

01 *In* Curator's  
*Out* Note  
*Near*  
*Far*  
*Push*  
Berny Tan *Pull*

**BERNY TAN** (b. 1990) is an artist, curator, and writer. Her multidisciplinary practice explores the tensions that arise when one applies systems to—and unearths systems in—intangible personal experiences, complicating the false binary between rational and emotional. She is currently pursuing an MA in Contemporary Art Theory at Goldsmiths, University of London. Tan previously worked as Assistant Curator for OH! Open House, a non-profit that explores Singapore's cultural geography through art. She has also exhibited her work in Singapore, New York, and the United Kingdom, with two solo presentations in Singapore in 2018.

☒1 Why do we willingly leave the known, stable environment for a strange one? To learn, first of all—to gain new knowledge, to have new experiences, discover new perspectives, experiment with new methodologies. Always the new, different, unfamiliar.

But we come not just to look outward, but also inward—to the familiar, yes, but also to see what is within as potentially unfamiliar. We come to step outside of ourselves, to dissect ourselves and put ourselves back together again and again; perhaps in an entirely different configuration, perhaps by replacing some parts altogether. We take the messiness within our minds and offer it up to the world, then reclaim it for ourselves only to complicate it again, and hope that in this process of reorganisation we move closer to something like synthesis, or coherence. We hope that this will surprise us, and maybe we hope it still remains recognisable to us.

It is only through confronting and experiencing difference—the deviations from the norm—that one is forced to redefine, renegotiate, reconstitute. In that process, amidst all this change, what stays the same? Does it persist because of our own stubbornness (a refusal to change), or because it speaks to some kind of essence (that which we cannot change)? If we assume we are beings open to self-interrogation, we will ask this of ourselves. We displace and destabilise, create internal schisms, search for the thing within us that, in spite of everything, becomes more luminous, more crystalline.

☒2 *(You came towards something, here in London, and you also came to run away from something—we'll call it X—to escape, to put distance between yourself and X. But sometimes distance makes you realise the proximity to X is irrelevant. What you really needed to run away from in the first place is the idea of X that you've constructed in your own head. How do you escape your own mind? You find yourself still thinking of X in so many different ways. When X comes to mind after a period of reprieve, why does it still feel like you are coming back to yourself? You want to expel X, but X is also that which has shaped you.*

*X could represent anything for anyone. It could be an accepted norm, or the norm against which you want to define yourself, or indeed something that you have managed to distort into a norm, whose importance you may now want to diminish. Perhaps for others, that distance from X is liberating. Perhaps they breathe easier, here, away from X. But X has been internalised, nonetheless. X is far away; X is still with you; X and you are forever intertwined; X is lost to you forever.)*

☒3 It is still two weeks to the opening, so I can only move through the exhibition in my mind: I walk among things that both claim to imitate and yet lay bare their own mimicry; around forms that speak a language both line and curve, body and abstract; along images that excavate dark histories and objects within which those histories are embedded; here, again, marks and shapes that call towards the not-quite-fruit, not-quite-body; across, bodies constructed as not-quite-bodies (are our bodies not-quite-bodies?); then, recognisably, arms playing a game in which to be victorious is not to win; now, whispers in the form of familiar things in unfamiliar permutations; through here, whispers to a person that has been lost, that still feels present; next, another journey, another memorial to a person disappeared; finally, turn around to face environments that imitate (here the mimicry is not laid bare), spaces embedded with traces of (human) power.

02 03 I weave between the (not-)video  
(not-)language  
(not-)history  
(not-)chance  
(not-)body  
(not-)game  
(not-)poem  
(not-)here  
(not-)known  
(not-)nature.

I weave between that which allows one thing, one story, one space, one body, not just to be *other-than-themselves*, not just to be *opposite-of-themselves*, but in that process of negotiation and expansion, becoming *more-than*.

☒4 *(You have made work about X for a long time, longer than most people know. You have figured out a way to encode it in your work, to embed it so far within a network of Ys and Zs that it would be difficult to say the work is only about X. Fine, you know that it isn't only about X. But X is that which gets under your skin, has burrowed its way into your very bones, stays there. You can't seem to excise—exorcise—it. You're not sure if you want to.)*

☒5 The art we make, we make to deviate from a norm, to challenge and maybe even dismantle it. The norm is flexible where it was once oppressive, reference point where it was once definition. We attempt to present the new, different, unfamiliar—that which we have learned and absorbed and reshaped. But, as always, we circle back, fold into ourselves. Even when the work is not about us, per se, we find we cannot run away from the nexus of our obsessions: those ideas, objects, experiences that we are seeking to bring into existence. Yet, though the self—its thoughts, its feelings, its beliefs—is inescapable, we know now that it can metamorphose, evolve, be transformed, become *more-than*. The self is the (not-)norm.

*(Perhaps the self is X.)*