Epilogue — ‘My Future is Not a Dream’:¹ Shifting Worlds of Contemporary Asian Art and Exhibitions

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If Asian art of the 1990s offered glimpses into the shifting conditions of Asian societies, especially those of newly industrialised, globalising status, the essays gathered in this collection suggest that art at the turn of the century was poised to take on a different project. They collectively ask *what are we to make of this newly changed Asia, for the present and for the future, for Asia itself and for the world?*

Miwa Yanagi, *Yuka* from *My Grandmothers* series 2000; C-print between plexiglass; 160 x 160 cm.

© The artist; image courtesy of the artist

1 ‘My Future is Not a Dream’ is the title of Part III of Chinese artist Cao Fei’s video, *Whose Utopia?* (2007).

At the Introduction to this volume, Caroline Turner's essay foregrounds the dramatic shifts in the world of contemporary art at the closing decade of the twentieth century and the new significance of contemporary Asian art within this. As Turner and other authors in this volume have described, the art world began to admit a variety of contemporary art practices from all over the globe, not least Asia, with contemporary Asian art now a thriving presence in international exhibitions. Indeed, alongside Asia's renewed influence in matters of global economics and politics, it has likewise been impossible to ignore Asia's revived cultural influence in the world. This includes the explosion of contemporary art from Asia—the now ubiquitous and striking array of avant-garde, experimental or transforming art practices, which communicate not only the vitality of contemporary Asian art practice, but also reflect the rapidly changing social circumstances of Asia.

Part of the motivation behind Asian art production in the twentieth century was to explore the possibilities of the new Asia and the new art and, in turn, to assert its place in the global art landscape and help convey the new Asia to the world. As the essays in this volume suggest, there is now, however, an increased focus on Asian art for Asia itself, not only so as to continue to nurture and develop a self-defined vocabulary for Asian art, but also increasingly, to address issues of local and regional relevance to Asian societies and to communicate such issues to local and regional audiences—audiences now more accustomed to contemporary art as a feature of urban Asian realities and an increasing part of Asia's newly established cultural industries. Highlighted in Oscar Ho's essay in this volume is the growing attention being given to 'cultural' development within Asia, most strongly demonstrated by newly established cultural projects supporting developing cultural industries and creative economies across various parts of Asia,² with contemporary art being a key part of this. Moreover, as Charles Merewether's essay in this volume registers, contemporary art offers a means for developing new transnational networks across Asia, encouraging renewed regional connections across national borders and divides of colonial making. In addition is the variety of new intercultural projects that work *with* and *through* the diversity of cultural difference within the region: in this volume, the 'West Heavens' project, the focus of Chaitanya Sambrani's essay, and the Japan Foundation 'Under Construction' project mentioned by Turner, are key examples of such transnational and intercultural, regional initiatives that at the same time argue for Asia-based exhibition frameworks and perspectives. Meanwhile, projects such as the 'Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art' exhibition, discussed by Turner and Pat HOFFIE, and Asialink's art-focused

2 Lily Kong, 'From Cultural Industries to Creative Industries and Back? Clarifying Theory and Rethinking Policy' (paper presented at the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies International Conference 'Beyond the Cultural Industries', National University of Singapore, 3–5 July 2013) (*The Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* journal, in which Kong's paper will appear, is forthcoming).

initiatives in Asia discussed by Alison Carroll, point to continuing Australian interest in engaging with Asia's contemporary art and the strengthening significance of Asia's art to international audiences in the twenty-first century.

Indeed, the changing circumstances of Asia and its art, as the authors in this volume have suggested, also bear relevance for the world, necessarily showing Asia as enmeshed in, even increasingly at the centre of or directing, global currents and transnational networks. Politics, the economy, and environmental issues, for instance, may relate directly to local Asian concerns, but also have consequences for the world and international engagements with Asia. Similarly, as Asian art has taken hold in Asia, it has also captured international attention and affects currents of international art. In this sense, as essays by Marsha Meskimmon, Francis Maravillas and Jacqueline Lo highlight, Asian art exemplifies the conditions of 'contemporary art' practice in that it simultaneously speaks to both local and global concerns, is capable of communicating and connecting with audiences near and far across borders of all kinds, and is distinctive in its emergence from or influence by particular Asian cultural contexts of production with concurrent relevance and relation to the world.³

These antinomies lie at the heart of the developing field of art historical enquiry surrounding 'contemporary art' practice. As the field continues to be debated and theorised, contemporary Asian art has helped to expand the field's possibilities, revealing Asia-based histories for contemporary art in the world and refuting an exclusively Euro-American paradigm for understanding art developments of the last two to three decades. Contemporary Asian art reveals how the world is made increasingly smaller and connected by the currents of globalisation, but nevertheless, unlike those perspectives encouraging a universalising frame of 'world art', contemporary art is increasingly acknowledged as a diversified field emerging from multiple contexts and differentiated histories, including those of Asia. Indeed, even as contemporary art forges new connective currents of 'global' art, it is propelled by the very diversity and difference of the world's contemporary artistic practices. As the authors of this volume have suggested, Asia is not merely a landscape of renewed regional connection in the twenty-first century, but a place from which we must recognise alternative perspectives on and of the world: for instance, John Clark's essay makes this point specifically with regard to the development of Asian art's history; Patrick Flores, via the Philippines, articulates critical Asian positionings embedded in complex national and cosmopolitan belongings; while HOFFIE's essay urges the specific contribution of contemporary Asian art practices to broader notions of the 'contemporary'.

