

28 FEBRUARY—23 MARCH 2025

ABOUT BLANK CANVAS

blankcanvas.my

Blank Canvas is a not-for-profit contemporary arts space within the heart of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of George Town, Penang. Opened in 2022, it seeks to be a bridge between its richly historic surroundings and the international contemporary art world. It aims to create greater local awareness and appreciation of Malaysian and international contemporary art, as well as to encourage international contemporary art practitioners to discover and engage with the contexts of Penang and its region.

V I D



ABOUT HIN BUS DEPOT.

hinbusdepot.com

Hin Bus Depot is a contemporary arts and cultural space in Penang, Malaysia, dedicated to fostering creativity, collaboration, and community engagement. Housed in a repurposed 1940s bus depot, it has become a creative hub for exhibitions, performances, and multidisciplinary projects, supporting both emerging and established artists. Through regular art markets, residencies, and public programmes, Hin Bus Depot plays a vital role in Penang's creative ecosystem, championing inclusivity, sustainability, and artistic innovation while bridging the past and present through community-driven initiatives.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Void is the first collaboration between Hin Bus Depot, a community creative hub, and Blank Canvas, an independent contemporary art platform, both based in Penang. The artworks in Void are drawn from the personal collection of Leong Kwong Yee, the founder of Blank Canvas.

It is said that nature abhors a vacuum; but is it always possible to fill a gap? Some artworks in Void strain powerfully to claim victory over a void; other contemplate poignantly ways to acknowledge, even honour, absences which cannot be overcome.

These artworks span a spectrum of media and invoke different moods and responses. He An pays tribute to his father and his favourite Japanese actress through stealthily acquired neon signs. Trevor Yeung reminisces about an unrequited opportunity through still image and a plant installation. Joshua Serafin's video work captures the emergence of a new deity to protect and champion a marginalized community. Jessica Kairé meditates on how a public monument can be remembered and maintained through interactive soft sculpture. Vunkwan Tam questions purpose and form through his readymades in the form of two stacked Ikea baby chairs. And Sidsel Meineche Hansen's charming yet rather macabre tiny human-shaped bell performs its function only through its missing head.

Yet, while disparate in media, tone and scale, the artworks in Void do cohere in their contemplations of the different manifestations of a void, in turn physical, emotional, spiritual as well as metaphysical – a hole in our heart, a missed connection, a lapse in memory, a lacuna in knowledge, a dearth of being.

In exploring the concept(s) of void, the show serves also as a metaphor for the roles which Hin Bus Depot and Blank Canvas play within Penang. They are committed, in their own ways, to addressing the gaps each perceives in the art scene in Penang.

