



Centre for
Contemporary
Asian Art

By All Estimates

Rathin Barman
Jessica Bradford
Erika Tan
Moses Tan



Taking Singapore as a locus of multiple regional identities, *By All Estimates* brings together works by artists that give form to narratives obscured by the city-state's rapid urban and social development and the coexistence of competing projections of cultural inheritance and recognition. Over the past decade, Singapore's investment in cultural institutions has been seen as an attempt to position the nation as a beacon of cultural capital in Southeast Asia. Underpinning this expansion lies an ever-evolving matrix of received and contested narratives that jostle, overlap or otherwise mingle within certain contemporary public realms—from the streets of the city to the corridors of the museum—in approximations of the influence of multiple societal and economic imperatives. *By All Estimates* presents works from Kolkata-based Rathin Barman, London-based Erika Tan and Singapore-based Moses Tan in Australia for the first time, alongside works from Singapore-born and Sydney-based artist Jessica Bradford.

Rathin Barman's *Home, and a Home* (2016) takes as its foundation the façade of a colonial shopfront building in Singapore's Little India district. Commissioned by and created for the Singapore Biennale 2016, Barman considers his scaled structure of welded brass and steel as a three-dimensional drawing in which he invites viewers to physically enter, thereby transforming the body's relationship to the work from an architectural exterior to a cage-like interior space. During his research for this work, Barman spent significant time engaging with migrant workers—mostly men from the Bengal region of Bangladesh—whose day of hard labour in the construction and maintenance sectors begins before sunrise. Many of these men live in cramped conditions above such shophouses that, on the outside at least, offer tourists a picture of Singapore's colonial past while masking the visibility of the migrant workers that are essential for the ongoing development of the city's infrastructure and the services that keep its economy humming.

Jessica Bradford's ongoing research around the history and present-day incarnation of Singapore's Haw Par Villa is the basis for her most recent body of work, *Haw Par Villa*. Formerly known as Tiger Balm Garden, Haw Par Villa's website describes the site as 'an 8.5-hectare Asian cultural park, the last of its kind in the world ... The eclectic park is a treasure trove of Asian culture, history, philosophy and religion—quirky yet enlightening, at the same time.'¹ Established in 1937 by Burmese-Chinese brothers Aw Boon Haw and Aw Boon Par—developers of the famous Tiger Balm medicinal ointment—the park was intended as a both an educational and entertaining experience that offered hundreds of statues and giant dioramas based on Chinese folk history, mythology and morality. In the 1980s, a period coinciding with Bradford's early memories as a child visiting with her family, the park was acquired by the Singaporean Government during a period of concentrated governmental debate around national identity marked by a renewed focus on 'Asian values'. Over the years, sculptures have been added or removed, modified or relocated by various involved parties, often altering the intended symbolism or meaning of the statues, dioramas and the park itself. In her work, Bradford excavates and further obfuscates Haw Par Villa's layered representations of the intertwined projections of cultural and national identities that jostle among competing ideas about tradition and its processes of inheritance.

In the first-floor galleries, Erika Tan's *Repatriating The Object With No Shadow: Along, Against, Within and Through* (2015) takes the structure of an A to Z (a 'gesture' towards the encyclopaedic or comprehensive), to approach a glossary of terms, events, artefacts and personal accounts which connect us to the historical through the specifics

¹ Har Paw Villa website, 2019. Available online at: <https://www.hawparvilla.sg/>

and the context of the colonial museum in Malaya. Beginning with 'A is for adventure, advantage and advocate', Tan's video work employs archival anthropological films of indigenous tribes of the Malay peninsula, tracking shots of museum displays, animations of collection objects backed by green screens, and a voiceover narration that hovers between pedagogical lecture and fictional fable, among other audio-visual material, to create a mesmeric filmic montage that challenges past paradigms of ethnographic inclusion and omission, inclusion and exclusion, with broader contemporary resonances and implications.

Presented across both gallery spaces, is the work of Moses Tan, incorporating drawing, sculpture, audio and virtual reality. Tan's suite of works in *By All Estimates* seek to re-articulate often forgotten, repressed and censored queer histories of Singapore, especially of the communities and activities that centred around Bugis Street from the 1950s to the mid-1980s when the downtown area begun its transformation from a well-known (and well-frequented) site for cruising and transgender sex workers and their clients to what is today a haven for tourists with malls, markets and cultural institutions. Playing with 'Boogie Street', the title of a Leonard Cohen song that is said to have been inspired by the songwriter's short stopover in Singapore in the early 1970s on the way back from Sydney as part of a world tour, Tan's works are an elegy to an era that seemed more open and—paradoxically, compared to today—permissive of flaunting queerness, and at the same time stand as metaphors for the relationship between the street and the inner lives and latent desires of its varying denizens.

