

# THE GREAT EXHIBITION

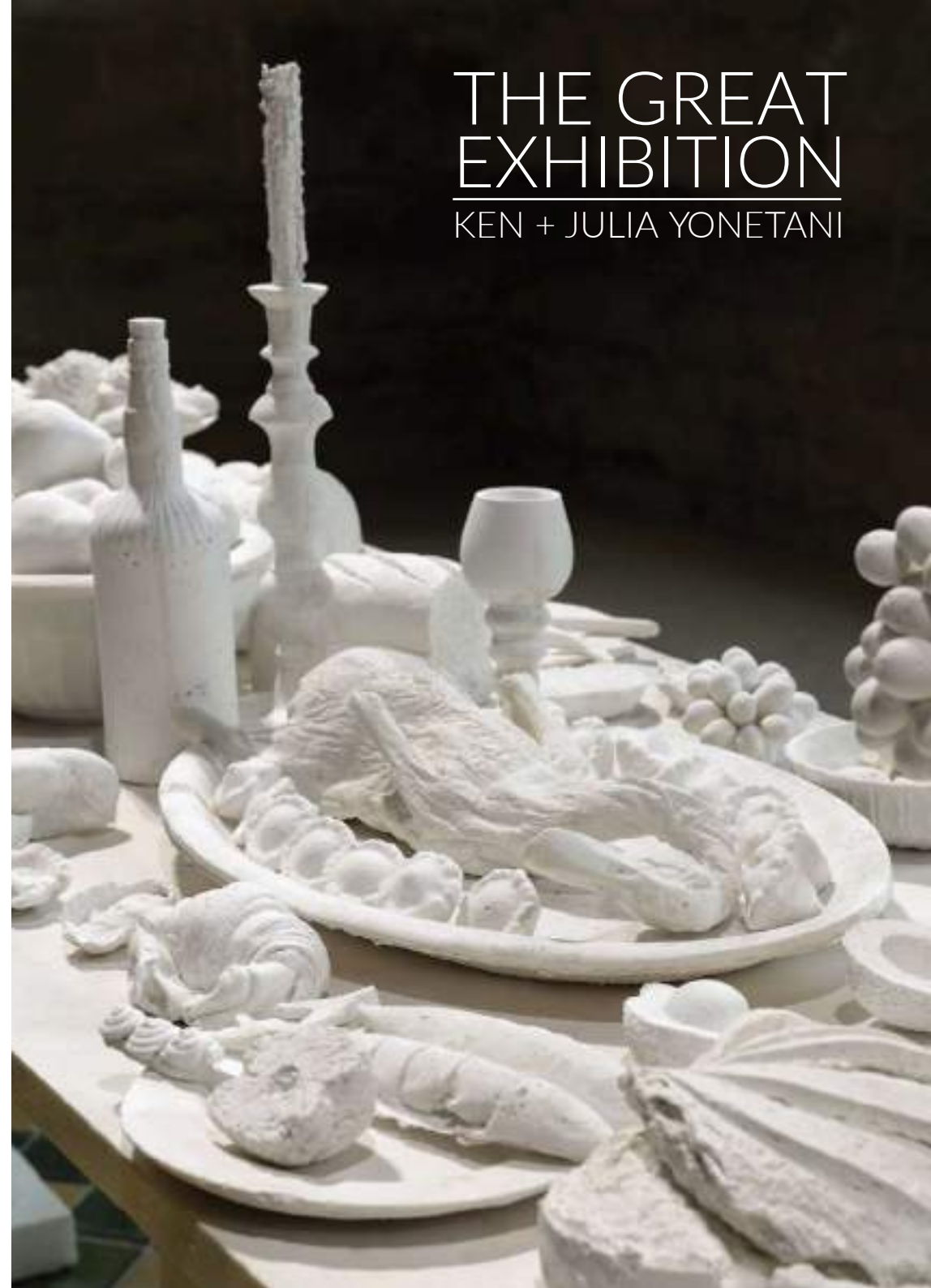
KEN + JULIA YONETANI



# THE GREAT EXHIBITION

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KEN + JULIA YONETANI



## FOREWORD

I first saw the chandelier artworks created collaboratively by this Australian-Japanese artists' duo at the 2013 Singapore Biennale. Ever since the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011 caused the accident in which three nuclear power plants went into meltdown, many regions of Japan (including Tokyo) have as a consequence been constantly exposed to the threat of radioactivity. In Ken and Julia's work, the size of the chandelier expresses the volume and scale of a particular country's nuclear power stations, which left a strong impression on me. The sinisterly glittering uranium glass gradually degrading within these chandeliers seemed to be sounding a warning about humanity's future.

