



5 September - 20 September 2020

THE VIRALITY OF CHANCE
ANDY YANG

Curated by Marjorie Chu

FOREWORD

It is with great pleasure that I announce Art Forum's hosting of the latest works by Andy Yang.

Throughout the COVID 19 period, Andy has been fearlessly challenging himself in producing this body of works.

I invite you to come and view his journal of thoughts recorded during this period.

Marjorie Chu

Art Forum

August 2020

THE VIRALITY OF CHANCE

ANDY YANG

A murky swirl of greys, blues and greens as our days collapse into one endless procession of light and dark.

Muddled worries about what might come next, and when we would be able to embrace our loved ones once more.

The thick, blurry swamp of thoughts that had hitherto been banished to the deep recesses of our minds – those hidden pockets of darkness, once lurking unnoticed amidst the clutter of everyday city living, now coming to the fore.

Confusion, anxiety and stress, punctuated with the odd neon-bright rictus grin of an Instagram reminder to “live our best lives” as we proof sourdough amidst the chaos.

Our collective experience of the COVID-19 pandemic could well match the description above as aptly as *The Virality of Chance*, the latest exhibition of works by artist Andy Yang.

A multi-hyphenate stalwart of the Singapore contemporary art scene, Yang is a merry master of many trades. A musician, designer and fine artist, the depth of his life experience and varied talents comes across keenly in this latest body of work. Yang occupies an interesting space in Singapore’s contemporary art history, with a distinctive practice that includes both sound art and abstract painting.

Art historian John Clark observed “[t]hat the whole of modern Asian art history is full of critical roles played by small groups that appear at particular junctures to coalesce new positions within art discourse and redefine practice”.¹ True to form, Yang’s recent performative sound art collaborations with collective INSTINC Space in its critically-acclaimed 2019 and early 2020 presentations *DE:FAULT* and *DE:VOTED* are interventions into new and different expressive forms. They infuse his current practice with an exciting energy, a possible spillover effect of what curator Russell Storer refers to as the desire of independent art collectives to “provide a critical alternative to the dominant systems of art, including museums and the art market. . . which includes the creation of broader possibilities for artistic production and reception than may be currently available.”²

Produced during Singapore’s curiously-named Circuit Breaker period of viral lockdown, Yang attempts to render visible, the invisible and often unspeakable emotional nuances of the stresses and realities of life during COVID-19.

Yang’s signature sweeps of colour, with their staccato dips and controlled drips of contrasting primary tones, are immediately visible in works such as *Pure, Stillness* and *Solitude*. This time however, the swashes of paint take on an almost frantic quality, a zeitgeisty reminder of these anxious times. The frenetic flurry of greys, blues and greens, punctuated with crimson splashes, are as much a visual treat as they are an allegory for the complexities of pandemic living.

As Yang ruefully recollects, “I lost sleep over how I should even move forward”.

The expanse of time afforded to communities under lockdown often came at the expense of income-earning opportunities. The world, while moving more slowly, suddenly seemed much harder to negotiate. The gummy feeling of swimming through muddied waters is perfectly conveyed through the splattered brown tones of *Dreams of Translucent Perfection* and *Fire Dance*. And yet, unifying circular motifs contain the mess in a subtle embrace, a nod perhaps to the constructs that kept us sane during the pandemic lockdown – family, friends, essential workers – the delicate strands which held everything together during a period of utter chaos.

Yang takes a different turn in this exhibition with a selection of works that, while still abstract, hint at figurative landscapes. The lily ponds of *Drifting Towards Ecstasy* and *Rapturous Feeling of Ecstasy* recall Claude Monet’s rendition of his glorious Giverny gardens, with the artist famously remarking in his letters after extensive work had been done on the garden: “I saw, all of a sudden, that my pond had become enchanted... Since then, I have had no other model.”