3 On theorising contemporary art see, among others, Hans Belting, Patrick Flores, Terry Smith, Hal Foster, and the Asia Art Archive ('The And: An Expanded Questionnaire on the Contemporary', *Field Notes* 1 (June 2012), accessed 7 June 2012, <http://www.aaa.org.hk/FieldNotes/Details/1167>).

In the following, I reflect on new currents of contemporary Asian art and exhibition in the twenty-first century, highlighting the concerns of a new generation of Asian artists, new issues expressed via art, and new modes of art practice and exhibition with regards to Asia. In so doing, I draw from the various themes and arguments explored throughout the essays in this book as a means of reflecting on Asian art's histories, presents and futures.

Reflections on Contemporary Asian Art: Then and Now

The Malaysian artist Liew Kung Yu participated in the seminal international art exhibition, *Cities on the Move* (1997–1999).⁴ This travelling mega-exhibition presented some of Asia's rising contemporary artists alongside architects and filmmakers, seeking to show to largely European audiences the circumstances of Asia's dramatically changed societies and urban landscape under intense industrialisation and globalisation in the late twentieth century. Like other key exhibitions of this time, such as the New York-based Asia Society's *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions* (1996), it also sought to situate Asia's artistic landscape as part of contemporary currents in the world, moving beyond Western stereotypes of an unchanging, traditional and exotic Asia devoid of contemporary art.

Liew Kung Yu, *Pasti Boleh/Sure Can One* 1997; installation view, for *Cities on the Move* exhibition; installation with red carpet, trophies, photo booth; collage.

© Liew Kung Yu; image courtesy of the artist

⁴ *Cities on the Move* (1997) was curated by Hou Hanru and Hans-Ulrich Obrist and first presented in Vienna with different versions thereafter in London, Helsinki, Bordeaux, Copenhagen, New York, and Bangkok. See Hou Hanru & Hans-Ulrich Obrist, eds, *Cities on the Move*, exhibition catalogue (Ostfildern–Ruit: Gerd Hatje, 1997).

Liew's contributions to the exhibition reflected Malaysia's newly prosperous economic status in the mid-1990s as one of the rising 'Asian tiger' economies—a position that was famously argued by then Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad as resulting from unique 'Asian values'. Liew's installation *Pasti Boleh/ Sure You Can* (1997)⁵ comprised five photo-collage 'trophies' presented in neatly gift-wrapped glass vitrines, and reworked the symbols of Malaysia's economic strength and global status in the race to be 'bigger and better'. These trophies straddled a long stretch of red carpet and suggested the treasured monuments and achievements of the modern Malaysian nation. Among the icons of Malaysian modernity appropriated by Liew were the Kuala Lumpur Tower and the famed Petronas Twin Towers—the latter notable for being the world's tallest skyscrapers at the time of completion in 1999. But Liew's artwork was not necessarily an unequivocal celebration or veneration of Malaysian progress, since its garish vision of the newly urbanised Asia might also be read as a parody of all things shiny and novel: indeed, at the end of the red carpet, visitors were met with a monstrous if alluring idol of modernity at this symbolic altar of progress. Bearing the sign 'Vision 2020', it heralded the further progress of the Malaysian nation striving towards the future. Continuing to trace Malaysia's modernist 'progress', in 2009 Liew exhibited *Cadangan Cadangan Untuk Negaraku* (*Proposals For My Country*), at the Twin Towers' Galeri Petronas. The exhibition presented four large-scale photo-collages in Liew's typically garish and kitsch style, based on photographs of Malaysian icons, sculptures and monuments that he had sighted while touring the country. They convey vivid images of Malaysia's future landscapes as a spectacular if chaotic assemblage of modernity and history.

Liew Kung Yu, *Cadangan Cadangan Untuk Negaraku* (*Proposals for My Country*) series: *Metropolis Warisan* 2009; photo-collage.

© Liew Kung Yu; image courtesy of the artist

5 Liew also presented the performance *Selamat Datang to Malaysia* (1998–1999) with Lena Ang.

In 2012, 15 years after Liew's participation in *Cities on the Move*, artist Phuan Thai Meng offered another vision of Malaysian urbanisation, but one which is decidedly bleak and seemingly less ambivalent about the effect of economic 'progress' in Malaysia. His canvas *The Luring Of* //流水不腐, 户枢不蠹 (2012) depicts some of the massive concrete bridge structures that define Malaysia's cityscapes, but this is a deserted landscape, an urban dystopia, unpeopled and lifeless. Far from the busy, colourful kitsch of Liew's imagination, this is a grey, barren and ominous scene with apocalyptic overtones. A faded sign greets visitors with 'Selamat Datang' ('Welcome'), provocatively recalling a former thriving cityscape that is now decayed and abandoned. The enormous six-part panel also addresses formalist concerns of painting, with its ripped canvas spilling onto the gallery floor, reminding its audience of the connectedness of contemporary art to issues of everyday reality. Eventually the façade of the new must give over to the old, as surfaces fade, begin to crack and peel off to reveal the plain and often brutal realities of everyday life, mimicking the economic collapse, which affected many parts of Asia in the late 1990s, and which demanded a re-examination of the dreams and hopes for Asia's futures.

