

Reflections

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Each year in the *Almanac*, we invite curators, patrons, artists and arts professionals active across the Asia-Pacific region to offer their impressions on the year in contemporary art. Our six contributors for the 2018 edition of the *Almanac* offer candid perspectives on their own projects and the world as it appears from their personal and professional geographies, at a time of great cultural and political realignment. Our contributors were writing in the context of late 2017, a year that for many people moving through cultural circles has been an intensive one—not only in terms of scheduling and high-profile events but also the economic and political fervor surrounding them. As always, some of the momentous changes we witnessed this year appear to be progressive, others reactionary—but as our contributors detail in these Reflections, the reality is more nuanced, the future more unpredictable. Art and culture act as lenses that allow us to zoom in on and out of a world that is changing and that also remains, stubbornly, the same. **HGM**



YAYOI KUSAMA

2017 was another amazing year for me. As soon as my retrospective exhibition—which toured important museums in Scandinavian countries—ended in late 2016, I held the inauguration of my new large-scale public sculpture, *Flower in Guangzhou*. With this flower in Guangzhou, I strongly wish to bless the world with a promising future using the power of art, and I want to express my praise to all the people who live up to innocence and their true nature.

In February, the North American tour of the “Infinity Mirrors” retrospective began at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden and since then has traveled to the wonderful venues of the Seattle Art Museum and the Broad in Los Angeles. It will travel to other museums of significance through 2018. I heard that the shows have drawn so much attention that the presale tickets sold out very quickly and people stood in long lines to see the exhibits. I was deeply moved by this fact and am grateful to everyone. The highlight of the exhibition are my infinity mirror rooms, of which there are six. Creating an infinite mirror room has been a long-cherished dream. The psychedelic images of lights make the world a kaleidoscope, mirroring the light at the root of all things. It brings people to the state

of rapture that I myself have experienced, between life and death. Thousands of illuminated colors blink at the speed of light: my breathing manifesto of love. I am honored that people from all around the world are sharing the experience of my art.

My largest exhibition to date at the National Art Center, Tokyo opened in February as well. I filled one entire room with 130 large-scale canvases from my latest series, “My Eternal Soul,” which I have been working on daily since 2009. Now the series consists of more than 500 pieces. I am determined to paint 1,000 or 2,000 of these paintings until the last day of my life, to deliver my messages of love, peace and the universe to people of the world.

As soon as the Tokyo show ended, my solo exhibition began at the historical National Gallery Singapore. The show was more than I could have imagined. I was impressed by how beautifully the displays presented my works. The show then traveled to the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane, an institution that I have maintained a great relationship with for the past 20 years. I am pleased that this show will also travel to Indonesia in 2018, where I will be exhibiting for the first time.

Another remarkable event in 2017 was the opening of the Yayoi Kusama Museum in Tokyo, where I live. Tokyo is a place that attracts visitors from all over the world and I am deeply touched by this fact. I wished to contribute to this, and to allow people to gain deeper knowledge about the wonders of Tokyo as well as my art. I would be delighted if the museum provides visitors with happiness and touches their hearts.

I have struggled a great deal as an artist and for my art. Now, with the growth and tours of my art, I would like to struggle even harder with the power of the limitless spirit of my creativity. I never forget that my artworks have been presented at museums all around the world and have moved hundreds of thousands of people. The great joy of my life is the feeling that I may be contributing to the development of the future, human love and world peace. I have aged over the years of struggling, and now I wish to devote the rest of my artistic life to the hearts of people all over the world and, more importantly, to future generations. 2018 will be another amazing year, and I hope to paint and create as much as possible until the last day of my life.

Yayoi Kusama is an avant-garde artist and a poet known for her multimedia works that incorporate polka-dot and net motifs and mirrors. Her works are in numerous public and private collections around the world, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Tate Modern, London; and Centre Pompidou, Paris. She currently lives and works in Tokyo.

AARON SEETO

I spent most of 2017 in a hard hat. I arrived in Jakarta in November 2016 to oversee the development of the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Nusantara (Museum MACAN), and my year was filled with construction timetables, planning with curators and learning about this wondrous, complex city.

Living in a city gives you a completely different view on the production of its artists, and my experience in Jakarta affirms this. The last 12 months have been a process of relearning what I thought I already knew about Indonesia. The collection of the museum tracks the history of Indonesia from the colonial period of the Dutch East Indies right up to the present day, featuring international viewpoints from the United States, Europe and East Asia. Most collections and presentations of Indonesian art abroad miss the complexity of its historical and social situations, and elide the prejudices inherent in the act of positioning work within other cultural contexts. Through the eyes of my young Indonesian curatorial and education teams, different narratives begin to unfurl, revealing complex relationships between the national and the international, and the local and the regional. Looking at the collection of Museum MACAN, the relationship between nationalism and globalization is impossible to ignore. These discussions will provide fruitful programs in the future.

