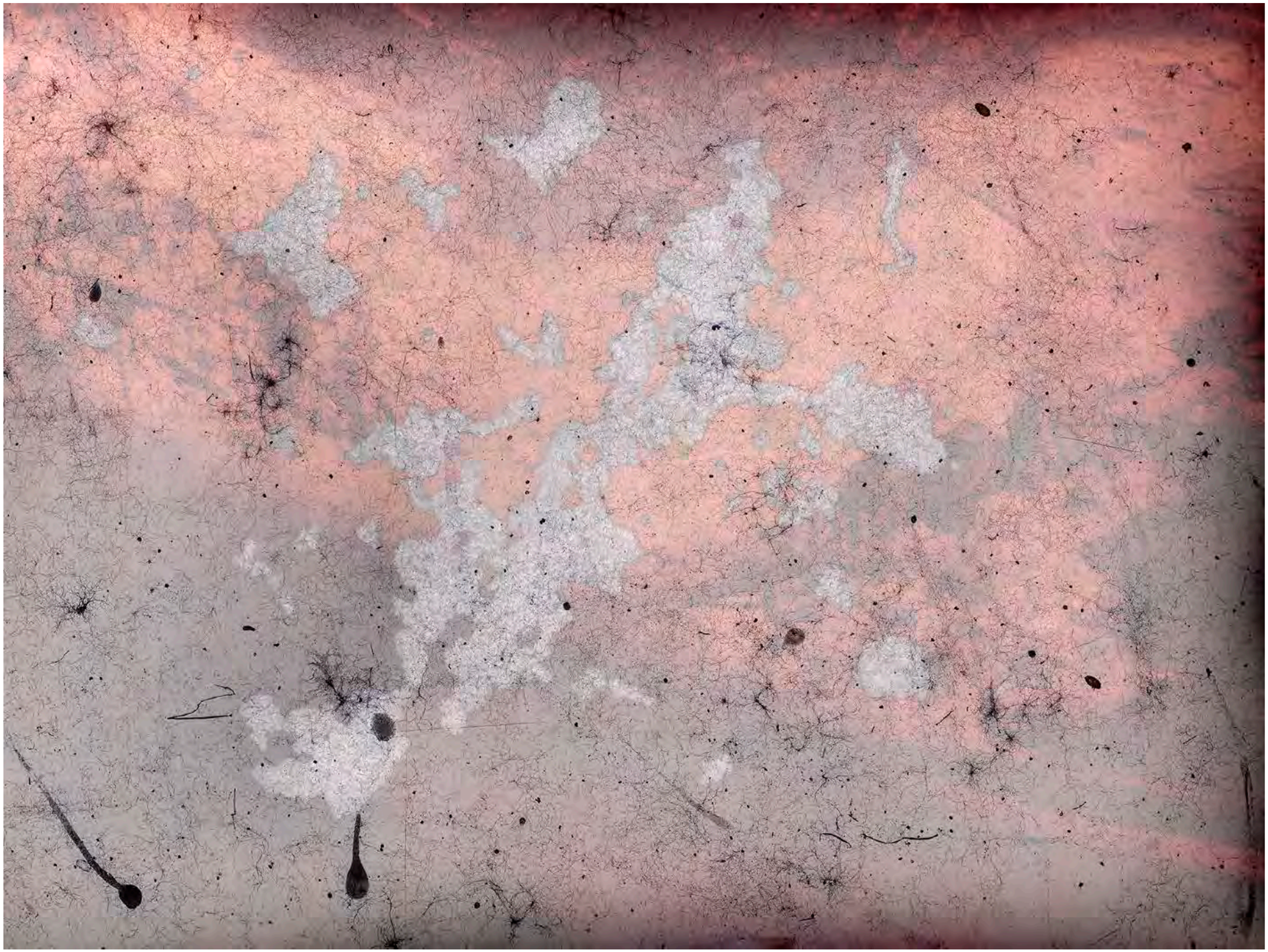


One full frame 135mm colour reversal film slide. "KING's PARK" hand-written and "10 NOV69M3 MADE IN AUSTRALIA" printed on 'Kodachrome transparency processed by Kodak'-branded heat-sealed cardboard slide mount. In Agfacolor-branded orange plastic slide box labelled "TITLE Perth people DATE Sept. '70." // 100x magnification. Ring and coaxial episcopic, and transmitted illumination. Cropped. // 180x124cm archival pigment print on Ilford Galerie Smooth Cotton Rag paper.
(2020)

Dimensions: 124x180cm
Medium: archival pigment print on Ilford Galerie Smooth Cotton Rag paper



Detail. *One full frame 135mm colour reversal film slide. "KING's PARK" hand-written and "10 NOV69M3 MADE IN AUSTRALIA" printed on 'Kodachrome transparency processed by Kodak'-branded heat-sealed cardboard slide mount. In Agfacolor-branded orange plastic slide box labelled "TITLE Perth people DATE Sept. '70." // 100x magnification. Ring and coaxial episcopic, and transmitted illumination. Cropped. // 180x124cm archival pigment print on Ilford Galerie Smooth Cotton Rag paper.* (2020)



One half frame 135mm colour reversal film slide. “Sept ’70” hand-written on Agfacolor-branded heat-sealed cardboard slide mount. In Agfacolor-branded orange plastic slide box labelled “TITLE Perth people DATE Sept. ’70.” // 150x magnification. Full coaxial episcopic and transmitted illumination. Cropped. // 90x120cm archival pigment print on Ilford Galerie Smooth Cotton Rag paper. (2020)

Dimensions: 90x120cm
Medium: archival pigment print on Ilford Galerie Smooth Cotton Rag paper

One half frame 135mm colour reversal film slide. "I-71" hand-written on Agfacolor-branded heat-sealed cardboard slide mount. In Agfacolor-branded orange plastic slide box labelled "TITLE Perth people DATE Sept. '70." // 150x magnification. Partial coaxial episcopic and transmitted illumination. Cropped. // 56x70cm archival pigment print on Ilford Galerie Smooth Cotton Rag paper. (2020)

Dimensions: 56x70cm
Medium: archival pigment print on Ilford Galerie Smooth Cotton Rag paper

One full frame 135mm colour reversal film slide. "Celtic club under construction, May '70" hand-written and "17 NOV69M3 MADE IN AUSTRALIA" printed on 'Kodachrome transparency processed by Kodak'-branded heat-sealed cardboard slide mount. In Agfacolor-branded orange plastic slide box labelled "TITLE Perth people DATE Sept. '70." // 150x magnification. Ring and coaxial episcopic, and transmitted illumination. Cropped. // 80x100cm archival pigment print on Ilford Galerie Smooth Cotton Rag paper. (2020)

Dimensions: 80x100cm
Medium: archival pigment print on Ilford Galerie Smooth Cotton Rag paper

One full frame 135mm E-6-processed Ektachrome colour reversal film slide. 'Ruby colour service'-branded made in Germany plastic slide mount. In 'Colour Transparencies processed by Kodak'-branded yellow plastic slide box with typed labels "FULL FRAME" and "POSTAGE PAID PERTH W.A. AUST. 6000." // 20x magnification. Partial coaxial episcopic illumination. Cropped. // 37.5x50cm archival pigment print on Ilford Galerie Smooth Cotton Rag paper. (2020)

Dimensions: 37.5x50cm
Medium: archival pigment print on Ilford Galerie Smooth Cotton Rag paper

between leaving and arriving (2019) is a photographic reproduction and enlargement of one un-annotated Ektachrome slide. It depicts an aerial view of an unknown place taken from an airplane, somewhere during the journey of my parents from Australia to Singapore. The full slide image is created with a grid of 88 A3 sized prints, coming together systematically to form the image of the photographic object. The once small object, easily held in one's hand, is scaled to a size that reaches from floor to ceiling, confronting the viewer with its materiality, history, and eroded representation.

Additional reading:
Kenneth Tay. "A Slow Descent: Through the Photographic Surfaces of Wei Leng Tay, Vandy Rattana and Poklong Anadang," Living Pictures: Photography in Southeast Asia, National Gallery Singapore, 2022, pp. 360-365

between leaving and arriving
(2019)

88 A3 (29.7×42.0cm) photo prints on paper
Dimensions of print grid: 327x336cm

Exhibited at:

Living Pictures: Photography from Southeast Asia, National Gallery Singapore 2022-23

NTU CCA Singapore **Open Studios** 2019

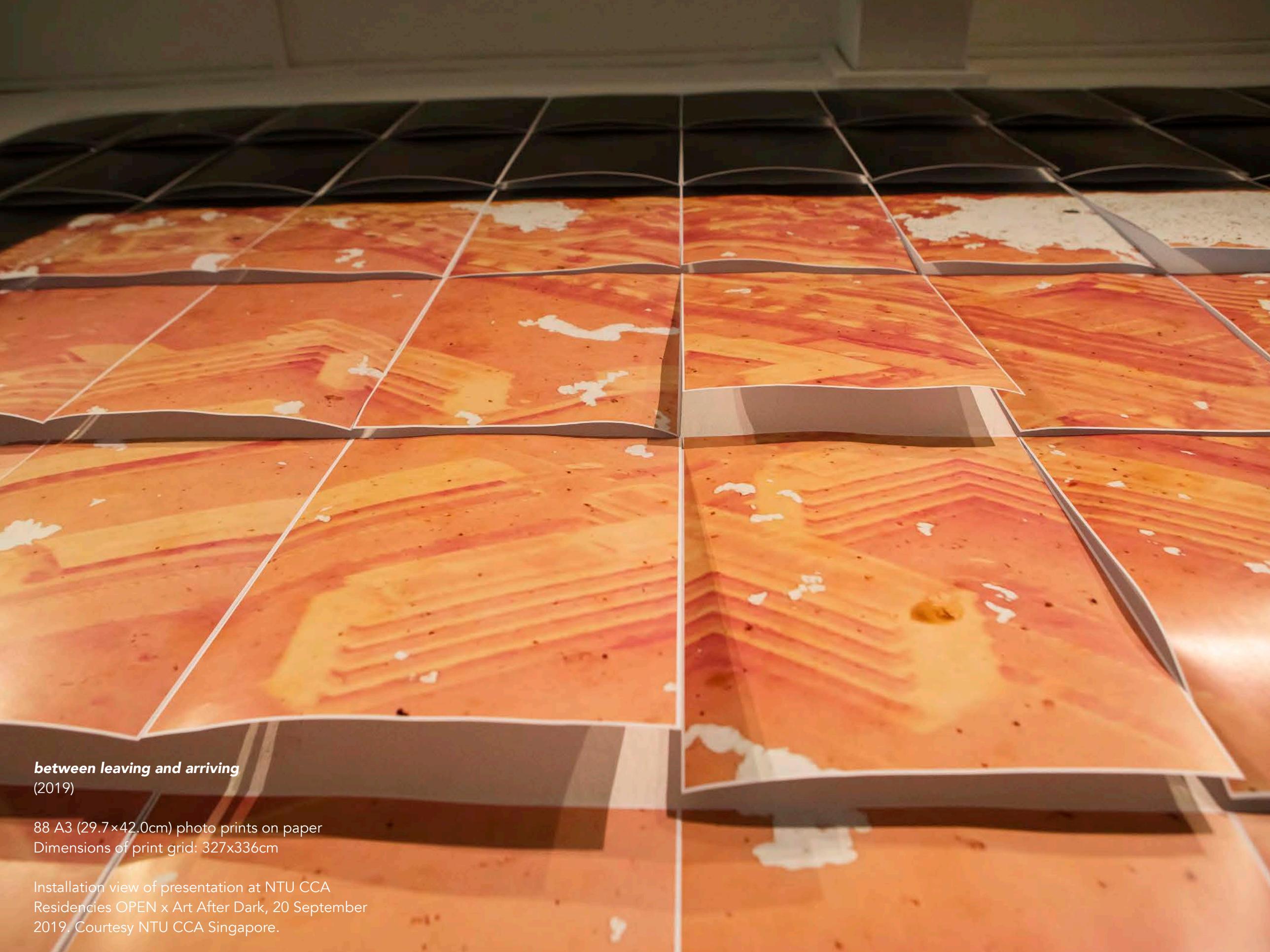
between leaving and arriving

(2019)

88 A3 (29.7×42.0cm) archival pigment prints

Dimensions of print grid: 327x336cm

Installation view of work (left) in exhibition ***Living Pictures: Photography in Southeast Asia***, National Gallery Singapore, 2022-23.



between leaving and arriving
(2019)

88 A3 (29.7×42.0cm) photo prints on paper
Dimensions of print grid: 327x336cm

Installation view of presentation at NTU CCA Residencies OPEN x Art After Dark, 20 September 2019. Courtesy NTU CCA Singapore.

between leaving and arriving
(2019)

88 A3 (29.7~42.0cm) photo prints on paper

Dimensions of print grid: 327x336cm

Installation view of presentation at NTU CCA Residencies OPEN x Art After Dark, 20 September 2019. Courtesy NTU CCA Singapore.

between leaving and arriving
(2019)

88 A3 (29.7~42.0cm) photo prints on paper

Dimensions of print grid: 327x336cm

Installation view of presentation at NTU CCA Residencies OPEN x Art After Dark, 20 September 2019. Courtesy NTU CCA Singapore.

between leaving and arriving
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88 A3 (29.7×42.0cm) photo prints on paper
Dimensions of print grid: 327x336cm

Installation view of presentation at NTU CCA Residencies OPEN x Art After Dark, 20 September 2019. Courtesy NTU CCA Singapore.

between leaving and arriving
(2019)

88 A3 (29.7×42.0cm) archival pigment prints
Dimensions of print grid: 327x336cm

Installation view of presentation at NTU CCA Residencies OPEN x Art After Dark, 20 September 2019. Courtesy NTU CCA Singapore.

What does it mean to make images in an uncertain present? Through photography, video and sound, Abridge reflects on the materiality of images and media, grappling with the vital yet tenuous presence of personal and shared pasts.

This project began through a series of interviews with people who migrated from southern China to Hong Kong between the 1960s and 2000s. Tay sought to develop her earlier body of work titled ***The Other Shore*** (2014-2016), which focused on portraits and narratives from a young generation of 'mainlander' migrants to Hong Kong. But in 2019, these narratives of historical displacement themselves became unmoored amid the protests, complicating conversations and personal networks. This dilemma exacerbated existing uncertainties about the need or ability to continue making familiar photographs and recordings from which to work.

I've had problems taking photographs these last few years. I remember talking to you about how the encounters and interviews I had when I was working on The Other Shore, felt like so much more than the photograph. . .

I think the use of more space and objects has mainly to do with the image — how one encounters it, how one sees it, how one understands it . . . And that goes back to my frustration in working with photography and my wanting to just break it all up. How could I make more apparent how I was thinking about the photograph as I was working with it, to show the document as more than representation? [1]

Developed between 2018-2021, the three parts of ***Abridge*** reflect a process of introspective, instinctive exploration, in which the artist's previous work becomes the subject. ***Abridge*** probes the materiality of Tay's process, through photography, video and sound. The central collection of images is a new body of C-type photographic prints made by rephotographing a corpus of images Tay made while living and working in Hong Kong as a professional photographer for over sixteen years from 1999. In that time, the former colony witnessed significant challenges and changes, many of which passed before her lens. Yet her camera also recorded corners of everyday life, liminal and fleeting moments. By reproducing and transforming parts of these images with her mobile phone — sometimes literally holding the slides and contact sheets in one hand, her phone in the other — Tay registers their presence as more than images, as artefacts, and in turn signals her insistent position in the present, echoed in the fluid reflections on their luminous surfaces. There is a sense of the uncanny in a familiar street or crowd, or the gesture of a boy lifting a mask to his face; flashes of collective memory that linger and are refracted through. This process parallels her initial conversations about displacements across time and space, partially recuperating these images and her complex position in this transversal landscape.

I don't think working with space or putting images in an installation is a big shift away from images . . . The space frames the way the image is encountered, to make the image also tactile, embodied, atmospheric. [2]

[1] This and the following excerpts from an email conversation with Wei Leng Tay, published in Krischer and Tay, 'Excerpts from a conversation', S. Perez ed., Crossings (NUS Museum, 2019), p.21-22.

[2] Wei Leng Tay, ibid, p.28-29.

Abridge

(2018-2021)

c-prints of variable sizes, vinyl,
video installation

Video Installation:

Bus ride, Hong Kong to Zhuhai, 28/1/2019. (2021)
Single channel 16:9 video, colour, stereo sound. 36 min 38 sec. Looped. Wood and diffusion filter screen.

Link to video:
https://vimeo.com/579386661/56af525320

All installation photos of Abridge by Zan Wimberley.
Photos of artworks by Jessica Maurer.

Tactility

Tay used her mobile phone to register both shifts in technology and her practice, but also the broader question of the way we see and interact with images today. This stages a kind of friction, in which Tay uses this now everyday (amateur) device to physically rediscover her 'professional' images. There is a slippage here between their status as images of the past and their presence as material artefacts, the physical vestiges not only of the past, but the technologies and processes invested in its documentation. This is reinforced by the taxonomical titles, each pedantically cataloguing where the original image was made, the precise film stock used, and sometimes the obsolescence of an earlier, once favoured, kind of film. Like those memories and meanings, such technologies are not so much lost as eclipsed.

Such an exploration of the role of photography and video in mediating not only the past but also the unfolding history of the present takes on material form in ***Live streaming, Prince Edward, 12/11/2019, 23:35:05-06. 25 frames per second, 1920x1080*** (2019). This work comprises 25 individual ink-jet prints, each showing a single frame from one second of video recorded from one of the live streams on evening television at the time. This precise number of images is based on the PAL ('Phase Alternate Line') video format, in which a picture is made of 625 interlaced lines of colour displayed at 25 frames per second, perceived as a smooth and continuous image by the human eye. Through this PAL structure, a format Tay shoots commercially as a regional standard, the material form of Live streaming, not unlike the C-type prints, intentionally references a particular media genealogy, foregrounding the coexistence and friction between digital and analogue processes and standards. There is a tension here between the suspended time of the photographic instant, and the montage movement between the collected frames; a closure that rests on the performance of viewing the work in the exhibition space. Moving back and forth between the frames, the narrative passage in time is difficult to reconstruct: do these extrapolated frames make this split second of the past any clearer? Meanwhile, in each still from this 'moving' image, above the fixed television, there is a barely discernible photograph, a framed photograph from one of Tay's earliest series, looking on like a spectre.

Every night it would come on and everyone was doing it. You could stream it on your phone… I wanted to reflect this experience of watching.[3]

These two bodies of photographic work orbit a single-channel video installation, **Bus ride, Hong Kong to Zhuhai, 28/1/2019** (2021), projected onto a light, hand-made screen, which floats in the space. Based on video documentation of a trip from the earliest part of Tay's research process, here we journey across the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau bridge, embodying the camera. An engineering marvel, this mega infrastructure promises regional circulation, symbolically positioning Hong Kong in a network across the so-called 'Greater Bay Area'. Given the sheer scale of the bridge, however, our camera eye can only ever take in a fraction—a moment—of the whole. Where ***Live Streaming*** makes time into space, here time seems suspended, on the contrary, by the sense of endless movement, a progress through liminal space in which one loses a sense of direction. The disorientation is echoed at intervals by flashes of other rephotographed images from the C-type series. Yet, not unlike the surface reflections on those images, grounding us in the present, the mundane chatter of the other passengers—a guy making phone calls, children eating snacks—lends the journey a casual, everyday ambivalence.

Anascopia

In What Photography Is, James Elkins sets out to write 'against' Barthe's Camera Lucida, to grasp another 'sense' of photography. For Elkins, Camera Lucida, a persistent influence on theorizing and thinking of photos, is 'too full of light' to register the medium's other, 'inhumane' dimensions. Elkins seeks to recover or see what he terms 'hardnesses'; those surfaces over which our eye glosses in search of something else, something to interrupt or distract—a more uncomfortable presence than Barthes' punctum. Such a point registers or allows us to register our fears and desires; they offer a means of identifying the image—identifying with the image. In this light, any photograph forms a kind of mirror image. Without this, we fail to see ourselves, to relate, and eventually lose interest in seeing altogether. But what is it that we don't see?

Elkins wonders what would happen if he removed familiar modes of seeing from the equation, to defamiliarize his eye, so he writes out a series of 'farewells' to familiar genres, which invite familiar modes of seeing: farewell to family photos, to street photography, to 'found images', to photojournalism. Rather than leaving empty surrounding space, he uses the example of microscopic photography to literally illustrate his conception of 'the surround', a kind of fullness of that space we don't see. He pictures and describes a series of amoebic life forms, usually invisible in their watery universe, as evidence but also metaphor.

Sometimes the best strategy for changing a way of thinking is to just spend time looking differently. Catascopia, looking down into the world of small things, is inevitably anascopia, looking up from among those things and toward the world above—a world that is then somehow changed. Spend time pondering photographs of things other than people . . . and your habits of seeing will slowly become visible.[4]

The works in ***Abridge*** share the common features of being layered fragments, recaptured and layered again, intentionally revealing their making, their surfaces, as image-objects; and yet also register Tay's hand in their current state – in their currency. No longer informing as they once did, they reflect a past as only so many fragmentary glimpses, stubbornly refusing to form a nostalgic whole.

Olivier Krischer

[3] Interview with Wei Leng Tay, 15 April 2021.

[4] James Elkins, What Photography Is (Taylor & Francis, 2011), p.152.

Further reading:

Wei Leng Tay, Olivier Krischer, An abridged conversation in acts, in LASALLE College of the Arts' annual ISSUE 9 journal, April 2021.
https://irp.cdn-website.com/f0c95995/files/uploaded/TayKrischer_issue09.pdf

Olivier Krischer: Surface Tension: Hong Kong Photographs in Wei Leng Tay's Abridge Project in Trans Asia Photography (TAP) Review, Volume 10, Issue 2: Ten Years of the Trans Asia Photography Review
https://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/tap/7977573.0010.207?view=text;rgn=main

Soo-Min Shim. "Mediating the Media: Politics and Place in Wei Leng Tay's Photo-Images" in Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia, Volume 5, Numbers 1 & 2, October 2021, pp. 359-364.

Kathleen Ditzig: LIVE STREAMING, PRINCE EDWARD, 12/11/2019, 23:35:05-06 in Osmos Magazine, Issue 20
https://www.osmos.online/wei-leng-tay

Recordings of conversations:
Memory, media, escape, Hong Kong: Wei Leng Tay and Yung Ma in Conversation.
https://vimeo.com/652415188/2ea0b46888

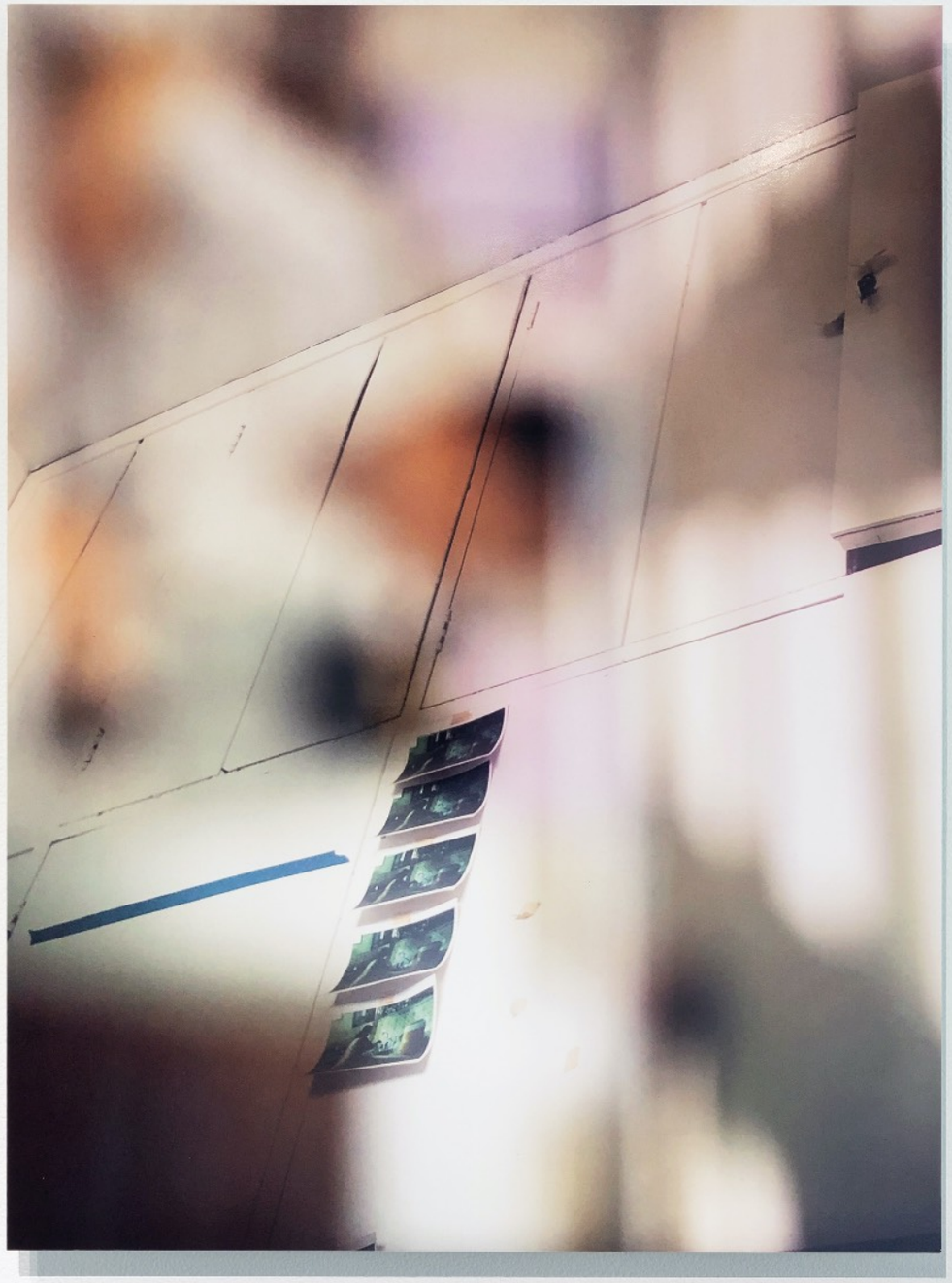
IMAGE HISTORY MEMORY PLACE: Wei Leng Tay and artist John Young AM in conversation. Moderated by Olivier Krischer. Link:
https://vimeo.com/543444471

Installation view at University of Sydney, 2021. From left to right: 1. ***Bus ride, Hong Kong to Zhuhai, 28/1/2019***. 2021. Single channel 16:9 video, colour, stereo sound. 36 min 38 sec. Looped. Wood and diffusion filter screen. 2. ***Missing sign, Kai Yuen Lane, date unknown. Fujifilm RVP100F slide film (Kodak E100VS slide film discontinued), 120mm.*** 2019. 75x100cm. Digital c-print. 3. I***mmigration Department, Wanchai, 1999. Fujifilm RMS slide film, 135mm.*** 2020. 37.5x50cm. Digital c-print.

Missing sign, Kai Yuen Lane, date unknown. Fujifilm RVP100F slide film (Kodak E100VS slide film discontinued), 120mm.

2019. 75x100cm. Digital c-print

Installation view. From left to right: 1. ***Article 23 protest I, Causeway Bay, 1/7/2003. Contact sheet, Kodak Portra 400VC negative film, 135mm***. 2019. 45x60cm. 2. ***Article 23 protest III, Causeway Bay, 1/7/2003. Contact sheet, Kodak Portra 400VC negative film, 135mm***. 2019. 45x60cm. 3. **Missing sign, Kai Yuen Lane, date unknown. Fujifilm RVP100F slide film (Kodak E100VS slide film discontinued), 120mm**. 2019. 75x100cm. 4. ***Immigration Department, Wanchai, 1999. Fujifilm RMS slide film, 135mm***. 2020. 37.5x50cm. 5. ***Residents' office, Upper Kai Yuen Lane, 2008. Kodak E100VS slide film, 120mm***. 2020. 45x60cm. All prints are digital c-print unless stated otherwise.



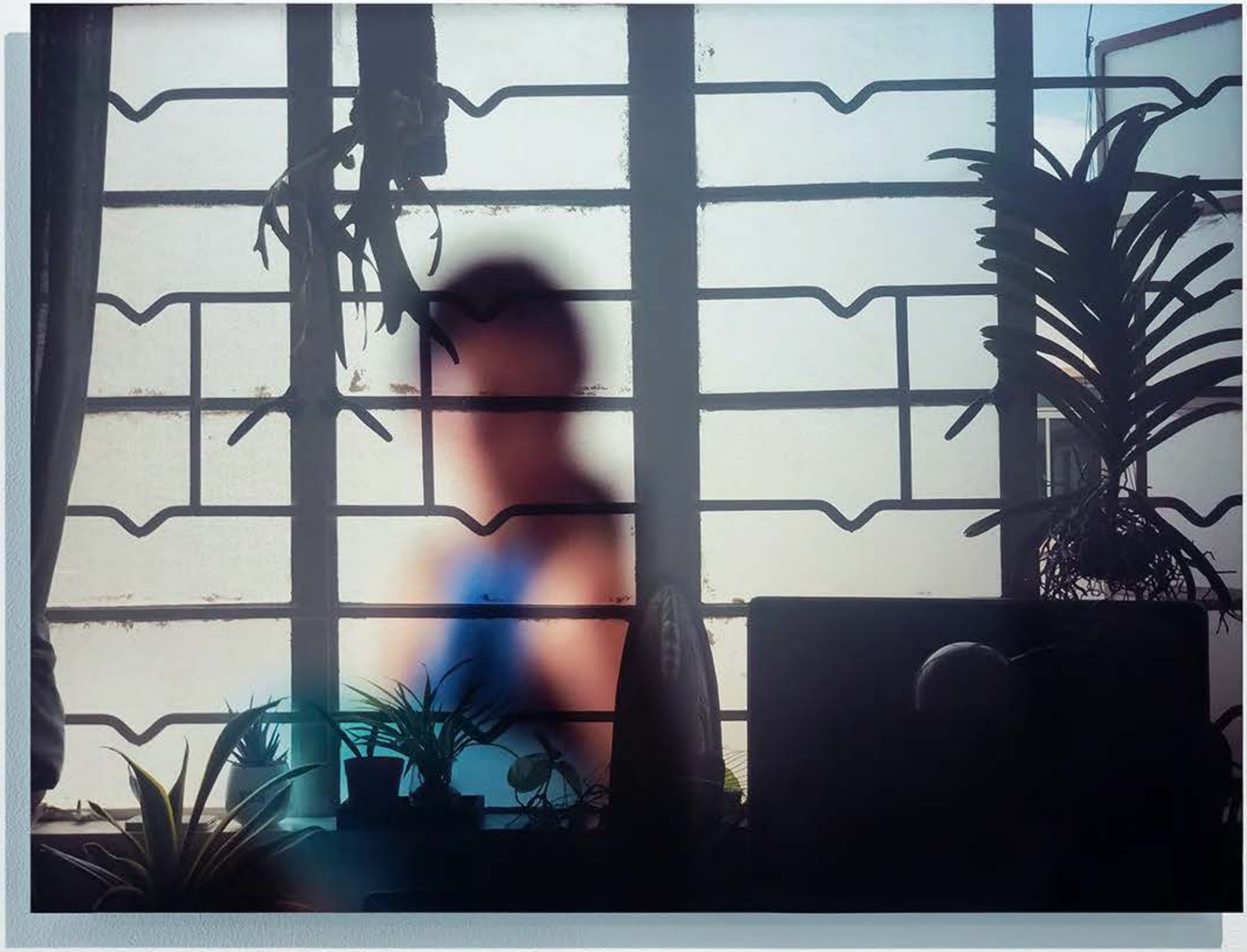
Immigration Department, Wanchai, 1999. Fujifilm RMS slide film, 135mm. 2020. 37.5x50cm. Digital c-print

Installation view. at WMA Space, Hong Kong, 2021. From left, ***Neighbour, Upper Kai Yuen Lane II, 2008. Kodak E100VS slide film, 120mm***. 2020. 37.5×50cm.***Immigration Department, Wanchai, 1999. Fujifilm RMS slide film, 135mm***. 2020. 37.5x50cm. Digital c-print.

文化大革命後就已經forget 啦 in a way, 唔再諗。我try to go through 我個心理。70年呢，我記得好清楚㗎，去廣州見哥哥家姐，爸爸有去，嗰陣時係坐火車嘅。一上咗大陸深圳嘅火車，就有嗰啲歌聽，我係嗰陣時會喊嘅，聽嗰啲歌會喊嘅。哩個就係嗰陣時嘅心理。It just recalls 你嗰個……你嗰陣時會成日想，會發夢返屋企啊，冇得返呢即係唔係成日有得返呢，即係我嗰時嘅學校啊，乜啊。嗷就，幾時開始冇咗哩啲嗷嘅夢呢，我就……應該係文化大革命開始淡咗啦。到六四啦就，no more，即係好clear cut 嘅。

After the Cultural Revolution, I started to forget, in a way. I stopped thinking about it. At least, that's what it felt like. But I remember very clearly, when we went back in 1970, we went to visit my older brother and sister in Guangzhou; father went too, we took the train. As soon as we got on the train in Shenzhen, there were Mainland songs playing, and when I heard them, I cried. I cried when I heard those songs. That's how I felt back then... Back then, you'd dream about going home, because you couldn't go back all the time. When did I stop dreaming of that? Well, it probably started from the Cultural Revolution. But after June Fourth, that was it, no more. It was a really clear cut.

