

IVAN LAM

THE SOIL ON WHICH I BLEED

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Wei-Ling Contemporary

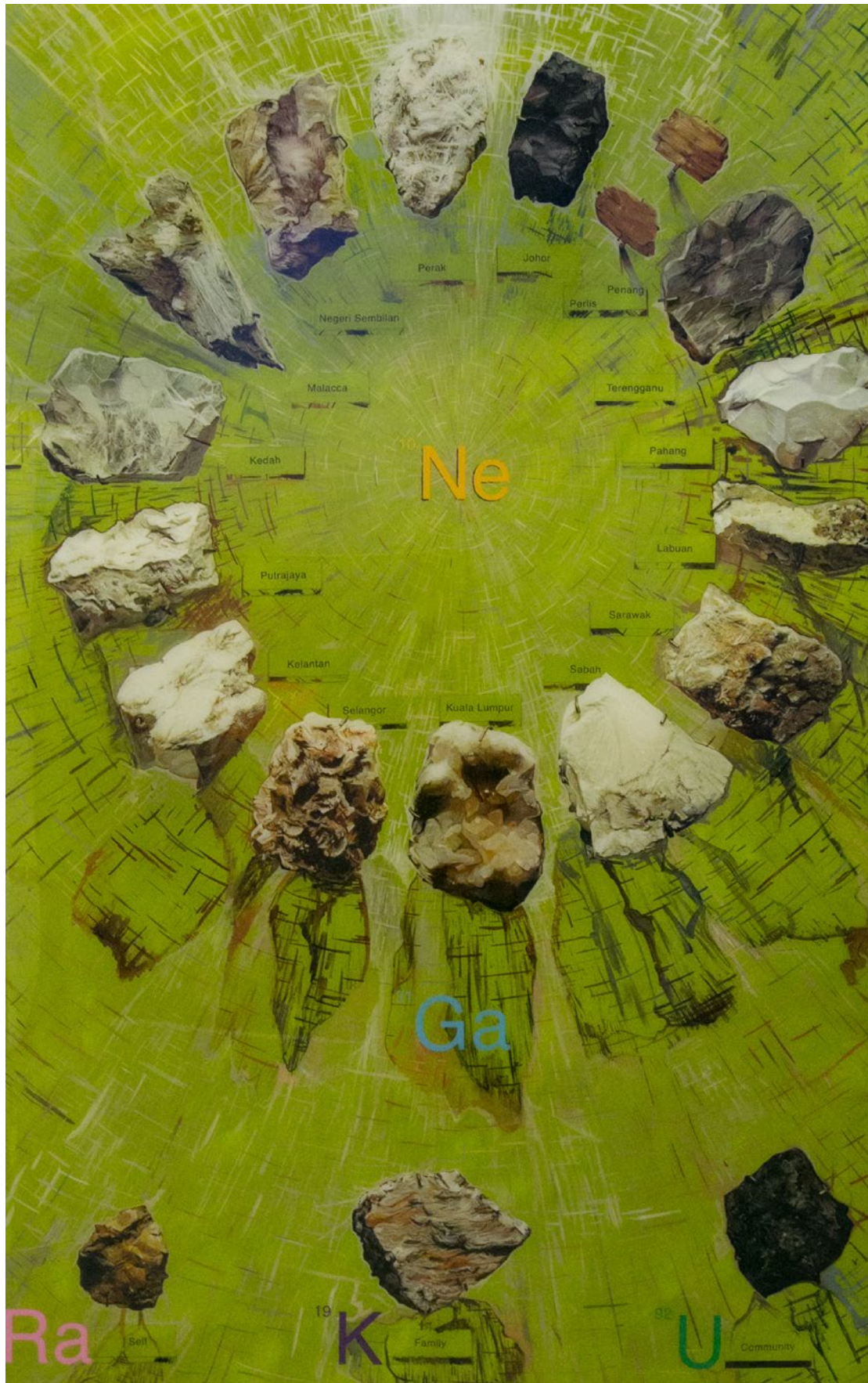
23 March - 25 April 2021

THE SOIL ON WHICH I BLEED

In *'THE SOIL ON WHICH I BLEED'*, Ivan Lam presents three main oeuvres through which he collapses the boundaries between two contexts – his country and himself – raising fundamental questions that encourage us to reflect on what it means to be a citizen of a nation. Throughout the global pandemic, we have inevitably witnessed the fall of our healthcare systems, economy and government, yet as citizens, we are often placed at the periphery, acting merely as observers. The exhibition title – *'THE SOIL ON WHICH I BLEED'* – is an English translation of the line 'Tanah tumpahnya darahku' extracted from Malaysia's national anthem 'Negaraku'. Although we have been burdened by the idea that nothing seems to fall under our control, through his paintings, Ivan Lam attempts to switch the mindset around. He engages critically, by embedding his commentaries in response to the national and global issues that have surrounded us during the pandemic, through the use of symbolism and metaphors in his paintings: from stones that represent the 13 states of Malaysia, a rifle that reminds the artist of the lockdown, to the moon as a symbol of unity. His works put us as individuals at the centre of it all, emphasizing the moral and collective power that we hold, to spark a difference.

As a master of dualities and dichotomies, both tension and harmony are equally embedded into his paintings, as seen through the subject matter and compositions adopted. This series also marks a significant growth in the artist's practice, as he pushes the limits of painting beyond hyper-realism, into a more conceptualised form. Here, 'conceptuality' is informed by the fact that each image is an assemblage of different parts and pieces; almost like jigsaw puzzles that viewers are invited to play with. These parts come together to reveal encrypted messages and meanings encapsulated within them. The works are placed with a certain distance between one another, referring to the concept of minding the gap that we have learned to apply to our lives today.

