

soft doubles
Maria Taniguchi

ROH

soft doubles

30 AUGUST 2023

Joselina Cruz: Hi, let's start talking. So you were telling me earlier about your first visit to ROH.

Maria Taniguchi (MT): First I want to welcome you to my studio because I realized you've never been.

It's a very nice and large studio, thanks for inviting me!

MT: So I was telling you this ghost story earlier. To give context to my story, I was only in Jakarta for less than a day. The flight schedule was slightly difficult so when I arrived, I was tired and I wanted to nap. I went upstairs to the office and they offered me the office couch to sleep in. I would have slept, but I asked them for more information about the house because it was an old mansion, and I was wondering about the sort of people who used to live there. So they told me this ghost story. Apparently there is a ghost of a Dutch woman who still lives in the gallery and because I was sitting on the office couch they told me I had a direct view of where she liked to hang out, which was on the fifth step of the stairs. And so she would be seen there looking at people. She likes to sit on that fifth step of the staircase that leads from the office to the smaller space downstairs. She moves around the space, and the last time that they saw her she was looking at a textile sculpture in the main gallery space. I didn't get my nap in the end.

Which sculpture was that?

MT: It was a suspended work by Agung Kurniawan that was a circular form covered with clothes, I think, or some textiles that looked like they were once clothing.

So tell me about the gallery space.

MT: It's not a complete white cube. You can still see portions of the rooms almost imprinted on the gallery walls, maybe where a kitchen sink used to be. It used to be this old mansion. And what they did was tear out the two floors inside the main space. What that did was it opened up the space and turned it into one large giant space. They chose to leave the walls untouched so on the walls you still see traces where plumbing used to be. The plumbing obviously is not there anymore, the rooms are no longer defined, but the traces of what once were remains. There are tiles and crumbling corners. They also chose not to clad the walls to make it a single surface. So in effect, there are many surfaces in the gallery space. I was telling Jun that the space was already quite "full" because there are all these surfaces. It's the opposite of a white cube, actually. You sense the former life of the house. But despite all these details the domestic aspect of the house is no longer there, it's gone. It's different from a place like Calle Wright which still feels like an old home, I mean, they retained the rooms, so the proportions of the space, everything, still reflects a living space.

When you were in the space taking in scale, the many different surfaces, what were you thinking of when you were mulling over your show?

MT: We were initially talking about including *runaways*, or an iteration of that. I wanted to do a variation of that sculpture in a space where there's a massive volume of space. The first iteration was made of Java Plum- it was carved wood. I was also thinking a lot about the carbon footprint of my work. I didn't want to send a giant crate to Indonesia. I wanted to avoid, as much as I could, any kind of shipping. So if I could make a work in the place where it was being shown I would. We were looking at options for fabrication, and I always wanted to work with rattan; in a way it's a slightly trickier material to work with. As you know, I like working with archetypal material and forms, but with rattan, there is this immediate association with certain things especially when it's bent rattan. One starts thinking about domestic objects... wanted to avoid that. A loose association is fine, but I wanted to use rattan, and somehow still calibrate it so that it would be freed from any association to the domestic.

And by free you mean removed from certain associations?

MT: Yes. Free to become something other than the fact that this material is so tied to furniture, for example. Rattan also has a certain give. Unlike hardwood. Hardwood can be shaped. Rattan is bendy.

Let's return to the space. You thought that the space had so much texture. What were your thoughts about that in relation to your work?

MT: I thought the space was already very full. I mean, you have the ghost and then there were also the elements of the house inside the space. There was a lot going on.

Perhaps it was the perfect foil for a minimal practice. Did you find it a bit too busy? Was it a challenge? Did it become more interesting for you?

MT: I think, first of all, I don't know if I would use the word minimal to describe my practice. There are elements of it there, for example that there is a form of compression in some of the works. I mean in a way the spatial dynamics are minimal, but I don't think the works are quiet in this sense.

You don't think they're quiet? I think they have a presence. The physicality of the work is very present.

