

Perfect Mimicry

/ Yeo Chee Kiong

The face is still a little pale, although it was cleared of make-up and allowed to breathe through the night. Rubbing the acupoints around the eyes activates the blood vessels and nerves. Without the effect of coloured lenses, a peek through the gap between the fingers reveals a pair of clear eyes in the mirror, primitive and moving. Sparkling eyes, where the moon left its traces from the night before. The hazel eyes, like the vaguely undulating moonlight, blink, looking in the mirror at a face that is slightly blushed, as if becoming unfamiliar again.

With light strokes, the black eyebrow pencil brushes from the beginning point of the eyebrow, pausing just at the arch, then down from the brow peak and falling away from the eye. Turning and peering at the side profile of the contour of your face in the mirror, aside from the forehead, fringe, and sideburns that constitute the adjustable proportion of the most desirable shape of the head, the only contours of silhouettes that can be reshaped are the length of eyelashes and the stubborn double chin. The fingers gently flick the layer of fat around the double chin, attempting to concoct this season's eye shadow make-up seen in fashion magazines yesterday afternoon, exploring the gradual, fading layers. She can only marvel at the makeup artists' skillful, the delicate blend of colour, light, and shade. Each season, the feel of elegance from the eye and brow always carries the endless satisfaction of being at the current season's forefront of fashion. A slight modification of the daily image is a display of a positive attitude toward the fashionable life, without a moment of negligence, like the mascara constantly lengthening the unbridled tip of the eyelashes.

Mirror, mirror on the wall! Such chiseled beauty lies at the other end of the mirror. Who is the most beautiful woman in the world? Impeccable! Made impeccable by the power of fashion. Everyone is able to undergo a gorgeous transformation like the Sailor Moon. This is the magic of modern fashion. As long as you are transformed and enters the beautiful simulation of your make-up armour, is there anything you can't achieve?

Vague Vogue understands that fashion is not just an add-on for a better life, but also one of the pretenses of life that must be taken seriously at the social level and in the workplace. That is why we specially excerpted contents from the "Session I: Eye Covered: In the Name of Beauty", "Juming Art Forum — Mimicry: Art Unmasked" to share with readers. The intellectual perspectives of two leading scholars, Professor Yeo Chee Kiong and Professor Andrew Pai, thoroughly analyse and expound the forms and associations of beautiful mimicry from their respective philosophies of life, enabling readers to better understand and control the pure sense of existence in life. Attached below are the concept brief of "Juming Art Forum — Mimicry: Art Unmasked" and the selected seminar contents of the two scholars.

Session I: Eye Covered: In the Name of Beauty

/ Prof Pai Shih-Ming, Yeo Chee Kiong

Original in Chinese, translated by Rye Lin & Tan Yen Peng

Just as in the world of biology, humans perform "mimicry" for survival. "In the name of beauty", we change ourselves from the outside to the inside, from the biological to the psychological; or "in the name of beauty" we differentiate between you and me, rejecting the others and restricting ourselves. By "covering up" our sight, or by peeping through fingers, we constructed the classic model of beauty, while art, embodying a restless and discontented spirit, seeks eagerly to break through the established norms. This session will gather artists, curators and art historians to discuss the factors that have influenced the shaping of contemporary aesthetics and artists' response towards today's beauty standards shaped by mainstream culture.

Yeo: I am not sure if you have read the introduction in the Seminar leaflet carefully – there are two parts that I may be able to expand further here. The first part is, "Just as in the world of biology, human perform "mimicry" for survival." The second part is, "art, as the discontented one, [will] continuously [try] to break through the standard restrictions." I will talk about what is the so-called "beauty" that is exclusive to all living organisms, and the function of "mimicry" in the overall biological world.

National Geographic impressed me with its documentaries on animals, especially those about how some particular kinds of birds attract the opposite sex with unique methods. For example, the marine birds with blue webbed feet called the blue-footed booby, or the birds of paradise with unique huge air sacs and a beautiful appearance. The most attractive part for me was their unique sexual character, which attracts the opposite sex for reproduction, yet it makes no contribution to its chance of survival in the wild. What if we apply this to human beings? If there is a pretty woman or a handsome man who lost their way on the African Savannah, will they be exempted due to their beautiful appearance? The lion will not let go of a man simply because he is handsome, since this kind of "beauty" does not apply to lions. So how did the primitive idea of beauty form? If we take evolution into consideration, it is the special sexual characteristic that has been passed down and reinforced through the combination of genes over many generations, which seemed more and more attractive in the eyes of the opposite sex and finally form a new subspecies. This kind of so-called "beauty" is exclusive, applicable only to a certain group of living creatures.

