

CCA

CENTRE for
CONTEMPORARY
ART

A national research centre of Nanyang Technological University



Trinh T. Minh-ha

/ Surname Viet Given Name Nam

Zarina Bhimji

/ Yellow Patch

Fiona Tan

/ Disorient

18.01–30.03.2014

Paradise lost

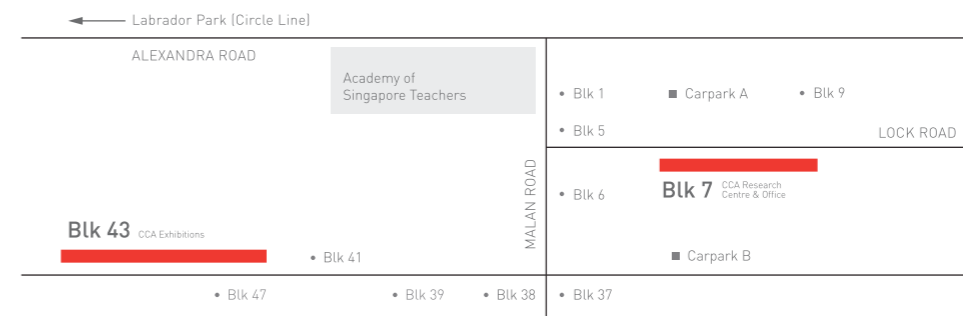
CCA - NTU Centre for Contemporary Art, Singapore

The Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA) is a national research centre of Nanyang Technological University, with support from the Economic Development Board, Singapore. Located in Gillman Barracks alongside a cluster of international galleries, the CCA takes a holistic approach towards art and culture, intertwining its various platforms: exhibitions, public programmes, research and residencies.



LOCATION

CCA – NTU Centre for Contemporary Art
Block 43, Malan Road, Gillman Barracks, Singapore 109443



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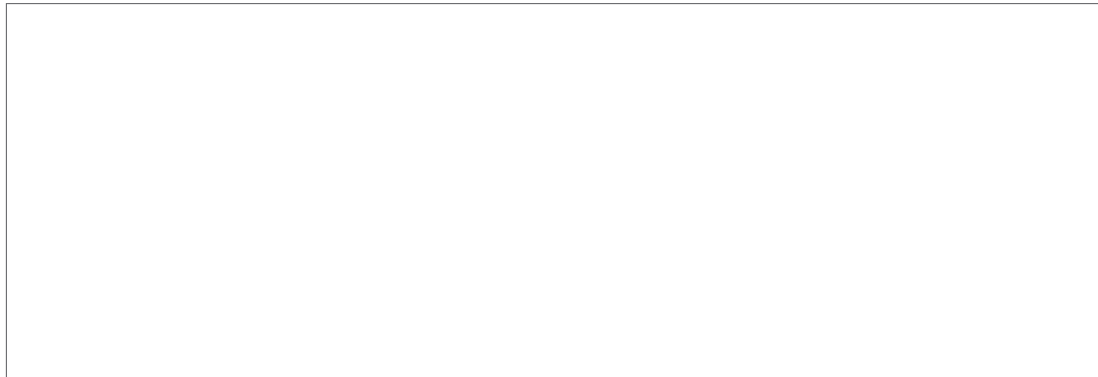
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MEDIA PARTNER
KALEIDOSCOPE

COVER

BACK



Paradise lost is the inaugural exhibition of the newly established Centre for Contemporary Art in Singapore. Conceived as a constellation of three artistic productions that together explore narratives of travel and migration, place and displacement, the personal intertwined with colonial history, *Paradise Lost* introduces an imaginary Asia — Asia as a space of projections and desires stemming from an experience of dislocation and asynchronicity. The exhibition juxtaposes trans-generational perspectives, bringing together three major installations of moving image: *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* by Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Yellow Patch* by Zarina Bhimji and *Disorient* by Fiona Tan. While all three artists are of Asian descent, their education and artistic practice unfolded in Europe and the U.S., and gained international exposure from there. This is the first time these works are shown in Asia in an exhibition context.

