

*Justin
Rui Han*

Cover: Justin Rui Han, detail from “*Floating Beacon (after Abd al-Rahman al-Sufi)*,” 2025. Rattan, abaca, plywood, pigment dye, various fibers, hardware.

Pg. 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 27, 30, 41, 43, 47, 50, 71, 97, 106; photos by Justin Rui Han. Pg. 14-15, 18-19, 92-93, 95, 98, 102-103, 104-105; photos by Steven Abraham. Pg. 16-17, 74, 75, 84-85, 86-87, 90-91; photos by Lissie Zhang. Pg. 18-19; photo by Malery Nguyen. Pg. 20-21, 23, 25, 26, 28, 29, 32, 36, 37, 38, 39, 42, 44-45, 46, 48, 49, 54-55, 58-59, 60-61, 64-65, 66-67, 78; photos by Damian Griffiths. Pg. 40; photos by Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong, Diocesan Board of Catholic Cemeteries. Pg. 68, 80, 81, 82-83; photos by Hive Center for Contemporary Art. Pg. 71; photo by Leo Cocar. Pg. 72; photo by KITLV/Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies. Pg. 99; photo by Dustin Lin. Pg. 107, 108-109, 110-111, 112-113, 114-115, 116-117, 118-119; photos by David Stjernholm. Pg. 120-121; photos by Zhuolong Li. Pg. 128-129; photo by Kay Hickman.

Hyenas, directed by Djibril Diop Mambéty (1992) is distributed by California Newsreel.

Oh! The Nomugi Pass, directed by Satsuo Yamamoto (1979) is distributed by Toho International.

The Land, directed by Youssef Chahine (1969) is produced by Ogec and distributed by Misr International Films.

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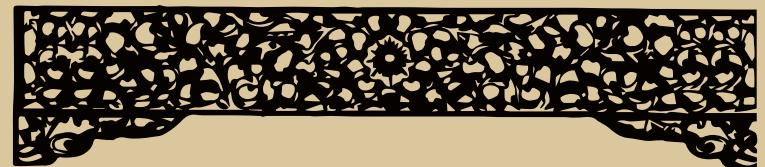
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Prize-Fighters, 2022



Foreword

by Claire Kim

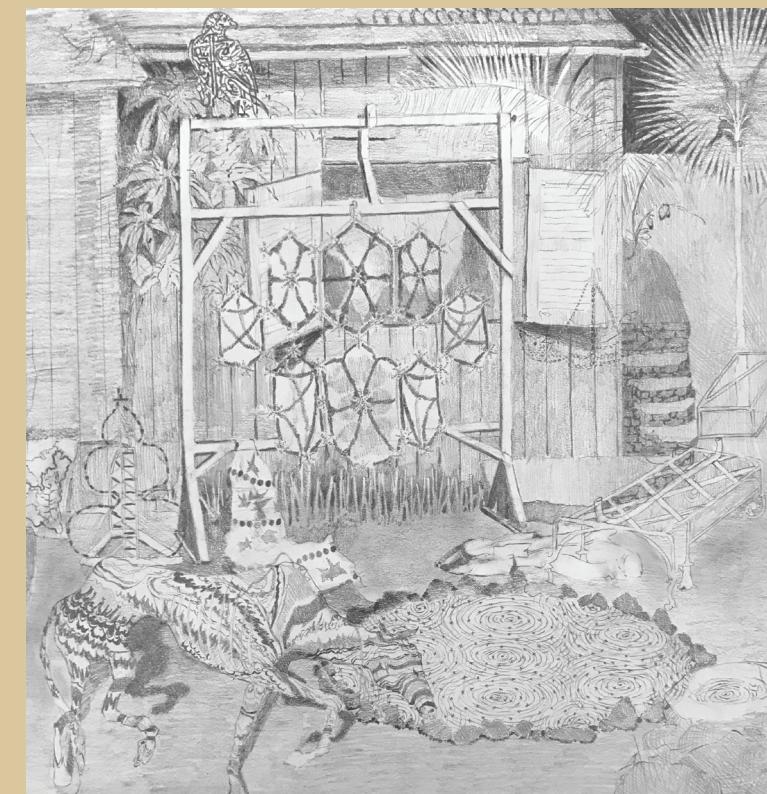
We're thrilled to have closed out our second season of The Here and There Collective's studio residency program with artist Justin Rui Han. During his time, Justin opened up his practice to cultural workers, artists, friends, and many others—investing in moments of connection through an unabated dedication to conversing and making. He has been prolific in his creative process, completing new works for three exhibitions while exploring unfamiliar materials, techniques, and theories. Perhaps most memorable to his time with us was the dramatic shift from his painting practice to sculpture—a shift that I feel privileged to have witnessed, one that reminds me, and all viewers, of the value of being bold and figuring things out as you go.

Justin applied to our program with a portfolio that included ten recent paintings. The works, even seen through



Yet Never Weary, 2022

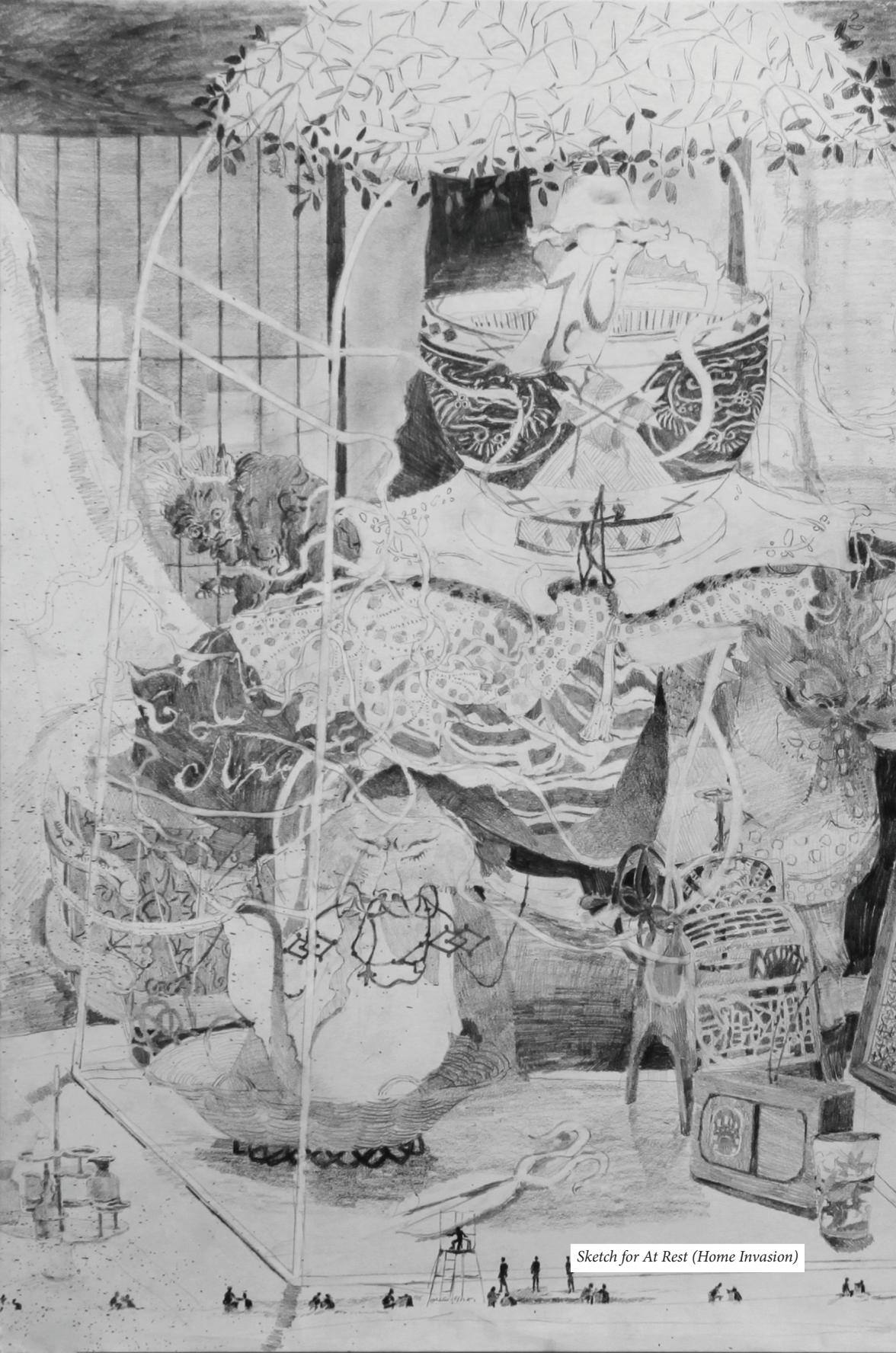
the computer screen, impressed our jury members for its cogent ability to portray patched histories of disparate peoples and places. The layering and textures within the paintings harness the viewer's attention, daring us to continue looking for a key detail to unlock a simple meaning, one that never appears. In his application, Justin shared this final sentence in his statement at the time: "Decorative objects figure in my work to investigate histories of trade and legacies of colonial incursion, and works of luxurious craft are transposed into my work as a way to think (non-cynically!) about painting as an act that transmutes raw material into a thing of obscene value." I saw a blurry outline of Justin's personality when I first read this line and I can recognize a somewhat clearer one



Sketch for Yet Never Weary



At Rest (Home Invasion), 2022



Sketch for At Rest (Home Invasion)

as I re-read it today. He has veered his practice towards a new series of sculptural works—pieces that stretch his strengths as a maker and unfurl dynamic interests into themes of energy and modes of power throughout time. Yet, I don't think this is proof of a cynical view towards painting. If anything, the dialogue within his larger practice now proves the opposite—he seamlessly traverses multiple mediums with a steady focus. Justin's combination of rooted yet fearless entry into unfamiliar methods, histories, and ideas combined with a humble openness to re-thinking methodology bolsters this remarkable shift and new beginning.

