

before the world fell to pieces

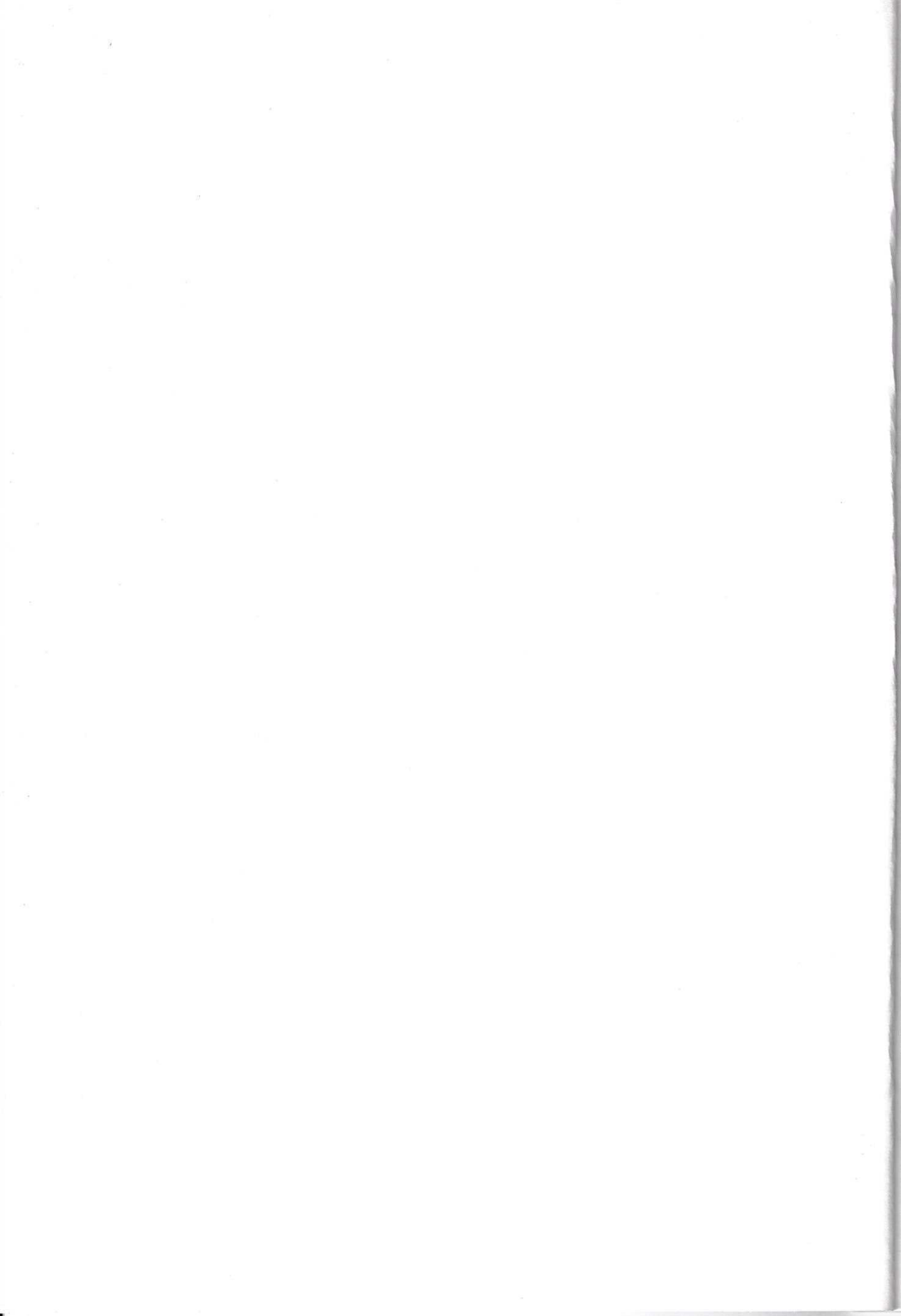
EIFFEL CHONG

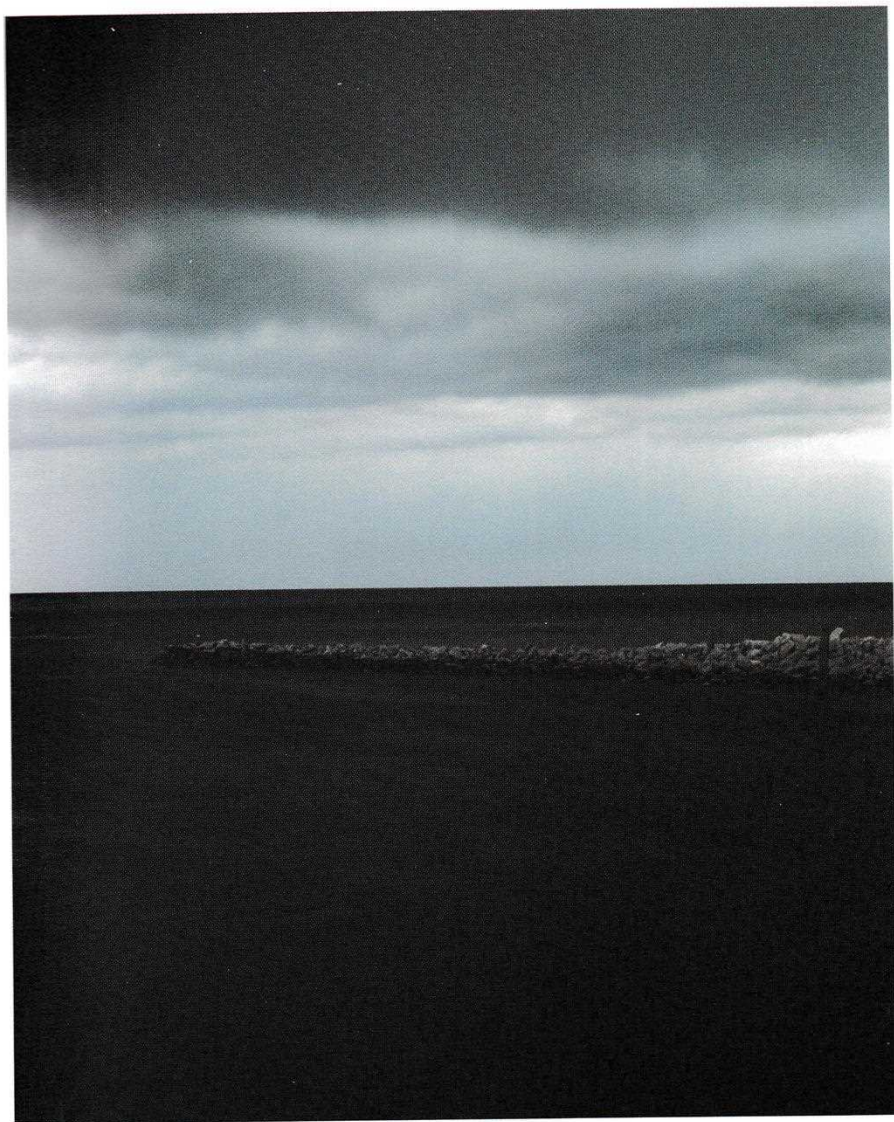




before the world fell to pieces
PHOTOGRAPHY BY EIFFEL CHONG
2006 - 2012

Eiffel Chong





tales of dai nippon teikoku rikugun, vol. xiv: the fall of malaya, 2011
from series: *a matter of life and death*. c-type print. 101.5 x 80 cm / 40 x 32 in

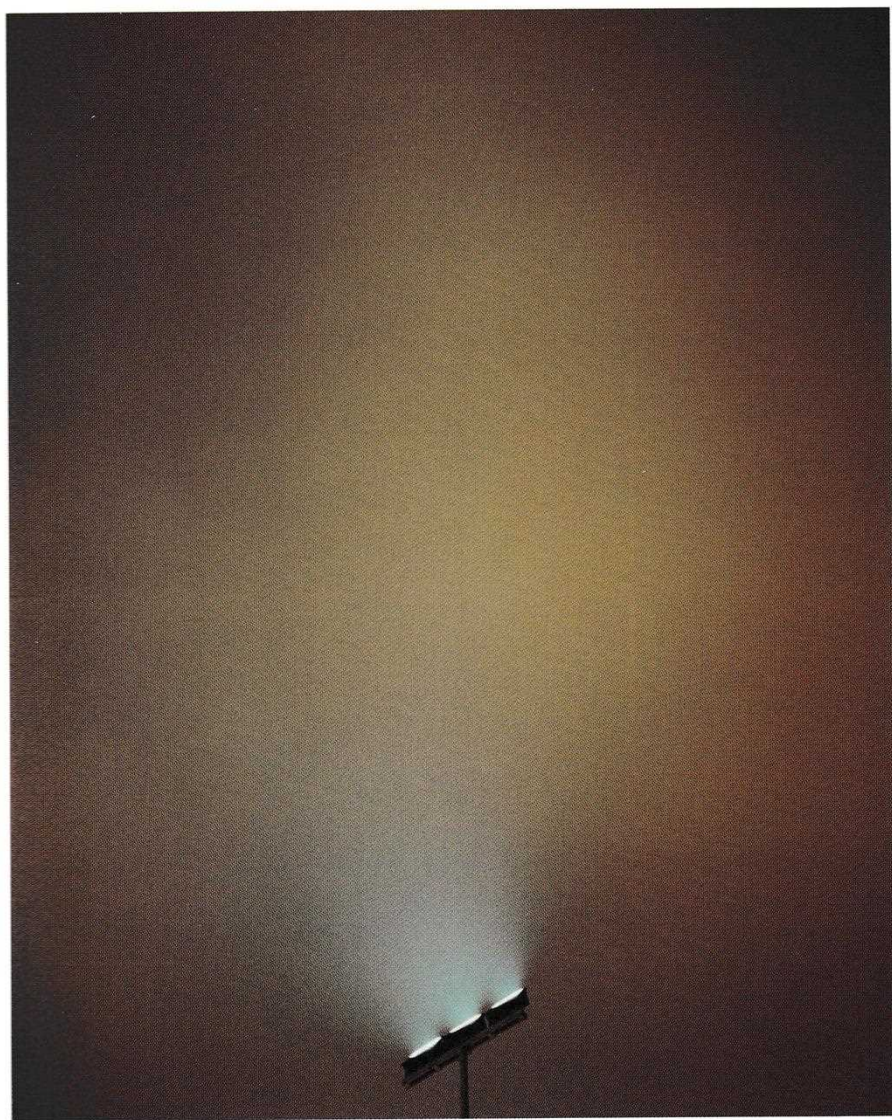




a promise that couldn't be fulfilled, 2007
from series: *a matter of life and death*. c-type print. 101.5 x 80 cm / 40 x 32 in



