

The Cold War in Asia

VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE COLD WAR AND POSTCOLONIAL STRUGGLES

ART IN EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

Edited by Midori Yamamura and Yu-Chieh Li



Visual Representations of the Cold War and Postcolonial Struggles

The essays and artworks gathered in this volume examine the visual manifestations of postcolonial struggles in art in East and Southeast Asia, as the world transitioned from the communist/capitalist ideological divide into the new global power structure under neoliberalism that started taking shape during the Cold War.

The contributors to this volume investigate the visual art that emerged in Australia, China, Cambodia, Indonesia, Korea, Okinawa, and the Philippines. With their critical views and new approaches, the scholars and curators examine how visual art from postcolonial countries deviated from the communist/capitalist dichotomy to explore issues of identity, environment, rapid commercialization of art, and independence. These foci offer windows into some lesser-known aspects of the Cold War, including humanistic responses to the neo-imperial exploitations of people and resources as capitalism transformed into its most aggressive form.

Given its unique approach, this seminal study will be of great value to scholars of 20th-century East and Southeast Asian art history and visual and cultural studies.

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Visual Representations of the Cold War and Postcolonial Struggles

Art in East and Southeast Asia

Edited by Midori Yamamura and Yu-Chieh Li



First published 2021 by Routledge 2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge 605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN: 978-0-367-61529-1 (hbk) ISBN: 978-0-367-61531-4 (pbk) ISBN: 978-1-003-10539-8 (ebk)

Typeset in Galliard SPi Global, India

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Contributors

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- Harsono, FX FX Harsono was among a group of young artists who founded Indonesia's New Art Movement (*Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru*), which emphasized an experimental, conceptual approach, the use of everyday materials, and engagement with social and political issues. Over recent decades that have seen vast transformations in Indonesia, Harsono has continuously explored the artist's role in society, particularly in terms of his relationship to history. During Indonesia's dictatorial Suharto regime (1967-98), his installation and performance works were eloquent acts of

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protest against an oppressive state. Following the regime's fall in 1998, he embarked on an ongoing exploration of his own family history and the position of minorities in society, especially his own Chinese-Indonesian community. Harsono received the first Joseph Balestier Award for the Freedom of Art and the Prince Claus Fund Laureate Award. He has participated in key local and international biennales, including the 20th Biennale of Sydney (2016), the Jogja Biennale XII, Yogyakarta, Indonesia (2013), the 4th Moscow Biennale (2011), the 3rd Kwangju Biennale, South Korea (2000), and the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Australia (1993).

Jennison, Rebecca

- Professor Emerita, Department of Humanities, Kyoto Seika University.
 Rebecca Jennison has collaborated with scholars and artists in Japan working on diaspora and contemporary art in East Asia, including the "Asia, Politics, Art" (2006-2008), and has published in such journals as Asian Diasporic Visual Cultures and the Americas and Inter-Asia Cultural Studies as well as anthologies such as Performance, Feminism and Affect in Neoliberal Times (Palgrave, 2017) and Still Hear the Wound: Toward an Asia, Politics and Art to Come (Cornell East Asia Series, 2015). She received an MA in East Asian Languages and Literatures from Cornell University and has been based in Kyoto for several decades. Her current research focuses on Tomiyama Taeko and other contemporary artists from the perspective of postcolonial and transnational studies and visual culture.
- Kao, Jun-Honn Kao Jun-Honn lives and works in Shulin District, New Taipei City, Taiwan. His artistic practice focuses on decoloniality and the voices of the working class under the suppression of neoliberalism and the Asian Cold War, through video art, performance, and writing. Having studied Fine Arts at Taipei National University of the Arts, Kao is now a council member of Taipei Contemporary Art Center (TCAC) and project director of "East Asia Multitude Meeting 2013: Post-Occupy (art/ activism) Study." His solo exhibitions include Taoist Trinity Fairyland (Kuandu Museum of Fine Arts, Taipei, 2018), Abandoned Path: A Creator's Geopolitical Method (A+ Contemporary Project, Taipei, 2017), Overtime in Tokyo (Amateur's Revolt, Tokyo, 2015), and Pass-Platform of Friends (Auditorium of Taishin Bank Foundation for Arts and Culture, Taipei, 2008). His group exhibitions include Wild Rhizome-2018 Taiwan Art Biennial (National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taichung, 2018), The Essential: New Acquisitions (Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts, Kaohsiung, 2018), Taipei Biennial 2016: Gestures and archives of the present, genealogies of the future (Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, 2016), and Asia Triennial Manchester-Harmonious Society (Museum of Science & Industry, Manchester, 2015).
- Lê, Dinh Q. Growing up in Vietnam near the border of Cambodia, Lê and his family fled Vietnam when the Khmer Rouge invaded his hometown

in 1978. Lê studied photography at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and received his MFA from the School of Visual Arts, New York. He most famously grapples with sociopolitical issues around the Vietnam War. Lê has exhibited extensively in museums around the world, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Mori Art Museum in Tokyo, and the Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies. He had a major mid-career survey, *A Tapestry of Memories: The Art of Dinh Q, Le*, at Bellevue Arts Museum, Washington. His works are in the collections of The Museum of Modern Art, New York, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Portland Art Museum, The Bronx Museum, New York, and The Israel Museum. A co-founder of the Vietnam Foundation for the Arts (VNFA) and Sàn Art, he now lives and works in Ho Chi Minh City.

Lee, Jung Joon

- Associate Professor of History and Theory of Photography, Rhode Island School of Design.
- Lee is an art historian whose interests span the intersections of art and politics, transnational militarism and decoloniality, and gender and sexuality. Lee received her PhD from The Graduate Center, The City University of New York. Her current book project examines how the medium of photography and its subjects have been politicized through transnational militarism—a legacy of the Cold War—shaping life in the two Koreas and beyond. Lee has published in such journals as *History of Photography*, *Journal of Korean Studies, Trans-Asia Photography Review* and *photographies* as well as anthologies such as *Photography and Imagination* (Routledge, 2020) and *Constructing the Memory of War in Visual Culture since* 1914: The Eye on War (Routledge, 2018).

Li, Yu-Chieh

- Research Assistant Professor in the Department of Visual Studies, Lingnan University.
- Prior to joining Lingnan University, Li was a Judith Neilson Postdoctoral Fellow in Contemporary Art at UNSW Art and Design, Sydney (2018-2020), and an adjunct researcher at Tate Research Centre: Asia (2017-2018). Her interests encompass performance art and artist-led research responding to decolonial discourses in the Sinosphere as well as the tension between locally generated art discourses and neoliberal globalization. Currently, she is working on a book about the artistic autonomy of post-socialist China. Her edited volume *Xu Bing: Beyond the Book from the Sky* was recently published by Springer Verlag.

Ma, Lesley

Curator, Ink Art, M+.

At M+, the museum of visual culture in Hong Kong, Ma curated *The Weight* of Lightness: Ink Art at M+ (2017-18). Previously, she co-curated the Para

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Site exhibition *Great Crescent: Art and Agitation in the 1960s – Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan* (2013-16). From 2005 to 2009, she was Project Director at Cai Guo-Qiang Studio, New York and, from 2011 to 2012, Curatorial Coordinator at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Ma received a PhD in Art History, Theory, and Criticism from the University of California, San Diego.

Nelson, Roger

Curator, National Gallery Singapore.

Roger Nelson is an art historian, and curator at National Gallery Singapore. He is author of *Modern Art of Southeast Asia: Introductions from A to Z* (National Gallery Singapore, 2019) and translator of Suon Sorin's 1961 Khmer novel, *A New Sun Rises over the Old Land* (NUS Press, 2019). He is also co-founding co-editor of *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*, a journal published by NUS Press. Nelson completed his PhD at the University of Melbourne, on Cambodian arts of the 20th and 21st centuries. He has contributed essays to scholarly journals, specialist art magazines such as *Artforum*, books, and exhibition catalogues. He has curated exhibitions in Australia, Cambodia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, including *And in the Chapel and in the Temples: Research in Progress by Buddhist Archive of Photography and Amy Lien and Enzo Camacho* (The Lab, NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, 2018-2019).

Storer, Russell

Director (Curatorial & Collections), National Gallery Singapore.

- Former Head of Asian and Pacific Art at the Queensland Art Gallery / Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia, Storer was a member of the curatorial team for the 6th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT6) in 2009-2010, APT7 in 2012-2013, and APT8 in 2015-16. He was previously a curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, co-curator of the 3rd Singapore Biennale, *Open House* in 2011 and visiting curator at documenta 12 in 2007.
- Sunairi, Hiroshi Born in Hiroshima in 1972, Sunairi is a filmmaker and visual artist. His earliest work, *A Night of Elephants*, was a sculptural installation using *hibakuju* (atom-bombed trees). That work developed into the process-based art for which he is best known, *Tree Project*, in which Sunairi asks volunteers to grow seeds from atom-bombed trees. By way of recording this project, Sunairi began filming documentaries on social issues. His second feature-length documentary, *Air*, captures a road trip to Fukushima, Japan, in August 2011, just months after the nuclear disaster. His latest film follows the documentary photographer Mao Ishikawa, who has been documenting the lives of US soldiers stationed in Naha since the Cold War. Her photographs focus on American soldiers and the sex workers of the Philippines.

Yamamura, Midori

Assistant Professor, CUNY Kingsborough.

Yamamura is a modern and contemporary art history specialist with a focus on feminism, Asian, and Asian diasporic art. The author of *Yayoi Kusama: Inventing the Singular* (MIT Press: 2015), she is currently working on her second book, *Japanese Contemporary Art Since 1989: Emergence of the Local in the Age of Globalization.* Yamamura received her PhD from The Graduate Center, The City University of New York. She taught art history at Okayama University, Fordham University, Hunter College, The Museum of Modern Art, and Pratt Institute. Her essays can be found in major museum catalogues, including Tate Modern and the Whitney Museum of American Art.



Introduction

Locating Asian art in the Cold War

Yu-Chieh Li and Midori Yamamura

The Cold War has conventionally been viewed as the binary opposition between American-style democratic capitalism and Soviet-style communism from 1945 until the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the communist regimes of Eastern Europe in 1989. During this time, as media theorist Marshall McLuhan observed, it developed a "War of the Icons" that was fought with "information technology." ¹ In the bid to win such a psychological war, art became important ammunition as propaganda for both the United States and the Soviet Union, and art historical studies of the Cold War proliferated.²

Early studies assessed the ideological split between capitalism and communism, echoing the divide between US-style abstract expressionism and Soviet-style socialist realism. At the start of the Cold War, the US Information Agency promoted contemporary American art exhibition abroad, while the Soviet government disseminated socialist realism in the former Eastern bloc. However, as recent studies reveal, civil protests in the United States over the artworks included in the *Advancing American Art* exhibition (1946) compelled the government to eschew fine art and focus instead on popular culture.³ Soviet cultural politics also failed to make a lasting impact on Asia, as the original wave of communism merged with local left politics and transformed into various postcolonial struggles.

In newly independent countries, the left responded critically to socio-political power relationships, with the local authoritarian government oftentimes being backed by the United States. These circumstances inevitably influenced artistic production of such diverse places as Indonesia, Korea, Okinawa (former Ryukyu Kingdom), and the Philippines, among other countries. However, not only are studies of contemporary Asian art history relatively scarce but, as noted by cultural historians Chen Kuan-hsing and Sun Ge, local decolonial discourses were hindered by the intervention of colonial powers, particularly the United States.⁴ Furthermore, for their critical views and new perspectives, artists from newly independent countries who were still struggling with postcolonial conditions deviated from the communist/capitalist dichotomy to explore issues of identity, environmental exploitation, market-economy and independence, among other topics. These new emphases offer windows into lesser-known aspects of the Cold War, as capitalism morphed into its most aggressive form after the 1970s. Without attending to postcolonial issues more broadly, we

could end up confining ourselves to the binary rhetoric that has surrounded the Cold War. Visual Representations of the Cold War and Postcolonial Struggles: Art in East and Southeast Asia addresses these alternative aspects of the Cold War to examine how postcolonial struggles manifested in art, while bringing to light some lesser-known facts and new artistic expressions from Australia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Okinawa, the People's Republic of China, the Philippines, Republic of Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam.

In the history of the Cold War, Asia has played a pivotal role. Among various accounts of the Cold War's beginnings, Marc Gallicchio explained in 1988 that it started with the United States' East Asian policy after Japan's defeat in 1945.5 Further examination of the regional history reveals the US government's desire to become political and economic hegemon of the world. The Bandung Conference (1955), now generally known as the first conference to promote Afro-Asian economic and cultural cooperation and anti-colonialism, was "far from representing a united front against racism, neo-colonialism, and imperialism," as Gerard Greenfield put it. Rather, it "reaffirmed the legitimacy of US imperial ambitions," as implied by the Thailand Minister of Foreign Affairs relaying "greetings" from President Eisenhower.⁶ By 1963, the US Atomic Energy Commission was strategically promoting their programs throughout Asia.7 Two years later, the United States was using a network of Asian countries to escalate its military aggression against Vietnam, not to mention supporting a military coup in Indonesia. While communist combatants were struggling for the independence of their own destiny, the US military intervened, and Washington sided with authoritarian regimes in Korea, the Philippines, and Indonesia, and pursued commercial interests.

In stark contrast to the ideological flexibility shown by the United States, Soviet policy in Asia collapsed due to poor cross-border communication and the government's failure to incorporate local diversity.⁸ As in the cases of Hukbalahap Rebellion (1946–54) in the Philippines, the Communist-led peasant uprising in central Luzon, and the ethnic conflict in Taiwan since 1949, local anti-government movements in Asia adopted Communism and, as a result, developed into heterogeneous factions.

With the Korean War currently in a state of armistice, Okinawans facing the controversial relocation of the US base, and China being the world's second-largest economy, posing a new threat to the United States, the Cold War in Asia is nowhere close to ending; however, as Edward Said observed in 1993, one thing that became apparent after the fall of the Soviet Union was the "triumph of the United States as the last superpower."⁹ This led to the emergence of "a new set of force lines," whereby "the less economically developed lands are subjected to the more economically developed [countries]."¹⁰ The new global power structure, with loosely regulated capitalism that was based on "the freedom to make inordinate gains without commensurable service to community," as historian Karl Polanyi observed in 1971, was the hallmark of the type of capitalism that spawned at around that time, known today as "neoliberalism."¹¹

The present volume examines visual manifestations of the postcolonial struggles in artworks from East and Southeast Asia that were made while the

world was being shaped by neoliberal political, ethical, and economic pressures. In the age of globalized capitalism, art also became internationalized. In the recent art historical study of the Cold War, *Global Art and the Cold War* (2018), John J. Curley urges readers to look past the binary rhetoric to explore the gray areas between and beyond. Whereas Curley broadens the scope of art historical studies on the Cold War, the present volume deepens our understanding of arts from East and Southeast Asia as consequences of the Cold War, especially in relation to neoliberalism, the rise of US neoimperialism, and artists' decolonization struggles and postcolonial visions. Approaching myriad issues through varied methodologies, the two sections of scholarly writings (Sections 1 and 3) focus, respectively, on regional diversity and the legacy of the Cold War. To complement the scholarly essays, these sections are bridged by works and writings from five artists in Section Two.

Section One, "Joining the Game: Trauma and Regionalism," opens with Lesley Ma's analysis of the first major exhibition of Chinese abstract ink paintings that toured the United States between 1966 and 1968. Exploring it by way of curatorial approach and diplomacy, Ma argues how interpretation of *The New Chinese Landscape: Six Contemporary Chinese Artists* oscillated between traditionalism and neo-imperial ideology, even though the artworks were unrelated to Cold War's ideology.

If diplomacy is key to understanding the Cold War's regionalism in art, then physical and psychological trauma from postcolonial struggles is essential to the artworks that emerged from newly independent countries in Southeast Asia. Roger Nelson's eve-opening object-based study examines how US involvement in the regional conflict in Laos impacted ordinary people's everyday life, as revealed in a body of works painted by the self-described British aviation artist Terry Wofford and the black-and-white photo-collection belonging to senior Buddhist monk Pha Khamfan. In sharp contrast to Nelson's object-based study, Wulan Dirgantoro interprets the works of Indonesian experimental art groups such as the Indonesian New Art Movement (Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia) and PIPA, based on the analysis of artists' subjectivity using trauma psychology. Drawing from archival materials, Dirgantoro investigates the impact of the military government's anti-communist killings (1965–1966) across the archipelago on the postcolonial subjects. In Asia, trauma was not limited to people but included environmental devastation. Based on an ecocritical analysis, Midori Yamamura discusses how the impact of neoliberal economy on the environment shook Filipino artists Kidlat Tahimik and Roberto Villanueva from the media-imposed American dream, resulting in their rejection of the capitalist mode of production. Instead, they re-embraced the indigenous model of regenerative economy and the community-based art-making, promoted these concepts through their respective art. The section ends with Russell Storer's seminal research on the exhibition history of Australia, which emerged as the main hub for contemporary Asian art in the 1990s. Assessing that art can be seen as a visual manifestation of collective perceptions of time, Storer explores the transition of Australia's postcolonial cultural identity through artworks and

exhibition history during the Cold War, which was decisively influenced by the traumatic experience of the country's participation in the Vietnam War.

The second section, "Visual Gallery and Primary Documents," features artworks and writings by five artists from East and Southeast Asia that further articulate postcolonial struggles. In some cases, the decolonial process did not necessarily come with the independence of the occupied territory. Hiroshi Sunairi's excerpts from the film FROM OKINAWA WITH LOVE (2020) reveals Okinawan photographer Mao Ishikawa's complex rejection of the dominant neocolonial narrative in works that capture the relationships formed between African American soldiers and Okinawan women. In the subsequent section, the Vietnamese and American artist Dinh Q. Lê critically examines the Vietnam War (1955–1975) by way of disclosing the discrepancies between American perception of the war and the lived experience of the Vietnamese, juxtaposing war imagery from popular media with interviews of Vietnamese war survivors, or restaging the scenes from the war. In the next section, Chinese-Indonesian artist FX Harsono questions the legitimacy of the dominant history of Indonesia by disclosing a little-known event-the ethnic cleansing of Indonesian Chinese (1947–1949)—through his written accounts and video documentaries of site visits to cemeteries as well as his father's archival photographs.

Occupying a key position in the first island chain of US bases, Taiwan remains a battlefield for an extension of the Cold War conflicts. In *Topa Project* (2012–), Kao Jun-Honn depicts the exploitation of the land and people in Taiwan that resulted from multiple waves of imperialism and neo-liberalization. His site-specific drawings, documentaries, and social actions are inspired by "critical geology"—his collaborative research with blue-collar workers and indigenous tribes. The section concludes with Malaysian artist Au Sow Yee's archival research that reveals the continuities and discontinuities of cultures bound by sea routes and diaspora in South-East Asia, poignantly captured in her video series *Kris Project* (2016–2020). These primary documents reveal postcolonial struggles in Asia against local authoritarian powers and distant empires. The artist-led research, which incorporates media images, becomes its own form of storytelling. Situated at the center of the collection, the artists' writings and artworks offer a fuller understanding of the issues that spun out of the Cold War.

As stated earlier, the lasting influence of the Cold War can still be felt in Asia. Section Three, "The Continuous Cold War," opens with Yu-Chieh Li's investigation of Post-Mao Chinese art under the country's turn toward a neoliberal economy in the 1980s, which resulted in the development of a hybrid system where the Cold War's dichotomy was no longer applicable to foreign policy or internal propaganda. As observed in the works by Wang Guangyi, Song Ta, and Polit-Sheer-Form Office, artists became increasingly critical of domestic policies that aimed to ignite consumerism and control the market without liberal democracy. Following Li's essay is Rebecca Jennison's analysis of Okinawan artist Chikako Yamashiro's three-channel video *Mud Man* (2016). With close scrutiny, Jennison brings out conflicting histories and memories of Japan's colonial past in Okinawa and Jeju Islands, South Korea. Partially shot in Vietnam, Yamashiro's *Mud Man* reveals the neoimperialism underlying everyday life in Okinawa and elsewhere, awakening her audience to the ongoing consequences of the Cold War, hidden in plain sight.

The legacy of the Cold War is irreducible in the politics and culture of the two Koreas and beyond. In the final chapter, Jung Joon Lee examines another critical outcome of the Cold War—namely, transnational interracial adoption. Despite European and Japanese precedents, it was the Korean War that brought widespread awareness of transnational adoption to the American and European public. This chapter examines the ways in which the linearity of Cold War temporality is complicated by French photographer and Korean adoptee Agnès Dherbeys's photographs of Korean birth mothers and her own adoptive father; in turn, it exposes the neoliberal effects underpinning the politics of Cold War temporality.

The three sections of this volume elucidate new research across East and Southeast Asia, discerning the complexities of the Cold War beyond the dichotomy of capitalism and communism. Shedding new light on heterogeneous events, the volume invites readers to examine asymmetrical power relations on the national and international levels in East and Southeast Asia, to stimulate reflection rather than pushing particular answers. In these areas, the social predicaments generated by the neoliberal economy and neoimperial relationships with global super powers offered critical views and insights into postcolonial and postsocialist subjects. Visual arts addressed in this book reveal the varied perspectives that emerged from the processes of decolonialization, whereby artists seek to resolve relationships with colonial and neocolonial powers.

Neoliberalism exploited the newly independent, economically insignificant, politically unstable countries; yet, media disguised its impact. These new nations often inherited the economic system that had been established under colonial administration, resembling an inverted pyramid where wealth was not to be distributed among the workers but collected at the narrow end; the elites were supported by the neocolonial matrix. As seen in the cases of Indonesia, the Philippines, and Taiwan, decolonial practices resonated with what Walter Mignolo designated as "delinking" from the authoritarian states, which involves a search for alternative values.¹² As in the case of Tahimik's *Perfumed Nightmare*, decolonization does not always occur immediately after national independence. In Taiwan and Okinawa, decolonization took place without national independence. Still it is in this decolonial process that artists conducted new research that brings a more holistic view of the Cold War. In this respect, regional histories help determine the future of our humanities.

Note to readers

Asian names are spelled how they are usually published in English: in some examples, we follow the traditional order (family name before given name), such as Chuang Che or Wang Guangyi. Some people, however, upon emigrating to the English-speaking world, adopted the western order when transliterating their name, such as C.C. Wang or Chu-tsing Li.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all authors, the five blind reviewers and the editors and production team at Routledge, particularly Simon Bates and Malcolm Murfett. This book is supported by the PSC-CUNY Research Award, The City University of New York, and the Faculty Research Fund of the School of Art and Design at the University of New South Wales.

Notes

- Marshall McLuhan, "Weapons War of the Icons," in Understanding Media: The Extension of Man (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 1964, reprint, 1994), 338–39.
- 2 See, e.g., Serge Guilbault, How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Michael Krenn, Fall-out Shelters for the Human Spirit: American Art and the Cold War (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Claire F. Fox, Making Art Panamerican: Culture Policy and the Cold War (MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); John J. Curley, Global Art and the Cold War (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2018).
- 3 Yuka Tsuchiya and Kishi Toshihiko, eds. *De-Centering the Cultural Cold War: The* U.S. and Asia (Tokyo: Kokusai Publishing Co. 2009); 15–19; Tony Day and Maya Ht Liem, eds. *Cultures at War: The Cold War and Cultural Expression in Southeast* Asia (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2010). However, under the Kennedy administration, there was a policy change. As discussed in Chapter Five of this volume, the government again promoted fine art in overseas with nationalistic tones. For example, a 1964 memorandum indicates promoting the "dynamic image" of Abstract Expressionism as a symbol of "democracy" and to assert the "creative free spirit which is America." Robert Sivard, "The Venice Biennale Art Exhibit," a government memorandum to "Mr. Harris" (first name not given), August 14, 1964. USIA (64-045). Venice Biennale Files. Record Unit 321. Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
- 4 Sun Ge, "The Epistemological Implications of East Asian Ways of Seeing," *Taiwan:* A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies 70 (2008): 213–44; Chen Kuan-Hsing, "Why is 'Great Reconciliation' Im/Possible? De-Cold War/Decolonization, or Modernity and Its Tears," *Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies* 43 (2011): 41–110.
- 5 Marc Galliocchio, The Cold War Begins in Asia: American East Asian Policy and the Fall of the Japanese Empire (New York: Columbia University Press).
- 6 Gerard Greenfield, "Bandung Redux: Imperialism and Anti-Globalization Nationalisms in Southeast Asia," in *Socialist Register 2005: The Empire Reloaded*, eds. Leo Panitch and Colin Leys (2005): 167.
- 7 Box 4162, RG 53, The National Archives.
- 8 Sergey Radchenko. Unwanted Visionaries: The Soviet Failure in Asia at the End of the Cold War. Oxford Studies in International History Series. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- 9 Edward W. Said, "Freedom from Domination in the Future," in *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 282.
- 10 Michael Barratt-Brown, *After Imperialism* (rev., ed. New York: Humanities, 1970), viii.
- 11 Karl Polanyi, "Our Obsolete Market Mentality," in *Primitive, Archaic, and Modern Economies*, ed. George Dalton (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 74.
- 12 For the idea of "delinking" and "decoloniality," see Walter D. Mignolo, "Coloniality Is Far from Over, and So Must Be Decoloniality," *Afterall* 43 (2017): 40.

Part I Joining the game

Trauma and regionalism



1 "The New Chinese Landscape" in the Cold War era

Lesley Ma

From 1966, as the Cultural Revolution was reaching full force in mainland China, until 1968, The New Chinese Landscape: Six Contemporary Chinese Artists toured the United States. Sponsored by the John D. Rockefeller III (JDR 3rd) Fund and managed by the American Federation of Arts (AFA) in New York, it was the first major exhibition of contemporary Chinese art in the postwar Western hemisphere.¹ Organized by Chu-tsing Li, a Chinese-American art historian, the exhibition introduced a new style of painting, one that not only referenced traditional Chinese landscape painting but also incorporated the ideas and techniques of American and European abstraction. The exhibition featured 60 works by mainland-born artists living in Taiwan and the United States: C.C. Wang, a mid-career artist in New York; Chen Chi-Kwan, an architect and artist who had moved from New York to Taichung; Yu Cheng-yao, a self-taught senior painter in Taipei; and Liu Kuo-sung, Chuang Che, and Fong Chung-ray, three young painters of Wuyue huahui (Fifth Moon Painting Society), a modernist art group in Taiwan. The timing was remarkable. While the Red Guard denounced tradition and artists produced socialist-realist paintings in mainland China, this exhibition brought to America a cosmopolitan version of a traditional painting genre, created by Chinese artists living outside of the mainland, thus announcing divergent, contrasting developments of art on either side of the Bamboo Curtain.

A multi-city US tour of Chinese contemporary art at the height of the Cold War invites further exploration of the complex web of forces involved in its making. Against the backdrop of Cold War geopolitics where the Republic of China's Kuomintang (Nationalist) government in Taiwan was an American ally on the Pacific Rim and the only "China" recognized by the Free World, the exhibition was a product of the alignment of various interests: a US-based Chinese curator championing artists in Taiwan; a group of young artists modernizing their painting traditions by embracing American and European modernist abstraction; and funding from a prestigious New York-based private foundation promoting Asian art in the US. The exhibition press release effused positive internationalism:

Recently emerged and flourishing are many painters of all ages whose techniques refer to the great and ancient tradition of Oriental painting,

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but carry it forward in many highly personal ways due to the impact of modern Western art styles.²

Celebrating a highly adaptive and cosmopolitan version of Chinese art, the statement announced an unprecedented moment where Chinese painting—a discipline with its own system of training, technique, vocabulary, and circulation—discovered new creative potential by absorbing Western, "modern" influences and entered transnational dialogues. While international exchange in the form of touring exhibitions is a familiar trope in cultural diplomacy, that an American private foundation proselytizing modernist ideals supported Chinese painters honoring centuries-old ink painting philosophies, and that landscape painting, a traditional art form, found affinity in modernist abstract art from America and Europe, are curious phenomena. This chapter thus parses the factors contributing to these developments.

Previous scholarship on the exhibition has focused on the personal triumphs of the artists. Indeed, a celebratory exhibition at the National Museum of History in Taipei prior to the tour demonstrated the endorsement from the Taiwanese establishment and officially crowned the Fifth Moon artists as the vanguard of Taiwanese art. As a result of the exhibition, Liu Kuo-sung, Chuang Che, and Fong Chung-ray, who had never been abroad, received JDR 3rd travel grants to the US and Europe that transformed their lives and careers.³ However, the geopolitical circumstances and art historical significance of the exhibition merit deeper examination. My research reveals a curatorial framework and the aesthetic choices conditioned by Cold War geopolitics that impacted the modernization of Chinese painting in the mid-20th century.

The exhibition cannot be understood without taking into consideration the underlying national interests-even though its organization did not involve any government; these included American cultural influence in Taiwan and the Nationalist's self-promotion as the bastion of legitimate and enlightened Chinese culture. For the curator and artists, these forces created an urgencyas well as an opportunity-to construct a modern Chinese cultural identity distinct from that of Socialist China and the prewar era. They chose landscape painting at this critical juncture for its aesthetic value in Chinese culture, its role as a platform for intellectual expression during national crises, and its formal and conceptual affinity with abstract art, the lingua franca of the art world at the time. On a macro level, their work expanded the political dimension of landscape painting and brought new meanings to the genre. The exhibition, conceived in part due to the physical inaccessibility of mainland China, became a marker for the artistic and ideological differences-and synthesized the artistic with the ideological-on either side of the Taiwan Strait. As a result, Taiwan, a former Japanese colony and a peripheral island in Chinese history, was elevated to become the new center for Chinese art, expanding its geographical footprint to include the Chinese diaspora in America. The circulation of The New Chinese Landscape in the US, as this chapter lays bare, inadvertently validated contemporary ink painting from Taiwan and the diaspora as the representative voice of Chinese art in the postwar decades.⁴

The geopolitics of the exhibition

Chu-tsing Li (1920–2014), who immigrated to the US from China in 1947 and was one of the first scholars to establish modern and contemporary Chinese art as a field of study in postwar America, conceived *The New Chinese Landscape* in 1964 under serendipitous circumstances. At the time an art history professor at University of Iowa, on a research trip to Taiwan on Yuan dynasty paintings, Li saw the works of several young painters in Taipei, describing his discoveries as follows:

I found the situation in art in...Taiwan very much the same as that of the time when I left China. There is still a sharp dichotomy between traditionalism on the one hand and Westernization on the other. Young artists simply have to choose between the two, but are not supposed to embrace both....However...I did encounter a number of interesting artists who seem to be able to absorb both the Chinese tradition and Western influence to achieve a new expression. The number of artists in this direction is very small, but, from my point of view, they represent the genuine creative effort in China today outside the mainland.⁵

After almost 20 years abroad, Li seemed delighted to observe novel attempts to solve a lingering issue that in his view had rendered Chinese art stagnant. His observations summarized the high stakes for 20th-century Chinese art; at the heart of the question of modernity in painting is its compatibility with Western art. This perennial question was raised by the May Fourth movement in 1919, when "traditionalism" and "Westernization" became two sides of the cultural debate. Painting practices in China since then were divided into "national painting" (guohua), which referred to painting in ink on paper or silk following the centuries-old tradition of Chinese ink painting, and "Western painting" (xihua), which employed materials, techniques, and styles of late-nineteenth, early-20th-century European painting. Early 20th-century ink painters like Huang Binhong (1865-1955) and Pan Tianshou (1897-1971) cited traditions while innovating in brushwork, composition, and use of color.⁶ Their peers in oil painting, who had studied in Europe, such as Lin Fengmian (1900-1991) and Pang Xunqin (1906-1985), experimented with Cubist and Fauvist styles.⁷ Both camps argued for the progressive modernity and patriotic motivations of their chosen medium. However, their endeavors were interrupted by the Japanese invasion and the subsequent wars from 1937 to 1949.

When the Nationalist government retreated to Taiwan in late 1949 after the catastrophic defeat by the Chinese communists, they brought with them the unfinished cultural debate. The dichotomy between "traditionalism" and "Westernization" in postwar Taiwan was further complicated by colonial Japanese influence. During this tumultuous period, the Nationalists struggled to maintain peaceful governance on the island, where mainland refugees clashed with the local Taiwanese, who had previously been steeped in

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Japanese culture. Chinese ink painting—formerly excluded by the Japanese from official exhibitions⁸—was reinstated by the Nationalists in an effort to decolonize society and accommodate the tastes of the mainland elite. The colonial aesthetic standards, once a symbol of modernity for the colonial subject—with their Japanese-style painting (*nihonga*) and oil and gouache paintings ($y\bar{o}ga$)—fell out of favor due to political incorrectness. In this era when political ideology reigned over artistic merit, tensions divided the academic art community between painters who had trained in Japan and those trained on the mainland.⁹

The post-colonial reorientation compounded by a Cold War mentality heightened the urgency of reclaiming a national, Chinese culture. Under martial law, the Nationalist government's staunch conservatism exerted strict control over intellectuals and artistic productions. The quest for a national culture in Taiwan-to shed the peripheral, colonial identity and differentiate itself from the PRC-intertwined with the country's efforts to establish an international reputation. Being recognized, especially by its international allies, as the sole, authoritative representative of Chinese culture became a priority. This position was bolstered by the presence of the Palace Museum treasures that the Nationalists had brought to Taiwan in 1948 and 1949. Symbolically and politically, the museum collections, comprised of the crème de la crème of the imperial treasures, ranging from prehistoric artifacts and paintings and calligraphy to decorative arts and first-edition classics, bestowed the dynastic heritage on Taiwan and transformed it into the center of Chinese culture. Scholars from all over the world who wished to research classical Chinese culture turned to Taiwan to access primary materials; Chu-tsing Li's 1964 trip there was for this purpose. The collections thus became an asset for diplomatic soft power and cultural development in Taiwan for the years to come.

The Palace Museum collection's role in diplomacy was best demonstrated by a landmark touring exhibition to five major US museums from May 1961 to June 1962: The National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC; The Metropolitan Museum in New York; Museum of Fine Art, Boston; Art Institute of Chicago; and De Young Museum in San Francisco. These encyclopedic institutions in major metropolises, the sites of American cultural power and cosmopolitan taste, all hold impressive collections of Asian art and artifacts.¹⁰ Feeding into the American imagination about the glorious imperial past of Chinese culture, the collection highlights tour testified to the ROC's legitimacy and confidence on the international stage, cementing the island nation as the representative of Chinese civilization. This in fact was the first time that the imperial collection had traveled abroad in 30 years.¹¹ Making the US its first destination served as an indication that America had overtaken Europe as the Western cultural powerhouse and signified the importance of the relationship to the ROC.

In the immediate postwar years, as the threat of military conflict with the PRC persisted, the Nationalist government was eager to secure its international alliances, with the US being its top priority. Initially the US government was ambivalent to throw its support behind them, despite the shared ideology of

anti-Communism. Only after the Korean War broke out, however, did that alliance take root.¹² The Sino-American Mutual Defense Treaty in 1955 officially sealed the United States' commitment to the Republic of China in Taiwan and acknowledged its sovereignty and international stature. Since then, American aid on all fronts—including economic, military, medical, educational poured into Taiwan along with American arts and culture. Literature and the arts mostly came through the library of the United States Information Services (USIS), the government-run outlet for American information following the State Department policy of fostering exchange with allying countries to curb the spread of Communism.¹³ Private organizations operated with a similar mission. The JDR 3rd Fund, bankrolled by a scion of the powerful Rockefeller family, brought Asian art and artists to America,¹⁴ with the hope of spreading the influence of American culture and values worldwide through cultural exchange.

The rise of the Fifth Moon

In this complex cultural ecology, the Nationalist government-backed conservative orthodoxy dominated the art establishment, yet a laissez-faire attitude arose in parallel that allowed for pluralistic artistic explorations. The artists of the Fifth Moon Painting Society-half of the artists included in the exhibition-emerged under such circumstances. Born on the mainland and emigrating to Taiwan as adolescents around 1949, they were formatively shaped by the wars and their aftermath, entangled in the nation's self-strengthening aspirations. Their experimentations in art were motivated by a desperate need to find expression for their personal experiences of displacement and loss of national identity, as well as by an intellectual responsibility to redefine Chinese culture from outside the mainland. The Society's founding members-who named themselves after the Parisian avant-garde group Salon de Mai ("fifth moon" is the transliteration of "May")-were graduates of National Taiwan Normal University in Taipei, the country's most prestigious department of Fine Art. Fifth Moon's first annual exhibition in 1957 announced their deviation from the official course. They first pursued early 20th-century European modern art styles, including Cubism and Surrealism. Around the early 1960s, however, they turned to European and American abstract art-primarily Informel and Abstract Expressionism-that they had learned through reproductions in American books and magazines. Though they were attracted to the freedom of expression, virtuosic individualism, and new visual possibilities offered by the abstract styles popular in the Free World, they also sought inspiration from their own cultural heritage, especially landscape painting. Three young abstract painters in The New Chinese Landscape were core members of this group: Liu Kuo-sung (b. 1932), who had co-founded the Society in 1956 and worked primarily in ink and paper; Chuang Che (b. 1934), who joined the group in 1957 and devoted his efforts to oil painting and collage; and Fong Chungray (b. 1933), an artist working in abstract ink paintings, joined Fifth Moon in 1961.

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The young artists' innovations in painting first came as a shock to society but gradually attracted official support as the government learned of contemporary art's currency in the international art world. The ROC's participation in several early editions of the Bienal de São Paulo-an international showcase of contemporary art founded in 1951 and organized by national pavilions-from 1957 to 1973, instigated this change of attitude.¹⁵ Upon the revelation that abstract art was favored by the biennial, the ROC government devised a strategy to "introduce the long history of the great Chinese culture" and show "radical new art" that emphasized the country's proud tradition as well as its contemporaneity with the rest of the world.¹⁶ To the ROC, this was an opportunity to boost the country's international status by showcasing its cultural assets—exhibiting replicas of Chinese antiquities alongside contemporary paintings-to edge out the PRC's presence in the cultural arena. The international exhibition prompted the government to recognize "radical new art" for its international appeal, even as they continued to champion traditional art. Fifth Moon's Liu Kuo-sung, Chuang Che, and Fong Chung-ray, as well as young artists of other avant-garde groups, sent their abstract paintings abroad at the government's recommendation. Abstract painting thus became "a tool that was being experimented with and improved upon in the diplomatic war between Nationalist and Communist China."17 Artistic innovations of this period were understood within the framework of national reputation and the context of the Cold War era cultural war. Indeed, before The New Chinese Landscape embarked on its American tour, the National Museum of History hosted a preview exhibition, only because it would be traveling to the US under the sponsorship of the Fund.¹⁸ Though Li's exhibition was organized independently from governmental initiatives, it was inseparable from these factors. Yet Li also pushed the boundaries beyond the conventional national construct.

The new landscape painting

Li chose landscape painting—*shanshui hua*, paintings of mountains and rivers—as the exhibition's theme because it "is traditionally the most respected mode in Chinese painting"¹⁹ and "distinguishes the Chinese tradition from those of other parts of the world."²⁰ Yet the choice also has important historical and political connotations, ones that reflect the Cold War realities. A genre of painting that evolved from the Chinese understanding and depiction of the cosmological world in the second century BCE, landscape painting emerged in the late Tang dynasty (618–907), reached an impressive height in the Northern Song period (960–1127), and further developed into a subject matter with profound humanistic meanings in the Southern Song era (1127–1279). It was the preferred genre of the educated elite—the literati. A product of visual observation of nature, imagination, and skillful use of the brush and ink, landscape painting often hovers between the realistic and the fantastic and is defined by an aspiration for unity between the cosmos and the artist. While it could depict actual sights and scenery,

it places greater emphasis on the role of the painter's mind in the act of reflection; thus, abstraction is inherent in landscape paintings. The Southern Song dynasty, forced to move its capital to the south with a much diminished territory due to foreign invasion from the north, marked a time when landscape painting served as a vehicle for literati artists to express feelings of frustration, longing, comfort, and patriotism in the aftermath of invasions, forced migrations, and political turmoil.²¹ It thus became a link between the personal and the national. Thereafter, it sustained these symbolic meanings and acquired new ones, as an outlet for declaring aspirations and expressing personal misfortunes, longings for redemption, opposition to the status quo, or celebration of enlightenment. Most of these meanings subscribe to the lineage of the educated class looking to nature for guidance, solace, and strength for renewal.

In the 1920s and '30s, facing territorial and economic threats from the West, landscape painting acquired a strong nationalistic tenor, as an extension of the literati sense of cultural responsibility. Ink painting became known as "national painting," and many artists insisted on painting ink landscapes, with references to a wide spectrum of styles, from the courtly, monumental landscapes of the Northern Song to the lyrical scenes of the Ming (1368–1644), during a national identity crisis to assert a patriotic, unapologetic Chinese identity. Ink painting thus became synonymous with Chinese modernity and closely linked with national pride.²² Landscape painting's historical significance as an allegory for national territory and a spiritual dwelling of the learned gentry, as well as its versatility in accommodating various usages and meanings, is crucial in understanding Chu-tsing Li's curatorial framework as well as the artists' choice of genre.

Li, as a scholar of Yuan (1271-1368) paintings, was especially sensitive to the aspect of landscape painting as a salvage operation and a marker of dignity for intellectuals. Many Yuan painters resisted the Mongolian rulers and directed their feelings of loss, resentment, and humiliation to landscape painting, bringing the genre's development to a high level. The forced retreat of the Nationalists in 1949, along with two million refugees, to Taiwan, represents the most recent southern migration in Chinese political history. With this knowledge, one can recognize the lens through which Li viewed contemporaneous painters who were transforming their frustration toward their country's misfortune into a new version of landscape painting. For the diasporic artists and curator, "landscape" represented the homeland they were forced to abandon, and a literati tradition with which they wished to maintain dialogue. Thus, Li's choice of landscape painting as the exhibition's theme underscores its historical and political associations, in addition to its artistic significance; the artists' engagement with the landscape tradition continued the genre's art historical legacy, even as they sought to update it in unorthodox ways.

With landscape painting as an affirmation of cultural identity, the 60 paintings in *The New Chinese Landscape* formed a strong statement on the genre's vitality, its connection to historical memories and contemporary conditions,
and its evocative potential. So, although it was a Chinese artistic tradition to turn to landscape painting after a major political upheaval, the young painters of the Fifth Moon Painting Society, Liu Kuo-sung, Chuang Che, and Fong Chung-ray, chose to do so while shedding the formal qualities of traditional landscape paintings. Inspired by modernist abstract paintings in Europe and America, and especially the latter, they invented techniques and materials. In other words, Fifth Moon artists made their paintings look less like those by their predecessors, but maintained the same aesthetic and conceptual backbone, while striving for affinities to the language of international abstraction. Their motivation was to rebel against the status quo and connect more deeply with Chinese culture, a paradoxical objective that allowed foreign painting ideas to catalyze and boost their cultural capital. This choice signaled a new kind of painting under the unique geopolitical and cultural conditions of Taiwan.

The Fifth Moon artists' Western-inspired abstraction appeared in the early 1960s. Liu Kuo-sung's signature technique of removing fibers from cotton paper after painting it with ink to reveal sinewy white lines as the new "textured strokes" developed in early 1963 and was prominently featured in The New Chinese Landscape. Liu's works in the American tour had none of the traditional landscape painting forms or structures, yet they embodied its spirited atmosphere. Early Spring (1964) (Figure 1.1), a hanging scroll with black masses of ink swept across the paper: left to right, top to bottom. A large void occupies the center and bottom half of the composition. The interplay between black and white makes the painting dynamic. This calligraphic abstraction-though no calligraphic principle was exercisedconjures no landscape image. Yet the title references a prized possession of Taipei's Palace Museum-the landscape masterpiece by the Northern Song painter Guo Xi (ca. 1020-1090), whose majestic painting and influential theories greatly inspired Liu. He used "Early Spring" to name at least three works in this period, an homage not in form but in spirit. In Liu's work, Chu-tsing Li saw a quality that resonated with both Chinese and Western painting: abstraction was a way "of capturing the mystery and essence of nature-still a traditional characteristic of Chinese painting."23 Here, Li asserted an important concept of his exhibition, that classical ink painting had long shown ambivalence toward representation, a revelation that Liu had also addressed in his writings.

While Liu subtracted substance from the painting's surface, Chuang Che added layers. Beginning in 1963, Chuang pasted paper onto canvas and slathered it with broad slashes and washes of oil and ink, fully embracing the unruliness of the painterly instinct. One of the most poignant examples in the exhibition was in the collage style, representing a state of brokenness and turmoil with a hint at reconstruction. *Sublimation* (1964) possesses the monumentality of a mountain peak looming above stacked rocks, a classic painting composition (Figure 1.2). Yet Chuang's "mountain" was constructed by overlapping paper and paint washes. No brushwork is distinguishable; only saturated masses. He consciously integrated the ink wash effect with the



Figure 1.1 Third hanging scroll from left in the vitrine: Liu Kuo-sung, *Early Spring*, 1964, ink on paper, hanging scroll, 86.4 x 55.3 cm. The first two hanging scrolls from left and all handscrolls laid flat are works by Fong Chung-ray; the rest are by Liu. The New Chinese Landscape, 1968, negative 38802F, Cleveland Museum of Art Archives.

collage technique while letting accident reign. The inscription on the right by the artist's father, a renowned calligrapher, obscures the link between the forms and a mountainous scene: "So elated I have forgotten myself and kept painting. But it doesn't look like anything."²⁴ The ambivalence suggests that the elder Chuang saw traces of the *xieyi* (writing the mind) method—albeit a measured kind—where the artist would let the ink and paper interact to achieve an uninhibited state. "Sublimation" thus refers to how the spirit of painting—and of landscape—renders all form and content secondary. Here, Chuang Che shows that the motivation for abstraction, rooted in Chinese painting philosophy, is first and foremost the painter's emotions and beyond the scope of figuration.

By 1961, Fong Chung-ray had already forgone any kind of figuration or traditional brushwork. Fong was a co-founder of *Sihai huahui* (Four Seas Painting Society), which was comprised of painters in the navy, and their artistic mandate had never followed classical conventions. Around 1963, he began to create idiosyncratic ink marks in different shades and gradations by sweeping rolled palm fibers across paper. To make marks with an instrument so unwieldy, Fong had to raise his arms, putting him farther from the painting surface, which guaranteed little adherence to formal principles and literally distanced him from the mannerisms and habits of traditional painting. Instead, the materiality of ink and paper took over. Chu-tsing Li thought Fong's ink marks resembled "the flung-ink technique of Jackson Pollock."



Figure 1.2 Chuang Che, *Sublimation*, 1964, ink and paper collage on canvas, 119 x 86 cm. Pink Bear Collection (Elgin Chan and Anne Goh). © Chuang Che. Exhibited in *The New Chinese Landscape*.

Yet, "he is never so forceful or violent as the American expressionist."²⁵ Li considered Fong's work the closest to Western modern art in his pursuit for "more universal and absolute of form," but noted that it originated "from the traditional approach to nature."²⁶ While his work and Pollock's share an affinity for the dynamic appearance of their marks, Fong's paintings retain

a subtler, more introverted emotion, much like the temperament of literati paintings. And like the work of his Fifth Moon peers, Fong's abstraction relies on the contrast between inked and blank areas for movement and variety on the painting's surface and an illusion of depth in the pictorial space. His paintings, all titled by numbers indicating the year and sequence of production, avoid representational connections. Yet they were all mounted on scrolls. The diffuse edges of the ink masses, created by the unruly palm fibers, became one of the most recognizable features of Fong's paintings from this period (Figure 1.3).

In their own ways, the three artists retained a nuanced relationship with classical Chinese painting. More prominently, though, their work reveals an obsession with surface textures, a strong feature of mid-century American abstract painting. It also resonates with the "textured strokes" technique in landscape painting that provides a tactile quality to the forms of mountains and rocks. The artists seem to be taking the best of both worlds-the features that mattered the most to them-to make their work legible to a broader audience. This characteristic is also true for C.C. Wang (1907-2003), who was, in addition to being a painter, considered one of the best connoisseurs of his generation. Wang moved to New York from Shanghai in 1948 and never returned. Experiencing the heyday of New York Abstract Expressionism prompted his interest in the painting's surface. To form the underlying structure of a painting, he used what Jerome Silbergeld later called "impressed texture"-using crumpled paper to dab ink marks onto paper—before applying brushwork.²⁷ Thus, in his paintings, the brushwork, the foremost element of painterly endeavor in Chinese art, had become supplementary to textural and compositional concerns (Figure 1.4).

Two other artists did not make abstract ink paintings but were selected based on their landscape styles. Chen Chi-kwan (1921–2007), a modernist architect who worked under the Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius in Boston,



Figure 1.3 Fong Chung-ray, *65-35*, 1965, ink and color on paper, handscroll, 56 x 119 cm. Collection of the artist. © Fong Chung-ray. Exhibited in *The New Chinese Landscape*.



Figure 1.4 C. C. Wang, Sailing Boats and Misty Mountains, 1964, ink and color on paper, 40 x 60 cm. Collection Museum Rietberg, Gift of Charles A. Drenowatz. © Museum Rietberg. Exhibited in The New Chinese Landscape.

drew lines using a traditional brush and incorporated multiple perspectives within the pictorial frame (Figure 1.5). That he and C.C. Wang, who both lived in New York, remained devoted to ink landscape and renovated it based on contemporary ideas and their own expertise testifies to the ways that landscape paintings could accommodate visual and technical varieties and fulfill cosmopolitan aspirations. Li's inclusion of their works expanded the geography of Chinese painting and put New York on the map of Chinese art. By adding Yu Cheng-yao (1898–1993), a retired, disenchanted army general whom he described as the "Chinese Grandpa Moses" or a "Chinese Henri Rousseau,"²⁸ Li championed the practice of an outsider who had been excluded from the Taiwanese cultural world, further challenging the status quo. The only artist in the exhibition who did not cite Western art and lacked formal art training, Yu painted boxy landscapes with raw, clumsy textured strokes that he invented to interpret the spectacular scenery of the mainland in his memory (Figure 1.6).

The artists in *The New Chinese Landscape*, never before discussed in the same conversation, demonstrated their effort in deviating from traditional expressions. All the artists in the exhibition harnessed literati aspirations and complex emotions in their paintings. What also united them—perhaps the most important commonality—was their experience of exile after the Communist takeover of the mainland. They either left China for the US before 1949—as in the cases of C.C. Wang and Chen Chi-kwan—or moved to Taiwan with the Nationalists—as with Yu Cheng-yao and the Fifth Moon artists. (Chen moved from New York to Taiwan in the early 1960s). To varying degrees, their landscapes fulfilled a recuperative mission, whether as a therapeutic outlet for their



Figure 1.5 Chen Chi-Kwan, *Panorama*, 1957, ink and watercolor on paper, 23 x 122 cm. FranzArt Collection, Hong Kong. © Chen Chi-kwan Education and Cultural Foundation. Exhibited in *The New Chinese Landscape*.

displacement, or as critical device pushing for change. Beneath the landscape forms retained by the senior artists lies a deep sense of loss and longing. Yu Cheng-yao's paintings are said to be his way of surrounding himself with the landscape and the vista he desired—as a form of consolation.²⁹ C.C. Wang, never returning to live in China, later admitted in the 1970s that he "misses his home country tremendously," giving his lifelong devotion to landscape an emotional context.³⁰ In Chuang Che's Untitled, a verse from a poem by Tang-era poet Du Fu (712–770), "The country has fallen; only the mountains and rivers remain," incorporated into the composition, particularly captured the ethos of the postwar Chinese diaspora. It applied the historical experience of "a country being torn apart"³¹ to the trauma of the present, quite literally through the poetry and the patched surface of the painting (Figure 1.7). Like Chuang, the other young painters, while they shared the nostalgia and melancholy, drastically transformed the visuality of landscape painting that signified a broader ideological shift. Their migration and new identity in Taiwan prompted a decisive break from the traditional styles.

From the outset, Li's formulation of Chinese art for the exhibition complied with the parameters drawn by Cold War divisions.³² In this sense, the New Chinese Landscape was not just the theme of the exhibition but a geopolitical metaphor, indicating that the center of Chinese contemporary art-proclaimed and supported by this exhibition-had shifted away from the mainland, and that the boundaries of Chinese art had been expanded partly by the political and cultural ideology of the Free World and partly by the location and trajectory of diasporic communities. For this reason, artworks that embraced the expressionist quality of American abstraction were heralded as modern. It is also why Wang, Chen, and Yu-three older artists who were never recognized or placed in the Taiwanese artistic discourse—were included in this narrative. Also worth noting is that half of the participating artists-Yu, Chen, and Fong-served in the Nationalist military, which underscores how the wars set the stage for the exhibition. By normalizing the condition of a "national" culture detached from its original territory and recognizing the multiplicity of expressions of Chinese painting, this exhibition literally created a "new landscape" for Chinese art. It ultimately celebrated the generative power of the diasporic condition in the effort to internationalize Chinese painting and put artists working outside of the mainland—especially in Taiwan—at the core of a new paradigm.

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Figure 1.6 Yu Cheng-yao, Deep Ravine, Rushing Torrent, early 1960s, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 135.8 x 68.4 cm. Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, The Chu-tsing Li Collection, Gift of B U.K. Li in honor of Chu-tsing Li and in memory of Yao-wen Kwang Li and Teri Ho Li. © President and Fellows of Harvard College.

Inscription on upper right: "Deep Ravine, Rushing Torrent. Gigantic rocks pile up on lofty peaks. Spring waters, green as jade, splash across dangerous paths. White clouds hover above the emerald valley. When can I return home? Done by Yu Cheng-yao"



Figure 1.7 Chuang Che, *Homage to Du Fu*, 1966, oil and collage on canvas, 152 x 112 cm. Collection of Longmen Art Projects Shanghai. © Chuang Che.

The exhibition's Chinese title, *Zhongguo shanshuihua de xin chuantong*, has a subtly different meaning from the English one. Translated as "The new tradition of Chinese landscape painting," it legitimized the artists' approach that "absorb[ed] both the Chinese tradition and Western influence to achieve a new expression."³³ By calling these works a "new tradition," Li seemed to suggest that the new style succeeds the older one. However, not all artists subscribed to Li's curatorial characterization of their work as

landscape painting. In a letter to his poet friend, Chuang Che expressed this dissatisfaction: "Now I start to suspect that the motivation for Mr. Li to make this exhibition was completely limited by a vision based on history and tradition. Otherwise why name it the new landscape tradition."³⁴ Chuang felt the characterization was inadequate because his artistic journey had begun with Surrealist and Abstract Expressionist principles, in search for their intersections with Chinese traditions.³⁵ Liu Kuo-sung apparently "only nod[ded] noncommittally" when responding to viewers who noted traces of landscape elements in his abstract paintings.³⁶ However, later in life both artists adamantly discussed their art in the context of the landscape tradition. Fong Chung-ray, who did not directly engage with the landscape tradition but allowed his work to be categorized as such, acknowledged Li's projecting onto the young painters his hope that the genre would continue to evolve.³⁷ The unwillingness to be understood only through association with tradition reveals the dilemma of modernizing Chinese painting. Yet the reluctance to openly reject the curatorial interpretation was perhaps due to a genuine appreciation for the curator's belief in their work. Such support from a Chinese-American curator and a prestigious American organizationespecially a powerful name like Rockefeller-was a weighty endorsement. This phenomenon itself was a circumstance of the times, as American recognition mattered greatly to these young artists desperately seeking validation. Whether the Chinese title was a curatorial strategy to convince conservative elites in Taiwan to accept the new kind of painting was unclear, but the fact that renowned calligrapher and deputy director of the Palace Museum, Chuang Yen (1899–1980, father of Chuang Che), inscribed the title for the catalogue—a customary act for endorsement—supports this speculation. The curator advocated for the construction of a new Chinese visuality that drew from the political division across the Taiwan Strait, the diasporic experience, and the historically and politically significant subject of landscape, with the consideration of what would benefit their work's circulation in the West.

The exhibition and its reception

The exhibition took quite some effort for Li to realize. He approached Porter McCray (1908–2000), the director of the JDR 3rd Fund in 1964, and received the funding more than a year later. McCray, a former board chairman of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, was one of the most influential operators of American cultural diplomacy in the 20th century.³⁸ In response to Li's exhibition proposal, he wrote that Asian artists would "come to grips with the spirit of Western painting rather than its outward forms and in the process acquire a vitality which frequently produces a new and stronger expression of their own."³⁹ What McCray meant by "the spirit of Western painting" is anyone's guess—bold individualism, unapologetic confidence—the traits of New York Abstract Expressionist paintings that he had championed through MoMA-organized exhibitions in Latin America, Europe, and Asia throughout the postwar decades.⁴⁰ His attitude toward Asian art was telling of the foundation's true view and what they had hoped to achieve through these exchanges.

