



FOREWORD

TYLER ROLLINS

Yee I-Lann's primarily photomedia-based practice engages with archipelagic Southeast Asia's turbulent history, addressing, with wit and humanity, the socio-political impact of current politics, neo-colonialism, and globalization. *Like the Banana Tree at the Gate*, an exhibition of new works presented at Tyler Rollins Fine Art from April 28 – June 17, 2016, takes inspiration from two motifs that are iconic in her native Malaysia and throughout Southeast Asia: the ubiquitous banana tree; and the *pontianak*, a vengeful female spirit with long black hair who is sometimes said to reside in that plant. With a series of her characteristic digital photomontage works, along with a three-channel video, Yee captures the potency of female power derived from local knowledge and folkloric traditions, reframing it in a contemporary context informed by an active socio-political engagement. She conflates legendary tales with the memory of mid-twentieth century feminist movements such as Indonesia's Gerwani organization, which gained enormous popularity in the 1950s and '60s before being suppressed by the military. The exhibition's title references a 17th century sultan in southern Borneo who advised his subjects not to plant a banana tree near their front gates so as not to advertise their wealth to potential colonial exploiters. This story is cited as an example of an early form of anti-colonial resistance in Michael Dove's academic study, *The Banana Tree at the Gate: A History of Marginal Peoples and Global Markets in Borneo*. "The *pontianak* continues to haunt us in 21st century patriarchal Southeast Asia," Yee explains. "She is the woman standing at the gate like the banana tree in full view. She is potential and power and resource. A banana plant lives only briefly, bearing just one bunch of fruit before it dies. Its root structure, however, grows a new plant immediately – and so the cycle continues, ever present with a memory of the past."

Born in 1971 in Kota Kinabalu, capital of Malaysia's northern Borneo province of Sabah, Yee received her BA in Visual Arts from the University of South Australia, Adelaide, in 1993. Now based in Malaysia's capital city, Kuala Lumpur, she has established herself over the past 20 years as one of the region's leading contemporary artists, known for her digital photomontage series that deftly employ a complex, multi-layered visual vocabulary drawn from historical references, popular culture, archives, and everyday objects – works that speculate on issues of culture, power, and the role of historical memory in social experience, often with particular focus on themes and motifs that reference the indigenous cultures of Borneo. Yee has exhibited widely in museums and biennials around the world. Selected highlights include: the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Brisbane, Australia (2015 and 1999); the Jakarta Biennale, Indonesia (2015); *The Roving Eye*, ARTER Space for Art, Istanbul, Turkey (2014-15); *Finding your place in the world: Asian photomedia*, at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (2014); *Afterimage: Contemporary Photography from Southeast Asia*, Singapore Art Museum (2014-15); *Suspended Histories*, Museum Van Loon, Amsterdam, the Netherlands (2013-14); *Contemporary Commonwealth*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia (2006); the Singapore Biennale (2006); *Thermocline of Art: New Asian Waves*, ZKM | Museum of Contemporary Art, Karlsruhe, Germany (2007); and the Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale, Fukuoka, Japan (2009). *Fluid World*, a solo exhibition surveying her major works to date, was presented at Adelaide's Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia in 2011. She was a member of the curatorial team for the 2013 Singapore Biennale.

LIKE THE BANANA TREE AT THE GATE

YEE I-LANN



VIEW OF THE EXHIBITION AT TYLER ROLLINS FINE ART



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LIKE THE BANANA TREE AT THE GATE SERIES

2016

Giclee print on Hahnemühle PhotoRag® paper

three panels

edition of 8, 1 AP



LIKE THE BANANA TREE AT THE GATE: IBU OR THE BEAST
24 x 80 ¾ in. (61 x 205 cm)



LIKE THE BANANA TREE AT THE GATE: THE FLAMING WOMB
24 x 91 ¾ in. (61 x 223 cm)



LIKE THE BANANA TREE AT THE GATE: A LEAF IN THE STORM
24 x 62 in. (61 x 160 cm)



CONFERENCE SERIES

2016

Giclee print on Hahnemühle PhotoRag® paper

three panels

edition of 8, 1 AP



CONFERENCE: PANEL 1
24 x 48 ¼ in. (61 x 122.5 cm)



CONFERENCE: PANEL 2
24 x 83 ¼ in. (61 x 211.5 cm)



CONFERENCE: PANEL 3
24 x 66 in. (61 x 168 cm)