monumentalisation of death, 2009
from series: *a matter of life and death*. c-type print. 127 x 101.5 cm / 50 x 40 in



a trace of mortality, 2006

from series: *a matter of life and death*. c-type print. 101.5 x 80 cm / 40 x 32 in



tension between saturated colour and contrast, 2009
from series: *a matter of life and death*. c-type print. 127 x 101.5 cm / 50 x 40 in



studies in the varietal breeding of yorkshire sheep, 2006
from series: *a matter of life and death*. c-type print. 101.5 x 80 cm / 40 x 32 in



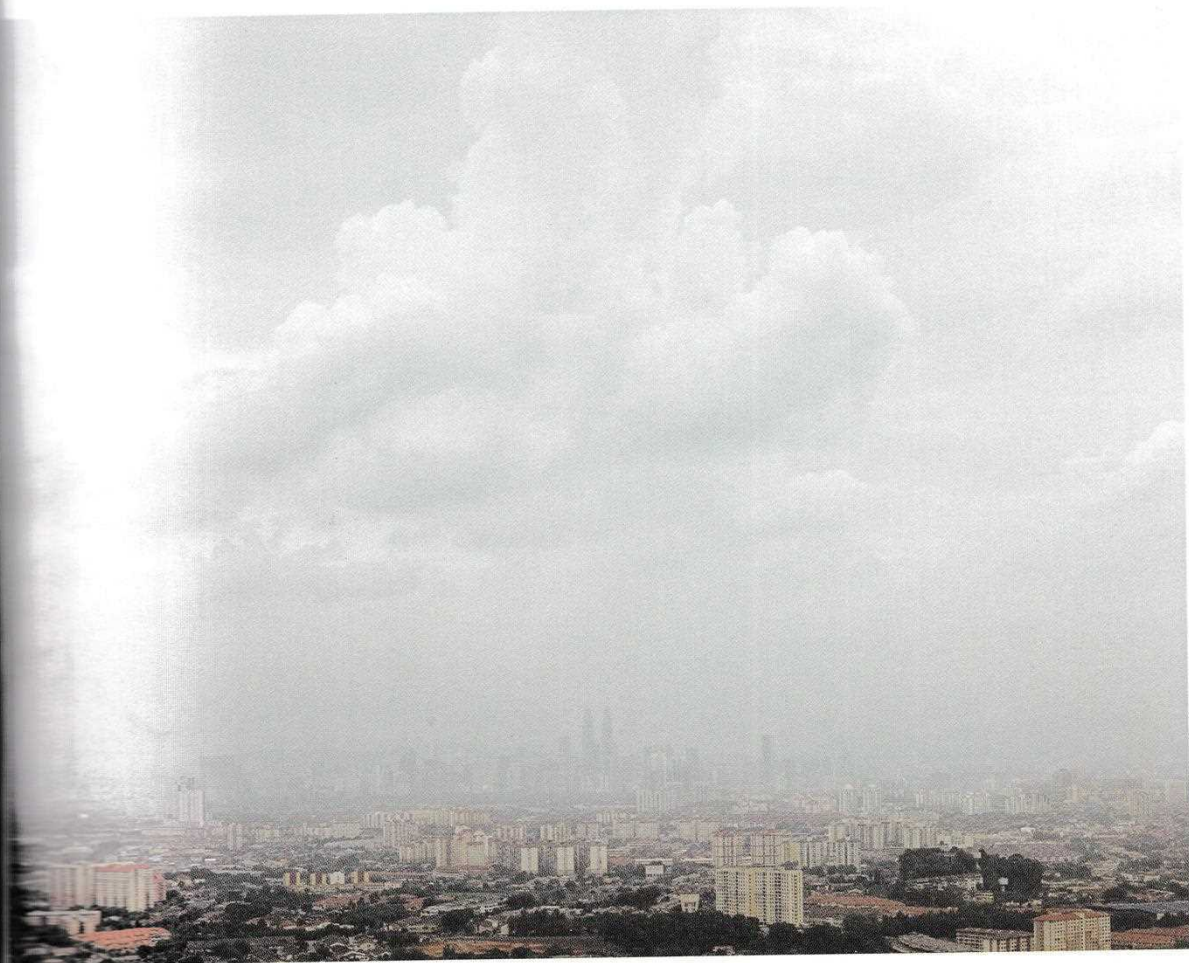
a visitation of various worlds, 2009
from series: *a matter of life and death*. c-type print. 101.5 x 80 cm / 40 x 32 in



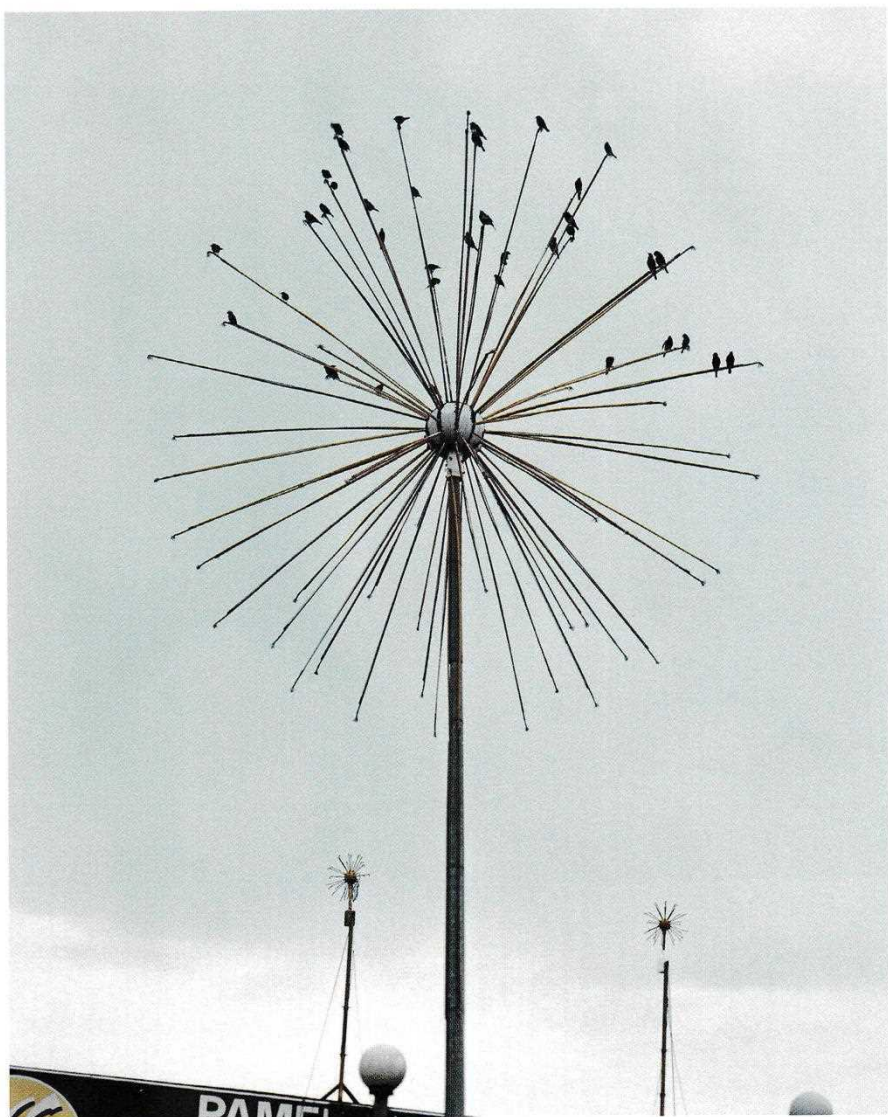
love from a sister to a sister (diptych), 2008
from series: *a matter of life and death*. c-type print. 101.5 x 80 cm / 40 x 32 in (each)