“What is my background and to which culture do I belong?” — inevitably, the subject confronted with the experience of migration and diasporic existence is confronted by such an ongoing question. This underlying interrogation is addressed in all the works through theoretically and formally complex approaches. Wrapped up in allegory and fiction, each work maintains a tight connection with the artists’ personal experiences of navigating cultural identity and homeland, migration and crossing borders. As much as the artists engage with political content, what is arguably more important is that the political is embedded in the work itself — challenging and undermining mainstream languages and ideologies, opening up fields of multiple, often conflicting narratives, and developing visual languages resistant to dogmatic interpretations. While the exhibited works bring forward different operating methodologies, it is worth noting that they share an interest in the exploration of archives — from the inclusion of archival footage in Trinh T.’s and Tan’s works, to the documentation of the derelict administrative buildings, files reminiscent of British colonial bureaucracy, in Bhimji’s film.

Paradise Lost complements current explorations on the region, bringing to the fore a perspective of Asia and its colonial history as perceived from near and afar. The exhibition investigates fictions of Asia by complicating them with more fictionalities. While Trinh T. articulates a cinematic dialectic, Bhimji and Tan work through an immersive visual language. In a conversation with the curator Saskia Bos, Tan pleads for a stronger presence of visual language in critical artistic practices: “One of the things that bothered me about the whole multicultural/post-colonial discussion in art is that it became a discussion only about politics and political positions, particularly during the last decade of the last century. The visual side of things was too often neglected. Images — and as an artist I consider myself an image-maker — their role, their importance, their ambiguities seemed to play too minor a role. It is easier to write and talk about ideas than it is to talk and write about images.”¹

Inspired by Marco Polo’s travels, Fiona Tan’s *Disorient* was conceived for the Dutch Pavilion at the *Venice Biennale*, 2009 commissioned and curated by Saskia Bos. This project questions stereotypical representations of the East as constructed by Western historical narratives and orientalist imaginations. The work disorients our patterns of looking by contrasting hoards of exotic and aesthetically loaded objects with incongruous images of violence, pollution and poverty making any process of schematisation and categorisation impossible. A montage of news footage and archive materials is juxtaposed with a documentation of an encompassing installation of artefacts and goods filmed in the Dutch Pavilion in Venice itself. Tan literally stages the Orient, reinforcing how the process of representation is itself theatrical.²

In *Yellow Patch* (2011), Zarina Bhimji traces her father’s migration from India to East Africa, revisiting an array of

Paradise lost



buildings and landscapes in Bombay and Gujarat through a disembodied, almost ghostly viewing experience that isolates images from any contextual information. Refraining from facts and references, Bhimji allows stories to manifest in the physical structures of abandoned buildings — archeological palimpsests that evoke a phantomatic presence, the spectre of a land of emotion. As Walter Benjamin noted, ruins are the emblematic expressions of allegory as manhood stories are reabsorbed into the landscape reminding us of the irreversible process of decay and material vanishing and subsistence of past.³

In *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989), Trinh T. Minh-ha questions the norms of representation and filmic documentation, as she examines the lives of women in Vietnam and the U.S. through themes of dislocation, exile and resistance. Juxtaposing archival footage, proverbs and poetry, voice-over narrations, and written text, the film articulates the complex diversity of the lives and roles of Vietnamese women within culture, and confronts certain essentialising Western paradigms. A filmmaker, composer, anthropologist and post-colonial theorist, Trinh T. has advocated in her art and writings for a continual readjustment of our understandings of what is “other” and “otherness”.

Paradise Lost is part of an inclusive institution programme that intertwines academic research with a curatorial programme and residencies. The exhibition will serve as a catalyst for a long-term collaborative research project that will investigate the asynchronisities of diasporic spaces connected to the political and economical histories of migration along old and new trade routes.

