



the images by Keiko Sasaoka, Tomoko Kikuchi, Masumi Kura, Kazuna Taguchi, and Chino Otsuka were disturbingly aloof.

In *Fishing*, Keiko Sasaoka (b.1978) captures desolate shorelines and rocky outcrops in this series of unlovely landscapes that resemble *impromptu* holiday snapshots. The steely tones of these color works render them monochrome, triggering a documentary feel to the wary balance of sky, land, and sea. *Samani, Hokkaido* (2010) presents an odd splinter of rock against foggy sky; watery brushstrokes sketch its tide-pool reflection. Despite the occasional figure of a fisherman, Sasaoka's forlorn images are somehow incomplete, quickened only by bright patterns of foamy wave spew or rocky spatters at low tide. This fragmentary awareness is echoed in Kazuna Taguchi's portraits. Taguchi (b.1979) uses magazine photographs to create realistic paintings of women: she then photographs the paintings, reconfiguring them as dim, intangible gestures. In several of these works, pale multiple

exposures blur into darkness; an elusive face in *At a dead end, in deep* (2009) is a sensuous vapor. Taguchi's rich, gelatin silver prints embrace shadowy tones of sepia, blue, and charcoal, which, when coupled with her convoluted, Richter-like technique, evoke the half-melted imagery of an old film staggering on torn sockets.

In contrast, the lurid photographs of Tomoko Kikuchi (b.1973) are tense and solid. Kikuchi, a longtime Beijing resident, began her ongoing documentary series *I and I* in 2005, which explores transgender issues by following Chinese drag queens. With little besides their titles to offer context, most of Kikuchi's color images are merely dark in both tone and theme; yet a honey-red glow invigorates a few, including the expectant *Lala waiting for her performance at 80 years old farmer's birthday party, Sichuan province* (2011). Context is also absent in the works of Tokyo photographer Masumi Kura (1975), who sought to reinvigorate her creative eye by tracing an ancient pilgrimage route in

the color series, *Adventures of Kura*. In doing so, Kura indulges in a form of lackluster street photography intended to preserve the unseen moment. This imagery works best when she permits pattern and color to disrupt otherwise banal shots of people waiting in line or loitering on street corners. A vivid umbrella in *Sennan, Osaka* (2009) exalts one mundane moment on a beach.

A sense of detachment was discernible in all these works—even, unexpectedly, in the very personal photographs of London-based Chino Otsuka (b.1972), who untangles her own childhood memories from the grip of nostalgia. In her series of double self-portraits entitled *Imagine Finding Me*, Otsuka digitally juxtaposes her adult image within old photographs of herself as a child. The child and the adult Otsuka pass on a stairway in *1981 and 2006, Ofuna, Japan* (2006); they are oblivious to one another in Beijing; they eat bread together in Paris. Rather than sentimental indulgences, however, Otsuka's washed-out color photographs

are chaste and evocative. Her video installation *1978 and 2009, Kitakamakura, Japan* (2010) is accompanied by the faint summer hum of cicadas: young Otsuka in red coveralls stands alone on a hilly street, then fades away as her adult self slowly emerges into being, only steps away.

In negotiating the constraints "between me and this world," each of these five photographers pursues a diffident, almost passive imagery. Ultimately, this show was underscored by its eloquent sense of submission, and its reluctance to assign definitive visual meaning to expressions of solitude, alienation, and the past.

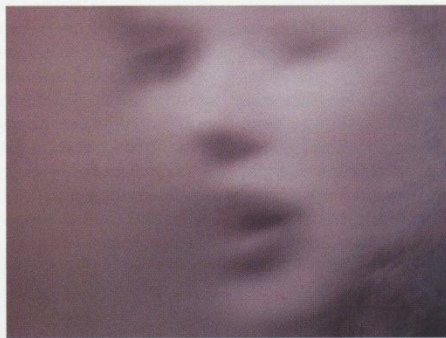
Marybeth Stock

...

SINGAPORE

Fabienne Verdier at Art Plural Gallery

In her first solo exhibition in Southeast Asia, French artist Fabienne Verdier



Clockwise from top left: Keiko Sasaoka, *Fishing, Samani, Hokkaido*, 2010, chromogenic print, 72 x 72 cm. Collection of the Artist. Kazuna Taguchi, *At a dead end, in deep*, 2009, gelatin silver print, 120 x 147.6 cm. Collection of the Artist. Courtesy of ShugoArts. Masumi Kura, *Sennan, Osaka* (from *Adventures of Kura* series), 2009, chromogenic print, 45.7 x 45.7 cm. Collection of the Artist. Courtesy of Zeit-Foto Salon. Tomoko Kikuchi, *Lala waiting for her performance at 80 years old farmer's birthday party, Sichuan province* (from *The Way We Are*), 2011, ink-jet print, 38 x 55.9 cm. Collection of the Artist. Chino Otsuka, *1978 and 2009, Kitakamakura, Japan* (from *Memoriography*), 2010, HD video, 6 minutes, sound. Collection of the Artist.

