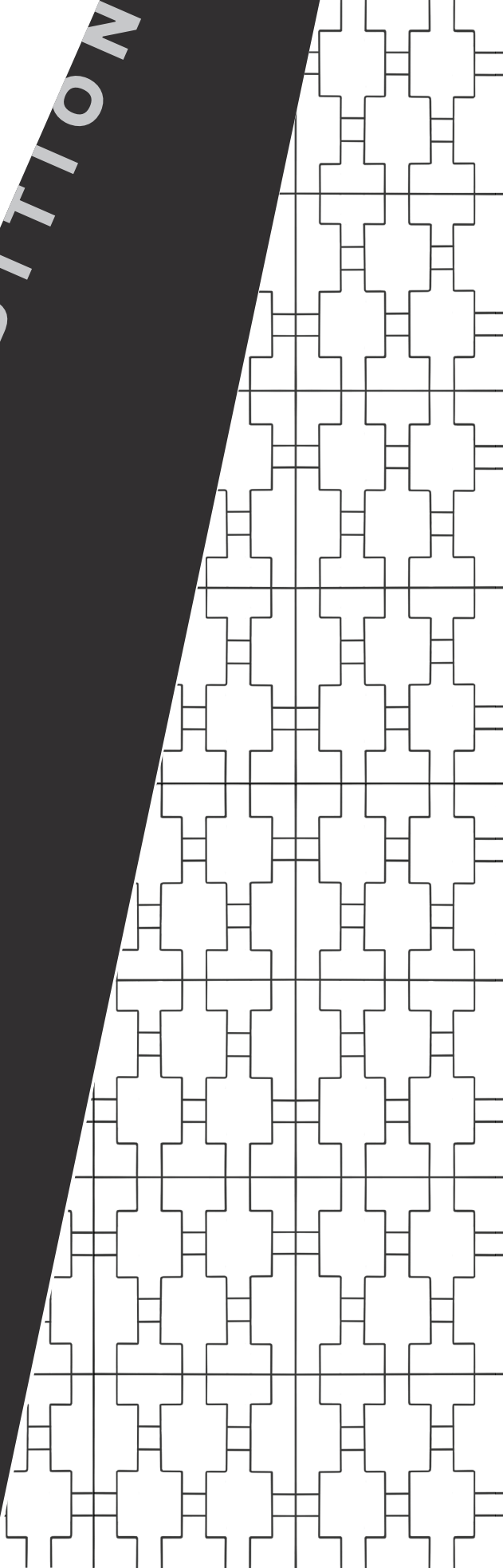


3+3+3+3+3

ON CONDITION



3+3+3

ON CONDITION

**Artists**

Finbarr Fallon & Claire Goh  
Geraldine Kang  
Michael Lee  
Mervin Loh  
Isabella Teng Yen Lin

**Guest Curator**

Andrea Fam

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A Farewell; A New Chapter

In the last decade, the art sector saw waves of rapid development in many areas—from the overhaul of the former parliament house in preparation for the new home of the National Gallery Singapore (NGS) to the announcement of renovating the former St Joseph’s Institution and 8 Queen Street (SAM at 8Q), both housing the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) since 1996 and 2008 respectively. Situated on the same historic roads of Queen/Waterloo Street as SAM and nestled in the building of the former Catholic High School, The Private Museum Singapore (TPM) took root and charted its 11-year journey as a private arts space. In 2010, TPM was established by father-and-daughter real estate developers and art patrons, Daniel Teo and Rachel Teo—envisioned as a space where people from all walks of life can gather, discover, and share their love for art. A decade on, the vision has materialised in many shapes and forms—enriching the art ecology in numerous profound ways. From showcasing rare private collections to artistic collaborations with artists and curators, TPM has truly become the bridge for the arts—intimately connecting private and public spheres.

The buildings at 51 Waterloo Street + 222 Queen Street were repurposed for the arts by TPM’s founders and their real estate partners under the Singapore Land Authority’s commercial lease agreement widely known as ‘3+3+3’, referring to the occupancy in periodic terms of 3 years. Aptly titled, the exhibition 3+3+3: On Condition curated by Andrea Fam marks the museum’s final showcase in the premise before its long-scheduled departure from 51 Waterloo. Featuring a remarkable interdisciplinary roster of artists and architects including artist duo Finbarr Fallon & Claire Goh, Geraldine Kang, Michael Lee, Mervin Loh and Isabella Teng Yen Lin, curator Andrea Fam skilfully weaved the unique artistic narratives from the artworks with the histories of the building, while examining the complexity of urban development and place- and space-making in Singapore.

Although the lease of the buildings was in fact due at the end of 2019, further extensions were granted due to external circumstances including the Covid-19 pandemic, which allowed for more exhibitions at the premise. In a fateful coincidence, the exhibition will be the 51st exhibition materialised in the museum’s history—corresponding to the name of the building, 51 Waterloo.

A curatorial interview conducted by Andrea revealed a pivotal insight shared by the founders. Through their seasoned lens of looking at property leases, Rachel shares a poignant reminder “...while it is indeed hard on businesses, 3+3+3 can also be seen as an opportunity for renewal and forces businesses to look hard at what they are doing, and see how they can move forward”. As we look forward to a new chapter at our new space, may we always remember 51 Waterloo, the memories made and lessons learned. And of course, not forgetting the spirits inhabiting this space—thank you for allowing us to be your transient companions.

On behalf of the founders, our board of directors and the team, we would like to express our sincere appreciation to Mr Michael Koh for his time and contribution as Guest of Honour. Our warmest thanks to curator Andrea Fam and the artists for joining us in this final hurrah. On this note, we would like to convey our heartfelt gratitude to all our patrons, collectors, artists, curators, galleries, collaborators, partners, and staff for being part of this 11-year journey, and for the continuous support towards TPM.

Aaron Teo  
The Private Museum, Singapore

In 2008, 51 Waterloo Street + 222 Queen Street, the former site of the Catholic High School (secondary school wing), was given a new breath of life through a tender organised by the National Heritage Board (NHB) and the Singapore Land Authority (SLA), during my term as CEO of the NHB. The lease of the building was for 3+3+3 years, for the adaptive reuse of the historically significant building for museum and arts/cultural facilities, with some supporting commercial uses.

Culture philanthropist and Catholic High alumnus Daniel Teo rose to the occasion and successfully bid in 2009 for the building and subsequently invested over \$2.5 million to convert it into a ballet school (the home for the Singapore Ballet Academy), a private museum, and a centre for a variety of arts and heritage uses. Through his visionary efforts and commitment, the building has been part of a thriving arts and culture eco-system in the vibrant Bras Basah.Bugis Precinct for the last nine years. Daniel also commissioned a series of wall murals by local artists Yip Yew Chong and Yuen Kum Cheong that recall the rich memories of the area, such as people viewing the first Star Wars movie in Odeon Theatre and students enjoying traditional ice-balls purchased from street vendors.

A key anchor in this building is The Private Museum, founded by Daniel and his daughter, Rachel Teo in 2010. This non-profit museum has been an independent voice in the arts scene, offering an independent platform for art collectors to share their private collections with the public, complementing public cultural institutions in building up Singapore's vibrant art scene. As a private museum, Rachel also commissioned curators to work with artists to push boundaries, and take greater liberty in their artistic approaches, ideas and aesthetics. Beyond the visual arts, the museum also worked with writers, performance artists and filmmakers, and hosted many educational visits by schools. Since its founding, the museum has organised more than 50 exhibitions featuring over 100 artists. The museum has also played a critical role in grooming the next generation of Singapore-based artists, sending talented artists on art residencies abroad and setting up the Moving Image Platform, an arts film fund.

It is thus with some sadness to announce that the exhibition 3+3+3: On Condition, is the last exhibition that The Private Museum will be holding in these premises. The title of the exhibition is an apt, albeit tongue-in-cheek reference to the length of lease of the building. The exhibition explores the complexity of urban planning and its psycho-spatial associations and materialities. It hopes to evoke reactions to our built environment, bringing to mind the close interwoven relationships between public agencies, professionals in practice, construction implementation and ultimately the people who reside in and interface with the resulting environment. In so doing, the exhibition also bears reference to Daniel's own roots as an

architect and developer, and is a tribute to him as a champion of causes such as the provision of residential developments for active ageing and ageing in place.

This exhibition is guest curated by Andrea Fam and features five artists/architects namely, artist duo Finbarr Fallon & Claire Goh, Geraldine Kang, Michael Lee, Mervin Loh and Isabella Teng Yen Lin. Their enthusiasm, energy and creativity can obviously be seen in the selected works which comprise preparatory sketches, utopian models and performative engagements. These artworks invite us to think about important, yet sometimes overlooked aspects of our urban environment. Geraldine Kang's Aesthetic Screening and Live-in highlight our transient workforce such as the foreign domestic helpers and workers responsible for cleaning our housing estates. Finbarr Fallon & Claire Goh's Flat Earth reflects on the en-bloc fever in Singapore and the challenges for large, strata-subdivided buildings. From Michael Lee's Dwelling series are National Library and Shell House, that are a means of recording buildings that have been 'lost' in some shape or form. Mervin Loh's Delectable Cityscape is a multi-sensory, multimedia feature on spaces such as our hawker centres. Isabella Teng Yen Lin's two-part anamorphic work brings to attention the temporal, yet impactful nature of people, things and memories, particularly apt as the museum prepares to leave the building.

In conclusion, please join me in commending Daniel Teo and Rachel Teo for supporting NHB's vision in tendering for 51 Waterloo Street + 222 Queen Street all those years ago, their dedicated efforts in adaptively using this old school building for arts and cultural uses, and creating conditions for arts and culture to thrive through their private sector and philanthropic efforts in the Bras Basah.Bugis Precinct. I hope their shining example will be followed by many others in future as we will need our communities onboard #SGTogether to make Singapore an even more vibrant and inclusive place to call our home. Please join me in wishing them well as they embark on their next journey into the future!

Mr Michael Koh  
Former CEO of the National Heritage Board (2006 to 2012)

## The Blind Timekeeper

A thought process inspired by reflections from Mr Daniel Teo and Rachel Teo, the architecture of the old Catholic High School building on Waterloo and Queen Street, and The Private Museum's history and significance to the art scene.

How does one keep time?

Do you turn your eyes to your wrist  
Or skyward to the sun?  
Or do you rely on someone else  
To draw you from your fun?

///

Three years have passed  
Three years to go  
And maybe even three years more  
Only if they say so.

How does one reflect on time?

Are you running through a corridor  
Across shadows of balusters cast on the floor?  
Or are you recalling delicious aromas  
Wafting through heavy wooden doors?

///

Collectors, artists, curators  
A space for reunion  
Printmaking, sound sculptures, paintings  
A vital ecosystem.

How does one envision time?

A return to Waterloo Street  
Where only address remains?  
Always a reminder of the role of art and culture  
And what needs to be maintained.

///

Restrictive growth or a chance for renewal  
A deft balancing act  
3+3+3 continues in word and practice  
Ours the choice of how to react.

By Andrea Fam  
Guest Curator

# Realistic Speculation / Speculative Realism //

Finbarr Fallon & Claire Goh



Flat Earth; resin 3D print (detail)



Flat Earth; resin 3D print and sand, 35.5 x 19.5 cm

Flat Earth  
2021  
Resin 3D print and sand, video recording, photographs  
Dimensions variable

**Flat Earth** is a personal reflection on the tension between buildings’ corporeality and transience in Singapore. A persistent belief in the need for constant urban renewal to optimise scarce land means that demolition is the default fate for most buildings, sometimes prematurely so. Much like the oddly enduring conviction that the earth is flat, despite evidence to the contrary, this belief continues to underpin and shape our ‘pragmatic’ approach to buildings.