In August and September, we presented “First Sight,” a program of performances in the museum, before it officially opened to the public. The response definitely surpassed my expectations. Performance art has played a crucial role in the development of contemporary art here in Indonesia. Since at least the 1970s, the relationship between art and society in Indonesia has been made visible with the

establishment of artist groups such as the New Art Movement, performance art and social action. Artists played a vital role as they responded to the political, geopolitical and economic changes occurring in the country. I have long suspected that there lies a division between painting—which can be easily commodified—and performance, within popular discourses of Indonesian art. The choice of performance as the medium to introduce this private museum was a conscious decision that I hoped would open up conversations about art beyond painting and the purely visual, and to introduce the museum as a place for artistic intervention, public contemplation, insight and exchange.

The “First Sight” program included many artists whom I admire, and who have limited recognition within Indonesia, in contrast to their male, painter contemporaries. We re-staged a number of historically important performances—including *Handle Without Care* (1996–2017) by Arahmaiani, *Eins und Eins* (2016/17) by Melati Suryodarmo, *Dogwalk* (2016) by Mella Jaarsma and a live event of *Writing in the Rain* (2016) by FX Harsono. These were shown alongside existing performances by Tisna Sanjaya, Heman Chong, Yin Xiuzhen, Xu Zhen, Reza Afisina and newer works by younger artists Justin Shoulder and Duto Hardono. We were overwhelmed by the public response. Crowds flooded the empty galleries, and for many, this was their first experience of ephemeral work.

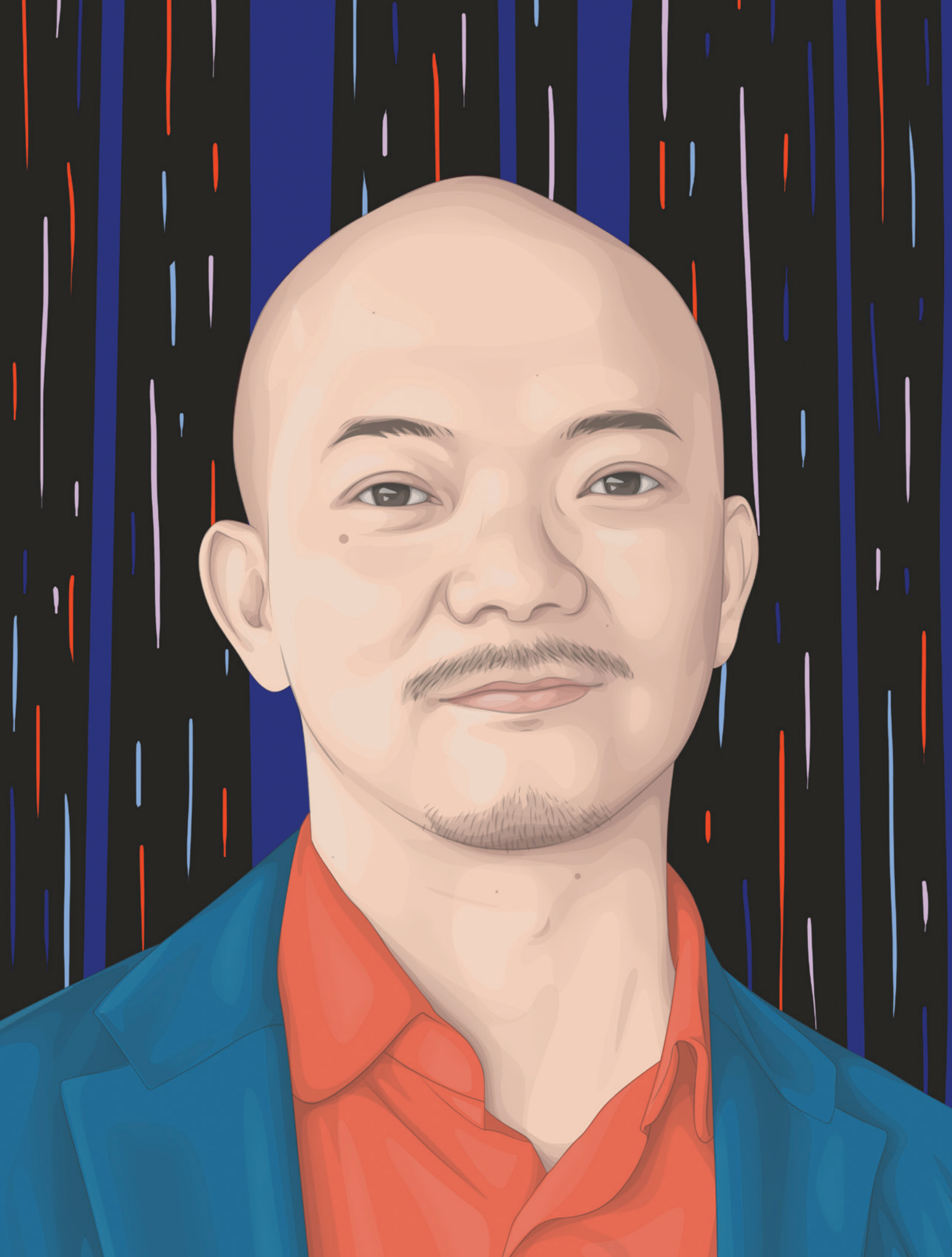
For me, re-presenting Arahmaiani’s *Handle Without Care*—a work I first encountered as an art student in Wollongong, when I saw a powerful image of it gracing the cover of *ArtAsiaPacific* in 2000—was an incredible experience. That image has been imprinted in my mind since my early career, as a way to break through the strictures of the traditional and the

