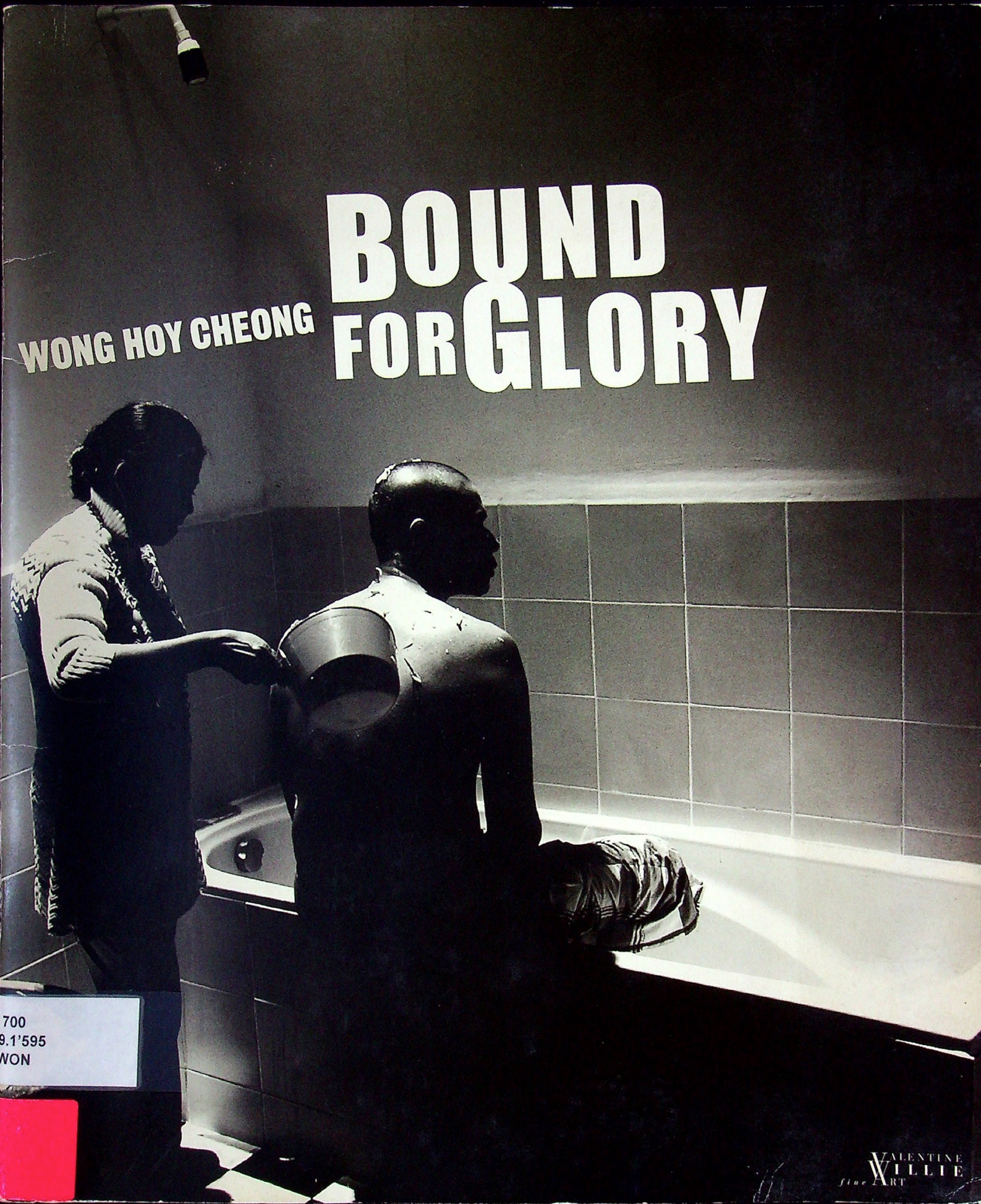

EXHIBITION DATES

9 TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2006

FRONT COVER:

CHRONICLES OF CRIME: MANDI BUNGA/BATH OF FLOWERS
2006
DIGITAL PRINT ON KODAK PROFESSIONAL PAPER
84 X 120 CM

INTRODUCTION

The exhibition *Bound for Glory* is a homecoming of sorts. It is Wong Hoy Cheong's first showing of a completely new body of work in Malaysia since 1996 and the landmark *Of Migrants & Rubber Trees* at the National Art Gallery. It is a surprising venture, in terms of both theme and strategy.

To date, Wong Hoy Cheong's work has been characterised by its engagement with history, or more accurately, the forces and phenomena which have shaped and continue to shape our reading of history. An investigation which began with Malaysia's own post-colonial situation, its migrant history, its socio-political makeup, its crises of identity, has in more recent years extended its purview. Commissioned projects in Austria, the UK and China, for example, have engendered a series of 'appropriations' of other people's histories – imagining an Austrian colonial past under a Malaysian empire, re-enacting a slice of the history of transatlantic relations through the eyes of an American equine celebrity in a Liverpool hotel, reviving the memory of Muslim traders entering China through the port of Guangzhou.

Bound for Glory makes no such direct references to the cultural and political tensions on which so much of Wong's work has thrived. Rather it probes the more gelatinous substance of a 'psycho-social fabric' of Malaysia and, by extension, a wider contemporary reality in which an excess of information, and the breaking of so many taboos, have led to some loss of comfortable moral bearings. As such, the works in the exhibition are particularly complex and ambiguous, while focusing keenly on effect, on immediate sensory response.

The theme of 'glory' is divided into three parts – *Chronicles of Crime*, a series of staged photographs and studies, *Suburbia: Bukit Beruntung, Subang Jaya*, a video work and related drawings, and *Anthem*, a medley of national anthems welcoming visitors to the exhibition. The first plays off cinematic stylizations of criminal violence using famous local murderers and victims, the second portrays two suburban landscapes, one abandoned, one prospering, while the third element nudges the concept of national pride. 'Glory' here for Wong is ironic, he means to explore the ambiguity of notions of ambition, success and pride in the collective imagination.

There are clear dichotomies laid out – dark, criminal, underground elements versus suburbia with its middle-class aspirations to security and prosperity; perpetrators and victims; failure and success. Yet if we examine our responses to what is presented, the lines are unclear – crime is sensationalized, entertaining; we proceed through busy shopping malls and decaying streets insulated by a cheery soundtrack. Glory is a veneer, darkness and wrongdoing are vindicated by glamour, real experience is made banal. Echoing in the back of our consciousness are the glorious propagandist songs of proud nations.

The Malaysia Wong 'returns' to with this exhibition is strikingly of the present. The question he seems to ask here is no longer 'Where do we come from?' or 'What are we?' but pointedly, 'Where are we going?', what are we bound for?

