

In every
grain of sand
there is
a
World.

An exhibition by anGie Seah

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An exhibition by

anGie Seah (SG)

08 October - 17 October 2014

Victoria College of the Arts

Melbourne

Australia

This Asialink Arts Residency Project is a collaboration between Asialink, The Art Incubator and Victorian College of the Arts and is supported by Arts Victoria



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In partnership with the Victorian College of the Arts, Asialink Arts has been delighted to host Angie Seah who has been artist in residence at the VCA between August and October 2014.

The residency is a reciprocal residency between the VCA, Melbourne and the Arts Incubator, Singapore.

Singaporean artist Angie Seah's participatory multidisciplinary practice traverses the mediums of drawing, installation, performance and sculpture. Her work explores the interaction of human relationships with social environments, through encounters with the ephemeral realm of sound.

In every grain of sand, there is a world features new work that Angie Seah has produced over the past seven weeks, including a collective performative work developed with VCA students from across various programs. Congratulations to Angie for developing such a stimulating body of work and performance piece during her residency.

It is increasingly recognised that to be effective and meaningful, cultural engagement must be truly a two-way exchange, both in terms of the arts professionals 'trading places', but also in terms of the in-country exchanges, discussions, interactions and relationships that are forged. We are pleased that Angie's 'reciprocal', writer and Associate Curator at the Centre for Contemporary Photography,

Melbourne (CCP), Kyla McFarlane – who has been based at the Art Incubator Singapore – has written an essay for this exhibition.

Asialink Arts is grateful to both Angie Seah and Kyla McFarlane as well the host partners the Victorian College of the Arts and The Art Incubator for participating so enthusiastically in this inaugural Singapore – Melbourne reciprocal residency. In particular, thank you to Kate Just, Jan Murray, Kim Donaldson and Elizabeth Gower for their support at VCA and Charmaine Toh in Singapore for her ongoing interest in Australia and Australian artists. Thanks also to our funding partners for this program, Arts Victoria and the Australia Council for the Arts.

LESLEY ALWAYS
Director, Asialink Arts



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I first met Angie Seah in Singapore, where I was in curatorial residence at The Art Incubator during the 2014 Melbourne winter, and from where she has travelled to be artist in residence in Melbourne for three months. I was researching an exhibition on Singaporean performance art — gathering relics, objects and ephemera from artists that told me something of their practice, their history. Seah lent me a gold pair of boots and a Bruno Magli leather jacket that she wore while collaborating in a performance with Chicks on Speed and Francesca von Habsburg at the Australian Pavilion party at the 2013 Venice Biennale. We agreed that this was a strange convergence of our respective countries in a nation foreign to us both.

The title of Seah's residency exhibition at the Victorian College of the Arts, *In Every Grain of Sand There is a World* suggests the capacity for tiny and insignificant things to be complex, rich and expansive. And in a different country, we often experience difference in myriad small ways, rather than a singular, all-embracing sense of change. When I visit Seah in her VCA studio, she tells me about the shadows she has encountered in Melbourne — sharp, blunt and so present, so much more so than in her home country where light is diffused by humidity and haze. She has captured these shadows in a series of small photographs. Sounds have also caught her ear during her hours spent at the VCA

studio; the curious sound of horses from the police stables located nearby, for example.

Before she left Singapore, Seah told me she was looking forward to making objects from clay, something she hadn't worked with for several years. She was looking forward to engaging with its raw, material qualities and the pleasure of making with her hands. In the early weeks of her residency, Seah made an array of ceramic objects, which now cover her studio table when I visit. Some are body parts: hearts, teeth, eyes, lips, bones ... One small heart contains a tiny object, which rattles pleasingly when picked up. There is a ceramic brain, with a hole for a straw, which Seah inserts: 'Mind blowing!'

Nearby, an unfired, vase-like vessel is embellished with multi-coloured wool twisted and unfurled into decorative fringes and braids, the work of Melbourne-based craft artist Warisa Somsuphangsri. A creamy-white ceramic tower of cups look like they will topple at any moment, and a small ceramic Op Shop sits under a glass bell jar, aligning it to the kind of curio you might find in such places. (Op Shops are practically non-existent in Singapore, the home of malls and discount shops).

For Seah, these simple, crafted objects are made complex by association, as mirrors to and reflections upon her everyday lived experience, and to their relationship to her performing body.

