



Virgin Land

Tempered glass floor, Ultraviolet Light tube, Neon lamp, Raw material of cinchona tree, Tonic water, Multi-channel video (15'25")
Size Variable
2019

Taiwan's colonial period under Japanese rule witnessed its largest scaled introduction of, and experimentation on, tropical plants. Taiwan's geographic location, climate and ecological environment made the island an ideal habitat for the *Anopheles* mosquitoes known for spreading malaria. In the course of their colonial conquest, European colonizers discovered that certain groups of indigenous South American people used cinchona tree barks to treat malaria. Before the emergence of technology for the production of artificial vaccines, quinine extracted from cinchona trees was the only form of treatment and preventive measure against malaria. Quinine thus provided colonizers with protection for them to venture further into new territories of primal forests and tropical islands.

All of a sudden, islands with the threat of dangerous diseases became treasure vaults for the pharmaceutical industry, as cinchona trees and botany were turned into an alternative imperial weaponry, with which the process of colonization could be extended, and transformed more thoroughly into profit-making territories.

'Virgin Land' is conceived of as a stage in the form of a pop-up bar. Scattered on the floor and emitting fluorescent light are glass tubes filled with a concoction of gin and quinine. As cure, the meaning of quinine is multivalent. In a way, coloniality is like a virus sieving through our veins and bones, permeating through our consciousness.





Things Change

Three-channel video with sound, Roof tile, Fluorescent bulb
Size Variable
2019

"What is more, each thing moves to its own place," wrote Aristotle in the Book IV of Physics. Place is about knowledge of space. It is also abstract, immaterial and conceptual. "Things Change" takes particular "places" as protagonists; historic contexts and political meanings within the spaces are formed and transformed into signs of visual culture in the society. Also, de-objectification and deterritorialization of place itself make it difficult to experience and understand it physically. I try to further explore and trace the mutation of "place" in the process of cultural production, and evoke a "sense of place" through the sensible experience in the Visual culture. When the viewer echoes with the works, the works come to re-affirm new places.

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TING Chaong-Wen is skilled in dealing with mixed media, such as space installations which mixed with images and sounds. TING's works are often inspired by his own experiences and often include ready-made objects, which through the context of a particular exhibition, become part of a particular historical narrative. Thus artist deconstructs, interprets, and reinterprets our shared history in surprising and innovative ways. He examines dominant values, historical conflicts such as colonialism, migration, and cultural collective memory and their cross-border existence.

Interview

R: You have spoken of exploring the relationship between memory and the urban environment. Taiwan is somewhere that has changed rapidly and experienced, in succession, different waves of political rule. There have been so many ruptures. How do you think memory is manifested in the urban landscape in Taiwan?

As an artist that grew up in Taiwan in the 1990s, my emotion and memory about the city are always related to some important historic moments. I was born in 1979 when the U.S. broke off diplomatic relations with Taiwan. An uncanny feeling pervaded among people in the country. Confronting changes of the overall situation, they felt the urge to be more connected with the world. After that, the lift of the Martial Law brought about economic developments; there was a wave of construction policies implemented by the government. Today, what we face is another wave, a capitalism which crosses borders. Urged by neo-liberalism, our country's policies are oriented towards urban development projects. Just like organisms such as cells, urban landscape is constantly shifting in the cycles of aging, death and rebirth. In the past, perhaps it was a succession of foreign regimes that brought about changes in the country whereas now it is about the struggles between the exploitation of real estate and the ecology protection. Anyhow, the urban contours in Taiwan always appear to be fragile and fragmented. Similarly, our memories of them have become piecemeal. Maybe it is the reason that motivated me to record through my own work the infinitesimal experiences with regards to my surroundings.

R: You studied in Tainan, in the south of Taiwan, and now are based in Taichung. In the age of the global art world, these are peripheral locations, compared to Taipei. There is still much more evidence of the traditional and past in the landscape in these locations. Has living outside of Taipei influenced the kind of work you make or the approach you take to your environment?

I feel lucky that I've been living and studying in the south of Taiwan. Tainan has been successively governed by the Netherlands, the Ming Dynasty, the Ching Dynasty as well as the Japanese colonizers before being taken over by the Kuomintang government after World War II. The four-hundred-years history can be seen as an epitome of Taiwan's history. From official culture to folk culture, there is a huge amount of energy that is accumulated in this city. Artists can discover many wonderful stories here. As for the historic traces that are kept within the local daily life, they also manifest themselves in different archival forms. As an artist, what I should do is to reveal the perceptual experiences contained in the archives and to make installations that would create a "Blind Field" that surpasses the archive of memory. In viewing my works, the viewers' emotion and imagination are released into a free state. Also, through reviewing historic archives, the viewers are invited to look at the synesthesia consciousness in our immediate circumstances of existence.

R: Your work deals with subtle changes in the landscape which are only observable over time. How do you train your mind and eye to discover these tiny modulations which appear in an environment characterised by a ceaseless interplay between renewal and decay?

If you ask me to explain my habitual way of exerting the mind and observation in my work, I would divide my art-making into three periods. The first period is about material and memory; my work of this period is about using signs, objects, fogs and sceneries that are familiar to us as well as devices with certain functions. As a whole, they make a multiple setting. But the meaning they represent differs from the ordinary; so they become an alternative mode. There, I create some curious atmosphere that would arise from the environment; daily objects intended as instruments are inserted into an artist context and would no longer remain tangible objects of interpretation. Rather, they would manifest a kind of poeticness with multiple meanings. The second period is about corporal perception; what I'm

interested in is the individualistic corporal perceptions in viewing and approaching works. My works of this period are not about boundaries among disciplines but rather the loss and the sublimation of the definition of boundary, the blurring of discipline categorization and the emphasis on corporal perception. The idea is to let self-discipline work with the heterogeneous, let art shift to life and vice versa and to finally let the artist and the viewer share an "imaginary" regime on the synesthesia homogeneous surface of "work". We will no longer view or experience art through rational recognition but through resonances of corporal perceptions. Finally, in the third period, I shift my focus to social practice. Even though the context is still daily life, the works of this period no longer consist in inviting the viewer to evoke his/her memory; neither are they about corporal perceptual experience. These works are installations that represent becoming relations between historical memory and stock of information. It is also the base of my recent projects. For example, in my Tso Chen Man project, I explore the relations between pre-history and anthropology.

R: Your work is often inter-media and explores the plasticity of materials, the points where one material crosses or bleeds over into another, a kind of synesthesia where the senses bend toward one another. Light seems to play an important role in this. Can you speak a little about the use of light in your art.