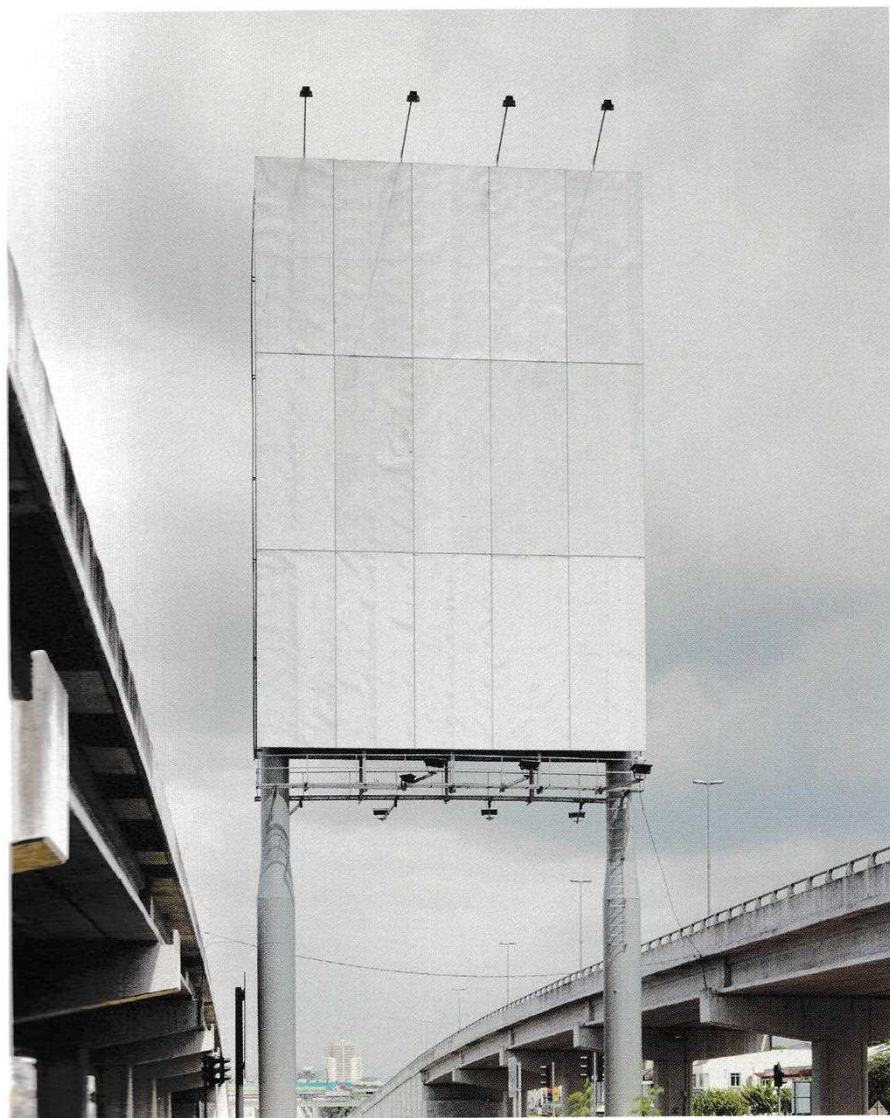
rise and fall of the roman empire, 2009
from series: *a matter of life and death*. c-type print. 80 x 101.5 cm / 32 x 40 in



city of funeral pyres, 2011
from series: *a matter of life and death*. c-type print. 80 x 101.5 cm / 32 x 40 in



as the birds fly south, 2008
from series: *a matter of life and death*. c-type print. 101.5 x 80 cm / 40 x 32 in



mathematical equations with emotional contours, 2008

from series: *a matter of life and death*. c-type print. 127 x 101.5 cm / 50 x 40 in.







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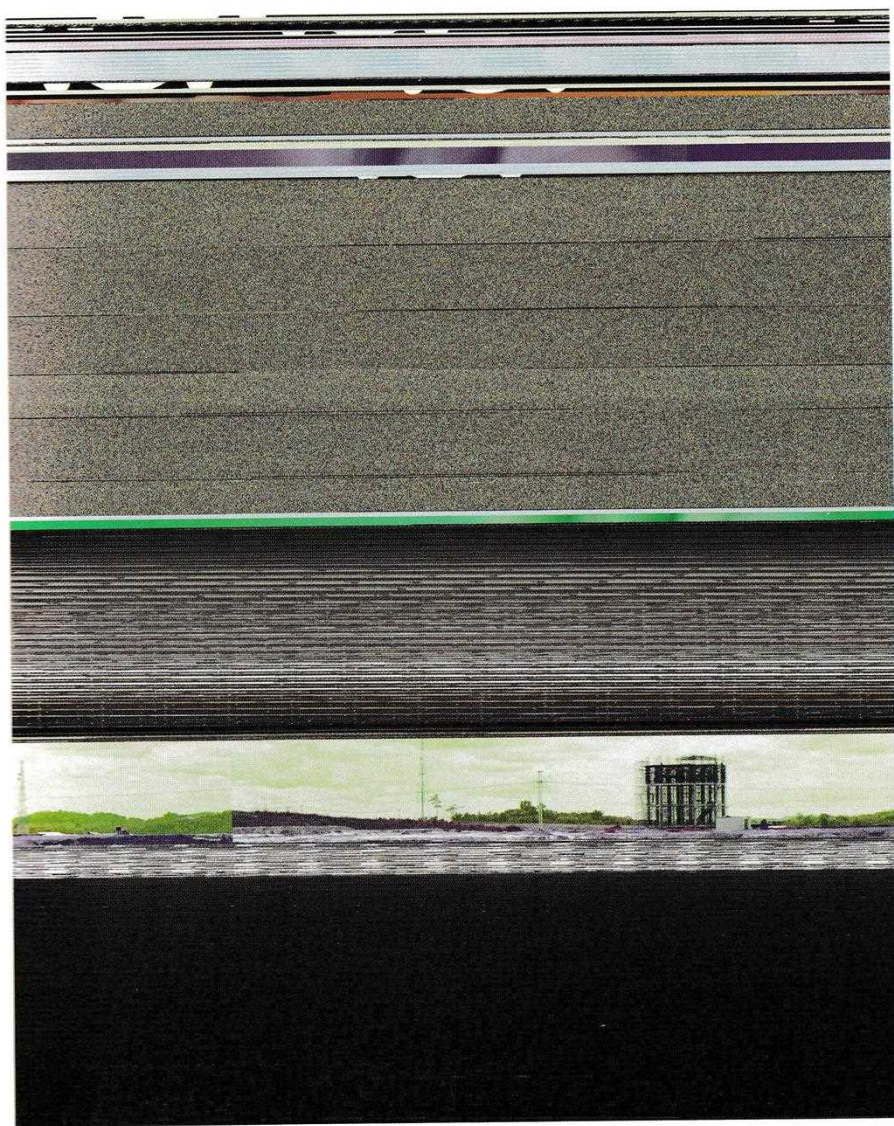
the sky foretold the end of the world, 2011

from series: *a matter of life and death*. c-type print. 80 x 101.5 cm / 32 x 40 in

ABOVE

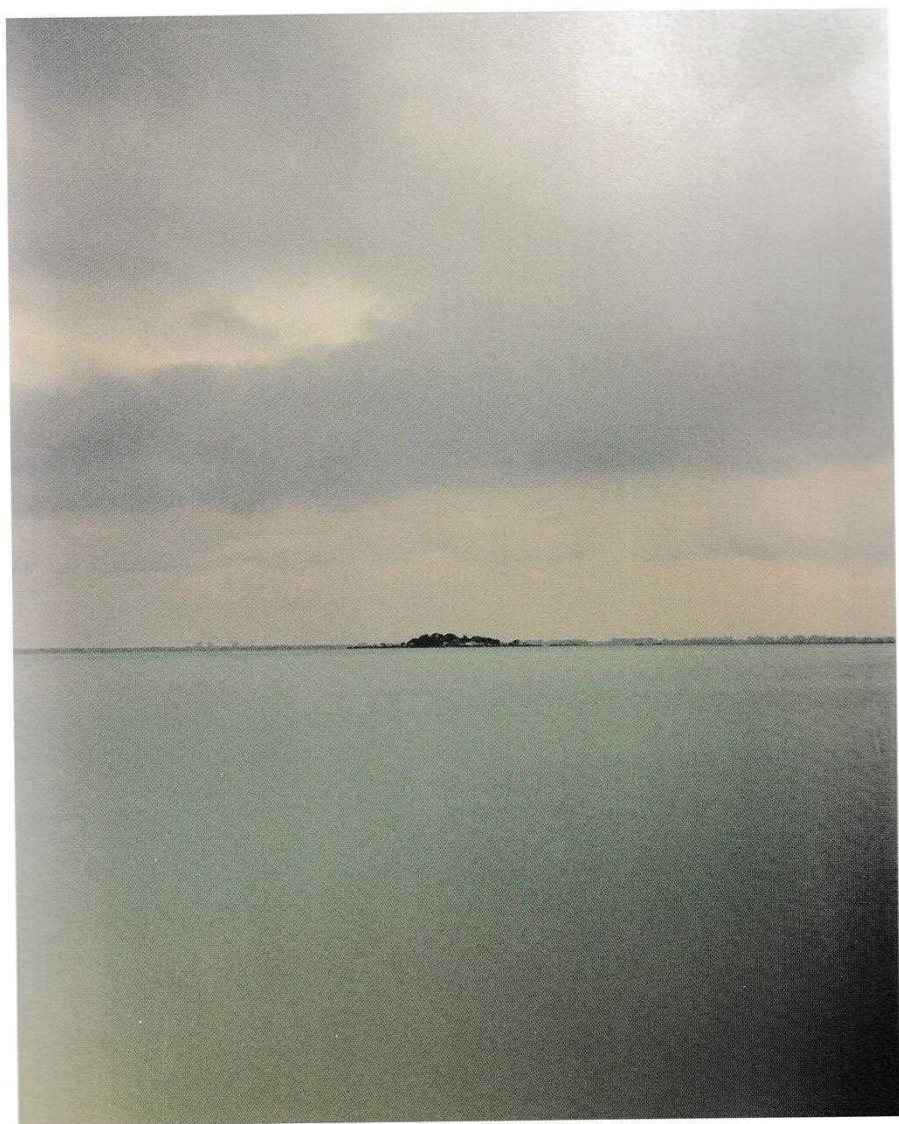
mental disease #1, 2009

from series: *a matter of life and death*. c-type print. 50.8 x 40.6 cm / 20 x 16 in



