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Wei-LingGallery

to be able to advance is to be able to let go

Vanity
Project



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Re: Introduction

On Wed, 22 Jun 2016, Dr. Hanni Geiger:

Me too! Thank you Wei-Ling.
Hanni

On Wed, 22 Jun 2016, Ivan Lam:

Looking forward to it! Will mail Dr hanni in length very soon.

And thanks ms lim for bridging the gap.

I

On Wed, 22 Jun 2016, Lim Wei-Ling:

Dear Dr Hanni,

Thank-you so much for agreeing to collaborate with Ivan Lam on his next project.

I would like to introduce you to Ivan Lam via email so that you may start the ball rolling!

Am excited to see what will come out of this conversation between the two of you-artist and curator!

Dear Ivan,

Please meet Dr Hanni Geiger!
I hand the baton over to you....

Can't wait to see how this unique experiment develops!

Warm wishes,
Wei-ling

The middle is where I come from. On a collaboration project between art and theory

“Every orientation presupposes a disorientation.”¹

What Hans Magnus Enzensberger, the famous German poet, dramatist and philosopher claimed in his exquisite and always valid essays on problems of ethnicity, migration and violence, applies perfectly to this very special project the renowned Malaysian artist Ivan Lam came up with. In May 2016, one year ago, the KL-based artist defined together with his gallery Wei-Ling Contemporary a new path in his well-established working method. As each migration generates conflicts², it was clear that this voyage, breaking out of the familiar patterns, would surely generate a friction. But according to Freud’s concept of the “uncanny”³, this inevitable migration to new shores had to generate something that would paradoxically feel incongruous, instable and mysterious, yet strangely familiar.

The ten artworks, all of them of same format (210 x 120cm) but with different themes, are hybrids – a series born out of a collaboration between Ivan Lam – the artist, and the art theorist and curator, which is me. When Lam came up with the idea of bringing up a very personal art project, I was fascinated and thrilled about this “uncanny” plan of merging traditionally very opposed working processes of hands and thought.

¹ Enzensberger, Hans Magnus: Topological Structures in Modern Literature, in: Sur (May/June 1966).

² Cf. Enzensberger, Hans Magnus: Die große Wanderung: Dreiund-dreißig Markierungen. Mit einer Fußnote „Über einige Besonderheiten bei der Menschenjagd“ (1st edition Frankfurt am Main 1992), 7th edition Frankfurt am Main 1993, p. 13f.

³ Cf. Freud, Sigmund: Das Unheimliche (1919), in: Psychologische Schriften. Studienausgabe, ed. by Alexander Mitscherlich, 4 volumes (1st edition 1970), 4th edition Frankfurt am Main 1978 (1. Aufl. 1970), p. 241-274.

Breaking up the conventional meant giving up the common exhibition strategy with a curator at the very end of an art process. Twelve months later, the ongoing conversation, a back and forth of images, thoughts and philosophies between artist and theorist led to a series of in-betweens, a new middle between different positions, working and thinking approaches.

The “middle” can be defined as the point equidistant from extremes or limits, or as the centre of something. Particularly Buddhist philosophy stands for a middle as a rebellion against all extremes. Even French philosopher Camus propagated a concept called *la pensée midi*. Nothing new to Lam, who always challenged existing systems by mapping and negotiating visual and ideological dualities in all of his works, as also evident in this series with two distinct sections on each of the single canvases. By providing enough space for both polarities on the work surfaces, he manages to create a new statement, something like a third space between the extreme entities. Just as this body of works represents the midway point of the usual opponents art and theory, Lam’s pieces like *They can’t kill us all* not only broach eloquently the old duality issue. As a positive response to his previous work *They will kill us all* (2015), this piece negates the danger contained in the former title’s words. But instead of the previous image with children playing and simulating a shooting situation, this time the gun is real – but the title signalsises hope. Hope, which is also being reflected at the bottom part of the painting. The linear connections between the dots which stand for all Malaysian cities can be read as borders which always separate and bind at the same time – something Lam emphasizes again and again.

Whether it is the complicated political situation in the multi-ethnic, but unfortunately not (yet) transcultural⁴ state Malaysia or the negotiation of life and death, like Andy Warhol already explored it in a similar graphical manner in his *Guns, Knives, Crosses and Skulls* series (1984), the dialectic approach is never only a comparison or a confrontation. In *Dead Bird*, the obvious death, pictured through a lifeless bird body split in a figurative and a more abstract, linear part, seems strangely beautiful. The bird's feathers lead us to think about life as something very fragile; but both their beauty and vibrancy surviving death can be reflected in connection with a death which is more than the end of all things. It was already the Futurists who embraced war and death through their impulsive and colourful brush strokes as a chance for a new beginning: erasing the past and simultaneously setting new standards. But, isn't death always linked to life, and vice versa? And isn't art always the production of new life? So the end would be the same as a new beginning and the artist would be a "creator" too, turning death, damage and loss into beauty. The tiny vectors of red, blue, green, lucid colours springing outwards from a radiating source – a middle (again) – behind the figurative motif in most of the paintings accentuate this energy representing movement and therefore life.

⁴ Transculturality stands for cultural hybridisation in a globalised world, whereas multiculturalism denotes a parallel coexistence of closed and homogeneous entities. Cf. Welsch, Wolfgang: Transkulturalität. Zur veränderten Verfassung heutiger Kulturen, in: Hybridkultur. Medien, Netze, Künste, ed. by Irmela Schneider/Christian W. Thomsen, Cologne 1997, p. 67-90.

Another formal tool which led Lam and me to a deeper thinking was his usage of "the grid" as a set of linear (*They can't kill us all, Let your downlights shine up, Dead Bird*) and organically structures filling up the second half of his partitioned works. In Western art history the grid has been positioned as an emblem of modernism⁵, and still today it can be a sign for a radical art practice that addresses the topic of today⁶. In *Diabetic Love Affair* the upper part of the canvas is defined by a graphical set of circular lines representing a knitting pattern. It is juxtaposed to the bottom part, which is coated with honey, polyurethane and then burnt, illustrating a topographical map of the Nigerian villages and towns destroyed by Boko Haram. Lam's approach using grids is even more than modern: one man – the artist – standing up against a world led by men who kidnap, rape and even kill women: mothers, grandmothers, daughters, aunts and sisters. Is it a coincidence that Lam chose to repair this terrorised, indeed fallen apart world by throwing a graphically knitted net over it – a technique traditionally attributed to female labour? Here he is: a man questioning obsolete gender attributions and providing all women, especially the humiliated and despised ones, with power.

⁵ Cf. Krauss, Rosalind: Grids, in: The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths, Cambridge/Mass./London 1985.

⁶ Cf. Tupitsyn, Margarita: The Grid as a Checkpoint of Modernity (Autumn 2009), no. 12, in: Tate Papers, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/12/the-grid-as-a-checkpoint-of-modernity>.

