

EIFFEL CHONG

I Dim The Sun So That Dusk Arrives Earlier



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A digital catalogue for "I Dim The Sun So That Dusk Arrives Earlier", a solo exhibition by Eiffel Chong at Richard Koh Fine Art, Blk 47 Malan Road, #01-26 Gillman Barracks, Singapore 109444 from 12-27 April 2019.



Eiffel Chong: I Dim The Sun So That Dusk Arrives Earlier

by Naima Morelli, 2019

Have you ever heard the story of how Kandinsky created abstract art? One stormy night the artist came home to his studio. All he could see of his paintings, slightly lit by the thunders outside, were just non-identifiable forms. He thought these images and glimpses were more beautiful than any other painting he had created so far. He was inspired to replicate those shapes; that's how he created his first abstract watercolour in 1913, shedding references to conventions of representation and narrative allusions.

It is in this twilight – it seems – that artists start grasping some truth about art and reality. Eiffel Chong's exhibition "I Dim The Sun So That Dusk Arrives Earlier" at Richard Koh Fine Art is concerned also with these truths lingering in this semi-darkness, and it was also created by accident. For his previous show "Mud & Mashed Hydrangea Leaves And Salad Of Dandelion Greens", the artist left bouquets to wilt, photographing the vulnerability and the fragility of the flowers. During one photoshoot the flash didn't go off, resulting in an extremely dark photograph of the wilted flowers. The artist thought that the photograph looked so sad and beautiful at the same time. He realized he had accidentally created something special, and he kept going in this direction.

When I first saw his photographs of flowers in the dark, I thought of a rest of the soul. When I say rest of the soul, I'm not talking about deep sleep. I'm rather describing that unique state of drowsiness we experience just before completely waking up. That in-between state when we are about to snooze on our friends sofa after a pleasant night of chattering and games. It's the craved shavasana after an intense hour-long yoga practice. It is a state of rest when we are free of preoccupations, of the drama of everyday life, of the argument with our spouse the day before. It's a state when we just are. Comfortable. We rest. We actually don't give a damn if the world around crumbles. Even if it did, we would observe it with detached interest, while melting in a puddle of water. In those moments we feel so united with everything that we don't even conceive the idea of separation. That state – I'm sure you experience it from time to time – is a state of no-mind. Of utter calm and ease.

But then our stomach starts growling, reclaiming its breakfast. The tank of camomile we drank the night before is asking us to carry out our physiological functions. And then bit by bit we recall that nasty argument we had after dinner. And the deadline of that huge project. And the day ahead full of appointments. And all the things that need to get down. And before we know it, we go back into being our usual selves, our names, our roles. We go from being a beautifully mollified, drooping bouquet resting in dark, peace and stillness, to become form. The flowers start having colours, substance, vigour. Lifeblood starts running in our petals and veins again. Energy will come to us, and it will even make us quite excited. Adrenaline, rage, perhaps even annoyance. Feelings. Emotions. And that is a good thing. Like plants give oxygen to all the creatures around them during the day, so we hopefully perform our service to the world with our own jobs or activities. We are part of the world again, but as individuals. Why this happens, we don't know. All we know that it's the game of life and we keep on keeping on.

This is what those images by Eiffel Chong told me as I was holding copies in my hands, sitting in my living room, thinking about this curatorial text. In that moment I shook my head a little, aware that in the mind of the artist the series started from a completely different assumptions. The title of the show itself "I Dim The Sun So That Dusk Arrives Earlier" and the single photographs titled after antidepressant medicines, conjure up a fragile peace which is achieved through pharmaceutical numbness. In modern societies, we prescribe antidepressant solutions to a relative who is mourning the death of a loved one, to our young who is experiencing the emotional difficulties of being a teenager, to the wife who can't stand their husband's betrayal, to those who are going through a tough breakup. As if these things weren't painful by themselves, more suffering is added when our societies say this kind of pain and sadness shouldn't exist. We are subliminally told we should be able to go back to work and keep being productive as soon as we are done with that meaningless crying.

