

BY AMY OTHER NAME

BY NADDYA WANG



At Art Basel 2016, taking place in the Swiss city from 14 to 19 June, Singapore artist Ho Zhen (2015) presented in the Unlimited section by Tyler Print Institute (TPI).
Woven from footage cut from films starring known Hong Kong actor Tony Leung Chiu-Wai in 1989 and 2013, the 20-minute video tells the story of an individual known as Lai Teck, one of the aliases. Lai was the Secretary General of the Communist Party from 1939 to 1947, and a revolutionary who worked for the French, British and Japanese during World War II. The result is an intriguing portrait of the mysterious Lai that is simultaneously a fragmented depiction of the career of Leung and a work that is part of the artist's continuing exploration of neglected histories, which has given birth to films such as 'Utama - Every Name in History' (2003), a work about a founding myth of the Communist Party, 'The Nameless' - made in response to 'The Nameless' - made in response to Gene Z. Harahan's controversial book 'The Communist Struggle in Malaya', an authoritative history of Malayan communism published in the mid-1980s. 'The Nameless' is one of only two films of 80 works that will be displayed at the Unlimited gallery booth. It is also the first time a standard gallery booth. Emi Eu, Director, artist will show in the section. Emi Eu, Director says, "This will be our inaugural presentation in the sector and it's a significant moment for us beyond the normal booth, from large-scale live performances to sculptures, paintings for projection. It will mean more visibility for Singapore in general amongst notable curators and critics."
Ho's works, which relate to his interest in philosophy and history, have been widely prominent spaces such as the Guggenheim Museum Tate Modern and the Venice Biennale, and festivals such as the Berlin International Film Festival and the Cannes International Film Festival. Art Republik speaks with Ho to find out more about 'The Nameless' and its upcoming projects at Art Basel, as well as his current projects.
'The Nameless' is about a triple agent in Southeast Asia during World War II - the idea for the storyline come about?
The storyline is based on an actual, historical figure commonly known as Lai Teck - one of the most famous Communist Party from 1947 to 1954. He became the Secretary of the Malayan Communist Party from 1939 to 1947. Historical actors and events are profoundly

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Could you talk about the research that went into the making of this film?

'The Nameless' grew out of my interest in the histories of the 'left' in Malaya. I have been collecting and reading these materials over the last 11 or 12 years. In dealing with these histories, one of my most persistent questions was not how much one knew, but how one determines the truth claims of these accounts. After all, it is clear that much of what we know about these periods are dependent on the accounts of spies, traitors, informers and double-agents that were further edited and shaped by the police, who are the masters of these narratives.

How did Tony Leung Chiu-Wai become 'involved' in the project?

To be a successful triple agent requires a degree of acting prowess, and Tony Leung Chiu-Wai is one of the great actors of our time. What interests me about Tony Leung specifically is the blankness of his acting style which comes out in the films where he plays informers and traitors, for example in the 'Infernal Affairs' trilogy by Andrew Lau and Alan Mak, 'Hardbodied' by John Woo and Lee Ang's 'Lust, Caution', so I think that Tony Leung was to be a vessel for Lai Teck.

How does music in the film convey specific ideas about Lai Teck, for instance in the beautiful Vietnamese song playing on the gramophone at the beginning of the film?

All of the sound and music in 'The Nameless' are recycled from films involving Tony Leung Chiu-Wai. This particular Vietnamese song was hummed by a character from the film 'Cyclo'. In a sense every sound, like every image in 'The Nameless' has several meanings simultaneously. This simultaneously is important for creating a work about Lai Teck that also behaves like Lai Teck.

Where was 'The Nameless' filmed? And what was the biggest challenge you faced?

All the segments of 'The Nameless' were filmed around China, Hong Kong, and also Thailand, over a period of 24 years. As such I think of 'The Nameless' as a kind of growing up together with Tony Leung Chiu Wai. I don't think I faced any particularly great challenges in making this film. Things came together quite rapidly.

A few of your films are centered on names: 'Utama - Every Name in History is I', 'The Name' and 'The Nameless'. What is it about names that fascinate you?

I associate naming with human domination, the need to classify, master and possess. Naming is an act driven by a kind of desire to suspend time and flux by attributing a fixed essence and identity to beings and



and ambiguous at the same time. But more specifically, 'The Nameless' came out of a theatrical performance I created in 2014 called 'Ten Thousand Tigers', where I was looking into the histories and weretigers in the Malayan world, which brought me to Lai Teck. Could you talk about the research that went into the making of this film? 'The Nameless' grew out of my interest in the histories of the 'left' in Malaya. I have been collecting and reading these materials over the last 11 or 12 years. In dealing with these histories, one of my most persistent questions was not how much one knew, but how one determines the truth claims of these accounts. After all, it is clear that much of what we know about these periods are dependent on the accounts of spies, traitors, informers and double-agents that were further edited and shaped by the police, who are the masters of these narratives. How did Tony Leung Chiu-Wai become 'involved' in the project? To be a successful triple agent requires a degree of acting prowess, and Tony Leung Chiu-Wai is one of the great actors of our time. What interests me about Tony Leung specifically is the blankness of his acting style which comes out in the films where he plays informers and traitors, for example in the 'Infernal Affairs' trilogy by Andrew Lau and Alan Mak, 'Hardbodied' by John Woo and Lee Ang's 'Lust, Caution', so I think that Tony Leung was to be a vessel for Lai Teck. How does music in the film convey specific ideas about Lai Teck, for instance in the beautiful Vietnamese song playing on the gramophone at the beginning of the film? All of the sound and music in 'The Nameless' are recycled from films involving Tony Leung Chiu-Wai. This particular Vietnamese song was hummed by a character from the film 'Cyclo'. In a sense every sound, like every image in 'The Nameless' has several meanings simultaneously. This simultaneously is important for creating a work about Lai Teck that also behaves like Lai Teck. Where was 'The Nameless' filmed? And what was the biggest challenge you faced? All the segments of 'The Nameless' were filmed around China, Hong Kong, and also Thailand, over a period of 24 years. As such I think of 'The Nameless' as a kind of growing up together with Tony Leung Chiu Wai. I don't think I faced any particularly great challenges in making this film. Things came together quite rapidly. A few of your films are centered on names: 'Utama - Every Name in History is I', 'The Name' and 'The Nameless'. What is it about names that fascinate you? I associate naming with human domination, the need to classify, master and possess. Naming is an act driven by a kind of desire to suspend time and flux by attributing a fixed essence and identity to beings and

What are you working on now?

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How is 'The Nameless' going to be presented on TV?

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