

YOUNG ARTIST AWARD 2017

# KRAY CHEN



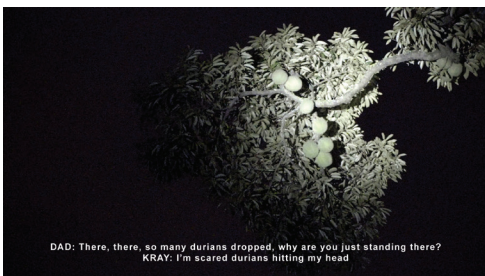


**Through performance, video, film and interactive installations, Kray's works attempt to anatomise the concept of 'human resource', based on three broad themes of memory, the body and inertia.**



'Not Sure What To Eat For Dinner', installation view, FRAC Des Pays De La Loire, 2015

Photo courtesy of FRAC Des Pays De La Loire



DAD: There, there, so many durians dropped, why are you just standing there?  
KRAY: I'm scared durians hitting my head

'Durian Picking', film still, 2015

Photo courtesy of Kray Chen

Kray Chen (b. 1987) is a multi-disciplinary artist, who graduated with a Master of Fine Arts from LASALLE College of the Arts.

Through performance, video, film and interactive installations, Kray's works attempt to anatomise the concept of 'human resource', based on three broad themes of memory, the body and inertia. He is interested in muscle memory and how coordination, remembrance and synchronicity of motions collectively differentiate actions from demonstrations. In 'Exercise Now and Fit a Standard Size Coffin' (2013 - present), a series of video performances, Kray uses the rhythm of workouts to draw out the banality and existential undertones of a society's fascination with performance and efficiency. The series has been exhibited at the Chi-Wen Gallery (Taiwan), the Substation (Singapore), Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, and The Lab @ NTU-CCA (Singapore). Another notable work, 'I'm a Steamroller Baby' (2017), is a video installation commissioned for the Esplanade Tunnel. It explores obese bodies in Singapore's National Service, and the ways they are defined, regimented and sculpted through running, numbers and singing. Kray's short film, 'Durian-Picking' (2016), was featured at the Singapore International Film Festival in 2016. It tells the tale of his father's peculiar hobby of looking for wild durians in Singapore.

Kray has been a lecturer at LASALLE since 2013. He has also been involved in curatorial work such as 'Wayang Malam', 'One Night Only', 'Noting Nothing', 'Background Playground', 'Something Rather Decorative' and 'Finding Humour'. In collaboration with Swell Studios in 2016, he published an art book 'And It's Getting More And More Absurd?' for his solo exhibition, 'It's A Set Situation' at Grey Projects, Singapore.

Kray has participated in the NTU-CCA residency (2016) in Singapore, the FRAC Des Pays De La Loire residency in Nantes, France (2015) and the Hangar residency in Barcelona, Spain (2014). He was also the Prudential Singapore Young Artist Finalist in 2014. ■



A CONVERSATION WITH  
**KRAY CHEN**

---

**“I've come to accept that the first idea is usually neither the best nor the final expression, and generally, the final outcome is somewhat different from what I had originally envisioned.”**

---

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

-

I was a very active band member when I was younger, at one point I was considering pursuing music full time. During one band practice we were made to practise rest notes (notations to pause) by repeatedly counting time. The conductor emphasised the importance of the rest notes, and how silence contributes to the form of music. He also told us about a piece that was composed entirely out of rest notes, and how the orchestra sat still and silent for exactly 4 minutes and 33 seconds. I remember that I was rather frustrated by what I took to be a banal exercise, and that I was dismissive towards that piece of silent music. Somehow though, the concept of silence in music took root in me; much later, when I was a student of fine arts, I realised that it was the legendary '4:33' by John Cage. The piece began to make perfect sense to me by then, extra sense in fact when I started to apply it to the way we think of positive and negative spaces visually. (Shout out to Dr. Leonard Tan!)



*What were some of the biggest challenges you faced when creating new works?*

I get really excited about new ideas, and I would jump into them impulsively almost every time. Most of the time though, they fizzle out just as quickly, if not, concerns like budget and logistical or production issues will check that initial burst of excitement. Therefore, I've come to accept that the first idea is usually neither the best nor the final expression, and generally, the final outcome is somewhat different from what I had originally envisioned. It is then a challenge to make sure that the problems are solved without compromising the latency of the initial ideas, and that the work remains honest, artistically resolved, and conceptually sound. In a way, I've learnt to place my bets at the right time and place, if say, a work is met with too many issues, I would let it go – maybe it will be revisited in the future, or not, I can't be sure, but it is important that I don't go against the flow too much. If the process takes the work somewhere that I didn't foresee, I am happy to react and respond accordingly.



*What is your personal philosophy in life, and how does it translate into your videos and installations?*

I like balance, symmetry and a sense of neutrality. I guess my works tend to embody that balance, either aesthetically or conceptually.



'It's a Set Situation', installation view, Art Stage, 2017

Photo courtesy of Kray Chen



'I'm a Steamroller Baby', video still, 2017

Photo courtesy of Kray Chen

*What do you want the audience to experience through your work?*

-

I wish to imagine that my works are seedlings - each time they plant themselves in the viewer, they have the potential to grow into something else. Maybe it will germinate and blossom, or maybe not! But I like the possibility that the audience can one day remember a work and relate it to their own experience and life.

---

**“I wish to imagine that my works are seedlings - each time they plant themselves in the viewer, they have the potential to grow into something else.”**

---

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

-

I think often we forget that the audience forms a big part of the art scene, especially members of the audience who respond critically and challenge the artists. So, I really hope we continue to inspire more people to actively visit, engage with or think about Singaporean art.

*How does receiving the Young Artist Award change things for you? Tell us more about how you intend to further grow and contribute to the arts scene.*

-

I am very grateful and humbled by this award and I hope it will expose my works and ideas to more people. I hope that they speak to more people here. ■







## WORDS OF APPRECIATION

A big thank you to all my friends, peers and mentors who have been so encouraging, optimistic and guiding in my practice so far. Thank you for seeing the good in the things I do; thank you for your patience and constructive criticism.

Also, thank you to all the staff that I've worked with at ICAS, LASALLE, NTU CCA, Objectifs, The Substation, SGIFF, NHB, Esplanade and Grey Projects. I look forward to working with you further.

Special thanks to the often uncredited individuals who have assisted me tremendously in my practice: Adele Tan, Alex Yang, Charles Merewether, Chang Poo Hee, Deusa Blumke, Filip Gudovic, Gilly Beal, Homa Shojaie, Isrudy Shaik, Kheyton Lim, Lee Young Rim, Patrick Ong, Tan Yingyi, Vera May, Dr. Winston Oh, Wong Deming.

Last but not least, the warmest of appreciation to Corine Chan, anchor in a turbulent voyage.





© 2017 NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior permission from the National Arts Council.