To forgive is an intensification of the grid seen as threads in a textile context. The diagonal and straight lines and systems of squares and triangles, reminding of fabrics and their pattern grids, are actually a whole textile surface – a quilt Lam got as a child from his grandmother and used as a cover for a long time. That is why this very personal grid contains the artist's physical traces. His DNA: blood, hair, sweat and tears are registered in each membrane of the threads and fabric pieces the quilt is made of. Maybe this is the grid Clifford Geertz meant when defining culture as a hand-spun fabric of meanings, done all by one selves, staying in a constant change and never being finished⁷. Culture is never static⁸ – so weren't obviously the Japanese conquerors who occupied Malaya between 8th December 1941 and 16th February 1942, a reality Lam's grandmother remembers only too well. The grid: a system of separation and connection, at times beautiful, at times painful and bloody too.

The maps of places Lam often depicts through a grid system with spots denoting where people died by climbing Everest or signalling open fires in East Asia as seen in *Melts in your mouth, not in your hands* remind us of classical weather charts; the graphical, stylized crosses, points and dots in bright complementary colour contrasts and primary tones of yellow, blue, red and orange are very similar to the charts with their simple sign systems of arrows, winds,

isobars and other meteorological marks. Pretty, all these signs. But what Lam's and the weather charts have got in common is their abstraction – they must depict a dynamical process by static means⁹. Not a logical image, as the normal state of the atmosphere (and the world) is turbulence. Hence constant colonisation and illegal settlements by humans of all kind count to this dramatic normality.

But it is not only the outer turbulences that Lam is trying to visualise in his, towards the end of the project, obviously more and more abstract art. Illustrating the inner state of being, the invisible, is something which doesn't work through abstraction as a means of simplification or reduction of visible things. It is rather the haptic quality of the material and the technical experiments of collecting pieces of our outer world that allow an inspection of Lam's inner ghosts. With the gold leaves, cassette tapes and vinyl as in *Black Gold*, glitter, aluminium blades and resin in *The first cut is deepest uncut* or beeswax, soya wax, vinyl, gunpowder, aluminium in *T marks the spot* some of Lam's inner fights and traumas concerning the outer world breach to the surface of his art. So, are the cuts he integrates in his works by adding blades and tearing the latex and resin surface openings to the artist's being? The outer fissures as inner cuts? They are indeed unrepeatable, unique traces of one's personality.

One thing should be clear – Lam's search for new shores will never end. How could it, when the arrival always signifies the end of the yearning.

⁷ Cf. Geertz, Clifford: *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Selected Essays, New York 1973.

⁸ Cf. Hall, Stuart: *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, in: *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. by Jonathan Rutherford, London 1990, p. 226.

⁹ Cf. Enzensberger 1993, p. 9.

Maybe it is the postcolonial, global world Lam is born in, which, for the constant search of cultural belonging, doesn't allow a standstill. Working between the things, positions, worlds, never means a completed "to be". Rather it's about staying in the middle, being an intermezzo, a constantly redefined alliance of different, sometimes opponent poles. The middle as an act of balance, hence, a permanent motion?¹⁰ Probably, it is this middle Sigfried Giedion meant when proclaiming the equilibrium as the new ideal of humankind.



THEY WILL KILL US ALL
Synthetic house paint and resin on canvas on board
240 x 315cm (Triptych)
2015

Dr. Hanni Geiger

PhD, is a principal lecturer/reader at the Fresenius University of Applied Sciences (Design Department)/ AMD Academy of Fashion and Design, Munich, Germany. She studied fashion and textile design in Zagreb, Croatia, as well as art history, art education and intercultural communication at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University of Munich (LMU), where she completed her doctorate in 2014 with a dissertation on the British-Cypriot couturier and artist Hussein Chalayan (form follows culture. *Entgrenzungen im Konzept-Design Hussein Chalayans*, Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Böhlau 2016 [= mode global; vol. 1]). From 2015 to 2016 she undertook a research period in Malaysia and Singapore and, to date, has collaborated with Wei-Ling Gallery in Kuala Lumpur. Previously, from 2013 to 2015, she was a research associate and lecturer at the Institute of Art History at the LMU Munich. From 2011 to 2012 she was part of the research project *Exil, Migration und Transfer* at the Center for Advanced Studies in Munich (led by Prof Dr BurcuDogramaci). Further career steps include among others the project work at the Goethe-Institute Croatia, as well as the editorial work for the reviewed (art) history academic online journals *sehepunkte* and *lesepunkte*. Her research focuses on modern and contemporary art, the interdependencies between (fashion) design, art and migration and the relationship between mobility, exile, transculturality and identity building, as well as postcolonial artistic positions.

¹⁰ Cf. Giedion, Sigfried: *Mechanization Takes Command*, Oxford 1948.

THEY CAN'T KILL US ALL

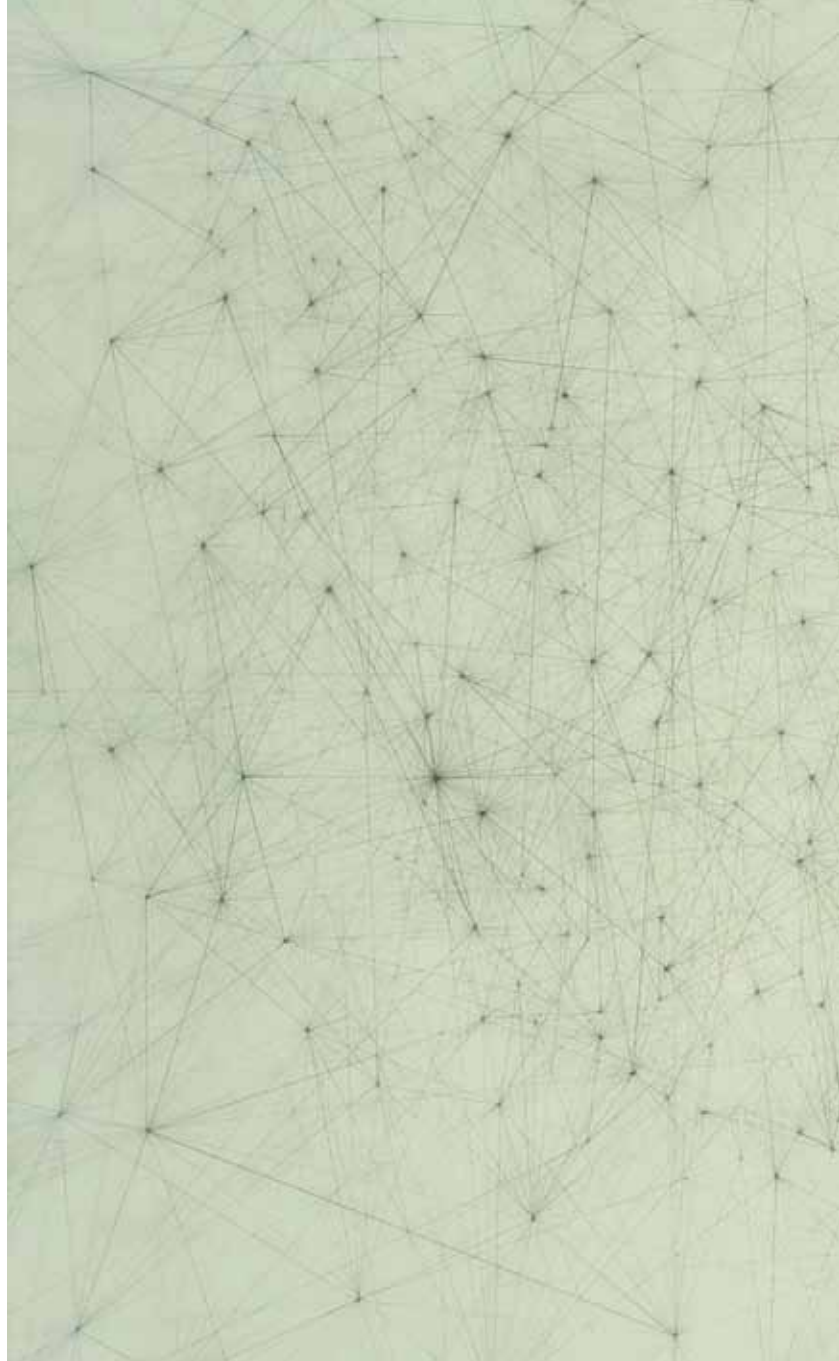
Synthetic house paint, pencil and resin on canvas, on
board

