

# EXHIBITION

## REVIEWS

### AUSTRALIA

#### Campbelltown, Sydney

#### *Edge of Elsewhere* at Campbelltown Arts Center & 4A Center for Contemporary Asian Art

**E**dge of Elsewhere has been a three-year project that has engaged the cultural mix of suburban Australia, specifically Sydney's urban fringe populated by Pacific Islanders, urban Aboriginal Australians, Arab, and Asian-Australian communities. Due to this geography of exchange, the exhibition has been sited across two venues.

The *Edge of Elsewhere* project was ambitious in its vision from the outset. According to co-curator Lisa Havilah, the project was about "rethinking the region;" to draw those 'edges' of cultural meeting closer together through collaborations aiming at a broad reach. Viewing this year's edition, however, the sustainability of the project's ideals across its three years is questionable.

The project launched with a powerful wallop. Its impact, however, has dwindled. I go as far to say that some work in this edition struggled with a sincere embrace of that engagement and fell into forced rhetoric. Maybe that is the pitfall of a heavily funded, commission-based project—it becomes contrived. Perhaps we need to be a little more honest which boxes are being ticked: trading on the glow of community collaboration or the international kudos of the artists. The two are, in my mind, worlds apart and diametrical opposites.

On the upside, many of the artists delivered new work beyond expectation for this edition of *Edge of Elsewhere*. Of particular note are Khaled Sabsabi, Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba, Michel Tuffery, Shigeyuki Kihara, and Phaptawan Suwannakudt.

Khaled Sabsabi stunned audiences in the first exhibition with a stacked corridor of televisions screening a Sufi dervish, disorientating and leading. For his exhibition he overlaid



Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba, *Breathing is Free: 12,756.3 – Canberra Christmas Island 90.8 km*, 2011, production still. Commissioned by Campbelltown Arts Center and 4A Center for Contemporary Asian Art for *Edge of Elsewhere*. Photograph: Cole Bennetts.

Sufi philosophies with social realities and geography, a five-channel video installation titled *Corner* (2012) and screened across the two venues.

His astute reading of our times explored the concept of 'edge' as a meeting place between held traditions—ancient and contemporary—connecting members of South West Sydney's order of Naqshbandi Sufi with communities in Lebanon and Syria. Understandably the result was an extremely layered viewing experience, pushing our engagement between a micro level (viewed through a camcorder) and macro level (as

projections), playing off notions of intimacy, action, voyeurism, and enormity.

*Corner* struck a chord for its subtle questioning of contemporary society's desire (or lack of) to understand, fluttering between the narrow drive into a 'corner' and dwelling zone of the 'edge,' both equally isolationist.

Similarly filmmaker Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba used geography as an axis for drawing out dialogue. He premiered the next installment of his project *Breathing is Free: 12,756*—the earth's diameter. The artist ran 90.8 kilometers mapped as the

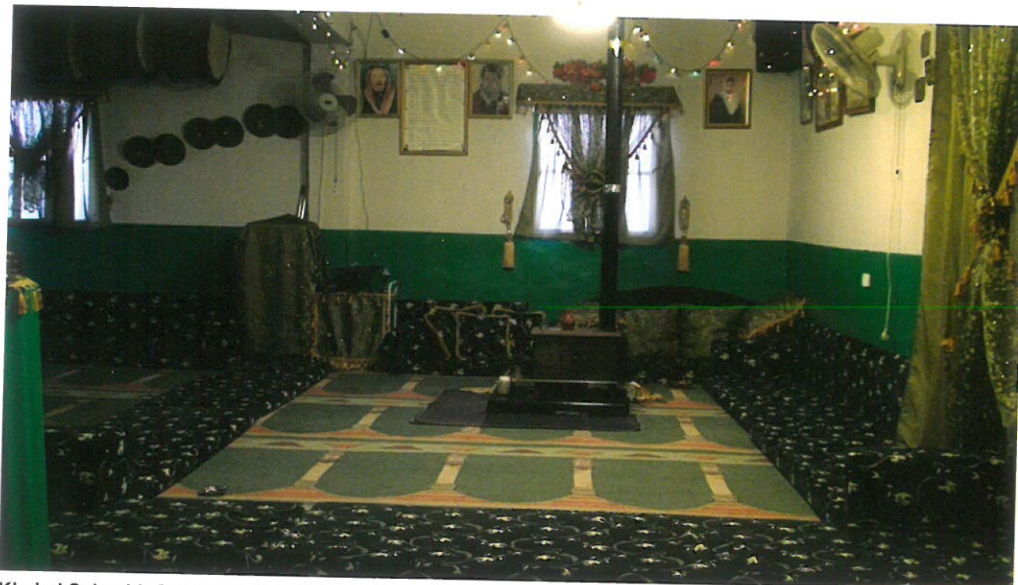
footprint of Christmas Island over Canberra, taking political, cultural, and refugee issues to the seat of power.

Presented in a darkened, drum-likeroom at Campbelltown Arts Center, a satellite map of the route carpeted the space forcing viewers to walk its territory. The video was streamed rotating the room, its unsettling green glow and motion alluding to surveillance.

This security-conscious format was repeated at 4A where a bank-like arrangement of monitors screened Ngyuen-Hatsushiba's previous runs. Seemingly embracing an environmental tone or geographic nostalgia, a much more layered and bleaker global narrative is being charted by Ngyuen-Hatsushiba.

While culturally disparate, *Edge of Elsewhere's* links are found through the vehicles of 'message' and storytelling, building validation and value. Sydney-based Thai artist Phaptawan Suwannakudt, Korean duo Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries' (YHCHI), and Indonesian artist FX Harsono, for example, each used narrative as a foundation to encourage new dialogues.

Suwannakudt collected fabrics and stories for her wall hanging *Home Away from Home* (2011). FX Harsono worked with a group of arts professionals and artists on a kind of content-



Khaled Sabsabi, *Corner* (still), 2012, five-channel digital video installation and traditional Sanjank flag. Campbelltown Arts Center. Commissioned by Campbelltown Arts Center and 4A Center for Contemporary Asian Art for *Edge of Elsewhere*. Photograph: Susannah Wimberley.