



After-image: Living with the Ghosts in my House

Minstrel Kuik

**Wei-Ling**Gallery

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Minstrel Kuik

15th January - 29th February 2016

# Beyond the horizon

*Minstrel Kuik's After Image: Living with the Ghosts in my House*

*"Sometimes, a wave that was choppy due to a distant hurricane brought news about it, because the sea, woven together in vast mobility, makes it possible to speculate beyond the horizon."*<sup>[1]</sup>

Minstrel Kuik's works tell stories about leaving and coming back into a place that is long gone. The "ghost"-pieces represent the disillusionment with the present social and political situation in her homeland.

The exhibition *After-image: Living with the Ghosts in my House* at Wei-Ling Gallery is showing a broad range of Kuik's art works from 2015 and 2016, varying in technique, material and style. Yet there is one important link between the digital laser prints, charcoal drawings, mixed-media installations including folded banners, fabrics, paper works and light settings. They are all collected, deconstructed and newly formed remnants of the Malaysian 13th General Election in May 2013. It seems that the free gifts, banners and flags from different parties, advertisements and much more are fundamentally examining the meaning of a today's national state in contrast to something which should be very familiar to everybody called globalization.

Enrique Fajarnés Cardona states that a wavy sea allows thinking beyond "the horizon". In a similar way, Kuik's work seems like an unlimited horizon – it blurs up the boundaries set by the system, poses questions on what is right or wrong, and stimulates, in an indirect way, the beholder to think about his own role in society.

In *Vote and Vow* (2015) a photographed, folded banner from the last general election reveals two signs: in the background of the blue fabric we can barely see the mandarin character "vote". On top of it, the white cross stands for an appeal to vote – a simple sign as an equivalent substitute for a personal signature – once an individual, which in the end becomes a no-body; one in a mass of voters for the largest political party – Barisan National (BN), an Alliance Coalition of ring-wing parties (UMNO, MCA, MIC).

1 Fajarnés Cardona, Enrique: No title nor year (translated from Spanish). Quoted after: [Anonymous]: Untitled (2013), in: Ciudades Patrimonio de la Humanidad, <http://www.ciudadespatrimonio.org/ciudades/index.php?cd=6> [Retrieved: 29.01.2016].

Another general election paraphernalia, a flag in *1-1 Malaysia* (2016), is being installed on a wall, tied with three yellow ribbons, thus not revealing the flag's actual message. Kuik is neutralizing the flag's former threat and masculinity through these very fine, feminine looking ribbons. Their yellow color stands for the Bersih movement (Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections) as an opponent to the ruling BN party. Even *Ghost in the House* (2016) transports an ambiguous meaning through its form. A braid made out of political party flags makes us think of a girl's braid, at the same time evoking the connotation of a drop hanging rope. The braid, seen as a line or border, may also be understood as a means of connecting but also separating people, when we think of borders for example.

This interest in opposition, duality or juxtaposition is eminent to most of Kuik's works. Maybe it is because of her hybrid background – a third generation Malaysian Chinese, lived in Taiwan and France before returning to Malaysia – she must have experienced something that Salman Rushdie describes in his "Satanic verses" as impurity and the fear of the absolutism of the pure.<sup>[2]</sup>

With her experience with and the knowledge about the inexistence of an uncontaminated culture in a single country, Kuik describes a moving, broken-up world, which denies the conservative thinking on belonging, as for example the obsolete concept of "races", but opens up to pluralism, hybridity and mixture. That is why we often find transformation as an important tool in Kuik's oeuvre. In *Coloring Flags* (2015) she is lighting up different deconstructed and folded party flags with colored bulbs. Whether she is using the bulbs to intensify the flags' own colors, as the green one for the Islamic PAS party, or to neutralize the originally blue BN flag with red light, she is

2 Rushdie, Salman: *Heimatländer der Phantasie: Essays und Kritiken 1981-1991* (engl. original version: *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*, London 1992), p. 457.

changing their original appeal and meaning. The play with geometrical shapes in *Lonely Star* (2015) is affirming Kuik's fascination for the deconstruction of old, passed on forms and the creation of something new. Originally 12 political campaign flags were transformed into a "lonely" star – derived from the 1Malaysia campaign which emphasizes national unity and ethnic harmony: actually an antithesis to the acknowledgement of diversity and pluralism.

