

## ARTISTS TALK “*Cuttings*”

Ang Song Nian, Marvin Tang, Robert Zhao Renhui,  
Sarah Isabelle Tan, thesupersystem, Woong Soak Teng  
Mizuma Gallery, 10 September 2022, 3 – 5pm



Exhibition view of “*Cuttings*” at Mizuma Gallery Singapore, 2022. Photography by Marvin Tang, courtesy of Mizuma Gallery.

### Theresia Irma:

Thank you all for coming here, sorry that we ran pretty late today. Welcome to Mizuma Gallery, we'll start the artist talk with introductions from Robert. *Cuttings* is a group exhibition by six artists, we have Robert Zhao, Ang Song Nian, Marvin Tang, Sarah Isabelle Tan, thesupersystem/Heider, and Woong Soak Teng. So please, Robert, we can start.

### Robert Zhao Renhui:

Thanks everyone for coming for the talk today, sorry we ran a bit late, there were still some people arriving so we delayed a bit. Thanks for coming, thank you Mizuma for organizing this talk and this show for us. Today's session is quite informal, we'll be walking through the artworks with the artists and I'll talk a bit about the process of how we came together to do this show. The show is called “*Cuttings*”, the interpretation of cuttings I think, we left it very — we, as in the gallery and all of the artist that came together, we felt like the artists, and the things we were doing at that point of time, could somehow relate or interpret this theme ‘cuttings’ in very interesting ways. Immediately, of course, ‘cuttings’ for me, is from my interest in nature, it is the act of cutting off branches or pruning if you like, it can be both an act of violence and maintenance. Especially for me, in Singapore, the act of control over nature is very evident, it's very obvious, it's very visible, everywhere we go. We are at once a very green space, a green city, but we are also a city that is constantly having a somewhat violent and invisible relationship with nature.



Robert Zhao Renhui, *Untimely Meditations I (Do trees go to heaven?)*, 2022

Chu Kang, and Bukit Panjang, the sky was a bit, I would say, smoky. Then there was a newspaper article that came out that said it was a horticultural waste fire. What happened was, beside it [the fire] is a nursery where they grow plants, and you see this little hill here, that's actually horticultural waste.

If you've been in Singapore, when you travel around, sometimes you would see the traffic slow down because there's a truck that's pruning trees and cutting down trees. Each time when they prune, there will be truckloads of leaves and branches. So where do these leaves and branches go? Everyday there's a few hundred tons of trees being pruned and maintained and the waste needs to go somewhere, right? Some of them will be brought to places like this to be dumped. This place is actually supposed to burn the waste but I do not know why a part, or a large part of this facility was just leaves and branches that were being dumped and dumped and dumped. Eventually, there was about 4 hectares and 6-story high of this waste. During Valentine's Day of 2020, a fire broke out and the smoke that was coming out, which lasted for about two weeks, was all from this horticultural waste burning. So that got me started - when I was there photographing, it was really bad, it was as bad as the haze. I came out very smoky, very stinky, because there was so much carbon being released. This was just from the pruning, from the branches, and the leaves that we cut off our roadside trees. This prompted me to think, "of course all these prunings and truckloads of leaves and branches had to go somewhere, but I never thought where they would go. And I should, because destroying them will release a lot of carbon, and everything must go somewhere." It made me realize that actually a lot of processes in maintaining nature and our relationship with nature are very invisible.

This [*Untimely Meditations I (A boar does not care)*] also happened somewhere nearby — it is a scene of a forest that was being cleared and I was on the way to another big tree that was being cut down. I was trying to reach there to photograph the falling of the tree but I stumbled upon a wild boar that was probably disturbed by the land being cleared. It was just there and I felt like there was this awkward kind of tension as we just stood there. After that, I was going to go and photograph the tree but then the tree fell down, I heard it falling down, and that was when the wild boar scooted away. So that was the boar running away because of the tree falling down, which was what I was trying to video. They took about a whole day to bring this tree down.



Robert Zhao Renhui, *Untimely Meditations I (A boar does not care)*, 2022

I'll start off with the work here, *Untimely Meditations*. I'll start with this scene, this image [*Untimely Meditations I (Do trees go to heaven?)*] - this image was taken in Lim Chu Kang in 2020 during the pandemic when I think the lockdown just started. It was a time of great uncertainty I guess, everyone's not sure what they're doing at home. Like most of us, I started to look out of the window because I was so bored. What I saw suddenly one day was smoke coming out from Lim Chu Kang. I stay in Bukit Panjang, so I could overlook the whole of the Woodlands area, a bit of Mandai, and of course Tengah and Lim Chu Kang. This smoke didn't stop for three days, and in fact, you could smell it, it was like the haze that comes into Singapore - everyone knows, and the sky got a bit foggy. Around Lim Chu Kang, Choa



