



Whorinal?, 2021

Marcel Whochamp

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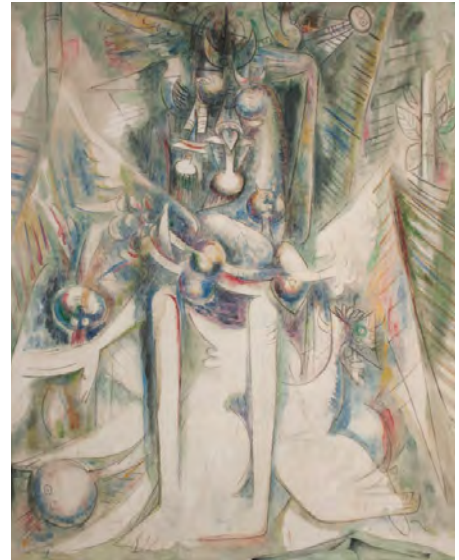
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Images of Identity

Nowadays, most of us watch the world change through a screen. This was the case for multimedia artist Simon Fujiwara, who observed the torrent of images on social media as the pandemic and social movements, such as Black Lives Matter, revealed societal fractures. Taking a closer look at collective and personal reckonings with notions of identity that were occurring around him, and the mediation of these issues, particularly through social media, he began a new body of work that revolves around Who, the cartoon bear seen on this issue's cover, who is on a quest to define himself in a world full of projected personas and images. Speaking to contributor Frances Arnold about his latest works, he explained: "In the past I've dealt with people who have become like cartoons. But what if I make a cartoon that then walks into the real world and sees it in this reduced way that's essentially already there?" Tracing the turns in Fujiwara's practice in her cover Feature, Arnold reveals the artist's evolving approach to understanding the relationships between identity and image.

For five decades, experimental filmmaker Kidlat Tahimik has explored the question of national identity in the context of the Philippines, where the long history of colonialism is woven into aspects of daily life. For our second Feature, Manila-based writer Portia Placino spoke to the iconic, charismatic figure about his open-ended approach to making films and his recent series of large-scale installations that dramatically narrate episodes from Philippine history. Placino describes the centerpiece of the latest of these, *Magellan, Marilyn, Mickey & Fr. Dámaso. 500 Years of Conquistador RockStars* (2021), displayed in the Palacio de Cristal in Madrid where the Philippine Exposition took place in 1887, as "wood relief carvings of Inhabian, an Ifugao goddess of winds, and of Marilyn Monroe, the epitome of Hollywood culture, representing the inescapable struggle Filipinos still experience in the battle between indigeneity and coloniality."

In Up Close, *ArtAsiaPacific's* editors spotlight three new works: Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries' riotous video installation *CRUCIFIED TVS—NOT A PRAYER IN HEAVEN (TRADITIONAL CHINESE/CANTONESE/ENGLISH VERSION)* (2021), installed for the opening of M+ museum in Hong Kong; artist-duo Breakwater's tapestry-and-audio work *Fermented Flower* (2021), a commission for the group show "Future Ages Will Wonder" at FACT Liverpool; and Yuko Mohri's *Piano Solo* (2021), a networked sound installation. For Inside Burger Collection, writer Johannes Hoerning examines how growing up in China's post-reform era has shaped Cao Fei's approach to making art about labor and utopia.

Elsewhere in the issue, in Profiles, contributor Tiffany Leung speaks to Sin Wai Kin about the drag personas that they have devised throughout their practice to date, and

delineates how "every time Sin puts on a face and embodies a role, it changes them in some way." In the same section, AAP deputy editor HG Masters looks at Barış Doğrusöz's latest video trilogy, *Locus of Power* (2017–), which examines the archeological and cultural legacy of the ancient walled city of Dura-Europos on the Euphrates river, in present-day Syria near the border with Iraq, and which despite being covered by desert sand for thousands of years, again is at the crossroads of civilizational conflict and war. Reflecting on his own teaching experiences and Oscar Murillo's *Frequencies* (2013–) project, where the artist compiles canvases that school children across the globe have doodled on, Christopher Whitfield's Essay explores pedagogical models that encourage international solidarity among students instead of reinforcing nationalistic ideas.

Extending this interrogation of education in The Point, Liang Jianhua, director of Guangzhou's nonprofit platform HB Station, explains the organization's past and present approaches to providing alternatives to China's art education. For Dispatch, we hear from Brunei-based cultural workers Osveanne Osman and Aqilah Ali about how histories of colonialism and Brunei's economic reliance on petrochemicals continue to impact the local arts community. In Tribute, writer Rayya Badran reflects on the deepening resonances of late poet and painter Etel Adnan's words ever since a teenage introduction, particularly through Beirut's recent socioeconomic struggles, and Rhana Devenport, director of Adelaide's Art Gallery of South Australia, mourns the sudden passing of Australian-Iranian artist Hossein Valamanesh. In a new column titled Making Of, AAP assistant editor Nicole M. Nepomuceno and AAP editorial intern Victoria Chan reveal the processes behind Tino Sehgal's ever-evolving performances, or what he calls "constructed situations," guided by individual participants and their creative choices.

