

**LAST WORDS
PHASE 2**

ALFREDO + ISABEL AQUILIZAN

PATTY CHANG

WILL FRENCH

YOUNG SUN HAN

MEIRO KOZUMI

TATSUMI ORIMOTO

SHEN SHAOMIN

SUMUGAN SIVANESAN

KIRAN SUBBAIAH

TINTIN WULIA

Phase 2 Exhibition dates: **3 Sept - 16 Oct 2010**

Launch: **Friday 3 September 6-8pm**

Phase 2 continues with an emphasis on video, technology and performance by artists working in Australia and internationally. These artworks provoke questions around the individual and the artist at the interface of both internal and external forces – the family and culture, technology, community and the nation.

The dissolution of traditional boundaries of geography and culture through technology and globalization poses particular issues for both artists and society. The emphasis on performance driven work in Phase 2 is an acknowledgement of the anxiety and politics that emerges when individuals attempt to articulate their place, their histories and a sense of connection within these changing environments.

On the ground floor, Isabel and Alfredo Aquilizan's sleek, stainless steel jeepney, In God We Trust (2010), remains as a link to the artists and works in the first phase of the exhibition. Left over by the Americans in the Philippines after the end of the war, jeeps (or jeepneys as they are affectionately called in the Philippines) resonate with much of the cultural history of colonization and American occupation. Modified, decorated, this is a spectacular symbol of popular culture and vernacular design in Filipino culture. For the Aquilians, the jeepney is also a symbol of how cultures transform, how imports become locals and how everyday popular culture can be beautiful.

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Alongside In God We Trust, Meiro Koizumi presents a two-screen video work that similarly looks at some of the cultural and social resonances of the Second World War on Japanese culture and ideas of Japanese nationalism. Koizumi describes the foundation of this work in his observation of Japanese nationalism in contemporary society and in popular culture:

Portrait of A Young Samurai (2009) has a very particular context, and it is a bit complicated. It deals with how "Kamikaze Pilots" are depicted in films. I picked an actor whose age is around the same age of those pilots, and gave him lines which are written by me. I tried to make the lines as cliché as possible. "Samurai spirit" is an ideological term that people have been using since the 1860's to connect one's action to the tradition of the country. It is a term that was invented in the 1870's after Japan became a modern nation. This ideology was also used during the Second World War, and we still see it today in the context of sport."

Like previous works (for example, Human Opera XXX (2007), which is exhibited on the first floor), the artist employs actors, using repeated takes of the same or similar lines to build a sense of drama as well as to make us aware of the external social and cultural forces which direct the way in which the audience sees the subject. In Portrait of a Young Samurai the audience becomes aware of the role of cinema, popular culture and political history in conditioning our understanding of the deeply nationalistic text. In Human Opera XXX, the absurd interventions of the artist as he interrupts and dramatizes what is an extremely personal and traumatic story of the volunteer subject, makes us aware of how acutely unfunny the treatment of trauma and the personal can be by popular culture. In these works Koizumi makes us aware of the simultaneous unfolding of real life and its representation within the media, and asks us to think about the difficulty (and possibility) of articulating meaning, truth and the personal in an age of global media saturation.

Winding its way through the ground floor gallery, leading to a 'claw skill tester' is Tintin Wulia's Lure (2009). Small, hand made replica versions of passports lure visitors to a skill testing machine. By playing the machine visitors enter into a game of chance for citizenship. In previous installations of this work in Singapore and Hong Kong, the artist remarks how competitive individuals become in seeking to win certain passports. Through this game of chance and skill, Lure makes us aware of how nation and nationality, access and circulation of people creates a manufactured sense of freedom.

Also on the ground floor is documentation from two performances 4A staged this year. Born in 1946 in Kawasaki, Japan, Tatsumi Orimoto was an assistant to Nam June Paik through whom he was introduced to the activities of Fluxus. In 1977 he returned to Kawasaki where he continues to live and work. Staged during lunch time in Chinatown in May this year, Oil Can (2010) saw passersby and volunteers solemnly standing in 44 gallon steel drums. Typical of Orimoto's work, humour is used to examine forms of communication. Throughout the duration of the performance, the absurd gives way to a tender and serious existential questioning. People appear marooned

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and isolated by their steel confines. Though physically close and in the same situation as their neighbour, no one is able to connect.