Robert Zhao Renhui, *Untimely Meditations I (The holes we dig)*, 2022

This one [*Untimely Meditations I (The holes we dig)*] is an image of them surveying the land, it is an archival image that I found and bought off eBay. This was actually in Gillman Barracks, somewhere near here, where they were taking soil samples to find out what was underneath the earth and whether it was safe to be built on. I incorporated a lot of archival images within my work mainly because a lot of secondary forest today, which is what is here, is regrown forest of lands or spaces that have already been built before. What we are seeing here in nature is not divorced from history. I place these different elements together to form a kind of uneasy dialogue, if you like. For you to contemplate the connections between what we see now, history and its effect on nature, the environment, the animals, non-human species, and things like that. I

assembled it into a cabinet, so this can be closed and opened, and it's a space for you to think about this connection.

And then of course I started to think about how my peers, the other artists here, how they were kind of — I think most of them, material wise, have a hand on nature I would say, and the works we produce manifest very differently, material wise at least. It's not just photographic but we have things that are robotic and moving. We actually come from very similar concerns, the way that we look at the city and the narratives around nature that people are built upon. I think we can move on to Song Nian's work.

#### Question from audience:

What was the idea behind the cabinet framing?

#### Robert Zhao Renhui:

It acts as a device to hold these things, the objects together, almost like an altar? That's the closest word I can think of, but it's not an altar. It's a site and a space to help form a connection between the three elements, the three images. I felt like it was much easier to lead you to link them together rather than just three works on the wall. It's contained within its own universe to force you to make some connection. That's mainly it – a type of device that I would say, to contain them together instead of just putting them on the wall.



Robert Zhao Renhui, *Untimely Meditations I*, 2022

#### Ang Song Nian:

Ok, hi everybody, my name is Song. This is from a rather recent, very new series of work called *This Garden Bears No Weeds*. What I really wanted to do was, reflecting upon my earlier works, I've always been looking at the way we control nature, in particular, how we manipulate them into landscaping, through potted plants and plants that somehow work their ways into a domesticated landscape. For this body of work, what got me more intrigued was this whole idea of controlling, controlling from another perspective whereby we are not adding more to it but instead, the kind of implementation that we made to restrict the plant from coming into our space.





Ang Song Nian, *This Garden Bears No Weeds*, 2022

In this image, taken somewhere near Teck Whye, in the west side of Singapore, you will notice that the weeds that's been observed along pedestrian pathways have been intentionally sprayed with weed killers. The act of spraying the weed killers actually prevents weeds and plants from growing out onto the pedestrian walkway, preventing it from encroaching into our space. That to me was very interesting because on one hand, the nation is working on making the entire country greener, I mean we've moved from garden city to a city in the garden. At the same time, actions like *that* got me very interested because of the way we want to be near to nature, while at the same time we want them to be maintained at a particular distance from our daily lives.

As I started on this work, I also realized that this is actually quite a common sight. In fact, if you walk in from Depot Road into Gillman Barracks, just along the road you'll actually see traces of plants and weeds being sprayed with this kind of weed killer to prevent the grass from growing just a little bit more. Hence that is why the work is titled *This Garden Bears No Weeds*, because the nation and the government have this compulsion to always keep things maintained in a particular way. We want things to be growing, but at the same time we are not allowing something that is very organic and natural to be thriving at the same time. There will be more images for this [series] but for now, for this exhibition, I've decided to just only show one image and also because of the scale that I wanted it to be presented in.

**Question from audience:**

What's the scale of this?

**Ang Song Nian:**

The scale — the size of this? The size of this frame is 3 metres by 2.4 metres in height. Just now I overheard some discussions about the production and fabrication, it's actually printed on a material called samba backlit, it's a special kind of fabric that's meant for a lightbox backlit kind of presentation.

**Robert Zhao Renhui:**

It's the same as the one beside you, it's just the miniature version of it. It's like a fabric, almost. It's what they use for Uniqlo and H&M too actually, if you touch it it's kind of soft, it sinks inside. Material wise, the good thing about this is of course you can go bigger, because images, photographs there's a size limit, I think two-point-something metres. If you want to go bigger than that, you'll have to kind of piece them side by side, there will be a line. But with the lightbox, you really can have a large image.

**Ang Song Nian:**

I think this is where the commercial production methods come in very handy for certain kinds of presentation within a gallery context or in terms of presentation of an artwork.

