

# PearlLam Galleries

Hong Kong Pedder Building

## Alchemist(s)

Featuring works by Alan Kwan, Ni Zhiqi, Peter Peri, Thukral&Tagra, and Sara Tse

Exhibition Dates 4 July–14 November, 2020 Monday–Saturday, 10am–7pm

Venue Pearl Lam Galleries, 6/F, Pedder Building, 12 Pedder Street, Central, Hong Kong

Pearl Lam Galleries is delighted to present *Alchemist(s)*, a group exhibition featuring six artists, including Alan Kwan (b.1990), Ni Zhiqi (b.1957), Peter Peri (b. 1971), Thukral&Tagra (b. 1976 & b. 1979), and Sara Tse (b.1974).

As an ancient branch of natural philosophy and proto-scientific tradition, alchemy has always been perceived as a form of pseudoscience with more than 2,500 years of history. It originated in Egypt and was practiced throughout Europe, Africa, and Asia before it was discredited as a worthy intellectual endeavour with the emergence of modern science. *Alchemist(s)* examines the intuitive potential of art. In particular, this group exhibition highlights the migration of art forms from one state to another. On view is a wide variety of artworks ranging from painting, sculpture, video, installation, and virtual reality. The juxtaposition of artworks is intended to consummate an experience of metaphysical transformation collectively, and in doing so it exposes the object's indeterminate physical characteristics as ones of simultaneous strength and vulnerability. Hence, the objects on view function as psychoactive vehicles for viewers to pay closer attention to their hearts and souls and the contradictions of human fate.

Similar to contemporary artists, alchemists spent years in their laboratories/studios, conducting experiments through trial and error on the appearance of materials in non-qualitative ways. The *Emerald Tablet*, the foundational Egyptian-Greek text of Hermetic tradition, revealed that the secret of alchemy laid with its transmutation between infinite scope and physical manifestation. Believing that all creatures are made equal by first matter or “prima materia”, alchemy advocates a holistic vision to achieve a trinity of body, soul, and spirit. Alchemists dedicated their whole lives towards purifying materials in the hope of elevating it to a higher form. They blurred the distinction between inner and outer worlds, yet they remained faithful to the search for spiritual resonance relative to the meaning of our existence.

Bearing similar ideals, the artists in this exhibition all delve into their subconscious and question our reliance on conventional belief systems and institutional structures to give us meaning. Introspective in their approach, they use different strategies to recuperate different kinds of losses, be it of memories, identities, or a sense placed within a deep personal conviction. What began as a hunch or an intuition from experimenting with materials subsequently became a catalyst for developing a corpus of artworks. Suspicious of the formal language of Western modernism, these artists opt for processes of making that are largely instinctive, natural, and faithful—like extracting a panacea from the cosmic realm in order to prompt us with a prophetic vision of a new future.

*Present Continuous* by **Thukral&Tagra** is a film consisting of arbitrary day-to-day scenes in the city. In the centre, a ping-pong ball acts as a pendulum, balancing and dancing vertically. Played continuously

in a loop, it blurs the notion of a clear start or stop point. As the ball continues to bounce, it mirrors the ticking of time or the beating of a heart. The practice, the very act of balancing your game, symbolizes the state of meandering through the mundane aspects of life while we live the days. The duo's *Mythological Induction* painting series narrates the story of Kalki, the final incarnation of Lord Vishnu, reducing prophecies and characteristics of the avatar into possible logical relations. Probing the unconventional connection between the spiritual and the mathematical, the series reflects on how society is conditioned to think about God and prayer.

In 2011, with a custom video camera mounted on his glasses, **Alan Kwan** documented every waking moment of his life during that year and thus generated a database of digital memories. Using these digital memories and also his dreams from the same year, he created the video game *Bad Trip*, which allows audiences to delve into his subconscious. Colourful memory blocks archiving the artist's own daily experiences are stored within different imaginary dwellings inside an expansive surrealistic virtual landscape. On view is a video documentation of navigating through the game as a linear narrative.

Drawn to the description by Rene Guénon, an early 20th century anti-Modernist, of the orthogonal cross as a symbol of "universal man" in Eastern and Western traditions, **Peter Peri's** paintings explore Guénon's explanation of the Taoist three-dimensional cross. In this metaphysical schema, the vertical line represents axis mundi, the "will of heaven", and the horizontal line represents a profile section of an infinite spiral formed by the linked circles of individual human lives. Accordingly, this series of paintings repeats a composition of a single vertical and multiple horizontal lines; however, Peri employs a strip of black shadow in each case to block any meeting of the two axes. Thus, the central point of the cross, the symbol of a revealing dynamic between man and heaven, is systematically obscured. As a series, the paintings propose a new notion of constructive abstraction by presenting the perpetual deferral of the centre—its effacement—as the perpetual deferral of meaning. The heavy steel cuboids of *La Paresseuse*, which translates to "the lazy one", offer a weighty earthbound counterpoint to the paintings' macrocosmic concerns. Placed in the centre of the exhibition space as a fictional "viewer", the reclining sculpture is a problematic bodily remainder that complicates our own optical engagement.

In **Ni Zhiqi's** *Alhambra* series, which combines both collage and paint, the artist has chosen to cover the canvas with a specific handmade paper produced by ancient and secretive Chinese papermaking techniques. The works focus on the Alhambra's tile patterns and evoke a feeling of infiniteness while recalling memories of the red palace built by the Moors in Spain in the Middle Ages. With the help of Chinese traditional techniques, gentleness and warmth are slowly revealed. The core concept hidden in the faded colour and rough edges of Ni's works is a philosophical outlook on time and memories from an Asian perspective.

*Mapping Memories- Keijyo (Seoul) 1920* by **Sara Tse** is an installation that depicts the map of historic Seoul as the traces of impermanence and human fate. As an instrument of control, maps are used by those in power who want to control and plan for land and possessions they own. On display is a set of miniature porcelain images mounted on slide sleeves on one side of a hybrid projection archival device. This wooden apparatus of human scale resembles a sculpture or camera obscura of sort that entices the audience for a closer inspection of both source images and their projection. The production process of the porcelain images is extremely labor intensive. Pages of artist's journal with porcelain clay are first mixed together and then painted on rice paper with renderings of the old map of Seoul using underglaze pigment. After firing on in the kiln, only faint remnants of the map remain. In close proximity to the installation is a new video work titled *Mapping Memories- Taihoku (Taipei) 1932*. Using a similar production technique as the Keijyo piece, on view is a video projection of fragments of an old map of Taipei. Since both Seoul and Taipei were once colonized by Japan during the 20th century, the two works provoke a comparative reading on issues of geopolitical power and its influence on the spatial history of a place. Tse claims: "What I learn from old maps is that nothing really lasts, everything eventually vanishes in time."

## About Pearl Lam Galleries

Pearl Lam Galleries is a driving force within Asia's contemporary art scene. Founded in 2005, the Gallery plays a vital role in stimulating international dialogue and cross-cultural exchange between East and West.

Following a rigorous programme, Pearl Lam Galleries presents museum-quality exhibitions that re-evaluate and challenge perceptions of cultural practice in Asia. With a thoughtfully balanced roster of Chinese and international artists, the Gallery is strategic in its curation, positioning itself as an educator.

The Gallery maintains two spaces in Hong Kong: one in the historic Pedder Building and another in the recently erected H Queen's. The Shanghai space is situated in the heart of the Bund district.

With a team of international staff, Pearl Lam Galleries' reach is global, having presentations at major international art fairs including The Armory Show, Art Cologne, Art Basel Hong Kong, Frieze Masters, and West Bund Art and Design.

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## Press Enquiries

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