

RADIO MALAYA

A black and white photograph of a stone building with a tall, tiered spire and palm trees in the foreground. The building is constructed from large, rectangular stone blocks. The spire is a prominent feature, rising from the building's roofline. Several palm trees are visible in the foreground, their fronds silhouetted against the sky. The overall composition is a low-angle shot, looking up at the building and trees.

abridged
conversations
about art

NUS MUSEUM



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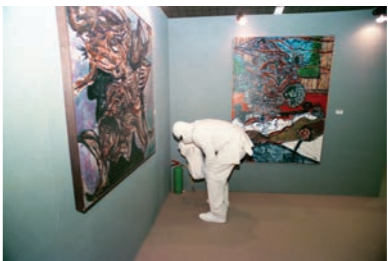
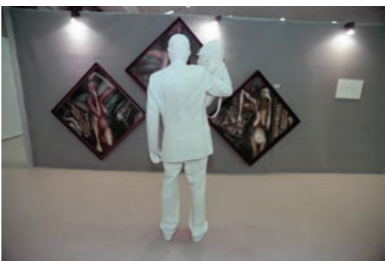
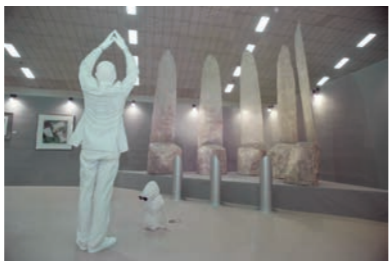


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Ahmad Mashadi and Siddharta Perez

It was a chance reading of a publication The Short Stories and Radio Plays of S. Rajaratnam, edited by Irene Ng and published by Epigram in 2011 that brought our attention to S. Rajaratnam’s 1957 radio play entitled ‘A Nation in the Making’¹. The play is an intriguing work devised around the notion of ideas, conditioned by aspirations and realities, and the author’s self-initiated task of coalescing opinions around a unifying perspective of community and nation. The setting for the play was significant, written and presented during the very period when these opinions were in currency and as such, evolving within a landscape of apathy, skepticism and enthusiasm. Contemporaneous to the unfolding events and the varied responses to them, the play is highlighted here also for its prescient regard to culture, conceived in terms of identity-making informed by geography and history.



Its adeptness and skill in the craft of reason and persuasion cannot be emphasized enough within the medium of radio being instrumental in its formal and conceptual articulation. The exhibition in this regard is conceived as discursive encounters of ideas about art and culture in Singapore, having its roots in the late colonial conditions of the post-War. As such “Radio Malaya”² is not referenced here in its institutional terms, that is its role and place in history, but rather to invoke the dialogic play between perspectives, competing or complementary, disciplined and defined or bifurcating and elusive. The artifactual, as a basis of exhibition making, remains central to the conception of the project. Included are objects from the Museum’s collection³, supported by loans from collectors and artists.

The exhibition follows from the NUS Museum’s earlier project “Between Here and Nanyang: Marco Hsu’s ‘A Brief History of Malayan Art’” (2013-2016), proposing ways that the University’s permanent collection – its conception informed by Singapore’s period of decolonization – may be read in relation to one of the earliest writing on the art and cultural history of Malaya. The book “A Brief History of Malayan Art”⁴ consolidates Hsu’s writings from the early 1960s, a period of transformation that led to Singapore’s

short-lived merger with Malaysia in 1963. In it Hsu proposes a cultural history, from the neolithic to the contemporary, which sought the viability of a concept of national culture, one that could accommodate the dynamics of cultural encounters, reshaping older traditions and forging newer practices, while at the same time presupposing a collective struggle to identify such practices to Malaya and Singapore. Nation and citizenship as crucial themes in the decades leading to Singapore’s self-rule and eventual independence made the work of commentators and practitioners complex, whether held latent or overt. For Hsu who wrote for the Chinese language newspapers, part of this concern involved negotiating between national and communal identities. Hsu’s final invocation “from desert to oasis” proposed a modernity shaped by positions and interactions, optimistic in his prognosis that “Malayan art” in 1963, conceived by choice or accident, is already upon us.

Marco Hsu’s cursory survey of Malaya’s material and cultural histories has to be appreciated in its relationship to a mass

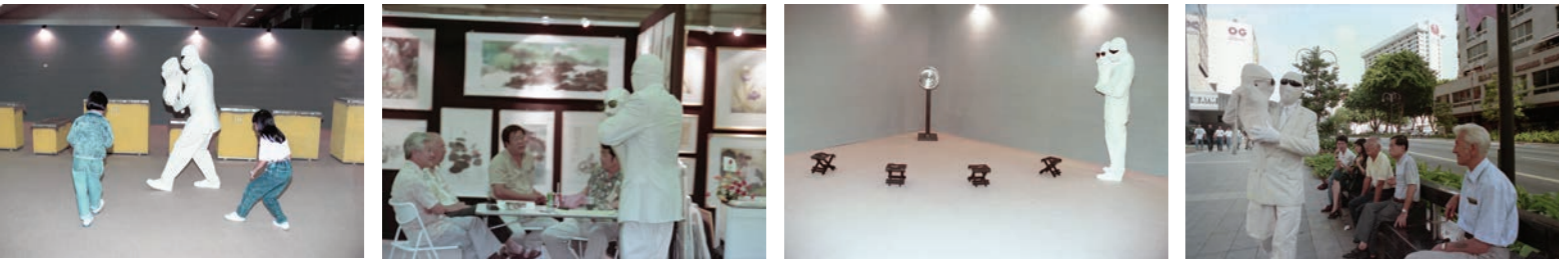
public: as arguments and positions developed over time, published variously during the furtive period of the 1950s. In a period significant for creative writers and artists to stake their varied positions on art, society and politics, he was not alone in his belief in the active use of the media to shape public opinions.

“A Nation in the Making” was written by S. Rajaratnam prior to his entry into politics, when he was an editorial staff at the Straits Times and was then known as a journalist, fiction writer and playwright. The six-part radio play was broadcasted by Radio Malaya from 11 July to 15 August 1957, at the eve of the formation of the Federation of Malaya.

