

You, Other; I, Another

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You, Other; I, Another

18 May - 22 July 2018

Artists

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Leroy SOFYAN

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The Private Museum is pleased to present *You, Other; I, Another*, a group exhibition curated by Dr Susie Lingham. This marks The Private Museum's new initiative in collaborating with guest curators to facilitate and support independent and experimental curatorial practice, and to present different perspectives on our world. This exhibition features nine artists including Regina De Rozario, Mithun Jayaram, Mumtaz Maricar, Siew Kee Liong, Leroy Sofyan, Vincent Twardzik Ching, Victor Emmanuel, Susie Wong and Yeo Chee Kiong. Their works span a plethora of mediums, all investigating the dynamic spectrum of the 'Other'. In commemoration of our 8th anniversary, The Private Museum hopes to broaden its horizon and explore new pastures in expanding its mission to bridge collectors, artists, curators, and the general public through our exhibitions of varying subjects and mediums. Through the 'Guest Curator Initiative', we are engaged at this point to reflect on our role and identity as an arts space in bringing new ideas and fresh perspectives to the local arts scene. I would like to extend my gratitude and appreciation to our Guest-of-Honour Prof Kwok Kian Woon, our nine artists, Regina De Rozario, Mithun Jayaram, Mumtaz Maricar, Siew Kee Liong, Leroy Sofyan, Vincent Twardzik Ching, Victor Emmanuel, Susie Wong and Yeo Chee Kiong, our supporting partners and the team, in making this exhibition a memorable milestone for The Private Museum.

Last but not least, our heartfelt gratitude to our guest curator, Dr Susie Lingham, without whom this exhibition would not have been possible.

Mr Daniel Teo

Founder

The Private Museum

“You, Other; I, Another” – the title of this exhibition curated by Dr Susie Lingham is both refreshing and provocative. Refreshing because it teases us away from the tired and tiresome mode of “Us versus Them” that is so prevalent in the world today. Provocative because it jolts us into asking new questions. In that default mode, one’s self is embedded in a single “community” or “race” or “nation” etc., in effect a collective self. And membership or belonging entails a denial of other ways of looking at and experiencing the world, indeed a denial of the otherness within oneself and between ourselves. The unsettling questions posed by Dr Lingham and our nine artists widen the scope of our questioning and deepen our search for new ways of regarding the Other, regarding each other, regarding I as another, and regarding ourselves as others. Perhaps there is no way or even no need to quickly arrive at answers, which would tend to be easy and simple answers that reinforce the comforting and lazy mode of “Us versus Them” that is predicated on insecurity and vulnerability. Instead, in conscious resistance to that default mode, let’s take our time to immerse ourselves in these difficult and complex ways of questioning, perhaps even to savour and enjoy the process. In this sense, the theme of the exhibition is not just refreshing and provocative, but deliciously so, inviting and tempting us to discover and recover – to taste – a multi-layered, multi-textured sense of conviviality and solidarity, both because of and in spite of difference among ourselves, between “You, Other” and “I, Another”.

Prof Kwok Kian Woon

Associate Provost (Student Life)

Professor of Sociology

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You, Other; I, Another

A. A Meditation on Otherness & Belonging

by Susie Lingham

Relation is reciprocity. My You acts on me as I act on it. [...] Inscrutably involved, we live in the currents of universal reciprocity.¹

I. The Human, Conditioned: Preconceptions

To and from every I there is a You, a They, a We, an Us, an Other. To *whom* is another, Other? Or is it more precise to say: *When* is the other Other to another? Otherness is an oscillation; is *in* oscillation. The binary-dynamic of finding the self in the other has always been tipped at moments, and shifts to finding the other in the self – recognising difference within oneself is ongoing, and unnerving, for every ‘I’.

Within the structures of any society, how is the other conditioned into being ‘Other’? How is otherness represented? Who represents otherness? In what way do we feel ‘other’, and how do we feel *for* and *with* ‘the other’ who differs from our self-sensed otherness? How is any ‘We’ held together? Who decides to let ‘Us’ be ‘Us’? Perhaps there is no immutable ‘Us’? What holds a ‘people’ together? What is it that magnetises the ‘core’ of a sense of civic or national identity? Does that actually override cultural-racial-religious identity? What value systems do ‘a people’ hold in common? And how have these arisen, if they have been allowed to rise? Preconception, conception and perception feed into each other in continuum, and given human nature, perhaps inevitably, the Other demarcates the line of belonging: what we identify *against*. So many ‘normalities’ are perpetuated by default, and justified as what the ‘majority’ accepts, and expects. As Foucault insightfully states:

In actuality, dialectics does not liberate differences; it guarantees, on the contrary, that they can always be recaptured. The dialectical sovereignty of similarity consists in permitting differences to exist, but always under the rule of the negative, as an instance of non-being.²

The scope of this subject is indeed perilously tortuous and unwieldy. This meditation sets adrift some thoughts for contemplation, in the hope that deeper understanding can find new moorings amidst some of the more discernible currents in the deepflow of the subject. ‘Otherness’, the experience of being perceived and treated differently within dominant society-specific norms – with varying degrees of acceptance – is that deeprooted part of the human condition with entangled anthropological genealogies buried deep in the ancient, fathomless darkness of the collective

unconscious. Snarled in associative conditioning, encounters with capricious Nature, feelings of vulnerability, survival, familiarity, family, bloodties, kin, skin, limited resources, tribe, clan, caste, village, kingdom, power, recognition, powerlessness, exploitation, slavery, loyalty, trust, privilege, protection, ownership and legacy, all contribute to the wretched cycles of being human. Uniting through division, privilege – in a world of limited resources – is much sought after, and given that there is more desire and need for privilege than there is ‘enough’ to go around, the pecking order that emerges is often vicious.

Otherness, or the subject of ‘the Other’, as termed in various strands of Western critical thought, has been much studied as an ever-deepening aspect of the human condition. Nonetheless, it is embedded first, namelessly, in and within experience, and extended in-between embodied experiences. The named concept was, and remains necessary, and has spun and spiralled along in various analyses of accounts of historical experience, from the trauma of war, genocide, the holocaust, colonialism, civil disobedience, ethnic ‘cleansing’, human rights leaders’ ideals and their assassinations – analyses that continue to evolve through the ever-honed instruments of different modes of thinking. Indeed, many brilliant thinkers have pondered this much-knotted nodal point of the human condition, involving everything and everyone on the ‘other side’ of power and influence, throughout the history of human culture – any existence that has encountered power and privilege, been disempowered, and oppressed by turn. These explorations have been “negotiated” through phenomenology and existentialism (e.g., Hegel, Husserl, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Buber); psychoanalysis (e.g., Freud, Lacan, Irigaray), Marxism and feminisms (e.g., Wollstonecraft, Steinem, de Beauvoir); postcolonial theory, including concepts of the “hybrid”, the “hyphen”, interculturalism, and more (e.g., Said, Bhabha), as well as gender studies and queer theory (e.g., de Lauretis, Butler, Munoz, Cixious). In fact, the study of the Other is *necessarily* highly interdisciplinary, given the subject’s scope and influence within human conditioning.

These are the Lethan depths where the forces of the unconscious, consciousness and that most human of traits – conscience – come into being; where power, politics, ethics, and aesthetics are inextricably entwined. Pre-wired, hardwired and constantly rewired within the sensitive realms of psychoneuroimmunology³,

here be primordial phobias and drives: the treachery of darkness, dispelled by life-giving sunlight; friend or foe; win or lose; live or die; attract or repulse; survive or thrive; self-preservation and well-being. To be safe, to feel loved and protected and well, we all long to belong, but perhaps no belonging is unconditional. Any conditioned predisposition inherited and reinforced through preconceptions over aeons cannot easily be rationalised away. This is an unbearable, unscratchable itch, and is akin to being aware of the need to fathom the pain of a long-excised, now-phantom limb. It involves a proprioceptive sense of understanding your place in the world, while being aware of everything out there, or wherever whatever might be, or *should be*, in relation to you. At the microcosmic levels, pecking order patterning is cause-effect bound with preferential treatment within families – whether compelled by cultural norms, personal dispositions or merely echoing societal expectations – influenced by gender, by order of birth, by physical traits. Hence, the perennial paradox: if the ‘self-preserving’ family unit is at the root of all concepts of Otherness in human culture, the Other is [a] relative. Such conditionings simmer and seethe in the individual as well as extended, collective psyches – racial, cultural, gender-related, tribal, national – and get transmitted across generations as intensifying cause-and-effect impacts that sometimes reach the exponentially retaliatory horrors of Jacobean tragedy: shuddering, violent reciprocity resulting in irrevocable damage that takes generations to even *contemplate* reconciliation, let alone repair. Every new repression-expression accrues to what becomes experienced as insurmountable oppression – which ends, and ironically, begins anew in the catastrophe of war and bloodshed.

Embodiment conditions; conditioning is embodied. The fundamental difference across the human, animal and botanical worlds is between maleness and femaleness, biological distinction: the primal, generative polar-other pair, whose sexual consummation ensures genetic destinies are infinitely shuffled in the cycle of the survival of every species. Until recent advances in molecular biology, genetics and the chromosomal shuffle of each individual’s genetic destiny being equally bequeathed by both parents were relatively unknown, and patriarchal cultures and religions designated a secondary, inferior status to women in general, with childbearing and childrearing as their primary roles. Besides the asymmetry in literal biological costs involved in the reproductive cycle weighing heavily against the female of the species, oddly, oftimes because of it, cultural bias, taboos and prohibitions continue to dog women’s very existence. The many millennia of violence and

inhumanity that has been perpetrated against women and girls in the name of the ‘natural order’, the law, tradition, religion and culture encompass female infanticide, female genital mutilation, subservience, silence, inequalities in human rights from citizenship to professions, the inability to represent anything other than themselves in female-centred roles, and even then, only with difficulty. From this discrimination, the practical and theoretical categorisation of the Other snowballs to include other perceived ‘imperfect’ manifestations of the human being, together with the coincident inequalities and social injustices endured. As explicated by Deleuze and Guattari, in their theory of “becoming”:

[T]he majority in the universe assumes as pre-given the right and power of man. In this sense women, children, but also animals, plants, and molecules, are minoritarian. It is perhaps the special situation of women in relation to the man-standard that accounts for the fact that becomings, being minoritarian, always pass through a becoming-woman.⁴

Women – by birth – can scarcely be called a minority as they make up nearly half of the world’s population, but they are classified collectively under the non-discrimination policy thus: “women, minorities, and individuals with disabilities”. With women as the emblematic Other, gender, race, ancestry, ethnicity, caste, class, religion, language, sexuality, national identity, political leaning, age, disability – any minority status at all – are collectively co-existent, parallel and intermingling live currents in this flow of Otherness.

Ironically, the ideals of Beauty and embodied ‘perfection’ have always been woven into evaluative categorical systems, which have been inadvertently tyrannical, intolerant, and self-sabotaging, even. Aesthetics and ethics are diabolically bound, and can confound our best intentions to remain unbiased. Eugenics, Nazi ‘Aryan race supremacy’, and once held ‘truths’ like phrenology, and the belief that “an organism’s “outer state” – its appearance – reflected its “inner state,” its moral or intellectual worth”⁵ are notions that subtly reinforce the phenomenological experience of appearance and physiognomic markers, and points of identification with, and deviation from such ideals. Hence from the start, Darwin’s insights provoked outrage, and evolutionary biology’s stance on humanity’s very animal beginnings continues to invoke horror and disbelief. Beauty may be truth and truth, beauty, at its most philosophical foundations, but it is probably more truthful to say that beauty is experienced as powerful; and by extension, the desire of, and for power is tied to this experience.

So. We perceive but the tip of the primordial iceberg: so much lies at subconscious levels, and, despite advancements in sociology, psychology and psychiatry, remains furtive – inscrutable, without purposeful unmooring from the safety of structures designed to maintain perceived ‘natural order’, and preestablished ‘superiority’ and power.

A sense of ‘belonging’ crystallises around culture, tradition, pride, resilience, *and* also pain and loss, and accretes generationally: at some point, responses get conditioned, and lines are drawn to keep some in, and others out. Retrospect far enough, those lines recede, fade, overlap, disappear: so much of any definitive, identifying legacy arises from shared influences – from belief systems to food sources and cuisine, to language. Not all ‘influence’ was, or is, benign, of course. We impress, and are impressed upon: these pivotal moments have complicated, double-edged beginnings. Indigeneity stakes the deepest claim on belonging, where landscapes are bound with mindscapes, and the blood, sweat and tears of the living, and the bodies of the dead, feed identification with ancient geographies and stories. Yet, like the settlers who arrive millennia later, even indigeneity has beginnings. Belonging has beginnings in endings.

II. Mutual Conditioning: Walking in Another’s Skin

“...the secret of happiness and virtue [...]: making people like their unescapable social destiny.”⁶

Aldous Huxley’s dystopian and prescient *Brave New World* scopes the pragmatic solutions of social conditioning mercilessly, with the “Hatchery and Conditioning Centre” where embryos get predestined into specific castes: from Alpha-Plus through Beta, Delta, Epsilon, Gamma, all carefully conditioned to be happy with their lots. Ringing Neo-Pavlovian bells, he imagines a future governed by what is reasonable-sounding: “The World State Motto: Community. Identity. Stability.” In Huxley’s world, a person from one caste could not possibly imagine being, or *being with*, someone else from another caste: that was disapproved of.

It takes empathy and imagination to experience Other perspectives, to “become-Other”, and some inescapable shared aspects of human experience (at least thus far) like pain and suffering certainly bring one person’s world closer to another. Literature, story, art and images, music – all grow empathy. At the Virtual Reality (VR)

Innovations at the Tribeca Film Festival 2018 in New York, the Virtual Arcade featured ‘storyscapes’, or what is called “immersive experiences” of the new genre of VR films. The BBC World Service *Click* programme host Gareth Mitchell spoke to the VR filmmakers about modes like “Embodiment” and “Social VR”, which allow anyone to “take on a role, go into somebody else’s shoes.” Mitchell, describing himself as a “white male”, donned his VR goggles and experienced the VR film *1,000 Cut Journey*, “where the person undergoing the VR experience is teleported into the body of a VR character and is subject to that foreign character’s experience, such as police brutality and racism.” This is related to the concept of the ‘avatar’, of which many definitions now pertain, but the origins of the word come from Hindu mythology, referencing the incarnation of a god in some form. Here in immersive VR mode, it enables embodied, intersubjective experience. *1,000 Cut Journey* is described thus:

In this immersive virtual-reality experience, the viewer becomes Michael Sterling, a black man, encountering racism as a young child, adolescent, and young adult. 1,000 Cut Journey highlights the social realities of racism, for understanding racism is the essential first step in promoting effective, collective social action and achieving racial justice.⁷

The instructions include being told to look in the mirror where Mitchell sees himself as a seven-year-old black boy looking back at him: he *is* Michael, on his first day at school, and experiences discrimination at each small ‘cut’ inflicted, through micro-aggressions – from being mocked, to being ignored, and through fully traumatic moments in the character’s life. Mitchell said he felt the weight of “assumptions made about you before you’ve had a chance to speak.” Just 10 minutes into the embodiment experience, sitting crosslegged on the floor as a child, waiting for an interview as a young adult, and later made to kneel, to “feel subjugated” under police control, and Mitchell says: “I was furious, I mean really, genuinely.”

Pre-avatar technology, in the late 1960s in response to the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., the American teacher Jane Elliott created the now-iconic “Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes”⁸ experiential workshop, where the children in her class experienced what it felt like to be ‘othered’ – an experiment which “labels participants as inferior or superior based solely upon the color of their eyes and exposes them to the experience of being a minority.”

While some have, since then, critiqued her work as “sadistic”, etc., this “lesson of a lifetime” provides the same immersive experience that helps with identification and empathy. Similarly, experiential workshops where able-bodied people *experience* disability, e.g., undertake tasks while blindfolded, demonstrate the powerful way imagination is informed by experience, and vice versa. As Atticus Finch says to his daughter, Scout, in Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mocking Bird*: “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view [...] – until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.”⁹

However, the ‘corrective’ pendulum has now swung into hyperdrive in the world of publishing fiction and literature, where “sensitivity readers” are now all the rage. Authors are often obliged to take on the services of these “sensitivity readers”¹⁰ who vet manuscripts for “stereotypes, biases and problematic language,” to which author Lionel Shriver responds that there is “a thin line between combing through manuscripts for anything potentially objectionable to particular subgroups and overt political censorship.” The claim is that this is not censorship, but “offering perspectives,” which might include suggestions to a writer that they “may not be the best person” to write from particular perspectives! This is tricky terrain: if one person’s freedom to express is another person’s experience of oppression, how does an evolving society balance these rights, i.e., the right to express, and the right to experience? And what of responsibilities on both sides? And aren’t writers worth their salt already their own first “sensitivity readers”, and aren’t their publishers there to work with them?

Writers *imagine*, that is critical to the profession, and good writers imagine *experienceable* worlds, however ‘unreal’. Literature is a wormhole: sit down with a book and in an instant, we are transported into worlds beyond the space of our own lives and time – we retreat into the past, and race far into the future; we climb into characters’ heads – men, women, children, animals, even inanimate objects – and understand – deeply understand – what it feels like to be other than ourselves, while, at the same time, *recognising* ourselves through these other perspectives. We feel the characters’ pain, shame, regret, exhilaration, despair. We identify with them, and so live a thousand lives in one lifetime. Literary devices or figures of speech are the most sophisticated instruments the human mind has created to conceptualise the world around us and our place in it – from simple and familiar similes to the

mysterious metaphor and the meaningful allegory; through fiction and poetry, life becomes even more real. We are sensitised; we learn about the complexities of human nature; we become more accommodating and more compassionate when we read, write, make, and appreciate art. Conscience cannot be outsourced.

III. Conditional Representation; Obligatory Belonging

*Difference can only be liberated through the invention of an acategorical thought.*¹¹

*One alien is a curiosity, two are an invasion.*¹²

The Other fascinates; confounds; is feared and rejected; is reviled; is ignored, dismissed; is mistreated, marginalised, alienated; is tolerated. Then again, some specimens of otherness are denied even ‘existence’ because quite anomalous, and uncategorisable: perhaps the Other is a Hydra, not a community. Otherness differentiates on a spectrum of ‘difference’ – in kind, by degree, by decree, by choice, inevitably. So, how can otherness be represented? Who represents otherness? The socio-political-cultural arena still regulates by order of stereotype: ironically, it typecasts the ‘typical’ Other, yet views askance the atypical Other. The representation of the Other and the representative of Otherness further tighten stereotype, exacerbated by the ethics-aesthetics Gordian knot.

