

TITLE & YEAR

In the Skin of a Tiger: Monument to What We Want, 2019

ARTWORK DESCRIPTION

In the Skin of a Tiger: Monument to What We Want is a site-specific installation consisting of a suite of banners in geometric shapes and solid colors, hung from the ceiling of Coleman Atrium, National Gallery Singapore.

It includes an element of public participation across two events: one at the National Art Gallery (NAG) in Malaysia, followed by another at National Gallery Singapore (NGS).

The banners are constructed from political party flags collected around Port Dickson during recent election campaigns. Each banner is a monochrome patchwork of solid colored fabric squares reclaimed from the flags. No party insignias or logos are visible. At the corners where each square joins another is an 'X' embroidered in black. This is in reference to the 'X' that voters make on ballot papers when casting votes.

In two participative events, members of the public are invited to sit with, and sew something on these banners, as they contemplate the words 'what we want'. They stitch with thread the same colour as the banner they are working on, thus what they sew will not be visible from a distance.

The first of these events is held at NAG in Malaysia, and will culminate in participants carrying the flags in a short parade on the streets of the capital city, Kuala Lumpur. The purpose of the parade is celebratory, but contemplative. There will be no chanting or additional placards. The proposed date for this event is some time after 9 May 2019, which marks the first anniversary of the country's historic change of federal government.

The second event is held at the floor space of Coleman Atrium at NGS, just prior to the raising of the banners to the ceiling of the space. The proposed date for this event is some time before the opening of Singapore Biennale 2019.

The final installation at NGS includes a video tentatively titled *Langit biru, tanah merah, rimba hijau, awan putih* (Blue skies, red earth, green forests, white clouds). This short, impressionistic video depicts scenes and landscapes that give insight into the images and process of creating this work.

Copies of the printed booklet given to participants will also be available for the public to take for free (until copies run out).

Comment [SC1]: I always start with a description of the whole project. In straightforward language, I describe what the form of the work will be. I only mention ideas/concepts if they are necessary to explain the form.

Comment [SC2]: I like how Ellen Lee interpreted the title as a reference to *Gilgamesh* in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, who dons a lion's skin to mourn his friend Enkidu (2019: *The Year in Malaysian Art*, Penang Art District blog). She's accurate in spirit, if not in fact. 'In the Skin of a Tiger' invokes spiritual power in the process of becoming, while 'Monument to What We Want' is a direct statement of socio-political intent. Energy comes from the two halves being in relation with each other. I added '(Tugu Kita)' to the final title because that's how we referred to the project in Malaysia, before it moved to Singapore.

Comment [SC3]: Left this out due to limited time and budget. I did make a small study of blue patchwork squares (exhibited at *Transit 2x2* at HOM), which includes 'X's. I don't think the final work suffered from this omission, because light shining through NGS's glass ceiling unexpectedly highlighted the formal qualities of the patchwork grid in each banner.

Comment [SC4]: Left this out. Unnecessary, as the work's intent was already stated clearly in its title. Participants were free to sew whatever they wanted.

Comment [SC5]: The sewing event was at Padang Atrium, at the other end of NGS. We walked over to Coleman Atrium with the banners. Some people did stay to watch the installation, which went on for many hours.

Comment [SC6]: The video was left out and budget redirected towards making a collaborative print zine with the same title. I'd been inspired by a languid behind-the-scenes video of Solange making her 2016 album 'A Seat at the Table', and wanted to do something similar.

Description of public participation events at NAG and NGS

Participants will register online via open call. Prior to the day, they will be given written instructions on the concept, purpose and requirements of the event. They will be asked to wear monochrome outfits, in the color of their choice. In addition, each person will be given a bandanna of iridescent holographic fabric to wear during the event.

Participants will show up on the day and go through a registration process. Each will be provided with a small package including sewing materials, a holographic bandana, and a printed booklet containing poetry and short texts about the artwork and its meaning. They will be ushered by volunteers to their pre-assigned flag, all of which are laid out on the floor of the venue beforehand. There will be a few participants sewing on each flag.

After approximately 45 minutes of sewing, participants will gather with their flags outside the entrance of NAG. Following instructions of the road marshals, they will walk on a planned route around NAG and back. On their return they will place the flags on the floor of NAG. This signals the end of the event.

At NGS, the event will take place in a similar manner. However, there will be no parade. Instead, participants will watch as the flags are raised to the ceiling of Coleman Atrium.

Comment [SC7]: We ended up doing two events over a weekend at NAG and one at NGS.

