

Simryn Gill
HUGGING
THE
SHORE
27 March – 14 June 2015

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NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

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NTU CENTRE FOR
CONTEMPORARY
ART SINGAPORE

Simryn Gill HUGGING THE SHORE

Simryn Gill's first major solo exhibition in Southeast Asia brings together a series of works that reveal different methodologies, ways of looking and thinking underlying her artistic process.

Gill's practice carries a poetic attitude towards the world, combined with philosophical reflection and scientific methodology. Such an approach does not situate itself within the realm of the interdisciplinary, but rather highlights that the complexity of our world can only be unpacked from various angles and subjectivities. It also suggests that to reach the core of things, to capture inwardness from outside we need to accommodate many ways of seeing and being.

With the energy of a collector, Gill gathers and accumulates objects that are further organised and classified into subjective taxonomies and open-ended systems of knowledge. This process of working constitutes the basis of her many object installations and it is further extended into the realm of photography. What is particular about the three photographic series *Standing Still*, *Dalam*, and *May 2006*, presented in the show is that they are not records or documents of an existing environment. Rather, the photographs are conceived as a gathering of objects, structures and moments in time that are bestowed with a strong material presence. They are all a result of a durational process, of hours of looking, wandering, and collecting. The materiality of the photographic work does not only carry an ontological dimension, but it also derives from the density of the work itself, which amounts to hundreds and hundreds of photographs. "When does one have enough? For what ... to represent an idea? Does a big group tell you more or less? Does it tell you more truthfully?" asks the artist. This exploration is continued by *Like Leaves*, Gill's new work made for the exhibition consisting of hundreds of leaves from a stand of *jambu laut* trees, and cut into the square shape of much of her photography prompting the question: "Do many leaves show us the whole tree?".

The title of this exhibition, *Hugging the Shore* comes from the title of John Updike's collection of essays and reviews - an allusion, according to the author, to the critic who stays close to the shore and, unlike the writer of fiction or poetry, does not venture far out to sea. The metaphor of *Hugging the Shore* could be conceived as a proposition for ways of seeing and approaching the world that traverses throughout Simryn Gill's large photographic works as well as her collections of objects, and here, her geometrically trimmed leaves. It is an act of stepping back, shifting our eyes from the fragment to the whole. An act that allows us to take a longer view, apprehend the whole thing and let ourselves be absorbed into the overall picture.

The rigorous display of these photographs and pinned leaves, be it in vertical or horizontal columns creates an oscillation between the act of looking and reading. Instigating a continuous process of associations and permutations, the work is close to a writing process. It produces a specific sensibility that lingers with us after experiencing Gill's work. A sensibility towards exploring the world around us in such a way that the act of looking, reading and creating overlap; the banal turns into something extraordinary and time becomes material.

Ute Meta Bauer & Anca Rujoiu (Curators, *Hugging the Shore*)

Simryn Gill was born in Singapore and she lives in Port Dickson, Malaysia and Sydney, Australia. She employs a range of media and methods, including photographs, texts, publications, collections, drawings. Her work has been seen in several solo and group exhibitions including at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2014); the Australian Pavilion, 55th Venice Biennale; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2013); dOCUMENTA 13, Kassel (2012); 12th Istanbul Biennale, (2011); Australian Centre for Photography, Melbourne (2009); Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney (2008), documenta 12, Kassel (2007).

STANDING STILL

2000–2003

116 C-type photographs,
31.5cm x 31.5cm

Capturing a large number of abandoned buildings across Malaysia, *Standing Still* can be conceived as an exploration of landscape as a palimpsest, a layering of different historical moments in which older aspirations co-exist with contemporary experiences. Building projects abandoned before completion in the wake of the financial crisis that hit the Asia-Pacific region in the late '90s led the artist "to look around and see all the other layers of previously abandoned buildings, both lived and un-lived, old and new, which are also present in that landscape, and which perhaps we have stopped seeing" (Simryn Gill). Structures that could have become shopping malls, apartment towers, hotels and residential houses blend in the landscape with older derelict buildings: architectural remains of mansions, shops, modest kampong houses ranging from the recent past to colonial times and the wartime Japanese occupation. The artist continued this exploration in *Station Hotel* (2006) and *My own private Angkor* (2007-08).

