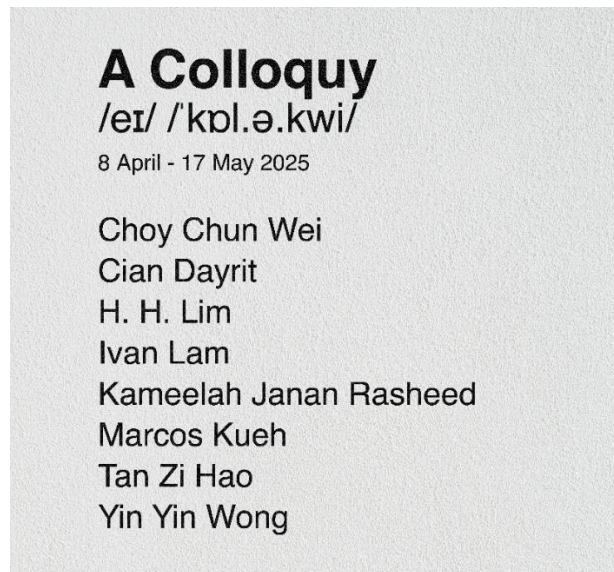


A Colloquy: In Letters We Find Ourselves



"Colloquy", pronounced *KOL-uh-kwee*. Someone asked me if it was a real word in the dictionary. How would you define what's real and what's fiction. To be fair, is *anything* real? How sure are we that we aren't just avatars in a simulation game, controlled by higher beings with a warped sense of humour? Are words real if we just agree they are? Are *we* real if someone else observes us? As the lingo of today's youth would have me say: "Existential crisis much?" Well, that was quite a tangent. Alright, back to what we — or maybe just *me*? — came here for. Unless, of course, none of us actually *came* here and this is all just a narrative loop collapsing in on itself.

A Colloquy, a group exhibition at Wei-Ling Gallery that invites viewers into a conversation with the works made by eight contemporary artists: Choy Chun Wei (Malaysia), Cian Dayrit (Philippines), H. H. Lim (Malaysia), Ivan Lam (Malaysia), Kameelah Janan Rasheed (United States), Marcos Kueh (Malaysia), Tan Zi Hao (Malaysia), and Yin Yin Wong (The Netherlands). What these eight vastly individualistic beings have in common are the avenues through which they chose to narrate how each of them sees and inhabit the world in which we live in. Even with very distinctive artistic practices, all have incorporated letters, words, text, fonts, and language into their work in some way. They come from different walks of life, each with their own unique worldview, and each, in their own way, opens up conversations on different matters — making *A Colloquy* less of a statement and more of an invitation: a space for dialogue, interpretation, and the discovery of meaning in the interplay between word, image, and context.

Why is there so much importance placed on language? Because it is the primary way we communicate with each other, be it verbal or non-verbal. And as Edward Bulwer-Lytton said, "*The pen is mightier than the sword*". We often think of military hardware and weapons of mass destruction as the most dangerous elements in war. But if we look closer and think deeper, we might realise it

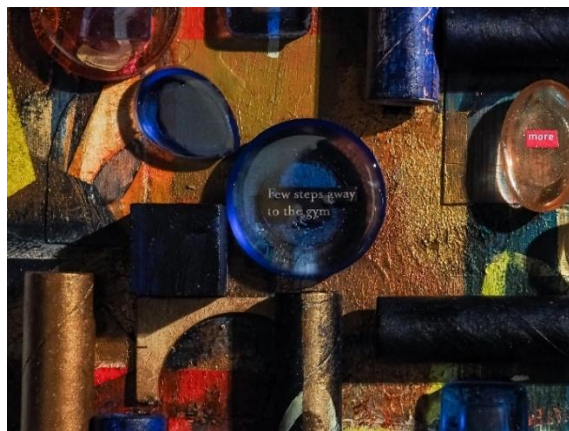
begins with a word. A singular person, uttering a single command. Such is the weight of words: capable of decimating populations and levelling countries.

But enough of such extremities.

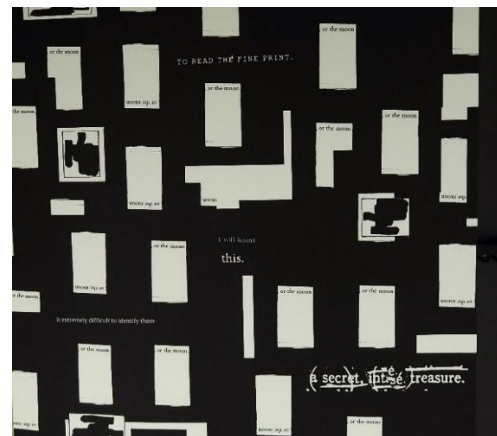
The artists here use syntax, text, and language not to destroy, but as a way of disseminating and encouraging discourse.