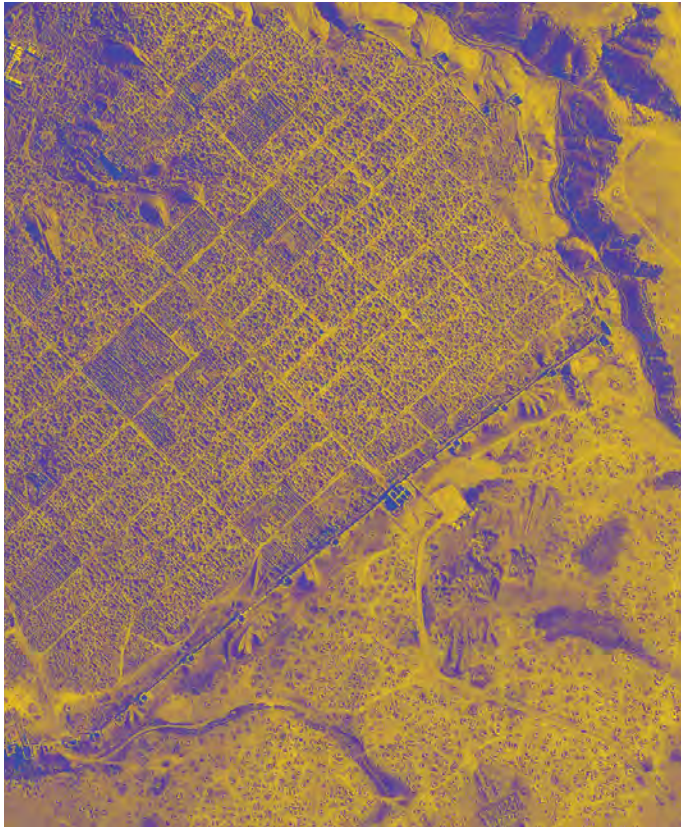
Last but not least, in One on One, artist and curator Enoch Cheng reflects on the pandemic and the collective traumas of political unrest that he has witnessed and felt in recent years. Cheng pays homage to writer and actor Michaela Coel, whose work has given him the courage to say that underneath attempts at maintaining the cartoonish appearance of normalcy, we are not alright.



ELAINE W. NG

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PROFILES



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Lamenting the Ruins

BARIŞ DOĞRUSÖZ

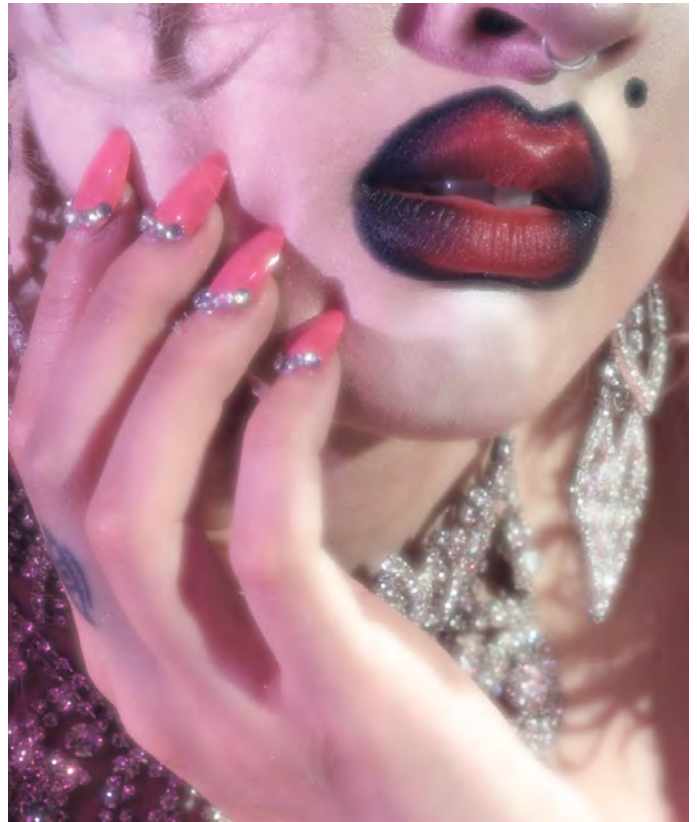
BY HG MASTERS

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Self, World, Universe

SIN WAI KIN

BY TIFFANY LEUNG





Portrait of SIN WAI KIN. All images courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong.