**Robert Zhao Renhui:**

At first when I saw this image, I knew there was something odd about it. I mean this is a scene we'll see if we just go by Singapore, forest at bay, and grass, flat grass. It's such a common sight that we don't really think about, "Why does the forest suddenly stop in the middle of a field and not just encroach out anymore? How does it decide to stop there?" Efforts have been made by whatever government bodies on that space of land to devise a way that you can cheaply maintain, as cheap as possible, a wasteland or secondary forest like this. Constant pruning with machines and manpower actually costs a lot, there's a lot of manpower involved. So, weeding itself, the spraying of the chemical, is a much more efficient and economical way to maintain a landscape as clean. When the landscape is at bay, you'll not have wild boars, and insects like mosquitoes, and things that you will not associate with a clean city living, or healthy city living, will not come out of the forest. I guess that's why that little clean break here is something we see every day, but we don't think too much. But it's, immediately to me, actually a very violent part of our landscape that we have come to accept, we don't think too much. That life should stop somewhere on a given perimeter that we give it.

Moving on, I think we can start to talk about all these canvases with sticks that are really tightly bound together. It's a work by Soak, who is here, so Soak if you can kind of tell us a bit about your processes.

**Woong Soak Teng:**

Hi everyone, my name is Soak. Thank you for coming today. These series of canvases that you see on the ground, they are part of a work that's titled *Trying to Straighten a Branch*. Like what the title suggests, every canvas is an attempt to straighten a branch that I picked up from the ground and was growing to be quite curved in nature. If you look at the canvas, the branch is actually straightened by sewing white thread through the canvas to tie the branch down to the canvas, and at the same time, there was always a tension and attempt to straighten the branch along the way. In one or two of the canvases where you see a lot of that brown line on the canvas, that's where the branch was struggling a lot to the left and right as I was trying to straighten it, and that's the mark that's left behind by that struggle. I think as the work is quite minimal in itself, I welcome you to bring along your own interpretation to the work, but I would also like to share the inspiration on what came before and after this series of work.



Woong Soak Teng, *Trying to Straighten a Branch*, 2022



Woong Soak Teng, *Ways to Tie Trees*, 2015-2018

I brought along two of my earlier works, one of which is called *Ways to Tie Trees*, a work that I made in 2015-2016, of portraits of trees being stuck around Singapore. In each photograph, there are close ups of trees that are being tied with supporting structures and you see them all around Singapore. It's a form of control in a sense that because all our trees, they're not usually naturally growing from the ground, they are grown in nurseries and then uprooted and transplanted and hence there is a need for this support device so that they don't fall, they don't cause destructions to our urban landscape. In Singapore, they're usually outsourced to different companies, so they all look very different. This goes way back, I think 2015, 7 years ago, when I started working on it.

Later on, earlier this year, I made another work called *Rules for Photographing a Scoliotic Patient* and this work was inspired partly by my own experience with scoliosis, which is the curvature of the spine. When I was growing up, my spine wasn't straight, it was curved, and I had to undergo a surgery for it to try and straighten it. Sometime in late 2019, I saw this medical image found in a medical book about scoliosis, of tree tying. It was also used as an analogy to talk about the treatment of scoliosis. When I first saw this image, it was after I made *Ways to Tie*

*Trees* and that point of connection was very, very uncanny, it was very serendipitous. Later on, I worked with people in Singapore with scoliosis and I also played around with medical images and tried to mediate that medical gaze between the old photographs that were taken by doctors and the new photographs that I would then make with people with scoliosis in Singapore.



Woong Soak Teng, *Rules for Photographing a Scoliotic Patient*, 2020

The reason why I'm sharing about these two works is because this work [*Trying to straighten a branch*] came out of a visual exercise in-between the making of these two works. I was trying to visualise that violence and the act of control that happens both on the trees around our urban landscape, and also on our bodies, in the case of a scoliotic individual like myself. The way that the control is being enacted on something like the spine and the tree is so similar that I think it's important to try and make sense of that kind of control that we perform not just on our environment but also on ourselves. The gesture of just trying to straighten the branch is also a study of the tension between what is natural and organic, and what is manipulated or imposed. That's all I'll share for now and we can leave any questions later. Thank you.

**Robert Zhao Renhui:**

Actually, we have a short [written] Q&A with the artists, kind of a compilation, that is available at the front desk, with a legend of where all the artworks are at. I just thought I would take this time to bring it up because it contains a lot of what we just said, what we shared for the show.

Moving on to the next work, this is Sarah's work which at once is — I think when we talk about visibility and invisibility, I think for Sarah's work there is a long process that is almost invisible but is hinted at in each of these images, we can see rare traces of it. I will leave Sarah to talk about the work.



Exhibition view of Sarah Isabelle Tan's works in "Cuttings" at Mizuma Gallery Singapore, 2022.

