

## SUPER/NATURAL: Possibilities for Singaporean Artists in Indonesia | COBO Social

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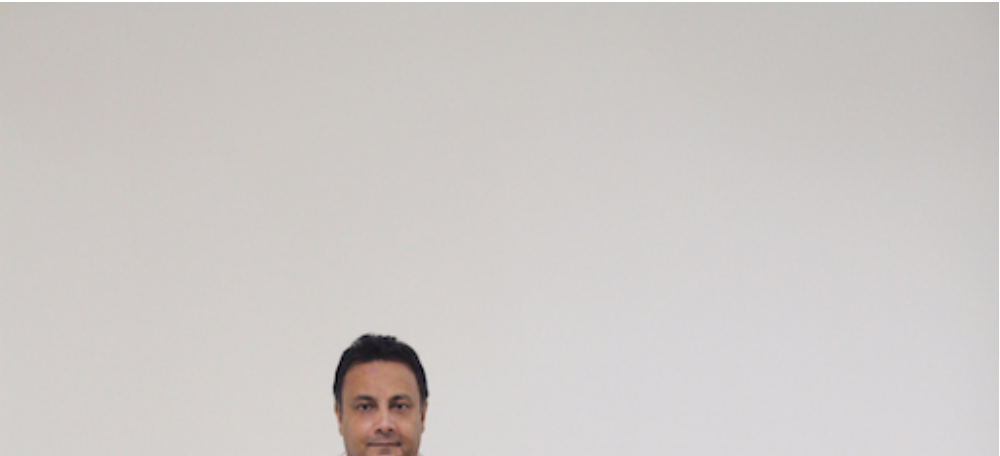


Zen Teh, 2012, Singapore Landscape Painting, inkjet print on archival japanese handmade paper, 60 x 460 cm