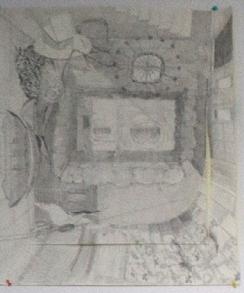
When Lisa, Steven, and I first began to imagine and build our residency program, we had hoped to foster a place for artists to land softly and create without inhibitions. Through his time in the residency, Justin realized these ambitions through the works he made and the trust he has shown towards himself—forging new roads in his practice. I am proud to have worked with him and grateful for all that I've learned through his art.

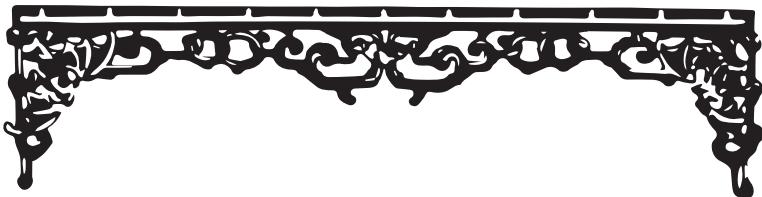


Patrolling, 2022









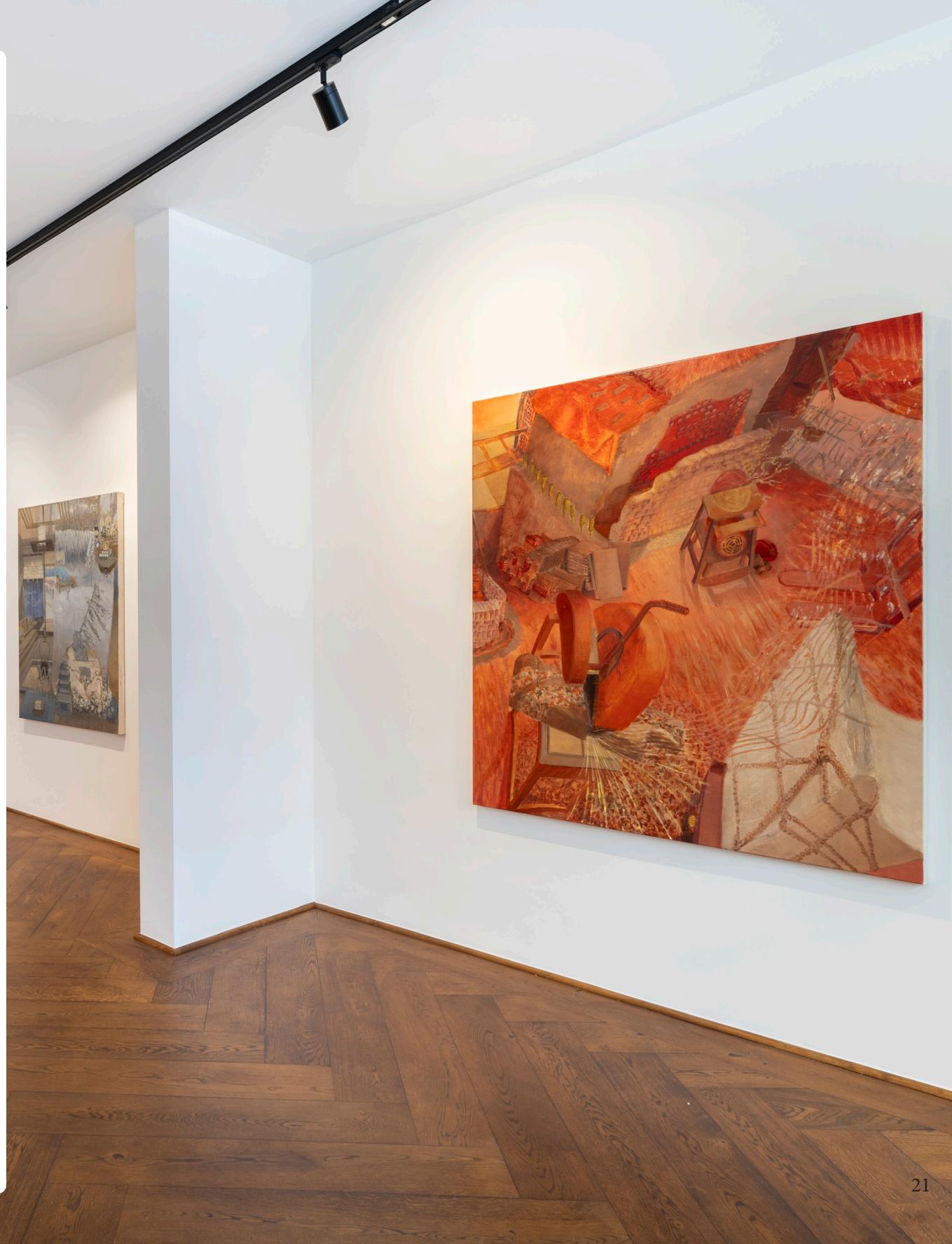
Shatter Zones

by Zach Ngin

The Artist Room presents *Shatter Zones*, an exhibition of new paintings by Justin Rui Han (b. 1999, Rochester, New York).

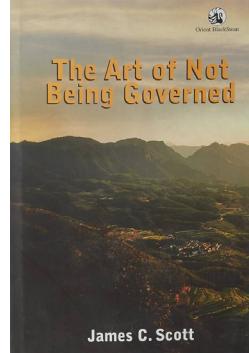
The exhibition's title is a term that anthropologists have appropriated from geologists. Taken from anthropologist James C. Scott's book *The Art of Not Being Governed*, it refers to areas of refuge, "where the human shards of state formation and rivalry accumulated willy nilly, creating regions of bewildering ethnic and linguistic complexity." Where in Scott's case this describes the vast highlands spanning mainland Southeast Asia, 'shatter zones' are generally peripheries resisting the oversight of state and empire. In the eyes of colonial mapmakers and would-be bearers of civilization, such territory appears perilously confused, ill-disciplined, and all too often impassable.

Han's paintings are likewise composed of shards of ungovernable material. Each work in *Shatter Zones* is conceived as a kind of autonomous system, arranged to suggest dense

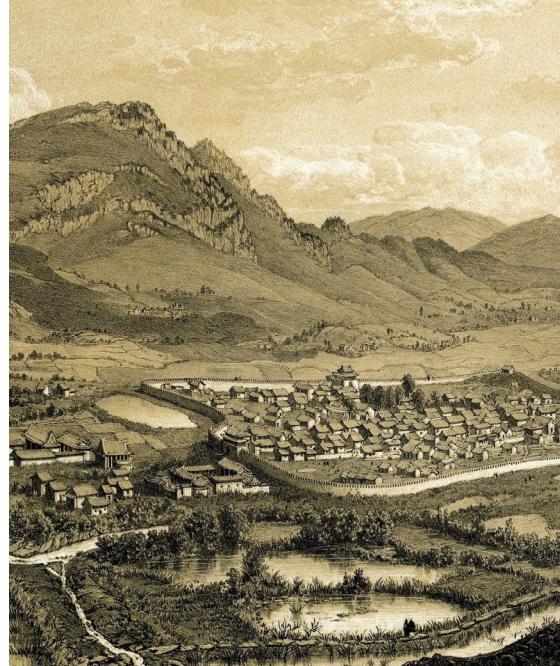


networks of function that must remain opaque to outsiders. The paintings' titles suggest the beginnings of narrative, while closer looking reveals a patchwork of specificity: local areas of command, conflict, and exchange. Han's paint may describe objects with inviolable ties to places and cultures, but they resist identification and deny citation. The works are likewise populated by figures whose business is unknown and whose motivations we can only guess.

Tsuchigumo's Playthings depicts autonomy through the eyes of the tsuchigumo, a monstrous spider from Japanese folklore. It owes its name to tuchigumori, which in an 8th-century chronicle referred to renegade tribes who lived in caves and evaded the imperial court. Here, the tsuchigumo sits in a corner near a silk-spinning station. The objects in the painting are projections of its sadistic play. The viewer enters the



The Art of Not Being Governed
by James C. Scott



*The walled city of Pu'er in Southern Yunnan,
a part of Zomia highlands* by Francis Garnier.



Rescued Fighter, 2023

bathhouse it occupies from above, dangling vertiginously. An adjacent painting, *Risk and Sanctuary*, responds to Satsuo Yamamoto's 1979 chronicle of silk production, *Oh! The Nomugi Pass*. Juxtaposed against the silk workers' lodgings is a snowy landscape and hulking vehicle, alluding to a promotional trans-Himalayan expedition undertaken by the automotive manufacturer Citroën. Both canvases are littered with objects, rendered in the borrowed style of ukiyo-e (translated as "floating world") woodblock prints, produced primarily in Japan between the 17th and 19th centuries. They become almost interchangeable, and there is something insidious about this slippage: an agricultural tool might be a toy; a toy might double as a shelter or a tool or a weapon.

