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BRACKMAG

Issue 3 | August 2016

Home Edition

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“We wish to review
the very idea of
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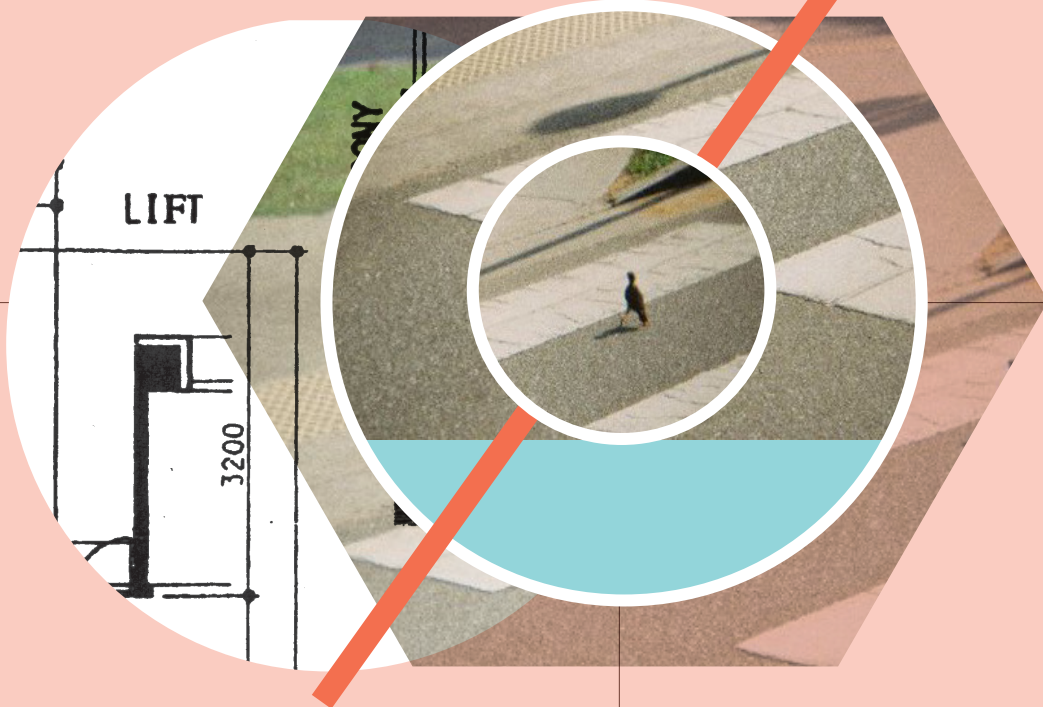


Welcome Home

Welcome to Home/ground. In a city that is perpetually mending its landscape, ours is a deconstruction site. We wish to arrest development. We wish to manufacture mischief. We wish to review the very idea of home. We believe that home is where the art is. It is time we take stock. It is time we take stock of taking stock. All these analogised as the familiar trope of an HDB flat. As you're lulled by the humming buzz of our lift, or strolling past our corridor lined with potted plants, or sipping teh, kopi or just plain NEWater in our cozy living room, keep your eyes peeled for ruminations. We have hidden them under cushions, in kettles, behind the mirror, everywhere. We hope you'll enjoy the sights and words of this third rendition of Brackmag. This issue is enabled by the co-creative art project 'This is Home' organised by Matt3r, in collaboration with Brack, which ran from October 2015 to May 2016.

Nazry Bahrawi | EDITOR





Going Home

Within five decades, most Singaporeans on the island-state have become home-owners. Their routines attest to a common malaise that leaks from the tenacious vision for a progressive nation and a organised society.

Words by **Loo Ching Ling**



The Writer

Loo Ching Ling is a part-time designer, curator and writer who has lived and worked in London, Shanghai and Singapore. She is also a full-time crazy cat lady. She co-conceptualised This is Home, the cultural mapping project that is the subject of this issue.

Home in modern Singapore aspired to much more than the construction of sanitary, ventilated shelters for the population. Home-building would bring kampung dwellers into modern, state-planned units, putting to rights the haphazard approach of the colonial administration.



8pm. Work is done. You are going home.

Home is in one of the many ubiquitous multi-storied public housing blocks that mushroom across the island nation, housing up to 85 percent of the population. An indelible part of the local topography,

“the template of the republic’s staggering rectilinear volume, [that] carves out the impression of permanence against all odds, defying the equatorial entropy all around it.”

– David Teh on Heman Chong’s *Calendars*, 2011

Home in modern Singapore aspired to much more than the construction of sanitary, ventilated shelters for the population. Home-building was about the creation of a new urban society, one that would bring *kampung* dwellers into modern, state-planned units, putting to rights the haphazard approach of the colonial administration.

On the MRT, you pull out your phone. Home is 40 minutes away from the city centre on the East-West Line.

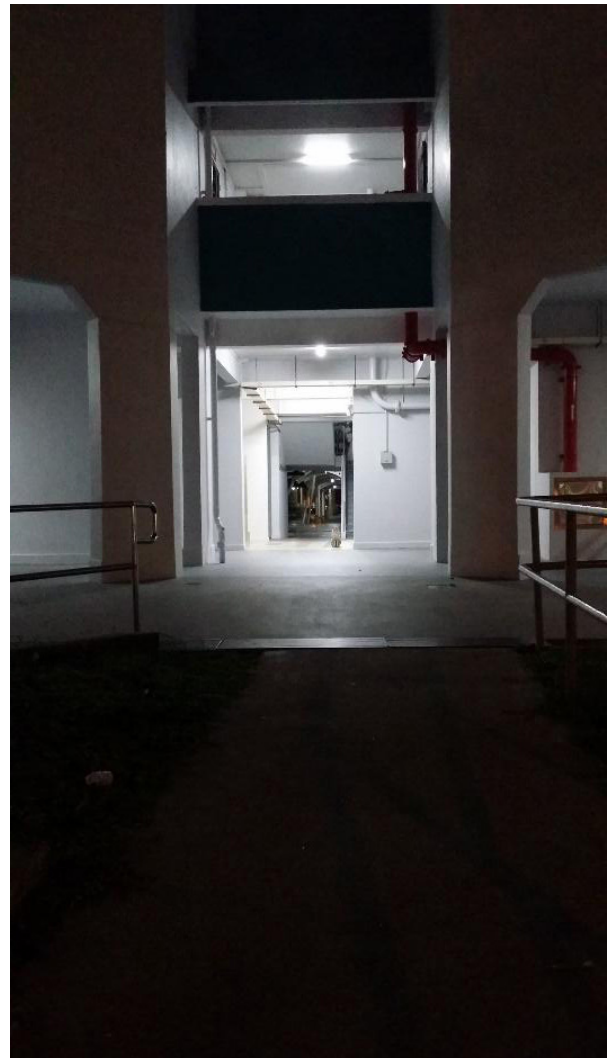
The Urban Renewal Department was set up in 1966 to clear out slums and revitalise the city centre—land too valuable to leave to the incumbent squatters. Meanwhile, high-density housing was built in satellite towns away from the centre. Within a breath-taking eight years of construction, 36 percent of the population had already been resettled into their gleaming new units.

Re-housing went hand-in-hand with plans for industrialisation. This necessitated a transformation of the informal economy, with its irregular workers, hawkers, street vendors, labourers, *kampung* dwellers, into full-time employees. Steady, full-time work would be required for regular mortgage or rental payments in these planned housing blocks. But you knew this already; there are 22 years left on your housing loan.

Off the train, and then a 6-minute walk. You do this everyday; it's always the same.



Public flats were often constructed on large tracts of land outside the central area that used to be occupied by intensive farm holdings. In the mid-1930s, nearly two-thirds of Singapore was given over to agriculture—either cash crops for export, like rubber, or food crops for local consumption. The comprehensive new town programme, however, sounded the death knell for family farms and estates.



Unbeknownst to you, your home used to be someone's pig farm, chicken-scattered backyard, zinc-roofed hut, rubber plantation. You reside on living history—a dense, rapidly compacted historic site of political will and social aspiration.

To get to the lift lobby, you walk across the unwallled ground-floor communal area known as the void deck.

The concrete floor is slick. It has been raining, and some errant drops had been borne in by the wind; others had been brought in by dripping umbrellas and sodden shoes. The footprints criss cross crazily in front of you. You can't follow them because hundreds of people live in this block and several more traverse the open space of the void deck en route to somewhere else.

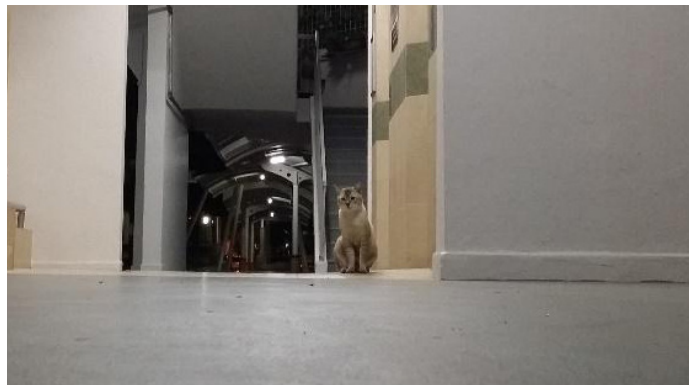
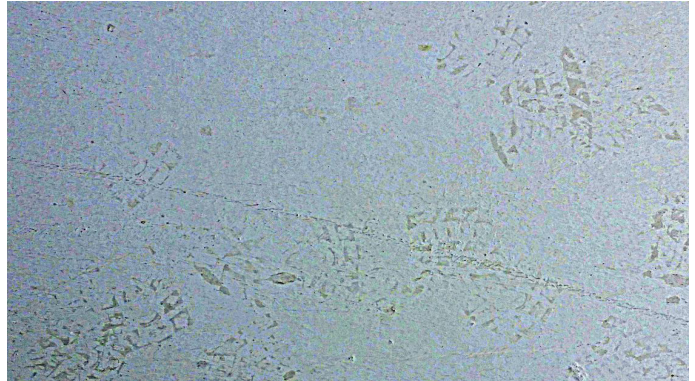
Void decks were supposed to replace the community spaces lost to *kampung* dwellers when they moved into these public housing blocks. The space is open, neutral, mostly empty—void. But you are not fooled. This isn't tabula rasa, as you found out when kicking a ball around the space as a child. Like everyone else, you tread upon an invisible mesh of tensions between the assertion of ownership and the sanctions of regulation.

At 8.50pm on a Wednesday night, the space is unoccupied.

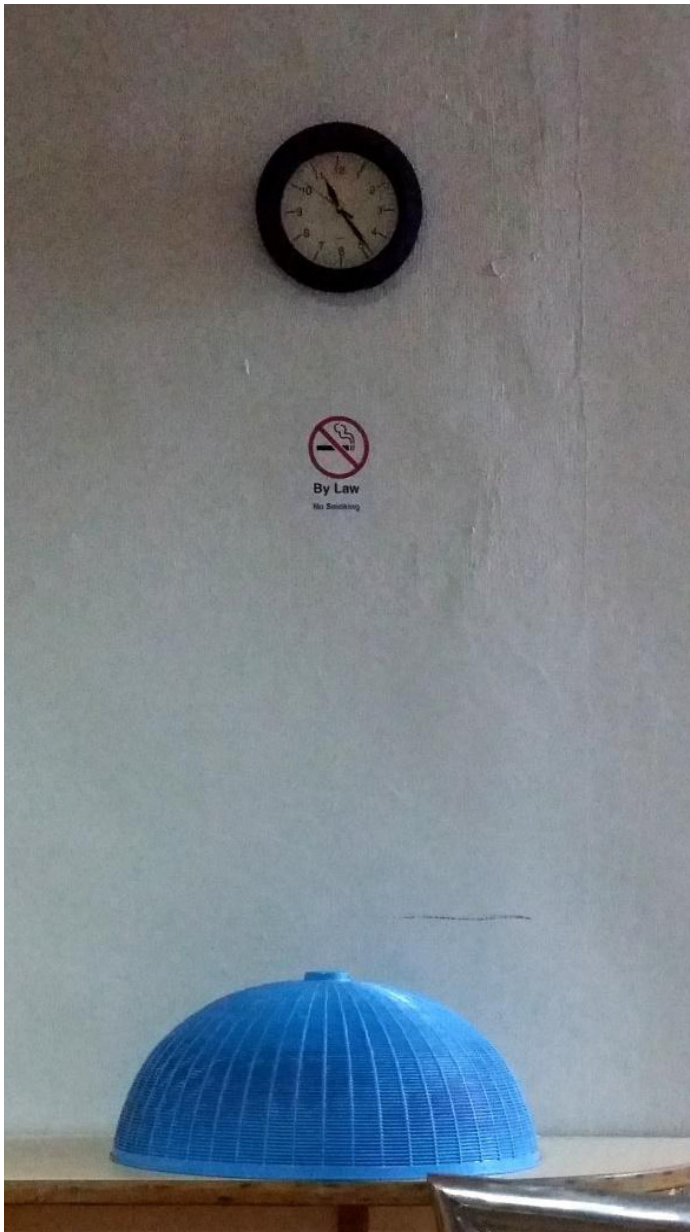
The community is quiet now, but its presence is felt through a few pieces of litter—food wrappers, paper cups, balled up tissues (“we were here, we were here”). This irritates you. You think you know who the culprits are.

(Litter in communal spaces is a social problem—not a marker of space, not a memory of use and occupancy, not a harmless and easily resolvable by-product of community.)

There are a few mismatched pieces of furniture as well, meekly shoved behind the monolithic, unmovable stone tables and chairs that smugly occupy the space—sleek, state-sanctioned sculptures.



*A place to be avoided, this,
How in its vastness it devours hours.
Little wonder then,
Why residents rush through void decks
Back to the cramped comforts of home
As if in fear of what such open space might do
To cosy minds.*
– Alfian Sa’at, “Void Deck”, *One Fierce Hour*, 1998



So you walk on, not really noticing these things anymore.
You are focused on getting to the lift lobby, and the
mailbox that stands by it with ruffled metal flaps.

At the lift lobby, you face the mailbox and grapple with the modern-day Shakespearean tragi-dilemma: To look or not to look?



You dither over opening the mail box to check for new mail. The mailbox is quiet too, but only seemingly so. It conceals the cacophony of demands: phone bills, electricity bills, broadband bills, credit card bills, Town Council notices, advertisements. All the wants-turned-needs of your shiny urban life. For now, these all lie under lock and key, accessible only to you, your family, the post-person, and the endless companies that have persuaded Singpost to deliver their flyers and brochures and other glossy appeals to spend money.

You turn away from the mailbox and its silent scream. You firmly press the silver button at the lift door.

Your fingers no longer feel the etched braille; it is as invisible as the group of people it serves. You step into the slightly grubby little conveyance that draws you up the arterial passage of the block, as essential as the hydraulics that pulls water from root to leaf.





Taking the lift with other people is an uncomfortably intimate experience; the situation in which notions of personal space is (reluctantly) suspended. Unwilling bedfellows; everyone looks at the floor (unless there is some unspeakably foul spillage) or at the passing scenery of one-two-three-floors that are exactly the same. The installation of windows for safety have made this possible.