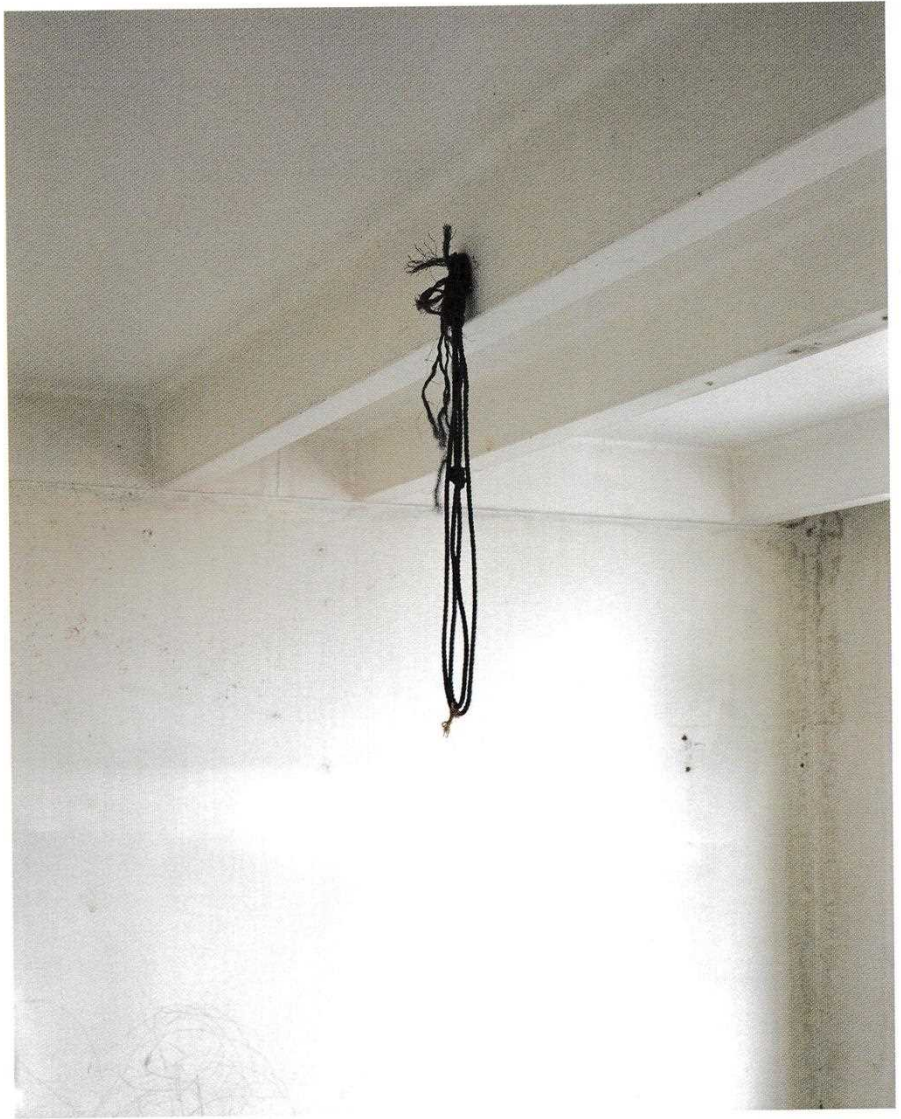
mental disease #2, 2009
from series: *a matter of life and death*. c-type print. 50.8 x 40.6 cm / 20 x 16 in





on a slow boat to china, 2011

from series: *a matter of life and death*. c-type print. 127 x 101.5 cm / 50 x 40 in



the place that was promised, 2009
from series: *a matter of life and death*. c-type print. 101.5 x 80 cm / 40 x 32 in

goodbye my love

It's 2012 and the world is going to end.

Or so says interpretations of the ancient Mesoamerican Mayan calendar. For some this means the beginning of a new philosophical era, for others it marks the apocalyptic destruction of life itself. Perhaps the human race deserves such an ending. Our nature to exploit and destroy not only each other but also our planet seems an innate weakness, destined to repeat itself. Ethically bankrupt we unwittingly plot our demise through the power plays of politics, economies, consumption and violence. Science and religion further compound this bleak prognosis through hypotheses and prophecies foretelling various forms of cataclysmic extinction. So, having sown the seeds of our own undoing, a return to ground zero seems inevitable, and something extremists might say is almost necessary.

The end of the world narrative has been a compelling subject matter, deeply embedded across time and cultures, inspiring various literary and visual forms of storytelling. After all, the unimaginable has limitless interpretations, each more horrific than the next. Malaysian photographer, Eiffel Chong, revises the dystopian sentiments of human deterioration and destruction into poetic laments that utilise the theatre of photography to hyper-realise, exaggerate and distort perceptions of the human and natural world around us. Fascinated with the many realities and metaphors of death, Chong seizes upon the ultimate form of destruction in his first solo exhibition *Before the World Fell to Pieces* at Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur. However it is not disaster in progress but rather the ominous calm before an unthinkable demise that he selects to framework two bodies of work: *A Matter of Life and Death* and *A Fragile Thing Called Man* of which this publication presents in its entirety. As an anthology of images and stories Chong shares his obsessions with mortality and excess by using landscape and objects to create an ominous survey of society.

A Matter of Life and Death has been an ongoing series for the artist since 2006 and the body of work Eiffel Chong is most well known for to date. It embodies his intuitive production processes, what the artist describes as 'hunting for ghosts', a practiced attraction to loud silences, saturated with mystery and isolation. He begins with an intuitive documentation of places inspired from his research or arbitrary wanderings around Malaysia. Visually drawn to the connection between objects, landscape and space he creates dramatic mysteries of the uncanny through specific formal approaches to subject. After scrutiny and reflection, surreal narratives are then inferred through a

careful choice of titles that suggest narratives of politics, history, alienation, and states of collapse. For example, *A Slow Boat to China* relates an image of an island with the continuing taunting of Chinese Malaysians as 'pendatang' or immigrants by extremist politicians who call for their return to a fictitious national Motherland. *Tales of Dai Nippon Teikoku Rikugun, Vol. XIV: The Fall of Malaya* depicts an ominous Kelantanese coastal view of the landing site of the Japanese during World War II referencing the violent repercussions of the occupation. *City of Funeral Pyres* and *The Sky Foretold the End of the World* is a pre-apocalyptic warning of an impending Doomsday set in the city of Kuala Lumpur. More cryptic in sentiment is *Mental Disease* that presents the recovered findings of the artist's corrupted portable USB flash drive that contained digital files of his work. This Frankenstein of images displays the fragility of technology, and the results of what happens when something is brought back from the dead, mutated and transformed into the unexpected. Chong's darkly romantic evocations and 'mini deaths' are thus haunted by memories on the brink of being forgotten. This is the dislocation of time and specificity, of text and image, the connection point of the seen and unseen. The rest of the series whether buildings in progress, empty billboards, clinical interiors or seductive trees each exudes a type of narrative tension, the anxiety of what could happen next, filled with the spectres and errors of man.

If *A Matter of Life and Death* infers human excess and failure through landscapes of absence, *A Fragile Thing Called Man* casts an anonymous series of human characters that focus on the physical vulnerability of a frivolous civilisation. These miniaturised sites of leisure and daily urban life, are emphasised by titles such as *Bachmann Scene Scapes*

– *Evergreen Trees: 1 – 4 inches (200g per pack) CHB 1902 – 2020* that reference model toys and as such, the insignificance of human life. This brings to mind the much quoted analogy that if the world was defined as a 24-hour clock, Man would have appeared only 1 second ago, and the sum total of our entire human history would amount to 1/10th of a second. Our perceived conquest of the world is therefore, nothing more than misguided arrogance. And yet Humanity believes it reigns supreme, the most important living element on Earth. Chong exposes this farce, presenting civilisation as a defenceless toy-land oblivious to the forces of its destruction, be it an imaginary Godzilla or an all too real black hole, earthquake or nuclear war.

The epicentre of such disasters appear to be on Malaysian soil, unfolding across Putrajaya, Genting Highlands, Broga Hill, Kuala Lumpur and Cameron Highlands. Such specificity is complimented by Chong's formal exercises in lens focus, colour, pattern, movement and stillness that become a mixture of technical mastery and creative intuition. Here, he uses a Hasselblad camera to create dramatic relationships between figures and landscapes. Working with a popular photographic technique called tilt shift, where the lens is moved in a certain way to create selective focus, Chong scoured the country for high vantage points in order to produce his sweeping vistas. The blurred edges of each bring into absolute clarity the minutiae the camera is able to reproduce, a visual feast of foliage, water rapids, cars, buildings, and human activity. By emphasising smallness and detail, Chong highlights the inferiority of our perceived supremacy reducing purpose to pointlessness.

