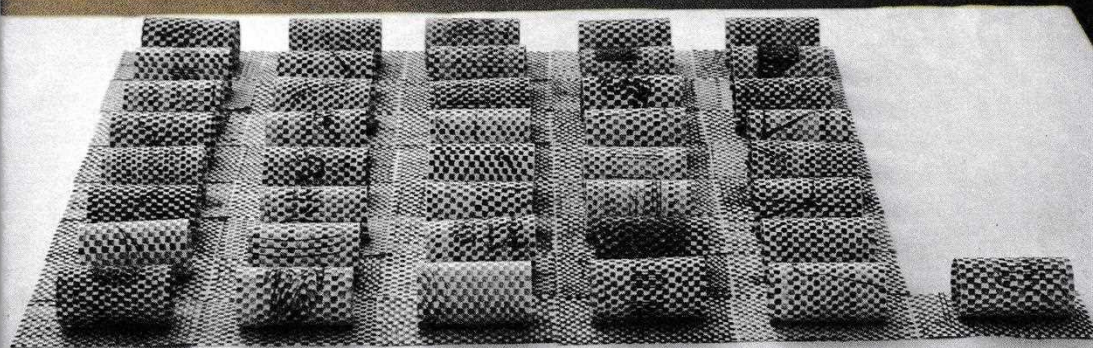


LIEW KWAI FEI THERHYTHMOFDOING



VALENTINE
WILLIE
fine ART
project room

left to right

Colour

2008

Acrylic on paper

25 x 18 cm x 28 pcs

[Details]

LIEW KWAI FEI T H E R H Y T H M O F D O I N G

Each day of our lives, we perform hundreds of little tasks—we take a shower, go to work, arrange meetings, negotiate contracts, harvest food, mop floors, write letters. In mathematics and computing, tasks are formalized as algorithms, defined as a set of instructions for carrying out a procedure or solving a problem. Based purely on the number of steps involved, you could say there are complex tasks and simple ones—cooking spaghetti versus determining traffic flow parameters, for example.

The thing about algorithms is that they make all tasks equal in importance. In other words, they allow us to look what we do in a socially and morally neutral way. Most tasks involve the following factors: input (data, ingredients etc), a process and an outcome. However, while procedures may be neutral (an algorithm for interrogating prisoners, say), the intent and effect of the outcomes are not. This human evaluation of cause and effect (as opposed to input/output) is what makes us different from computers. In it lies some indication of what it means to live in the world.

Liew Kwai Fei's solo exhibition explores this reality of action and its meaning by setting into motion a procedure—an algorithm for making art.

In a series of ink drawings, the algorithm appears to be:

Make a mark on a sheet of paper with a brush and ink.

Leaving a gap, make a subsequent mark similar to the first one.

Continue 1 and 2.

The algorithm for a series of monochromatic paintings is similar:

Put a layer of paint down on a sheet of A4 sized canvas.

Immediately put a subsequent layer of the same paint on top of the previous one.

Continue 1 and 2.

What is crucial about Liew's algorithms is that, unlike most of what we do, they are not performed with an outcome or purpose in mind. This does not mean there is no outcome. On the contrary, a pattern is produced, a documentation—of time and of doing, which exists in the here and now; something we can see and touch. Likewise, a purpose also emerges. Imagine the beat of rhythm that exists behind every poem: the poem exists and has function (is purposeful), but the invisible rhythm is the energy that drives it into being—it's the work that's being done, and it is its own purpose. This is what Liew makes visible for us: the invisible rhythm of doing.

What is the nature of this rhythm? As we can see in Liew's works, it is shaped by time. Looking at his ink drawings, we see instantaneously a checkered motif on a sheet of paper. It is that, but it is also this: the first mark determines the second one; the first row of marks determines the shape of the subsequent row, and so on. In the same way, whilst the paintings appear to us as monochromatic rectangles of texture and color, they also exist simultaneously as many layers of paint—the one on top is always influenced by the physicality of the one underneath. It is the same as a clock—each minute follows the next; yesterday determines the shape of today, which in turn affects tomorrow.

