

**The Collectors Show:  
Asian Contemporary Art from Private Collections  
*CHIMERA***

14 January to 25 March 2012  
SAM

## > Exhibition Synopsis

*The Collectors Show: Chimera* brings together major works of Asian contemporary art from private collections around the world. A tribute to the art patrons of today, the exhibition offers an insight into the breadth and richness of private art collections, introducing visitors to the personal visions and passions that shape them.

Titled *Chimera*, a deliberately evocative word that references both the mythological hybrid monster and the idea of an illusion, fantasy, or delusion, the exhibition presents contemporary art in all its various and hybrid forms, from painting to sculpture, to new media and interactive multi-media. The works selected eschew conventional spectacle in favour of a reflection on vision and visibility, offering up visually seductive surfaces tinged with undercurrents of anxiety. These artworks remind us of the spectres of our age – questions and issues which continue to haunt us and test our judgement at every turn and corner of our new millennium.

*The Collectors Show: Chimera* is a parallel event of *Art Stage Singapore 2012* and independently organised by the Singapore Art Museum.



**LEE YONG BAEK**

*Broken Mirror (Classic)*

2011

Multimedia

124 x 80 x 8 cm

Edition 2 of 7

Collection of Lee Jae-Hwan

*Broken Mirror (Classic)*

2011

Multimedia

77 x 127 x 9 cm

Edition 2 of 7

Collection of Lee Jae-Hwan

A mirror is a means by which we perceive and understand ourselves and the world around us. Regarding our reflection in the mirror is a way for us to affirm our self-image, identity, and our relationship to our immediate environment. Art has often been likened to a mirror, a reflection of the world around us. In Lee Yong Baek's work, this parallel between art and mirrors is reinforced by the mirrors' heavy gold frames, which are very similar to those reserved for 'masterpieces' of art.

However, Lee's mirrors shatter before our eyes, thus unsettling our perceptions of the stability of the world around us, as well as that of the mirror (and art)'s role as a faithful chronicler of our environment. The shattering of the mirrors is in fact an illusion, and Lee's mirrors magically reconstitute themselves, only to shatter again. The magic of their technical sophistry blurs the boundaries between illusion and reality, destabilising our vision and expectations – we cannot trust what we are shown, and must learn to see anew.



**YASMIN SISON**

*Orange Madonna*

2006

Oil on canvas

152.4 x 121.92 cm

Collection of Dr George Soo

Yasmin Sison's paintings are enigmatic narratives, often featuring a figure—scratched out or shrouded—against an intricately-detailed background. In *Orange Madonna*, a female figure carrying an infant is posed against a landscape, the details and palette of which recall Renaissance paintings, rich in symbolism and allegory. Sison's mother with child—her Madonna—is however wearing an anachronistic pair of high-heeled shoes, more commonly associated with contemporary media images of women. This disjuncture between the painting's human subject and its background is heightened by the artist's erasure of the subject's identity, rendering the 'Madonna' a blank slate on which viewers can project their own narratives, poised in a moment of infinite possibilities.



**ALFREDO ESQUILLO JR.**

*The Thomasites Were Here*

2009

Oil on canvas

182.88 x 457.2 cm

Paulino and Hetty Que Collection

Alfredo Esquillo Jr.'s photorealistic triptych is based on old historical photographs of students at a Thomasite school, which he has altered to reflect a critical commentary on his country's colonial past. At first glance, the painting seems innocuous enough, presenting groups of students in their classrooms with a group of boy scouts occupying the central panel, smartly attired in their uniforms with all the trappings of their membership – drum, American flag and banners – proudly displayed.

The details of this work however, are disturbing: the scouts have stars covering their eyes, and a figure in their group portrait - who may be the leader or scoutmaster - is wearing a clown's nose. The shoelaces of the scouts in front have been tied across the left and right shoes, and will only serve to trip up their victims. In addition, the faces of the schoolchildren in the right-hand panel have been hollowed out. Suspended above the students are paper military planes, with one penetrating the blackness where a student's face should have been.

The 'Thomasites' referred to in the title of this work were the American missionaries who came to Philippines in 1901, introducing a new education system which the artist believes led to the exclusion of native culture and values. *The Thomasites Were Here* is hence a reminder of a lacuna in Philippine history—the altered historical photographs are, in the words of the artist, "narratives of betrayal", a testament to American colonisation in the guise of 'education', and a memorial to his countrymen on how to "learn and unlearn the teachings of our American teachers".