SIN WAI KIN

Self, World, Universe

BY TIFFANY LEUNG

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SIN WAI KIN, *Preface/Looking without Touching*, 2017, still from single-channel video: 1 min 2 sec.

"It felt like home," Sin Wai Kin said effusively when asked about their month-long trip to Hong Kong in November 2021. Born to a Hong Kong Chinese father and a White British mother, Sin grew up in Toronto and is now based in London. They have been to Hong Kong on several occasions, with their father as a child and later on as an artist, but never stopping for more than a week. This time, it was to launch their most ambitious solo exhibition to date, which also happened to be their first solo presentation in Asia, at Blindspot Gallery. Sin's survey spanned works from 2016, when they finished their graduate degree at London's Royal College of Art, to 2021, and showcased their ability to bring fantasy to life through moving image, performance, writing, and other media. Part homecoming, part retrospective, the exhibition also offered an opportunity for renewed reflection for Sin, whose identity embraces fluidity and transience. "It was the largest space I've ever had to work with, and having all my work in one place has enabled me to see how my thinking has developed and changed," they explained.

Over the last few years, Sin has created and embodied a range of feminine and masculine drag characters. Earlier videos like *Narrative Reflections on Looking* (2016–17) and *Tell me everything you saw, and what you think it means* (2018) feature Victoria Sin (the name Sin used to go by), an exaggerated, old-Hollywood female archetype who wears a luscious,

platinum wig, over-the-top makeup, and balloon-like silicone breasts. The persona was born out of Sin's nascent exposure to London's fluid drag scene, where, unlike the homonormative drag that they had experienced in Toronto, it was "about blowing up gender and identity completely." By reclaiming qualities of hyper-femininity and Whiteness, drag became "an excavation of all the things I've been socialized with," they said. Around four years after their first appearance, however, Victoria is no longer front and center in Sin's practice. They last appeared in the performance *Sandwich* (2021) at WorldPride Malmö, where Sin made a cheese sandwich, evoking 1950s cooking shows for housewives. "I've gotten what I needed from [Victoria] and I started thinking about what else I can bring into my drag practice," the artist elucidated. The exercise of putting on and taking off a character had prompted them to ask the questions: who do I want to be now? What are other identities I want to embrace?

It was during a lockdown in 2020 when new perspectives emerged and manifested. Isolated at home, Sin suddenly found themselves in heightened sensitivity in relation to their body: "It made me realize that my

relationship with my body has completely transformed from a few years ago," they recalled. "I want to embrace masculinity in a way I haven't done before." Also lamenting a recent breakup, they found themselves repeatedly listening to popular 1990s breakup songs like "I Want You Back" by NSYNC and bingeing music videos by boy bands from the Backstreet Boys to BTS, which gave them the idea to transform into "a teenage heartthrob." "I started collecting images of boy-band haircuts and photoshopping their hair onto my face, to help me decide on my new hairstyle," they shared.

Their growing interest in new conceptions of self led Sin to restore their Cantonese name, 慧乾 (Wai Kin), which means wisdom and intelligence. The latter character is also one of eight trigrams representing the principles of reality in the Taoist cosmology, and denotes heaven, creativity, and masculine (yang) energy. Simultaneously, because, for Sin, the line between life and performance is consistently blurred, their personal discovery bled into their works, and they began developing a set of masculine drag characters.

A sample of Sin's new direction and one of their most ambitious films yet,



SIN WAI KIN, *Today's Top Stories*, 2020, still from single-channel video: 6 min 30 sec.

