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ASIA CONTEMPORARY ART WEEK FIELD MEETING: THINKING PROJECTS

BY TAUSIF NOOR



The discussion "The Status of Culture and the Culture of Status" unfolded on the first day. Panelists included (from left to right): Ian Alteveer, Brian Kuan Wood, Hera Chan, Meitha Al Mazrooei, Suhanya Raffel, David Xu Borjonjon and Leeza Ahmady. All images courtesy Asia Society, New York.

In its fifth iteration, Asia Contemporary Art Week's Field Meeting convened to address the bounds and possibilities of the "project," a concept that has become increasingly popular in artistic practice. In its adaptability to uneasy political climates, research-driven and project-based work allows for timely investigations into the connections between artist, institutions and culture—broadly writ—probing both the conditions of production and the afterlives of artistic creation. In this regard, Field Meeting aspires to be both a platform for surveying the current state of contemporary Asian art while also considering alternative methods for engaging participants and audiences.

Leeza Ahmady, the curator and director of Field Meeting, eschews the formulaic methods of a typical symposium and accordingly approaches the annual event "like an exhibition, rather than a conference or a meeting." Over the years, she has gradually included more of her own interests as part of the programming, the shaping of which she describes as being "artistic, intuitive," and informed by Sufi spiritualism. Her goal is that participants "leave with that sense of being bewildered, having some discomfort, but feeling energized." Over the course of two days, a diverse group of artists, writers and curators presented their insights and work as spoken presentations and performances to ensure that a vital energy was consistently maintained.

DAY 1: ASIA SOCIETY MUSEUM

Cities and urban development served as the focal point for the first group of presenters, whose diverse works dealt with ideas of fictive structures and architectures. Hera Chan presented on her discursive project with Para Site, "In Search of Miss Ruthless," exploring the legacy of beauty pageants in Chinatowns and their relationship to class mobility and the film industry. Suhanya Raffel spoke on the cultural ecology of Hong Kong and its role in the development of the forthcoming M+ museum, while Meitha al Mazrooei discussed how oral histories were integral to capturing the constant construction of new buildings in Dubai. Brian Kuan Wood presented a short work of fiction, *The Story of Peter Green Peter Chang* (2017), which took the form of a fable that probed the



ethics of China's urban development.

DAI GUANGYU's *The Failure of Defense – America* (2017) is based on Dai's personal struggles of living under a politically repressive regime.

Following a discussion section led by the Metropolitan Museum's Ian Alteveer and Eyebeam's David Xu Borgonjon, Dai Guangyu gave an ink-based performance titled, *The Failure of Defense – America* (2017), an iteration of a previous work adapted for the American context. The piece is based on Dai's personal struggles of living under a politically repressive regime. At the same time, the work considers the role of borders in constructing state violence.

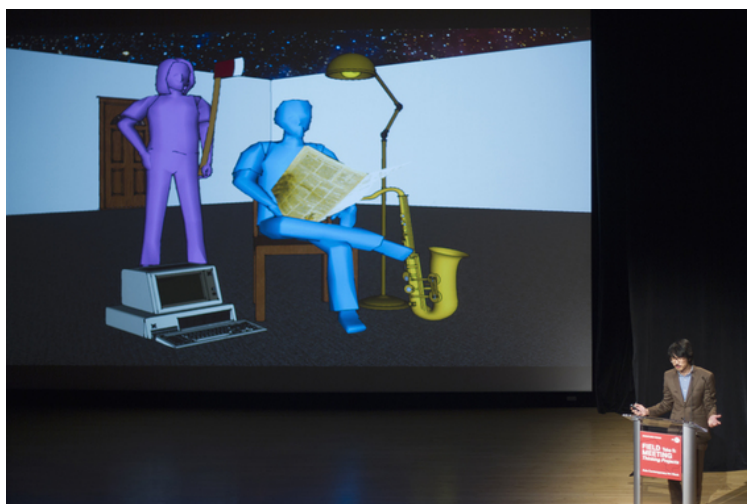


ABDULLAH MI SYED performed *Flesh and Blood* (2017), which entailed the artist eating a bowl of rose petals, gagging and retching in the process.



In **HU WEIYI's** *A Speechless Speech* (2017), sentences addressing defiance and violence are inscribed on the body of an immobile performer and are projected to the audience.