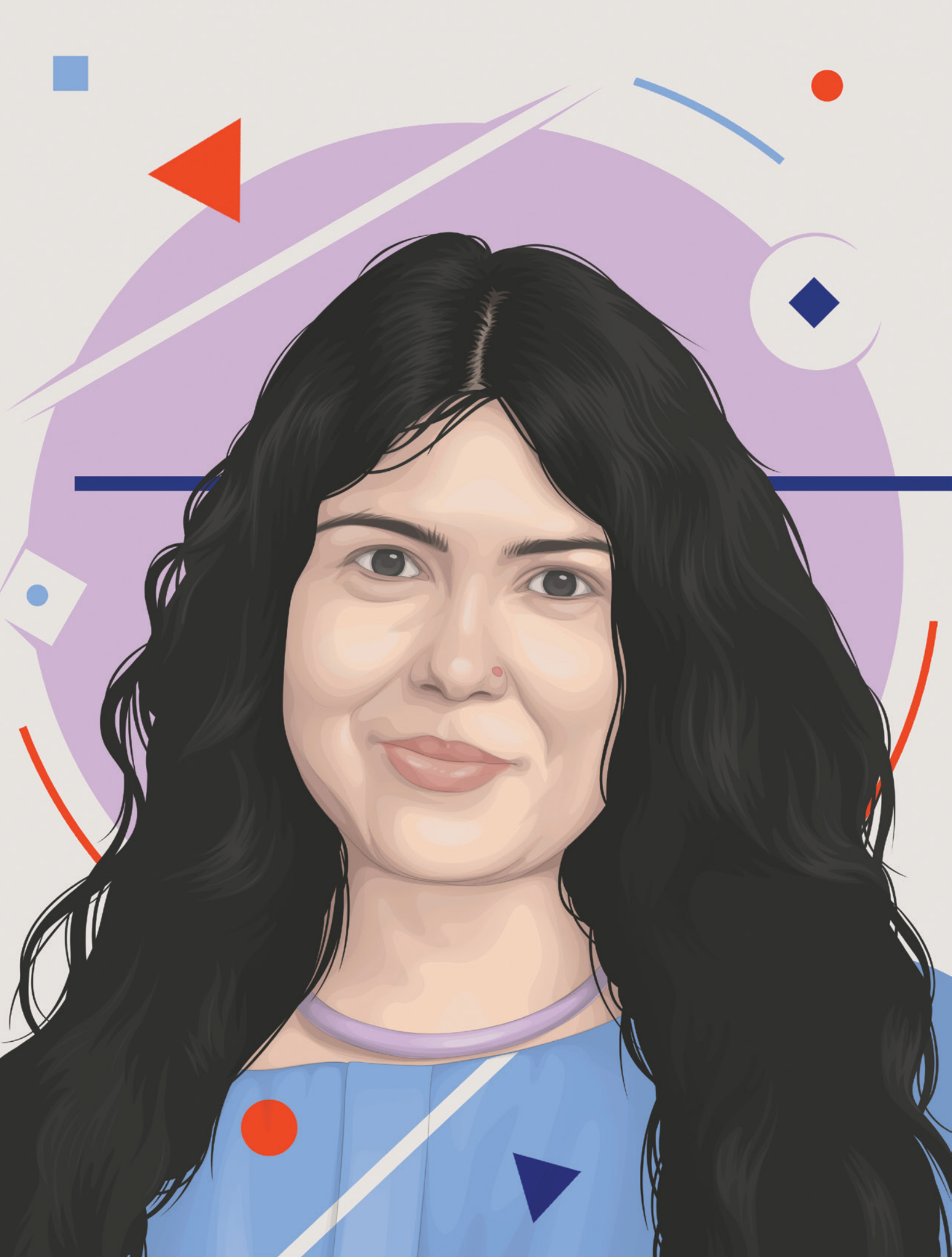
conservative. I had read about it, and seen clips and photographs, but had never had the chance to see it in the flesh until “First Sight.”

I loved how Melati’s guttural endurance work, where she spits ink for three hours, and Heman Chong’s *A Short Story, Somewhere, Out There* (2017)—an exchange of words via a short story that is staged away from the public—generated conversation and discussions, not only about the possible forms of artwork, but also about their broader generative role and the possibilities of the museum itself.

