

FAULT-LINES: DISPARATE AND DESPERATE INTIMACIES

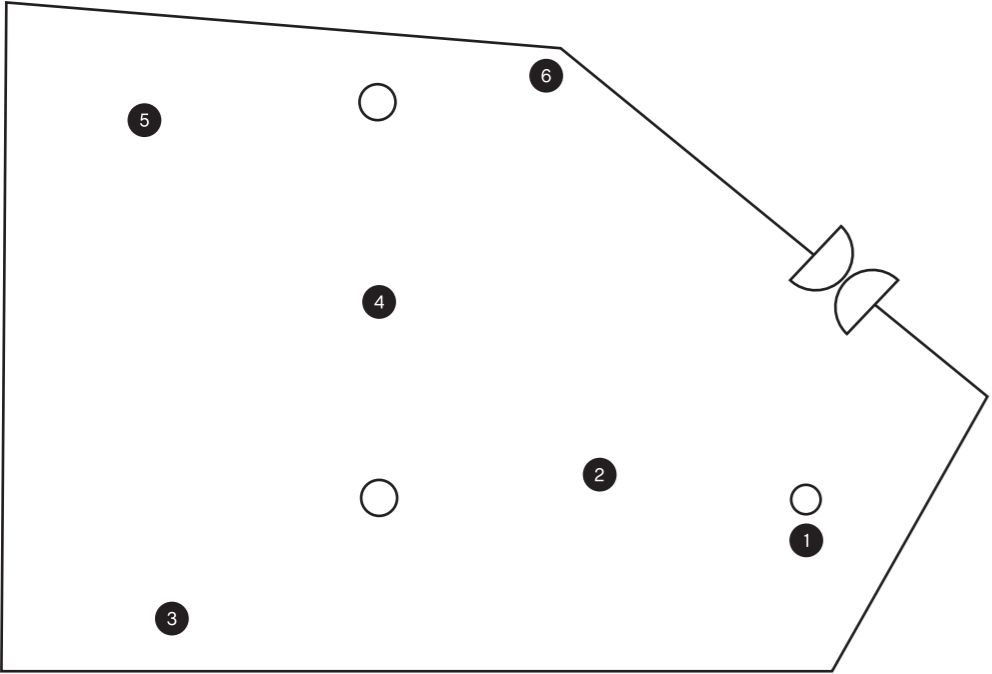
Earl Lu Gallery
Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore
LASALLE College of the Arts
13 February – 13 April 2016

Artists
Marla Bendini
DarkMatter
Juntae TeeJay Hwang
Lam Hoi Sin
Loo Zihan
Bhenji Ra & Justin Shoulder

Fault-lines: Disparate and desperate intimacies is a curatorial project that brings to light the personal experiences of Southeast Asian queer diasporas. Within these widespread territories, dovetailed movements across space and identity complicate already fraught assumptions around embodiment and belonging. The impulses and longings of individuals are often irreconcilable with larger structural categorisations of nationality or citizenship.

This exhibition presents eight emerging artists' video, performance and installation works that feed back these disconcerting conditions of life, visibility, and desire. Inexorable flux and uncertainty produce estranged subjects that grapple with the loneliness of being placeless and erased. *Fault-lines* takes account of these illegible subjects and their various unorthodox kinship practices. The artists' works embody the nuances and contingencies of care and togetherness, which are reflected in their production as well as our experiences of spectatorship. For instance, while the works cleave the exhibition space, providing direct testimony, they are also able to unearth other families, worlds and trajectories. To supplement these interventions, the gallery will host *Pillow talk*, a series of informal conversations that aim to flesh out the exhibition's key themes. By engaging both theories and practices of kinship, *Fault-lines* articulates latent desires for connection, community, and solace, and the unlikely, ephemeral formations that facilitate these intimacies.

