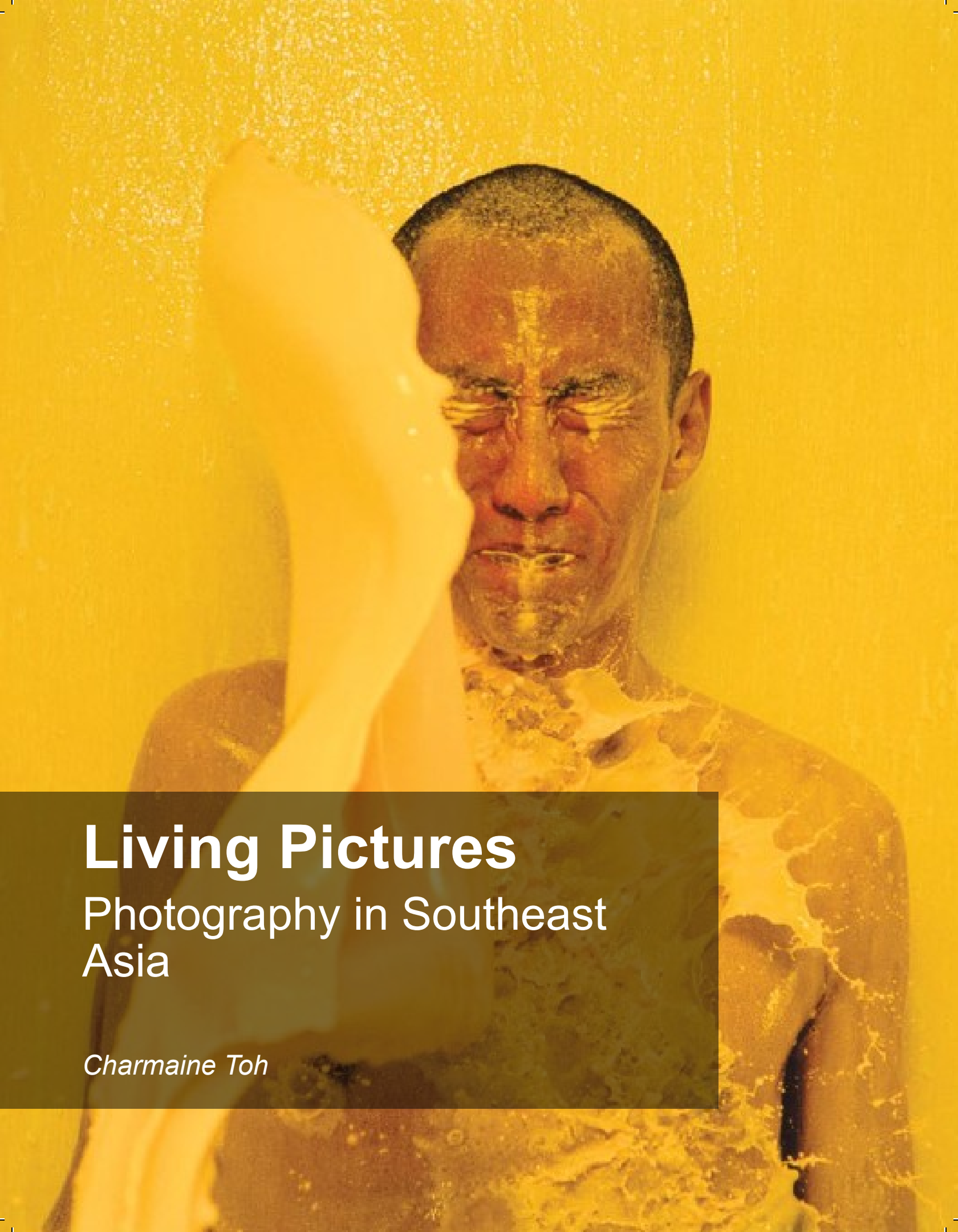

Living Pictures

Photography in Southeast Asia

Charmaine Toh

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Living Pictures: Photography in Southeast Asia

Charmaine Toh

NATIONAL GALLERY SINGAPORE, SINGAPORE

Foreword

Eugene Tan, Museum Director at National Gallery Singapore

National Gallery Singapore is proud to present *Living Pictures: Photography in Southeast Asia*, a groundbreaking exhibition of photographs by artists working in and from Southeast Asia. *Living Pictures* represents the Gallery's first foray into writing a regional history of photography, the culmination of years of thought, research and care into crafting a narrative of great significance to our understanding of global art histories.

