



BIRMINGHAM CITY
University

DIGITAL ARTS AND DESIGN

International Conference
and Exhibition

28 - 29
November 2024

Royal Orchid Sheraton
Hotel & Towers

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Review Process

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Welcome Message from the President of Silpakorn University

On behalf of Silpakorn University, I extend the warmest welcome to all participants of the International Conference and Exhibition on Digital Arts and Design, 2024, held in collaboration with Birmingham City University. We are thrilled to present an array of high-quality artworks from around the globe, alongside insightful research presentations.

This event offers a unique platform for academics and industry experts to convene in Bangkok, Thailand, and share new research perspectives in the field of art and design. As a leading art and design university in Southeast Asia, Silpakorn University is dedicated to pushing boundaries and exploring innovative techniques. We are honored to have significant contributions from our international partners, Birmingham City University and the University of Applied Arts Vienna, as well as researchers from universities in China, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea and various Southeast Asian countries.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to our distinguished keynote speakers for their invaluable speeches and to the conference committee members for their diligent efforts in ensuring a high-quality review process. Additionally, I greatly appreciate and congratulate the dedicated organizing team who have worked tirelessly behind the scenes.

Finally, I thank all participants for their commitment to research excellence and wish everyone a fruitful and stimulating conference.

Prof. Tanasait Ngawhirunpat, Ph.D.

President of Silpakorn University

Welcome Message from Birmingham City University

Birmingham City University (BCU) sends its warmest greetings to all participants of the International Conference and Exhibition on Digital Arts and Design, 2024. As we mark 20 years of partnership with Silpakorn University, we are thrilled to co-host this event, fostering the exchange of ideas and experiences that are crucial in our high-tech modern world.

Both BCU and Silpakorn University have deep roots in art and design, with BCU tracing its origins back to 1843 as The Birmingham Government School of Design. This shared heritage underscores our belief that creative practice is central to our mission. Our collaboration goes beyond academic programmes, offering students and faculty from Bangkok and Birmingham opportunities for cultural exchange, thereby enriching our partnership.

This conference therefore serves as an invaluable platform for sharing new knowledge and perspectives in the dynamic field of digital art and design. It is essential that we discuss the latest digital innovations and techniques to ensure that education and industry progress in tandem, while also contemplating future implications for art and design.

As the conference is being held in Thailand, we express our heartfelt gratitude to Silpakorn University for leading the organization of this event. I would also like to personally thank the keynote speakers, organizing committee, and peer reviewers for their dedication and hard work in making this conference a reality. Finally, I extend my best wishes to all participants for a productive and insightful conference.

Nathan Tromans

Associate Professor and Head of the College
of Art & Design, BCU

The Transformative Effects of Consuming Data – The Experiences of Digital Art and Beyond



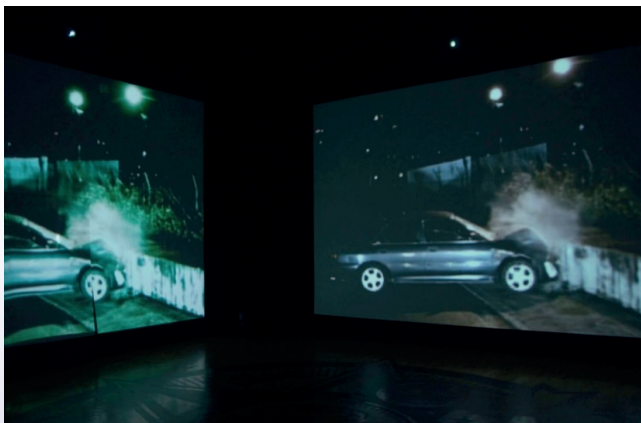
Dr. Bridget Tracy TAN

Abstract

The term 'digital' has been used frequently of late to denote an increase in technology used collaboratively with conventional media in the space of visual arts. In truth, the concept of 'digital' has been around for over a century. Inventor Herman Hollerith was the first to pioneer a form of storing and generating data 'digitally', in a value based, countable format that could transmit and translate into readable intelligence when converted. Digital technology has afforded humans the ability to record, track, transmute and consume data at increasing speeds and across a spectrum of origin and profile. Both audio and visual data, excavated from live or archived sources, are available for us to sense and appreciate, depending on our ability to transmute such data legibly and meaningfully. The practice of art, in its manifold forms, has long played a role in this process.