The play is structured around the themes of history, ethnicity, and contemporary politics, organized to address questions of social cohesion, the struggle for an independent and united Malaya and national identity. In the immediate years after the Second World War leading to independence, radio assumed a crucial role in shaping public opinion. His writings can be associated to his reflections and extensive readings into the English literature, Greek and Indian classics, the philosophical foundations of the classics best indicate the rhetoric underpinning of the play

which weaves and addresses diverse positions in an attempt to acknowledge perspectives and persuade. He referenced a range of historical and contemporary sources, utilizing them to establish contexts, identify precedents and issue propositions, devised through character choice. They are among an ensemble of characters introduced to represent at the time, commonly held views and anxieties about race, politics and cultural identity. Rajaratnam clarifies the project of nationalism and the search for converging histories:

Student of Malayan History: Colonialism exposed countries like Malaya to progressive thought and learning. One of these is nationalism and the national state. Now having created the economic institutions appropriate to a national state, it was inevitable that sooner or later the political institutions national state would be created. The emergence of an independence movement, and its victory, were logical and inevitable developments. It was not a question of whether we were or were not



fitted for Merdeka. It was simply that a free enterprise economy could develop further only on the basis of free political institutions. To have withheld independence would have been to invite the breakdown of the whole system that colonialism had helped to create. But it is not enough to win independence. We must learn to hold the independent state together. Nationalism is such a force. But it must be nationalism appropriate to conditions in Malaya.⁵ [...]

Spirit of History: Forgive me if I make it seem too simple. But from my vantage point here, very often such problems are not so serious as they appear to mortals like you [referring to quibbling Malaysians to-be]. It is simply that the growth of civilisation in Malaya is not due to the effect of one race, one community, one group. So if you discover in the history of Malaya the imprint of many civilisations and many cultures; and if you can show that the Malaya of today is what it is, through the efforts not of one race but of all races who may live in it, then you will reveal the binding strands of a Malayan history.⁶ [...]

The play by S. Rajaratnam, shaped by the urgencies of its day should be noted for its attempts in developing economic and social arguments drawn from fiction and academic writings in history, from Rudyard Kipling for his provocation of difference, to the Malayan economist Ungku Abdul Aziz for his prescient observations into the material conditions of then Malays. To underline such invocations, he summons the Spirit of History and Ptolemy, introduced to discipline a line of inquiry structured along a dialectical interplay between diverse sentiments. At its core is the appeal for a Malaya defined by the 'binding strands' of the many civilisational histories that make up its ethnicities and their potentials for an assimilationist ideal, in part through the struggle for a common language that accommodates varied cultural attitudes. S. Rajaratnam builds into his passages stirring exchanges on communal identities between the many characters – lines drawn from the great traditions of India and China, as well as the wave of Islamisation, finding new potentials in a transformative Southeast Asia – remarkable in foregrounding speculations into the unfolding project of national culture. While



the play is driven by a literary impulse as much as an attempt to persuade an anxious public, its implications into what it may constitute such national culture materially is intriguing, forming part of the emerging cultural discourse in which others, including Marco Hsu, were part of. At the University of Malaya, the inception of the University Art Museum earlier in 1955 formed part of this consideration, conceived, according to its founding curator Dr. Michael Sullivan, to develop a collection for the purpose of the teaching of art history, organized along five key collections: (1) Chinese and Southeast Asian Ceramics, (2) Hindu and Buddhist Art, (3) Malaya and the Islamic World, (4) Southeast Asia, and (5) Contemporary Malayan Art. Sullivan had also proposed that the Museum should also have “a representative collection of contemporary art, particularly from Malaya and Indonesia,” as a way to reveal the “state of our own culture and of the way Malayan artists are contributing to it.”⁷ Sullivan – moved by the nascent postcolonial discourses operating within the intellectual and political fields – was in the thick of this transformation, and was then tasked with the role of establishing the art museum alongside an art history course at the University of Malaya. Sullivan’s approach was one of locating and cultures in a network of relations alongside the very need to situate its constitutive

necessity. Singapore and Malaya, according to Sullivan, “want the dignity that comes with cultural independence.”⁸ T.K. Sabapathy arguably became Sullivan’s most significant student, later remarked that Sullivan and his activities “propel the teaching of art and the art museum into the social, private and public spheres, reaching beyond the university.”⁹ For Sabapathy, the ‘intercultural’ and ‘interculturalisation’ (transmission and reception) suggested in Sullivan’s scholarship and curatorial work prospect a humanist concern in the study of material culture, proposing comparability between aesthetic systems over geographies and periods, and further, their interactions and outcomes. Malaya and Southeast Asia – in being permeable, receptive, and transactive – fascinated Sullivan as settings that mediate and sustain such encounters of exercising choice through continuities and inflections.

Further in his many writings Sabapathy expanded on these prospects. The great traditions of Southeast Asia and the contemporary regard for the cultures of the region’s distinct modern states provide a material grounding into this question

where colonial and post-colonial scholarships, while distinct in their objectives, origins and approaches, may offer affinities and relationships – if not reconciliation - if the project of Singapore and Southeast Asian art history is to be rendered meaningful. His practice in writing and curating offers ways of gauging such potentials. These may be read directly or indirectly in relation to his accounting of the historiography of Southeast Asian art, prospecting art to accommodate comparabilities, diverging contexts, and contemporary receptions. His seminal paper isolated for the purpose of this exhibition, “Preliminary Observations On Art Historiography in Southeast Asia”, presented at a regional symposium “Towards a Southeast Asian Perspective in Art History and Aesthetics”, was written in 1995 during the feverish period of intra and inter regional cultural exchanges across Southeast Asia and the Asia Pacific. He foregrounds the art historiography of Southeast Asia, highlighting scholarships of historians of classical India and pre-colonial Southeast Asia by examining possibilities offered as much as the blind spots. Likewise, he articulates the implications into ways in which the modern and the contemporary may be read meaningfully, as he returns again and again to a fundamental question – “To date not a single perspective or framework for the study of modern

art of the region has been mooted by writers or scholars from this country or the region”¹⁰ – necessary in accounting the art of the region, calibrated to the circumstances of its production and reception. He explicates further:

Be that as it may, by and large we are urged to re-look into ways by which we write the history of art; we are asked, as a matter of urgency, to re-examine motivations which spur such enterprises and the grounds on which histories are built. We are also required to explore methods by which the apprehension of artistic productions can be integrated or connected with other modes of production in order to gain for artists and their practice a sense of rootedness in society. In enjoining participants to attend to all or any of these, the writer/writers of the brief envision the emergence of a Southeast Asian art history with a distinct identity, one which while being different will not be subservient to art historical discourses elsewhere, most especially

from the West and even more especially when studying modern contemporary art practice and beyond. In this connection, I am reminded of Apinan Poshyananda’s query, expressed in vivid terms, directed at what it takes to maintain this sense of difference; he asks: must artists and writers necessarily succumb to “the heavy breathings of the Crow-Krauss-Crimp clique” before their views are recognised as valid and authentic?¹¹

The aforementioned texts described above are by no means highlighted to suggest the absence of others that may prompt further complexities. An accompanying gallery guide that consists of texts drawn from other writings, reportages and interviews, completed over the broad period of the 1950s to 1990s are included in the exhibition. These are selected to complement ways through which the NUS Museum’s permanent collection may be speculated and rendered as objects whose collecting histories may be associated to Malaya’s anxious period of decolonization, and are complicated either by a residual anxiety of becoming or responses to a project that is sustained albeit differentiated across decades following independence. The privileging of such complexities is crucial –

in as far as to acknowledge collections and their institutional histories as material to their readings and surfacing the need to allow re-renderings that are fruitful in their provisionalities of accommodating varied positions, complementary or oppositional. To this end the exhibition is also augmented by loans from artists and collectors, each artwork allowing strands of connections and disruptions, allowing conceptions of the Malayan to interweave and contrast – in their effervescence, reticence and ambivalence.