210cm x 120cm

2016







DEAD BIRD

Synthetic house paint, pencil and resin on canvas, on
board

210cm x 120cm

2016







LET YOUR DOWNLIGHTS SHINE UP

Synthetic house paint, watercolour pencils and resin on
canvas, on board
210cm x 120cm
2016





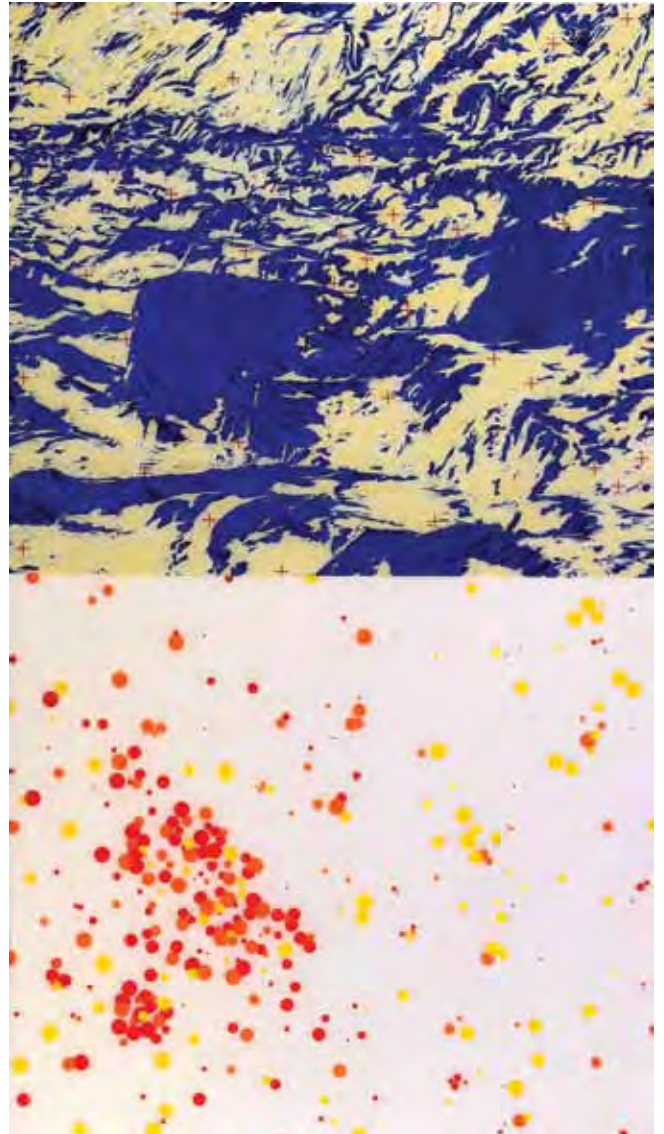


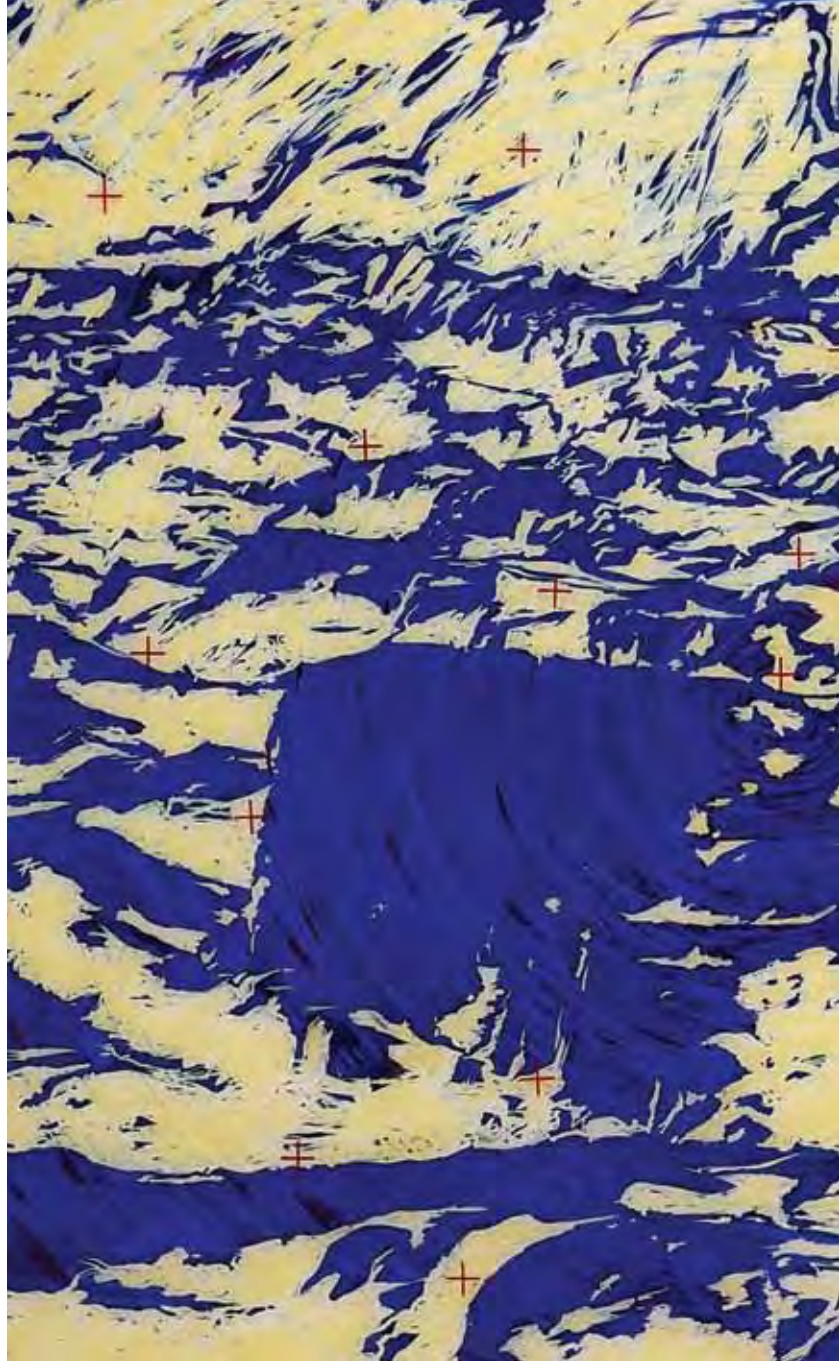
MELTS IN YOUR MOUTH, NOT IN YOUR HANDS

Synthetic paint vinyl, cut circles and resin on canvas, on
board

210cm x 120cm

2016

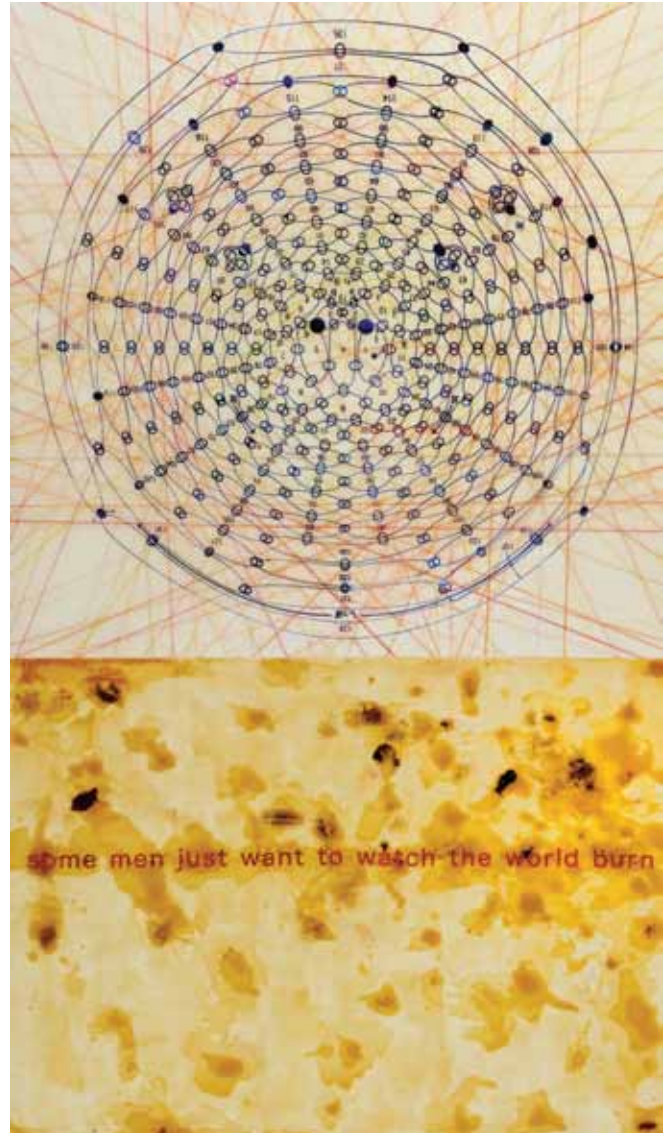


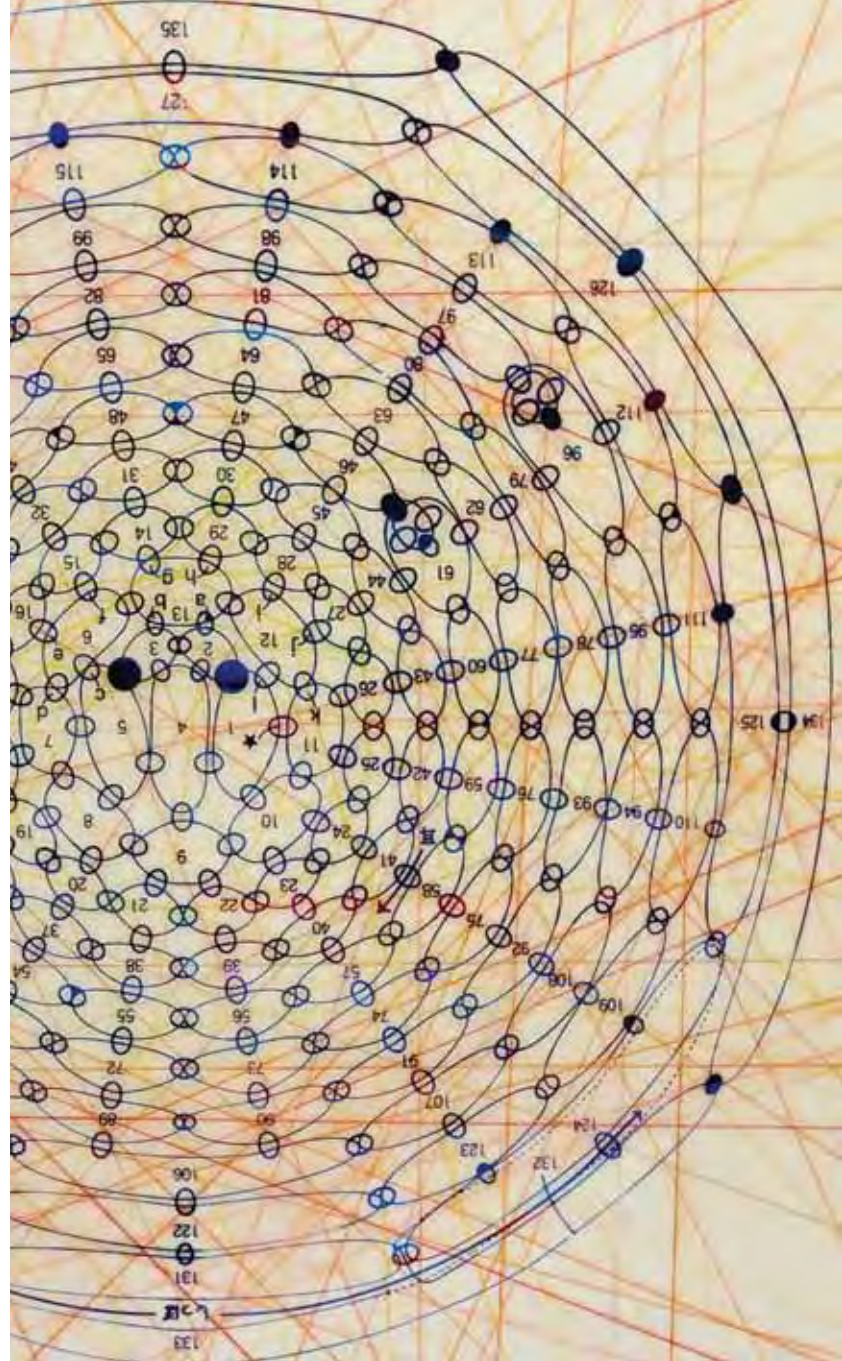




DIABETIC LOVE AFFAIR

Honey, polyurethane, watercolour pencil and resin on
canvas, on board
210cm x 120cm
2016