But how do we get to the other side of pain, if we are not open to get to know it, go through it and accept that we would take an indefinite amount of time to heal? Of course, this is

easy to say, harder to practice. Modern societies have little to no container for our emotions, have little patience for us to carry on experiencing them, let alone allowing us the space to become so changed by the experience to become "crazy" at the eyes of those looking at us. We know many modern and ancient spiritual teachers describe their "illumination" as following period of intense pain, whether it takes the form of an helpless depression, actual physical pain, or a contained space of isolation from the world to understand its evils.

We can see now how a state of depression and a state of enlighten peace are strangely close to each other. In this perspective, what we previously saw as a dark depression, we can now see as the possibility for a breakthrough. In this sense, the artist's intention and my reading are simply two sides of the same coin. The artist and I are both seeing the flowers depicted in "I Dim The Sun So That Dusk Arrives Earlier" as representing a state of no-mind. While in this condition I saw rest and union with everything, the artist associated it more to depression and pharmaceutical numbness. While I thought of natural oneness, the artist was interested in depicting artificial alienation. Curiously, from the outside, these two states look quite similar. Soft and quiet. But can you notice the difference from the outside? Not always.

Spiritual teacher Eckart Tolle speaks about two types of no-mind state. In the condition of natural union, you rise above thought; in the drug-induced one, you fall below it. One is the next step in the evolution of human consciousness, the other a regression to a stage we left behind eons ago. The first is virtually to find by jumping into presence, into every moment wherever we are, and it's about underlying clarity. The second is dependent of the alteration induced by a substance and can easily spiral out of control. Becoming an addiction.

The discourse of addiction is indeed another one that the artist is interested in exploring through the metaphor of the antidepressant and the withered flowers. Eiffel keeps on reasoning on artificial solutions, and how these are harming us. He traces a parallel between our mental and emotional health, and the one of the planet. We are fully aware that synthetic materials - such as plastic - are destroying Mother Nature, but

we keep on using it. In the series, the artist compares the use of plastic to the use of medicine. We already pointed out how many of the medicines are killing us. We want to believe that everything can be cured by just taking a pill. We have been abusing this concept to an extent where certain medicines, like antibiotics, are not efficient anymore, or we need increasingly stronger doses. Drugs, like plastic, are clearly pervasive. Our life depends on these medicines, just like the flowers depicted in the series depend on the plastic to protect their fragile petals.