At the time Ken + Julia were widely known in America, Europe and Australia for presenting work that addressed environmental and societal problems with a sharply incisive approach, but they were still largely un-exhibited in Japan. Feeling my soul moved as a gallerist for the first time in a long while, I wrote to the artists in Okinawa where they were then living, and we were able to realize their Tokyo exhibition.

This time, we present their first solo exhibition in Singapore. To work together with these artists, whose practice possesses such spirit of societal critique and on such a major scale, can only be described as an unanticipated joy.

May, 2016  
**MIZUMA Sueo**  
CEO, Mizuma Gallery

### *The Last Supper (details)*

2014, salt, 900 x 75 x 125 cm,  
installation view, L' Abbaye de Maubuisson  
site d' art contemporain, Val d' Oise, France







***The Last Supper***

2014, salt, 900 x 75 x 125 cm,  
installation view at L' Abbaye de Maubuisson site d' art contemporain, Val d' Oise, France

## BEAUTY AND PANIC: THE ART OF KEN AND JULIA YONETANI

Each time I encounter the work of Ken and Julia Yonetani, I am reminded of the dreams of medieval alchemists, in their search to transform base metals into precious gold or a universal elixir. Alchemy, as a forerunner of modern chemistry believed in the possibility of transformation, of transfiguration of the base, common and everyday into the valuable and valued.

Ken and Julia's sculptures, performances and installations seem to be acts of anxious alchemy. They are attempts to transform prosaic and materials such as sugar, salt, and uranium glass beads (a common decorative material from our historical past) into something more precious but ominous. The resulting installations and sculptures are visually stunning and emotionally evocative. Yet for them, this universal elixir of the alchemical process is not merely an object of beauty, but rather a carrier of larger anxieties and insecurities for our continued existence in the world. Indeed, the artists have more pointedly described their work as 'Armageddon work' as it expresses their own anxieties about our future. The root cause of this uncertainty are man-made and yet almost intractable as its roots lie in very basic attempts by societies to grow food, power our cities, provide water for ourselves and our crops.

That quality of evoking both beauty and panic is exemplified by the installation *Crystal Palace: The Great Exhibition of the Works of all Nuclear Nations* in response to the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power disaster in Japan, perhaps their most ambitious work till date. The complete version was first shown at the Singapore Biennale 2013 and comprised of 30 antique chandelier frames and one replicated frame, which had been fitted out with uranium glass. The UK chandelier is being presented in this current exhibition. Once powered on, the UV bulbs cause the glass beads to glow with a haunting green. Collectively, the 31 pieces signal the existence of the 31 nuclear nations of our contemporary world, and the size of each chandelier corresponds to the number of operating nuclear plants that nation possesses. The USA, France and Japan figure quite large in this installation due to their investments in nuclear power. The hope of the artists was also that when a particular nation turned off its

nuclear plants, the corresponding chandelier would also be switch off. The 2013 Singapore exhibition marked the completion of all the pieces in this series and its premiere showing in South-east Asia, a region still without nuclear power plants. The title of the work references the grandiose cast iron and plate glass building designed by Sir Joseph Paxton for the mega exposition called the 'Great Exhibition' of 1851 in London. The 1851 Crystal Palace was an ultimately fragile monument to the world conquering ambitions of the British Empire and a demonstration of the unparalleled heights of human achievement that the industrial revolution promised to bring to humanity.

Although the thrilling visceral beauty of the current *Crystal Palace* installation-with its glass beads seemingly glowing from within using its own energy-evokes the heroic reach of human technological progress, the visitor's knowledge of the source of this beauty brings uncertainty and ambivalence, similar to how some now feel towards the possibilities of a nuclear powered future. Writing in the local daily, art critic Clara Chow remarked that "I cannot help but admire Crystal Palace's guts... its masterful treading of the border between beauty and panic. One way or another, it has altered me. And that is the most any piece of art can hope to do." (Straits Times, 12 November 2013).

Similarly, beauty and panic permeate the other work in this exhibition that uses uranium glass, *Wishes*. This work is a series of signs after cheery slogans from Disneylands across the world. The slogans "It's Magic" (French), "Happiness is here" (Japanese) and "Tomorrowland" (Mandarin) all riff off Disneyland's desire to be a place where "Where Dreams Come True...". Instead of neon, the works is made of uranium glass tubing and instead of electrodes, glow independently a haunting green in reaction to the UV light tubing. Like with *Crystal Palace*, the use of uranium glass contaminates with perceived danger the cheery surfaces and form of the work, with its promise of instant happiness.

