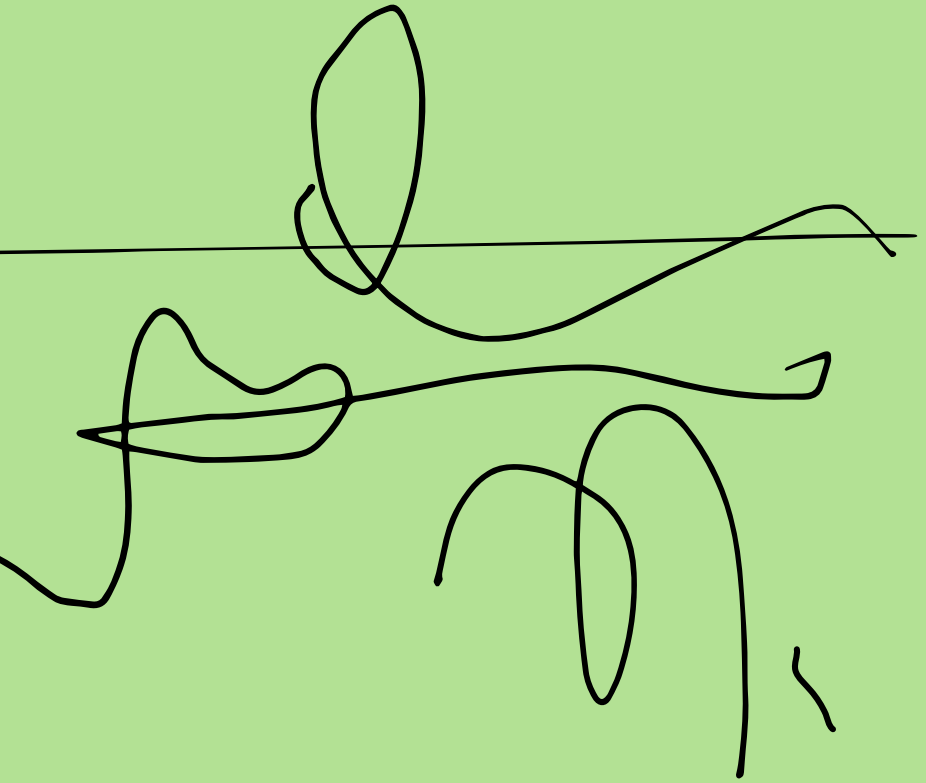


承受著自身的姿態

My Body Holds Its Shape



Summer 2020

En

My Body Holds Its Shape

The space becomes a living body from the first hour to the last.

A twelve-metre-long steel needle, piercing through the air, points towards the temporary opening of the fire escape to the outside world. This view that was not there before sits in this exhibition space, built as a printing house in 1900 and later served to confine female inmates. In the space's latest incarnation—a contemporary art centre for two years and counting—the white cavity walls form the main support and background for artworks, as it is assumed traditionally that art needs walls. This time, the gallery's "white cube" is cut out, while light and sound leak in through the window, breathing in the same sky as one does outside in the Prison Yard. Part of Thea Djordjadze's new installation, this endeavour to expand existing enclosures and rules lies at the heart of this exhibition—looking in and out of the box, weighing the limits, walking on both sides.

In the metaphorical shape of a body, the exhibition conceives of I and us as individuals, things, beings, collectives, and countries; it thinks through how eagerly we seek to keep our world under control and our future intact. In doing so, we are immersed in everyday practices, often unconsciously: ways of manoeuvring in the world, ways that authority is exercised over others.

This exhibition of five artists circles around the expansion of limits and constraints, working through how they could serve as an artistic framework rather than as objects of antagonism. This ranges from sorting, editing, and re-organising materials on the exhibition floor to the tirelessly polished mirror sculpture that embeds stories of hardship from Laotian farming communities. One work melts the ice between words and the imagination, rendering both fluid and vivid; another work blends the mind states of wakefulness and dream time. Experimenting with concepts of "sculpture", the artworks are ways of exploring our multifaceted facts and ecologies, with unimposing gestures and an insistent effort in getting to the bottom of things.

Constraints often imply boundaries; they mark out a field of warning signs, of where we ought not go near. When we look upon this zone of intimidation, should we think of how fearful it is to look down from the skies, or merely enjoy the dizzying vertigo? Such distances from the earth to the atmosphere are translated through weavers' palms in Jason Dodge's works in the *Above the Weather* series, making the unimaginable physical and tender. *Darkness Falls...* portrays an event at a family villa at the end of Mang Kung Wo Road in Sai Kung, Hong Kong, sinking into moments of darkness within the forest—a situation that can only be visualised by the large pile of lighting equipment laid out on the floor of the exhibition. Or another sign: the breathing bodies of dancers in Eisa Jocson's new work *Zoo*—a work in progress, and a study of the labouring gestures of exploited Philippine migrant workers—in conjunction with new materials gathered from the lives of displaced animals and beings, as some of the movements are transformed by shape-shifting dancers, a work of theatre-in-becoming. Constraints are walks of awakening and dreaming with Tap Chan, whose kinetic sculptures spin at the speed of night as a memento of where reality is anchored. Pratchaya Phinthong's alchemy brings bomb shells from polluted farmlands in Laos, transforming nightmarish materials into screws for practical support and a standing sculpture with two sides—a peaceful mirror surface and melted-down chaos.