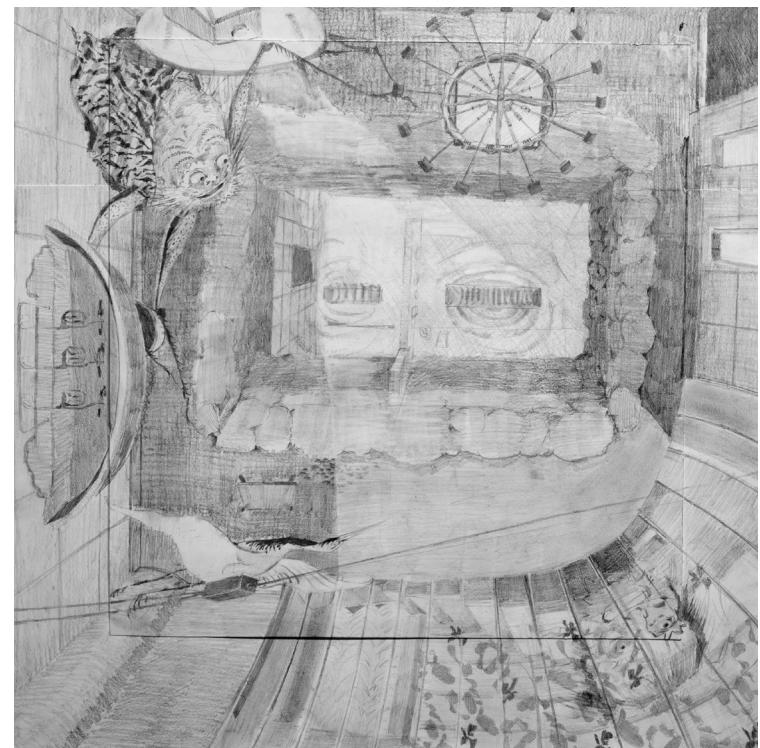
In *Stonecutter's Revisions*, a saw cleaves a block of patterned stone, making a terrible sound. Like many of Han's paintings, it pulls imagery from anticolonial and socialist cinema. Its architecture is drawn from Youssef Chahine's social drama *The Land* (1970), as well as from various stone workshops Han observed in Southeast Asia, including one near the reconstructed temple of Borobudur.

Fishery and Semaphore at Day's End is an ode to the sea divers of Jeju Island, South Korea. Devices for naval communication, reconstructed from models in the Rijksmuseum, puncture this windblown landscape. A lighthouse—like one used by the Dutch to mark the contours of their empire in the East Indies—casts more shadow than light, presiding over a restive archipelago.

Attendant and Desecrators depicts a terraced cemetery as a contentious site of memory and mischief. The lone attendant, sagging on his perch, is helpless to prevent the advance of grinning vandals. This painting was prompted by Han's visit to



Tsuchigumo's Playthings, 2023



Sketch for *Tsuchigumo's Playthings*

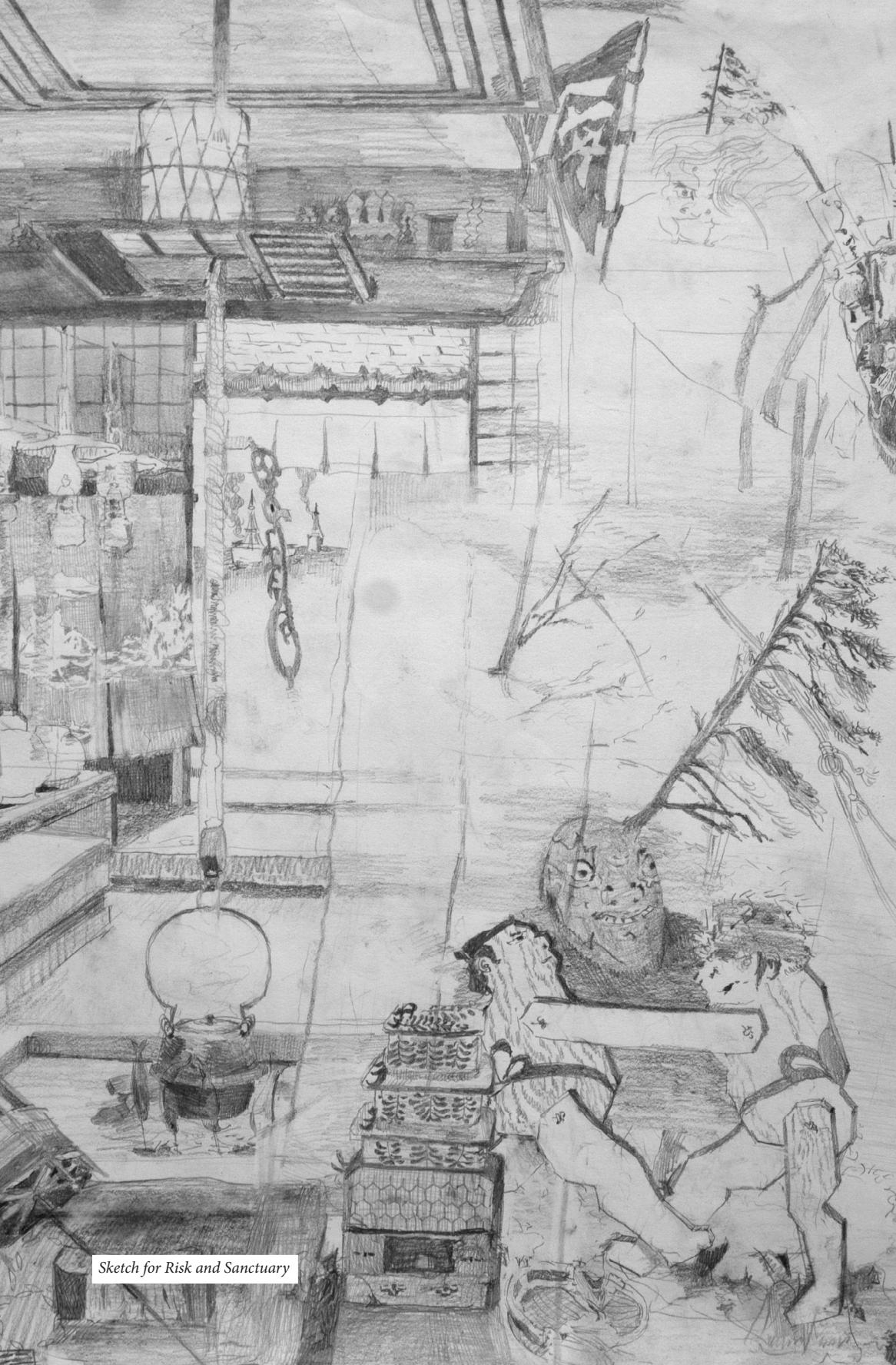


Minamoto no Yorimitsu cutting the Tsuchigumo yōkai. Woodblock print by Utagawa Kuniyoshi, early Bunsei period (c. 1818-1830).



Risk and Sanctuary, 2023





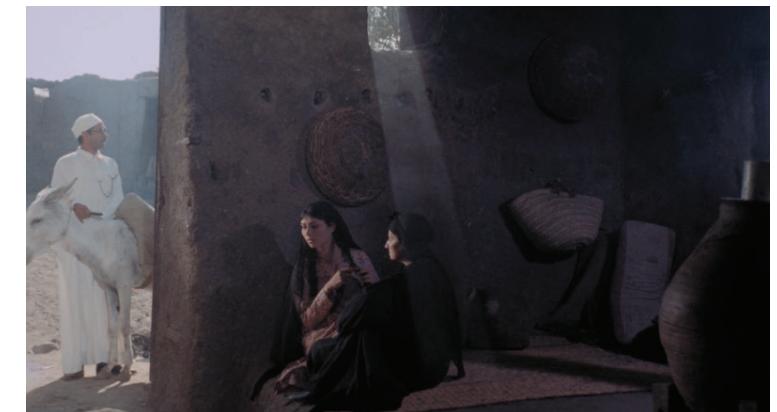
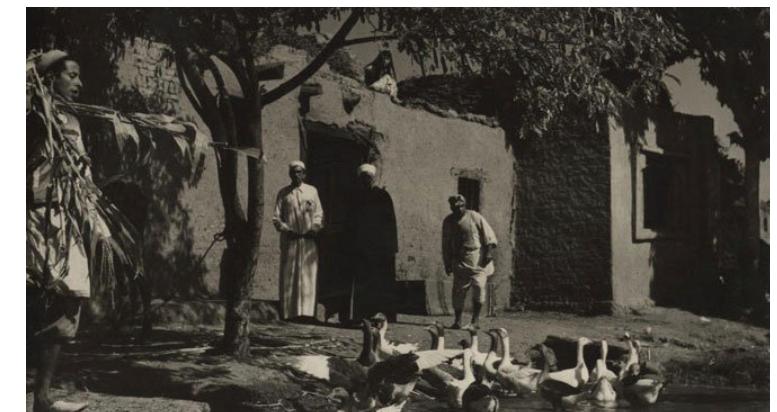
Sketch for Risk and Sanctuary



Oh! The Nomugi Pass (dir. Satsuo Yamamoto, 1979)



Stonecutter's Revisions, 2023



The Land (dir. Youssef Chahine, 1969)

the terraced St. Michael's Catholic Cemetery in Hong Kong, a city where traditional funerary practices have been adapted to a dense and ultramodern setting. One proposal, for instance, imagined a floating structure that would be filled with urns. The painting, however, does not belong to a single time or place: its wooden water wheel is drawn from a Chinese agricultural manuscript, and the offerings on its periphery were observed from burial grounds in Ridgewood, Queens.