Personally, I feel that it is their work with uranium glass that most compellingly captures the ambivalent mix of emotions that characterize their work. They were the works that first drew me to their practice when I was researching for the Singapore Biennale 2013: If the World Changed. These are not easy works, given that they seduce us while reminding us of the dangers that

they embody. A more recent, smaller-scaled work *Three Wishes* is thematically linked to the earlier *Wishes* signage work through its reference to Disney. This sculpture, however, goes beyond suggestion and allusion to physically embodying the consequences of miss-steps in nuclear power. The angelic Tinker Bell is transformed here into the atomic genie, with wings of an actual butterfly. The butterfly specimen is the *Zizeeria maha*, a common Lycaenid butterfly in Japan. The specimen, while beautiful is tainted goods. The artists, worked with scientists led by Professor Joji Otaki at the University of the Ryukyus, Okinawa, to produce this work, raising the butterflies with Otaki's team using eggs of specimens collected from an area approximately 20kms from the Fukushima Daichi nuclear power plant. Professor Otaki's research had identified mutations and higher mortality rates in these butterflies populations as a result of radiation exposure. These mutated specimens are the unexpected offspring of our dreams of unlimited and easy energy, of which Disney himself was an enthusiastic advocate some time ago.

While Ken and Julia Yonetani's work engages ultimately with larger, global themes, the trigger is often local and specific. This is also echoed in the other works in this exhibition, which use salt as an expressive medium. Specifically, the artists have over the last few years, created a series of work in response to the threat of rising highly saline groundwater in the Murray-Darling Basin. The rivers in the basin span the states of New South Wales, Victoria, Australian Capital Territory, and parts of Queensland and South Australia. As the country's most significant agricultural areas, it produces up to 90 per cent of Australia's fresh food. This crucial 'food bowl' however, are under constant threat from the increasing rise of highly saline groundwater which would devastate the river ecosystem and croplands. The rise of the water table in the basin and increasing salinity was the result of practices such as river regulation, irrigation and the clearing of bushland as well as drought. In response, up to 550,000 tonnes of groundwater salt is pumped out of the ground every year to try and stem the rise of the saline groundwater. From 2010, the artists began working with salt during a Synapse art-science residency awarded by the Australian Network for Art & Technology (ANAT) which enabled them to collaborate with scientists at the Murray-Darling Freshwater Research Centre and Sunrise 21 in Mildura.

During this residency, they developed a way to manipulate salt such that it could be poured into moulds and then cured to produce sculptural forms. Since then, they have gone on to produce works shaped in the form of food produce, but using salt extracted from the Murray River. In works such as *Still Life: The Fruit Bowl* (2011), *Grape Chandelier* (2011), *Five Senses* (2011), culminating in the massive installation *The Last Supper* (2014), the artists 'crystalize' the rising threats against food security as a result of human over-reach. The most recent work *The Last Supper*, in particular, draws its power also from its evocation of the social and religious values attributed to salt. Whether as symbol of sanctity in Christian mythology or used to ward off evil in parts of Asia, its use as the sole raw material to construct the last supper on the eve of death and slaughter powerfully brings across the message of humanity reaching a penultimate point in history. Food that is supposed to nourish our bodies have been turned inedible and dangerous, a punishment to come. In this imaginative realm, we are all like Lot's wife, at the moment before we are turned into pillars of salt for our failure to heed the warnings.

### **Tan Boon Hui**

*Vice President, Global Art & Cultural Programs  
And Director, Asia Society Museum NY*

**Boon Hui Tan** is Vice President for Global Arts & Cultural Programs and Director, Asia Society Museum, New York, where he leads the organization's global arts and cultural activities. He oversees Asia Society Museum's acclaimed exhibition programs and the Asia Society Museum Collection, which comprises the Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection of Traditional Asian Art and the Contemporary Art Collection of photography and new media works by Asian and Asian American artists. Additionally, he directs the organization's initiative Transfuze: The Asia Arts and Museum Network. Prior to this, he was Assistant Chief Executive (Museum & Programs) at the National Heritage Board (NHB) in Singapore, overseeing exhibitions, programs, and outreach events across the Board's museums, institutions, and divisions. He was Artistic Director for the 2015 Singapore en France, le Festival, the largest multidisciplinary presentation of contemporary culture from Singapore and Southeast Asia in France, and is a founding board member of the International Biennial Association. As Director of the Singapore Art Museum from 2009 to 2013, he led the transformation of the museum into a contemporary art institution focused on Southeast Asia and assembled the largest public collection of contemporary art from the region. He conceived the regional focus and group curating approach of the groundbreaking Singapore Biennale 2013: If The World Changed, as well as serving as its Project Director and Co-Curator.





