

IN STRANGER
LANDS

COCOA'S JOURNEYS TO ASIA

A TOURING ART EXHIBITION
ABOUT
ASIAN COCOA

當代唐人藝術中心
TANG CONTEMPORARY ART

BEIJING HONG KONG BANGKOK SEOUL SINGAPORE



A TOURING ART EXHIBITION
ABOUT
ASIAN COCOA

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COCOA'S JOURNEYS TO ASIA

OCTOBER 17 - NOVEMBER 14, 2024

CURATED BY CAROLINE HA THUC

LOCATION: TANG CONTEMPORARY ART
20/F, LANDMARK SOUTH,
39 YIP KAN STREET,
WONG CHUK HANG, HONG KONG

RAVI AGARWAL TIMOTEUS ANGGAWAN KUSNO
ANTARIKSA AGUNG FIRMAN TO BUDI HARTO BUI CONG KHANH
JIGGER CRUZ MAUNG DAY CIAN DAYRIT
CYRIL DELETTRE VERONICA EMERY JIANDYIN COLLECTIVE
LIM JASON PAN LU & BO WANG KITTI NAROD
RODEL TAPAYA ERIKA TAN TING CHAONG-WEN
ARIN RUNCJANG ROBERT ZHAO RENHUI ZHENG MAHLER



Curatorial statement

For many of us, the taste of chocolate evokes childhood memories, sweetness, and the warmth of family. In Asia, chocolates were often brought back from visits to faraway countries and received as gifts with excitement and pleasure.

Today, chocolate is no longer considered an “exotic” luxury item. In addition to Western brands, many Asian countries have developed their own chocolate industries, incorporating flavors and ingredients that resonate with Asian palates. However, what lies behind the chocolate bars that we see daily on supermarket shelves remains, for many, unknown territory.

Is cocoa produced in Asia? Why has chocolate been absent for so long from the Asian culinary landscape, and can local producers meet today’s growing demand? Who are the farmers cultivating cocoa in the region, and what are the challenges they face when asked to scale up production in a sustainable way?

By the way, how do we make chocolate?

Featuring 20 newly commissioned artworks created by established artists working across Asia, this exhibition is an invitation to delve into these issues. Conceived as a collective and creative research project, it aims to shed light on the many untold stories of Asian cocoa and chocolate through an array of embodied, emotional, imaginative, and conceptual artistic expressions.

The title of the exhibition alludes to the alien nature of cocoa, originally native to Central and South America, and to the myriad narratives that have progressively emerged since its introduction and subsequent adoption in Asian countries from the 16th century. Today, the origins of Asian cocoa are still shrouded with mysteries, with many contradictory and fragmented narratives involving Jesuit priests, explorers, traders and even the bacteriologist Alexandre Yersin. Besides, the colonizers abandoned quickly most of the cacao plantations they had initiated in Asia, as the cacao tree proved too fragile and its yield uncertain. For many years, the cocoa trees were neglected, and the fruits were likely consumed locally in their fresh state. Over time, though, local cultures appropriated them and developed their own uses for cacao. While each story is unique, this is how, for example, the Filipinos developed their own way of consuming chocolate, either as a beverage made from dense, round tablets called *tablea*, or enjoyed alongside dried fish. In Vietnam, people love it as a liquor, an alcohol made from the fermented juice of the cacao fruits.

In Hong Kong, cacao cultivation is only just beginning, with a few experimental plantings in the New Territories. However, an increasing number of chocolate makers are emerging, sourcing beans from around the world and infusing them with distinctly local flavors.

Each artist has delved into various fields of research, including the sculptural shape of the cocoa pods, their ritualistic uses and the trade routes they have traversed. Viewers are invited to move freely between the artworks, as these fields of inquiry overlap and complement each other. The specific characteristics of cocoa beans, their growing conditions, and the related colonial histories have not only influenced trade and modes of exchange, but have also shaped local environments and cultures. The long and complex process of transforming cocoa beans into chocolate is also a significant factor. The featured artworks reflect this interconnectedness, pointing to the continuous metamorphosis of cocoa, both in a literal and a metaphorical sense. In the porous landscapes they described, humans, technology, insects, rain, time, and even humus are interdependent.

Originally a drink for the gods, cocoa continues to be a source of dreams and marvels. It also represents an important crop and, as such, its culture and commodification exemplify the current ecological challenges and trade inequalities faced by any raw good mostly produced in the Global South. Ultimately, the featured artworks not only push the frontier of artistic expression but also question the extent to which art can contribute to dialogues on current social issues.

Special events

Venue:
Tang Contemporary Art
(Wong Chuk Hang, Hong Kong)

Grand Opening of the Exhibition

Date: Thursday, October 17
Time: 4 PM to 7 PM

Join us for the grand opening of the exhibition! Meet the curator and featured artists—Cyril Delettre, Veronica Emery, Jiandyn Collective, Pan Lu, and Zheng Mahler—as they share insights about their work. Enjoy a delightful evening filled with refreshments and indulge in exclusive chocolates sponsored by Conspiracy Chocolate!

Maersk Private Event (by invitation only)

Date: Friday, October 18, 1 PM to 5:30 PM

Please note that the gallery will be temporarily closed for this private event.

Curator's Tour by Dr. Caroline Ha Thuc

Date: Saturday, October 19
Time: 3 PM

Exclusive curator's tour led by Dr. Caroline Ha Thuc. Discover the stories behind the artworks and gain deeper insights into the exhibition. The tour will be followed by a delightful cocoa tea prepared by Conspiracy Chocolate, offering a perfect way to unwind and reflect on the experience!

Live Chocolate Tempering & Hot Chocolate Drinks Inspired by Maya Recipes Hosted by Conspiracy Chocolate

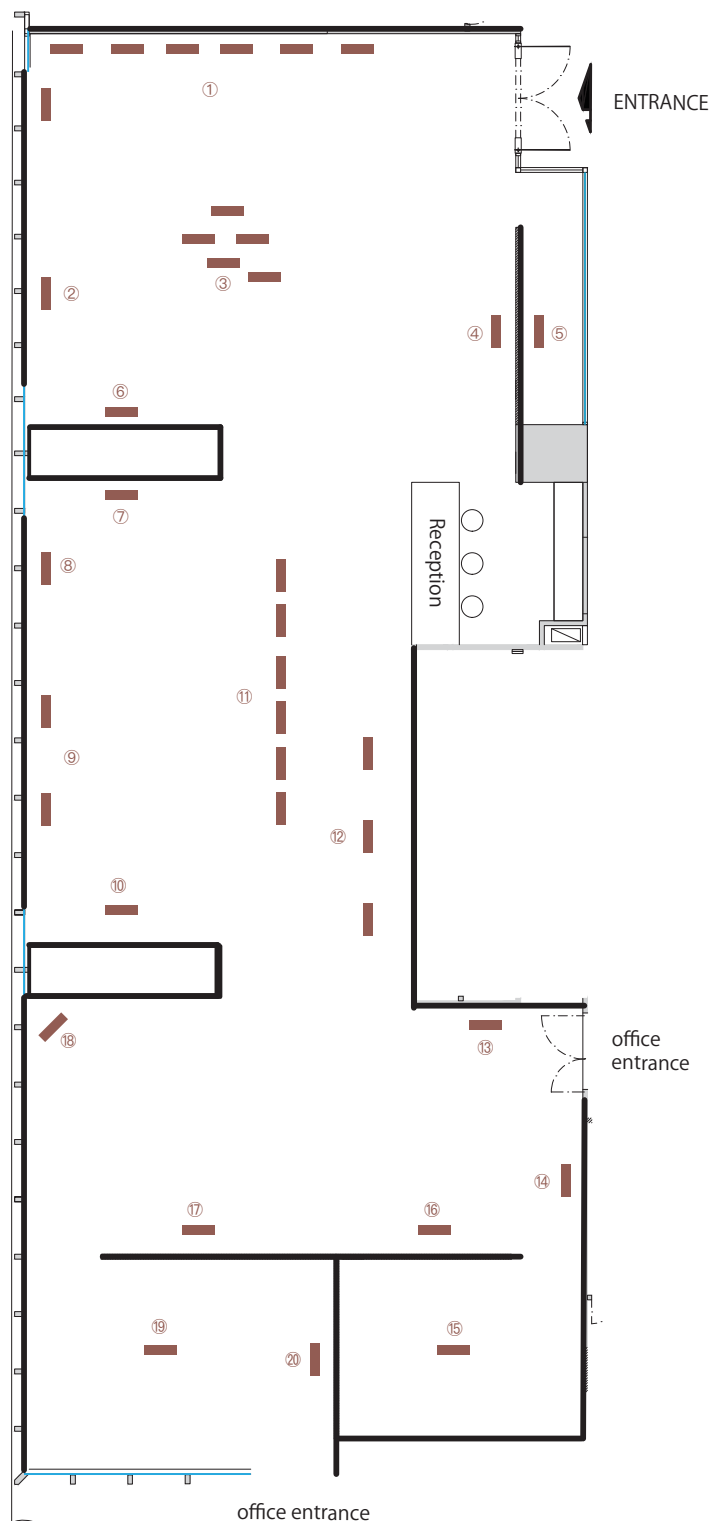
Date: Saturday, October 26
Time: From 4 PM

Join us for an engaging live chocolate tempering demonstration by Conspiracy Chocolate on a cozy Saturday afternoon. Discover the artistry of chocolate-making while savoring a delicious hot chocolate beverage inspired by ancient Maya recipes. Don't miss this delightful opportunity to indulge your senses!

Docent Tours

Date: Saturdays, October 26, November 9
Time: 11:30 AM to 2 PM
Language: English, Mandarin

Join us for an enriching exhibition tour that explores the transformative power of cocoa in art and culture. Enjoy insightful commentary from expert guides as they lead you through captivating displays, offering a deeper understanding of this fascinating exhibition!



