

# WEIXIN CHONG

From: Cheo Chai-Hiang <[cheochaihiang@gmail.com](mailto:cheochaihiang@gmail.com)>  
Date: 29 June 2018 at 14:29  
Subject: Why printmaking?  
To: [weixin.chong@network.rca.ac.uk](mailto:weixin.chong@network.rca.ac.uk)

Hello Weixin,

Thanks for making contact. As our knowledge of one another's work is fairly circumscribed, I thought it may be useful if we started some sort of conversation before we meet on the 16th of August.

To begin the conversation, I have jotted down a brief introduction to my own interest in printmaking and how it has fed into my broader art practice. It would be great if you would respond with some thoughts on your own work as an artist.

Regards,

Chai

## Why printmaking again now?

About two years ago, I learnt from Ms Lindy Poh, consultant to the UOB Art Collection, that a couple of my old prints are in the UOB Art Collection. As it turned out, these prints were part of a small print folio I did around 1971–72, during my foundation studies course at Birmingham Polytechnic, UK.

'Were the prints sold to UOB or was it a donation? If so, who was the vendor or donor? And when did the transaction take place?', I asked myself.

While I was curious as to how and why these prints ended up in the UOB Art Collection without my knowledge, I was nevertheless happy that they still existed and appeared to be in a reasonable condition. I started to wonder where the other prints in the same folio had gone.

Around the same time, a friend alerted me that he had seen one of those prints featured in the UOB Collection show held in the NAFA galleries. I went to see the show and met some other friends there who expressed an interest in seeing more prints of mine. I was reminded that both my first and post-graduate degrees were in printmaking and that I had also been awarded the Rome Scholarship in Printmaking that allowed me to live and work at the British School at Rome for two years after leaving the Royal College of Art (RCA).

These friends wanted to know why they had hardly seen any of my prints over recent years. I then realised that they did not know the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) actually had a whole portfolio of the etchings I had completed when I was a student at the RCA. Except for a few smaller ones featured in an exhibition at SAM called *Untitled* in 2014, SAM had never shown any of these prints to the public.

These conversations started me thinking once again about my printmaking practice. I made a decision to re-engage with printmaking. I thought it would allow me to re-examine and reflect on this particular aspect of my practice that some had perceived as 'neglected' for many years now.

So how many prints in edition had I produced while in art schools in the UK between 1972 and 1978? Not many. And although there was a fully-equipped print studio at the British School at Rome, I used it primarily to make drawings and objects.

As an art student in the UK in the 1970s, we were encouraged to investigate interdisciplinary modes of working through exploring unfamiliar terrains. We were always reminded to think rigorously and critically. During my foundation studies course in Birmingham, we were exposed to so many different media and processes in order to gain a range of hands-on experiences and to understand the possibilities and limitations of various materials and processes. Back then, I had spent two weeks in the printmaking studio and that was when I did those prints now in the UOB Art Collection.

My initial interest in printmaking lay in the question of 'What is a print?' This question, in itself, contained other questions—about the definition and the nature of printmaking; about the relationship between plates, templates and printed surfaces, etc....

Although I spent hours in the print studio and had gained hands-on experience in various processes, I never confined myself to only making prints. Once I felt that I had attained a certain level of technical proficiency in a chosen process that is required of a practicing printmaker, I tended to move on to something quite different and more challenging.

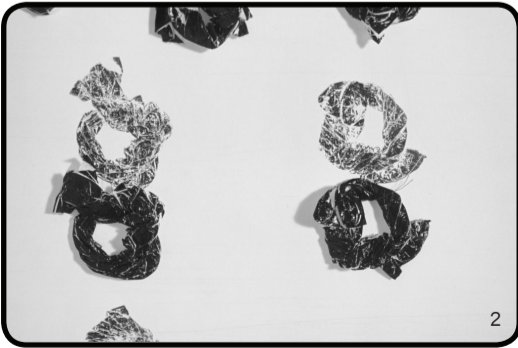
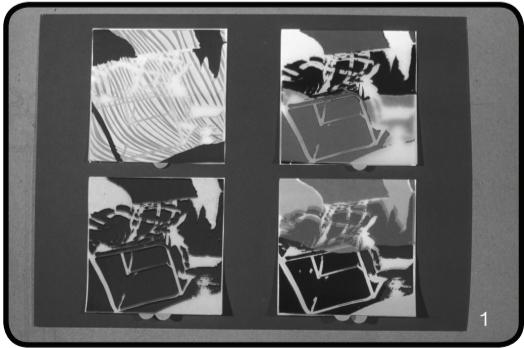
When I first arrived in Australia in 1980, in the art schools I visited or taught in, the teaching of printmaking was concerned mainly with reprographic techniques. The teaching was simplified, reduced and confined to two separate concerns: technique and subject matter. In these printmaking, students were assessed on how well they managed to translate the 'content' into technically accomplished prints—including their ability to produce an edition.

