



### *Editorial Note*

This issue came from the juncture of an open call, the ongoing dispute around Ahmet Ögüt's artwork, and most importantly the ongoing genocide in Palestine and Lebanon. We would like to thank all of the contributors to the issue for sharing their perspective, opinions, and thoughts. At this moment of profound loss there can be no words and yet somehow...

To quote contributing editor Tyuki Imamura's reflections on the recent passing of artist and cultural worker Dinh Q. Lee. "His voice echoes, his smile lingers, entrusting us with grains of hope to carry forward as we journey toward that distant horizon."

*- Jason Waite*

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The fence was installed around the Radcliffe Camera, the  
university's epicenter,  
to enforce the disbandment of the Oxford Action for Pales-  
tine encampment;  
a second fence was installed around the Pitt Rivers Museum  
encampment.

As of writing, both remain.

Ale Nodarse Jammal

new geometry  
this fence  
this frame  
this peremptory embrace  
this force  
this silence  
this continued weaponization  
this overwhelm  
this your “solution,” one  
that invokes others’, and  
this truism  
that there are those who build fences and  
that there are those who live within them and  
this reality  
forty-three thousand killed and counting

what will remain  
remain to be carried  
to be carried away  
kept neither in likeness nor metaphor?  
assembly asks for space  
discourse, ground  
but then comes your silence  
both object and command

at night I  
press against your boundary condition  
set fingers between metal and I RUUUN  
your geometry, a bicycle wheel  
my fingers, sticks in the spoke  
our rattle an elegy now  
a call to those wildflowers  
which eddy, rise, and  
whisper relentless  
you have not done enough

*Ale (Alejandro) Nodarse Jammal is a writer/artist (MFA  
Candidate, Ruskin) and art historian (PhD Candidate,  
Harvard) concerned with art in relation to observation,  
memory, language, and ethics.*

# Please undo your Ghostly Pretence!

Youxi Chen

In times of censorship, symbols of the pretence of silence morph into sites of defiance. There is an immaterial lucidity to these signs, forever shape-shifting spectres—cryptic wordplays and empty signifiers—that hint at an undercurrent of discontent.

请不要装  
神弄鬼

During COVID, the blank sheet of A4 paper emerged as a ubiquitous symbol of protest, its emptiness embodying a potent refusal to signify fixed meanings. This forced Chinese institutions into a futile cat-and-mouse chase that, in turn, consolidated their guilty history. Drawing on Didi-Huberman's concept of "broken images," the White Paper, in its opaque nature, transformed into momentary barricades.<sup>1</sup> As protective membranes that resist erasure, they affirm messages of protest through their absent materiality. It is a "spectral sign"—a site of mourning and loss that stands in defiance of the projection of fixed meaning.

Since 2022, Halloween festivals in Shanghai have offered a light-hearted yet subversive response to the traumas of COVID, embracing spectral embodiment as a form of resistance against cultural and social homogeneity in China. Echoing the ambiguity of the White Paper, participants in these gatherings creatively resist by assuming ghostly forms. Much to the authorities' dismay, some cosplayers appeared as Dabai (protective-suited COVID workers), while others invoked radical moments from Chinese history, such as embodying Lu Xun and carrying signs that read, "Studying medicine won't save the Chinese people." Iconoclastic displays included portrayals of the Buddha and Guanyin, with the latter's cosplayer expressing her passionate love for lesbian icon and singer Leah Dou. In the most creative case, a person even dressed as a surveillance camera, to ridicule the tightening of censorship. Beyond their social and political commentary, these gatherings challenge the rigid boundaries of public expression, transforming the heteronormative streets of Shanghai into spaces of playful defiance.

This queering of the spatial-temporal context through the act of embodiment aligns with Judith Butler's theory of "performative acts," where the re-enactment of past trauma transforms these gestures into collective, embodied memory.<sup>2</sup>

The ghostly pretence we see on the street is not confined to static artefacts in museum spaces; it embodies a haunting vitality, dynamic and enduring. Traditional art historians often share this melancholic fixation on the fixing of origins, conducting almost anatomical analyses under the tyranny of white cubed space. In contrast, these corporeally engaged practices disrupt the static forms of visual scrutiny, moving from the "botany of death" in museums to sites of dynamism, urgency, and unfinished potential. In Georges Didi-Huberman's essay, "Conflicts of Gestures, Conflicts of Images", he characterises political art as *non-finito*:

"People endlessly rise up. Endless uprisings: because they often fall down, they fail, they wash up on the sands of conformism or come up against law enforcement.

Endlessly: without the final goal—everything calming down, reconciliation obtained, desire satisfied at last—ever being reached. But also without desire ever letting up and along with it, the courage to disobey, the drive to invent, the force to do otherwise, the energy to re-subject oneself."<sup>3</sup>

Judith Butler also echoes Didi-Huberman's idea of "endlessness." For Butler, failures never fully enclose themselves; rather, they are transformed and monumentalised as historically transmitted memory, "an unfulfilled promise taken up by future generations who vow to realise those aims."<sup>4</sup> Paradoxically, through historical erasure

and rewriting, the spectral presence of suppressed voices persists—embodied in costumes, blank signs, or empty spaces—preserving the unspoken narratives of the marginalised. Authorities’ attempts to silence these images affirm their defiance, turning absence into a lasting icon of resilience.

*The Chimei wangliang* on the streets of Shanghai has, through pure contingency, formed a haunting intertextual and intermediary resonance with my recent cinematic experience (such is the mercurial nature of ghosts! They defy the spatial-temporal unity of the present moment). This time, I am transported to the jungle mountains of Isan, Thailand, with Palme d’Or-winning director Apichatpong Weerasethakul’s film *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010).

Here, memories of a ‘future past’ manifest through a labyrinthine sequence of ten still images that interrupt the film’s overall temporal tapestry, evoking Boonmee’s memories in a way reminiscent of Chris Marker’s 1962 experimental film *La Jetée*, where time and memory oscillate between movement and stillness. The photographic stills were gestated from Apichatpong’s project *Primitive* (2009), a multi-medium participatory project in which he collaborated with the youth of Nabua, a region in northeast Thailand. This region, wounded to this day, suffers the aftermath of mid-20th-century clashes between communist insurgents and state forces. In the film, Boonmee’s memories conjoin with the turbulent historical soil beneath his feet, conjuring ghosts from his suppressed unconscious.

Film scholar May Adadol Ingawanij notes that the youths in *Primitive* may likely represent descendants of the communist fighters. Dressed in their almost farcical costumes, they are re-enacting a history inherited from their predecessors—a history that has long been erased but remains hauntingly present. In *Uncle Boonmee*, actors speak in the local Isan dialect, which, although somewhat intelligible to Thai speakers, reflects the region’s distinct identity. This distinction highlights the nuanced centre-periphery dynamic in Thailand, differing from other Southeast Asian countries. In Thailand, however, the violence of homogeneity and temporal unity is an internal imposition: Thais imposing it upon Thais. Thus, the photographic sequence becomes a re-emergence of Thailand’s past—suppressed memories now recalled by those denied a voice. Apichatpong himself reflects on this:

“In my work, I don’t want to talk about that obviously, but I wanted to work with the teenage offspring of the people who have been killed or tortured. I’m like these teenagers, who have no direct experience with this but have a second or third-hand memory.”<sup>5</sup>

Borrowing the Derridean concept of hauntology, Thailand’s Isan region is haunted by memories of failed left-wing revolutions and suppressed political histories, with lingering voices hidden in local folklore.

In *Uncle Boonmee*, the spectral photographic stills disrupt, capturing fragments of crystallised time to challenge the teleology of Boonmee’s march toward death. The poetic idea of “a ghost never dies; it remains always to come and to come back” finds



embodiment in Uncle Boonmee's characters, particularly in the form of Boonsong, Boonmee's son, who, like a ghost, disappears into the forest. The unresolved nature of his fate serves as a spectral reminder of the unresolved nature of history. As the still images flicker through Boonmee's (as well as the spectator's) eyes, they create a haunted space, an echo chamber full of repressed collective memory.

