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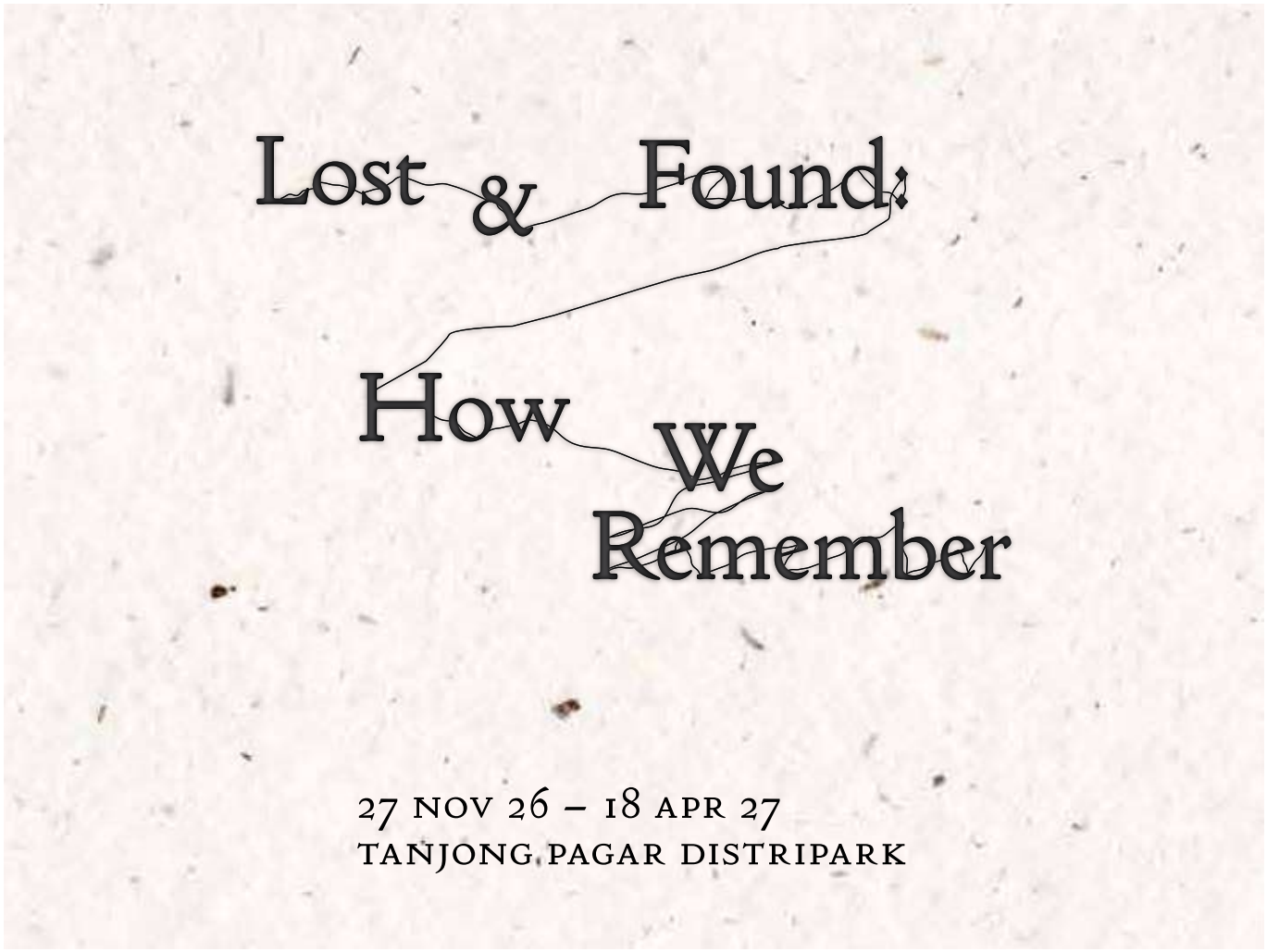