Another highlight was to be able to support the emerging artist Justin Shoulder. His seductive performance *Carrion: Episode 1* (2016) played with new identity formations that transgress perceptions of the natural and the real, male and female, the internet and the human. These are conversations that I expect to be difficult, but necessary to have here in Indonesia. Justin, like myself, was transfixed by Arahmaiani, and the younger artist remarked how so much of Arahmaiani’s processes resonate with his own.

Of the many conversations I’ve had over this past year with artists, one of the most emotional was the one I had with Arahmaiani after her work *Lingga-Yoni* (1994) was acquired by the museum. The painting, with its representation of symbolic male and female power, as well as other artworks created around that time, caused so much controversy in the 1990s with conservatives that the artist fled in self-exile to Australia and, later, Germany. Her emotion stems from the fact that the work had returned to Indonesia and that new, younger audiences may have the opportunity to see it, signifying that, perhaps, we are finally ready to have a conversation about it.





NATASHA GINWALA

You cannot write poems about the trees
when the woods are filled with policemen.
—Bertolt Brecht

At the Dharamshala International Film Festival—led by festival directors and filmmakers Ritu Sarin and Tenzing Sonam and held in early November at the Tibetan Children’s Village, with the express mission of “Bringing Independent Cinema to the Mountains”—I experienced one of the most genuine efforts in realizing a community-integrated festival that responds to and reimagines our political present. Across dozens of international films, and in particular in several entries from South and Southeast Asia, questions of exile and depictions of exuberant lives spent embracing nonconformity were persistent. Cinematic protagonists slid under my skin and began to haunt me as I shuttled between films, while walking amid children playing on sports fields and through the undulating landscape that enfolded us.

The festival program included Naeem Mohaiemen’s first fiction film, *Tripoli Cancelled* (2017), and Amar Kanwar’s latest production, *Such a Morning* (2017)—both were exhibited at Documenta 14 in Athens and Kassel. Mohaiemen introduces his audiences to a man caught for more than a decade inside the abandoned Ellinikon International Airport in Greece—a neo-futurist building still littered with the material ruins of global commuters and motionless aircraft on a runway. Kanwar’s plot in *Such a Morning* unravels as an analysis of darkness and alienation. A mathematics professor recedes to a reflective state of withdrawal from a world in upheaval, choosing to adopt a threshold space as a temporary home: he moves into a train carriage in a forest that he slowly inhabits as he acclimatizes to his own blindness. It is from here that his observations and experiments in comprehending the complex nature of vision—as well as textures of the dark—are carried forward. Elsewhere, in the high mountains, a woman awakens with a rifle in hand as her house is encroached upon and dismantled stone by stone. Screening these works in Dharamshala added another dimension to their resonances, considering

the prolonged colonization, censorship and displacement of the Tibetan diaspora.

Earlier in the year, Contour Biennale 8, “Polyphonic Worlds: Justice as Medium,” had taken as its departure point the historic grounds of the Great Council that was established in Mechelen, Belgium, during the 15th century as a European courthouse that first sought to address the Low Countries through rational jurisprudence. Here, law was not only spoken but also enacted as a regional force across Dutch, German and French territories. We sought to examine the roles of the artist as witness and narrator in re-performing the trial as well as the production of evidence within the manifestation of artistic work, seeking to consider the realm of social justice through the dynamic and at times fractious relationship between art and law. In considering the Biennale as a collectively produced organ, we recalled the notion of polyphony not simply as a reminder of the acoustic musical traditions of the European lowlands but as a working method in gesturing toward a plurality of voicing and acting in the world. And for the first time, we included in this edition of Contour Biennale a number of collectives, including the online platform Inhabitants, Karrabing Film Collective, and Council (Sandra Terdjman and Grégory Castéra), among others.

It is an enormous task to reflect on working within the dual-sited Documenta 14, and in this case the conclusion of an exhibition never entails finitude, but rather a longer process of arriving at comprehension. Such a project tends to resonate as a tectonic shift not so much in professional terms, but rather in readjusting one’s thought-horizon and building lasting relationships with artists who have participated in a herculean effort, and who, in their own practices, already assume a hyphenated role in society: as poets, teachers, community organizers, musicians, choreographers and architects. Just two weeks ago, when sitting on Nikhil Chopra’s front porch—a Goan Portuguese house in Assagao—and looking at his drawing of the sea and an overcast sky, I had to catch my breath thinking of how his Documenta 14 project *Drawing a Line*

