

Visualizing Global Asias

Author(s): Alexandra Chang

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Portfolio

CURATED BY ALEXANDRA CHANG

Visualizing Global Asias

ENVISIONING GLOBAL ASIAs makes possible the multiple spatial and temporal imaginings necessary for thinking through a *longue durée* art history by reflecting the myriad ways in which contemporary artists are engaging with diasporic, transcultural, and transnational issues through visual culture. The discourse of transculturality—as theorized by scholars including Wolfgang Welsch (1999) and Arjun Appadurai (1996)—posits continual and multiple layers of ongoing encounters and cultural indigenization. Despite working in diverse media, genres, aesthetic styles, and cultural locations, the artists featured in this portfolio all emphasize how artistic production is situated in relation to overlapping, nongeospatial, and image- and context-delimited ecologies. Their artistic endeavors share an interest in examining the multiple scales of visibility in the broader envisioning of global Asias as well as wider art historical and visual cultures practice and discourse.

The *longue durée* art history of the contemporary now of global Asias art and visual cultures is long indeed, influenced by transcultural interactions from the movements of people, goods, images, and ideas since the sixteenth-century Manila galleon trade to ongoing transmigrations between the Pacific, Americas, Africa, and Europe as well as the history of the development of an inter-Asian and Asian diasporic art discourse in the past century. Throughout the century, the influence of these migrations, circulations, and exchanges has been and continues to be evidenced within the artistic production of the present. No doubt they will also be critically significant for the works and narratives that are still to be produced. Of particular import in this artistic dynamic is an attentive reframing of the nature of the historical: such work fully embraces aesthetic practices and visual vocabularies that make visible the

present past and the future's impending arrival in the process of constantly shifting transcultural landscapes. Thus such a narrative is less a linear eventual history than one that is multivalent and plays by multiple temporal algorithms.

Networks of scholars such as the Diasporic Asian Art Network (DAAN), the International Network for Diasporic Asian Art Research (INDAAR), and the NYU Global Asia/Pacific Art Exchange (GAX) are some of the interinstitutional field-building initiatives with which I've been involved since 2008. These initiatives have sought to engage scholars in multiple fields—including art history, visual cultures, history, Asian American studies, East Asian studies, art education, archives, museum studies, and digital humanities, among others—to further reexamine the very nature of art and visual cultures' narrative-generative practices. These scholarly initiatives aim to build networks of collaboration to create the research materials and international accessibility necessary for such reconsiderations to shape evolving research practices on transnational histories and repositories.

This portfolio presents some of the artists who have participated in the network working sessions or program initiatives sponsored by DAAN, INDAAR, and GAX. Their work asks us not only to reenvision ways of engaging with the contexts of artistic production and reception but also to reimagine accepted temporal and geopolitical economies of place. Although their works fit into any number of categorizations—from street-influenced, steampunk, contemporary ink to Asian aboriginal, Asian diasporic, or New York-based—their aesthetic productions reflect the multivalent visual narratives and flows that are integral to the envisioning of multiple Asias within a global framework.

■ LAM TUNG-PANG

Lam Tung-pang's work purposefully mimics the format of large-scale black-and-white ink painting, which holds a defined place in the art historic tradition of Hong Kong and East Asia. He notes on the work *Past Continuous Tense* (Figure 1),

Wisdom from the old days sometime [*sic*] is just like a joke for today. What does tradition mean today? How is it perceived and what does it contribute to our contemporary life? I went back to look up at traditional Chinese Painting, which I always failed during [*sic*] my school days. This work, *Past Continuous Tense*, is formed by those questions and copying of images of trees from ink paintings including Korean and Japanese. (Lam Tung-pang, pers. comm., January 29, 2014)



Figure 1. Lam Tung-pang, *Past Continuous Tense*. Charcoal, image transfer, acrylic on wood, 244 × 1560 centimeters, 2011. Courtesy of Hong Kong Arts Centre.