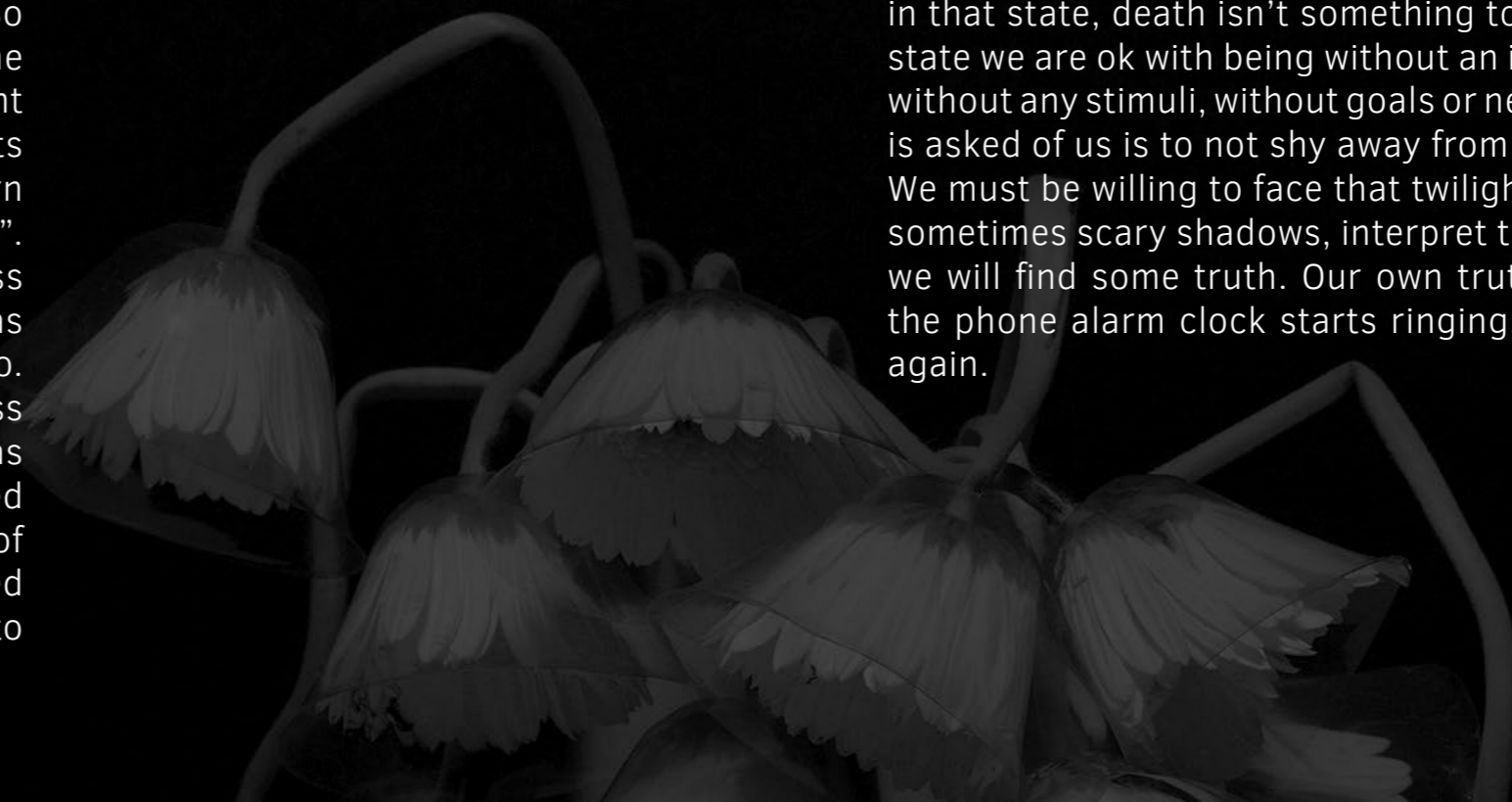
The parallelism between plastic and medicines came to Eiffel Chong after realizing “Mud & Mashed Hydrangea Leaves And Salad Of Dandelion Greens”, his first photographic series featuring flowers bouquets. It was then that he started noticing that though the flowers naturally drooped over time, the plastic that hold them together didn’t get disintegrated. How fragile life is, and how dependent we are on non-organic and artificial matters, thought Eiffel at that time. He found himself pondering that mainstream culture seems incapable to get rid of plastic. It might be rather disquieting thinking that our bottles will probably survive us. Of course, these reflections perfectly clicked with themes that have always been near and dear to the artist’s heart, such as fragility, change, impermanence, decay, eternity.

These themes are at the core to one more invisible narrative which has been the first inspiration for “I Dim The Sun So That Dusk Arrives Earlier” in the mind of the artist; that of the city of Bangkok. Eiffel travelled to the Thai capital at different times in his life. He became very melancholic witnessing its changing and become the epitome of the evils of modern metropolis, including the “psychopathology of everyday life”. He saw the slow disappearance of the magic and specialness that he encountered over his first visit. But to the artist it was not just the city that changed; he saw himself changing too. The city met him every time a little bit older, a little bit less enthusiast. When realizing the photographic series, Eiffel was looking back at the expectations he had when he first visited Bangkok as an emerging artist. He also looked at the state of the art world at large. Having recently turned 40s, he reflected on his path in the arts and in life, and realised he was not to

consider “young” anymore. A new understanding of his own health and mortality have been also elements that concurred in the creation of this series of the dark flowers.

Lifting my eyes from those photographs, I adjusted my position on the sofa I was sitting on, glanced on a catalogues of Eiffel Chong which I have next my tea cup. I could see that the past series of the artists have always been concerned with artificial versus natural, alive versus fake, death and a longing for eternity. He has always talked about humanity by erasing human figures from his work. Confronted with such larger-than-life themes the artist never holds a nihilistic stance. I could see clearly how “I Dim The Sun So That Dusk Arrives Earlier” was a point of arrival in a way, where all the past reflection analysed through photography came to a sort of reconciliation. The artist himself speaks today of his work as a form of ‘detoxification’, using photography as a form of therapy. The darkness of the dark room becomes the place where truths become evident. The artist’s own imagination reveals itself a natural medicine soothe the soul. To find the perfect rest and stillness in a world that is never stopping.