More telling is the inadequacy of the American cultural environment even as it promoted its values internationally. Contemporary Chinese art did not fit with the American imagination, conceptually or museologically. Asia House (later Asia Society), a non-profit institution dedicated to traditional Asian art also founded by the Rockefellers, did not have space for contemporary art in their building.⁴¹ Li himself had determined that his exhibition was "not for major museums," so he targeted galleries in Midwestern "Big Ten" universities. He explained, "the intellectual atmosphere of the universities, the international outlook of their faculty and students, and the artistic interest of their art departments, will be able to appreciate the ideas and aesthetic quality of the exhibition."42 The exhibition eventually reached 15 regional and university museums across 12 states, mostly in the Midwest and several on the coasts, including AFA's gallery in New York's Upper East Side. The New Chinese Landscape served a niche, academic audience with limited access to the mainstream powerbrokers and tastemakers.⁴³ The physical limitations and conventional thinking of the American museums dictated how contemporary Chinese paintings were displayed and thus interpreted. At the Cleveland Museum of Art, for example, the scroll paintings were placed in vitrines reserved for classical Chinese art and artifacts.⁴⁴ Such enclosures gave the works an antiquated context that seemed to also highlight their Chineseness.

The American media did not give much attention to the exhibition, compared to the situation with the Palace Museum exhibition five years earlier. Reviews were rather superficial, based on the dichotomy of Chinese and Western, traditional and contemporary, regardless of whether the encounters took place in cosmopolitan centers like New York or regional cities like Denver or Ann Arbor. Only trained Chinese art experts were equipped to offer more profound observations on technique or to decipher the references to classical paintings. Moreover, the popularity of Abstract Expressionism had waned in American art; Minimalism, Pop Art, Hard Edge, and more conceptual practices had taken over. Therefore, the ideas of "abstraction" and "landscape" that the exhibition championed hardly qualified as new attractions. Liu Kuo-sung and Chuang Che were the only ones mentioned in the reviews. Liu's work, especially due to its material of ink on paper, seemed to be the easiest for American critics to digest. The Kansas City Star praised Liu's work for the "wonderful values of Chinese painting: a blend of austerity and sensuousness, great delicacy, an almost ethereal atmosphere...."45 In his review of Liu's debut at the Lee Nordness Gallery in January 1967, a more discerning critic, John Canaday of The New York Times, noted the ambiguity between pictorial space and the physical surface: "seas, mountains and valleys appear and disappear...the paper seems to have been rent by weights and forces that open up chasms-but it is only collage."46 Canaday called Liu "a dashing exponent of traditional Chinese landscape painting hybridized with modern abstraction."47 The surface textures were crucial for the hybrid quality of the work, yet neither critic picked up on Liu's new technique—Canaday even thought it was collage, while in fact Liu had removed pieces of fiber from the paper—or the political significance of landscape. More obvious to both of these critics was the rather vague "atmospheric effect" that they had taken as an indicator of the Chinese quality. Liu's work seemed to them a natural heir to the traditions of Chinese painting, and Canaday's deeming it "modern abstraction" certainly furthered its validation.

Chuang Che's paintings-framed canvases covered in collage and gestural strokes—were more challenging to Americans, even though the images displayed a strong resemblance to Abstract Expressionism. To some degree, the paintings suffered as a result of Chuang's use of the western medium, with no immediately recognizable formal qualities of traditional Chinese artexcept for those with inscribed Chinese characters. At Chuang's 1968 oneman show in Ann Arbor, Jean Paul Slusser, a former art museum director of the University of Michigan, criticized the work as "the stereotype of current abstract expressionism...but retains some of its Chinese flavor." 48 He continued: "Surprisingly enough, certain...tenets of Western abstract expressionism seem not far removed from which have long been commonplaces of oriental expression. Accordingly, Far Eastern painters have had little trouble in adapting to them." Though he seemed impressed to find traces of Western abstract expressionism in Chuang's paintings, not acknowledging the semi-abstract nature of ink landscapes-"an openly declared utilization of the nature of his materials; the cult of a direct, and practically calligraphic, type of handling, and the mobilization of a wide range of textual effects"-he was uncomfortable with Chuang's ambitiously sized canvases and virtuosic mark-making. Identifying "subtlety" as one of the key virtues of Chinese literati art, he declared, "Frankly, I prefer the canvases of Chuang Che in which he retains some of it."49 Chuang's bold works seemed un-Chinese in this critic's mind. His dismissal was ever more evident when he considered Chuang's exhibition a mere "footnote" to a concurrent exhibition of Qing painter Shitao at the University of Michigan Museum of Art.⁵⁰ Evidently, Li's confidence in the Midwestern audience and the internationalism of the American art world did not reward him or his artists with sophisticated or deserving responses.⁵¹

Conclusion

The New Chinese Landscape made space in the canon for modernist ink painting that synthesized classical Chinese and modern Western ideas. Sensitive to the cultural relations between the Republic of China and the US, the new landscape painting took on the political dimensions and philosophical underpinnings of its Chinese heritage, absorbed aesthetic values and techniques from American abstraction, and received validation through its US tour. It was a product of a national identity crisis compounded by personal awakenings, due to the mass migration, decolonial efforts, and rise and presence of American cultural power in Taiwan. Just as the Cold War had elevated Taiwan and transformed it from a peripheral island into the center of international politics—at least on the Pacific Rim—the exhibition thrusted the art and artists of the Chinese diaspora, especially those in Taiwan, onto an international platform. The process of internationalization legitimized the works as modern, even though its intended American audience did not fully appreciate the conceptual depth and the radical nature of the artistic decisions made by these artists. The exhibition nonetheless confirmed the path of modernizing ink painting for these artists and inspired generations to follow. Li's belief in the evolution and staying power of ink paintings also made him a tireless champion of the new landscape—stylistically, technically, and geographically—of Chinese art.

Notes

- 1 Selected exhibitions of modernist artists from Taiwan in the US prior to *The New Chinese Landscape* include: Ton Fan Painting Society artists at the Mi Chou Gallery, New York (January and November 1960), reviewed by Dore Ashton in *The New York Times*, January 11, 1960; *The Chinese Contemporary Painting Exhibition* at the Parrish Art Museum, Southhampton, New York (1963), organized by painter Sun Duo-tzi, former art professor at the National Taiwan Normal University in Taipei; an exhibition of Chinese painters, the Woodrow Wilson Society of Princeton University, organized by Chu-yuan Lee, a Princeton architecture student from Taiwan (March 1965). These exhibitions were smaller in scale and more informal and thus had less impact than *The New Chinese Painting*.
- 2 Press release, "Contemporary Paintings from Taiwan," Exhibition 66–22, The New Chinese Landscape, The American Federation of Arts (AFA) archives.
- 3 The JDR 3rd Fund's activities in Taiwan began with this exhibition and continued until 1979. The Fund supported overseas travel and studies for Taiwanbased scholars, artists, writers, educators, and museum professionals. Liu and Chuang received the travel grants between 1966 and 1967, and Fong in 1971.
- 4 Thomas Lawton, then a Harvard PhD student in Chinese art history on a Fulbright scholarship in Taipei and later a curator at the Freer Gallery of Art, served as the local liaison for Chu-tsing Li and was billed as co-author and cocurator of the exhibition. However, Lawton played a supporting role in handling the correspondence and logistics in Taiwan during the preparation stage. Most importantly, the curatorial ideas were Li's, according to the archival documents. For the sake of simplicity, I refer to Li as curator of the exhibition.
- 5 Chu-tsing Li, letter to Porter McCray, June 27, 1964, Grant B-6625 AFA, Exhibition-China, JDR 3rd records, Asian Cultural Council (ACC) collection, Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC). Li's letter explains that the "traditionalists" he saw were those who emulated the classical ink painting styles, while those painting in "Western styles" were those imitating what they had seen in foreign periodicals and exhibition catalogues.
- 6 Many scholarly volumes and exhibition catalogues are dedicated to this subject, including Yang Xiaoneng ed., *Tracing the Past, Drawing the Future: Master Ink Painters in Twentieth-Century China* (Milan: 5 Continents, 2010).
- 7 For an overview of the history of modernist painting in the Republican era, see Julia F. Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, *The Art of Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 27–113.
- 8 Andrews and Shen, The Art of Modern China, 242.
- 9 For the conflicts between Japanese-trained and mainland transplant painters, see Hsiao Chong-ray, Wuyue yu donafang: zhongguo meishu xiandaihua yundong zai zhanhou Taiwan zhifazhan 1945–1970 (Fifth Moon and Ton Fan, The

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Development of the Modernization of Chinese Art in Postwar Taiwan, 1945– 1970) (Taipei: Dongda, 1991), 133–86. Jason Kuo summarizes how the crises in national and cultural identities in postwar Taiwan are reflected in the island's visual art in Jason Kuo, *Art and Cultural Politics in Postwar Taiwan* (London: University of Washington Press, 2000), 1–14.

- 10 Li Lin-t'san (Li Lincan), "Guobao guihang manji" (On the Return Journey of the National Treasures), Wenxing 58 (August 1, 1962): 30–34.
- 11 For more on the migration of the treasures, see Tsuyoshi Nojima, *Liangge gugong de lihe* (The Separation and Reunion of Two Forbidden Cities), trans. Zhang Huijun (Taipei: Lianjing, 2012), 109–16, 122–47. A selection from the collection traveled to the British Museum in 1932, the last time it had left Chinese soil.
- 12 For details, see Hsiao-ting Lin, Accidental State: Chiang Kai-shek, the United States, and the Making of Taiwan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).
- 13 The USIS established a branch in Taipei in 1945, headed by the renowned Sinologist John Fairbank. See Wang Mei-Hsiang, "Susha suiyue de meili/meili? Zhanhou meiyuan wenhua yu wuliushi niandai fangong wenxue xiandai zhuyi sichao fazhan zhi guanxi" (Beauty/American Force: The Relationship between Postwar American Aid Culture and the 1950s and 1960s Anti-Communist Literature and the Development of Modernism) (MA thesis, National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan, 2005), 39.
- 14 For example, in 1966 and 1967, The Fund sponsored *The New Japanese Painting and Sculpture*, which had a nine-city tour in America, including the Museum of Modern Art. The JDR 3rd Fund became the Asian Cultural Council in 1980, an important funding body that continues to support cultural exchanges between Asia and America.
- 15 The participation ended after Brazil terminated diplomatic relations with the ROC in August 1974.
- 16 These were directives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education, and the ROC Embassy in Brazil for the 1961 Bienal de São Paulo. Cited in Chiang Po-shin, "Mirror of Modernity: Piecing Together/Installing 'New Painting' in Taiwan and Brazil (1957–1973)," in Collision between Regions and Styles of Times—Collected Papers from the Academic Conference on Subjectivity of Taiwanese Art, ed. Tsui Yunghsueh (Taichung: National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, 2007), 193–94.
- 17 Chiang, 201.
- 18 Thomas Lawton, letter to Porter McCray, August 28, 1965. Folder B-6625, Box 98, AFA-Grant, Exhibition-China, JDR 3rd Fund, ACC, RAC.
- 19 Chu-tsing Li and Thomas Lawton, *The New Chinese Landscape: Six Contemporary Chinese Artists* (New York: The American Federation of Arts, 1966), 4.
- 20 Li, letter to McCray, June 27, 1964, RAC.
- 21 Many scholarly publications provide in-depth studies on the landscape painting tradition and case studies. Peter C. Sturman's article provides a useful summary from prehistory to the Qing dynasty. Sturman, "Landscape," in *A Companion to Chinese Art*, eds. Martin Power and Katherine R. Tsiang (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 177–94.
- 22 For scholarly studies on twentieth-century Chinese landscape painting as a nationalist endeavor, see Julia Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, "The Golden Age of *Guohua* in the 1930s," in *The Art of Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 93–113; Andrews and Shen, "Traditionalism as a Modern Stance: The Chinese Women's Calligraphy and Painting Society," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 1–30; Andrews and Shen, "The Traditionalist Response to Modernity: The Chinese Painting Society of Shanghai," in *Visual Culture in Shanghai*, 1850s-1930s, ed. Jason Chi-sheng Kuo (Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2007), 79–93.
- 23 Li and Lawton, New Chinese Landscape, 10.

- 24 Ibid., 18.
- 25 Ibid., 12.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Jerome Silbergeld, *Mind Landscapes: Paintings of C.C. Wang* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987), 71.
- 28 Li and Lawton, "The New Chinese Landscape," Art Journal 17, no. 2 (Winter 1967–68): 147 and Li, letter to McCray, June 27, 1964.
- 29 Chu-tsing Li, "Chikai de huaduo: yu chengyao" (The Late Bloomer: Yu Cheng-yao) in Shih Shou-chien ed., Qianyan jingxiu (Majestic Mountains: Yu Cheng Yao At Ninety) (Taipei: Hanart Gallery, 1988), 9.
- 30 Joan Stanley-Baker, *Huayulu: wang jiqian jiao ni kandong zhongguohua* (C.C. Wang Reflects on Painting) (Taipei: Artco Books, 2013), 309.
- 31 Li and Lawton, The New Chinese Landscape, 11.
- 32 In Li's first proposal in June 1964, eight artists were listed as candidates—the five included in the final exhibition (aside from Fong Chung-ray), Hong Kong artists Lui Shou-kwan and Kwong Yiu-ting, and California-based artist Lü Wujiu. In February 1965, he settled on the final six, five in Taiwan and one in the US. See "The New Chinese Landscape: An Exhibition of Paintings by Six Artists in Taiwan and Hong Kong," May 1965. Grant B-6625, Exhibition-China, JDR 3rd group, ACC collection, AFA records, RAC. Though it may have initially been to simplify shipping logistics, Li's choice to eliminate the artists from Hong Kong and California heightened the exhibition's focus on developments by artists in Taiwan. Thus, the choice had historical importance.
- 33 Chu-tsing Li, letter to Porter McCray, June 27, 1964.
- 34 Translated by author. Chuang Che, letter to Wai-lim Yip, June 19, 1966, Wailim Yip personal archive, Del Mar, CA.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Thomas Lawton, "A Foreigner Looks at Contemporary Chinese Painting." Folders B-6612, B-6723, Box 108, Liu Kuo-sung, Painting/Sculpture-China, ACC collection, RAC.
- 37 Fong Chung-ray, interview by author, Walnut Creek, CA, June 4, 2013.
- 38 Before and during World War II, McCray worked for Nelson Rockefeller at the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, a privately funded agency promoting cultural exchange between the Americas. In 1947, McCray was the board chairman of the Museum of Modern Art in New York with major support from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund.
- 39 Porter McCray, letter to Chu-tsing Li, July 20, 1964, Grant B-6625 AFA, Exhibition-China, JDR 3rd records, ACC collection, RAC.
- 40 For an understanding of the export of Abstract Expressionism and the rise of the New York School on a global stage, see Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).
- 41 Li, in his letter to McCray July 20, 1964, mentioned that Asia House might not be able to host the exhibition due to its dedication to traditional Asian art, and asked McCray for help. In his reply on July 27, 1964, McCray, who was on the gallery committee, did not think that Asia House would support the exhibition.
- 42 According to Li, interest was shown by the following institutions: University of Minnesota, University of Michigan, University of Chicago, University of Illinois, University of Nebraska, and University of Iowa. "A Request for Support for a Travelling Exhibition, 'The New Chinese Landscape,'" February 5, 1965. Grant B-6625 AFA, Exhibition-China, JDR 3rd Fund records, ACC collection, RAC.
- 43 Li rallied the support of historians of Chinese art, including James Cahill, at the time curator at the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, DC., and Laurence Sickman, curator of Asian Art at the Nelson Gallery of Art (now known as the

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Nelson-Atkins Museum) in Kansas City, and approached other museums with "Oriental interest." Sickman's words quoted in Chu-tsing Li, letter to McCray, November 27, 1965. Li mentioned to the AFA that he had shown pictures of the works to George Kuwayama of the Los Angeles County Museum, Max Loehr of the Fogg Museum, Hsio-yen Shih, Far Eastern Department, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, and Betty Maurstad, curator of the University Gallery at the University of Minnesota. Chu-tsing Li, letter to Robert Luck, October 8, 1965, Grant B-6625 AFA, Exhibition-China, JDR 3rd Fund records, ACC collection, RAC. The two bigger museums that the show visited were the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Nelson Gallery of Art, both of which have strong holdings in Chinese antiquities.

- 44 The exhibition period ran from January 17 to February 25, 1968. One portion of the exhibition (the non-scroll portion) was closed on February 11 and the rest on February 25. Press release, Folder 8, Box 31, Exhibition Compendium, Cleveland Museum of Art Archives.
- 45 Donald L. Hoffmann, "Art in Mid-America," Kansas City Star, April 2, 1967.
- 46 John Canaday, "Art: Sample of Americana, From Copley to Calder. Other New Exhibitions are Summarized," *The New York Times*, January 21, 1967.

- 48 Jean Paul Slusser, "Local Oriental Conquest Continues," Ann Arbor News, August 18, 1967, 10.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Half of the works by the three Fifth Moon artists in the exhibition had been sold to American expatriates prior to the tour. These Americans—academics, historians and curators of Chinese art, benefactors of Asian cultural affairs, and family members of State Department employees—lived in Taiwan and knew the artists personally. They were the first patrons of the young artists and gave them a source of income and confidence. But because they were hardly seasoned collectors or art world insiders, their support did not impact the critical reception of *The New Chinese Landscape* in the US.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

2 Before and beyond the Cold War

Visual accounts of the "Secret War" in Laos (Pha Khamfan's collection of photographs and Terry Wofford's paintings of planes)

Roger Nelson

It is often noted that research on art and visual culture relating to the "Cold War" in "Southeast Asia" has expanded in scope and intensified in volume in recent years. Less widely recognized, however, is that most studies begin with and proceed from a shared methodological and epistemological assumption at their foundation: that increased attention to the art and visual culture of Cold War-era Southeast Asia will, in turn and inevitably, offer insights into the historical events and contexts that images relate to or depict. In particular, recent studies have often highlighted the entanglement of internal and external forces shaping art, culture, society, and politics in the period.¹ But is it always the case that images offer insights into the contexts from which they emerged, and is this always the most sensitive and generative way to approach art and visual culture emerging from Cold War-era Southeast Asia? Such images are enmeshed in a dense multiplicity of networks and narratives that often extend geographically out of and away from this region and are historically rooted before this moment. Might this mean that the process of analyzing images sometimes complicates-rather than clarifies-our understandings of these various conflicts? Despite the burgeoning scholarship on the Cold War and the arts, many aspects and details of the ideologies, micro-histories, and affective experiences of the period remain unknown and perhaps unknowable: art makes this elusiveness most powerfully apparent. Might it sometimes be possible-even preferable-to approach the art and visual culture of this period not only (or mainly) with the aim of elucidating regional geopolitics but also (or instead) to enrich our appreciation of other, even seemingly unrelated (micro-) histories and connections that extend before and beyond the Cold War?

This essay will consider these questions while examining two corpuses of images that depict the United States' "Secret War" in Laos. My aim here is both to introduce some under-studied historical material relating to this conflict and to venture some theoretical and methodological thoughts about studying the art and visual culture of Cold War-era Southeast Asia. Chief among these thoughts is the suggestion to study images from this place and time in multiple, overlapping frames, which also allows attention to their intersections with other contexts. In essence, I am hoping to reckon more fully with the Cold War period while at the same time decentering the conflict.

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The "Secret War," waged as part of the Second Indochina War—and never a "secret" for those in Laos²—was a conflict that involved covert aerial bombing on a scale that was historically unprecedented, as well as a proxy war fought by Hmong and other highlander soldiers, armed and often trained by the US, and aided by Thai mercenaries and other military support.³ It began around 1959 and continued for 16 years until 1975. During this period, ten percent of the Laotian population died, twenty percent were wounded, and a quarter became refugees.⁴ While the "Secret War" has given rise to what one historian describes as a "cottage industry" of studies,⁵ the literature tends to neglect visual accounts of the conflict.

The first body of images we will consider comprises photographs collected by a senior Buddhist abbot in Luang Prabang, Pha Khamfan Silasangvara (1901–1987), who (like many Luang Prabang monks in the 20th century) was also a celebrated maker and collector of photographs. Among the eleven hundred prints that he has collected over several decades, 28 images (all dating to the 1960s) relate explicitly to the "Secret War," depicting human and nonhuman victims of bombing campaigns, as well as gatherings of Pathet Lao communist figures with senior Buddhist clergy from Luang Prabang, together with laypeople. The original prints are held in the Buddhist Archive of Photography, at Vat Suvannakhili, in Luang Prabang. Digital versions are also available online.⁶

Second is a series of paintings depicting Air America planes that were deployed, under the order of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), for clandestine military and other purposes. These paintings were made by British-born self-described "aviation artist" Terry Wofford (née Gilbert, 1943–), who lived and worked in Vientiane from 1968 to 1972, while her US-born husband was a pilot for Air America. This was a commercial airline secretly owned and operated by the CIA, which was used as a front for military operations in Laos, including the delivery of arms and other supplies to proxy fighters, as well as the transport of refugees and soldiers, surveillance, and other activities. Most of the original paintings made by Wofford in Vientiane are dispersed in private collections, chiefly in the United States; digital images of many are also available for viewing online.⁷

These two sets of pictures are among the very few major visual accounts of the "Secret War" made in Laos, aside from photojournalism and snapshots taken by American pilots. The two sets differ in many ways but are linked by the historical event they depict: the photographs show victims of and responses to the "Secret War," while the paintings show the military planes used to perpetrate that violence. Pha Khamfan and Wofford, as makers and collectors of the images, represent perspectives from both "sides" of the conflict, to put it crudely, but the works themselves also seem in some ways to challenge binary understandings of the war, due to the ambiguity and ambivalence of their imagery, and the nature of their circulation. Moreover, and importantly, while the works depict moments from the "Secret War" in Laos, they are also deeply linked to discourses and narratives that geographically reach beyond Southeast Asia, and temporally extend before the Cold War period. Wofford's paintings may be most productively considered in light of the little-studied hobbyist and commercial genre known as aviation art, which is concentrated in North America and Western Europe, and which is not known to have many followers in Southeast Asia.⁸ Pha Khamfan's collection of photographs, on the other hand, may be most productively understood in relation to the longstanding practice of monks making and collecting photographs as Buddhist pedagogical tools, in several monasteries in Luang Prabang (as elsewhere in the Theravada world). This practice originates in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, long predating the Cold War period, an important factor as discussed below.

Like most art and visual culture originating in modern Laos, these two collections of images have never been substantially studied,⁹ yet they reward close scrutiny not only for their rarity but for aesthetic, methodological, and historiographical reasons as well. Aesthetically, despite their obvious differences in form and subject matter, the photographs in Pha Khamfan's collection and the paintings by Wofford share a particular attention to composition and framing, affording us carefully cropped views of scenes not otherwise represented in visual form. Despite their evidently aesthetic qualities, these bodies of images sit outside of a mainstream discourse of "formalist art-historical narrative" and may be considered "vernacular," in the terms set out by photography scholar Geoffrey Batchen, even though they are also far from the "ordinary photographs" that have been "made or bought ... by everyday folk," which Batchen takes as his central object of inquiry.¹⁰ Methodologically, the works resist easy incorporation into museological or other canon-making processes. One reason for this is that the photographs can only be exhibited as reproductions, as the original prints must remain in Laos under the care of the Buddhist Archive of Photography in Luang Prabang. Moreover, the identity of the photographer/s is unknown. The paintings, too, are unlikely to be exhibited in Southeast Asia. This is due not only to their somewhat dated and sometimes amateurish appearance (and the awkward counter-canonical position of aviation art as a genre) but also to the general reluctance, widespread in Southeast Asian museums and other exhibitionary settings, to exhibit artworks made by white, Euro-American artists, especially those made in the latter half of the 20th century, and especially those artists (like Wofford) who spent only a short time resident in Southeast Asia, and had limited contact with local artists and art worlds.¹¹ Historiographically, the works foreground anonymous participants in and victims of the "Secret War," and thus counter the prevailing tendency in most studies of that conflict to privilege American rather than Laotian perspectives, and to focus on a small number of commanding officers with larger-than-life personalities (such as infamous CIA paramilitary officer Bill Lair, and Hmong proxy army leader General Vang Pao), rather than the rank and file of soldiers and civilians involved and affected.

My primary aim in this essay is simply to provide a basis for further research by others in future,¹² and this is reflected in its three-part structure. After first embarking on a comparative and somewhat speculative discussion of selected images from both corpuses of work, I will then follow the fairly conventional path of introducing each body of images in turn, enabling the explication of greater detail about Pha Khamfan's collection of photographs and Terry Wofford's paintings of planes. In the first section, which focuses on the images themselves rather than their contexts, I draw on recent experimental anthropological writing about Laos in the aftermath of the "Secret War" in an attempt to point to the affective qualities of ambiguity, mystery, and "haunting" which are shared in the photographs and paintings.¹³ Both provoke questions that are unanswered and unanswerable but also, as I will highlight, demonstrate an ability to foreground under-privileged perspectives. In the second and third sections, I discuss Pha Khamfan's photographs and Terry Wofford's paintings of planes in relation to discourses on other topics, such as photography in Theravada contexts—which directs our attention to a period before the Cold War—and the amateur and commercial genre of aviation art in the US—directing our attention away from Southeast Asia.

"Oblique, riven by silences": images as deathly and unyielding

Now that we have begun, let us begin again: by looking at (and listening to) 14 images.

The first image is a photograph, untitled, printed in silver gelatin on inexpensive paper, depicting two human figures, dated circa 1960s (Figure 2.1). In this image, a young child tilts its head back, resting on the cheek and shoulder of a young woman, perhaps the child's mother. The skin of the child's face blisters, discolored. It appears to have been burned, by flames or chemicals, or both. The child's mouth is open, as if in the fitful sleep of exhaustion, yet not open enough to be actively crying; the corners of the lips turn slightly downwards, as if in some kind of pain that cannot be expressed by crying. The child's eyes are closed, and the knitting of the brow suggests that they have closed tightly, as if to shut out the world. The woman averts her eyes from the photographer's lens and thus from our gaze: she looks down to the child, her brow, too, furrowed in a frown, an expression of care and concern, again, seemingly silently. The entire image is printed in black and white and closely framed around the two faces; yet the blurred shapes in the background suggest the lush tropical foliage of a Laotian jungle, with its sounds of fertile life and lethal violence. On the reverse of the photograph, a typewritten caption in Lao asserts that "the disaster of the war" brings sadness "for life and nation."¹⁵ By activating both sides of the photographic print, the makers of this inexpensively produced image transform what photography conservator Paul Messier terms "functional" photography paper into "expressive" paper, and thus simultaneously signal both "objective reality" and "interpretive subjectivity" in not only the image itself but the whole print as a two-sided object.¹⁶

But who is this child in the image? Who is this woman? What specific "disaster of the war" has befallen them? Are they victims of the covert aerial attacks, which—terrifyingly and deafeningly—detonated one bomb on average every eight minutes for a decade?¹⁷ Or are they casualties of ground



Figure 2.1 Photographer unknown. Collected by Pha Khamfan Silasangvaro. Undated, circa 1960s-1975. Silver gelatin print. British Library Endangered Archive Programme record number C-1111. Reproduced with permission of the Buddhist Archive of Photography.

battle, in which proxy soldiers were known to have indulged in extreme brutalities, encouraged by their US backers, such as severing their victims' ears?¹⁸ Are this woman and child just victims, or might they also be perpetrators of violence? Have they posed for this image or been caught unawares by the photographer? Did they survive? When this photograph was taken, was the child, perhaps—do we dare to imagine—already dead?¹⁹ These are but some among any number of questions that the photograph provokes. So too do the other photographs among the 28 collected by Pha Khamfan Sila-sangvara that relate specifically to the "Secret War." These questions remain unanswered and will remain unanswerable. The image may invoke the illusion of a visceral appreciation for the experience of the war in Laos; but for most, this illusory sensation offers no real insight into the historical context that produced the photograph, and which it depicts.

This photograph, made by an unknown photographer likely involved with the communist organization known as the Pathet Lao, was collected by Pha Khamfan Silasangvara, presented to him after a visit to a communist-controlled "liberated zone," and kept in his *kuti*, or abode, within the Vat Suvannakhili temple and monastery in Luang Prabang. It was discovered there in 2007, two decades after Pha Khamfan's death, by researchers working for the then-newly established Buddhist Archive of Photography, which is housed on the same grounds as the temple, and available online.²⁰

A second image: a painting, titled *Dropping Supplies*, done in oil on canvas, in a pastel palette of saccharine hues, and dated 1971 (Figure 2.2). The



Figure 2.2 Terry Wofford. *Dropping Supplies.* Oil on canvas, 45.7 × 61cm. Private collection. Reproduced with permission of the artist.

painting's sun-drenched hues recall the family-friendly "technicolor" films made by Disney or Paramount in the 1960s and '70s. This is the palette of an all-American fantasy far from the horrors of the war in Laos. Filling the frame, extending to all four sides of the portrait-oriented picture, is the pale cerulean blue and pristine chalky white of a lightly clouded sky.²¹ This is not a realistic depiction, but a fantasy. The artist has carefully framed the imagined composition to give the impression of looking upwards. There is no horizon line, no visible land, just endless sky. The airborne objects that comprise the painting's real subject—the wooden crates—hang from parachutes and fall toward the viewer, as a small aircraft flies off, having made its delivery and now making its exit. The crates seem identical, unlabeled. The largest in the frame,

foregrounded to appear closest, seems to be made of at least 12 boards of timber, with double reinforcements on each side, suggesting that it holds substantial cargo. The crates hang from parachutes that have ballooned to their maximum inflation; they are the round "jellyfish" parachutes, which rely on drag caused by wind resistance to slow the object's descent, for gentler landing. These full parachutes, together with the blue sky, and the plane diminished in optical size as it flies off—all of these elements combine to suffuse the scene with an air of calm, an almost childlike sense of wonder and peace.

Yet defying this cheery mood of almost cartoonish calm-which is at odds with the foreboding atmosphere in most of Wofford's contemporaneous paintings of planes done in Laos, as we will see below-is the fact that this aircraft is a war plane. More specifically, it is identified by the artist as a Fairchild C-123K: an American military plane used throughout the Second Indochina War (of which the "Secret War" in Laos was part), which is described by the National Museum of the US Air Force as a "short-range assault transport used for airlifting troops and cargo from small, unprepared airstrips," an "essential part of US Air Force airlift during the Southeast Asia War [sic]," and the plane used for the spraying of Agent Orange (officially known as Operation "Ranch Hand").²² This was one of the Air America planes flown by Bob Wofford, an Air America pilot whom the artist, then named Terry Gilbert, would marry the following year, changing her name to Terry Wofford. The crates that this "short-range assault transport" plane dropped were filled with arms and ammunition, which the Air America pilots and their crowd called "hard rice," to distinguish it from the actual, edible rice (sometimes called "soft rice"23) that was also sometimes airlifted to remote areas and air-dropped, the sacks often bursting upon impact.²⁴ According to The History of Air America, military activities in Laos intensified in the years between 1968 and 1973, meaning that "Air America had to transport more troops, more 'hard rice' and more big guns than before... [and] more Company aircraft were shot at or even shot down."²⁵ This period of intensified aerial warfare-which also saw an explosion in the number of refugees fleeing bombing²⁶—coincides exactly with the period in which Terry Wofford lived and worked in Vientiane. Yet no sense of that violence and danger is conveyed in the cheerful colors, quiet tone, and placid atmosphere of Dropping Supplies. The artist explains that she believes Air America was "performing a service that was primarily humanitarian and in exceptionally dangerous circumstances," and that "[t]he majority of [Air America] missions were delivering aid of all sorts."27

This optimistic conviction is belied in another painting made that same year, titled *Night Mission Over Laos*, which depicts an Air America spy plane flying a night reconnaissance mission over a rural Laotian village (Figure 2.3). Quite at odds with *Dropping Supplies*, the palette in this work is dark and ominous; the gentle silvery light of the moon, which illuminates the irrigation channels crisscrossing the rice fields, is drowned out by the inscrutable blackness that dominates the left side of the canvas. Barely visible shapes emerging from this darkness may be clouds, or craggy mountains, or both:

their appearance imbues the image with a threatening atmosphere, and signals danger for the small plane that is the painting's principal subject. This plane, the artist explains, is "a highly modified, electronics-filled spy plane that flew night patrols and also staved aloft during the day for many hours." The aircraft's operation was unaffected by cloud cover, according to the artist, yet the clouds in her depiction "are symbolic of the hidden nature of these missions."28 We know, from military archival records, that this model of plane-officially called a Douglas B-26 and commonly referred to as an On Mark aircraft—was dangerous to fly. One Air America pilot's logbook records being "quite well shot up today! Left engine, nose cameras, rear [high frequency] radio station, etc., five hits from 14.5mm anti-aircraft fire."29 Who was doing this shooting? It was the Laotians, on whom the Air America planes were spying. The pitched-roof houses of the Laotian village, visible on the ground below, all have lights burning inside, visible through small rectangular windows or doorways. The careful inclusion of this detail leaves us wondering, as the spy plane's operators must have been: what is happening in this village, what is being said or planned or done? With retrospective knowledge of the scale of destruction during the "Secret War," we might also wonder: did this village survive? Or was it bombed into oblivion, by another American plane? The sense of danger and mystery in Night Mission Over Laos leaves us guessing, and fearful.



Figure 2.3 Terry Wofford. *Night Mission Over Laos.* 1971. Oil on canvas, 50.8 × 61cm. Private collection. Reproduced with permission of the artist.

Did Bob Wofford sincerely believe he was doing "humanitarian" work when he knowingly dropped crates of weapons called "hard rice" in Laos. and did Terry Wofford sincerely believe this when she depicted the scene in Disneyesque hues, and such an unrealistic composition, depicting more of a fantasy than a war? The artist's generosity in sharing, her openness and reflexivity, suggest nothing but frank honesty in her recollections. But how might her bright-eyed faith in Air America square with the fact that on her first date with her future husband, the artist "shocked" the pilot "by asking him about [Air America's] CIA connection"?³⁰ How might the optimistic atmosphere in Dropping Supplies square with the darker hues and persistent air of mystery and foreboding in Night Mission Over Laos, and most of the artist's other paintings of planes made during her years in Laos? Might the sweet, innocent appearance of Dropping Supplies, which depicts weapons of war being delivered, have been a tongue-in-cheek provocation, a gesture deliberately a bit off-key? Like the questions provoked by the photograph of a woman and child in agony discussed above, these questions also evade an answer. Wofford affirms that she holds multiple perspectives on the infrastructures of the "Secret War": views which might seem contradictory, or at least cause tensions that remain obscured in the placid appearance of this painting. She earnestly claims to have "had and still have nothing but the highest regard for Air America and all the people associated with it," while also decrying "US government policies that enabled such wanton destruction by the US military machine, destruction that continues unabated today."31 Indeed, other observers have noted that the mode of warfare preferred by the US today—as carried out in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere—was pioneered during the "Secret War" in Laos.³² It was impossible for Wofford to have anticipated the long-lasting impact of the activities she depicted in her paintings of planes. Yet, does this sufficiently explain the dulcet and otherworldly appearance of Dropping Supplies?

Although it differs strikingly from *Night Mission Over Laos*, and most of the other paintings of planes that Wofford made in Laos during the "Secret War," the work shares with those others a stubborn resistance to any attempt at establishing direct or clear links between the image and its context. As we will see, when we turn to examine other works by Wofford and consider the artist's biography and interests, these paintings may reveal more about the position of amateur and commercial aviation art as a genre (and women as artists within that genre) than they do about the military operations undertaken by Air America in Laos. Yet their eeriness—the ghastly and hushed sweetness of *Dropping Supplies* and the uneasy foreboding of the artist's contemporaneous works, including *Night Mission Over Laos*—suggests that they are, nonetheless, not only made possible by that military context but indeed haunted by it.

Let us add to these captivating yet obstinately mysterious and unyielding pictures another image: one conjured in words. Unlike the pictures described above, this image was not made while the "Secret War" was raging in Laos in the 1960s and early '70s; rather, it describes the everlasting aftereffects

of that war, as experienced in Laos in the 2010s. The image describes leftover bombs from the "Secret War" as looking like fruit—"cucumber bombs" and "guava bombs" and "bael bombs" and "pineapple bombs" and "melon bombs"³³—that lie near the surface of the ground in a forest in Laos, unexploded and thus (so to speak) live, and therefore lethal. They are, moreover, "bombs as numerous as fruit, needing to be harvested before they explode."³⁴ These bombs are haunted, possessed—"the ghosts of war are said to have triggered explosions, or evil spirits are said to have animated bombs in order to control their detonation"³⁵—and, thus, these are bombs that necessitate the invention of a language to describe "the deadly agency of bombs (to kill, to haunt, to explode)." These are bombs that embody the "deadly, haunting quality of military waste."³⁶

This image, conjured in deliberately experimental and poetic words by anthropologist Leah Zani, is richly descriptive but also purposefully eschews narrative. In this sense, Zani mimics in literary form the close-up, tightly framed compositions of the photograph and paintings described above. She focuses in on an image without showing or telling us what happened in the moment before or after its appearance. Zani's deliberately non-narrative prose, like those carefully composed pictures described above, invokes the sense that perhaps we are glimpsing just one mysterious instant in an unfolding sequence of unknowable moments, whose horror might be not only unknowable but also unimaginable, or at least beyond the ability of words to convey. That is, all of these images imply that we are accessing only a partial, incomplete view of the experience of the "Secret War" and its deathly afterlife. This strategy of closely cropping and tightly framing images "builds toward [Zani's] larger claim that narrative language does not have a monopoly on truth,"37 while also pointing to the value (and sometimes the necessity) of speaking indirectly, of silence or "nondisclosure," or at least of a disclosure that is always already only ever partial and muted.

As well as highlighting the incomplete nature of knowledges and narratives of conflict, Zani's approach-in particular, her focus on embodied, affective understandings and embrace of experimental and unusual modes of writing-foregrounds anonymous, everyday experiences of violence. In this way, this mode of scholarship counters the prevailing tendency, found in a review of most literature and research on the "Secret War" in Laos, to privilege American over Laotian perspectives, and to emphasize the role of a small number of well-known individuals (American and Laotian) more than the experience of a larger number of unknown people. For example, many studies examine US foreign policy rather than considering competing ideological policies within Laos, and many studies focus on high-ranking soldiers rather than rank and file or civilian participants in-and casualties of-the "Secret War." The approach taken by Zani, as well as in the photographs collected by Pha Khamfan and the paintings made by Wofford, shifts our attention away from these prominent, mostly male figures toward the unnamed Laotian villagers, who included women and children, as well as American pilots, and other anonymous cogs in the war machine. These visual accounts of the

"Secret War" thus complement a small but compelling tendency in the literature on Cold War-era Laos that may help to enable a kind of history from below, focused on the lived experience of conflict.

These images—Zani's drawn-in words, the others rendered in paint and silver gelatin photography—are, as Zani writes, "oblique, riven by silences." They make for "ghostly, read-between-the-lines, fingers-crossed" accounts of the "Secret War" in Laos. They do not necessarily show or tell us what happened, at the level of policy or command; nor do they really reveal what that felt like, at the ground level.

These images do, however, make us see that what happened during this lethal is little-known, and we do not know what it felt or smelled or sounded like—or what it might continue to feel like today. Their precious value, then, is not only to offer insight into the Cold War-era context from which they emerged, but to also do the opposite: to make manifest the elusiveness of that moment, and the difficulty of gaining affective insight into the "Secret War" in Laos.

"Of benefit both to its receiver and its donor": Pha Khamfan's collection of photographs

Having registered the haunting and mysterious qualities of the images described above, and their tendency to provoke unanswerable questions, we now shift from a focus on individual images to considering, instead, each corpus of work as a whole, in its broader context. It is hoped that this explication of further detail about each body of work may enable further research or alternative interpretations in future. In this section, I will argue that Pha Khamfan's collection of 28 photographs is best understood not in connection to the "Secret War" or the Cold War period but to the longer duration of history. In the next section, I will argue that Wofford's paintings are best understood not only in connection to Laos or the Second Indochina War, but also in connection to the field of practice known as aviation art, which is concentrated in Europe and North America.

Pha Khamfan's 28 photographs of the Laotian Civil War are but a small component of a much larger collection, totaling over eleven hundred images, assembled by a man who was a monk for more than six decades, the abbot of Vat Suvannakhili for half a century, and held numerous other senior positions in the Theravada Buddhist clergy, while also being active as a painter, photographer, and designer and restorer of monasteries and temples.³⁸ Pha Khamfan's collection includes many photographs and drawings by the late monk himself, as well as others covering his travels throughout the Theravada world and Asia, and portraits, depictions of the late monk making artworks, scenes of landscapes and architecture, and records of religious festivals and ceremonies.³⁹ His collection is, in turn, but one among many collections of photographs assembled by Luang Prabang monks, now gathered at the Buddhist Archive of Photography, where more than 35,000 photographs are housed in total.

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The sheer volume of this archive indicates that photography was widely practiced and collected in Laos, throughout the 20th century. It was largely an activity for amateurs, or else for commemoration or journalism. In Laos during the 20th century, there were no "fine art" photographers in the Western sense.⁴⁰ While the full extent of amateur or other photography practices is unknown, it is very likely that photographers were commissioned by the Pathet Lao and other communist organizations to document aspects of battle and life during wartime, and that the resulting images officially "belonged" to the authorities that had commissioned them, as was the case in North Vietnam; more research is needed on this aspect of photographic practice during the Second Indochina War in Laos. Certainly, monks were not the only Laotians with an active interest in photography, yet their practices and collections are today perhaps the most accessible of any from the 20th century in Laos, thanks to the efforts of the Buddhist Archive's founders.

Each collection in the Buddhist Archive has an individuated emphasis and feeling—they are, in Hans Georg Berger's words, "distinct, and each lay out a different focus"—and Pha Khamfan's is among the more aesthetically cohesive, reflecting his own artistic and photographic practice.⁴¹ Included in his collection are images he made, images he collected, and album pages in which he placed images in careful relation to each other, decorating the paper of the page by hand. This indicates not only that Pha Khamfan was particular about the appearance of the photographs he made and collected, but also that he paid special attention to their edges, framing, and relationships to each other. This is reflected also in the composition of the pictures of the "Secret War," and in their use of both sides of the print, including with typewritten captions in Lao appended behind the images, as noted above.

Despite the diverse subject matter of the 28 photographs in this collection, the images are all carefully framed, with every picture tightly focused on its principal subject. Of the 28 photographs collected by Pha Khamfan that relate to the "Secret War," three depict human victims of bombing (Figure 2.1, as discussed above), one captures a destroyed Buddhist temple (Figure 2.4), and the remaining 24 show groups of monks, Pathet Lao members, and laypeople engaged in various activities together, including political demonstrations (Figure 2.5), classes (Figure 2.6), religious ceremonies (Figure 2.7), and festivities. The tight framing of the subject in these depictions of diverse scenes suggests either that they were made by the same photographer, or compiled by a single authorial figure, before being presented to Pha Khamfan. Identically formatted typewritten captions in Lao on the reverse of the images—rarely found in any of the other collections within the Buddhist Archive—further suggest the hand of either a single maker or single compiling author.

As these (undated) captions indicate, the photographs were all taken in the "liberated zone" of north-eastern Laos and probably presented to Pha Khamfan after a visit to this communist-controlled area. By the late 1960s, the conflict between the Pathet Lao and the Royal Lao Government had split the country between communist-controlled "liberated zones" and royalist



Figure 2.4 Photographer unknown. Collected by Pha Khamfan Silasangvaro. Undated, circa 1960s-1975. Silver gelatin print. A caption in Lao on the verso of the image states: "A thousand temples in Laos were damaged by bombing in the American war." British Library Endangered Archive Programme record number C-1113. Reproduced with permission of the Buddhist Archive of Photography.



Figure 2.5 Photographer unknown. Collected by Pha Khamfan Silasangvaro. Undated, circa 1960s-1975. Silver gelatin print. A caption in Lao on the verso of the image states: "Peace and independence are strongly wished for by all Lao people." British Library Endangered Archive Programme record number C-1115. Reproduced with permission of the Buddhist Archive of Photography.



Figure 2.6 Photographer unknown. Collected by Pha Khamfan Silasangvaro. Undated, circa 1960s-1975. Silver gelatin print. British Library Endangered Archive Programme record number C-1116. Reproduced with permission of the Buddhist Archive of Photography.



Figure 2.7 Photographer unknown. Collected by Pha Khamfan Silasangvaro. Undated, circa 1960s-1975. Silver gelatin print. A caption in Lao on the verso of the image states: "Although the country is at war, people always tried to hold festivals for the solidarity of the local people." British Library Endangered Archive Programme record number C-1119. Reproduced with permission of the Buddhist Archive of Photography. strongholds, such as the capital Vientiane, where there was the strongest American military and civilian presence. The division was determined largely by the intervention of foreign powers: the eastern provinces were controlled by North Vietnamese forces backing the Pathet Lao, while the northern provinces were held by Chinese-backed Pathet Lao, leaving the west to the Royal Lao Government with the backing of the US (and Thailand).⁴² This splitting of the newly independent nation into mutually antagonistic zones was commonplace in the Second Indochina War, as elsewhere in Asia and beyond, especially in conflicts during the Cold War period. In the Laotian context, it predated the "Secret War." A letter dated 1950 from a disciple to a senior Buddhist monk in Luang Prabang apologizes for a "slow response" due to the "obstacle" caused by fighting guerrilla factions: the writer's "journey back home lasted more than a month as the roads were difficult due to [the activities of] the Itsala [guerrilla movement]."⁴³ Even earlier, the borders of Laos shifted repeatedly during the colonial era, with the former royal capital of Luang Prabang switching from Thai to Laotian control several times, in part as a result of negotiations between Thai and French colonial authorities.44

This notion of a divided land may seem abstract to those who have not experienced it first-hand; histories of the making and/or presentation of souvenir images after a visit from one side to the other makes manifest the palpable sense of distance and difference between opposing zones within a single nation. In Laos, repeated visits by the same monks resulted in repeated gifts of differing photographs. For example, in May 1975 (after the official end of the Laotian Civil War, and the cessation of bombings related to the "Secret War"), Pha Khamfan traveled to the "liberated zone" of Xam Nua province, accompanied by other senior monks, including Pha Khamchan Virachitta (1920–2007), who would later establish the Buddhist Archive. Again, photographs were presented to the visiting monks to record that "they visited many important political and religious places." As Khamvone Boulyaphonh has argued, "[t]hese photographs demonstrate that the Liberated Zone was a peaceful place and that the Pathet Lao movement respected Buddhist monks and believed in Buddhism."⁴⁵

The presentation of photo souvenirs to visitors of "liberated zones" during Cold War-related conflicts is, of course, not unique to Laos. For example, numerous images recording such visits between the US-backed zone and the communist-controlled "liberated zone" during a different (but related) civil war were also collected by Cambodian prince and former head of state Norodom Sihanouk, in 1973, at the height of conflict between the US-backed Khmer Republic and the communist Khmer Rouge.⁴⁶ The existence of such photographs—and the knowledge that they were frequently made to officially record the passage of notable individuals from one zone to another, in the context of Cold War-era civil wars—indicates the perceived importance of such cross-border visits.

In this way, Pha Khamfan's collection of photographs suggests that in the under-studied context of Laos, images behave in a similar manner to elsewhere in Cold War-era Southeast Asia: offering insight into the lived experience of the effects of the political machinations of the times. Yet, in other ways, the images also intersect with older narratives that predate the Cold War and are derived from even older habits of image circulation, some of which may be pre-modern in origin. We will now turn our attention to the narratives that tie this corpus of images to histories before the Cold War.

The presentation of photographs as souvenirs of cross-border or interzone travel is consistent with—and may be understood as a continuation of—a long-standing tradition of Theravada Buddhist monks in Southeast Asia being presented with photographs as souvenirs of travels and meetings, which predates the Cold War by some decades, and has attracted scholarly attention within regional discourses. Held in the Buddhist Archive of Photography are numerous examples of studio portraits of monks and novices from the 1930s with inscriptions on the reverse, as well as *cartes de visite* that had been presented by monks and novices from elsewhere in Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand. The handwritten Lao inscription on one 1936 photograph presented by a Lao student in Bangkok to a Lao novice monk in Luang Prabang indicates something of their purpose and meaning:

I hand over this picture to Novice Suvankeo as a token of memory, so that we might not forget each other both in this life and the next lives. I hope you will receive it with happiness so that it may be of benefit both to its receiver and its donor.⁴⁷

As these words suggest, the presentation of photo-portraits as souvenirs had both a sentimental quality ("we might not forget each other"), and a religious merit-making and devotional effect ("of benefit to both its receiver and its donor"). Similar examples are found in Thailand. Photo-souvenirs of this kind attest to the dynamic network of exchange that existed within the Theravada world of the early 20th century (and long before), with monks from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and beyond frequently traveling to study at temples, schools, universities, and institutions in each other's countries.

The tradition of monks and novices gifting photographic portraits of themselves as souvenir *cartes de visite* may also be considered a renewal and adaptation of an older trope, established during the colonial era in the mid-to late-19th century, when visiting European photographers also made post-cards featuring images of Buddhist monks of Southeast Asia.⁴⁸ Such images exoticize and objectify in their colonial gaze, produced for circulation in a world far removed from that of the Buddhist clergy themselves. The studio portraits exchanged by monks have a different quality, resulting from their circulation between monks and novices, without the obvious intervention of Europeans or colonial authorities. This transformation in the purpose, tone, and circulation of photographic portraits of monks is continued and expanded with the presentation of more varied kinds of photographs, not only portraits, as souvenirs of travels between political zones, among not only Buddhist clergy but also laypeople, political figures, and so on.

The exchange of photographs as special, commemorative gifts among monks, laypeople, and others is not only derived from colonial cartes de visite but can also be seen as a reworking of an older, pre-modern Theravada Buddhist religious practice, in which the replication and proliferation of miniature sculptural images (in bronze and other materials) representing various deities is understood to increase and disperse their symbolic power, through the process of copying and circulation. Scholars linking pre-modern practices for the exchange and adornment of sacred images (such as bronze sculptures) to modern photographic technologies and networks have observed that the circulation of photography, like the distribution of sculptural images made in older media, functions to communicate power, in the Theravada Buddhist contexts of Cambodia and Thailand.⁴⁹ While similar studies have not yet been conducted in Laos, the many similarities in the practice of Buddhism there-and the many historical links between clergy in Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand-mean that observations made of the latter countries may also offer insights into the Laotian case.

By surveying the scholarship on photography's uses in Buddhist contexts in Cambodia and Thailand, I have identified three key elements that scholars have posited as necessary to enable the symbolic functioning of photography as a communicator of power.⁵⁰ The first and most important is the distribution of multiple copies of photographic images, ensuring that the authority being communicated in photography is widely distributed. The second element is the replication of images of royals and other important persons at varying scales, ranging from billboards to pocket-sized prints.⁵¹ The third is the worshipful adornment of photographic images, typically with gold leaf on the surface of framed prints, and more recently in the form of digital enhancement through image editing software, in which "the virtual hand touches up and reworks the image as an act of devotion and of imagination."⁵² All three elements have been argued to be modern extensions of already extant pre-modern practices to do with the replication and circulation of miniature statues, and other devotional and talismanic objects.

Significantly, none of these three elements appear to be present in the history or uses of Pha Khamfan's collection of photographs relating to the "Secret War," even though all elements can be seen in the circulation and reception of other examples of photography in religious contexts in Laos. The crucial first element—that of image replication and distribution—is most notably absent. None of the 28 photographs from the "liberated zone" are known to have been replicated. The photographs are not known to have been published in any journalistic or other accounts of the "Secret War," in Laos or elsewhere. It is possible, indeed likely, that copies of the images were presented by the Pathet Lao to other visitors to the "liberated zone" and have since been lost; indeed, their survival in Pha Khamfan's carefully protected collection is remarkable, a matter we will return to shortly. However, that the photographs have not, to date, been found or published in any other contexts suggests that their circulation was extremely limited. Insofar as the images may be understood to communicate power—or to function

as "propaganda" for the Pathet Lao-their reach appears to have been very small. Therefore, their function must be reconsidered. In terms of the second element-namely, that of scale-the general situation in Laos is comparable to that in Cambodia and Thailand: many photographs and postcard portraits of senior monks and abbots are enlarged for display at varying sizes in Buddhist temples in Laos. Again, however, the 28 photographs relating specifically to the "Secret War" are an exception: since none are known to have appeared in other contexts, they are not known to exist in any other sizes. Finally, on the matter of adornment, one point is of particular interest. As mentioned above, all 28 images feature Lao captions on their recto side, which is unusual in the collections of the Buddhist Archive. Yet other than this, none of the images have been altered or enhanced. This places them at odds with many photographs in Pha Khamfan's larger collection, which are carefully displayed in hand-painted album pages, or else formally manipulated by applying chemical or other treatments to the negative or printed image.

In all of these (and other) ways, the 28 photographs relating to the "Secret War" collected by Pha Khamfan fail to display the elements typically identified as necessary for photography to operate as a tool for communicating power; therefore, another function for this collection of images must be considered. One clue may lie in the 1936 Lao inscription, quoted above, which suggests that the presentation of photographs is intended not only "as a token of memory" for "this life and the next lives" but also a merit-making act that "may be of benefit both to its receiver and its donor." Many of the 28 photographs depict monks working together with Pathet Lao politicians and laypeople: in the celebration of religious festivals, or while marching in a political demonstration, or in studies. Unlike in Cambodia, where the radical communists known as the Khmer Rouge banned religion and violently targeted Buddhist monks, in Laos, communist ideology has almost always not only tolerated Buddhism but celebrated it as a key tenet of "Lao" identity.53 Indeed, as Khamvone observes, the photographs collected by Pha Khamfan demonstrate that the Pathet Lao "aimed to propagate Buddhism and Lao tradition as symbols for peace."54 The production and presentation of the 28 photographs relating to the "Secret War," by the Pathet Lao, and their collection by Pha Khamfan, may be seen as an instantiation of the mutually merit-making collaborative bond between communist and Buddhist forces at the time.

If the photographs can be understood as enacting an alliance between communists and Buddhists in resisting the "Secret War" in Laos, this is evidence of the failure of the US in their attempt to co-opt Buddhism to counteract communism's appeal in Southeast Asia. Recent research, focused on the *sangha* or monastic order in Thailand but with broader relevance across the Theravada world in the post-WWII period, has shed light on covert cooperation between US forces and some Buddhist leaders.⁵⁵ This is one example of an exciting new area of scholarship on Cold War-era Southeast Asia, which has roots in older approaches to studying the region.⁵⁶ More

work needs to be done to explore how the secretive partnership between the US and the Theravada Buddhist *sangha* played out in the realm of art and visual culture in this period. Yet the evidence from Pha Khamfan's collection of photographs also suggests that this pro-American coalition was far from all-encompassing, and indeed that the opposing, anti-American alliance between communists and Buddhists deployed photographic technologies not only for propaganda purposes but also for merit-making as well. This analysis "localizes" our understanding of anti-American forces in the Cold War context, moving beyond left/right binaries to point to the imbrication of modern political positions within older spiritual practices.

It is possible to conceive of Pha Khamfan's collection of photographs relating to the "Secret War," and indeed of many of the other, larger collections held within the Buddhist Archive of Photography in Luang Prabang, as constituting in their very existence an act of defiance of the violence and upheaval of the Cold War period. As the Archive co-founder Hans Georg Berger has described, the "collections were carefully protected from dangers during the civil war and the destructions of the 'Secret War on Laos,' when the country was most savagely bombed." Moreover, this protection continued and endured:

During the revolution [of 1975], and in following years, these collections were preserved and hidden in the abodes (*kuti*) of the collecting abbots. This collection was so efficient that, in the 1990s, when the country opened again to the West, very few people knew about their existence.⁵⁷

These photographs derived their symbolic power not through their replication, circulation, adornment, rescaling, and proliferation but from their mere existence, which may itself have been understood as merit-making.

This understanding of the symbolic function of photography, like the context in which the photographs were collected and preserved for safekeeping, links the narrative of the Cold War to older histories predating this period, and precede its links to Euro-American political disputes. These older histories and understandings are rooted in the encounter between Theravada belief systems and image-related practices, on the one hand, and photographic technologies on the other—not the encounter between rival superpowers that was played out in the Cold War.

"The emotional side of flying": Terry Wofford's paintings of planes

If Pha Khamfan's collection of photographs related to the "Secret War" requires us to be more inclusive and look to networks and understandings from a time before the Cold War, rooted in the Theravada world rather than the geopolitical construct that is Southeast Asia, and prompts us to see the images in the context of a longer duration of history, then Terry

Wofford's paintings of planes ask us to look to discourses centered outside of this region, seeing the works in a broader context that extends beyond Southeast Asia. Wofford, we will see, was a highly atypical resident in Laos during the "Secret War" and had a distinctly individual experience of this period, which is reflected in her paintings. Therefore, we will examine some salient aspects of Wofford's biography, to reveal the exceptional nature of her positionality. This inversely mirrors our examination, above, of aspects of Theravada approaches to the production and circulation of images, in order to reveal the consistent nature of photography's relationship with these older understandings.