Within the body of this exhibition, no walls or fixtures are added; this is one of the principal premises. The artworks rely on each other and yet are autonomous on their own. The exhibition comes alive when visitors flow in, when dancers activate moments with routines and off-track improvisations, practising to perfection until the very last hour, holding it in place.

Known for her installation-based practice and *in situ* works, Thea Djordjadze's distinctive visual language evolves through locations, materials, memories, and literary influences. Trained as a painter in Tbilisi from the late 80s to the early 90s, the artist left her home country in 1993 to study in Amsterdam and later in Düsseldorf, where she developed a range of experimental works under the artist-professors Rosemarie Trockel and Dieter Krieg.

Djordjadze's work sutures the decay of modernity with reflections on our contemporaneity. Her sculptural works display a certain poise and an alluring postmodernist *je-ne-sais-quoi*; the materials and spatial dialogue lie beyond simple categorisation. This perhaps has to do with the artist's consummate familiarity with the contemporary West while constantly revisiting the traditions and vernaculars of the East.

For this exhibition, the artist creates the new installations *.pullherawaypull.* and *Needle*, and thinks through existing enclosures—architecturally with the cavity walls, designed as the supporting background for artworks, as traditionally assumed. This main structure renewed the historical site as a place of art and also curtained off the features of the past. Here, *.pullherawaypull.* subtly changes the aura of the space, inserting a view of the outside into this space of

“confinement” (for women prisoners in the past and artworks in the present). The art indoors encounters the outside, infusing the space with a new vitality—the changing light of the day from dawn to dusk, casting shadows and movements into the exhibition.

Many of Djordjadze's works are conceived around movements; some recent works are sculpted from steel sheets—heated, then blended and stretched by the artist herself. One can sense her body's movement in the process: the jut of an elbow, the stretch of an arm, a dance move in her studio. When installed on location, the works assemble a landscape guiding one's path: the artist envisions spaces where she scrupulously composes her works.

Supporting structures have long fascinated Djordjadze. In any display setting, artefacts and objects cannot be detached from their support; in her work, the fragility of such relations and structures is explicit. *Untitled*, a vitrine-sculpture inspired by the set design of a late-1950s exhibition in Tbilisi, is realised with residual construction materials salvaged by the artist in Venice. The volume appearing miraculously on its thick legs is, in this new environment, a mesh structure—which recalls the old prison structure and now hosts photographs of Pratchaya Phinthong, peering towards the sky through what lays on the ground.

Thea Djordjadze

(b. 1971 Tbilisi, Georgia; based in Berlin)

.pullherawaypull., 2020
Steel, fire-tempered glass,
6000 × 2400 × 121 cm

Needle, 2020
Steel, 1200 × ø 6 cm

Commissioned by Tai Kwun Contemporary

Untitled, 2014
Steel, set of two, each 2418 × 4050 × 43 cm

Trying to balance on one hand, do not forget the center, 2010
Steel, paint, 67 × 135 × 28 cm

His and My Own Measures, 2016/2019
Steel, brass, 67 × 186 × 40 cm

His and My Own Measures, 2017/2019
Steel, 76.3 × 248.4 × 31 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Sprüth Magers

Pratchaya Phinthong is a conceptual artist based in Bangkok. His practice explores how matter, situations, systems and economies could be fluid and mutable.

The newly commissioned work *Fork* is a sculpture made of melted lead from dismantled bombs on farmlands in Laos, which suffered severely from wars in the area. *Fork* is the continuation of the *Spoon* project (2019), with the same material also made into screws to support the artworks in this exhibition. The four photographs, *Untitled* (2009), hosted in the sculpture of Thea Djordjadze, document fragments of meteorites placed in the location where they fell from the sky. Both the celestial movements and the hazardous metal from conflicts share a “reflective” quality.

Who will guard the guards themselves? (2015) is a photograph of a closed 24-hour convenience store on a deserted street in

Bangkok, taken during the military coup in May 2014. A surveillance video was recorded when the work was first exhibited in Thailand, and now installed at the entrance of the exhibition. This double surveillance poses questions about the mechanism of control: who should be responsible for looking over the power of authorities and ensure such power is not abused?

As with many works of Phinthong, which are rooted in his observations of street markets and everyday life, *Social Sculpture Project 05* captures a unique self-invented economy—two men volunteering to occupy a parking lot, trading their dismissal from the space with the drivers in need. For the artist, such “ordinary” and “mundane” things in life “have been there for years, and there is life around them, like rivers shaping the earth.”

Pratchaya Phinthong

(b. 1974, Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand)

Fork, 2020

Polished lead and tin, 60 × 170 × 1.5 cm

Commissioned by Tai Kwun Contemporary

Who will guard the guards themselves?

2015

Lightbox, duratrans and steel frame,
161 × 200 × 9 cm

Untitled, 2009

Four colour photographs, lambda print,
42.5 × 55.5 cm

Social Sculpture Project 05, 2017

Set of two colour polaroids,
33.5 × 57.5 × 2.4 cm

Courtesy of the artist and gb agency, Paris

(b. 1969, Newton, USA; based in Berlin)

In Hong Kong, St. James Creation produced several weavings, the combined length of the yarn that was woven, equals the distance from the earth to above the weather. The weavers were: Au Ching Ki Tina, Chan Chor Tung Francesca, Lai Kin Sang, Lam Yuk Ying, Leung Ming Hong, Ng Kwok Fai, Ng Sze Ki, Poon Ka Yan Fiona, Tang Kar Po, To See Wai, Wong Wai Han, Wong Wai Ngun, Yip King Ting Kinki.