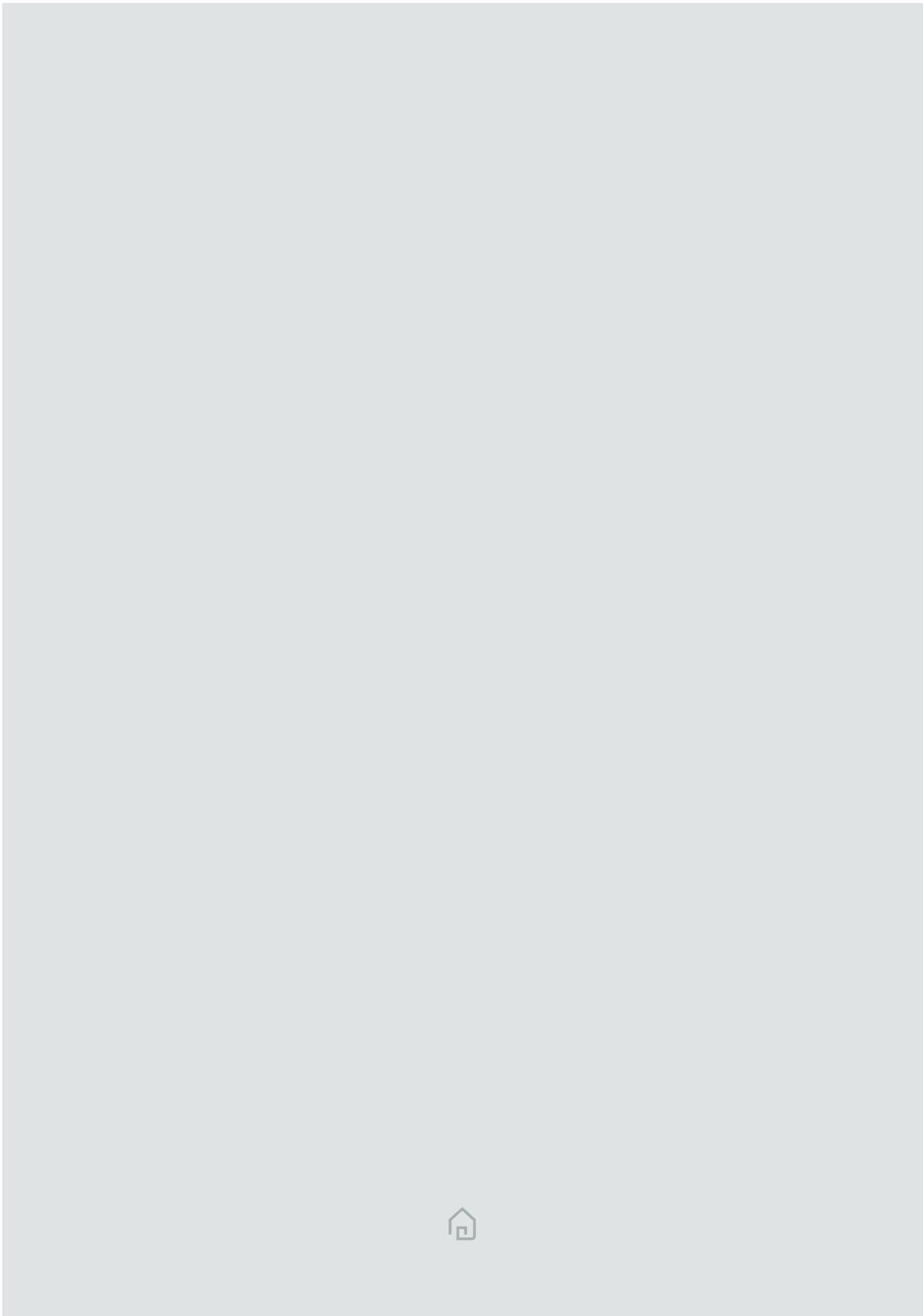
For such a tiny area, the lift has a curiously undefinable quality to it. It is so essential that it has become a headache. Its breakdown questions the very identity of the high-rise block it serves; its momentarily-afforded privacy and seclusion sometimes results in very public nuisances (pee, poo, actual crimes). It even ate someone's hand.* The tiny square of no-man's-land has, in consequence, become one of the most policed areas in a block's communal spaces.

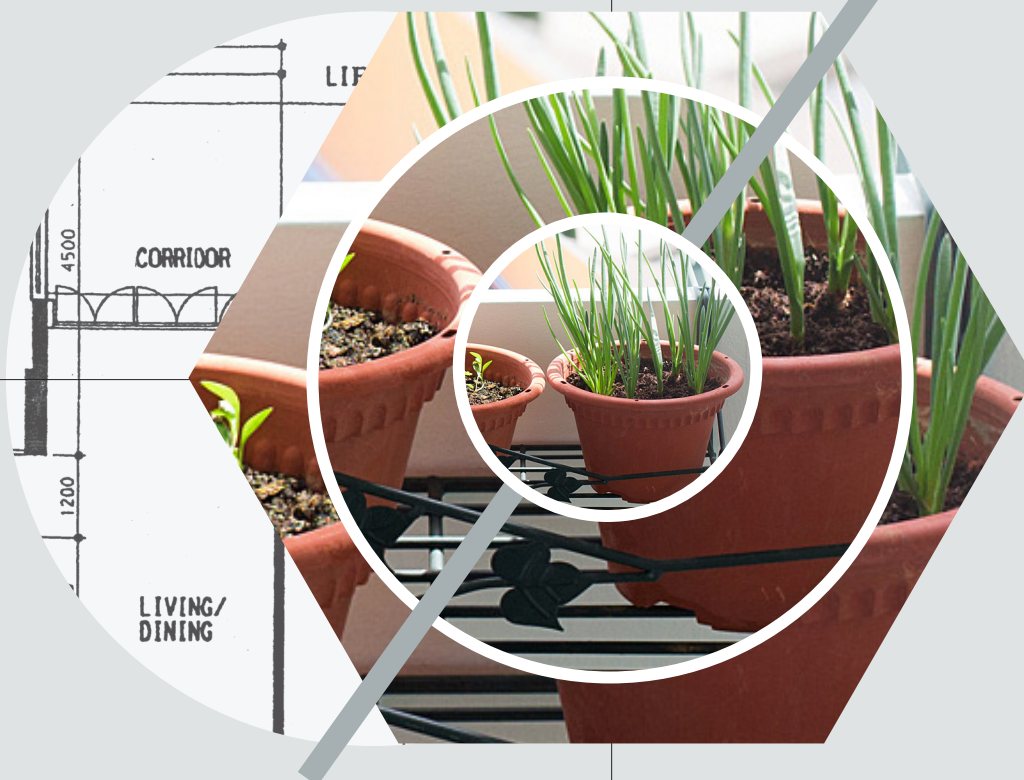
You reach your floor. You step out of the lift and reach for your keys to get into your home.

But where does home begin and end? Ancient Southeast Asian kingdoms defined their polities by their centre of power, from which radiated increasingly diffused circles of influence and networks of vassalised settlements. Described as *mandalas* after the Sanskrit word for circle, these would have been impossible to capture by modern cartographic techniques, which require—almost demand—starkly defined territorial boundaries and fixed political identities.

How much has this modern need for definition and ownership coloured our attitudes towards our living spaces? Have we disingenuously drawn borders between home and not-home, yours and mine, everybody's and nobody's? The lines are not as clear as we think. We need to reopen our difficult and messy dialogue about the void deck, lift lobby, lift, and all the other pockets of spaces that everybody uses but nobody wants—lest they fall into sterility, barrenness, and worse, become utterly vulnerable to being affixed with an externally-defined identity. We may not have to “go home” everyday, if we are already at home.

*EDITOR'S NOTE: IN OCTOBER 2015, AN ELDERLY WOMAN'S HAND WAS SEVERED WHEN A LIFT MALFUNCTIONED IN A JURONG HDB FLAT. THIS WAS ONE OF A SERIES OF FREAK INCIDENTS; A 77-YEAR-OLD WHEELCHAIR BOUND MAN DIED IN A LIFT MALFUNCTION IN A TAMPINES HDB FLAT IN MAY 2016. CITIZENS TOOK TO THE INTERNET TO VOICE THEIR CONCERNS, APPALLED AT THE LAPSE IN SECURITY AND SAFETY—LONG DEEMED A STALWART OF SINGAPORE LIVING.





The Art and Science of Drifting

The Corridor is a transitory, liminal space: bridge and buffer between public and private. Two local artists began with similar themes of travel and transience, but ended with divergent expressions.

Words by **Bestlyn Loo**

The Writer

Currently based in Australia, Bestlyn Loo is a freelance writer, researcher and policy analyst with a background in law and political science. Her research interests include gender studies, intersectionality, postcolonial theory, criminal justice, and feeding her virtual cats.





“As any good urbanist will tell you, most things that begin with utopia often end in nostalgia. Not the longing for a place, but for a different time. I thought about the man with the strange solitary life, sitting alone and counting his cans. Whether he would have walked on the same streets Joscelin did. Whether he would have been drawn to the same bridge, not by the fog of pesticides in the air, but memories of the faint, sweet scent of orange, star-shaped blossoms.”

OPPOSITE CHEE WEI TECK, 'RE/MOTION: QUEENSTOWN'

The Corridor is a transitory, liminal space, serving as both bridge and buffer between the public and the private.

Here, we discuss and exhibit projects by two local artists, Joscelin Chew and Chee Wei Teck, who began with conceptually similar themes of travel, transportation and transience, but ended up with divergent means of expressing those ideas.

"The space is akin to an extension of homes – the array of shoes on racks and a display of potted plants. It is an everyday space in which one passes through, at times meeting your neighbours along the way." – Joscelin Chew

Drifting

In *Untitled (Queenstown)*, Joscelin utilises the act of walking in a *dérive* ("drifting") as a form of urban exploration and artistic expression. "Walking, for me, is the most ideal means of exploring the neighbourhood at a pace that is controlled by oneself and the environment," she says. The practice has its roots in the theory of psychogeography, the study of urban landscapes and the psychological or emotional states they provoke. Early Situationist International members were interested in urban drifting as a means of resisting the utopian and prescriptive values in urban planning as shaped by bureaucratic capitalism. Rather than condemning capitalist society, however, the Situationists encouraged *dérives* as playful group behaviour in these contexts, believing in the socially transformative potential of urban practice from within.

"There is a sense of playfulness in the ways the Situationists apprehend our environment," Joscelin explains. "This subversiveness raises questions and heightens awareness in the ways we carry out our everyday practices and the environments in which we are situated. I use walking as a basis for my process, and like many contemporary psychogeographers like Will Self and Iain Sinclair, the act of writing—the text form—has become one crucial component of the work."

The resulting exhibit, *Untitled (Queenstown)*, is a sprawling arrangement of delicately-positioned B&W photographs and introspective text—written like snapshots of a scene—on a customised ankle-height tabular structure. Each print is anchored, just barely, by smooth pebbles. The layout of the installation is in itself an opportunity for *dérive*-like exploration.

"This requires me to maintain a constant half-squat to read," I remark while peering down at Joscelin's installation at The Recess on Guillemard Road.

"That's why I made it so low," Joscelin replies serenely.

In pursuit of this "mental map of experiences", Joscelin perambulated up and down the neighbourhood once a week in November and December, rain or shine, hauling her hefty medium format camera along from late morning to evening. The ongoing en bloc developments and the tight deadlines meant that the project took on a pervading sense of urgency: to capture what

OPPOSITE JOSCELIN CHEW'S 'UNTITLED (QUEENSTOWN)' AT THE RECESS; IMAGE CREDIT: LOO CHING LING





would be gone, and to make sense of what was left.

"I started off with an interest in the diversity that lies within its urban landscape, Queenstown being a neighbourhood of many firsts," Joscelin says. In many ways, Queenstown is a fascinating place for discovery. The area is rich in soil and used to be filled with saga trees, the kind famous for its bright red seeds and orange star-shaped flowers. There is also a variety of novel architectural features in Singapore's first satellite town comprising some of the nation's first point blocks, flatted factories, and a public housing block with a curving façade which earned it the name 'Butterfly Block'.

The practice of *dérive* involves allowing the self to be directed by the psycho-geographical contours of the city while maintaining a heightened awareness of visual, auditory or sensory cues embedded in the environment. "I remember being drawn to the bridge between the 'seventies' blocks as the loud buzz of the fumigation tools and the chemically-saturated air steered me towards a group of workers carrying out fumigation along the canal," Joscelin recalls.

Soon, however, she began to identify an undercurrent of tension, an aching sense of loss that punctuated the pavements. "There is this sort of resistance between the residents' emotional attachment to places and the rapidly changing landscape," Joscelin says.

TOP JOSCELIN CHEW, 'UNTITLED (QUEENSTOWN)' OPPOSITE: CHEE WEI TECK, 'RE/MOTION: QUEENSTOWN'

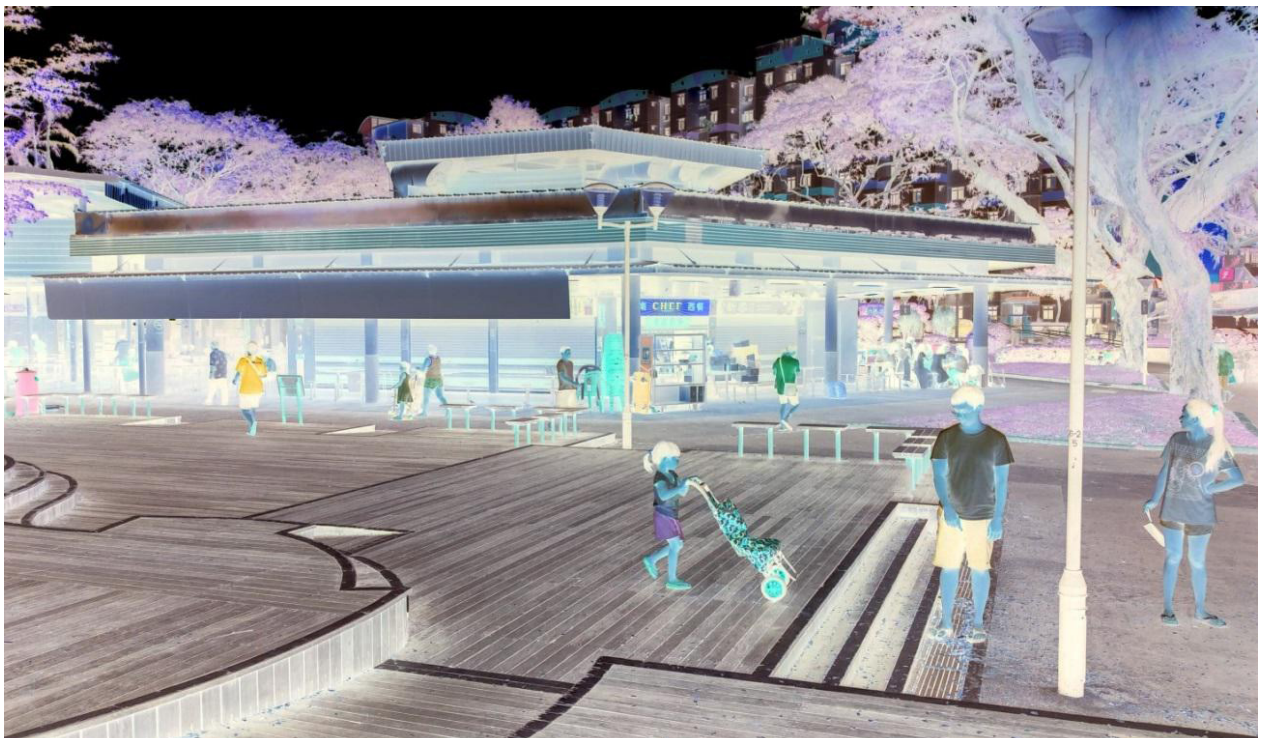
In one SERS-abandoned estate, she encountered former residents who make regular, often daily, pilgrimages back to their old neighbourhood, as if no-one taught them how to leave. "Some still walk to the vacated blocks during their free time to reminisce about the past, others walk through the estate to get to the train station, and there is a man who stations himself at the corner of a block with his collection of crushed cans and newspaper."

As any good urbanist will tell you, most things that begin with utopia often end in nostalgia. Not the longing for a place, but for a different time. I thought about the man with the strange solitary life, sitting alone and counting his cans. Whether he would have walked on the same streets Joscelin did. Whether he would have been drawn to the same bridge, not by

the fog of pesticides in the air, but the memory of the faint, sweet scent of orange, star-shaped blossoms.

The Science of It

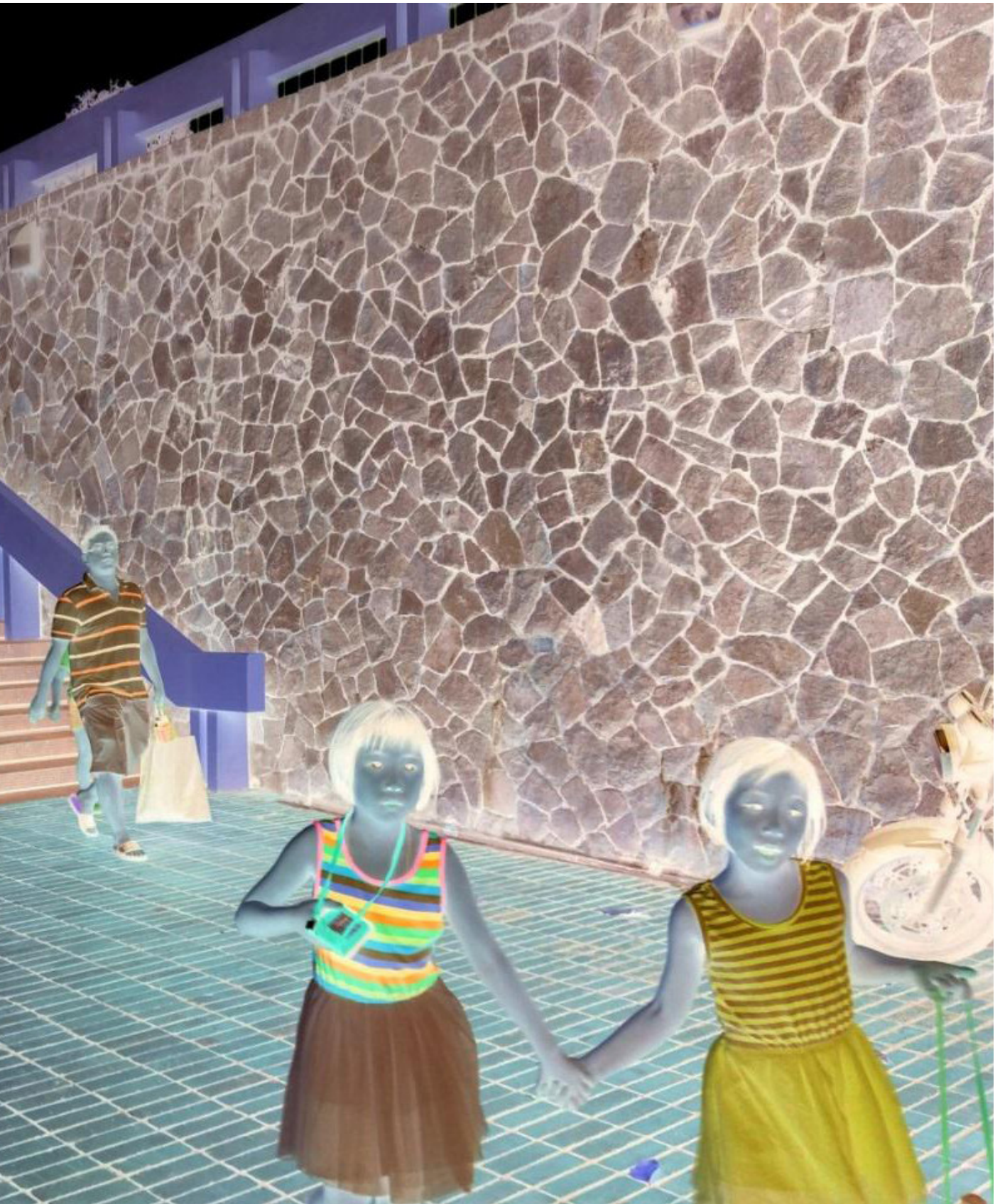
Nestled among the food centres at Tanglin Halt is a sunny open piazza with wooden decks called the Tanglin Halt Community Plaza. It is a familiar and beloved communal space where social community events are held. In his interactions with Tanglin Halt residents, Wei Teck discovered that they had put in a request for a similar communal area to be built in the replacement flats because they wanted a gathering place to hold the community together. His project, *Re/Motion: Queenstown*, is a transcription of a specific route from the community plaza to the new flats, presently fenced off in a construction site. The photographs, which act as markers along his route, are paired



“The balance between modernism and conservation is a question that Singapore continues to wrestle with. Perhaps what is missing in the conversation is what we can do to mitigate the consequences of grief and loss.”