① . Ravi Agarwal

Redemption/Homage

Six digital color prints on archival paper, one gum oil print on art paper, video performance (00:02:00), fieldwork documentation

② . Cian Dayrit

Shrine to what is shared; shrine to what is coveted; shrine to what is collectively cultivated, Wooden sculpture, rattan and metal shelf, plaster, casts, embroidery on fabric, wooden table

③ . Jason Lim

Terra, 2023 | Black clay, glaze, metallic luster, red cotton thread

Exocarp, 2023 | Black clay, glaze

Placenta, 2023 | Black clay, luster, red cotton thread

Flower, 2023 | Black clay, glaze, sand

Seed, 2023 | Black clay, glaze, sand

④ . Rodel Tapaya

The Water is Color Chocolate, Acrylic on canvas

⑤ . Veronica Emery

Gift of Desire (GOD), Photograph of an original collage

⑥ . Erika Tan

Sour Kana: All That is Solid Melts into a Mass of Sticky, Dark, Mess, Video, 00:11:45

⑦ . Jiandiyin Collective

Space and Time: Planting the History of Narratives, Video, 00:13:41

⑧ . Jigger Cruz

Shaping Browns from the Rocks and a Tree, Oil on canvas

⑨ . Kitt Narod

Green Kitchen, Acrylic on canvas

⑩ . Bui Cong Khanh

Chocomedals, War medals cast in chocolate and their jackfruit wood molds

⑪ . Cyril Delettre

Shrine to what is shared; shrine to what is coveted; shrine to what is collectively cultivated, Wooden sculpture, rattan and metal shelf, plaster casts, embroidery on fabric, wooden table

⑫ . Maung Day

Scenes from a Childhood No.1, Acrylic and pen on canvas

⑬ . Arin Rungiang

Time is movement and incomplete, Multimedia interactive installation

⑭ . Antariksa

Untitled, Video, sound 00:02:28

⑮ . Timoteus Anggawan Kusno

Anatomy of Nostalgia, Multimedia installation including video projection (00:07:11), 3D-printed resin dioramas coated with paint, archival materials, and oil pastel drawings on books

⑯ . Robert Zhao Renhui

The Last Wild Cocoa and Its Inhabitants, Series of 4 photographs with images printed on the frame

⑰ . Zheng Mahler

Buitenzorg Criollo, Single-channel 4K video 00:10:26

⑱ . Ting Chaong-wen

Cocoa Solar Farm, Mix media installation 00:18:30

⑲ . Pan Lu and Bo Wang

The Adventures of Cocoa on a Southern Island, Interactive board game, cards, and documentation

⑳ . Agung Firmanto Budiharto

Making Chocolate Together, Video, 00:12:55

Exhibition map

Wong Chuk Hang, Hong Kong

20/F, Landmark South, 39 Yip Kan Street,
Wong Chuk Hang, Hong Kong

History

Wild cocoa finds its origins in the Amazon basin of Central America, where early civilizations such as the Olmecs, Mayans, and Aztecs cultivated it. Archaeological findings reveal traces of cocoa in ancient jars dating as far back as 1400 BCE. The Mayans, imbuing cacao with divine significance, integrated it into various aspects of their lives, as food, currency, medicine, and in ceremonial rituals.

From the 16th century onwards, Western colonizers embarked on a global expansion of cocoa cultivation to exploit its rich potential. Their production relied on the labor forces of native populations, followed by the exploitation of enslaved African peoples transported in what has come to be known as the “triangular trade”. Cocoa became part of an extensive and exclusive monopoly trade system, dominated by colonizers who extracted resources from their colonies, including gold, silver, and agricultural products, in exchange for manufactured products across the world.

Initially valued as currency, colonizers were reluctant to utilize cocoa as a beverage until the addition of sugar transformed it into a delicious treat. Only then did they fully realize the gastronomic potential of chocolate. In Europe, a craving for chocolate developed quickly from the 17th century. Initially imported for its medicinal properties and reserved for royal courts, chocolate consumption gradually extended to the noble and ecclesiastic classes. Its popularity accelerated with the industrialization of its production processes in the early 19th century, transforming chocolate into one of the world’s most beloved products.

In Asia

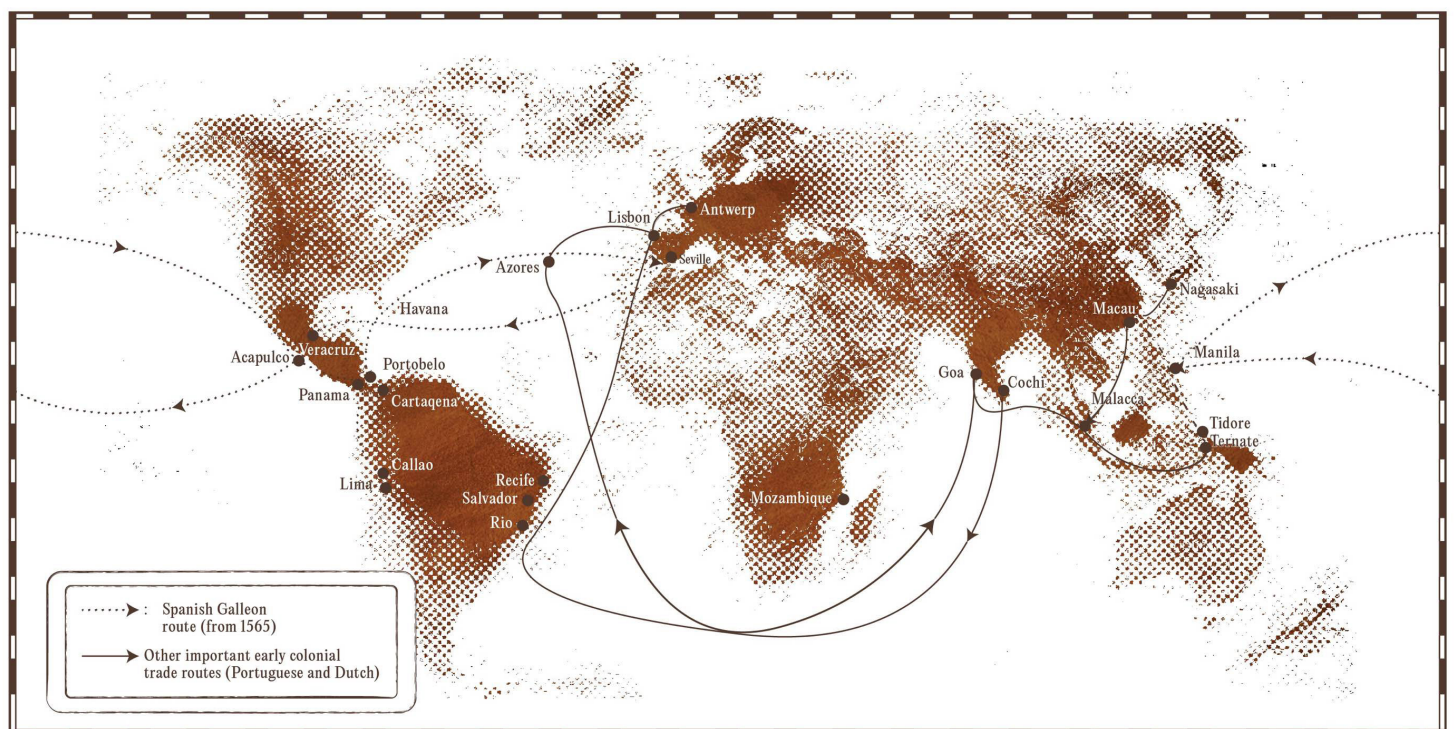
In Asia, cocoa trees were first introduced for cultivation in the 16th century by Spanish colonizers, followed later by the Dutch. There were essentially two primary trade routes. The first, known as the Spanish route, connected Mexico, then a Spanish colony, to the Philippines. Ships made one or two voyages per year between the ports of Acapulco and Manila. It is said that small cocoa trees were transported in mini-greenhouses to maintain adequate temperature and humidity levels during the journey.

The second route, referred to as the Dutch route, involved the Dutch, who controlled the coast of Venezuela. In the 18th century, they introduced cocoa cultivation to the island of Ceylon and later to Java by the end of the century. They hoped it would become a profitable crop to offset their declining coffee production, but the results were less successful than anticipated.

In the 19th century, the French initiated cocoa cultivation in regions such as Vietnam’s Mekong Delta and Central Highlands. However, cocoa never achieved the same level of success as other lucrative crops like rubber or coffee, leading to its limited expansion and eventual abandonment. In Taiwan, the Japanese introduced cocoa pods in the 1920s and began cultivation during their colonial rule, which persisted until World War II. Meanwhile, in India, cocoa cultivation is more recent, dating back to the 1960s and tied to the British company Cadbury’s efforts.

Interestingly, local cocoa production in Asia has grown significantly beyond the colonial framework, as many regions have progressively reappropriated cocoa cultivation, except for Indonesia where the mass production remains largely under the control of foreign companies. More recently, local cocoa cultivation has seen a resurgence, and today, Asian cocoa is quickly emerging as a promising crop, offering new opportunities for the region.

Cocoa’s major colonial trade routes



Cocoa’s major colonial trade routes

Botany

The cocoa tree, a unique species growing exclusively within the “chocolate belt” — a zone approximately 20 degrees north and south of the Equator — requires warm and consistently moist conditions, a stable climate, and shade provided by taller trees like coconut, palm, or durian. Midges, or tiny flies, play a paramount role in cocoa pollination, thus underscoring the importance of maintaining “messy” plantations with rich soils and high biodiversity.

Cocoa pods, containing cocoa seeds, grow directly from the trunk and emerge from delicate pollinated white flowers. On average, a single tree yields around 40 pods, producing approximately two kilograms of cocoa per year. While cocoa harvesting occurs throughout the year, it typically takes between five and six years for a tree to bear fruit. However, certain new varieties have the capacity to produce fruit as early as 18 months, earning them the nickname “speedy Cacao Mercedes”!

After 25 years, cocoa trees experience a decline in productivity, necessitating replacement. The cocoa tree is delicate and highly susceptible to diseases. Some varieties are more resilient than others, prompting scientists to work diligently in search of more resistant hybrid species. The original species, known as criollo, is, for instance, more vulnerable to diseases compared to forastero, a hybrid cocoa variety constituting the majority of cocoa produced today. Despite these efforts, it is not uncommon for up to 40% of the harvest to be lost due to pests and diseases.