This phantasmal and involuntary nature of Boonmee's memory parallels Laura Mulvey's concept of "delayed cinema," where cinematic time becomes an open field for political contestation, challenging patterns of closure and resolution. She observed that cinema is uncanny for its self-referential paradox of the "co-presence of movement and stillness, continuity and discontinuity":

"A delayed cinema gains a political dimension, potentially able to challenge patterns of time that are neatly ordered around the end of an era, its 'before' and its 'after'. The delayed cinema gains further significance as outside events hasten the disappearance of the past and strengthen the political appropriation of time."<sup>6</sup>

In every silenced voice, a ghost lurks in the shadow—a timeless echo in spectral form. Bound not by mortal breath but by memory's pulse, they drift through the seams of forbidden words, haunting until their echoes reshape the living.

*Youxi Chen is a recent History of Art graduate from Oxford; she is currently pursuing an MPhil in Film and Screen Studies at the University of Cambridge.*

<sup>1</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, *Uprisings* / Georges Didi-Huberman (Paris : Gallimard/Jeu de Paume, 2016) 207.

<sup>2</sup> Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519–31.

<sup>3</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, "Conflicts of Gestures, Conflicts of Images," *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 27, no. 55–56 (November 6, 2018) 8.

<sup>4</sup> Judith Butler, "Uprising," In *Uprisings*, by Georges Didi-Huberman: 31.

<sup>5</sup> Kerstin Winking, "Interview with Apichatpong Weerasethakul: 'A Dream Is Like Another Life Recurring,'" Kerstin Winking (blog), June 1, 2013. <https://kwinking.com/2013/06/01/about-dreams-memories-an-interview-with-apichatpong-weerasethakul/>.

<sup>6</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Passing Time," in *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007) 25.

# Limitations

Joni  
Brown

# Within

# Participatory Art

Limits of participatory art are only seen when through a patriarchal and consumerist lens. Coordination of collaboration and participation requires artistic skill and intention deserving of validation equal to processes of painting or sculpture. Yet, fruition of a collaborative project facilitates creativity of many, not just a select few. An aid of protest and community connection, specifically by women, participatory art holds significance as a practice with intention and engagement. Collaboration provides a channel presenting artists' work alongside others, distinguished from but still significant alongside participation engaging directly with the public in its creation. I would argue that participatory art is a drastically positive practice, in which general criticisms, focussed on the lack of aesthetic value or requirements for individual artistic skill, can be argued against and resolved as beneficial to processes of participatory art. Regardless of potential limits, processes of creating art within a group of women, using participation to engage women in creativity, emphasises power, not restrictions, of participatory art.

Intention and coordination of participatory and group work require command of artistic skill and intention. Criticisms faced by Turkish artist's collective Oda Projesi's that their approach of facilitation over direct authorship 'Ultimately leaves little to separate their work from arts and museum educators worldwide, or indeed community arts tradition'<sup>1</sup>, provides a misjudgement of participatory art as social project over intentional creative practice. Through community workshops and collaborative events around their apartment in Istanbul, Oda Projesi produced a 'Creative and participatory social fabric'<sup>2</sup>. Yet criticism reducing their practice to simple social projects rather than intentional community engagement emphasises the lack of understanding of power and intention within participatory art. This reduction also takes a patriarchal tone when considering the creators of Oda Projesi are women. Expectation of women as guides, healers, facilitators, diminishes the significance of their roles as artists in their own right, therefore the lack of recognition of this work as contemporary practice perpetuates patriarchal standards of personal skill and power as opposed to collective. References to artistic or creative 'mastery'<sup>3</sup> emphasise these patriarchal elements embedded in the judgement of contemporary practice. In this way, significance of participation as a process is only heightened in active opposition against the patriarchy. Thomas Hirschhorn's 'Bataille Monument'<sup>4</sup> proves to work against this emphasis towards counteraction of patriarchal expectations, where objectification and disregard of those involved in the participatory work quickly developed a toxicity of manipulation of the other. Focusses on feminist inclusivity and protest hold significance where the entire practice is the process, therefore 'working with' as opposed to 'using', only strengthens participatory work. Fruition of a collaborative project facilitates creativity of many, not just the select few. In this way, participatory art engages artistic skill by 'making social dialogue a medium'<sup>5</sup>.

Criticisms of participation and collectives as 'Indistinguishable from government arts policy'<sup>6</sup> diminishes the intention it holds to inspire collective and collaborative creativity, neglecting to recognise power held when creating work with clear group intention as opposed to the individual. Protest art and group action doesn't just comment on sociological discourse; it is actively intertwined with the movement.

Value in this practice is through emphasis on the other, rather than the individual, and reference to participatory and collaborative practice in this context focuses on that of women and feminist art specifically, rather than variations titled within participatory practice serving to prove different aims. Criticisms of participatory art may be centred on their failure to recognise intentions of the practice, one focussed on the collective rather than solo success of the artist in creating a piece of aesthetic individualism.

Aesthetic consideration is still relevant in terms of participatory work, yet not a necessity for social change or protest. Liisa Roberts' participatory project 'What's the Time in Vyborg?'<sup>7</sup>, in which exhibitions, workshops and performances were orchestrated around the city library, faced criticisms towards the aesthetic elements of the work. Facilitation of community engaged events was the intention of the practice, yet by dismissing the project on the basis that the intention doesn't fall into the brackets of contemporary art, its purpose failed to be recognised. Removing aesthetic consideration when assessing the value of work propels it further from patriarchal standards when made by women, allowing participatory art to be considered without visually based criticism. Aestheticism and objectification of women in art notoriously places the female body under the male gaze, within social constraints limiting power conveyed to objects of aesthetic value. This isn't to say the engagement of the female body in the participatory project is insignificant, only if the documentation and criticism of the aesthetic value of the work were removed from the assessment of its quality to begin with, intention of participatory art in engaging communities and inciting change may become the focus, and any preset objectification of the people involved would be eliminated. If intention of project and process of creation is where the artistic substance is held in the intention of participatory art, then the purpose behind the engagement of the female body is what should be significant, not how it looked while doing it.

Ultimately, recognition of the significance of participatory work is best achieved when removing the visual, consumerist and patriarchal constraints on the judgement of contemporary art. Collaborative art's ability to engage communities in the context of women's protest contributes to its significance as a valid artistic practice. The power of participatory art is held in its community engagement, and the lack of aesthetic focus so criticised in this practice allows the intention of the work to be more directed towards impact than looks, in which the engagement of women allows their involvement without objectification. By changing the perspective of the use of participatory art and the success of its intentions when engaged with, the process can be seen as far from limited.

*An interdisciplinary artist at the Ruskin School of Art, Joni Brown's work engages in the roles of gender, participation and performance in the ecological landscape.*

<sup>1</sup> Istanbul Bienal, Anne(x)- Oda Projesi, <https://bienal.iksv.org/en/17b-artists/oda-projesi>.

<sup>2</sup> Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents", in *Artificial Hells*, (London: Verso, 2012) 20

<sup>3</sup> Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces : Community and Communication in Modern Art*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Hirschhorn, *Bataille Monument* (2002), <https://www.thomashirschhorn.com/bataille-monument/>.

<sup>5</sup> Bishop, 22.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Margaret Sundell, *1000 words*: Liisa Roberts, New York: Artforum (2004).

Grains of  
Interwoven  
Fluidity  
—  
In Memory  
of  
Dinh Q. Lê

Tyuki  
Imamura

The unexpected passing of Dinh Q. Lê was both shocking and profoundly painful. Just two weeks before in what would be our final meeting in Tokyo, he subtly hinted at a kind of goodbye. With 2025 approaching — the fifty-year anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War — he spoke of stepping back from his role as an artist bearing the weight of war's history. He conveyed a readiness to embark on a new chapter, to turn a fresh page in his life. Simultaneously, he encouraged younger practitioners, like myself, to ask ourselves where we stand, surrounded by the ready-made cultural infrastructure — including the alternative spaces which came into being through the timeless effort of practitioners like himself and his colleagues, which we now take for granted—and to open up spaces of expression by our own hands.

Dinh's teachings were vast and empowering. As the founder of Sàn Art in Saigon, he created a platform in the truest sense, as the word Sàn literally denotes — a space of humanity and encounter formed through art. The spaces he envisioned held the weight of human suffering — perhaps the very root and essence of humanity, if such a thing exists — yet within that pain, he found a beginning, an invitation to transformation. "People are often surprised to see that in all my work, there's no anger, no accusation," he once reflected, illustrating his refusal to reduce trauma to simplistic terms.