In Liuyang, China, Tan Zhixiang wove Jute fiber thread the distance from the earth to above the weather, the fabric he wove was dyed the color of the night time sky.

Darkness falls on the house at the end of Mang Kung Wo Road, in Hong Kong.

Commissioned by Tai Kwun Contemporary

Jason Dodge

The Berlin-based artist Jason Dodge's artistic practice has something of a subtle, deft touch which flirts with both the familiar and the uncanny. Familiar things are transplanted to the exhibition space in simple-looking interventions that yield evocative, enigmatic associations and allegories that belie the apparent simplicity. The economy of Dodge's visual and literal language opens up a space for meaning to be read in, sustaining a poetic narrative that offers surprising tales and untold stories.

An important part of these works are the titles. The artist sparks the viewer's imagination all the while highlighting the significance of the process in his art. With *In Hong Kong, St. James Creation produced several weavings ...* and *In Liuyang, China, Tan Zhixiang wove Jute fiber thread...*, the titles describe the instructions given to the weavers. In the former case, the weavers from St. James Creation are people with intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorders, their bright and vivid choice of colour reflecting their extraordinary imagination (moreover due to the situation

with COVID-19, staff members there also helped with the weaving since the centre was closed for an extended period).

In Darkness falls on the house at the end of Mang Kung Wo Road, in Hong Kong, the title hints at the condition: all the lights were taken from a family house in Sai Kung and transferred here, the objects thus transformed into symbols that disclose allegorical and other readings. Themes such as displacement and transience thus subtly and magically emerge.

One very latest work will be included in the exhibition and excluded when visitors come into the space, as the process of its making—the story—unfolds through the duration of the exhibition, existing as word of mouth. The work consists of six knives, each in the form of the six steps of making a functional knife, representing the progress leading to a cut. As the artist intends, the work offers up a story rather than a physical object, its invisibility providing the possibility for everyone involved in the exhibition to take part.

(b. 1986, Manila, the Philippines)

Zoo, 2020

Durational performance

Commissioned by Tai Kwun Contemporary

Manila collaborators and performers:
Bunny Cadag, Cathrine Go, Russ Ligtas,
Joshua Serafin

Hong Kong collaborators and performers:
Cox Sylvie Nadine, Yang Hao, Yeung Hei
Yan Harriet

Eisa Jocson

A choreographer, dancer, and visual artist based in Manila, Eisa Jocson explores the politics of the Philippine body, particularly with regards to the questions of representation and visibility, on a spectrum between coercion and choice. She looks at how the body moves, physically and across borders, and the conditions under which it moves; her oeuvre has investigated how the body is conditioned by social, economic, class, and other conventions, often through the prism of the service and entertainment industry.

For her new project *Zoo*—the third part of her *Happyland* series—Jocson continues her research on labour and fantasy production. While her previous works had ranged from pole dancing to macho dancing, to the protocols of hostesses or the affectations of a Disney princess, the artist zeroes in on Philippine performers employed in theme parks, focusing on animal characters as human puppets filled in by Philippine performers. In Hong Kong and elsewhere, Philippine performers are cast as highly skilled, energetic, world-class happiness-machines, always in the service of their audiences.

The *Happyland* series delves into how the body is programmed, performed, and disseminated under this empire of

manufacturing “happiness”, all in the context of migrant affective labour. In *Happyland 1: Princess*, two Philippine performers hijack the character of Snow White, and in *Happyland 2: Your Highness*, a group of ballet dancers unpacks their formatted bodies tailored ideally for a Disney workforce. In this third part entitled *Zoo*, Jocson explores the relations between humans and animals, systems of labour and confinement, politics of the gaze and spectacle. The work starts off by looking into the animal characters played by humans in theme parks, eventually turning to the conditions of displaced and captured animals in zoos. The work furthermore speaks to our current situation caused by COVID-19, where for the first time in history humans are forced to self-isolate on a global scale, mirroring animal behaviour in confinement. This newly commissioned work is a growing body of performances that deal with the material of animals as spectacle—in the zoo and in Disney representations of animals—and the shared psychosis between humans and animals in isolation. The work effectively and touchingly reflects on affective labour in a potentially provocative way, hinting also at the transgression of borders and limits—of individuals, nations, and species.

(b. 1981, Hong Kong)

Speed of Night, 2020

Jesmonite, paint, and motors,
dimensions variable

Commissioned by Tai Kwun Contemporary

Tap Chan

Tap Chan's artistic practice is rooted in her long struggle with insomnia, a result of the intense years when she had to work full-time while studying in art school and striving to become an artist. Such a stressful lifestyle is common among the younger generation in Hong Kong, particularly in the art community where the precarious life of an artist is not possible without a day job. This double life of ideals and survival is a daily regime and moreover a dilemma.

During those years, Chan's yearning for a good night's sleep involved wrestling with her mind and body every evening, which led her to observe subtle shifts in her surrounding environment. Light, sound, and texture were the main objects of exploration, so when these were accelerated to a state of psychosis, illusions sank in, leading her to frequently wonder what the real was.

Chan's sensitivity lies at the core of her work, often fabricated with uncanny yet ubiquitous materials such as plastic bags, cushions, tree branches, and shower curtains. Duality and symmetry run through Chan's works, echoing her meanderings between two realities of dreams and wakefulness, of the real and the fantastical.