The second part is the all-around and practical form of "mimicry", which is applied to imitate the features of the surroundings in order to hide oneself; it is the key surviving skill when one is in the face of challenges. The difference between the two is that the first kind of "beauty" involves flaunting, attracting, and is exclusive to a certain species on a primitive level, while the second one is non-exclusive, hidden, and more pragmatic. As for human beings, I think that analysing the subordinate relation between "beauty" and "mimicry" can be quite an interesting topic. At this point I also want to bring up briefly: Beauty seems to be a necessity, is Art the same? Is Art important to human evolution? Some theories on evolutionary aesthetics point out that the human's capability in creating art and making aesthetic judgements is similar to the function of the peacock's tail, which is to attract the opposite sex. If we go by this logic, then the artists will be comparatively sexier than the rest of us? Do you agree?

But what is the nature of Art? Or to be more precise, what is the nature of Art to an artist? These things matter because Art is often assumed to be a channel, a platform, or a cultural venue for one to express themselves, or something that allows spontaneous creation with or without a purpose. We can no longer give one single definition to the motivation behind an artwork, and this is also why art allows the rebellious artists to create works without having to follow a singular example, mode, or standard. It is through the rebellious artists, that art can break through restrictions and established standards to advance forward. I was trying to differentiate between “Art” and “Artist”, and a question came to my mind: Does “art” need to survive as well? I think that the correlation between the act of “covering the eyes” and “mimicry” is quite interesting. “Covering the eyes” and seeing through the fingers is a more active and domineering act as it suggests the covering of the eyes of oneself or the others in order to set a framework for achieving something, while “mimicry” is more concealed and obscure as it is mainly about observing the environment, following the trend, and catering to the mainstream.

In 2013, I stayed in Paris for two months. At that time, I was thinking to myself that since I am now in Paris, why not learn something about fashion design and create some works? By chance, I have a student who has been staying in Paris for 30 years and owns a fashion label, so I asked her, “Since you are in Paris and in this industry, can you explain what fashion is?” And she said that the trend of each season was actually defined by the big designers and stakeholders two years prior to the season. And within those two years, they will work on the design, the colours, and the direction. Because these people rank top in the industry, they get to set the trend. For smaller companies, what they could do is to attach to the trend to get a ride and save some costs. If they were to push for a new trend, it may require much more costs and that would be a much riskier business decision.

My first question: Is it possible to manipulate others’ aesthetic judgements and impose those standards and frameworks on them? Are we entering an era when “beauty” keeps updating itself automatically? And as we seek the wonderful experience of “beauty”, do we take the initiative to update our perception of it accordingly, and become part of this deliberately constructed system of “beauty” passively? But, is our current experience of “beauty” real “beauty” as it will be updated and replaced quickly in two years’ time? I think this is an interesting issue as we could experience “beauty” in different forms and from various stages as time changes. A more critical question is: does “Art” require a survival plan? This is an important question in the current era because the sign of “beauty” can be the result of a series of messages that form an ephemeral imagery. For example, an artist may work very hard on the artworks he considers good and right in the studio, but he will still need to face the forever changing framework of “beauty” and it is possible that he may be rejected by this framework. If he fails to adapt to the current system, he may find no connection between his works and the current states of art.

So, back to the old question: should artists be obedient or rebellious? I will not ask artists the surviving question since the answer could be quite subjective or objective. But is it necessary for “Art” to survive? This is definitely a subjective issue, and it is from here that the artist will decide his or her own method of survival. These are questions that are on my mind all the time. It is a kind of intuition, a process where my

thoughts go from vague to concrete, or even from clarity back to the state of confusion. I am not a philosopher. I try to raise these questions and seek answers through my own artworks. Next, I will talk about the ideas behind *A Beauty Centre* (麗美中心) and “the beauty in the centre of the heart” (心中美麗), including the process from conceptualization to completion of the first show in 2016 in Singapore, to the later version in 2017 at Juming Museum in Taipei which I am fortunate to have. This work is one of the questions rooted in my heart. Initially, I wanted to abandon and go beyond all existing frameworks, so I set up a “framework” that does not belong to any “framework”. It is actually a contradictory concept, but it is a very straightforward thought in my heart. I wanted to create a framework that does not belong to any existing structure but meanwhile stays true to my belief in “beauty”. I have a special love for making sculptures, so I constructed an art museum and a beauty centre based on the possibility for them to overlap, making use of the way they “cover” and “mimic” each other to introduce my thoughts on “beauty” and the various ways to define it.

