

ArtReview Asia



Suki Seokyeong Kang



The Theatre of Objects

Previewed

Wu Tsang
Gropius Bau, Berlin
Through 12 January

Karen Knorr
Sundaram Tagore, Singapore
21 September–16 November

Nikhil Chopra
Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York
12 – 20 September

*Sita and Rama: The Ramayana
in Indian Painting*
Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York
Through 23 August 2020

A distant relative
Hopkinson Mossman, Wellington
Through 28 September

KAWS
National Gallery of Victoria,
Melbourne
20 September – 13 April

Philip-Lorca diCorcia
David Zwirner, Hong Kong
Through 12 October

Naeem Mohaiemen
Experimenter, Kolkotta
Through 5 November

Micro Era. Media Art from China
Kulturforum, Berlin
Through 26 January

*RIFTS: Thai contemporary artistic
practices in transition*
Bangkok Art and Culture Centre
Through 24 November

*Phantom Plane: Cyberpunk
in the Year of the Future*
Tai Kwun Centre for Heritage & Arts,
Hong Kong
4 October – 4 January

Liquefied Sunshine | Force Majeure
Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong
Through 2 November

Xiao Lu
10 Chancery Lane, Hong Kong
Through 5 October

Ryoji Ikeda
Taipei Fine Arts Museum
Through 17 November

What Lies Within: Centre of the Centre
Museum of Contemporary
Art and Design, Manila
Through 1 December

Istanbul Biennial
Various venues, Istanbul
Through 10 November

Nam June Paik
Tate Modern, London
17 October – 9 February

The Herstory of Abstraction in East Asia
Taipei Fine Arts Museum
Through 27 October

*Clapping with Stones:
Art and Acts of Resistance*
Rubin Museum, New York
Through 6 January

Genieve Figgis
Almine Rech, Shanghai
20 September – 19 October

Atsuko Tanaka
Moderna Museet, Stockholm
Through 16 February



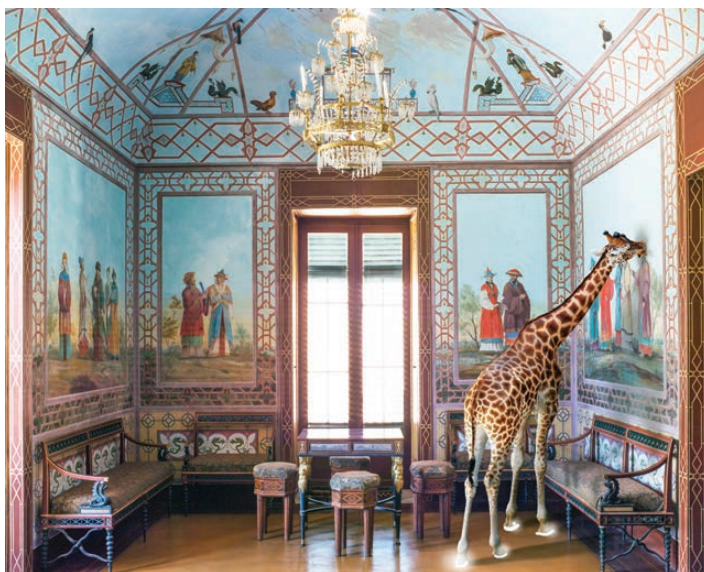
4 *The Combat of Rama and Ravana*, India, Coromandel Coast,
late-eighteenth century, painted and mordant-dyed cotton, 87 × 539 cm.
Courtesy The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

After the tyrant Iskander is overthrown in Salman Rushdie's 1983 novel *Shame*, his exiled wife weaves the history of his reign into 18 magnificent shawls. Rather than the glowing tributes to his greatness that the king might have expected from a dutiful consort, however, Rani's fabrics relate in graphic detail the systematic torture, sexual violence and moral corruption through which her husband exercised power. Life came to imitate art when, after the publication of his 'blasphemous' next novel prompted Ayatollah Khomeini to issue a fatwa against him, Rushdie was also forced into hiding. The official histories of absolutist regimes are enforced, as neither the author nor his character needed to be told, by violence.

