

BLANK
CANVAS

16 March — 26 May 2024

Ḳāh Ẓee cʰow
Ḥasānūl Isyraf ṣḍris
Nurūl Aih Ẓihlī Mor Ḥālim
Yong Hoy cʰeong

Curated by Christina Li



LIWE
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Curatorial Statement

Like cities, time is not static. It can stay still, advance, and disintegrate alongside its inhabitants. There are pockets that move slower, others that make speedy headways; some are stuck, as if caught in traffic or a crumbling façade left to weather time's progression. On the main thoroughfare of Bukit Mertajam¹, past the outmoded barbershops, watch sellers and sundry stores, was an inconspicuous clothing store. There hung a T-shirt with a perplexing jumble of alphabets, like a prompt asking, "What is the flipside of time?"

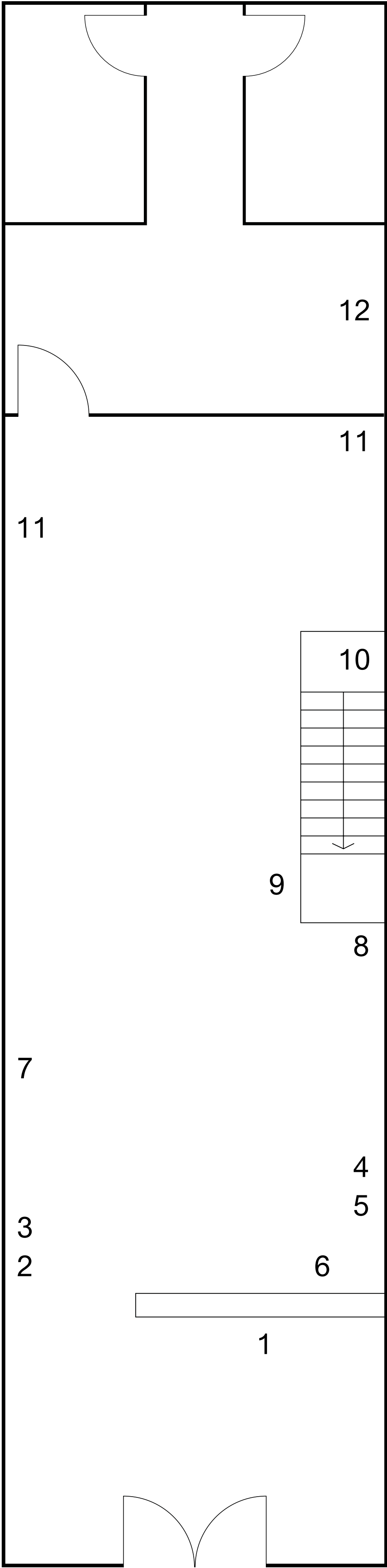
Stories are portals across temporalities. In an era where feeling chronologically unrooted becomes commonplace, the experience of time, as well as the memories and desires they carry can be deeply idiosyncratic and manifold. The poet Dionne Brand wrote, "All artists are involved in their time." Assembled under the umbrella of *LIWE* are narratives that probe into time as material and agents of change, and consequently undermine ideologies and values prevalent within our society. These works not only chronicle personal mementos, offer alternative histories and ways of living, but also function as brief dislocations from the present. In doing so, they open other ways of how one can relate to our own time.

—

LIWE is the outcome of Christina Li's three-week long curatorial residency at Blank Canvas in November 2023.

¹ Bukit Mertajam is a city on the mainland, and part of the state of Penang.

Floor Plan



Kah Bee Chow ^[P5]

- 1 *Hujan*, 2019
Digital Video
4 minutes 3 seconds

Hasanul Isyraf Idris ^[P10-11]

- 2 *Dust and Smoke*, 2024
- 3 *Skin of Water*, 2024
- 4 *Hamburger Buns*, 2024
- 5 *Yellow Carpets*, 2024
- 6 *Foxfire*, 2024
Ink, watercolour and gouache
on cotton paper
30×21 centimeters each

Wong Hoy Cheong ^[P13-14]

- 7 *RE: Looking*, 2002–2003
Video Installation
30 minutes 42 seconds

Kah Bee Chow ^[P6-7]