through Landscape evolved as an incredible journey along the 3,000-kilometer road that he traveled from Athens to Kassel. For over three weeks, Chopra journeyed with a large tent made by traditional tentmakers in Rajasthan. As he crossed abandoned villages, city squares and areas of wilderness along the way, Chopra pitched the tent, and it became an itinerant studio as well as a site of gathering and feasts with other performance artists and collaborators of local organizations including a dance troupe in Budapest and an arts residency in the village of Gorna Lipnitsa, Bulgaria. Artist Madhavi Gore, who documented and participated in this project, wrote: “The tent is a traveling theater of calm and humble hospitality that is always grounded in the sincere effort to find oneself lost in translation.” Inevitably, in assembling an expansive panorama of drawings, relating to each site along the journey, on the platform of the old Hauptbahnhof in Kassel, Chopra’s *Drawing a Line through Landscape* forms an introspective tableau of the paradoxes shaping European reality. Aside from their own artistic work, Chopra and Gore have also co-founded HH Art Spaces, where I met with artists-in-residence and participated during open studios, which went on to be a high-energy evening bringing together Goa’s cultural community.

I have commenced my reflection with a Brechtian quotation when considering the character of 2017, as we are starved for poetry that can speak to our times neither with sensationalism nor blocked by (self-) censorship. We are in dire need of a language with cracks that is unafraid of sonority and radical love. Instead, the manufacturing of “lists” replaces time-consuming assessments, and the relentless need to guzzle controversial broadcasts produces a frailty of trust. The familiar question circling restless mouths is one that plunges cultural workers into noncommittal modes of transitory living: “Should I stay or should I go?” It was only during the summer months of this past year that I chose to unpack my suitcase on an island home without checking in advance for a pre-booked ticket leading me elsewhere.

SULTAN SOOUD AL-QASSEMI

“Remember: Empty the storage. Ideally everything should be on display.” These are the words I told Barjeel Art Foundation director Karim Sultan when he joined us in early 2016. Since then, Barjeel has escalated its already active loans and exhibitions programs. In April 2016, the Barjeel collection exhibition displayed more than 100 works in “The Short Century” at the Sharjah Art Museum, including Hamed Ewais’s allegorical canvas *Protector of Life* (1967–68), Marwan’s tempera painting *Head* (1975–76) and Saloua Raouda Choucair’s abstract *Composition in Yellow* (1962–65).

In late 2016, we opened the very first modern Arab art exhibition at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, where 40 works from Barjeel were paired with 40 works from the Iranian museum’s collection in what was a coup of cultural diplomacy. A few weeks later, an exhibition opened at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina celebrating the art of Hurufism (Lettrism) to coincide with our publication *Arabic Hurufiyya Art and Identity*. Overall, 2017 was the busiest year yet with shows at the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris, the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts, Yale University Art Gallery in New Haven, Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College and the American University Museum at the Katzen Art Center in Washington, DC.

Back when the Foundation was established in 2010 there was no articulated plan to loan works, as Barjeel had traditionally organized shows at its 475-square-meter space in the al-Qasba district in Sharjah. A few years after our opening, however, we began to be approached for individual loans from the likes of the Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp in Belgium (for “Narcisse Tordoir: the Pink Spy”) and the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo (“Arab Express: the Latest Art from the Arab World”). In 2012, the Singapore Art Museum approached us and together we held “Terms and Conditions,” curated by Mandy Merzaban, a logistically monumental show that included works from both the collection and various regional institutions. In 2014 we mounted “Sky Over the East: Works

from the Collection of the Barjeel Art Foundation,” curated by Suheyda Takesh, in collaboration with the Abu Dhabi Music & Arts Foundation, and in 2015, “Home Ground: Contemporary Art from the Barjeel Art Foundation” opened at the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto. However, Barjeel’s tipping point was no doubt our most ambitious project yet. “Imperfect Chronology,” curated by Omar Kholeif, now Manilow Senior Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, was held over a period of 16 months at London’s Whitechapel Gallery. That exhibition—which attracted more than 330,000 visitors—would help raise awareness about Barjeel’s activities. Before we knew it, global institutions and museums including Yale University Art Gallery contacted us to borrow works and organize exhibitions.

The reason we are readily willing to loan works is that we view art as an essential and often overlooked element in the dialogue of civilizations. This dialogue need not only take place between East and West and North and South, but we realized it is often needed the most within regions themselves—hence our exhibition in Iran at a time of heightened regional political tensions.