Two visible instances of anomalous events: Barack Obama, President of the USA (2008-2016), and Meghan Markle, married into British royalty (2018), both American, both hailing from mixed race – biracial – heritage. They are, at once, *both* black *and* white, and *neither* black, *nor* white. Yet how they are perceived, and what they choose to project – are significant. To state categorically that Obama was the first black president is inaccurate. He is the first mixed race, or biracial, president. Does that make a difference? Yes. And no, in a democracy, it should not. Yet, it does. Displaying a sense of belonging – whatever the motivation on choice of sides – was critical. Politically, it kept things ‘sided’, and he could fulfill obligations to represent the obvious Other. It addressed and also perpetuated difference via obvious polarisation, giving precedence to his father, and sidestepping his mother in the equation, as if pecking order rights needed to be observed first, and reversed. If he *did* identify as white, or biracial – neither side might have deemed him a worthy ‘representative’, as Obama is both *more* minoritarian

than black, and ‘insufficiently’ white. What about all the other Others – the indigenous peoples, Hispanics, Asians, people of mixed races? Somehow, his being different did make a difference: poised as a fulcrum between worlds, Obama did stand up for Otherness, including the Hydra-Other. With Markle, the claim that she represents the black *and* biracial population in Britain also works on this principle – although care is taken to note that she is ‘biracial’. American and biracial, marrying into the British royal family is entering even more primordially sensitive terrain, given royalty’s very premise of bloodline and kingdom. This marriage is epochal.

Another set of issues much in the public eye now: gender, sexuality and sexual abuse. What began as the LGB ‘community’ has now become LGBTQ+, an increasingly unpronounceable acronym representing a very diverse collective. Transgender issues, the T in LGBTQ+, marks the transitional, crossers of lines of belonging that reflect the complexities of embodiment and identification most visibly. The hold on gender and sexuality has long been regulated by religion and continues to engender intolerances.

While collective identity and the extended sense of self are strategies now in practice, allowing distressed online communities to represent themselves via social media like the #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, and even the #NotMyPresident movements, it is religion’s strategy that stands par excellence: hearts-and-minds forged in collective identification – beyond geopolitical, national, cultural, racial, or social and class boundaries – with timeless storyscapes that intimately include the extremely extended self, aligned directly to ultimate power. There are rules and regulations of course, yet this is a *near*-unconditional sense of belonging that does wonders in terms of psychoneuroimmunology.

How does a diversity of othernesses represent themselves? When can othernesses be represented with critical mass, ‘solidarity’? Group, gang, community, assembly, crowd, mob, horde? How held? The difference between and within othernesses could be even wider than the difference they might individually have with the relatively more homogenous majority. The adage: “The enemy of my enemy is not necessarily my friend” is true, yet we often find, as Trinculo in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* says, taking shelter with that great Other, Caliban, to escape a storm, that “misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows.” Discussing group psychology, the social psychologist Stephen Reicher cites an example of contingent

identification: imagine all the individuals in a train, boarding as individuals with “no psychological commonality.” If the train breaks down (yet again) however, all these ‘Is’ become ‘One’ against the train company, as they become “aggrieved commuters,” and experience “the transition from the physical to a psychological group, where people have, if you like, that sense of ‘we’.”¹³ Riots, rituals, sports events and music festivals all have such fluid, yet highly regulated group dynamics, through “shared purpose.”

Declarations of equality and meritocracy, more often than not, fall short of lived realities. Tokenism will not cut it anymore: the much-managed anxiety of engineering optics-conscious, harmonious-seeming resolution, is no real resolution at all. Based on the core tenet of democracy, the majority wins: if the majority is constituted by race, as is the case in many nations, when can someone from the minority represent their country, within which everyone is supposedly an equal citizen? What does this imply for proportionally representative governments? Can the minority *only* ever represent themselves and their ‘minority issues’? When can minorities be represented with critical mass, or, the powers forbid, *represent* the critical mass? What is national identity, if it doesn’t override race, racial distribution, and ‘community’? *When* can we belong to each other, to our shared humanity? Quite an impasse. David Reich, Harvard University geneticist, states that with the advances made in molecular biology, we now know that Homo sapiens and Neanderthals had a common ancestor, about 500,000 years ago, and that “interbreeding may have occurred on more than one occasion.” With this shared history, “it should give us an alternative to the evils of racism and nationalism and make us realise that we are all entitled equally to our human heritage.”¹⁴

Animal, vegetable, mineral: since *all* life shares common ancestry, we should perhaps all shift from mere humanism to neo-enlightenment ‘Earthism’. And even as we gain new insights on how ethics and aesthetics concatenate, conscience might move us beyond ‘optics-diplomacy’: within, and between My You, and Your Me, we might just find each Other belonging.

NOTE: The essay *You, Other; I, Another* is written in two parts: A. *A Meditation on Otherness & Belonging*, B. *The Works of Art: Living Realities & Shaping Perceptions*. Part B, which discusses the nine artworks in this exhibition, continues on page 48.

Endnotes (to Part A of essay)

¹ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Touchstone, 1996), p67.

² Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), p184.

³ <https://academic.oup.com/ilarjournal/article/39/1/27/710062>.

Robert Ader, 'Psychoneuroimmunology', *ILAR Journal*, Volume 39, Issue 1, 1 January 1998, Pages 27–29, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ilar.39.1.27>. Psychoneuroimmunology, or PNI, is a relatively recent "convergence of disciplines" pioneered by Dr Robert Ader, who states: "Until recently, the immune system was considered an independent agency of defense that protected the organism against foreign material (i.e., proteins that were not part of one's "self"). Indeed, the immune system is capable of considerable self-regulation. However, converging data from the behavioral and brain sciences now indicate that the brain plays a critical role in the regulation or modulation of immunity. This new research indicates that the nervous and immune systems, the two most complex systems that have evolved for the maintenance of homeostasis, represent an integrated mechanism for the adaptation of the individual and the species."

⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993/first published 1980), p 291.

⁵ <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/ranking-humankind>

In 1795, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, in his book, *On the Natural Variety of Mankind*, divided humanity into five varieties linked to geography: Negro (African), Mongolian (Asian), Malay (Southeast Asia), American Indian (American), and Caucasian (European). He introduced the word Caucasian for what he called the first and most beautiful race; other races represented "a degeneration from the original type." Like Blumenbach, Dutch professor of anatomy Petrus Camper was also "preoccupied with the idea of beauty and order in the world." He ranked human faces on degree of resemblance to the Enlightenment ideal – ancient Greek sculptures – believing that "an organism's "outer state"—its appearance—reflected its "inner state," its moral or intellectual worth."

⁶ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, (first edition 2006), p16. First published by Harper & Brothers, 1932.

⁷ <https://www.tribecafilm.com/immersive> The 12-minute VR film *1,000 Cut Journey* – project creators: Courtney Cogburn, Elise Ogle, Jeremy Bailenson, Tobin Asher, Teff Nichols; project directors: Courtney Cogburn, Elise Ogle; key collaborators: Virtual Human Interaction Lab, Cogburn; research group producers: Jeremy Bailenson, Courtney Cogburn; writers: Courtney Cogburn, Cogburn Research Group; funded by: The Brown Institute for Media Innovation. (USA, 2018.) Other VR films at the Virtual Arcade included *The Day the World Changed*, "which brings to viewers the harrowing impressions of the victims and survivors of atomic bombings and nuclear arms testing through first-hand testimonies, data visualizations, and innovative use of 3-D scanning and photogrammetry", and *Hero* which transports viewers to the present-day Syrian conflict.

⁸ <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/lesson-of-a-lifetime-72754306/> "Jane Elliott, internationally known teacher, lecturer, diversity trainer, and recipient of the National Mental Health Association Award for Excellence in Education, exposes prejudice and bigotry for what it is, an irrational class system based upon purely arbitrary factors."

⁹ Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mocking Bird* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1982 edition), p39.

¹⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/apr/27/vetting-for-stereotypes-meet-publishings-sensitivity-readers> Alison Flood, *Vetting for stereotypes: meet publishing's 'sensitivity readers'*, Fri 27 Apr 2018.

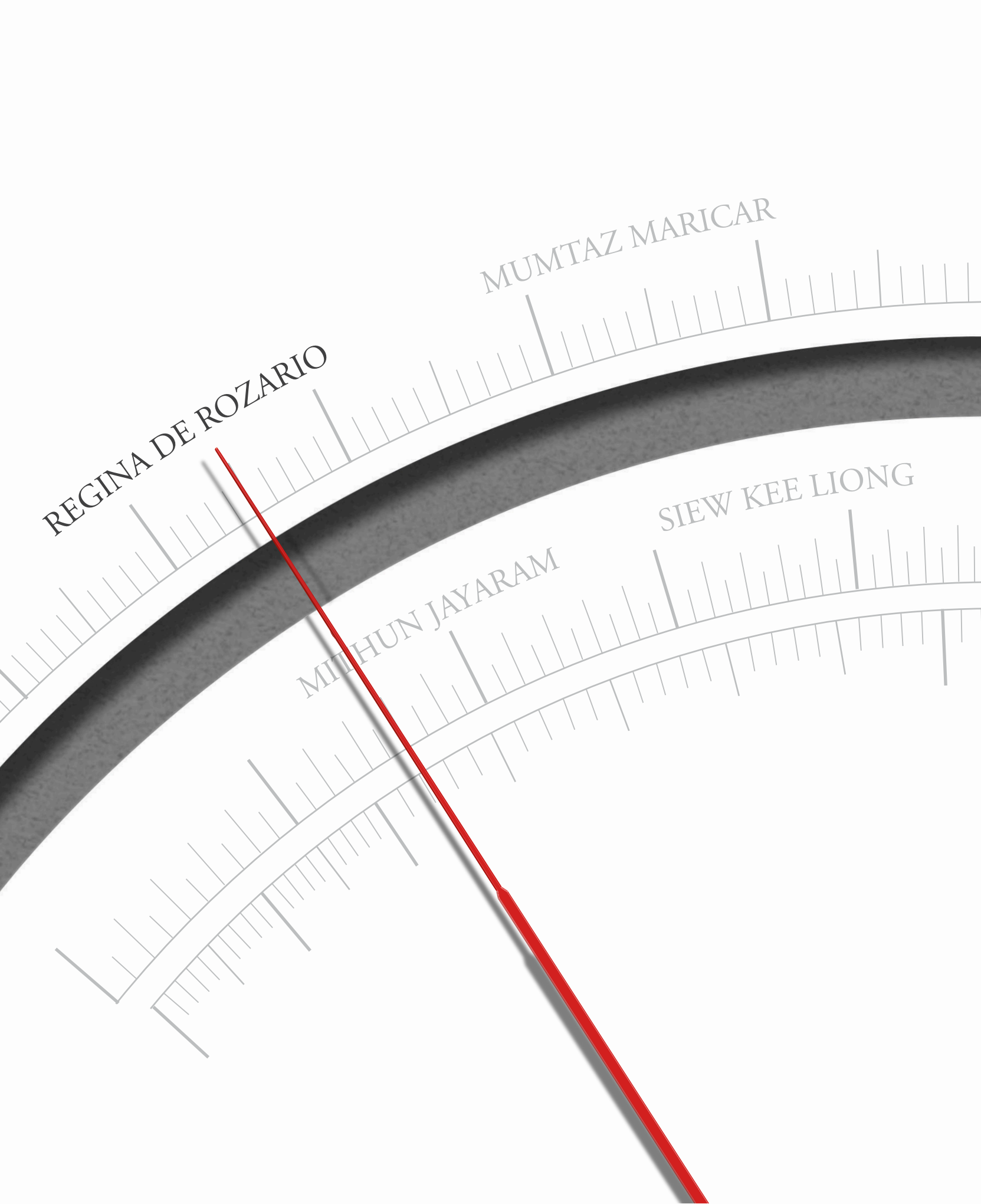
¹¹ Foucault, p186.

¹² Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (New York: Ace Books, 2010), p224. First published 1969.

¹³ <https://www.socialsciencespace.com/2016/02/stephen-reicher-on-crowd-psychology/>

¹⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2018/apr/07/ever-evolving-story-humanity-david-reich-interview-neanderthals-denisovans-genome>
See also: <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2018/04/reich-genetics-racism/558818/>

DR SUSIE LINGHAM (b. Singapore) is an interdisciplinary and independent thinker, writer, educator, curator, and maker in the arts. Appointed Creative Director of *An Atlas of Mirrors*, Singapore Biennale 2016 (2016/17), Lingham was Director of the Singapore Art Museum from 2013 to 2016, shaping its new vision/mission, curatorial direction and acquisition strategy, and oversaw the development, organisation and curating of 13 exhibitions, including *After Utopia: Revisiting the Ideal in Asian Contemporary Art*, Singapore Art Museum (2015) and *5 Stars: Art Reflects on Peace, Justice, Equality, Democracy and Progress*, Singapore Art Museum (2015/16). Prior to these appointments, Lingham was Assistant Professor at the National Institute of Education/NTU, Singapore (2009-2013). Conferred the Distinguished Alumni Medal 2014 by Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, Lingham has a DPhil in Literature, Religion and Philosophy (University of Sussex, U.K.); an MA (Hons) in Writing (University of Western Sydney, Australia); and a Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching Higher Education (NIE/NTU, Singapore), and has taught at universities and art colleges in Australia, Singapore and the U.K.



REGINA DE ROZARIO

MUMTAZ MARICAR

SIEW KEE LIONG

MITHUN JAYARAM

SIEW KEE LIONG

LEROY SOFYAN

VICTOR EMMANUEL

YEO CHEE KIONG

VINCENT TWARDZIK CHING

SUSIE WONG

The act of asking questions is innate in all of us. As social creatures, we encounter and dispense questions on a daily basis to help us make sense of our place, and the place of others, in the world. Depending on our need for answers, these questions may range from the superficial, presumptuous, and transactional, to the interrogative and passively aggressive, to those that are empathetic, exploratory and transformative.

With this new work, I focus on re-collecting the questions I have been fielded and have had to respond to. Over time, they have become prompts for personal reflection, and for a closer investigation of the ground I have had to navigate as a person who has never quite 'fitted' in, or found my 'place', either by my own volition or circumstance.

Presented alongside childhood photographs, these questions serve as prompts for consideration and reflection, of how the different dimensions of my identity layer themselves into an interior landscape formed by curious intersections and faultlines, and the tensions between perceived privileges and barriers.

On one level, the work is explicitly autobiographical – it is an articulation of my own experience (as a minority within a minority within a minority...) negotiating through a field of 'norms' and expectations. On another, it is an exploration of how we ask questions, seek answers of others, and shape the ground for conversation, connection and growth beyond transactional relationships.

Regina De Rozario

Faultlines (or, The questions you ask today will be the questions I ask tomorrow), 2018

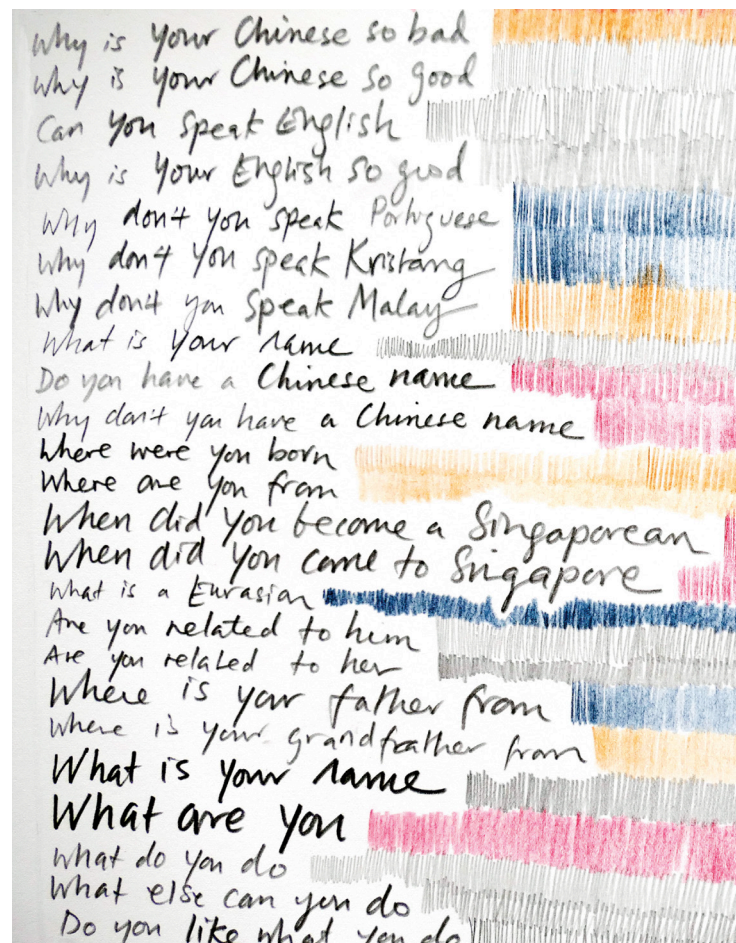
Handwriting on pillar with photographs; handwritten work on paper

Dimensions variable

What is your name
 Where are you from
 Are you Singaporean
 Are you Filipino
 Are you Malay
 Why are you so dark
 Why are your eyes so big
 Is your father Chinese
 Is your mother Chinese
 Why do you look Chinese
 Why don't you look Chinese
 Are you Singaporean
 What are you
 What is your name
 What is your Chinese name
 Can you speak Chinese
 Why is your Chinese so bad
 Why is your Chinese so good
 Can you speak English
 Why is your English so good
 Why don't you speak
 Portuguese
 Why don't you speak Kristang
 Why don't you speak Malay
 What is your name
 Do you have a Chinese name
 Why don't you have a
 Chinese name
 Where were you born
 Where are you from
 When did you become a
 Singaporean
 When did you come
 to Singapore
 What is a Eurasian
 Are you related to him
 Are you related to her
 Where is your father from
 Where is your grandfather from
 What is your name
 What are you

What do you do
 What else can you do
 Do you like what you do
 Are you happy where you are
 Is there somewhere else you can go
 How much will they pay
 How much do you make