Speaking about Minimalism in 1968, Donald Judd said: 'I object to the whole reduction idea. If my work is reductionist, it's because it doesn't have the elements that people thought should be there. But it has other elements that I like'. Liew's work can be seen in tune with the values and ideas of Minimalism, which for the most part (with the possible exception of Liew's contemporaries Lau Mun Leng and musician Goh Lee Kwang), have not had a sustained inquiry in Malaysian art.

I speak of Minimalism here as the western, modernist reaction to the individual subjectivity of 1950s western Abstract Expressionist painters like Pollock and Rothko. In the Malaysian context, Abstract Expressionism emerged as a dominant idiom in the 1960s, and due in part to state-sponsored Islamisation of the 70s and 80s continues to inform a great deal of Malaysian painting. As has been noted elsewhere, the Malaysian response to Abstract Expressionism has been a return to figuration and a socially engaged approach to art making—minimalism has been of limited concern.

It is important to mention this, albeit briefly, so that we can begin to place Liew's works in the Malaysian art context. It allows us to look at it not as an aberration, but in conversation with narrative and symbolic art forms, as well as the continued preoccupation with abstraction, prevalent in our contemporary art today.

This conversation is clearly articulated in *Upside Down Triangle*, in which Liew's ink drawing algorithm is executed on pages taken from Chinese language black and white manga, or graphic novels. Like a second skin, his ink marks cover, but do not obliterate, these pages whose original function was to narrate a story. They are like the background beat of time, reminding us of an eternal rhythm to which all stories, invented or real, are subject. Liew's works acknowledge that we act out our daily lives alongside an infiniteness that is given shape through what we do, yet continues to flow on like water.

SHARON CHIN

JUNE, 2008

LIEW KWAI FEI 廖贵辉

born in 1979

EDUCATION

Diploma in Fine Art (major in Ink Painting), Malaysian Institute of Art.

E-MAIL

kwaifei@yahoo.com

BASE IN KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA.

SOLO EXHIBITION

2003 'FEI' A SOLO EXHIBITION BY LIEW KWAI FEI

21-28 June 2003 at Rumah Air Panas, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

5-31 July 2003 at Le Bois Creation, Melaka, Malaysia.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2002 GROUP OF 6-Fine Art Diploma Show, Gallery MIA, Malaysia.

2003 3 INSTALASI+3@RAP-A Preview of Installation Art and Drawings, Rumah Air Panas, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

SPACE(S) DIALOGUE + EXHIBITION, Rumah Air Panas, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

