

GUGGENHEIM BILBAO

Press release



The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao presents on December 22, 2016

Fiona Tan: *Disorient*

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- Dates: December 22, 2016–March 19, 2017
- Curator: Manuel Cirauqui
- Film & Video Gallery (103)

From December 22, 2016, through March 19, 2017, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao will present Fiona Tan's work *Disorient* (2009) for the first time in Spain. This is the ninth piece programmed in the Film & Video gallery since it opened in 2014 as a space dedicated to video art, video installation and the moving image.

Fiona Tan (Sumatra, 1966) produced *Disorient* in 2009 for the Dutch Pavilion of the 53rd Venice Biennale, where it was also partially staged and shot. In fact, the film reflects the history of Venice as a strategic center for the trade of goods from newly charted Asian territories in the 13th to 16th centuries. Tan's film evokes the dream of a "great Orient", as described by Marco Polo in his famous *Book of the Marvels of the World*. This collection of tales, now seven centuries old, inspired in Europe the image of a fairytale and fantastic Orient, rich in millenary cultures open for the first time to European knowledge; a cliché manipulated, also for centuries, to mask the exploitation of peoples and resources. This paradox impregnates the different elements in Fiona Tan's installation.

Disorient is composed of two facing screens, which communicate with one another by means of the objects appearing on them and the speaker placed between them, from which a man's voice can be heard whispering fragments of Marco Polo's travel chronicles. On the largest screen, a slow travelling shot depicts an anachronistic collection of souvenirs and trophies from the Far East: taxidermied exotic animals, gold statues, luscious fabrics, fine porcelain, spices and amulets; but also, surprisingly, modern bibelots, cash in various currencies, TV sets, and even a model of the Dutch Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. All of these objects are stored in a lonely warehouse kept by a mysterious, pensive man—a Westerner—dressed in a golden robe.

On the opposite screen, a montage of images describes contemporary life in the Asian lands allegedly visited by the celebrated Venetian explorer, where its inhabitants scrape a living among pollution, poverty and labor exploitation, in an environment of violence and chaos. These images, shot in Afghanistan, Iraq and China, obliquely document the creation, collection, shipping and installation of the luxurious objects represented in the rich warehouse on the first screen. As the title of the piece suggests, the juxtaposition of these two narratives, apparently disparate, but deeply connected, generates a sense of disorientation in the spectator.

Fiona Tan transforms the warehouse into a stage and archive for cultural memory and modern myth, reconstructing Marco Polo's legendary Asia, a reconstruction which is at once the recovery of an unwritten memory of the Asian continent and an invention of what this recollection could have been.

Fiona Tan

Fiona Tan, born in 1966 in Pekanbaru, a city in the center of Sumatra (Indonesia), has been based in the Netherlands since 1988. With a Chinese father and an Australian mother, Tan calls herself a "professional foreigner," a migrant by birth whose background inspires many of her works. Her productions, combining film, video and photography, examine the formation of identities in the post-colonial, globalized culture, particularly in relation to the myths and legends of the colonial East.

Fiona Tan is one of the most acclaimed contemporary film and video artists. The artist earned recognition for a series of works based on archive footage where she questions the role of the observer and the observed, challenging the myths of the colonial past. Reflection on identity, time and memory is a constant in Tan's work. Her portraits combine analysis of the sociological and historic-artistic context with a reflection on how time influences our perception of those portrayed.

Fiona Tan has participated in numerous exhibitions, both collective and solo, among which are the Documenta in Kassel and the Sao Paulo, Istanbul, Sydney and Yokohama Biennales. In 2009, Tan represented the Netherlands at the Venice Biennale. Among her most important solo exhibitions are the MCA in Chicago, the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Sackler Galleries in Washington, the Aargauer Kunsthau in Switzerland and the MMK in Frankfurt, where an extensive retrospective of her work will run until January 16, 2017. She won the J.C. van Lanschot Prize for Sculpture in 1998 and the Infinity Award for Art in 2004, and her work can be found in famous public and private collections, including the Tate Modern in London, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the New Museum in New York and the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

Cover image:

Fiona Tan

Disorient (2009)

Two-channel digital color video installation, with sound, 17 min. and 19 min. 30 sec.

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

Purchased with funds contributed by the International Director's Council, 2014

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All information about the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is available at www.guggenheim-bilbao.eus (press room).

Press Images for
Fiona Tan *Disorient*
Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

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At the press area (prensa.guggenheim-bilbao.es/en) you can register and download high resolution images and videos featuring the exhibitions and the building. Sign in to get access. If you are already a user, log in here (you need your username and password).

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

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