We travel by Spaceship and seek new experiences

In 2007, Azhanti High Lightning landed in the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, creating a spectacle born from the universe of gaming and its many mythologies. The video at the penultimate room was presented as a 360 degree 'theatre', projecting on 4 walls, footage that had been shot with, among other equipment, a 360-camera mounted on a vehicle. A specific



type of codecs and software was needed to coordinate the video presentation, which began on one wall, and successively began on the second wall, followed by the third and fourth, at staggered intervals.

Fig. 1 Car crash, screenshot of video room installation, Azhanti High Lightning, 2007

This is the age of digital.¹

The 360-degree video room was in fact limited by the projection technicalities, in distance of throw, size and aspect ratio of image. The software itself was a masterful suite to manage code sharing between production and display functions; and high-quality playback mixing sets of moving and still images as well as other AV components, including sound.² (See Fig.1)

The interactivity with the human visitor for this genre of presentation is minimal. The creation and display simulate the multi-sensory, engaging two or more senses to build on phenomenology as activated consciousness that quantifies experience. The existence of the 360-degree projection facilitates the relationship of events and the spectacle with the attempts of human consciousness to rationalize perceptions as meaningfulness. *Azhanti High Lightning* was conceptualised as the passage of birth to death, along a cataclysmic representation of disparate events and moments, briefly summarised as an epic slice through the chronicles of humanity, human history.

The digital here afforded the distillation of complex data of experience into varied components then blended to a singular presentation that envelopes the viewer. The body is positioned in space that disrupts a one-dimensional visual field, precipitating an experiential cascade from all directions. Such a tumult anticipated the immersive theatres and curated spectacles of the current day, in ways designed to overwhelm human sensory capabilities. The chaos of complex systems interacting in digitised space reveals minute transitions of occurring, unpredictable phenomena, sharing coded connections to translate, calibrate and synchronise diverse blends of light, image, and sound. The installation was a concentrated realm of data hammering away through explosive, countable, so-made synchronous release, becoming a simile of life at large, a declaration and embodiment of 'being' in the present.

The video medium as dispensed by digital technology controls both the constituent parts of experience that includes sound and visuals and the tenor in layers. How loud, how acute, how sharp, how explosive, how confrontational – these are constituent parts but ultimately coalesce into the totality of the phenomenal moment as the viewer stands inside the space. *Azhanti* spatialises time, but only as a capsule of the repeated events set inside the video. As with Kubler, "Duration thus consists of distinct actions which resist classification, because each action differs from every other action in the microstructure of happening as to time, place and event. Yet the large-scale classing of actions is continually needed for activity to seem to have purpose."³ In invoking the phenomenal, it is necessary to acknowledge the purpose only of the moment and its instructive quality toward activating consciousness. Once a visitor enters and re-enters the space repeatedly, every experience begins again, from ground zero, tabula rasa. The time-space compression compels the necessary 'epoche' warranted in the valourised phenomenal. We suspend any frame of reference inside the 'spaceship', exchange unseen gestures and dialogue with the 360-degree manifestation of visual as well as auditory force and volume against the consciousness.

¹ The exhibition *Azhanti High Lightning* was held in 2007 at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts featuring the works of Simon Birch and Wing Shya.

² Fahl, M., *The Story of WATCHOUT* Retrieved from <http://fahl.se/the-story-of-watchout/> last accessed 26 September 2024.

³ Kostelanetz, R. (1989). *Esthetics Contemporary*. Prometheus Books, p.128.



Fig. 2 *Internalised conversations*, CRT monitors, view of installation

The body as an independent agent can be unwittingly immersed in a room where interactivity is confined to sensory activation. But what if the body is compelled to adopt a position that engages a second layer in purposiveness? This extension of being in a body postured is seen also in the work 'Internalised conversations' by Farizi Noorfauzi, splicing together clips of older Malay films from the black and white era in a montage that plays on two CRT monitors installed low to the ground.⁴ Here the viewer is more actively and physically engaged, and consciousness is embodied in the physical posture of being. Farizi's intention is for the viewer to encounter the CRT monitors and squat close by, to engage with the videos. Anecdotal sources speculate that the posture of squatting originated from habits in Asian cultures derived from living in rural areas. Rice farmers and workers are one key example, where the ground is wet and sprawling. In lieu of seating, workers crouched low in a squat balancing on the calves and ankles while not resting completely on the wet ground, offering temporary relief from standing and working. To squat is also common in dusty and sandy ground, to keep way from the dirt. It was not uncommon to find people in groups in the squat position while engaging in recreational activity, such as playing games, drinking, smoking, or snacking and even gossip and repartee.