Photography has thus far been included in the art histories of Southeast Asia in minor, even incidental, ways, ill befitting of the power of the medium, perspective of the photographers and influence of the images produced. Its exclusion from predominant art historical narratives could well be due to the complex nature of photographs themselves, tied up simultaneously as a mode of documentation and artistic production. The potential of the medium gives rise to inherent contradictions that might be perceived as obstacles to a singular, coherent narrative.

Living Pictures confronts the complexities of photography head-on. It traverses the character of each individual image to take a wider view of photography, shifting the general tenor of discussion on photography beyond the framework established by the chronological analysis of stylistic development particular to the formation of the Western photographic canon, focussing instead on the function of these photographs. Lines of inquiry explored both in the exhibition and this catalogue evolve from the notion that photographs have and continue to play a role in how we see the world and therefore shape it: what do photographs do?

Living Pictures responds to five key themes that have emerged over the course of research, elaborated upon in detail in this catalogue by forerunners in the work on photography in Southeast Asia. Each section of this book, introduced by lead curator Charmaine Toh, illustrates the power and influence of photography: from its effect on the colonial imagination and formation of certain identities to present-day effects of the blitz of photographic images in our daily lives. The exhibition and catalogue both highlight the place of photography in art history, but as its title suggests, the changing uses of photographs—perhaps even the changing narrative of a single photograph—reveal their relevance to the way we see and interact with our world today.

That the Gallery is actively rewriting the histories of global art through the perspective of Southeast Asian art histories is no small feat; unreserved thanks is given to our colleagues, including exhibition curators Roger Nelson, Goh Sze Ying, Roy Ng and Kenneth Tay, who are dedicated to uncovering these marginalised narratives that we hope will make a great impact on the art historical canon. We are also grateful to the individuals and institutions who have generously lent us their works for this display, allowing our publics this significant access. We hope the many lives of photographs might inspire new reflections on the medium, and much more exciting possibilities to come.

I

Living Photographs

Charmaine Toh, Former Senior Curator at National Gallery Singapore

Excerpt from "Living Photographs" in Living Pictures (2022) edited by Charmaine Toh. Available for access in its entirety, on Project Muse and JSTOR.

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Since its invention, photographic practices have been integral to visual culture and art in Southeast Asia, but recognition of their specificities have yet to be fully discussed. Photography in South- east Asia has thus far been largely left out of both photographic and art histories, even those of its own nations. Ironically, this exclusion has allowed such photographs to "live" outside the established historical canons and so offer an opportunity to tell alternative histories. *Living Pictures: Photography in Southeast Asia* looks at the power of photography in affecting the way we see and approach the world, and its mobilisation n systems of knowledge and representation since it arrived in the region in the mid-19th century.

This is not an attempt to draw regional or national boundaries, nor to identify a characteristic or style of photography, but to bring out certain practices and developments in this part of the world. As scholars increasingly recognise the need to address the dominance of Eurocentric histories and knowledge, the research for this exhibition offers an additional strand in the tapestry that is the global history of photography.

In the attempt to take some tentative steps towards photography's own history in this region, the curators of *Living Pictures* have consciously avoided the existing frameworks of photographic histories, particularly the Museum of Modern Art model, which is largely driven by stylistic developments in a reactive chronology.[1] More generally, the way the exhibition has been organised eschews such formalist art historical categories of style and technique. Instead, the overarching question the exhibition asks is: what do photographs do? The search for answers has been productive. Photographs have lives—they move and they act—and in the process, they affect the world around them.

By looking beyond the image, the exhibition draws out the conditions of production and reception of photography in Southeast Asia and the ways it has shaped the visual imaginary of the region, for itself and for others. *Living Pictures* is the culmination of the Gallery's extensive research and collecting efforts in photography since we opened in 2015, when the medium was identified as a gap in our understanding of the histories of modern art in the region. As the first substantial survey of its kind, it highlights the important role photography has played in the development of visual culture and lays the groundwork for future research by others.

As the most ubiquitous visual medium of the modern age, photography has had a tremendous impact on the way we see the world, and ourselves. The power of photography is deeply tied to a dis- course of "truth" and the history of its own development and use since its invention in France in 1839. Photography's ability to capture a perfect, never- seen-before likeness was quickly appropriated by scientific and government agencies for use as documents, evidence and records. However, rather than thinking about photography as a reflection of the world, this exhibition asserts that photography has *shaped* our understanding of the world. *Living Pictures* reveals the roles photographs have played in imperialism and nationalism, in constructing and asserting

modernities, and in challenging class and gender hierarchies. What is made visible and what is left out? And how does this change the way we engage not just with the image, but with the photographic object?