Visual art is inseparable from the functioning of light. Before the Christ's birth, epicureans proposed the concept of photon; the pre-modern mystery in all this attracts me to a certain extent. You can imagine a reflection of eternity that is set off from the seemingly foggy depth of time and pulled back to the present. It manifests itself in our daily life, in realistic painting, spiritual rituals, historic archives and social landscape. The light makes its path by following the traces of time. Wherever it passes, attachments to light and vehicles of light will be produced. Elements surrounded by light will manifest in the process of movement. In short, in my work, light proves the existence of time's movement.

R: As an artist you appear to put space at the forefront of your concerns, rather than a topic, concept or focus on medium. I am not denying that those other concerns are also present, but I am interested in why space, as a construction and a meditation, is so primary to your work.

Space as is a certain construction or thinking. The entire process reveals how to move toward a more remote sub-consciousness from the starting point of reality and to reflect feelings and spiritual levels hidden within the space. If the materials can be seen as the minimum units of space structure, our relation to the space can be concretely expressed in the various combinations of materials. Yet space can be re-produced in the field of art. Recently, I've become curious about the relation between space production and economic activities. For example, spatial economics' axis is convergence. The reason for a certain profession to converge in a particular place is the effect of accidental historic events or that of looping and accumulated self-realization mechanism and expectation. I try to take the analysis of space production in economics as a base and transform this into an exploration of construction of matter and form in art production.

R: Often your work deals with fragments or objects from some past age; there's an archeological quality to it, even if it's not in a straight-forward way. Recently there was a report from Stanford University that says we are entering the sixth great extinction. What kind of traces of our current civilization can you imagine lasting into the future? Is your interest in these remnants from the past connected to this sharp moment of transition we going through in terms of our relationship with the earth?

Since the 15th century to modern times, by our exploitation of fossil fuel, livestock industry development, systematic deforestation and utilization of ocean fishery resources, we have made ourselves an uncertain factor of the whole system. Therefore, I think Anthropocene or the extinction theory is absolutely tenable.

If current traces of civilization would remain in the future, the production system will not be the same. I even doubt whether if the law or moral will remain effective? Our society would probably return to the state of the Stone Age and the original starting point of imitating nature. This also proves the messages of existence that barely connect the past and the future. In his conception of "imitation", pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus explained that the imitation is not merely representing nature but also contains an exploration of imitation rules. In his view, different things encounter one another and the most beautiful harmonies are born from diverse elements; everything originates from conflict. What conflict represents is change and renewal; it is founded on human's cognition and comprehension of nature after countless practices, incarnating human's superiority over nature. Desire forms a motivation that pushes forward and human found the rules of nature and the content of human spirit during the imitation process. What interests me is exactly this: next time, what will human ambition and desire lead us to?

R: With more than 15 years of artist career, your overall practice has evolved from investigation of sensorial materials (sound, light, etc.) to more sophisticated installations supported by in-depth historical research. How do you describe your artistic evolution? What are the threads that remained in terms of subjects and approaches, and what are the possible orientations and shifts you will take?

My current art projects mostly involve historical studies on Taiwan and especially on colonial modernity. The latter is a colonial tool for colonizers to facilitate ruling and was introduced into colonies after the Enlightenment in Europe. "Colonization" is necessarily based on exploitation, discrimination and profit channeling. Although relatively advanced techniques and constructions (like the Western school system, modern medicine, public health, etc. established by Japan in Taiwan to facilitated modernization) were introduced to reach the goals faster and more easily, colonial natures remain indelible, including more important and complicated negative colonial effects on politics, culture, religion, landscape, community, etc. With the advent

of colonizers, began unlimited long-term exploitation. Introducing modernization was meant to facilitate colonization but also accelerated the progress of modernization in colonies, which indicates two sides of the same history. Based on some historical ambiguity and contradiction, historical archives trigger shared perception toward the unique time born and dead at the present. Many archives about "time" thus signify confrontation with history. For me, "time" has its plasticity. The ways of treating light or sound in my past works involve possible mutations of materials and imaginary space. When contemporary artists are hurried by history to linger in it and capture instant occurrences existing in time and space, artists transform their forms hidden within. Neither figurative nor abstract, such forms are closer to disturbed emotions. Artists capture subsequences of affection brought out instantly from diverse materials. These are hybrids mixed with "sensible" substances, seducing me to analyze and form them beyond historiography. Such is arguably the direction of the evolution of my work.

R: Your works often evolve examining the history of a certain place and seeing how it is implied in the contemporary world. One of the regions you penetrated is Tainan where you live for many years. Related projects include The Tsuo Chen Man Project (2012), an installation of mixed media, and Site of Consciousness: Council Room (2018), a collective project involving interventions from other artists and local politicians. In retrospective, what insights have you gained year after year after the continuous effort invested in Tainan in terms of its historical, post-colonial aspects and how these are surfaced in its current state?

For example, my exhibition project in Site of Consciousness: Council Room contains two parts: historical research on specific sites and visualizing narrative structures. Since the venue was the county council, I tried to make content differing from my past works. Especially in terms of political issues, I revisited politicians in the history of autonomy. Having gone through Japanese colonization, Taiwanese elites actively devoted to the local elections after World War II. Different

identities and political stands resulted in several sudden accidents. The video Prophet took the first chair of the Tainan County Council Chen Huazong's story as prototype, showing a young man revisiting Chen's former home in Xuejia, an already collapsed house of eclectic style in desolation, and a sculpture of Chen inside the storage room in the council building. Through his story, I want to represent intertwined networks of reality and fiction behind historic sites.

Another work titled North approaches the building of Tainan County Council and discusses how rulers' ideologies were spread or enhanced through spatial signs. The Kuomintang introduced glamorous architecture style close to palaces in Northern China but did not bring good luck. Several councilors died of illness and accidents, arousing clamorous rumors. Locals rumored that the Chinese-style official building ruined the feng shui, making the council remove the roof crown to appease voices from all sides. I took old photos of the building as reference and remade the pottery roof crown left behind for several decades, finally retrieving the object's original function and beauty as a container, leading to the further reflection that art is never detached from political and ideological frames.