⁴ *Internalised Conversations* appeared as part of an installation of artworks by Farizi Noorfauzi, in the exhibition *How to Desire Differently*, held in 2020 at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts. Retrieved from <https://360.nafa.edu.sg/HTDD/> last accessed 25 September 2024.

The presentation of video from a digital source (itself a result of conversion from analogue recordings) provides greater precision in the quality of the audio and atmosphere. There is no noise distraction and lesser distortion, situating the CRT clips as immersive and almost meditative. Squatting low to the ground, we physically inhabit the old world, 'internalising' the conversations, drifting on jump cuts with footage and blackouts interspliced. (See Fig 3. for sample footage still) The abruptness offers an intensification of the experience, while the quality of the conversation and the rhythmic pace provide a sense of somewhere familiar and stable.

“Music”: a proto-faculty in meaning making

Anthropologists, linguists and philosophers have not been able to agree on whether the genetic disposition to music predates the genetic code for language abilities in humans. Instead, ongoing studies continue to debate the definition of what constitutes music and its relationship to early manifestations of such vocal and tonal expressiveness with humans. There are, however, compelling studies that suggest, as Herzog proposed, “a patterning of sound” related to pitch, melody, timbre for instance, could demonstrate this critical importance in early human vocalisation and the importance of sound to creativity and to meaning making.⁷ Merleau-Ponty's writings on phenomenology and music have suggested that manifestation of 'music' (the patterning of sound if we use Herzog's definition) itself does not constitute the meaning as signifier to signified; notes on a page cannot automatically presume to

mean whatever sound is produced from it being played. Instead, reading Merleau-Ponty it is conceivable that the lived bodily experience must engender the meaningfulness based on a concept that arises from say the 'performative', between the signifier and the signified. If we invent a new language of sound never before ascribed specific and known values, it can be argued that the semiotic process becomes embedded in its own manifestation of the performative. It is conceivable that the sound itself has no meaning but the process of how it has come to be made manifest.



Fig 4. Photo inside the Haw Kham, Mae Fah Luang Art and Cultural Park (image author's own).

⁷ Levman B. G. (1992). The Genesis of Music and Language. *Ethnomusicology*, 36(2), 147–170. <https://doi.org/10.2307/851912>

In the realm of music and the use of sound, digital technologies have transformed the way we as conscious beings are able to consume data and the experience with which we process the said data into meaningful interludes. During the recent Thailand Biennale held in Chiang Rai,⁸ Vietnamese artmaker Nguyen Trinh Thi installed 'Soundless', a haunting but sonorously beautiful work created from a combination of live mechanisms and digital processes. In the อุทยานศิลปวัฒนธรรมแม่ฟ้าหลวง (ไร่แม่ฟ้าหลวง) Mae Fah Luang Art and Cultural Park, the Haw Kham or Golden Pavilion (see Fig. 4), mirrored a sacred setting for the installation of a dismantled ranat ek ระนาดเอก (Piphat วงปี่พาทย์ xylophone) and flute with a mechanical apparatus attached to a digital source tracking real-time and historical data over 70 years in two sets of the rise and fall of the waters in the Mekong river. Sonification of data is not new; since digital technology has rapidly advanced and innovated, we have seen scientists calibrate and make audible, among other things, the sounds of planets and outer space. Nguyen Trinh Thi's piece is an intelligent and sensitive translation of data from capture (employing hydrophones and recording devices), to documentation and visualisation (creating graphs and lines) to transcription (as musical notes and staff) to performance (mechanical dispatch). Part of this is done using computer coding, providing algorithms that furnish the 'instructions' with which all the parts can accomplish the set tasks.(Fig. 5)