OPPOSITE CHEE WEI TECK, 'RE/MOTION: QUEENSTOWN'



with GPS coordinates and elevation data of each location and printed on such a small scale they require the literal use of a magnifying glass. Like *Untitled* (Queenstown), Wei Teck's installation also demands physical intimacy to fully appreciate.

Wei Teck was intrigued by the temporality of routes, how the little alleyways, burrows and foot paths around the neighbourhood would fade, shift or retreat back into the earth as fresh routes surfaced to accommodate new flows of traffic. When it comes to urban renewal, "most people think about the replacement of original buildings and residents," Wei Teck muses. They don't realise that the routes and roads around the area will be altered or lost too.

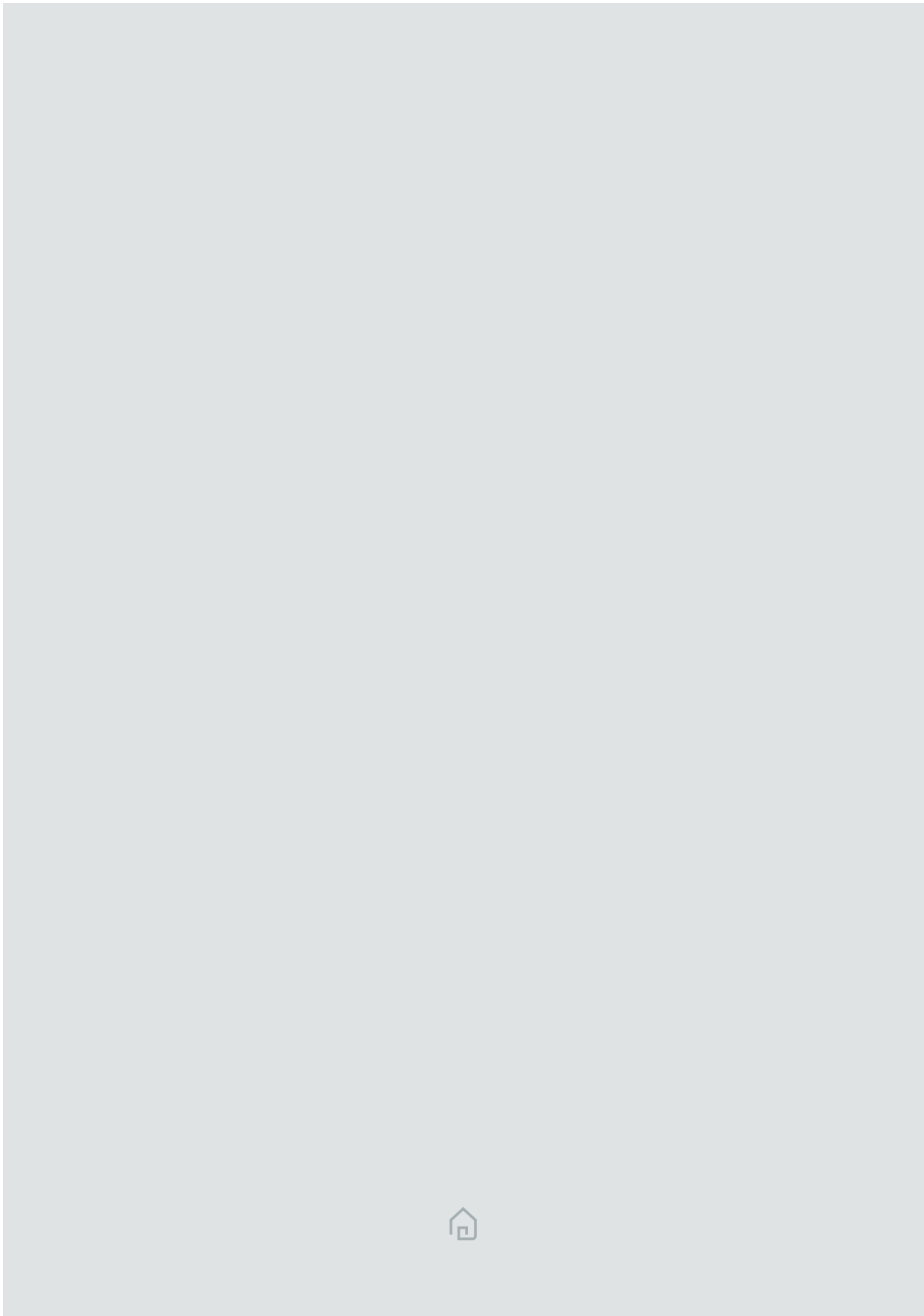
"My presentation shows the status of an urban environment at an exact moment—the moment of my presence," Wei Teck says. The concept behind creating a detailed photographic and digital record of the route is so that anyone using the map and measurements could retrace it in its entirety, making detours wherever accessibility proves to be an issue in the future. I mention that his process appeared to be very rigorous and scientific, almost like field research, except instead of producing objective scientific data he was producing art, which is more emotive and subjective.

Wei Teck points out that there is no reason a scientific endeavour cannot result in art. He brings up the aestheticism of the NASA-produced topographical map, "Surface of the Moon, Day 319, W-F." (1967), a beautifully composed, scientifically accurate photomontage of individual sections of the lunar surface.

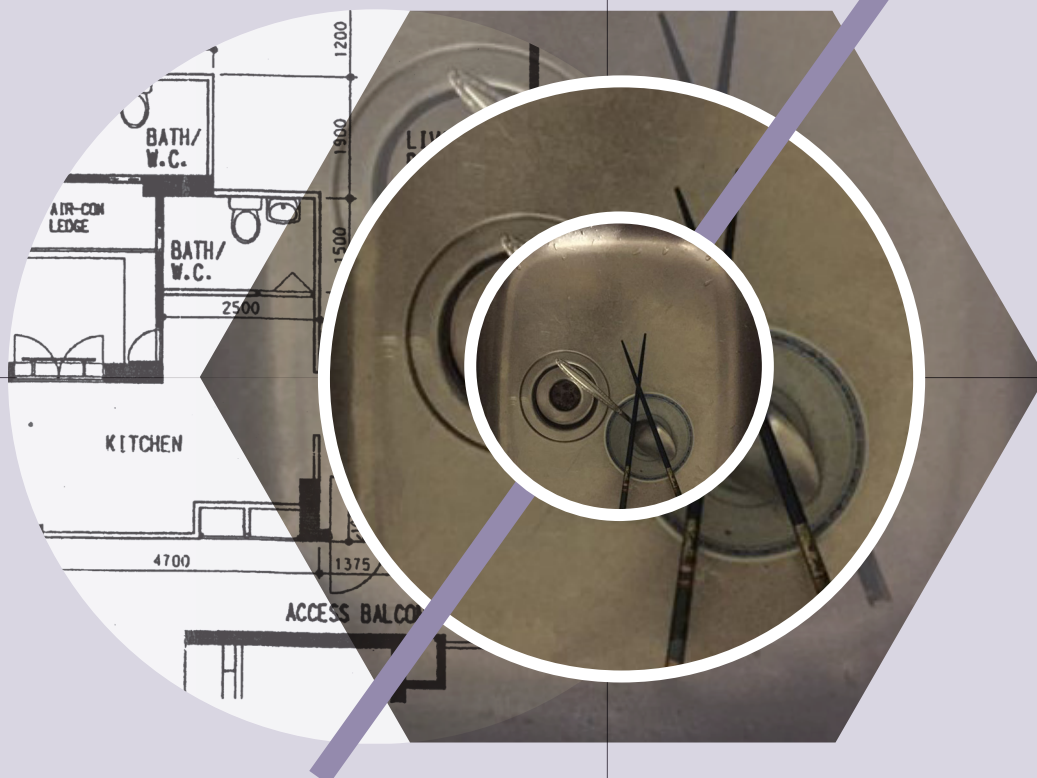
"It's about manipulating technologies to serve our needs," he says.

Citing the 16th century Chinese classic *Journey to the West*, he concedes that "journeys and routes are better described in literature than visual arts." I begin to notice the striking parallels between his project and the search for promised land in *Journey to the West*. The popular fictionalised story is based on the real Buddhist pilgrim Xuanzang's *Record of the Western Regions*, an account so extensive it included daily records of the food and spices he received from Buddhist monasteries. The empirical geographical descriptions in the text were later studied by officials, travellers and merchants who sought to venture into the Central Asian and Indian regions.

For Queenstown residents, whose journey is one not of spiritual edification but state-sponsored relocation, can there be light at the end of the tunnel? The movement of people and homes under the banner of redevelopment is part of broader tectonic shifts in population demographics, government spending, expectations surrounding quality of life and standards of living, and the ineffable value of land. Many of the residents agree to be rehoused on their own volition and, at the same time, despite themselves. The balance between modernism and conservation is a question that Singapore continues to wrestle with. Perhaps what is missing in the conversation is what we can do to mitigate the consequences of grief and loss. The artworks proffer the beginning of an answer to this in their attempts to record the collective memory of a space before it is lost to the corridors of time. 🏠







Noodles

A young lady meets a stalwart of the neighbourhood. Through new relationships, the fabric of a place weaves new memories.

Words by **Emma Goh**

The Writer

Emma Goh works in communications by day and scribbles in her spare time when encouraged by friends. She takes comfort in fiction.







Gill peeled the prawns and chopped them up with the minced meat. The heavy, cool steel of the chopper was comforting, and the repetitive motion lulled her into a meditative state this sweltering afternoon. Nodding to the beat of a top forty hit blasting on the kitchen radio, she grabbed a *wonton* skin and spooned the meat onto a square, flat slice of dough. Gill dipped a finger into the bowl of egg white and skilfully pleated the loose flaps before sealing the dumpling. She set it carefully on a flour-dusted plate, to join twelve other pouches almost bursting at their seams.

The clock read 4:15, forty-five minutes before Mr Wong closes the shop. Mr Wong ran the space for many years but didn't sew anymore. At seventy-two, his eyes have lost their sharp focus and after having cataracts removed at sixty-four, he relinquished his tedious, time-consuming role at the sewing machine.

Gill had taken her favourite dress in right on the day she moved into the neighbourhood. Her parents had just taken a peek at her new rented room and reluctantly left their only adopted daughter to her newfound freedom. The first thing she did was to arrange her clothes in the wardrobe, and saw that her lucky black shift had a long, rather systematic rip where the seams hid the zip at the back. She had a first date the following evening and was dismayed at the thought of wearing anything else.

Panicking, she had run into the tiny store under the next block, to find the old man

OPPOSITE NG HUI HSIEN, 'SANDS'

leaning back in an armchair, nodding off with a pen in his hand. The soft whirr of the fan next to him stirred the short white wisps at the side of his brow. She glanced at the photograph next to a notepad he was writing on: it showed a young woman holding a baby, with two older ones on either side of her. There wasn't anyone else in sight. He looked very comfortable but she really needed to get this sorted. Gill had walked up to him and hesitantly tapped him on the shoulder, "Uncle?"

That was two years ago. Gill later found out that the woman was the old man's niece, and that he had been tailoring, mending and altering all manner of garments in the neighbourhood for the past 45 years. He moved into the nearby flat just across the food centre with his late wife just after they were married in the 60s. Their two children, who have years ago left the nest to start their own families, were living an hour away by bus.

All this Gill discovered after a few more trips to renew shredded hems of dress pants and getting her *cheongsams* and formal dresses tucked in (or out) to fit. She saw that the old man's loyal customers regarded him with much fondness, often hanging around to trade news, confide or seek advice as he lounged in his chair. Gill herself walked past the shop everyday on the way out and back, and often stopped to chat. She gathered he loved the noodle dish that his wife used to cook for him, and often brought portions down for the tailor when she made some for herself.

OPPOSITE NG HUI HSIEN, 'SANDS'









He took in a deep breath and slowly opened his eyes. The uncle looked at her and his mouth curved into a small smile. “Lei farn lei lah¹?” Gill couldn’t help but smile back, a reaction to the open, affectionate tone. “Tho ngor moh? Ngor dey hor yi hui sek. Lei zong yi ar – wan tan min oi mm oi²?”

“Oh, er, uncle ngor mm hai er... 你可能认错人了³.” The old man sat up and gazed at the young lady he hadn’t seen before. She looked familiar.

The faint sounds of footsteps and a door swinging open made and both of them turned to a woman entering the shop. It was his niece, who found out what the visitor wanted with her dress.

Over time, Mr Wong built a rapport with this tall lady whom he had mistaken for his wife. She looked exactly like her when she was in her thirties. Even her easy charm and hand gestures were the same.

Today, she came bearing a plastic container of *wonton* noodles for him. She sat down and started chatting while watching him eat. His mind went back to the day he met Gill. It would have been his wife’s seventieth birthday. He saw her again when he dozed off, “Hoi fan zor lei er... dai gor laeng lui⁴.”

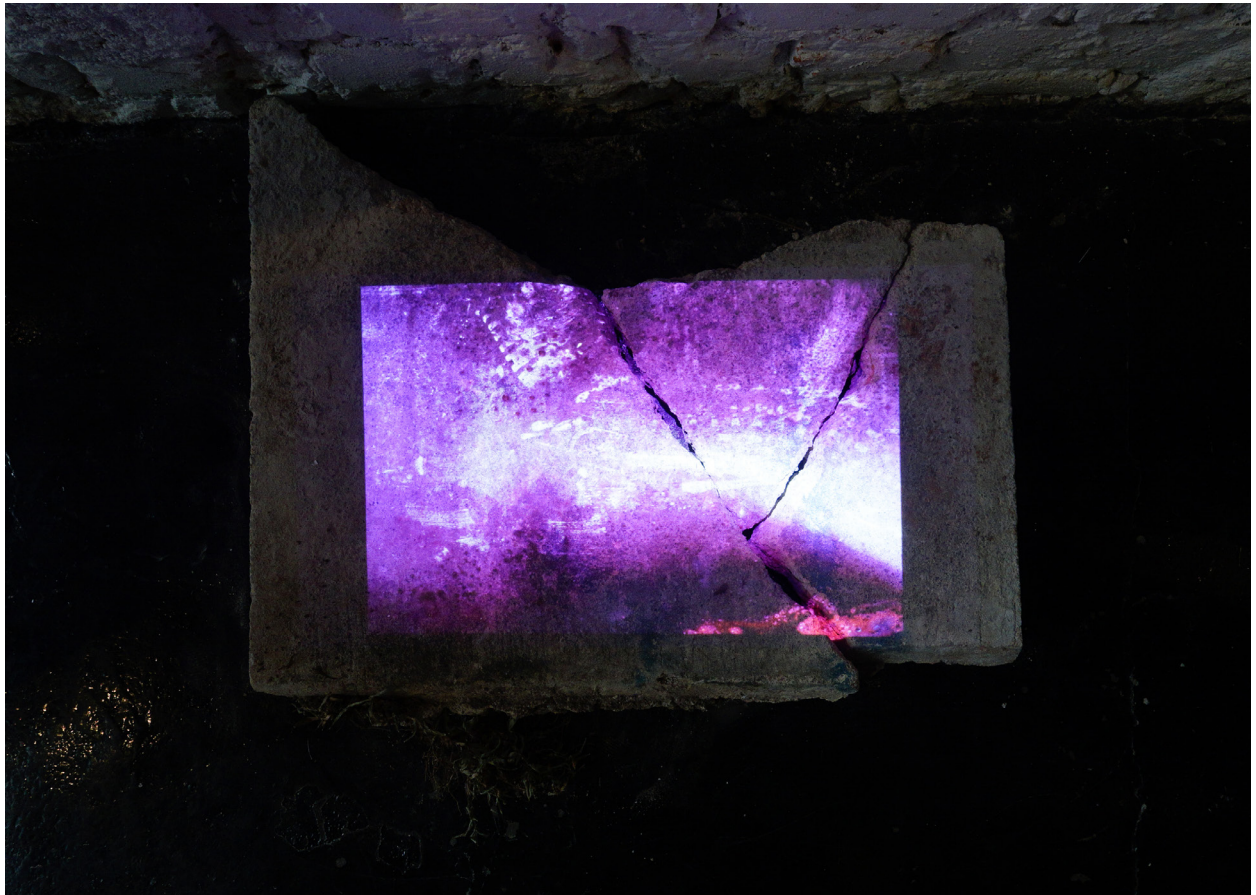
She would probably be around her age then. I wish I had a daughter like her.

