

AiRCAST #9

HILMI JOHANDI

NTU CENTRE FOR
CONTEMPORARY
ART SINGAPORE

Anna Lovecchio: This episode features a conversation between two artists who work primarily with painting: our Artist-in-Residence Hilmi Johandi and Singaporean artist and educator Ian Woo. In this peer-to-peer exchange between thoughtful image-makers, Hilmi and Ian ponder over the significance of the studio in Hilmi's practice revealing how walls, and spaces, can shape artistic mindsets and generate different patterns of thought. Throughout the conversation, they address the potential of a local residency to shift the perception of the familiar, open up new ways of seeing and refresh routines and rituals. And they also touch upon the artist-audience relation and other core aspects in Hilmi's practice such as the role of emptiness in the painted surface, the process of reframing, and the inspiration that comes from old films and photographs.

Before they take it away, I will shortly introduce them

Drawing on archival footage, old films, and other imagery produced for mass consumption, the artistic practice of Hilmi Johandi refigures the iconography of Singapore and our relation with images. His body of work is deeply rooted in painting, but it also harnesses other mediums to mobilise symbols and sites where memory and nostalgia, leisure and desire become deeply entangled.

Ian Woo is an artist influenced by modernist abstractions, the phenomenology of perception, and the sound structures of music improvisation. His paintings, painted objects, and drawings are traversed by a sense of gravitational change that makes the image function as a diagram of states of consciousness. The distinct use of frames, axis, and invisible grids is expressive of his "compartments and systems" approach, a methodology the artist has developed in his exploration of the painted space as activated time.



Hilmi Johandi recording AiRCAST, 15 July 2022. Courtesy NTU CCA Singapore.

Ian Woo: Hi Hilmi.

Hilmi Johandi: Hello Ian.

Ian Woo: How are you?

Hilmi Johandi: Not too bad, yourself?

Ian Woo: Good, I just had lunch! Thank you very much for inviting me. I think

it was probably a couple few weeks ago when we were at your studio at NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore that we looked at some of the works and some of the ideas that you were preparing for, as part of your residency experience. Maybe we can start off by having you telling us how this residency started and some ideas that you initially had when you began planning for it?

Hilmi Johandi: Sure, thanks Ian. Without trying to sound too formal, I also want to thank you for agreeing to join me with this conversation. Regarding the residency experience as an artist here, I guess I will start by sharing about how or what I was thinking when I was intending to pursue for this artist residency with NTU CCA Singapore. At the time of the proposal, I was thinking about certain ideas of developing possibilities in forms, particularly about image-making, and how this could potentially be more sculptural and tangible. In my own studio, I usually tend to work with paintings and work with images that are rather flat, like drawings and all that. [With this residency,] I was thinking maybe I can develop something more installation-based, or something that I don't usually do, since it is a space that I'm not used to. As it is an entirely new space, it could be interesting to see how it goes about. I think since the residency started, based on my own experience with a couple of residencies I have had, the proposed idea is always different when I actually experience going through the residency. It turned out to be something that was focused on research, and I was looking back at what I have been working with, ideas, references, sources that I've been looking at, and perhaps try to extract certain ideas or interests that I may have overlooked. For the past two to three years, I have been working on projects back to back... so when there is a potential idea emerging from a series of work or certain experience that I find interesting, I try to put it aside, to then maybe come back to it (later). So I thought this would be a good opportunity to reflect and see how I can revisit some of these ideas.

Ian Woo: So yeah, you use the term "see how", which is quite a local term – "Let's see how things happen." I'm quite interested in how you initially proposed certain ideas about working with a more installation-based format of working with your image and how things changed. Maybe you can tell us a bit about this change that you're talking about. Was it discovered when you were spending time in this location? Because I know that you have a more permanent studio at Goodman [Arts Centre], which is in a more city part of Singapore, while the NTU CCA residency studio is a bit closer to the sea, in the West Coast area. Of course,

for the residency there is also a timeline. Can you maybe share a little bit about this change of environment? And because you are still in Singapore, you travel between the two spaces, or maybe you don't? Maybe you decided not to. Maybe you can comment about that?

