

H.H. Lim, a pivotal artist renowned for his thought-provoking creations, has been sharing his artwork worldwide and is currently presenting 'The Gaze of Sleepwalkers' (2024) at Wei-Ling Contemporary in Kuala Lumpur. This exhibition reflects upon the human condition in society, our endless journeys, and the state of unconsciousness, leading to the ceaseless evolution of mankind. "We don't see the fundamental problem of life because we don't stop to think about it. We get up, commute, work, eat, work, commute, sleep. But occasionally a breakdown occurs, a Chandos-like moment in which a beat is skipped and the question of purpose arises."<sup>1</sup> In this exhibition, the artist H.H. Lim delves into several intriguing nuances, providing a shifting gaze that transcends perceptions by disrupting the obvious, allowing contemplative purposes and observing beyond from the apparent. "In order to relate attention to the life of consciousness, [one must] show how a perception awakens attention." stated by Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

'Home-world' and 'alien-world' are terminologies from Martin Heidegger, wherein an 'alien' merges into an unfamiliar territory full of a non-identical civilization, faces linguistic barriers and a sense of obscurity, which enables one to discover and stimulate self-questioning. H.H. Lim's cross-cultural circumstances from the East to West, needless to say, contribute opportunities to reinvent perspectives of a new world and a transformation of identity. The intricacy of art lies in the ability to observe and the exploration of diverse possibilities, empowering Lim to seek for self-development. His '*Sitting Sculptures*' (created over various years) Fig 1 serve as an example of his introspective expedition, in which he challenges the notion of identity by using chairs as a symbol of one's shadow.



Fig 1



Fig 2

Even in the midst of cultural mayhem, H.H. Lim preserves his authenticity through diving into the equilibrium principle of life. A unique delicate blend of cultural philosophies and languages is submerged into his creations. This is particularly evident in '*Enter the Parallel World*' (2001-2006) Fig 2, which draws from Eastern tradition in its search for the understanding of balance. Additionally, '*The Cage, the Bench and the Luggage*' (2011-2017) Fig 8 and '*The Beginning of Something*' (2014) Fig 5 all seem to investigate the equilibrium between internal and external, life and death, positive and negative. Undoubtedly, '*The Gaze of Sleepwalkers*' (2024) explores the interconnectedness of human experiences and the

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<sup>1</sup> Bakewell, Sarah. *At the Existentialist Cafe : Freedom, Being and Apricot Cocktails*. Toronto, Vintage Canada, 2017.

interplay between opposite forces, such as humans and animals, peace and chaos, reality and dream.

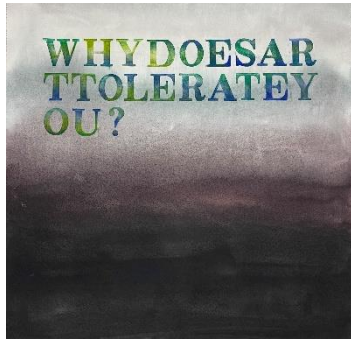


Fig3

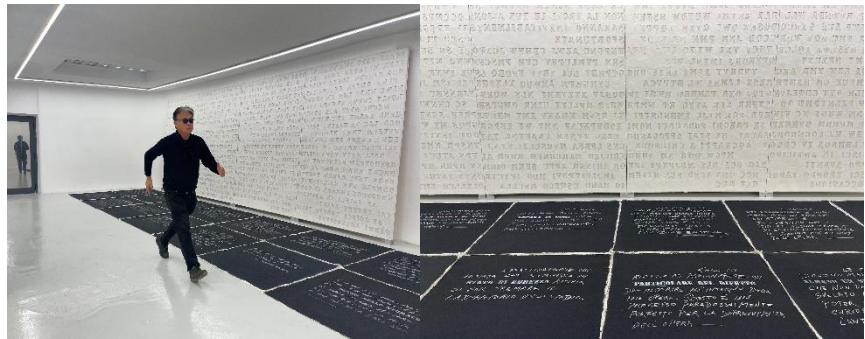


Fig 4

H.H. Lim's artistic creations are engaged profoundly with the use of language, as he playfully integrates linguistic elements into his visual compositions. This is evident in the work 'Why does art tolerate you?' (2022) Fig 3, where Lim adopts a deceptive element by altering traditional sentence structures, navigating disorientation, and challenging conveniences and comfort. Similarly, in 'No Words Can Speak' (2023) Fig 4, he demonstrated his ideologies by employing the word "axioms", creating a puzzle-like game that reveals uncertainties of thoughts beneath the obvious. It involves searching to interlock the absurdity of everyday dialogue. Furthermore, in 'Red Room' (2004) Lim employs the idiom of 'tongue nailing' as a metaphor for incessant chatter.



