

To Dance Alone

—Kimberly Shen

Exhibition Programme

Opening reception TUESDAY, 7 JANUARY 2020, 7 – 9PM
Guest DJ ZAI TANG

***Kwek Mambo* by Zai Tang**

Echoing Susie Wong's *Dancing Alone*, Zai will be playing an eclectic selection of local and regional music from bygone eras, as well as sonorous offerings from places further afield. Put on your dancing shoes and prepare for some pop yeh yeh, rock Khmer, molam magic, Sumatran sublimation, indigenous ingenuity and much more!

In Conversation SATURDAY, 11 JANUARY 2020, 2 – 3PM
Speakers SUSIE WONG, KIMBERLY SHEN, AND FAITH NG

This conversation will expand upon the work's focus on women's narratives and representation, dovetailing into the liberatory potential of dance, everyday nuances of love, romance, desire and vulnerability.

Joget Malam FRIDAY, 7 FEBRUARY 2020, 7.30 – 9.30PM

Featuring Zai Tang's music playlist mixed by Mr. Has (Telok Ayer Arts Club) and performances by Sharda Harrison and Sabrina Sng

***Surrender* by Sharda Harrison**

The body is a pathway to God. Our bodies have a delightful ability to communicate, to commune, to illustrate, to surrender, to liberate, to ... dance. Our bodies are ancient portals that connect us to the spirit world. A Chukchee proverb declares, "Woman is by nature a shaman." Yet, we now live in a world where the female goddess whom resides in each of us, has been slighted, over-looked and even objectified. This short piece invokes the ultimate goddess in every woman and man, through text, ritual and movement.

***the butterfly effect* by Sabrina Sng**

the butterfly effect invites the watcher to the inner world of a Singaporean woman where she reveals her transformative process in search of herself.

Dancing

Alone

(DON'T LEAVE ME)

CURATORIAL NOTES

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8 JAN – 9 FEB 2020

SUSIE WONG

Dancing Alone (Don't Leave Me)

by artist Susie Wong is an immersive

video installation of solitary women

dancing freely, evoking imagery

of dance halls in the 1950s and 60s.

Referencing a line from the film,

The King and I:

“no woman would dance alone

while a man is looking at her,”

the exhibition alludes to the consumed

representations of women in media that

are re-enacted in the everyday. The dancers

in Wong’s videos evoke both the desire

to be freed from these tropes and at the same

time to themselves consume by reinforcing

them through the culturally

infusive practices of a modern

society. Through dance, she is

both empowered and subjugated.

Amongst the many questions that have surfaced

from my spirited discussions with Susie,

we often find ourselves asking, in the age

of female empowerment and the rise of the

#MeToo movement, why are we still driven

to think about ideas of woman? In our

prelude to these extended conversations,

why do we speak as if we are encountering

these issues for the very first time? What has

emerged from previous discourses — what

has shifted, changed, improved and are

we starting (again) from ground zero? In

curating this show, it would seem natural

to employ a feminist framework as context:

to subvert the gaze and objectification

of desire, as a revolt and rejection of the

patriarchal narrative. But this too, renders a

homogeneity to the existence of the everyday

woman, assuming she is in a privileged

position to be fighting the same battles.

In *Dancing Alone (Don't Leave Me)*, solitary women

dance quietly in the darkened gallery space —

simultaneously and separately, in a haunting

repetition of gestures and movements.

The work takes reference from the film,

The King and I (1956) during the iconic dance

sequence between British governess, Anna

Leonowens and the King Mongkut of Siam.

When the King observes Anna to have stopped

dancing, she expresses matter-of-factly, “no

woman would dance alone while a man is

looking at her”, seemingly to suggest the

image of a woman is inextricably tied to an

other. In film critic Laura Mulvey’s seminal

essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*

(1975), she expounds, “A woman performs

within the narrative. The gaze of the spectator

and that of the male characters in the film are

neatly combined without breaking narrative

verisimilitude.” Here in Susie’s work, however,

these women dance wordlessly — alone,

notwithstanding the viewer and escape the

male (othered) gaze. In this ordinary act of

pure indulgence, these dancers at once, invite

meaning but also firmly invoke their sense

of place. No longer obscure, she is dancing

alone and with herself.

