



Temporary Certainty

Rushdi Anwar
Alana Hunt
Sarker Protick

Temporary Certainty is shaped by an investigation of sudden shifts of historical change wrought by complex interventions in the greater Asia region. Showcasing new works from Australian artists Rushdi Anwar and Alana Hunt alongside a new body of work from Bangladeshi artist Sarker Protick, this exhibition brings together three distinct voices that share long-standing commitments to humanitarian and activist concerns. With a focus on Bengal, Kurdistan and the Kimberley region of Western Australia, *Temporary Certainty* explores how artists approach geography as a marker of the consequences of broader geopolitical expediencies.

The three distinct geographical contexts represented in this exhibition, each with their seemingly disparate environmental challenges and contingencies, are here connected by the way the artists have explored questions of nationalisms, the legacies of sovereignty, and contested narratives of memorialisation. Equally defined by more urgent concerns and experiences of displacement and transience, the works presented in *Temporary Certainty* are distinguished by their emergence within conditions of uneasy reconciliation. Additionally, a common thread between each artist's vision across the works presented in this exhibition is the central importance of the photographic image as a medium that excels at mediating between space and time, reality and illusion. The artists utilise this visual language, alongside other mediums and methodologies, in a shared pursuit of seeking to unveil the symbolic resonances that inhabit built environments within fractured contexts. The impetus for the curatorial conception of this project was a desire to incorporate contemporary voices from Bengal into a broader regional dialogue that remains undeniably pertinent to Australia's constantly evolving self-perception of its relationship to its neighbours. Following research trips undertaken over 2017 and 2018 by exhibition curator Pedro de Almeida across three of Bengal's most diverse cultural hubs—Kolkata, the capital of India's West Bengal state; then to the Bangladeshi capital, Dhaka, and Chittagong, the Bay of Bengal's most historically significant maritime port—*Temporary Certainty* brings to fruition, in its own modest way, some of this vital first-hand research and relationship-building between artists and curators, organisations and audiences. To this end, this project brings together three distinct voices who share long-standing commitments to humanitarian and activist concerns in the region.

Historically, 4A's expertise has been centred on China and South-East Asia. This has partially been a response to our location in Sydney's Chinatown and its communities in tandem with strong connections, from the organisation's foundation in 1996, with individuals of cultural backgrounds from these regions. Though we have worked with important South Asian artists over the past twenty-two years, the region had formed a relatively small component of 4A's international programming. Recognising this, in 2015 the organisation initiated a renewed commitment to engage more South Asian artists and communities in our activities. With support from a private foundation we conceived a five-year plan (2016–2020) to develop 4A's capacity to present contemporary art from South Asia. Highlights from this initiative include the commissioning of major new works from preeminent Karachi-based artist Adeela Suleman, that were presented at 4A in the exhibition *I don't want to be there when it happens* (2017) before traveling to the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, as well as the symposium *When South is North: Contemporary Art and Culture in South Asia and Australia* (2017) presented in association with Western Sydney University. Within this context, *Temporary Certainty* marks an important step in consolidating 4A's steadfast belief in the vital interconnectedness of our region, while also broadening our engagement with Australia's large South Asian communities.

Alana Hunt's activities as an artist are defined by her commitment to broadening and challenging the possibilities of communicating ideas in the public realm. For *Temporary Certainty*, Hunt has created a new work, *Faith in a pile of stones* (2018), that takes as its focus Lake Argyle. Located near the artist's home in the town of Kununurra, Lake Argyle was constructed in 1971 (and filled by 1974), following the damming of the Ord River. An immense human-engineered reservoir of freshwater whose capacity is more than eighteen times the volume of Sydney Harbour, its construction for the purpose of irrigation for agricultural production drowned places of significance and altered the ecologies of country belonging primarily to Miriwoong, but also Gija and Malgnin people. Hunt reconfigures the monumental aspect of the dam wall in a work that explores the convergence of the bureaucratic management with natural resources driven by colonial dreams of development that have been shaped by faith in the idea of permanence.

