

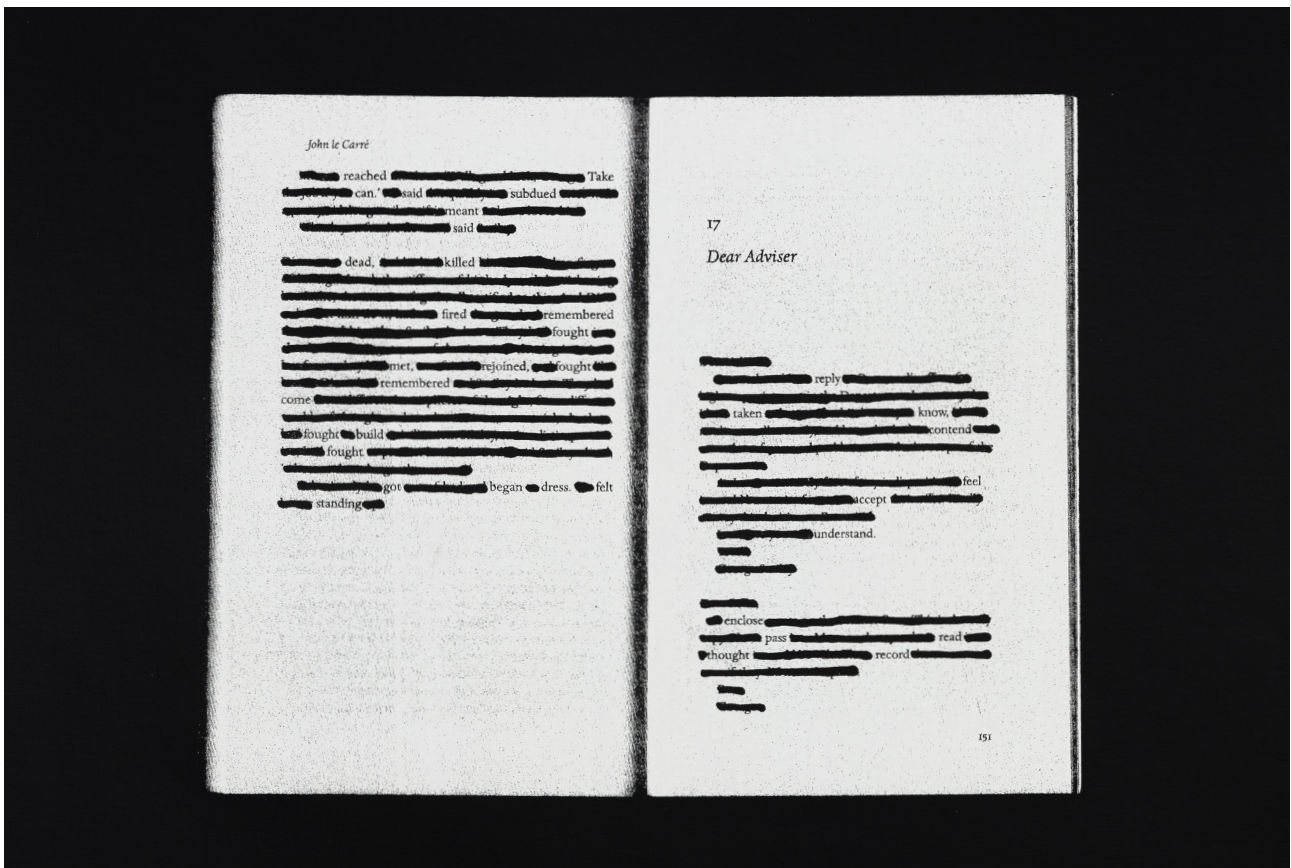
## Heman Chong: Peace Prosperity And Friendship With All Nations

### Opens to Public:

20 February - 18 April 2021

STPI Gallery

Free Entry



Heman Chong, *Call for the Dead*, 2020

STPI Gallery is pleased to announce *Peace Prosperity And Friendship With All Nations*, Heman Chong's first solo exhibition at the gallery.

From the Brexit coin, the backdoors of embassies, the spy novel, and the Straits Times to the QR codes of Singapore's COVID-19 SafeEntry system, the artworks in the exhibition bring together a constellation of conceptual gestures based upon everyday encounters and autobiographical objects that chronicle the complex political and cultural landscape of our present moment.

In 2020, the United Kingdom government released the Brexit fifty-pence coin to commemorate the UK leaving the European Union on 31 January 2020. To Chong, Brexit not only marks a global turn to ultranationalism but also a real end to the British Empire as the nation turned away from the multilateral internationalism that the European Union represented.

The title of the exhibition, which is both the text on the Brexit coin and an artwork in the exhibition, points to the commemorative coin as a byproduct of a significant historical turn in the capitalist world system. A method of de-colonialising systems of power, this deadpan gesture of pointing to an everyday object that is a vehicle and representation of global power defines the artworks in this exhibition.