atch the world burn

BLACK GOLD

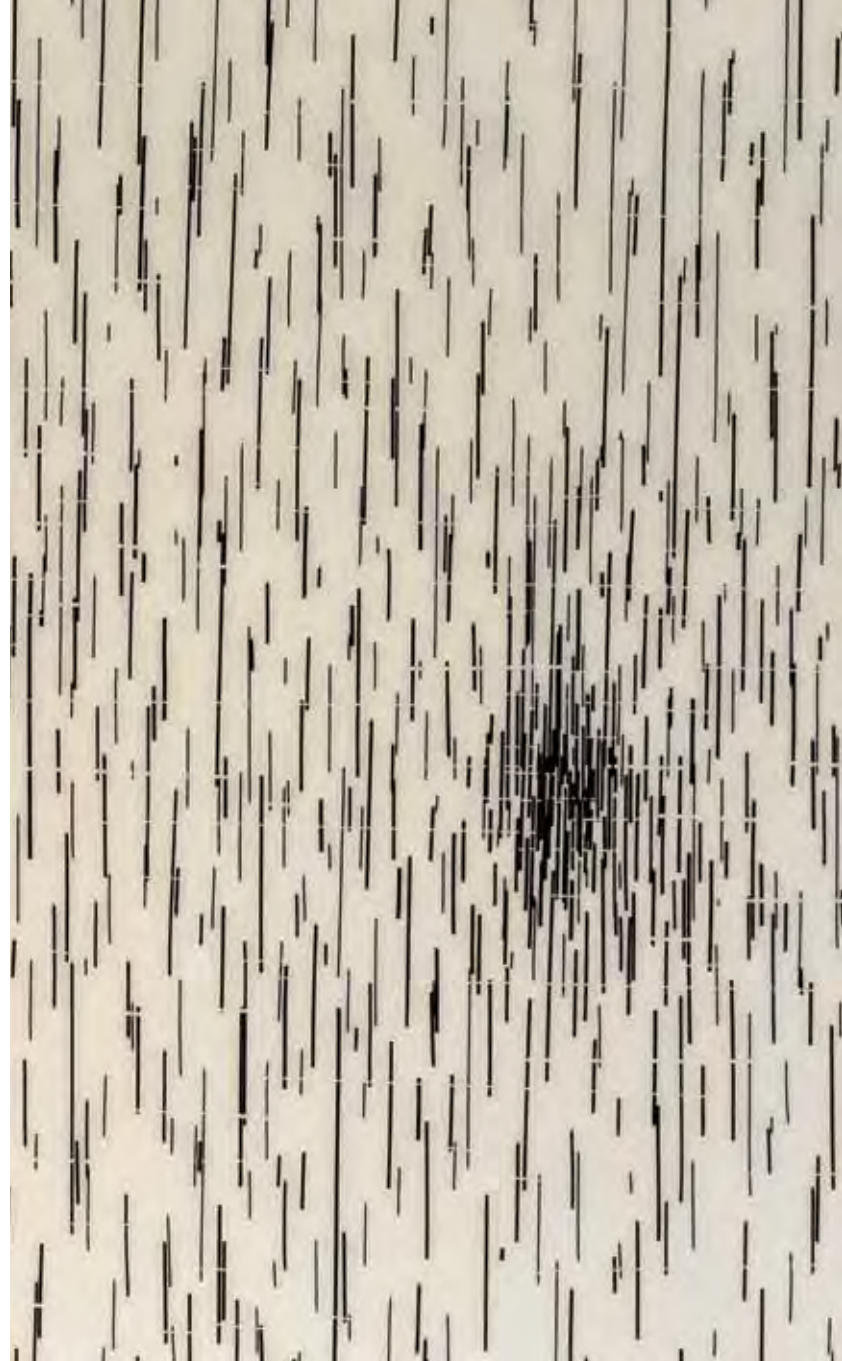
Gold leaf, cassette tape vinyl and resin on canvas, on
board