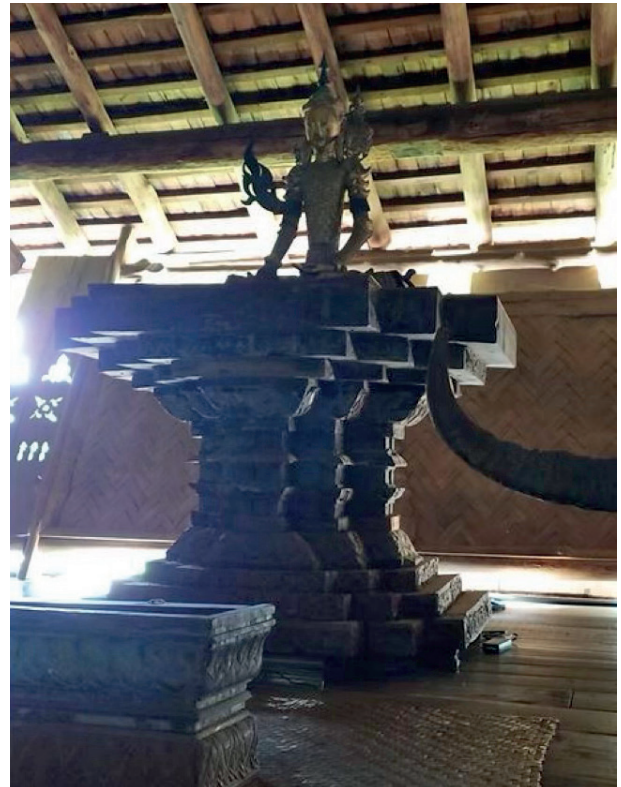


Fig 5. Screen capture, display and concealed device mechanically playing in background (video author's own)

In the Haw Tham, the instruments are rudimentary in action, taking simple instructions to execute tasks, creating an audio that resembles the random, but is in fact factual and corresponding to the rhythms and energies that are of life itself. The interactivity of this digital realm may not directly engage the human viewer as the 'interactive' component is the live recording of phenomena in nature, minute changes and shifts in time and forces: the Mekong River as it flows and alters clearly with careless human acts. The act of transcribing and performing the 'data' results in sonorous beats not unlike an ancient heart; while the flute whistles at random, not unlike the whispers of a bygone by prevalent spirit. Technology and the digital afford us multiple, profound, interpretative layers of experience not otherwise possible through conventional means.

⁸ The third edition of the Thailand Biennale, *Thailand Biennale Chiang Rai 2023, The Open World* Retrieved from <https://www.thailandbiennale.org/en/> last accessed 26 September 2024.

Alternative Worlds as One World, All Times, All Space

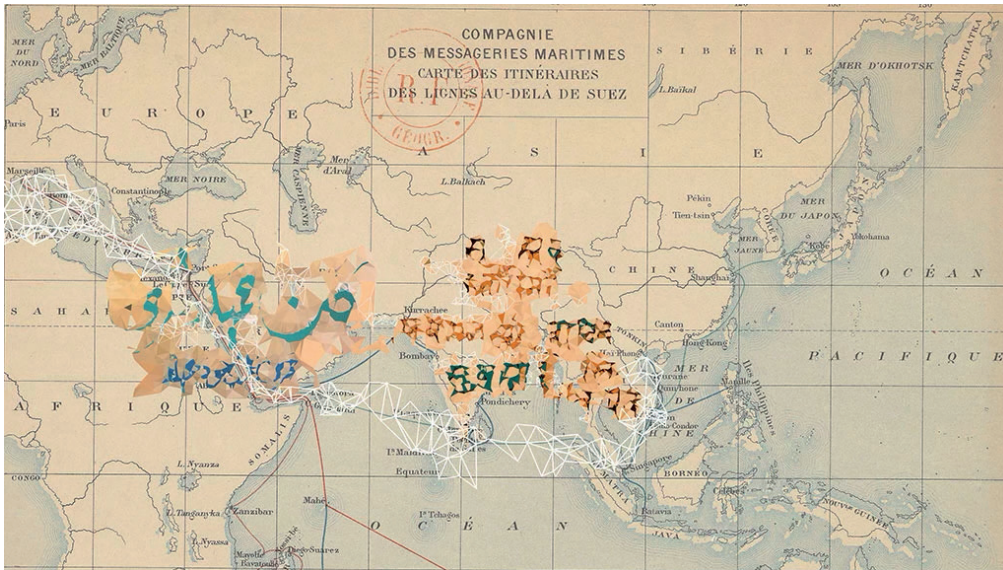


Fig 6. Quang Lam, *East to West Meta map*, 2023.