**Sarah Isabelle Tan:**

Hi everyone, my name is Sarah and this body of work you are seeing over here is called *The Timeline: Like the delayed rays of a star*. I began this series of work in 2019, about three years ago, and it actually began from a single memory. Let me just go a bit into why I called it *Like the delayed rays of a star*. The author, Roland Barthes, wrote about how light is a carnal medium, how when you take a photograph in the present, it instantly becomes the past. He believes that even though the photograph always references the past, when the viewer looks at it in the future, even a hundred years from now, the light that is captured in the photograph will still touch the viewer like the delayed rays of a star. This body of work began from a single memory, a personal memory from 3 years ago, about this experience I had with someone that I loved and I did not have a photograph of this person. I struggled to remember this person, I started to question if it was real, since I didn't have a photograph to remember the person by. What I did have was a single rose, a stalk of rose, which I had when it was fresh and I still have it now. It's all withered, dried up. It led me down this rabbit hole of representing moments that are so fleeting that I can never hold on to. Essentially what you're seeing over here - how they are made, they are actually photograms. I used light sensitive silver gelatin paper and placed them out in the sun and then I have these, these are botanicals, they're florals that I foraged around my local neighbourhood. I would place these florals on top of the paper with the sunlight exposed to the paper, hence all these colours that you are seeing over here. The ones on display over here are digital scans of the original silver gelatin print because I intentionally left the original silver gelatin prints unfixed. These scans are a documentation of something that I try to hold on to. These are actually what happens to the original prints, they're all faded and you can't see them anymore. I feel like through this process it's just a reminder of how we can never hold onto things that are intangible in life, like they're so fleeting and it just goes. Like memory, it never is the same as the original encounter.

**Robert Zhao Renhui:**

As Sarah has said, because the images are not fixed, they will potentially keep on changing forever because the papers are light sensitive. So, at which stage did you —



**Sarah Isabelle Tan:**

Capture the image? This is right after the first exposure, so within 10 minutes, since you know Singapore has a very bright sun right, a UV index 14 kind of sun. You immediately get these colours within 10 minutes, so I would take the florals off and then scan them immediately. The original prints will continue changing as it is exposed to light, even in room lighting. It will just fade off to this brown-ish thing, I think you can still see a trace of what used to be but it remains as that, it will just be a fragment and a trace of what I can never hold on to.

**Robert Zhao Renhui:**

So how long has this been fading?

**Sarah Isabelle Tan:**

This print? Actually, this particular one was left out in the sun, I continued leaving this out in the sun without the florals so within a few hours I would say, it became this brown and then just stop at that.

**Robert Zhao Renhui:**

So these are also not fixed?

**Sarah Isabelle Tan:**

Not fixed, yeah. So it just stays as that. I don't know, I mean, I haven't lived long enough yet, maybe in ten or twenty years they might become some other thing like colour, but as of now they are just stuck like that. Thank you!

**Robert Zhao Renhui:**

Thank you, okay so if we shift over here to the corner to find this, thesupersystem's work. I've known Heider for a bit before the show, and I know that he loves going to secondary forests, like me. The work is about a tree that is – if we talk about secondary forest trees and about trees or forests that are invisible to us almost, this tree is I would say the most visible tree in the Singaporean landscape because his work is responding to the durian tree. In the secondary forest, most Singaporeans will recognize and know that that's the durian tree. In fact, it's probably the only reason why they would enter the forest and is probably I would say almost the most iconic because usually most people know what it is and it would be a tree that commands you to wait. My father was one of those that would spend the whole night waiting for the fruits to drop in the forest, so it's one of these trees that have a kind of power over people. During seasons, you can suddenly see people just appearing, sitting beside the tree and just waiting for the fruit to fall. I'll leave it to Heider to talk about it.



thesupersystem, *Hutan jauh diulangi, hutan dekat dikendana*, 2022

**thesupersystem:**

Hi guys, thanks for coming down. My work is about the relationship between the people of Singapore, the durian gatherers, and also with the durian tree itself. Usually people would have family heirlooms, it will be in the form of jewellery or maybe like furniture or whatnot, but for some families in Singapore the durian tree itself is like a family heirloom. What they would do is basically these trees are planted by the families, probably prior to independence or even way earlier than that, probably during the colonial era actually. These trees actually belong to some families, and how I chanced upon them was when I was doing research in the jungle looking for deers in Singapore. I chanced upon this group of people looking at trees around the jungle and they were just standing around trees. Then I started seeing them carrying sacks so I asked them "Uncle, what's inside?", "Oh durian, this is my family's durian tree." From then on, after going to the jungle a few times I bumped into all these people carrying sacks out of the jungle with durians inside. There's this relationship between the government, the state, and the people, and also the flora in Singapore, because in Singapore the public is not supposed to pick even a flower or even a seed. It was interesting to see that even



though the government has taken over this land these groups of people are actually sort of doing a silent protest and taking care of these trees like “this is my tree; this is not the government’s tree.” It was interesting to see that happening.