A site-specific kinetic installation, *Speed of Night* has two poles with hand-painted stripes inserted at the two corners of the space. The graphic element is reminiscent of hair salon signage, though the rough-and-ready quality and monochrome colour contradict this association. The familiarity and representation of memories become visual materials for the artist. As defined by the artist, the work rotates at the speed of night—hypnotically and possibly waiting endlessly for a dream.

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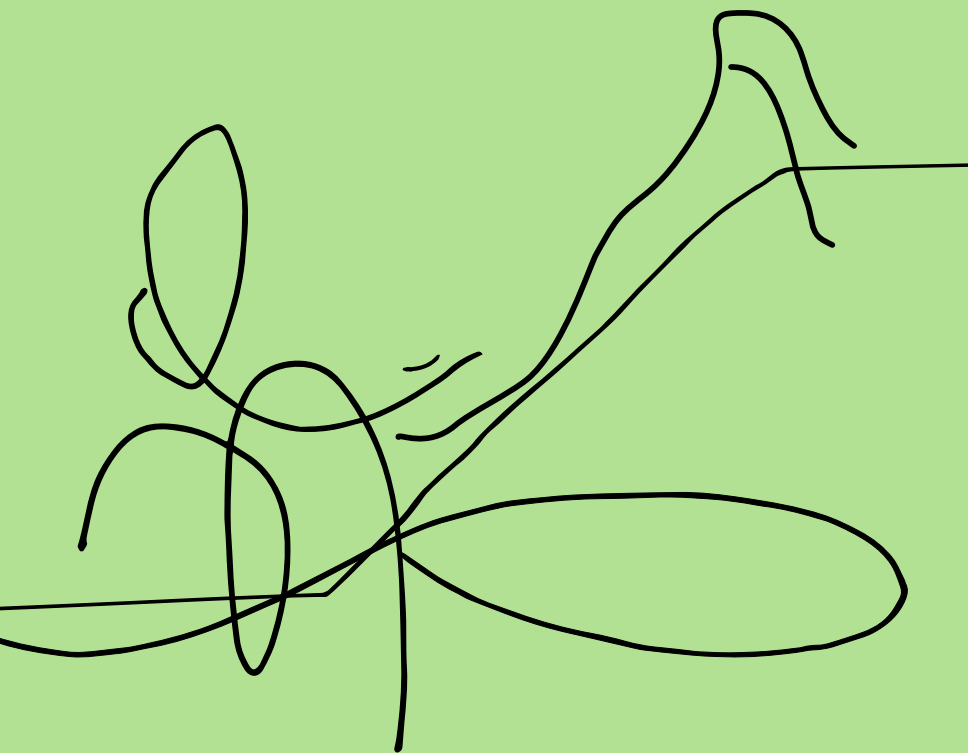
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香港賽馬會
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Conversations with
Pratchaya Phinthong,
Jason Dodge, Tap Chan,
and Eisa Jocson,
with an intervention
by Thea Djordjadze

Pratchaya Phinthong

Xue Tan: You often situate yourself right on location when investigating a particular economy or conflict. For your latest work *Waiting for Hilsa*, you went to Farakka Barrage on the border of Bangladesh and India, with the aim of discovering the impact of this border conflict on Hilsa fish migration. How did the story unfold from an idea to a physical journey?

Pratchaya Phinthong: As with many things, I try not to predetermine anything—this is also the challenge in my art practice. I don't construct stories or facts before the work, and I let the materials flow in naturally; this enables me to see and work with others and be part of others. I always think art is something just a little bit more than people's reality. In essence, I go above or under that line where we understand realities and try not to have a method, or form, or representation of things before I learn about it personally.

I tend to place myself in a situation first. Situations could be a thinking situation as well—where your body or my body has to move to the site. I would feel things through talking to people; this is partially based on luck and everything around that. The situation can shape and move you out of a comfort zone. I have always refused to have a studio, and therefore everywhere becomes my studio. I don't want to have the authorship where I direct everything, but rather I want to learn from a different situation in a different place.

At the beginning of the project, I knew the target—the place I was going and wandering around. I try to be most sensitive, absorbing and translating the experience into this “art form”, this art space, this society where it will be seen; it is the vehicle that the audience can drive or propel.

However, it does not always happen like this. I do get bored by the same procedures, and I ask myself all the time, why am I still doing art?

X What else would you rather do if not make art?

P My wife and I cannot survive with my art in general; many of my

works are not commercial. At the same time, I don't want my work to be influenced by the commercial side. I try to work as freely as possible. It would be up to me to balance this.

X This is part of your work, don't you think?

P It is part of it. That's why I am really interested in the market. I am trying to learn more about business and the economy, which prods politics. My interests lead me to other things: I learn how to dance around other subjects and not frame myself around one subject.

That's why we have had a T-shirt shop at the weekend market for ten years. We make the graphics, print them on T-shirts, sell them in the market—like running a bakery. It gets us to develop life, pay the rent and daily expenses, and I can be free to do my art—and I can be free to understand life from selling T-shirts, seeing street life, and understanding the real effects on people from the recent coronavirus, or the mass shooting in Thailand. These facts are grounded by our work at the market.

We can talk more about my latest project with the Hilsa fish. So I went to Farakka Barrage to look for the "effects"—how the monsoon season and the manmade dam allow the fish to pass through in their migration, how the fish would understand the 50 years of blockage (since the construction of Farakka Barrage), and how people around the dam see the fish under the water, how the fish are eaten by both Muslims and Hindus.