- 1 The original typewritten scripts are housed in the S. Rajaratnam Private Archives Collection in the ISEAS Library, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. See Irene Ng Ed., The Short Stories and Radio Plays of S. Rajaratnam (Singapore: Epigram, 2011).
- 2 Radio Malaya was formed through the merger of the Malaya Broadcasting Corporation and Pan-Malayan Department of Broadcasting in 1946, headquartered in Singapore. As part of the British post-War programme, the station was conceived to carry out the task of information and enlightenment of the peoples in the colony. Licensing began in 1947 with the critical task of promoting Community Listening. Broadcasting during the Malayan Emergency (1948–1958) was an important tool in winning the hearts and minds of a public, whose diverse wartime experiences and perspectives on the British's post-War role were made complicated by communist insurgencies and its own information offensive. Broadcasts on the subjects like rural development were aimed at vulnerable communities of the kampongs, farms and the



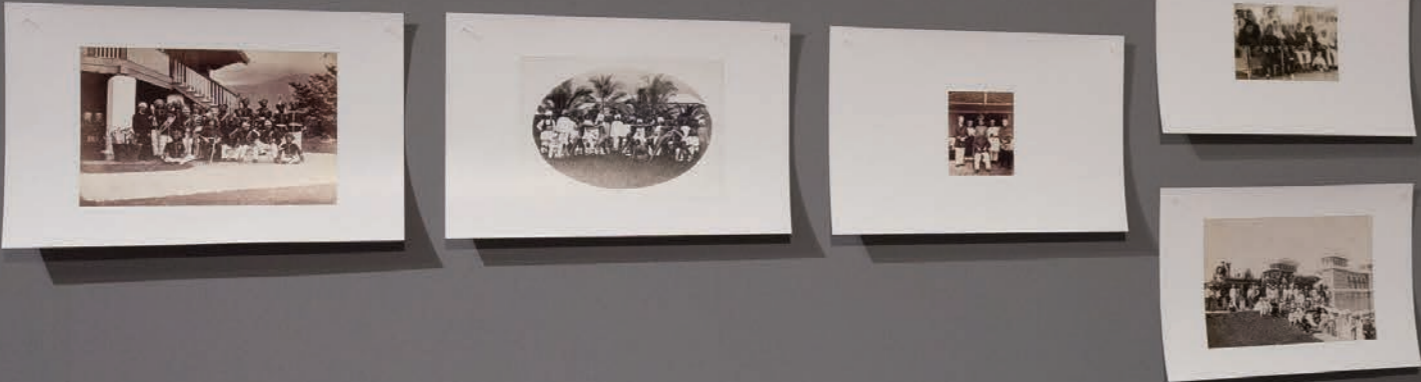
plantation and tin-mining districts to 'bring them into closer touch with the government and with progress in the outside world'. With the formation of the Federation of Malaya in 1957, radio services between Singapore and Kuala Lumpur were eventually separated with the establishment of Radio Singapore in 1959, with H.H. Beamish as its Director, adopting Aneka Budaya Tunggal Suara (Many Cultures, One Voice) as its motto.

- 3 This exhibition was also conceived as an opportunity to display recent donations to the NUS Museum from T.K. Sabapathy, collected by the donor over the course of the 1980s and 1990s as purchases or gifts from artists principally from Singapore and Malaysia.
- 4 Marco Hsu, Lai Chee Kien Trans., A Brief History of Malayan Art (Singapore: Millenium Books, 1999)
- 5 S. Rajaratnam, "A Nation in the Making (Part I)", in Irene Ng, op cit., p. 91
- 6 S. Rajaratnam, "A Nation in the Making (Part III)", in Irene Ng, op cit., p. 126
- 7 Quoted in T.K. Sabapathy T.K. Ed., Past, Present, Beyond: Re-nascence of an Art Collection. (Singapore: NUS Museums, 2002), p. 11-12.
- 8 Michael Sullivan. 'Art & the University Malaya' in The Singapore Artist, Journal of the Singapore Art Society, Vol 1 No 3, March 1955. (Singapore: Singapore Art Society, 1955) p. 4, 6.
- 9 T.K. Sabapathy, op. cit.
- 10 T.K. Sabapathy, "Preliminary Observations On Art Historiography in Southeast Asia", a paper presented at Towards a Southeast Asian Perspective in Art History and Aesthetics, SEAMEO SPAFA Symposium on Southeast Asian Art History and Regional Aesthetics, 1995, Unpublished, p. 1













Asbestos¹, Beads², Toothbrush Handles³, Carved Tortoiseshell Handle⁴, Wood Bristle Base⁵, Wood Handle⁶, Corks⁷, White Ceramic Electrical Fitting⁸, Bulb Filament⁹, Small Glass Bulb¹⁰, Small Battery¹¹, Belt Hook¹², Bolt¹³, Brass Lid¹⁴, Buckle¹⁵, Burton¹⁶, Cigarette Holder¹⁷, Straits Settlement Copper Coins¹⁸, Square Coin¹⁹, Door Furniture²⁰, Fish Hook²¹, Corroded Lamp Base²², Lead Pieces²³, Nails²⁴, Pin²⁵, Scale Hands²⁶, Wall Hook²⁷, European Type Spoon²⁸, Bakelite Threaded Neck²⁹, Two Pink Fragments³⁰, Political Party Badge³¹, Chinese Type Spoon³², Table Tennis Ball³³, Degraded Rubber³⁴, Cylindrical Pounder³⁵, White Marble Spheres³⁶, Dice³⁷, Modern Compound Tiles³⁸, Iron Spike³⁹, Iron Bill Hook⁴⁰, Fragile Carved Comb⁴¹, Broom Handle⁴², Oar⁴³, Clog⁴⁴, Coal⁴⁵, Flints⁴⁶, Pyrite⁴⁷, Green Stone⁴⁸, Pumice⁴⁹, Slate Knives⁵⁰, Small Smooth Pebbles⁵¹, Worked Stone⁵², Quartz Rock Crystal⁵³









Siddharta Perez

Jose Tence Ruiz performed "Without It, I Am Invisible" in Singapore in 1993. A series of three-performances, his bandaged white figure roamed the 1993 Singapore International Art Fair, the stretch of Orchard Road, and finally as a joint performance with Jailani Kuning in a group exhibition by The Artist Village in Gallery 21. Clothed and bandaged in white, Ruiz references the image of the character Griffin from from the 1933 film "The Invisible Man" based on the 1897 novel by English author Herbert George Wells (H.G. Wells). The mummy-like apparition that inspired these performances highlights a metaphor that man will use technology to render himself visible. Ruiz's statement at the period of these performances is grounded on using this antiquated image to call attention to its appropriateness to the coming millennium and the humanist compulsion to resist technology and the displacement that comes with its acceleration.