The vessel is a memorial for the buildings going and long gone from the cityscape. An uneasy collage of architectural fragments from these buildings united in a translucent hourglass form plays on the idea of a



Sand (Tuas); photograph  
as part of Flat Earth, 48.5 x 74 cm

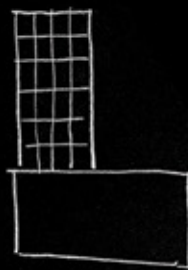


Sand (Bedok); photograph  
as part of Flat Earth, 48.5 x 74 cm

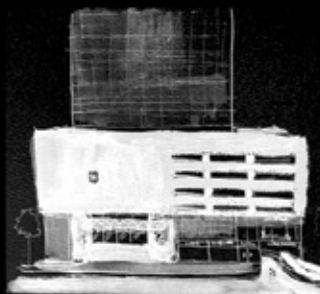
building as crystallisation. The work subverts the central role of sand in the construction of a building—literally, in its material origins of sand, and metaphorically, as a manifestation of its designer and developer’s visions. A juxtaposition of photographs showing monolithic sand stockpiles provides a backdrop to the piece, and a film showing the steady flow of sand through the vessel to mark time passing, symbolise the inherent contradiction for buildings in Singapore: that their apparent physical permanence always anticipates their inevitable dematerialisation, illustrating the unstoppable cycle of life and death for buildings.



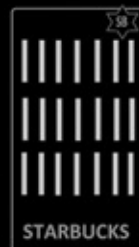
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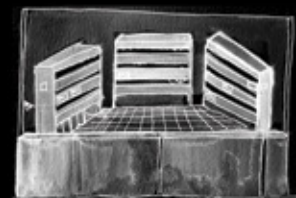
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4.

# Legend: Age, Location

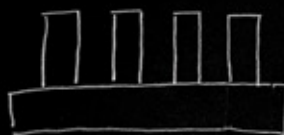
1. 34, Jurong
2. 17, Braddell
3. 29, Bukit Timah
4. 58, Braddell
5. 33, Jurong
6. 29, Serangoon
7. 59, Toa Payoh
8. 26, Tanah Merah



5.



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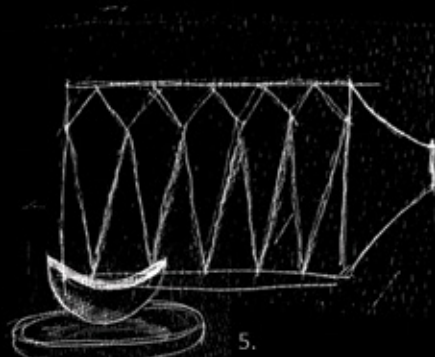
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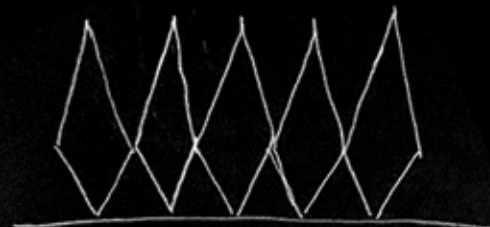
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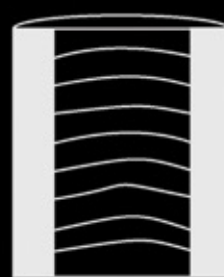
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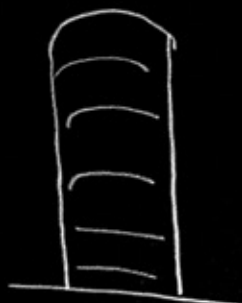
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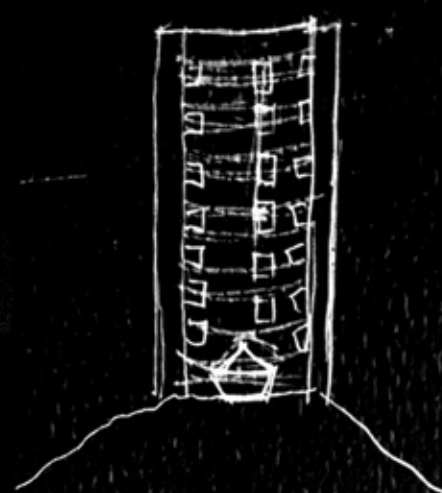
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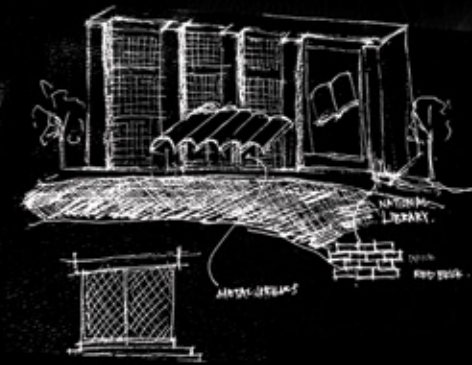
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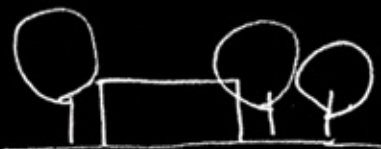
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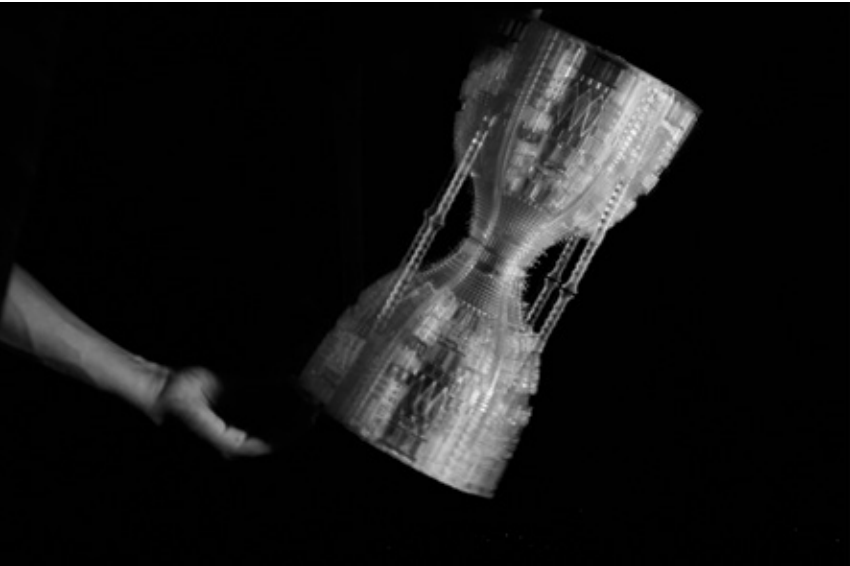


Old National Theatre  
Shaw Tower  
Old National Library  
Pearl Bank Apartments  
Rochor Centre

Flat Earth began as a reflection on the tension between the transience of buildings’ corporeality, and their continued existence in our and others’ memories. We provided a list of the buildings referenced in the object to people of varying ages, and asked them to draw or describe what they recalled of any buildings in the list without referring to or videos to prompt their memory. What we found was that people usually could sketch a vague idea of the shape of the building, and follow on to verbally describe its distinctive features; naturally, people also had better recollections of recently demolished buildings. This informed how the work was developed: the vessel’s translucency makes it almost insubstantial when viewed from a distance, except for the overall geometry of its form; but closer up, it resolves into an almost overwhelming mass of detail. This evokes the partial and fragile way in which we remember buildings that no longer exist—a hazy blur overall, with specific moments recalled in achingly sharp detail. The representations of sand in the photos and film, as static, monolithic shape and as a marker of time passing, also evoke the inchoate nature of our memories of buildings, and their slow erosion over time.

For the artists, this has been a meditation on matter and mattering in cities and cyberspace. So what if a building disappears, when we still have our (flawed, incomplete) memories of it in our heads or in cyberspace? Is it enough to keep small fragments of its past existence in the landscape, as physical markers to anchor these memories, and do these remain meaningful outside of the larger context of the building? How do we define and agree on buildings that we care about collectively, and how might we build care for these significant buildings early, when they are still physical matter in our cities; or are we doomed to care only when they exist exclusively in the grey matter of our minds?

Rochor Centre  
Pearl Bank Apartments  
Old National Library  
Shaw Tower  
Old National Theatre



Screengrab of video recording from Flat Earth



Exhibition view of 3+3+3: On Condition, The Private Museum, Singapore  
Finbarr Fallon & Claire Goh, Flat Earth (2021), resin 3D print and sand, video recording, photographs, dimensions variable

# Out of Sight, Out of Mind // The Ever Constructing City

Geraldine Kang

Conversation

Andrea Fam (AF) Geraldine Kang (GK)

AF Hello Geraldine! I thought I'd start by asking just one question and to see where it takes us: How did you first come to want to make works about and with migrant workers?

GK Hi Andrea, it all began when I was photographing a night construction site near my home. I was exploring my own responses towards land and environmental control then, and these tended to manifest in more poetic modes of photography. I was enthralled with the large moon over the horizon lighting the movements of the machines and began to try and capture the visual rhythms of the site. However, as I was laying out the collection of images into a book, I realised that while I had made conventionally aesthetic images, I had spent months glossing over the unspoken and unseen—the labour that was physically, emotionally and mentally powering the site. I acknowledged the privilege and distance that my equipment afforded me, which paralleled my privilege as a citizen in a first-world economy and recipient of the fruits of their labour. Ever since, I sought to be more critical and tackle the presence of migrant workers in Singapore head on.

AF On this last point—you moved from making works about migrant workers to making works with them and they have featured as co-creators of several of your projects. What made you decide to reconsider your role within the artistic process? And what have been some of the key observations made in this approach to creating works and conversations?

GK Following the construction site series, I tried to familiarise myself with migrant worker service organisations and undertake projects with them. The first was a photovoice-style workshop in 2016, organised in partnership with the Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics (HOME). The contents of the workshop were co-conceptualised and facilitated with Yeo Su-Jan (who was then a researcher at the SDE at NUS). It was titled [Topophilia and Topophobia: A Tale of Two Cities](#) and through that we wanted to encourage participants to express their views of the city that they build and maintain. The eventual exhibition at The Substation featured not only their photographs but also detailed statements on a range of experiences. The opening reception in particular was an interesting day as it was the first time I had seen so many (male) migrant workers gathered together with Singaporeans at all, let alone in an art space. This awkward ‘rubbing of shoulders’ was something I had hoped to play out, in an attempt to let ‘both sides of the city’ encounter one another more intimately. Shortly after, I was in talks with Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2) to photograph images that would accompany the launch of a work-site accident research report that a handful of their members had authored. Unfortunately, the project fell through due to misaligned understandings of what was expected of the images. Partnering with HOME and (almost with) TWC2 was an incredibly eye-opening experience; their work is hard and severely underrated as fighting for the rights of vulnerable non-citizens is a terribly unpopular position.

As an artist, however, I was conflicted about my inability to make images that advocacy and rights campaigning typically need: direct, emphatic visual statements of causes and issues. I was trained, above all, to express complexity and to embody a personal subjectivity within all that, and it took a while before I accepted that that stance is just as valid. I began to study the past works of Singaporean artists and documentary photographers Sim Chiyin, and Bernice Wong, and Bangladeshi photographer and activist Jannatul Mawa. Later on, films regarding low-wage migrant labour like [Roma](#), [Ilo-Ilo](#), [A Land Imagined](#), [You Are Served](#) and documentaries by news platforms became part of my study as well. These helped me to understand what nuances and aesthetic choices were best for my work to take on. One of the things I wanted to avoid, for example, was making projects with the intention of helping readers see low-wage migrant employees as “human too”, as if that was not already obvious. I also became hyper-mindful of indexing identities to employment too closely, and the ethical concerns that may accompany such image-making.

While on residency at the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art in 2017, I invited a group of Bengali poets to perform during the open house for the residency. I liaised with the curators to set up a small screen and recital area outdoors and let the poets take the stage. During the residency, I also began to focus on bin centres (cue [Aesthetic Screening](#)) and the men who live and work out of them. I saw myself very much as an outsider to these public-turned-semi-private spaces, even though I pass by many on a

daily basis. Due to an earlier news report on illegal lodging in bin centres, I was afraid of intruding and revealing too much and photographed the exteriors of the bin centres, with some of the images showing hints of personalised space. The work received mixed feedback: some appreciated the aesthetic quality despite the onerous tone of the work, while others felt the aestheticised framing did not make these spaces seem ‘dangerous’ or ‘unsafe enough’ (which is bizarre if you think about it). Nevertheless, the largest takeaway from this series was my inability to speak to workers themselves in their private space, mostly for gender reasons. Their voice in this felt missing.