Terry Wofford first began making paintings of airplanes soon after her arrival in Vientiane in 1968. Prior to this, she had been working as a commercial artist while traveling around East and Southeast Asia throughout 1967 and 1968, including visiting Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, and Thailand. Her motivations for this travel were undoubtedly multiple and likely included romantic fantasies about adventure—yet the desire for a kind of autonomy or "freedom" as an artist who was also a woman was also a factor, as we shall see below. Although Wofford remembers having "found traveling alone as a woman to be a big advantage as it seemed to make me more approachable," she also recalls being an oddity in many locations.⁵⁸

More than sometimes feeling herself to be out of place, she also experienced more acute difficulties due to her gender. Wofford recalls, of the experience of working as a commercial artist at the time, that "in general during my travels it was the usual problem of being paid less as a woman."⁵⁹ At times, she managed to overcome gender-based injustice—an obstacle by no means unique to Southeast Asia or the Cold War period—and her correspondence from the time demonstrates a palpable pride in this achievement. In Bangkok, she was employed to make fabric designs for the reputable Jim Thompson silk company, writing home in letters dated April 1968 that she had "thousands of ideas" for designs that the company "loved," and that the fee she had "agreed on" with the company was sufficient to "be very nice… For a few weeks anyway!"⁶⁰ This feeling of success enabled more than the ability to buy fleeting comforts during her travel. It made possible a deeper sense of freedom and accomplishment.

Wofford's professional training as an artist—studying first at the Moseley Road Art School in Birmingham, in the United Kingdom, from 1956 to 1959, and then at the Birmingham Art College for five years—had equipped her with the skills necessary to freely find her own path, traveling far from her birthplace in Leicester. She also managed to far exceed the social expectations of women who studied art at the time, which dictated a more modest and contained career trajectory; as Wofford recalls, "it was assumed back then, in fact almost mandated that girls would pursue teaching."⁶¹ After her time in Laos, Wofford relocated to Arizona, and helped to establish the American Society of Aviation Artists.⁶² She attributes her ability to repeatedly transcend expectations of women and women artists not only to her tenacity

but also to her name: "I know I was taken far more seriously due to my name being Terry, spelled with a Y and presumed male," she recalls. The name was unusual for a girl at the time, and Wofford explains that "I think that helped give me the sense I was not limited by gender."⁶³

While it is clear that a feminist approach is necessary for understanding the relationship between Wofford's gender and her artistic practice and professional biography, it is also clear that her circumstances were particular to her being an expatriate white woman—albeit a slightly out-of-place one, as a British citizen in an American enclave—and thus offer no special insight into the Laotian experience of the "Secret War," or the experience of most women in Laos at the time. Rather, studying Wofford's paintings of planes and the circumstances in which they were made indicates the extent to which her world was insulated from that of the Laotians affected by the conflict, despite her sincere respect for and interest in their culture, and concern for their plight, which is evident in many of her paintings and also photographs from the period.

As well as feeling "not limited by gender," Wofford lived a privileged and cloistered life in Vientiane, due to being a white woman, partnered with (and later married to) the Air America pilot Bob Wofford. Although the artist laments that "Air America pilots were on their own when it came to finding accommodation and most else for that matter," she also recalls that she and Bob had access to the US Information Service (USIS) swimming pool and the commissary. These and other privileges in their lives, setting them apart from most Laotians, were directly tied to and made available because of American covert military operation in Laos. This is made evident by the fact that the artist and her partner chose to rent an apartment on a block informally known as 'the USIS apartments,' thus named "because the entire bottom floor was taken up by USIS with a library and rooms, including secretive electronic equipment."64 One American government body employed spies, while Air America employed pilots; each were dependent on the other, and both were afforded various luxuries in Laos, including imported consumer goods, which effectively insulated the American community from locals.

A 1971 photograph of the artist's studio in Vientiane (Figure 2.8) suggests that her consumption of goods commercially available in the US was equal to or greater than her patronage of markets in Laos, despite Wofford having taken many striking photographs of the "Morning Market" in Vientiane.⁶⁵ The 1971 photograph shows an easel and paints that she had acquired from a departing American and "augmented from a Sears [US department store] catalog," as well as, tellingly, a cardboard carton bearing the label "American dinner." To complete the sense of disconnection from the city and country in which she was hosted, Wofford's studio also housed a "shortwave radio [which] provided news and entertainment from the outside world."⁶⁶

This picture of deliberate self-insulation from Laotian life, encapsulated by the photograph of Wofford's 1971 studio, is in keeping with the recollections of Penelope Khounta, an American woman who was also resident in Vientiane at the time. In her published memoirs, Khounta recalls that the US commissary


Figure 2.8 Terry Wofford, photographer. Studio, Nongduang House. 1971. Reproduced with permission of the artist.

"sold American food, laundry products, cosmetics, clothes and other items, mostly not available locally... Americans living in Vientiane never had to go to the local markets, and some of them never did, except for perhaps a sightseeing expedition."⁶⁷ She also describes the wife of the Air America airport fire chief having "taught ballet to young girls from the American and other schools."⁶⁸ In a letter dated October 1968—just a few months after her arrival in Vientiane— Wofford enthused about the opportunities available to her as an expatriate artist:

It's very cheap to live here, and after so much traveling I really have the painting bug. Plus, there is a large expat. community and I think probably a good market for 'European' art. Anyway I'm going to give it a try. I'm just itching to paint again.⁶⁹

Wofford does not recall meeting any Laotian artists, other than woodcarvers and other "artisans working in the basement of Gregory Rogers...the head-master of the International School at that time."⁷⁰

As these various accounts show, Wofford's life in Vientiane was quite removed from the Laotian community, and it was precisely this racialized separation that contributed to her desire to practice her art, and facilitated her ability to do so, on her own terms. These circumstances were a direct result of the American covert war effort in the country.

Studying the artist's work in order to gain insights into the "Secret War" is therefore unavoidably limiting: Wofford's paintings and the context in which she made them demonstrate her separation (and that of the Air America community) from Laos. These works and their world are quite far removed from Cold War-era Southeast Asia, even though they were made here, in that period.

The new freedom that Wofford found in her cloistered community in Vientiane, together with the singular nature of her life in Laos during the "Secret War," and the artist's developing relationship with the Air America pilot Bob Wofford, swiftly catalyzed a significant shift in her painting practice. Wofford made her very first painting of a plane in 1968, "soon after I met Bob," motivated by a desire to prove to him that her work was different from the "gaudy" and orientalist work that was "prevalent in that part of the world at that time [such as] Chinese junks against garish sunsets, knotty praying hands, Philippine nudes on black velvet etc."71 The first painting of a plane that Wofford made, Runway Zero One (Figure 2.9), depicts a plane above a runway at night, in a sky turbulent with clouds. "This painting is really a narrative of my own experiences flying from one country to another without any plan," the artist explains.⁷² The sense of possibility tinged with uncertainty is reflected in the painting's many ambiguities. Is the plane landing or taking off? Is the sky pink because the sun is rising, or setting? Or is it perhaps a sign of distant flames? Is this a passenger plane or a military plane? Is its presence cause for hope, or despair? A compelling feature of Runway Zero One is its openness to multiple interpretations.



Figure 2.9 Terry Wofford. *Runway Zero One.* 1968. Oil on canvas, 45.7 × 61cm. Collection of the artist. Reproduced with permission of the artist.

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Beyond its affective undecidability, Wofford's first painting of a plane is striking also for its negotiation and rejection of conventions of the (amateur and commercial) genre of aviation art, which is dominated not by openended suggestive imagery but by precise and technically detailed illustrations of aeronautical engineering.⁷³ From the outset of her career in aviation art, Wofford rejected the genre's usual technical precision. The artist explains that completing "Runway Zero One...eventually led to my decision to focus on aviation and from the emotional side of flying rather than the technical and illustrative which it seemed limited to back then."74 This "emotional side of flying"-referring to her own experiences as a passenger, as well as accounts from her husband of piloting-is evoked through the ambiguous elements in the work, described above; the "technical and illustrative" is flatly refused through the painting's deliberate obfuscation of aeronautical detail. The blurred depiction of the plane in Runway Zero One, its indistinct outline and lack of identifiable features, makes it impossible to pinpoint exactly what kind of aircraft it is. This is completely at odds with most aviation art. Yet the stridency and consistency of Wofford's later self-identification as an "aviation artist" means that even Wofford's early paintings of planes reward investigation through the lens of this genre.

The little-studied genre of aviation art-popular among hobbyists and commercial artists, but "fall[ing] outside the critical mainstream" and almost never discussed in scholarly settings or exhibited outside of aircraft-related institutions-has been described (in one of very few scholarly articles about the phenomenon) as being "strongly representational" in style, with artists aiming "to portray with careful realism the form and color of particular aircraft and the events that mark the history of aviation."75 In Runway Zero One, as in several of Wofford's other earliest paintings of planes done in Laos, it is impossible to identify the "particular aircraft," as insufficient detail of the "form and color" of the plane's design is depicted. This is likely due to a combination of Wofford's limited understanding of the aircraft's construction, and her apparent preference for a semi-impressionistic style in which brushstrokes are visible and details indistinct. It is unlikely that security concerns were a factor in Wofford's withholding of detail in her depiction of Air America aircraft, since most were standard models masquerading as commercial planes, anyway.

In *Air America Helio over Remote Village* (Figure 2.10), for example, the form of the airplane is radically simplified to just a few straight lines. Moreover, the plane is painted in just white and gray, this reduced palette serving to emphasize the contrast between the steel aircraft and the many greens, blues, browns, yellows, and purples of the farmlands and forested mountains below. The clean precision of the plane's rendering works in tandem with this tonal contrast, highlighting in its difference the shift from staccato impressionistic brushstrokes in the depiction of the lowland farm areas to the heavy washes along the broad mountains and moody skies. Wofford recalls that her earliest paintings of planes—of which this 1969 work is one—feature "the most abstract airplanes."⁷⁶



Figure 2.10 Terry Wofford. *Air America Helio Over Remote Village*. 1968. 45.7 × 70cm. Private collection. Reproduced with permission of the artist.

Clearly, Wofford's initial interest in painting planes was not to "portray with careful realism" any "particular aircraft." In *Air America Helio over Remote Village*, the artist seems instead to have been exploring the striking incongruity between the sleek appearance and humanmade nature of the aircraft in the sky, and the variously wild-looking natural forms of the farmlands and mountains below. In this painting, it may even be imagined that the plane stands in for (American?) modernity and culture (by way of technology), in contrast to the Laotian natural environment, in which the artist

depicts no traces of modernity or culture, and in which even the habitation has been rendered so indistinct as to be effectively invisible: small spots of brown offer the only hint of the huts and houses that would have dotted these lowlands. In *Runway Zero One*, however, the artist's interest seems to have been less formal and aesthetic than in *Air America Helio over Remote Village*, and more psychological and emotional. If the latter painting explores the contrast between the plane and the land, then Wofford's first depiction of an aircraft explores the feelings and memories that its appearance invokes.

Despite these differences, both of these early paintings of planes explore aspects of aviation in general rather than any aircraft in particular. This marks a significant divergence from most aviation art, which typically attempts to illustrate the appearance of an identifiable aircraft as faithfully as possible.

By 1971, when she painted *Dropping Supplies* (Figure 2.2), Wofford had evidently become interested in depicting specific aircraft, and included enough details to ensure they were recognizable, at least by informed viewers. And indeed, most of Wofford's viewers were informed. We have seen that the artist lived a cloistered life in Vientiane, surrounded mostly by Air America employees and their families; as a result, pilots and their spouses were initially an important client base, while the artist was resident in Laos.⁷⁷ After her migration to the US, she became involved in a network of aviation artists, participating in the founding of the American Society of Aviation Artists (ASAA) in 1986, following a gathering of aviation artists in Virginia, organized by historian Luther Gore.⁷⁸

Yet while Wofford's involvement in the ASAA and her increasing interest in portraying identifiable aircraft brought her closer to the mainstream of aviation art—a chiefly hobbyist genre which, as noted above, itself "fall[s] outside the critical mainstream"-she was also in important ways marginal from this field of practice. She later recalled that although "the ASAA was instrumental in improving my technical skills, it is in my opinion too limited in scope, too concerned with nuts and bolts accuracy, and too traditionalist in methods." She takes specific issue with aviation artist Keith Ferris, "the primary founder and driving force behind the association... who is a stickler for technical accuracy and a three color limited palette, and who strongly encourages use of his 'descriptive geometry." Wofford positions her practice as involving more "free expression as well as innovative materials and concepts" than is allowed by Ferris or advocated by the ASAA.⁷⁹ This pointed assertion of divergence from Ferris is a bold position. In one of the only scholarly articles on aviation art, Ferris is described as "probably the best-known aviation artist today," one who "has been instrumental in promoting recent American interest in the genre."80 His work appears as a mural in the National Air and Space Museum, which was established in 1976 in Washington, DC, and is described as an "institutionalizing force."81

Wofford has also been involved in promoting aviation art to North American audiences, but unlike Ferris, her focus has often been on amateur artists rather than official institutions. In 1990, she authored an article on aviation art in a magazine popular among hobbyist painters.⁸² As well as offering "tips on perspective, accuracy and marketing," the article insists that "Feeling is what turns painting of aircraft into a work of art."⁸³ This conviction, marking Wofford's disagreement with Ferris and other aviation artists, is illustrated in five finished paintings, with sketches and photographs to document the painting process.

Strikingly, all five images in Wofford's 1990 article relate directly to the Cold War, yet only one is drawn from the artist's years in Laos. Two paintings (The Observer and Arizona Thunder) depict American military technological prowess, through detailed depictions of the interior and exterior of advanced warplanes of the kind in use at the time. In their boastful celebration of the scientific achievements of the US military, the paintings are similar in tone to many Hollywood war movies. Another work, titled Open House, depicts the annual welcoming of the public to visit the Arizona Air Guard, an event surely intended, at least in part, to demonstrate US military technologies and win support from the taxpayers who fund them. And a painting titled Spirit of Discovery, made from sketches done in the dark at the Kennedy Space Center, depicts a space shuttle illuminated by dramatic floodlights. The artist describes "the magnificent and ethereal look of the shuttle against the endless night sky,"84 and the message of American dominance over that vast celestial terrain is plainly evident, with the stars-and-stripes visible on the port-side wing of the shuttle. All four of these paintings convey a sense of US prestige, in which the artist's careful focus on "feeling" does not detract from technical precision or an uncomplicated message of allegiance to America in the context of the (official) closing of the Cold War around the time of the article's publication in 1990.

Yet in the fifth painting, Taxi (Figure 2.11), which depicts a scene during the "Secret War" (made by drawing on "memory, sketches and the dozens of photographs I took in Laos"85), the message is much more complex and ambiguous, and the "feeling" of the work is ambivalent and undecidable. The painting depicts two adult women and three young children, standing on a patch of grass alongside a dirt runway, where a small plane is landing. The figures are all dressed in the distinctive garments of the Hmong people or another highland community; their home is likely in the mountains, shrouded in the distant haze in the background of the painting. Four of the figures look toward the approaching plane, their faces turned away from view, while the eldest child looks directly at the viewer, with an ambiguous facial expression. Wofford describes the work as a "typical scene of tribespeople awaiting an aircraft bringing aid to and transportation out of the mountains,"86 yet the atmosphere is one not straightforwardly hopeful but also anxious and full of uncertainty. Are the "tribespeople" sure that the plane will bring assistance, and not more "hard rice" or other dangers? How do they feel about their increasing reliance on "aid" and "transportation" provided at the discretion of Air America, anyway?⁸⁷ And what of the pilot, how might he feel? Wofford was keenly aware of the dangers that



Figure 2.11 Terry Wofford. *Taxi*. Circa 1986–87. Oil on canvas, 45.7 × 61cm. Private collection. Reproduced with permission of the artist.

her husband faced flying missions that must have looked very similar to the one depicted in *Taxi*. In a letter dated September 1972, she described one such event:

Two days ago Bob was flying over an area...A group on a craggy outcrop were waving frantically and he went in close...As he flew just 20' away, they suddenly opened up with 5–6 machine guns...The airplane was riddled, one bullet going up the wing strut close to Bob's head. The fact that they didn't blow them out of the sky is nothing short of a miracle.⁸⁸

How was the pilot, or the artist—or we, the viewers of the painting—to know if this "group on a craggy outcrop" as depicted in *Taxi* are friends, happily awaiting "aid," or enemies, fearful of "hard rice" and ready to shoot?

These questions are unanswerable, and this is reflected in the uncertain atmosphere of *Taxi*. Unlike the stridently technophilic and patriotic tone of the other four paintings accompanying Wofford's article introducing aviation art to a broader public of North American amateur art enthusiasts, this depiction of a scene from the "Secret War" in Laos is ambiguous and ambivalent. Perhaps this reflects the artist's wish to convey the complexity of her experiences in Laos, or perhaps it is an unintentional reflection of her mixed feelings regarding the conflict. The painting is also compositionally atypical of aviation art. The human figures are the largest and most colorful elements in the composition, rather than the aircraft; our focus is on their distinctive appearance, and their indistinct emotional response to the plane's arrival, rather than on the aeronautical details of the approaching vehicle. This clearly reflects Wofford's sincere interest in and concern for the Laotian people.

Yet, like all of Wofford's paintings, *Taxi* is not made for the Laotian people. It offers insights not into the "Secret War" that it depicts but instead into the idiosyncratic and highly individual trajectory of one woman's practice, and her negotiation of the strictly conservative and male-dominated genre of hobbyist and commercial aviation art.

It is unlikely that Wofford's paintings of planes, or Pha Khamfan's collection of photographs relating to the "Secret War" in Laos, will ever be considered canonical. Yet given that art historians and other scholars now generally feel "free to pursue diverse, extra-canonical subject areas,"⁸⁹ will these corpuses of images (and others like them) nevertheless become subjects of further study, in the ever-expanding field of discourse on the art and visual culture of Cold War-era visual culture?

This is possible, but only if these bodies of work can be approached on terms of their own, and not with the assumption that they will offer insights into the geopolitical and historical context from which they emerged. Insights can emerge from the study of these images, and these may contribute to a history from below, focused on the anonymous individuals and communities imbricated in the "Secret War" in Laos. Most powerfully, however, these insights will highlight the persistently elusive nature of the ideologies, micro-histories, and lived experiences of the Cold War in the Laotian context.

Acknowledgements

I thank the editors for their gracious invitation to contribute to this book, and their helpful comments on an earlier draft. I also extend great gratitude to Khamvone Boulyaphonh, the chief archivist at the Buddhist Archive of Photography in Luang Prabang, as well as the artist Terry Wofford, for their tireless generosity in sharing images and stories over a period of several years. It has been a great pleasure to learn from them both. It was also a great honor to be able to invite Khamvone to Singapore in 2018, during an exhibition I curated featuring digital images of photographs from Pha Khamfan's collection, among other works in the collection of the Buddhist Archive of Photography. For a Postdoctoral Fellowship during which I developed that exhibition and conducted further research in Luang Prabang, I thank Nanyang Technological University; for hosting the exhibition, I thank the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore. For many inspiring conversations about the Cold War in Southeast Asia more broadly, I thank Kathleen Ditzig, Chairat Polmuk, Simon Soon, Thanavi Chotpradit, and other friends and colleagues.

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Notes

- 1 One example is a Getty Foundation-funded research project during 2015 and 2016, titled "Ambitious Alignments: New Histories of Southeast Asian Art," in which I took part alongside 14 other researchers. See: http://ambitiousalignments.com/, accessed November 1, 2019. The project resulted in an edited volume that reflected most of the research conducted. See: Stephen H. Whiteman, Sarena Abdullah, Yvonne Low, and Phoebe Scott, eds., *Ambitious Alignments: New Histories of Southeast Asian Art, 1945–1990* (Sydney and Singapore: Power Publications and National Gallery Singapore, 2018). Another widely cited earlier example is: Tony Day and Maya H.T. Liem, eds., *Cultures at War: The Cold War and Cultural Expression in Southeast Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Constitutes a vibrant but also relatively self-contained field of discourse, despite its many and deep interconnections with Asia more broadly.
- 2 Even for those in Laos not affected first-hand by the bombings, detailed information about the war was available in both the Lao and Vietnamese languages: "The air war in Laos was not officially revealed to the American people or Congress for the best part of five years, despite being meticulously reported by both Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese radio." Martin Stuart-Fox, A History of Laos (Cambridge, UK, New York, NY, and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 139.
- 3 The Hmong and other highland peoples in Laos are part of the vast, dispersed communities collectively referred to as "Zomia." Following the widely cited work of James C. Scott and others, it may be possible to interpret their participation in the Second Indochina War as proxy soldiers for the US as part of a larger historical resistance (over a longer duration) to the formation of Southeast Asian states, like Laos, which are governed from centres of power in lowland areas. See: James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2010).
- 4 Joshua Kurlantzick, A Great Place to Have a War: America in Laos and the Birth of a Military CIA (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016), 13.
- 5 Seth Jacobs, The Universe Unravelling: American Foreign Policy in Cold War Laos (Singapore: NUS Press, 2013), n. 57, 296.
- 6 "Collection of Photographs at Vat Suvanna Khili [1910–1987]," Endangered Archives Programme, British Library, accessed November 1, 2019, https://eap. bl.uk/collection/EAP177-3?page=9.
- 7 "Terry and Robert Wofford Laotian Image Collection," *Digital Collections, University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries*, accessed November 1, 2019, http:// digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/LaosImages.
- 8 The genre of aviation art under consideration here is chiefly practiced by amateurs and commercial artists and has little intersection with mainstream discourses on global modernisms, or with professionalised art worlds. In these ways, the genre of aviation art as practiced by Wofford is quite distinct from movements such as Futurism (and in particular the *aeropitture* or "aeropaintings" embraced by many Futurist artists during the 1930s, including many women) which also engaged with depictions of flight. On the genre of aviation art, as practiced by amateurs, commercial artists, and Wofford, see: Luther Y. Gore, "The Winged Paintbrush: Aviation Genre Art," *Leonardo* 21, no. 1 (January 1988): 71–75. On Futurism and *aeropitture*, see: M. Barry Katz, "The Women of Futurism," *Women's Art Journal* 7, no. 2 (Autumn 1986 –Winter 1987): 3–13.
- 9 Wofford appears only in journalistic, rather than scholarly, publications. See, for example: Stephen Canner, "Music on the Hippie Trail: Laos and The Third Eye, 1968," *Mediated Signals*, March 10, 2018, accessed November 1, 2019,

https://mediatedsignals.com/2018/03/10/music-on-the-hippie-trail-laosand-the-third-eye-1968/. Pha Khamfan's photographs have been more extensively studied, in various publications relating to the Buddhist Archive of Photography, and in an unpublished doctoral thesis which details the Archive's establishment and the life and work of its co-founding abbot, Pha Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela (a follower of Pha Khamfan). These sources are cited throughout this essay. They provide invaluable insights and information, yet because they survey the entirety of the Buddhist Archive of Photography's collection (numbering some 35,000 images), they are unable to focus closely on any single body of images, such as the 28 pictures relating to the "Secret War" discussed here.

- 10 Geoffrey Batchen, "Vernacular Photographies," in *Each Wild Idea: Writing Photography History* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2000), 57.
- 11 These observations draw on my experience as a curator at National Gallery Singapore, where (since January 2019) I have been part of a team of curators working on a long-term (but constantly changing) exhibition of the modern art of Southeast Asia, drawn largely from Singapore's permanent collection. Within that exhibition, several artworks by European and American artists made in the 19th and early 20th century are shown, but very few (if any) made in the latter half of the 20th century. Since 2019, three reproductions of photographs from Pha Khamfan's collection have been exhibited, but these are among just a handful of reproduction prints on show. For an overview of the exhibition as it appeared in 2015, see: Low Sze Wee, ed., *Between Declarations and Dreams: Art of Southeast Asia Since the 19th Century*, exh. cat. (Singapore: National Gallery Singapore, 2015).
- 12 I am not from Laos, nor have I been a long-term resident of the country. I am an "outsider," looking in. For these reasons and others, I refrain from offering more interpretation than is prudent, here, instead presenting some aspects of the stories about Pha Khamfan's and Wofford's images in the hope that perhaps some "insiders" might be inspired to tell their own stories of these works in future.
- 13 Although the notion of "haunting" may recall Jacques Derrida, within a Southeast Asia-centered discourse, a more pointed touchstone for my thinking here is Arnika Fuhrmann, *Ghostly Desires: Queer Sexuality and Vernacular Buddhism in Contemporary Thai Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).
- 14 More work can be done to situate visual materials, such as those discussed in this essay and the 35,000 images in the Buddhist Archive of Photography, in a multisensory epistemology in which the sonic plays an important role. Few scholars working in the field of Sound Studies have turned their attention to the Theravada world, and none (to my knowledge) have yet approached Laos. Yet, as one scholar has argued of Sinhala Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka, "sacred sounds are not merely 'devotional,' if we take that word to mean the self's outward expression...Rather, sounds in Sinhala Buddhism are best understood as objects that are separate from the self, which gain their meaning through their (frequently *public*) exchanges with nonhumans and their positioning in relation to stars, gods, objects, and so on." Jim Sykes, "Sound Studies, Difference, and Global Concept History," in Gavin Steingo and Jim Sykes, eds., *Remapping Sound Studies* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019), 207.
- 15 This and other details about the photographs are drawn from a number of bilingual (Lao and English) spreadsheets which serve as a database for the entire Buddhist Archive of Photography; they consist chiefly of information about the photographs, including their inscriptions and locations, with minimal interpretation involved. Although unpublished, these spreadsheets were kindly provided to me by Khamvone Boulyaphonh, who has been an invaluable guide to

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navigating their rich resources. Translations from Lao to English are derived from these spreadsheets. See also: Khamvone Boulyaphonh, "The Life, Work and Social Roles of the Most Venerable Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela (1920–2007)," unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Hamburg, Hamburg, 2015, esp. 253–254.

- 16 Paul Messier, "Image Isn't Everything: Revealing Affinities across Collections through the Language of the Photographic Print," in Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg, eds., Object: Photo. Modern Photographs: The Thomas Walther Collection 1909–1949 (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2014), 1, accessed June 1, 2020, http://www.moma.org/interactives/ objectphoto/assets/essays/ Messier.pdf.
- 17 Kurlantzick, Great Place to Have a War, 8.
- 18 Kurlantzick, Great Place to Have a War, 25.
- 19 Another picture, of the same mother and child, captures them both at full length. In this photograph, the child is naked, its legs scarred and wrapped in bandages, but its eyes—hauntingly—closed.
- 20 On the founding of the Buddhist Archive of Photography, see: Volker Grabowsky and Hans Georg Berger, "Introduction. Buddhist Collections of Luang Prabang: A History of Research (2005–2015)," in *The Lao Sangha and Modernity: Research at the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang 2005–2015*, ed. Volker Grabowsky and Hans Georg Berger in collaboration with Bounleuth Sengsoulin and Khamvone Boulyaphonh (New York and Luang Prabang: Anantha Publishing, c. 2015), 26–36. In the same volume, see also: Martin Jurgens, "The Buddhist Archive of Photography: Archival Organization, Digitization and Conservation in the Context of Research Projects of the British Library (2006–2014), 267–290.
- 21 This kind of cloud is named altocumulus, and was later described by Wofford (in an instructional article written for amateur artists) as "stretch[ing] to the horizon in dramatic perspective." Terry Wofford, "Controlling the Sky," *The Artist's Magazine* (February 1992): 54–57.
- 22 Terry Wofford, email to the author, January 4, 2018. "Fairchild C-123K Provider," *National Museum of the US Air Force*, posted February 15, 2011, accessed November 1, 2019, archived at https://web. archive.org/web/20140204001303/http://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/ factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=310.
- 23 Jacobs, The Universe Unravelling, 202.
- 24 Terry Wofford, email to the author, January 4, 2018.
- 25 Joe F. Leeker, "Air America in Laos I Humanitarian Work. Part II," in *The History of Air America*, 2nd ed., (Dallas: Eugene McDermott Library, University of Texas, 2015) accessed November 1, 2019, https://www.utdallas.edu/library/specialcollections/hac/cataam/Leeker/history/index.html.
- 26 Grant Evans, A Short History of Laos: The Land in Between, revised ed. (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2012), 164.
- 27 Wofford, email to the author, January 15, 2018.
- 28 Wofford, email to the author, January 4, 2018.
- 29 Logbook of pilot Ed Eckholdt, quoted in: Joe F. Leecker, "Air America: Douglas B-26s/On Marks," in *The Aircraft of Air America*, 5th ed., (Dallas: Eugene McDermott Library, University of Texas, 2015) accessed November 1, 2019, https://www.utdallas.edu/library/specialcollections/hac/cataam/ Leeker/aircraft/index.html.
- 30 Wofford, email to the author, February 14, 2018.
- 31 Wofford, email to the author, February 14, 2018.
- 32 Kurlantzick, Great Place to Have a War, esp. 13-20.
- 33 Leah Zani, "Fieldpoem 11: The Fruit Eaters," in Bomb Children: Life in the Former Battlefields of Laos (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019), 36.

- 34 Zani, Bomb Children, 21.
- 35 Zani, Bomb Children, 12-13.
- 36 Zani, Bomb Children, 13.
- 37 Zani, Bomb Children, 33.
- 38 For a short biography of Pha Khamfan, including details of his ecclesiastical appointments, see: Pha One Keo Sitthivong and Khamvone Boulyaphonh, *Great Monks of Luang Prabang 1854 to 2007* (New York and Luang Prabang: Anantha Publishing, c. 2010), 66–69.
- 39 For an overview of Pha Khamfan's collection, see: "Collection of Photographs at Vat Suvanna Khili [1910–1987]," *Endangered Archives Programme, British Library*, accessed November 1, 2019, https://eap.bl.uk/collection/ EAP177-3.
- 40 Pictorial photography is not known to have emerged in Laos, nor are exhibiting artists known to have practiced photography alongside other media. Painting (and sculpture) dominated fine art in 20th century Laos.
- 41 Hans Georg Berger, *Monks and the Camera* (New York and Luang Prabang: Anantha Publishing, 2015), 17. For a further introduction to Pha Khamfan's biography and practice of making and collecting images, see: 60–66.
- 42 Stuart-Fox, A History of Laos, 135.
- 43 Letter dated May 17, 1950, sent from Vat Chan, Vientiane, to Pha Khamchan Virachitta, abbot at Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, in "Appendices: Translations and Annotations," trans. Volker Grabowsky, in *The Lao Sangha and Modernity: Research at the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang 2005–2015*, ed. Volker Grabowsky and Hans Georg Berger in collaboration with Bounleuth Sengsoulin and Khamvone Boulyaphonh (New York and Luang Prabang: Anantha Publishing, c. 2015), 345–347.
- 44 See: Søren Ivarsson, Creating Laos: The Making of a Lao Space between Indochina and Siam, 1860–1945 (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2008), esp. 24–59.
- 45 Khamvone Boulyaphonh, "The Life, Work and Social Roles of the Most Venerable Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela (1920–2007)," unpublished PhD dissertation, Hamburg University, 2015, 253–254.
- 46 See, for example: "Trip to the Liberated Zone of Cambodia by Norodom Sihanouk, March/April 1973 [29]," Norodom Sihanouk Archival Collection, Monash Collections Online, Monash University, accessed November 1, 2019, http://hdl.handle.net/1959.1/484516.
- 47 Berger, *Monks and the Camera*, 21. The inscription is translated from the Thai original.
- 48 See, for example, French-born photographer Émile Gsell's *Portrait of Vietnamese Priest (Carte de visite)*, c. 1866, collection of National Gallery Singapore, available online at *Roots, National Heritage Board*, accessed April 1, 2021, https:// www.roots.gov.sg/Collection-Landing/listing/1150507. The man depicted is dressed in the robes of a Theravada Buddhist monk.
- 49 On the Cambodian case, see: Joanna Wolfarth, "Lineage and Legitimacy: Exploring Royal-Familial Visual Configurations in Cambodia," *Trans Asia Photography Review* 8, no. 1 (Art and Vernacular Photographies in Asia, Fall 2017), accessed November 1, 2019, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/ spo.7977573.0008.104. On the Thai case, see: Clare Veal, "The Charismatic Index: Photographic Representations of Power and Status in the Thai Social Order," *Trans Asia Photography Review* 3, no. 2 (Local Culture/Global Photography, Spring 2013), accessed November 1, 2019, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.7977573.0003.207.
- 50 This draws on my reading of work by Wolfarth, Veal, cited above, as well as Morris, cited below, and Maurizio Peleggi, *Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002).
- 51 Wolfarth, "Lineage and Legitimacy."

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- 52 On digital adornment, see: Joanna Wolfarth, "Royal Portraiture in the Cambodian Politico-Cultural Complex: Norodom Sihanouk and the Place of Photography," Udaya Journal of Khmer Studies 12 (2015): 163. On the use of gold leaf, see: Veal, "The Charismatic Index;" see also: Rosalind C. Morris, "Photography and the Power of Images in the History of Power: Notes from Thailand," in Photographies East: The Camera and Its Histories in East and Southeast Asia, ed. Rosalind C. Morris (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 121–160.
- 53 Martin Stuart-Fox, Buddhist Kingdom, Marxist State: The Making of Modern Laos, 2nd ed. (Chiang Mai: White Lotus, 2002), esp. 91–122.
- 54 Khamvone, "The Life, Work and Social Roles of the Most Venerable Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela (1920–2007)," 254.
- 55 Eugene Ford, Cold War Monks: Buddhism and America's Secret Strategy in Southeast Asia (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017). See also: Patrice Ladwig, "Special Operation Pagoda': Buddhism, Covert Operations, and the Politics of Religious Subversion in Cold-War Laos (1957–60)," in Changing Lives in Laos: Society, Politics, and Culture in a Post-Socialist State, eds. Vanina Bouté and Vatthana Pholsena (Singapore: NUS Press, 2017), 81–108.
- 56 See, for example: Robert N. Bellah, ed., *Religion and Progress in Modern Asia* (New York and London: The Free Press and Collier-Macmillan, 1968).
- 57 Berger, Monks and the Camera, 17-22.
- 58 Wofford, email to the author, December 22, 2017.
- 59 Wofford, email to the author, December 29, 2017.
- 60 Letter from Wofford to "home," dated April 4, 1968, sent by email to the author, February 14, 2019.
- 61 Wofford, email to the author, December 29, 2017.
- 62 Wofford, email to the author, January 4, 2018.
- 63 Wofford, email to the author, December 29, 2017.
- 64 Wofford, email to the author, January 4, 2018.
- 65 See, for example: Terry Wofford, "Morning Market 2," 1969, "Terry and Robert Wofford Laotian Image Collection," *Digital Collections, University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries*, accessed November 1, 2019, https://digital. library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/524LUXPUT66DP8F.
- 66 Terry Wofford, "Studio, Nongduang House," 1971, "Terry and Robert Wofford Laotian Image Collection," *Digital Collections, University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries*, accessed November 1, 2019, https://digital.library.wisc. edu/1711.dl/R3AT45RRANTZP9B.
- 67 Penelope Khounta, *Love Began in Laos: The Story of an Extraordinary Life* (Walnut Creek, CA: PBK Press, 2017), 50. Thanks to Anna Koshcheeva for bringing this book to my attention.
- 68 Khounta, Love Began in Laos, 180.
- 69 Letter from Wofford to "home," dated October 16, 1968, sent by email to the author, February 14, 2019.
- 70 Wofford, email to the author, December 29, 2017. Rogers' story is fascinating, and merits further research. According to Wofford (in an email to the author, January 4, 2018), "Gregory arrived in Laos as a Jehovah's Witness missionary. Like so many of us he was captivated by the country and stayed on as headmaster of the International School in Vientiane. ... He was very involved with the Laotian culture and at one point had an affair with one of the royal princesses which caused him to be persona non grata for a while. His large home off the Mekong was filled with valuable antiques and artifacts along with work produced by his artisans who he supported financially but I don't know the details. He also hosted parties in his huge main living room where Royal Lao dancers would perform. ... [H]e was a very secretive person, never allowed photographs of himself. When the

Pathet Lao entered Vientiane he escaped across the river losing everything. He was found murdered in Bangkok not long after that."

- 71 Wofford, "How It Began...," unpublished note, sent by email to the author, December 29, 2017.
- 72 Wofford, "How It Began ... "
- 73 As noted above, the genre of aviation art to which I am referring here, largely practiced by hobbyists and commercial artists, exists outside of mainstream discourses. It is quite distinct from the "aeropaintings" made by Futurist artists, for example, and is discussed in magazines aimed at amateurs, offering tips on technique (as we will see below), rather than in magazines such as *Artforum*. For an introduction to this genre of aviation art, see: Gore, "The Winged Paintbrush: Aviation Genre Art."
- 74 Wofford, "How It Began ... "
- 75 Gore, "The Winged Paintbrush: Aviation Genre Art," 71.
- 76 Wofford, email to the author, January 4, 2018.
- 77 Wofford, email to the author, January 4, 2018.
- 78 Wofford, email to the author, February 14, 2018.
- 79 Wofford, email to the author, February 14, 2018.
- 80 Gore, "The Winged Paintbrush": 72.
- 81 Gore, "The Winged Paintbrush": 71. On the museum, see: Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, accessed November 1, 2019, https://airandspace.si.edu/.
- 82 Terry Wofford, "Painting the New Frontier: Flight," *The Artist's Magazine* (October 1990): 58–65.
- 83 Wofford, "Painting the New Frontier: Flight": 58.
- 84 Wofford, "Painting the New Frontier: Flight": 64.
- 85 Wofford, "Painting the New Frontier: Flight": 60.
- 86 Wofford, "Painting the New Frontier: Flight": 60.
- 87 It is widely accepted that the "history of aid to Laos during the period 1955–1975 revolves around the US and its allies giving assistance to Laos to contain the expansion of communism, specifically to prevent the communist Pathet Lao from entering the governing coalition." Viliam Phraxayavong, *History of Aid to Laos: Motivations and Impacts* (Chiang Mai: Mekong Press, 2009), 63.
- 88 Letter from Wofford to "home," dated September 12, 1972, sent by email to the author, February 14, 2019.
- 89 Anna Brzyski, "Introduction," in *Partisan Canons*, ed. Anna Brzyski (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 2.

3 Affects, trauma, and experimental art in New Order Indonesia, 1970–1977

Wulan Dirgantoro

Introduction

The development of Indonesian contemporary art, which can be traced to the experimental period of the 1970s, has been viewed as closely intertwined with socio-political events in the country.¹ Indeed, this period was considered to be one of the defining moments in Indonesian art history when socio-political issues were incorporated back into artmaking despite the oppressive environment of the authoritarian regime. While most scholars agree that the radical nature of the practices was a strong reaction against the conservatism in the art academies, this chapter proposes that the new trend of happenings and installations as practiced by the artists in the experimental groups PIPA and GSRBI (*Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia*, Indonesian New Art Movement) in the 1970s not only was driven by dissatisfaction with the art institutions but also transects with the trauma of the anti-communist killings of 1965–66.

The genocide between October 1965 and July 1966 marked the end of Indonesia's Guided Democracy (1959–66) and the rise of anti-imperialist political rhetoric, supported by the growing Cold War climate,² where artists and cultural activists became divided over political views.³ The chapter will discuss the aftermath of the mass killings by examining the roles of two artists—FX Harsono and Bonyong Munny Ardhie—as witnesses and recipients of historical trauma. In doing so, the chapter's discussion on trauma will shift from the widely understood definition of trauma art—that is, artworks created in therapy by survivors—to how artmaking can contribute to a broader understanding of trauma in Indonesia.

The anti-communist killings and Indonesia's cultural trauma

While PIPA and GSRBI's use of found objects and their spontaneous, provocative happenings are already well discussed,⁴ to date, there has been no discussion linking the anti-communist mass killings with artistic practices, apart from passing references that link the socio-political interest of the group to the time before 1965–66.⁵ While some artists engaged with social issues in their works, the topic of 1965–66 remained untouched, yet it profoundly affected artmaking during this period. The anti-communist killings of 1965–66 took place in the context of Major General Suharto and the military takeover of the Indonesian state. The killings were triggered when an attempted coup by a group of Left-leaning soldiers calling themselves *Gerakan 30 September* (30th September Movement) failed. The poorly planned and executed coup became the tipping point for the annihilation of the Indonesian Left. Spurred by military propaganda blaming the attempt on the *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (Indonesian Communist Party, hereafter, PKI), many Indonesians joined the military in waves of violence and mass killings targeting members and sympathizers, real or imagined, of the PKI across the archipelago.⁶ The victims came from diverse ethnic, gender, religious, and class backgrounds. According to most contemporary analyses, up to half a million Indonesians were killed between October 1965 and mid-1966, with up to one and half-million people detained in mass arrests.

The mass-killings caused a reorientation of Indonesian society and the rise of a military-dominated government that labeled itself as the *Orde Baru* (New Order). Against this background, the state of the arts in Indonesia's New Order radically shifted. With the left-leaning artists and intellectuals disappeared, imprisoned or exiled during the anti-communist purge, the artists who survived turned away from any socio-political subject matter that could be linked to leftist ideology. From 1966 to 1998, public discussion of the killings was forbidden. State agencies actively intervened to censor any mention in public documents, including visual displays, artistic representations, or allusions to the killings, PKI, or Marxist-Socialist ideas.

Accordingly, the mass killings were absent from public discourse for the 32 years of the authoritarian regime. Indonesians had to pretend that the killings did not happen, even though the millions affected were family members, friends, neighbors and business partners—they were the victims, witnesses, collaborators, and perpetrators.⁷ The absence was also reflected in the visual art scene by the lack of direct references to the events in the artworks and art historical writing under the New Order.

After Suharto's resignation in May 1998, Indonesian visual artists began to speak more openly about their memories of the chaotic period. For example, FX Harsono, in a public seminar titled "Art Movements during the New Order" organized by the Faculty of Fine Arts and Design at the Bandung Institute of Technology in 2013, described how once, as a high school student in 1965, he saw a horse-drawn carriage piled with corpses in his hometown. In another instance, he described discovering a human ear that had been placed in his pocket as a prank by a friend who had gone "communist hunting" the night before. Yet, despite witnessing these events, however, he stridently claimed in 2013 that "this trauma is not ours."⁸ Harsono's claim came from his understanding that trauma can only be experienced by those who directly experienced the violence of the anti-communist purge, not those who witnessed it or the generation that came after it.⁹

However, another artist, Siti Adiyati Subangun, offered a different recollection than Harsono in the same seminar and later repeated her statement in a recorded interview in 2015.¹⁰ She explained that their generation was traumatized by witnessing the killings of their friends and teachers during the time, "it remained in our memory, and it is always at the back of our mind when we created our art."¹¹ It should be noted that these statements were made public nearly 50 years after the events, thus indicating the belatedness of the collective trauma of the mass killings.

"Trauma" in this chapter is used to describe the events and assaults on the psyche that cannot be processed by a conscious mind and whose understanding is often, at best, deferred.¹² Furthermore, scholars have also established how traumatic memory can be transmitted across members of a community and even across generations and time.¹³ In discussing the broader impact of trauma, Alexander's study explains that trauma has a social dimension that impairs the basic sense of communality.¹⁴ The study emphasizes how collective trauma works insidiously where it lacks the suddenness typically associated with individualized trauma, as in Harsono's comment above. However, it is still a form of shock, particularly when combined with the realization that the community no longer exists as effective support.

Eyerman reiterated that in cultural trauma, the trauma need not necessarily be felt by everyone in a community or experienced directly by any, or all. While it may be necessary to establish an event as a significant "cause," its traumatic meaning must be established and accepted for the trauma to be worked through and resolved.¹⁵ Harsono and Subangun's statements above bring us back to the context of Indonesia's collective memory of 1965–66. In this regard, the silencing of the 1965–66 narratives caused the trauma of the killings to never fully be established or accepted in Indonesian society. The socio-political challenges of elaborating the event that caused the trauma and its exclusion from the nation's conscious memory means that the repressed thought recurs in the same form. This memory continues to haunt long after the end of the New Order.

Mapping trauma: affect and the collective memory of 1965-66

The aftermath of the anti-communist killings marked an art scene that mostly turned inwards and became resistant to change. By the time the experimental art groups were forming in the early 1970s, Indonesia had experienced relative stability in the forms of economic growth and political stability. Under the New Order, the cultural sector was an integral part of the regime's *Pembangunan* (developmental) philosophy.¹⁶ Under this philosophy, cultural actors and producers were encouraged to develop Indonesian culture and identity to contribute to the nation's economic progress.

An example of such participation was the exploration of the languages of modernism, with a focus on abstract formalism where painting and sculpture were the dominant media. Visual artists were inspired by Islamic culture, classical Hindu-Buddhist mythology and the traditional arts from across the archipelago while at the same time responding to the development of modern art and aesthetics from the West. The focus on modernism was to amalgamate Indonesia's cultural heritage with Western art and aesthetics to create a distinct Indonesian character in the visual arts. The artistic direction of the period can be seen in G. Sidharta's (1932–2006) sculpture *Tangisan Dewi Bathari* (Weeping Goddess, 1976–77), which depicted the Hindu goddess Bathari (or Betari) in a cubistic style, combined with intricate decorative patterns inspired by Sidharta's Javanese background. The result is a hybrid work that showcases a modernist expression with an Indonesian face.¹⁷ Most importantly, it was also a way to emphasize the new development of non-political artistic expression, to contrast with the social-realism genre that dominated the art scene before 1965–66.

However, despite the regime's efforts to suppress the discussion of the killings, communities across the archipelago were aware. Scholars noted that while the mass-killings were absent from public discourse, people knew that certain places, such as edges of forest, rivers, and caves as well as buildings, had served as sites of mass killings or mass graves, as well as torture or interrogation.¹⁸ The paradox created by the public denial and the common knowledge of the killings caused an epistemological crisis in the Indonesian collective memory.

Furthermore, the afterwardness (*Nachträglichkeit*) of trauma means that an interval exists between the event and its consequences. This interval means that trauma can also be interpreted as causally determined by specific event/s and emerging after other events, internal and external, that may offer different perspectives of the trauma.¹⁹ The search for a different perspective is thus important in Indonesia as the trauma of the killings cannot be located in the images, words, and phrases that facilitate the story of the mass killings.

Importantly, Jill Bennett's work on trauma and affect in contemporary art outlines pathways for investigating the link between artmaking and the noncausal notion of trauma. An affinity exists between trauma, she notes, and experimental artistic practices:

Trauma's inherent unintelligibility, and consequently "unrepresentability," has become something of a trope. Derived from clinical and psychoanalytic accounts of trauma, the configuration of traumatic memory outside the normal cogitative process is, as Ruth Leys demonstrates, a discursive organisation with its own genealogy. But it is a modelling that allies trauma with avant-garde projects in the arts. That which is categorically "beyond representation: may find expression within experimental formal languages."²⁰

Bennett further suggests that trauma-related art is best understood as transactive rather than communicative.²¹ To understand the transactive nature of affect, we need to examine how affect is produced within and through the work, and how it might be experienced by viewers. However, she cautions, if this affective transaction does not in and of itself convey the meaning of the trauma, we need to pursue the question of how it led us toward a conceptual engagement with trauma.

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Bennet's cautionary approach is highly instructive in examining PIPA and GSRB's use of objects and happenings in their work. In contrast to "trauma art" where artworks are created by survivors in therapy or as a documentation of the true violence or devastating loss, the artworks discussed in this chapter make little to no direct references to the mass killings, either due to strict government censorship or self-censorship by the artists. The chapter instead seeks to examine traces of collective trauma as it emerged from non-causal and other pathways—namely, the affective, sensorial, and political—to discuss the affective operations of art and the ways in which art intersects with trauma. Following Bennett's approach, the focus on affect enables us to engage with emotions and sensations as more productive forms of engagement with trauma when no form of direct representation was available.

Hamilakis suggests that affects are best understood as assemblages that cohere around in-betweenness. Key features of assemblage thinking are sensoriality, memory, multi-temporality, and political effects. Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari, he argues that sensoriality cannot be separated from affectivity: in other words, the primary role of the senses is not to allow the organic body to operate but to enable affectivity, to establish affective connections, to allow us to be "touched" by other bodies, by things, by the atmosphere, and by the world in general. He states:

...in addition to the material components that are brought together and arranged to produce a co-functioning entity, there are other components, which are seemingly immaterial, but which require materiality to be enacted: I am referring to discourses, memories and affects, not just linguistic utterances and signs.²²

Hamilakis' proposal in linking objects and affect with memory echoes Subangun's earlier statement about the background of their artistic practice. Relatedly, as Susan Best explained, affect is one aspect of the expressive dimension of art; it provides the tone of the work and some orientation for the viewer. To map this pathway, the artworks discussed in the following section will be considered through the framework of traumatic affect, or the ways in which objects and the materiality activated by the sensorial may engender collective trauma.

Importantly, while dissatisfaction with art academies mostly drove the experimental practice of GSRB and PIPA, members of the groups also participated in broader student movements that criticized the widening class and economic gaps. More importantly, this was also the period when *tapols* (a contraction of *tahanan politik*, political prisoners, former inmates of prison camps) of 1965–66 events were gradually released into the community due to the increasing pressures from international human rights organizations who had visited some of the prison camps.²³ Perhaps for the first time after the mass killings, Indonesians directly faced the narratives of violence and loss brought by the re-emergence of *tapols* among them. Yet, not much is known about the community reception of the *tapols* after their immediate

release. The artworks that emerged from these experimental groups seemed to project disturbance onto the façade of the *kerukunan* (social harmony) that the state aggressively promoted.

Artistic rebellion and traumatic affect: FX Harsono and Bonyong Munny Ardhie

GSRBI was comprised of 17 artists from academies in Jakarta (Jakarta Art Institute, IKJ), Bandung (Faculty of Fine Art and Design, ITB), and Yogyakarta (Indonesian Art Academy, ASRI). Between 1975 and 1977, the members of GSRBI were Ries Purwono, S. Prinka, Anyool Subroto, Satyagraha, Nyoman Nuarta, Pandu Sudewo, Dede Eri Supria, Jim Supangkat, Siti Adiyati Subangun, Bachtiar Zainul, Nanik Mirna, Hardi, Wagiono S., FX Harsono, Agus Cahyono, and Bonyong Munny Ardhie. In 1977, some members of GSRBI who were based in Yogyakarta—namely Bonyong Munny Ardhie, Dede Eri Supria, and Ris Purwono-organized the exhibition Kepribadian Apa? (What Identity?) along with other Yogya-based artists who will be discussed more below. While other collectives were formed during the New Order, and other artists were also interested in experimental works, such as the poet and artist Danarto (1940-2018) and ceramicist Hilda Soemantri (1945–2003), these two groups were notorious for provocative works and artistic strategies that directly challenged the dominant aesthetic direction of the time. In parallel with other artistic practices in Southeast Asia during the 1970s, these young artists sought new ways of making, understanding, and experiencing works of art to break the status quo.

GSRBI's founding reflected this push. They were interested in bringing social issues back to artistic practices and focusing on the emotional impact of the artworks on the audience. In contrast with the previous generation that favored aesthetic formalism with its attendant objectivity, GSRBI's (and subsequently PIPA's) artworks rejected the previous generation's highly personalized approach to art. Instead, they called for more open and socially engaged practices. When GSRB first presented their works in 1975, they boldly stated that "social problems rather than personal emotions expressed through art should be the basis of new Indonesian art."²⁴

Furthermore, the group called for art to enter the realm of the everyday and to erase the boundary between "high" and "low" art (as represented by folk or traditional forms). The group's core aesthetic strategy of bridging the everyday with artistic practice was to utilize utilitarian items, such as toys and food items, alongside mediums conventionally used in art such as canvas and paint. However, embedded in the group's aims to provoke and challenge, I would like to speculate that these strategies also emerged in close proximity to trauma, as highlighted by FX Harsono and Bonyong Munny Ardhie's works in the following section.

FX Harsono (b. 1949), one of Indonesia's eminent contemporary artists, regularly represented Indonesia in regional and global contemporary art exhibitions. Born in Blitar, East Java province, he was trained in the Indonesian Visual Art Academy (ASRI) from 1969 to 1974 and Jakarta Art Institute from 1987 to 1991. His interest in socio-political issues had already emerged in his student days at ASRI. He became known for participating in the *December Hitam* (Black December) protest in 1974 that galvanized the experimental movement in Indonesian visual arts.²⁵ In the first GSRBI exhibition in 1975, Harsono created four installation works—*Paling Top* (The Most Top, 1975), *Manusia Terbelah* (The Divided Human, 1975), *Pistol Plastik, Kembang Plastik Dalam Kantong Plastik* (Plastic Gun, Plastic Flower inside Plastic Bags, 1975), and *Rantai yang Santai* (The Relaxed Chain, 1975). The discussion below will focus on the latter two.

For the installation *Pistol Plastik* (1975), the artist hung three plastic bags in a row (Figure 3.1). In one of the few existing documentation of this artwork, each large translucent bag contains a single object suspended from a string in the middle. Two bags, each containing a plastic gun, flank a central bag containing a plastic flower. The artist's interest in plastic's materiality can be seen as a critique of the growing consumerism in Indonesia's increasingly modernized society. The plastic objects in his works seem to be full of meaning but always ready to become junk or transform into something else.

Another work by Harsono, titled *Rantai Yang Santai* (The Relaxed Chain, 1975) (Figure 3.2), further exemplifies this intersection between objects and the possibilities for transformation. The installation comprised of a pillow and two bolster cushions arranged on a baby mattress that is encircled by a chain, one end of which dangles to the floor. The artist offers that the installation was about the pervasiveness of the military in everyday life. He explains:

At the time, people did not feel secure in their daily lives because we did not feel free even in our private space. It was like we were chained, tied. It was as if the regime installed a surveillance camera in people's houses. Even in our private houses, people did not want to talk about the military at all.²⁶

As scholars have noted, by the early 1970s, Indonesia's armed forces had established dominance over four major areas: the political sector, the economy, the military, and the socio-cultural arena.²⁷ In the latter, the government exercised tight censorship of media and cultural activities with writers, painters, and musicians often jailed or socially marginalized for expressing a critical attitude.

Measuring only $67 \times 97 \times 56$ cm, the installation's soft materials contrast sharply with the metal chain. The artist's explanation implies that the chain represents a sense of fear toward the military for many Indonesians during the early New Order regime. Simultaneously, as the chain sinuously encircles the bolsters and pillows, the work also suggests that such fear has become an intimate part of everyday life.

The use of weapons and chains in these works gestures toward social and political issues, particularly *Rantai yang Santai* as explained by the artist



Figure 3.1 FX Harsono, Pistol Plastik, Kembang Plastik dalam Kantong Plastik (Plastic Gun, Plastic Flower inside Plastic Bags), 1975, mixed media, variable dimension. Image courtesy of Indonesian Visual Art Archive (IVAA). Exhibited in the first Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia.

in his statement above. However, it should be noted that the artist's explanation of this work was made long after the work was completed. As this explanation was not available during the original exhibition, I offer another reading of both works to capture how the artist's works might be created in close proximity with trauma and how trauma's affect is present in the artworks.

Harsono's installations, though they might appear to represent violence through the use of guns and chain, could also be seen as representing the shutting down of the senses. The *Plastik* installation depicts the stillness of



Figure 3.2 FX Harsono, *Rantai yang Santai* (The Relaxed Chain), 1975, mixed media, 67 × 97 × 56 cm. Image courtesy of Indonesian Visual Art Archive (IVAA). Exhibited in the first *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia*.

the objects encased in the plastic bags. Everything seems to be temporarily suspended; the guns are forever poised to shoot, yet nothing happens, and nothing will. The chains that bound the pillows and the mattress together further emphasized this sense of stillness where the metal constrained any possibility of movement. Both installations seemed to capture the almost imperceptible affect of trauma. While trauma's effect is violent and discordant, its affect is often quiet and insidious.

In this regard, the stillness and the shutting down of senses in Harsono's installation captures the sense of paralysis and disconnection caused by trauma where language and meaning have broken down. While the artist made the political decision to avoid direct narratives in his installation, the paralysis palpable in the works also compelled the viewers (including ourselves) to search for a sense of narrative or marks that speak of intelligibility.

Sanento Yuliman, the late Indonesian art historian and critic, highlighted this search:

Can we say from this exhibition that we are being introduced to a new aesthetic experience where the "sense of concreteness" becomes the basis to that same experience, hence transforming the experience qualitatively into a different one from the "conventional"... as though to *shock* us with the materiality of the banal?²⁸

Yuliman's reading about the sense of shock points out the group's strategy in foregrounding the objects' political agency. At the same time, it was also applicable to the way in which Harsono's works resist narrativization. Trauma's belatedness disallows narrative closure and can only be expressed through its symptoms, which are made possible through artistic representations. Here, the symptoms are manifested in the shock that Yuliman registered and the paralysis captured by Harsono's works. These reactions possibly emphasized trauma's affect as it insidiously entered the making and reading of the works.