THE COLONIAL ARCHIVE

Early photography played an important role in visualising the world, and that included Southeast Asia. Photography's history in Southeast Asia was closely linked to exploration, travel and its vaunted ability to accurately depict the world around it. The camera lent the explorer both status and credibility; it became a metaphor of objectivity. The earliest extant photograph made in Southeast Asia was Jules Itier's (1802–1877) daguerreotype of the Thian Hock Keng temple in Singapore in 1844.[2] The 1850s onwards saw a large number of itinerant European photographers travelling through parts of Southeast Asia. These travelling photographers typically spent a few months in one city providing their services before moving on to other nearby cities. They would then sell their works to illustrated magazines, publishers or even directly to customers, which included the European residents in the various Southeast Asian cities as well as the general public in Europe. This first section of the exhibition, "Colonial Archive," recognises that many of the photographs made during this period resulted from European aims and desires. As such, they present a particular type of imperial gaze.

In a lecture on photography and exploration to the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1891, John Thomson (1837–1921) claimed: "Where truth and all that is abiding are concerned, photography is absolutely trustworthy and the work now being done is a forecast of a future of great usefulness in every branch of science." [3] Thomson was a Scottish photographer and one of the earliest to travel to Asia. He received significant recognition for this work, which brought images of the Far East to the audiences in Europe interested in finding out more about foreign lands and peoples. Thomson's photo- graphs were shown in lectures as well as books and magazines, and of course sold to individuals who often assembled them in albums. Such photographs not only satisfied the curiosity of the European public but also played a crucial part in conveying the extent and power of their empires. This was supported by the belief in photography's autonomy and neutrality.

However, in his book *Picturing Empire*, James Ryan has demonstrated how the photo- graphs made for British consumption in the 19th century revealed

> *"as much about the imaginative landscape of imperial culture as they do about the physical spaces or people pictured within their frame."* [4]

While Ryan's book focused on the British Empire, this is equally true of images of the Dutch and French colonies. Consider the album owned by Charles McWhirter Mercer (1828–1884) with views of Punjab, Kashmir, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Penang, Singapore and Java. Within it are a large number of photographs of newly built infrastructure such as roads and buildings, all carefully composed to present visually pleasing scenes. Even the photographs of the countryside are picturesque landscapes, rather than untamed tropical jungles filled with wild beasts (**see** pl. 37). The images conveyed the civilising benefits of colonialism while also "domesticating a potentially hostile landscape." [5] They offered a deliberate balance of the foreign and the familiar.

The photographic studio of G.R. Lambert & Co. was also aware of what its customers wanted. Active in Singapore from 1867 till 1918, the studio had one of the largest catalogues of images—over 3,000 from different parts of Southeast Asia—including landscapes and images of people of various races, which sold extremely well to tourists and residents. [6] It is important to note that the latter were not portraits in the traditional sense but were closer to ethnographic studies. Such photographs are described as "types" rather than "portraits" because the people in them were depicted as observed subjects rather than individual personalities. For example, the photograph of two Indian men had the caption of "Kling Washermen" and showed them posing with bags of laundry.

Figure 1 G.R. Lambert & Co. *Indian Dhobies* (inscribed as "Kling Washermen"). Early 20th century. Gelatin silver print on paper, 21.4 × 15.9 cm Collection of National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board, Singapore

ENDNOTES

1. Christopher Phillips has traced the story of MoMA's department of photography through the reign of its three directors Beaumont Newhall, Edward Steichen and Jan Sarkowski, effectively demonstrating the way the museum produced a version of photographic history that was "in truth, a flight from history." Christopher Phillips, "The Judgment Seat of Photography," October 22 (1982): 63.

2. Gilles Massot, "Jules Itier and the Lagrené Mission," *History of Photography* 39, no. 4 (2015): 319–47.

3. John Thomson, quoted in James R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), 24.

4. Ibid., 20.

5. Ibid., 51.

6. John Falconer, *A Vision of the Past: A History of Early Photography in Singapore and Malaya: The Photographs of GR Lambert & Co.*, 1880–1910 (Singapore: Times Editions, 1987), 5.