Taking inspiration from Jannatul Mawa [the photographer] most of all, I decided to focus on issues pertaining to domestic work. It speaks true to my experience, and having grown up with domestic workers and around friends and family who have domestic employees, I was confident of gaining the access I needed. [Live-in \(Mattress provided\)](#) was a process of pitching to different employers, all of whom did not want themselves, their employees or their home to be identifiable. A lot of people wonder if I managed to speak to the employed women, and this largely depended on if they were permitted to speak to me, and if they could converse in English. The stories I heard are mostly good experiences, with the bad experiences lying largely with agents and having their salary docked as payment to them for being here.

Another thing I noticed was that migrant workers usually never get to speak on the record about the injustices they face, if any. I also wondered if Singaporeans were ever witnesses to any injustices or wrongdoings towards migrant workers. I, therefore, sent an open call to see if anyone would come on the record (at a level they are comfortable with) to detail what it is they witnessed. This resulted in the interviews for [Bare Witnesses](#) and [Neither In Nor Out](#). The latter is a collaboration with Rolinda Espanola, an ex-domestic employee in Singapore. She was a prominent member of the migrant poetry scene and was familiar with the nature of collaborations. We were put in touch by Shivaji Das, who is the founder of the yearly Migrant Poetry Competition. Rolinda also agreed to have some of her photographs and excerpts from her poems featured in the piece, and she is credited as co-creator. Individuals like Rolinda are few and far between; while migrant workers will share their stories to those who will listen, it is very rare for someone to go publicly on the record, especially if they are in the midst of negotiating a case. I actually managed to interview a male migrant worker about his workplace accident injustice but he was settling his case at that point and I, therefore, could not release his recording. We have also since lost contact and I am unable to seek his permission officially. Rolinda agreed to do so as she was almost at the end of her stay here and did not need to think about negative consequences.



Image from Bare Witnesses

Bare Witnesses  
2021  
Audio recordings, matte vinyl stickers  
Dimensions variable

Bare Witnesses is an installation comprising images and audio recordings. Central to the work are two conversations with two separate Singaporeans who have directly witnessed an injustice committed against a foreign domestic helper (FDH).

The first pivots around a bowl of homemade soup. It is an account about an abusive family whose frustrations found a target in their FDH. Raw while deadpan, it is a revealing confession. The second narrative recounts the process of an FDH's plea for help from a neighbour, as told through the voice of that neighbour, and accompanied by images of their correspondences via Google translate and WhatsApp text.

While these stories are but brief snapshots of encounters by FDHs in Singapore, they serve to reveal the potential dangers faced by outsiders with foreign statuses against homes with histories of unresolved patterns of violence or trauma.

Transcription Excerpt

Bare Witnesses Recording 1  
(witnessing family abusing employee)

What I witnessed was when I was a child, actually there were multiple episodes but I'm just gonna talk about one, which is the one I mentioned to you before. So I think i must have been in the afternoon session at school, and I was eating at home before going to school, and erm, my helper served like a soup, and I was just being grumpy and it was also true, so I said that it tasted disgusting or something like—I said it made me feel like vomiting, something about the soup made me feel like vomiting. Which looking back, actually, I mean there's this taste of like, er, radish, that still today makes me feel like it's a bit unusual and I can feel nauseous if I'm not feeling good or

something. So anyway, I just said that it was making me feel nauseous and my mom erm, my mom did something to the helper, like I think she hit her? So, that's like one instance in my childhood. It was unjust because I actually wasn't erm, complaining about the helper, I was complaining about the food which would have been disgusting no matter who cooked it, and er, yeah and also even if it was—firstly it has nothing to do with the helper, what the helper did or didn't do, and secondly even if it was somehow helper's responsibility, the physical attack was uncalled for, it was totally unjustified.

Yeah I mean some were also like, myself 'cos I learned from the environment that I was in, that it was okay to be violent and stuff, so I remember in the mornings like okay now I'm in morning session I guess, but like sometimes having to wake up to go to school was very difficult and when my helper tried to wake me up I would just kick and scream, and this kicking and screaming was also a violence towards her, but I was just doing it because I thought it was normal to kick people, yeah.

Er, I and my siblings fought a lot, my parents fought a lot, my parents hit each other, my parents hit us, we hit each other, so like it was really normal. Physical—being physical was really normal in our household, erm, as a way to maybe try and get what you want from the other person, yeah.

Yeah, [I was] fearful of the emotional state that my mother was in because clearly, it's disproportionate. Her reaction was disproportionate. And it clearly indicated I should not do anything to attract attention to myself. So I just did nothing. Erm, like kind of in a self-protective way, but yeah I knew that it was wrong because I knew that it's like, somehow it shouldn't happen. Yeah. I think as an adult I have more empathy for everybody, so, I still think it's terrible what my helper suffered, like long term, and I also wonder about like, how my mom probably needed help at this stage in her life? Yeah, just the stresses that she was going through, erm, also the fact that the violence is everywhere, so she's not the root and the only cause of it, you know? Like, everybody was violent to everyone, and she would sometimes complain about how, like one incident she talks about is how my father's father was teaching my father to beat his wife, like to discipline the wife. So, this was just going on everywhere and I think I have a wider perspective as an adult, er, and I have a larger capacity to be, but I'm still shocked by it. As a child I was shocked by the immediate moment, but as an adult, like, just in the face of the entire scope of the violence and how it is endless, like it comes from somewhere much deeper and further than I can grasp.

Later on in my life erm, my sister would tell me that she snuck around in my parents' room and found a police report from a helper or something like this. Er I don't know the details cos it wasn't me that snuck around, and it's just yeah, I guess one of them ran to the police once and then ran back—and then got sent back [home]. But this thing was not something that was discussed in the family and I never knew that it happened so what my sister says is like a story that I hear, it wasn't something I lived, I didn't live it at that time but I mean of course I saw the violence all the time so I wasn't surprised that one of the helpers would run away to the police station.



Bare Witnesses Recording 2  
(witnessing neighbour abusing employee)

I guess I'm discussing the case of er, a neighbour's domestic worker. So this is er, a domestic worker from my estate, and er, from a neighbour who is a little bit further away from us with a shared common corridor further along at a different part of the block, and erm, in one afternoon, erm, we heard a loud knocking on the door and er, when we opened the door, the domestic worker was there. She was in tears, and she couldn't speak English, and erm, kinda, kinda very insistently pleaded “phone, phone” and it became clear that she wanted to borrow our phone to make a phone call, and so of course we lent her the phone and er, that began then a long er, few months within which we had er, conversations and dialogue to try and help her, and as she gradually kinda explained more of her predicament, erm, which we had to do through notes that she might hand us regularly, often desperately scrawled on bits of paper, or she might borrow one of our phones, er, there are three of us in the household—she might borrow one of our phones and er, write something, and we would use google translate to translate the text messages.

I think some of the main aspects, or conditions she was living under became clear. Number one, that her phone had been confiscated by her employers, erm number two, erm, that er she was very severely overworked, er, often from three to four a.m. in the morning, er to eleven pm at night, erm, that er, she was constantly scolded about her work even though she fulfilled all her duties, but every single thing was picked at, and er in a way that clearly caused her a lot of distress. So most importantly she didn't have her phone which meant that she could not contact her family members, er, and she said that she was very depressed over that and also she wasn't able to contact her agent for help er in seeking a possible transfer or just actually seeking their counsel on what she ought to do. Er, she, she erm, was I think her early twenties but er, was very new, new to Singapore, new to the work. She had come from a very rural area of her country and it was the first time er, working er, outside the home. so, she had never been employed outside the home before. She had worked on the farm and looked after her siblings.

I think the agents had initially tried to suggest she try to tolerate whatever what was going on, she should try to adjust, and that this was not abnormal, and she couldn't be sure that a new employer would necessarily be better. erm, now that I look at the dates, you know, more than about one and a half months of these calls and escalation before I think the agent took her seriously. I think there was also the fact that erm, the agents would agree to help her seek her transfer and promise her that one was coming but it never really came along, so that actually you know, in an unintended way on their part, but it led to I think a lot of psychological stress on her...

Her demeanor was noticeably much erm affected, she lost a lot of affect, she was no longer registering emotion, and er, very often when we crossed paths in the estate or in her corner of the block, er, she would be just

honestly I can not survive to stay in this house work I can do but my life depressed I've tried to survive but can not

I want to change but I have not got a new employer I can not stay with them I'm depressed can not talk to anyone or any day my employer's day is angry with me when I'm not wrong I want to survive but can not my cellphone with the same employer

Good morning sir That girl send to employer house maybe today sir yesterday just do zip in mom  
Tell her to wait La I cannot ask mom to do faster also right sir :)

yes will pick up.the problem sir want to hold my work permit if he can not get a new maid

Hi Sorry, had to go back indoors. Her emoloyer is now locking her in, without key. So she cannot call you easily. I will try to pass her your message when I see her next.  
He is locking her in all the time now, except when she comes out to clean the floor.  
Yes thank you sir soon new maid would be coming waiting for her pasport on procces now thanks for your help always sir may GOD bless you n more BLESSING for you family  
No problem. I really hope you can arrange things soon. She is more distressed every day, in tears by herself. We are worried for her well-being.  
Yes i understand sir

I did not understand my employer I remember I did not do bad or bad things at home but he intend to hold my work permit and repatriate me to batam

need your help  
sorry i do not understand english speech  
and hope i want to help me this time i have a lot of troubles

Sister sorry I bother you again. Brother can you please me again? Please Contact my ejen in Indonesia. Please tell my ejen that I can not stand staying in this house until when I am in this house. My days are mad when all my work is done. sorry my sister actually i was not given the isin to talk or greet you guys to my employer. I am confused with all this I hope my sister can help me to get out of my employer's house. please do not let my employer know if I ask for my sister please. thank you kaka. I have a lot of trouble.

my brother is now difficult to contact my ejen because my employer did not give me the key of the house another week I can just get out of this house, sorry brother before my employer angry if you greet me

Screengrabs of text correspondences from Bare Witnesses



Aesthetic Screening  
2017  
Digital photographs on loop  
92 x 138 cm

**Aesthetic Screening** takes its title from the administrative language articulated around bin centres in Singapore. Highly overlooked as architectural structures, bin centres are often framed as a necessary inconvenience to nearby residents, and are therefore designed to be unnoticed, or as one document describes it, ‘aesthetically screened’. Bin centres serve as work sites for the migrant workers hired to clean public housing estates; but for a significant proportion of estate cleaners, the centres also serve as places for their resting, cooking, eating and laundry, before returning to their (often crowded) dormitories or apartments. The work responds to the legal and financial precariousness of migrant workers at large, but also contends with the ethics and politics of photographic inclusion. As any unsanctioned participation in photographs in and of a worksite poses potential risks, the images are deliberately quiet about the locational contexts of these centres. They refrain from featuring any identifiable human figures and were made during the night when labour is most invisible and when the bin centres are least recognisable. It also questions the nature of dignified modes of living, and perhaps what can be done to design just spaces for workers who make up almost one-fifth of Singapore’s total population. Finally, it foregrounds the bin centre as a reminder of the jarring worlds that separate migrant workers and the residents they serve, made more acute by their ridiculously close proximity.









