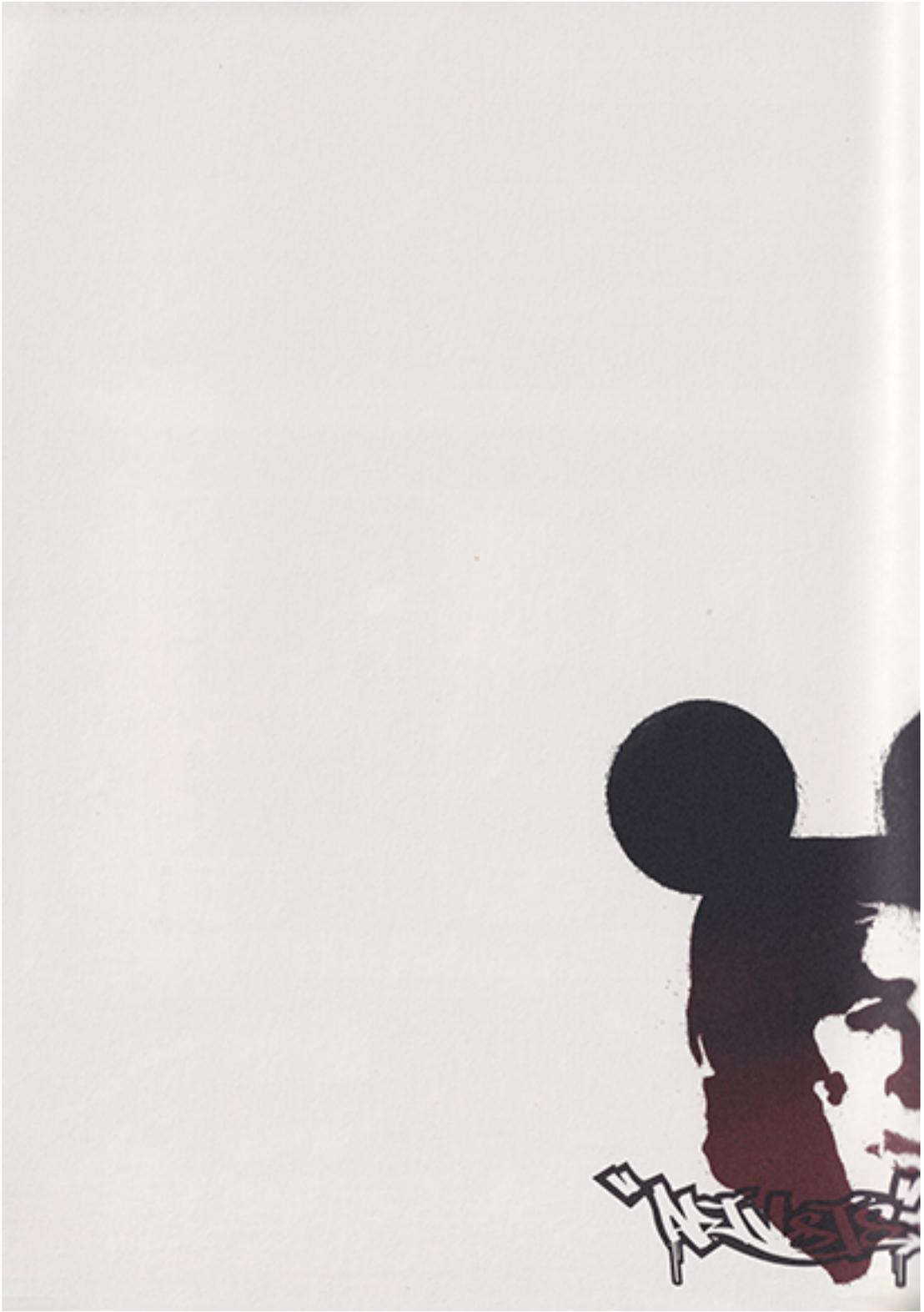


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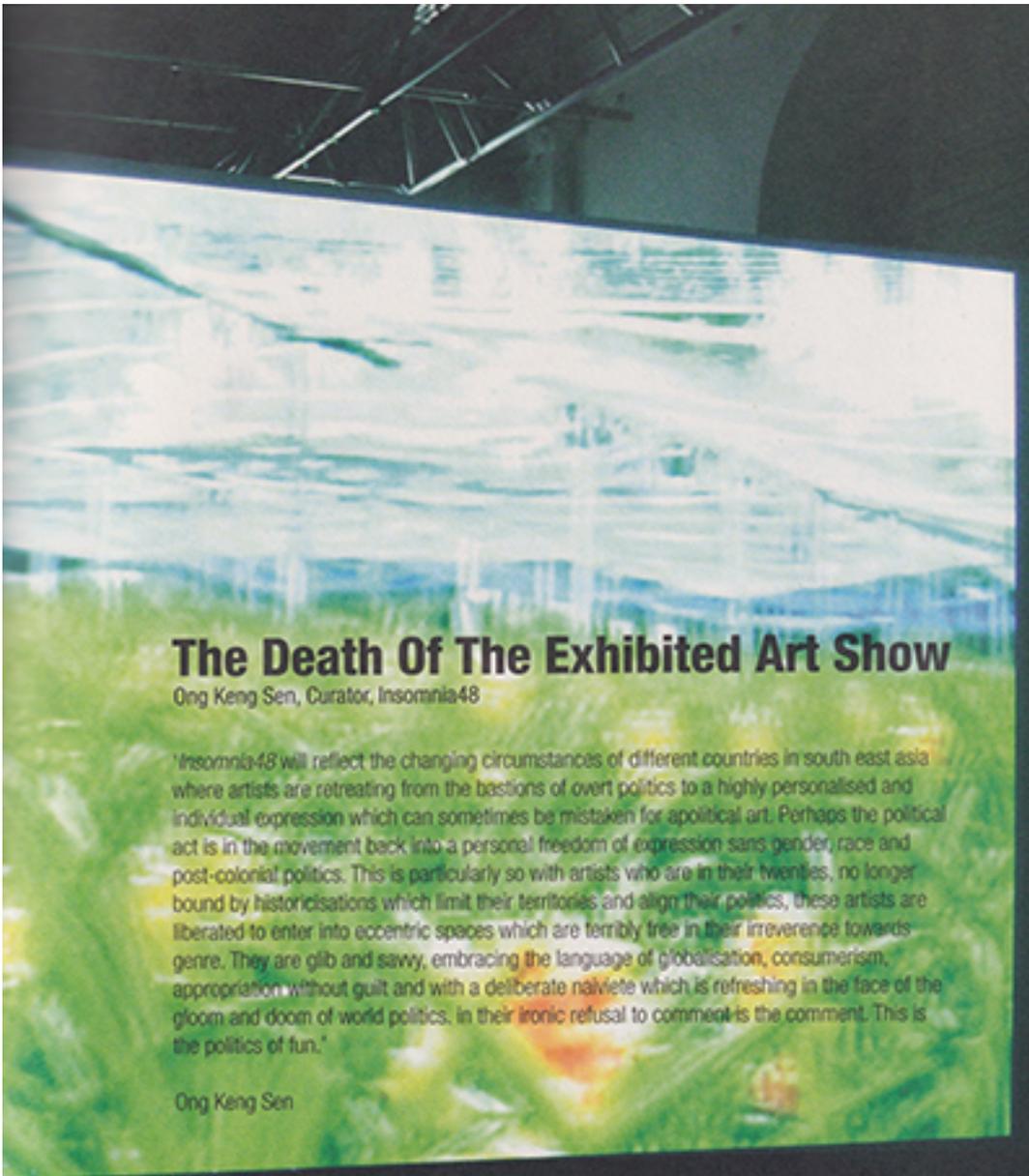


insomnia48





Video Installation by Apichatpong Weerasethakul



The Death Of The Exhibited Art Show

Ong Keng Sen, Curator, Insomnia48

'Insomnia48 will reflect the changing circumstances of different countries in south east asia where artists are retreating from the bastions of overt politics to a highly personalised and individual expression which can sometimes be mistaken for apolitical art. Perhaps the political act is in the movement back into a personal freedom of expression sans gender, race and post-colonial politics. This is particularly so with artists who are in their twenties, no longer bound by historicisations which limit their territories and align their politics, these artists are liberated to enter into eccentric spaces which are terribly free in their irreverence towards genre. They are glib and savvy, embracing the language of globalisation, consumerism, appropriation without guilt and with a deliberate naivete which is refreshing in the face of the gloom and doom of world politics. In their ironic refusal to comment is the comment. This is the politics of fun.'