Siddharta Perez: Will you then introduce us to the white figure that was the crux of the three-part work "Without It, I am Invisible" (1993) performed in Singapore? Last night I revisited James Whale's 1933 film to find affinities of the invisible man to your work. As an image, your white figure looked like a spectre from the past; how did Whale's film figure into your work?

Jose Tence Ruiz: I have not watched "The Invisible Man" recently. What got burned into my memory was the magic moment when Griffin drinks the monocane and begins to disappear. My mental residue which gave me the trope in 1992 came from watching the televised excerpts in the early '60s. There is a Classic Illustrated comic of this as well and I also own a book on movies in Hollywood. The frames of the comics visualization and the stills of Whale's efforts aided my recall and emerged in my mind as I contemplated the action. Hints of Ralph Ellison's "Invisible Man" was a mere conceptual overlap. The picture of my Invisible Man was of H.G. Wells's and Whale's. I deal in pictures after all, even if they are informed or nuanced by other readings.

SP: Thirty years after you watched the movies in your grandfather's black and white television in Quezon City, what

conditions then incubated this image when you moved to Singapore?

JTR: The topic of HG Wells, my own anxiety at the technological transformation I was seeing in Singapore from 1988 to 1993, and the resultant distances these created congealed in me then the onus for this action (which is what we will call the performances from hereon).

The white figure, not exact to James Whale’s icon, was my decision as a reaction to the comparatively very clean surroundings that Singapore had. Anyone who’s lived in Metro Manila feels this difference. The whiteness was not meant to be ghost-like, but rather it was meant to depict the encounter of the clinical. The bandages, referenced from H.G. Wells and Whale, carried this sense. In fact, many of them were purchased at the Singapore General Hospital dispensary in Outram.



SP: I am speculating on time as shaped by the unique system of Singapore, and how you felt that the city was on acceleration as a construction but also in its subsumption to make the state arrive foremost in the new millennium. It is telling that you speak of this every day disjunction having moved into Singapore in 1988.

JTR: I was more into the “shock of the clean” — the reliably antiseptic, and desirable surroundings of the no-littering state: the erasure of the dirty kampongs in favor of 5, 12, or 25 story efficient housing, the stainlessness of the modern 90s along Orchard, the effective implementation of a no-emissions policy for cars, no ‘bloody’ spitting on the sidewalks rule (expletive, not tubercular idiom). I was impressed if not downright envious that we couldn’t even keep this clean atmosphere in good old Quezon City, compared to “scruffy” Outram Park.

Because it was clear to me that I would not be absorbed and that I would eventually return to chaotic Manila soon enough, I did not let myself yearn to belong in a place that I was projected to leave in five years time. Read the account of the cannibal who wore a clock as an amulet but would not be governed by its time – that was me, Filipino time with a Singaporean bundy clock.

SP: Anachronism can make ghosts out of people in a place that aspires to be hypervisible. Did the white figure manifest as a symptom of being spectralised – where certain conditions produce subjects (such as an émigré yourself) that stand apart from society?

JTR: Manifest may not apply as much as finally come out. It took 5 years almost before all would be borne from all the accumulated conditions I had encountered. But being in pristine, airconditioned, efficient, clinical, antiseptic, and distant Singapore allowed my Invisible Man to germinate. I would not have had this displacement had I been born in Singapore and grew up there as the tech advancement was unfolding. I would have felt it natural and even an achievement. But I went there at 32, from the bowels of Legarda, post the Marcosian years of illusion and unkept promises of development into an actual developed Asian state: I was of course out of sync.



SP: What gave you the impetus to perform “Without It, I Am Invisible” after all this time of coming into terms with your own transplantation?

JTR: My entering The Artist Village was the valve. I could only speculate that their encouragement towards one another and favouring of actions came from the conditions that there were no urgency for sales, no enterprises for the avant-garde just then and the existence of other displacement.

But being employed full-time/overtime at the Straits Times didn’t leave me too much time to intellectualise my projects. One just has to find time. I had to look at the rules that one had to confront in Singapore, and work out ways to get it done. Remember, actions were officially not allowed except with a local police clearance. I clearly had no interest in this process, and thus planned everything with a venue for misdirection and implementation, given all the constraints. All participants — myself, my wife and the photographer involved were generally pre-occupied, so minimal planning was all we could afford. Then we had to go and do the action. However, my wife had all our immigration papers with her in case the authorities stopped us and brought us in for inquest.

SP: I understand that the theatrical framing of your performance owed itself to your collaborators/photographers George Gascon, Lilen Uy, Lim Sin Thai, Koh Nguang How and Rochit Tañedo. But how were your actions determined – were you enacting a certain vibe reflective of the itinerary of the day of your performance?

JTR: George, Lilen, Sin Thai, Koh, Rochit and I never planned what to do. The only critical part of the preparation was bundle myself so no skin would ever show through. I relied on their instincts, their vision. I trusted their expertise and experience. What we have in the pictures is genuinely spontaneous but shared; me posing, vogue-ing with them deciding, framing, composing, reacting non-verbally. I gave no clues as to what I would do next, but slowed my action enough for them to capture. We used 300 and 1200 ASA films then, automatic focusing SLRs. That was a lot more challenging than today (23 years later). But, I did know they were seasoned journalists, and Koh was a dedicated documentarist. Three and a half hours later, I was soaked and the sweat was about to come through the



white dermis. My illusion had to end. I would shout through my mouthpiece to the entourage, time to go home, and all followed.

SP: Not discounting its ghostly form, do you think the figuration of absence and presence hold the power of the spectre to demand at least a response in its haunting? In this case, it is spectral body that inhabits social/public spaces and regulated spaces of art.

JTR: Spectrality may have been better called “low-profile”. Also, I executed the action based on a better informed, more involved and ultimate rather inbred constituency: Artists Village and maybe friends who might make sense of it. What the Singaporean public would do was unknown to us, and we were gambling on any collateral reaction, but all that happened was a bonus.