Dinh's approach transcended neutrality or indecision; it was a way of seeing that resisted confinement to any single perspective. His sensitive portrayal of the complexities of war, perhaps best captured in *The Farmers and the Helicopters* (2006), moved beyond fixed narratives, embracing a spectrum of emotions and points of view. His work often incorporated weaving techniques he learned from his aunt, both literally and metaphorically interlacing diverse perspectives to reflect the tangled, multifaceted nature of memory and history.

In *The Farmers and the Helicopters*, Dinh amplified voices often silenced in mainstream historiography — neglected in both Vietnamese and American accounts. Through his three-screen video installation, he assembled multiple viewpoints on the Vietnam War, taking issue with both the one-sided narrative in America and even his own interpretation of the war. He invited Vietnamese farmers to recount their memories of the war, particularly their encounters with helicopters, and to articulate what these machines symbolized for them. Drawing on these vignettes and found footage—from air raids to Hollywood depictions — Dinh constructed a mosaic of imagery and musings on the helicopter. Diverging responses among his interviewees complicated any simple reading, as some dreamed of manufacturing helicopters for agriculture, while others expressed a haunted fascination rooted in trauma. Together, these voices reject any black-and-white narrative, revealing the helicopter as a complex, ambivalent symbol.

Beyond this intricately woven work is a profound, fluid shift in perspectives. Dinh's storytelling resists any singular viewpoint, refusing to anchor itself to one position. This approach does not seek to affirm or deny any particular stance but allows for the simultaneous presence of opposing accounts. To see the helicopter solely as a symbol of menace or as an emblem of hope and renewal oversimplifies its layered significance. Dinh's work embodies the ability to hold contradictory views, accepting the complexity and pain that accompany such a position.

In this ceaseless oscillation, a new vision emerges—one that embraces differing perspectives to fully grasp the hovering spectre of the war in its many dimensions. Dinh invites us to live within a shifting horizon, transcending our linguistic and conceptual boundaries. Such an approach allows us entry into a world beyond dichotomies and simplistic interpretations, encouraging an engagement with complexity and a relinquishment of definitive conclusions.

In August 2016, I accompanied Dinh on a research trip to Tohoku, a region in northeastern Japan profoundly affected by the 2011 tsunami. We travelled first to Fukushima and then along the coast of Iwate Prefecture. Over time, I began to recognise issues that diverged from those Dinh had encountered during his initial visit in 2011, shortly after the earthquake. Witnessing communities disperse, rebuild, and grapple with conflicts within these processes filled me with almost unbearable thoughts and emotions. As we returned to Tokyo on the bullet train, I sat beside Dinh, quietly processing the enormity of what we had seen, striving to understand the emotions that lay beneath the surface.

Amid this journey, as we observed identities shaped by land and culture undergoing transformation, a question arose: how can we situate ourselves within the intricate divides that shape society? In response, Dinh shared a perspective that seemed to reflect not only our experience in Tohoku but his broader outlook on life. There are countless identities and cultural boundaries, he suggested, and they do not all need to be reconciled. It is not necessary to force oneself, or others, into a singular identity. Recognize these boundaries, understand that sometimes you stand within them and other times, you see things from the outside. Keeping one foot on either side is actually essential; we don't need to confine ourselves to a single entity. I remember he spoke with a poetic conviction, tempered by a profound sincerity.

These days, I wake up and find myself reflecting on his attitudes and approaches—lessons that are often painfully difficult to uphold yet inspire me to keep alive the possibilities he embodied. In the aftermath of an unparalleled global pandemic and amid escalating conflicts, the boundaries in our lives have become ever more entrenched. Can we find the strength to keep our minds open, to look beyond these fortified divides toward a wider horizon? His voice echoes, his smile lingers, entrusting us with grains of hope to carry forward as we journey toward that distant horizon.

*Tyuki Imamura is a DPhil Candidate in Contemporary Art History and Theory at Ruskin School of Art the University of Oxford and works at the intersection of art urban planning writing and curatorial projects*



# Factory

Fei Geng 飛梗

# Story

I graduated with a Master's degree from Goldsmiths, University of London. After graduation, I worked at a large gallery in Taiwan. Working in the art industry is a profession where it's hard to thrive, but you also won't starve.

Instead of spending my days inside a "small white-cube", I wanted to see the third world to understand how the everyday products we use are made. Rather than opting for a higher-paying job in the electronics industry, I chose a shoe manufacturing factory, which is less automated.

Since 2017, I have been working in overseas factories of a Taiwanese company, stationed in China and Vietnam. The company produces for nearly all major sneaker brands, including Nike, Adidas, New Balance, and others. We wear these shoes and these factories are actually quite close to our everyday lives.

In the monotonous life of the factory, we basically live like robots every day. It's only during strikes with the raw sense of humanity and the thrill of collective uproar that one truly feels alive.

Although the mainstream media occasionally reports on them, it's impossible to describe the situation from an outside perspective. That's why

I write down what I witness from within the factory. I hope you enjoy the account.

In 2018, I encountered my first factory strike at a shoe manufacturing plant. The strike was triggered by political issues related to nationalism. At that time, the Vietnamese government introduced the “Economic Zone Law” policy, planning to establish three economic zones and provide foreign investors with lease terms of up to 99 years as incentives. Protesters were discontent with the government’s extension of lease terms for foreign investors. They believed that granting foreign investors prolonged land use rights in the economic zones would infringe upon national sovereignty and negatively impact immigration management. As a result, they gathered in the streets to protest.

The strike lasted for several days, which is longer than usual as strikes typically end within one day. Suspending operations for more than one day the factory would suffer significant losses, which would be difficult to justify to the shareholders. In 2014, Vietnam experienced a serious anti-China protest where many foreign factories were vandalized and Chinese-owned factories were set on fire. Several Chinese factory employees were injured or killed. Therefore, the company couldn’t afford to take the strike lightly this time. The dormitory for expatriate managers is located next to the factory, with a swimming pool downstairs surrounded by palm trees. Several mini buses were parked nearby ready to transport us to downtown hotels for refuge or directly to the airport to fly back to Taiwan should the situation escalate.

During these days of strike, the various departments in our factory kept opening and closing production lines, trying to overcome challenges to continue production. When the protesters stormed into the factory and caused damage, the operations came to a halt. On the third day of the strike, the factory started playing broadcasts resembling traditional songs accompanied by some spoken messages. I couldn’t understand Vietnamese so I asked my Vietnamese colleagues for a translation. The content was roughly, “Please stop the strike. If everyone returns to the production line, the company will not hold previous strikes against you, wages will be paid as usual without deductions due to the strike. Please return to your workstations.” I asked my Vietnamese colleagues if this broadcast was recorded by the company, but it wasn’t. It was actually recorded by the labour union based on the statement of the Vietnam General Confederation of Labour.<sup>1</sup>

In communist countries, every company is required to have a workers' union. Workers' unions are typically organizations controlled or regulated by the government or official institutions, and they closely cooperate with the government to promote its policies and objectives. In these countries, workers' unions may play a role in propagating government policies, promoting labor education and training, and managing workers' affairs. From what I know, the workers' unions in our factory elect worker representatives and regularly organize recreational activities such as karaoke singing, movie screenings, sports events, and even beauty contests of Ao Dai.<sup>2</sup> It was surprising to me that in the case of a strike, the union takes the side of the management and assists in pacifying the workers.

There was a poster placed outside the office issued by the headquarters, with one side in Chinese and the other side translated into Vietnamese. It began with the words, "Dear brothers and sisters, the company has always stood with you. Please stay calm and return to the production line. We hope everyone maintains their dignity and does not join the strike instigated by bad individuals." At the end of this statement, the signature of the highest responsible person in the factory was attached. A Vietnamese employee was called to recite the content to all the employees. On that day, in addition to political demands of the strike related to the extension of the leases to the foreign owners, the request for a salary increase was added.

In general, other factories disliked it when our factory granted salary increases to its workers. Salary negotiations for workers always happen in our company first because we are a representative foreign company. Once one factory increased salaries, employees from other factories would easily move to higher-paying ones. However, other factories might not have the same profitability as ours, making it difficult for them to sustain production.

Interestingly, the strikes every morning were peaceful. Protest activities would only take place after the workers had finished their meals. In the afternoon, many workers spontaneously gathered at the factory entrance. By this time, the factory had requested assistance from the local police. The workers began shouting, throwing bottles and leftover food containers at the company's security guards instead of the police.