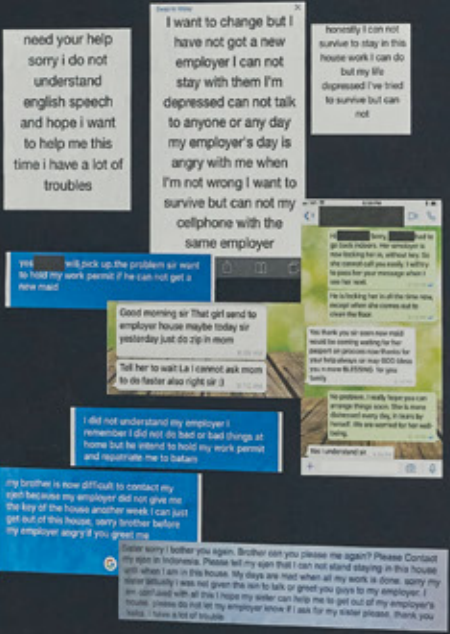






Selected photographs from Aesthetic Screening





Exhibition view of 3+3+3: On Condition, The Private Museum, Singapore  
Left: Geraldine Kang, Bare Witnesses (2021), audio recordings, matte vinyl stickers, dimensions variable  
Right: Geraldine Kang, Aesthetic Screening (2017), digital photographs on loop, 92 x 138 cm

Neither In Nor Out, in collaboration with Rolinda Espanola  
2019  
Video projection  
10min 12sec

Neither In Nor Out is made in collaboration with Rolinda Espanola, whom at the time of the interview held for this video, was working as a foreign domestic worker in Singapore. Throughout the piece, Espanola details certain unsavoury experiences with her employer, and shares her thoughts on the state of foreign domestic work in Singapore. The video features Espanola’s photography and poetry layered above an image of her employer’s front doors. In an environment where the rights and well-being of low-wage migrant workers are consistently oppressed, this project hopes to provide a space for an individual to speak confidently on-the-record, and for others to actively listen.

Neither In Nor Out is not exhibited in 3+3+3: On Condition.

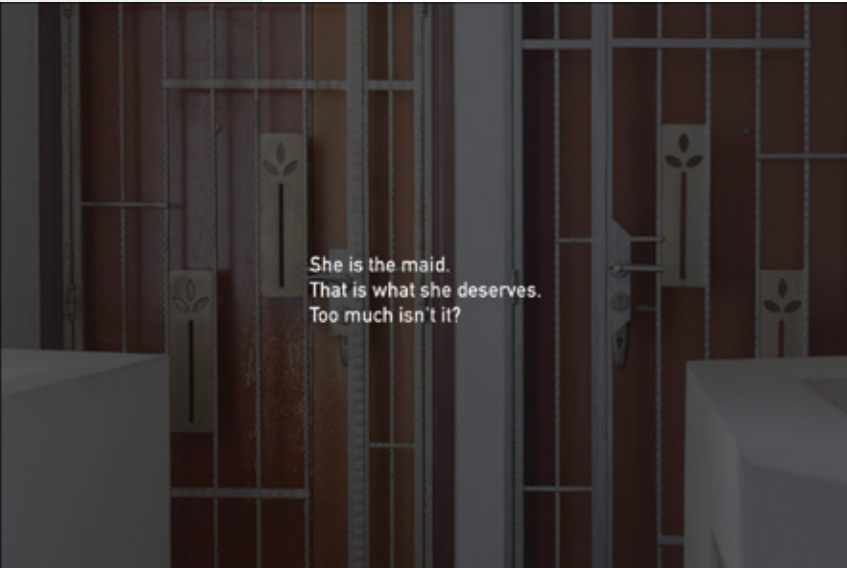
Transcription Excerpt

Neither In Nor Out  
in collaboration with Rolinda Espanola (2019)

There is this one instance, that er, I have to say sorry though I didn’t do anything, erm, the usual, the usual thing that er, happen on weekdays is my employer go to work so, er, one day I go to the, I go to bath and er go out from the bathroom with just a towel wrapped on my body and er my employer my boss er come home er unnoticed he didn’t even call but usually he will call me if he wants to go home or he wants something in the house during those office hours but that day he didn’t inform me so when I am passing er on the, on the room, he was there, sitting and saw me with just the towel around me. And er he didn’t say something he just look at me, but er, after that at night, the wife called me and wants to talk to me and told me that I have to say sorry to my Sir because we have rules in the house that I as a maid don’t have to go out with just a towel wrapped around me from the bathroom. I have to put on my clothes before I go out from the bathroom, that is the rules, she said. But, she didn’t, she didn’t told me those rules before and she’ll also told me that er I don’t have to worry about my Sir because er he is conservative. I don’t really get the idea of what she’s telling about the conservative, but erm, from that time that happened, my... without her knowing, my Sir is always coming home, my conservative Sir is always coming home in the house I noticed, he’s not informing me he will just come by in the house and then just check on me if I’m there in his house, and he will just go. And er, there were, there were these improvement to my conservative Sir that er now because he smoke when I am in the kitchen doing my things and he will come to the kitchen,



Screengrab of video recording from Neither In Nor Out, in collaboration with Rolinda Espanola



Screengrab of video recording from Neither In Nor Out, in collaboration with Rolinda Espanola

he will take off his shirt and put there in the kitchen the shirt, and he will go to the laundry area and smoke, after he smoke then he will come to the kitchen which is my area I am there around, and then he will put on his shirt and then go inside the house that the wife is inside the house. The wife don't know what he's been doing in the kitchen.

Okay, erm, living with them is er I have a curfew hours, erm, I must go home exactly 6pm in the one time I go home late and he keep calling me already, er where are you, you don't know your, your time, but er yah the girl 12 years old can come home 10:30[PM], I don't I don't really compare how they treat me because it's their daughter it's their way as a parent it's their way I think, to, to, to le—it's their way to let her grow or whatever, their parenting their parenting thing, but er, for me I just was wondering why I am also they say I am a part of the family, they treat me well, why I have to be home by 6 and they have to be, to be, so, so, er, how you say that one, so bothered if even 15 minutes I was late, why, what's in me that er, they have, they don't, they don't I don't know if they don't trust me or what, I don't know the term but, I, why, why the child that she is, I consider her as a child because she is just 12 years old, that me, that I am fully grown, I am 40-something already why I have this curfew, why I don't have freedom like, why in the house I have to ask everything if they allowed or not allowed then I can do things. Because I am a worker? Because I am, I am a maid, they, they think you don't have your own mind or, you don't have your own stand in your life so you have, they have to guide you what? They don't guide even.

Because in the contract, if, no before we come here we have the sit-in program, only issue [they bring up] in the sit in program is if they don't give you enough, enough er, food, you can call MOM (Ministry of Manpower). If they don't give you your salary, you can call MOM. If they beat you, you

can call MOM. What is this unfair treatment also, just a little bit unfair treatment this, er, psychological... where we can ask help because that's the only thing will entertain. How about this social thing, the psychological thing, where we will ask help?

Singapore is a rich country, they say it's number one rich country, it's the most expensive country, so you can still see there is slavery...

I think this one way so people, authorities will know that er, can we stop the live-in workers? And, I think just to, to let others knows also that er, our our our... as a domestic worker, our struggles is... our struggles is different because it's more on... yourself alone...

...living with employer is like they, they take everything from you already. When you go inside that house, you don't have anything but you have to, you have to follow them, and it's hard, it's hard for, for us to let, to stand for ourselves also, that, to show them that we also have own minds, that we are, we are not uneducated, that we know these things also, they are not the only one who knows those things that we know also, that we are not er, they treat us as I think, everything they buy, everything the contract, so you, you don't have choices. And it's hard for us to, to show courage, to show that we have the choices, but in the long run yah... if, if you have faith, yeah, you can, you can overcome but er, we just have to be strong, something like that.





Live-in (Mattress provided); selected digital photograph, UV print on acrylic, 17.5 x 26.5 cm

Live-in (Mattress provided)  
2017–ongoing  
Selected digital photographs, UV print on acrylic  
68 x 180 cm

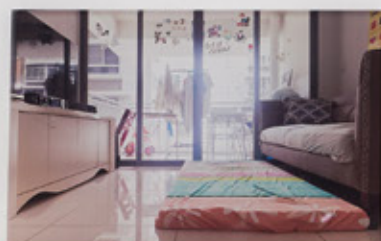
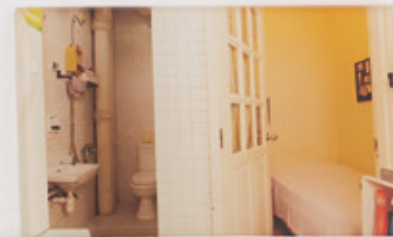
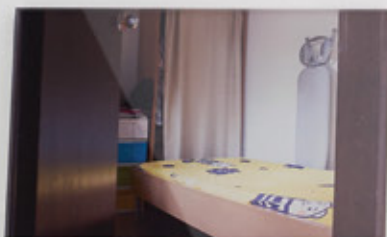
Live-in (Mattress provided) is an ongoing photography series that responds to the live-in rule adhered to by women employed as foreign domestic helpers (FDH) in Singapore. The rule mandates that all FDH live with their employers throughout their stay. At present, the series showcases a rough spectrum of different living spaces afforded to FDH; these are featured across a range of homes, and they vary in size, location within the home, and level of privacy. It is also to be noted that “living space” is oddly defined for these women as their site of work is conflated with their place of rest and relaxation. The rule has therefore been heavily criticised for leaving FDHs vulnerable to various types of exploitation, such as long and unclear work hours, and mental health

issues resulting from prolonged social isolation or abuse. Access for this series was granted through the generosity and trust of friends, who were then guaranteed anonymity in exchange. On one level, the decision to not include any identifiable human figures is a choice made in promise to these homeowners and employers. On another, it is also a response to the types of photographs already in circulation, coupled with a strong hesitation to tie anyone employed as an FDH to that one dimension of identity. A deliberate focus on domestic space and plain mattresses—void even of any personal belongings of these women—stands as an architectural expression of a host of systemic conundrums. Despite the obvious relationship to advocacy, the work seeks less to incriminate, and more to capture and understand the relational dynamics within different members of different homes. It also alludes to larger questions about the support systems in place for a country’s citizens.



Live-in (Mattress provided); selected digital photograph, UV print on acrylic, 17.5 x 26.5 cm





Exhibition view of 3+3+3: On Condition, The Private Museum, Singapore  
 Geraldine Kang, Live-in (Mattress provided) (2017-ongoing), digital photographs, UV print on acrylic, 68 x 180 cm

# Mapped Encounters

Michael Lee



Dwelling series: National Library, 1960-2004 / 1:50 (2015)  
Acrylic on canvas, 165 x 200 cm

Artist's reflection on architecture

### Pragmatic, Poetic

As a teenager in the 1980s riding home in a school bus, I would look out of the windows at construction sites. These buildings-in-the-making impressed me not just by their size and shape but also the host of activities within—manual labour, machinery running, concrete being reinforced and cast—urban process as embodiment of bio-social life.

Once the buildings were finished, however, usually painted or cladded over and cleaned up for human use, they became less interesting to me. They stopped growing and changing; they became closed off from public view. To me, they felt selfish and dead in equal measure.

Today, as I laugh over my juvenile musings as a seat-belted urban aesthete, I can't help but wonder how, in land-scarce Singapore, we could strike meaningful dialogues between pragmatism and poetry when deciding between development and conservation, in a way that doesn't regard the two as mutually exclusive.

I reflect on three perspectives to the conundrum.

### 1. Let's admit it: We fear the inevitable.

In March 2017, various local media reported on the 75-year-old Mr Or Beng Kooi, better known as 'Yishun uncle', who was asked to remove his tower of objects from an Yishun HDB void deck. He made the work, consisting of found and contributed toys, figurines and knick-knacks, to “make everyone happy”. It received positive reviews from residents and visitors. Artist Shirley Soh called it “ground-up art”, noting his thoughtful selection and placement of items. Residents shared that the work, instead of being in the way, improved the communal space.<sup>1</sup>

Mr Or's void deck intervention could be seen as an instance of creative resistance against the narrow definition of communal space as serving social rather than individual needs. And while the town council cited his items as posing fire and safety hazards, it's more likely that the authorities did not want to be seen as making exceptions to the rules they had already set in place.

We might read this in a bleaker, more realistic way. Recognising that everybody and everything will perish eventually, Mr Or was suggesting that we enjoy the journey towards that end. The authorities worried that allowing the installation to continue existing may inspire others to upset the order so valued by the government. One is saying: Let's enjoy life while we still have it. The other: Let's not be reminded that life will end one day.