We can find no-mind spending time alone with a camera, creating work like Eiffel. Or we can find it in the shavasana at the end of the yoga class, in the few minutes of sweet dozing, or in these photographs of wilted flowers in Richard Koh’s gallery space. Wherever we look for it, we can be assured that in that state, death isn’t something to fear any longer. In that state we are ok with being without an identity, without a name, without any stimuli, without goals or necessities. The only thing is asked of us is to not shy away from it too quickly, too often. We must be willing to face that twilight, those mysterious and sometimes scary shadows, interpret those faint shapes. There we will find some truth. Our own truth. Just for a bit, before the phone alarm clock starts ringing, and we need to get up again.



WORKS



Amitriptyline (Elavil)



Piezography on Washi Torinoko paper
121.92 x 97.5 cm
2019

Desipramine (Norpramin, Pertofrane)



Piezography on Washi Torinoko paper
121.92 x 97.5 cm
2019

Desvenlafaxine (Pristiq & Khedezla)



Piezography on Washi Torinoko paper
121.92 x 97.5 cm
2019

Doxepin (Adapin, Sinequan)



Piezography on Washi Torinoko paper
121.92 x 97.5 cm
2019

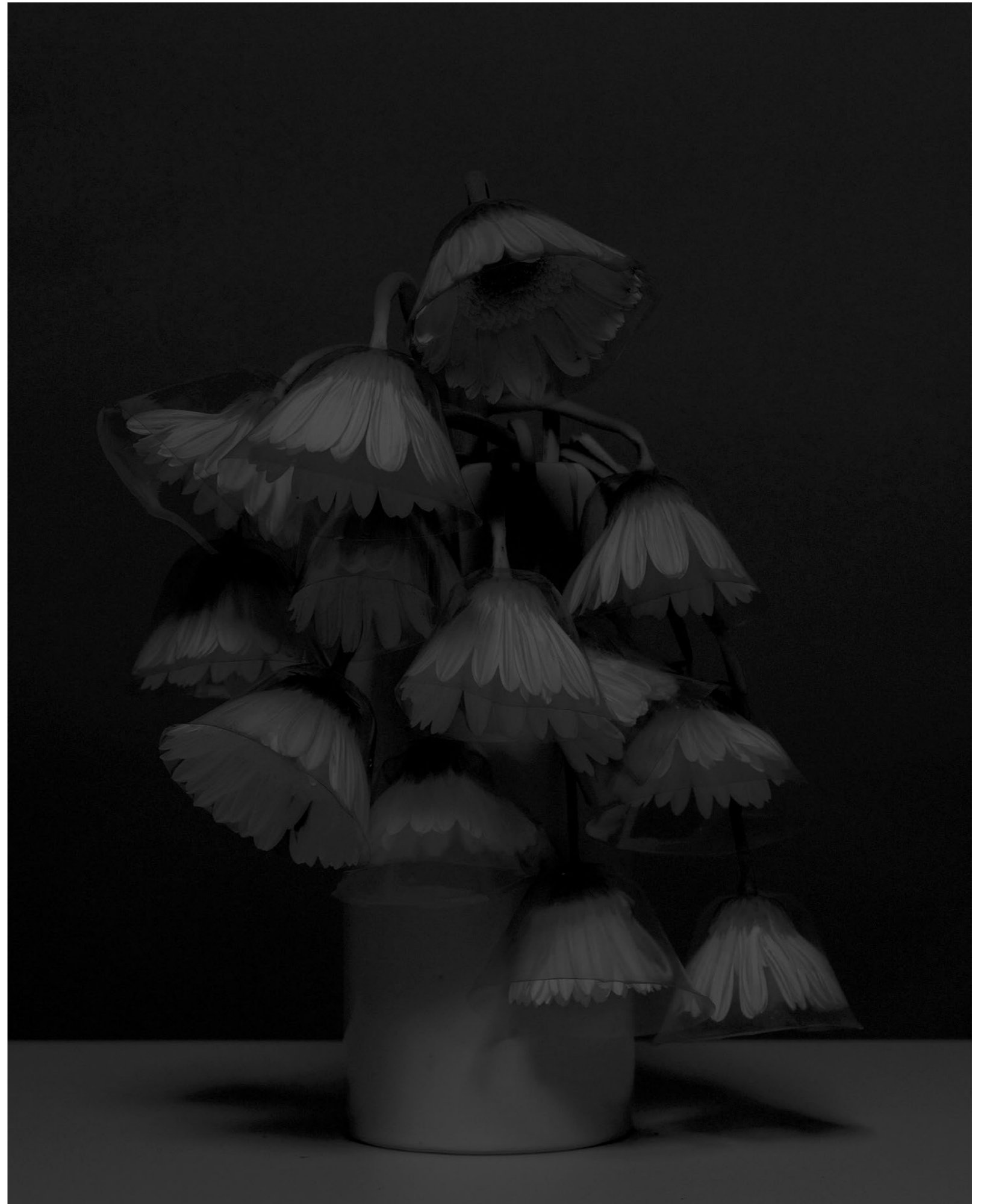
Duloxetine (Cymbalta)

