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ART REVIEW: MEDIUM AT LARGE

The medium is the message

SAM's latest collection show is playful and fresh

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SINGAPORE – With the National Gallery Singapore set to open next year, it's the perfect time for Singapore Art Museum (SAM) to fully embrace its position as a space completely devoted to the story of contemporary art.

Its latest show is yet another important step in that direction. Culled primarily from SAM's permanent collection, with a few loans and a commission thrown in, *Medium At Large* is a rather narcissistic, inward-looking show where you can imagine the 31 pieces on display asking themselves and the viewer: What am I?

It's also one of SAM's most playful shows in a while and examines this often-taken-for-granted descriptor in art, the "medium". In category- and label-obsessed Singapore, we like things clear-cut and defined. But that's not quite so easy when faced with a work like, say, Annie Cabigting's *On The Shelf*, *On The Shelf (After Michael Craig-Martin)*. It's an exact painting of an installation by British conceptual artist Craig-Martin. The original work, *On The Shelf*, comprises a tilted row of milk bottles placed on a shelf. In a Mobius loop, Cabigting's own painting is, itself, placed on a shelf. A painting? A conceptual work? A sculpture? That's where the fun begins.

Obviously, a lot of interesting materials pop up here: Human hair in Mella Jaarsma's outrageous, huge, wearable sculpture *Shaggy*; honey sticks in Yu Shufang's interactive *Project: Honey Sticks (6,425)*; the tree in all its various permutations in Titarubi's Venice Biennale installation *Shadow Of Surrender*.

render, comprising charcoal drawings of trees, wooden benches and thick books.

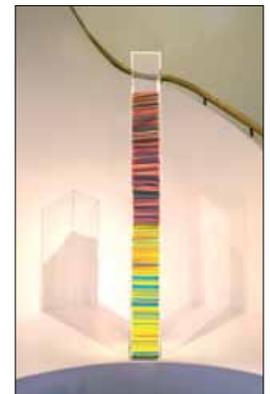
Two "paintings" highlight their very materiality. Jane Lee's *Status* is a monumental work where the paint spills out and onto the floor, leaving a void where the painting should be. Gerardo Tan's *thisisthatisthis* are two works made of dust scraped from old paintings and presented as works of high art: A small glass bowl and a framed "painting" of the recovered grime.

However, it's ironic that, even as the show aims to question the point of categories, one can't completely get away from them here. Many of the works are clumped together based on their respective genres, whether it's a painting or a drawing. However, it does make for clearer comparisons on how different works wriggle away from its "root" genre in their own particular idiom.

Ian Woo's *Lot* drawings, for instance, are partly rendered in a painterly way, using a brush to employ graphite mixed in water. Next to it are Alvin Zafra's portraits done using a bullet to draw on sandpaper. Behind it, Sai Hua Kuan reduces the very idea of drawing to its basest element, the line, without actually drawing any thing. Instead, his *Space Drawing 5* is a video of a rope whiplashing and snapping all around an abandoned building — the line becoming an action instead of being something imprinted on a surface.

There's a wonderful sense of flow as you move one artwork to another and forms overlap: You can go from a huge sculpture made from a collage of photographs (Osang Gwon) to a series of photographs of a painting (Chua Chye Teck).

Medium At Large also redefines



Clockwise from top: Titarubi's *Shadow Of Surrender*; Ye Shufang's *Project: Honey Sticks (6,425)*; Osang Gwon's photo collage-meets-sculpture *BluRay B*; Mella Jaarsma's very hairy *Shaggy*. PHOTOS: SAM

"medium" as the artist or creator of the artwork. In Alan Oei's *The End Of History*, with its series of defaced paintings and archival material, you have an entire construct of an artist and his life — via the fictional Nan-yang artist Huang Wei.

And bringing all of these different ideas together — the medium as material, genre and creator — is Ho Tzu Nyen's Venice Biennale work, *The Cloud Of Unknowing*. A wily, chameleon-like work, it was previously presented in various ways not only in Venice, but at Gillman Barracks and Tokyo. It's an immersive piece hinging on a video set up at the museum's chapel space that employs smoke ma-

chines (and at some point will probably include a performance element). The videos themselves, comprising tableaux, were derived from, and refers to, old paintings and texts.

Is the exhibition fetishising this whole idea of the medium? Yes, it is — but it's about time. Many of the works on display will be familiar to regular museum-goers, but combined, you get a fresh perspective. Appreciating art isn't just about what they mean, but also about what they are — things and ideas created from other things and ideas. Ultimately, it makes our experience and reading of contemporary art, and appreciation of what a museum is and does, all the richer. ★★★★★

> **Medium At Large** runs until April 2015 at the Singapore Art Museum. For more information, visit <http://www.singaporeartmuseum.sg>

RANT AND RAVE

Chong Tze Chien doesn't like latecomers

When an artist has something to say about something

SINGAPORE – If you've been kicking yourself for missing the first staging of *Rant & Rave* back in 2012, you can catch the restaging next week. Presented by The Finger Players under The Esplanade's Studios series, it's a hilarious history lesson on Singapore theatre and the important issues that have arisen over the years. Playwright and director Chong Tze Chien dug into a huge range of archival text from newspapers. The performance

is brought to life by Janice Koh and Karen Tan and you can expect some hilarious impersonations. But before that, we thought it'd be fun to hear the guy behind the show do a bit of ranting and raving himself. Here's what Chong had to say.

RANTS

1. Trying to explain my profession to taxi drivers
"Because whenever you tell them you

are a playwright, they would invariably ask, which MediaCorp Channel 5/8 drama did I write and if I know Zoe Tay/Fann Wong/Li Nanxing."

2. Latecomers to shows
"No matter how much you explain to latecomers that they can't enter the theatre until an appropriate time in the play, they will insist that they can creep to their seats undetected like stealth fighters in Afghanistan."

3. Ilo Ilo's Golden Horse triumph
"As much as I adore the film and take pride in a homegrown film made good internationally, I am dumbfounded whenever relatives ask me if I would ever get a Golden Horse award for my work. Hello, I work in a completely different discipline and industry, thank you very much."



Chong Tze Chien. PHOTO: THE ESPLANADE

> **Rant & Rave** is from May 1 to 4 at Esplanade Theatre Studio. Tickets from SISTIC. For the full rant (and rave) visit, <http://tdy.sg/artssakeblog>

RAVES

1. Singapore International Festival Of Arts 2014

"Three words: The Wooster Group. This legendary experimental theatre collective, which counts Willem Dafoe as a founding member, is finally making its Singapore debut! 'Nuff said."

2. Post-show S\$5 beers at the Esplanade Waterfront bars

"Sharing a bucket of cheap good beer with friends after a show at the Esplanade is all you need to round up the evening."

3. Kenny Leck of Books Actually

"For working tirelessly at championing local authors and books. If we ever needed a justification to confer a Cultural Medallion on a bookstore owner, Books Actually would make a hell of a case."

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