



So long, thanks again for the fish

“So long, thanks again for the fish,” curated by Yeewan Koon for the Helsinki International Artist Programme, featured new commissions by five Hong Kong-based artists—Luke Ching, Christopher K. Ho, Lam Tung Pang, Cédric Maridet, and Angela Su—who each examine the signifiers of power, whether those signifiers take the form of still or moving images, sounds, computer code, or legal statutes and notices.

At the exhibition, housed in the historic boat workshop of Levyhalli on the fortress island of Suomenlinna, 99 flags hung high above the space’s steel girders. Detailed inspection of Luke Ching’s *Flag-Day* (all works 2021) reveals that not one of these brightly colored designs corresponds to an official national or regional flag; they instead represent models that were never adopted. Ching invites viewers to match his flags to official ones on a corresponding chart, enabling them to re-envision national identities. The notion that something as immutable as a national flag was chosen from diverse designs leads to the question: “why are things this way and not another?” A change in the symbols associated with a given institution or territory

might impact the reality surrounding it.

The malleability of reality is further explored in Angela Su’s video *Lacrima*, which follows an artist who goes missing on the fictional island of Lacrima after becoming possessed by spiritualist Nina Palladino. The mockumentary consists of disparate visual and sonic elements, mixing found footage and photography with voiceover narration and haunting song. As we learn from the narrator, while the island’s inhabitants believe the disappearance is due to demonic forces, scientists explain them as a form of collective “negative hallucination,” whereby the mind erases objects or people. This disjunction introduces a central theme of the film, namely the dialectical interplay between science and spiritual belief. This topic is elaborated in the efforts of early filmmaker Georges Méliès to debunk 19th to early 20th century photographs of “ghosts” made by Nina Palladino’s grandmother, the spiritualist Eusapia Palladino. Su’s film argues that leaps of faith, while often lacking in credibility in our materialist age, often lead us to achieve the impossible, forming the basis of art, music, poetry, and revolution.

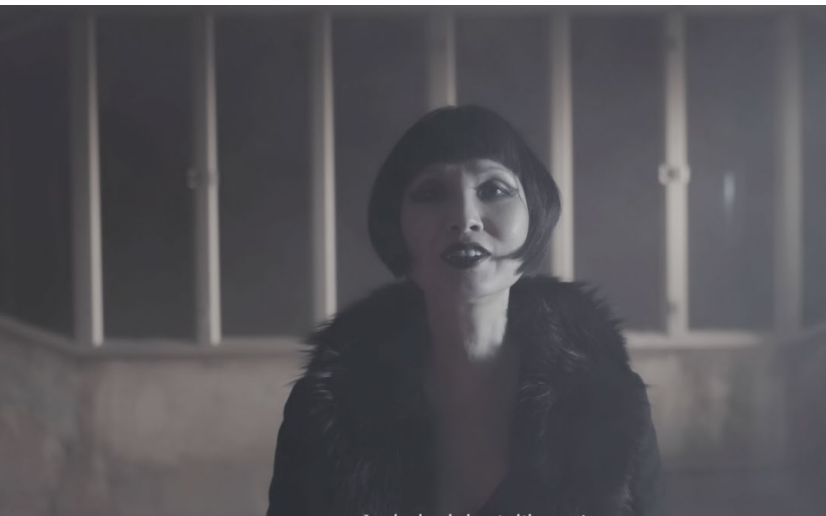
The film plays upon the thin line between the rational and irrational, fact and fiction, forcing the viewer into becoming a cultural and historical detective as the themes and signifiers of *Lacrima* are decoded. The act of deciphering is further explored in Su and computer engineer Jan Chong’s *Itchy Twitchy Bitchy Glitch* through code poetry—the practice of writing computer code that both reads as poetry and functions as a computer program. The work features three layers: a code poem

written on perspex, a drape featuring embroidered pieces of an imagined insect torso, and a screen displaying glitched words from the aforementioned poem. Fragments of the text emerge out of static interference—“bleeding (sliver by sliver)”; “alabaster ruins”; “drop, surrender”—inviting the viewer to make sense of senselessness, to create meaning from the poetic but nevertheless lifeless interaction of a computer with a code.

Continuing the theme of the creation and alteration of meaning through the appropriation of cultural signifiers, Cédric Maridet’s *Humming* comprises six speakers playing chants from six demonstrations. Maridet broke these chants down into separate syllables, converting the vocal expressions of groups from Thailand, Russia, the United States, Chile, and Hong Kong into an abstract musicality that is also interpreted visually on music stands in front of each speaker, as charts mapping the tones in each chant. Together, these new compositions, which can be heard throughout the space, represent the collective desire of varied, perhaps even contrary, demographic groups.

In the digital age, attention spans have shortened so much that it seems natural that manifestations of power should be reduced to symbols, slogans, and chants. “So long, thanks again for the fish” asked to what degree these symbols—and the power structures they represent—are fixed or malleable. This question is key to understanding these uncertain times, in which new technology leads simultaneously to greater freedom and greater control, and arbitrariness seems to be the only certainty.

MIKE WATSON



ANGELA SU, *Lacrima*, 2021, still from single-channel video: 19 min 48 sec. Courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong.