

Time



Ho Tzu Nyen

the cloud

호추니엔:
시간과
클라우드

2024.
6.4.
– 8.4.

Co-Organized by

Art Sonje Center,
Singapore Art Museum

Exhibition Supported by

Arts Council Korea

Production Supported by

Korean Foundation for International
Cultural Exchange



A

SJ

C

Art Sonje Center is delighted to present *Ho Tzu Nyen: Time & the Cloud*, a comprehensive solo exhibition showcasing the artistic journey of Singaporean artist Ho Tzu Nyen. Spanning two decades of his practice, this expansive exhibition explores complex layers of modernity in the postcolonial contemporary Asia. Ho's exploration transcends geographical boundaries, delving into social, cultural, political, and economic realms across Southeast Asia and beyond.

Ho Tzu Nyen: Time & the Cloud also highlights how Ho's persistent exploration of modernity expands to the exploration of everyday life in the complex operation of politics, culture, and time. Ho explores the present of Asia as a newborn space shaped by the encounters and clashes between West and Asia, Asia and Asia, empire and colony, and colony and colony. Yet, the artist's exploration goes beyond simple binary oppositions; it seeks to articulate the present of Asia as a site where many different modernities collide and shatter, where we understand and misunderstand, and where new possibilities are generated and expanded.

In this exhibition, the term “cloud” takes on multiple meanings. It can refer to the cloud as a natural phenomenon floating in the sky, or as a mythological, spiritual, and religious symbol. It can also refer to servers that can be accessed online, and the software and databases that operate on those servers. These multiple meanings of the cloud run through Ho Tzu Nyen's oeuvre and play a critical role in conceptually, physically, and aesthetically activating his worldview.

Ho Tzu Nyen: Time & the Cloud unveils the lingering awe, fantasies, fears, and frustrations entwined with the experience of modernity

in Asia, casting them as spectral presences hovering over contemporary societies and cultures. Through the exhibition, visitors encounter the echoes of imperialism, the legacies of colonialism, and the paradoxical situations faced by those who navigated these turbulent times. Designed to immerse audiences in the vast stream of cosmic time, the exhibition paints a picture of the present shaped by the collisions, misunderstandings, appropriations, and reconciliations of multiple modernities.

In 2022, Art Sonje Center and Singapore Art Museum collaborated to explore Ho Tzu Nyen's artistic world and co-produce *T for Time*, in collaboration with M+, with support from Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo and Sharjah Art Foundation, and KOFICE (Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange). This joint effort led to two versions of the exhibition: *Ho Tzu Nyen: Time & the Tiger* at Singapore Art Museum from November 24, 2023 to March 3, 2024, and *Ho Tzu Nyen: Time & the Cloud* at Art Sonje Center from June 4 to August 4, 2024.

Ho Tzu Nyen

Ho Tzu Nyen (b. 1976) is a Singaporean media artist and filmmaker whose works involve film, video, performance, and immersive multimedia installations. His works explore the complexities of the Southeast Asian region, challenging its homogenization within the Western dialectical historical framework. His major solo exhibitions include *Ho Tzu Nyen: A for Agents* (Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, 2024), *Ho Tzu Nyen: Time & Tiger* (Singapore Art Museum, 2023), *Voice of Void* (Yamaguchi Center for Arts and Media, 2021), and *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Spain Guggenheim Bilbao, 2015). His major group exhibitions include *Shéhérazade, at night* (Palais de Tokyo, 2022), *Imagined Borders* (Gwangju Biennale, 2018), *Mapping Asia* (Asia Art Archive, 2014). He represented the Singapore Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale. Together with Taiwanese artist Hsu Chiawei, he co-curated the 7th Asian Art Biennial entitled *The Strangers from beyond the Mountain and the Sea*. He was selected as a resident of the DAAD Artist-in-Berlin Program from 2014 to 2015, won the APB Foundation Signature Art Prize in 2015, and was awarded the Chanel Next Prize 2024.