Nearby, *Peddlers' Feud (A Breath of Wind Merits Release)*, which pays tribute to Djibril Diop Mambéty's revenge drama *Hyenas* (1992), documents a failure of exchange, with two merchants leaving one another. Sometimes you have to hold onto what you have and walk away. Water flows through a field of opium; irrigation opens after being closed for days.

Occupational Hazards is an accident waiting to happen. Blades sit beneath a tarp, biding their time—a form of trap drawn from a premodern military manual. Looming overhead is a skeletal structure from Lino Brocka's film Manila in the *Claws of Light* (1975). On the right, blue material is processed through a chute: the imperative of production exerts itself totally, like gravity.

In Han's work, references collide and collude, frustrating attempts to account for their origins. It is impossible to take an adequate census of them. We might ask of any of them: How did this object enter this space? What are the systems that brought it here and imported it to this place? Han's paintings emerge from curiosity and wonder in the face of an object's alterity: the beautiful and terrible forces that congeal in the presence, here—in a street market, a museum, a digitised manuscript, a film still—of something from far away.

The art historian Joan Kee asks: "How can artworks

that differ from, clash with, and even undermine one another coexist without capitulating to the logic of domination and subordination?" Han's works don't necessarily provide an answer to this query, but each one proposes a specific situation of convergence, alliance, and dissensus. For the artist, a painting can aspire to produce a feeling of historical opening, as the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung or the global revolts of 1968 did for Third World liberation. While those events' visions for decolonization may not have been fully realised, the possibilities they presented remain open. His paintings, then, are redolent of a dusty meeting hall, where things and nonhuman beings are substituted for people: a space for civic assembly or communion, where something yet might happen.

But it would be a mistake to say that these paintings "call back" to a golden age of solidarity or "prefigure" a pluralistic society to come. Han is drawn to objects for their indigestible complexity, their infinite internal variety. They are too particular—too peripheral—to consent to being enlisted for long. They make an appearance and keep going.

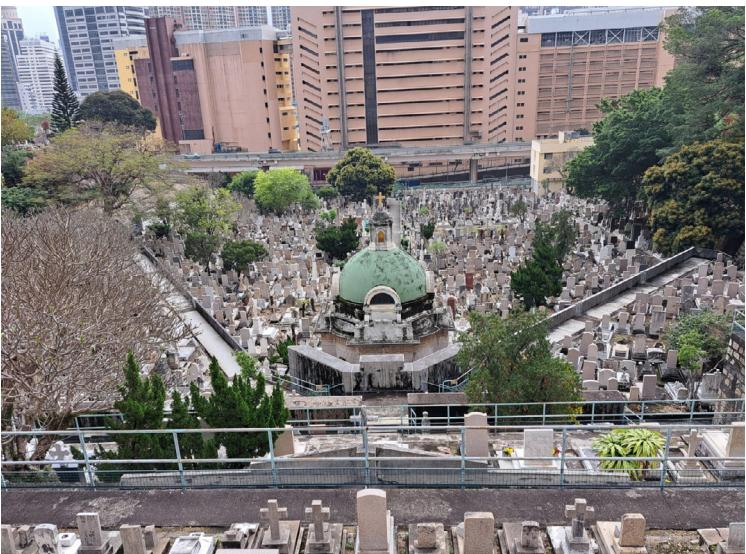


Fishery and Semaphore at Day's End, 2023





Attendant and Desecrators, 2023



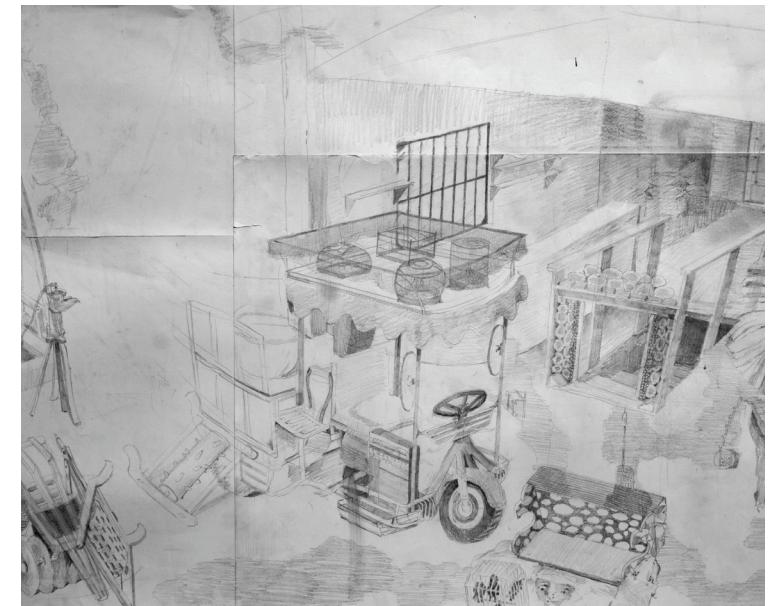
St. Michael's Catholic Cemetery, Hong Kong



Sketches for Attendant and Desecrators



Peddlers' Feud (A Breath of Wind Merits Release), 2023



Sketches for Attendant and Desecrators



Hyenas (dir. Djibril Diop Mambéty, 1992)







Occupational Hazards, 2023



Sketch for Occupational Hazards



Shed with Contraband, 2023





Linguere's Courtyard, 2022



In Conversation: Justin Rui Han and Laurie Barron

for Ocula Magazine

Painter Justin Rui Han had just completed a BFA from Rhode Island School of Design when The Artist Room's Laurie Barron spotted his work at the degree show and invited him to participate in *Eccentric Spaces*, a group show at the London gallery in January 2023.

Justin brought *Linguere's Courtyard*, an oil on canvas that referenced *Hyenas*, a 1992 film about a woman returning to her hometown in Senegal to propose a deal to the populace: her fortune in exchange for the death of her husband who abandoned her with their child. The gallery's footfall was taken by its clear descriptive qualities and painterly charm, and as such conversations about a solo exhibition with the gallery began.

Fast forward 12 months and a series of nine paintings have now arrived in London for his first solo exhibition *Shatter Zones* (February 22–March 23, 2024) at the gallery in Soho.

Ocula invited Barron to speak with Han about his plans for the show, the artists that formed his thinking, and how this year could see him ‘break out of the rectangle’ into more sculptural works.

Laurie Barron: What are the key investigations that make up your practice?

Justin Rui Han: Within the formal constraints of painting, I am testing how disparate forms might encounter others like or unlike themselves. The beings, objects, flora, and architecture in my recent work are decided by a narrative condition like a profession (fishing, mining, peddling goods) or a social institution (bathhouse, burial ground, storefront).

It's a way of anchoring the work so that the resulting image swirls around a central, fabulistic pretence. Composing images is a way for me to grasp at a feeling of community, and I do so by aggregating components from film stills, direct observation, and archival sources.

I imagine each painting as a space where the participants, still or animate, are stewards of distinct lands and memories. In some scenes, these actors engage in frivolous mischief, while in others they work out disagreements.

I want to conjure the feeling that arises out of intermingling across multiple genres of social difference, in someone's home or on the street, whether one experiences an ideological clash or an instant affinity with someone else's sensibility.

For me, the experience of being among others is most aptly summarised in ideas like camaraderie and intimacy, or conversely, indignation and shared dissent. Painting is an avenue for conveying that kind of social magic, while also delving into transnational histories.

LB: What have you planned for your first solo show with The Artist Room?

JRH: There are nine paintings in this show. They're primarily oil on canvas, though some include earlier layers in acrylic or shapes blocked out with handmade paper. Each begins with a different trigger or provocation: a specific pigment or hue, a site depicted in a film, or a mere feeling (a vengeful atmosphere, vertigo, dust carried by wind), that a painting becomes an excuse to pursue.

LB: Tell me about the title: *Shatter Zones*.

JRH: While seeking an analogy that would be apt for how I construct a painted space, I began reading anthropologist James C. Scott's book *The Art of Not Being Governed* (2009), which is told as an ‘anarchist history’ of the highlands of Southeast Asia and southern China.

Scott is interested in the choice communities make to remain stateless, to be fugitives from empire. Before reading the book, I had been interested in how painting might address or hold a mirror up to such ideals about social reorganisation. I build assemblies in paintings as an oblique way of exploring utopian ideas, and texts like this are a kind of conceptual ammunition.

The show title is aspirational and I think of each painting as its own porous ‘shatter zone’. Each is provisionally mapped out, and the elements relate with some volatility to one another; the objects and beings alike are passing through, each with their desires and motivations.

LB: I'm really interested in how your work brings different, carefully sourced, phenomena together: histories, geographies, and forms of culture. How do you plan each work?



JRH: The work is meant to replicate the feeling of exposure to unfamiliar histories—the objects and beings are a prism through which to realise that feeling. That is to say that though not everyone is responsible for knowing the date of a coup in Iran or Chile, or about a 19th-century rural revolt in Vietnam, I choose to dwell in the far reaches of what the Western pathology (borrowing Howardena Pindell's words) considers unknowable or indigestible.