If everyone projects their own truth onto the world then, as the title of **Wu Tsang's** exhibition at Berlin's Gropius Bau proposes, 'there is no nonviolent way to look at somebody'. This survey of the trans artist's work, which includes a new video installation shot on the Greek island at the centre of the migrant crisis, extends the artist's attempts to unsettle fixed categories (of gender, ethnicity, nationhood) by disrupting the conventions of documentary filmmaking. By interpreting the world through fluid and hybrid narrative strategies that recall Rushdie's magical realism, Tsang's work also suggests that, while looking is always fraught, some ways are more compassionate than others. The effect is to render the dissolution of real-world borders

(whether of gender, nationality or any other reductive category) as, according to curator Stephanie Rosenthal, 'a crisis of representation'.

Such crises are the theme of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (c. 8CE), source of the legend of the weaver Arachne that Rushdie adapted to the subcontinent's post-partition history. A similarly syncretic approach to Asian and European cultures informs the work of photographer **Karen Knorr**, who juxtaposes anthropological studies of the English upper class (*Belgravia*, 1979–81) with her celebrated series *India Song* (2008–17) at Sundaram Tagore in Singapore. The photographs in a series titled, conveniently for the sake of this digest, *Metamorphoses* (2014–18), transport conspic-



2 Karen Knorr, *Love at First Sight, Palazinna Cinese*, 2017, Hahnemühle inkjet print, 80 × 100 cm.
Courtesy Sundaram Tagore Gallery, New York, Singapore & Hong Kong



1 Wu Tsang, *One emerging from a point of view* (detail), 2019, two-channel overlapping projections, sound, 43 min.
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin



3 Nikhil Chopra, 2019. Photo: Stephanie Berger. Courtesy the artist



4 The Monkey Prince Angada Steals Ravana's Crown: Folio from the dispersed Shangri Ramayana series (Style 111), India, Punjab Hills, kingdom of Jammu (Bahu), c. 1700–30, opaque watercolour on paper, 35 × 22 cm. Courtesy The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

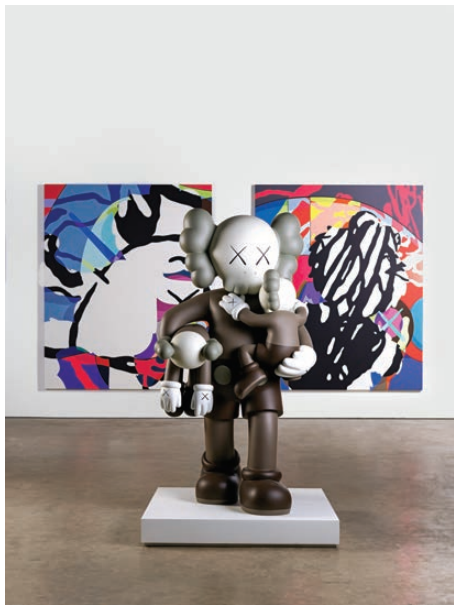
uously 'exotic' animals into opulent Italian palazzos, the free play of signifiers seeming to celebrate the movement of people and ideas across borders. Besides which, who doesn't want to look at a photograph in which a giraffe appears to lick clean an Orientalist fresco.

3 *ArtReview Asia* can only hope that **Nikhil Chopra's** transplantation into the Metropolitan Museum of Art is similarly irreverent. For nine consecutive days the performance artist will meander through the museum's collections, adopting a variety of different personae in the course of his tours. *ArtReview Asia* imagines that the artist will improvise a loosely autobiographical story that threads the different objects he encounters (and the cultures they

represent) together. Or, more precisely, that the multiplicity and contradiction of voices will unravel the justifications underpinning the idea of a 'universal museum'. Either way, 4 let's hope that the tour makes time for *Sita and Rama: The Ramayana in Indian Painting*, which displays work made between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries inspired by the Sanskrit epic. *The Ramayana* offers another example, if it were needed, of how art can be used to support or disrupt the fixed and singular narratives that buttress the myth of fixed and singular identities: in 2011, a celebrated essay by A.K. Ramanujan was removed from the syllabus of Delhi University after protests that its celebration of the poem's hundreds of different

versions was offensive to ultra-orthodox Hindus. For a less prescriptive reading of the world's cultures, meet Chopra in *The Temple of Dendur* (floor 1, gallery 131).

