

CHUN KAI QUN



Chun Kai Qun (b. 1982) is a visual artist. He attained his Diploma in Fine Arts at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts with the support of Georgette Chen Arts Scholarship (2005-2007). In 2011, with the support of the National Arts Council's Arts Scholarship (Postgraduate), he went on to pursue a Master of Fine Arts at Glasgow School of Arts.

Kai Qun's works are underscored by an interest in the social biography of objects relating to notions of identity and are manifested as dioramic installations and sculptures. Inspired by dioramas at Haw Par Villa, Kai Qun created an ambient installation *A Lifetime of Warranties* (2014) which depicted the exploitation of human anxiety and imperfection. In addition, Kai Qun has demonstrated a curatorial practice during his graduate studies in Glasgow, where he founded the New City Space, a now-defunct art gallery within his apartment where he collaborated and exhibited with fellow artists. Upon returning to Singapore, Kai Qun has continued in leading and making accessible unconventional arts spaces that sparked collaborative artistic exchanges among young artists.

Kai Qun has participated extensively in art exhibitions, residencies and collaborations locally and overseas. Locally, he has exhibited at key institutions such as the Singapore Art Museum (2009) and National Museum of Singapore (2009) as well as a solo show at The Esplanade Concourse (2010), and at commercial platforms such as ArtStage Singapore (2011) and FOST Gallery (2006 - 2009). He also exhibited in major cities around the world such as Glasgow, Taipei, Melbourne, Hong Kong and Fukuoka.

Kai Qun is a recipient of the Merit Award for the third CDL Sculpture Award (2007) organised by the Singapore Art Museum. He has also been invited to several international artist residencies including the Hospitalfield Graduate Residency Programme in Scotland (2013), and the Artists Exchange Programme at the fourth Fukuoka Asian Art Triennial in Japan (2009).

Kai Qun serves as an adjunct lecturer at LASALLE College of the Arts and actively contributes to art writing as the editor of Unproductive Online, as well as The Artling magazine.



The Coffin is Too Big for the Hole (2013). Tesco Baker Bread (Thick) toasted using Quantum (Model ET-275) toaster, paraffin wax, raffia string. Photo courtesy of Chun Kai Qun



The Paper, Some Paper (II) (2015). Classified newspaper, raffia string. Photo courtesy of Chun Kai Qun

A CONVERSATION WITH CHUN KAI QUN



Tell us about your earliest memories encountering the arts. Who or what were your key influences?

My twin brother Kai Feng and I are the youngest in the family. From the age of four, along with three elder sisters, our father would bring us to participate in plein air drawing competitions. We won many awards - there must have been more than two hundred trophies in the house. Despite the early nurturing, my brother and I did not continue to study art as a subject in secondary school and junior college. It was quite a while before I got re-acquainted with art and this was in university when I was trying to pay for my tuition fees by importing silkscreened music posters from the U.S. I was so absorbed into finding out more about the poster artists and the silkscreen process of creating them, that I eventually made a switch to Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) to study printmaking in 2005. While in NAFA, I had the opportunity to learn from practising artists such as Tang Da Wu and Michael Lee. In addition, I met my long-time collaborator Joo Choon Lin who was also majoring in printmaking in NAFA and she continues to be highly inspiring and diligent, succeeding to be a wonderful artist herself. Hence, the school was a combusive learning environment where many endearing artist-friendships were formed. During this time, I also befriended Lee Wen and The Artists Village members, spawning dialogues which made me think about the role of an artist in Singapore. I wished to become an artist's artist, who carves a space not only for my own art-making but also for others.



Are You Ready to Rejoin Society (2012). Holographic film, faux gold frame, clear bin liners, hinge.
Photo courtesy of Chun Kai Qun

What are some of the biggest challenges you faced when creating new works and exploring with different types of media?

My biggest challenge was trying to push the boundaries of art-making. After graduating from NAFA, I was practising for a few years with some degree of success and the opportunities to exhibit my works were getting frequent.

On a personal level, I felt I was not sufficiently grounded academically and that my artistic practice required critical rigour and research. I needed to further my understanding of contemporary art and wanted to visit the art capitals in UK and Europe. So I enrolled in The Glasgow School of Art in 2011.

The period when I felt my art was not making leaps and bounds was difficult to endure, but as I come to appreciate the different rhythms and the negative spaces of life, I began to structure my practice between experimentation in the studio, research and writing, and exhibition making.

What motivated you to continue in spite of these challenges?

I have long-term relationships with mentors, artists and peers whom I constantly have meaningful conversations with and they have been guiding me all these years, to overcome the challenges.

Most importantly, I have the encouragement of my parents who provided me with a loving home to return to and I feel that I can pick myself up from failures with their support. My siblings and I have humble upbringing yet my parents have been able to provide a space within the family for art to flourish. Everyone in the household was involved in the arts at some point or another; art has always been accepted and I never felt the need to justify my passion. There were difficult times when my parents would worry about my financial state, and how I could continue on, but the NAC has always been actively supporting my artistic practice in terms of funding, a studio space and publicity.

What are your vision and hopes for Singapore's visual arts scene?

I wish that artist-initiated projects, especially the trend of pop-up events taking place at idle spaces in Singapore, are taken seriously. They are experimental, on-site, and efficient in giving us an idea about what the general public really desires of how a space could be reinvigorated. Hence, I would like to see more of a bottom-up approach in these areas.

WORDS OF APPRECIATION

First, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my parents and my sisters for being the driving force behind my art practice, for providing me with an education, for their patience, encouragement, and immense love. My mother's guidance helped me with many important life decisions and my father always reminded me of the virtue of humility and hard work. My sisters afforded me the freedom to focus on art-making, while they took on the burden of supporting the family.

Next, I am eternally thankful to my brother for constantly picking me up from my failures and always keeping a watchful eye for me not to make them again. I cannot imagine life without him.

My sincere thanks to my former tutor Michael Lee who nominated me for the award. He trusted my talent and ability to play an important role in the local arts scene. I am grateful as well to Tang Da Wu, Lee Wen and The Artists Village for being an inspiration and paving the way for young artists like myself. I am also fortunate to have known my long-time collaborator Joo Choon Lin and I thank her for helping me to overcome many challenges, and for all the fun we have had since our school days.

I also thank the support of my tutors, colleagues and friends from St. Joseph's Institution, Anderson Junior College, Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, LASALLE College of the Arts, The Glasgow School of Art and the Singapore arts scene.

The final and utmost appreciation goes to the National Arts Council for supporting every step I take in my career as an artist. I thank the NAC for helping me fulfil my artistic potential, so I can be a useful member of the Singapore society. I promise to always work hard and remember the privileges the NAC has given to me.