MT: About working with the space, I feel like all these elements that are present- ghostly and domestic elements that are still in this space -somehow makes it softer than a stark white space. I don't know if this makes it more difficult or easier to think around. It sounds counterintuitive to say that an empty room has more volume than a room that's populated by various elements, but I think it's true in this instance. And just on the subject of works existing in specific spaces- you know how some paintings are? They are themselves no matter where they are in a room, no matter the conditions of a space. As objects these kinds of paintings tend to be quite stable. And then there are other types of paintings, and I think my work probably falls in this category, that are a little bit unstable.

Can you explain more what you mean by stable and unstable? Is it the sense of maybe even for practical reasons, let's say a change of position in a room?

MT: I feel like I started to think about this because of the ghost lady. I was thinking about things like stability, instability, even porosity, not in terms of the surface that you first encounter when you look at the paintings, but in terms of its permeability by the other elements in the space, whether it's other objects or artwork in the space, or natural or synthetic elements like light for example. Stability in the case of my work is a relational quality.

I don't think your works have this internal narrative going on. I mean it does materially and construction-wise, there is that, but because there are no images, what happens is it has to relate to things outside of it.

MT: I don't want to say that they're unfinished, but they in a sense are, and in that way there's no 'complete' internal narrative.

There's no internal narrative which creates this sense that it's a complete unit. So yes, your works including the brick paintings all have a relational quality. I think usually when you look at an image it scans the surface from one end to the other, even if it's an abstraction or color field painting, etc. There are things on the surface to anchor your sight. Your work has the object's materiality to engage with. Each piece, each little brick cell has its own internal narrative. But this is something that you have to engage with after more than a first glance. Imagine encountering your work for the first time and you realize that each piece is painted individually and independently of each other, and you're actually facing an entire wall of individually painted boxes. That's sort of what you're looking at.

MT: Yeah. Somebody once asked me if I paid special attention to certain bricks in a large painting.

Do you?

MT: I do sometimes fixate on a few bricks in on painting.

You mean there are some bricks that you paint over and over again?

MT: No, I just find particular ones maybe more interesting or more beautiful than the rest of the thousand other bricks that are on that particular painting. I can't explain it. I think it's a bit irrational.

Sometime ago we were talking about your videos being a kind of "decompression," of the paintings because they (the videos) also share this quality of not having a "complete" internal narrative.

MT: Not that they're not finished, but I feel like they articulate and release information of a different kind.

I guess because there's no edges to it.

MT: Ah, I think you're right. It allows for another kind of overflow.

When we first talked about your first brick, you were talking about skinning. Remember? I sort of still see that in some of the work, because there is this engagement with surface. Now there is this added interest in volume. Not only with your brick paintings, but also with the *runaways*.

MT: It's about an awareness of volume. That, for me, is very present. Like the *runaways*, for example, once you place it in space, it speaks to volume but not in a heavy sense,

because it sits very lightly in space. I would say it has as much volume as a drawing.

Let's go back to the videos for a moment. Your videos engage with the concept of surfaces. And when you speak of surfaces, it's the fact that the paintings have no edges. It can conceptually run into video, and with it (the paintings) also being drawings, it runs into the *runaways*. It's like this thing that keeps on flowing through your works. Perhaps all of those other elements are part of the brick paintings...

MT: I maybe see a kind of interchangeability between the videos and the painting. But this is something I will have to think about some more. Maybe it's the wrong word.

I see what you mean. Interchangeable might not be the precise word. It's just that certain concepts access all your works. It's a sort of leak from one work to another... the drawing that you see here leaks into the runways, etc. Maybe we can talk a bit more now about your drawings.

MT: I like that we don't really throw certain expectations on drawings. They're not expected to do certain things that a painting is expected to do. Not only because of the fact that when you call it a drawing, I mean like drawings can be any medium, whatever, you know, but there is a feeling that you have the capacity to erase it.

Drawings can be like studies. It can represent the most basic idea. It can be very raw. Conceptually, the first spark of an idea can be shared as a drawing.

MT: I don't sketch.

Ah, okay. That's interesting.

MT: Yeah, I don't sketch. I don't have a drawing practice that sketches, let's say, my ideas.

In that sense, drawing doesn't occupy a huge part of your practice...

MT: It does. Drawing is very important to me, but I don't use it in order to think about work that will eventually become something else. In a sense, I don't use it as a preliminary form. I draw, but I guess over time, I stopped making drawings because a lot of my drawing practice already exists in the brick paintings, which all start with drawing.