To me, wonder and awe are catalysts for taking collective responsibility and refusing interminable violence. Constructing images is how I open viewers to that possibility. The dispersed nature of their presentation reflects how I came to know each thing, whether a bough on a frankincense tree, an irrigation diagram, or an animal imagined to hold messianic power.

Physically, the work comes together through drawings (tonal or colour), colour studies, large packets of printed images, and reflections from studio visitors. I take time to give each work clear descriptive qualities before I put down any pigment, then improvise as I encounter things that might become pertinent.

Sometimes I see what I'm imagining by coincidence, as happened recently when I was in Hong Kong and saw the terraced cemeteries that inspired *Attendant and Desecrators*.

LB: References in your show are wide-ranging: Japanese folklore; the automotive manufacturer Citroën; and Djibril Diop Mambéty's revenge drama *Hyenas* are just a few examples. How would you describe the process behind showing these fascinating references to visitors in a different context?

JRH: The dynamic I have with my source material alternates between admiring and oppositional. I like to implicate stories that provoke in me a kind of disgust at human hubris or sensorial aversion, things like Citroën's *La Croisière Jaune*

(*Yellow Cruise*), an expedition from Beirut to Beijing that began in 1931.

I came across this bizarre marketing campaign by chance, while looking at 1920s archival footage of the Swedish explorer Sven Hedin's time in Xinjiang and Tibet, guided by my paternal great-grandfather Xu Xusheng.

I look back on this ancestor of mine whom I never met with awe and disbelief: awe that our interests have coincided in this way (I also studied history alongside archaeology), and difficulty stomaching that he'd help this foreign explorer plunder gratuitous quantities of Silk Road heritage.

I respond to a lot of other historical material with a similar fascinated ambivalence. *Risk and Sanctuary* nods to the printmaking of Kobayashi Kiyochika, whose later prints, during the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars, functioned as imperial propaganda, proud endorsements of violent campaigns across greater Asia. I cite and react to film or literary works when they carry a pathos that signals a wider expanse of historical burdens and urgencies.

Filmmakers like Mambéty and Youssef Chahine have been transformative for me in that they connect their aesthetic sensibilities to an oppositional stance (for them, against neo-colonialism and predatory globalisation). But the impacts are first delivered through activation of the senses, and then a sensitive humanism. I hope that the paintings unfold in a similar way.

LB: Your paintings evoke a certain timelessness—could you discuss this particularly universal feeling of absence, of untold stories?

JRH: Situating myself outside of time and geography is a creative permission, allowing me to implicate various forms as





appropriate to tone and mood. I neither hedge to the present nor silo my work within the deep past. When my interests cut across time, I can work with images that tap into mediaeval interconnectedness as much as contemporary global capital.

I picked this attitude up while studying history and literature comparatively; I converted this academic permission to a studio one, in which I am not afraid to look at things synchronically, to imagine their confluence.

Distorting time is how I prod at what should not be forgotten, invoking our many responsibilities to the living and dead. If there is a feeling of mourning in my work, it has to do with our civic duty to remember. Memory gives one clarity and courage to intervene when an atrocity is underway.

I often think of this in terms of infrastructure projects, such as working class and immigrant communities destroyed by the building of highways in the U.S., or the Three Gorges Dam in China (well illustrated in the films of Jia Zhangke).

Today, many of my artist peers are mobilising memory and storytelling in opposition to the genocidal Israeli campaigns in Gaza—I aspire to this kind of clarity of pictorial purpose.

LB: Could you talk about the role lighting plays in your work? And the perspective manipulations you use? Often, viewers watch from above, or the angles and planes are skewed, creating a disorientating effect.

JRH: In my manipulation of spaces, I like to weave between the enclosures of genre. The scenes variously sample from categories like domestic interior, town square, vast agrarian landscape, or the grim severity of a construction site. The plays on perspective (in paintings like *Tsuchigumo's Playthings* and *Attendant and Desecrators*) are informed by artists like Mernet Larsen and Roger Brown, both of whom grapple with graphic

flatness and maintain a sceptical distance from the illusionistic.

I want the paintings to permit accidental stylistic intrusions, which to me seem appropriate to the dizzying multiplicity of what they include. I made multiple drawings for these compositions, looking for viewpoints that would either gently or more dramatically bewilder.

Light is what lends space dynamism, whether its source is natural, oil-fed, or fluorescent. In some of the paintings, the light sources are rendered naturalistically, as initially observed. In others, I imagine light without a rendered source, which is an invitation to examine that skin of paint. Light, like time, is a permission by which I can assert that the moon, as seen from a riverbank in Vermont, should cast a shadow that lands in Manila.

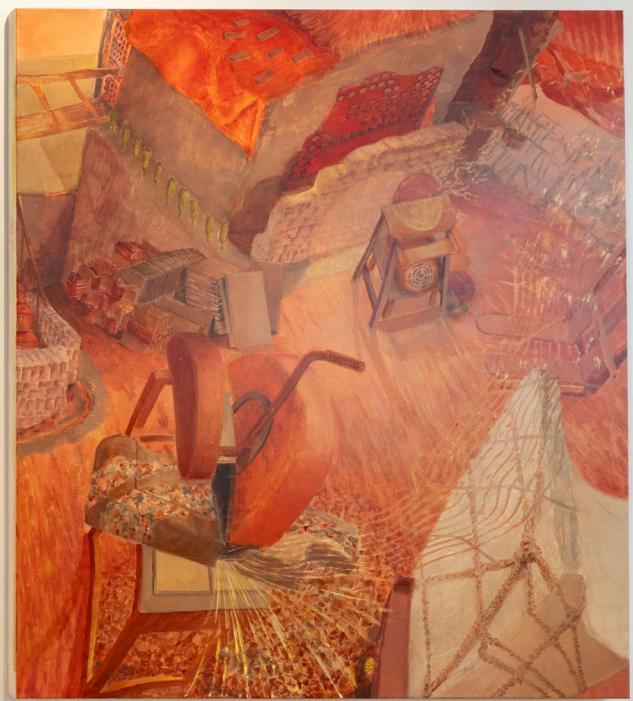
LB: Which painting movements and artists have been foundational in forming your thinking?

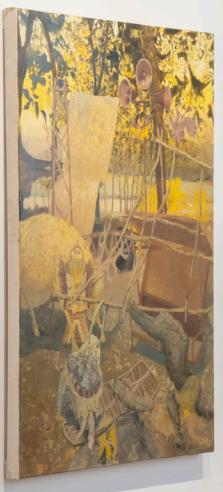
JRH: At this moment, I'm thinking often of Miyoko Ito, Roger Brown, and Evelyn Statsinger, who worked in my hometown of Chicago; modernists Yasuo Kuniyoshi and Marsden Hartley; the industrial scenes of Charles Sheeler; and finally, Charles Garabedian and Mary Lovelace O'Neal.

While working on the paintings for The Artist Room, I often looked at paintings by Chie Fueki and Timothy Lai. Contemporary artists who I can imagine informing my future work include Candice Lin, Suneil Sanzgiri, and An-My Lê.

LB: What's next?

JRH: I'm imagining some new work that will involve textiles and reeds, among other materials, and break out of the rectangle. I've been conceiving of these works even while finishing the London show, so I'm very eager to realise them.







Kégresse and Altimeter, 2024



A Thin Membrane, A Transmutation

by Leo Cocar

Justin Rui Han's objects—whether painting or sculpture—are marked by a curiously open quality, as if every medium is alchemized into a porous skin, variously held in a state of becoming or transition. Within these osmotic objects a variety of concerns flit in and out of perception; histories of technology (and their development), capital's flow between the metropolis and the colony, and the impossibility of extricating any "pure" culture from the geo-temporal space of empire. Formed as a painter, his residency at The Here and There Co. has provided a pause to experiment with sculpture in a way that allows his concerns with space and experience to infiltrate both mediums—a transmutation into a hybrid methodology. In this sense, the shift is a logical one. His paintings are often marked by a concern with architectural space and its composition; the sculptures extend these concerns, by both continuing to

mobilize architectural forms and references while extending his work into real space.

It is this marked in-between state in his work that makes two of Han's unfinished sculptures an appropriate vantage point from which to peer into the concerns embedded in his practice. These wood and rattan armatures seem on the one hand exceedingly fragile and on the other hand demand a sort of activation. This quality that calls for the object's use is materialized through their form, which connotes a potential for kinetic movement through their references to tools and mechanical devices. This kineticism is drawn from Han's use of archival and historical material and their subsequent translation into new and provisional forms. In Untitled [Fig. 1] a parasol-like shape is mounted to two vertical wood supports. The "canopy" bends downwards, denying any reprieve from rain. This form is derived from vernacular architecture Han encountered during travels in Ho Chi Minh City, specifically public faux-concrete "umbrellas" (made out of molded plastic) that shelter police and traffic officers from rain [Fig. 2]. The planned bottom section is derived from a 1926 image of a massive boiler used in a colonial dam-building project in Palembang, South Sumatra [Fig. 3]. A Dutch engineering firm involved in coffee, rubber, and sugar plantations executed and documented this undertaking. The object's appearance here points towards a particular ideological dynamic within the formation of empire—the construction of public works under the guise of "aiding" the subaltern subject. In reality, these acts of "public good" merely obfuscate theft and primitive accumulation. This is to say, what appears as public infrastructure becomes another means to funnel wealth into the colonial center. In



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

this case, the dam may contribute to the local electrical grid but is inextricable from private enterprise and the brutality of the plantation. Here, the artist has mobilized two forms of public infrastructure in Southeast Asia, engaging with the manipulation of water into a singular new object, knotting together their histories.