Ecology

Today, many cocoa producers must grapple with the impacts of climate change, facing challenges such as unpredictable weather patterns, increased droughts, rising saltwater intrusion, and new diseases, which pose threats to cocoa yields and quality. Additionally, farmers also contend with soil degradation and decreased productivity due to aging trees, leading some to resort to clearing additional forest land and using chemical fertilizers to meet production demands.

Addressing these challenges, the promotion of sustainable and environmentally friendly cultivation practices has become an urgent issue for all actors in the cocoa industry. Numerous international and local programs, trainings, and incentives have been developed to encourage agroforestry techniques, intercropping, knowledge sharing, and the strengthening of livelihoods and farming systems’ resilience. Significant efforts are underway to mitigate and regulate deforestation, evident in endeavors such as the Cocoa and Forests Initiative signed by various companies and governments. Organizations like The Rainforest Alliance and Fair Trade provide support to farmers and cocoa communities prioritizing environmental protection. In Vietnam, the Cocoa Trace program aims to empower local farmers to enhance the value and quality of their chocolate while promoting sustainable production practices.

To extend their practice beyond mere exploitation of nature, growers are adopting the role of “landscapists”, or caretakers of an entire ecosystem. They learn intercrop farming and how to use every part of the cocoa tree. Cocoa husks, for instance, can be brewed into delicious tea and used as animal feed. Empty pods and cocoa waste can serve as valuable fertilizers, feedstock, or even fuel for energy production. Additionally, cocoa leaf litter creates a precious habitat for midges, the tree’s main pollinators. Within this ecological perspective, the cocoa tree offers a plethora of resources!

Economy

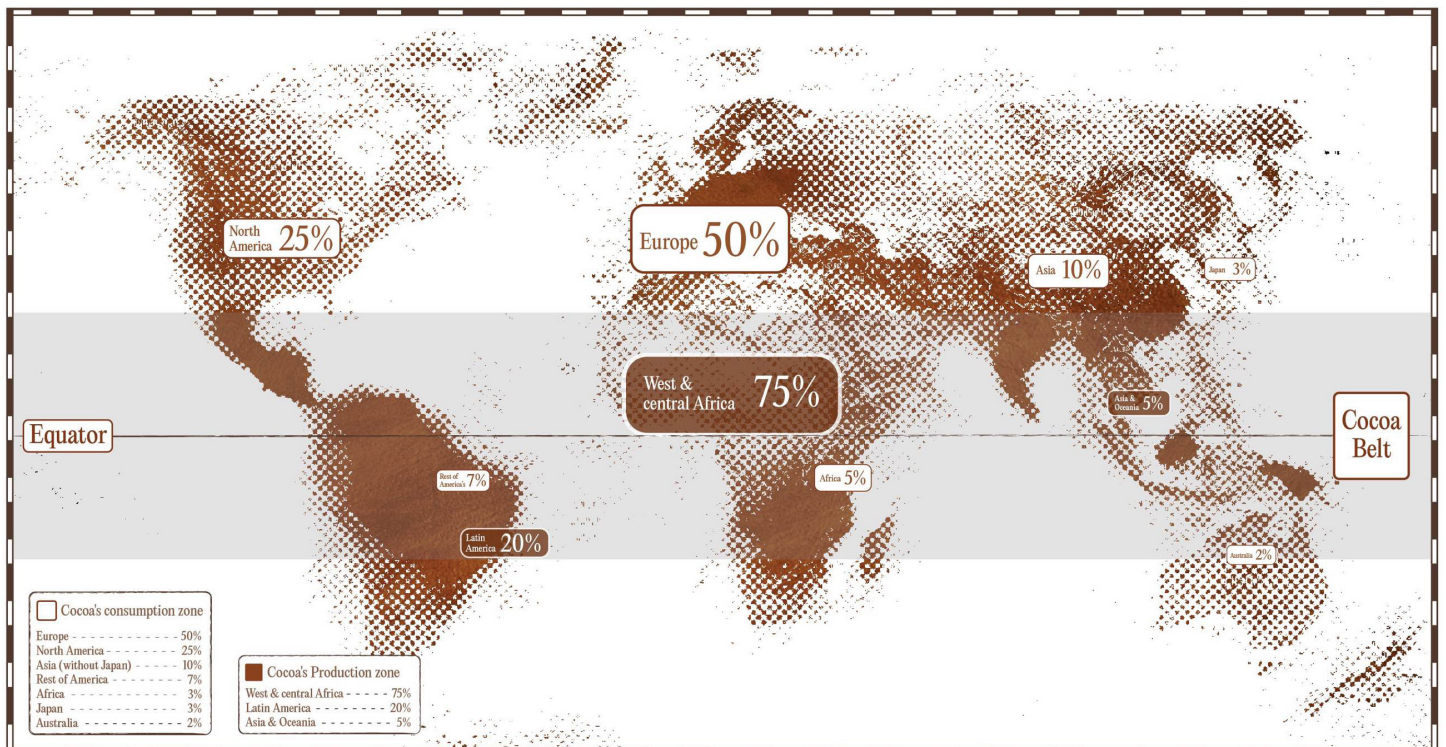
The Ivory Coast and Ghana in West Africa are the largest cocoa-producing countries, accounting for over half of global cocoa production. Notably, although Indonesia ranks as the world's third-largest cocoa producer, Asia as a whole contributes only 5% to global cocoa production. In contrast, Europe, despite not cultivating cocoa beans, consumes half of the world's chocolate.

In 2021, global chocolate consumption reached approximately 7.5 million tons. On average, a person in China consumes 200 grams of chocolate per year, while in Vietnam, the average is 100 grams. At the top of the consumption statistics are the Swiss, with a per capita consumption of 11.6 kilograms.

The process of transforming cocoa fruit into chocolate involves multiple phases that require specialized equipment and an extensive chain of intermediaries. Cocoa cultivation primarily occurs as in family-run operations, with 90% of global production coming from farms occupying between two to five hectares of land. Cocoa growers often face challenging conditions, influenced by volatile cocoa prices and low income. Limited access to credit and financial resources hinders their ability to reinvest in their farms and increase productivity. This lack of capital also acts as a barrier to transforming cocoa beans into higher-value forms such as cocoa mass, cocoa butter, cocoa powder, chocolate, or other cocoa products.

Currently, Europe remains the leading processor of cocoa beans, contributing to a significant disparity between cocoa growers and chocolate producers. However, chocolate processing is increasingly shifting to Asia, and we might soon witness a radical change in the geography of this industry.

Cocoa Production and Consumption in the world (2022)



Cocoa Production and Consumption in the world (2022)

Diversity

The cocoa tree's scientific name, *Theobroma cacao*, translates to "the food of the Gods". Throughout its extensive history, cocoa and chocolate have been deeply connected to a rich array of symbolic meanings, virtues and power. In ancient Mayan and Aztec civilizations, for instance, cocoa held a revered status and played a vital role in religious ceremonies, primarily consumed as a beverage rather than as solid chocolate. Mixed with red spices, it bore a resemblance to blood and thus was featured in sacrificial rituals. The Aztecs, who were renowned warriors, included chocolate in military rations, serving it during military ceremonies to honor their bravest warriors, even associating cocoa with heart extraction in a spectacular ritual.

Yet, the significance of cocoa extended beyond violence. Some Mesoamerican poems celebrate its luxurious nature, and planting rituals also involved community gatherings and festivities to honor the cocoa tree and the deities associated with it. Cocoa was considered a part of traditional medicine, utilized to alleviate ailments such as dyspepsia, fever, and asthenia. It is under this guise that it was first introduced to Europe, yet some Christians immediately condemned its consumption, linking the beverage with witchcraft.

Overall, colonizers stripped cocoa of its spiritual meanings and imbued it with the qualities they wished to project onto it. While many of these original symbols have disappeared today, the medicinal virtues of chocolate continue to be acknowledged. In parallel, a new imaginary has emerged, associating chocolate with sweetness, love and social interactions. In Asia, chocolate has found its place as a ritual for gift-giving, adding yet another layer to the diverse tapestry of cocoa's cultural and social significance.

"If you are not feeling well, if you have not slept, chocolate will revive you."

Marquise de Sévigné, French writer (1626–1696)

Ravi Agarwal



Redemption/Homage

Biography

2023

6 digital color prints on archival paper and 1 gum oil print on art paper,
video performance, and fieldwork documentation
Installation dimensions variable
(Courtesy Ravi Agarwal and Gallery Espace, New Delhi)

Ravi Agarwal embarked on a journey to cacao-growing regions in South India — Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka — with the aim of understanding the alternative model of development implemented by smaller independent cocoa producers. As an ecological activist, the Indian artist is dedicated to exploring the dynamics between human interaction and nature within the locality of their context. For this exhibition, he delved into the political history of cocoa cultivation in India, along with the recent economic surge driven by demand from Cadbury, a British multinational confectionary company. During his field trip, Ravi visited two distinct locations. The first was Bon Fiction in Rajahmundry, Andhra Pradesh, which encompassed a processing facility and a farm dedicated to the production process of cocoa beans, including growing, sorting, fermentation, and drying (tree to bar). The second site, Subko, situated in Mumbai, operated as a boutique processing facility specializing in the purchase of cacao beans (bean to bar).

Through his research, Ravi discovered vintage postcards and images depicting the colonial histories of cacao and its subsequent commodification, which he repurposed and incorporated as collages within his photographs. Additionally, the artist performed a series of dance movements, rooted in and reinterpreting the traditional Indian Arti — a ritualistic prayer conducted with an oil lamp, to symbolically pay homage to cacao as a representation of nature, acknowledging its desecration by human intervention.

Redemption/Homage delves into the metamorphosis of the cocoa seed, evolving from an ecological entity to a symbolic species, extracted from its original landscape and purpose. Initially held in high regard in ancient Amerindian societies, the cocoa seed underwent a transformation into a coveted commodity associated with sensuality, virility and desire upon its introduction to new transatlantic environments. The works signify an act of homage and a quest for redemption, addressing the ongoing colonization of nature by humanity.