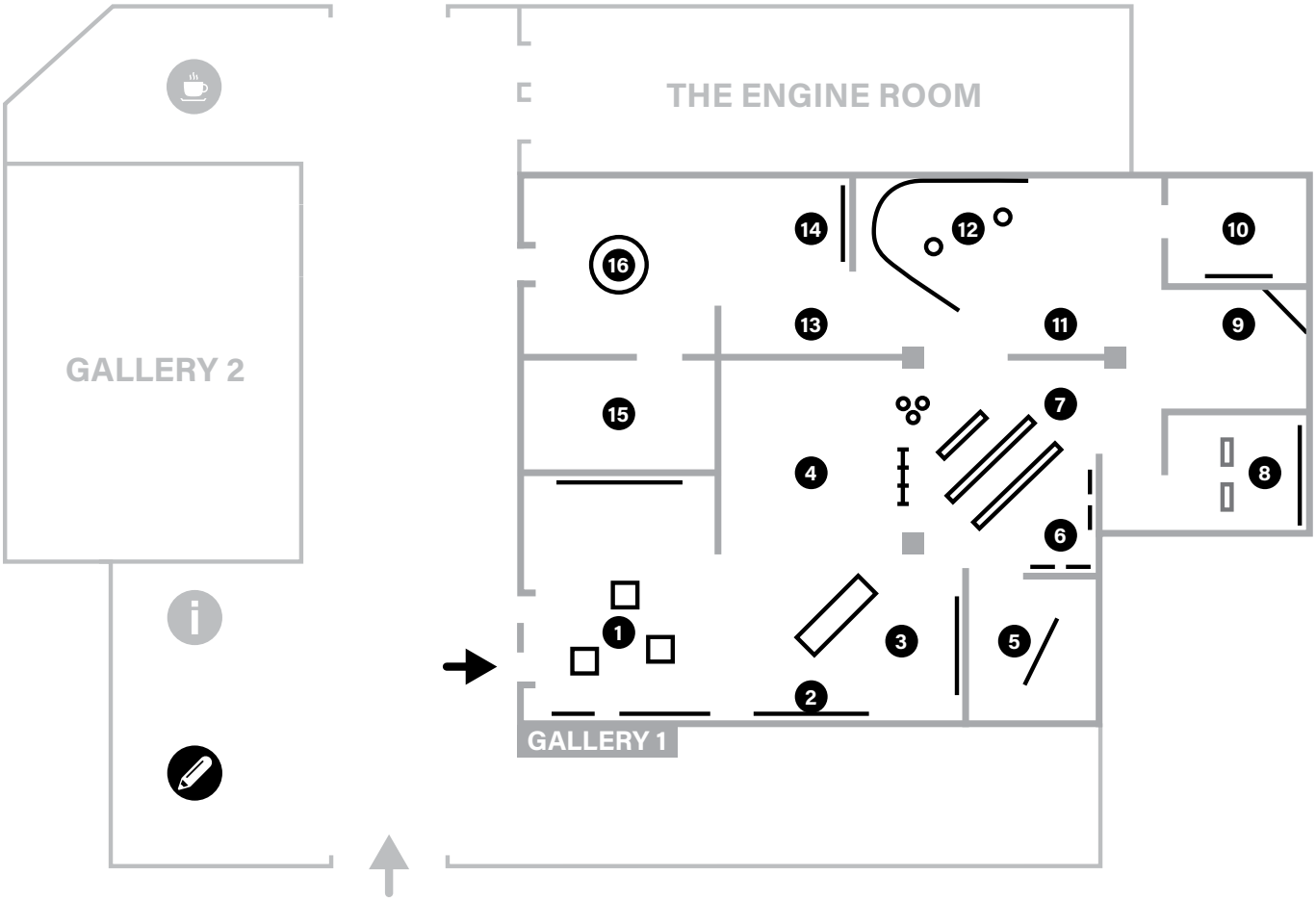
CONTEMPORARY ART IN SOUTHEAST ASIA