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John Thomson. *The Waterfall Penang*. c. 1876. Albumen print on paper, 38.8 × 29.2 cm. Collection of Asian Civilisations Museum, National Heritage Board, Singapore.

II

The Tender Insistence of Ruthless Remembering

Sze Ying Goh, Curator at National Gallery Singapore

Excerpt from "The Tender Insistence of Ruthless Remembering" in Living Pictures (2022) edited by Charmaine Toh. Available for access in its entirety, on Project Muse and JSTOR.

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The camera does not lie, but its artful ability to isolate a moment has been the most seductive tool for this apparatus in its long history of shaping our habits of seeing. Inherent to the production of the photographic image is the Janus-faced split between *showing* and *selecting*: an operation that has historically differentiated photography from painting. Unlike a painter, a photographer can never add a detail into the picture after the fact (unless manipulated in the darkroom or with software). This is the distinction between being *taken* and being *made*.[1] In spite of the photograph's mimetic ability to depict reality—what Barthes terms as an "analogical perfection"—the photographic image flits furtively between exactitude and context.[2] Visual details are cropped out in favour of compositional, ideological or cultural factors; nonetheless these decisions are often assumed as the photographer's natural impulse to enhance the veracity of their subject.[3] Photojournalism's ur-hero Henri Cartier-Bresson equates the photographer's flair as "the decisive moment," an instance when a "satisfying" picture meets the revelation of "a truth about the subject." [4] For Cartier-Bresson, the *decisive* appears to be simultaneously *discerning*: the photographer's reflex manifests his technical virtuosity with the camera—a characteristic which separates the great from the average. Virtuosity very rarely discloses the intentions of the photojournalist, how the sum of their politics and prejudices shapes their coverage.

When probed, we find our faith in the press photograph—of showing things and events as between image and text [5]. In order for their objective and descriptive qualities to translate, even the most decisive photographs have generally relied on words before they can tell a thousand more. This assumed realism of the picture is in fact naturalised with the aid of captions, as Barthes outlines: "a press photograph is never without a written commentary." [6] This essay centres upon the recuperative approaches taken by four artists in the *Living Pictures* exhibition which problematise representation and the circulation of the image, particularly those used in reportage. While each artist has a distinctive practice, in these selected works they share a similar interest in mining images found in mass media to draw out the complex relationship between photojournalism and its construction of history, and the way we see and understand the world.

Photojournalism came to prominence in the 1930s as a result of the introduction of handheld cameras in the mid-1920s, which led to a rising popularity in illustrated essays in widely circulated picture magazines, such as *LIFE* and *Look* in the United States, and *Münchner Illustrierte* (Munich Illustrated) and *Vu* in Europe. Media magnate Henry Luce, who bought *LIFE* in 1936 and engineered its pictorial turn, articulated emphatically the publication's maxim: "to see life; to see the world." [7] Luce knew that texts without pictures would sell fewer magazines, while photographs without captions failed to exploit the full spectrum of the reader's imagination. At its height, *LIFE* reached one in three American readers; some of the most iconic images of the 20th century adorned its covers

in the age preceding television. It is hard to ignore the fact that the demand for pictorial appeal, even in the venerated sphere of documentary photography, was largely shaped by market forces. Social theorist Susie Linfield aptly surmises that photography's "original sin" lay in its supine relationship with consumerism. [8] In the 1960s, *LIFE* published various series of pictorial volumes, including the *LIFE World Library* anthology. This ambitious publication project took six years to complete, with an aim to "present a comprehensive interpretation of the principal nations and peoples of the contemporary world." [9] While the volume has been translated into 13 languages and circulated in over 90 countries, the majority of the writers are American and British. One of the editorial decisions for how the volumes are grouped is "its special relevance to American readers." [10] The criterion comes as no surprise given Luce, then editor-in-chief of *LIFE*, wrote in a 1941 editorial that "the American people are by far the best-informed people in the history of the world," a not-too-audacious statement considering it coincided with the rising political dominance of the US. [11]*LIFE World Library* is an unabashed expression of the American view of the world, to the rest of world.