Underpinned by significant research, each of the four exhibiting artists seeks to present a nuanced and complex view of contemporary Singapore, a place at once as deeply familiar as it is ever-changing.



Curator: Pedro de Almeida
Curatorial Assistant: Janet Jin

To view a full list of works, artist biographies and public program details, please visit: <http://www.4a.com.au/by-all-estimates/>

By All Estimates is produced and presented by 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. This exhibition and associated programming are supported by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts and supported by the British Council and Singapore Tourism Board. Erika Tan's work and participation in public programs has been supported by the British Council.

LIST OF WORKS

Ground floor:

Jessica Bradford, *Haw Par Villa – Video Snapshots series*, 2016–2019, mixed media video installation, looping single-channel video, screens, bamboo, metal scaffold couplers; courtesy the artist and Galerie pompom, Sydney

Moses Tan, *A Eulogy to Boogie Street*, 2016–2019 (ongoing), graphite on paper, dimensions variable; courtesy the artist

Moses Tan, *The Oral History of Boogie Street*, 2019, fabric, 8 single-channel audio, dimensions variable; courtesy the artist

First floor:

Rathin Barman, *Home, and a Home*, 2016, welded steel and brass, h.422cm, w.132cm, d.226cm; commissioned by Singapore Art Museum for Singapore Biennale 2016; courtesy the artist and Experimenter, Kolkata

Jessica Bradford, *Haw Par Villa #5 (Swans)*, 2016, pastel and liquid pencil on primed aluminium on top of underglazed ceramic base, h.9cm, w.16cm, d8.5cm; courtesy the artist and Galerie Pompom, Sydney; photo: Laura Moore

Erika Tan, *Repatriating The Object With No Shadow: Along, Against, Within and Through*, 2015, HDV originating in multiple formats and codex, duration 36.46min; Camera: Anthony Lam & Erika Tan, Editing: Erika Tan, Voices: Erika Tan; with thanks to British Museum, Raffles Bio-Diversity Museum, Taiping Museum, Matang Museum, Lenggong Archaeological Museum, Shabbir Hussain Mustafa, Anthony Lam, Heidi Tan, Michael Rogge; courtesy the artist

Erika Tan, *Vacationem Universalem / Universal Call*, 2015, originating as a 3D Maya model, output HDV, duration 13.30min; conception, scripting & editing: Erika Tan, 3D Model: Irene Lema, Voices: David Smith and Teow Yue Han; courtesy the artist

Moses Tan, *Slow Steps*, 2019, fabric, wood, single-channel video and audio shown through VR headset, dimensions variable; courtesy the artist

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Please Explain: The Rise of New Asia Is Not the End of the World
Saturday 13 April
2pm – 3.30pm

Panel discussion featuring exhibiting artists Erika Tan (UK) and Moses Tan (Singapore) alongside academic Dr Yvonne Low (Power Institute, The University of Sydney), June Yap, Director of Curatorial, Programmes and Publications at the Singapore Art Museum, and Ursula Sullivan, co-owner of Sullivan+Strumpf.

Free, book at 4a.com.au

Congee Breakfast Tour with Jessica Bradford
Saturday 4 May
10.30am – 12.30pm

A walk through of *By All Estimates* with a discussion led by artist Jessica Bradford and exhibition curator Pedro de Almeida, followed by a Chinatown brekkie at a much-loved local eatery.

\$25, book at 4a.com.au

Cover image: Jessica Bradford, *Haw Par Villa #5 (Swans)*, 2016, pastel and liquid pencil on primed aluminium on top of underglazed ceramic base, h.9cm, w.16cm, d8.5cm; courtesy the artist and Galerie Pompom, Sydney; photo: Laura Moore

Background image: Erika Tan, *Vacationem Universalem / Universal Call*, 2015, originating as a 3D Maya model, output HDV, duration 13.30min; conception, scripting & editing: Erika Tan, 3D Model: Irene Lema, Voices: David Smith and Teow Yue Han; courtesy the artist

By All Estimates

12 April – 16 May 2019