Comment [SC8]: Left this out as unnecessarily complicated. I also disliked treating participants as a kind of art material whose aesthetics I could programme.

Comment [SC9]: I'd become obsessed with a holographic outfit by the designer Sies Marjan. I thought of the reflective spectrum as a kind of talisman against darkness and an escape from reductionism. 'Democracy is a reflection of you' was what I said when asked about the bandanas. I wanted to give something special to participants, to adorn them in the light of their own individuality. Each was signed and numbered, and printed on the reverse with a poem in Malay.

Comment [SC10]: I thought people would have difficulty sitting still for even an hour. But those at the first NAG sewing event described time as passing too quickly - by the time they had settled down to sew, it was almost over. So, we made the second day and Singapore event 1 hour 30 mins long.

Comment [SC11]: On the first day at NAG, we walked up the circular ramp and unfurled the banners from the railings. I watched from the ground floor while people made their way up, round and round. Finally, with everyone looking down at me from above, we read out the poem that was printed on the back of the bandanas together:

"Tiap-tiap hari
biar jari menyatakan
waktu mulut mengatakan
apa yang jelas di depan mata
Bahawasanya ini tugu kita:
Langit biru
Tanah merah
Awan Putih
Rimba hijau"

In the long process of completing this project, this is the moment I hold closest to my heart.

ARTIST STATEMENT

Every election Port Dickson is draped in political party flags. Their primary colors and graphic shapes interject the landscape of my adopted town. The hard-edged visual formality of these flags frame the fluid continuity of everyday life, which nonetheless flows along like water, weathering the flags like the rain and sun.

I collect, then cut up the flags of Parti Keadilan Rakyat, Parti Islam Se Malaysia, Barisan Nasional and Pakatan Harapan, and quilt them into new primary shapes and fields of color: sky blue, midnight blue, forest green, true red and white. *Langit biru, tanah merah, rimba hijau, awan putih*. Sewn in the corners of each square that makes up these new shapes is an 'X' - the black 'X' that marks our votes, growing like weeds in the cracks.

When Pakatan Harapan won the 14th General Election on 9 May 2018, it replaced a government that had been in power since this country was formed over 50 years ago. Analysts say it was this factor or that, but I will never forget the image that occurred me, in the shower, two days after the result was announced: a blank blue sky. Like the residents in Jose Saramago's novel 'Seeing', who, without being told, come out to sweep the streets when their government abandons the city, we had achieved this blue sky, outside the wildest predictions of our politicians. **No matter what comes after, this moment, this gift we made for each other, remains for all time.**

But it's what we do with the gift that matters.

Before these new flags are hung up like the monuments they are, I would like to celebrate by inviting citizens to sit with the flags, think about 'what we want' and sew something on them. Sewing, because it is the tender labour of our hands that determines and achieves the desires of our hearts. This celebration will be conducted across two events. The first is in the rotunda of National Arts Gallery (NAG) of Malaysia. Afterwards, we will take the flags out on a short parade through the streets of the capital, Kuala Lumpur. The second event will be held in National Gallery Singapore, just before the flags are raised to the ceiling.

Comment [SC12]: In my Artist Statement, I write about the **feelings, thoughts and situations** that are driving the work. Compare it to Artwork Description. It is useful to separate the two, because you will avoid unnecessary repetition or elaboration. I try to keep it the same length or shorter than the description.

Comment [SC13]: I'm still thinking about what this work means in the wake of Langkah Sheraton and the subsequent collapse of the Pakatan Harapan government in March 2020, after just 21 months in power.

It's a question I can't answer alone. I wish there were more minds to gather and engage in honest reflection, criticism and yes, mourning. Publishing this proposal is the best I can do, and it's not much more than a wild dog barking at an empty sky. Whatever, maybe another dog, just as wild, will bark back.

I never meant this work as a personal expression of my own political affiliations. As I've said publicly and expressed in my work, I'm not very invested in electoral politics or the parliamentary system as a viable practice of democracy. My interest in statecraft goes as far as imagining ways to undo it.

However, there are some works that do not come from me, as much as come **through** me, and this is one of them. It monumentalizes a significant moment in the history of a place called Malaysia, that I also call home. Its shifting, adaptable form continues to reflect the reality of change, and of the many forces, seen and unseen, that bring it into being. It is a monument to change, and therefore, to hope. I don't know what else it has to say to us in the days and years to come.

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

1. LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

- Official letter from National Gallery Singapore / Singapore Art Museum to National Art Gallery of Malaysia, outlining the project as a commissioned work for Singapore Biennale 2019. In addition, requesting the permission and cooperation of NAG as a venue host for the public participation event.