As my art practice gradually began to involve more learning, sharing, participatory, collaborative and 'performative' processes, I stopped making prints.

An opportunity was presented to me to exhibit my prints and related work in Singapore in January 2017. That gave me the idea of producing a small body of prints and related work for the exhibition. I wanted to take the opportunity to explore participatory and collaborative processes with some young printmakers. I was introduced to the Chiang Mai Art on Paper (CAP) Studio in Chiang Mai run by Kitikong Tilokwattanotai. I liked the way the CAP Studio operated which I will talk more about when we have our conversation session on 16 August 2018.

I am sending you a few images. In these photographs, you will see how the nature and characteristics of printmaking and its related materials and processes has influenced my art practice.

For example, the idea of repetition and multiples; the relationship between plates/stencils/templates and printed surfaces; the inclusion of both plates/stencils/templates and printed surfaces in the 'finished' visual statement etc....



Over to you.

# CHEO CHAI HIANG

On Friday, 13 Jul 2018 at 2:29 AM, Weixin Chong <[weixin.chong@network.rca.ac.uk](mailto:weixin.chong@network.rca.ac.uk)>

Dear Mr Cheo,

Thank you for your email and for sharing about the printmaking-related experiences in your practice. It was great to know that you were awarded the Rome Scholarship in Printmaking for the British School at Rome!

Like you, both my bachelor's and postgraduate degrees specialised in printmaking. I did my undergraduate studies at LASALLE in Singapore, during which I made my first presentations of print works, which I am sending you pictures of in WhatsApp as a response to those you've shared. I really loved the workshop space and the demands of technically practicing print methods like etching, lithography and screenprinting. Print was a really small group with barely a handful of students then. There was also often a general misunderstanding or disregard for the medium. Was it different while you studied in the UK?

Later, when I studied my masters at the RCA I found a much larger Print community, but also experienced being encouraged to think in a multidisciplinary way.

I have always been very fascinated by the possibilities and context of the medium but have also often worked outside it. In recent years, I have made more photographic images and experimented with digital ways of transferring images to surfaces like fabric and metal, using the prints in an installative way when possible.

Attaching images in WhatsApp.

Warmly,  
Weixin



From: Cheo Chai-Hiang <[cheochaihiang@gmail.com](mailto:cheochaihiang@gmail.com)>  
Date: 13 July 2018 at 08:07  
Subject: Re: Images from Chai 1  
To: Weixin Chong <[weixin.chong@network.rca.ac.uk](mailto:weixin.chong@network.rca.ac.uk)>

Hello Weixin,

Thanks for your email. I hope what we've got so far is sufficient for the broadsheet. I liked reading what a friend sent me about your work approach:

Chong Weixin is a young artist! I think what she says in this 2015 online interview is illuminating of her work:

*"I often feel a pang of guilt at not keeping up more carefully with the current motions of the art world, but at the same time I recognise it as a coping mechanism for dealing with the vast information-overload that characterises almost every field of contemporary production. I secretly relate art world trends to those of seasonal fashion, a comparison that includes current massproduction modes for over-consumptive lifestyle models. I like blatant superficiality and decorative duplicity; it appears fresher and much more direct and honest than striving to create a presumptuous apparent depth of content. It's as treacherous as the 'no-make-up' makeup philosophy: try too hard to look like you're not trying at all, while all purporting to be appreciative of the 'natural'. It's these treacherous surfaces, signifiers of propriety and legitimacy and social approval, that fascinate me. They're always in my mind while I'm working."*

Two things:

1. Don't address me as Mr Cheo, just Chai. OK?
2. Your WhatsApp piggies are too small, especially on my iPhone.

Have a nice day.