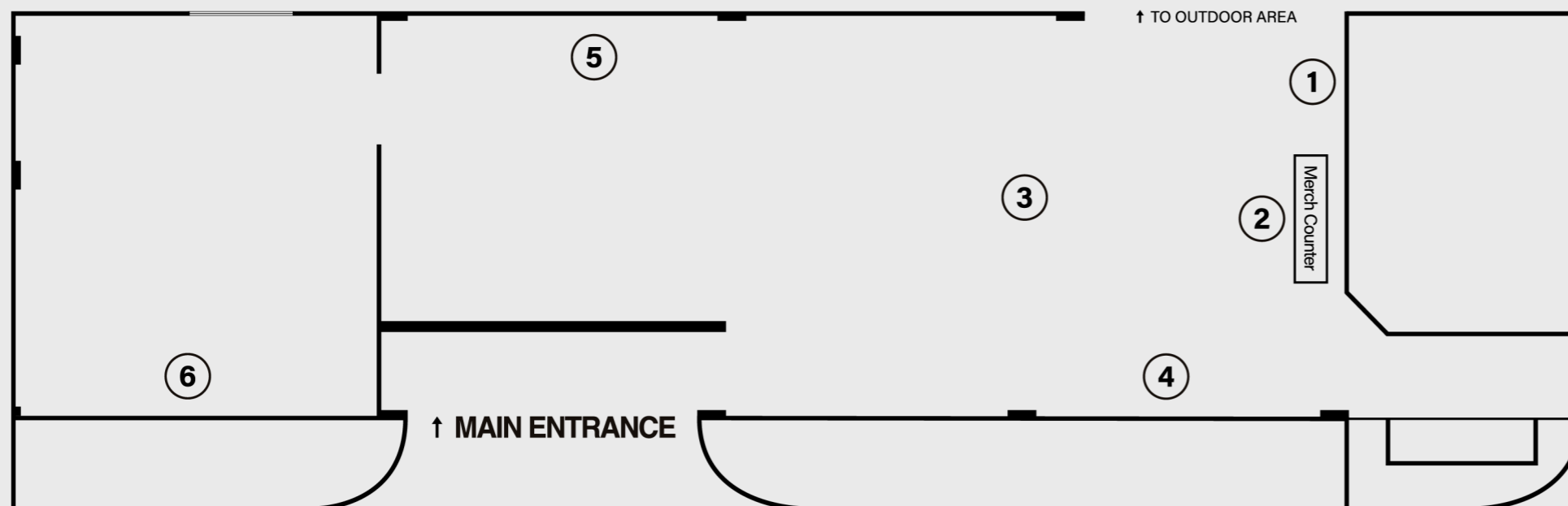
HIN BUS DEPOT EXHIBITION SPACE


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- HIN BUS DEPOT. -

Text by Nicholas Song



1. Untitled (Two Baby Chairs)

Vunkwan Tam 2021 Baby chairs 48 x 36 x 36 cm

Vunkwan Tam's *Untitled (Two Baby Chairs)* exemplifies his practice of assembling readymade objects and linguistic fragments into spatial narratives that explore material afterlives, memory, and cycles of consumption. By recontextualizing two secondhand toddler's chairs into a contemplative sculptural composition, Tam highlights the paradox of these objects—mass-produced yet deeply personal, functional yet destined for obsolescence. Unlike possessions discarded out of disinterest or defect, children's chairs transition from necessity to sentiment, accumulating meaning even as they are outgrown. Their vacant seats evoke both absence and presence, triggering a quiet confrontation with time, intimacy, and loss.

Through subtle interventions, Tam reframes these everyday objects, resisting linear narratives of production and consumption. The work challenges notions of redundancy and value, suggesting that discarded objects retain an emotional and ontological presence beyond their intended use. By positioning the chairs as spectral remnants, *Untitled (Two Baby Chairs)* invites reflection on how mass-produced objects shape personal histories, while also interrogating the broader structures that dictate their creation, use, and eventual abandonment.

2. Anti-(Lady bell)

Sidsel Meineche Hansen 2022 Lady bell of Queen Elizabeth I, with clapper of dismantled head, bronze, recast 8 x 6 x 6 cm

Anti-(Lady bell) reimagines the traditional lady bell, a domestic object historically used by women to summon servants, by incorporating the likeness of Queen Elizabeth I, the British monarch who legalized the transatlantic slave trade. In this work, the queen's head is removed and repurposed as the bell's clapper, symbolizing a critical reexamination of colonial legacies and the gendered dynamics of power. The bell's bronze materiality and the repurposed head critique the intersectionality of history, gender, and the objects that embody these entangled narratives.

This recontextualization positions *Anti-(Lady bell)* as a conduit for commentary on the influence of colonialism, gendered labor, and the ways in which historical figures and objects continue to shape contemporary discourse.

3. Folding Monument (Juan Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán Monument, General Cemetery, Guatemala City)

Jessica Kairé 2021 Cotton canvas, thread, cotton webbing, plywood board, 2 wooden brackets, photograph 108 x 108 x 274 cm

Folding Monument is an interactive soft sculpture that reexamines the role of public monuments and the responsibilities they impose in either upholding or dismantling the ideals and histories they represent. Made out of cotton canvas, the work is a scale replica of an existing monument dedicated to Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán (Guatemala's second democratically elected president), and remains either folded on a shelf or collapsed on the floor, caught in a state of suspended animation.