A series of talks, reading groups and workshops will further explore the conceptual framework of the exhibition, including keynote presentations by Sarat Maharaj (Professor of Visual Art and Knowledge Systems, Lund

University, and Malmo Art Academies, Sweden) and Ann Demeester (currently director de Appel Arts Centre, Netherlands).

Paradise Lost is curated by Ute Meta Bauer (CCA Founding Director) and Anca Rujoiu (CCA Curator, Exhibitions)

PROJECT MANAGER / Khim Ong

EXHIBITION ASSISTANT / Aparna Nambiar

GRAPHIC DESIGN / Factory 1611

MEDIA PARTNER / Kaleidoscope

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS / Thanks to the Artists’ assistants, Sue MacDiarmid and Ivo van Stiphout, and to Lee Weng Choy, CCA Deputy Director and Senior Curator (Designate)

1. Tan, Fiona (2009) *Disorient* / [exhibition curated by Saskia Bos and organised by Mondriaan Foundation; catalogue concept Gabriele Franziska Götz and Fiona Tan]. Heidelberg: Kehrer, p. 24
2. Said, Edward (1977) *Orientalism*. London: Penguin
3. Walter Benjamin quoted in Craig Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism”. *October*, Vol. 12, [Spring, 1980], pp. 67-86

Zarina Bhimji

Born in 1963 in Mbarara, Uganda. Lives and works in London.

Zarina Bhimji is an artist whose work spans a range of media – from installations to photography, from film to sound. “Landscapes and buildings haunted by their layered histories are the protagonists in British artist Zarina Bhimji’s photographs and large-scale film installations with India and East Africa the repeat location for her foray into the archaeology of place. Sound and picture combine to transform image into metaphor, politics into poetry.” Often in her work, Bhimji engages with her family story. Of Indian descent, born in Uganda, Bhimji and her family left the country in the wake of Idi Amin’s expulsion of the South Asian community. Bringing aesthetic to the fore, Bhimji’s approach to colonial history is defined by a strong visual language that resists simplifications and predictable interpretations of the work.

Bhimji’s work has been shown extensively both in the UK and abroad and her solo shows include de Appel Arts Centre (2012-2013), Whitechapel Gallery, London (2012); The New Gallery, Walsall (2012), Kunstmuseum Bern, Bern (2012), Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (2009), Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago (2009). Bhimji’s work has also been shown at *He Disappeared Into Complete Silence*, De Hallen Museum, Haarlem (2011), *ARS11 – Africa in Kouvola*, Kouvola (2011), *Göteborg International Biennial*, Göteborg (2011); *29th Bienal de São Paulo*, São Paulo (2010), *Capturing Time*, Kadist Art Foundation, Paris (2009), *Zones of Contact, Biennale of Sydney* (2006). Her first film, *Out of Blue* was commissioned, produced by and presented in 2002 at *documenta 11*, Kassel. Zarina Bhimji was nominated for the Turner Prize in 2007, received a DAAD award in 2002 and was a recipient of the Paul Hamlyn Visual Arts Award in 1999.

Yellow Patch (2011)

Zarina Bhimji’s latest film installation *Yellow Patch*, shot on 35mm, premiered simultaneously in 2012 at the Whitechapel Gallery in London and The New Art Gallery in Walsall. Taking as its starting point the history and migration between India and Africa, *Yellow Patch* is filmed in four main locations across the Indian sub-continent: the old Victorian offices in the port trust of Bombay, the desert landscape of the Rann of Kutch, the Indian Ocean near the port of Mandvi and various houses and structures in western Gujarat. The locations loosely reference Bhimji’s father’s story of migration in colonial times. The film is the result of an extensive and in-depth research conducted by the artist, yet it disconnects image from background information. As with her other works, *Yellow Patch* relinquishes historical references and factual presentations in favour of the quality of spaces, materiality of specific locations, micro details and the light of the distant interiors. Focusing on derelict buildings, abandoned landscapes, archives and spaces of bureaucracy, the film explores how history manifests itself and leave its traces in urban structures. In correlation with the moving



images, the layered soundtrack consisting of waves, birdsongs, typewriters and voices produce feelings of dread, loss, passion, love and tenderness.