Ong Keng Sen

In Arthur Miller's *The Death Of A Salesman*, his central character Willy Loman is a travelling salesman who moves from town to town to sell his wares. In our times of increased mobility, the artisan/worker/curator is a travelling salesman, a perpetual foreign worker who is destined to work across borders as he moves his wares from city to city. In each city, he sets up shop as he installs his work, meets more curators to disseminate information about his product to the right buyers. He is careful to select the right sample to display which would give the correct impression of his current line of work. He advertises through the media his product. He may then leave the city with all his work. More often than not he leaves behind some products which would be sent back to him at a later stage. There is hardly any interaction with the city; the dialogue with other people outside of the trade is minimal; the intense focus is on achieving the best display opportunity for the product. Sometimes he meets other salesmen at the bar, they swap stories of similar experiences. Seldom is there the time nor the need to talk to people who are not directly in their profession of buying and selling.

Conversely the buyer or curator may be someone who selects from a catalogue or internet site the best product to buy this year. He needs to showcase the correct work which would further the agenda of his institution. His role is to highlight the need for taste in the markets (there could be different markets that he has to shape, both local and international). Sometimes, he waits for the travelling salesman to pass by his city, sometimes he has to make an educated guess from the catalogue, sometimes he has to get in touch with other buyers in the trade for tips on the product of the season.

He has to pitch the taste for the markets, to attain a level of quality which would match his institution's image. He is the gatekeeper who will ensure that the right product can get through and the wrong products are kept out. He has to finetune market sensibility. Often the buying process is very much pegged to the taste in the art capitals which dictate certain products for the season. Sometimes the buyer also has to travel to the source, to engage with the producers of the product. This requires a whirlwind trip to the site where the products are made. He meets many sellers who are aware that this is an important occasion – the buyer is in town. The transactions of these meetings are diverse. Sometimes catalogues of products are given to the travelling buyer, sometimes the buyer is brought to the factory to catch a glimpse of the manufacturing process, how unique it is. The search for the exquisite may require the specific trip to assess its quality, to determine whether there is a correct match between his institution demands and this singular product. If the buyer is fortunate, he may catch a good market which is specially created to attract buyers like him. The salesmen and saleswomen are all specially grouped together, so that in one fell swoop, the buyer meets all that the town has to offer. If the buyer is even more well-planned, he may visit an international trade fair with booths specifically set up to attract and call his attention to the products of the season, a broad survey of what's being considered and being made right now. He needs to survey as many products as possible in three days, often he has to justify his time away to his institution. Finally the buyer has to use his intelligence to carve out a different approach from this trade fair for his individual institution (even though he is buying the same products on the circuit). The buyer must showcase the selected products in his homecity, the right campaigns with media, the right rhetoric to capture the best investors, the right methods to bring in the mass numbers of visitors to his institution. Will he have to package a number of educational programmes to introduce the product? This is the only way to ensure that he continues to be the buyer for the next season which will begin immediately after the opening of the exhibited art show.

The art show as a Public Space

Insomnia-48 began from a reconsideration of the complex nexus of relationships which exist in the artworld and which are often obscured by the trappings of the exhibited artshow. It attempts to put at the heart of the event both the process of the art and the need for a complex space of interactions between

interviews which were live streamed during *Sleepless in Singapore* from 10pm – 4am Singapore time. Ultimately *Insomnia48* pierced the veil to reveal and communicate the interiority of the painting process, the growth of a graphic work, the imagined landscape of video as a panoramic but personal journey into self.

Insomnia48 also points to new working strategies between curator and artists. The main focus is once again that of time. Time is of essence, time to track artists onsite but also time to be involved in the artist's process. Intense dialogue on the ground to capture the pulse of the site is supported by continued relationships over time. Research is not result oriented but part of the process of existence in this complex nexus of art, artist, curator, public. The curator has to enter into the real-time process of making rather than purchasing the work, the joys and the frustrations inherent in this journey. Sustaining young artists who are not brand names because the passing of time would bring forth new discoveries about them, about you and about the public who come to see the work. Understanding time means realizing that yesterday's crisis has transformed bringing about parallel transformations in the work of artists who are on the frontline of life and art. What was powerful five years ago has shifted and perhaps the artist is no longer making work at all or in that same way. The time has passed and it is important not to revive work artificially to be exhibited unless it is clearly a documentation show. Time to investigate the effect of bringing a particular artist's work into a different environment and how to smooth that transit with appropriate public processes which will enhance dialogues in shared communities. Part of the curator's struggle would be to fight for time from his institution for time is money. In the lead up to *Insomnia48* and in those 48 hours itself, the curator and the artist are often living in each other's space, reading the effect of time on the audiences as well as on themselves.

Insomnia48: a non-stop 48-hour event of performance, clubbing, music, happenings, videos, installations, ateliers, workshops and social interactions.



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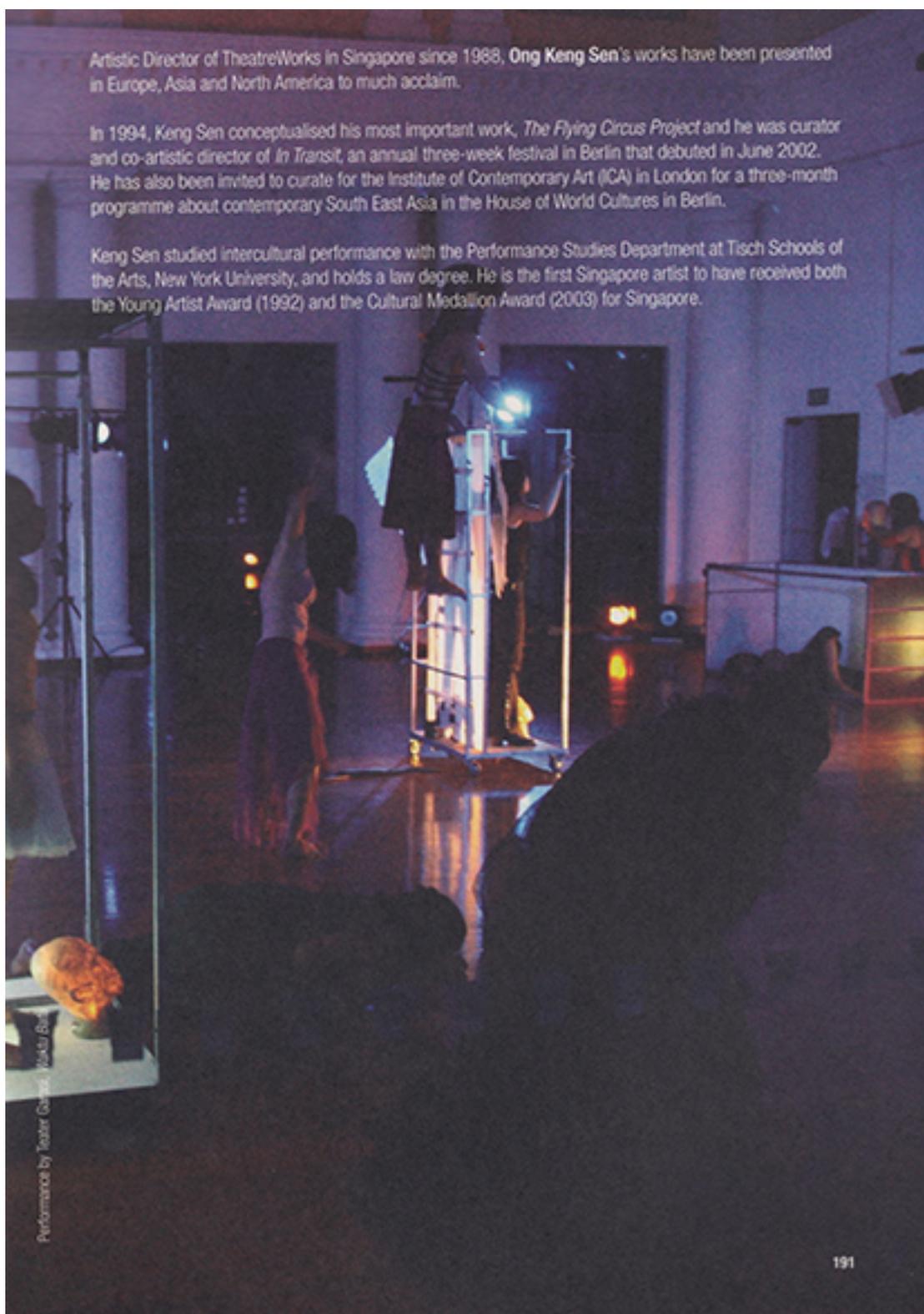
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Artistic Director of TheatreWorks in Singapore since 1988, **Ong Keng Sen's** works have been presented in Europe, Asia and North America to much acclaim.

In 1994, Keng Sen conceptualised his most important work, *The Flying Circus Project* and he was curator and co-artistic director of *In Transit*, an annual three-week festival in Berlin that debuted in June 2002. He has also been invited to curate for the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in London for a three-month programme about contemporary South East Asia in the House of World Cultures in Berlin.

Keng Sen studied intercultural performance with the Performance Studies Department at Tisch Schools of the Arts, New York University, and holds a law degree. He is the first Singapore artist to have received both the Young Artist Award (1992) and the Cultural Medallion Award (2003) for Singapore.



Performance by Teater Garasi, Jakarta, Bali

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