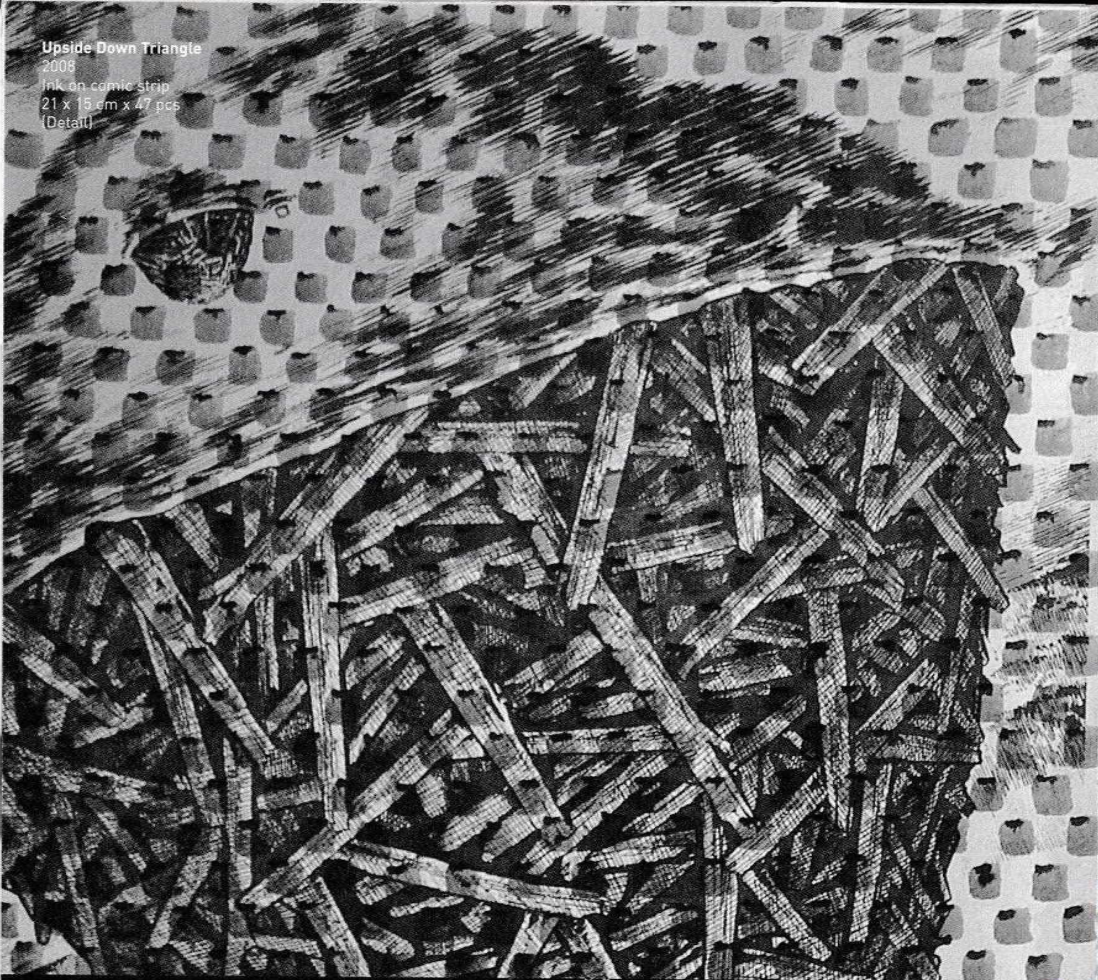
VASL International Artist Residency and Exhibition, Karachi, Pakistan.

2004 YOUQING-A Showcase of Ink Painting and Drawing, Rumah Air Panas, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