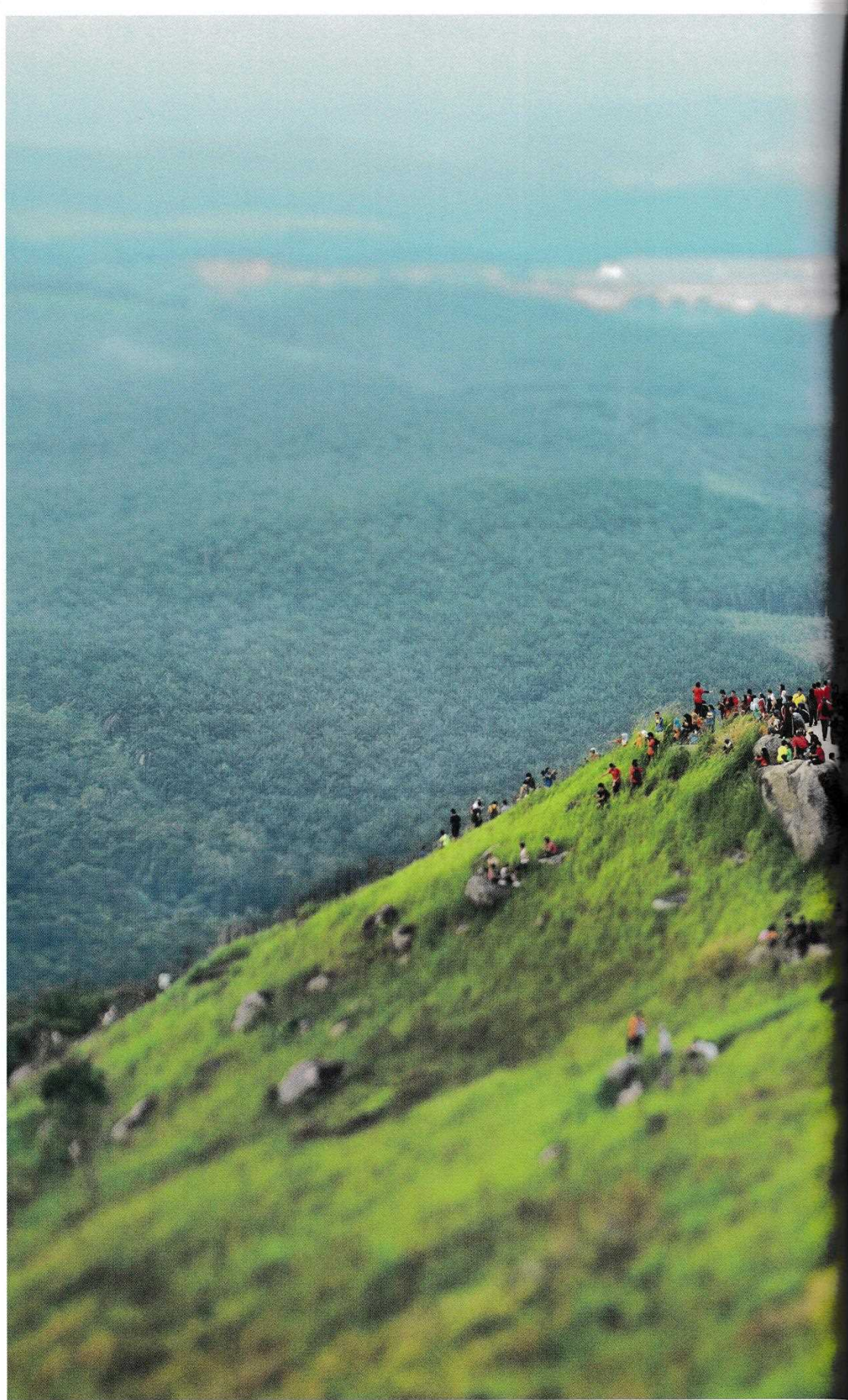
Eiffel Chong's *A Matter of Life and Death* and *A Fragile Thing Called Man* are undeniably beautiful and technically exact. Even without titles his aesthetic and conceptual intentions are clear. Clinically atmospheric and sharply dramatic he presents a sinister vision, the result of an obsessive photographic mind searching and claiming the things and places around him. By revealing and reframing the real, he succeeds in presenting a society unaware of the last and final act of karmic retribution. A visual travelogue of the last days before the world ends. *Before the World Fell to Pieces* (and framework of these two bodies of work) is therefore, a deceptively poetic exhibition that belies a critical judgement of Mankind as an excessive and deteriorating civilisation. By manipulating our relationship to landscape and place, multiple readings of politics, history and nostalgia unfold across Chong's two most ambitious bodies of work to date. Literally functioning as a higher being, his visual selections, therefore echo the potential sentencing of the gods, frowning at how humanity has manipulated the world around us.

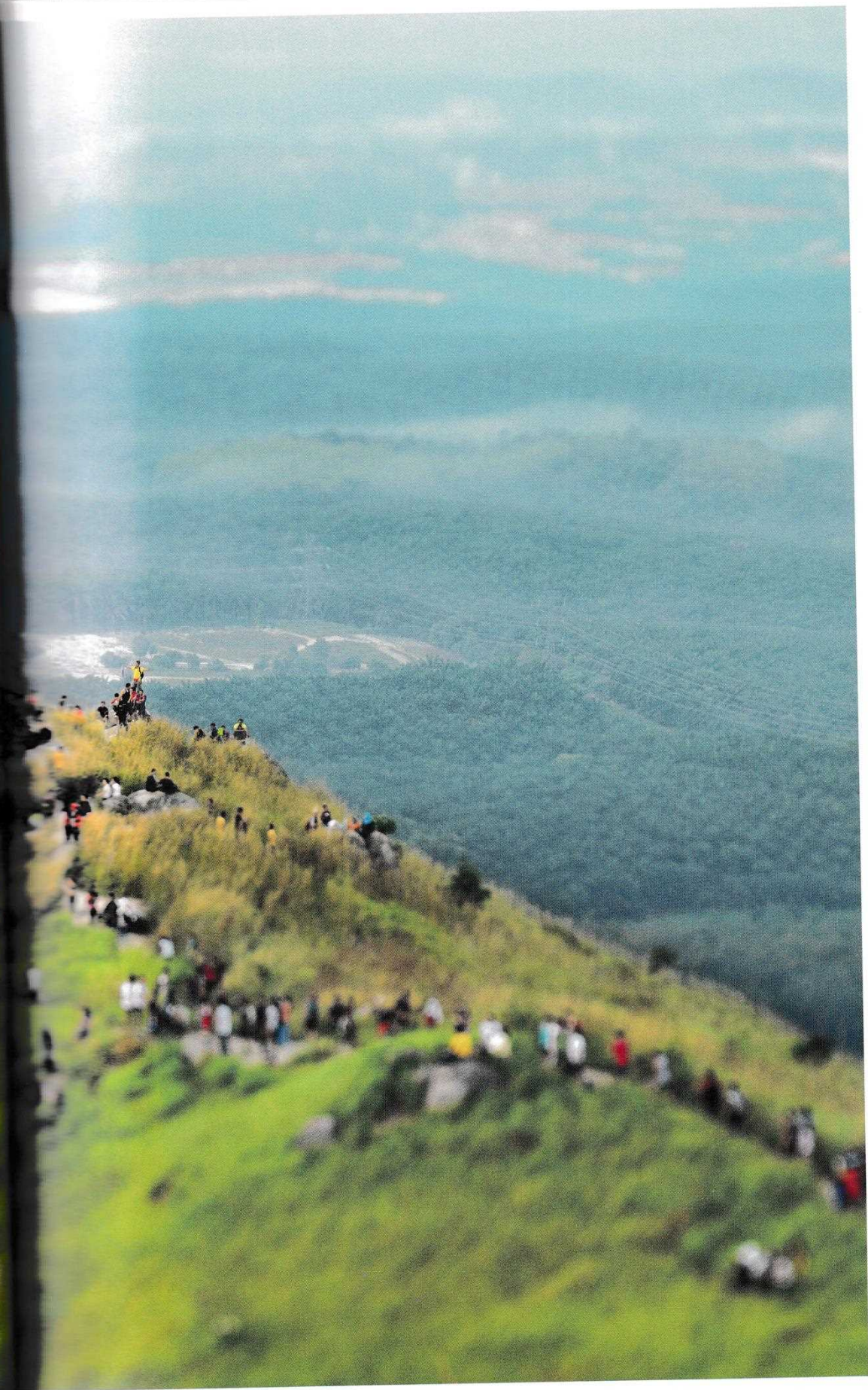
At any point, it could all fall to pieces.