### 2. A lot more work and resources are needed to save a building.

We have little control over nature's course. When buildings show signs of wear and tear, and even more so when the structures are abandoned, turning derelict, they reveal the work of nature, reminding us that nothing lasts forever. What we can try to do is maintain and upkeep, to make our environments usable and liveable. From the regular cleaning of our own bedrooms to five-yearly repainting of HDB blocks, we attempt to prevent, or at least slow down the deterioration process. And when a building becomes so worn out that maintaining it costs more than getting rid of it, or if a building is in the way of better use of space, it will have to go.

Buildings spring back to life, in morbid ways: such as when they are being knocked down.

Dakota Crescent made history in Singapore for being the first residential estate to be conserved, albeit partially, after being earmarked for redevelopment. Completed in 1958 by the Singapore Improvement Trust, the estate was originally announced in 2014 to be redeveloped. That was the same year the Save Dakota Crescent movement began. Consisting of architects and residents, the activist group put together a formal paper that listed options for conservation (from total to partial) of the estate. In 2017, the Ministry of National Development announced that six of the existing 15 blocks, including the iconic Dove Playground, will be conserved.<sup>2</sup> This was a

historic feat that took persistent effort by the activists and long-term ‘tripartite’ dialogues among the grassroots, residents and government to realise.

Pearl Bank Apartments was not so lucky. Despite countless pleas by architects and heritage lovers to have it conserved, the post-war brutalist architecture, which was completed in 1976, was reduced to rubble in 2020, after its successful fourth attempt (since 2007) to be sold to a developer in 2018. The main reason for the Pearl Bank not being saved, despite the Dakota Crescent precedent, was that it was privately owned and thus out of the hands of the government. To save the building would incur a lot more effort and resources.

3. Let’s delink a building’s structure from its use.

Ruins have a cult value in Singapore as a critical counterpoint to its enforced order, newness, cleanliness and beauty.

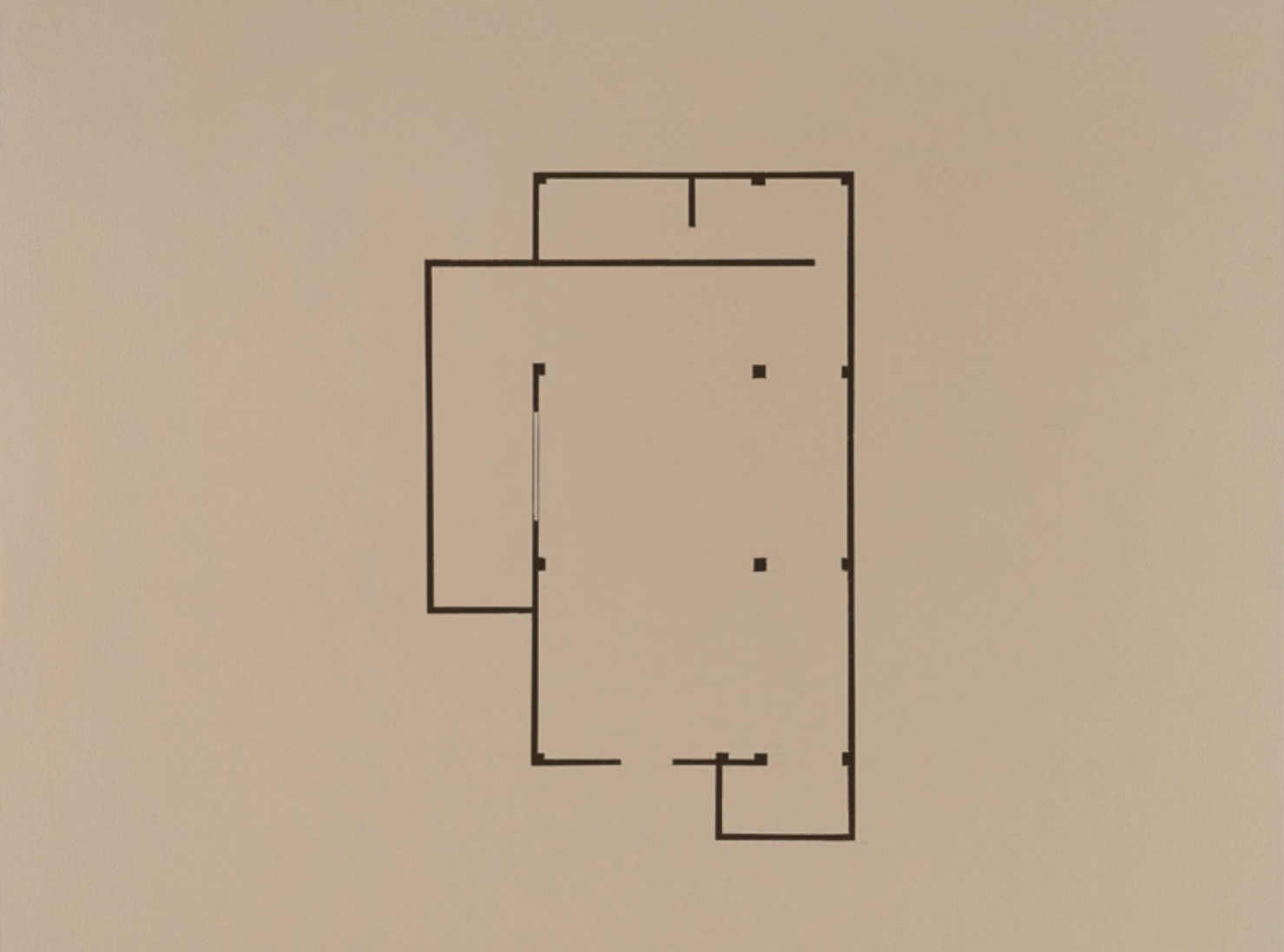
During the circuit breaker (CB) last year, as part of the safety management measures against the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, much of the city came to a standstill. Not only did work on construction sites stop but also many public spaces in Singapore became devoid of the usual crowds and activities. Wild plants thrived amidst the overgrown grass, inspiring a blossoming of citizen botanists and flower arrangers alike.<sup>3</sup> Behind this brief period of ‘ruination’ was of course the spread of the virus among migrant workers’ dormitories. The temporary ruins in the city belied blindspots in managing migrant workers’ working and living conditions.

Post-CB, when the wild grass was cut, many felt we could have saved money and kept a beautiful environment by leaving things as they were. Of course, such laments have not considered the complexity of the issue of prior human resources deployment: Many grass cutters will be out of job if we stop grass cutting altogether!

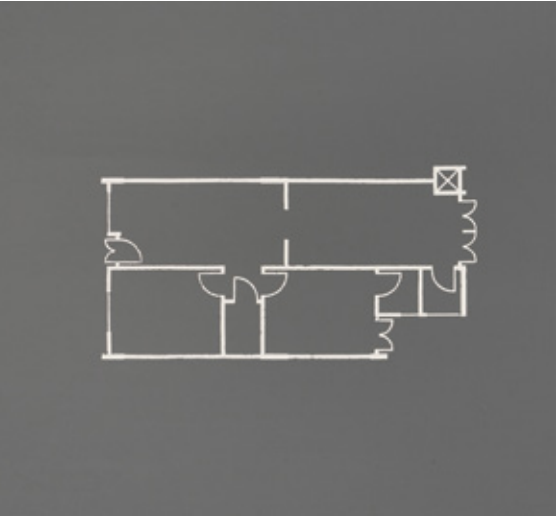
This brings me to the question: When we say we want a building like Pearl Bank Apartments to be saved, what are we really asking for? Are we asking to maintain its current use as residences, or to consider developing new uses? Or is the development’s physical structure in itself valuable for existence, void of its original or any other inhabitable function?

Let’s try a thought experiment. You are a building. You want to continue existing but you don’t want to continue playing your original role. In fact, you wish to do nothing. Also, you don’t want to burden your human creators to upkeep you. What would you do? Help is all around actually. Just call out to nature. Take the ruins at Angkor Wat in Cambodia, for example. They are still standing today after almost a thousand years, partly because they have been held in place by strangling fig trees.

What I’m suggesting here is the possibility of retaining a building’s structure as an object of admiration rather than a structure for functional use by humans; a sculptural monument, not a building.



Dwelling series: The Private Museum, 2010-2021 / 1:50 (2021)  
Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 60 cm

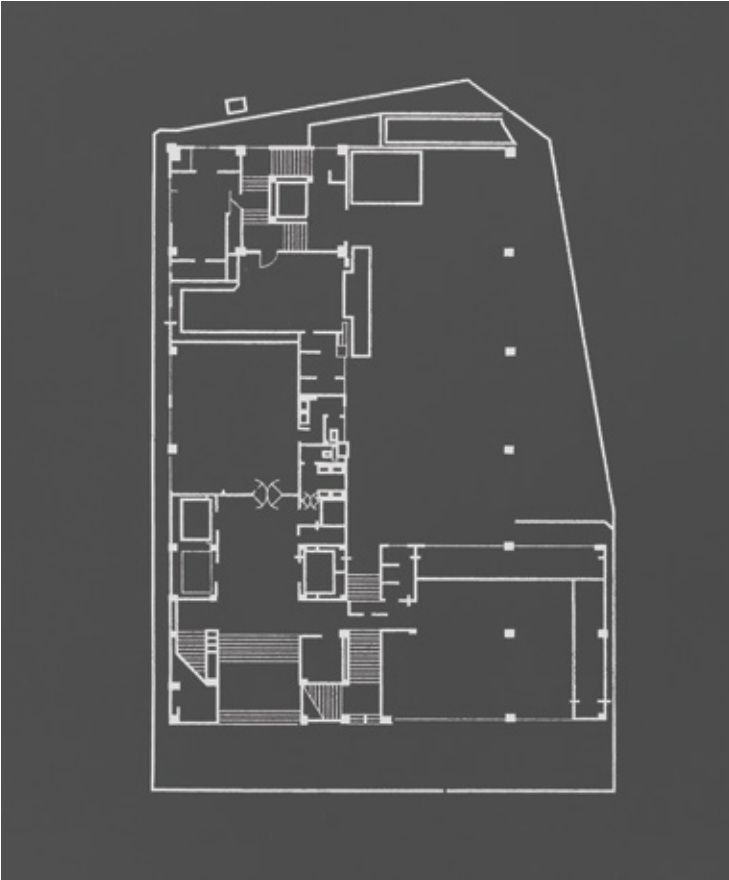


Dwelling series: Home of Michael Lee, 1998-2004 / 1:50 (2012)  
Acrylic on canvas, 50 x 60 cm





Referenced image: A thought experiment by Michael Lee



Dwelling series: Shell House, 1960s-1980s / 1:50 (2012)  
Acrylic on canvas, 120 x 90 cm

Surely the throngs of tourists visiting Angkor Wat to witness the beautiful collaboration between architecture and nature should be enough testament to give my latest musing some serious consideration?

- 1 Melody Zaccheus, "Artistic' tower of items at HDB void deck trashed", The Straits Times (March 2, 2017). Available: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/artistic-tower-of-items-at-hdb-void-deck-trashed>
- 2 TODAY, "Partial conservation of Dakota Crescent gives heritage enthusiasts hope" (Dec 12, 2017): Available: <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/partial-conservation-dakota-crescent-gives-heritage-enthusiasts-hope>
- 3 Ashley Tan, "Nature-loving S'poreans surprised by abundance of wildflowers on grass verges during CB period", Mothership (May 17, 2020). Available: <https://mothership.sg/2020/05/circuit-breaker-wildflowers/>

Selections from the Dwelling series  
2012-2021  
Acrylic on canvas  
Dimensions variable

The Dwelling series started in 2012 as a response to thinking about worlds past, present and future. It deconstructs the concept of buildings to their fundamental component—a design of, and desire for spaces.

From the outset, the works are a series of architectural plans, a recognisable schema that has worked its way into public consciousness; we see them at lift lobbies of shopping malls and corporate offices, and Housing Development Blocks and condominiums alike. They provide a means of locating oneself within the grand scheme of built spaces, big or small, and it is this relationship between the individual and the context of their association with these places that is enfolded within the Dwelling series.