While Lam places his work in direct dialogue with ink painting, he consciously is not creating ink paintings. The media that Lam regularly employs are everyday plywood, charcoal, image transferring, pencil, acrylic, video projections, toys, and plastic models. His use of such eclectic materials and the injection of humor and play into his pieces work counter to the elite traditions, schools, and collections that surround black-and-white ink painting (Figure 2).

His large-scale installation *Things Happen on the Island* (Figure 3) consists of a painting on plywood with smaller elements of toys and models affixed to its surface and in its surrounding space. Where one might usually find small village scenes interspersed throughout an ink painting, instead Lam employs toy miniatures to humorously depict contemporary scenes. An installation of toy blocks, vehicles, and roads complements the painting, asking audience-goers to develop their own extensions of the painting into what they will. However, as each person participates, the toys are taken down and altered, creating a city that is made of elements from the past, present, and future, constantly in a state of change, destruction, and being built.



Figure 2. Lam Tung-pang, *The Youngest and Oldest*. Acrylics, pencil, charcoal, clay, plastic models, and image-transferred on plywood, height 214 × 455 centimeters, 2011.



Figure 3. Lam Tung-pang, *Things Happened on the Island*. Acrylics, charcoal, pencil, scale model, and wooden toys on plywood, height 244 × 700 × width 60 centimeters, 2013.



Figure 4. Annysa Ng, *Ambiguous Space aka Hua Xuan*. Ink on silk, two panels: 30 × 80 inches (76.2 × 203.2 centimeters), 2009. Courtesy of the artist.

■ ANNYSA NG

Steampunk was an alternative historical trajectory that paralleled the emergence of interest in cyberpunk in the 1980s. Implied in both steampunk and cyberpunk is a future that combines elements of the past and a relationship with modernity in an imagined world of the subject.¹ Annysa Ng's work compresses and layers linear time and intermingles multiple myths, period costumes, objects, and art historical references through steampunk aesthetics and cabinet of wonder–inflected collections and iconography, consciously reflecting on and re-creating a space of transcultural intermix.

Her two-dimensional paintings, such as *Ambiguous Space aka Hua Xuan* (Figure 4) and *Hollow* (Figure 5), are reminiscent of popular Victorian silhouette cutouts. Silhouettes served as an inexpensive way to create a portrait likeness and have had resurgence in popular steampunk style. Although the technique allows for a recognizable portrait, the details of the subject's face are obscured, placing the identity of the subject in a position of ambiguity and possibility even as certain details within the silhouettes are discernible, including the composition of the works and the period costume dress of the subjects.

Several of her works reference the portraiture of Italian court painters in China, such as Giuseppe Castiglione, pointing toward artists who were living and creating between cultural spaces in the 1700s. The two-panel painting *Ambiguous Space aka Hua Xuan* references the work of Qing Dynasty artist Hua Xuan, who painted *Eight Beauties on the Balcony of a Brothel* (circa 1736). The women are painted in the ambiguous space of a balcony, in which they are both inside and outside, both on view on a



Figure 5. Annysa Ng, *Hollow*. Ink and acrylic on canvas, 64 × 60 inches (162.6 × 152.4 centimeters), 2013. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 6. Annysa Ng, *Convergence : Divergence*. Wall paper and mirror, 85 × 114 inches each (216 × 289.6 centimeters each), two walls are twelve feet apart, 2011. Courtesy of the artist.

“stage” framed by the balustrade as well as enclosed within an architectural space. The artist notes, “The painting negotiates both the presence and absence of culture that takes place in Hong Kong, where people cannot be defined as Chinese or British yet struggle to form themselves into something distinct from both” (Annysa Ng, pers. comm., January 30, 2014).