Indeed, around the time of Black December in 1974 and the first GSRBI exhibition in 1975, the Indonesian government was also under international and domestic pressures to reconsider its treatment of political prisoners. Exposure by non-governmental organizations from outside Indonesia of the appalling conditions in prison camps, combined with the government's need to increase its aid from foreign economic and military assistance, showed the early release of around 1300 Category B prisoners in December 1975.²⁹

However, after their release, ex-*tapols*' movements were significantly constrained, and they were effectively under town arrest.³⁰ Most ex-*tapols* also had to restart their lives as their properties, including their businesses, often had been seized by the government or military members who had evicted ex-*tapols*' families. Homelessness was rife, families were separated and dispersed across Indonesia, and strong social stigma was attached to both ex-*tapol* and their families. It was clear that this situation had caused severe trauma to the individuals and a rupture of the social fabric in many communities.

The New Order's notion of *kerukunan* (social harmony) that emphasized community consensus was heavily promoted for the 32 years of the regime. As such, difficult and traumatic narratives such as those brought by the *tapols* were silenced by the state. Moreover, the silence was also internalized by many survivors and their families to maintain their already tenuous relationship with their communities.

The lack of signification about the mass killings in Indonesian public discourse seemed to cause the trauma to be buried in the public memory. Nevertheless, trauma's insidious affect on the body can be illustrated, this chapter argues, through the processes of material transformation represented in Bonyong Munny Ardhie's works below. Bonyong Munny Ardhie (b. 1946) was born in Malang, East Java province. He studied at ASRI, Yogyakarta, from 1969 until 1980, majoring in painting. His early practice was shaped by the desire to challenge artmaking conventions; he used the Javanese term *waton suloyo* (loosely translated as "being reckless") to describe his interest in experimental art forms and media.³¹

In comparison with Harsono's works that captured paralysis as a psychic wound, Ardhie's objects bear the imprints of trauma on the body. His works appeared to echo what happened in the real event where hundreds and thousands of bodies experienced deprivation, neglect, starvation, pain, and systematic assault to the psyche during the events of 1965–66. The discussion below examines how Ardhie's works engage with the materiality of the medium, the body, and mnemonic practices.

After the initial shock of their first exhibition in 1975, the second (1977) and third exhibitions (1979) of GSRB saw a deepening of conceptual and artistic strategies in the group. In 1977, for example, for the group exhibition at the French Cultural Centre in Bandung, Ardhie presented *Monumen Revolusi*:

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diresmikan oleh Pak Bejo Tukang Becak (Monument of Revolution: inaugurated by Mr Bejo, a *becak* driver, 1977) (Figure 3.3). The sculpture consisted of seven military boots placed haphazardly on a pedestal and drenched in thick black paint that dribbled to the floor. Before the pedestal, the artist had placed a plaque with the title. Pak Bejo, the official recognized by the monument, was the driver of a *becak*, a popular mode of transport in small neighborhoods of Indonesia that has long been seen to symbolize the urban poor.³²

The textual element in this work primarily defines its interpretation as a commentary on many ex-combatants' forgotten fate after Indonesia's independence in 1945. Ostensibly, the word *Revolusi* (revolution) refers to the period of 1945–49, when Indonesia defended the young republic from a series of military takeovers by the Dutch. However, it was also used in the New Order's military propaganda to describe the so-called PKI's council of military officers (*Dewan Revolusi*, the Revolutionary Council) that allegedly claimed responsibility for the failed coup.³³ The use of military boots tantalizingly suggested both meanings, in particular, the way state propaganda permeated the making and reading of the work. Here, I offer a reading into the paint's thick and viscous materiality where it might have transected with trauma to deepen the meaning of the work.

The title *Monumen Revolusi* might have referred to a monument for national remembrance. However, as the artist reminds the viewer, it was not a government official that officiated the monument but Pak Bejo, a symbol of the urban poor—invisible to the viewer, yet very much present in this work. Ardhie's strategy in depicting an abject object (the decaying boots)



Figure 3.3 BM Ardhie, Monumen Revolusi Diresmikan oleh Pak Bejo Tukang Becak (Revolution Monument Inaugurated by Mr Bejo, Becak Driver), 1977, mixed media, variable dimension. Image courtesy of Indonesian Visual Art Archive. Exhibited in the second Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia.

and invisibility (the figure of Pak Bejo) mobilized the work's materiality to evoke death and decomposition as marking the traumatic narratives that were suppressed during the period. Ardhie intentionally used thick paint to emulate putrefying objects where the paint's materiality transformed the symbolism of the military boots from order and strength to decay and decomposition. The seemingly soft and yielding material mimed a kind of surrender to a natural condition that pulled the body down and became a reminder of transient mortality. As one critic noted, the work had a *getir* (bitter or painful) tone as deeply embedded in everyday life.³⁴

While the artist's intention might be to push the boundaries of artistic mediums, the work also highlighted violence's cyclical nature. Indeed, the artist's interest in an emotive approach created a work with haptic and mnemonic qualities; it highlighted that Indonesia's independence from the colonial powers and the emergence of the New Order both stood on the sheer material weight of multitudes of damaged bodies. While trauma may not be "present" in this work, the emphasis on death and decay gestures toward what needs to be forgotten in Indonesia's history (the mass killings); yet, in doing so, the artwork through processes of signification might reveal the trauma that it sought to suppress.

The mutability of the industrial substance used by Ardhie not only represented an attack against the art establishment—a material rebellion against conventional art forms—it also became an expression of protest aiming to disrupt the social order. Ardhie and his peers' attempts to disrupt the conventional order through artmaking continued to gain support from cultural institutions and notable art critics such as the late Sanento Yuliman and Sudarmadji. The group also increased in numbers as more artists joined the spirit of the experimental art scene in cities such as Jakarta, Bandung, and Yogyakarta. In Yogyakarta, some artists that joined GSRB expanded the spirit by producing group exhibitions, notably in *Kepribadian Apa*? (What Identity?).

The works in *Kepribadian Apa* departed in several ways from GSRB's exhibitions, particularly with the higher number of performative works and the strong protest content. Ardhie, Ries Purwana, Gendut Riyanto, and Ronald Manulang introduced aesthetic approaches that the discussions at the GSRB had honed. Other artists who participated in the exhibition were drawn by the spirit of discontent and openness that permeated the artistic and cultural atmosphere in Yogyakarta during the time.³⁵

Kepribadian Apa? (What Identity?) was the original title of the group exhibition. After the controversy, the title was then adopted to describe the artists in the show. The title was the group's rhetorical response to the pervasive debate about "Indonesian identity" in art and cultural circles. Artists and writers were expected to produce works that expressed a sense of Indonesianness.³⁶ Thus, the exhibition strategies struck a decidedly political note by rejecting this demand. PIPA also published a manifesto that can be summarized as expressing a strong desire to break down the conventional system and the art establishment. As a group, they intended to unify all forms of artistic practice into one type of art that was "free from jargons and definitions."³⁷

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Ardhie presented several works in this exhibition, including a participatory performance titled *Mimbar Bebas* (Podium for Free Speech, 1977) and installations *Etalase* (Display Case, 1977) and *Menara ASEAN* (ASEAN Tower, 1977). His works, already political in GSRBI, became more pronounced in *Kepribadian Apa*. His *Menara ASEAN* (Figure 3.4) echoed *Monumen Revolusi*'s critical approach as an anti-monument, yet it also reinforced the challenges in remembering early New Order Indonesia's atrocities.

As Alexander (2004) argues, to construct the meaning of trauma within a community, the original event must be supported by processes of signification within that community; the cultural construct of trauma depends on how the event is perceived as traumatic. In this regard, it is both the event and the meaning that provide shock and fear. As discussed above, the New Order's denial and suppression of the anti-communist killings pointed to the lack of signification of the trauma in the nation's conscious memory, which may explain its absence in Indonesia's visual arts. In contrast to *Monumen Revolusi*, which may inadvertently reveal the hidden narratives, Ardhie's *Menara ASEAN* illustrated the consequences of this lack of signification.

Menara ASEAN was comprised of a three-meter wall of bamboo with a figure slumped against it. On the wall were several signs ranging from a large one stating *Disini Akan Dibuat ASEAN Tower Bertaraf Internasional* (ASEAN Tower with International Standards Will Be Built Here) to a smaller sign stating the name of the developer as *C.V. Suhartono* (Suhartono, Inc.), a play on Suharto's name.



Figure 3.4 BM Ardhie, *Menara ASEAN* (ASEAN Tower), 1977, mixed media, variable dimension. Image courtesy of Indonesian Visual Art Archive. Exhibited in the first *Kepribadian Apa*?

The installation's focus was a life-sized male figure with suitcases, clothes, and shoes scattered around him. The figure is presented as thoroughly abject, slumped against the wall with eyes closed, bare feet, and torn clothing. The figure's face and hands, Ardhie explained, were life-casts of his body, thus giving the figure the uncanny semblance of a living figure.³⁸ Hamilakis' study on assemblage thinking is instructive to reconsider the political reading of this work beyond its textual elements, particularly how the assemblage of objects might constitute a selective mnemonic practice. Ardhie's installation as a deliberate arrangement of objects assumes a social agent's ability and power that brought social and political consequences. While on the one hand, the abject figure has been read as symbolizing one of many victims forced to become homeless and displaced by the New Order's relentless developmentalism,³⁹ another reading of the work offers the narratives of many ex-*tapols* who faced similar, if not worse, fates at the hands of the authoritarian regime.

However, nothing of the latter exists in the installation; there are no symbolic images of the ex-*tapols* or their narratives. By this stage, obliteration and invisibility seem to be the primary keys to understanding the strategies of control and domination set in motion by the authoritarian regime. Indeed, the political force of the installation could be seen as emerging from the selection of specific instances ("the poor and the homeless") and the forgetting of others (ex-*tapols*). Such selection also, potentially, actualized distinct modes of remembrance in Indonesian visual art practices that can be instrumentalized for the present and the future—namely, that the forgetting of others can erase a difficult or inconvenient truth.

Conclusion

Fifty-five years after the events of 1965–66, challenges still exist in Indonesia on how to deal with its dark past. To this day, no one has been held accountable for the mass-killings of 1965–66; victims and perpetrators continue to live side by side in everyday life. More often, the victims and their families are silenced by intimidation and terror. Despite visual artists' alignment with socio-politically engaged practices, our discussion in this chapter has demonstrated that visual artists were also profoundly impacted and possibly also implicated in forgetting the events.

Ardhie stated, in his typically understated way, that his works were about "playfulness" (*main-main*).⁴⁰ However, his works were also consciously cultivated to express a sense of freedom in artmaking. Together with FX Harsono and their peers, the artists' intention to represent reality was consistent with their aesthetic strategy to incite emotions without any filter or aesthetic mediation. By so doing, they also offered a cathartic release through representations of dissent and chaos. The arrangement of objects in their artworks challenged the restrained and distanced approach of the dominant mode of artmaking of the time—formalist abstraction—and questioned the notion of *kerukunan* (social harmony) through their portrayal of human action and suffering.

The debate on identity or "Indonesianness" that foregrounded many young artists' rebellious and experimental practices during the 1970s was shaped by the localized inflection of the cultural Cold War in Indonesia. While their works did not directly represent the anti-communist killings, the freedom and rebellion they conveyed through the installations were often shadowed by a charge of *subversi* (subversive) or accusations of sympathizing with PKI—both of which were dangerous in early New Order Indonesia.⁴¹ Their practices aimed to push the boundaries of artmaking and what was permissible in terms of subject matter but still were bounded by the fear and trauma of 1965–66. Their works instead pivoted to capture the different registers: the sensorial and the affective that channeled the silencing of critical voices and the inability to mourn collectively.

Nonetheless, I caution against a total reframing of the experimental practices in Indonesia in the 1970s through the lens of trauma. To identify any art in a post-conflict society as being about trauma may open new readings. Still, it may also reduce the meaning of the artworks to a singular definition, which can be counterproductive. Instead, this chapter seeks to capture the experimental practices' encounter with collective trauma by highlighting the intricacies underlying given ideas about artmaking and art historical writing. In illustrating trauma's affect as quiet and insidious, yet ever-present, trauma's belatedness deals with a past event or with the objects of memory and the present experience of memory as captured in the experimental artworks during Indonesia's authoritarian era.

Notes

- Research funding for this chapter was partially supported by the Art Histories and Aesthetic Practices program at the Forum Transregionale Studien, Berlin, 2016–17. The author also wishes to thank Dr Amanda Katherine Rath (Goethe University Frankfurt) for her generous feedback. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.
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- 6 The scholarship for this topic is extensive. See, e.g., Geoffrey Robinson, "Down to the Very Roots': The Indonesian Army's Role in the Mass Killings of 1965–66," *Journal of Genocide Research* 19, no. 4 (2017): 465–86; Katharine McGregor, Jess Melvin, and Annie Pohlman, eds. *The Indonesian Genocide of 1965: Causes, Dynamics and Legacies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); John Roosa, *Buried Histories*, 2020.
- 7 Adrian Vickers, "Where Are the Bodies: The Haunting of Indonesia," *The Public Historian* 32, no. 1 (2020): 45–58.
- 8 FX Harsono, Gerakan-gerakan Seni Rupa Pada Masa Orde Baru (Art Movements during the New Order). Seminar April 21–23, 2013, Faculty of Fine Art and Design, Bandung Institute of Technology. Audio file. Selasar Sunaryo Art Space. For discussion of Harsono's recollection of the anti-Chinese violence see Karen Strassler, "Zones of Refuge: Fugitive Memories of Violence in the Works of FX Harsono," History of the Present 8, no. 2 (2018): 177–208 and Agung Hujatnikajennong, "Things Happen When We Remember: History and Memory in FX Harsono's Art," in Things Happen When We Remember: FX Harsono Solo Exhibition, exhibition catalogue, 6–28 September 2014 (Bandung: Selasar Sunaryo Art Space, 2014), 30–45. See also Harsono in this edition.
- 9 However, Harsono later corrected his statement and explained that all Indonesians, in fact, experienced the trauma of 1965–66. See Grace Samboh and Haruko Kamakura. *Video interview with FX Harsono.* 2015a, accessed August 10, 2020. https://youtube.com/watch?v=CQIFLp42Qsk.
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- 21 Bennett, Empathic Vision, p. 7.
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- 30 They were also forbidden to write books or for news media, speak in public, join political or mass organisations, or go abroad. Every Indonesian had to have an identity card stating their identity number, address, occupation, and religion; for ex-*tapols*, their identity card was stamped with the code ET (from ex-*tapol*), which often blocked them from employment. Amnesty International described such treatment as being similar to the discrimination by the Third Reich against the Jews. See Amnesty International, *Collection of Material Relating to Political Imprisonment in Indonesia*, 1980, 10–12, accessed August 12, 2020. https://www.indonesia1965.org/wordpress/index.php/1980/01/31/collection-of-material-related-to-political-imprisonment-1980/.
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- 32 Amanda K. Rath, *Contextualising 'Contemporary Art'*, 160–62. Also "'Monumen Revolusi' Karya Murni Ardhi Membawa Kesan Tersendiri" (Monument of Revolution: Artwork by Murni Ardhi Carried an Impression) in *Pikiran Rakyat*, April 13, 1977. Indonesian Visual Art Archive, accessed July 30, 2020. http://archive.ivaa-online.org/khazanahs/detail/3232.
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- 38 Critics who reviewed the exhibition implied that the real reason for its closing was because of the criticism toward social injustice through the representation of the poor and the thinly veiled reference toward Suharto. See Hardi, *Pameran Kepribadian Apa Ditutup Polisi*, 1977 and "Surat Ijin Pergelaran Seni Kepribadian Apa di Seni Sono Dicabut" (Permit for What Identity Exhibition Revoked) in *Bernas*, September 1977, Indonesian Visual Art Archive, accessed July 30, 2020. http://archive.ivaa-online.org/khazanahs/detail/3229
- 39 Amanda K. Rath, Contextualising 'Contemporary Art', 160-62.
- 40 Ardhie in Grace Samboh and Haruko Kamakura, 2015b.
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4 Asia's Cold War and environmental devastation

Kidlat Tahimik and Roberto Villanueva's neo-indigenous response in the Philippines and beyond

Midori Yamamura

On August 6th, 1945, an American B-29 bomber, *The Enola Gay*, dropped a bomb containing uranium-235 on the city of Hiroshima. A fission-chain reaction generated a lethal wave of heat and radiation, a blast that—in seconds—terminated more than 140,000 human lives.¹ Some cited that horrific event as the point when the "hot war" became a "cold war." A photo taken in 1945 reveals two charred trees standing amid the rubble. The image is a testimony that the bomb destroyed not only people and buildings but also the city's biosphere where each organism—including plants and animals—played a distinct role (Figure 4.1). Like humans, the trees survived the bombing suffered from its aftereffect; they stunted in growth on the side facing ground zero.² Despite the toll on the people or the environment, three days later, yet another atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki.

The United States' lack of environmental concern became quite literal between October 3rd and 7th, 1945, when a group of 21 Manhattan District officers and enlisted personnel arrived in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Their mission was to assess only the distractive effects of the atom bombs.³ After the Soviet Union tested its first nuclear weapon, the RDSS-1 on August 29th, 1949, the nuclear arms race between the two superpowers resulted in an average of 55 nuclear tests per year between 1955 and 1989. With such unprecedented environmental violation, in recent years, geologists have begun to recognize how these nuclear tests contributed to the current situation in which "the Holocene must give way to the Anthropocene."⁴ Although the commencement of such a significant human impact on the ecosystem is now generally traced back to the Industrial Revolution, some see Hiroshima as ending 12,000 years of climate stability and marking the start of human-caused climate change.

Considering Hiroshima as a symbolic site for the Anthropocene, in 1994, the Filipino environmental artist Roberto Villanueva (né Robert Gorospe Villanueva, b. 1947–1995) proposed *Sacred Sanctuary, Acupuncture the Earth* to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the atom-bombing. The artist had been grappling with environmental issues since the early 1970s, trying to influence the course of what he once described as "massive destruction working against nature."⁵ When he conceived *Sacred Sanctuary*, the artist was battling leukemia. Whereas his earlier works had focused on



Figure 4.1 Unknown Photographer, Hiroshima, around October 1945. The National Archives.

environmental sustainability, his last two including *Sacred Sanctuary*, centered on healing the Earth, as if his failing health were part of the ailing environment, as all aspects of an ecosystem are intertwined (Figure 4.2).

The central concept of *Sacred Sanctuary* was to merge "modern technology and ancient wisdom to focus on healing the Earth."⁶ Villanueva's plan entailed using *feng shui* to interpret the Earth's energy flow and erect "eight oversized needles (15 cm diameter, 914.4 cm length) of copper or copper alloy. Each needle had a "2 cm diameter hollow space" inside and was perforated from outside at about 152 cm above the ground. Through this hole, people could "hear the sounds from inside the earth," such that the "participant immediately senses a connection to the earth." As described by the artist, this "increased awareness or sense of the earth" opens the door for an "exchange of healing energies between the participant and the earth."⁷

Based on the age-old Chinese method of treating ailments, Villanueva's precolonial idea was a characteristic of a particular group of Filipino artists. According to the Manila-based sculptor Agnes Arellano, there was a movement in this country [the Philippines] to reassess indigenous culture. In art, this was so clearly seen during the heyday in the early '90s of the Baguio Arts Guild, with Santi[ago] Bose and Roberto Villanueva taking the lead.⁸

After Villanueva's passing in February 1995, his good friend and fellow Baguio artist, the filmmaker Kidlat Tahimik (b. 1942, né Eric Oteyza de Guia), continued the project. He renamed it *Healing Our Planet Earth* (HOPE) after Hiroshima and executed it with his son, Kawayan de Guia (b. 1979), and four other artists from the Cordilleras. The project resulted in two films, entitled Our Bomb Mission to Hiroshima (1995) and Our Bomb Missions to Hiroshima/Celebrating the Year 2021 (2020).



Figure 4.2 Roberto Villanueva, plan for Sacred Sanctuary: Acupuncture the Earth, 1994. © Eva Corazon-Abundo-Villanueva and Napoleon A. Villanueva.

This chapter explores how Tahimik and Villanueva responded to the environmental destruction during the Cold War as part of their postcolonial endeavor. To avoid President Marcos's martial law (1972~1981), the two moved to Baguio in 1978, where Tahimik was from. In this strategically situated city in the Cordillera mountains, the local inhabitants had resisted Spanish colonial control for more than three hundred years and preserved their rich indigenous heritage. While most of the world's population preferred to live in thee metropolitan centers, Baguio artists formed a new community in the province. They embraced indigenous principles to develop a

more sustainable environment. "Think globally, act locally" was their slogan, and their proposals aimed at the world more broadly. These artists arrived at their postcolonial identity only after awakening from a hypnotic state that had trapped the former colonies in a chronic cycle of consumption, conformed them to Western ideals, and compelled them to devalue their cultural heritage.⁹

The perfumed nightmare

For 33 years . . . I slept in my cocoon of Americanized dreams. After this anaestheticized [*sic*] state, I found myself stirring. I knew I was coming out of my perfumed nightmare. In 1977, I was reborn.¹⁰

For Kidlat Tahimik, the making of his first film, *Mababangong Bangungot* (*The Perfumed Nightmare*, 1977) was comparable to his decolonization process. The semi-autobiographical film follows the self-searching journey of a *jeepney* driver named Kidlat; the filmmaker himself played this role. One of the most original and poetic works of cinema made anywhere in the seventies," as Werner Herzog described it. And the critic Jonathan Rosenbaum pointed out, "a conscious technical primitive like Luc Moullet," a French Nouvelle Vague director, known for his anti-authoritarian leanings and rigorously primitive aesthetics adopted from American B-movies.¹¹ Beyond Tahimik's search for identity, the poetic and primitive are the characteristics of this film.

Tahimik's unique aesthetics will be the topic of the following section.¹² Going back to Herzog's point, with scrutiny, Tahimik establishes conscious ties with Euroamerican films, which evoke poetic nostalgia in its audience. He creates a dialog with filmmakers he admires; in others, he reveals the profound impact of the foreign films on Filipino psychology. As a whole, the film renders Kidlat's extrication from what he describes, the "nightmare of progress."¹³

The film begins by portraying how deeply Western ideas have permeated the psychology of Filipino life. The impact is apparent in the protagonist's image, who looks like an indigenized version of Charlie Chaplin's tramp, with the traditional Igorot hairdo and typical American attire; Kidlat wears jeans and a T-shirt. His appearance suggests the co-existence of strong US influence and primitive culture: his hairstyle is often identified with the headhunters of the Cordilleran tribes. ¹⁴ This deliberate reference can be the filmmaker's ironic statement on how Filipino urbanites conceive their indigenous heritage—one of colonial legacies (Figure 4.3).

As the film opens, Kidlat stands before the only bridge to Balian, where he lives and works. Mimicking Jean-Luc Godard's Nouvelle Vague film, the scene starts with the protagonist speaking directly to the camera: "I am Kidlat Tahimik. I am trying to make that final crossing to freedom. I choose my vehicle, and I can cross all bridges." A brief colonial history of the Philippines is given in an explanation of the bridge, which was first a bamboo bridge, built by Kidlat's Filipino grandfather, then converted to concrete, taken over


Figure 4.3 Kidlat Tahimik, A still from The Perfumed Nightmare, 1977. Kidlat driving a Jeepney. © Kidlat Tahimik.

by the Spanish, Japanese, and Americans, respectively. At the end of each sequence, Kidlat appears with his vehicle—from a toy to a real *jeepney*. Each time, the size of his jeep becomes larger. He then looks at the camera, repeats the phrase: "I am Kidlat Tahimik. I am trying to make that final crossing to freedom. I choose my vehicle, and I can cross all bridges." However, he cannot cross the bridge, unable to make "that final crossing to freedom."

The lasting nature of US colonial influence is suggested in this sequence by the way filmmaker reordered the chronology. The actual colonial history was 333 years of Spanish rule followed by 47 years under the United States, and three years under the Japanese. However, positioning the United States after Japan, with the narration starting in Tagalog but switching to English, conveys the continuous American influence on its former colony.¹⁵

The camerawork of the first scene pays homage to the French filmmaker Jean Renoir, borrowing from his introduction of Monsieur Lange, the protagonist in Renoir's 1936 film *The Crime of M. Lange*. While Kidlat sleeps, the camera surveys the wall of his bamboo hut as a reflection of his character. It captures an illustration of the Katipunan (Filipino revolutionary society), and a history of the Philippine flag's development from the revolution in 1896 to the present day. The sequence informs us of the protagonist's ardent nationalism. All the while, popular American music plays from the radio. Next, we see a pin-up of Miss Universe–svelte, white, blonde—symbolizing the emblematic colonial mindset of longing for whiteness. The soundtrack of this scene, the radio tunes in to *Voice of America*, an American government English-language program, as the camera captures Kidlat waking from a dream. His first act of the day is to kiss Miss America. Tahimik shot the film's first half in the Philippines, the second half in Europe. Throughout the first section, the radio soundtrack plays a significant role, linking the provincial setting to major events in the West, particularly in the United States.

American soft power drives Kidlat's obsession with progress and his dreams of high-tech society and Cape Canaveral (Kennedy). He is the President of Werner Von Braun Fan Club. Von Braun is a rocket scientist who contributed significantly to the US space program. Despite his pro-American fever, simple phrases in the film, such as "American space imperialism" and "Can St. Marco protect us from the atomic bomb?" suggest Kidlat's distrust toward the voice of the neocolonial master that still murmurs deep in his psyche.

His disbelief in the neo-colonial power becomes most obvious in a blackand-white flashback featuring Kidlat's father, who fought in the Philippine Revolution against the Spaniards with a rifle given to him by an American soldier. The father celebrated a brief victory after the Spanish surrender, believing that the United States is the ally of the Philippine Revolution. But in the following scene, while crossing a bridge, a US soldier suddenly murders him. In this film, the bridge is a metaphor that leads to freedom. The murder of Kidlat's father symbolically diminished the path to freedom, while the narration sarcastically informs us: "For twelve million dollars, the Americans bought your soul and mine . . .ⁿ¹⁶ In the actual history, after the Filipino revolutionaries' brief victory, the Spanish government ceded the archipelago to the United States in 1898 for 20 million dollars in the Treaty of Paris. The deflated value was probably Tahimik's satirical gesture, suggesting that Western nations viewed Asia's first revolution as a trifle event.

Even though the American soldier killed his father and the United States bought the Philippines for a pittance, Kidlat is apparently pro-American. In his Sunday prayer, even the Virgin Mary replies in the hard-boiled cadences of Anne Sheridan: "You're okay in my book, baby."17 Kidlat's mindset attests to how US soft power-like radio programs, film, and entertainment-aided the United States's gradual ascent into the cultural influence and the world superpower in the Cold War. As Takeshi Matsuda's 2007 study convincingly argues, US government had already asserted its hegemonic position at the onset of the Cold War by promulgating its culture in the Axis countries of Germany, Italy, and Japan.¹⁸ The government's strategic plan was laid out in a diagram in the 1949 United States Advisory Commission on Information (Figure 4.4). The three main categories International Broadcasting, International Press and Publication, and International Motion Pictures systematically propagated the American industrial, economic, and cultural merits in 84 countries, including the Philippines. Because US soft-power enters through fantastic American dreams rendered in cinema, Tahimik describes Hollywood film, "the Trojan Horse of American culture."19

Cultural programs especially stoked a tremendous intellectual appetite in war-torn countries where people longed for news, commentaries, books, magazines, movies, and photographs of any kind. To generate pro-US



Figure 4.4 US Information Agency, "Information Media Services," in 1949 United States Advisory Commission on Information, 1949. The National Archives.

opinions, US Information Service agents established contact with receptive government officials, political leaders, newspaper editors, writers and journalists, directors of radio newscasts and program producers, motion picture producers and distributors, education leaders, school teachers, labor leaders, people in business, industrialists, church officials, scientists, and artists. These grassroots efforts ultimately permeated civic psychology and generally led people to accept all things American in the occupied territories and beyond.

It is this soft-power that makes US environmental exploitation less prominent. However, with the acceleration of climate change and intensifying environmental disasters, the relationship between the Cold War and ecological history has become a topic of recent scholarship. In *The Polar Regions: An Environmental History* (2016), Adrian Howkins' chapter, "War and Peace: The Cold War," discusses the nuclear tension between the United States and the Soviet Union in the highly militarized Arctic zone.²⁰

The environmental hazards were not limited to the testing of nuclear bombs. According to the "US Atomic Energy Commission" files kept at the National Archives, the US Department of State has "looked to develop nuclear program system with [the] economic appeal" in the global market since 1958, peddled nuclear power plants country to country throughout Asia. According to Edwin O. Reischauer's letter to the US Secretary of State dated November 1, 1963, for Japan alone, the Atomic Energy Program was a 20-billion-yen project, six-year-spun.²¹ Despite being the only country to endure a nuclear bombing, Japan eventually built 54 nuclear plants during the Cold War. Its only solution for managing radioactive waste was the deep burial.²² Toxic materials were brought to disposal sites far from urban centers or exported to developing countries. In the Philippines, Japan is "infamous . . . for its preferential treatment of toxic wastes, hazardous chemicals, and nuclear wastes."23 This transboundary waste disposal deeply impacted people in the archipelago. In Sacred Sanctuary, Villanueva may have wanted to call attention to such interconnectedness, linking disparate locations through a seismic sound that could be heard from the ground through his giant needles, illuminating diastrophism by demonstrating how the Earth knows no national boundaries. Nuclear waste anywhere in the world taints the ecosystem shared by all.

Nevertheless, during the Cold War, despite its lethal effects on people and the environment, an estimated 11.2 million gallons of Agent Orange were sprayed on Vietnam between 1962 and 1971. This toxic herbicide caused severe health damage such as cancer and Parkinson's disease to humans and deformities to newborns. Defoliated 90–95% of the cultivated fields, and 36% of the mangrove forests had no small impact on the ecosystem.²⁴ Notwithstanding the severe health threat, a less hazardous version of Agent Orange remained in use for forest management in the US homeland until 1985.²⁵ Agent Orange remained in the market due in part to the post-WWII shift in US environmental regulation approaches, which was based more on economic merit than on the people and environment's wellbeing.²⁶ The new safety concerns about hazardous chemicals like Agent Orange centered only around animal testing. Furthermore, the cases before the Food Additive Amendment of 1958—Agent Orange was in use since the 1930s—were pardoned from premarket testing.²⁷

The impact on the economy is equally essential in *The Perfumed Night-mare*, as it eventually shakes Kidlat from his enthrallment with progress. His awakening occurs during his sojourn to Europe. The opportunity to leave the Philippines arrives coincidentally one day, as Kidlat meets a wealthy American Boy Scout who offers him a job tending vending machines in Paris. Kidlat accepts, and the whole village holds a party to wish him farewell. Kidlat promises, when he becomes rich abroad, to donate a traffic light for the village bridge. The scout leader takes Kidlat to Paris. The film demonstrates

what the cultural critic Frederic Jameson has assessed, both contextually and methodically, as the influence of economics.²⁸ The Scout leader reveals his corporate strategy in Paris: "First, sell my chewing gum empire, then buy a blue jeans factory, after that army jeeps, and then jet planes . . . progress my boy, progress."

After arriving in Paris, Kidlat blindly follows the Scout leader's plan, and every day earnestly fills the vending machines. His only friend in Paris is Lola, one of the "last merchants of four seasons," an ambulant vendor, selling eggs from the stall. Her business is under threat of obsolescence due to the construction of a huge supermarket nearby. Lola worries that mass-produced synthetic eggs will eventually overtake her small organic egg business. Kidlat is sympathetic, but the Scout tells him: "One market vendor less is one parking space more."

In real life, Tahimik's wake-up call came with a research project he did for the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Initially, Tahimik left the Philippines to earn an MBA from the prestigious Wharton School of Finance in 1967, and then he worked as an economic researcher for almost four years at OECD in Paris (1968–1971). While conducting comparative studies on "fertilizer distribution in third-world countries," he realized that the "real intention behind the official aid from the OECD participant countries was to promote their chemical inputs—'The Miracle Rice Program of 1968.'"²⁹

Funded by the Ford Foundation and Rockefeller Foundation, the goal of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) began in Mexico to increase agricultural production worldwide by developing High-Yielding Varieties (HYV) of cereals, especially dwarf wheat and rice. The IRRI packaged the miracle rice with chemical fertilizers, agrochemicals, and a specific irrigation system and, converted rice fields into a factory of crops.³⁰ Growing up in Baguio and being familiar with indigenous rice farming, Tahimik saw the potential of miracle rice to cause "detriment of indigenous natural farming practices." Thus, deciding that it was time to drop his career as an economist, he returned to his writing.³¹

Before his career abroad, Tahimik had written a musical while attending the University of the Philippines as a drama major. In his last summer with OECD in 1971, he worked on a Norwegian farm, where he pitched hay in the mornings and wrote in the afternoons. He remembers today, on his last day there, how he decided to quit his consultancy job at OECD and "tore up my Wharton MBA diploma . . . started growing my hair And never looked back again."³² Ultimately his project transformed from a career in theater to indie filmmaking.

In *The Perfumed Nightmare*, Kidlat witnesses the inauguration of the supermarket, an event attended by influential leaders of the First World—from Henry Kissinger to Queen Elizabeth. "If the small markets work," Tahimik asks, "why the supermarkets?"³³ Furthermore, these economically powerful countries control the developing world. In the film, Kidlat "takes a mythical super-breath to blow down his nightmare's mega-capitalist icons"

that eliminate the small street vendors and exploit countries like the Philippines and its indigenous farmers (Figure 4.5). "The perfume of my nightmare had finally worn off."³⁴

After awakening to his values, Kidlat makes a pilgrimage to Germany, Werner Von Braun's homeland. On the way there, he witnesses the rapid gentrification of Europe. He starts seeing progress and destruction as dual effects of modernization. A white carabao (water buffalo) that sporadically appears throughout the film is most probably the symbol of progress, which according to Kidlat's good friend in the Philippines, a builder of traditional bamboo huts, Kaya, is: "born against nature. It is beautiful, but inside it is cold and aggressive. Its sweetness is like the chewing gum the American soldiers gave you. It is sweet in the beginning, but soon you feel like spitting it out (Figure 4.6)."³⁵ The forceful intervention of artificial technology, like the chemically-laden miracle rice that threatens biodiversity, could enchant people and change those indigenous farmers' attentiveness for maintaining the delicate balance between humans and nature. The entire "nature-friendly" production system can easily shift into the "super-profit" -generating economy that paid a little attention to the environment.³⁶

Kaya also complains to Kidlat that nobody wants to learn traditional bamboo arts any longer, and everyone goes to engineering school instead. Eventually, though, Kidlat starts seeing more value in the indigenous way of thinking as an alternative to the progress promoted by US soft power. For example, the *jeepney* was a form of mass transportation, recycled from the US military jeeps left in the Philippines after World War II. Filipinos cut its



Figure 4.5 Kidlat Tahimik, The Perfumed Nightmare, 1977, film still, Kidlat taking a mythical super-breath. © Kidlat Tahimik.

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Figure 4.6 Kidlat Tahimik, The Perfumed Nightmare, 1977, film still, white carabao (white water buffalo). © Kidlat Tahimik.

body in two, stretched the jeep's length using recycled industrial materials, painted them with original designs, and transformed the "vehicle of the war into a vehicle for life."³⁷ Under capitalism, people compete to purchase the latest models of cars and other household appliances, which often resulted in overspending and excessive materialism. After awakening from the perfumed nightmare, Kidlat begins to see more value in indigenous ways of thinking about sustainability, such as repurposing excess resources.

Kidlat's journey to Europe, in a way, became his search for his *Sariling Dwende*, "an inner esprit that is autonomously creative,"³⁸ which could dissociate him from the society filled with the politically purposed information that colonizes everyday life in the Philippines. The American "Trojan Horse" media incorporates people into capitalist circuits from within, and drives them into unnecessary spending without thinking of the consequences. On one end, this leads to environmental abuse. Capitalism also removes humanity; for example, it evaluates people not by their character but by the price of their labor.

Tahimik's decision to dissociate himself from the dominant beliefs, which he addresses to his "MBA Echo Chamber,"³⁹ came after he had experienced "the tensions, which develop when the members of one culture try to measure themselves by the standards of a foreign culture. Quite often the end result is an explosion."⁴⁰ The tension between the profit-based rationalism represented by the miracle rice, and the 3,000-year-old traditional rice farming in the Cordillera terraces became Tahimik's explosive point. It freed Kidlat from his fascination with "progress." In the film, Tahimik uses a large butterfly tattoo on Kaya's chest to symbolize spiritual freedom and a strong sense of self. Kaya tells Kidlat, "When the sleeping typhoon blows off its cocoon, the butterfly embraces the sun." The emblematic phrase means that one can embrace true freedom only by reaching a sense of one's own "native" substance, or *Sariling Dwende*.⁴¹ Kidlat finally realizes that his real strength lies not in mimicking the West but in having critical eyes to measure the progress imposed upon the Filipinos, based on his cultural values, and to find ways of advancing humanity. His "declaration of the independence" comes not with the physical revolution but a psychological liberation from colonial values. Ultimately, Kidlat decides to return to Balian.

"Waste nothing" aesthetics

At *The Perfumed Nightmare*'s New York premiere in 1980, critics unequivocally assessed the film as "underdeveloped" and "primitive."⁴² Although their intentions were positive, the tone was also the lack of technological sophistication came from the country's underdeveloped status. However, the Philippine cinema has a surprisingly long. The Lumiere Brothers baptized the industry in 1897, concurrent with the European film industry.⁴³ Although Tahimik admits in an interview, he "didn't even know rules of the editing,"⁴⁴ the industry consists of different specialists. Thus, keeping out a professional camera operator, sound engineer, and editor was Tahimk's deliberate choice.

Often out of focus, with its total absence of technological sophistication, but the Village Voice critic Jim Hoberman was right to assess The Perfumed *Nightmare* as establishing a unique genre, which he called "waste nothing' aesthetics."45 The film was shot with an old Kodak camera, with rental equipment, expired film stock, recycled documentary footage, and second-hand audiotapes, in 16-mm format. The self-funded 90-minute production cost a mere \$10,000 in total. In such a context, Tahimik not only appreciated all that was given to him-currency, human resources, materials-but also ritualized the act of filmmaking. As he says: "If you don't have resources, you squeeze things out of the cosmos. If things are easily available, you probably won't try so hard."46 This concept, according to Tahimik, is rooted in the indigenous Filipino idea of Bathala-Na (trust the cosmos). According to the German-Filipino psychologist and his wife, Katrin De Guia, this ancient belief is based on the idea that when a human being surrenders his or her maximum effort to the cosmos, a person can "become a co-creator with the supernatural force."47 Similar to how tribal shamans enter an altered state to commune with the cosmos, the Bathala-Na concept made Tahimik's filmmaking style closer to the indigenous rituals.

Furthermore, Tahimik's indigenous filmmaking enabled the filmmaker to stay outside of the capitalist mode of production. For example, with \$10,000, he could not hire professional actors. He thus plays the lead role and gets the Balian residents to play their roles. Tahimik's unique filmmaking style resulted in a community production where each volunteer was not just a staff member but also a co-author. The kind of community participation Tahimik encouraged is similar to how people get involved in tribal rituals. In this sense,

Tahimik's filmmaking was not a process of making but of becoming. It awakens creative thinking in the participants, as Tahimik remained open to ideas. Consequently, he does not use a strictly planned script, nor make people follow his ideas. Instead, Tahimik converted his film into a joint production.

With his indigenized filmmaking, the ex-economist challenged the capitalist mode of production:

The big production is like a taxi-meter, where time becomes money.... In the commercial film industry, money would tell you how to make the film. Because the film business has to make money, so the purpose of the film becomes money.⁴⁸

Film can be the costliest form of art, as it requires high-cost expertise, hightech equipment and involves an army of people. So the Hollywood scale production, the costs affect both the content and quality of the final production. Thus, the first creative freedom that Tahimik secured as a filmmaker was freedom from the penetration of capital.

With his "waste nothing' aesthetics," Tahimik proposed something new; he was replacing the production model of the social system that had existed since the Industrial Revolution, which converted human labor into units of money, and commodified land and natural resources. Instead the systemic model that the former economist proposed was the regenerative economy. He made *The Perfumed Nightmare* in such a way. Circumventing the Hollywood style of sex and violence that can hike up a film's revenue. *Perfumed Nightmare* proved Jean Renoir's claim; technological sophistication has little to do with film's quality.⁴⁹ Ultimately, *The Perfumed Nightmare* was praised for its poesy and humor and received an International Critics Jury Prize at the Berlin Film Festival in 1977.

Bagong Sibol ang Gubat (The forest is newly grown)

Tahimik was not alone in recognizing the deleterious effects of capitalism on the people and the environment. During the Cold War, against the rapid deforestation taking place under the Marcos regime, Roberto Villanueva and his colleagues—Antonio Gerena, Jaime Fabregas, and Anton and Cesar Natividad—formed the United Filmmakers Organization (UFO) and pursued the Bureau of Forestry's film project. Since funding came from the government, UFO members "had to put the Bureau in a good light," as Gerena remembered. Nonetheless, the young artists sought to make changes from within the administration.⁵⁰ The film became the award-winning documentary *The Forest Is Newly Grown* (1982).⁵¹ Unfortunately, the film no longer exists.⁵² But Gerena remembers that it captured "how the forest[s] were exploited for financial reasons" and covered "legal and illegal logging" as well as "'kaingin' (swidden agriculture)." The final section "encouraged people in reforestation," based on indigenous knowledge of forest preservation practices.⁵³

It is noteworthy that in pre colonial society, land was a communal asset. No one can own land under the tribal policy because such tribal communities as the Bataks in Palawan Island, for example, maintained a delicate balance between humans, nature, and spirits, based on their knowledge of forestry. They believed that humans could not conquer or control nature and instead should "strive to be in perfect harmony with nature through adapting to and worshipping it."54 However, the local conviction began to change with the arrival of Spaniards in the lowlands and their introduction of land ownership. By commodifying the land and natural resources, Spanish governance cut forest cover in the Philippines by 0.16% annually on average. The numbers aggravated under US colonial rule, which slashed forest cover by almost fivefold.⁵⁵ Conditions worsened during the Cold War when the United States mandated the Philippines, as part of the war reparations, to export timber to Japan-a vast wood-consuming country in Asia. In 1950, forest cover in the Philippines was at 49.06%, that number dropped to a "mere 8 percent" by 1992 for the entire country.56

The rapid decrease in forest cover occurred in tandem with the 1975 introduction of President Marcos's Decree 705 (The Revised Forestry Code), which required loggers to plant one hectare of trees for every hectare they harvested.⁵⁷ With this decree, the government allowed up to 100,000 hectares of logging per concession for 25 years. It mandated a filing fee of one peso for one hectare per year and imposed a 1.5-peso tax for every cubic meter of timber, essentially converting the forests into a timber factory. As neoliberalism spawned public-private partnerships that sapped the capacity of the public sector and promoted private interests, the new logging enterprise became an "arena for rent-seeking politicians." Aid for these projects came from the United States' Cold War ally, Japan—specifically, the Official Development Assistance (ODA) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).⁵⁸ After the completion of their war reparations, these Japanese agencies provided loans to the Forestry Bureau of the Philippines for the reforestation of 358,000 hectares.⁵⁹

Unfortunately, the government's postwar reforestation efforts led to a large-scale monoculture forest that lacked the biodiversity that tribal communities in the uplands had long maintained. With their in-depth knowledge of the forests, indigenous peoples such as the Igorots, had resisted colonial powers and maintained a tenuous balance with the natural environment, based on the belief that all lives are interconnected. But the new decree gave Marcos vast political control over public land, mandating that indigenous highlanders obtain government permission before accessing their ancestral lands.⁶⁰

In response to the negative impacts of the government's logging industry, the regime created programs in the 1970s that involved upland communities in forest management. These included Forest Occupancy Management (FOM) in 1975, Family Approach to Reforestation (FAR) in 1976, and Communal Tree Farming (CTF) in 1978. These were the forerunners of community-based forest management programs. Due to poverty in the uplands, the administration promoted community involvement in reforestation, which led to the social forestry program of 1982 and made funds available for a promotional film, *The Forest Is Newly Grown*.

The film was shot in different areas; some, still rich with indigenous heritage. *The Forest Is Newly Grown* highlights the importance of indigenous forestry, which aims to conserve species' diversity, enabling the Earth to maintain its balance among them.⁶¹ The film was made widely accessible on Channel Four, and the Bureau of Forestry toured it in schools throughout the provinces.⁶²

For Villanueva, who was mainly known as a surrealist painter, the film's production became a turning point in his career. After traveling to various destinations and becoming familiar with the diversity of Filipino culture, he gave up his teaching position in Manila to join the government's cultural magazine. The job involved traveling across the archipelago and getting to know the tribes.⁶³ In the early 1980s, together with a group of artists, he received a grant from the Ford Foundation to live, work, and interact with artisan communities in Ilocos.⁶⁴ His solo project from this period, a film on Tinggian Festival, demonstrates his interest in indigenous rituals.⁶⁵ Despite Villanueva's environmental concern and in-depth knowledge of indigenous forestry, he could only be integrate these ideas into his art after partaking in the collective indigenous art movement in Baguio, where he and his family had moved in 1978 and after traveling abroad.⁶⁶

The Baguio Arts Guild

During President Marcos's Martial Law (1972–1981), more than 70,000 people were imprisoned, 30,000 tortured, and 3,000 killed.⁶⁷ For progressive artists seeking political asylum, the political and cultural makeup of Baguio became attractive. After the film production designer, Adelaida Lim Perez, migrated from Manila to Baguio in 1973, Tahimik returned from Europe to his hometown in 1978. The same year, Villanueva moved to Baguio. Within a decade, the painters Santiago Bose (1949–2002) and Benedicto Cabrera (b. 1942, better known as "BenCab"), respectively, moved from New York and London to Baguio, where Bose was born.

Empowered by the People Power Revolution (1986), Bose, Cabrera, Tahimik, and Villanueva, along with the anthropologist David Baradas, established the Baguio Arts Guild (BAG) the following year with Bose as the first President. With its members counting around 100, the guild's overall mission was to contribute to "a cultural climate that [strengthens] Filipino identity," as stated in the guild's brochure.⁶⁸ One of the goals of the artists was locating their postcolonial identity in their pre-colonial roots. They achieved this by regularly engaging in lunchtime discussions and organizing exhibitions.

This period coincided with the Cultural Center of the Philippines' (CCP) attempts to explore ways of decentralizing the administration of cultural affairs. Eventually, the BAG became one of the local arts councils that the

CCP linked up with each other in Bacolod, Bulacan, Cebu, Iloilo, Laguna, Silay, Tuguegarao, and Viganto to promote the new local policy. Within this context, the CCP assisted in the BAG's planning of cultural activities by generating local support for artists and art activities. In August 1987, the guild opened their first official project, *A Day's Portrait of a City*, which toured several cities in Mindanao as part of the CCP Outreach and Exchange Program. The November 1987 exhibition, *Marapait* (*Installation*), was administered with support from Cordillera Cultural Foundation.⁶⁹

A year after the People Power Revolution, fueled by the government's cultural decentralization project,⁷⁰ BAG had good prospects for influencing the country's future. "The Artist and Nation Building" was the title of their statement. In it, they observed, "Filipinos of olden times integrated 'art' as part of their lives." Pre-colonial Filipinos were "skilled craftsmen, artisans, boat builders, and weavers. Art was manifested in rituals, tattoos and equipped with a wealth of materials used as symbols of communication." Unlike modern Western art that revolved around individual artists, the guild artists modeled their work after indigenous art. They saw art as a collective endeavor: "The rice terraces in Ifugao were built . . . by tribal communities, and is a monument made collectively," as articulated in their statement. However, "400 years of colonization imposed the colonial worldview, and miseducation of the Filipinos made them believe that foreign culture was better than their own."⁷¹ Such was the mentality that the Baguio artists had to renounce. Within this context, Villanueva came up with the idea of his first "ephemeral art."

Ephemeral art: Villanueva's sustainability aesthetics

In December 1988, at the local mini–Baguio Arts Festival, Villanueva premiered *The Labyrinth*, an early version of his *chef-d'oeuvre*, *Arche-types: Cordillera's Labyrinth* (1989). Like Tahimik's indigenous filmmaking, social engagement was essential to Villanueva's practice. The "giant walk-in nature-installation," creating a spiral maze, was built in collaboration with the northern Luzon mountain tribe, the Ifugaos.⁷² During the festival, the *dap-ay*—a sacred meeting spot for the Ifugao people—became a communal ground. A bonfire was set, "food was distributed, people gathered, made music and danced around the fire."⁷³ Predicated on the Cordilleras' indigenous customs, *The Labyrinth* centered on a traditional sense of community.

The work's ethnic roots drew interest from the CCP curator to create a new version. Ultimately the artist reinterpreted the work and retitled it as *Archetypes: Cordillera's Labyrinth*, and erected on the grounds of the CCP. An architecturally scaled 150-foot-wide spiral of 2,000 feet long, when set against the urban context, *Archetypes* evoked many thoughts in its viewers (Figure 4.7). Since I have interpreted this work in depth elsewhere, I will not analyze it in detail here.⁷⁴ Suffice it to say, however, that the work certainly challenged how we interpret urban space.



Figure 4.7 Roberto Villanueva, Archetypes Cordillera's Labyrinth, 1989, runo reeds, stone, wood, etc., 150' wide 2,000' long. © Eva Corazon-Abundo-Villanueva and Napoleon A. Villanueva.

According to Marxist geographer Neil Smith, "specific spatial patterns and processes characterize capitalist society," with "development at one pole and underdevelopment at the other." 75 Smith's image of contrasting poles is founded upon the division between town and country, industry and agriculture, with the former being more desirable for people who are absorbed in its tenets, since the land has auxiliary value. Capitalism is the force behind urbanization, and as the information society advanced its principles, people flocked to metropolitan Manila. There, as with the deforestation of the Philippines, also with Miracle Rice's mono-cropping, profit-based competition drove irresponsible development and commodification of nature. Villanueva's first "ephemeral art," Archetypes, demonstrated how indigenous community preserved a delicate balance of nature, or in his words, "collaborating with nature" through "borrowing' [materials] from the natural environment-earth, wind, fire, and other elements having organic cycles." In due time, his artworks would "vanish" by returning to the Earth, with communal rituals that raised environmental awareness, marking its beginning and end.⁷⁶

Among different artistic approaches to the environmental problem, this type of socially engaged practice to ameliorate environmental despoliation by building community is what I have termed "sustainability aesthetics."⁷⁷ Like Tahimik's "waste nothing' aesthetics," Villanueva arrived at his distinctive aesthetics only after affirming his postcolonial identity by distrusting what the historian Renato Constantino termed as the "miseducation" of Filipinos. Like all BAG-funders, who had once lived abroad and then rediscovered local traditions, Villanueva embraced indigeneity only in 1987,

after his travels to Europe and Asia (1983–1985). His various encounters with archaic ideas in Germany and different parts of Asia led him to think that there existed "archetypal forms" which are "identical among all humans regardless of time, culture, and geography."⁷⁸ The idea "harks back to the depths of antiquity,"⁹ wrote Villanueva in one of his artist statements.

His pathbreaker was the November 1987 Renaissance Gallery exhibition, *Ugat (Root): A Tribute to the Ifugao Tribe Heritage.* At this exhibition, Villanueva collaborated with the anthropologist David Baradas, who published an article, "Roberto's Archetypal Art," in December 2, 1987, *The Manila Times.* It explained how Villanueva conceived tribal art as archetypal, similar to how Claude Lévi-Strauss had observed the psychic unity of all human beings. In Baradas's ideas, the "nature of archetypal forms is identical among all humans regardless of time, culture, and geography,"⁸⁰ which became the eponymous principle of Villanueva's *Archetypes.*

Naming his magnum opus *Archetypes*, Villanueva dealt with universal issues of humans' relationship with their environment. Seeing "indigenousness" as an "inherent direction of 'Filipino art,'" ⁸¹ like Tahimik's anti-capitalist film production, at *Ugat*, Villanueva notoriously refused to sell his artwork when Jaime Zóbel de Ayala asked to buy it. His refusal was because, in indigenous societies, art was not created for sale.⁸² Thereafter, Villanueva's rejection of capitalism became the crux of his artistic practice. But his anti-capitalist concept worked adversely for preserving the legacy of his work. Before his death, Villanueva was part of the critical international exhibitions that defined contemporary Southeast Asian art. However, since he did not issue a certificate for his ephemeral art and deliberately made them unsuited for the capitalist circuit, 25 years after his death, his work has almost been forgotten.

Healing Our Planet Earth (HOPE) after Hiroshima, 1995

On the steaming hot afternoon of August 5th, 1995, six artists arrived in Hiroshima from Baguio. They included the Ifugao elder, Lopes Nauyac, the artist Kawayan de Guia, the musicians Arnel Banasan and Raffy Kapuno, performance artist Rene Aquitania, and Tahimik. "Armed with our gongs, nose flutes, kubings and tungatongs (plus the bomb bell!)," wrote Tahimik in his reflection 25 years later. After Villanueva's death in February 1995, the artists held an "auspicious peace ritual" at Sacred Sanctuary, which became part of Hiroshima Art Document 1995 exhibition, directed by Sachiko Ito. I was the organizer of the project on the Japanese side. My methodology in this section is my participation in Villanueva's, what would become "relational aesthetics," based on the French curator Nicolas Bourriaud's 1998 definition. My involvement in this work provided indispensable insights.⁸³ With Tahimik spearheading the project, Sacred Sanctuary became part of the larger project Healing Our Planet Earth (HOPE) after Hiroshima. As mentioned earlier, out of this project, the filmmaker made two short films, Our Bombing Mission to Hiroshima (1995, 2020), out of this project.

To complement Villanueva's acupuncture needles, Tahimik brought an unexploded WWII bomb-head that had been converted into a church bell from Baguio. Tahimik's Ifugao mentor, Lopes Nauyac, had found an intact bombshell from the 1944 American carpet-bombing raids of the Cordillera mountains. Using a hacksaw, Nauyac spent two weeks patiently sawing off the bomb's cast-iron head and repurposed it as the bell for the chapel that Nauyac had built for his congregation in 1994. The unexploded bomb, which had slept for 50 years in the river bed, uncovered just six months before this project, according to Tahimik's *Bathala-Na* concept, was destined for *HOPE after Hiroshima*. Thus, the group borrowed the 108-kilogram bell from the church and brought it to Hiroshima as a bomb for peace.

The second Hiroshima film, Our Bomb Missions to Hiroshima/Celebrating the Year 2021 (2020), begins with Tahimik's third son, Kabunyan, uncovering wartime stamps from his grandfather's old chest. Some stamps and postcards are printed in Japanese; others have Japanese printed over the US stamps. These stamps unwittingly became a testimony to the complex colonial history of the Philippines. The film uses a montage technique by juxtaposing the scenes from the project in Hiroshima with scenes shot in the Philippines. The major takeaway of this film comes in the form of people's prayers for peace. Some of the Baguio scenes are from a "no nukes day" event at a local elementary school. Small children protest France's resumption of atomic bomb tests in Bikini Atoll with their hand-made signs reading "No nukes!" The scene is juxtaposed with the Baguio artists discussing where to hang the bell by consulting with feng shui. In this film, a coherent narrative of the ritual ceremonies at planting the needles, erecting the bell, and a solemn ceremony on August 6th morning, intercut with scenes of the bomb's discovery in Baguio, Nauvac sawing off the bomb-head, and removing the bell from the church.

As understood from the film, many parts of *Sacred Sanctuary* were altered from Villanueva's original plan. Due to limited funding, instead of casting copper or copper alloy needles, they were made by cutting a readily available industrial iron pipe. The number of acupuncture needles reduced from the original eight to three. They were intended to be manually erected following *feng shui* on the morning of August 6th.⁸⁴ However, due to the city's safety requirements, the needles had to be planted by drilling the ground with machinery. If the artist were alive, he most probably would have disapproved of the needles' forceful intrusion into the Earth (Figure 4.8).