EXHIBITION REVIEWS

(b.1962) successfully illustrates an unparalleled ability to meld Eastern and Western artistic practice to make works that are striking, expressive, and innovative. Her mastery of Chinese brush painting is remarkable throughout (she apprenticed under various calligraphy masters during her decade-long stay in China), so, too, is her propensity to distil the traditional practice, to experiment and to generate works that are alive, fresh, and contemporary.

Installation II ABCDE of the Energy Fields series comprises a monumental pentaptych, which fills an entire wall. Multiple nimble brushstrokes traverse outsized chalk-hued paper and, in their delineation of space and mass, give structure to the piece. Each thick black line appears as the naked branch of an enormous tree, the splatters and spots of ink in its wake the twigs and tendrils. Lines are controlled, their trajectory resolute and their vitality totally uncompromised despite crossing panel divides (polyptychs are a common feature of Verdier's work.) The composition is simple, the work minimalist, yet Verdier gloriously encapsulates the very essence of a chilly winter scene.

Nature is an underlying theme in the 55 pieces of this exhibition. In *Memories of Norway*, fleeting glimpses of the Norwegian coast are immortalized in drawings and minimalist abstract paintings. The drawings reduce the coastline to three or four dense and impenetrable black pastel strokes, suspended in space. Despite the economy of line, they are immediately recognizable as dramatic mountain landscapes. They are small, intimate, and static whereas the paintings they juxtapose are large, visually loud, and dynamic. In *Memories of Norway 5* brushstrokes are syrupy, jagged, and impulsive.

Fuelled with drama and spontaneity, they rise and fall, stop and start, haphazard and at random. They are replete with life as the living scenes they represent. Unlike the flat surfaces of traditional Chinese paintings, Verdier introduces the third dimension as ink is



Fabienne Verdier, Cercle - Ascèse Rouge sur vert flamand, 2012, pigments and ink on canvas, 183 x 135 cm. Image: Courtesy of the Artist and Art Plural Gallery.

applied copiously and unevenly to confer depth and texture. The undulations, ripples, and furrows are representative of the imperfections of the landscape portrayed. In *Fractalscapes III - Paysage dans l'énergie d'un trait* a solitary brushstroke is isolated in what seems a fitting tribute to Verdier's primary tool. Each stroke is 'magnified' to reveal the finest detail. As if time has stopped, these works are almost topographical studies of land and sea, a microcosm of our own living and breathing universe.

Verdier's use of the brush

is revolutionary and further distinguishes her practice from pure Chinese tradition. Homemade and huge (often over two-meters tall,) the brush suspends freely from the studio ceiling to take full advantage of gravity. Acting as intermediary between heaven and earth, Verdier's body weight is used to guide the mammoth implement. Bicycle handles enable her to gain more momentum and move spontaneously. Her capacity to twist and turn is integral to the creative process and infuses her paintings

with energy (*qi*) and power.

Circles were painted in a single 360-degree rotation from within the canvas. True to Chinese tradition and the compositional importance of negative space, the rings remain open and unfinished. Hitherto monochromatic, it is in the *Circles* and *Color Flows* series that Verdier really harnesses the Western aesthetic and, for the first time, she bathes her beautiful strokes in color. Reminiscent of and inspired by the early 15th century Flemish Painters and their 'jewel-like' tones, Verdier contrasts a black hoop with a vivacious mustard yellow in *Cercle-Ascèse, Jaune*, evocative of a summer's day; a burnished ochre-brown in *Cercle-Ascèse, Brun clair*, reminiscent of autumn's rotting leaves; the moodiest and most somber of charcoal grays for winter; and an arresting lantern-red circle against a vibrant viridian green in *Cercle-Ascèse, Rouge sur vert flamand*, redolent of new life that comes with the Spring.

Color Flows represents the synthesis of line and color, of expression and control, of movement and life, and the culmination of Western and Eastern artistic sensibilities in Verdier's work. *Color Flows 7* boasts chunky, rich-red brushstrokes, which meander fluidly and freely across an exhilarat-



Above left: Fabienne Verdier, Memories of Norway 1, 2012, mixed media on canvas, vertical polyptych, 211 x 180 cm (2 frames: 120 x 180 cm and 90 x 180 cm). **Above right: Fabienne Verdier, Installation VI** (from *Energy Fields* series), 2012, ink on Moulin du gué paper, 198 x 134 cm. Images: Courtesy of the Artist and Art Plural Gallery.

ing, luminous, tri-paneled green field. The lines pulse rhythmically to the beat of a twisting river, a rugged coastline or the path of the wind.

