



The Gate Foundation is an international art foundation devoted to promoting intercultural exchange of contemporary art. The Gate Foundation aims to stimulate knowledge and understanding of contemporary art and artists, emphasizing non-Western and migrant cultures.

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# xs-XL, Expanding Art

Asian Art >  
Singapore

26 July - 26 August  
2002  
Singapore

By John Gee

Sculpture Square is located in two buildings that used to belong to a church - one being the former place of worship itself, now preserved as a historic building. Its entire inner space forms Sculpture Square's main exhibition area, while the adjacent building contains three smaller exhibition spaces. xs-XL provoked viewers to look at the world in different ways. Liwayway Recapping Co., an anonymous group of artists, suspended thirty open black umbrellas from the ceiling of the former church, seeking, through *After Magritte*, to show how familiar the Belgian painter's images have become, and yet how, when placed in a different context, they can still seem surreal and surprising.

The transportation of artworks from country to country can be a very expensive operation, so that usually only wealthy, well-funded galleries and institutions can afford to organize exhibitions of works from overseas. This can restrict artists in having their works featured internationally and even within their home region. Five artists in the Philippines met the challenge by producing works that could be packed into a single box and when unpacked, could be expanded into a full exhibition. Hence the inspiration for xs-XL (extra-small - EXTRA LARGE), a group show initiated, organized, and co-curated by Sculpture Square in Singapore, which displayed the exhibition from 26 July to 26 August.

Gerardo Tan, whose works have won awards in Australia, the USA, and several Asian countries, mounted gilded picture frames on two gold-painted panels, facing each other, lit and captioned in traditional fashion, but with a small picture at the centre of each frame consisting of formless dust. Tan's friend, the art restorer Helmuth Zotter, collected the dust whilst he was cleaning it from paintings by Canaletto and the Filipino artist Juan Luna. Tan says that he would like to have covered the walls with golden leaf, but it would have been too expensive, 'I wanted to counter-pose something that's worthless with something that's precious.'

*Compressed/Decompressed* is a series of photographs that can be stored as digital images. Tan took them over two years,

during his travels in the Philippines and abroad. Each photo shows a different number, between 1 and 100, printed or displayed on an object in a way that interested Tan. Some occurred in fairly obvious places, such as on a highway sign, but others were found in more unexpected locations: one is on a washing bowl in a market. For Tan, this variety of contexts shows the pervasive presence of numbers in the human world.

Katya Guerrero, the assistant director of a gallery café in Quezon City, sent over a cheque for 90,000 pesos as a small item that could easily be expanded in the XL transformation. Converted into a pyramidal heap of shiny golden Singapore five-cent coins, it constituted *Interest*, one of Guerrero's two offerings. Beforehand, she wondered whether the

amount of money would change as viewers came by and displayed/added interest.

Sid Hidawa, director of the Cultural Centre of the Philippines Museums and Galleries Division, photographed people wearing fashionable choker necklaces. His work featured these close-ups configured in a great circle, which broadened the sense and expanded the form of chokers as constrictive, confining objects.

Cecilia Avancena works between Europe and Asia, conducting art-related research and lecturing. Her *Gypsy Mood Thermometer* in the XL show recalled a tradition of Roma communities in southern France and Spain in which elders gave empty jars to engaged couples. In them they placed different coloured beans or grains according to their moods and feelings, allowing the overall state of their emotional relations to be revealed and thus improving their chances of a happy marriage. Avancena's work began as a collection of empty jars in which visitors could place coloured glass stones in any way that suited their personal feelings.

There is certainly interest in Singapore



An overview of xs-XL, Expanding Art

Sculpture Square Limited, 2002

in seeing what artists from other countries in the region are producing, and the Philippines has a lively arts scene which is underexposed to the outside world due to economic restrictions. The possibility of taking xs-XL elsewhere is still being explored. While artworks in the show teased, entertained, and provoked Singaporean visitors, they also drew attention to the much-trumpeted era of globalization, and successfully raised the question of future contact between artists who are not from rich countries with audiences in other lands. <

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# It 'May Be' Fantastic Again The Biennale of Sydney

Asian Art >  
General

14 May - 14 July  
2002  
Sydney, Australia,

By Thomas Berghuis

In the early 1970s the Italian-born founding chairman of the Transfield Holding Corporation, Franco Belgiorno-Nettis, personally took part in setting up and financing the Biennale of Sydney. By that time, international recurring exhibitions were scarce and the decision was made to model the Sydney Biennale on the Venice Biennale, the most renowned biennial art show at the time. From the start, Belgiorno-Nettis wanted to have people in Australia share his fascination for modern and contemporary art. His personal statements about visual art often inspire creativity and encourage people to take inspiration from the artworks shown at the Biennale. This year, under the title (*The World May Be*) *Fantastic*, the Biennale seems to continue to share Belgiorno-Nettis' fascination for the arts, although perhaps with a bit more caution.