Piezography on Washi Torinoko paper
121.92 x 97.5 cm
2019



Escitalopram (Lexapro)

Piezography on Washi Torinoko paper
121.92 x 97.5 cm
2019



Imipramine (Toframil)

Piezography on Washi Torinoko paper
121.92 x 97.5 cm
2019



Levomilnacipran (Fetzima)

Piezography on Washi Torinoko paper
121.92 x 97.5 cm
2019

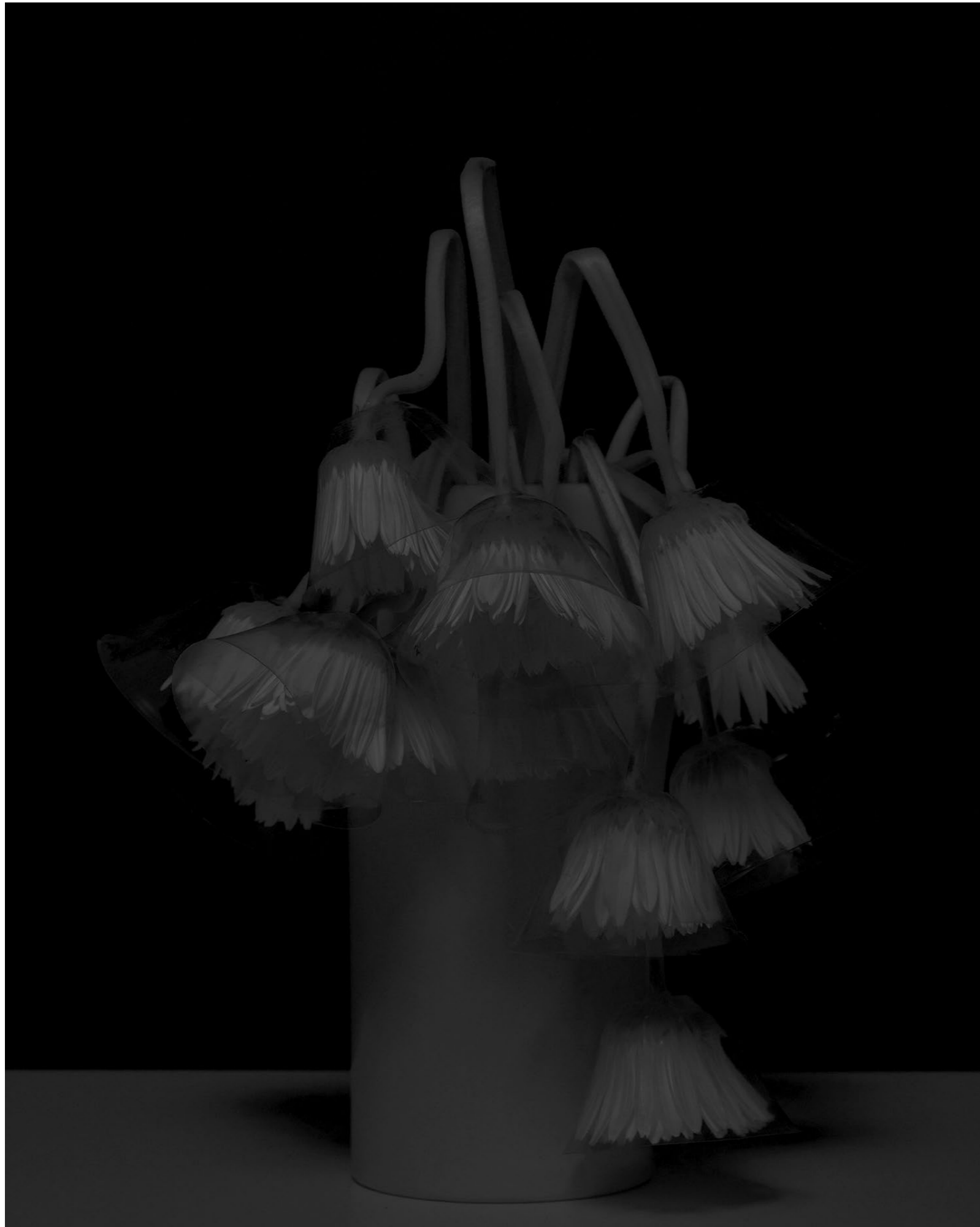


Nostriptyline (Aventyl, Pamelor)



Piezography on Washi Torinoko paper
121.92 x 97.5 cm
2019

Protriptyline (Vivactil)



Piezography on Washi Torinoko paper
121.92 x 97.5 cm
2019

Trimipramine (Surmontil)



Piezography on Washi Torinoko paper
121.92 x 97.5 cm
2019



Piezography on Washi Torinoko paper
121.92 x 97.5 cm
2019



Eiffel Chong



Eiffel Chong (b. 1977, Malaysia) graduated with an MA in International Contemporary Art and Design Practice from the University of East London and a BA (Hons) in Photography from London College of Printing. Besides his production of photographic work, Chong is highly engaged with the Malaysian photographic community; taking on the role of mentor for the Goethe Institut Malaysia / Nikon Shooting Stars programme and Exposure+ Workshop. In addition, he has been appointed to the panel of judges for the Kuala Lumpur Photography Awards 2013 and 2010/2011 Annual Nikon Photo Awards, Malaysia. Eiffel Chong's work considers abstract concepts of life and death through the banal details, silent landscapes and curious obsessions he observes from daily life. He is interested in how the photographic medium can translate a particular time and space, memories and thoughts into something permanent. He personally thinks that the images say more with less, and makes one just want to stare and think about it.