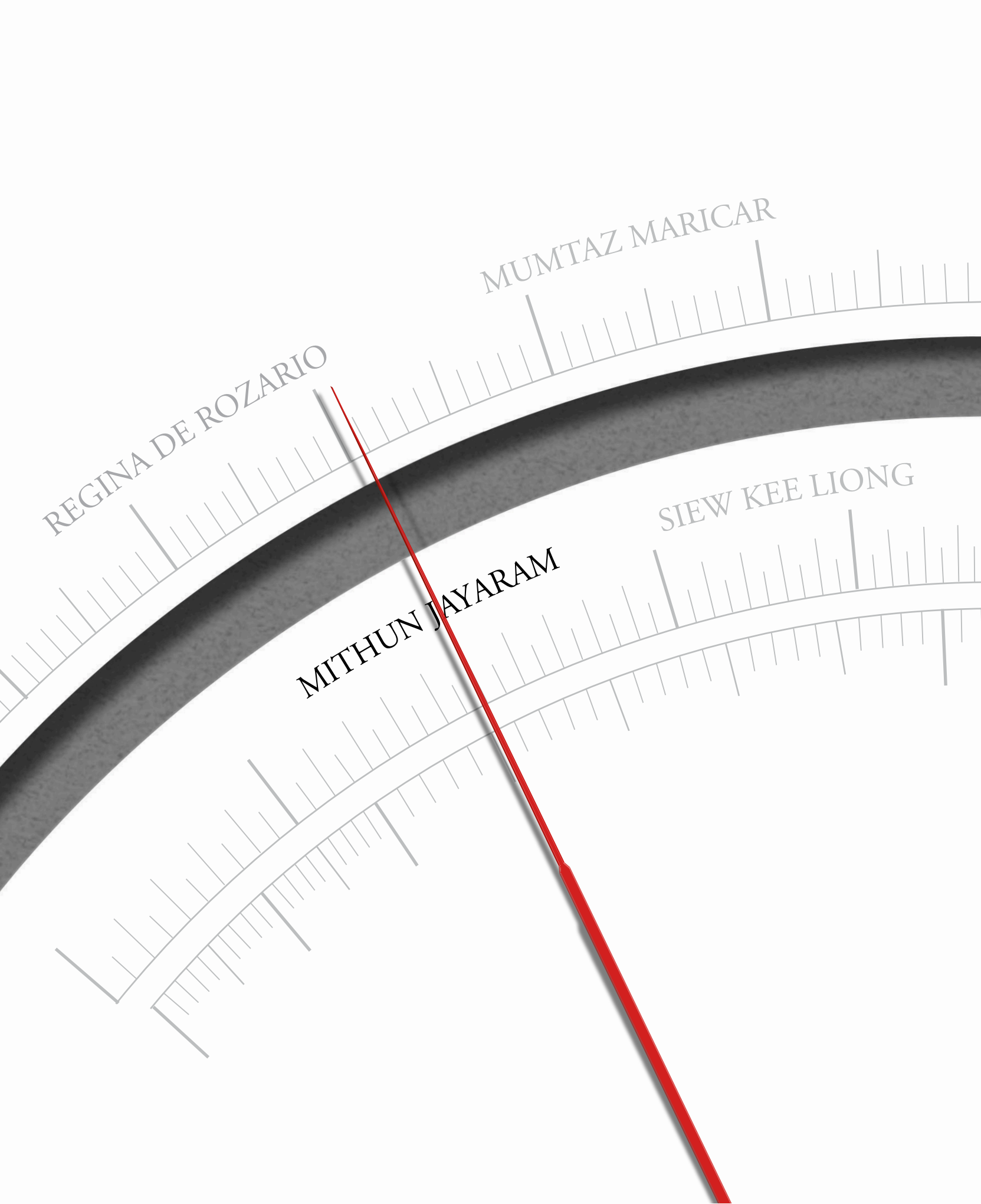
Where do you live
 Do you live alone
 Where is your mother
 Where is your father
 What is your name
 How do I pronounce your name
 How do I spell your name



How much do you save
 How do you get by
 Do you have enough
 Will you have enough
 How will you get by
 What will you leave behind
 What is your name

Why is your name so hard
 to pronounce
 Why do you have that name
 Who gave you your name
 Who gave you that name
 Is that your husband's name
 Did you marry an ang moh

Why aren't you married
 What is your name
 Are you attached
 Do you want children
 Why don't you want children
 Who will take care of you
 Don't you like children
 Do you hate men
 Don't you want to get married
 Will you live on your own
 Who will take care of you
 What is your name
 Where do you live
 Where is your home
 Why do you live there
 Did you rent or buy
 How big is your flat
 Do you own this flat
 How much did you pay
 for your flat
 How do you afford to live here
 Do you like living in Singapore
 Have you lived anywhere else
 Why are you still here
 Won't you be happier
 someplace else
 What is your name
 Is that your Christian name
 Aren't you a Catholic
 Why didn't you go to a
 convent school
 Why don't you go to church
 Why don't you pray about it
 Do you believe in God
 Do you believe in karma
 Do you believe in fate
 Do you believe in heaven
 Aren't you afraid of
 going to hell
 What are you going to do
 What are you



REGINA DE ROZARIO

MUMTAZ MARICAR

MITHUN JAYARAM

SIEW KEE LIONG

LEROY SOFYAN

VICTOR EMMANUEL

YEO CHEE KIONG

VINCENT TWARDZIK CHING

SUSIE WONG

Approaching a Mending Wall is a process-based sculpture, representing a mental snapshot of how I perceive the communication barrier between my father and myself.

Observing his devotional connection with his God, and his twice-daily meticulous ritual with his oil-lamp, was my entry point through which I began to examine the texture of our relationship. The acts of knotting, severing, stacking, weaving, unravelling, ravelling, and the spaces between these actions, revealed aspects of a repression that felt like a binding silence-as-violence, a kind of non-contact, we seemed to have grown accustomed to. The 'weaving' and knotting had a damaging effect on my wrist and fingers. The more I kept working on it, the more I saw myself creating meanings of how I associate the process (mundanity/pain/numbness, etc.) with a relationship I have with my father. The wick material became a very physical link, and once, my father asked me if he could join in helping me with the knotting; I almost said no, as I found myself (unusually) possessive of the process.

Having knotted away obsessively for several months, I gathered enough knots, and stacking them led to the formation of a wall resembling the diagrammatic interior of human skin. Not unlike geopolitical borders, our skin is an edge that is almost always fraught with conflict. It is a personal border that perpetually makes us an interior with a relationship to something exterior. A second skin was formed, followed by a projection of the interaction of skins that are connected using lengths of temple oil-lamp wicks.

While making the work, it became apparent that while observing my perception of my father as an "other", the silence-as-violence – the distancing – is undoubtedly a habit of my own making, and the "other" doesn't just exist as my father, for clearly, I too withdrew, as another "other".

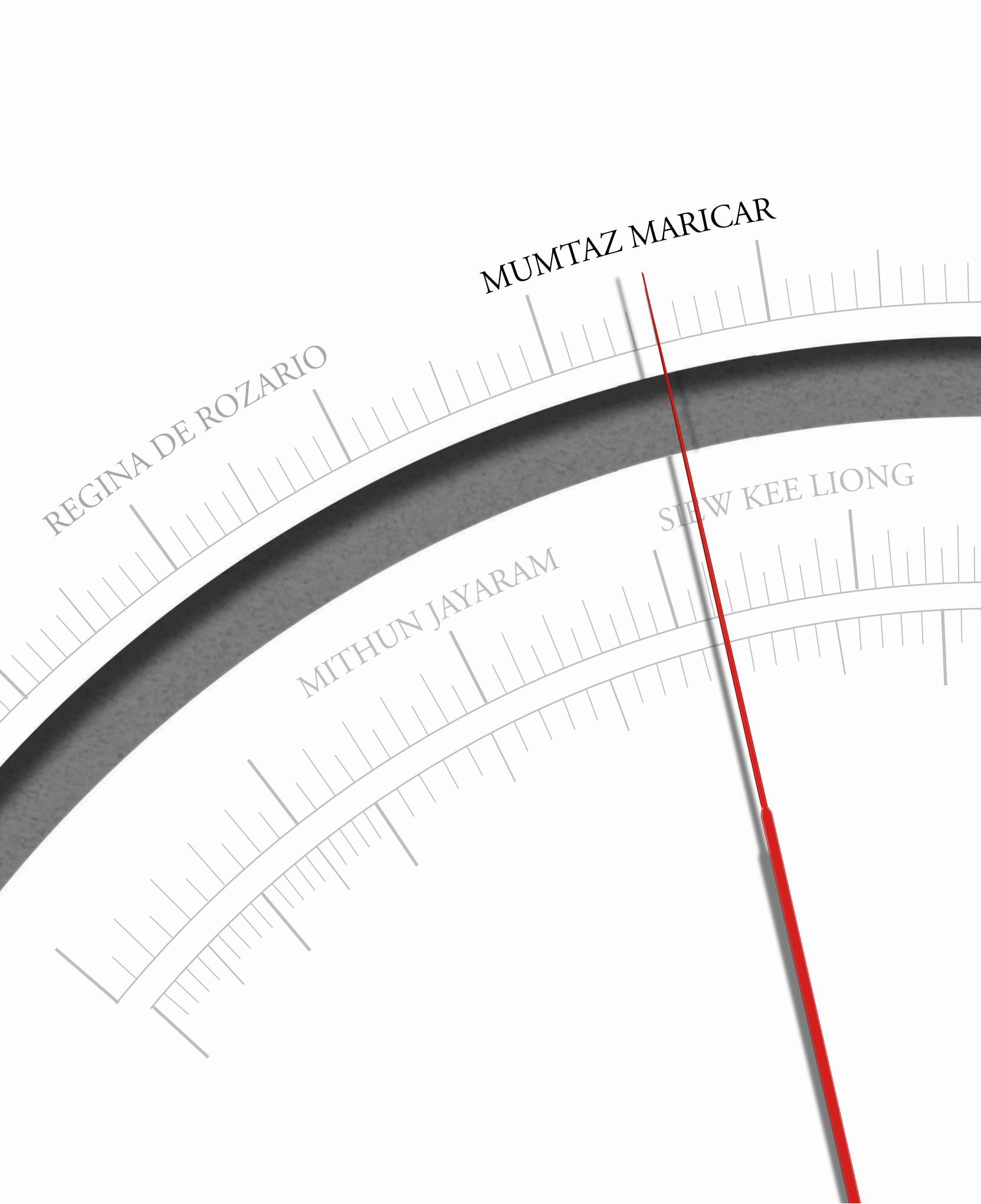
Mithun Jayaram

Approaching a Mending Wall, 2018

Woven and knotted cotton twine (cotton twine balls used in temples as oil-lamp wicks); photo prints

Dimensions variable





MUMTAZ MARICAR

REGINA DE ROZARIO

SEW KEE LIONG

MITHUN JAYARAM

LEROY SOFYAN

VICTOR EMMANUEL

YEO CHEE KIONG

VINCENT TWARDZIK CHING

SUSIE WONG

On flesh...Like Brundle from Cronenberg's seminal remake of *The Fly*, what makes us so crazy about the flesh? Or why does the flesh make us crazy? It is a ground, a platform, a space, receptacle, a spectacle. The sheath through which we protect and penetrate. Like a victim of Stockholm Syndrome, to the wearer it is an intriguing captor that shackles and liberates. How far does one consider the self through the veil of the flesh? Can one ever not begin to consider this through its slick, ruddy lens? How does one end up with the self that appears to be at the head, steering 'identity'? Who decided that it would be this She or He or It that leads? This terrifying and continuous act of dissidence is not easily accepted by most. Unable to face the cacophony of this monstrous parliament from within, it is no wonder then that we as a collective appear to so eagerly join in the shared activity of 'othering' another. The only way, it seems, that the populace is able to position the stronghold of their own sense of self. I know who I am when I know who or what you are that I am not...

What is interesting is that if you allow for this thought to stew long enough, you might begin to see that this body, this case, may not contain a single version of You. That in its wanton, unruly, chaotically calculated calibrations, it has within and without its folds, the fortuity for an infinite number of Is and Yous. And, this reveal is petrifying. We are then faced with an inexplicable and deep-seated fear, associated with the repressed and dull realization that the body is indeed an independent agent, separate from an individual's mind or sense of self and being. That through the passage of time and empirical experience, the lie of oneness that was presented to us during childhood, slowly dissolves. It is with horror that we then begin to witness the body unfurl as a transgressive being, autonomous and intelligent, able to infiltrate, influence and control the mind, able to grow new flesh. The Doppelganger that has always been with us since conception and birth. A creature that is by far more competent at being 'me' than myself. Does one then do as Brundle does and dive deep into the plasma pool, emerging with the ability to penetrate beyond society's sick, grey, fear of the flesh? As with any form of seduction, proceed with caution.

I present these thoughts via a life-sized self-portrait in oil, in a standing position, with hands placed above and just below the womb, framing the site of the laparoscopic wound through which a uterine fibroid was removed. Through the wound that is no wider than 1 – 2 cm, the tip of a finger emerges from within, with subtle impressions of other fingers belonging to the same hand showing from underneath the skin. With a glazed expression (trance-like, ecstasy?) gazing into the eyes of the viewer at my/her own reflection, with acceptance and fascination at the colonisation of the body by an alien agency. Painted in a realist manner, what I am looking at in terms of atmosphere and feel would be something in the line of the sublime, and gothic horror.

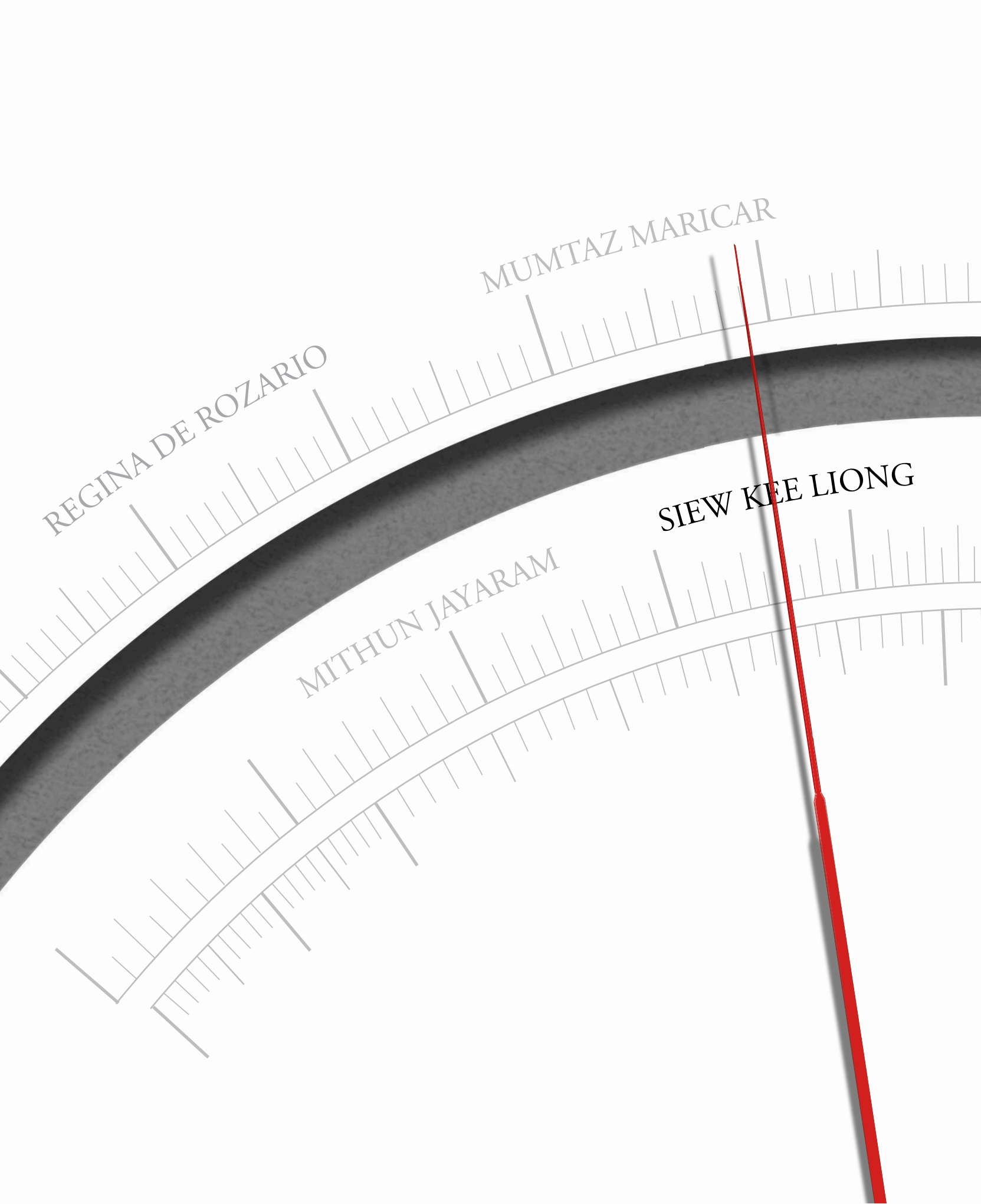
Mumtaz Maricar

Laparoscopic wound, no wider than 1–2 cm, 2018

Oil on linen

195 x 122 cm





REGINA DE ROZARIO

MUMTAZ MARICAR

MITHUN JAYARAM

SIEW KEE LIONG

LEROY SOFYAN

VICTOR EMMANUEL

YEO CHEE KIONG

VINCENT TWARDZIK CHING

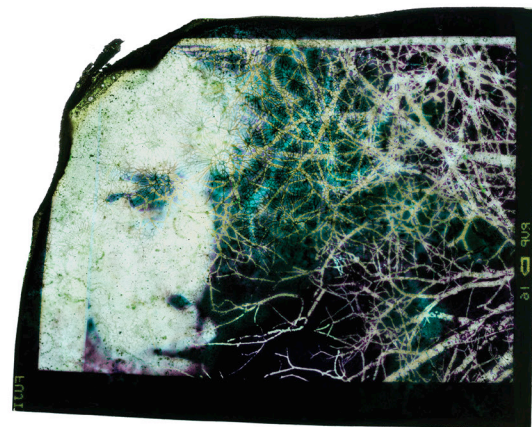
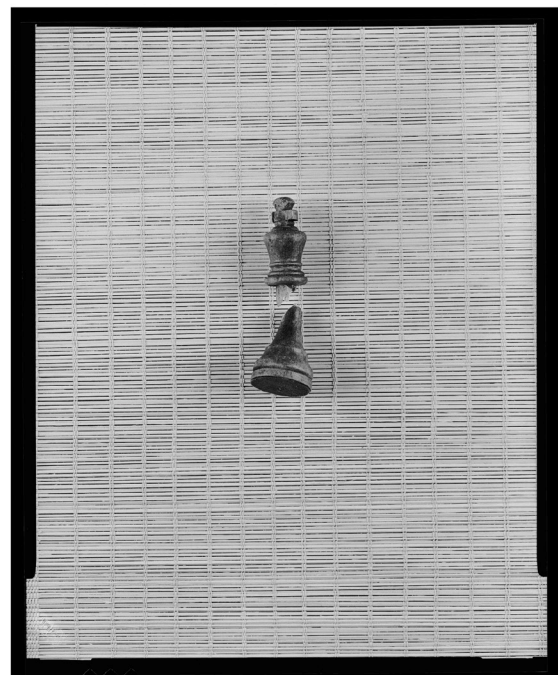
SUSIE WONG

There is always something magical about how film – the acetate material of traditional photography and movies – works, especially in people or portrait photography.

