

# Ornamental · 瓊

Lizzie Wee | Quynh Dong | Shayne Phua  
Stephanie Jane Burt | Santi Wangchuan

13.11.21 - 09.01.22

# Ornamental · 瓊

Featured Artists:

Lizzie Wee  
Quynh Dong  
Santi Wangchuan  
Shayne Phua  
Stephanie Jane Burt

This catalogue was made for the occasion of the exhibition  
Ornamental · 瓊 (xiāng) from 13 November 2021 - 9 January 2022  
at Yeo Workshop, Singapore.

*Beauty involves purposiveness without a purpose.*

– Immanuel Kant

<sup>1</sup> 璫 (*xiāng*) translates to beautification or adornment, but is a character not commonly used in present day. In ancient times, 璫 (*xiāng*) was used to describe the jade ornaments used to decorate horse belts, or the inlaid patterns of female hairpins.

<sup>2</sup> Clement Greenberg popularised the notion of medium specificity in the mid-1960s, which prioritised medium as an artwork's most expressive feature such that "purity in art consists in the acceptance... of the limitations of the medium of the specific art".

<sup>3</sup> According to Rosalind Krauss, 'post-medium' forms of art (or what many think of as postmodern or post-structuralist) did not try to engage people via a pure and discrete artistic medium, nor did they represent a means of protest to commercialism and commodification. These works are not bound by a supposed universal symbolism.

**Ornamental** · 璫 (*xiāng*)<sup>1</sup> highlights an attentiveness towards the physicality of art works as 'objects', where artists in the show re-materialise various forms of domestic, cultural and political constructs to transcend the notion of utility in favour of aesthetics. Personal and collective memories pervade the space in ways that are recalled and revitalised into an ornate, dreamlike environment. It deliberates on the 'decorative' as critical, which recalls the Greenbergian-theory of medium specificity<sup>2</sup> in aesthetics, whilst echoing Rosalind Krauss' belief that modernism is rooted in a purity where art is bound to nothing but its own essence.<sup>3</sup> As one navigates through familiar portrayals of the home, history, or post-colonial; the divides between the public and private, home and state, conscious and subliminal become increasingly blurred.

The exhibition is an invitation back into the physical space and experience of art, away from the nebulous realm of the virtual and immaterial encounters. Within this sanguine choreography of pink – one that is seemingly imposing yet intimate, the viewer becomes an embodied spectator rather than a 'disembodied eye'. Beyond what these artworks necessarily signify and decode, there is a greater sense of probing into what these objects and their forms can set in motion for the viewer. Taking the form as the departure of inquiry, these artists explore the shifting goalposts of wherein the body and object borders between tradition and rejection, objectivity and fetishism.





Exhibition View, *Ornamental* 瓊 (xiāng), 2021. Yeo Workshop, Singapore.





Quynh Dong, *đuổi đom đóm (Under the Fireflies)*, 2021, Still from Video.

# Quynh Dong

đuổi đom đóm  
(Under the fireflies)  
2021

video, 1920 x 1080 cm  
6:42 min  
Edition of 10 + 2 AP

In her new video work *đuổi đom đóm (Under the Fireflies)*, Quynh Dong plays on Ferdinand Hodler's *The Woodcutter* (1910) to illustrate the tribulations of the humble Vietnamese farm worker, whilst insinuating a deeper action of violence still prevalent in present day. One of the best-known Swiss painters of the 19th century, Hodler had painted the lumberjack against a blank backdrop of a white sky in *The Woodcutter* (1910), which has since become a symbol of strength, authenticity and resilience in Swiss culture and history. Echoing this work, Dong frames the Vietnamese farmer as a central figure who tirelessly hits the air with a stick as fireflies fly towards him like pouring rain. A reference to the character Bát Lê from Nguyễn Tuân's 1940 *Vang Bóng Một Thời (A Memorable Time)*, the enigmatic figure is symbolic of the every man and brings us back to the time where Confucian ideology was receding to a new French-influenced culture in 1930s Vietnam. Yet his repetitive action of violence raises questions on the continued practice of beheading still performed by the Vietnamese military today. Such violence intermixed with nostalgia is further dramatized by the EDM soundscape Dong has created. The work is also informed by Gillo Dorfles' *Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste*. In an unassuming manner, *đuổi đom đóm* holds a sensibility that is, in its arbitrariness, necessarily urgent.