The concept of this exhibition was that I wanted to create a non-negligible, material beauty through my sculptures. I tried to link the objects that I created with an unrelated thought, a fictional story. This is because I feel that in the contemporary world of art, the intention and ideas of the artists or authors is one thing, but the interpretation of the readers is diverse due to their different experiences and different viewpoints. It is not possible to control how people read the artwork. So, instead of leaving the work for open interpretation, I attempt to provide a fictional version, where the description of this imaginary interpretation is based on the idea that I think is workable, so as to disrupt our usual habit or pattern of reading things. And when things could not be explained with reason, is it still necessary for you to render an explanation for the sculpture that is physically right in front of you? It is a sculptural object that is actually standing right in front of you. These are the basic ideas behind *A Beauty Centre*.

So, I put two versions of the leaflets at the entrance, with one of them covering the original concepts of the artwork in *A Beauty Centre*, and another containing a fictional story. I had hoped that audiences would be uncertain about what they were looking at when they entered the venue of *A Beauty Centre*. When they could not be certain of what they had seen, they would ponder more deeply and interpret the scene from a more personal perspective. Therefore, I did not add any tag and title to the works in the venue, instead, I wanted to return to the purer essence of these sculptures. Now let us look at the fictional part. Here is the proper content of the artworks (the other leaflet), which might be a bit boring, therefore I presented this portion in a simpler format even though this was in fact my truest thoughts. I think that paradoxical “beauty” would allow me to return to my original approach. For me, “beauty” is very important. And when “beauty” becomes interpretable and could be put in a framework, it seems to be less transcendental. This is why I have been looking for a kind of “beauty” that will surpass and allow straightforward comprehension and interpretation. This “beauty” lives in your heart. It is beyond words and could only be expressed through feelings or experiences. Thank you.

Pai: The topic for this talk is quite special - “mimicry”. When you enter an exhibition and performance venue like this, and look at Mr Ju Ming’s works on the grass outside the Museum as well as those in the indoor exhibitions, you are actually experiencing an entirely different kind of “mimicry”. When we enter a different space, along with time transference, our mind and body will respond to situations and interact with the environment while we enter the atmosphere of simulation. So, focusing on the topic of “mimicry”,

I would like to share my thoughts on self-imitation, self-generation, and the mechanisms of transformation between the audience, the exhibition, and the artworks.

This is a forum, so I would like to open our conversation in a more relaxing way. Firstly, I would like to remind everyone of the question: What are the ways and approaches that artworks or artists apply to achieve the state of “beauty” through “mimicry”? The transference of time and space was mentioned earlier – just like our visit to Jinshan from Taipei – the change of space or landscape refreshes our feelings and sensations. With the continuation of time, we perceive the changing atmospheres between morning, noon, evening, and night, and we respond to the changes accordingly. Through beautiful objects like Mr Ju Ming’s or Mr Yeo’s sculptures, we can sense the unique quality of the works formed by the passage of time and the change of space. Therefore, I think the issue of “mimicry” could be discussed separately within the context of time and space.

Mr Yeo have mentioned the event of “mimicry” in nature. Initially, it related to the biological features essential to animals’ survival. Living creatures develop behaviours of disguise or "mimicry" in order to survive. And, we all know that humans, as higher animals living in a civilised environment where the mode of survival changes continuously, the imitation modality is generated by our imagination and simulation of the surroundings or the future and contains both the aspects of time and space – the simulation of time and the simulation of space. We know that human evolution involves more than biological, physical, and other external factors, and it includes the transformation of the mimicry of languages and thoughts as well. For example, why is dressing in Western style so natural for us today? What does it mean when Taiwanese males in the Qing dynasty have to keep long hair and put on long robes? These all resulted from the change of time and space. In terms of time, industrial society replaced the agricultural one. In terms of space, Western cities replaced Han villages – both of which speak of the simulation mode and the mimicry resulted from the change of time and space.

