



Choo Ly Tan, *Crepuscular Dreams of (Dis-) Alienation*, 2020, video

## Choo Ly Tan: Crepuscular Dreams of (Dis-) Alienation

Banner Repeater, London, 29 February to 9 May

The title of Choo Ly Tan's 15-minute video at Banner Repeater conjures what is an undoubtedly difficult experience for the viewer. *Crepuscular Dreams of (Dis-) Alienation*, which is projected onto the back wall of the gallery, comprises interviews and tells stories of different women and non-binary people of colour and their experience of colonialism and neocolonialism, edited together with found footage sourced by Tan.

Crepuscular, meaning something related to or active during twilight, speaks of the interviewees' fight for a space to exist, both physically and in discourse. We are asked to consider how certain people have been pushed into the twilight at the peripheries of society.

This marginalisation is made apparent in the video when Congolese-born artist Ida Macondo, interviewed by Tan while leaning against a simple cream wall in a domestic setting, tells the story of her cousin's failed attempt to secure an internship while living in Paris; it dawned on her cousin that, of all those studying on the same course as her, the only other person who wasn't able to secure an internship was another black woman. Macondo tells Tan that her cousin 'grew up thinking that people aren't necessarily racist, but now she thinks that they are'. Continuously examined throughout the video, examples like this document the racist cause and effect that has impacted and shaped the lives of the video's subjects. This is further elucidated when Tan's sister Dijana, a security officer, shockingly reveals that her trainer once commented: 'Ah, Asian people, I mistrust them because I don't know how they think.'

None of this should suggest that Tan's video charts a simple and easily understood series of events, however. Instead, the 'visual essay' or 'experimental documentary', as Tan described the work at the gallery's opening event, plays with an unfixed chronology and editing style that highlights the irreducible complexity of the stories and events examined. The video includes informal interviews, screen recordings of online articles, television interviews, archival news footage, Facebook videos and animated maps that are edited together with various techniques. For example, during Dijana's interview, an animated map of Southeast Asia suddenly appears sitting atop first-person-shooter video-game footage in the background while a voice cuts in inconspicuously: 'I hope you enjoy your flight with us today.'

Similarly, the work begins with a flat rectangular image of the earth slowly rising out of black on its bottom left and right corners to eventually fill the

screen, then fades to a close-up of Tan's shoulder and arm which punches the screen, before changing to footage of an explosion and fading to the artist dancing in the foreground of an unidentified desert landscape, before this image starts to fall backwards from its top left and right points and disappears once again into black. The flattening and layering of still and moving images coupled with the use of black in the video creates a self-reflexive and reorganised space where content and information are reframed through Tan's editing process, the interviewees' recounted experiences and the four corners of the screen.

This technique seems especially fitting when, towards the end of the video, Tan reveals in conversation with Macondo over lunch that, when telling someone she was visiting East Africa and Zimbabwe in 2015, the person worried about the dangers; Tan comments that what people 'remember of certain African countries is mostly based on information of the past'. Tan highlights a misconception stemming from prejudice and a lack of effort to update selected information in an era supposedly obsessed with hyper-connectivity and the accelerated distribution of information and content across media.

As French filmmaker Louiza Benrezzak states at the end of the video, 'the real battle for people who are like me is to occupy space, the space of discourse', and this is exactly what Tan enables both through the dissemination of stories and through the projection's occupation of the physical space of the gallery. Indeed, Tan devotes part of the video to a segment titled 'PROJECTS AND IDENTITY', where interviewees discuss the project they are working on or interested in. The press release speaks of the 'grand optimism' of the interviewees, an optimism that helps to unravel Tan's difficult title and the term '(Dis-) Alienation'. Mirroring the video's assorted editing techniques, the term is both hyphenated and separated by parentheses, suggesting meaning through its own nuance. Tan's visual and audio collage of found and new material recounts the personal and societal narratives of colonialism's past and present. The optimism of the film is not the desire to forget alienation but the hope for an informed '(Dis-) Alienation' in the future.

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## Julijonas Urbanos: Planet of People

Collective Gallery, Edinburgh, 29 February to 8 May

In episode five of *Star Trek: Picard*, we discovered that there were scavengers travelling the galaxies and brutally harvesting cyborg parts that had been implanted in living beings by the Borg. (For the uninitiated, the Borg are a cyber race whose aim is to 'assimilate' all biological lifeforms and, of course, take over the universe.) Meanwhile, in the finale of the latest series of *Doctor Who*, the good old Cybermen were planning to rid their bodies of their remaining organic components and ascend to a state of artificial perfection, before 'deleting' the rest of biological life in the universe.

Travel to distant stars and encounters with alien and mechanised lifeforms are now so much a part of mainstream entertainment that an interest in the