1. Cantonese: “You’ve come back/home/returned”.

2. Cantonese: “Are you hungry? We could go eat. Whatever you want – how about won ton noodles?”

3. “(Cantonese) ...uncle, I’m not er... (Mandarin:) You probably mistook me for someone else.”

4. Cantonese: “She’s back, grown up and beautiful.”



Artist: Ng Hui Hsien

Title: Sands

Medium: Photographs projected on
concrete

A series of photographs thoughtfully articulated into a slideshow present Queenstown and its residents in a mixture of abstract and realistic arrangements. "Sands" is a collection of images that for the artist, "convey a sense of place, but also to represent and express subjective, intimate states of being."



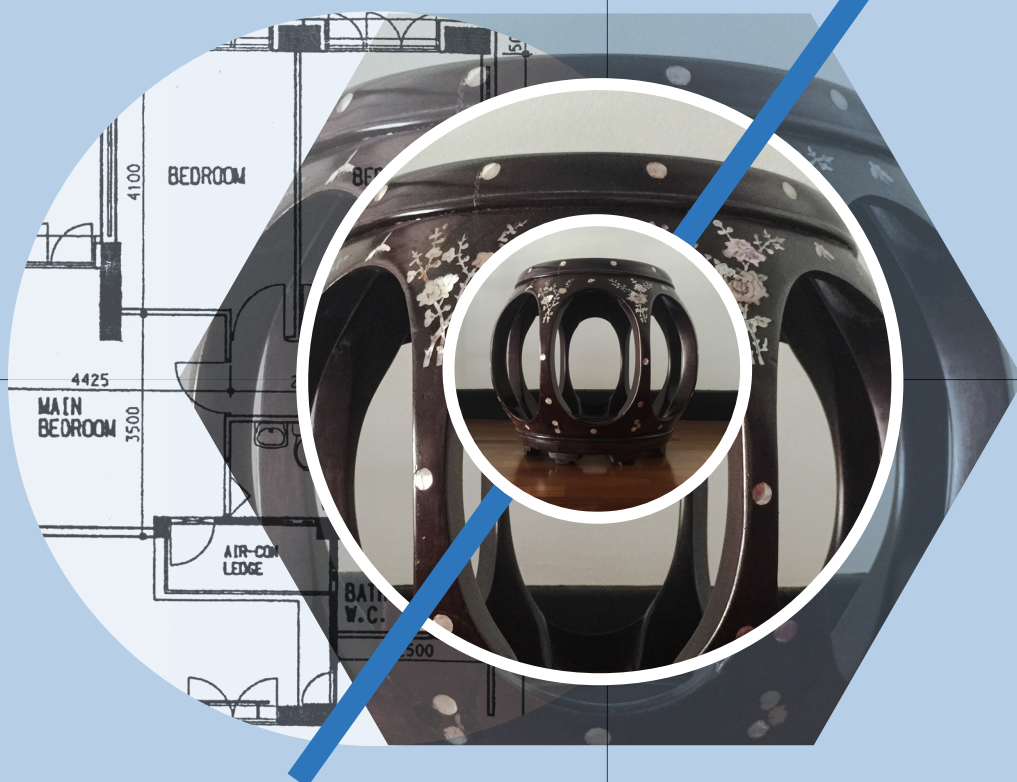
Artist: Sufian Samsiyar

Title: The Imaginary World of Tanglin Halt

Medium: Cork board and drawings on paper, book

This whimsical piece consists of an imaginary map made up of buildings, items and entities drawn or described by friends of the artist. The artist takes on the role of Mayor and redevelops an imagined estate by pinning drawings on corkboard, to render a town "ridiculous, absurd, strange and magical" - a comment on society's obsession with creating Utopia.





Here Before There After:

These footnotes from a stranger's notebook present a trove of memories—and an ambivalence that come with such territory.

Words by **He Liwei**

The Writer

He Liwei is a freelance writer, copywriter and translator who lives and works in Singapore. She was trained in Sociology and is curious about people, food and the relationship that unites both. This is her first creative writing piece.



Ex-Libris

Backstory, 1970. A repository of books had been prescribed for the town. Nine months earlier, the boys had watched as ladies laid the bricks one on top of the other: The oblongs, the H-shaped, the curious ellipses. Inside, a space to linger and soak it all in, **dangly keys to a new world**¹. (The kiddies get their own floor, along with one **storytelling room**². Perhaps some stories are better told in person.)

Escape

Go to your happy place. **Golden City and Venus cinemas**¹, beckoning with the glamour of anywhere-but-here. Celluloid stage is set for duelling sword-fighting heroes. And yet who'd have guessed, decades yonder, these venues were themselves to ignite **new odes**² to a tinted mythic past. **The Quest**³ began simply enough, but we'll have to find a larger stage.

¹"When I want to research, that's the only place where you can have encyclopaedias, only hoping that when you get to the page, that it's still there, it's not been torn out.....in those days, you feel a sort of rite of passage in different ways. Downstairs was the children; upstairs was adult and you just wanted to wait for the day when you can go upstairs."

- Interview with Mr Heng Chee How (Accn no. 003142/01), Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore

²One of two floors of the original layout of the Queenstown Library was demarcated the 'Children's Room'.

¹Golden City and Venus (1965 – 1984) were two cinemas that featured prominently as epicentres of entertainment in Queenstown.

²Three of the seven short films in 7 Letters (2015) featured Tanglin Halt in Queenstown. Tanglin Halt also formed the backdrop to Perth (2004), a film whose main character harbours dreams to migrate to the title city.

³The Quests was one of the most popular local bands in the sixties comprising members who first had first met at Queenstown Technical Secondary School, a stone's throw away from the cinemas. The band had taken its name from the title of the school publication.



Halt

Keep the shutters open, to let in the light. But don't peer too close, for these new heights take some getting used to. Keep the shutters open, they say, to allow for the **air to circulate**¹. Like the chatter of the neighbours, **ball-trippin' children**² from the plots below. Or the scheduled honks from passing trains and the saccharine scent of **confectionery**³ on the make. But that was then, this is now. The **disused tracks**⁴ hum to an idle lullaby, chocolate factories melt into a sweet memory. Keep the shutters open, regardless.

Signpost

Unlike piped running water, it took a while to get accustomed to the presence of the flash new structures. Dwellings **ten-fourteen-sixteen storeys high**¹, others accented with blue-tinted glass windows. Linking them, newly-minted transport arteries bearing names from **faraway temperate places**² --- all the better to welcome **royalty knocking at the door**³. Doesn't matter if you can't read the signs, take your **bearings from these structures**⁴. Drop pebbles along the trail, choose them over crumbs. Choose pebbles over crumbs, and you'll always find your way home.

¹"Neighbourliness very, very strong because you open up, you have got neighbours. In those days people usually don't close the doors because otherwise it is very hot."

- Interview with Mr Chan Soo Sen (Accn no. 003151), Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore

²"And we used to play like four a side or five a side depending on how many players you have. And then you would get shouted at by the neighbours especially when you hit the ball and it hits the wall of one of their flats. And you know, this lady will open up her window and scold obscenities, "anak suna mau mati..." So we all go and hide."

- Interview with Mr Brian Richmond (Accn no. 003155/3), Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore

³Tanglin Halt Industrial Estate, which occupied parts of the area from the sixties to the eighties, comprised occupants from the light and medium industries that included chocolate-making factories.

⁴30-06-11, 11:09 pm. The last KTM train made its last foray on the tracks bordering the Tanglin Halt estate.

¹Chap Lau, Chap Si Lau, Chap Luk Lau were colloquial nicknames given to the apartment blocks by the residents of Queenstown, in reference to the number of floors that each had.

²Not only was 'Queenstown' a nod to Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953, roads --- Dundee, Strathmore, Stirling --- take on names that referenced places in Scotland where the Queen had spent her childhood.

³As the first satellite town in Singapore, Queenstown played host to a roster of visiting dignitaries, including the Duke of Edinburgh Prince Philip in 1965 and more recently, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge in 2012.

⁴"Because most of the parents were illiterate. They couldn't read the street names, so they used the local nicknames to call them. So we tell them [taxi drivers] Thye Hong, Thye Hong, Lam Po Lay. Turn right, Boh Beh Kang, Chap Si Lau, Chap Luck Lau... And then Tanglin Halt is called Chap Lau. So these are the nicknames, you know, so to give landmarks to them."

- Interview with Associate Professor Koo Tsai Kee (Accn No. 003140/01), Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore



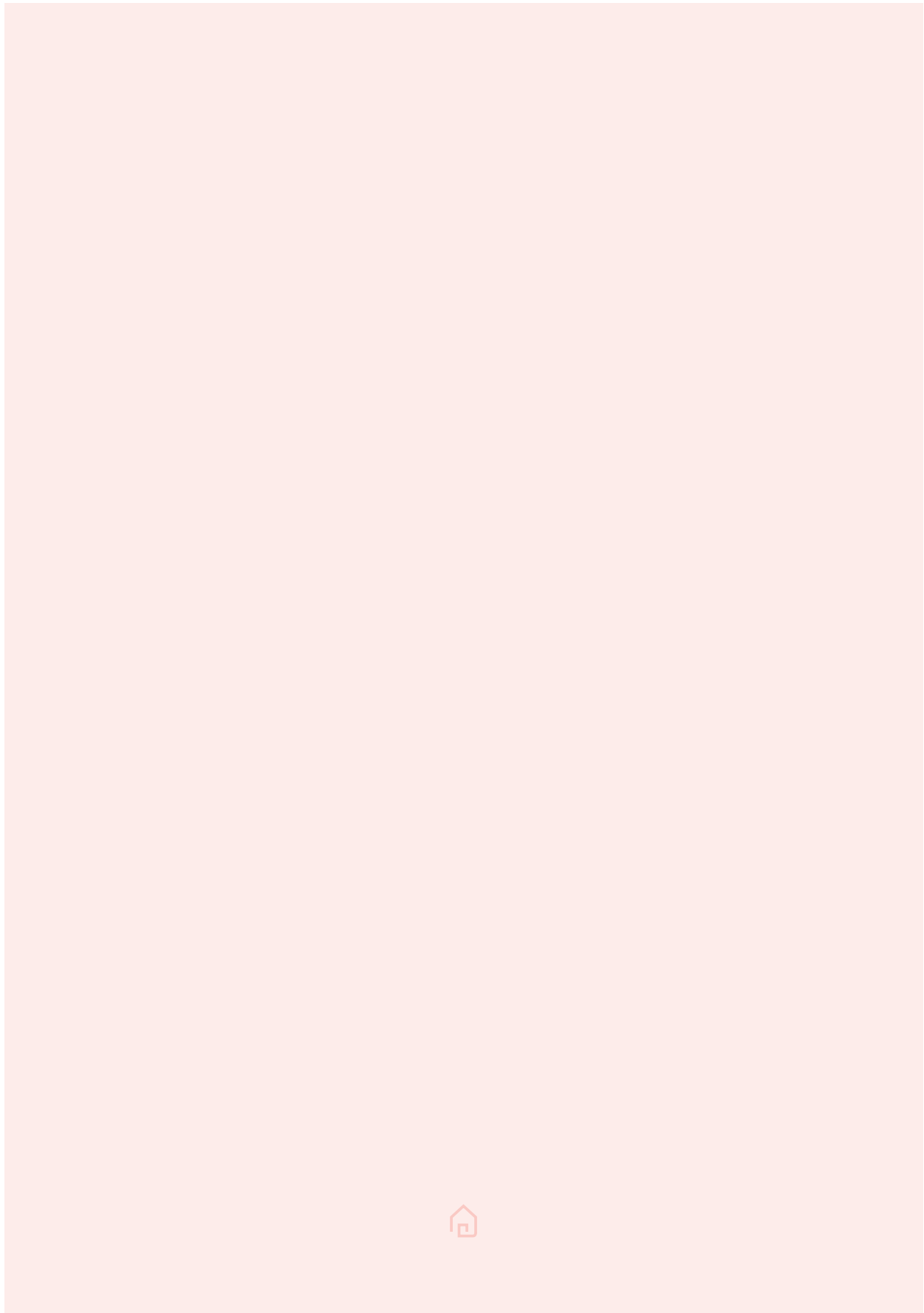
POSTSCRIPT

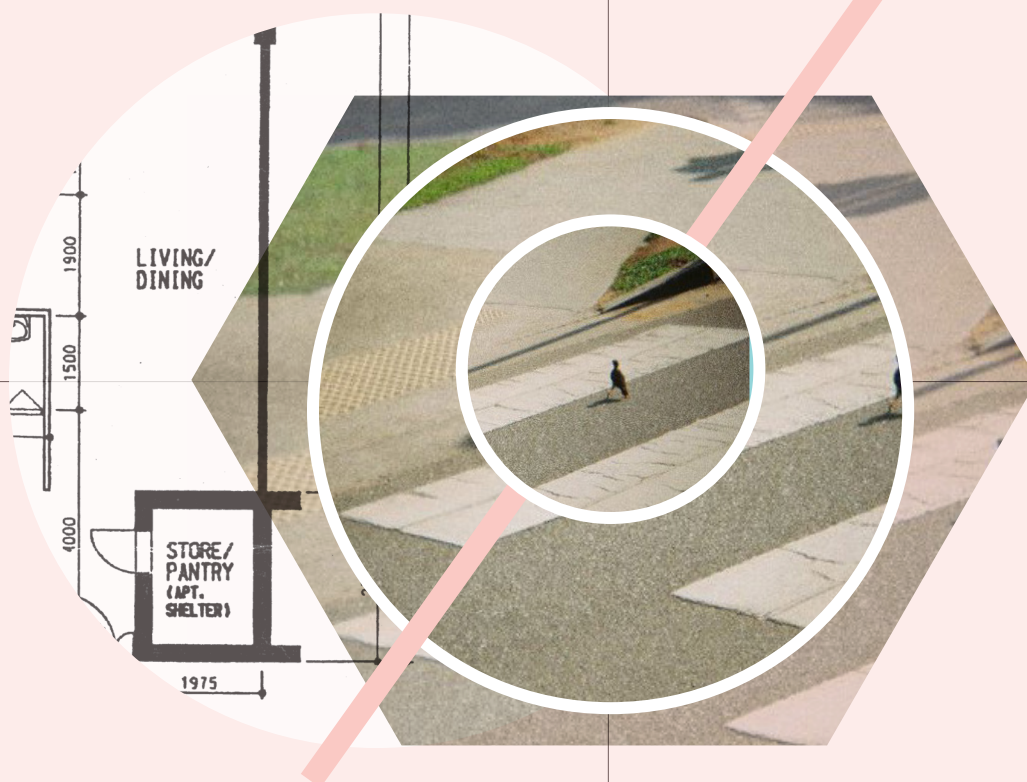
Some are everyday, others are symbolic, but all are precious. Just as the personal objects in the evocative make-shift bedroom in Charmaine Poh's *The Room Within* are rendered priceless because they hold a trove of memories, life lessons, dreams and heartbreak for her subjects, so the landmarks in Queenstown referenced in this written piece are inscribed with meaning by the community because they are repositories of memory --- albeit on a different scale. For that reason, content was gleaned entirely from secondary digital sources to reflect this shift from the individual to the collective, from primary to iterative.

Megan Miao's installation *Air/Soil* captures the dialectical nature of community responses to urban renewal, along with the assessment of 'value' when we speak of home. The fluid and intangible nature of air, exemplified by a standing fan, is juxtaposed with the weightiness and tactility of soil. Both elements are inextricably linked by a common thread, literally and figuratively speaking: the yarn --- or story --- of Tanglin Halt continues to unravel to create new imaginings. This written piece is a response and attempt to capture that sense of ambivalence.









Movements and Barriers

Artist Nuria travelled 14,000km from Girona to Tanglin Halt for her month-long residency. Her journey offered a snapshot of a connection made across the most complex of boundaries: language, ethnicity, culture.

Interview by **Loo Ching Ling & Bestlyn Loo**



The Interviewers

Loo Ching Ling and Bestlyn

Loo are sisters-in-crime who, when left unattended, took the opportunity to grill artist Nuria on all topics they could think of. Their other joint endeavours include blogging about documentaries and competing to find the best cat videos.