## **TROMARAMA**

*Extraneous*

2010

Installation with video and batik panels

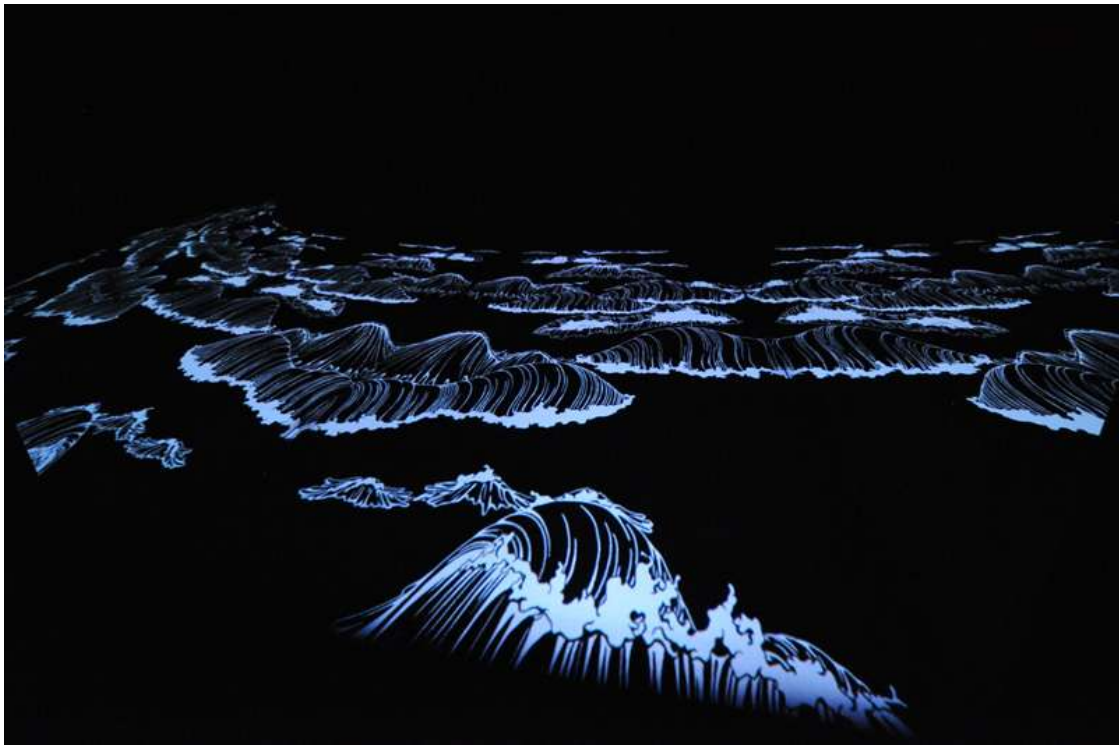
1:19 min (loop)

Collection of Arif Suherman

The age of digital networking and social media has irrevocably transformed human relationships. *Extraneous* was born of Indonesian art collective Tromarama's personal experiences, a reflection on how people we encounter and interact with on the internet are, in reality, the complete opposite of their virtual selves.

The idea of this awareness or enlightenment coming only when one views the situation from afar compared to when one is caught up or directly immersed in online interaction, is reflected in the fact that the image in the video projection—a pair of ghostly eyes staring out at the visitor—coalesces into a legible image only when viewed from a distance. Seen up close, the image dissolves into a mass of "1"s and "0"s, recognisable as the binary code used in computer programming.

The animated image has been painstakingly created from 210 still frames which flank the video projection. Aptly enough, Tromarama have chosen to use *batik* as their medium – a traditional form of art unique to this region which has been used as a means of recording history in past times. Tromarama have updated this time-honoured art form by recording the images and issues of our time with binary code—a visual language befitting our digital age.