210cm x 120cm

2016



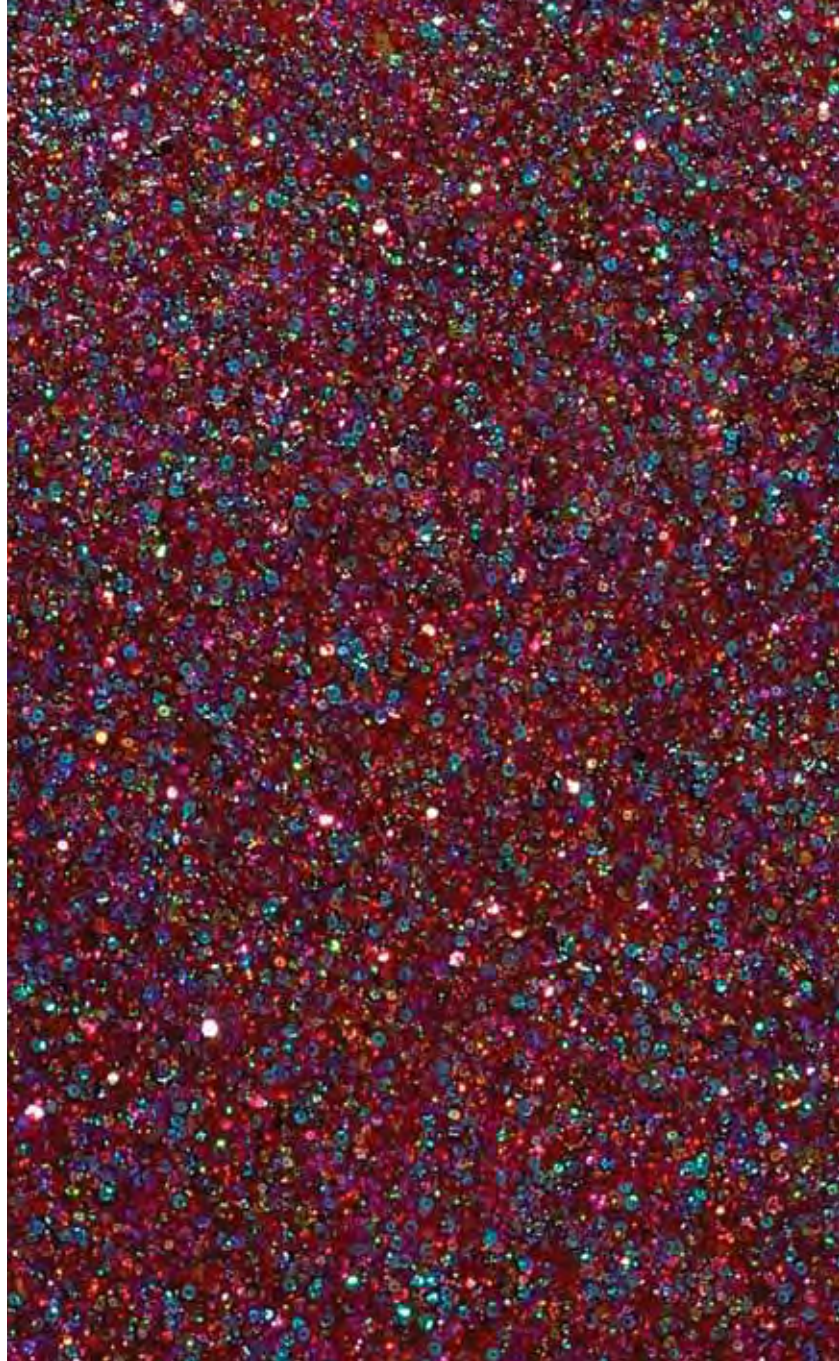




THE FIRST CUT IS DEEPEST UNCUT

Sequins, aluminium blades, synthetic latex and resin on
canvas, on board
210cm x 120cm
2017