Each painting is finished with his signature resin coat, and is displayed side by side to a composition of words on the wall, serving as signifiers of what the images in the painting suggest. In his attempt to break the myth of conceptual art being perplexing in the eyes of its audience, the artist provides these words as clues for viewers to grasp his stream of thought. Each painting is accompanied with a smaller-format artwork, a laser-jet print which the artist used as a reference when painting. These prints appear incomplete and disjointed, creating voids that represent the absence of certain aspects in our lives, caused by the pandemic. Altogether, *'THE SOIL ON WHICH I BLEED'* is a culmination of the artist's sentiments during the pandemic, and yearnings for a better day.



Negaraku

Synthetic house paint, acrylic, vinyl sticker, and resin on canvas on board
190cm x 122cm x 8cm
2020



Family

Negaraku (detail)

On the other hand, the circular arrangement allows us to see them as a whole, as a concerted group. Seeing this composition might be reinforced by the Japanese Enso symbol, a hand-drawn circular form that expresses a "imitating the form of the Enso symbol in a periodic table, "Ne", "Ga", "Ra" and "I"ing the word "ie ga ra ku"

All States as One Society

COMMUNITY

MY COUNTRY

One FAMILY STRENGTH

INDEPENDENCE

Separate Entity

ESSENCE Whole Social Environment

NEGARAKU

Mimicking the visual of a stone chart, and borrowing the style of a naturalist, Ivan Lam paints different types of stone down to their most realistic details. Each piece of stone reserves its own character, compelling in its own ways. These stones are labelled in a way that each piece represents one state of Malaysia, seen as separate entities. At the same time, the circular arrangement of the stones allows us to see the states as a whole; as one nation. Imitating the symbol of elements in a periodic table, “Ne”, “Ga”, “Ra”, “K” and “U” are spread around the layout of the painting, as if forming the word ‘negaraku’ which translates as “my country”. “Negaraku” is also the title of the national anthem of Malaysia; a song shared by all 13 states and 3 federal territories of Malaysia.

One might also be reminded of the Japanese *Enso*; an ancient symbol that expresses the moment in time, when our mind and body are free. The arrangement of the stones invites us to free our heads from the idea of segregation that preoccupies our mindset. It is only by looking at all the states as one society, that we would be able to sense the strength of Malaysia as one nation.