In Simryn Gill's (b. 1959) *32 Volumes* (**see** pl. 287), *32 volumes* from the *LIFE World Library* anthology are stripped bare by hand. The original titles and images on the hardcovers are painted over in gesso, while the printed text on the inside pages has been meticulously sandpapered away. The work serves up documentary photography in its most rudimentary form—a Barthesian purity of image without text—which in turn demonstrates the ambiguity that lurks behind every photograph. As with Gill's other works, her interventions stem from her "fascination with the limit of rational knowledge, and with the instability of images and texts as forms of representation." [12] Gill obtained several sets of the anthology from a second-hand bookstore, a place that fits suitably with her compulsion for collecting. Objects and detritus often find their way into her personal radius, both fortuitously and with purpose: books, magazines, shrines, things washed up on the beach or crushed on the road, discarded and lost knick-knacks found on the street, fruit seeds and garden overgrowth. Gill gathers things to take them apart, alter or rearrange them, in a nebulous fashion that reveals *changefulness*, chipping away preordained ways of seeing the world. [13] Gill's interventions with books speak more of her love for them—for reading and as objects—and from which her awareness of how the written word is imbricated in the power structures of problematic histories stems. It is as if she knows too well—and wants us to realise, too—that while representation is a function which reveals and clarifies the world, it is also the operation of how power begets power.

ENDNOTES

1. John Szarkowski, *The Photographer's Eye* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007), 9.
2. Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 17.
3. In his essay "The Photographic Message," Barthes describes how "the photograph allows the photographer to conceal elusively the preparation to which he subjects the scene to be recorded by way of effects, staging, stylistic or syntactical preferences. For more, see Barthes, op. cit., 19–2.
4. Peter Galassi, *Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Early Work* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1987), 9.
5. Barthes refers to the photographic code" insofar as the image is an analogous reproduction of the object's reality. However, Barthes explicates the paradox of (press) photograph as a co-existence of rhetoric and image, of objective and invested, of natural and cultural. See Barthes, op. cit., 16–31.
6. Barthes, op. cit., 16.
7. The phrase is taken from a longer excerpt: "To see life; to see the world; to eyewitness great events; to watch the faces of the poor and the gestures of the proud; to see strange things—machines, armies, multitudes, shadows in the jungle and on the moon; to see man's work—his paintings, towers and discoveries; to see things thousands of miles away, things hidden behind walls and within rooms, things dangerous to come to; the women that men love and many children; to see and take pleasure in seeing; to see and be amazed; to see and be instructed" from the original prospectus of *LIFE*. See *LIFE* 5, no. 2 (11 July 1938): i.
8. The surfeit of scepticism directed at documentary photography has been reflexively discussed in Susie Linfield's book *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010). Her opening chapter jocularly titled "A Little History of Photography Criticism; or Why Do Photography Critics Hate Photography?" tracks the criticism mounted on documentary photography mapped across a range of curators, historians, even artists—a list which includes Douglas Crimp, Carol Squiers, Rosalind Krauss, Allan Sekula and Martha Rosler. See Linfield, op. cit., 3–12.
9. The anthology contains 34 volumes, 32 are dedicated to countries—the major ones have their own volume to itself, while others are included in regional categories. The 2 supplementary companion books *Handbook of the Nations* and *Atlas of the World* serve as extended endnotes in this pictorial encyclopedia. See Oliver E. Allen, ed., *LIFE World Library: Handbook of the Nations and International Organisations* (New York: Time Incorporated, 1966), 6.
10. Ibid., 7.
11. Henry Luce, "The American Century," in *LIFE* 10, no. 7 (17 February 1941): 61–5.
12. Russell Storer, "Simryn Gill: Gathering," in *Simryn Gill* (Sydney: MCA & Koln: Verlag der Buchhandlung, 2008), 45.
13. The term "changefulness" comes from Ross Gibson's essay which charts Simryn Gill's work in relation to Australia's history in "Motility" in *Simryn Gill: Here art grows on trees* (Belgium: MER and Australia Council for the Arts, 2013), 259.

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Simryn Gill.*32 Volumes*. 2006. Complete series of *LIFE World Library* (New York: Time Inc., 1961–1970) with text erased, gesso. 20.4 × 7.8 × 1.2 cm each. Collection of Phillip Keir. Images © Simryn Gill; courtesy of Simryn Gill; photos: Jenni Carter.

III

(Other)worldly Things: The Social and Material Lives of Photographs in Southeast Asia

Roy Ng, Assistant Curator at National Gallery Singapore

Excerpt from "(Other)worldly Things: The Social and Material Lives of Photographs in Southeast Asia" in Living Pictures (2022) edited by Charmaine Toh. Available for access in its entirety, on Project Muse and JSTOR.