There is an immense wealth to express how divinity manifests. There is a spiritual consciousness that is healthy, respectful and harmonious rooted in everyday life of people.

During her month-long residency in a local Singapore neighbourhood, Nuria puzzled over Singlish tongue twisters, wilted under the equatorial sun, and fretted over domestic issues back home. Yet, she was excited and inspired by her strange new surroundings. How do we get to know a place, a person or a period? Over several rounds of kopi and kaya, we looked for ways to bring out the beauty and randomness of our too-short time together.

B/CL: What difficulties did you experience during your project?

N: Having produced work immediately. And the language.

B/CL: How did you try to overcome these difficulties?

N: Changing my perception remind me that I've done so far is part of a process that goes beyond the immediacy and that I have finished presenting, in

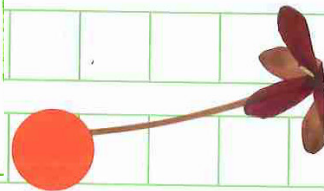
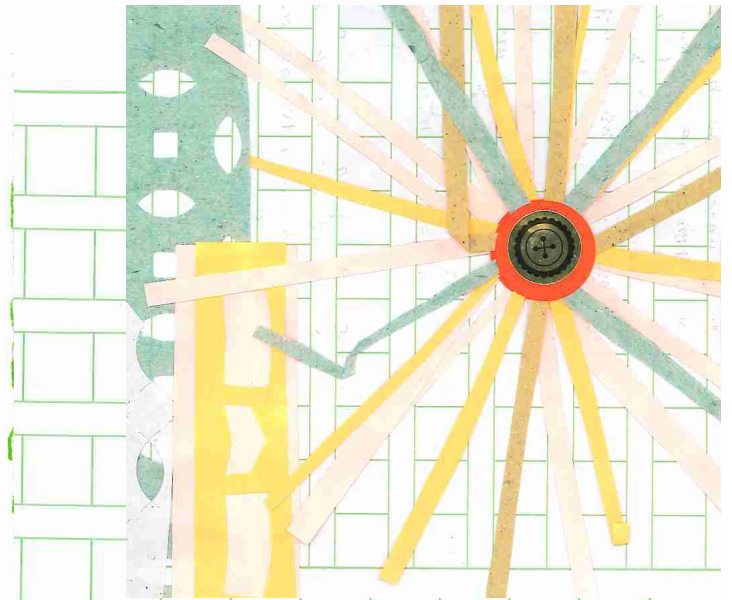
certain aspects, are initial notes about perceptions in which I could satisfy more research. Internally, it live as the start of a process that asks me to close the formal level, but I can not conclude in the vital and creative area. It isn't in my hands, I can only hear him, it travels free inside me. It's life giving me and I already speak when the time past. Regarding language difficulties, I have tried to treat them with playfulness, while still being aware of the limitations in this area.

B/CL: How did you incorporate these difficulties into your work?

N: Accepting and adding.

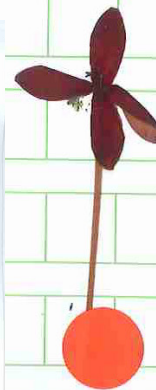
B/CL: Why did you want to come to Singapore?

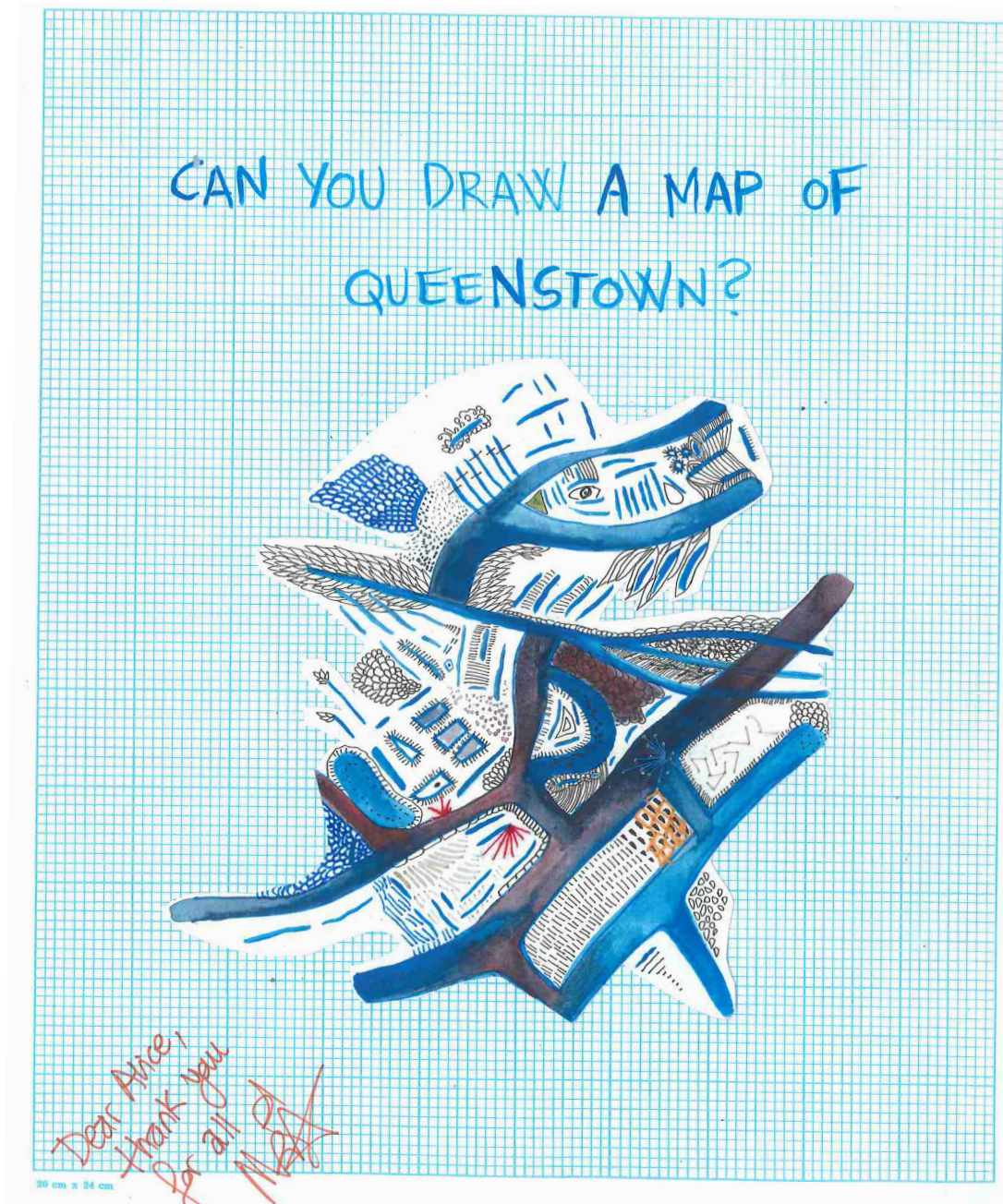
N: I request a scholarship in art community that develops here. My lack of knowledge of about Singapore was considerable, especially not being able to speak English, and could have been anywhere else in the world. Anyway,



WHAT SIMILARITIES OR DIFFERENCE DID YOU DISCOVER BETWEEN SINGAPOREAN CULTURES AND YOUR OWN?

DIFFERENCE: Here there is an immense wealth to express how divinity manifests. There is a spiritual consciousness healthy, respectful and harmonious rooted in everyday life of people. In my country, there are many more contradictions toward religious beliefs and spiritual awareness, and great confusion between belief and fact of feeling. I personally feel it is essential to do this and lead to spiritual awareness. When I plug it all makes sense and feel that my degree of acceptance towards improving things.







I saw it was an opportunity to open myself and go beyond what was known so far.

B/CL: What similarities or differences did you discover between Singaporean culture and your own (back home in Italy)?

N: Here (in Singapore) there is an immense wealth to express how divinity manifests. There is a spiritual consciousness that is healthy, respectful and harmonious rooted in everyday life of people. In my home, there are many more contradictions toward religious beliefs and spiritual awareness, and great confusion between belief and fact of feeling. I personally feel it is essential to do this and that it can lead to spiritual awareness. When I plug in, it all makes sense and feel that my degree of acceptance (is directly related) towards improving things.

The similarity in this respect is that although various forms manifest, the essence is the same: there is something that is bigger than us, bigger than what we can feel. Its mystery is nothing, yet it is.

Unfortunately, we share a 'cultural trait' and that is the excessive consumption of things that are not necessary to live. It is something that I have saw clearly both here and there.



B/CL: How did you feel talking to Alice and the other Queenstown residents?

N: One of the difficulties has been the language, as I said. After the first meeting with Alice, I had a little difficulty because I had not clearly explained my goals. Then I transform this feeling and I realised I just had to listen and trust in the same process. So I afford not to make use of the organisational work that had been prepared and of unique form on intuition.

B/CL: Was it easy to move around in Queenstown, and Singapore?

N: Yes, Matt3r has done a lot for me in this regard.

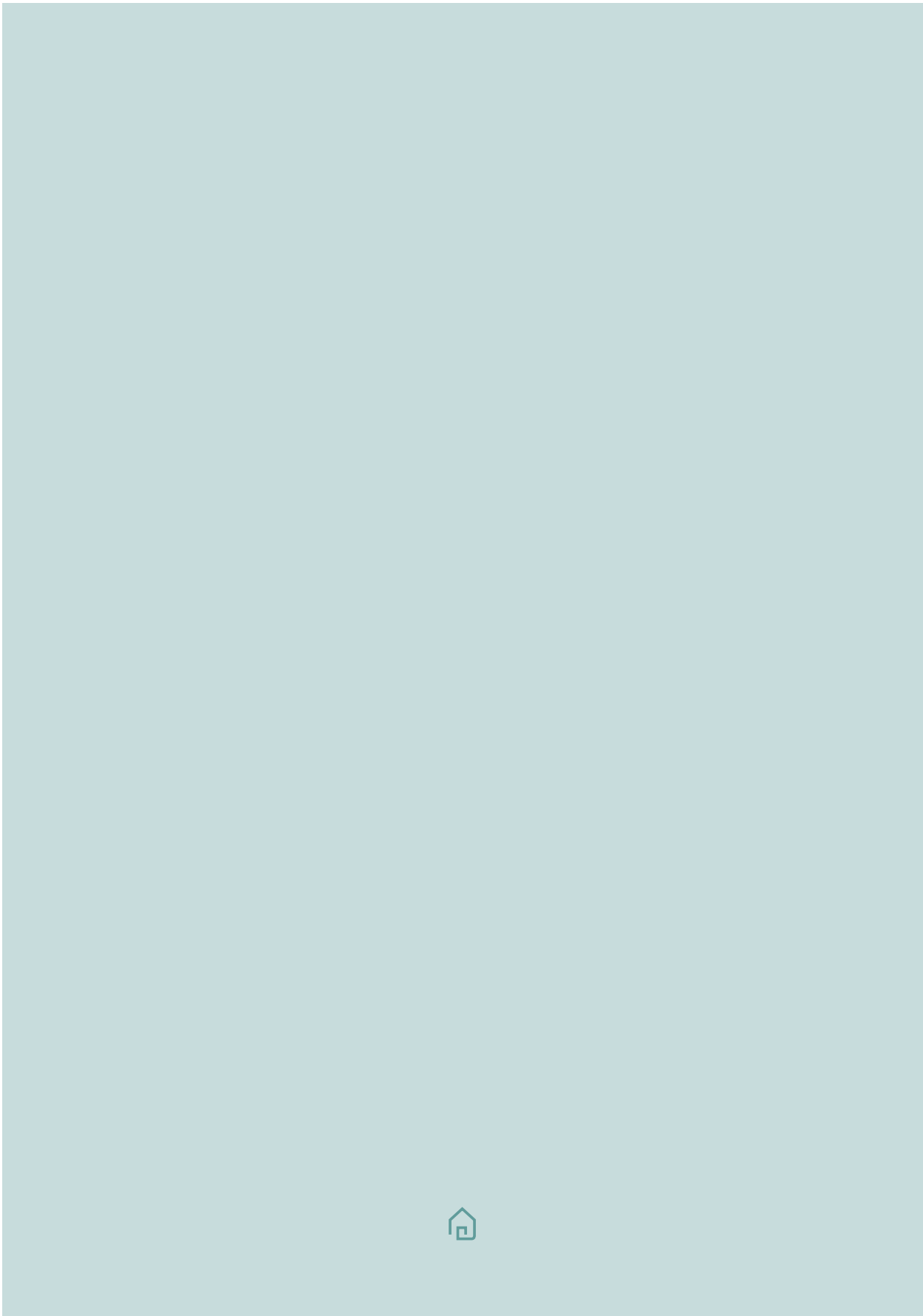
B/CL: How has your experience so far changed you?

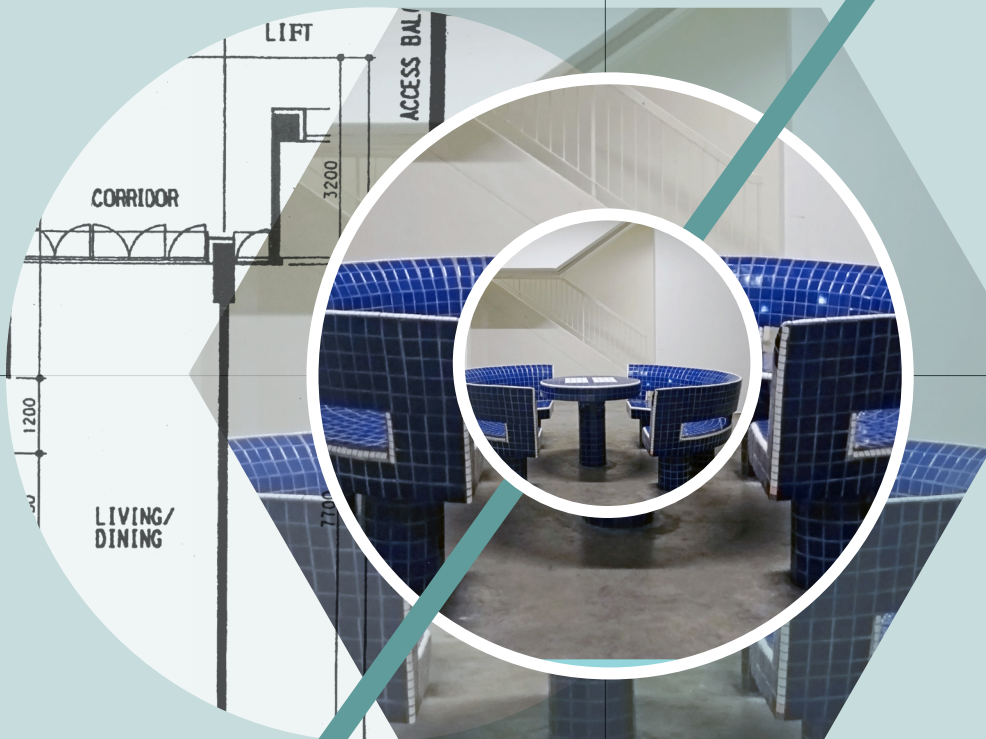
N: The experience since beginning was rich. I know I'm changing, but I dare not put words to something that still cooks in secret. At the moment, I feel that any change I will see in the same creative work and over the time.

B/CL: What advice would you give another artist who participates in a foreign residency?

N: You should be faithful to yourself and open yourself, for things are expressed through you.

EDITOR'S NOTE: THE INTERVIEW WAS TRANSCRIBED AD VERBATIM, WITH SOME AMENDMENTS FOR READABILITY, TO CAPTURE THE IN-PERSON CONVERSATIONS WITH THE ARTIST NURIA, FOR WHOM ENGLISH IS NOT A NATIVE LANGUAGE.





Settlements

Penang and Singapore can still be seen as foils to each other. They share a certain core—multiculturalism, economic prowess, strategic location, ambitions.

We can add one more to that list. Culture. Both cities are in pursuit of an artistic renaissance of sorts.

Words by **Nazry Bahrawi**

The Writer

Nazry Bahrawi is a literary and cultural critic who flourishes in intersections. His research explores the interstices between cultures, philosophies, aesthetics and disciplines. His op-ed commentaries have appeared in The Guardian, Al Jazeera, South China Morning Post and Today.





They share a certain core —
multiculturalism, economic
prowess, strategic location,
ambitions.

IN THE beginning, there were three. At least that is what appears to be the consensus over at the British East India Company back in the nineteenth century. Three golden cities along this narrow strip of water that is the Straits of Malacca. A triptych of treasure troves. Or, three cash cows to be milked. Penang, Malacca and Singapore. Banded together in 1826, the three became the Straits Settlements, together with the lesser known Dinding district as well as Christmas and Cocos islands. Between these, the two that truly stood out for these British capitalist-overlords were Penang and Singapore. Both were christened capital of the Settlements, with Penang making way for bustling Singapore in 1832. I am the son of the latter. I am Bin Singapura.