Before dawn on August 6th, there was "barely audible sound [of a nose flute] merging into the surrounding environment." As the sun rose, "a ritual for marking a sanctuary took place . . . with people from the mountain province of Baguio in G-strings offering their traditional dance. People who were gathering became barefooted and felt tender earth with their feet."⁸⁵ Except for the three needles erected in the background that reiterated part of Villanueva's drawing, all the activities were unscripted and spontaneously performed. My impression is that the prearranged needles were the least animated part of the ritual, whereas the spontaneously brought bell for peace



Figure 4.8 Kidlat Tahimik and Baguio Artists, Healing Our Planet Earth (HOPE) after Hiroshima, August 6, 1995. Courtesy of the author.

from Baguio was vigorously alive. After the ritual dance and music, people were invited to toll the bell for peace and healing. According to the former curator of Fukuoka Asia Museum, Masahiro Ushiroshōji, who first introduced Villanueva's ephemeral art in Japan, the artist "initiates activities," and "the operation itself becomes art." Ephemeral art is "not about art that is good or bad in art historical context. The most important aspect of it is the moment of the work's becoming."⁸⁶

Contemplating HOPE after Hiroshima from a distance, I now realize how the entire theater operated on different principles. In a capitalist society, everything-from labor to objects-is traded for money. While organizing Sacred Sanctuary, I had to realize how deeply capitalism had saturated my life. For example, the easiest part of managing Sacred Sanctuary was paying for the fabrication and gardeners to install the needles. A few grassroots environmental activists and other sympathizers came to participate from Kyūshū to Hokkaido-areas Villanueva had visited during his stay in Japan for the New Art from Southeast Asia exhibition in 1992. The participants included: Hisako Nitta, a gallerist who had helped build Villanueva's ephemeral Dream Weaver (1992) at Fukuoka Art Museum, musician Haruomi Hosono, a member of Yellow Magic Orchestra who happened to meet Villanueva in Tokyo, and the Mikami family, whom the artist had met in Hokkaido while visiting Ainu tribes with Tahimik. The project compensated nobody, and participation was purely voluntary.⁸⁷ While organizing the project, I felt most awkward accepting volunteers' participation, which I could not compensate for because of the limited budget.

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But that discomfort stemmed from the capitalist convention. Like the communal forests in pre-colonial Cordilleran society, no single person can claim credit for ephemeral art in its entirety. Villanueva's art belongs to each participant who traveled to Hiroshima and partook in *Sacred Sanctuary*. It comes into being only with the participants' earnest desire and creativity. And it becomes effective only with each participant's care for the environment.

Likewise, Tahimik's film's visible part is only one aspect of *Our Bombing Mission to Hiroshima*. Equally significant was how he shot his film. Tahimik's anti-capitalist mode of production kept the work outside of the dominant system. The filmmaker compensated nobody for this film. Almost no money was involved in transporting Filipino artists since Tahimik used free-mileage tickets for the trip, probably donated by his family members. In Hiroshima, the group camped near the installation site of *Sacred Sanctuary*. The group then stayed at places offered hospitably by their sympathizers. Once you decide to stay outside the market economy, you cannot solve things by merely opening a wallet; instead, human relationships are built based on trust and sympathy. The relationship helped nurture empathy that provided insights for others' needs.

Contrasting the Hiroshima event with life in the twenty-first century New York City, under neoliberalism, the essential human rights, such as housing, are converted into global investment targets. Prominent hedge fund farms are buying lands with a goal to increase auxiliary value in the city's primary locations. Their investment leads to the gentrification of the area, which dismantles the original residents' community. Deregulated investments in housing inflate the rent, resulting in almost 60,000 Gothamites being homeless, whereas three times that number of vacant residences quietly lay as assets—stripping financially precarious citizens of their dignity and security.⁸⁸

Housing is one consequence of deregulated capitalism. Since neoliberalism is profit-driven, it takes advantage of financially insignificant countries where the costs of human labor and natural resources are low, which can generate massive revenue for capitalists. As demonstrated in this seminal research, during the Cold War, the new globally-scaled production-based economy led by the advanced nations resulted in the abuse of the environment and human resources. The damages are evident in the economically vulnerable, politically unstable, newly independent countries. In these nations, information played a tremendous role in hypnotizing people. While American dreams wreaked havoc on the Philippines' environment, dismantled communities, and rendered tradition obsolete, the art by Tahimik and Villanueva demonstrated the power to transcend our conventional views and prejudices.

25 years after Villanueva's death, his ephemeral art that left the capitalist circuit is now posing a critical question for collecting, maintaining, and preserving it. By answering these questions, his anti-capitalist practice will help us to come up with new systems and new ways of thinking. While neoliberalism deprived people's welfare and a healthy environment, Tahimik proposed a regenerative model of economy; the idea that has been present since his first indie film, *The Perfumed Nightmare*, which can work as the most feasible revolution for change. In these respects, Tahimik's "waste nothing" aesthetics and Villanueva's ephemeral art can be seen as the most farsighted proposals in the Anthropocene.

Acknowledgments

My utmost gratitude goes to YuChieh Li, my co-editor, whose insights and organizational skills were crucial to this project. I also cannot thank enough for Kidlat Tahimik for commenting on this manuscript in his busy schedule. I am also indebted to Katrin de Guia for sharing her research and insight. I also thank the following individuals: Eric Berlin, Benedict Cabrera, Eva Corazon Abundo-Villanueva, Agnes Arellano, Rica Concepcion, Kawayan de Guia, Antonio Genera, Adelaida Lim, Annie Sarthou, and Roberto Yñiguez. The initial research for this text was done for my master's thesis. I thank Anna C. Chave for overseeing the project. Last but not least, I thank my husband, Luis H. Francia, for his vast knowledge of the Philippines.

Notes

- 1 Yūko Ishida, *Hiroshima no ki ni ainiiku* [*To go meet trees in Hiroshima*] (Tokyo: Kaiseisha, 2015), 31.
- 2 My own observation from visiting these trees with a tree doctor, Chikara Horiguchi, in 2016. I thank Hiroshi Sunairi for introducing us.
- 3 The United States' lack of environmental concern is apparent in its agenda. The researchers' mission was to investigate the "total effects of the atomic bombs on the cities and the people exposed" to the radiation. Their objectives were twofold: 1) "to investigate any unique effects due to radiation," and 2) "to observe and record residual evidence of physical damage in the bombed cities and to evaluate these observations in relation to physiological effects." See "Record of the Office of the Commanding General, Manhattan Project General Administrative Files, Reports Pertaining to the Effects of the Atomic Bomb," 1945–46, n.p., in RG 77, Entry 6, Box 9, National Archives, College Park, MD.
- 4 The term "Anthropocene" was recommended to the International Geographical Congress in Cape Town on 29 August 2016. Damian Carrington, "The Anthropocene Epoch: Scientists Declare Dawn of Human-Influenced Age," *The Guardian*, August 29, 2016.
- 5 Roberto Villanueva, "Archetypes," artist statement probably from 1989. File, "Roberto Villanueva," Pinaglabanan Galleries, San Juan, Manila. The term "ephemeral art" was coined by the artist.
- 6 Roberto Villanueva, "Sculpture Description," June 15, 1994, n.p., folder "Roberto Villanueva," Pinaglabanan Galleries, San Juan, Manila.
- 7 Roberto Villanueva, "Sculpture Description."
- 8 Agnes Arellano, email to author, May 23, 2017.
- 9 This hypnotic state, according to Tahimik is also known as "benevolent assimilation." Kidlat Tahimik email to author, November 21, 2020.
- 10 Janet Susan Rodriguez, "Baguio's 'Quiet Lightning' finds his place in the sun," *PARADE* III, no. 14 (August 22, 1981): 8.
- 11 Werner Herzog, cited in "Kidlat Tahimik: *Perfumed Nightmare*," Roy and Edna Disney/Calarts Theater. April 20, 2015. Accessed April 11, 2021. https://www.redcat.org/event/kidlat-tahimiks-perfumed-nightmare.

- 12 Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Mudpie Modernism," Soho Week News, November 26, 1980, accessed November 20, 2020. https://www.jonathanrosenbaum.net/1980/11/ mudpie-modernism/.
- 13 Tahimik, email, November 21, 2020.
- 14 The Igorots—a collective term for the natives of the northern Luzon Cordillera mountains—until the early twentieth century, had a custom of headhunting, and are often regarded as savages by upper- and upper-middle-class Filipinos.
- 15 While Tahimik was growing up, in many schools attended by upper and upper middle-class Filipinos, the local language was suppressed and English was used. Jojo Legaspi, interview with author, New York, Art in General, April 12, 2001.
- 16 The actual purchase price of the Philippines was \$20 million. In this film, Tahimik fantasizes about different details but avoids making them too politicized lest viewers get offended. Instead, he infuses humor to make the critical issues more approachable. The depreciated value also conveys a satirical thought about colonialism—namely, that for colonizers, the value of colonization is a trifling matter; that it makes little difference whether the price was \$12 million or \$20 million, but under capitalism, cheaper is definitely better.
- 17 Jim Hoberman, "Jungle Fevers," *The Village Voice*, November 28–December 2, 1980, p. 48.
- 18 Takeshi Matsuda, Soft Power and Its Perils: US Cultural Policy in Japan and Permanent Dependency (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).
- 19 Tahimik, email, November 21, 2020.
- 20 Adrian Howkins, "War and Peace: The Cold War," in *The Polar Regions: An Environmental History* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2016), 132.
- 21 Edwin O. Reischauer, letter for the US Secretary of State. "General Records of the Department of State Central Foreign Policy Files 1963," RG59, Box 4163, the National Archives. One billion yen in 1963 is about 4,547,511,312 dollars in the value of 2017. Japanese money value calculator, accessed November 21, 2020. https://yaruzou.net/hprice/hprice-calc.html?amount=100000000&cc y1=1963&ccy2=2017. Based on the same box file, the Philippine scientists failed to build the reactor, whereas Japanese scientists did the job too well, though the scientists were very skeptical of constructing the nuclear powerplant in Japan.
- 22 This account is based on Hitomi Kamanaka's well-researched film about nuclear waste in Japan. *Rokkashomura Rhapsody*, dir. Hitomi Kamanaka, 2004.
- 23 "Radioactive Waste Management," *World Nuclear Website.* www.world-nuclear. org; Raffy Cabristante, "Six Years after JPEPA: PHL the World's Toxic Waste Site?" *GMA News Online.* October 8, 2014. www.gmanetwork.com/news.
- 24 Liane Clorfene Casten and Paula Anne Ford Martin, "Agent Orange," in *Environmental Encyclopedia*, 4th ed., vol. 1. (Gale, 2011), 20–24.
- 25 Clorfene Casten and Ford Martin, "Agent Orange."
- 26 Linda Nash, "From Safety to Risk: The Cold War Contexts of American Environmental Policy," *The Journal of Policy History* 29, no. 1(2017): 2.
- 27 Nash, "From Safety to Risk," 5.
- 28 Fredric Jameson, "Art Naif' and the Admixture of Worlds," in *The Geopolitical* Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 192.
- 29 Kidlat Tahimik, email to author, October 10, 2020.
- 30 For the International Rice Institute, see https://www.irri.org/about-us.
- 31 Tahimik, email, October 10, 2020.
- 32 Tahimik, email, October 10, 2020.
- 33 Tahimik, email, October 10, 2020.
- 34 Tahimik, email, October 10, 2020.
- 35 Tahimik, email, October 10, 2020.
- 36 Emphases are Tahimik's comments from Tahimik, email, November 21, 2020.
- 37 Tahimik, email, November 21, 2020.

- 38 Tahimik, email, November 21, 2020.
- 39 Tahimik, email, November 21, 2020.
- 40 Ronn Ronck, "The Cup-of-Gasoline Approach to Filmmaking," *The Honolulu Advertiser*, April 11, 1985, sect. C, p. 8.
- 41 Emphasis by the filmmaker. November 21, 2020. According to Karin de Guia's definition, *Bathala-Na* is the "cosmos" giving way to the "ever-present spiritual principle." *Bathala* means cosmos. It is a "benevolent, life-enhancing force" that "permits its 'children' much 'playing' and experimentation." Katrin Luise M. De Guia, *Filipino Artists as Culture Bearers: Lifestyles and Worldviews of Some Contemporary Filipino Artists*, vol. 2, Ph.D. diss., University of the Philippines, 1997, 238.
- 42 The *Village Voice* critic Jim Hoberman wrote that it was a "blueprint of the underdeveloped films," and *The New York Times* critic Vincent Canby evaluated it as unbelievably primitive. Vincent Canby, "Movie: From Philippines, 'Perfumed Nightmare," *The New York Times*, November 28, 1980; Hoberman, "Jungle Fevers."
- 43 After the US takeover of the country, Edison films came in, and most production companies were US-owned up until World War I. The first Filipino-owned production company, Malayan Movies (est. 1919), emulated Hollywood productions. The massive US influence started to change during the period of martial law, and some film directors—such as Lino Brocka and Marilou Diaz Abaya—who were concerned with contemporary social issues rose to prominence. Another prominent genre in the Philippine cinema is the "bomba," soft-core sexploitation films that make tons of money. Luis H. Francia, "Philippine Cinema: The Struggle against Repression," in *Film and Politics in the Third World*, ed. John. D. H. Downing (New York: Autonomedia, Inc., 1987), 209–15.
- 44 Kidlat Tahimik, interview by author, Baguio City, the Philippines, July 7, 1998.
- 45 Hoberman, "Jungle Fevers."
- 46 Rodriguez, "Baguio's 'Quiet Lightning," 10.
- 47 Tahimik, email, November 21, 2020.
- 48 Tahimik, interview, July 7, 1998.
- 49 Daniel Garrett, "Honor, Humanism, Humor: Notes on Jean Renoir's film The Rules of the Game and the Book Jean Renoir: Interviews," Off Screen 12 issue 8 (August 2008) accessed November 21, 2020. https://offscreen.com/view/ honor_humanism.
- 50 Antonio Gerena, email to author, May 29, 2017; January 7, 2018.
- 51 Gerena, email to author, May 29, 2017; January 7, 2018. The film won a silver medal at the 1982 XII Internationaler Agrarfilm Wettbewerb (International Agricultural Film Competition) in Berlin.
- 52 According to Gerena, the only copy that he owned "melted one hot summer when I left it in a steel cabinet." Gerena, email to author, May 29, 2017.
- 53 Antonio Gerena, email to author, 13 January 2018.
- 54 Bao Maohong, "Research Note: Deforestation in the Philippines, 1946–1995," *Philippine Studies* 60, no. 1 (2012): 120.
- 55 Bao, "Research Note," 120.
- 56 Between 1964 and 1973, Japan's timber imports grossed 62% of the total timber production in the Philippines. Ohno Takeshi, "United States Policy in Japanese War Reparations, 1945–1951," Asia Studies 13, no. 3 (1975): 39; "Paralleling the legal export of timber," Bao Maohong estimated that "almost the same amount of timber was smuggled to Japan during the 30 years after 1946." Bao, "Research Note," 119, 121.
- 57 Bao, "Research Note," 125.
- 58 Bao, "Research Note," 125.
- 59 Bao, "Research Note," 125.

- 60 Bao, "Research Note," 122-23, 25-26.
- 61 "Give at Least (5) Ecological Importance of Forest Ecosystem," *Martins Library Blog Spot*, accessed May 30, 2017. http://martinslibrary.blogspot.jp/2012/10/give-at-least-5-ecological-importance.html.
- 62 Unidentified writer, "The Person," in "Roberto Villanueva, 'Ephemeral Art," unpublished research paper, 1. Folder, "Roberto Villanueva," Pinaglabanan Galleries, San Juan, Manila.
- 63 Unidentified writer, "The Person."
- 64 Gerena, email to author, May 29, 2017; "The Person," Roberto Villanueva, 1; Showman/Shaman, dir. Egay Navarro, 2003.
- 65 The scene from this film is featured in *Showman/Shaman*. According to Gerena, the film was part of the Ford Foundation grant. Gerena, email to author, May 29, 2017.
- 66 Eva Corazon Abundo-Villanueva, the artist's former wife, email to the author, May 8, 2014.
- 67 Ringo Bunoan, "The 70s Objects, Photographs & Documentation," in *The 70s Objects, Photographs & Documents* (Manila: Ateneo Art Gallery, 2018), 9.
- 68 Baguio Arts Guild (Baguio City, Philippines: published most likely in 1991), n.p.
- 69 Michele T. Logarta, "Off the Fast Track," November 29, 1987, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, newspaper clipping, folder "Roberto Villanueva," Pinaglaban Galleries, Manila.
- 70 The new government project provided funding for not-for-profit artistic activities such as exhibitions and art festivals that the BAG conceived for the community.
- 71 "Miseducation" is a term coined by the historian Renato Constantino. Renato Constantino, *The Miseducation of the Filipino*, original, 1959, reprint (Quezon City, Philippines: Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1982); "The Artist and Nation Building."
- 72 Elizabeth V. Reyes, "A Heaven for Lowland Artists: New Arts, New Visions, New Life," *Mabuhay* 10, no. 11 (November 1989): 28.
- 73 De Guia, Filipino Artists as Culture Bearers, 114.
- 74 See Midori Yamamura, "Making the Art Object Disappear: Roberto Villanueva's Response to the Anthropocene," in *Mountains and Rivers (without) End: An Anthology of Eco-Art History in Asia*, ed. De-Nin Lee (New Castle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019). The work bears affinity with Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970). But the inspiration for *Archetypes* was not *Spiral Jetty* but *uma ti biyag*, the Cordilleran way of planting rice.
- 75 Neil Smith, Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and Production of Space (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 3, 6.
- 76 Roberto G. Villanueva, "Artist Statement," in Yasuko Furuichi, ed., New Art from Southeast Asia (Tokyo: Japan Foundation ASEAN Cultural Center, 1992), 133. Villanueva's idea of ephemerality might have drawn from Asian tradition outside the Philippines. For example, Tibetan Buddhist monks practice ephemeral art by constructing sand mandalas and, when they are done, pouring the sand in a nearby stream. Their intention is not necessarily ecological but more philosophical: everything in this world is impermanent.
- 77 I distinguished Villanueva's social practice by calling it his "sustainable aesthetic" because people were brought together for the sake of creating a more sustainable environment.
- 78 David Baradas, "Roberto's Archetypal Art," *The Manila Times*, December 2, 1987, p. 16.
- 79 Roberto Villanueva, "Archetypes by Roberto," a typescript in folder "Roberto Villanueva," Pinaglabanan Galleries, San Juan, Manila.
- 80 Baradas, "Roberto's Archetypal Art."
- 81 Baradas, "Roberto's Archetypal Art."
- 82 Katrin de Guia, email to author, 4 June 2017. Although he sold some old works after this point, but not his ephemeral art.

- 83 Relational Aesthetics is the term created by curator Nicholas Bourriaud in the 1990s, and published in 1998 as the book of the same title, which is the tendency to make art based on, or inspired by, human relations and their social context. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon, Frans: Les Presses Du Reel, 1998).
- 84 Roberto Villanueva, "Sculpture Description," June 15, 1994, n.p., folder "Roberto Villanueva," Pinaglabanan Galleries, San Juan, Manila.
- 85 Mayumi Nakayama, "Daichi ni hari, fuhatsudan de kane, chikyū ni iyashi (Needles puncturing the ground, a bell made out of an unexploded bomb, healing the Earth)," newspaper clipping, probably from August 6, 1995. Midori Yamamura papers, New York.
- 86 Masahiro Ushiroshōji, former curator of Fukuoka Art Museum, described his experience of inviting Roberto to create his ephemeral art on the grounds of Fukuoka Art Museum as part of the *New Art from Southeast Asia* exhibition in 1992. Masahiro Ushiroshōji, response to the author's presentation of the earlier version of this research. October 3, 2016, Tokyo, Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties.
- 87 Tahimik and I functioned as organizers for the event. I was responsible for having the needles fabricated and obtaining permission from City Hall to use the park.
- 88 Some hedge fund farms, such as Blackstone Capital infamously buying the lands in popular destinations. The process and people's testimonies are recorded in the new documentary film, *Push: A Documentary Exploring the New, Unavailable City,* dir. Fredrik Gertten. I thank Robert Robinson for bringing my attention to this film.

5 Imagining a region

Australian exhibitionary turns to Asia in the late Cold War

Russell Storer

In her 1992 study of Australian impressions of Asia, the academic and former diplomat Alison Broinowski identifies the persistent divergence between those Australians for whom history-with its colonial alignment to British identity-dominates, and those for whom geography is more important, with a conception of Australia as "part of the Asia-Pacific hemisphere."1 This dichotomy in how Australians define themselves has underpinned modern Australian perceptions of Asia, and consequently its political, economic, diplomatic, and cultural approaches to the region, which have lurched over time from the purely transactional to desires for deeper "enmeshment." As Broinowski's book traces in detail, artists have been important chroniclers of this ambivalent Australian condition.² Art can make collective perceptions visible, often before they are commonly understood, and is therefore an important means of understanding a national psyche in retrospect. If we look to the late 1960s and early '70s, we can see that the artistic landscape in Australia fundamentally shifted in a way that reflects wider cultural and social transformations that would unfold over the next two decades and continue to resonate today. It was the final phase of the Cold War as it played out in Asia: the British Empire had withdrawn, the United States was recalibrating, Japan was economically ascendant, China was beginning to reach out, and newly independent Southeast Asian nations were becoming increasingly assertive and prosperous. Under these new conditions, Australia was forced to take up a new, more independent postcolonial identity, which required a reckoning with the interrelated issues of its own colonial history, the treatment of its First Peoples, and how it would relate to its Asian and Pacific neighbors.

Until the 1960s, Australian artists traditionally looked to London, and to a lesser extent Paris, for their education, inspiration, and affirmation. That is where they understood their identity to lie, and where they could seek access to the powerful artistic narratives and infrastructures of Europe. While the center of the Western art world had shifted from Paris to New York by the 1950s, it was not until the mid-1960s that American art began to have significant impact in Australia through museum and gallery exhibitions, and artists returning from working and studying in the United States, even though American popular culture had been flooding in via television (introduced in 1956), cinema, and music since the end of World War II. In both contexts, Australian artists struggled to find a distinctive position in relation to the overwhelming cultural hegemony of the north Atlantic, working either through the perception that Australian Modernism was somehow "diminished"—with their efforts "essentially imitative, pale effects and always too late"—or that it was entirely different, a local development in response to local conditions.³

For some artists, however, and increasingly from the 1970s onward, a willingness to see themselves within Asia became a powerful, if necessarily complicated, grist for the thought-mill of figuring out how to work from a deeper sense of place. Asian art and cultures helped Australian artists forge a geographical connection as part of the "Asia Pacific," to find a sense of solidarity and resistance against the dominance of "the center," and in turn, rethink their own history. Art institutions were also deeply invested in these questions, both within Australia and in how they projected and connected the country to the region and the world more broadly. "Asia," long perceived and described in Australia as an undifferentiated, uniformly threatening entity, was crucial to this rethinking as its people, countries, and cultures began to take a more defined, diverse, and complex presence in the nation's consciousness through tourism, trade, investment, immigration, and popular culture. The exhibiting of Asian art in Australia, and Australian art in Asia, grew significantly at this time via cultural diplomacy efforts and curatorial enterprise, underpinned by emerging postmodern and postcolonial theory and greater mobility. Yet by the late 1990s, this seemingly inexorable course toward closer cultural engagement had shifted again as the nation pivoted politically back to Britain and the US, with institutional funding and activity subsiding accordingly.

This chapter considers several key art exhibitions in Australia over the latter two decades of the Cold War as the nation's identity shifted; they are set against a backdrop of foreign and cultural policy, particularly regarding Asia, in which a geographical perspective began to take precedence over a historical one. Beginning in the late 1960s, a moment of "internationalization" for Australian art, it then looks at the emergence of the Biennale of Sydney, inaugurated during Gough Whitlam's watershed government (1972–1975), which promised to take "Australia in a new direction in its relations with the modern world,"⁴ and ends by looking toward the early 1990s, during the governments of Bob Hawke (1983–1991) and Paul Keating (1991–1996), which sought to "establish Australia's 'rightful presence' in the Asia-Pacific"⁵ and ushered in what was arguably the high point of artistic dialogue between Australia and Asia. The focus here is on the visual arts, although there was also extensive activity in theatre, literature, music, and dance, and on exchanges with East (China and Japan) and Southeast Asia. In studying exhibitions, the reception of artworks, along with the networks of social, economic, and cultural forces that circulate through and around them, can be analyzed.

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White Australia

The Commonwealth of Australia was formed on the first day of the 20th century, 1 January 1901, by the federation of the six self-governing British colonies that were founded across the continent between 1788 and 1859. The federation was driven significantly by the fear that these small, isolated outposts of the Empire could easily be overrun by the more populous and powerful Asian countries to the north, and that the growing numbers of Asian and Pacific workers in Australia, particularly Chinese migrants and Melanesian indentured laborers, were taking job opportunities from whites. They were increasingly seen as a threat to Anglo-Celtic Australian culture, morality, employment, and national security, and among the first pieces of legislation enacted by the new parliament were the Immigration Restriction Act and Pacific Island Labourers Act. Collectively known as the White Australia policy, these acts aimed at curbing those two groups but also to halt non-British migration overall.⁶ The policy provided a basis for Australia's formative identity as staunchly British and ethnically "pure," supported and protected by an allegiance to the Empire and visualized through virulently anti-Asian films, cartoons, and novels (Figure 5.1).

A mixture of economic pragmatism, realpolitik, and xenophobia has been an enduring feature of Australia's relations with Asia since. Over the 20th century, fears of invasion or attack continued with Japanese expansionism in the Asia-Pacific until the end of World War II, followed by an adherence to the American domino theory of Chinese-backed communism overtaking a decolonizing Southeast Asia during the Cold War. In this century, the threat of terrorism has been used to justify the draconian border policies



TRTORIA_-GRIA THERES BUT ONE WAY TO RID OURSELVES OF THE UNSIGHTLY THING, AND THATS BY ALL TAKING HOLD TOGETHER A STRONG, VALUATION HAVE WITH THIS LAVE AND THE JOES DOSE.

Figure 5.1 Anti-Chinese immigration cartoon, *Melbourne Punch*, 10 May 1888. Illustration by "B." Reproduced courtesy of the National Library of Australia.

enacted against South and West Asian refugees coming to Australia by sea, while long-standing fears of China have been revived by its rapidly expanding power and influence in the region, unsettling diplomatic and hugely lucrative trade relationships. After World War II, in which the Americans led the Allied forces in the Pacific, Australia increasingly turned to the United States for its security and direction in foreign affairs, enshrined in the 1951 Australia, New Zealand and United States Security Treaty (ANZUS). The rise of communism in East Asia also brought Australia closer to non-communist Southeast Asian states such as Thailand and the Philippines, which joined Australia, the United States, Britain, France, Pakistan, and New Zealand to form the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO), in 1954 to contain communist influence in Asia. Australia's relations with the region were also developed through organizations such as the Colombo Plan (founded 1951), which aimed to foster social and economic development for Asian nations within the British Commonwealth (and during the White Australia policy period, was one of the few avenues for Asians to live in Australia, largely for education and training); and the Asian and Pacific Council (ASPAC), founded in 1966, a diplomatic grouping which included Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and the non-communist countries of Southeast Asia.⁷ Following a preventative "forward defence" strategy, Australia deployed troops across Asia throughout the Cold War, joining the British in Malaya and Borneo, UN forces in Korea, and the Americans in Vietnam. These military engagements honored key alliances while being driven by local fears about perceived threats in the region. The dangers of communism and its subtext of Asian invasion dominated domestic political debate about the Cold War, minimizing more complex discourse and marginalizing dissent, which "contributed to an impoverishment of Australian understandings of Asian decolonization and social movements."8 Australia was notably absent from the 1955 Asian-African Conference in nearby Bandung, for example, with then Prime Minister Robert Menzies refusing to consider participating-despite lobbying from the opposition leader, the US State Department, and Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru-viewing the conference as a promotion of "color prejudice" against western nations like Australia "under the guise of peaceful co-existence."9

Vietnam, Americanization, and internationalism

Australia's Cold War orthodoxy was upended by its military involvement in Vietnam. This was the longest and most controversial of the country's Cold War engagements, with its first troops committed in 1965 and the last withdrawn in 1973. It was the first to receive widespread public condemnation, dragging the peace movement from the social margins of far-left politics, where it had lingered through the 1950s and early '60s, into the center of public debate. With television and newspaper images of the war flooding in, particularly of the My Lai Massacre in March 1968, mass protests such as the 1970 Moratorium marches took place in cities and towns across the country,

following similar demonstrations in the United States and across the world. While the government continued to justify its commitment, the withdrawal of troops had begun, under mounting pressure from all sides. Such open displays of public opposition "marked the end of the Cold War epoch which had produced the Vietnam intervention....It finally reclaimed the political use of the public sphere against a Cold War which had intended to silence it."¹⁰ The changing position on Vietnam ruptured the unquestioned mainstream consensus on the traditional East-West divide, opening the door for a new perspective on Australia's role in the region.

Culturally, Australian resistance to the Vietnam War and American imperialism was linked to broader social upheavals manifesting around the world in the late 1960s, embodied by the protests of May 1968. As art historian Charles Green has written, "Although Australian artists were distant from late-1960s American and European turmoil, they were far from unaffected by the sense of utopian possibility current in popular culture and the fine arts. The anti-Vietnam movement was only one aspect of an often inconsistent mood of social change in Australia."11 A number of artists worked with the protest movement and responded directly to events in Vietnam, such as the Melbourne-based painter and printmaker Noel Counihan, who had been a member of the Australian Communist Party and was long involved in antiwar activities. Counihan's social realist works include anguished portraits of boyishly young soldiers as, simultaneously, oppressors and victims, drawn into a war they barely understood. Artists such as Chips Mackinolty and Toni Robertson in Sydney and Mandy Martin and Ann Newmarch in Adelaide contributed to the burgeoning political poster movement, with their witty and luridly colored photo-stencil silkscreens plastered across public spaces and university campuses. The artists drew on collective labor and alternative distribution networks, operating outside of established channels of artistic production and display, a community-based approach that was to expand during the '70s as artists sought to reimagine the relations between art and society (Figure 5.2).

These various expressions of political resistance were part of more profound artistic shifts taking place in Australia during the late '60s and '70s in step with a wide range of emerging social movements: feminism, Aboriginal land rights, gay liberation, environmentalism, and anti-capitalism, as well as anti-war. The traditional forms and institutions of art, perceived as propping up the old order, were, in Australia as elsewhere, starting to be challenged by dematerialized, anti-market, anti-art forms such as conceptual art, process art, earth art, and performance: a postmodern array of styles that self-reflexively addressed local specificities within global artistic flows. These practices also provided a contrast to "international" (read Euro-American) formalist styles of hard-edge and color-field abstraction and minimalism that had emerged in Australia in the mid-1960s, which eschewed local references or content. Both developments marked an embrace of an international avantgarde, and a transition away from the local modernist figuration and allegorical narrative that had dominated Australian art since the 1940s, through the work of artists such as Sidney Nolan and Arthur Boyd (Figure 5.3).



Figure 5.2 Ann Newmarch, Vietnam Madonna, 1975. Screen print on paper, 67.2 × 42.0 cm (image irreg.), 76.3 × 42.0 cm (sheet). South Australian Government Grant 2005. Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide.
© Courtesy of the artist.

Australia's opening up to concurrent tendencies in American art coincided with US actions in Vietnam and Australia's own involvement there. The influx of American art and culture therefore became a local bone of contention, as it was elsewhere in the world. Major institutions and the general public largely embraced it, while artists and critics of all stripes criticized the "Americanization of art," with conservatives lamenting its apparent slickness and cynicism, and progressives attacking its attendant cultural imperialism. Such divided views met the first major exhibition in Australia of the

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Figure 5.3 Arthur Boyd, Shearers playing for a bride, 1957. Oil and tempera on canvas 150.1 × 175.7 cm. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Gift of Tristan Buesst, 1958 (11-5). © National Gallery of Victoria.

American post war avant-garde, Two Decades of American Painting, which showed at the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) in Melbourne and the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) in Sydney in 1967. Two Decades was organized as an Asian touring exhibition by the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), with support from the United States Information Service (USIS), and traveled to Tokyo, Kyoto, and New Delhi before coming to Australia. It was one of dozens of exhibitions sent by MoMA and the USIS during the Cold War to Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America, to disseminate American art and culture throughout the world while promoting American values of liberty, individualism, and creative freedom. Two Decades was no different, tracing a lineage of changing styles in American painting from 1946 to 1966, reinforcing a modernist sequence of innovation as well as New York's primacy as the hub of advanced artistic development. It featured significant works by Abstract Expressionists such as Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Helen Frankenthaler, and Willem de Kooning; Pop artists such as Andy Warhol, James Rosenquist, and Roy Lichtenstein; and proto-Minimalist painters such as Ad Reinhardt and Frank Stella, along with selections of works by Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, and Josef Albers, among others. The exhibition was the first Australian showing for most of these artists, introducing the general public to American postwar art of monumental scale (in contrast to the more modest dimensions of Australian painting at the time). It attracted huge crowds and sold hundreds of catalogues, even while works such as Ad Reinhardt's three severe black monochromes bewildered many visitors (Figure 5.4).¹²

In response, many older and leftist artists criticized the exhibition's works for presenting a nihilistic worldview, as expressed to Melbourne's Communist Party newspaper Tribune by the social realists Counihan ("dehumanised values") and Herbert McClintock ("Contempt for the cultural achievements of mankind").¹³ For younger artists at the leading edge of the local scene, it was influential in the sense that it helped legitimize their practices, "giving authority to the range of styles encompassed by New York art,"14 although there was also the recognition that it foregrounded styles-Abstract Expressionism, Pop-that were already receding into the past. As noted later by John Stringer-then exhibitions officer at the NGV, instrumental in convincing MoMA to extend its Asian tour to Australia-"Though not without admiration, the vanguard quickly concurred that abstract expressionism had already run its course. It was equally apparent that the abrasive commercialism of pop art was being eclipsed by the more disciplined, cool, pure and restrained formalism of minimal art."15 The mixed response to Two Decades demonstrated the complex ways that Australian artists were now thinking about their place in a globalizing world.



Figure 5.4 Installation view of Jasper Johns's (L-R) Periscope (Hart Crane) 1963, White flag (1955), Target (1958), Map (1961), on display as part of Two Decades of American Painting, at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1967.
 © 2020 Jasper Johns/ Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Photo: Geoff Parr.

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The following year, the NGV followed Two Decades by launching its new brutalist building with *The Field* (Figure 5.5), a large survey of recent Australian art (it then traveled to the AGNSW). Curated by Stringer and fellow NGV curator Brian Finemore, the exhibition foregrounded hard-edge and color-field abstract painting and sculpture by 40 young artists (including only three women). A number were associated with the artist-run Central Street Gallery, including Sydney Ball, James Doolin, Tony McGillick, Wendy Paramor, and Vernon Treweeke. Founded in Sydney in 1966 as a hub for artists working with "international" modernism, Central Street quickly came to be considered Australia's first New York-style white cube gallery. Others, such as conceptual artists Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden and abstract sculptor Clement Meadmore, had already left Australia and were living in New York. The exhibition consisted primarily of large canvases featuring geometric shapes in bold, flat fields of color, hung on silver-painted walls, along with several abstract sculptures in industrial materials such as steel and acrylic. Although some artists were already moving away from abstract painting into conceptual art and other modes, this was the first time that an Australian art institution had promoted contemporary Australian art linked to a relatively current international avant-garde, making "a more deliberate alignment of Australian art with the modernist tradition."¹⁶

The Field unambiguously announced a new phase of Australian artistic and curatorial practice that looked toward American, rather than British art. As with *Two Decades*, the exhibition split the local art community,



Figure 5.5 Installation view of *The Field*, National Gallery of Victoria, 1968. © NGV. Photo: George Mehes.

with conservative critics lamenting its internationalism and apparent lack of local specificity.¹⁷ In his review in the national daily *The Australian*, Laurie Thomas wrote that "in abandoning all subject matter, the Americans and their faithful followers have left us, and themselves, with something nice and cool like a logical deduction, but only occasionally ever resembling a work of art."¹⁸ Meanwhile, participating artist Sydney Ball credited *The Field* as marking

the period that liberated Australian art from its provincialism to a 'Golden Period' of work by emerging artists of the time determined to take on not only the best Australia had to offer, but to excel on the world stage.¹⁹

Ian Burn, who contributed one of the few conceptual artworks-a pair of framed mirrors-was more equivocal, later writing that the legacy of The Field was "the institutional sponsorship of an avant-garde context for contemporary art in Australia."20 Burn was highly critical of the American impact on global art: in 1975, he and Karl Beveridge had offered a stinging rebuke to Minimalist artist Donald Judd's provocative article in Studio International in 1970, in which Judd declared, "I think American art is far better than that anywhere else, but I don't think that's desirable." Burn and Beveridge wrote that the "remark blatantly reproduces the ambitions of US hegemony and economic and cultural imperialism-where "international values" are dictated by the US's "national interests."²¹ In his 1981 reflection on conceptual art, "The Sixties: Crisis and Aftermath," published in the inaugural issue of the internationalist Melbourne journal Art & Text, Burn wrote that the "consequence [of Americanization] was, in places like Australia, that a generation of young artists became alienated from their own cultural specificity."22

As Burn observed, The Field's institutional championing of emerging artists within a global framework defined a new role for Australian art museums, which began to move toward an American-style modernist institutional model à la MoMA. Around this time, American art also began to enter local museum collections, which until then were comprised primarily of Australian and British works. Several paintings from Two Decades were acquired by the NGV and AGNSW, including those by Albers, Frankenthaler, and Morris Louis.²³ In 1973, the newly established acquisition committee for the planned Australian National Gallery (now National Gallery of Australia), with a brief to purchase "International Art of the Modern Period," acquired Jackson Pollock's Blue Poles (1952) for a record-breaking USD\$2M. This was followed by purchases of other significant American works, including de Kooning's Woman V(1952–1953), Warhol's silver Elvis (1963), Reinhardt's black monochrome Painting (1954–1958), and major sculptures by Robert Morris, Richard Serra and Judd. The Pollock purchase generated enormous controversy in the press and with the general public, primarily due to its massive price, but also for the seemingly random, incomprehensible aesthetic of the work, which made the extravagant cost even more difficult for the public to correlate. For many Australian artists, the purchase of *Blue Poles* represented "a slap in the face," again along divided lines: for older, conservative artists, the work was an affront to their more traditional forms of art-making, while for younger and leftist artists, the purchase was "merely an example of Australia's sycophantic embrace of American cultural imperialism."²⁴ It was both a progressive and a regressive move, marking a new internationalist confidence and embrace of the modernist avant-garde at the same time that American "neo-colonial" influence was being questioned more than ever before, and when Australia was starting to take a more independent approach to foreign affairs under the prime ministership of Gough Whitlam.

Gough Whitlam and the geographical turn

Whitlam was elected as Prime Minister in December 1972. Leading the center-left Labor Party to power for the first time since 1949, he entered government with a raft of domestic policies and new diplomatic commitments with the aim of forging a more independent stance in relation to Britain and the United States and strengthening Asian ties. The White Australia policy was finally ended in 1973 and replaced with an official policy of multiculturalism and non-discriminatory immigration. Conscription, introduced in 1964 at the start of the war in Vietnam and widely unpopular, was also abolished, and the last Australian soldiers were pulled out of Vietnam amidst strong criticisms of American actions in Indochina, creating substantial tension with President Richard Nixon's administration.²⁵ Whitlam's new regional diplomacy took shape in the context of détente and the 1969 Nixon Doctrine, in which the United States scaled back its engagement in Asia and required its Asian allies to take greater responsibility for their own security and defense. He took the opportunity to move away from Cold War ideological alliances and the containment of Communism by reducing Australia's military presence and reshaping diplomatic relationships in Asia. One proposed measure was "a new regional community geared to the realities of the '70s,"26 which caused further friction with the United States and failed to enthuse Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, which considered it a potential threat to the recently formed Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).²⁷ Whitlam's call was therefore not heeded at the time, although Australia was invited to be the first ASEAN dialogue partner in 1974 and went on to found the regional economic forum APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) in 1989.

Whitlam's geographical perspective was made clearest in his reform of relations with China. In 1971, while Leader of the Opposition, he traveled to Beijing to conduct talks with Premier Zhou Enlai on trade and diplomatic recognition of the People's Republic of China (PRC). In the midst of the Vietnam crisis in Australia, the Beijing visit was "a bold expression of Whitlam's foreign policy vision, which prioritized regionalism and internationalism over ties with 'great and powerful friends' [former Prime Minister Menzies' term for Britain and the United States]."²⁸ As countries around the world were shifting their stance toward the PRC, Australia had become increasingly isolated, and the trip aimed to convey the Labor Party's policy of recognition, to be enacted on winning the pending election. The visit received significant attention in China and at home, with Whitlam harshly criticized by the then Prime Minister William McMahon as "becoming a spokesman for those against whom we are fighting [in Vietnam]."²⁹ Yet Whitlam had unknowingly arrived in Beijing just a few days before Henry Kissinger held the secret meetings with Zhou that paved the way for Nixon's historic visit in 1972. He had been in the right place at the right time, and his meeting with Zhou was widely promoted to Australian voters in his election campaign's television advertisement, however uncertain they might be about the "China syndrome."³⁰ Whitlam returned to China as Prime Minister in 1973, receiving an audience with Chairman Mao Zedong and a spectacular greeting and farewell (Figure 5.6).

Whitlam's recognition of China brought significant opportunities for cultural exchange in both directions. Cultural diplomacy was activated early in the China relationship, with the Beijing embassy establishing a Cultural Counsellor position in 1975. By the late 1970s, Foreign Affairs set up a cultural council for China (one for Japan followed soon thereafter) to advise on and fund bilateral cultural diplomacy efforts. Among the cultural activities that Foreign Affairs helped support were exhibition exchanges, which had been undertaken since the 1940s with South and Southeast Asia but on a relatively ad-hoc basis, featuring modest groups of works and held in



Figure 5.6 Gough Whitlam with Premier Zhou Enlai on his departure from China, 1973. Sources: From the collection of the National Archives of Australia. NAA: A6135.

small venues.³¹ The Chinese exhibitions were undertaken on a far more ambitious scale in terms of their size and quality and attracted large audiences in both countries. The Chinese Exhibition: A Selection of Recent Archaeological Finds of the People's Republic of China, featuring antiquities from the Neolithic period to the 14th century, traveled state galleries in 1977 and drew 595,000 visitors, the most attended international exhibition in Australia at the time.³² It was followed by Entombed Warriors, an exhibition of nine terracotta soldiers and related artefacts, which toured six cities in 1982-1983 and attracted almost one million visitors (Figure 5.7). The show's enormous success demonstrated a broad interest in Asian art and has been acknowledged as helping spawn "the age of the blockbuster" in Australian art museums, which continue to stage large exhibitions of Asian traditional and contemporary art, particularly from China, India, and Japan.³³ Australia reciprocated by sending survey exhibitions of Australian landscape painting to Beijing and Nanjing in 1975 and to Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou in 1983, each attracting tens of thousands of visitors over just a few weeks.³⁴ Given the lack of access to Western art and art books during the Cultural Revolution, the 1975 exhibition made a particular impact; it was described as "the first public display in China, within living memory, of art from the western world."35

On the domestic front, Whitlam introduced policies to drive artistic development, which would also enable Australian artists to engage internationally on a stronger footing. In 1973, the smattering of cultural boards, arts funds, and advisory bodies established by previous governments were consolidated to form a single organization, the Australia Council, with greatly increased funding.³⁶ Its International Program was set up to co-ordinate international exhibitions and artist exchanges in collaboration with agencies such as the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) and the Department of Foreign Affairs. While the Council's sights were still overwhelmingly on Europe and North America at the time, cultural and diplomatic attention was beginning to shift toward Asia.³⁷ The vision of the Council's inaugural Chairman, H.C. Coombs, was to develop an unique Australian cultural identity, "drawing on its colonial heritage but not simply deriving from British and European cultural sources... artists and writers could find inspiration in indigenous traditions and could also look to Asian and other non-European cultures."38 With travel, funding, and information now becoming more accessible, interest in Asia began to grow through the 1970s as artists and curators looked to broaden their horizons beyond Europe and the United States.

Homegrown internationalism: Biennale of Sydney

One of the most significant artistic events during the Whitlam era was the inaugural *Biennale of Sydney*, Australia's first homegrown exhibition of international contemporary art, which opened in November 1973. Sydney's Biennale is one of the most enduring of what Charles Green and Anthony Gardner have described as the "second wave" of biennials, "which emerged along the art world's so-called "peripheries"—in São Paulo in 1951, for instance,



Figure 5.7 Entombed Warriors exhibition in Canberra, 1983. From the collection of the National Archives of Australia. NAA: A6135.

and in Alexandria, Egypt and Ljubljana, Yugoslavia in 1955—long after the inauguration of the Venice Biennale and the Carnegie International in the mid-1890s."³⁹ Biennials—regularly recurring exhibitions of international contemporary art—became the primary platform for the circulation of contemporary art in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. They have helped connect a wide global network of curators, critics, artists, dealers, and audiences, and have therefore acted as crucial conduits for cultural translation from one site to another, and for the circulation and legitimation of artists, particularly from outside the established centers of Western Europe and the United States. The mid-century "second wave" biennials arising in cities in Eastern Europe,
North Africa, South America, and Asia were often linked to regional formations arising out of Cold War politics, such as the Non-Aligned Movement, promoting "*cultural* independence in the aftermath of *national* independence... neither neo-nationalist retreat nor hubristic drives towards globalization but an insistence on *reimagining the regional*."⁴⁰ Each biennial negotiates its own complex combinations of the local, the regional, and the global: aiming to strengthen local culture while projecting it into wider networks, and resisting the hegemony of Europe and North America while opening up to global artistic flows. Australia in the early 1970s had undergone a significant "internationalization," with artists and institutions embracing new forms of practice informed by American and European developments, yet criticism of Americanization as a form of neo-colonialism was strong, and local culture was developing a new confidence. These tensions flowed through the Biennale of Sydney, which sought to connect Australia with the world while at the same time, at least initially, create a new regionalist position.

The Biennale of Sydney was conceived and largely funded by the industrialist Franco Belgiorno-Nettis, an Italian migrant who felt Australia's cultural isolation acutely, and was inspired by the "flavor of international extravaganza, originality and explosive vision" of the Venice Biennale.⁴¹ Having funded a local art prize named after his construction company, Transfield, since 1961, Belgiorno-Nettis wanted to expand it into an international exhibition, as "such an event was exactly what Australia needed, a link to the world."42 The first Biennale was held in the Exhibition Hall of the Sydney Opera House as part of its opening celebrations. With its spectacular modernist architecture, the Opera House served as another powerful symbol of Australia's cultural "coming of age" in the early 1970s (although its design had been approved in 1957) and it was pitched as "a center for national and international performers and artists."43 Running for one month, the inaugural Biennale was a small exhibition of only 37 artists, selected by a committee under the aegis of the Australia Council's Visual Arts Board, which also contributed funding. The exhibition struck a somewhat conservative note in this era of conceptual art, comprising a mix of abstract and figurative painting and sculpture, along the lines of the local art prize from which it emerged; the catalogue notes that "no artists of what may be regarded as the right-wing of art, neo-realism, or of the left-wing, post-object, have been selected."44 It was a modest, rather tentative beginning. In his catalogue text, AGNSW curator Daniel Thomas writes that "Since it is not a large exhibition, it will be more easily enjoyed and comprehended by the public, and hence it can perform its traditional function of generating international understanding and cultural uplift."45 One critic assessed it as a "rather haphazard and uncertain effort,"46 while another described it as a "piccolo Biennale" featuring artists that had been "so long established that they hinder the recognition of newer talents."47 It was left to a more expansive exhibition held concurrently at the AGNSW, Recent Australian Art-also as part of the Opera House's opening festival-to show the work of 60 local artists involved in the latest forms of practice, including installation, video, and performance.

What was innovative about the inaugural Biennale, however, was its significant and surprising focus on artists from the Asia Pacific region. Out of the total of 37 artists, 22 were from Australia, two were from New Zealand, and seven from Asia: Biren De (India), Affandi (Indonesia), Minami Tada (Japan), Park Suk Won (South Korea), Joseph Tan (Malaysia), Solomon Saprid (the Philippines), and Sawasdi Tantisuk (Thailand). The other artists were Clyfford Still (United States), Emil Schumacher (Germany), Renato Gutusso (Italy), Antonio Pelaez (Spain), and Patrick Heron (Britain). The Asian artists were mostly well-established modernists, chosen through diplomatic channels via the Department of Foreign Affairs rather than from a specific curatorial premise or local research, suggesting that the selection was pragmatic and opportunistic. Japan, for example, was Australia's largest trading partner at the time, and high-level ministerial visits had been undertaken with the new Whitlam government in the months prior to the Biennale, including discussions about a bilateral treaty that included cultural awareness. The Japan Foundation had also just been established (in 1972) by the Japanese government as part of an active drive to promote international cultural exchange. The selection of Tada to represent Japan in the Biennale suggests diplomatic connections-she was a prominent winner of several national prizes-and it could be speculated that "the design simplicity and technical sophistication of her glass and plastic sculpture [the minimalist Poles (c.1972) promoted the nation's culture as well as its strength as an industrial producer."48 Tourism, then the primary means by which Australians experienced Asian cultures, was heavily promoted in the catalogue's final pages, which sport advertisements for Air New Zealand, Thai International, Garuda, and Philippine Airlines.

The catalogue introduction outlines the Biennale's geographical ambitions, stating that "Sydney is making a virtue of its remoteness by confining its choice of countries to Australia's regional neighbors and to the countries with well-established international exhibitions of contemporary art."⁴⁹ In the closing note, Transfield's Anthony Winterbotham suggests that this direction would continue, stating that "the vision for the future of the Biennale encompasses a cultural focus on the expanding Pacific Basin."⁵⁰ While the exhibition offered a rare opportunity to see recent Asian art—critic Elwyn Lynn noted that "it was blessed by excitingly new principles of selection that recognize the recent, contemporary art of the Pacific"—it was difficult to appreciate them without any context; the review went on to state that "We are presented with alternative traditions that, because of a local conformity, are felt to be oddities and eccentricities."⁵¹

The content of the first Biennale had little impact on the local scene; however, the project's regional scope was taken in a more deliberate direction for the second edition in 1976. This exhibition took up a tighter curatorial premise, with the title *Recent International Forms in Art*, and artists were selected through local and regional advisors as well as on-the-ground research. The exhibition was held at the AGNSW, and with increased funding from the Australia Council, Foreign Affairs, and Transfield, the 1976 Biennale was a more ambitious affair in terms of scale and vision. It featured 80 artists, with over half from Australia, New Zealand, Korea, and Japan, along with several leading European and American artists such as Giovanni Anselmo, Lynda Benglis, Joseph Beuys, and the late Robert Smithson.⁵² It established the curatorial model that continues for the Biennale today, with an independent artistic director appointed to shape the curatorial direction and select the artists.

The direction of the 1976 Biennale was largely inspired by the Mildura Sculpture Triennial, the most important platform for experimental art in Australia at the time, held in a small city in regional Victoria. The Triennial's artistic director, Tom McCullough, had organized four successful editions since 1967, shifting it from an art prize format into a more curatorial direction in 1970, and titling it *Sculpturescape* from 1973 on. This enabled McCullough to shift the focus away from the discrete objects favored by art prizes in order to respond to the anti-formal and ephemeral nature of sculpture in the late 1960s and early '70s: environments and installations, serial objects, earthworks, process art, performance, and film. The Triennials were organized like festivals, including performances, screenings, and talks, and featured artists from Australia and New Zealand working in the newest forms of sculptural practice. McCullough's focus on sculpture aligned him with the most experimental international practices of the period, which had "nurtured a shift 'from object to context."⁵³

While the funding had increased for the second Biennale, the budget for travel was meagre. McCullough later wrote:

I visited only two countries while preparing for the Biennale, as we didn't have much money. I was only allowed two weeks overseas so I decided to focus on a Pacific triangle (the first Biennale had quite an emphasis on Asia). New Zealand, California and Japan were selected for their ambience of experimentation that would suit Australian attitudes to sculpture and art generally.⁵⁴

He had previously traveled to Japan, Europe, and the United States on a Gulbenkian fellowship in 1970, which had informed his development of the Mildura Triennial, and thus had learned of recent artistic developments in the region.⁵⁵ Such a specific configuration was unusual in Australia for the time—critiqued as being "at the moment far more desirable than real"⁵⁶—yet it intriguingly echoes an earlier geographical proposition by modernist painter Margaret Preston, who in 1942 wrote that:

Australia will find herself at the corner of a triangle: the East, as represented by China, India and Japan, will be at one point, the other will have the United States of America representing the West. It will be in the choice of one of these corners that the future of Australian Art will lie.⁵⁷

Preston had traveled through Japan, China, and Southeast Asia in the 1920s and '30s, and was also deeply interested in Aboriginal art, incorporating aesthetic aspects of each culture into her work at different points in an attempt

to develop a specifically Australian modernism, grounded in its geography. As Broinowski observes of Preston and others, "A characteristic of artists who were concerned to relate Australia's identity more closely to its location, and hence to make connections with Asia in their work, was that they tended also to be interested in Aboriginal culture."⁵⁸ While Preston's regionalist position was rare in her own time, her statement reflects a desire long held by Australian artists to find connections that would place them on an equal footing with artists from elsewhere.

Using his thematic focus of experimental sculpture, McCullough's curatorial selection, while opportunistic to a degree, enabled him to draw formal, conceptual, and material connections between artists and across contexts, rather than along national lines. Through this approach, he was able to position Australian artists within current international debates around the status of the art object, as had been undertaken by curators such as Harald Szeemann, who had been brought to Sydney and Melbourne by philanthropist John Kaldor in 1971 to curate two exhibitions of local conceptual art, between his groundbreaking When Attitudes Become Form (1969) and documenta 5 (1972).59 For critic Margaret Plant, McCullough's curatorial approach placed Australian artists "perhaps for the first time in Australia-side-by-side with their international colleagues-John Armstrong, Marr Grounds, John Davis beside Stuart Brisley, Robert Grosvenor, and artists from California, Japan, and Korea."60 The position taken here was contemporaneousness within a highly pluralistic art world, rather than whether Australian art was derivative, and temporally and conceptually lagging behind the avant-garde elsewhere. In making his Biennale selection, McCullough turned to the artist-advisors with whom he had worked in Mildura, such as the earth artists Ross Grounds and John Davis, who urged him to look toward Japan and California.⁶¹ Another advisor, artist and critic Terry Smith, later wrote that they encouraged McCullough to give "local artists and audiences a chance to see whether a regionalist response does not have more to offer than provincialist dependence by mounting a show free from the internationalist, i.e., US-dominated Official Culture."62

Smith had recently articulated this sentiment in his essay "The Provincialism Problem," published in *Artforum* in 1974 and illustrated with images from the 1973 Mildura *Sculpturescape*. In this essay, Smith questioned the global art system centered around New York, and called for a rejection of "an attitude of subservience to an externally imposed hierarchy of cultural values," which had so deeply infused artistic practice and discourse in Australia and other countries.⁶³ Smith wrote that whether intentionally or not, New York artists and institutions—also provincial in themselves—"cannot but carry the condescending implication of superiority," which he likened to the authoritarian operations of Cold War US foreign policy. This "vicious circle" could only be broken by exhibitions that aimed for a "display of the very problematic which its own incursion into a provincial situation raises."⁶⁴ That is, to reflexively acknowledge and critique the dynamics of the center-periphery structure—which, with its carefully balanced geographical co-ordinates, the 1976 Biennale made a valiant attempt to do.

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McCullough's Japanese selection was assisted by several local advisors. These included the Yokohama-based Australian artist Stelarc, best known for body performances in which he suspended himself in different positions and locations from cables hooked into his skin. Stelarc's interest in these works was to treat the body as a sculptural object among other objects, emptied of agency and action. The first of these, Event for Stretched Skin (1976), in which Stelarc was suspended horizontally from a wooden beam over a large stone at the Tokiwa Gallery in Tokyo, was included in the Biennale as photographic and video documentation. Another advisor was Father Joseph Love, an American art history professor at Sophia University in Tokyo, who had curated a 1973 touring exhibition of Japanese postwar art, The Art of Surface, on the invitation of the Art Gallery Society of New South Wales. This exhibition included works by leading avant-garde figures such as Jirō Takamatsu, represented by *Slack of Net*, a floor grid constructed from string; Yoshishige Saito, who gouged the surfaces of his abstract paintings with electric drills; and New York-based Tadaaki Kuwayama, known for his minimalist monochrome canvases. Love noted that the exhibition did not include "younger artists working in three dimensions in a more environmental or conceptual context," even though "they represent a serious and profound mainstream of art right now."65

This omission was somewhat rectified by the 1976 Biennale selection of younger Japanese and Korean artists experimenting with site and materials based on rigorous philosophical inquiry. They included Lee Ufan, Kishio Suga, Koji Enokura, and Noboru Takayama, associated with the Mono-ha (School of Things) movement that foregrounded the placement of natural and industrial materials such as stone, wood, metal, and glass to create an unmediated "encounter" between object, space, and viewer. Similarly, the Korean artist Quac Insik presented a series of stone boulders with tiny dots tapped into their surfaces. These works found conceptual and materials in their exploration of sculptural process and the status of the art object, particularly Davis, Marr Grounds, Ken Unsworth, and Stelarc (the latter two also using stones in their work).⁶⁶

McCullough organized his Biennale along the festival model of his Mildura Triennials, with a series of events taking place throughout the city, and an engagement with students through educational activities. One of the special commissions for the Biennale was by the Japanese environmental artist Fujiko Nakaya, who created one of her signature "fog sculptures" in the Domain, a large park adjacent to the AGNSW.(Figure 5.8) The work was subsequently purchased by the National Gallery of Australia for its collection. Nakaya was one of several participating artists sent around the country to give lectures at art schools and independent spaces, building connections that eventually led to her co-organizing, along with Stelarc and others, a multi-venue project in Melbourne in 1981 titled *Yoin: Ideas from Japan Made in Australia*. Comprising video, installation, and site-specific sculpture, and including several artists from the 1976 Biennale, the project employed local



Figure 5.8 Fujiko Nakaya's *Fog Sculpture* installed in the domain for the 1976 Biennale of Sydney, 17 Nov 1976. National Art Archive/Art Gallery of New South Wales

Sources: Photo: AGNSW. ARC40.3.1.

art students to realize the works in situ. The success of the endeavor led to another multi-venue exchange, *Continuum*, which sent 27 Australian artists to Tokyo in 1983 and brought 33 Japanese artists to Melbourne in 1985.⁶⁷ Momentum for more regular and diverse artistic exchange was starting to build and continued to grow through the 1980s and early '90s.