A Zarina Bhimji film

DEVELOPMENT / Pinky Ghundale, Artangel, Doro Globus, Manick Govinda, Artsadmin and Andrew Love

PRODUCTION MANAGER / Dinesh Shenoy assisted by Vivekanand Ahuja

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY / Nina Kellgren

SOUND RECORDISTS / Zarina Bhimji, Assisted by K S SIVADAS, Steve Felton

CAMERA / N Ragunathan, Babu, Santosh D Zagade

CAMERA ASSISTANT / Barnaby Crocker

EDITOR / Paul Carlin

COMPOSING, RECORDING, MIXING / Craig Pruess

SOUND DESIGNED BY / Craig Pruess & Zarina Bhimji

COLOURIST / Edwin Metternich

POST PRODUCER / Andrew McIntock

ONLINE / Tim Greenwood

VOCALS / Begum Abida Parveen, courtesy of Times Music India, Unyago by Bi Kidude, courtesy of RetroAfric

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER / Artsadmin

GENEROUSLY SUPPORTED BY / Outset Contemporary Art Fund, Arts Council England, de Appel Arts Centre, The New Art Gallery Walsall, Framestore

INDIVIDUAL DONORS / Shiraz Boghani, Salima Bhatia, Nazmin Kassam, Caroline Miller, Lupe Sanchez, Shashi Sen, Lew Hodges, Jaf Shah

SPECIAL THANKS TO / Andrew Love

Courtesy the artist

Fiona Tan

Born in 1966 in Pekanbaru, Indonesia. Lives and works in Amsterdam.

Fiona Tan is an artist engaging with the medium of photography and film in works ranging from photographs to drawings, from digital installations to theatrically scaled projections. Tan’s evocative works are powerful investigations of identity and belonging in a world shaped by global culture. Much of her work expresses a long-standing interest in the documentary image, both personal and public, and the role of memory, time and place in the construction of identity. The artist’s explorations on issues of post-colonialism and displacement originate in her own biography straddling East and West. Born in Indonesia, to a Chinese-Indonesian father and an Australian mother, she was raised in Australia and moved to the Netherlands in her late teens where she studied at Rijksakademie, Amsterdam. Still, her work often suggests that displacement is part of everyone’s life and everyone’s identity is in a constant flux.

Tan’s work has been shown in numerous solo and group exhibitions. She participated in various biennales including *29th Bienal de São Paulo*, São Paulo (2010), *Göteborg International Biennial*, Göteborg (2009), *New Orleans Biennial*, New Orleans (2008), *Zones of Contact, Biennale of Sydney*, Sydney (2006), *Berlin Biennale* (2001) and she also took part in *documenta 11*, Kassel (2002). In 2009, she represented The Netherlands at the *Venice Biennale* for the Dutch Pavilion. Tan’s recent solo exhibitions include: *Inventory*, Maxxi, Rome (2013), *Disorient*, Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow (2012), *Point of Departure*, Andalusian Centre of Contemporary Art, Sevilla (2012), *Rise and Fall*, a touring solo exhibition at Aargauer Kunsthhaus, Aarau; The Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver (2010 – 2011).

Disorient (2009)

Disorient was commissioned and curated by Saskia Bos for the Dutch Pavilion at the 53rd *Venice Biennale*, 2009. The starting point for this installation is *The Travels of Marco Polo*, a 13th century travelogue describing the journeys pursued throughout Asia by the famous Venetian merchant. The book was originally written in prison, transmitted orally by Marco Polo to his fellow prisoner Rusticello of Pisa, yet the original was lost. Centuries after its publication, the book is still an object of controversy partially due to inherent incongruities raised by its oral transmission and circulation of various, often conflicting translations. Polo’s accounts of Asia survive only through the works of his memory, being part of a type of literature that contributed to the vivid Western portrayals and representations of the East. Composed of two video works, one that was filmed in the Dutch Pavilion in Venice prior to the biennale’s opening where the artist created an encompassing installation of artefacts and goods, and another that is a montage of news footage and archive materials, *Disorient* juxtaposes time, place, facts and fictions. Pointing to the strategic geopolitical position held by Venice



in the distant past, *Disorient* builds a bridge across centuries and raises critical questions about contemporary globalism and its origins.