I think that's one element that a lot of people actually miss because the works are named as brick paintings.

MT: That brick painting is actually just a nickname for them. I have to say that the works are actually *untitled*.

I think the use of this nickname occludes our capacity to see an actual drawing. Right?

MT: Exactly. It obscures this, the naming obscures the actual practice, the actual act of drawing. There's a lot of flipping going on.

Flipping, you know, maybe from one form to another... I see what you mean. The runaways are seen very much like sculpture, but actually, for you, in your mind these are drawings.

MT: Yeah. I mean, if I would define them, they would be defined as part of where my drawing practice actually exists. If you were to ask me about drawings, I would then point to *runaways*.

So this is your flipping. Is there a way you'd like your audience to see your work, or you'd like them to work through this lens of conceptual slippage? which allows for this depth of—not meaning—but depth of engagement, with the materiality of the object and the intentions of that object's very materiality. There is precision to the sort of material you use, for example like the lattices. Which are actual drawings. When I first saw them as an image on my phone they did not look like drawings. They looked more like swashes of paint.

MT: Yeah, it's funny that you don't see them as drawings.

I showed it to some other people and they said, Oh, is that masking tape? Like paper? No, it's not. It's a drawing.

MT: Well, they're very simple. I gave myself a simple condition when making these drawings. It was about making lines meet, and then to define the intersections by creating a sort of gradient. That's where it started. I had also been wanting to really work with colored pencils for a long time! It's a childlike attraction and sometimes you just have to find around material you've been wanting to work with. Like when you really want to eat or cook something, and you're just like, okay, forget it, I'm just going to make that pie. So I had this intuition, this urge to a.) Use colored pencils, and b.) Go back to the same surface that I had been using for drawings previously. I've always used a particular type of paper to draw on.

Why did you stop using the paper?

MT: I didn't really stop. It was just in my studio. It's often like that, I have these surfaces in the studio that I like having around. Like companions.

I think this work, these *lattices*, might be like a continuation of your *runaways*.

MT: Maybe. I don't know. Sometimes I'm really blind to my own intentions. At least

I'd like to think so, just so I can feel like I'm playing.

I know you are not so comfortable in describing your work as minimal; however in the same breath I'm also saying that your practice has a minimalism that comes through your capacity to distill ideas. An efficiency of movement, coupled with rigor and labor. It is a mode of inquiry, like a mental game or challenge.

MT: I think it's easy to be tricked by this word minimalism in my practice. If you just think of that word in the context of them as paintings then you're stuck there. It's like quicksand, and you get sucked into a mode of interpretation that's not very useful or generative. I've been working on them for such a long time, which is necessary, by the way, for them to exist in the way that they exist conceptually. It's easy to miss out on these things.

There are several ways to "pierce" through the work. One is to see it as a drawing, the precise lines. And one can see it as painting, which is the painted image in between the lines, inside the little boxes. Then one has to go back to the fact that you also regard your work sculpturally. It is an object that morphs as sculpture, drawing, painting. It really takes a particular commitment, I suppose, to access certain kinds of painting.

MT: I think the other elements, for example, the *runways*, the videos, help you enter the paintings. This is why I say that they're decompressions and they release more information. They're like entry or exit points. Let's go back to the *lattice* works. They have a playfulness, are lighter, and feels like a departure, although they still skew to the same motifs of your practice, for example in the shading, and the precision. maybe you can describe how you put together a lattice work. Are you okay if we break it down?

MT: I don't want to tell you how it's done. (laughs) I got myself a huge set of colored pencils, an ambitious amount, with like fifty kinds of blues. I had to trick myself to not just gravitate towards the colors that I like, like subjectively, but then I was looking at this big colored pencil set... Why did I buy it when I was only going to use 5 colors? So I spent a lot of time trying to use the colors that I at first thought I hated or thought I would never touch.

Yeah, and you did. I never thought you would use red.

MT: Medium cadmium red. I was just saying that this one is very nice! We are putting some of the drawings upstairs.