Curated by Wong Binghao



1 DarkMatter (Janani Balasubramanian and Alok Vaid-Menon)
Janani Balasubramanian born Bangalore 1991;
Alok Vaid-Menon born College Station, TX, 1991;
live New York

#itgetsbitter 2014–15

Alok Vaid-Menon
Trans/Generation
performance at Under the Radar Festival, New York, January 2015
digital video by Nerdscarf Photography
16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound
5:15 minutes

DarkMatter
Bollywood
performance at Under the Radar Festival, New York, January 2015
digital video by Nerdscarf Photography
16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound
2:32 minutes

Alok Vaid-Menon
Native informant
performance at Under the Radar Festival, New York, January 2015
digital video by Nerdscarf Photography
16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound
5:27 minutes

Janani Balasubramanian
Some nursery rhymes for babies resisting empire
performance at Under the Radar Festival, New York, January 2015
digital video by Vicky Du
16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound
3:23 minutes

DarkMatter
Padma and Parvati Patil
performance at Under the Radar Festival, New York, January 2015
digital video by Vicky Du
16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound
3:35 minutes

Alok Vaid-Menon
When brown looks in the mirror and comes out white
performance at Trans Literary Salon, Philadelphia, PA, June 2014
digital video by DarkMatter
16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound
4:33 minutes

DarkMatter
The story they never told us
performance at Trans Literary Salon, Philadelphia, PA, June 2014
digital video by DarkMatter
16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound
2:17 minutes

DarkMatter
Rainbows are just refracted white light
performance at Under the Radar Festival, New York, January 2015
digital video by Vicky Du
16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound
2:26 minutes

DarkMatter
It gets bougie
performance at Under the Radar Festival, New York, January 2015
digital video by Vicky Du
16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound
3:49 minutes

Janani Balasubramanian
Trans/national
performance at Bluestockings, New York, March 2014
digital video by Vicky Du
16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound
2:27 minutes

DarkMatter
White fetish
performance at Hampshire College, Amherst, MA, March 2014
digital video by Devyn Manibo
16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound
3:41 minutes

Janani Balasubramanian
I don't take shit from anyone
performance at Hampshire College, Amherst, MA, March 2014
digital video by Devyn Manibo
16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound
2:51 minutes

Alok Vaid-Menon
The Bible Belt
performance at Under the Radar Festival, New York, January 2015
digital video by Vicky Du
16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound
6:10 minutes

DarkMatter
OkCupid
performance at Bluestockings, New York, March 2014
digital video by Vicky Du
16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound
4:06 minutes

Alok Vaid-Menon
The pain and empowerment of choosing your own gender, 2015, from *The what's underneath project* by StyleLikeU
16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound
14:48 minutes

2 Marla Bendini
born Singapore 1986, lives Singapore

Do you know some animals have made this place their home? 2016
bunk bed frames,
clothing, costumes and objects belonging to the artist
dimensions variable

3 Juntae TeeJay Hwang
born Seoul 1991, lives New York

Death of a Korean author 2014
high-definition video, 16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound
10:54 minutes

4 Loo Zihan
born Singapore 1983, lives Singapore

Queer objects: An archive for the future
2016 and ongoing
81 objects borrowed from people in Singapore including: Action for AIDS Singapore, Alfian Sa'at, Boo Junfeng, Leon Cheo, Kenneth Chia, Olivia Chiong, Chiu Chien-Seen, Bryan Choong, June Chua, Shawn Chua Ming Ren, Becca D'Bus, Tania De Rozario, Nicholas Deroose, Eztelle, Free Community Church, Guo Jie Si, Ivan Heng, Russell Heng, Darren Ho, Sun Koh, Lan Gen Bah, Eileena Lee, Lee Mun Wai, Jereh Leong, Joena Shivani, Leow Yangfa, Casey Lim, Atiq Lukman, Alex Neo, Ng Yi-Sheng, Irene Oh, Oogachaga Counselling and Support, Pelangi Pride Centre, Phitthaya Phaefuang, Pink Dot SG, Alan Seah, Jerry Siah, Miak Siew, Avin Tan, Jolene Tan, Kathleen Elizabeth Tan, Luke Tan, Roy Tan, The Necessary Stage, The T Project, TheatreWorks Singapore, Tracy, W!ld Rice, Jason Wee, Jason Wong, Lydia Wong, Ming Wong, Bjorn Yeo, Sammi Zhen, Darius Zheng, among others.
79 objects on display
overall dimensions variable

Visitors are invited to lend objects to the installation by contacting Loo Zihan at loozihan@gmail.com.