Ravi Agarwal has an interdisciplinary practice as an artist, writer, curator, and environmental campaigner. His research-based work mediates art and activism to address the entangled questions of nature and its futures using photography, video, text, and installation. His work has been shown widely at National Museum of Asian Art — Smithsonian Institution (2022), Havana Biennial (2019), Yinchuan Biennale (2018), Kochi Biennale (2016), Sharjah Biennial (2013), Indian Highway, Serpentine Gallery, London, UK and Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo, Norway (2009), and documenta 11 (2002) amongst others, besides numerous solo and group exhibitions. He curated New Natures, A Terrible Beauty is Born, Goethe Institute and CSMVS Museum, Mumbai, India (2022), Imagined Documents, Les Rencontres d' Arles, France (2022), and the project on multispecies worlds Samtal Jameen, Samtal Jameer. He is the curatorial advisor for the forthcoming exhibition Carbon, Science Gallery, Bengaluru, India (2023). Ravi is alongside the founder and director of the environmental NGO Toxics Link based in New Delhi, and The Shyama Foundation's Shared Ecologies program, which supports emerging initiatives at the intersection of art and ecology in India. He is also a visiting fellow at the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art and Co-Convenor for the Bergen Assembly 2025.

Timoteus Anggawan Kusno



Anatomy of Nostalgia

2023
Multimedia installation including video projection,
3D-printed resin dioramas
coated with paint, archival materials, and oil pastel drawings on books
Installation dimensions variable

Anatomy of Nostalgia is an exploration into the intricate history of cocoa, and moreover, of (colonial) nostalgia. Through an amalgamation of drawings, a diorama, and a single-channel video, the work prompts questions about cocoa's trajectory, tracing its journey from colonial times to its impact on our present lives.

The artwork draws inspiration from a book published by a Dutch chocolate company that showcased the Dutch East Indies. Penned by JC Lamster, a filmmaker, soldier, and curator at the Colonial Institute in Amsterdam, the book vividly portrays the people of the Netherlands Indies from a colonial perspective, contributing significantly to the exoticization of its subjects. The accompanying video intervenes and disrupts colonial footage filmed by Lamster, which forms the early chapter in the history of colonial moving imagery within the Indonesian archipelago.

Anatomy of Nostalgia unveils the unseen power dynamics inherent in the construction of colonial imagery and nostalgia, interweaving themes of economic liberation, modernization, and society's collective addiction to sweetness. It exposes the historical context of cacao as an integral part of Dutch colonization's plantation demands in the mid-19th century. Simultaneously, cocoa's history reveals a darker side, shrouded in exploitation and inequality, with the shadows of slavery, child labor, and deforestation haunting its narrative.

The work disrupts and questions the narratology, archives, and colonial framework that propelled their creation. It invites reflection, urging viewers to grapple with the complex and problematic legacy of colonialism, emphasizing its enduring impact on contemporary society — particularly through our unexamined addiction to sweetness and the imageries we have taken for granted.

Biography

Timoteus Anggawan Kusno is an artist who works across a range of mediums, including installations, drawings, filmmaking, and institutional interventions. His work explores the entanglement of history, memory and imagination, and their relation to power and narratology. Kusno's pieces frequently use a (meta)fictional approach to examine the role of the medium in storytelling, and he critically examines the editing and production structures that underpin the creation of historical narratives. His work has been exhibited in numerous cultural institutions and biennales worldwide, including the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, South Korea; Museum of Contemporary Art Taipei, Taiwan; Mumbai City Museum, India; Centre for Fine Arts Belgium, and many others. Simultaneously within his artistic practice, Timoteus has been developing the Centre for Tanah Runcuk Studies since 2013, which is a fictional institution project that aims to conduct experimental studies on a lost territory in the Dutch East Indies called Tanah Runcuk. This project involves historians, ethnographers, fellow artists, curators, and writers. In 2021, Kusno was awarded the Video Production Award from the Han Nefkens Foundation — Loop Barcelona, collaborating with several institutions worldwide. Timoteus is currently pursuing his PhD at the University of Amsterdam while living and working between Amsterdam and Yogyakarta.

Antariksa



Untitled

2023
Video, sound
00:02:28

Focusing primarily on the history of Japanese-occupied Southeast Asia during World War II, historian and researcher Antariksa unearthed compelling archives related to the distribution of chocolate bars to Japanese kamikaze aviators during the war. These chocolate bars had an intriguing origin, with the cocoa beans sourced from Taiwan, a then Japanese colony, processed in occupied Indonesia, and subsequently shipped to Japan. Notably, the wrapping of these chocolate bars was entrusted to school children, who unknowingly contributed to diverting them from their primary nutritional function: the bars were laced with methamphetamine, intended to stimulate the pilots for their final and deadly flights.

In addition, Antariksa found a collection of last letters written by Japanese soldiers to their families. These letters, containing their final wishes and thoughts, convey a mix of uplifting and poignant sentiments. Through the juxtaposition of the soldiers' last letters and evocative poetic imagery, his video prompts reflection on the nature of time and our capacity to grasp our own destinies.

Biography

Historian and researcher Antariksa's work centers primarily on art collectivism and the mobility of ideas in Japanese-occupied Southeast Asia during World War II. A few years ago, he began presenting his research in an exhibition format, using hard research sources along with softer approaches such as performance, music, theatre and audience participation. Antariksa lives and works between Paris, where he teaches, and Yogyakarta.

Antariksa's work has notably been presented at Orange Regional Gallery, Australia (2021–2022); Sharjah Biennial (2019); Asian Art Biennial (2019); Jakarta Arts Council (2018); group exhibitions *Power and Other Things: Indonesia & Art (1835–now)*, BOZAR, Brussels, Belgium (2017–2018); and *The Time is Out of Joint*, Sharjah, UAE (2016), among others. His publications include *Sur le feu — Glossaire pour une exposition*, ENSBA (2023); *Art Collectivism in Japanese-Occupied Indonesia*, Kyushu University Press (2017) and *Tuan Tanah Kawin Muda: Art and the Institute of People's Culture 1950–1965*, CAF/IVAA (2005).

Agung Firmanto Budiharto



Scan the QR code to view the work

Sinau Tuwuhing Kakao *(Learning from the Growth of Cocoa Trees)*

Biography

2023
Video documentation
00:12:55

Since 2021, Agung Firmanto Budiharto, also known as Geger, has been developing a series of workshops in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, titled “Learning Together About Cocoa” and “Make Your Own Beans-to-Bar Chocolate”. These workshops serve as platforms for sharing knowledge and experiences, emphasizing collaborative learning. Fascinated with chocolate since his childhood and eager to understand its origin, Geger has been cultivating cocoa in his yard. Realizing that many local residents grow their own cocoa trees but lack the expertise to process the beans or understand the chocolate-making process, Geger decided to venture to various areas to find abandoned cocoa plants and initiate discussions with the owners. He extends invitations to these individuals, encouraging them to participate in workshops where they can learn about chocolate making and gain insights into the characteristics of this fruit. This initiative is integral to Geger’s ongoing project centered around decolonizing knowledge.

This documentary showcases Geger’s project, highlighting one of the workshops he conducted in December 2023. The workshop took place at Ngargosari, Samigaluh, Kulon Progo in Bukit Menoreh, Indonesia and included activities such as “How to Process Cocoa from Your Own Garden”.

Agung Firmanto Budiharto is a fermentation enthusiast based in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. He is a co-founder and current director of Lifepatch, a cross-disciplinary collective established in 2012. The collective brings together practitioners to examine, explore, and develop socially engaged projects related to art, science, technology, history, culture, and human resources.

Geger documents street art in Yogyakarta on urbancult.net. He is also interested in gardening, activities related to the environment, public spaces, cycling, and street art communities. Previously, he worked as a government employee in the tourism and culture office, as well as in the screen-printing industry. He has a keen interest in graphic printing with linocut, photography, and natural pigment printing.

In 2022, Geger participated in a residency in the framework of documenta 15, in the Study Collective Program in Kassel. Since 2016, he has been engaged in the history, culture, and restitution of Batak community artifacts. Currently, as part of the Arus Balik Initiative, he is actively researching and learning about Pushata, the magic book of the Batak people, in an effort to restore and revitalize these artifacts for the community.

Bui Cong Khanh



Chocomedals

Biography

2023
War medals cast in chocolate and their jackfruit wood molds
Mold dimensions: 30 x 11.5 x 3 cm
Medal dimensions variable

Chocomedals represents an expanded version of Bui Cong Khanh's prior work, *Porcelain Medals*, made in 2018. In the history of humanity, the adage "History is written by the winners" is well-known, yet acknowledgement through medals is not exclusive to victors; it also extends to the vanquished to recognize their sacrifice. In the book *Füves könyv* by writer Márai Sándor, an affecting statement is made: "The fatherland does not give you medals, titles or bread. The fatherland just exists. And the state can attach medals to your shirt, can give you many benefits, if you serve diligently."

Employing cake molds, Bui Cong Khanh recreated war medals in *Porcelain Medals*, delicately hand-painted in porcelain. These porcelain medals were then displayed on a table, evoking the appearance of biscuits. Khanh's mother, having personally experienced the hardships of war when his father served as a soldier, used to question the purpose of such medals in the face of widespread hunger.

For this exhibition, the artist collaborated with a local chocolate maker from Da Nang to adapt the molds and cast the medals in chocolate. Khanh deftly experiments with various cacao compositions, ranging from white to dark, transforming these military symbols into delectable treats capable of coexisting peacefully. By mixing the chocolate medals together, he disrupts their traditional hierarchy and invites viewers to partake in a healing process. The warm aroma emanating from the artwork further enhances the sense of harmony and reconciliation.

Through his unique artistic expression, Khanh prompts contemplation on the power of transformation and the potential for bridging divides. His work serves as a poignant reminder of the need for understanding, empathy, and healing in the wake of conflict.

This artwork benefited from the support of TBros chocolate

Bui Cong Khanh is one of the first Vietnamese artists to gain international reputation in the 1990s with his performances that questioned the restrictions on individual expression in Vietnam. Deeply concerned with the social constructions of cultural value, Khanh's multifarious practice has since embraced painting, sculpture, installation, video, and drawing. A poetically provocative artist, Khanh's works, informed by historical research, continue to venture to new depths, and expertly combines the plastic arts with a conceptual method not taught within the Vietnamese educational system.