I used robot arms to represent the people, the community, when they’re in the jungle at night when they’re pointing up to the trees with their torches to look for the durians. It was very interesting to see them actually knowing where the durian is because when you enter the jungle, your visibility goes up to maybe 15-20 metres when it’s at night. There will be snakes, spiders, wild boars, and maybe deers also, depending on where you go. The robot arms are being used to represent them doing that at night, pointing out the trees. This [leaves] is actually from a real durian plant. During the season, other animals like monkeys, wild boars and whatnot, also eat the durians. The seeds tend to be left behind by all these animals, so I managed to chance upon some of them and decided to grow them. I still have maybe about two that are still surviving at home, this one was not doing so well so I decided to preserve it. I used this part to showcase the importance of these durians in certain communities and certain families in Singapore.



thesupersystem, *Hutan jauh diulangi, hutan dekat dikendana*, 2022

#### **Robert Zhao Renhui:**

In the last room here, this is Marvin’s work. Immediately we are confronted with, I guess the most beautiful part about nature which is flowers, and it is something that we can all look forward to and relate to. But of course, in Singapore, the orchid flower especially, has a special resonance and identity, and it is very obvious in our landscape because orchids are intentionally planted at many places where we’ve tried to place them into our landscape. If you look around, there are a lot of tiger orchid clumps placed all around Singapore at the strangest junctions, just to exert a kind of- I don’t even know what it’s trying to exert. But I think it’s trying to say that the tiger orchid is part of our landscape although this landscape has changed quite a lot, but we have successfully replaced all these orchids back into our original landscape. At the same time, we have an orchid garden and we are famous for creating new orchid species, so I guess this creation of nature is where Marvin is interested in, so he will talk a bit about that.

#### **Marvin Tang:**

Thank you so much for staying on here to listen to us. Just to share a little bit, I think in order to explain this, we got to go back a little bit to talk about my practice in general. My practice goes between two fronts: one, looking into the past, the colonial past, to look at how we handled nature, how we deal with the idea of the botanics, and how that affects our land. And today, a lot of my research is dealing with present-day nature. Earlier when Song mentioned about how we were called the Garden City, then the City in Garden, and then the City in Nature. I think one thing that always shocked me is that as a Garden City to start off with, a garden always requires a certain kind of maintenance, and because the Garden City is essentially our branding for Singapore, we are constantly trying to kind of reframe this branding, to modernise it, to make it more relevant to our time as well. As we try to make it more relevant to our time, you will see new, very strange ways that we try to intersect with nature and try to blend it to the ability that we have. So that is also one part of my research, trying to understand how time progresses, how we look at nature, and how nature is being represented as well.

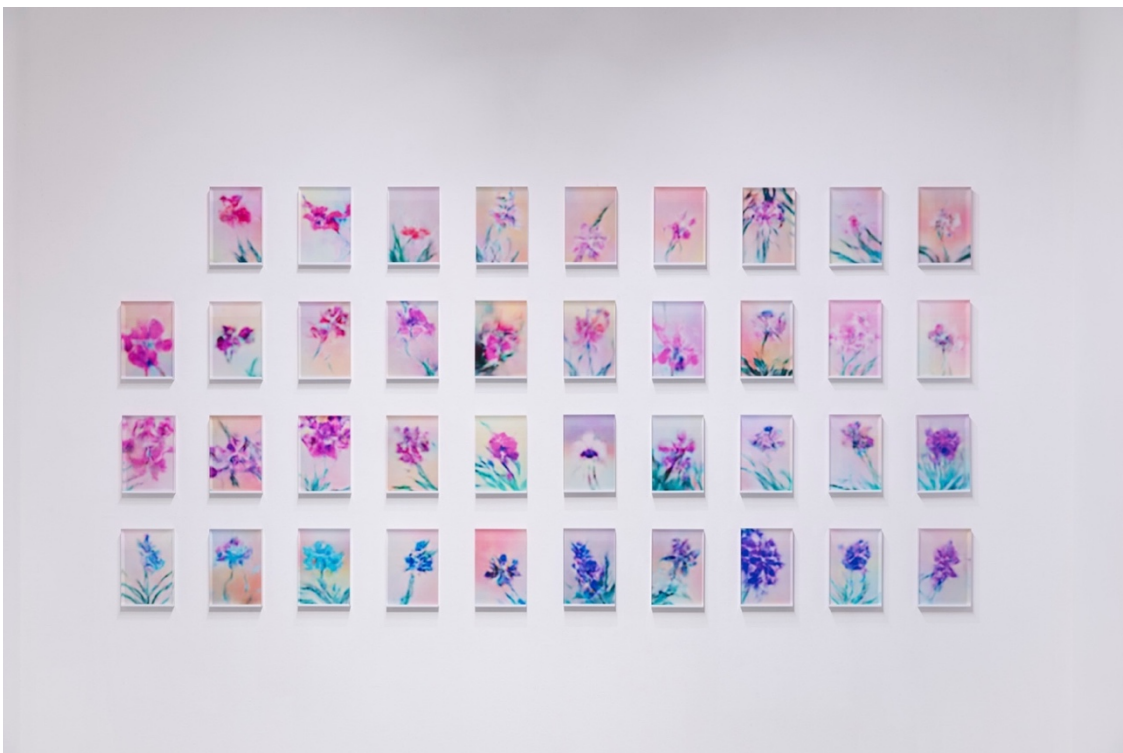
Before this work [*Hybrids*], I was actually looking a lot into graphical representation of nature and one of the works I made previously was called *Wayside Trees*. So *Wayside Trees* essentially are dismantled panel construction hoardings that you probably see nowadays, they are actually imported specially so that you can create these patterns. The construction manual that most of the contractors have actually tells you: “There are 4 of these colours, you can blend these colours to