Screening Details

- Duration: 80 minutes
- Schedule: Four films will be shown from 12:10 PM to 6:50 PM
- Order: *Newton*, *Earth*, *Gould*, and *The Cloud of Unknowing*

The Cloud of Unknowing, 2011

Single-channel HD projection (16:9 format, color, and 5.1 surround sound, 28 min).

Singapore Art Museum Collection

Taking its title from a 14th-century Christian mystical text, the work tells the story of eight people stuck in the monotony of their existence, living in a low-income public housing complex in Singapore. These characters are visited by a cloud. At first, they confront the cloud, but eventually, they move towards acceptance of the possibility of a new life. This possibility is fleeting and momentary; a spiritual, mystical, and surreal experience. This seemingly simple work brings together various connotations of the cloud in Eastern and Western cultural histories, generating a powerful energy that seeks to transcend the banality of their existence. The cloud is a multifaceted symbol. It embodies both a stranger who visits the protagonists, seemingly tired of their daily routines, and a mysterious entity that emerges between them, or between them and the (other) world. Returning to the Christian mystical text that inspired the artwork's title, we can conclude that what lies between us and the divine is not darkness, but something that allows us to embrace it – the the "cloud of unknowing."

Therefore, *The Cloud of Unknowing* can be seen as a comprehensive database of all the indeterminate, mystical experiences that surround us. Meanwhile, the mise-en-scène of this video work borrows not only from the imagery of Western European artists such as Tintoretto, Caravaggio, Bernini, and René Magritte, but also from the landscape paintings of Eastern painters of the Song and Ming dynasties, such as Mi Fu and Wen Zhengming.

The Cloud of Unknowing, 2011

Single-channel HD projection (16:9 format, color, and 5.1 surround sound, 28 min).

Direction, edit, sound design: Ho Tzu Nyen

Production: Fran Borgia

Cinematography: Amandi Wong

Production design: James Page

Art direction: Jed Lim

Assist direction: Ong Chao Hong

Assist art direction: Andy Phua

Art department assistant: Russell Morton

Make-Up + hairstyling: Haslina Ismail

Cloud Hair design: Kizuki + LIM

Project management: Stephanie Goh

Additional lighting design: Andy Lim

Show-control, sound design, audio engineering: Jeffrey Yue

Additional sound design: Yasuhiro Morinaga

Additional music (drums): Zahir Sanosi

Cast:

The Actor: Johnston Anderson Cheong

The Scriptwriter: Remesh Panicker

The Sound Designer: Haslina Ismail

The Editor: K. Rajagopal

The Producer: Andy Hillyard

The Set Designer: Helen Chan

The Composer: Zahir Sanosi

The Director: Nick Ng

Project originally commissioned by the National Arts Council for the Singapore Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale (2011), curated by June Yap.

Supported by Mori Art Museum.

Gould, 2009-2013

Single channel HD video, stereo sound, 1 min 49 sec.

Titled after the pianist Glenn Gould, this short video shows an Asian albino playing the piano with extreme concentration, bobbing his head vigorously. However, a white hand lies on top of his white hair, giving the impression that he is being guided by this white hand and is merely acting to play the piano. The image of a genetically mutated, non-white white man playing the piano—the epitome of a modern, Western musical instrument—apparently under the control of a white hand carries several contextual implications. The myth of the white man as a perfect creation is transformed into a mutated being, and the white hand, which resembles the omnipotence of God, is transformed into a logic of power that dominates us or a camouflage for such omnipotence. It is in this context that the artist brings in the name of Glenn Gould, a genius pianist of the 20th century who took an extraordinary and aberrant path.

GOULD, 2009-2013

Single channel HD video, stereo sound, 1 min 49 sec.

Direction, edit: Ho Tzu Nyen

Production: Fran Borgia

Cinematography: Amandi Wong

Production Design: Patrick Storey

Sound: Ho Tzu Nyen

Cast: Johnston Cheong

Newton, 2009

Single channel HD video, stereo sound, 4 min 16 sec.