Did I care for the spectrality? If it kept me from being arrested for not complying with ordinances governing street actions, why not? Do some art, tell your friends, keep your high paying job. That seemed to be a good premise. Most of the people we showed ourselves to along River Valley Road, Orchard Road, World Trade center and all the bus rides in between actually surmised that it was an episode of Gotcha!, a Singapore Broadcasting

Corporation [now Mediacorp] candid camera spinoff popular in Singapore then. They actually felt I was going to do a gag. I’d live with that ambivalence, if only to negotiate the general repression that surrounded unofficial and unofficialized public action in Singapore then.

SP: For the first performance at the Singapore World Trade Centre [presently Harbourfront Centre], how did the character of the white figure project a spectralised body representing an expendable public that looks at art?

JTR: I really didn’t think of my World Trade Center actions as a public looking at art, but as me: an artist filtering other art. I would mock, copy, mime, spoof art, as artists do when documentation abounds and the panoply of the past is there lain like a free buffet. I did somehow also react to the fact that I had my little id, my mini-me ventriloquist’s puppet which I spoke to silently, hinting at any and many repressed dialogues surrounding me. When I glanced at the multitude of fire extinguishers at the WTC, it hit me for the

puppet to hit on them. Impulse, but not premeditated.

I still have to actually re examine why I responded like I did. But appropriation and mirroring previously done art was all at the fore of what I chose to do in those three and a half hour stretches. I might add that it was physically uncomfortable, and maybe the discomfort fed my impulsiveness every now and then.

Public reactions were generally beyond my control, and, save for the police, I didn’t give them that much focus, as compared to the unspoken, gestural dialogue I was having with myself and my photographer. Knowing about art then seemed like an incestuous secret. So the public had to be reckoned as incidental. Publics are arbitrary menageries, and I have opted for my inner compass to weave my way through the encounters.

SP: Thinking about your translocation between Manila and Singapore and back, did the reiteration of “Without It I am Invisible” mirror a certain belatedness of being naturalized into a (new) cultural space? It’s as if the spectral body is the globalized figure, traversing borders and across practices and imaginations.

JTR: My Invisible Man belonged to Singapore. This action/ performance wouldn’t make sense back here [Manila].

The general parallel of 19th century chemistry that fostered invisibility, distance, disconnection appealed to me as a description of my then condition in Singapore: an OFW [Overseas Filipino Worker] in a high paying job in one of the most high-tech ASEAN neighbors not having too much human connectivity because of the preponderance of tech versus empathy. One must comprehend my touchy feely Woodstock generation and its comfort with presence, intimacy, direct conversation, contact with skin, warmth and all these rather more “analog” situations. Then, there were us in Singapore, talking via interoffice network chat, making appointments by fax and pager, getting all our work done in front of a monitor. One takes this as normal today, but then they were milestones in a drift towards device centered alienation and replacement of the actual body with illuminated ciphers. If you work 5 to 6 days a week at a stressful but super efficient newspaper job, this alienation can get really enhanced.



I would catch up a bit in Singapore as the seven years wore on. But I was a siano — not asiano, but probinsiano [country-folk] all over again. “Without It I am Invisible” was my means of recording this asynchrony. I was doing the transformation. I was the displaced. Singapore was in full sync with itself and I carried the time warp in me.

Add to this is the general homesickness I had and the absence of any power initiative being a “handsomely paid transistor in the Singaporean motherboard of the early 90s” faced with the almost mechanistic but admirably efficient way that many issues were dealt with in the Lion City. You would understand how this was welling up, looking for some art to vent through, someday or the other.

Therefore, my Invisible Man was a function of disappearance into contexts of social strata. Whether as an OFW in lion city, or as the iconic OFWs in all better world economies.

