

Artist Project

What is wrong with Singapore

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Published online: 27 December 2021

To cite this article: Roopesh Sitharan. 2021. What is wrong with Singapore. *Wacana Seni Journal of Arts Discourse* 20: 87–92. <https://doi.org/10.21315/ws2021.20.8>

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.21315/ws2021.20.8>

ABSTRACT

This artwork was produced as part of the residency programme organised by the Centre of Contemporary Art, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, and the Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, Philippines called Acts of Life, with support from the Goethe-Institut. During the residency, the artist observed that media technology is utilised to abate the narratives by the nation state to define how a subject should operate and experience the world. Reflecting this, the artist created a work to discern the truthfulness and relevancy of a national narrative in individual lives. For this, a survey is devised as an artistic strategy to juxtapose the desires of a subject with the expectations of a nation state. An opinion booth was set up as part of the 2019 Singapore Art Week. With the header “What is wrong with Singapore”—the booth invites the audience to contribute their opinion towards the statement by writing it down on a postcard and pasting it on a designated wall. The accessibility, dissemination, and restriction of these opinions are left completely to the judgement of the audience visiting the booth.

Keywords: *network art, new media art, site specific installation, post-truth*

EXPOSITION

The initial research proposal for the Acts of Life Critical Research Residency programme is to examine the relationship between technology and subject from a post-colonial perspective. The aim is to scrutinise this subject/technology relationship to unveil a suspicion of underlying biases that exist in modes of enquiries under the disguise of “critical” research. The plan was to examine and collate the post-colonial discourses that were coming out of the Philippines and Singapore to substantiate this unveiling. However, during the research in the Philippines, it quickly became apparent to the artist that colonial history is closely tied to the construction of grand narratives such as national history. More importantly, such national narratives acutely utilise colonial legacy for the rhetoric of “truthfulness” to justify the demarcation of geographical and political sovereignty. The aggressiveness of such rhetoric was particularly apparent during the second part of the residency when the artist moved to Singapore. Arguably, it can be said that “truth” stands as the unquestionable pillar in which narratives are politicised by the nation state to define how a subject should operate and experience the world.

Conversely, when looking at the operation of media and technology in the everydayness of a subject, it reveals a stark contrast. In both Philippines and Singapore, technology and media operate on the level of the national narrative, not to fortify but to abate any sort of proclamation of truth by undermining it through the idea of “fake.” In other words, fake dramatically weaponises the constructivist nature of truth through communication technology. From the residency in these countries, the artist finds that truth is, after all, should not be understood as superior to the narrative for it is also inscribed within a certain tradition of thinking, rational and parameters of cultural utterance. This leads to a peculiar realisation that “fake” operates in a form of a collective action that unshackles the fixation on arbitrating and articulating truth to sustain modern

rationality. It is in this way that the research evolved into thinking about “post-colonial encountering post-truth.” Crucially, it also reveals that “post-truth” is not experienced the same way throughout the entire world. Approaching this from a post-colonial stance (in particular as a subject living in Southeast Asia) enables the artist to rethink the idea of fake as a trigger encompassing technological transformation that insists on the rights and freedom of sovereign subjects amidst the stern, rigid narrative of the nation state. *What is wrong with Singapore* is a concerted, serious intervention of art in the politics of narrative through the mechanics of the post-truth experience.

NOTE

All the comments posted by the public and the opinion booth is now part of the Centre of Contemporary Art, Nanyang Technological University, contemporary art collection. This project is funded by Goethe-Institut as part of Acts of Life Critical Research Residency programme.

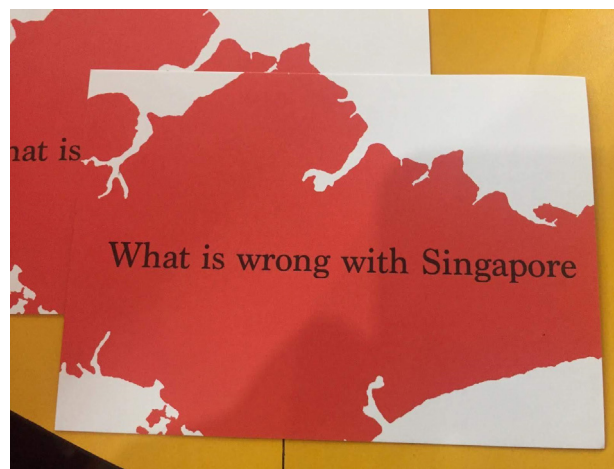


Photo 1 Postcard that was used as the placeholder to write the opinion in response to the tag line.
Source: Image courtesy of the artist.



Photo 2 The opinion booth setup during the 2019 Singapore Art Week.
Source: Image courtesy of the artist.



Photo 3 Banner was also placed along the Coleman Barrack roads.
Source: Image courtesy of the artist.