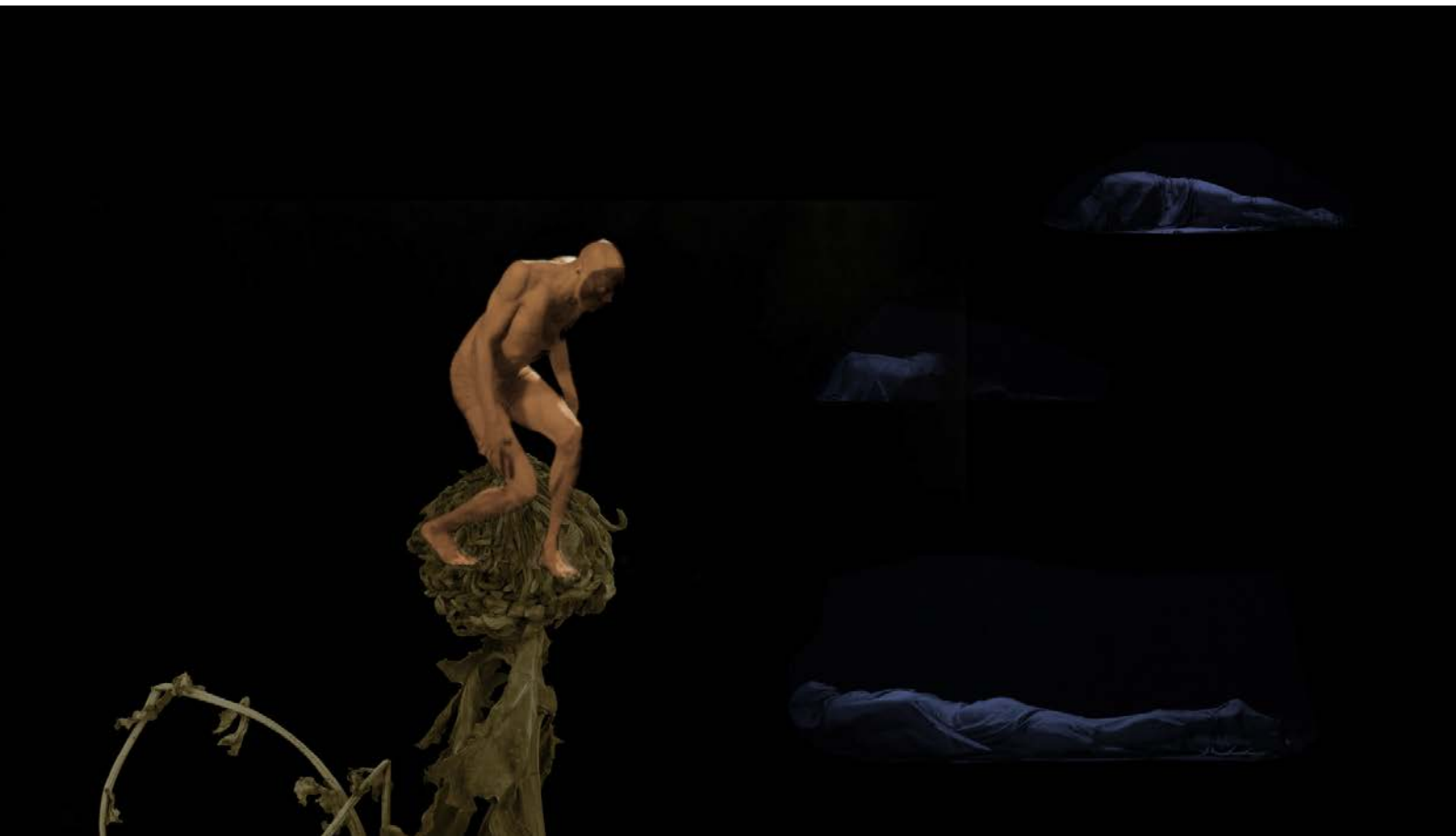




Quynh Dong, *đuổi đom đom (under the fireflies)*, 2021, Video 1920 x 1080 cm, 6:42 min