- 8 海龜, 2017
Text on A3
- 9 *GĒLĒS shields made for Blank Canvas*, 2019–2024
Plastic cardboard, and cable ties
60×40 centimeters each
- 10 甲 (*for Blank Canvas*),
2019–2024
Vinyl on wall, and windows
Dimensions variable

Nurul Ain binti Nor Halim ^[P12]

- 11 *Kisah Sekali* (Once Tales),
2023–2024
12 ash paintings
13.5×19 centimeters each

Kah Bee Chow ^[P8-9]

- 12 *Effeminacy*, 2012
Digital Video
14 minutes 5 seconds

Artworks

ARTWORKS

Kāh B̥ee chow

Hujan, 2019

Digital Video

4 minutes 3 seconds



The definition of home shifts in relation to its dwellers and as years go by. Penang-born and Malmo-based artist Kah Bee Chow's delicate constellation of works poetically considers the way and the speed in which associations and mythologies surrounding her home city can change and reconfigure through her subsequent return visits. Known for its natural turtle shape, Penang alongside its' UNESCO World Heritage City George Town, is caught in between opposite poles of development and preservation. With its ongoing land reclamation projects, the island is slowly losing its initially shape. Chow has been documenting the luxury property developments on the extending waterfront on Gurney Drive, the east coast of the island, since 2011. The eerie barren landscape accompanied by footage of abandoned pet turtles—re-homed a second time—in a local park pond, conjuring a ghostly existence of what once was, and dispossessed from the present.

Sound by Filip Mayer

Ķāh Ķēē čow

甲 (*for Blank Canvas*),
2019–2024
Vinyl on wall, and windows



Originally conceived for an exhibition titled *GĖLĖS*, that means flowers in Lithuanian, Chow adapts the existing piece for this occasion. The character “甲” undergoes a transformation while referring to its etymological format drawn from the picture of a single piece of armour. The artist posits this armour as something soft and malleable, drifting or falling throughout the exhibition space.

海龜, 2017
Text on A3

Writing is a crucial facet of Chow’s multidisciplinary practice. Included in the exhibition is an earlier text that was part of her 2017 solo exhibition 海龜 at Tranen Space for Contemporary Art in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Design by Jacob Grønbech Jensen

Ḵāh Ḵēē cḥow

*GĒLĒS shields made
for Blank Canvas,
2019–2024*

Plastic cardboard, and
cable ties



The central motif of the turtle and its shell undergoes manifold permutations in Chow's constellation of works in the exhibition. First made by Chow from simple elliptical shapes cut out of discarded iMac boxes for a presentation during a residency in Rupert, Lithuania, this version is fabricated on site and cut out of corrugated plastic cardboards, a material commonly found in Penang. These make-shift shields are scored along the middle so they can fold with cable ties on both sides, creating rudimentary protections not unlike handheld covers people fashion for themselves during riots and protests.

Fabricated by Zhi Kai

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Effeminacy, 2012

Digital Video

14 minutes 5 seconds



Placed in the storage area of Blank Canvas is an intimate video that draws from our quotidian experiences, as well as our evolving relationship to family and, in this case, to our mothers. Curator Wong Bing Hao describes the work: “Chow records her mother arranging flowers in their family home in Penang, Malaysia, while watching a melodramatic Malaysian or Singaporean Chinese television show. The majority of the frame is restlessly vacant, as Chow’s mother occupies the left background throughout the video. Chow’s father makes a brief cameo.

About halfway through the 14-minute-long digital video, Chow's mother starts to pay close attention to a tense exchange between a disgraced daughter who begs her reluctant father to be taken back into the family fold. Viewers never see the television content itself, only the silence that transpires between the artist and her mother. A moment, perhaps, of tacit appreciation. In a glass partition behind Chow's mother, momentary reflections of the television's shutter-like brightness can be glimpsed."² As the viewers witness Chow's mother arranging flowers in real time, one is reminded on the familiar and uncanny, the eventful and mundane moments, all of which constitute how we find belonging in an ever-changing world.

² Wong, Bing Hao. "Diamante." *State of Motion: Rushes of Time*. Edited by Cheng Jia Yun, Cheong Kah Kit, Selena Yap and Tan Guo-Liang, Asian Film Archive, 2020, p. 96-97.