*Call for the Dead* (2020), a monumental new work produced in residency at STPI represents the labour and agency inherent in the act of redaction. Expanded across an entire room with 83 silkscreen prints on linen, the work represents Chong's redaction of John le Carré's first spy novel *Call for the Dead* (2020). The novel was published in 1961 when Le Carré was a spy for British Intelligence.

Chong's blots of ink across the pages of the novel remove all but the verbs of the story, writing out the secrets that Le Carré could have leaked out in his fiction. For an artist in Singapore, a former regional headquarters for MI6, to redact a text about British Cold War espionage is an act of redaction as much as it is an act of post-colonial reclamation.

Accelerating Brexit's historical trajectory of de-globalisation, COVID-19 has called into question the primacy of a West-centered world system. *The Circuit Breaker Paintings* (2020), a series of 56 paintings, is as much art as it is an artefact of our times. History collects as layers upon the objects that Chong makes. The series of paintings mark every day of the 2020 Singapore circuit breaker (7 April 2020 – 1 June 2020).

The paintings, which collectively are a retrospective of Chong's painting practice dating back to 2009, are deliberately painted over with an 'X' that recalls the social-distancing measures cordoning off Singapore's public spaces. The 'X's mark both the circuit breaker as a hard stop in the daily flows of life and capital, and the reach of the state onto the surface of the painting.

Chong's latest works made in light of COVID-19 do not declare a world gone array, rather they resound with the quiet anxiety of a world turning slightly off-kilter. *In Safe Entry (Version 2.0-2.7)* (2020), an iteration of a public artwork made for the Singapore Art Museum, the QR Code – a small incidental phone-mediated encounter of everyday life – is enlarged to life-sized proportions.

The QR code, instead of giving you access to the national registration system, gives you access to a recorded walk of Terminal 2 Changi Airport posted on Chong's YouTube channel [Ambient Walking](#). The video was filmed before it closed for renovations during the circuit breaker. It functioned as a social coping tool that provided entertainment and access to a public space during a partial lock-down. A disabled man wrote Chong that his videos finally allowed him to walk freely around Singapore. Yet, the video of the airport terminal was also a disquieting suggestion of impending economic doom as flows of capital facilitated by in traveling human bodies reduced to a trickle.

*Foreign Affairs* is a series of photographs of embassy backdoors, which Chong repeats to form a pattern that he applies to the surface of the canvas, making 'paintings' and 'curtains'. In picturing the backdoor, Chong makes apparent the everyday manifestation of the immaterial yet exceptionally powerful acknowledgement of state legitimacy. Presented in this exhibition as a monumental and overpowering curtain, *Foreign Affairs #106* denotes a physical threshold that regulates what we see and how we navigate the gallery.

Chong's deadpan conceptualism in *Peace Prosperity And Friendship With All Nations* leaves one unsure if they should laugh or cry. In Chong's work, it is the simple accumulated labour of the task – from the "X"ing out of a painting to the deliberate monotonous grind of redacting an entire novel to the repetition of an image – that marks time, charts capital flows, and registers the totality of systems of governance.

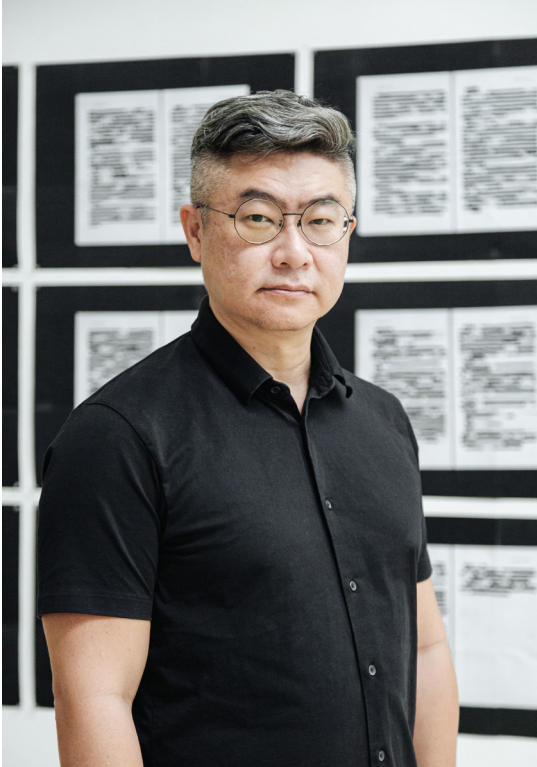
In the face of such expansive and everyday systems, the artworks, like the exhibition title, are ironic - at first funny and absurd and later bureaucratically insidious and unnerving. They are like bad jokes falling flat as reality sinks in.

This exhibition is curated by Kathleen Ditzig.

#### **Note to Editors**

For further details and interview requests, please contact STPI Gallery's Communications team at [communications@stpi.com.sg](mailto:communications@stpi.com.sg).