Edition of 10 + 2 AP





biển đen với cá vàng  
(black sea with goldfish)  
2018-2020

Three-channel video installation  
 9 min  
 Edition of 3 + 2 AP



Culture as identity is constructed by the collective. At the same time, culture is invariably bound to meaning, as Max Weber wrote in 1988: "From the human point of view, culture is a finite segment of the meaningless infinity of world events, a segment in which human beings confer meaning and significance." In *biển đen với cá vàng* (*black sea with goldfish*), Dong questions the stereotypical image of Asia through the lens of Vietnamese art history. She draws from the influences of lacquer painting in Vietnamese art, an art form that is traditionally shaped by China and later promoted by the École des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine in Vietnam, to bring attention to the corporeal in relation to the construct of one's identity. A direct reference to Pham Hau's (1903-1995) lacquer painting '*Goldfish in the Pond*', the work bears the spirit of Chinese landscape ink painting, which strives for atmosphere over originality. Dong further integrates Japanese Butoh dance into the landscape as a reflection of the body as a sculpture. Butoh is a break from the rational principles of modernity. Its roots can be traced back to modern German expressive dance in the 1920s, where it sought to resist both the import of Western modernism and classical Japanese dance-drama in favour of a new, contemporary and self-reflective form. In various contortions and hyper-controlled movements, the alienated body mirrors this very spirit of resistance and defiance against definition through time.





Quynh Dong, *biển đen với cá vàng (black sea with goldfish)*, 2018-2020, Installation View.



# Stephanie Jane Burt

## Romance Report Letters

2021

Mixed media on wood

Dimensions variable

Stephanie Jane Burt creates sculptural installations that reference film, literature and fashion to unpack the narratives around feminism, girl culture and nouveau roman. With her profound attention to materiality and form, Burt has created a new body of work, *Romance Report Letters*, for the exhibition. Developing on her research around the narratives of female characters such as Lux Lisbon from *The Virgin Suicides* (1999) and Betty Draper from the television series *Mad Men* (2007), Burt delved into the genre of romance comics mainly published during the first three decades of the Cold War (1947-1977). In these stories, girls are often cast in a tragic plight in their pursuit for love and happiness. Referencing *Girls' Romances* and *Girls' Love Stories*, both published by DC Comics in the 50s, Burt takes archival images from these romance comic anthologies to reimagine the heroine and her passionate chronicles, recasting her away from a state of constant peril.





Stephanie Jane Burt, *Romance Report Letters 1*, 2021.



Stephanie Jane Burt, *Romance Report Letters 3*, 2021.





Exhibition View, *Ornamental* 瓊 (xiāng), 2021. Yeo Workshop, Singapore.





Shayne Phua, *Padma Malayan*, 2021, detail.

# Shayne Phua

## Padma Malayan

2021

Ceramic, fountain pump,  
rose syrup ingredients  
Diameter 90cm

Fountains were originally purely functional to distribute water in ancient civilisations but later became a form of theatre for recreation and entertainment - honouring individuals and events, and decorating city parks and squares as we know of today. Shayne Phua draws on the ornate spectacle of the fountain and reimagines it in a new sculptural work that takes the form of a Rafflesia flower. Crowned by a merlion seated in padmasana (lotus pose in yoga), reminiscent of Buddha and Hindu deities in meditation, the work is abound with symbolism in relation to religion, history, tradition, and literature. Phua references the native name of Rafflesia, where it is more commonly known as the Padma Raksasa or giant padma in the region. Padma, in turn, is the Sanskrit word for 'lotus flower' and signifies primordial purity and enlightenment. By highlighting the origins of the Rafflesia flower as informed by indigenous communities before its later colonial research and findings, Phua challenges the objectivity of History that often favours the Western perspective. In a playful spin to decolonise our culture, she fills the Rafflesia with rose syrup - an ingredient familiar to many Southeast and South Asia countries for beverages and desserts - and lets its fragrance take one by surprise. Bridging the political and mythical in imaginative and uncanny ways, Padma Malayan ultimately raises questions against the glorification of colonialism in Singapore. It also marks the beginning of Phua's exploration of fountains as a critical form, a development from vintage pastry moulds in her practice.