Three stones are arranged in a line, at the lower part of the canvas. The first stone represents ourselves as ‘individuals’, whilst the second stone represents ‘family’ as the first social group that we are born into, and the third one symbolises ‘community’ as a social environment that you encounter outside of the household. Echoing Mahatma Ghandi’s statement, “*If you want to change the world, start with yourself,*” the artist included these three aspects to demonstrate the idea that we must make compromises within our closer circles, before we are able to make a change to a country or a place.



The absence is present. Someday we will be okay.
Laser jet print on laminated paper
110cm x 75cm
2020



MCO (Master Control Operator)
Synthetic house paint, acrylic, vinyl sticker, and resin on canvas on board
190cm x 122cm x 8cm
2020

7/4

MCO (Master Control Operator) (detail)

PROTECTED
Will these different pieces ever
united? Will these be used to protect
the citizens or be pointed towards
pieces ever be united? Will these
protect, or will the weapon be used
towards the citizens inside

Unauthorised
Restricted
COURAGE
Wakeup Call

owly lose our
average and
reference for a
reference. Kille, as a
reference, the artist
shed light on
the as a wakeup
call.
fight for independenc
uly independent? False Promise

Lockdown

distinct from his
previous ones, is the
by the artist, chose
components of the
separate components of the rifle are arranged in its tech
museum display. Will these different

CITIZENS

HOPE
ght for independenc
Better Days
“Soldering On”
With the rise of Covid-19 cases
spread, our mobility have
been one year since the prime
announced the first lockdown
2020 of March until the
factory, we have been faced w
families of what the future mig

UNITED?
an artist, components of the rifle are arranged in its tech
museum display. Will these different
FRAGMENTS

MCO (Master Control Operator)

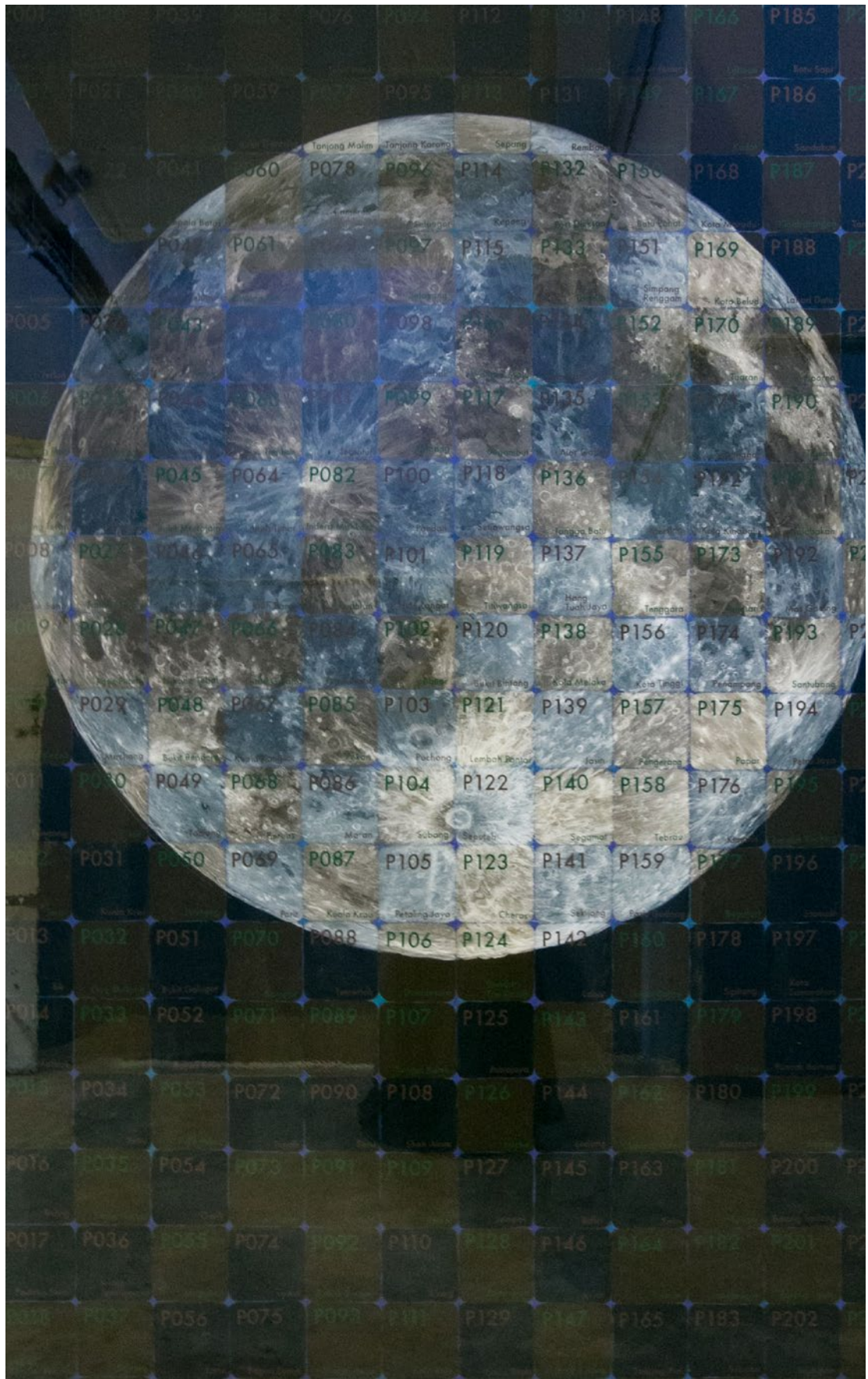
With the rise of Covid-19 cases and the advent of the Movement Control Order (MCO) in Malaysia, mobility has been restricted, and before we knew it, one year has passed since the first lockdown: from the 18th of March until the 28th April 2020. Since then, we have been faced with uncertainties of what the future might bring. *Will the lockdown be extended? Are more than 2 persons allowed in a car? When will borders re-open?*