## About the Artist



Heman Chong (Malaysia, 1977) is an artist whose work is located at the intersection between image, performance, situations and writing. His practice can be read as an imagining, interrogation and sometimes intervention into infrastructure as an everyday medium of politics. He received his Masters in Communication Art & Design from The Royal College of Art, London in 2002.

His solo exhibitions include: *Spirits in the Material World* (Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam, Netherlands, 2019); *fiktionfiktionfiktion* (Weserburg Museum, Bremen, 2019); *Foreign Affairs* (Amanda Wilkinson Gallery, 2019); *Legal Bookshop* (Swiss Institute New York, USA, 2018); *Never is a Promise* (Calle Wright, Manila, Philippines, 2018); *Because, the Night* (72-13, Singapore, 2017); *IFS, Ands, Or Buts* (Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai, China, 2016); *An Arm, A Leg and Other Stories* (South London Gallery, London, England, 2015); *Never, a Dull Moment* (Art Sonje Center, Seoul, Korea, 2015); *Of Indeterminate Time Or Occurrence* (FOST Gallery, Singapore, 2014); *Correspondence(s)* (PI, New York, USA, 2014); *LEM1* (Rossi & Rossi, London, 2012); *Calendars (2020–2096)* (NUS Museum, Singapore, 2011); *Common People and Other Stories* (Art in General, New York, USA, 2007); *The Sole Proprietor and Other Stories* (Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou, China, 2007); *Bhutan* (Deckard & Pei, Singapore, 2006); *PHILIP* (Project Arts Centre, Dublin, 2006); *Vexillogy, Cartography and Other Stories* (Ellen de Bruijne Projects, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2005); *Snore louder if you can* (The Substation, Singapore, 2004); and *The Silver Sessions* (Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, Germany, 2003).

In 2006, he developed a writing workshop with Leif Magne Tangen at Project Arts Center in Dublin where they co-authored PHILIP (2007), a science fiction novel with Mark Aerial Waller, Cosmin Costinas, Rosemary Heather, Francis McKee, David Reinfurt and Steve Rushton.

Between 2012 and 2014, Chong produced Moderation(s), a third space that exists between Witte de With Contemporary Art in Rotterdam, Netherlands and Spring Workshop in Hong Kong, China which involved more than 50 artists and comprised a conference, three exhibitions, three residencies and a book of short stories.

Chong is the co-director and founder (with Renée Staal) of The Library of Unread Books which has been hosted by the NTU Center for Contemporary Art, Singapore; The Museum of Contemporary Art and Design (MCAD), Manila; Casco, Utrecht; Kunstverein Milano, Milan; Jameel Arts Center, Dubai; tranzit, Prague, and I\_S\_L\_A\_N\_D\_S, Singapore.

His work is included in the public collections of Art Sonje Center, Kadist Art Foundation, M+ Museum, The National Museum of Art Osaka, NUS Museum, Rockbund Art Museum, Singapore Art Museum and Weserburg Museum.

## About the Guest Curator

Kathleen Ditzig is a curator and researcher based in Singapore. Her work unpacks the enduring legacies of the Cold War, and examines art as an exceptional site and system of speaking to power.

She is a PhD candidate at the Nanyang Technological University, School of Art, Design and Media and recently was a fellow of the research platform Modern Art Histories in and across Africa, South and Southeast Asia (MAHASSA), convened by the Getty Foundation's Connecting Art Histories project. She is also a co-founder of [offshoreart.co](http://offshoreart.co), a curatorial and research collective that examines contemporary flows of capital and art.

Her art historical research has been published in Southeast of Now (NUS Press, 2017) and presented at international academic conferences and platforms. Other than being featured in artist catalogues, her writing has been published by Artforum, OSMOS magazine, Art Agenda, Art Review Asia and Flash Art, and in books such as *Perhaps it is high Time for a Xeno-Architecture to Match* (Sternberg, 2018).

She recently curated *As The West Slept* (World Trade Center, 2019) as part of Performa 2019 and was assistant curator to Ute Meta Bauer for the exhibition *Spring of Democracy* (2020), commissioned by the Gwangju Biennale Foundation.

## About STPI

STPI Gallery fosters the exchange of ideas in contemporary art with its diverse exhibitions and public programme. The gallery hosts specially curated exhibitions of works produced in the STPI Creative Workshop and regularly participates in international art fairs. This enables it to nurture and sustain local and international interest in both its residency artists as well as the mediums of print and paper.

STPI is a creative workshop and contemporary art gallery based in Singapore. Established in 2002, STPI is committed to promoting artistic experimentation in the mediums of print and paper, making it one of the most cutting-edge destinations for contemporary art in Asia. STPI sits alongside National Gallery Singapore and the Singapore Art Museum as part of the national Visual Arts Cluster of leading institutions in the region.