After Arachne had the temerity to express her own experience of reality (in which the gods abuse their power over humans) and defeat her divine rival in a test of skill, Minerva beat her over the head with a shovel (rather proving her point). Which might serve as a warning to Ruth Buchanan, Oliver Perkins, Peter Robinson and Renee So, whose disparate practices are threaded together at Wellington's Hopkinson Mossman by their shared inheritance of Arachne's... umm... thread. With a title that nods to the looseness of the ties that bind these



6 KAWS, 2016 (installation view, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, UK). Photo: Jonty Wilde



5 Ruth Buchanan, *Can tame anything, tables, tables, doors, blinds, bodies*, 2016, mixed media, 90 × 90 × 120 cm. Courtesy the artist and Hopkinson Mossman, Wellington



7 Philip-Lorca diCorcia, *Head #23*, 2001, chromogenic print, 125 × 156 × 5 cm (framed). © the artist. Courtesy the artist and David Zwirner, New York, London & Hong Kong

5 artists together, *A distant relative* features 'knitted tapestries, paintings tied up with braided rope, hand-latch hooked rugs, and drooping felt'. A craft always associated with the structuring of subaltern narratives offers a means by which artists can, it is proposed, 'position themselves in relation to a total(ising) structure' of power. Arachne, it seems fair to presume, would sympathise.

6 New York-based **KAWS** first came to prominence as a street artist making interventions on billboard posters in his hometown, a practice he labelled 'subvertising'. While he may share our heroine's desire to undermine the stories told by the hegemonic power struc-

tures, he diverges from her in his wholehearted embrace of revenue streams including the production of collectible toys. This major retrospective of his paintings, sculptures and design at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne showcases superficially brash, bold productions that are distinguished by their note of lament for lost innocence.

Troubling easy binaries between the 'authenticity' of the street and the 'artificiality' of the artist's studio, **Philip-Lorca diCorcia** is best known for his superficially spontaneous but precisely choreographed photographs. His latest exhibition at David Zwirner, Hong Kong, includes works from series including

the pointedly titled *East of Eden* (2008), which captured a moment at the end of George W. Bush's tenure that the artist might reasonably have assumed marked a generational low in the country's political disenchantment. That these photographs look in retrospect like artefacts from a cosy prelude to the terrifyingly unstable politics of today is testament, at least in part, to the profound unreliability and unaccountability of our era's most influential narrators.

The post-partition histories of the subcontinent fictionalised by Rushdie find new tellers in **Naeem Mohaiemen's** *Volume Eleven (flaw in the algorithm of cosmopolitanism)* at Experimenter, Kolkata. The show takes as a starting point a

series of essays by the influential Bengali writer Syed Mujtaba Ali which, written between the world wars, predicted that Germany would defeat Britain and hasten India's independence. Mohaiemen riffs on freedom and division by combining typewritten pages, photographs taken by the artist's father during the 1950s, a video responding to those photographs and a transcribed conversation between the artist, his father and two aunts. Together they tell the stories of a family scattered across the world by the violent consequences of a society's failure to accommodate different ways of seeing the world.

How artists can respond to social change
9 is one subject of *Micro Era. Media Art from China* at Berlin's Kulturforum, which features

moving-image artists Cao Fei, Lu Yang, Fang Di and Zhang Peili in a follow-up to 2001's *living in time. 29 contemporary artists from China*. The narrative that this exhibition seeks to challenge seems by comparison to the above examples a little academic: video art's reputation, 'within the Euro-American context', as a democratising artform. Yet by interrogating the presumption that the free circulation of information is necessarily empowering to the majority, it might be hoped the show draws attention to how unevenly distributed access to technology is shaping the way that 'truth' is being manufactured and disseminated.