create trees.” That has become a mainstay in Singapore. A few years back, I noticed that it was largely in the new construction sites but today you actually see them almost everywhere.



Marvin Tang, L-R: *Wayside Trees*, *Papaya*

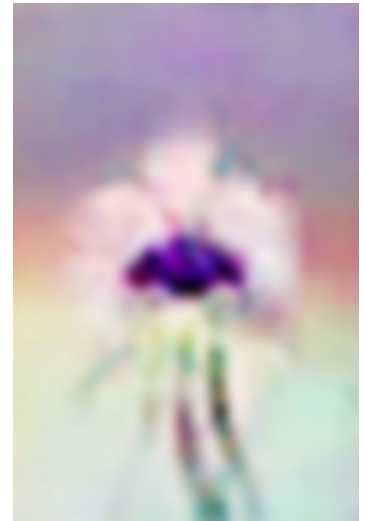
Another form of representation is through this book I made called *Papaya*. *Papaya* looks at how we were using vinyl stickers of forests to cover our construction hoardings. If you drive down an expressway, you will see a very long stretch of forest going through the sides, on your left and right, which takes time to paste these vinyls onto the hoardings. I became very curious about representation and thinking about how we might resonate or identify with nature moving forward in time, and this work approaches that subject matter.



Marvin Tang, *Hybrids*, 2022

The work itself [*Hybrids*] was actually thought about from as early as 2019. I was in a cafe in London and my friend was late, then I just realised that there was this orchid, this very familiar orchid in the cafe. I started thinking, why is this orchid here in London, what is the significance, and how does it associate with our Singapore identity? So, all those things really just came out and the grander project of this is called *A History of 39 Cuttings*, and this is actually the last chapter of the work. For those who are wondering, the first two chapters have literally not been made, so ironically, I created the last chapter first. But a part of the process was also thinking a lot about image and representation again, how we might see orchids in the future and how it might be generated in our imagination.

Initially, one of the reasons I started with these 39 orchids is because in the process of selecting our national flower, there were actually a total of 40 candidates, and more than half of them were orchids. Today if you look at the archives, at least for me right now, I still haven't found the entire compiled list of the 40 flowers. What we do know of is the winner of course, the Vanda Miss Joaquim, and then as well as the runner up, which is the *Arachnis hookeriana*. I was very fascinated with the process and the thought process of how we decided what should be our national flower, and back then the parks and recreation department, which is now today's NParks, didn't really have a clear archive of how this selection was made. In fact, the team that was helming this was actually by the Singapore Tourism Board, not by NParks. The person that was running the campaign, according to some research, actually related to Lee Kuan Yew and apparently at some point the decision actually did go up to that level to decide what is our national flower. I was very interested in the entire narrative of this selection of national flowers. With this body of work, I was interested in how if we were to reselect our national flower, would we come back to the Vanda Miss Joaquim again, or would we potentially select a flower that is more inclined to our future identity. It's something of a more digitised future as well. I started thinking about how hybridization and the computer AI process is really quite similar. With today's hybridization process, you take two different orchids and you take traits that you like and put them together to create a new orchid. But with the computer process, I can actually mesh together 50 different orchids to create a new orchid.



Marvin Tang, *Hybrids\_02*, 2022

The series of images here, these 39 images, are a proposal for future national flowers that you can consider, but they are all based on orchids that you can find in Singapore. In order to create this, I started off by buying a few orchids to test out and then I realised it was getting very expensive. I reached out to a few nurseries and a few of them really kindly allowed me to go and photograph. The way that the nurseries buy flowers was quite interesting because it's all based on one, whether the kind of flower, the type, the look of it, the rarity, is something people want to purchase, or maybe these are flowers that can be used for decorative purposes. So, these are flowers that people are more inclined to want to buy and use as well. I documented almost about, I think, ninety to a hundred different kinds of flowers from different angles and we used a process called the GAN Network, the General Adversarial Network, and fed it into this computer system to recreate images of orchids. I work with a researcher who happens to be doing his PhD in AI Networks or Machine Learning, and most of the time what they normally do is that they will go online where there are these data sets that are ready for you to just take and use. But one thing that I really wanted was my own form of aesthetics, so that meant that I needed to create my own data set, so I had to photograph all these orchids myself, instead of going to the computer to grab it. It was really quite a strange process because you are looking at the flowers again, digitising it, and then re-digitising it. By the end of the day, it actually created almost tens of thousands of variations but only a few ended up looking like orchids. This is the final selection of orchids that were created by the computer system, the AI System. So, this is *Hybrids*. Thank you.

