



*The Gate Foundation is an international art foundation devoted to promoting intercultural exchange of contemporary art. The Gate Foundation aims to stimulate knowledge and understanding of contemporary art and artists, emphasizing non-Western and migrant cultures.*

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# xs-XL, Expanding Art

Asian Art >  
Singapore

26 July - 26 August  
2002  
Singapore

By John Gee

Sculpture Square is located in two buildings that used to belong to a church - one being the former place of worship itself, now preserved as a historic building. Its entire inner space forms Sculpture Square's main exhibition area, while the adjacent building contains three smaller exhibition spaces.

xs-XL provoked viewers to look at the world in different ways. Liwayway Recapping Co., an anonymous group of artists, suspended thirty open black umbrellas from the ceiling of the former church, seeking, through *After Magritte*, to show how familiar the Belgian painter's images have become, and yet how, when placed in a different context, they can still seem surreal and surprising.

The transportation of artworks from country to country can be a very expensive operation, so that usually only wealthy, well-funded galleries and institutions can afford to organize exhibitions of works from overseas. This can restrict artists in having their works featured internationally and even within their home region. Five artists in the Philippines met the challenge by producing works that could be packed into a single box and when unpacked, could be expanded into a full exhibition. Hence the inspiration for xs-XL (extra-small - EXTRA LARGE), a group show initiated, organized, and co-curated by Sculpture Square in Singapore, which displayed the exhibition from 26 July to 26 August.

Gerardo Tan, whose works have won awards in Australia, the USA, and several Asian countries, mounted gilded picture frames on two gold-painted panels, facing each other, lit and captioned in traditional fashion, but with a small picture at the centre of each frame consisting of formless dust. Tan's friend, the art restorer Helmuth Zotter, collected the dust whilst he was cleaning it from paintings by Canaletto and the Filipino artist Juan Luna. Tan says that he would like to have covered the walls with golden leaf, but it would have been too expensive, 'I wanted to counter-pose something that's worthless with something that's precious.'

*Compressed/Decompressed* is a series of photographs that can be stored as digital images. Tan took them over two years,

during his travels in the Philippines and abroad. Each photo shows a different number, between 1 and 100, printed or displayed on an object in a way that interested Tan. Some occurred in fairly obvious places, such as on a highway sign, but others were found in more unexpected locations: one is on a washing bowl in a market. For Tan, this variety of contexts shows the pervasive presence of numbers in the human world.

Katya Guerrero, the assistant director of a gallery café in Quezon City, sent over a cheque for 90,000 pesos as a small item that could easily be expanded in the XL transformation. Converted into a pyramidal heap of shiny golden Singapore five-cent coins, it constituted *Interest*, one of Guerrero's two offerings. Beforehand, she wondered whether the

amount of money would change as viewers came by and displayed/added interest.

Sid Hidawa, director of the Cultural Centre of the Philippines Museums and Galleries Division, photographed people wearing fashionable choker necklaces. His work featured these close-ups configured in a great circle, which broadened the sense and expanded the form of chokers as constrictive, confining objects.

Cecilia Avancena works between Europe and Asia, conducting art-related research and lecturing. Her *Gypsy Mood Thermometer* in the XL show recalled a tradition of Roma communities in southern France and Spain in which elders gave empty jars to engaged couples. In them they placed different coloured beans or grains according to their moods and feelings, allowing the overall state of their emotional relations to be revealed and thus improving their chances of a happy marriage. Avancena's work began as a collection of empty jars in which visitors could place coloured glass stones in any way that suited their personal feelings.

There is certainly interest in Singapore

An overview of  
xs-XL, *Expanding Art*



Sculpture Square Limited, 2002

in seeing what artists from other countries in the region are producing, and the Philippines has a lively arts scene which is underexposed to the outside world due to economic restrictions. The possibility of taking xs-XL elsewhere is still being explored. While artworks in the show teased, entertained, and provoked Singaporean visitors, they also drew attention to the much-trumpeted era of globalization, and successfully raised the question of future contact between artists who are not from rich countries with audiences in other lands. ◀

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