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# 成為一座島嶼的方法— 專訪冉阿末創辦人符芳俊

/ 符芳俊、鄭文琦

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**符芳俊：**從小就很困惑，因為我小學和中學都在華人居多的環境。所以就算長輩會說「祖國」或「母語」，這些概念對我都模糊；不確定他們說的是馬來西亞或中國。我的父親會以羽毛球賽為例，問小孩關於存在感的問題，像如果中國跟馬來西亞國家隊對打，會支持誰？我感覺他在某種程度上好像希望我們支持中國。所以我一直思考這些問題，就是父母對中國的思念，加上中國近年崛起但對我來說很遙遠，就算三年前去了海南島，我也不覺得它像家。所以我的年代和父輩有很大的落差，我始終覺得自己先是馬來西亞人，才是馬來西亞華人。

**鄭文琦：**就我自己觀察，馬來西亞不同種族之間固然會有落差，但就算在馬來西亞華人之中也有認同矛盾。如果要問得更有效率，我想知道你在馬來西亞的藝術啟蒙源自何時？因為你在多媒體大學的五年「數位媒體」（Digital Media）好像更偏「設計」。

**符：**可以這樣說，當初之所以選「數位媒體」可能是比較有保障。就是能學創意，又能學技術，跟我的父母也比較有交代。大學後開始做些程式設計和Flash的網頁設計並在廣告公司上班。但我也在這時候接觸攝影，那時候喜歡街頭攝。我去英國進修是因為想成為像《國家地理雜誌》或「寂寞星球」那類的街頭沙龍攝影師，結果我去英國唸了一堆論述，例如圖像怎麼操作，使我不再相信攝影了。而且我好像找到另一種方式，除了理解圖像的運作，圖像政治和圖像作為ideological tool，也不會被自己選擇的媒材所侷限（怎樣創作）。我不知道那個點如何發生，反正主題是最重要的，我再選擇適合的視覺語言來說我要說的故事。除了攝影，我也

嘗試行為、雕塑。

我做過一件作品談倫敦中產如何享受安逸生活；他們總是從地下經濟獲取好處（來支持其市場）。因為非法居留者的薪水比他們低很多。我爺爺當年也是從海南島來檳島，那時國界的概念沒有這麼明確，外人要進入一個國家沒有這麼難。但我不知如何處理這麼大的題材，也不希望掉入一種化約陷阱，又要有自身在場。於是做了一個在冬天游過一條河的行為錄像，我翻譯為〈鯉魚躍龍門〉（Carp leaping over the Dragon's Gate; 2008），它也是在唐人街可以吃到的一道菜名。或許因為我知道多種語言，所以可以進入較多參考資料。中文我可以進入比較白話的參考資料，英文可以比較學術性，現在這樣想我才意識到—你知道「鯉魚躍龍門」是一個童話嗎？

**鄭：**當然知道。但你的解釋讓我想到，在Co-Temporary論壇上你替自己的報告翻譯時會有不一致的情形。因為當你先說英文再自己翻譯成中文（或者相反）就會換一種說法，我想是因為你通曉兩種語言。

**符：**可能再將我的演講翻譯成另一種語言時，又有新的想法進來。

**鄭：**你想成為像「寂寞星球」記者那樣的攝影師，那是否表示你並不滿足於住在一座小島上，你有意識到「島嶼」的生活方式對你的影響嗎？

**符：**沒有，因為我是吉隆坡人而不是檳城人。以前，我嚮往

「旅行攝影」這種生活方式。如果你要這樣解釋我的生活方式與嚮往職業的關聯，那或許是因為我的家鄉在吉膽島（Pulau Ketam<sup>1</sup>）上，那是只有幾千人的小漁村。我在那裡長大，祖家還在那裡，但大部分親戚都移居了，除了一些節慶才回去。爺爺和爸爸都在那裡捕魚、長大，可是我小學、中學都是在城市裡面，只有長假的時候會回島上。我以前是由姨婆照顧，在那長大。幼稚園時回到城市裡，可是每年長假都回到島上。

**鄭：**我原以為你是檳城人。檳城2008年前後經歷喬治市（George Town）被指定為「世界文化遺產」。2014年，我去時「喬治市藝術節」已經非常熱鬧，超過一半的藝術觀眾都來自外地，像DA+C藝術節策展人的蘇西蘇萊曼（Suzy Sulaiman），似乎只有市場而缺乏社群參與。

**符：**其實落腳檳城只是因為私人理由，我從沒有想過自己會待下來。因為「喬治市藝術節」讓很多人關注喬治市，也有公開徵件，許多策展人來申請補助。這也造成問題，畢竟很多人在做計劃時，當地社群不一定是優先考慮，計劃也不一定和當地歷史有關。重要的是對他們來說，藝術節能提供許多觀眾。但在一個月的喧嘩後，其他11個月也很重要啊。我在論壇提到，很多事情發生時，我都是被動地想怎樣回應。再阿末從來沒有一個「大方向」。你在論壇上看到關於檳城的簡報，是我初次認真回看它在檳城扮演的角色，這裡的藝術生態，我們有什麼資源；一切都是我之前沒想過的問題。

<sup>1</sup> Ketam在馬來文為「螃蟹」之意。

**鄭：**你早期的作品都很直接。可以看出立即反映社會事件，或者跟不同族群構成的社會有關的主題。像〈從黃到紅〉（From Yellow to Red, 2008）就相當直接。

**符：**我是第一次在一個用顏色來標籤民族的國家，在馬來西亞不會直接用「膚色」開玩笑。我去英國時，他們會說「Brown persons, white persons, yellow persons」。現在因為政治正確，較少聽到。同時「紅色」也象徵中國共產黨，「黃色」又是華人。當然這是一個潛台詞，我沒有一定要去討論它，觀眾自己能夠聯想也很好。

**鄭：**有些作品需要轉個彎思考背後的語言、形式。例如〈You Say Jelly, I Say Agar〉（2010）。

**符：**這些都跟我的成長經驗有關。如果我沒有出國長住他國，我就沒有一個參考對象。那系列是因為我在做關於「Jelly」的研究，在中世紀它是貴族才能吃的，因為以前果凍是用動物骨頭做的。可是果凍在我家鄉是小朋友在節慶會吃到的東西，所以我要把這兩個很遠的東西拉在一起。

**鄭：**你的成長也有這兩部份，通過把它們拉在一起來表現你的東方與西方背景。但它不是針對殖民的直接批判，它是有一點幽默的。

**符：**「幽默」是一種讓人很容易吸收資訊的方式。重點是果凍很便宜、沒什麼營養又色彩繽紛。我做了一系列果凍雕塑〈Jelly Sculpture〉（2012），我想知道英國人製造果凍的鑄模為何使用那種造型？源自何處？我的結論是它們仿照城堡

的設計。所以我就用保麗龍做成幾個漂亮的內模，再做許多形狀的果凍。

**鄭：**許多作品牽涉到特定的背景，如旅館或舞廳。你的〈柳景盤〉(The Blue and White Collection)系列<sup>2</sup>則是相當複雜，最後以攝影呈現，希望故意將這些紙製的瓷盤呈現一種逼真、拍賣會式的效果。

**符：**因為大家相信攝影，我反而故意模糊它。或許該說在自己的創作上，我關注人們對文化的認同，還有決定品味的機制，誰來決定現在要穿什麼款？什麼是好的文化？什麼是次等或不好的？我感興趣的是決定的人或事物，為何在一個國家本來就有的東西，到另一個國家就變成受重視的文化。

**鄭：**我覺得你剛剛提到文化品味的建構，涉及「歷史」也涉及「地理」的因素，就是你剛剛提到價值的轉換。這裡的誤解可能源自於浪漫或東方情調。就如以前冒險家會從殖民地搜刮奇珍異品，展示在家中作為一種收納這個世界的想像。建立文化品味好像包含這兩部份，有時不是因為它們在產地多稀有，而是蒐藏家想藉蒐集全世界的收藏來凸顯身份，好像某種文化上的主權，這讓我想到黃海昌過去的議題。只是，在你的作品裡高級藝術正好是由殖民者文化所代表，倒不是這麼嚴肅地拆解殖民主義的權力關係。我也發現你常常從「飲食文化」延伸。例如〈You Say Jelly, I Say Agar〉是果凍，〈柳景盤〉是餐具，〈Keep Calm and Watch Youtube〉