This immobile form invites engagement, encouraging viewers to collectively determine when and how to raise and animate it, almost altering commemoration into an active, participatory act. Through this approach, *Folding Monument* probes the power dynamics surrounding public monuments, the shifting ways history and collective memory are engaged with, and, by replicating this overlooked monument, further questions the role of public memorials in shaping historical consciousness, prompting a reconsideration of how memory is preserved, erased, or contested in civic spaces.

Note: Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán was overthrown in a CIA-sponsored coup in 1954, largely in response to his Agrarian Land Reform, which threatened the economic interests of the United Fruit Company and its U.S. shareholders—some of whom were members of the CIA. His removal ended Guatemala's "Ten Years of Spring," ushering in a brutal 36-year civil war that claimed over 200,000 lives, including the victims of the Ixil genocide.

Despite the historical significance of these events, the Árbenz monument remains largely unnoticed in Guatemala City's General Cemetery. Its obscurity reflects the country's complex relationship with its past, where denial and historical amnesia persist despite overwhelming evidence of state violence.

4. The Enigma (Sheung Wan)

Trevor Yeung 2015 Unique Archival inkjet print, plant 102.8 x 152.6 x 4.4cm (framed size)

The Enigma (Sheung Wan) embodies Trevor Yeung's ongoing exploration of botanic ecology and its intersection with the human experience. Central to the work is a large potted plant, strategically placed in front of an image, echoing how real-life encounters often have their view obstructed by objects in the environment.

As viewers engage with the setup, *The Enigma (Sheung Wan)* prompts a process of spontaneous seeing whilst challenging fixed perspectives and revealing the nuanced relationship between the viewer and the subject being observed. The work also highlights how both presence and absence, visibility and concealment, shape our interaction with the world around us.

5. What Makes Me Understand What I Know? 是什么让我理解我的知道?

He An 何岸 2009 Neon Signs 7 individual signs, Size variable

What Makes Me Understand What I Know? 是什么让我理解我的知道? reflects the artist's personal confrontation with loss, memory, and the complexities of meaning. Following the death of his father, He An scoured his hometown, Wuhan, for neon signs to re-create his father's name, "He Taoyuan". These stolen or repurposed neon lights, often sourced from the city's underground scene, are recontextualized from commercial tools into an intimate, glowing language of grief and remembrance. Through their flickering, He An brings the ephemeral nature of memory to life, creating a modern-day mausoleum that reflects his ongoing search for meaning and the emotional weight carried by these illuminated symbols.

In this work, He An questions and recontextualizes meaning itself. The neon signs' intermittent light speaks to the fragile nature of memory, as well as the tension between personal grief and societal constructs of language. As he continues to subvert the commercial use of neon, He An reflects on the layers of meaning embedded in ubiquitous objects and their ability to carry emotional significance. This work, oscillating between mischief and investigation, becomes a contemporary mausoleum, a space where personal loss and collective history are constantly in flux.

6. Void

Joshua Serafin 2022 Edition 3/5 4k-Single Channel Video 10:32 minutes

Void is a performance and video installation by multidisciplinary artist Joshua Serafin, exploring the complexities of non-binary identity, ancestral connection, and decolonization. Drawing inspiration from pre-colonial Filipino spirituality, the work envisions a speculative deity, *Void*, who embodies fluidity and transformation. Through ritualistic dance and expressive movement, Serafin channels this deity, challenging non-normative constructs of gender and colonial history.

As both a performance and a healing process, *Void* offers a pathway to reclaim and reimagine ancestral identities, confronting generational trauma. The invocation of the deity *Void* seeks to dismantle binary structures and heteronormative ideals, proposing a future grounded in indigenous philosophies and queer cosmologies.