

ROH

BECOMING UNCENTERED

DENISE LAI

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As you hold this text, I'm aware that my descriptions of the exhibition may already belong to another time. The works I might describe from Charwei Tsai, her mirror installation which currently snakes along the entrance floor like stepping stones into the gallery, have likely undergone several iterations. Kazuko Miyamoto's wall installation, with its precise geometric construction of cotton string on nails, may have been scaled down or removed entirely. The obsolescence of this very text—its inability to capture what you might encounter in the gallery today—is fundamental to our project: that perhaps we have been too quick to fix meaning in place.

Historical precedents exist. There was Harald Szeemann's 1969 exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form*, when process-based works refused to resolve into finished objects, and the exhibition space became a site of continuous becoming and transferability. Our current undertaking extends this uncertainty to a group of artists whose works made clear that, as Scott Burton wrote for the aforementioned show's catalogue, art continues to be "invaded by life, if life means flux, change,

chance, time, unpredictability". This lineage of uncertainty is echoed in Martin Germann and Carla Donauer's pivotal 2021 exhibition *July, August, September*—an exercise in adaptive curation responding to the fractured logistics and border closures during the "half-states" of the pandemic. Through Martin and Carla's generous contribution of their exhibition catalogue to *There is no center*, we find ourselves in dialogue with these moments of rupture—a testament to how artistic practice adapts and finds new meanings within contexts of chaos and constraint.

In the opening moments of 2025, *There is no center* arrives from an understanding that certainty has become an artefact, one that might fail our needs in a time that requires a continuation of this agile spirit, which embraces the productive tensions between stability and flux. It imagines itself as a space where artworks can enter at different stages across its twelve-week show period, and in which their forms are fundamentally contingent and relational by transforming throughout. This approach acknowledges both the impossibility and persistent allure of the center as an organising principle of gathering and meaning-making, and gathers artists whose practices have inspired the tension which animates the exhibition.

Formally, this might look like the slackening of a rope. Kate Newby's installation, *Smaller than some bigger than most*, enchants a xylophone of brass chimes hung along locally-sourced jute slung across two faces of the gallery. It's not the kind of work that announces itself but that divides and organises the volume of the space without insisting on its importance. Our distributed field of attention here exemplifies the exhibition's artists' profound attunement to the poetry to the peripheral, and the reorientations that can offer the most profound

challenges to centralised authority and meaning-making by inhabiting a radical modesty. Listen out for the ticking of Orawan Arunrak's clocks, reworked to tell us nothing about the time except for its steady, inexorable movement. Tith Kanitha's philosophy of allowing her sculptures and drawings to find new configurations on each occasion of display speaks to an understanding of how meaning emerges not through predetermined frameworks, but through patient attention to possibility. The tentative nature by which Budi Santoso's figures emerge from wood and stone offers what we might understand as a map of alternative pathways through space, each one determined by a material's own internal logic rather than external impositions of order.

Kazuko Miyamoto's 1978 string construction offers a crucial historical touchstone for understanding how artists have long grappled with questions of center and periphery, stability and impermanence. Built through a dialogue between space and the performer's body following a set of instructions, Miyamoto's works emerged from the language of Minimalism while unravelling its masculinist certainties. Critic Olamiju Fajemisin has described her's as an act of "feigning monumentality"; I enjoy this reading because it draws out the tangle amongst the seeming order of Miyamoto and, by extension, Tith's works—that there is shared delight in soft, deliberate resistance, in an aesthetic that performs its own undoing. Outside, on the facade, Mira Rizki Kurnia invites audiences to press their ears into pots and paint cans in her constellational sound installation. She retunes live environmental recordings of the gallery's surroundings into a multitextured hum, exploring the artist's interest in the sound of small entities resonating within a chaotic system.

Aditya Novali's disco *blencong* keeps pace with the exhibition's rhythm of undoing, reimagining the traditional Indonesian lamp, a singular flame that brings puppets to life in *wayang kulit* performances, through the aesthetic vocabulary of the mirror-ball of contemporary dance culture. Both technologies of illumination have served as instruments for collective theatres of becoming—spaces where identity becomes negotiable and the expository glare of daylight gives way for self-discovery in movement. Mirrored interventions continue in Novali's multimediac paintings and their dialogue with Charwei Tsai's floor installation, the latter transforming these reflective planes into platforms for vessels hand-pinchd by participants in an artist-led workshop. In this field of offerings, each individual was invited to fill their vessels with materials that embodied what they wished to release in an ongoing process of reflection, selection and surrender.

Tcheu Siong and Albertho Wanma's works form the exhibition's waypoints for an ongoing exploration of how meaning manifests across the material and spiritual. Caught between human and spirit realm, Wanma's self-portrait of his disembodiment expresses the artist's feelings of being caught between a traditional and local culture, and a centralized national culture. Tcheu Siong's tapestries interpret the creatures of the Hmong spiritual world who occupy her dreams, where the traditional Hmong practice of story cloth creation becomes a site of recording what conventional frameworks of representation fail to capture.

A white carpet awaits Bea Camacho and *Efface*, first performed in 2008 at Green Papaya Art Projects where the artist crocheted herself into the fabric

and into obscurity—a work to be reprised later in our exhibition. Until then, we have Erwin Romulo's essay reflecting on his contemporaneous review of the performance, engaging with this conversation between artist, space, time, and witness. For now, it remains simply carpet, embodying potential energies of future movements to come.

We continue to learn from artists: to loosen and to be distracted, to bury ourselves deep into momentous intensities before refracting them into bits and inquiries. The exhibition continues. Tomorrow it will be different. The center cannot hold because we have begun to imagine different ways of being with art.

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