EVA MCGOVERN

HEAD OF REGIONAL PROGRAMMES

VALENTINE WILLIE FINE ART







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DPM Scenery Pte. Ltd. Tropical Mountain All Scale 38"x13" – #M1FT48BH, 2011
from series: *A Fragile Thing Called Man*. C-Type Print. 99 x 127 cm / 39 x 50 in

ABOVE

Squidoo Ltd. Super Précision Metal Figures. Water Sports: White Water Rafting (1:250) No. 23-06SAT2, 2012
from series: *A Fragile Thing Called Man*. C-Type Print. 99 x 127 cm / 39 x 50 in

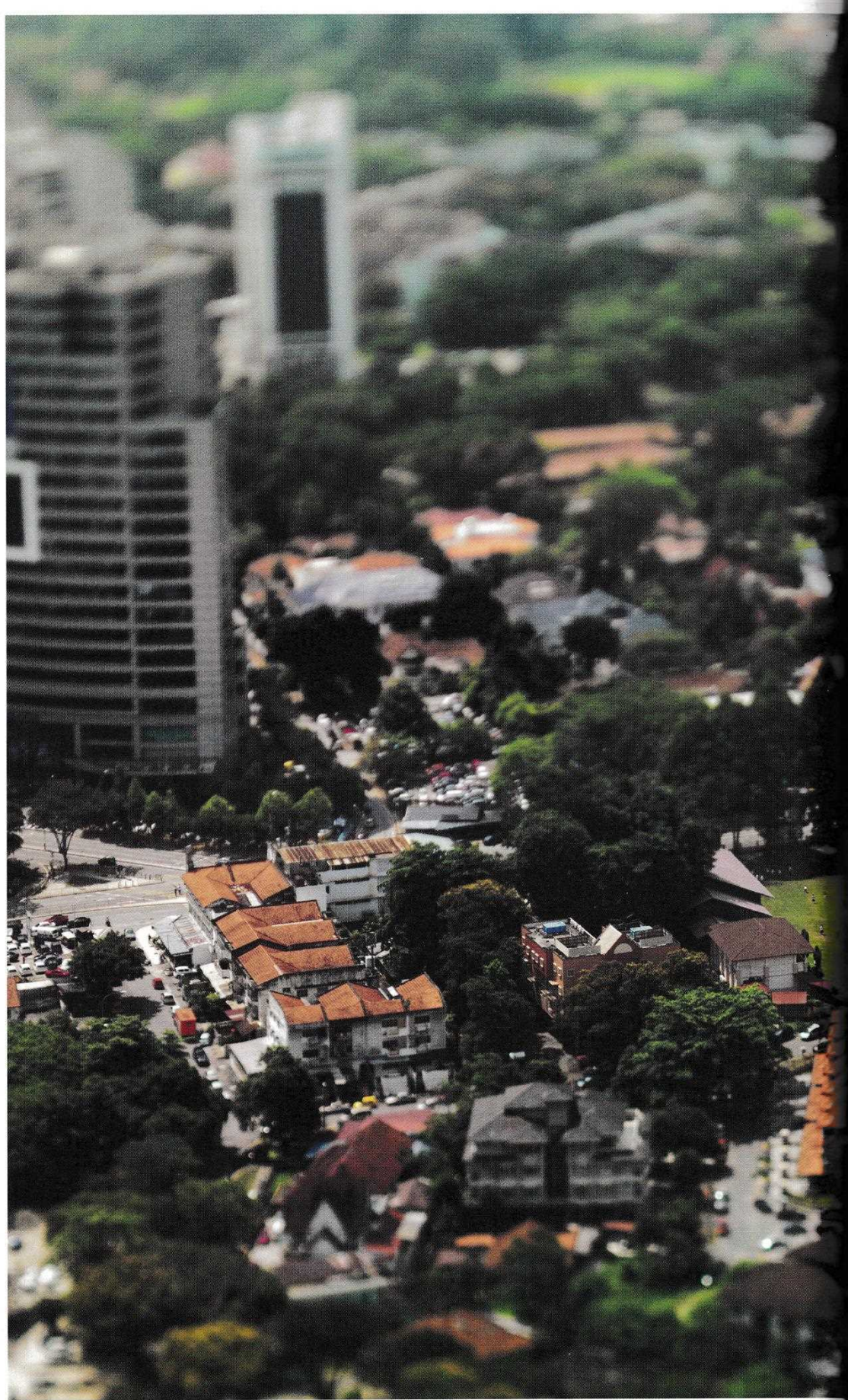


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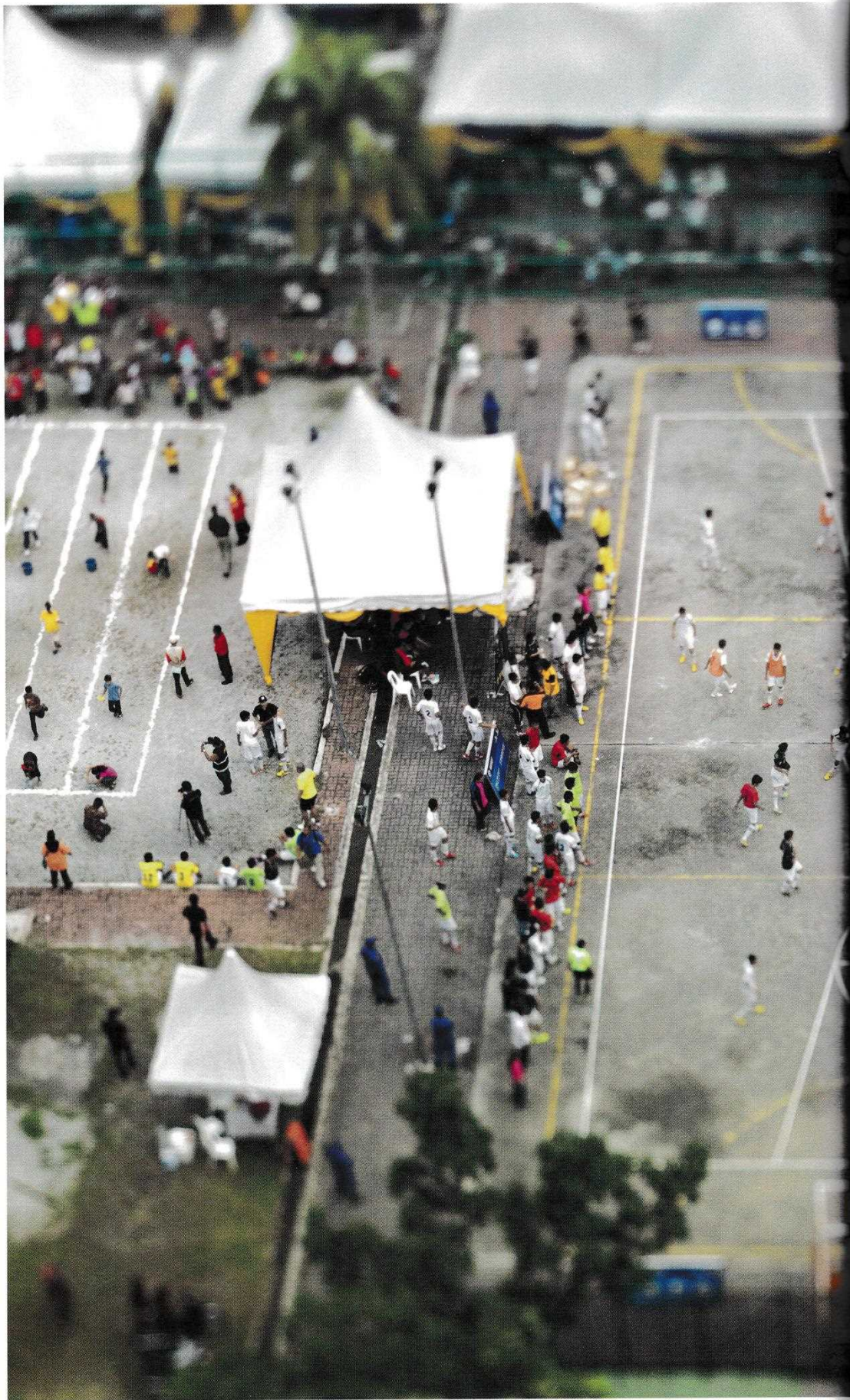
Bachmann Scene Scapes -Evergreen Trees: 1-4 inches (200g per pack) CHB 1902-2020, 2012
from series: *A Fragile Thing Called Man*. C-Type Print. 99 x 127 cm / 39 x 50 in