Like a shoreline that changes with each wave, what fades from memory can return in new forms and take on new meanings.

Lost & Found: How We Remember explores how memories endure, through the body, in language and sound, or within objects and places. Bringing together works by 17 artists from Asia and beyond, the exhibition looks at histories that have been overlooked, obscured or are at risk of disappearing. Some artists follow personal stories, while others work with endangered languages and oral traditions to examine how changes in the natural environment shape what we remember.

How We Remember is the final part of *Lost & Found* (2023–2026), a multi-chapter project at SAM that asks what an archive can be and what it can preserve in today's world. Other chapters have investigated different ways of keeping memory alive through song (*Sea Chanty Project*, 2024), bodily movement (*Embodied Archive*, 2024) as well as research and conversation (*Rings*, 2026). Overall, the project has sought to understand how artists gather fragmented experiences and stories, and give form to things that may be lesser-known or unseen.



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Lost & Found: Learning Station

① Shubigi Rao

River of Ink II

2023
270 handmade books soaked in ink

The Pelagic Tracts

2018
Video, photographs
Video: HD, single channel, 16:9 aspect ratio, colour and sound (stereo), 24 min 39 sec

River of Ink II is inspired by the Siege of Baghdad in 1258, when the Mongol army destroyed the House of Wisdom and threw its books into the Tigris. Recalling accounts of the river turning black with ink, the installation features 270 handmade books filled with words and drawings submerged in black ink. These books are stacked precariously across three plinths. Warped, crumpled and falling apart, their pages bear fragmented phrases about destruction, nationalism, cultural loss, freedom of expression and consumerism. Through their physical degeneration, the work reflects on the fragility of knowledge and memory in the face of cultural destruction. It also considers whether erasure itself can be an act of resistance.

While *River of Ink II* addresses the deliberate destruction of knowledge, *The Pelagic Tracts* examines loss caused by nature. The film tells the fictional story of a British colonial officer, S. Raoul, who discovers a book about smugglers transporting books at sea. Three photographs of water-logged books accompany the film, implying the challenging nature of the smugglers' mission. The work was developed in the aftermath of the devastating floods in Kerala, India in 2018, drawing connections between torrential monsoon rains and the unforgiving force of the sea.

Together, the works consider the perilous existence of books, knowledge and memory, threatened by both human violence and natural elements.

② Budi Agung Kuswara

Wildly Convenient

2019
Brass, cyanotype, acrylic on canvas
Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Working with archival images that have been carelessly labelled or categorised, Budi Agung Kuswara converted images found in Dutch institutional collections into enlarged film negatives. These include images from the Tropenmuseum (today's Wereldmuseum) and Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. Alongside organic material like rice stalks, he laid these film negatives on canvases conventionally used for traditional Balinese *kamasan* painting. They were then exposed to the sun to create large cyanotypes.

The cyanotypes feature two central figures: the Karangasem Regent, I Gusti Bagus Jelantik, and his oldest son, Anak Agung Gede Djelantik. Regrettably, Tropenmuseum's image documentation denies them their names, referring to them generically as the "Radja van Karangasem [Raja of Karangasem]." Critiquing the museum's negligent representation of these figures, the artist painted fruits, flowers, fossils and creatures around them, alluding to the Balinese spiritual tradition of *banten* (offerings). By introducing these offerings into the image, the artist gives recognition to these unnamed figures and accords them the respect they deserve. The work suggests that archives are not static repositories, but living collections that can be reclaimed and reinterpreted through thoughtful interventions.

③ Zhang Wenzhi

Whale Sea

2025

Ink and soy sauce on paper, teakwood screen

Chart of the Sea

2024

Ink on rice paper scroll

Referencing taxidermy specimens from Dalian Natural History Museum, these works examine the history of Zhang Wenzhi's hometown. He tells a pictorial story that combines classical tales with archival materials from personal and governmental documents.

Whale Sea is a six-panel artwork that depicts a dreamlike ocean scene where folk legends meet modern industry. On one side, a mother whale and her calf carry the sea goddess Mazu across the Sea of Japan, joined by the area's prehistoric and mythical creatures. The mother whale's skeleton is visible like a scientific display. Inside her ribs are the Sakhalin mountains bordering the Sea of Japan, linking the whale's fate to the region. Above them, a whaling ship and a trading boat hint at the impact of commercial industries. The back of the panels shows sea plants on a blank background, suggesting the calm of the deep sea or the emptiness left by human activity.