Bui Cong Khanh has widely exhibited in the Southeast Asian region and beyond, with notable group and solo exhibitions including *Illuminated Curiosities*, Nguyen Art Foundation, HCMC, Vietnam, 2022; *Impressions Unearth*, San Art, HCMC, Vietnam, 2021; *Stealing Public Space*, Singapore Art Week, Singapore, 2020; *Homo Faber: Craft in Contemporary Sculpture*, Asia Culture Center, Gwangju, South Korea, 2019; the 5th Singapore Biennale, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore, 2016; and *Dislocate*, The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, organized by San Art, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. His artwork is in the collections of M+, Hong Kong and Nguyen Art Foundation, Vietnam.

Jigger Cruz



Shaping Browns from the Rocks and a Tree

2024
Oil on canvas
158 x 132 x 9 cm

Biography

Challenging the very nature of painting materials, Jigger Cruz approaches his work with the intention of creating an object rather than merely representing a subject. His artistic objective transcends the mere recreation of reality; instead, he seeks to transform it into something more complex and intriguing. Cruz's abstract compositions are marked by assertive, confident strokes that develop a textured, three-dimensional surface.

“Shaping Browns from the Rocks and a Tree” exemplifies his recent oeuvre, encapsulating the artist's dynamic gestures and his investigation of textures and materials. Dominated by earthy brown tones, the painting is deeply rooted in the soil and the natural world. Elements such as rocks, stones, and cocoa pods emerge from what appears to be a primordial surface. Their forms are simplistic, almost childlike, perhaps intended to evoke the early stages of Earth's creation. The richness of the paint suggests a connection to nourishment and the intrinsic joy of artistic creation. The cocoa pod, in particular, embodies a sense of natural sensuality and evokes early sensations of pleasure experienced by children. Furthermore, this work emphasizes our relationship with the environment and highlights its inherent richness, which we often overlook.

JIGGER CRUZ b. 1984, Malabon City, Manila, Philippines, Jigger Cruz graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the Far Eastern University, Manila and also trained at the De La Salle College of Saint Benilde before pursuing a full-time career as a painter. The artist has been listed in international auction houses around the world, and has exhibited in both solo and group shows locally and internationally, from the Philippines to Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, Japan, Germany, Switzerland, France, Italy, Austria, and the United States. His work can be found in multiple public collections, including The Dikeou Collection, Denver, CO, USA; Guggenheim Museum, NY, USA; Saatchi Collection, London, UK; and Zabudowicz Collection, London, UK.

Cruz's art practice is characterized by his idea to play with defacement and vandalization, making use of oil colour, spray paint and rough interventions directly on the canvases, which are sometimes burned and, in some cases, even cut. Each artwork is created by the artist from a canvas previously painted, where he copied the Flemish and Post-Renaissance masters. Apparently, without a logical scheme, Cruz applies layer by layer the dense oil colour, not only hiding, but rather mystifying the classical backdrop. In this way, the artist explores, through his artworks, the deep relationship between the canvas and its meaning, past and present, figuration and abstraction. The figures of the classical paintings that transpire below, remind the viewer of the painstaking pictorial activity and the art historical baggage of the contemporary painter.

Maung Day



Scenes from a Childhood No.1

Biography

2024
Acrylic and pen on canvas
122 x 183 cm

“Children anywhere like to imagine there is rainbow somewhere and at the end of it, a gold pot full of chocolate and sweets. Most of my childhood took place in the 80s and the 90s. I was born at a time when Myanmar was ruled under General Ne Win whose idea of the Burmese Way to Socialism put the country under immense economic pressure, poverty, and isolation. It was also the time when the first few TVs arrived in my neighborhood. One of them belonged to my aunt. TV put me under its spell immediately and I went to my aunt’s place every day. On TV, I saw chocolate bars, ice cream, and sweets especially in the foreign programs. I wanted them all.”

In this series of works, Maung Day reflects on his childhood memory and on his crave for chocolate at that time, under Burmese dictatorship. The drawings feature a group of children watching TV that is physically attached to the neck of an adult sitting face-to-face. On their bodies are a series of scenes from the artist’s childhood and from the tales he read and was taught. “As a child, I was constantly taught to be good and asked to read tales with moral lessons, but what I lived through even as a child was an experience of contradictions and hypocrisy manifested in the society in various ways.”

The artist, who is also a poet and a writer, began working as a literary translator in the early 2000s. His first interest was children’s fiction, and his first translation was Charlie and Chocolate Factory by Roald Dahl.

Maung Day is a Myanmar-born poet, editor, and visual and performing artist based in Bangkok, where he works for Eco-village Transition Asia, a Thai NGO which focuses on Eco-village Design Education and the empowerment of civil society.

Maung graduated from the Institute of Technology in Thanlyin and Dagon University in Yangon, was chief editor of Ainka Wutyi music journal and edited Han Thit literary magazine and the art magazine Pan, amongst others. He has published three books of poetry, *Pleasure Sea* (Kyaw Mhway, 2006), *Surplus Biology* (The Eras, 2011) and *Alluvial Plain of Ogres* (The Eras, 2012). His poems have appeared in international magazines such as *The Wolf*, *Guernica* and *The Awl*. Maung’s translations of children’s books include *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Charlotte’s Web*, and several others. He co-founded the celebrated *Beyond Pressure International Performance Art Festival* in Myanmar in 2008, and his artworks have been showcased at home and abroad and on his blog.

Cian Dayrit



Shrine to what is shared; shrine to what is coveted; shrine to what is collectively cultivated

2023
Wooden sculpture, rattan and metal shelf, plaster casts,
embroidery on fabric, wooden table
Installation dimensions variable

For this installation, Cian Dayrit aimed to create a humble shrine dedicated to not only cacao but also its broader ecosystem, encompassing its natural, historical, and socio-political dimensions. The exportation of cacao production is largely dominated by major multinational companies in the Global North. At the same time, cacao is seldom cultivated in isolation due to intercropping practices. This interconnectedness presents a singular identity, and thus the story of cacao cannot be approached without considering the stories of other crops, the land, and the people who are not only cocoa farmers but also producers of durian, coconuts and more.

The installation consists of two primary components. The first entails a wooden sculpture of cacao, adorned with 3D-printed flames reminiscent of the sacred heart, and teeth casts evoking the crown of thorns. The triangular shape of the assemblage symbolically alludes to historical societal inequality. The second component involves a fabric with loosely drawn depictions of narratives collected from farmers, farm workers, and indigenous communities during the artist's stay in Mindanao, the Philippines. These stories encompass discussions on land, life, struggles, and systemic injustice. Resting on the fabric are three earthenware busts crafted from clay sourced from Mindanao Island. Serving as effigy-like figures, they offer support and vigilance as they watch over the shrine.

While many of the artist's recent map-based installations heavily emphasize information, Cian wished to create something more aligned with his early influences drawn from Catholic retables and religious imagery. These visual inspirations have played a crucial role in shaping both his artistic endeavors and his activism. The arrangement of anting-antings (amulets) and talismans, as well as Christian allegorical paintings and iconographic elements, has informed the development of his compositions. Drawing upon these visual cues, he built narratives around the stories of cacao, infused with symbolic and metaphorical forms.

Biography

Cian Dayrit is an interdisciplinary artist whose work investigates notions of space, power and identity as they are represented and reproduced in monuments, museums, maps and other institutionalized media. Working with textile, installations, archival interventions and community-based workshops, Cian's work responds to different marginalized communities, encouraging a critical reflection on colonial and privileged perspectives. While informed by the experience of colonialism from the perspective of the Philippines, his work nonetheless defies being tied to a specific position or location. Instead, his work and research cross over geopolitical and supranational bearings.

Cian is a founding member of Sama-samang Artista Para sa Kilusang Agraryo (SAKA), an alliance of cultural workers advocating for land rights and food sovereignty. He is also currently enrolled at the Department of Geography in UP Diliman.

Cyril Delettre



Hope

Biography

2023
6 photographs printed double-sided on vinyl banner
240 x 160 cm each

Known for his documentary approach and wealth of experience, for this exhibition, Cyril Delettre traveled to two main co-coa-growing regions in Vietnam, namely the Mekong Delta and the Dak Lak region. During his visits, he met with local cocoa growers, and inquired about their dreams and expectations for the future.

From each insightful interview, Cyril carefully selected a single word that encapsulated the core sentiments of the interviewee. These words, such as “peaceful”, “confident”, or “possible”, were then skillfully designed with vibrant patterns, giving rise to unique artistic representations. Coupled with the corresponding portraits of the local cocoa growers, printed in large formats, these pieces of “word-art” were deliberately shredded and suspended from the ceiling. As an immersive installation, they converge to create an environment that invites viewers to walk through, gradually enveloping themselves in the aspirations of the community of farmers. As such, the installation serves as a bridge, attempting to foster a deeper connection between different communities.

Cyril Delettre’s artistic practice primarily revolves around photography and videography, influenced by his documentary approach and rich experience. Initially educated in economics, Delettre shifted his focus to cinematography, gaining valuable experience for his coverage of the 1987 Festival de Cannes, with his work published in *Les Cahiers du Cinéma*. Joining the agency Imapress as a photojournalist in 1989, he later became a member of the REA agency. In 2012, he created a monumental work for SNCF, exhibited on the façade of Austerlitz station in Paris, spanning an impressive 60 meters by 7 meters.

Having relocated to Hong Kong in 2014, Delettre currently runs an art gallery dedicated to photography. Inspired by his new environment, Cyril has produced several series of works, including *How To See The Light...*, *Walk the dog*, *Eclosions HK*, *After Midnight*, *Afternoon*, *Rythmes*, *Walk Don’t Walk*, *Wild City* and *Hope*. Additionally, he documented the lives of people residing in the Dump Site of Cebu, Philippines in 2018.

Veronica Emery



Gift of Desire (GOD)

2023
Photograph of an original collage
190 x 130 cm

In the creation of *Gift of Desire (GOD)*, Veronica Emery collected chocolate packaging sourced from numerous craft chocolate makers across Asia. Drawing inspiration from the allegorical figure of the Trojan Horse, she alludes to the foreign nature of cocoa in Asia, as well as the pervasive influence of industrial Western brands worldwide.

Infused with her characteristic touch of humor, Veronica constructed her colossal Trojan Horse with the diverse array of local packaging she had gathered instead of using the more commonly known, dominating chocolate brands. Through a clever blend and re-composition of these materials, she created a compelling unity that exudes a powerful and unexpected visual impact. In this rendition, the horse transforms into a vessel embodying the aspirations and hopes of local producers who strive to reclaim and revitalize the cocoa industry on their own terms.

