

PRESS RELEASE

New exhibition from Gilles Massot to be unveiled at NUS Museum

Singapore, Friday, 31 May 2019 — “...***you have to lose your way to find yourself in the right place***” presents the works of Singapore-based French artist, Gilles Massot. Featuring a selection of photographs, videos, sketches and writings from his extensive corpus of works from his arrival in Singapore in the early 1980s to the present, it explores the artist’s evolving negotiations with place and self-identity. The exhibition will be opened by Guest-of-Honour Professor Rajeev S Patke, Director of the Division of Humanities, Yale-NUS College on 13 June 2019, 7pm.



Gilles Massot, *Meeting in Macau*, 2019, Digital video, 00:24:32. Collection of the artist.

Oscillating between his work as a photo-journalist travelling across Asia, his involvement in the changing contemporary art scene, and his expatriate status in Singapore, Massot’s art practice is driven by a search for identity affirmation. In particular, his sustained interest in photography’s action of “duplication and recording” and its resultant question of “subject and significance” forms the medium through which he interprets his relation to the world.

From Jules to Gilles

This artistic trajectory has drawn his attention and research to Jules Itier, a French trade envoy who produced daguerreotypes during his travels to Singapore, Indochina and China in the 1840s. This latest project on Itier provides the basis for the exhibition’s selection from Massot’s wider oeuvre.

In these images, Massot traces and re-enacts scenes photographed by Itier not simply to prompt contrasts, but to assert a kinship where origins and destinies converge. Finding parallels between their individual circumstances and the predicaments faced, Massot reads Itier's narratives as unfolding simultaneously alongside his own. On one hand, Itier's work presents a point of historical interest to Massot's photographic explorations, especially in his early photographs of Singapore. On the other, and in a more personal regard, lines of connections are proposed by Massot through a series of "coincidences" between their lives.

Disrupting the image

Massot's early practice in relation to his commissions for travel magazines also involves cycles of making and remaking, "sabotaging" the pristine status of the photographic image by cutting the image into parts, disrupting its continuities and re-rendering them into newer compositions. At other times, he introduces colour to black-and-white photographs by painting over them with whimsical lines and vibrant colours to animate the elements and emphasise conceptual interests.

In *Reflections in an Electronic Eye*, 1986, Massot crops images of a National Day Parade in Singapore taken off a television screen. Through the processes of rendering highly saturated colours and culling specific symbols, the work alludes to the reproduction and maintenance of relations between state and society. Like many of his other works produced during this period, it also captures a snapshot of Singapore that eludes the brevity of time.

Never one to conform to predictability, his manipulations of the artwork through re-ordering and re-incorporations of other mediums, point towards a persistent theoretical concern of attempting to sieve through modes of seeing and understanding. Collectively, they form ways in which Massot engages with images and their potential meanings.

"I intuitively sensed at a very early age that there was a lot more to a photograph than the self-absorbed air of certainty floating on its surface," Massot writes in his paper, *The White Space Theory*. "This understanding gradually led me to painting, as I wanted to disrupt the sense of assurance or belief in the reality created by the illusion of the photographic image. A photograph exists only as a probability."¹

Positioning himself

Through the documentation of his temporal sojourns, his artistic efforts in Singapore complicate the ideological and orientalisng features of these journeys undertaken, and relocates his positioning in relation to the circumstances he finds himself in. As he says in an interview with curator Foo Su Ling, "I was a stranger in a strange land, an "other", and everything was fine since there was room here (in Singapore) for me to be just that."

Some earlier works that audiences can look forward to are: *Time Frame*, completed in France during the summer of 1977 and which Massot describes as a decisive turning point in his practice; *Coffee Shop Triptych*, created in 1992 and exhibited through an array of photographs, paintings and sketches in a Bukit Timah coffeeshop; and the *Singapore from BW to C* series originally held in 1985 in Lucina Talib's carpentry workshop in Macpherson as a party.

"...you have to lose your way to find yourself in the right place" will be open until 31 December 2019.

¹ Massot, Gilles. "An Open Call to Open Minded Scientists" (unpublished article).



Gilles Massot, *Time Frame*, 1977, Mixed media on paper, 50 x 65cm. Collection of the artist.

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Annex A: About NUS Museum

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NUS Museum is a comprehensive museum for teaching and research. It focuses on Asian regional art and culture, and seeks to create an enriching experience through its collections and exhibitions.

The Museum has over 8,000 artefacts and artworks divided across four collections. The Lee Kong Chian Collection consists of a wide representation of Chinese materials from ancient to contemporary art; the South and Southeast Asian Collection holds a range of works from Indian classical sculptures to modern pieces; and the Ng Eng Teng Collection is a donation from the late Singapore sculptor and Cultural Medallion recipient. A fourth collection, the Straits Chinese Collection, is located at NUS Baba House

NUS Museum is an institution of NUS Centre For the Arts.

Annex B: About NUS Centre For the Arts

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Established in 1993, NUS Centre For the Arts (CFA) is a vibrant space for the appreciation of the arts and nurturing of the creative and inquiring spirit. CFA supports student engagement with the arts and the integration of the arts into the life of the University.

CFA includes the NUS Museum, NUS Baba House and a Talent and Development arm that oversees 22 student arts excellence groups. Through our myriad of programmes, practices, exhibitions, workshops and outreach, such as NUS Arts Festival and the ExxonMobil Campus Concerts, we enrich the university experience and contribute to the building of knowledge and transformation of students.

CFA also manages facilities such as the University Cultural Centre, with its 1700-seat Hall and 425-seat Theatre, and rehearsal spaces in Runme Shaw CFA Studios and University Town.