**TABAIMO**

*Midnight Sea* 2006 / 2008

Video installation

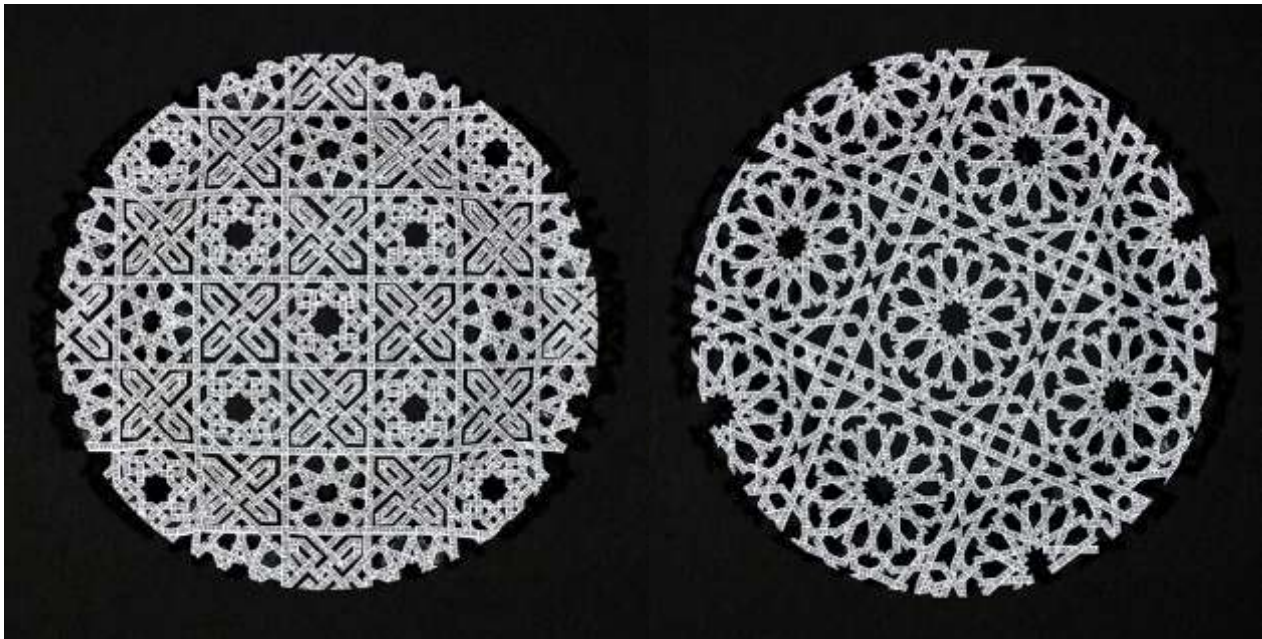
4:42 min (loop)

Collection of the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art

The sea has long held many in fascination with what lies beneath its mysterious depths. The sea at night is an even more unfathomable mystery, with the darkness of night further cloaking its impenetrable depths, inspiring emotions of wonder, fear, uncertainty and even contemplation.

Drawing on the sea's evocative power, Tabaimo's delicate yet powerful line drawings delineate a nocturnal seascape with breaking waves. Slowly, the viewer is offered a glimpse of the enigmatic, supernatural world that lies beneath the cresting waves, comprised of forms and organisms that simultaneously resemble corals or aquatic plants as well as human organs and entrails. Moving through these life-forms is a strange creature which could be a jellyfish, or a wig of white hair.

In the Japanese language, the word *kaminoke* refers to hair that grows on the head. It can also mean a supernatural spell, or an ailment thought to be caused by spirits or deities. In addition, the artist has explained that a wave is a metaphor for age-wrinkled skin, and in turn, a wrinkle is a metaphor for ripples on the surface of the water. *Midnight Sea* can therefore be seen as a metaphor for the human body or a troubled subconscious, poetically reaffirming the intimate relationship between humanity, nature and forces that we cannot apprehend with our rational mind.



**HAMRA ABBAS**

*Paper Plates*

2008

Paper collage and ink

20 cm diameter

Collection of Shirish Apte

Abbas's *Paper Plates* are composed from an intricate and beautifully-woven lattice of delicate paper strips, bearing the text 'Please Get Served'. Disposable paper plates are symbolic of our modern-day obsession with consumption and a throwaway culture. Abbas addresses these dynamics in her work with porous plates that can never fulfil their function, subverting our contemporary profligacy and tendency towards mindless cultural consumption, by transforming her paper plates into works of art displayed and encased within a pedestal.



**PATRICIA EUSTAQUIO**

*Psychogenic Fugue*

2008

Crochet lace and epoxy

108 x 212 x 104 cm

Collection of Marcel Crespo

*Psychogenic Fugue* comprises a lace piano cover, swathed over an absent piano. Delicate in detail and haunting in its hollowness, this ghostly shroud calls attention to its absent object, poignantly emphasising its loss.