When the shutter is released, the image of a human being is photographed. A slice of the history of their life is captured on a thin emulsion on cellulose acetate film, invisible to human eyes as a latent image until processed into a negative film or positive slide by a chemical reaction. The processed acetate film (negative film or positive slide) can then either be printed as a photograph through the traditional way or be scanned into digital image file for future use.

An image will almost always be captured in a rectangular frame edged with film type and frame number. Holding the processed acetate film up and seeing its content against the light always fascinates me. It is mesmerising to think that the aura of that decisive moment has been retained and will outlast the subject of my photographic interest. Holding it physically between my fingers brings me in touch with the precise instant that the shutter was released. I can feel its physical existence. I am holding a slice of the narrative of a human life, suspended perpetually on acetate film, distinct and separate from the human being I photographed.

I also take photographs of used or found objects. Objects that speak to me. Objects that have served their purpose of existence and are now ready to be retired. Objects that connect with me through their texture, shape, colour, or smell. I can feel or imagine their history. And now their history is also captured and preserved on acetate film.

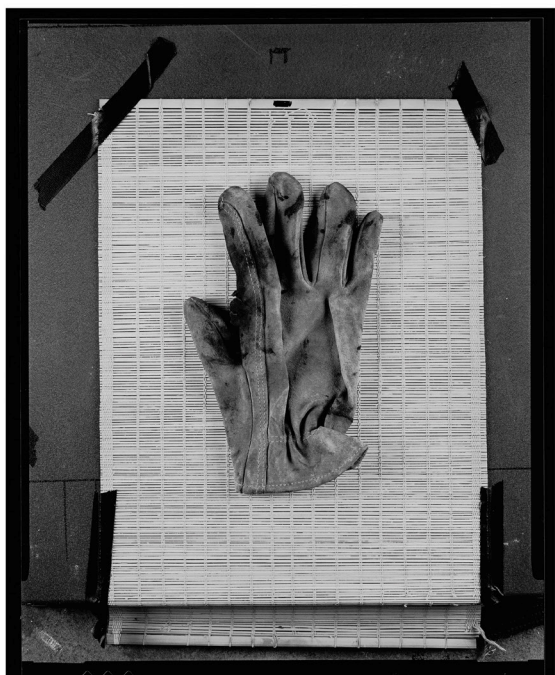


Siew Kee Liong

Sessa's Dream, 2018

Digital Inkjet print on SIHL MASTERCLASS Smooth Matt Cotton Paper 320

188 x 106 cm



The image on film we are seeing is actually the difference of density in the formation of film grains across the film emulsion area. Manipulation, etching or distorting of film emulsion is a commonly used technique found in the experimental films of the 1960s. The viewer is asked to focus on the essence of the film medium itself – film grain, emulsion, and the thin acetate that holds them together.

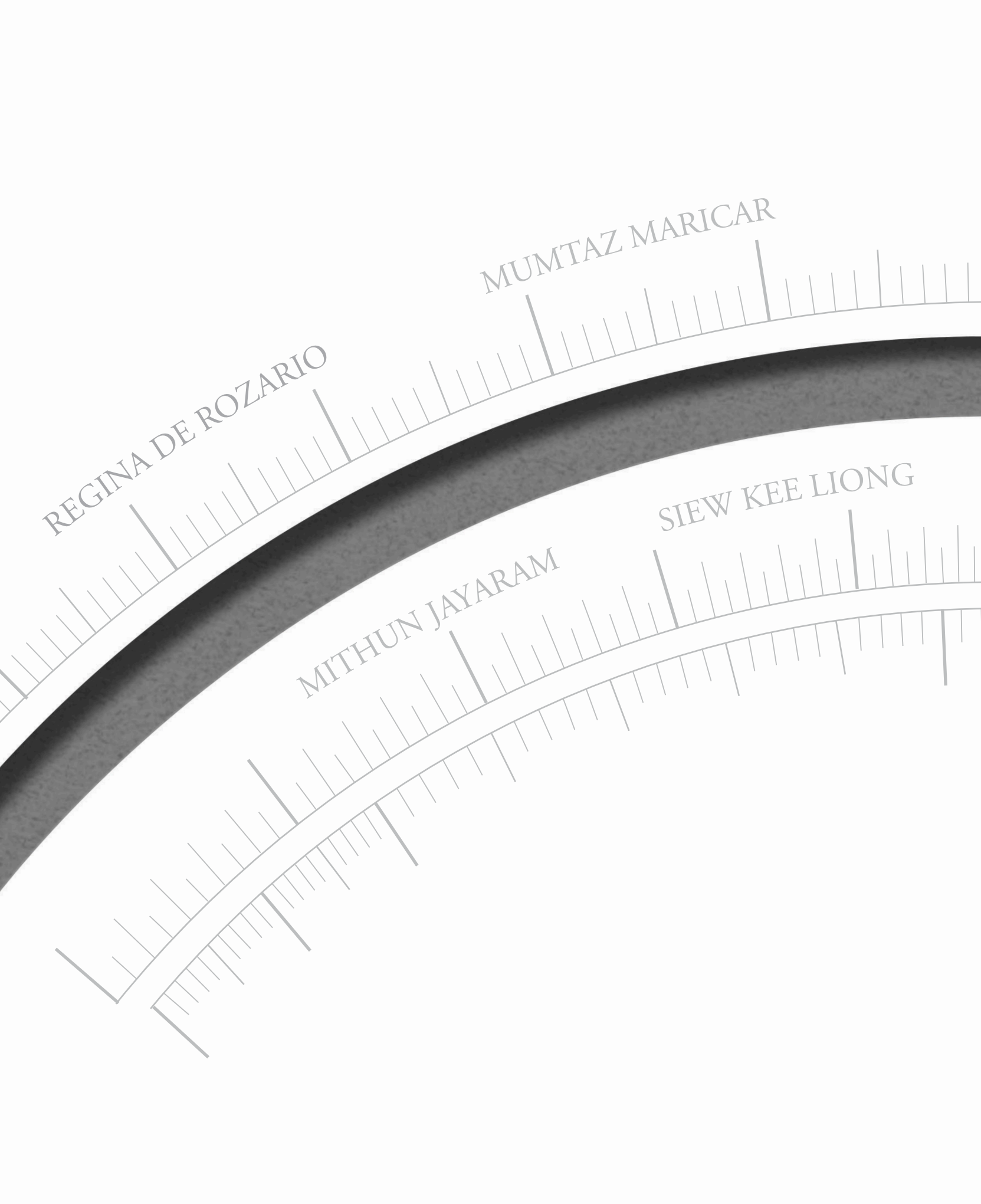
By manipulating this micrometre-thin material – scratching the film emulsion; burning the acetate base; or just simply letting it disintegrate in moist conditions with mould and fungus – I am trying to remind the viewer that the original narrative is on a piece of cellulose acetate film; at the same time, showing them the beautiful organic visual quality inherent in the medium.

I would like to place the viewer in a more active and more thoughtful relationship to my work. The pairing of the human subject and the object is an attempt to create a trigger that stirs the viewer to form their own narrative. Everybody has a gallery of images inside their mind. It may be photographs, poems, stories, or some faint concepts that they may visually remember. I hope the viewer can find affinity in my work that resonates with some images in their own gallery. Perhaps it might help crystallise those fluid, nondescript images they have in their mind, and by connecting those dots in-between, build some continuity that flows ahead with a unique narrative that they can call their own.



Siew Kee Liong
Vassal's Glove, 2018

Digital Inkjet print on SIHL MASTERCLASS Smooth Matt Cotton Paper 320
188 x 106 cm



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SUSIE WONG

Hegel's self and other dialectic in his 1806 work *The Phenomenology of Spirit* speaks of the "struggle for recognition" implied in self-consciousness – between, on one hand, the moment when the self and the other come together, which makes self-consciousness possible, and, on the other hand, the moment of difference arising when one is conscious of the "otherness" of other selves vis-à-vis oneself, and vice versa.*

My work *Measure/Measured* analyses how the self and other are intertwined. It tries to help us think about how the other is from the self, like the self, but not the self. Despite the technical difficulty, it was important for me to carve these aspects as one sculpture, from one single block of wood. I wanted to convey how inextricable the self is from the other, how similar. And yet, how different. I wanted to make physical the struggle within ourselves and the long process of understanding that difference. The weighing scales are carved as inverse opposites, to invite thought about how the struggle between mutual identification and estrangement plays out in the field of social relations.

I needed to use a stain on the wood, not a varnish. Risky though it was, and unpredictable. I wanted it to be like our thoughts. Pervasive and permanent, more than skin deep. The final subtle blackness that emerged was deeply satisfying. It expresses the darkness in otherness; the side of us which we don't want to think of, not even wanting to acknowledge the 'master and slave' hierarchy in our own minds.

This work is a vignette of my own journey; in realising that by becoming so accustomed to the self, there is a struggle to acknowledge ideas of difference and the other. This struggle is between two opposing tendencies arising in my own self-consciousness, which as Hegel explains, is really a struggle for recognition between two individuals bound to one another as unequals (subject and object) in a relationship of dependence.

This work is also inspired by the mundane elements of everyday life. A weighing machine is a transactional tool, used for a few

brief seconds. Yet, it is a determining factor of the query: "enough, or not enough?" We are dependent on the weighing machine's mechanisms being right, and in good working order. What happens when the machine is bereft of gravity? Or its indicators? By subverting the rules which make the scales function, I want to recreate the same "not quite right" discomfort that is the reality of the struggle between self and other.

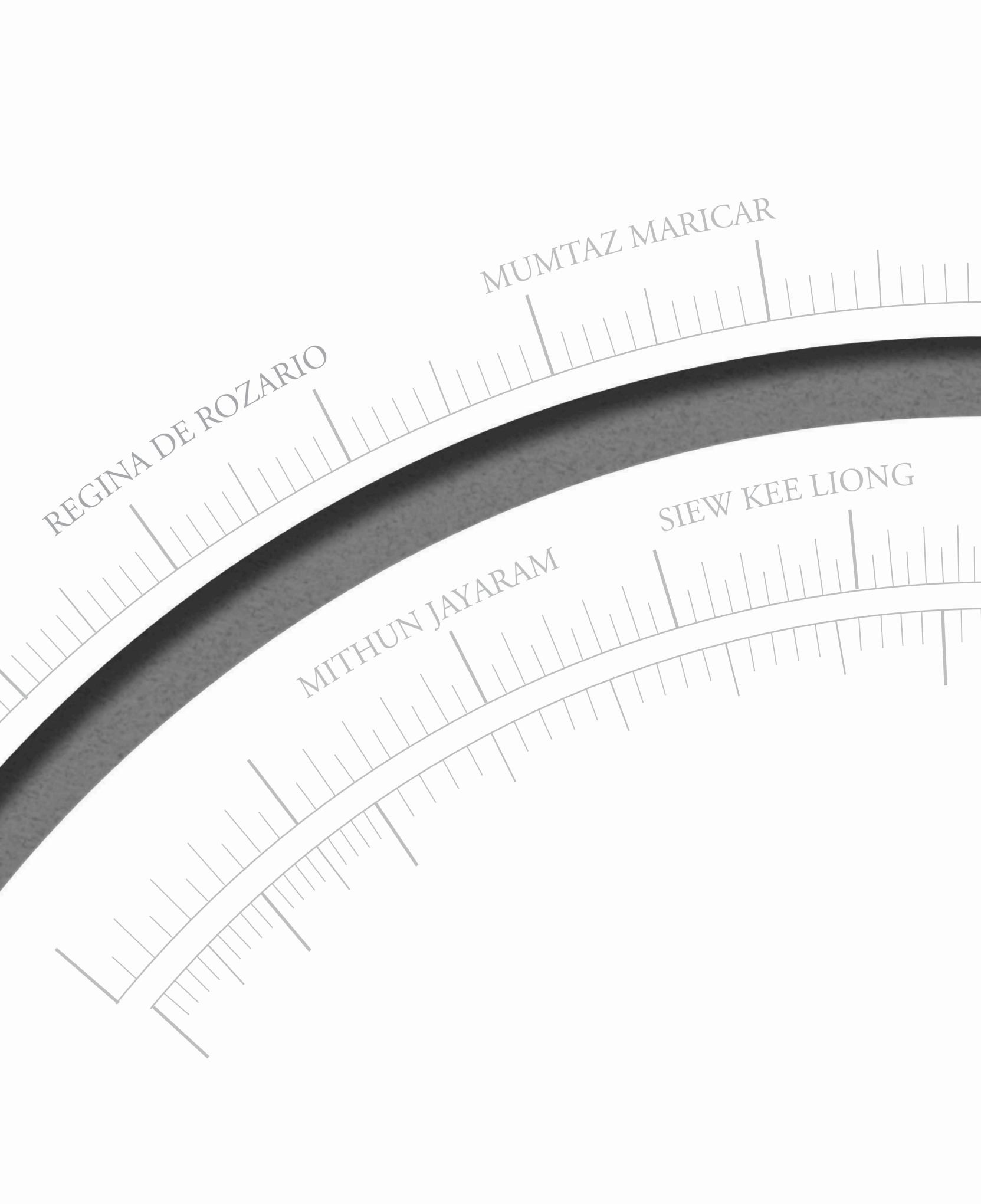
The inverted weighing scale signifies the bondsman (subject) who is able to derive satisfaction in labour, a process of working on and transforming objects through which he rediscovers himself and can claim a "mind of his own." This effort offers some hope for those who can scale the vertical escarpment of master privilege. As I worked through this, I felt the work needed almost the ritual geometry of a totem, so immovable, I felt, were skewed societal constructs.

The axe at the base of the machines is my Another (who is not you or I). The old axe, after a lifetime of work and use, is my slow dawning recognition of a plural otherness; its humble wedge seeking to disrupt the balanced work's symmetry, inviting thought about our attitudes.

Growing up in a household with a Minang father who practised the Baha'i faith, and a Eurasian mother who practised the Catholic faith, seemed very normal. However, once outside the safety of home, there was always a sense of not quite fitting, but not really understanding why. I looked like I belonged to a race, but did not identify with it. It was there, inevitably, indelibly. I am reminded, an uncomfortable niggles, each time a hawker looks curiously at me eating and says, "You Myanmar? You Feilipine?" The larger community has a constant itch from their need for neatness to fit me in somewhere, like a knob puzzle. Because the other is us, not like us and just like us. Racially, it is an inescapable, unchangeable and very visible part of me.

* <http://www.sparknotes.com/philosophy/hegel/section2/>





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In Bronze Age Finland, nomadic peoples used to visit a particular wild place known as *Eraphya* (*era* meaning wilderness and *phya* meaning holy). In discovering this past reality that my ancestors may have visited this wilderness area, regarded as a mystic and ceremonial site, I find a confirmation of my own feelings about such wild places as sacred vital spaces with a power to rejuvenate and inspire. This discovery in the search for deeper understanding into my own identity seemed to fit the direction in my work that has been bubbling to the surface for some time.

Like those nomadic ancestors I am fascinated and sustained by raw elemental nature and by the possibilities inherent in the making of something out of nothing. At a young age, my eyes were opened to the human imperfections that exist just below the veneer of material prosperity, and to the conscious realization that my identity as male is founded on profound dichotomies where violence and industriousness, insecurity and self-reliance are juxtaposed in fragile and volatile relationships to each other. The results of these dichotomies persisting are multi-generational and continue to wreck havoc in the world through emotional damage, misery and death. I grapple with these interior tensions through a particular type of making where the expectations of the intended results are my own, meaning they do not necessarily match widely accepted standards of the “well-made” or “impressive” and usually do not match consumerist expectations embodied in the glossy perfection we have become so accustomed to in products, and often in art. The leftover debris of my creative and personal life that has travelled with me over time: wood, metal, old artworks, have become my main source of raw material. The content of my recent sculpture, paintings

and drawings presents a scarified journey through an interior landscape, full of physical juxtapositions that reflect complex emotional and mental states: crude construction vs. balance, worn surfaces vs. organic growth. These sometimes jarring and unexpected constructions mirror the shock of a rebalancing of the world after experiencing profound trauma. I am fascinated and comforted by the rejuvenating power of the raw elements of nature I prefer to use which are present through the materials in their origins: earth (landscape), plants (often grasses and trees), and through my direct representations of man in nature where human presence is often an absence except for traces of ruin or where a lone figure is engulfed in a vital, imposing and abundant nature. In the studio, these two parts of my identity, the debris of my life and the elemental nature of materials are constantly colliding and guiding my choices.

What has become apparent to me in focusing my work on these two areas is that the unconscious mind often inherently reflects itself in representations of the natural world within the landscape, and the stages of the life of things act as metaphors and mirrors for our unconscious, internal realities. These new works are deeply autobiographical and at the same time widely applicable to the ongoing struggles in contemporary society through issues of trauma, identity and healing. My goal is to create artworks that are somehow cathartic meditations for myself and that conjure a shrine-like space for viewers where identity is caught in a moment of flux; a physical representation of an interior crossroads-moment where human capacity to choose in spite of cultural conditioning overcomes difficult contradictions, and where old materials manifest the potential for new possibilities.