As natural as Kuik is playing with the form and sujet of the Election party items, using deconstruction and juxtaposition to get a new perspective to something which is assumed to be "normal" or right, she is also naturally switching between the different media. It seems quite logical to apply the conviction of postcolonial hybrid culture as a permanent change, a never ending flux<sup>[3]</sup>, to other segments of life and art. A constantly changing, borders transgressing world must inevitably lead to a transgression of aesthetical categories too.

The charcoal drawings *Jangan Tipu 1* and *2* are photographic positives turned into drawn negatives in order to bring some details of the image to light. Instead of a mingling mass of people now there appears a center through a highlighted figure of a woman which – in this reverse technique – stands out of the crowd. The same regards the little girl with her father in the second drawing, both focusing the camera in the center of the image. Staging women and muslim girls in the middle of a democratic assembly protesting for change and real equality, challenges the stereotypes on what a Muslim is. Kuik is always in search of images which show another Malaysia, as in *National Baby* (2015). A usually as harmless perceived small little girl holds the Malaysia Day (Merdeka Parade) celebration flag in her hands, at the same time playing with

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3 Hall, Stuart: *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, in: *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford, London 1990, p. 226.

a pistol, turning her into both innocence and threat – a metaphor for the state Malaysia?

Kuik's "ghosts" are statements of a constant shift between the old and the new (home, system, identity, culture) – a basic principal of each hybrid person. Like Fajarnés Cardona's turmoiled sea which allows thinking beyond the horizon, Kuik creates so-called ethnoscares: landscapes of items and persons [...] who constitute the shifting world in which we live [...] [and] affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree.<sup>[4]</sup>

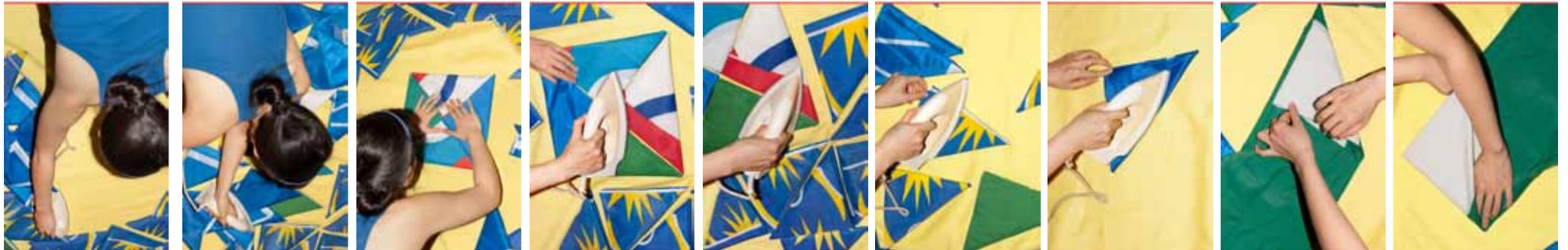
The beholder gets the opportunity to think Kuik's works further, continue the implied juxtapositions, transformations and the breaking with stereotypes, in order to construct a home which hopefully allows more than one Malaysia(n).

Dr. Hanni Geiger

*Dr. Hanni Geiger is an art historian and researcher specialized in modern and contemporary art (20–21st century) with a research focus on the interdependencies between art, design and migration (PhD thesis: "Form follows culture. Entgrenzungen im Konzept-Design Hussein Chalayans"; engl. Form follows culture. Boundary Expansions in the Concept-Design of Hussein Chalayan) / LMU Munich, grade: summa cum laude). Among others worked at the Design Academy and/Hochschule Fresenius in Munich (professor), the University of Munich (Institute of Art History) (lecturer and researcher), the Goethe-Institute Croatia and the Center for Advanced Studies in Munich (research project „Exile, Migration and Transfer“). She studied art history, intercultural communication, art education and fashion design in Munich and Zagreb.*

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4 Appadurai, Arjun: *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation (= Public Worlds; vol. 1)*, Minneapolis / London 1996, p. 33.