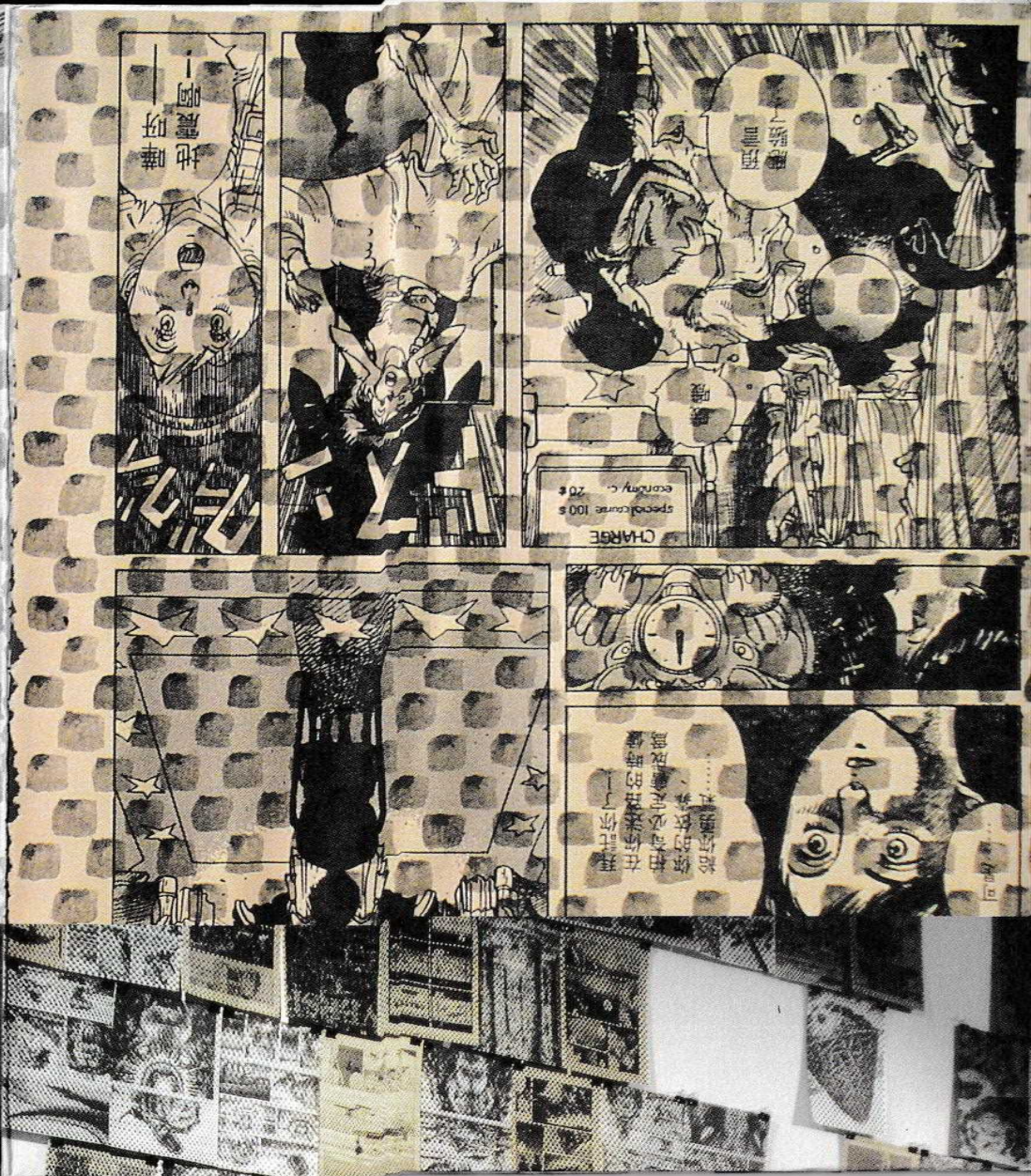
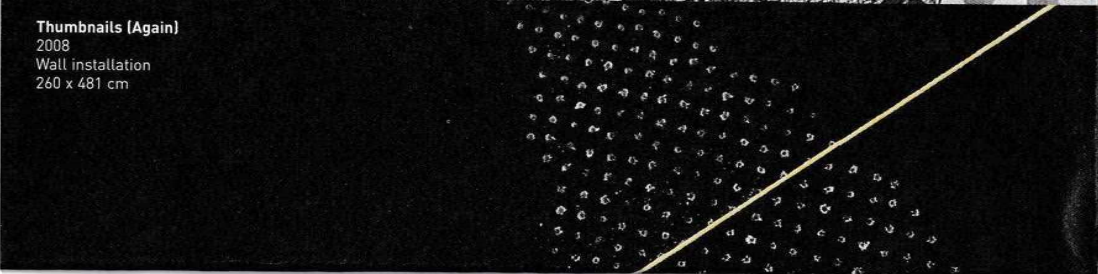
2005 DREAM, DELIRIUM+FACE EXHIBITION, Reka Art Space, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2007 NOTTHATBALAI ART FESTIVAL, Lost Generation Space.