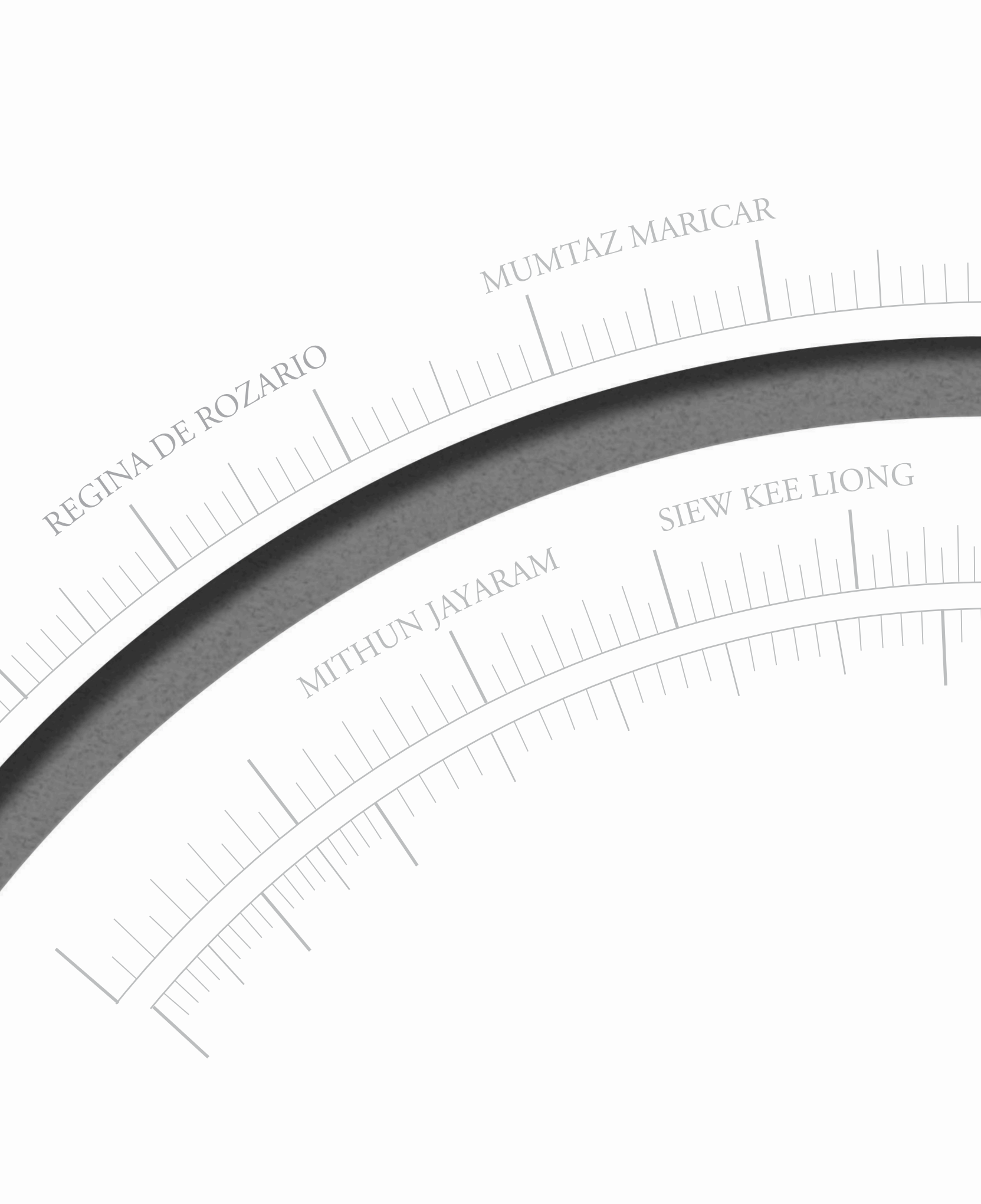
Vincent Twardzik Ching

Eraphya, 2018

Installation: mixed media on wood panels, acrylic, oil, conte chalk, copper and audio drivers on wood sculpture; oil on linen

Dimensions variable





REGINA DE ROZARIO

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SUSIE WONG

Memento Mori; Romanticising the beauty of life's finality.

'Osseous' is defined as being of, relating to, or composed of bone. To view the structures/infrastructure that supports the whole organism, in their myriad forms, is a journey that helps me understand the motions and limitations of life through form.

The *Osseous* series is an ongoing work of discovery, born out of my close affinity to Nature, and a desire to examine and encounter the fragility of life.

This humble display of bone and exoskeletons are a presentation of the finished processes of decomposition, subtraction of epidermis, muscles, organs, etc., leaving the final ivory white remnants of specimens that have expired of natural causes. The final specimens are carefully selected, and some also undergo a process of crystallisation before being encased for display. Appearing as precious artefacts and jewellery, and paired with carved resin skulls, the works are reminiscent of still lifes, and evoke the 'vanitas' mode, a reminder that glitter turns eventually to dust.

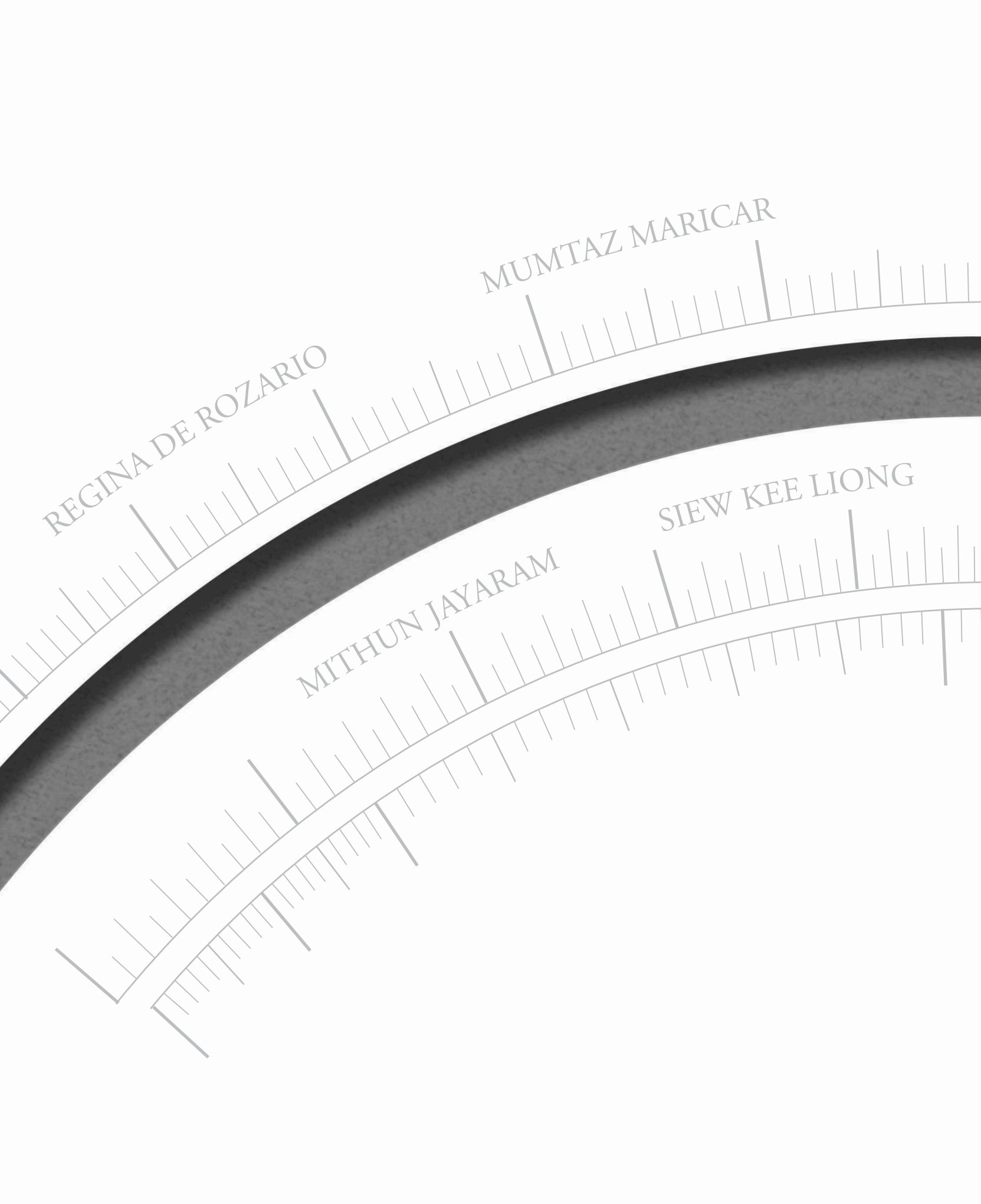
As an artist and lover of Nature, I give tribute and honour to the parts of Nature that are increasingly losing visibility, and disappearing from our consciousness.

Ethics, morality, coexistence and craftsmanship are primary considerations in my artmaking process. The decision to rely solely on "chancing" upon expired specimens, is deeply rooted in the years I grew up with the Scouting movement. A desire to acknowledge the individuals and institutions that have contributed to my growth, and creating display structures primarily from carefully selected discarded materials, are also related to my sensitivity to current climate, social and environmental changes.

Osseous is an ongoing project for me, where I rediscover Nature in its various forms – as living, and in death.

Victor Emmanuel
Osseous, the Series: 'Osseous Crystallised'; 'Osseous Ivory', 2018
Glass, resin, wood, found treated specimens
Dimensions variable





REGINA DE ROZARIO

MUMTAZ MARICAR

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SIEW KEE LIONG

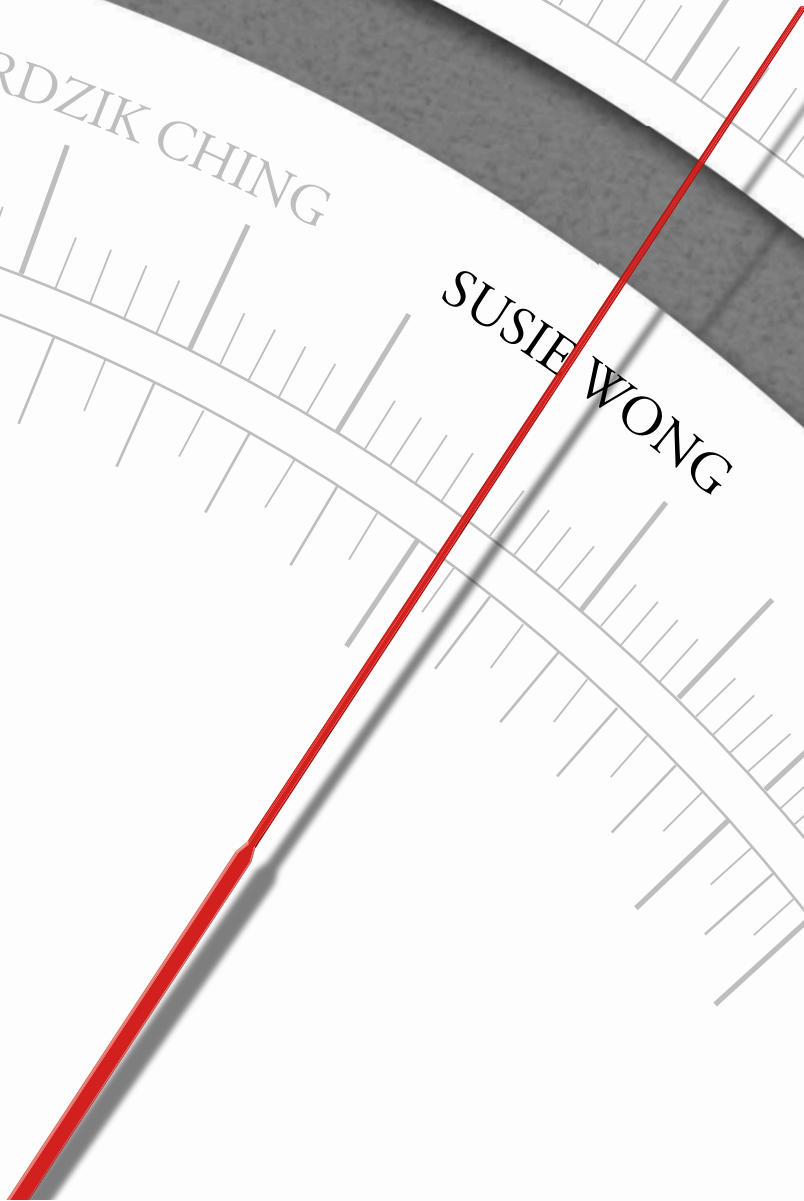
LEROY SOFYAN

VICTOR EMMANUEL

YEO CHEE KIONG

VINCENT TWARDZIK CHING

SUSIE WONG



The romance relationship is imbued with power codes: who takes care of whom, who surrenders, who conquers and how love is performed. The romance tropes are repeated, and exponentially circulated and consumed, whether it is pulp romance in books or TV dramas or (today) over the internet. We consume Romance, and it devours us.

These works are based on a 1960 film, *The World of Suzie Wong*, drawing the images from screen grabs of the film found on a website. They show the couple in a tight embrace, in a moment of love-confession said in anticipation of separation.

The texts (lines spoken by the character) in the drawings echo repeated longings in romances. The film is an American production, with American-English as the main language; it is set in Hong Kong in a seedy hotel/brothel. The American male journalist/artist falls in love with the Hong Kong bargirl/prostitute. Obvious tropes, well worn out today, are played out here. The strong, white male (William Holden, synonymous with the average American guy), with the “dirty street girl” (lines spoken in the film) are suggestive of the power codes and the Othering of the East. The character Suzie Wong has since become iconic in the imagination of Western audiences, with the proliferation of bars, restaurants, and even pole-dancing websites named after her.



Susie Wong
I can't tell, 2018
 Pencil, wash, paper
 50 x 60 cm

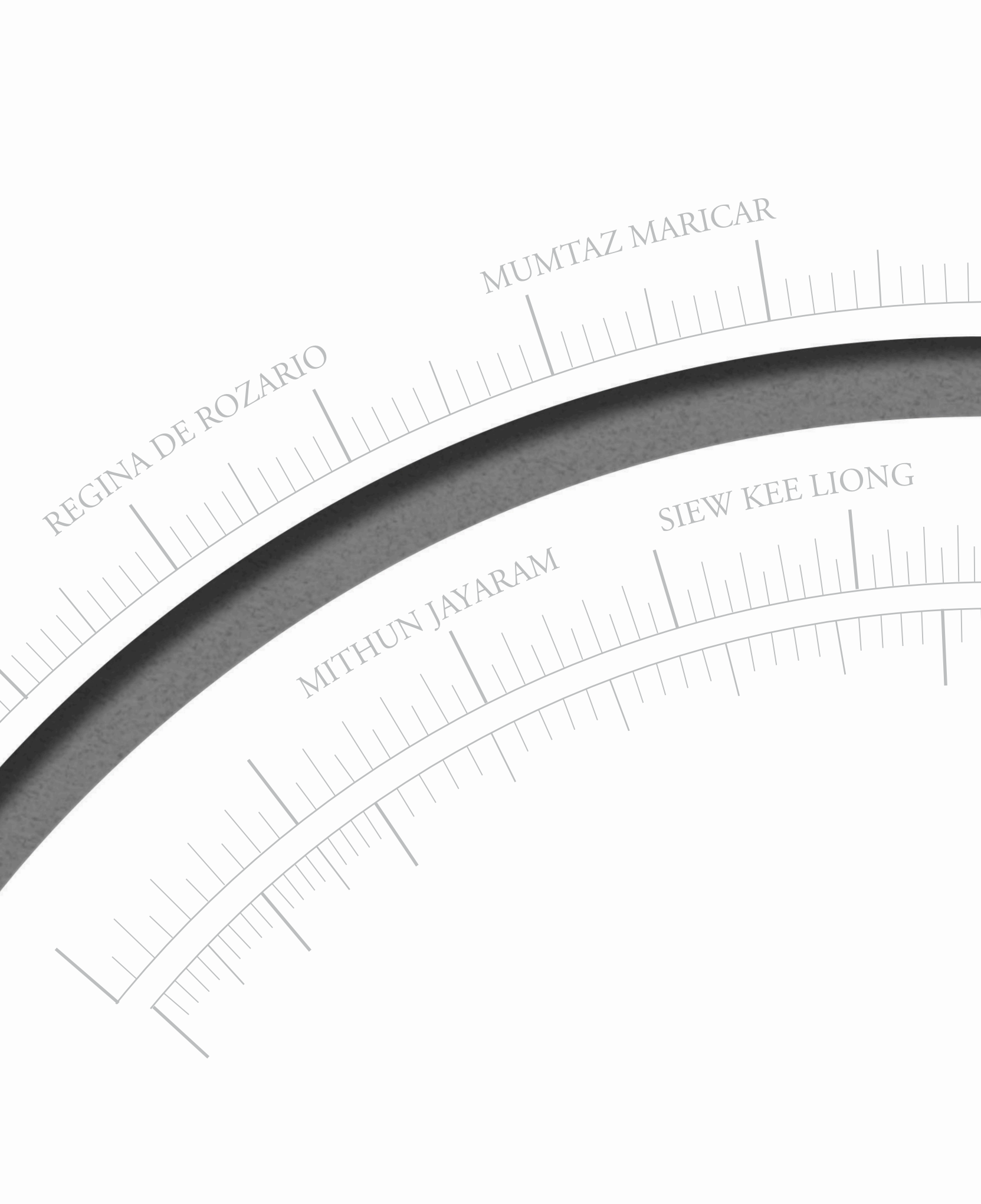


As drawings, the images taken as screen grabs from the computer, are changed from a pixellated palette to more nebulous entities. The practice of tracing or unthinking repetitions of strokes, lines and tones, is an attempt at keeping subjectivity at bay. It is the performance of a ritual that is consciously futile. For me, it recalls the need to resuscitate the screen-grab image – to bring to life – to become real, to both consume and to be subsumed.

In the subtitles, the choice to translate the spoken lines into standard Chinese seems logical. Yet this preserves a sense of irony, as I ask: would it expand the audience globally? And much more pertinently, as it places the setting in the 'Far East' – and as the smattering of Chinese spoken in the film is Cantonese, this subtitling therefore raises the spectre of a language that is politicised as standard within the PRC.