After several days of the strike, even the cleaning staff joined the strike. The factory premises were already dirty and chaotic. The hot weather intensified the foul odor emanating from the garbage. Strangely enough, it was the female factory workers who were at the forefront of confronting the security guards, throwing objects and shouting. I was deeply impressed by their courage. Suddenly, there was a loud explosion. I thought the police had fired their guns. After inching my way to the front, I realized that police officers and guards set off firecrackers to disperse the protesting workers. Workers started fleeing in all directions to avoid the deafening sound, covering their ears and pushing outward. With the confrontation between workers and security and police, another day came to an end. Although the work hours were chaotic, the end of the day was always orderly.

The next morning when we arrived for work, the factory premises were unusually quiet. There were no more broadcasts of the labor union's propaganda. Several military trucks were parked on the main road of the factory, and they had brought in special forces police officers wearing black bulletproof vests. Each person was armed with submachine guns, and a few of them had trained dogs accompanying them. The police officers stood in formation, moving like dark strange cubes within the factory. Normally, in the morning the workers would sit on the green pathway leisurely enjoying their breakfast. Today, however, it was replaced by groups of armed police. It was evident that the strike had come to an end.

After a few days, the local newspapers in Vietnam featured the headline news: the largest footwear factory in Vietnam incurred massive losses due to the strike and the company decided to withdraw its investment from Vietnam. The factory would be gradually relocated out of Vietnam and the company would cease further investments. It was likely the threat of divestment that forced the government to deploy the military and armed police on the last day to suppress the situation. As a result of the strike, the company conducted investigations and terminated the employment of approximately 4,000 workers involved in the strike and those associated with dissent. It was reported that many of these employees cried and apologized to the company when they were being dismissed, but they still lost their jobs.

*Fei Geng recently published a book titled "On Hold: The Tale of Taiwanese Factory Supervisors Abroad" (Homeward Publishing, 2024), you can follow on Instagram at @flyingtrunk.xd and <https://medium.com/@flyingtrunkXD>.*

<sup>1</sup> The Vietnam General Confederation of Labour (Tổng Liên đoàn Lao động Việt Nam) is Vietnam's sole legal and official labor organization, representing the labor movement and workers' interests in Vietnam. It is one of the state institutions under the leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam.

<sup>2</sup> Áo dài is a traditional Vietnamese attire that holds significant cultural importance in Vietnam. It typically features a form-fitting cut that accentuates the curves of women.

# Critical Document Series

Statement Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam following loan request for Bakunin's Barricade by **Ahmet Ögüt**

● **the Not Surprised Collective** Stedelijk Museum Fails to Loan Artwork by **Ahmet Ögüt** to Protect Students in Amsterdam

**Ahmet Ögüt** Public Statement June 2024

**Ahmet Ögüt** Updated Public Statement August 2024

**Ahmet Ögüt** Demand to the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam to Take Down My Work Bakunin's Barricade  
October 2024







First version

*Eindhoven* 2015

A barricade inspired by Bakunin's never realized proposal in 1849 using works from the Van Abbemuseum's

Collection: *El Lissitzky, Proun P23, No. 6*, 1919

Oskar Kokoschka, *Augustusbrücke Dresden*, 1923

Pablo Picasso, *Nature morte À la bougie*, 1945

Fernand Leger, *Une Chaise, un pot de fleurs*, 1951

Asger Jorn, *Le monde Perdu*, 1960

Ger van Elk, *Adieu IV*, 1974

Rene Daniels, *Grammofoon*, 1978

Marlene Dumas, *The View*, 1992

A loan contract, prepared in collaboration with a lawyer, stipulates that the barricade may be requested and deployed during extreme economic, social, political, transformative moments and social movements.

*Ahmet Ögüt born in Diyarbakır, is a sociocultural initiator, artist, and lecturer, working across a variety of media, including photography, video, and installation, Ögüt often uses humor and small gestures to offer his commentary on rather serious or pressing social and political issues.*



## Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam

### Statement Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam following loan request for *Bakunin's Barricade* by Ahmet Ögüt.

June 19, 2024

On 28 May 2024, the Stedelijk received a loan request for the work *Bakunin's Barricade* by Ahmet Ögüt, from a collective made up of cultural workers and activists. The collective is extremely concerned about human rights in Gaza-Palestine, and would like to use the work at a forthcoming student demonstration at an Amsterdam educational institution. Driven by these same concerns and our role as a museum – multivocal and with an eye for the social context – we already had plans in place for an upcoming presentation of the work. In spite of that, we were receptive to the request. Although loan requests normally have to be submitted several months in advance, we accelerated the procedure and met with various representatives of the collective on 5 June.

#### *Context of the Work*

*Bakunin's Barricade* (2015-2020) was featured in the group exhibition *In the Presence of Absence – Proposals for the Museum Collection* (5 September 2020–31 January 2021). The museum purchases work presented in these biennial exhibitions, and acquired this installation by Ögüt for its collection.

*Bakunin's Barricade* is based on a concept introduced by the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin. When Prussian troops prepared to crush the socialist uprising in Dresden in 1849, he proposed placing paintings from the National Museum's collection in front of the barricades. Bakunin reasoned that Prussian soldiers would not dare to destroy priceless artworks to breach the barricade. Inspired by Bakunin's proposal, which was not carried out, Ahmet Ögüt created a barricade made of fences, scrap cars, construction materials and other objects, combined with a number of artworks he selected.

Following previous presentations of this work at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, Museum Ludwig, Cologne, ZeynoMuhsin Bilge, Istanbul, Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen and Kunstverein Dresden, Ögüt installed *Bakunin's Barricade* at the Stedelijk with artworks by Else Berg, Timo Demollin, Marlene Dumas, Pieter Engels, Nan Goldin, Käte Kollwitz, Jan Th. Kruseman, Kazimir Malevich, and PINK de Thierry from the Stedelijk's collection.

#### *The Contract*

The purchase of *Bakunin's Barricade* by Ahmet Ögüt is accompanied by a contract which stipulates that we, as the buyer, declare our willingness to lend this work to third parties to be deployed as a barricade, if these parties request the loan in the context of extreme economic, social and political transformative moments and social movements that are designed to express serious public concerns regarding fundamental human rights, including those defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We, as purchaser, declare our willingness to negotiate with third parties for the use of at least five artworks from our collection that are part of *Bakunin's Barricade*. These artworks may also be reproductions.

The contract also stipulates that we as a museum will decide on a case-by-case basis and at our own discretion whether to honor the request, whether and which artworks to make available and under what conditions.

Should the museum not honor a request, it must issue a statement to clarify and explain its considerations in light of the museum's mission and vision.

### ***Outcome of loan request***

In discussions with the applicants, we let them know we were open to their request and offered them two options:

*A. The Stedelijk will loan the work, with reproductions instead of original artworks.*

*B. Since, at the time of the application, we already had plans in place for an upcoming presentation of **Bakunin's Barricade** in the museum, accompanied by a Public Program – an equally important element – in which the installation acts as a catalyst for talks and discussions, we invited the collective to co-design the program.*

During conversations with the collective, the applicants made it clear that for them *Bakunin's Barricade* was to be shown outside the museum. Although the contract offers the option of using reproductions instead of original artworks, the collective rejected that possibility, as it would be 'too performative' for them. They also let us know that they will not accept our invitation to co-curate a Public Program around the presentation of the work at the Stedelijk in the summer of 2024.

### ***Motivations, Stedelijk Museum***

First and foremost, what is happening in Gaza is closely monitored and heavily discussed by all of us at the museum. We too are shocked and saddened by the ongoing violence and loss of so many lives.

If a loan request for this important work is rejected, we are obliged to issue a public statement listing our reasons. We want to be transparent about our decision-making even though, after all, we didn't reject the request and thus are not obligated to disclose this. However, out of respect for the applicants' sincere intentions, we decided to do so.

We always review a loan request on the basis of the content of the work and our role as a museum. The installation was purchased in full awareness of the content and the contract, so we are receptive to requests to borrow the work. In this case, the selected artworks were to be provided in the form of reproductions (this wouldn't be stated publicly, so the installation's message would have remained intact). While we regret that the applicants turned down *Bakunin's Barricade* in this form, we understand their decision. Providing original works of art for use in a demonstration clashes with an integral part of our mission and values: to care responsibly for our collection, and to preserve it for future generations. As a museum, we have this role and responsibility.