However, audiences and artists may look at the idea of mimicry from different points of view. Aside from the aspects of time and space, the interaction between different roles matters as well. For example, we think that the general public will always ask “what is the artist trying to express?” when they are looking at artworks. And if they do not understand the art, it is not because of the figurative or abstract nature of those works. What do you think of Ju Ming’s sculptures? Are they figurative or abstract? They could be both, and it seems like I can understand his works, yet my comprehension of it is partial, and this is what “mimicry” can do. When audiences try to judge the artworks from higher or professional standards, they will question their own understanding of the artworks like I did. Therefore, they would have entered the state of self-simulation when looking at artworks. It is like trying to understand what the artist was trying to express, whether it is a drawing of an apple, a pear, or some of Ju Ming’s Taichi series. What kinds of experiences do they reflect? “Mimicry” can happen at any moment. When we are looking at or interpreting artworks, it is mimicry that matches our mental and physical feelings and helps the artist and the work reach a state of harmony. However, the process of matching may not bring forward a particular result. As a society becomes pluralistic and democratic, there are no fixed aesthetic standards and beauty can be interpreted from different points of view. Under these circumstances, “mimicry” has developed a million peculiar ways. “Mimicry” is a way animals adapt to the environment – a result of their natural reactions. That is to say, when we see a work of art, we pretend that

we are immersing in an artistic environment and think about the relation between the artworks, the artists, and ourselves accordingly. Society needs art to make our life more beautiful because it satisfies both our sensations and feelings.

Furthermore, “mimicry” is all around in our society and history not only because it is natural biological behaviour but also because it is an indispensable part of the development of human civilisation, a tool people need right from their birth, during their growth, and throughout their journey of socialisation. The problem is, in the process of socialisation, what have we changed? What kinds of mimicry do we apply and what is the outcome? When we are in a professional art venue such as where we are now, it is more likely for us to act like we are really artistic and cultured- it might feel slightly different from the setting of our daily lives, we might not be used to it, at least psychologically if not physically. I think that between day and night, public and private sectors, we need to be able to mimic easily so as to blend in further with the surroundings, especially in a rapidly changing environment. In today’s condition, in the art museum, we need to, whether voluntarily or passively, switch to an identity that will “appreciate”, “understand”, and be keen to approach “beauty”. But when we leave this place, the situation may change completely or we no longer have the need to act in this manner. This is the inevitable result of socialisation. We will apply completely different kinds of “mimicry” in different places such as the art museums, public areas, or the schools. It is generated automatically at different times and different spaces.

For the question about Mr. Yeo’s artwork, you may wonder if it is a sculpture, a bathroom, or a piece of furniture randomly placed at a specific venue. In fact, it represents not only pure object or space but also the concept of time, such as the experience in his childhood or during his growth. Just like the visit to Paris that he mentioned earlier, his work is the re-presentation of what his body and mind have experienced during the trip, which involves “mimicry”; or more specifically, it combines memory and spirituality with the totality of his life experiences in different stages rather than the natural, physical “mimicry”. In fact, placing and displaying the ready-mades at the venue make things more realistic than through imitation - why? When we see a bathroom, a desk, we will enter our memory vault directly to search, simulate, and then create links or even interpretations to give the ready-made objects a real meaning. So, artists link themselves with the audiences through the ready-mades, which are in a seemingly “ambiguous” state, and they hand over the right for interpreting the artworks to the audiences. In the discussion of “the death of the author”, the practice of art renders various cultural values and meanings, and they are not determined solely by the authors, as the right has gradually been given to the viewers; artworks are no more confined by pragmatic concerns such as expressing formal or stylistic beauty but is an almost completely open field or forum. Artists no longer offer answers, they do not even ask questions, as their work becomes a mechanism that allows freedom of discussion. This state of cross-imitation is very important in contemporary art as it allows mutual exchange between authors and audiences.