GHOST IN THE BANANA TREE

2016

Giclee print on Hahnemühle PhotoRag® paper

238 pieces

each 10 ½ x 5 ¾ in. (27 x 14.5 cm)

full installation 42 ¼ x 374 in. (107.5 x 950 cm)

edition of 3, 1 AP



GHOST IN THE BANANA TREE
(detail)



LANDSCAPE

2016

Giclee print on Hahnemühle PhotoRag® paper

19 ½ x 66 in. (50 x 168 cm)

edition of 8, 1 AP



IMAGINING PONTIANAK: I'VE GOT SUNSHINE ON A CLOUDY DAY

2016

three channel video

13:11 min.

edition of 3



POSTER: LIKE THE BANANA TREE AT THE GATE
 2016
 80 gm bookpaper, 4 color print
 33 x 24 ½ inches (81 x 59.5 cm)
 edition of 700



Resource Room
 The Resource Room features documentary materials relating to the *pontianak*, a vengeful female spirit with long hair, sometimes said to reside in the banana tree, who is a legendary figure throughout Southeast Asia. The 15 minute video on view, *Pusaka Pontianak (The Accursed Heritage)*, is a montage of scenes featuring the *pontianak*, with clips of films from Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Poster: Like the Banana Tree at the Gate
 Made in the style of old movie posters, this work is composed of elements taken from 19th century French lithographs of scenes from Southeast Asia, alongside a stereotypical image of the *pontianak*.

Ghost in the Banana Tree
 An installation of 238 photos of banana trees taken by the artist and her assistants in cities and villages throughout Malaysia, including the banana trees outside the bedroom window of her childhood home as well as her grandfather's banana estate in Sapong, Tenom. The title refers to the Cambodian name for *pontianak*.

Conference series
 A series of three digital photcollages (entitled *Panel 1*, *Panel 2*, and *Panel 3*) that combine to form a continuous frieze. Shot in the artist's home town of Kota Kinabalu in Borneo, the images feature men and women of different ethnicities and walks of life, their legs cropped off where their clothing begins. Tables are an ongoing motif in the artist's work.

Imagining Pontianak: I've Got Sunshine on a Cloudy Day
 In this 13 minute three-channel video, a group of women, their faces obscured by long, black wigs that evoke the image of the *pontianak*, sing snippets from popular folk songs, recite poems, and chat about topics ranging from relationships and sex to possession by ghosts. Intimate conversations between Malay women, usually relegated to the private sphere, are rarely shown in the media and popular culture.

Landscape
 Shadowy figures with their long, black hair watch over the land at twilight.

Like the Banana Tree at the Gate series
 Each of the three digital photographs is composed of 100–200 collaged elements. The women playing the role of the *pontianak* responded to a public mobile studio set up in the Arts For Grabs market in Kuala Lumpur; many are well known activists and artists. The titles of each photo, from left to right, are:

Ibu or the Beast: "Ibu" is an affectionate term for "mother" (in Malaysia) or "woman" (in Indonesia). The title references an essay by Saskia Wieringa, "IBU OR THE BEAST: Gender Interests in Two Women's Organizations," that describes women's political involvement in Indonesia, particularly the Gerwani feminist movement, at the time of the military coup in 1965.

The Flaming Womb: the title refers to a book by Barbara Andaya describing the history of women in pre-colonial Southeast Asia. It is one of artist's favorite books.

A Leaf in the Storm: the title refers to a biographical account by Ibu Marni ("I Am a Leaf in the Storm," translated by Anton Lucas) describing her political leanings, involvement with Gerwani, and life during Indonesia's 1965 coup.

YEE I-LANN

SELECTED BIOGRAPHY

Born 1971 in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. Lives and works in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

EDUCATION

1993 BA, Visual Arts, University of South Australia, Adelaide, Australia.

RECENT SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2016 Ayala Museum, Makati City, Philippines.
Like the Banana Tree at the Gate, Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, NY, USA.

2014 *Picturing Power*, Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, USA.
Tabled by YEE I-LANN, Silverlens, Singapore

2011 *Fluid World*, MSAC Gallery, Taipei, Taiwan.
Fluid World, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, Adelaide, Australia.

2010 *Boogeyman*, Black Box, MAP, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

2008 *Sulu Stories*, Kathmandu Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand.
Kinabalu, Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide, Australia.