Filed on location in the Dutch Pavilion, Venice

CAST – MARCO POLO / Francesco Grigoletto

VOICE-OVER SPOKEN BY / Michael Maloney

VOICE-OVER / excerpts from Marco Polo’s ‘The Travels’, 1298/9

CONCEPT AND DIRECTION / Fiona Tan

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY / Stef Tijdkin

ART DIRECTION / Vincent de Pater

EDITED BY / Mario Steenbergen, Fiona Tan

SOUND DESIGN / Hugo Dijkstal

CAMERA ASSISTANT / Steven van Beek

GRIP / Daan Dillo

GAFFER / Maarten Rijnbeek

BEST BOY / Oscar van Rijn

PROPS / Elsa Oskam

SET DRESSER / Mark Hammel

ART DIRECTION ADMINISTRATION / Wilma Scheumie

SET CONSTRUCTION / Albert Kuipers

ARTIST’S ASSISTANTS / Camilla Robinson, Nina Yuen

ARCHIVE RESEARCHER / Gerard Nijssen, Marty de Jong, Fiona Tan

ARCHIVAL MATERIAL / AP, Nova, NOS Journaal, VPRO, IKON, RVU, Beeld en Geluid, Hilversum, Nederlands Filmmuseum / Eye Film Instituut Nederland

SET PHOTOGRAPHY / Per Kristiansen

PRODUCER / Floor Onrust, Sanna Fabry deJonge, Family Affair Films

PRODUCTION MANAGER / Noortje Wilschut

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT, VENICE / Ankie Schellekens

CAMERA / Camera Rentals, Amsterdam

LIGHTING / Rental & More, Venice

POSTPRODUCTION / AVP, Amstelveen

SUPPORTED BY / Juiist Just, www.juiistjust.com

SHIRDAK / www.shirdak.nl

Commissioned by the Mondriaan Foundation for the Dutch Pavilion, 53rd *Venice Biennale*

Funded by the Mondriaan Foundation and Frith Street Gallery, London

Courtesy the artist, Frith Street Gallery, London and Wako Works of Art, Tokyo

Trinh T. Minh-Ha

Born in 1952 in Hanoi, Vietnam. Lives and works in San Francisco.

Trinh T. Minh-ha is a filmmaker, music composer, anthropologist, feminist and post-colonial theorist. She pursued her education at the National Conservatory of Music and Theater in Saigon, Vietnam. In 1970, Trinh T. migrated to the U.S. where she continued her studies in music composition, ethnomusicology, and French literature. She is renowned for her experimental approach to documentary combining personal, subjective, ethnographic and documentary elements. In her writing and work, she introduced the concept of the “inappropriate/d other” which refers to a figure that is at once “inappropriate” and “inappropriate”. Challenging the conventions of ethnographic documentaries and defeating the expectations of an omniscient, scientific voice that assigns meaning to images, record and categories, she famously stated – in her film *Reassemblage* (1983): “I do not intend to speak about/Just speak nearby.”

Her work includes seven feature-length films that have been honoured in numerous retrospectives and film surveys around the world. She has also created several large-scale art installations and published twelve books, of which the more recent are: *D-Passage. The Digital Way* (2013), *Elsewhere, Within Here* (2010), *The Digital Film Event* (2005), *Cinema Interval* (1999), *Framer Framed* (1992) and in collaboration with Jean-Paul Bourdier: *Vernacular Architecture in West Africa* (2011), *Habiter un monde* (2006) and *Drawn from African Dwellings* (1996). Her films have been honoured in over forty-five retrospectives in the U.S., Europe, South America and Asia. Her works were exhibited in numerous exhibitions including *Guangzhou Triennale*, Guangzhou (2008), *Shanghai Biennale*, Shanghai (2004), *Busan Biennale*, Busan (2004), *Kyoto Biennale*, Kyoto (2003), *documenta 11*, Kassel (2002), *Biennials of Whitney Museum*, New York (1993, 1987).

