

2 May - 1 June 2024

Navigating Histories

Ren Gregorčič, Phuong Le, Chris Siu and Estelle Yoon

Navigating Histories presents the distinct perspectives of four artists—Ren Gregorčič, Phuong Le, Chris Siu, and Estelle Yoon—who employ video and documentary photography to delve into themes of displacement, memory, and identity. Their artworks depict personal and collective narratives, reflecting on the enduring repercussions of historical events.

The exhibition is framed by Benedict Anderson's idea that communities are imagined constructs. This concept underscores how shared narratives and experiences shape communal identities and influence historical understanding and contemporary societal dynamics. Each artists' work provides a unique lens through which to view the ongoing impact of these narratives.

Phuong Nguyen Le, an emerging Vietnamese artist based in Naarm (Melbourne), presents *Sunshine*, a constellation of colour photographs exploring the Vietnamese diaspora community in the Melbourne suburb of Sunshine. The installation features a dynamic array of photos in varying sizes, arranged in a staggered pattern across three gallery walls. Larger central images highlight significant community events, while smaller photos capture everyday life and portraits.

His vivid, flash-heavy photographs examine both his and his community's positioning within a colonial framework marked by historical violence and division. This body of work fosters a narrative of resilience and identity reclamation. *Sunshine* not only showcases the suburb as a tangible space but also symbolises new beginnings and the complexities of post-war identity among Vietnamese Australians.

In the adjacent gallery, Chris Siu's large-scale black and white photographs are from his series, *Then We Keep Living Vol.2*, which poignantly captures the emotional and societal aftermath of Hong Kong's 2019 political uprising. Siu, a Hong Kong-born photographer based in Adelaide, continues his ongoing interest in documenting the intricate relationships within his surrounding social landscapes.

Through his medium format photographs, Siu articulates the diasporic anguish and the pursuit of freedom, offering a broader commentary on the universal struggle for human rights amid global social upheavals.

Shifting the focus to an introspective examination of cultural heritage and familial bonds is Estelle Yoon's video work *씨씨씨 (sse-sse-sse)*. Yoon is a queer, Korean-Australian visual artist currently practising on Gadigal land (Sydney), who explores notions of family, time, memory and nostalgia through her core mediums of analogue photography and filmmaking.

Her Prussian blue 16mm film video is a poetic homage to intergenerational love. It harmonises the South Korean traditional lullaby '반달 (Bandal)' and its hand gestures to nurture deep familial bonds in their simplest form.

The exhibition culminates with Ren Gregorčič's projection work, *Under the Foot of Neptune*, which exemplifies the Australian-Slovenian artist's interest in interrogating materials and spatial configurations of landscapes and the relationships between materiality, form, structure, and power.

The video is focused on the floodlights that illuminate the Fountain of Neptune in Florence, Italy, presenting them as stylised stars, pointing towards the constructed nature of the symbolic function of the fountain; the depiction of the divine is not a pure, natural phenomenon, but rather a product of human construction and interpretation. The visuals are overlaid with the constructed political rhetoric of war within the context of Vladimir Putin's 2022 threats of nuclear strikes against Ukraine. The audio presents the nature of veiled language in its divine, prophetic status in which life, power and renewal coexist in a precarious state.

Navigating Histories offers a timely and relevant examination of how historical narratives and identity constructions are visually and culturally negotiated through these diverse artistic lenses. It reflects the experiences of civil unrest and its enduring repercussions, making it a pertinent exploration. Set against the backdrop of global social and political upheavals, the exhibition seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on these crucial issues, underlining the universal significance of individual narratives within the collective struggle for freedom.

Ren Gregorčič

Ren Gregorčič is an Australian-Slovenian artist working in film to interrogate materials and spatial configurations of landscapes, and relationships between materiality, form, structure, and power.

Gregorčič has a BFA from the Victorian College of the Arts, MA (Cultural Materials Conservation) from The University of Melbourne and is presently a Fine Art PhD candidate at the Australian National University. He has worked in conservation roles at various museums and was awarded a Junior Fellowship by the American Slovenian Education Foundation in 2021.

Phuong Le

Phuong Nguyen Le is an emerging Vietnamese artist based in Naarm (Melbourne). He employs photography to explore themes of identity, family, sexuality, and decolonisation. His work critically examines his position within an ongoing colonial structure in the Asia-Pacific region, characterised by violence, censorship, and division.

In 2024, he published his debut monograph, *Sunshine*, which was featured in the *Australian & New Zealand Photobook Awards* at PHOTO2024, Melbourne. He also participated in the *Today/Tomorrow* group exhibition at the Parliament of Victoria during PHOTO2024.

Chris Siu

Chris Siu, a Hong Kong-born photographer based in Adelaide, South Australia, works primarily in medium-format analogue photography. His work explores the intricate relationships within his surrounding social landscapes, pivoting around representations of civil unrest, diasporic experience, cultural displacement, and marginality within contemporary existence.

Siu has exhibited at various venues throughout Australia, including Nexus Arts, Adelaide Contemporary Experimental, Centre for Contemporary Photography, and Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts.

Estelle Yoon

Estelle Yoon is a queer, Korean-Australian visual artist currently practising on Gadigal land. Through her analogue photography and filmmaking, Yoon's artistic practice pursues simplicity, beauty in imperfection, and transience. Her works explore identity, family, time, memory, and nostalgia.

Yoon exhibited new work as part of PHOTO2024 in the group exhibition *Surfacing*, which challenged the photographic medium from queer and diasporic views.

List of works

- 1 Phuong Le, *Sunshine*, 2023, installation of inkjet prints, dimensions variable
- 2 Chris Siu, *Hong Kong Grocery, Adelaide, South Australia*, 2022, from the series *Then We Keep Living Vol.2*, archival pigment print, 88.9 x 76.2cm, ed. 25, \$1050
- 3 Chris Siu, *Ted Hui, Adelaide, South Australia*, 2022, from the series *Then We Keep Living Vol.2*, archival pigment print, 88.9 x 76.2cm, ed. 25, \$1050
- 4 Chris Siu, *Expired Passport, Adelaide, South Australia*, 2022, from the series *Then We Keep Living Vol.2*, archival pigment print, 88.9 x 76.2cm, ed. 25, \$1050
- 5 Chris Siu, *Untitled, Adelaide, South Australia*, 2022, from the series *Then We Keep Living Vol.2*, archival pigment print, 88.9 x 76.2cm, ed. 25, \$1050
- 6 Estelle Yoon, *씨씨씨 (sse-sse-sse)*, 2023, 16mm film, 3:19min
- 7 Ren Gregorčič, *Under the Foot of Neptune*, 2022, polaroids, \$120 each
- 8 Ren Gregorčič, *Under the Foot of Neptune*, 2022, single-channel video, \$2500
- 9 Ren Gregorčič, *Chairs*, Recycled Blackbutt timber, \$350 each

Publications

Sunshine by Phuong Le

168 pages

24 x 18.3 cm

\$65

Nature, Post-Nature by Ren Gregorčič

42 pages

25 x 17 cm

\$15

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