Hilmi Johandi: I think one of the things that I have observed from this residency... having to do a residency locally in a place where I work and where I live, it would be very much different from having a residency overseas where I am completely new to. In this case, while locally, it is still in a landscape that I am not entirely familiar with, or where I situate myself going often. I am familiar with Gillman Barracks. I have been to the studios, like for previous artists' Open Studios, but to occupy the space is completely alien. So having said that, occupying the space to work with the means of certain expectations in the residency or within the structure of a residency... what I've learned was how to think about routines as an artist, as a practitioner, and as a person. How do I break routines that I usually go about in my daily occurrences or my daily life?

Even the whole process of commuting is quite an experience for me. As a person, I dislike having to walk the same distance every day. For instance, with my studio at Goodman Arts Centre, I always switch around the different routes to go there. I will take the train, and then stop to a particular train station to take the bus, so that I can alight at a specific bus stop that is across the studio. Or, I would drop at somewhere convenient for me to buy lunch, so that I could just stay in the studio to work and have my lunch. So it is always changing, and my wife would know that I don't like having a set routine. It is a bit different with the Gillman Barracks' NTU CCA studio. Everything is completely new, very refreshing! So when I step into the studio, I don't have a certain structure to go about within the space. I could do things that I usually find it challenging to do in my own studio space, which is a space where I'm more familiar with, where I have stuff on the wall... I tend to get distracted quite easily when I look at the stuff on the wall. But in this case, you have a white-washed space, where there is plenty of potential to think about how to situate images or texts on the wall, like how I will usually treat the space in the studio.

Ian Woo: The idea of arranging...

Hilmi Johandi: Yes, arranging, re-arranging.

Ian Woo: This is also not just to do with the arrangement of images on the wall, but also the arrangement of furniture in the studio, such as where to face in terms of having a table.

Hilmi Johandi: Yeah.

Ian Woo: It is interesting that you talk about this idea of the routine, and that which is not a routine. You talk a little bit about setting yourself up to be surprised and you seem to like the idea. It is almost like you want to experience something new each time you travel to the studio. It is interesting to have this idea of the two studios in this island. The two studios and the way you talked about it almost makes it seem like... you are referring to the studio space as something that is life, as if you need to build a relationship with it. One [of the studios] is more familiar, and yet, you still try to surprise your own visit there. The way you spend the time before arriving at the studio changes, so that when you do arrive, you will be surprised by something and maybe it will help you will be ready for something. The same goes to the new studio that you are currently using in Gillman Barracks. You are using it for a shorter period, and you are trying to form a new relationship with it. It is almost like having two wives.

Hilmi Johandi: Haha, yes, two partners.

Ian Woo: You're trying to...

Hilmi Johandi: ...get to know the other.

Ian Woo: Yes, you're trying to get to know the other person! I use this example, because I think artists always try to find a kind of life in the idea of objects. If you are making a painting, it is almost like you are trying to bring out a kind of life in it.

Hilmi Johandi: I totally agree with that. I think that also informs how I go about making my choices, living life, and thinking about this idea of 'see how'. Yeah, I think it is quite interesting that you brought that up.

Ian Woo: I guess the idea of 'see how' is also connected to your practice and the way you prepare yourself mentally.

Hilmi Johandi: Absolutely.

Ian Woo: I wanted to immediately use the term "drawings on the wall", which you did mention earlier, but there is always a slight hesitation. Because I sometimes see your drawings not just as a kind of traditional format, but a lot of cutting of images from different sources. You work quite closely with digital photography of sceneries and landscapes, which brings me to the idea of that wall at the Gillman Barracks studio space, with images taped up. You taped these images up on the wall, and when I was there, there were a couple of them strewn on the sofa. So there was a sense of that life that I saw when I entered into the studio space to greet you that afternoon. And when I saw the images on the wall, I could tell that the order in the way you stuck some of them was quite random. Maybe some were grouped at one corner while another were grouped at another corner. That seemed to signal to me that there is a kind of movement, obviously, that was happening in the studio with the way you were putting things up. Tell me a little bit about the importance of the wall, and the importance of putting information up. That information could be text, which I didn't really see a lot of... I saw mostly the cut-out images. I think we talked about the arrangement of the studio earlier, right? So this is the arrangement of things on the wall. What is it like for you to put these things up and shift them around? How does that connect back to the idea of the paintings or the installations that you're going to make, and even the video works that you might make? Because I know that in your practice you do have some of these disciplines criss-crossing each other.

