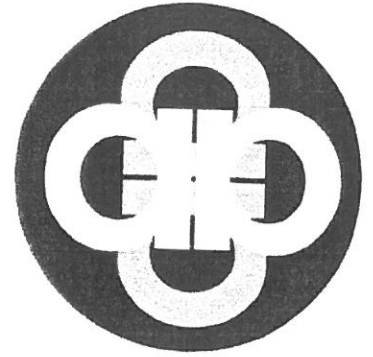


Asia Australia Artists Association



Identity Thieves
Gallery 4a - Asia-Australia Art Centre
March 15 – April 14
Opening Thursday March 15
Curated by Dougal Phillips

Angkrit Ajcharyasophon (Thailand), Anthea Behm, Tim Gregory, Suzan Liu, Laurel Nakadate (US), Patrick Swann. Special opening performance by Renny Kodgers

Identity Thieves brings together work by Asian-Australian, Australian, Asian and Asian-American artists who imagine and construct complicated identities for themselves (overlapping and folding in on their own identities) and enact the slippages and uncanny dimensions of these identities through performance, video and installation. It also considers the role of giving, borrowing and stealing in the economy of identity – in this exhibition the artists work across media to reveal the play of who we are and who we can be in a hyper-mediated culture.

Angkrit Ajcharyasophon interrogates the artworld's institutional formations in his performance installation, *The Perfect English Gentleman*. Proceeding from a pun on his own name (Angkrit is Thai for 'English'), the artist has devised for himself a program of becoming-English, taking lessons in cooking, table manners, deportment - and of course, English language - in a parodic attempt to become the perfect English artist-gentleman. His progress is performed and documented as a dynamic installation in the gallery. Rather than exoticise his Thai identity, Angkrit prefers to revisit and parody colonial models that persist to this day. Angkrit's work addresses the soft colonialism of the art world, the behavioural and social coercion by which the dominant, English-speaking culture quietly and politely takes over the world. In Angkrit's peculiar mode of ironic self-portraiture, he critiques art's celebrity system, but aspects of his practice remain rooted in fine art tradition, the systems of which are too often taught and learned uncritically.

Laurel Nakadate is half-Japanese, was born in Texas, and grew up in the Midwest. After studying photography at Yale University she began producing video pieces in which she stars, along with older, dishevelled men she picks up in bars and in the street. Along with the men she stages birthday parties, sing-a-longs, stripteases and other games. Her video pieces are shown as strange montages which pass from scenes of geysers (*Old Faithful*) through to the artist pole-dancing in front of the house from Grant Wood's iconic painting *American Gothic* (1930) through to moving images of Nakadate framed by a slow-motion fireworks display. Nakadate's acclaimed work is about going out into the world and discovering little tragedies and how they meet with the world's larger tragedies. Although in her confronting work, the scenes of child-like play force the viewer into an uneasy position, at the end of the day, the work is optimistic: it is about making moments and connections and remaking of a type of social theatre.

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Gallery hours 11am-6pm, Tuesday–Saturday

Anthea Behm's practice deals with idealised notions of female identity, and her work is an artistic representation of an attempt to confront and understand these issues. In *The Chrissy Diaries*, Behm attempts to digest the effects of this conditioning, and in doing so, aims to highlight current issues of women living in commercial society. She utilises her own body as the vehicle for expression, with performances being explored through the mediums of photography, video and installation. *The Chrissy Diaries* aims to explore and implicitly critique the plethora of stereotypes in mass media. This excerpt of *The Chrissy Diaries* presents two channels from a four channel video installation: *The Airhostess* and *The Bikini Model*. Performing as Chrissy, Behm registered with Virgin Airlines and entered the Miss East Coast Bikini Competition. The videos in this exhibition capture elements of this process of assimilating into the groups of each stereotype at an experiential level.

Suzan Liu's installation *Inborn Fantasies* is a reconstruction of the artist's strongest recurring fantasy: to one day trek out to an isolated temple in China, train heavily in martial arts, meditate for an extended period of time, and attain Inner Peace through this rigorous lifestyle. Despite the power of the dream, and the artist romantically assuming an inborn propensity to Kung-fu, it is nonetheless a fetishization of her roots - constructed on Australian shores, and raised to lofty heights of fulfilment, but ultimately untouchable. Liu's work addresses slippages in cultural identity and fantasy - caught up between Chinese and Russian heritage lines, (hence the Rabbit-fur hat), mixed-down and misappropriated through references to Chinese mountain painting and the Australian bush, the artist finds herself ever-shifting in a cultural sense of self. The 'cloud' is the symbolic made tangible.

Tim Gregory's *Gregorian (999)* is informed by the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy and by Cetina and Bruegger. The artist focuses on the idea of singularity and the way pure singularity has become the dominant method of identity formation - identity using itself to identify itself (Nancy). Gregory directly addresses the question of theft: he believes it is much easier and more comfortable to thief/borrow from the identity of an institution or a so called "Other", a theft maintained by perpetual performance, because no one knows what it means to be themselves. The first part of Gregory's video is an attempted cleansing where the artist cuts off all his hair in front of 999 paper cranes. Any idea of cleansing is polluted by the self-consciousness of the video and by the black hair covering over the white cranes. The shaving of my head is in preparations for the monastic Gregorian Chant in the second part of the video - a failed attempt at communication wherein the artist attempts to improvise with machines. Gregory's work is identity theft because it cannot achieve what it sets out to do and its failure is really the failure of the artist himself - the failure of not being able to understand what "myself" means. The working towards failure is reference in the 999 paper cranes. It took months to make 999 and the artist stopped one short of the mythical 1000, which are supposed to bring wisdom/health/transformation. The tapestry contains the artist's logo, which refers to the artist collective "Fuck the Artist" whose membership is only Gregory.

Patrick Swann's *Like A Rat With Phar Lap's Heart (Patrick Swann's Hypotheticals)* is a set of effigies and an ongoing, interminable competition - and yet, it also deals with good guys and good times. The work asks a series of important questions: What happens when said good guys are robots? What happens when said robots are rodents? What happens when said robot rodents engage in pugilism? What happens when said robot rodents win hearts and minds? The answer? Good luck - better luck next time.



The Asia-Australia Arts Centre gratefully acknowledges its Principal Patrons: Geoff & Vicki Ainsworth, Patrons: Johnson Pilton Walker, Dr Dick Quan, Benefactor: Steensen Varming, the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its funding and advisory body, the NSW Government through Arts NSW and the City of Sydney.

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