Another preliminary work, *Delivery Subsystem*, takes the form of a wooden chair-ladder-slide combine. The work will function as a sort of water instrument, where performers will use pistons to produce sounds amplified via contact mics. The work mechanically references the extraction of water from mines, which are present in its formal inspiration: prints from the 19th century *Kodo Zoroku*, a book on Japanese techniques for smelting copper. Specifically, an edition co-edited by Cyril Stanley Smith, a metallurgist who contributed to the Manhattan Project. Again, Han amalgamates varying histories of technology into a singular work—but this combinatorial approach is not one of pure fantasy but one grounded in the reality of technology's genesis, in which all technological objects are the product of the tangle rather than the linear.

However subtle, there is a dialogue between the artist's sculptures and paintings. Although trained in the former medium, Han has extended his practice into the latter during his time as a resident with The Here and There Co. The relationship between the two is inextricable. At the level of material, the final versions of his sculptures will fold in pictorial devices, color, and decorative concerns, thus emphasizing the often under-examined element of aesthetics within technological design. The overlap is also present at the level of concept. His paintings are often marked by a concern with architectural space and its composition; in this way, the sculptures become a



Preliminary work for Delivery Subsystem

vessel with which to extend these concerns, by both continuing to mobilize architectural forms and references while extending his work into real space. Specifically, within Han's paintings, tension comes to the fore in regards to the articulation of space and architecture within the painted image vis-à-vis the entangled web of history. These works evoke M. C. Escher's drawings of impossible interiors, in which passageways seem to endlessly loop together, floors become ceilings, and entrances become dead ends. These spaces exist as a zone of historical-cultural confluence.

Here, a cabinet of curiosities (*wunderkammer*) logic takes hold in which objects and materials from seemingly unrelated cultures, eras, and geographies exist as one composition. This is to say, within naturalistic depictions of the world, the dynamics of labor, cultural circulation, and thought that inform the image must be rendered invisible (as it is within the so-called real world). In the *wunderkammer*—an early form of museum originating in Europe—“curiosities” both anthropological and natural are displayed in the same setting with little context or categorical differentiation. Although historically problematic as a mode of display, as a model for thinking-history, it is potentially productive. The *wunderkammer* rejects “naturalistic” displays in which immediately linked objects are set into conversation—rather, through juxtaposition, invisible (but nonetheless real) relations come to the fore. In a similar manner, Han's paintings reject the obfuscating qualities of the so-called naturalistic, trading it for a dream-like logic that unveils far more than it conceals.

Throughout his paintings, the rational perspectival devices used by much of Western painting since the 15th century for the composition of seemingly “enterable” spaces is rejected, as if the

crush of history has come to deny the viewer the possibility of any singular view of Han's interior worlds. When considering the multiple histories embedded into each of his images, a linear view onto history's vista is indeed an impossibility. Han is thus engaged with the infinite number of possible permutations when looking at a given historical “scene,” which can potentially radically shift in form when considering the often undersung dynamics of labor and economics.

Take for example *Risk and Sanctuary*, a work in which Han's mobilization of the breakdown of architectural space is particularly clear, insofar as the space “breaks down” as we move from the naturalism on the left towards the intrusion of a surreal screen-like structure on the right. On the left, the viewer apprehends the interior of a traditional Japanese home, with signs of domestic life indexed by a fire pit (*irori*), around which a circle of skewered sweet fish (*ayu*) roast gently by the coals. This painting is an engagement with Satsuo Yamamoto's film *Oh! The Nomugi Pass* (1979), which is a narrative centered around silk production. In this sense, this domestic space (a silk worker's lodging) is inextricable from labor. A door opening to the exterior gestures towards both the porosity of the home and the inhabitants' possible departure or future return. To the right, a silk screen acts as a transition zone through which the winter landscape outside begins to infiltrate the home. Acting as a dream-like channel, figures from woodblock prints materialize into the home. Offsetting this surreal quality is the presence of a rusted industrial vehicle, underscoring this image's anachronistic qualities. The vehicle's presence in the snowy landscape references a promotional trans-Himalayan expedition by French auto manufacturer Citroën—another iteration of a project by Western industry posing as a public



Risk and Sanctuary, 2023

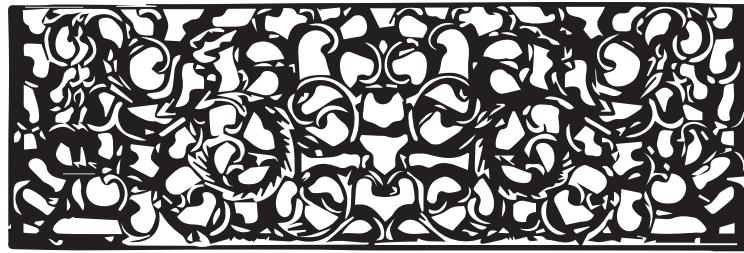
good when it functions as a guise for a profit motive.

This temporally and culturally destabilized quality in Han's work acts as the crux or anchor from which his compositions emerge. Seemingly "traditional" spaces are warped by a cinematic quality—often formally inspired by postcolonial films—and shifted further by the presence of extractive technologies or architecture. Although his images bear a dream-like logic, they are in a sense, realist, in the ways in which they excavate or visualize interconnected histories that have been obfuscated over time but are nonetheless present. I think what is at stake in Han's work is the rejection of any given scene or object "as such". His work takes into account the intangible, often unseen flows of labor and capital in the formation of technologies and culture. Although the histories Han addresses are always already in a state of hybridity, this "unveiling" approach feels particularly important in a moment in which historical revisionism and technological fetishism has come to the fore. The shifting quality of his works, their porosity, and their combinatory logic indicates a self-critical poeticism—that his work (like all work) is merely a link in history's continuum.



Kegresse and Altimeter, 2024





Artist Feature Conversation with Claire Kim

Claire Kim: Justin, you're our fourth artist in residence, and I think we've worked with artists who have come into this studio with different motivations. Some people come in with a very specific idea, working toward a particular show, while others use the time to explore new directions in their practice. I feel like you lend yourself towards the latter category. You came into the studio with a portfolio that was very focused on oil painting, and yet, after the nine paintings for the London show were shipped out, you really switched gears. While I still see so many of the influences from your paintings in this new work, it's also completely different. I think it was quite shocking for folks who came into the studio after seeing those nine paintings on the wall. Tell us a little bit about this new and exciting shift in your practice.

Justin Rui Han: I see it more as a return to the kind of breadth I'd been pursuing before the show. Before I finished





my undergraduate degree, I was casting and blowing glass, and just beginning to learn to weld and pour metals, and then I lost access to those resources. Though painting has always been my first disciplinary home, I felt a certain discomfort with being bound to the formal constraints of oil on canvas. The new materials I've been introducing into my practice are wood, rattan, and yarn; each requires distinct methods of working by hand.

I'm working on building supports that highlight the armature as an internal network—forms that are informed by objects from my paintings. I'm interested in creating systems that rely more on a diagrammatic logic than a narrative one. For now, I'm stepping aside from my reliance on cinematic space, or maybe I'll employ film stills differently, rather than allowing them to dictate the structure of each work.

It's been refreshing to take out a jigsaw, shape plywood or pine, and build something from the ground up instead of off the wall. I think I'm starting to absorb ideas in my practice that I encountered a long time ago—from performance, time-based media, and especially, sculptures I've seen around the city.

CK: We were just talking about your transition into sculpture, and we also have this explosion of mood boards and material explorations behind us. Since we're sitting in front of the textiles, do you want to talk a bit about those pieces and what you've been doing with the knitting machine in your studio?

JRH: I've been working with the Silver Reed knitting machine for about a year now, but it hasn't made its way into any finished works yet. I wanted to make a commitment to building my own surfaces—and that includes both the wood and the fabric. I'm starting to diagram out what kinds of shapes and

forms I need in the fabric, then designing the patterns that run throughout.

Sometimes I create slits in the fabric so that it can be enmeshed among the other materials, as if creating a mechanical joint or a kind of hardware, or else I embed it more organically into the structure as it grows.

On the wood surfaces, I'm thinking of using a lime plaster surface called tadelakt, a North African soap-finishing method that I first encountered in the work of Jumana Manna. In her work, the material evokes Levantine grain storage methods, and the material reminds me of the time I spent in Jordan, working with an archaeological team on terraces and cisterns near Petra.

Each material I've chosen has clear ties to land use and land sovereignty. Rattan, in particular, has environmental and historical connections to Southeast Asia, especially the Philippines. I want to build material ecosystems for myself, where I can explore how the materials respond to one another and what kinds of incompatibilities might arise.

There are both historical and technical reasons I'm drawn to each material. A surface made with lime plaster takes three or four days to build. It needs to be in a space with 80% humidity or higher, and you have to attend to it the whole time.

Each of these materials exists on its own timeline—they offer different working durations and carry distinct social and economic histories. I don't have all the language yet for why or where the compulsion comes from, but I know the compulsion is there. I'm beginning to find that language, and also considering how the works could grow to include sonic or kinetic elements.

CK: Can you talk a about what you're struggling with most right now? I know you've been experimenting with limestone as a





new material and trying to figure it out. Is there anything else you've been wrestling with?