Hilmi Johandi: Regarding the wall and how I see the wall in the space... it comes down to the two ways of how I see the walls quite differently in the case of my more permanent studio space in Goodman Arts Centre and NTU CCA studio in Gillman Barracks. So firstly, the studio wall serves as a space for me to put up information. This is a way for me to digest whether they could be resourceful in how an image could be depicted in a work, or perhaps subconsciously influence the way I think and make my decision. Some of these images that I hang on the wall in my permanent studio could be of old explorations that I found interesting, and so I've just stuck them on the wall. Sometimes when I ponder upon them, I will try to see whether I can actualise an idea or make that possibility happen. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't, so it's really the idea of "see how". But I continue putting them on the wall just to



Hilmi Johandi, Residencies OPEN, installation view, 20 August 2022. Courtesy NTU CCA Singapore.

maybe feed my mind with it. If it stays on the wall for a bit too long, I will remove them and then put up more recent images or visuals.

This act of putting up images was developed while creating an installation work that I did in Rumah Lukis, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in 2019. That exhibition was inspired by how I work with the wall in my studio. I thought a way I could further develop this act of image-making on the studio wall was by imposing ideas like a large scale mind map onto the wall itself. With this approach, I thought I could bring it forward into the NTU CCA Singapore residency. And this time the ideas were more concurrent to what I'm currently looking at and the interests that I currently have. Whereas with the show in 2019, in Rumah Lukis, it was ideas from the beginning of my practice, and how they've evolved and developed. So here at the NTU CCA Residency Studio, I'm trying to reconstruct that format in a slightly different angle, such as with ideas and research that I am interested in that would

be relevant to this residency.

Ian Woo: It is nice to hear that you are talking about a project in 2019 that you're using in this current residency. Because, obviously, the idea of history and continuity is important to you.

Hilmi Johandi: That's true.

Ian Woo: This continuity, of finding something new in the past... I think earlier on, at the start of interview, you talked about the idea of building up possibilities. I guess that was why I asked you about the way you use the wall to work with the images. Actually, a very important thing that I noticed when I saw the images on the wall was the cropping of the images. I saw images related to Singapore in the past, probably in the 1970s and 1980s?

Hilmi Johandi: 1980s.

Ian Woo: The ideas were related to postcards and the promotion of the idyllic landscape, a place of fun, a place of leisure, a place for a great holiday. I remember we talked about how there was an image of a girl wearing a kebaya having a dinner or lunch with a man in a suit. That was a very common theme where you would promote the island of Singapore as a place that you can come and have a great time, whether it was breakfast, lunch, dinner, or supper. And of course, when I talk about the cropping, it is also about the idea of emptying. By cropping, I mean, it's also about the idea of emptying parts of these sceneries that you have collected. These images on the wall, if I am not wrong I think they are from the Internet... you would print them out and then you would crop them. I find the cropping interesting because when you place them on the wall, you actually layer them between other sources. So there is always a slight confusion of what is from one location or source, and what the other is from, but they probably belong to one image because of the way you stuck and layer them on the wall. Plus, there were shadows forming on them, so there was this interesting cohesion of images from particular sources, which is then changed because you placed them on the wall. Of course, before that the image has been changed when you printed them out from the Internet. It goes through various transitions of how space is being manipulated. I feel that that's a very important language that you seem to carry through into your paintings, your videos, and also your objects. The idea of an image appearing but sometimes they do not seem to belong in that location. They seem to be like floating or something.

I was thinking of, or rather, you reminded me of, the idea of how artists in the past... when they painted a painting of objects, such as with still life, they would look at the placed object on the table. Do you actually look at the placed objects on the wall? Because they are like your collage or montage? They are a bit like still life.

Hilmi Johandi: Exactly, I think you brought up an important occurrence that has been consistent in my process of image making. This act of cropping, by cutting out certain portion of the image, is pretty much prevalent in my process, like how I extract a certain image out to function in another space. And then the remaining 'negative space', would also be considered as the subject for

future developments. Having said that, sometimes some of these remnants would remain on the wall, and then an accident happens. By accident, I mean, to put another image on top of that remnant, a new world would start to form. That moment of seeing a new world that has potential to be realised... I would try to capture that moment, and aim to bring it into the platform of painting to create my image. In a way, what you said about seeing this montage or these layers of prints as objects, it is a literal way of seeing how I usually build layers, moments, or spaces in my paintings. Because I would look at them, take a photo of the layers, and then maybe manipulate or add that to an existing scene in my painting, or in a painting that I'm currently working on. It is almost like applying or painting the object into that landscape.