<sup>2</sup> 收錄於《攝影之聲》創刊號(The premiere issue of *Voices of Photography*)。

(2013) 邀請大家邊吃邊看網路。

**符：**我沒有想過。但我覺得跟「吃」有關的禮儀(ritual)、器皿非常有趣。因為你用什麼器皿吃什麼，它完全掌控人們吃東西的方式、步驟、禮儀如何進行。

**鄭：**這是否涉及文化的比較？在我的經驗裡，在東南亞的空間進駐時，用餐階級並不明確。

**符：**英國也要看情況。如果你在倫敦跟一群藝術家用餐，也不可能很儀式化。我在描述的是殖民時期，一種經過時間沈澱到現在，人們對於大英全盛的維多莉亞時代想像。他們的生活方式複製到現代是很不實際的…我沒有想過。不過你這麼說是對的，因為我打算做一個跟飲食有關的計劃。馬來西亞有很多即溶咖啡包，可是現在很多咖啡包還有壯陽成份。可能是因為飲食是每個人都需要的，在包裝上要跟一般人對話，因此它的呈現是最直接、簡單的方式，我對於它要如何溝通很感興趣。

〈柳景盤〉比較複雜，它在我所有作品裡面應該是最攝影的作品，包含我所有對於殖民、攝影想說的東西。例如「藍彩」，當時植物學家要去熱帶考察植物時，用經過化學處理的感光紙來保留採集植物的輪廓(氰版顯影術, Cyanotype)，又叫藍曬法(blueprint)，它是一種關於原件的概念。<sup>3</sup>文化有沒有原件？這是我想探討的。〈柳景

<sup>3</sup> 如維多莉雅時期的女性植物學家Anna Atkins(1799-1871)

盤〉背景設定是從中國傳入英國，但適應後成為英國自身的文化，可能每個家庭都有一些。

鄭：這涉及兩種對真實的質疑，一是文化上的原初性，二是攝影作為媒材的真實性。一你有想過不做空間嗎？如果你留在倫敦嘗試當個專職藝術家呢？

符：每天都在想啊。尤其是在群體中遇到某些瓶頸，就會想到底在幹嘛？可是如果做為藝術家，活在這個生態裡還是會有問題。但在英國畢業後雖然得過獎，也沒有想繼續待下去。因為我很清楚知道我不想在國外當藝術家…有許多東西是我無法相信的，例如強烈的形式主義，我一直相信藝術跟社會政治有關，脈絡非常重要，作為創作或觀看的脈絡一旦拿掉就無法運作。同時在英國當一個馬來西亞華人藝術家，也找不到能溝通的對象。就像〈柳景盤〉，很多策展人問我為何作品不熱帶一點而是那麼歐洲？表示我的個人背景被錯讀，而且東南亞文化更有趣，我覺得它像一本永遠無法讀完的書。其實〈柳景盤〉是針對英國觀眾，我在韓國和馬來西亞都展過，但馬來西亞觀眾似乎不能明白我在幹嘛。

鄭：我也喜歡你策劃的《*Fall into the sea to become an island*》，可以指涉檳島或吉膽島，和我們的關注相通，又體現你的幽默及敏感度，你的其他命名也是如此。

符：好像，我的東西都是昨天想做今天就看到。我一直希望能用一句話跟家人解釋我在做什麼，但如果大家能從不同面向來討論，我還是可以給與一些。《*Fall into the sea and become an island*》聯展的概念來自展場外的裝置，在檳威

大橋旁邊的人造小島上做一個瞭望台，讓大家離開檳島再從那裡反眺。可是最後land office因為安全考量而不允許。原先瞭望台的設計是馬來式建築。我希望展覽讓大家來一起討論這件事。

鄭：我還想問如何從「空間」的角度思考「區域」；還有關於2013年你做過一個邀請大家來冉阿末看競選影片的行動。

符：我2013年有這個想法，但執政黨把大選時間拖到15天之前才公布。所以我在那時候就很快借來許多電視機，再瘋狂的下載所有政黨競選Youtube，因為我要做一個「資料庫」的計劃，不知道何時才會結束，每個政黨都有很多互相污蔑與宣傳影片。我希望能通過影像，或許帶點趣味—大家因為大選搞得很焦慮，就像英文說的「panic room」，來這邊越看越焦慮。樓上又有一個卡拉OK，可以在那裡唱任何愛國歌曲。還有一個飲料站，在馬來西亞所喝的飲料是很毒的，我們吃進身體裡的顏色是無法想像的多。可是又因為顏色很豐富，又可以用顏色去做自己的雞尾酒，代表自己支持的政黨色彩。

2013年，我還在認識檳城這座城市，了解馬來西亞有哪些藝術家。說不出什麼大方向，廖貴輝是我們最早認識的藝術圈朋友，我和Trevor一開始買他的作品，認識後問他要不要來冉阿末展覽，之後策他的個展。他和郭靜潔是一對住吉隆坡的伴侶，他們加入冉阿末之後，另一位畫家Hasanul Isyraf Idris和老婆Tetriara Ahmad Fauzi在檳城唯一一所大學教書，會參加我們的活動。那時成立一個團體是因為他們常來參加，而我又剛去Fergana Art上班無法分身，問他們要不要一起來

做。當然都是不支薪，也沒有明確分工，基本上行政都由我和Trevor處理，偶爾貴輝與Hasanul會策展，他老婆偶爾煮些東西。規劃就是以團體取代個人來經營冉阿末（空間），最重要的成員的時間分配應該要更具彈性，但是，其他成員也有自己的工作室，因此壓力也很大。你一直問我有沒有想專心創作，我的答案是：我們也許有點類似打開-當代藝術工作站吧！

當我在「Co-Temporary」上看到Cemeti Art House，會有信心堅持下去。雖然日惹之於檳城的背景不同。我甚至奢望有位成員會突然變很有名，賣很多畫來支持冉阿末。當然我現在會回答你有信心走下去。可是最初對自己的承諾是沒到十檔展覽不會停止，而今超過十檔了。然而，冉阿末現在已是一群人不是我一個人的，它不是我不想做就不做了，因為要對每個人負責。所以我還在思考，能不能做集體策展或集體創作的嘗試？後者已被打槍了，要不是Trevor也很相信「社群」的價值，不會讓我這麼自私的投入這些。

最後我還在理解「藝術進駐」，倒不覺得它是藝術生產的必要形式，也還在思考如何做。不管創作或交流，進駐如何激盪彼此？主辦者若無法幫助藝術家理解在地知識，我覺得不一定有幫助。

## 一隻吳郭魚的冒險：從許願池到魚塢

/ 符芳俊、侯昱寬

**侯昱寬：**你同時作為藝術空間的經營者、策展人，又是一位藝術家<sup>1</sup>。這次單純以駐站藝術家的身份來臺參與駐站計劃。面對身份上的轉變，你有什麼想法？

**符芳俊：**冉阿末需要策展人的原因是，有一個空間就需要內容，我不需要特別扮演什麼角色，也沒有學過策展，常常只是用常識的想像去找理念相近的藝術家。剛開始我在馬來西亞藝文界不認識太多人，寫信邀藝術家也得不到回應。第一檔展覽找來一個跳蚤市場的叔叔，他自稱有陰陽眼，愛畫自己看到的鬼魂。所以我不一定是跟傳統意義上的藝術家合作，而去考慮我有什麼資源。像那位叔叔所在的市場離冉阿末不遠，這就是我的資源。從第一檔到收掉實體空間，一共有20幾檔展，其中一半以上由我策展。作為策展人在跟藝術家合作時，必須處在一種非常理性的狀態，這導致我在藝術創作上的想法無法太多發揮，雖然在過程中也是享受的。這次作為駐站藝術家的身份是奢侈的。我只想討論吳郭魚，當我要做一道吳郭魚料理，就會得到朋友的支持，但以前從來沒有資源讓這樣的事發生。可能也是因為這是我第一次出國進駐，讓我覺得當藝術家很幸福，可以不這麼理性，而是自發性、直覺性朝著靈感前進。我覺得身份轉換確實有落差，我比較喜歡藝術家的身份。策展會讓我頭痛，而且需要跟很多人合作，像《吃風》就有13個藝術家。

我思考自己到底夠不夠格策展，但我做了一段時間以後，發現有沒有藝術史背景不一定重要，因為我是從藝術家的角度

<sup>1</sup> 見〈成為一座島嶼的方法—專訪冉阿末(Run Amok)創辦人符芳俊〉, 2016年11月訪談。  
[www.heath.tw/nml-article/how-to-become-an-island-interview-with-hoo-fan-chon-run-amok/](http://www.heath.tw/nml-article/how-to-become-an-island-interview-with-hoo-fan-chon-run-amok/)

看展覽，這有弱點也有優勢。有一位東南亞策展人說過，策展是作為研究和寫藝術史的一種方式。當然這個說法有爭議，但我們長期使用西方的觀點，覺得彷彿只有學藝術史的人才擁有權力寫藝術史。所以我是有點用「非菁英」方式來看策展。

