



Remember This Place,  
**Faris Nakamura**  
For We Will Be Back Here Again Someday

# Remember This Place, For We Will Be Back Here Again Someday

A Solo Exhibition by  
**Faris Nakamura**



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4 - 19 October 2019



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# The Hypotenuse Of A Stairwell

by Euginia Tan, 2019

In geometry, a hypotenuse is the longest side directly opposite of a right-angled triangle. The perspective of the hypotenuse is compelling in Faris Nakamura's present series of works, as the hypotenuse indicates the prompt of an ascending stairwell, the hint of a crevice that occupies. At first glance, this detail seems like an innocuous, slightly vexing wedge in the otherwise seamless flow of a structure. Yet it is a fixture that becomes telling in the way the artist has chosen to reveal laws of space – fragmented visual cues we can recognize in our minds through the suppression of our own containment.



Void Deck of 778 Yishun Avenue 2, Photo credits: Faris Nakamura

Nakamura's conviction in having a stake to his own space led to his ongoing inquiry with how we have ordained certain "rights" to spaces. Why are some persons/activities allowed in the partaking of a space? Inversely, why are they not allowed? There is a particular fascination with a larger social statement, spaces have become unspoken echo chambers of the irrationality in a legislative system. The artist's subliminal suggestions planted in each work unravels an unspoken code of personal restraint and yearning of permission.

## The Rake

The rake is the ratio of the slope in a flight of stairs. In most of the artist's works, stairs feature prominently as complementing features. However, let us consider their rake: While approachable, and

therein somewhat seemingly functional, there is an austere quality in the way they are presented. Where do these stairs go, and dare we be using them to get somewhere? Why does the rake taunt as much as it poses dutifully? Nakamura's experiences in facing difficulties while attempting to study on staircases offer an irony that the rake has to be utilized in order for a society to deem a flight of stairs appropriate. Therefore, is the notion of the rake indeed deciding the stairs' implementation?

A study conducted by the US National Library of Medicine notes that "stair walking is a challenging locomotor task, and visual information about the steps is considered critical to safely walk up and down. Despite the importance of such visual inputs, there remains relatively little information on where gaze is directed during stair walking."<sup>1</sup> Medically, there has not been a determinant as to where we look when we climb a flight of stairs. Yet, shifts in the functions of stairs are so instinctively frowned upon. The abnormalities we detect are proven to not be cognitively inherent in us. The research was concluded with results revealing that "the specific role of gaze behaviour in guiding immediate action and that stair transitions did not demand increased gaze behaviour... These findings may also indicate that individuals may rely on a spatial representation built from previous experience and/or visual information other than gaze fixations to extract information from the surrounding environment." If we ponder on that statement, the rake in the artist's stairs then scrutinizes the biases pinned on a space. We harbour certain doubts triggered by how and what we are

<sup>1</sup> US National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health. "Where do we look when we walk on stairs?" Medical Abstract. Last modified March 2011. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21188360>

taught, a space is also not spared by the mind's judgement.

Examining the role of the rake in Nakamura's works more evocatively, we can consider it to be the posture of a flight of stairs. Postures are human inflections: one slouches when they are tired, sits up upon excitement. The postures in the artist's rendering of stairs suggest an enticing quality of invitation. This invitation is ambiguous in its request, for it can seem to lull one to rest on the stoop of the stairs at one moment, seduce one to linger in the after-hours with a lover. The rake is a swoop in a moment, what happens thereafter makes the stairs accomplice to an instant rather than a mere prop on set. To elaborate further, a children's poem *Halfway Down*<sup>2</sup> by author A.A Milne serves as a reflection for the choices we make on stairs:

*Halfway down the stairs*

*Is a stair*

*Where I sit.*

*There isn't any*

*Other stair*

*Quite like*

*It.*

*I'm not at the bottom,*

*I'm not at the top;*

*So this is the stair*

*Where*

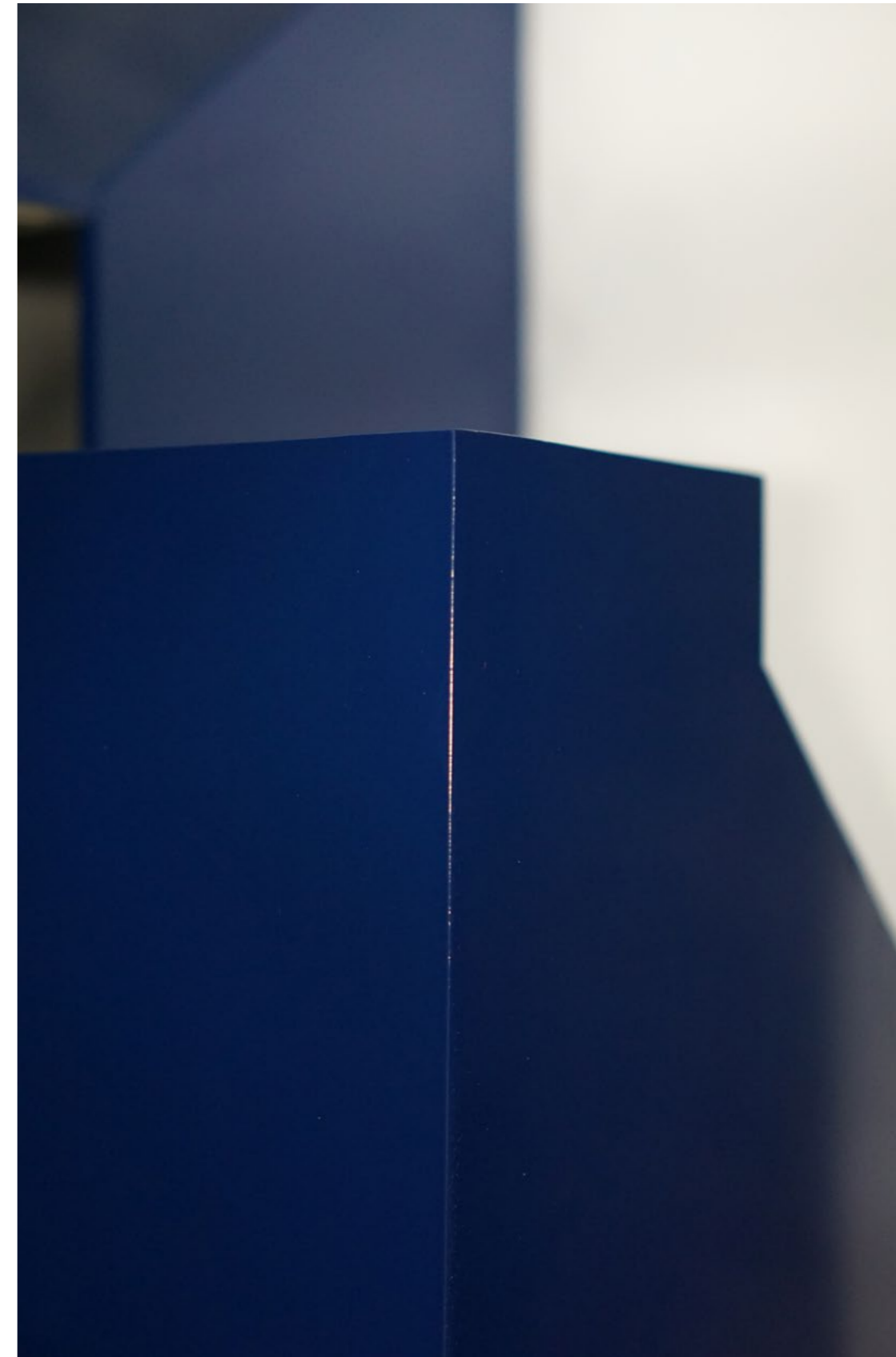
*I always*

*Stop.*

While intended for younger readers, the poem is noted to be meditative in nature, concise in capturing the present. The hopscotch, staccato style of the poem shows how stairs are formed and built. There is no clear distinction of a beginning, middle and end,

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<sup>2</sup> A.A Milne, *Halfway Down* (London: Methuen & Co., 1924).



rather it exists as a whole. This is a premise of a moment on a staircase, there is no definitive reasoning behind what simply chooses to happen. The rake of stairs is therein a purveyor of subconscious desires, literally raking in what culminates.

### Fixtures, Handles, Windows: Further Details

Scattered strategically around various angles are place holdings in the works – the familiarities of a door handle, a partial window, a balcony. The artist conveys our futility as dependents to a space. We need anchors such as these to open, climb and examine our surroundings. Often, these place holdings are little comforts, sometimes reminders about how we ought to interact. When they are distributed sparsely, a jolt of attention is delegated back to their purpose. These further details evident in Nakamura's composition offer a certain extent of consolation. On the other hand, they show us that a space is controlled by its fixtures.