**Question from audience:**

It's not real yet?



**Marvin Tang:**

I don't think it will ever be real. But at the same time while this was happening, the Garden Festival was happening, I didn't know this but I would have approached them if I did. But when I went to the Garden Festival, they had an orchid competition and if you went there to see the orchid competition the bizarre kind of collection of orchids was really amazing, like things you didn't expect to find. One thing I learnt is that, blue orchids actually don't grow in the natural world but through hybridization, like natural hybridization, people have actually managed to create orchids that look slightly blue, something that should not exist in the natural world. For some reason when we photographed all the orchids there weren't any blue orchids, but the computer-generated blue orchids for us. So, it was quite strange to see that as well.

**Robert Zhao Renhui:**

How many images were part of the data set?

**Marvin Tang:**

We shot and fed the system about 2,000 images, of course the more the merrier. But we were looking at the kind of orchids that were there and after a while, we realised that the orchids in Singapore were largely the same types because they are the kind that people would want to buy, so there wasn't a really big variety across the nurseries.

**Robert Zhao Renhui:**

Where did you get the 2,000 images?

**Marvin Tang:**

There's this private grower at Bukit Timah, I feel like I need to plug in the name, since he let me shoot his orchids- he's called 'jnorchids', you can find him on Instagram. He's a private grower, and he's actually very young, he's only like I think, 17 years old, but he grows his own orchids. The other one is Toh Gardens at Choa Chu Kang Lane area. I spoke to them and they were "Oh yeah sure, come photograph the orchids."

**Robert Zhao Renhui:**

Okay, so with that we have the last artist, if anyone- we can move in front to the bigger room now, thank you Marvin. If anyone has any questions, we can have a short Q&A now. If you don't feel like asking in a group, we will still be around, we can answer your questions. Anyone have any questions for us today? Okay well, I guess not (laughs). Okay, thank you for coming today, we'll still be around, feel free to approach us if you want to ask us any details about the work okay. Thank you so much.

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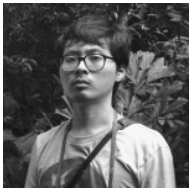
## About the Artists



**Ang Song Nian** (b. 1983, Singapore) graduated with an MA in Photography from the London College of Communications, University of the Arts London, London, UK in 2012 and a BA in Photography from the Camberwell College of the Arts, University of the Arts London, London, UK in 2011. His solo exhibitions to date include *Artificial Conditions: Something To Grow Into* at the Tokyo Photographic Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan (2019); *As They Grow Older and Wiser* at the Bangkok University Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand (2016); and *A Tree With Too Many Branches* at DECK, Singapore (2015). Ang was the recipient of the Grand Prize in the 41st edition of the New Cosmos of Photography award organized by Canon Inc., Japan (2019). He has undertaken residencies at NTU Center for Contemporary Art (2019), and Sunderland University, UK (2017) amongst others. Ang Song Nian lives and works in Singapore.



**Marvin Tang** (b. 1989, Singapore) graduated with a Master of Arts in Photography from the London College of Communications, University of the Arts London, London, UK in 2018 and a BFA in Photography and Digital Imaging from Nanyang Technological University, Singapore in 2015. His solo exhibitions to date are *In Every Season of Change* at DECK, Singapore (2019) and *The Mountain Survey* at Alliance Française de Singapour, Singapore (2018). Tang was the recipient of the LCC Photoworks Prize, UK, in 2018 and also the 8th France + Singapore Photographic Arts Award, Singapore in 2017. Marvin Tang lives and works in Singapore.



**Robert Zhao Renhui** (b. 1983, Singapore) graduated with a MA in Photography from the London College of Communications, London, UK in 2010 and a BA in Photography from the Camberwell College of the Arts, University of the Arts London, London, UK in 2008. His solo exhibitions include *The Lines We Draw* at Yalu River Art Museum, Dandong, China (2019); *Hugo Boss Asia Art 2017* at Rockbound Art Museum, Shanghai, China (2017); *Singapore, Very Old Tree* at National Museum of Singapore, Singapore (2017). Zhao's works are in the public collections of National Museum of Singapore, Singapore; UBS Art Collection, UBS Global; Statoil Art Collection, Norway; Kadist Art Foundation, USA; and UOB Art Collection, Singapore. He has undertaken residencies at NTU Center for Contemporary Art, Singapore (2017); The Arctic Circle Residency, Norway (2011); and Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Japan (2010) amongst others. Robert Zhao Renhui lives and works in Singapore.