Education

MA in International Contemporary Art and Design Practice, University of East London, United Kingdom

BA (Hons) in Photography, London College of Printing, United Kingdom

Solo Exhibitions

2019 *I Dim The Sun So That Dusk Arrives Earlier*, Richard Koh Fine Art, Singapore

2018 *Mud And Mashed Hydrangea Leaves And Salad Of Dandelion Greens*, Richard Koh Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2017 *A Trace Of Mortality*, Kathmandu Photo Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand

2016 *Seascape*, START SOLO, START Art Fair, London, England

2015 *Seascape*, Artify Gallery, Hong Kong

2014 *Works 2002-2014*, Hong Kong Design Institute, Hong Kong

2013 *Under Control*, 2902 Gallery, Singapore

2012 *This Used To Be My Playground*, Artify Gallery, Hong Kong

Before The World Fell to Pieces, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Selected Group Exhibitions

2019 *Art Staged: No Booth*, Richard Koh Fine Art, Singapore

2018 Xishuangbanna Foto Festival, Yunnan, CHINA Fine Art Asia, Hong Kong

Wu Yinxian Photography Art Biennale, Jiangsu, China

2017 *Urban Implosion*, Asia Culture Centre, Gwangju, South Korea

Ilham Contemporary Forum Malaysia 2009 – 2017, Ilham Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA

Singapore Contemporary 2017, Singapore

2016 *Malaysian Art, A New Perspective*, Richard Koh Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Victoria Crime, MC3@702 Creative Space, Hong Kong University, Hong Kong