**侯：**以台南獨立空間為例，近年來也見到許多試圖與社區進行對話的活動或是展覽，如駒空間的《赤崁男孩》找了空間附近寫書法、畫看板及刺八仙彩的阿伯一同展出，或絕對空間近年持續出版的鄰里報，都試圖找尋我在「此」的意義為何。回頭看冉阿末，讓我印象深刻的是，像你提到見到鬼的叔叔。這些與常民文化有關的展覽，似乎也揭示冉阿末作為獨立藝術空間與商業畫廊不同之處，會尋找一種和社區連結的方式。

**符：**這可能跟我們的組成有關。我認為藝術跟生活並沒有脫節，我們用的詞彙也不會過於理論化，當然也可能是自己沒有足夠的能力處理理論，但這不代表我們不關心它。獨立空間也不一定非得跟社區連結，冉阿末從未刻意做跟社區相關的活動，預設對象是藝術圈的觀眾。我不一定要跟街上的叔叔、阿姨去連結。當然喬治市有很多非營利組織在做社區。我提到找素人藝術家是因為我覺得他的作品適合在藝術空間裡討論。藝術不應該菁英化，美學不只有一種，日常美學也應該關注。有時素人的東西會比藝術家更能連結地方文化，像那位叔叔的畫法受到廟宇或牆繪影響，他直接吸收週遭的文化。把這樣的藝術放到藝術空間裡，我覺得很合理。

**侯：**你的創作在攝影、錄像、行為記錄的媒材分類下，我認

為有當代藝術的學院訓練影響。但在冉阿末的展覽中，或許是找尋不同目標，而不是追求完成度，更像是一種宣言，宣告不一樣的美學。

**符：**我們也很關注空間設計啊。不過你的說法很有趣，因為你是從美術館的角度出發，我的經驗是把一個原本不是展場的空間變成白盒子。那種慣性的美學標準跟我們不一樣…你怎麼看冉阿末的展覽，就是妥協藝術史？

**侯：**要先說明，我提到完成度並不是指展示的品質，而是打破展示的慣性。我也不覺得是妥協，它滿接近現在對於獨立空間的想像。但這種想像也滿學院的，存在某種姿態去思考這些被納入空間的常民文化，想像藉由他們重塑一種新的美學觀點。我想台灣的獨立空間仍在想像「社區」，社區在當下是經營獨立空間會迅速連接的方法。

**符：**有時與社區連接是因為補助的需要，空間被強制要求跟社區互動。但冉阿末的獨立性高，資源也不多，我們就用自己的方式回應對當代藝術的想像。我剛從英國回到馬來西亞時，對當代藝術的認識並沒有在檳城被滿足。我沒有看到什麼當代藝術展館或經營當代的藝廊，所以乾脆自己來，這是冉阿末的出發點。後來我覺得把東西分得那麼明確，在喬治市這個場域並非真的必要，因為大家對藝術的認知都很不一樣。喬治市還是比較輕鬆的狀態。我們也策過一個木雕展，木雕在喬治市生活中處處可見，那當代藝術可不可以去談？因此在一地生活久了動機還是會被影響。因為我知道從國外學到的那些，無法硬生生地塑造出我想要的模樣。

我們還策過一檔龐克內容的展覽，有些人批評我們為何要把龐克體制化。我們覺得很奇怪，他們為何覺得冉阿末是「機構」。這讓我想了很久，是否我們變得如他人想像的有點菁英？但我本來是想接地氣，用比較草根的方式接觸藝術，在這之後讓我有些掙扎。

**侯：**獨立空間會採取兩種策略連接地方文化，一是將空間視為凝聚週遭日常力量的集散地，另一則是重思日常如何被藝術空間吸納而成為一種美學，兩者在思考空間定位時有明顯的不同。回到這次計劃，你來駐站的時間緊接在冉阿末空間結束之後。首先關注台灣的吳郭魚，可不可以聊聊其中轉折？

**符：**我屬於焦慮型的藝術家，有時候發現一些事覺得自己挖到寶，又擔心自己會不會一廂情願地相信。我會跟朋友討論、觀察他們的反應，看他們覺得這是否可行或有趣。我不是典型的工作室藝術家，需要一邊創作一邊跟人討論。創作模式會從視覺出發，可能是從一張圖像開始發想。像這次的吳郭魚，一開始沒有明確方向，只是因為牠的故事吸引我，我也不知道會變成怎樣。這種未知有點不一樣，應該說除了「柳景盤」系列外不曾花那麼多時間研究。以前的創作比較是突發的，一想到以後可能隔天就做出來了。像在《吃風》裡，我懸吊幾個人偶在電風扇上轉，概念源自亞航的口號「現在人人都能飛」(Now everyone can fly)，但事實上不是，我就用三個布偶呈現永遠在飛的狀態。

最初被邀請時我還沒想到要做什麼，但有一個馬來西亞朋友從台灣回來，他去了一趟曾文水庫，當地有個老先生知道他

是馬來西亞人，問他知不知道從馬來西亞引進的筍殼魚。我覺得這個連結很奇妙，為什麼他會預設馬來西亞人知道筍殼魚，用一種魚來跟一個國家連結？我從那時起開始醞釀這件事，也跟陳擎耀討論關於魚的事，他提到吳郭魚如何來到台灣，我就開始蒐集有關資料。後來覺得應該把田調範圍再縮小，只聚焦在吳郭魚上。

這次計劃之所以奢侈，是因為能夠一整個月只做研調，同時以座談呈現。不是每個藝術家都有這些資源，如果我沒有一個作品產出，我不知接下來會怎樣，這是我的焦慮。我也好奇你在關渡美術館跟委託藝術家的合作方式，你們會挪出那麼大的資源讓他們研究嗎？還是只從作品出發？很多藝術家的研究是美術館忽略的一環。

**侯：**近年台灣的駐館計劃開始對研究者與策展人進行徵件，讓他們針對提案在台灣進行相關研究。但對藝術家的創作研究，在駐村計劃裡普遍比重不高，這也是這個計劃有趣的部份。當然每次進駐、創作的狀況不同，給予的協助也會跟著藝術家的創作形式有所改變。

**符：**我認為有時是藝術家先完成作品，策展人才去研究。如果藝術家已經把討論的議題做成作品，策展人跟藝術家的面向卻不一樣呢？如果藝術家要求一段時間或資源做研究，有可能嗎？

**侯：**如果藝術家要求明確的目標，當然會盡力協助他們朝此前進。如果在討論中逐漸將作品成行，這樣的創作計劃也是可行的。甚至有時候這樣的合作模式更加有趣，在這種情況

中，我會先思考，自己或藝術家是否保持足夠的彈性想像作品最終的樣貌，雙方能否互相接受及妥協對方腦中的構想。因為這個資料庫計劃讓你在台灣一個月，並沒有要求你要有作品展示。在來之前你就確定要做吳郭魚，也接觸台灣早期的養殖漁文獻或有關的文學。你蒐集那麼多文本，卻不知道最後會以怎樣的方式呈現，這點很有趣，只要求提案卻不要求完成。

**符：**很有趣沒錯，但同時是一種真空；你沒有東西能捉住，不知道會在哪裡展。這些是身為藝術家想捉住的。假如我知道作品最後會在OCAC展，就會對這個空間很敏感，我會想像如果我做這個作品，它要以什麼方式出現或什麼人會來看。我相信藝術家在之前都會投入研究，可只有像現在才會意識到它正在發生。去年我觀察到Anang Saptoto自己找了許多空間，因為藝術家駐村發表作品還是滿重要的。Anang到處問人有沒有興趣展出他的作品。我覺得當一個藝術家累積過多資料卻還沒辦法將之翻譯成作品時，會比較焦慮。

策展人跟藝術家研究的方式會不會重疊？我覺得也滿值得討論的。我在做策展人時研究範圍會有限制，作為藝術家卻很開放，想像的事情都可以成立。或許談談你的策展案例？是否從藝術史或社會、哲學、歷史…取徑？作為藝術家時來源可以是社交媒體、YouTube，我覺得比較自由。

**侯：**我對於策展偏向某種後設狀態，必須在作品已有一定雛形，或是觀察到某種藝術生態的狀況下，展覽才有辦法成形。就是一切流程之前必須先有一個事件，才有可能把問題視覺化，或讓它在空間內呈現。相對於藝術家的研究，我覺

得是相似的，但位置不太一樣。

你剛剛提到策展人比較有限制，藝術家比較自由地，當然這跟前面提到那種突如其來的靈感不太一樣。可是我想藝術家在研究時，應該是想怎麼找尋不同的路徑。假設我們寫論文會有前期研究，看看有多少人討論過相同議題，又有多少問題被解決，或還未被解決等等。但如果提出新的路徑，或許得到完全不同的答案。