Ian Woo: You mentioned the idea of the empty space earlier, when you were commenting about this idea of the collage, montage, and cropping. You said "empty space". I think the empty space is not really 'empty'. I'm just wondering what is this empty space to you? I feel that it is very important. Maybe when we talk about empty space, it means the space that doesn't have representational



Hilmi Johandi, Residencies OPEN, installation view, 20 August 2022. Courtesy NTU CCA Singapore.

content. It is more ambiguous, and you are not sure whether it is a space you can enter or not. You always seem to combine that with the very rich information that you have from the postcards, as well as the vintage and nostalgic advertisements. That seems to be a very important combination.

And I'm thinking now about this work called *Dancing Flowers* [2020]. When I spend a bit more time with it, I see other stuff in it, you know. At a glance, it looks like a group of spectators watching a film. In the work, there are these really large orchids, and I wouldn't say micro, but they are closeups of orchids. Looking at your wall space, I begin to see some connection. I don't quite see the idea of the spectators, they are just black silhouettes in this painting. But on the wall, they could be a real shadow that has been cast by the cropping. There is a kind of subject matter that appears in the painting *Dancing Flowers*, which actually at a glance, you see them as spectators. Yet when you get close to it, they are actually just very abstract, blobby, ghost-like shapes that feels like a group of people. So there is this idea of a mirage in the way you reveal something in the painting, or something in the drawing. I guess the idea of the spectator is something I want to talk about in this time with you, because I am always thinking: who is the protagonist in the painting? The idea of the audience... I mean, there is the audience that sees the work, and there are so many different kinds of audiences. There is obviously a way that you control the work, where the audience is you isn't it? Is there a character you are painting for? Is there an alter ego that you have in yourself for the work that you are making?

Hilmi Johandi: I think it is interesting that you brought up the idea of the spectator. I recently read somewhere where Alex Katz mentioned thinking about five different audiences when he was painting: one, the painter/the artist; two, collectors; three, the institutions; four, the public. And five, I forgot who they are... I think it could be painters? So he tries to think about these five audiences when he's painting. Sometimes when I am painting, I tend to think about this. For me, it is quite relevant because I have to think about the spectator, for one to immerse into the space that I am creating. What is familiar and what is not? What is grey, in the sense of what is ambiguous? I try to create that balance between what is obvious and what is not within that space. Sometimes [that balance is achieved] not just in one painting, sometimes it is in a group of paintings in the same show. Thinking about it, [the balance] is also prevalent not just in my paintings, but in how I create a sense of distance that one will expect or anticipate. You may see it

at a glance, but when you spend a bit more time with it, you realise maybe certain things change. Of course, different people see things differently. Sometimes they see it very differently, to a point that I did not or would not expect myself, which I find very interesting as well. I do find it interesting that whatever I was thinking in that moment of creating the work, whether it is a painting or what have you, it is a record of that moment... of how I was thinking about space and how I made the decision, whether it was clumsily, nervously, or confidently. In a way, I see it as a record of the things I create in different durations of time. But that's more of a long term view, like more of a wide angle perspective. Even in a more macro perspective, where you see it closely, you see painting as layers. That itself is a record of moments of decisions made as well.

So if you were to look at a work individually, that would also have been a sort of record. They're like moments frozen in time within that space, whether they would be mistakes or ideas changed the next day when I'm creating the paintings. With *Dancing Flowers*, of what you thought was the audience, it is my first time seeing that now. Now that you mentioned it, it does look like a silhouette of people in a semi-abstract way! But when I was working on this painting, I was actually thinking about silhouettes of petals and flowers that were more up-close. As if there is not enough light on them, they become silhouettes. So it is just about the frame of one's perception.

