

GUGGENHEIM BILBAO

Press release



The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao presents on December 3, 2015

Ho Tzu Nyen: *The Cloud of Unknowing*

Ho Tzu Nyen: *The Cloud of Unknowing*

- Dates: December 3, 2015–April 24, 2016
- Curated by Lucía Agirre
- Film & Video gallery (103)

From December 3, 2015 to April 24, 2016, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is proud to present the Spanish premiere of Ho Tzu Nyen's *The Cloud of Unknowing*. This will be the sixth work featured in the Museum's Film & Video gallery, inaugurated in 2014 and dedicated to video art, video installation, and the moving image. The work was acquired in 2012 by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, through the Guggenheim UBS MAP Global Art Initiative, which is a multiyear program of exhibitions and acquisitions that builds on and reflects the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation's distinguished history of internationalism.

Ho Tzu Nyen (b. 1976, Singapore) uses the cloud to confront foundational myths and the geopolitical history of Southeast Asia. *The Cloud of Unknowing* (2014) is an immersive multichannel video installation that explores the representation of the elusive, amorphous theme of the cloud. The video, staged in theatrical atmosphere, consists of eight vignettes that unfold in a deserted, low-income public housing block in Singapore. Each of the eight vignettes revolves around a character who is unexpectedly met by an ethereal cloud that permeates their immediate surroundings. The scenes allude to historically significant works by Western masters, such as Caravaggio, Francisco de Zurbarán, Antonio da Correggio, Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini, René Magritte, and Eastern artists, such as Mi Fu and Wen Zhengming.

Created to represent Singapore at the 2011 Venice Biennale, *The Cloud of Unknowing* takes its title from one of the most influential works in English mystical literature, a late 14th-century anonymous treatise written in the Christian Neoplatonist tradition and intended to be used for contemplative prayer. The installation was also inspired by the book *Théorie du nuage. Pour une histoire de la peinture (A Theory of /Cloud/: Toward a History of Painting)*, published in 1972 by French philosopher Hubert Damisch, in which the author uses symbology and semiology to examine the significance of cloud imagery in art history.

Clouds, fog and mists, are recurring features in Ho Tzu Nyen's work. It appears in previous pieces such as *Utama: Every Name in History Is* (2003) and later ones such as *Ten Thousand Tigers* (2014), which also incorporate artistic, cultural, historical, musical, and philosophical references from Eastern and

Western culture. Describing the evolution of his interest in clouds, the artist says, "I was interested in clouds, of every shape and form, literal and metaphorical, tracking them through different paintings and iconographical traditions, through the poetry of the Romantics, to nephrology, to still-life paintings, to the paintings of Magritte and Chinese ink paintings, to cloud chambers, and so on and so forth."

The installation includes a soundtrack made up of short music clips, which the artist compiled from a selection of approximately 200 songs that make references to clouds. The work itself is a machine, in which influences and precursors are mixed and reconfigured into a polysemic narrative. Four large screens envelop the viewer in a dense, theatrical atmosphere that further enhances the sensory impact of the installation. The artist even used smoke machines to this effect when he presented the work at the Venice Biennale. For Ho Tzu Nyen, the cloud is simultaneously a metaphor for oppression and transcendence, as the multitude of audio and visual references compressed into the work gives each viewer a unique sensory experience of the work.

About Ho Tzu Nyen

Ho Tzu Nyen earned a BA in Creative Arts from the Victorian College of the Arts in Melbourne, Australia, in 2001 and an MA in Southeast Asian Studies from the National University of Singapore in 2007. He works primarily in film, video, and performance, and has recently been experimenting with environmental multimedia installations. In his oeuvre, he appropriates the structures of epic myths and uses them as discursive tools.

Ho Tzu Nyen has had solo exhibitions at various museums and galleries, such as Substation Gallery, Singapore; Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, Adelaide; Artspace, Sydney; and Mori Art Museum, Tokyo. Important group exhibitions include the 26th São Paulo Biennial (Brazil, 2004), 3rd Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale (Japan, 2005), 1st Singapore Biennial (2006), *Thermocline of Art: New Asian Waves* (ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany, 2007), 6th Asia Pacific Triennial (Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia, 2009), 5th Auckland Triennial (Auckland Art Gallery, New Zealand, 2013), *No Country* (Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2013), 10th Shanghai Biennale (Shanghai Power Station of Art, China, 2014), and 2nd Kochi-Muziris Biennale (Kochi, India, 2014). His films have been shown at the 41st Directors' Fortnight at the Cannes Film Festival (2009) and the 66th Venice International Film Festival (2009). His theatrical projects have been presented at the KunstenFestivaldesArts (Brussels, Belgium, 2006 and 2008), Theater der Welt (Mulheim, Germany, 2008), and the Wiener Festwochen (Vienna, Austria, 2014).

In 2006, Tzu Nyen presented *The Guernica Project* at the ARCO Madrid fair, a 300-piece puzzle based on Picasso's celebrated painting, and more recently, in 2011, he represented Singapore at the 54th Venice Biennale with *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

Film & Video (gallery 103)

The Film & Video gallery opened its doors in 2014 with the aim of displaying video art, video installations, and moving images, both from the Guggenheim Museums and from other international collections. Over the past year the gallery has housed audiovisual works by three internationally renowned artists. The gallery opened in March with Christian Marclay's installation *The Clock*. In June the Icelandic artist Ragnar Kjartansson's *The Visitors* was on display, from October through Mars 2015 the space hosted the video installation *The Crazyhouse (Megan, Simon, Nicky, Philip, Dee)*, *Liverpool, UK*, by Rineke Dijkstra; from Mars to July, 5 the film series *Thread Routes* produced by conceptual artist Kimsooja was on display and from July to November Shahzia Sikander's *Parallax*.

Cover image:

Ho Tzu Nyen (b. 1976, Singapore)

Still from *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 2011

Four-channel video installation, color, with sound, 17 min., with theater spotlights

Edition 1/1

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York Guggenheim UBS MAP Purchase Fund, 2012

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For further information, please contact the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao Press Department: tel. +34 944 35 90 08 and email: media@guggenheim-bilbao.es

Ho Tzu Nyen (b. 1976, Singapore)

Still from *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 2011

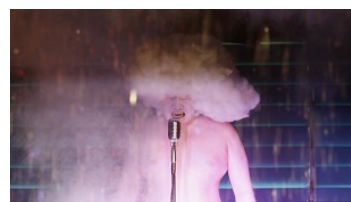
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