In the horizontal polyp-tych *Color Flows 8*, black labyrinthine strokes frenetically navigate an incandescent red field prompting thoughts of volcanoes and what lies beneath the earth's crust. Verdier's intuitive selection of color fully complements the vigor and precision of her brushwork such that her paintings are engaging, compelling, and, above all, bursting with life.

The works resonate particularly well in Singapore where green space is limited. They provide momentary respite from the urban and serve as a pertinent reminder of the grander scale of nature.

Jo Shrosphire

...

Engaging Perspectives: New Art at the Singapore Center for Contemporary Arts

The Center for Contemporary Arts launched its inaugural exhibition at Gillman Barracks at the beginning of this year. In *Engaging Perspectives: New Art from Singapore*, a compelling lineup of nine Singaporean artists and collectives explored both tangible and intangible patterns of "the everyday within the context of Singapore." The results included photographs, paintings, and installations ranging from reflections of the mundane to visions of the stars.

These artists, all born in the 1980s, were a mix of emerging and internationally established talents that included Ang Song Nian, Black Baroque Committee, Mike Chang, Nah Yong En, Bruce Quek, the Singapore Psychogeographical Society, Frayn Yong, Jasper Yu, and Zhao Renhui. Their works were exhibited individually, in separate rooms within several of Gillman's restored colonial-era buildings. These boxy spaces, with their bare concrete interiors, invite an intimacy



Above left: Bruce Quek, *Consider (Singapore): Cadastre per Aspera*, 2013, single-channel animated video projection, dimensions variable. **Above right:** Nah Yong En, *Trees and Buildings*, 2012–2013, photographic print, 75 x 100 cm.



Singapore Psychogeographical Society, *Ethnographic Fragments from Central Singapore*, 2012–present, collection of rocks, dimensions variable.



Ang Song Nian, *Towards A New Interior*, 2013, site-specific installation and photographs, dimensions variable.

that particularly complements installations and smaller works.

This atmosphere underscored the meditative aura of Bruce Quek's animated video *Consider (Singapore): Cadastre per Aspera* (2013). In this study of urban environments, Quek captured patterns of Singapore's artificial light sources and reinvented them as a starry galaxy of depth and splendor. On a more earthly plane, Ang Song Nian raised questions of possession versus obsession in *Towards a New Interior* (2013). Ang's two installations and large color photographs portray tidy heaps of discarded furniture; one photograph frames a window, whose interior view is obliterated by towers of hoarded rubbish. This near-documentary inquiry into the potency of materialism contrasts vividly with Frayn Yong's stark forms. Yong manipulates cardboard, pencil leads, and slender tree branches to construct fragile, slightly bewildered sculpture. His small pencil-lead matrices are demure: tiny dollops of glue bind varying lengths of thin

graphite into delicate, origami-like polyhedrons that threaten to unfurl into planar flatness. *The Castle, Another* (2013) is a cindery tower of demented graphite spider webs.

Other works, while entertaining, were rooted in labored metaphor. Mike Chang's mixed-media *Arrival Reception* (2013) invited visitors through a doorway to experience literal versus conceptual aspects of "transition"; likewise, any implied irony was lost amidst unsubtle analogies of guillotine-as-camera/executioner-as-photographer in *The Photographer: An Executioner's Assistant* (2013) by "not-a-collective" Black Baroque Committee. In *Jasper's Travelogue* (2012), Jasper Yu presented several mixed-media transparencies founded on street photography, which incorporated minute, amusing elements of movement into frozen crowd shots.

Two photographs by Nah Yong En portrayed vertiginous nightscapes that drew the gaze upward into the sky; but his series *The Overseas Moon is*

Rounder #2 (2011–2012) redirected that gaze inward. Moon comprises nine small, gentle acrylics of odd-shaped pools and empty deck chairs within barren landscapes. Devoid of life, Nah's pastille-pale desolations are both disconcerting and enchanting, thanks to eloquent brushwork that barely touches the canvas. The icy imagery of Zhao Renhui's *The Glacier Study Group* (2013) is similarly charged. This small grouping of video, installation, and three surreal photographs is excerpted from a series generated during an Arctic research expedition. The melting Arctic in Zhao's photographs is ravishing in its glacial translucence: figures wander among dirty, bluish outcrops of ice or take bizarre leaps into slate-grey water.

While images from *The Glacier Study Group* were backed by conventional scientific inquiry, the Singapore Psychogeographical Society derives *Ethnographic Fragments from Central Singapore* (2012–present) through a witty meth-