Beverly Yong

DARKNESS RISING
By Carmen Nge

Murder. Armed robbery. Rape. Abduction. Snatch theft. We see it in the papers and hear about it in the news. We take extra security measures and circulate emailed safety tips to our friends. We live in gated communities and lock ourselves in. We fear.

Crime. It's taking over the urban sprawl, ricocheting out of control. CCTVs. Vigilantism. Rakan Cop. Political machinations designed to calm us down.

We live in a world sustained by contradictions. We are aghast at the spiraling crime rate yet we continue to consume virtual crime in huge doses – in movies, video games, media. CSI. 999. Se7en. PS2 and X-box interactive crime simulations. Crime novels.

We fetishize criminals as much as we vilify them. In the West, Jack the Ripper and Charles Manson are celebrated figures, propelled to cult status. In our own backyard, we have Mona Fandey and Botak Chin – icons in the popular imagination, fodder for *kedai mamak*-talk, and the stuff of myth and legend.

Bound for Glory is an exploration of crime, heroes and cityscapes, using a combination of video, black and white photography, drawings and installation. This exhibition is only a slight shift away from Wong's usual interrogation of Malaysian socio-political history, which he still mines with a sardonic whimsy. ***Bound for Glory*** is anchored by two sets of different artworks: ***Chronicles of Crime***, comprising a series of ten black and white digital photographs, and ***Suburbia: Bukit Beruntung, Subang Jaya***, a two-channel video projection accompanied by a set of drawings.

Chronicles of Crime exploits our fascination and obsession with homegrown serial killers and sexy victims, but without judgment

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Film noir, at its height in the 1940s, emerged out of a post-war American context marked by urbanization, women's entry into the workplace in increasingly large numbers, and a paranoia about crime due to changing racial demographics in the cities. With severe censorship restrictions at the time, filmmakers devised an ingenious strategy: create and embellish a universe filled with sex, greed and intrigue but contain these controversial elements at a film's end through death or nihilism. Censors were satisfied that the moral universe remained intact while audiences savoured every pleasurable second of the unfolding of a seedy, corrupt world with shady, hard-boiled characters.

Contemporary Malaysia is marked by a similar tension: we want to prevent crime but we are suckers for titillating crime scenes and climactic showdowns. Just like in the movies.

Chronicles of Crime exploits our fascination and obsession with homegrown serial killers and sexy victims, but without judgment. Just as there can be no light without darkness – complementary opposites that reinforce each other's limits and boundaries – there are no clear-cut good or bad guys. The series of ten enlarged digital photographs is a play off this visual schematic, appropriating the conventions of two genres that derive their structure and essence from the meticulous manipulation of light: film noir, and black and white photography.

Chronicles of Crime is loosely based on oral history and archival research of legendary Malaysian criminals Botak Chin, a local Robin Hood; Mona Fandey, a *bomoh* and murderer; Kalimuthu, a trigger-happy folk hero; and beautiful, young victims of crime, Canny Ong and Noritta Samsuddin – women with hidden secrets. The photographs re-enact archetypal scenes of crime; some visual details are derived from news reports but more than a few reference famous Renaissance art works.

Whether painstakingly inking intricate pseudo-real maps of an imagined hybrid colonial space (***Map of Buckingham Street and its Vicinity***, 2002) or carefully constructing human heads out of dried skins of fruits and vegetables (***Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Skins***, 1998-2000), Wong's oeuvre has always been synonymous with a persistent, meticulous attention to detail. ***Chronicles of Crime*** is no different.

Wong spent months researching and preparing for his photo shoots, which were completed in a matter of days. He constructed maquettes to help him position light sources, cameras and shadows. With erratic monsoon weather, a limited budget and a team of models, actors and crew, he could not afford reshoots. Like Hitchcock, he had to be precise.

Such clinical precision is undoubtedly manifest in the mise-en-scène of each photograph. Adopting the perspectival depth of Leonardo da Vinci but without the twelve disciples, Wong recreates ***The Last Supper*** from behind bars. A remorseful figure resembling Botak Chin, seated at a glowing table, is about to tuck in to his final meal of KFC, his right hand upturned – a subtle nod to Christ's stigmata. In ***Asphyxiation***, a female victim is given an updated crucifixion, sans the blood. Bound and tethered to the bedpost with wires and cables, her body becomes the site of the interplay between religious symbolism and sado-masochism – apt bedfellows indeed. Michelangelo's ***Pietà*** is similarly transposed onto ***Point Blank***, an assiduously composed shot that contemporizes the iconic image of Jesus in his mother's arms. Here we see a man kneeling next to the bloody body of his dead brother. His gaze is transfixed, his expression unfathomable. To his left is the disproportionately smaller figure of the assassin, seemingly pointing his weapon elsewhere.

Such awkward, spatially skewed compositions that mislead using ridiculous proportions (***Mandi Bunga/ Bath of Flowers***), impossible scenarios (***Carpark***) and historical anachronisms (***The Magnificent Three***), only serve to emphasize the mythic quality of both crimes and criminals. Wong calls his photographs *tableaux vivants*; they are recreations of visual artifacts appropriated from the media and aestheticized.

By so doing, the artist introduces distance in the relationship between media-hyped events and those who consume their sensationalism. We become less enamoured with historical accuracy and the facts of each crime. Instead, we become complicit in a process of glorification and mythification – whether through Bollywood glam (*Rooftop*), Hong Kong glitz (*Sawmill*) or Hollywood gore (*Burial*). Not forgetting film noir homage, of course: *Swimming Pool* is an elegant rip-off from the opening scene of *Sunset Boulevard*.

It is impossible to disengage the term 'glory' from its religious associations. Webster's definition adds a layer of aesthetic sheen; glory also means 'dazzling illumination' and 'great beauty and splendour'. The word conjures up images of halos and 'rings of light' – iconic emblems of the divine. But just as Jesus' crucifixion was a prolepsis to his symbolic glory, it also bound him to a chain of events he did not wish upon himself (Matthew 26:39). The word 'bound' in the exhibition's title references this double entendre – on the one hand, a criminal's actions underscores the inevitability of his/her infamy and on the other, such actions constrict his/her ability to travel a different path to salvation.

Where there is crime, there are victims. *Bound for Glory* positions the middle class duo of Noritta and Canny as foils to the working class tripartite of Mona Fandey, Botak Chin and Kalimuthu. The two groups never meet in real life but in this exhibition, which references such historical figures using their doppelgängers, their visual interrelation in the exhibition is not coincidental. Crime is given media attention only when it infiltrates the idyll of suburbia: Bangsar and Sri Hartamas, where Canny and Noritta were killed. Yet, are the spaces inhabited by criminals and victims so different?