Rushdi Anwar presents two works that are deeply related to the artist's experiences as a member of the Kurdish diaspora. The video and sound installation *Facing Living: The Past in the Present* (2015) shows a pair of hands that proceed to tear up and piece back

together an official image of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein until the image is overwhelmed by black adhesive, an act that balances between destruction and creation, erasure and elegy for those who suffered under Hussein's rule. *We have found in the ashes what we have lost in the fire* (2018) is the artist's response to his recent experience of entering a church in the town of Bashiqa located in north east Mosul, part of disputed territories between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Iraqi government. This work explores unsettling connections between the destruction, transience and renewal faced by displaced and uprooted communities globally and the built environments they are forced to leave.

Sarker Protick's *Exodus* (2015–ongoing) considers the expediencies of decolonisation while at the same time being a haunting meditation on the universal contingencies of time. Over a selection of photographs and moving image, the artist explores the decaying buildings and surrounding lands of the feudal estates in East Bengal that were previously owned by Hindu *zamindars*, or landlords. Following the Liberation War of 1971 that abruptly established the newly independent nation of Bangladesh, huge migrations took place across Bengal. This saw wealthy Hindu landowners abandon their estates for India in fear of the kind of violent reprisals that had erupted following the Partition of India in 1947, while at the same time many Muslims fled West Bengal heading east. A series of controversial laws dating from 1948, culminating in the *Vested Property Act* of 1974, allowed the confiscation of property by Bangladeshi authorities from groups declared 'enemies of the state'. Since then, these estates have commonly been left in disrepair, taken over by nature and appropriated by local villagers—another chapter in a landscape indelibly marked by the influence of Mughal rule and British imperialism

Grappling with tensions between certainty and doubt, permanence and all that is ephemeral, *Temporary Certainty* contemplates the value of what can be apprehended—much less held onto—with any guarantee in an age lurching towards ever greater polarisation.

ARTISTS

Rushdi Anwar (b. Halabja, Kurdistan) is a Melbourne-based artist, currently working between Australia and Thailand. His installation, sculpture, painting, photo-painting and video work often reflect on socio-political issues relating to Kurdistan, Iraq and the Middle East. He explores these issues through an investigation of form, utilising a material vocabulary and different processes of making. Anwar was educated in Kurdistan and Australia, studying at the Institute of Kirkuk–Kurdistan and Enmore Design Centre/Sydney Institute. He holds a Master of Fine Art (2010) and a PhD in Fine Art (2016) from RMIT University, Melbourne. He has held solo and group exhibitions widely in Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, Finland, France, Japan, Kurdistan, Norway, Switzerland, Thailand, United Arab Emirates and USA. Recent and upcoming exhibitions include 12th Gwangju Biennale, Korea (2018), and the 13th Havana Biennial, Cuba (2019). Anwar's works are held in the collections of the Australian War Memorial, the Kurdistan Regional Government, and in private collections. He has curated exhibitions in Kurdistan (2010), Thailand (2012, 2015), and Australia (2013). Following several artist-in-residence programs in Thailand, he co-founded and co-coordinated the Australian Thai Artist Interchange, Melbourne (2012–2016), an organisation founded to enhance cross-cultural exchange, awareness and appreciation of art and culture between Thais and Australians. Rushdi is a founding member, with Brook Andrew and Shiraz Bayjoo, of the artist collective The Working Collection.

Alana Hunt (b. 1984, Sydney) makes contemporary art, writes and produces culture through a variety of media across public, gallery and online spaces. She lives on Miriwoong country in the north-west of Australia and has a long-standing engagement with South Asia. The politics of nation making and the colonial past and present of Australia and South Asia are central to her practice. Since 2009, she has orchestrated participatory art and publishing projects that have activated different media forms in the public sphere to shed light on Kashmir. *Paper txt msgs from Kashmir* (2009–2011) prompted media in India and Pakistan to speak about a state-wide mobile phone ban they had previously been silent on. This work won the Fauvette Laureiro Artist Scholarship. In 2016, the seven-year participatory memorial *Cups of nun chai* circulated as a newspaper serial in Kashmir, reaching thousands of people on a weekly basis during a period of civilian uprising and state oppression. This work won the 2017 Incinerator Art Award. Her essay, *A mere drop in the sea of what is*, published by *4A Papers* (Issue 1, November 2016), explored the art circulating on the 'streets of social media' in Kashmir and made it into the Hansard Report of the