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The photograph is, in the most fundamental sense of the word, a thing. It is created, dispersed, kept, relocated and stored for purposes which do not necessarily coincide, sometimes appearing torn, scratched or cropped depending on how it is used. Rather than simply defined by its two-dimension-ality, it is also tied inescapably to space and time. The photograph is more than a depictive device; it is entangled in everyday life—its physical, tactile and often opaque quality renders it a subject of daily interaction. While the act of engaging with a photograph invariably exposes it to the rough and tumble of reality, the same photograph also helps to construct that same reality—it engenders not a passive text but rather an active dialogue, a locus for a collective show-and-tell. Simultaneously, the transparency of the medium compels a kind of self-deception on the part of the viewer—"in order to see what the photograph is '*of*' we must first suppress our consciousness of what the photograph '*is*' in material terms." [1] To immerse ourselves in the world of the image, we need to detach ourselves from the photograph's physical properties and the print we are holding and beholding. Materiality, in this regard, is often glossed over as a neutral, unobtrusive support for the picture, such that we may try to absorb ourselves into that which is depicted—to move beyond the picture plane to forge a kind of bond with the portrayed (and sometimes revered) subject. [2]

Such visual negotiation is all the more pertinent in the context of royal and religious devotion in Southeast Asia. Rather than deflecting or demystifying the aura embedded in the image, the photograph augments that same aura with a tangible and earthly identity, reifying the image's visual and spiritual presence to the point where it becomes physical and almost equivalent to any other everyday object. The photograph, in keeping with its objecthood, exists as a paradox: it is through the print's "worldliness" that the gaze may be transported towards the "otherworldly" dimension of the image. This essay assesses the social and material functions of photographs in Southeast Asia by paying particular attention to works that operate as images for visual commemoration, devotion and worship, because of and not despite the fact that they are objects. It aims to explore this notion through the prism of portraiture—specifically the royal portraits in Thailand, images of patriarchs and matriarchs in Straits Chinese ancestral halls, and the monastic prints of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (1906–1993) and Manit Sriwanichpoom (b. 1961). Perhaps, rather than seeing objecthood as being antithetical to the image, we may find a kind of ironic compromise, where the medium offers access to the message precisely because of the photograph's social and material qualities. We enter, through the world of the humble print, into an otherworld.

ROYAL PORTRAITS

Unlike the rest of late 19th century Southeast Asia, which was marked by the cultural conditions of colonialism, photography in Thailand was a technology that was indigenised and appropriated as a tool for the fashioning of a people's monarchy. Before the advent of photography, images of royalty revolved around Indo-Buddhist notions of *devaraja* and *dhammaraja* (divine and moral kingship), where the monarch was sacred to the extent that he was remote from the public eye. [3] Commoners were expected to lower their gaze during royal processions and foreign envoys were prohibited from looking directly at the sovereign during royal audiences. The monarchy was nearly devoid of pictorial representation; even after death, images of the Buddha were used instead of a monarch's visage to commemo-rate the king. [4] Royal portraiture was by and large absent before the mid-19th century. With the arrival of the camera in Thailand around that time, photographic objects circulated widely and were soon appropriated as new symbols of the modern state. Such demands paralleled a shift in cultural values amongst the Thai royals and aristocrats who had, according to historian Maurizio Peleggi, embraced photography as a mode of portraiture now that they had "re-oriented their social identity from the civilisational sphere irradiating from India, and to a lesser extent China, to one centred in Europe." [5] The real-ism of photography embodied, for these Thai elites, a certain allure—the camera symbolised what they perceived as among the most advanced products of Western culture and technology, where representational power seemed to resonate with the political might of imperialism.

Examples of this notion include the portraits of King Chulalongkorn, Rama V (r. 1868–1910), one of the most photographed monarchs in the 19th century and an avid photographer in his later years. A portrait, taken on his second coronation in October 1873 (*see* pl. 104), reveals the new king's desire to harness the magic of photographic reproduction. In this albumen silver print produced by Thai court photographer Francis Chit (1830–1891) in 1873, the monarch is seated in his royal regalia. His front-facing posture and stately pose create a symmetrical composition only to be broken slightly by a sword which he wields as if it were a godly attribute. One could read this as a mode of royal legitimisation, a visual proclamation of Rama V's right to inherit the throne. [6] The stern composition of the image is reminiscent of Hindu-Buddhist iconography—from the king's crown at the centre, the fruit bowl on the left and the urn on the right, we see a triadic arrangement befitting of, and alluding to, the *devaraja*. Contrast that with the photograph of Rama V taken by Prussian photographer Robert Lenz (1864–1939) before the king left for his first journey to Europe in April 1897.