In 18th and 19th century London, suburbia was space appropriated by the bourgeoisie for their own capitalist consumption. Formerly the enclave of the working class masses during the industrial revolution, suburbia was stripped of its image as a place of sin, crime and debauchery, and subsequently gentrified. Desiring proximity to the economic vibrancy of the city without abandoning the stately wealth of their country homes, the bourgeoisie re-envisioned the suburbia of the working class as a utopia of their own.

In his video work, *Suburbia: Bukit Beruntung, Subang Jaya*, Wong excavates twin conceptions of suburbia: one successful (Subang Jaya) and the other, a failure (Bukit Beruntung). The 'hill of profits', as is the latter's name, nary lives up to expectations. A sprawling ghost town of derelict shop lots, vacant houses and desolate factory shells, Bukit Beruntung is a space of unrealized ambition – utopia overrun with lalang and left to rot. The wail of Woody Guthrie's harmonica and the folksy-Western rhythms of *Railroad Blues* is an ambient track that is curiously upbeat and energetic – a jarring juxtaposition to the landscape of premature urban decay. (In an unexpected serendipitous twist, Woody Guthrie is also the subject of a 1976 film biopic entitled, *Bound for Glory*.)

Contrast this location with the bustling suburbia of Subang Jaya (literally, 'creeping plant of success'), where a never-ending parade of lights illuminates the corridors of consumption. Like diamonds in the sky, these lights are emblems of hallowed success. But the red carpet also ushers us into a location cut up and demarcated by highways and flyovers, where living and shopping occur in isolated spaces. The idyll of suburbia is the success of alienation – a city built for profit, not for people. Bert Kaempfert's chirpy tune, *Swinging Safari*, is ubiquitous muzak befitting shopping malls and suburban sprawls.

Filmed from the vantage point of a wheelchair and a remote control toy car, Wong's two-channel video flirts with the speed of mobility and its anti-thesis, the deprivation of unrestricted movement. The wheelchair sequence was originally intended to emphasize how unfriendly the city was to the disabled. However, due to the video being sped up, the stereotypically sluggish wheelchair zips along in the right frame, navigating and maneuvering with fluid ease. The two slipper-encased feet focus our eyes to a mobile median whereas the camera atop the toy car captures a wider array of images that unfold less rapidly along a low horizon line. We are invited to see suburbia with fresh eyes, unencumbered by the usual urban accoutrements.

Whither crime in this cushy landscape of middle-class security? Is it hidden or repressed? Lurking in parking lots and along quiet residential sidewalks? Is the illusion of safety intact, bolstered by politically-motivated assurances of frequent police patrols and newly acquired CCTVs? After all, it is easy to believe that the criminal element resides in the peripheries of success, voyeurs of a lifestyle they are unable to enjoy.

The idyll of suburbia is the success of alienation – a city built for profit, not for people.

In the 1960s, during the heyday of pop art, Andy Warhol predicted that everyone will have their 15 minutes of fame. Visitors to Wong's exhibition will feel this palpable sense of being connected to something radiant and dazzling. They will understand what it means to experience glory, to be king and queen for a day.

In our media-saturated age of reality TV and sensationalism, individual glory is finally conceivable. Ordinary Malaysians vie to be idols and icons of a new generation; this is popular patriotism at its finest. Ultimately, whether via criminal pathways or political byways, aesthetic ruptures or media fissures, all Malaysians now have an entry point to celebrity.

Carmen Nge is regular contributor to Off the Edge magazine, usually writing on art and books. She is an assistant professor at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, teaching English, journalism, and critical thinking. She obtained her PhD in English and American Literature from Brandeis University in the USA, where she also taught film, gender and cultural studies.

THE THIRD DEGREE:
WONG HOY CHEONG ON CRIME, GLORY, FUN AND MIDDLE-CLASS MALAISE
in conversation with Joselina Cruz

Transfigured, from this kindling hath foretold
A torch of inextinguishable light;
The Other gains a confidence as bold;
And thus they foil their enemy's despite.
The penal instruments, the shows of crime,
Are glorified while this once-mitred pair
Of saintly Friends the "murtherer's chain partake,
Corded, and burning at the social stake:"
Earth never witnessed object more sublime
In constancy, in fellowship more fair
(from *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* (1821-22), William Wordsworth)

Joselina Cruz: This particular project sees you continuing with your interest in working with historical documents. Although this time around your choice of historical material is perhaps less precious.

Wong Hoy Cheong: I think that in the past the kind of histories I played with were more authoritative histories – whether these be the document of the book, the map or the dictionary, while now the material I've chosen can be seen as anti-authoritative histories.

I chose three murderers and three victims. It was easy choosing the murderers as historically, or at least to my mind, they were important anti-heroes, infamous, legendary murderers and criminals

JC: In fact this time around, similarly perhaps with *Re: Looking* you've turned into a fabulist, a mythmaker – with you extending the idea of your chosen subjects, filtering these through your own sensibilities. Almost that of an author perpetuating histories... so my question, how did you choose your subjects?

WHC: In the project *Chronicles of Crime* I chose three murderers and three victims. It was easy choosing the murderers as historically, or at least to my mind, they were important anti-heroes, infamous, legendary murderers and criminals: Botak Chin, Mona Fandey, Kalimuthu. What really interested me, even though I didn't know very much about them, were the number of stories that were already floating around each of these characters... Botak Chin was known as the Robin Hood of Malaysia. His story goes back to the 70s. Mona Fandey's and Kalimuthu's stories are from the early 90s. Mona Fandey was a *bomoh*, a spiritualist, a healer. Kalimuthu was the trigger-happy gangster. Elements of myth surrounded them and their circumstances. The more I found out about them, I realized that every person I spoke with had their own version of their stories, particular anecdotes – details from how one victim loved to eat guava, to a murderer asking for *wanton mee* (noodles) for his last supper. Thus in terms of selecting, it wasn't difficult. I selected those whose circumstances and characters had produced myths around their person.

With the victims I chose three: the boy in the swimming pool, the woman in the car park, and another photograph of a woman tied to a bed. And already two of the women had stories being woven around them. They were beautiful women, middle-class women with careers, a lifestyle which the middle class could identify with. The events surrounding the deaths of these individuals incited talk about the circumstance of their deaths. They were beautiful women with secrets. A lot of moments were never uncovered, while investigations were being undertaken. For example, during the period of one of the kidnappings, a lot of opportunities for escape were presented, but were never taken. Such unresolved moments, generated questions (regarding her abduction that led to her death), created a sensation around the events. This was the same with the other victim – a young boy. In the original story, he was studying in Malaysia from abroad. He was a Chinese national, and again there were unresolved stories surrounded the boy's death. Was the boy abused? Why was he killed? Why was he dumped in the swimming pool? For each of these stories, there were a lot of uncertainties. The speculation that surrounds these events, for me, are part of our notions of middle-class life.

JC: The creation then, of each photographic scene was based on...