Voice excerpt and translation.
(2020)

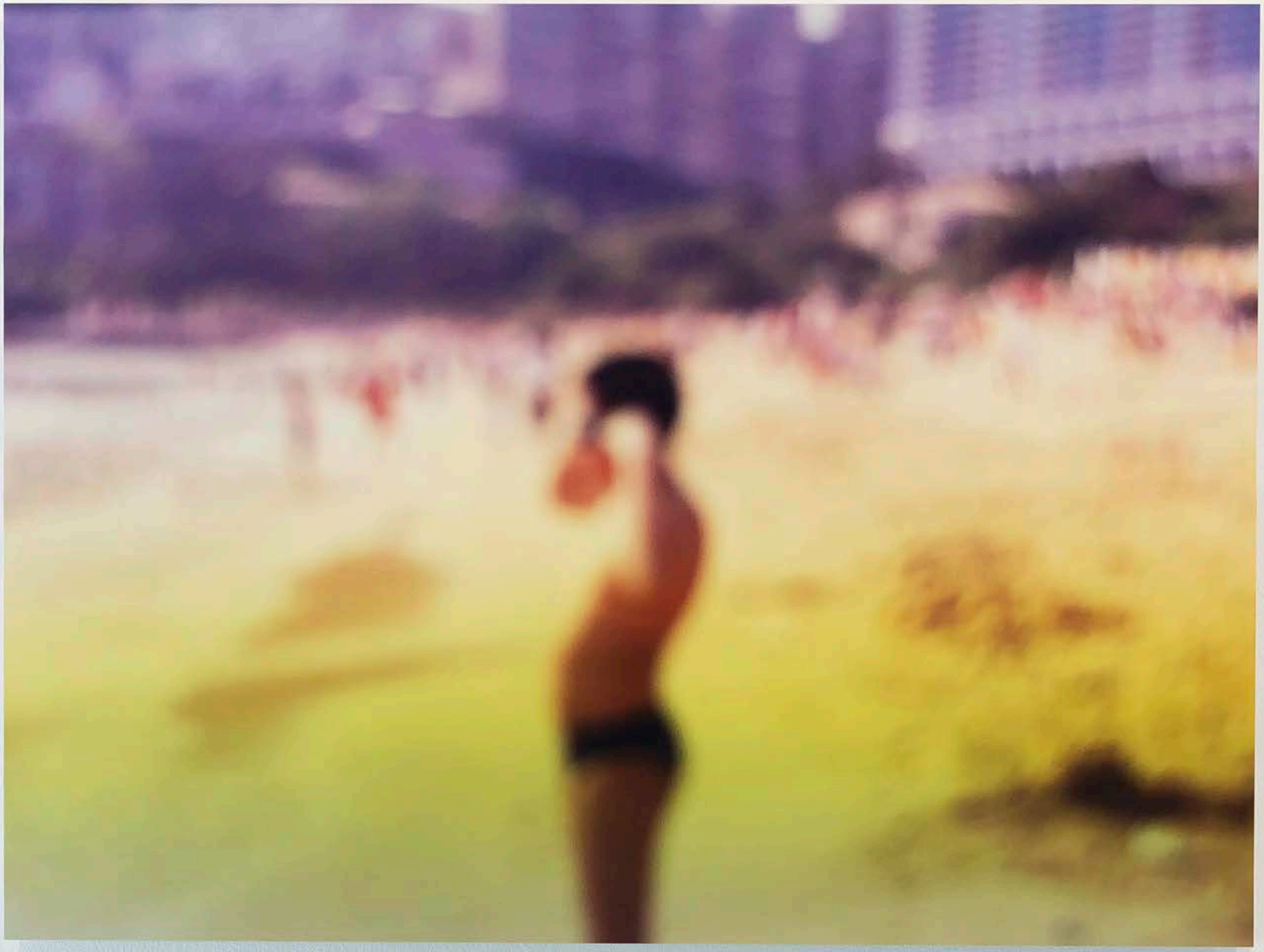


Untitled (The Other Shore), Lohas Park, 2015. Fujifilm RVP100F slide film (Kodak E100VS slide film discontinued), 120mm.

2020. 45x60cm. Digital c-print

Detail. ***Untitled (The Other Shore), Lohas Park, 2015. Fujifilm RVP100F slide film (Kodak E100VS slide film discontinued), 120mm.***
2020. 45x60cm. Digital c-print

Installation view at University of Sydney. 2021. From left to right: 1. ***A boy at Repulse Bay Beach during SARS, Repulse Bay, 2003. Kodak E100VS slide film, 135mm***. 2019. 75x100cm. Digital c-print. 2. ***Residents' office, Upper Kai Yuen Lane, 2008. Kodak E100VS slide film, 120mm***. 2020. 45x60cm. Digital c-print. 3. ***View from Kai Yuen Street, date unknown. Fujifilm RVP100F slide film (Kodak E100VS slide film discontinued), 120mm***. 2019. 90x120cm. Digital c-print.



A boy at Repulse Bay Beach during SARS, Repulse Bay, 2003. Kodak E100VS slide film, 135mm.
2019. 75x100cm. Digital c-print

Dad: *I had thought about it way earlier; it was just a matter of when I would leave.*

Mom: *At that time, many people were leaving.*

Dad: *Everybody dreamt of Hong Kong. Those songs we would hear from the radio back then, we would get Hong Kong radio and songs of that period.*

Mom: *It was illegal…*

Dad: *Hong Kong seemed interesting, very free, like it was easy to find work there. That's what we thought. One day I heard rumours that Hong Kong was opening up. I was pretty much done with the construction work, so I went back to my village. I took some chicken biscuits and escaped, and walked over to Hong Kong.*

WLT: *How did you walk?*

Dad: *I just walked, and walked, and walked….*

Mom: *He walked for 5 days…*

Dad: *No, I walked 3 days and 3 nights.*

Mom: *From Shenzhen?*

Dad: *What are you talking about? Shenzhen? From our front door!*

Mom: *Back then, if you didn't reach Hong Kong in five days, and your family at home didn't hear from you, they would worry. [laughs]*

Translation.
(2020)

View from Kai Yuen Street, date unknown. Fujifilm RVP100F slide film (Kodak E100VS slide film discontinued), 120mm. 2019. 90x120cm. Digital c-print.

Lei Yue Mun, 1999. Kodak E100VS slide film, 135mm.
2020. 37.5x50cm. Digital c-print

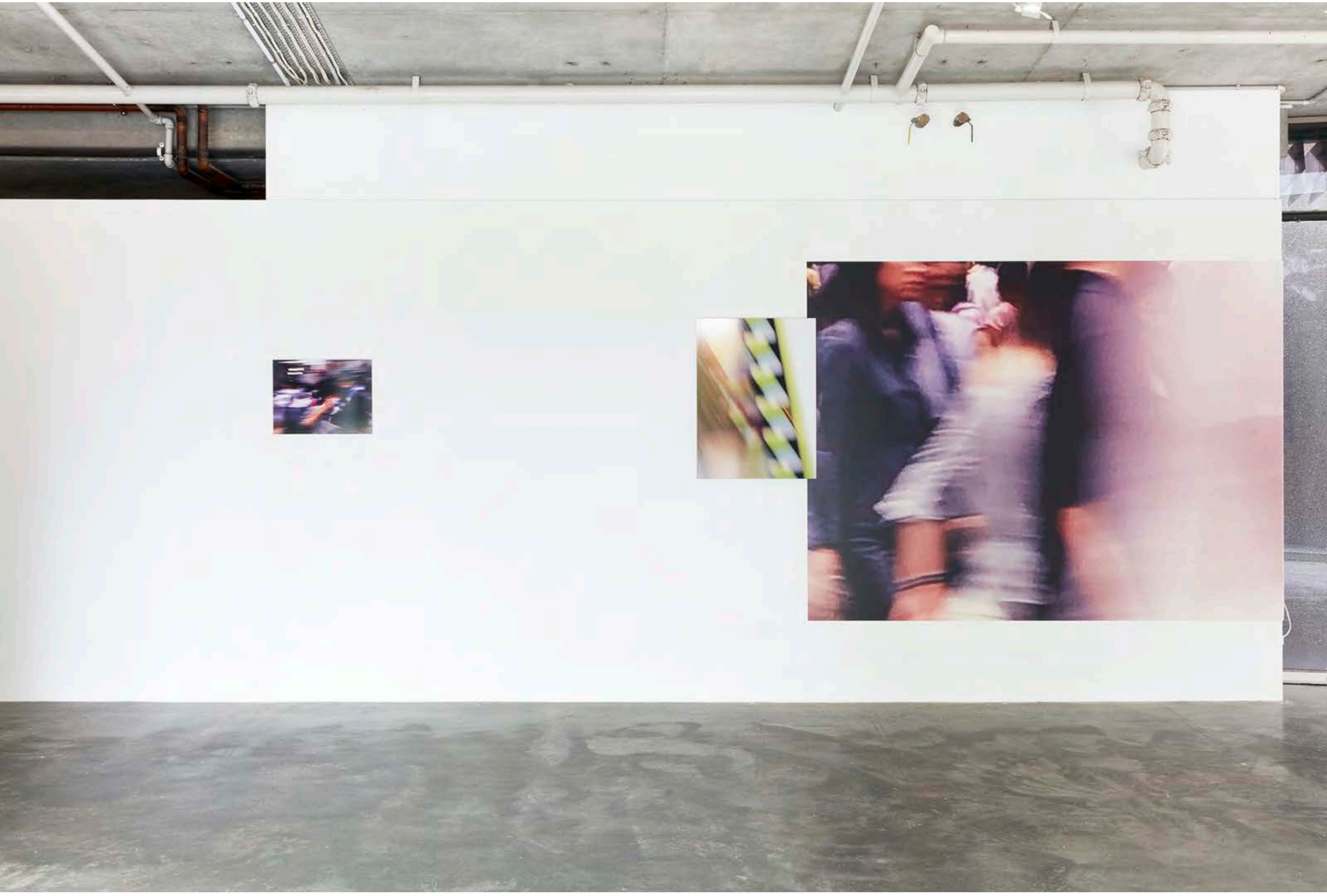
Lei Yue Mun, 1999. Kodak E100VS slide film, 135mm.
Installation view.

***Auntie**: My brother and sister? I've never talked to them about this before. We're blood relations, but we're not close. After we came out [in 1960], they came out after they were grown up and one had a kid [in the mid-70s]. We were already distant. Our backgrounds were different, language… They can't speak proper Cantonese; they don't understand Hong Kong society. They're Hokkien and live in North Point, they don't have many Cantonese friends, just colleagues. Unlike me, they aren't integrated into Hong Kong society, even now. I understand everyone's Hokkien in North Point. Because of language, they can't communicate naturally, that's to say, they might be able to talk to you, but they can't really communicate with you. The majority can't, even the ones who are younger than me. Many have returned to China to live; they come and go. So you heard in North Point the Hokkiens came out to beat people up; they don't think about integrating. They want the benefits, but don't feel any ownership. I can understand that this is their condition. But if they think it's so good there, why don't they go back?*

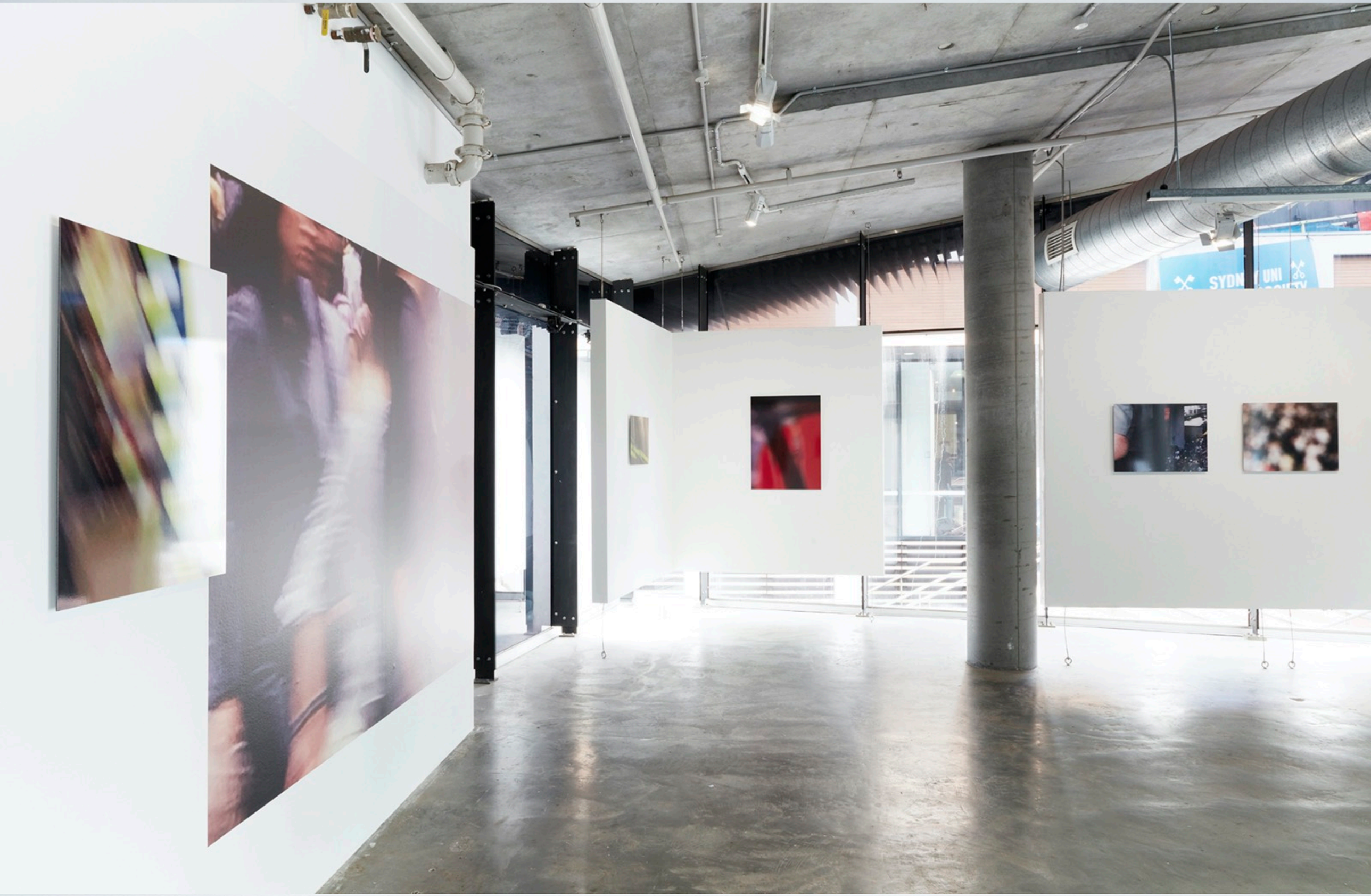
Translation.
(2020)

Students, Queen's Road Central, 2003. Kodak E100VS slide film, 135mm.
2020. 37.5x50cm. Digital c-print

Students, Queen's Road Central, 2003. Kodak E100VS slide film, 135mm.
2020. 37.5x50cm. Digital c-print. Installation view.



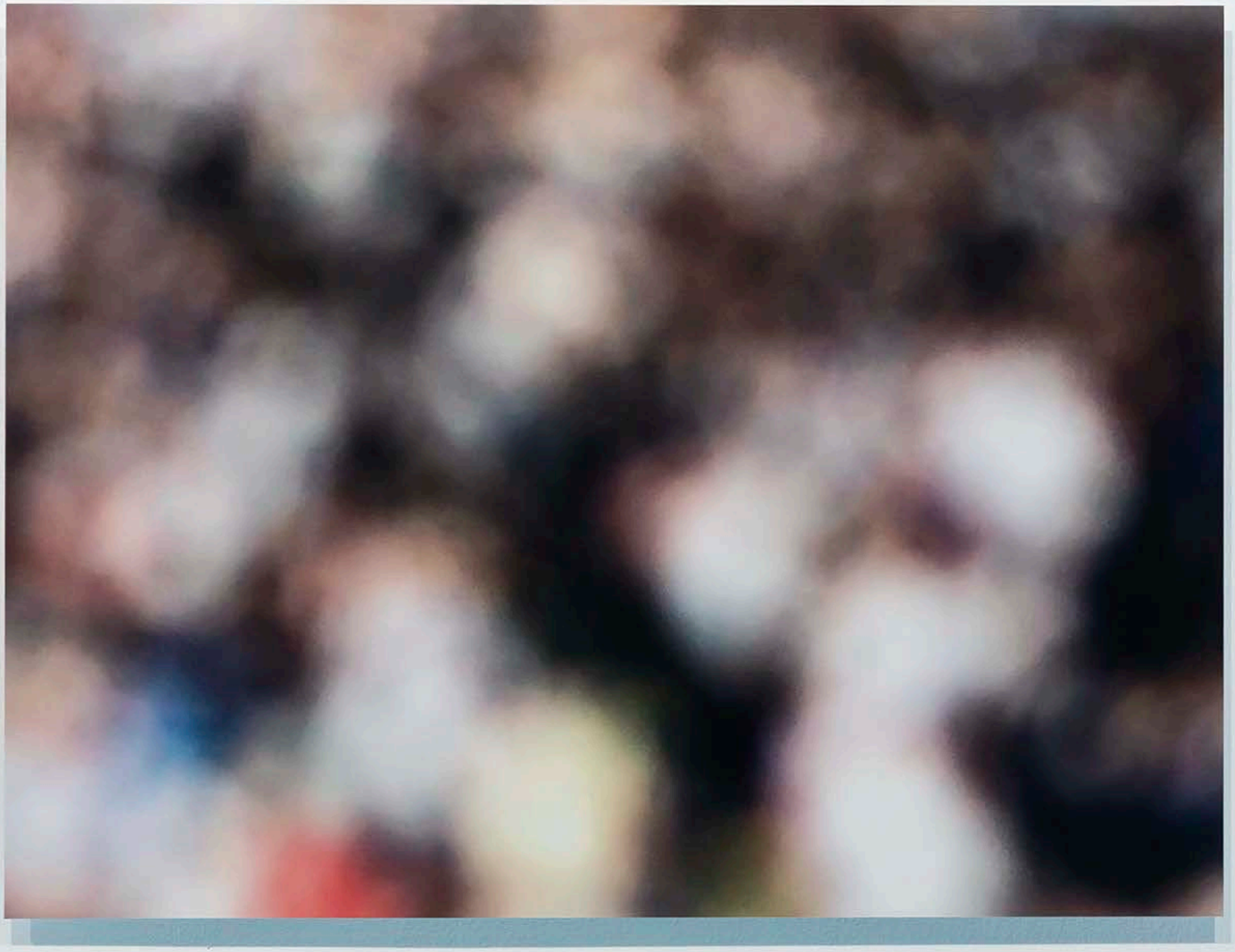
Installation view at University of Sydney, 2021. From left to right: 1. ***Students, Queen's Road Central, 2003. Kodak E100VS slide film, 135mm***. 2020. 37.5x50cm. Digital c-print. 2. ***Queen's Road Central II, 2003. Kodak E100VS slide film, 135mm***. 2020. 80x60cm. Digital c-print. 3. ***Office crowd, Queen's Road Central, 2003. Kodak E100VS slide film, 135mm***. 2020. 180x240cm. UV Inkjet print on vinyl.



Installation view. From left to right: 1. ***Queen's Road Central II, 2003. Kodak E100VS slide film, 135mm***. 2020. 80x60cm. 2. ***Office crowd, Queen's Road Central, 2003. Kodak E100VS slide film, 135mm***. 2020. 180x240cm. UV Inkjet print on vinyl. 3. ***Ming Yuen West Street III, 2010. Kodak E100VS slide film, 120mm***. 2020. 37.5x50cm. 4. ***Grocery store, Tung Lo Wan Road, date unknown. Kodak E100VS slide film, 120mm***. 2020. 80x60cm. 5. ***Article 23 protest I, Causeway Bay, 1/7/2003. Contact sheet, Kodak Portra 400VC negative film, 135mm***. 2019. 45x60cm. 6. ***Article 23 protest III, Causeway Bay, 1/7/2003. Contact sheet, Kodak Portra 400VC negative film, 135mm***. 2019. 45x60cm. All prints are digital c-print unless stated otherwise.

Article 23 protest II, Causeway Bay, 1/7/2003. Contact sheet, Kodak Portra 400VC negative film, 135mm. 2019. 45x60cm. Digital c-print

Article 23 protest I, Causeway Bay, 1/7/2003. Contact sheet, Kodak Portra 400VC negative film, 135mm. 2019. 45x60cm. Digital c-print



Article 23 protest III, Causeway Bay, 1/7/2003. Contact sheet, Kodak Portra 400VC negative film, 135mm. 2019. 45x60cm. Digital c-print

WLT: *How did Hong Kong people see those coming over?*

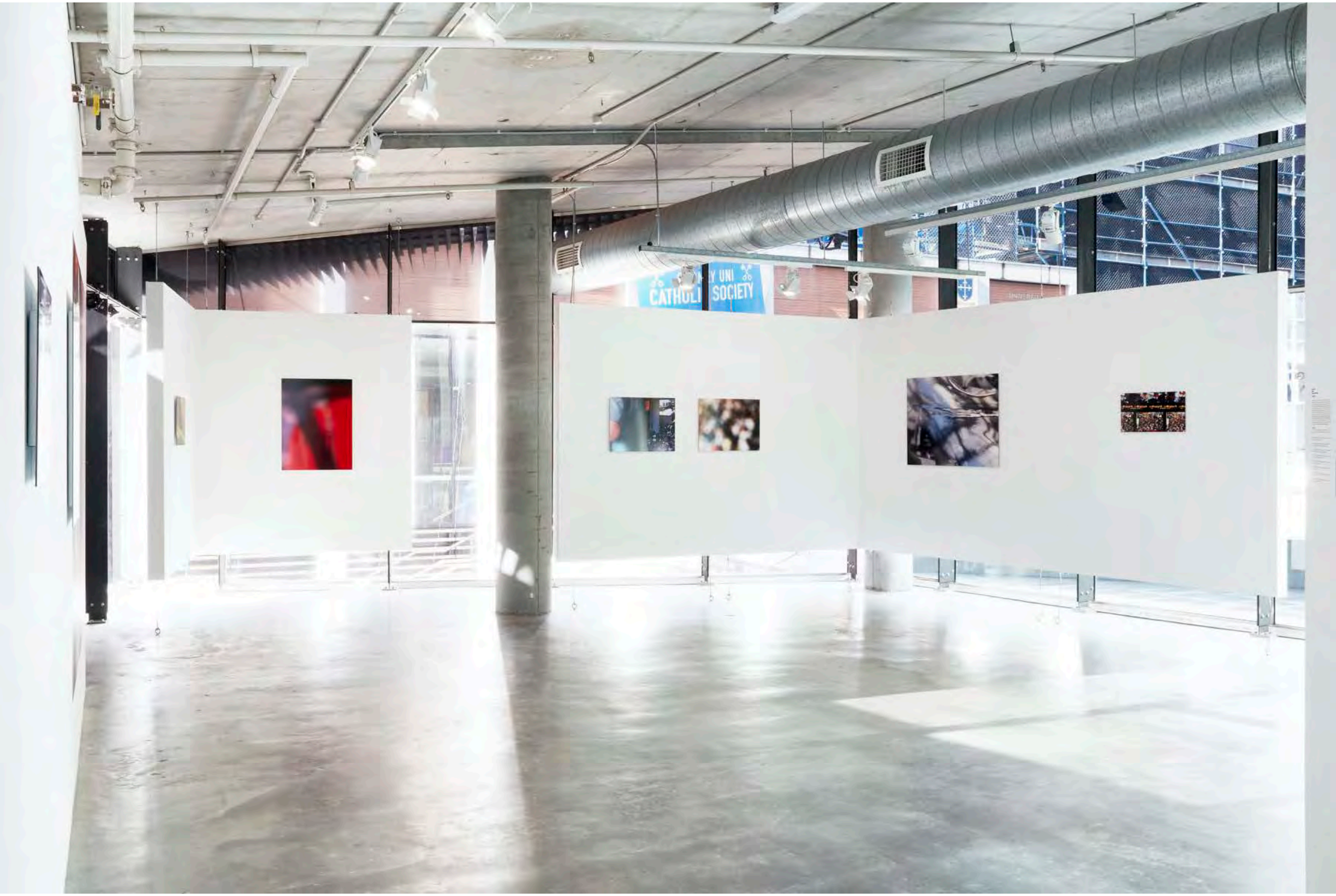
Mom*: There was definitely a difference.*

Dad: *They didn't like it so much; they didn't like people coming here and bothering them.*

Mom*: We are even in the movies — Ah Chan! [laughs]. They didn't imagine we would be so hardworking.*

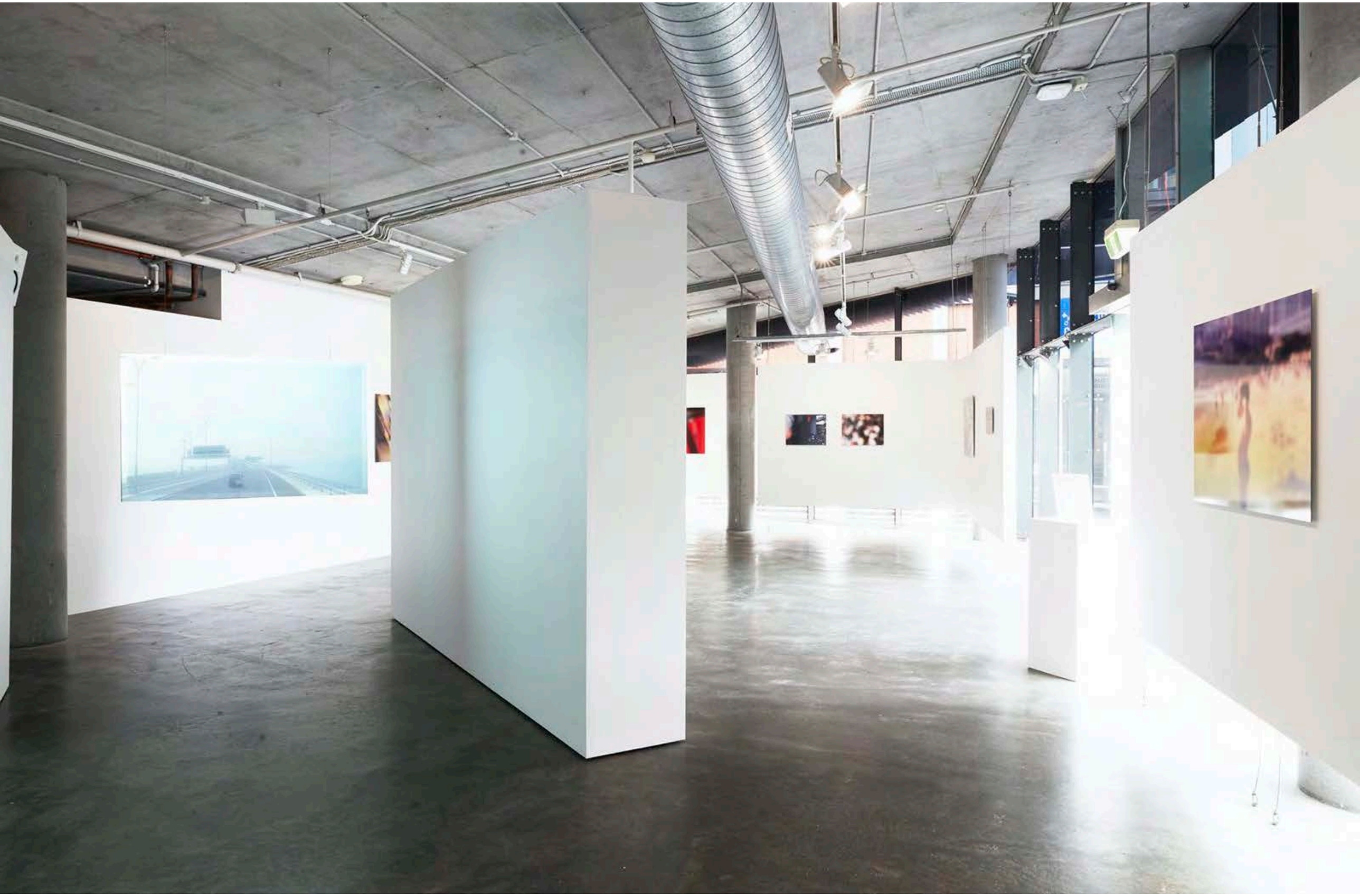
Dad*: Those of us who came out back then, we weren't afraid of dying, we weren't afraid of hardship.*

Translation.
(2020)



Installation view. From left to right: 1. ***Grocery store, Tung Lo Wan Road, date unknown. Kodak E100VS slide film, 120mm***. 2020. 80x60cm. 2. ***Article 23 protest I, Causeway Bay, 1/7/2003. Contact sheet, Kodak Portra 400VC negative film, 135mm***. 2019. 45x60cm. 3. ***Article 23 protest III, Causeway Bay, 1/7/2003. Contact sheet, Kodak Portra 400VC negative film, 135mm***. 2019. 45x60cm. 4. ***Causeway Bay, 2001. Contact sheet, Kodak Tri-X 400 negative film, 120mm***. 2020. 75x100cm. 5. ***Article 23 protest II, Causeway Bay, 1/7/2003. Contact sheet, Kodak Portra 400VC negative film, 135mm***. 2019. 45x60cm. All prints are digital c-prints unless stated otherwise.

Causeway Bay, 2001. Contact sheet, Kodak Tri-X 400 negative film, 120mm.
2020. 75x100cm. Digital c-print



Installation view. From left to right (Only works in full view captioned): 1. ***Bus ride, Hong Kong to Zhuhai, 28/1/2019***. 2021. Single channel 16:9 video, colour, stereo sound. 36 min 38 sec. Looped. Wood and diffusion filter screen. (excerpt: https://vimeo.com/537075608) 2. ***Article 23 protest I, Causeway Bay, 1/7/2003. Contact sheet, Kodak Portra 400VC negative film, 135mm***. 2019. 45x60cm. 3. ***Article 23 protest III, Causeway Bay, 1/7/2003. Contact sheet, Kodak Portra 400VC negative film, 135mm***. 2019. 45x60cm. 4. ***A boy at Repulse Bay Beach during SARS, Repulse Bay, 2003. Kodak E100VS slide film, 135mm***. 2019. 75x100cm. All prints are digital c-prints unless stated otherwise.

Video still. ***Bus ride, Hong Kong to Zhuhai, 28/1/2019***. 2021. Single channel 16:9 video, colour, stereo sound. 36 min 38 sec. Looped. Wood and diffusion filter screen.

Installation view at WMA Space, Hong Kong, 2021. From left, ***View from Kai Yuen Street, date unknown. Fujifilm RVP100F slide film (Kodak E100VS slide film discontinued), 120mm***. 2019. 90x120cm, digital c-print. ***Live streaming, Prince Edward, 12/11/2019, 23:35:05-6. 25 frames per second, 1920x1080***. 2019. 14.06x25cm. 25 Archival pigment prints.***Queen's Road Central II, 2003. Kodak E100VS slide film, 135mm. 2020***. 80x60cm. Digital c-print. ***Office crowd, Queen's Road Central, 2003. Kodak E100VS slide film, 135mm***. 2020. 180x240cm. UV Inkjet print on vinyl. ***Bus ride, Hong Kong to Zhuhai, 28/1/2019***. 2021. Single channel 16:9 video, colour, stereo sound. 36 min 38 sec. Looped. Wood and diffusion filter screen. ***Neighbour, Upper Kai Yuen Lane II, 2008. Kodak E100VS slide film, 120mm***. 2020. 37.5×50cm. Digital c-print.

This work comprises 25 sequential still images from 1 second of PAL video footage in November 2019. The video is of protests that are ongoing in Hong Kong at the time in 2019, streamed on a television. While safe in their own homes, there is a shared anxiety as families watch the same streaming of events happening across the city, and are witness to and participant of this tumultuous change.

Recorded in the toy filled living room of a family in Hong Kong, the television screen displays the live streaming of events going on outside at that time. Above the television is one of my earlier works from Kai Yuen Lane, a then already demolished neighbourhood in Hong Kong. The distribution of one second of video across 25 frames in the gallery space changes the viewing of the event from a temporal one to a spatial one of photo prints, with viewers moving right across the space as they look, and people moving leftward in the teargas in the television screen in the still image.

Live streaming, Prince Edward, 12/11/2019, 23:35:05-6. 25 frames per second, 1920x1080
(2019)

14.06x25cm.

25 Archival pigment prints.

Exhibited in **Abridge** solo exhibition at University of Sydney Verge Gallery, Australia, and WMA Space, Hong Kong, in 2021.

Installation photos courtesy WMA Space

Installation view. ***Live streaming, Prince Edward, 12/11/2019, 23:35:05-6. 25 frames per second, 1920x1080.*** 2019. 14.06x25cm. 25 Archival pigment prints.

Detail. ***Live streaming, Prince Edward, 12/11/2019, 23:35:05-6. 25 frames per second, 1920x1080.*** 2019. 14.06x25cm. 25 Archival pigment prints.

Detail. ***Live streaming, Prince Edward, 12/11/2019, 23:35:05-6. 25 frames per second, 1920x1080.*** 2019. 14.06x25cm. 25 Archival pigment prints.

Detail. ***Live streaming, Prince Edward, 12/11/2019, 23:35:05-6. 25 frames per second, 1920x1080.*** 2019. 14.06x25cm. 25 Archival pigment prints.

Detail. ***Live streaming, Prince Edward, 12/11/2019, 23:35:05-6. 25 frames per second, 1920x1080.*** 2019. 14.06x25cm. 25 Archival pigment prints.

Detail. ***Live streaming, Prince Edward, 12/11/2019, 23:35:05-6. 25 frames per second, 1920x1080.*** 2019. 14.06x25cm. 25 Archival pigment prints.

Installation view. Detail. ***Live streaming, Prince Edward, 12/11/2019, 23:35:05-6. 25 frames per second, 1920x1080.*** 2019. 14.06x25cm. 25 Archival pigment prints.

This work is a video installation of an interview with a Chinese woman from Liaoning province, China, who migrated to Karachi, Pakistan, after her marriage to a Pakistani man. In the video, she discusses her marriage and what she gave up. The work touches upon how one emotionally and psychologically deals with the decisions one makes, and weaves in a migratory narrative that coexists with an economic one more commonly tied to China's economic and political influence with the One Belt One Road initiative in Pakistan. At the same time, the video installation uses the relationship that is formed between the moving image, text and voice, language (Mandarin and English) and translation to question what is happening between the interviewer and the interviewee. The movement that is asked of the viewer around and between the screens brings the idea of migration into the space and asks the viewer how he/she/they want to understand, engage and watch the subject and image in the installation.

The documentation photos depict the installation in an unfinished form. The final screens are hung in a similar manner in terms of size and positioning, but are made with framed light filters.

Link to video:
https://vimeo.com/525601660/7b2424c8c6

***Untitled** (Pakistan. China)*
(2017-2019) 11min 40 sec, looped two-channel projection

Exhibited at NTU CCA Singapore Open Studios in 2019.

Untitled (Pakistan. China)

(2017-2019)

2-channel projection, 2-channel sound, wood and filter screen, 11 min 40 sec looped

Installation view during NTU CCA Residencies OPEN,
29+30 June 2019. Courtesy NTU CCA Singapore.

Untitled (Pakistan. China)

(2017-2019)

2-channel projection, 2-channel sound, wood and filter screen, 11 min 40 sec looped

Installation views during NTU CCA Residencies OPEN,
29+30 June 2019. Courtesy NTU CCA Singapore.

Untitled (Pakistan. China)

(2017-2019)

2-channel projection, 2-channel sound, wood and filter screen, 11 min 40 sec looped

Installation view during NTU CCA Residencies OPEN, 29+30 June 2019. Courtesy NTU CCA Singapore.

Untitled (Pakistan. China)

2-channel projection, 2-channel sound, packaging paper, 11 min 40 sec looped

Installation views during NTU CCA Residencies OPEN,
29+30 June 2019. Courtesy NTU CCA Singapore.