As a museum, our mission is to provide a platform for artists, to offer an engaging exhibition programme, and to create a space for dialogue and debate around it. One of the ways we intend to accomplish this is with an upcoming presentation of *Bakunin's Barricade* in the museum where it will be the focus of a Public Program that promotes an open exchange of ideas.

## the Not Surprised Collective

### Stedelijk Museum Fails to Loan Artwork by Ahmet Öğüt to Protect Students in Amsterdam

June 28, 2024 at 9:30pm

*The Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam refuses to mobilize the artwork **Bakunin's Barricade** to protect protesting Amsterdam students. A group of cultural workers, artists, and activists made a loan request in the spirit of the work and in line with contractual agreements.*

***With this statement, we, the collective, share our perspective on the chain of events and the statements made by the Stedelijk Museum and artist Ahmet Öğüt.***

In 2020, the Stedelijk Museum acquired *Bakunin's Barricade* (2015-2020) by Ahmet Öğüt. The work consists of a barricade incorporating valuable works from the museum's collection. As part of the work, the museum signed a contract upon purchase stating its willingness to:

*loan the Barricade to third parties in the Netherlands in order to be used as a barricade if they request this loan in the context of extreme economic, social, political, transformative moments and movements which engender high levels of public concern relating to fundamental human rights, including those defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.*

On 28 May 2024, we, a group of cultural workers, artists, and activists, submitted a collective request to the Stedelijk Museum to loan *Bakunin's Barricade* to help protect protesting students from police brutality. We are deeply concerned about the ongoing genocide and human rights violations against the Palestinian people and the lack of action by the Dutch government and public institutions, including the Stedelijk, despite several preliminary rulings of the International Court of Justice. We support the protesting students and their demand that educational institutions end their cooperation with the Israeli state and Israeli-affiliated companies and institute an academic boycott. The excessive police violence used during evictions of student encampments in Amsterdam, Groningen, and Utrecht, among other places, shows that these students need effective protective measures. *Bakunin's Barricade* can provide this protection. In fact, it was made to serve this purpose. The loan also offers an opportunity for the Stedelijk Museum to be socially relevant and side with justice, after more than half a year of silently witnessing genocide.

On 5 June, we had an in-person meeting with Rein Wolfs, director of the Stedelijk. We were told that *Bakunin's Barricade* would soon be put on display in the museum galleries, and we were invited for a public conversation with the museum as part of their public programme. We immediately declined this proposal. The urgency of the situation in Palestine demands concrete action outside the museum walls, and it is for this reason that we submitted the loan request to the Stedelijk. A conversation within the safety of the museum is contrary to the spirit of the work, and to our intentions as a collective.

As an alternative, the museum proposed to build up *Bakunin's Barricade* in the public space in front of the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, but without using a selection of original artworks of considerable economic and cultural value. The museum invoked a remarkable clause in the contract stating that reproductions could also be used. Moreover, the museum proposed to use the reproductions without disclosing this, which would practically constitute forgery.<sup>1</sup> We could not agree to this proposal either. Using replicas would not only be a lie to the public. It would also make *Bakunin's Barricade* purely performative, contributing to the aestheticization of politics without putting the actual art pieces at risk.

We are disappointed, but not surprised, by the decisions of the Stedelijk Museum. The institution pretends to be “engaged,” but its commitment to social justice never extends beyond self-interest. The museum fears the destruction of art and heritage, but above all fears loss of revenue and negative press coverage if it speaks out against genocide and shows solidarity with the student movement.<sup>2</sup> This is evident, among other things, in the statement the museum published, which mainly focuses on the museum itself, not on genocide or police violence. The Stedelijk thus prefers economic interests over people and the protection of heritage over the protection of students working to end the best-documented crime against humanity in this century. Once again, the museum confirms that an artwork in its collection becomes a commodity, regardless of its (purported) revolutionary potential.

According to an Artnet article, our collective has “tried and failed” to loan *Bakunin’s Barricade*. We disagree. In our view, the Stedelijk Museum has failed. It has failed to loan *Bakunin’s Barricade* now that it really matters. The genocide of Palestinians while the world is watching demands courage from all of us: art workers, collectives, and institutions. This courage is lacking at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, and that says it all.

Stand in solidarity with the students! Escalate for Gaza and decolonise! Free Palestine!

*On behalf of the collective,*

Alina Lupu, Emin Batman, Esmee Schoutens, Jeftha Pattikawa, Juha van ‘t Zelfde, Macarena Loma Yevenes, Maren Siebert, Mitchell Esajas, Pieter Paul Pothoven, Raul Balai, Rowan Stol, Sepp Eckenhaussen, Stefanie van Gemert

<sup>1</sup> The museum is legally bound to publish a statement if a loan request of *Bakunin’s Barricade* is refused. In this statement, the Stedelijk confirms the intention not to inform the public of the usage of replicas.

See: <https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/news/statement-stedelijk-following-loan-request>

<sup>2</sup> The silence of the Stedelijk stands in painful contrast to its earlier public statements in support of Black Lives Matter, Kick Out Zwarte Piet, and Ukraine.

## Ahmet Öğüt

### Public Statement

June 2024

I first installed “Bakunin’s Barricade” in 2015 at Van Abbemuseum. It was important to demonstrate that original artworks from the museum’s collection, some with astronomical insurance value, could be included in the barricade installation. Although the contract remained unsigned and the work was not acquired, I didn’t consider it a failure. Van Abbemuseum was the first institution to agree to include original works from its collection.

Five years later, after various iterations of the work were installed in different museums, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam became the first to sign the contract. This shifted the work from a proposal to a functional piece with real potential to be loaned back to the streets. I spent several months negotiating the contract with the Stedelijk Museum’s lawyers. Grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the contract ensures the work can be loaned to the public and the streets if requested during future mass protests or wartime.

But what constitutes the artwork? The installation consists of two parts, and I am the creator of one part: the elements used to construct the barricade. I demand that my part of the physical barricade/work of art should be loaned upon a request, the way it is specified in the contract. The second part includes borrowed original artworks from the collection, which belong to the museum and were made by other artists. The contract requires the museum to negotiate the loan of these works, rather than automatically declining, and must issue a public statement explaining any refusal justified in relation to their code of ethics.

Unfortunately, the Stedelijk Museum did not agree to loan the original works from its collection when a group of cultural workers, artists, and activists collectively requested to loan “Bakunin’s Barricade” to protect protesting students from police brutality, amid concerns about the ongoing genocide in Gaza. Instead, the museum offered reproductions, an option added by its lawyers to the contract, as I understood it meant to be for extreme situations when the museum and city are no longer safe for its collection. For example, right now in Kharkiv, the city is literally bombed every day, making museums unsafe, the original artworks are evacuated to somewhere safe. The Stedelijk was the first Dutch museum to have a bunker, transferring many works to it for safekeeping during the Second World War. However, this situation is different, and it should have been more clearly specified in the contract to prevent the museum’s current interpretation. I wish the museum had not proposed the reproduction option. If the museum chose to miss the opportunity to give original works within the concept of my work, I would have preferred the museum to at least loan my part of the barricade, as I had already given consent in the contract. Had this happened, I believe many artists with valuable artworks, including the ones who have other works in the museum collection, would have been willing to contribute their works to the barricade once it returned to the streets in solidarity.

The code of ethics for every museum must represent not only the responsibility to protect cultural heritage but also accountability to the public, to remain relevant and aligned with justice. I think it is crucial that, not only individual cultural workers but also institutions must condemn the three acts of genocide with requisite intent clearly committed in Gaza, as also stated by UN Human Rights Council experts.

## Updated Public Statement

August 2024

In my previous statement, I outlined several key points about *Bakunin's Barricade*.

However, given recent developments, I feel the need to clarify a few additional points:

Both the museum and the activists - during their negotiations - failed to recognize *Bakunin's Barricade* as a standalone work of art, independent of the borrowed pieces from the collection. While the inclusion and negotiation of other original artworks is indeed important, it is crucial not to lose sight of the primary intent of the work for the sake of additional polemics. I have already committed to loaning the piece back to the streets in the event of basic human rights abuses since the day the contract was drafted. In this instance, the request clearly aligns with the conditions stated in the contract, and thus, the museum has an obligation to loan the standalone work of art. The negotiation over the other original works is a separate and additional contractual obligation. I'm not the author of those additional original works, but I can insist that the museum negotiate their inclusion as a defining element in the contract.

