

YOUNG ARTIST AWARD 2019

# WEIXIN QUEK CHONG

**W**eixin Quek Chong (b. 1988) is a visual artist. Her practice explores the dialectics of materials and sensations, often dealing with the stylisation of natural elements, digital and organic memory systems and a fascination with books and printed matter. Among her projects of recent years is the installation of 'sft crsh ctrl' at the Singapore Art Museum, which received the 2018 President's Young Talents Grand Prize.

She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Fine Arts (Printmaking) at LASALLE College of the Arts (2011), and was the recipient of the McNally Award for Excellence in the Arts (2011). She received the National Arts Council (NAC) Arts Scholarship (Postgraduate) in 2012 and the Tan Ean Kiam Postgraduate Scholarship (2012), both of which helped her pursue a Master of Arts in Fine Arts, Printmaking, from the Royal College of Art in London.

Since completing her postgraduate studies, Weixin has been working nomadically. She has been an artist-in-residence at Komplot (Brussels, Belgium) (2019); the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, South Korea through Grey Projects (Seoul, South Korea) (2019); Museo de Arte Contemporaneo through Molten Capital (Santiago, Chile) (2017); and at the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore (NTU CCA) (Singapore) (2015).

She has shown her work in Brussels, Istanbul, London, Seoul, Taipei, Vienna and Yogyakarta. An advocate for forming meaningful relationships between creative communities locally and internationally, she is interested in how art can enable or create spaces in order to foster empathy and understanding. One of the themes in her work is how tools and implements can change a human society's psychological structures and even its consciousness, affecting people's experience of their existence.

In Singapore, Weixin has been active in the art community since her undergraduate days. She has been an art educator at LASALLE College of the Arts and Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts as well as other institutions, through which she works with and mentors young artists as well as other art educators.

As a co-founder of soft/WALL/studs, an artist-run space which has showcased local and international creatives and events since 2016, she strives to host and nurture a creative community across diverse fields.



Studio work in progress.  
Photo courtesy of Singapore Art Museum





A CONVERSATION WITH  
**WEIXIN QUEK  
CHONG**

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

Since I was a child, books have been my main influence. I soaked up everything ranging from literary books to encyclopedias, magazines and periodicals on film, fashion, design and art.

My aunt, a graphic designer, encouraged me to pursue an arts education. She gave me art materials, and foreign periodicals which I would pore over till they fell apart. Possibly the earliest and most influential moment for me was discovering Leigh Bowery in an article by Hilton Als in my aunt's copy of 'The New Yorker' in 1988.

I was 10 then, and something clicked in my mind when reading about this incredible, creative force. It was about the joining of dots across different fields and interests.

**“I want my works to be spaces where audiences can access their own sensations and thoughts, even if they may not be likeable or popular.”**



'flesh skin surface.3' from series 'Beige Dreams', photographic print on aluminium, 600 x 400mm.  
*Photo courtesy of Weixin Quek Chong*



Video still from 'eating cake.1', part of 'sft crsh ctrl', President's Young Talents, Singapore Art Museum, 2018.  
*Photo courtesy of Weixin Quek Chong*

*What were some of the biggest challenges you faced when creating new works, and how did you overcome them?*

My biggest challenges have usually been about finding resources, including time, material, and support. I've always had more ideas than I could pursue. The challenge is how to fit this pursuit into my reality, where logistics and matters of survival set limits, and one must find ways around them. Thankfully, help in various forms has often sustained me, and opportunities given by others have realised some of my ideas.

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

Questioning the value system, and learning to listen and to articulate – these ideas ground my philosophy in navigating life, and in my practice.

Rather than subscribe to an imposed hierarchy which wrecks violence and keeps people closed off from one another, I believe in taking an individual as he or she is, and examining the multiple facets in the relationships between individuals.

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

I want my works to be spaces where audiences can access their own sensations and thoughts, even if they may not be likeable or popular. To me, artworks are arenas where one can connect with one's particular context and background. It does not matter how specialised your knowledge is – each artwork is a site which reflects individuality in the form of one's particular reaction and reading of it.



Installation view of 'sft crsh ctrl', President's Young Talents, Singapore Art Museum, 2018.  
Photo courtesy of Weixin Quek Chong



'orchidia lust lush.1', photographic print on aluminium, 450 x300mm, 2017.  
Photo courtesy of Weixin Quek Chong

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

I hope the scene will grow with more support and participation across varied communities. It is a mature, diverse scene in terms of artists and audiences, and one in which counterpoints and alternatives to institutional channels can flourish. This is greatly needed as a next step to growing the arts ecosystem.

One characteristic of the art scene here is the availability of public funds which benefit individuals who would otherwise not be able to develop their talent. However, I feel strongly that it is better for the sustainability and independence of the scene in the long term if there are more diverse sources of funds.

*Please share what a typical day in your life as a visual artist is like.*

This would usually either involve a lot of running around, finding and collecting materials, or experimenting with them, and testing. Other than that, it is a lot of planning, reading, browsing and generally sitting in front of my computer!

*What advice would you give to students who want to pursue a career in your field?*

Be very clear about what is important to you and what brings you satisfaction in this line of work. And don't give up on things too easily!

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

I am very fortunate to be acknowledged through the Young Artist Award. It marks an important milestone. It will help me take my work and research to another level. I also want to develop plans in mentoring and supporting younger artists and creative practitioners, through linking them with platforms and creating opportunities, or co-creating some of my own.



## WORDS OF APPRECIATION

I want to thank the special people in my life whose encouragement has enabled me to persevere in this often lonely and precarious field:

My grandparents who were visionaries in teaching me to value culture and community, and to work hard and take risks; and my family who has gone through this journey with me, bearing much with patience and love over the years;

My lecturers in LASALLE, who displayed a range of perspectives and whose influence was formative in my artistic work;

My music teacher who instilled in me the importance of practice, presentation and philosophy which has shaped my art-making;

The cherished individuals whose friendship and counsel have sustained me through difficult times;

The support from the National Arts Council throughout the stages of my studies and practice which has helped me develop my craft – and may this source of nourishment to the arts scene nurture even more diverse, creative voices and communities.

Most of all I want to thank my beloved partner and my closest friend: Thank you for being there, and for seeing me, hearing me, changing with me and valuing me.