WHC: Hearsay. I wanted the element of hearsay to be very strong for this project.

JC: Did you want to create a work which was strongly based on oral history? Perhaps in strong opposition to the authority that weighed your past projects.

WHC: Hearsay and anecdotes were actually the more important elements than the actual research. For example, for the shoot-out in the sawmill, I did not use the sawmill warehouse where the actual confrontation took place, but staged it on stacks of wood, like an altar.

JC: Did you consciously choose characters and settings that would and could, in a certain fashion be 'glorified'? Would you think, for example, that certain 'redeeming' qualities were present in these individuals that you've chosen to further present? Particularly those whose stories continue to be perpetuated in people's imaginations?

WHC: Certainly. The fascination with murders permeates the imagination of people and to some extent raises them above the 'reality' of the events. Botak Chin was seen as the Robin Hood of Malaysia, stealing from the rich and gave to the poor. One of the things sensationalized in the newspapers, just before he was hanged was his statement of him being a non-worthy person, so much so that he asked for his ashes to be thrown into the drain. There is a sense of regret, a sense of drama. A sense of redemption was also part of this.

JC: Would you think that such moments perpetuate the glorification of evil, perhaps? And that such sensationalist work doesn't allow for a critical distance?

WHC: Yes there is that too. But in my work, I have taken a sort of expediency with regard to sensationalism and used this. The criminal mind becomes central in the creation of myth and glorification. In fact I consciously replicated sensationalism without creating clear critical distance. How important is it to have a once-removed objectivity? I am not writing a critical paper on the exploitation or sensationalism that media creates around such events and individuals. But questions did occur parallel to the project as it unfolded: there was the issue of aestheticizing crime, violence – what does that do to the individuals I've chosen? To

those who view the pieces? To myself, even? And what if I make these works so aesthetically beautiful, how would people react to all the violence? I've always been interested in that sort of duality. In some of my earlier works, for example when I made the islands [*Exile Islands*, 1999], having them look like little gems rising out of a vast ocean of blue was important to me. If you could enjoy the aesthetic experience of this, that was good enough. But if you were to probe deeper and look at them as exile islands, and read the text, you would become aware of the disjuncture between the beautiful surface and the actuality.

JC: Do you think that a piece can get so aestheticized that the history it comes from can actually get erased? They may even look, or appear so far removed from their own history that each work becomes acknowledged just for its own presence.

WHC: I have shown these pictures to a variety of people, from media people to an aunty mopping the floor, as I wanted different responses. The images of the victims were generally disturbing for the women. Perhaps such reactions were stronger because when talking about victims, there is always that possibility that it could be you. Due to recent events, where women have been abducted from carparks, the idea of walking through a carpark has come to have an uncomfortable resonance for them especially. Meanwhile, other people see *Carpark* as a beautiful reconstruction of an event, like a fashion shoot. On the other hand, when looking at the photographs of the murderers or criminals, the response was entirely different, as there was no personal identification; the criminal is never you, never us.

there was the issue of aestheticizing crime, violence – what does that do to the individuals I've chosen? To those who view the pieces?

JC: Your photographs for me appeared somehow nostalgic – a representative recreation of the Malaysian city, much like Atget's photographs of Paris which captured Paris' empty streets. In a sense, despite the fact that your photographs have people in them, there is this feeling of emptiness. A certain absence hangs over each one.

WHC: Perhaps it is the absence of the spectator. But more so perhaps because I wanted the photographs to have a feeling of film noir, which was one of the first aesthetic appropriations I made when I started this project. Film noir was based on film expressionism which began in the 1930s; this was during the Depression. But classic films like *Sunset Boulevard* emerged in the 40's. This period brought about the idea of the femme fatale, as well as the aestheticization of crime because this could not be presented otherwise in media at that point in history. So if you look at film noir there's no gore. Everything is just dark, achieved with low lighting and budget, always framing very aesthetic moments of death and the events prior to that. But I want to take this to an experiential level by creating a space which also exemplifies the basic tenets of film noir, light and dark. I'm immersing the audience within a sensorial experience beyond a visual level.

JC: Since we are talking about your creation of a site of experience, can we talk a bit about your idea of placing national anthems into the space when we first enter.

WHC: I see anthems as representative of state ideology, national anthems can conjure large emotions in people. At moments when one requires a sense of a collective identity, a national anthem stirs up such identification. Whether such emotions come out as positive or negative doesn't matter. For example if you hear *Deutschland über alles* (as the German anthem is informally known), it stirs up different notions, with its call for Deutschland over everything else, above all. They stir up notions of the past, as opposed to notions of something more progressive, perhaps.

The twenty-plus anthems I will be using are those basically with march rhythms, those that build up to climaxes. Specifically, there is the Soviet anthem that doesn't exist anymore, the *Internationale*, which was the Communist anthem, the American, British, Malaysian, Indonesian anthems, etc.

JC: Perhaps we can talk about your ideas of glory.

WHC: The first notion I get of glory is almost religious, because there is the glorious kingdom, the glory of God. No! I'm not Christian. Although I am quite familiar with the bible as a text. Then also there's smoke and light, and all these grandiose images that come with the idea of Glory.

JC: Then, there is also death – in Christian belief, glory is attainable only after death and through that of resurrection.

WHC: This is one of the religious overtones that to some extent permeates the work – in terms of the crucifixion, the Pietà, the Last Supper... But this is only one level. My impulse for the project was not the idea of glory, but that of crime. People always speak of the 'glorification of violence' right? This phrase is almost passé, but it may be time to rethink it. Our fascination continues. Why do we continue replicating it in media? Why do we want to see it on TV, in film, read about it in tabloids and broadsheets? Why do we read crime novels? Why do we want to know? In this project I'm immersing myself in it and that's why we were talking about expediency and its sensationalism. I don't know why, each time, over dinner conversations, for example, when one mentions a crime, everyone has a story to tell about the event.

JC: I also wonder at this fascination with the workings of the criminal mind. It's as if we want to reach that point as to how such a desire to commit crime flowered in the criminal's brain. People seem to want to have the vantage point of judging an event, whether it's right or wrong. And it appears to be human nature to want to judge someone who has become a persona, as with that of a criminal or a victim. But your work seems to have culled from a lot of sources... I can see nostalgia, some aspects of irony and fun, but in others these are not present.

WHC: There has been an element of fun, of play in both the production and the outcome of the photographs. I made references to Bollywood which I thought were quite funny, and the film poster references were cheesy. With the video, there was the use of guerilla tactics in its production, running in, shooting, and running off – seeing the surprise of people responding to these interventions. I think we often think of art as too precious and the element of play is completely lost.

But at the same time, yes, some of them are very dark. I wanted these differences, from the playful and funny, to the ironic, to the poignant. I wanted to achieve a whole range of emotions.