The texts in the drawings perform as subtitles of the films; it is a language in which I am neither conversant nor literate. I need others to execute the translations for me, and in doing so, discussions arise over nuanced meanings and intentions. Such translations are also suggestive of the freely shared subtitling culture within the internet audience/community, that occurs generally in an unregulated internet space. The uniqueness and peculiarities of translation, and the slips and gaps in the translation process, are also points of interest in my research.

Susie Wong
Don't leave, 2018
Pencil, wash, paper
50 x 60 cm



REGINA DE ROZARIO

MUMTAZ MARICAR

MITHUN JAYARAM

SIEW KEE LIONG

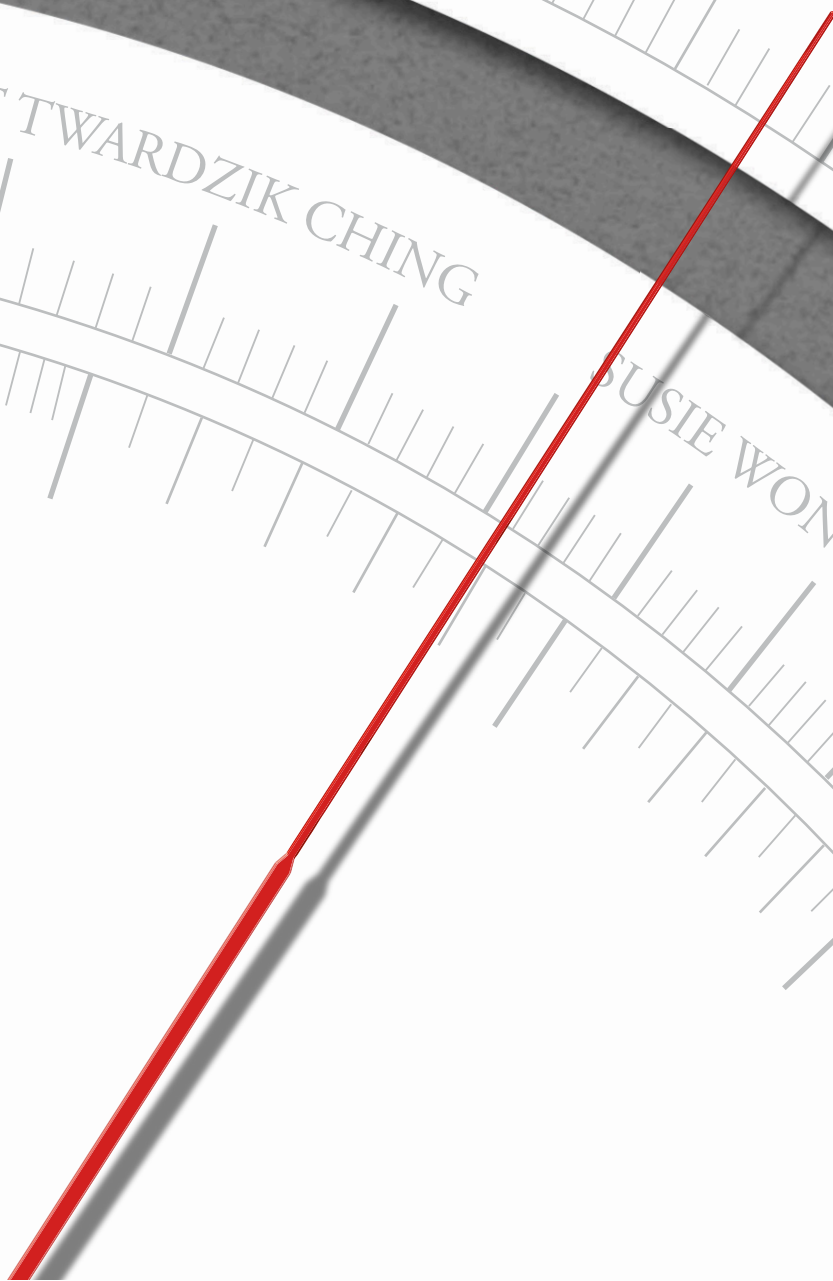
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VINCENT TWARDZIK CHING

SUSIE WONG



Based on the Zen story of “Shaking Tree, Blowing Wind and Tempted Mind”/ “树动，风动，心在动”，my wood sculpture series *Tempted Mind* in 2008, titled “*It is the Tempted Mind, it is the Blowing Wind, and the Shaking Tree*”/ “心动，风动，树也动”，was developed in an attempt to offer a reinterpretation of that famous quote of Master Dajian Huineng – the Sixth Chan (Zen) Patriarch. Huineng hailed from the far southern city of Guangzhou, and was said to be from a poor family – “quite possibly a member of the Hmong, or Miao, ethnic minority.”* Arriving at East Mountain Monastery for instruction, he was instead sent to work in the fields. At some point, the head monk Master Hongren invited all the monks to respond to his verse written on the temple wall:

*The body is the Bodhi Tree,
the mind is the stand for a bright mirror -
at all times diligently polish
to remain untainted by dust.*

Huineng, although illiterate, asked for a monk’s help to read this verse, and to help him write his own verse in response to the head monk’s verse:

*Bodhi has no tree,
nor is there a stand for the mirror.
Our true nature is forever pure,
so where can dust gather? **

To contextualise the motivation of my *Tempted Mind* series, and the title of my current sculpture, I cite from source material online:

“One day many years later in the south of China, the priest Yinzong, who had studied with Master Hongren, was giving a lecture on the Mahaparinirvana Scripture at Dharma Uprising Monastery. During the talk a storm began brewing and the wind grew strong. Seeing the monastery banner flapping in the wind, a monk asked if it was the wind that was moving, or the flag. One monk said “It’s the wind that moves,” and another said, “It’s the flag that moves.” The two stuck to their viewpoints and asked Yinzong to say who



was right. But Yinzong was unable to resolve it. Huineng, who had been camping out under the eaves of the temple, offered to help.

"Neither the wind nor the flag is moving," he said.

"Then what is it that is moving?" asked Yinzong.

"Your mind is moving," said Huineng.

In a later time the nun Miaoxin said:

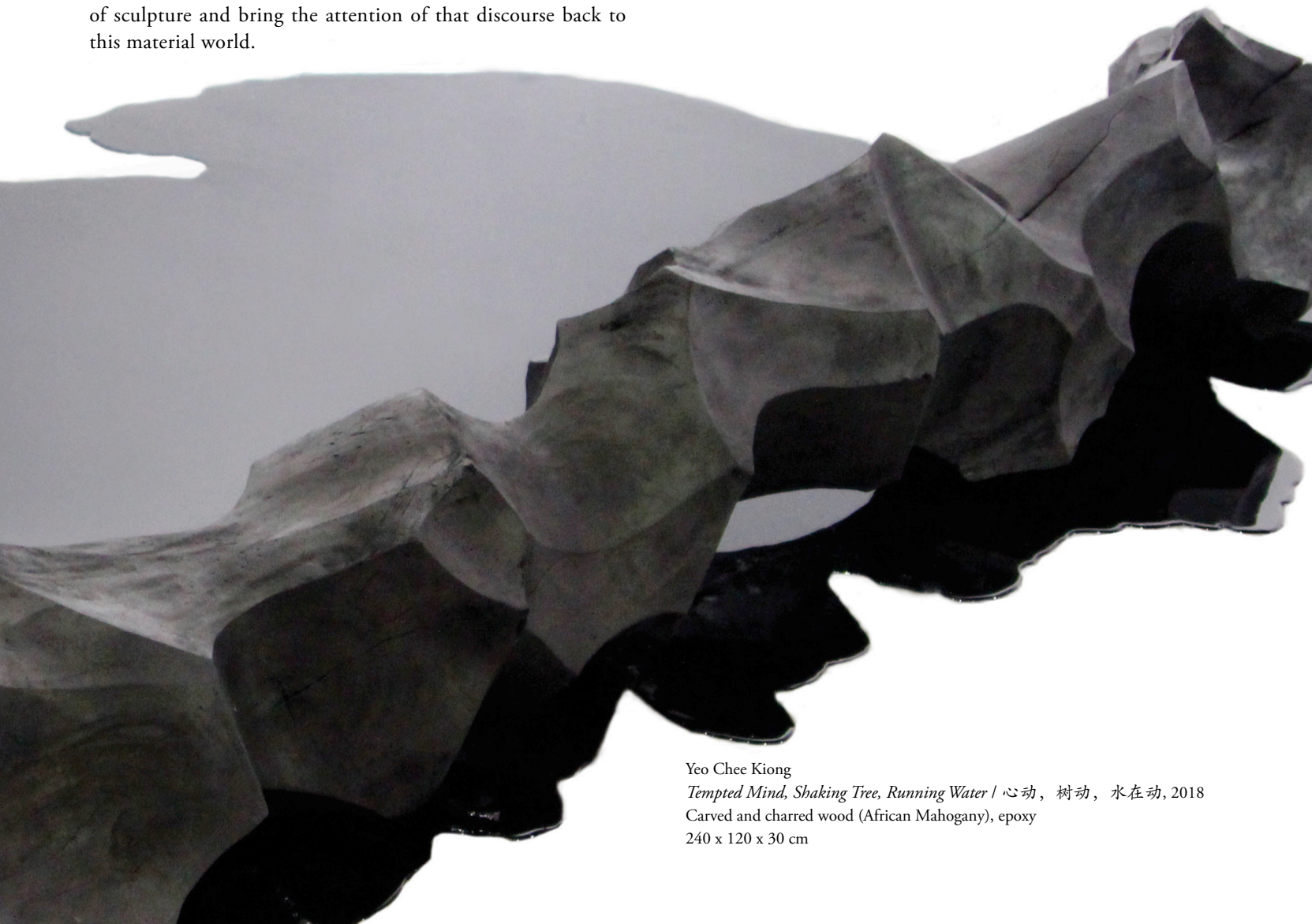
"It is neither the wind nor the flag nor the mind that is moving." *

The different ways of how we perceive this material world under various mental states fascinate me. In this material world, the 'wave' is not a physical form. It is the water surface/water molecule that has been blown by the wind and it forms the 'wave' under that particular 'wind' moment. In my *Tempted Mind* series, I carved the driftwood tree trunk into a 'wave' form, and put it back into the water to replace the 'moment' with a physical form and let it drift away as the 'wave'. The intention to create a physical 'wave' is my personal answer to that Zen question. It is to materialise an abstract concept through a piece of sculpture and bring the attention of that discourse back to this material world.

In 2018, my 'charcoaled' wood sculpture, sculpted from a felled tree from Fort Canning Park, will 'wash' through the exhibition floor of The Private Museum as the 'black wave'. A pool of black epoxy shadowing the 'black wave' is the symbolic 'liquefied shadow/running water'.

I am interested in the interchangeable materiality of the 'burnt charcoal' and the 'liquefied shadow', the collapse between the metaphorical words and the physical materials, and the congruent decoding of meanings within the individual and the collective mind. I hope that these overlapping visual references will generate a complex yet straightforward visual experience, a multiple reading experience between I, You and the Other – "The Tempted Mind".

* See <https://terebess.hu/zen/huineng-eng.html> for more information on *Encounter Dialogues of Dajian Huineng (638-713)* compiled by Satyavayu of Touching Earth Sangha.



Yeo Chee Kiong

Tempted Mind, Shaking Tree, Running Water / 心动, 树动, 水在动, 2018

Carved and charred wood (African Mahogany), epoxy

240 x 120 x 30 cm



Bewitched • Knotted • Guarded • Incorporated • Captured



• *Commemorated* • *Escaped* • *Probed* • *Countered*

You, Other; I, Another

B. *The Works of Art: Living Realities & Shaping Perceptions*

by Susie Lingham

Art can transcend the constraints of culture. In *You, Other; I, Another*, all nine artists come from very dissimilar backgrounds, and their works diverge off various individual realities of lived Otherness, or concepts of difference – expressed in diverse materialities and modes. From the rhythms of the natural world to the measures of culture and custom, and stemming from the personal, the familial to the societal – all manner of Other manifest here reciprocally, “inscrutably involved.”

While not an ‘international’ exposition as far as convention goes, nonetheless the age-old thorny subject that all nine artists ponder is surfacing to the forefront of world attention: it is many-faceted and far from convenient to package and present, and inevitably so. The artworks, while very singular, resonate in subtle ways, and some come within range of each other’s territory, and some overlap. No, this isn’t about “harmony”. Instead, there are clear, unexpected overtones – sympathetic resonance – in the individual refrains: notes unstruck, tremble to each other’s presence. These can be discerned with keen listening.

Bewitched; Knotted; Guarded; Incorporated

Associations emerge between the works, and these first four all engage in their unique ways with gendered and self-conscious relations within the structures of romance, the family, the self and cultural heritage; how the sexes are socio-culturally conditioned and embodied – with subtle inversions of the male-female relational continuum – and how these relations are encountered personally.



I can't tell (detail)

Susie Wong's three trace-drawings respond to the genre of romantic movies. Taking computer screen-grabs off certain scenes – stilling specific moments – from the iconic 1960s film *The World of Suzie Wong*, the artist remarks, dryly, that the Hong Kong heroine is her namesake,

and that she made this choice for “a hoot and a laugh.” In any romantic relationship, as famously excavated in Roland Barthes’ *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*, his glossary-analysis of the agony and ecstasy of love and desire – there is the lover, and the beloved, and these roles are asymmetrical, and dynamically very differently charged. The lover suffers: compelled to demonstrate devotion, to perform, to make promises and overt gestures of reassurance; it is the lover who longs for the beloved ‘other’; it is the lover who is abandoned. The beloved is on the passive and receiving end of this performance of love. Barthes’ “I” is the lover, and the beloved is written of as the ‘other’. Frequently, though not always, this dynamic is mapped on typical male-female relations, in a game of pursuit and capture; endless waiting; loss; absence, etc. This in turn, as exemplified in

The World of Suzie Wong, also maps against the power dynamics between East and West, the colonial and the colonised. Wong’s chosen-stolen moments show the male white protagonist in jacket and tie, but with mouth slightly agape as he pulls away, or where he is all ‘back’ – the figure is sentimental, protectively tender, but gingerly, and somewhat under siege, as evident from the man’s utterances in American-English off screen-grab, caught as subtitle-titles in Mandarin in the drawings, “a language in which I am neither conversant nor literate”, declares the artist. In the film, it is the man who beseeches his amour to stay, which echoes Barthes’ observations:

“Historically, the discourse of absence is carried on by the woman. [...] Woman is faithful (she waits), man is fickle (he sails away, he cruises). [...] It follows that in any man who utters the other’s absence *something feminine* is declared: this man who waits and who suffers from his waiting is miraculously feminized.”¹

This power imbalance inherent in romantic relations and mirrored in romantic movies as well as East-West relations, where the ‘Oriental other’ is often *further* feminised, gives pause for thought. Yet, as Wong says: “We consume Romance, and it devours us.” Language still attests to the bias that reflects the state of hapless disempowerment of the role and status of women, where words like ‘emasculated’ and ‘effeminate’ are used to belittle men, or indeed, other cultures. Ultimately though, the love to be loved disarms, and renders individuals, female *and* male, vulnerable, as evident in the delicate watercolour drawings of Wong’s unhappy lovers.

Approaching a Mending Wall, a pair of heavy tapestry-like hanging works, is what **Mithun Jayaram**, who lives and works in Bangalore, India, calls “process-based sculpture”, made in response to the scope of this exhibition. It began with observing his Hindu father’s daily rituals: cleaning, trimming and lighting of the oil lamp at their home, which uses a cotton lamp-wick twine used in temples as well. The work presents a father-and-son portrait, hung and tenuously bound to each other. Both sides of the handknitted base are heavily textured: the ‘backs’ bristle with dangling knobbly knots; the ‘fronts’ are long-furred with frayed ends. At points, the frayed ends of each tapestry are pulled and tied to each other, tensioned in sections, and looser in others, like webbed tendons, stretched and forced to keep connected.

That the tapestries are knotted and woven from temple oil-lamp wicks, spins another dimensional backdrop of family traditions, religion, ritual, cultural contexts and heritage. The tapestry-portraits wick material is a by-product in the manufacture of cotton saris: this rather intriguingly alludes to a woman’s absence – the mother’s severed umbilical connection to son – being yet another hush in this ode to silence. Perhaps also another unknotting: what is extraneous to the clothing of women’s bodies umbilical-binds the relationship of father to divine Father, and son to father. In Hindu temples, oil-lamps are filled with different flammable fats: ghee, sesame seed oil,



Approaching a Mending Wall (detail)

or coconut oil. The wick, when saturated in these oils and lit, draws up the flammable liquid in a capillary flow, and keeps the flame constant on a slow aromatic burn. The very material is metaphorically saturated in the latent potential of controlled flammability, and when repeatedly knotted, suggests an inhibited, snarled up 'violence'. Knotting and knots usually serve a vital function of holding things together, but here, the separate knots are non-functional – these knots cannot be unravelled, they are deadknots, and it is pointless to unravel them, because each knot is knotted unto itself from a separate length of twine. We eavesdrop on the unconscious and subconscious convolution of repeating patterns; of unsaid, unheard emotions and thoughts. The string-ends of the knots in front are the frayed ties that bind, and evoke familial relations of the father and son as kin; as skins, touching, and touched, while tensed across the silent acknowledgement of circumscribed roles. This family portrait of father and son is one of estranged masculine interiorities – not quite looking at each other, but unavoidably aware of each other's presence amidst furtive sidelong glances. The distance between father and son, both Other to each other, is measured in fidgety, Gordian-knotted silences; it is given skin, uneasy touchability.