Time is important; works come into shape through time. I was lucky to meet a doctor who wrote a book about the Hilsa, a crazy and serious hobby of his for seven years. I met him after I explored a bookshop during my trip to Calcutta; he was carrying his manuscript and asking the publisher to publish his book. He spoke deeply about the regional fish and its political situation, and one thing opened up to another.

The Hilsa fish have been swimming along the Ganges river for centuries. The doctor was highly knowledgeable about the mythology around the fish, its market value and representation, as well as how it affects us in relation to climate change and ecology. That was a starting point of the collaboration. Some photos in the work were taken by the doctor—it's like a mix between my work and the doctor's work, and I published some samples of his book and invited him to a public talk at the event in the end. Everything came together slowly and firmly.

Later, the doctor told me that he opened a private eye hospital with his friends. I was very touched by the fact that their hospital has 30 beds, and half of it charged only well-off patients and another half offered free treatment for those in need. You know, this kind of work doesn't exist everywhere. Whenever I think about it, I feel stunned—it's powerful. Then I told him we would do something together in the future. We could create an interesting event at the hospital, challenging other artists to the show, raising money with works can sell for charity—and we could help people who suffer from eye problems. This might be an answer to myself as to why I am still doing art.

X What role does ritual play in the formality of your practice? In your work *A Whole from a Different Half*, you went to Ekhiin Agui ("Mother's Womb Cave"), a sacred site in Tövkhön Monastery in Mongolia. It is a long journey—a pilgrimage.

P For my work *One of Them*, I sourced yttrium from China, a rare earth mineral, which I made into a ball, in reference to Zhang Heng's seismograph, which was a device to detect earthquakes. Invented in 132 AD, it consisted of eight dragons facing different directions, each one holding a ball in its mouth. When a ball falls, it means an earthquake would happen in that direction.

So I made a ball with the rare and precious mineral used in the manufacture of mobile phone LED screens. China probably produces around 80–90% of these materials in the world; meanwhile the mining system for this mineral is very toxic, mainly located in Inner Mongolia.

X Why did you leave this precious ball in Mother's Womb Cave?

P The work is based on the idea of reincarnation, which is looking at a source or a place poetically, reintroducing the same thing in a different prospect. In this case, it also implies the geopolitical relation of Inner Mongolia as a part of China and the country Mongolia.

X That's why you returned the mineral to the cave. It sounded like you had to get to the bottom of things.

P Yes. The process of bringing the mineral ball to the cave is a passage to experiencing the very moment where the body and mind are folded because the cave is about the size of the human body. You have to move your body horizontally until the end of the cave to be able to turn your body and come out of

the same entrance. I mean, in such a narrow space, it was tense; somehow it strangely simulated the feeling of going back to the uterus. In the end, the treasure is not gold but yourself. It is philosophical in a way.

X I think of your process as social sculpture—the people who are involved in it, and you who made the artwork as a lived experience.

P Social sculptures for me are ordinary and mundane things in life, on the street, in the back alleys. They have been there for years, and there is life around them, like rivers shaping the earth.

I find the situation of objects interesting, and sometimes I would try to trade and ask questions. There was a T-shirt shop where the owner marked a chair tied with plastic, and she would put it in front of her shop so that no one could park there.

I asked her to sell the chair to me, and later she would make a new one. Then I would buy it again, and so it repeats.

X Perhaps I am just picking up on things: I feel some of your works seek a closeness to the world, or we can call it the core of its nature. Your meteorite work involves the distance of the earth to the sky. And then you went down to Mother's Womb Cave, like a pilgrim. Do you agree there is something worshipful towards nature, the universe, the cosmos?

P Yes, that's right. Well, I'm not a shaman—I could be in the next life or maybe at the end of this life.

I wish I could change smell into a form of belief. I am interested in and respect many other dimensions, which are not explained in science.

I see my work as a vehicle that people could drive wherever they are thinking of, and this vehicle can last as long as they can think of it. This is probably the potential of an artwork: it can stay for generations after us. But you know, there's a time limit for all of us.

Jason Dodge

Xue Tan: In your work, peculiar combinations of elements are often composed together, for example *A Tube Filled With Seeds of Poison Hemlock Traverses a Room*, *Emeralds in an Owl*, and *Glove Burnt by Gold*. How wild is this sensation? Can you talk about the process by which these things come together?

Jason Dodge: In thinking about how thingness uses its own language, the way you can see beyond or inside of a word is different from how you can or cannot see inside of a thing. It is our bodies, our beating hearts, the blood moving all around—you can't see that, or gems inside an owl, or poison inside of a flute. There are different kinds of knowing.

X You once said that your artworks came from 1% of life. Could you elaborate this 1%?

J There is a line from Michael Dickman which I love: "There is only this world, and this world, over and over." There is only living; the urgency of a work comes after everything else has been felt and constructed, eaten and cared for, read or discussed. It is the exhaustion of everything.

X I want to ask about your relationship to poetry—the role of poetry for you, your work, and our world at large.

J Poetry has been my connection to literature for most of my life. I have trouble reading, but I love language and intensity—when I was little someone brilliant gave me an Elizabeth Bishop poem, "In the Waiting Room". Like in the poem, it made me realise I was a "me". I started publishing Fivehundred places so that I would have a foundation both to deliver poems to artists but also to develop a conversation with the poets I love. It is really important to me.

X Your works bond with real stories, stories we don't know from the surface. I wonder, what type of stories are you interested in and what type of stories do you read?