Snippets

Excerpts from sentences, cut out, only to be embedded into works to form new narratives; Kameelah Janan Rasheed (she/her) and Choy Chun Wei (he/him) have that in common. Though the content of their works differs greatly, it is this act of extraction and recontextualisation that connects this American and Malaysian artist. Both Rasheed and Choy engage with the complexities of language and memory, using fragmented texts and recontextualised fragments to spark reflection. Through their work, they engage viewers in a process of uncovering and reimagining, where each piece becomes a space for exploring identity, history, and the fluid nature of meaning. Thus, encouraging a personal and interactive response.



Detail of *Cityscape with Talking Heads* (2025);
Glass Ink, Wood, printed Typography, plastic,
acrylic, resin, and wax on wooden panel;
152.5cm x 76.3cm. Artist: Choy Chun Wei



Detail of *Air Shaft Study II* (2023); Stoff, Tinte /
Textile, ink; 1070cm x 135cm. Artist: Kameelah
Janan Rasheed

A love for reading and words was instilled in her from a young age. Following in her father's footsteps of annotating, Kameelah Janan Rasheed grew up a logophile, lending to the unique way her works take shape. Snippets taken from books and printed materials are purposefully rearranged into poetic, provocative, and sometimes enigmatic combinations. Her work traces the tension between overlapping histories, the realities of Black life in America, and the fragile terrain of memory. Often

reaching into what has been silenced or forgotten, yet rooted in diverse disciplines held in equal regard, her practice centers on Black improvisation and experimental poetics, where text functions as a living, dynamic form. Whether across architectural spaces or within her own archive, she turns to annotation, redaction, indexing, and blurring. Positioning reading and writing as ways of knowing and reimagining the world. Her debut showing in Malaysia exhibits works that offers a fresh lens through which to experience her expansive, text-based practice.

Air Shaft I – III are monumental works, with the longest measuring at a whopping 1530 meters. These large text-based installations that challenge conventional legibility with language blurring and shifting in response to the viewer's movement, inviting an interactive and embodied engagement with meaning. Here, Rasheed treats architectural space as an ambiguous zone — one where voices, identities, and meanings converge and shift, echoing her broader practice that investigates how language operates across spatial and cultural contexts.

For instance, in *Air Shaft I*, a single sentence is repeated three times with only the final word changing: *"the FEBRUARY trees delivered one happiness; a wild messenger offering the purple ocean as a SISTER / SONNET / SUPPLICATION"*. It demonstrates how a single word can alter the context of a sentence, highlighting the weight and resonance language as a whole.



Installation view of the exhibition Schering Stiftung Award for Artistic Research 2022: Kameelah Janan Rasheed – in the coherence, we weep at KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin 2023; All works: Courtesy the artist and NOME, Berlin. Photo: Frank Sperling.

This subtle variation speaks to her embrace of fragmentation and multiplicity. By resisting fixed interpretation, the work disrupts linear comprehension, creating space for reflection, and alternative modes of understanding. In its entirety, Rasheed's work draws you in, inviting you to think alongside

her and encouraging you to arrive at your own conclusions in a collaborative act between the reader and the writer.

Choy Chun Wei's work has always been richly layered. Drawing from his background in graphic design, he brings that sensibility into his fine art practice, creating a visual language that is distinctly his own. What may first appear as pure abstraction invites viewers to lean in — almost eyeball to surface, revealing a multitude of details waiting to be discovered. Scattered throughout Choy's *Cityscape of Talking Heads* are what he describes as, “*shallow, textured reliefs are covered with cast resin and found plastics that reveal broken messages through decontextualised fonts, collaged and frozen in cast resin capsules*”.