Next, I would like to talk about the issue of “mimicry”. Besides being the natural result of socialisation, there are in fact more issues involved in it. Mr. Yeo has mentioned that “mimicry” is the artists’ way to get rid of frameworks, to escape from existing restrictions, and to set up their own rules. How so? For example, we are all people of Chinese heritage in broad definition, and we all speak Mandarin. But when we showcase artworks that reflect Chinese culture to people of non-Chinese backgrounds, would the foreigners understand

what they see or hear? That is to say, the existing or long-established rules in Chinese culture may be a big issue and an obstacle, and thus the purpose of “mimicry” is to go beyond these frameworks. Furthermore, the topic today also provides solutions to go beyond races and social status.

I think such issues are reflected in Mr Yeo’s works. Singaporean Chinese have experienced history and life differently from what we have in Taiwan. However, as our cultures, languages, religions, and beliefs overlap in many ways, we may ask what are the crossing characteristics that all Asian art share? As Asians we find his works familiar because we share commonalities in geography, genes, culture, and lifestyle, all of which are results of simulation or mimicry. For example, we, as Asians, especially Taiwanese, may be more conservative and shy, while Singaporeans may be more open, this is because we are cultivated by different histories and cultures, and the shift of time and space do the tricks as well. The diverse opinions, however, do not stop things from crossing one another; instead, there must be something mutual among different opinions so that they can be linked together. As for artworks, they could get rid of the framework and develop a linkable state even under huge cultural diversity. The similarities of Chinese cultures accelerate our understanding of Asian art across the regions. In fact, mutual understanding is based on differences built on an existing ground, or these cultures might have detected their differences during the process of understanding each other. Therefore, I consider “mimicry” a contemporary art strategy linking things together as well as detecting differences.

So, the approaches of “covering up the eyes” and “mimicry” that artists apply to create artworks are actually relative. For instance, “covering the eye” is a strategy, while mimicry is a process. How so? Why do we have to “cover the eyes” – or conceal something to allow people of different cultural backgrounds to understand a certain idea? To “conceal” something from others means nothing bad but conveying ideas through indirect mediums to help artists achieve their purposes. Under the process of such strategy, the ready-mades or forms that we are familiar with become mediums that link us together. The work Taichi that we mentioned earlier is a good example. In Asian or Chinese societies, Taichi is a national treasure that we are all familiar with since we were young even if we have never practiced it personally. Here, it is a medium, an approach, or a way for “covering the eye”. In other words, we have never practiced Taichi, but we know what it is and how the meanings connect through linking to the “cultural codes”. Therefore, as the audience, we can engage in the conversation with the artist more easily. In this case, “covering up the eyes” is a strategy that artists apply to connect with audiences or the external world through indirect means. Moreover, we are also talking about “mimicry” as a necessary process of an individual (the artist) linking himself or herself with external societies and making that connection meaningful. Without doing so, everything will go back to its original state, making it difficult for artworks to activate themselves to define and interpret what “beauty” is. So, the biggest difference between an artist and the general public is that an artist has to make use of “mimicry” to express his or her emotional or aesthetic feelings, and thus connect with the general public. Therefore, “mimicry” and “covering up the eyes” are just two sets of related words facilitating the delivery of certain concepts or ideas through “beauty”.

The third issue I want to bring up is the necessity of the notion of “in the name of beauty”. Artmaking is different from taking pictures with a camera, and it is something more than capturing the moment or the scene right in front of you. No matter what method the artists apply to perform artistic transformation, -

"covering the eyes" or "mimicry" -, it is something they *must* do, so that the notion of "in the name of beauty" makes sense. But why "in the name of beauty"? To discuss this issue, we must go back to the fundamental questions of "beauty" and "what is art"? Firstly, what is the function of "beauty"? The artist must be trying to convey a certain function of "beauty" so that such a work is created, otherwise anyone could produce something similar without the need for the mechanism, messages, or values of "beauty". For example, if we are only concerned about functionality, then "beauty" is not important at all as long as something is usable. As our civilisation advances, "beauty" becomes important, and the notion of "in the name of beauty" develops into a good topic that reflects on the function of "beauty" in human societies and on how artists accomplish and create "beauty". It is necessary that these questions be further explored. "Beauty" is related to society in two ways. Firstly, if we consider that "beauty" purifies or improves society, then it is close to religion. Secondly, if "beauty" inspires the artists' thoughts, concepts, or spiritual imagination about themselves or as a concern for the society, then it is closer to philosophy. In fact, "beauty" possesses the characteristics of both religion and philosophy. If we were to discuss the function of "beauty", I think religious function is the main thing, while philosophical function comes next. The purification of minds, beautification of societies, or development of pure aesthetics are achieved through the artists' conveyance of their experiences that are close to that of religious or philosophical experiences. Therefore, when we talk about "in the name of beauty", we have to take note of its indubitability and necessity, and take into consideration how "beauty" is related to an external world beyond itself.