She has taken them with her into the urban and natural environment around Melbourne, as talismans with which she plays out certain actions and activities. Photographs document these interventions: the woolly-fringed vessel covers her face, a decorative prosthesis protruding like a snout as Seah holds it to a tree trunk, or points its hollow form to the ground. Small, white fist and heart sit on a grassy path, echoing each other in their form.

...

In her exhibition, Seah brought together her photographs and crafted objects into a densely-filled space, repurposing and reanimating them into an environment that felt like a cross between a gallery, a hippie commune and a ritualistic, sacred space. The sounds of the horses emerged from within a ceramic vessel, which has now become a listening device. The unfired vessel that once covered her face is now an object from which sounds can be heard if we tilt our ear in close, a Night Ritual:

Whispering from a small group of people

Heartbeat of a person

Bell of an artist's studio

Digeridoo busker in South Melbourne

Horses outside VCA

Sound of sand

Some of the ceramics are titled 'studies' and 'experiments'. Some hang from the ceiling by woollen

macramé receptacles made by Somsuphangsri — horns, hearts, bowls and wind chimes. Others, such as Studies of a Domestic Scream, are instructional pieces, made available to visitors as receptacles for our own cathartic release, should we care to use them. You just need to put your mouth to the lip of the cup and blow...

This simple action of breathing and blowing, and of using the voice to the point of screaming, is an important performative device for Seah. A scream is the voice at its height of emotion, and the constant breath is one of the body's instinctive acts. At her opening, Seah performed with four VCA student collaborators, En-En See, Aniquah Stevenson, Sarah Rudledge and Jennifer Arllen Ferguson. Kneeling before water-filled bowls, they periodically lowered their faces into the water, the release of their breath and voice producing a near-guttural sound. Seah also played a small Indian drone instrument, its sustained notes from bellow-like sides echoing their focused breath. There was a quiet pause at the close of this work as the performers stood before us wet-faced and flushed, and the audience appeared to collectively exhale.

Seah's practice seems to me to exist in a space between many things: materiality and performativity; absurd humour and gruelling tenacity; ritual and release; sound and silence. It is intuitive and considered, ephemeral and object-based. It inhabits body,

object, room and world. Following the group performance, a friend described the frisson it created as ‘ha ha drowning’, an apt evocation of the tension created between levity, vulnerability and bodily risk. After her opening, Seah tells me that she would love to perform inside the body of a whale, enjoying its expansive, cavern-like surrounds and resonant acoustic space. I like to think of her existing in this water-filled chamber, the krill floating by as she lets out a resonant scream.

Kyla McFarlane



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This interview comprises of two parts. The first part is an interview between Seng Yu Jin and Angie Seah with interjections by Warissa and Lesley Alway as critical reflections on the exhibition titled, *In Every Grain of Sand There is a World*. The second part comprises an interview with four student - collaborators from the Victoria College of the Arts, En-En See, Jennifer Ferguson, Sarah Rudledge and Aniquah Stevenson who performed with Angie in the performance titled, *Water Ensemble* during the exhibition opening on 8 October, 2014 at the Victoria College of the Arts (VCA) Gallery at around

In Every Grain of Sand There is a World

Seng Yu Jin (SYJ): Angie, can you share how your artist's residency at the VCA has shaped this body of works that you are now showing in this exhibition?

anGie seah(AS): Melbourne is a fantastic place to make art as there are so many artists here. The VCA's facilities such as its library and workshops, as well as good-spirited students from the VCA who attended my workshop and collaborated with me on the performance, *Water Ensemble* have made my residency here a productive and engaging one. I am interested to explore how and if my work relates to people in Melbourne that is culturally dynamic

with many exhibitions going-on at a frantic pace. I had good energy during my residency and produced a lot of works because of the availability of materials here, especially the richness of clay in Australia coupled with an active crafts practice that serves as a productive dialogue with the academic side of artistic practices. It helps to position me where I belong in the Melbourne art world.

SYJ: We'll come back to the productive tensions between craft and fine art practices, and the conflictual tension in the grafting of what appears to be different materials like clay with hand knitting. Coming back to the title of your exhibition, *In Every Grain of Sand There is a World*, can you elaborate on the concept of your exhibition in relation to its title?

AS: For me, everybody and everything is significant regardless of how big or small as we need to come together collectively to achieve something. It is therefore a salute to everyday life and the everyday 'hero'. Sand is the simplest thing on ground and I like the idea of being grounded and there is strength in that belief. I am presenting that belief.

SYJ: And you are also saying that in every grain of sand there is a world or multiple worlds.