Hasanul Isyraf Idris

Dust and Smoke, 2024

Skin of Water, 2024

Hamburger Buns, 2024

Yellow Carpets, 2024

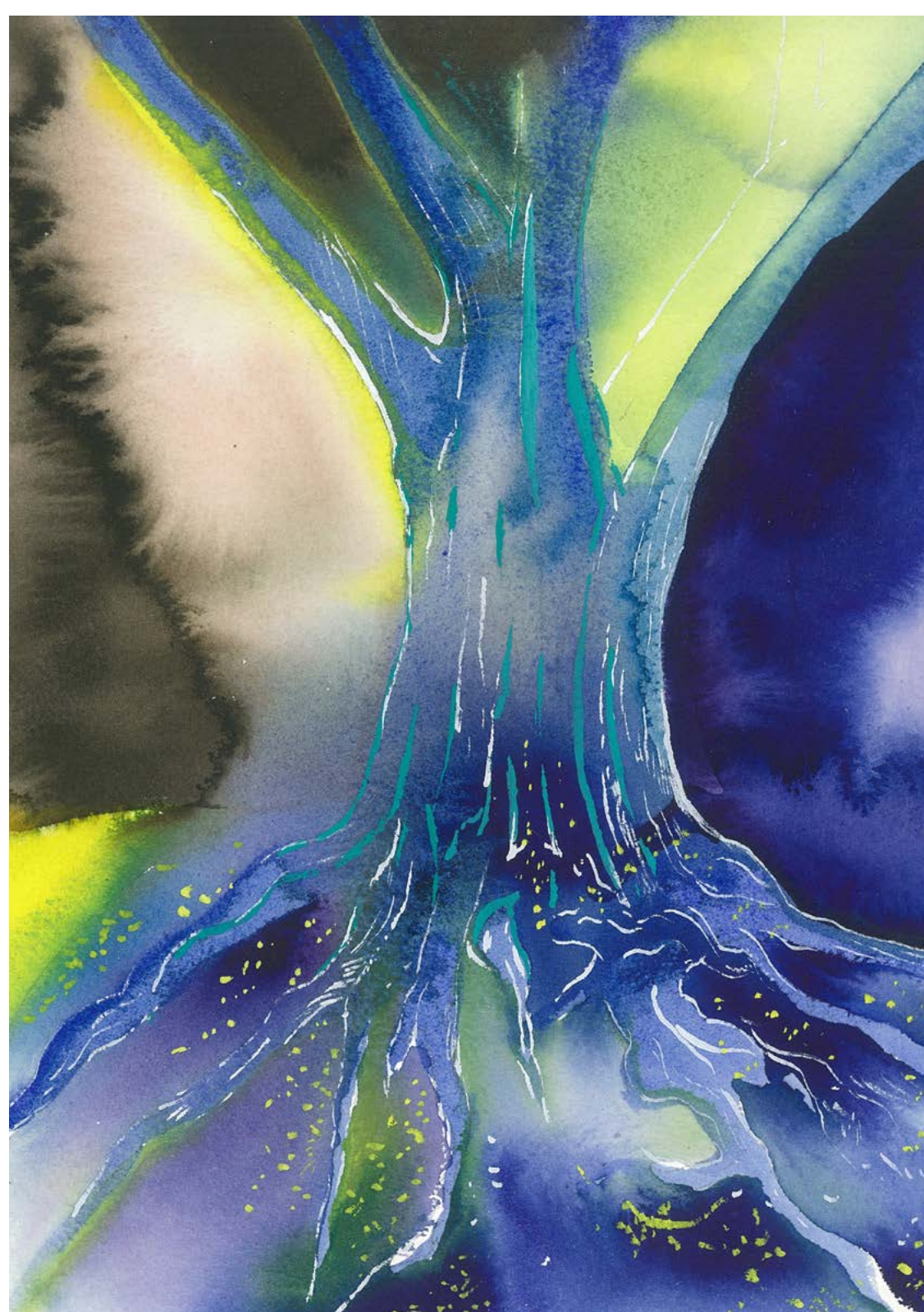
Foxfire, 2024

Ink, watercolour and
gouache on cotton paper
30×21 centimeters each



Hamburger Buns, 2024

Photos courtesy of Richard Koh Fine
Art and Hasanul Isyraf Idris.