Ng (pers. comm., September 13, 2011) notes the Daoist influence in her work: “There’s no absolute, everything changes, so only ‘Change’ is the forever true.” Her work *Convergence : Divergence* (Figure 6) is made of two facing walls, covered in wallpaper patterned with her black-and-white silhouettes. The walls run parallel, never to touch, save for two mirrors hung on each wall directly across from each other. The mirrors both reflect the opposite wall and place the viewer within a mirror-in-a-mirror reflection, where the infinite timeline of the past and the present in which the elements of one wall and one reflected direction are a part of the creation of the other as both continuity and simultaneous presence. The piece underlines the artist’s space of transcultural convergences and the distinct yet blurring boundaries of its histories of place, time, and colonial legacies.

■ JASON WING

The works *In Between Two Worlds* (Figure 7) and *An Australian Government Initiative Self-Portrait* (Figure 8) give a window into the overlaps and relationships between the artist’s influences and experiences as a mixed-race artist. Wing created a self-identifying categorization titled “ABC, Aboriginal Born Chinese.”

His work *In Between Two Worlds* is a public artwork commissioned in 2011 by the City of Sydney on Kimber Lane, a laneway that offshoots from Dixon Street, the main commercial street in Sydney Chinatown. The work mixes symbols of Chinese and Aboriginal mythologies, including elements such as heaven and earth, wind, fire, and water, and employs urban art paste-up and Chinese papercut techniques. Wing’s sculptural depiction of a child spirit figure in the work both references spirit figures in Chinese and Aboriginal cultures and serves as a symbolic suspension between cultures as well as the icon’s suspension between the human and spirit worlds.

The work consists of thirty of these large-scale aluminum laser-cut child spirits, lit by electric blue LED lights, floating amid long patterns of “good luck” cloud stencils (with the word *yun* in Chinese meaning “cloud” and “luck” or “fortune”) of up to two hundred meters long that run the length of the sides of the buildings along the lane. The stencils are meant to be temporary, a complement to the more permanent metal sculptures, allowing for an aspect of decay and additional markings on the wall that might eventually obliterate them. The cement of the laneway also



Figure 7. Jason Wing, *Between Two Worlds*, 2012. Public artwork. Kimber Lane, Haymarket, New South Wales.

alternates between portions of painted cloud stenciling to lengths of granite tiles, etched with the cloud pattern. The shifting between paint and granite, again, emphasizes an in-between-ness of permanence and impermanence, of change.

While *In Between Two Worlds* is a celebratory look at the intersections of Chinese and Aboriginal symbols and myths cross-mixed with the artist's street practice in paste-ups, the artist's work *An Australian Government Initiative* crosses communities as a response to ethnic stereotyping and violence against marginalized groups and, in this particular case, the Aboriginal community. The work consists of a series of monumental black-and-white paste-up photographs of the artist, bare-chested, wearing a plaque that reads alternatively "rapist," "pedophile," "criminal," and "alcoholic." The artist created the self-portraits in reaction to the Aboriginal communities being targeted in the Northern Territories, Australia, with the implementation of the Northern Territory National Emergency Response in 2007, colloquially known as the "intervention."

Following the 2007 "intervention," large blue-and-white signs to ban alcohol and pornography were posted at the border of Aboriginal lands,

