

# Singapore artist to show in Art Basel Unlimited



The video installation, *The Nameless* (2015) by Ho Tzu Nyen (above), appropriates images from films which Hong Kong actor Tony Leung has starred in from 1989 to 2013. PHOTO: AMOS WONG

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In a first for Singapore, home-grown artist Ho Tzu Nyen will be showing alongside art world giants such as Ai Weiwei, Tracey Emin and Anish Kapoor at the coveted Unlimited platform of Art Basel in Basel, Switzerland, next month.

The exhibition platform, started in 2000, is a high-profile segment at the six-day art fair, which draws about 98,000 international visitors.

The sector regularly attracts the attention of major private and institutional collectors, as well as top art critics and curators.



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It is dedicated to projects that transcend the limits of a standard gallery booth, including monumental sculptures, wall paintings, video projections, large-scale installations and live performances. Among them are key works of modern art and new pieces by contemporary artists.

Ho's video installation, *The Nameless* (2015), is one of 88 works that made the cut from a pool of more than 200 submissions.

His work is presented by STPI, the only Singapore gallery at the major international art fair.

The Unlimited's curator Gianni Jetzer, 46, says he is "very interested" in showing *The Nameless* at the sector because "it is a work that deals with the political past of a region, but also with the culture of cinema" and it embodies a complex layer of meaning.

"Great contemporary art for me holds an enigma that can never be totally resolved. This is strongly the case in Ho's seminal work," he says.

*The Nameless* is inspired by the Sino-Vietnamese secret agent Lai Teck, whose real name is not known. Lai Teck was one of several aliases he used and the name he used as the secretary-general of the Malayan Communist Party from 1939 to 1947. He was killed in Thailand after being exposed as working for different sides, including the Japanese, French and British.

Ho, 40, who is an artist-in-residence at the prestigious DAAD residency in Berlin, says: "While the life of Lai Teck was a fascinating record of the complex interplay of power and ideology in 20th-century South-east Asia, I wasn't so much interested in telling his story as I was in thinking about how such a story can even be told."

The video is hence less about the story of a triple agent than about the work itself, which he says is meant to "function and communicate like a triple agent".

It appropriates images from various films which famed Hong Kong actor Tony Leung has starred in from 1989 to 2013, such that each shot "simultaneously tells the story of Lai Teck while evoking a missing context - the original films from which they have been derived".

He adds that he sampled images from films which Leung starred in because he is fascinated by the star's acting style.

He describes it as "a certain blankness that allows us to sense a kind of chaos beneath" as seen in films where the actor plays informers and traitors, such as the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy (2002 to 2003) by Andrew Lau and Alan Mak, *Hard Boiled* (1992) by John Woo and Lee Ang's *Lust, Caution* (2007).

STPI's director Emi Eu, 47, declines to say how much it will cost to mount Ho's installation at the fair, except to say that its team is taking a coffee machine and kettle there to save on miscellaneous costs. The installation is priced for sale at US\$42,000 (S\$58,000).

She says she was drawn to Ho's work because of its artistic rigour and compelling presentation, as well as how it can offer audiences at the fair in Europe a view of Hong Kong cinema, one of the great cinematic cultures in the world.

She says: "Our gallery is focused on working with artists from around the world and promoting artists in Singapore and South-east Asia on an international platform. And as the only Singapore gallery to show at Art Basel in Basel, we see it as our mission to tell the international art crowd what is happening in Singapore."