

Cut Down The Middle

João Vasco Paiva, Heman Chong,
Ramiro Guerreiro, Ko Sin Tung,
Magdalen Wong

9.4 – 13.6.2021

curated by
Claudia Pestana in dialogue
with João Vasco Paiva

Galeria Avenida da Índia
Avenida da Índia 170, Lisboa
Tuesday to Friday: 10am-1pm and 2pm-6pm
Saturday and Sunday: 10am-1pm
Free entrance

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Galeria Avenida da Índia

Cut Down The Middle gathers a selection of recent works by João Vasco Paiva with pieces by Heman Chong, Ramiro Guerreiro, Ko Sin Tung and Magdalen Wong, artists with whom Paiva has exhibited, worked, shared space or been in conversation with over the past decade.

Paiva's *The Highways Department Colouring Book* (2016), a collection of interventions drawn by the artist on a series of blueprints appropriated from the Hong Kong Highways Department Manual of Standard Drawings, established the initial premises for the exhibition. Although this type of manual precisely outlines the concrete infrastructure that constitutes the city, from furniture such as barriers, to the materials to be used for footways and cycleways, people experiencing the city as their lived environment are mostly unaware of the pervasiveness of these specifications except in moments of crisis. With this context as a departure point, the exhibition gathers work by these five artists where the backdrops of the realities we inhabit, be they physical, conceptual or artificial, are highlighted, exposed or put into question. The topographies made present through these works, as well as the passage of time within such settings, suggest the reciprocity between our perceptions and the effects that the arrangements behind such landscapes have on how we understand our surroundings.

This show is also an invitation to consider how, in the same way that rarely noticed urban elements like kerbs, bollards, or street markings, affect our routines, the constructions inherent to communication and information platforms have a similar impact on our ways of thinking about and even imagining our worlds. Our experiences are continuously woven and reconfigured from a multitude of contexts that span beyond what we watch, read, see, or even exchange with others. *Cut Down The Middle* is anchored on relationships between the work of João Vasco Paiva and the works of the artists Heman Chong, Ramiro Guerreiro, Ko Sin Tung and Magdalen Wong. These associations are only suggested and the connections between works are open to construction, appropriation and misappropriation in exactly the same way we make inferences from the elements underpinning our lived environments.

João Vasco Paiva

Untitled_ Sunday IV (2017) is the result of the artist applying a process of casting and moulding to a cardboard box he collected from a public area in Hong Kong where domestic workers often gather on their days off. The artist translated this malleable and resilient object used as a makeshift place to sit, eat and chat, into a sculpture with a more rigid and fragile materiality. Removed from its original context, it conveys the artist's observation of how people transform the public spaces they inhabit, while also drawing attention to the precariousness of many migrant workers' lives.

Emergency Crash Gate, Typical Details of Concrete Profile Barrier to Accommodate Column of Light Pole, and Concrete Profile Barrier - Terminal Section, Elevation + Plan (all 2021) are watercolours drawn from the Hong Kong Highways Department's 'standard drawings' of different types of barriers previously referenced by the artist in his *The Highways Department Colouring Book*. Paiva's ability to manipulate the specifications that determine the forms these items take and explore how they impact a daily experience, transforms them into the opposite of structures that direct flow and circulation. Through the fluid lines of the watercolours, he subverts these forms associated with control into figures almost reminiscent of unknown alphabets and calligraphy.

Untitled (Containers)_barricade remake I and II, are clusters of cement casts of water containers that have been stacked in rows. These works by Paiva allude to water cooler bottles that are regularly delivered to office blocks and other buildings housing numerous people, a common sight on the streets of a large city like Hong Kong, where the artist lived for a decade. In these sculptures, the artist appropriates the surface and texture of the containers for his moulds and then fills them with cement, a material that gives shape to most of the city's structures.

Paisagem/Objeto LB/MRC (2016), *Paisagem/Objeto ICL* (2016), *Paisagem/Objeto IR* (2016), and *Paisagem/Objeto TM* (2016) are series of wooden sculptures with surfaces that depict large-scale satellite images of different places worldwide. Shaped like benches, ramps, or ledges, and other elements characteristic of most urban spaces, they were initially left at the disposal of skateboarders. Only after their surfaces had become marked and scratched by the skateboarders doing their tricks, were these wooden structures re-appropriated as sculptural objects.

