



ASIA PACIFIC
VIDEO



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Artists in the Asia Pacific region were quick to embrace the possibilities of video art as it first began to emerge, and the region is home to some of the world's leading moving-image artists. With techniques that range from the most basic use of a handheld video camera to elaborate, theatrical productions, video continues to enable artists in the Asia Pacific to explore and communicate their social conditions, cultures and ideas on ever-evolving screen-based platforms.

As an artistic device, video has enabled artists to investigate ideas and document activities in a way no longer reliant on traditional art materials — to experiment with technologies, to capture bodily actions and performative practices, to create intersections between contemporary art and other screen and film cultures, and to develop new ways to explore materials, objects and environments. Creating art in video form has also given artists the power to rethink conventional and studio-based practices, free from the bounds of art history that ground more established art forms. This includes introducing a new paradigm for creating time-based works, where gestures and narratives can unfold through a controlled period of time. Video has also afforded artists a different kind of mobility; they can travel and create works in locations beyond

conventional studio settings and art centres. With little more than a camera, their actions can be recorded and communicated to viewers across the world.

Drawn from the QAGOMA Collection and including works that have featured in the Gallery's flagship exhibition series, The Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, 'Asia Pacific Video' shows how artists have applied such video devices by staging performances and interventions into public space, involving communities in collective acts, and expressing a wide range of social commentary and artistic gestures. The exhibition includes artists who have played a pivotal role in developing film and video as an artistic media globally and examples of experimental new media art, as well as works created in contexts where less conventional arts infrastructure exists in which video has provided the means for producing and exhibiting art in places with limited access to materials, studios and galleries. Together, they demonstrate how video and digital media have played an influential role in shaping local developments in contemporary art in the Asia Pacific region, and how the medium has become a valuable instrument of expression for a diversity of artists.

1. Why do you think Asian and Pacific artists have embraced video to document life in the region? What would you prefer to capture through video (as opposed to photography or text)?

Some of the world's pioneering new media artists emerged from the Asia Pacific region. In the 1960s and 70s, Japanese artist **Takahiko Iimura** performed and made experimental films, his first experiments were prompted by his introduction to Korean-born media artist Nam June Paik. Iimura's practice later developed into installations in which he further experimented with the emerging medium of video. Originally shown as part of a six-monitor video installation, *Performance: AIUEONN Six Features* 1994 explores the incoherent relationship between the vowel sounds and characters of the Japanese alphabet and English. The artist grotesquely distorts the screen-image self-portrait, as he enunciates to camera the vowel sounds of English and Japanese. Iimura's work captures an artist negotiating the new possibilities that video enables in a performance, while providing a playful insight into cultural difference; meanwhile, his work is imbued with more conventional aspects of abstract art as it transitions between colour and shape.



2. Face a friend and carefully say each vowel. What do you notice about how the shape of the face and mouth change with each letter? Can you speak another language? Repeat this exercise saying the vowels in that language.

Salote Tawale is another artist for whom capturing her own bodily performance is an ongoing preoccupation. Throughout her career, the Fijian–Australian artist has performed for the camera, creating playful reflections on various stereotypes and identity positions. In particular, Tawale confronts traditional female and Pacific islander roles by mixing and blurring genres of autobiography, documentary, ethnography and the music video to create witty narratives out of the everyday experience of a woman of Pacific Islander heritage living in the diaspora. *I get so emotional* 2006 sees Tawale performing as various musical stereotypes while singing Whitney Houston's 'I get so emotional'. The fantasy of 'making it' as an icon of contemporary black, female identity, which Houston achieved, is unravelled in Tawale's humorous cover of this song as she plays out the complex shifts in character and circumstance that it requires.

As with Tawale, video plays only part of Taiwanese artist **Joyce Ho**'s practice, as a medium in which performative actions can be fastidiously controlled. Ho's work is strongly influenced by avant-garde theatre, and she is particularly fascinated by the theatrical device of the prelude — an opening scene that produces a sense of anticipation — and has a desire to extend that suspense infinitely. There is always another layer to the everyday and another way of seeing the familiar. Shot against a lemon-yellow wall, *Overexposed memory* 2015 features an actor slowly squeezing and biting into several different fruits, lingering on their surfaces until they collapse into pulpy mush. To emphasise the effect, Ho subjected the fruit to prolonged boiling before painting the surfaces in their original colours to create the illusion of ripeness. As they break apart, pigment mingles unnaturally with their juices.





3. Imagine walking through your town with a group of friends. Where would you go/what path would you take to showcase the main public spaces of the area? If this were a choreographed piece, what music would you choose? How might different types of music change the meaning of the scenario?