Liew and Phuan's works together reflect the twin contrasting images of Asia at the beginning of the twenty-first century which have recurred throughout this volume: on the one hand, Asia is characterised by glitzy spectacle, glittering skyscrapers, dazzling prosperity and all things new, the excitement and thrill of modernity, economic progress and development; on the other, by degeneration and regretful loss of the old and the past, the disappearance of traditions and former ways of life, the continuing political and economic struggles of everyday people and ongoing socio-economic disparity between the rich and the poor, the urban and rural classes. As with artists of the past, contemporary artists of this century provide us with critical reflection on the positive and negative aspects of living in present-day Asia. Increasingly artists are attentive to the antinomies of progress, and present these contradictions in their art as part of the everyday conditions of Asian experience in the twenty-first century. Often this is so as to highlight multiple and overlapping perspectives on Asia's stories—its presents and futures, its distinct and shared experiences—and to register Asia's modernity as an unfinished project of diverse possibilities and potentialities.

Phuan Thai Meng, Malaysia, b. 1974. *The Luring of []*. 流水不腐, 户枢不蠹
2012; synthetic polymer paint on canvas mounted on plywood; six panels:
300 x 996 cm (overall), 300 x 166 cm (each).

Acc. 2012.442a-f; purchased 2012; Queensland Art Gallery; Collection: Queensland Art Gallery; © Phuan Thai Meng; photograph: Natasha Harth, QAGOMA

The exquisite filmic works of Chinese artist Chen Qiulin, also discussed by Merewether in this volume, are marked by such contradictions: the pessimism and hope which characterises China today. Her art considers the effect of recent industrial progress in China on the everyday lives of individuals, their redefined relationship to changed environments, and their disappearing memories of place. The artist suffered the loss of her hometown of Wanxian when the nearby Yangtze river was flooded for the Three Gorges Dam project, constructed between 1994 and 2008. This incident, alongside other effects of urbanisation, has been powerful subject matter for her films including *River River* (2005) and *The Garden* (2007). In *Peach Blossom* (2009), Chen reflects on another kind of destruction adding to the already changed environment following the Three Gorges Dam project—that of the devastating earthquake which affected Sichuan in 2008. In a kind of fantastical, surrealistic self-ethnography the artist casts herself in the role of a bride and she and her surrogate groom wander amid the ruins of this derelict landscape, as if ghosts in a suspended future, out of time and place. In their dreamlike wandering they evoke the kinds of trauma that people endure following such natural disasters. In fact, the artist went to visit the Sichuan countryside in search of a location for her real-life wedding, but was met with a still severely dishevelled landscape a year on from the earthquakes, despite government reports suggesting the area's restoration and resumption of order. In the photographs, the wedding couple represent the hopes and dreams of the community that once peopled this landscape, longing for the reappearance of a familiar place they once called home, but their romantic attempts seem futile. Human interference, followed by environmental destruction, has rendered the landscape barely recognisable. Yet, as with much of Chen's art, hope and will are registered through the artist's intimate and

personal attempts at reconnection with this place and, always, there is some beauty to be revealed or made anew. As with Liew and Phuan, Chen illuminates the consequences of development, thus registering commonalities of experience across contemporary Asian societies and between the motivations of artists as they reflect present-day social concerns in Asia.

Chen Quilin, *Solidified Scenery* (from 桃花 *Peach Blossom*) 2009; 录像 video; 16 min, 37 sec; photograph, 154 x 124 cm.

Courtesy of the artist and Beam Contemporary Art, New York and London

Contemporary Asian Art: Asian and International Currents

Exhibiting Asian Art

As I intimated earlier in this epilogue, exhibitions of Asian art have been a major focus of this book, discussed especially in essays by Turner, Sambrani, Hoffie, Ho and Carroll. As Turner's essay discusses, besides country-focused

or thematic exhibitions, a burgeoning number of Asia-based art biennale and triennale exhibitions—major international recurring exhibitions⁶—sprouted across Asian urban centres in the 1990s, which prior to then were only to be found in Japan, India and Bangladesh (Tokyo Biennale, 1952–1990; Triennale India, 1968–; Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh, 1981). Many of these act as important sites for the exhibition of contemporary Asian art to international audiences, some even arguing their mutual influence in shaping the new Asian art markets. As the Biennial Foundation describes, 'Biennials have become, in the span of a few decades, one of the most vital and visible sites for the production, distribution, and public discourse around contemporary art.'⁷ The new Asia-based biennales have not only attracted international curatorial expertise, but also increasingly, the creativity of a new force of Asian curators, and new intra-Asian collaborations and networks.⁸

These globalised art exhibitions have been key driving factors in encouraging new kinds of contemporary art, with art and artists constantly on the move as part of developing global trajectories of art production, exhibition, and cultural exchange projects.⁹ Undoubtedly, globalisation has played an enormous part in shaping contemporary art everywhere.

New Asian Art Markets and Cultural Industries

Asian art has also acquired a spectacular new commercial value in global markets, arguably at such an accelerated and commanding pace as to now be a dominating influence on the kinds of art being produced and in shaping artists' careers. Part of this stems from the emergence of art markets that are based in Asia itself and which have developed as a result of new Asian prosperity among the upper middle classes. This increasingly commercially valuable art is registered especially in the unprecedented exhibitions of Asian art in major commercial galleries in the United Kingdom and Europe, such as the London-based Saatchi Gallery's *Indonesian Eye: Fantasies & Realities* (2011) and, in Paris, *Transfigurations: Indonesian Mythologies* (2011) at the Espace Culturel Louis

6 'Biennials and large-scale periodic exhibitions constitute a sizeable part of the production and distribution system of artistic products, an instrument of the economic strategy of the worldwide cultural industry, and a vehicle for the development of cities' (1st Athens Biennial, *Gallery Online*, 6 July 2007, accessed 26 October 2013, <http://gallery.esquare.it/press/index.asp?idp=79>).