In 2023, the Vietnamese visual art collective, XEM, assembled a group exhibition celebrating a decade of practice and diversity. Founding member, photographer, and multimedia artmaker, Quang Lam, envisaged a conceit of the continental sojourn, pushing bodies from peninsula to plateau, from canyon to coast. Meta-Far-East, as Quang Lam titled his project, reflects on the nomenclature of what is the 'Far-East' as a specific noun hyphenate for an exotic place beyond the Western world, an era specific term that invokes the mysteries of undiscovered territories outside of protocol, outside the limits of our apparent knowledge to date. 'Meta' for Quang Lam, denotes in his own words, [that the] “virtual environment cannot be differentiated from the real world.”

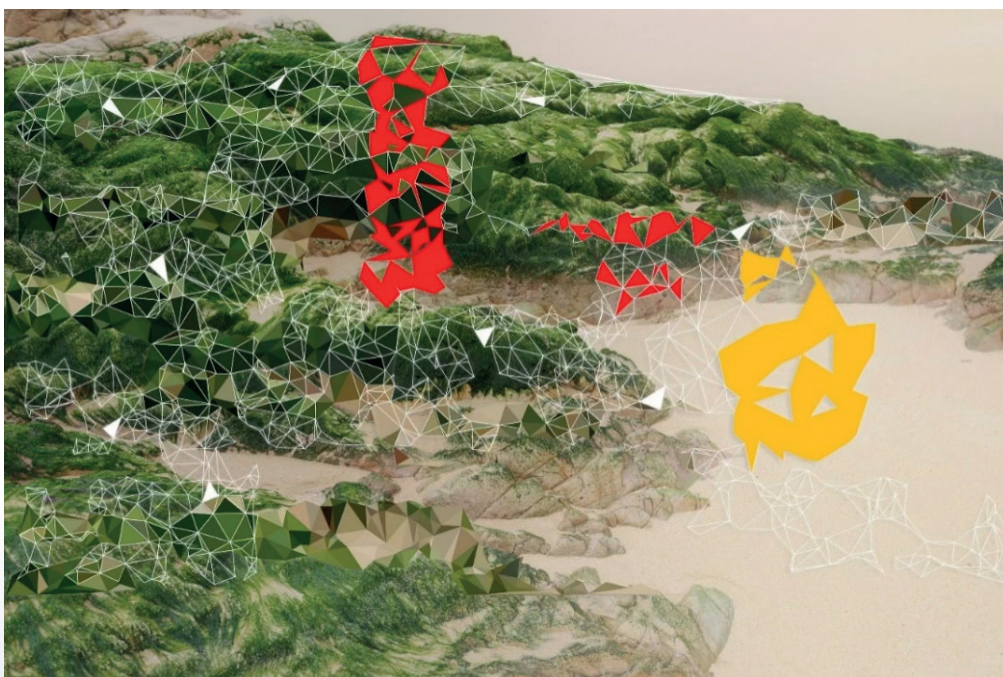


Fig 7. Quang Lam, *Terra Utopia* (series), 2023.

Using digital technology, Quang Lam's still images are an intriguing discourse in mathematic tessellation. A plane is broken into 'vertex sets', with geometric shapes that meet taut line to line with no overlap. Tessellation also demands a repeated pattern, where the form can be generated autonomously based on the countable, formulaic renderings. In this respect, tessellation as a concept resembles the digital and binaries in code, reduction of signals into predictable and repeatable patterns using only binaries (1 and 0). The tessellated patterns yield suggestive shapes that Quang Lam fills to propose written characters from various languages, including Chinese and Jawi. Indeed, 3500 BC, when cuneiform developed as likely the first writing system to represent multiple languages, the 'alphabet' constituted rhomboids, tetrahedrons, cones and discs, among other shapes that matched the objects used in cross-border trading activities. The visualization of tessellated form into a script is not far-fetched: construing the rocks and earth as currency, as tokens, in human exchange, the building blocks of civilization coming to life by staking claims on our material existence. It is data that reads backwards in time, if we invoke cuneiform script, and forwards into the unknown future, as the computer releases calculated algorithms into space. (See Fig. 7)