Upside Down Triangle
2008
Ink on canvas strip
21 x 15 cm x 47 pcs
(Detail)



Thumbnails (Again)
2008
Wall installation
260 x 481 cm



Pandora's Box 'O'

2008

Acrylic in medicine pill box

2 x 7.5 cm diameter

Edition of 7



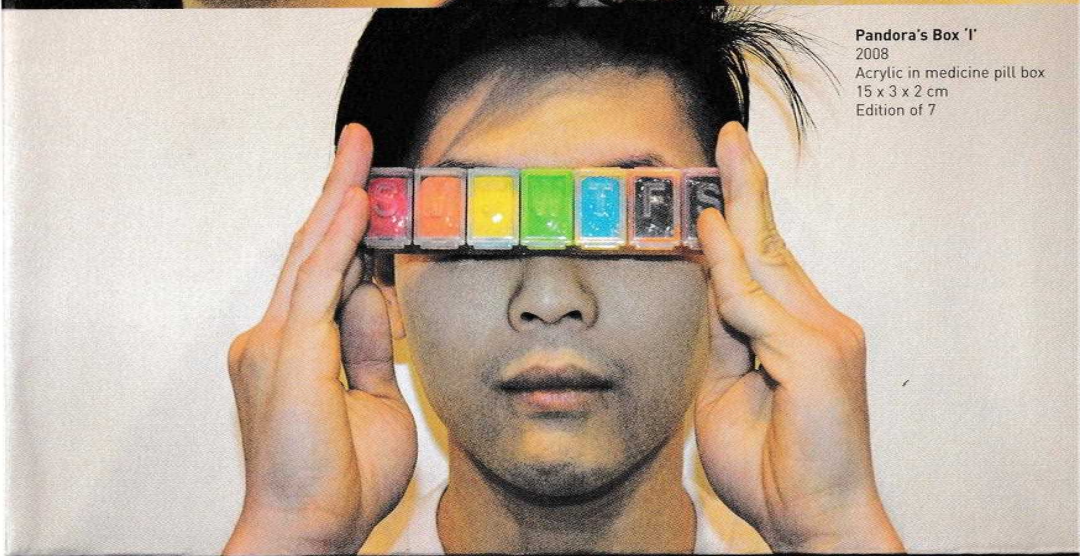
Pandora's Box 'I'