符：策展人要解決問題嗎？還是提出問題？

侯：沒有問題好像不知為何而做，先有自己的想像，再更進一步推進問題範圍。像你這次的研究，不覺得推進路徑跟之前不一樣嗎？

符：這確實是我第一次創作要上圖書館。我特別想說台灣的圖書館很厲害，從農委會的文獻來看，完整度非常齊全。我忽然覺得台灣藝術家很幸福，能在圖書館找到非常多資料。

侯：你在找資料時用什麼關鍵字？我的意思是你想從文本裡找到什麼？

符：我並沒有預設找什麼。我的方式是從較大範圍找跟吳郭魚有關的事物。但閱讀刊物時會留意到怎麼拍攝魚、如何捉魚等或關心魚的什麼，以及版面。我看了幾種雜誌，都有歌譜、漫畫。它的表現形式反映當時的狀況，非常有趣。我很清楚自己只是一個視覺藝術家，而在翻閱時，不只看到吳郭魚，也會看到豬種或抗生素廣告。這些跟我研究的題材有一

點遠，但或許能發展出另一條路徑。

還有一件奇怪的事。現在網絡彷彿變成許願池。任何你能想到荒謬的事，很多都發生過了。例如我想知道在台灣的外勞有沒有吃吳郭魚，於是輸入「吳郭魚、外勞」，結果發現一則外勞在水溝撈吳郭魚被警察阻擋的新聞，這件事讓我對網路有不同態度。在做研究時會找圖書館、網路、聊天…但我當策展人就難以如此做法。

侯：這對你是無效的嗎？因為最後你未必找到想要的資料。

符：但我會看到那時代的人對藝術的感知，這也很重要。假設吳郭魚真是1946年引進台灣，那當時的美感和視覺是怎樣的狀態。像看到黑白照片的質感，就大概知道是什麼年代拍的。

侯：上一位藝術家周盈貞（Okui Lala）找了幾位台語老師，最後的呈現比較像把在這裡的經驗整理出來。後來沒有提出作品，但又可窺見她創作的「模樣」。例如跟老師一起拍錄像，討論視覺跟文本的關係。顯然這個駐站不要求提出創作，而是讓你重新思考創作路徑。

符：我不覺得重新思考路徑，因為每個藝術家都有自己的方法或研究。研究一個月是很奢侈的，不會發生在每個藝術家身上，除非資源很雄厚。駐站一開始不以展出為目的，這是沒問題的。如果能在藝術家還沒創作時先辦一個座談，分享彼此關心的議題，跟很多人一起討論，這對藝術家絕對有利。創作是為了跟他人溝通，溝通當然希望有共鳴。問題是

它有一個盲點，它具有高度的文化特徵（culture specific）。如果不在台灣談吳郭魚，在其他國家就難有共鳴。如果外國人要進入作品，可能得和跟我之前的作品同時展出，才看得出創作脈絡，知道為何我關注吳郭魚。如此有文化特徵的作品，若抽離原地在歐洲展出，就會變成異國情調。觀眾的語境也不一樣。

侯：那你結束以後，離開這裡還會希望完成作品嗎？

符：一定要，不管時間多久，因為提案沒有實現。就算沒辦法去做，還是會醞釀。就算藝術家把作品完成了還是會想。當你跟一個題材相處久了，很難就這樣把它拋棄。把作品做出來是對自己的交代，發表對創作者來說是重要的。

侯：如今藝術家進駐發展出不同模式，短則一個月長則三個月。它有一個格式，就是你進來，必須了解那個地方，很快在那裡創作、展出。我覺得這個計劃好像打破這種慣性。畢竟要求藝術家在幾個月內生產作品似乎不公平；一開始設想群島資料庫，就是一種面向海洋的方法，是在顛倒慣性並重新想像。

符：我最近思考駐村的功能。把一個人抽離原來的舒適區到一個陌生文化裡，用身體感受異地文化是滿重要的。就像我去台南魚塢跟養魚的吳先生談話，他直接問，這些資料是不是都在網路上找的？一句話就能打破所有研究方向。這種田調是重要的。網路或許是許願池，但當你跟真實的人談話，他們能馬上否定你覺得重要的成見。重點在如何從中找尋平衡，去應對你研究的議題。

## 如何用吳郭魚煮一道亞叻沙

/ 符芳俊

吳郭魚對某些人來說是一種可疑魚種，尤其關於牠的養殖方式、吃了可能中毒的謠言和其他不確定的訊息來源。牠的肉吃起來其實相當美味軟嫩，而且價格低廉，一般市場或超市都可買到，又或者在河裡、溪邊、溝圳裡釣（或撈）得到。台灣在引進東南亞移工的同時，也引入其故鄉的飲食文化。這次藝術家以吳郭魚為主題的推薦料理，「Asam Laksa」（亞參叻沙）則是一道源於南洋的麵食，為馬來西亞和新加坡的代表性料理。味道偏酸也偏辣，湯頭主要由淡水魚熬製。這道料理如果處理得宜，味道豐富的香料不但可以蓋過吳郭魚的土味，還可以帶出魚肉的鮮味。新鮮的配料、粉條和魚肉摻雜吃起來，非常清爽開胃。

#### 份量：

7~8人份

#### 材料：

1公斤米苔目或粉條

#### 預製醬料食材：

15條新鮮辣椒和10條乾辣椒

80克紅

6瓣蒜頭

1拇指大的高良薑（又稱南薑）

1拇指大的薑黃

3支香茅（只用白色部份，切小段）

20克馬拉盞（蝦醬）

#### 湯頭：

15杯清水

4支香茅（只用白色部分，拍扁）

2顆薑芽（剝片，或用茗荷代替）

3吋長高良薑（切對半）

1.5公斤吳郭魚

4~5匙羅望子醬

10根越南香菜／叻沙

鹽（適量）

砂糖（適量）

#### 配菜：

80克紅（切絲）

1根小黃瓜（切絲）

1顆萵苣（切絲）

1顆薑芽／茗荷（切細）

1/2粒鳳梨（削皮去芯、去眼、切絲）

2杯薄荷葉

1根紅辣椒（切片）

#### 調味料：

蝦膏（或XO醬）

金橘（又稱四季橘；剖半）

**煮法：**

①先將預製醬料的食材用攪拌機絞成泥狀。

把吳郭魚蒸約15~20分鐘，小心把魚肉從魚骨上剝開並去刺，盡量不要破壞魚肉的組織，並將魚肉擱在一旁放涼。

將一鍋水加熱並加入香茅、南薑、薑芽。等水煮沸，接著加入剝下的魚骨熬湯，以中火煮15~20分鐘。

將越南香菜、叻沙汁、羅望子醬和絞成泥狀的預製醬料加入湯底，再以小火煮到沸騰。

當水沸騰時，火轉到最小並煨40分鐘到一小時。在煨湯同時加入調味料鹽、糖，調整到你想要的酸度和辣度。

在碗裡盛米苔目／粉條，倒入熱湯，並加入切絲黃瓜、鳳梨、洋蔥、薄荷葉、辣椒、薑芽／荖荷以及魚肉片。將金橘汁擠在小碟子裡，或者你也可以加一匙蝦膏當作調味。

主廚小叮嚀：此煮法因部份食材較不容易取得，而依照台北所能找到的食材設計。

**台北地區食材購買地點（主廚建議）：**

台北市濱江果菜市場（第二果菜批發市場）  
 新北市中和區華新街曼第一泰緬商店、金鷹商店  
 中壢市後火車站的東南亞商店  
 中壢市龍岡忠貞市場  
 台北市中山北路小菲律賓區，金萬萬大樓附近  
 新北市七張建國市場越南商店  
 台北地下街的EEC東南亞食品百貨



掃描此QR條碼以連結Google Map

本食譜部份取材自「season with spice」這個食譜網站，並根據符芳俊在《數位荒原》駐站計劃中所能取得的食材而編寫、構成；同時是「荒原見面會第19場：吳郭魚也想出人頭地」之部份分享內容。

## **How to Become an Island? Interview with Hoo Fan Chon, Run Amok**

/ Hoo Fan Chon, Rikey Tenn

*Originally published on No Man Land: November, 2016;  
translated by Zoey Wu*

**Hoo Fan Chon:** Since I was little, and growing up in predominantly Chinese neighbourhood, I was puzzled by the concepts of “motherland” and “mother tongue” mentioned by elder members in the family. I didn't quite know if they meant Malaysia or China at that time. My father would ask question related to national identity, for instance, if China badminton squad is competing against Malaysia, which team would I support? At the back of my mind, I had a feeling that he was hoping that I would root for team China. These thoughts have been playing in my head, just like my parents' longing for the China, and China being the emerging world political power. Just like my last visit to Hainan island three years ago, where my grandfather came from, I could not relate to it as being home. There's a huge gap between my way of thinking as compared to my dad's. I regard myself as Malaysian first then only as Malaysian Chinese.