Today, the two cities can still be seen as foils to each other. They share a certain core—multiculturalism, economic prowess, strategic location, ambitions. We can add one more to that list. Culture. Both cities are in

pursuit of an artistic renaissance of sorts. The sort enabled by markets. For Penang, this was spurred by George Town's status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, conferred alongside Malacca City in 2008. Singapore, meanwhile, harbours hope of becoming a vibrant cultural hub in Southeast Asia. Not only will make this make the city-state alluring to the throngs of economic migrants and tourists it wishes to attract, but it will also nurture a certain patriotic pride for its citizens, transforming the idea of the Singapore nation from an imagined community into an empirical one. Culture, like the media, can aid 'nation building', to borrow the phrase popular with its political elites.

Amidst the sweltering heat of December 2015, I was haunted by this sense of twinning as I wandered the streets of George Town. My virgin visit to the capital of a former capital was full of nostalgic observations. Parts of George Town made me think of Tiong Bahru. Then there were parts that

OPPOSITE EVEN THE MALAYSIAN MONARCHY CAN BE THE SUBJECT OF SATIRE IN GEORGETOWN.
IMAGE CREDIT: NAZRY BAHRAWI

invoked the feel of Arab Street. Yet some others seemed to me like Little India. But all of it took me back to the Singapore of my childhood when it was still morphing into a first world economy. An in-between state. A cocooned state. Thankfully, today we flutter like the butterfly we rightfully should be.

Penang was when it hit me that I had truly fallen prey to Singapore's rags-to-riches story. I am not alone in this. Many of my fellow countrymen are taken by the narrative of our astounding progress. They think of home. They think of visionary leaders. They think of pioneers who had toiled. They think of racial riots. They want to keep the streets safe. They keep alive the Singapore Story. To be born in Singapore is to be blessed. Were it that simple. Penang was when I suffered from the nagging feeling that it is equally a curse. In truth, this was not an epiphany but a lingering sentiment.

It was an arts gathering that had beckoned me to George Town. A regional meeting of community-engaged artists and practitioners organised by the non-profit outfit, Arts-ED Penang. While the event was funded by two government-linked institutions, it also felt free from the grips of bureaucracy. Panel discussions sometimes went beyond their allocated time and topic, but the digressions were seldom banal. There, I became acquainted with

an eclectic group of artists from the region. Forming a quick but lasting bond, my friends/peers and I were quick to settle into bouts of ramblings. Late into the night, we discussed the possibility of an arts movement. The One Movement, we've called it. That which embraces the polymathic ideal in a world that rewards expertise and silos. Except everything is part of something else. All roads lead to one. Our ramblings weren't just abstract. Together, we roamed George Town. Moving as one. Being true to our philosophy. This time, I no longer saw the town as Singapore-in-progress. It was a visit to an art gallery that drove this point home. An old friend of a new friend had a gallery. He was holding a party, and our tight little group was invited. Eager for adventure, we acquiesced. As soon as dusk came, we meandered through the alleys, turning into a dodgy street but emerging into a delightful little corner at the next, this process repeating itself several times over, till we finally found our way to our destination. All in all, the trip must've only taken us fifteen minutes. It felt like fifteen hours.

The gallery didn't conform to my Singaporean sensate. It may be in a shop-house but it's nothing like the fancy units at Gilman Barracks or those nestled comfortably within the alleys behind New Bridge Road. The Penang gallery was run-down. Perhaps it saw better days, but

we were there on its last day of operation, something I found out only on reaching the place. On its first floor was laid out a rudimentary table with snacks that include fruits and crackers. Its second floor had a tiny balcony and two small rooms.

Its art pieces were synonymous to its décor, as if the gallery was an ordinary house. This was the genius of it all. The very embodiment of community-engaged art. Unpretentious. Organic. Accessible. Perched on its balcony was a wooden sculpture of three men in songkok. One figure was holding up coconuts in reverence and another was peering through what appeared to be bamboo binoculars. It was a political piece. A satirical take on the widely-reported case of the Malaysian bomohs who had appeared at Kuala Lumpur International Airport one fine March afternoon in 2014 to help rescuers find the missing MH370 flight through magic. Another critical piece was expressed in the form of two portraits of the Malaysian royals, but with their backs turned to the viewer. For the uninitiated, Malaysians often hang portraits of the Agong and his Permaisuri as a sign of respect in public offices, shops and homes. I left early that night. But it wasn't because I disliked the experience. On the contrary, it was cathartic. As I wandered back to my quarters, this time alone, I recalled stopping a minute to admire the cloudless sky that night. The stars looked different in Penang. 🏠

OPPOSITE TOP LEFT THIS CANDID SHOT OF AN ELDERLY CHINESE MAN NONCHALANTLY CYCLING PAST A TAMIL MUSLIM MOSQUE SUGGESTS ORGANIC MULTICURALISM AT PLAY IN PENANG.

OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT ART FOR SOCIETY'S SAKE REPRESENTED THROUGH THIS WOODEN SCULPTURE OF THE INFAMOUS COCONUT BOMOHs PERFORMING RITUALS USED TO HELP RESCUERS FIND THE MISSING MH370 FLIGHT IN 2014.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM LEFT PERANAKAN TILES, REMINISCENT OF PORTUGUESE AZULEJO TILEWORK, ADORN SHOPHOUSES IN GEORGETOWN.

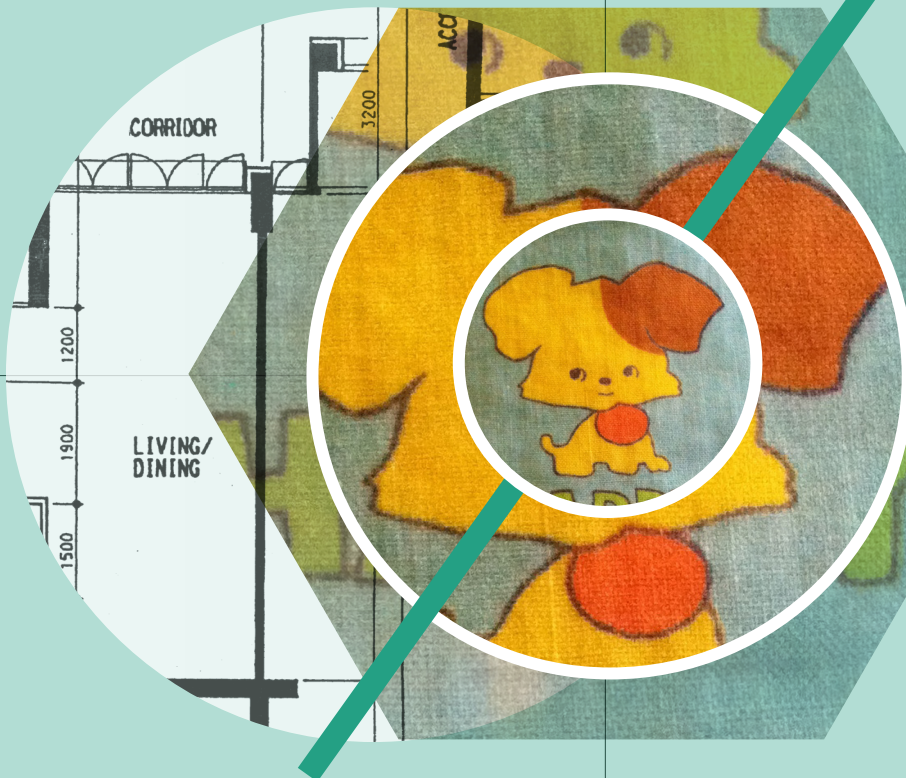
OPPOSITE BOTTOM RIGHT HERBS JARS LINE A TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICAL HALL, OR *SINSEH*, WHICH USED TO BE A COMMON SIGHT IN SINGAPORE HOUSING ESTATES.



ALL IMAGE CREDITS: NAZRY BAHRAWI



THE LIVING ROOM



By Force or By Circumstance

As gentrification fears sour New York's status as a hub for artistic production, the Fung Wah Biennial turns movement democratic by way of travelling art encounters.

Words by **Melinda Lauw**

The Writer

Melinda Lauw is a Singaporean artist and writer based in New York. She specialises in hand tufting, a carpet making technique, and is the recipient of The Christine Risley Award 2015 from the Goldsmiths Textile Collection and Constance Howard Gallery. Her wide-ranging research interests include human perception, material culture and immersive theatre. She is currently an Art Business graduate student at Sotheby's Institute of Art New York.



The lease was ending The owner wants to sell

Artists have made a gentrified New York City. The creative classes move in, turning cheap and unpopular neighbourhoods into safe and trendy locales, and attracting property developers, who in turn roll out fancy apartments and upscale shops. Rents rise above the threshold of the area's original inhabitants.

This theory, though, has also been challenged. Sarah Schulman, author of **The Gentrification of the Mind**, for instance, has argued that gentrification is a systemic problem distributed via government policy, and is inexplicably intertwined with issues such as the increasing professionalisation of the artist.

Regardless, the movements of the New York art world can be traced geographically. In the 70s and 80s, the East Village, known then as Downtown New York, was an incubator for a diverse range of artists that included Sol Lewitt, Eva Hesse, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring, who played leading roles in the 1960s Conceptual movement. In the 1990s and 2000s, as the big brands moved in, artists and galleries moved out to Brooklyn (Greenpoint and Williamsburg, then

Bushwick) and Chelsea; the latter is now lined with blue-chip galleries, 'starchitecture' and topped off with the new Whitney Museum of American Art building.

Galleries that had been pushed out of Chelsea have moved back down to the Lower East Side and up into the untrodden north that is Harlem, while artists have been pushed deeper into suburbia, some even uprooting to more affordable cities altogether, such as Detroit. In 2016, the opening of European galleries Sprüth Magers and Hauser & Wirth in Los Angeles sparked more fears that New York's status as a hub for artistic production would be further threatened by the allure of more space at less cost.

I wish I could allay these fears, but it seems that gentrification has become the de facto condition in which artists today work. If this is accepted, at will or by circumstance, we are forced to rethink the idea of art being tied to a specific breeding ground.

The owner still wants to sell The space is closing But art never stops

In March 2016, Flux Factory organised the Fung Wah Biennial, a 4-in-1 art project constituted by three daytrips via

Chinatown bus routes to Philadelphia, Baltimore and Boston, and a final exhibition in New York. Spread across the month, these trips took audiences on a tour of artist-run or activist-run spaces in neighbouring cities, whilst presenting commissioned works by twenty-six artists en route.

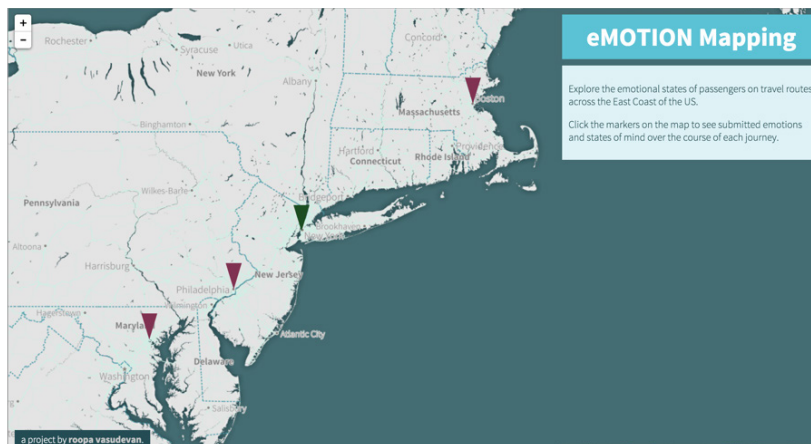
Flux Factory is an artist-run, non-profit space in Long Island City, Queens, which houses artist studios, exhibition space and a residency program. Since their days in a \$1,000-per-month

Brooklyn rental in 1993, the organisation has been collectively run by a group of cultural creators, as they like to call themselves. Each year, they manage a total of thirty to thirty-five artist residencies and organise a multitude of events including 'Flux Thursdays', a monthly salon and potluck that is open to the public. Sadly, the space is set to close in April 2017 at the end of their lease.

In the face of this situation, resident artist Will Owen proposed the Fung Wah Biennial, which overcame Flux's impending lack of physical space and provided them a chance to learn from other artist-run spaces. It also expanded on his personal experience commuting on cheap Chinatown bus routes, a result of him being based in both New York and Philadelphia. To Owen, these bus routes represent a democratic means of intercity travel, an affordable option which many New York artists had historically relied upon in order to travel outside the city to see art. Things have turned the other way around now. Artists who have been pushed out of are increasingly travelling in.

The co-curators, Owen, Matthias Hvass Borello and Sally Szwed conceptualised the bus journeys as micro-communities, existing between a group of passengers for a fixed period of time. The Fung Wah Biennial attracted the standard art audience from its website, but it also created opportunities for strangers to join the trip by posting advertisements for their bus rides onto the classified advertisements website Craigslist.

The Fung Wah Biennial
overcame Flux's impending
lack of physical space.
These bus routes represent
a democratic means of
intercity travel. Except
now, artists who have
been pushed out of are
increasingly travelling in.



Those who joined just for the commute had no idea what was going on and were free to choose if they wanted to participate.

Many of the newly commissioned works were site-specific, or rather, journey-specific, and participatory. For example, New York and Shanghai-based artist Roopa Vasudevan created eMOTION Mapping, a mobile application and web-based map which visualised passengers' state of mind in transit, allowing them to compare the emotional arcs between the three bus routes. Mexican artist Marco Castro Cosio joined the trips carrying onboard a living garden of lavender, which he shared with others on the way. Artist duo Marjan Verstappen and Jessica Vallentin performed the Fung Wah Onboard Service, catering drinks and snacks to passengers. There were also plays, projections, games and podcasts, which enlivened the journeys in bizarre and wonderful ways. In fact, the buses functioned almost as a theatre, with forward facing seats and a microphone in the front.

Many of the commissioned works were site-specific, or rather, journey-specific, and participatory. The plays, projections, games and podcasts enlivened the journeys in bizarre and wonderful ways.

TOP LEFT ROOPA VASUDEVAN, EMOTION MAPPING, 2016. IMAGES COURTESY OF THE ARTIST. OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT SUNITA PRASAD, PRESUMPTUOUS LIVE, 2016. PHOTOGRAPHED BY BRYAN CHANG. OPPOSITE MIDDLE RIGHT MARCO CASTRO COSIO, ROOTS AND BAGGAGE, 2016. PHOTOGRAPHED BY MATTHIAS BORELLO. OPPOSITE BOTTOM RIGHT MARJAN VERSTAPPEN AND JESSICA VALLENTIN, FUNG WAH ONBOARD SERVICE, 2016. PHOTOGRAPHED BY ALEX NATHANSON.

**When we move out
We will have to move all our stuff
Art still refuses to stop**

Currently, Owen is planning a project with two Danish artists, where they would re-appropriate the many storage facilities in Long Island City as art spaces, leveraging their one-month free trials.

Gentrification is perennial, but it is perhaps an imperative for artists to continue to forge new spaces and modes. These 'way out's are perhaps necessary way forwards that work with the ever-changing circumstances that exist in a cityscape.



“Nostalgia” was coined by a young Swiss medical student, Johannes Hofer, in his 1688 medical dissertation from the Greek *nostos*, or homecoming, and *algos*, or pain. He described a pain that results from a desire to return to one’s home—an equivalent to the German term *Heimweh*.

As the term came into vogue in the United States, American military doctor Theodore Calhoun thought nostalgia was something to be ashamed of, that those who suffered from it were unmanly, idle and weak-willed.

It has since shed its negative connotations to become a blanket term for a fondness for a past.
A benign transience.

Singapore's home-ownership has been used as a vehicle of political stability and personal investment amongst communities of immigrants; it is also the kernel around which social bonding and civic movement are wrapped.

This is Home: A Co-creative Artistic Approach

Beyond the legal definition of home-ownership, what does it mean to own a home in Singapore, a country younger than so many of its citizens? And, especially in cases of 99-year leaseholds, how do so-called home-owners define their ownership? For the generation who relocated from laissez-faire lifestyles in kampongs to state-subsidised public housing built by the Singapore Housing Development Board (HDB), how did their experiences of “home” evolve or endure? At the heart of This is Home, the project asks the question “What is home?” to HDB residents.

Within a couple of generations, Singapore has gone from a nation of home-seekers to home-owners, and the country boasts home-ownership rates above 80 percent of the population. Home-ownership has been used as a vehicle of political stability and personal investment amongst communities of immigrants; it is also the kernel around which social bonding and civic movement are wrapped—the HDB allocates flats based on ethnic quotas, encourage grassroots initiatives through the Residents' Committees and promote shared experiences through shared spaces. Home-ownership has also been the key to Singapore's rapid industrialising success in the 1960s—regular mortgage payments necessitated steady income and employment, and thus transformed irregular, informal workers dwelling in kampongs into full-time employees residing in allocated apartment units.

This task is especially pertinent in our pilot estate, Queenstown. We launch our project* in one of Singapore's earliest public housing estates, a landscape of rich historical context and diverse architecture where SIT flats, HDB flats and various public spaces come together. In addition, the imminent relocation of Tanglin Halt residents

through the Selective En-bloc Redevelopment Scheme also infuses an urgency and importance in undertaking a task to document that which would soon be gone.