Titled after Isaac Newton, who ushered in modern science and established the concept of the clockwork universe, this work depicts an Asian man with albinism repeatedly performing actions that mimic scientific inquiry. This behavior starts after a blank notebook falls from the sky and strikes him on the head. The blank notebook fluttering down alludes to the famous story (probably of questionable accuracy) of Newton being struck by a falling apple, leading him to discover the theory of gravity. The moment of supposed epiphany and the protagonist's struggle to prove this phenomenon comically represent the often rigid and performative nature of what is considered rational and scientific. This act of investigation, performed by a genetically mutated Asian albino set against a stark white background, serves as a satirical commentary on the myth of whiteness and its association with modernity.

NEWTON, 2009

Single channel HD video, stereo sound, 4 min 16 sec.

Direction, edit: Ho Tzu Nyen

Production + Edit: Fran Borgia

Cinematography: Amandi Wong

Production design: Patrick Storey

Sound design: Matthew Koh, Lim Ting Li

Cast: Johnston Cheong

Earth, 2009–2011

Single-channel HD video, 5.1 surround sound, 42 min.

Singapore Art Museum Collection

On a seemingly still screen, we see 50 people lying as if caught between life and death. A video work that seems to depict a scene of disaster, *Earth* does not refer to a specific event, but presents images of light and darkness, day and night, life and death, and resurrection, all of which slowly float across the screen. Most of the images seem to be borrowed from major paintings in Western art history. Ho Tzu Nyen can be considered a visual researcher who, in the course of his work, seeks out various visual materials relevant to his work, including historical paintings. He reinterprets and transforms them to create new contexts and meanings for his work. His main references in *Earth* are Théodore Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa* (1818-1819), Caravaggio's *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* (1601-1602) and *David with the Head of Goliath* (c.1610), and Anne-Louis Girodet de Roussy-Trioson's *The Sleep of Endymion* (1791). Ho Tzu Nyen does not aim to represent these existing visual materials. Rather, he appropriates the meaning, iconography, and context of the original work, weaving them into his research subject and creating new meanings in the process. This work, which began as an exploration of how images, bodies, and events are represented in Western painting, ultimately conjures a grotesque landscape in which all events and bodies have been crushed, leaving only rubble. While this may not have been the artist's intention at the outset, the work is undeniably a depiction of an apocalyptic landscape of the earth after a catastrophe, alluding to the present state of the future that we will one day face. Although this work was originally produced as a silent film, it has been shown with various versions of soundtracks. In this exhibition, it will be presented with the soundtrack by Black to Comm.

Earth, 2009–2011

Single-channel HD video, 5.1 surround sound, 42 min.

Direction, edit: Ho Tzu Nyen

Production, edit: Fran Borgia

Cinematography: Amandi Wong

Additional lighting design: Andy Lim

Production design: James Page

Music: Black To Comm, Featuring Vindicatrix and Renate Nikolaus

Cast: John Low, Erik Wayne Goh, Andy Hillyard, Paul Lucas, et al

General Information

Art Sonje Center

Opening hours

Tuesday-Sunday, noon-7pm

Closed on Mondays

Admission (Combination ticket for all exhibitions)

10,000 KRW (25-64 years)

7,000 KRW (19-24 years, over 65 years, Art Pass cardholders)

5,000 KRW (9-18 years)

Free: 8 and under, visitors with disabilities, ICOM · CIMAM · SCM cardholders

Ticket reservations can be made through the Art Sonje Center website.

Inquiry 02-733-8949 | artsonje.press@gmail.com

Webpage www.artsonje.org

Address 87 Yulgok-ro 3-gil, Jongno-gu, Seoul 03062 Republic of Korea

© 2024. Art Sonje Center all rights reserved.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means without prior permission in writing from the copyright holders and publishers.