1	Lim Mu Hue. Those Who Are Not Involved View The Matter Clearer, 1966. Woodblock print. 20.5 x 15.2cm. Gift of the artist	Vessel, pear shaped - lip broken. 18th C, Chiengsaen Period. Ban-pa-tung, Thailand. H 11.5 cm. Transferred to University of Malaya, 1973	Cup. 15th C, Thailand, Sukhothai. Ceramic. 5 x 5.3 cm Jar, Blue-white glaze. C.1350–1480, Sukothai, Thailand. Stoneware, H 6.4 cm. Transferred to University of Malaya, 1973	5	Chang Tan Nung. Old Man Riding in Snow, 1948. Ink & colour on paper. 104.1 x 33.6 cm. Donated by Malcolm MacDonald	26	Choo Keng Kwang. Roadside Hawker, 1955. Woodblock print. 20 x 31 cm
2	Tan Tee Chie. Persuading, 1958. Woodblock print. 20.5 x 31cm	Vessel. 15th C, Thailand, Sawankhaloke. Ceramic. 8.1 x 9.9 cm. Gift of Kun Kraisri Nimmanhaeminda	Jar. C.1350–1480, Sukothai, Thailand. Stoneware, brown glaze. H 7.6 cm. Transferred to University of Malaya, 1973	6	Arthur Johnson. Street Scene with Lantern, 1952. Oil on board. 51.4 x 36.8 cm Donated by Malcolm MacDonald	27	Koeh Sia Yong. Gambling, 1957. Woodblock print. 15.3 x 20.5 cm
3	Charles Dyce Manuscript, Double-sided, Introduction of Singapore, 1816–1853 (Reproduction). 75 x 60.6 cm. Original purchased with grant from Rothmans of Pall Mall	Jar. 15th C, Vietnam. Ceramic. 4.5 x 7.4 cm. Gift of Kun Kraisri Nimmanhaeminda	Jar. 15th C, Thailand, Sawankhaloke. Ceramic. 3.3 x 3.6 cm. Gift of Kun Kraisri Nimmanhaeminda	7	Artist unknown, undated Young Girl's Head Oil on board. 30 x 30cm Donated by Malcolm MacDonald	28	Lee Kee Boon. Street Scene, 1959. Scraper Board. 29.5 x 38 cm
4	Plaque, a series of Buddhas, Votive tablet 16th C, Thailand. Bronze. 9.9 x 7.3 x 1.8 cm. Gift of Kun Kraisri Nimmanhaeminda	Jarlet. Cambodia. Ceramic. 6.9 x 7.8 cm. Gift of Kun Kraisri Nimmanhaeminda	Bowl. Early Ming, C.1400–50, South China. Stoneware. D 12 cm. Transferred to University of Malaya, 1973	8	Chen Chong Swee. Kampong, 1949. Ink & colour on paper. 114.3 x 68.5 cm	29	Georgette Chen. Still Life with Tiger Lilies, undated. Oil on canvas. 65 x 53 cm. Donated by Ng Eng Teng
	Votive tablet. C.1250–1350, Sukothai, Thailand. Brown clay. H 9 cm. Transferred to University of Malaya, 1973	Vessel. 15th C,Thailand, Sawankhaloke. Ceramic. 2.9 x 4.1 cm. Gift of Kun Kraisri Nimmanhaeminda	Jar. C.1350–1480, Sukothai, Thailand. Stoneware, light brown glaze. H 4.5 cm. Transferred to University of Malaya, 1973	9	Chen Wen Hsi. Rooster and Hen, 1950s. Ink & colour on paper. 115.5 x 51.7 cm. Donated by Malcolm MacDonald	30	Liu Kang. Maidens Under a Tree, 1956. Oil on board. 112.5 x 49.5 cm Donated by the artist
	Jar. 18th C, Chiengsaen Period. Ban-pa-tung, Thailand. Stoneware. H 20.3 cm. Transferred to University of Malaya, 1973	Jar. 15th C,Thailand, Sawankhaloke. Ceramic. 3.3 x 3.6 cm. Gift of Kun Kraisri Nimmanhaeminda	Bowl. 13th–14th C, Sukhothai, Thailand, Sukhothai. Ceramic. 4.4 x 5.2 cm. Gift of Kun Kraisri Nimmanhaeminda	10	Ajit Krishna Gupta. Balinese Dancer, 1934. Colour Pigment on Paper. 118 x 52.5 cm. Donated by the Government of India, 1959	31	Koeh Sia Yong. Illegal Hawking, 1957. Woodblock print. 20.5 x 15.3 cm
	Jar. 16th C, Thailand, Sankampaeng. Ceramic. 21.2 x 17.5 cm. Gift of Kun Kraisri Nimmanhaeminda.	Jar with cover, mended. C.1350–1550, Sukothai, Thailand. Stoneware, grey-green glazed. H 8.3 cm". Transferred to University of Malaya, 1973	Vessel, Pouring. 16th C, Ceramic. 4.7 x 8.5 cm. Gift of Phra Sawanvaranayok	11	Liu Kang. Building Site / Samsui women, 1951. Oil on canvas. 212.5 x 151 cm	32	.Koeh Sia Yong. Night Hawker, 1958. Woodblock print. 20.5 x 15.3 cm
	Vessel, pear shaped - lip broken. 18th C, Chiengsaen Period. Ban-pa-tung, Thailand. Stoneware, grey-green glazed. H 17 cm". Transferred to University of Malaya, 1973	Opium pipe, Shan. 17th–18th C, Burma. Ceramic. 4.6 x 8.6 cm. Gift of Kun Kraisri Nimmanhaeminda	Pottery, Figurine, Mother & Child. C.1350–1550, Sukothai, Thailand. H 9.5 cm. Transferred to University of Malaya, 1973	12	Chuah Thean Teng Farming, 1930s. Woodblock print. 11.2 x 3.4 cm	33	Koeh Sia Yong. Missing Out from School, 1957 Woodblock print 20 x 15.5 cm
	Plaque, a series of Buddhas, Votive tablet,16th C, Thailand. Bronze. 9.9 x 7.3 x 1.8 cm Gift of Kun Kraisri Nimmanhaeminda	Pipe. L 8.3 cm. Transferred to University of Malaya, 1973	Figurine - Tuton Sia Kabarn. 15th C, Thailand, Sawankhaloke. Ceramic. 6.8 x 6 x 5.1 cm. Gift of Phra Sawanvaranayok	13	Tan Tee Chie. Back Lanes, 1953. Woodblock print. 15.5 x 20.5 cm	34	Michael Lee. Sites of Manoeuvre, 2013. Acrylic Cut Outs on Lightboxes. 50 x 50 cm; 50 x 60 cm; 50 x 80 cm; 50 x 110 cm