Installation View of Super Natural





Portrait of Jasdeep Sandhu, Gajah Gallery

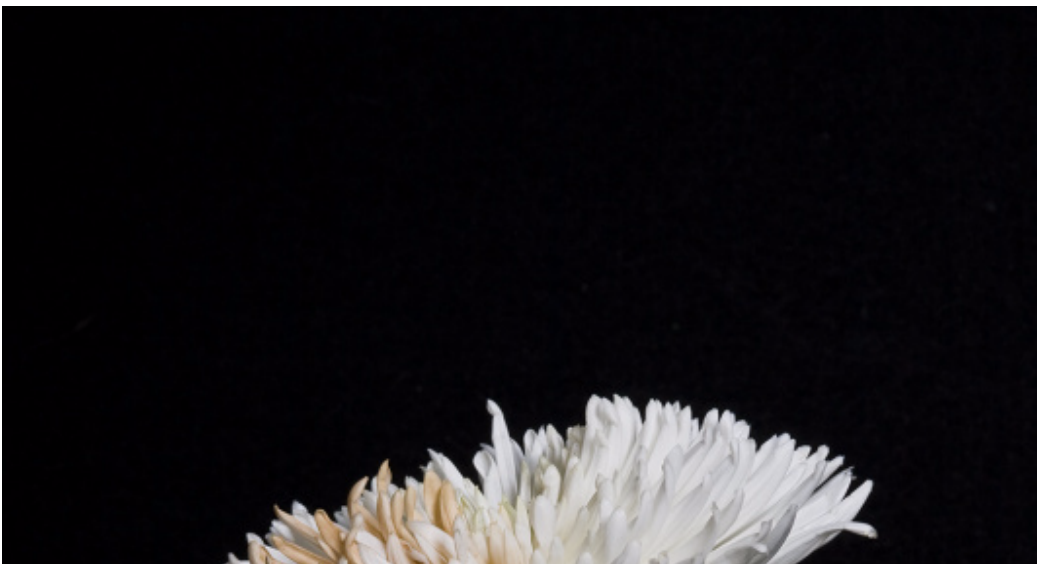




Portrait of Michelle Ho



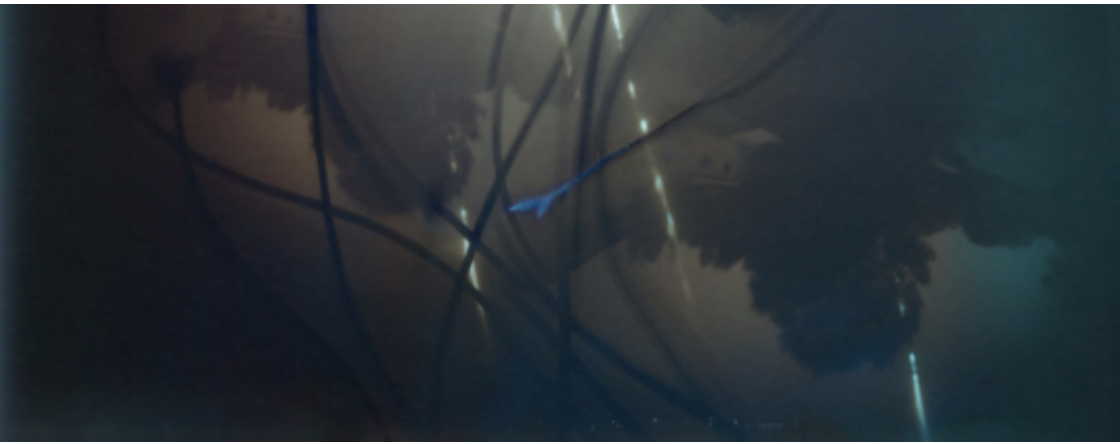
Robert Zhao, Flock of Ocean Munias, 2009. Digital Pigment Print, 121 x 84cm, Edition of 6 + 1AP





Chong Weixin, *Beige Dreams Flesh Skin Surface 1*, 2017. Photographic print on aluminium, 44.6 x 29.4cm, Edition of 3





Lavender Chang, The Movingly Minute Scale Of a Restricted Life\_#03-78, 2016. Archival Fine Art Inkjet Print on Dilite



Zen Teh, 2012, Singapore Landscape Painting, inkjet print on archival japanese handmade paper, 60 x 460 cm





Ng Joon Kiat, Untitled Cities 3, 2016, Acrylic on Cloth, 200 x 180cm



Portrait of Jason Lim



Jason Lim during his performance

7

Jul

[Naima Morelli](#)

[32](#)

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Naima Morelli is an art writer and curator with a focus on contemporary art from the Asia Pacific region. She has written...

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*Gajah Gallery's exhibition SUPER/NATURAL not only has a timely theme, but also tries to create new a market for Singaporean art in Indonesia. Will this open up a two-sided channel between the two countries? Naima Morelli ponders the question with gallerist Jasdeep Sandhu and the show curators.*

What makes the Southeast Asian art scene exciting is that it is still in the process of being build up, with a lot of room for testing ideas. What's more is that if these experiments succeed, they are able to truly become game-changers. They can create new markets and open up new channels for artistic communication.

The show SUPER/NATURAL – until 19 June 2017 at Gajah Gallery in Yogyakarta – has all the numbers to belong to this category. There are three reasons why this exhibition is important. The first is because it creates a mutual dialogue between two actors that previously only had a one-sided conversation, namely the Indonesian art world and the Singaporean art world. The second is that it explores a very important idea: the way we think about nature and the consequences of our mindset on nature. The third is that SUPER/NATURAL had performers seamlessly performing within a commercial show in a cohesive way.

TEXT: Naima Morelli

IMAGES: Courtesy of Gajah Gallery







Installation View of Super Natural



*Opening up inter-dimensional portals*

Since its inception Gajah Galley, the brainchild of Jasdeep Sandhu, has been making waves, creating fruitful connections in the process. “For more than 20 years I’ve brought quite a number of Indonesian artists to Singapore and had fantastic results promoting their work here,” says Jasdeep. “In the long term I hope to do the same for Singaporean artists in Indonesia.”



Portrait of Jasdeep Sandhu, Gajah Gallery

The gallerist feels the responsibility to encourage the artists he works with to push the limits of their potential by presenting their work to a wider audience. “The first step is identifying the epicenter of artistic activities; and for the region of Southeast Asia, Yogyakarta is definitely one such place. What emerging artist would not dream to be part of such a dynamic and organic

emerging artist would not dream to be part of such a dynamic and organic artistic narrative?”