Trinh T. is the recipient of numerous awards and grants including the Women’s Caucus for Art Lifetime Achievement Award, the *Trailblazers Award* at MIPDOC, Cannes, AFI National Independent Filmmaker *Maya Deren Award*, fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment of the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation, the American Film Institute, The Japan Foundation, and the California Arts Council. She has lectured extensively — on film, art, feminism, and cultural politics and taught at numerous universities. She is currently Professor of Gender & Women’s Studies and Rhetoric at the University of California, Berkeley.

Surname Viet Given Name Nam (1989)

Surname Viet Given Name Nam addresses notions of identity, popular memory and culture. While focusing on aspects of Vietnamese reality as seen through the lives and history of women’s resistance in Vietnam and in the U.S., it raises questions on the politics of interviewing and documenting. A theoretically and formally complex work, *Surname Viet Given*



Name Nam explores the difficulty of translation, and themes of dislocation and exile, critiquing both traditional society and life since the war. Juxtaposing archival footage, proverbs and poetry, voice-over narrations, and written text, the film features interviews with five Vietnamese women. It becomes clear throughout the film that these interviews are restaged and the women portrayed are actually amateur actresses living in the U.S. Taking a hybrid form, the film articulates the complex diversity of the lives and roles of Vietnamese women within culture, and confronts the essentialising Western paradigms. It challenges the traditions of documentary filmmaking through complex interconnections of sound and image, rejection of a single, omniscient voice and undermining of the authority of the camera itself.

DIRECTED, WRITTEN & EDITED / Trinh T. Minh-ha

PRODUCED, PRODUCTION DESIGN AND LIGHTING DESIGN / Jean-Paul Bourdier

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY / Kathleen Beeleer

INTERVIEWEES AND PERFORMERS / Khien Lai, Ngo Kim Nhuy, Tran Thi, Bich Yen, Tran Thi Hien & Lan Trinh

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Distributed by Women Make Movies, Inc., New York, New York

January – March 2014

Public Programme

Paradise lost

17.01

FRI 4—6PM

Paradise Lost Forum with presentations by Sarat Maharaj (Professor of Visual Art and Knowledge Systems, Lund University, and Malmo Art Academies, Sweden) and Ann Demeester (Director de Appel Arts Centre, Netherlands)

24.01

FRI 7.30—9PM

Curatorial Tour with Ute Meta Bauer (CCA Founding Director) and Lee Weng Choy (CCA Deputy Director and Senior Curator)

14.02

FRI 7.30—9PM

Exhibition Tour with Khim Ong (*Paradise Lost* Project Manager) and Ho Tzu Nyen (Artist)

15.02

SAT 3—5PM

Reading Group with Anca Rujoiu (CCA Curator, Exhibitions)

20.02

THU 6.30—9PM

Workshop by Trinh T. Minh-ha (Registration required)

21.02

FRI 7.30—9PM

Artist’s Talk by Trinh T. Minh-ha

28.02

FRI 7.30—9PM

Exhibition Tour with David Teh (Director Future Perfect) and Anca Rujoiu (CCA Curator, Exhibitions)

07.03

FRI 7.30—9PM

Stefano Harney (Professor of Strategic Management Education, Singapore Management University) in conversation with Ute Meta Bauer (CCA Founding Director)

08.03

SAT 3—5PM

Contemporary Fiction, A special session in collaboration with Books Actually

28.03

FRI 7.30—9PM

Exhibition Tour with Vera Mey (CCA Curator, Residency) and Mustafa Shabbir Hussain (Curator, National Art Gallery, Singapore)