The Rifle, as a reference to the act of “soldiering on”, is a recurring symbol in Ivan Lam’s works. This symbol has appeared in his past paintings, *They Will Kill Us All* (2015) and *They Can’t Kill Us All* (2017), part of the VPX series in 2017. Having to deal with these uncertainties during the pandemic, we slowly lose our courage and determination for a better day. Therefore, the artist feels that it is timely to present the rifle again, serving as a wake-up call to keep on fighting. At the same time, it also reminds him of Malaysia’s own fight for independence, and where the country sits today. He questions ‘*After all this time, are we truly independent?*’.

This rifle is however distinct from the ones that have appeared in his previous works, the artist has chosen to present it in fragments. All the components of the rifle are painted as separate pieces, arranged across the canvas. Ivan Lam records the dates of which he painted each piece during the first lockdown, leaving marks of these numbers all over the canvas. *Will these different pieces ever be united? Will this rifle be used to protect the citizens, or pointed at them instead?*



The presence is absent. Someday we will get better.
Laser jet print on laminated paper
108cm x 75cm
2020



Dark Side of the Moon
Synthetic house paint, acrylic, vinyl sticker, and resin on canvas on board
194cm x 122cm x 8cm
2020



Dark Side of the Moon (detail)

222

This work presents the moon as a central reference point and once again in a fully detailed surface map. The high quality of the significant details of its surface, in the light of its daily motion would look up to it in search of answers and guidance.

MOON

SIGNIFICANT MINISTERS

MOON PHASES

PEOPLE

Recurring opposition

SIDE

Sense of Time

MAHATHIR SPACECRAFT

2020 with the moon landing of the Chandrayaan-3.