Young Sun Han's performance Sliding Mirror: 24 Hour Embrace, Sydney (2010) similarly looked at interpersonal communication. Staged in 4A's street front gallery, the performance involved the artist looking for strangers who matched his physical description through an online listing service. At the stroke of midnight the artist and the strangers embraced for 24 hours. Using the body as a medium, the performance raised questions about intimacy, our longing to connect with others and also seeing ourselves reflected in other people.

Upstairs, Sumugan Sivanesan and Damian Martin present Elroy (2010), a life-size model of Sivanesan's head in a jar and named after a fictional alter-ego. The artist suggests, "my 'Elroy' is something of a talking point that collects ideas around it - War, death, cryogenesis, B-grade horror and popular culture." Elroy emerges from Sivanesan's ongoing research into cannibalism and cultural cannibalism and popularized notions of race. The artist is interested in the legacies of colonisation, how it plays out in contemporary and popular culture in an attempt to flip the dialectics of power. So, looking at examples of medical and anthropological collections of human body parts, which in some contexts have used unscrupulous practices of collection, it is important to realize that this specimen is not the artist himself, not a true representation of the individual, but a representation of an absurdly-named alter ego.

Also on the first floor are two works by the New York-based artist Patty Chang. In Love (2001), is an example of Chang's performance work, where she uses her body to explore questions of intimacy, and the deep, indefinable relationships between individuals. In this work, the artist appears with her parents, who are each on separate screens. The artist appears face to face with her parents, in what appears to be a deeply passionate kiss. Eventually it becomes clear that the video is running in reverse, and that they do not share a kiss, but are eating an onion, their faces wet with tears, their mouths streaming with saliva. If In Love explores intergenerational, familial relationships and the emergence of the individual from the trauma of this immediate cultural environment, Minor (2010) explores the external environment and the formation of individuality within the national, and larger cultural and historical frameworks that govern knowledge. Filmed in Xinjiang province in Western China where recent clashes between the Uighur minority and the Han Chinese have created tensions, Minor is a video about the indefinable properties of history, language, geological formations and adolescence. The artist states that the work was inspired by Sven Hedin's The Wandering Lake (1930), a first person account of Hedin's unsuccessful expedition funded by the Chinese government to "revive the old Silk Road and turn it into a motor highway" and his quest to map the 'wandering' lake Lop-nor, Minor examines indeterminate and ephemeral ways in which culture and landscape are linked.

Minor opens with an image of a mummified woman – a human body that is stepping into geological time – it is an image of a human form that is in an in-between the state of humanity and geology. Her body contains a history of conflict from another era but exists in the present. Interspersed with footage of the landscape, from ground level and also shot from an airplane

window, the video has a languid quality. A recurring image in this video is the appearance of texts and characters which are etched by the artist in dirt or in air and appear to float in and amongst the landscape. The writing of both readable and unreadable texts reflects upon the idea of a landscape marked by both human history and human culture, which are both known and unknowable. The layering of readable and unreadable texts creates moments of poignancy and poetry. Beauty takes on a critical function to make us aware of the limits of our own reading. Minor raises a range of philosophical questions about the limits of knowledge (what can be known and by whom). The juxtaposition of these two works reflects on trauma and a slippage between the internal and the external, and the ways in which individuals may open up space to articulate personal critical positions.

In Phase 2 we present Shen Shaomin's newest documentary work which examines similar terrain to his works exhibited in Phase 1. One Monk's Temple (2010) is a story of a monk who was once a business man, and examines his ethical and personal decisions often made at odds with this monk's surrounding social and cultural context. As with much of his work One Monk's Temple explores philosophical ideas of freedom and the relationship between the human subject and the social, cultural, historical and religious context that directs an individual and private position.

Conceived on a residency in Tokyo, Will French's Colourful Language (2010), is part of an ongoing body of work where the artist has engaged with the meaning and uses of flags. Flags bring together a range of historical meanings and uses from communication, nationalism, internationalism, modernism, colonisation and conquest. Growing up in Indonesia, attending an international British school, and now a mobile young artist working across a range of different timezones and cultural contexts, the idea of a flag as representative and reductive of personality or character, in light of the artists' own personal cultural experience, seems largely outmoded and old fashioned. This is the starting point for Will French's inclusion in Last Words. French's work uses semaphore or signal flags – a language of international shipping, recognisable but mostly unreadable to the lay-eye. The artist was also attracted to the flags' hard-edge geometric abstraction, their tactility and the ability to create visual compositions through language. In this work, the artist encourages visitors to write profanity on a piece of paper, submit it in the box and everyday over the period of the exhibition, a visual composition will be made spelling out the messages submitted by visitors.