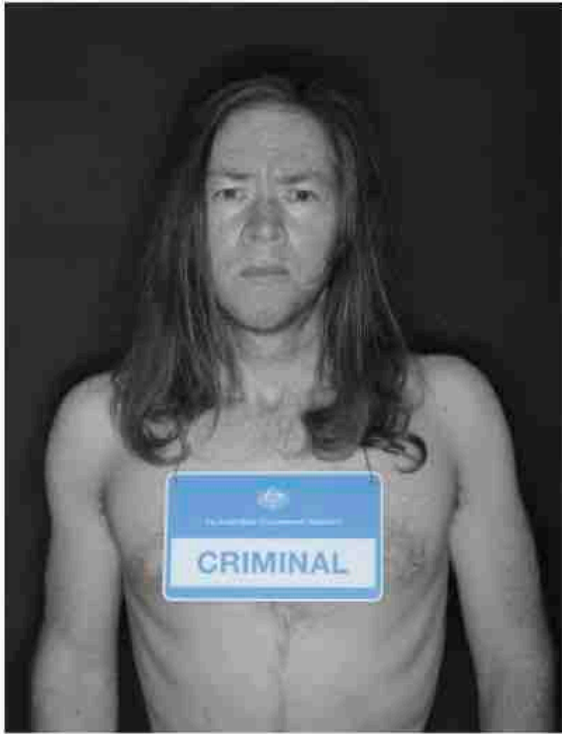


Figure 8. Jason Wing, *An Australian Government Initiative*. Black paint; laser prints, 686.0 × 367.0 centimeters (irreg.), 2012. Collection of the artist.

instilling stereotypes of degradation and criminal activity onto the image of the Aboriginal population, officially labeled by way of the signs by the government. In Wing's work, his body looms large over passersby, pasted on the wall, much like a billboard, but his work counters officially sanctioned labels used to perpetuate racial profiling and stereotypes and to create awareness of the policies enacted onto marginalized communities and their consequences.

■ SHIGEYUKI KIHARA

Shigeyuki Kihara's works—her series *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* and her triptych *Fa'a Fafine; In a Manner of a Woman* (Figure 9)—engage with counterhistories, revealing the functions of visualities in the everyday in relation to the legacy of colonial imaginings of the Pacific.

Kihara's work *Fa'a Fafine; In a Manner of a Woman* is composed of three

Figure 9. Shigeyuki Kihara, *Fa'a Fafine; In the Manner of a Woman*, 2005. From the series *Fa'a Fafine; In the Manner of a Woman*. C-prints 60 × 80 centimeters. Edition of 5 + 2 AP. Courtesy Shigeyuki Kihara Studio and Milford Galleries Dunedin, New Zealand.





Figure 10. Shigeyuki Kihara, *Saleapaga Primary School after Tsunami Galu Afi, Saleapaga*, 2013, from the series *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* C-print, 595 × 840 millimeters. Edition of 5 + 2 AP. Courtesy Shigeyuki Kihara Studio and Milford Galleries Dunedin, New Zealand.

images of the artist reclined on a divan. Awash in sepia tint, the image at once references vintage tourist souvenir postcards, highly popular colonial ethnographic photography, and studio-shot portrayals that formulate the sexualized image of the “dusky maiden.” The title of the work, *fa’a fafine*, translates to “in a manner of a woman” and references *fa’a fafine* in Samoan culture, who embody what might be defined as a both male and female gendered space. As scholar Erika Wolf (2010) notes, the artist additionally references and positions the work within and as a response to the Western art historical canon of portraiture and the reclining women of J. A. D. Ingres’s *Odalisque* and Jacques Louis David’s *Madame Récamier*. In the first photograph, the artist presents a stereotypical image of the “dusky maiden,” reclining on her side with her hair waving down, her chest bare while wearing a grass skirt. The surrounding backdrop of the image underlines the historical stereotypes of the Pacific as an exotic elsewhere in relation to a monolithic Western colonial modernity with the staging framed by palm tree fronds. In the second image, her skirt is absent, an unveiling of the hidden. In the third, her penis is present. Like the speculative postcolonial archive, instead

of a single image, Kihara offers multiple images, multiple possibilities, an encircling of the originary image with a shifting image and an untenable absolute dominant and gendered narrative. Kihara's work signals the artist's overlapping and multivalent positionalities as artist creator and image subject, *fa'a fafine*, part of the Samoan diaspora in New Zealand, and aware of her own placement within the discourse and power functions of visuality.

In her series *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* the artist is referencing Paul Gauguin's critically debated and well-known work, which resides at the Boston Museum of Fine Art collection as a prominent work of Western primitivism. At the center of this piece, she has famously painted a *mahū*, painting self-reflexive trajectories onto the other, imaging or imagining for the other (see Figure 10).