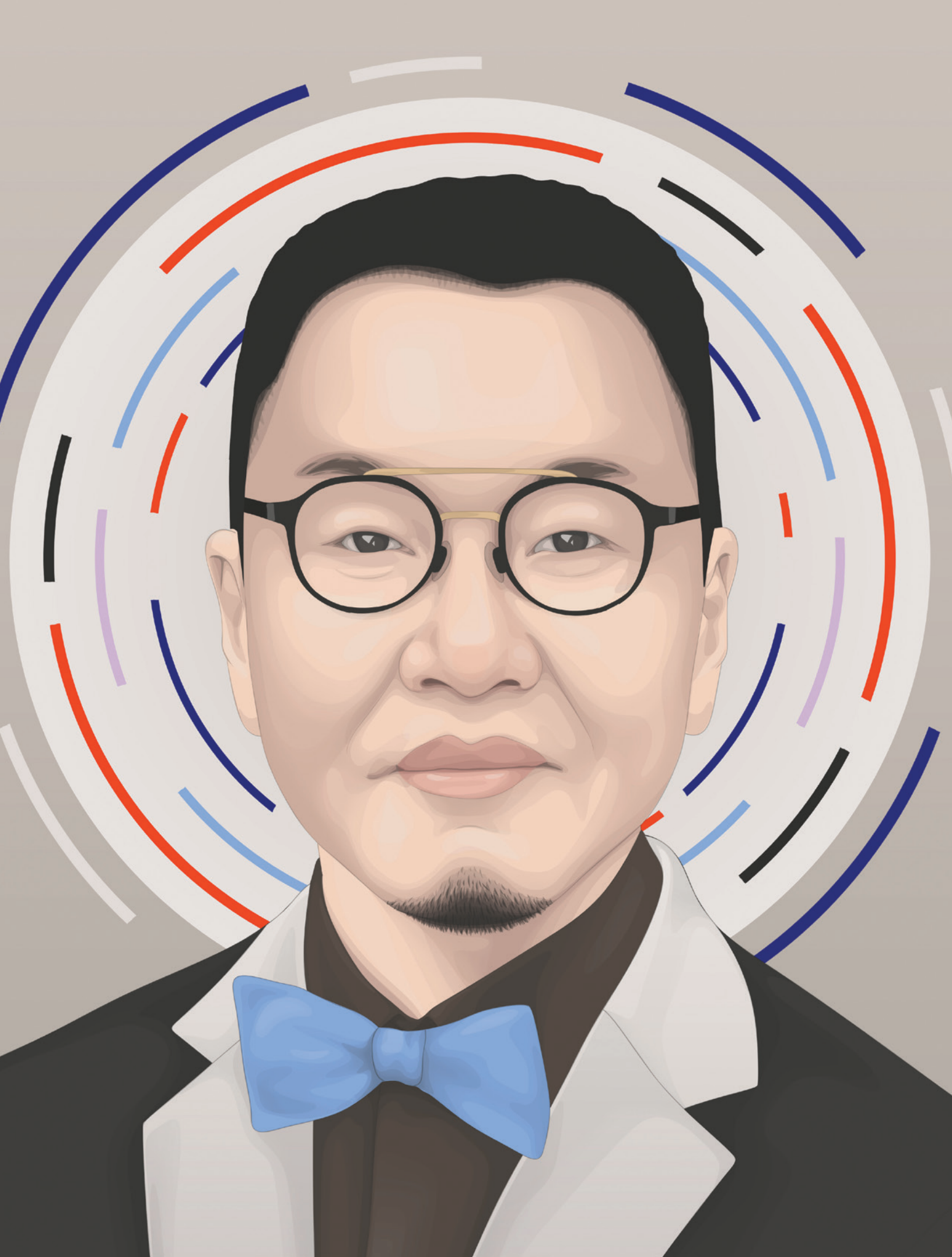
What we have learned on this journey is manifold. First, we learned that there is a great deal of interest in art from the Middle East (our Singapore and Toronto shows attracted close to 60,000 visitors each). Second, we learned that despite sometimes sharing costs these shows can be very expensive as they involve logistics, publications and insurance as well as costs associated with the educational programs that are held alongside the exhibition. Unfortunately, and although we at Barjeel operate on a strictly nonprofit basis, we are unable to obtain a nonprofit license to offset these costs because of UAE bureaucracy, which almost only grants them to government-affiliated organizations. Thus, eight years on, we continue to operate under a commercial license, which denies us the opportunity to apply for international funding. So far Barjeel has been purely funded from my inheritance and private business

enterprises—by no means a long-term, sustainable approach. Third, we realized that orientalist attitudes are still prevalent in the art world. We have noticed a repeated insistence on comparing Middle Eastern artists to Western ones; “the (insert name of European/American artist) of the Arab world” is a phrase we often encountered. Furthermore, certain journalists from reputable publications who covered some of our shows didn’t even bother contacting us for information. Others questioned the logic of organizing an exhibition from a single collection; such concerns would likely not arise around a show from François Pinault’s or Bernard Arnault’s collections, for instance.

Despite these challenges, we have persevered. What the Arab world needs now more than ever are more cultural foundations to document and archive, preserve and display, safeguard and share our culture that is under threat from dark forces. Since the turn of this century, museums in Iraq were at first looted under the negligence of American occupiers and then destroyed by terrorist criminal gangs. Conflict has touched every corner of the Arab world from Algeria to Yemen, including Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Libya. Among the many responses to conflict is more education and more emphasis on culture and art. We have to instill a sense of pride in young Arabs in their own culture including movies, music, theater and certainly the fine arts. In order to avoid falling into the same trappings of orientalism, our own points of reference must include Mahmoud Saïd as well as Picasso, Etel Adnan as well as Frida Kahlo and Dia al-Azzawi as well as FN Souza and Amrita Sher-Gil.