7 Biennial Foundation, 'About', accessed 19 September 2013, <http://www.biennialfoundation.org/about/>. See also Asia Art Archive & Art Map Ltd, 'All You Want To Know About International Art Biennials', <http://www.aaa.org.hk/onlineprojects/bitri/en/didyouknow.aspx#fn1>

8 For instance, the Biennale Jogja XI – Equator # 1 (2011–2012), saw the meeting of Indian and Indonesian curators and artists, while the Japan Foundation exhibition *Under Construction* (2002–2003) was premised on intraregional collaborations between curators from China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand.

9 The antecedent of these exhibitions is the Venice Biennale, established in 1895, which has notably boosted its Asian representation since the 1990s, with national pavilions of China, Singapore, Indonesia, and Thailand being added in the early 2000s.

Vuitton. Famously, Japanese artist Takashi Murakami began his long-standing artistic alliance with luxury fashion house Louis Vuitton in 2002, collaborating on the design of their merchandise; and, as Clark describes in his essay in this volume, Sudarshan Shetty was commissioned by Louis Vuitton to produce *House of Shades* (2009/2010) for the Women's Fashion Week in Milan, installed at Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II. Ironically, the controversial installation by Xiao Lu, which prompted the closure of the famous *China Avant-Garde* exhibition at the National Art Gallery, Beijing, in 1989, forcing Chinese avant-garde art to go back underground, sold in 2005 at the China Guardian auction in Beijing for 2,310,000 yuan,¹⁰ indicating both the ideological and monetary force of the market in giving new value to Asian art.

The strength of Asia's art industries is most obvious in Hong Kong's new status as the site for one of the world's leading commercial art fairs, featuring modern and contemporary art from all over the world. After the success of the Hong Kong International Art Fair, launched in 2007, the fair was taken over by the longer standing 'premier' international art fair, Art Basel. For the inaugural Art Basel in Hong Kong in 2013, '53 per cent of the 245 galleries on show [were] from Asia and the Asia-Pacific.'¹¹ According to the organisers, this 'confirm[s] Art Basel's desire to build a cultural bridge between the long-established Western artworld and the vibrant new scenes of the entire [Asian and Asia-Pacific] region.'¹² Meanwhile, the former Singapore Art Fair was surpassed by newer commercial initiatives such as Art Stage Singapore (est. 2010, with its first show in 2011)¹³ focusing on Asian art, and especially South-East Asian art, and the Affordable Art Fair that takes place in both Hong Kong (since 2013) and Singapore (since 2010) and other major cities around the world. Reflecting the renewed economic importance of India, the India Art Summit was established in 2008—and rebranded in 2012 as the India Art Fair—to meet the world's interest in modern and contemporary Indian art but also includes international art. Coinciding with the India Art Summit 2011, the Lisson Gallery, representing world-renowned sculptor Anish Kapoor, presented the artist's first exhibition in India—the self-titled *Anish Kapoor* (2010–2011)—nearly 40 years after the artist's departure to England from India, his country of birth. Evidently, these new sites of commercial exchange across Asia have created connections within the region, and between the region and global art market networks.

10 See Payal Uttam, 'A Shot in the Dark', *Prestige Hong Kong*, 18 January 2013, accessed 26 October 2013, <http://prestigehongkong.com/2013/01/shot-dark>.

11 'Magnus Renfrew, Art Basel HK Director', *Australian*, 3 May 2013, accessed 24 June 2013, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/executive-living/luxury/magnus-renfrew-art-basel-hk-director/story-e6frg8io-1226631745312>.

12 Art Basel, 'About Art Basel: Our History', accessed 24 June 2013, <https://www.artbasel.com/en/About-Art-Basel/History>.

13 The Founder & Fair Director of Art Stage Singapore, Lorenzo Rudolf, was director of Art Basel (1991–2000) and launched *ShContemporary* in Shanghai in 2007, mainland China's first international art fair.

Independent and Localised Engagements

Alongside the commercial growth of Asian art, a phenomenal array of new art galleries and museums has been established across Asia. These include commercial spaces, state-supported projects, private initiatives, artist-run initiatives and independent projects. The government-supported M+ museum in Hong Kong, as Ho discussed in his essay in this volume, seeks to be a centre for the collection and exhibition of 'local' art (see Ho, this volume); the Gillman Barracks in Singapore serves as a contemporary art hub connecting diverse art galleries and a Centre for Contemporary Art; and the National Art Gallery Singapore as a centre for modern South-East Asian art. Alongside these larger state-supported projects, the presence of smaller independent or 'alternative' initiatives has been instrumental in nurturing contemporary Asian art, a point also emphasised by Ho. This was especially so in the 1990s when, throughout Asia, there was far less state-supported infrastructure or even interest in contemporary art.¹⁴ Together these initiatives form a dynamic intra-regional network for alternative art practices across Asia that are concurrently embedded within transregional, global art networks.¹⁵ While such independent initiatives are often short-lived or shift in their 'alternative' value, the relative longevity of these in the Asian context is testimony to their vital part in the contemporary art scene.