「你就慢慢考虑，慢慢选择……」
'you think it over slowly, slowly choose…'
(2018)

13x50: 650 inkjet prints on tissue
Untitled: 4 channel text and image video projection.
12 min

“you think it over slowly, slowly choose…” is a work comprising two parts - **13x50** and **untitled**, made up of found images and my footage, where the fragility and precarity of a life is articulated through the photograph and its form. **13x50** comprises 650 3R-sized photographic tissue (kleenex) prints and **untitled** is a 4-channel video and text projection installation.

The project begins with my grandaunt, who looked after my sisters and myself as small children but who I don’t much remember. She crossed into Singapore in 1955 with her 10-year-old son when it was still a British Crown colony, before it became an independent country and nation state in 1965. According to her son Ah Po, who became a Singapore citizen in 1978, 23 years after arriving in Singapore, she was deemed not good enough for citizenship by the state. Grandaunt lived in Singapore for 50 years till her death in 2004. During that time, she was stateless and excluded from the privileges of citizenship; she was trapped in a place that wasn’t a country when she arrived and excluded her after it became one.

To make sense of the history, I approached family members in Penang, Malaysia, and Singapore. I conducted interviews, found photographs and papers, and looked for ways to connect the dots. Narratives overlapped and circumstances were sometimes intentionally and unintentionally omitted. Memories were hazy, sometimes judgmental, temporally uncertain.

There are 13 existing photographs of grandaunt found across the families - birthdays, a graduation, a wedding. In the tissue work, each of the 13 3R photo prints is re-photographed 50 times with different crops and focuses with my smartphone, an everyday photographic device held close to one's body. Each frame highlights particular relationships through specific representations of touch, place, people and objects in the photographs. One shot is made for every year she was in Singapore. 13 become 650. 650 3R-sized prints on tissue paper (Kleenex) are made with an inkjet printer. Tissue is used because it is a common, everyday material used on bodies, fragile, disposable and appears weightless. Its tactile fragility is keenly felt when one holds the print in one’s hand. The material degrades the image in terms of sharpness, colour, and exactness of reproduction. The tissue is translucent and porous, and the image has two sides.

In reworking old family photographs, this work refocuses and repositions their narratives, considering the encounters had with family members — the messiness and differences between narratives of the same incidents by different people, and the elusive and fragile nature of these memories in their retelling. The use of family photographs and tissue also question and comment upon the relationship between the state and the person, the value of the individual implied by the State’s denial of an elderly lady’s citizenship, and the internalising by her son of this value in his retelling of her story.

Untitled in “you think it over slowly, slowly choose…” is a 4-channel video and text projection installation. The three text channels comprise literal truncated translations (from Cantonese to English) from interviews of two family members conducted during the reconstruction of these memories and events, reflecting gaps. The image channel depicts a silent excerpt of the interview with Ah Po. The text channels are unsynchronised, allowing new meaning to be created as the different texts appear. The silent video channel is projected onto a two-sided screen. The life-sized image of Ah Po, who is seated on the floor, hangs slightly above the viewer who would be seated close in front of the screen, hung such that the screen moves slightly as viewers move past. The video of Ah Po appears alternately with a blank video of the same duration. The four channels are positioned such that the viewers have to choose between the information presented in the text, and the video image of the man whose life and family the texts are about. This second part of the work directly responds to the identity that is prescribed to the tissue works in its figuration and materiality.

***'you think it over slowly, slowly choose...': 13x50* [你就慢慢考虑，慢慢选择……: 13x50],** 2018, detail. 650 inkjet prints on tissue, dimensions variable. Installation view at Yeo Workshop, Singapore, 2024

'you think it over slowly, slowly choose...': 13x50 [你就慢慢考虑，慢慢选择……: 13x50], 2018, 650 inkjet prints on tissue, dimensions variable. Installation view at Yeo Workshop, Singapore, 2024

***'you think it over slowly, slowly choose...': 13x50* [你就慢慢考虑，慢慢选择……: 13x50],** 2018, detail.
650 inkjet prints on tissue, dimensions variable. Installation view at Yeo Workshop, Singapore, 2024

「你就慢慢考虑，慢慢选择……」: 13x50
'you think it over slowly, slowly choose...' :13x50
(2018)

650 inkjet prints on tissue

Installation views at Bard UBS Exhibition Center, USA, left, and NUS Museum, Singapore, 2018.

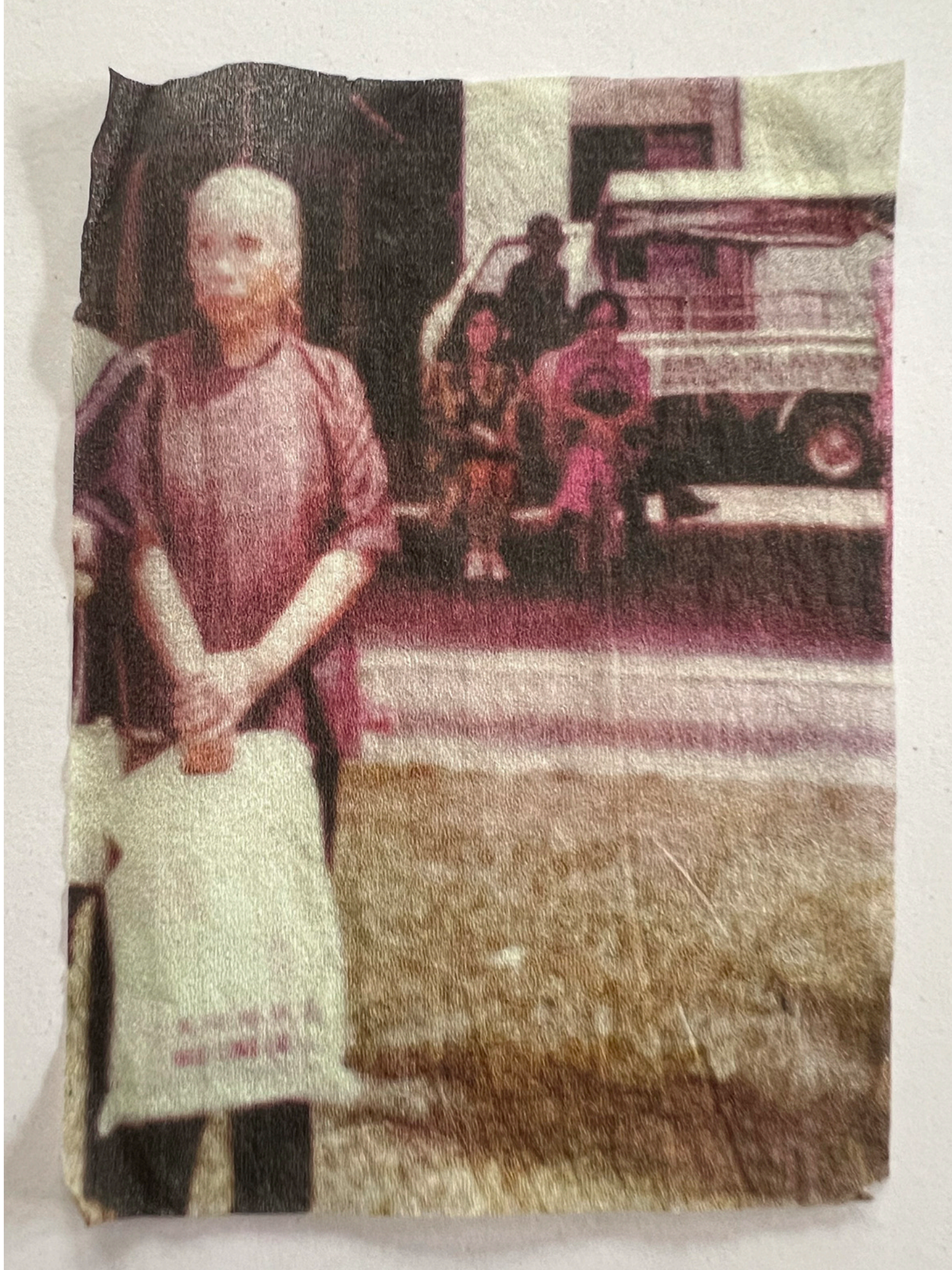
「你就慢慢考虑，慢慢选择……」: 13x50
'you think it over slowly, slowly choose…' :13x50 (2018)

650 inkjet prints on tissue
Installation view at NUS Museum, Singapore, 2018.

「你就慢慢考虑，慢慢选择……」：***13x50***
'you think it over slowly, slowly choose…' :13x50 (2018)

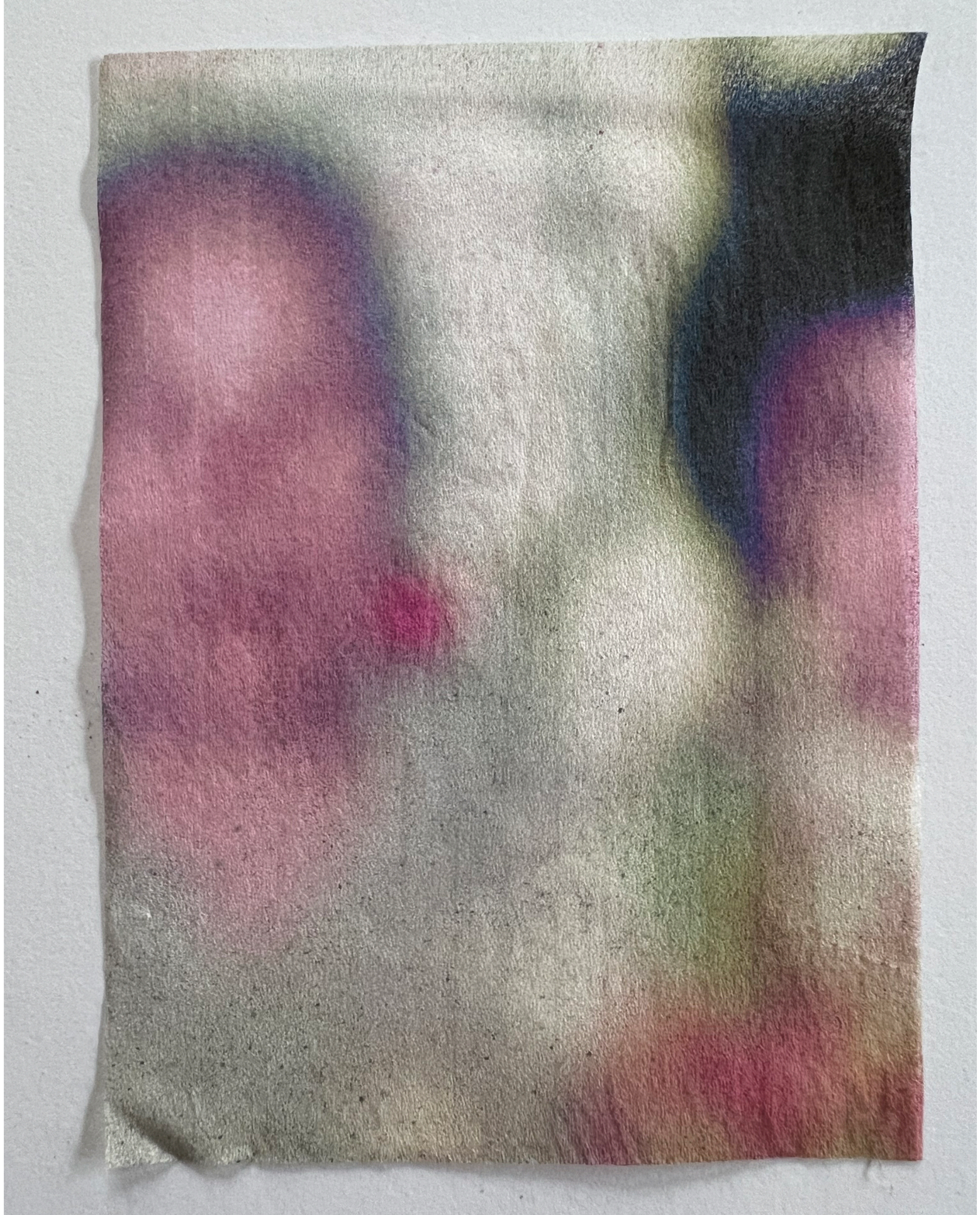
650 inkjet prints on tissue
Installation view at the Secretariat, Yangon, 2019.

Detail「你就慢慢考虑，慢慢选择……」: ***13x50***
'you think it over slowly, slowly choose…':
13x50 (2018)
650 inkjet prints on tissue



Detail「你就慢慢考虑，慢慢选择……」：***13x50***
'you think it over slowly, slowly choose…':
13x50 (2018)
650 inkjet prints on tissue

Detail「你就慢慢考虑，慢慢选择……」: ***13x50***
'you think it over slowly, slowly choose…': 13x50 (2018)
650 inkjet prints on tissue



Detail「你就慢慢考虑, 慢慢选择……」*: 13x50*
'you think it over slowly, slowly choose…': 13x50
(2018)
650 inkjet prints on tissue

Detail「你就慢慢考虑, 慢慢选择……」*: 13x50*
'you think it over slowly, slowly choose…': 13x50
(2018)
650 inkjet prints on tissue

Detail ***「你就慢慢考虑，慢慢选择……」：13x50***
'you think it over slowly, slowly choose…': 13x50
(2018)
650 inkjet prints on tissue

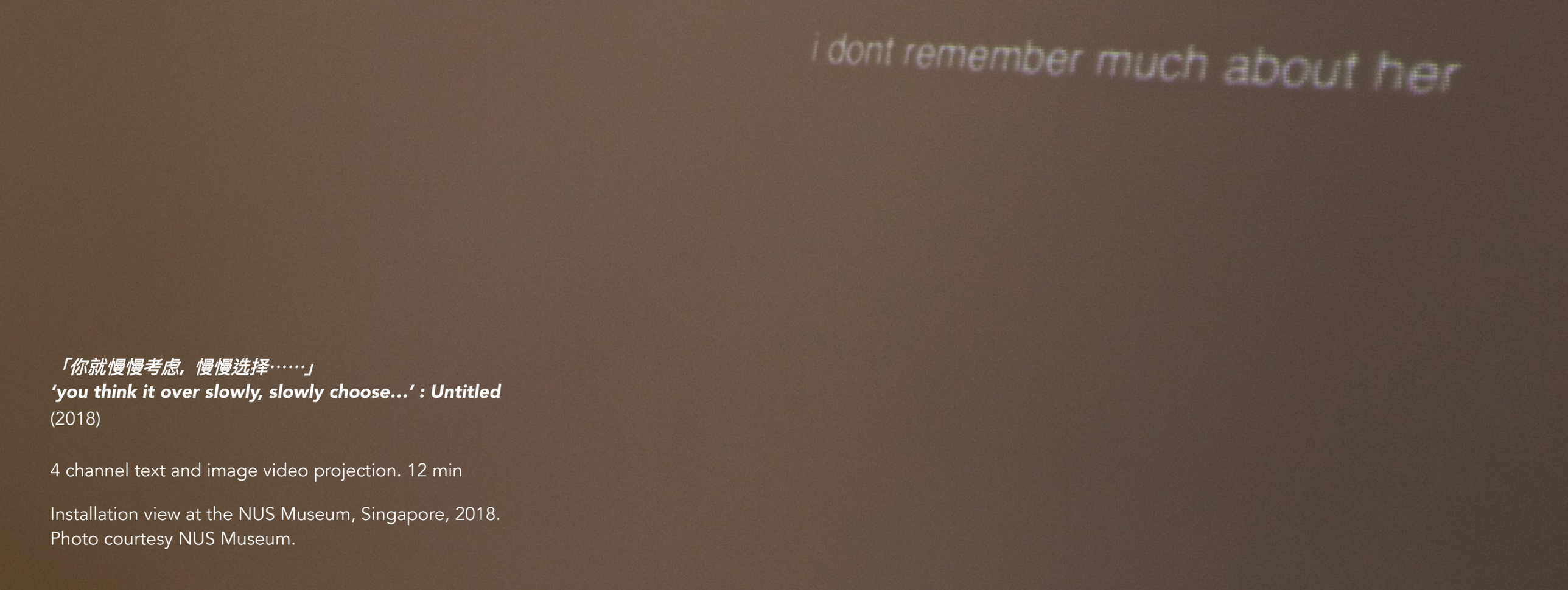
Detail *「你就慢慢考虑，慢慢选择……」：13x50*
'you think it over slowly, slowly choose…': 13x50
(2018)
650 inkjet prints on tissue

Detail ***「你就慢慢考虑，慢慢选择……」：13x50***
'you think it over slowly, slowly choose…': 13x50
(2018)
650 inkjet prints on tissue

「你就慢慢考虑，慢慢选择……」
'you think it over slowly, slowly choose…' : Untitled
(2018)

4 channel text and image video projection. 12 min

Installation view at the NUS Museum, Singapore, 2018.
Photo courtesy NUS Museum.



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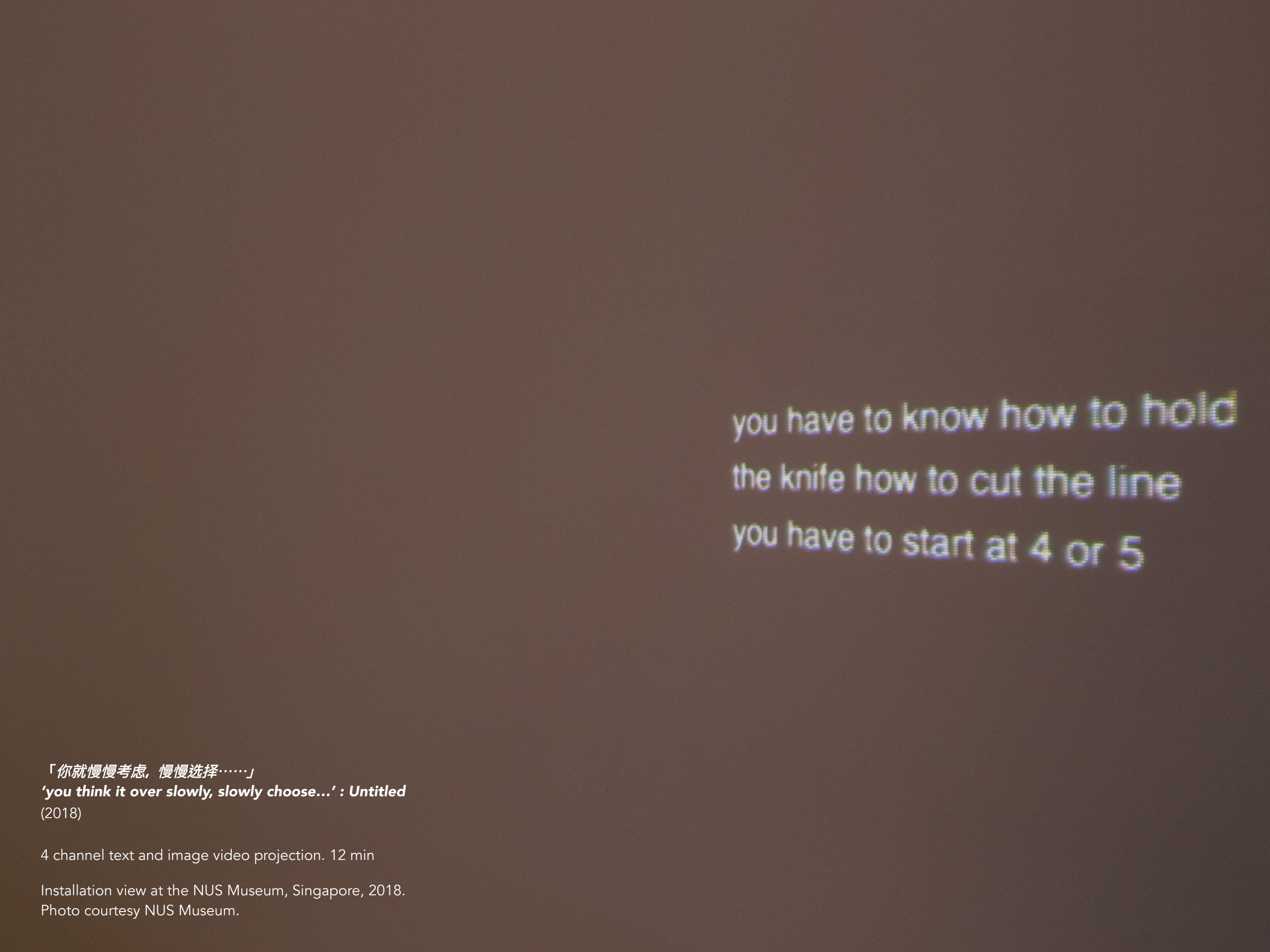

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Installation view at the NUS Museum, Singapore, 2018.
Photo courtesy NUS Museum.

「你就慢慢考虑，慢慢选择……」
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(2018)

4 channel text and image video projection. 12 min

Installation view at the NUS Museum, Singapore, 2018.
Photo courtesy NUS Museum.

「你就慢慢考虑，慢慢选择……」
'you think it over slowly, slowly choose…' : Untitled
(2018)

4 channel text and image video projection. 12 min

Video still.

This projection installation is based on the recollections of 4 twenty-somethings in Karachi, Pakistan. One talks about her grandparents' home and life pre-Partition in Lucknow, India. One talks about his own recent migration from Karachi to Toronto, Canada, and back. One describes her 'family home' in Goa, India, and another talks about her grandmother's journey from Burma to India during WWII. The different stories, are based on a fantasy, lived trauma, an imposed identity based on one's heritage, and family lore.

The voices are layered over and under each other via four speakers, resonating through the repetition, pairing and juxtapositioning of words. The voices are synchronised with the images in two of the three projections. The three projections in the installation present three types of images. The main projection comprises mainly of photographs I made of the narrators' homes and objects, and also video of places passed enroute to these places. They are my documentation of the people I met. The second projection is of mainly video of two participants in the project telling me, via their mouths and their drawings, what happened, and in this way a documentation of the way they present their narratives. The third projection is footage taken from the taxis I took while I navigated the city, with the Urdu-English bilingual radio in the background.

The video and photographs are projected onto screens in the form of parcels, projection fabric, calico and plexiglas. These materials allow the images to be seen frontally and in reverse, to be layered through more translucent fabric, and also to be fragmented. The projections and audio come together in the space as visually and orally disembodied and fractured narratives. They foreground negotiations one makes with oneself and with families and communities as one moves, as one recalls an inherited migration, and the influences these trajectories have. The installation also asks how audiences can negotiate the document, present as image and voice, in relation to their subjectivities and perspectives.

Interview about NUS Museum exhibition Crossings that this work is a part of: https://artradarjournal.com/2018/11/05/crossings-with-wei-leng-tay-at-nus-museum-singapore-artist-profile-in-conversation/

And this is the lady and her pond
(2015-2018)

3-channel projection, 6-channel sound, found objects of varying dimensions, 15 min looped

And this is the lady and her pond
(2015-2018)

3-channel projection, 6-channel sound, found objects of varying dimensions, 15 min looped

Video still.

And this is the lady and her pond
(2015-2018)

3-channel projection, 6-channel sound, found objects of varying dimensions, 15 min looped.

Video still.

And this is the lady and her pond
(2015-2018)

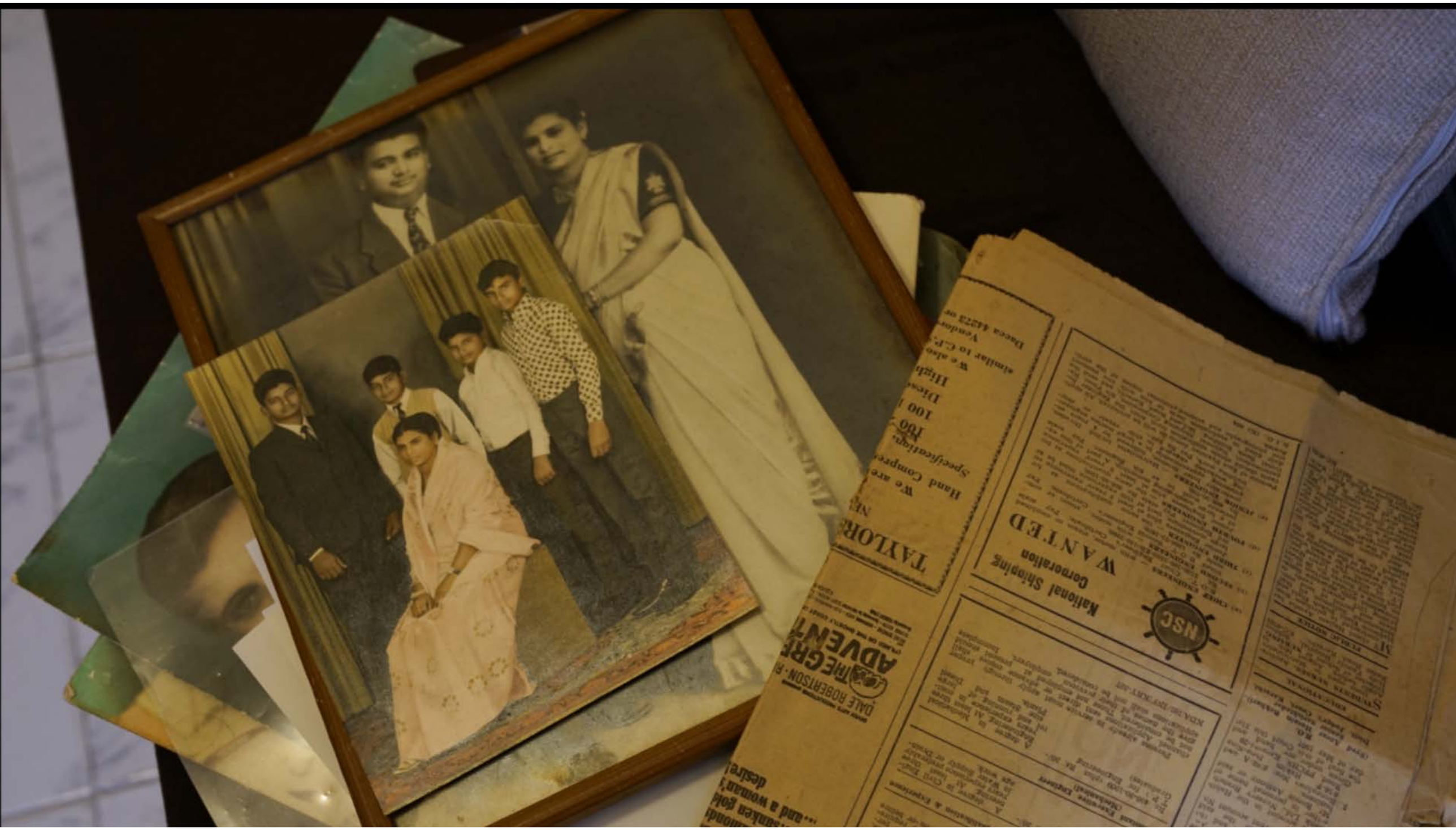
3-channel projection, 6-channel sound, found objects of varying dimensions, 15 min looped.

Photograph in video still.

And this is the lady and her pond
(2015-2018)

3-channel projection, 6-channel sound, found objects of varying dimensions, 15 min looped

Installation view at NUS Museum, Singapore, 2018.



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Photograph in video still.

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And this is the lady and her pond
(2015-2018)

3-channel projection, 6-channel sound, found objects of varying dimensions, 15 min looped

Installation view at NUS Museum, Singapore, 2018.

The first chapter it starts with the horses is based on conversations with an old trader in Karachi, Pakistan, who had migrated as a teenager to Karachi, Pakistan, from Bombay, India, by boat in 1948. The work is a video projection of waves in the sea through a jute sack onto the ceiling, accompanied by the voice of the old trader listing items and commodities that can be imported into Pakistan. The jute sack, with the words Made in Pak written on it, is sourced in Karachi. It acts as a screen, and also fragments the image into the perforated one that is eventually seen on the ceiling -- the second screen. The voice of the trader is played from a speaker above the viewer, and the sound of the waves are emitted from a speaker on the floor beneath the viewer. The monotony of the image of the sea allows for an opportunity for the items listed by the trader, falling over on the viewer below, to transform from sound to image, and create an imaginary visual catalogue.

Vimeo link for an excerpt of video projected into jute: https://www.weilengtay.com/the-first-chapter-it-starts-with-the-horses

The first chapter it starts with the horses
(2017-2018)

Jute, single-channel video projection, colour, 2-channel sound, 32 min

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(2017-2018)

Jute, single-channel video projection, colour,
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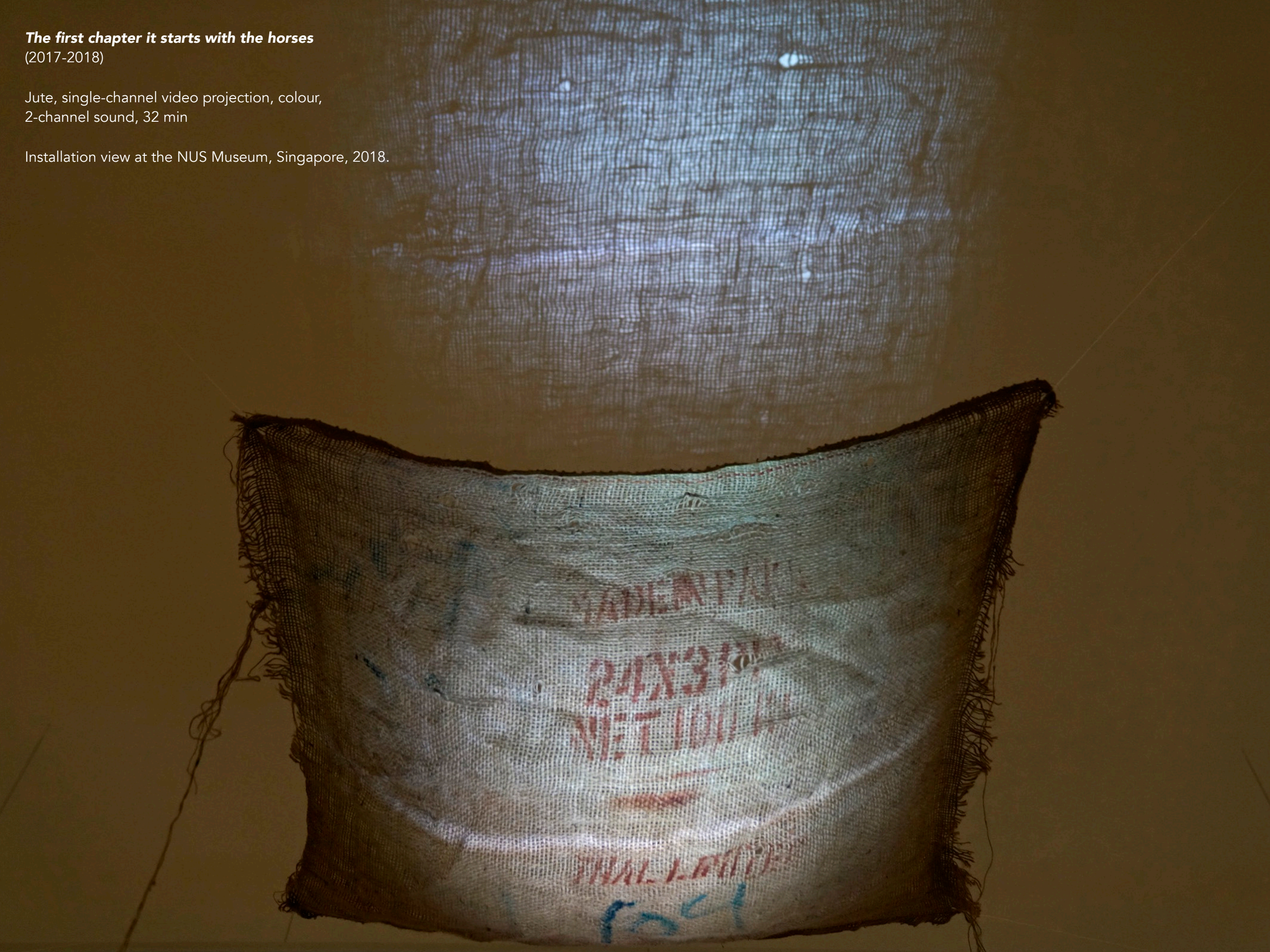
Installation view at the NUS Museum, Singapore, 2018.



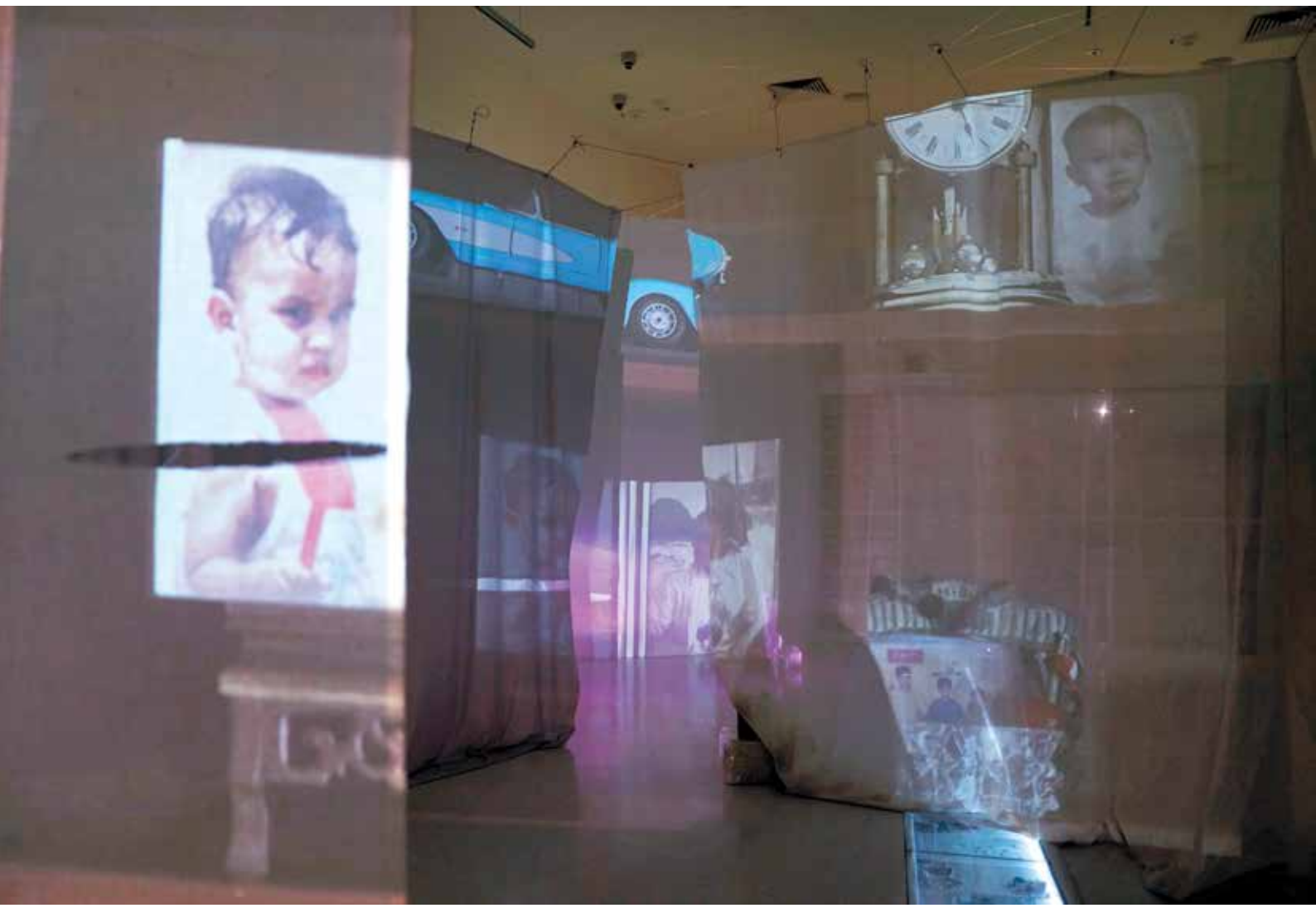
The first chapter it starts with the horses
(2017-2018)

Jute, single-channel video projection, colour, 2-channel sound, 32 min.