Figure 2 Robert Lenz. *King Chulalongkorn*. Early 1890s. Albumen print on paper, 22 × 16.2 cm. Collection of Mr and Mrs Lee

In this case, the king emulates Western conventions of royal portraiture: Rama V is dressed in a Napoleonic garment with a robe flowing across his shoulder, with the studio's interior décor resembling a salon. Lenz's work transposes the well-known visual norms of royal portraiture under the camera's lens, cropping the regal aura of the image to fit into photography's vernacular. By domesticating the status of kingship within the print's representational space, he confers the idea that the king can be looked upon in private, domestic settings. [7]

While originally produced for visual consumption by the Thai elite and Western expatriates, these photographs occasionally circulated as postcards and illustrations in books and magazines for a mass audience in Thailand. Towards the latter part of Rama V's reign, his face was even embossed on coins and printed on stamps, and his equestrian statue was erected to oversee Bangkok's public space, as was the civil model and convention in Thailand's neighbouring colonies under European rule. [8] It is from such an unprecedented scale of reproducing the king's likeness that one might then speculate a withering of his royal aura. His image, to use German philosopher Walter Benjamin's term, is subject to the onslaught of mechanical reproduction, and the authoritative, authentic and aesthetic presence of the original—that single definitive encounter with the king—is eroded. [9] Through the photographic medium, the original is displaced by the ubiquitous copy, embedded in a process of mass circulation. The "reproduced" monarch, according to historian H.G. Quaritch Wales, far from being reduced to an everyday commodity, is transformed into a historical subject. Likewise, the king, insofar as he is a symbol of "perennial" or "eternal" Buddhist values, could also be a product of changing times. [10] If reproduction was a force to be reckoned with, the point then, at least for Rama V's court, was not to deny it, but to use it. More than just the image, the process with which it was dispersed became in and of itself a mode of self-fashioning, positioning Rama V as a forward-looking sovereign attuned to flux and receptive to the speed of modernity.

In this regard, the photographic object both entrenches and disrupts this historically bound conception of royalty, shifting the relational dynamic between king and Siamese subject towards one that occurs within a space of intimate devotion. Now a presiding figure in each household or one's private possession, the royal image is assumed to be anywhere and everywhere, his omnipresence buttressed by modern modes of reproduction. What emerges could well be a type of *buzz*, to use art historian David Joselit's term, where under the purview of the king's photographers and their studios, reproductive behaviours are coordinated to exalt the monarch's presence in newly inventive ways. [11] The velocity and commercial mobility

of *all* royal portraits might be regarded as constituent parts in an ever-expanding economy of images, existing in a constant state of becoming. Reproduction, far from negating the monarch's allure, reifies his image as a progressive figure. With the endless potential of copying and dispersing his portrait, the royal presence could be seen as extending beyond the strict confines of the court, to "touch" the subject through private or public moments of viewing, and vice versa. It is through the photograph as *object* that the king appears before his subject—not in the flesh, but a close equivalent of it through print, to be seen and held by the beholder. Represented, collected, distributed and displayed as didactic expressions of ideal leadership, the monarch resides in a variable, liminal and contingent space existing here and now as much as he does *there and then*. [12]

ENDNOTES

1. Geoffrey Batchen, *Photography's Objects* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Art Museum, 1997), 2.
2. Elizabeth Edards & Janice Hart, "Photograph as Objects," in *Photographs, Objects, Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, eds. Elizabeth Edwards & Janice Hart (London: Routledge, 2004), 2.
3. Maurizio Peleggi, "The Aesthetics and Politics of Royal Portraiture in Thailand," *Ars Orientalis* 43 (2013): 84.
4. Apinan Poshyananda, *Chittrakam lae patimakam baep tawantok nai racthasanmak* (Western-Style Painting and Sculpture in the Thai Royal Court), vol. 1 (Bangkok: Bureau of the Royal Household, 1992), 336.
5. Maurizio Peleggi, *Lord of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image* (Ho-nolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 11–14.
6. Peleggi, "Aesthetics and Politics," 87.
7. Ibid., 88.
8. Ibid.
9. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Arin the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 217–251.
10. H.G. Quaritch Wales, *Siamese State Ceremonies* (London: B. Quaritch, 1931), 173.
11. D. Joselit, *After Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 15–16.
12. Joanna Wolfarth, "Royal Portraiture in the Cambodian Politico-Cultural Complex: Norodom Sihanouk and the Place of Photography," *Udaya: Journal of Khmer Studies* 12 (2014): 145, 163.

