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PRESS RELEASE

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**The Not Singapore Art Project:
Migration to the Internet Country and Portable Identity.
Some paintings at play: a flash solo by NG Joon Kiat**

18 May – 16 June 2024

Opening Saturday 18 May, 3 - 7pm

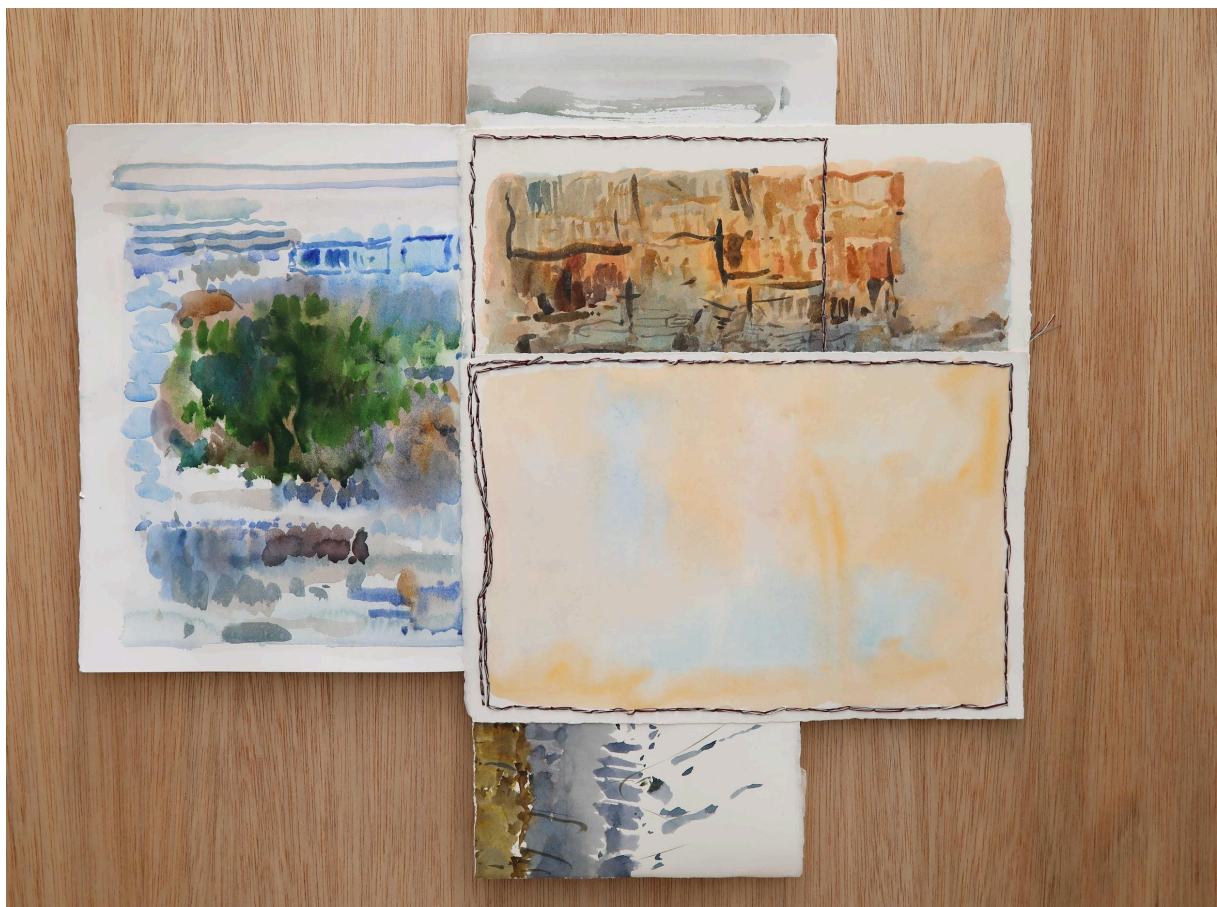


Ng Joon Kiat, *Surgery, Zombie Abstraction and Covid Series 3*, 2020, surgery instruments, wood, acrylic on linen, 45 x 55 x 25 cm. Image courtesy of Ng Joon Kiat.