	Votive tablet. C.1250–1350, Sukothai, Thailand. Brown clay. H 9 cm. Transferred to University of Malaya, 1973	Pipe. L 7 cm. Transferred to University of Malaya, 1973	Pottery, Figurine, Baby. C.1350–1550, Sukothai, Thailand. H 4.5 cm. Lost since 1973	14	Choo Keng Kwang. May 13th Incident, 1954. Woodblock print. 20.4 x 15.3 cm	35	Lai Foong Moi. Pounding Rice, 1959. Oil on canvas. 201 x 250 cm. Donated by the artist
	Jar. 18th C, Chiengsaen Period. Ban-pa-tung, Thailand. Stoneware. H 20.3 cm. Transferred to University of Malaya, 1973	Shards – 22 pieces. 1350–1550, Chiangmai,Thailand. Ceramic. Various dimensions. Gift of Kun Kraisri Nimmanhaeminda	Unknown. C.1350–1550, Sukothai, Thailand. D 20.3 cm. Transferred to University of Malaya, 1973	15	Lim Hak Tai. Landscape, 1951. Oil on board. 49 x 59 cm	36	Chen Wen Hsi. Fishing Village, 1956. Oil on canvas. 91 x 108cm
	Jar. 16th C, Thailand, Sankampaeng. Ceramic. 21.2 x 17.5 cm. Gift of Kun Kraisri Nimmanhaeminda	Vessel, stoneware, grey-green glaze. Pear-shaped with spout. Lip broken. 15th C, Thailand, Ban-patung. Ceramic. 8.6 x 5.2 cm	Base of a dish. C.1350–1550, Sukothai, Thailand. D 12.7 cm.	16	Liu Kang. Studies of Balinese Woman, 1952. Charcoal & pastel on paper. 34.3 x 54 cm. Donated by Malcolm MacDonald	37	Goh Beng Kwan. Abstract Composition, 1963. Collage on canvas 82 x 66.5 cm. Donated by the artist
	Vessel, pear shaped, fragment. 16th C, Thailand, Sankampaeng. Ceramic. 14.9 x 8.8 cm. Gift of Kun Kraisri Nimmanhaeminda	Jar with spout. C.1380–1550, Ban-patung, Thailand. Stone-ware. H 7 cm. Transferred to University of Malaya, 1973	Bowl, grey blue celadon glaze. C.1350–1550, Sukothai, Thailand. Stoneware. D 15.3 cm. Transferred to University of Malaya, 1973	17	Kenneth Tay in conversation with T.K. Sabapathy. 15 June 2015 at the NUS Museum	38	Wee Kong Chai. After the Fire, 1960. Oil on board. 45.7 x 158 cm. Donated by the artist
	Vessel, pear shaped, fragment 16th C, Thailand, Sankampaeng Ceramic. 13.6 x 8.6 cm. Gift of Kun Kraisri Nimmanhaeminda	Shards – 43 pieces. C.1380–1550, Ban-patung, Thailand. Various dimensions.	Part of a bowl, grey-green celadon. C.1350–1480, Sukothai, Thailand. Stoneware. H 7.6 cm. Transferred to University of Malaya, 1973	18	Cheong Soo Pieng. Fruitseller, 1954. Woodblock print. 20 x 15.3cm	39	Cheong Soo Pieng. Red Composition, 1966. Oil on board. 90.5 x 122 cm. Donated by the artist
	Vessel, pear shaped, fragment. 18th C, Chiengsaen Period. Ban-pa-tung, Thailand. H 13.5 cm. Transferred to University of Malaya, 1973	Shards – 32 pieces. C.1250–1350, Sukothai, Thailand. Various dimensions.	Buddha head. Uthong, C.1250–1350, Thailand. Bronze. H 17.2 cm. Transferred to University of Malaya, 1973	19	Lee Kee Boon. Nanyang University, 1955. Woodblock print. 20 x 31 cm	40	Choy Weng Yang. "On the National Museum Art Gallery." Interviewed by Chang Yueh Siang. 8 December 2016
	Vessel, pear shaped, fragment. 12th–13th C, Vietnam. Ceramic. 12.7 x 8.3 cm. Gift of Kun Kraisri Nimmanhaeminda	Bowl. 15th C, Thailand, Sawan-khaloke. Ceramic. 4.6 x 8.9 cm	Head of Buddha. 1350–1500, Thailand, E. Ayuthya. Bronze. 14.4 x 5.2 x 6 cm	20	Chen Wen Hsi. Dance, 1954. Oil on canvas. 154 x 200 cm. Donated by the artist	41	Tan Teng Kee. Studies in Drawing II, 1967. Ink on paper. 43 x 30 cm Donated by T K Sabapathy
	Vessel, pear shaped, fragment. 18th C, Chiengsaen Period. Ban-pa-tung, Thailand. H 12 cm. Transferred to University of Malaya, 1973	Jar. C.1350–1480, Sukothai, Thailand. Stoneware. H 6.4 cm. Transferred to University of Malaya, 1973	Kendi. 15th–16th C, Thailand, Sawankhaloke. Ceramic. 14.2 x 16 cm	21	Cheong Soo Pieng. Motherly Love, 1956. Oil on board. 45 x 69.5 cm	42	Lin Hsin Hsin. Posy, 1990. Oil on paper. 19 x 53 cm. Donated by T K Sabapathy
		Jar. C.1350–1480, Sukothai, Thailand. Stoneware. H 6.4 cm. Transferred to University of Malaya, 1973		22	Cheong Soo Pieng. St. Andrew's Cathedral, 1955. Oil on board. 58.5 x 68.5 cm	43	Thomas Yeo. Lovely Dawn, undated Watercolour & ink on paper. 90 x 45 cm. Donated by the artist
				23	Wee Kong Chai. Mother and Child, 1959. Oil on canvas. 79 x 139 cm	44	Ng Yak Whee. Landscape in Blue, 1988. Oil on canvas 53.6 x 106 cm
				24	Lim Cheng Hoe. Singapore River, 1959. Watercolour on paper. 37.5 x 50.5 cm	45	Jaafar LaLff. Untitled, 1985. Acrylic on batik. 108 x 108 cm. Donated by T.K. Sabapathy
				25	Suri Mohyani. Kampong, 1955. Watercolour on paper 39 x 49 cm	46	Salleh Japar. Untitled, undated. Collage. 16 x 30 cm. Donated by T K Sabapathy