The artists' social identity is also closely related to this topic. As we mentioned, the animalistic and biological behaviours of "mimicry" is because human beings live in a world based on the need for survival. There is also the mechanism of "self-individuation" and "socialisation" in operation. In fact, it is through the method of "mimicry" that artists create art, and they may possess the necessary skills of self-protection and self-nurturing. For example, many artists are good at drawing since they were young; Director Wu is a writer, so he might have been excellent at writing since young. The talents for art or literature may be inborn, and this is the biological function that I mentioned. For instance, a male peacock will open its prominent tail to attract partners for mating and reproduction, many other animals do the same. Hence, even though colourful appearances or eye-catching body figures are beautiful characteristics for the eyes, that is, "beauty" in our eyes, they actually relate more to an innate capacities of defending, frightening, tempting, or adapting. "In the name of beauty" in this sense is but a response to the relationships between people in a society.

However, strangely, humans seem to lack the capacities to morph and to transform. For instance, men's robust figures and strong muscles may attract the opposite sex or frighten their enemies away, but they do not adapt to the environment like those of other male animals. In primitive societies, there might be some alternatives methods, for example, they might use masks, tattoos, or other forms of disguise for facilitating communication between humans and gods, intimidating enemies, serving as symbols of power, or pursuing partners of the opposite sex. Nevertheless, these are not inborn abilities like those of the animals. How do males attract females to reproduce their offspring? In biological terms, aside from emitting hormones that attract the opposite sex, the mimicry of appearance in terms of creating visual impressions of power, security, or success (like the masculine dress of the primitive society mentioned above) seems to be more important.

Similarly, artists are creating similar mechanisms to disseminate beautiful messages and promote aesthetic values through their “artistic hormones” (inborn) and “artistic dressing” (man-made). This mechanism could be everywhere and penetrate the inner world of the audiences. In fact, Yeo’s works allow the audiences to intervene, engage, and interact in many aspects. His works are very “welcoming”, they continue to release “artistic hormones” and invite the audiences to be part of them. Therefore, I think that in our discussion about the social identity of artists, we must talk about this kind of mechanism that involves transmission and connection to make art more powerful and functional.

Finally, I would like to go back to the main point of this forum’s topic, why does contemporary art use comparatively less traditional means and mediums but applies more straightforward strategies of “mimicry” (e.g. ready-mades, machines, objects) to convey ideas? It may even make use of smells, sounds, light and shadow, and other natural phenomenon to deliver complicated, interweaving experiences at a particular moment. Contemporary art has entered the interdisciplinary realm where its frameworks, media, or forms could work together to present purer and more direct states of mind and ways of thinking. To sum up, no matter what media, concepts, or forms are in use as the strategy, “mimicry” or mimetic phenomena will always be in place within the realm of “beauty” as it is an important process whereby artists convey messages and values of “beauty”. It is not only a reaction of the artists’ animal behaviour, but in trying to attract viewers to approach their works, it has to perform its role in socialisation. “Mimicry” is thus a product derived from social interaction. The animal behaviour is the result of spontaneous production; through various media, ideas or styles, artists generate a sort of "art hormones" to lure, guide, and connect the viewers. Otherwise, their works would render a value of socialisation in the name of social beautification and catharsis and eventually reach the status closer to philosophy and religion.

Audience 1: There were mentions of “framework” and “trend”, I would therefore like to ask this question: in the field of art, the art galleries or the art museums are institutions that lead the trend. However, there might be artists who are just expressing themselves naturally, yet their art might not fit in with the current trend or the established framework and is therefore not accepted. I imagine such artists would be unknown to the public, as they would not be “marketed”. I wonder what are your views on this? Today’s information dissemination tends to develop in people’s mind similar understanding about things and create resonances among them – if an artist works alone on an island and their creations were not discovered, does that mean they are no good?

