

# Ho Tzu Nyen: A for Agents

April 6 – July 7, 2024

Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo presents a solo exhibition of Singaporean artist Ho Tzu Nyen.

Ho's films, video installations, and performances traverse historical events, political ideologies, subjectivities, and cultural identities of Southeast Asia. Drawing from existing film footage, archival material, and documentation, rearranged into abstract yet evocative images, his work renders the complexities of geopolitical histories palpable. Ho's work has been presented in numerous art institutions and biennials as well as theaters and film festivals worldwide. In Japan, he has participated in exhibitions including *Time of Others* at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo in 2015, and he has produced new work for the Performing Arts Meeting in Yokohama (TPAM) in 2018 and again in 2021, Aichi Triennale 2019, Yamaguchi Center for Arts and Media [YCAM] in 2021, and Toyota Municipal Museum of Art in 2021–22.



1. *Utama—Every Name in History is I*, video still, 2003

This latest exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, *Ho Tzu Nyen: A for Agents*, traces the trajectory of the artist's practice, presenting six film-based installations alongside a new work. The exhibition includes Ho's earliest video installation, *Utama—Every Name in History is I* (2003), which challenges the modern narrative of Singapore's foundations by tracing its precolonial origin to Sang Nila Utama, who is said to have named the land "Singapura" (Lion City, in Sanskrit).

Singapore's past also features in *One or Several Tigers* (2017), where 3D animations of a tiger and a human morph into various instances of the ruler and the subjugated, including the precolonial tiger as ancestor spirit and the mythological weretiger; the colonial encounter of a tiger and the road surveyor George D. Coleman who served the British administration in the nineteenth century; and the battle between the British army and the "Tiger of Malaya," Japanese military commander Tomoyuki Yamashita, during World War II.

A pair of works in the exhibition, *The Nameless* and *The Name* (both 2015), use existing film footage to speculate on two enigmatic individuals from Malaya's tumultuous political past. *The Nameless* sheds light on

Secretary-General of the Communist Party of Malaya, Lai Teck, who operated as a triple agent for the British, French, and Japanese during World War II, while *The Name* takes up the story of Gene Z. Hanrahan, who authored publications on the Malayan Communist Party using highly classified information—some believe him to be a ghostwriter.



2. *One or Several Tigers*, video still, 2017



3. *The Nameless*, video still, 2015

In 2012, Ho initiated the project, *The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia* with the question “What constitutes the unity of Southeast Asia, a region that has never been unified by language, religion or political structures?” It is a matrix for his artistic production, including the online platform shown in this exhibition, *CDOSEA* (2017-). The sequencing of sampled images and keywords is continuously generated by an algorithm and resists any definitive meaning of the term “Southeast Asia.”

Among Ho’s works produced in Japan over recent years, *Voice of Void* (2021) is presented in the exhibition. Consisting of VR (virtual reality) and six-channel videos, this installation restages conversations, speeches, and texts of the philosophers of the Kyoto School, who advocated for overcoming Western modernity and speculated on the value in establishing the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere. *Voice of Void* invites us to navigate across different time-spaces and become immersed in discussions among members of the Kyoto School, such as on the ethics of Japanese military ventures, the question of sacrificing one’s life for the nation, or founder Kitaro Nishida’s idea of “nothingness.”



4. *CDOSEA (Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia)*, screen capture, 2017-ongoing Image courtesy of the artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery



5. *Voice of Void*, installation view, 2021 Photo: Ichiro Mishima Image courtesy of Yamaguchi Center for Arts and Media [YCAM] and the artist

*T for Time* (2023) marks a new chapter in Ho's practice. It will be shown in Japan for the very first time. Based on an algorithm, the work generates sequences of images from multiple fragments of sampled footage to animate various aspects and scales of time: from elementary particles to the life span of different organisms to the vastness of the universe. The sequences evoke a multitude of meanings, sensations, and narratives, while questioning what is time, what mediates time, how do we experience it, and what could we imagine time to be?



6. *T for Time*, video still, 2023-ongoing  
Image courtesy of the artist and Kiang Malingue



7. *T for Time: Timepieces*, video still, 2023-ongoing  
Image courtesy of the artist and Kiang Malingue

## Ho Tzu Nyen



Ho Tzu Nyen / Photo: Matthew Teo

Ho Tzu Nyen was born in 1976 in Singapore, where he lives and works. His films, film-based installations, and performances draw from a vast range of cultural materials and discourse, which are repurposed into a visual machinery that animates the entanglement and complexity of history, subjectivity, and power.

Ho's recent solo exhibitions were held at Singapore Art Museum (2023), Hammer Museum (Los Angeles, 2022), Toyota Municipal Museum of Art (Aichi, 2021–22), Crow Museum of Asian Art of the University of Texas at Dallas (2021), Yamaguchi Center for Arts and Media (2021), Kunstverein in Hamburg (2018), and Ming Contemporary Art Museum (Shanghai, 2018).

He represented Singapore at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011. Ho's recent group exhibitions include Thailand Biennale (2023), Aichi Triennale (2019), 12th Gwangju Biennale (2018), and 10th Shanghai Biennale (2014). His works have also been presented in numerous international theaters and film festivals, including Theater der Welt (2010, 2023), Holland Festival (2018, 2020), Berlin International Film Festival (2015), Sundance Film Festival (2012), and 41st Directors' Fortnight at the Cannes Film Festival (2009). In 2019, Ho co-curated the 7th Asian Art Biennial with Taiwanese artist Hsu Chia-Wei at the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts.

## Information

### Ho Tzu Nyen: A for Agents

Exhibition Period	Saturday, April 6 – Sunday, July 7, 2024
Opening Hours	10 AM –6 PM (tickets available until 30 minutes before closing)
Closed	Mondays (except 29 Apr, 6 May), 30 Apr, 7 May
Venue	Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, Exhibition Gallery B2F
Admission	To be announced.
Organized by	Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo operated by Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture
Curated by	Che Kyongfa (Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo)

## Concurrent Exhibitions

March 30 – July 7

Tokyo Contemporary Art Award 2022-2024 Exhibition

April 6 – July 7

MOT Collection

April 18 – July 7

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- 1 *Utama—Every Name in History is I*, video still, 2003
- 2 *One or Several Tigers*, video still, 2017
- 3 *The Nameless*, video still, 2015
- 4 *CDOSEA (Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia)*, screen capture, 2017-ongoing  
Image courtesy of the artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery
- 5 *Voice of Void*, installation view, 2021 Photo: Ichiro Mishima  
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- 6 *T for Time*, video still, 2023-ongoing  
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- 7 *T for Time: Timepieces*, video still, 2023-ongoing  
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