At once prosaic and mechanical in appearance, the maps, as hand-painted illustrations of flattened spaces, contain traces of not just the manual marks of its making, but prospects of how these spaces can be activated, and memories of how they have been navigated.

The Dwelling series began with a focus on buildings erected in the 1980s and plans to be a means to record all buildings that have been 'lost' in some shape or form—demolished, unbuilt, abandoned. While remaining aesthetically consistent as floor plans, they have adapted to reflect the changes in contemporary interests, concerns and requests of artist, communities and society, each time inviting observers to consider, linger, dwell in the quiescence of these demarcated spaces.



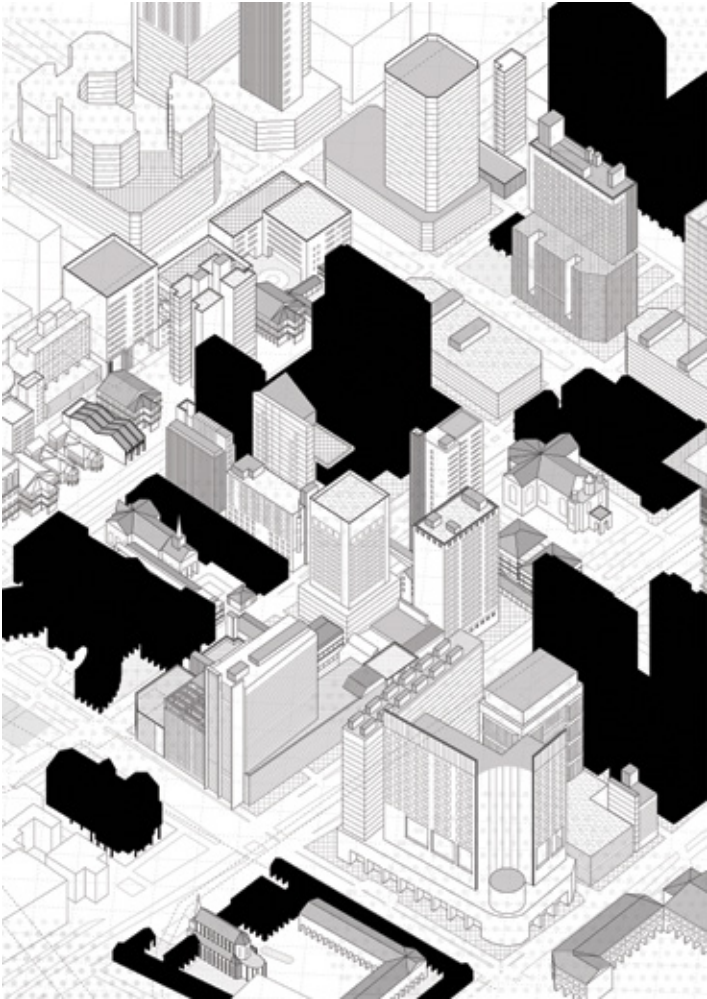
Exhibition view of 3+3+3: On Condition, The Private Museum, Singapore  
Michael Lee, Dwelling series (2012-2021), acrylic on canvas, dimensions variable

# The Smell of Memories

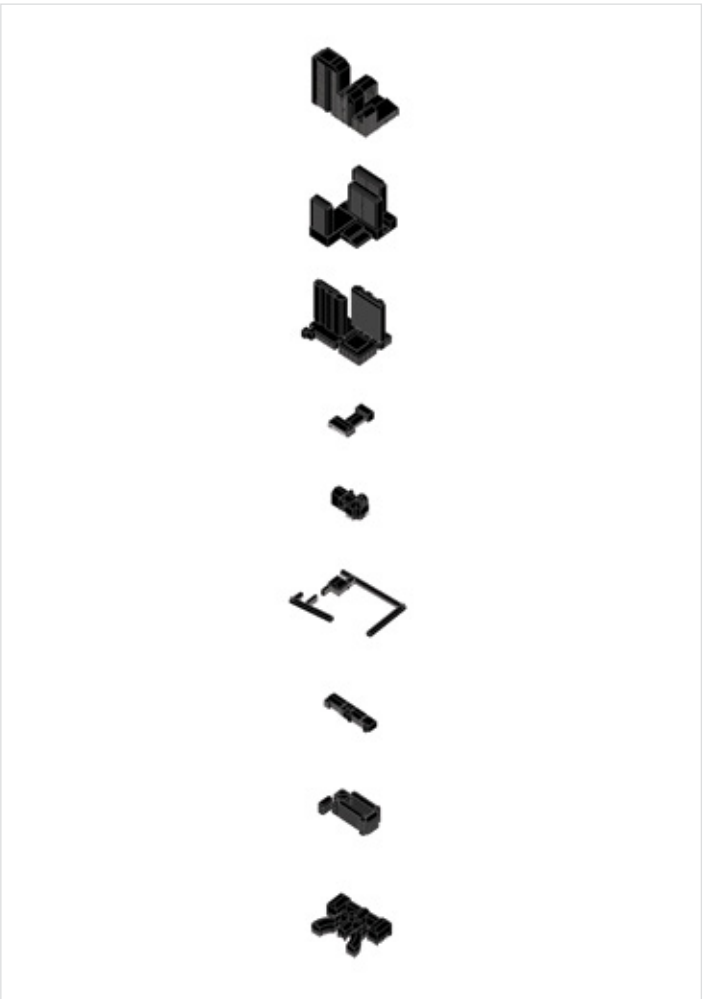
## // What does Architecture smell like?

Mervin Loh





Delectable Cityscape: Smell, Space and Memories; Triptych of smell experiment on cartridge paper, digital prints on satin paper (left to right), 76.5 x 58 cm x 3

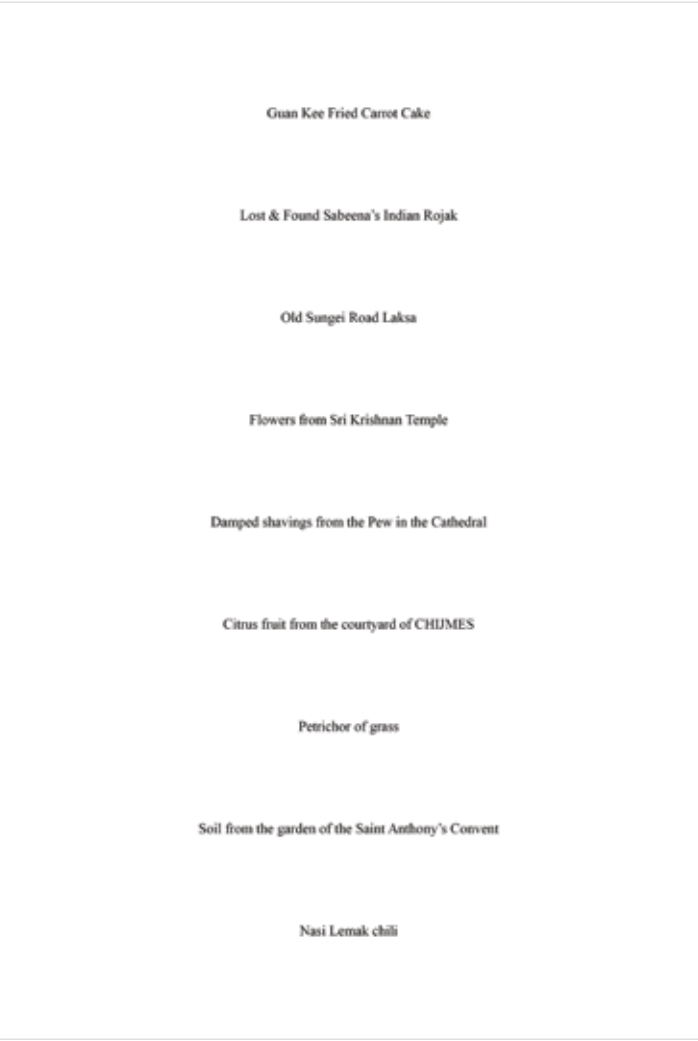


Delectable Cityscape: Smell, Space and Memories  
2021  
Multimedia installation  
Dimensions variable

Delectable Cityscape: Smell, Space and Memories seeks to locate the relationship between the built environment and expired spaces (spaces whose leases are non-renewable) through the most basic human faculty—the sense of smell. The work aims to use the sense of smell as a catalyst to invoke moments of nostalgia within our memories, about the history and architecture of Singapore. Delectable Cityscape attempts to use these moments to investigate the possibility of smell as an architectural phenomenon and as an architectural technique.

Spaces are associated with smell even if we do not detect any odour; the petrichor of grass during the wettest monsoon days, the musk of a





Legend of Delectable Cityscape: Smell, Space and Memories; Triptych of text on paper, 30 x 21 cm x 3

school chapel, the fragrance of flowers used during religious rites at an Indian temple, the aroma of food wafting from hawker centres during lunch hour, the dusty sediments around construction sites in the late afternoon... These mundane moments carry smells and add richness to our recollection of even the simplest memories. The quality of a space then is not merely a visual perception of spatial qualities through the retinal memory, but a complex multi-sensory fusion that revolves around smell as a catalyst to identify spatial phenomena.

Buildings carry historical moments that we can look at to explore the notion of memories through architectural debates. By using smell(s) as a catalyst, *Delectable Cityscape* attempts to draw viewers to not only read the works, but engage in atmospheric smelling of the works to reignite moments within the psychological sensuality where spaces and memories are recreated through smells.

# Delectable Cityscape

*Smell, Space and Memories*

Mervin Loh

The body of work starts off as an all continuous questioning, one that is always seeking the relationship between the built environment and its' expired spaces. How would a person recall the specific moments within the space, can a catalyst be used to evoke a form of engagement between memories and spaces. Can these nostalgic moments allude to the built environment or can these moments allude to the landscape that once existed within the area.

Delectable Cityscape builds on the most basic sensorial that most people would use on a day to day basis, the sense of smell. The notion of using smell as a catalyst to invoke the nostalgic moments within our memories, our history and our architecture in Singapore. The work will use these moments for the investigation of smell as an architectural phenomenon and as an architectural technique.

The Olfactory system (or the sense of smell) is a series of components that provides information to the brain. It reads molecules as a series of data from the receptor neuron that is transmitted into the brain, projecting what we call smells that are associated with various things. We only need eight molecules of substance to trigger an impulse of smell, but we can detect more than 10,000 different odours. These sensorial perceptions aid in simulating different memories either spatial or particular objects that assist us in recalling spaces that were completely forgotten by our retinal memories.<sup>1</sup>

Spaces are associated with smell even if we did not pick up any; the petrichor of grass during the wettest days of Singapore, the musky smell of the school's chapel, the fragrant flowers that were used during religious rites in an Indian temple, the smell of food during lunch hour in the Hawker centers, the dusty sediments of construction in the late afternoon - these mundane moments of smell added richness to our recollection of simple memories in our lives. The quality of a space then is not merely an visual perception of spatial qualities through the retinal memory, but a complex multi-sensory fusion that revolves around smell as a catalyst to identify spatial phenomena.<sup>2</sup>

How does smell play a part in the architectural discourse of nostalgia, memories and history, in the approach of drawing the architectural profiles of buildings that form the language of these familiar buildings within the urban environment; Is the constant engagement of discussion and research good enough to establish certain historical moments? Or is the sense of smell juxtaposing onto the historical drawing of the space able to evoke a certain stage in time within our memories? Is then smell which is all permeating, a very spatial technique that could be used in architecture?

These buildings carries historical moments that we can look at and explore the notion of memories through architectural debates - using smell as a form of catalyst that draws the viewers to not only read and see the works, but engaged in atmospheric<sup>3</sup> smelling of the works to reignite moments within the psychological sensuality where spaces are recreated through smells.