Back to The Tsuo Chen Man Project earlier on, it can be seen as a series of practice and action regarding objects, archives and history. From contemplating private collectors' cow leg bone fossils unearthed in Tsai-Liao Creek, Zuozhen in the 1970s unfolds a series of historical symbols hidden behind materials. Retreating to Taiwan in the 1950s, the indignant Kuomintang regime endeavored to reconstruct an imagination of national territory. The island was an extension of mainland and also the departure for returning there. Fossil traces indicated by rulers through unearthed archaeological artefacts proved Taiwan and Mainland were linked by bridges and belonged to the same vein. After another fifty years, fossil fever already faded and barren mountains in Zuozhen became ideal recycle and landfill sites. Jobless and homeless people suffered and made a living by gleaning. Some held spades and others held pickaxes. They carefully rummaged in wasteyards. The scene is nevertheless quite similar to that of Tsai-Liao Creek banks amid fossil fever in the 1970s; people of all

ages devoted to finding ancient bones that prove the existence of "Homo sapiens". No history is formed incidentally. From Tsuo Chen Man Project to Site of Consciousness: Council Room, through historical sameness and difference represented, I try to find autonomous interpretations beyond objective ones, manifesting internal space through art and constructing another possible interpretation of historical archives through this "imaginary regime."

R: Topologically, your other projects are extended to Peru, Singapore and Java through the botanical aspects which reflect intertwined colonial histories of/among these regions. What artistic inspirations you gained in researching and realizing these projects? Do you think your Asian background contributes to alternative visions on these issues than those of Westerners?

The Cinchona tree field project you mentioned signifies tracing a colonial history gradually forgotten. Its first stop was part of "Micro-Historical in Peru" planned by Idolon Studio in 2018. I studied Hoshi Pharmaceutical director Hajime Hoshi's traces of creating a Cinchona tree plantation yard of 3,000 square-kilometers in Peru in 1918. In 2019, I took the theme "The Quinology in the East Indies" and made interviews about the history of Indonesia's plantation of Quina in Western Java. I also included field study records on the Cinchona tree afforestation park set up by Hoshi Pharmaceutical in Jihiben, Taitung in 1924. Not long since, Cinchona tree plantation across Peru, Java, Japan and Taiwan has made "Quinology" an imperialist weapon. Foreign tropical plants and their forestation facilitated the consolidation of imperial rule and colonial expansion. The colonies were thus constructed into profitable new territories. My works attempt to outline how Cinchona tree plantation was run as an imperialist enterprise and its global trajectory as a way of colonist and economic expansion. The project will continue in the future.

For me, my Asian identity allows for more possibilities of imagination than westerners in confronting my own history. Neither an individual nor an imagination of the West on the East, Asia is a relatively wide

notion. A suitable definition of it is a plural and diverse collective developing organically. Similarly, imagination on Asia is not single but plural and diverse among Asian civilizations. Rooted in Asia's complex history, such imagination is also highly ambiguous and inherently contradictory. It can be colonist or relate to independent movements; it is conservative but also revolutionary; it can be a situation where nationalism and internationalism coexist. Europe's definition of Asia in turn shapes Europeans' self-understanding. Asia has been faced with questions of national self-determination while intersecting with imperialist visions. Imagination of Asia may be in contrast to Europe's civilization but also a geographic issue. Geographically, Asia is situated at the intersection of two major seismic belts. Taiwan is situated at a converged boundary with numerous volcanoes and frequent, intense earthquakes. The island's natural closedness involves a natural connectivity. There are various possibilities between the island of Taiwan and the world. We might start from ourselves in imagining Asia.

R: You made several residency projects around the world; the sites range from Sapporo, Seoul to Paris with their distinct geographies, characteristics and cultures. As an artist in residency, how do you approach foreign localities and search out methods of investigation and artistic practice? And please talk about the residency experiences that cast strong impacts on you.

Due to cultural differences and language barriers, when an artist takes on a residency overseas, his or her identity as an "other" is more similar to that of a "prehistoric man" hidden in ordinary life. To a certain extent, for me, this relies largely on the primitive instinct to carry out tasks of exploration, collecting, understanding and creation in different cities or regions. Yet, meanwhile, the artist in residency is also an anthropologist making field research and interviews, especially work about archive archaeology. Archive is seen as a place of the past, containing traces of collective memories of a country, a people or a group. Through archive, an artist can also understand the relations that affect our past, present and future. Archive is not only the

record, reflection or icons of an event; it also forms the event itself and thus influences the present and the future.

Let me take my residencies in Sapporo and Seoul as examples to discuss artistic practice. Both projects in the two cities involve the idea of "place". My residency project in Sapporo was in wintertime. At the beginning, I got to understand the place through Hokkaido's natural history, geology, ethnology, archeology or traces of recent times. Hokkaido is situated in the north of Japan. Compared to the culture of Japan's largest island, the region's history is more connected to culture of the north-eastern region, pre-modern Eurasia culture, Jomon culture, Okhotsk culture or Aynu culture. Art arguably influences culture most directly. When an artist from a subtropical country stays in Hokkaido and sees the pure white snow, he or she comes to understand the dreamlike fantasy such a white sphere brings to tourists. However, for Sapporo residents, this means cruel reality. Far from some romantic imagination, snow puts trials to all beings. In confronting local history, one finds stories hidden in Aynu, the Republic of Ezo or the Sakhalin region during the Second World War. That's why an artist has to reside personally at some place and try to become an "insider" from an "other".

As for Seoul, it embodies a sample of urban life that is faster than real-time. City is a kind of relic of modern life. Spectacles of consumer culture are omnipresent in the entire city of Seoul. I picked up wastes around the industrial area where the artist village in Seoul was situated. Through a modernologic way, I dug out objects with cultural symbolic meanings, such as military boots of the Korean Army and plastic tea tables printed with patterns of Mother-Of-Pearl Lacquer. I juxtaposed them with the volcano rocks I picked up on Ulleung-do . The icons respectively represent a certain subjectivity of Korea. I moved the objects encountered by chance or obtained spontaneously from the streets outside into the studio. Through recombination and alteration and by means of affectional and spiritual levels hidden within materials, the whole process is an attempt to reveal the "identity" of a place and how it influences local residents. In short, I'd like to represent how contemporary art gets closely related to the production of reality.

Ron Hanson is editor of the international arts magazine White Fungus. Launched in Wellington in 2004, the magazine has been based in Taiwan since 2009 but maintains coverage of New Zealand arts and culture.

