

STPI AT 'OVR: PORTALS'

ARTIST HEMAN CHONG REVEALS THE
INVISIBLE GEOPOLITICAL CONDITIONS THAT
SHAPE OUR WORLD TODAY

VIP Preview

16 - 17 June 2021

2.00PM CET / 8.00PM SGT

Open to Public

17 - 19 / 20 June 2021

2.00PM CET / 8.00PM SGT &

12.00AM CET / 6.00AM SGT



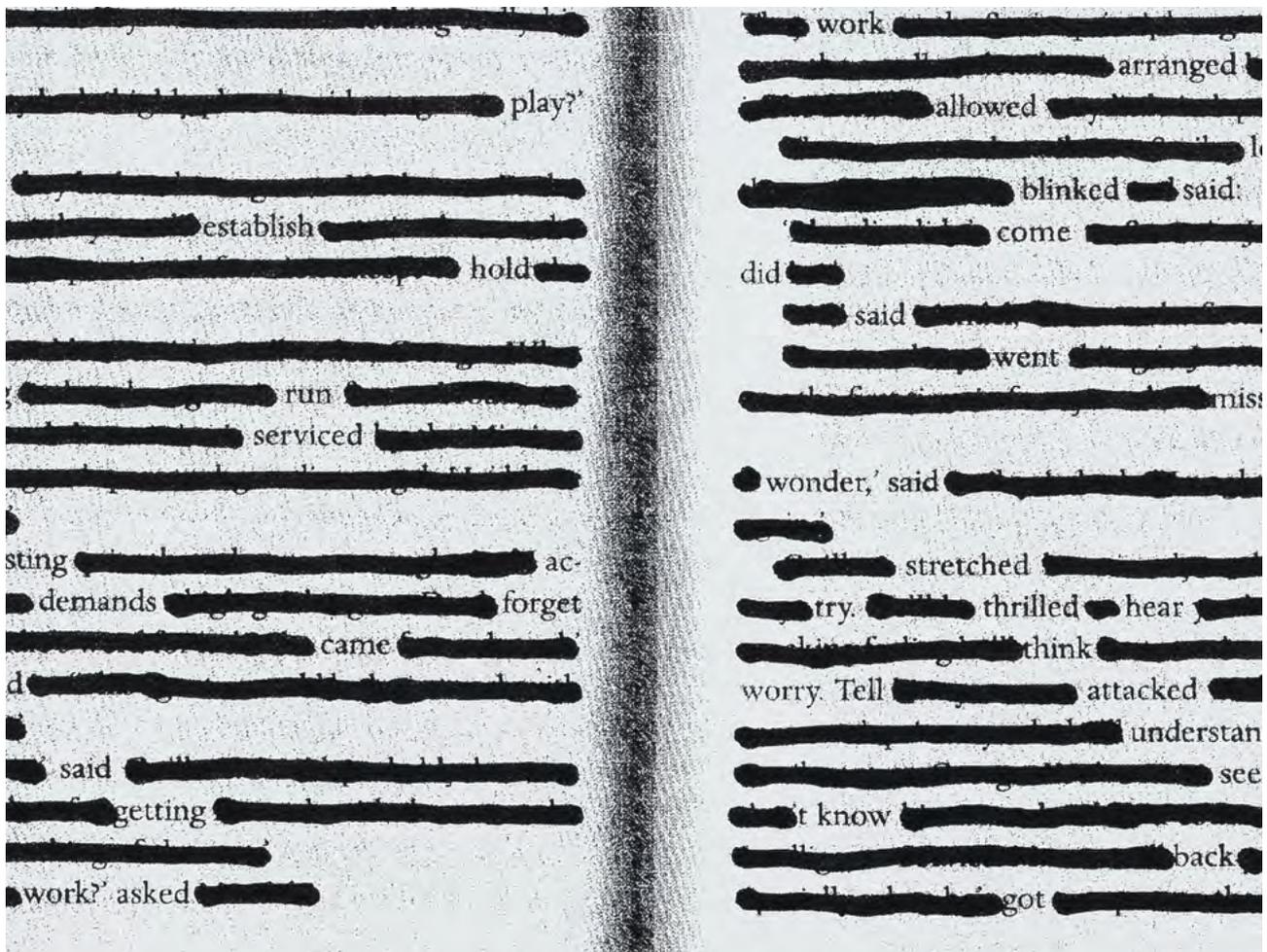
Heman Chong, *Call for the Dead #6*, 2020, Screenprint and acrylic on linen, 46 x 61 x 3.8 cm.