Video still.

Fragmentation and complexity in Crossings
by Wei Leng Tay

Roger Nelson



Above and opposite, far right:
Wei Leng Tay: Crossings
Installation views, NUS Museum,
National University of Singapore

Opposite, left:
Wei Leng Tay
Pakistani Man
Photo courtesy the artist

"When we first met, he had prepared several pages of text about his life. He had even checked words in the dictionary," explains Wei Leng Tay. The artist is speaking about an unnamed octogenarian man, whose recorded voice forms a major component of *And the first chapter it begins with the horses* (2017–18). An installation comprising a 32-minute video projection of waves lapping on sand, projected onto and through a jute sack and accompanied by an audio soundtrack, the work is the second of four separate iterations of Tay's *Crossings,* curated by Siddharta Perez for the NUS Museum, National University of Singapore.

Tay explains that the elderly gentleman, who had lived in Bombay as a teenager, travelled by boat to Karachi in 1948, and has worked there in a private customs company ever since. This lifelong proximity to the regulations surrounding the movement of goods—an entanglement of the personal and the national–political which began in India and Pakistan just one year after independence from British colonial rule—serves as a fitting reflection of the concerns with movement and displacement in Tay's work. *Crossings* is the artist's first major institutional exhibition since recently returning to her birthplace of Singapore, after living and working in Hong Kong for over fifteen years. Many of her previous projects have also dealt with diasporic Asian communities.

In the voiceover, the man is "compulsively reading" (in the artist's words) from a kind of shipping manual which lists the goods that are permitted to be imported into the Pakistani port, and the conditions under which their movement and distribution is governed. The words are difficult to discern. A combination of the density of descriptive detail in the man's monologue, his heavily accented voice, the artist's manipulation of the sound and placement of the speakers and the acoustics of the room cause the words to glide in and out of intelligibility with the same slow, steady insistence as the waves which rise and fall on the sand in the looped video. This mesmerising moving image is projected from the floor upwards: an inverse of the more familiar view of the ocean's edge lapping at our feet. The effect of this simple but effective configuration is at once disorienting and compelling, much like the challenging obscurity of the audio recording.

The man's insistent refusal to simplify or to overlook any detail in his account of customs regulations—his passionate embrace of a bewildering complexity, even at the expense of narrative clarity—is a fitting point of entry to Tay's practice in general, and to the quietly confounding and achingly poetic *Crossings* project in particular. Like much of Tay's work, the focus on migration draws on extensive interviews and research

conducted at locations in Karachi and across Asia over the course of half a decade. The significance of this project, and of the artist's practice more broadly, lies not in the stories that it tells, but rather in the ways in which it remediates and complicates those narratives. Tay is not a storyteller, but rather a dissector of tales.

The artist deploys fragmentation as a key aesthetic strategy for dealing with stories of migration and displacement. In *Crossings* she combines numerous accounts of the role of long-distance movement in people's lives with her own personal reflections on family histories of migration as well as statelessness. To achieve this, Tay juxtaposes photographic and video images of her own creation with those gifted her by others. Her strategies of fragmentation include a deliberately rough-and-ready improvisation in her handling of evocative and tactile materials. Torn gauzy fabrics, haphazardly applied brown packing tape, and audio recordings of real-life sounds recur across the four iterations of *Crossings*.

At the opening of the second exhibition within the *Crossings* series, Tay invited several collaborators to recite other people's testimonies of their experiences of relocation, thus re-voicing accounts which were already mediated by the passage of time and the circumstances of their telling. That these haltingly delivered tales were recited in Cantonese, English, Mandarin, Punjabi and Urdu further compounds the opacity of the process of remediation for a predominantly Anglophone and Sinophone audience in Singapore.

The fragmentation and obfuscation that defines Tay's aesthetic makes *Crossings* at times challenging to apprehend and interpret. It's also what makes the experience of visiting the exhibition especially memorable and rewarding. *Crossings* is not an attempt to "represent" the experience of migration or displacement, either in general, or as an individual case study. Rather, the project enacts an insistence on the complexity and multiplicity of lived experiences. Different kinds of stories overlap and intermingle in Tay's work as projected and printed still images, durational audio and screen recordings and other forms of bricolage. This emphasis on the role of complex systems of migration and trade is reinforced by the location of the exhibition. The project is presented in a gallery within the NUS Museum which also displays shards of ancient Asian ceramics and pottery, some of which lie beneath a glass panel under the floor, bisecting the room diagonally. The presence of these fragments points to the pervasive role of mobility and dispersal in the progress of human life.

Crossings is filled with mysteries and unanswerable questions. Whose voices are we hearing? What are we looking at? What is being said in these languages we cannot understand? Sometimes, we learn more from not being told. This strategy of fragmentation offers a refreshing and challenging counterpoint to more documentary-style approaches to measuring the impact of movement and migration on people's lives. Although Tay has previously worked as a photojournalist, her artwork is closer to abstraction or poetry than it is to reportage. It works to evoke a more emotional intelligence, communicating feelings of ambivalence and complexity in response to life circumstances.

Crossings, a solo exhibition by Wei Leng Tay is on exhibition at the NUS Museum, National University of Singapore, 9 March – 30 November 2018.

Roger Nelson is an art historian and independent curator who specialises in modern and contemporary arts of Southeast Asia and is currently a postdoctoral fellow at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He is co-founding co-editor of Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia, a scholarly journal published in print and online by NUS Press.

NUS Museum
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We had to wait ten years. We had to wait ten years. We had to wait ten years to even apply. How does one even begin to compare… We could only apply after living in Singapore for 10 years. Back then, it became independent in 1965, and became Singapore. So if you started counting from 1965, you would wait till 1975, and then you could finally apply for citizenship. You had lived here for ten years, and you could prove it. Whether or not they approved it was another matter entirely. Until then, whether or not they approved it was another matter.

CROSSINGS

NUS MUSEUM

crossings

crossings

a solo exhibition by Wei Leng Tay
curated by Siddharta Perez

Archaeology Library, NUS Museum
March 2018 – May 2019

introduction
Time between
p.7–17

letters
Excerpts from a conversation
p.19–38

stories & poems
MOVE | writing movement
p.43–91

commentary
Between not yet and nevermore
p.93–117

appendix
p.119

interviews
p.4–back cover

Time between[1]

Siddharta Perez

The photographic images on tissue in the trough of the Archaeology Library were found only in the search for them[2]. This is not necessarily an exposition about absence. I wonder, however, if those tissues were the best expression of enacting the temporal aspirations of *Crossings*[3]. After all, does the virtue of exhibitions rely entirely on its makers — artwork, prop, artist, curator, designer, site?

This could be an exposition on tautology, rather than ontology[4]. "you think it over slowly, slowly choose..." is the one work that remained true in all iterations of the serial mode of *Crossings*. It was the work that delineated the exhibition's four installations and museum space as subjectivities that

had specific demands. It was also the work that gestated in its own fixture, leading to a transformation that congealed the project's anxious and generative inquiry: "Who are we to dare speak about/on behalf of other people's stories?"

Crossings began as an artist proposal to reckon with a collection of personal documentary work[5]. The exhibitionary form this artist used to be known for was mainly photographic[6]. When the mutability of the photographic form asks to be addressed, where are the entanglements of representation located? There must be ways where we can think about identity, diaspora, migration beyond the definitions that these terminologies get hijacked by. If an image can say a thousand words, where did those words come from? Are they funneled by specific social

I could go back to Malaysia to get citizenship. But I had left Malaysia for more than 50 years. I had been in Singapore for so long. I might as well say in Singapore. For one, there was no one left there. In Malaysia, who was left there? Just grandaunt and you bunch. There was nobody else.

programming that privileges the viewer to speak in a language that distinguishes another (place, person, time)? Does the context of the image substantiate an affectual association to the composition and the "captured" performativity of a subject? In the desire to rid images of singular "interpretations", *Crossings* speaks — loudly and softly, through interference and in delay. A narrative falls apart. The "story" cannot hold.

"you think it over slowly, slowly choose..." brings us through the iterations. For a work carrying the lowest decibel, it held all the pitches and pictures that occupied and passed through *Crossings*. The ambivalent images printed on tissue sat among the archaeological fragments in the trough, seemingly camouflaging their fragmentation with the sherds[7] that make up the site of the exhibition project. In theory, the trough separates the temporary exhibitions from the permanent showcases of artefacts. With "you think it over slowly, slowly choose...", the trough becomes the intermediate space[8] that locates the withdrawal of one installation in *Crossings* and the emergence of another. An indication is this: for every iteration, a batch of tissues were taken away. Do the images become more stark when we withdraw the multiple quality of the work's seriality? Or does the spectral rendition of the images get amplified?

Here, voice largely played at the undoing of normative representation. Addressing "identity" meant privileging the capacity for something else to arrive — certain selves that are mired in and liberated from a

limited literacy of personal histories and capricious memory. Artworks that become in a space exercise a process of editing. The work is not the document (photographic, textual or archival). Rather, the work becomes — out of the artists' negotiation of both their own subjectivities and their subjects. Across the entire project, we wanted to extend this process of mediation with excerpts from voice interviews. These were not necessarily about oral history; these accounts were rendered as how the subjects spoke. Different languages ebbed through the Archaeology Library, in a way that disoriented the ones that heard them. Sometimes they spoke in ways we cannot relate to. Sometimes the speech was similar to ours but their diction gave away places and generations that we thought lucky for not having lived through[9]. Sometimes they were

我小的时候，我爸爸妈妈都在农村里出来的嘛。那么，我爸他当兵，所以我出生的时候，他也不在身边。一直都我读小学二年级的时候才回来。所以我小时候基本上都是跟我外公和妈一起生活，说是跟我妈一起生活，我妈也不是常常的带我，因为她很忙。所以我最早的时候是跟我外公一起生活。我外公主要带我，所以我跟我外公的感情最好。然后后来就，有不同的人带我，我姑姑啊，姨姨啊，一些这样女性的角色。但是我都不太记得，换得比较频繁。所以我小的时候，我感觉可能不是非常的有安全感。因为总是在换地方。然后，跟我妈的关系也不是特别好。因为她很忙，压力很大，所以对她来说孩子是一个负担。

silent. *Crossings* allowed itself to surface as a discordance, because it needed to find a way for the audience to find themselves[10]. Curatorially, the project aspired for the artwork to arrive at itself with those who listened, understood, misheard and walked away.

Coming back to "you think it over slowly, slowly choose...", voice also retreated with the final debris of the images on tissue. It departed so that our reading of verbatim could arrive. Word by word, repetition does not essentially repeat itself. In seriality do we find the integrity of fragments, whole in themselves. Punctuated by hesitation and reiteration, we find that what was transcribed were soliloquies on values made complicated by social constructions. In the time between words and images that we could

*I was small, my parents
rural area they were
My dad was in the army;
I was born he wasn't
He came back when
primary two. So when
small, I pretty much lived
down and my grand-
why I was living with my
but she was really busy
look after me much.
caregiver was my
I'm closest to him.*

Later, various women from my family looked after me, like my aunts from both sides, but things were always changing, I don't really remember. So when I was small I didn't have a good sense of security because I moved around a lot. My relationship with my mother wasn't very good because she was really busy and under a lot of pressure. To her I was a burden.

define, we nervously locate internalized impositions on relationships with our self, our families and the politicized states where we migrate to and fro.

1 This introductory text wishes to speak in the way *Crossings* unfolded curatorially — under the pressure of contextualizing without having to gratify normative didactics. Usually, I find introduction texts on artists' work to be skewed towards justifying amorphous motivations of their practice or artworks. As with *Crossings*, I would like to move parallel to what were mostly overlooked or nondescript in the work that was done in shaping the show.

2 A visitor came in during the last iteration of *Crossings*, looking for the "tissue work." The visitor never saw the preceding iterations.

3 *Crossings* is a four-part exhibition that ran from March 2018 to May 2019 in the Archaeology Library in NUS Museum. Its installations were generated from a body of art and research work by artist Wei Leng Tay.

4 I attempt at not talking about the object at hand. We know that tissue is a common, everyday material. It is fragile, disposable and it appears weightless. In Wei Leng's reproduction of these images, she feels the "tactile fragility when one holds the print in one's hand... The material degrades the image in terms of sharpness, color, and exactness of reproduction. It is translucent and porous, and the image can be seen from both sides." (Wei Leng Tay, for provisional exhibition guide placed in the Archaeology Library).

pugh residencies, exhibitions, graduate school and moving back to gapore from 2014–2018, Wei Leng Tay worked through her inter- ions with individuals from different generations and backgrounds akistan, Hong Kong and Singapore.

t people latched on to the circulation of her practice was mostly tographic portraits, suffixed by captions stripped of emotionally en judgments, despite their suggested proximity to the artist as nily relation. See *Discordant Symmetries* (2010) exhibition at the Baba House.

ds, by definition, are historic fragments of pottery. The Archaeo- brary presents a parallel view to the making and unmaking of es, and the artefacts that represent them. The sherds in the space de an idea of how motifs and material migrate, coalesce and entiate in the routes of exchange in the region.

eng and I had a conversation about what it means to place these es to the treasure-seeking people's walk over them? Is that a gesture the exhibition is one about the woman who was photographed in ger? Contextually, here is of a story not untold but a story that complicates spaces, contradictions. It is about an individual over ew's life, whose story we would have wanted to be self-evident. Instead, a story that the individual kept as a piece as ing fragments of her life.

of the project's second iteration on 3 May 2019, a was staged by four participants. Our call-out for that ed people who could speak in English, Mandarin, the participants were tasked with memorizing and the views conducted by Wei Leng in the years prec ings. The performance tested the encounter of listening and transmission. It also aspired to bridge the form of the first iteration with the subsequent parts of Cro then interrogated the voice as document to elucidate cy, relationships and nation implicit to moving between

exercise illuminated particular ways of listening and debrief, Sohaib Nashit defined his process of memo- ating to a context. Living through a similar set of circum- managed to superimpose his narrative over what he nterviewee's story to be. For another track, he explained not apply that process because the interviewee was of different vernacular). Another participant, Loo Zhi En, ies in the speech that described another generation ewever, he was piqued by the fallacy of empathy — erstand about another person's narrative may just . "Because I don't want to make it seem as if this more real than it actually is" (from a transcript of the with Zhi En, 10 May 2018).

define, we nervously locate internalized impositions on relationships with our self, our families and the politicized states where we migrate to and fro.

1 [illegible] text visible [illegible] the way [illegible] section the present as [illegible] dialectics, [illegible] and [illegible] towards justifying [illegible] artworks. As with *Crossings*, I would like to [illegible] personally overlooked or misrecognised in the work [illegible] done in shaping the show.

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5 Through residencies, exhibitions, graduate school and moving back to Singapore from 2014–2018, Wei Leng Tay worked through her interactions with individuals from different generations and backgrounds in Pakistan, Hong Kong and Singapore.

6 What people latched on to the circulation of her practice was mostly photographic portraits, suffixed by captions stripped of emotionally driven judgments, despite their suggested proximity to the artist as a family relation. See *Discordant Symmetries* (2010) exhibition at the NUS Baba House.

7 Sherds, by definition, are historic fragments of pottery. The Archaeology Library presents a parallel view to the making and unmaking of trades, and the artefacts that represent them. The sherds in the space provide an idea of how motifs and material migrate, coalesce and differentiate in the routes of exchange in the region.

8 Wei Leng and I had a conversation about what it means to place these images in the trough. Would people walk over them? Is that a gesture that further discards the life of the woman who was photographed in that image? Contextually, hers is of a story not untold but a story that carries complications and contradictions. It is about an individual Wei Leng knew somewhat — whose story we would have wanted to hear, from her self. It became a story that the individual kept as sparse as the only surviving documents of her life.

9 For the opening of the project's second iteration on 3 May 2018, a recitation was staged by four participants. Our call-out for that recitation required people who could speak in English, Mandarin, Urdu and Cantonese. The participants were tasked with memorising audio clips from the interviews conducted by Wei Leng in the years preceding *Crossings*. The performance tested the encounter of listening, embodiment and transmission. It also aspired to bridge the formal considerations of the first iteration with the subsequent parts of *Crossings*, which then interrogated the voice as document to elaborate ideas of agency, relationships and nation implicit to moving between places of home.

10 The recitation exercise illuminated particular ways of listening and retelling. In a debrief, Sohaib Nashit, defined his process of memorizing by relating to a context. Living through a similar set of circumstances, he managed to superimpose his narrative over what he imagined the interviewee's story to be. For another track, he explained that he could not apply that process because the interviewee was of another "race" (different vernacular). Another participant, Loo Zhi En, identified specificities in the speech that described another generation and upbringing. However, he was piqued by the fallacy of empathy — that what we understand about another person's narrative may just be simply theoretical. "Because I don't want to make it seem as if this connection is any more real than it actually is" (from a transcript of the debrief interview with Zhi En, 10 May 2018).

...My grandmother fell severely ill. She fell ill to the point that she could not go forward. Her family could not carry her forward. Because she was so unwell, they took the decision to leave her behind, and they left her behind assuming that within the next few hours or days she would die. And she was lying there, and around this time they were somewhere close to India. This group of people from India came, and were looking for people who were either dead, or alive, had survived. So they found her, took her to their village or home, and treated her, so eventually she got better and she was there till the war ended.

Excerpts from a conversation

Olivier Krischer & Wei Leng Tay

Sat, Feb 23, 2019 at 10:10 PM

Dear Wei Leng,

You seem to move fluidly — does it feel that way?
Do you take bits of "home" with you;
does it matter?
For someone whose practice is often built on levels of intimacy or familiarity, yet in such different places – how do you get to know a place and the people there?
Where do you start?

Olivier

Mon, Feb 25, 2019 at 8:21 AM

Good morning Olivier,

When you ask if it matters, I wonder if it is not just a question of "home", but also a question of perspective and habit. As much as I want to, it is difficult for me to escape my own mind wherever I go; so that frames my encounters, however strange or new, and introduces an initial sense of familiarity in my approach to what is foreign. Also, I have routines that comfort me. For example, I have the same boring breakfast wherever I am, if I can get it — fruit, yoghurt and muesli. To think of "home" as a place one belongs to is perhaps different from a condition that gives comfort.

But the encounters are usually difficult because they are often confusing. They require a constant re-evaluation of myself, my values. The encounters are also difficult because I am meeting strangers and getting to know people. These processes are important to me, but I am not a natural extrovert.

You ask how I start? I start with trying to get a broad understanding of the place — its economics, hierarchies, politics — and through reading articles I find and that friends send me. I meet people and then get a sense of their relationships to the place, how they live, and then we speak on a more intimate level through interviews or casual chats.

Wei Leng

Thu, Feb 28, 2019 at 3:17 AM

Hello Wei Leng,

I remember writing that in your photos it felt like we, as the viewer, were being somehow invited into an intimate or personal space through your mediation. I was thinking at that time more about the work *Convergence*, and *The Other Shore*. Your projects have developed considerably since then, becoming more complex, more diffuse too, and more about spaces than images — spaces to move through, incorporating objects. Do you feel like they have become more about your relationship with the subjects and these contexts, rather than "places"?

Olivier

——

Fri, Mar 1, 2019 at 2:18 AM

Hi Olivier,

I've had problems taking photographs these last few years. I remember talking to you about how the encounters and interviews I had when I was working on *The Other Shore* felt like so much more than the photograph. I always think about the image and the relationship with the people in the projects.

I think the use of more space and objects has mainly to do with the image — how one encounters it, how

one sees it, how one understands it. The objects, while they have some contextual importance, also function as screens, feeding the image and reception. And that goes back to my frustration in working with photography, and my wanting to just break it all up. How could I make more apparent how I was thinking about the photograph as I worked with it, to show the document as more than representation?

Also, I started working with a digital camera at the end of 2015, when I started working in Pakistan. That switch, from transparency film to digital, medium format to a smaller mobile camera, also changed my relationship to the camera and the people I was photographing.

Wei Leng

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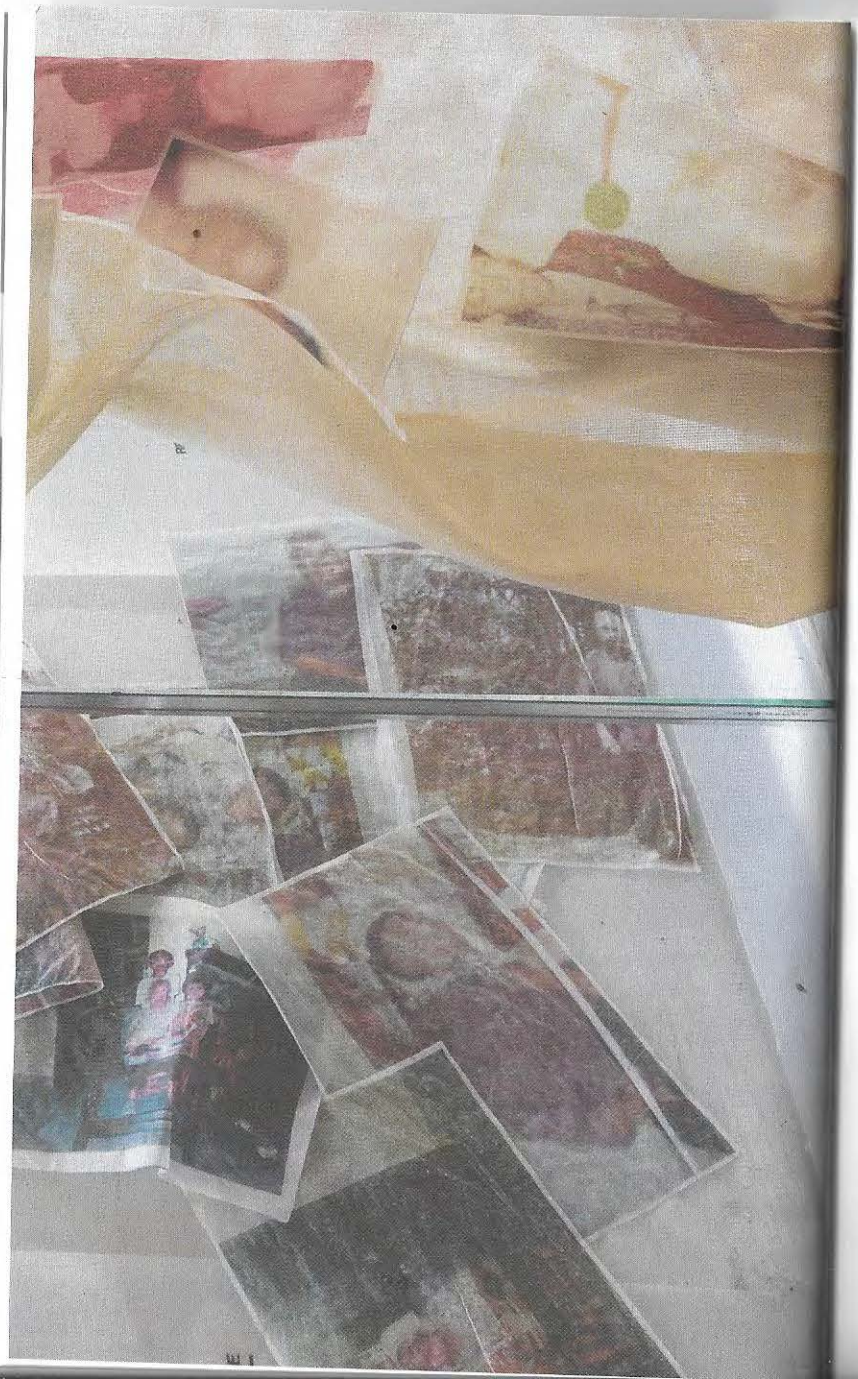
Fri, Mar 1, 2019 at 7:01 AM

It's a big shift to move from images, no? It sounds like you are searching for ways to share this complexity, intimacy; to share the worlds you encounter — or is the work something other, an alternative, in between?

I guess I'm describing work that distances itself from narrative function somewhat, even while I think you are quite fascinated in the stories, in the incidental elements.



ve've wandered into the issue of fictions. It's as, or perhaps natural, that someone who has ed professionally in the world of "truth telling" hotojournalism — should seek the personal in posite direction.

— —

Sat, Mar 2, 2019 at 12:55 AM

Here we've wandered into the issue of fictions. It's curious, or perhaps natural, that someone who has worked professionally in the world of "truth telling" — of photojournalism — should seek the personal in the opposite direction.

Olivier

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Sat, Mar 2, 2019 at 12:55 AM

Hi Olivier,

I do like stories, and many people I meet share their lives with me. And as I listen and ask questions, I have always wondered about what is happening

[illegible] sure where in India she [illegible] from. But, what I remem- [illegible] her story was that she [illegible] and they walked [illegible] the jungle. So I'm guessing [illegible] be somewhere near [illegible] of India. She never [illegible] mentioned where [illegible] did mention when these [illegible] took her, they took her [illegible] mountainous area. And [illegible] she got well she would [illegible] the hills and she enjoyed [illegible] because she was in nature [illegible] she was a young [illegible] had the liberty to just go out and enjoy herself. So I remember her telling me that she would go out into the mountains and hills and enjoy herself and she recalls that as the best time of her life because she was absolutely free. And even though she was away from her family, she felt happy. But, um, after that when she did come, she just felt like her life took different turns. So I recall her telling me that that period, even though it was just a few months, was the happiest period of her life.

between myself and the person who is telling me about his/her/their life. So perhaps it's natural that I want to think about that when presenting the work. I don't think I am sharing worlds though; I'm not providing some window into some person's life or culture — far from it. When I meet people and they are talking about things that happened to them, there are so many gaps, and if and when they retell the same stories, things might shift, even just simply in how they are told. So, then it's a question of how one can piece these memories and lives together, but it's precisely that inability to represent anybody or anything "accurately," and trying to make sense of it for myself that makes me go on.

I don't think working with space or putting images in installation is a big shift away from images. My

但倒过来说，他们来到这里，好像一段足够长的时间以后，他们就会忘记了这件事情。在我的角度来看，我觉得我的舅父忘记了这件事情，我妈妈忘记了这件事情。于是他们就单纯的站在一个，嗯，与大陆人不一样的角度来看所有的事情，所以就变成是今到香港看大陆这件事情[的时候]更加的疏远，甚至曾经跟大陆非常亲密的人都会突然间[觉得自己]跟大陆是不一样的 - 我跟他们是不一样的 - [以]好像隔岸观火一样的一种看法去看所有的事情。

work deals fundamentally with the image and photograph, with the relationship that happens — between myself, the person I am talking/interacting with, and the place. The space frames the way the image is encountered, to make the image also tactile, embodied, atmospheric.

And how one responds to an image, in my mind, is also related to how one responds to another person. The question of intimacy comes up so much when people talk about my work. You didn't answer my questions about including myself in my work more physically or obviously. That seems related.

x wei leng

[illegible] after they have been [illegible] long enough, they forget [illegible]. In my opinion, I feel [illegible] has already forgotten [illegible] too. So then they [illegible] entirely different post[illegible] Mainland Chinese [illegible] on everything, and this [illegible] the sense of distance Hong Kong feels from China. Even people who were once intimately tied to China will think they are different from Mainland Chinese, presuming 'I am not the same as them' — as if they are watching the fire from the other shore, on everything Chinese.

Tue, Mar 5, 2019 at 2:25 PM

Hi,

You use words such as a "tactile image", "embodied image" — this is interesting to consider alongside the notion of intimacy. What does it mean for you and why is this important?

You mention that in *The Other Shore* series it felt like those encounters weren't really adequately expressed or represented by the images. I remember when we worked on that installation, we discussed trying to create a sense of encounter . . . And how does this relate to performance?
I guess this is a question of fiction and documentary and something in-between?

Olivier

——

Fri, Mar 8, 2019 at 9:08 AM

Perhaps an example of a tactile image is my use of the video of my uncle in the fourth iteration of the NUS exhibition, where there is a silent video of him just sitting in front of a couch. He breathes deeply, and a fan blows at his left sleeve such that his sleeve moves softly in the image. My uncle is life-size, and the video is projected on a hanging screen where his face is situated a little higher than a viewer's face if the viewer sits on the bench provided in front of the screen.

Watching the wind on his sleeve makes me imagine feeling the wind blowing on my skin. With the hanging screen that moves slightly with people moving around it, it invokes a breathing movement echoing that of his chest in the image. That for me bridges the idea of the tactile image to the embodied image, imagining myself breathing also. But, the embodiment of the image in this instance also comes in the way the viewer has to look at it — head tilted up, and close. It is as if one is facing my uncle, sitting in his presence, and looking slightly up at him, in a way becoming a part of the image, and a part of my encounter with him that day.

This is important for me in thinking about how I can implicate the viewer in the work. The people who are in my work can often be identified in certain ways;

[illegible] was so small,
[illegible] so we left Penang.
[illegible] on grass in
[illegible] I was three.
[illegible] along for a job,
[illegible] to hire someone
[illegible] troublesome,
But if she didn't bring me
along, who would look after me.
She had to bring me along, but
then nobody wanted to hire
her. So she had to cut grass on
a rubber plantation.

for example, my uncle is marked by his earlier statelessness, and his mother's statelessness in Singapore in the narrative of the work. The participants in *The Other Shore* are young Chinese migrants in Hong Kong. The image then, while beginning as a documentary image, has to perform another role when viewed in a space. Perhaps that's where the performance you mention comes in? It has to subvert one's understanding of a person labelled within a group and subvert one's understanding of what that documentary image is.

My thinking that the images were not "enough" at that point was perhaps because I valued and savoured those encounters so much, and they provoked such a confusion of paradigms, values and translation in my mind. At that time, I was taking portraits of these people I met in places that we chose together. The images didn't convey that disturbance and confusion, but then this shortcoming became important, and became a key component to the dissonance that I was trying to create with the languages and their content, the soft voices, and the portraits. The light boxes in the space were important in helping create the dissonance and displacement. The way the light-boxes confronted the viewer from the middle of a space, from different heights, made the viewer wonder about how the image was viewed, and what that meant.

x wei leng

Fri, Mar 8, 2019 at 10:46 PM

What about the question of not picturing yourself? I wonder if *The Other Shore* was also probing your own experience of being a kind of 'local' outsider in Hong Kong . . . You have your own stories there, in a way that might be different in Karachi for example. Was that an issue or challenge, not having such personal background to build on?
I guess the switch to digital in that project was practical as much as anything — and the luminosity of your images there really surprised me — but was there a conceptual shift with digital, did it change your relationship to the subject and place?

[illegible] maternal grand-[illegible] her holding [illegible] I remember at [illegible] and I can recall her [illegible] and I can recall she [illegible] When I was [illegible] completely white [illegible] could give [illegible] *mehndi*, so she had orange hair. And for some reason, I can recall her holding me and I can recall her orange hair. And I think a lot of that is from pictures, maybe. It's probably not a memory, but because I have seen pictures of her holding me.

I've always liked the use of sound alongside your earlier images, as this situates images in space very subtly; it lends them temporality.

Olivier

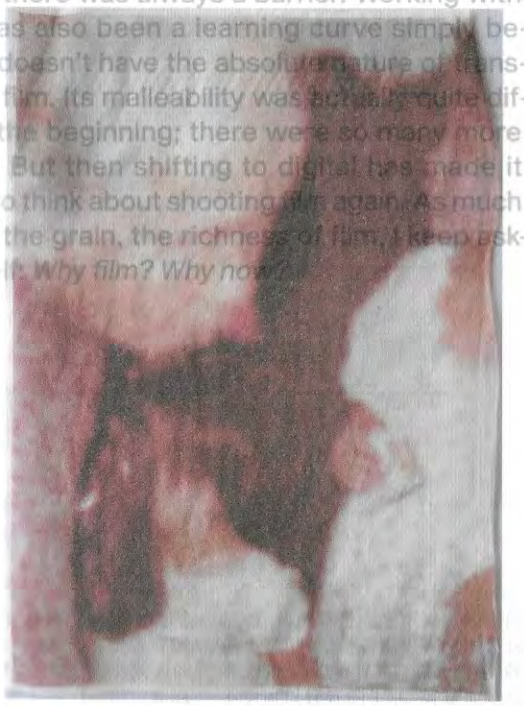
——

Tue, Mar 12, 2019 at 6:48 PM

Hi Olivier,

My not knowing the place, when I first went to Karachi, was important. And you're right, it was a shift in my position. Similarly, coming back to Singapore has shifted my position again. One of the things I think about is my identity as a long-term resident, a foreigner, and a returnee citizen in the three different places, and there has been a triangulation of these roles within the works in the exhibition. How do these roles affect how I relate to the people I work with? How was I looking and listening? How does that in turn affect the outcome? In Karachi, it was a challenge because while I felt a certain kinship and familiarity when I was there, but it was still a place I only knew through what I read when I first arrived, and the learning curve was steep. In the end, I had to ask myself what I was doing there, and I sat with the material for quite a while before I eventually worked with it. I don't know if I was probing my own experience in HK with *The Other Shore*, but HK is a place I am emotionally attached to as I spent most of my adult life there. Perhaps witnessing from within yet being an outsider, as you say.

anging to digital changed the way I photograph ply because I was not going around with a camera on a tripod, so I was more nimble; my 's relationship to the camera and what I was ographing became more flexible — possibly ate, possibly distant. Before, with the larger era, there was always a barrier. Working with al has also been a learning curve simply because it doesn't have the absolute nature of transparency film. Its malleability was actually quite difficult at the beginning; there were so many more choices. But then shifting to digital has made it difficult to think about shooting film again. As much as I love the grain, the richness of film, I keep asking myself: *Why film? Why now?*



I've always liked the use of sound [illegible] your earlier images, as this situates images [illegible] very subtly: it lends them temporality.