OF

A spacecraft that landed in a plath

THE SOCIETIES

THE

sense of Time between the government and its people

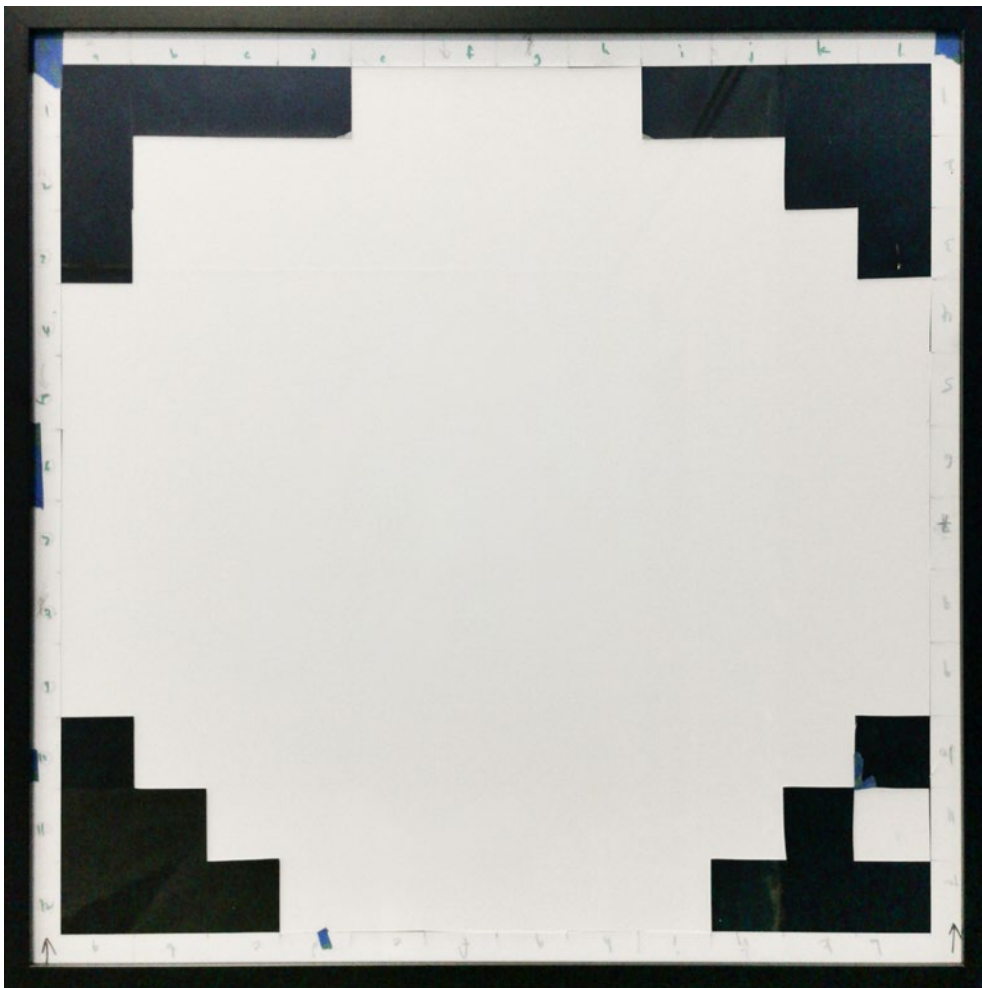
phenomena GUIDANCE

Dark Side of the Moon

This work presents the moon as a centrepiece, painted in a hyper-realistic manner, highlighting the magnificent details of its surface. The moon is a universal element in our world, as historically speaking, mankind would look up to it in search of answers and guidance. One of the ways it has helped humankind is through the moon phases, which have become a reference point for many societies, to determine the sense of time. In Malaysia, the lunar calendar is known to the Islamic, Chinese, and Hindu societies; therefore, symbolically to the artist, the moon preserves a certain uniting power.

In contrast, lines divide the painting into 222 squares, each one either blue or brown, reflecting the recurring opposition between the government and its people. These squares are subtly embedded into this painting, referring to the number of the Members of Parliament in Malaysia, each one representing an area. More than just the year of the “pandemic”, 2020 was also the year that Malaysia witnessed a significant change in its government. The dates when these phenomenal events took place are also part of the painting; including Mahathir Mohamad’s resignation as Prime Minister.

As Malaysia “loses” its government, in parallel, the world of science has taken a huge step forward in 2020, with the moon landing of China’s Chang’e-5. A spacecraft that landed in a plain that is about two billion years younger than the parts of the moon explored more than four decades ago by NASA’s Apollo astronauts, and the Soviet Union’s robotic Luna landers. With both of these national and global issues in mind, this is a painting that marks the year 2020.