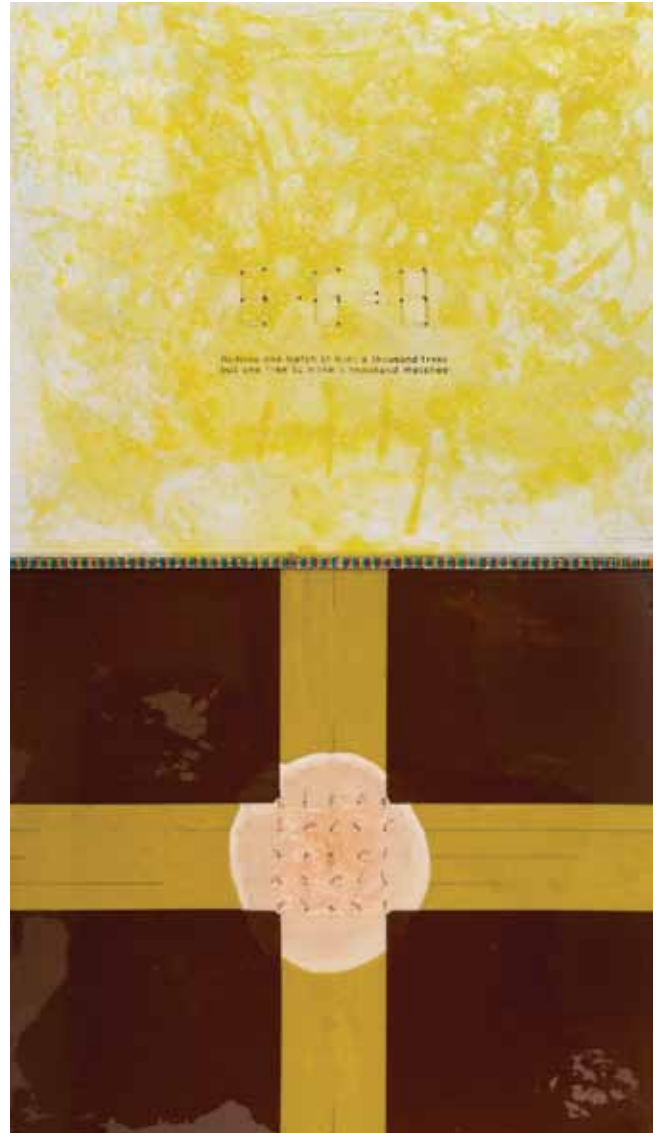


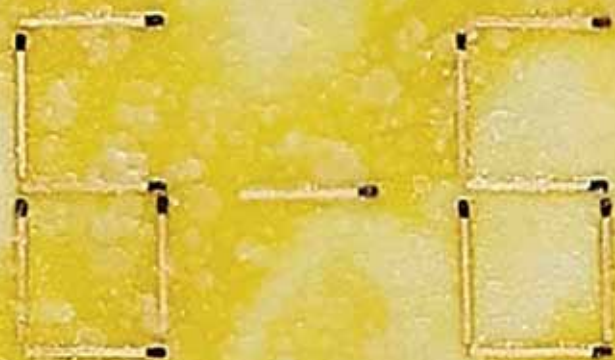




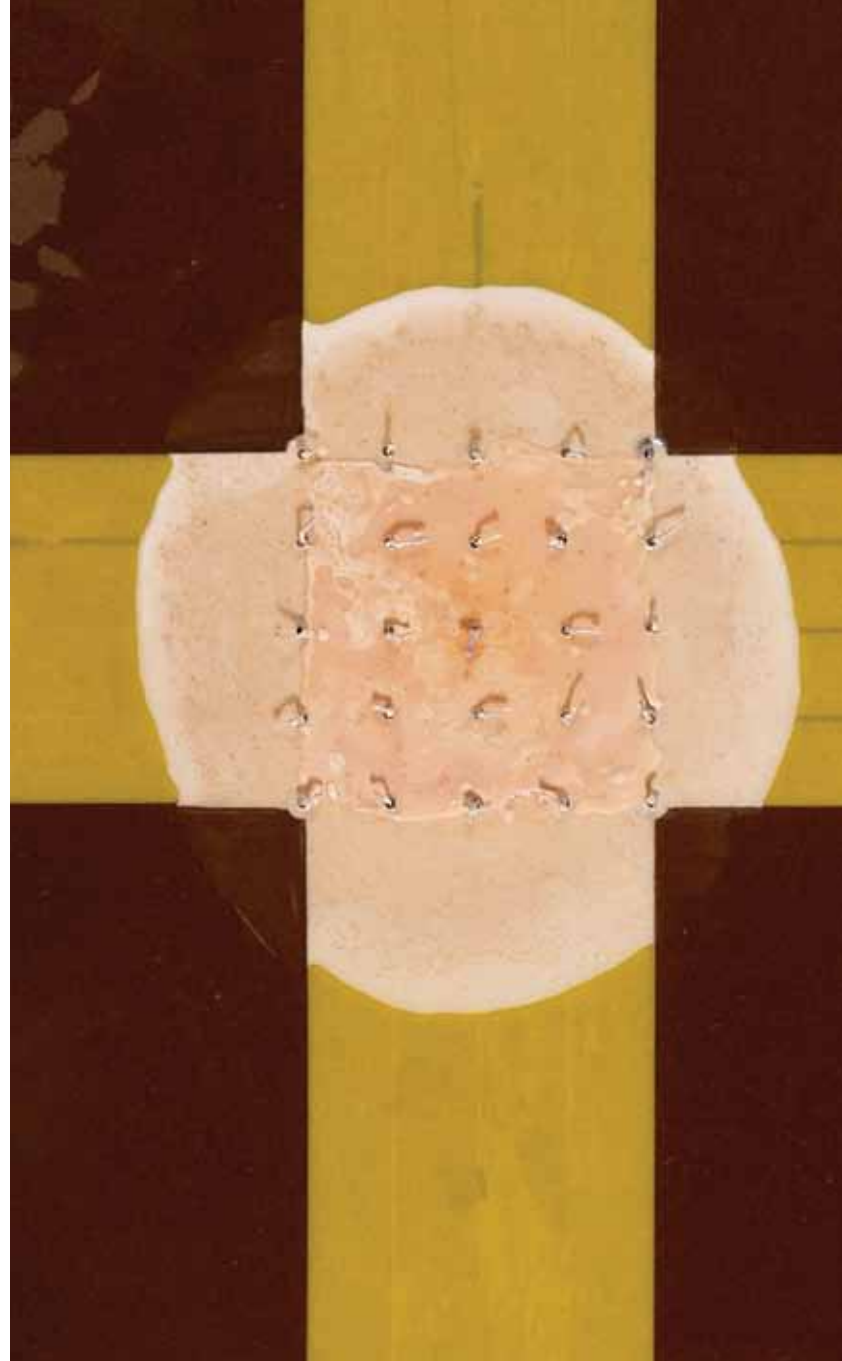
T MARKS THE SPOT

Beeswax, soya wax, gunpowder, vinyl, wick, aluminium