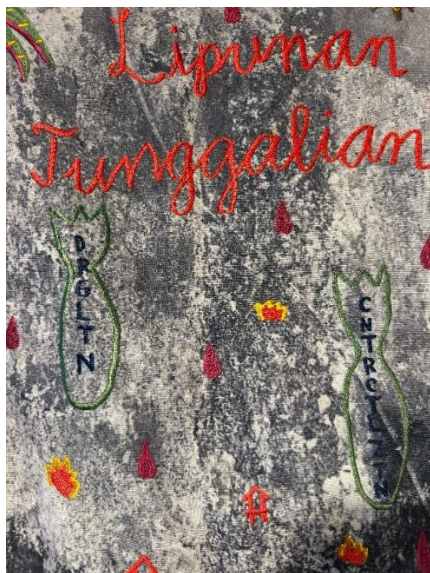
Cityscape with Talking Heads (2025); Glass Ink, Wood, printed Typography, plastic, acrylic, resin, and wax on wooden panel; 152.5cm x 76.3cm. Artist: Choy Chun Wei. Photographed by Kamarudin Diran

His work prompts us to see the city not just as architecture, but as a reflection of our emotional landscapes. A place shaped by longing, disorder, and control. Through cast resin and found plastics, Choy preserves fragments of language and form: decontextualised fonts, fragmented messages, and glossy, textured surfaces that feel at once intimate and distant. These small, intricate compositions draw the viewer in, encouraging close inspection while resisting easy interpretation. Now and then, humanoid shapes emerge. Like mechanical, ambiguous figures that seem caught between presence and absence. They speak to the strangeness of contemporary life, where connection is constant yet often impersonal, and where identity feels both exposed and uncertain.

Every element is carefully composed, creating a world that feels observed, coded, and quietly charged. The beauty of Choy's work is that it doesn't shout. Instead, it lingers, offering a poetic reflection on the tension between communication and alienation in the spaces we inhabit and the systems we build.

Decoding and Disruption

Visually, the practices of Cian Dayrit (he/him) and Ivan Lam (he/him) occupy markedly different visual territories. Though in a similar vein, the use of code-like text in their works, while not the central focus, plays an important role in clarifying and reinforcing the message the artists aim to convey. It works in tandem with other visual elements to bring cohesion to their narrative. The fonts used by the two artists are jarring in their contrast. Dayrit's text appears almost hand-drawn — loose, intimate, and organic — evoking the urgency of annotation or a note scrawled in the margins of history. In contrast, Lam turns to stencil-like fonts, precise and impersonal, echoing the mechanical systems of signage and control he so often interrogates in his practice. The fonts used by Dayrit and Lam beautifully demonstrates how typography can shift the very tone of a message, whether it be the seriousness, urgency, or intimacy of the words. And in doing so, quietly guides the way we connect with and interpret what is being said.



Details of *Mulat na masa ay Mesiyas noon pa man* (2022); Digital print, found objects and embroidery on fabric (collaboration with Henry Caceres); 119.4cm x 152.5cm. Artist: Cian Dayrit



Video still of *Colloquy* (2025); Digital art, Video projection; 00:00:30 (loop). Artist: Ivan Lam

Cian Dayrit's practice unfolds at the intersection of memory, power, and resistance. Through his work, he functions as a palimpsest of contested histories and cartographic resistance. Moving fluidly across

painting, sculpture, installation, and textiles, his work questions the systems that have shaped our histories (the state, the institutions, the military) and the lingering traces of colonial rule. Through a subversive approach to cartography and institutional imagery, Dayrit unearths the contradictions at the heart of these structures, mapping out how stories of empire, extraction, and displacement persist in the present. Charged with both history and intent, his works do not offer easy answers. Instead, they open up space for reflection, urging us to imagine other ways of knowing, remembering, and relating. This exhibition marks Dayrit's first presentation in Malaysia, featuring *Mulat na masa ay Mesiyas noon pa man* and *Shrine for the Battle Dance 2*. They open up new terrain in which to engage in the urgency of questioning written narratives. As it is known, history is written by the victors.



Mulat na masa ay Mesiyas noon pa man (2022); Digital print, found objects and embroidery on fabric (collaboration with Henry Caceres); 119.4cm x 152.5cm. Artist: Cian Dayrit. Image courtesy of the artist & Drawing Room, Manila



Shrine of the Battle Dance 2 (2024); Objects and embroidery and digital print on fabric (collaboration with Henry Caceres); 154cm x 136cm. Artist: Cian Dayrit. Image courtesy of the artist & Drawing Room, Manila

Dayrit's practice is instantly recognisable, marked by his idiosyncratic visual language of dense layering using found objects, embroidered text, cartographic motifs, and archival references come together in a style that is strikingly emblematic of his work. Working in collaboration with Henry Caceres, whom he fondly names 'Henricus', Dayrit continues to fuse material texture with political urgency, creating fabric-based assemblages that interrogate historical and contemporary systems of power.