**Tenn, Bun-ki:** From my own observation, although there are differences between ethnic groups in Malaysia, the identity contradiction also exists among Malaysian Chinese. By asking more efficiently, I would like to know when was the time you got enlightened in the field of art? As I know, the five years of Digital Media you've majored in the University of Multimedia seem to focus more in designing.

**HF:** Yes indeed. Choosing Digital Media as a major was a matter of assurance because I could cultivate creativity and learn the technical skills. Moreover, this was a more viable career path to my parents. After attended university, I was doing some web programming and worked at advertising firm. At the same time, I developed my interest toward photography especially street

photography. The reason I went to the U.K. to study was to become a street photographer and make photograph like the ones I saw in *National Geographic* or *The Lonely Planet*. During my photography course, I was exposed to a whole bunch of discourses and theories, such as how image operates and photography was not what I understood it to be. I found another way to engage the medium, not only about the operation of image or photography as an ideological tool, and my art practice was not bound by the choice of medium. I didn't know how this all started, but for me personally, the subject should always be the more important part of the work, then followed by chosen visual language to tell the story. Apart from photography, I also tried performance and sculpture making.

There is a project which discusses how the middle class benefitted from the underground economy. My grandfather came to Pulau Ketam from Hainan at the time when national borders was not as strictly enforced. It was not so difficult for an outlander to enter into the country. I didn't know how to engage a subject with such a huge theme, and I didn't want to reduce the subject for the sake of artmaking. In the end, I chose to talk about the subject through a performance of me swimming across a canal during winter. I named the work “Carp leaping over the Dragon's Gate” (2008). It is also a dish that can be ordered in chinatown. Perhaps due to the fact that I speak a few languages, it gave me different contextual entry points to words. I could have colloquial reference in Chinese and be more academic in English. Do you know that “Carp leaping over the Dragon's Gate” is a Chinese folklore?

**BT:** Yes, of course I do. However, your explanation reminded me

of that when you interpreted for your own presentation on Co-Temporary forum, there were divergences in the text of translation. When you first said it in English and then translated it into Chinese (or vice versa), you would change a way of saying it. I guess it was because you master both languages.

**HF:** Or you could also say that during my presentation, as I was translating my presentation, new thoughts and ideas came to mind.

**BT:** You said that you wanted to become a Lonely Planet photographer. Does it reveal that you are not satisfied of living on an island? Have you ever been aware of how the island lifestyle make an impact on you?

**HF:** No, because I am from Kuala Lumpur not Penang. I used to yearn for travel photography kind of life style. If you would like to define the relations between my life style and my dream work in that way, it perhaps has something to do with my hometown Pulau Ketam<sup>1</sup>. It is a small fishing village consist of only thousands of people. I was brought up there and my grandparents still live there. However, most of my relatives have moved out, and they only come back to visit during some festival holidays. My grandfather and my father went fishing there and also grew up there. I used to take care by my grandaunt and grew up in the village until I went to kindergarten. Later on, I spent my elementary school and middle school in the city. Nevertheless, I will go back to the island every year during long vacation.

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<sup>1</sup> "Ketam" means "crab" in Bahasa Melayu.

**BT:** I thought that you were from Penang. Around year 2008, George Town was designated as World Cultural Heritage. In 2014, I participated Penang Georgetown Festival, and it has already been very active and crowded. More than half of the art audience were from other places. Like I have noticed that the DA+C Art Festival curated by Suzy Sulaiman only brought in the market but was absent from the local community engagement.

**HF:** The decision to be based in Penang was due to personal reason. I never thought that I'd be staying for this long. George Town Festival has attracted many people's attention and it provides opportunity and platform for cultural practitioners. Yet, local community are not the main target audience and some of the programmes might not have anything to do with the local history. This festival mobilises audience from the region and it is crucial to the cultural practitioners. However, as the hustle and bustle of the festival subsides, the rest of the 11 months are as equally important. I have mentioned in the presentation before that I always been more reactive than proactive when it comes to responding to the Penang cultural landscape, we never really had a clear general direction. What you saw during my presentation, is the first time I tried to map the Penang art ecosystem, what kind of resource do we have and these are the things I've never thought about before.

**BT:** The early works of yours are very straightforward that enable the audience to reflect on social events or the themes related to the multiethnic society. "From Yellow to Red" (2009) is a very direct example.

**HF:** It was the first time I stayed in a country which colour

sometimes is associated with ethnicity. In Malaysia, we don't really joke with "skin tones". When I was in the U.K., I have heard expressions such as brown persons, white persons, yellow persons. Of course due to political correctness, the terms are now less used. Personally, "red" symbolizes Chinese communism and "yellow" represents Chinese descents. These terms are for subtext reading and I don't have to elaborate it. It is also good for the audience to make their own connections.

**BT:** For some of your works, we need to be able to think about the languages and forms that hide beneath, for instance "You say Jelly, I say Agar" (2010).

**HF:** The works you mentioned are all related to my growing up experience. If I have not gone abroad and lived overseas, I wouldn't have another model or reference to the one I'm used to. "You say Jelly, I say Agar" came from my research on "Jelly". During middle ages, only the noble class could afford to eat jelly. However, Jelly is a treat children get to eat during festive seasons back home, so I want to connect these two remote ideas together.

**BT:** There are pretty much the same elements recurring in your past experiences. Through connecting those two remote ideas, the eastern and western backgrounds of yours are highlighted. Yet the work "You say Jelly, I say Agar" is rather humorous than being sharply critical toward colonial issues.

**HF:** Humor is a great way for people to absorb information effortlessly. Jelly is cheap, colorful and not very nutritious. I made a collection of "Jelly Sculpture" (2012) because I would to find out

why British adopted certain forms in making jelly? Where do these forms come from? From the materials I found, the forms often suggest the shape of a castle. Based on that I started creating my own moulds and make jelly based on these.

**BT:** Many of your works involve some particular backgrounds, such as inns or discos. Your photos of "The Blue and White Collection<sup>2</sup>" is somehow quite complicated which demonstrate by photography at last. You hope to simulate porcelain dishes by paper-made dishes in an auction manner of demonstration.

**HF:** I have a sense of skepticism towards photography. Perhaps I should put it this way, in my works, I often focus on the cultural identity, as well as the taste setting mechanism; who decide what to wear? What is a superior culture? What is an inferior or bad culture? I am interested in people or things which they decide; how a banal object could be elevated into a cultural object of appreciation in another?

**BT:** I suppose the the construction of cultural tastes involves with "historical" and "geographical" factor, that is, the conversion of values that you have just mentioned. The misunderstanding may come from a romantic or oriental atmosphere. Just like in the past, the adventurer would search for treasures from the colonies and exhibit at home to fulfill the dream of possessing the world. The establishment of cultural tastes seems to contain these two parts. Sometimes it is not the matter of how rare the

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<sup>2</sup> The premiere issue of *Voices of Photography*

treasure is in the place of origin, but the collector's desire to own the world and magnify his social status. It is like claiming cultural sovereignty, this make me think of Wong Hoy Cheong's past discussions. Nevertheless, in your work, high art is just happen to be represented by the colonial culture, so it doesn't have to be disassembled down the power relation of colonialism so seriously. I also found out the works of yours are often extended from the "food culture". For example, "You Say Jelly, I Say Agar" is jelly, "The Blue and White Collection" is the tableware, "Keep Calm and Watch Youtube" (2013) is inviting everybody to eat while watching the Internet.

**HF:** I didn't pay attention to it, but I find the rituals and utensils related to food are very interesting. The kind of utensils you use will determine how people eat, how we conduct ourselves, and how etiquette works.

**BT:** Does this involves any cultural comparison? In my experience of art space residency in Southeast Asia, I didn't pick it up when it comes to dining etiquette.

**HF:** Even it's in the U.K., it also depends on the social situation. If you are dining with a group of artists in London, it can not be too formalised. I am describing the colonial period, people's imagination of Victorian era in the heyday of Britain that's be practised and survived through time. It is unrealistic to apply that lifestyle on today's modern society... I haven't thought about it before. However, I guess you are right because I intend to do a diet-related project. There are a lot of pre-mixed instant coffee packet sold in Malaysia, and some of which contains aphrodisiac

substance. Because is a common food product sold in regular coffee shops, therefore the packaging oftens employ a very direct visual symbols. I am interested in how the visual symbols are being used.