Works

Darkness Equation

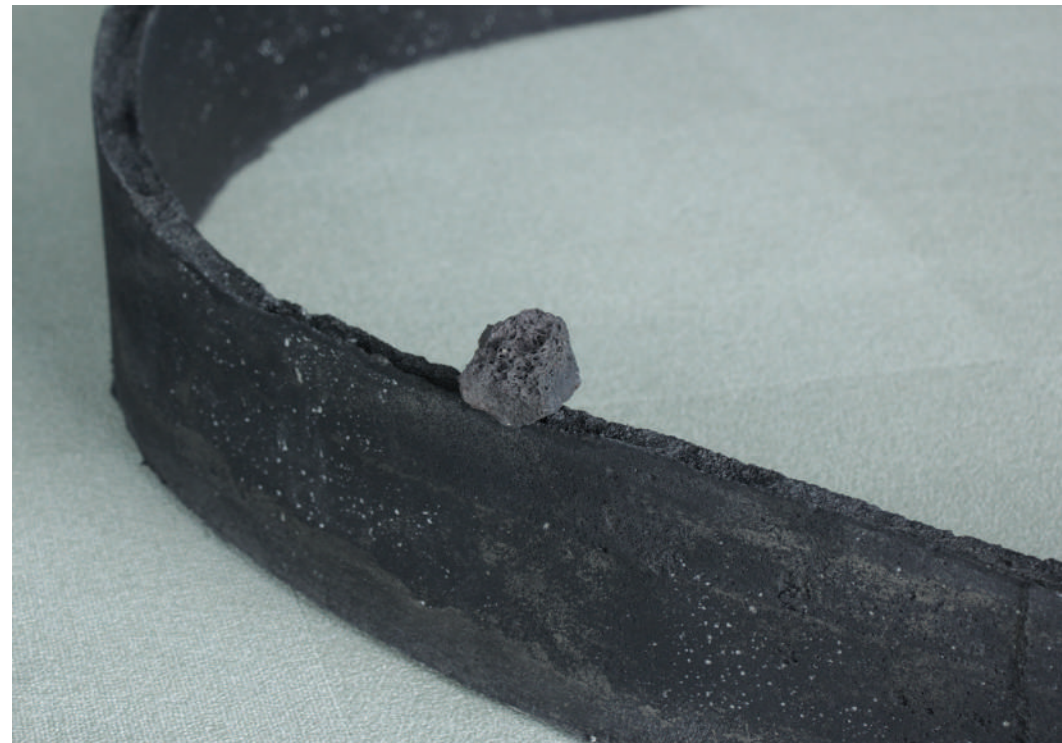
Concrete, VHS tape, Single channel video

Size Variable

2017

With the work "Darkness Equation", there is a temptation to draw a boundary line which cannot be defined by cultural geography. The rock-covered landscape formed by several eruptions of the Mount Mihara volcano symbolizes the uneasiness of the community and the expectation of disaster. This black sand desert bedded with volcanic rock, providing people with a physical experience of heterogeneous space and illusions, stimulates an imagination for culture workers in terms of Izu Oshima.

These fictional disasters and horror movies contribute*, therefore, to our understanding/misunderstanding of this place. I am going to investigate and extend the process that helps visualize symbols in a culture system, and, in the meantime, study the process by which materiality helps constitute bias, metaphors and invisible history.





Turnstile

Synthetic fabric, Moisturizing gel, Electric cable, Engine oil, Combat boots, Concrete, Bricks, Rubber bands, Concrete, Rocks, Plastic rope, Elastic band, Non-woven fabric, Fluorescent bulb, Mirror, Toothpaste

Size Variable

2015

'Turnstile' represents my experience living in Seoul. It embodies a series of mental and cerebral transformation in my consciousness. Through metaphors in images, sculptures, and videos, I turn my own experiences of desire as well as that of the environment, on both an emotional and aesthetic level, into physicality.

During the process of collecting discarded materials (synthetic fabric, manila paper, Styrofoam, electric cables, chipboards, fluorescent bulbs, plastic bags, and other petrochemical products) near the artist residency site, I discovered a few objects possessing unique meanings: for example, a pair of Republic of Korea Army combat boots and a plastic tea table with mother-of-pearl lacquer decorations. I placed these objects with the volcanic rocks that I found on the Ulleung-do Island. These icons symbolize some sort of solidarity of Korea as a nation. My investigation focused more on the material qualities, not the constitution, of iconography, however.

I painstakingly hauled my discoveries, some were encountered, and others were sought after, back to the studio, rearranged and modified them, and then carefully positioned them inside a well-conditioned indoor space. The whole process revealed how a distant sub consciousness could be channeled through reality, and furthermore reflected the emotive as well as spiritual components hidden within materials.

I intend to have the viewers wonder amongst the different art pieces, forming new connections with the inherent structures of various materials. The viewers may be able to interpret freely and become witnesses to the subtle signs of correspondence between a variety of civilizations. Working as an artist-in-residence is not only a methodology but also a tool for production. As if using a stone implement in prehistory times, I captured my "artwork" through labor, and demonstrated how art is closely related to a manufactured reality.



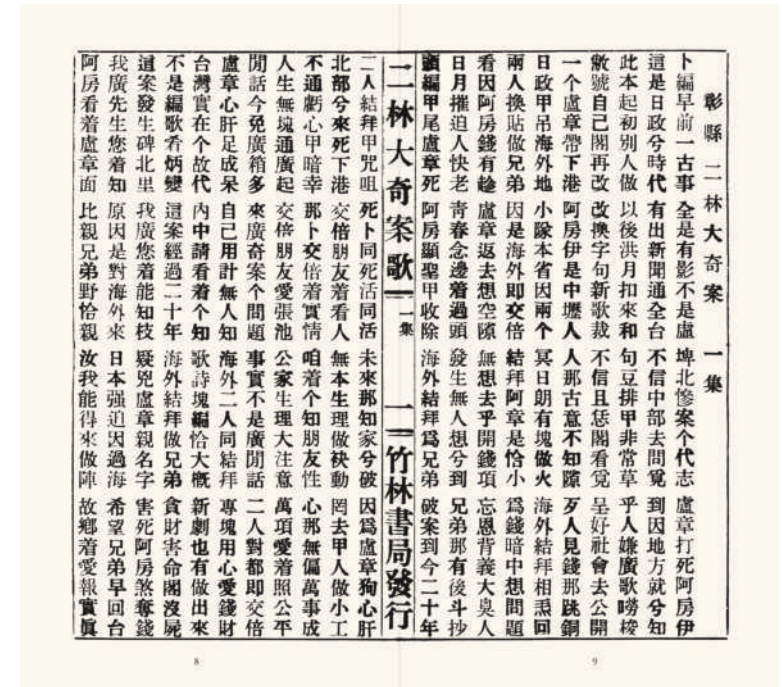
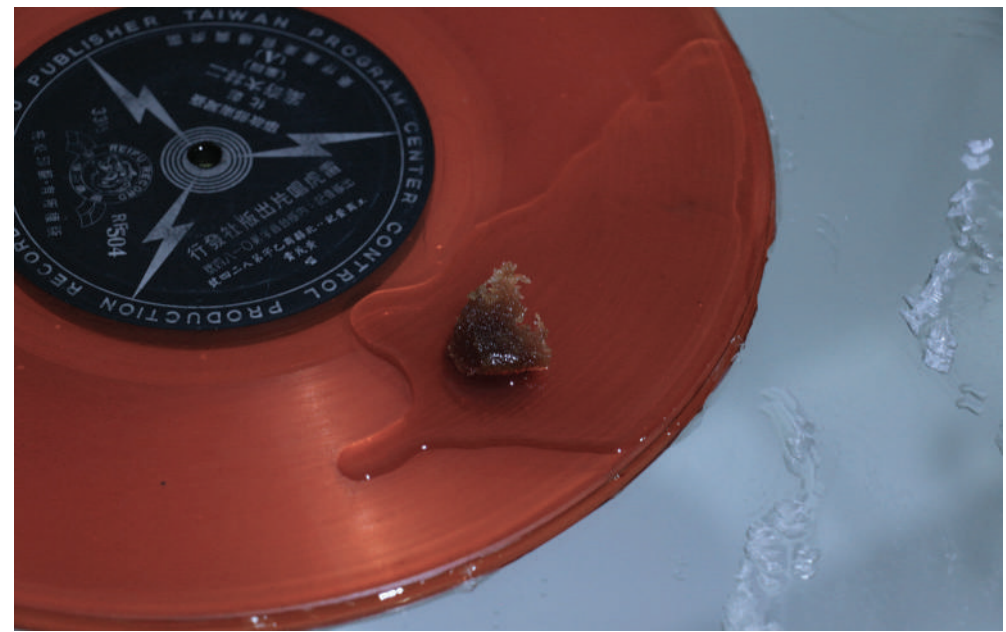