The composition of each photograph is always centred, with a large depth of field that translates into an act of stepping back, taking distance from the object. Abandoned by people, the buildings are embraced by tropical plants offering to the whole series a vivid palette of colours heightened by the intense light of the tropical sun.



DALAM

2001

260 C-type photographs,
23.9cm x 23.9cm

Dalam (the term translates as 'deep' or 'inside' in Malay) comprises 260 photographs of living rooms taken across Peninsular Malaysia over a three-month period. Unfolding in full, strong colours, the series offers a glimpse into the most public space of the house, but one in which one still has to seek consent to enter. In this sense, *Dalam* addresses the relation between host and guest, the conventions and boundaries that define the delicate realms of hospitality and privacy.

These living rooms may be perceived as portrayals of their inhabitants, where objects and pieces of furniture preserve personal stories, but also convey desires and aspirations. The focus on a subjective collection of objects resonates with other works by Simryn Gill, such as *Garland* (1993-2008) which is a collection of man-made debris picked up by the artist from the beaches of the Straits of Malacca.

NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore

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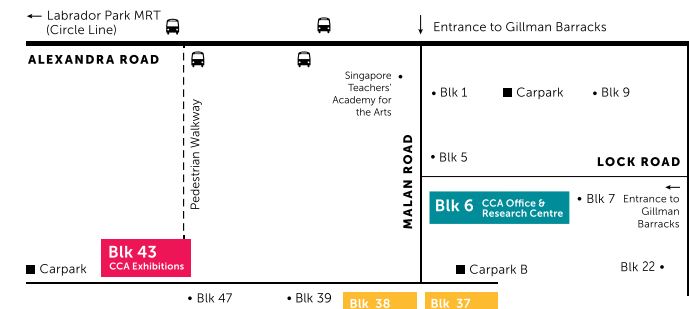
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LOCATED AT
GILLMAN BARRACKS

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MAY 2006

2006

817 gelatine silver photographs from 30 rolls of discontinued film, used to photograph the artist's immediate neighbourhood in Sydney every day of the month in which it expired. 12.7cm x 17.8cm

The photographic series, *May 2006*, is best described by Simryn Gill as the process of "understanding the place as a verb rather than as a noun, which exists in our doings: walking, talking, living". This epic body of work consists of 800 photographs that traces the artist's one-month journey on foot in her neighbourhood of Marrickville in Sydney where she had lived for over a decade. Gill used 30 rolls of a discontinued black-and-white film in the month which the film stock expired. As the curator Jessica Morgan pointed out *May 2006* "suggest(s) a memento mori to both the soon to be redundant film stock and to the neighbourhood in which she lives that was itself undergoing rapid change". The photographs not only present the viewer an archive of the everyday, but propose a new mode of looking at, and engaging with, our surroundings.



OVERLAP TO JOIN

PART TWO

OVERLAP TO JOIN

PART TWO

LIKE LEAVES

2015

480 leaves from *Syzygium Grandis*,
6cm x 6cm



The leaves in the exhibition are the same as those presented as photographs in the artist's book, *Jambu Sea, Jambu Air* (2013). Each page of the book is a close-up of a leaf from a single botanical species, cropped into a square by the lens of the camera. Here, the leaves are shown cut into squares and pinned. As opposed to being photographs, "they are actually themselves," as Simryn Gill herself puts it, "they do not stop time on their surface, but will fade and shrivel, so that they do exactly the opposite of the photos". All the leaves come from the same species of tree, *Syzygium Grandis*, commonly known as the sea apple or *jambu laut* and found throughout coastal areas in various parts of Southeast Asia.

All works and images courtesy of Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai; Tracy Williams Ltd, New York; Utopia Art Sydney.

The artist would like to thank Michael Janssen, Christopher Hodges, Bryan Hooper, Kuna Rajah Naidu.

HUGGING THE SHORE PUBLIC PROGRAMME

The public programme is conceived as an extension of the exhibition itself. Comprising a series of conversations and Exhibition (de)Tours, the public programme brings together different approaches and points of view towards the artist's work.

Otherwise stated, all programmes take place at NTU CCA Singapore, Block 43 Malan Road, Gillman Barracks.