The vulnerabilities of masculinity and the formation of male identity in relation to Nature and Culture pulse at the hidden heart of **Vincent Twardzik Ching's** installation *Eraphya*, in which he invokes his ancestral lineage on his Canadian-Finnish mother's side. *Eraphya* – meaning sacred wilderness – enshrines another hidden dimension of gender relations, and in the context of family, the artist constructs the space of fathers and sons, and of archetypal male coming-into-being, drawing on his own lived experience. The installation is constructed in a series of 'screens', nut-and-bolted together, of reclaimed wood panels, 'distressed', sanded, hammered at and painted upon, then deliberately set up at angles so that it is impossible to get a clear view from any particular point – except through peering and peeping – of the presence of a suggested interior. Reminiscent of a 'kids' fort', a child's hideout,

or of a makeshift shelter of the homeless – it is fragile in its make-do mode – yet *necessary*. The painted surfaces on reclaimed panels bear abstract imagery, evocative of lichen and moss, and landscapes around which the viewer wanders. The 'inner sanctum' that one journeys towards, and even when one arrives within, is partly obscured by what the artist calls "three guardians" – vertical sculptures that seem to take on aspects of natural forces that collide, synthesise and incarnate as cultural-material shields, complete with the hiss of an untuned radio. Then, more veiling: a constructed 'thorny bramble' crowds protectively around the heart of the structure – a small oil painting featuring a man and an animal. This seems to also conjure the classic fairytale grove, where a charmed princess lies asleep, awaiting her kiss into womanhood – but this time, it's a masculinity that is being 'guarded'. The small, classically painted oil painting, enshrined on an easel, was inspired by a 1960s postcard, picturing a scene of the very site where the artist's Finn ancestors migrated to in Northwest Ontario, Canada. This space also conjures a sense of an artist's studio-sanctuary, where images are dreamt up and made manifest. One is granted a glimpse of a secret, quiet moment, a *sacred* moment, when a man is pictured nursing a baby moose with a bottle of milk: an archetypal manly man, coincident as a 'mothering' man, nurtured by Nature and nurturing Nature.

Male identity in relation to Nature – overcoming challenges of weather and wilderness, farming, the domestication of wild animals – and its vestigial associations with physical strength, is constructed around, as Twardzik Ching notes: "profound dichotomies where violence and industriousness, insecurity and self-reliance are juxtaposed in fragile and volatile relationships to each other." The ancestral notion of 'home' – built for self and significant other, is still an issue today, when domestic duties are negotiated, and physical strength isn't literally necessary in the corporate, urban city.

Intriguingly, *Eraphya* calls to mind Duchamp's *Étant donnés*² which can only be seen through two peepholes in a solid, sealed wooden door. Duchamp's last work is riddled with visual and linguistic puns, alluding perhaps to Courbet's infamous painting *The Origin of the World*. The hole through which one peeps, leads the eye to yet another 'hole', that is perceived as part of a whole but in actuality isn't: the coming-into-being of what isn't whole, as perceived through the peephole, is the eroticised space between the spread 'legs' of a three-dimensional *not-quite-woman* figure. It is a woman's body in parts, headless, only barely assembled, just enough for the eye to make out the erotic-symbolic scene.

Eraphya seems to be an



Eraphya (detail)

inversion of *Étant donnés* in more ways than one: here, the largest peephole up front is a violently smashed-in gash on plywood; elsewhere peepholes are frayed cracks between hinged panels, or drilled ‘bullet-holes’. The installation has a sense of secrecy, of ‘hoarding’, that suggests interior construction that must be shielded from view until completed. This is a space for the ‘becoming-self’, backed against the wall, which will always have protective hoarding up at the deepest, most vulnerable moments – yet the work also has a ‘backstage-set’ effect. The perfect gem of an oil painting nestles within this space, only perceptible through the inconvenient, ‘culturally conditioned’ construction of manliness that is still the measure of desirability in all orientations, depending on who masculinises, and who feminises between relations. A relevant aside: Twardzik Ching and his Chinese artist wife, both of the Baha’i faith, take on each other’s surnames, deliberately unhyphenated, as a significant mark of mutual respect.

Mumtaz Maricar’s oil painting *Laparoscopic wound, no wider than 1–2 cm*, is named for the bodily site of an excision. This uncanny portrait of female embodiment, clad in the culturally-specific Indian sari, does reflect Indianness, yet what is not apparent is that the artist was raised in an Indian Muslim family, and cultural identity here is more convoluted than is visible. In this self-portrait, the artist’s hands are depicted, as expressed by the artist, “framing the site of the laparoscopic wound through which a uterine fibroid was removed”. At the painted re-opened incision just below the navel, the impression of a third hand presses up from beneath the painted skin, and fingertips seem to pry open the wound from within. This “colonisation of the body by an alien agency”, as Maricar describes, while viscerally referencing the abject, extraneous fleshly material produced when changes in the body sensitises it to high estrogen levels within the body itself, also grapples with the female body as a self-exceeding, autonomous Other, with its own will and desires, pregnant with her sense of self. The ground, against which the figure arises, blooms with cloud-like fibroid-forms, surrounding the woman. In the age of the Selfie, this self-portrait is a doppelganger who



Laparoscopic wound, no wider than 1–2 cm (detail)

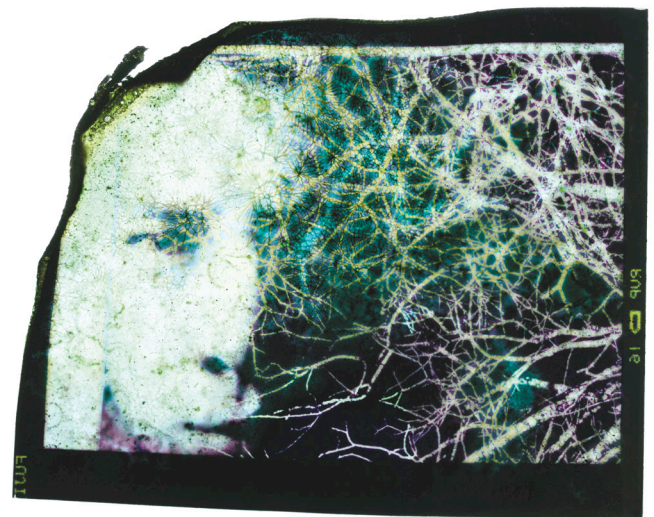
craves rebirth as another self, the female self who rebirths herself through a wound: as Maricar notes, it is her doppelganger who is the painter, struggling for existence. Resurfacing through the site of the laparoscopic wound as the “object of desire”, this artist-self, in Kristeva’s words, “bursts with the shattered mirror where the ego gives up its image in order to contemplate itself in the Other” and the abject becomes “simply a frontier, a repulsive gift that the Other, having become alter ego, drops so that “I” does not disappear in it but finds, in that sublime alienation, a forfeited existence.”³

Here, surrealist painting arises beyond the ‘truths’ of the abstract-painterly surface once again; as surface *within* surface, paint paints skin and skins apart painting: a representation of the psychological dimensions of human nature.

Captured; Commemorated; Escaped

The elemental forces and forms of Nature are what inspire the next three artists, although each work with very different materials: photographic print and its chemical capture of timed being and presence; found dead and treated specimens of fauna; a felled tree turned sculptural wave. Their works resonate on themes of transience and the transitional nature of existence and perception.

Siew Kee Liong’s *Sessa’s Dream* and *Vassal’s Glove* are paired and juxtaposed photographic prints of photographs and negatives of people and objects that seem to symbolically hint at the shifting power dynamic between masculinity and femininity via the inverse relations of the moment as negative, and another instantiation in print. *Sessa’s Dream* features a broken chess piece – the King – and is paired with the furtive and anxious partial portrait of a man on negative film, an image obscured by a decade’s growth of dendritic mould and fungus, and burnt edges.



Sessa’s Dream (detail)

Beside this ‘internal’ pair, is another pair of images: *Vassal’s Glove* depicts a much-worn workman’s glove, and a negative image, less stained with fungus, of a woman curled up on the ground, and yet somehow afloat, perhaps asleep, perhaps huddled, post-trauma. There is a suggestion of lost time, touch, and non-touch, given that gloves protect a user from direct contact with any surface or object. Both works are symbolically linked, referencing the legendary Sessa, Indian inventor of *chaturanga*, the ancestor of chess, and the power dynamics between king and the ‘hand’ of the king, in relation to the ‘protection’ of the queen – here is a parable about roles, betrayal and broken trust. Yet, that is just one possible narrative: the artist reassures that “the pairing of the human subject and the object is an attempt to create a trigger that stirs the viewer to form their own narrative.” These enigmatic images, particularly the portraits, are each “sliced” moments of a life, as Siew states, and having been captured in an instant in traditional photography on acetate – the negative – remains “distinct and separate from the human being I photographed.” A separate life, a parting of ways post the capture, with the photographed person living on, aging with each day, away from their stilled image-in-time; each drifting further apart from one another over the years; each figuring thereafter in a different story. This is the ‘stilling’ of life itself, which estranges the ‘me now’ from every passing moment. You get asked, when sharing past photographs: *Is that you?* You may ask that of yourself, gazing at a surrogate that perpetuates a once-you. The sense of self continues under your very nose; your image once captured, separates from you – like Oscar Wilde’s dire tale *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, but in reverse – the once-you gets progressively differentiated in time from the continuing self. And upon the discontinuation of that self, others choose ‘their you’ from the images left behind to remember a once-you by.

Despite perhaps sharing ancestral lineage in the murkiest, archaic depths of our mutual coming-into-being, the animal is what humanity distinguishes itself from most keenly. We may love animals – our pets; the beauty and freedom of wild animals; as wrought works of art; as revered animal spirit guides, and animal-headed gods; as the grilled steak on our plate; our handsome leather shoes; the feathers in our caps. Yet we take pains not to ‘behave like animals’, implying wayward lack of morality, and strenuously object to being ‘treated like animals’, implying slavery, powerlessness and indignity – while, at the same time, we anthropomorphise and divinise all manner of creatures in our myths, morality tales and cartoons, and create soft animal-surrogates to provide comfort and companionship for our young. While the animal is seen as Other to the human being, death others us all, human and animal alike. **Victor Emmanuel’s** *Osseous* series of works are what he calls a “tribute” to Nature’s wondrous forms, in life and in death. *Osseous Ivory* is one set of carefully cleaned and re-assembled skeletons: a delicately-boned pigeon and two of the enigmatic Royal Pleco fish, with primordial-looking skeletons. Dead when the artist found or was given them, their now polished ivory skeletons belie the visceral processes Victor undertook to allow for the hidden sculptural beauty of their bones to be revealed. Another series, *Osseous Crystallised*, is a paean to life and lifeforms: rare creatures and insects, disappearing from our urbanised islandscapes, found dead on his nature trails, e.g., the Carpenter Bee, are lovingly



Osseous, the Series: 'Osseous Crystallised' (detail)

collected and transformed into works of art through a crystallisation process. From seahorse, sea-swallow, to wasp, these are ensconced in glass spheres and affixed within cast and carved resin skulls, representing how we might hold them precious in our minds, lest we forget, or should they go extinct in our lifetimes. Most poignantly, these works remind us that our human consciousness is on continuum with the animal world, as we co-exist on Mother Earth.

Still on Nature, but this time with a focus on natural phenomena as transient form, Malaysia-born sculptor **Yeo Chee Kiong** received his early art education in Singapore and has lived and worked in Singapore for decades. He now also works in Taiwan. Yeo’s practice, inspired by natural forms and forces, also works through allusion and paradox, giving sculptural permanence to what has no solid form, e.g., water and wind, and their interactions. This is seen in *Tempted Mind*, *Shaking Tree*, *Running Water*, where he carves a felled African Mahogany tree trunk, chars it, and with mallet and chisel, turns wood into a stylised form of moving water – a curve-faceted ‘wave’. In keeping with his use of epoxy ‘spills’ to ‘liquefy’ hard surfaces e.g., walls and other architectural features, this tree-wave casts a wet-looking black shadow that seems to flow away from it on the floor of the space. As a sculptural response to an anecdotal Zen question about the deceptive perception of cause and effect in the phenomenal world, *Tempted Mind*, *Shaking Tree*, *Running Water* is a simple yet startling reminder that perception is constantly shifting, and that all is in flux, as deeply held in Buddhist understanding. Wood becomes ‘water’; ‘water’ casts a solid-liquid ‘shadow’; ‘shadow’ becomes solid form that resembles water. The metaphorical here becomes material, and vice versa. Nothing is what it *seems*. Shift your point of view, and everything – including preconceptions of another – transforms.



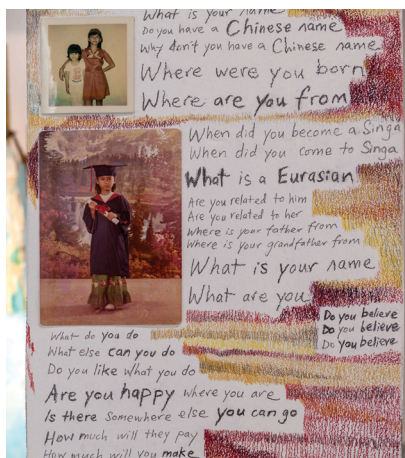
Tempted Mind, Shaking Tree, Running Water (detail)

Probed; Countered

The final two artists' works are individual contemplations on their experience of being overtly made to feel Other in the very country they were born in, and how estrangement becomes internalised, slowly whittling away any sense of belonging from within.

Reflecting on her childhood growing up in Kampong Siglap, Singapore, as a Eurasian girl, **Regina De Rozario's** work is a careful inventory of the questions she has been traumatised and bombarded with, and that have chipped and chiselled away at her sense of identity over the years. In her words, she has "never quite 'fitted' in, or found my 'place', either by my own volition or circumstance." 101 questions form the core of her thinking around the subject of Otherness, and the work *Faultlines (or, The questions you ask today will be the questions I ask tomorrow)* is made manifest as a handwritten list of these questions on and around a pillar in the gallery, on which she also affixes photographs unearthed from her childhood photo albums. The non-word markings on the pillar are deliberately worked to extend the existing visible mended-cracks on the floor of the gallery right up the pillar, creating a sense of instantiated 'faultlines' – the very title of her work. There is irony here: architecturally, pillars uphold ceilings and roofs; metaphorically, pillars of society keep us feeling protected – we lean upon them; value systems and ideologies are spoken of as pillars too. This pillar-of-questions, instead, is a monument to estrangement; a whipping pillar.

Noticeably absent in these photographs is her father, who was a seaman, although she notes that she had, in the past, cut some family members out from certain photographs. The pencilled 101 questions, hammered out like statements, hang without question-marks; some asked repeatedly of her over the years, right until the present, include: "What is your name • Why is your name so hard to pronounce • Do you have a Chinese name • Are you Malay • Why are you so dark • What is a Eurasian • Are you Singaporean"



Faultlines (or, The questions you ask today will be the questions I ask tomorrow) (detail)

Such questions have been experienced as "bruises" that continue to hurt – and they reveal much about dominant Singapore society, and the many crude prejudices and projections cast upon minority cultures and subcultures – people who appear Other, or who are simply perceived as being visibly not part of the majority, i.e., 'not belonging'. As De Rozario says, she is "a minority within a minority within a minority." Writing stories and drawing pictures on the walls of her home as

a child, her mother never cleaned or painted over any of this accumulating 'graffiti'. This background to her childhood remained until they had to move house when she was eight, and the house was left, with the marked walls still whispering.

Leroy Sofyan hails from a family of mixed ethnicities: half Minangkabau (his father, he says, was born in West Sumatra on a volcanic lake) and half Eurasian; and different faiths: Baha'i and Catholic. He worked as a paramedic for six years, before turning sculptor. Sofyan has had to suffer all manner of presumptuous interrogation and treatment that has left him somewhat resigned to the ongoing undermining of his sense of belonging in the country he was born in. His thoughtful wood sculpture is heavy with significance, which it carries with stoic, ironic dignity. *Measure/Measured* is hewn and carved from one trunk of Tembusu wood, a species of tree indigenous to Singapore. It is shaped as two weighing scales, one upside down atop the other, and sits squarely on a tall grey granite plinth. Malt vinegar-stained a deep purple-brown, the grain and beautifully worked fractures of the wood surfaces appear fragile-yet-strong. There is an old, much-weathered axe with a worn wooden handle 'wedged' between one part of the base of the sculpture and the top surface of the granite plinth: a 'counterbalance'. This is Sofyan's recognisable hallmark, where he integrates readymade tools, objects and instruments of measure with his handshaped sculptures, such that they wittily 'pry' each other open into another dimension of thinking. The axe as art-object also calls to mind Tang Da Wu's work *'Untitled'* (1991), generally known as *'Axe'*,⁴ where the wooden handle of the axe-head seems to sprout new leafy growth, suggesting diabolically redemptive dialectics: that the very handle, shaped from the wood of a felled tree to become the agent of tree-destruction, will in time develop 'self-consciousness' and begin anew, *as tree*.



Measure/Measured (detail)

Referencing Hegel's "master and slave hierarchy in our own minds," Sofyan used "one block of wood," with the aim, he says "to convey

how inextricable the self is from the other”; “to make physical the struggle within ourselves” and “to invite thought about how the struggle between mutual identification and estrangement plays out in the field of social relations.”

Measure/Measured questions the societal standard of measure, set at an unspoken default, against which we are weighed and, inevitably, found ‘wanting’. We are prompted to ponder measurability: who is positioned to evaluate our worthiness to belong; how we appraise ourselves, or ‘measure up’; that we do indeed transact on the perceptual, and are at the mercy of appearances; how are we perceived, even as *our* appearances belie our sense of self, and – how might we *counter* the weights of social bias and injustice. The gentle irony of a symbolic counterweighted counterweight is both charming, and at once deeply unsettling: here, in hewn wood, perched on stone and axe-wedged, is some measure of Foucault’s difference-liberating “acategorical thought,”⁵ given heft.