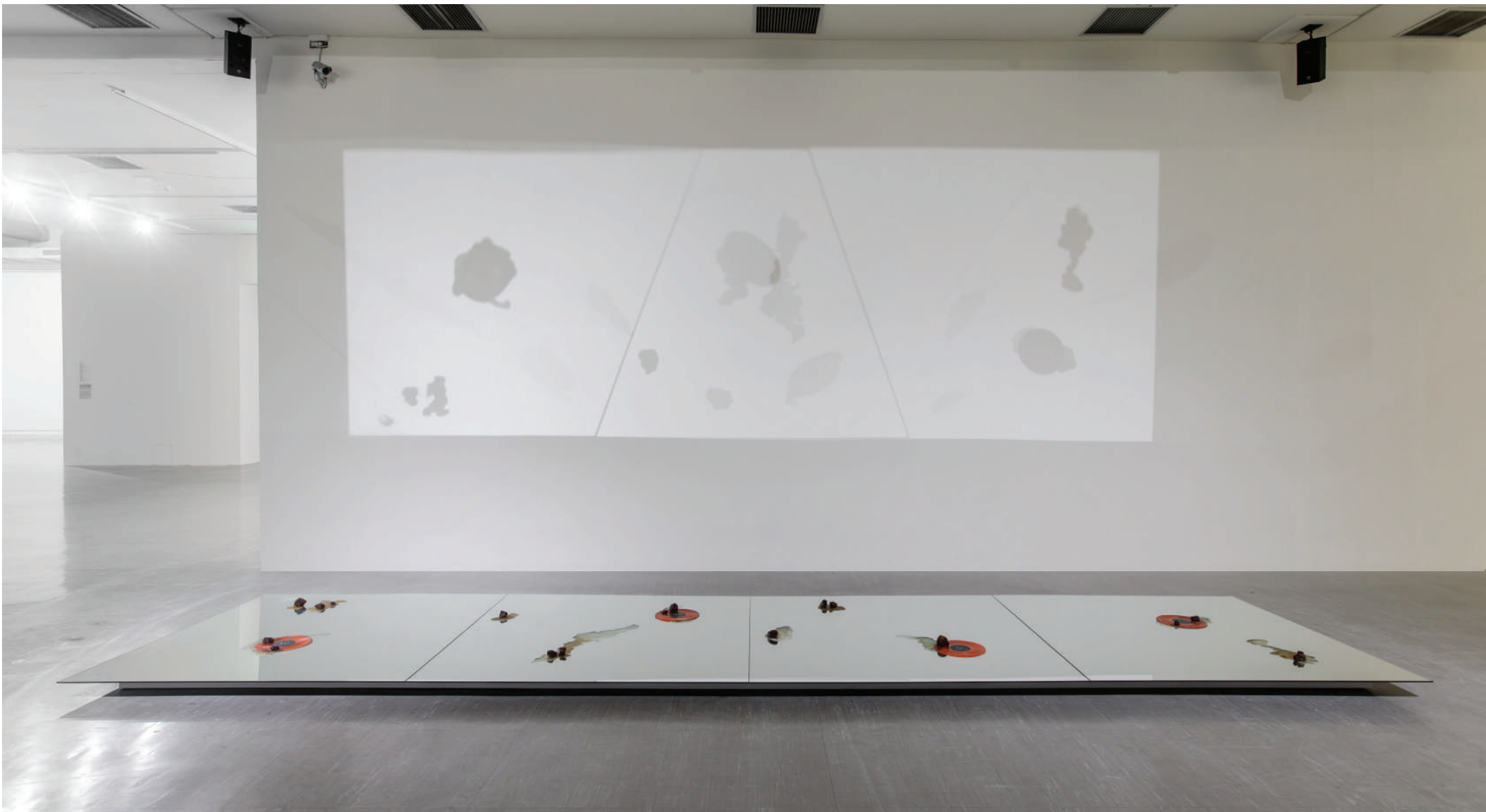
Murder: Er lin qi an

Sucrose and Environmental Record (66'50")
Size Variable
2014

The Er lin murder case took place from 1941 to 1944 in Chunghua, Taiwan. The victim, Shi A-Fan, and the offender, Lu Chung were Taiwanese soldiers recruited by the Japanese government. Lu coveted his sworn brother Shi's wealth and murdered for money. Shi's body was found buried in a field of sugarcane. All evidence pointed towards Lu's assault but Lu would not admit to the crime. The investigators had to stage a scenario in which Shi's unrested ghost came back to haunt the guilty for Lu to finally admit to the murder. Later on, the Er lin incident was adapted to a Taiwanese Opera piece titled The Tale of Er lin. My work Murder: Er lin qi an is about the archaeology of sound.

A vinyl record of The Tale of Er lin is brought back to the sugarcane field and played there. The story-filled melody mixes with the surrounding sound to create layers of clashes between different audio fields. A fracture through which multiple sets of time and space could be observed thus forms: an encounter between the ghost of Japanese Occupation Period and the ghost of quantum entanglement. The sound of work created in collaboration with sound artist Yannick Dauby.





