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WINNERS OF KWEK LENG JOO PRIZE OF EXCELLENCE IN PHOTOGRAPHY PRESENT SHOWCASE, ‘THE TREE IS THE LEAF IS THE LAND’

Singapore, 2 May 2019 – The two recipients of the Kwek Leng Joo Prize of Excellence in Photography 2018 will be holding their highly-awaited showcase at DECK from 15 May to 2 June 2019. The showcase is titled ‘the tree is the leaf is the land’, and is the 9th edition of the annual showcase for the award recipients.

The exhibition seeks a renewed way of understanding leaves as fractals of the natural environment. By adopting methods of collaboration with nature and the organic processes within, the two artists, Ernest Wu and Woong Soak Teng, explore the beauty and intrinsic value of nature beyond its superficial role in our anthropocentric era.

Ranging from photographic prints to sculptural installations and moving image, the exhibition re-examines our relationship with nature through the simplest observation of a leaf.

Exhibition synopsis:
Looking at a leaf, we see the leaf as the tree, the tree as the sun, the sun as the dew, the dew as the root, the root as the bug, the bug as the leaf.

We do not own the land. Instead, what can we learn from it? The artists begin simply with the observation of leaves in the cityscape, whose abundance has been left mostly neglected. Looking at the holes created by insects, the changing colour of a leaf’s decomposition, the effect that wind has on the trajectory of a leaf’s fall, they meditate on its existence while taking walks. The exhibition proposes that by sustaining our attention on the simplest of natural phenomena, we can learn from it and apply the processes and perspectives to the world at large.
The exhibition structures itself around the idea of a walk and the observations and discoveries one makes along the way. For both artists, the act of walking was important in their processes, inspiring and becoming part of the explorations and outcomes.

For **Ernest Wu**, he began his explorations by catching instances of falling leaves as reminders to be mindful after spending some time at a meditation retreat. This meditative observation led to the process of figuring out a way to capture the trajectory and the infinite routes in which a leaf can take as it falls. The poetic images printed on fabric echo the leaves that it captures and the conversation they have with the wind.

For **Woong Soak Teng**, her explorations involved the improvisation of a cameraless approach using the traditional darkroom and enlarger to engage found leaves as collaborators. Both detailed and abstract at once, the unique silver gelatin prints are reminiscent of ink marks, made possible by the natural processes that interact with each leaf over time.

The conversation between the two artists culminates in the collaborative act of leaf raking. Mediated by a rake, they displace, draw, shift, mould, guide and ultimately gather the leaves in and out of formations. Their attempt to commune with nature ironically reflects man’s relationship with nature – one of disruptive intervention and violence beneath the peaceful veneer. The rakes thus become symbols of this relationship.
“Our hope is for the audience to walk out of this exhibition feeling like they can look at a leaf a little differently, with a heightened awareness and understanding that a leaf is more than what we would usually think of,” said Woong Soak Teng.

“Between us, our methods and processes differ but what remains the same is a love for nature. We conceived the exhibition as a way to develop an awareness that even in the urban environment one can find a little piece of nature to observe and be in awe of,” added Ernest Wu.

The exhibition reminds us that we are not so different from the leaves that fall, not so different from the diseased veins and not so different from the decomposition of our material selves into its constituent parts. It is only through developing an understanding of something seemingly insignificant that we can perhaps understand ourselves and our relationship to nature.

‘the tree is the leaf is the land’ is supported by the National Arts Council, Nanyang Technological University, School of Art, Design and Media, and DECK. It will run at DECK from 15 May to 2 June 2019. For more information, visit the event page here.

ABOUT THE KWEK LENG JOO PRIZE OF EXCELLENCE IN PHOTOGRAPHY

Initiated in 2009 by the late Mr Kwek Leng Joo, the award was established to recognise photographic excellence among students at NTU School of Art, Design and Media. Every year, two outstanding graduates are selected by a panel based on their portfolio, proposal and potential.

Each graduate is awarded a sum of SGD$25,000 to support and kickstart his/her artistic career. the tree is the leaf is the land is the 9th edition of the annual recipients showcase to celebrate the award and the milestone for the artists.
ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Ernest Wu (b.1991, Singapore) uses the camera as a tool for meditation, exploring the possibilities of image-making. His images challenge traditional ways of looking at photography, and explores unconventional methods of creating images structured around the limitations of the camera. His projects adopt these unique methods to explore questions of existence and the mortal nature of things. By adapting ideas from painting and Zen Buddhism, his poetic images aim for a seeing of how things truly are and not what we think it is. Ernest studied film at Ngee Ann Polytechnic from 2008 to 2011 and graduated in 2018 from Nanyang Technological University, School of Art, Design and Media with a BFA(hons) in Photography and Digital Imaging. His work has been exhibited in festivals and exhibitions internationally in Auckland, Dali, Paris and Singapore.

www.ernestwu.com

In awe of natural phenomena and nature at large, Woong Soak Teng (b. 1994, Singapore) ponders on our human tendency to control and go against them. Her works often develop alongside natural processes in hopes of learning from them, embracing various mediums in her practice ranging from photography and painting to moving image and found materials. At the core of her explorations lies the inquiry of what is nature in our present reality. Soak graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Photography and Digital Imaging at the Nanyang Technological University, School of Art, Design and Media. She has participated in festivals and exhibitions internationally in Greece, Auckland, Tokyo, Shanghai, Dali and Singapore. One of her works, ‘Ways To Tie Trees’ was selected to be published by German master publisher Gerhard Steidl, as part of the Steidl Book Award Asia. Her accolades include the Singapore Young Photographer Award 2018.

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