Kihara's work was influenced by a photograph titled *Samoan Half Caste* from the album *Views in the Pacific Islands* (1886) by Thomas Andrew (New Zealand, 1855–1939), which she uncovered during her archival research. The photograph shows a Samoan woman wearing a Victorian dress and may have been commissioned by the subject herself. In Kihara's photographic series, she—as both subject and creator—is dressed in a black Victorian mourning dress, a haunting and contrasting figure within the environments surrounding her, from an international airport to a church and school devastated by the tsunami. In these images, facing away from the viewer, she recalls the Derridean spectral archive “neither present nor absent ‘in the flesh,’ neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met” (Derrida 1995, 84). Her seemingly anachronistic costume and haunting of the places of encountering and engagement with power structures of modernity and the Pacific enfold the *longue durée* visual narratives.

■ CYJO

The photography projects of CYJO utilize methodologies that reappropriate anthropological and scientific image and information collections-building. By creating such collections, she is developing an archive of narratives that have been left unseen and unconnected.

For *The Kyopo Project*, CYJO has photographed more than two hundred individuals who are part of the Kyopo or Korean diasporic population. The photos are full-body images of the individuals as they pose standing in front of a white wall. In addition to the photographs, CYJO asked project participants about their relationship to being part of the diaspora. Rather than a formal systematic search for participants, the

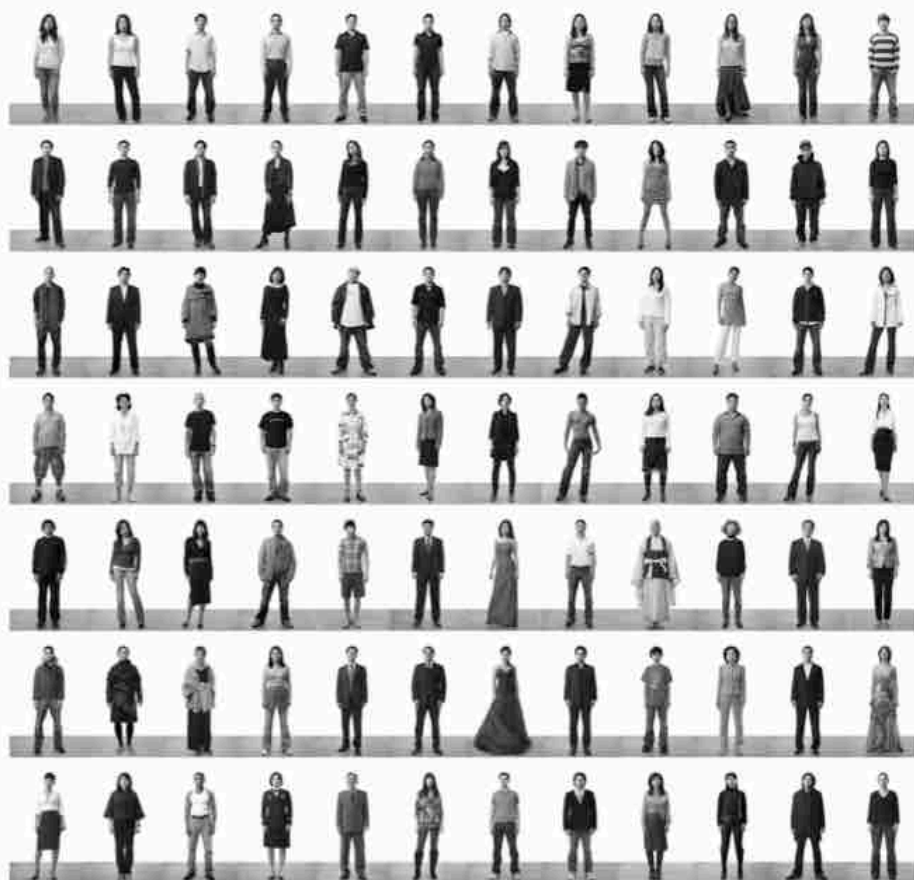


Figure 11. Section of *KYOPO Collective*, 2004–9. Archival pigment print 57.09 × 57.09 inches. Copyright CYJO.

project expanded via word-of-mouth introduction from one person to another, much like a person meets and connects with another through everyday motions. Through the artist's practice, *The Kyopo Project* creates an international community of its own within the scaffolding of the larger Kyopo community. While the project reappropriates ethnographic practices, it also formulates a counterarchive that allows for the linking of individuals through personal stories and interactions, emphasizing the importance of community connections that span transnationally and may not be in full view in dominant narrative structures (see Figure 11).