Certainly, Monet’s comments were made a lifetime ago. Yet they were oddly resonant in Circuit Breaker-Singapore which saw much of the populace compelled to seek solace in nature as malls, cinemas and all other indoor forms of recreation became off limits. The emptied streets and buildings called to mind art historian T.K. Sabapathy’s lament that “as an urban construct, Singapore is energized by rampant consumerism, feeding on a vast array of imported merchandise. Every which way one turns, one is confronted with images and messages pitched at levels to ensure uniform obsessive consumption.”³

When the temples of consumerism are closed, what remains?

In *Romantic Without Being Sentimental* and *Time to Reflect*, Yang captures the Singapore public's newfound enchantment with nature in loving and sinuous detail. Flurries of fish seem to make their way busily across flourishing ponds, in a squint-and-you'll-miss-it composition of quick movement and graceful strokes.

There is care and emotion in these paintings but also a touch of hesitancy, as the eye struggles at first glance to understand what exactly is being depicted. The initial unfamiliarity soon falls away as the lively suggestions of squirming fish take shape in the mind's eye. These abstract renditions of familiar natural scenes prompt the perplexing question of why it took a pandemic for us to learn to value our lush tropical heritage, and whether the Monet-like magical spell will persist once life returns to normal. Sabapathy has framed Singapore's culture of consumerism as a "challenge to be met head on" by artists in Singapore, to ensure that it does not "impinge on creativity, innovation and authenticity".⁴ In his thoughtful and complex depictions of the natural world, at the curious point in time when consumerist tendencies suddenly fell away, Yang has risen up to meet this challenge.

These works also stand as markers of a pivotal time in the artist's life, one which finds him in the pincer-tight grip of both family commitments, and COVID-19 travel restrictions. Unable to physically seek out far flung destinations overseas, Yang began to imagine the gardens and forests that he longed to visit. The result? Complex imagined realities which are conventionally beautiful but which also ache with the frustration of unfulfilled desires. The edges of the canvases of *Unknown Reality*, *Time to Reflect* and *Drifting Towards Ecstasy* bleed blue and violet, giving the viewer a peek into the colours which gave these paintings life before they were aggressively layered with other hues. In these paintings, beauty, fear, regret, pain and joy, all reside together in energetic and hopeful landscapes.

The poignant duality of the COVID-19 experience comes through strongly in the diptych *All or Nothing*- a pair of works split down the middle and yet which are part of the same robust whole. The shattered veins and vines of this magical forest-world, appear to emerge from an ominous darkness, but are punctuated nonetheless with glorious bursts of sunshine and satsuma- orange optimism.

As Yang explains, "Perhaps it is cliched, but because these works were made during a period of deep uncertainty, they are really about appreciating what you have, because you really don't know what is going to happen next."

A slowing-down of the frenzied pace of life, and the time to sit and ponder the value of an existence spent chasing the dollar.

A renewed appreciation of Singapore's greenery as nature runs amok — a gloriously unattended, unfettered and ungroomed mess.

The privilege of time to sit still and consider what is left when the trappings of urban living fall away.

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By Usha Chandradas, with Michelle Lim, (Plu)ral Art LLP

¹ John Clark, *Modern Asian Art* (Sydney: Craftsman House, 1998), 226.

² Russell Storer, "The Artist's Village : Collaboration as Transformation", in *Histories, Practices, Interventions: A Reader in Singapore Contemporary Art*, ed. Jeffrey Say and Seng Yu Jin (Singapore: Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, 2016), 372.

³ T.K. Sabapathy, "Contemporary Art in Singapore: An Introduction", in *Tradition and Change: Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Caroline Turner (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 1995), 83-92.