Yeo Workshop is pleased to present The Not Singapore Art Project: Migration to the Internet Country and the Portable Identity by **Ng Joon Kiat**, the artist's first solo exhibition with the gallery. Having long endeavoured to dismantle the confines of geographical boundaries and identity politics, Ng constantly strives to liberate his mediums and aesthetics at the same time. This new body of work that he has developed in recent years, marks an exciting trajectory in his practice. Building on from his earlier map paintings that consider the socioeconomic and political nuances of borderlands, Ng turns to watercolours in his exploration of landscape and abstraction in relation to his artistic selfhood. The lengthy, tongue-in-cheek, exhibition title and prelude written by the artist (on the gallery wall) conveys

a deliberately brusque humour amid his urgent attempt to shape a new identity and search for alternative spaces in his practice.

Where nationality and nationalism seem increasingly emphasised in Singapore and globally, these new works are deviations from such jingoistic sentiments. Rather, Ng explores the possibilities of the nomadic citizen, where one widens and deepens their knowledge through travel. Here, the artist points to both forms of physical and mental travel through our real and virtual personas. The exhibition begins with his *Surgery, Zombie and Covid* series, which evince a straightforward attempt to deconstruct Abstract Expressionist and formalist ideas around painting, both physically and conceptually. He considers the parallels between medical surgery and abstraction, where the gestures of removal, operation and recovery become methods to critique reductionist traditions. Surgical tools are affixed to the edges of these paintings, frayed and irregular, adding a sculptural quality that necessarily rejects the 'all-over' flat surfaces conventional of Abstract Expressionism. Framed landscapes and scenes taken from the Internet and travels resembling an arbitrary newsfeed interrupt the formations of what could be all-white paintings. A calculated sense of spontaneity rests within the seemingly violent gestures of cutting open and dismantling the 'conventions' of painting in these works, to arrive at a renewed clarity and understanding around its materiality.



Ng Joon Kiat, *Patchwork Identity 2*, 2021, thread, watercolour on paper, 43 x 49 cm. Image courtesy of Ng Joon Kiat.

Such critical lens on painting and contemporary discourse imperative in Ng's practice reverberate throughout the exhibition. Since the pandemic, the Internet has formed a critical resource for Ng in seeking communities and aesthetics that are not conventionally bound by where one comes from. It serves as a proxy or utopian realm for assimilation and accommodating differences, transcending geographical boundaries to seek meaningful connections and comfort elsewhere. In his *Patchwork Identity* series, hazy landscapes overlap with impressions of news headlines and screengrabs, capturing the multifarious and ever-shifting composites of our environments that collectively inform our identities. These collage-esque paintings translate the infinite and expansive possibilities of shaping our sense of selves today, with the Internet as an indomitable tool.



Ng Joon Kiat, *Painting techniques on the go: observations from internet sites and physical sites. Screw those stupid white frames along the way. Ghost figure. Series 2, 2021, screws, board, watercolour, paper, white frame, 33 x 39 x 29 cm.* Image courtesy of Ng Joon Kiat.

In other paintings, Ng focuses on the immediacy of physical travel, reflecting the very temperament of watercolour as a medium. Much as watercolour has historically been concerned with documenting an artist's creative process and the on-site experience, recalling the likes of J.M.W Turner, *Screw the white frame* captures the ephemerality of a

moment. The 'ghost figures' that emerge in these paintings are after-effects or imprints made serendipitously when two paintings or sketches incidentally stuck together before proper drying are pulled apart. Ng pushes a step further in 'recreating' such transient moments beyond the canonised ways of displaying art, binding together loose sheets pages of these watercolours outside of the white frame—questioning the relevance and limitations of the white cube ideology. By extension, he also probes the power dynamics at play between the artist and museums, galleries, and art schools here in Singapore, where the established institutional infrastructure seem to leave little room for creative authenticity.