At Bangkok Art and Culture Centre, meanwhile, *RIFTS: Thai contemporary artistic practices*

in transition documents a comparably dramatic shift in the country's production of contemporary art from the late 1980s onwards. Those changes were effected through new infrastructures as much as new media or subject matters, with artists establishing independent spaces and transnational networks; that new connections fragment old unities is reflected in the ambivalent title. Nevertheless, the exhibition features many of the biggest stars among the artists who emerged onto the national and international stage during the 1990s and 2000s, among them Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook, Chatchai Puipia, Chumpon Apisuk, Kamin Lertchaiprasert, Kamol Phaosavasdi, Manit Sriwanichpoom, Michael Shaowanasai, Montien Boonma, Navin



8 Naeem Mohaiemen, *Baksho Rohoshyo (Chobi Tumi Kar?)*, 2016—, solvent transfer prints of drawings and text onto BFK Rives paper, reproductions of vintage photo strips. Courtesy the artist and Experimenter, Kolkata



9 Lu Yang, *Delusional Mandala* (still), 2015, single-channel video, colour, sound, 16 min 27 sec. © the artist. Courtesy the artist and Société, Berlin



10 Montien Boonma, *Manual Traces in the Paddy Field with Fish Net and Spade*, 1991, soil pigment on papers, terracotta, fish net, spade, dimensions variable. Courtesy the estate of the artist and Pearl Lam Galleries, Hong Kong & Shanghai



11 Chen Wei, *In the Waves #3*, 2013. Courtesy the artist



12 South Ho Siu Nam, *Whiteness of Tree I* (detail), 2018, archival inkjet prints, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong



12 Ching Chin Wai, *Weather Report: Liquefied Sunshine* (documentation), 2014–15, two-channel video, 3 min 40 sec. Courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong

Rawanchaikul, Pinaree Sanpitak, Prasong Luemuang, Rirkrit Tiravanija and Tawatchai Puntusawasdi: a generation that continues to exert a huge influence on the kingdom's artists today.

The difficulties for artists and writers in keeping pace, much less predicting, the technological advances that have shaped twenty-first century life were first laid out in the offshoot of New Wave science-fiction that emerged during the 1980s and came to be known as cyberpunk, the wide-ranging influence of which inspires

11 *Phantom Plane: Cyberpunk in the Year of the Future* at Hong Kong's Tai Kwun Centre for Heritage & Arts. In what some might say is a further excava-

tion of the themes recently showcased in the institution's Takashi Murakami exhibition, *Phantom Plane* explores how cyberpunk aesthetics began to seep into popular visual culture, fuelled by Manga classics such as Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira* (1982 and its 1988 anime adaptation), Ridley Scott's Hong Kong-inspired adaptation, *Bladerunner* (also 1982) and various iterations of cyberpunk superstar William Gibson's fiction (although *ArtReview Asia* is curious to see whether or not Robert Longo's 1995 commercial flop *Johnny Mnemonic* makes the grade). In any case, cyberpunk's dystopian and underground visions may be very apt for Hong Kong right now, although it's fair to say that its immediate present

may be a more pressing concern to visitors than any visions of a future to come.

Because, as no one will have failed to notice, the licence and limits of speech are being violently contested on the streets of the SAR. For their dual exhibition *Liquefied Sunshine | Force Majeure* at Blindspot Gallery, Luke Ching Chin Wai and South Ho Siu Nam draw an Ovidian analogy between the exercise of divine and temporal power. The only difference is that, rather than classical legends of Gods killing humans for sport, they take for a metaphor the 'acts of God' described in insurance claims. Where Ching's video tracks destructive weather phenomena in Hong Kong and Taiwan, Ho's