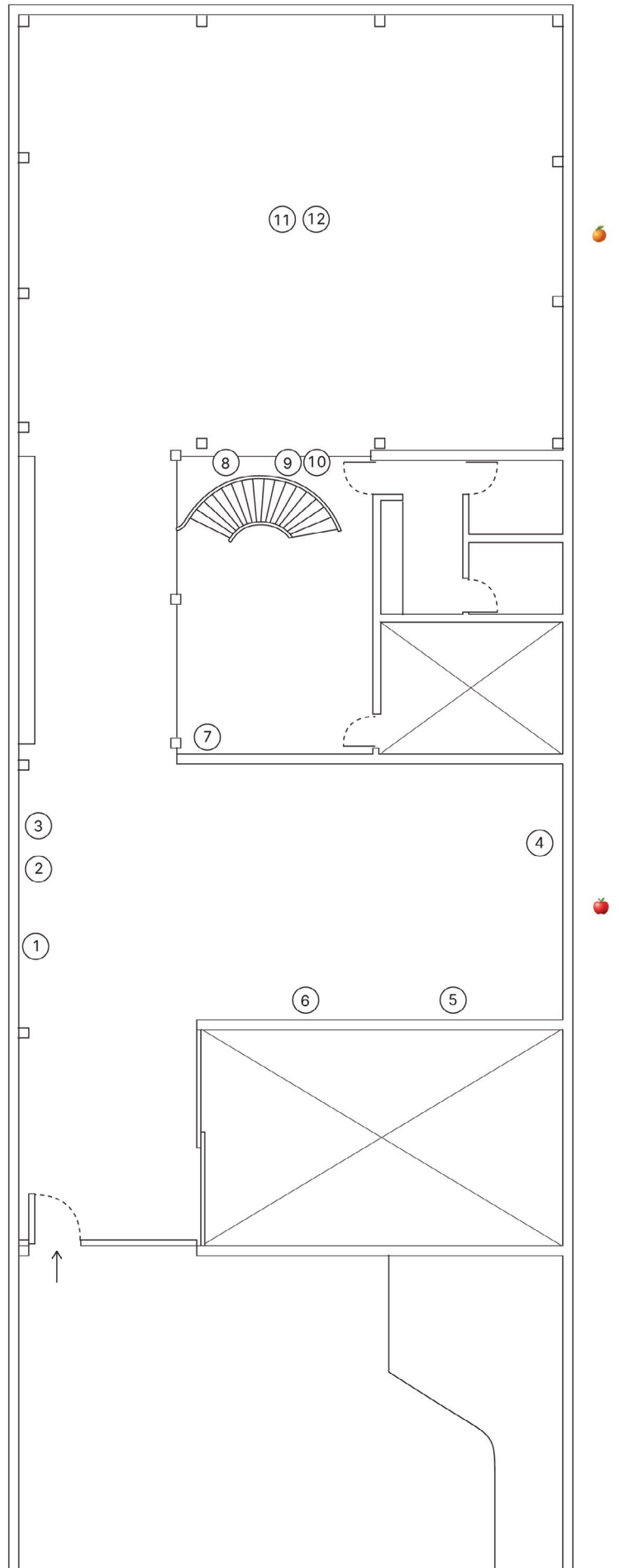
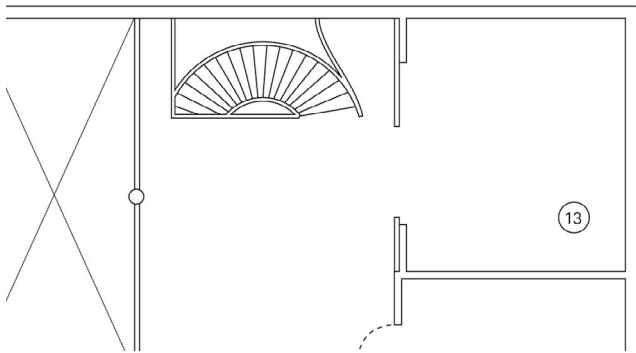
Btw, speaking of color, we need to borrow that one brick painting that has color in it. The one...

MT: Oh, the colored brick paintings. Yeah. We should borrow that. Do you want to see my pencil set?

Okay.

(We check out her multi-layered box of colored pencils. It is an impressive amount of colored pencils.)