Conclusion: postcolonialism and a new regionalism

The 1980s saw a rapid consolidation of the tentative regionalist cultural direction begun in the early 1970s, with the development of numerous platforms for artistic exchange with Asia. As Australia's primary economic and demographic sources shifted decidedly toward the region by the middle of the decade, Prime Minister Bob Hawke advocated what he called "enmeshment with Asia" and greater "Asia literacy" as national imperatives.⁶⁸ This resulted in increased support for Asian cultural diplomacy and greater alignment between the objectives of Foreign Affairs and the Australia Council, including the introduction of new country-specific programs and funding.⁶⁹ This included increasing the proportion of the Australia Council's international budget that was spent on projects in the Asia Pacific region to 50% (from its then level of around 12%), which was adopted as policy in 1991.⁷⁰ The government also partnered with the philanthropic Myer Foundation to found Asialink in 1989, with the aim to "create an Asia literate Australian community and to help build and maintain Australia's role and influence in the Asian region," hewing closely to Hawke's vision for Asian engagement.⁷¹ Its cultural arm, Asialink Arts, established in 1991 by curator Alison Carroll, set up residencies for Australian artists across Asia, and organized an intensive program of touring exhibitions of Australian art and craft to Asian venues (around 80 between 1992 and 2010), supported by institutional collaborations and funding from the Australia Council and Foreign Affairs.⁷²

Asialink had been proposed by Carrillo Gantner, former Cultural Counsellor in Beijing and on the boards of the Australia Council and the Myer Foundation, after encountering perceptions of Australia as "racist and colonial" on his travels in Asia during the late 1980s.73 Besides its history of restrictive immigration policies, Australia's negative image in the region was closely linked to its brutal treatment of its First Peoples. By the 1980s, the questioning of Australia's postcolonial identity as a white British outpost had intensified across the country, particularly in the lead-up to the 1988 Australian Bicentenary of British settlement, controversially framed by the government as a "celebration of the nation." Indigenous art and culture was by then gaining unprecedented art-world visibility, having steadily grown in prominence over the previous two decades, galvanized by the land rights and self-determination movements that had begun in the mid-'60s and expanded through the '70s. Indigenous Australian artists' deep connection to the land, and their complex negotiation between local tradition and imported modernity, offered an entirely different perspective on what it means to make art in Australia. First Nations art became intrinsic to any postcolonial reassessment of Australian art in its relationship to Euro-American art history, as well as to how it navigated its place in the region. The official promotion of Australian art abroad also began to shift during this time, from largely European-Australian landscape painting to include Aboriginal art; the Australian pavilion at the 1990 Venice Biennale, for example, featured Aboriginal artists for the first time, with an exhibition of pioneering Kimberley painter Rover Thomas and the Adelaide-based urban artist Trevor Nickolls.

The 1988 Biennale of Sydney, renamed the Australian Biennale for the bicentenary, featured as its centerpiece an installation of 200 burial poles by Aboriginal artists from the Ramingining community in Arnhem Land. The work marked 200 years of European occupation and stood as a memorial for the many thousands of First Nations people who had died as a result.⁷⁴ This positioning of Aboriginal artistic practice alongside contemporary western art had first been made in the third Biennale of Sydney in 1979, titled European Dialogue, which, while consciously countering the dominance of American art in Australia over the past decade, also shifted the Biennale away from its initial Asia Pacific direction. In this edition, bark paintings by artists from Arnhem Land were shown among works by European artists, "the first time [Aboriginal artists] had been shown in an international contemporary context."75 The following Biennale in 1982 featured a floor sand painting and performance by Warlpiri artists from the Lajamanu community in the Northern Territory, placed at the center of the AGNSW and surrounded by works by artists from around the world. Its inclusion influenced curator Jean-Hubert Martin-who visited Sydney as commissioner for the French

artists—in his development of the highly influential 1989 exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* in Paris, the first major exhibition in Europe to juxtapose artistic practices from the "West" and "non-West," and to expand beyond established definitions of contemporary art to incorporate craft, folk, and customary forms.⁷⁶ This curatorial methodology for showing First Nations art has become standard for Australian institutional collection displays and survey exhibitions ever since.

As contemporary Asian cultures became more visible and accessible in Australia, through immigration, cheaper travel, and closer economic and diplomatic ties, Australian art institutions also began to look beyond "timeless" traditional Asian art-which had comprised almost all of their collections and exhibitions of Asian art to date-to encompass contemporary art. Yet influential early projects emerged from individual artist initiatives and independent art spaces rather than museums, such as Continuum between Melbourne and Tokyo in the mid-1980s, and the Artists Regional Exchange (ARX), which was established in Perth in 1987 as a biennial exhibition and residency for artists from Australia, New Zealand, and Southeast Asia. ARX had itself emerged from a series of exhibitions, titled ANZART, held in Christchurch (1981), Hobart (1983), and Auckland (1985), organized by Australian and New Zealand artists in an attempt to develop a regional platform, both as trans-Tasman and presented outside the major cities of Sydney and Melbourne.⁷⁷ The interpersonal connections that grew out of these grassroots projects, along with the Asialink exhibition and residency program and the growing presence of Asian art students and art history research in the tertiary education sphere, were formative in building regional networks.78

The most prominent of these initiatives was, and remains, the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT) at the Queensland Art Gallery (QAG) in Brisbane, which held its first edition in 1993.(Figure 5.9) The exhibition included artists from Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and East and Southeast Asia, a remit that stretched to encompass South and West Asia and the wider Pacific over subsequent editions. The QAG was able to build on ground laid over the previous decade by a host of smaller projects, including its own *Japanese Ways, Western Means* exhibition of contemporary Japanese art in 1989, and initiatives such as Asialink and ARX.⁷⁹ As Singaporean art historian TK Sabapathy observed,

ARX really was seminal and germinal for the Southeast Asian connection with Australia... you could say that what happened in APT in Brisbane in 1993 was in part a continuation, at least from our point of view, and an amplification of that moment in 1987.⁸⁰

Also in 1993, the art magazine *Art and Asia Pacific* (now *ArtAsiaPacific*) was established in Sydney as a sister publication to *Art and Australia*, with contributions from many of the curators, artists, and writers involved in ARX, Asialink, and the APT. Collectively, such projects took an active role in



Figure 5.9 Installation view, Watermall, 'First Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art', Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, September – December 1993/ Photograph: Richard Stringer/Image courtesy: QAGOMA.

Sources: Foreground: Shigeo Toya (Japan), *Woods III* 1991-92/The Kenneth and Yasuko Myer Collection of Contemporary Asian Art. Purchased 1994 with funds from The Myer Foundation and Michael Sidney Myer through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation and with the assistance of the International Exhibitions Program/Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art. Water: Kamol Phaosavasdi (Thailand), *River of the King: Water pollution project one* 1993. Right hand wall: Vasan Sitthiket (Thailand), *Resurrection*, 1992 (left); *Buddha returns to Bangkok'92* 1992/Collection: Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok. Above escalator: S Chandrasekaran (Singapore), *Duality*, 1993.

trying to recalibrate Australian art as part of a regional configuration, with the catalogue for the first APT states that:

given that Australia in its world view is no longer solely a Euro-American country, that an Australian art museum would take up the challenge of a major series of exhibitions and forums concentrating on the vitality and diversity of the region's contemporary art at the beginning of what is undoubtedly a new era for both Australia and the region.⁸¹

Terry Smith identifies the regionalism that emerged in Australia in the 1980s as "an element within the two critical tendencies" of "anti-modernism and post-colonial critique"; "a conscious turning of the tables against" what curator Bernice Murphy described as "monolithic centers and the repositories of "international culture" located elsewhere."⁸² The shift from the

internationalism of *The Field* to the tentative regionalism of the early Biennales of Sydney, to the more fully realized world-making of projects such as ARX and the APT, follows to some degree the changing conception of regionality in Australia through the final two decades of the Cold War, as the country struggled to find a distinctive place within a volatile global landscape. It saw an expansion from a parochial, colonial view of Australia as a British remnant of Empire in the Pacific, to being an active participant within the Cold War sphere of the United States in Asia, into joining a post-colonial, cosmopolitan arena that incorporated far broader cultural horizons.

Yet those earlier regionalities never really went away. This progressive trajectory has been tempered somewhat since the mid-1990s, impacted by the highly partisan nature of Australian politics. The Asia-directed vision promoted by Whitlam in his brief three years in government, and by his longer-serving Labor Party successors Bob Hawke and Paul Keating, was not always so visibly embraced by Liberal Party leaders. On becoming Prime Minister in 1996, Keating's successor John Howard declared that Australia did not need to choose "between our history and our geography," and reaffirmed an emphasis on American and European ties amid what he described, rather disingenuously, as an "Asia first or Asia plus, not Asia only" policy.83 For artists and art institutions interested in Asian engagement, this pivot led to a reduction in support and focus as the priorities of national funding bodies and cultural diplomacy programs changed, with a consequent drop in regional programming. The brief ascendancy of a geographic view of Australian identity that emerged as the Cold War waned seemed then to revert to the prioritizing of a historical one, with Howard often accused of seeking a retreat to the 1950s. Australia is of course, however, a far more complex country, and in a far more complex world, than half a century ago; and this binary is in fact deeply intertwined. The door that opened back then onto a cultural identity more deeply connected to place can never be fully closed again.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Abigail Moncrieff for research assistance, as well as the following for information, suggestions, and support: Amy Barrett-Lennard, John Barrett-Lennard, Max Bourke, Alison Carroll, Julie Ewington, Carrillo Gantner, Simryn Gill, Julian Goddard, Marco Marcon, Matthew Ngui, Les Rowe, TK Sabapathy, Shahmen Suku, Caroline Turner, and Yao Souchou.

Notes

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Part II

Visual gallery and primary documents



6 FROM OKINAWA WITH LOVE

Hiroshi Sunairi

Okinawan photographer Mao Ishikawa (b. 1953), worked as a barmaid in her early twenties in establishments that catered to African American GIs in Koza City and Kin Town. At the time, black soldiers still faced considerable discrimination in the United States and the US military. And Okinawan women, like Ishikawa, who had relationships with these men were derided as *pan pan* (prostitutes). Ishikawa produced photographs documenting the intimacy of friendships, love affairs, wild nights, and domestic accords in her social circle. The images were published as *Hot Days in Camp Hansen!!* (1982), *Hot Days in Okinawa* (2013), and *Red Flower - The Women of Okinawa /Akabana - Okinawa no on'na* (2017). Together, they offer a frank, defiant, and joyful exploration of the freedom of youth and personal connections.

From 2017 to 2019, Hiroshi Sunairi visited Ishikawa in Okinawa to document the landscape, Ishikawa's struggle with cancer, her intimate reflections on her three books, her life in the '70s, and her visits to Koza City and Kin Town. The outcomes were three feature-length documentaries—the OK3, or Okinawa Trilogy. OK1 - OKINAWA OKINAWA is a history of the sexual crimes committed by the US military from 1945 to 2016. OK2 - FROM OKINAWA WITH LOVE explores Ishikawa's life and her three books—Hot Days in Camp Hansen!! (1982), Hot Days in Okinawa (2013) and Red Flower - The Women of Okinawa (2017). OK3 - Okinawa Philadelphia follows the life of an American soldier once deployed in Okinawa, back in Philadelphia.

Story about a rape victim

As far as I remember, it was in the 1960s, in the neighborhood of Uruma, what was then known as Ishikawa. A girl a few years older than me, around 5 or 6, was abducted and raped by an American soldier. The girl's private parts were left looking like mutilated by a knife. Her clothes were ripped with only underwear remaining. Her hands gripped weeds and her teeth clenched tight. On a rainy day outside the American base, she was left like that at the dumping grounds.

If I was the little girl's parent, I would have killed the criminal. She was only five years old, raped and killed by an American military man, and left in a dumpster on a rainy day. She was discarded like a piece of trash, basically saying she's not human.

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Until 1972, incidents like this happened as if they were normal. And we are told not to hold a grudge against the American military? Impossible.

I've been thinking since then. What is Okinawa to Japan? Are Okinawans Japanese? What is the "Japanese motherland" that my teacher spoke about?

You are all Japanese. Be aware of that, and study to be respectable Japanese citizens. The Japanese motherland has the peace constitution [ARTI-CLE 9] that will protect us from the American military. We must return to the Japanese motherland as soon as possible.

That is what I remember from my primary school education.

In conclusion? Returning to Japan was not so great after all. It's been 73 years since the war, but nothing has changed. Moreover, the Japanese government and American military have joined forces. The Japanese government is basically there to please America. "Americans, you're free to use Okinawa as you wish, as long as you don't bully the rest of Japan." That's what I hear, and this attitude remains even today (Figure 6.1).

*ARTICLE 9. Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.

How Japanese think of Okinawans

Right now, to build a new large-scale American military base, the coastal seaside of Nago city, where the US military base Camp Schwab is currently located, is roped off. Henoko Camp Schwab in Nago is only 30 kilometers



Figure 6.1 Hiroshi Sunairi, *FROM OKINAWA WITH LOVE*, 2021, film still, Mao Ishikawa. © Hiroshi Sunairi.

from Ginowan. They call this a relocation? It's only 30 kilometers away! You can drive there, and that much of a difference will eliminate danger? Even if the airfield is relocated, the US military aircraft fly noisily. Whether it's over Okinawa's mainland or remote islands, US military crafts fly above my house. Japanese self-defense aircrafts too. They're free to do whatever.

Why photography?

To photograph, you have to stand in front of your subject with a camera, so you must meet the subject. You can't just sit in a room and paint from your imagination. When I talk to my subjects, I'm straightforward and hide nothing from them, so they open up and talk to me honestly. This is not a strategy. I was born this way.

Akabana

I titled this collection of photographs Akabana, a symbolic flower in Okinawan culture. It's a gaudy red flower, but at the same time it is just a weed. Akabana, a red flower, or in other words, Okinawan women. I used it as a metaphor for the women I photographed. These weeds survive no matter how much they're trampled on and show their glorious flashy red. The women at bars who served black men were thought of as prostitutes. That's not true. There was genuine love and passion between them. Living on the small island of Okinawa, these women chose to live as they desired. "What's wrong with loving black men? What's wrong about living freely?" I thought I was free until I met these women. Their provocative life influenced me to strive for greater freedom. I am so proud of these women and the photographs of them I took. You are free to work anywhere and love anyone. These women are marvelous. I didn't want their history to be lost to obscurity, so I decided to republish this book in America. I cherish this book. I lost the film negatives, but these photographs are magnificent (Figures 6.2 and 6.3).

Whether in Kin Town or Koza City, I always carried my 35 mm camera. It was only black-and-white film I used back then. Hanging my camera on my shoulder, I took pictures spontaneously. I took time to photograph just as I might keep a diary.

I used to spend my day working at the bar or visiting my hostess friends' apartment, and I photographed what was in front of me. All my friends got used to me carrying my camera and taking pictures all the time. So, when I photographed them, they never became self-conscious. They were authentic as they were in my photos, sometimes drunk, sometimes serious. Some of the girls had children, so I photographed them together, and when they were with their boyfriends too. Often, these boyfriends were American soldiers. At first, I jumped into this world to photograph the soldiers but gradually took more interest in the women who went out with them.



Figure 6.2 Hiroshi Sunairi, FROM OKINAWA WITH LOVE, 2021, film still, The cover of Mao Ishikawa's photography book, Red Flower – The Women of Okinawa/Akabana – Okinawa no on'na (2017). © Hiroshi Sunairi.



Figure 6.3 Hiroshi Sunairi, FROM OKINAWA WITH LOVE, 2021, film still, Mao Ishikawa in the picture from the photography book, Red Flower – The Women of Okinawa/Akabana – Okinawa no on'na (2017). © Hiroshi Sunairi.

Okinawa may seem like a festive and tropical place, but people there worry about how they are seen. That's how provincial places work. But these girls, once they fell in love with black men, simply dove into that world. No matter what happened, they stayed together through thick and thin. During those days in Okinawa, there was a lot of hatred toward Americans due to family members being killed by the Americans in the war. On top of that, Okinawans saw Whites as superior to Blacks.

Of course, among the black people, there were people who looked down on us Okinawans. Because America had won the war, some had a swagger. Many decades have passed since, but what I photographed during that time was segregation of the White and the Black. I was able to capture that history. The island was full of soldiers. Cities were lively. Nowadays, girls come here from everywhere. Then, it was mostly Okinawan girls, some from mainland Japan. They all hung out intimately, really being human. "I love you so much baby!" They let it all out-sperm, sweat, spit, banging each other. I loved their rawness. "Why is such a life bad? I think my life is the best!" With their outpouring of enthusiasm, they were so free and I was so stimulated. What a world I found! Magnificent! Full of vitality for life, they loved freely and said what they had in mind. They were naked, because it was hot. Why is that bad? To be free on this small island, they lived life to the fullest. These women were tough. They would get wasted sometimes, but never sloppy. These girls would become defiant so mercilessly, "why the hell is it bad to do what I like." They were badass and nobody's fool but never obscene.

Why identify with Black culture?

At the time, the slogan "Black is beautiful" was everywhere. The Blacks who had been slaves and prosecuted before took this matter into their hands, declaring independence in America. The Black Panther Party appeared and



Figure 6.4 Hiroshi Sunairi, *FROM OKINAWA WITH LOVE*, 2021, film still, Mao and her boyfriend, Sir on the right in the picture from the photography book, *Hot Days in Okinawa* (2013). © Hiroshi Sunairi.

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held massive demonstrations, fighting for their rights. Even in Okinawa, there were demonstrations (Figures 6.4 and 6.5).

The similarity between the blacks and the Okinawans is that the Okinawans were prosecuted, looked down upon, and discriminated against by the Japanese. This is what I sensed once I understood history. The blacks, too, had been slaves for a long time, prosecuted, looked down upon, and discriminated against by the Whites. I came to realize the similarities between the White/Black and the Japanese/Okinawans. I didn't see it while I was working at the bar, only after I had left that world. I wondered, "ah, perhaps the reason I was so drawn to the blacks was because I was feeling sympathy for their history, so similar to the Okinawans."



Figure 6.5 Hiroshi Sunairi, *FROM OKINAWA WITH LOVE*, 2021, still from film "BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL" (1974), a poster from the German chapter of the international Black Is Beautiful movement | Junge Union [Young Union]. © Hiroshi Sunairi.

7 Dinh Q Lê

Works and primary documents

Dinh Q Lê

Dinh Q Lê, photo-weaving work

Lê's photo-weaving series consists of photo prints that have been cut into strips. The artist then weaves them by means of crosshatching, a traditional Vietnamese method for weaving grass mats that Lê learned from his aunt. He made the technique his own by modifying traditional patterns, which became the hallmark of his oeuvre (Figure 7.1).

In these weavings, Lê brings together found images from the Internet and photographs that he has taken himself, cuts them into strips, and weaves them together into a new image. The process disrupts the image's coherency. The new hybrid image with various suggestive elements actively engages his viewers in the thought process while leaving it open to new interpretations. *Untitled* from *The Hill of Poisonous Trees* series (*man and woman*) (2008) (Figures 7.2), for example, is based on two images: 1) Angkor Wat; and 2) Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, located on the site of the brutal Khmer Rouge execution center (1975–79). In this image, the Khmer Empire's greatest artwork and the horrific dimensions of the Cambodian Genocide were placed in conversation with each other. It also commemorates the victims of the Khmer Rouge, who were notorious for taking photographs of everyone they brought to Tuol Sleng.

The farmers and the helicopters, 2006

In 2004, Mr. Tran Quoc Hai, a self-taught mechanic in the farming community of Tay Ninh Province, began testing a homemade helicopter that took him more than six years to research and build. When Vietnamese newspapers asked why he built it, Mr. Tran spoke about his childhood obsession with the helicopters he witnessed during the Vietnam-American War. Mr. Tran also spoke about his desire to create an affordable helicopter for farming and emergency evacuation purposes (Figure 7.3).

The helicopter has a deadly history in Vietnam. With more than 12,000 American helicopters, the Vietnam-American War was the first helicopter war. More than 36,125,000 sorties were conducted, and some combat operations involved more than one hundred helicopters at a time. Attack helicopters, like the Huey Cobra, were heavily armed. The Vietnamese could suddenly,



Figure 7.1 Dinh Q. Lê, Untitled (Tom Cruise & Willam Dafoe, Born on the 4th of July/Highway 1), 2000. C-print and linen tape, 40x60 in. © Dinh Q. Lê.



Figure 7.2 Dinh Q. Lê, Untitled from The Hill of Poisonous Trees series (man and woman), 2008. C-print and linen tape, 47.25x78.75 in. © Dinh Q. Lê.



Figure 7.3 The Farmers and The Helicopters, 2006

Sources: 3-Channel Video Installation. Duration: 15 Minutes, edition of 5 with 1 AP. Dinh Q. Lê in collaboration with Tuan Andrew Nguyen and Ha, Thuc Phu Nam. © Dinh Q. Lê.

without warning, find themselves under assault from the helicopters flying above. It has been over 30 years since the end of the Vietnam-American War. Vietnam is slowly moving away from the trauma as new meanings and memories are being constructed daily in the country. Mr. Tran's helicopter images mark a shift in the perception of the helicopter. To Vietnamese today, helicopters are no longer machines of war and death but modernity and hope.

This three-channel video installation entitled *The Farmers and The Helicopters* consists of Mr. Tran's interviews with Vietnamese farmers. As they share their memories of helicopters in the war and their view of helicopters today, they also mention a desire for modernity. Intermixed with this footage are clips from Hollywood movies of the Vietnam-American War and documentary wartime footage. Somewhere between fact and fiction, between old memories and newly constructed ones, *The Farmers and The Helicopters* presents a portrait of Vietnam.

South China Sea Pishkun, 2009

The United States military deployed 11,827 armed helicopters to serve in the Vietnam War. A total of 5,086 were destroyed. "Pishkun" is a term used by the Blackfeet American Indian for the site where they would drive wild bison into panic and run them over a cliff. It can be loosely translated as "deep blood kettle".

On April 30th, 1975, as the North Vietnamese Army and the Viet Cong were marching toward Saigon and other cities in South Vietnam, thousands of panicking Southern Vietnamese soldiers, American soldiers, and US diplomatic personnel were trying to get out of South Vietnam. Hundreds of

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US helicopters were fleeing toward the South China Sea, searching for US aircraft carriers to land on. Many eventually were forced to crash in the South China Sea when they ran out of fuel. Some helicopters found aircraft carriers, but the carriers soon filled up leaving hundreds of helicopters hovering in the air. At some point, decisions were made and an unknown number of helicopters were pushed into the sea to make room for others to land. *South China*



Figure 7.4 Dinh Q. Lê, *South China Sea Pishkun*, 2009. Single channel hi-definition digital animation video. Duration: 6'30". Edition of 7 and 1AP. © Dinh Q. Lê.



Figure 7.5 Dinh Q. Lê, South China Sea Pishkun, 2009. Single channel hi-definition digital animation video. Duration: 6'30". Edition of 7 and 1AP
© Dinh Q. Lê.

Sea Pishkun (Figures 7.4 and 7.5) depicts these powerful machines in their final moments, crashing, struggling, and sinking. These helicopters that had rained terror on Vietnam for so long were also the technology that the US military was counting on to give them the advantage they needed to win. In their last moments, the failure was tragic and spectacular.

South China Sea Pishkun is a restaging of this last historical moment. With America contemplating its position and strategies for withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan, South China Sea Pishkun is a timely revisitation of this tragic event.

8 Reconfiguring history

FX Harsono

Historical background

In 1946, after the Japanese surrender at the end of World War II, the Dutch returned to Indonesia and launched Police Action (*Politionele Acties*), mobilizing the Royal Dutch Indian Army to the outskirts and rural areas in Java and several cities in Sumatra in an attempt to regain its former colony. Their maneuvers included forcing the Indonesian Chinese to cooperate with them, due to the long relationship between the Chinese and the Dutch, as military police, standby troops, and spies in various regions, particularly in Java.

The Indonesian army retreated and conducted guerrilla warfare in the jungles and villages. Before they departed from each city, they burned the buildings, factories, and important facilities. This strategy was called "*bumi hangus*" or the scorched-earth policy. Amid this chaos, some militia ransacked, robbed, and raped the Chinese whom they considered to have sided with the Dutch, as their spies.¹

Anti-Chinese sentiment emerged among the native Indonesians since the Chinese were recruited as the Dutch's standby troops. Being afraid, the Chinese resorted to serving the Dutch since many of their family members had been murdered, raped, or robbed during this political upheaval. However, the Consulate General of the China Republic in Batavia, Chiang Chia Tung, opposed this policy. In a letter to Lieutenant Governor H.J. Van Mook and Lieutenant General S.H. Spoor, he stated that the presence of Chinese troops might cause a grave misunderstanding between the Indonesian government and Chinese community in Indonesia, even jeopardizing the safety of the Chinese community in other parts of the country.

The turmoil was also aggravated by the release of prisoners, like what happened in 1946 in Kalisosok Prison, Surabaya. Numerous inmates were freed and individually recruited. They were invited to do as they pleased as long as they scorched the city when they were done. These armed inmates looted, robbed, killed, and raped the Chinese in several cities of East Java such as Blitar, Caruban, Kediri, Kertosono, Madiun, Malang, Nganjuk, Tulungagung, Wiingi.² The scorched-earth policy was first used as a guerilla warfare strategy and then misused by militia and Lasykar groups to rob, kill, and rape the Chinese people. The Chinese were forced to flee. After they fled, their homes were ransacked and burned. Most Chinese men were separated from the others to be killed, but in some areas, women and children were killed also.

Bone cemetery

At first, I just wanted to reflect on the history of my parents. There was no desire to trace the history of Chinese killings in Java. My father was a photographer. He had a photo studio called Photo Atom in Jalan Merdeka Barat, Blitar. Located in East Java, Blitar is a small city where I was born in 1949.

There is one memory I will always remember. Once, I saw a black album containing photographs of human bones and skulls that had just been dug from the ground (Figure 8.1). There were about 60 photos, 6×6 cm. The album was stored in the living room—documentation of the Chinese who were killed in 1948–1949 in villages around Blitar.

As a photographer, my father was assigned to document the excavation with a group of volunteers who were looking for buried victims. The remains, mostly bones, were then reburied in a Chinese mass graveyard in Karangsari village, Blitar. The excavation and reburial took place in 1951.



Figure 8.1 Hendro Subagyo (Oh Hok Tjoe), *Karangbendo*, 1951, gelatin silver print on paper, 6×6cm. Image courtesy of FX Harsono.

This was coordinated by a self-organized Chinese community called Chung Hua Tsung Hui (CHTH) as an order from CHTH Jakarta.

The ritual of exhuming bones from the grave is still practiced by Chinese people, though for different reasons.³ In the Chinese belief, the funeral ritual for families and ancestors must be managed properly for the sake of life today and a better future for the offspring of the deceased. In several writings, the massacre is identified as an impact of Dutch Military Aggression that violated the outcome of the Linggarjati Agreement (1947) between Indonesia and the Dutch. The Indonesian government then mobilized the national army for guerrilla warfare and scorched-earth tactics to confront the Dutch. At the same time, the Chinese people were subjected to violence in the midst of uncertain economic conditions because of political divisions within the Indonesian government with some opportunist militant groups and militias wanting to benefit directly.

As a visual artist, I am interested in further exploring what I have discovered. Fortunately, my father wrote captions to each photo, complete with the dates, locations, and number of victims in each location. Based on this information, I visited several villages in search of witnesses and survivors. I made a documentary called *nDudah*, which in Javanese means "to excavate." This video, 21 minutes and 18 seconds long, documents the exhumation of the Chinese victims.

Mass graves

The research also traces the history of Chinese killings that occurred at the same time in other places in Java. Subsequently, I found mass graves in Tulungagung, Kediri, and Pare. Eventually, I visited the sites of more than ten mass graves. Not all mass graves are still intact. Some were destroyed, others were moved, and still others are simply gone. One can only say that they used to exist.

The future of Chinese cemeteries in several cities is quite uncertain since there is no official regulation from the government to protect them. Meanwhile, Chinese cemeteries will be maintained or are still functioning and protected if the land belongs to local Chinese community organizations. In certain cities, a number of wealthy Chinese businessmen have taken the initiative to buy graveyards and take care of them. The Chinese cemetery in Kediri is very well preserved because a famous cigarette company and several businessmen purchased a large portion and assigned a Chinese community organization to tend it.

Today, many Chinese graves that have been abandoned and neglected by the Chinese Memorial Foundations exist. This fact indicates that the Chinese community's insecurity, mainly caused by political problems or racial riots. Therefore, they prefer cremation over burial. In addition, cremation has been a tradition for generations, as the ancestral ashes can be stored in a columbarium or brought home for private purposes, keeping them or scatter them in sea or river. This lack of attention to care for and protect the Chinese graves has triggered local residents in some cities to plunder the land and turn the plots into illegal settlements. Chinese cemeteries in Kuto Bedah Malang were illegally made into settlements by local thugs, and the Chinese community did not have courage to ask for the land back. However, some wealthy families who cared for their family burial sites successfully exhumed the graves for reburial or cremation. There is a possibility that a mass grave from the killings of 1948 once existed there. However, I did not dare to enter the area because the person who escorted me said that it was controlled by thugs and thus was quite dangerous.

Feeling insecure

I started this research without adequate references, equipped only with a book by Benny G. Setiono entitled *Tionghoa dalam Pusaran Politik* (*Chinese in Political Vortex*). There is only one chapter that speaks of the killings. This chapter quotes a memorandum written by Kwee Kek Beng in 1951, published by Chung Hua Tsung Hui community in Batavia. It is called *MEMORANDUM: Outlining Acts of Violence and Humanity Perpetrated by Indonesia Bands on Innocent Chinese Before and After the Dutch Police Action was Enforced on July 21, 1947.* This memorandum is a report that was later sent to the United Nations in 1951.

I usually start my research by visiting the Chinese Memorial Foundation, which has an office in most cities, and looking for information there. Afterwards, I went to the Chinese cemetery, seeking clues, assisted by graveyard custodians. In researching the existence of mass graves, I found that many undertakers at funeral homes knew nothing about it. Some had been born after 1965, and some were newcomers unaware of the city's history. Besides visiting the Chinese Memorial Foundation in each city, I also stopped by Chinese temples looking for administrators or people over 70 years old, as they might know more about the city's history. However, it was very difficult since many people of this group had died, were sick, or had troubles with memory.

When I finally met with eyewitnesses or survivors, they seldom wanted to discuss their past. They all had similar reasons. They said that it was such a dark history, it was better left untold. In fact, they did not even want their own children to know. Thus, if no one is willing to tell the story, this oral history will vanish.

The Chinese killings in 1947–1949 are considered as a dark history that should be forgotten or buried. If this story is being told openly to the public, they worry, then the fate of the Chinese people may be endangered in the future.

From the research that I conducted from 2009 to 2017, I made pilgrimages to ten mass graves and noted the number of victims buried there. They were inscribed in the tombstones as follows: 191 at Blitar, 69 at Caruban, 300 at Kediri, 17 at Muntilan, 788 at Nganjuk, 68 at Pare, 78 at Purwokerto, 73 at Tulungagung, 155 at Wonosobo, and 25 at Yogyakarta.

Arts and pilgrimage to history

A very strong impression that comes from my research is that of the insecurity among the Chinese. The Chinese people still have political and social trauma from racial riots of the past. They do not feel safe as a minority group. This insecurity manifests in their efforts to protect themselves from threats of all sorts. Racist riots occur repeatedly, both small and large, as well as persecution and other threats from the majority. The penalization of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama or Ahok is viewed as a sign of the government's inability to protect minority groups against majority political pressure. This causes latent insecurity.

Acts of eliminating history, insecurity, threats, and ongoing political intimidation over an extended period led to a loss of trust. This impression is what I would like to present in my works, but without resentment or anger. I interpret this dark history as a pilgrimage. A pilgrimage for me is a ritual and a very private ceremony to honor and pay homage to the victims. I raise this issue through the arts (Figures 8.2, 8.3 and 8.4).

I recorded this pilgrimage through an installation work and video documentation entitled "Pilgrimage to History" (2020). This work is a manifestation of my pilgrimages to the mass graves, where I rubbed pastels on a cloth that I held to the tombstones. The rubbings produced 18 pieces of cloth with the names of 1,764 victims imprinted on them. I also created a documentary called *The Last Survivor*, 27:06 minutes long, which I have been making since 2016 and only finished in 2020. The video shows the



Figure 8.2 FX Harsono, Screening Shot of *Pilgrimage*, 2013, single channel video, color, 17'41". © FX Harsono.



Figure 8.3 FX Harsono, Screening Shot of *Pilgrimage*, 2013, single channel video, color, 17'41". © FX Harsono.



Figure 8.4 FX Harsono, Screening Shot of Pilgrimage, 2013, single channel video, color, 17'41". © FX Harsono.

humility of the survivors. They are well aware of what they experienced in the past but not angry or vengeful. They never stop striving to continue their lives and support their families. The story of the past is remembered and celebrated as part of their dark history. The film focuses on three of the last survivors. In their old age, they are able to release the burden of the past through acceptance.

Description of artworks⁴

Writing in the Rain, 2011, video documentation of performance, single-channel video, 6' 11" (loop) (Figure 8.5).

This video documentation of the performance features the artist behind a transparent plate, writing his Chinese name (Hu Fengwen) with ink and brush repeatedly, to the extent that the characters overlap and block his face. At 4:36, an artificial rain starts to pour on the artist, who keeps writing, until the ink becomes a waterfall and the names exist only as traces. This work is about remembrance and the attempt to recuperate cultural identity.

Gazing on Collective Memory, 2016 (Figure 8.6), sculptures, installation, wood, found objects, books, ceramic bowls, wooden butter mould, wooden cookie mould, metal spoons, 3D digital prints, framed photographs, and electric candle lights.

This installation is the artist's response to the killings of ethnic Chinese Indonesians between 1947 and 1949. It is composed of objects that bear reference to their lives. The wooden stands, photographic portraits, porcelain bowls, school books, and electric candles compose a ritualistic atmosphere. The assemblage of these daily objects serves as a metaphor for the cultural memories and identity of Chinese Indonesian people. Harsono has written about the experience of the Indonesian Chinese in 2019 as follows: "Their collective memories had been partitioned, disconnected, and are not fully integrated into their lives today. A hybrid Chinese was formed."



Figure 8.5 FX Harsono, *Writing in the Rain*, 2011, single channel video performance, color, 6'11". © FX Harsono.



Figure 8.6 FX Harsono, Gazing on Collective Memory, no. 2, 2016, installation with wood, found objects, books, ceramic bowls, 3D digital prints, frames and photographs, and electric candle light, 80×190×270 cm. © FX Harsono.

Notes

- 1 Benny G. Setiono, *Tionghoa dalam Pusaran Politik (Chinese in Political Vortex)* (Jakarta: TransMedia Pustaka, 2008), 586.
- 2 Setiono, Tionghoa dalam Pusaran Politik, 616.
- 3 In Indonesian modern society, the ritual of unearthing bones is conducted because burial grounds in urban regions are increasingly limited. Numerous graves have been evicted to expand the commercial area. Furthermore, the booming of business property in providing prestigious cemetery plots in suburban areas has also led to a growing number of grave exhumations.
- 4 The description of these two works was compiled by the editors.
9 Voyage into the COLD SEA

Sow Yee Au

Discussing the relation between art and politics, French philosopher Jacques Rancière once said that both require the construction of a "fiction." Fiction, in a way, is a strategy of composition, and composing is an ever-shifting chimera. As a mythical figure made up of different living beings, a chimera is a metaphor for a political ideology assembled from various languages and forms. The previous prime minister of Malaysia Tun, Dr. Mahathir Mohammad, returned to office in 2018 and refurbished his *Wawasan 2020* (Vision 2020) from back in 1991, rebranding it as the *Wawasan Kemakmuran Bersama 2030* (Shared Prosperity Vision 2030). This vision is indeed a chimera, as no one knows whether another twist of fiction will arise as 2030 approaches.

The title of this article includes two keywords—COLD and SEA. "Cold" has multiple meanings, including the post-Pacific War era that still haunts the region. "Sea" refers, here, to Southeast Asia. Thus, "COLD SEA" suggests a northern body of saltwater. The water tends to warm as we approach the equator, making it easier for ships to travel. COLD SEA thus also refers to the dialectical and complex situation of natural phenomena and political resonance. This article shares the story of an intermingling, how it problematized the composition of a voyage into the cold sea, of the South and the North, the East and the West.

Furthermore, the "SEA" is a stage for various theatrical and historical moments. The vastness of the sea and Southeast Asia has opened fluid "ground" in our quest for unknown lands since the Age of Discovery, from European kingdoms to the East India Company, from Indian to Arabic and Chinese merchants throughout history.

When speaking about the SEA, there are always stories of lost voyages. For instance, in *The Voyage of François Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas, and Brazil, there is a footnote describing a particular memory of getting lost among scattered reefs and rocks while crossing through the Sunda Straits.*

Then Raja Suran Padshah formed the design of subjugating China, and for this purpose his men at arms, and the rajas dependent on him, assembled from every quarter with their hosts, to the number of one thousand and two lacs. With this prodigious host, he advanced against China, and in his course, the forests were converted into open plains; the earth shook, and the hills moved; the lofty grounds became level, and the rocks flew off in shivers, and the large rivers were dried up to the mud. Two months they marched on without delay, and the darkest night was illuminated by the light of their armour like the lustre of the full moon; and the noise of the thunder could not be heard for the loud noise of the champions and warriors, mixed with the cries of horses and elephants.¹

In this excerpt from *Sejarah Melayu* (*The Malay Annals*), an Hindustan prince, while wandering through the Malay Archipelago, mistakenly concludes that he has arrived in China. The Malay Annals shaped the story of the founding of Malacca, one of the most important Malay Sultanates west of the Malaysian Peninsula. The Straits of Malacca are an important waterway that links the European west to the Bengal Bay, the Southeast, and the East. The world is made one family, it is said, through the Strait of Malacca.

Here I would like to refer to a lyric entitled *The World is One Family*, which identifies the frontiers and allies in each camp of the Cold War, from Hong Kong, Kinmen, London, Malaya, Paris, Singapore, to Taipei.² Written during the ideological and territorial divides in the postwar period, it actually bears a cosmopolitan view of the world being one family, regardless of skin colors. The joyous song appears in a Mandarin musical and heart-breaking romance *Because of Her*, produced by Motion Picture & General Investment Company (MP&GI) in 1963, the year when Singapore and Malaysia united to form one country, though they split again in two years. MP&GI's mother company, Cathay, was founded by the late Mr. Loke Wan Tho, son of the tin mining tycoon Loke Yew, whose legacy was honored by the naming of the main road in Kuala Lumpur's urban center. Cathay Company produced films through international collaborations, which was more difficult in that political climate.

In 1962, Cathay-Keris partnered a team of French filmmakers to produce *Your Shadow is Mine*, but the film was a box office disaster. In June 1962, Cathay-Keris co-produced *A Star of Hong Kong* with Cathay's Hong Kong studio. The film, starring Hong Kong star Yu Ming and Japanese lead Akira Takarada, featured English, Mandarin, and Japanese dialogue. In June 1963, Cathay-Keris produced its first overseas film, *Malam-di-Tokyo*, which was shot in Japan.

This is a quote from an article on Singapore Infopedia by Joshua Chia Yeong Jia.

Both MP&GI and Cathay participated in the *Southeast Asia Film Festival*, founded in 1954 by Japanese film producer Masaichi Nagata in Tokyo. In order to welcome the new member state South Korea, the Festival changed its name to *Asia Film Festival* in 1957. Here again, you will notice the revelation of Cold War alliances, linking the East and West across the Pacific. In 1964, Loke Wan Tho attended the *Asia Film Festival* in Taipei, which is currently named *Asia Pacific Film Festival*. There were rumors that Loke Wan

Tho was to be hosting a party at the Grand Hotel the night after his daytrip to visit collections from the National Palace Museum, which was then stored in Taichung. However, the party never happened. And the mystery of Loke Wan Tho's death in a plane crash on his way back to Taipei was lost in the sea of time. Not only did the incident end Loke Wan Tho's film production business, but there were also assumptions that the history of film in Taiwan would have been different had the party taken place and Loke survived.

German writer Hermann Hesse writes in *Singapore Dream* about a song he heard in a dream.³ The song describes the auditory hallucinations of a wanderer in the mist, entranced by the ringing of a bell. He then reveals that the song is "We are heading to Asia." That was in the early 20th century; yet, the sea of Southeast Asia remains shrouded in a similar tune today.

The Kris Project (2016 to 2020)

These stories intermingling from West to East and North to South transformed into the context of *The Kris Project*—a series of video installations I completed from 2016 to 2017 (Figures 9.1–9.5). Deep inside a forest of the Malay Archipelago, secret agent "Loke" of *The Kris Project*, taking his name from the famous Malayan film tycoon, acts in a series of video installations—a troubling romance, mysterious adventures, problematic myths, secret codes. I imagine *The Kris Project* as an SEA, a chimera that is ever-transforming and evolving, loosening the rigid borders between politics, nation-states, and ideologies, particularly those bounded by the Cold War. With videos constructed of collages and cut-outs from "found" footage as well as shot images, this is a journey also into the complex relations between popular



Figure 9.1 Au Sow Yee, Kris Project I: The Never Ending Tale of Maria, Tin Mine, Spices and the Harimau, 2016, single channel video, 15'2", film still. © Au Sow Yee



Figure 9.2 Au Sow Yee, Kris Project I: The Never Ending Tale of Maria, Tin Mine, Spices and the Harimau, 2016, single channel video, 15'2", film still. © Au Sow Yee



Figure 9.3 Au Sow Yee, Kris Project I: The Never Ending Tale of Maria, Tin Mine, Spices and the Harimau, 2016, single channel video, 15'2", film still. © Au Sow Yee



Figure 9.4 Au Sow Yee, Kris Project II: If the Party Goes On, 2016, single channel video, 13'52", film still. © Au Sow Yee



Figure 9.5 Au Sow Yee, Prelude Kris Project II: To the Party, 2016, single channel video, 4'42", film still. © Au Sow Yee

movies of the 1950s and '60s—at the height of the Cold War era—and the hidden power structures of that time.⁴ This history still haunts us today, transfigured into disputes over borders and indications of the Other.

Both as a self-reflection and a mirror showing us our fear for the Other, *The Kris Project* embarked on an embodied voyage of collected, collaged, deconstructed, reconstructed, and reimagined historiographical memories. While these historiographical memories might have grown from the darkest waters, hovering above the mystical surface of the COLD sea, here and again, arises a new fiction

Notes

- 1 "Malay Annals," translation by Dr John Leyden, *Monthly Review*, vol. 98 (May to August 1822), 247.
- 2 The original lyric was written by Evan Yang (Yi Wen, 1920-78). See "The World is One Family," *My Music*, accessed December 22, 2020, https://www.mymusic.net.tw/ux/w/song/show/p000008-a0390794-s004840-t009-c8.
- 3 Herman Hesse dreamed of a ship voyage when he fell asleep in a movie theatre in Singapore under British colonial control.
- 4 In the video, the fictional character Ravi creates a film studio in the forest.

10 From cities into the mountains and the fields

An archaeology of lives in dark ruins

Jun Honn Kao Translated by Yu-Chieh Li

In this article, I analyze my recent departure from the practices of critical geology, investigation into dark ruins, and transitional justice of indigenous sovereignty.¹ I discuss the potential of creative processes to contribute to "social movements." Among those, *The Ruin Image Crystal Project: Ten Scenes* uses abandoned buildings and sites to reflect upon the influence of neoliberalism and transnational trade on Taiwanese society and offers situations to connect with various communities. The *Topa* project (2016–) investigates the Atayal Nation's Topa Tribe to explore the various sovereignties of Taiwan and the descendants of colonized peoples who were driven into the mountains by the many waves of colonization that swept the island.

The Ruin Image Crystal Project (2012–) deals with a transitional moment of the Taiwanese economy, as the secondary sector relocates to other thirdworld countries, leaving many industrial ruins and personal stories of tragedy due to job loss.

I undertook fieldwork to visit industrial ruins, which included defunct mining sites, porcelain factories, entertainment parks, a toothbrush factory, a car plant, jails, and residences of Nationalist military cohorts (*juancun*) that were slated for demolition; evidence of Taiwan's neoliberalization—and for many people, sites of trauma and disillusionment.

For *The Ruin Image Crystal Project*, I convened a group of participants to probe into microhistories based on my fieldwork into the ruins (Figures 10.1 and 10.2). These sites are still personal property albeit abandoned for many years; uncountable people, stories, and objects have been dissolved there. We gathered historical photographs, completed on-site drawings, put together performances, interviewed protagonists, and edited these materials into videos, as if assembling a historical puzzle. In the first stage (2012–2016), we worked on sites such as Haishan Mining (Sanxia), Taiwan Motor Transport Factory (Shulin), Dale Garden (Jinshan), Investigation Bureau of Ankang (White Terror Prison in Xindian), Refurbishment of juancun (Tainan City), and shuttered vacation resorts along the seaside. The research outputs have been shared at exhibitions internationally.

As the project developed, my team conducted research and actions on the neoliberalization of those sites. We focused on commercial sectors of Taipei, such as the Huaguang and Shaoxing Communities in Taipei City—two



Figure 10.1 Kao Jun-Honn, The Ruin Image Crystal Project: Ten Scenes, 2013. Sitespecific drawing in an abandoned military camp in Yi-Lan, based on a photograph of "Divine Wind Attack Units" taken by an anonymous photographer during the second world war. © Kao Jun-Honn.



Figure 10.2 Kao Jun-Honn, The Ruin Image Crystal Project: Ten Scenes. Site-specific drawing in an abandoned military camp in Yi-Lan, 2013. (Depicted is Chang Cheng Guang, A Taiwanese Member of "Divine Wind Attack Units" during the Pacific War.) © Kao Jun-Honn.

communities that constitute a kind of juancun "beyond governance." They were initially built as temporary dwellings for dependents of the Nationalist party military in 1949. After the commodification of national property according to new laws in 1990s, even residents who had lived there for two or three generations suddenly became illegitimate. The local communities had initiated protests against forced urban renewal; we initiated art actions with the residents. However, the case was declared illegal by the government and the residents were eventually driven away. The buildings were demolished.

The second and last phase of *The Ruin Image Crystal Project* is *Bo-Ai* (Figure 10.3). For this work commissioned by the Taipei Biennale in 2016, I focused on four locations from the first phase of my fieldwork and made videos of various locations based on interviews in the documentary mode: the Bo-Ai Market where I grew up; Haishan Mining where an explosion sparked a human rights movement among the indigenous people in 1984; the Taiwan Motor Machine Factory, representing the privatization of public resources in the 1990s; and the Ankang Investigation Bureau. Bo-Ai is not just the name of the market, it also means "universal love"—an irony for those excluded by the "progressive" ideas of Taiwan's modernization.

The process of research led to creative practices, so my approach is distinct from that of realistic documentary; rather, my videos montage impressions from my field research. I decided to host the first screenings in the locations of the historical events listed above. This return to the original site is also for



Figure 10.3 Kao Jun-Honn, Bo'ai: Taiwan Motor Transportation Factory, 2016, photo-documentation of a screening on site as a socially engaged component of the Bo'ai project. © Kao Jun-Honn.

the purpose of possibly calling upon spirits—those who lived there before and are now absent. Calling them back to the site, I believe, is a form of art activism.

Secondly, I invited participants to visit, to enter into life politics (microhistory) and the history of the space in the 1990s. For example, what happened in the traditional market of Bo-Ai reflects the shift in the Taiwanese economy. In the 1990s, Taiwan became a location for entrepôt trade between Mainland China and other countries. At this moment, many cheap madein-China products flooded Taiwan, and vendors of this market had to either start selling cheap products of bad quality, or switch to temporary labor such as driving taxis. This resonates with Michel Foucault's comment on biopolitics: that under neoliberalization, the idea of a free market and the truth about the market drastically pushed contemporaries into new class struggles. I lived through those changes as I helped my mother sell clothes in the market during my youth.

Continuing from *Bo-Ai* in 2016, I turned from urban ruins to the mountains and fields, to launch new and wider spatial and temporal explorations, which became the *Topa* project (Figure 10.4). If *The Ruin Image Crystal Project* and *Bo-Ai* focused on abandoned spaces and their histories in the 1980s–90s, then *Topa* records the fate of the Atayal tribe, which was annihilated by the Japanese colonial power according to official sources; I aimed to recuperate the history through on-site investigation, creative practices, and exploration into the complex colonial history of Taiwanese forests and lands.

The *Topa* project is based on my long-term fieldwork into the mountains and fields of Taiwan. I discovered ruins of several military bases and frontier guard posts at the border of Han-Chinese and indigenous tribes in the northern mountains, which had been constructed in the early Japanese colonial period (1895–1945) for economic benefit, and to conquer the "uncivilized" aboriginal people. Their methods of control included setting up guard



Figure 10.4 Kao Jun-Honn, Apparatus of Topa, drawing on paper, 2018. © Kao Jun-Honn.

stations with high-voltage transmission lines, land mines, and fortresses, to encircle indigenous communities and break connections among them, since they were adept at fighting in the forests. The frontier guard posts were thus the most instrumental in colonizing the mountainous areas throughout the island of Taiwan. As a consequence, the Japanese colonial government employed the frontier guard posts to govern and expand the economy of the mountain, which was later taken over by the Nationalist government. The new government was supported by American aid to more efficiently exploit the resources of the mountain areas. In the 1980s and '90s, the strategy shifted to postmodern entertainment parks. In other words, from colonization of indigenous lands to forestry and tourist resorts, the frontier guard posts played a central role in exploiting the Taiwanese.

I thus began my investigation into the ruins of frontier guard posts during the Topa incident (1900–1906, during which time the whole tribe was annihilated), in the Northern Forest, which spans 100 km in total. The search into those ruins was driven by a passion I cannot explain; it does not come from a pure longing for knowledge. I see frontier guard posts as non-human agents—objects that guide an artist like myself during the creative process.

I was able to identify surviving descendants, which helped me investigate into the old paths and tribes of Topa. Striving for land sovereignty and transitional justice in general is defined as social activism. Furthermore, *Topa* involved creative practice, such as filming the documentary *Llyong Topa* (River of Topa in Atayal language) between 2018 and 2020, writing and publication, as well as video work and topographic transference of sites into visual objects, which became an installation of archives, *Abandoned Path: A Creator's Geopolitical Method* (2017), and the video work *Taoist Trinity Fairyland* (2018).

The research for the video *Taoist Trinity Fairyland* was initiated when I encountered a dilemma about disclosing an illegal development and deforestation project (Figures 10.5 and 10.6). While investigating Topa, I learned of an old tribal area that had been exploited illegally. A local senate member had cut the top off of a mountain to build a Toad Temple dedicated to a deity of wealth, using the project to attract supporters. During that time, I filed a lawsuit to demolish the huge temple and evoked the Toad Deity Liu Haichan of Chinese folk culture who deals with wealth. To drive away bad fortune, we performed an old ritual of "burning the toad" that is still practiced in Nanchung, Sichuan. My team performed this ritual while moving against the current in a stream of the Topa. This action of mourning and cleansing was edited into a video.

Indeed, the whole *Topa* project is an action of transitional justice to retrieve land rights, supplemented by creative practice. In this process, I benefit from the notion of "Critical Geology," which was also applied to *The Ruin Image Crystal Project*. The two projects share a lot in common. In both, I disclose the process whereby the national apparatus and capitalism (of various types and processes) exploit the land: *The Ruin Image Crystal Project* reveals how individuals experienced the shift of society under global



Figure 10.5 Taoist Trinity Fairyland, single channel video, color, 14'39". © Kao Jun-Honn.



Figure 10.6 Taoist Trinity Fairyland, single channel video, color, 14'39". © Kao Jun-Honn.

neoliberalism (empire without borders); *Topa* is the result of exploitation by classical imperialist violence. These events traumatized both urban and suburban spaces. Thus, these two projects can be described as archaeology into biopolitics through dark ruins; the former is an exploration into urban ruins, while the latter is a creative process on war wreckages in the wilderness. Both aim to raise our awareness of the violence that indigenous clans experienced and to push for transitional justice. They can be described as biopolitics of the "populace/masses," a process from space critique to identarian politics of communities.²

My creative practices deal with various stages of global wars and postcolonial struggles, departing from relevant cases in Taiwan. I am particularly concerned with the "action" and possibility of art. We usually see contemporary art as useful in a useless way—bearing its own political meanings and critiques; but contemporary art cannot be understood without problematizing its production and commodification. Every artist should think through their position on either intervening into the reality or maintaining a distance from it. For me, art is a technique but not my only concern. Art only makes sense when it pushes a concept, emancipates it further, and reacts to actions in reality. Otherwise, art is reduced to a game of esthetic judgment among elites.

Notes

- 1 Translator's note: the author uses "dark ruin" to refer to sites inscribed with colonial violence.
- 2 Many changes happened within those communities. Some descendants of the Topa started to investigate into their history and are now establishing a connection. I also interviewed many elderly people to preserve old lore before the tribe's extinction. I am not trying to take credit: there have been lots of social movements and discussions surrounding transitional justice in recent years which pushed such actions further.

Part III The continuous Cold War



11 Survival tactics within Cold War ideologies

Post-Mao artists on the tides of globalization

Yu-Chieh Li

Introduction: the postsocialist condition of People's Republic of China

Postsocialism in Central and Eastern Europe, as Uros Cvoro points out, did not end with 1989-it is still in a state of transition with the continuation of socialist ideology despite its incongruencies with the current market economy.1 Due to its hybrid and often contradictory nature, the system is sometimes referred to as "neoliberal postsocialism," for which postsocialist China is another notable example. Since Deng Xiaoping's economic reform in 1978, the Chinese Communist Party similarly maintained the socialist ideology in their governance but adopted neoliberalism as the economic policy to create a hybrid system. Deng's economic policy allows some private ownership in business and property. The completion of various property laws since the reform era has also encouraged the purchase of real estate (although legally one can "rent" the land from the government for up to 70 years), whereby the government was able to boost the economy by selling, or temporarily "renting out," properties and encouraging foreign investment. In the new economy that depends on surplus value, capitalism exploited cheap labor, which proved effective for China's rising GDP. The result was the removal of lifelong positions for unit workers at national enterprises, and their replacement by migrant workers that receive fewer benefits. There is no longer a guarantee of jobs and economic equality comparable to that before the reform era. In this hybrid system and with rising social inequality, the government embraced privatization of businesses but never stopped meddling in the market. David Harvey describes this worldwide phenomenon since the late 1970s as "accumulation by dispossession," meaning a peculiar freedom that exploits others for inordinate gains. Such accelerated capitalism was then globalized, and the artists in this chapter benefited from the booming art market that arose with China's turn to neoliberal postsocialism.

In this context, the Cold War in Asia is nowhere close to ending. China has benefited from its hybrid governing system, ascending to the world's second-largest economy, and becoming a de facto leading power that competes with various US interests, including aid to third-world countries in Africa. Suddenly the triumph of democracy in 1989, as announced by

Francis Fukuyama, requires further scrutiny. It is clear that the ideology clash among the world's leading powers has been used by the PRC to promote nationalism at home against the US and its allies, turning it into their biggest national enemy—this had already begun in the Mao era and continued throughout the Trade War. No contemporary artist could ignore this conflict which has been looming since the 1980s. This chapter examines creative practices of the post-Mao period to elucidate the ideological war, as an outcome of China's social and economic adjustment to the globalized free market economy combined with authoritarianism.