the Australian Parliament. In 2018, Alana undertook a residency in Sulawesi with Rumata Art Space & the Makassar International Writers' Festival and will present *Cups of nun chai* at Tufts University Art Gallery, Massachusetts, and a series of artists presentations at Tufts, Brown, and Parsons universities. Her work is held in both public and private collections including Artbank and the Macquarie Group Collection.

Sarker Protick (b. 1986, Bangladesh) is a Dhaka-based artist whose work explores the possibilities of time, light and sound. His portraits, landscapes and photographic series engage philosophically with the specificities of personal and national histories. Sarker's approach across various mediums incorporates detailed observations and subtle gestures as a means of creating personal spaces, often minimal and atmospheric. He was named in British Journal of Photography's annual 'Ones to Watch' and Photo District News' (PDN) 30 emerging photographers of the year. Sarker is the recipient of Joop Swart Masterclass, World Press Photo award, and Australian Photobook of the Year grand prize. His body of work *Exodus* was awarded the Magnum Foundation Grant 2018. Sarker's work has been shown in museums, galleries and photo festivals internationally, including Art Dubai; Paris Photo; Singapore Art Week; Dhaka Art Summit; Chobi Mela International Photography Festival, Dhaka; Latvian Contemporary Museum of Photography, Riga; and Noorderlicht International Photofestival, Netherlands. Sarker is a faculty member at Pathshala South Asian Media Institute, Dhaka, and currently represented by East Wing Gallery, Dubai.

Exhibition curator: Pedro de Almeida

LIST OF WORKS

Ground floor:

Alana Hunt
Faith in a pile of stones
2018
installation incorporating photography, video and sound dimensions variable;
archival video appropriated from 'Ord River Dam' produced by Film Associates Pty Ltd for Public Works Department WA (currently Water Corporation WA); Photography: B. Lobascher and J.Green; Narration: D. Ellery;
commissioned by 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art; courtesy the artist.

First floor:

Rushdi Anwar
We have found in the ashes what we have lost in the fire
2018
print on plexiglass, photograph printed on paper, mixed medium, resin embedded within wooden box;
12 boxes: each box 32.5 x 22.5 x 9.0 cm (one edition);
installation dimensions variable;
commissioned by 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body;
courtesy the artist.

Rushdi Anwar
Facing Living: The Past in the Present
2015
single-channel HD video and sound installation;
12:30 mins;
courtesy the artist.

Sarker Protick
Arrival (from the series *Exodus*)
2015–ongoing
single-channel HD video and sound installation;
8:00 mins;
courtesy the artist.

Sarker Protick
Disintegration (from the series *Exodus*)
2015–ongoing
black & white photographs (selection of 19);
22.5 x 28.0 cm (each photograph);
courtesy the artist.

Sarker Protick
Elegy to Empire (from the series *Exodus*)
2015–ongoing
black & white photograph;
127.0 x 101.5 cm;
courtesy the artist.

Sarker Protick
Elegy to Empire (from the series *Exodus*)
2015–ongoing
black & white photograph;
28.0 x 22.5 cm;
courtesy the artist.

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Background image: Rushdi Anwar, (detail, still) *Facing Living: The Past in the Present*, 2015, single-channel HD video and sound installation, 12:30 mins, courtesy the artist.

Temporary Certainty

31 August - 14 October 2018

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Temporary Certainty is produced by 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. Rushdi Anwar's commissioned work has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body. The presentation of Sarker Protick's *Exodus* has been supported by The Esplanade, Singapore, with additional support from the Australian Centre for Photography.