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Francis Chit. *H. M. King Chulalongkorn, Rama V, on his Second Coronation*, October 1873. 1873. Albumen print on paper, 27 × 21.5 cm. Collection of National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Purchased 2006. 2006.427.

Image Plates

G.R. Lambert & Co, *Colonial Archive / Kling Washermen*, early 20th century. Collection of National Museum Singapore, National Heritage Board Singapore

Colonial Archive / Kling Washermen

Artist	G.R. Lambert & Co
Year	Early 20th century
Dimensions	21.4 cm × 15.9 cm (8.4 in × 10 in.)
Medium	Gelatin silver print on paper
Location	National Museum Singapore

Taken inside a studio, it is unknown if the two men really were washermen or simply pretending to be. Either way, it would not have mattered to either the photographer or the future customer, who were more interested in a representation of race and occupation, rather than in the men themselves.

EXHIBITIONS

Living Pictures: Photography in Southeast Asia, National Gallery Singapore, December 2 2022–August 20, 2023

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Yee I-Lann, Detail of *Tabled*, 2013. Collection of Singapore Art Museum. Image courtesy of the artist and Silverlens

New Subjectivity / Tabled

Artist	Yee I-Lann
Year	2013
Dimensions	195 cm × 312 cm (180 $^{709}/_{1000}$ × 122 $^{167}/_{200}$ in.)
Medium	Ceramic rimmed flat plates with digital decal prints and back-stamp
Location	Singapore Art Museum

Tabled by Yee I-Lann was first exhibited in Suspended Histories in 2013. Along with ten other artists, Yee was invited to create a work in response to Museum Van Loon, which was at one point the home of the Van Loon family who had history with the Dutch East India Company.

EXHIBITIONS

Living Pictures: Photography in Southeast Asia, National Gallery Singapore, December 2 2022–August 20, 2023

Bibliography

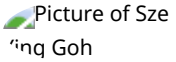
pl. 37
John Thomson. *The Waterfall Penang*. c. 1876. Albumen print on paper, 38.8 × 29.2 cm. Collection of Asian Civilisations Museum, National Heritage Board, Singapore.

pl. 104
Francis Chit. *H. M. King Chulalongkorn, Rama V, on his Second Coronation*, October 1873. 1873. Albumen print on paper, 27 × 21.5 cm. Collection of National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Purchased 2006. 2006.427.

pl. 287
Simryn Gill.*32 Volumes*. 2006. Complete series of *LIFE World Library* (New York: Time Inc., 1961–1970) with text erased, gesso. 20.4 × 7.8 × 1.2 cm each. Collection of Phillip Keir. Images © Simryn Gill; courtesy of Simryn Gill; photos: Jenni Carter.

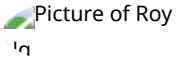
Contributors

Sze Ying Goh


Picture of Sze Ying Goh

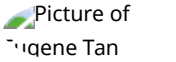
Goh Sze Ying is Curator at National Gallery Singapore. She has worked on exhibitions including *Living Pictures: Photography in Southeast Asia (2022)*, *Ever Present: First Peoples Art of Australia (2022)*, *Minimalism: Space. Light. Object. (2018)*. In 2019, she also co-curated the 6th edition of the Singapore Biennale, *Every Step in the Right Direction*.

Roy Ng


Picture of Roy Ng

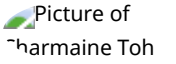
Roy Ng is Assistant Curator at National Gallery Singapore.

Eugene Tan


Picture of Eugene Tan

Dr. Eugene Tan is Museum Director of both National Gallery Singapore (NGS) and Singapore Art Museum (SAM).

Charmaine Toh


Picture of Charmaine Toh

Charmaine Toh earned her PhD at the University of Melbourne, researching pictorial photography in Singapore from the 1950s to 1970s. She was Senior Curator at National Gallery Singapore where she worked on exhibitions such as *Siapa Nama Kamu: Art in Singapore since the 19th Century* (2015), *Earthwork 1979* (2016) and *Living Pictures* (2022). Previously, Charmaine was the Programme Director at Objectifs Centre for Photography and Film. She co-curated the 2013 Singapore Biennale.