In *Mulat na masa ay Mesiyas noon pa man*, the embroidered phrase "The enlightened masses have always been the messiahs" sets the tone for a work that reclaims historical agency from colonial, capitalist, and state structures, while the cryptic omission of vowels echoes institutional strategies of obfuscation. *Shrine of the Battle Dance 2*, meanwhile, turns its gaze toward the aggressive

commercialisation of Philippine cities, unmasking the illusion of progress imposed through the rapid proliferation of malls and the erasure of public space. His work does not just narrate struggle; it weaves it into form.

Ivan Lam's work engages with the tension between stillness and movement, static and dynamic. In his own words, the print, a singular, static edition, acts as a "conceptual launchpad," propelling the work into a new realm of exploration. Through video projection, the image is animated, challenging the boundaries of fixed representation and expanding into a fluid space of transformation. In the exhibition, this video is projected onto one of two archival prints placed on opposite walls, creating a dialogue between the two. The projection reflects back onto the floor and the other wall, suggesting a continuous, evolving exchange between the prints. Mirroring the nature of conversation itself. Just as a conversation requires two parties, this interaction between the prints and the video projection emphasises the back-and-forth of ideas and perception, illustrating how meaning is continuously shaped and redefined. In this way, the work not only disrupts the boundaries of stillness and motion but also invites us to reflect on the fluid, ever-evolving nature of communication.



Installation view at Wei-Ling Gallery of *Colloquy* (2025); Digital art, Video projection; 00:00:30 (loop) & *The dichotomy of the opposites* (2025); Archival print; 118.9cm x 84.1cm. Artist: Ivan Lam

Cian Dayrit and Ivan Lam both disrupt the stability of text. Dayrit embeds it within densely layered cartographies that challenge colonial narratives, while Lam fragments and formalises it into rigid, almost mechanical forms, drawing attention to how language can be both a system of control and a site of personal assertion. Their works unsettle the idea of text as objective or fixed, instead revealing its role in shaping histories, identities, and ideologies.

This unravelling of language and meaning finds an emotional and formal counterpart in Marcos Kueh's (he/him) *Double Happiness – Spring and Autumn*, part of his *Four Seasons of Separation* series. Marcos Kueh's practice has always been deeply entrenched in threading together memory, myth, and identity through the language of textiles. Grounded in Bornean traditions, his works reimagine fabric as a storytelling device, one that carries the weight of cultural memory in the absence of written history. With a deep sensitivity to Malaysia's complex postcolonial landscape, Kueh uses his textiles to reflect on inherited narratives and to question how identity is shaped in the spaces between tradition and modernity. His works are both personal and political, offering quiet resistance through pattern, thread, and form.



Double Happiness – Autumn (2024); Industrial weaving with recycled PET, 8 colours; 56cm x 100cm; Edition 2 of 6. Artist: Marcos Kueh. Image courtesy of the artist and The Back Room, KL

In *Double Happiness – Spring and Autumn*, the Chinese character “囍” (double happiness) is split down the middle, isolating each half in its own realm, connected only by loose threads. Drawing from the ornamental motif of marriage, Kueh reimagines it through personal reflection; exploring the tension between familial expectations and individual identity, between cultural tradition and emotional truth. As he navigates his own experience of living apart from his family, Kueh speaks to broader themes of disconnection and adaptation.

In conversation, the works of Dayrit, Lam, and Kueh each probe how systems — be they linguistic, political, or familial — construct and fracture our understandings of self and belonging.

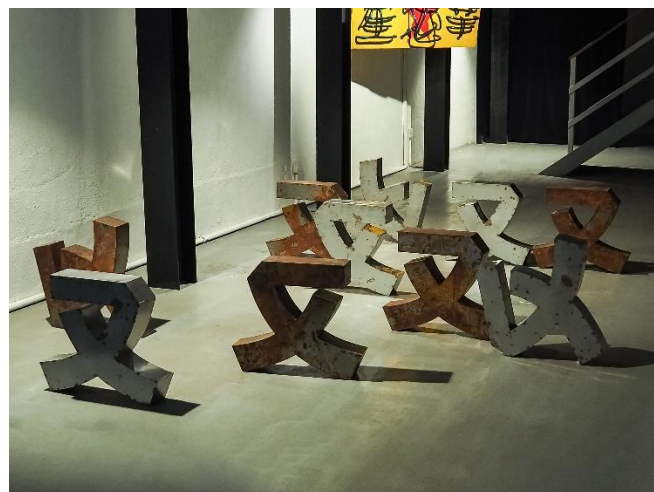
Nuanced Multiplicity

Tan Zi Hao (he/him) can be thought of as a “linguanaut”, term that fuses language (lingua) with exploration (naut), reflecting his adventurous, inquisitive approach to language and meaning. Yin Yin Wong (they/them), meanwhile, navigates the world as a diasporan; as they are someone who, while