J I am not interested in stories as much as what it means to

sculpt something. I remember wanting to make a sculpture of the distance airplanes fly. Brancusi was interested in movement; I was interested in the volume in space. I thought that it was important to touch that distance, so weavers could touch that distance—it is more the physical act of touch, while the story is somehow a machine to deliver the viewer back to touch.

X Is distance an important story to tell?

J Proximity is the salt in every dish.

X Should every story be told?

J The stories we tell ourselves are the real stories—who we are, what makes us, who our families are, what is happening in the world—these stories are what we use to understand other stories.

X When I read the work title *Darkness Falls...*, it's a mix of feelings—thrill, excitement, wonder, danger. What exactly happens when “darkness falls”?

J I know what you mean...

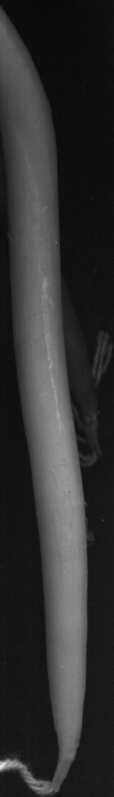
X What do you believe in?

J C. A. Conrad showed me how hope is something not to believe in. This is an important notion for me. It is not at all something negative and has more to do with the hyper-present. Learning to express what is happening with what is happening, as opposed to hoping something happens.

X Has anyone ever told you that they feel honesty in your works?

J There is a moral ring to “honesty”. Yes, people have, but also my work is not for everyone; often people ask if what I am saying in the title of the work is true. I don't publish any “proof” ever of the works being made. It is important to me that they can be believed or not believed—I guess that is honesty.









Tap Chan

Xue Tan: In the exhibition, your new work is entitled *Speed of Night*. What does this refer to?

Tap Chan: The speed of night is, for me, slow. For a long while, I had insomnia. When I used to wake up in the middle of the night, I might have had a nightmare or some other dreams, and so I couldn't go back to sleep. The night would drag on; from when I woke up until the next morning, three or four hours might pass. And so that's why the "speed of night" was so slow.

X Is this how you imagine time slipping away?

T Most probably. I then had a day job in the fashion industry, where it was fast-paced. I would stay anxious at night.

X How long did you have insomnia for?

T For about two years.

X Is insomnia a matter of waiting or a process of experiencing a particular kind of time?

T I feel it is a process of waiting. Say I couldn't sleep, for example: I would read, have a drink, lie on my bed and watch the cars go by. The headlights would flood the ceiling. You would stare at all these movements, fall into a daze, and time would seem to drag out.

X You have many works that explore the minute transformation of objects with their environment. Did insomnia trigger your sensitivity to the environment?

T You could say that. I also enjoy observing the things happening around me. For instance, I would try to figure out where this beam of light is coming from in this room.

X You once mentioned the methods of falling asleep. Which was the most effective one?

T The most effective way was to take melatonin supplements, though I didn't know at the time there were side effects. It is not medication, but I had quite a bit, about 5 mg. I only

figured out later that it causes hallucinations. And then I started wondering if I did fall asleep with the pills, or was it a hallucination?

X Did these hallucinations take place while you were awake or asleep?

T I couldn't really tell.

X You spoke about lucid dreams last time. Could you share a couple of lucid dream experiences? What was it like to be unable to distinguish dreams and reality?

T I still can't tell between dreams and reality. Sometimes I dreamt of lying in bed, in the bedroom, where I would see clothes flying out of the wardrobe. The garments would be floating around—very whimsical. After a while, I would have the feeling that I was waking up but then I would wonder if I was awake or dreaming.

When I moved out on my own, I had a friend who lived nearby—he lived on the first floor and could see me going downstairs. Every Sunday, we would meet up for breakfast. One Sunday, he called me and said that he saw me going downstairs. But I was just getting up then, so I suspected I had been sleepwalking! He described me the exact clothes I was wearing, so I checked my wardrobe to see if I had worn any of the garments he was talking about. I later thought that time was cracking up and a parallel world was emerging.

X When did you start using your dreams as artistic material?

T I like things that are doubled and symmetrical. In my work, there often appear blurred boundaries between worlds that differ and yet echo one another.

X Something like Zhuangzi's dream of the butterfly?

T Yes—am I dreaming or are you dreaming? I constantly ask myself whether this is real or not.

X How can you tell?

T Moving elements is constant in my work—like signs that confirm the reality of the waking world.

X It reminds me of the spinning top in Christopher Nolan's film *Inception*.

T Right. Christopher Nolan's earliest short film *Doodlebug* is often on my mind.

X Could you speak more about the unconsciousness—how do you constitute the perception of the world from your work and your dreams?

T When I make works, I would try to sense the space. I would not disregard the surrounding environment. It is important for me to determine the work's dimensions, so that it enters into dialogue with the space. This way, it becomes easier for the work to travel into the unconscious and connect people, as if it was an extension of memory.

X That sounds like an intuitive reaction.

T Yes—as though it belonged to the space, or something like that.

X You have multiple works that examine the psychological dimensions of a space, such as a memory of the space. Could you speak about *Intervention 444* or *Soft Note*?

T *Intervention 444* is quite interesting in terms of space—a deserted office. Apparently there was a small fire: water marks were all over the walls, parts of the walls were damaged. The employer at the time thought there was bad fengshui and moved out. When I visited the space for the first time, I was immediately attracted to the water marks; “water” was the point of departure for the work. In this intervention, I used water sound, such as sounds from a washing machine, from the sea, from pipe devices, and so on—to respond to the water marks and to the carpet in the office, which was as blue as the sea. *Soft Note* meanwhile attempts to materialise the strange spaces and daydreams that emerge from insomnia.

