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APT10; REX BUTLER ON 'KNOW MY NAME'; REMEMBERING MANDY MARTIN
LÉULI ESHRĀGHĪ ON THE WHITE POWER STATUS QUO; LENA YARINKURA

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A POSITIVE TANGO: ARTISTS AND INSTITUTIONS IN APT10

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Seleka International Art Society Initiative, *Hifo ki 'Olunga*, 2021, detail; synthetic polymer paint, recycled fabrics, barkcloth, wood, coconut shells, dried pandanus, mixed media, dimensions variable; commissioned for APT10; Queensland Art Gallery / Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA), Brisbane, purchased 2021 with funds from Tim Fairfax AC through the QAGOMA Foundation; image courtesy: Taniela Petelo

Phuong Ngo and Michelle Hamer, *Untitled No. 45 (Collaborative racist paintings)*, 2020, detail; synthetic polymer paint and mixed media on plywood boards, 25.4 x 40.6cm (diptych); courtesy the artists



Artist Phuong Ngo has described his relationships around the 10th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT10) as a 'positive tango'. Together with six other participating artists and two curators from Queensland Art Gallery / Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA), he joined me in exploring this dynamic at a time when we (my correspondents, our readers and I) are endeavouring to scrutinise the conduct of all our relations through a greater range of theoretical positioning and lived experience.¹ Such dialogue must acknowledge the weight that is accorded the curatorial rationale and dominant culture of any recurrent survey exhibition and, in this instance, the APT's central concerns of collection building and reception by Meanjin Brisbane audiences. I also note how several of my correspondents work in adjacent studio-based curatorial and producing roles, and that our exchange took place before the opening of the APT program.

Ruha Fifita, Curatorial Assistant, Pacific Art, highlighted how being attentive to the specific conditions of the Pacific can have wider application across institutional curatorial processes. In the Pacific, where there is less infrastructure to support the connection between contemporary arts practices and international platforms, artists and organisations are compelled to consider how their relationships can be generative for arts and culture overall. Fifita looked to projects such as 'Women's Wealth' (APT9), in which women from the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, the Solomon Islands and Australia reconnected across colonial borders, as having brought questions

about the efficacy of exhibition-making into sharper focus for the region/s.

For Tevita Latu and Taniela Petelo, lead artists with collective Seleka International Art Society Initiative in Haveluloto, Tonga, relationships with institutions are viewed in the context of affiliation with one's people. With Latu and Petelo unable to travel internationally, the practical input of Meanjin Brisbane's Tongan community to Seleka's *fale* (house) installation and the community's 'witnessing of the work' have afforded 'peace of mind'. However, as correspondents pointed out – despite institutions having a tendency to present relations between artists and their communities and networks as unfailingly cordial – they are not necessarily so. Seleka's name is derived from a derogatory comment made by a neighbour in its early days who described the collective as an outhouse (toilet) because of the misfits it attracted. Initially hurtful, the Selekarrians now regard it as a badge of honour and have reflected this in their installation for APT10.

In 2020, Narm Melbourne-based Ngo instigated 'Collaborative racist paintings', in which wooden panels painted in colours from the Dulux 'Oriental' range were posted to 104 collaborators with instructions for their completion, as a fortifying gesture during lockdown. As Ngo's peers were disputing the rigidity of his instructions, the work's multi-authored form and distributed processes were being drawn into the orbit of APT10 – calling attention to the inherent individualism of the art world's systems of value. Western institutions have historically propelled white



male artists to heights of acclaim. Accordingly, Ngo did not view APT10 as the ‘summit’ of his achievements but, rather, as a ‘pause’ in his ongoing interrogation of the art world as a racialised system. Through his APT participation he acknowledged that he had learnt to be ‘more flexible’, while also questioning if acceptance of his necessary curatorial ambit across this work had taken the edge off its unconventional relationship with QAGOMA.

Michiko Tsuda’s initial proposal was that her experience of locally inflected body movements of people in Meanjin Brisbane would be the starting point of a new installation. Unable to proceed, Tsuda’s 2021 work *Looking Back* was subsequently transposed across two spaces of the GOMA building. Working with Japanese-speaking Reuben Keehan, Curator, Contemporary Asian Art, Tsuda directed and delegated the work’s arrangement of mirrors, frames, pre-recorded video and closed-circuit television footage as a ‘device to bring focus’ to the gallery spaces and their Maiwar (Brisbane) River and city skyline atmospherics. Underlining the ‘trust and respect’ of her exchange with Keehan and colleagues, Tsuda was mindful that relationships between artists and institutions are prescribed by factors of cultural origin. In her recent experience, the cultural ‘gap’ had narrowed when exhibiting with an organisation like Japan House Los Angeles and widened in contexts such as the APT. From this perspective, Tsuda’s desire to take up the kinds of challenges presented by the APT’s sites and relations added to her feelings of distance

from Meanjin Brisbane.

New York-based Amy Lien and Berlin-based Enzo Camacho recounted how the earliest days of the pandemic felt like a ‘flashback’ to the first years of a 12-year collaboration that has never depended on Lien and Camacho being in the same place. Their thinking about institutions had been evolving over several years, and within this they observed how the pandemic accentuated the structural problems of institutions and society in general.