⁴ *Ibid.*



Fire Dance

Size: 56cm(H) x 76cm(W)

Media: Oil On Canvas

Year: 2020



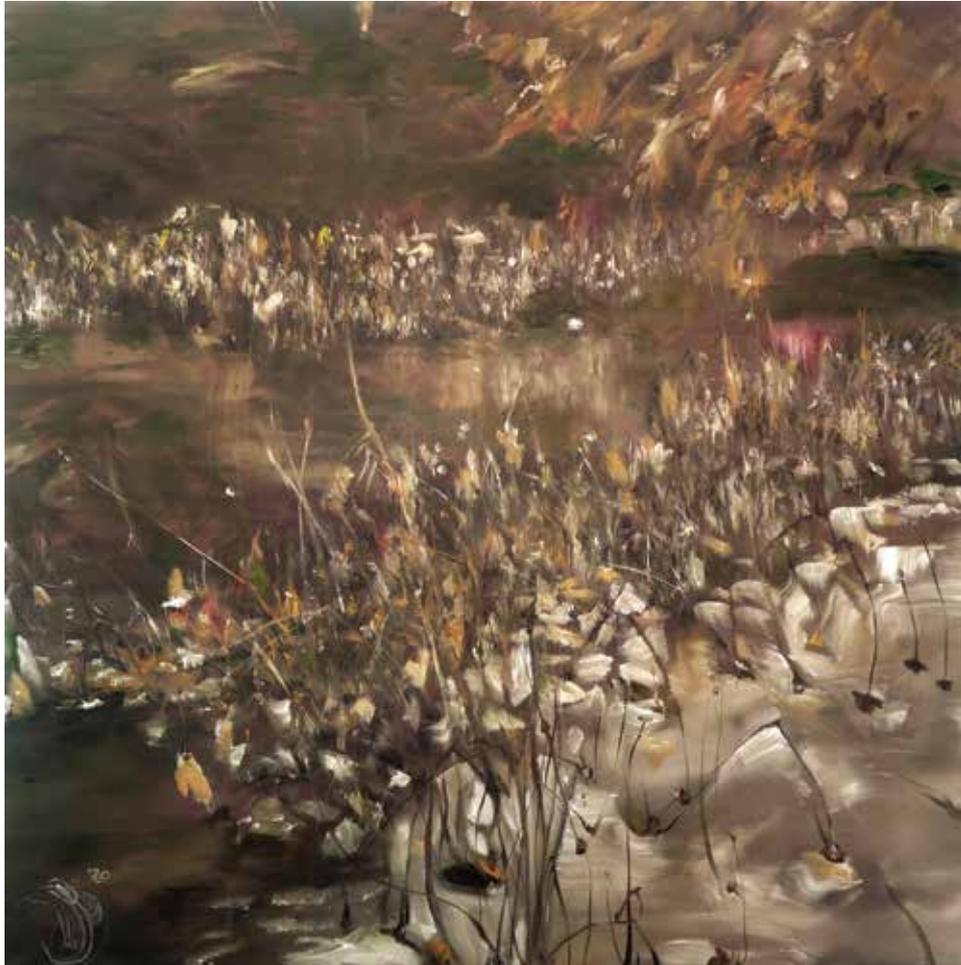
Pure

Size: 56cm(H) x 76cm(W)

Media: Oil On Canvas

Year: 2020

The smell of the kerosene fires lingering in the air. The hypnotic sounds and ritualistic performances depicting the epic Ramayana poem. All these on a stage atop the cliffs, surrounded by the sounds of crashing waves. The beauty and warmth of the majestic sun setting around us. I was totally absorbed and besotted by the experience.