Over the past few years, Barjeel has produced a dozen international exhibitions and an equal number of publications in English and Arabic. Going forward, our plan would be to reach an arrangement with a museum, either regionally or internationally, for the works to be on long-term display for the public to enjoy, learn about and hopefully gain a deeper understanding of the Arab world.





PATRICK SUN

The past year was a memorable one. Trump dominated the news. Brexit talks shook Europe. North Korea's nuclear power threatened Asia. In the art world, the Venice Biennale, Documenta and Skulptur Projekte Münster all coincided for the first time in a decade. But when I think back on 2017, three words stick out in my mind: Queer. Art. Now.

"Queer" used to be an abusive label, but LGBTQ communities have reclaimed it as a fluid term for people of different sexualities and gender identities. As the famous gay director Derek Jarman once said, "To use the word queer is a liberation." Indeed, 2017 was a year of liberation for the queer community—not just because of steps toward marriage equality in Taiwan and Australia, but also in the art world.

To mark the 50th anniversary of the decriminalization of homosexuality in Britain, many museums around the country hosted LGBTQ-themed exhibitions. This included Tate Britain's "Queer British Art," the British Museum's "Desire, Love, Identity" and Walker Art Gallery's "Coming Out." Gay artists such as Martin Wong, David Hockney and Wolfgang Tillmans also had retrospectives in museums around the world.

This proliferation of queer art exhibitions reflects what many people believe is the power of the medium: it sparks discussion, challenges the norm and, at its best, can help to change people's perspectives. It is because of this belief in the power of art that I founded the Sunpride Foundation, with the mission to promote equal rights for the LGBTQ community through the collection and exhibition of art. From September to November, Sunpride Foundation co-presented the LGBTQ-themed exhibition "Spectrosynthesis – Asian LGBTQ Issues and

Art Now" at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MoCA) in Taipei. Three years in the making, it was the first large-scale show of its kind to take place in a public museum in Asia and was a timely parallel to its international counterparts.

Taiwan has always been the most progressive Asian society when it comes to LGBTQ rights. What we see now is a culmination of events that started as early as 31 years ago with activists and martyrs such as Mr. Qi Jia-Wei, student Ye Yong-Zhi, professor and artist Jacques Picoux and many others. With the High Court's ruling on May 24 that paved the way for same-sex marriage, "Spectrosynthesis" became more relevant than ever, bringing LGBTQ issues and related artworks to wide public attention not just in Taiwan but also in other parts of Asia.

While "Spectrosynthesis" was on, I would sometimes visit MoCA and observe the visitors. One day I spotted a mother with her son, who was maybe five or six years old. They were standing in front of Jimmy Ong's huge charcoal drawings, *Heart Sons* (2004) and *Heart Daughters* (2005), which illustrate scenes of gay parenthood. While they were looking at the drawings, the mother calmly explained to her son that in this world there are men who love women, women who love women and men who love men. And her son just nodded and accepted it. To me, that moment showed exactly how art encourages tolerance and acceptance.

So where do we go from here? How can we continue to promote equality through exhibitions of contemporary art?

I think there should be a two-pronged approach. Firstly, it is important to keep hosting dedicated exhibitions of LGBTQ art, like "Spectrosynthesis" and Tate Britain's "Queer British Art." After decades of being deemed

taboo and kept out of sight, it's important that queer art be prominently displayed in government-run museums and seen by the wider public. These exhibitions spark dialogue by placing LGBTQ issues front and center.

On the other hand, it is also crucial to acknowledge LGBTQ art as part of the wider art history. This was best shown by the exhibition "The Other's Gaze" at the Museo del Prado in Madrid, which opened in June. Instead of moving all their art with LGBTQ themes into one room, the museum's curators simply left them hanging throughout the exhibition halls and installed special plaques that highlighted the queer aspects of some works. One could walk around the galleries as normal, but then might discover a sculpture of Antinous with a note explaining that he was the lover of Roman Emperor Hadrian, or a painting by Caravaggio accompanied by wall text about his sexuality. This, of course, truly reflects how integrated gay people are in society. We're not all together, fenced into one area. We're out there, part of the community. We're your neighbors, your colleagues, your friends.

Some people may think I am too optimistic, but I firmly believe that equal rights for the LGBTQ community will eventually be attained. I look forward to the day when more conservative Asian countries host similar exhibitions of LGBTQ-themed art. That will be a true milestone, and I think it will happen.

One day, countries will wake up and see that societies around them have embraced equality. No one wants to be left on the wrong side of history, so they will adapt. The world is changing.

See our website for the Chinese version of this article.
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SIMON MORDANT

Having spent much of the last 12 months taking the opportunity to immerse myself in art whenever the opportunity arose, my initial recollection was that it wasn't a year of great inspiration. However, in reflecting more deeply on my travels, I have very much surprised myself with the amount of art that left a deep impression on me. It is always good to reflect.