JRH: I've been doing a lot of reading to build a knowledge base for these new sculptures. I really want to think about systems of dispersed power, like water management (as in how Jia Zhangke's work explores the Three Gorges Dam), telegraphs, electricity, and railways. I'm thinking about how colonial infrastructures made claims to serve colonized peoples—whether under the French, the British, or the Dutch—while, in truth, these systems obfuscated the reality of resource extraction. You can often see these contradictions in socialist filmmaking, as exemplified by the protagonist of Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali* setting her ear against the hum of a power station. That scene, to me, is where her character witnesses the imposed promise of electricity but finds that it hardly benefits her in the present.

But it's not a one-to-one relationship. You don't always read a text and find an image. Often, there's nothing there. There's no visual record, nothing to reflect on. So it then has to be conjured through fabulation or imagined entirely.

Maybe what I'm trying to say is that I'm constructing a language for something that doesn't have a visual archive. I do have a few printouts from state archives and the like, but they don't always offer the kind of visual provocation that makes someone want to paint or build.

CK: For this specific structure, you had a reference that we can see above and to the right—some sketches of police shades from Ho Chi Minh City [Fig. 1 & 2]. I'm curious how important it is that this reference be legible to the viewer, especially when the sketches and source images are no longer present. How



important is it to you that these histories are translated, whether clearly or ambiguously, to the audience?

JRH: Some shapes in the work are borrowed from vernacular architecture, used for their compositional power. Other elements are more graphic, more charged, and I do want them to be read in more provocative ways, more locatable within history.

This umbrella, in particular, caught my attention. It's this kind of lumbering, molded plastic police umbrella I encountered on the street, and it felt like it could act as a structural shelter for other kinds of stories. I'm not totally sure what that story is yet for this piece—it's being developed in conversation with the image of this monumental boiler from an irrigation project in Dutch Surabaya.

This is a new work I'm developing [Fig. 3]. It doesn't have a title yet. I'm imagining a peachy orange palette that involves this particular persimmon dye (*kakishibu*) I want to use. In this I'm reworking an idea from the last painting I made for the London show, titled *Lighthouse and Semaphore*. I developed that painting as I read historian Eric Tagliacozzo's writing on the lighthouses the Dutch built across the Indonesian archipelago. He describes this system as a sort of oceanic panopticon, and I was interested in this identification of the insidious within a network that was ostensibly just to serve the interests of maritime commerce.

That painting opened something up for me, but it didn't fully resolve the formal and conceptual questions I had. I felt like a sculptural structure would better convey the kind of dispersed spatial quality I'm looking for.

The main shape of this piece comes from an early modern Egyptian shadow puppet that depicts the Argo. The Persian



Fig. 1

astronomer Abd al-Rahman al-Sufi depicted the same ship as a constellation while he was translating Ptolemy's images for his audience. I was struck by the feeling of coincidence as I looked at these images together—dioptic lenses blinking across Dutch lighthouses, this Persian rendering of stars arranged to evoke the sea. I hope my work suggests that the movement of ideas, objects, and people can always evade strictures and defy impossibility, wherever they might be imposed.

So yes, I take long-winded routes to get to an image. It's not always important to narrate all of that on a wall label, but the journey is important to me. And it's fun, figuring out how to bend this material, how to make a fabric that fits the armature just right.

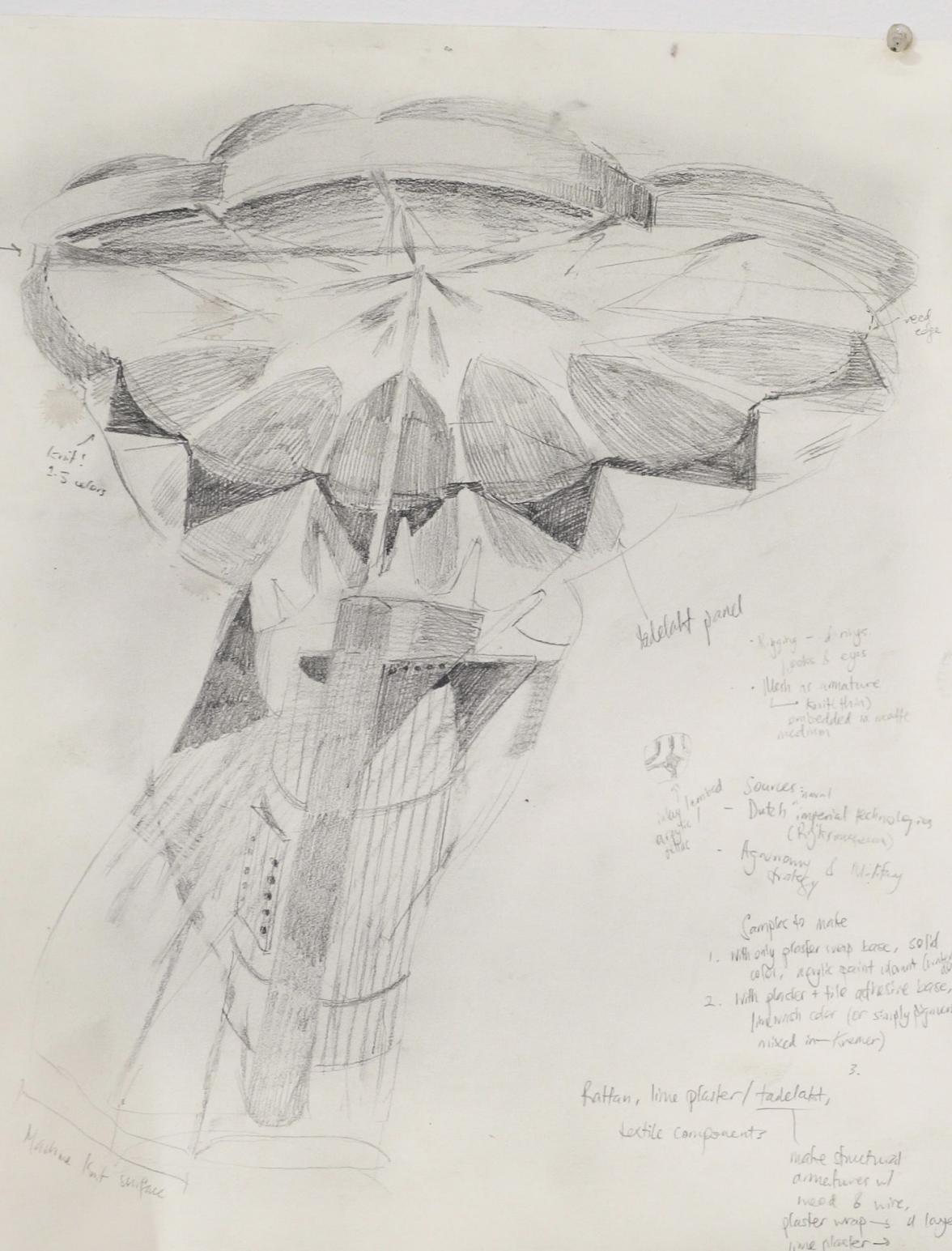


Fig. 2 (sketch for Palembang Canopy)

Palembang Canopy, 2025

CK: You say it's a long-winded journey, but I think that kind of deep research, even if it doesn't end up on the wall, will really have an impact on your practice. There's something powerful in the density of references. It becomes a kind of timekeeping. Do you want to talk a bit about how this piece will move forward?

JRH: Yeah. I've set aside a bunch of yarns for this—there's a silver one, and an orangish-brown persimmon-dyed one. The fabrics will fill this space. I've woven the rattan to act as handles or bars to stretch and hang the fabric on.

I might dye the reed to be in dialogue with the other materials. I've been sketching with draft fabrics to figure out how the surface will move around the armature. The drawing's underway—it's back there. But there will be many more drawings and diagrams to help me think through how the materials relate, how the structure stands, and so on.

CK: Have you thought about how the work relates to the viewer?

JRH: I'm thinking of this work as a bridge into installation, where the conditions of a viewer's encounter have a certain priority. I think the works as they are now need some sort of tertiary link, such as text, drawings, or video, to paint a fuller picture of the questions I'm trying to engage. I want the work to be more ambitiously engaged with how culture, infrastructure, and technology invoke questions of accountability—how powerful actors resist or neglect the needs of those they claim to represent. This is something that the filmmakers I revere put at the forefront of their work, and it should find its way into what I do as well.

CK: I'm really excited to see more. I just want to say it's been such a pleasure having you in the studio over the last five



*Shadow puppet of a ship with soldiers. Egypt, fourteenth to eighteenth century. Present location unknown. (After Paul Kahle, "Islamische Schattenspielfiguren aus Ägypten II," *Der Islam* 2 [1911])*

months. There's a kind of energy that comes into the studio when shifts like this are happening. There has to be a real fearlessness in trying new things, especially in a residency setting, where people are constantly coming in and out of the space. I really applaud you for that. And, I'm so excited to see not only where this new series goes, but where your practice goes from here.