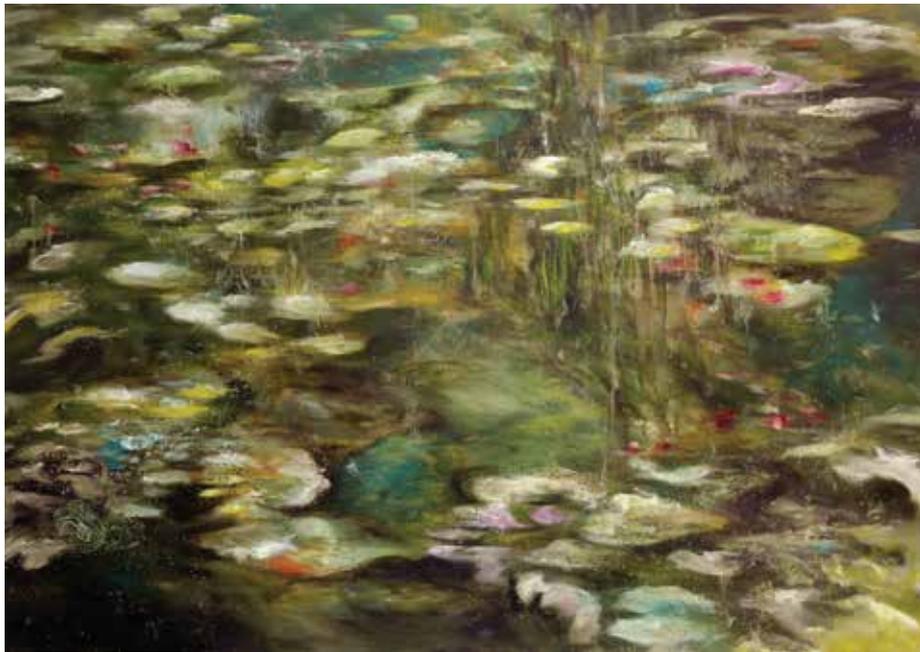
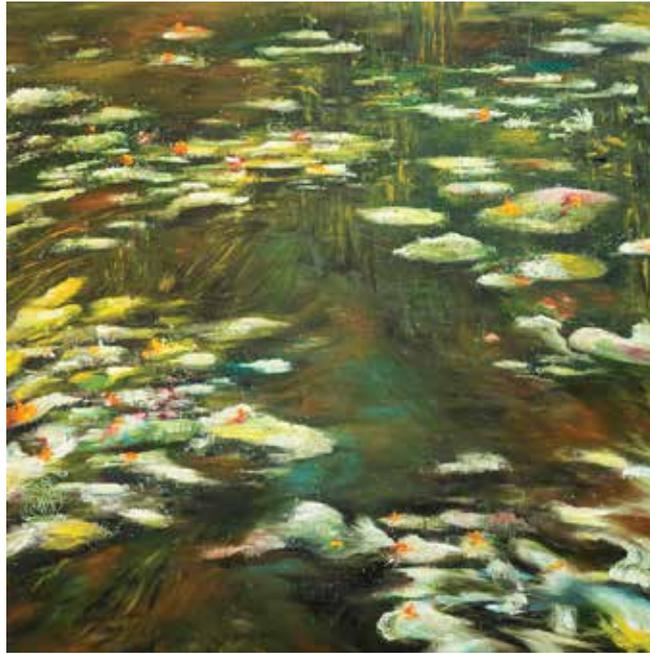
Unknown Reality

Size: 100cm(H) x 100cm(W)

Media: Oil On Canvas

Year: 2020

A discussion with a friend recently got me thinking about this inexplicable uneasiness in our 'new normal'. This weird feeling lingering in the air. It feels like there is this heavy cloud that has yet to drop down on all of us. Who will be strong enough to survive the test?



Rapturous Feeling Of Ecstasy

Size: 100cm(H) x 100cm(W)

Media: Oil On Canvas

Year: 2020

Drifting Towards Ecstasy

Size: 100cm(H) x 140cm(W)

Media: Oil On Canvas

Year: 2020

There is just something magical about oil paints. The chromatic, tonal intensity, and the satin finish are simply remarkable. It's just plain sexy if you ask me. The way the surface responds to the brushes and painting knives. From the lightest to the most intense of marks.



Loneliness & Elegance

Size: 56cm(H) x 76cm(W)

Media: Watercolour On Paper

Year: 2020

Woke up really early yesterday, feeling trapped with anxiety—it was a horrendous feeling. I had to do something to clear my mind and so I sat on the floor in front of this sheet of paper and decided to go for it.