Photo 4 Hashtag that was used as people uploaded images of the works and responses on social media.
Source: Image courtesy of the artist.



Photo 5 Participants contributing their opinion as well as uploading the responses on social media.
Source: Image courtesy of the artist.

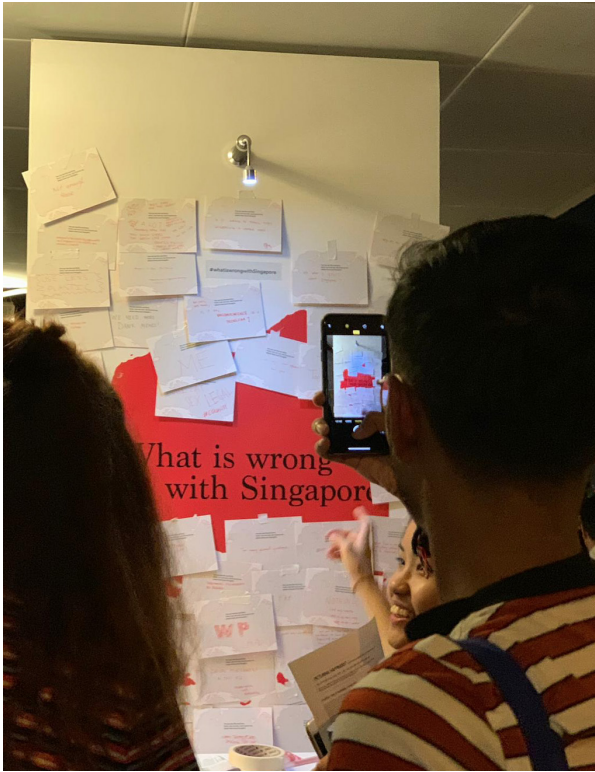


Photo 6 The opinion booth where the public was able to engage and post their responses.
Source: Image courtesy of the artist.



Photo 7 Crowd surrounding the opinion booth.
Source: Image courtesy of the artist.



Photo 8 Crowd surrounding the opinion booth.
Source: Image courtesy of the artist.



Photo 9 Crowd surrounding the opinion booth.
Source: Image courtesy of the artist.



Photo 10 Crowd surrounding the opinion booth.
Source: Image courtesy of the artist.



Photo 11 All the responses posted on the wall.

Source: Image courtesy of the artist.

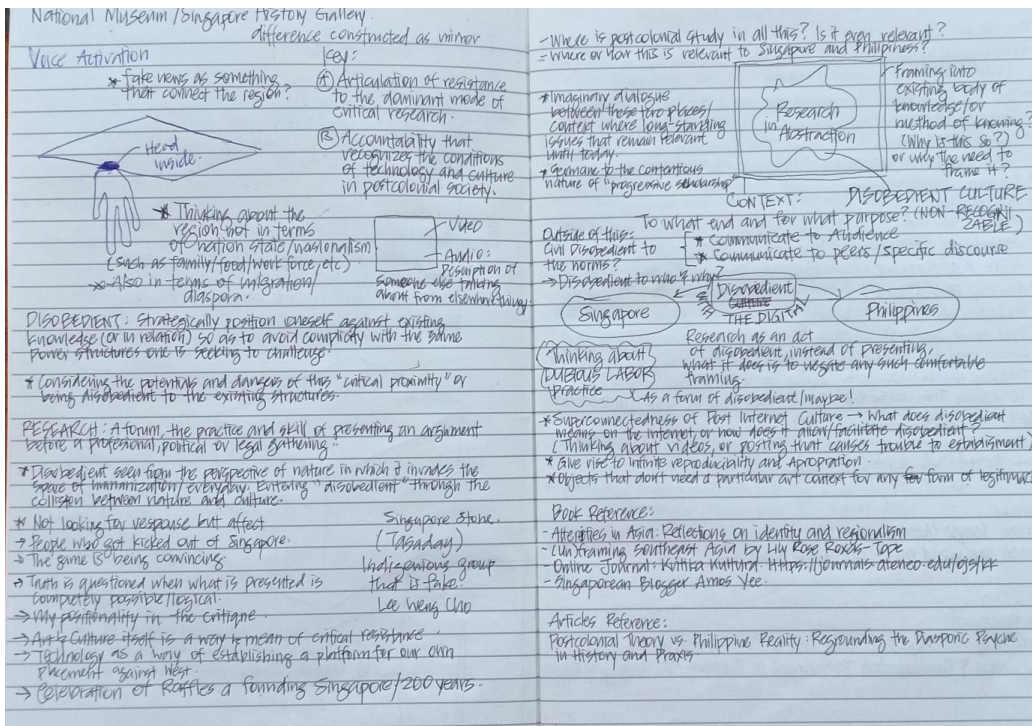


Photo 12 Artist note.

Source: Image courtesy of the artist.