Another project influenced by ethnographic methodology is CYJO's recent ongoing project *Mixed Blood* (Figures 12 and 13). Beyond the image of the individual, *Mixed Blood* stretches to the satellite of the family unit. Now living in Beijing, the artist has been able to document mixed-race families in China and New York, thinking through the connectors of

race, ethnicity, mobilities, citizenship, and the community of home. In this series, families are photographed standing amid their living rooms. The stance of each individual is similar, with arms close to the body, standing stiffly and looking ahead as a conscious subject to this project inquiry. The uniform stance serves as a “control” to the other aspects of the project. Unlike *The Kyopo Project*, not only do the subjects and their clothing alter with each photograph, but the living room surround or the units of “home” within the global cities of New York and Beijing stand out as unique. Like *Kyopo*, the participants are also asked about their relationships to their identity, this time their mixed-race families. The answers are far ranging, touching on topics of national identities, language, descriptors of home and family, and negotiating cosmopolitan lives, including questions of place and belonging, while acclimatizing to resettling into a global city from the multiple vantages of partner, parent, and child.

■ **SAMSON YOUNG**

Samson Young’s work often explores the relationship of intimate human encounters with technology and a democratizing of learned structures in the production of music. Having studied in Hong Kong, Australia,



Figure 12. *Mixed Blood—Beijing Collective 2013*. Archival pigment print 29.5 × 39.5 inches. Copyright CYJO.



Figure 13. *Mixed Blood Snodgrass Family*—Sept. 28th, 2013. Archival pigment print 29.5 × 39.5 inches. Copyright CYJO.

and the United States, his work *Memorizing the Tristan Chord* (*Institute of Fictional Ethnomusicology*) (Figures 14 and 15) is in conversation with his self-reflexive awareness of the lingering hold of his formal training in Western classical music and the legacies of dominant structures of musical composition, training, and performance on the artist and on the general public.

For this work, which Young created as a commissioned work for the Goethe-Institut to commemorate the two-hundredth birthday of composer Richard Wagner in 2013, the artist asked seventy participants to create different Cantonese phrases that could be mapped tonally to the Tristan Chord, a heavily studied chord in Western music found at the start of the Wagner opera “Tristan und Isolde.” Young found that Cantonese, with its nine tonal inflections, was suited to such a remapping. The phrases varied from haiku-like sentences to ones with political overlays regarding Hong Kong. In creating these phrases, he references memorization practices that students often use, but he also creates “earworms” that not only map onto the music but in fact overtake the music and become the active memory of the music.

Young videotaped each of the subjects of his project in a studio, pur-

posefully avoiding eye contact with the participants, creating an atmosphere of scientific fieldwork and a controlled formal environment. In his documenting of the participants, he has also created an archive of the present, cast in the past, in which the subjects do not perform live in front of an audience, save for the artist, and are instead videotaped in an intimate space, with the resulting documentation meant to be opened up to a wider audience only later through the added layer of technology. The personal becomes the public, the present is presented as archive, and performance and sound are mitigated and received through technology.

■ AMY LEE SANFORD

Amy Lee Sanford was born in Cambodia in 1972 and was sent in 1974 to live with her father's Swedish-American wife in the United States, where she was brought up in the Northeast. Sanford's father, who stayed behind, was killed during the takeover by the Khmer Rouge. As a result of her personal history, the artist notes that her work "explores the evolution of emotional stagnation, and the lasting psychological effects of war, including aspects of guilt, loss, alienation, and displacement."²

In 2005, she returned to Cambodia to reconnect with family she hadn't realized she had there. After the death of her adoptive mother when she was only fifteen, Sanford believed herself to be the only one of



Figure 14. Samson Young, *Memorizing the Tristan Chord* (Institute of Fictional Ethnomusicology). Video and online database, 2012.