*Domesticated Politics*

Mixed-media: digital print on fabrics doubled with cloth

80cm x 48cm x 9pcs

2016



*A Break 1*  
 Multiple digital laser prints on acid-free paper  
 160cm x 220cm  
 2015



*A Break 2*  
 Multiple digital laser prints on acid-free paper  
 160cm x 220cm  
 2015



*A Chinese Vote*

Mixed-media: custom made ballot box, 13th General Election

paraphernalia, political party flag

Dimension varied

2015



14

15

*A Worm Turns*  
Digital laser print on 100g acid-free paper  
29.7cm x 21cm (Diptych)  
2015

*A Wreath for the Ghosted*  
Mixed-media: plywood, 13th General Election paraphernalia)  
150cm x 100cm  
2016



16

*Ghost in the House*  
Mixed-media: political party flags, 13th General Election paraphernalia  
1160cm  
2016



17





*Coloring Flags*

Installation : political party flag, wooden rack, coloured light bulb

92cm x 210cm x 34cm

2015

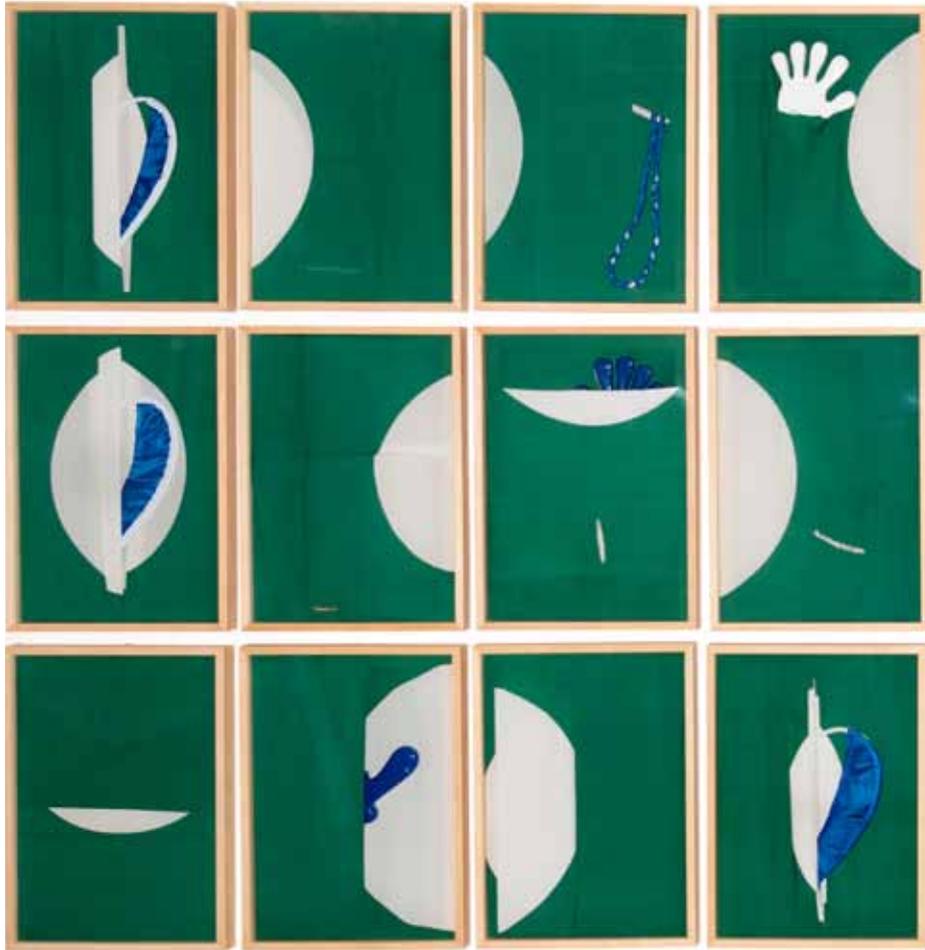




*Jangan Tipu 1*  
 Charcoal drawing on acid-free paper  
 150cm x 100cm  
 2015



*Jangan Tipu 2*  
 Charcoal drawing on acid-free paper  
 150cm x 100cm  
 2015



22

*Flirting with the Moon*  
 Mixed-media: political party flag, 13th General Election paraphernalia  
 140cm x 136cm  
 2016



