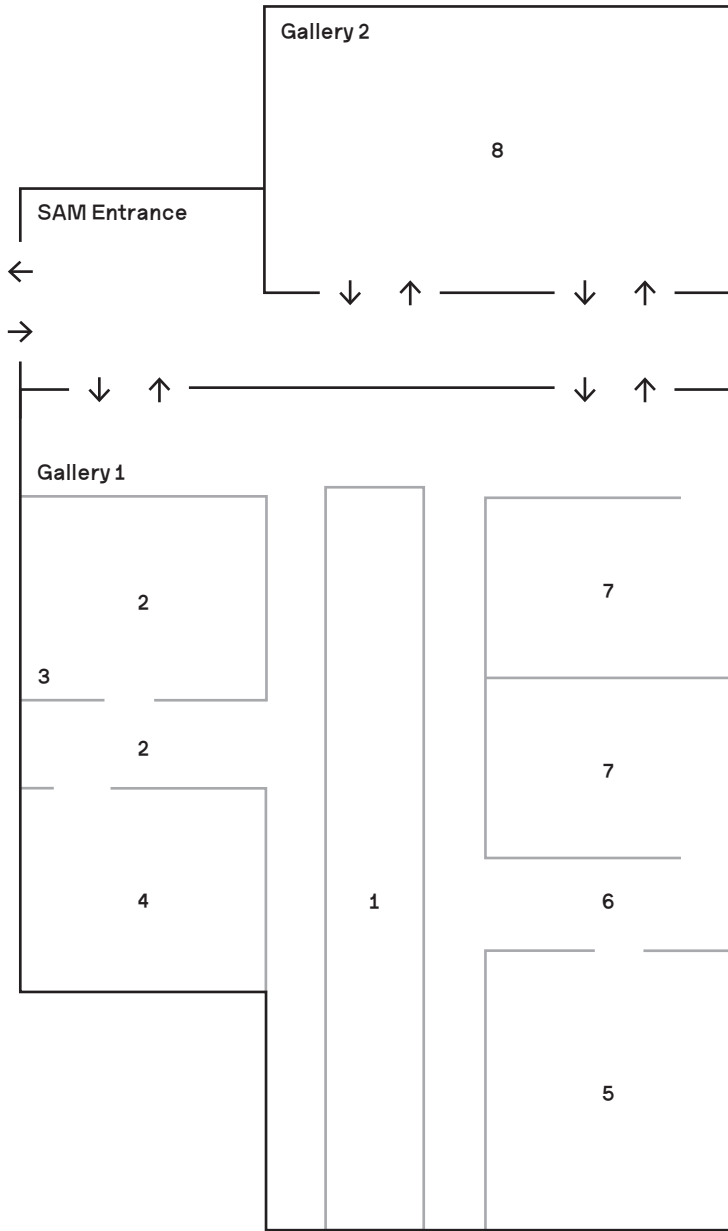


Exhibition Floorplan

Gallery 1 & 2, Level 1, SAM at Tanjong Pagar Distripark



- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1 Ho Tzu Nyen
<i>Hotel Aporia</i>
2019</p> <p>Video, automated fan, transducers, show control system
 Video: six-channel projections, 4:3 format, colour and 24-channel sound, 84 min 1 sec
 The Waves: 12 min; The Wind: 24 min; The Children: 24 min; The Void: 24 min 1 sec
 Collection of Singapore Art Museum</p> | <p>5 Ho Tzu Nyen
<i>T for Time</i>
2023-ongoing</p> <p>Video, voile screen, scrim walls, internet connection, real-time algorithmic editing and compositing system
 Video: two-channel synchronised HD video, 16:9 format, colour and eight-channel sound, approximately 60 min
 Commissioned by Singapore Art Museum and Art Sonje Center with M+, in collaboration with Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo and Sharjah Art Foundation</p> |
| <p>2 Ho Tzu Nyen
<i>CDOSEA</i>
2017-ongoing</p> <p>Video, mini PC, algorithmic editing system, LED lights
 Video: single-channel projection, 16:9 format, colour, five-channel sound, infinite duration
 Collection of Singapore Art Museum</p> | <p>6 Ho Tzu Nyen
<i>T for Time: Timepieces</i>
2023-ongoing</p> <p>39 flatscreens (various dimensions), apps and videos, various durations (1 second to infinite)
 Commissioned by Singapore Art Museum and Art Sonje Center with M+, in collaboration with Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo and Sharjah Art Foundation</p> |
| <p>3 Ho Tzu Nyen
<i>F for Fold</i>
2021</p> <p>Coloured print on paper
 Configurations variable: 12.4 x 18 x 5 cm
 Collection of the artist</p> | <p>7 Ho Tzu Nyen
<i>The Name</i>
2015-2017</p> <p>Video, 16 books
 Video: single-channel HD projection, 16:9 format, colour and six-channel sound, 16 min 51 sec (English); 16 min 52 sec (Chinese)
 Collection of Singapore Art Museum</p> |
| <p>4 Ho Tzu Nyen
<i>The Cloud of Unknowing</i>
2011</p> <p>Video, smoke machine, lights and show control system
 Video: single-channel HD projection, 16:9 format, colour and 13-channel sound, 28 min
 Collection of Singapore Art Museum</p> | <p>8 Ho Tzu Nyen
<i>One or Several Tigers</i>
2017</p> <p>Video, smoke machine, automated screen, show control system, 14 wayang kulit puppets in aluminium frames
 Video: two-channel HD video projections, 16:9 format, colour and 10-channel sound, 33 min 33 sec
 Collection of Singapore Art Museum</p> |