Shayne Phua, *Padma Malayan*, 2021, detail.



Exhibition View (Right):

Santi Wangchuan  
*Free Form From Weaving No. 2*, 2011.

Shayne Phua  
*Padma Malayan*, 2021.







1963 Death of Democracy  
2020

White stoneware, underglaze,  
gold lustre, mother of pearl lustre  
34 x 7 x 38 cm

*1963 Death of Democracy* recalls the Cold War period in Singapore, when the dominant party 'won' its place through labelling political opponents as communists and detaining them without trial. The work makes a direct reference to the year 1963, when leaders of the now-defunct political party, Barisan Sosialis, were arrested. Shayne Phua signals the need to challenge the supposed objectivity of history, which is often underpinned by an underlying state-dictated narrative. One side of the ceramic vessel reflects the logo of Barisan Sosialis, while the other is a flower garland made using vintage pastry moulds from East Asian culture. Phua also utilised the brass stamping of Medusa with gold lustre to symbolise victim blaming. Till today, prominent members of Barisan Sosialis are still being accused of various incidents in the state official narrative to justify their arrest in the past. *1963 Death of Democracy* also features letters cut out individually in a font reflective of the period in the 60s.





Right:  
Shayne Phua  
*1963 Death of Democracy*,  
2020, detail.



# Lizzie Wee

## Honey Trap

2021

Multimedia video installation  
comprising:

4K Video with NFT, 4:52 min  
Edition of 3 + 1 AP

Digital Prints  
Dimensions variable  
Edition of 3 + 1 AP

Beaded curtains, Prints, scent  
200 x 100cm each

Building on her extensive research of female archetypes in popular culture, Lizzie Wee creates a new video work that examines the notions of 'desire' and 'seduction' stereotypical of female characters portrayed in Asian television series and movies. She looks towards stylised imagery of women and re-appropriates vernacular used to describe them to devise her own femme fatale. Cross-referencing vintage magazines including Penthouse and Playboy that she gathered from her father's youth, Wee unpacks how women have been depicted to be desirable though purposefully posed images in domestic settings and fan fictional-like texts of strangers' sexual escapades. From phrases like "Gentle pleasures, give me young honey" taken from these magazines to popular lyrics "(like a virgin) touched for the very first time", Wee frames a familiar yet disconcerting image of femininity through the years. The work exudes a poetic reflection on womanhood with a viscous sensibility through her original arrangement of these texts and literature. In abstracted fragments of her own body rendered in varying hues of pink, Wee transports us to an otherworldly, sensuous rhapsody. She takes an absurdist turn on the idea of the 'honey trap', where the beautiful borders the grotesque, challenging how femininity and the construct of it has given rise to the illusion of an 'ideal' woman.





Lizzie Wee, *Honey Trap*, 2021, Installation View.





Lizzie Wee, *Honey Trap*, 2021, Installation View.



# Santi Wangchuan

## Flowers Rain

2021

Weaving

120 x 55 x 40 cm

## Free Form From Weaving No. 2

2011

Weaving

306 x 246 cm

Santi Wangchuan has been using a traditional weaving technique that has been passed down from his family through the generations. He safeguards this technique amid the rapid intervention of urban development in Thailand whilst drawing visual references from the culture and history of his home country. Religion, traditional dance, calligraphy, and botanical species native to northern Thailand form various inspirations in Wangchuan's bold, elaborate and textural woven works. In a new work *Flowers Rain*, the artist makes a reference to the Greek Goddess Flora, which appeared in his dreams. He carefully weaves together flowers and forms that are significant of old Thai traditions and modern times. Its highly decorated structure recalls the arrangements of phuang malai (floral garlands), often given as offerings or for good luck, and the floral floats used in the Bun Bang Fai (Rocket Festival), which is a merit-making ceremony traditionally practiced in North-eastern Thailand near the beginning of the wet season. By virtue, the work become contemporary symbols of hope, luck, and blessings. An earlier work, *Free Form from Weaving No. 2*, harmonises the intimate affection and warmth towards his family, with folk wisdom and beliefs that are receding with societal metamorphosis. Suspending as important testaments of a history that is both personal and collective, these intricate arrangements become a laboured inventories of the real and make-believe.