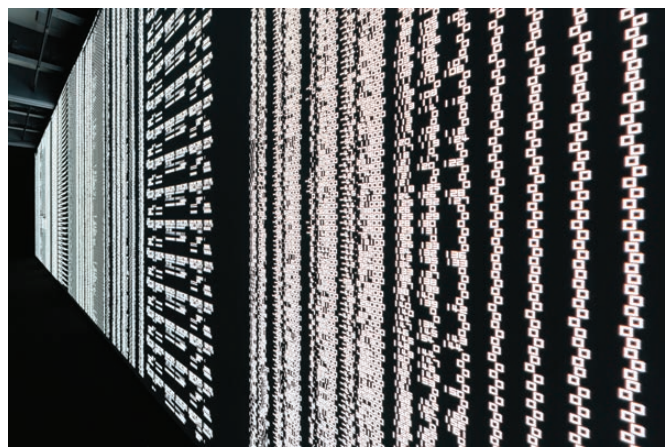
photographs document the damage incurred when a powerful tropical cyclone made land-fall. Both present Hong Kong as at the mercy of greater forces.

13 Seamlessly picking up the thread, **Xiao Lu** calls to mind another weaver from the *Metamorphoses*, Philomela. A retrospective at 10 Chancery Lane in Hong Kong gathers together works including *Sperm* (2006) – a protest against the denial of women’s reproductive rights – and the hugely influential *Dialogue* (1989), which staged the artist’s experience of sexual abuse as part of a wider protest against the abuse of power, prompting a backlash that contributed to a period of almost 15 years of silence, in which

the artist exhibited no new work. Having had her tongue cut out by King Tereus, Philomela smuggled a tapestry telling the story of her rape and mutilation to the king’s wife – she reacted by chopping up their only son and feeding him to Tereus in a stew – before transforming into a nightingale in order to broadcast the crime in song. You might want to stay away from any canapes at the opening of this one.

14 Taking big data for their source, the ‘data-matics’ of glitch-music superstar **Ryoji Ikeda** generate pattern and form from the frighteningly unpredictable and bewilderingly complex systems that shape our lives. Which is, it occurs to *ArtReview Asia*, just another way of saying

he makes art. The title of his major retrospective at Taipei Fine Arts Museum, *A Cosmic Journey from Infinitesimal to Astronomical*, makes clear the scope of his ambition as realised in immersive sound sculptures and audiovisual installations, and isn’t to be missed. Not to be outdone in the competition to find a title which is both bombastic and deeply helpful for writers trying to work out what the show might actually be about in advance of its opening, the Museum of Contemporary Art and Design in Manila plumps for *What Lies Within: Centre of the Centre*. How the ‘centre of the centre’ is distinguished from ‘the centre’ continues to escape *ArtReview Asia*, but maybe it’s just not getting into the spirit of a show that



14 Ryoji Ikeda, *code-verse*, 2018. © the artist. Courtesy Taipei Fine Arts Museum



13 Xiao Lu, *Dialogue*, 1989, c-type print on vinyl, documentation of installation and performance during *China/Avant-Garde* at National Art Gallery, Beijing. Courtesy the artist and 10 Chancery Lane Gallery, Hong Kong

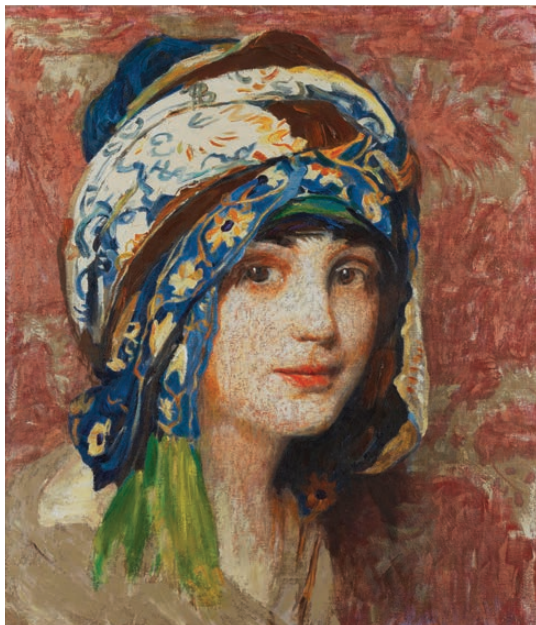
will ‘question notions of perception, intuition, and empirical knowledge’ through the work of Mel O’Callaghan, Laurent Grasso, Suzanne Treister and Pamela Rosenkranz. No answers to the aforementioned questions will be forthcoming, the press release warns, only ‘visceral presentations of probabilities and truths’. Which gruesome image suggests the Roman practice of divination by reading the entrails of disembowelled animals, which is how *ArtReview Asia* currently feels about interpreting gallery press releases.