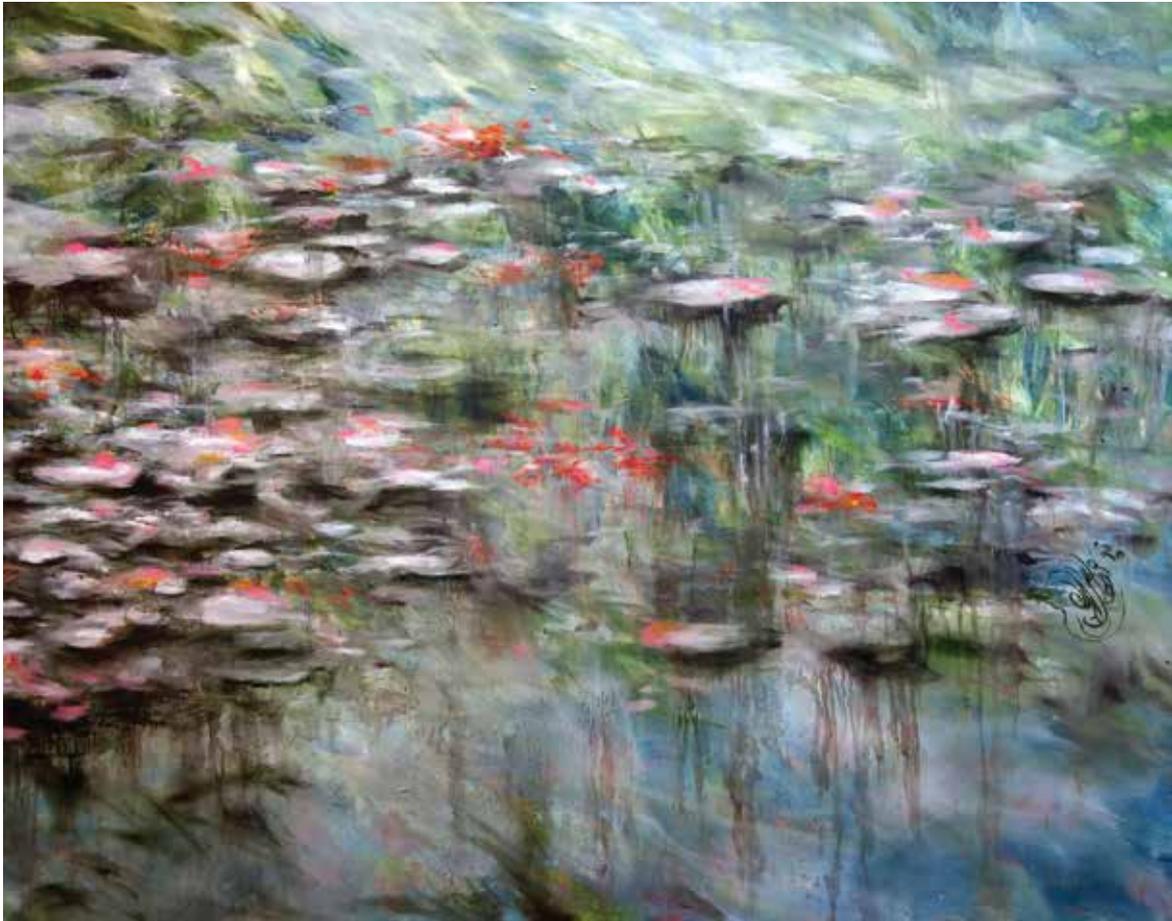
Set Adrift

Size: 80.5cm(H) x 115cm(W)

Media: Watercolour & Graphite On Paper

Year: 2020

Will this make us stronger? We will never know until strength arrives, if it ever arrives. These thoughts have made me want to create even more. I am curious about what lies ahead, and I've been at this for a while. We have been in difficult situations before, but this time it seems different. It's joy and torment all at the same time. I am eager to know what this journey brings.



Time To Reflect

Size: 123cm(H) x 153cm(W)

Media: Oil On Canvas

Year: 2020

Painting and drawing are always risky. You don't get it right all the time. The willingness to make that move, to move on and to learn from it. Layer upon layer of thoughts, hopes and fears. One just has to keep going. It can be quite draining but if we don't make that first move, we don't go anywhere.



