



**A Moment in Extended Crisis  
23 April – 28 June 2024**

**Nathan Beard, Isaac Chong Wai,  
Prima Jalichandra-Sakuntabhai,  
Jane Jin Kaisen, Sarah Ujmaia,  
John Young. Curated by Andy Butler.**

UTS Gallery Level 4, 702 Harris St Ultimo NSW +61 2 9514 1652



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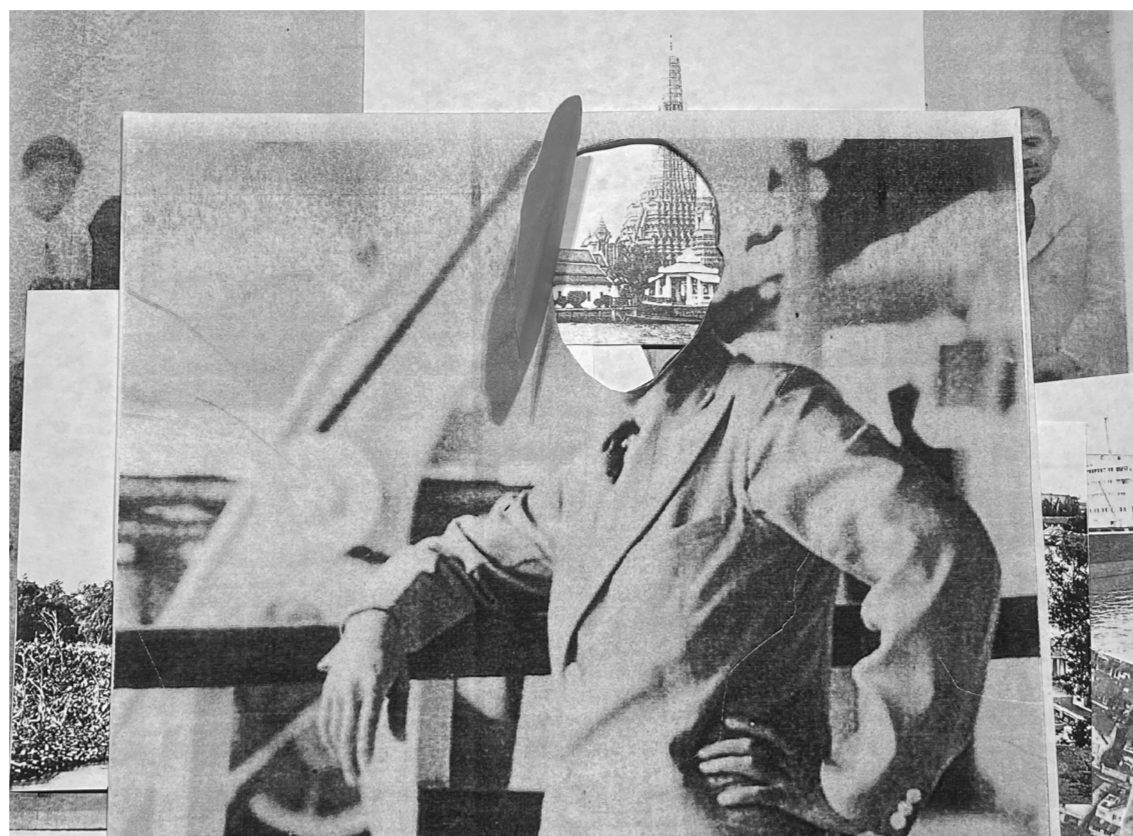
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## A Moment in Extended Crisis

The first four years of the 2020s have been punishing. The various crises we're facing—military interventions and genocide, political uprisings, the rise of fascism, the crushing inequality of a new “gilded age”, pandemics, inaction on the climate crisis—are all happening at once. There's an entanglement and amplification of troubled global systems of power, and it feels unending when we're all stuck in the middle of it.

The title of this exhibition, *A Moment in Extended Crisis*, is lifted from the late Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* (2011), in which they theorise that while previous generations have framed catastrophic forces and traumatic events as discrete historical happenings from which we recover, our contemporary moment is defined by the unresolved political currents of the 19th, 20th and early 21st centuries all coming home to roost at once. “Crisis is not exceptional to history or consciousness,” they claim, “but a process embedded in the ordinary that unfolds in stories about navigating what's overwhelming.”<sup>1</sup>

The migration of people over the 20th and 21st centuries to the West has been driven by war, geopolitics, statecraft, military interventions, and the influence of tightly guarded resources that Western countries have extracted through the imperial project and via contemporary capitalism. With a focus on the long shadow cast by movement out of Asia across the 20th and 21st centuries, the works in this exhibition offer poetic and intimate responses to the overarching political currents that frame personal upheavals.