Olivier

[illegible], Mar [illegible] 2019 at 6:48 PM

Hi Olivier [illegible]

My not knowin[illegible] when I first went to Karachi, wa[illegible] you're right, it was a shift in my position. Similar[illegible]ing back to Singapore has shifted my posi[illegible]. One of the things I think about is my ident[illegible], a foreigner, and a return[illegible] different places, and there ha[illegible] of these roles within the work[illegible] How do these roles affect how I [illegible] I work with? How was I look[illegible] does that in turn affect the [illegible]? In [illegible] was a challenge because wh[illegible] felt a cert[illegible] and familiarit[illegible] when I was there, but it wa[illegible] place I only knew through what I read when I fir[illegible]ved, and the learning curve was steep. In the end, I had to ask myself what I was doing there, and I sat with the material for quite a while before I eventually worked with it. I don't know if I was probing my own experience in HK with *The Other Shore*, but HK is a place I am emotionally attached to as I spent most of my adult life there. Perhaps witnessing from within yet being an outsider, as you say.

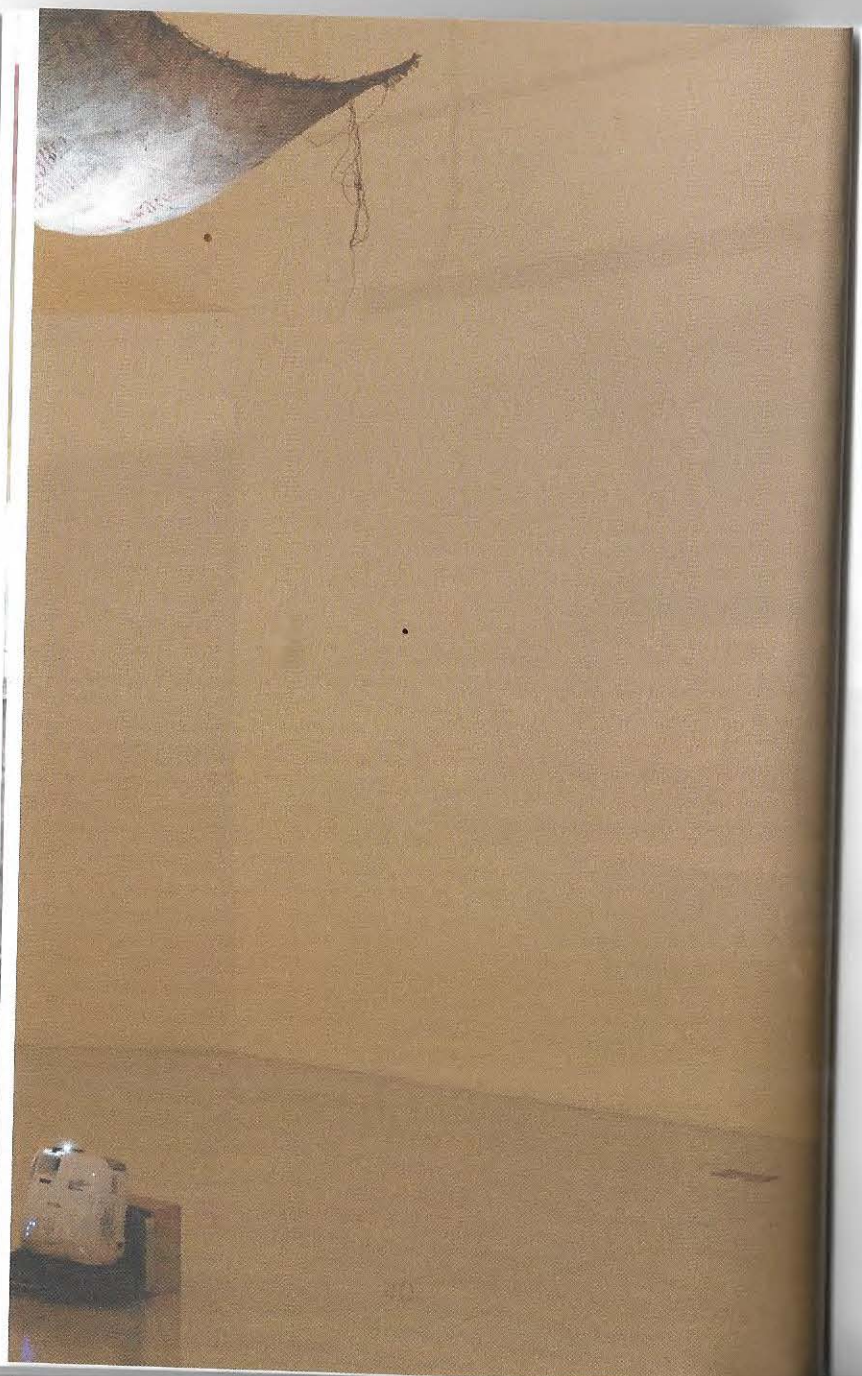
Changing to digital changed the way I photograph simply because I was not going around with a large camera on a tripod, so I was more nimble; my body's relationship to the camera and what I was photographing became more flexible — possibly intimate, possibly distant. Before, with the larger camera, there was always a barrier. Working with digital has also been a learning curve simply because it doesn't have the absolute nature of transparency film. Its malleability was actually quite difficult at the beginning; there were so many more choices. But then shifting to digital has made it difficult to think about shooting film again. As much as I love the grain, the richness of film, I keep asking myself: *Why film? Why now?*

[illegible]当那个时候内地呢，[illegible]啊，你国民教育啊，[illegible]，你是读书的去读[illegible] Tony（队同）这套的，[illegible]早上需要你 daily [illegible] practice（实行）[illegible]只不过是[illegible]科目呢，你[illegible]内面系经科[illegible]考试，你不[illegible]practice了每天拳[illegible]部是好嘅嘅，现[illegible]人那样生活咯，共产党是完全不会影响到你的生活的，但是香港人完全不是这样想的，就觉得有共产党一天呢，就不会可以好好的生活。就是他觉得呢，每件事情都关政府的事，但是不是这样的嘅。可能是。。。。。。嗯。。。崇尚那种共产精神，只不过是口头上嘅，不是吗？就是你不可以说中国现在还是奉行共产主义的嘛。所有事情都是资本主义的啦，是吗？你有竞争不就可以赚到钱嘅。就是一个很资本主义的环境。

Maybe having to use digital photography, especially with a small mirrorless camera that makes me think more about photography within media and that documentary history, has brought me a little closer to the problems that photography now presents and represents — in terms of the quality of the image, the ease and consequence of its manipulability, and the relationship with and perception of the subject matter or content it creates. Inversely, the kind of camera that it is also changes the way that people I work with perceive my handling of and relationship to photography. Unlike the larger camera, the camera I use now is one that people are familiar with. I think it adds some confusion as to what is being achieved.

xx wei leng

But I remember, back when I was in China, you wear the red scarf to school, you have patriotic studies. When you learn about Communism, it's all part of your studies, but it is not practiced in your daily life. You don't practice Communism in your daily life. It's like some subjects — you study them for exams. It's like bible studies. You wouldn't really practice what is said in the bible everyday. It's just like that. You are a normal person. The Communist Party doesn't affect your life at all. But Hong Kongers don't think so. They think if the Communist Party exists, they can't live properly. They think everything has to do with the government. But that's not the case. You just need to live normally. People just pay Communism lip-service. You can't really say China is still Communist. Everything's capitalist. If you are competitive, you will make money. It's a very capitalist environment.



她[illegible]觉得是[illegible]她。[illegible]是[illegible]的压力吧，所[illegible]Dolmacer。她[illegible]成[illegible]自己的[illegible]作中活。她觉得自己在做事业，做生意的过程中，创业的过程中很辛苦，很辛苦，但她没有别选择，所以她希望我可能有一个好的归宿，这样子男方是一个更强有力得角色，更加能够为家庭 provide 的角色的一个，那么我就可以轻松一点，她是这么觉得的。

They did not approve her citizenship. If you were an older person, with no skills or qualifications, and didn't have much to contribute to Singapore, they just told you to wait. Singapore was very pragmatic. It's like if you are a skilled migrant, you get citizenship very quickly. This is reality. If you are an older person, and you come here, you don't benefit Singapore. They will think about it. If you are a professional, skilled, it's very fast. It's pragmatic like that...

Between not yet and nevermore: *Wei Leng Tay's fugitive images*

Fang-Tze Hsu

"... [C]ameras, in short, were clocks for seeing, and perhaps in me someone very old still hears in the photographic mechanism the living sound of the wood."[1] So states Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*. Being one of the most read books on the topic of photography, *Camera Lucida* resembles a photograph theory in the utterance of eulogy — eulogy for both Barthes' late mother and Barthes himself (considering his sudden demise shortly after *Camera Lucida* was published, due to a car accident). It is difficult to neglect how Barthes saturates his theorization with melancholy or with a tonality of mourning on "what [he] see[s] has indeed existed"[2] but no longer present — the nevermore. Particularly, when readers encounter Barthes' grief reifying in

the passages about Winter Garden Photograph (a photo of Barthes' mother when she was five), these readers are also touched by the nevermore which objectifies the physical absence of the subject. In this case, what has been seen through "the clocks for seeing"? Then, what has been heard when the "the clocks for seeing" are making "the living sound of the wood"? Or, what exactly happens when one sees through "the living sound of the wood" while listening to "the clocks for seeing"?

The focus of this essay is to explore the abovementioned dynamics between aural and ocular perceptions through Wei Leng Tay's *Crossings*, but, in the meantime, the study of this essay is to reconsider Barthes' "the clocks for seeing" beyond the indexical mode of reference — as a way to unpack the politics of Wei Leng's storytelling without telling. *Crossings* is housed in the Archaeology Library in the NUS Museum from 8 March 2018 to 4 May 2019. The subject-matter of this exhibition is straightforward: the migration of people. Or, as Wei Leng has mentioned, "Psychic and emotional displacement is something that I have been very sensitive to for many years."[3] *Crossings* encompasses audio, visual, and moving image materials, which the artist has consciously accumulated with a sense of ethnographic groundedness during her research at various points in a quadrennium project. Without falling into the dichotomy of home versus foreign, the result is a canvas of study that stretches between multiple sites cross Asia: Singapore and Malaysia, Bombay in India and Karachi in Pakistan, Hong Kong and China. *Crossings* consists of four

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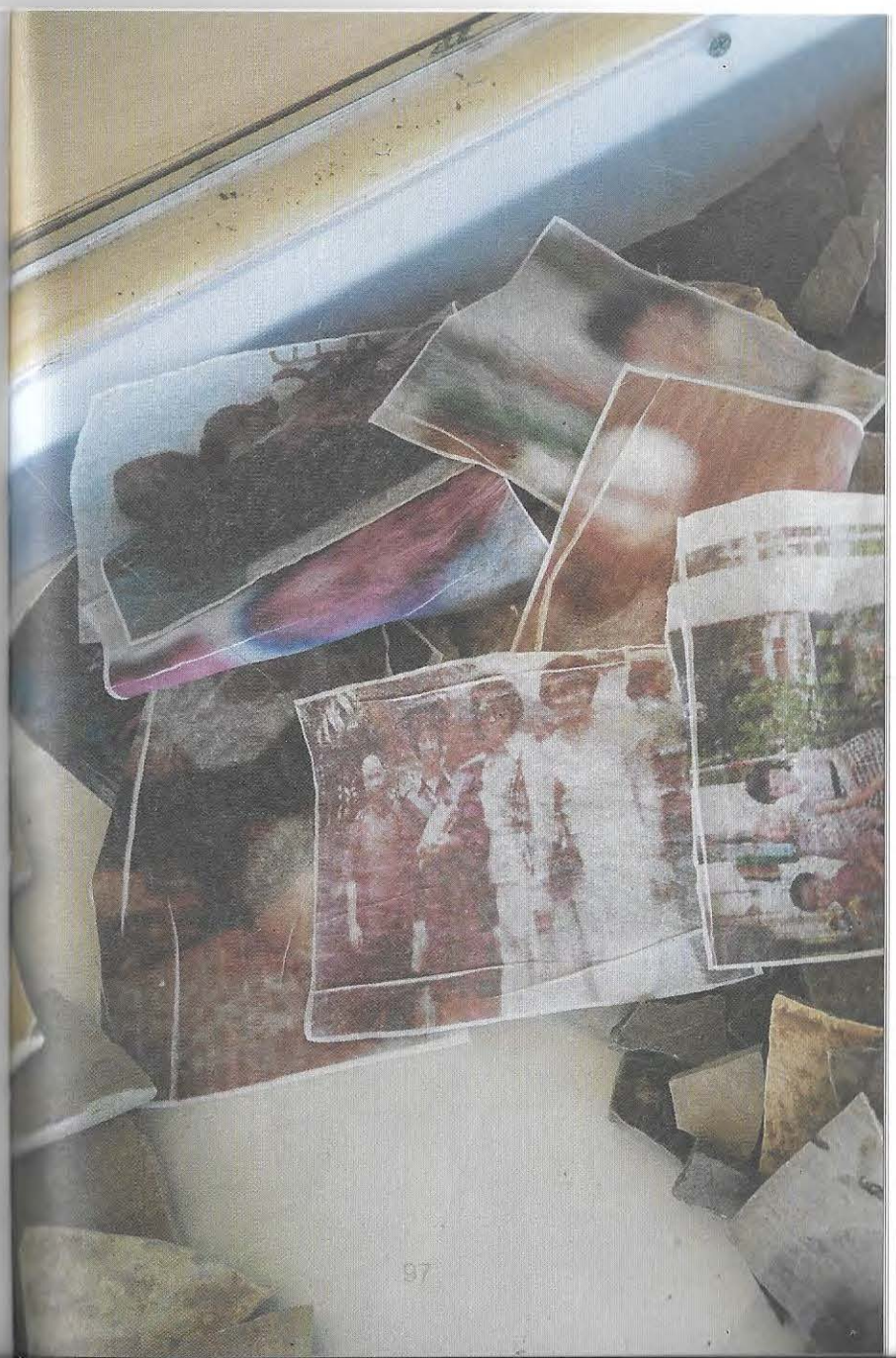


iterations and two performances in between — one staged as the opening performance for the second iteration and the other presented as the opening performance for the fourth iteration. The first iteration is composed of "you think it over slowly, slowly choose..." (2018) and "And this is the lady and her pond" (2015–2018); the second iteration highlights "The first chapter it starts with the horses" (2017–2018); the third iteration features "The Other Shore" (2014–2016); the final iteration retunes back to "you think it over slowly, slowly choose..." (2018) in a different semiotic configuration. In which, spatially, these artworks intervene into the gallery space of the Archeology Library with their distinctive screen-based materiality — ranging from screen fabric, light box, calico, parcel boxes, to tissue paper and, in turn, proactively converse with the semiotic significance

所以那段时间就很多压力，就是将在镜面上看我是从言语的障碍开始，因为你语言上有障碍，你没有办法听懂别人在说什么话，或者你只能猜到几句这样。而且你跟人家去沟通用普通话的时候，这不知道为什么，当下有一种感觉好像你比别人低了一等，就是你没有办法去主动跟人家沟通或者你会觉得普通话就怎么了呀。...就是觉得普通话在广东话的下面，所以当时有一段就是很努力的学广东话，可能也由于当时在 O camp 很灰暗的一段经历，就是你很想融入，但是很难，就是包括你心理上的调整也很难。

of the Archeology Library — the historicity of a nation-state in the name of Singapore.

The Dramaturgy of (In)completion

First of all, in order to discuss the trans-sensorial essence of photography inspired by Barthes through Wei Leng Tay's *Crossings*, it is crucial to acknowledge that it is an art project that I actually could not claim to see in its completed entirety. It is by no means confessional; what I discuss in the essay projects a sense of hypothetical speculation. Instead, this acknowledgment of my incomplete experience is my reluctance to conflate the concept of walking into a slice of time with the physical memory of walking into a gallery space. The gallery

So at that time, there was a lot of pressure, and I believe, at least if one looks at it superficially, it all started with the language barrier. Because of that initial barrier, I couldn't understand what people were saying, or I could only guess at certain words and phrases. And when I tried to speak with others using Mandarin, I don't know why, but I felt like I was somehow beneath them. I couldn't initiate conversations and it felt like Cantonese was superior. So, for a time, I tried very hard to learn Cantonese, perhaps coming out of the dark experience of that orientation camp. You really want to fit in, but it's very difficult, and it's also very difficult to adjust psychologically.

space of the Archeology Library is far from neutral. Not only is the artist project surrounded by display cabinets containing archeological findings of Singapore's past, but it is also situated within the evidence speaking to migratory experiences of Singapore prior to its independence. From the first iteration to the third, reading "you think it over slowly, slowly choose..." (2018) is to encounter images printed on tissue papers juxtaposed with sherds loaned from Dr. John N. Miksic. Of course, reading those images means that the audience need to squat down in order get closer to those images on tissue papers casually scattered inside the trough that cuts diagonally through the floor of the Archeology Library; reading those images means also that the audience come to exercise their own experiential knowledge in order to identify those images being none other than someone's family photos. Not to mention that these are actually photographs of the artist's grandaunt.

In Wei Leng's *Crossings*, to read an image is to relate with the image and to relate with this image is to relay this image through one's own experiential knowledge of the symbolic meaning about the given image. Curatorially speaking,[4] *Crossings* creates a network of different migratory traces by re-laying one trace upon another. To see oneself is to see oneself within others. Here, it is Wei Leng's ethnography of self from within. From the middle-class Chinese families in Singapore and Malaysia in "Convergence" (2009–2013) to the young mainland Chinese migrants in Hong Kong in "The Other Shore" (2014–2016), Wei Leng's photographic im-

age surgically tears out what George Herbert Mead calls "social self." Such a self is discussed not in the terms of individual but is about how self "arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process." Wei Leng's ethnography of self is precisely done through these transregional back-and-forth journeys that she taken on within herself, her family, and her identity. Allan Sekula once said, "Every photographic image is a sign, above all, of someone's investment in the sending of a message."[5] In the case of Wei Leng's *Crossings*, the photographic image is still a sign, but is a sign of relaying connections rather than a sign of merely being informative or of being narrative.

By being a sign of relaying connections, Wei Leng's photographic image, as a collective whole, is the very picture of the artist's physical act of making and bears resemblance to a collective process of "response-ability."[6] The former can be seen in Wei Leng's creative process of re-photographing; the latter can be found in the dramaturgical relationship between seeing and hearing in *Crossings*. For instance, the blurriness of images on tissue papers featured in "you think it over slowly, slowly choose..." is the result of re-photographing. "Each is re-photographed 50 times in different crops, depths of field and focuses with an iPhone."[7] The artistic act of re-photographing responds to two critical features of the conceptualist photography — "the systematic deskilling of photographic practices" and "its ostentatious denial of the viability of documentary

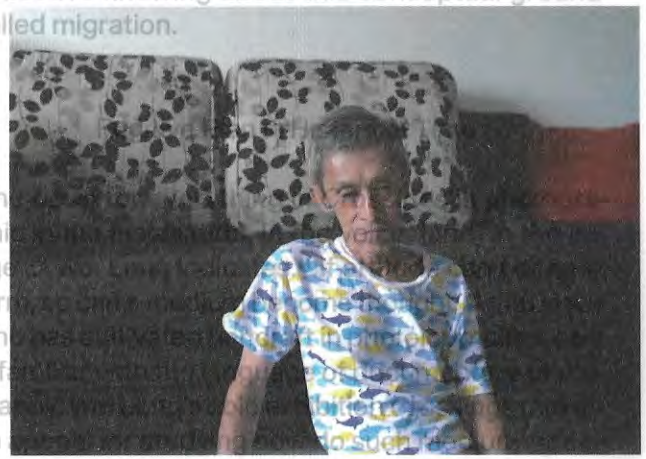
and narrative tradition."[8] The choice of using iPhone — one of the most prevalent acts of making photography in the age of digital reproduction — to take pictures of her late grandaunt appearing in those family photos not only re-injects an intimate sense of care back to one of the most careless modes of photographing in our age, but also turns the heavily commercialized photographic discourse against its own representational tasks driven by our consumerist syndrome in contemporary society. By doing so, what we once took for granted — our intuitive response of taking migrants as the other — comes to hold up a mirror to ourselves. By delinking photography from the regime of representation, the subject of migration in the discourse of photography can be perceived in its mental quality of going-ness and be laid, again, back to photographic practices as a socio-economic critique.

Nevertheless, does the work of art need an audience to fulfill its capacity of socio-economic critique? To answer this question with a sense of context-specificity is to address my sense of (in) completion with regard to *Crossings*. To put it more succinctly, *Crossings* is a state of *completing*. Rather than being incomplete, a state of being that is constantly completing is a state of perpetual co-becomingness. Obviously, this sense of co-becomingness has to do with the asynchronicity between the photographic images and audio installation in Wei Leng's *Crossings*. In the exhibition, these audio installations are the constitutive part of Wei Leng's photographic image. They are from the recordings of the conversations between Wei Leng and those

whom she photographed. As indicated in Wei Leng's artist's statement, "My process begins with conversations and interactions I have with people I meet, which inform the images and forms the projects take."[9]

Even though Wei Leng seems to only enunciate the epistemological aspect of her dialogues with those whom she photographed in relation to her making of photographic image, her artistic decision of incorporating those recorded voices by re-articulating them into a sonic component of installation is a refusal to subordinate those recorded voices to their pure informative and therefore indexical capacities. For example, when one walks into the installation "And this is the lady and her pond...", we are welcomed by a theatrical atmosphere consisting of moving images projected on those calicos hanging from the ceiling, on those screen fabrics floating in between the drapes, and on those empty parcels flooring the ground. The setting requires us to navigate in between those images. This is where the audio comes into the set. Due to the thoughtful arrangement of speakers and the subtlety of the sound, one can't help but move in accordance with the connections which is formulated by their individual processes of weaving their visual perception with their aural sensation. By considering the interdependency of the eye and the ear being together but apart in *Crossings*, Wei Leng's photographic image as sign of relaying connections is also dramaturgical. It is dramaturgical in this sense of creating a relationship by providing a "proprietary structure" between

eye and ear, between the work of art and the audiences, and even between the artists and those whom she has collaborated with during the process of creating. It is dramaturgical because Wei Leng's photographic image is able to render a "proprietary structure" that "is both weight-bearing and enabling of motion and articulation."[10] In other words, encountering the photographic image in Wei Leng's *Crossings* is to partake in the process of re-playing and is to take the response-ability in the collective knowing about this conceptual ground called migration.



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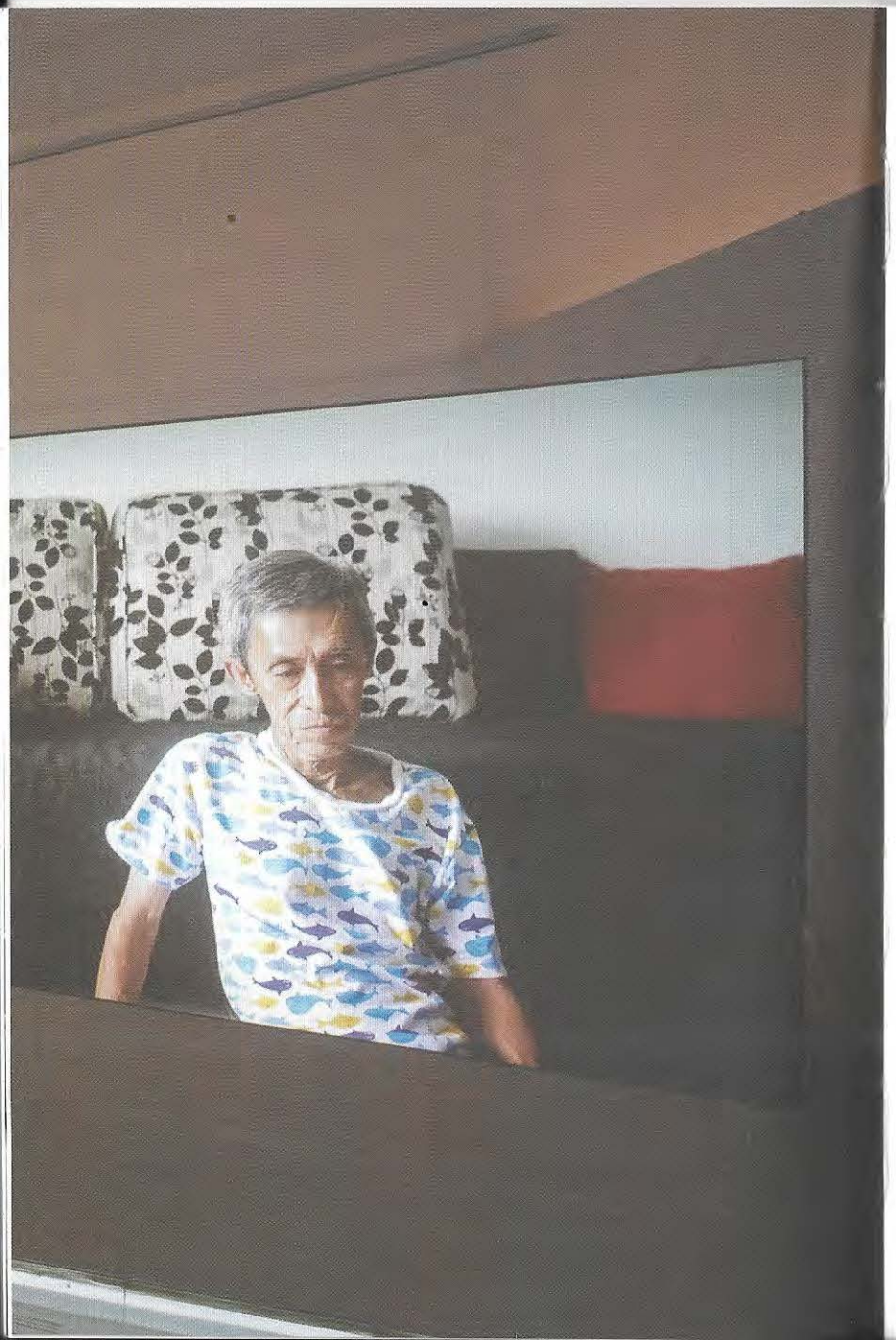
Fugitive Plan in Historical Time

"The basis for everything in *Crossings* is photographic in the installation, in the voice, [and] in the image..." Wei Leng indicates.[11] If attitude can become form, so can a medium become thought. As an artist who has cultivated her craft in photojournalism and is familiar with the language of documentary photography, Wei Leng's solo exhibition *Crossings* makes an appeal for studying how do such medium-specific thoughts think. By anchoring the analytical lens upon migratory experiences of people, the spatio-temporality of *Crossings* embodies points of entry for one to experience how would such medium-specific thoughts, in turn, determine the possibilities of form.

Before I examine what "thought" Wei Leng's photographic image is thinking about, I would like to ask how has photography been understood in relation to

historical time? First of all, by embodying "the eye of history"[12] that images a window for the present to witness the factual reality of the past, photography also represents "the decisive moment"[13] that imagines a door for the present to enter the speculative fantasy about the future. In the age of analog photography, the positivity of an image requires a developing process from film negative. As Walter Benjamin puts it: "The past has left behind in literary texts images of itself that are comparable to the images which light imprints on photosensitive plates. Only the future possesses developers active enough to bring these plates out perfectly."[14] Being a threshold in time — "at a standstill"[15] — the materialization of photography not only reveals how dark is a constitutive part of light but also implies how the future is intrinsic to the past. If the dialectical

Made from stone combined with mineral materials. Tiles and roofing tiles and flooring and sinks, bathroom sinks, ceramic sinks, bathroom tiles, tableware. Then there is a chapter of glass. Different types of glass and articles of glass. Glass articles those are used in laboratories. Glass articles those used for decorative purposes, ornamental purposes. Then comes the chapter of precious metals. Precious stones, gold, silver, precious stones. Articles of goldsmith, silversmith, articles of silver, imitation jewellery. Then comes the chapter of base metals. Iron, iron flares, iron waste, iron strips, iron rods, iron wire, iron grill, all that. And products have simple iron and some products have alloyed iron. Alloyed means adding some elements to make the quality better. Similarly stainless means Chromium content up to 11%. If the Chromium content is 11% then it becomes stainless. Iron and steel. Then there is a chapter of 73, articles of iron and steel. This is the unwrought form. Sheet, plate, wire. And this is the made-of articles. Tanks, kegs, drums, and other structures, and cooking utensils, chains, screws, springs made from the and kitchen utensils made from the iron and steel.



conception of analog photography is the conceptual device that enables Walter Benjamin to articulate his Messianic conception of history, the juxtaposition between Wei Leng's photographic image and the shards of the Archaeology Library is an invitation to a heterogeneous connection between past and future in the present.

In the light of history, photography is dialectic. To be more precise, in a Benjaminian sense of the term, photography has conditioned image into a "dialectics at a standstill" when it comes to the discussion of historical time.[16] By distilling the notion of historical time, the urgency of disenchanting our relationship with time from the capitalist clock-time and the nationalistic homogenization as a continuum in time is what Benjamin's reminder really is about. However, after World War II, the situation that worries Benjamin only gets further accelerated when the figures of nationalism interlock with capitalism. Such a tight grip on the notion of time, as stated by art historian T.J. Demos, "renders us all perpetual refugees in the fleeting present."[17]

Demos' concern can be exemplified by the instrumentalization of photography particularly in the context of archive where Barthes' theorization of photography as "see[ing] what has indeed existed" becomes a nationalistic straightjacket of history. The representational value of photography not only silences Barthes' tone of mourning pronounced through The Winter Garden photo but also denies the right of entry to those who do not fit to the narrative of national history. In other words,

the symbolic meaning of the Archaeology Library indeed accentuates the historical notion of time speaking through Wei Leng's artistic practices of photographing the migration of people. In *Crossings*, Demos' notion of "perpetual refugee" is literally exemplified in two inter-linked circumstances. Firstly, by the stateless status of Wei Leng's grandaunt. Secondly, by the uncanny feeling when one views the projected video of Wei Leng's uncle (who is the late grandaunt's son) in the final iteration in which the setup makes the screening panel float right in front of a transparent display case of the Archaeology Library next to one of the entrances of the gallery space. Due to the direction of the projection, one can only see the clear imagery by either sitting in the bench in front of the display case or standing outside the Archaeology Library in order to view the video via window of the transparent display case. To watch this video is to make decision between one of the viewing options. By acquiring the visual clarity of the image, one is forced to eliminate other potential ways of navigating through *Crossings*. For instance, there is a potentiality of neglecting texts silently projected on the gallery walls behind the floating screening panel. Does this then connote that the perspective of this video is physically framed by the transparent display case of the Archaeology Library? And does this also compromise the knowing of the eye for a representational actuality? Wei Leng neither circumscribes the dialectical intensity between the eye and the ear within the domain of bodily sensation nor confines her narrative within the regime of representation. Instead, Wei Leng's photographic image is a sign of relaying connections

that constantly flee from the indexical function of narrative and continuously urge its audiences to reassemble dialogic relationships with their immediate surrounding.

Therefore, what exactly happens when one sees through "the living sound of the wood" while listening to "the clocks for seeing"? By returning to the early proposition about Barthes' theorization of photography in times of mourning, it is generative to unpack the dialectical intensity of Wei Leng's photographic image through the framework of "the political ontology of photography." By "the political ontology of photography," Israeli theorist of photography Ariella Azoulay means, "... an ontology bound to the manner in which human beings exist — look, talk, act — with one another and with objects....

By this I mean an ontology of a certain form of human being-with-others in which the camera or the photograph are implicated."[18] In *Crossings*, we entangle with Wei Leng's photographic image. Such being-togetherness in the fugitive — an act of relaying or a journey between attachment and detachment — suggested by Wei Leng's photographic image enables us to re-relate past and to emancipate history from the Archaeology Library. Through Wei Leng's photographic image in *Crossings*, we are with statelessness, displacement, and migration. By doing so, we can ceaselessly ask "Can this being together in homelessness... be a place from which emerges neither self-consciousness nor knowledge of the other but an improvisation that proceeds from somewhere on the other side of an unasked question?[19]

Roland. *Camera Lucida. Reflec*[illegible] *phy*. Mai[illegible] 1981. p.15.

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[illegible]ifford, Jessica, and Wei Leng Tay. "[illegible] Tay at NUS Museum, Singapore — Artist Profile [illegible] 5 Nov, 2018, artradarjournal.com/2018/[illegible] tay-at-nus-museum-singapore-artist-profile[illegible]

4 By accentuating the notion of curation, I refer [illegible] boration between the featured artist Wei Leng Tay and the [illegible] curator Siddharta Perez, in which, the curat[illegible] decision-making process but rather is a platfor[illegible] beyond verbal communication. In fact, their shared [illegible] idea of displacement can be traced back to their previous project titled "Untitled: Peninsular Collab" (2016). In this project, several ideas that later fully-cultivated in *Crossings* can already be found in forms of lecture performance and writing under the experimental premise of "Untitled: Peninsular Collab."

5 Sekula, Allan. "On the invention of photographic m[illegible] *photography*. Palgrave, London, 1982, p.5.

6 Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the trouble. Mak*[illegible] *lucene*. Duke University Press, 2016, p.58.

7 *Crossings* exchange guide, p.4.

8 Buchloh, Benjamin H.D. "Cosmic Replication: C[illegible] graphe." Gabriel Orozco (2000), pp.[illegible]-40.

9 Tay, Wei Leng. "About." Wei Leng Tay. Singapore, [illegible] weilengtay.com/about/.

10 Proleta, Katherine. Dramatur[illegible] ment Performance. University of [illegible]

11 Wei Leng Tay, interview [illegible]

12 Didi-Huberman, Georges. [illegible] sitions. The MIT Press, 20[illegible]
"The eye of history, [illegible] time they see. This [illegible] way of looking."

13 The [illegible] and a common saying when people relates photography to the notion of time.

14 Buck-Morss, Susan. *The dialectics of seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. Mit Press, 1991. p.250.

15 Benjamin, Walter. *The arcades project*. Harvard University Press, 1999. p.3.

16 Ibid. p.3.

17 Demos, T. J. *The migrant image: The art and politics of documentary during global crisis*. Duke University Press, 2013., pp.1–2.