5 Bhenji Ra & Justin Shoulder
born Sydney 1990 and 1986 respectively,
live Sydney

Ex nilalang 2015
high-definition video, 16:9 aspect ratio, colour, sound
18:53 minutes

This work was made with the support of Arts NSW, Australia

6 Lam Hoi Sin
born Hong Kong 1986, lives Hong Kong

D 2015
adhesive vinyl on glass
300 x 1000 cm (approx.)

All works courtesy the artists



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officially missing you

Fault-lines tells stories that are oblique, irresolute, insouciant, and fearless. The exhibited artists and participants of our public programmes speak of sad, lonely, dead, or forgotten things. As diasporic queers, we are often required to call upon our acute imaginations to repurpose abject, nihilistic realities. Practices that draw from low theory are futile, amusing, but highly rewarding, readily adapted in order to dream, survive, and thrive. These methodologies seem to starkly contrast with assimilationists' teleological focus on respectability politics, visibility, obtaining legislative rights and equality through a homonormative, patriarchal lens. I am invested in the ways we continue living as unwanted, forgotten, and erased under gay imperialism's capitalist enterprise. How do defunct bodies practise sustainability? Is fortification plausible when we ricochet between rejection from both outside and within our predetermined 'communities'?

Scholar Gayatri Gopinath's poignant theorization of the queer diasporic subject as 'unthinkable' served as my starting point for this project. The important work of Jasbir K. Puar, David L. Eng, Jin Haritaworn, Nguyen Tan Hoang, Eng-Beng Lim, Martin F. Manalansan IV, and others also provided similarly vital resonances, and helped me to ask necessary questions about how to recalibrate my work within local and regional contexts. A recurrent impasse discussed in this body of scholarship is the exclusion of the queer diasporic subject from her constituencies. The queer subject has to be imagined as white, family-oriented, or homonormative in order to be folded back into the life-worlds of national protection. Consequently, the racialized or ethnic diasporic subject is cast as heterosexual, premodern homophobe. The former's megalomania justifies the latter's ill fate. This project examines ways that the terms 'queer' and 'diasporia' oppose and influence each other. Stranded in-between identities, where does the queer diasporic assemblage lie?

It was while processing these theories and ethnographies that I made the connection to a group of artists' practices that I had been following closely for a period of time. Among them were the artists in this exhibition, who appeared to be responding to the dilemmas of the scholarship through works that express an often deeply personal yearning for connection and community in the forms of friendship, sex, love, (chosen) family, and more. Affective and unabashedly poetic, these works were timely reminders

that queer texts, images, and scenarios should be relatable without compromising on multidimensionality. The exhibition therefore takes erratic, precarious forms, as each of the exhibited works embodies the contradictions, nuances, and viscera of lived experiences.

Located in an unassuming, nearby corner upon entering the Earl Lu Gallery is *#itgetsbitter* (2014–15), a collection of videos of performance poetry by Janani Balasubramanian and Alok Vaid-Menon of DarkMatter. The trans South Asian performance duo has amassed something of a cult following through their on and offline activism, quirky fashion, and searing words. Videos of their performances are presented on a computer screen in a cushioned corner, replicating the informal contexts and online or social media in which most viewers have access to their work. The duo is shown in various venues discussing such pertinent issues as queer of colour critique, abolitionism, dating, and popular culture. Their performative and representational strategies critically tackle the clashing dual frames of hyper-visibility and invisibility that trans femmes of colour face daily. Unpredictably funny, impassioned, honest, and moving, DarkMatter's performances are testament to the irreducible complexity, beauty, and poignancy of community.

Echoing these dissonances is Marla Bendini's installation *Do you know some animals have made this place their home?* (2016). For *Fault-lines*, Bendini has fashioned an uninhabitable space by draping grey steel bunk bed frames with used clothing and lengths of fabric. The chaotic woven fabric references a larger body of photographs taken of Bendini in public spaces in Singapore over the past seven years. She has digitally manipulated these photographs, often with the effect of completely fragmenting her body. This edifice and its illegible representations evoke the artist's contested experiences of living as a trans woman in Singapore.