4. Have you noticed someone acting or dressing in a particular way that seemed out of place? Have you ever done something to intentionally subvert social rituals/norms? (e.g., walking the wrong way on an escalator or travelator)

The theatrical capacity enabled by time-based media like video is also employed in the public sphere, where interventions in public spaces are executed to create layered messages about social contexts, while also revealing the idiosyncrasies of daily ritual. In a mass-choreographed collective action, **UuDam Tran Nguyen** comments on the transformation of Vietnam's rural and urban spaces through dramatic economic and industrial development in *Waltz of the Machine Equestrians – Machine Equestrians 2012*. The procession of drivers features 28 motorcycle 'equestrians' wearing brightly coloured poncho capes, rendering them as anonymous 'knights' from a forgotten myth. The video tracks their choreographed passage through the city, accompanied by a soundtrack of Dmitri Shostakovich's 'Waltz no.2' from his 'Suite for Jazz Orchestra no.2' (1938).

Tsui Kuang-Yu relies on a more spontaneous approach to creating public interventions, relying on the reaction of people and surroundings to examine aspects of urban life and human behaviour in regulated contemporary city environments. A recurrent feature in the Taiwanese artist's work is a sophisticated critique of public life, its social groups and urban systems. In particular, he highlights the plight of the time-poor city dweller contending with a population density and pace that impels order and efficiency. Shot in London and Taipei, *Shortcut to the Systematic Life 2002–05* presents a series of intentional misunderstandings of urban architecture

and ritual — specifically, of that which prescribes where and when to walk, work, exercise or play and how to dress. With a slapstick sense of humour, Tsui's videos reflect on the changing city and what it means to live there.

Japanese artist collective **Chim ↑ Pom** is known for its satirical and witty videos. Works commonly take the form of raucous stunts and public interventions, through which the collective confronts contemporary social and political conditions in Japan in a form of activism instilled with humour and mischief. *KI-AI 100 2011* depicts a group of young Japanese people in a huddle, which includes the six members of Chim ↑ Pom, along with a few Soma City locals and tsunami survivors they met while assisting with the clean-up in devastated neighbourhoods in Fukushima. Proceeding one by one around the huddle, the group shouts improvised encouragements and dedications. The shouts are by turns encouraging, absurd, funny and satirical, and the exercise produces an empathetic humour as the group struggles to improvise the full 100 cheers, lapsing into confessions of social and romantic anxieties, even pausing at points to check the number of cheers achieved. The work is shot from the perspective of an upward pointing camera in the centre of the huddle, and also from a series of wide angles that depict the little circle dwarfed by tsunami wreckage.



5. What sorts of things do you say to your friends that are encouraging and supportive? In small groups, try to improvise 100 cheers.



Video allows narratives to slowly unravel in ways beyond the abilities of static art objects, through which sensibilities of suspense, intrigue, shock and satire are manipulated for the audience. **Yang Zhenzhong's** *922 rice corns* 2000 is a refined and ironic visual metaphor. Playfully invoking the Cultural Revolution dogma of gender equality, industry and extreme rationalisation, *922 rice corns* sets a hen and a cockerel before the camera alongside a small pile of rice, creating a satire on the control and surveillance of food consumption. Aided by two numerical counters at the bottom of the screen, a male commentator enumerates the cockerel's progress and a female voiceover tallies the hen's progress in an absurd dramatisation. Plump hens and cockerels were a common motif in Cultural Revolution propaganda paintings of rural life, which lauded the productivity of strong, hardworking male and female labourers. *922 rice corns* underlines historical cultural concerns in a playful manner and is an example of Yang Zhenzhong's contribution to an influential output of Chinese contemporary art in the early 2000s, alongside artists such as pioneering video artist Yang Fudong, who provides the male voiceover for this work.

A gradual unfolding also shapes a narrative steeped in symbolism for **Neha Choksi's** *Leaf fall* 2008. The work documents a group of rurally based Indian actors picking the leaves from a large Bodhi tree by hand, leaving behind a single leaf. In a video of the performance, members of the group move around a wooden scaffold and offer comments on their actions, speculating on how the process will change the environment around the tree. The tree becomes a symbol of decay and renewal, part of a collective ritual; the solitary leaf will soon be lost among the tree's new growth. Throughout the work, the actors offer poetic comment on their action, speculative

at times, self-critical at others. Will the tree's boughs enjoy the warm sunlight to which they will be exposed? Will birds continue to roost here or will they travel elsewhere? What dark force drives such undertakings? The varying camera angles and astute editing provide a propulsive and poetic viewing experience as the group goes about its curious task.

Since its introduction as an artform, video has brought forth a new set of formal and technical devices for artists to test and manipulate, and the field remains one of the most quickly changing forms of artistic production as technologies of recording and display continue to evolve. Korean artist **Junebum Park** experiments with the camera's view, how the experience can change with angles, depth and scale, and how the factor of time can be manipulated with looping, repetition and layering. Park uses studio production to construct miniature stages and optical tricks in which daily human actions are humorously emphasised as repetitive and banal, such as the comical distortion of urban life referenced in *The advertisement* 2004. In this work, a commercial district is bombarded with the mania of advertising billboards and logos, placed and replaced on the buildings by the giant hands of the artist. Influenced by mime performance and traditional Japanese *bunraku* puppet theatre, Park begs the viewer to reconsider the relationship between his performing hands and the miniature objects he appears to be moving.