18 Azoulay, Ariella Aisha. *Civil Imagination: a political ontology of photography*. Verso Books, 2015. p.18.

19 Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons. Fugitive Planning and Black Study*. Wivenhoeu. a: Minor Compositions (2013), p.[illegible]

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1 Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on photography*. Macmillan, 1981. p.15.
2 Ibid., p.82.
3 Clifford, Jessica, and Wei Leng Tay. "'Crossings' with Wei Leng Tay at NUS Museum, Singapore — Artist Profile in Conversation." Art Radar, 5 Nov. 2018, artradarjournal.com/2018/11/05/crossings-with-wei-leng-tay-at-nus-museum-singapore-artist-profile-in-conversation/.
4 By accentuating the notion of curation, I refer specifically to the collaboration between the featured artist Wei Leng Tay and the appointed curator Siddharta Perez. In which, the curatorial is not merely a decision-making process but rather is a platform for forms of dialogue beyond verbal communication. In fact, their shared concern on the idea of displacement can be traced back to their previous project titled "Untitled: Peninsular Collab" (2016). In this project, several ideas that later fully-cultivated in *Crossings* can already be found in forms of lecture performance and writing under the experimental premise of "Untitled: Peninsular Collab."
5 Sekula, Allan. "On the invention of photographic meaning." *Thinking photography*. Palgrave, London, 1982. p.5.
6 Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press, 2016. p.34.
7 *Crossings* exhibition guide, p.4.
8 Buchloh, Benjamin HD. "Cosmic Reification: Gabriel Orozco's Photographs." Gabriel Orozco (2005), pp.139–40.
9 Tay, Wei Leng. "About." Wei Leng Tay. Singapore. Hong Kong, www.weilengtay.com/about/.
10 Profeta, Katherine. Dramaturgy in Motion: At Work on Dance and Movement Performance. University of Wisconsin Pres, 2015. p.3.
11 Wei Leng Tay, interview by author, Singapore, April 12, 2019.
12 Didi-Huberman, Georges. *The Eye of History: When Images Take Positions*. The MIT Press, 2018. p.xxvi.
"The eye of history, therefore, reveal something of the space and the time they see. This implies re-spatializing and re-temporalizing our way of looking."
13 The decisive moment is both the title of Cartier-Bresson's monograph and a common saying when people relates photography to the notion of time.
14 Buck-Morss, Susan. *The dialectics of seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. Mit Press, 1991. p.250.
15 Benjamin, Walter. *The arcades project*. Harvard University Press, 1999. p.3.
16 Ibid, p.3.
17 Demos, T. J. *The migrant image: The art and politics of documentary during global crisis*. Duke University Press, 2013., pp.1–2.
18 Azoulay, Ariella Aïsha. *Civil Imagination: a political ontology of photography*. Verso Books, 2015. p.18.
19 Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*. Wivenhoeu. a: Minor Compositions (2013), p.96.

I was a different type of man back then is based on a conversation between myself and a man about his decision to give up his relationship with a woman in India, return to Pakistan, and marry the woman who was chosen for him by his family. The single channel projection comprises photographs taken now of him and his family, as well as photographs he showed me of a time past in India. The images are projected onto one layer of glassine and one layer of tracing paper, and the edges fall onto a third layer - the wall beyond. The layers, differently sized, simultaneously erase and emphasise different people and relationships in the photographs. The fragile papers move as audiences move around the installation, changing the focus of the image, and size of the image on the screens, alluding to the unfixed nature of memory and the story retold. The words 'I was a different type of man back then' in Urdu, spoken as he tried to remember, are cut into the first small letter-sized screen (made of tracing paper) in a lateral inversion, making the words legible from between the edges of the 3rd layer of the projection and the second.

Vimeo link to video of installation: https://vimeo.com/181603208

I was a different type of man back then (2015-2016)

Single-channel projection, glassine, fishing wire, tracing paper

I was a different type of man back then
(2015-2016)

Single-channel projection, glassine, fishing wire, tracing paper

Installation view at Cemeti Art House, Yogyakarta, 2016

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Installation views at Cemeti Art House,
Yogyakarta, 2016

I was a different type of man back then
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Single-channel projection, glassine,
fishing wire, tracing paper

Installation view at Cemeti Art House,
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The Other Shore is a story of a new generation of Chinese migrants in Hong Kong. Young Mainland Chinese have been migrating to Hong Kong from across China, leaving their homes because of family business, or in search of better education and career prospects. In Hong Kong, they find themselves in majority Chinese and increasingly tense environments, often confronting entrenched ideas regarding 'Mainlanders'. I worked with mainly young professional or student Mainland Chinese in their twenties and early thirties who are reflective of the surge in this particular immigrant demographic in the last decade. The interactions, which culminated in audio interviews and photography, asked how movements affect how one conceives of one self - how national and family histories and narratives converge with one's memory, how they are affected by everyday relationships, and how contemporary conditions, be they social, economic or political, create a discordant interiority that inadvertently shape the participants in the project. ***The Other Shore*** was created via a methodology of encountering, interviewing, photographing, hearing, seeing and unseeing, and questioning. In ***The Other Shore***, the participants are not named and the image and text/audio elements are unlinked. These create an anonymity and a sense that what is said and the experience recounted can be heard in much of Hong Kong. Through this anonymity and the relationship between the images and audio/text, a dissonance between what is said and what is seen is created. Through this dissonance, the idea and fluidity of the migrant identity in Hong Kong, the relationship that many Hong Kongers have to this migrant identity, and the complex relationship between Hong Kong and China are questioned.

The Other Shore | 彼岸
(2014-16)

Transparencies in Lightboxes of variable sizes, audio installations of variable durations

All works untitled

The Other Shore | 彼岸
(2014-16)

Transparencies in Lightboxes of variable sizes, audio installations of variable durations

Installation view at the Jut Art Museum, Taipei, 2018.
Photo courtesy Jut Art Museum.

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Installation view at the Jut Art Museum, Taipei, 2018. Photo courtesy Jut Art Museum.

***The Other Shore* | 彼岸**
(2014-16)

Transparencies in Lightboxes of variable sizes, audio installations of variable durations

Installation view at the Jut Art Museum, Taipei, 2018.
Photo courtesy Jut Art Museum.

Installation view. ***The Other Shore*** (2014-2016)

The Other Shore | 彼岸
(2014-16)

Transparencies in Lightboxes of variable sizes, audio installations of variable durations

Installation view at the NUS Museum, Singapore, 2018.

Transparency in Lightbox, 40x50cm

香港其實本身是一個移民城市來的，就是多與少也好，這一代會少一些。他們的上一代與大陸都會有關係。可能是他們Daddy媽咪在大陸，或者他們甚至是小時候在大陸[長大] ，類似這樣。但倒過來說，他們來到這裡，好像一段足夠長的時間以後，他們就會忘記了這件事情。在我的角度來看，我覺得我的舅父忘記了這件事情，我媽媽忘記了這件事情。於是他們就單純的站在一個，嗯，與大陸人不一樣的角度來看所有的事情，所以就變成是令到香港看大陸這件事情[的時候]更加的疏遠。 就連曾經跟大陸非常親密的人都會突然間[覺得自己]跟大陸是不一樣的——我跟他們是不一樣的—— 好像隔岸觀火一樣的一種看法去看所有 的事情。其實[這種態度]令香港人和大陸的距離，都還是很遠，我自己是這樣覺得。所以說，回歸了，但是人心未歸。可以這麼說。

Hong Kong is actually fundamentally a migrant city. The older generation invariably has some kind of relationship with China—perhaps their mum and dad are in China, or maybe they themselves grew up there. But then, after they have been here for long enough, they forget about that. In my opinion, I feel my uncle has already forgotten this, my mum too. So then they take an entirely different position from Mainland Chinese people on everything, and this adds to the sense of distance Hong Kong feels from China. Even people who were once intimately tied to China will think they are different from Mainland Chinese, presuming 'I am not the same as them'—as if they are watching the fire from the other shore, on everything Chinese. This really creates a vast gap between Hong Kongers and Mainland China. That's how I feel. You could say, the city has returned, but not the heart.

Transcript and translation of Cantonese voice excerpt

Transparency in Lightbox, 80x100cm

Transparency in Lightbox, 56x70cm

Transparency in Lightbox, 56x70cm

Transparency in Lightbox, 80x100cm

Transparency in Lightbox, 80x100cm

但是其實，我記得那個時候內地呢，你帶紅領巾上學啊，你國民教育啊，你共產黨那套呢，你是讀書的去讀咯，就是你系要buy這套的，讀書去讀。嗯，但是不需要你daily life去practice呢一個，共產黨的精神。它只不過是好像.....就是有些科目呢，你讀了是為了考試。可能以前聖經科啊那樣，讀了就單單為了考試，你不會說真的daily practice聖經那樣。就是都是這樣咯，就是你只不過是一個正常的人那樣生活咯，共產黨是完全不會影響到你的生活的。但是香港人完全不是這樣想的，就覺得有共產黨一天呢，就不會可以好好的生活。就是他覺得呢，每件事情都關政府的事，但是不是這樣的咯。可能是。。。嗯。。。你只需要正常的生活。

你是崇尚那種共產精神，只不過是口頭上咯，不是嗎? 就是你不可以說中國現在還是奉行共產主義的嘛。所有事情都是資本主義的啦，是嗎? 你有競爭就可以賺到錢咯。就是一個很資本主義的環境。就是我覺得香港人是bias了那種政府那種手法咯。從頭到尾都沒用過共產的手法咯。它個黨，只不過叫共產黨咯，它其實可以改名的啊，是不是改了名你們就能接受。就是只不過是一種手法嘛，是的。

But I remember when I was in China, wearing the red scarf to school, studying patriotic things. When you learnt about Communism, it was all part of your studies; it wasn't something you needed to practice in daily life, like practicing the Communist spirit. It was just a subject, like something you study for an exam. Perhaps it's like Bible studies once was. You don't really practice what is said in the Bible everyday. It's just like that. You still lead your life as a regular person; the Communist Party didn't really affect your life. But Hong Kongers don't see it that way at all. They think that as soon as the Communist Party is here they won't be able to live a good life anymore. They think everything is related to the government. But that's not the case. You just need to live normally.

Nowadays, people just pay Communism lip service. You can't really say China still upholds Communism. Everything's capitalist now, right? If you are competitive, you will make money. It's a very capitalist environment. But I think Hong Kongers are biased against this government and it's methods. But from the beginning, they've [i.e. China] never really used Communist methods. The Party is called the Communist Party, but they can change their name, right. If they change their name, will Hong Kongers accept them then? It's just a method, that's all.

Transcript and translation of Cantonese voice excerpt

Transparency in Lightbox, 80x100cm

Transparency in Lightbox, 56x70cm

Transparency in Lightbox, 100x125cm

刚来香港的那个时候, 好像觉得自己一头家在自己学校的圈子里面， 而且我们刚上大学的时候就会有一个**orientation camp** 。然后在那个 **O CAMP**里面，我们可能一**team**里面有十几个人，然后完了以后 呢，其他人都是**local**，然后可能有两个是跟我一样是**Mainland**。那 我们刚刚来都真是完全听不懂广东话，但是其他的所有人都在说广 东话，然后包括这整个活动，就是**organiser**在比如在解析这是个什 么活动现在要干嘛干嘛，都是在说广东话。所以那段时间就很多压 力。就起码在表面上看我是从语言的障碍开始，因为你语言上有障 碍，你没有办法听懂别人在说什么话，或者你只能猜到几句这样。 而且你跟人家去沟通用普通话的时候，这不知道为什么，当下有一 种感觉好像你比别人低了一等。就是你没有办法去主动跟人家沟通 或者你会觉得普通话就怎么了哈。。。就是觉得普通话在广东话的 下面，所以当时有一段就是很努力的学广东话，可能也出于当时在 **O CAMP**很灰暗的一段经历。就是你很想融入，但是很难，就是包 括你心里上的调整也很难。就所以。。。但那个之后，可能就是大 家慢慢去学会了那种语言，然后你又有机会跟别人沟通，就包括你 就是可以用普通话和英文跟人家去沟通的时候，你可能会慢慢的消 除一些误解或者消除当时那种就是自卑的感觉。但是像后来其实我 们是不是真正融入到，就比如说香港同学的那个圈子里， 其实也很 难说。

When I first arrived in Hong Kong, I felt I had to immerse myself in university life. Furthermore, there was orientation camp. In an o-camp team, there were ten or more people and most would be locals; there might have been two other Mainland Chinese students like me. When we first arrived, we didn't understand any Cantonese, but everyone else would be speaking it, and the organisers would use Cantonese to explain the activities. So, at that time, there was a lot of pressure. And I believe, at least if one looks at it superficially, it all started with the language barrier. Because of that initial barrier, you couldn't understand what people were saying, or you could only guess at certain words and phrases. And when you tried to speak with others using Mandarin, I don't know why, but you would feel like you were somehow beneath them. So you couldn't initiate conversations or you felt like Mandarin was so whatever… and that Mandarin was inferior Cantonese. So, for a time, I tried very hard to learn Cantonese, perhaps it was also after the negative experience of o-camp. Even if you really wanted to fit in, it was very difficult, and it was also very difficult to adjust psychologically. So… After that, perhaps everyone all slowly learnt enough Cantonese, and there were opportunities to communicate with people, as well as use Mandarin and English. So you might slowly get rid of misunderstandings and feelings of low self-esteem. But did we really assimilate ourselves, for example, into our Hong Kong classmates' circle? It's hard to say.

Transcript and translation of Mandarin voice excerpt

Transparency in Lightbox, 80x100cm

Transparency in Lightbox, 56x70cm

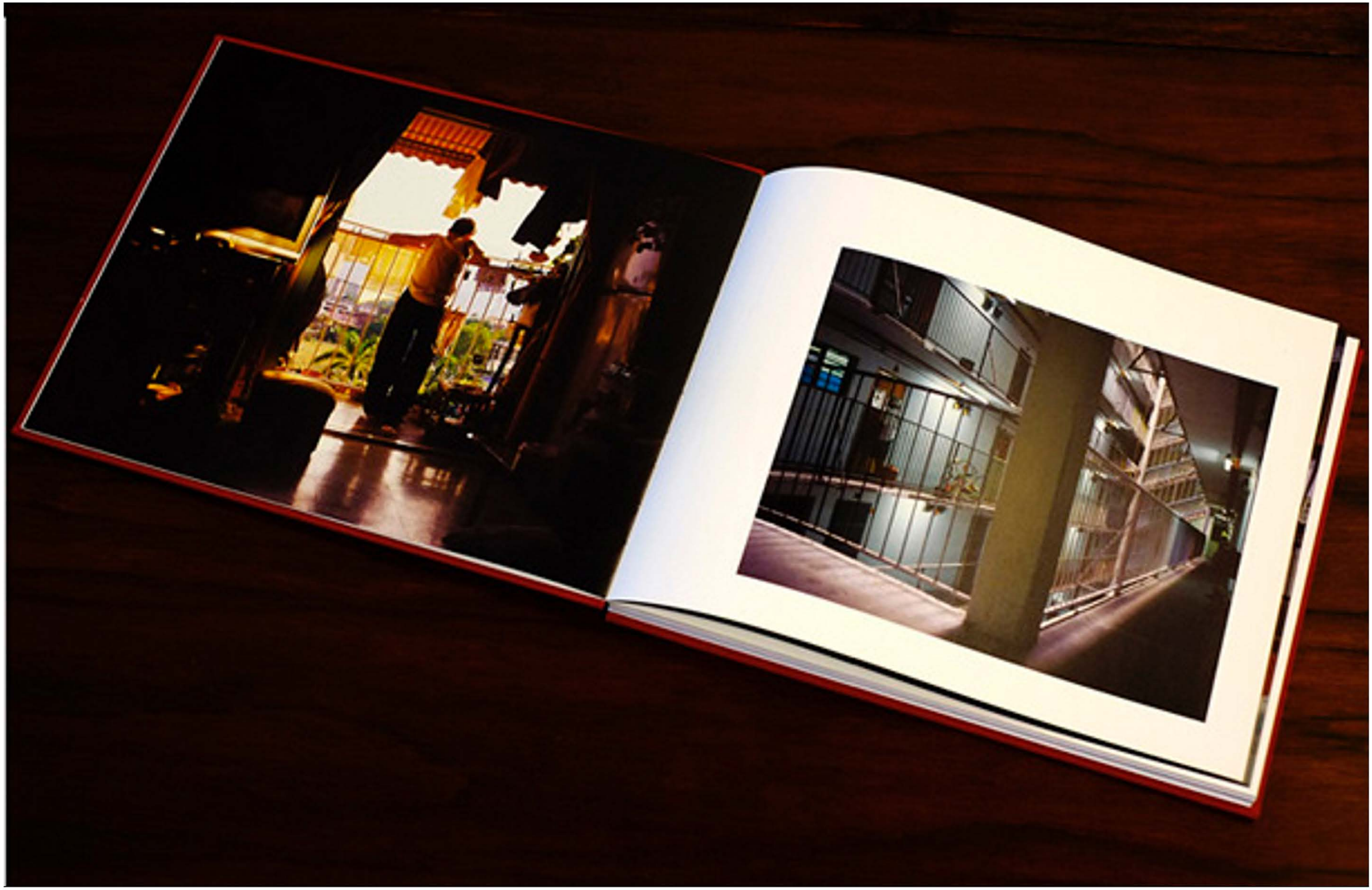
Transparency in Lightbox, 56x70cm

Transparency in Lightbox, 100x125cm

Convergence is a body of photographic and audio work that takes an intimate look at segments of the Chinese community in Singapore and Malaysia and how people live and see themselves in these two countries with shared histories. It considers race, politics, history and privilege through conversations on and photographs of the lives, personal spaces and experiences of participants. This work contemplates how people have evolved with characteristics shaped by colonial and migratory history, by the politics that have dominated the landscapes, and social norms particular to Singapore and Malaysia. It also questions and records the changes current generations experience as they grow increasingly distant from their grandparents' homeland, and as attitudes and values shift.

Convergence
(2009-13)

Archival pigment prints of variable sizes, audio installations of variable durations



Convergence
(2009-13)

Archival pigment prints of variable sizes, audio installations of variable durations

Installation view at the Baba House, NUS Museum, Singapore, 2010-2011.

Convergence
(2009-13)

Archival pigment prints of variable sizes, audio installations of variable durations

Installation view at the Baba House, NUS Museum, Singapore, 2010-2011.

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Installation view at the Baba House, NUS Museum, Singapore, 2010-2011.

Convergence
(2009-13)

Archival pigment prints of variable sizes, audio installations of variable durations

Installation view at the Baba House, NUS Museum, Singapore, 2010-2011.

Convergence: Shi Wei
(2009)

Archival pigment print.
100x125cm

Kian Foo's home
(2010)

Archival pigment print.
56x70cm

Kim and family
(2010)

Archival pigment print.
80x100cm

Cheong
(2010)

Archival pigment print.
80x100cm

Victoria's Bed
(2010)

Archival pigment print.
56x70cm

Bandar Utama
(2010)

Archival pigment print.
80x100cm

Third Grandaunt I *(left)* and ***Third Grandaunt II*** (2010)

Archival pigment print. 40x50cm (left) and 80x100cm

Uncle, Mr Joon
(2010)

Archival pigment print.
56x70cm

Amelia
(2010)

Archival pigment print.
56x70cm

Pam
(2010)

Archival pigment print.
56x70cm

Karl
(2010)

Archival pigment print.
80x100cm

Eldest Aunt's Bedroom (2010)

Archival pigment print.
56x70cm

Ah Siew
(2010)

Archival pigment print.
56x70cm

Chris and Elsie
(2010)

Archival pigment print.
80x100cm

Felicia and Adan
(2010)

Archival pigment print.
80x100cm

Uncle, Mr Joon II
(2010)

Archival pigment print.
56x70cm

BABA HOUSE

Discordant Symmetries | Wei Leng Tay

64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 1 14/09/2010 5:43 PM

Published on the occasion of the exhibition

DISCORDANT SYMMETRIES | WEI LENG TAY

NUS MUSEUM

An Art Initiative by National Arts Council

NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL
SINGAPORE

17 September 2010 – 11 March 2011

The artist and NUS Museum would like to thank Cindy Wong, Foo Su Ling, Donald Lim, Tan Li-Jen, Bruce Quek and Jimmy Cheang for their help in logistics and administrative coordination. Special appreciation goes to Chan Meng for catalogue design and all the participants who helped make this project possible. In addition, the artist would like to thank Lisa Botos, Neil Gough, Noorashikin Zulkifli, Tan Wei Ming, Lee Yong Uei, Leong Ming Chern, Sumana Rajarethnam, Katrina Kon, Chris Yap, Daniel Tay, Steven Yip, Philip Francis, Nadia Ng and Sophia Loke for their continued support.

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD 4

Ahmad Mashadi

INTRODUCTION 13

Lim Qinyi

CAN CULTURAL IDENTITY TRAVEL? 20

Dr Ooi Kee Beng

PHOTOGRAPHING YOUR OWN 35

Dr John Rohrbach

Foreword

Ahmad Mashadi
Head, NUS Museum

To present an exhibition at the Baba House is to situate objects into defined or often narrow contexts. Conditioned by such challenge, Tay Wei Leng's series of photographs for the exhibition curator, Lim Qinyi, discharges inquiries into self and consequences of mobility, cultural encounters and time – "questions that framed the artwork". She asks, "[h]ow would locating these photographs within the Baba House, a heritage house that retains the splendorous visage of the 1920s Straits Chinese family, help navigate and contextualise the complexities of Chinese identity over the last eighty years?". Here, Qinyi insists that the acuteness of the *Peranakan* as a dominant concern for the Baba House be assessed, broadened and measured as a contemporary inquiry of Chinese-ness in its general terms, defined by economics of mobility and politics of ethnicity. As such, variously advanced through essays by Dr John Rohrbach and Dr Ooi Kee Beng in this catalogue, Wei Leng's body of photographic works is positioned as ways to understand generational shifts in attitudes towards ethnic identity, and status of the Chinese diaspora in contemporary societies of Singapore and Malaysia.

In this regard, the Baba House as a statement of history, place and community simultaneously facilitates and constrains readings. Needless to say, central to the preoccupations of representation and understanding of the Straits Chinese culture are conceptions of hybridity, referenced to the complementary but at times conflicting layerings of popular culture, collective self-regard and history. Wei Leng's images do not claim to speak about the Straits Chinese, but rather set themselves as multiplicity of windows into which we may peer, to spectate and speculate into individual lives and their predicaments. In modeling her methods, Wei Leng implicates her own status and condition of itinerancy, where the notions of self and what it constitutes can no longer be held stable and indubitable. Here, syncretism and hybridity as potential outcomes of cultural encounter must initially be appreciated by their varied contexts, as those that are heterogeneous, underlined by individuated experiences and responses. The domestic – a lived-in or living space – is expressed by the interplay between interiors and their various objects as tableaux, and bodies as performative entities, each scene manifesting diverse outcomes of private struggles and choices rather than forms of conscious cultural claims. Returning to the Baba House, its presence as conceptual and poetic expression of community must perhaps be understood through the limitations of collective representation, and its value be rendered by its ability to provoke as well as to produce counter positions and complexities.

The NUS Museum congratulates Tay Wei Leng and Lim Qinyi for their partnership in developing the exhibition, which is based on the former's investigations funded by National Art Council's Arts Creation Grant. We are also grateful to Dr John Rohrbach and Dr Ooi Kee Beng for their scholarly contributions to the exhibition catalogue.

64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 4 14/09/2010 5:43 PM

Jac

Singapore, 2010

64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 5 14/09/2010 5:43 PM

Felicia and Adan

Singapore, 2010

64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 6 14/09/2010 5:43 PM

Ivan

Singapore, 2010

64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 7 14/09/2010 5:43 PM

Living in the Temple

Singapore, 2010

64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 8 14/09/2010 5:43 PM

Amelia

Singapore, 2010

64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 9 14/09/2010 5:43 PM

Karl

Singapore, 2010

64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 10 14/09/2010 5:43 PM

Angela and Mom

Singapore, 2010

64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 11 14/09/2010 5:43 PM

Shi Wei

Singapore, 2009

64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 12 14/09/2010 5:43 PM

Introduction

Lim Qinyi

Discordant Symmetries is the culmination of photography and audio materials collected and created over the last year by Wei Leng Tay. Initially titled “To be Chinese” and “Convergence”, the project takes off from the perspective of the artist as a third generation ethnic Chinese born, bred and largely educated in Singapore. However, over the last few years, she has been based in Hong Kong and experienced a personal disjuncture on what it meant to identify as an ethnic Chinese living on the peripheries of modern China. This disconnection, Wei Leng pointed out, arises out of being geographically separated from her family and as well as the lack of volition to practise traditions as a member of the dominant race in Hong Kong. Taken as a foreigner by the locals, the displacement made her reconsider the nuances being the ethnic identity and if there would be others out there who empathized with this condition.

Framed by these questions, *Discordant Symmetries* features 26 varying sized photographs of still life and portraits of friends, acquaintances and family members and their domestic situations in Singapore and Malaysia. These photographs capture and highlight the subjects in their everyday lives, more often than not, in their various domestic situations with their occupants reacting and seen in relation to the various artifactual ephemera that defines their own stake in this world. Similarly, the still-lifes are treated with certain clinical detachment, be it the collection of clocks at the head of the bed or the revelatory open door to the toy storeroom beneath the stairs. Unlike the intimate questions from where Wei Leng started out from, she only allows her subjects to be identified and contextualised by her audience through the subject’s first names and geographic locations in the captions.

The question about photography will always be how does one read into them, or rather, where one should position oneself in relation to these materials. How would locating these photographs within the Baba House, a heritage house that retains the splendourous visage of 1920s Straits Chinese family, help navigate and contextualise the complexities of Chinese identity over the last eighty years? More fundamentally, how would these photographs help answer the questions that framed the artwork?

Photography, described by Susan Sontag as “the modern way of seeing”, allows reality to be seen in fragments. She elaborates, “It is felt that reality is essentially unlimited, and knowledge is open-ended. It follows that all boundaries, all unifying ideas have to be misleading, demagogic; at best, provisional; almost always, in the long run, untrue. To see reality in the light of certain unifying ideas has the undeniable advantage of giving shape and form to our experience. But it also, - so the modern way of seeing instructs us – denies the infinite variety and complexity of the real…what is liberating, we are told, is to notice more and more[1].” These fragments of reality also allow the audience and Wei Leng to reach a certain consensus towards what they are each individually seeking in the image and audio renderings. For Wei Leng, focusing on domestic situations is an extension of how she relates to human relationships and families. With the notion of the home as a focus point, it enables her to deal with intricate perplexities of

64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 13 14/09/2010 5:43 PM

reality around her and to observe relationships that form "because of places and traditions that we live within[2]." Likewise, her audio recordings are charted out using similar framework but even more highly contingent on the subjects and their responses. Wei Leng's process involves briefly mapping out a framework of questions that allows the subjects the space to move organically and at the same time, allows her to negotiate through certain subjects like the subject's lack of familiarity with their own ancestral history. To her, this ahistory is both telling and "not uncommon[3]."

Wei Leng's position in this can be read as one of non-intervention and even as a participant of her subject's vulnerability and mutability[4] in which to a certain degree, allows the audience to make the decision of partaking in this act. It is upon here that one would call upon Barthes' notions of the *studium*, *punctum* and above all, *noeme*. The *studium* has been described at length as the order of liking, "it mobilizes a half desire, a demi-volition; it is the same sort of vague slippery, irresponsible interest one takes in the people, the entertainments, the books, the clothes find 'all right'[5]" and the *punctum* (the prick or "detail") that captures attention and enables the audience to intervene with their own interpretations of the circumstances or even to enter in harmony with that of the photographer's intentions. The interesting co-relationship shared between both terms is evident when works such as *Kian Foo's Home* where a neat dresser of personal artifacts and family photos are placed sparingly apart where the viewer would at length empathise with. However, our direction is directed to each of the artifacts: the crucifix in the corner, the sunglasses and the lamp. Our attention is drawn to the obscured black and white family portrait in the background, which together with the title, creates a web of connections with the other works in the exhibition.

While the point of interest here could be of what each image and audio snippet reveals, it is the *noeme* ("That –has –been" or *The intractable* or memento mori*)* that forms the driving force behind this project and seeks to fulfil the questions she earlier asked. The *noeme,* as defined by Barthes, is the quality of which "what I see has been here, in this place that extends between infinity and the subject; it has been here, and yet immediately separated; it has been absolutely irrefutably deferred[6]." The quality of deferment relates to the theme at hand or as briefly mentioned the ahistory conveyed by Wei Leng's subjects during the interview process. Wei Leng's subjects span across two generations – one being of her mother's generation that has experienced to certain extent the birthing pains of independence and the later generation who can be regarded as Wei Leng's contemporaries and are born in a time when the governmental infrastructure for smoothing out the thorny issues of national identity have been set in place and merely finetuned as time progressed. For example, the boy in the family portrait in *Kian Foo's Home* is a far cry from what he was but rather, is now portrayed in *Kian Foo* as a senior patriarchal figure with greying hair who runs an optometrist business in a cluttered office space in Penang, Malaysia. The transitory process of time and fluidity of human migration between Singapore and Malaysia is documented here by the title of the works but also through the geographic locations where it is noted in *Kian Foo's Home* and the

64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 14 14/09/2010 5:43 PM

rest of her works. It is in these two generations that she focuses on and finds disconcerting symmetries that allude to the apathetic, if not, alienation felt by the broader academic discourse of primordial ethnic identity.

The issues contributing to this disenfranchisement are plenty and one of them that has been briefly discussed is the growing politicisation of these discourses, which has resulted in over-simplifying and over use of the particular terminology. In the case of the Chinese Sojourner and diasporic studies, the use of such terms has since become a platform for establishing ethnic and racialised bonds between China and the overseas Chinese as a whole community. As highlighted by Professor Wang Gung Wu, despite progress within the field of the discourse towards splitting the definitions of "Hua Qiao" and" Hua Yi" - the latter denoting a move towards deformalised connections with China, there is still a move within the academic discourse to generalize the signification of the term "Chinese Diaspora" as one that defines a singular body of Overseas Chinese as "Hua Qiao" was used thirty years ago[7].

While this contest of terminology and definitions belies implications of transnational allegiance and political tensions, such contests have little bearing on the subjects of these discourses or even, of this exhibition. Consider the subject depicted in *Karl*, a young man seated in his new governmental housing unit amidst familiar furniture from Ikea and holding onto specialized Japanese toys. He does seem like any other Chinese on the street but as a Singaporean born to Chinese citizens, he is the only member of his immediate family who would fall under the strict definition of *Hua yi* (Ethnic Chinese) by virtue of his citizenship. Despite the fact that the cultural and racial identity practised by him and his family would have straddle the grey area of being between formalized customs and intrinsic which cannot be governed by geopolitical boundaries or notions of citizenship and allegiance, Karl is undeniably a subject of the Chinese diaspora. It is here where the fissures between discourse and reality becomes acute and at the times like this, irrelevant. Nonetheless, Karl serves as a reminder of the growing voices of transationalism discourse that problematises the notion of primodial theories of ethnic identity and at the same time, the shift in the historical stereotypes attached to the idea of the migrant Chinese that has dominated these narratives. Rather, Karl would serve to be a stirring reminder that the Chinese sojourner and migrant Chinese now undertake the journey under differing socio-political reasons and circumstances.

While it would have seemed how the discourses come into disjuncture with reality, a number of root causes are at work and we cannot pin it down entirely on the inflexibility of the vernacular. One factor that has yet to be accounted for is the governmental policies put in place in order to handle the issues of citizenship in the region. In particular, when looking at Singapore, conflation applied to ethnic and racial identities into a single racial identity has resulted among others - the inability of the younger generation to communicate with the older using dialects native to their ancestor's origins. To look further back and in a broader context, the concept of nation-states has always been a foreign to regions where pluralities of

64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 15 14/09/2010 5:43 PM

society and fluidity of culture transcends contemporary definitions of boundaries. To the Chinese, the ethnic identity, which is rooted within the culture and language of their own region, is considered the essential connecting factor between that of them and the culture of a unified and larger community under the Son of Heaven[8].

Focusing on Singapore, the conflation ethnic and racial identities may be seen as a case of exercised pragmatism to resolve with the conflicting models of citizenship practised by the British and Chinese government that run in tandem with the fears of the rising left-wing nationalist ideologies coming from China would influence the local Chinese. On the other hand, the move towards such conflation arises from the introduction of the four official languages known as Article 49 to the Legislative Assembly by the then-Chief Minister David Marshall. The underlying concerns behind this motion was mainly to eschew the prevalent English monolingualism practised by the British colonial government and also, to allow a fairer demographic representation of Singapore.

"Language, Sir, has been and is an instrument of racial culture. To impose one language on the whole population is to impose the domination of that one race. In this plural society like ours, if we seek justice for all, we must reject monolingualism and accept the principle of multi-lingualism. We must, Sir, give equal respect to as many of the major languages as meet the essential needs of the people. I am advised and I believe that Mandarin will satisfy our Chinese people of all dialects…Sir, I am not unconscious that, in this fascinating city of ours, we have many other races and many other language but like true Singaporeans, they are reasonable and they realize their small numbers and, by virtue of the progressively growing difficulties of additional languages, it would be impossible to give consideration to more than four languages…[9]"

The effects of Article 49 and subsequent enforced learning of Mandarin as mother tongue aggravated the situation among the Chinese community and allowed ethnic differentiation to lurk in the shadows of the new racialised image of multiculturalism in Singapore[10]. Leading into the late 1970s, the enforced conflation took on a different turn as Lee Kuan Yew started promoting the use of Mandarin with the exclusion of other dialects and a highly conservative form of Confucianism as cultural ballast at the expense of other Chinese dialects. Looming in the background of this move was the closure of the Nanyang University, the only Chinese-language university in Southeast Asia and also the crack down on radical student politics and militant trade unionism of the 1950s-60s that were linked with Chinese culture[11].

Wei Leng and her subjects can be seen as fruition of such policies and cultural upbringing. In fact, Wei Leng herself understands the issue at hand and the dislocation that it caused. One of the other experiences she mentioned is being able to understand the Cantonese dialect used at various family gatherings across the causeway where the dialect is used more prevalently, thus rendering her unable to articulate herself fluently. Through the years, it is little incidences like these that made her more acutely aware that being racialised in a plural society is not enough. To her

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subjects, in *Felicia and Adan* and *Jac*, the understanding of such pluralities may not exist at a conscious level but at subconscious level there is a certain resistance against the constructed single definition of the Chinese in Singapore that manifest as a struggle to reject Confucianism and replace it with the perceived trends of the moment. The question lies in how this will lead future generations of ethnic Chinese with the blurring of migration and multiple diasporas. If we understand photography to be a record of change, then we understand all identities to be constructions and the only irrefutable reality is how people appear[12]. At the end of the day, there can be no final photograph that would suitably answer all questions pertaining to the stereotypes or the constructs articulated by the various discourses.