The director of the Istanbul Biennial might be accused of having tempted the fate that fortune tellers read when announcing that the institution has always ‘turned the lack

of a permanent venue to its advantage’, only for it to transpire that the landmark venue it had earmarked for the 2019 edition was packed to the rafters with asbestos. The last-minute resettlement of a number of the biennial’s artists, nonetheless, a useful metonym for an exhibition that, under the title of *The Seventh Continent*, will investigate the causes and consequences of ecological crisis and the movement of people. Figuring the artist as ‘foreigner’ or ‘savage’ to the self of the viewer, curator Nicolas Bourriaud’s statement promises a show focused on archipelagic models of social organisation in the Anthropocene. Which of course sparked a serious-minded philosophical debate in the offices of *ArtReview Asia*, at least until someone

pointed out that there are now only five continents (there used to be seven but Europe and Asia have been folded together by some ‘modern’ geographers, as were North and South America), in which case the island of plastic floating in the centre of the Atlantic to which the title nods should be the *sixth*, not the *seventh*. But if there are in fact *seven* actual continents, it would make the artificial landmass the *eighth*. After much debate, it turns out that no one really knows. Which lesson, *ArtReview Asia* often thinks, might be the real message of all art.

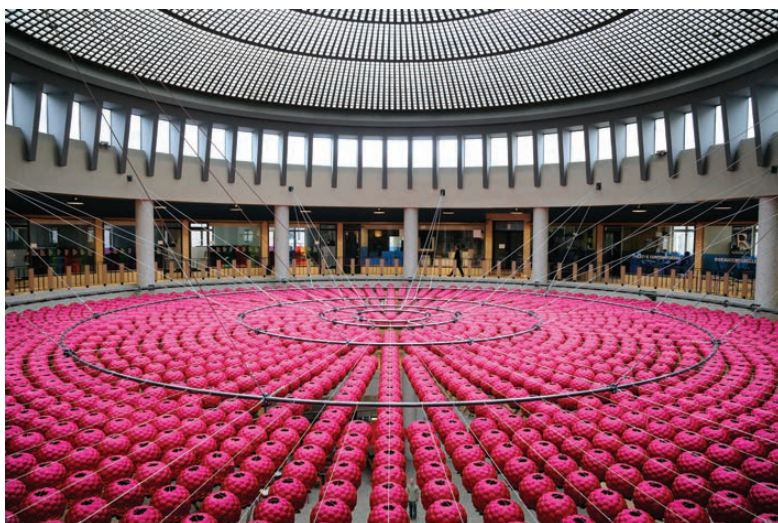
The inability of the world’s great minds to agree on what constitutes a continent does not inspire hope for a coming era of global intellectual cooperation. But a significant survey of the



16 Piotr Uklanski, *Untitled (Eastern Promises VIII)*, 2018, ink, acrylic and oil on jute over canvas. Courtesy the artist



17 Nam June Paik, *Magnet TV*, 1965, television, magnet, 72 × 49 × 62 cm. © the estate of the artist. Courtesy Tate Modern, London



19 Kimsooja, *Lotus: Zone of Zero*, 2008 (installation view, Galerie Ravenstein, Brussels).
Photo: Fabrice Kada. Courtesy the artist, Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels,
the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, Korea, and Galerie Kewenig, Berlin



18 Yang Shih-Chih, *An Elusive Curve*, 2005, acrylic on canvas, 180 × 300 cm.
Courtesy Taipei Fine Arts Museum

17 pioneering work of **Nam June Paik** at London's Tate Modern (travelling afterwards to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art) offers a glimpse of what a global, open, interdisciplinary and genuinely democratic cultural discourse might look like. At a time when the superficial freedoms fostered by fast-access telecommunications networks have come to seem sinister, Paik's demonstration of the capacity of new technologies to advance rather than obstruct progress feels timely. Not that anyone knows what progress is either.