23





*Circle of Connections*

Digital laser print on 100g acid-free paper  
29.7cm x 21cm (Quadriptych)  
2015

*Old Wave*

Multiple digital laser prints on acid-free paper  
160cm x 110cm  
2015



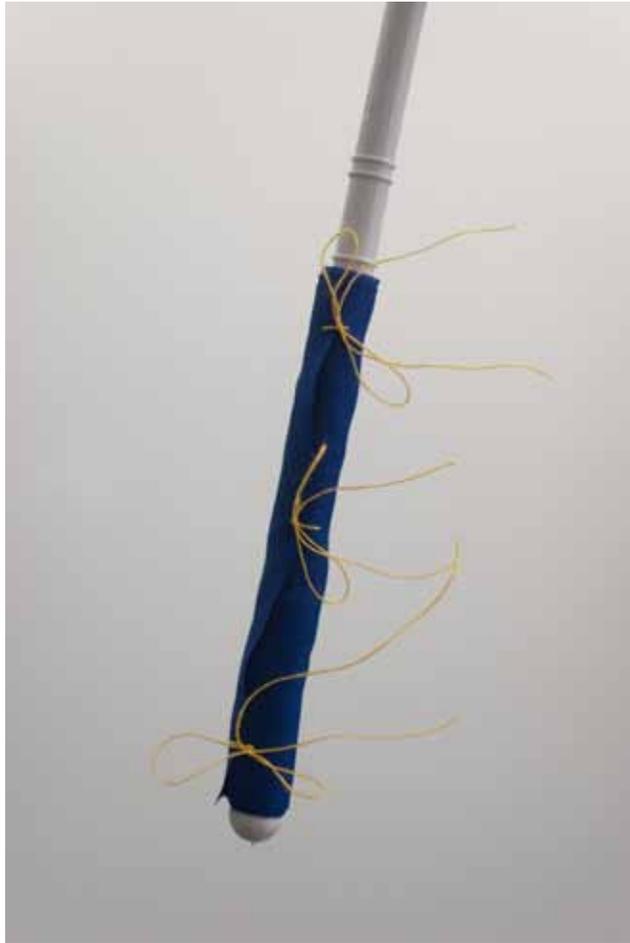
*House Cleaning*

Installation (bucket, paraphernalia, used cloths)

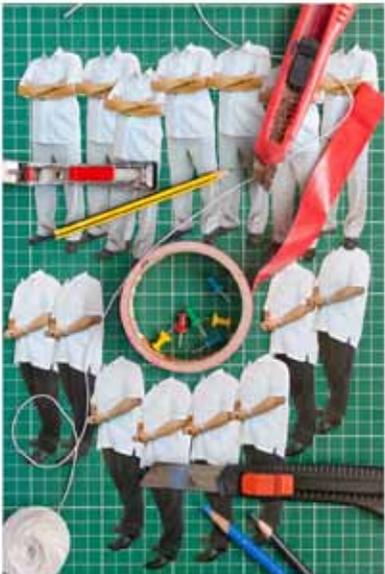
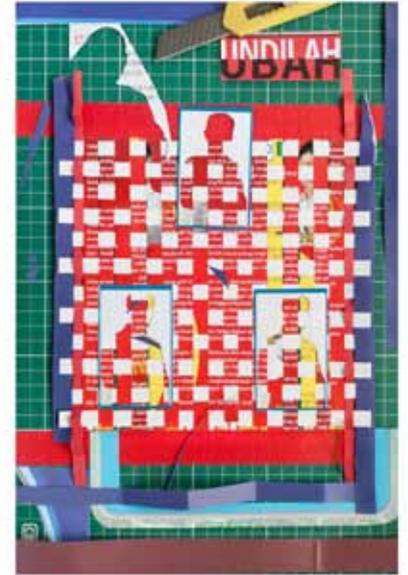
Dimension varied

2016





1 - 1Malaysia  
Mixed-media: 13th General Election paraphernalia, cotton string  
Dimension varied  
2016





*The Gridded Ghosts*  
C-print  
62cm x 45cm x 10 pieces  
2016



*Vote and Vow*  
Multiple digital laser prints on acid-free paper  
160cm x 110cm  
2015



*National Baby 1*  
Multiple digital laser prints on acid-free paper  
116cm x 80cm  
2015



*National Baby 2*  
Multiple digital laser prints on acid-free paper  
116cm x 80cm  
2015



*The Day of the General Election*  
Light Box  
68cm x 102cm  
2015



*The Day of the General Election* (Installation view)



*A Lonely Star*  
 Mixed-media: political party flag  
 83cm x 120cm  
 2015



Wei-Ling Gallery

Produced by **Wei-Ling Gallery**

To accompany the exhibition entitled '*After-image: Living with the Ghosts in my House*' by Minstrel Kuik from 15th January- 29th February 2016 at

**Wei-Ling Contemporary**

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Cover image: *A Worm Turns*,  
 Digital laser print on 100g acid-free paper,  
 29.7 cm x 21 cm (Diptych), 2015

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