Right:  
Santi Wangchuan  
*Free Form From Weaving No. 2*  
2011





Santi Wangchuan, *Free Form From Weaving No. 2*, 2011, detail.



# About the Artists

**SHAYNE PHUA** uses ceramic as the main medium in her practice, which explores the notions of form and functionality in relation to historical and cultural narratives as informed by religion, literature and tradition. She graduated with a BA (Honours) in Communication Design from The Glasgow School of Art. Her works were exhibited in Chan + Hori Contemporary, Gajah Gallery, and Your Mother Gallery. In 2019, Phua was an Artist in Residence at Zentrum für Keramik in Berlin and Guldagergaard International Ceramic Research Center in Denmark. In 2020, she had her debut solo, 'Sehnsucht' exhibited at Coda Culture.

**STEPHANIE JANE BURT** is an artist whose practice spans from sculptural installations to fictional prose. She completed her studies at Glasgow School of Art, where she received her Bachelor of Arts (Hons) Painting and her Master of Fine Arts. Her work invites the viewer to explore dialogues between her installations and their settings through a fictional narrative at times referencing film and literature. Her research looks across feminism, gender, an analysis of girl culture and the nouveau roman. She recently completed a residency at ISCP New York in 2019 and has started a research project, A Stubborn Bloom, which explores representations of femininity within fashion, film and material culture.

**SANTI WANGCHUAN** makes hand-woven works inspired by his family's traditions, reflecting an integration of religion, stories, equipment, and tools that are native to his hometown in Thailand. Wangchuan earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Thai Art (Second Class Honors) from the Faculty of Painting Sculpture and Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University, and recently graduated with an MFA in Visual Arts, the Faculty of Painting Sculpture and Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University, Bangkok. He was awarded the "3rd Honoured Bronze Award" at the 61st National Exhibition of Art, Bangkok, Thailand in 2015 and has participated in multiple art exhibitions, such as the 35th Bualuang Painting Exhibition, The Queen's Gallery, Bangkok in 2013, and the Amata Foundation's 'Art Awards'.

**LIZZIE WEE** is a Singaporean multidisciplinary artist, designer, illustrator, art director and video editor. She received her Bachelor's in Fine Arts from New York University Steinhardt, and Master's in Fine Arts awarded by Goldsmiths, University of London from LASALLE College of the Arts. Her present practice-based research investigates notions of identity and belonging through an examination of archetypal female roles found in Southeast Asian pop culture and visual media. Her works are expressed through video, performance, and writing for performance. Apart from her artistic practice, Wee has worked with Sotheby's Hong Kong and Kitchen Hoarder, a woman-run production team focused on lifestyle and food culture.

**QUYNH DONG** creates hyper-real video works to provide an innate platform upon which she deliberately challenges cultural stereotypes. Her practice extends to also include performance and sculpture. She studied Fine Arts at Bern University of the Arts and completed her MA in Fine Arts at Zurich University of the Arts. Dong has been exhibited internationally, notably including the Kunsthalle Bern, Galerie Perotin in Paris, Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in Amsterdam, and Galerie Bernhard Bischoff & Partner in Bern. She has further performed her works at Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique Paris; Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts Lausanne in Switzerland; LISTE 17, the Young Art Fair in Basel, Switzerland; the Emily Harvey Foundation in New York, USA; and YAP'15, The Twinkle World, Exco 1F, Deagu, in South Korea.





Exhibition View, *Ornamental 瓊 (xiāng)*, 2021. Yeo Workshop, Singapore.





Exhibition View, *Ornamental 瓊 (xiāng)*, 2021. Yeo Workshop, Singapore.





Lizzie Wee, *Honey Trap*, 2021. Installation View.

Text & Design Keoy Wan Hui

Photography Marvin Tang  
Jonathan Lum

Cover Image Quynh Dong, *biển đen  
với cá vàng (black sea with  
goldfish)*, 2018-2020. Still  
from three-channel video  
installation.