above:

***The Five Senses***

2011, salt, 92 x 123 x 6 cm each

installation view at L' Abbaye de Maubuisson site d' art contemporain, Val d' Oise, France

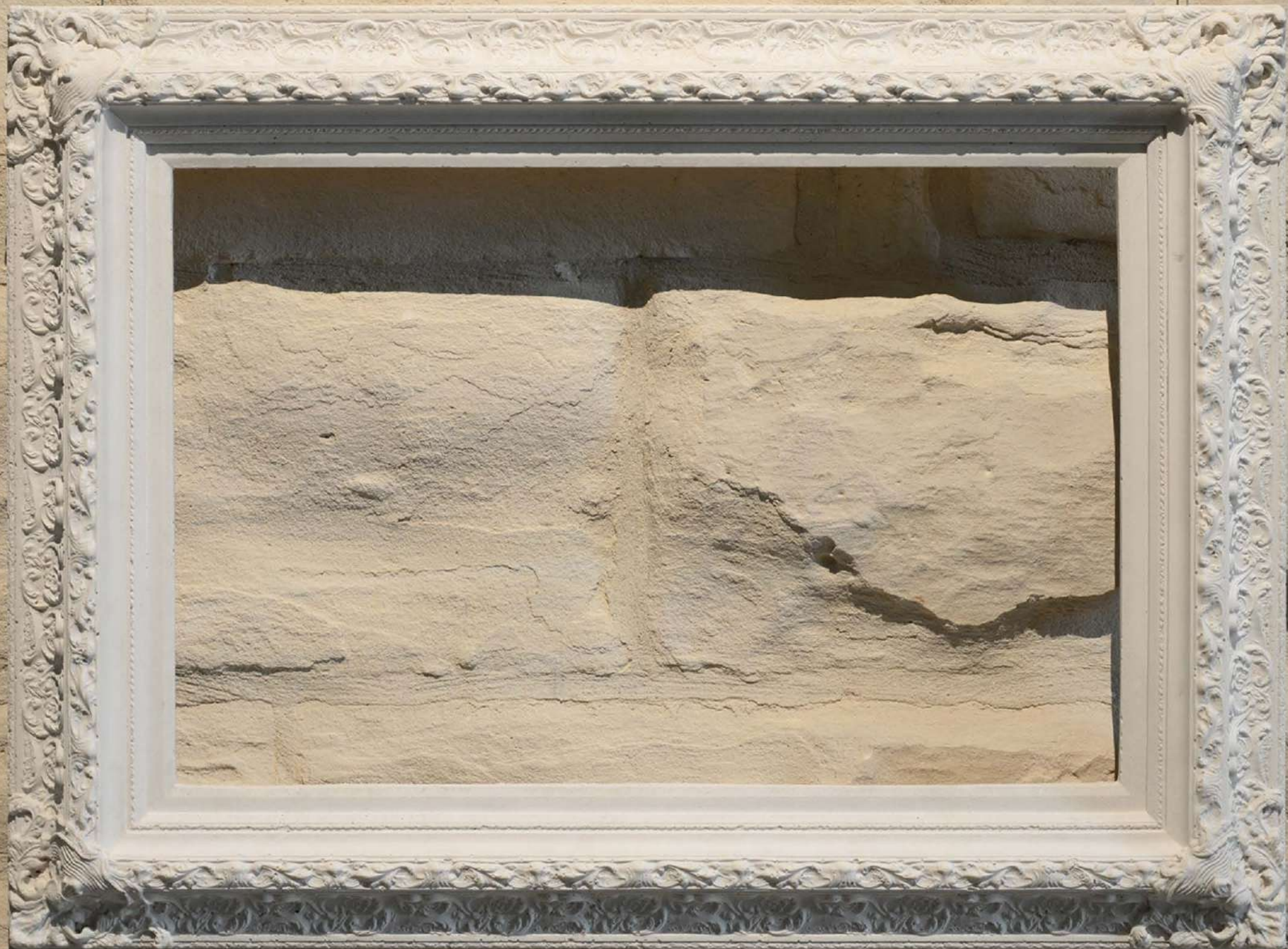
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***Sense of Vision***

2011, salt, 92 x 123 x 6 cm

installation view at L' Abbaye de Maubuisson site d' art contemporain, Val d' Oise, France