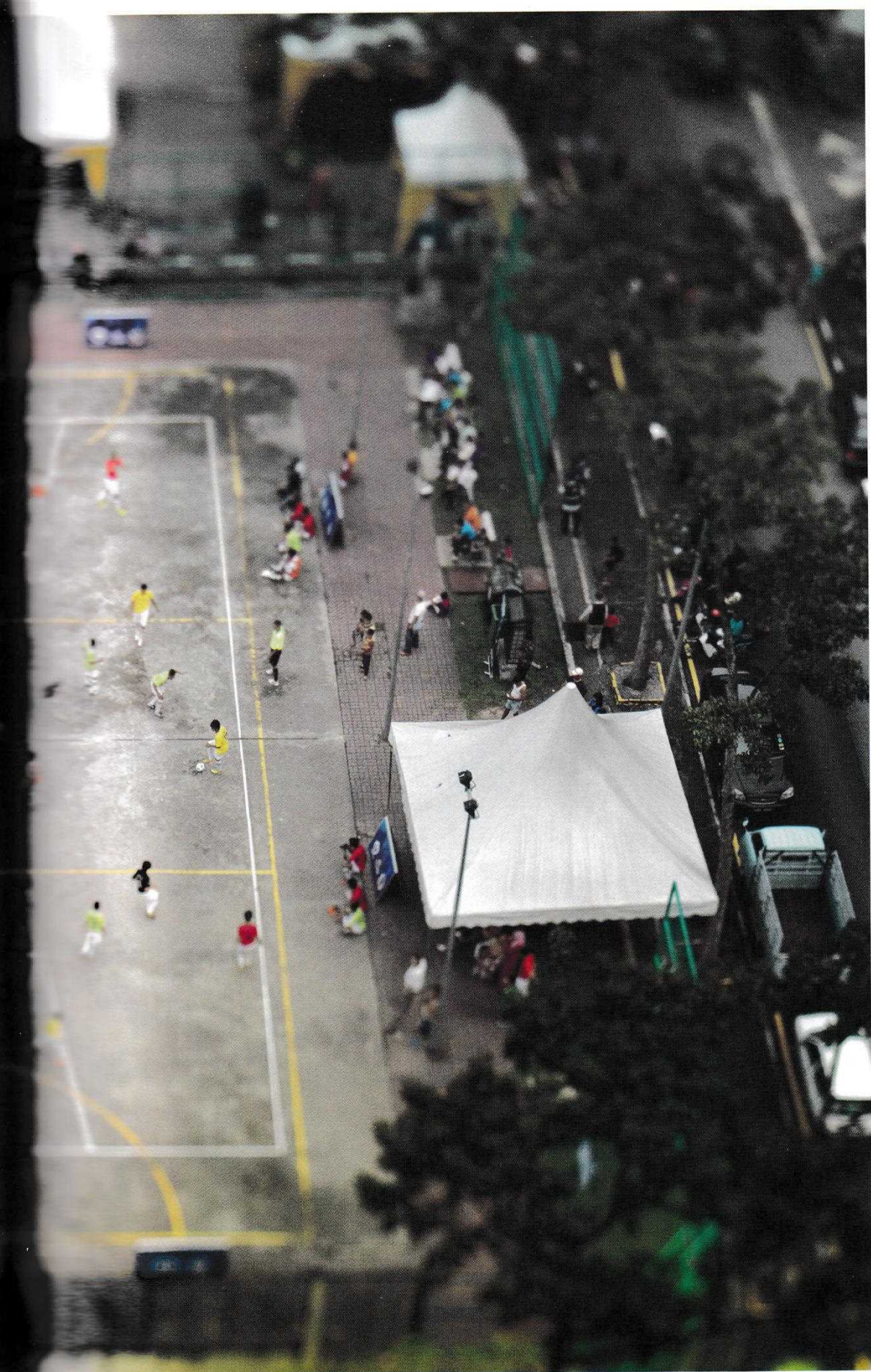
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BLMA Citymodel Precision Scale - Lasercut township building BLMA-0014A-34, 2011
from series: *A Fragile Thing Called Man*. C-Type Print. 99 x 127 cm / 39 x 50 in











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Seri Perak Z Scale Painted Teenage Sports Figures (Assorted Jersey Colours) – SEN #785-009, 2011
from series: *A Fragile Thing Called Man*. C-Type Print. 99 x 127 cm / 39 x 50 in

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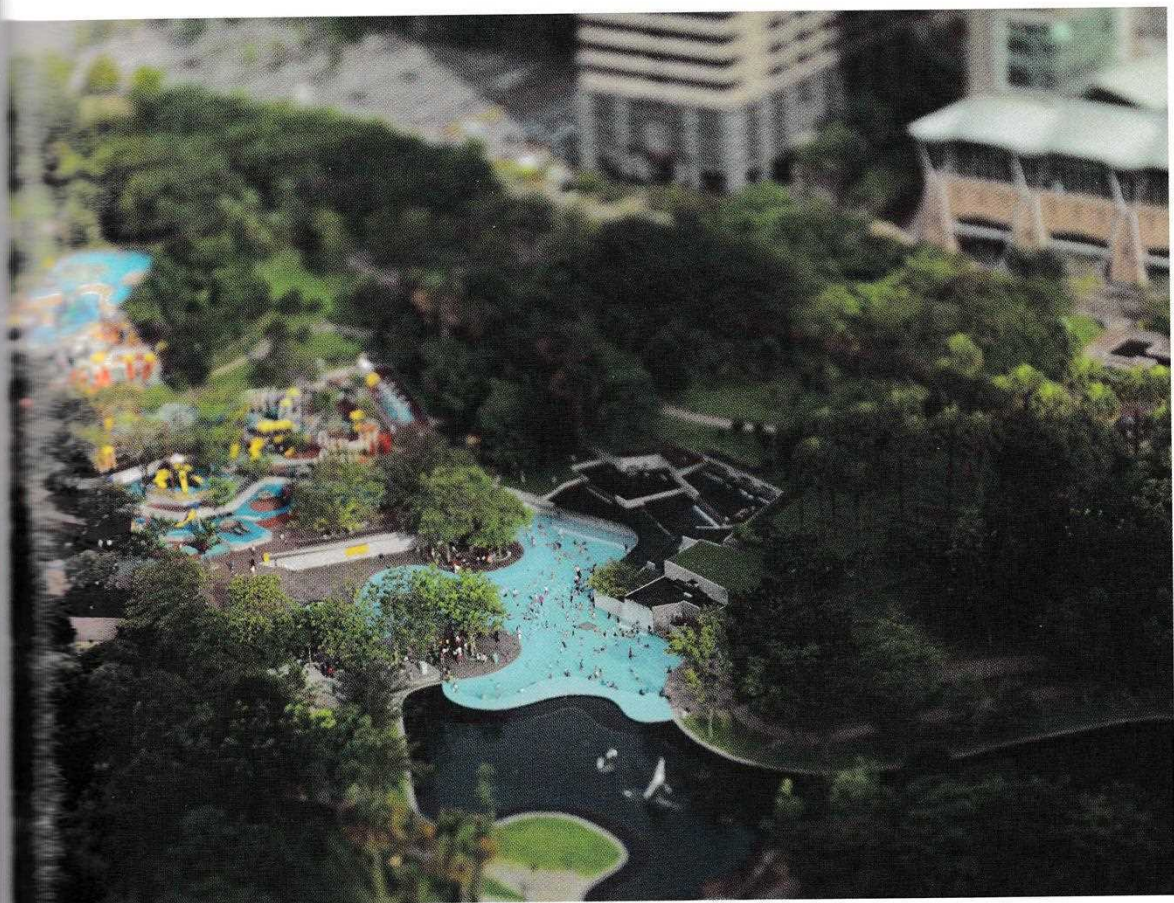
Classic Metal Works Custom Cuts 1:250 scale, Amusement & Theme. A&T_Brown 44 Various Adjustment, 2012
from series: *A Fragile Thing Called Man*. C-Type Print. 99 x 127 cm / 39 x 50 in



MAXIMS Miniature Silver Series. Trams & Cable Cars series (Pack of 5 various colours) 9400PHT-1400TH, 2012
from series: *A Fragile Thing Called Man*. C-Type Print. 99 x 127 cm / 39 x 50 in



Woodland Scenics 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ " to 3" Various Straight Tree Trunk Kit (5 per pack) WOO-TK13, 2011
from series: *A Fragile Thing Called Man*. C-Type Print, 99 x 127 cm / 39 x 50 in



ABOVE

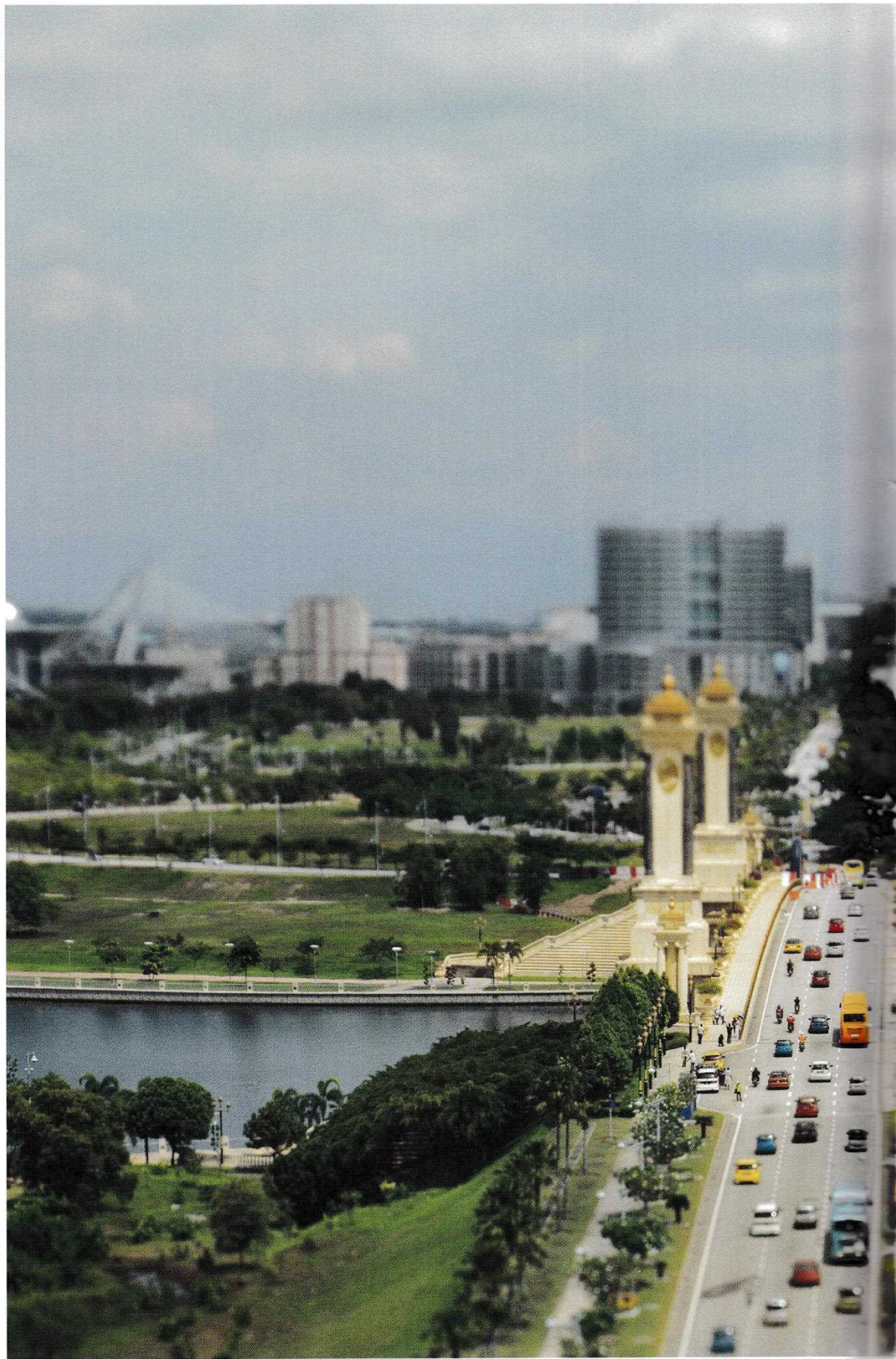
Preiser N Scale Painted Recreation & Leisure Set PN-176-6504P, 2011
from series: *A Fragile Thing Called Man*. C-Type Print. 99 x 127 cm / 39 x 50 in