holder on board
210cm x 120cm
2017



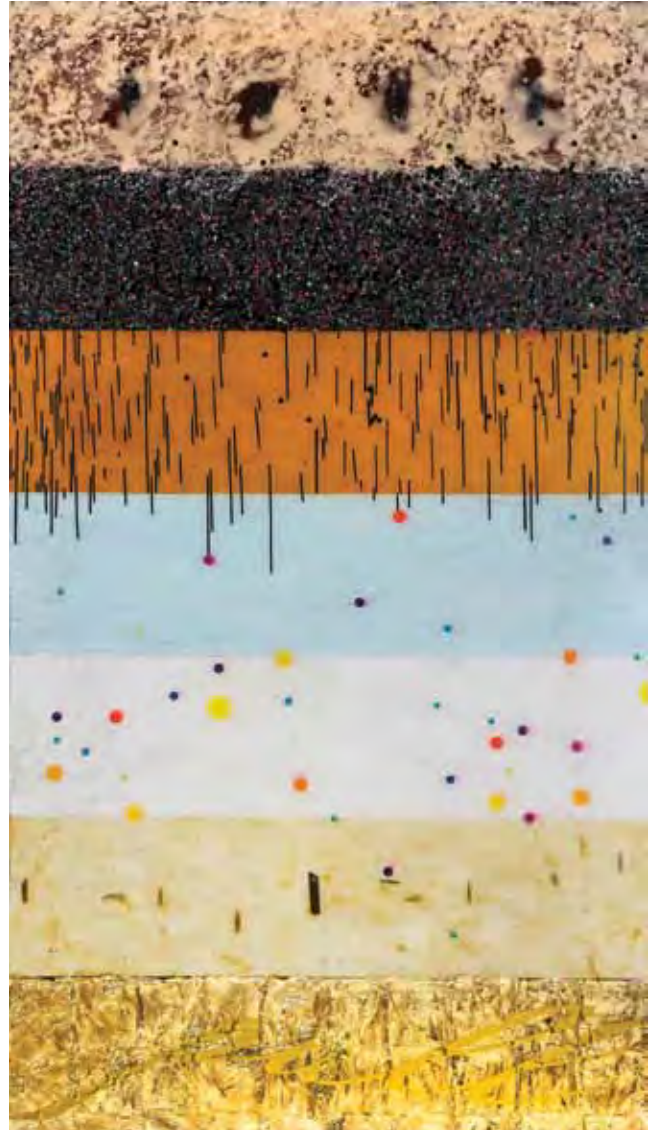


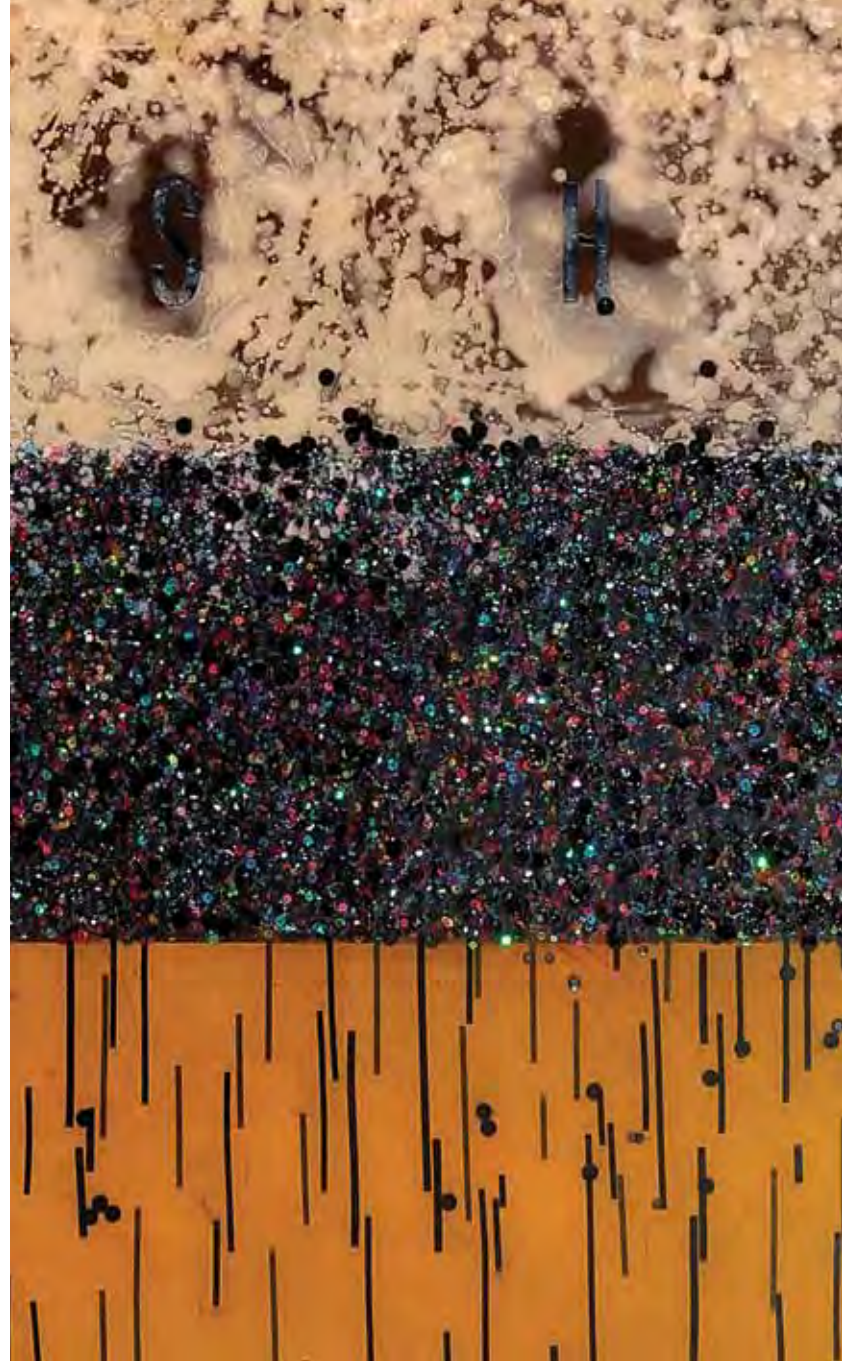
remove one match to burn a
ut one tree to make a tho