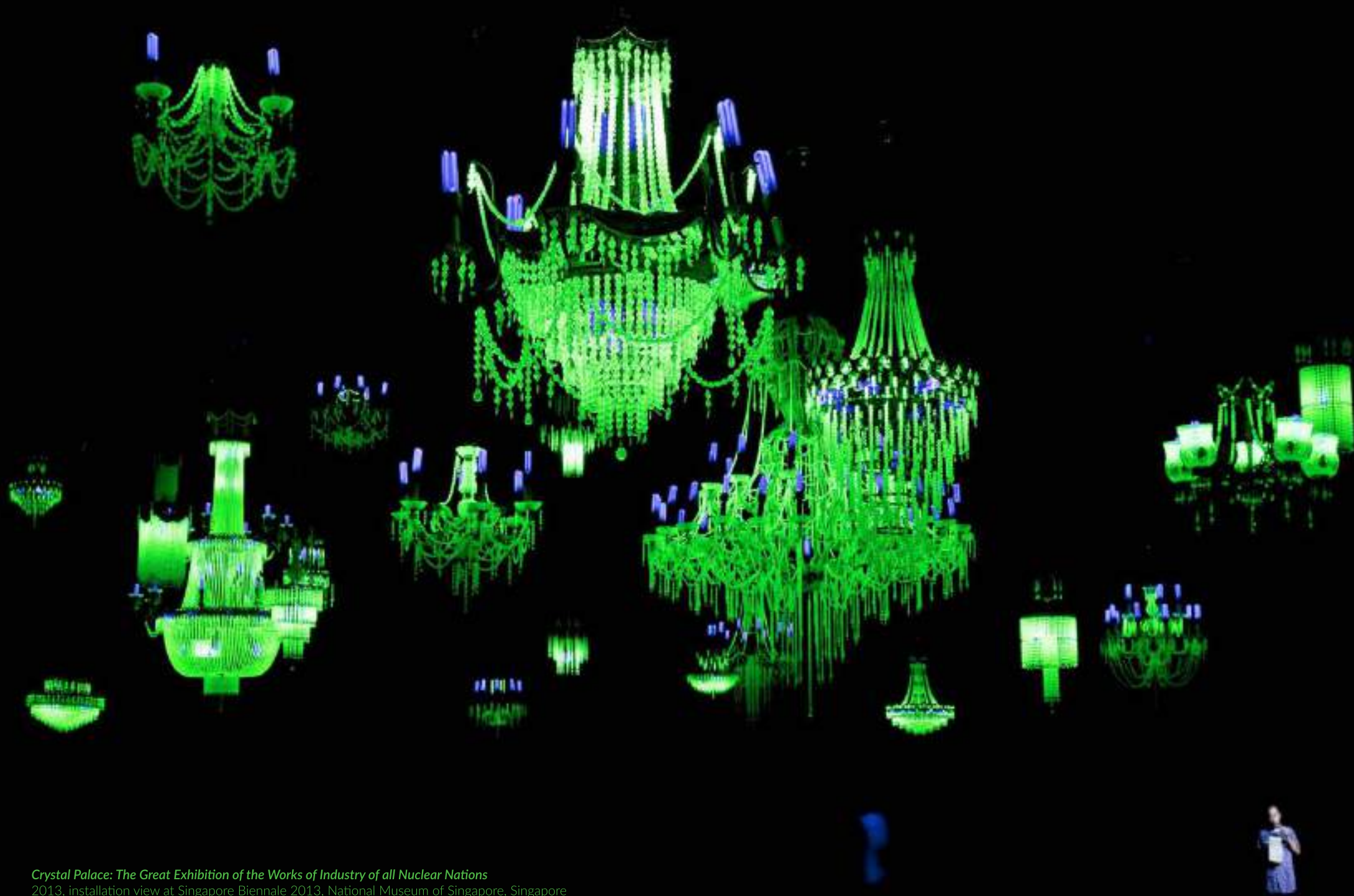






***Grape Chandelier***  
2011, salt, 150 x 150 x 210 cm  
installation view at L' Abbaye de Maubuisson site d' art contemporain, Val d' Oise, France





*Crystal Palace: The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nuclear Nations*  
2013, installation view at Singapore Biennale 2013, National Museum of Singapore, Singapore





*Crystal Palace: The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nuclear Nations (United Kingdom)*  
2012 - 2013, uranium glass, metal structure, UV lighting, 68 x 68 x 79 cm

ハピネス イズ ヒア, *Wishes*, 明日世界, *C'est Magique*  
2015, installation view at Mizuma Art Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