Lim Qinyi is Assistant Curator at the NUS Museum and a graduate student under the Southeast Asian Studies Programme at NUS. Her previous exhibitions include *Curating Lab: 100 Objects (2009)*, *And The Difference Is: The Independence Project (2009)* and *Telah Terbit: Out Now (2007).*

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Effigy Maker

Penang, 2010

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Effigy Shop

Penang, 2010

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Can Cultural Identity Travel?

Dr Ooi Kee Beng

We all travel more or less nowadays, and every good trip tweaks our perspective of state, society and self to some extent. Numerous short trips leave us with numerous occasions for thought.

But for those who stay away from home a long time, and the further the cultural distance between the new and old places of domicile, the adjustments required can amount to serious psychological trauma.

For physical security, economic shelter, cultural refuge, and mental health, migrating in groups has therefore often been preferred, by humans as well as most animals.

Many terms have been thought up to describe people on themove—transients, sojourners, migrants, wanderers, drifters, travellers, nomads, itinerants, wayfarers. This is for the purpose of contrast with a state of existence – and a state of mind – assumed more natural and unproblematic, namely that of the homesteaded.

And politically, those who stay put are considered the culturally steadfast and reliable. This is not strange, since mobile groups are practically by their nature in search of something, be these personal fortune, political asylum or profitable employment. They may also have invasion or plunder in mind.

Be that as it may, the contrast between the mobile and the immobile is often exaggerated, especially in areas of the world where migration is extremely high and cultural hybridism has always been the norm.

What has been happening in modern times is the rise of the nation-states. This notion of nations expressed as states was a straitjacket that former European colonies had to adopt. Within that constraint, ethnic essentialism became the *raison d'etre* in these countries.

In Southeast Asia, this political device has been most palpably applied in Malaysia. There, the homesteaded were distinguished from the migrant; the indigene from the transient. While the Cold War clothed nationalism throughout the world as class conflicts writ large, Malaysia cultivated ethnic consciousness as its political logic.

Official knowledge about Malaysia is thus often manufactured through racial categories. This is compounded within a structure where political parties pose as racial champions, and dissent are branded as racial treason.

Now, while ethnic identities are strong in most of us, it does not follow that our politics cannot transcend them. In fact, subsuming them under a more harmonizing nomenclature would be a better way to go. Inter-ethnic cooperation does not really have to take the form of clearly distinguished groups negotiating with or threatening each other; it can just as well seek non-ethnic expressions that can unite individuals more solidly. Aiming for national unity by conjuring essential differences does not seem a bright stratagem.

The Malaysian situation is therefore a serious one, but one which, if solved, would provide an exemplary lesson to the world.

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For now, let us focus on a long-term sojourner — the Chinese Malaysian.

His is an interesting case. His migration is relatively old, he makes up a sizeable proportion of the population, and he is modernized where economic functions and skills are concerned.

While his forefathers once migrated as traders and workers to what they saw as frontier regions where economic life was intensive and dynamic, the pandemic spread of the nation-state after 1945 left him in danger of becoming stateless.[1]

The colonialist attempt in 1946 to simplify colonial rule by standardizing political control throughout the Malaya Peninsula excepting Singapore, was in line with egalitarian notions of citizenship that had become fashionable in Britain following the war against the unhampered racism of the Nazis. Citizenship was to be liberally regulated under the Malayan Union Plan, and the legal distinction between indigene and migrant eradicated.[2]

This quickly led to a strong reaction from leading members of Malay polities on the peninsula which had subsisted in acquiescent form under British and Japanese rule. A new order – the Federation of Malaya – was announced in 1948 that limited citizenship rights and the right to citizenship for the Chinese on the peninsula.

Once Communism claimed victory over the Nationalists in China in 1949, and once the Bandung Conference of 1955 attending by new Asian and African nations accepted the reality of post-colonial nation-states, the die was cast.

The fact that the communists engaged in the guerrilla war after 1948 were mainly Chinese weakened further the bargaining power of the Malayan Chinese community at large. In the rush towards independence, and with the British hurrying to retire from the region, compromises were quickly penned which remain controversial and deeply significant to this day.

In standard global practice, citizenship brings equal basic rights to all, but in Malaysia, the distinction between indigene and migrant was imported into the concept of citizenship. That vital conceptual principle was bent in the negotiations between the political parties that gained independence from Britain. Compromises made on equal citizenship rights and on the secularity of the modern nation-state continue to infect political discourses and pervade inter-personal relations in the country.

More profoundly, over the years, the initial ambiguity surrounding matters of principle must bear some blame for undermining the sanctity of the legislated word, the integrity of the judiciary, and the rule of law. If a political point is so important that a basic principle of law had to be qualified because of it, then surely the evident validity of that point would over time become more sacrosanct than the principle it tweaked, and not the other way around. The point does not remain a temporary measure but will increasingly undermine the principle itself.

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Article 153 of the Federal Constitution, in its present form, announces "the special position of the Malays and natives of any of the States of Sabah and Sarawak", as a way of contrasting indigenes from migrants. The mention of natives of Sabah and Sarawak was an addition made in 1965 when Malaysia was formed, and soon made room for the adoption of "bumiputera" as a conceptual cornerstone in public policy. Indeed, for legal purposes, Article 153 in 1957 had necessitated an accompanying definition of "Malays". Through Article 160, therefore, an ethnicity was challengingly defined at length in the national Constitution.

A Malay, according to Article 160, is "a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay custom and (a) was before Merdeka Day born in the Federation or in Singapore or born of parents one of whom was born in the Federation or in Singapore, or is on that day domiciled in the Federation or in Singapore; or (b) is the issue of such a person".[3]

As one might have expected, indigenism – being so susceptible to political populism and so easily understood intuitively – soon overshadowed other political discourses and made the already difficult task of forming a coherent and cohesive national identity all the more formidable.

The dynamics of this fateful compromise accelerated tremendously after the racial riots of 13 May 1969, when hundreds, according to official figures, were killed.[4]

Other effects of such a divisive discourse being sustained over decades, aside from the ranking between national and ethnic identity, include precipitously falling standards of governance, a serious emigration of talents, one-party-state tendencies, and heightened segregation among ethnic groups.

The government's need to muffle the press, to confiscate books, to ban publications and to suppress political activity among the young, stems to a large extent from the prescribed clash of ethnicities, and from the vain idea that a nation can be built by means of an irreparably divisive discourse.

Malaysia's self-image is therefore schizophrenic. This has impeded the synergic potential of the country, not only economically but culturally as well. The collectivism of ethnocentrism works against individual growth and spontaneous hybridization.

Unremitting consciousness about any aspect of our life – personal or national – is a painful fixation that would be recognized as pathological if it were not so ubiquitous. Being Chinese in Malaysia, is therefore a pain. This is equally true about being Malay, being Indian, or being Eurasian in this otherwise so promising country.

The easy path out of this dilemma, one would think, would be to develop a sense of being Malaysian that was strong enough to exceed and overshadow the ethnic sense. But for that to happen, the definition of being Malaysian has to straightforward, and the rights enjoyed by a Malaysian citizen must be self-evident, and not

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eclipsed decisively by ethnicity.

However, while ethnic differences was the major issue in the beginning, racialism process has been exploited for so long now that the greatest problems facing the country today have developed into those of corruption, incompetence, weak leadership, a weak economy, a politically subservient judiciary, and other governance issues.

To be sure, the New Economic Policy implemented in 1970, and which is still in practice today, was meant to render ethnicity as irrelevant was possible. This is forgotten today.

The idea was for government policies to make it possible for Malays to participate with increasing competence in the modern economy and the modern administration of the country. To do that, a handicap was to be given to them. As in golf, that handicap – properly managed – provided an artificial playing field. And as in golf, the idea is for this handicap to be minimized over time.

The only sure criterion of success for the NEP was therefore its own dissolution. It was to seek its own early demise.[5]

Strangely, the NEP might actually have succeeded better if the extending notion of "Malay special position", or "Malay rights" or "Malay supremacy" had not accompanied it, warping it beyond recognition. The idea of perpetual right jived badly with the rationale of the NEP.

Achieving state quotas was not supposed to be understood in a passive manner as a rectification of some historic injustice done to the Malay community which then had to be defended, but instead as the attainment of the critical level needed for a process of self-modernization among the Malays to kick in.

Thus, the original goal was for the government to work towards pushing at least 30% of the Malay community into the business world. Governmental help would not be needed after that point. What this idea was distorted into was for 30% of share equities to be owned by members of the bumiputera community.[6] This is something essentially different.

A belief in internal dynamism became at the hands of opportunistic populists a demand for endless external sustenance of a passive entity. This demand worked through transforming the notion of Malay special position into Malay special right, and then into Malay supremacy. In the beginning, the position was special only in a negative sense—the Malay community, for historic reasons, needed governmental help to participate competently in the modern economy. It was special on such grounds. If the NEP had worked, then that position would have lost all relevance.

Now, some countries are supposed to be eyeing Malaysia as a model to be copied, especially for how it succeeded in keeping inter-ethnic peace for so long while maintaining an enviable level of economic growth. Most notable among these – and most understandably too – are South Africa and Fiji.[7] [8]

64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 23 14/09/2010 5:44 PM

In both of these, the "indigenes" make up the majority of citizens, are the economically weaker party, and feel threatened by migrant groups. The temptation is therefore strong for these countries to imitate the seeming success story of Malaysia's majority-favouring affirmative action policy. As I have tried to show, the issue is a highly complicated one.

In summary, the bigger issue for Malaysia – and for these other countries – is whether racialism is a necessary political requirement in countries where the majority communities are poor. The possibilities that racialism opens up for political opportunism and manipulation are scarily high, and in the not-too-long run threatens the nation-building project itself.

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64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 24 14/09/2010 5:44 PM

Wei Wei's Toyroom

Kuala Lumpur, 2010

64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 25 14/09/2010 5:44 PM

Ah Lok

Penang, 2010

64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 26 14/09/2010 5:44 PM

Rosemary and Daughters

Kuala Lumpur, 2010

64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 27 14/09/2010 5:44 PM

Eldest Aunt's Husband, Mr Joon

Penang, 2010

64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 28 14/09/2010 5:44 PM

Grand Uncle, Mr Joon

Penang, 2010

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Chinese School

Penang, 2010

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Cheong

Penang, 2010

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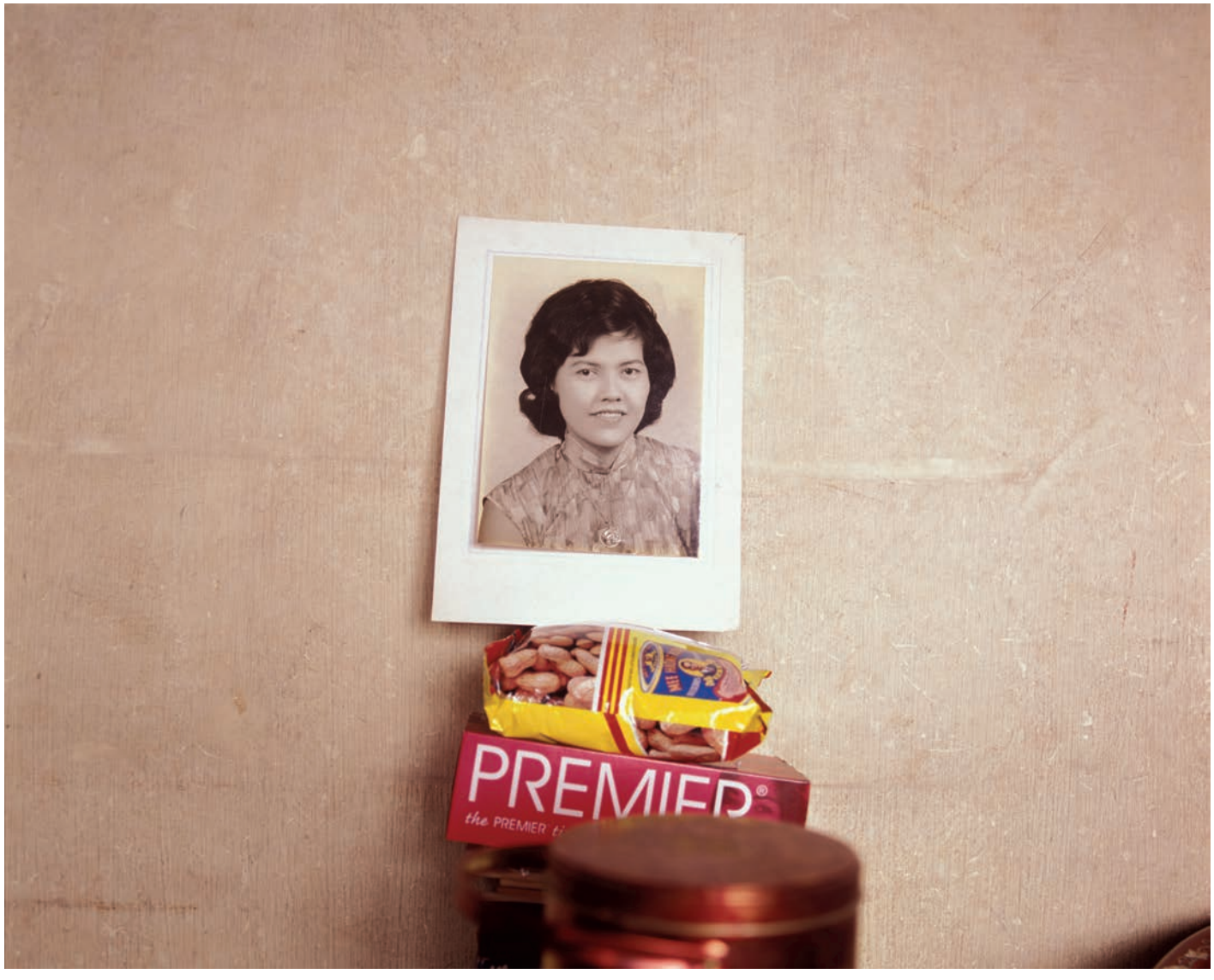

Third Grandaunt II

Ipoh, 2010

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Third Grandaunt

Ipoh, 2010

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Kim and Family

Kuala Lumpur, 2010

64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 34 14/09/2010 5:44 PM

Photographing Your Own

Dr John Rohrbach

Photography's heart, if not its soul, lies with portraiture, the camera's ability to describe the sitter's outward appearance so acutely that one cannot help but enter that person's world, if just for an instant, to stand before them in a shared humanity. If the portrait is particularly good, it transcends the emotions of the moment, the sitter's cold distrust or warm embrace of the camera lens, to reflect a larger condition. When the setting shifts beyond the studio, the surrounding details frame the scene in a web of class, lifestyle, and idiosyncrasy.

Wei Leng Tay's quietly compelling photographic portraits of Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia place before us individuals who have generously accepted the camera's intrusion into their private lives. Many of the photographs are set in kitchens, bedrooms, and dining rooms. Even those depicting shops and temples offer quiet back areas where people let down their guard. One feels a special privilege at this access. Older sitters offer themselves to the camera often surrounded by tables, shelves, and countertops that are filled with their accumulations of living all close at hand. The settings of younger people tend to present less clutter, suggesting not merely their more modern outlook, but spaces to grow into.

Rarely do the sitters look at her camera. Their disregard raises awareness of the camera's distance; Wei Leng Tay has positioned herself as if she were a quiet watcher just off-stage. The low light in the images furthers that sense of a theatrical setting. As with plays, the colorful light is carefully focused on the players. Rather than act out for the camera, they exude stillness, or when sitting in groups, quiet interchange. One is reminded of Rineke Dijkstra's portraits of young women and men. Here too the sitters offer themselves with open passivity to the camera, accepting its presence rather than projecting a stance. Jeff Wall's Hollywood-infused photographic stagings and Philip-Lorca diCorcia's subtly crafted family and street fictions come to mind. But where Wall's and diCorcia's "slice-of-life" photographs reveal their falsities on extended interrogation, Wei Leng Tay's images suggest a more honest connection, as if the photographer has settled in about twenty minutes earlier and let initial conversation give way to silence so that the sitters could turn back to their own concerns. Her crafted focus and balanced composition draw one comfortably into this relaxed atmosphere, allowing one to peruse each person and their surroundings at leisure.

What is this performance that Wei Leng Tay introduces? Looked at temporally, it is the settling into life — the initial preoccupation with monetary and career ambitions, courting and raising of a family, and the settling in to a modicum of comfort. Gradually ambitions are diminished, accumulations gather around, and one's days and nights come to be enveloped by quiet habits. But there is another just as potent angle to her story. It is the flow, played out across the world for centuries, of people who have left their homeland in search of better lives, of the life of one culture embedded within another. This spread of people from one country to another is a tale that many other photographers have depicted over time, from Jacob Riis' intrusive documentation of migrants to America stuffed into ramshackle tenement houses in lower Manhattan in the 1890s

64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 35 14/09/2010 5:44 PM

to Brazilian photographer Sebastio Salgado's late twentieth century heroicizings of third world migrants working in their adopted lands. The life of one culture embedded within another has also been a continuing preoccupation. Arnold Genthe photographed San Francisco's Chinatown in the 1890s and 1900s. Roman Vishniac photographed the Jewish ghettos of Eastern Europe in the 1930s. Josef Koudelka photographed the gypsy communities dotting his native Czechoslovakia in the early 1960s, just to name three such projects.

Wei Leng Tay now brings us the migration of the Chinese into Singapore and Malaysia. It is a potent subject. Chinese citizens have been migrating not only through Asia, but increasingly to countries across the world. The issue extends far beyond the Chinese, of course. Global migration is a central feature of our time, influencing the world as much as cell phones and the internet. As the *New York Times* recently pointed out, one can look at almost any headline in the news, and between the lines one will find a chapter in the story of global migration.[1] The United Nations estimates that there are 214 million migrants worldwide today, an increase of 37% over the last twenty years.[2] Singapore alone has seen a 41% increase of foreign-born migrants between 1990 and 2010.[3]

Wei Leng Tay is herself a part of this migration. She is a citizen of Singapore, but her Chinese father is from Malaysia. Her Chinese mother has many relatives in Penang. Like many of those she photographs, Wei Leng also has family in China. Recognition of these connections reveals her project to be a personal exploration of that broadly human tale of generational transformation, where the elders are more likely to hold on to the language and customs of their ancestors, while the young embrace the new. Most Chinese Singaporeans in their 20s do not speak their family's traditional dialect and many have broken from their traditional religious roots. Wei Leng Tay tells her tale from the perspective of a generation beyond the upheaval of the physical migration, but not fully beyond its effects. The first generation settles in. The second generation becomes more integrated, finding a balance between traditions of the culture left behind and those of the adopted land. The third generation, her generation, has the perspective and distance to take a critical look at this balance. Like the young the world over, they chafe at their parents' ways. But their sense of separation is more acute. Even as these young adults and their burgeoning families still often live with their parents, their outlook has taken on a new far more expansive and challenging global cast defined not just by other Asian States but by Australia, Europe, Canada, and America. Some of them have studied abroad. Wei Leng Tay gained her Bachelor of Sciences degree at McGill University in Montreal. She is a young professional like many of the young adults she photographs — artists, designers, photographers, and writers. Like these subjects she is a striver with a modestly secure financial situation and tied to the internet. Like them, she struggles with the prejudices of her parents' generation, and the sense of separation brought by her more global outlook. In that acute sensation of separation, she positions herself through her images of young and old alike as the empathetic watcher and recorder of stasis and change. Rather than break away from her roots, she

64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 36 14/09/2010 5:44 PM

acknowledges them with openness and respect, valuing them even as she questions them.

The occasional formal studio portraits of ancestors gracing the walls behind some of the older sitters like Ah Biang bring reminder of how thoroughly times have changed. Wei Leng Tay's new color portraits are keepsakes informed by a new far more informal outlook. Here, the surroundings she depicts are just as important as her sitters. Shelves filled with clocks or action figures, or friends playing Guitar Hero, each unveil personal passions not considered appropriate to portraiture of the past. As the images shift from Penang to Kuala Lumpur and Singapore they also deliver visceral reminder of the economic and cultural disparities between various urban areas and between the photographer's relatives and her friends. Rock band posters posted adjacent to funerary lanterns become symbols of the speed and disruptions of these changes. Photographs of young parents with their toddlers raise questions of how the fast encroaching globalization of life will affect those relationships twenty years down the line, and what further historical roots will be lost.

What these photographs do not easily convey, are the social tensions and ethnic prejudices that so deeply inscribe life in Singapore and Malaysia. The depictions of Chinese schools in Penang remind audiences there of segregation hidden to outsiders. The portraits of young women of mixed ethnicities instantly raise thoughts of conflict to those viewing them from within these cultures. The tensions of intersecting languages and the struggle to find a common means of comfortable communication, even within families, likewise cannot be conveyed visually. Wei Leng Tay is too sympathetic to her sitters to allow ethnic tensions to overtly dominate. Instead, she allows these tensions to remain just under the surface, more truly reflecting how they do just that in daily life.

In an art world driven over these past ten years by a passion for photographing the other, it is refreshing to see someone photographing her own life, not to trumpet its distinctive outsider status but to try to understand its intergenerational dynamic. Wei Leng Tay does so not only with sincerity, but gentle acuity. These photographs may not help her resolve her relationship to her family's history, bridge the powerful disjunctions between her fellow young adults and their parents, or mend the deeply engrained prejudices in Singaporean and Malaysian society, but that they open these doors is enough.

Dr. John Rohrbach is Senior Curator of Photographs at the Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas, where he has been employed since 1992. He gained his doctorate in American Civilization from the University of Delaware in 1993, completing his dissertation on the photographer Paul Strand. His publications include Eliot Porter: *The Color of Wildness* (2001); *Regarding the Land: Robert Glenn Ketchum and the Legacy of Eliot Porter* (2006); *Accommodating Nature: The Photographs of Frank Gohlke* (2007), and *Reframing the New Topographics* (forthcoming 2011).

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64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 37 14/09/2010 5:44 PM

Hoi Yan and Family

Kuala Lumpur, 2010

64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 38 14/09/2010 5:44 PM

Eldest Aunt's Bedroom

Penang, 2010

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Ah Lan

Penang, 2010

64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 40 14/09/2010 5:44 PM

Kian Foo

Penang, 2010

64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 41 14/09/2010 5:44 PM

Eldest Aunt

Penang, 2010

64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 42 14/09/2010 5:44 PM

Kian Foo's Home

Penang, 2010

64645_Brochure 40pg 1.indd 43 14/09/2010 5:44 PM

About Baba House

A gift from Ms Agnes Tan to the National University of Singapore, the Baba House was officially opened in September 2008. Once the ancestral home of a Straits Chinese family, it is now conceived as a heritage house which facilitates appreciation, reflection and research into the Straits Chinese history and culture. This is articulated primarily through the reconstruction of a domestic space characterised by the architectural conservation of the shophouse, and restoration of interiors including furnishing, household materials and decorative features. Research, conservation and restoration were undertaken in partnership with NUS' Department of Architecture and Urban Redevelopment Authority.

The first and second floors of the Baba House reference the community's material culture during the first half of the 20th century. The third floor hosts temporary exhibitions, encouraging academic researchers and art practitioners to explore fresh perspectives into an evolving discourse on the Straits Chinese, and to develop insights into cultural encounters, hybridity and their contemporary implications. Baba House is also a unique resource for the study of architectural traditions, conservation efforts and urban developments in Singapore.

Baba House is managed by NUS Museum, an institution of NUS Centre For the Arts

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BABA HOUSE

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- Visits to the exhibition only (3rd floor) are free and By Appointment.
- Visits to the 1st and 2nd floor of Baba House are By Appointment Only. Visitors are required to sign up in advance for a heritage tour.

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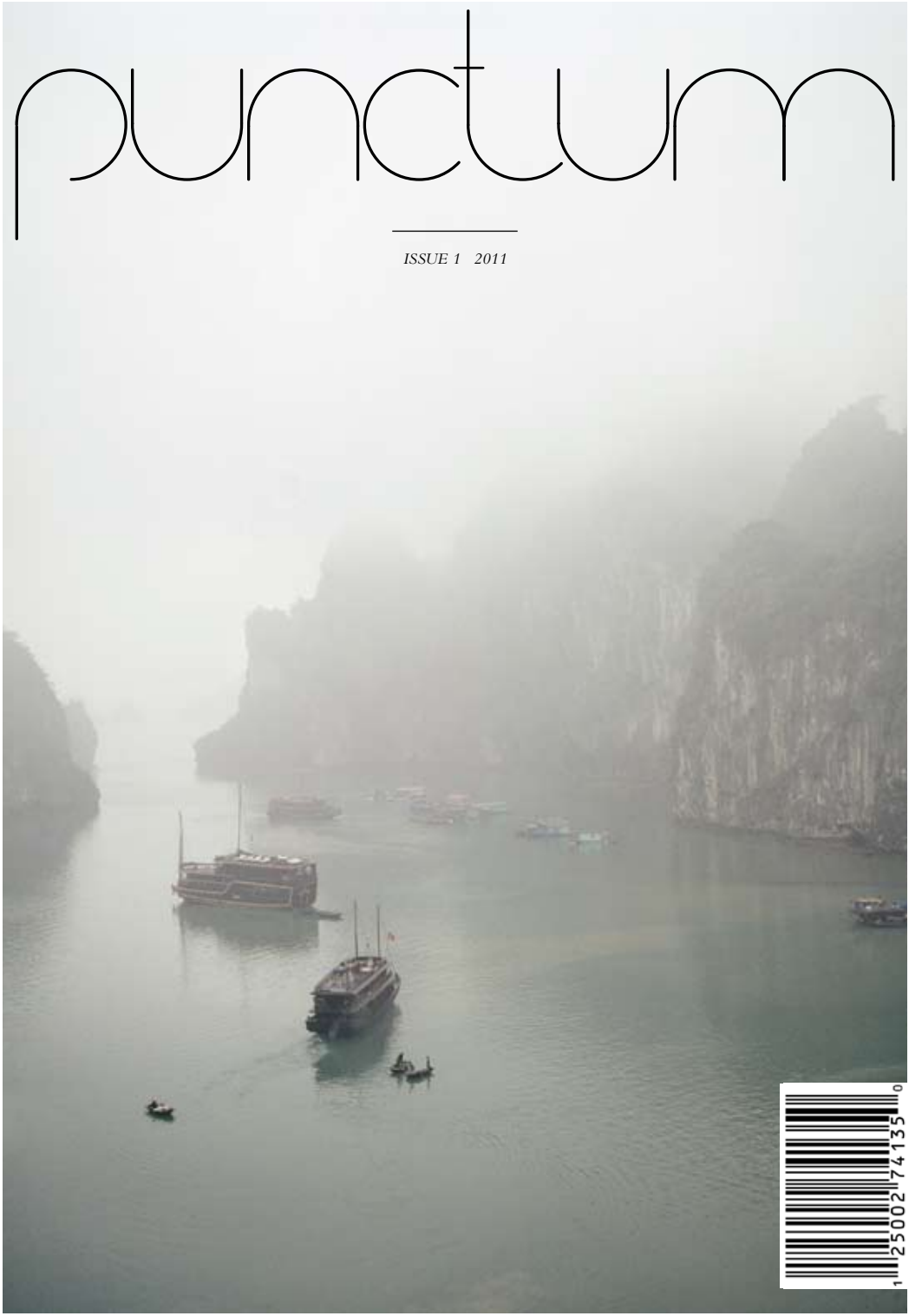
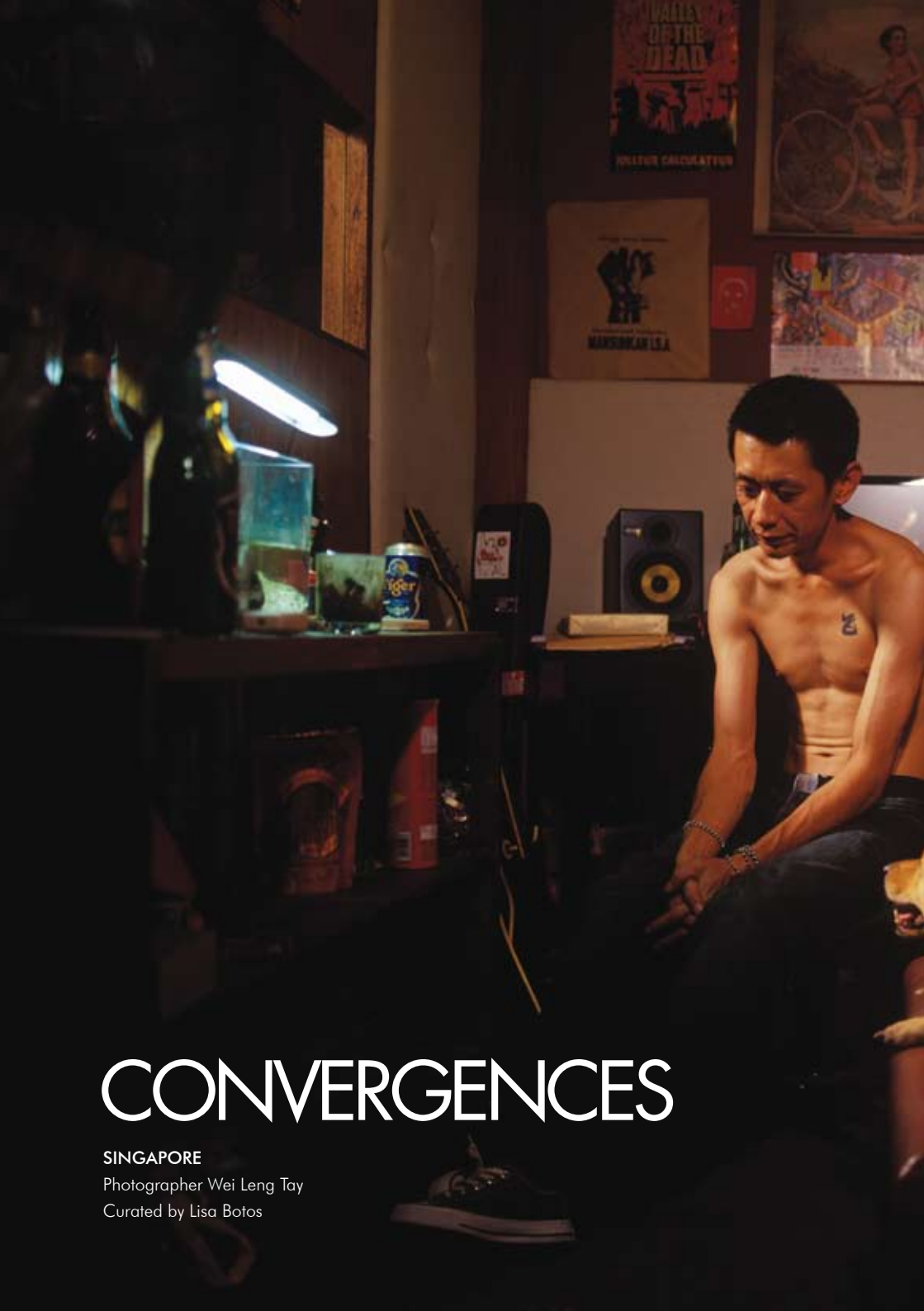


10 € | 12 US$ | 300 Rp | 8 £ | 1000 ¥



CONVERGENCES

SINGAPORE

Photographer Wei Leng Tay

Curated by Lisa Botos

Cheong Cheong. In his early thirties, he speaks Cantonese, Mandarin and Malay. He has a Mandarin rock band. Here he is sitting in his studio in Penang, Malaysia. He is from the Cameron Highlands (in another state in Malaysia). His father was a principal at a Chinese school in the Cameron Highlands when he was a child. The Tamil school had asked to borrow classrooms from his father. His father agreed to let the Tamil school use their classrooms. The local Chinese community came down on his father and called him a traitor. His father left his position as Principal and became a farmer.

Hoi Yan and family Kuala Lumpur Wai Leung, a corporate lawyer, and his wife Hoi Yan, a stay-at-home mother and part-time graphic designer.

In 1963 Singapore gained independence from Britain and joined the Malaysian Federation, only to become a sovereign state two years later. It is in the micro-history of these events, and what resulted afterwards, in which Wei Leng Tay dwells, with familiarity. Her series of portraits tell stories on how lives were shaped, inadvertently, by distance, proximity and politics.

The Border, its notion, both real and fantasized, is present in the series *"Convergence"*, which was photographed in Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore in 2009 and 2010. These are places where the photographer engaged in her project and conducted her research, and where she blended with her surroundings. It is a story of separation and togetherness, of families that were never reunited after political breakaway, and of communities that are built in isolation. Sometimes they are friends or relatives, but not always. The storytelling power of these images becomes amplified as we listen to the recorded conversations that are part of this project. Stories about everyday life, about family and triviality, that emerge from hours of bonding, and sometimes result in a photograph. Because, for all the cinematic quality of these photographs, they are, after all, snaps of life, slices cut through time, and maybe it would not be appropriate to call those she photographed

Chris and Elsie Singapore Chris Ong and Elsie. They are in Chris's parents' kitchen. They both live at home with their parents. Elsie is half Malay, on her mother's side. They both spent a few years studying in Australia.

sitters, although they are obviously aware of the presence of the camera. This is the portrait of a community, not of an individual, so what matters is the totality of the series that has been built over two years. The complexity of multiple languages used in the region by ethnic Chinese communities is part of this dialogue. Hokkien, Mandarin and Cantonese are exchanged between different members of the same family, and this adds a texture layered to family relationships.

Wei Leng Tay has embarked on other portrait exercises of communities. Other projects have taken her to Hong Kong, Fukuoka and Bangkok. The project in Bangkok possibly most resembles this series, as she focused on the Chinese communities there. Wei Leng Tay processes the idea of Otherness transforming the Other into the familiar. This notion of proximity is a fundamental departure in strategy from the 90s, where identity became one of the major themes for contemporary art. This relentless task of becoming part of the Other results in the disappearance of the boundary between the photographer and the subject. There are epic undertones to this project, when we think of the near impossibility of success or the almost unlimited number of possibilities. It reminds us of August Sander with his series "Man of the Twentieth Century", although the

Eldest Aunt Penang, Malaysia My mother's oldest sister, 78 years old, at her dining table peeling guavas. Her first language is Cantonese, and she also speaks Mandarin and some Malay. She is at home most of the time. When she was younger, she used to work at the family shoe factory.

German photographer pursued the anonymity of his sitters, citing only their profession. Wei Leng Tay, on the other hand, empowers her subjects through their personal storytelling, and as a result they become Karl, Pam, Shi Wei or Jac to all of us.