Yeo: From a commercial point of view, if you go to a shopping mall with so many brands available, you will think: Which one is the best? What is the price range of these brands? Are expensive labels the better ones? Probably the cheapest brand is good enough for daily use. What I want to say is that every art museum has its aims and objectives worked out by a team behind. If the artists make an effort to reach out, they could probably find a museum that recognises their art. This is about how an artist takes survival into account. They need to think about whether this is the only way to survive.

Audience 1: Should they be true to their own art and practice, or should they follow this trend and perform what is required?

Yeo: Surviving in the art sector could be a very subjective issue; it is about how an artist defines his way of survival. I think that artists should think about this because if they do not consider this kind of survival necessary, they could lead their life according to their own will; but it is not the case for everyone. Van Gogh is one such example. After he passed away, his sister-in-law tried her best to introduce him to the world. So it is still true that artists need a living person who has faith in them as many artists will not do such things as promoting themselves.

Pai: I'll answer your question. Artists will talk about this issue from their perspectives, and I will use the perspective of a scholar, a critic, or an audience. I will put this in two parts. Firstly, who should decide what is the trend? For example, where should an artist exhibit his works? Or should he not exhibit his works at all? What works should he exhibit? This definitely involves the attitude or the stand of the artists when facing the trend (or should we say the audiences), and they have the right to make their own choice. If I do not want to exhibit my works here, I could do it elsewhere. The artists' subjective willingness is probably way more important than the objective condition. In Taiwan, during the martial law era, there were few exhibition venues, and artmaking was closely monitored and controlled. Even the art museums built were spaces of authority and power. The artists who refused to join the system and framework would not be able to enter that system, and thus the museum becomes the symbol of dictatorship that excludes dissidence. Today, there are so many more venues for exhibiting artworks including alternative art spaces such as the abandoned construction sites. So it is not compulsory to turn to art museums for exhibiting artworks. Here, the museum indirectly becomes the passive or the rejected one that is subjected to the supervision of artists and the general public. This results in issues such as the weakening of the museum's social function and their shifting away from the mainstream. In fact, the diversity of exhibition venues frees the artists from struggling with the need to catch the trends, and this allows them to be more autonomous and creative. Therefore, in my opinion, there should be no opposition in the relationship between the artist and the exhibition venue. Instead, they should negotiate with one another. On the other hand, what should we make of the audiences' perspective? Do they expect artists to follow the trend? This is something that the audiences must decide for themselves. If the artist stays too close to the trend, audiences may consider their works too commercial; if they stay closer to the system, audiences may have doubts about their personality or principle. Yet those who stay away from the trend may be taken as weird or eccentric, every small error they make will be scrutinized. Therefore, in terms of the relationship between the artists and the audiences, whether to suit the trend or to break away from the framework, are relative questions of choices.

Recently, I have just finished a thesis on Taiwan's art scenes of the 80s when artists tried to "emancipate from the system". It is known to us that in the wake of Taiwan's democratisation, the art sector developed new perspectives on "framework" as artists no longer had to surrender to the governmental system - thanks to the emergence of alternative art spaces; freedom of choice became the new rule. Artists wandered around different exhibition venues according to their wills, and they could turn down invitations and connections proposed by the government – the rights of going against or following the system were at two opposite ends of a scale. With their refusal, the government or the system might become void, unbalanced, or surrendered.

This newly defined, autonomous system, however, became the best way to present contemporary art. For instance, the artworks we were discussing and looking at were video images; they were produced at different times, in different spaces, and from different historical perspectives. The question is: should these be exhibited in an art museum? I do not know. We have an art museum so we have to organise some exhibitions, don't we? However, for mediums like photographs or videos, what will happen to them if they are not exhibited in art museums? These issues lead us back to the two mentioned questions. (1) What kind of works do art museums expect to exhibit? (2) Where do artists expect to showcase their works? If I were an artist, I would take "nature" or "life" itself as the exhibition space. There is no need for the so-called white cube or black box because the exhibition of art does not rely on any authoritarian systems. If an artist relies on art museums and always takes political correctness into account, how would he be able to balance what he sees, thinks, and even reveals the truth? Therefore, as subjectivity is reinforced in modern societies, it is inevitable that artists tend to turn away from museums in order to accentuate their own identities, behaviours, or concepts. They may showcase their works at random marketplaces, street corners, or unknown natural sites so as to establish new relationships with the external world. At this point, the external world could be in a state where reality and fiction, urban spaces and natural landscapes conglomerates and co-exist, and is characterized by mobility and indefinability.