1. Pallamrao, Juhant, 'The Eyes of the Skin - Architecture and the Senses', John Wiley & Sons Ltd (2008), p. 54  
2. Walter, Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', New York: Schocken Books (1969), p. 22v  
3. Horik, Klaus, Tieren, Gus, 'Atmosphere, Compassion and Embodied Experience. A Conversation about Atmosphere with Juhant Pallamrao, OASE (2013), p. 45

Albert Centre's Hawker

Waterloo Centre's Kopitiam

Bras Basah Complex's Food Court

Stamford Arts Centre

Cathedral of the Good Shepherd

Cloister of CHUMES

Singapore Catholic High School

Saint Anthony's Convent

Saint Joseph's Institution

Conversation

Andrea Fam (AF)   Mervin Loh (ML)

AF        Hi Merv, your research interest has taken a turn from the physicality of built spaces to the ephemerality of smells and how they permeate through and around constructed environments, at once highlighting the material form and porous quality of places. Could you explain how and when this shift in your interest took place? Why smell?

ML        It was during my Masters programme in RCA [Royal College of Art] that I chanced upon a beautiful writing by Philippe Rahm that talks about temperature and convection as an architectural tool to design spaces. Reading into many works that he had done, one of the most intriguing projects that he had developed was Jade Eco Park in Taichung. At the same time I was researching on colours of food and the morphication of food stains that turns from one colour to another in a matter of days. It was during that time I decided to branch out into smells as a tool for design and started experimenting with smell and atmosphere—and how different smell composition can affect physiological change in humans and space. During the early days of researching on smell, I found it interesting how olfactory memories can segregate different smell compositions into the air and allow us to recall different objects. The in-depth research on such phenomena within the human body led me to start reading into neuroscience which forms a huge bulk of my research on smell and the human physiological matter. At the same time I started to incorporate smell into architecture by introducing spaces that allow smell to be controlled, diverted and contained. This research is what led to my final thesis project in RCA.

AF        Your thesis being Eating Together in Singapore: Hawker Centres as an Extension of the Domestic Spaces of HDBs—was your decision to hone in on hawker centres and Singapore’s hawker culture random or strategic? Do you have any personal affinities with hawker food or centres? And any anecdotes to share?

ML        Growing up in Singapore I spent most of my childhood running around Albert Centre hawker centre [Albert Centre Market & Food Centre] due to my parents being hawkers themselves. It felt normal and mundane that I did a lot of my schoolwork and spent my free time within this infrastructure—I guess that’s the reason why I started to do extensive research on domestics spaces of HDB and its relationship with the hawker centre during my masters in RCA. The memories of time spent within the hawker centre were so common back in those days that only when I started architecture studies did I start to question its spatial values and atmosphere in relation to the domestic spaces and estates Singaporeans live in. I won’t consider it random but more like a calling for the preservation of such unique spaces as a typology in Singapore. One of the most memorable things that happened when I was young was my receiving tuition in different subjects from different hawkers in the hawker centre—almost all of them watched me grow up. Thinking back it’s a very strange phenomenon of something that would normally happen in a domestic space but became infused into the public space of the hawker centre.

Clockwise from Left

Laksa Paste  
from Albert Food Centre  
01 - 16/5 Strong smell  
02 - 18/5 Smell gets stronger  
03 - 20/5 Smell light  
04 - 22/5 Musky smell

Ice Kachang  
from Albert Centre  
01 - 18/5 Sweet smelling  
02 - 20/5 Sweet smell  
03 - 22/5 No smell  
04 - 24/5 No smell

Fried Carrot Cake  
from Albert Food Centre  
01 - 19/5 Strong smell  
02 - 21/5 Strong smell  
03 - 23/5 Slight smell  
04 - 25/5 Musky smell

Fruit Juice  
from Sunshine Plaza  
01 - 19/5 Fruity smell  
02 - 21/5 No smell  
03 - 23/5 No smell  
04 - 25/5 No smell



Smell experiments on cartridge paper, 42 x 30 cm





Part of Delectable Cityscape: Smell, Space and Memories; Digital prints on Lustre paper, 15 x 15 cm x 9

Extracts from Eating Together in Singapore: Hawker Centres as an Extension of the Domestic Spaces of HDBs by Mervin Loh as part of his Masters thesis on The Politics of Home. Submitted 2020.

The extension of the domestic space from the home to the hawker centre can be seen as a paradigm shift in the social production of modern day Singaporean families, whose father and mother of the family are required to participate in productive labour and hence spend less time in the domestic space with their children. The shift has constructed a scenario in which the mother regularly feeds the child at the hawker centre while waiting for the father to get off from work to join them for dinner. The hawker centre table is then seen as an extension to the narrative of the dining table within the domestic space, but this time located in an infrastructure called a hawker centre. The hawkers that prepare the food become the amplification of the production of cooking—which is to say there is a sense of relinquishing control over the domesticity of family meals. What seems to be family-time at the dining table is further complicated through the introduction of a couple who shares the same table as the family having their dinner. An unusual but interesting situation surfaces as the couple engage in conversation with the family seated at the same table, eating together not as a family, but as strangers and fellow Singaporeans.

Singapore's is a culture of food. The culture that gave birth to a unique infrastructure that blurs the boundary between private and public spaces by creating an area that is at once public and domestic. It is the familiarities of Singaporeans that allow this unique spatial character to continue its existence, even if the typology of hawker centres change through architectural intervention or progressive urbanisation of Singapore. As long as hawker centres remain familiar to Singaporeans, these spaces will always be an extension of domestic living and remain rooted in Singapore's collective food culture.



Referenced image: A busy weekday afternoon at Hong Lim Market in Chinatown



Exhibition view of 3+3+3: On Condition, The Private Museum, Singapore  
 Mervin Loh, Delectable Cityscape: Smell, Space and Memories (2021), multimedia installation, dimensions variable



# A Nod to History // A Performance with/ through Time and Space

Isabella Teng Yen Lin



I. A WAY TO ARRIVE

Perhaps we could start by talking about lines.

On one hand, we have the timeline of past, present and future, which seems to move in a linear fashion, carrying us unceasingly forward.

On the other hand, we have lines of movement, or the traces of movement of physical bodies as we weave our lifelines within and around the spaces we inhabit.

Between the lines that cross space and the lines that cross time, their unique intersections mark the places where we exist. Where, inescapably embodied, we eat, live, breathe, sleep... where we worry, hope, and love.

I like to think of the line as a metaphor for all of these things, a catch-all metaphor for our lives. The boundaries that we draw. The lives that we live. The patterns we are familiar with, all bound up in lines that we recognise, or arrangements of lines that we resist. The lines that we dare to cross or do not cross. Lines that shape us, form us, protect us, and soothe us.

For the artwork I've created for 3+3+3, I have sought to discover through-lines in TPM's history at 51 Waterloo Street in the last 11 years, chiefly by browsing through their catalogues to retrieve and recover ideas, concepts, and also visual line-work that I may reach back through time and bring forward into the present. In keeping with the theme of the artwork and of the exhibition, I have prioritised works that spoke predominantly to the dichotomies of being and non-being, of presence and loss. All in all, I have tried my best to pay attention to the normally invisible presence belonging to things, people and memories past, which nonetheless continue to have a felt presence within a space.

Along this train of thought, I have also observed architectural elements in 51 Waterloo Street, a site rich with history, whose iconic structures must bring, if not a sense of nostalgia, then at the very least a sense of poignancy that is rather difficult to put a finger on. Anticipating the possible remodelling of the building, I have sought to draw attention to beautiful aspects of this site: its lovely, idiosyncratic window grills, wall designs, and stairway patterns. Translated into lines, their form changes but some part of their essence remains.

I have also sought to create “disappearances”, three places in the gallery space where aspects of the architecture (two pillars and a wall) seem to fade out into the background as a result of linear anamorphic interventions.

The line, I hope, is what unites them all: all these disparate fragments of past, present, future, be they from here, there, or (perhaps now) nowhere. Most importantly, I pay homage to the line of sight, the viewer's vision that makes all visual perception possible.

As long as we are walking along a line, perhaps we can have faith that somewhere down our path, the intersections we long for will arrive.... and arrive again.

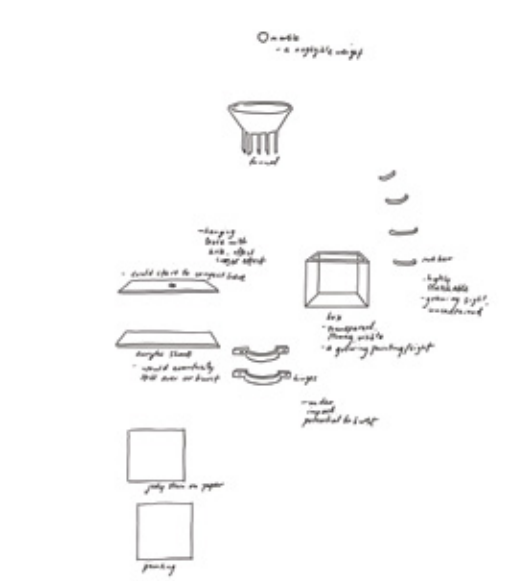
We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.  
– T.S. Eliot

II. ONE WAY TO SAY GOODBYE

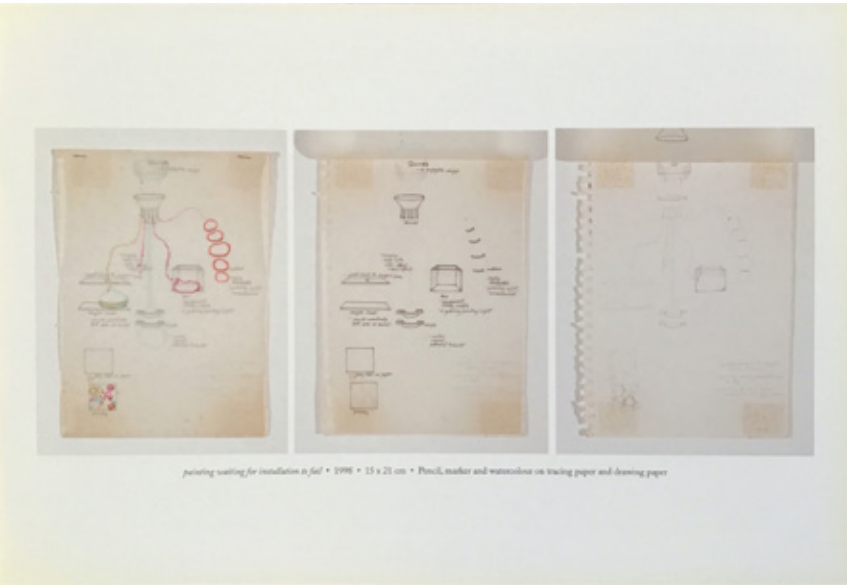
Is it inevitable that every attempt to say goodbye recalls that which one is hoping to release?

The original artwork, a conceptual drawing titled painting waiting for installation to fail, imagined a fictitious situation where an ice-block would drip into a funnel connected to five different water balloons. The thought sketch imagined these balloons overflowing and bursting in unpredictable yet inevitable ways, ultimately dripping onto an ‘average’ painting.

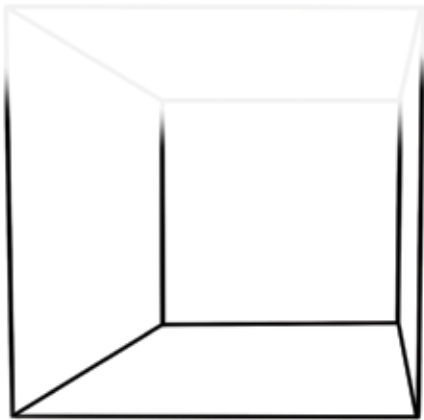
In extracting a single frame from a triptych, the meaning of the original work is referenced, yet challenged: in the same way, even as we wait for memory to fail, the fact of a thought-idea once existing cannot be erased.



Sketch of middle panel from painting waiting for installation to fail



Referenced artwork: Ye Shufang, painting waiting for installation to fail (1998)  
Pencil, marker and watercolour on tracing paper and drawing paper, 15 x 21 cm x 3  
From the exhibition The Loss Index: Perishables and Other Miscellanea (2013), The Private Museum, Singapore.