LIST OF WORKS

S. Chandrasekaran. Unit 205 "We can", 1999. Indian ink on paper. 58 x 73 cm. Donated by T K Sabapathy	62 S Chandrasekaran. Deva Series II, 1994. Bronze. 24 x 24 x 6.5 cm. On loan from the artist	70 Sancai Bactrian Camel. Ceramic. 78 x 56 cm Painted Pottery Horse, undated. Ceramic. 52 x 38 cm Teabowl, Jun Ware. 12th Century, China. 6.5 x 12.5 cm Jar, Neolithic (Majaiyou Culture). 2500–2000 BCE, China. Painted Pottery, 13.5 x 13 cm	"Framed picture in the kitchen (bowl of cherry [sic]) / during exhibition, Dragon Court (1987). On left corner is an altar for Goh Choo San — First Singapore gay person who died of aids". Photograph. 9 x 14 cm. On loan from the artist. "Dragon court". Photograph. 14 x 9 cm 四姑 (Fourth Aunt) and Pandan Leaves. Photograph. 14 x 9 cm "The bed-room picture whitened by spot-light. Dragon Court." (c. 1987/88). Photograph. 9 x 14 cm. On loan from the artist. "Stanley Tan, Dragon Court" (c. 1987/88). Photograph. 9 x 14 cm "Dragon Court." (c.1987). Photograph. 9 x 14 cm Laundry, Dragon Court (c. 1987/88). Photograph. 14 x 9 cm "Portfolio of works on cabinet-top in the kitchen. Kettle on wall made unuseable when someone left it unattended on stove. Dragon Court" (c. 1987/88).Photograph. 9 x 14 cm "Close up of artist's studio wall, Dragon Court" (c.1987/88). Photograph. 9 x 14 cm. Contact print for "Grandmother Watching". Photographic contact print. 6.5 x 10 cm "Hanging on Dragon Court Wall — This drawing was given to Henri Chen later." (c. 1987/88). Photograph. 9 x 14 cm. On loan from the artist	84 Artist unknown. Portrait of lady in baju kurung and sarong with stylised flora and fauna motifs, circa 1890–1900. Oil on canvas. 58 x 42.5 cm. Donated by Agnes Tan Kim Lwi
48 Goh Ee Choo. The Theatres of Power, 1991. Pen & ink on paper. 200 x 129 cm. Donated by T K Sabapathy	63 S Chandrasekaran. Deva Series IV, 1994. Bronze. 23 x 21 x 9.5 cm. On loan from the artist	71 Malay Swivel-Gun or lantaka, 18th century. Bronze. 30 x 22 x 93 cm. Donated by Lin Tong Yin Malay Swivel-Gun or lantaka, 18th century. Bronze. 8 x 16 x 74 cm Malay Swivel-Gun or lantaka. Bronze. Malay Archipelago. 19th C. 8 x 14 x 67 cm	"Dragon Court." (c.1987). Photograph. 9 x 14 cm Laundry, Dragon Court (c. 1987/88). Photograph. 14 x 9 cm	85 Debbie Ding. The Library of Pulau Saigon, 2015. PLA Print. On loan from artist
49 Ng Eng Teng. Flat Head, 1970s. Ciment fondu. 45.4 x 24 x 22.5 cm. Donated by the artist	64 Salleh Japar. Cultural Sinkholes, 1998. (reconstructed in 2016). Mixed media. Variable dimensions. On loan from the artist	72 Harry Chin Chun Wah. Sleeping Figure, 1966. Pen on paper. 29 x 40 cm. Donated by the artist		86 Archaeology collection under the care of Prof. John Miksic, Department of Southeast Asian Studies, NUS Fort Canning. Buff stoneware. Various parts. 14th–15th Century St. Andrews Cathedral. Earthenware. 14th–15th Century St. Andrews Cathedral. Stoneware. 14th–15th Century St. Andrews Cathedral. Earthenware. 19th–20th Century St. Andrews Cathedral. White porcelain. 14th–15th Century St. Andrews Cathedral. Green Porcelain. 14th–15th Century St. Andrews Cathedral Construction materials. 19th–20th Century St. Andrews Cathedral. Metal. [no dating] St. Andrews Cathedral. Glass. 19th–20th Century St. Andrews Cathedral. Chinese and European Porcelain. 19th–20th Century St. Andrews Cathedral. Stoneware. 19th–20th Century
50 Ng Eng Teng. Body Talk, undated. Unglazed stoneware. 59 x 30 x 40 cm. Donated by the artist	65 Erika Tan. A Thin Green Line, 2013. 11 A3 Inkjet Prints. 29.7 x 42 cm each. On loan from the artist	73 Harry Chin Chun Wah. Sketches, 1972. Pen on paper. 40 x 31.5 cm. Donated by the artist		
51 Jimmy Ong. Blue / Green Swimming Pool. Study, 1989. Watercolor on paper. 32 x 24 cm. On Loan from the artist	66 Dr Ivan Polunin and Tony Beamish, Edited by Kazymir Rabier. The Humanist 00:05:4. Main cast: Dr. Ivan Polunin and Ms. Fam Siew Yin. © The Ivan Polunin Multimedia Lab	74 Harry Chin Chun Wah. Sleeping Figure, 1965. Pen on paper. 40 x 31.5 cm. Donated by the artist		
52 Jimmy Ong. Night swimmer, 1990. Watercolor on paper. 36.5 x 26 cm. On Loan from the artist	67 Figurine of a Religious Female (Vijayanagara). 12th–14th Century, India Sandstone, 24.2 x 17.5 x 7 cm. Donated by Malcolm Macdonald	75 Koh Nguang How. Untitled, 1994. Mixed media. 50 x 60 cm. Donated by T K Sabapathy		
53 Jimmy Ong. Q8 Night Bather, 1990. Watercolor on paper. 36.5 x 26 cm. On Loan from the artist	68 Standing Figurine. 20th Century, Hindu-Javanese. Bronze, 11.7 x 4.6 x 3.8 cm Figurine of Ganesha. 20th Century, Hindu-Javanese. Bronze, 11.2 x 4.9 x 3.5 cm Figurine of Durga. 20th Century, Hindu-Javanese. Bronze, 23.5 x 12.3 x 7.4 cm Five seated figures on a two-tiered plasorms. 20th Century, Hindu-Javanese. Bronze, 16.5 x 22 x 13.8 cm Standing Figurine. 20th Century, Hindu-Javanese. Bronze, 12.2 x 4.4 x 3.2 cm Standing Figurine. 20th Century, Hindu-Javanese. Bronze, 11.5 x 4.3 x 2.8 cm Standing Figurine. 20th Century, Hindu-Javanese. Bronze, 12.5 x 4.7 x 3.4 cm Figurine Seated on a Plasorm. 20th Century, Hindu-Javanese. Bronze, 7 x 6 x 4 cm Figurine Seated on a Plasorm 20th Century, Hindu-Javanese. Bronze, 7.3 x 5.3 x 4 cm	76 Signed: "Hui Yip Seng, Pioneer Singapore, 24/2/87". Photograph. 10 x 15.5 cm "Dempsey Rd" Pioneer Magazine Chinese NY Party, 1983". Photograph. 12.5 x 8.8 cm "Seetoh Kok Fei, Me, Alan Seah + Desmond Sim on trip to Tioman, 1983". Photograph. 10 x 15.4 cm See Chong Ho, Desmond Sim, Jimmy Ong. Photograph. 15.4 x 10 cm "See Chong Ho". Photograph. 10 x 15.4 cm Group photo. Photograph. 10 x 15.4 cm "Jimmy + JunXiang, Ivan Heng and Stanley Tan on Chinese New Year in 1983/84. Pioneer Magazine Art + Writer department, CMPB". Photograph. 12.5 x 8.8 cm Masked party, Dragon Court (c. 1987/88). Photograph. 9 x14 cm "Dragon Court Kitchen God" (c.1987). Photograph. 9 x 14 cm "A guest at the sign-in dinner table. Mark Lee at Dragon Court Exhibition." Photograph. 9 x 14 cm Bathroom, Dragon Court. Photograph. 14 x 9 cm		
54 Wong Shih Yaw. The Tree, 1996. Acrylic on Canvas. 127 x 76 cm. Donated by T K Sabapathy				
55 Ho Soon Yeen. Monkey & Thinker, 1992. Ink on paper. 127 x 96 cm. Donated by T K Sabapathy				
56 Jose Tence Ruiz. Without It, I Am Invisible, 1993. Performed on: 1. Solo Performance by Jose Tence Ruiz at River Valley Road, on Bus 65 en route to the Singapore International Art Fair at the World Trade Centre, Pavilions 1 and 2 on 32 July 1993. Documentation: George Gascon, Rosario Tañedo 2. Solo performance by Jose Tence Ruiz at River Valley Road, on Bus 65 en route to Orcahrd Road, and along Orchard Road commencing from Le Meridien Hotel up to Isetan Scotts, Wisma Atria. Documentation: Lilien Uy, Rosario Tañedo 3. Joint performance by Jailani Kuning and Jose Tence Ruiz at Gallery 21, Riverwalk Galleria on 30 October, 1993. Documentation: Koh Nguang How, Lim Sin Thai, Rosario Tañedo, George Gascon				
57 Amanda Heng. Let's Chat, 1996–present. Performance				
58 Nataraja, undated. Bronze. 7.8 x 15.3 x 5.1 cm. Donated by M. Nadarajan				
59 Akshobhya, 4th–7th century. Eastern India. Sandstone. 60 x 36.5 x 19 cm. Donated by the Government of India				
60 Buddha Muchalinda, 12th century. Cambodia. Sandstone. 71 x 35.5 x 25 cm. Donated by Lady Yuen Peng McNeice				
61 Books Donated to the NUS Museum by T K Sabapathy				

Exhibition supplemented with loans from

S. Chandrasekaran
Debbie Ding
Amanda Heng
Salleh Japar
John Miksic
Jimmy Ong
Nadya and Olga Polunin
Kazymir Rabier
Jose Tence Ruiz
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