Many are sceptical of the success of the of a show of Singaporean artists in Indonesia. To that, Jasdeep replies that since the opening there has been a steady stream of collectors and art enthusiasts who have visited the gallery on a daily basis: “It got to the point I had to hire two gallery sitters to field questions,” he says.

What motivated Jasdeep to put up such a show was observing the curiosity of Indonesian collectors about what Singaporean artists have to offer: “There are so many different kinds of collectors in Indonesia, and I think many of them are looking to expand the breadth of artwork they collect - particularly from neighbouring Singapore.”

The Singaporean artists in the show were from different generations, ranging from to the established Suzann Victor to the emerging Melissa Tan. “Singaporean art in general is not well known in the Indonesian Art scene,” explains Jasdeep. “This exhibition seeks to show a trajectory of the Singaporean Art narrative, represented by works and artistic practices of artists from different generations, in many different forms and mediums, reaching out to different audiences. It shows a variety of artistic talents as well as the social concerns which exist within Singaporean art. And most importantly, it shows the capacity for Singaporean art to progress and regenerate throughout the years, while displaying its continuity over time.”

*Our view of nature is influenced by our belief systems*

For this pioneering operation, the chosen theme is one that is near and dear to both Indonesians and Singaporeans: nature. However, in many of the works exhibited the idea of nature is not presented in a didactic or obvious way.

“The works look at what is considered natural and real, particularly at this juncture in 21st century contemporary society,” says curator Michelle Ho. “Urbanisation has changed the city landscape, and new technologies have also altered how we relate to our surroundings. Modern lifestyle may have also shifted how we view tradition, folklore and belief systems. This condition affects not just Singapore, but Indonesia and the region beyond.”





### Portrait of Michelle Ho

Michelle selected artists to reveal different reflections of our relationship with nature; while Jason Lim and Kumari took on a recognizable form of nature informed by symbolic meanings in Southeast Asia, the works of Robert Zhao and Chong Weixin are much more conceptual; they may appear at first as beautiful images of floral and animal species, but the images are also edited and enhanced. The result is having the viewer starts to questioning what we typically consider to be natural and real. On the other hand, Lavender Chang's work appears like abstract photographs, but incorporate a sense nature's cycle of life and decay.





Robert Zhao, Flock of Ocean Munias, 2009. Digital Pigment Print, 121 x 84cm,  
Edition of 6 + 1AP



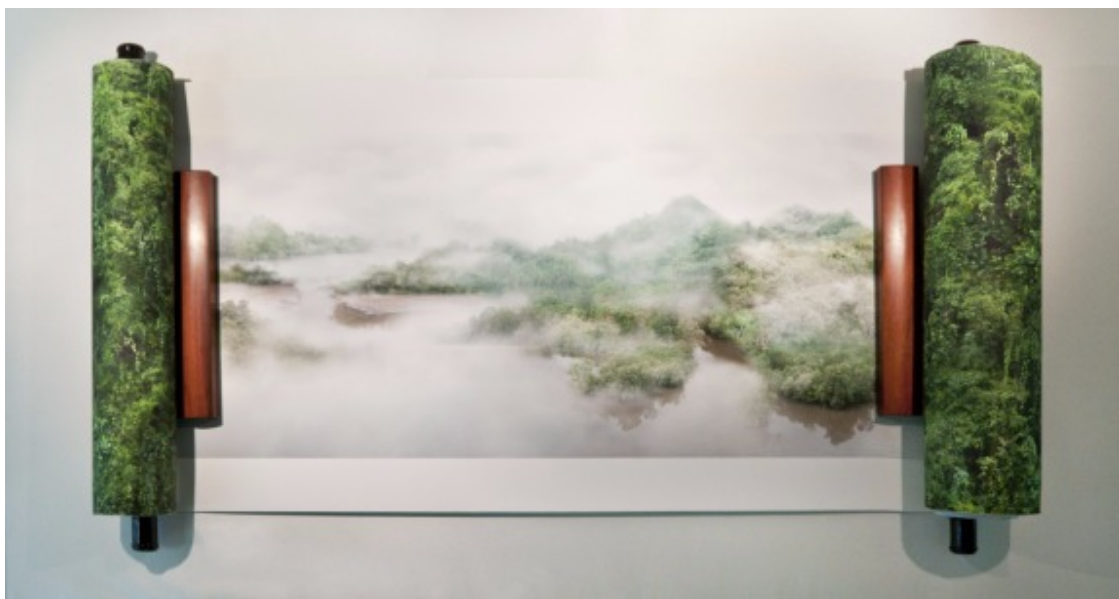
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Lavender Chang, The Movingly Minute Scale Of a Restricted Life\_#03-78, 2016. Archival Fine Art Inkjet Print on Dilite