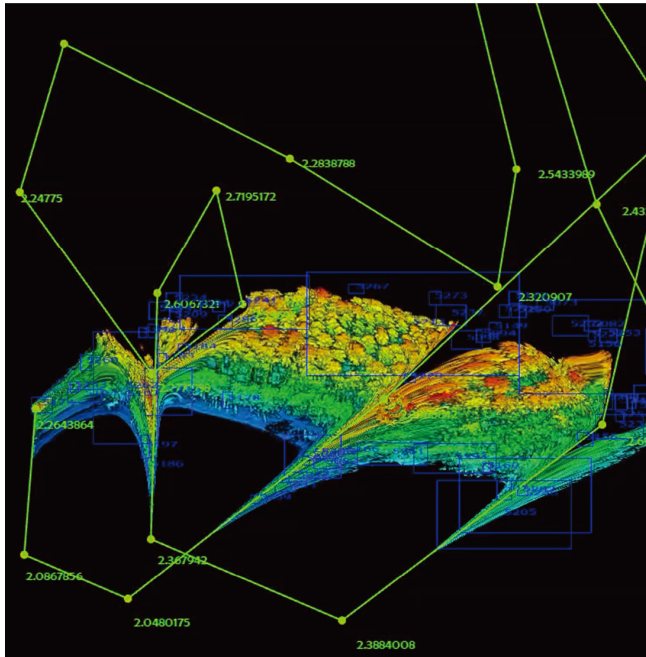
Veronica's artwork serves as a thought-provoking representation of the complex dynamics between the global cocoa industry and the burgeoning craft chocolate movement in Asia. It invites viewers to reflect on the interplay between cultural influences, the aspirations of local producers, and the potential of a reimagined future within the cocoa industry.

Biography

Veronica Emery is an Argentine mixed media artist based in Hong Kong who predominantly employs collage in her art making. Having initially pursued a career in law, with a focus on commercial and criminal law, Veronica ventured into the corporate world after attending business school. Her path eventually led her to embrace the field of art, where she immersed herself in design, exploring the multiple possibilities offered by materials. Fascinated by the world of appearances and how design can simultaneously embody and unveil hidden fantasies, she began to experiment with existing images, resulting in the creation of complex *mise-en-abîme* compositions.

Inspired by the renowned writer Jorge Luis Borges and the notion of magical realism, Veronica's artistic practice revolves around the concept of "reality", intriguing viewers by challenging their initial perceptions of her art. Demonstrating adept material manipulation, she crafts elaborate puzzle-like artworks, where various elements and printed matters intertwine to form multi-layered pieces. Through this approach, Veronica cleverly beguiles the viewer, blurring the distinction between what appears at first glance and the true composition of her artworks.

Jiandyin Collective



Space and Time: Establishing the History of Narratives

Biography

2024
1 Channel full HD Video, Color, Sound
13' 42"

For this project, the duo Jiandyin has investigated a specific cacao farm located in the Prachuap Khiri Khan province of Thailand. The origin of the farm can be traced back to 1989, when cacao plantations began with seedlings provided by the Department of Agriculture as part of a government initiative to support farmers affected by the Typhoon Gay. Since its inception, the farm has undergone continuous expansion.

The images depicted in *Space and Time: Establishing the History of Narratives I & II* present the fragility of space and time, specifically within the context of conflict in Sai Buri district, Pattani province. The artists drew inspiration from the story of Go Niaw*, a Thai Buddhist citizen they met while exploring his cocoa plantation. For twenty years, Go Niaw's family peacefully ran their business until 1980 when the Thai government increased their operations against separatist insurgencies in the Deep South, resulting in innocent lives lost on both sides. Go Niaw made a last-minute decision to quietly flee the area with his family at the age of 42 and began his new life as a self-taught coconut farmer in Pran Buri district, bordering Chumphon province. With his plantation wrecked by Typhoon Gay in 1989, Go Niaw decided to experiment with planting cocoa in his hybrid coconut-coffee plantation, and subsequently eliminated all his coffee plants to make room for the cocoa trees. His goal is to continue expanding his cocoa farm.

The use of LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) technology to survey Go Niaw's cocoa crop serves to illustrate the geological layers and geopolitical connectedness of space and time, which captures the collision of past, present, and future identities. The history of narratives hidden in space and time is thus metaphorically planted and becomes the history of narratives that grows out of cracks and collisions.

*Go means elder brother in Cantonese.

With support from UAV LiDAR Laserscan by INFRA SERVE,
Bangkok, Thailand

Jiandyin is a collaborative interdisciplinary duo of artists and curators, Pornpilai Meemalai, and Jiradej Meemalai, who currently live and work in Ratchaburi, Thailand. Jiandyin's artistic practice revolves around artistic research, fieldwork, and the integration of multiple sources and evidence. Their work spans various disciplines and mediums, and they actively engage in collaboration and social involvement. Their aim is to create spaces or platforms that allow for the analysis of relationships between individuals and society, within the specific context and history of a place or space. Through their art, Jiandyin delves into complex and specific issues, particularly those related to political conflicts and their effects on marginalized groups.

Jiandyin's recent exhibitions include *Portrait [Archives of Dialogue: Seeing and Being]*, Gallery Seescape, Chiang Mai, Thailand (2017) and *The Ontology of Gold: Magic Mountains*, Cartel Artspace, Bangkok, Thailand (2017). The duo has also participated in the Jakarta Biennale (2021); Asian Art Biennial (2019); Kuandu Biennale (2018); Thailand Biennale Krabi (2018). In 2011, Jiandyin co-founded the non-for-profit Baan Noorg Collaborative Arts and Culture, who participated in documenta 15 (2022) and the Thailand Biennale Chiang Rai (2023).

Jason Lim



Terra

2023
Black clay, glaze, metallic
luster, red cotton thread
20 x 20 x 30 cm

Exocarp

2023
Black clay, glaze
18 x 18 x 28 cm

Placenta

2023
Black clay, luster,
red cotton thread
20 x 20 x 32 cm

Flower

2023
Black clay, glaze, sand
20 x 20 x 38 cm

Seed

2023
Black clay, glaze, sand
20 x 20 x 42 cm

Biography

Jason Lim employs meditative practices and repeated actions as a way to honor his craft. By incorporating mindfulness into his creative process, he strives to create artworks that are not only visually captivating but also imbued with profound meaning and intention.

This body of work centers around the artist's exploration of the historical significance of cocoa in Asia. Rather than replicating the plant's physical features, Lim aims to capture its essence, as indicated by the titles of the pieces, choosing to represent the species in a more abstract and symbolic manner. This approach allows viewers to connect with the artworks in a more interpretative and emotional way.

The use of thread, sand, and metallic lusters brings forth layers of complexity and texture to his ceramic sculptures. Ceramics, with their tactile quality, can enhance the viewer's experience, encouraging engagement with the artwork on a sensory level. Exploring the origin of cocoa and its historical importance introduces another rich layer to this artistic project. Cocoa has a fascinating history spanning different cultures and continents, with its roots tracing back to the civilizations of Mesoamerica, where it was revered not only as a food source but also for its religious and spiritual significance.

For this series, the artist draws inspiration from the spiritual and religious use, and the symbolic aspects, of cocoa in ancient cultures. He incorporated elements that symbolize its sacred and esteemed status, creating abstract depictions of cocoa in ceremonial settings and incorporating symbolic motifs that represent the plant's spiritual significance. Lastly, presenting these artworks on a reflective surface serves to amplify their importance and meaning.

Jason Lim's practice centers around the fundamental elements of nature and the alchemical relationships between them. He explores the convergence of the body, matter, and spirit through ceramics, drawings, photography, film, and performance art. His creative process involves meditative practices and repetitive actions, producing thought-provoking and visually captivating works.

Since 1994, Jason Lim has showcased his art in prestigious international art events. Some notable highlights include shows such as the 52nd Venice Biennale (2007); the 4th World Ceramics Biennale, South Korea (2007); the Taiwan Ceramics Biennale (2008); and the 1st Jakarta Ceramics Biennale (2009). His contribution in JIWA: Jakarta Biennale (2017) and solo presentation at the Western Australian Museum, Australia (2022), further solidified his international reputation.

Pan Lu & Bo Wang



The Adventures of Cocoa on a Southern Island

2023
Interactive board game, cards, and documentation
Installation dimensions variable

Hainan Island, located to the south off the coast of mainland China, boasts a hot climate occasionally marked by typhoons and heavy rainfall. Surrounded by abundant marine resources, the island's central region is characterized by dense forests and mountainous terrains, with Wuzhi Mountain as its highest peak. Home to Han Chinese immigrants who migrated from the mainland, as well as the Li and Miao ethnic groups with a longer history of residence, Hainan Island has attracted travelers since the late 19th century who participated in the establishment of botanical gardens on the island. In this context, cocoa stands out as a particularly precious plant species.

For this exhibition, Pan Lu and Bo Wang have created an interactive board game that invites viewers to assume the roles of various historical figures, including an overseas Chinese merchant, a female revolutionary soldier, a French missionary, a German anthropologist, a Japanese informer, a Chinese military officer, and a native Li weaver. Players engage in a race to be the first to cultivate cocoa in Hainan, thereby exploring the complex dynamics and legacies of war, colonialism and revolution on the island. To construct their narrative and design the diverse characters' adventures, the artists drew inspiration from historical facts, weaving a tapestry of fictional yet thought-provoking stories.

Pan Lu is Associate Professor at Department of Chinese History and Culture at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University; and Bo Wang is an artist, filmmaker and researcher based in Amsterdam. Pan Lu and Bo Wang have been working together on various artistic projects since 2012, delving into themes such as space, image, environment, colonialism and the Cold War in the entangled histories and presents in East Asia. Their collaborative works include *Postcards from the Future* (2014) and *Ode to Infrastructure* (2016) as multimedia installations. Additionally, they co-directed *Traces of an Invisible City: Three Notes on Hong Kong* (2016); *Miasma, Plants, Export Paintings* (2017); and *Many Undulating Things* (2019).