Yellow Carpets, 2024

Hasanul's new evocative series *Nightjar* is inspired by his nocturnal walks. They are conceived as a response to reclaim a body desensitized from the onslaught of visual, mental, and internal noises inherent within our fast-paced contemporary life and the urban environment. Through this daily practice of walking, the artist is compelled to thoroughly embrace every sensation and emotion in minute detail. These walks are pockets of contemplation that removes him from the demanding cacophony and extends time that otherwise flies by. In this delicate

timezone that Hasanul has reclaimed for himself, is a profound moment of discovery for his surroundings and himself where he feels at home in his own time and space.

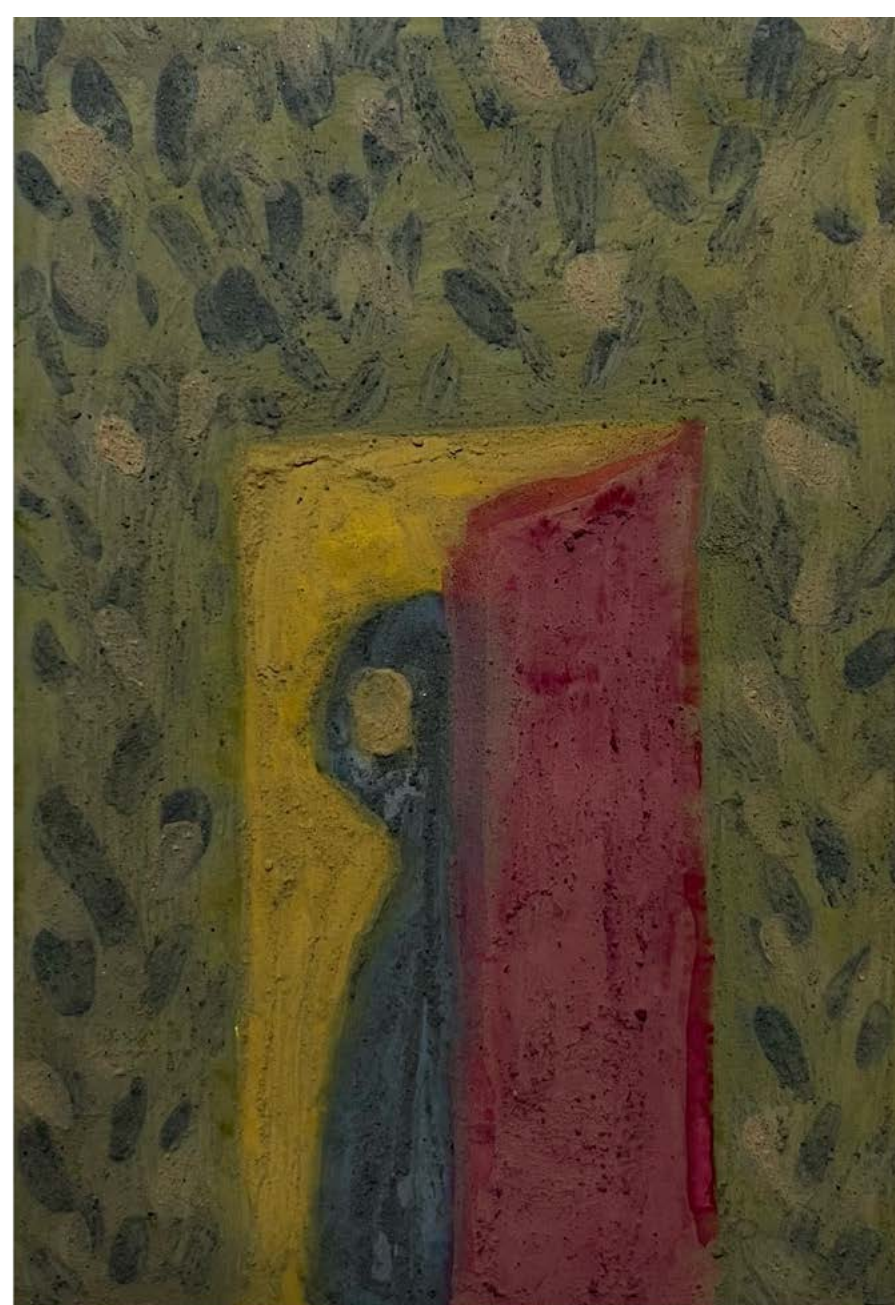
The artist writes, “During these long nights of walking my vision gets thinner. My olfactory senses heighten, and I can smell the scent of flowers that are released only at night to attract pollinators such as bats and moths. It sometimes crosses my mind that these trees could be as old as my father. It transports me to another world, in which I bathe in the stars and feel their seeming motion; I watch the moon change its colour each night or catch a glimpse of what might be a shooting star and hearing the occasional nightjar. Silence can be an abstract concept whereas walking is clearly an action. Night walking distances me from the distraction of everyday life and acts as a purifier that sanctify me and pushes me to navigate without the help of applications and give in to the feeling of being lost.”