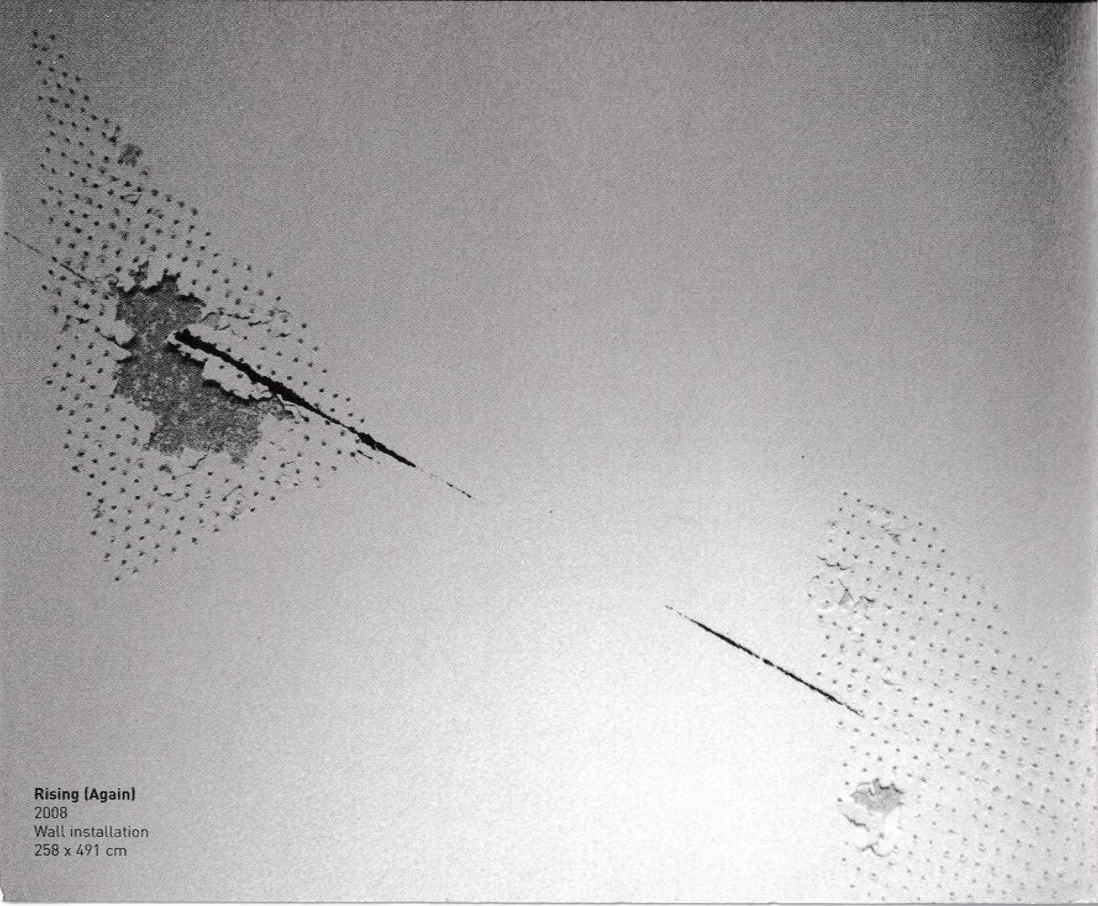
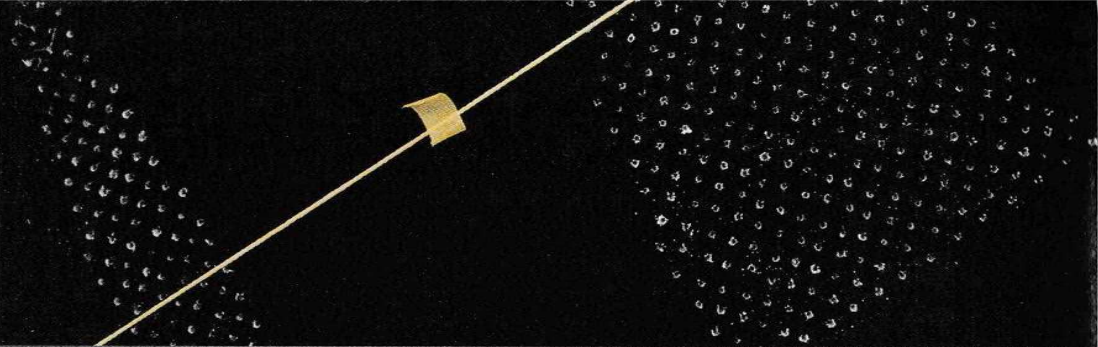
2008