João Vasco Paiva (b. 1979, Coimbra) transforms his perceptions of spaces he inhabits, and objects found within them, into works that include videos, sculptures, and installations. These transformations result from processes of mapping, translating, moulding and casting. Paiva's examination of the ephemerality, and durability, of the structures and languages behind the construction of these often neglected items, draws out their continuously shifting characteristics.

João Vasco Paiva's solo projects include. *Connecting*.(with Irini Miga), PRACTICE, New York (2017); *Green Island*, Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong (2016); *CARGO*, Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea do Chiado, Lisbon (2016); *Dormant Fabric*, Counter Space, Zurich (2015); *Objects Encrypted*, Goethe Institut, Hong Kong (2013). His work has been in numerous group shows including *Bold Tendencias 2018: Ecology*, Bold Tendencias, London (2018), *Scraggly Beard Grandpa*, Capsule Shanghai, Shanghai (2017), *The Part in the Story Where a Part Becomes a Part of Something Else*, Witte de With, Rotterdam (2014), *Living as Art Form*, Independent Curators International, New York (2013).

Heman Chong

MAKE YOUR OWN PUBLIC LIBRARY! (2020) challenges what art can do, where it circulates, through whom, and how. As posters covering an entire wall, it brings a form of outdoor graphic communication into an interior gallery space. Downloadable for free as a PDF on the Galerias Municipais de Lisboa website, it is a digital work anyone can collect and choose to actualise. As a sentence, it initially reads like a clear request. Yet, when considered more closely, questions emerge about what constitutes a library or how something can be made public. Whether an experience, a digital file, or an imperative sentence, this work asks us to confront our understanding of how an artwork operates and our role in making it work.

Everything (Wikipedia) (2019) involves an individual reading aloud from the online encyclopedia Wikipedia accessed in real time on an electronic mobile device. The individual performing the work always begins with the featured article of the day. Once they reach the end, they select another hyperlink from within the page to read from, and continue repeating this action for a predefined amount of time. Once relevance with the original suggested article is lost, the action of repeatedly going from entry to entry becomes a futile attempt to vocalise this representation of the entirety of human knowledge.

Cut Down

The Middle (2020) consists of the artist selecting the title for this exhibition and the process he used to arrive at his choice. The four words Chong chose for this title were taken from a sentence in Clarice Lispector's

first novel *Near to the Wild Heart*: "The dense, dark night was cut down the middle, split into two black blocks of sleep." Chong remarks that Lispector's title, according to Benjamin Moser, was suggested by the author's friend and fellow writer Lúcio Cardoso from a sentence in James Joyce's *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

Heman Chong (b. 1977, Malaysia) is an artist whose work is located at the intersection between image, performance, situations and writing. His practice can be read as an imagining, interrogation and sometimes intervention into infrastructure as an everyday medium of politics. Chong is the co-director and founder (with Renée Staal) of *The Library of Unread Books*, a library made up of donated books previously unread by their owners.

Heman Chong's solo exhibitions include *Spirits in the Material World*, Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam, *fikitionfiktionfiktion*, Weserburg Museum, Bremen (2019); *Legal Bookshop*, Swiss Institute New York, *Never is a Promise*, Calle Wright, Manila, Philippines (2018); *Ifs, Ands, Or Buts*, Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai (2016); *An Arm, A Leg and Other Stories*, South London Gallery, London, *Never, A Dull Moment*, Artsonje, Seoul (2015). His work has been in numerous group shows including *#Art #Commons*, Nam June Paik Art Center, Korea (2018), *Take Me I'm Yours*, Jewish Museum, New York (2016), *Time of Others*, The National Museum of Art, Osaka, *expo zero*, Tate Modern, London (2015).