"The Blue and White Collection" series was layered in contexts, it should be my most photography-based work, it touches upon issues surrounding post-colonialism and my way towards photography. For instance cyanotype was a photographic technique used by botanists to study plants – a technique that could capture silhouette of the plants on photosensitive paper, it is also known as the blueprint. It is a concept about the original<sup>3</sup>. Is there such thing as an absolute original when it comes to culture? This is what I would like to explore. The Willow Pattern is an adapted and affordable version of Chinaware that has become a common household object in the U.K.

**BT:** This involves two kinds of questions on authenticity, one is the origin of culture, the other is the factuality of photography as a medium. – Have you ever thought of giving up running an art space? What about staying in London and try be a full-time artist?

**HF:** I do think about this a lot, especially when confronted with challenges within the collective. However a similar set of problems will come out if I chose to be an artist, problems still pop up in the art society we live. Although I have won the prize in the U.K. after graduation, I didn't continue staying there.

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<sup>3</sup> Female Botanist Anna Atkins (1799–1871) in Victorian era

I was very clear that I didn't want to be an artist abroad. On the one hand, there are many things I can't share value with, such as excessive Formalism. I believe that art and social politics are tightened, and the context is very important for the creation or the viewing. Once it is removed, the rest hardly make sense. On the other hand, being a Malaysian Chinese artist in U.K., I couldn't find anyone to communicate with. Take "The Blue and White Collection" for instance, many curators asked me why the work appear so European rather than tropical? This question was raised to show that my personal background has been false interpreted. Southeast Asian culture is much more interesting, just like a book that never comes to an end. In fact, "The Blue and White Collection" aims at the British audience. It has already shown both in Korea and Malaysia, but the Malaysian audience didn't seem to get what I was trying to convey.

**BT:** I also like the one you curated *Fall into the sea to become an island*. The island here can be referred to Pulau Pinang or Pulau Ketam, same as what we focus on, and it shows your sense of humor and sensitivity. The other works of yours follow this naming logic as well.

**HF:** It seems like I always witness things right after I intended to do it. I hope I can explain what I am doing to my family simply with a sentence. Yet, if everyone would like to discuss from different perspectives, I would love to elaborate more. The concept of *Fall into the sea and become an island* group exhibition came from the installation outside of the exhibition, an observatory-to-be on the artificial island next to Penang Bridge where people could gaze back after leaving Pulau Pinang. However, the land office didn't

approve the construction at last due to security considerations. The original design of the observatory is Malay architecture. I hope that the exhibition encourages people to discuss about this.

**BT:** I would like to ask how to think about the "region/place" from the notion of the "space"; and also about the act you have done in 2013 to invite everyone to watch the campaign video in Run Amok.

**HF:** I had this idea in mind since 2013, but it was until 15 days before the election did the ruling party announced the date. At that time, I gathered many TVs as soon as I could and madly downloaded all the youtube videos from every campaign parties because I wanted to do an archive project. I had no idea when this project would end since there were so many promos and slander videos coming up from every parties. I hoped to add some fun factors into these images because the election has messed up everyone in anxiety, just like the "panic room" we said in English. You came here to watch my archive and became even more panic. In Run Amok, we offered karaoke upstairs, you could sing any patriotic songs you had in mind. We had a beverage stand as well. You see, in Malaysia the amount of unhealthy colored beverage you took in were beyond your imagination. However, the colors were as well so rich that we were able to use different colors to make our own cocktail, representing the color of the party we supported.

In 2013, I was still exploring the city of Penang, getting to know the artists in Malaysia, and pondering the way to head to. Liew Kwai Fei was the first friend we made in art circle. Trevor and I bought his artwork at first and then invited him to join the exhibition in Run Amok after getting to know him more. Later on, he had his solo

exhibition in Run Amok. Liew Kwai Fei and Kuik Ching Chieh is a couple living in Rawang. After they became the members of Run Amok, another painter Hasanul Isyraf Idris and his wife, Tetriana Ahmed Fauzi, who teach at the only university in Penang, also attended our activities. We formalised as a collective because they often come to participant and I was tie up with my new job at Fergana Art. We asked them if they were willing to join us without getting payment and detail assignment. Basically, Trevor and I are in charge of administration duties, Kwai Fei and Hasanul curate exhibitions from time to time, Tetriana sometimes prepares food for opening receptions. Our plan is to operate Run Amok (space) with community instead of individuals. Ideally, the core members should be more flexible with their time in running the space, however, they are under great pressure because they need to focus on their studio works. You have been asking me if I want to concentrate on artmaking, my answer is, *“We may be a bit similar to Open Contemporary Art Center!”*

When I saw Cemeti Art House on Co-Temporary, it encouraged me to keep faith although the background of Yogyakarta is different from Penang. I even expect a member of ours become an instant hit and sell a lot of paintings to support Run Amok. Of course I can now answer you I have the confidence to keep the space running, but at the very beginning I only promised myself not to quit until ten exhibitions were out. By far, there are over ten exhibitions already. Run Amok is now owned by a group of people not just me, so I can't quit only because I don't feel like doing it. The space depends on every members, and I need to be responsible for all. Therefore, I am still thinking if there is possibility that we attempt to do collective curatorial or collective creation. Well, the second

option has been rejected. I know if Trevor is not convinced by the value of “collectivism”, he will not support me devoting this much unconditionally.

Lastly, I am still in the state of realizing what exactly “Artist in Residence” stands for. I don't think it is an essential form of art making, and I am still trying to figure out how to do it. How one evokes another through residency either in terms of creating or experience exchanging? If the organizer is incapable to assist artist to have a better picture about local knowledge, then I don't really see the practicality of residency.

# **A Tilapia's Adventure: From Wishing Pond to Fish Farming**

/ Hoo Fan Chon, Ho Yu Kuan

*Transcribed by Yizai Seah*

**HYK:** Having to run an independent space, and to work as a curator and artist<sup>1</sup>, yet this time you are invited specifically as an artist, what's your take on the multiple roles you have to perform?

**HFC:** Art space needs content, this is why curating is essential to Run Amok. Before we decided to stop operating the space, we have produced more than 20 exhibitions, half of which was handled by me. When it comes to curating, I did not assume a specific position, nor did I have any formal training, it is usually intuitive and I normally work with artists whose art practices I find interesting. When I first return to Malaysia, I did not know many people from the local art scene, and I did not get many replies from the emails I wrote to artists about potential collaborations. I don't always work with artist in a traditional sense. I had to evaluate what are our resources when it comes to exhibition making. For instance, we featured drawings by an uncle who we chanced upon in a local flea market in our inaugural exhibition. He claimed that he could see ghosts and other presences, and turned his encounters into drawings. The flea market is not far from the gallery and it is one of our resources.

When I work with artists as a curator, I have to be reasoned and logical. I did enjoy the process but it is quite different to artmaking. It is a luxury to be able to be involved in a month long research residency program. Tilapia fish is my research subject, and I received great support when it comes to sourcing ingredients for a

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<sup>1</sup> See: Rikey Tenn's interview with Hoo Fan Chon, "How to Become an Island? Interview with Hoo Fan Chon, Run Amok", *No Man's Land* in November, 2016.

Tilapia dish. Perhaps this is my first ever residency and it feels like a treat, I could switch from being reasoned to being intuitive and spontaneous in the creative process. I think the difference in the switch is palpable, at the moment, I do enjoy working as a visual artist, and I can work independently. Compared to say, one of the exhibitions I've curated – *Eating Wind*, I had to work with 13 artists, it was no easy task.

I sometimes questioned my academic qualification when it comes to curating, but after working for a while, it is quite clear that I am engaging exhibition making as a visual artist. Of course, it is both an advantage and weakness. I once read from a text written by an Southeast Asian curator, where he postulated the idea of exhibition making as a form of art history writing. It is a controversial statement, but must we only engage exhibition making from the western point of view, where art history is only for those who is academically trained. Maybe this is "anti-elitist" way of curating.

**HYK:** In recent years, some independent spaces in Tainan have taken initiatives to establish dialogue with local community through programming and exhibition. Take the *The Province Boys* exhibition curated by the Howl Space for instance, they involved local talents such as calligrapher, billboard painter and traditional embroiderer; or the community newsletter produced by the Absolute Space, both as attempts to define the idea of "local". And to reflect on Run Amok's past exhibitions, the one that left the deepest impression in me was the one that featured works by the uncle who claims that he could see "ghosts". The focus on the local vernacular culture, in a way, underlines the different approaches taken by the independent spaces and the commercial galleries, whereby the

former seeks connection with the local community.