Sketch of To Be & Not To Be Conceptual Installation



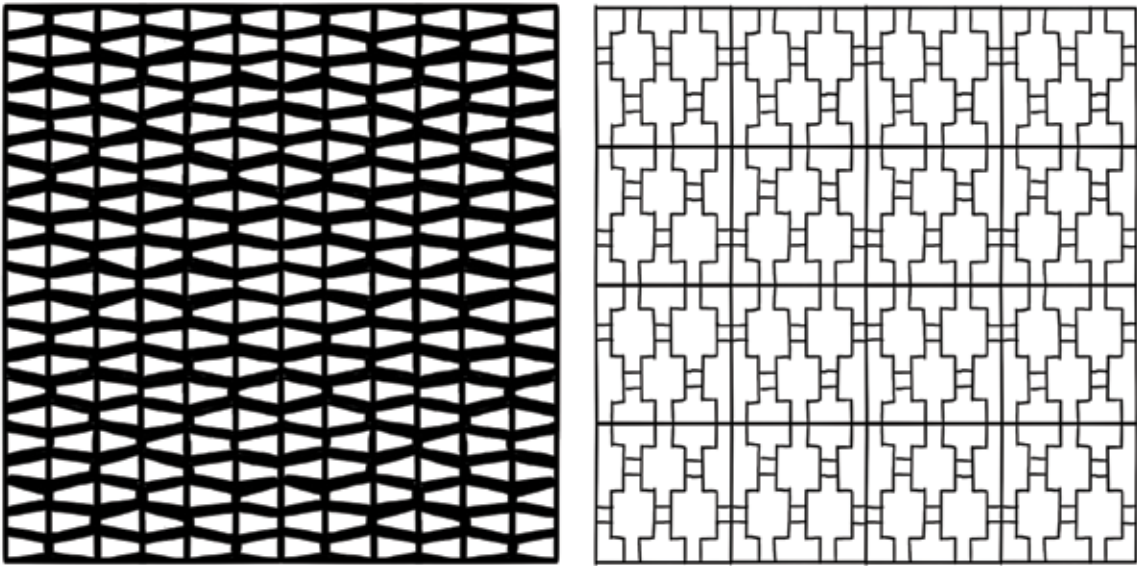
Referenced artwork: Fung Ming Chip, To Be & Not To Be Conceptual Installation (2012)  
From the exhibition To Be & Not To Be (2012), The Private Museum, Singapore.

The joy of collecting becomes more meaningful and significant when one is able to share this joy.

Sketch of collector's quote



Referenced quote from the exhibition Search and Discover: The Joy of Collecting - Selections from the Yeap Lam Yang Collection (2020), The Private Museum, Singapore.



Sketches of architectural elements of 51 Waterloo Street



Architectural elements of 51 Waterloo Street







5 ways to return (2021)  
Site-specific installation made with pencil  
Dimensions variable

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3 ways to disappear, 5 ways to return, 1 way to say goodbye  
2021  
Site-specific installation; vinyl tape, pencil, colour pencil and paint  
Dimensions variable

---

3 ways to disappear,  
5 ways to return,  
1 way to say goodbye

3+3+3 seems an arbitrary combination of numbers, a curious formula. What other pathways can we take, on a journey to the number nine? This artwork in three parts considers the varied ways that aspects of reality might disappear and return, shifting and sliding through the doors of perception from alternate times.

3 ways to disappear and 5 ways to return exist as site-specific installations of an anamorphic nature. They combine visuals from The Private Museum's archives, with elements of its built environment to uncover our place amidst the ever-changing architectural and psycho-social field that we live in. Some parts of the gallery have been made to disappear. Other parts, finding their way back from a decade ago, have taken root once again in the present, if only for a moment.

The works allude to the normally invisible presence of things, people and memories past, which nonetheless continue to have a felt presence today. 1 way to say goodbye, the third component of this work, resides within the pages of this catalogue. Its contemplations welcome a rumination on the following: once breathed into existence, does anything—or anyone—really leave?

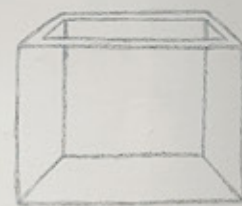
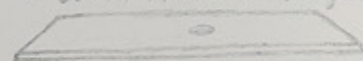


rubber

- highly stretchable  
- growing sight, uncontained

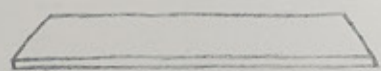
- hanging loose with hole, effect craze effect

- could start to connect here



box

- transparent, strong, visible  
- a growing painting/sight



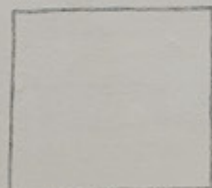
acrylic sheet

- would eventually spill over or burst

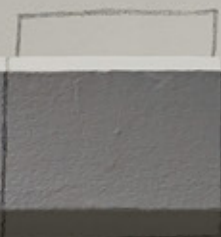


hinges

- under impact, potential to burst



jelly stain on paper



painting





Exhibition view of 3+3+3: On Condition, The Private Museum, Singapore  
 Isabella Teng Yen Lin, 3 ways to disappear, 5 ways to return (2021), site-specific installation made with vinyl tape, pencil, colour pencil and paint, dimensions variable



Andrea FAM (b. 1988, Singapore) is the Singapore Art Museum Residencies assistant curator. Between 2015–2020, she was an assistant curator in the curatorial and collections department of the museum. As a curator, she employs research methodologies of empathic readings and fieldnotes to investigate embodied histories of space, place, and power structures. Her groundwork lies primarily in the regions of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.



Finbarr FALLON (b. 1992, United Kingdom) is a Singapore-based multi-disciplinary designer and artist, whose work draws on his formal training in architecture. As a spatial thinker and storyteller, his works explore the evolution and transformation of the modern urban environment—creating pieces that exist in both the physical and digital worlds. He received his Master and Bachelor of Architecture from the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London, in 2016 and 2013 respectively. His accolades include Winner of the Blueprint Architecture Photography Awards, Atrium People’s Choice (2019) and The Guardian Big Picture: Architecture (2016). His photographic works have been featured in numerous photography exhibitions in London and Singapore, alongside works in architecture, animation and art featured at Singapore Art Museum (2020), Marina Bay Sands (2019), and the National Museum of Singapore (2018).



Claire GOH (b. 1991, Singapore) is an urban geographer who is keenly interested in the mutability of buildings and how they exist as infinite permutations of fact, fantasy and failure. She received her Master in Urban Studies and Bachelor in Geography from University College London in 2014 and 2013 respectively. She has contributed writing and ideation to photographic projects on a range of urban issues such as greenery (Flora Phantasmagoria Series at The National Museum, 2018), and topographies of death (Dead Space, Hong Kong, 2019).



Geraldine KANG (b. 1988, Singapore) is an artist and educator at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts. Her recent work focuses on using photographs to talk about the living conditions of migrant labour in Singapore. Her other interests include family, mental illness and land space issues in Singapore. She uses the act of photography as an introspective method, and wishes for her images to challenge and evoke questions. She received her Master in Fine Arts from the Parson’s



Michael LEE (b. 1972, Singapore) is an artist, curator, and publisher. He researches urban memory and fiction, especially the contexts and implications of loss. He transforms his observations into objects, diagrams, situations, curations, or texts. He received his Master and Bachelor of Communication Studies from Nanyang Technological University in 2001 and 1997 respectively. He has staged solo exhibitions in Germany, Hong Kong, and Singapore. His accolades include the APBF Signature Art Prize (2011) and the Young Artist Award (Visual Arts) from the National Arts Council, Singapore (2005). His works have been included in international group exhibitions such as the Shenzhen Sculpture Biennale (2014), Asia Triennial Manchester (2011), Singapore Biennale (2011), and Shanghai Biennale (2010). His works have been collected in public and private collections in Brussels, China, Hong Kong, and Singapore.



Mervin LOH (b. 1988, Singapore) is an architect currently based in Singapore. He is currently pursuing his academic research interest in the architectural approach of domestic spaces as part of the larger production of the city-living—that uses smell as the design generator for architectural design discourse. He received his Master in Architecture from the Royal College of Art after completing his Bachelor in Architecture from the University of Westminster in 2020 and 2016 respectively followed by 2 years with design firm FARM. He has run projects spanning residential, commercial and public projects in Singapore and China.



Isabella TENG Yen Lin (b. 1990, Singapore) is an inter-disciplinary artist who explores the intersection of logic and intuition in art. Her installations and paintings seek to delight her viewers and deepen their experience of life, directing their attention back to the power of their own perceptions and the richness of their inner and outer worlds. She received her Bachelors in English Literature in 2014 from the National University of Singapore and is currently pursuing a Master of Fine Arts in Fine Art at LASALLE College of the Arts. Her individual works, as well as works from her Collaborative Visual Act, MIRROR Art Duo, have been shown in Thailand and Singapore, and have been collected as part of The Teng Collection.



Our warmest thanks to the Guest of Honour Mr Michael Koh, Former CEO of the National Heritage Board (2006 to 2012), for officiating the opening of the exhibition and taking time to write the foreword in this publication.

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The Private Museum Ltd  
51 Waterloo Street #02-06 Singapore 187969  
O: (65) 6738 2872  
E: [mail@theprivatemuseum.org](mailto:mail@theprivatemuseum.org)  
FB / IG: [@theprivatemuseum](#)  
[www.theprivatemuseum.org](http://www.theprivatemuseum.org)

The Private Museum is a non-profit private museum in Singapore founded by Singaporean philanthropist, art collector and real estate developer, Daniel Teo, together with his daughter Rachel Teo in 2010.

Fuelled by passionate patronage for the arts, the museum aims to establish an alternative platform to bridge different communities, private and public. It supports the exchange of ideas across cultures, educational initiatives, artistic and curatorial collaborations with practitioners of the arts as well as art collectors.

With a vision to promote art appreciation, the independent arts space engages local, regional and international audiences from all walks of life. The Private Museum is a registered Charity and Institution of a Public Character (IPC) since 2010 and 2015 respectively.

## 3+3+3: On Condition

“Building, structure, edifice. Home, office, organisation. Community, city, country. Shelter, safety, comfort. Identity, memory, history. 99-year lease, freehold, 3+3+3, Master Plan.”

The Private Museum Singapore (TPM) is pleased to present 3+3+3: On Condition—a group exhibition curated by Andrea Fam. This marks the third edition of TPM’s Guest Curator Platform—collaborating with guest curators to support and experiment with independent curatorial practice through the presentation of different perspectives of our world. This interdisciplinary exhibition will feature both new and ongoing works by five artists and architects including artist duo Finbarr Fallon & Claire Goh, Geraldine Kang, Michael Lee, Mervin Loh and Isabella Teng Yen Lin.

Our governing bodies, architects, invisible labour, civilians, new and temporary residents have seamlessly infused their own histories and intimate memories into the foundational and poignant blueprints of our small island nation. Borrowing its namesake from the commercial lease agreement under the Singapore Land Authority (SLA), 3+3+3 explores these unseen psycho-spatial associations and the complexities of our urban planning while musing on the ephemeral nature of space and place-making in our land-scarce city.

Through preparatory sketches, utopian models, performative engagements and satirical ‘white papers’, this exhibition is an open-ended invitation to reflect on our ever-evolving relationships with our urban environment. Engaging our different senses, these works contemplate notions of nostalgia and transience while considering the overlooked inhabitants of Singapore.

Having served as an independent arts platform for the past 11 years, 3+3+3 marks TPM’s last exhibition in our home at 51 Waterloo Street. Such is the life of built spaces in our metropolis—though they bestow us with character, identity and heritage, we confer them with impermanence and dispensability, provoking the question, “If buildings retain the lived histories imbued into them, shouldn’t we consider their embodied human spirit?”

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Guest Curator: Andrea Fam  
Artists: Finbarr Fallon & Claire Goh | Geraldine Kang | Michael Lee | Mervin Loh | Isabella Teng Yen Lin

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