Despite the force of the art market, or perhaps because of its influence, a new generation of artists is embedding itself in community-based art activities, which are often removed from commercial imperatives. This kind of art, typically connecting with and engaging everyday communities as participants and creative agents in the art-making process, resonates with the 'relational', 'participatory' or 'collaborative' art engagements variously theorised and famously debated in art circles by Nicolas Bourriaud, Claire Bishop, Grant Kester and others (see also Maravillas, this volume). While these art historical debates erupted around the early 2000s, following publication of Bourriaud's 1998 *Esthétique relationnelle* (*Relational Aesthetics*),¹⁶ as early as 1993, artist FX Harsono

14 Prominent 'alternatives', past and present, include Cemeti Art House (Yogyakarta) and Ruangrupa (Jakarta); 798 Art District and Long March (Beijing), Vitamin Creative Space (Guangzhou); 1a space and Para Site (Hong Kong); Surrounded by Water, Big Sky Mind and Green Papaya (Manila); Salon Natasha and Blue Space (Ho Chi Minh); The Artists' Village and the Substation (Singapore); commandN (Tokyo); About Studio / About Café (Bangkok); The Land Foundation (Chiang Mai); Alternative Space Loop (Seoul); Khoj (Delhi), Open Circle (Mumbai); and Theertha (Colombo), alongside newer spaces and collectives such as SA SA BASSAC (Phnom Penh) and Sàn Art (Ho Chi Minh).

15 The Aar-Paar project beginning in 2002, involving the 'cross-border' exchange and exhibition of artworks between Indian and Pakistani artists, demonstrates the capacity of such independent projects to make political interventions and implement social change by negotiating national borders and connecting people across physical and ideological constraints.

16 See Nicolas Bourriaud, *Esthétique relationnelle* (*Relational Aesthetics*) (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2002 (1998)). The term 'relational aesthetics', however, was first used in Bourriaud's 1996 catalogue for the exhibition *Traffic* at the CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, France.

suggested the particular relevance of a socially engaged art practice within the Indonesian context: 'The resulting art installation is known as participative art. In this type of art, the participation of the public is vital.'¹⁷ These types of performative, community-engaged, participatory practices are witnessed in the work of other contemporary South-East Asian artists as early as the 1960s and 1970s—for instance, the Conceptual art forms signalled by Merewether in this volume—and some have argued their distinctive affinities to traditional South-East Asian cultural practices.¹⁸ The turn to community via contemporary art is particularly pertinent in the twenty-first century as contemporary art becomes a more familiar communicative tool and popularised cultural practice in Asian societies. Whereas prior to the 2000s the communities for contemporary art in Asia arguably targeted more elitist and art-specific audiences, the last decade has witnessed an increased mainstreaming of contemporary art in public spaces.

FX Harsono, *Writing In the Rain* 2011; single-channel video performance.

© FX Harsono; image courtesy of the artist

17 FX Harsono, 'The Installation as the Language of Social Concern', in *The First Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art. Identity, Tradition and Change: Contemporary Art of the Asia Pacific Region* (QAG, Queensland Cultural Centre, South Bank, Brisbane, 17–20 September 1993); unpublished conference papers & list of attendees; Queensland Art Gallery et al. (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 1993).

18 See Raymundo R. Albano, 'Installations: A Case for Hangings', in *ASEAN Art Exhibition: Third ASEAN Exhibition of Painting and Photography 1984*, ed. ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information (Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1984); Julie Ewington, 'Five Elements: An Abbreviated Account of Installation Art in South-East Asia', *ART and AsiaPacific* 2, no. 1 (1995): 108–15.

Elly Kent, *Nee (Born As)* ongoing participatory project January 2012 – ; (top) participants stitching and conversing at 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, 18 February 2012; (bottom): the physical artefact of the first conversation/stitching session held in the artist's garage, 26 January 2012.

Photography: Elly Kent; image courtesy of the artist

Between 2010 and 2013, Harsono participated in the *Edge of Elsewhere* exhibition project (a curatorial collaboration between the Campbelltown Arts Centre and 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art), which invited Asian and Pacific contemporary artists to engage with Sydney's everyday suburban communities in forms of community-engaged art.¹⁹ Harsono initiated a public curatorium entitled *In Memory of a Name*, inviting participants to reflect on the memorialisation of names.²⁰ The project took inspiration from his previous artwork *Rewriting the Erased* (2009), a film depicting Harsono repeatedly inscribing his original Chinese name, responding to its erasure under the Suharto regime when Indonesians of Chinese descent were forced by government decree to adopt 'Indonesian' names. This action was also demonstrated in his subsequent film-performance *Writing in the Rain* (2011). Australian artist Elly Kent, a participant in Harsono's curatorium, in turn developed her own participatory conversation project: *Née (Born As)* invited participants to tell and stitch the stories of their names—names 'left behind, names "embraced"'—²¹—registering the social, material and affective significance of art to illuminate forgotten histories and to communicate narratives of shared human experience between people across cultures.

Projects such as *Edge of Elsewhere* can be situated within the familiar frame of international exhibition projects which seek dialogue between cultures. Unlike traditional nation state-to-nation state exchanges or collaborations emphasising the display of one culture to another, however, a new stream of collaborative projects seeks to create more experimental and flexible platforms for art's production and exhibition *within* and *by* localised communities and emphasise art's possibilities for everyday, grounded community engagement. This return to community and local concerns is a means of redressing the oversights of global and regional views in cross-cultural projects where a localised basis can afford different perspectives. *Edge of Elsewhere* foregrounded the value of the localised community in representing suburban community perspectives on globalisation's massive cultural transformation affecting people and major cities in all parts of the world. This intersection of the local, national and global demonstrates 'important new models for placing communities at the centre of contemporary art development ...',²² which in turn illuminate the everyday realities and cultural entanglements of Asia's diasporas, migratory flows and their legacies in all parts of the world. As mentioned at the Introduction (Part 2) and as Lo discusses in her essay in this volume, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art²³ has established

19 *Edge of Elsewhere* was supported by the Australia Council for the Arts and the NSW Government.

