

SUNDAY AT BLK 35A.
TANGLIN HALT.

Notes from an opportunistic observer

When Núria first asked Alice to play a game of five stones with her, the latter laughed and promised to practise.

The simple game between a Girona native and a “married to Tanglin Halt” resident was an attempt to engage and connect two individuals dissimilar in age, culture, ethnicity, native language and background. For the performance artist Núria, physical engagement through a game created a perfect, safe space to reach out to Alice, the local resident she was partnered with – of whom she arrived knowing nothing about except that once, there was a game she enjoyed in her youth.

“Five stones” later became a motif in the work that resulted, culminating in their joint performance one muggy Sunday under the pavilion of Blk 35A. By accident rather than design, Alice invited 3 other residents to join in a group game of five stones, making up (with Núria) a rather unexpected but lovely crew of five. Sitting on a recreated street map of the area on the pavilion floor, the five “stones” were a literal, poignant reminder that places are created by the community that inhabits them.

Núria performed twice – less a performance than an expression of both her longing to connect and the multiple frustrations and anxieties of repeatedly

trying to do so over the past 4 weeks of her residency. She interprets her local hosts’ conversations over their game through movement, at times disjointed, jerky and fretful in moments of isolation; at other times, fluid, joyful and expansive during moments of breakthrough in connection.

Alice and the residents had a surprise up their sleeves. Moving into a Stonehenge-like circle, they started an acappella choral singing of the Chinese-language lullaby 世上只有妈妈 (Mother is Best), to Núria’s delight. The latter’s appreciation was not merely for the gift of the song – it was a particularly touching choice given the recent bereavement of one of the singers in the group. This was later shared with Núria – a true connection through the offer of vulnerability.

Other Tanglin Halt residents passing through the pavilion on Sunday must have been surprised by the surreal scene of a red-haired, 6-foot-tall woman leaping, twirling and pirouetting around 3 singing ‘aunties’ and a silent, shy child. The strangeness, however, is only aesthetic. Underneath the surface was an expanding notion of home, place and family.



SEEDS AND STONES

'Seeds and Stones' is a multi-layered visual art and aural experience. The installation explores themes of **loss, transformation and renewal** in light of Tanglin Halt's impending demolition and redevelopment. Clips of buildings in Queenstown are overlaid with fractal, Rorschach-like imagery of cranes with their spindly claws extended, twisting out towards the buildings. Sequences of giant trees and buildings being felled are interspersed with archival film footage depicting moments in the ordinary lives of residents - neighbourhood kids hunched over some shared mischief, playing five stones and trying to jump rope. The use of visual layering creates the textural effect of residents watching, almost impassively, their houses slow-gliding to destruction.

The artist's own fluid, sinuous and expressive movements are integrated within the work, the calligraphy of her long limbs drifting, swirling and curling with emotion. Her dance sequences are rendered in shimmering, phosphorescent light silhouettes, carefully stacked and layered over each other to dreamy, mesmerising effect.

The haunting, fragmented soundscape is a product of the artist's interactions with, and interpretations of, the **people and natural environment in Queenstown**. The artist blends a rhythmic drumming pattern of saga (love) seeds indigenous to the area with excerpts of recorded interviews with Alice, a resident and community leader in Tanglin Halt, to create intricate **polyphonic textures** unique to the neighbourhood. The sonic reinterpretation of the interviewee's **familiar but disembodied** and deconstructed Singaporean accent also captures and offers an insight into the way Singaporean accents sound to foreigners.

Each element of the installation thus provides the Singaporean viewer with a novel, unexpected opportunity to understand and confront their own perspectives and understandings of home.

Named after the colloquial Chinese term for takeaway food, 'TAK PAO' is an experimental take on film as a medium for experiential mapping, resisting the bird's eye view of conventional two-dimensional maps. The artist uses her camera to **traverse the lived environment** of a residential estate in Queenstown, circumnavigating through the corridors of Singapore's earliest HDB flats, built so early they preceded the HDB's public housing policy of creating void decks. The camera celebrates minor landmarks in the topography, lingering over **areas of symbolic value or sites of social interaction** such as pavilions and public tables to offer the viewer a visual exploration of the cultural data and spatial dynamics of the area.

Long takes which track the camera's progress through the estate and its attendant wet market and hawker centre shore up deeper realisations of how the built environment shapes and reflects **patterns of daily use and shared identity by inhabitants** of the area. The installation evokes understandings that these communal areas of food and commerce are very much a natural extension, perhaps even an integral element, of residential estates in Singapore. The fruits depicted in the film are a result of a collaborative process between the artist and Alice (the resident), who pointed them out and explained them when taking her on her first tour of a Singapore wet market.

The fascinating sequences of the artist's performance art executed in selective spaces and landmarks embody the artist's attempts to reconstruct and recreate the participatory processes of the urban environment and landscape. By incorporating inter-disciplinary techniques of dance, mutual engagement with local residents and experiential community-specific fieldwork, the installation is a layered, visceral and **evocative take on the cartographic process** as a means of bringing to life notions of heritage, culture and identity.



A chat with ALICE LEE, Queenstown

Resident

Alice, can you introduce yourself?

I am a resident of Tanglin Halt. I have lived here for 38 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.

Eat together

Enjoy together!

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 her?

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 looked after 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.