This year, the Sydney Biennale chose to challenge its assertion of a 'fantastic' world by selectively casting a group of artists whose work could be easily placed in a unique and above all amaz-

(*The World May Be*) *Fantastic* is the title given to the thirteenth Biennale of Sydney that took place at different venues around the city and aimed to capture the imagination of the public who had come to Sydney in large numbers to see this international showcase of artworks and performances by a range of artists, including a small but significant group of artists from Asia. In 1973, the Sydney Biennale was born out of the Transfield Art Prize for contemporary Australian art. It has since grown into an important recurring event for the city of Sydney and its local artist community, which includes a growing number of artists who have come from Asia.

Both photo's:  
Cang Xin,  
*Communication*  
Series



Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, 2002

ing spectacle. Spread over key locations in the central business district, and particularly around the Circular Quay and the harbour, the organization chose for the participating venues not to be too far apart for this year's event. Two years ago, the 2000 Sydney Biennale was turned into a citywide event and included not just the six recurring venues, but also a wide range of supporting exhibitions and satellite events. One wonders why the organization decided to change this concept suddenly by not expanding this year's event into the greater city. It seems that this time, and as a result of opening up only a limited space, one of the main official venues - the Museum of Contemporary Art - was literally packed with artworks, including many poorly projected and installed video

installations, scattered over different floors. After a few hours in the exhibition, having walked past all of the artworks, many visitors seem somewhat relieved when they make it to the exit. As if they reach the conclusion that the world outside may indeed be more fantastic.

Overall, the set-up of the 2002 Biennale bears proof of a lack of inspiration and any type of 'fantastic' curatorial vision. Too much emphasis seems to have been placed on hosting a travelling exhibition, rather than creating an international event that has an impact on the entire city, as one would expect from a Biennale. Perhaps the use of alternative spaces is important when creating an international art event in a large city such as Sydney. It may even offer the

opportunity to expand the representation of artists, and in particular, the representation of artists and their works from outside Europe and North America. The 2002 Sydney Biennale again seems to confirm that a small and powerful group of art mediators work together to circulate an increasingly 'exclusive' set of Asian artists and their works. These mediators give the impression that they want to set up a new quasi-market for these works, which operates entirely on the basis of transnational reappearance. With the New York-based artist Do-Ho Suh representing Korea, the Tokyo-born artist Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba representing Vietnam, and the L.A.-based artists Yutake Sone and Miwa Yanagi together representing Japan, the Asian participation at the Sydney Biennale seems to have been focused on artists who were already well represented elsewhere. Therefore, it seems the Biennale attempts to further boost this year's popular charts, following the charts of the 2001 Venice Biennale, the 2001 Yokohama Triennial, and the Neo-Tokyo exhibition that was held in late 2001 at the MCA in Sydney.

One surprising newcomer to the scene of international recurring art exhibitions was the Beijing-based performance artist Cang Xin. In particular his live performance at the Casula Powerhouse Museum, about an hour's drive from the city centre, had great visual

impact. In this performance, which is part of his ongoing *Communications Series*, Cang Xin was dug into a hole in the ground and had the audience give him objects for him to lick. Later that same week, Cang Xin staged two similar types of performances at the Museum of Contemporary Art and the Art Gallery of New South Wales, but in both cases his proposal to be buried into a hole in the ground was disapproved by the inner city council. Only at Casula was the performance allowed as it was intended. Therefore, despite the suburban museum not being part of the official list of venues for the 2002 Sydney Biennale, these satellite events should at least be mentioned as they show the real importance that a recurring art exhibition has in creating a wide range of platforms for artists to develop their work and interact with local communities throughout the city. Inviting the greater city to participate also means attracting additional financial support from the different local councils. Therefore, by allowing for new spaces to be part of the event, the next Biennale 'may be' fantastic again. <

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