Chai



## CHEO CHAI HIANG (B.1946)

Cheo Chai Hiang (b. 1946, Singapore) is one of the nation's pioneers of conceptual art. His work and thought negotiate trajectories through domains related to identity, culture, and place. His practice spans a wide range of disciplines, including sculptural work, printmaking, and writing. In 2005, Cheo completed *Re-Connecting: Selected Writings on Singapore Art and Art Criticism*, in which he translated selected writings by Liu Kang and Ho Ho Ying from Chinese to English about Singapore's art and art criticism. Since returning to Singapore from Sydney, Australia in 2003, Cheo has cast an artistic, forensic gaze over his 'hometown' culture. A veteran of Singapore's arts scene, Cheo's practice spans over 40 years. He graduated from the Royal College of Art in London and was awarded the position of Rome Scholar in Printmaking at the British School at Rome, Italy, for two consecutive years. Since 1975, Cheo has held over 20 solo shows in Singapore, Malaysia, Italy, Australia, and China and has also presented his work in important international exhibitions in Australia, Italy, Germany, and Singapore. As an educator, Cheo taught for 20 years in the School of Contemporary Arts at the University of Western Sydney, Australia. Cheo lives and works in Melaka and Singapore.



## WEIXIN CHONG (B.1988)

Weixin Chong (b. 1988, Singapore) works through printed surfaces and objects to examine relationships between the digital, organic, and aesthetic metaphors. These manifest in Chong's practice as material metaphors for human social relationships and the psychology behind the structures and projections of power, value, and desire. Chong received her Master of Arts—specialising in Fine Art, Printmaking—from the Royal College of Art in London. As an artist, Chong has presented her work in Singapore, London, Seoul, Vienna, Paris, and Istanbul, among other countries. She is also an educator: a part-time lecturer at LASALLE College of the Arts and the Singapore University of Social Sciences. She has given guest lectures and tutorials in various schools, from School of the Arts, Singapore, to the University of Brighton. Chong lives and works in Singapore.

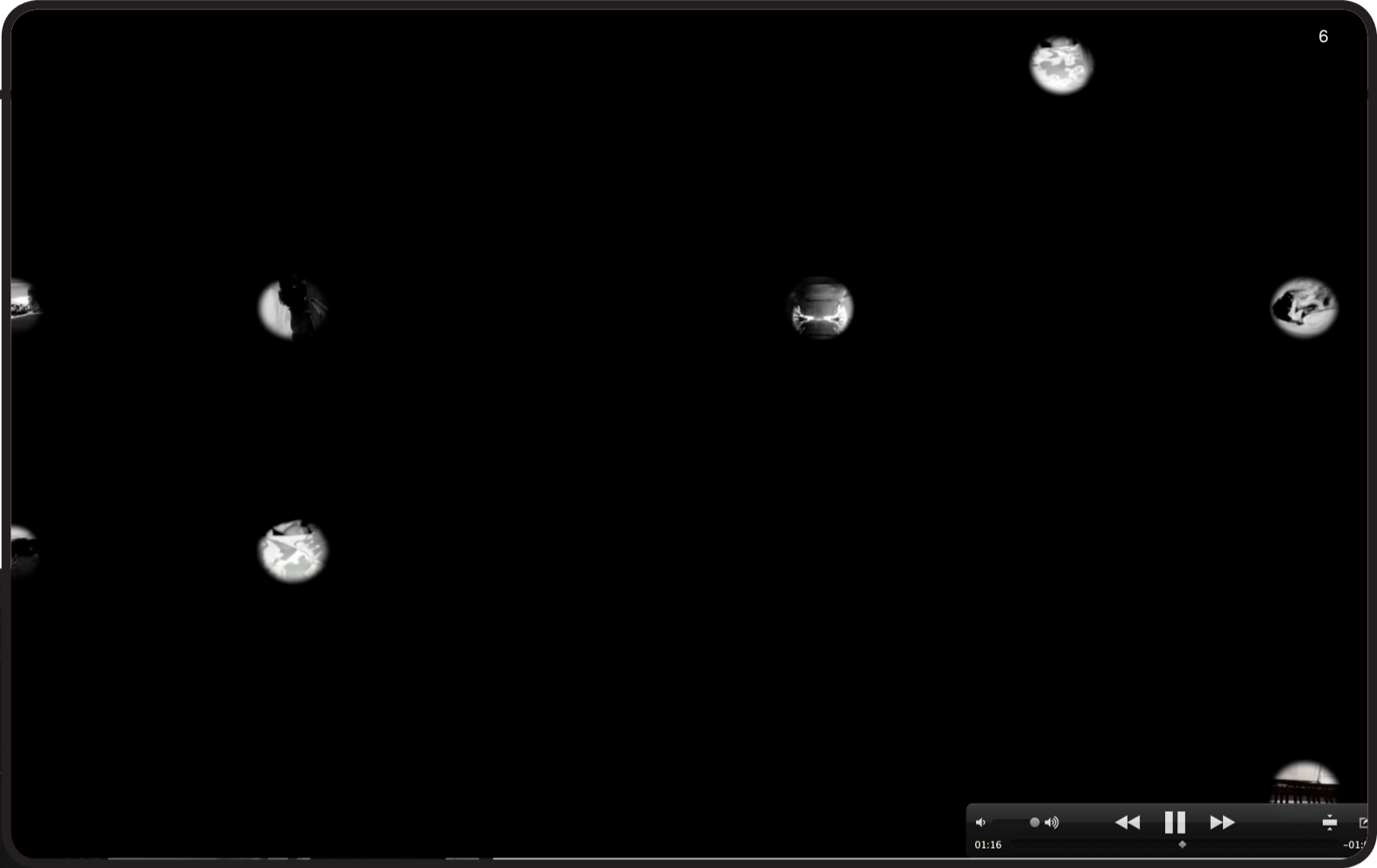
On Sat, 14 Jul 2018 at 19:24, Weixin Chong <weixin.chong@network.rca.ac.uk> wrote:

