



YOUNG ARTIST AWARD 2022

HO RUI AN

HO RUI AN (b. 1990) is an artist and writer working in the intersections of contemporary art, cinema, performance and theory. His work often takes the form of long-term, research-based projects examining systems of governance in a global age.

His passion for the arts began in secondary school where he cultivated his sensibility for the moving image through the Art Elective Programme. Following his studies in art and anthropology across schools in London and New York, he returned to Singapore and has since developed a practice well regarded locally and internationally for its compelling and rigorous engagement with history, geopolitics, economics and visual culture.

His projects have been shown at numerous biennales and major institutions, including the Gwangju Biennale; Jakarta Biennale; Kochi-Muziris Biennale; Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin; Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; Singapore Art Museum; and Para Site, Hong Kong. In 2021, his first major institutional solo exhibition opened at Kunsthalles Wien. In the same year, he was a finalist for the Future Generation Art Prize, one of the largest global contemporary art prizes for young artists. In 2018, he was a fellow of the DAAD Artists-in-Berlin Program.

As a performer, he has presented work at festivals such as Theatertreffen, Berlin; SPIELART Festival, Munich; and TPAM – Performing Arts Meeting in Yokohama. His work has also circulated within film networks, most prominently at the 65th International Short Film Festival Oberhausen in Germany, where he won the International Film Critics' Prize (FIPRESCI Prize). He is also a prolific writer who has authored many books and essays, including a forthcoming monograph published by Spector Books, Leipzig.

Approaching his work as a form of public pedagogy, he has taught at several educational institutions across Asia and Europe and frequently organises workshops and dialogues to broaden the public discourse around contemporary art in Singapore and beyond.



Installation view of Screen 'Green at Public Spirits', organised by Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw, 2017.

Photo courtesy of Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle



A CONVERSATION WITH HO RUI AN

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

I remember enjoying making images since I was a child. My family didn't have an artistic background, so I'm thankful that they encouraged me to pursue my interests, even though it did set me on a trajectory that is still quite unfamiliar to them. As I entered my 20s, my most formative influences were from the moving image, and I eventually wrote my undergraduate dissertation on the Thai auteur Apichatpong Weerasethakul. The writings of the film historian May Adadol Ingawanij and the anthropologist Rosalind C. Morris, among others, were also important in opening me towards new ways of thinking with images.



'Performance of The Economy Enters the People' at Singapore Art Museum, 2022.

Photo courtesy of Singapore Art Museum

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

As with most long-term research-based practices, the challenge is always securing enough resources to support the development of the work. Most of my projects involve archival and on-site research across different locations around the world that typically takes two to three years before any kind of work is produced, so institutional support is really necessary for me to sustain my practice. However, the speed of production in contemporary art sometimes makes it difficult to find the right institutions that are willing to invest in such a demanding process. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was extremely challenging to continue working on my projects but something positive that came out of that situation was that it prompted many of us within the cultural field to reflect on the need to slow down.

What motivated you to continue in spite of these challenges?

I find that once a project gets going, I'll get so absorbed into the process that I am compelled to see it to its completion despite the circumstances. Sometimes, it just means taking more time or a different approach. It's almost like there's a responsibility that I feel not so much to the different institutions and people who have supported the work as to the work itself.

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

It really depends on how far in the process I am with the projects I'm working on at any given time. When I'm researching, I tend to take my time to gather materials by reading, watching films, doing fieldwork and talking to different people. When I start to shift into production mode, it could be months and months of writing, filming and editing. There is also a tendency in my projects for the research, production and presentation of the work to happen simultaneously. For instance, very often when I travel to present a completed project, I would also use the time to also do research for ongoing projects.

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

My aspiration for my work is that it can open up new ways of looking at a particular subject. For me, I don't really expect my audience to agree with all the arguments that I present in my work. It's more important that the work serves as a provocation for them to question their own positions and reflect upon how those positions were given form to begin with.



Installation view of 'Asia the Unmiraculous' (2018-20) at 'The Ends of a Long Boom', organised by Kunsthalle Wien, 2021.

Photo courtesy of Kunsthalle Wien

What advice would you give the younger generation who would like to pursue a career in your field?

I find it difficult to give advice that's not targeted at anyone in particular as everyone is born into different circumstances in life that determines how easily they can pursue a career in the arts, if that even presents itself as an option. So I would say that the best advice I can give is to never take the advice of any one person too seriously.

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

My hope is for an art world that nurtures a diversity of practices that enable us to imagine and build a collective life that is worth living. My vision is for a kind of art that envisions futures that are not merely better than our present predicament, but also more evenly distributed.

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

I've always said that although not every work of mine mentions Singapore, it is always my point of departure, sometimes despite my intentions. Given this, it means the world to me to have my practice recognised in the country with this honour. I'll continue to pursue projects that expand our understanding of the world through Singapore (and of Singapore through the world) and hopefully inspire the next generation of artists and thinkers to continue the struggle for a better world.



WORDS OF APPRECIATION

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