Although there are no rules, most portraits are taken in the domestic space, others are images in workshops or in public spaces, but even then there is a sense of privacy. A psycho-geography sometimes emerges from these encounters. This is the space of Gaston Bachelard or Henri Lefebvre, as in "Eldest Aunt's bedroom" or in "Grace's ironing board", where the domestic space is left empty but fully charged with powerful, iconic symbols. For the former, the bed sits perfectly done under the looming presence of dozens of clocks. In the latter, the iron sits on the ironing board. Some of the most enduring images distill a sense of solitude and isolation, of melancholy that submerges the viewer into the depths of the self. These are images that are a continuation of a narrative. Like "Shi Wei", standing in the middle of the road at night, drawing us into the solitude of the scene, the underlying tension in the image, and the stillness of the moment. Or like "Karl", unfolding his collectibles in an eerily tidy room, void of warmth and clinically clean. These are stories that are

Karl Singapore He's in his temporary home. First generation Singaporean Chinese, he is the youngest in his family and the only one who was not born in China. Born and bred in Singapore, he feels a strong cultural and ideological difference with his parents.

developing in front of our eyes, and we regret not knowing the end or the next chapter. These are stories that evoke the memory of endless ramifications and possibilities. And for all the closeness, there is a terrible detachment in these stories. In many of the most striking images light becomes a tool of the narrative language, through a focus or multiple focuses which build this atmosphere, as in "Cheong", where a bright neon light brings out clearly cut shadows that contrast with the organically random surface of his skin and that of his dog.

Other images show us some moving tenderness, as in "Eldest Aunt", which bring us back to memories of Flemish painting and domestic portraits. Here our gaze is directed to her hands and her expression through the centrally-based composition and perspective. It is as stately as a portrait can be. In "Felicia and Adan" the photographer makes a rare incursion into the idea of landscape. Here the shapes, the postures, and movements become classical, although we do not forget that we are confronting snapshots of daily life.

These images reveal the complexity of the inner worlds that they represent. They show a wealth of accumulation in intimate spaces that define the characters that we observe. They are not sitters, but neither are they subjects, they are more like friends. There is tension between

Pam Malaysia Pam Yee, in the garden of her family home. She lives with her family in a new gated community in Klang, which historically had a large Chinese migrant population because of tin mining.

the detachment and the proximity, between the unfamiliarity and the deep knowledge and understanding. There is a permanent questioning of the place of the photographed through these unfolded strategies. The photographer tries to escape this fate by erasing and blurring the edges that define the artist as actor, as planner, as director.

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Wei Leng Tay

How did we get here

Benjamin Hampe

When Chan Hampe Galleries opened its doors in 2010, the gallery's aim was to "create a platform for East-West cultural exchange by exhibiting and promoting contemporary art with a primary focus on Singapore". As the gallery developed, the emphasis on "East-West" became less relevant. "East-West" was far too simplistic a description for the programme and the complex art practices it represented.

Wei Leng Tay is one of many Singaporean artists working abroad, including Heman Chong, Ho Tzu Nyen, Suzann Victor, and Ming Wong, who represent Singapore in various biennales, exhibitions, and art fairs. The idea of a "Singaporean artist" is linked to a porous concept of "Singaporean-ness", a principal characteristic of which is racial diversity. Many years ago, I had the pleasure of seeing Wei Leng's *Discordant Symmetries* exhibition at the NUS Museum Baba House (Singapore, 2011). She approached this project, even though she had by then not lived in Singapore for more than a decade, from the perspective of a third-generation ethnic Chinese—born, bred and largely educated in Singapore.

However, setting up base in Hong Kong, a place more ethnically homogenous and familiar, and yet less welcoming than her home country, had stirred deep-seated questions about difference and inclusion. This experience and the nuances behind these perceptions continue to inform Wei Leng's practice.

The issues and perspectives illuminated by Wei Leng for her show are very close to my heart as someone with mixed parentage. I constantly strive to understand myself and have come to embrace who I am as a "Millennium Child", a term endearingly tagged onto me by my playwright friend, Bille Brown. It is a term for a person who is the embodiment of a *melange* of different cultures, habits, and identities, and who comfortably embraces these differences to his or her advantage. Wei Leng is, then, undoubtedly a true-blue Millennium Child.

Robin Peckham

Reading a Photograph by Wei Leng Tay

Reading a photograph by Wei Leng Tay necessarily begins with the sensation of boredom—this is natural, and must be admitted before we can move on to more productive things. Her photography initially deflects curiosity about the specifics of the work and instead raises the status of the image: What are we supposed to be looking at here? What kind of image are we facing? We recognize that the work is not about the particular in a meaningful way, and that these images belong to a broader system that lies just beyond the boundaries of understanding available to individual works. There is a feeling that it is the viewer who falls under critique here, that our media consumption habits predispose us to read these images incorrectly. Our approach to photography today is often far too literal, leaving us unable to decode the relevance—not to say meaning—of the image outside of its immediate media context, be it photojournalism, contemporary art, or something else entirely. Tay's work reeks of aura, but what its halo stands for is more complicated. We feel that these works are intensely personal, and that whatever research might go into them (that is to say, whatever they might be about in a social sense) and whatever formal attributes affect their composition are secondary to the involvement of the artist herself.

Preconceptions, mercifully, can be wrong; this applies to the viewer as much as the characters who inhabit the work, who often feel lost as to their roles in the practice, and the artist, who, we suspect, often ends up with more than she intended. The obvious topics of the work are naturally and immediately deconstructed. Domesticity, of course, is submerged in a sexualized nostalgia for the familiar relationships surrounding the individuals pictured in scenes like *Cathleen and Raphael* or *Pinky*. What remains is a latent discomfort that cannot be explicitly discussed, but rather informs and adds an edge to everything around it. There are artists who take questions of media and the use of the image—even looking directly at domestic situations—and make them more or less boring. Think of Li Yu and Liu Bo, who dramatize offbeat articles from the newspaper by restaging the tableaux of frontpage photographs with long, still videos in which no one moves—almost. Or John Clang, whose work with telepresent families split up over long distances is his least visually engaging practice, even if it constitutes the ineffable background to his more exciting one-off still lifes. There

is Nguan, whose outdoor lightness mirrors the darkness of Tay's interiors. And there is Chien-Chi Chang, whose responsibly distant black-and-white images counterbalance the inextricably intimate and oddly entangled subjectivity we find here. For all of these photographers, the fates of the artist and the image diverge as much in their afterlives as, we suspect, do their subjects. Unique to Wei Leng Tay, there is far more to be discovered in the expressiveness or, more likely, non-expressiveness of the figures she captures in *Lee Family* than in their living conditions and the social environment around them.

Reading a photograph by Wei Leng Tay often then proceeds to a feeling of revulsion when we mistakenly focus more on these external conditions than on the involvement of the artist or the relationship between figure and lens. This is the problem with the extravagant profusion of research-based practice and the artist-as-ethnographer today; everyone gets pulled into this way of working. For Tay, the question of how the artist is perceived—by the viewer and by her subject—is often more significant than what she herself perceives. There are, indeed, social issues that are raised in her work, but most are the product of the artist's interest in herself: she focuses, for instance, on middle-class Chinese families in Singapore and Malaysia, as well as, later, Hong Kong; she has also immersed herself in mainland families in Hong Kong, and in Japanese families in rural Japan. The constant, however, is displacement, not the particular ethnic or cultural matrix that might come to dominate the practice of a lesser artist. These categories are interesting because of their self-imposed racial segregation, and for the images of insularity that they cultivate. Certain formations emerge in Tay's understanding of these displaced domestic cultures within cultures: what she sees is the framing of the self, of gender, and of family structures, albeit in ways that reflect her own position as much as anything else. Everyone becomes subject to the epistemic violence of the category, of the label, and so this is the last thing that the artist seeks to do with her photographs. They speak, always, in the register of "Am I this?" rather than the more common "You are that." Tay understands her own process in a way that is open-ended enough for it to avoid becoming literally sociological; wherever there is a message, it should be far from obvious. Our lives, after all, are not so dramatic. What we end up seeing is that things aren't happening at all.

Reading a photograph by Wei Leng Tay settles, in the middle phases of the process, into a satisfaction with or at least acceptance of the flatness of the image. Putting aside questions of research and realizing that there are forms of silence other than boredom, we become curious about how, precisely, the artist manages to accomplish what she does with these pictures. There is a very conscious flattening of any family or social drama that might take place before the moment is recorded, even when it is clear that Tay pulls the trigger at a sensitive time. When something happens, it is always a memory of the very recent past. The key question in her work is this: How much should the audience understand of what she is trying to do? How much of herself should enter the images? How much social history should be captured? It is this instability, this refusal to make a decision about where the photograph begins or ends within her practice (and within the world at large) that makes this body of work so compelling.

For Tay, the perfect threshold is reached when she herself understands what she is trying to do. Everything else, as they say, is icing on the cake—including the legibility of the photograph for her viewers, even those who could be considered ideal viewers. The artist has experience in photojournalism, and in the flatness of her creative work there is a curiosity about the current polarization of photography in the news: to have value, an image must be either unique, unreproducible and spectacular; or universal, endlessly recyclable and timeless. Tay's photography has nothing to do with these categories, and yet her practice speaks to mass media culture far more than it does to the culture of viewing photography in galleries. As if to underscore this fact, she pays attention to the balance between various forms of media in her work, occasionally including recordings or transcripts of conversations and other forms of documentation alongside the images of her subjects. This background, however, necessarily becomes vague. Tay refuses to attribute specific quotations to specific personalities, allowing their positions to recede into a general interest in social conditions that never overwhelms the photograph.

Reading a photograph by Wei Leng Tay really only becomes interesting after the viewer has already passed through these initial phases of discomfort. What happens next is surprising: perversion enters the picture, with the understanding that something else entirely is happening here—that the pictures we are looking at resonate not because they reflect their subjects or their intended audience, but rather the projected desires and positions of the artist herself. This is most obvious in Tay's involvement with Hong Kong Chinese families, but is also evident (in a more distant and, therefore, extreme way) in everything up to and including her portraits of the women in Japanese families. Sometimes this takes the form of projected autobiography—the feeling that subjects with the same life experiences might have similar concerns—but, as often as not, it also takes the more interesting form of projected image production. Here, the artist makes pictures that tell her things about herself that she otherwise refuses to acknowledge, and presents her subjects in ways that affirm the self through the manipulation of the other. This is a long, two-way process of dealing with expectations: Tay might expect the social circumstances of a family to tell her one thing, while the subjects depicted might expect to be presented in a certain light.

As these disagreements are negotiated, social realities collapse onto individual psychological portraits, both of which evaporate and enter into the artist's production of a possible image of the self. There is something performative about this process, as the artist embeds herself within families (members of which quickly go from being strangers to relatives in a queer domestic structure). This is not to suggest that Tay's work with her subjects is at all flippant—her approach is earnest, curious, and open. It is possible, after all, that this way of working is nothing but the projection of a writer onto an artist. We all traffic in misunderstandings, even as we hope that some might be more critically productive than others. The artist is a participant in an open-ended theatrical rehearsal without star or director—one that never expects to come to fruition on the proper stage. By appropriating the lives of others, Tay comes out on the side of an anti-identitarian politics.

Reading a photograph by Wei Leng Tay concludes with a feeling of optimism and excitement born of the fact that so much of the baggage that would otherwise weigh down her project can be successfully stripped away. There is an understanding of what can be accomplished in interpersonal relationships, and of what art can do to mediate otherwise tricky social situations. Rather than engaging in the kind of humanizing documentary approach that has poisoned so many otherwise inoffensive images, Tay delivers a universalizing project that is simultaneously more open and less understanding—or less willing to understand. Her strongest photographs eliminate the visible identifiers of culture, shifting these outside of the frame of relevance and leaving behind only the remnants of what could be called universal culture, the culture of the non-place. The artist has moved tangibly from searching for something within her practice to producing; what she needs is no longer something tied to a self or other out there in the world, but rather something that can be called into being through the image. Looking at photographs from the better part of a decade ago, certain social issues remain evident; today, this space has already been explored, catalogued, and left for dead. Perception becomes alien. Tay is not interested in commentary on a specific community, but rather on the conflicting ideas of image and media that pass directly over these communities—how the universalizing lens of the genre of family portraiture in *Fion and Hei Hei* or *Kitty*, for instance, might reveal both the fractures and connections between individuals, between households, between cultures, and, most importantly, between self and other. Many things feed into the final emotion that is distilled in any one of Tay's pictures: the search for a subject, the painstaking work of getting to know strangers, the fabrication of particular moments, the capture of something that disregards the content of all of these things. As we move on to the next image, we are left with the feeling that Tay has done as much as any artist can do—she went somewhere, did something, and only came part of the way back.

Robin Peckham is an independent curator and Deputy Editor of LEAP.

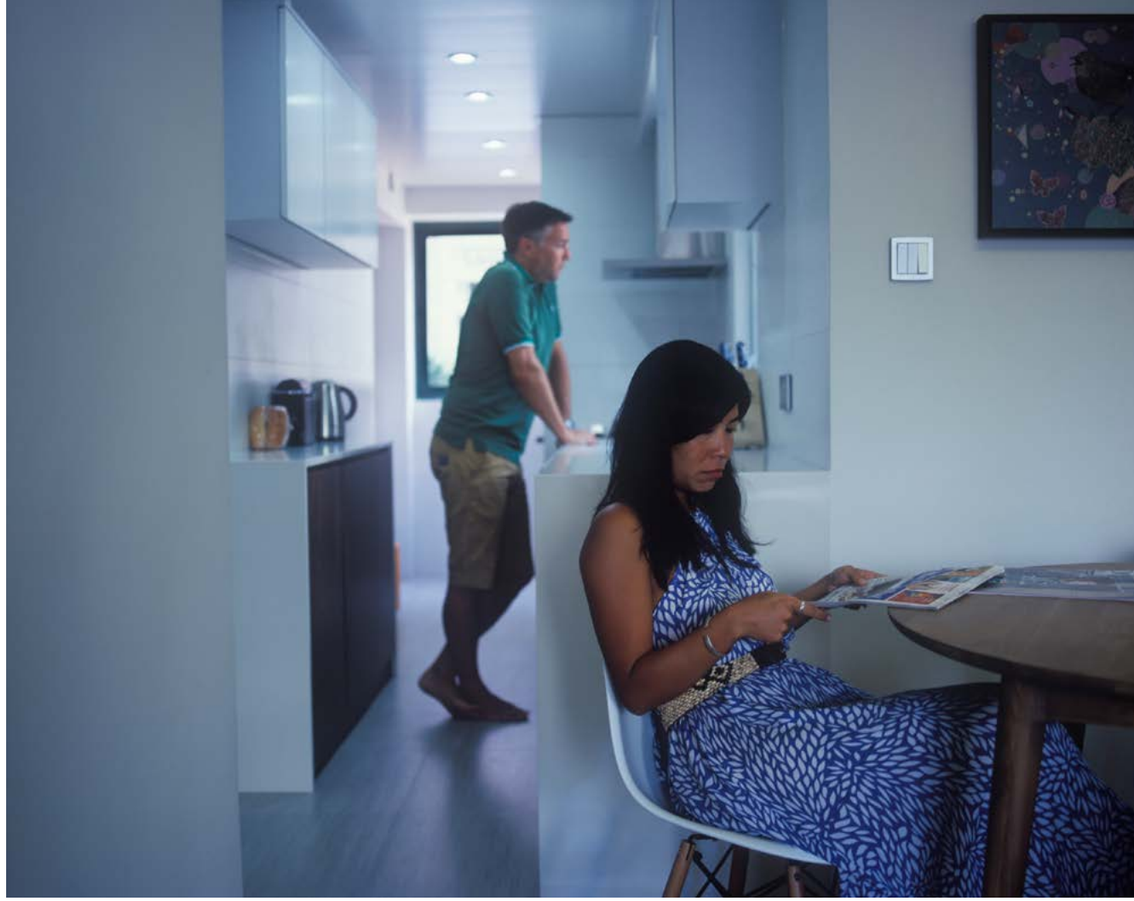
Yan Yan, 2006

(L) **Taken Over,** 2008
(R) **Cathleen and Raphael,** 2013

Lee Family, 2013

(L) **Alison I,** 2015
(R) **Alison II,** 2015

(L) **Zach's Collection,** 2008
(R) **Kitty,** 2015



Fion and Hei Hei, 2013

Community, 2007

Pinky, 2015

Detritus, 2007

Lisa Botos

Out of Place

The idea of place, as psychological or physical orientation, as social position and relational emplacement, in context and in concept, is relevant when thinking about the work of Wei Leng Tay. Subtext in some works, catalyst in others, disposition and dislocation—although subtle and elusive—invade all. Place plays its most conscious role in Tay's *Hong Kong Living* (2005—present); her only series title that explicitly establishes place. The exhibition *How did we get here* features photography-based work from this series. The systems in and of this place Hong Kong, where Singapore-born Tay has lived for fifteen years, impelled the artist to query her own position. She began to make this ongoing series of largely domestic scenes, mining her contentions and questions about her life and relationships. Steeped, too, in the abstract notions of place, are colour and composition.

Her most intimate body of work, Wei Leng Tay invites us to enter her interior province through these observed spaces where both the physical and psychological are now made public. Tay's photographs are not discrete works of other people; they are part of a larger personal narrative. There is a process of embodiment with her subjects and an ability to project herself into the lives of her sitters. And, by way of her acute relational and social observations, she is able to contemplate situations from both within and without. This orientation shift from observing others to observing herself is elemental to this work.

There is a temporal dimension to this, thus far, decade-long *Hong Kong Living* series, in which the viewer is invited into a complex web of narratives with no fixed beginning or end. This is, in part, due to Tay's process where works of art interact and build upon each other, creating space for mediation and multiple readings. Works are assimilated and reworked by the artist, often shaped by her interactions with people in earlier works and her reflections on her own uneasy relational experiences. At the same time, more recent works can inform and prompt new readings of earlier works, frustrating any kind of linear reading. The work as a whole remains fluid and dynamic, disallowing the establishing of fixed coordinates in time.

Colour has its own intrinsic function in the artist's photographs. Colour suggests the place in which the artist is making images and allows that place to assume its role in the larger ideas she is hinting at. She doesn't impose a particular kind of colour; hers is not a stylistic exercise or a surface-driven position. At the outset, Tay experimented with one or two artificial lights to dramatically illuminate sections of a space she was working in, resulting in an enhanced saturation of the colours present. The muscular palette of the city seeped into these private spaces. A sense of the beast at the door, and strategies for living with it, were tested. The presence of Hong Kong is insistent and overwhelming in those early works. Present too, is the air of unremitting demands this city has of one to "stage" and position oneself within its constellation, both in the public and private sense. Solid masses of colour and defined edges seen in *Yan Yan* and *Belinda and Dennis*—which have an appearance of being staged, but are not—reflect this. These early works emphasise the architectural construct of the city, the compressing intensity of its ethos and a nod to its cinematic heritage.

In the beginning, Tay's dominant focus was on the male, seen in such works as *Nadav* and *Ilyas* and *Family*. At the time she was experiencing confusion in her life, asking deep questions about her own relationship with her now long-time partner and the city she had chosen to live in. She soon abandoned the dramatic lighting, shifting to a more subtle mixture of ambient and artificial lighting and organically shifted her gaze too, from the male, naturally and instinctively opening up to the full spectrum of the domestic experience and embarking on a deeply reflective and complex internal dialogue. In recent years, she has consciously stopped using her lights, managing the ambient light sources within the composition, and reducing chromatic intensity. Still, what remains is the power of conspicuous colours to isolate and hold the visual focus in each work.

Wei Leng Tay's compositions, too, accentuate the physical, social and psychological textures associated with a range of conceptual interpretations of "place". In *Fion and Hei Hei*, the vertical and horizontal lines in the image hold the two figures tightly in the space, creating tension in what is a quotidian activity for a mother, but speaks of weightier issues of power relationships in the home, prescribed roles of women in society and what women want out of their own lives—all consequential questions Wei Leng Tay has of her own life. Although we know Fion is in the act of feeding her child, we can't actually see that physical connection. But that connection, our brain tells us, is there, expressed formally, and playfully, through the repetition of polka dots in Fion's blouse, the child's chair, and even in the tray of food. However, the visual obstruction of the physical connection between the two figures from the viewer's perspective amplifies a tension present in the work. A physical disconnection and, perhaps, a psychological isolation felt by both the mother and the artist. Tay's emotional ambivalence here is palpable. The composition is further accentuated by the complexity of the lighting. The foreground and middle ground light outline and define the edges of the figures, reducing them to pleasing, sculptural shapes— albeit separate and distinct— triggering a subtle perception of emotional displacement within.

The idea of place, in its full spectrum of possibilities, opens up fresh lines of thinking on Wei Leng Tay's work. Place as a physical location, place as a conceptual framework for orientating and observing oneself and place as a formalistic tool, invite concomitant avenues of engagement. The idea of place is just but one way in. Once inside, the works do not disappoint, beckoning us to circulate through, traversing divergent levels, always open.

Lisa Botos is a Singapore-based curator and founder of Botos., an arts-related, project-orientated initiative.

Wei Leng Tay

Solo Exhibitions

2016 Australian National University Centre On China in the World (CIW) Art Gallery, Canberra, AUSTRALIA
2015 *How did we get here*, Chan Hampe Galleries, SINGAPORE
2014 *Out of Place*, Lumenvisum, HONG KONG
2012 *Convergence*, Chulalongkorn University Art Center, Bangkok, THAILAND
10/11 *Discordant Symmetries*, NUS Museum, Baba House, SINGAPORE
2010 *Slow Cool Breezes*, Month of Photography Asia, Alliance Francaise Gallery, SINGAPORE
2009 *Where do we go from here?*, Winds of the Artist-in-Residence, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, JAPAN (2 person)
2008 *Desultory Landscapes*, Ooi Botos Gallery, HONG KONG

Group Exhibitions

2015 *300 Families*, Palace 66, Shenyang, CHINA
What we are left with, FORMAT Festival, Derby, U.K.
2014 *The Roving Eye: Contemporary Art From Southeast Asia*, ARTER Space for Art, Istanbul, TURKEY
Hong Kong and Macao Visual Arts Biennial, Beijing World Art Museum, CHINA
Basically.Forever – KMOPA, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, JAPAN
Yuejin Lantern Festival, Yanshuei, TAIWAN
13/14 *Concept, Context, Contestation: Art and the Collective in Southeast Asia*, Bangkok Art and Culture Centre, Bangkok, THAILAND
2013 *Everyday Life*, Asian Art Biennial, National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taichung, TAIWAN
Bright Lights, Galerie Steph+Botos., Scotts Square, SINGAPORE
300 Families, Hong Kong International Photo Festival Flare, Hong Kong Design Institute, HONG KONG
Samsung Masterpieces, National Museum of Singapore, SINGAPORE
YP13, Kiyosato Museum of Photographic Arts, Seoul Photo 2013, SOUTH KOREA
WYNG Masters Award Exhibition, ArtisTree, HONG KONG
P.O.V.: Alternate Perspectives In Asian Contemporary Photography, Galerie Steph, SINGAPORE
2012 *DiverseCity*, 8Q, Singapore Art Museum, SINGAPORE
Moving Up, Para/Site Art Space, HONG KONG
Singapore Survey 2012: New Strange Faces, Valentine Willie Fine Art, SINGAPORE
STILL BUILDING, Valentine Willie Fine Art, SINGAPORE
STILL BUILDING, Selasar Sunaryo Art Space, Bandung, INDONESIA
12 Oil Street Project, Arts Promotion Office, ART HK, HONG KONG
Portraiture Now, Objectifs Centre for Photography and Filmmaking, SINGAPORE
11/12 *I have also other favorites, Stacion* – Center for Contemporary Art Prishtina, KOSOVO
2011 *Convergence*, Delhi Photo Festival 2011, INDIA
ICON de Martell Cordon Bleu Profile Exhibition, Millenium Walk, SINGAPORE
Clean Air Auction, Sotheby's Hong Kong Spring Auction 2011, Kee Club and HKCEC Sotheby's Hall, HONG KONG
2010 *ArtMART 2010*, Para/Site Art Space, HONG KONG

Human Faces, National Museum of Singapore, SINGAPORE
All About Fukuoka: The 10 Years of FAAM Artist-in-Residence Program, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, JAPAN
Singapore Survey 2010: Beyond LKY, Valentine Willie Fine Art, SINGAPORE
City Flaneur: Social Documentary Photography, Hong Kong Heritage Museum, HONG KONG
Young Portfolio Acquisitions 2009, Kiyosato Museum of Photographic Arts, JAPAN
Grid versus Chaos, Gallery VER (with Para/Site Art Space), Bangkok, THAILAND
2009 *Photo MIAMI 2009*, Charles Guice Contemporary, Miami, USA
ArtMART 2009, Para/Site Art Space, HONG KONG
The Pursuit of Happiness, Noorderlicht International Photofestival 2009, THE NETHERLANDS
Traces, Singapore Art Show, Earl Lu Gallery, Institute of Contemporary Art, SINGAPORE
Where do we go from here?, 3. Internationales Fotografiefestival F/Stop, Leipzig, GERMANY
Declinations of Joy, Fotografia International Festival of Rome, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome, ITALY
2008 *Document*, O'Born Contemporary, Toronto, CANADA
The Photo Review 2008, Gallery 1401, The University of the Arts, Philadelphia, USA
Volume XVII, New Works Gallery Online, Silver Eye Center for Photography, Pittsburgh, USA
Young Portfolio Acquisitions 2007, Kiyosato Museum of Photographic Arts, Kiyosato, JAPAN
2007 *Singapore Art Exhibition 2007*, Singapore Art Show, Singapore Art Museum, SINGAPORE
Descubrimientos Phe07, PhotoEspana 2007, Museo de Arte Contemporaneo, Madrid, SPAIN
Projections of the Night of Photography, PhotoEspana 2007, Madrid, SPAIN
Group Exhibition, Grotto Fine Art, HONG KONG
Young Portfolio Acquisitions 2006, Kiyosato Museum of Photographic Arts, Kiyosato, JAPAN

Public Collections

National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taichung, TAIWAN
Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, JAPAN
Kiyosato Museum of Photographic Arts, Kiyosato, JAPAN
Heritage Museum, HONG KONG

Residencies and Commissions

2015 *What we are left with*, Format Festival and WYNG Masters Award, Derby, U.K. and HONG KONG
2011 12 Oil Street Project, Arts Promotion Office, HONG KONG
2009 The Art Incubator Residency, SINGAPORE
Artist-in-Residence Program 2009, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, JAPAN

Grants and Awards

2015 Presentation and Participation Grant, National Arts Council, SINGAPORE
2014 Market and Audience Development Grant, National Arts Council, SINGAPORE
2012 Finalist, WYNG Masters Award, HONG KONG
International Development Grant, National Arts Council, SINGAPORE
Singapore Internationale Grant, SINGAPORE
2011 Nominee, ICON Martell de Cordon Bleu Photography Prize 2011, SINGAPORE
Hi2P Grant, National Heritage Board, SINGAPORE
2009 Singapore Internationale Grant, SINGAPORE
Arts Creation Fund, National Arts Council, SINGAPORE
Singapore International Foundation Sponsorship, SINGAPORE
2008 Arts Professional Development Grant, National Arts Council, SINGAPORE
2007 Finalist, Descubrimientos Prize, PhotoEspana 2007, Madrid, SPAIN

Selected Publications

2014 *Photography & Diaspora: A roundtable with Pok Chi Lau, Surendra Lawoti, and Wei Leng Tay*, moderated by Anthony W. Lee, Trans Asia Photography (TAP) Review
The Roving Eye: Contemporary Art From Southeast Asia, ARTER Space for Art
Photofile vol. 94, Australian Centre for Photography
Concept, Context, Contestation, Bangkok Art and Culture Centre
2013 *Everyday Life*, Asian Art Biennial, National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts
300 Families, Hong Kong International Photography Festival Flare
Convergence (monograph)
2012 *STILL BUILDING*, Selasar Sunaryo Art Space
Like Boys, *WERK No 19*
2011 *Affinity*, Delhi Photo Festival 2011, India Habitat Centre and Nazar Foundation
Punctum, Issue 1
2010 *Discordant Symmetries*, NUS Museum
Interior Living, *Daylight Magazine*, May 2010
City Flaneur: Social Documentary Photography, Hong Kong Heritage Museum
Outside, *Ojodepez*, #20
Photographs by the Next Generation: 2009, Kiyosato Museum of Photographic Arts
2009 *The Pursuit of Happiness*, Noorderlicht 2009
Traces, The Art Incubator 2009
Where do we go from here?, F/Stop Katalog 2009
La Gioia - visioni e rappresentazioni, Fotografia - Festival Internazionale di Roma 2009
2008 *Desultory Landscapes*, Ooi Botos Gallery
Un Día Cualquiera, *OjodePez*, #12
Photographs by the Next Generation: 2007, Kiyosato Museum of Photographic Arts
2007 *Photographs by the Next Generation: 2006*, Kiyosato Museum of Photographic Arts

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Wei Leng Tay
How did we get here

WEI LENG TAY

SLOW COOL BREEZES

Returning to this past series recently, Wei Leng Tay said: 'I think it's dangerous to attribute a text or statement to an actual photo because it makes you read the photo differently.' 'Slow Cool Breezes' was developed in 2009 when Tay had the chance, for the first time in over a decade, to return to Singapore for more than a brief visit. This was her way of revisiting her birthplace, of 'getting back in touch' after a decade living and working in Hong Kong, where the artist remains based. A set of untitled photographs, the series was originally exhibited at the Alliance Française de Singapour in 2010 with edited excerpts from conversations Tay had conducted with her various subjects, mostly friends of friends.

Tay's images have been noted for eschewing nostalgia or codified cultural identity. Here, as in her other work, we are ushered into clearly individual lives, of people in familiar spaces, often their own homes. We feel implicitly allowed to be here, an acknowledged, even familiar presence in the image. But that 'familiar presence' is also that of the photographer, who is evidently an 'insider', even if only temporarily. Despite the individual lives she depicts, Tay is spoken to as one of an 'us', as a fellow Singaporean, a fellow Chinese, a woman, or one of those who have grown up through the 'good old days' of the city-state's carefully crafted post-1965 economic miracle.

But as Tay said in her artist statement for this series: 'Our homes are what are closest to us. They are also where we have to face ourselves.' Under the cover of familiarity, Tay probes personal, social and cultural issues which, even to the photographer's own surprise, remain insistently just below the surface of these diverse lives. Her interviews start as conversations, in which she often reveals just as much about herself in the process. Here there is the sense of something shared, something exchanged. And we have been allowed in like guests of the photographer and her subjects.

Tay's own immediate family extends from Singapore, through Malaysia, into Thailand, with not-too-distant roots in southern China, and new migrations, including her own, to regional hubs such as Hong Kong. These shifting 'routes' and 'roots' – as James Clifford characterised them – have given Tay a multiplicity of questions to explore, including just what it means to be 'Chinese' in Singapore, or Southeast Asia, for example?

Such personal networks are particularly explored in Tay's recent book and web project *Convergence* (2013), for which the artist photographed family and friends in places such as Ipoh, Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. However, Tay's work continues, almost stubbornly, to elide narrative. The accumulated objects in the home of *Third Grandaunt*, or the pensive gazes of *Eldest Aunt* and *Eldest Aunt's Husband Mr Joon*, suggest an intricate web of still unfolding histories, yet the subject's insistent presence confounds the simplification of a grand narrative. If a history, then a history of what? Of the photographer's family? Of the 'Chinese'? Of Singapore? Neither simply a document, nor a story: Tay's images hover; they are all and none of these things.

TEXT BY OLIVIER KRISCHER

Wei Leng Tay, *Untitled #15* from the series 'Slow Cool Breezes', 2009, archival pigment print, 45 x 60 cm, courtesy and © the artist.

Wei Leng Tay, *Untitled #11* from the series 'Slow Cool Breezes', 2009, archival pigment print, 45 x 60 cm, courtesy and © the artist.

The following interviews were conducted between June and August 2009. Excerpts have been edited for clarity, but every effort has been made to preserve people's natural way of speaking.

We started to do this thing called the 'pig party', where we, we roast a whole pig. So we had it in my house, like behind, in the forest lah … and we build like a pit. But getting a pig in Singapore is like buying drugs lah, you know. Because, you can't buy a whole pig in Singapore, except if you buy it for religious purposes. So we actually had to get one of our Chinese friends to go to the abattoir, to like sign off to say that this pig is being bought for religious purposes, otherwise you can only get the pig in parts lah, you can't get the whole pig. We found this guy, we named him 'Pork Roger' lah, right; and it's so shady you know, because we have to go at about 4:30, 5 o'clock in the morning, right, and Pork Roger will say: 'Okay, you meet me at this deserted road in Choa Chu Kang.' And Pork Roger will pull up beside us, and he will get out of his car and he'll come, to make us sign that sheet lah, right. So after signing he'll say: 'Okay, you wait here.' And Pork Roger will disappear. And then this other car will come and like flash his lights, so then we will follow the other car [chuckles], and we'll go to the abattoir lah, right. And at the abattoir, you know, the guy will say: 'Okay, open your trunk.' And then these two men will run out and they'll dump the pig inside, and they'll run away [laughs] … It's like a great big party lah, you know, we invite like hundreds of people.

Singapore's a great place. I honestly think we have gone very far; for a small dot in the world, we have achieved a lot. If you travel, you go to other countries, you see like America – the crime rate is so high. For example, right, if, when I do have kids, I would like my kids to grow up in Singapore first. Because, be it a son or a daughter, if I was in Australia and my son or daughter came back at 4 or 5 a.m., I would be quite anxious. Singapore, if they took public transport and came back at 4–5 a.m., I can definitely say I would still have a peaceful night's sleep because Singapore is much safer. You don't really appreciate what Singapore has until you go out and live a life elsewhere I guess.

I mean, yeah, you've always had people coming to live and work here, but, you know, it's a matter of scale and proportion. It's become a thing where you just wonder what does it mean to be Singaporean, already? Like, what can you relate to? I feel it's not a situation where you're being xenophobic, although it's a situation that can probably induce xenophobia. Um, but it's the fact that there are suddenly so many of them everywhere, and it happened so fast. And it's like, where do you have the time and space to actually deal with that? How do you talk to these people? Nobody's really working out how to interrelate. I think there's a lot of tension going on everywhere.

In the society here, there are times that I felt that I couldn't relate to, or rather that I felt suppressed staying in Singapore. Probably my character; I crave for freedom, and here it's so orderly and so fixed that I find it so boring. Another reason why, it could be because of my family background as well. Like, my parents have passed away, and somehow … I don't really feel home. So I always have this desire like I want to get out, I want to go somewhere else and explore. And probably it's a way for me to try and escape from reality.

Opposite page: Wei Leng Tay, *Untitled #12* from the series 'Slow Cool Breezes', 2009, archival pigment print, 45 x 34 cm, courtesy and © the artist.

Wei Leng Tay, *Hoi Yan and Family, Kuala Lumpur, 2010* from the series 'Convergence', 2013, archival pigment print, 56 x 70 cm, courtesy and © the artist.