My overall practice speaks for my ethical position. The question is what is the ethical stand of the Museum when such a moment comes? The contract enforces transparency on that. Adding the option of fake replicas to two other options was the museum's idea. That did not remove the option of possibly giving original works from the contract and did not remove the important element of entering serious negotiations in all transparency. Especially in this particular case conceptually and at the end ethically, offering replicas makes no sense. This suggestion calls into question the museum's sincerity and integrity toward the integrity of the work and both the public and the artists. The museum's claim that it never intended to loan the originals is speculative. Future scenarios may play out differently as we can't be sure of how the situation will be in 50 years or 100 years from now. The contract ensures that negotiations over the works can and will continue in future cases.

I do not agree with the current state of my work being confined within the museum, detached from its real intent and distanced from its revolutionary potential during these turbulent times. This work was created to challenge art and art institutions that underestimate themselves within symbolic boundaries. I stand by the integrity of my work and remain confident in its purpose. Until the museum takes the necessary stand and honors the integrity of the work, I will not participate in any public programs and will not oversee any attempts at installing my work.

Ahmet Ögüt

## Demand to the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam to Take Down My Work *Bakunin's Barricade*

October 2024

*Bakunin's Barricade* is based on a concept introduced by the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, and the idea to use the worth of artworks in barricades in order to protect movements from state violence, as officers would not dare to destroy priceless artworks to breach a barricade. Thus, *Bakunin's Barricade* is a conceptual art piece which enforces the Museum's ethics through a contract.

I published statements explaining the sequence of events around the refusal of the first and only request made to the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. In short, the museum has refused to loan my work to a group of activists last June consisting of cultural workers, artists, and activists collectively requested *Bakunin's Barricade* to protect students demonstrations against genocide in Gaza from police brutality. The Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam is also yet to make any public statement condemning the genocide in Gaza.

Since my last statement, I have been in negotiation with the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam's director, general counsel, and legal team to update the contract and make *Bakunin's Barricade* more accessible to movements. After weeks of negotiations, The Museum and its legal apparatus is trying to further limit the obligation of The Museum to issue a public statement explaining any refusal justified in relation to their code of ethics.

This stance is completely against the core idea behind the *Bakunin's Barricade*, to the point that as an artist, I have no option but to publicly demand the removal of my work from the collection display. Though the Museum legally owns the work, I expect it to respect both the integrity of the artwork and my role as its author.



Moe Satt:

*Rest the Thumbs on the Cheekbones*

Review

Delfina Foundation,  
London

Jo-Lene  
Ong

Four gesturing hands cut-out in placard size — thumbs down, three finger salute, gun finger, and raised pinky — are lined up on the floor, unpretentiously leaning against the wall. They are signs familiar to many as candid or even playful indications of disapproval, a scout's honour, shooting, and perhaps a pinky ready to make a promise but there is something sombre about these black and white prints on perspex that captures the viewer's reflection against every line and crease of the signifying hands.



The work's title, *Storyline (voted/ gun/ revolution/ thumbs down)* (2024), reveals the subversive plane coded in these expressions. They outline four chapters in Myanmar's recent political turmoil through symbols of collective action and resistance, in chronological order from right to left: a raised pinky from waves of people documenting their voter participation; a gun sign relating to the military coup that occurred one day before elected members of Parliament were to be sworn in; the three-finger salute adopted by protesters as a pro-democracy symbol; and finally a thumbs down at the ongoing military dictatorship since 2021.

*Rest the Thumbs on the Cheekbones* is the first European solo by Moe Satt presented in Delfina Foundation, London. One of the most prominent and prolific artists from Myanmar, Moe Satt's compelling performance art has long been recognised in Southeast Asia. He belongs to a second generation of contemporary artists in Myanmar who turn towards more conceptual and abstract modes of grappling with the political and social reality of a country that has gone back and forth with military rule since 1962. Curated by Erin Li, the exhibition stages a modest but concise study of the artist's long-term focus on the language of the body, particularly hand gestures. The selection of works builds upon Satt's recent two-year residency at Rijksakademie, Amsterdam (2022-2024) as well as his 2020 residency at Delfina Foundation, extending into a new commission and a collaboration with Tate on a new iteration of his performance *f'n'f (face and fingers)* in The Tanks.

A self-taught artist, Moe Satt began with performance art in 2005, joining an active field of performance practices and happenings across the region during the 90s to 2000s. Satt was drawn to performance art for its immediacy in engaging with the public, as well as the direct connection between the artist's mind and his medium. I first encountered Satt's performance in the streets of Kuala Lumpur's Chinatown during Buka Jalan Performance Art Festival, an artist-organised festival with a name that translates to opening a road or path. Over the past twenty years, Satt has performed in a diverse range of contexts and conditions — DIY performance art festivals, public spheres, private non-gallery

spaces, and art museums. Through this experience of adapting, translating, and code-switching, Satt has developed a nuanced understanding of his own body as symbolic field. In 2008, before the proliferation of Asian biennials, he sought to create more encounters for exchange and founded Beyond Pressure International Performance Art Festival in Yangon. By the 5th edition it was renamed Beyond Pressure International Festival of Contemporary Art to reflect its expanding field. In his own practice, Satt too has been exploring other other forms such as video, sculpture, and installation but the body remains central to his art. His use of material is most effective as a vehicle for performance, be it by his own body or audience actions. In the gallery courtyard, *Parasol Alternative* (remade in 2024) invites audiences to zip and unzip a parasol canopy into a myriad of shapes. Speaking about this work in the press release, Satt poses the question, "When you put together pieces of a broken object (or a disintegrating society), can it all go back to normal?"

Next to the playfully poignant parasol is a sculptural installation piece, *Bodies Inside T-Shirt*, comprising three hollow and distorted plaster cast t-shirts suspended from a carousel. Satt describes them as a metaphor for how "many outside of the country know something is happening inside but are uncertain about the actual developments on the ground." Displayed in the same space as *Storyline (voted/ gun/ revolution/ thumbs down)*, *Parasol Alternative*, and *Pinky Say Something*, an installation that juxtaposes bullet cases with wax casts of pinky finger stained in election ink, *Bodies Inside T-Shirt's* enigmatic form allows space for contemplation beyond the artwork's description. I left wondering if I was moved by the enigma or the indelible memory of a similarly titled performance by Satt during the Rijksakademie Open Studio earlier this year. Silently entering a room encircled by the audience, Satt crouched down and contorted his entire body to fit inside a white t-shirt. Once encased in the t-shirt, he slowly writhed into different positions, occasionally making piercing whistles, and stretching his arm out from the cocoon to communicate with disquieting gestures. Eventually, Satt emerges from the t-shirt entirely and picks-up a hand-gesture cut-out from *Storyline*. He moves through the room while

confronting audiences with their reflection on the mirrored plane and finally leads audiences in a procession down the corridor. Here, Moe Satt's movements retrieve deep embodiment and calculated choreography, transforming personal history into an encounter of transmissive reflection.

A whistling sound in the exhibition implores a turn into the adjoining space housing two video works that showcase Moe Satt's mastery of corporeal gestures. Satt's extensive study of everyday forms, collective consciousness, and psychogeography is evinced in *Hand Around In...* (Yangon, Busan, Jogja) (2012-19). These three early video works of hand movements across distinct Asian cities are brought together for the first time in an aptly lyrical installation of three diminutive floating screens. The highlight of the exhibition is arguably *Nothing But Fingers* (2023), a two-channel video of a performance by Moe Satt with dancer Liah Frank inspired by tribal hunting communication in Africa and folk-dances in Southeast Asia. Subconsciously influenced by his university studies in zoology, Satt first produced *Hunting & Dancing* (2006), a photographic index of hand animal gestures. This collaboration is the artist's most successful recent exploration into purpose-made video performances, working with other performers, and developing instructions. Curator, Erin Li writes in the exhibition booklet, 'The idiosyncratic choreography accentuating arm, hand, and finger movements in silence or to the rhythm of whistles create a meditative field for contemplating the relationship between human and animal, self and Other, and survival and art.' The booklet also features an intimate portrait of Moe Satt's artistic evolution by poet and artist Maung Day.