Chart of the Sea's composition borrows the conventions of imperial maps. Coastlines, islands and sea lanes are laid out not as a sailor would see them but through the gaze of a state surveying its territory. Across this charted water, a procession of whales travels the Deng-Lai Sea Route, the historic passage linking the Shandong coast to the Liaodong Peninsula. It is as if they are on a pilgrimage to Mazu, the goddess revered by seafaring communities. Like *Whale Sea*, the scroll mixes scientific detail with spiritual meaning, showing how human history, myth and nature are closely linked.

④ Candice Lin

Seeping, Rotting, Resting, Weeping

2021

Hand-printed (*katazome*) and hand-drawn (*tsutsugaki*) indigo-dyed panels, steel bar, dyed rugs, glazed ceramics, epoxy resin, block-printed and digitally printed fabric (masks), bells, tassels, miscellaneous small objects

Collection of Walker Art Center, Minneapolis Justin Smith Purchase Fund, 2022

The Blueness

2021

Video, single channel, 4:3 aspect ratio, colour and sound (stereo), 4 min 45 sec

Courtesy of the artist and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles, New York

This installation features a tent-like structure draped with hand-dyed indigo textiles and filled with rugs and ceramic cats. Visitors are invited to enter and experience, what the artist calls a "feline temple," reflecting her interest in more-than-human ways of sensing and knowing the world, shifting our attention beyond a human-centred perspective.

Lin developed the installation during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns in her Los Angeles studio, as wildfires raged in the surrounding areas. The artwork's title refers to both her feelings of isolation, grief and uncertainty, as well as the processes used to make the work. To create the dye for her textiles, Lin grew, harvested and fermented indigo plants. The fermentation process involved decomposition—or rotting—as a transformative process that gave rise to new forms and colours.

Indigo has a history tied to colonial trade and exploitation. Its production and circulation were connected to different forms of coerced and exploited labour, including slavery and indentured labour. By growing and processing the plant herself, Lin engages with these histories and explores how the past persists not only in documents but in plants, bodies and processes.

⑤ Chia-Wei Hsu

Volcano and Pencak Silat

2026

Video, 2 channels, 16:9 aspect ratio, colour and sound (stereo), 4 min 30 sec

Commissioned by Singapore Art Museum

Volcano and Pencak Silat shows two films side by side. One video features selected footage from the region, filmed between 1913 and 1945 and held by Amsterdam's Eye Filmmuseum, which houses a total of 250 documentary films of similar content. These films were used to train Chia-Wei Hsu's AI model, which generated images shown in the work. The other video features his own footage of Pencak Silat performances at Mount Bromo in East Java.

Pencak Silat is a martial art from the Indonesian-Malay Archipelago that blends fighting techniques, physical and spiritual practice, and dance. Hsu suggests that during colonial times, when martial arts were discouraged, these techniques may have been hidden in dance and rituals to keep the tradition alive. He brings this idea to life by attempting to reconstruct the past through AI, demonstrating how tradition can be seen through archival records, creative imagination and technology.

The work holds experimentation as an open-ended enquiry, probing what new forms of expression emerge through these technologies even as AI's place in artistic practice keeps changing.

⑥ Ismail Hashim

(From left to right)

Penunggu-penunggu Surat Sepanjang Jalan Bagan Serai **(Post Boxes Along Bagan Serai Road)**
1993
Hand-tinted toned gelatin silver print
Collection of National Gallery Singapore

Tempat Duduk Basikal-basikal Buruh Pelabuhan Pulau Pinang **(Seats of Bicycles of Penang Port Labourers)**
1993
Hand-tinted toned gelatin silver print
Collection of National Gallery Singapore

Bahagian Dapur, Siang Malam, Luar Dalam (Bhg. 1 & 2) **(Kitchen Corner or How a Housewife Makes Do, Pt. 1 & 2)**
1992
Hand-tinted toned gelatin silver print
Collection of National Gallery Singapore

Ismail Hashim was a pioneer of Malaysian photography who documented everyday life, from ordinary kitchens to roadside mailboxes to labourers' bicycles. He recorded mundane aspects of Georgetown, Penang's capital city, which may have otherwise been considered less significant in official accounts. His careful application of colours and playful titling in his works reflect his deep love for his homeland.

