

Asia Contemporary Art Week Signature Program
2015

October 31 & November 1,

FIELD MEETING Take 3: *Thinking Performance*

Day 1: Hosted at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Opening Remarks by Leeza Ahmady

Welcome to All. I want to begin by thanking and introducing ACAW Team members: Managing Director Ambika Trasi, who has tirelessly worked on every aspect of ACAW platform for the past three and half years. She has helped me take the initiative to the next level in multiple ways. Michelle Loh, a well-respected art consultant, with past initiatives including publications, art fairs, and exhibitions, recently joined ACAW team this March 2015 as Development Director. She has contributed great support to our efforts on many fronts this year. Our interns Cathy Fan, Andree Yeh and Shin-yi Tan have provided tremendous support in coordinating the week and FIELD MEETING over the past months and weeks. Thanks also to all the volunteers for their work during today and tomorrow's FIELD MEETING sessions.

Thanks to Metropolitan Museum of Art for hosting today's program and to all the colleagues at the Met who advocated and made it a possibility: Ian Alteveer, Limor Tomer, Sandra Jackson-Dumont, and Marlene Graham.

As you may be aware, this is the 10th edition of Asia Contemporary Art Week, seven of which I have directed since 2005. The seed for the week was planted by a group of curators, museum and gallery directors and collectors, who came together to create Asia Contemporary Art Consortium in 2001, with the aim of addressing the lack of representation and absence of critical contextualization of art from Asia in New York and the United States in general.

Founding ACAW Consortium members (2001) include major museum curators Melissa Chiu, Vishakha Desai, and Alexandra Munroe, and collectors Jack & Susy Wadsworth, alongside gallerists Jung Lee Sanders, and Shumita and Arani Bose, some of whom are still Consortium members and are present in this room today.

I came on board ACAW because I found the unlikely coming together of a group of non-profit institutions and commercial galleries to create a powerful collective voice, an interesting in-between space for curatorial and educational intervention. I interpreted my job as that of strengthening, broadening, and growing the Consortium as well as highlighting the significance of their efforts through each edition. Yet it is ACAW's other tier, the wobbly leg, the one I have tried to build stronger and keep standing through the ups and downs of the shifting landscape of the past ten years, the always meager and increasingly decreasing budgets, and lack of true institutional support and foundation; it is that wobbly leg that keeps me coming back.

So what is the turn on? It is the difficult work of truly looking at what is not presented, not included, missed, omitted or simply and merely inaccessible through museums, galleries, art fairs, biennials, publications, and other such arenas. This need to look further has harnessed the energy for me to work harder each year, given also the vast and growing whole organism that contemporary art is becoming not only in Asia but also in the world

at large. This passion for looking, connecting and making visible what is not seen or not seen in the light that it could be seen in— as more nuanced, more meaningful, more true, more diverse, more inclusive and more impactful— makes my work through ACAW platform more relevant than ever today.

How do we really account for the true ratios, the intensity of artistic activity and rapid changes taking place not only inside of Asia but also beyond? Amongst hundreds of museums and art institutions and thousands of galleries in New York, there are still only a dozen or so institutions and galleries exclusively representing artists from Asia while only a handful of leading galleries have added one or two artists to their roster over the years. Many enter the US art scene through biennials and blockbuster museum group exhibitions, a majority of whom never get to come back for solo shows forgotten by the next wave of new artists woven through the web of the system. While only few names are repeatedly paraded in institutions small and large. None of this is bad or good— it is simply reality. The question that I have continued to encounter over the past several years is, what do I really give all this energy to? How am I making a difference for anyone? Why should I, or anyone care about all of this really?

FIELD MEETING as a format for presenting artistic content came to mind slowly through a number of captivating lecture-performances by artists Walid Raad and Rabih Mroué in Lebanon and elsewhere over the years. March Meeting, a Middle East and South Asia forum initiated by Sharjah Art Foundation 7 years ago is another model that inspired FIELD MEETING. Yet an insightful studio visit with artist Sheba Chhachhi in New Delhi during a research visit for dOCUMENTA (13) solidified more clearly one particular element of exhibition making I have always loved. Becoming intensely aware of the quintessential need for being in the presence of an artist and the importance of exchange with an artist in curatorial work. Recognizing that in all my years of curating exhibitions, why I select one work over another has as much to do with the artist, his or her being, personal and artistic process, philosophy and how they have internalized their experiences than the final art work of art or art object at hand.