**HFC:** Maybe it has something to do with our collective members. I don't think there should be a clear divide between art and everyday life, and the supporting text we use are not just about art theories. Or, you may argue that art writing is not our strong suit but we are aware of how instrumental it can be in creating dialogues. Also, I don't think it is obligatory for independent space to engage in community project, and Run Amok does not claim to be actively doing so, our main serving audience is the local art community. There are a number of NGOs dedicated in carrying out community engagement projects. The reason I mentioned outsider artist simply because, at that time, I felt his works were suitable to generate dialogues in art space. Art should not too elitist, and there shouldn't be only one form aesthetic, everyday visual culture could also be a form of aesthetic too. And sometimes, what the outsider artists could offer is a form of internalised culture, compared to seeing things through a pair of trained eyes by career-artist. Take this uncle's works for instance, his drawing style in my view, was influenced by local temple mural art. It makes perfect sense for me to exhibit these works.

**HYK:** Looking at your art practice as a whole, through your works in photography, video and performance art, one can see the influence from art institution training. However in your curatorial practice, is it fair to say that you are trying to look for a different approach, one that is not necessarily about the exhibition being "finished" or "complete", but more like to make a statement, to posit a different kind of aesthetic.

**HFC:** But we do care about exhibition design too! It is interesting you said that, maybe you are thinking from a museum curator's point of view. We appropriated a non-art space into an art space, and it might not comply to the exhibition standard you are used to seeing... But in general how to see Run Amok's exhibitions, do you think we compromised the exhibited artworks?

**HYK:** Let me explain myself, when I mentioned "finished" I wasn't referring to the exhibition production quality. I was referring to the experimental nature in them that consciously reject typical exhibition models. And I don't think it was a compromise, in fact they were close to what one would expect to see from independent art spaces. I must admit this is an academic way to understand the relationship between independent space and everyday vernacular culture, and their tendency to carve out an aesthetic viewpoint from within. I think most independent art spaces in Taiwan are still trying to imagine the notion of "community" and remain responsive towards it.

**HFC:** Sometimes art or cultural spaces had to include more community engagement activities in their programming to fulfill the state funding criteria. And Run Amok has been mostly self-funded, though we are not that resourceful, we use our own way to respond to what we understand as contemporary art. When I first return to Malaysia from England, my appetite for contemporary art could not be fulfilled in Penang. I could not find many contemporary art museum or gallery. So I thought, why not start one myself? This is one of the reasons how Run Amok came into being. Then I asked myself, is there a need to compartmentalise arts in such a way, especially in a place like George Town? Here, art is engaged

through various vantage points, and there's a certain relaxedness towards it. We once put together a woodcarving exhibition, woodcarving is ubiquitous in George Town. And I wonder if we could discuss it through the lens of contemporary art? Once we spent a long period of time in a city, our agenda and sensitivity change over time. I can't take what I saw overseas and forcefully replicate it in different locale.

We had also produced a punk-culture related visual art exhibition, some local artists questioned our intention in institutionalising the local punk culture. I was puzzled, how could a small independent space being perceived as an institution? Are we becoming more elitist in our undertakings? Our original intention was to find ways to connect with local cultures, perhaps in a more grassroots approach. This remark had me thinking for some time.

**HYK:** In connecting with local culture independent art spaces usually deploy two strategies: one is treat the space as a distribution platform which gathers the vigour of everyday life; second was reflect on everyday life and how it can be distilled as a form of aesthetic. I think there's a palpable difference in the two approaches. Back to this research residency project, you joined in this project right after you've stopped operating the gallery space. And your project is about the Tilapia fish, could you tell me why the Tilapia fish and your trip to Taiwan this time?

**HFC:** I'm an artist with high anxiety, sometimes my hunches led me believe that I have discovered something immensely exciting, at the same time I worry it might just be a self-indulging thought.

I will normally discuss with friends, observe their responses, and explore the possibilities in developing it further. I am not a studio-based artist, I don't always generate idea through making. Instead, conversation is an important process for me. And it is usually driven by visual, it could either be a photograph or an image. Just like the Tilapia fish, I don't yet have a clear direction as in how am I going to take on the subject, but I'm fascinated by its story. This sense of not-knowing where it will end up is slightly different to my other works. Perhaps, other than my "Blue and White Collection" work, I haven't spent similar amount of time in doing research. Many works in the past were more intuitive, I may formulate the idea in a day and execute on the next day. Just like my work in the *Eating Wind* exhibition, I hung three wooden dolls on a ceiling fan, the idea came from AirAsia's slogan – "Now everyone can fly", but in actual fact not everyone can afford to fly, that's why I chose to present the idea in this way.

I joined this project without a predetermined idea. A friend just got back from Taiwan and during his visit to Zengwun Dam, where he met a local who once learned that he's from Malaysia and started asking if he knew that the Marble Goby fish in the dam originated from Malaysia. I find this connection interesting, why would he assume everyone Malaysian to know about this fish? And the way he connects a type of fish to a the idea of nation identity. Based on this, I was curious to find out more about the fish in Taiwan, and during a conversation with an artist friend, Chen Ching-Yao, mentioned to me how the Tilapia fish was brought to Taiwan. And later on, I decided to narrow down the scope of research to focus only on the Tilapia fish.

This is a self-indulgent project, simply because I could have one whole month dedicated on research and able to discuss my research findings in the final sharing session. Not every artist could afford this kind of time and resource. But a residency project without having to fabricate work somewhat makes me anxious. By the way, I'm curious about the way you work with other artists, do you normally support them in doing their research? Or, is it only focus on the artistic production? I personally find research is not what the art museum would focus on in the process of artistic production.

**HYK:** The residency programs in Taiwan lately started to pay more attention to researcher and curator, to include more research-driven projects. But to engage artist as researcher during residency program is not a common exercise, which makes this project an interesting one. Of course, every residency is different, and the support we provide vary from project to project.

**HFC:** Sometimes curator will research and contextualise the artwork once it's completed. If the artist were to turn what's being discussed into artwork, how is this different in the curator and artist's approaches? If artist requests time or resource for research, would that be possible?

**HYK:** If artist request this with a clear intention in mind, of course we will try our best to facilitate. And if the work materialises through ongoing dialogues, it is also a viable way to collaborate. In fact, it can be invigorating. In situation like this, I'll also take into account if both me and artist are willing to allow a certain level

of flexibility in anticipating the final output of the work, and if we could accept or compromise each other's expectation during the process.

Back to this project, since this is a research residency, during the one month in Taiwan, you're not required to fabricate work nor will you be exhibiting your work. But before you arrival, you've already decided to focus only on the Tilapia fish, and during your time here you've begun looking at Taiwan fishery department's journals, or related literary works. Without a clear idea how you are going to translate these materials into artwork yet to continuously accumulate textual reference, I find this to be an interesting working methodology, the fact that you're required to put together a proposal without having to fabricate artwork.

**HFC:** It is undeniably an exciting process, but I could also be immersing in a vacuum of information; you don't really anything to hold on to, for not knowing where you will be exhibiting the work. For artists, I think it is something we will want to be sure of. For instance, if I knew that this work will be shown at the OCAC, I will be become more sensitive towards the space, and start to visualise how the work will be shown and who are my audience. I believe every artist will carry out some form of research before they start making work, but it is only until now that I especially conscious of the process, I did not spend substantial amount of time researching before the residency. Last year, I observed Anang Saptoto was actively looking for space or interested party to exhibit his work during his residency at the OCAC; it is important for artist to exhibit the outcome of the residency. I think the fact that I am only amassing research material but not translating them into artwork is

making me slightly anxious.

Do curator and artist share the same research methodology? I think is worth discussing. When I engage project as a curator, my area of research could be limiting, but as an artist, I personally find that it can be more expansive and easily justified. Or perhaps you could tell me more about your past curatorial project? Do you begin your research from art history, similarity in artistic practice; or is it based on sociology, philosophy, history etc.? My research area includes social media i.e. Youtube, popular culture; there's a greatest sense of freedom.

**HYK:** I think my curatorial practice is slightly reactive. Only when the artwork is shaping up, or if I can observe some form of art ecology, then only the exhibition will come together. There must be a clearly defined issue before the work begins, then we can visualise the speculated issues, to present them within a physical space that allows discussion to take place. I think the research methodology between curator and artist to some extent, is similar, but each performs a different role during the process.

You mentioned that curator's research area can be limiting yet artist has more freedom to explore, of course this is different to what we discussed before about artist's intuition. When artist talks about research, shouldn't they be thinking more about their research methodology? For instance, when we are writing a thesis we will conduct preliminary research to find out about if similar works have been done, and what are their proposed resolution or resolved issues etc. But, if we can propose a new methodology, we might get a different answer.

**HFC:** Are curators supposed to solve problem or to ask question?

**HYK:** Most projects begin with a question, and usually informed by our speculations, then we edge slowly towards the core of the question. For your research this time, are you taking a different approach?

**HFC:** This is my very first research which involved library visit. I am impressed by the collection of council of agriculture periodicals at the library I visited in Taipei. I am jealous of the artists in Taiwan, for having access to a wide range of information at the libraries.