Collectively, the works use various artistic processes and mediums to make sense of the intimate experiences of movement, migration, and exile, to ruminate on the ways that these political legacies continue to resonate now. While this is a necessarily partial view of the whole, these geopolitical histories give us insights into Imperial interventions in the region throughout the 20th century in the bloody battle for the dominance of a Western-led neoliberal world order—and the various forms of movement that follow from Asia to the heart of empire.

John Young's *Manchurian Snow Walk* (1979), shown here as a performance documentation with instructions, was performed three years after the death of Mao. Young was sent away from Hong Kong in 1967 at 11 years old by his family, to protect him from the Cultural Revolution. As a 23-year-old art student, deeply entrenched in the Conceptualism, Minimalism, and Land Art movements of the 1970s, Young's father bought him a train ticket to the farthest corner of mainland China for reasons still unknown, and too late to discover. Young traipsed back and forth from a single point, tracing lines in the snow, with the indication of his presence bound to disappear.

In a 1981 artist publication, Young describes himself as a “nomad” as he travels from place to place because it is no longer safe for him in his country of origin. Then, “diaspora” wasn't a term circulating in artistic discourses. Young would go on to experiment with different creative tactics—turning to post-modernist painting and appropriation—to try and get to the heart of his experience.

Young's work acts as a point on the map for the other artists in the exhibition—all born after *Manchurian Snow Walk* was made. Like Young, they choose a starting point, walk back and forth across familiar and new terrain, and deploy the capacity of art practices to hold concepts, emotions, and political currents together at the same time.

Isaac Chong Wai's video *Neue Wache (The New Guard)* (2015) is curatorially positioned as a letter to Young's *Manchurian Snow Walk* from 36 years in the future. Chong, like many artists in the 21st century, has made his way to Berlin, and stayed. In the video, Chong breathes onto a window overlooking Neue Wache, a Berlin monument that has endured as 200 years of European history has shaped global events: from the formation of the German Empire, the rise of the Nazis, the Soviet Era, Reunification, to today. The traces that Chong leaves on the window with his breath are both poetic and impossible—with the eventual obfuscation of the monument only possible through artistic ingenuity.

For a decade, Nathan Beard collaborated with his mother, Noi, who migrated to Australia from Thailand in the 1970s after marrying Nathan's Australian father. One of their final projects together, *A Dense Intimacy* (2019), tracked the murder of Noi's first husband in Thailand that preceded her second marriage and migration to Australia, and Beard's birth. Their intimate and playful collaboration ended with Noi's untimely death in 2019. Following Noi's death, the foundations of Beard's practice have shifted after his closest and most intimate connection to Thailand has gone.

### List of works

Isaac Chong Wai  
*Neue Wache (The New Guard)*, 2015  
Video, 10:52 mins  
Courtesy of Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong and Zilberman, Istanbul, Berlin, and Miami

Jane Jin Kaisen  
*Community of Parting*, 2018  
Single channel film installation, 72:13 mins,  
with single channel video installation, 2:58 mins  
Courtesy of the artist and Martin Asbaek Gallery

Sarah Ujmaia  
*Conduit Drawing* (horse shoe and nails), 2024  
*Conduit Drawing* (metal pen caps), 2024  
*Conduit Drawing* (broken church bell), 2024  
*Conduit Drawing* (fabric scissors), 2024  
9 x 4.5 x 75cm (each)  
Courtesy of the artist

John Young  
*Manchurian Snow Walk*, 1979  
Digital print on rag paper  
97.42 x 68cm  
Courtesy of the artist

*Manchurian Snow Walk, Completed*, 1979  
Digital print on rag paper  
68 x 97.42cm  
Courtesy of the artist

Nathan Beard  
*Noi*, 2024  
Repurposed clothes belonging to the artist's late mother,  
steel, floristry foam, plaster, dressmaking pins  
92 x 52 x 46cm  
Courtesy of the artist and Futures