JC: With regard to the video, it reminds me very much of your work *Trigger*...

WHC: Yes, it is similar to *Trigger*. The videos are very much based on the idea of the camera as an eye, and its relation to the human eye – I feel that this idea is not seriously thought through enough by people who work with the camera in Malaysia. The camera capturing images from the level from where the eye or the camera is normally held doesn't seem very interesting. It doesn't reveal new things. Re-positioning the 'eye' reveals new things – new ways of seeing the world and the environment. It depends on how and where you look, on how the camera shakes. The camera, particularly now, has become so tiny, so accessible, so mass-oriented and so un-precious, that I find it strange that people still treat the camera as a precious object, and shooting a precious form.

I was trying to break this down by relinquishing some form of control over the camera. The camera is a mediated object. A mediated filter for us and I want it mediated even further. With *Trigger* it was the horse and cowboy. With this project it was the wheelchair and the person pushing the wheelchair; and the toy car and the person controlling the remote control. Thus I relinquish control of what can happen, of the accidents that can happen. Directors of photography and directors often want to have full control and manipulation of the camera and images. With mine, the control came only during editing. But in terms of production we hardly checked footage, redid takes.

JC: We talked earlier that the underlying thread between the photograph and the video work is the idea of the middle class. But I also find that there is this opposition between stillness and movement and the clash between these two experiences. From a very staged and very controlled *tableaux* of black and whites to the visual experience of a totally uncontrolled rushing of the camera covering two different perspectives in color. These are both very interesting counterpoints to each other. And I wanted to ask how you wanted your audience to come out from such an experience.

WHC: I think that one of the major things that concerned me with this exhibition was the flow – the rhythm of the video images and sound design, the flow and continuity. But underneath this nice meandering flow, there lies a darker content. And I think what pulls both works together is the sense of alienation and numbness that threads these events. It's this sense of alienation that I'd like to deal with. Particularly middle-class alienation.

JC: Let's talk about middle-class alienation.

WHC: I don't want to sound very definitive about it, nor to make large sweeping conclusions about the middle-class, but a lot of my notions of the numbness of the

middle class come from my academic background which was shaped during the 80s reading people like Christopher Lasch and Herbert Marcuse, people who examined the culture of mass consumerism, narcissism, surplus suppression, alienation. Consumerism and late capitalism having absorbed men into its contradictions so that these contradictions get negated. Things flatten out and everything becomes one-dimensional.

I was very interested in that sort of alienation and looking at books, as well as films that came out in the late 90s such as *American Beauty*, *Virgin Suicides*, and Japanese films like *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, that have dealt with that kind of middle-class alienation. I am very interested in this sort of numbness as I can really see it in Malaysian society, the way that suburbia is developed and the frenzy of building in the 80s and 90s. Communities are sort of destroyed, they are physically sliced up, in both urban and rural areas. One has to drive through a three-tier spaghetti junction to get to the opposite side of the road. The madness for construction to achieve Vision 20/20 which was Mahathir's national narrative (this being Malaysia's bid to receive first world status by the year 2020) – in the translation of this desire for a perfect vision, we have a lot of failed visions, which include huge suburban developments – highways, roads and toll stations built for them but now many have become ghost towns. Whole areas dug up, turned into concrete jungles: some built halfway, some completed and laid to waste.

JC: How do you think such failed plans affect the middle class?

WHC: I think the middle class suffered especially during the economic crash during the late 90s. There was a real fear of dropping below their status quo, their middle-class comforts. I think the middle class, as has been written about, is a rather ineffective class, because they live fearful lives, and constantly need to move forward, not wanting to fall backwards.

JC: There really is the need for the middle class to maintain status quo, the desire for continued comfort and the loss of that causes fear. And as a result the need for comfort becomes utmost, that even self-improvement is not even desired as a goal, in some areas of the middle class.

WHC: This is not a new notion, this numbness and fear that affects the middle class, neither is it a new notion to me. I knew about it the moment I came back from my studies, or rather I saw it. The reason perhaps for doing this project is that the middle class has grown, there appears to me now a clearer sense of that numbness and alienation. The scale is much larger, and maybe the most prominent example is the growth and spread of shopping malls.

JC: When you speak of the middle class do you speak of it as an economic force or as a cultural entity and its intellectual cache?

WHC: I speak of the middle class as both, as a cultural/social class as well as an economic class. I think that it has been argued that after late capitalism, one cannot define it purely in terms of economics. Culture and class are intertwined. And easier access to culture transforms class values.

JC: The economic power of the middle class certainly, especially when it has become very big, tends to shape the culture of a society. And without that we would not have our megamalls...

WHC: America seems to me to have brought the idea of suburbia to the world with their need for ownership of that quarter acre of land, with a swimming pool, the front lawn, no fences, with each house having the same facelessness as the next. And malls – supposedly ideal environments for their families to shop in. Safer than the streets!

JC: This seems to have been translated to other places, except its been adopted differently. Or mis-translated to suit specific cultural sites. Suburbia in some Southeast Asian countries seems to be about fences and walls and grills that keep out the world.

WHC: Yes, the underbelly of the middle class is its fear of crime. Suburbia is a middle-class utopia. In these supposedly ideal middle-class environments, crime is there, crime lurks.

For example, in Subang Jaya, near a college, there are quite a number of the shops which of late require you to press a buzzer before you're let in – from pharmacies, travel agents to wine shops. I mentioned earlier that people assume that I work a lot with research. But for this exhibition, I didn't want to do too much research, have too many pre-conceived ideas about the crime, or theories of the middle class. I depended on my own limited baggage of knowledge, so as to create

the underbelly of the middle class is its fear of crime. Suburbia is a middle-class utopia. In these supposedly ideal middle-class environments, crime is there, crime lurks

