

belief

Singapore Biennale 2006
4th September to 12th November 2006

Exhibition Short Guide

Organised by



In Partnership with



Ma, Jennifer Wen

Born 1973, Beijing, China. Lives and works, New York, USA

Maghain Aboth Synagogue/Masjid Sultan/Saint Joseph's Church:

Alms, 2006

Single channel video installation



The theme of ritual finds fanciful exploration in a selection of works by Jennifer Wen Ma. In *Wash Hands* (2003), created during the SARS epidemic, visitors were offered a basin of water and soap in which to wash their hands. While in another work titled *Cleansing Walk* (2005), the artist walked through the city wearing a dress with a twenty-meter long train. Though initially these works enact rituals of a seemingly mundane nature, notes of discord surface in their presentation. In *Cleansing Walk*, for example, the dress worn by the artist was white causing its meandering train to become overlaid with the street stains of the cityscape. Similarly, the basin of water in *Wash Hands* was not changed but permitted to stand festering for the duration of the exhibition. In effect both works contradict customary belief in the form of slight, but poetic, conceits opening the unexpected gaps between description and meaning.

Identifying the gaps of a city's religious past and its secular present formed the basis of a work Ma created for the small Tuscan town of Colle di Val d'Elsa in Italy. Entitled *Aeolian Garden* (2005) the work used windpipes and hammocks to create an environment of contemplation within the arches of the town's medieval Bridge of San Francisco. Responding to the way in which the bridge had become a habitual meeting ground for anti-social activity, *Aeolian Garden* attempted to reclaim the bridge and its surroundings for more convivial ends. Due to its popularity *Aeolian Garden* remains permanently in place and depending on the strength of the wind can be heard to emit melodic or clamouring, church-like chimes across a once-soulless public space. Through such an intervention the work also bears distant echoes of the bridge's original purpose, which was to connect the city to the nearby monastery.

The lyrical sentiments of *Aeolian Garden* are movingly developed in Ma's video trilogy for the Biennale, *Alms* (2006). Euphemistically titled, the work brings together two traits commonly associated with Singapore – economic prowess and a multi-faith society. In the work we watch looped footage of an outstretched hand whose contents steadily appear and disappear in relation to the motion of the hand as it opens and closes. Repeating this mantra-like image of giving and receiving across three religious sites, each video remains distinct by way of its accompanying soundtrack. By combining recordings across the three religious contexts, Ma composes three distinct religious soundscapes, which simultaneously attune us to the amorphous line between concordance and discordance at the heart of all faiths.

Sharmini Pereira Curator, SB2006

Selected Exhibitions:

- 2006 *Project Change Word*, Long March Space, Yan'an, China
- 2005 *Aeolian Garden*, UMoCA, Arte all'Arte 10, Colle di Val d'Elsa, Italy
- 2005 *Whiplash*, Shigeko Bork MU project, Washington D.C, USA
- 2003 *Distance*, Guangdong Art Museum, Guangzhou, China
- 2001 *Crouching Bitch*, Deitch Projects, New York, USA



Aeolian Garden, 2005. 45 copper pipes, 6 hammocks and metal frames. Photograph by Ela Bialkowska. Courtesy of the artist