X Apart from movement, there is a sense of rhythm in your work.

T To a certain extent, rhythm is somewhat ritualistic or hypnotic. When the repetition of rhythm and movement adds up, it transforms into a mentally satisfying energy.

X Are the dualistic elements in your work intentional?

T The dualistic elements only appeared in the past few years. At first, I was conflicted about parallel universes, but then I became convinced by the quantum notion of the entanglement of parallel worlds. At the same time, the works are borne from

dreams, which operate on a world parallel to reality. So I began to consider the dualistic nature of these worlds.

X Does reality affect our dreams, or vice versa? What is the dynamic relation between these two worlds?

T I think reality affects dreams more than the other way, since we live in reality, and in the end dreams emerge only when we go to sleep. I don't exclude the possibility that dreams can affect reality. Perhaps I will want to enact something I dreamt of in reality.

X Does insomnia let you forge psychic connections?

T I think so—is this too ridiculous? Insomnia feels as though it opens your third eye, secreting melatonin which induces somnolence. It makes you think night is day, it makes you feel less tired. When it opens up, to a certain extent it connects you with something or another, making you see something you ought not see.

X Do you still have insomnia?

T Not anymore.

Eisa Jocson

Xue Tan: In your body of work, you have investigated various types of entertainers as performed by Philippine workers. How did you start looking at this economy?

Eisa Jocson: It might look like a well-planned-out trajectory, but it happened organically: one work came out of another work and continues. My point of entry into this body of work was my engagement with the pole dancing community. My aunt introduced me to the first "pole dancing for fitness" class in Manila back in 2008. I was in my 3rd year at the University of the Philippines, majoring in Visual Communications. Prior to that my movement training involved 8 years of classical ballet from the age of 7.

At that time, pole dancing was highly stigmatised. As part of the first batch of pole dancing students in Manila, we were tasked to re-introduce pole dancing to a wider public, as a fitness activity that empowers women. Gradually I understood the radical expansion of the socio-economic function of pole dancing. In strip clubs, women are paid to pole dance for the male gaze, while in the fitness studios, women pay to learn pole dancing for their own as well as other women's gaze.

Pole dancing students who experienced the challenges and joys of learning pole dancing gained newfound respect and admiration for professional pole dancers in strip clubs. This paved the way for crossovers between contexts—for example, pole dancers from the strip clubs would teach in the fitness studios. The crossovers between the two contexts became more fluid and eventually gave birth to a global pole dancing/aerial community. I'm interested in the appropriation of the language of movement in different contexts and the subsequent transformation that it proposes or enables—that's how it started.

X Do you feel this empowerment from pole dancing?

E Everything grows stronger both on a personal and community level. Pole dancing demands continuous, intense physical training, thereby developing strong confident bodies and a solid

community. A collective sharing of vulnerability and encouragement from fellow practitioners binds them into lifelong friends. Performing female seduction can be liberating especially in a Catholic country—this openness is born out of shared experiences developed over many dance classes with the same community of women. I am proud to have been part of this community and of how pole dancing empowers solidarity among different women.

- X It is fascinating to see how this economy can be transformed into its opposite.
- E It was gradual and still continues. From the private context of the strip club into the fitness studio I started to wonder where else it could go. *Stainless Borders: The Deconstruction of Architectures of Control* (2010) proposes to further dislocate pole dancing towards a public urban space—a performance intervention using guerilla street pole dancing combined with graffiti tagging on vertical poles. Poles such as signposts, railings, traffic post, flag poles that control the movement and in some cases the identity of people. The work pushes the limits of the body into vertical urban landscapes and challenges gender performativity in public space.
- X Do you think parkour is equivalent in challenging those limits?
- E Yes, I looked into parkour when conceptualising this work. Parkour is a predominantly male activity, similar to graffiti. Both parkour and pole dancing demand intense physicality though the former traverses the city horizontally and the latter vertically. Pole dancing is rooted in the feminine, proposing a softer encounter with the public space.
- X How come you got into macho dance in 2013 after this? A dance that celebrates the ultimate masculinity.
- E It was to challenge my formatted way of being—an educated, female, middle-class upbringing. Social class is inseparable from identity, gender formation, conditionings that are performed by the body. Macho dance is performed by men for gay men and women in a macho club. It is an economically motivated language of seduction that employs masculinity as body capital.
- The training for macho dance took about a year. I became aware of how my ballet and pole dancing practice has influenced how I held and moved my body. Macho dance training, which

reconfigures my body's female-formatted alignment, opened other levels of awareness. Adjustments in the spine would alter the hip placement and muscle tensions in the body, as well as the position of the gaze. A different sense of inhabiting the body arises.

X Is that what you meant when you said it was difficult for macho dance to be performed by another person because it's so tied up to your own history?

E Yes, the other person's bodily history would come into the piece. I came from ballet and pole dancing, both of which work with the illusion of flight, lightness, weightlessness, and defying gravity. Macho dance is the opposite: it works with weight, tonicity, a certain groundedness; it strongly relates to the floor. When I started learning it, I realised that I did not have a strong grounding—my equilibrium then was in relation to the pole, like a tripod. Your centre is shared between your two feet and the pole, with your body weight pulling or pushing against the pole.

X Wrestling with gravity, right?