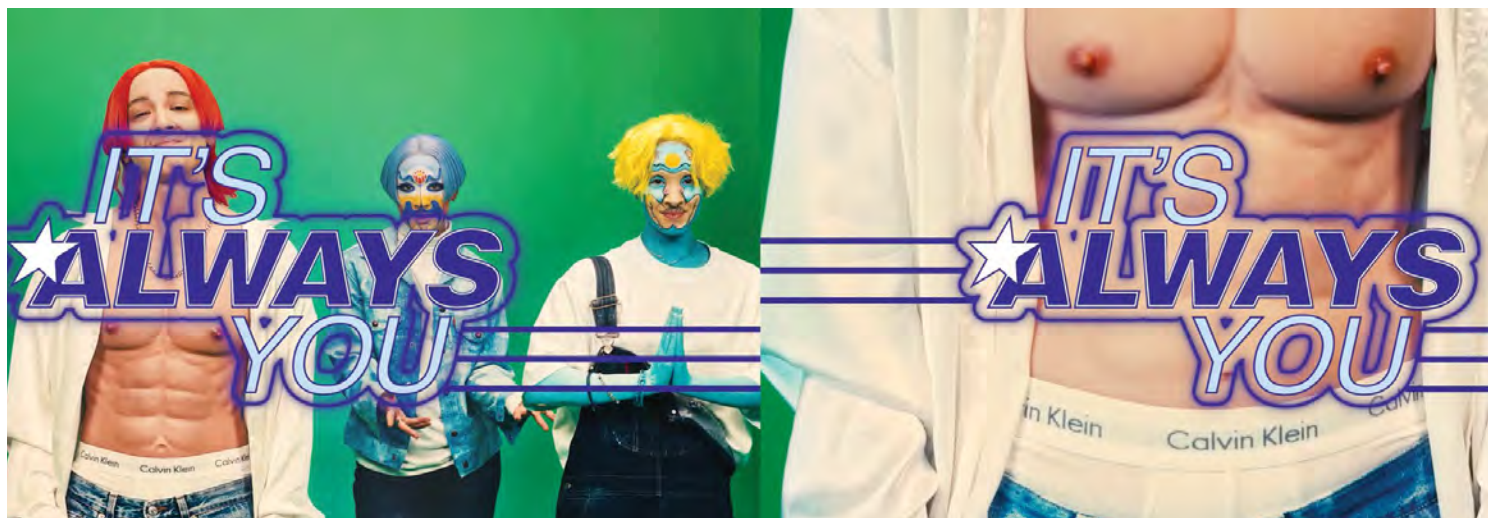
A Dream of Wholeness in Parts (2019–21)—currently touring as part of the British Art Show 9—brings together two of their new alter egos in “a self-contained universe.” Woven together by a speculative narrative and reveries of landscapes, the film takes its inspiration from *Dream of the Butterfly* (c. 300 BC), a Taoist allegory by Chuang Tzu that delineates a philosopher who wakes up from a vivid dream in which he was a butterfly, only to find that he is no longer sure which state of consciousness is true. The Universe, one of the protagonists, references the Zing’s (warrior) role in Peking and Cantonese opera, and a mercurial masculine archetype from Wong Kar Wai’s films—fey and graceful, yet also tempestuous and vulnerable—frequently embodied by Hong Kong actors Leslie Cheung and Tony Leung. The Construct,

the other star, is influenced by a feminine archetype in Cantonese opera known as the Daan role. Both of them don a series of resplendent outfits, faces painted in vivid colors. The verbose script that they enact in both English and Cantonese is also transposed between subjects and objects: occasionally a tree and a bowl of wonton noodles are animated, as if speaking back or speaking for characters, creating a sense that they are slipping in and out of dreams, unsure about where reality lies. Departing from Victoria Sin, the personae transcend explicit gender and racial binaries, and synthesize other “false dichotomies”—life and death, self and other, dreaming and waking, truth and fiction, tangible and metaphysical.

In another recent body of multimedia work, *It's Always You* (2021), which debuted

at Zürich’s Shedhalle in 2021, The Universe reappears as “the pretty boy” of a boy band. The expansive series consists of a karaoke-style music video and memorabilia including signed posters with imitative fold marks, as if pulled from a teen magazine, and life-size cardboard cutouts of each band member. Performing alongside The Universe is The Storyteller (the serious one), The One (the childish sweetheart), and Wai King (the heartthrob), all played by Sin. They dance, with effortless charisma, and lip sync to a mesmerizing voiceover by the artist. “The boyband is the perfect vehicle for thinking about desire; the concept was created exactly for that purpose, constructed to provoke the most intense desire, for mostly teenage girls, but also everybody else, the most dreamy, the most whatever,” said Sin. Conjured by fantastical narratives and overlapping stories, Sin’s figures are treated as devices of their thoughts and desire. “Each character is an embodiment of something I am trying to work through myself,” they explained. These identities are in a constant wheel of reinvention, deconstructed and recast each time they appear in a new work, reveling in their complexity and hybridity.

Every time Sin puts on a face and embodies a role, it changes them in some way, including their relationship with their body and the surrounding world. Meanwhile, for the audience, each persona is an invitation to recognize the perspectives and narratives that limit our lives, and to ponder ways to unravel these ways of seeing and being. The artist’s work tests the boundary between self and world, seeking, but never securely defining their meanings. “The only everlasting truth is change,” Sin quoted of science-fiction writer Octavia E. Butler. While the inhabitants in Sin’s universe continue to change and evolve, so do they.



SIN WAI KIN, *It's Always You*, 2021, stills from two-channel video: 4 min 5 sec.