

ASIA PACIFIC // BRISBANE

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REVIEWS

**Christian
Thompson**
Trinity I, 2014.
C-print,
39 x 29½ in.

BRISBANE

Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art 8

*Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of
Modern Art / November 21, 2015–April 10, 2016*

AT THE FIRST edition of the Asia Pacific Triennial (APT) in 1993, Doug Hall, director of the Queensland Art Gallery, noted how Australia's near northern neighbors were still in common parlance exotically known as the "Far East." The following years have seen this exhibition morph through eight iterations, including editions with work from more than 160 artists and a pared-down version with just 17. Meanwhile, Brisbane has also seen the opening of a new venue, the Gallery of Modern Art (GOMA)—which more than quadrupled the existing exhibition space and

REVIEWS



ABOVE:
Asim Waqif
Installation view
of *All we leave
behind are
the memories*,
2015. Reclaimed
timber from
demolition sites
around Brisbane,
interactive
electronic and
acoustic system,
and metal
hardware.
187 x 29½ x 52½ ft.

RIGHT:
Khvay Samnang
Rubber Man,
2014. Ink-jet print
on Hahnemühle
photo rag paper,
31½ x 47¼ in.

was built with this hallmark exhibition in mind—as well as the growth of the institution's reputation as the foremost leader in acquiring and exhibiting work from the Asia Pacific region, tangible development that speaks as well to shifts in the consciousness of a viewing public.

In its eighth edition, which includes 83 artists from 36 countries (including, notably, Mongolia, Nepal, and the Solomon Islands), the show has no unifying visual thread, nor does it seem that artists hailing from the same country share much of an aesthetic with their compatriots. For the first time, however, a suitably nebulous curatorial theme, movement and the body, unites the work. It could be this development that makes the show feel both visually diverse and curatorially tight—one in which Filipino artist Maria Taniguchi's monochrome brick paintings might be recalled when, two floors up, viewers encounter a conveyor belt carved with traditional designs by Gunybi Ganambarr, or where David Medalla's dish-soap sculpture will bring to mind the snakelike plastic tubes trailing behind the motorbikes seen earlier in UuDam Tran Nguyen's three-channel video installation *Serpent's Tails*, 2015.

Immersive environments—often collaborative or performative in nature—recur throughout. Dominating GOMA's central, three-story-high gallery and visible from every floor is Asim Waqif's *All we leave behind are the memories*, 2015, a clicking, vibrating installation made of rough timber common to Queensland architecture. It's a

family-pleaser, a playground embedded with lights and sensors inviting visitors to interact. For *Ils vous regardent*, 2015, Nicolas Molé projects a vibrant animated forestscape on the walls of a third-floor gallery, which contains, in the form of a traditional Kanak hut, a more contemplative inner room lined with slow-moving figures on flat-screens and scented with an earthy pandanus-leaf flooring. Rosanna Raymond's *SaVAge K'lub* project, 2010–ongoing, usurps the stereotype of colonial gentleman's clubs with an installation and performance space made in collaboration with the K'lub's 19 members, and Lawrence English's droning sound installation, *Audition*, 2015, changes drastically, depending on where the listener is situated in relation to the concave objects at either dimly lit end of the room. These environments make possible an experiential involvement with the themes at play, prompting a cultural submersion of sorts for visitors.

This triennial is flexible in the demographics it anticipates, serving multiple audiences—both art world types and locals experiencing firsthand the continuing shift in their country's regional identity. The curators' treatment of place displays a genuine engagement with visualizing and defining what it means to live in and be from this newly designated area. In a region marked by fluctuating political lines, and in a nation that still struggles with the ramifications of its own violent colonial history in a unified territory once made up of hundreds of indigenous countries and distinct language groups, the organizers of this exhibition should be acknowledged for their transparent attempt to incorporate the societies and cultural groups that make up the place we are coming to understand as the Asia Pacific.

More often than not, the artists here cannot name one single place to identify with, having left their first home for any number of reasons, from political strife to furthering their education. And those who do have a place to call home are often exploring other cultural influences wrought by history of place, access to global communities brought on by rapid changes in technology, trends in immigration, and family legacy. Examples include Thailand-based Paphonsak La-or's painted landscapes made from Google Maps aerial footage of the Fukushima area; Juan Davila's paintings, which draw from both his Australian and his Chilean heritage; the London-based, native Australian (hailing from the Bidjara people of Western Queensland) Christian Thompson's video and photographs that merge international pop culture with his indigenous heritage; and Pacific artist Len Lye's films and sculptures, which owe as much to the patterns he encountered in Maori culture as they do to the kinetic art scene he was involved in beginning in the 1930s. As what it means to be a part of the relatively new designation Asia Pacific becomes more sophisticated, APT has followed the dialogue, exploring this larger identity and those it encompasses through such wide-ranging cultural production. —Juliet Helmke