AS: Exactly! Sand is cheap and free; and therefore a way to reaffirm my own belief in humanity and the human condition.



SYJ: I will like to explore the concept of sacredness in everyday life and also in relation to rituals. Can you unpack for us what constitutes sacredness?

AS: When I was exploring Melbourne, I like the Op Shop a lot as a sacred place because it has items from different periods of time, of people's lives embedded in the loves of the objects. For me, that is sacred because it is personal. It has a lot of memories not as discarded objects but being shared. The Op Shop is such a sacred place for me as it allows many different experiences to happen. Every day is in fact, personal and therefore sacred. We live different lives everyday with different actions that may be explainable as the sacred does not

require much explanation as it is filled with mystique. I am interested in that mystique.

SYJ: How can we find sacredness in everyday life?

AS: Voice for me is very sacred as it has a lot of body. You scream, you sing, you shout, you talk is done in different tones and it belongs to you only. Your own voice is your strength. For me that is sacred. Your scream could haunt people and make people stop and pause for that very moment and that moment is very sacred. I am also exploring different elements of the sacred in some of my play pieces that have different body parts trying to reexamine what it means for me.

SYJ: In one of your works in the exhibition titled, Day Ritual/Night Ritual, you recorded voices and sounds. How does that relate back to sacredness and ritual?

AS: Sound is sacred because it is beyond words that does not have words. It is an experience for people when they hear it and the experience of hearing it becomes part of the work, and to understand what each sound is even better. So it becomes a show and tell because normally when artists use sounds, they will not tell the listener what sounds they use. But for me, I want to share with them and let them know that the seemingly abstract sounds are actually very instructional and very routine.

SYJ: it seems to me that you are demystifying sound...

ASL: Yes, when I let people know what sounds I use in an instructional way, it becomes performative and it comes from my interest in the Fluxus movement and Dada. Letting people know what sounds are used is part of the work so that they can relate to the sounds themselves from their own experiences and contexts.

SYJ: Can you explain your concept of the voice as psychological?

AS: When we express through our voice like shouting, screaming or scolding, the voice that comes out of our heads and manifests as our voice is out of control and therefore

psychological. It is an embodiment of our personality and also mystical. The voice is something primal and the beginning of forming something, a sense of rawness and untrained even because no one is trained to scream. A cry for a baby is never trained. It is primal.

SYJ: Coming back to your use of materials, and your decision to use clay that is connected to your experience in Australia, can you tell us more about the materiality of clay in this body of works?

AG: Australia has a rustic atmosphere and an active craft practice, and at the same time, it has one of the best clay in the world because of the quality of the earth and the soil. Feeling the soil in my hands is a ritualistic experience. I feel as if I am building my own world out of the clay in Australia.

SYJ: How was your experience collecting clay here?

AS: I like to mix different clay to have different earthly tones and colour. I tend to use earthly tones in my work. I use different colour schemes for this exhibition to relate back to our everyday life.

SYJ: I am interested in your use of the term, 'conflicting materials' to describe the employment of hand knitted yarn into the clay forms. Tell us about why you grafted these conflicting materials together.



AS: For this residency, I collaborated with Warisa who is into knitting yarn to bring the practices of craft and art together. I like the use of knitted yarn and clay as materials that one would intuitively use together but look aesthetically intriguing when grafted jointly. I have not had the experience of working with a craft artist and Australia offered the perfect opportunity to work with craft.

SYJ: Can you elaborate how working with a craft artist is say, different from working with another visual artist?

AS: For me it was a wonderful experience because she was productive and we had a lot of fruitful discussions. We never determined what the finished work will look like which makes our collaboration very genuine.

SYJ: Some of the forms that you use in this exhibition are body parts such as mouth, brain, and heart. Why have you decided to use these human forms?

AS: It goes back to the human condition in the social environment that is my interest. The unexplainable and absurdity of being human is ineffable sometimes. To start with anatomy is to understand things from what it is. From what I am thinking is my mind, is my brain. From what I am feeling is my voice, is my heart, and my flesh and my blood. Going back into human parts is relevant and also what is going on in head and my heart. It is like mapping in my practice whereby things are related. The use of seemingly different materials like

clay and knitted yarn is actually not different to me but ways in which to convey a concept.

SYJ: This entire exhibition is to be conceived as one body then.

AS: Yes, it is actually one process, experiences, execution, and action.

SYJ: Let's talk about your use of shadows in *Apparatus for dream* and also the concept of echoes in this body of works.