Ian Woo: Yeah, it's interesting, this reading that I have of it here. I still sense that idea of the group of people. Now, the more I look at it, they actually remind me of a shadow, like... under a scorching sun that's shining on a distorted shadow. But it is interesting that it actually came from the idea of the petals! I think your analogy of Alex Katz is interesting, because both Alex Katz and you actually both use the image of advertising. Katz worked with the billboard, where the idea of the billboard is a kind of influence for him. I find that connection fascinating, with both of you using the marketing concept of the punch line. It's very important to consider how much of the information you give, there should be just the right amount to seduce the audience. It is a juggling act of working with all kinds of audience, including yourself. It makes me think about the idea of the observer. As an artist, the observer is also yourself. The observer is also the audience. And there are many kinds of audiences! Although you cannot control the audience, you can control what you want some of us to see.



Hilmi Johandi, *Dancing Flowers*, oil on linen, 2020. Courtesy the artist..

Hilmi Johandi: Also, to add on to your question earlier regarding the audience and the spectator, on whether I have myself embody another person when I am painting or there is an alter ego that I pretend to be, but... it is not really. I think each time I am in the process of image making, I try to dive deep into thinking or dealing with the subconscious. How I, as a person with a certain ideology that I carry with me through the experiences and things that I've learned, and the decisions that were made in the process of this painting, or in process of image-making, is evident through the act of making. What I want the audience to perceive, to a certain degree, is based on that subconsciousness of what it could potentially be when it is presented to the audience and viewer.

Ian Woo: We talked a little bit about filmmaking earlier on and about the idea of the director and the filmmaker, that is different from the actors and actresses. This idea reminds me about that conversation. The idea of Katz and yourself, thinking about all these types of audiences, including the collectors, almost sounds like a bad thing. It almost sounds like you are trying to please everyone. But I understand what you're trying to say, and I know what Katz is driving at. It's more about being aware of how much you can let the audience know an image, without being able to control it. Something that has a lot of information, or something that doesn't have that much information. Because if there is too much information, then you lose everyone. So I think the parts where you have ambiguity, when you have pauses, they are very important in the image. That pause to me, goes back to the idea of the empty spaces evolving in the work. With that, maybe I want to talk about the importance of the framing device, which you talked a bit about: you used the term "re-framing". I talked about cinema, and I think in your work, the idea of reframing also makes me think about movement and time. Because if an image has three cropped frames, then I feel that you are trying to suggest that there is a kind of movement at stake... at stake in the sense that it is in the midst of transition.

Hilmi Johandi: There are various interpretation of frames in my work. One is opening up spaces that lead to a certain kind of possibility. Another way of approaching this framing is thinking about the process of image making itself, in this case moving images. In the beginning when I started my practice as an artist, I was looking a lot at films, the process of or the language of film, the notion of frames in moving images, and how that can be incorporated into painting. In a way, I had created a certain kind of fusion between the two, where the painting takes adaptations from film language, while the moving image take adaptations from painting. So what was presented was a series of paintings that had a multiplication of spaces... that is how I see reframing images from a film to re-narrate into my own discourse.

And for the moving image itself, it was simply a documentation of painting to suggest a certain kind of illusion, which is merely a movement of someone singing or someone smoking. But it was not merely the illusion of the subject matter. Let's say, with someone singing or smoking, through the act of painting – it is a painting stop motion – but it also shows a documentation of how paint reacts on the surface and how colour turns to mud, like becoming muddier colours, and so on and so forth. Whereas, the painting itself, it has multiplications

of frames. So, the movement, the narrative, is a bit more endless. It's continuously developing as one looks into the painting. That approach of framing has been quite consistent to how I think about images and how I put them together to look into opening up possibilities in a space within the space.

Ian Woo: I want to maybe end this talk with you by diving a bit more into the discipline of painting, which is a source that you always use whether you're making installations or videos. It always comes back to the way we think about paintings or the memory of it. Earlier on, we did talk about where painting used to be baggage, and maybe now, the baggage is lighter? Painting is also a process that is different in terms of speed; from the currency of the way we look at images today, to even if you look at the way art is being made with the computer. At the same time, you use the computer quite effectively to source for images as a process, to generate ideas, and then you paint later at the end. I find this interesting because there are two opposing and contradictory speeds happening, and the body changes when you are making a painting. Do you actually complete the painting within a day?