Fig 5



Fig 6

Delving into symbolism in H.H. Lim's creations, which play a significant impact, include works such as 'The Beginning of Something' (2014) Fig 5 and 'Gone with the Wind' (2010) Fig 6 at UCCA Ullens Center for Contemporary Art in Beijing. The imagery of helicopters highlights both the exterior and interior chaos of our living world, signifying the struggle for salvation amidst relentless storms. It presents an illusion of colourful fantasy, where we seek hope and answers that transcend reality. However, the flying helicopter in 'The Gaze of Sleepwalkers' (2024) exists more than mere hope; it symbolises the human condition and the summoning of our enlightenment. Moreover, Lim delves into the complexity of human expression and communication, particularly focusing on the art of sign languages. In the work 'Sign Language Series' (2009), the depiction of his own profile with sign languages

portraying a profound collection of thoughts, imaginations, emotions and changes, prompting to communicate and interplay within himself. This sophisticated practice has evolved to recent work '*Code 8363*' (2023), symbolising the introspective journey and key imagery of H.H. Lim.

In discerning and embracing a fresh interpretation of things, H.H. Lim demonstrates his ability to absorb and sense experiences in their purest essence. This empowers him to express and touch his canvases with raw strokes, combining his web-like mind to enable numerous possibilities and answers through his art. Lim's inclination towards journaling his expeditions and accumulated thoughts is visible in the recognizable yet disordered visual components of his current work. This artistic practice can be traced back to his previous creation, '*Four Seasons*' (2019) Fig 7 exhibited at the 58th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, showcasing 'Timeframes', which similarly compiles elements from throughout his lifetime.



Fig 7



Fig 8

'*The Gaze of Sleepwalkers*' (2024) is indeed a continuous exploration of H.H. Lim's commentary on society, reviving elements from his existing creations and evolving into a profound remark. Certainly, significant themes such as humanity and consumerism can be traced back to Lim's past practices. '*The Cage, the Bench and the Luggage*' (2011-2017) Fig 8 conveys the conflict that represents our history of mankind, between temptation and freedom. The desire to chase treasures hidden inside a confined prison implies that protection comes with a form of control, contradicting the sitting bench across the cage, which symbolises nothingness and freedom. In addition to that, '*The Beginning of Something*' (2014) Fig 5 showcasing the juxtaposition between possession and abandonment, and our excessive consumption of luxurious goods. This current exhibition reveals the truth of the present where we live – the primitiveness of humanity and the transformation of 'Lucy'. The veracity puts us in the seduction of gold, living restlessly in our constrained society. Undoubtedly, Lim's intention suggests endless evolution as a survival mechanism, considering traces of existence in this universe. Thus, the circle of life continues.

H.H. Lim's art serves as a bridge to convey truth in society, with his diverse range of mediums and input offering a fresh perspective, provoking contemplation of one's significance and functionality. The complexity and ambiguity of linguistic elements and symbolic images that appear in his works are certainly incomprehensible, enlightening a

sense of cynicism. Most importantly, these perplexities prompt self-exploration of our individuality and the balance in life amidst obscurity. As Socrates said, "I know you won't believe me, but the highest form of Human Excellence is to question oneself and others."

**Fig 1**

Timeframes  
Pavilion of Malaysia at the 58th  
International Art Exhibition – La Biennale  
di Venezia  
2019

**Fig 2**

Enter the Parallel World  
Performing Arts, Video  
00:28:25 Multiversion  
2001 – 2016

**Fig 3**

Why does art tolerate you?  
Acrylic on canvas  
105cm x 105cm  
2022

**Fig 4**

No Words Can Speak  
Fondazione Baruchello, Rome  
2023

**Fig 5**

The Beginning of Something  
Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur  
2014

**Fig 6**

Gone with the Wind  
UCCA Ullens Center for Contemporary  
Art, Beijing  
2010

**Fig 7**

Timeframes  
Pavilion of Malaysia at the 58th  
International Art Exhibition – La Biennale  
di Venezia  
2019

**Fig 8**

The Cage, the Bench and the Luggage  
Iron cage, bench and luggage  
484 × 216 × 228 cm  
2011-2017