Hello Chai,

I've attached more images here as they were too small in Whatsapp! Looking forward to continuing the conversation at the talk. Have a lovely weekend too!

(The screenshots are stills from a video work.)

Warmly,  
Weixin



On 14 July 2018 at 20:22, Cheo Chai-Hiang <cheochaihiang@gmail.com> wrote:

Got them, thanks!  
Goodnight.

Chai

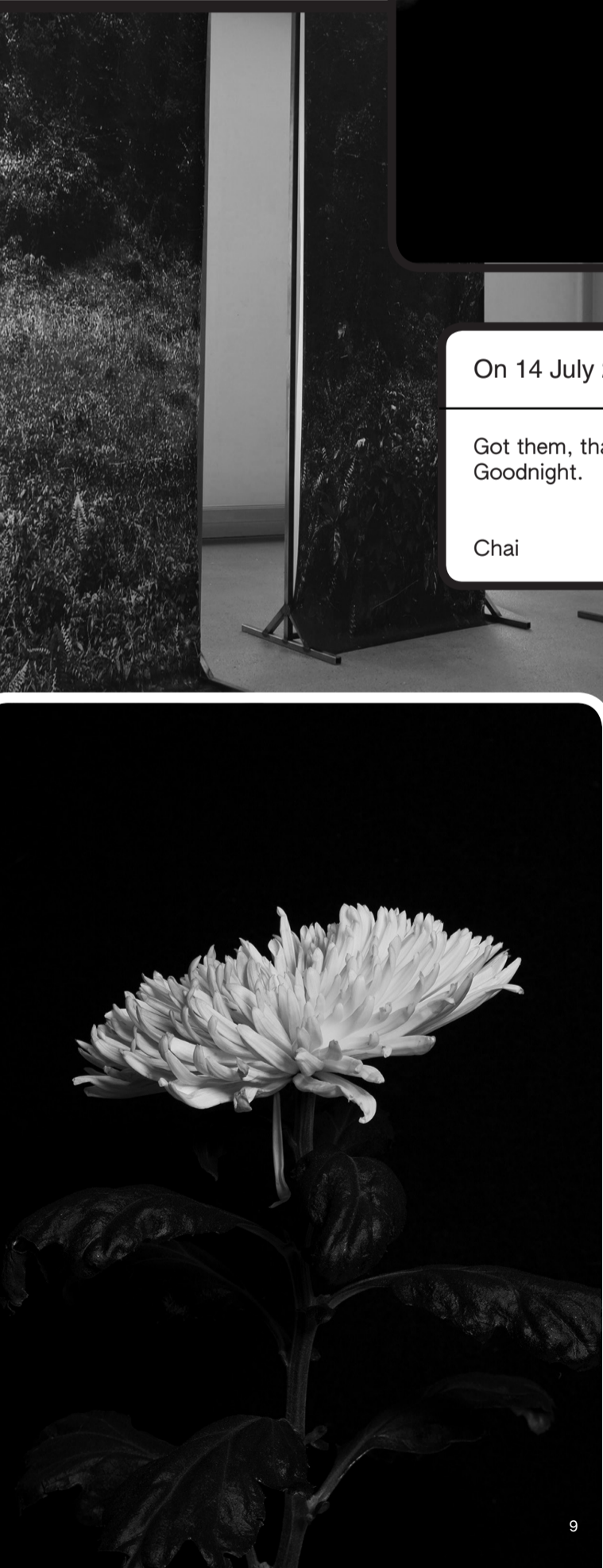


Image Caption

1. Silkscreen print  
An exercise during Foundation Studies  
1971/72
2. Detail of an off-set relief print  
1977/78
3. Installation view of "Poaching Durer's Young Hare", Brisbane, 1986  
Woollen thread, ladder, masking tape  
12 x 8 x 1.8 m
4. Installation view from "Beige Dreams", for "The Making of An Institution",  
NTU-CCA, 2017

5. Still from "Suiseki Slip", video, 2016
6. Still from "Sleepwalk", video, 2010
7. Details and installation view from "Copse", silkscreen on polyurethane, 2014
8. Details and installation view from "Copse", silkscreen on polyurethane, 2014
9. "flesh skin surface.3" from "Beige Dreams" series  
Photographic print on aluminium  
44.6 x 29.4 cm, Edition of 3

# SPEAKING ANEW

“Now that was brilliant to me, absolutely brilliant.”

“The steel cube was brilliant?”

“Yes! To me, it was very textural, if you know what I mean, it was perfectly integrated and it had a marvellous kind of negative capability. The rest of the stuff downstairs was bullsh\*t.”

— Isaac and Mary in Woody Allen’s *Manhattan* (1979)

We all inhabit distinct communities that speak the same language, rely upon constant rituals, and assume a shared history. Through our own idiosyncratic vocabularies, we circle back and forth within these silos, maintaining consensus and perpetuating specific agendas. Though often walled and coded, these communities are nonetheless vital. They speak to our very nature — they affirm our universal need to belong.

But as we move into the second decade of the millennium, with all of its upheavals, and with the resurgence of a hazardous form of guarded, prideful nationalism, we must become more self-aware. No longer can we gate-keep according to the same tendencies — whether conscious or not — that we leaned on before. We must take deliberate steps towards understanding and building bridges.