6. Can you think of human actions that might affect the natural environment?





Nathan Pohio is similarly an artist whose formal artistic experiments with video have been recognised internationally. Pohio draws on various photographic and cinematic practices producing images that reveal his playfulness with techniques and materials in creating a unique viewing experience. Rather than depicting a specific place and time, the New Zealand artist experiments with the possibilities of constructing a screen-based experience to elicit a certain feeling, one that encourages viewers to imagine another time and encounter. *Landfall of a spectre 2007* is based on a lenticular print of a colonial ship, artfully made to pitch and roll by filming across the reflective and alternating surfaces of the photographic image. The result is a bit like a hologram. The sepia image sets the scene of action in another time and place, bringing to mind journeys of discovery that early colonial vessels undertook to find Terra Australis and the Northwest Passage linking the North Atlantic to the Pacific. With its references to older technologies of travel and moving image, Pohio reminds us of what seems to have been lost, but which is still hauntingly there: the fictional and constructed nature of any travel or moving image.

By performing for the camera, recording collective actions and experimenting with technologies and theatrical scenarios, the artists in this exhibition deliver a range of critical, humorous and magical insights into their own artistic motivations and the contexts in which they live and work. Through a wide-ranging series of encounters that manifest across the screen, they capture how the medium has become such a valuable form of expression for many of the region's artists, defining new platforms where their voices and visions can come alive.

Tarun Nagesh is Curatorial Manager, Asian and Pacific Art.

7. Which of the approaches demonstrated in these artworks do you find most inspiring? Could you create a work of your own? Discuss your idea.

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Images

Cover Joyce Ho / Taiwan b.1983 / *Overexposed memory* (still, detail) 2015 / Single-channel video: 5 minutes, colour, sound, ed.3/5 / Purchased 2018. QAGOMA Foundation / © Joyce Ho

pp1,5 Neha Choksi / United States/India b.1973 / *Leaf fall* (stills, details) 2008 / Single-channel digital video on DVD: 14:14 minutes, looped, colour, stereo, English subtitles, widescreen, ed.4/4 (2 AP) / Purchased 2011. QAG Foundation / © Neha Choksi

p2 Takahiko Iimura / Japan/United States b.1937 / *Performance: AIUEONN Six Features* (stills, detail) 1994 / Videotape: 8 minutes, colour, stereo / The James C. Sourris AM Collection. Purchased 1999 with funds from James C. Sourris through the QAG Foundation / © Takahiko Iimura

p2 Salote Tawale / Fiji/Australia b.1976 / *I get so emotional* (stills) 2006 / Single-channel SD video: 4:30 minutes, colour, sound, ed.1/4 / Purchased 2020 with funds from the Bequest of Jennifer Taylor through the QAGOMA Foundation / © Salote Tawale

p3 Tsui Kuang-Yu / Taiwan b.1974 / *The Shortcut to the Systematic Life: I am fine, I don't get wet* (stills) 2002 / Digital video transferred to DVD: 4:24 minutes, colour, stereo, single-channel video, 4:3, ed.14/15 / Purchased 2010 with a special allocation from the QAG Foundation / © Tsui Kuang-Yu

p3 Tsui Kuang-Yu / Taiwan b.1974 / *The Shortcut to the Systematic Life: City Spirits* (stills) 2005 / Digital video transferred to DVD: 4:50 minutes, colour, stereo, single-channel video, 4:3, ed.14/15 / Purchased 2010 with a special allocation from the QAG Foundation / © Tsui Kuang-Yu

p3 Tsui Kuang-Yu / Taiwan b.1974 / *The Shortcut to the Systematic Life: Superficial Life* (stills) 2002 / Digital video transferred to DVD: 9:54 minutes, colour, stereo, single-channel video, 4:3, ed.14/15 / Purchased 2010 with a special allocation from the QAG Foundation / © Tsui Kuang-Yu

p4 Yang Zhenzhong / China b.1968 / *922 rice corns* (still) 2000 / Betacam SP and DVD formats: 8 minutes, colour, stereo, ed.7/10 (Betacam SP case: 17.2 x 11.2 x 3.0cm; DVD case: 19.1 x 13.5 x 1.5cm) / Purchased 2005. QAG Foundation / © Yang Zhenzhong

p4 Junebum Park / South Korea b.1976 / *Puzzle III* (still) 2006 / Mac Mini and DVD formats: 1:12 minutes, colour, sound, ed.1/5 / Purchased 2007 / © Junebum Park

p4 Chim↑Pom / Japan est. 2005 / *KIAI 100* (still, detail) 2011 / Single-channel video: 10:30 minutes, sound, colour, ed.38/100 / The Kenneth and Yasuko Myer Collection of Contemporary Asian Art. Purchased 2013 with funds from Michael Sidney Myer through the QAGOMA Foundation / © Chim↑Pom

p6 Nathan Pohio / New Zealand b.1970 / *Landfall of a spectre* (still) 2007 / Digital (AVI) file: 1:55 minutes, black and white, silent, ed.1/5 / Purchased 2008. The Queensland Government's Gallery of Modern Art Acquisitions Fund / © Nathan Pohio

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