20 See the 'Edge of Elsewhere' blog, <http://edgeofelsewhere.wordpress.com/category/fx-harsono-in-memory-of-a-name/> (accessed 23 September 2013).

21 Elly Kent, *Née (Born As)*, accessed 26 October 2013, <http://ellydotkent.blogspot.com.au/p/nee-born-as.html>.

22 Kon Gouriots & Frank Panucci, 'Creative Adaption and Continuing Conversations ...', *Artlink* 3, no. 1 (2011): 53.

23 The '4A' alliance (the Asian Australian Artists' Association) was established in 1996 as a non-profit organisation to support the differently positioned cultural concerns and challenges of multi-disciplinary

an important profile in Australia, but also Asia, as a significant independent art space for the development of contemporary art at the intersection of Asian, Australian and Asian–Australian concerns. It has undertaken art projects in Australia and Asia that build experimental and collaborative contemporary art platforms between Asian and Australian artists and audiences. Echoing Lo's hopes for new 'Australian' narratives for engaging with 'Asia', 4A's mappings of contemporary art, I suggest, bring complexity to otherwise simplistic identitarian notions of art, challenging what is meant by contemporary 'Asian', 'Australian', and 'Asian–Australian' art.

Transnational Vectors, Responding to the World

The art-focused essays by Meskimmon, Maravillas, and Lo in this volume point to contemporary Asian art practices that are deeply informed by specific issues of localised meaning, but which at the same time respond to and resonate with transnational issues and audiences. The focus of Wong Hoy Cheong's art has over the last few decades constantly shifted between local concerns of Malaysia and South-East Asia, and issues of transnational, global relevance, including the significance of Islamic identifications around the world following the September 11 terrorism attacks of 2001, and the subjecthood of contemporary migrants and refugees in a world of intensified globalisation and continuing global conflict. What remains an ongoing thread in Wong's practice is his illumination of power struggles that are inherent to identity formation, whether in Malaysian or wider global contexts. In so doing, he reveals themes of human connectedness across cultures reflecting the multi-layered cultural positioning of people. For the Australia–Malaysia collaboration, *The Independence Project*²⁴ (Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne and Galeri Petronas, Kuala Lumpur) Wong offered a work that, at first glance, bore no relationship to Australia–Malaysia cultural crossings. He presented his film *Aman Sulukule Canim Sulukule (Oh Sulukule Darling Sulukule)* (2007), first shown at the *10th Istanbul Biennial*, the result of his time working with children of the Roma community of the Sulukule quarter in Istanbul, Turkey. By positioning this work as part of *The Independence Project*, Wong also set up a deliberate cultural 'transfer' of sorts, situating the Australia–Malaysia collaboration in the 'third space' of Turkey, thereby reinforcing issues of universal, transnational human concern and connection. By bringing disjunctive regions into proximate dialogue on seemingly distant global concerns, Wong's projects rather reveal the intersection and adjacencies of local

Australian artists of Asian ethnic heritage, then at the margins of a largely Anglo-centric Australian arts scene. The independent art space now known as 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art developed from the earlier organisation. See 'About 4a', accessed 8 October 2013, <http://www.4a.com.au/about-4a/>.

24 *The Independence Project* was the first in a series of Australia–Asia cultural exchange projects beginning in 2007, between Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne, and independent art spaces in Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Beijing and Seoul.

and global influences, evincing possibilities for more fluid imaginations of Asia and Asian networks of transnational, cosmopolitan belonging. He also registers a particular trait of contemporary art at the turn of the twentieth century in evoking local issues that are contingent to global currents.

Wong Hoy Cheong, *Aman Sulukule Canim Sulukule (Oh Sulukule Darling Sulukule)* 2007 (video still); 13 min, 52 sec, PAL (in Turkish with English subtitles). Video installation produced with the Roma community of Sulukule, Istanbul, Turkey, for the 10th Istanbul Biennale, 2007.

© Wong Hoy Cheong; image courtesy of the artist

Similarly, India-born artist N.S. Harsha draws us into the entangled worlds of people everywhere, their struggles and injustices, their daily lives, as well as their ambitions and hopes. Best known for his intricate figurative works evoking the miniature-painting tradition, Harsha's art conveys the shared stories of the masses, but concurrently focuses on individual lives. For instance, his painting *Mass Marriage* (2003) reflects such tendencies, exploring the ritual of marriage, especially its new complexities and entanglements across contemporary cultural contexts worldwide. Through the artist's use of repetition, a seemingly infinite number of couples are depicted in multiple linear patterns, techniques that are commonly employed across the artist's oeuvre to reinforce themes of

human connection across spatial and temporal zones. Harsha's installations and community-based collaborations engage similar themes and modes, including in his workshops with children in India, such as *Our Bridge* (2011), which invited children to draw their 'dream village' onto 277 pillars of the bridge between Bodh Gaya and Sujata Village in southern Bihar, and the outdoor installation *Ambitions and Dreams* (2005) in Tumkur, in which long, connective shadows were cast in the spaces between children dotting the landscape. The installation *Leftovers* (2008), presented in Tokyo, was inspired by the elaborate and hyper-real plastic food replicas displayed in the windows of Japanese restaurants. Harsha's installation, however, replicated traditional Indian meals—of curry, rice and beans served on a banana leaf. The meals were laid out on the floor, the scene suggestive of the aftermath of a mass banquet, where everyone has been served the same meal, but experienced it uniquely, with different 'leftovers' at the meal's end. Alongside each 'meal', lay a white mat imprinted with the imagined diner's feet, a further individual trace left behind. In this linking of Japanese and Indian cultures, the artist suggests the human commonalities and differences in the aesthetic and ritual patterns of food consumption, but also highlights both individual and shared responsibility in global consumption and waste.