Published on the occasion of the exhibition *Ho Tzu Nyen: Time & the Tiger*, at Singapore Art Museum, 24 November 2023–3 March 2024. All artworks in this publication are © Ho Tzu Nyen.

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Time & the Tiger

This **mid-career survey**—the first devoted to the work of Ho Tzu Nyen—attempts to represent the entire scope of the artist’s broad-ranging and multifaceted work from 2003 to 2023. Featuring eight major installations across two galleries and a new commission titled *T for Time*, the works are primarily drawn from the collection of the Singapore Art Museum. Throughout his journey, Ho has explored various media—from objects and paintings to animation and soundscapes—pushing each medium’s limits, culminating in his iconic video installations.

Ho’s art has been an embodiment of a political ethos that continuously challenges conventional hierarchies in our understanding of the past. His art is often narrated through a constellation of **unruly characters** through which Ho engages with the nature of identity, storytelling and the passage of time in Asia, particularly since the Second World War. These characters include the triple agent and Malayan communist leader Lai Teck who was also known as Trương Phước Đạt, Loi Teck, Lighter and Mr. Wright to British, French and Japanese authorities; G. D. Coleman, the first land surveyor in colonial Singapore, who was also the superintendent of prisons; and the Kyoto School philosophers who confronted Western philosophy with Zen Buddhist-inspired thought during Japan’s imperialist surge in the 1940s.

This preoccupation with characters who are constantly in a state of metamorphosis can be traced to Ho’s first major artwork from 2003 titled *Utama—Every Name in History is I*, which delves into Singapore’s founding myth by referencing its pre-colonial founder, Sang Nila Utama, often credited with naming Singapore. Intriguingly, much like Lai Teck, Utama was known by multiple names, including Sri Tri Buana, Paramēswara, Iskandar Shāh, and Sang Si Perba. The myriad names associated with figures such as Utama and Lai Teck indicate that they adopted and shed identities based on evolving political situations. This fluidity mirrors what the intellectuals of the Kyoto School termed “self-emptying” or letting go of rigid identities, even though they were geographically far away from the humid jungles of Malaya.

On the reverse of this pamphlet there is an aggregation of images that serves as a visual guide to the tapestry of the unruly and fluid characters that have fascinated the artist over the past two decades.