The acknowledgement of recognisable signifiers locates the 'self' inside this vortex of all time, all space. There is no spaceship or physical embodiment to rationalise our sense of self and what we are experiencing. The visualisation of data is the physical incarnate, brokering meaning-making by seeding doubt instead of providing assurances. The meta experience is to move outside the realm of familiarity and into a new environment in which the self proposes through agency.

Quang Lam emphasises the point of this meta-experience by creating a video that references the computer game he has developed: Air Skylen Crash Underwater. In the video, he demonstrates part of the gaming sequencing where population data is computed into pulsating 3D graphs, superimposed onto the geographic landmasses of specific cities, including Port Said, Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City), Colombo and Singapore. Digital data input is rendered with 3D plots and coded to produce a visible display (as seen in the screen capture below in Fig. 8).



Fig 8. Quang Lam, screenshot, *Meta-Far-East*, video projection accompanying *Zen Garden*, 2023.

In the game, programming language is used to code different components in the gaming engine to render how piloting an aircraft for rescue purposes will trigger the 3D plots that are responsible for calculating population density, global warming, and rising water levels. Although it is only a game, the real-time interface is a fast-paced exchange that demonstrates how decisions and actions correspond directly to changes in 'real time'. Unlike a typical RPG, there is no gradual layering of inhabiting characters and understanding motives and plots: the plot is that the planet is drowning in a cataclysmic flood and we must act to slow down this destruction. There is no greater agency than to embody the sensible exchange through playing the game: visualising how decisions made result in visible consequences that are not so far off, manifesting a future not so inconceivable in the contemporary Anthropocene.

The digital coalesces history, horticulture, culture, science... and art

In 538, the Asuka period came to be in Japan and was to last for more than 150 years. Around this time, the introduction of Buddhism thrived alongside a growing interest in せきてい sekitei, the famous rock garden more commonly referred to today as the Zen Garden. By the 12th century, the sekitei was crystallised as a place of contemplation and reflection, specifically for the Samurai as action men to retreat to, modelling its current day inheritor of the Zen Garden.

Unifying his conceit, Quang Lam translates the 3D plots of data from sea levels even over brief periods. The 3D plots are rendered as large white tiles, set to join in a tessellated brotherhood, to create his version of sekitei, the Meta-Zen-Garden. (Fig. 9)



Fig 9. Quang Lam, *Meta-Zen-Garden* (foreground), 2024.

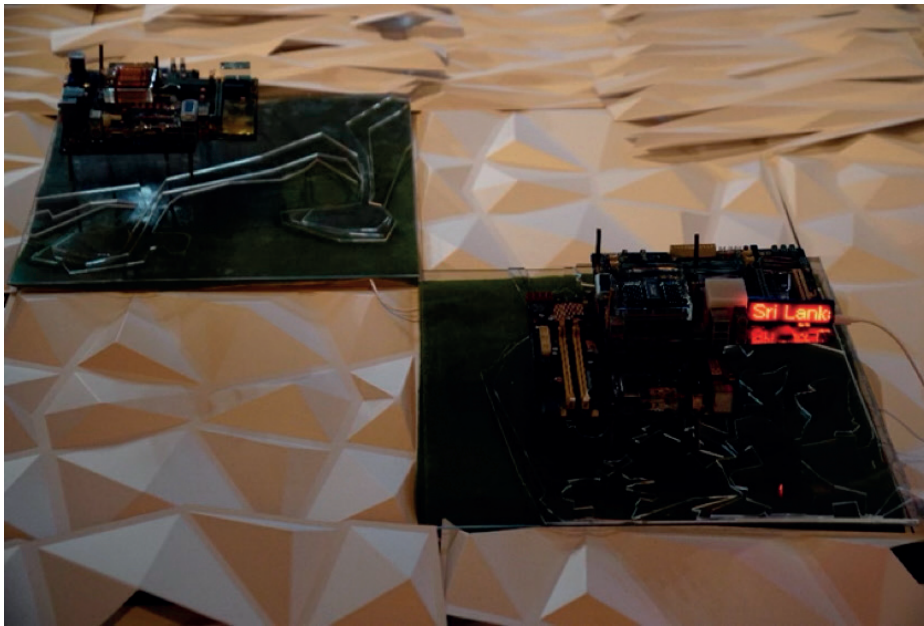


Fig. 9a *Meta-Zen-Garden* (detail), 2024.