N.S. Harsha, *Ambitions and Dreams* 2005; cloth pasted on rock, size of each shadow 6m. Community project designed for TVS School, Tumkur, India.

© N.S. Harsha; image courtesy of the artist; photograph: Sachidananda K.J.

And the Future?

How do we think through the futures of contemporary Asian art? If Asian art at present shows general tendencies to the past, uncovering hidden histories and remembering forgotten stories, the essays in this volume suggest that it often does so as a means of understanding the present and to carve a trajectory for the future.

Contemporary artists point to shared future concerns, especially via tropes of memory, time and history. They invoke common issues of life and death, youth and ageing populations, the surreal experience of rapid development, and consequences for the future. They also register personal and individual stories of Asian experience, especially via intergenerational change and continuities: Miwa Yanagi's iconic photographic series *My Grandmothers* of the early 2000s (see first figure, this essay) captures the self-perceptions of young Japanese women asked to imagine themselves in 50 years' time; Fiona Tan's film *Cloud Island* (2010) (see figure, Introduction Part 2) portrays the quiet, slow-paced life of a diminishing and ageing community on Inujima, an island in Japan's Seto Inland Sea; in Jun Yang's film *Seoul Fiction* (2010) we accompany an elderly couple taking a bus trip from a rural area to Seoul, experiencing their conflict and confusion in a surreal journey through space and time; in its intimate portrayal of everyday life in suburban Taiwan, Yuan Goang-Ming's three-channel video, *Disappearing Landscape—Passing II* (2011), suggests the passing of time, cycles of life, and intergenerational connections of human experience.

Alongside such artistically driven projects mapping the present and the future are growing initiatives to document and archive contemporary Asian art, given the breadth and richness of material now available, over two decades after its international emergence. Since 2000, the Hong Kong-based Asia Art Archive (AAA) (see figure, Introduction Part 2), a private, non-profit organisation, has been a pioneering force in the collection and generation of physical and online resources on modern and contemporary Asian art, guided by a critical, self-reflexive and open approach to archiving the still evolving field of 'contemporary art'. Significant digitisation projects undertaken by the AAA include 'Another Life: The Digitised Personal Archive of Geeta Kapur and Vivan Sundaram'; the Salon Natasha archive (documenting Vietnamese art since 1990); 'The Chabet Archive: Covering Fifty Years of the Artist's Materials' (tracing the Filipino artist Roberto Chabet's personal archives and larger influence); and a number of China-focused archives including 'Materials of the Future: Documenting Contemporary Chinese Art from 1980–1990'.²⁵ Other important archives include

²⁵ See Asia Art Archive, 'Special Collections', accessed 23 September 2013, <http://www.aaa.org.hk/Collection/SpecialCollections>.

the Australian Centre of Asia Pacific Art at the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA),²⁶ the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum (FAAM) research library, and a growing number of country-based archives, such as the Indonesia Visual Art Archive (IVAA, Yogyakarta, formerly Cemeti Art Foundation, est. 1995) and the Cambodian Visual Art Archive (at the Phnom Penh based art space SA SA BASSAC, est. 2011). The politics of archiving—which art and artists should be collected and documented, and on what grounds—are important topics for the critical development of such archives, crucial to the question of Asian art's futures and its canonical histories.

Critical scholarship about Asian art has challenges in keeping pace with the changes in Asia and developments in art. Nevertheless, significant critical dialogue, inquiry, documentation, and historicisation of contemporary Asian art occurred during the 1990s and earlier via the important work of key art historians, curators, institutions, organisations and journals for instance, forming pioneering work which must be built upon. As essays in this volume by Turner, Clark, Sambrani and Ho emphasise, there continues to be a widening field of art historical work that takes into account the important modern and contemporary art histories of Asia and which, up until recently, was overshadowed by hegemonic Western art histories.²⁷

Academic work and other scholarly enquiry regarding Asian art is certainly being increasingly pursued, especially as a gradual accumulation of Asian art documentation now demands critical reflection. Moreover, the historical lack of public resources and support to develop art history departments and professional arts and culture training programs in many parts of Asia²⁸ is being challenged at the beginning of the twenty-first century, via a mounting desire across the region to match the rapid growth in the cultural industry sector with locally based knowledge and expertise (see Ho, this volume). Exhibitions have themselves been a significant site for the generation of critical knowledge and documentation about contemporary Asian art. Indeed the educative and critical purpose of exhibitions—including their catalogue essays, related symposia and conferences and reviews—has been instrumental in the development of critical dialogues for the field of Asian art.²⁹ Art writing often develops in

26 For *The Seventh Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* (2012–2013), QAGOMA presented 'The 20-Year Archive' project, inviting artists to engage with the archives of QAGOMA and marking the APT's 20-year anniversary.

27 See also John Clark, ed., *Modernity in Asian Art* (Sydney: Wild Peony, 1993); and Caroline Turner, ed., *Tradition and Change: Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1993).

28 See T.K. Sabapathy, *Road to Nowhere: The Quick Rise and the Long Fall of Art History in Singapore* (Singapore: The Art Gallery at the National Institute of Education, 2010).