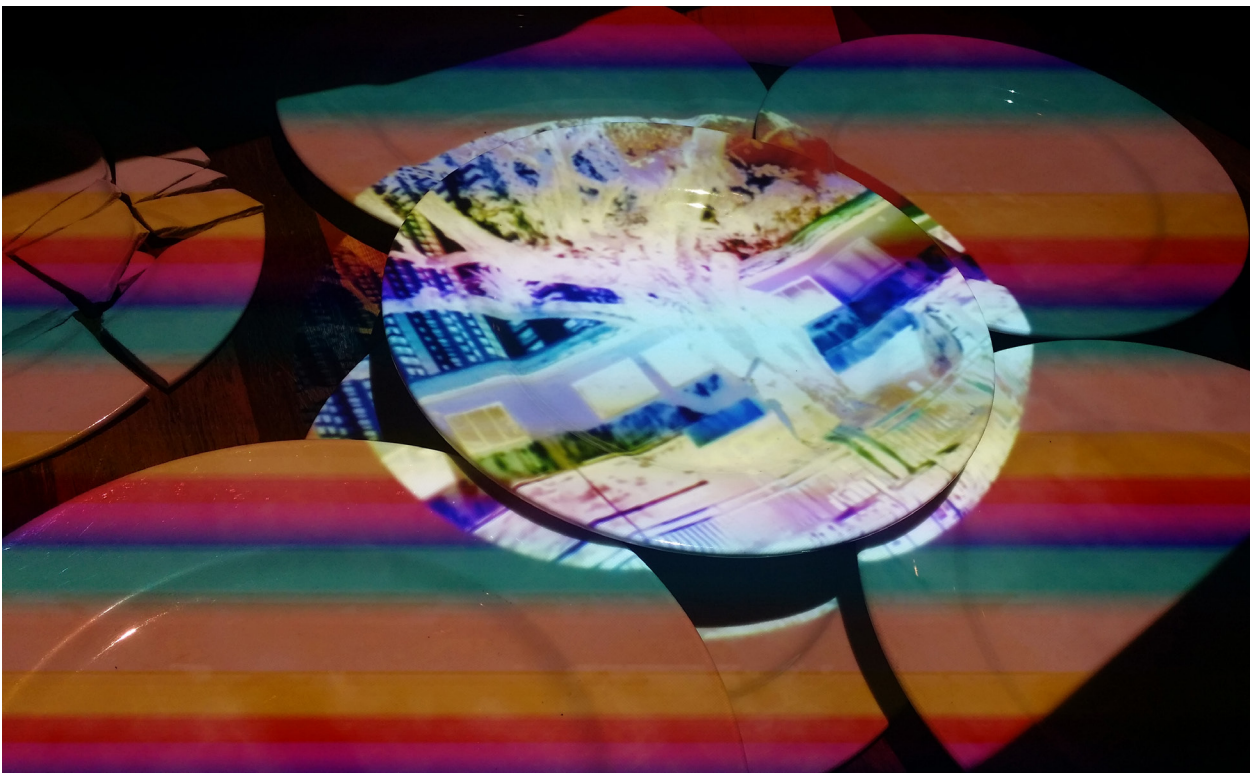
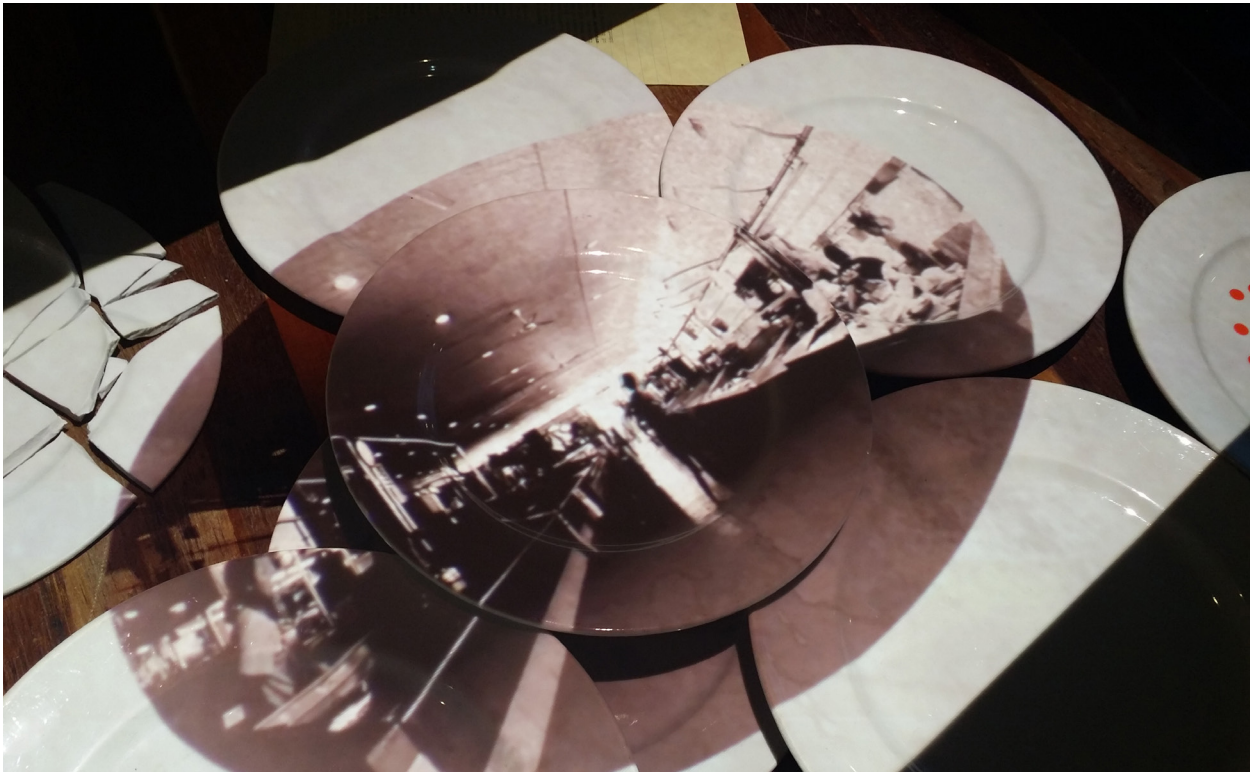
The past decades would also have pitted “modernising” influences of proprietorship against traditionally-held values of belonging. Amidst the homogeneity of HDB blocks, it could be easy to forget that each unit houses dwellers who have interacted and engaged differently with their spaces. Through searching out a diverse definition of “home”, we also hope to uncover a similar diversity within our communities.

Beyond the legal definition of “home-ownership”, the project also aims to expand the concept of home as a space of familiarity, personal history and self-identification by encouraging residents to step beyond their literal four walls. We hope to open a dialogue about the spaces surrounding our “owned homes” that are also homely or home-like – the coffee-shop, the barber, the mini-mart, the void deck, the park where communities are built and connections are forged. Through the project, we reflect upon our ideas of “home”, “ownership”, and whether we have indeed found what we set out to seek 50 years ago.

*THIS IS HOME WAS CONCEPTUALISED AND ORGANISED BY JAN CHEN AND GENINE LOO OF MATT3R DESIGN & RESEARCH, IN COLLABORATION WITH BRACK. THE PROJECT INVITED 7 ARTISTS TO PARTICIPATE IN A CO-CREATIVE ART EXPLORATION WITH RESIDENTS OF QUEENSTOWN.

By encouraging residents to step beyond
their literal four walls, we hope to open
a dialogue about the spaces surrounding
our owned homes that are also
homely or home-like.

This is Home aimed to explore the notion of “home” in the context of the Singapore HDBs and its attendant meanings through a co-creative artistic approach. The project was set in Queenstown, and has exhibited at The Recess, Queenstown Library and Queenstown Community Centre. The cultural mapping project by MATT3R, from October 2015 to May 2016, collaborated with 7 artists from Singapore and Nuria Iglesias Rodriguez, a Brack Artist-in-Residence. The pilot opened in Queenstown—Singapore’s oldest public housing estate. On 5 December 2015, the exhibition opened at The Recess, a social hub, with a performance by Nuria Iglesias Rodriguez.



Charmaine Poh

THE ROOM WITHIN

Conceptual installation, photographs, objects

"I should say: the house shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace."

- Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

With *The Poetics of Space* as a point of departure, the installation looks at the significance of objects in people's homes, and by extension, explores the occurrences within the walls of the physical home. The work is about our human response to our immediate environment: about what gets seamlessly absorbed into our everyday routines, and what we subconsciously neglect. The objects we possess have a variety of qualities: they are functional, sentimental, or both. What can we not bear to part with? What has come to represent us as people? What, at the end of a long day, do we come home to?

Our homes, in turn, conjure up different images in our minds. They are a place of refuge, of solace, and of joy. They are also, at times, places of fear, and of entrapment, and of heaviness. They have undoubtedly played a part in shaping who we are.

Through objects and their stories, the installation maps the various narratives that exist in Queenstown, from elderly Tanglin Halt residents to young people reaching the brink of adulthood.

Artist Biography

Charmaine Poh is a Singaporean photographer and writer. She graduated from Tufts University in 2013 with a B.A. in international relations, and was also a student in the Program for Narrative and Documentary Practice. Over time, she became interested in storytelling as a form of contemplating issues of identity, place, and society.



Chee Wei Teck

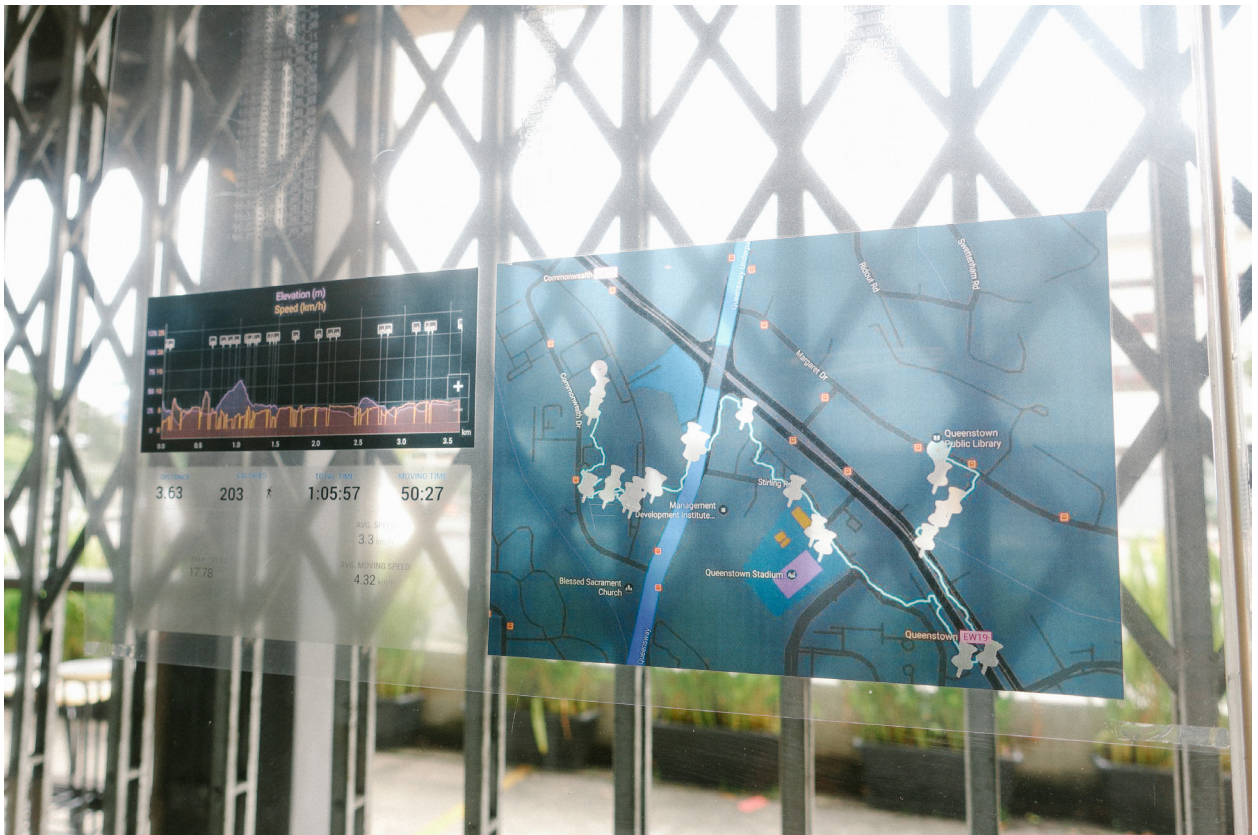
RE:MOTION/QUEENSTOWN

Photography/ Transparency Sheets

Queenstown is an old estate in Singapore that is going through renewal. The Residents encountered for this community project will be relocated three years from now to make way for new developments. Collectively, as a community, they made a request to the authority—to build a Communal Space for them to gather and hold activities, much like the existing space beside the Tanglin Halt Food Centre. Wei Teck's project traces a walking route from the residents' existing gathering space to the construction site of their replacement housing. Photographs are taken as markers of the route; paired with maps of the route with scientific measurements. Both are presented as film negative contact sheets on transparency sheets, much like microfilm of yesteryears, for archival purposes, so that future generations can use them as a reference for the route.

Artist Biography

When not roaming around to capture the ever-changing cityscape with his camera. Chee Wei Teck is the Social Media Editor for an online art magazine.



Joscelin Chew

UNTITLED (QUEENSTOWN)

Mixed Media

Joscelin is interested in mapping out the terrains of Queenstown by means of walking. She perceives walking as a form of mapping whereby the experiences that are derived through walking in this neighbourhood come together to form an overarching map-like structure consisting of a mental map of experiences, the walk as a trace that weaves through the streets and buildings and the gathered evidences of the walk. Her approach is to explore the multitude of facades in Queenstown beginning with taking walks within the neighbourhood not specified to a particular route, which is akin to Guy Debord's theory of the *dérive*. The experience of walking led to an interest in observing the everyday activities that circulate Queenstown, including those that remain in the seventies blocks along Commonwealth Drive whereby residents have already shifted out due to the Selective En Bloc Redevelopment Scheme.

Her work is an installation comprising of various digital prints—texts based on encounters with residents and observations alongside images taken during the walks. It reflects the fleeting moments and the environmental cues that excavate memories in the walking process. The work explores with two-fold perspective of a map—the bird's eye view versus the ground level approach.

Artist Biography

Born in Singapore, Joscelin Chew (b.1992) is a multidisciplinary artist working with various mediums ranging from medium format photography, text and drawings. Her current practice is concerned with walking and topography, exploring our ways of seeing, the visual culture of aerial view and questioning the concept of 'place'. She is also concerned with working with local communities to understand the ways in which people negotiate between public and private spaces and to discover about their values placed on certain objects or locality through conversations. She has recently graduated with a BA Fine Art Degree from Goldsmiths College, London.



Megan Miao

AIR / SOIL

Installation, dimensions variable

Air / Soil is an attempt to map the value of space in Tanglin Halt, Queenstown. Nostalgia has crept into modern society, bringing with it inherent value in the old and precarious. Romanticised, it paints the SERS (Selective Enbloc Relocation Scheme) as a bulldozer through the Singapore dream of stability, uprooting unwilling citizens and exchanging the old for the new. In reality, Tanglin Halt stands firm, without the slightest hint that it is either on its last legs, or unwilling to let go.

The land on which Tanglin Halt now stretches over was extremely dense prior to building. In fact, it was such prime soil that machines were not necessary to pound the ground into stable foundation. Stone by stone, the beloved HDBs grew upwards, and over the years, settled into their concrete bases. Such land is rare nowadays, with looser soil and reclaimed land taking over much of the Singaporean soil.

In Singapore, life is always lived one step away from the air, with buildings orientated to catch the casual breeze. Windows flung far open to receive the warmth of the sun and doors wide open to welcome the wind (and nosy neighbours).

In a city where fresh air is prioritised over authentic land, what can our spaces be, if not homes? Sold in glossy catalogues and illustrated through lush depictions of wholesome family life and retirement joys through architectural renderings against a bright blue sky, the new Dawson redevelopments work hard to promise longtime residents of Tanglin Halt a future in which the community remains intact.