The reign of Deng Xiaoping (1978–1994) was the watershed era when the Sino-US relationship finally replaced the USSR-US Axis. After the Sino-Soviet Split (1956–1966), the USSR became China's rival, and their officials observed how China gradually formed alliances with the US and adopted military power to tackle the USSR.² As China strives to become one of the imperial powers, new-left scholars who lived through the democratic student protests of the 1980s are becoming critical of its embrace of neoliberalism (both in the economic sense as well as the western democratic system) as the source of oligarchy—and they often homogenize "neoliberalism" as new imperialist power. Wang Hui describes the new neoliberal economy in China as an authoritative power that clashed with socialist democratic movements initiated by grassroots intellectuals in the late 1980s. Although it was a totalitarian political system under socialism, it still tolerated calls for reform from the intellectuals, manifested in protests throughout the country between 1980 and 1989 demanding democracy and equality for different social classes.³ In Wang's description, social stability in the 1980s could not merely be attributed to government control, intellectuals supported peasants and workers through systematic reform. Wang also pointed out that these intellectuals calling for reform in the 1980s did not go beyond the Cold War framework, as they primarily sought to adopt democratic models from Euroamerica that may be incompatible with those in China, which is why the indigenous democratic movement failed. Wang's peer Gan Yang attacks neoliberal democracy more ruthlessly, which he labels as rightist and identifying with Euroamerican democratic values. His account downplays the Euroamerican democratic system as a new authoritarianism that does not lead to real democracy as it leaves the working class dispossessed.⁴ The two sides-idealistic socialist democracy and looming capitalism-reveal the transformation of the society facing the monopoly of a state-manipulated market, and market-oriented approaches to art that replaced utopian thinking represented by the new left in old socialist paradigms. Different camps within the Chinese Communist Party started to clash at the end of the 1980s, as there was no liberal democratic system to legitimize the market economy.

It was not until the late 1980s that a capitalist economy proliferated. Positivism toward a more liberal society emerged with marketization, but the ruling concept and pedagogical philosophy still followed the Chinese socialist paradigm. Artist Wu Shanzhuan's performance piece at the National Art Museum of China in February 1989 acutely reflected the shift of momentum

toward privatization—he started a small business by selling shrimp that he acquired through friends in the fishing trade in Zhoushan. The work was halted for lack of a license to sell, which indicates how new economic activity was still strictly controlled. It would not be until the 1990s that bigger private businesses could develop—as charted by Wang Guangyi's work with abundant foreign brands. After leaving the state-supported art academy system, Wang secured the capital for his artworks by manipulating representational images of socialism and capitalism, drawn from Chinese and US media. In the process of economic reform, accumulation of wealth became a life pursuit for commoners (which was already against credo of the communist revolution); with a relatively stable life, people developed firm belief in the economic achievements of the government, which was mobilized into new nationalism; this in turn led to the Polit-Sheer-Form Office's works addressing new material life and the loss of socialist comradery. At the same time, historical views of Mao and the bureaucratic system still persist in political rhetoric, as reflected in Song Ta's practice. The works addressed in this chapter appear to be commemorating the Mao era on the material and symbolic levels, but they also found a gap or space for voicing freedom through obscure political references overseas. Their expressions and motivations are far more complex than what appears on the surface-art representing anti-institutional or even anti-authoritarian positions, or, a parody of socialist ideology. Their works have thus become a double-edged sword using Mao-era political rhetoric as a tool, while critiquing the Neoliberal camp of the Cold War as imperialist. Here "imperialism" is adopted from Chinese leftist thinkers, which refers to how the economic system exploits peasants and workers. The rhetoric is developed as a survival strategy and has to do with the educational and social background of Chinese artists.⁵ To live with the system, one must master the political language and make works in line with the party guidelines.⁶

Wang Guangyi: art predicting "globalization?"

Artists who lived through the Cultural Revolution observed how the market economy gave them hope for careers as independent artists. Some successful cases in the 1990s profited from the imagination of freedom of the Western world (US allies). Works they created made a spectacle of imagery from the Cold War media. Wang Guangyi (b. 1957) brings mass culture of the two Cold War camps into the same work of art with paintings and installations that reify the collective creation at the center of China's propaganda culture, particularly before the economic reform. In his *Great Criticism* series (1990–2006), Wang depicts the marriage between American consumerism and Chinese socialist political culture, which illustrates the shift in this period from the credo of working-class people leading the nation to personal freedom through consumerism. Among the works in this series, *Great Criticism—Coca Cola* (1990–1993) became the first piece of contemporary Chinese art to be featured on the cover of *Flash Art* in 1992 (Figure 11.1). In retrospect, it stands as a prediction and admonition that

China would soon be joining the US as a world power.⁷ Oil on canvas, it features rigid strokes, angular transitions, sharp edges, and flat fields of color modeled after woodblock prints-considered to be the most effective medium for distributing the socialist teachings initiated by Lu Xun's woodcut movement in the 1930s.8 A peasant, a soldier, and a worker are depicted in three-quarter profile; their bodies and hands disproportionately larger than their heads-a common feature of Chinese propaganda art. The figures are rendered in an exaggeratedly strong and healthy manner; together they hold a fountain pen, which serves as the pole for a large red flag emblazoned on the lower right with the logo of Coca Cola.9 Wang based his figures, with their firm gazes and strength, on propaganda books circulated for the decoration of public posters and publications during the Cultural Revolution.¹⁰ The primary colors and silkscreened numbers hint at mass production. The depiction with the proletariat holding Little Red Book, the bible of Mao's teaching, in the central position, conveys the political message that the working class under the communist regime is well versed in the foundational teaching of the newly established PRC. Socialist realism-the official figurative styles in communist countries until 1989, is



Figure 11.1 Wang Guangyi, Great Criticism-Coca Cola, 1990-93, oil on canvas, 200 × 200cm. © Wang Guangyi.

appropriated and juxtaposed with symbols of capitalist consumerism, which endows Wang's art with a global look. David Joselit remarks that the postmodernist pastiche of symbols synchronizes different historical momentsnamely the two divergent worldviews in the Cold War, a situation that was about to transition into a liberalized economy.¹¹ For me, far more important than the result of synchronization that opened up a global era is the belatedness of the reception of such ideological struggle. The mass cultures from the two Cold War camps were part of the commoners' life in the 1980s: American jeans were being worn by artists, Coca Cola was being sold in Friendship Hotels. Wang recycled the mass-produced images of socialist propaganda, and ironically transformed pop art's critique of capitalism into a symbol of America's hegemonic role in world politics since the Cold War. What became appropriated were not merely images of official publications but thousands of non-art professionals who transcribed and accumulated the ill-defined style, which had already lost its origin.¹² Although the style of official illustration was first enacted by the ruling class rather than created by the people, the effectiveness of the pictorial schemes comes from its process of production, which is edited, disseminated, affirmed, and internalized through nobodies, and eventually reified into a piece of oil painting circulated on the international art market. The consumption of such art through international exhibitions further converted the propaganda images produced for the masses into a luxury item-which addresses a cross-section of the art market and privatization into the 1990s.

Distinguished by Li Xianting as "Political Pop," Wang's Great Criticism-Coca Cola, Pepsi Cola, and Great Criticism-Marlboro won the first prize in painting at the first art fair in China, the Guangzhou Biennial, in 1992.¹³ Initiated by art historian Lü Peng, the event foresaw the flourishing of the art market in China, which is interpreted by Jane DeBevoise as a chance to leverage state control in art.¹⁴ The jury members especially encouraged the use of East-West symbols, such as Pepsi Cola bottles and other trademarks, in Wang's Great Criticism series. The position derives from mixing the commercial and academic values, since even superficial East-West contrasts may bring commercial profit, a goal set by its organizers to liberate contemporary art from its dependence on the official system.¹⁵ This approach of pairing various symbols to achieve an effect of alienation might appear to be in the Duchampian mode; in the artist's own words, "emptying the content" of symbols that are laden with political meanings emerged as early as the '85 New Wave phenomenon.¹⁶ This discourse on emptiness signifies two layers: one is the bureaucratic empty talk under the Chinese socialist system; the other is a way to avoid censorship while claiming elusive poststructuralist approaches to concepts-or "Zen" talking, which is shared by many Chinese critics and artists. Artists of this generation favored the method of appropriation and a favorable conceptual practice, as the alienation of specific symbols and icons empowers diverse interpretations of works under strict censorship. In the context of the 1990s, the re-interpretation of socialist symbols went hand in hand with the soaring art market.

The first appearance of the Great Criticism series in an art fair context turned the objects of its critique into an irony, foretelling the rise of contemporary Chinese art to a global capitalist power.¹⁷ It was this series inscribed with capitalist brands such as Canon, Marlboro, and Chanel, that earned Wang substantial US dollars and shaped his economic approach in stride with China's economic boom. Critic Andrew Solomon reported in 1993 that Wang's paintings sold for \$20,000 a piece.¹⁸ And Wang himself claims in an interview, "I used to think art is a spiritual object without concrete meanings; however today my art has value both on academic and economic levels, which makes me happy."¹⁹ The Great Criticism series could be interpreted as a declaration of economic victory, by reifying "the people's hand," as reflected in the process of copying the model books, and foretelling how Chinese socialism would not shake the capitalist system. The CCP's mobilization of the masses during the class struggles has been successfully converted into cheap labor for its conversion into a world factory. China's economic and military expansion, and effectiveness in adopting capitalism, gradually threatened the other Cold War camp led by the US.²⁰

Privatization under neoliberalism in China

In Wang's images, capitalism is an alluring but imperial power, and this impression goes back to the economic growth and new capitalist cult of the 1980s and '90s. The government on the one hand promoted a liberal image of itself but on the other disseminated propaganda to fight US imperialism. Harvey has already elaborated on how postsocialist China embraces market economy and exploits land rights of the less privileged, including farmers.²¹ By boosting the real estate market, the government created surplus value as a utopian goal for the middle class to pursue; and Harvey is critical of the result of capitalist accumulation. In his research, China is depicted as a neoliberal power that has authoritarian and imperialist characteristics but also aligns with certain conservative tides in the United States, described as a "democracy of consumption."22 Teresa Wright offers an explanation as to why neoliberal economic reform led not to democratic reform but to strong support for the authoritarian government. As depicted by Wright, the educational system of the early reform era promoted equality by focusing on merit and admitting people who were not financially privileged. This shifted the course of the reform era, as private businessmen gradually earned more than people with higher education.²³ Wang is an example of someone who climbed the social ladder by means of the educational system, failing three entrance exams before finally gaining admittance to the China Academy of Fine Arts. His trajectory from being a railway worker in Northeast China to an art professor at Zhuhai Academy had to do with the flourishing economy in the Pearl River Delta due to privatization in the late 1980s. With the rise of the art market in the 1990s, he finally became an independent artist with a stable income from his art. As Wright states, at the start of the reform era, the centralized system-despite its downsides-still offered a basic safety net of workers' rights.²⁴ With the shift to a market economy, local businessmen and common people would only

support democratization if it benefited their social-economic mobility and material well-being. Socialist legacy, market forces, and industrialization reinforced class inequalities, which in turn stabilized one-party governance. This background shaped Wang's view of the scene as a transformation from state cult to an embracing of Western products, in which workers were consumed as national emblems and deprived of steady employment by the restructuring of state-owned enterprises in the 1990s.

Another feature of postsocialist status in China is the state-centralized art system that split experimental artists' efforts between the pursuit of autonomy and serving the people. It is impossible to identify a clear-cut boundary between official artists and avant-garde or "underground" practices, as the state-system infiltrates not just life but the ways in which art and culture are practiced and facilitated. Artists were all employed by the state between 1980 and the mid 1980s.²⁵ According to Julia Andrews, Chinese artists had to live with the state system in order to retain a certain level of artistic autonomy, as being a professional artist in China meant receiving state support financially or through the state-sanctioned art associations. Artists worked in a world of "centralized social engineering," with "far-reaching social, economic, and political policies of the official sector; the Communist remolding of Chinese art has thus had every opportunity to gain the upper hand."26 In the 1980s, the birth of avant-garde art relied heavily on support from official sectors. Wang Guangyi, for example, received funding from Zhuhai Painting Academy to organize the first conference on contemporary experimental art in 1986. The Pond Society's first experimental exhibition 85 New Space in 1985 was another example; it started out as a semi-official artist group and received some state funding. The group was able to put on installations and artworks with semi-abstract forms, which would have been criticized in some circumstances in the same period. Their work opened up some significant space for challenging authority, though only briefly, when the Art Academies reopened after the Cultural Revolution. Zhang Peili's well-known video 30x30 (1988), for example, depicts cyclic narratives, with the artist repeatedly breaking a mirror and gluing it back together. The absurd repetition of empty political gestures rejects ideologies and discourses. This positivism and artistic freedom waned with the failure of student protests and calls for democracy in 1989, and the emergence of the art market in the 1990s, replaced by satisfaction of the growing GDP. Painters outside the state system such as Zhu Jinshi and Zhang Wei were generalized as "dissidents" in the Euroamerican art world in the 1990s, who are now earning capital by selling colorful canvases. Meanwhile, artworks that cited socialist symbols were turned into commercial devices.²⁷ One sees here how opening the market led to interdependence between socialism and capitalism.

Cold War images as propaganda

Already an independent artist who enjoys international fame, Wang continued to translate visual propaganda into three-dimensional works. The *Cold*

War Aesthetics series (2007–2008) reflects on the brainwashing and the party attitude toward the "West" before the reform era (Figures 11.2 and 11.3). It recycles non-artistic visual material from public service brochures regarding wartime evacuation into sculptures. Video projections of atom bombing in Hiroshima appear beside a group sculpture of Chinese commoners molded in fiberglass, drawing connections between war memories from Japan and China. Painted in primary colors, the figures perform various instructive gestures demonstrating self-protection. Some evacuate, some lay on the ground face-down, some swat at flies, wear gas masks. Their physiognomies and bodies are not individualized, and their gestures are mechanical; they look rough and genderless like the dull, anatomically ill-defined figures in textbooks that aim to be informative. The roughness is due to the fact that the illustrations were simplified and mass produced, to spread instructions or ideologies quickly and effectively. The lack of physiognomy symbolizes not just the socialist status but the anonymity of the workers who created China's GDP: each person is considered a cog in a larger machine, and their bodies represent the national whole rather than any individual self. In addition to the sculpture, a series of oil paintings in 2007 contains illustrations taken from such propaganda in the 1960s about how to evacuate, hide, wear a gas mask, and treat radiation sickness.²⁸ Though nuclear weapons are the quintessential symbol of the Cold War, looking in retrospect, it is clear that a hot war as such did not really happen on Chinese territory.²⁹ The Cold War in this context became the structural exploitation of the poor and lower class by encouraging nationalism and continuous control of information. The dissemination of such images conveyed wartime ideology, to unite the new nation against Western imperialist powers, more than providing essential knowledge of safety.

Politics as aesthetic forms

The control of public space continued after the reform era, and the PSFO responded to the widespread deprivation of Mao-era community life through seemingly obscure art language. Several years younger than Wang Guanyi's



Figure 11.2 Wang Guangyi, *Cold War Aesthetic–People Living in Fear*, 2007–2008, Installation with colored fiberglass and video, dimension of sculptures 215 × 60 × 30 cm each. © Wang Guangyi.



Figure 11.3 Wang Guangyi, Cold War Aesthetic–People Living in Fear, 2007-2008, Installation with colored fiberglass and video, dimension of sculptures 215 × 60 × 30 cm each. © Wang Guangyi.

generation, the members of Polit-Sheer-Form Office (PSFO) rode the wave of China's economic boom in the real estate market, gaining an international advantage, as can be seen from the birthdates of its members: Leng Lin (b. 1965), Song Dong (b. 1966), Hong Hao (b. 1964), Liu Jianhua (b. 1962), Xiao Yu (b. 1965). The displacement of political symbols in works

by postsocialist artists is often read as a passive revolt against ideology and content. PSFO identifies creative practice as reflecting pure forms of politics, which are signifiers laden with various contents within their social-political contexts.³⁰ They create situations that address the changing values under socialist market economy, and sometimes craft their work with pleasing and non-political Chinese symbols, such as non-action in Zen philosophy and objects that signify communal living. The emphasis on symbols with rich visualization of socialist community life is open to various interpretations and is considered safe in most exhibition contexts.

The failure to reform individuality is a trait of the neoliberal state of contemporary Chinese life. Consumerism enables the young generation to access commercial goods and even name-brands, yet the power of capitalism has also become instrumental in monitoring individuals in the name of national security, such as the apps Ali-pay and Wechat. PSFO's work traces the socialist convention of non-individuality and how personality has continued to be suppressed after the economic reform.

A problematic feature of contemporary China is its failure to reform individuality with visions of freedom and democracy beyond material life. The PSFO celebrates the socialist convention of non-individuality while also resisting straightforward political messages in their visualization of daily scenes. Mr. Zheng (2007) appears to be a portrait mourning the loss of personal political rights: a computer-generated portrait that combines the facial features of each group member: the hair of Leng Lin, the mouth of Song Dong, the eyebrows of Hong Hao, the eyes of Liu Jianhua, and the face of Xiao Yu (Figure 11.4). Mr. Zheng's hair is combed neatly to the side. He wears a white shirt with a blue PSFO badge on a gray background. The size of the picture evokes the standard Mao portrait, as if the party leader has swapped positions with a commoner. Mr. Zheng's look is solemn yet plain, perhaps even bureaucratic or pretentious, each of which implies strong political messages when one discovers that the name "Zheng," a homophone of the first character in "Polit-Sheer-Form (Zheng chun ban)," is also the first character in "Politics (zheng zhi)."

The PSFO's artistic language is full of references to the superficiality of performing political culture. The group calls itself an "office," a dull name referring to an official unit; thus, its self-presentation is already laden with political implications. The blue of the badge is adopted as its representative color, applied to various tools and props at performances and as keepsakes of the group. In contrast to the red and yellow used on the party emblem of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), blue is a rather obscure color that avoids direct connections to a specific political camp. The elimination of individual politics is vivid in the visual language.

PSFO members are beneficiaries of the new economic system that introduced international buyers of Chinese art between the international market and state control. The gap between their claims about humanism in socialist life, and their citation of Mao-era political culture, is intentionally kept, to maintain critical voices as cultural capital. As artists who joined the boom of



Figure 11.4 Polit-Sheer-Form Office, Mr. Cheng, color photo, 120 × 155.7 cm, 2007. © Polit-Sheer-Form Office.

the global contemporary art market in the 1990s, PSFO's work maneuvers between political symbols and nostalgia for communal life, opening a space for cultural negotiation. Much of their work centers on the idea of "being together" that comes from the loss of intimacy and trust among neighbors and friends with China's economic reform.³¹ These are critical of the privatization that created interpersonal boundaries. Although the five artists grew up with vague memories of the Cultural Revolution, community life under socialist economics was still part of their childhood and is dramatized in their performances. Documentations of their group activities become visual objects.³² Restaurant menus and travel tickets are reproduced on wallpaper and installed as installation. Work-out facilities of public sport spaces in residential areas are recreated for visitors to try out (Figure 11.5). Someone who is well versed in contemporary art language might consider these works participatory in anglophone art terms, but such equipment more importantly signifies urban change and how it affects community living. Here, the incongruency between socialist and neoliberal values is revealed in these awkward and artificial situations. For example, danwei-the standardized living units that were often identical in design and thus easier for local officials to manage-were strictly controlled. The diversity of urban life in the early reform era waned drastically; in homogeneity with danwei today, which involves both domestic living demand and public activities, through which the middle class created their picture of well-being.

Polit-Sheer-Form is a series of documentations in oil painting showing the artists eating, drinking, or hanging out together (Figure 11.6). The illustrations borrow the grayish tones and celebrative atmosphere of propaganda painting: usually with a scene of collective activity and a line of socialist moral instruction or a slogan. Although they evoke constructed happiness, they



Figure 11.5 Polit-Sheer-Form Office, Polit-Sheer-Form-16, oil on canvas, 200 × 300 cm, 2007. © Polit-Sheer-Form Office.



Figure 11.6 Polit-Sheer-Form Office, Do the Same Good Deeds, performance on Times Square, November 3, 2014. © Polit-Sheer-Form Office.

are based on haptic, nonsensical moments caught on camera. This series employs the visual language of socialist propaganda to narrate life under neoliberal economy, such as group trips to tourist sites and restaurants. Hong Hao explains that the oil paintings and artist book of this series are inspired by comic strips which they enjoyed in childhood. Yet unlike these comics, PSFO's images are devoid of linear narratives and instead show scenes of daily life, such as cityscapes, travel vehicles, and dining places. These images bear political messages similar to those of propaganda posters: people live a happy life of prosperity.³³ Astonishingly, propaganda and the PFSO are similar in that neither provides realistic information, content, or personalized styles. In their view, contemporary artists became responsible for finding links between culture and life in art. The emphasis on pure artistic intent comes from the experience of evading censorship, which means political interpretations are often dissolved in the name of art.³⁴ An example is PSFO's artist book published in 2006, which turns communal life into humorous comic strips. The sketches show the five artists visiting different sites, including a Mao Zedong Souvenir Shop and a historical archive of the Communist Revolution.³⁵ Those sites once embodied Maoist thought and party ideology but became the backdrop for neoliberal postsocialism, holding symbolic meaning as traces of Chinese socialist reform that only led to greater economic inequality.

The mundane, prosaic quality of communal life is the collective's aesthetic source, as claimed in their manifesto: "We have personally experienced in the later part of the political movements a stage of formalism lacking in content, and from within this apparent 'form' of social movements we have gained fresh notions of aesthetics."³⁶ This lack of "content" is the result of the superficial performance of Maoist political culture: one has to conform to party teachings, which follow certain norms and procedures without caring for essential results. Do the Same Good Deeds (2015) delineates the collectivist spirit encouraged by the state (Figure 11.7). It was a performance in which four hundred participants washed the ground of Manhattan's Times Square, armed with mops and buckets in PSFO's blue. The absurdity of this action lies in the ill-defined "good" deeds that were practiced in vain: the open-air square will not be cleaner when mopped. The unnecessary gesture even prevents the normal flow of traffic on site. The idea of performing trivial work comes from the political experience under the one-party system: one never questioned what one was told to do, and the effect of deeds concerns their use as propaganda. The slogan of good deeds refers to Lei Feng, a model citizen in CCP's propaganda. In the media, he is described as a good person always doing good things, such as being helpful, loval, and obedient to the party.³⁷ Yet, he makes no concrete contribution to the nation other than never questioning authority. PSFO critiques the superficiality of this goodness. Time Square is symbolic of capitalist commercial success. By bringing the everyday activity of mopping and the socialist connotations of this group event to this spot, where free service is unthinkable, the artists acted out the contradictions between the communist motto of serving the people and



Figure 11.7 Polit-Sheer-Form Office, Fitness for all, installation view at Queens Museum, 2014. © Polit-Sheer-Form Office.

the consumerist drive that keeps the contemporary economy running. As curious onlookers watched, the performers appeared to be genuinely happy, which created a live show that dramatized the politics of socialist service.

From Mao to Shanzhai art

Song Ta's (b. 1988) generation grew up in a wealthier society compared with Wang Guangyi with a relatively liberal education. Although propaganda was common and governmental control over public space was strict, there was no firewall and relatively little Internet censorship before the Beijing Olympics in 2008. The state-funded art system was replaced by a soaring economy, a proliferation of commercial galleries, and a general sense of nihilism in the contemporary art scene. Shanzhai (cheap imitations of name brands) products satisfied the material needs of various social classes. Chairman Mao's portrait became a collective memory and an irony of the workers' revolution that eventually was instrumentalized and exploited to benefit a few elites. Song poked fun at this emblem that catered to the ambience of globalization in which he had grown up: China's capitalist economy was gaining momentum, the nation embraced foreign tourists who consumed the Cultural Revolutionary culture, and the old infrastructure and ideologies that still existed in daily life became incongruent with the capitalist economy. His early works paint a humorous picture of how the postsocialist state system infiltrated ways of thinking. Stories of commoners-such as bureaucrats, ugly pageants as participatory performance, and an installation made of school children's test sheets that scored below the cut-off scores-present mentalities and ideologies under

state control and negligence of individuality. In the following, I will explore Song's idiosyncratic appropriation of the Mao icon to discuss how this image plays with the Euroamerican expectation for Chinese art and also how he sees the simulacrum and *Shanzhai* production as a creative process.

Why do they never take color photos (2013–2016) is a two-stage re-enactment of a statue of Mao as young poet. This romanticized icon calls to mind various moments of revolution and nationalism, which ironically have been made into a consumerist product today. Song made reproductions of the Orange Isle monument in Changsha—a bust designed by Li Ming, an art professor at Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts. Completed in 2009, it is the largest Mao sculpture in China to date.³⁸ Although an official project, its iconography as a young and melancholic poet with a subtle frown is rather unusual, showing that Li aimed to debunk pure political narratives and focus on the romantic sentiment of the Communist Revolution. Made of granite, the youthful Mao is 32-meters high, wears long hair and frowns. Song transferred the monument into a series of actions from 2011 to 2016. First, he secretly placed a replica of the bust of Mao near a lake on the Guangdong Academy of Arts campus, cast from a miniature model that Li Ming made as a maquette for the Orange Isle monument (Figure 11.8). The residents did not react to this intervention, assuming that the statue had been placed there officially. After several days, Song sprayed symbolic colors on the sculpture and video-recorded the process: red for the foundation, standing for the Communist Party, and a saturated, commercial blue for the Chinese long shirt. The coloring makes the sculpture more vivid but also desecrates it. The erection of the sculpture did not cause a stir on campus, indicating how accustomed people have become to propaganda culture and control of public space.



Figure 11.8 Song Ta, Why do they never take colour photos, 2013-16. © Song Ta.

The playful act was not a parody of the leader's cult, Song claims, but a serious engagement with modern Chinese history which should be considered a grassroots culture.³⁹ The political image is appropriated and continues to be assimilated into various contexts of contemporary life: the process of copying the monument and relocating it to residential England shows how the icon of Mao mutates from a national monument into a landscape of public sculptures under capitalist economy. The project was re-performed in the CASS Sculptural Foundation, in a garden in West Sussex, UK, where Song erected a second replica of Li Ming's monument in gray fibreglass produced by the same factory (Figure 11.9). The occasion was A Beautiful Disorder (2016), a group show of 18 internationally renowned artists from Hong Kong, mainland China and Taiwan, who submerged their different agendas into the category of public sculpture. At the vernissage, several performers sprayed the sculpture's surroundings, including the green trees, in a neutral shade of gray, creating an artificially monochromatic scene.⁴⁰ The gray encircles the monument as if filling a flat canvas, returning the historical image to its symbolic status.⁴¹ Next to the installation, Song showed video documentation of the first sculpture he made in Guangzhou. Young dancers performed hip-hop dance before the sculpture at CASS. This interaction led to the re-institutionalization of the icon and certainly some frustration in viewing it. The editing on an official monument and its dialogue with contemporary dance juxtaposes the historical Mao with subcultures but cunningly keeps a distance from it. The artist attempts to bid farewell to the sole association of Mao's authoritative image in the mainstream national narratives. First, the iconography of the youthful Mao is based primarily on his identity as a poet, which reminds us of the aesthetic dimension, rather than the function of art in socialism. Painting it with colors decenters and



Figure 11.9 Song Ta, Why do they never take colour photos, 2013-16. © Song Ta.

humanizes this modern icon. The various iterations in South China and in West Sussex synced two temporalities and cultural-ideological spaces. The icon's strong symbolism does not create incongruences with the idyllic green of the English garden. There, the statue looks not unlike other European modernist sculptures—and is thus a perfect example of how art responds to the needs of its audience in globalization.

Since the early 1990s, the attention of international audiences has been caught by images of Mao in Pop style and the big bald heads of realist artists with sarcastic smiles which are interpreted as dissident voices under Socialist hegemony.⁴² The resurrection of Mao portraits in contemporary art has sparked heated discussions over its representation. Just like Warhol's repetition of famous icons, Mao has been re-contextualized as a global symbol widely through the global media, creating a simplified image of the Cold War. Art historians have identified the turn of Mao's iconography since the Cultural Revolution as a transformation from a monolithic cult to diverse receptions of the history of Maoism, which in turn suggests how visual production became complicit with neoliberalism. Barbara Mittler argues that the Cultural Revolutionary culture involves different motivations, domestic and foreign transformations, as well as official and non-official practices.⁴³ Dai Jinhua notes a displacement of political power with consumerism, as Mao is made into a symbol of modern China available for sale at souvenir shops with the country's opening up.⁴⁴ Dal Lago analyzes different pictorial languages that transformed the monolithic portrait of Mao into antithetical ideologies.⁴⁵ Valjakka describes the phenomenon of caricaturing Mao as a parody of modern Chinese history.46 In these studies, the undemonized process of the Mao icon is central to the argument that China's monolithic leader cult is liberated by individual gazes-which I consider an overinterpretation, as there is little individualism with privatization and consumerist culture. Song's recycled Mao image neither narrates liberation of socialist history nor the authority; rather, it makes use of the flexibility of political symbols maneuvered in the cross-cultural dialogue to cater to Euroamerican gaze, and like Wang Guangyi, is an admonition of the cooption of economic and political life in contemporary China. It references the youthful Mao as a melancholic poet, summoning a less materialist image of socialism.⁴⁷ Particularly in the depictions of CCP's Jinggangshan period of the late 1920s and early 1930s, a heroic sentiment is apparent in the leader's portraits, with scenic mountain views and his gaze on the distant horizon, a convention with possible origins in German Romantic painting. This iconography can be perfectly assimilated into the English garden, and further reminds us of the utopian vision of early socialism, which contrast with its process of materialization. The readymade sculpture was cast from molds in a factory to negotiate with consumerist-dominated globalization-Mao here becomes Duchamp's urinal, which can be endlessly copied in the contexts of capitalism and postmodernism. The adaptation of this image is a revisionism of Mao's caricature prevalent in the international art and souvenir market since the 1990s and shows little hope of liberating and reforming the mainstream narrative of PRC.

The various replications of the Mao monument remind us of *Shanzhai art*—a special copycat culture that enables specific luxurious foreign products to flow to the market, as cheaper alternatives for middle and lower class to consume. Shanzhai is sometimes interpreted as a creative way to fight capitalism and the monopolies of certain entrepreneurs.⁴⁸ More often, it is considered beneficial as it fulfills materialist freedom for the lower class. In reality, it allows minimal creativity as the consumerist effect is solely based on poor copying. This phenomenon is tied to the production and consuming power of the working class in China. As the Shanzhai Mao affirms, the authenticity of Chinese identity, Song's "artistic" image, becomes even more tied to the contemporary labor behind the global economy. The simulation of mass culture cunningly reminds us of the current production context of China being a world factory the production mode introduced in the art world. The spread of the Mao icon is no longer related to class struggle or leftist positions; rather, it emphasizes the exploitation of materials and images in the course of globalization.

Conclusion: the ideological war never ended

In the New Cold War equilibrium, China has gradually replaced Russia as the enemy of the US; yet, both have their own agendas for globalization. This competition is the backdrop of Chinese artists' practices in the hybrid neoliberal socialism, which continued authoritarianism and embraced capitalism. Since China's open-up policy, economic life has undergone drastic change, much of which is incongruent with the old cynical socialist values; yet in public space and bureaucratic cultures, socialist instructions and the political rhetoric are still followed, creating a gap between economic and technological progression and the state-dominated socialist system. Post-Mao artists have responded to the contemporary condition of rootlessness; their simulation of Mao era political culture is a below the cut-off symptom of the Cold War that de facto connects them with the global art circuit, and it also creates approachable identity as authentic Chinese. The political symbols that the artists adopted are double-edged swords, which have the potential to continuously mutate and open up biased interpretations within the Cold War binary: the bureaucratic depiction of PSFO's political portraits can be considered a critique of the monolithic Chinese culture or the party guidelines as it had annulled through the introduction of new economic policy. These "war" images ultimately depict the cooption of consumerist and propaganda culture in contemporary China, and further criticality attuned to the places where they show works. The artists' staging of the socialist past could appear at times to be more nostalgic than sarcastic. Surely, Wang Guangyi's art that materializes the mass culture and Song Ta's sprayed Mao sculpture are genuine tributes to the proletariat in class struggle and their original utopian visions. They also poke fun, however, at the socialist past positioned in its neoliberal socialist present. Such work reacts to socialist teaching and institutional critique in the contemporary art world, to survive in neoliberal socialism. They are testimonies of how Chinese artists still struggle to create a space for political voices domestically and overseas.

It should be noted that liberal democracy did not become a norm with China's growing GDP, and also that the government even at times used contemporary Chinese art as a tool to boost its own appearance of liberalism-proving that it allows plenty of freedom of expression. Co-operation between the state and the commercial art system continues to thrive, which led to the development of the 798 art district in Beijing and Shanghai's West Bund, which introduced branches of European mega museums such as the Pompidou, Ultimately, the global art market commodified art's free form of expression. Coming from a different ideological space, Chinese artists not only took part in art's globalization, they also developed rhetoric to articulate critiques of authoritarian powers. However, the current reception of contemporary Chinese art in the Neoliberal West remains stuck at the binary of liberal versus authoritarian worlds. This is an ideological war in which all artists who strive to be international inevitably participate. If we fail to identify the survival tactics of Post-Mao artists in their visual production, our understanding of art cannot be pushed beyond the borders.

Notes

- 1 Uros Cvoro, Transitional Aesthetics: Contemporary Art at the Edge of Europe (Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2018), 10–11.
- 2 James Hershberg, Sergey Radchenko, Péter Vámos, and David Wolff, "The Interkit Story: A Window into the Final Decades of the Sino-Soviet Relationship," *Cold War International History Projection, Working Paper #63*, February 2011, 19.
- 3 Wang Hui, "'Xinziyou zhuyi' de lishi genyuan ji qi pipan—zailun dangdai Zhongguo dalu de sixiang zhuangkuang yu xiandanxing wenti" (The Historical Origin of 'Neoliberalism' in Mainland China and It's Critique-Re-examining the Intellectual Condition in Contemporary Mainland China and the Question of Modernity)," *Social Studies Quarterly in Taiwan* 42 (June 2001): 1–65.
- 4 Gan Yang, "Zhongguo ziyou zuopai de youlai" (The Original of Liberal Leftists in China)," *China Labour Bulletin*, August 5, 2002, https://bit.ly/33psTeA.
- 5 This is reflected in several exhibitions about Post-Mao art since the 1980s which depict the East-West and Neoliberalist-Socialist binary after *China-Avantgarde* (Beijing, 1989); *China-Avant-Garde* (Berlin, 1993).
- 6 See Yan Geng, *Mao's Images: Artists and China's 1949 Transition* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2018).
- 7 Wang created different versions of Great Criticism—Coca Cola between 1990 and 1993, some oil on canvas and some woodblock prints. This version is reproduced in Flash Art's issue 162. The Great Criticism series was continued until around 2007. Wang exhibited a triptych of Mao Zedong covered with black grids at the China Avant-garde exhibition in 1989, which resulted in him leaving the position in Zhuhai. He relocated to School of Industrial Design in Wuhan. See Karen Smith, Nine Lives: The Birth of Avant-garde Art in New China (Hong Kong, Timezone 8, 2008), 63.
- 8 In the woodblock prints, especially as developed by the German Expressionists, Lu Xun saw an effective tool for exposing the social ills of China. Although Lu Xun was never an official member of the Communist Party, his emphasis on the exploitation of peasants and the working class fit well with the revolutionary message of the CCP. In 1937, after Lu Xun's death, the Lu Xun Academy of Arts was established at the Communist base of Yan'an to instruct artists in the art of propaganda.

- 9 Coca Cola was imported to China in 1920 but only lasted until 1930. It reentered in 1979 and was sold at first only in "Friendship" hotels.
- 10 For example, Western Shanghai Workers' Palace ed., Model Illustrations for Posters at Factories (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing, 1975).
- 11 David Joselit, *Heritage and Debt: Art in Globalization* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2020), 31.
- 12 This was confirmed as his interest during the author's interview in August 2013.
- 13 See Jane DeBevoise, *Between State and Market*, 235; Political Pop not only adopts consumerist or mass cultural symbols, it also translates ideologies into popular symbols. Li Xianting, "Major Trends in the Development of Contemporary Chinese Art," trans. Joan Tate, in *China's New Art: Post–1989*, ed., Johnson Chang (Hong Kong: Hanart TZ Gallery, 1993), XXII.
- 14 The Guangzhou Biennale Art Fair was established by Lü Peng in light of the lack of an art market in China and the abundance of restrictions; the art fair was not successful, but it was at this time that foreign foundations and collectors started to buy his works.
- 15 The Guangzhou Biennale Art Fair was established by Lü Peng in light of the lack of an art market in China and the abundance of restrictions; the art fair was not successful, but it was at this time that foreign foundations and collectors started to buy his works.
- 16 Yu-Chieh Li, "Interview with Wang Guangyi," audio recording, Beijing, August 25, 2013.
- 17 In 2011, China became the world's second-largest economy, after the US. See Hugo Duncan, "China Overtakes Japan to Become World's Second-Biggest Economy (and will power ahead of US in a decade)," February 15, 2011, accessed October 29, 2019, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1356788/ China-worlds-second-biggest-economy-Japan-falls-40-years.html.
- 18 Andrew Solomon, "Their Irony, Humour (and Art) Can Save China," *The New York Times*, December 19, 1993, section 6, 42–51, 66, accessed January 10, 2018. http://www.nytimes.com/1993/12/19/magazine/their-irony-humor-and-art-can-save-china.html?pagewanted=allm.
- 19 Wang Youshen, "Zouxiang zhenshi de shenghuo-Wang Guangyi da jizhe wen" (Heading for Real Life-An Interview with Wang Guangyi)," *Beijing Youth Daily*, March 22, 1991, 6.
- 20 Yu-Chieh Li, "Interview with Wang Guangyi."
- 21 See David Harvey, "Neoliberalism with Chinese Characteristics'," (Oxford University Press, 2005), 120–51; here 146.
- 22 David Harvey, A Brief History of Neoliberalism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 125.
- 23 Teresa Wright, Accepting Authoritarianism: State-Society Relations in China's Reform Era (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 61–2.
- 24 Ibid., 163.
- 25 Jane DeBevoise, Between State and Market (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 74.
- 26 Julia Andrews. *Painters and Politics in the Republic of China*, 1949–1979 (Berkeley; Los Angeles; Oxford: University of California Press, 1995), 400.
- 27 A similar situation happened in the USSR, see Piotr Piotrowski, in *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 58.
- 28 Gary G. Xu, "Wang Guangyi, Precisely," in *Thing-in-Itself*; Utopia, Pop and Personal Theology, ed. Huang Zhuan (Lingnan Art Publishing), 473.
- 29 Except for at the border of Vietnam in 1979.
- 30 "Pure Forms of Politics" is a slogan painted on their oil painting series, *Polit-Sheer-Form* (2007).
- 31 Shen Ruiyun, Song Dong, Xiao Yu, Liu Jianhua, and Hong Hao, "Polit Sheer Form!" November 3, 2014, Asia Art Archive in America, accessed January 28, 2017, http://www.aaa-a.org/programs/polit-sheer-form-2/.

- 32 Shen et al., "Polit Sheer Form!".
- 33 Mathieu Borysevicz ed., We Are Polit-Sheer-Form (Hong Kong: Blue Kingfisher Limited, 2011), 76–91.
- 34 Shen Ruiyun et al., "Polit Sheer Form!"
- 35 PSFO, Polit-Sheer-Form: Only One Wall, 2005, 78-79, 160-61.
- 36 Polit-Sheer-Form Office, "Only One Wall," in We Are Polit-Sheer-Form, ed. Mathieu Borysevicz (Hong Kong: Blue Kingfisher Limited, 2011), 31.
- 37 Chen, Tung-lei. "Lei Feng, A Fine Example of Chinese Youth," in *Communist China 1949 to the Present*, eds. Franz Schurman and Orville Schell (New York: Random House, 1967), 450–56; John Fraser, *The Chinese: Portrait of a People* (Collins: 1980), 100–102.
- 38 The public monument was completed in 2009. Its designer, Li Ming, did not want to repeat the well-known icons of Mao produced mainly from 1966 to 1976. He followed Mao as a poet. See: 'Sculptor Li Ming: I want to create a unique Mao,' *Changsha Evening Post*, November 6, 2009, accessed January 30, 2017, archived at http://news.ifeng.com/history/zhiqing/huodong/200911/1106_6853_ 1423811.shtml. See also, Si Maogeng, "A Sculpture of Mao Standing at the Orange Ile, Its Height is 32 Meters, Presenting a Heroic Image of the Great Man," *People's Daily Overseas*, November 02, 2009, 2.
- 39 Li, "Interview with Song Ta."
- 40 The sculpture, including the platform, is 7 meters high, 13 meters long. Li, "Interview with Song Ta." See also: the artist statement on CASS Sculpture Foundation's website, accessed January 28, 2017, http://www.sculpture.org. uk/artist/song-ta.
- 41 Song Ta, "Artist Statement," September 2015, unpublished.
- 42 Cynical realism (wanshi xianshi zhuyi) is a term that first appeared in curator Li Xianting's writings.
- 43 Barbara Mittler, A Continuous Revolution: Making Sense of Cultural Revolution Culture (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).
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12 Performance, memory, and affect in Yamashiro Chikako's *Mud Man*

Rebecca Jennison

Introduction

Our visions of history are drawn from diverse sources: not just from the narratives of history books but also from photographs and historical novels, from newsreel footage, comic books and, increasingly, from electronic media like the Internet. Out of this kaleidoscopic mass of fragments we make and remake patterns of understanding which explain the origins and nature of the world in which we live.¹

... [O]n a more fundamental level, history can only be a bodily experience.²

In *The Past Within Us*, Tessa Morris-Suzuki considers ways in which representations of history in a range of media play a critically important role in how we remember and make sense of history and in turn shape our understanding of the "world in which we live." In her analysis of fiction, photography, films, comic books, and other media, Morris-Suzuki also stresses that "Our relationship with the past is not simply forged through factual knowledge or an intellectual understanding of cause and effect. It also involves imagination and empathy."³ She looks closely at how photographs or films "can evoke empathy and identity," or become "a departure point for thinking about film as an expression of the past."⁴ Although Morris-Suzuki does not discuss works by contemporary visual artists, as the editors of this volume rightly note, works by such artists can also be points of departure for speculation about and imaginative and "affective" ways to understand history, and in the context of this volume, of the Cold War and postcolonial struggles in East and Southeast Asia.

Yamashiro Chikako (b.1976) is a contemporary artist based in Okinawa who draws on a variety of materials and techniques—including documentary film, poetry, and music—to create innovative performance, video, film, and installation works that communicate to viewers in powerful, visceral ways. At the same time, Yamashiro's works can be seen as what the editors suggest: "windows into some lesser-known aspects of the Cold War" that can "deepen our awareness of multiple, concrete, coexisting, yet disparate spaces within the reality we inhabit." Like other artists discussed in this volume, Yamashiro

is continuing to develop new and innovative practices and techniques that Brett de Bary asserts resonate "on multiple registers and in multiple expressive modalities, going beyond the conventional writing and rewriting known as history" and that "can only be a bodily experience."⁵

From early in her career, Yamashiro has made innovative use of performance and engagement in site-specific photographic and video works. As her practice has evolved from the use of photos and single-channel recordings of live performance in sites such as graveyards or along the fences of US military installations, she has come to produce more complex works using actors, multi-perspective and multi-vocal film, sound editing, and installation. Here, I aim to briefly discuss selected earlier works that highlight Yamashiro's development over the last two decades and then focus on the three-channel film and sound installation Mud Man (Tsuchi no Hito), first shown at the Aichi Triennale in 2016.6 Mud Man makes innovative use of performance, sound, and moving image and was partly filmed in Jeju Island, Korea. The work makes voices and memories of Okinawans tangible, but at the same time, alerts us to the entangled colonial histories beyond Okinawa and their legacies that underlie present-day tensions in the region. As I will try to show, Yamashiro's imaginative exploration and uses of film technique both literally and figuratively take us on a journey into sites of significance in the Cold War.

Growing to sense Okinawa: fences, seaweed, meat, and mud

In a time which continues to try to jettison and erase, as if they were just noise, those memories which come to terms with and struggle with its past, Okinawa's present remains a fraught one.⁷

I first came to know of Yamashiro Chikako and her work through the Asia, Politics, and Art project initiated by poet and political philosopher, Lee Chonghwa in 2006. This project brought practicing artists together with scholars, curators, and activists of diverse backgrounds working in Japan to consider new meanings of "Asia," "politics," and "art," and to probe connections between these terms to see links between past histories and ongoing geopolitical tensions in the region. Okinawan writer and scholar Shinjō Ikuo writes that the project helped us to see those whose lives have been "erased from the front stage of Asian politics," and called for artists to continue to make works that might help us hear the voices of those

who wait with bated breath in a disappearing 'past' for a time that will recall their lived experience in word, sound and form. What else is asked of us other than to listen to the silent call of the mourned?⁸

Yamashiro's works might well be seen as one artist's response to Shinjō's call. I first saw Yamashiro's installation of photographs and the single-channel video *Seaweed Woman* (2008) in an exhibition titled, *Okinawa*

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Prismed: 1872–2008 (2008). This work had evolved out of a series titled *Okinawa Complex Volume I* that included another short video work, "Shore Connivance—Shore of Ibano, Urasoe City" filmed at what Yamashiro called "*Mokunin hama*," a stretch of undeveloped shoreline where local people gathered to fish and spend their free time. The term *mokunin* derives from *mokunin kōsaku chi*, or "tacitly-approved farmlands," referring to lands along the fences of US military installations that are technically off limits, but where local residents can continue to engage in fishing and agriculture. As we will see, the notion of "*mokunin* spaces" comes to play an important role in this artist's work. One segment of *Seaweed Woman* was filmed in Oura Bay in Henoko, where for more than 20 years non-violent protestors have continued to try and stop the construction of an offshore landing strip adjacent to Camp Schwab, a so-called a "replacement facility" for Marine Corps Air Station Futenma.⁹

I still vividly recall the powerful images, movements, and sounds of the character "Seaweed Woman", performed by Yamashiro who was filmed swimming and diving in the waters of Oura Bay. The shifting camera angle conveys to viewers the sensations of floating, drifting, swimming with the creature (Figure 12.1) swathed in seaweed; we follow her as she crosses the invisible border between local fishing waters and those controlled by the US and begin to look back at the shoreline from "her" point of view, breathing with her as she swims and dives in the cloudy waters and encounters the Japan Coast Guard boat patrolling to disperse peaceful protestors in canoes.

Camp Schwab and Marine Corps Air Station Futenma are just two of more than 20 US bases located in Okinawa that makes up only 0.6% of the total land area of Japan. More problematically, of all US military facilities in Japan, about 74% are located in Okinawa. In addition, 20 air spaces and 28



Figure 12.1 Yamashiro Chikako, Seaweed Woman, 2008 version. Video, 7'15", © Yamashiro Chikako, courtesy of Yumiko Chiba Associates.

water areas surrounding the archipelago are designated for the exclusive use of the US Forces for their training purposes.¹⁰ Issues of territorial control of islands and seas, rich with natural beauty and resources, have plagued the people in what was once the independent Ryukyu Kingdom, for centuries. In 1879 the Kingdom became a prefecture of Japan, and according to some scholars, Okinawa has been "treated more like a 'colony or conquered territory than an integral part of the motherland."¹¹

In 1945, the Battle of Okinawa—the single and most devastating land battle of the Pacific War in which almost one-third of the civilian population perished—and the subsequent atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, brought an end to World War II. But for Okinawa, the "postwar" era began with what was to become a 28-year US occupation. Local farmlands were confiscated as US bases were expanded during the Korean and Vietnam Wars and Okinawa became a pivotal "launching pad" for US forces in Korea and Southeast Asia and later, in the Middle East. With the escalation of US involvement in the Vietnam War, the anti-war movement in mainland Japan and Okinawa grew, and many began to advocate Okinawa's "reversion" to Japan which was carried out in 1972.

Yamashiro was born in Okinawa in 1976—four years after Okinawa's reversion to mainland Japan. She grew up surrounded by both the lush natural environment that characterizes the Ryukyu archipelago, and countless miles of fences marking the division between US military bases and local communities, agricultural lands and shoreline still legally owned by the Okinawans. Beneath the surface of Okinawa's fraught present lie many layers of history. As Shinjō Ikuo notes, a deeper understanding of these histories uncovers connections to other places that have suffered from war and colonization.

It is against this background that Yamashiro began to question what she had seen growing up. She studied painting at the Okinawan Prefectural University of Arts, and as a graduate student studied at the Surrey Institute of Art and Design in the UK where she saw films of live performance art by Gilbert and George and was inspired to begin her own experiments with film, performance, and photography. After her return to Okinawa and graduation from the MFA program there, she began to exhibit new works-photographs and single-channel videos filmed in graveyards, along the fences of US bases or in tourist sites-that can be seen as activist-performance interventions that playfully disrupt the stereotypical "tourist gaze" at Okinawa.¹² As her work began to attract more attention in Okinawa and Tokyo, she took up new themes and experimented with new techniques, developing unique ways of addressing the question of intergenerational memory and delving more deeply into specific sites in Okinawa. Yamashiro's practice has evolved out of intuitive responses to materials and specific sites, and a strong curiosity about the many-layered histories, memories, and voices discovered in them. She has continued to push against the boundaries of performance and art activism while developing new film, sound, and installation techniques that are reaching ever-widening audiences.

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As Yamashiro experimented with techniques such as underwater filming, camera-angle, and sound editing seen in Seaweed Woman, she also began the "Inheritance Series" and produced photographs like Virtual Inheritance (2008) capturing gestures and facial expressions in large photos that were part of a "reminiscence therapy" workshop with elder survivors of the war. In Your Voice Came out through My Throat (2009), the last single-channel video work in which she herself performed, Yamashiro experimented with double exposure of the film and "lip synch" in the sound track in an attempt to convey the voice and memory of one survivor's traumatic experience of war: as a nine-year-old boy, he had witnessed his mother and sister as they leapt from "suicide cliff" during the Battle of Saipan. Directly facing the camera in a close-up shot, Yamashiro's image is shown while she attempts to lip-synch the voice of the survivor who is giving his testimony. As he slowly tells his horrific story, the image of the man's face appears and is juxtaposed with hers; as his voice fades away, we begin to hear hers in its place. It took Yamashiro 18 attempts to create the video which conveys the visceral experience of the speaking subject and the listener, but this attempt to "swallow" and give voice to the trauma of one elder survivor left her with the sense that she could never fully digest or transmit his voice or experience. His and other "undigested" voices felt like lumps of meat that "swayed back and forth at the bottom of [her] belly as if they would never dissolve."¹³ The more literal attempt to embody memories through performance led Yamashiro to create other, more abstract works as she continued to experiment with film techniques and explore questions of memory, place, and history. In Sinking Voices, Red Breath (2010), she filmed an elderly woman whose narrative monologue is indecipherable. The microphones used to record voices of elders in Virtual Inheritance (2008) and Your Voice Came out through My *Throat* (2009) are seen sinking into the sea. Like a bouquet of kelp, they sink deeper into what the artist imagines to be the body of the sea, as we hear the sound of swirling bubbles that rise again to the surface.

In a series of still photographs and video installation titled, *Choros of the Melodies* (2010), the "undigested voices" seem to wash ashore and find their way to the floor of a dense, tropical forest where they reappear as fragments of faces and bodies half-buried in earth, glimpsed among the flickering shadows and light through the leaves. A closer look shows that some of the "camouflaged" women's faces are smiling, some are old, and some are young.¹⁴ Asanuma Keiko writes that *Choros* with its assemblage of "nature motifs like soil, water, sea and plants in [sites] blended with human beings, can be considered as the most poetic representation of inheritance from death/former generations to life which Yamashiro has pursued as her theme from the earliest stages."¹⁵ The images are haunting and poetic, and suggestive of the theme of death and regeneration that reappears in *Mud Man* (Figure 12.2).

As Asanuma notes, it is not necessary to know the actual site where the images in *Choros of the Melodies* were photographed or filmed in order to engage with the work. But the fact that Yamashiro shot half of the forest scenes in Mabuni, Itoman-shi, and the Peace Memorial Park there—a site



Figure 12.2 Yamashiro Chikako, Choros of the Melodies, 2010. Chromogenic print, 600 x 900 mm. © Yamashiro Chikako, courtesy of Yumiko Chiba Associates.

where thousands of Okinawans died in the Battle of Okinawa—alerts viewers to a deeper understanding of these "fertile" images of death and regeneration. Through "scooping up the voices from the site in which human beings and natural materials are intertwined and synthesized," a new awareness of the connection between human history and natural motifs is awakened in the viewer.¹⁶

According to Asanuma, Yamashiro's attention to specific sites in natural settings can be seen throughout her work. Her choice of "mokunin hama" as the site for her 2007 work, Shore Connivance, led to the creation of Seaweed Woman. Interestingly, when mokunin is translated as "tacit approval," the viewpoint of the authorities who grant approval is highlighted, while "connivance" places emphasis on the subjectivity (and precarity) of the local people who "connive" to use spaces designated as "off-limits." Film scholar and critic Higashi Takuma situates Yamashiro's works in relation to both resistance "movements" and cutting-edge art practices that convey "movement=filmic image." He writes:

Like *mokunin no kōsaku chi*, Mokunin hama is a place where people can come and go, but only with the tacit approval of the authorities. The place Yamashiro has "discovered" is in a precarious and constantly changing state. At the same time, it can be understood as a space of *ajir*—or asylum.¹⁷

Yamashiro chose another precarious, "*mokunin* place," a weekend flea market found along a municipal road named Vietnam Street next to the chain-link fence inside Kadena Airbase, as the setting for the three-channel film/video installation *Woman of the Butcher Shop* (2012), first exhibited at the Mori Art Museum.¹⁸ Suzuki Katsuo argues that Yamashiro's use of such places as settings for her works allows her to uncover and re-map "complex power relations" embedded in them and to re-imagine and reorganize

them new ways.¹⁹ Suzuki goes on to suggest that Yamashiro's attention to "mokunin places" might be understood in connection with Foucault's notion of heterotopia, "a single real space" juxtaposed with other incompatible places in order "to increase sensitivity toward an actual place of a historical nature and to urge others to pay attention to the memories that have accumulated there."20 He goes on to state that Yamashiro's works bring viewers face to face with "the multi-layered reality of Okinawa." In the moment of encountering the work, "A heterotopia where different spaces coexist and heterochrony where different times coexist undoubtedly creates an opportunity poetically to reorganize the rigid spatial order and single-track temporal axis." As we will see in the discussion of Mud Man that follows, Yamashiro makes use of the concepts, images, materials, and film techniques developed in her earlier works to re-map and reorganize spatial and temporal order, interweaving images of reality and fiction, acting and natural behavior, activism and art. The sites and spaces explored in Mud Man not only bring us face-to-face with many-layered sites in Okinawa, they show links between these spaces and other postcolonial locations such as Jeju Island in Korea and Vietnam. As we will see, in Mud Man, the artist has continued to develop more sophisticated film and sound-editing techniques that take viewers "below the surfaces" of sea and land, through space and time.

Viewing Mud Man (2016)

It was on a sweltering hot day in August, 2016 that I first saw *Mud Man* at the *Aichi Triennale* in Nagoya. The three-channel film and sound work was installed on the third floor of an old, abandoned building; viewers had to wind their way through a dark and dusty first floor space, climb a narrow stairway to the third floor, and finally enter a large room at the back of the building that housed the installation. At the entrance to the gallery, there was a handout with poems in Korean, Japanese, and English, and words from one of the poems, "And they had wings," were inscribed on the wall. Inside, the narrow room was dark, the air heavy. We made our way to benches in front of the three screens, and sat watching and listening, suddenly immersed in a world of images and sounds so loud that they seemed to pound against our bodies.

The images were moving in rapid sequence on the three screens in a non-linear visual narrative. A tall figure walks toward us through a field as if out of another era, another world. Overhead views of lush green fields with rows of crops appear and alternate on the screens; then scenes of grassy fields follow. We see people who might be sleeping or dreaming, lying face-up on the ground, their faces caked with yellow-gray mud. From time to time, they quiver slightly. And suddenly, an arm reaches up, like the stalk of a growing plant (Figure 12.3).

One man slowly stands and looks up at a tree and gazes at a nest high in its branches. Soft clumps of mud or earth begin to fall from the sky on the people who begin to stir as he places a clump of soft earth to his ear and



Figure 12.3 Yamashiro Chikako, Mud Man, 2017. Video, 2016 version, 3-channel video installation, 23'00", in cooperation with Aichi Triennale 2016.
© Yamashiro Chikako, Courtesy of Yumiko Chiba Associates.

listens, as if it is a conch shell from the sea. A soft chorus of voices in Korean, Japanese, and Okinawan dialects murmur words that resonate as sounds and build into a rhythm. The poems are like music and at the same time fill the space with voices in multiple languages. Although the words are mostly indecipherable, the multi-lingual, multi-vocal chorus itself hints at the artist's aim to bring multiple "minor literatures" such as works by Korean poets under Japanese colonial rule, Okinawan poets writing in dialect and a poem by Kafka translated into Iejima dialect, together in the work in a way that generates and circulates new meanings and disrupts hierarchal relations between languages that co-exist in postcolonial and neo-colonial territories.²¹

The artist imagined that the dung of a mythical bird contained "poetry seeds" fell on the people and that from them grew the words of poets who gave voice to those who had died in battles. As the voices fill the entire gallery, poetic images of plants, seeds, flowers, and laments for lost home-lands fill the screen. A voice declares that wings are "useless" and asks, "Why should I fly away from my home town? Why leave my homeland, the dead and the gods?" Later in the work, Nakazato Yugo, an Okinawan poet who also appears in several segments of the film, recites a poem with the refrain using the words "*bogo*" (mother tongue) that "burbles" from within, that can be "lamped, clomped and thumped," but never "dumped."²²

In another segment, one man tumbles down a hole into a cave and finds himself in an underground tunnel; bent over, he breathes heavily as he slowly makes his way through a dimly lit concrete bunker where missiles and warheads were once stored. He climbs up through another narrow passageway and emerges to the surface, now in a trench with others who are looking up in horror at a dark sky, filled with flashing lights and sounds of battle. Soon, they also begin to see flashbacks of black and white documentary films of the Battle of Okinawa and the Vietnam War (Figure 12.4).

