



Mask by Damien
Gulkledup (Papua
New Guinea), 2011

WORDS DAVID WATERS

FantAsia

WORDS ASHLEY HAY

From spirit houses to astral stick maps and blue train sets, the seventh Asia Pacific Triennial pushes both artistic and geographical boundaries.



Clockwise from above: Louisa Bufardeci (Australia), *String Theories #1-24 (detail)*, 2012; Tiffany Chung (Vietnam/US), *Roaming With The Dawn - Snow Drifts, Rain Falls, Desert Wind Blows (detail)*, 2012; Nguyen Thai Tuan (Vietnam), *Black Painting No.80*, 2009



IN THE QUIET halls of the Queensland Art Gallery/ Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA) some of the world's most creative people are drawing a new map, detailing where we are – and who – through the symmetries and intersections of art. On show from December 8, the works curated for the seventh Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT7) make up a particular and poetic atlas, sweeping from the infinitesimal to the infinite; from a herd of tiny glass animals by Tiffany Chung (US/Vietnam), to a forest of ritual New Guinean *bisj* poles, to exploration of the very edge of the universe by Louisa Bufardeci (Australia).

Sourced from a geography stretching from the Pacific's eastern shores to Turkey, the imagination and creativity resident in this space feed into an impressive tally of 75 artists, collectives and art communities.

"We've gone to the limits of what we can call Asia Pacific this time, right to the Bosphorus," says Russell Storer, the curator of Asian and Pacific Art at QAGOMA and the man in charge of this seventh triennial. "It's the broadest geography we've ever worked with."

Previewing APT7 is like devouring an artistic degustation of rich and complementary courses. Through different works by diverse artists, a number of themes and connections develop in terms of media, intersecting ideas and the ways these creators seek to engage their audiences. There's a strong focus on painting, which emerged during research trips to Indonesia (with the street-style pop of Uji Handoko Eko Saputro, aka Hahan) and Vietnam (specifically Nguyen Thai Tuan's haunting *Black Painting No.80* where a headless man sits in an empty room, hands tied behind his back). ➤



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“Some of the first artists we were interested in happened to be painters,” says Storer. “Then we thought of the Philippines, where painting is a strong practice – Manuel Ocampo is a senior painter and very influential. He hadn’t shown at APT, so this was a good chance to work with him. We have Tomoko Kashiki referencing traditional Japanese painting in her pieces, even though they’re very contemporary, while Raqib Shaw, an Indian artist who works in the UK, plays with innovative materials such as enamels. And, of course, Indigenous painting is a crucial movement in Australia, which led us to such diverse artists as Timothy Cook, who works with quite traditional imagery, and Daniel Boyd, a young, contemporary urban painter and video artist – they provide other contrasts.”

One of the show’s most captivating works is by Daniel Boyd, based on a traditional Oceanic stick map that facilitated navigation by the stars. “I was interested in this lost art form, and in the way objects taken out of their original places and transferred to museums lose their context and their stories,” says Boyd – one of seven Australians in the program – of viewing the original maps, now held in London’s Natural

History Museum. “And I was interested that a lot of the questions I had been asking through my work related so directly to other work in the show.”

For Louisa Bufardeci, too, there were intersections between her own work and that of other artists. Building on a long interest in “borders, boundaries and limits,” she began to wonder about an ultimate boundary.

“We can go beyond Earth and beyond the solar system, but in most theories, we can’t cross into another universe,” Bufardeci says. “It felt almost political to find a boundary we couldn’t traverse.” When Bufardeci learned that another of Boyd’s works was inspired by dark matter, she was intrigued. “It was so exciting that something else was coming from out there,” she says. “That will make a beautiful conversation between the pieces.”

All of these artists seek to translate complicated ideas into artistic forms. “There are several works that deal with globalised labour; the experiences of people working in other countries,” says Storer. “But these artists are trying to find a way of representing experience that isn’t just documenting it, but is more about embodying it in some sense.”



Uji Handoko Eko Saputro, aka Hahan (Indonesia), *Letters To The Great Saatchi*, 2011

Talking with Storer, there's a palpable sense of the reach and excitement involved in piecing it all together – from the curatorial rush of commissioning new works to the thrill of unveiling site-specific works that audiences can only experience in Brisbane in the next four months. Alongside two purpose-built New Guinean spirit houses, New Zealand-based Richard Maloy will fill the elegant River Room with a wonderful yellow edifice that can't ever be remade.

"There's always an interesting tension in projects where there is that sense of the ephemeral – of works made for that moment," says Storer. "And then there's the excitement of working with a senior artist such as Australia's Shirley Macnamara, who's well-established, with her beautiful woven baskets and pots made of spinifex. But APT7 gave us the opportunity to commission something incredibly ambitious, something she hadn't attempted before."

As one of approximately 40 commissions initiated by the triennial, Macnamara has woven from native spinifex strands an entire, large-scale, upturned turpentine tree. And there are other significant commissions from two senior international installation artists: a "self portrait" of cabinets made by Atul Dodiya (India), which is inspired by Gandhi's house; and the first Australian showing of work by Huang Yong Ping (China/France), who will fill the gallery's Water Mall with a gigantic new snake sculpture that swoops from the ceiling to the floor "like a kind of gothic architecture".

What's also engaging is a certain sense of playfulness – from Takahiro Iwasaki's minute and fragile sculptures made from threads and dust, to Japanese collective Paramodel's compelling installation of a bright-blue children's train set. As for the intersection of big ideas and wittiness, "a lot of artists like to work that way," says Storer. "Humour is an important aspect in terms of drawing people in. Artists want to break down distinctions between art and everyday life – that's been an ongoing project in art for 100 years or so. Because

the triennial brings such big audiences, it's a platform for those things to happen." In 2009-2010, APT6 drew more than 531,000 visitors over four months – a national gallery record at the time.

This latest incarnation of the flagship show celebrates 20 years since its inception. But rather than a "retrospective" approach that simply remounted work shown in earlier APTs, the anniversary has inspired a suite of new pieces that draws on various archives around the region – including APT's own, which seeded an epic sound piece by Heman Chong from Singapore. "We wanted to bring the archives into the show somehow rather than to turn this triennial into a linear history or bring back earlier work," says Storer.

APT itself is now part of history – as Storer says, you can't open a book on Asian or Pacific art that doesn't mention it. In the early 1990s, "the idea of looking at contemporary art in this region was new – and in Asia, certainly, there was the question, 'why is this *Australian* museum looking at us?'"

Now, APT has become firmly entrenched in the region's cultural calendar, its audiences eager for the entrancing journeys available across the landscapes of an atlas formed by so many of the world's imaginations. 🌐

✦ Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, QAGOMA, Brisbane, December 8-April 14. www.qagoma.qld.gov.au/apt7

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