Hilmi Johandi: No. Usually, in the process of painting, there are a variety of moments, whether it's good or bad. On average, it probably takes a week to a month to finish depending on the size and subject matter. In the process of painting, I often try to understand the forms and try to get to know them better. In one of these many moments, they can be very assuring so I try to look into this familiar experience in the painting. When I say familiar, it is not necessarily that every painting is the same, but there is a certain kind of confidence or assurance when I know how it's going to be, but I still leave it open. When I leave it open, maybe certain gestures or certain attempts may open up to more possibilities, but I also have to be careful not to open too much. I think there is a certain kind of balance between the intentions that I hope I would see, and also what the painting hopes to be. There is always this dilemma. I was assured that this is how it's going to look like, and then after a few moments with it, it evolves into something else. When it evolves into something else, I have to spend some time to get to know it a bit more. It's a bit like in the beginning [of this conversation] when we were talking about the studio wall, it is quite similar like how we see it as a person.

Ian Woo: You use a couple of terms here about looking, and I think that is so important. Because painting is the dynamics of looking while applying substance

and pigment on to a surface. Some people say that painting is magical because you can put a mark and suddenly you see an object. It can be solid, it can be empty, but you will see a presence. So there is this thing that happens a lot with painters. I guess the idea of looking and deciding what remains, or shifting it, is a very inviting process for painters. Of course, when you do too much of it, it can go wrong. This goes back to the idea of what you want from the work. I think you are referring to what you want, there's always something that you want to have in the work. And I am reminded of the colours that you use in your work. There are framing devices and subject matters that you work with, but also in the way you paint the subject matter to describe it. Painting is a kind of visual description with the apparatus, whether you're using a brush... I think you use brushes most of the time, unless I'm missing out something. Do you use a scraper? I don't really see much of that.

Hilmi Johandi: Not really, mostly brush.

Ian Woo: It is a touch of the brush! There is this thing about how the brush and the liquid of paint can form shapes that depict transparency, and that connects with the human body and the flesh. There is something concrete, solid, not quite water reflection, which appears in your work quite a bit. I am talking about the [*Landscapes & Paradise: Poolscales*] series, where there is also a painting with a cocktail. I feel that you are familiar in handling these visual descriptions, but at the same time, you combine that with the idea of the arrangement: what needs to be there, what needs to be removed. It seems like there is a lot of waiting time in between, but I don't see that much layering your work. So I guess it feels like you are painting in parts. It is like parts appear, and you just have to wait until you find the next thing or the right thing to pursue. What is that waiting time in terms of the importance of finding the right colour that you're looking for? The shape? The scale of the thing? Or maybe something is not right and needs to be readjusted?

Hilmi Johandi: For me, the process of using colour has been very spontaneous. It is merely based on the reference that I look at. Usually I would pick a few colours and work within the means of that palette. Of course, I will add a few other colours to add on, maybe to create some contrast or to deal with the usual aesthetic concerns. With that, the process of applying colour is in the moment of confronting and dealing with a painting. But the moments that we have been talking about and what you have brought up, are actually a lot of time staring at it. You also brought up this point of digital intervention earlier in this conversation.

Usually at the end of the day, with the work that I am working on, whether they are in that moment of a work in progress, or maybe a work that I've stopped to put aside, I will usually document them using my iPhone. And then on my way back, I would just stare at it. Of course, I also acknowledge the fact that looking at the painting on a digital screen is very different from looking at a painting in person. But I acknowledge this difference, and I find it very important to ponder, continuously look at this painting, whether I am looking at it consciously or subconsciously. When I say subconsciously, maybe I will just tweak or squint my eye to see something that I don't usually see. On a serious note, when I come back to the studio the next day, the painting will look very different from what it looked like on the phone. When the painting is photographed on the phone, it compresses the image. I think the compression is very important, and it is quite interesting to see it from a distance. So when I come back to it the next day, maybe I had certain intentions that I had hoped for, but when I apply it on the surface, it doesn't work out. I'm not feeling it. But I still remember this point that you brought up a long time ago, sometimes when a painting is not in that moment, it can still be a moment that will be relevant.

Ian Woo: So it depends on whether you want to take advantage of that mistake?

Hilmi Johandi: Correct. Sometimes I will carve or sculpt the form that may no longer be apparent, into something else that is useful, or make apparent that I take reference from another postcard or subject matter. For instance, an accidental mark may turn into an orchid or something like that.