GREATEST HITS - COMPILATION VOL.1

Synthetic house paint, beeswax, latex, sequins, pencil,
vinyl, cassette tape and resin on board
210cm x 120cm
2017





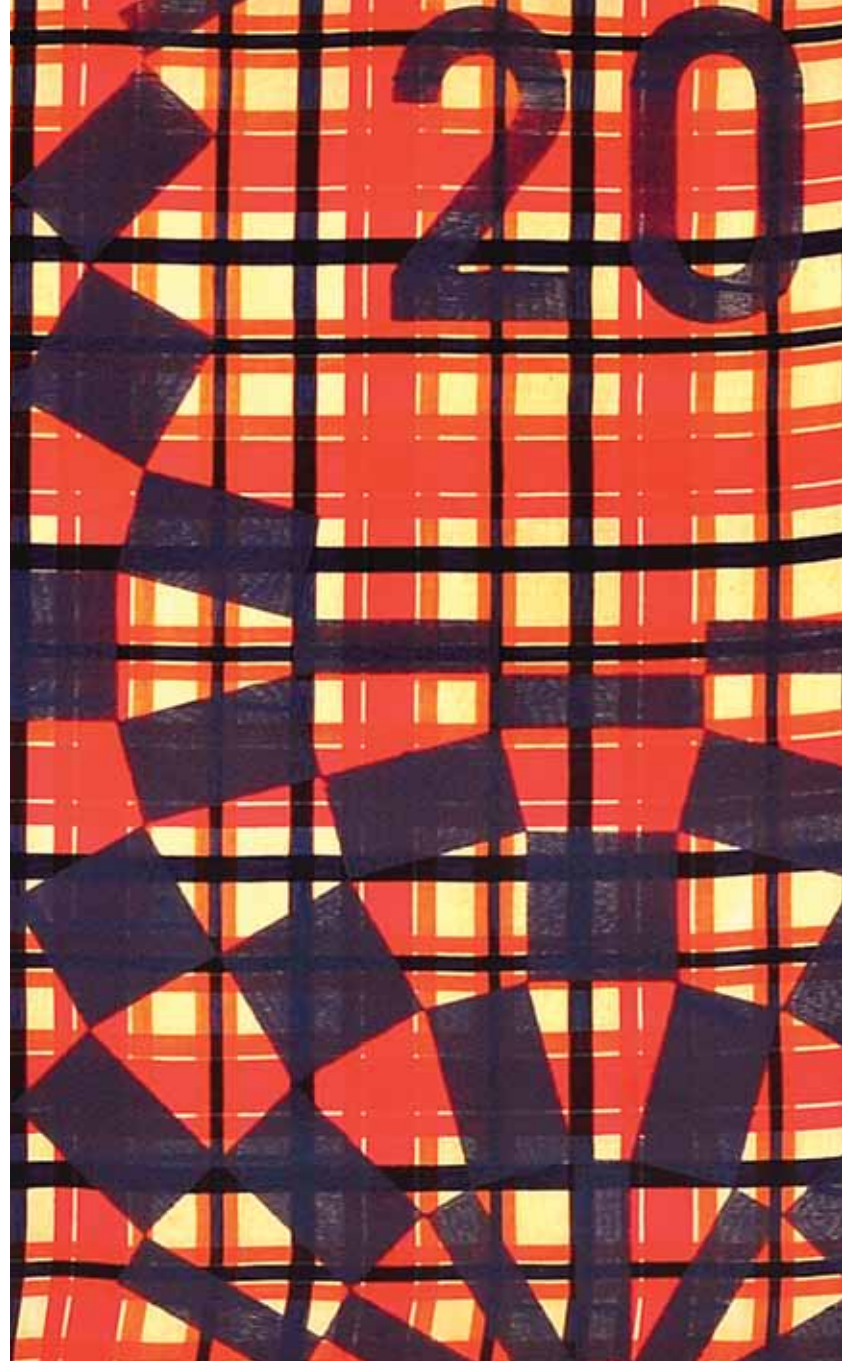


TO FORGIVE

Quilt, vinyl, resin on board
213cm x 152cm
2016







IVAN LAM (b.1975)

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

- 2017 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
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
Art Basel Hong Kong 2013, Hong Kong Convention Centre, Hong Kong
- tion Sotheby's 40th Anniversary Auction (Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Paintings), 6th October 2013, Hong Kong Convention Centre, Hong Kong
Christie's Auction (ASIAN CONTEMPORARY ART (DAY SALE), 25th May 2013, Hong Kong Convention Centre, Hong Kong
- 2012 MACHINES, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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, Singapore
- 2004 Plosive, Taksu, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2002 911, Taksu, 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

- 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
Timeless, Group Exhibition, 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

2007 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
 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, KL, Malaysia
 Nasi Campur 2006, Taksu, 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 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 ME, USA
 1997 Maine Art Auction, Selected for Live Auction, Portland ME, 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, KL, Malaysia
 2001 Group Exhibit (Honourable Mention), Phillip Morris 2001, National Art Gallery, KL, Malaysia
 1999 One person Exhibit, Bright Sight Night Lights, Galeriwan, KL, 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

These are my love letters to Art and H...



Produced by Wei-Ling Gallery

To accompany Ivan Lam's **'Vanity Project X'**
9th May - 12th June 2017

Wei-Ling Contemporary

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DESIGNED BY | Lim Siew Boon

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