Yeo: According to modern phenomenology, we have all information, messages, and experiences stored in our mind, everyone has it, but the methods we choose to find the materials are not the same. Just like the searchlight - if you already have pre-existing data in your mind when trying to search for some information, your method of search may be something that you have done many times, so the information that you find will always be the same because your approach is the same. However, I feel that as artists we need to offer new ways of searching – a bit of modification here, some adjustment of angle there, and you may find information that you will not discover within the existing system of knowledge. I think we are not magicians who could create something from nothing; all we can do is to offer one more option under the existing circumstances.

Pai: This may sound contradictory: Artists must seek audiences and resonate with them, therefore there must be some existing commonality between them, otherwise they cannot establish communication. In fact, we have to return to the nature of art making in our discussion of this issue. Is art meant for the purpose of communication with society? Art needs communication, but is it built fundamentally on communication? If we understand the meaning within, then there will be no contradiction. In other words, artists need audiences but do not aim to serve them. It is also not merely about making them understand something, nor to satisfy their physical and biological sensations with visual, audio, and other stimulation. This is the first point -there is no contradiction. Secondly, we should go back to the social function of art. Why do we need artists? Are artists special residents living at the borders with no governors? Or are they businessmen who conform to the system looking for commercial benefits? Maybe it is possible that they are both, but the thing is, people from different socialisation levels or consequences bring totally different social effects. For example, some artists wish to be a cultural master, so they may have to promote ethical values, highlight social expectation through social media, and align with national policies. There is nothing wrong with this. However, returning to what we mentioned earlier, if the audiences think that art needs a two-way communication between its functions of purification and beautification, have the artists reached this goal? This is the commonality mentioned earlier, as for whether the goal has been reached is open for examination. Now let us go back to the earlier question again: Is serving audiences the only function of art? Of course not. I believe Mr Yeo commented that artists have to satisfy both themselves and the society, so it is natural for them to look for

balances and search for answers between the two opposite ends. If we think of art as a platform or a mechanism for communication, who will it serve and how does it offer mutual satisfaction? Who will consider it unsatisfactory? These questions definitely exist. Going back to the relation between art and society, I think that artists are continuing to create a new system of freedom. No matter what their attitude, stand, or view is, they have to take their ultimate goal into account. For example, are they going to promote a certain philosophy or religious belief? Do they create art for themselves or for others? Maybe both, that is why they are always able to balance the elements through free choices although they are situated within contradictions. It is especially necessary to discuss the position of artworks in the current social environment, the goals of artists today are not so much about pursuing the traditional and distant value of beauty, but more about looking into reality, making intervention in the society, and crossing over the borders. For example, what is happening in the world? How can art relate to different phenomena? How do they represent reality and convey current condition in order to make all that has happened meaningful and useful? For example, Director Ho mentioned the documenting of environmental destruction, the condemnation of wars, and the reminder of possible human extinction, etc. with all these, the simple concept of “beauty” has become too limitative for the broad area that contemporary art is covering. So, is contemporary art about achieving social commonality or for the artists to pursue their own uniqueness? I think it is both as they are intertwined. Thank you.

Prof Pai Shih-Ming, a curator, art critic, and scholar in East Asian art history. He holds a master's degree from the Graduate Institute of Art History in National Taiwan University and a Ph.D. in Art History from the Kyoto University in Japan. He is currently a full-time professor at the Department of Fine Arts in National Taiwan Normal University. His research area includes modern and contemporary Taiwanese art, traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy, regional cultural exchanges in East Asia, curatorial studies, and contemporary art criticism, etc. He is particularly keen in the methodological application of East Asian regional art history and issues in the construction of contemporary historical views, the research topics include: modernization of art, modernity in art, visual representation, historical memory, cultural boundaries, local identity, cross-colonial discourse, and cultural subjectivity.

Yeo Chee Kiong, the founder of *A Beauty Centre*, a contemporary sculptor and conceptual artist who is fascinated with the language and spatial relationship between object, space and authorship. His work destabilises the familiar notions of spatial proportions and perspectives, whilst examining the human conditions in the construction of an extended surreal world. Yeo teaches at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts and Lasalle SIA College of Art in Singapore, and was Visiting Assistant Professor in the Sculpture Department at National Taiwan University of Arts from 2017-2020.