Of the sekitei or the zen garden concept, Japanese architect and architectural historian, Terunobu Fujimori has said there are two characteristics that can be gleaned. The “first is a spiritual heaven in the form of paradise (Amitabha's Pure Land), and the other is a miniaturisation of the country as a garden.”⁹ Zen Garden proponents take their craft seriously: there is no meaning for its own sake in the garden. You are there simply to experience it, to reflect upon it. Zen garden designer Shunmyo Masuno has said that the urban world is cluttered yet regulated (temperature in concrete buildings or dwellings) and there it is difficult to “sense changes in time and season.”¹⁰ By conceiving of this Meta-Zen-Garden, Quang Lam has digitally reimaged the construction of consciousness to be made manifest as that in the sekitei. The data has been transformed into physical renderings that simulate meditative stimuli, exploring time and space, refining and attuning the senses toward the greater and ambient forces often underestimated by humans in the material world.

The digital comes full circle, as a means of processing and reintroducing the known and structured world to us as strangers struggling with purpose and meaningfulness. In all three works, with Farizi's internalised conversations, Nguyen Trinh Thi's *Soundless* and Quang Lam's *Meta-Far-East*, data from the real world is ingested into the digital realm and fed back in layered constructions that are interconnected and remind us, that we are inextricably interconnected. Not just as a kind of spiritual tie, but by the simple gestures, behaviours collectively a gestalt toward the life of the universe. Its survival is contingent on the agency of sentience created through a 'digital' architecture that contemporary artmakers manifest employing tools and technology. Yet the philosophy derives from the ancients, and the practical course of established scientific gestures such as Newton's Third Law.¹¹

⁹ Locher, M. & Fujimori, T. (2020). *Zen garden design : mindful spaces by Shunmyo Masuno, Japan's leading garden designer*. North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle Publishing.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Whenever one object exerts a force on another object, the second object exerts an equal and opposite force on the first. Retrieved from <https://www1.grc.nasa.gov/beginners-guide-to-aeronautics/newtons-laws-of-motion/#newtons-third-law-action-reaction>, last accessed 26 September 2024.

With the advent of AI and the increasing prevalence of computing and the digital, there has been a concern that we are losing touch with humanity and perhaps compromising on specific human traits when we engage in our correspondence with the world, with how we work, how we interact and how we live, even how we might die. Our experiences build on a persistent and reinvented sense of self beyond the world of established systems and science. This paper proposes that a sensitive approach in applying digital practicum towards artistic creations will, in fact, remind us that self and human agency prevail. Like if we imagined ourselves in Quang Lam's Meta-Zen-Garden, sensing the minute changes of time and season, articulating consciousness toward the reality of being in the universe and purposefully acknowledging how the fragility of human life and all the things we value, are only equal to the profound truth in human agency. Transcribing our very existence in the metaverse, as a portal to humility and ultimately, wisdom.

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Notes from the Author

Bridget Tracy Tan, PhD

Senior Director, Institute of Southeast Asian Arts & Art Galleries

Academic Advisor (Southeast Asian Art)

Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts Singapore

- I. This paper is submitted as an original work in research to the “Digital Arts and Design: International Conference and Exhibition,” jointly hosted by the Silpakorn International Centre, Silpakorn University International College, and Birmingham City University, United Kingdom.
- II. All images are rights-free with the permission of the respective authors where required.
- III. The exhibitions of *Azhanti High Lightning* (2007), *How to Desire Differently* (2020) and *XEM 5 Friends 10 Years* (2023) were held at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts as part of commissioned and collaborative projects involving the artists.
- IV. The work *Soundless* by Nguyen Trinh Thi was encountered and experienced personally by the author at Thailand Biennale held in Chiang Rai for its 3rd iteration, in December 2023.