© Heman Chong / STPI. Image courtesy of the Artist and STPI.

Heman Chong's works are penetrating interrogations and interventions into the everyday medium of politics. Taking cues from the furtive manoeuvrings that prop up our international geopolitical theatre, the artist incisively reveals underlying conditions that have led us to the present state of affairs we find ourselves in today.

STPI will present two works by Chong, ***Call for the Dead*** (2020) and ***Foreign Affairs*** (2018). The works respond to the urgent concerns posed by the premise of 'OVR: Portals' by Art Basel, which calls for artistic practices that interrogate the parameters that have shaped our contemporary landscape.

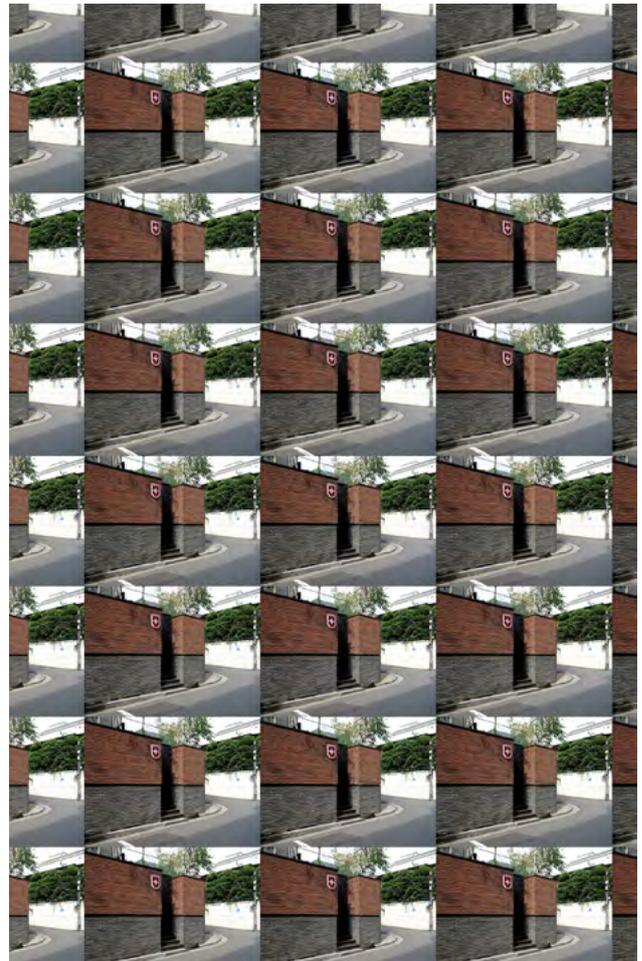
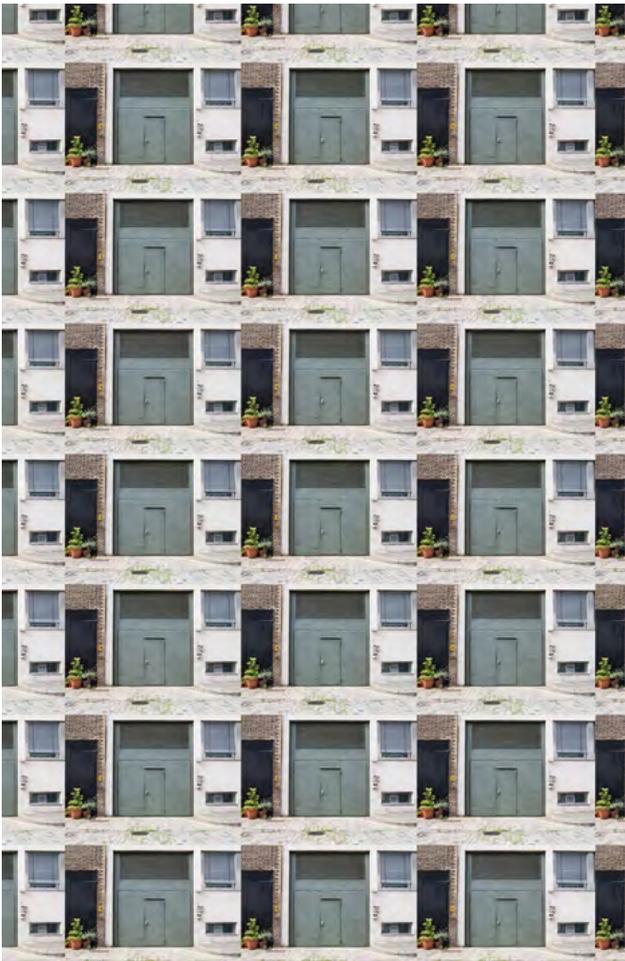
Please direct press enquiries and requests for press images and interviews to:
STPI Communications | communications@stpi.com.sg