Bahagian Dapur, Siang Malam, Luar Dalam (Bhg. 1 & 2) (Kitchen Corner or How a Housewife Makes Do, Pt. 1 & 2) celebrates the creativity and labour of homemakers. The photographs use the window to create a tightly framed composition. Basins, pots and baskets are carefully balanced along the horizontal glass panes to dry, turning chores into a display of ingenuity. The Malay title, which translates to "day and night, outside inside," connects these visual details to the women's lived experience. "Day and night" emphasises the endless, cyclical rhythm of domestic labour, while "outside inside" highlights objects resting on the home's physical threshold. Through this lens, Hashim transforms a fleeting routine into a lasting tribute.

Penunggu-penunggu Surat Sepanjang Jalan Bagan Serai (Post Boxes Along Bagan Serai Road) depicts mailboxes located between Bagan Serai and Taiping in Perak, and is part of a series of more than 80 photographs. *Tempat Duduk Basikal-basikal Buruh Pelabuhan Pulau Pinang* (Seats of Bicycles of Penang Port Labourers) records the bicycle seats of Penang port labourers. Both works were meticulously developed in a darkroom, cropped and tinted by hand. Arranged in grids, these humble objects form a collective portrait of the workers and communities that keep these places alive.

⑦ Minstrel Kuik

RROSE: A Story of Two Worlds

2004–2026

Laser print on acid-free paper, table, steel

In 2004, Minstrel Kuik began working on *RROSE* and *Mother Says*, projects that culminated in the 2009 artist book *RROSE: A Story of Two Worlds*. During that time, she was studying photography in Arles, France, and had few opportunities to return to her hometown of Pantai Remis, a fishing village in Perak, Malaysia. However, she still felt some connection to her homeland, as both places were by the sea.

In 2005, Kuik began researching her family history and contemplating the feelings she associated with these two places: the messy and unpredictable Pantai Remis and the structured and orderly Arles. Moving between these places made her examine leaving, separation and the difficulty of saying goodbye more closely.

In this 2026 iteration, Kuik returns to *RROSE: A Story of Two Worlds* with a new perspective. Bidding farewell and revisiting memories are seen as gradual processes of coming to terms with the passage of time and letting go of the past. Kuik expands the original artist book into a larger installation with prints and small publications. Drawing on memories accumulated over two decades, the work explores autobiography, displacement, ritual, environment and transformation.

⑧ Wang Tuo

Tungus

2021

Video, single channel, 16:9 aspect ratio, colour and sound (stereo), 66 min

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Tungus, the third chapter in Wang Tuo's *Northeast Tetralogy*, weaves together the lives of four fictional characters from different eras to explore collective memory. Shifting between periods and settings, its story follows figures navigating personal and historical disruption, including two soldiers escaping wartime conflict and a scholar losing his sense of time amid hunger. By blending sound and image, Wang draws their seemingly disparate narratives into quiet resonance.

Set against broader echoes of twentieth-century upheaval in Northeast Asia, the film connects these fictional journeys through what the artist terms "pan-shamanism." Within this dreamlike cinematic state, minds move fluidly across time and place, bringing distant lives and shared grief into dialogue. Anchored in speculative storytelling, *Tungus* locates collective memory within the body, tracing how inherited experience endures in hunger, dreams and rituals passed down over generations.

⑨ Kaede Yamato

Sitting in the Time

2025

Video, bullet fragments

Video: single channel, 16:9 aspect ratio, colour and sound (stereo), 2 min 25 sec

Base Origami

2026

Pencil and ink on paper

In both works, Kaede Yamato explores her personal connection to historical records through embodied movement and audience participation.