THURSDAY, 2 APRIL 2015*
7.00PM – 8.30PM
Public Talk: **Simryn Gill** in conversation with **T.K. Sabapathy**, Art Historian, Curator and Critic

*This talk takes place at *School of the Arts Singapore* (SOTA) and is part of the Louis Vuitton – SOTA Arts Excellence Programme.

FRIDAY, 10 APRIL 2015
7.30PM – 9.00PM
Public Talk: **Lee Weng Choy**, Art Critic in conversation with **Simryn Gill**

FRIDAY, 24 APRIL 2015
7.30PM – 9.00PM
Exhibition (de)Tour: **Lilian Chee**, Writer, Theorist and Designer

SATURDAY, 6 JUNE 2015*
4.00PM – 6.00PM
Exhibition (de)Tour: **Lai Chee Kien**, Architect

*This Exhibition (de)Tour will take place off-site.

For updates on the public programme, check the NTU CCA Singapore website and Facebook page.



CONTRIBUTORS

T.K. Sabapathy is an art historian, curator and critic. Sabapathy's areas of research include art and artists in Southeast Asia. Sabapathy is currently a lecturer in the history of art in the Department of Architecture at the National University of Singapore. He is also a lecturer in the history of Southeast Asian Art at the School of Art, Design & Media at the Nanyang Technological University, and a Research Fellow at NTU CCA Singapore.

Lee Weng Choy is the president of the Singapore Section of the International Association of Art Critics; he was a former artistic co-director of The Substation from 2000 to 2009. He has collaborated with NTU CCA Singapore on various projects. Lee has published widely on contemporary art, including contributions to the collections, *Theory in Contemporary Art* since 1985, and *Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Art*.

Lilian Chee is an Assistant Professor at the National University of Singapore. Her recent work includes *Asian Cinema and the Use of Space: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Routledge, 2015), *Conserving Domesticity* (ORO, 2012), and the architectural film *03-FLATS* (NUS and 13 Little Pictures, 2014). She is on the editorial boards of *The Journal of Architecture* and *Singapore Architect*, and is a series editor for *Ashgate*.

Lai Chee Kien researches on histories of art, architecture, settlements, urbanism, and landscapes in Southeast Asia. His publications include *A Brief History of Malayan Art* (1999), *Building Merdeka: Independence Architecture in Kuala Lumpur, 1957-1966* (2007) and *Cords to Histories* (2013). He is also a registered architect in Singapore.

PLACE. LABOUR. CAPITAL.

PLACE.LABOUR.CAPITAL. is NTU CCA Singapore's overarching year long framework that will intertwine our platforms: exhibitions, residencies, research & education. This open-ended research and curatorial programme will address the complexities of a world in flux and the dynamic and inseparable relation between the local and the global. The notion of place as a locale often fades into the background shadowed by the focus on the 'larger picture'. How does labour, routes of migration, and flows of glob al capital impact upon smaller scale? Singapore – the world's second largest trading port and an economic epicentre of Southeast Asia serves as point of departure and 'locale' to examine the entanglement between place, labour, and capital.

PLACE.LABOUR.CAPITAL. is translated spatially through a new configuration of the exhibition area designed by **Fareed Armaly**. From *The Exhibition Hall*, a new space emerges, allowing an interplay of dialogues across NTU CCA Singapore's three platforms – exhibitions, residencies, research & education. This space is divided into two areas: *The Lab* will introduce various stages of research and *The Single Screen* will be dedicated to moving image.

Fareed Armaly is an artist, curator and author who lives and works in the United States and Germany. Since the late 1980s, his artistic practice expresses a research-driven methodology that combines guidelines from various institutional roles and fields of enquiry. Through different formats, his projects spatially manifest an interplay between politics of identity, representation and culture.

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Opened in October 2013, NTU CCA Singapore is a national research centre of Nanyang Technological University. Developed with support from the Singapore Economic Development Board, NTU CCA Singapore is located in Gillman Barracks alongside a cluster of international galleries. Led by Founding Director, Professor Ute Meta Bauer, NTU CCA Singapore takes a holistic approach towards art and culture, intertwining its three platforms: exhibitions, residencies, research & education.

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