Ramiro Guerreiro

Grelhagem sobre abertura pré-existente II (2021) is an architectural intervention that covers the entrance and an entire wall of the gallery space with a black and white photograph of walls made from perforated ceramic or cement blocks. A nearby shelf displays postcards portraying similar perforated walls and indicating the streets where they were photographed. By foregrounding these façades commonly used to regulate the flow of air and sunlight, as well as degrees of privacy in structures like balconies or corridors, Guerreiro's work highlights the blurring of thresholds between interior and exterior and brings this daily experience into the exhibition itself.

peessoa-pano-do-pó, av. Marconi, (2009) is video documentation of a performance where Guerreiro climbed up a scaffolding structure and used his body to clean a relief sculpture located above the entrance of a building. The use of his own body as a bright orange dust cloth, instead of tools more readily associated with the regular maintenance of outdoor building structures, brings a sense of domesticity to his action that draws attention to the urban planning of the areas where buildings with these decorative sculptural elements are usually found. Performed

in public space, his work also confronts contemporary art practice with preconceptions about art, taste, and public good.

entalados (2005) is a series of slides documenting the artist performing a series of poses in void spaces found in modernist architecture. This appropriation of such spaces, as it is imagined and then performed by the artist, corresponds to Guerreiro's reflection on these architectural features, rather than a direct observation of people actually using them. The action of wedging himself into these voids confronts the scale and design of these buildings with his own body and the realised construction. Practically an exercise in reading modernist architecture with his body, the artist's actions suggest an intimate reflection on the extent to which such places can be fully inhabited and experienced.

Ramiro Guerreiro (b. 1978, Lisbon) works with the body, architecture, and documentary material to question socio-political and economic contexts. His practice often involves performance and results in drawing, photography, video and printed material that challenge perspectives on cultural heritage. His practice gives particular focus to the elements and functionalities that make cities into how they are perceived and experienced.

His recent solo exhibitions include *Moi Aussi...*, Lehmann + Silva Gallery, Porto (2019); *The T.I.N.A. Pamphlet*, πνεύμα / Pneuma Project, Lisbon, and *Abrigo para um só corpo*, École Supérieure de Beaux Arts, Angers (2017). His work has been in numerous group shows including *De Outros Espaços*, Galeria Municipal do Porto, Porto, *Ponto de Fuga*, Galeria Municipal do Torreão Nascente, Lisbon (2019); *Escala 1:1*, La Tabacalera, Madrid, *O que pode a Arte?*, Atelier-Museu Júlio Pomar, Lisbon, and *Mistake! Mistake! said the rooster... and stepped down from the duck*, Lumiar Cité, Lisbon (2018).

Ko Sin Tung

Sunflower and safety helmet (2017) captures a detail from an outdoor advert commonly found at urban development sites in Hong Kong. Often, these adverts bring together generic images of plants, equipment or joyous people, to transmit a sense of nature and trust that a busy redevelopment site might lack. As might happen when something is perceived in passing, the work only captures a fragment. By foregrounding the vibrancy of the colours and composition, the work highlights the impact of the advert, rather than a clearly legible image. Although most of the information or slogans delivered by the advertisement have been lost, when the vinyl print is observed more closely, new layers of information about the colours and the way the image is constructed become visible.

P-E-R-M-A-N-E-N-T (2014) is a video piece that transports the inescapable presence of the lights and colours of shop signs and advertisements visible in Hong Kong at night into the gallery space. By focusing closely on the lights, the artist annuls the usual experience of reading the signs on the street. Instead, their pulsating presence becomes both surface and texture for reflection on a series of antonyms floating in a sea of coloured light that exists as a backdrop to life in the city.

The world of yesterday (2017) is a double channel video work exploring perception, adaptability, care and time. The artist juxtaposes different images with text conveying reflections on how we perceive and are affected by our surroundings. Different forms of adaptability, ranging from a cat's jumpiness to the human ability to cope with change, also suggest that environments and those inhabiting them, affect each other directly and indirectly. Through images and ideas that juxtapose experiences in the street, domestic settings, and commercial spaces, with musings on the passage of time, the artist's work presents change as simultaneously inevitable and possible. Evoked almost as a mood, the work fosters an introspective reflection on change as something that we may observe and struggle with, but to which we can also adapt and contribute.

Ko Sin Tung (b. 1987, Hong Kong) uses media, ranging from painting to video and digital prints, to convey personal lived experiences and how these are related to the structures and configurations of urban space. She creates work that reflects insights into how the images and objects that populate domestic and urban spaces exist between people's projections and expectations of daily life and the future.