In looking at the works of both Singaporean and Indonesian artists, we can see how they reflect the differences in their respective local landscapes and conditions: “Indonesia is home to the two significant sites of Borobudur and Mount Merapi, that exist today, and continue to provide inspiration to artists,” points out Michelle. “Singapore is a city state of built-up high rise buildings, and with a much smaller land mass than Indonesia. The pace of change – building and demolition and reconstruction – in the landscape occurs much

faster, but is also seen as necessary. It is a dilemma, and perhaps, one might detect this sense of loss and unease as possibly also inevitable, through the works of Zen Teh and Ng Joon Kiat.”



Zen Teh, 2012, Singapore Landscape Painting, inkjet print on archival japanese handmade paper, 60 x 460 cm



Ng Joon Kiat, *Untitled Cities 3*, 2016, Acrylic on Cloth, 200 x 180cm

Another theme contained in the “supernatural” name of the show is the spiritual domain embedded in nature. We must consider that both Indonesia and Singapore are part of a multicultural region with a rich history of belief systems, transmitted folklore and mythology. To Michelle, these continue to provide inspiration and subject matter for their artists. “However in recent Singapore contemporary art practices engagements with such domains of the supernatural do not appear to be a strong inclination. In this regard, the works in the exhibition by Adeline Kueh and Suzann Victor provide an exceptional counterpoint.”

### *A cross-national dialogue through performance*

The part of the show in which Singaporean and Indonesian artists engaged the closest is the performance platform. There, on the opening night, six Indonesian performance artists took the centre stage. This section was curated by Jason Lim, whose personal practice encompasses both ceramics and performance.



### Portrait of Jason Lim

“Although performance art is very much on the rise in Indonesia, it is still quite rare to see performance art integrated within the curation of a larger exhibition,” explains Jason.

He retraces the relationship between Singaporean performance artists and the Indonesian art world going back into the 80s: “Through meetings, conferences and performance events, artists continue to meet to establish new networks and relationships, and expand on existing ones. Prior to social media, knowledge and relationships were exchanged through face to face meetings. With the advent of social media, the networks are much more closely knit, real-time communication is possible and the general knowledge of each other’s practices is increasing at an amazing rate.”



Other's practices is increasing at an amazing rate.



Jason Lim during his performance

Jason was glad to see that the audience came from diverse backgrounds, and most who chanced upon the presentation stayed on even late into the night. “As performance artists, we strive to create images that are powerful and hopefully become memorable in the mind of the audience,” says Jason. “The dialogue between the artists and audience may not be immediate but I hope there will be a beginning and continuation on other social media platform.”

Additional links:

<https://www.cobosocial.com/dossiers/four-singaporean-artists-help-us-rethink-nature/>

<https://www.cobosocial.com/dossiers/five-indonesian-artists-that-help-us-rethink-nature/>

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**Naima Morelli** is an art writer and curator with a focus on contemporary art from the Asia Pacific region. She has written for ArtsHub, Art Monthly Australia, Art to Part of Culture and Escape Magazine, among others, and she is the author of “Arte Contemporanea in Indonesia, un’introduzione” a book focused on the development of contemporary art in Indonesia. As a curator, her practice revolves around creating meaningful connections between Asia, Europe and Australia.

[#Adeline Kueh#Aliansyah Caniago#Arsita Iswardhani#Chong Weixin#exhibition#FJ Kunting#Gajah Gallery#Ian Woo#Jasdeep Sandhu#Jason Lim#Kumari Nahappan#Lavender Chang#Maxine Chionh#Melissa Tan#Michelle Ho#Mimi Fadmi#Ng Joon Kiat#Ridwan Rau Rau#Riyadhus Shalihin#Robert Zhao#Ruben Pang#Sarah Choo](#)