Sitting in the Time centres on a photograph from the Okinawa Prefectural Archives showing an unnamed figure with his head bowed and a hand covering his face. Yamato links this figure to her grandfather's past as prisoner of war. Keeping this photograph private, she instead brought a small trampoline to campsites across the island, jumping on it to mirror the figure's crouched posture in brief moments of weightlessness.

In *Base Origami*, Yamato translates public site plans from Okinawa into paper-folding instructions. The work plays on "base" as both a military structure and a starting form in origami. Visitors may follow the steps and contribute folds at SIP at SAM, gradually reshaping the plan into butterflies as a metaphor for transformation.

⑩ Susan Hiller

Lost and Found

2016

Video, single channel, 16:9 aspect ratio, colour and sound (stereo), 30 min

© Estate of Susan Hiller; Courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Lost and Found brings together archival recordings of voices speaking 23 languages, some of which are extinct, endangered or have been revived. These recordings include stories, songs, memories and conversations. Many of them reflect on the language in which they are spoken. Once these voices are collected and archived by researchers, they resurface on a screen in Hiller's work. The voices, juxtaposed as they appear one after another, transform the screen into a cross-cultural encounter.

Translations appear as subtitles while a shifting green line visualises each voice in sound waves. The line emphasises that language is not only about meaning but is something physical and embodied—carried through breath, sound and the body.

By including languages that have been revived and are still spoken, Hiller considers how archived voices might return to the present as living forms of communication. She questions whether preserving a language alone is enough to preserve the people, experiences and cultures that are connected to it.

Hiller was a conceptual artist who worked with media from the 1970s onwards. Influenced by feminism and her background in anthropology, she consistently explored the limits of language and communication. Her work reveals how knowledge is constructed, recorded and organised, and what kinds of experiences may have been left out.

(11) Amy Suo Wu
in collaboration with Sarafina Paulina Bonita, Sami Hammana, Karen Huang and Sandim Mendes

Shapeshifty

2021

Robe, scarf, hat with veil, tags

With *Shapeshifty*, Amy Suo Wu builds on her practice of embodied publishing, a process where knowledge is materialised into garments. The work was made in collaboration with three Netherlands-based artists, Sarafina Paulina Bonita, Sami Hammana and Sandim Mendes.

The work proposes that languages can be worn like clothing and read like books. It is presented in two ways: as a cloak draped over a wooden body and a stretched, skin-like canvas. Each collaborator lent their voice to one component of the garment, examining the body as a site where languages are carried and transformed through diasporic experiences. Like shapeshifters, people navigating multiple cultures often move between their mother tongues and other languages as they communicate and explore their own identity.

(12) ila
in collaboration with Alysha Rahmat Shah and Jennifer O'Connor

mantera apotropaic

2026

Embroidery on cotton cloth with mangrove propagule–derived dye, aluminium wire, cardboard and mangrove pulp paper bandages, sound (stereo)

Commissioned by Singapore Art Museum

In *mantera apotropaic*, ila depicts a speculative world whose last mangrove forest is dying. The installation swathes us in an abstract map of the Maritime Southeast Asian archipelago and two tree effigies. Viewers are introduced to different mangrove forests through their cultural lore, natural produce, fisheries reliant on mangrove ecosystems, flora and fauna, ocean currents, monsoon winds and dispersal routes of mangrove propagules. The accompanying sonic landscape blends field recordings made in mangrove forests the artist has visited.

Existing between land and sea, mangroves are changing habitats with shifting shorelines and myriad inhabitants, including crabs, mudskippers, fish, stingless bees, snails, birds and snakes. While we often use maps to identify different countries and states, ila invites us to see our shared environment through the living thickets of swamp that connect land, sea and community.

⑬ Vincent Rumahloine

Don't Call Me Hero: Finale

2026
Video, photographs, sound (stereo)
Video: single channel, 16:9 aspect ratio, colour and sound (stereo), 25 min
Commissioned by Singapore Art Museum

Don't Call Me Hero: Finale brings together the lived experiences, personal memories and visual diaries of Indonesians who stayed abroad during the 1960s and built new lives in the Czech Republic. Presented in an intimate living room setting furnished with family photographs and cherished belongings, Vincent Rumahloine's work invites viewers into this community's domestic worlds.