Historical works have time and again come more alive for me through the contextualization of scholars and curator who have studied and researched them as opposed to reading books, essays and articles. In time it has become clear that while aesthetic and conceptual excellence in works of art is important, what makes this so, or what moves most art professionals to create long lasting and nurturing relationships with artists and their practices is linked to their internal ingredient as individuals, their humanity and energetic being. So in this iteration of FIELD MEETING, beyond the proposition that we are in a communal studio visit on a communal scale, I am proposing that we are in an exhibition. An exhibition of people, their ideas, processes and insights in the form of an energetic exchange which will in turn shift, transform and translate into what is being talked about, thought about, researched and made in the future. We will be contributing to the works of all those presenting by our presence, reception and interaction all of which require energy and this I believe is a form of exhibition making if not a performance in its own right.

To accomplish the goal of better examining and thinking about performance, which is the focus of this year's forum, we have once again collaborated with numerous individuals as

well as art spaces and organizations based in cities across Asia and beyond, many whom are supporting the participation of the artists and arts professionals in today's *FIELD MEETING: Thinking Performance*. These organizations are important agents enabling activities of artists, curators and other arts professionals behind the scenes. By spotlighting the individuals they support through FIELD MEETING, we are essentially also acknowledging their contributions to the field as well.

While FIELD MEETING Take 3 focuses on performance more intentionally this year, the emphasis is not new. I mentioned already that lecture-performance is a medium that has become increasingly prevalent in the past decade inspires both the format and mission for FIELD MEETING. So again to be clear, this is neither an academic symposium nor a conference and while some of the content may be as imperative and connected to academics, the aim is to go beyond presenting information. Information alone is not art. An individual's energy, their processing of information and organization of information in such a way that it becomes both insight and inquiry is art or artful. I am determined to make a distinction that FIELD MEETING by nature of its liveliness is performative.

I have been asked why I have chosen to present a forum on this media now? What is the relevance of exploring performance art today in Asia, and in a global setting?

I have answered that the relevance is that performance, if you were to detach the word "art" from it, has been around since cavemen began singing and painting caves. Performance art is a term used by our contemporary art world of the past 30 years to categorize performance works made primarily by visual artists. It is really institutional semantics and surely there is a place for such language. In a way, that is what contemporary art is, how we are defining and interpreting things. However, while this year's FIELD MEETING will certainly consider the realm of performance art and its multiplicity of manifestations both inside and outside of Asia, we are aiming at a much wider scope of analysis to de-categorize performance as much as possible, allowing for discovery of its true poetics, roots, history, and meaning in different places, now and at different times beyond just the contemporary.

Performance is often an undeclared means to a process rather than an objective end. It is a method of delivery, a tactful language—the quintessence of all creative practitioners and their inner workings—painters, novelists, architects, comedians, poets, and so on. Often performance is subliminal, a subconscious strand poised to seduce, communicate, enlighten, and provoke. Again, I am proposing that we scrutinize performance much more openly, which is why the subtitle of this year's FIELD MEETING is *Thinking Performance*. It is an attempt to think and allow a diverse set of thoughts about the subject at hand. It is a much more interesting way than continuing on the path of East-West dichotomies. I think for many of us, the practice or the experience of performance is not readily defined. Every artist and professional presenting at FIELD MEETING has a distinguished point of view, individual approach that is worth thinking about.

In last year's FIELD MEETING we had envisioned a set of objectives, which I shared with the audience at my opening remarks in a kind of ceremonial invocation. I think we certainly paved the way for many of those declarations and those accomplishments are

moving forward as instigations that continue to unfold onwards, manifesting in different ways even today, one year later; they will continue into the future as many significant things do.

Please refer to the FIELD MEETING Narrative and Curatorial Statement for a more extensive overview of the forum and individual excerpts and biographical information about the roster of our outstanding presenters. I would like to end my opening remarks by renewing some of the most important objectives for FIELD MEETING:

_To create partnerships, collaborations, and relationships forged organically between presenting artists and art professionals and organizational leaders and professionals on the receiving end as the audiences.

_A broad and open representation of Asia, while focusing on artistic practice as an ongoing process rather than end results.

_ Considering unconventional modes of performance, art and exhibition making practices

_ Highlighting artists & artistic initiatives in a timely and less mediated fashion.

_ □ Facilitate a kind of exchange that is far beyond established institutional representation and discourse _ Address the large gaps in the ratio of Asia based artists represented in US museums, galleries and institutions by presenting many current and recent-historically relevant artists.

_Access to unfamiliar yet existing art-historical scholarship and inspiring new and rigorous research by artists, and further analysis of new institutional models specific to local arenas.

We are very thankful to the many galleries and arts organizations in the US, Asia and other parts of the world that have joined ACAW this year by sponsoring some of the FIELD MEETING invited artists' trips to New York.

See all presenters profiles at: http://www.acaw.info/?page_id=18412