2015 *Noorderlicht Photo Festival 2015*, Noorderlicht Gallery, Groningen, The Netherlands

Victoria Crime, Artify Gallery, Hong Kong

Only A Fragment, Richard Koh Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

The Space Between - An Exploration of Role, Meaning and Intent in Contemporary Malaysian Art, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur

2014 *After Image: Contemporary Photography From Southeast Asia*, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore

Others & Me: A Contemporary Photography Exhibition, Sharjah Art Museum, Sharjah, UAE

Sovereign Asian Art Prize 2014, The Rotunda, Exchange Square, Hong Kong

Malaysian Eye, White Box Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

My Country, Louis K. Meisel Gallery, New York City, USA

2013 *Mt. Rokko International Photo Festival 2013*, Kobe, Japan

SIPF NOMAD, Noorderlicht Photo Festival 2013, Groningen, The Netherlands

Portraits - Group Exhibition from Singapore International Photography Festival, Theory of Clouds: Gallery and Community Worldwide, Kobe, Japan

MIDTERM, Shalini Ganendra Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Chobi Mela International Festival of Photography, Shilpokola Academy, Dhaka, Bangladesh

2012 *Wawasan 2020*, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Singapore

Headlights 2012, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2011 *Young Artist Project 2011: Future Lab*, Daegu EXCO, Daegu, South Korea

Tanah Ayer: Malaysian Stories from the Land, Selasar Sunaryo Art Space, Bandung, Indonesia

Angsana: Southeast Asian Photographers Taking Flight, 2902 Gallery, Singapore

2010 *2010 ASEAN- Korea Multimedia Competition*, Gallery Jinsun, Seoul, South Korea

CUT2010: New Photography from Southeast Asia: Parallel Universe, Manila Contemporary, Manila, Philippines; Sangkring Art Space, Jogjakarta, Indonesia; Valentine Willie Fine Art, Singapore; Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Al-Kesah: Once Upon a Time in Malaysia, MAP White Box, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2009 *Eyes Wide Open: Selected photos from the First Singapore International Photography Festival*, The Annexe Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Different But Same, Wei-ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Paradise Lost, 2902 Gallery, Singapore

A New Wave of Responsive Images, Nikon Ginza Gallery, Tokyo, Japan; Sabanci University, Istanbul, Turkey

2008 *Singapore International Photography Festival*

2008, LaSalle College of The Arts, Singapore

Photoart Asia 2008, Zengallery@Central World, Bangkok, Thailand

CUT: New Photography from Southeast Asia, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Singapore; Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2007 *Bebas Lah: Malaysia@50*, Annexe Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Sharing Space: Contemporary Photography of Malaysia + Japan, The Annexe Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

NYKL: Landmarks of New York and Kuala Lumpur, The Annexe Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Young Contemporary Arts Award 2006, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Awards

2015 Nikon Photo Contest 2014-2015, Category D, Japan (2nd Prize)

The Prix Pictet: Disorder, London, England (Nominee)

Asia-Pacific Photobook Award, Australia (Finalist)

2014 The Sovereign Asian Art Prize, Hong Kong (Finalist)

2013 The Prix Pictet 2013, London, England (Nominee)

2012 29th Higashikawa International Award, Hokkaido, Japan (Finalist)

2010 2010 ASEAN- Korea Multimedia Competition, Photography Category, Seoul, South Korea (3rd Prize)

2006 *Young Contemporary Arts Award 2006*, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (Finalist)

Publications

2015 *Seascape*, Artify Gallery Publication

2013 *Institutionalised Care*

2012 *This Used To Be My Playground*, Artify Gallery Publication

Before The World Fell To Pieces, Valentine Willie Fine Art Publication

2008 *Faces of IJN*, Institut Jantung Negara Foundation Publication (National Heart Institution Foundation Publication)

Public Collection

Singapore Art Museum, Singapore



Richard Koh Fine Art has been in operation since 2005 and is regarded as a pioneer for introducing contemporary art to Malaysia and the region. Promoting an adventurous roster of emerging and established artists, the gallery regularly mounts exhibitions locally and abroad with a commitment to emerging practices and challenging media.

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