If you look long enough into the void, the void begins to look back through you.
Laser jet print on laminated paper
69cm x 69cm
2020



Installation view, *THE SOIL ON WHICH I BLEED* by Ivan Lam at Wei-Ling Contemporary, 2021



Installation view, *THE SOIL ON WHICH I BLEED* by Ivan Lam at Wei-Ling Contemporary, 2021

IVAN LAM WAI HOE (B.1975)

Ivan Lam (b1975) has earned a reputation as one of Malaysia's leading contemporary artists for his continuous ability to push the boundaries of his art practice. Unafraid to take risks and never content to lean on the familiar, he is constantly posing himself new challenges through experimentation with techniques and mediums, taking his art practice to the next level. In so doing he has evolved into an artist of critical acclaim who is answerable only to himself, consistently striving towards conceiving and actualizing new concepts and ideas.

Over the last 23 years he has charted new territory on the contemporary Malaysian art scene with his mastery of printmaking, his conquering of contemporary painting, through his trademark use of resin both imbuing his paintings with a technical ingenuity and transforms the narrative tone of the work – adding hyper-reality to the natural, distance to the familiar, pragmatism to pathos. Other dualities and dichotomies abound within his paintings and conceptual works, both harmoniously and in tension, underpinning his enquiries on popular culture, current affairs, art history and autobiography. His practice has recently taken on a more conceptual bias, raising questions around authorship, the role of the artist and the very nature of art itself.

He has exhibited widely in the local and international arena and has also garnered multiple awards in a career laden with solo and group exhibitions.

Ivan Lam has been recognized for his achievements and has been collected by reputed institutions in Malaysia, Europe and the USA. He was the first and only Malaysian artist selected to present a one-man project at the inaugural Art Basel Hong Kong in 2013, and was the first Malaysian artist commissioned by Louis Vuitton for their collection in 2014.

In 2017, he presented a performance work entitled '*Curating Human Experiences: Human Experience 66:06:06*' in Kuala Lumpur, and was the only artist from Malaysia invited to create a project for the Karachi Biennale in the same year.

Ivan Lam was one of four Malaysian artists to represent Malaysia at the country's first ever National Pavilion at the 58th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia in 2019. The work presented, *One Inch* (2019) explores dualities and dichotomies which sit both harmoniously and in tension in Lam's work, beguiling the viewer to discover the multiple meanings within. In 2020, he launched 'The Ivan Lam Giveaway' an online platform where art is used as a tool to promote action.

Ivan Lam is an innovator, a fearless explorer and an obsessive perfectionist- all qualities of an artist.

EDUCATION

- 2006 University of East London, UK, MA in International Contemporary Art and Design Practice (Final Semester, Graduating Jan 2007)
Professors: Hedley Roberts, Dr. Daniela Leva
- 1998 Maine College of Art, Bachelor of Fine Arts, Painting (Full Honours)
Professors: Johnnie Ross, Honor Mack, Peter Sucheki, George Larou
- 1994 Lim Kok Wing Institute of Technology, Graphic Design Certificate

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2021 *THE SOIL ON WHICH I BLEED*, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2020 *small works + drawings*, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2019 *FAUX*, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2018 *Hymen*, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2017 *Curating Human Experiences 66:06:06*, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
You said you'll never leave, Karachi Biennale 2017, Narayan Jagannath Vaidya, Karachi, Pakistan
Vanity Project X, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
For those who don't believe, no proof is possible. 56/200, Art Stage Singapore 2017, Southeast Asia Forum- Net Present Value: Art, Capital, Futures, Marina Bay Sands Exhibition Centre, Singapore
- 2016 *Cutting the lines that bind*, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Cutting the lines that bind, VOLTA NEW YORK 2016, The Pier 90, New York, USA
- 2014 *IVAN LAM: TWENTY*, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2013 *Day Zero Night Hero*, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Compendium of Malaysian Art (COMA), Art Basel Hong Kong 2013, Hong Kong Convention Centre, Hong Kong
- 2012 *MACHINES*, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2011 *Together Alone*, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Art Stage Singapore 2011, Marina Bay Sands Exhibition Centre, Singapore
- 2009 *Panorama*, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2007 *After all these years....*, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2004 *Plosive*, Taksu Gallery, Singapore
- 2004 *Plosive*, Taksu Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2002 *911*, Taksu Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 1998 *Ins and Outs*, Crank, Portland, ME, USA
MECA Senior Thesis Show, Institute of Contemporary Art, Portland ME, USA
Exit Removals, Artworks Gallery, Portland ME, USA