Murul Ain Binti Nor Hālim

Kisah Sekali (Once Tales),
2023–2024

12 ash paintings

13.5×19 centimeters each



Using leftover ash from her pottery works, Ain's suite of paintings capture tales that has long been passed on orally throughout her family. The phantom figures and other-worldly scenes outlined on these miniature works on paper, some cautionary tales, others curious occurrences, serve as fleeting records before the ash markings dissipate with time's passing.

Wong Hoy cheong

RE: Looking, 2002–2003
Video Installation
30 minutes 42 seconds



First shown in the Venice Biennale, Wong Hoy Cheong's now seminal work, *RE: Looking* explores the slippery threshold between fact and fiction in this mockumentary that imagines an inverted past where Malaysia, a former colonial power has to come to terms with the its Austrian subjects and its post-colonial condition. Meticulously

constructed with found material but with a fictional twist in a once familiar narrative, this topsy turvy portrayal of Malaysia's 250-year rule over Austria in a BBC-style investigative TV program from make-believe MBC (Malaysian Broadcasting Corporation) borrows, and in turn critiques the mechanisms of art and media, and how representation can distort and manipulate the way we perceive our past and present. The reconstructed living room setting adds a layer of disconcertion, inviting visitors into this unsettling liminal space where the dynamics around hegemony, global migration, race and class is radically recast in a new light.

Public Programme

Public Programme

Public Programme

Dialogue with the Artists

Moderator:
Christina Li

22 March 2024, Fri
6pm–7.30pm
Blank Canvas

Participants:
Kah Bee Chow
Nurul Ain binti Nor Halim
Wong Hoy Cheong

Available for IG Live
[@blankcanvas.penang](https://www.instagram.com/blankcanvas.penang)

Nightjar —

Nightwalks with Hasanul Isyraf Jarris

Join the artist for a night walk to experience the sensations, fauna and flora in USM campus, which form the basis of Hasanul's intricate invented worlds that he portrays in his paintings.

20 April 2024, Sat
24 April 2024, Wed
8.30pm–10.00pm
Universiti Sains
Malaysia (USM)

For registration, please
WhatsApp [+6016 246 6814](https://wa.me/60162466814)

Artists

Artists

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Kah Bee Chow works with forms of enclosures in relation to animals and the human body, with close attention to particularities of space and site, through sculpture, video and text. She lives and works in Malmö and Penang, Malaysia. Chow received her MFA in 2012 from Malmö Art Academy in Sweden and her BFA in 2004 from Auckland University of Technology in New Zealand.

Website: www.kahbeechow.com

Instagram: [@kbc_](https://www.instagram.com/kbc_)

Hasanul Isyraf Idris

B. 1978, Perak, Malaysia



Credit: Tetriana Ahmed Fauzi, courtesy of Richard Koh Fine Art & Hasanul Isyraf Idris.

Hasanul Isyraf Idris was trained at Mara University of Technology (UiTM), Perak, Malaysia and is presently based in Penang, Malaysia.

His practice spans a variety of media, including painting, drawing, installation, video work and sculpture. His works typically manifest hybridity of fictional and surreal iconography drawn from the personal invention as from a mélange of pop cultural references, such as comic books, science fiction, street art and film. He personifies his personal struggles as an artist with strange characters and creatures that inhabit his invented universes.

