



Centre for
Contemporary
Asian Art

Acute Actions: Responses to I Am Not A Virus

Part 2: 3 June – 3 July 2021



Acute Actions: Responses to I Am Not A Virus presents four artistic interrogations of racism, personal identity and cultural displacement commissioned by Diversity Arts Australia's *I Am Not A Virus* project. Initiated in late 2020, the project has funded a breadth of artworks responding to the heightened xenophobia and racism emerging locally and globally amid the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. *Acute Actions: Responses to I Am Not A Virus* exposes and examines the traumas and lived experiences of People of Colour (POC) who battle the pervading domination of Eurocentric and Western-oriented ideals and values on a daily basis.

Building upon the previous *Acute Actions* exhibition, the works of Jin Hien Lau, Nathan Liow, Zachary Lopez and Sweet and Sour Collective delve into distinct experiences informed by disconnection and isolation. Working across a variety of practices and artistic methods, this exhibition further demonstrates the wide impact of racism and displacement on the POC population. The presented works poetically illustrate possible outlooks featuring cultural diversity in Australia's future.

Collected from second-hand shops throughout Australia, *Roil Horizon* is a multilayered navigation of kitsch, otherness, discrimination and identity. **Zachary Lopez** fuses contemporary dance and installation to satirise the misrepresentation and homogenisation of diverse Asian communities. His found object assemblage of decorative, domestic, found objects invites the viewer to question the distinction between worth and value, prompting consideration of the stories these discarded items embody. Transformed into staging, Lopez moves through the installation, presenting their lost stories while processing the ingrained trauma reignited by reports of racial violence during the coronavirus pandemic.

Jin Hien Lau has established himself as a strong presence and voice in the independent comics scene in Australia, and continues his blend of storytelling and autobiography with *Train of Thought*. The comic details Jin's stream-of-consciousness as he recounts acts of racial violence in Australia, following his mind as it jumps from Pauline Hanson to the Cronulla riots. Compositionally, the comic challenges norms, with text and illustrations spilling across panel borders suggesting the author's urgency and asserting his voice. Confronting the performative activism of our national media, and cognisant of his situation aboard a public transport, Jin silently expresses his incredulity at the incongruence between lived experience and what is broadcast by the media.

Composed and recorded during Melbourne's 112-day COVID-19 lockdown, *Air(borne)* positions **Nathan Liow** as a two-person ensemble performing to and for himself. Composed for guqin and piano, the semi-improvised work weaves between Chinese and Western formal music with careful consideration paid to the harmonic qualities and capabilities of each instrument. *Air(borne)* wordlessly vocalises the artist's inner dialogue, debating self-regulation of identity and Liow's desire to be inconspicuous as a Chinese Australian while remaining faithful to his cultural heritage.

Conversely to the internalisation and individuality of Lau, Liow and Lopez, the volunteer collaborative group **Sweet and Sour** engaged with collective participation in their postcard project. *Sweet and Sour: Postcard Collaborative* chronicles the overwhelming urge for human interaction during lockdown periods. The collective designed and distributed over fifty bespoke postcards to Asian-identifying individuals across Australia asking them to reflect on 2020. Responses ranged from intimate personal stories of families and household crises, to musings on time and scattered thoughts. The resulting collection of vignettes include a suite of ephemera complementing the returned postcards. As global discourse homogenised and dehumanised various communities, this project thoughtfully provides snapshots of individuals far and wide, while also recording the hardships endured and successes achieved as a result of this once in a lifetime event.

Acute Actions: Responses to I Am Not A Virus presents the work of twelve artists commissioned through Diversity Arts Australia's *I Am Not A Virus* initiative. This selection represents a range of artistic practices and conceptual reflections, including acts of processing and healing from the trauma of racial prejudice experienced by POC. Through ceramics, photography, performance, music, craft and storytelling, these artists have wrestled with racial prejudice and reframed multiculturalism to reflect this new lived experience.

List of Works:

1. Nathan Liow, *Air(borne)*, 2020-21, two-channel video, 2min 37sec.
2. Jin Hien Lau, *Train of Thought*, 2021, giclee prints.
3. Zachary Lopez, *Roil Horizon*, 2021, installation, bamboo, nylon string, various objects and materials.
4. Zachary Lopez, *Roil Horizon*, 2021, video, sound, 3min 15sec; filming and editing by Emma Harrison.
5. Sweet and Sour, *Sweet and Sour: Postcard Collaborative*, 2020-21, mixed media postcards.

Curators: Con Gerakaris and Reina Takeuchi

Project Producer: Kevin Bathman

Curatorial Assistant: Dylan Goh

Artist Biographies:

A proponent of the values of narrative across all forms of media and practices, **Jin Hien Lau** believes that in order to tell a good story, you must listen to a thousand better ones from everyone and everywhere first. Based in Sydney but a frequent collaborator on projects across Asia, Jin has applied his craft to fields ranging from prints, comics, illustrations and animation.

Melbourne pianist and composer, **Nathan Liow**, recently exhibited his collaborative work, “Music For Eyes” at Incinerator Gallery, which was also featured in the “New Movement Exhibition” at Cost Annex, Boston MA. His digital work, “Artifacts”, exhibited at West Space Gallery for Next Wave Festival. Liow’s compositions have appeared on a diverse range of mediums including for MIFF Official Selection film “Creswick” by filmmaker Natalie James, and other film and music festivals globally. He has performed alongside multiple ARIA recipient Andrea Keller at Melbourne’s Jazzlab, and during lockdown, he was commissioned by City Of Melbourne to broadcast a series of concerts from Tempo Rubato in Brunswick.

Sweet and Sour is a collective focusing on providing a voice for Asian-Australians. Being Asian today in Australia is not easy. When more than one culture demands your allegiance, there is a bizarre sense of existing between multiple worlds, yet not fully belonging to either. We are international students, mixed-race individuals and second-generation immigrants; many of us belong to multiple cultural identities, and face issues relating to belonging, racism and identity. Sweet and Sour was conceived with the notion of creating a space for individuals and communities with Asian heritage in Australia to share our thoughts, experiences and creativity. Members in Sweet and Sour: Chetan Kharbanda, Eleanor Hsu, James Yang, Joanne Leong, Malcolm Fortaleza, Melodie Liu, Sydney Farey, Viv Wang and Yvonne Yong.

Zachary Lopez (b. 1993, Meanjin Country, Brisbane) is an artist working with dance and choreography. An Australian-Filipino, his practice is primarily concerned with the experience of the ‘other’ with focus on dualism and draws from the experiential, myth and archive. Lopez shares his knowledge and experiences through various engagements as a teacher, performer and choreographer. He has worked on a multitude of projects and performances with independent practitioners and companies in contemporary dance, physical theatre and opera and is currently performing with Marrugeku on their touring production, Jurrunga Ngan-ga. Choreographically, he has been commissioned to make work for Sydney Dance Company (Pre-Professional Year), Dance Makers Collective (NSW) and the Keir Choreographic Awards and has received fellowships, grants and scholarships for development, performance and choreography from Australia Council for the Arts, The Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries WA and Create NSW.

Image caption: Sweet and Sour, *Sweet and Sour: Postcard Collaborative*, mixed media postcards, 2021; photo: courtesy the artist.