Tucked away in wooden boxes, *Looking at the South China Sea* is based on a few trips the artist had made to the coasts of South China Sea. With prayer at heart and navigation apps at hand, he searched for fishing villages that pointed towards this hot bed, while paying close attention to the dynamics of nature around him. At times, Ng was trapped in remote locations or swarmed by sandflies while chasing the seas, as he recollects. These scrolls of watercolours were painted on the spot and thus are infused with the saltiness of the sea and this spirit of adventure.

Alongside these new paintings, several examples of earlier series of works such as *White Noise* made in 2017 and *Painting Vocabularies* that were first exhibited in his 2019 solo exhibition at NTU ADM gallery Singapore are also on view to provide a broader view of the artist's oeuvre. In *Painting Vocabularies*, for instance, Ng recalls his past developments on his painting processes and materials, some of which strike a conversation with Abstract Expressionism and painting histories. This imaginary library nestled within the exhibition serves as a personal effort in archiving the some phases in his own painting practice as Ng feels museums would not be inclined to do so. The Not Singapore Art Project: Migration to the Internet Country and the Portable Identity is a highly idiosyncratic and introspective exploration of what contemporary painting could be and do for the artist—and perhaps us too—beyond place, time, social structures, and whatnot.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

NG JOON KIAT (b. 1976, Singapore) is a painter who works with the material language of paint as thought and conceptual processes. He draws references from archives of varied disciplines such as geography, microscopic science, history, cartography, surgical history, and city-planning to interrogate the practice and boundaries of painting. His present area of practice includes looking at shaping an artistic identity outside of national boundaries.

His work has been exhibited widely in Singapore and internationally. In 2019, he had a seminal solo exhibition '*Searching Operations: Bodies Of Painting by Ng Joon Kiat*' at the School of Art, Design and Media, Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in Singapore. Other notable solo exhibitions include Osage Gallery Hong Kong (2015, 2013 & 2012), Esplanade (2010), National Museum of Singapore (2007). Ng has also participated in the Singapore Biennale 2013 and Busan Biennale 2014, exhibited with Britain's Royal

Academicians, and represented Singapore in the Asia-Pacific Nokia Art Competition 2000 in Seoul.

ABOUT YEO WORKSHOP

Yeo Workshop is a gallery committed to contemporary art in Singapore. Based in Singapore's Gillman Barracks district, the gallery features the works of cutting-edge Southeast Asian artists. From artists who employ more traditional techniques and mediums to those who tap on new technologies and innovation such as CGI and AI, Yeo Workshop champions a diverse roster of artists whose practices reflect deep engagement with our contemporary socio-cultural landscape, to stimulate dialogue and critical discourse. In addition to its exhibition programming, it actively engages with the global art world through regular participation at international art fairs including Frieze Seoul, Asia Now Paris and Art Dubai. Covering a multi-disciplinary approach, the gallery defines itself by its progressive engagements that strive to shape the trajectory of contemporary art in Southeast Asia and beyond.

Embodying a collaborative spirit, not only with its artists, Yeo Workshop partners with curators, art foundations and international galleries to showcase and promote its artists beyond its own gallery space and traditional art spaces. Most recently for Singapore Art Week 2024, it presented *'Archiving Landscapes'* with support from the Yenn and Alan Lo Foundation, placing in dialogue the works of Priyageetha Dia and Maryanto to reflect on the region's shifting terrains.

Founded by Audrey Yeo in 2013, the gallery continues to push frontiers in the local and regional scene through community outreach and education, nurturing the next generation of both artistic talents and patrons. It regularly organises talks, workshops, and public programmes to foster deeper understanding and appreciation for contemporary art among wider audiences. Recognized for her achievements and dedication to the Singapore Art Scene, Audrey Yeo was appointed President of the Art Galleries Association (AGAS) in Singapore in 2023. A dynamic force in the regional scene, she has been instrumental in the launch of several noteworthy local platforms including S.E.A Focus art fair as the former Project Director in 2019, and the Julius Baer Next Generation Art Prize for Southeast Asian digital artists.

OPENING HOURS

Tue – Sat, 11am – 7pm; Sun, 12pm – 6pm
Closed Mon and Public Holidays.

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