The title of the exhibition, ***Time & the Tiger***, alludes to the primary sources of Ho’s work: the fascination with tigers that is demonstrated across Asia and how these majestic animals enable us to reflect on the very idea of time. Today, tigers are on the brink of extinction. However, two million years ago they roamed freely across Asia, notably in Sundaland—a landmass now submerged beneath the oceans that once connected present-day mainland Asia with insular Southeast Asia. More recently, tigers were a potent symbol of power during Japan’s invasion of various parts of Southeast and East Asia. While the weretigers of the Malay world, who can transform from man to beast and back again, serve as a bridge linking humans and ancestral memory. Tigers, in other words, allow us to think about time through various scales: from the geological scale of Sundaland’s transformation, to the cosmological scale of our ancestral memory.

In today’s world, we often view time as a seamless continuum. This understanding is shaped, in large part, by the Gregorian calendar, introduced at the tail end of the 16th century, coupled with the establishment of national and regional time zones aligned with the International Prime Meridian. Yet, time does operate at different scales. While shaping this exhibition, Ho mused,

The question is: Can all these scales of time co-exist and thrive simultaneously? Drawing from the metaphor of forking pathways—where each decision creates a new path, and the outcomes of those decisions create more opportunities for choices that split into their own paths—I want to try and suggest every possible route, not merely specific timelines or narratives. It is this possibility that fascinates me. While I remain interested in individual stories and moments, the aim, since my earliest works, has been to generate artworks that are like machines that hold this vast spectrum of possibilities.

For Ho, time is not just a linear progression but a multi-dimensional matrix, shaped and reshaped by cultural, ecological, and historical forces, with the tiger serving as a powerful emblem of its fluidity and complexities.

Just as tigers traversed Asia’s terrains, so did its shifting ideologies. **Asia**, with its vast array of differences, nuances and contradictions, experienced a unique synchronicity in 1944. Through the command of General Yamashita Tomoyuki, the so-called “Tiger of Malaya,” the Japanese Imperial government unified many of its territories in the region—what are today Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines—under the singular pulse of Tokyo Imperial Time. This unification serves as an example of how Japan’s ideologies permeated Asia during the Second World War. This moment is captured in the installation *Hotel Aporia*, which occupies a central place within the exhibition. Spanning four rooms, the installation interweaves writing with found footage drawn

HO TZU NYEN

Born in 1976 in Singapore, where he remains an active contributor to the contemporary arts scene, Ho Tzu Nyen is a visual artist, writer, theatre-maker and filmmaker. Ho pursued creative arts at the Victorian College of the Arts in Melbourne before studying Southeast Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore. His artistic journey began more than two decades ago, a period marked by rapid globalisation of the arts in Singapore and Southeast Asia.

Ho’s art examines the potency and architecture of myths, offering a profound investigation into the mechanisms through which history is constructed, documented and analysed. Central to his practice are the dialogic exchanges between Asia and the West, underscoring Southeast Asia’s distinct place within the socio-political whirlwinds of decolonisation that swept through the 20th century. Ho’s works often use unruly and shapeshifting characters to navigate these complex and dynamic conditions, while remaining centred on the fluid identities that make up the region’s imaginaries. This is particularly evident in his long-term project *The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia* (initiated in 2012), an ongoing artwork through which the artist synthesises research materials to conceive an infinite number of parallel (historiographical) accounts of the region’s intricacies. This endeavour juxtaposes an array of subjects, ranging from personalities to notable phenomena, each echoing resonances from global narratives of leftist and anti-colonial movements.

Aggregation plays an important role in Ho’s approach, as seen in the way the artist continues to add to *The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia*. This method of aggregation was further expanded through Ho’s work as a curator. As co-curator of the 7th Asian Art Biennial (2019), Ho’s roles as writer, researcher and artist converge as he organises and interprets an array of artworks and a network of key concepts relating to the anarchic zone of upland Zomia and the unruly pirate zone of the Sulu Sea. These two spaces formed the loci for Ho and his co-curator to rethink the question of Asia itself: Where and how else should we locate the geophysical and geopolitical contours of Asia?