Indeed, the branching and unpredictable ways in which intellectual currents travel
18 around the world are traced by *The Herstory of Abstraction in East Asia* at Taipei Fine Arts

Museum. Telling the stories of the evolution of modernisms through Taiwan's Fifth Moon Group, Japan's Gutai group and Korea's Dansaekhwa movement, the show contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the disparate forms and versions that an idea or set of ideas can, like the basic narrative structure of *The Ramayana*, accommodate. Atsuko Tanaka's *Denkifuku (Electric Dress)* (1956) – more on which later – appears here in the form of the preparatory drawings that will be exhibited alongside works by artists including Yayoi Kusama, Yang Shih-Chih and Ahn Mija. 'The women seem to have taken over,' says the narrator of *Shame* in a quote that could serve as an epigraph to this show, 'they marched in from the peripheries

of the story to demand inclusion of their own tragedies, histories and comedies.'

Language is among the battlegrounds of history, or herstory, or rather her/his/tory/ies.
19 Curated by Sara Raza, *Clapping with Stones: Art and Acts of Resistance* at the Rubin Museum, New York brings together Lida Abdul, Kader Attia, Nadia Kaabi-Linke, Naiza Khan, Kimsooja, Pallavi Paul, Shahpour Pouyan, Ibrahim Quraishi, Nari Ward and Hank Willis Thomas on the principle that their works 'poetically employ non-conformity and resistance as tools to question and upend power in society'. Given that *ArtReview Asia's* attempts to weave these previews together with reference to a variety of verse epics has frayed disastrously, it would draw



20 Genieve Figgis, *Teatime*, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 100 × 140 cm.
© the artist. Courtesy of the artist and Almine Rech, Shanghai



21 Atsuko Tanaka, *Denkifuku (Electric Dress)*, 1956,
the artist wearing her Electric Dress suspended from the
ceiling at the 2nd Gutai Art Exhibition in Ohara Hall, Tokyo.
© Kanayama Akira and Tanaka Atsuko Association

your attention to the use of the word ‘poetically’. Let’s hope that the adverb here connotes an approach that resists fixed (and by extension violent) definitions in favour of describing the world exactly as it is observed, which is to say truthfully. (OK, *ArtReview Asia* also knows that ‘poetically’ might be as potentially meaningless as the seven continents and progress.)

If even poetry is a weapon of the resistance, as the Rubin’s press release implies, you might reasonably ask if there is anything left that is *not* political. One answer might be the paintings
20 of **Genieve Figgis** exhibited at Almine Rech, Shanghai, which in their indebtedness to the boisterous scenes of Watteau seem determined

to escape the crises of twenty-first-century life. But it’s difficult to begrudge these self-consciously literary paintings their eccentric humour and commitment to sensory pleasure, not least because they feel so defiantly at odds with the wider mood. If we accept that a healthy culture should be able to accommodate different perspectives on the world, that should include even those that seem to have turned away from it.

Ultimately, as *ArtReview Asia* is coming to feel about this article, it might be better to rip up the stitching and start again. A retrospective
21 of **Atsuko Tanaka** (see the promise three paragraphs back – *ArtReview Asia* is a deliverer!) at Stockholm’s Moderna Museet shows how

she and her colleagues in the postwar Gutai group constructed a new idea of art from the scraps of a devastated society. The most famous of her works is *Denkifuku (Electric Dress)* (1956), a costume comprising hundreds of coloured lightbulbs that flashed when worn by the artist. This is the point at which *ArtReview Asia* would, had it not comprehensively run out of steam, wrap up its themes of new media, performance and the future in this image of the artist as postmodern seamstress. Instead, it will finish with the short film *Round on Sand* (1968), which shows Tanaka on the beach drawing circles to be washed away by the tide, like a spider building a web in the wind. *Ben Eastham*