Here, Yamashiro's experiment with sound design and forms of popular music produce an especially strong visceral impact: the images move rhythmically, along with the sound of weapons shrieking through the air above the mud people. The sounds of warfare, produced by a voice percussion artist, hip-hop musician, and DJ, are skillfully transformed into contemporary music.

Kohara Masashi discusses *Mud Man* in connection with the artist's earlier works, *Your Voice Came out through My Throat* (2009) and *Choros of the Melodies* (2010).²³ Here, two Cold War sites—Okinawa and Jeju Island in South Korea—are linked. In Okinawa, citizen protestors have continued to resist the confiscation of Okinawan lands and the construction of new US bases. Similarly, citizens of Gangjeong Village have protested the construction of a trilateral naval base there. Both islands were once kingdoms, both were colonized, and parts of both have become resorts for tourists. Kohara writes:

We can see that Okinawa and Jeju are closely related. In their connections with the United States, and with mainland Japan and South Korea, they are like siblings, cursed with having great geo-political value as strategic location for military bases. Gradually, viewers come to recognize that these references to specific geopolitical sites are like missing pieces in a puzzle that when recovered, help us to see new connections, and imagine an alternative historical narrative, both past and present.²⁴



Figure 12.4 Yamashiro Chikako, Mud Man, 2017. Video, 1-channel 2016 version, 3-channel video installation, 23'00", in cooperation with Aichi Triennale 2016. © Yamashiro Chikako, Courtesy of Yumiko Chiba Associates.

In one of the final segments of *Mud Man*, we follow the man as he descends into the caves and crawls underground through tunnels that were once wartime bunkers or storage sites for missiles. Suddenly, there is silence, as the camera pans over a field of luscious white *teppo yuri* (coronet-shaped Easter lilies, cultivated today on Iejima). Images of the lilies swaying in the breeze come in and out of focus. Again, we see the mud people, lying in the field among the lilies. One by one, their hands and arms reach upward, like plants with flowers that are beginning to bloom. As they reach toward the sky, the hands slowly begin to clap, first randomly and then in unison. The sound and rhythm build to a crescendo in a vibrant musical cadence that reverberates throughout the gallery space and our bodies. In the final moment, all is silent, and the camera rests on a field of dried, tangled vines spreading on the earth, a metaphor for the cycle of death, decay, and regeneration (Figure 12.5).

Mud Man and Cold War sites: Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, Kadena, Iejima, Jeju Island, and Beyond

In *Mud Man*, Yamashiro continued to develop the technique of suturing and editing film segments she had developed in *Woman of the Butcher Shop* (2012) in her "risky" endeavor to come to terms with the voices of others and engage in dialogues with places of historical and geo-political significance. As we have seen, the artist juxtaposes film segments of sites in Okinawa, including clips from her own earlier works, with images of Gangjeong Village in Jeju, South Korea, and black and white documentary footage of the Battle of Okinawa and the Vietnam War.



Figure 12.5 Yamashiro Chikako, Mud Man, 2017. 2016 version, 3-channel video installation, 23':00", in cooperation with Aichi Triennale 2016.
 © Yamashiro Chikako, Courtesy of Yumiko Chiba Associates.

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A closer look at the histories of Okinawa and Korea reveals other clues about the sites Yamashiro has chosen for this work. The process of forceful confiscation of Okinawan lands began immediately after the end of the Pacific War and continued during and after the Korean War.²⁵ Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, located in present-day Ginowan City and the source of the controversial plan to build a "replacement facility" at Henoko, was also built at around this time. In 1953, US forces drove people in Iejima off the island and took control of sixty-three percent of the island.²⁶ Kadena Air Base, situated on forty-six square kilometers of prime Okinawan farmland, was also built at around that time, and during the Vietnam War, an estimated one million military flights transported troops and supplies from Kadena to Vietnam. It is now known that toxic chemicals such as Agent Orange that were stored and transported from Kadena to Vietnam not only caused enormous damage there, but have left areas in Okinawa contaminated today.²⁷ As we have seen here, the weekend market filmed in Woman of the Butcher Shop, fragments from which are seen again in Mud Man, was located on Vietnam Street that runs through the center of the base.²⁸ In 1959, Camp Schwab, adjacent to Henoko and Oura Bay, was built after local landowners were pressured to give up their land. As we can see, this trajectory of expanding land grab by the US is closely connected to the escalation of tensions during the Cold War era.

Iejima, where many scenes in Mud Man were filmed, is a small island in the archipelago, off the northwestern coast of the main island. After the US military landed on the main island on April 1st, 1945, US forces moved north and 16 days later, landed on Iejima, the site of "Asia's biggest air base."29 In Mud Man, we not only see images of lilies and other crops cultivated today on Iejima, but also scenes shot in subterranean tunnels that were once used as nuclear storage facilities constructed by the US in 1953 along with the expansion of military installations during the Cold War.³⁰ Iejima, where 35% of the land is still controlled by the US military today, was seen not only as a strategic location for the execution of US "containment" policy during the Cold War, but also an apt testing site for low altitude bombing. It has been reported that over a thousand missiles with nuclear warheads aimed at the Korean Peninsula were installed and "launch-ready."³¹ In Mud Man, Yamashiro uses film segments and footage from US wartime documentaries, weaving them into her own alternative, allegorical narrative that is "transnational" and thus de-constructs and de-colonizes existing linear narratives of Cold War history.

In the period immediately after WWII, tensions and conflicts on the Korean Peninsula, particularly in the South Cholla region and Jeju Island, were escalating. Resistance by local organizations of farmers and workers were violently suppressed, and Jeju island was the site of a violent massacre in which, 30,000 or more civilians were killed. The tragic events known as the "4.3 incident" (April 3, 1948) and deeply traumatic experiences of the Jeju Islanders were left unaddressed for many decades.³² This and other early "postwar" violent incidents are viewed as a precursor to the Korean

War. Limited space does not allow for a more detailed discussion of these entangled histories, and the many ways in which the US and Japanese governments have been complicit in them, but in the context of this volume, it is important to note that poets, writers, and artists have played, and continue to play—a vitally important role in bringing about a deeper understanding of the enmeshed histories of the region ³³

In 2018, Yamashiro collaborated with young musicians and performers to create the live performance work, And I Go Through You... (2018) presented alongside Mud Man as part of the Kyoto Festival at the Kyoto Arts Center. The artist's aim was to return to the question of intergenerational memory and to create a live performance in which participants might "draw closer to others through the body, through bringing the voice of the other into the body."34 Mud Man had been shown in a number of venues and was attracting more attention internationally. But knowing that many of the elder survivors she had interviewed ten years earlier were passing away and that younger generations would never have the opportunity to hear their testimonies first hand, Yamashiro felt the need to "return to the source, to the voice" in a live performance space in order to communicate the testimonies of elder survivors in Okinawa to a younger generation. She noticed that when speaking of their experiences, survivors often use "giongo" or sound words to convey their experiences, and so she asked sound artists-beatbox artist, ShOh; DJ, Shota; and rapper, Tokii-to join her in the collaboration. At each of three hour-long performances, a small audience was invited to sit on the floor of the auditorium. Community volunteers worked together with voice percussionist, rapper, and DJ to create an environment of sound, moving image and live performance linked to Mud Man.

Conclusion

Yamashiro Chikako has continued to produce powerful performance, video and film works that help us imagine and understand entangled histories and present contemporary struggles in Okinawa and the Asian region in new ways. In the context of this volume, Yamashiro offers "critical views and new perspectives" and explores issues of identity, environmental destruction, as well as neoliberal/neo-imperial exploitations of indigenous peoples and natural resources. The questions raised through her work touch on Okinawa's double-bind in "postwar" Asia as a place that is still "made to exist as a front line/link to the violence encroaching on the lives of those living in Asia," and at the same time "this Okinawa that continues to be an alternative name for war, has claimed those living in Okinawa itself in its fires of war."35 Needless to say, complex multimedia works like *Mud Man* cannot be grasped in words alone, and must be experienced in a "bodily" way. The artist's ongoing explorations of actual and imaginative spaces reveal diverse states of precarity and continue to open up new possibilities for dialogue and lead to unexpected ways of "seeing" Okinawa. As Shinjō Ikuo writes,

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It is as if Yamashiro's work is fiercely resisting understanding Okinawa. I get the sense that while in the process of fleeing Okinawa, at the very moment of the desertion, there's a moment when an Okinawa that no one has been able to notice before materializes, or becomes visible as something physical.³⁶

Yamashiro's most recent single-channel video installation, Chinbin Western: Representation of the Family (2019) returns to Henoko and Camp Schwab and the citizens continuing to engage in non-violent protests against the construction of the US base at Henoko; the artist draws on the Western film-genre, also, highlighting the destruction and "desertification" of Okinawa's indigenous natural environment.³⁷ Here, the artist focuses on a narrative of two families living near a mine or quarry where sand and gravel are being extracted and transported to Henoko by land or sea. As the melodrama unfolds, we see how the lives of the characters are entangled with the ongoing issue of construction of the "replacement facility" in Henoko and how the natural environment is being destroyed by the extraction of sand and gravel required to make the thousands of pilings being used in Oura Bay. In this modern day, "Western" (chinbin is a local snack food and a pun on the Italian "macaroni or spaghetti") Yamashiro juxtaposes a variety of performative styles including opera, Okinawan poetry, and traditional drama. Underlying the work are the ongoing issues surrounding the relocation of Marine Corps Air Station Futenma to Henoko, but it is clear that such issues-environmental destruction, militarization, the impact on local cultures and communities-are not limited to Okinawa. Rather, they are universal problems facing countless communities around the world. The work leaves the viewer asking questions not only about the future of Okinawa, but also about that of other precarious, postcolonial locations in the Asian region and beyond.

As the landscapes and seascapes that are sites for Yamashiro's works continue to undergo drastic transformation at the expense of the natural environment and local communities, Yamashiro continues to record the layered dynamic, and complex histories embedded within them. Her practice integrates art, performance, and activism, as it pushes the boundaries of existing fields and continues to show how both Cold War histories and present-day struggles are interconnected. At a time when historical reckoning has become the focus of attention in the region and around the world, Yamashiro's works constitute a timely interventions and point to new ways in which contemporary art offers insights into postcolonial histories and struggles. As the editors of this volume rightly state, "the Cold War is nowhere near over." Okinawa and the entire East and Southeast Asian regions will no doubt continue to play a role in this drama. Yamashiro's works will undoubtedly continue to help us make sense of the past, the present, and an Asia, politics, and art to come.

I am grateful to Hanashiro Ikuko, Kawamura Masami, and Sakamoto Hiroko for their generous advice and support.

Notes

- 1 Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "The Past is not Dead," in *The Past Within Us* (New York; London: Verso, 2005), 2.
- 2 Brett de Bary, "Afterthoughts, 'Afterlife' on the Occasion of Translation" in *Still Hear the Wound*, ed. Lee Chonghwa, trans. and eds. Brett de Bary and Rebecca Jennison (Ithaca: Cornell East Asia Series, 2015), xxxiii.
- 3 Morris-Suzuki, "The Past is not Dead," 22.
- 4 Morris-Suzuki, "The Past is not Dead," 118, 122.
- 5 De Bary, "Afterthoughts, 'Afterlife' on the Occasion of Translation," xxxii–xxxiii.
- 6 In Japanese, the title is written with the characters $\lceil \pm \mathcal{O} \land \rfloor$ and read *tsuchi no hito.* It might also be translated as "earth people," and is meant to counter the racist, derogatory term *dojin* that has sometimes been used to discriminate against Okinawan people.
- 7 Shinjō Ikuo, "The Contours of Sound," trans. Andrew Harding, *Still Hear the Wound*, ed. Lee Chonghwa, trans. and eds. Brett de Bary and Rebecca Jennison (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 4.
- 8 Shinjō Ikuo, "The Contours of Sound," 8.
- 9 See Douglas Lummis, "The Most Dangerous Base in the World," Asia-Pacific Journal 16, Issue 14, no. 1 (2018).
- 10 See Okinawa Prefecture Website, accessed November 19, 2020. https://www.pref.okinawa.jp/site/chijiko/kichitai/documents/us%20military%20base%20 issues%20in%20okinawa.pdf.
- 11 See Michael Molasky and Steve Rabson, "Introduction," in Southern Exposure: Modern Literature from Okinawa (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 18. Also see Davinder L. Bhomick and Steve Rabson, "Introduction," in Islands of Protest: Japanese Literature from Okinawa (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016).
- 12 See Kondō Kenichi, "Seeking Okinawa's Real Face: The World of Yamashiro Chikako," Yamashiro Chikako, MAM Project 018 (Tokyo: Mori Art Museum, 2012); Shinjō Ikuo, " 'Open Wounds: What Chikako Yamashiro Portrays,' Interview with Kondō Kenichi," in Yamashiro Chikako, trans. Pamela Miki Associates, ed. Naoko Fukuda (Tokyo: Yumiko Chiba Associates, 2012); Ayelet Zohar, "Camouflage, Photography and [In]visibility: Yamashiro Chikako's Chorus of the Melodies series (2010)," accessed, September 20, 2020. https:// quod.lib.umich.edu/t/tap/7977573.0003.105/--camouflage-photography-and-invisibility-yamashiro-chikakos?rgn=main;view=fulltext; Idem., "Beyond Hiroshima: The Return of the Repressed. Wartime Memory, Performativity and the Documentary in Contemporary Japanese Photography and Video Art." In Beyond Hiroshima (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2012), 11–2; and Rebecca Jennison, "Unspeakable Bodies of Memory: Precarity and Performance in Recent Works by Yamashiro Chikako," in Bi-Annual Bulletin, no. 44 (2014): 183–200.
- 13 Yamashiro Chikako, "Tökereba toi hodo todoku koto mo aru" (Though far away they reach us. Interview with Yamashiro Chikako), in Bijutsu Techo (Art Notebook) no. 1044 (November 2016): 168–175.
- 14 See Ayelet Zohar, "Camouflage, Photography and [In]visibility: Yamashiro Chikako's *Chorus of the Melodies* series (2010) and Beyond," accessed September 20,2020.https://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/tap/7977573.0003.105/--camouflage-photography-and-invisibility-yamashiro-chikakos?rgn=main;view=fulltext.
- 15 Asanuma Keiko, "Circulating World," in Circulating World: The Art of Chikako Yamashiro (Tokyo: Yumiko Chiba Associates, 2016), 103.
- 16 Asanuma, "Circulating World," 105.

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- 17 Higashi Takuma, "Mizu no On'na," in Zanshō no Oto, ed. Lee Chonghwa (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2009), 171. Higashi also discusses the films of Takamine Gō, whose works Yamashiro greatly admires, in "The Angels of History in Okinawa," in Still Hear the Wound (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 75.
- 18 See Kondō Kenichi, "Seeking Okinawa's Real Face: The World of Yamashiro Chikako," in *Yamashiro Chikako MAM Project 18* (Tokyo: Mori Art Museum, 2012). As Kondō explains, Yamashiro admires the Thai video artist Apichatpong Weerasethakul who incorporates amateur actors and interweaves acting and natural scenes.
- 19 Suzuki Katsuo, "Conflicting Spaces: Questions from 'Mokunin' Places," in Circulating Worlds (Tokyo, Yumiko Chiba Associates, 2016),143.
- 20 Suzuki, "Conflicting Spaces," 151.
- 21 Here, the term "minor literature" is used in the sense that Deleuze and Guattari defined it in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1986). Okinawa and Jeju, both once independent kingdoms, share a history of colonization.
- 22 Other poems used in the sound track and distributed on a handout include *zainichi* Korean poet Gim Shijong's translations of such works as Jo Myeonghul's "A Marvel" and Joeng Ji-yong's "Homeland." Found in artist's statement and handout from *Mud Man*.
- 23 See, Kohara Masashi, "Yamashiro Chikako's Mud People," in *Kyotographie International Photography Festival 2017*, ed., Sayaka Sameshina (Kyoto: *Kyotographie*, 2017), 36–37.
- 24 Kohara, "Yamashiro Chikako's Mud People," 37.
- 25 See Gavin McCormack and Satoko Oka Norimatsu, *Resistant Islands: Okinawa Confronts Japan and the United States* (Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2012), 78.
- 26 McCormack and Norimatsu, Resistant Islands, 78.
- 27 See Jon Mitchell, "Agent Orange on Okinawa: Six Years On," The Asia Pacific Journal (2017). Also see Jon Mitchell, "Informed-Public Project Seeks Environmental Justice in Okinawa," Japan Times, November 19, 2016, accessed September 20, 2020. https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/11/19/ national/informed-public-project-seeks-environmental-justice-okinawa/for information about environmental justice in Okinawa today.
- 28 So-named by local people because of the B52's taking off from Kadena to Vietnam. Since this writing, the market has been shut down to make room for new construction on the base. Kadena is also the base where US Forces were allowed to enter Japan without strict testing for the Covid-19 virus resulting in a surge of cases in August, 2020.
- 29 Okinawa-ken heiwa kinen shiryō kan, sōgō an'nai (Okinawa Prefectural Peace Memorial Museum: General Guide) (Itoman: Okinawa Prefectural Peace Museum, 2017), 63.
- 30 NHK Special Documentary, Sukū-pu Dokyumento: Okinawa to kaku (Scoop document: Okinawa and Nuclear Weapons) NHK Archives, September 10, 2017, accessed November 19, 2020. https://www2.nhk.or.jp/archives/tv60bin/detail/index.cgi?das_id=D0009050820_00000. See also, Haruna Miko, Kamen no nichibei domei: Bei gaikō kimitsu bunsho ga akasu shinjitsu (Behind the mask of the US-Japan Alliance), Bunshun shinsho 1053 (2015).
- 31 NHK Special Documentary, Scoop document, accessed November 19, 2020.
- 32 Left-wing, communal areas on Jeju island that sought to remain independent of control by the new nationalist government under U.S. occupation were brutally suppressed by police and right-wing youth-group terrorism. See Bruce Cumings, "The Cheju Insurgency" in *The Korean War: A History* (New York: The Modern Library, 2011), 121–31.

- 33 See also Jane Jin Kaisen, *Dissident Translations* (Denmark: Arhus Kunstbygning, 2011).
- 34 Yamashiro Chikako, "Artist's Statement," And I Go Through You ... (2018).
- 35 Shinjō Ikuo, "Contours of Sound–A Place Connecting the Music of Takahashi Yūji and the Performances of Ito Tari," *Still Hear the Wound*, trans. by Andrew Harding (Ithaca: Cornell East Asian Series, 2015), 6.
- 36 Shinjō Ikuo, "Open Wounds: What Chikako Yamashiro Portrays," Interview with Kondo Kenichi, ed. Naoko Fukuda, trans. Pamela Miki Associates (Tokyo: Yumiko Chiba Associates, 2012), 70.
- 37 See Naoki Yoneda, "Literature in Japanese Contemporary Art" in Hanashiteiru no wa dare / Image Narratives: Literature in Japanese Contemporary Art) (Tokyo: The National Art Center, 2019), 34.

13 Undoing Cold War temporality

Transnational adoption in Agnès Dherbeys's *Omone* and *Retired*

Jung Joon Lee

The Korean War was a defining event in the early stages of the Cold War, resulting in the nation's partition and seemingly intractable state of war. Of the continuing ramifications of the conflict, one of the most insidious has been the transnational adoption of Korean children and its legacy. Although there had been European and Japanese precedents, it was the Korean War that brought widespread awareness of transnational, and interracial, adoption to the Euro-American public.

The rise of transnational adoption from South Korea to the West, particularly to the United States and western and northern European countries, was, in fact, initiated when the UN troops in South Korea began "adopting" war orphans from the streets to live at their base camps; some became "mascots" of the camps, others what they called "houseboys." Soon, American servicemen, usually with their spouses or occasionally as bachelors, began adopting Korean children. After the United States' two-per-family international adoption limit was annulled in 1955—so that Harry and Bertha Holt could adopt eight Korean war orphans—mass Western adoption of Korean children commenced. The Holt Orphanage (now Holt International), which the Holts established in 1962 in South Korea, was a clearinghouse where mixed-race orphans awaited adoption, mostly by Americans.

Although the physical specter of the Cold War is widely treated as obsolete in the West, it continues in the Asia-Pacific region. Indeed, the first major battle remains open, as North and South Korea have yet to sign a peace treaty. This continued state of war has placed various concepts and experiences of temporality in the Asia-Pacific on the homogenizing plane of transnational militarism, flattening Cold War ramifications into a series of causes and effects that have defined postwar national sovereignty and extra-national influences. Within the framework of the Cold War dominated by transnational militarism, the varying experiences of decolonization, American occupation, and militarization are charted according to a homogenizing time.

According to Bliss Cua Lim,

Modern time is thus projected in every direction to include even what exists outside of or prior to its minting as a concept, entertaining an 'ideal of objectivity,' a belief that its conception of history is the 'overarching language,' the universal narrative to which all specific instances can be subsumed. $^{\rm l}$

The Cold War is defined from the standpoint of this modern time, a force that homogenizes temporality—which I refer to here as homotemporality—even though its "national contexts" (of different times) are provided as a distinguishing backdrop. The homotemporal desire to collapse the multiple experiences of the Cold War works to consolidate the histories of the Cold War under *the* history. The disciplining "guidelines" of homotemporality are passed on to produce an epistemology of homogenizing time.

Likewise, where an artwork historicized by "nationhood" embodies temporal fissures, modernity as episteme can collapse all times into a homogenizing time. While it could fall under the force of a homogenizing time, a photograph, for example, can nevertheless complicate an experience of temporality: The moment a photograph is viewed is also the moment that the captured event is re-presented and thus cognitively experienced by the viewer. As such, the representation of the past event is recognized in the current moment—which results in a multitemporal, usually transtemporal, experience of the image, often without the viewer recognizing (to say nothing of acknowledging) this multitemporality.

In recent years, artists and scholars have critically reexamined and challenged homotemporality and encouraged others to scrutinize how it insists on a stagnant designation of adoptee identity. This chapter examines the ways that two photography series by the French photographer and Korean adoptee Agnès Dherbeys disrupt the temporality of the Cold War. Eschewing the expected visual rhetoric of transnational adoption based on the narrative drama of abandonment, benevolence, success, and return, Dherbeys juxtaposes the sending and receiving ends of the adoption narrative. While both the state and adoption studies typically visualize transnational adoption through the figure of adoptee, Dherbeys redirects the focus to other long-neglected subjects of transnational adoption: birth parent(s) and adoptive parent(s).

Dherbeys's photography projects *Omone* (2013) and *Retired* (2013–2015) present, respectively, several Korean birth parents—largely birth mothers and the stories they told Dherbeys of giving up their children for adoption, and her adoptive father in France. Together, *Omone* and *Retired* complicate the stereotypical reading of adoption imagery, and thus identification of the adoptee subject in the photograph, a learned practice of the positivist "knowing" of a subject supposed in the mimetic reading of photography. Both projects expose the specter of the Cold War in imperial liberalism, underpinning the politics of race and gender in transnational identities.² Furthermore, they transcend the favored documentary approach and reception of photography, particularly in adoption-related studies. Acknowledging the work of other adoptee artists and scholars, as well as pioneers in the field of adoption studies and beyond, this chapter offers a holistic understanding of the Cold War image culture, which this volume is committed to investigating.³

#K76_3613: Omone

In the winter of 2016–2017, the Museum of Photography, Seoul (MoP), held an exhibition, $O[H] \triangle II] \equiv H]Agnès Dherbeys #K76_3613$, consisting of Dherbeys's two photography series, Omone and Retired. It was the result of the museum's year-long effort to introduce selected French photographers in collaboration with various French institutions in celebration of "2015–2016 Korea France Year." As visitors proceed through Omone and Retired, the exhibition frontispiece, like the brochure, shows a twin-lens reflex camera and an old manila folder, labeled "#K76-3613," the cryptic code of the exhibition title; a large handwritten Korean name and date of birth, "Song Dong Hee 12-17-76 (KF)"; along with two small black-and-white photographs of an infant. The baby in the photographs is the artist, Agnès Dherbeys, who, after spending three months at Paekhap Orphanage in South Korea, was adopted by a French couple at the age of five months and fifteen days (Figure 13.1).

Dherbeys is one of the 167,353 South Korean children who had been adopted transnationally as of 2018.⁴ South Korea was long the top sending country of transnational adoptees, before the dramatic drop in transnational adoption of Korean children from the mid-1990s on. Dherbeys first visited South Korea in 2011 and returned in 2013 with a grant for a project to meet, collect oral histories from, and photograph birth parents.⁵ In initial meetings with members of adoption-related organizations to scout possible subjects and locations, things unfolded rather unexpectedly. Dherbeys



Figure 13.1 Agnès Dherbeys, #K76-3613, 2013. C-print. Courtesy of the artist. © Agnès Dherbeys.

was contacted by Sister Theresa, a nun who cared for children at Paekhap Orphanage. Through her, Dherbeys was soon connected with the elderly residents of Kŏnch'ŏn, the town of her birth, and introduced to a woman who seemed likely to be her birth mother.⁶ As it turned out, they were not related, as revealed by DNA test—and, with a certain sense of guilt, Dherbeys found herself relieved.

Following this bittersweet episode, Dherbeys continued on her journey to meet with other birth mothers (and occasionally birth fathers), who most likely went through similar experiences as her birth mother would have. As Dherbeys does not speak or read Korean, she was accompanied by a Korean photographer, who interpreted for them. The result of these meetings, which took place across South Korea, was *Omone* (2013). The name comes from the Korean word for "mother" (ŏmŏni). The series consists of short testimonies and photographs of Korean birth parents, mostly birth mothers, who in most cases against their will—sent their children to adoption agencies.

For *Omone*, Dherbeys works in a photojournalistic manner, taking photographs where the subjects appear engaged in candid moments rather than posed for portraits. In the exhibition and articles that introduce her work, each photograph is shown alongside her words in English and translated into Korean; the practice of oral history is a critical aspect of *Omone*. The text discusses the photograph and presents oral histories narrated by the birth



Figure 13.2 Agnès Dherbeys, "Ms. Yang Hay Suk with her daughter, Laure, and her boyfriend, Romain," from Omone, 2013. C-print. Courtesy of the artist.© Agnès Dherbeys.

parents—stories of their experiences in giving up their children for adoption. Dherbeys also contributes her first-person voice to the narrative, incorporating her experience—as an artist, researcher, journalist, and adoptee—of meeting birth mothers. Her voice yields a profound sense of intimacy for the viewer, which proves critical to the different ways that Dherbeys represents birth mothers, challenging the stereotypical picture of tormented women regretting the loss of their children (Figure 13.2).

One photograph shows a birth mother as she gazes at her visiting daughter. The daughter, in the foreground, is out of focus (Dherbeys and her translator are also present, outside the frame). The birth mother, Ms. Yang Hay Suk, appears in a domestic environment featuring everyday fixtures the refrigerator adorned with magnets and photos, plates, and glasses on the table. Despite the intensity expected in the meeting of the birth mother and her daughter, the photograph yields a sense of tranquility—no dramatic reunion, nor a refusal to interact, just subtle signs of confusion on Ms. Yang's face, as she is probably having difficulty understanding the conversation between her daughter and her boyfriend, who has accompanied her. Another photograph depicts two pairs of hands as the mother and daughter seek similarities between their hands (Figure 13.3).

The sense of placidity surrounding these subjects intensifies the frustratingly consistent story of misogyny undergirding the adoption narratives. For



Figure 13.3 Agnès Dherbeys, "Ms. Yang Hay Suk and Laure's hands," from *Omone*, 2013. C-print. Courtesy of the artist. © Agnès Dherbeys.

example, several testimonies in *Omone* include painful backstories in which birth fathers, and often these men's mothers, push birth mothers to put their daughters up for adoption—in some cases going as far as to kidnap them— specifically in order to reserve resources for prospective sons. A diptych (as installed in the exhibition) shows a crying birth mother, Ms. Lee Suk Yun, and several snapshot photographs of her holding her infant daughter on a table. In the accompanying text, Lee tells the story of losing her child:

My husband was not a good husband. I got divorced. I was very poor and at the time, it was mainly the fathers who take care of the child. He put [sic] her for adoption without asking me first, and with no help from adoption agencies. Maybe he sold her. I have no idea at all how to find her (Figures 13.4 and 13.5).⁷

In another text, Ms. Shin Kyung Hee speaks of her abusive husband who took her daughter to France for adoption:

My husband used to beat me up. While I was in hospital (because I broke my pelvis while trying to escape his violence), he and his new girlfriend



Figure 13.4 Agnès Dherbeys, "Ms. Lee Suk Yun," from Omone, 2013. C-print. Courtesy of the artist. © Agnès Dherbeys.



Figure 13.5 Agnès Dherbeys, Snapshots of "Ms. Lee Suk Yun's daughter," from Omone, 2013. C-print. Courtesy of the artist. © Agnès Dherbeys.

took my child and put her up for adoption. I have never forgotten her and I can't stand not knowing what my little daughter has become.⁸

Dherbeys states in the descriptions that a number of the birth parents have sought their children without success. They can only hope for their adopted children to find them. Nonetheless, not everyone has the same experience and, compared with other imagery involving adoption narratives, *Omone* is striking for its subtlety in the telling of individual stories. This allows for images of birth mothers who were pressured into giving up their children to be juxtaposed with the rare image of both birth parents present. They stand in an orchard where they work, accompanied by their narration of the circumstances that led to their daughter's adoption. The presence of the birth father—to say nothing of his continued relationship with the birth mother—is a rare case of men taking on responsibility for their child's transnational adoption (Figure 13.6).

While the efforts of transnational adoptee communities to write their histories, and of adoption studies scholars to establish this branch of the field, have been especially impressive over the last two decades, birth parents are rarely their focus. Dherbeys has repeatedly mentioned great difficulties in finding preexisting work on birth mothers, whether artistic, scholarly, or journalistic.⁹ Dubbed "socially and legally dead" by the adoption studies scholar Hosu Kim,¹⁰ birth mothers have been silenced by the collective shaming of unwed mothers and the resulting lack of support systems for single parenting. This



Figure 13.6 Agnès Dherbeys, "Ms. Park Woo Sik and Mr. Lee Sun Hwa in their farm in Nonsan," from Omone, 2013. C-print. Courtesy of the artist. © Agnès Dherbeys.

legal erasure has at the same time supported the systemization of transnational adoption: "The birth mothers' legal erasure is a critical step for the child to be considered adoptable by prospective adoptive parents[.]"¹¹

The lack of studies and interest in birth mothers is itself telling of the breadth of Cold War anti-communist ideology in South Korea, interwoven with the patriarchal nation-building efforts in the wake of the Korean War. The masculinist nationalism, particularly tied to military governance and everyday militarism, also contributed to the conditions of Cold War norms, including the imagining of the *kukka* (the nation-state) not as a political entity of governance but a patriarch who protects, nurtures, and punishes his subjects.

Persuading or coercing birth mothers to "surrender" their children for adoption is related to the military regime's reformation of the family as the most basic unit of a national community striving for global-capitalist economic advancement. For the regime's multi-phase development plans, the family needed to become compact and easily relocatable. Major family planning campaigns were launched, encouraging each household to limit their children to two, and even one, in the 1970s and '80s.¹² The biopolitics of the family, including the practice of transnational adoption, hence, is irreducibly aligned with the geo- and cultural politics of the Cold War. Hosu Kim argues, "By surrendering a child born out of wedlock, or into dire poverty, [birth parents] participated in a national security policy that linked the idea of a self-reliant family with the nation's economic development."¹³

In the period of "strengthening" South Korea in the face of North Korean communist threats, the 20th century nuclear family was established as the ideal foundation for the militarized, developmentalist agenda of the Park Chung Hee regime (1963–1979). At the same time, the state established and systematized the operation of special districts in camptowns to provide "services," following the system of "comfort stations" established during the Japanese colonial period, for the United States Forces Korea (USFK) deployed across the Peninsula.¹⁴ Not coincidentally, their work was a lucrative, if informal, source of millions of US dollars for the military regime.

Nonetheless, they were scorned by their fellow Koreans for both their work and for having given birth out of wedlock. Their mixed-race children often experienced severe racism in addition to the social stigma linked to their mothers. The collective negligence and social ostracization of birth mothers, and later pity and sympathy, was combined with a general acceptance and scant criticism of birth fathers abandoning their children and partners. This history of the collective discrimination of unwed mothers, and mothers bearing daughters (sons being the socially preferred outcome) and/ or mixed-race children with GIs, was both a major contributor to the practice of transnational adoption and remains one of the reasons behind the lack of scholarly and creative interest in birth parents.

Likewise, creative works involving birth mothers were scarce during the early days of the phenomenon. An exception is a photograph of a Korean woman and (most likely) her mixed-race child.¹⁵ The image was part of Joo Myung Duk's 1965 exhibition in Seoul, *Sõkkyŏjin irŭmdŭl (The Mixed Names)*, which portrayed children of Korean women and USFK servicemen and contractors. I have not encountered any other images of birth mothers that were publicly on view during the military regime (Figure 13.7).

Instead, commemorative self-victimization through images of war orphans became the common approach to numerous memorial events of the Korean War. Through these collective rituals, the faces of Korean war orphans came to symbolize the nation itself. And in the annual ritual of symbolization, South Koreans are supposed to identify themselves with the war orphans.¹⁶ In this process of identification, the viewer already understands that the photographed orphans persevered and overcame devastation, both personal and national, following the war: the rapid development of national economy during the military regime, dubbed "the miracle of the Han River" in the 1980s, and the hosting of the Asian Games in 1986 and the Summer Olympic Games in 1988, coinciding with the democratization movements, establish the national narrative as a neoliberal, global democratic success story. While neoliberalism has been viewed by nationalists as a global-capitalist force endangering the "independence" of South Korea's free market, the irreversible impact of deregulation and privatization is also due to market-oriented political practices, whereby the state and powerful family-owned conglomerates, i.e., chaebol, strive to "advance" the nation. Repeated, almost obsessive, recognition of national achievement continues in the collective pursuit of equal status with other sŏnjin'guk-advanced, leading nations.¹⁷



Figure 13.7 Joo Myung Duk, from Sökkyöjin irŭmdŭl (The Mixed Names), 1965. Gelatin silver print. Courtesy of the artist. © Joo Myung Duk.

Remembrance of the traumatic experience of the Korean War through war orphan photographs makes multiple contributions to the nationalist-masculinist narratives of nation-building. Another is the acceptance of the violence inherent in "modernizing the family" toward economic advancement—and as a consequence, the forgetting of injustice toward and collective negligence of marginalized birth mothers and children, as their stories and sufferings are folded within the collective experience of the Cold War as national tragedy: a tragedy to be overcome with capitalist—thus anti-communist, i.e., anti-North—advancement.

The media has consistently portrayed birth mothers' lives and stories through this rhetoric of national trauma and collective victimhood in a manner that ends up, once again, erasing their voices. In the grand narrative of national tragedy vis-à-vis the Cold War, transnational adoption has been represented in the South Korean media as a journey of the adoptee departing the country as an infant, growing up in the adoptive country (a country recognized as "advanced"), and returning in search of their birth mothers; reunion is its climatic closure. As a number of adoption studies scholars have noted, TV programs such as morning talk shows regularly broadcast the first meetings of adoptees and their birth mothers.¹⁸ The stories tend to end in tears, either through successfully reuniting with their "foreign" children or the publicly aired failure to find them.

Dherbeys's oral histories—and their intertextual workings with the images—pose a stark contrast to this standard, eschewing such melodramatic turns in both the photographs and the narrative texts. Where literary or visual

ruptures, e.g., climatic reunions, typically produce the accepted adoptee narrative, Dherbeys focuses instead on the birth parents' sense of loss. Through the absence of the adoptees-including Dherbeys herself-from her photographs, the stories of the birth parents in Omone convey deep grief, suppressed and carried throughout the birth parents' lives since the adoption, both for the loss of their children and the ensuing sense of loss that pervades their lives. As such, although absent from the photographs, the subjectivity conjured by Omone is that of the adoptee. Their absence permeates the work, reproducing the affect of the birth mothers' inability to mourn or celebrate the sending off of their children for adoption.¹⁹ While the affect of loss is profound, the photographs remain calm, belying the narrative that the viewer may be unconsciously expecting, thereby denving the viewer the self-identifying catharsis of melodramatic expressiveness. By instead representing non-climactic encounters between birthparents and Dherbeys, the photographs refuse to reproduce the nationalist, triumphal narrative of suffering-sacrificing-overcoming, which treats individuals as merely gears in the clockworks of progress.

The simultaneously familial and national (pan-familial) loss that takes place through the experience of transnational adoption is rarely examined in the context of either the trans-Pacific theater of World War II or the Cold War. Situating the practice of transnational adoption and its representation in the context of the continuing Cold War in the Asia-Pacific, it is critical to examine how such loss is part of what Jinah Kim calls postcolonial grief. Especially within the context of Asian diasporic subjectivity, the specter of World War II lingers in various forms, because "the notion of letting go of the attachment to grief... resolved through a new attachment to a proper replacement" is made impossible, "as some losses cannot ever be replaced, but rather are erased or lived as loss."20 For Korean birth parents and adoptees, the Cold War entails the most profound loss: for parents, of their children; for adoptees, according to Kim Park Nelson, "alienation from others and their birth race [...]." ²¹ At the same time, the public representations of this loss are primarily propagandistic celebrations of successful recovery: tearful reunions of birth parents and adoptees, occasionally followed by heavily scripted and edited "oohs and ahhs" from adoptees "impressed" with their (now equally "advanced") motherland.²² Indeed, these contrived spectacles are presented as a pan-Korean or "global Korean" event, bypassing the reality of the personal tragedies behind them.

The revamping of the nation as transnational—and, now, as encompassing a diaspora—is crucial to the process of simplifying and isolating the practice of transnational adoption in the history of the Cold War, itself the next step in global advancement. When transnational adoption is valorized as "the gift of freedom," the feelings of loss and grief on the part of both birth parents and adoptees are treated as a symptom of the Cold War condition, an unfortunate but unavoidable norm.²³ For the postcolonial/postwar nationstates of the Asia-Pacific region, the end of WWII also meant the start (or continuation) of US occupation, and thence to alliances and/or military conflicts with the United States: the Cold War. The Cold War is thus read as a historical chapter, progressing linearly from a starting point through conflict and culmination, and achieving closure through events such as treaties, reparations, and capital aid/investments. This Cold War temporality, however, ignores the multitemporal (and in this case transnational) experiences of its participants, and the continued state of transnational militarism in the Asia-Pacific and beyond.

To Jinah Kim, this complex reality of the Asia-Pacific arena is a "palimpsest" of the history between the United States and the Asia-Pacific. According to Kim, it

challenges a neoliberal temporality that fetishizes closure and linear progress, thus seeking to force a refusal to see how the past, present, and future exist simultaneously. But that simultaneity is impossible to ignore when thinking of how past wars and the violence of colonialism shape the postcolonial present.²⁴

Anachronistically Bergsonian or not, there is a critical point to take from Kim's argument. The first step of probing the Cold War temporality is, then, to unlearn its teleology: its lineal progression of developments and fallouts that perpetuate the South Korean state's positioning of itself as a victim, a positionality on which the state has depended for its transnational adoption practice and in their current "efforts" for reparation. Rather than treat transnational adoption simply as a symptom of the Cold War and an inevitable consequence of militarism, its foundation and the current official reaction—what has allowed the continued practice and ostracization of birth mothers and, at the same time, the ethnonationalistic repatriation of adoptees, whether they themselves desire or not—need to be scrutinized in consideration with individuals' differing experiences, including the multitemporality of adoption experiences.

The stories that Dherbeys presents and represents in her narrative texts and photographs conjure the multitemporality and spatiality of the Cold War as experienced daily by birth parents and adoptees. Their stories disinter the history of transnational adoption since the Korean War and the patriarchal nation-building processes that resulted in female infanticides and ongoing transnational adoption. And their different kinds of loss are perhaps irreconcilable, if we focus on the ways in which transnational adoption is merely the fallout of the Cold War—a repetition of a positivist approach to its history summated in binaries, particularly as in cause and effect; senders vs. receivers; and global superpowers vs. Third World victims. Yet the subject formation of the adoptee in the Korean transnational adoption narrative does not occur in Dherbeys's work, since her subject is not herself, or other transnational adoptees, but birth parents in South Korea. The adoptees remain outside of the photography extra-photographic—and can only be imagined, as most of the birth parents themselves have no idea where their adopted children live or what they do.

Also striking is the narrative's first-person voice. Dherbeys herself is an adoptee who has experienced emotionally overwhelming encounters and feels highly uncertain about her search for her birth mother.²⁵ As she openly admits that she was not ready to move forward quite so speedily as the

townspeople, who thought they knew her mother, the expected documentary mode in the reading of Dherbeys's photographs thus becomes something more intimate. *Omone* and *Retired*, Dherbeys has said, were turning points in her photography practice that "allowed her to reinvent herself as a photographer." ²⁶ This candidness and artistry allows the images and texts of *Omone* to blur the distinctions between the "genres" of photojournalism, ethnography, documentary, and art photography.

The multitemporality and multispatiality of transnational adoption: *Retired*

The second half of Dherbeys's exhibition, *Retired*, creates an equally powerful rupture in the rhetoric of transnational adoption and the temporality of the Cold War. The affect of intimacy remains constant despite the complete change of subject and location: an aging white man, Mr. Robert Dherbeys, Dherbeys's adoptive father; and the small southwest French city, Romanssur-Isère, where he was born and she grew up. ²⁷ *Retired* was conceived and executed in 2013–2015, upon Dherbeys's return from South Korea. Dherbeys moved back in with her father for about three months to do the initial shooting, returning later to photograph him several times more (Figures 13.8 and 13.9).²⁸



Figure 13.8 Agnès Dherbeys, "After three generations, December 2014, Romans, FR," from *Retired.* 2013–2015. C-print. Courtesy of the artist. © Agnès Dherbeys.



Figure 13.9 Agnès Dherbeys, "Last day, March 2014, Romans, FR," from *Retired*. 2013–2015. C-print. Courtesy of the artist. © Agnès Dherbeys.

Romans, with 34,095 residents, appears indistinctive and rather desolate during the daytime.²⁹ Dherbeys includes photographs of streets and buildings that she left behind at age 17 to embark on her studies. One shows an empty storefront with blue signage reading "J. Dherbeys." In the next, Mr. Dherbeys stands in a vacant store with a few shelving fixtures intact. Titled "After Three Generations" and "Last Day," these images allow viewers to deduce that the Dherbeys' three generations of family business have come to a close due to the city's ailing economy as well as the family's lack of offspring interested in continuing the business (Figures 13.10 and 13.11).

Photographs show Mr. Dherbeys grocery shopping in a supermarket alone, standing beside but not making eye contact with his new companion, and looking out the window of his apartment, the same unit in which Dherbeys grew up. The richness of soft yet clear details in the apartment interior, and the closeups of Mr. Dherbeys' aging features, produce an intense intimacy. Another photograph shows Mr. Dherbeys holding his granddaughter— Dherbeys' daughter. As in all of the photographs of Mr. Dherbeys, there is no notable expression of affection as he holds the baby. Unlike the other photographs, however, he is making eye contact with another person, as if engaging in a kind of conversation. This is particularly notable as he rarely faces Dherbeys or seems to communicate with her as she takes the photographs. Most of the images seem to be filled with awkward silences and the trials of living together again after many years (Figure 13.12).



Figure 13.10 Agnès Dherbeys, "Daily grocery shopping, December 2014, Romans, FR," from *Retired.* 2013–2015. C-print. Courtesy of the artist. © Agnès Dherbeys.



Figure 13.11 Agnès Dherbeys, "Robert Dherbeys, March 2015, Romans, FR," from *Retired.* 2013–2015. C-print. Courtesy of the artist. © Agnès Dherbeys.

In showing her retired, unexpressive, adoptive father who struggles with insomnia and feelings of emptiness,³⁰ Dherbeys does much more than capture an aging man in retirement or document uneventful days in an uneventful



Figure 13.12 Agnès Dherbeys, "Vercors, September 2014, FR," from Retired. 2013–2015. C-print. Courtesy of the artist. © Agnès Dherbeys.

town.³¹ The photographs convey the sensation of a quiet yet revealing reunion between father and daughter—which is particularly striking given the absence in *Omone* of socially conditioned reunion scenes, and the environment in which the exhibition was held, in South Korea and for mostly South Korean viewers.

To the South Korean viewer, transnational adoption-in this case represented by birth and/or adoptive parents—is the embarrassing result of (past) poverty and ignorance. As national development and enlightenment continues in the shadow of the militarized past and present, the state seeks to curtail criticism on transnational adoption by perpetuating the public rhetoric of victimhood: a story of children abandoned due to war and poverty, and the ignorance and low morale of birth parents. In the process of remembering the Korean War and the struggle for postwar recovery through the imagery of orphans, the affect of shame in sending children for adoption to "advanced nations" transforms into acceptance and hope. In the "tradition" of constant development and progress as a nation, the viewer sees that the advancement of the country remains the most critical aim, and that the history of transnational adoption was deeply unfortunate but ultimately inevitable (especially since most returnees are adults and presented as belonging to both their adoptive and birth countries). This narrative presents the ongoing, if greatly lessened, practice of transnational adoption as terminable only through even more economic and cultural advancement, as befitting a neoliberal temporality, a temporality of unrestricted growth based on the conception of a free market that can erase everything else in its path. Indeed, this self-legitimization continues to allow the adoption agencies-and the state that promoted their growth-to do their work without public scrutiny.³²

The small French city of Romans and the small towns that Dherbeys visited in South Korea to meet the subjects of *Omone* provide pairings and similarities that reinforce the multispatiality of transnational adoption. Despite the viewer's unfamiliarity with these places, the towns' declining economies and aging populations can be inferred. The adoptive parents get older as the birthparents get older. Mr. Dherbeys's days appear empty, like the family store that he is about to exit for the last time. Although the number of residents slowly increased over the years, many young people, like Dherbeys, have gone elsewhere in search of opportunities. The closure of the Dherbeys' family business is related to both the adoptive daughter's departure and her "not so close" relationship with her father, which she describes as "distant and filled with misunderstanding."33 Dherbeys, the photographer, is also grappling with these places rapidly becoming more and more irrelevant on the "advanced" global stage, where France once reigned and to which the South Korean state aspires. In this way, Retired ties in with Omone as part of the larger context of neoliberal temporality.

As such, although Dherbeys's two series bring to mind points of comparison between South Korea and France, they do not create the expected binary between the distinct worlds of her birth and her upbringing. This is crucial, given the ways in which transnational adoptee identity is typically represented. Nelson finds that the field of transnational adoption studies has traditionally forced adoptees to subjectivize themselves between their native and adopted homes.³⁴ In this process of subjectivization, what is made visible is not the postcolonial geopolitics that seeps through the global state of imperialist capitalism or the face of the receiving countries but the subjectivity of successfully grown adoptees returning to their "roots"—or tormented adoptees to be, belatedly, nurtured by their birth country.

The feeling of loss prevalent throughout *Omone* is thus sustained, differently yet equally intensely, in *Retired*. In Dherbeys's photographs, the sense of personal loss expands and permeates the town's landscape as well, and further: across France, across middle-class Europeans, where the declining European bourgeoisie feel they are a victim of "other," relatively younger, capitalisms on the other side of the globe.

* * *

While recent exhibitions featuring Dherbeys and other adoptee artists are valuable recognitions of their individual works, it is also noteworthy acknowledgement of the adoptee diaspora as a critical aspect of Korea's modern history.³⁵ Like many other histories of marginalized communities that do not represent the officially sanctioned national history, this recognition did not take place overnight. It is a product of decades-long creative endeavors, especially of adoptee artists, their collective activism, and scholarly activities that have made adoption studies in the trans-Pacific context a critical field within humanistic studies. Despite the potential for Dherbeys herself—a globally successful photographer who has garnered prestigious awards and solo shows—to be treated as a representation of adoptee success, her work defies the narrative of transformative subjectivization of an adoptee in the Western world. She thereby offers a new way to envision the multiple temporalities of transnational adoption and, ultimately, the Cold War.

Notes

- 1 Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 18.
- 2 Imperial liberalism has allowed the affect of benevolence and care regarding international/interracial adoption to create massive systems enshrining the practice. While the act of international adoption began as liberal democracy's righteous extension of generosity to Third World children, it is intrinsically entangled in the imperialist power struggles that shaped much of the geopolitics of the Cold War in Asia and the Pacific.
- 3 The list of adoptee artists and scholars is long and varied. The Copenhagenbased artist Jane Jin Kaisen was one of the three artists shown at the Korea Pavilion in the 2019 Venice Biennale; Tobias Hübinette, based in Karlstad and Stockholm, has published numerous works in adoption and cultural studies, including *Comforting an Orphan Nation: Representations of International Adoption and Adopted Koreans in Korean Popular Culture* (2006); Kim Park Nelson, a Minnesota-based scholar, has published a monograph titled *Invisible Asians: Korean American Adoptees, Asian American Experiences, and Racial Exceptionalism* (2016); the Berkeley-based producer, director, and writer Deann Borshay Liem has directed and produced award-winning films, including *First Person Plural* (2000), *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee* (2010), and *Geographies of Kinship—The Korean Adoption Story* (2019).
- 4 Unyŏngjiwŏnkwa, "Kuknaewoe Ipyanghyŏnhwang," The Ministry of Health and Welfare, June 25, 2019, http://www.mohw.go.kr/react/gm/sgm0601vw. jsp?PAR_MENU_ID=13&MENU_ID=13040201&page=2&CONT_ SEQ=342151.
- 5 Dherbeys was based in Thailand from 2005 to 2011 and was awarded the Overseas Press Club of America's Robert Capa Gold Medal in 2010 for her work in Thailand.
- 6 Agnès Dherbeys, Omone, 2013, Color photographs and text, 2013.
- 7 Agnès Dherbeys, Omone, 2013. Reprinted with permission of the artist.
- 8 Agnès Dherbeys, Omone, 2013. Reprinted with permission of the artist.
- 9 Agnès Dherbeys, "A Personal Look at South Korea's Long History of Adoptions," MSNBC, February 12, 2015, http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/ personal-look-south-koreas-long-history-adoptions. The few exceptions include the work of Dherbeys and Hosu Kim, whose monograph on what she calls virtual mothering is, as she states, "the first academic work to focus on birth mothers, who have relinquished babies to transnational adoption[.]" See Hosu Kim, *Birth Mothers and Transnational Adoption Practice in South Korea: Virtual Mothering* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 3.
- 10 Dherbeys, "A Personal Look at South Korea's Long History of Adoptions," 14.
- 11 Dherbeys, "A Personal Look at South Korea's Long History of Adoptions," 8.
- 12 For discussions on photographic representations of the family in family planning campaigns, see Jung Joon Lee, "Envisioning Modernity, Practicing Desire: Baby and Family Photographic Portraiture in Korea," *History of Photography* 37, no. 3 (August 2013): 323–24. The campaigns extended to the sterilization of women with disabilities.
- 13 Hosu Kim, Birth Mothers and Transnational Adoption Practice in South Korea: Virtual Mothering (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 38. Kim continues on the systemic exploitations of birth mothers: "The birth mothers' accounts

describe, a prevalence of domestic violence, spousal neglect, and economic hardship, fraught with interpersonal gendered violence, and multiple exploitations. Furthermore, the birth mother's separation from the child is fraught with institutionalized gendered violence, such as the economic marginalization of women; the absence of legal recognition for single motherhood; the lack of custody rights for divorcees; and the unavailability of public relief for battered women. Their life stories poignantly convey the concrete effects of gendered violence at both the interpersonal and institutional levels, illustrating how a family crisis can escalate into a family's disintegration, due to a dearth of public provisions."

- 14 See, for example, Naoki Sakai, "On Romantic Love and Military Violence: Transpacific Imperialism and U.S.-Japan Complicity," in *Militarized Currents: Toward a Decolonized Future in Asia and the Pacific* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 205–21.
- 15 In the 1990s, the series was published as a photography book in South Korea, gaining much attention for the photographs, as well as the topic of mixed-race orphans at Holt Orphanage (Holt International). See Myung Duck Joo, *The Mixednames: Photographs by Joo, Myungduck* (Seoul: Shigak, 1998).
- 16 For an examination of the ways in which the Korean War has been commemorated with photography, see Jung Joon Lee, "No End to the Image War: Photography and the Contentious Memories of the Korean War," *The Journal* of Korean Studies 18, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 337–70.
- 17 The United States and Scandinavian countries are often compared as such.
- 18 Hosu Kim, "Television Mothers: Birth Mothers Lost and Found in the Search and Reunion Narrative," in *Birth Mothers and Transnational Adoption Practice in South Korea: Virtual Mothering* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 115–43.
- 19 While the feelings of loss and grief discussed here mainly concern those of the birth parents, I am also referring to the loss and grief of adoptees in absence. Kim Park Nelson discusses transnational adoptees' "profound sense of isolation," including "alienation from others and their birth race... Other adoptees described feelings of loss and grief about their birth culture." See Kim Park Nelson, *Invisible Asians: Korean American Adoptees, Asian American Experiences, and Racial Exceptionalism* (New Brunswick: NJ, 2016), 84.
- 20 Jinah Kim, Postcolonial Grief: The Afterlives of the Pacific Wars in the Americas (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019), 9.
- 21 While the feelings of loss and grief represented here mainly concern those of the birth parents, I am also referring to the loss and grief of adoptees in absence. Nelson discusses transnational adoptees' "profound sense of isolation." See Nelson, *Invisible Asians: Korean American Adoptees, Asian American Experiences, and Racial Exceptionalism*, 84.
- 22 Dherbeys described her experience of appearing on a program about returnees on Arirang TV, an English-speaking Korean cable TV channel mainly targeted toward an international and diasporic viewership. Agnès Dherbeys, FaceTime interview with the author, January 11, 2020.
- 23 Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012).
- 24 Kim, Postcolonial Grief: The Afterlives of the Pacific Wars in the Americas, 8–9.
- 25 In a conversation with the author, Dherbeys expressed that she was never eager to look for her birth parents, nor felt comfortable identifying herself with other transnational adoptees. Dherbeys, FaceTime interview with the author.
- 26 Email correspondence with the author. December 12, 2019.
- 27 While Dherbeys was growing up, there were eight other transnational adoptees in Romans, including one from India with whom Dherbeys became close. Considering the city's size, I find this number to be rather high. Dherbeys, FaceTime interview with the author.

- 28 Dherbeys mentioned that her [adoptive] mother, Jacqueline, had died of cancer in 2007, suggesting that she would have photographed her if she were alive. Dherbeys.
- 29 "Populations Légales 2016 Commune de Romans-Sur-Isère (26281)" (Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques), accessed December 31, 2019, https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/3681328?geo=COM-26281.
- 30 For this series, the individual photographs come with brief captions hinting at what is going on: for example, a caption for one depicting Mr. Dherbeys's dining table reads "Ever since I can remember, my father has been hammered by insomnia. Every night around 4 am, he sets up the table for breakfast for the morning after." Reprinted with permission of the artist.
- 31 Dherbeys first noticed during the shooting that her father's face was "very cinematic, like an actor." Dherbeys, FaceTime interview with the author.
- 32 Comparatively, the steep rise in transnational adoptions from China is an alarming indicator of where transnational adoption stands in neoliberal temporality. Over 150,000 children, mostly girls, were adopted internationally since the introduction of the one-child policy in 1979, the annual number peaking in 2005. It has been decreasing since. See Monica Dowling, "Globalisation and International Adoption from China," in *Handbook on the Family and Marriage in China*, ed. Xiaowei Zang and Lucy X. Zhao, Handbooks of Research on Contemporary China (Cheltenham and Northamton: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2017), 305–20.
- 33 Agnès Dherbeys, Retired, 2013–2015, Color photographs and text, 2013–2015.
- 34 Nelson, Invisible Asians: Korean American Adoptees, Asian American Experiences, and Racial Exceptionalism, 152–53.
- 35 As noted earlier, the Korean Pavilion at the 2019 Venice Biennale, for example, included works by Jane Jin Kaisen, who was born in South Korea in 1980 and grew up in Denmark. Her work in Venice highlighted her decade-long project on the issues of transnational, interracial adoption that also unpacks the workings of the Cold War politics on race, gender, immigration, kinship, and more.
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