Figure 15. Samson Young, *Memorizing the Tristan Chord* (Institute of Fictional Ethnomusicology). Screen captures, video and online database, 2012.

her family to have survived from Cambodia and tried to piece together a past that seemed no longer accessible. The work *Suspended* (Figure 16), composed of cloudlike tangles of delicate copper wires suspended in mid-air, reflects on the fragmented and ephemeral elements of trauma, memory, and her personal history. The work includes fragments of her father's letters that he wrote to his wife and Sanford until April 17, 1975, when the letters stopped. In 2009, Sanford returned to Cambodia again and is presently living in Phnom Penh.

Her durational performance *Full Circle* marked her first performance piece. The work is documented by two cameras, which open their shutters every six seconds, creating a stuttering, fragmented video. The artist surrounded herself with forty Kampong Chhnang clay pots, which originate from her father's province. Coproduced by Java Arts, which has supported many artists in the nascent but growing Cambodian contemporary arts scene, the work took place from March 13 to 18, 2012, inside Meta House Gallery. For six days, Sanford attended to her performance, dropping each pot and meditatively gluing them back together and tying



Figure 16. Amy Lee Sanford, *Suspended*, 2006. Detail of installation. Installation with copper, monofilament, light filters, audio. Photo by Stan Chong.

them with string, giving a marker of both visible breakage and reassembly to each piece. The video, created by the photos strung together as a fragmented rendering of linear time, becomes the documentation of the performance, allowing the personal performance to open up to engagement while simultaneously developing and collecting an archive of trauma and rebuilding and the process of coming to terms with the past in a present so imbued with the past.

As with *Full Circle*, in her performance and video of the piece *Building Again* (Figures 17 and 18), commissioned by Our City Festival in 2012, the artist's background in art, engineering, and artisanal tile craft emerges within the work and its references to building. In this piece, part of the gallery space was left empty as an "archival site" or trace for the performance (Pace 2012). Bricklayers created a square wall of 2.3 by 3 meters outside of the entrance of the gallery. A small crowd then gathered to watch Sanford and others break down the wall with large sledgehammers and smaller hammers. Finally, the gathering of the participants and passersby joined the artist in reconstructing a wall from the broken fragments. The process of building the wall reflects the trauma of genocide and its wall of silences, deeply ingrained, with the legacies of trauma



Figure 17. Amy Lee Sanford, *Building Again*, 2012. Interactive performance, commissioned by Our City Festival 2012. Sothearos Park, Phnom Penh, Kingdom of Cambodia. Photo by Vinh Dao.



Figure 18. Amy Lee Sanford, *Building Again*, 2012. Interactive performance, commissioned by Our City Festival 2012. Sothearos Park, Phnom Penh, Kingdom of Cambodia. Photo by Vinh Dao.

built into the structures of the contemporary now. In turn, while the shattering of the wall may pose as a second violence, reducing the brick to rubble, it also contrasts with the silent and empty space of the gallery and gestures to an emancipation that enables the process by which a community can come to terms with the past.

Alexandra Chang is the curator of special projects and director of global arts programs at the Asian/Pacific/American Institute at New York University and the author of *Envisioning Diaspora: Asian American Visual Arts Collectives* (2009).

■ NOTES

1. Steampunk has roots dating back to Jules Verne novels and became a subculture of fashion, music, film, theater, and visual art featuring a blend of goth and Victorian style with a nod to the steam engine and wind-up watches, rethinking them for the future, often involving outlandish mechanical contraptions made of complicated inventions of metal gears and sprockets.

2. Amy Lee Sanford, <http://amyleesanford.com/about/bio/>.

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