His solo exhibitions include *Spiritual Zoo* (2021) at Richard Koh Fine Art, Singapore, *HOL: Scab: Crying Tiger In The Night Market* (2019) at Art Jakarta, and *HOL Chapter 2.3, Wound: Environment of Naga and Doubt* (2018) at VOLTA New York. His works have been presented in group exhibitions such as *Another Continent* (2022) at Taitung Art Museum, Taiwan, *Tranchée Racine* (2021) at Halle Saint Pierre, Paris and *FIELD MEETING Take 6: Thinking Collections* (2019) at 13th Edition of Asia Contemporary Art Week, Dubai.

Hasanul was the winner of the Young Contemporary Arts Award (2007) at Balai Seni Visual Negara, Kuala Lumpur. His work is most recently featured in publication *In The Heads of Stéphane Blanquet* Halle Saint Pierre, Paris (2021) by United Dead Artists. He also had two self-published zines, *3 TABIB HooHaZat* (2021) and *Kakrol* (2017).

Facebook: [@Richard Koh Fine Art](#)

Instagram: [@rkfineart](#) [@hasanulisyrafidris](#)

Nurul Ain Binti Nor Halim

B. 2000, Bangkok, Thailand



Nurul Ain Binti Nor Halim, in short Ain, is an artist born in Bangkok, Thailand and raised in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Japan, which makes her have a diasporic identity and longing for belonging. Her practice includes videos, audio, and installations that focus on themes such as belonging, language, memories, and national and cultural identity. Her work reflects her interest in post-colonial discourses, such as cultural preservation, exoticism, craftsmanship, and archives. Besides that, she questions the position and role of artists in decolonization, with references to Aimé Césaire, “Man of Culture”, and how one embraces a post-colonial history and reconstructs itself through culture and arts.

Website: ain.hotglue.me

Instagram: [@ainhannur](https://www.instagram.com/ainhannur)

Wong Hoy Cheong

B. 1960, Penang, Malaysia



Wong Hoy Cheong studied critical theory & literature, developmental psychology & education, and visual arts from Brandeis University, Harvard University and University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

As an artist, he works in a range of visual media including photography, video, drawing, and installation. His work often engages with communities and explores the retrieval of marginalised narratives; addresses the intersections of authenticity and indigeneity, migration and globalisation; and the slipperiness that lies between fact and fiction, past and present.

Wong has been the subject of solo exhibitions at Eslite Gallery, Taipei (2010), NUS Museum, Singapore (2008), National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur (2004 & 1996); Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (2004), Kunsthalle, Vienna (2003); John Hansard Gallery, Southampton (2003); and Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool (2002).

He has also exhibited in international group exhibitions including the Folkestone Triennial (2021 & 2017), Sydney Biennial (2018), Sunshower (Mori Art Museum, 2017), Ural Industrial Biennale of Contemporary Art (2015), No Country (Guggenheim Museum, 2013), Photo Espana (2011), Lyon Biennale (2009), Fukuoka Triennial (2009 & 1999), Taipei Biennial (2008), Istanbul Biennale (2007), Guangzhou Triennial (2005), Liverpool Biennial (2004), Venice Biennale (2003), and Gwangju Biennale (2000) and Asia Pacific Triennial, Brisbane (1996).

Wong lives and works in Penang, Malaysia.

Curātor

Curātor

Christina Li



Credit: M+ Hong Kong

Christina Li is an independent curator and writer who lives and works in Amsterdam. She has taken up numerous curatorial roles at Para Site in Hong Kong (2005–2008), SKOR in Amsterdam (2009–2010), basis voor actuele kunst in Utrecht (2010–2011) and as director of Spring Workshop in Hong Kong (2015–2017). She has presented exhibitions in Europe and Asia, including the Pavilion of Finland at the 59th Venice Biennale, Hong Kong’s presentation at the 58th Venice Biennale, Lafayette Anticipations in Paris, Tai Kwun Contemporary in Hong Kong, Z33 in Hasselt, and most recently the second edition of *Ghost*—a triennial video and performance art series in Bangkok. Over almost two decades, she has commissioned and worked with artists including Neïl Beloufa, Xinyi Cheng, Elmgreen & Dragset, Lee Kit, Rabih Mroué, Pan Dajing, Koki Tanaka, Pilvi Takala, Emily Wardill, Wu Tsang and Young-hae Chang Heavy Industries. Her writing has appeared in Artforum, Art Review Asia, LEAP, Parkett, Spike, and Yishu Journal of Contemporary Art among others.

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