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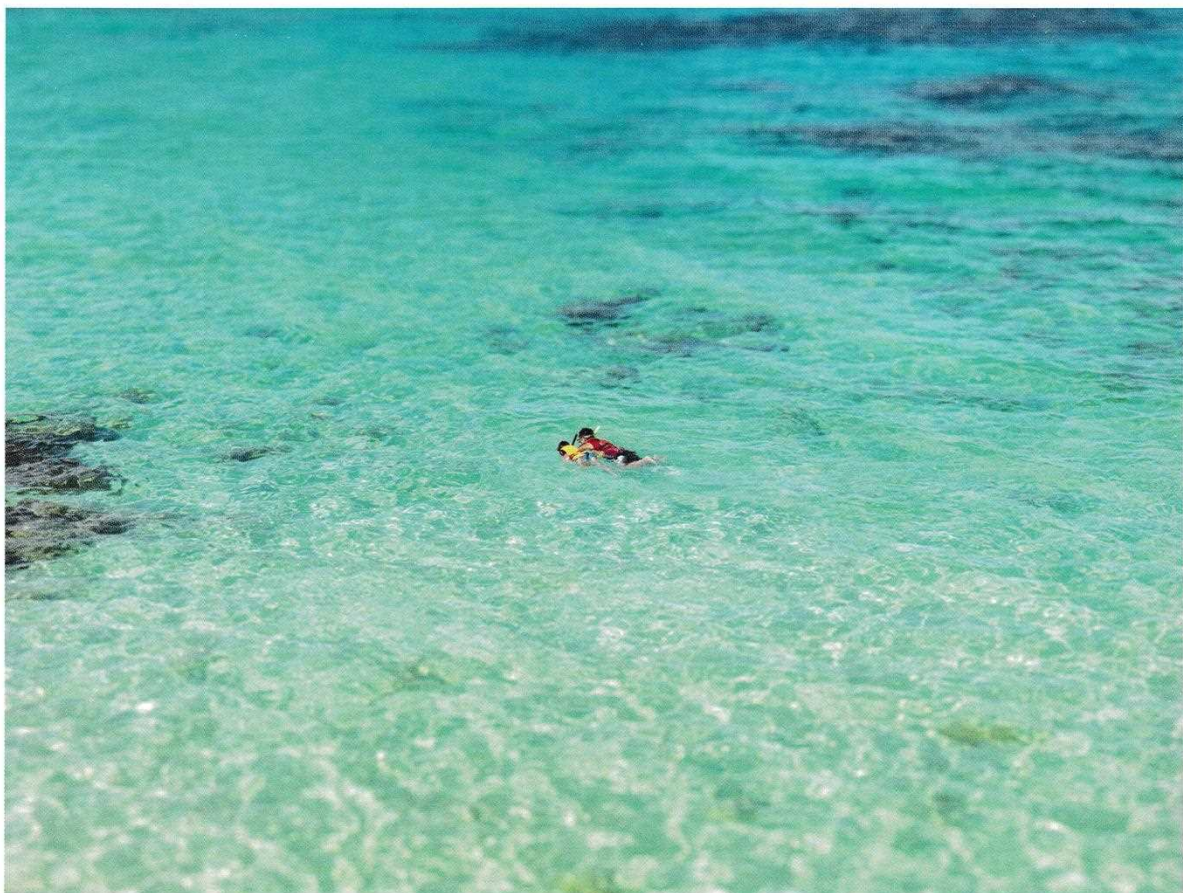
B&R Co. 1:250 scale World Buildings Series – KL – MAL #2.011-0907, 2012
from series: *A Fragile Thing Called Man*. C-Type Print. 99 x 127 cm / 39 x 50 in











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Southern Pacific Ltd. 1 inch size (Various Colours) Pack of 8. Catalogue No. 32, 2012
from series: *A Fragile Thing Called Man*. C-Type Print. 99 x 127 cm / 39 x 50 in

ABOVE

STARS Ltd. Figures Collection (Swimming) 1-2 inch scale. SUN14.388.846, 2012
from series: *A Fragile Thing Called Man*. C-Type Print. 99 x 127 cm / 39 x 50 in



Laguna Metal, Hand-Made 2" Human Figures. Water Sports: Scuba #114-118AB
from series: *A Fragile Thing Called Man*. C-Type Print. 99 x 127 cm / 39 x 50 in

Eiffel Chong

b. 1977, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Eiffel Chong graduated with an MA in International Contemporary Art and Design Practice from the University of East London and is currently a photography lecturer at an art institution in Malaysia. Besides his production of photographic work and lecturing, Chong is highly engaged with the Malaysian photographic community; taking on the role of mentor for the Photography Society of Petaling Jaya, as well the Goethe-Institute Malaysia/Nikon Shooting Stars programme. In addition, he has been appointed to the panel of judges for the 2010/2011 Annual Nikon Photo Awards, Malaysia; the Photo of the Year Award, Photography Society of Petaling Jaya, and apostrophegallery.com's postcards competition.

Eiffel Chong's work considers abstract concepts of life and death through the banal details, silent landscapes and curious obsessions he observes from daily life. More of his works can be viewed on www.eiffelchong.com

selected group exhibitions

- 2012 **A Matter of Life and Death**, The Art Dept. by VWFA, @ The Goods Dept., Plaza Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia
- Wawasan 2020**, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Singapore
- Headlights 2012**, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2011 **Photo Off, Young and Upcoming Photographers Art Fair 2011**, La Bellevilloise, Paris, France
- Young Artist Project 2011: Future Lab**, Daegu EXCO, Daegu, South Korea
- Tanah Ayer: Malaysian Stories from the Land**, Selasar Sunaryo Art Space, Bandung, Indonesia
- Now or Never**, ION Orchard Gallery, Singapore
- Angsana: Southeast Asian Photographers Taking Flight**, 2902 Gallery, Singapore
- 2010 **2010 ASEAN- Korea Multimedia Competition**, Gallery Jinsun, Seoul, South Korea
- CUT2010: New Photography from Southeast Asia: Parallel Universe**,

- Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Valentine Willie Fine Art, Singapore; Sangkring Art Space, Jogjakarta, Indonesia; Manila Contemporary, Manila, Philippines
- Al-Kesah: Once Upon a Time in Malaysia**, MAP White Box, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- Contemporary Rhetoric**, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2009 **Eyes Wide Open: Selected photos from the First Singapore International Photography Festival**, The Annexe Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- Different But Same**, Wei-ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- Paradise Lost**, 2902 Gallery, Singapore
- A New Wave of Responsive Images**, Nikon Ginza Gallery, Tokyo, Japan; Sabanci University, Istanbul, Turkey
- 2008 **Singapore International Photography Festival 2008**, LaSalle College of The Arts, Singapore
- Photoart Asia 2008**, Zengallery@Central World, Bangkok, Thailand
- CUT : New Photography from Southeast Asia**, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Valentine Willie Fine Art, Singapore
- 2007 **Bebas Lah: Malaysia@50**, The Annexe Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- Sharing Space: Contemporary Photography of Malaysia + Japan**, The Annexe Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- NYKL: Landmarks of New York and Kuala Lumpur**, The Annexe Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- Young Contemporary Art Awards 2006**, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- awards
- 2010 3rd Prize Photography Category, **2010 ASEAN- Korea Multimedia Competition**, Gallery Jinsun, Seoul, South Korea
- publications
- 2010 **Feng Shui: a Solo Exhibition by Munkao**, Exhibition Catalogue
- 2008 **Faces of IJN**, Coffee Table Book, IJN Foundation Publication

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ART & EIFFEL CHONG 2012

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