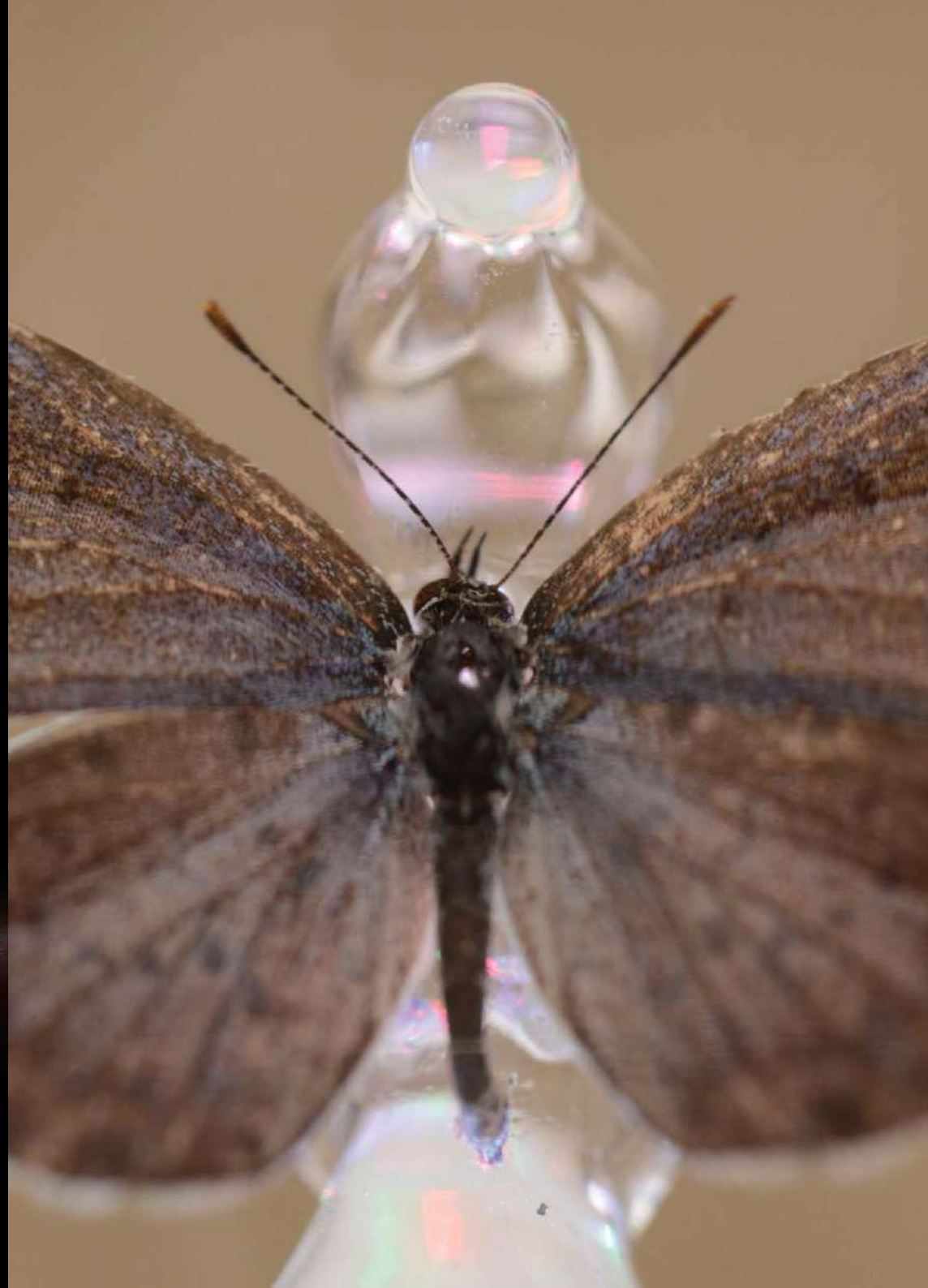


Wishes

明日世界

*Wishes*, 明日世界  
2015, uranium glass tubing, UV light, 40 x 68 cm, 30 x 125 cm





*Three Wishes*  
2014, glass figurine, butterfly specimen, glass dome, music box, 15 x Ø 9 cm



*Ultrabuddha*  
2010, 23 ct gold leaf on ceramic, 90 x 70 x 40 cm







KEN + JULIA YONETANI

Ken	1971	Born in Tokyo, Japan / work and live in Kyoto, Japan
	1996	Bachelor of Economics, Chiba University of Commerce, Chiba, Japan
	2005	Master of Arts (Visual Arts), School of Art, Australian National University, Australia
	2012	PhD (Visual Arts), Sydney College of the Arts, The University of Sydney, Australia
Julia	1972	Born in Tokyo, Japan / work and live in Kyoto, Japan
	1994	Bachelor of Arts, University of Sydney, Australia
	1999	Master of Arts, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, University of Tokyo, Japan
	2003	PhD (History), Australian National University, Australia