Kitti Narod



Green Kitchen

2024
Acryli on canvas
150 x 120 cm

Kitti Narod's paintings evoke a sense of joy and optimism through their gentle and warm depictions of everyday life and human relationships. This sense of joy is particularly evident in his two new works, one of which portrays a chef adding the final touches to an enticing chocolate cake, while the other captures a group of young people gathered around pieces of cake, likely the same one, delighting in the shared experience. For Narod, whose favorite desserts include chocolate cakes, these scenes embody moments of collective joy. This focus on simple pleasures is characteristic of his practice, as he seeks to remind viewers of the significance of everyday experiences and to highlight the often-overlooked sources of happiness found in mundane moments.

Both paintings are inspired by the Martha Stewart Show, an American cooking program that the artist frequently watched during his childhood. He recalls that his favorite part of the show was when the chef decorated the cake, especially using a piping bag to meticulously create floral designs with icing. This experience also made him aware of the marked differences between Western and Thai kitchens. During the 1980s, chocolate was scarce in Thailand, and cocoa was not traditionally incorporated into local cuisine. Narod's childhood memories are therefore intertwined with imported products, such as the Black Forest Sundae eaten at Swensen's ice shops and Nestlé's Milo bar—a particularly sweet chocolate bar containing powdered milk—which for him evokes a deep sense of nostalgia.

Biography

Kitti Narod trained at Wittayalai Pohchang Art College, Bangkok, from 1996 – 1998, and later obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree from the Rajamonkong Institute of Technology in 2000. He has exhibited extensively both domestically and internationally, including in Singapore, London, Bath, Edinburgh, Manchester, Dublin, Cork, Montreal, and Melbourne.

Kitti Narod creates paintings that convey a sense of joy and optimism through gentle and warm portrayals of daily life and human relationships. In his paintings, everyone and everything exist together in a utopia. This notion may seem unrealistic to some, especially during an era of social division, but the artist's work tries to remind us to appreciate the simple pleasures and raise attention to everyday mundane matters. In which, euphoric feelings will not seem so unattainable. The artist considers his works to be an intersection for diversity, where all the physical and spiritual are equal.

Kitti Narod's recent solo exhibitions include "Summer Wind", Tang Contemporary Art (Hong Kong Sar, China, 2022); "Fragrant City: Kitti Narod Solo Exhibition", Tang Contemporary Art, Bangkok (Thailand, 2021); "Roles in Life", We Gallery, Shenzhen (China, 2020); "Joy Land", Tang Contemporary Art, Bangkok (Thailand, 2020); "Kitti Narod Exhibition by O'logy", PPP, Taipei, Taiwan (China, 2019). Recent group exhibitions include "Falling", Tang Contemporary Art, Beijing (China, 2022); "The Space Between Us II" at ICONSIAM, Tang Contemporary Art, Bangkok (Thailand, 2021); "The Space Between Us I" at ICONSIAM, Tang Contemporary Art, Bangkok (Thailand, 2020); "A Silent Voice", Tang Contemporary Art, Bangkok (Thailand, 2020); "Spectrosynthesis II – Exposure of Tolerance: LGBTQ in Southeast Asia", Bangkok Art and Culture Centre (BACC), Bangkok (Thailand, 2019).

Rodel Tapaya



The Water is Color Chocolate

2023
Acrylic on canvas
244 x 183 cm

Born in the Province of Rizal, the Philippines, Rodel Tapaya has always been driven by the rich folklore of his native place — a small town nestled on the slopes of the Sierra Madre mountain range, renowned for its waterfalls and legendary stories. Over the years, Rodel has meticulously collected traditional folktales and oral stories, breathing new life into them through his magical realist paintings. One such work, *The Water is Color Chocolate*, is a tapestry of influences — from local cuisine and songs associated with chocolate in Filipino culture (notably featuring salty fish and champorado) to the artist's own memory and imagination. The painting also alludes to the famous chocolate hills in the Bohol province with their soil characterized by rich dark hues.

This large-scale painting unveils Rodel's signature style, marked by chaotic and dreamlike landscapes where disparate elements coexist in an absurd yet captivating manner. Ghostly figures emerge from rocks, seamlessly dissolving into architectural fragments, while trees inexplicably sprout and radiate, bathed in mysterious beams of light. Rainfall graces the scene, its drops assuming a golden hue reminiscent of the cocoa pods coveted by a magical bird. The artist's childhood memories resurface, recalling recurring floods that submerged his home and the surrounding land, turning the water muddy and chocolate-like.

A peculiar vessel crafted from a cocoa pod floats upon this murky river, laden with seeds that gleam like precious pearls. A sense of unease permeates the work. An enigmatic figure, hooded and draped in a pink coat, gazes intently at something hidden from view, exuding an aura of tension. Meanwhile, a yellow specter remains ever watchful, fixated on the viewer.

Beyond the realm of traditional folklore and collective memory, Rodel's art seeks to reflect the complexities of contemporary Filipino society. Employing metaphor and allegory, he sheds light on the nation's post-colonial heritage, political dysfunction, stark social inequalities, and ecological degradation.

Rodel Tapaya began his artistic journey as a student at the College of Fine Arts, University of the Philippines. His talent and dedication were recognized when he won the Nokia Art Prize in 2001, which provided him with a grant to pursue further studies at the Parsons School of Design and the University of Helsinki. In 2006, he made the decision to relocate his home and studio to Bulacan, Philippines. Rodel's paintings are characterized by visionary narrative tableaux, melding folklore, historical and personal references into painterly figurations. By forming thought-provoking instantiations of myth and contemporary existence — such as beastly incarnations of gods beside factories and television antennas — his works are both a retelling and a continuation of the oral and pictorial tradition of his milieu. Affectingly intimate and eclectic, his process mines indigenous craft that functions as a parallel to the text and provides insight into an amalgam of pre-colonial culture and contemporary political ethos.

Rodel's works are held in the collections of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, National Gallery of Australia, Michael and Janet Buxton Collection, Mori Art Museum, The Hori Science and Art Foundation, Singapore Art Museum, Bencab Museum, Ateneo Art Gallery, Iloilo Museum of Contemporary Art, Pinto Art Museum, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, Deutsche Bank Collection, SEACO, and several international private collections. He was awarded the Cultural Center of the Philippines Thirteen Artists Award in 2012 and was the inaugural winner of the Asia-Pacific Breweries Signature Art Prize in 2011. He is currently represented by A3 Arndt Art Agency.

Biography

Erika Tan



Sour Kana:
***All That Is Solid Melts Into
A Mass Of Sticky, Dark, Mess***

2023
Video installation
00:11:45

In her video *Sour Kana: All That Is Solid Melts Into A Mass Of Sticky, Dark, Mess*, Erika Tan explores the material, physical and situated histories of cocoa, drawing from personal experiences to cultural tropes. Taking the melting point of chocolate as a defining moment that distinguishes good chocolate from bad (melting in your mouth and not in your hands), Erika further emphasizes the division between cocoa growers (in the Global South) from consumers (in the Global North). This pattern of differentiation is explored in the work through the motif of the melting point, where solidity is transformed into a mass of sticky, dark mess.

Erika combines verbal anecdotes of early experiences of chocolate in Singapore with pieces of information about how producers have attempted to deal with the melting issue, using wax or palm oil instead of milk fat and experimenting with alternative materials like flour. This narrative is juxtaposed with visual representations of chocolate's de-solidification, accompanied by references to popular culture and advertisements where the "exotic" and the "erotic" intertwine with the globalized perception of this commodity. Erika skillfully plays with notions of the east, the unknown, the dark, and the alien to examine the contemporary production and perception of chocolate in Southeast Asia.

Erika Tan's practice as an artist, curator, researcher, educator has evolved from an interest in received narratives, contested heritage, subjugated voices and the transnational movements of ideas, people, and things. Her work arises out of processes of research and responses to the unravelling of facts, fictions, and encounters related to events, locations, audiences, and specifics that may already exist. Erika has been commissioned and exhibited internationally including Jakarta Biennale; Singapore Biennale; Busan Biennale; Times Museum Guangdong; The Diaspora Pavilion, Venice Biennale; Stanley Picker Gallery London; National Gallery Singapore; NUS Museum, Singapore; LABoral, Spain; ZKM, Germany; South London Gallery; Hayward Gallery London. Her work is included in the Kadist Foundation, British Council, Arts Council England, Newnham College Cambridge, He Xiang Ning Museum, Shenzhen, and NUS Museum Singapore.

Erika Tan leads the MAFA in Central Saint Martins, is a Reader of Contemporary Art Practice and Research Associate of Decolonising the Arts Institute, University of the Arts, London. She is also currently a research member of Circumambulating Objects: on Paradigms of Restitution of Southeast Asian Art (CO-OP), SOAS, London.

Biography

Ting Chaong-wen



Cocoa Solar Farm

Biography

2023
Mix media installation, including two solar panels
(151 x 70 x 3 cm each) and one 65" TV screen

While cocoa cultivation is feasible in Taiwan, the cocoa tree is sensitive to direct sunlight. The geographical advantage of the Fangliao township in Pingtung county, located in the southern part of the island, lies in its abundance of sunlight. Leveraging this opportunity, an innovative initiative has emerged to combine solar energy sharing with cocoa cultivation, facilitated through the strategic placement of solar panels that also provide shade. By integrating renewable energy sources with cocoa cultivation, this project serves as a model for a harmonious relationship between sustainable practices, exemplifying the potential for environmentally friendly solutions within the cocoa production sector.

Fascinated by this innovative approach, Ting Chaong-wen visited farms in Pingtung, where he could observe the synergy between solar energy and cocoa farming. Drawing from his discoveries, he experimented with a new type of solar panel that incorporates cocoa extracts as a natural dye instead of relying on chemicals. Cocoa Solar Farm features two real solar panels crafted by the artist and a documentary video showing the production of these panels set against the backdrop of local sceneries. The artwork highlights the dual challenges faced by today's landscape, with solar panel parks requiring increased land and at the expense of other cultivations such as cocoa, and the expansion of cocoa plantations.

Ting Chaong-Wen is a multi-media artist who creates spatial installations with images, video and sound. Often inspired by his own experiences, the works include ready-made objects that become part of a specific historical narrative in the exhibition context. The artist deconstructs, interprets, and reinterprets our shared history and collective memory in personal and innovative ways, exploring their cross-border and contemporary significance.