Ian Woo: Yeah, this reminded me about the way you talked about working with the camera. To take a picture so that you can go back and look at it... it's like a kind of anxiousness. I mean, I do that as well and it's great because technology now allows you to just snap things. Then you look at it. Sometimes there is an edit device that allows you to put in a colour or shade that you think that you might put on the actual painting the next day. And you'd decide to add to it, but the next day you'd say: "No, I'm not going to do that." Sometimes you will do it, and it works, but sometimes, it does not work. You also reminded me of the idea of going back to the studio and the painting has not changed, but you've changed. The human being changes, so you react differently. I think the idea of you working sparingly to a point where you built up to that moment, which takes



Hilmi Johandi, *Landscapes & Paradise IV (Park View)*, oil on linen, 2019. Courtesy the artist..

two or three weeks, reminds me of a talk that was given by Ian McKeever. He is an abstract painter who makes very large-scale abstract paintings and he takes a long time to make them. Sometimes he starts making them and then he will just put them away for a long time. It's not complete. He makes them in parts and he'll just put them away. He says that it is so important to just forget about the image for a while, then bring it up again later on. The reason why he does that has to do with the idea of building up the relationship with the art work. When you try to finish the work too quickly, in which he uses the term "heating up the painting", I found this phrase very interesting...

Hilmi Johandi: Interesting. It feels "heated".

Ian Woo: It is like you are artificially engaging the time to complete itself, so that was quite interesting. Going back to the idea of colour, which I think once we are done, this probably will end the talk. I realised, while looking at the palette, even when you're applying the reds to create that dynamism, there is a kind of softness to it. Maybe it is in the recent works, where maybe there is a change... which I think there is. I think when you first started, in the earlier works which were more cinema-based, there was a lot more blacks. They were darker, punchy and with more saturation. Shall we use that term saturation? But now, there isn't much saturation. Things are softer and they look almost like they are going to melt or fade away. Maybe that connects to this idea of memory? There is a kind of filter or lens that when you put it on, it creates this distance. That is the colour that I see in the recent works that you have been making.

Hilmi Johandi: In my response to that, to be honest, I myself am not so sure. Perhaps, it could be that I enjoy the consistency. It is currently a bit more washed out. I can play with layers, in terms of colour, and how it potentially looks like after I apply more colours of transparent glazes.

Ian Woo: Oh, so there's a glazing?

Hilmi Johandi: Yes! It could also be the images themselves that I work with. Because there is a certain kind of desaturation in these images, despite images from this period being in colour. Maybe it could be my printer? I value quite critically in my work so as to take advantage of aesthetic concerns. Even the

slightest dark mid-tone brushstroke can give an implication of something that may be depicted as a particular object. Let's say there is a wall, and then if I do a diagonal and a horizontal brushstroke, it looks like a back drop. I think these are some interesting observations I have thought about in my series of paintings from the past, where the images were more black and white. How I can make it stand out is by playing with more values, to create certain intentions that I might have had back then, which is to make it look more punchy while creating a certain distance within the composition.

Ian Woo: You used the term desaturation which I think is a good term. I think in the beginning of the interview, you talked about how you are searching for a new world. Perhaps, this desaturation is currently this world that you are talking about. To me, it is akin to a kind of dream world. Obviously, you are working with nostalgia that is combined with the current hectic and nervous climate that we are in, dealing with speed. Perhaps your desaturation is a way of negating your works and bringing us into this space of dreams. Thank you very much Hilmi for your time.

Hilmi Johandi: Thank you Ian! It's been such a pleasure to have you join us for this podcast.

Ian Woo: The pleasure is mine.

Anna Lovecchio: You listened to AiRCast, a podcast of NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, a national research of Nanyang Technological University. To find out more about our programmes, visit our website at www.ntu.ccasingapore.org, you can sign up to our newsletter, or follow us on your favourite social media platforms. And of course, if you'd like to hear the voices and thoughts of our other Artists-in-Residence, do subscribe to this podcast.

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This episode featured artist-in-residence Hilmi Johandi in conversation with artist Ian Woo.

I am Anna Lovecchio, the editor of this podcast.
The Programme Manager is Nadia Amalina.
The Audio Engineer, Ashwin Menon.

The intro and the outro were composed by previous Artist-in-Residence Yuen Chee Wai with field recordings of our non-human neighbours in the beautiful forest around us.

This episode was recorded on 15 July 2022.
Thank you for listening.



Hilmi Johandi and Ian Woo recording AiRCAST, 15 July 2022. Courtesy NTU CCA Singapore.