**HYK:** During your research, what keywords did you use? What I mean is, what are you hoping to find in these materials?

**HFC:** I don't have a predetermined idea of what I was looking for in particular. I was simply trying to look for the Tilapia fish related information through a broad range of materials. As I was going through the periodicals, I paid attention to how fish was photographed, information on how to catch them or ways of caring for the fish; and the cover page design. I leafed through a few types of magazines, and I saw music scores with lyric, comics etc. It reflects the socio-cultural conditions of the time, it is all very fascinating to me. I am also aware that I am a visual artist, and these materials fascinate me. While reading these magazines, other than information about the Tilapia fish, I also come across adverts about antibiotics for pigs, perhaps this is out of the scope of my research, but who knows this might lead to something interesting in the future.

And I have discovered something odd. The Internet today is like a wishing pond for anything you can think of; and for anything we can think off, it has already happened. For instance, I wanted to find out if the migrant workers in Taiwan do consume the Tilapia fish, then I typed in “Tilapia fish, migrant workers” and I found news about migrant workers who tried to catch the Tilapia fish at sewage canal and got warned off by the police. This has given me a different idea about what the Internet can deliver. During the research, I visited library, searched the Internet or had conversations with friends. But I think this is slightly different to the curator’s way of researching. Just like the last research, curator who accompanied me focused more on the text yet I was looking at the periodical layout, advert etc.

**HYK:** Do you think this is unproductive for you? Since you might not find relevant information about Tilapia fish.

**HFC:** But I will get a sense of visual culture of the era, which is important too. If the Tilapia was brought in to Taiwan in 1946, and what would the visual aesthetic be during that time. For instance, we can approximate the era by looking at the texture and the printing quality of a black and white photo.

**HYK:** Okui Lala was the first invited artist for this residency project, during which she engaged a few Taiwanese Hokkien language teachers<sup>2</sup>. And for her final sharing session, she presented her experiences in working with them. Even though she did not present

her work but we can get an idea of what outcome to expect from her. For instance, in the video she made with one of the teachers to rethink the connection between visual and subject matter. Even though she's not required to make work but it was a way to rethink about the artmaking process.

**HFC:** I don't think this residency is a way for me to rethink my artmaking process, because every artist has their own research methodology. It is a luxury to dedicate one whole month on research, not many artist can afford the time unless you are resourceful. Even though this project does not include exhibiting artwork, and I don't think that is an issue. It is beneficial for artist to have discussion at the early stage of artmaking process even if the work hasn't been made. Ultimately, artmaking for me is to communicate, when we communicate we hope to achieve some form of resonance with the audience. To make this happens, you will look for suitable exhibition venue. Having said this, I am aware that there's a blind spot in this project, it is a culture specific project. If I were to speak about the Tilapia fish in other country, I might not be able to generate similar level of interests. If this work was to be exhibited in another country, perhaps it has to be exhibited alongside other works to give an overview of my art practice. When a culture specific project is detached from its assumed audience and shown in say the Europe, it might become a exotic subject. It might be difficult to engender similar responses, due to different cultural sensitivity and context.

**HYK:** Once the residency has ended, will you still hope complete the work?

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<sup>2</sup> See: Meeting NML #18, “Okui Lala: A Proposal for Our Future Mother Tongue”.

**HFC:** I have to make it, doesn't matter how long it takes, the proposal needs to be materialised. Even if I can't make the work now, I will keep the idea brewing. And when the work is completed, there will still be issues to think about. Once you spent a long time with a subject, is not easy to be detached from it. Materialising the idea is a way to commit to oneself; and it is important for the work to be shown.

**HYK:** Artist residency program comes in different formats, ranging from one to three months long. It normally has a fixed course: once you arrived, you have to study the environment, almost immediately get into the process of fabricating artwork, and finally showcase your work. I think this project was an attempt to break away from this format. Perhaps it is unfair to demand artist to fabricate work within a short period of time? This project was formulated as the Nusantara Archive, as a way to confront the seas, to disrupt the existing model and to envisage new possibilities.

**HFC:** I have been thinking about the function of residency program that involves transporting a person from his or her zone of comfort to be present in a foreign environment. It is important to experience foreign culture, physically and experientially. Just like our visit to a Tainan fish farm, during a conversation with Mr. Wu about the Tilapia fish farming business where he questioned the reliability of the information I found on the Internet. His response reaffirmed the problem of being overly-dependent on the Internet for information. This is why field trip is important. The Internet could be our wishing well, but when we engage industry expert, our research findings can easily be challenged or questioned. All in all, it is about finding a balance between the two in engaging our research topics.

## How to cook Asam Laksa with Tilapia

/ Hoo Fan Chon

Some are suspicious of the Tilapia, especially on how it is farmed, whether it is safe to eat, and if the rumours that surrounding it are true. What we do agree on is that it tastes good and it is inexpensive. You can find it easily in markets, or they can be caught (or scooped out) by the in rivers, streams, or sewer canals. As Taiwan continues to attract the Southeast Asian labour force, so it also indirectly imports their food cultures. The artist will demonstrate a way to cook the Tilapia fish – to make Asam Laksa with it. Asam Laksa is a popular dish in Malaysia and Singapore; it is tangy and spicy, and the stock is usually made from the river fish itself. If this dish is well-prepared, the aroma of the fresh spices not only will take away the muddy smell of the fish, it can also will accentuate its savoriness. The combination of fresh ingredients, garnishes, noodles, and fish make this a refreshing and mouth-watering dish to enjoy.

### Portion

serves 7 - 8

### Ingredients

1 kg pre-cooked laksa noodles (or thick rice noodles)

#### Ground spice paste:

15 fresh red chilies and 10 dried chilies

80g shallots

6 cloves garlic

1 inch galangal

1 inch fresh turmeric

3 stalks lemongrass (use the white part only)

20g belacan (dried shrimp paste)

### Stock:

15 cups water

4 stalks lemongrass (lightly smashed the white part)

2 torch ginger flower (or replaced with Myoga ginger)

3 inches of galangal (halved)

1.5 kg Tilapia fish

4-5 tbsp tamarind paste

10 stalks Vietnamese mint (daun kesum)

Salt to taste

Sugar or to taste

### Garnish:

80g red onions (thinly sliced)

1 cucumber (thinly sliced)

Chinese lettuce (thinly sliced)

1 torch ginger bud / Myoga ginger (finely sliced)

1/2 fresh pineapple (sliced into small pieces)

2 cups mint leaves

1 red chili (thinly sliced)

### Seasoning:

Sweetened prawn paste (or XO sauce)

Calamansi (halved)

## Method

1. Blend spice paste ingredients into a fine paste.
2. Heat a pot of water and add lemongrass, galangal, torch ginger flower. Bring to a boil and then add fish. Boil on medium heat for 15-20 minutes or until the fish is cooked.
3. Transfer cooked fish to a bowl and let cool. Strain broth to remove spices. Add to the broth the Vietnamese mint, tamarind juice and tamarind peel and continue to boil on low heat.
4. Break the fish meat into tiny pieces, but keep some in bigger chunks.
5. When it reaches a boil, reduce heat and simmer for 40 minutes to one hour. While simmering, add salt and sugar to balance the spiciness and sourness to your liking.
5. Last, fill a bowl with noodle, pour in the soup, and garnish with sliced cucumber, pineapples, onions, mint leaves, chillies, torch ginger flower and fish flakes. Add calamansi lime on the side, and serve with a spoonful of shrimp paste if you like.

*Note: Some of the ingredients are not easily available, this recipe has been customised based on what's available in Taipei at the time of the research residency.*

## Places in Taipei area to source ingredients, refer to the map

- The Second Fruit and Vegetable Wholesale Market, known as the Binjiang Market (濱江果菜市場);
- The First Thai/Burmese Shop (第一泰緬商店), Gin-Ying Shop (金鷹商店) at Huaxin Street, Zhonghe District;
- Rear of Zhongli Railway Station;
- Zhongzhen Street Market in Longgang District, Zhongli City;
- Gin-Wan-Wan Building (金萬萬大樓) at Zhongshan North Road, Taipei City;
- Vietnamese shop near JiangGuo Market in Qizang MRT Station, New Taipei City;
- EEC Elite Express in Taipei City Mall (台北地下街)



**Scan this QR code for Google Maps link**

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This recipe was based on the recipe found on the blog “season with spice” and put together based on the ingredients can be sourced in Taipei at the time of the NML research residency. It is part of the content for the Meeting NML #19: “Wu Guo Yu – The Indigenous Foreign Species”, a sharing session organised by *No Man's Land*.

## 群島資料庫04：符芳俊

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