FLOOR PLAN



1
Untitled
2023
Acrylic on canvas
44.5 × 34.5 cm

2
Untitled
2023
Acrylic on canvas
34.5 × 27 cm

3
Untitled
2023
Acrylic on canvas
34.5 × 44.5 cm

4
Untitled
2022
Acrylic on canvas
274.32 × 121.92 cm

5
Untitled
2023
Acrylic on canvas
228.5 × 114.5 cm

6
*Untitled*2023
Acrylic on canvas
228.5 × 114.5 cm

7
Figure Study
2015
Single-channel HD video, black and white,
no sound
2 minute 29 seconds
Edition 4 of 5

8
Untitled
2023
Acrylic on canvas
12 × 19 cm

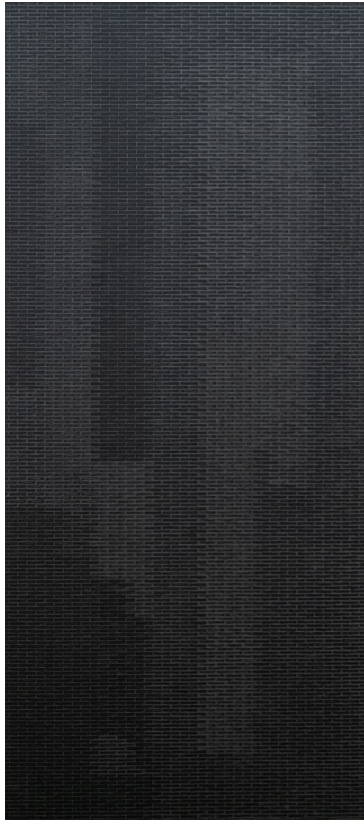
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Untitled
2023
Acrylic on canvas
19 × 12.2 cm

10
Untitled
2023
Acrylic on canvas
19 × 12.2 cm

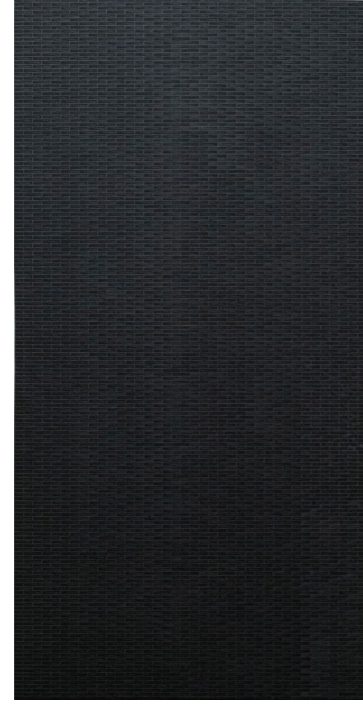
11
Untitled
2023
Acrylic on canvas
49 × 24.5 cm, 37 × 23 cm, 34.2 × 27 cm,
34.5 × 44.5 cm, 49 × 25 cm, 44.5 × 34.5 cm,
49 × 25 cm, 44.5 × 34.5 cm, 37 × 23.5 cm,
37 × 23.5 cm

12
Runaways
2023
Rattan, steel wire
Variable dimension

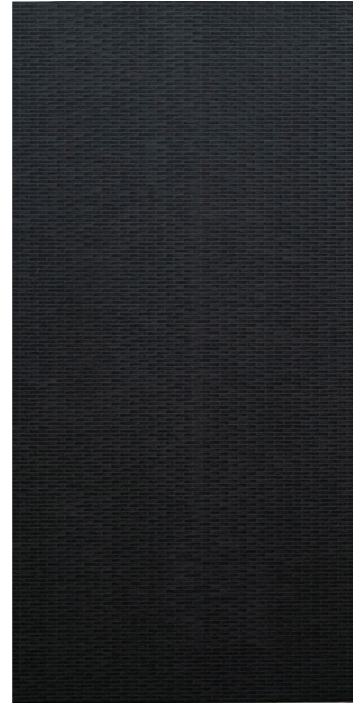
13
*Lattices (deep indigo, deep red, indanthrene
blue, magenta)*
2023
Pencil on paper
101.5 × 68.5 cm (set of 4)



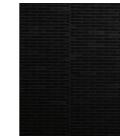
Untitled
2022
Acrylic on canvas
274.32 × 121.92 cm