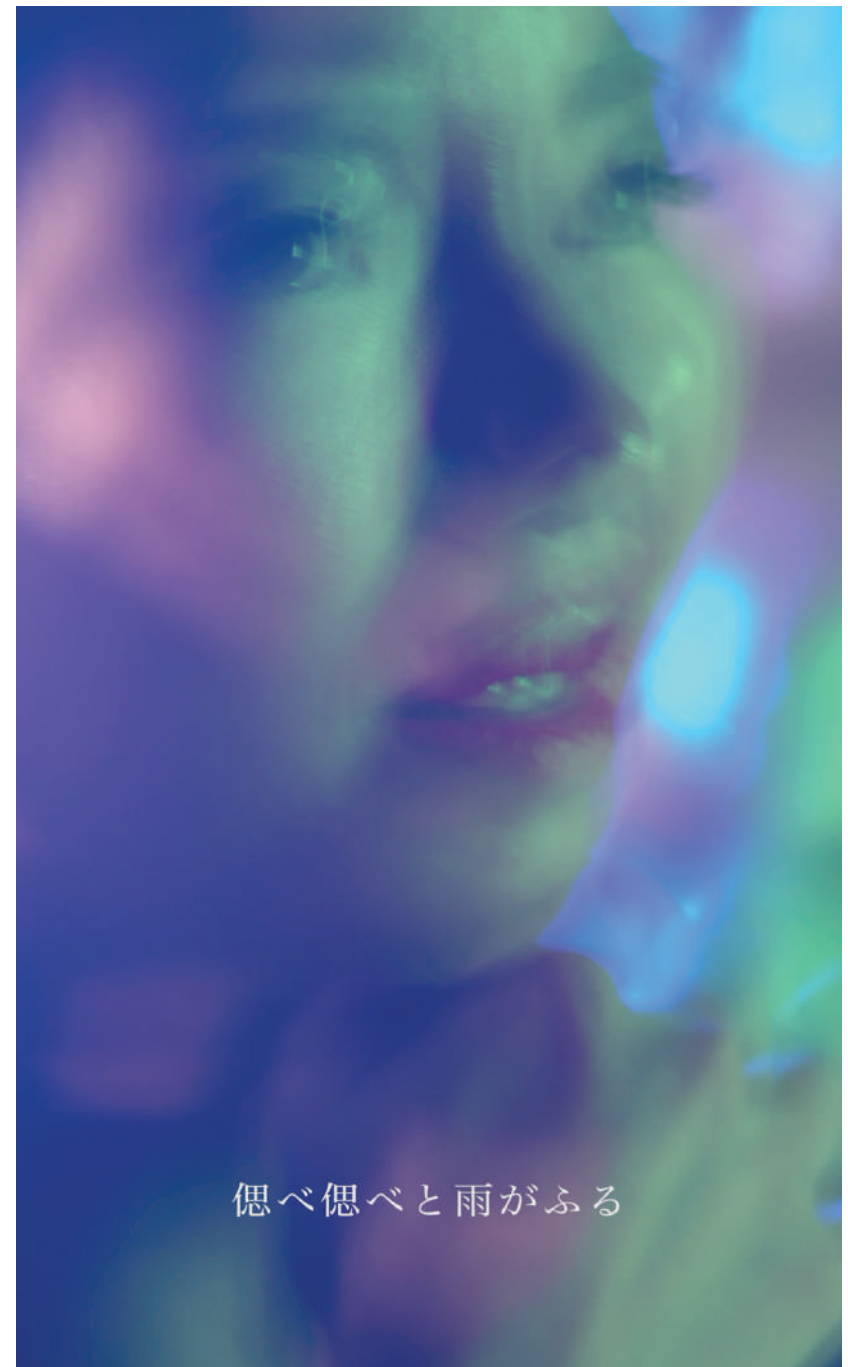
Temporary Physical Evidence

Sandbag, Aluminum plate, Stick, Mirror, Digital printing, Cement, Wire rope, Single channel video (6'15")
Size Variable
2020

The work Temporary Physical Evidence investigates "material culture" and "images of the times" for a spatial transformation of "7 by DOUCHANGLEE". Based on an imagination of "modern", it explores the remains of colonial modernity in modern life. "Café" interpreted through a single-channel video features a café waitress in the image of a "modern urban woman" of the 1930s, along with all kinds of alcohol, forming a space with functions similar to those of contemporary bars for social intercourse and nightlife. With the flashing neon light reflected through the mirror, and the music flowing from the phonograph, the sentiment is mesmerizing, echoing the pursuit of rhythm and speed in modern life. "Café" provides a space different from those in daily life, and, along with the interplay with the stimulation from the café waitress' service, forms an impression of the hedonism in people's lives in the late Japanese colonization period, which continues to the present.

As the "physical evidence" of the transformed space characteristics, piles of transparent sandbags and the giant cement block necklace turn "7 by DOUCHANGLEE" into a pseudo-relic. The so-called "relic" refers to the buildings or traces left from the lives of the predecessors, such as tombs, foundations, ateliers, etc. When the Mihashicho cemetery went from illegal settlement to urban renewal, and became a park completely renovated in 2003, its real "remains" have disappeared or been deeply buried underground. Clothes are wrapped in or carried by transparent, temporary and fluid sandbag structures, endowing a monument for "memory" to depend on. When a monument becomes a mediated space, the "reality" and "memory" it carries not only begin to integrate, but also start to flow, and attempt to make every object in "7 by DOUCHANGLEE" a temporary "physical evidence" supporting the history of "Tiaotong".





惚べ惚べと雨がふる

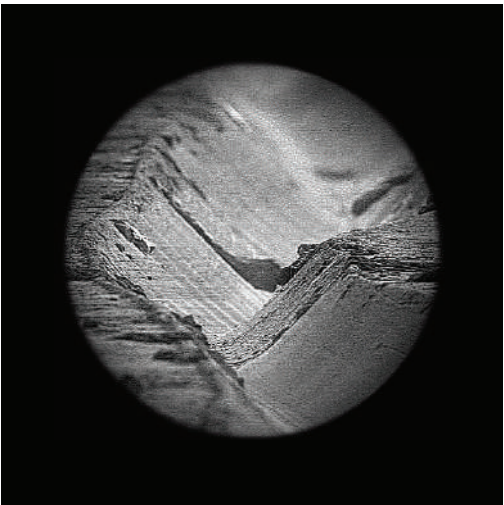
The Tsuo Chen Man Project

Microscope, Turntables, Sound system, Animal fossils
Size Variable
2012

'Tsuo Chen Man Project', the main thread of my work can be regarded as a series of archeological tasks towards objects, archives and culture. The work revolves around fossils of a cattle leg excavated in the Tsai-Liao Stream in Tsuo-Chen, Tainan in the 1970s as well as discarded phonograph records found in a recycling processing plant in Tsuo-Chen afterwards.