The second set of presentations, organized under the theme of resistance, began with Hu Weiyi's *A Speechless Speech* (2017) in which sentences addressing defiance and violence, inscribed on the body of an immobile performer, are projected to the audience. Echoing the theme of repression, Nadiah Bamadhaj spoke on the importance of "complicating language to maintain what is unsaid," using her research on governance in the special district of Yogyakarta in Indonesia as an example, and Philip Tinari described the valences of censorship in Chinese art institutions. Consistent with the program's thoughtful decision to place art at the forefront, Abdullah MI Syed mounted a performance in which the artist, dressed in black, consumed a bowl of rose petals for a discomfiting amount of time, made all the more unbearable by his gagging and retching. Rounding out the day's discussions were explorations of the cosmic and spiritual dimensions of Feng Shui and sculpture by Adrian Wong and Kingsley Ng paralleled concepts of acupuncture with art's role in society.



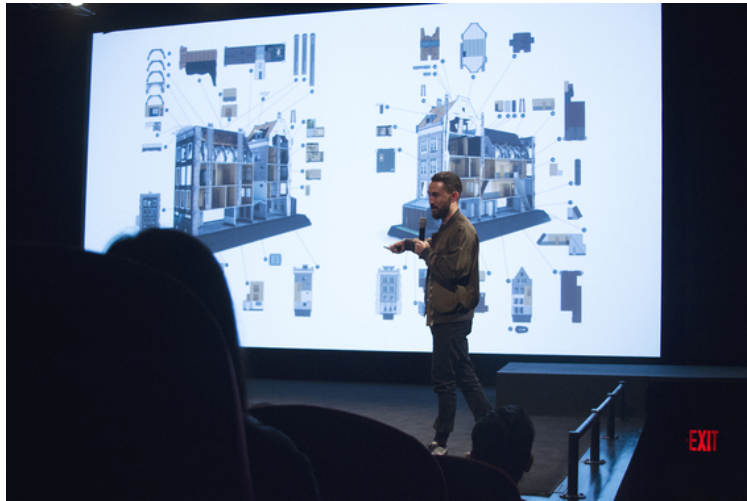
ADRIAN WONG spoke about Feng Shui.

DAY 2: SCHOOL OF VISUAL ARTS THEATRE

In his welcome remarks, Steven Henry Madoff cited Derrida's concept of hospitality within cosmopolitanism as a sort of ethical haunting, entreating the audience to consider the position of the stranger. Nancy Adajania's keynote address "How Not to Be a Footnote to Western Art History" offered a survey of Indian new media art as an example of transcultural praxis. Rather than the didactic lesson that the title suggested, Adajania emphasized the redistribution of privilege—the sharing of intelligence—as a useful praxis for art making and

consumption. Tiffany Chung's examination of microhistories of refugees—both in her own experience following the Vietnam War and in her volunteer work with Syrian refugees—emphasized the role of narrative in politics.

In a following set of presentations, Hajra Waheed and Bruce Quek took to the stars, examining accounts of violence through projections in Waheed's case, and exploring how urbanism impacts people's conception of starfields in Quek's case. Yin-Ju Chen then offered a deeply engrossing narrative of New Age thought, centered around the legend of Lemuria and Mount Shasta as a site of spiritual activity.



In his keynote lecture, **SIMON FUJIWARA** described his reconstruction of the Anne Frank house for an Israeli gallery.

In the final section, Marat Raiymkulov launched into the topic of Zen-Marxism—a revised edition of his planned presentation in light of the previous day's discussions. Through a humorous narration of his father's political philosophy and the dialectics of Kant, Raiymkulov explored the limits of reason by way of antinomies. Taus Makhacheva's performance-lecture used the strategies of ASMR videos—as well as Lenin-shaped lollipops distributed to the audience—to explore themes of consumption. Closing out the event was Simon Fujiwara's keynote, which linked ideology to materiality; Fujiwara described in detail his reconstruction of the Anne Frank house for an Israeli gallery. Though these presentations veered across and through multiple practices and ways of interpreting the world, they demonstrated Field Meeting's dedication to accommodating a multiplicity of voices, attitudes, and opinions.

"Field Meeting Take 5: Thinking Projects" took place on October 14 and 15, during Asia Contemporary Art Week, New York, 2017.

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