Stillness

Size: 36cm(H) x 51cm(W)
Media: Watercolour On Paper
Year: 2020

Solitude

Size: 36cm(H) x 51cm(W)
Media: Watercolour On Paper
Year: 2020

More watercolour forms and tones. They seem to resemble some familiar shapes--they are almost leaflike but at the same time, they are not. They were created out of a sense of curiosity mingled with a sense of adventure.



Romantic Without Being Sentimental

Size: 100cm(H) x 120cm(W)

Media: Oil On Linen

Year: 2020

Where do we go from here? What if I do this? What if I do that? Where will it all lead me?



Fields Of Unanswered Prayers

Size: 100cm(H) x 160cm(W)

Media: Oil On Canvas

Year: 2020

Sometimes I just sit alone in long periods of time staring at oil paintings. Inspecting the surfaces like a mad man obsessed with his lover. Just staring at the marks, the surface reliefs that were made, and the coloured pigments. And, of course, the aroma of linseed oil which I just like.



All Or Nothing

Size: 30cm(H) x 60cm(W) Diptych

Media: Oil On Canvas

Year: 2020

Dreams Of Translucent Perfection

Size: 66cm(H) x 101.6cm(W)

Media: Watercolour On Paper

Year: 2020

Too much optimism can be overbearing sometimes. So many different thoughts go through your mind while painting, it's akin to a complex bitter taste that's laced with joy. I feel like a mad man sometimes, pacing up and down for hours and hours to view what is being done on a small canvas surface. I lose some marks but gain back new ones. And then some really good marks just get lost forever and are never seen again. And so it goes.



Curtain Call For The Sunrise

Size: 75cm(H) x 105cm(W)

Media: Watercolour On Paper

Year: 2020

There is a tremendous positive side to all this. I see it as a chance for us to renew ourselves for the better. After having been a professional artist for close to two decades, I am not a stranger to self- isolation.



Inside The Window

Size: 40cm(H) x 80cm(W) Diptych

Media: Oil On Canvas

Year: 2019

Observations

Size: 40cm(H) x 120cm(W)

Media: Oil On Canvas

Year: 2020

Turning away from factual observation. Taking visible reality as nothing more than a point of departure. These ideas have been really helpful in creating new images during this part of my journey. Working this way has been a bit like walking into somewhere safe. A place where it's so safe, that you want to just stay in there, and not return to your last destination. I may soon be in mourning for the loss of the peace and quiet which resulted from the lockdown.

ANDY YANG

Andy Yang was born in Malaysia in 1973. He is a multi-disciplinary artist known for his abstract visual and sound experimentations. His explorations between visual art and music led him to the creation of works under musical stimuli with The Observatory. In *Anitya 1* (2011) at the Earl Lu Gallery of the Institute of Contemporary Art Singapore, the process of his art-making cycle was exposed in full, from the point of creation to destruction. In his latest ArtScience Late feature at the ArtScience Museum, the work *Ceremony* (2019) produced together with SAtheCollective, saw the artist celebrate the experiences of human childbirth through an energetic sound performance set against an elaborate visual art installation. Andy was also one of the key artists (in a select group of 8) who presented *DE:VOTED* (2020) a critically acclaimed immersive art experience at Helutrans for Singapore Art Week 2020—one which featured an intense communion with light, sound, and performance art.

In *The Virality of Chance*, artist Andy Yang lays bare his struggles with the vicissitudes of Singapore's COVID-19 Circuit Breaker lockdown period. Accompanied by no more (and indeed, no less) than a diaristic journey through the artist's mind, documented through personal journal entries and social media musings, these paintings offer searing insight into the pain, happiness and nuanced anxieties of life during a pandemic.



ART FORUM

The gallery was established by Marjorie Chu in Singapore in 1971 under the name of Raya Gallery, located at the Specialist Centre. The gallery was renamed Art Forum in 1980 when it moved to the Promenade. In 1989 Art Forum acquired a 1920's terrace house at 82 Cairnhill Road and converted it into an exhibition space. Art Forum has been at this address since.

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