Acrylic in medicine pill box

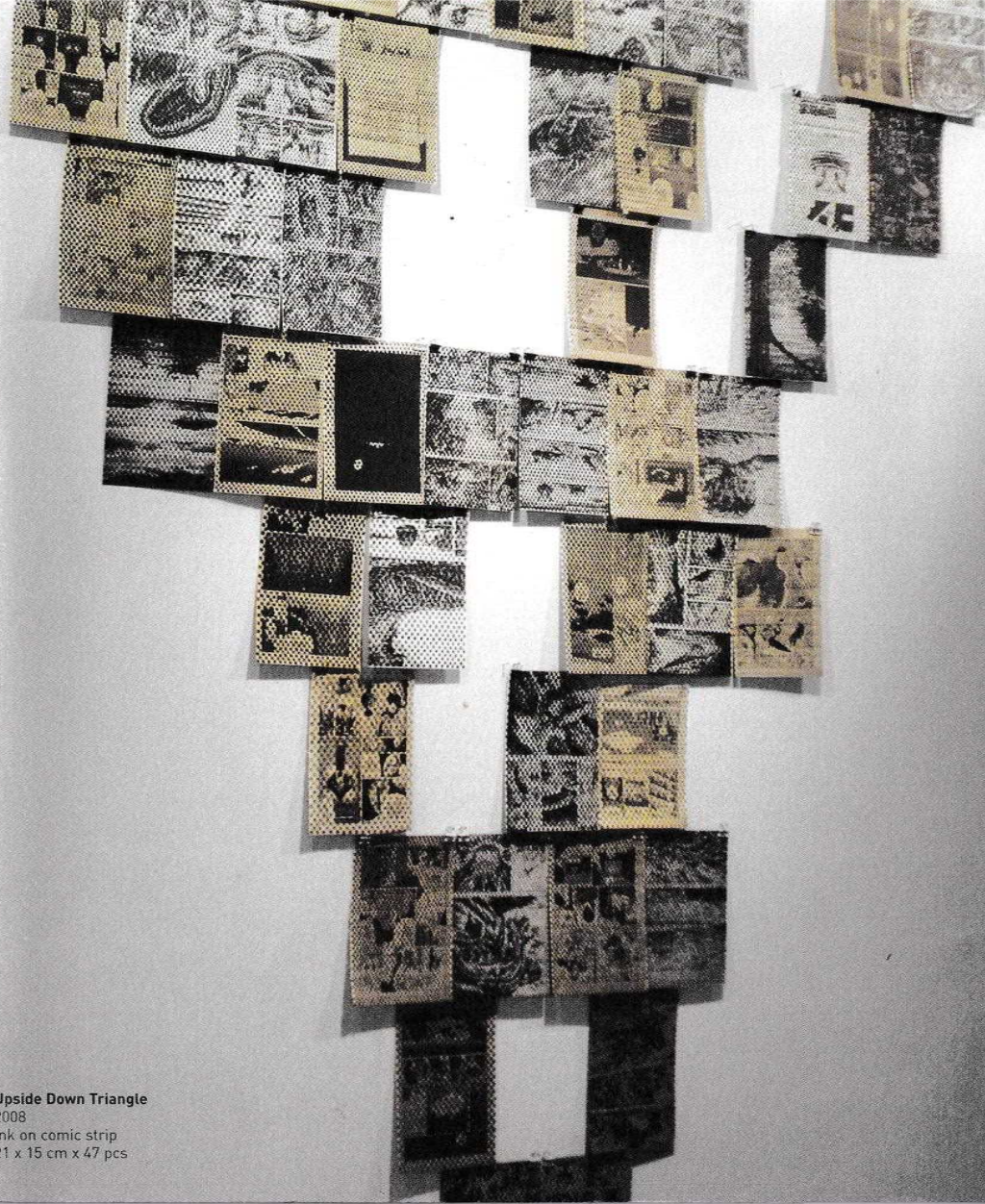
15 x 3 x 2 cm

Edition of 7





Rising (Again)
2008
Wall installation
258 x 491 cm



Upside Down Triangle
2008
Ink on comic strip
21 x 15 cm x 47 pcs

LIEW KWAI FEI THE RHYTHM OF DOING
13 AUGUST - 30 AUGUST 2008

Valentine Willie Fine Art cordial 8pm.

refreshments will be served
RSVP rachel@vwfa.net, 603 2284 2348

1st Floor, 17 Jalan Telawi 3
Bangsar Baru
59100 Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia

tel +603 2284 2348
fax +603 2282 5190
info@vwfa.net
www.vwfa.net

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Saturday 12 noon - 6pm. Closed on Sunday and public holidays.

Colour
2008
Acrylic on paper
25 x 18 cm x 28 pcs
(Detail)

cover and flap

Daylight
2008
Ink on photocopied monoprint
56 x 66 x 6.5 cm