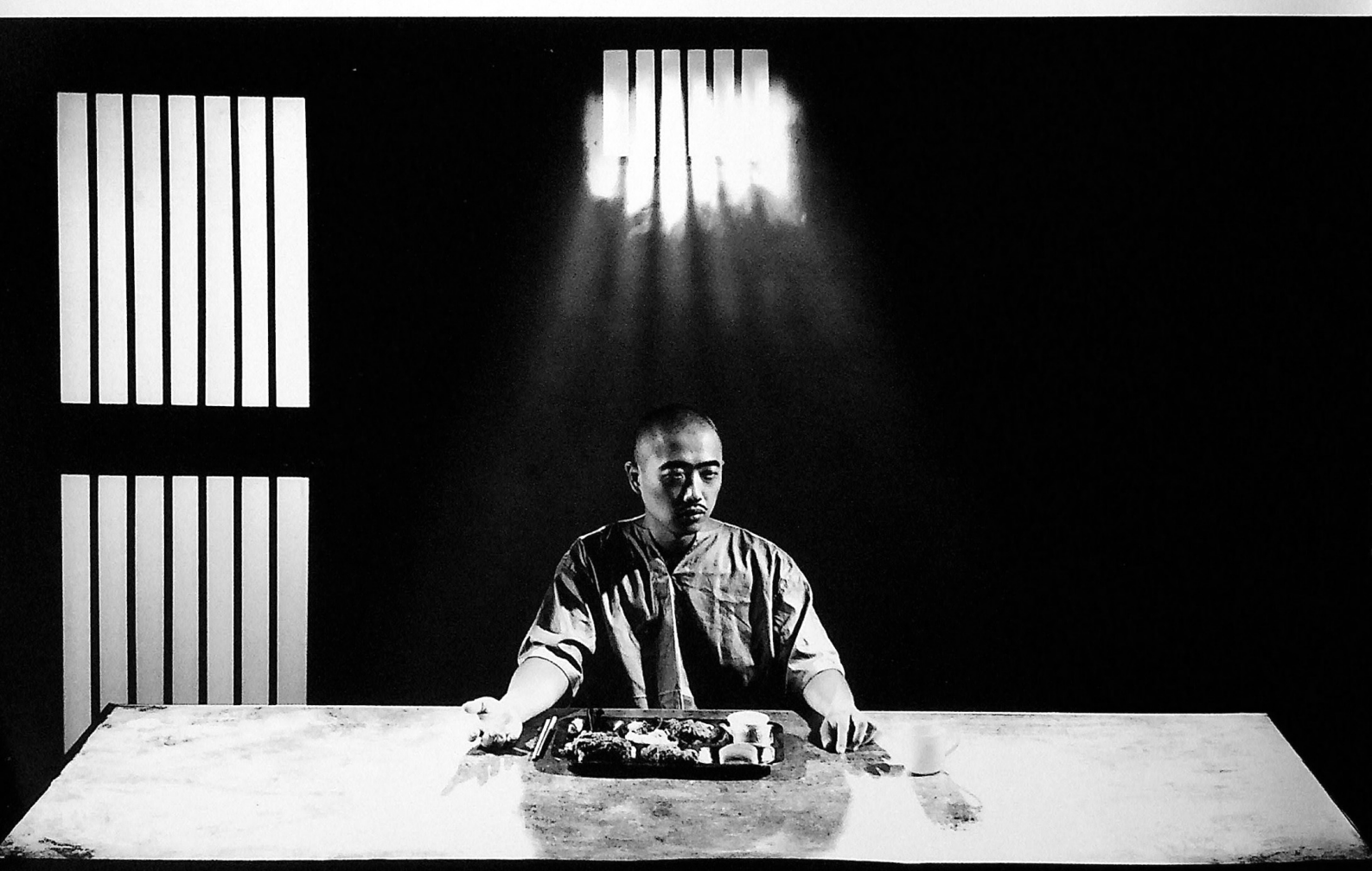
dialogues. I didn't want to be pedantic and didactic, telling the public how to view things.

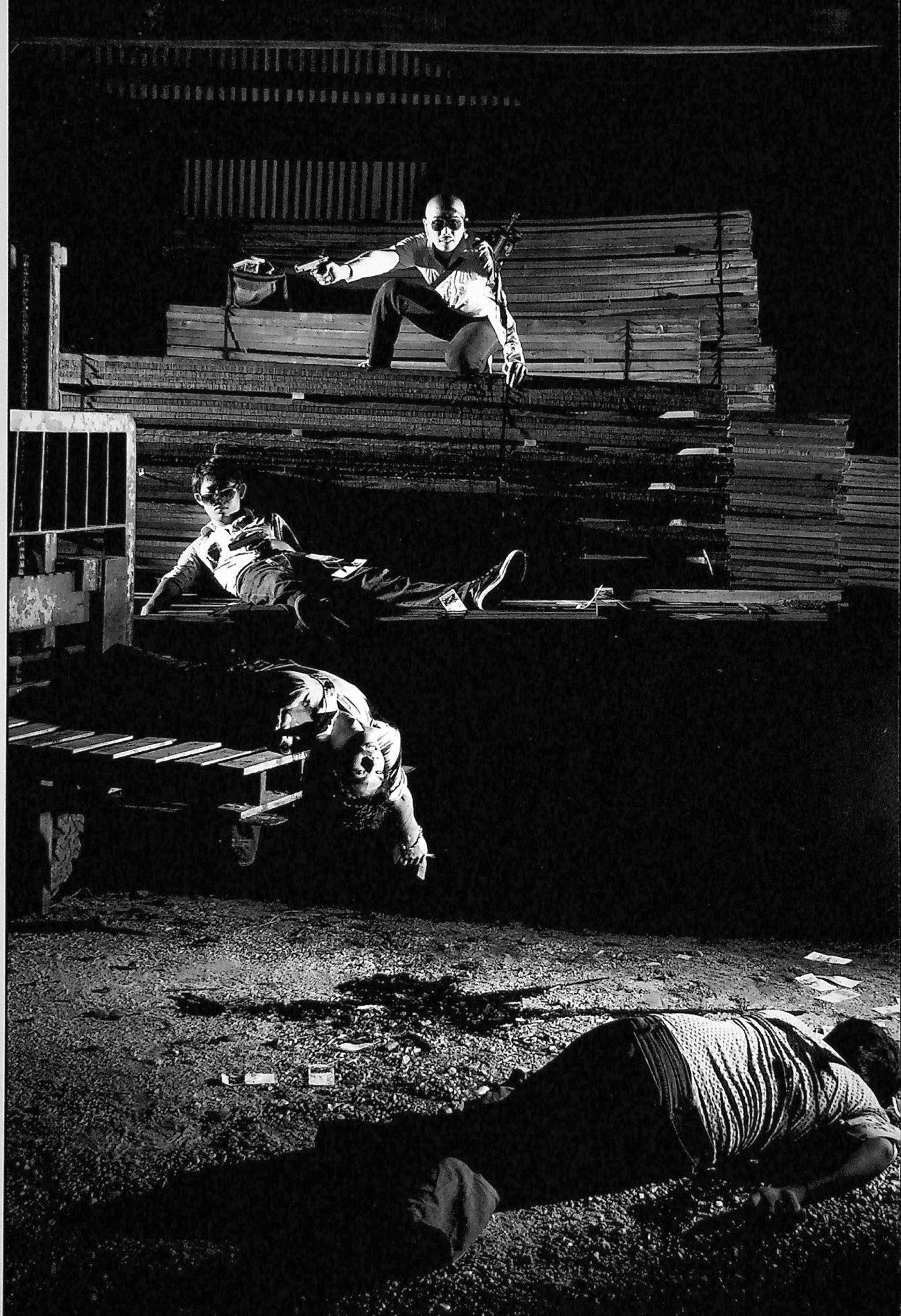
Joselina Cruz is currently Assistant Curator at the Singapore Art Museum. She is the Museum's specialist in Philippine art and was former Curator at the Lopez Museum in Manila. She has also written essays, reviews, and criticism for broadsheets and private publications. She holds an MA in Curating and Commissioning Contemporary Art, RCA (London, UK).