In the installation, images were shown through the monitoring of a microscope to construct a way of sensible interpretation beyond reason and to gaze upon the intricate perception of substance. Imagination over geographical conception is thus extended to a combination of ready-mades found in the area. An imaginary regime is thus created.





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Prophet and North

Two channels video, Object, Flowers, Pottery
Size Variable
2018

The work Prophet and North attempts to re-examine the political figures in the history of autonomy, especially the early Tainan County Council. Having gone through the Japanese colonization, Taiwanese elites actively devoted themselves to the participation of local elections after World War II. Before becoming the first chair of the Tainan County Council, Chen Huazong had been the head of Xuejia region in Showa 10 (1935), when the entire Office of the Taiwan Governor-General was mobilized to hold the Taiwan Exposition to commemorate the 40th anniversary of Japan's governance of Taiwan, promoting local urban planning and land division. Xuejia thus became one of the few townships where urban planning was completed before the war.

In 1947, the February 28 incident broke out. Chen Huazong, Senator Wu Xinrong and others were arrested, being accused of civil disturbance. Originally sentenced to death, they were then acquitted of the charge. After being released from prison, Chen Huazong was actively participated in Taiwan's politics. He has served as the county commissioner for four terms consecutively and became the leader of the "Beimen Group", the latter being the precursor of the "Sea Group." In November 1968, Chen Huazong as senator of the Taiwan Province was killed in a car accident near the Presidential Office Building on his way to the provincial council guest house in Taipei, with his car being crashed by a truck. He passed away after being sent to a hospital. The sudden accident led to the long-time local rumor that his death was related to his advocacy in the county council to establish an international port in the North Gate.

Prophet takes Chen Huazong as the prototype of the story. It begins with a young man revisiting Chen's former residence: an eclectic-style building hidden in a deserted place infested with weed that has been ruined for a long time, before taking to the statue of Chen Huazong in the storage room of the council building. Through his story, I attempt to show the many intertwined networks of reality and fusion behind a historic site.

The part of work, digs into the building of the Tainan City Council, discussing how the ideology of the country's rulers can be spread or enhanced by symbols in space. Completed in 1980, the council building has an Eight Trigrams-shaped roof whose corners and ridge were ornamented with statues of immortals riding beasts appropriated from ancient Chinese architecture. This kind of architectural elements resembling the style of the northern palaces appeared abundantly in the official architectural design of the 1970s, incarnating how art was employed as an instrument for political propaganda.

After the county council was moved into the building, the Eight Trigrams with the function of exorcism and golden glazed tiles as symbols of emperor failed to bring better feng shui. Many councilors died of disease or accidents, arousing clamorous rumors. The county people rumored that the Chinese-style official building had the negative effect of worsening the feng shui, leading to the final decision of the council to remove the roof crown to appease the voices from all parties. Although this incident happened after Chen Huazong had died of the car accident for more than a decade, all sorts of rumors around local politics implying coincidences and conspiracies remained to be exorcised. I took a photo of the completion of the council building as reference and remade the pottery roof crown that had been left behind for decades. Finally, the original function and beauty of the object as a container got restored. But how can life be separated from frames of politics and ideology? I still doubt.



Space-Between

Concrete, Glass, Plastic sheet, Bear skull, Plastic belt

Size Variable

2017

(A collaboration between Dominique Baron-Bonarjee and Ting Chaong-Wen)

A meeting of non-human subjectivities and the living body, through the relationship of spirit and matter, in the installation "Space Between", Chaong-Wen's focus on materials, such as concrete, water, glass, animal skulls, plastic and light form a passageway of elements that Dominique inhabits as live presence. Seeking an embodied encounter with the inanimate materials through the material of the human body, she develops a ritual that dwells on the imperceptible interactions that weave a network of co-existence between all things. Partly inspired by the practices of the Yamabushi monks of the Shugendō cult, whose long pilgrimages through sites of deep nature are a way towards connecting to vaster cycles of existence.

Starting off with the native characteristics and conditions of materials, the work Space-Between further explores the inner relationship these have with its extended materials in given cultural contexts. Through the use of moving image, water, concrete, plastic canvas, metal and animal skeletons, the work aims to communicate the invisible tension of the surface, energy vibes and frequency, in order to inspire the redefinition of the phenomenal world of all beings.









Dowsing and Earth Spirit

Coral stone, Synthetic fiber, Object, Water, Single-channel video (27'30")
Size Variable
2019

"Dowsing and Earth Spirit" refers to the story of poet Lu Yongchuan which inspires the artist's imagination of a fictional narrative thread. In different periods, the poet has been an intellectual, a traitor, a lay Buddhist or a poet. In his later years, he resided in a Buddhist temple at the foot of mountains, living in depression till the last day of his life. His figure is transformed into a ghost lingering among waterways in the images, guiding the viewer to visit special scenes around the national park: stalactite Guanyin statues, shell mound relics and waters of sulphide springs which represent multiple natural and artificial spaces. Each space is linked to one another through imperceptible interactions which compose the network existing among all things. Meanwhile, the artist roams among memory, consciousness, experience and feedback, like in an "unfinished dialogue" with himself.

According to the artist, "The universe is like a sewer where lots of frustrations are accumulated: volcano explosions, dead coral masses and pouring sulphide springs. As for man, he always returns to the original point; like it or not, the latter equals suffering."





TING Chaong-Wen

Your work through various media revolves around issues of identity, foreignness and their constructedness. What motivated you to take such orientation? How does your life abroad contribute to such creative practice and related reflections?

I believe that ‘knowing where the artist is (I am)’ is an important thing. I believe in speaking from your own perspective, and never speak as others. So yes, I do think that being a Taiwanese living in Europe for a decade definitely shaped who I am in some ways, and that shaped the works I made. It doesn’t mean that I can only talk about my personal experiences, instead, it’s ‘talking about anything I want from my own perspective’.

Meanwhile, I also see my works transformed based on the change of my position in the society. For example, *GODISAWOMAN*, a project of mine made in 2012, is a book revisiting my memory of being detained at Gatwick Airport in London, which is a very personal story that happened to me, as an immigrant. In 2014–15, another project of mine, *How to get out of London in 30 days*, was made during the time I was painfully waiting for my British visa. It discusses the love-and-hate relationship between immigrants and the country they live in, through humor and sarcasm. And then in 2017, I was the artist in residence at Stuart Hall Library at Iniva, London. In the project I made, *On the Desert*

04 *Mount Mihara Monogatari*, VHS Tape (Film: Ring 1998), 320 × 125 cm, 2018

05 *Turnstile-Plastic Surgery*, 75 × 50 cm, 2017

06 *Turnstile-Plastic Surgery #03*, Digital fabric, 75 × 50 cm, 2019



Island, I applied the audio archive of the library, the radio show Desert Island Disc in which professor Hall was a guest, to form an audio/physical walk/journey for the audience. In the work, audiences/listeners/participants are asked to imagine to be cast on a desert island, looking for the answers to where this island is and who they are. At the end, it was realised that those were not the questions at stake.