The project began in Prague, where Rumahloine met Soegeng Soejono, also known as Bung Yono, who rebuilt his life overseas. His stories led to others like Rony Marton, a former student who became a professional singer in the 1970s. For Bung Yono, persevering far from home was not heroism but a quiet necessity of survival. He notes his account is only one among many. Through these personal stories, Rumahloine reflects on how individual histories endure in memory, keepsakes and friendships.

⑭ Leyla Stevens

PAHIT MANIS, Night Forest

2024
Video, single channel, 16:9 aspect ratio, colour and sound (stereo), 28 min

In *PAHIT MANIS, Night Forest*, a *dalang* (shadow puppeteer) sits beneath an old banyan tree, telling tales of environmental loss in Bali. Her movements are careful and her voice carries both grief and anger, reflecting the complexity of the stories she tells. These stories are inspired by Tantri tales, old Balinese stories in which animals and mythical beings impart moral lessons.

The *dalang*'s stories are woven together with monochromatic animations that takes us through dense natural landscapes with fantastical creatures. These animations reimagine a series of Batuan paintings that were commissioned in the 1930s. By turning still images into moving performance, the artist revisits Balinese storytelling with paintings and asserts how such traditions can be renewed and undergo their own process of metamorphosis.

The work was mainly filmed in Jembrana, one of the last old-growth forests in southwest Bali. As urban centres in Bali expand due to tourism and development, forests like this are increasingly under threat. *PAHIT MANIS, Night Forest* is both a lament for habitats lost and a call to protect the forests that remain. The *dalang*'s voice is joined by recordings of the forest, bringing human and other voices together in a cacophony that becomes impossible to ignore.

⑮ Nona Garcia

Recovery

2015

X-ray images, acrylic sheets, wood, wires, LED lights, transformers, sound

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Set in a darkened room, *Recovery* comprises 60 lightboxes of X-ray images, accompanied by a continuous buzzing sound that reminds us of electricity passing through wires or crickets at night.

X-rays are used to reveal what lies inside a body. Nona Garcia questions the accuracy of X-ray photographic methods within her practice. This interest can be traced to her childhood, as she grew up around equipment at the small Manila hospital run by her parents.

The depicted objects belong to Ifugao communities of the mountainous Cordillera region in the Philippines. They are Indigenous peoples who resisted multiple Spanish invasions by consolidating their agricultural and social practices, which helped to foster social cohesion. Among the objects are *bulul*, wooden sculptures of rice guardian deities, and a *ling ling-o* fertility pendant, talismans often associated with healing practices.

Although the X-ray images reveal the objects' hidden interiors, the objects' true significance seems to elude the wavelengths of radiation. Garcia arranges the images in the shape of a mountain to echo the undulating landscape of Baguio, harking back to the Cordilleras that these objects originated from. She emphasises the objects' connection to place and draws attention to the limits of privileging sight above other senses. The work invites us to consider forms of knowledge that might emerge when we reach beyond what is visible.

⑯ Jewyo Rhii

Turn Depot – Singapore Seoul

2026

Motorised metal structure

Turn Depot – Singapore Seoul is part of Jewyo Rhii's ongoing *Love Your Depot* series, an open storage and display system designed to support artworks beyond exhibition cycles and the art market. Rhii draws attention to the often-unseen processes of making, transporting, installing and storing art. She turns her own work into a structure that houses works by other artists, reflecting on what happens to artworks once an exhibition ends.

This iteration of *Turn Depot – Singapore Seoul* brings together works by artists based in Singapore and Seoul, South Korea—two Asian cities that have undergone rapid urban development. In both places, familiar spaces are disappearing, creating ruptures between generations as they come to experience and remember the same city in different ways. The works consider alternate ways of living, remembering and sustaining artistic practices within these dynamic urban landscapes.

Made from industrial materials and storage systems, *Turn Depot – Singapore Seoul* is a cylindrical kinetic structure that rotates slowly, revealing the works it carries from various angles. Its slow pace invites viewers to identify relationships between neighbouring works, which are placed close together to suggest connections across cities, generations and practices.