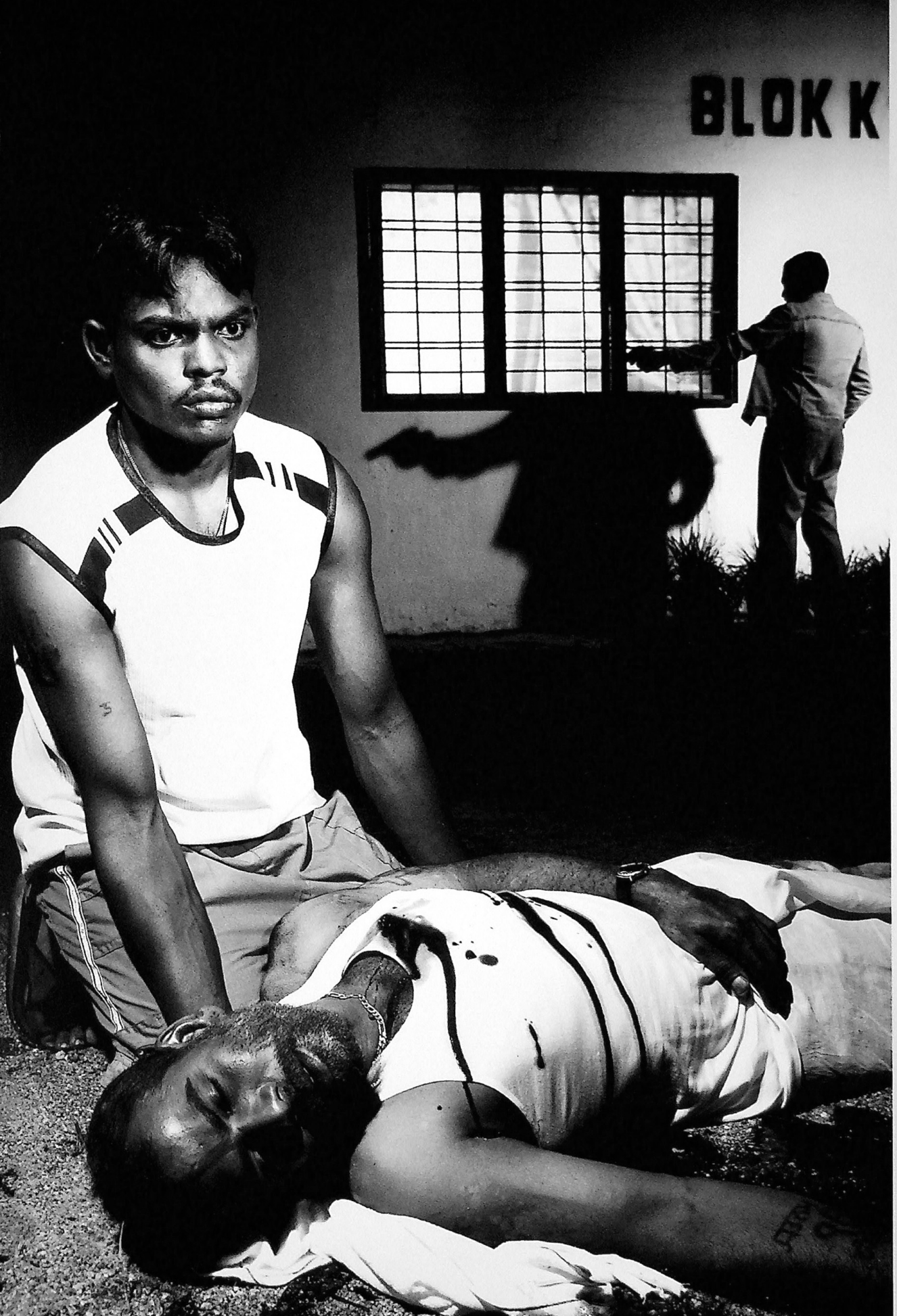
CHRONICLES OF CRIME

CHRONICLES OF CRIME: LAST SUPPER
2006
DIGITAL PRINT ON KODAK PROFESSIONAL PAPER
84 X 120 CM

CHRONICLES OF CRIME: SAWMILL
2006
DIGITAL PRINT ON KODAK PROFESSIONAL PAPER
120 X 84 CM






BLOK K

CHRONICLES OF CRIME: POINT BLANK
2006
DIGITAL PRINT ON KODAK PROFESSIONAL PAPER
120 X 84 CM

CHRONICLES OF CRIME: ROOFTOP
2006
DIGITAL PRINT ON KODAK PROFESSIONAL PAPER
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CHRONICLES OF CRIME: BURIAL
2006
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CHRONICLES OF CRIME: ASPHYXIATION
2006
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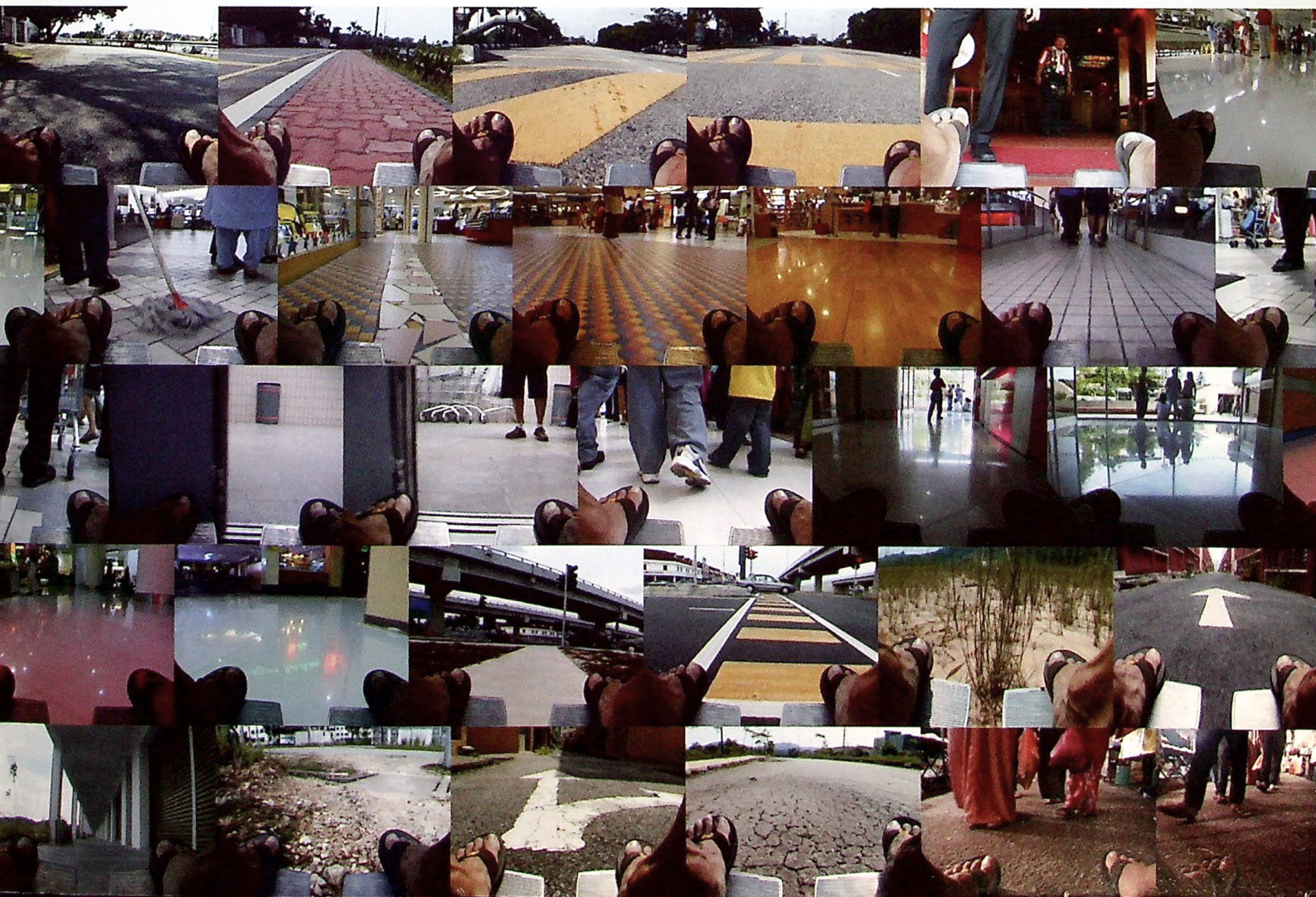
CHRONICLES OF CRIME: CARPARK
2006
DIGITAL PRINT ON KODAK PROFESSIONAL PAPER
84 X 120 CM

CHRONICLES OF CRIME: SWIMMING POOL
2006
DIGITAL PRINT ON KODAK PROFESSIONAL PAPER
84 X 120 CM

SUBURBIA:
BUKIT BERUNTUNG, SUBANG JAYA

SUBURBIA: BUKIT BERUNTUNG, SUBANG JAYA
2006
2-CHANNEL VIDEO PROJECTION
5 MIN 51 SEC
(VIDEO STILLS)



BUKIT BERUNTUNG: FLATS
2006
CHARCOAL ON PAPER
100 X 75 CM

SUBANG JAYA: FLYOVER
2006
CHARCOAL ON PAPER
100 X 75 CM

BUKIT BERUNTUNG: FACTORIES
2006
CHARCOAL ON PAPER
100 X 75 CM

WONG HOY CHEONG

Wong Hoy Cheong was born in Georgetown, Penang. He studied literature, education and fine arts at Brandeis University, Harvard University and the University of Massachusetts (Amherst) in the USA. His work is inter-disciplinary, involving areas such as drawing, installation, video/photography and theatre/ performance.

He has exhibited widely in Asia, Australia and Europe including solo exhibitions/projects at the National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur (2004 & 1996); Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (2004), Alexander Ochs Gallery, Berlin (2004), Kunsthalle, Vienna (2003); John Hansard Gallery, Southampton (2003); Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool (2002), Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur (2002).

He has also exhibited at the Guangzhou Triennial (2005), Liverpool Biennial (2004), 50th Venice Biennale (2003), ARS 01 (Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki; 2001), Gwangju Biennale (2000), Cities on the Move (The Secession, Vienna, 1997; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark, 1999; Hayward Gallery, London, 1999, etc.), Fukuoka Triennial (1999), and the AsiaPacific Triennial (1996); and has been involved in smaller thematic exhibitions and text-based projects including Naked Life (Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei, 2006); Shake (OK Centre of Contemporary Art, Linz/& Villa Arson, Nice; 2004), Handlungsanweisungen, (Kunsthalle, Vienna, 2003), Refuge (Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Norway; 2002), Mutation/Urban Rumours (Fri-Art Contemporary Art Centre, Fribourg Switzerland; 2000), Poisonous Targets (Gallery 4A, Sydney; 2000), Overtag (BildMuseet, Umea, Sweden, 2000), Babel (Ikon Gallery, Birmingham; 1999), and Intervention (Museum-in-Progress/Der Standard, Vienna; 1999).

He was artist-in-residence at Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (2004), Gasworks, London (2002) and Canberra Institute of Art, Canberra (1992); and Visiting Tutor at Oxford Brookes University, Oxford (2004), Goldsmith College, London (1999) and Central St. Martins, London (1998).

CHRONICLES OF CRIME
Cast: Ah Liang, Anan, Cik Siah, Daniel, Fizi, How Ong, Majing, Marcos, Miko, Kuang, Kumaran, Rosli, Sharon
Production: Mac Chan (Lighting), Nazim Esa (Photography), Shanaz Baharuddin (Make-up), Sharon Chin (Production), Vincent Leong (Sets & Props)
Post-Production: Dayang Amnah & Ng Kim Hock

SUBURBIA: BUKIT BERUNTUNG, SUBANG JAYA
Cast: Simon
Production: Nazim Esa, Simon Loke, Vincent Leong
Post-Production: Andy Alias (Sound Design), Johnny Chuah (Editor)

ANTHEM
Production: Andy Alias (Sound), Vincent Leong (Design of Profile)

Valentine Willie Fine Art and Wong Hoy Cheong would like to thank:

ABN AMRO
MFX
Off The Edge
Kino-I
5leleh
Bombay Sapphire
Italiannies

Mary Cardosa
Moon K Chan
Thomas Chin
Chuah Chong Yong
Chuah Su Ming
Lau Chee Kin
Eric Leong
Imri Nasution
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Ng Kim Hock & the staff of Photo Media
Normah Nordin
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***Discovering Jongkind:* ABN AMRO sponsored a large exhibition devoted to painter Johan Barthold Jongkind (1819-1891). Although not very well known, Jongkind was an inspiration to artists such as Manet, Monet, Zola and Signac. The exhibition appeared last year in Cologne, Germany at the Wallraf-Richartz Museum and in Paris, at the Musée d'Orsay.**

National Gallery, London: The ABN AMRO hall is located in the North Galleries and exhibits works by leading 17th century painters, including Frans Hals. The National Gallery attracts more than five million visitors a year.

concept design by :maya@grainstudio

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ISBN 983938915-7

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