JRH: Thank you so much for having me in the space. Thank you for this conversation today.

repeat brushing until no longer absorbing
allow to set while spraying
every so often - carbonization
completes after ~72h

crushed &
heated in
pit @ high temp

Quicklime
(caustic)

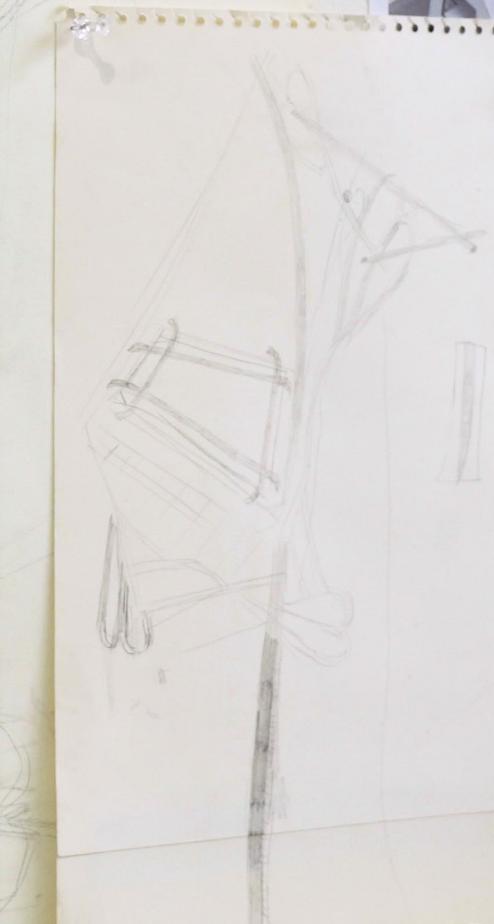
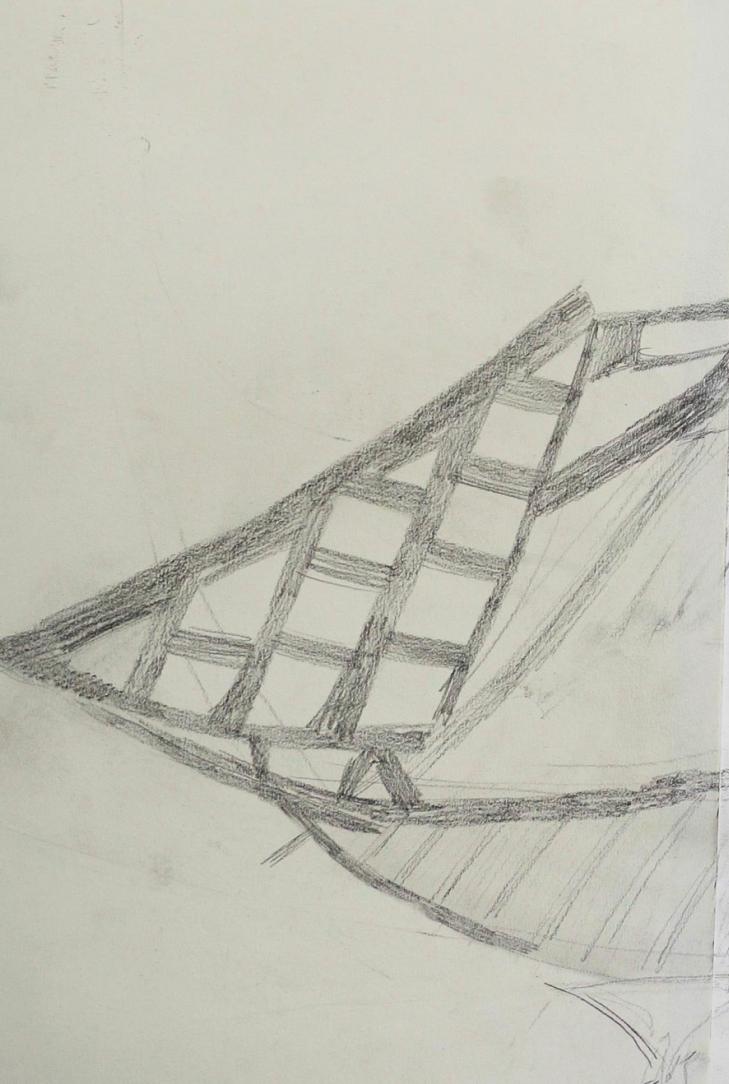


Fig. 3





Floating Beacon (after Abd al-Rahman al-Sufi), 2025







Monsoon Messenger (after Satyajit Ray), 2025







Installation view of *Under the Talking Tree*,
Kunsthal n, Copenhagen (curated by Kathy Huang)



Retracted Permissions, 2024



Artwork List

At Rest (Home Invasion), 2022
Oil on canvas
54 × 54 in

Attendant and Desecrators, 2023
Oil on canvas
54 × 72 in

Fishery and Semaphore at Day's End,
2023
Oil on canvas
46 × 30 in

Floating Beacon (after Abd
al-Rahman al-Sufi), 2025
Rattan, abaca, plywood, pigment dye,
various fibers, hardware
43 × 49 × 5 in

Intolerant Threader, 2025
Oil on canvas
9 × 9 in

Kégresse and Altimeter, 2025
Gouache and acrylic on cotton
fabric mounted to wood,
machine-knit textile, steel
hardware, rattan, and abaca
75 × 34 × 9 in

Linguere's Courtyard, 2022
Oil on canvas
26 × 24 in

Monsoon Messenger (after Satyajit
Ray), 2025
Rattan, abaca, ash, plywood,
pigment dye, various fibers,
hardware
33.5 × 68.5 × 3 in

Occupational Hazards, 2023
Acrylic and oil on canvas
60 × 50 in

Palembang Canopy, 2025
Rattan, abaca, plywood, black walnut,
soft pastel, mixed fibers
51 × 32 × 15 in

Patrolling, 2022
Soft pastel and colored pencil on
paper
24 × 18 in

Peddlers' Feud (A Breath of Wind
Merits Release), 2023
Handmade papers, acrylic, and
oil on canvas
48 × 60 in

Prize-Fighters, 2022
Soft pastel and colored pencil
on paper
30 × 22 in

Rescued Fighters, 2023
Oil on canvas
52 × 44 in

Retracted Permissions, 2024
Gouache on linen over plywood
panel, machine-knit textile
28 × 50 × 7 in

Risk and Sanctuary, 2023
Oil on canvas
50 × 40 in

Shed with Contraband, 2023
Oil on canvas
40 × 30 in

Stonecutter's Revisions, 2023
Oil on canvas
56 × 50 in

Tsuchigumo's Playthings, 2023
Oil on canvas
54 × 60 in

Yet Never Weary, 2022
Oil on canvas
60 × 60 in



CV

1999 Born in Rochester, New York
Lives and works in Brooklyn, New York

EDUCATION

2022 BFA Painting, Rhode Island School of Design
2022 BA Archaeology, Brown University

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

2025 The Textility of Organisms, Hive Center for Contemporary Art (Shanghai, CN)
Under the Talking Tree, Kunsthall N (Copenhagen, DE)
2024 Dialogues (benefiting The Here and There Co.), PHILLIPS, New York, NY
Night Vision, Warner Gallery (Milbrook, NY)
Crescent Heights, HARPER'S (Los Angeles, CA)
Shatter Zones, solo exhibition, The Artist Room (London, UK)

- 2023 The Lafayette Rendezvous, RAINRAIN (New York, NY)
Eccentric Spaces, The Artist Room (London, UK)
2022 Arecibo: Missed Connections, RISD Memorial Hall Gallery (Providence, RI)
Would That: Expressions of Possibility in the Asian American Diasporas, Providence Public Library (Providence, RI), curated by Diana Khoi Nguyen
Residual Hauntings, Gelman Gallery, RISD Museum (Providence, RI)

RESIDENCIES AND FELLOWSHIPS

- 2024 Sharpe-Walentas Studio Program (Brooklyn, NY)
2023 The Here and There Collective Studio Grant (Brooklyn, NY)
Vermont Studio Center Fellowship (Johnson, VT)
2022 Pilchuck Glass School Fellowship (Stanwood, WA)
Florence Leif Award, RISD Painting (Providence, RI)
2020 Jack Ringer Southeast Asia Fellowship, Brown University (Providence, RI)

CURATORIAL AND TEACHING

- 2024 Artist lecture, Millbrook School (Millbrook, NY)
2022 Flame Casts No Shadow, Subtitled NYC (Greenpoint, NY); Co-curated with In June Park
Co-founder, Brown University Asian American Artists' Residency (Providence, RI)
2019 Prior Things, Gelman Gallery, RISD Museum (Providence, RI), co-curated with Maya Cannon and Megan Molina



About

The Here and There Collective began with a simple yet urgent desire to create an accessible platform for the discovery and visibility of artists from the Asian diaspora by archiving and sharing conversations with them. Our founding was a direct response to the lack of representation of Asian diasporic artists within mainstream US cultural institutions.

Now in our fifth year, we've grown into a multifaceted organization supporting emerging and mid-career artists through three pillars: education, direct support, and community building.

Our education programs spotlight artists through written and video features, as well as public exhibitions. Through our direct support efforts, such as THAT Studio Residency, we offer artists studio space, tailored resources, and critical documentation of their practice. And our community partnerships with groups like AAPI Arts Network, Asianish, ARTNOIR, MoMA PS1, and Hammer Museum have enabled us to host walkthroughs, panels, and gatherings that connect artists with wider audiences.

Learn more about us on www.thehereandthere.co



Patrons

THAT Collective

Steven Abraham, Executive Director

Claire Kim, Director of Curatorial Affairs

Lisa Young, Director of Operations

THAT Founders

Carla Shen

Michael Lee

William Leung

THAT Partners

Amitha Raman

Annie Shi and Sean Anderson

John Jahng

Megan Noh

Roman and Charmaine Mendoza

THAT Friends

Navann Ty

Nelson Chu

Steve Juh

Yao King

Yayoi Shionoiri