RECENT GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2016 *Love Me in My Batik*, Ilham, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

2015 *Open Sea*, Musée d’art contemporain de Lyon, Lyon, France.
On Sweat, Paper, and Porcelain, part of *Moves & Countermoves*, CCS Bard Hessel Museum, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, USA.
Selected works on exhibition, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, MN, USA.
Sous la lune/Beneath the moon, Gallery 1, Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, Singapore.
The 8th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT8), Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia.
Jakarta Biennale 2015: *Neither Back Nor Forward: Acting in the Present*, Gudang Sarinah, Jakarta, Indonesia.

2014 *Away from the Long Night*, MSAC Gallery, Taipei, Taiwan.
The Roving Eye, ARTER Space for Art, Istanbul, Turkey.
Afterimage: Contemporary Photography from Southeast Asia, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore.
Origins, Memories & Parodies, Daegu Photo Biennale, Daegu Culture & Arts Center, Daegu, South Korea.
Curator’s Series #7: A Special Arrow Was Shot In The Neck..., David Roberts Art Foundation, London, UK.
Finding your place in the world: Asian photomedia, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Australia.

2013 Singapore Biennale, Singapore Art Museum and other venues, Singapore.
Artissima: International Fair of Contemporary Art: Present Future Section, Turin, Italy.
Helutrans Collectors Series: Southeast Asia/Contemporary, Artspace@Helutrans, Singapore.
Suspended Histories, Museum Van Loon, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
The (Post) Colonial Photostudio, Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, Sunderland, United Kingdom.
You Are the Company in which You Keep, Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, Sunderland, United Kingdom.
Gerai CCEP1M MalaysiaKu, Jalan Bangkung Malaysia Day Street Celebration, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
Jalan Bangkung Malaysia Day Street Celebration, Jalan Bangkung, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
Noorderlicht PhotoFestival 2013, Old Sugar Factory, Groningen, The Netherlands.
Walk in Asia II, Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo, Japan.

M50: Hari Malaysia 50th Anniversary, MAP @ Publika, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
Art of Memory: Contemporary Textile Expressions, Jim Thompson Art Center, Bangkok, Thailand.
CONVERGENCE: Allegories of the Malaysian Landscape, Galeri Petronas, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
Absurd(c)lity, National Visual Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
ArtJog’13: Maritime Culture, Taman Budaya Yogyakarta, Indonesia.
Welcome to the Jungle: Contemporary Art in Southeast Asia, Yokohama Museum of Art, Japan.
Art For Grabs, Annexe Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
Kuala Lumpur Triennale: *Barricade*, MAPKL @ Publika, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
Women In Between: Asian Women Artists 1984-2012, Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts, Tochigi, Japan.
Kembara Jiwa – The Traveling Soul, Selasar Sunaryo, Bandung, Taman Budaya, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.
Marcel Duchamp in Southeast Asia, Equator Art Projects, Singapore.
Encounter: The Royal Academy in Asia, Institute of Contemporary Art, a Royal Academy exhibition in association with Fortune Cookie Projects and the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, LaSalle College of the Arts, Singapore.
Post-Colonial Photo Studio: An exhibition about photography and post-colonial legacy, Action Field Kodra 2012, Thessaloniki, Greece.
Women In Between: Asian Women Artists 1984-2012, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan.
Waktu dan Ketika, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
Wawasan 2020: The Malaysian Dream, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Singapore.
Credit Suisse: Innovation In Art Series the Collectors Show: Chimera Asian Contemporary Art from Private Collections, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore.
Medit(lation): 2011 Asian Art Biennial, National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taichung, Taiwan.
Territories of the Real and Unreal, Langgeng Art Foundation, Jogjakarta, Indonesia.
Inner Voices, 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, Japan.
Tanah Ayer: Malaysian Stories from the Land, Selasar Sunaryo Art Space, Bandung, Indonesia.
Negotiating Home, History and Nation: Two decades of contemporary art in Southeast Asia 1991 – 2011, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore.
A Tribute to Photography, Primo Marella Gallery, Milan, Italy.
Daegu Photo Biennale, Asia Spectrum, Daegu Culture & Arts Center, Daegu, South Korea.
A Private Collection, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Singapore.

2012

2011

2010

SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA
Griffith University, Queensland, Australia.
Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan.
National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia.
Petronas Art Collection, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
Queensland Art Gallery, Queensland, Australia.
Sabah Art Gallery, Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia.
Singapore Art Museum, Singapore.
UBS Art Collection, New York, USA.
Universiti Sains, Pulau Penang, Malaysia.

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LIKE THE BANANA TREE AT THE GATE

YEE I-LANN

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