living away from their ancestral homeland, remains deeply connected to its language, memory, and legacy. Though their contexts differ, both artists share an instinctive curiosity for language's malleability. They stretch and bend it, experimenting with pronunciation, spelling, and meaning, treating words not as static symbols but as living, shifting forms. This sense of fluidity finds a kindred spirit in H. H. Lim's (he/him) work, which leans into contradiction with both humour and depth.

Tan Zi Hao's practice is deeply curious, anchored in language, yet always reaching beyond it. Moving between soil ecology, language politics, interpretive etymology, mythical chimeras, and organic assemblages, his works bring together unlikely elements to question fixed ideas of self and belonging. There's a quiet thoughtfulness in the way he assembles things. Reminding us that meaning is often found in what is layered, entangled, and in-between. He seeks to exploit the interface between language and materiality, going into the broader ecology of how language comes to matter (the conceptual chicken-and-egg dilemma), considering its evolution and the layers of meaning it accrues over time.

Tan's installation, *You Again*, provocatively explores the recursive nature of political change and the cyclical repetition embedded in language. Conceived in 2022 amidst Malaysia's political turmoil, marked by the rapid succession of Prime Ministers within just three years. Inspired by the Chinese internet expression "又双叒叕" (yòu shuāng ruò zhuó), the work playfully contemplates the repetition inherent in political cycles. The title, a bilingual pun, uses the character "又" (yòu), meaning "again," to evoke both the literal repetition of events and the more personal sense of encountering something familiar, perhaps even wearying.



You Again (2022); Steel and stainless steel, 10cm x 44cm x 40cm (each) (10 pieces). Artist: Tan Zi Hao. Installation view at Wei-Ling Contemporary

The piece's form isn't a pre-existing typeface, but rather Tan explains, "*It is a custom-made character. It's not adopted from any pre-existing digital font. Etymologically, "又" yòu is a pictograph of the right hand. And, it is also closely related to the character yǒu, the Chinese character "友" (yǒu), which means friendship. "又" Yòu is based on two right hands pictographically, quite similar to a handshake*". The custom-moulded steel representation of the "又" character, is intentionally weathered with ferric chloride, symbolising the passage of time and the impermanence of political change. Through this process, the installation subtly critiques the illusion of progress, reflecting on the cyclical nature of history and the complexities of change; both personal and political.

Yin Yin Wong (they/them) is Dutch-Chinese-Malaysian, born to Malaysian-Chinese parents who moved to the Netherlands in the late 1970s. Wong spent their early years in Nijmegen, where their family ran a Chinese restaurant called Choong Kee (松记). This backdrop of service work, culture, and migration continues to shape how they see and make art. Trained in modernist graphic design, Wong brings a sensitivity to form and visual language into their multidisciplinary practice that spans installation, sculpture, film, and drawing. But design, for them, is never just formal. It's personal, often political. Drawing from the layered experiences of growing up in a migrant family in the Netherlands, they use it to trace the subtle and complex way's diasporic identity is performed, seen, and remembered — especially within Western societies. Often starting from lived experience, they create space for veiled stories that complicate tidy narratives of culture, belonging, and representation.



Front of *Lucky Star* (2023); Wood, acrylic paint, water hose, electric wire; 58.5cm x 168cm.
Artist: Yin Yin Wong



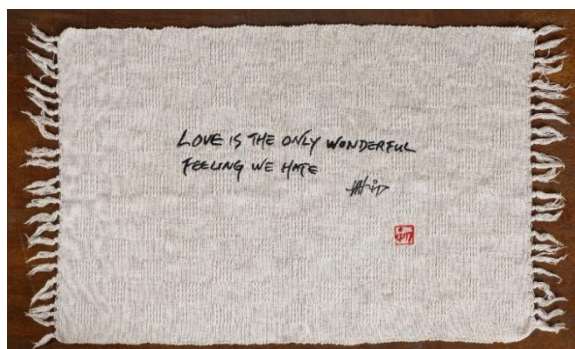
Back of *Lucky Star* (2023); Wood, acrylic paint, water hose, electric wire; 58.5cm x 168cm.
Artist: Yin Yin Wong