**Sarah Isabelle Tan** (b. 1995, Singapore) graduated with a Bachelor of Arts, First Class Honours in Photography from the University of the Arts, London College of Communication in 2019. Tan is an artist whose work delves into the ontology of the photographic, navigating between nuances of the tangible and intangible. Working across visual imagery and printmaking, she is particularly interested in the materiality of the photograph and its (re)representation of things. Navigating personal encounters of loss, memory, fleeting moments, and a longing to possess what is always beyond reach, her practice is driven by open-ended inquisition and contemplation. Tan's work has been published in *The British Journal of Photography*, and have been exhibited in *Only Losers Left Alive (love songs for the end of the world)* at Yeo Workshop, Singapore (2021); *Portal by The Starving Artists x Paper Mountain Australia* at DECK, Singapore (2020); *FLOCK* at Art East Gallery, London, United Kingdom (2019), amongst others. She was a Finalist (Still Image Category) of the inaugural Julius Baer Next Generation Art Prize (2021), and a recipient of the Objectifs Centre Documentary Award 2020 (Emerging Category) (2021). Sarah Isabelle Tan lives and works in Singapore.



**thesupersystem** is the brainchild of **Heider Ismail** (b. 1989, Singapore), currently a student at Lasalle College of the Arts pursuing his Masters in Design. Started off as a school project, it eventually evolved into a platform that merges technology, science and art. An advocate for environmental activism, thesupersystem seeks to inform the masses on the importance of climate change. A self-initiated campaign called “The Jungle Is Neutral” echoes a number of collaborative projects regarding the natural world. thesupersystem has exhibited in some notable places with the likes of National Gallery Singapore and also London Science Festival. Occasionally, thesupersystem steps up as a live visual artist for musical and theater performances. He is also part of local art collective, SYNDICATE. As a practicing designer, thesupersystem has also showcased his design research work at the Paris Design Summit 2015. thesupersystem lives and works in Singapore.



**Woong Soak Teng** (b. 1994, Singapore) graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Photography and Digital Imaging at the Nanyang Technological University, School of Art, Design and Media in 2018. She practices in the intersections of art making, producing, and project managing. Her personal projects examine human tendencies to control natural phenomena and nature at large. Current research interests include the human experience of living with spinal deformity and the role of image-making and representations of human bodies in the medical field. Woong has participated in festivals and exhibitions internationally in Auckland, Copenhagen, Dali, Greece, Tokyo, Shanghai and Singapore. Her accolades include the Steidl Book Award Asia (2016), Objectifs Documentary Award (2021), Kwek Leng Joo Prize of Excellence in Photography (2018) and Singapore Young Photographer Award (2018). She forms one-third of the art collective, DASSAD, and also manages content at Art & Market and art directs with Third Street Studio. Woong Soak Teng lives and works in Singapore.

## About Mizuma Gallery

Executive Director Sueo Mizuma established Mizuma Art Gallery in Tokyo in 1994. Since its opening in Gillman Barracks, Singapore in 2012, the gallery aims for the promotion of East Asian artists in the region as well as the introduction of Southeast Asian artists to the international art scene. From 2014 to 2019, the artist residency space “Rumah Kijang Mizuma” opened in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, to create a new platform for dialogue by supporting exchanges between East Asia and Southeast Asia. Later in 2018, “Mizuma & Kips” in New York, USA, as a shared collaboration between Mizuma Gallery from Tokyo and Singapore and Kips Gallery from New York.

## About Gillman Barracks

Set in a former military barracks dating back to 1936 and surrounded by lush tropical greenery, the Gillman Barracks visual arts cluster was launched in September 2012. Gillman Barracks’ vision is to be Asia’s destination for the presentation and discussion of international and Southeast Asian art. Today, Gillman Barracks is a place for art lovers, art collectors, and those curious about art. The cluster is a focal point of Singapore’s arts landscape, and anchors the development of visual art in the region and beyond.



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**Mizuma Gallery**

22 Lock Road #01-34  
Gillman Barracks  
Singapore 108939

**Gallery hours:**

Tue-Sat: 11am-7pm  
Sun: 11am-6pm  
Closed on Mondays &  
Public Holidays

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COVID-19 update: In accordance with the current advisory from the Singapore Government, we require all visitors to wear their masks during the duration of their visit. For more information, please visit: [www.mizuma.sg/news/notice-to-visitor](http://www.mizuma.sg/news/notice-to-visitor)

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