Heman Chong, *Call for the Dead #40* (detail), 2020, Screenprint and acrylic on linen, 46 x 61 x 3.8 cm.
© Heman Chong / STPI. Image courtesy of the Artist and STPI.

Call for the Dead (2020) conjures up ghostly spectres from recent history and propels them into the present. Completed during Chong's residency with STPI, the work takes its cue from a spy novel of the same name, 'Call for the Dead' by John le Carré who was himself a British intelligence spy during the Cold War (estimated 1947–1991). This monumental event was a pivotal interval in international politics, where the relentless ideological and geopolitical rivalry between communist Soviet Union and democratic America threatened to tear the world into half. Significantly, Southeast Asia became a theatre for the Cold War for these two superpowers, where devastating proxy wars took place. Yet, the actual espionages that launched these destructive episodes remain alarmingly opaque to an unknowing public, in spite of how its ramifications are still very much present today.

In Chong's powerful gesture of redacting everything but the verbs from 'Call for the Dead', the artist makes apparent the enormous shroud of secrecy surrounding Cold War operations exemplified by the frustrating lack of information from *Call for the Dead's* blacked-out contents. The monumentality of the work, where each page was laboriously worked on and then silkscreened onto 83 linen canvases, emphasises the immensity of the covert operations whose secrets are enough to fill up an entire room. Through this compelling act of censorship which calls attention to the powerful yet obscure state powers that leak into the everyday, a haunting tenor pervades *Call for the Dead*.



Heman Chong, (left) *Foreign Affairs #121*, (right) *Foreign Affairs #171*, (both) 2018, UV print on unprimed canvas, 200 x 130 cm. Image courtesy of the Artist and Rossi & Rossi.

Foreign Affairs (2018) deftly illuminates the secrecy of geopolitical infrastructures that play a heavy hand in shaping our lived present. In this series, images of embassy backdoors are systematically repeated over and over again on canvases and curtains. These backdoors literally and symbolically foreground the infrastructural importance of the embassy as an exceptional space of sovereignty and legitimacy for state powers. Eerily, in the same year that this work was created, a Saudi dissident journalist was assassinated by Saudi agents in their Istanbul embassy, driving home the point of the foreign embassy as a “backdoor”, clandestine space.

Through the act of repetition, Chong makes visible these buildings which are emblematic of international infrastructural enablers that tightly bolster the untouchable sovereignty of the state. These backdoors visually manifest the idea of a system hiding in plain view, surrounded by a shroud of mystery despite its peoples wielding an extraordinary amount of influence over daily lives.

Read in proximity, both works highlight the political machinations that greatly shape the world we live in. Through his masterful conceptualism, the artist uncloaks the unknowability of these phenomena, and how we, the participants and products of this contemporary system, are markedly kept in the dark.

You will be able to access our Online Viewing Room [here](#) during its run.

About the Artist



Heman Chong

Heman Chong 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 *Peace Prosperity And Friendship With All Nations* (STPI, Singapore, 2021), *Spirits in the Material World* (Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam, Netherlands, 2019), *fiktionfiktionfiktion* (Weserburg Museum, Bremen, 2019) and *Legal Bookshop* (Swiss Institute New York, USA, 2018). 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 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.