Upcoming Exhibitions

2016	"Perpetual Uncertainty", Bildmuseet, Umeå, Sweden
	"Kenpoku International Art Festival", Ibaraki, Japan

Solo Exhibitions

2106	"The Great Exhibition : Ken + Julia Yonetani", Mizuma Gallery, Singapore
2015	"The Last Temptation: the art of Ken + Julia Yonetani", NGA Contemporary, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Australia
	"Periodic Tales: The Art of the Elements", Compton Verney, U.K.
	"Wishes", Mizuma Art Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
	"Close Encounters", ArtPlay, Melbourne, Australia
	"The Last Supper", Glasshouse, Port Macquarie Regional Gallery, Australia traveled to Hawkesbury Regional Gallery, Western Plains Cultural Centre, Bendigo Art Gallery, Tweed River Art Gallery, Bega Valley Regional Gallery, Australia
2014	"Un autre rêve - Another Dream", L'abbaye de Maubuisson site d'art contemporain, Saint Queen-l'Aumone, Val d'Oise, France
	"The Last Suppermarket", Melbourne Art Fair, Fehily Contemporary, Melbourne, Australia
	"Crystal Palace: The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nuclear Nations", Fehily Contemporary, Melbourne, Australia
	"The Last Supper", Hazelhurst Regional Gallery, Sydney, Australia
2012	"Crystal Palace: The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nuclear Nations", Arterreal Gallery, Sydney, Australia
	"What the Birds Knew", 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Sydney, Australia
2011	"Sense of Taste", GV Art, London, U.K.
	"Ultrabuddha", Glasshouse, Port Macquarie, Australia
	"Still Life: The Food Bowl", Arterreal Gallery, Sydney, Australia
2010	"Ultrabuddha- that is why I want to be saved", Arterreal Gallery, Sydney, Australia
	"Ultrabuddha- that is why I want to be saved", Jan Manton Art, Brisbane, Australia
2009	"GLOBAL WARMING IS OVER! (If you want it.)", Federation Square, Melbourne, Australia
	"Sweet Barrier Reef in Venice", Dianne Tanzer Gallery, Melbourne, Australia
	"Sweet Barrier Reef for the 21st Century - Play Strauss's waltz grandly", La Trobe University Museum of Art, Australia
2005	"Sweet Barrier Reef", Artspace, Sydney, Australia
	"fumie-butterfly mandala", West Space, Melbourne, Australia
	"Sugar Project-Underwater", Phatspace, Sydney, Australia2
2003	"fumie-tiles", CSIRO Discovery, Canberra, Australia



## Selected Group Exhibitions

<b>2016</b>	<i>"Constituent Concreteness"</i> , Mizuma Gallery, Singapore
<b>2015</b>	<i>"Periodic Tales: The Art of the Elements"</i> , Compton Verney, U.K. <i>"Solid State: Casula Powerhouse"</i> , Sydney Australia <i>"Camera Atomica"</i> , The Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto Canada <i>"Scientific Gardening"</i> , ERES-Stiftung, Munich, Germany <i>"Radioactive: the Return of Godzilla in Japan"</i> , RMIT Gallery Melbourne, Australia
<b>2014</b>	<i>"Hypothèse de l'impact géant"</i> , Le Carreau, Cergy, France
<b>2013</b>	<i>"If the world changed"</i> , Singapore Biennale 2013, National Museum of Singapore, Singapore <i>"Sydney Contemporary 13"</i> , Installation Contemporary, Carriageworks, Sydney, Australia <i>"but mostly air"</i> , ANU School of Art Gallery, Canberra, Australia <i>"Not Book"</i> , Beit Ha'ir, Tel Aviv, Israel <i>"19th International Symposium on Electronic Art"</i> , Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, Australia <i>"Foundation's edge: artists and technology"</i> , QUT Art Museum, Brisbane, Australia <i>"Art &amp; Science"</i> , GV Art, London, U.K.
<b>2012</b>	<i>"Art+Food"</i> , Brenda May Gallery, Sydney, Australia <i>"Keeping Up Appearances"</i> , NKV, Germany
<b>2011</b>	<i>"Your Move: Australian Artists Play Chess"</i> , Samstag Museum, Adelaide, Australia <i>"2112 Imagining the Future"</i> , RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, Australia <i>"Arboreal"</i> , Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia <i>"That's not how you make porridge"</i> , Goulburn Regional Gallery, Australia <i>"Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize"</i> , Woollahra, Sydney, Australia <i>"Palimpsest #8"</i> , Mildura, Victoria, Australia <i>"Art &amp; Science"</i> , GV Art, London, U.K. <i>"Sir John Sulman Prize"</i> , Art Gallery of NSW, Australia <i>"Precious"</i> , Sydney College of the Art, Sydney, Australia <i>"2011 Josephine Ulrick and Win Schubert Photography Award"</i> , GCAG, Australia <i>"Underfoot"</i> , Overhead, Object Gallery, Sydney, Australia <i>"genart_sys"</i> , Australia Council for the Arts, Sydney, Australia
<b>2010</b>	<i>"2010 Stan and Maureen Duke Gold Coast Art Prize"</i> , GCAG, Australia <i>"Your Move: Australian Artists Play Chess"</i> , Bendigo Art Gallery, Australia <i>"Fisher's Ghost Art Award"</i> , Campbelltown Arts Centre, Australia <i>"Once Removed"</i> , Campbelltown Arts Centre, Sydney, Australia
<b>2009</b>	<i>"Satellite APT 6"</i> , Jan Manton Art, Brisbane, Australia <i>"The Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize 2009"</i> , Sydney, Australia