Prima Jalichandra-Sakuntabhai  
*terra australis incognita*, 2024  
Performative lecture, overhead projector, digital projector,  
Elmo Visual Presenter, images printed on black and white,  
books, cut-out colour transparencies, mylar, video  
Courtesy of the artist

*Chloropsis Aurifrons Pridii*, 2021  
Installation with Elmo Visual Presenter,  
images printed on black and white, books, video documentation.  
Courtesy of the artist

*Noi* (2024) is made from clothes Noi brought with her upon migrating to Australia, or on trips she made back to Thailand. Standing on a custom plinth to mimic her height, *Noi's* form is inspired by *bai sri*; objects used as offerings at Buddhist temples for good merit and fortune. *Noi* stands as a tribute to both Beard's mother and their relationship, and a testament to women who migrated from Southeast Asia to Australia through marriage during a flashpoint of Western intervention in the region—my own mother included.

Prima Jalichandra-Sakuntabhai's *terra australis incognita* (2024) is a performance lecture that considers the artist's immigrant journey, in parallel with their great grand uncle's historical journey into exile and the yearning for discovery of a new place without the violence of conquest. Building off research and past works, notably the installation and performance lecture *Chloropsis Aurifrons Pridii* (2021) on view in the exhibition, this body of work is a living archive of Jalichandra-Sakuntabhai's great grand uncle, Pridi Banomyong. Pridi was a leader of the 1932 revolution that shifted Thailand from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy. He went on to be a statesman in the pro-democracy People's Party, with a career holding various ministerial roles, including a 6-month stint as prime minister. A pro-monarchy coup in 1947, and subsequently a failed attempted pro-democracy coup in 1949, led Pridi into living in exile for the rest of his life.

Jalichandra-Sakuntabhai has similarly lived outside of Thailand since shortly after their birth, with contemporary coups and revolutionary fervour continuing between pro-monarchist and pro-democracy groups. In these iterative performances, Jalichandra-Sakuntabhai travels from place to place—their luggage packed with books about this political history, with their own experience of movement and exile mirroring the experiences of their great grand uncle. *terra australis incognita* has been commissioned on the occasion of Jalichandra-Sakuntabhai's first visit to Australia, where they continue to try and make sense of carrying such a legacy during a contemporary moment of revolution.

Sarah Ujmaia's *Conduit Drawing* (2024) considers the artistic histories that have afforded us the tools to navigate the world. In the series, Ujmaia marries her research into the history of Chaldean exile and movement out of Iraq, to her technical training in drawing. At the foundation of her *Conduit Drawings* are a roll of under-exposed photographs she took of objects in the Syriac Heritage Museum in Ankawa, Iraq, that speaks to the cultural heritage of Chaldeans, a minority Christian population, who now overwhelmingly live in the diaspora.

As her emergent practice has developed, Ujmaia has thought deeply about the materials used to visually describe the world. Her *Conduit Drawings* play with the lustrous qualities of graphite, with her multi-layered application affecting the play of light and the legibility of images. The work's sculptural forms mimic the legacy of 1960s Minimalism, with the drawings making their way around rectangular forms. As one moves around the sculptures, the light hits the graphite to reveal glimpses of the foundational image. You can never see the object, or get a sense of its history, as a whole; mimicking the limits of our artistic histories to make sense of non-Western experiences in their entirety.

Jane Jin Kaisen's feature length film *Community of Parting* (2018) uses the building blocks of filmmaking to trace an approach to borders, translation, and the affects of intergenerational communities who are shaped by the legacies of war and division. Kaisen deploys Korean Shamanism and the mythology of Princess Bari, who was abandoned at birth for being born a girl. A ritual led by shaman Koh Sunahn, a survivor of the 1948 Jeju Massacre in South Korea, gives rhythm and structure to *Community of Parting*, with archival material, poetry and soundscapes ruminating on the shared sentiment of the abandoned. The complexity and layers to this history, and its contemporary resonances, are given form through Kaisen's continued dedication to moving image as a cornerstone of artistic practice.

The artists in *A Moment in Extended Crisis* approach and process the intimate and personal worlds that are left in the long shadows of revolution, military interventions, exile, and emigration to the West. The exhibition asks how we carry these legacies across time and space, and how our current political worlds hold the traces of both individual and collective experience. The strategies these artists deploy, and the histories they make sense of, are the threads and currents that hold our world together—even when it is on the brink of collapse.

Andy Butler

1 Berlant, L. (2011). *Cruel optimism*. Duke University Press, p.10