Recent exhibitions include *Repeat Itself*, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin (2021); Asian Art Biennial, National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taichung (2019); High Tide 17 Fremantle Biennale, Art-source, Fremantle (2017); Nakanojo Biennale, Former Hirozakari Brewery, Japan (2017); *Citation From Craft*, 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, (2017) and Taipei Biennial (2016).

Arin Rungjang



Time is movement and incomplete

Biography

2023
Multimedia interactive installation
Installation dimensions variable

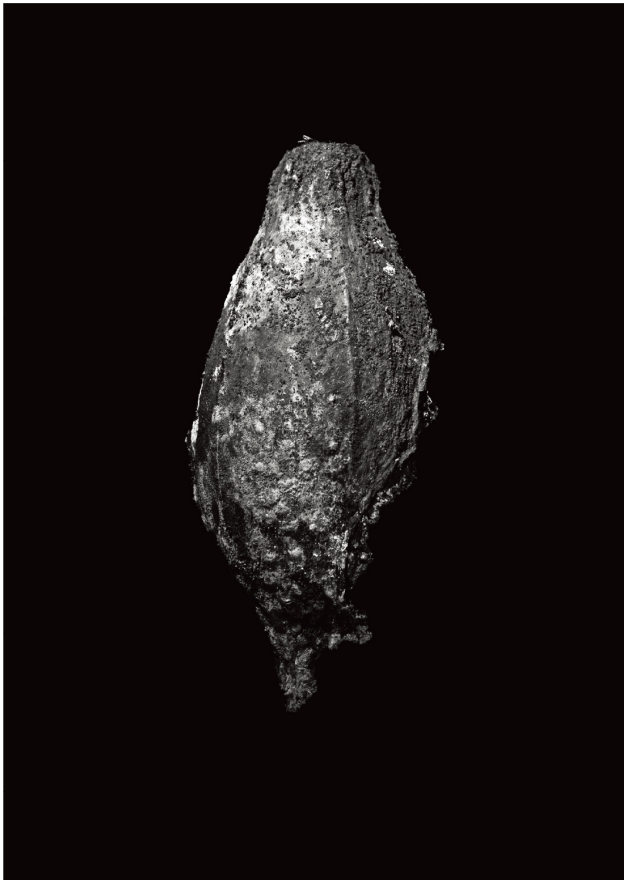
Arin Rungjang takes a contemplative approach to explore the nuanced and at times conflicting relationship between the production and consumption of chocolate, the growing of cocoa, and their intertwining with our perception of time. The prolonged maturation of cocoa trees, requiring five to six years to yield fruit, serves as a poignant reminder of a patient and gradual process. In contrast, the relentless and insatiable demand for chocolate and the pressures of fast-paced economies propel us to exist within an accelerated rhythm. As such, his installation encourages contemplation and introspection regarding the passage of time.

Simultaneously, the artist employs technology as a means to ponder nature, emphasizing the evolving dynamics between humans and their environment. Often associated with distance and detachment, technology typically symbolizes the growing divide that separates humanity from nature. However, it also possesses the potential to bridge this gap. In this installation, technology enables viewers to perceive the gentle vibrations of cocoa powder as it responds to agricultural chanting recorded by the artist in northern Thailand. Similarly, young farmers employ technology such as smartphone applications to establish a closer connection with their cocoa plantations, meticulously monitoring the condition of the soil and the well-being of their trees.

Arin Rungjang is known for revisiting historical material, overlapping major and minor narratives across multiple times, places, and languages. His interest lies in lesser-known aspects of Thai history and their intersection with the present in various local sites and contexts. Objects, which can draw together distant events across time and space, are central to his investigations. His practice spans different media and often involves video and site-specific installation.

Recent exhibitions include *Ravisara*, DAAD Galerie, Berlin, Germany (2020); *Arin Rungjang: They Beat Your Father*, ShanghART Singapore, Singapore (2019); *Spectrosynthesis II – Exposure of Tolerance: LGBTQ in SEA*, Bangkok Art and Cultural Centre, Bangkok, Thailand (2019); *Bengawan Solo*, Portikus, Germany (2018); *SUNSHOWER: Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia 1980s to Now*, Mori Art Museum and The National Art Center, Japan (2017); *documenta 14*, Kassel, Germany and Athens, Greece (2017). Arin has also participated in the Thailand Biennale, Chiang Rai (2023); the 2022 Bangkok Art Biennial; the 12th Shanghai Biennale (2018); and Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale (2018). He represented Thailand at the 55th Venice Biennale (2013).

Robert Zhao Renhui



The Last Wild Cocoa and Its Inhabitants

2023
Series of 4 photographs with images printed on the frame
30 x 42 cm each

For this exhibition, Robert Zhao Renhui investigated the history of cocoa plantations in Singapore, unearthing a narrative still shrouded with mystery. The last known cocoa plantation, located in Buangkok in the northeastern part of the island, now lies abandoned.

Despite the challenges in his research, the artist stumbled upon a wild and old cocoa tree thriving amidst the secondary forest of Singapore. The history of this solitary tree remains enigmatic. During his visits, Robert noted that most of the tree's fruits never fully mature. Always attentive to ecosystems and the invisible lives that inhabit our urban environment, he noticed the small midges responsible for pollinating the tree. Though notorious for their bites, these midges play an essential role in the survival of the species. Active at dawn and dusk, they transfer pollen between flowers for fertilization. However, pollinating cocoa is a challenging process, with only 10% of the flowers successfully fertilized.

Robert's series of black and white photographs, titled *The Last Wild Cocoa and Its Inhabitants*, captures images of isolated pods. Each pod is adorned with a glass frame featuring pictures of tiny midges. The spatial distance between the pod and the fly symbolizes the hurdles faced by cocoa trees in their reproductive journey. Through the interplay of light and shadow, the pods are magnified, yet they bear the appearance of decay, resembling stones more than vibrant living organisms.

Robert Zhao Renhui is a Singaporean interdisciplinary artist who explores the complex and co-mingled relationships between nature and culture. Working in installation, photography, video and sculpture, Robert is interested in the multifarious beings and objects that constitute the living world, and whose experiences and knowledge enrich our collective existence. By replicating the experimentation at the core of scientific inquiry, his practice challenges the ambiguous boundaries between art and science to toy with the viewer's perceptions of reality and fantasy.

Robert's recent solo exhibitions include *The Forest Institute*, Gillman Barracks, Singapore (2022) and *Monuments in the Forest*, Shanghart Gallery, Shanghai, China (2023). He has been featured in 10th Busan Biennale (2020), 6th Singapore Biennale (2019), 9th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (2018), 11th Taipei Biennale (2018), 17th Jakarta Biennale (2017), and 20th Biennale of Sydney (2016). He received the prestigious National Arts Council Young Artist Award (2010), Singapore's highest award for young arts practitioners aged 35 and below. He was also a finalist of the Hugo Boss Asia Art Award (2017). The artist is representing Singapore at the 60th Venice Biennale in 2024.

Biography

Zheng Mahler



Buitenzorg Criollo

2023
Single-channel 4K video
00:10:26

This short video work by Zheng Mahler, filmed in Indonesia, juxtaposes the history of the botanical gardens in Bogor on the island of Java with the present-day reality of cocoa bean farming in Jembrana, Bali. The botanical gardens, located at what was once known as Buitenzorg, served as an experimental scientific station with botanical, agricultural-chemical and pharmacological laboratories set up by the Dutch in the early 19th century. Over time, it evolved into a center for colonial scientific knowledge focusing on the cultivation of cocoa, coffee, coca and other cash crops. Through the late 19th century, cocoa farming was characterized by competition between the colonial state-supported plantations utilizing scientific botanical knowledge to increase yields and mechanize processing techniques on the one hand, and independent small holder farmers using traditional cultivation methods on the other.

The film's narration is a collage of scientific reports on cocoa cultivation published by researchers of the botanical gardens, essays on the political economy of cocoa production, and contemporary promotional material advocating fairtrade cocoa growing practices. In parallel, the film cuts between footage of the botanical gardens and the descendent of the Nicaraguan criollo cocoa bean (originally planted in the early 20th century) with contemporary scenes of the Kerta Semaya Samaniya cocoa co-operative in Jembrana, showcasing their use of organic fairtrade growing and processing techniques which hark back to the traditional smallholder cultivation practices of the 19th century.

Biography

Zheng Mahler is artist Royce Ng and anthrozoologist Daisy Bise-nieks's collaborative examination of global trade, the relational networks connecting nature with technology, and more-than-human geographies. They explore the flows of their mutual influence and the environmental architectures they produce. Utilizing digital media, performance, and installation, Zheng Mahler develops speculative scenarios and immersive, sensory encounters that explore the limits and potentials of their respective disciplines.

They have presented and participated in a number of solo and group exhibitions internationally, including *A Season in Shell*, Johann Jacobs Museum, Zurich, Switzerland (2014); *PERFORMA: New Visual Art Performance Biennale*, New York City, USA (2015); *Mutual Aid*, Jacobs Museum in 2006, screenings for Artist Film International (AFI), Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK (2017); *Sci(No)-Fi*, Akademie der Künste der Welt, Cologne, Germany (2019); *Phantom Plane: Cyberpunk in the Year of the Future*, Tai Kwun Contemporary, Hong Kong (2019); *Bodies of Water*, Shanghai Biennale XIII, China (2021); *Eurasia: A Landscape of Mutability*, Museum of Modern Art, Antwerp, Belgium (2021); *Lonely Vectors*, Singapore Art Museum (2022); *Liquid Ground*, UCCA Dune, Beidaihe, China (2022); *Rat! Rats! Rats! The Poetic Grammar of the Hack*, Caixa Forum, Barcelona, Spain (2022). Their multimedia project *What is it like to be a (virtual) bat?* commissioned by IFA (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen) was presented on the online platform *ARE YOU FOR REAL?* in 2022 and at Kunsthalle Mainz in Germany and PHD Group, Hong Kong in 2023. In 2023, they also participated in the second Helsinki Biennale with a new, large-scale public art commission entitled *Soilspace*.

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ko hesi Initiatives