## Grants, Scholarships and Awards

<b>2014</b>	Creative Australia New Work Grant Australia Council for the Arts Asialink Residency Grant
<b>2013</b>	Creative Australia New Work Grant Australia Council for the Arts
<b>2012</b>	Arts NSW Creation and Presentation Grant through 4A Sydney New Work Grant Australia Council for the Arts NAVA Marketing Grant
<b>2011</b>	Inter-Arts Residency Grant Australia Council for the Arts Kone Foundation Residency Grant, Finland
<b>2010</b>	ANAT, SYNAPSE Residency Grant New Work Grant Australia Council for the Arts NAVA Marketing Grant
<b>2008</b>	New Work Grant Australia Council for the Arts
<b>2005</b>	NAVA Marketing Grant
<b>2003</b>	Japan Foundation Grant4 Pat Corrigan Artist Grant through NAVA ACT Quick Response Grant

## Residencies

<b>2014</b>	Asialink residency, The University of Ryukyus, Okinawa, Japan
<b>2013</b>	ZK/U Berlin, Germany
<b>2011</b>	Inter-Arts Residency, Navegar Foundation, Portugal Kone Foundation Artist Residency, Finland
<b>2010</b>	Synapse Art/Science residency funded by ANAT in Mildura, Australia
<b>2005</b>	Gunnery Studio Residency, Sydney, Australia

## Collections

Mainland Art Fund  
Artist Pension Trust  
The Art Gallery of Western Australia  
Macquarie Bank Art Collection  
Art Bank  
The Balnaves Foundation  
Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation  
The Australian National University School of Art  
The Rockhampton Art Gallery and Mildura Arts Centre  
TAKAHASHI collection

# THE GREAT EXHIBITION

KEN + JULIA YONETANI

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installation view)  
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## GILLMAN BARRACKS

Mizuma Gallery is a part of Gillman  
Barracks (GB) is Asia's up-and-coming  
destination for contemporary art.  
It is distinguished as a vibrant centre in  
Asia for the creation, exhibition and  
discussion of contemporary art.  
Named after the late British General Sir  
Webb Gillman, GB is now home to 11  
international art galleries, three restau-  
rants, as well as the NTU Centre for  
Contemporary Art (CCA) Singapore. For  
more information, please visit  
www.gillmanbarracks.com

## MIZUMA GALLERY

Mizuma Gallery was established in  
Singapore's new art cluster Gillman  
Barracks in September 2012 by director  
Sueo Mizuma. The gallery was established  
in 1994 in Tokyo, and since its opening in  
Singapore aims for the promotion of Japa-  
nese artists in the region as well as the  
introduction of new and promising young  
talents from South East Asia to the  
international art scene. The gallery creates  
a new vector of dialogue within Asia, by  
exchanging art projects between East Asia  
and South East Asia.

Mizuma Gallery has featured the works of  
Japanese artists including Aida Makoto,  
Amano Yoshitaka, Tenmyouya Hisashi,  
Ikeda Manabu, Aiko Miyanaga, Ken + Julia  
Yonetani and Yamaguchi Akira. Moreover,  
it has showcased the work of renowned  
East Asian artists such as Jun Nguyen-  
Hatsushiba, Susan Philipsz, Ai Weiwei,  
and Du Kun. The gallery also organises  
exhibitions featuring the creations of In-  
donesia's forerunner artists including Heri  
Dono, Nasirun, Made Wianta, indiegueril-  
las, Albert Yonathan Setyawan, Agung  
Prabowo, and Angki Purbandono. Mizuma  
Gallery also participates yearly in Art Stage  
Singapore and Art Basel Hong Kong.



MIZUMA GALLERY

GILLMAN BARRACKS