Characterising themselves as artists with decolonial aspirations, they were nevertheless sensing the limitations of the ‘decolonise the institution’ project. They had been spurred to cultivate less ‘institutionally bound’ thought by clarifying their ‘investment’ in situations inside *and* outside the institution in which ‘you are called upon to articulate’ your politic. This led to a more nuanced understanding of ‘highly complicated’ situations such as the ongoing political violence of the sugar plantation system of Negros in the Philippines – the impetus for their APT work. With more ‘pragmatism’ around these relationships, Lien and Camacho relished what they describe as the ‘different communicative paradigm’ of the APT that enabled long conversations with curators as well as personnel such as framers and publicists.

Currently on a DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) residency in Berlin, Som (Sutthirat) Supaparinya reported the larger scale of her APT work compared to other works that she had previously shown in Thailand and internationally. Supaparinya’s

Top:
Michiko Tsuda, *You would have gone there to see them by then*, 2019, installation view,
Ito Residence, Aichi Triennale, Nagoya, 2019; courtesy the artist and TARO NASU, Tokyo

Bottom:
Som Supaparinya, *Collapsing Clouds Form Stars*, 2021, installation detail; single-channel
video, black-and-white, sound, 16:9, 279 ribbons with embroidered text, ed. 1 of 3 (+ 2 AP);
commissioned for APT10; QAGOMA, Brisbane, purchased 2021 with funds from the Spellbrook
Foundation through the QAGOMA Foundation; courtesy the artist; photo: Joe Ruckli, QAGOMA



Amy Lien and Enzo Camacho, *Martyrs*, 2021, watercolour, gouache, ink, wax, cotton, bagasse, seaweed, bark, gold leaf, 44.5 x 31.8cm; courtesy the artists; photo: Merinda Campbell, QAGOMA



ambitions had intersected with the APT commissioning process in a work that is a testament to resistance movements throughout Thai history. Researching and travelling to 24 sites across Thailand that are linked to stories forgotten or explicitly not spoken about, the work's political intention lies in the personal and collective context of the passing of her father, the 2020–21 anti-government protests and the pandemic. Responding to a curatorial brief that reflected the APT's production capacity, Supaparinya chose to relay the work's 'small narratives' through time-lapse photography and embroidered text fragments from banned books, song lyrics and protestors' Facebook messages and tweets. Still 'unsure' how this work might be shown in Thailand, Supaparinya conveyed how her relationship to the work and to the APT framed a space of 'expressive' possibilities denied to so many Thai people.

With limited mobility over the last two years, artists and QAGOMA staff have worked to overcome any 'depleting' implications. Ruha Fifita stressed that while the APT had always viewed artists' 'sense of ownership' and institutional responsiveness as paramount, it had never felt more important. Tarun Nagesh, Curatorial Manager, Asian and Pacific Art, reflected that because QAGOMA is 'continually working' on the APT in terms of growing relationships and knowledge, it was able to draw on this foundation in delivering the project. In doing so, he took care to acknowledge the greater difficulties faced by artists and institutions in the region such as the 3AM collective in Yangon, Myanmar.

Nagesh felt that it had been useful to consider the APT's triennial exhibition model. Globally speaking, three years is a long time to produce an exhibition, and Nagesh was reminded of how much change could occur in any three-year cycle. In the context of the APT, change has spanned the lives of its wealth of contributors as well as social and political shifts that have reverberated globally. Recalling the APT's adaptability over the course of its 30-year history had assisted Nagesh, who has worked at QAGOMA since APT7, in the face of current uncertainties. APT10 had also brought an appreciation for the Triennial as the project with the most number of curators working outside their regular departments. Nagesh contemplated how this transferral of expertise and understanding across the organisation for APT and other projects had contributed to its resilience.

Identifying processes and values that support artists to occupy the same institutional spaces and dialogues without glossing over their differences is

an evolving task. On this matter, Fifita expressed that 'across every platform and function the question of who the exchange is being shaped for' needs to be fully explored. Fifita and Nagesh conveyed their indebtedness to consultative groups ranging from the APT's regional interlocutors to exhibition participants, the local ACAPA Pasifika Community Engagement Project (ACE). As language has emerged as a touchstone of relations between artists and institutions, ACE had strengthened the use of Indigenous languages across 10 APT projects. Other Pacific collaborators instilled the need to include organisations with wider sovereign agendas when seeking an overview of exhibition-making in the region. Referring to the Australian context, Phuong Ngo was also interested in how the work he instigated might 'puncture' any assumptions that 'contemporary art', unlike community-located practices, is not produced through collective relations.

In conclusion, the exchange between my correspondents and I inevitably turned to the heightened possibilities of the APT's transnational format and the unprecedented curbing of connections between artists for this iteration. At the same time, all welcomed the 're-localising' process with its digital overlaying that has intensified throughout the pandemic. Citing situations in which an over-reliance on touring exhibitions had contributed to the local and the Indigenous being overlooked, correspondents recognised that these shifts are part of the reappraisal of relations that is underway.

When the first APT opened in 1993, the art world was internationalising and its people, ideas and materials were on the move. Looking back, we can see how the APT would both reflect and produce these changes. At the same time, the then-Queensland Art Gallery strove for institutional accountability – to artists, peers and audiences – by prioritising durational engagement which can be seen in its (at times) unwieldy number of regional co-curators. This sense of purpose and this incremental approach of retaining and diversifying institutional capability has proven to be vital in weathering the pandemic and in sustaining the APT's accent on locally and regionally situated relations.

1. This dialogue took place over email and Zoom during the months of September and October 2021.

The 10th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art is on display at the Queensland Art Gallery / Gallery of Modern Art, Meenjin Brisbane, from 4 December 2021 until 25 April 2022.