*Rest the Thumbs on the Cheekbones* casts a compelling compact retrospective look into the artist's abiding dedication to the language of the body and unspoken understandings. Moe Satt's extraordinary choreography transgresses a shadow of violence to evoke embodied consciousness and the undercurrents of a collective subconscious.

*Jo-Lene Ong is a curator with experience working across Asia and Europe. Her practice focuses on counter-colonial strategies and aesthetics. She currently serves as Curator of esea contemporary, the UK's only non-profit art center specialising in presenting expressions from East and Southeast Asia and their diasporas. Previous roles include Program Advisor, Seoul Mediacity Biennale (2023); Co-Curator of Visual Arts and Theory, Other Futures Festival Amsterdam (2020-21); Editor, Practice Space (2019) published by NAME Publications and De Appel; and curatorial team member, SUNSHOWER: Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia 1980 to Now (2017) at National Art Center, Tokyo and Mori Art Museum.*

# Haegue Yang: *Leap Year*

Hayward Gallery,  
London

Minji  
Chun

In the labyrinthine halls of the Hayward Gallery, London, Haegue Yang's *Leap Year* unfolds like a caravan, traversing the boundaries of culture, materiality, and perception. This expansive survey, encompassing over 120 works spanning two decades, is not merely a static collection of works; it is a choreographed dance of objects and senses, manifesting Yang's role as both a nomadic artist and a (re)creator of roving entities. The exhibition offers a sweeping retrospective from her early career-defining pieces to her most recent creations. It includes seminal works such as *Storage Piece* (2004), an installation composed of Yang's artworks and materials stacked and wrapped in industrial packaging as if awaiting shipment, and documentation from her first domestic solo exhibition, *Sadong 30* (2006), held in her grandmother's former residence in Incheon, South Korea. These early works, juxtaposed with her latest creations, provide a comprehensive view of Yang's consistent exploration of displacement, cultural hybridity, and sensory experience.

As visitors enter the show they are invited to pass through hanging strings of blue and silver metallic bells that make light cheerful sounds draped like

a curtain under a roof structure that references East Asian wooden architecture at the gallery entrance. Titled *Sonic Droplets in Gradation – Water Veil* (2024), this piece serves as a sonic and tactile gateway, marking the beginning of Yang's unfolding universe. Wandering through space, the audience finds themselves in a world where the mundane becomes extraordinary. Quotidian objects—light bulbs, drying racks, and Venetian blinds—shed their utilitarian skins and embark on cultural pilgrimages, as seen in *Non-Indépliables, nues* (2010/2020). Here, illumination transcends its functional bounds, metamorphosing into a vehicle of aesthetic and cultural discourse. These assemblages of bulbs and cords are not unchanging installations but ever-shifting beings, their glow a language that speaks of the fluid nature of identity in the contemporary era. In Yang's hands, these items are not just repurposed; they are reborn—their social biographies rewritten in the language of artistic alchemy.

Moving through the gallery we encounter *The Intermediates* (2015–), a tribe of anthropomorphic figures born from the marriage of traditional craft and modern materials. Inspired by animals and

mythical creatures from various folk tales across the globe, this series represents a labour-intensive body of work made with manifold materials including seashells, a palm tree basket, and knitting yarn. These entities, mainly woven from artificial straw, embody philosopher Jane Bennett's concept of 'vibrant matter', they are not inert forms but active agents, pulsating with an energy that challenges our anthropocentric worldview.<sup>1</sup> In their presence, we are compelled to reconsider the animate potential of the inanimate, the voice of the voiceless. The pinnacle of this odyssey is perhaps *Star-Crossed Rendezvous after Yun* (2024). This immersive environment of Venetian blinds, light and sound is a masterclass in what Jacques Rancière terms the 'distribution of the sensible', executed with particular clarity.<sup>2</sup> As a monumental installation that serves as a microcosm of Yang's social aesthetic, this work is further elevated by the incorporation of Korean–German diasporic composer Isang Yun's *Double Concerto* (1977), a piece that resonates through the space, adding layers of historical and cultural complexity to the experience.<sup>3</sup> When we navigate this forest of fluctuating planes and perspectives, our senses are dislocated, recalibrated, and encouraged to adapt to a new perceptual paradigm. Are we becoming sensory wanderers, our familiar habits left at the threshold? Is Yang's work a rebellion against the tyranny of fixed meaning and stable identity?

*Leap Year* is a waypoint in an ongoing journey, a temporary constellation in a universe of endless possibilities. Like the quadrennial occurrence it references, this show's title represents a rare and extraordinary time—a chance to reflect and then leap forward. The exhibition challenges us to embrace the nomadic not just as a physical state but as a philosophical stance, a willingness to inhabit the spaces between categories, to find a home in perpetual movement. In an age marked by global flux and cultural cross-pollination, the undulating blinds and the resonating sonic—sometimes even olfactory pieces remind us that, in art as in life, meaning is not a destination but a process. Through her orchestration, Yang invites the viewers to join her caravan and become nomads, in perception, in thought, and in spirit—offering a moment much like the extra day granted to us every four years.

*Minji Chun is an art critic and a DPhil candidate in History of Art at the University of Oxford, focusing on socially engaged art in Korea.*

<sup>1</sup> See: Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matters: A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press, 2010

<sup>2</sup> See: Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013

<sup>3</sup> Yun, who sought exile in Germany amidst the turmoil of a divided Korea, created music that bridged Eastern and Western traditions. His work, much like Yang's installation, speaks to the experience of displacement and the search for artistic expression that transcends geographical and political boundaries. Timely in its occurrence, a retrial was initiated for the 'Dongbaeklim Incident' in October 2024, revisiting Yun's 1967 conviction and imprisonment on charges of espionage due to his interactions with North Korean contacts during his time in Germany.

# Harit Srikhao: *IMAGO*

Bangkok CityCity Gallery,  
Bangkok

Pongsakorn  
Yananissorn

Harit Srikhao's solo exhibition, *IMAGO* opened at BANGKOK CITY CITY GALLERY from October 12th to November 30th, 2024. As the name suggests, BANGKOK CITYCITY GALLERY is located in Bangkok, being one of a few galleries in the city to support and encourage exhibitions and programming from emerging artists and other cultural practitioners. 'Aspiring to support the youth' as detailed in their statement, the gallery pushes exhibition making on all fronts, from the material to the conceptual. Such is so with this solo exhibition by Harit Srikhao. A visual artist working with photography and its potency in turning objects into subjects and vice versa. He often works through various themes from nostalgia-dripped imagery of youthful days gone by to a deconstruction of the aesthetics of politics and its performed traditions. Having worked with him in the past through a series dealing with aristocratic power relations behind closed doors, I often wondered of the intentions of his diverse body of work, as a contemporary living in the same city, sharing an artistic ecosystem and as a friend.

*IMAGO* refers to the last stage of an insect during its metamorphosis. It is both a maturation and a reaching of a new paradigm, both for Harit as well as his practice, for the two cannot be separated. It is a conversation with the medium of photography and its attempt at encapsulating the being of a person. And in this very case of his own complicated relation with the image of himself. It is a confrontation, chrysalis, and culmination of his practice in image making. Maturing in this sense arrives to Srikhao not as a surrendering of oneself to age but rather a coming to terms with the different temporal dimensions of himself, a synthesis of memories etched in light — a conversation to reclaim the image of the self.

The exhibition came as an anticipated surprise and a welcomed one. It struck through his previous body of work with an intense intention. The familiar flash of nostalgic adolescence in his past works is now composited with cozy filtered light in an intimate bedroom, the narrative instead of being elsewhere is now situated within his own experiences. Anxieties and trauma take the



form of grotesque yet alluring sculptures drifting and floating in those sun-licked rooms. Then all of the sudden as the soundtrack ascends we are confronted with the literal image of his past, graphic and scarred, sensual yet jarring. We are left with a sense that we just watched someone's life flash by, in obscured yet naked forms and shades. All this is displayed on a translucent LED screen, present yet not quite so. This is Srikhao's first moving image taking the same as the title of the exhibition, *Imago*. Behind the screen is a projection of another moving image work on a rectangular clear acrylic set against the ground, its reflection to the ceiling a meditative scenario. A few images are placed around the room, processes of how Srikhao has arrived at this point. With a final touch, a small self-portrait titled *Window* (2024- 2014), lit with a colored light that ripples gently.