Ho held his first solo exhibition at The Substation, Singapore in 2003, and has since exhibited widely, representing Singapore at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011. Ho was also a resident of the DAAD Artists-in-Berlin Program from 2014 to 2015 and at the Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong, from 2012 to 2015. He has held key solo presentations in numerous international exhibitions, including *Hammer Projects: Ho Tzu Nyen* (2022), Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; *Night March of Hundred Monsters* (2021), Toyota Municipal Museum of Art; *Voice of Void*, Yamaguchi Centre for Arts and Media, Japan (2021); and *G for Gong*, Edith-Russ-Haus for Media, Oldenburg (2019).

Ho has also been featured in important international film festivals, including the 42nd Rotterdam International Film Festival (2013); Sundance Film Festival (2012); 64th Locarno International Film Festival (2011); 66th Venice International Film Festival (2009); and Directors’ Fortnight, 62nd Cannes International Film Festival (2009). His works also feature regularly at theatre and performance festivals around the world, including Summer Festival, The Kampnagel, Hamburg (2018); TPAM, Yokohama (2018, 2020); Kunstenfestivaldesarts, Brussels (2006, 2008, 2017); Vienna Festival (2018, 2020); and Theatre der Welt, Germany (2010, 2023).

His works have been collected by major institutions and collections around the world, including The Guggenheim; Tate Modern; Mori Art Museum; MMCA Seoul; Hamburger Bahnhof–Nationalgalerie der Gegenwart; National Gallery Singapore; and Singapore Art Museum (SAM), which currently holds the largest collection of his works.



Video still from *Perfect Lovers* from Ho Tzu Nyen, *T for Time: Timepieces*, 2023-ongoing, 39 flatscreens (various quantities and dimensions), apps and videos, various durations (1 second to infinite). Image courtesy of the artist and Kiang Malingue

Ho’s latest work, *T for Time*, delves into various anecdotes and experiences related to time. It too incorporates found footage, as well as animations and scenes shot by the artist. In preparation for this work, Ho commented,

Time is the chief protagonist in my works. What, after all, is time? We seem to be able only to describe it through metaphors—time flies or time flows. If time is a river, what are its banks? Is there only a single time? And if so, is there a master clock that controls or enslaves other clocks? Or are there different temporalities, each with its own sovereignty?

At the heart of this exhibition is *The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia* (CDOSEA). Launched in 2012, Ho has been meticulously compiling found images, texts and music that form the foundation of his research, artworks and performances on Southeast Asian histories. This aggregation has also guided his ongoing explorations between Asia and the West. Many of the installations featured in this exhibition, including *The Name* and *The Nameless*, emerged from this continuously evolving project. In 2017, the artist consolidated the amassed materials into a database, which was then powered by an **algorithm** that continuously shuffles its contents. The result is a continuous and infinite flow of random sequences, available to anyone who visits the website www.cdosea.org. In this exhibition, *CDOSEA* takes the form of a single-channel video installation. It underscores Ho’s ongoing engagement with the medium of film, particularly its potential evolution, and nods to the classic film techniques of montage and sequencing. These concerns are also contemporaneous with the media conditions we find ourselves encoded within today—as databases and algorithms subtly shape our perceptions, behaviours and desires, orchestrating vast portions of our lives, steering choices and even the way we perceive reality itself. In its myriad forms, *CDOSEA* exemplifies Ho’s ground-breaking methodologies that embrace metamorphosis and an unruliness in challenging hegemonic narratives and established orders, defiantly advocating for a chaotic reimagining of history’s chains and conventions.

Much like the tiger and the shapeshifting characters that populate his works, Ho’s art is emblematic of a radicalism, perpetually in motion. It sheds its skin when it needs to; evades easy categorisation and dodges classification. Like a maze of narratives within narratives. Yet, one thing remains certain: in a time where complexity is reduced to soundbites, Ho’s art serves as a reservoir of reflection and critique, inviting us to engage with the nuances of a condition we know all too well but refuse to acknowledge—flux.



Still from Ho Tzu Nyen, *T for Time*, 2023-ongoing, Video, voile screen, scrim walls, internet connection, real-time algorithmic editing and compositing system, approx. 60 min. Image courtesy of the artist and Kiang Malingue.