Ko Sin Tung's solo shows include *Adaptation*, Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong, and *Dust and trivial matters*, The Bunker, Beijing (2019). Her work has been in numerous group exhibitions including *Borrowed Scenery*, Cattle Depot, and *Café do Brasil*, Para Site Art Space, both in Hong Kong (2019); *Whatever Works, Whatever It Takes*, Goethe-Institut China, Beijing, *The Racing Will Continue, The Dancing Will Stay*, Times Museum, Guangzhou (2019); *Taiwan International Video Art Exhibition 2018 – Offline Browser*, Hong-Gah Museum, Taiwan (2018); *Rehearsal*, Tai Kwun Contemporary, Hong Kong (2018); and *The 8th Vladivostok Biennale of Visual Arts*, Vladivostok, Russia (2013).

Magdalen Wong

Power. Performance. Prestige. (2012) addresses advertising as something that populates our consciousness and blurs distinctions between reality, desire, and need. The raw materials the artist chose to process for this video were luxury vehicle commercials often aired on television, yet

readily available on YouTube too. Wong removed the vehicles from the appropriated images in order to accentuate the background landscapes, sounds, and music. Wong then combined this edited footage into an uncanny nature video where mountains, sky, clouds, or forests, feel unimaginably distant. An initial seductiveness transforms into eeriness as prolonged exposure to this sanitised video-pixel reality and soundtrack loop makes its seams and artifice increasingly apparent.

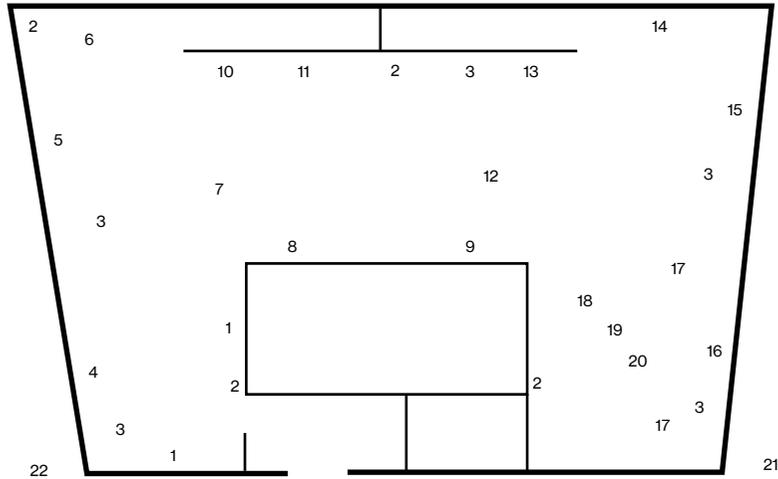
Dying robots' last words (2017-ongoing) is a sound piece that replays recordings of different people reading lines spoken by robot characters just before they die in scenes taken from several popular movies. Many of these lines are recognisable given the iconic status of their sources. However, once isolated and read in a different context, many are also striking articulations of the possibility of a robot experiencing death. These recordings, replayed via loudspeakers placed throughout the space, invite us to ponder our understanding of consciousness and what it entails. By having different people give voice to these appropriated last words, Wong's sound piece also conveys the impact of these forms of culture on how we think and imagine reality, as well as our human consciousness.

Untitled water (2020) is a sculptural and conceptual work that plays on both language and materiality. Made from a resin named 'realistic water,' and often used by model makers to create miniature bodies of water in their model landscapes, the artist's sculptures are scattered throughout the exhibition space as seemingly accidental puddles. As 'realistic water' that is almost invisible, these sculptures can be easily overlooked, however, knowledge that they exist makes them unexpectedly present. Once located, their transparency and texture make details taken for granted almost inescapable. Expectations of an experience similar to gazing at actual puddles of water, become considerations on how these interventions are only as realistic as they are artificial.

Magdalen Wong (b. 1981, Hong Kong) processes material drawn from social media, advertising and film, as well as local shops and markets, into videos and installations. By examining how these found images and sounds operate as languages, the artist seeks to understand the human need to build comfort and improve efficiency. Through this practice, she also questions how this desire to create and invent affects how we evaluate, alter, and exploit our surroundings and our own selves.