The work's title makes reference to a musical term, the fugue. However, a 'psychogenic fugue' is also a psychological disorder, a state or period in which one loses awareness of one's identity. This is often coupled with a flight from one's usual environment. Both ideas are woven together in Eustaquio's artwork, which is in part an homage to music, regarded by some in the past as the 'highest' of art forms but which, in contemporary times, has ceded its supremacy instead to the visual arts which now hold court in cavernous museums and elegant galleries. In the meantime, music languishes, compressed into digital bytes. In Eustaquio's work, it exists as an exquisite carcass in place of the original object.

Eustaquio's piano cover further challenges traditional hierarchies of art with its painstakingly detailed crocheted lace -- an art form previously excluded from the realm of 'fine art', relegated instead to 'craft' or 'women's art' -- hence reminding us of how notions of art inevitably shift and change over time, as old forms are vacated to make way for the new, or return in new guises and forms, like a musical refrain.



**YEE I-LANN**

*The Orang Besar Series: YB#1 - 10*

2010

Digital C-type prints

35 x 26 cm each

Collection of Chen Rong Chuan

In the *YB* series, what appears at first glance to be a group of still-lives or photographic studies of flowers is revealed to be a group 'portrait' of floral corsages pinned onto the shirts of their bearers.

These corsages are commonly worn by politicians and dignitaries in Malaysia when they attend official functions held in their honour. The title of this work makes this clear – 'YB' is an abbreviation for the Malay term 'Yang Berhormat' ('The Honourable'), used to address a person of political power or status in Malaysia.

Regrettably, the flowers in the photographs are wilting, a sharp commentary on the part of the artist on the fact that all too often, powerful patrons fail to live up to the position and status accorded to them, and neglect to support the social and cultural causes they are associated with.



**LI HUI**

V

2011

Installation

Variable dimensions

Burger Collection

Li Hui creates atmospheric environments with lasers and light, suggesting the dizzying futurism of a science-fiction world that lies ahead, while offering an experience that borders on the spiritual and sublime.

V takes its name from the shape of the laser beams that sculpt the space, as they are beamed down from a laser board and reflected off an angled mirror, coalescing into pinpoints of red light in a cloud of smoke. The smoke and ethereal cluster of light recall depictions of the Ascension, and as visitors walk into the path of the beams, their bodies dissolve into pinpoints of light.

While its materials are minimalist and industrial, V is a powerfully evocative work which raises questions about physicality and immateriality; the spiritual and the transcendental. First exhibited at the Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art in Beijing, V is now re-installed for *The Collectors Show* in the Chapel space of the Singapore Art Museum (formerly a Catholic school), giving the work an added resonance and power.



**SHEBA CHHACHHI**

*Winged Pilgrims: A Chronicle From Asia*

2006

Installation with silk and fibreglass sculptures and light boxes

Variable dimensions

Collection of Amrita Jhaveri and artist collection

*Winged Pilgrims* was born of artist Sheba Chhachhi's meditation on the impact of the avian flu pandemic that gripped the world a few years ago. Chhachhi was troubled by media reports about the culling of birds, which she perceived as the metaphoric murder of certain aspects of humanity (namely, our relationship with the natural world), and a bizarre manifestation of the impact of globalisation which had facilitated the spread of the virus across the globe.

Drawing parallels between ancient and contemporary times, the luminous and mesmeric images of *Winged Pilgrims: A Chronicle From Asia* tell the story of the journeys of various birds – the eponymous winged pilgrims – across landscapes drawn from both traditional art forms as well as contemporary documentary photography. The work is a chronicle of the spread of cultures and civilisations across Asia, with India and China as its main nodes. Similarly, in contemporary times, it is difficult to overlook the influence wielded by both India and China as recently-awoken economic giants.

At the same time, the narratives in *Winged Pilgrims* speak of Man's betrayal of his relationship with nature, poignantly symbolised by the story of the Kaha bird. Led by greed, Man's treachery leads him into filth, fear and ruin, as suggested by the images of polluted rivers that the bird soars over – a critical perspective on how rapid modernisation and urbanisation in many developing cities today has been at the expense of the delicate balance between Man and his environment.