How should we re-examine the fixtures in our immediate surroundings? Quickly, we begin to notice they are catered for a level of aptitude we are forced to take on. Michael Lee's *The Consolations of Museology*<sup>3</sup>, a work where ten models of hypothetical museums were created in response to a vice (i.e. jealousy, cowardice, ugliness etc.) is a poignant resonance of how artists are able to align vulnerability to architecture, akin to Nakamura's epiphany that spaces can too often fall prey to the survival of the fittest, the fall of the displaced.

To quote Lee, "In distilling and presenting truths that remain constant or change over time and space, museums assume that their work will inspire people to transcend immediate conditions, devastating or overly comfortable ones, thereby enriching their souls."<sup>4</sup> Assumptions of a space assuage. Place

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Lee Hong Hwee, *The Consolations of Museology* (Hong Kong, Studio Bibliotheque, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

holders in a space enable these assumptions. But their positioning has been so overlooked to a degree of oblivion that we cannot help but look to them as buoys out at sea. The assumption lies in the theory that we should all adapt. The reality is that some of us cannot. Even the neutrality of a window can become a looking glass one would shun, if they cannot see what is beyond that as a definition of freedom.

### Colour Inclinations

While the fixtures in Nakamura's works are calculated, the light-heartedness comes through with his colour play. At first glance, the colour scheme of the works might appear straightforward, a choice of black, white and others not too far astray. However, the artist has been careful in staying true to his process: Matt surfaces are often the go-to hue for a functional space, there is no need to pretend otherwise. What is not as obvious are the varying degrees of colour tone when one work is placed next to the other – a grey work, next to a white one, looks extremely dark. When it is placed next to a black, we notice that it pales considerably. Colours are the deceiving element in the works.

It speaks to an idiosyncrasy we are too familiar with. Our spaces look satisfactory, or something we are so accustomed to, until we compare. It then dips or increases in value thanks to our fickle measure of worth, we then in turn lament or laud it for its re-assessed yield. In something as nonplussed as colour, especially so when they are so similar in shade, it is humorous to see that something like this affects. The artist is able to respond to this whimsically, by then creating two other works with starkly more provocative textures and colour palettes. It is always a touch more enjoyable to view a series with a pinch of fun. It is surprisingly easy to find novelty in a space with a fresh coat of paint.



## In Lieu Of Viewing

With the majority of buildings in Singapore comprising of skyscrapers from the ground up, we tend to have a blinkered view of how to regard spaces in Singapore. We look at things by tilting our heads upwards, or by going very high and looking downwards. A middle ground or an alternate lens is seldom contemplated. By offering us other ways to view the wall-mounted and sculptural works as a condensed summation of a building, we have a broader insight from the artist about how to treat the building as separate from an architectural vocabulary. Aaron Betsky, critic and curator of architecture and design, concisely reinforces that “architecture is not building. Buildings are objects and the act of building leads to such objects, but architecture is something else. It is the way we think and talk about buildings... More generally, architecture is a way of representing, shaping and perhaps even offering critical alternatives to the human made environment.”<sup>5</sup>



Void Deck of 778 Yishun Avenue 2, Photo credits: Faris Nakamura

Nakamura invites the viewer to conjure additional ways of looking at the spaces in his works, be it through squatting down, tip-toeing slightly or shifting one's regular focal point. He rewards this by including déjà vu nuggets in these tucked away crannies. We are held sway by the prescription of nostalgia in our spaces, we hold on steadfastly to what these spaces were and could have been.

But we soon resume our movement and habits of viewing. The remembrance vanishes from plain sight, the work seems to have morphed back into another afterthought.

In her critic's essay on Lee's *Consolations*, Lilian Chee indicates that “through its seriality, what *Consolations* shows is repeated frailty, a constant re-working of an idealised idea, or an impossible process of trying to make something perfect happen caught in freeze frame. We look closer, become more involved until the geography of the model space engulfs our physical but disembodied positions. We shift from being in the museum to looking at ourselves in the museum. It is, above all, a self-situating perspective.”<sup>6</sup> Likewise, Nakamura provides a collage of memory and flawed societal regulation, whispering faintly behind the sturdy facades of a progressive nation. In lieu of viewing, spectatorship and kneejerk participation, do we allow ourselves chances to redeem a space? If so, we can then clearer evaluate what goes on behind our territorial psychology.

<sup>5</sup> Aaron Betsky, curatorial note, *Out There: Beyond Building*, the 11th International Architectural Exhibition at Venice Biennale, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Lilian Chee, *The Impediment of Conscience: Critic's Essay, The Consolations of Museology* (Hong Kong, Studio Bibliotheque, 2008).