Lucky Star is Wong's reflection on memory, migration, and the veiled narratives of labour that mark diasporic life. Weaving personal memory with broader diasporic realities, illuminating what is hidden in plain sight. They recalled being drawn as a child to the bright signage of massage parlours; mistaking their bold, cheerful fronts for ice cream parlours and corner stores. Only later did they understand the grim realities behind the flickering neon lights: many of these storefronts, often poorly maintained and always closed, were fronts for illegal sex work; sites tied to the economic precarity

and racialised labour of Southeast Asian women. While sex work is legal in the Netherlands, Wong's work draws attention to how Southeast Asian women, in particular, remain vulnerable to exploitation, even in systems that claim regulation. The duality of these signs, innocence and danger, brightness and concealment, is laid bare. In their other work, *Holaan Travel Service*, Wong connects language, migration, and familial memory, using the shared Chinese character “荷” (hé) in both “Holaan” and “lotus” to revisit a story their mother once told: never pick wild lotus flowers, as they grow near quicksand. This memory became a quiet metaphor for the immigrant experience. Blinded leaps into unknown terrain. Together, these works trace the dissonance between surface and meaning, between what is seen and what is lived.

H. H. Lim, an artist that explores the transient nature of meaning, blending subconscious elements, symbolism, memory, and language in playful, paradoxical ways. Having emigrated to Rome in the late 1970's, his multidisciplinary practice bridges Eastern and Western influences across video, installation, painting, and performance. The work he presents in this exhibition is a playful yet profound exploration of contradictions, inviting viewers to question what they see and feel. At first glance, the piece — a simple carpet embroidered with the phrase “*Love is the only wonderful feeling we hate*” — appears deceptively familiar (like one from IKEA, though its exact origin remains unknown to me). Yet, it quickly subverts expectations, blending humor with deep philosophical inquiry. The phrase itself encapsulates the tension between love and resistance, evoking an emotional ambiguity that leaves us questioning our own understanding of these powerful, often conflicting emotions.

The choice of the humble carpet is particularly striking. Domestic and commonplace, it serves as a vessel for something far weightier. Echoing the ideas of philosophers like Nietzsche, Deleuze, and Guattari, the carpet becomes a symbol for love's paradoxical nature, a force of both beauty and rupture, a source of liberation and vulnerability. Here, love is rendered both intimate and impersonal due to the contradiction embodied in the act of stitching philosophical words in Lim's own handwriting alongside his Chinese name stamp onto a store-bought carpet. Lim's use of the medium adds a layer of satire, questioning how something as simple and ubiquitous as a carpet can hold profound philosophical meaning. Such poignant words on something so humble.



Love Carpet (2025); Embroidery on industrial weaved carpet; 56.8cm x 88cm. Artist: H. H. Lim. Photographed by Kamarudin Diran

For Lim, art is never straightforward. As he said, “*Art is about love — the more you think you understand it, the more you misread it*”. This sentiment runs through his work, where the intellectual meets the poetic, the serious interwoven with the sly. His piece embodies a kind of paradox, simultaneously personal and open-ended, offering more questions than answers.

In different ways, all three artists — Tan Zi Hao, Yin Yin Wong, and H. H. Lim — unravel the tangled threads of language, identity, and belief. Each navigates a shifting terrain of cultural memory and lived experience, using language not only as subject but as material: something to sculpt, to question, to complicate. Their works resist neat conclusions and static definitions. Instead, they open up spaces for ambiguity, for contradiction, for humour and heartbreak.

Ever after

For the duration the exhibition, Wei-Ling Gallery became a place where language can breathe, mutate, and mean differently. What emerged is not a singular narrative, but a chorus of voices: multilingual, diasporic, fragmented yet deeply rooted. In this shared space, language becomes more than communication. It becomes connection, echo, inheritance, and resistance.

And perhaps that’s the quiet thesis of *A Colloquy* as a whole.

This exhibition does not seek resolution. It resists easy meaning. It asks instead that we dwell in ambiguity, in multiplicity, in dialogue. Across countries, materials, histories, and tongues, the artists gathered here remind us that language — whether spoken, stitched, scrawled, coded, projected, or broken apart — is never neutral. It is a site of power, memory, resistance, and reimagination. In a time when clarity is often demanded and complexity flattened, *A Colloquy* offers something rarer: the space to listen, to question, and to speak back.

So, is “*Colloquy*” a real word?

Maybe that’s the wrong question.

The better one might be: *What kind of conversation are you willing to have?*

Written by Prissie Ong

25 April 2025