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2020 *If These Walls Could Talk*, curated by Amin Gulgee and Sara Vaqar Pagganwala, Village Restaurant, Karachi, Pakistan

- 2019 *18@8 Turning Points*, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Holding Up a Mirror, Malaysia Pavilion, Palazzo Malipiero, 58th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia
- 2018 *Teh Tarik with The Flag*, curated by Wei-Ling Gallery, in association with The National Visual Arts Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Seen, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2017 *18@8 RIGHT HERE! RIGHT NOW!*, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2016 *The Past Is Never Where You Think You Left It*, curated by Gowri Balasegaran, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Art Stage Singapore 2016, Marina Bay Sands, Singapore
- 2015 *The Space Between*, curated by Anurendra Jegadeva & Rahel Joseph, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2014 *The PEAK Group Show- HO MIA*, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2013 *18@8 Mirror, Mirror on the wall*, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2012 *18@8 KUL-SIN*, ION Art, Singapore
18@8 KUL-SIN, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
A Decade of Collecting - Timeless, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Directional Forces, Artoll, Bedburg-hau, Germany
- 2011 *18@8 Save The Planet*, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2008 *18@8 Vice and Virtue*, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Christie's SEA Art Auction, Hong Kong
CIGE (China International Gallery Exposition), China World Trade Center, Beijing, China
Force of Nature, Pace, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia
- 2007 *Filtered*, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
The Force of Nature, Darling Muse Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2006 Larasati Art Auction, Singapore
18@8 KUALA LUMPUR-KARACHI, AMIN GULGEE GALLERY, KARACHI, PAKISTAN (in collaboration with Wei-Ling Gallery)
Au Naturel, Darling Muse Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
3 Young Contemporaries (1997-2006), Valentine Willie Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Nasi Campur 2006, Taksu Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2005 *18@8*, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Identifying Landscape, Darling Muse Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2004 Philip Morris Asean Art Awards 2004, National Art Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand
10th Anniversary, Taksu Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Footsteps, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
ArtFair Singapore, Singapore
- 2003 *Taksu Singapore Opening*, Singapore
Taksu Jakarta Opening, Jakarta, Indonesia
- 2002 *ArtFair Singapore*, Singapore
- 2000 *<1000*, Valentine Willie Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Transformations, Sculpture Square, Singapore

- Untitled*, Galeri Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia
Arus: Flow (Australia-Malaysia Electronic Art, Joint Show), National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 1999 *Philip Morris 99*, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Aku: 99 Portret Diri, Galeri Petronas, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 1998 *Sequence 11*, Timed Based Art, Imaging Center, Portland, Maine, USA
- 1997 *Maine Art Auction*, Selected for Live Auction, Portland, Maine, USA
Artworks, Portland ME, USA

AWARDS

- 2006 Group Exhibit, Sovereign Art Prize (Top 10 Finalists), Hong Kong
- 2003 Group Exhibit (Grand Prize Winner), Philip Morris 2003, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2001 Group Exhibit (Honourable Mention), Phillip Morris 2001, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 1999 One person Exhibit, Bright Sight Night Lights, Galeriwan, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 1996 Merit Scholarship Exhibit, 1st Place, MECA, Portland, ME, USA

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

- Artoll, Germany
 Catlin Re Collection, Switzerland
 Crank Design Consultant, Maine, USA
 Galeri Petronas, Malaysia
 HSBC, Malaysia
 Louis Vuitton
 Merrill Lynch, Maine, USA
 National Art Gallery, Malaysia
 The Aliya & Farouk Khan Collection, Malaysia
 Private Collectors



Wei-Ling Gallery

Produced by **Wei-Ling Gallery**

To accompany the exhibition entitled '**THE SOIL ON WHICH I BLEED**' by Ivan Lam
from 23 March- 25 April 2021

Wei-Ling Gallery

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Cover image: *Dark Side of the Moon* (2020)