29 In this regard the Asia Art Archive organised the symposia 'Sites of Construction: Exhibitions and the Making of Recent Art History in Asia', 21–23 October 2013, see <http://www.aaa.org.hk/Programme/Details/409>.

tandem with art exhibitions. Notably, the task of writing about Asian art is often one undertaken by those who also curate Asian art or are practitioners of it, connecting art practice, curatorship and art writing.³⁰

One of the key questions for Asia now is how to encourage creativity within society at large. As a number of Asian governments establish new cultural initiatives, it has been argued that a critical education is lacking not only for the development of art and other creative expertise within Asia itself,³¹ but also for the development of creative minds that are able to contribute to rapidly changing societies via new ways of creative thinking and solutions. Related to this, the influence of commercial imperatives has led to serious concerns in some sectors about the future of contemporary Asian art as having less to do with creative integrity and urgent social issues and instead concerned with the demands of commerce and fashion.³²

Reflecting on the changing conditions of 'creativity' through the phases of industrial to post-industrialisation, cultural theorist Sarat Maharaj has argued for a necessary reconfiguring of 'creativity' in order to reclaim its generative potential. Maharaj contends that 'as the "conditions of creativity" undergo change today, they have increasing bearing on what we consider as "work"—how we define labour, knowledge, creativity and art practice.'³³ Recognising the newly institutionalised and instrumentalised relationship of art to the assembly line growth of the 'knowledge' and 'cultural' industries in advanced capitalist societies, he poses the question, 'In the "creativity pandemic" where almost all activities are increasingly revamped as "creative" is anything actually so?'.³⁴ As Maharaj also reminds, not everything in the universe is wrapped up and regulated. Despite the machine rhythms of industrialisation and the regulated strictures of capitalist economies, creativity keeps doors open.³⁵

The conceptual art of Pak Sheung Chuen involves subtle interventions in Hong Kong's everyday urban reality. Pak's performative-piece *Waiting for everyone to fall asleep* (2006) involved the artist's contemplation of everyday life within a 13-storey apartment complex at Hong Kong's Sham Shui Po area. There, the artist stood outside from 10.38 pm until just past 5 am, recording the visual play

30 See Patrick Flores, *Past Peripheral: Curation in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: NUS Museum, National University of Singapore, 2008).

31 Sabapathy, *Road to Nowhere*.

32 Mella Jaarsma and Nindityo Adipurnomo, 'The Point: What Are We Waiting For?', *ArtAsiaPacific* 81 (Nov/Dec 2012): 47.

33 Sarat Maharaj, 'Know-How and No-How: Stopgap Notes on "Method" in Visual Art as Knowledge Production', *Art & Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 9, accessed 24 June 2013, <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n2/pdfs/maharaj.pdf>.

34 Sarat Maharaj, 'Know How & No How: Thinking Through "Art as Knowledge Production" in a Time of "Creativity Cholera"' (keynote address at the 5th Auckland Triennial, 10 May 2013).

35 Sarat Maharaj, 'Sounding Asia Pandemonium' (Inaugural Burger Collection Keynote Lecture, Asia Art Archive Backroom Conversations, Hong Kong International Art Fair, 26 May 2011).

of lit and unlit windows patterned across the face of the building at various times throughout the night, as tenants gradually turned off their room lights and presumably went to sleep. The concrete and glass of an ordinary apartment complex became infused with humanity as Pak took note of the persons living within, humanising the city and recognising beauty in the seemingly impersonalised nightscape of Hong Kong's concrete jungle. These are the hidden social relationships or correspondences of community life, which may otherwise go unnoticed, subtly disappearing from consciousness as people become preoccupied with the meta-realities and rhythms of rapid social change in Asian mega-cities. Even as Hong Kong represents a cultural space of shifting coordinates, transforming subjectivities and uncertain futures in the new century, especially in relation to China, Pak reminds us of the inter-subjective connections and creative possibilities of the present in Hong Kong's reality of here and now. He harnesses the political, aesthetic and affective potential of the everyday so as to reimagine and resensitise us to the extraordinary within seemingly ordinary experiences of human observation, encounter and connectedness.

Cao Fei, *Whose Utopia* 2006; video; 20 min.

Courtesy the artist and Vitamin Creative Space 2013

In his essay in this volume, Merewether points to what art does in society in terms of documenting and creating new future possibilities. It is in this vein that artist Cao Fei explores the possibility for the extraordinary within everyday life. Interested in the different worlds of reality and fiction, her art often reflects themes of the future, of utopias, of make believe and fantasy, of the surreal reality of contemporary urban life in China. In her video, *Cosplayers* (2004), (see Figure, Introduction Part 2) the artist draws attention to China's 'cosplay' scene in which participants carry out 'costumed play' representing fictional Japanese anime characters who battle each other and then return home to the routine of everyday life. For her later video *Whose Utopia* (2006–2007), filmed at an Osram lighting company factory in China's Pearl River Delta region, the artist invited the company's factory workers—emigrants from inland China—to share their aspirations and hopes for the future. She filmed them acting out their dream roles within the factory space, the workers interrupting the usual rhythms of factory life to momentarily perform the roles of, for instance, rock musicians, break dancers and ballerinas. Here, imagining the possibilities of the future is not the stuff of mere fantasy and unattainable utopias; it is given actual form in the space of everyday life in contemporary Asia, where the 'future is not a dream', but made real in the present. In foregrounding these connected worlds of the real and the possible, Cao also offers critical visions about the changed realities of Asia, the differently positioned, but shared utopias of Asian people—be they the new urban working class or upper middle class—as they navigate the social and political challenges of the present, recalling their individual and collective dreams and hopes for the future in a rapidly changing Asia.

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