Tatsuo Miyajima's extraordinary show "Connect with Everything" at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA), in Sydney, was a sumptuous feast—challenging in its diversity and wonder—with stark messaging about the state of the world today.

Over in New York, Pipilotti Rist's "Pixel Forest" at the New Museum saw crowds queuing around the block in the snow awaiting the opportunity to immerse themselves in the wonders of the work. "Pixel Forest" led me to greatly anticipate Rist's "Sip My Ocean," at MCA, which opened in November.

While in New York earlier in the year, three other highlights for me were Mark Rothko's "Dark Palette" at Pace gallery, an extraordinary museum-quality show; a great survey of Francis Picabia at the Museum of Modern Art, including more than 100 paintings; and Yoan Capote's show "Palangre" at Jack Shainman Gallery—this Cuban artist is making very strong work.

In Rome this summer, two highlights for me were a small Charles Ray exhibition at the American Academy featuring two works—one of them a new sculpture, *A Mountain Lion Attacking a Dog* (2017)—and Giuseppe Penone's "Matrice" exhibition at Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana in the EUR district. The modernist building itself, which is now Fendi's headquarters, is amazing.

Off to Kassel for Documenta 14—a visit I have come to dread, though I did have one of the best meals this year, at Restaurant Voit in Kassel. Overall, Documenta disappointed me, although I often say you only need to discover one artist to come away happy and I found two. Bonita Ely's installation *Interior Decoration: Memento Mori* (2013–17), at the Palais Bellevue, really moved me—and to think she is a fellow Australian and I hadn't engaged with her work before. Gauri Gill's photographs of Maharashtra village residents wearing masks ("Acts of Appearance," 2015–) lingered in my mind.

Now to Venice for the Biennale, "Viva Arte Viva," which was a pleasure to visit, away from the vernissage and free from my previous duties as Commissioner for Australia. As I reflect now, I really enjoyed the week immersed in art. In the national pavilions, highlights for me were Carol Bove's sculptures in "Women of Venice," for Switzerland; "Folly" by Phyllida Barlow in the British Pavilion; the US Pavilion, Mark Bradford's "Tomorrow Is Another Day"; "Emissaries" by Lisa Reihana for New Zealand; and works by Candice Breitz for South Africa. Other highlights for me were: "Studio Venezia," the France Pavilion, by Xavier Veilhan; "Laboratory of Dilemmas" by George Drivas in the Greece Pavilion; the Australia Pavilion, "My Horizon," by Tracey Moffatt; and in the Italy Pavilion, the extraordinary installation "Il Mondo Magico" by Roberto Cuoghi. In the Arsenale, there were two works that took me: Kader Attia's *Narrative Vibrations* (2017) and Guan Xiao's video *David* (2013).

Then there were some wonderful exhibitions in Venice. Highlights for me included the Fortuny Palace show, "Intuition," organized by Axel Vervoordt, the Axel and May Vervoordt Foundation's sixth and last with his wonderful curation

(along with Daniela Ferretti, Dario Dalla Lana, Davide Daninos and Anne-Sophie Dusselier); the extraordinary installation at Fondazione Prada by filmmaker Alexander Kluge, Thomas Demand and other collaborators, "The Boat Is Leaking: The Captain Lied"; and Shirin Neshat's haunting photographs at Museo Correr, even if the guides were the most unhelpful and disinterested in Venice.

In Tuscany, in the town of San Gimignano, at Galleria Continua, the direction Antony Gormley has taken with his new large-scale work using elastic cords, called *Lost Horizon II* (2017), was most interesting.

I took a quick visit back to Sydney for the opening of Jenny Watson's "The Fabric of Fantasy" exhibition, a survey of 40-plus years of her work at MCA, which was worth the long flight. A one-day visit to London had me listening deeply to Susan Hiller's work *Monument* (1980–81) in the Tanks at the Tate Modern.

When I was asked to reflect on 2017, I thought initially it wasn't an inspired year—how wrong I was. It's been a great year of art for me. And the highlights I've shared are the things that have physically stayed with me, along with hundreds and thousands of Instagram images of art I have seen through the year that have inspired others.

The other thing that has happened for me in 2017 is that I have become a virtual reality (VR) junkie. Without singling out an individual artist, I do think this immersive technology is going to enable artists to take their works in a new direction. I am excited, along with my wife Catriona, to have worked with the Australian Centre for the Moving Image in Melbourne to commission a new VR work for each of the next three years. I can't wait to see the first one by Christian Thompson, which will be completed soon.

Simon Mordant is the chairman of the board of Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, and one of the directors of MoMA PS1 in New York. He was previously the Australian commissioner of the Venice Biennale in 2013 and 2015, and was awarded Member of the Order in Australia for his philanthropic services in the arts.



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