With the three different projects in mind, I feel that the foreignness/outsiderness in the projects are fading away, being replaced with a growing sense of localness. I know it's hard to imagine or feel it through just the texts here. Furthermore, I am spending more time in Asia, especially Taiwan, these couple years. I had a residency at MMCA, Seoul, and I am currently having a residency at Taitung Art Museum. I feel that my positions are also different in the projects I made here. It doesn't mean that I am changing my interest or direction, just that the perspectives are different.

You made several residency projects around the world; the sites range from Sapporo, Seoul to Paris with their distinct geographies, characteristics and cultures. As an artist in residency, how do you approach foreign localities and search out methods of investigation and artistic practice? And please talk about the residency experiences that cast strong impacts on you.

Due to cultural differences and language barriers, when an artist takes on a residency

overseas, his or her identity as an “other” is more similar to that of a “prehistoric man” hidden in ordinary life. To a certain extent, for me, this relies largely on the primitive instinct to carry out tasks of exploration, collecting, understanding and creation in different cities or regions. Yet, meanwhile, the artist in residency is also an anthropologist making field research and interviews, especially work about archive archaeology. Archive is seen as a place of the past, containing traces of collective memories of a country, a people or a group. Through archive, an artist can also understand the relations that affect our past, present and future. Archive is not only the record, reflection or icons of an event; it also forms the event itself and thus influences the present and the future.

Let me take my residencies in Sapporo and Seoul as examples to discuss artistic practice. Both projects in the two cities involve the idea of “place”. My residency project in Sapporo was in wintertime. At the beginning, I got to understand the place through Hokkaido’s natural history, geology, ethnology, archeology or traces of recent times. Hokkaido is situated in the north of Japan. Compared to the culture of Japan’s largest island, the region’s history is more connected to culture of the north-eastern region, pre-modern

Eurasia culture, Jomon culture, Okhotsk culture or Aynu culture. Art arguably influences culture most directly. When an artist from a subtropical country stays in Hokkaido and sees the pure white snow, he or she comes to understand the dreamlike fantasy such a white sphere brings to tourists. However, for Sapporo residents, this means cruel reality. Far from some romantic imagination, snow puts trials to all beings. In confronting local history, one finds stories hidden in Aynu, the Republic of Ezo or the Sakhalin region during the Second World War. That’s why an artist has to reside personally at some place and try to become an “insider” from an “other”.

As for Seoul, it embodies a sample of urban life that is faster than real-time. City is a kind of relic of modern life. Spectacles of consumer culture are omnipresent in the entire city of Seoul. I picked up wastes around the industrial area where the artist village in Seoul was situated. Through a modernologic way, I dug out objects with cultural symbolic meanings, such as military boots of the Korean Army and plastic tea tables printed with patterns of Mother-Of-Pearl Lacquer. I juxtaposed them with the volcano rocks I picked up on Ulleung-do. The icons respectively represent a certain subjectivity of

Korea. I moved the objects encountered by chance or obtained spontaneously objects from the streets outside into the studio. Through recombination and alteration and by means of affectional and spiritual levels hidden within materials, the whole process is an attempt to reveal the “identity” of a place and how it influences local residents. In short, I’d like to represent how contemporary art gets closely related to the production of reality.

Please talk about *Turnstile* and *Mount Mihara Monogatari* shown in the NADA project.

Turnstile series was made during my residency in the Art Space in Seoul, Korea in 2015. It symbolizes a series of changes in psychology and thinking. The environment and experience of individual desire are incarnated through metaphors of images, sculptures and films, both emotionally and aesthetically. Motifs on the computer-generated fabric respectively represent a kind of Korean subjectivity. The fabric materials are made through an “imitation” of commodity advertising. Advertising media shape collective fevers. Our desires in the consumption era are mastered by images of commodities. The images are reassembled and edited, revealing how to arrive at some remote unconsciousness from the reality and reflect sensational and spiritual hidden within



certain cultures. Like Korea's dolmen culture which represents prehistoric humans' ambition of challenging nature, if collective memories can be stored in our veins, the current trend of cosmetic surgery in Korea represents alteration and breaking of the principle of naturalness.

Mount Mihara Monogatari project was done between 2016 and 2017. Originating from my four field trips and surveys in Mount Mihara, Japan, its first part of the begins with images of women living on the volcanic island Izu Ōshima. Since time immemorial, the island women carried the heavy load of family livelihood. In traditional kimonos and their waist-length hair combed into buns, they carried charcoal on their heads, transporting materials to the destinations along steep and crooked stairs around fishing ports. They were generally called "Anko". As time went by, images of "Anko" became sightseeing ambassadors greeting tourists by the ports. Both "Anko" and the volcano are like incarnations of Izu Ōshima. This incited me to further explore and extend our geographic imaginations, the re-insertion into cultural production system and visualization process, and reflect on how to transform emotion, metaphors and personal histories through images. In the original novel adapted into the

horror film *Ring* (1998), the female protagonist Sadako Yamamura's hometown is on Izu Ōshima. The story's background involves Sadako's mother who committed suicide by jumping into the volcano of Mount Mihara. In fact, the mountain has become a famous place for suicide—as the Japanese call it—since Shōwa era; a college girl graduated from Jissen Joshi Gakuen Senior High School chose to commit suicide by jumping into the mountain following friends' suggestion. Similarly, at the ending of *Godzilla* film series (1984), the monster was introduced to the volcano of Mount Mihara and fell into its wild flames. The stories penetrate our daily life by way of cultures through communication. They also inspired me to create *Darkness Equation: From the Corner of the Eye*.

“What is more, each thing moves to its own place”, wrote Aristotle in the Book IV of *Physics*. Place is about knowledge of space. It is also abstract, immaterial and conceptual. Both the two works take particular “places” as protagonists; historic contexts and political meanings within the spaces are formed and transformed into signs of visual culture in the society. Also, de-objectification and deterritorialization of place itself make it difficult to experience and understand it

physically. I try to further explore and trace the mutation of “place” in the process of cultural production, and evoke a “sense of place” through the sensible experience in the material culture. When the viewer echoes with the works, the works come to re-affirm new places.