Works





*The White Spaces In Between*

2019  
Enamel on treated wood  
70 x 70 x 12 cm



*The Dark Spaces In Between*

2019  
Enamel on treated wood  
70 x 70 x 12 cm



*Amid The Silence, Unquietly We Frolic*

2019

Enamel on treated wood, metal pieces and acrylic plastic  
90 x 130 x 18 cm

*In Place Of The Impalpable*

2019

Enamel on treated wood, metal pieces and acrylic plastic  
90 x 130 x 18 cm



*Desolate*

2019

Enamel on treated wood, metal pieces and acrylic plastic  
60 x 50 x 10 cm



*Reminisce*

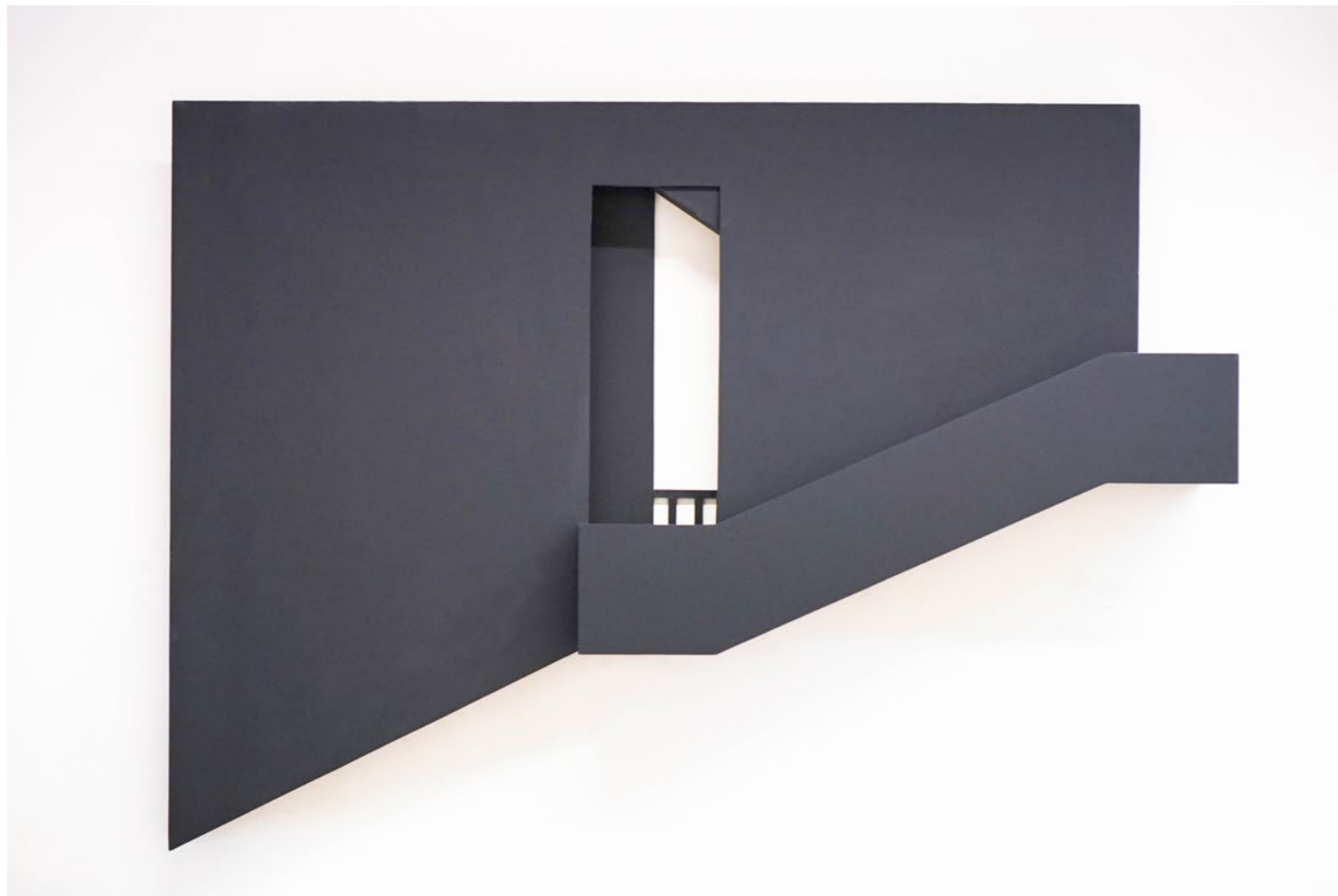
2019

Enamel on treated wood, metal pieces and acrylic plastic

50 x 80 x 12 cm







*The Place In Which Everything Exists*

2019  
Enamel on treated wood, metal pieces and acrylic plastic  
90 x 130 x 18 cm



*If We Stand Here And Look Down, I Wonder What Will We See?*

2019  
Matt enamel coated mild steel  
90 x 52 x 42 cm



*If We Sit Here And Look Up, I Wonder What Will We See?*

2019  
Matt enamel coated mild steel  
90 x 52 x 42 cm

# Artist Profile



Faris Nakamura (b.1988, Singapore) graduated with Bachelor in Fine Arts (First Class Honours) from LASALLE College of the Arts in partnership with Goldsmiths, College of London in 2014.

Through sculptures, installations and site-specific works, Faris investigates the way people navigate and orientate themselves as they encounter space. He desires to understand their attachments and detachments towards space, how these develop, and their impact.

Faris was most recently awarded the Young Talent Programme Winners' Solo, 2017/2018. He was the Grand Winner at the Shitsurai International

Art Competition, Kobe Biennale, 2015 and the Winston Oh Travel Award recipient, 2013.

Faris has exhibited both locally and internationally. He has showcased at venues such as The Substation (Singapore), ION Art (Singapore), Scotts Square (Singapore), Gillman Barracks (Singapore), Kobe Biennale (Japan), Georgetown Festival (Penang, Malaysia), FASS Art Gallery (Turkey), and Palazzo Ca' Zanardi, (Venice).

It is also notable that Faris is a flautist and has performed at venues such as the Esplanade Concert Hall and the Victoria Concert Hall (Singapore).

## Education

2011 - 2014 Bachelor (First Class Hons) of Fine Arts, Goldsmith, University of London by LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore

## Solo Exhibitions

2019 Remember This Place, For We Will Be Back Here Again Someday, Richard Koh Fine Art, Singapore  
The Camouflaged Man: Invisibility & Mimicry, S.E.A Focus, Richard Koh Fine Art, Gillman Barracks, Singapore

2018 Young Talent Programme Winners' Solo, ION Art Gallery, Singapore

2015 NMH x Flanuer 5.0: Between Places, New Majestic Hotel, Singapore

## Selected Group Exhibitions

2018 The Concerned Citizens Showcase, The Substation, Singapore  
Departure 3, Ipreciation, Singapore

2017 AAF: Young Talent Programme, F1 pit Building, Singapore  
VADA: Untapped Emerging - Shophouse 5, Singapore

2016 EPHEMERA, The Substation, Singapore  
Contemporary Venice: Architectures of Identities, Palazzo Ca' Zanardi, Venice

2015 Art Bounties, Central Public Library, Singapore  
Art of Our City: Young Singaporean Artist, The Art Space@Suntec, Singapore  
Affordable Art Fair, F1 Pit Building, Singapore

Art Discovered Edition 1, The Art Fellas Gallery, Singapore

Shitsurai Art International Exhibition, Kobe Biennale 2015, Meriken Park Kobe, Japan

2014 Lasalle Show 2014, ICA Gallery, Singapore

Dibs Collaboration, Dibs Restaurant, Marine Terrace Blk 55, Singapore

Open field: Offbeat@Winstedt, Winstedt Road No. 9, Singapore

"sMall iDeas", FASS Gallery, Sabanci University, Tuzla - Istanbul, Turkey

2013 Art of Giving Exhibition, Scotts Square, Singapore

Winston Oh Travel Award 2013, Praxis Space Gallery, Singapore

Lasalle Show 2013, ICA Gallery, Singapore

George Town Festival, Penang, Malaysia

2012 And the Story Goes, Brother Joseph McNally Gallery, Singapore

Raw & Craft, Ngee Ann Kong Si Library, Lasalle College of the Arts, Singapore

2011 Exhibition With Heri Dono, Critique Room, Lasalle College of the Arts, Singapore

Beyond Limits, Praxis Space Gallery, Singapore

## Awards

2017/2018 Young Talent Programme Winner's Solo

2015 Kobe Biennale Grand Winner, Shitsurai Art International Competition, Kobe Biennale

2014 First Class Honours, Bachelor of Fine Arts

2013 Winston Oh Travel Award



# Writer's Biography





Eugenia Tan is a Singaporean writer who writes poetry, creative non-fiction and plays. She enjoys cross-pollinating art into multidisciplinary platforms and reviving stories. Contact her at [eugtan@hotmail.com](mailto:eugtan@hotmail.com)





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