Suicide Note (2006), is a work by Bangalore-based artist Kiran Subbaiah. This video installation, with its panning video projection asks us to consider death, love and fame. The artist appears central to this work, using a deadpan delivery, which asks us to consider what could be truthful, and what meaning or truth might remain relevant in different time periods and in different contexts. Subbaiah's work is reflective of what the critic Nancy Adajania has termed 'new-context media', which emerges from the changing techno-scape in India in the 1990s, 'peopled by artists whose education and interests are not restricted to a Fine Arts milieu, but enriched by diverse subcultures. It stands at the intersection between various disciplines, genres, media, audiences,

and economies of production, including activist documentary filmmaking, social research, street theatre, satellite TV, philosophy of consciousness, and the internet.¹

It is at this interplay that *Suicide Note* sits. In this complex work, Subbaiah questions the efficacy of art in dealing with the world at large. It seems to ask us, if access, artworld circulation, fame and celebrity are key drivers in artistic production, how efficient is a work of art in articulating the private, the individual or the philosophical. Ironically, art (and knowledge) brings about its own demise through its own systems of circulation:

In the work he exclaims:

Now that I am dead I can declare that I was never really an artist.
I am a philosopher - a French philosopher.

And again:

It's all just profoundly cynical entertainment been repeated over and over again. Outright plagiarism. No new ideas. Plagiarism is the only hope, it's all got to do with how well the original sources are conceived to steal the credit. But just in case you have an idea that is completely original, don't let them know, tell them you stole the idea from me.

....

Making art always happened quite effortlessly. I only had to imagine something and my muses would get down to business. They would turn mundane pieces of nothing into a work of art. A work of art that never failed to draw its audience.

Art was always the easy part, dealing with the mess around art, was altogether another story.

So dear artist, Mr French philosopher, alias artist, who exactly was your audience

Hypocrite, it wasn't just anybody or everybody, definitely not the layman and definitely not you. It was the...

Where he leaves us hanging.

¹ Nancy Adjanja, 'New-Context Media: A Passage from Indifference to Adulation'
<http://www.goethe.de/ins/in/tp/prj/kus/exp/en/index.htm> [accessed 30 August 2010]

LIST OF WORKS

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GROUND FLOOR

Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizon

In God We Trust (2010)

stainless steel, Jeep parts

Courtesy of the artist and Jan Manton Art, Brisbane

Tintin Wulia

Lure, 2009

Installation

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist, and Osage Gallery

Meiro Koizumi

Portrait of a Young Samurai, 2009

Two-channel HD video

9 mins 40 secs

Copyright/courtesy the artist and Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam

Tatsumi Orimoto

Oil Can, 2010

Performance held at 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Sydney on 13th May 2010

Courtesy the artist and Galerie DNA, Berlin

Photography by Alex Craig



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Benefactors: Dr Gene and Brian Sherman AM, ARTCELL; Friends: Brooke and Steve Aiken and Claire Armstrong and John Sharpe and Dion Woo.

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FIRST FLOOR

Kiran Subbaiah

Suicide Note, 2006

Single-channel video with projector panner and semicircular screen

25 mins 34 secs

Courtesy the artist

Patty Chang

In Love, 2001

Two-channel video

3 mins 28 secs.

Courtesy the artist

Patty Chang

Minor, 2010

HD Video

25 mins.

Courtesy the artist

Will French

Colourful Language, 2010

Nautical signal flags

Dimensions variable (600 mm x 400 mm each flag)

Courtesy the artist

Shen Shaomin

One Monk's Temple, 2010

Single-channel video

Courtesy the artist

Meiro Koizumi

Human Opera XXX, 2007

Video

17 mins

Courtesy the artist and Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam

Young Sun Han

Sliding Mirror: 24 Hour Embrace, Sydney 2010, 2010

Single-channel video

90 mins

Courtesy the artist

Sumugan Sivanesan and Damian Martin

Eroy, 2010

Mixed media

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist