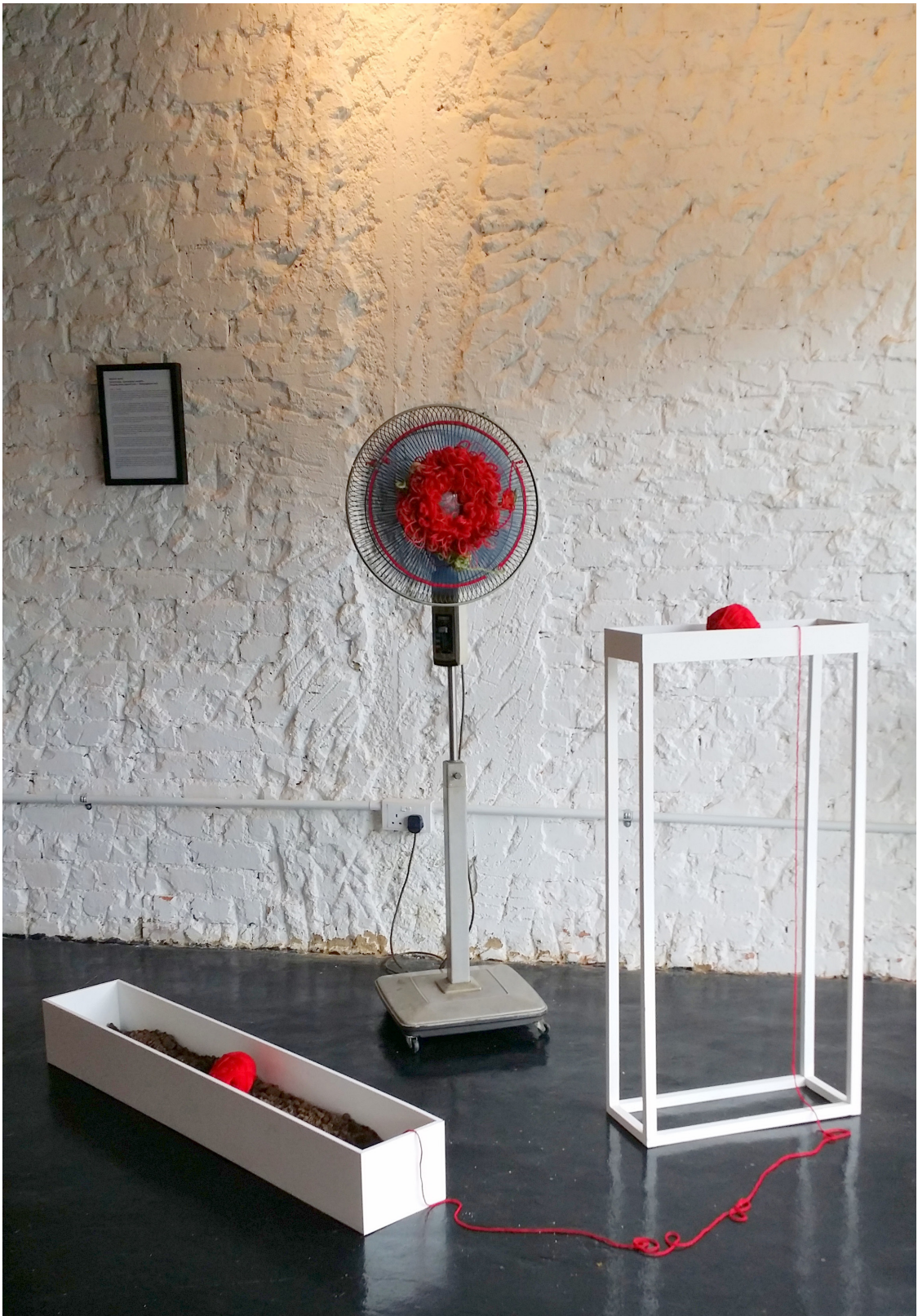
This work was inspired by one particular family amongst others, whose family home served as the center of a large universe. Space was transformed, in turn, into dwellings, into a gathering spot, into a space where grandchildren are raised, into a place to pay homage to the spirits and ancestors. Within their home were installed up to 14 fans in numerous spots, each put into the home over a long period of time to create wind within the top floor apartment.

What is the value of the space we inhabit? For the residents of Tanglin Halt, the SERS action threw long-time dwellings, invested with joy, despair, hope, longing and countless memories, into a property. How do we then put a valuation onto such a property?

I am proposing that there are dichotomies at play and one plays in a balancing act between polarities when speaking of the SERS. It is the value of solid ground against airiness, the value of memories against hope for a future, the value of community strength against individual desire, the monetary value of an apartment over the preciousness of a home. Being able to see these variance helps us understand the true value of Tanglin Halt, where everything is up in the air.

Artist Biography

Megan's practice is multidisciplinary and process-orientated, often socially-engaged, collaborative and dialogical. Her process aims to articulate the ways in which people organise their memories, aspirations and beliefs within different types of community. Identifying patterns in which people think and behave within a group, her work challenges commonly held beliefs and points out discrepancies in a humorous manner.



Ng Hui Hsien

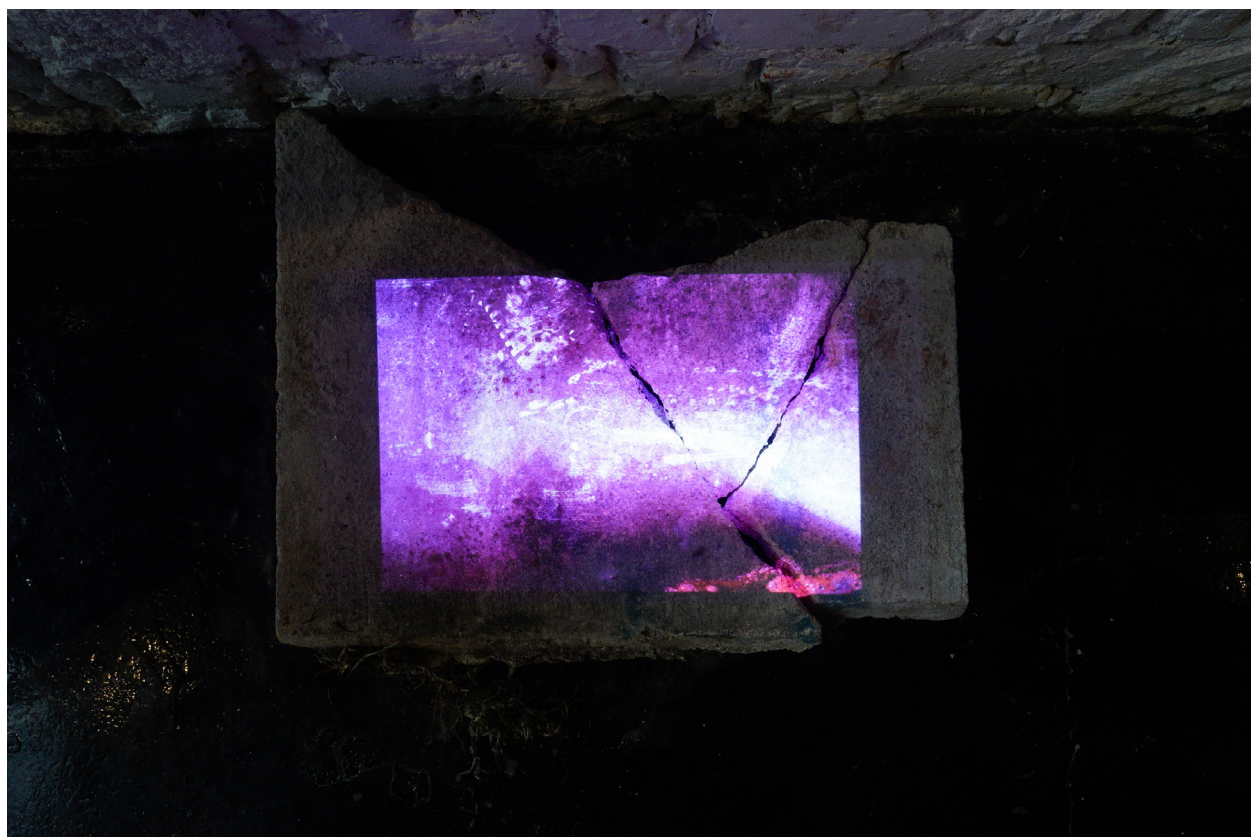
SANDS

Photographs projected on concrete

For Sands, I collected personal stories and sentiments from long-term residents in Queenstown. With these in mind, I explored the estate, focusing on areas mentioned by residents to be significant to them. In this manner, I sought to not only convey a sense of place, but also to represent and express subjective, intimate states of being. My art practice references the philosophical implications of our exploration of the universe—both inner and outer—and is a search for meaning and the interconnectedness of all things. It explores the essence of the physical world, while relating it to thoughts and emotions in our subconscious that are not often brought to light. It seeks to discover, create and reveal dreamscapes that reside alongside our everyday, in order to expand the scope of our perception and awareness of the unseen.

Artist Biography

Ng Hui Hsien has participated in professional mentorship programmes, including Shooting Home 2014 (Singapore) and the 10th Angkor Photo Festival Workshop (Cambodia). She completed an artist residency in Iceland and was selected to participate in a bookmaking workshop in Tokyo with the images created. My work has been showcased in Singapore, and Kuala Lumpur and Penang in Malaysia.



Núria Iglesias Rodríguez

SEEDS AND SUN / TAK PAO / QUEENSWAY: THE MAP OF THE HEART

Performance and videos

Examining notions of home, heritage and identity, conceptual video artist Núria Iglesias Rodríguez presents three video artworks based on public performances throughout Queenstown, as well as interviews and interactions with her host family and friends.

Núria's video art installation and performances take place in and around the Tanglin Halt estate, one of the first residential blocks in Queenstown, which has been earmarked for demolition and redevelopment under the Selective En bloc Redevelopment Scheme (SERS) in the coming years. Her spontaneous, evocative site-specific performances explore diverse themes of memory, transformation and play in relation to the social environment.

Artist Biography

Núria is a multidisciplinary visual artist and performer from Catalan, Spain. Her works investigate the use of the body, dance and movement as a channel for expression and communication. She showcased these works as part of her 2015 Artist Residency with Brack, a local platform for socially-engaged artists and their work.



Sufian Samsiyar

THE IMAGINARY WORLD OF TANGLIN HALT

Mixed media

The Imaginary World of Tanglin Halt is an unidentifiable and anti-foundationalistic topographic map of Tanglin Halt. It is a critique of our ailing obsession for a utopic city often rendered as cold and rigid.

The map does not make sense, literally, with neither reference to urban, architectural nor social conditions. It is a fictional realm. It is a culmination of imaginary and animated architectural entities (drawings) contributed by friends from the art community.

The collection of drawings will be in a sketchbook, which acts like a personal diary. Viewers are encouraged to draw what they wish to have in Tanglin Halt in the form of a map legend. The individual drawings will then be rescanned and reprinted before being pinned onto a map.

Imagining the concepts of urban expansion in a post-apocalyptic realm through snapshots of places, Sufian Samsiyar's practice has always responded to the complex issues surrounding urbanity that present themselves in architecture today. Unlike landscapes, figures and most other subjects of representational art, buildings are generally static. They succumb to their own demise.

Artist Biography

Sufian Samsiyar studied Fine Arts at Lasalle College of the Arts, Singapore. He has participated in various exhibitions, including his first solo exhibition Dystopian Urbanity at Institute of Contemporary Arts, Singapore, and was selected to participate in group exhibitions such as World Event Young Artists in Nottingham, UK, and Lit Up Festival's Progression at Aliwal Arts Centre.



I want people to know that Tanglin Halt is a place where the people have a lot of empathy. We have the KAMPUNG spirit! We eat together, talk together about what we are doing and thinking. The community is very close and feels warmly towards each other.

A chat with ALICE LEE, Queenstown Resident

Alice, can you introduce yourself?

I am a resident of Tanglin Halt. I have lived here for 48 years. I am 67 years old. I have two children, one boy and one girl.

My hobbies are going to look for places to eat. I'm a fussy eater but I like to look for new things to try. I like to eat together with my friends. I also like to travel, to go overseas with a group of friends.

What do you think of your artist?

<Laughs> I think she looks very young. And what she is doing is very meaningful, so I try my best to help her. For example, she used the games that we played in Singapore 50 years ago. She's bringing them out to the public in Singapore again and in other countries also. This will remind Singaporeans of the games we used to play when we were young. This shows how children used to play in Singapore, so we can teach the children today of these "forgotten" things.

How do you feel about performing together with Nuria?

I thought it was very meaningful. Her movements are so beautiful, they really attract people to watch. I wanted to watch her more, but I remembered the filming so I tried not to turn my head. Also when we were together, we could communicate and connect through the performance.

What do you want to tell people about Tanglin Halt?

I want people to know that Tanglin Halt is a place where the people have a lot of empathy. We have the KAMPUNG spirit! We eat together, talk together about what we are doing

and thinking. The community is very close and feels warmly towards each other.

Whenever anyone has difficulties, we will come together to help out. For example my neighbours and friends give me the keys to their flats. When they go out, if they forget to turn off the lights, or gas, or close the window, I will go over to help.

Last question, Alice. Why did you give Nuria the saga seeds when you first met?

These saga seeds are very meaningful to me. I have kept them for more than 12 years already. I collected them with my good friend when we went every morning to exercise together. Until now, I cannot bear to throw them away. We were very close friends. We helped each other a lot. When she was sick, I bought food for her and cared for her. She lives at nearby at Queens Close but something happened, some misunderstanding so from very good friends, we are now very distant. I still say hello to her. But these saga seeds remind me of her. I will think of those times we walked together and picked them together. Life was simple.

I don't blame her for anything. I trust her even now. So I keep these seeds by my side for so many years. She doesn't know that I kept them. If one day she comes to my house, I will show her the seeds that I have kept.

When you trust someone, when you have a friendship, you don't throw it away.

This is why I thought it was worthwhile to give Nuria the seeds when we first met, because they hold a lot of deep meaning for me.

Sponsors and Acknowledgements

A collaboration with MATT3R:

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This project is supported by
MATCHBOX.

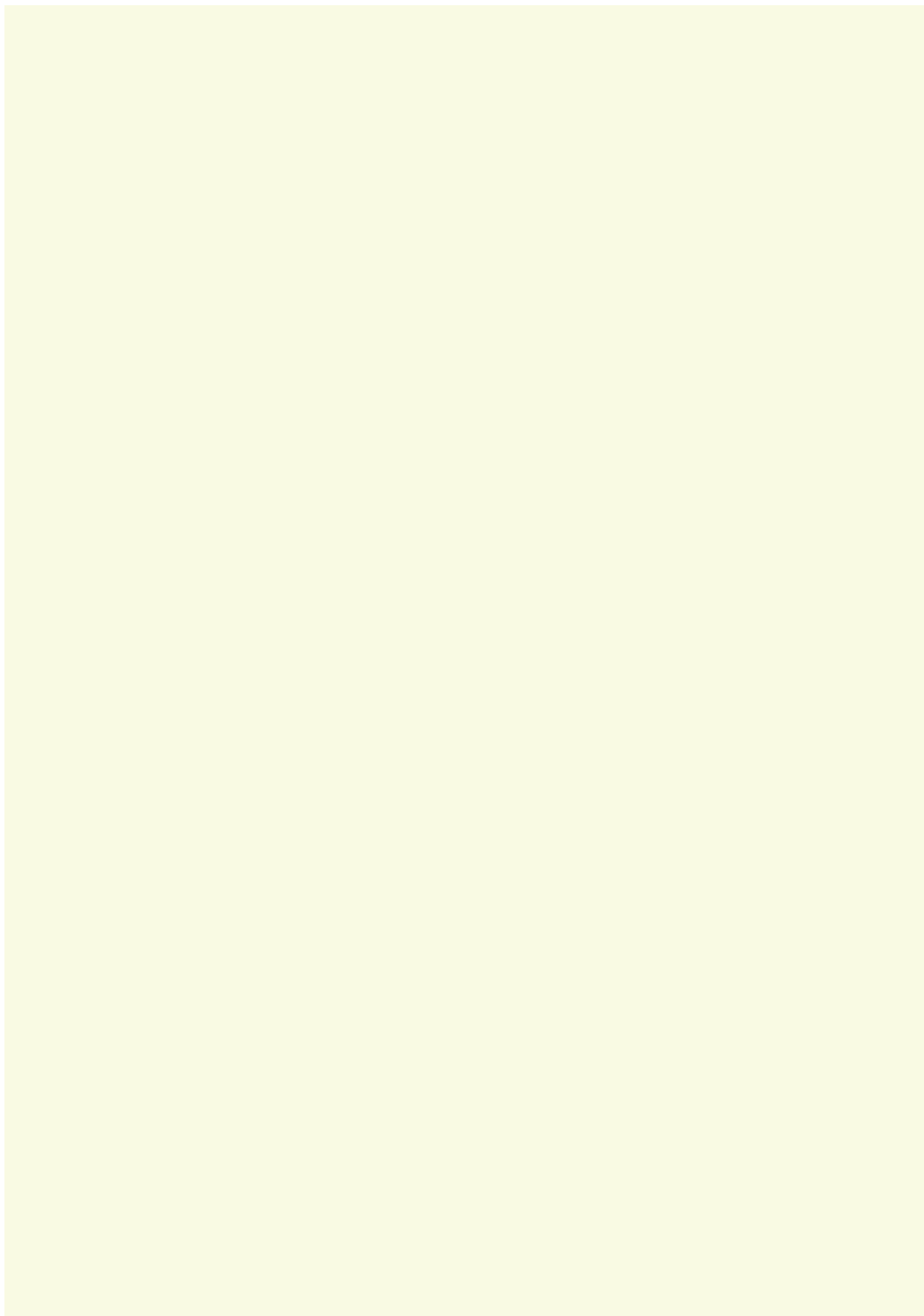
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