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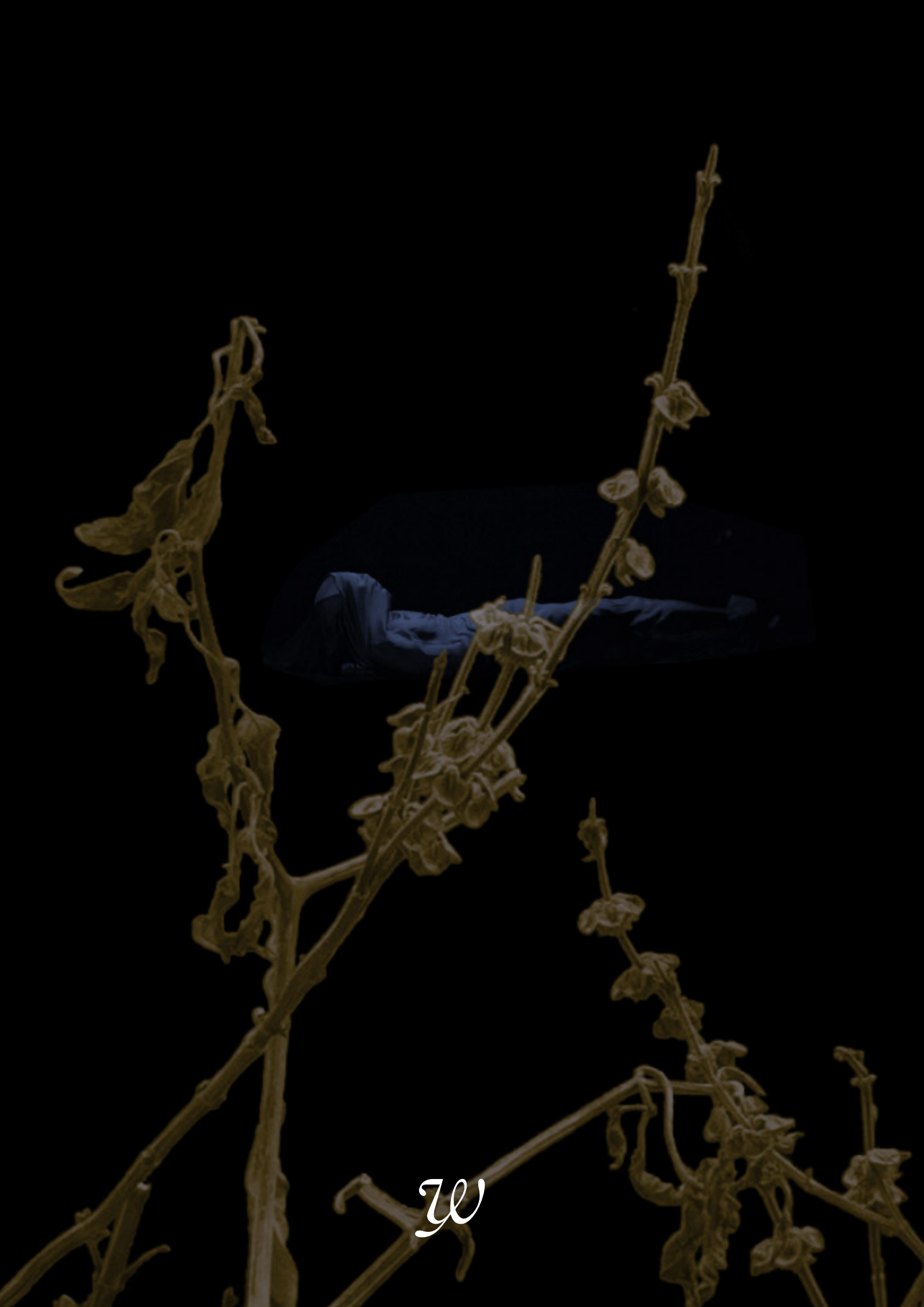


Yeo Workshop is committed to contemporary art in Singapore and supporting innovative practices of contemporary artists. Covering a multi-disciplinary approach, the gallery defines itself by its progressive engagements.

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