Amplifying similar visual tactics, Loo Zihan's installation *Queer objects: An archive for the future* (2016 and ongoing) literally cracks a fault line—one that spans nearly 11 metres—through the gallery space. An archive that pre-emptively locates itself in the distant future, *Queer objects* speculates through a collection of borrowed objects upon what it means to be queer for Singapore's present generation. The objects are stored on custom-designed shelves, and range from the banal and everyday, to more literally representational or flamboyant

tropes. The installation structure divides the exhibition space and its publics, while paradoxically attempting to formulate markers of the local queer community. *Queer objects* reflects Loo's invested, non-prescriptive inquiry into the archive: one that adroitly navigates its changes and particularities, rather than envisioning it as a static, homogenous entity. To that end, Loo will exchange objects every two weeks throughout the duration of the project. He has also carefully selected and arranged objects shelf by shelf, creating a personal yet open-ended narrative. These simple gestures activate a seemingly fixed work with elements of chance and agency, acknowledging the unexpected phenomenological pull of its objects.

In dialogue with Loo's installation is Bhenji Ra & Justin Shoulder's video *Ex nilalang* (2015), which is currently also on view at the 8th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art at Queensland Art Gallery/ Gallery of Modern Art. Both works use (and confuse) registers of time as a surprisingly productive strategy to explore practices of queer kinship. Drawing on their backgrounds in performance, dance, costume design, and club culture, Shoulder & Ra's video consists of three stories (*Balud*, *Dysebel* and *Lolo ex machina*) that re-imagine Philippine myths with nonhuman queer and trans bodies. The artists re-present condemned, forgotten figures as amiable, yet elegiac and lonely, in search of chosen or given kin. Shoulder & Ra's enlightening interventions in colonial, popular cultural, and personal pasts add dimensions of affect and reality in order to complicate entrenched perceptions of queer figures as inhuman and unlovable. Nurturing kinship through their Philippine ethnicity and lineage is very close to the artists' practice. In fact, they travelled back to the Philippines to collaborate extensively with friends and local artists in the making and filming of the video. *Ex nilalang's* ethereal, otherworldly beauty is therefore grounded in Shoulder & Ra's commitment. Aptly, the artists view their works collectively rather than separately, as contributions to a larger, unfinished narrative.

Like many of the artists in *Fault-lines*, Juntae TeeJay Hwang invests in practices of utopian world-making to fleetingly imagine other places, times, and domains. For *Death of a Korean author* (2014), Hwang invited a friend who practices Muism, or Korean shamanism, to perform the *kut*, a ritual of his (fictional) death. The Mu performs prayers, songs, and dances to mediate between spiritual and physical planes, lamenting the artist's absence and transition to other

worlds. In the background hang three lengths of fabric coloured red, yellow, and blue, which reference the symbols and colours of the Korean flag. Through this death ritual, Hwang attempts to expunge what he views as negative facets of his lived experiences, such as the patriarchy ingrained in Korean society. However, he ironically reverts to his Korean ethnicity and community to help him hide away and become transcultural. By utilizing local practices that have been dismissed or fetishized as premodern and superstitious to create his utopia, Hwang demonstrates the unlikely, fraught codependence of his ideality and reality.

Lam Hoi Sin's sprawling installation *D* (2015) further interrogates hegemonic gay and lesbian globalization. To create this work, Lam abstractly repositioned a set of physical distances between users of online dating sites such as OkCupid and Tinder, generating an erratic map that does not provide direction, information, or clarity. The numbers are not positioned according to their indicated distances, which displaces any sense of centrality or place. Installed on the inside of the gallery's glass façade, Lam's installation obscures the gallery's transparency, and confuses inquisitive external gazes. *D* makes a crucial spatial intervention that satirizes the ease of visibility and access to an assimilated narrative of gay desire. By parodying the imperialism of cruising technologies, Lam comments on the frequent futility of lonely yearnings. Her critical humour towards popular culture is evident in *D*, which alludes to a faulty 'gay-dar': a neologism for the personal biometric 'gay radar' that profiles homosexuality. Instead, *D* blankets the exhibition space with confusion, facilitating multiple, contradictory lines of engagement between the other works. Rather than fall for what Gayatri Gopinath calls ideological 'fictions of purity,' it is integral to this project, and my broader practice, that the often-irreconcilable pluralities of queerness be rendered in full.

Wong Binghao