Untitled
2023
Acrylic on canvas
228.5 × 114.5 cm



Untitled
2023
Acrylic on canvas
228.5 × 114.5 cm



Untitled
2023
Acrylic on canvas
44.5 × 34.5 cm



Untitled
2023
Acrylic on canvas
12 × 19 cm



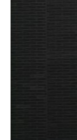
Untitled
2023
Acrylic on canvas
34.5 × 27 cm



Untitled
2023
Acrylic on canvas
19 × 12.2 cm



Untitled
2023
Acrylic on canvas
34.5 × 44.5 cm



Untitled
2023
Acrylic on canvas
19 × 12.2 cm



Untitled
2023
Acrylic on canvas
49 × 24.5 cm, 37 × 23 cm, 34.2 × 27 cm,
34.5 × 44.5 cm, 49 × 25 cm, 44.5 × 34.5 cm,
49 × 25 cm, 44.5 × 34.5 cm, 37 × 23.5 cm,
37 × 23.5 cm

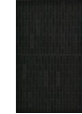
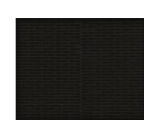




Figure Study

2015

Single-channel HD video, black and white,
no sound

2 minute 29 seconds

Edition 4 of 5



Runaways
2023
Rattan, steel wire
Variable dimension



*Lattices (deep indigo, deep red, indanthrene
blue, magenta)*
2023
Pencil on paper
101.5 × 68.5 cm (set of 4)

B. 1981, Dumaguete, Philippines
Lives and works in Makati, Philippines

Maria Taniguchi's works encompass painting, sculpture, video and installation. Her practices investigate space and time along with social and historical contexts. Her series of "Untitled" brick paintings is an ongoing series that began in 2008. Each painting consists of seemingly countless rectangular cells, each one outlined by hand with graphite and filled with gray and black tones. The painstaking process creates a subtle yet complex pattern on the surface. These paintings develop to various extents, most of them reaching meters in size. The constructive structure embodies architectural elements, resulting in the paintings themselves manifesting as monumental existences within the space. The artist has referred to her brick paintings as the fundamental root of her larger artistic practice, while the other artworks such as sculptures and installations are reflection, or refractions of it.

Maria Taniguchi was born in Dumaguete City, Philippines, in 1981. She won the Hugo Boss Asia Art Award in 2015 and was a LUX Associate Artist in 2009. Recent exhibitions include the 12th Gwangju Biennale: *Imagined Borders*, Gwangju Biennale Exhibition Centre, Gwangju, South Korea (2018); 21st Biennale of Sydney, *SUPERPOSITION: Equilibrium & Engagement*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia (2018); *History of a vanishing present: A prologue*, the Mistake Room, Los Angeles, United States (2016); *Afterwork*, Para Site, Hong Kong (2016); *Globale: New Sensorium*, ZKM Centre for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, Germany (2016); *The Vexed Contemporary*, Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, Manila, the Philippines (2015); and the 8th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, QAGOMA, Brisbane, Australia (2015). Her work is held in a number of collections including the M+ Museum, Hong Kong; the Burger Collection, Hong Kong; Kadist Art Foundation, San Francisco; QAGOMA, Brisbane; and the K11 Art Foundation, Shanghai.

B. 1970, Manila, Philippines
Lives and works in Manila, Philippines

Joselina Cruz is Director and Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art and Design (MCAD), De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde, Manila. Cruz has worked as a curator for the Lopez Memorial Museum in Manila and the Singapore Art Museum. She was a curator for the 2nd Singapore Biennale in 2008 and curated the Philippine Pavilion for the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017 with artists Lani Maestro and Manuel Ocampo. She has worked on group and monographic exhibitions with artists Paul Pfeiffer, Haegue Yang, Pacita Abad, Michael Lin and Apichatpong Weeraseethakul. In 2019 she published the first collection of writings by eminent Filipino political and cultural theorist Marian Pastor Roces. She is a Fellow of the Nippon Foundation's Asian Public Intellectuals, the Asian Cultural Council, and on the board of CIMAM (International Committee for Museums and Collections of Modern Art). She studied art history at the University of the Philippines, and Curating Contemporary Art (MA) at the Royal College of Art (United Kingdom).

THANK YOU

JUN TIRTADJI
WINFRED HUTABARAT

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ANISA RIANI
TUTI HARYATI
RAKA IMAM MUNADZAT
DEDI SUTOYO
WIWIT BUDI SANTOSO
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