The photographic image is potent here, it carries in its medium the ability to understand through visible light. But often, the subjects are conflicted. They bounce from being objects to subjects then back to being objects again once they are viewed. After talking to Srikhao, it is even more conflicted, the relationship between the lens and the light and the subject is reflected back into himself. They are in a sense all self-portraits. A self-portrait that produces another self, an involuntary act of distancing. This image of the self is divorced from the living and breathing one, it is an excess yet it arrives in all of his other works, as glimpses and shadows. All images are representations, in that they 're-present' an elusive subject that has its context and autonomy left out of the frame. It is to relinquish the subject to the past. Although this newly created image also escapes its creator, it could be used and appropriated, and have a life of its own or become the life of another.

This is all taken as his journey, one that wouldn't have been possible without working with an art therapist, Natchanat Krasachol. I decided that I couldn't approach it without her so we had a chat. Through our conversation it happens that the work isn't a straight product of an artist going through the process and producing work, it is not as simple as the goal is not therapy. Rather Srikhao went at it with the intention of learning the tools of art therapy, to understand the methods so that he could make them his own.

It began as a simple process of drawing oneself, to render visible much like the photographic process, the different dimensions of you. And in this case the ones that you dare not confront in its whole. It came to mean the manifesting forms of the self so you can come to live with it, make it digestible, make it portable, for you to carry forwards. The distancing act of the photograph then can reverse its relationship with him, from a relinquishing of the self from subject to object understood anew as a will of reclaiming them not as his present selves but as different bodies that he must bear. Unsightly images of the past are to be embraced not eliminated, it is making tangible the selves we choose to shun. She called it the rearranging of compositions of the self.

It all seemed a daunting task to someone who just heard and talked about it rather than experience it himself, but the overwhelming labour is not lost on anyone. It is the determination of the origin to approach its representation gone astray, a person attempting to talk to his past self. Ceaselessly confronting and transforming scarred images stripped of all its agency into one he could comprehend. There is nothing more honest than when he said that this work is for that boy in the past. The self-portrait in the room glances back at us. It was long overdue.

*Pongsakorn Yananissorn (b.1994, Bangkok, Thailand) is an artist and independent curator working around instigating and creating different modes of living and working together through employing shared fictions' his recent projects include educational program director for Ghost 2565 (2022) and is currently a member of Speedy Grandma in Bangkok.*

Edith Karlson:

*Hora Lupi*

Review

Estonian Pavilion,  
60<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale

“The lake was full of reflected stars. The strange water gave them a faint green tinge, flickering slightly as I watched, probably from ripples. Not that the ghastly lake ever seemed to ripple when I watched. I looked up, away from the water, hoping to find an anchor in the familiar constellations.

There were no stars.

I believe I stared for at least half a minute, while this knowledge worked slowly through my brain. It was an overcast night. The sky was dark grey with a sliver of moon just edging through.

I looked back down, at a lake full of stars.”

- T. Kingfisher, “*What moves the dead*”<sup>1</sup>

Patrycja  
Wojciechowska



The sense of falling. All around. The feeling I experience whenever I reflect on the collapse of the world I live in. The XVIII-century church is falling into pieces, half abandoned restoration works reminding us that not every place in Venice gets the same attention. There has been said a lot about it being a perfect setting for the work with the evocative beauty of ongoing disintegration, but it is easy to forget that this is not a gallery, that Venice is a real city with its inhabitants, that this is a working church with parishioners, that there are residents in the complex.

The church is filled with constellations of clay and cement-made anthropomorphic creatures. Some are more or less human, some more animalistic, all monstrous.

“The *monstrum* is etymologically “*that which reveals*”, “*that which warns*”, a glyph that seeks a hierophant. Like a letter on the page. The monster signifies something other than itself: it is always a displacement, always inhabiting the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is real.”<sup>2</sup> Delle Penitenti is a place of displaced revelation.

Perilously seductive fish-headed were-maids bask around a gaping hole in the floor, exposing canal water below. Giant troll-like men are clubbing snake-like creatures to death in front of the main altar decorated with phantasmagoric candelabras. A two-headed cat is guarding a small bedroom, waiting for its companion no longer there, traces of its paws scattered across the floor. A chapel full of faces arranged on the walls like a memorial. Weeping mourners lost in their ghostly grief wandering around the empty room. Generations of birds living and dying in the building. Skulls left in the cabinet like some forgotten collection. Liturgical music fills the space. The church is in-between ritual and abandonment, sacred and catastrophic, miraculous and monstrous, dream and myth. The space does not tell a story; instead, it is a realm, time-spatial reality marked by a sense of falling. Like in a dream.

The title, *Hora Lupi*, refers to “a mythical time between night and dawn when things arise and disappear- an hour of deep darkness but also transformation. It is believed to be the time of night, when most people are born and die and inexplicable things happen.”<sup>3</sup> Past, present, and future collapsed onto one another, replaced by moments that are never to reach completion. Who are the giants engaged in the act of killing in the centre of the main nave? Are they trolls? Are they human? More-than-human? Are they us? What do they reveal?

As I walk across Chiesa delle Penitenti, I think of another end. I think of Lars von Trier’s “*Melancholia*” where, to Wagner’s score, the world, about to be obliterated by a crash with a celestial body, is experiencing an event of gravitational collapse. Somehow this is how I feel now, as if I were melting into the ground below, as if my feet were reaching down to the lapping waters of the lagoon. As if the church, the world, and I, were the House of Usher sliding into the lagoon. The time modes merge and compress to an impossible white density within space-time of wolfish hour.

Hour of the Wolf. Hour of the unfolding. Forking paths of falling.

Kafka wrote about the Silence of Sirens, the far worse fate than their call. Tidal lagoon water floods the floor rhythmically, dispersed forever. All is silent. There is no end. We remain incomplete.

*Hora Lupi* is a place of intertwined and conflicting fictions; fictions of the site, reconstructed when in fact it isn’t, offering redemption and penance for women who should not have asked for it, of charity that is really control; fiction of Venice as a city—splendour and collapse, finery and brutality, the fictional monstrosity of all bodies contained—or intended to be contained—in the church. All re-enacting fiction that, in a way, is true. Fiction of the future now.

This is what *Hora Lupi* is about. It is about ends. Not the end of the world, but about the end of time mode, where past, present, and future become multiple, coexisting simultaneously enacted happenings, a temporality condensed by the gravitational pull of life no longer arranged as a sequence. It is about ends that have no end.

In this extreme density, we lose our boundaries, melting into a white dwarf that we encounter at the Chiesa. One feels pressure to assign the experience of distracted narrative to that of a dream, but I tend to think of it as the process of unmaking of worlds, of endless folding and unfolding. Stuck in-between before and after. A place where ghosts and hauntings take on monstrous flesh.

“In the time of catastrophe, reality and fiction don’t contradict but shimmer through one another”.<sup>4</sup> “Kata -down and streiphen-turning over = downturn which undoes the narrative structure. A system-wide shift in temporal gravity “like an emergence of black-hole that reshapes the time-space around it”<sup>5</sup>

The (un)making. Stories falling like an avalanche around me.

Catastrophe. Fiction that no catastrophe takes place.

The church is removed from being the place it always has been and becomes a place of elsewhere. Another place, the place of a wolf, a place outside of narrative time, outside of stasis, and populated by those who are outside of the norm, monsters. The interior is a place of upturning, a liminal space of the Big Crunch, where linearity is no longer a possible convenience. Delle Penitenti is in flux, destined to continuously transform, never retaining its complete state.

Always in-between before and after.

*Hora Lupi*, a moment of Melancholia.

“Not much happened today, but reality continues to slide.”<sup>6</sup>

*London-based curator and researcher, Patrycja Wojciechowska, sees creative practice as a process of emancipation through practising the undefinable language of poetry, an act of respiration, a breath and attunement to cosmic vibration of the world.*

<sup>1</sup> T. Kingfisher and Edgar Allan Poe, *What Moves the Dead* (New York: Nightfire, 2022) 70.

<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)." In *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. J. J. Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) 4.

<sup>3</sup> "Edith Karlson: Hora Lupi – Announcements," E-flux. February 7, 2024.

<sup>4</sup> Gary Zhexi Zhang, *Catastrophe Time!* (London: Strange Attractor Press, 2023) 41.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 37

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 38