Endnotes (to Part B of essay)

- ¹ Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments* (Penguin: England, 1990. Translation copyright Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, Inc. 1978), p14.
- ² <http://www.philamuseum.org/exhibitions/324.html> “Marcel Duchamp’s enigmatic assemblage *Étant donné: 1. La chute d’eau, 2. Le gaz d’éclairage* (Given: 1. *The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas*) has been described by the artist Jasper Johns as “the strangest work of art in any museum.” It has been permanently installed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art since 1969.
- ³ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p 9.
- ⁴ Tang Da Wu’s *Untitled* (‘Axe’), 1991, is in the Singapore Art Museum collection. Interestingly, another work, Tang’s performance relic *Montien and SAM*, 2010 (performance at SAM’s inaugural exhibition *Modernity and Beyond*, 1996), features two weighing scales, separately: one inverted with the acronym SAM on its base, the other bearing stacked ceramic ware, referencing Thai artist Montien Boonma’s work. Both artists’ works are installed in the National Gallery Singapore’s exhibition *Between Declarations and Dreams* (2015 - 2019).
- ⁵ Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), p186.

bottom:

Siew Kee Liong

Sessa’s Dream / 宰相, 2018; *Vassal’s Glove* / 諸侯, 2018





top (left):
 Regina De Rozario
Faultlines (or, The questions you ask today will be the questions I ask tomorrow), 2018



top (right):
 Leroy Sofyan
Measure/Measured, 2018

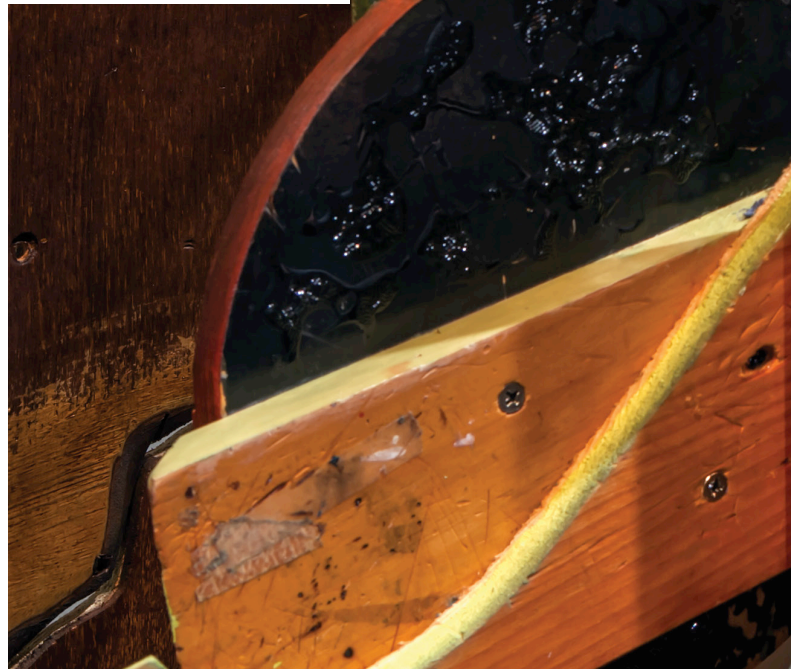
opposite:
 Mithun Jayaram
Approaching a Mending Wall, 2018





Vincent Twardzik Ching
Eraphya, 2018

left: overhead view of installation
right: interior view of installation





MARBY





top:
Victor Emmanuel
Osseous, the Series: 'Osseous Crystallised';
'Osseous Ivory', 2018

left:
Susie Wong
I can't tell, 2018
Don't leave, 2018
How much I need you, 2018

right:
Mumtaz Maricar
Laparoscopic wound, no wider than 1–2 cm, 2018





foreground:

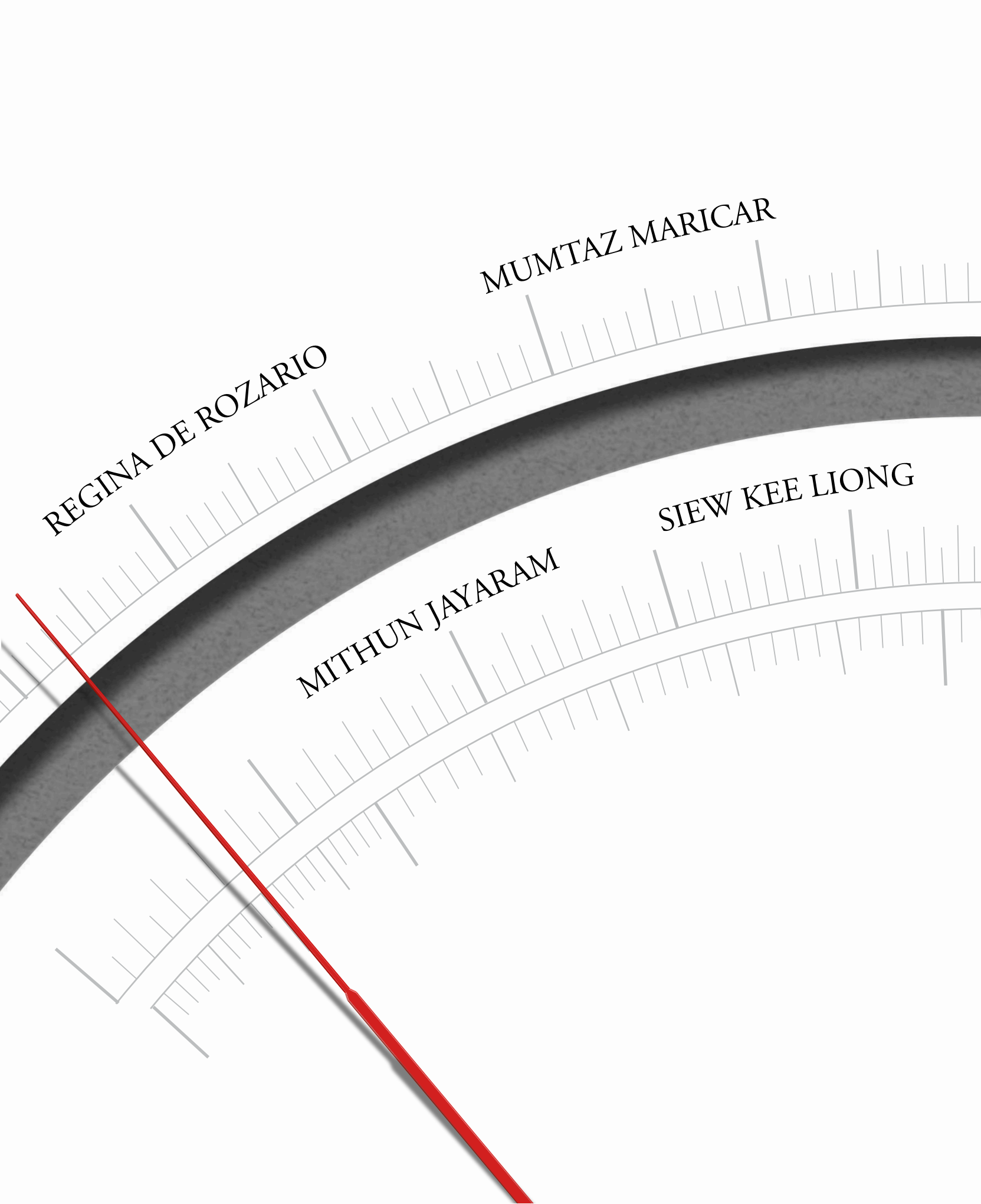
Yeo Chee Kiong

Tempted Mind, Shaking Tree, Running Water / 心动，树动，水在动, 2018

centrespread: exhibition view

* Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Touchstone, 1966), p. 67.





LEROY SOFYAN

VICTOR EMMANUEL

YEO CHEE KIONG

VINCENT TWARDZIK CHING

SUSIE WONG



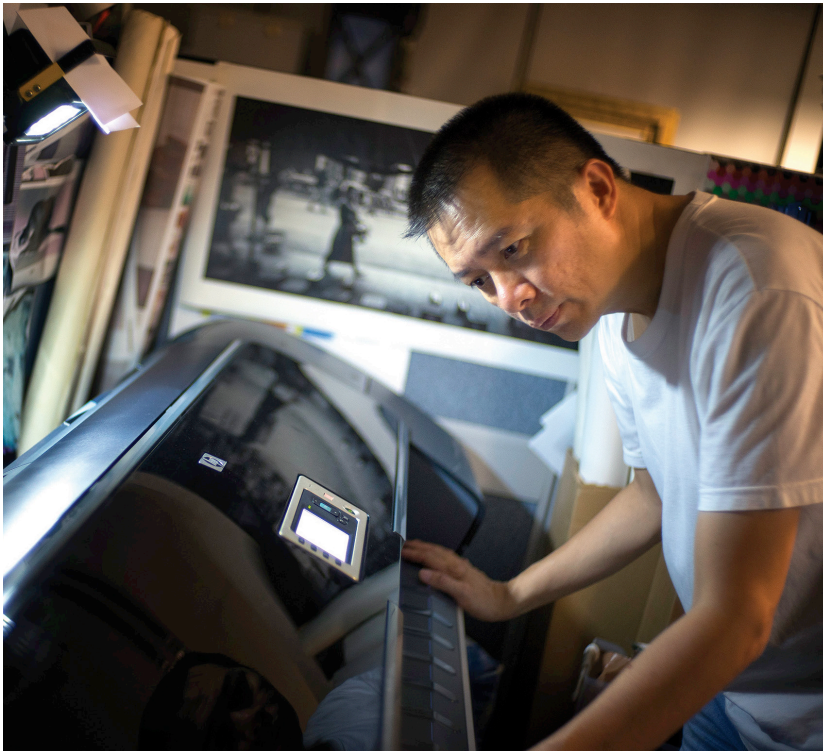
REGINA DE ROZARIO (b. 1973, Singapore) is an artist and writer. Her practice and research interests include psychogeography and urban visual culture – specifically, how related strategies of walking, mapping, writing and image-making enable us to recognise, reflect on, and respond to notions of power and control in the shaping of the physical and narrative spaces we inhabit. Apart from her solo practice, De Rozario is active as one-half of Perception3, an interdisciplinary art duo established in 2007 with design practitioner Seah Sze Yunn. Their collaborative work is currently focused on exploring the notions of loss and memory through text, photography, digital video, and site-specific installation. Recent exhibitions include *An Atlas of Mirrors*, Singapore Biennale (SB2016), Singapore (2016), *Urbanness: Contemplating the City*, Dubai (2015), and *Unearthed*, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore (2014). She received her MA in Contemporary Practice, and a BA (Hons) in Fine Art with Contemporary Writing from the University of Huddersfield (U.K.) at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, Singapore in 2010 and 2008 respectively. She has lectured and facilitated workshops at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore Management University, National Library, and Singapore Art Museum.

MITHUN JAYARAM (b. 1980, Calicut, India) is a Dubai-raised, Bangalore-based artist whose interest lies in observing the transience, decay, and frailty of everyday materials and objects, which are then translated into segments of mental landscapes through process-intensive installations. These installations tend to follow a pattern where an intended object/material gets processed and then reconstructed to form a site-specific texture. Though this texture eventually becomes sculptural in form, Jayaram places prime importance on the making and the taking down of the work. His participations and exhibitions include *Between Conversations*, Yavuz Gallery, Singapore (2013); *The Feeling Bubble of Forgetting*, Gloria Jeans Coffees, Bangalore (2009); *Photographing Everyday*, Alliance Française de Bangalore, Bangalore (2008) and *A Roomful of Old Ladies Clattering their Fingernails*, TickleArt Series, CityLink Underground Shopping Mall, Singapore (2005). Jayaram received his BA (Hons) in Fine Art (First Class Honours) from RMIT University, Melbourne at LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts, Singapore, where he was also presented the Winston Oh Award to travel to Romania for a research project.





MUMTAZ MARICAR (b. 1977, Singapore) is interested in thoughts, sensations, incidences and events that present the body as a site of transgression, negotiation, rebellion and potential revelation. Not reaching out merely for the comfort of well-demarcated areas in perception, she is far more intrigued by covert moments that shift with ease between the grey areas of observation and what appears more well-defined. These moments of sublimation are her focus. As a synaesthete, some of Maricar's previous works have been explorations into the condition in relation to sound and the formation of memories. Maricar was an art director in the television and film industry in Singapore for 14 years before she decided in 2017 to bid it adieu, and pave her way back into the world of creating art. Maricar received her BA (Hons) in Fine Art (First Class Honours) from RMIT University, Melbourne at LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts, Singapore, in 2001. Her video installation piece *Tragic Heroine Closet Series* (2004) in the exhibition *Exploring Memory & Self* at Jendela (Visual Arts Space), The Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, Singapore (2004) explored cinema, feminine archetypes and the formation of early identity.



SIEW KEE LIONG (b. 1962, Singapore) is a multimedia artist graduated from University of Miami, Coral Gables, with a BSC in Motion Pictures in 1989 and an MFA in Photography in 1991. Working mainly in the realms of photography and moving images in film/video, Siew works with both digital and analogue technology. Influenced by experimental films of the 1960s, he treats the film medium like a canvas where he alters it in an organic way: scratching, staining, burning, or sometimes, given the humid conditions of Southeast Asia, allowing the inevitable mould and fungus that thrive on celluloid to interact with the emulsion organically. The manipulated film frames, negative or positive, are digitally processed and printed as large-format photographs. His work has been exhibited locally and internationally at Lien Ying Chow Library, Ngee Ann Polytechnic, Singapore (2016); The Art Gallery, National Institute of Education/NTU, Singapore (2003); 5th Passage, Singapore (1993); The Substation Gallery, Singapore (1993); Singapore Film Festival, Singapore (1993); the 5th Fukui International Video Biennale, Japan (1993); the Museum of Art, Fort Lauderdale, U.S.A. (1993); Barbara Gillman Gallery, Miami (1991), and Lowe Art Museum, Coral Gables (1991), Florida. Siew has been involved in teaching since 1991, and is currently teaching photography in the School of Film & Media Studies at Ngee Ann Polytechnic, Singapore.



LEROY SOFYAN (b. 1973, Singapore) is an artist and sculptor. His previous career as an Emergency Paramedic exposed him to the grit and grime of everyday living at its most basic, and often traumatic, levels. He is concerned with the struggles of the common person and the responsibility of choice. His sculptural practice includes carving wood and stone, and is centred on found objects and tools. His exhibitions include *Some Things that Matter*, Jendela (Visual Arts Space), Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, Singapore (2013); *If the World Changed*, Singapore Biennale (SB2013), Singapore (2013); *Asia Contemporary Art: Space and Imagination*, Chonnam Provincial Okgwa Museum, South Korea (2010) and *Asia Contemporary Art: Now and Next*, Gwangju National Museum, South Korea (2010). Sofyan received his BA (Hons) in Fine Art from the University of Huddersfield (U.K.) at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, Singapore, in 2010. He is currently a Technical Officer at School of The Arts, Singapore.

VINCENT TWARDZIK CHING (b. 1970, Canada) is an artist and educator who lives and works in Singapore. Through paintings, drawings and sculpture, Twardzik Ching investigates trauma, healing and various aspects of male identity, often through the genre of landscape. Within these charged mindscapes, he attempts to reconcile experiences of conflict while exploring their dynamics as spaces of action and possibility. An advocate for Arts education, he completed an MEd in Visual Art at the National Institute of Education/NTU, Singapore, and holds a BA and an Academic Achievement Award from the University of Regina (Canada). He was awarded Honourable Mention in The Phillip Morris Singapore Asean Art Awards (2002 and 2003) and received a National Arts Council grant (2012) to attend the Academy of Realist Art in Toronto, Canada, where he studied the oil painting techniques of Caravaggio. His sculpture will be presented at *Multi-layered Surfaces*, a survey of Canadian artists, NICA Gallery, Tokyo, Japan (2018), and his work is included in the international travelling exhibition: *The Fieldtrip Project* (2015-present). Twardzik Ching is currently a part time Visual Arts Lecturer in drawing and painting at NIE (Singapore) and an Early Childhood Arts specialist at SEED Institute (Singapore).





VICTOR EMMANUEL (b. 1979, Singapore) spent most of his youth in small local pockets of greenery in Singapore, observing and discovering different fauna in their natural habitats. Later in his teens, his nature-driven journeys were extended to parts of Southeast Asia. More recently, he has been developing a deeper understanding of artistic techniques, including sculpture and casting, and wood carpentry as well. Victor received his Diploma in Fine Arts (Painting) from LASALLE College of the Arts in 2014. His recent exhibitions include *Qi@art*, Telok Kurau Studios, Singapore (2016); *50 Obsessions*, LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore (2015) and *Telok Kurau Studios Exhibition*, Telok Kurau Studios, Singapore (2013-2015).

SUSIE WONG (b. Singapore) began her arts practice in the late 1980s, in painting and art writing, complementing these with art education, teaching, and curatorial projects. She has exhibited works of figurative paintings, portraits, landscapes, drawings, and installations. Central to her current work is the inquiry of the image/light as a medium that mediates between memory and loss, between documentation and nostalgia. Her work *Trace*, installations of drawings, was exhibited at The Substation (2008), and it travelled to Valentine Willie FA Gallery, Kulau Lumpur. More recently, her works *My Beautiful Indies*, and *After Image*, were shown respectively at The Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, Singapore (2013), and *Space Cottonseed*, Gillman Barracks, Singapore (2014). Her video installation *Take Care of Me* was part of the curated series *Opening Day* at Upper Serangoon Shopping Centre, Singapore (2018).





YEO CHEE KIONG (b. 1970, Singapore) is a contemporary sculptor and installation artist who is fascinated with the language and spatial relationship between objects, space and authorship. His work destabilises the familiar notions of spatial proportions and perspectives, whilst examining the human condition in the construction of an extended surreal world. His recent exhibitions include *Yeo Chee Kiong Solo Exhibition*, Juming Art Museum, Taipei, Taiwan (2017); *3rd FORMOSA*, Sculpture Biennial 2017, Taiwan (2017); *Personal Structures*, parallel event of Venice Biennale 2017, Italy (2017); *Art In The Forest, Flamingo*, Dai Lai Resort, Hanoi, Vietnam (2017); *Suide International Sculpture Symposium, China* (2017) and *International Sculpture Group* – Tokyo & Seoul, Tokyo, Japan (2017). Yeo is an alumnus of the Glasgow School of Art (U.K.) and the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Singapore), and his list of conferred awards includes the NAFA Distinguished Alumni Medal (2016); the Grand Prize for the Inaugural APB Foundation *Signature Art Prize*, Singapore Art Museum (2008); the Young Artist Award, National Arts Council (2006), and the Grand prize for the 2nd CDL Singapore Sculpture Award (2005). He is currently the President of the Sculpture Society (Singapore) and Visiting Assistant Professor at National Taiwan University of Arts.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to Dr Susie Lingham and the nine artists, Regina De Rozario, Mithun Jayaram, Mumtaz Maricar, Siew Kee Liong, Leroy Sofyan, Vincent Twardzik Ching, Victor Emmanuel, Susie Wong and Yeo Chee Kiong for their dedication and effort in making this collaboration a success.

A very special thank you to the Guest-of-Honour Prof Kwok Kian Woon, Associate Provost (Student Life), Professor of Sociology, Nanyang Technological University for officiating the opening of the exhibition and taking time to write the foreword.

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All work-in-progress and artist-at-work images courtesy of Siew Kee Liong excluding work-in-progress image on page 15 courtesy of Regina De Rozario, work-in-progress and artist-at-work images on pages 46/47 and 71 courtesy of Clara Chong. All artwork images on pages 48 to 63 courtesy of Daniel Swee.

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