2. RAISING OF FLAGS

- Suspension system for several cloth banners of various geometric shapes to be hung vertically from NGS atrium ceiling
- Flags to be on the ground during collaborative sewing event, attached to suspension system
- After sewing event, flags to be raised to ceiling

3. PERMISSIONS AND CLEARANCE FOR USE OF ATRIUM FLOOR SPACE DURING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION EVENT

- Up to 100 participants estimated for the sewing event

4. LCD MONITOR to play single channel video, HEADPHONES for sound

Comment [SC14]: Having agreed to be complicit in the international contemporary art industrial complex by participating in an art biennale, one personal goal I had was to create a work that could only be realized by utilizing the biennale apparatus - i.e. its prestige, status, etc.

Getting the Biennale institution to ask permission for me to be in another institution was my way of inhabiting the institutions - making them work for me, when the reverse has been true most of the time.

Without people, institutions are not much more than skins. It's people who give them form, meaning and power. To inhabit an institution is to be 'in the skin of a tiger'.

Comment [SC15]: This wasn't needed because we didn't make the video.

ESTIMATED ARTWORK PRODUCTION COST

Item	Details	Quantity	Estimated Cost (SGD)
BANNER CONSTRUCTION			
Seamstress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cutting fabric patches - Sewing patches into banners - Embroidery of 'X' into corners - Sewing loops for hanging 	2 persons x 500 each	1,000
Sewing materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thread - Scissors - Reinforcing fabric 		300
TOTAL			1,300
OVERALL PROJECT PRODUCTION ASSISTANCE			
General Production Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scheduling - Materials sourcing - Budget management - Institutional communications & coordination - Participants open call - Participants registration - Participants briefing and communications 		1,500
TOTAL			1,500
SHORT VIDEO			
Videographer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shooting - Editing - Sound - Post-production 		1,500
TOTAL			1,500
PRINTED BOOKLET			
Layout & design			500

Comment [SC16]: A reminder that this budget was for the purposes of a proposal. Actual costs and items always shift in the realization of any project. I try to design sufficient slack into the budget. This also means designing slack into the final work, knowing which parts are absolutely essential and which ones can be let go if needed.

Artist fee: artists seldom discuss this with each other, to our detriment. Sometimes the artist fee will be fixed, sometimes you allocate it in the budget. In this case it was a fixed amount.

Other principles I try to practice with my budgets:

Before writing my proposal, I try to get a number on the upper limit of available budget from the bosses, i.e. the ones commissioning the project. This information is crucial because it determines the scale of what is possible, and you'll be surprised how often it's not forthcoming. Nothing is more unproductive than being asked to halve the budget on a completed proposal when no limit was set in the first place.

Never use artist fee to cover production costs. That fee is for your labour. If I have to use it, it means I've failed to work within budget.

I show the full budget to every person I hire to work with on the project, especially in regards to what I'm paid as artist. This transparency is essential for trust and equitable working conditions. I can count the number of times I've been extended this courtesy on the first 3 fingers of one hand.

Printing		1000 copies x SGD1.00	1,000
TOTAL			1,500
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION EVENT AT NAG (MALAYSIA)			
Special Media Liason	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Announcements & press materials - Communication with NAG - Translation of materials to Malay - Press liason (especially non-English press) - Crisis management 		1,000
Event Production Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Venue set-up - Production crew management - Volunteer management - Catering - Permits and permissions from city council and relevant authorities - PA system - Safety procedures and briefing 		1,500
Production crew	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assist production managers 	3 persons x 500 each	1,500
Road marshals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Safety procedures during street parade 	5 persons x 100 each	500
Catering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For production crew and volunteers - Light refreshments for up to 100 participants 		500
Bandannas for up to 100 participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Holographic fabric - Cutting and sewing 		1,500
Misc. Production costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sound system - Sewing materials - Transport and communications 		500
TOTAL			7,000

COLLABORATIVE EVENT AT NGS (SINGAPORE)

Event Production Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Venue set-up- Production crew management- Volunteer management- Safety procedures and briefing		Provided by NGS
Production crew	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Assist production managers		Provided by NGS
Volunteers stipend	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Assist and communicate with participants	5 persons x 100 each	500
Bandannas for up to 100 participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Holographic fabric- Cutting and sewing		1,500
Misc. Production costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Sound system- Sewing materials- Transport and communications		500
TOTAL			2,500
GRAND TOTAL			15,300

In addition to production budget, **ARTIST FEE - SGD2,000**