



The Sun Teaches Us That History Is Not Everything

by Vivian Li

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When you enter *The Sun Teaches Us That History Is Not Everything*, one of the first works you might overlook amongst the other more colorful installations is a large suspended orb slowly spinning in the center of the room. Made up of one long mobius strip of bamboo elegantly looping repeatedly upon itself, its form is inspired by the black tulip, a nonexistent flower that was the nickname for the 17th-century Italian explorer Matteo Ricci's first map of Asia. In João Ó's *Model for the Impossible Black Tulip* (2015), his material intervention into the ideas, assumptions, and tales born out of history serves as an entryway into the formal and conceptual strengths of this original and dynamic group show.



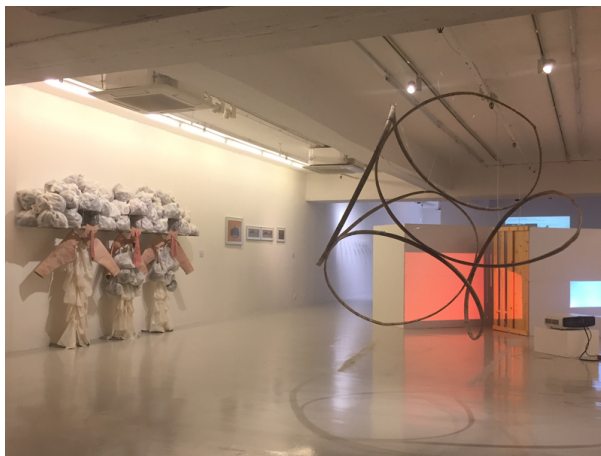
Mark Salvatus, *Silent Empire*, 2018, video. Courtesy the artist.

The Sun Teaches Us That History Is Not Everything ambitiously brings together new video and installation works by twenty-six artists from Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Hong Kong and Macau. Though the show's trans-regional logic may not be apparent, the artists coalesce around their shared interests in the odd place of modern colonial and diasporic histories, of which they are all personally acquainted with as descendents and products of these macro histories. The family histories of all fourteen Latin American artists, for instance, are marked by escape from Asia.

Several of the works take account of the gap between personal experience and grand narratives, especially national narratives rarely told from the point of view of the colonized or migrant. Yet unlike the distance or didacticism that often encumbers narrative-driven artworks, the works here invite viewer engagement, from printed handouts of phrases spoken by Japanese-Mexicans interviewed in Miho Hagino and Taro Zorrilla's video *A Country in Memories* (2010) to Mimian Hsu's playful hanging installation. Hovering like an alluring yet wildly entangled cloud above the heads of viewers, the 25,934 miniature sleigh bells of her *Hsu Zheng (Version 1)* (2018) represent the number of days since her grandfather's disappearance during the political protests in Taiwan in 1947, after which her family immigrated to her birthplace of Costa Rica.

The large population of Japanese in Brazil—the largest outside of Japan—also resulted from such escape when many Japanese migrated to Latin America for economic survival in the early 20th century. In Shinpei Takeda's *A Blueprint for Emigration/Immigration* (2018) the entire length of the gallery's outdoor terrace is painted with the blueprint of the Argentina Maru, a major ship that transported Japanese people to Latin America. Stepping on the work to read the writing by Japanese migrants that fill the silhouette, viewers immediately feel the enormous scale of the ship, but also its tight quarters mimicked by the crowded letters.

Several of the artists in the show from Southeast Asia, Hong Kong, and Macau also powerfully deal with the mixed feelings around colonialism in Asia, partly because of



Installation shot of João Ó, *Model for the Impossible Black Tulip*, 2015. Bamboo.

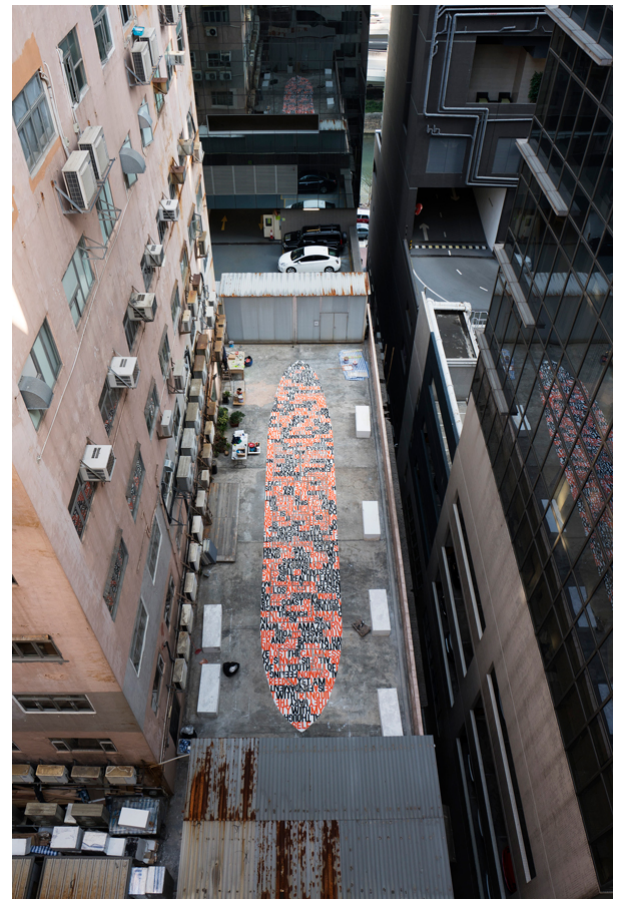
colonialism's close relationship with modernization. FX Harsono's video, *Testimony*, (2009) shows—through interviews with elderly men and women who were the first generation Chinese to immigrate to Indonesia—how as children they navigated the Dutch colonial education system and learned to adopt the Dutch worldview as Chinese-Indonesians.

The nuanced and critical readings of history offered in the show's works make *The Sun Teaches Us That History Is Not Everything* not only enlightening, but also motivating to go forward and see what more exists between the familiar national, regional, and period bound narratives. In Mark Salvatus's two-channel video *Silent Empire* (2018), two teams of youthful drummers in colorful shorts, shirts, and sandals face off. Called Tamboleros de Tondo, such groups are emblematic of the major district of Tondo in Manila, which never became a city as was promised after the Philippines' independence. Known for playing at parties around town, the young and boisterous musicians of Tondo are reminders of both a postcolonial modernity that never came as well as the one that did.

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VIVIAN LI is a contributor to the *Brooklyn Rail*.



Shinpei Takeda, *A Blueprint for Emigration/Immigration*, 2018, paint. Courtesy the artist.

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