Her solo shows include *Dreaming of Dying Robots and Artificial Flowers*, Make Room, Los Angeles, and *Invented Landscape*, Fresh Window Gallery, Brooklyn (2017). Her work has been

in numerous group shows including *Crush*, Para/Site, and *Dismantling the Scaffold*, Tai Kwun Contemporary, both in Hong Kong (2018); *TECHSTYLE Series 1.0: Ariadne's Thread*, Mill 6, Hong Kong, *Splotch*, Lesley Heller Workspace, New York, *S.O.S. Save Our Souls. Art for a Time of Urgencies*, EMAP sound and moving image festival, Seoul (2016); *The Part in the Story Where a Part Becomes a Part of Something Else*, Witte de With, Rotterdam (2014).



1
 Ramiro Guerreiro
Grelhagem sobre abertura pré-existente II (2021)
 Site specific-installation, black and white printing on canvas, shelf, postcards
 Courtesy the artist

2
 Magdalen Wong
Dying robots' last words (2017-ongoing)
 Sound loop
 Courtesy the artist

3
 Magdalen Wong
Untitled water (2020)
Realistic water resin
 Variable dimensions
 Courtesy the artist

4
 Magdalen Wong
Power. Performance. Prestige (2012)
 Colour video with sound, 2'39"
 Courtesy the artist

5
 Heman Chong
MAKE YOUR OWN PUBLIC LIBRARY! (2020)
 Posters on wall, color inkjet printing on paper
 Courtesy the artist and Amanda Wilkinson Gallery

6
 João Vasco Paiva
Untitled_ Sunday IV (2017)
 Acrylic on stone resin
 306 x 139 x 2 cm
 Courtesy the artist

7
 João Vasco Paiva
Untitled (Containers)_barricade remake I (2021)
 Cement, sand, sealer
 Variable dimensions
 Courtesy the artist

8
 Ramiro Guerreiro
pessoa-pano-do-pó, av. Marconi (2009)
 Video, 3' 47", color, stereo, loop
 Courtesy the artist and Lehmann + Silva Gallery

9
 Ko Sin Tung
Sunflower and safety helmet (2017)
 Inkjet print on vinyl
 138,43 x 176,53 cm
 Courtesy the artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery

10
 João Vasco Paiva
Concrete Profile Barrier - Terminal Section, Elevation + Plan (2021)
 Watercolour on paper
 160 x 113 cm
 Courtesy the artist

11
 João Vasco Paiva
Emergency Crash Gate (2021)
 Watercolour on paper
 150 x 113 cm
 Courtesy the artist

12
 João Vasco Paiva
Untitled (Containers)_barricade remake II (2021)
 Cement, sand, sealer
 Variable dimensions
 Courtesy the artist

13
 João Vasco Paiva
Typical Details of Concrete Profile Barrier to Accommodate Column of Light Pole (2021)
 Watercolour on paper
 113 x 150 cm
 Courtesy the artist

14
 Ko Sin Tung
The world of yesterday (2017)
 Double-channel video, HD, colour, no sound, 7'50"
 Courtesy the artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery

15
 Ramiro Guerreiro
entalados (2005)
 35 slides 35mm, color, loop
 Courtesy the artist and Lehmann + Silva Gallery

16
 Ko Sin Tung
P-E-R-M-A-N-E-N-T (2014)
 Single-channel video, HD, colour, no sound, 34'04"
 Courtesy the artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery

17
 João Vasco Paiva
Paisagem/Objeto LB/MRC (2016)
 Ink on wood
 152 x 122 x 30 cm
 Courtesy the artist

18
 João Vasco Paiva
Paisagem/Objeto IR (2016)
 Ink on wood
 152 x 30 x 30 cm
 Courtesy the artist

19
 João Vasco Paiva
Paisagem/Objeto ICL (2016)
 Ink on wood
 183 x 30 x 30 cm
 Courtesy the artist

20
 João Vasco Paiva
Paisagem/Objeto TM (2016)
 Ink on wood
 183 x 30 x 30 cm
 Courtesy of the artist

21
 Heman Chong
Cut Down The Middle (2020)
 Selection of the title for the show
 Courtesy the artist and Amanda Wilkinson Gallery

22
 Heman Chong
Everything (Wikipedia) (2019)
 Durational performance
 Courtesy the artist and Amanda Wilkinson Gallery
 17.4 / 11am – 12:30am
 2.5 / 11am – 12am
 22.5 / 11am – 12:30am