Within the art community, however open or progressive it may assume itself to be, these walls also exist. Unfortunately, they are constructed by the same building blocks that support the entire ecosystem. Between the two, indivisible pillars of art history, its storied academia and erudite criticism, and the art market, with its elitism and opacity, the visual arts are often set apart behind closed doors. Perhaps only a select few are privy to a regular, deep and meaningful engagement. As a format of and platform for exhibition-making, the artist talk has become the most requisite centre of such engagement. But who attends these artist talks? Who is in the audience? Who speaks to the artists? It is not enough that the same select few speak to each other, when we know the dialogue is of enough relevance and gravity to expand the context of the exhibition. For where else is this context, if not amongst the public?

It was these pressing questions that inspired this initiative, Audience with an Artist. Piloted by the Singapore Arts Club, a sister brand of Yeo Workshop which has been engaged with the local community in public arts programming since 2014, Audience with an Artist presents opportunities to speak to artists, and to each other with intentionality and openness.

Each month, the Singapore Arts Club invites two Singapore-based contemporary artists — often from different generations and whose practices are even more varied — to sit down with a moderator whose own world extends beyond the visual arts. In this way, the programme opens the gates of the traditional artist talk to a new audience. This audience is one that may not know curatorial vocabulary nor the finer points of aesthetic theory, but is nonetheless interested in understanding brilliance wherever it may be found, especially within the halls of an art gallery.

# CHRISTINA J. CHUA