E Yes, in pole dancing, in order to propel your body up or around, one works against gravity. With macho dance, I learned to work WITH gravity, to re-centre my body and relate downwards to the floor. Through macho dance training I gained embodied insight.

When I find myself in a dangerous situation—like walking alone at night, I would find myself going into the macho form as a defensive gesture that puts me in a state of preparedness.

X You would walk in dark alleys in a "macho dance" kind of way?

E Yes, less feminine, less vulnerable, more stable. The mind is set to be physically ready. If there is an attack, you're grounded enough to push it off.

X This change in gestures and forms makes me think of shape-shifters.

E Yes, the first shift for me was to explore the notion of who I am in relation to what I'm performing. I think of the body as clay, and the conditions around it mold it into shape. Through shape shifting one can glimpse a different worldview.

Of course, I can never be a macho dancer because I am not a man to begin with. According to industry standards in macho clubs, there are no gay macho dancers. It is super heteronormative.

X We are circling back to pole dancing; it is the same performativity.
E I thought all strippers danced the same way; later, a friend familiar with different kinds of strip dances told me that macho dance is particular to the Philippines: the use of power ballads, the languid movement, the cowboy boots—they can take everything off, but the cowboy boots stay on.

X Did you find out how the cowboy imagery got implanted into this dance?

E It came from American Wild West cowboy films. The macho dancer is the ideal male fantasy, an assemblage of influences from the West, machismo from Spain and American popular culture, mixed with local taste. American power ballads are still classics in macho clubs, like Mariah Carey, Celine Dion, and Bon Jovi.

X The top hits of American songs.

E 90s love song nostalgia extravaganza. This pervades the Manila soundscape: in taxis, jeeps, shops, and restaurants. It rocks you into limbo-land of romantic love sentiments.

X I want to talk about the gaze of the audience and about how it shapes the performance. The Philippine workers in the entertainment industry—the hostess, macho dancers and theme park workers—they perform for responses. How does the gaze fit in and interplay with all this?

E When we talk about the gaze, I imagine there is this internal gaze happening inside the entertainer—gazing at oneself through the gaze of the spectator, negotiating and shape-shifting one's performance according to the context. Honing it to service the expectations and desires of the spectator.

In the context of theatre, the relationship between the performer and the spectator is at the core of my works. I challenge the contract of looking by creating works that is complicated by its layers of dislocation and hybrid conditions. This raises friction, and questions set ways of looking. It's always about perception.

X There's a displacement of that psychological state with a physical state.

E It's more like an expanded awareness, my relation to what I'm performing—it is in a way artificially conditioning oneself.

- X Because of the economic nature of the performances of migrant workers, there is a sense of powerlessness in the centre of that performativity. Your new work *Zoo* looks at a deep isolation and powerlessness of caged animals. How shall we humans find a connection with this seemingly unimaginable condition?
- E At the centre of migrant workers' performativity is internal power, the vital force driven by the will to provide better conditions for one's family. This power is exploited to fuel world economies. The system must render huge populations powerless in order to extract cheap labour from them. Powerlessness is artificially imposed by the power-hungry.

We are inextricably connected to animals. The zoo is a human invention that we are culpable of. The performance-research work *Zoo* looks into the relation of Man and Animals. The zoo is a monument to the marginalisation of animals. In these cages, we've taken away their agency to live naturally; they have become objects to be looked at, studied, analysed, and kept alive for science and for species preservation. It is important to note that animal experiments are precursors to modern techniques of human social conditioning.

In the cultural sphere, animals are human puppets co-opted in the family and as the spectacle. Animals are reduced to their shells to be occupied by human personalities. In the Hong Kong Disneyland, Philippine performers are hired to fill in supporting character roles like a zebra in *Lion King* or a monkey in *Tarzan*. Through this entry point we develop *Zoo* as a platform for a live durational performance-research within the parameters of an art exhibition. The zoo and the art exhibition share the same elements: the act of looking and act of being looked at. The work experiments with traversing animal-object-performer-visitor positions within layers of confinements.

What we do to animals we do to ourselves.

- X Amid this global shut-down and quarantine caused by COVID-19, you are in Manila, in home quarantine for two months now. If this becomes extended, would the experience of confinement experience change people's behaviours?
- E We are in "enhanced community quarantine", extended until May 15. People's behaviour has already adapted to the situation. In the Philippines, staying at home means a greater social media presence and it has been used to strongly voice out criticisms

on the incompetence and opportunistic handling of the pandemic by our government. The online clamour has proved effective as changes are made and some statements retracted. People continue to be vigilant, but are at the same time exhausted because of the Philippine government.

Forced by current conditions, there is already an overwhelming amount of content springing up from artists as they adapt and move their practice online. The continued engagement over time would lead to content innovation and would open different habits of spectatorship. Still, this will not replace being “live”.

In relation to the exhibition, it was necessary to reformulate the development of Zoo to work around the conditions brought on by the pandemic. To address this, a new development has taken place: the Zoo performance-research will happen in quarantine and will be live-streamed into the exhibition. This is similar to zoos that offer online live streaming of animals going about their routines in their enclosure. Given how huge numbers of people around the world are in some kind of confinement or quarantine, this proposal is fitting.

I hope after this pandemic is over, having experienced the difficulties of isolation and confinement, we start to bring back animals to their natural environment. Instead of “preserving” species we must protect their natural habitats in order for them to thrive.

Impossible Glove

An impossible glove
for an impossible
situation

the

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in the Pulse
of the possible

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open up let the healing
come in.