Drawing upon the liberatory potential of dance

as a form of self-expression, these dancers are

empowered but also subjugated. These women

are not devoid of desire for she is acutely

aware of her yearning to be seen, to be loved

and have an existence acknowledged. I am

drawn to Rebecca Solnit’s essay *Grandmother*

Spider (2014) in which she recounts Ana Teresa

Fernandez’s painting of a woman hanging

laundry. In this unremarkable domestic act,

the woman – whose identity is shrouded by

a white bed sheet draped on the clothesline —

“both exists and is obliterated”. Solnit proceeds

to discuss female nonexistence and obliteration

through patrilineal ancestry (exclusion of

mothers, grandmothers), and the silence,

erasure and disappearance of women through

the roles they play.

Susie’s preoccupation with romantic tropes in

media and popular culture comes to the fore;

by employing filmic clichés, she urges a study

into the representations of women that are

embedded and perpetuated in modern society,

to relook the tokenisms and narratives that

we have consumed and become complicit to.

In dancing alone, the woman mediates

between the self and the other as a singular

fluid gesture; she embraces her desires and

flaws wholly and effortlessly.

Artist

SUSIE WONG began her arts practice in the late 1980s,

in painting and art writing, complementing

these with art education, teaching, and curatorial

projects. Among her works were the installation,

Trace, at The Substation, Singapore, and Valentine

Willie FA Gallery, KL, in 2008; *My Beautiful Indies*,

at The Esplanade in 2013, and *After Image*, at Space

Cottonseed, Gillman Barracks, 2014. Central to her

works then was the inquiry of the image/light as a

medium that mediates between memory and loss,

between documentation and nostalgia. Extending

this, her work now contemplates mass media

and the circulation of images and its voracious

consumption, appropriating images or visual

references for much of her work. Her more recent

works were: in 2018, *Take Care of Me*, part of the

curated series *Opening Day* at Upper Serangoon

Shopping Centre; in 2019, *The Idea of the Coconut*,

that encapsulates her research on romantic tropes

in media, in a book, as part of a collaborative-

curated project *Browsing Copy*.

She was artist-in-residence at the NTU-CCA (Centre

for Contemporary Art Singapore) from June to

November 2018.

Contributors

SHARDA HARRISON is a performer, theatremaker

and theatre educator. She has acted in local and

international theatre collaborations and is founder

of Pink Gajah Theatre, which performs mainly

fringe works and serves as a platform for artists

to create and showcase their own works.

FAITH NG is a playwright whose works are noted for

their rich characterisation and sensitive portrayals

of Singapore life. Faith's plays include "wo(men)"

(2010), "For Better or for Worse" (2013) and

"Normal" (2015, 2017), collected in 'Faith Ng:

Plays Volume One' (2016).

Curator

KIMBERLY SHEN is a curator and educator based

in Singapore. Her practice is situated between

text and image, drawn towards ideas of pluralism

in a mediation of feminine narratives. She has

presented her curatorial projects at the Institute

of Contemporary Arts Singapore, Objectifs —

Centre for Photography and Film, NTU Centre

for Contemporary Art Singapore, and the

Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA).

She co-founded and is editor of *ellipsis journal*,

a London/Singapore print publication which has

been distributed at local and international art

book fairs. She was winner of the IMPART

Awards (Curator Category) in 2019 and Curator-

in-Residence for The Art Incubator in 2015.

A recipient of the National Arts Council Arts

Scholarship (Postgraduate), she graduated

with a Master of Research in Art: Theory

and Philosophy from Central Saint Martins,

United Kingdom. She is currently Programme

Leader (Fine Art) at NAFA.

SABRINA SNG is a theatre artist from Singapore.

Her research revolves around the intricacies

of cultural identity, and what it means to be a

woman in performance and performance making.

ZAI TANG is artist, composer and DJ based in

Singapore. His new work Escape Velocity III & IV

are currently showing at the Singapore Biennale.