AS: *Apparatus for dream* is about chasing shadows. My body produces shadows while my voice produces echoes. For me, that is very poetic. Poetry is important in my work too because it comes from a narrative perspective, a poetic element, a sentiment. I like the idea of shadows because it does not have to say much, it belongs to something else but it cannot be denied. Just like an echo.

SYJ: Shadows and echoes produce a tension as shadows are silent while echoes produce sound much like the grafting of conflicting materials together produce a hybridized tension that is stable and unstable at the same time. Do you see your works as an intermediary for people to reconnect to their spiritual side?

AS: It reminds them of the importance of reconnecting to their spiritual side, the sacred and the ritualistic that is often overlooked but permeates in our everyday life.

Water Ensemble

Is a collective performance by anGie seah and five students from VCA who had attended her workshops

SYJ: Please tell me about your experience of collaborating with Angie on this performance, Water Ensemble.

En-En See (EES):

This performance was interactive and we make sounds collaboratively, which was for me interesting.

Aniquah Stevenson (ANS):

I felt like participating in the performance was like a ritual. I do not want to sound hippie but I felt a spiritual side to it and the screaming is even haunting.

EES: We had to work through the physicality of using our voice that had to be sustained. We responded to each other when we made the sounds and established a non-verbal connection in that process.

Sarah Rudledge (SR): I was keen to explore water as a material and the simplicity of the performance aspect (working with the voice, water and sound) also intrigued me. I really enjoyed working with a group under Angie's guidance, it was very supportive.

SYJ: You responded to each other's sounds and each other's rhythms from your breathing. There is physical side to me but also a

natural rhythm to the performance as well. Angie used the word 'primal' to describe this performance. Do the three of you experience this primal emotion as well in this performance?

Jennifer Ferguson (JF):

Yes, it was ritualistic in a way.

EES: I found that the ritual was a way to go discover the sacred and working with Angie in this performance tapped into the sacred realm.

SR: Very much so, it has an ancient feel too me.

SYJ: Did you discover something about yourself that you never knew or something about the other person in this performance?

JF: The performance bonded us together through a ritualistic experience.

ANS: The use of water has symbolic and religious connotations baptism as well, even danger.

SR: I discovered performance doesn't need to be complicated or too heavy handed in its making - just let it happen - this was a great experience for me.

EES: There was a texture of sounds that we created collaboratively that connected us collectively.



SYJ: Water is also another world that we are usually immersed in. I am interested to explore the idea of danger further because even in rituals, there might be danger in it and all three of you opened up to each other like you have never before in this performance. What is it that each of you took away from this performance.

JF: It was important for me as I had always wanted to do performance but never had the courage to do it and this offered me an opportunity to push myself and have that experience and Angie has been an amazing teacher who also gave me the courage to try experience making a performance.

EEN: This is something that I would not have done myself and so this was a great experiment.

SR: I loved being able to scream into the water and at the same time feel totally comfortable to do this with the group.

ANS: It gave me courage by experiencing being embarrassed and facing all these emotions and trusting my own intuitions and emotions.

SYJ: Trust and courage are important struggles that all artists have to confront and overcome. It looks like this collaborative performance and workshop has been a productive one that pushed all of you out of your comfort zone. Thank you for this interview.



Interjections: Lesley Alway

SYJ: Can you tell me about your immediate response to the performance, Water Ensemble?

Lesley Alway (LA): I was struck by how the audience was spellbound and focused on what was happening, not only on Angie but the four other student-performers. It was a combination of the visual experience but also the sound they were making throughout the gallery, and also the water. There is also the sounds from the extraordinary musical instrument, and also the ambient sounds from the birds just outside. I know that Angie is interested in the human environment and the human condition, and so that worked serendipitously well.

SYJ: What do you think is the relationship between the performance, Water Ensemble and the artworks in the exhibition?

LA: I have the benefit of insight having just talked to Angie but I think the human condition and ritual are really important to her work. Repetition and constancy are often very important to rituals and that came through in the installation works in the series and also the performance as well. So I think the exhibition and the performance complemented each other. A lot of the objects that she made have symbolic meaning that fits into the idea of repetition and con-

stancy in rituals. I asked Angie about her experience in Australia and how it shaped her practice in anyway and she mentioned about her rediscovery of the handmade and the importance of clay and the particular clay that she found here is different and sensual and how she was delighted in the making of the objects. That is quite interesting in this age when everything is focused on technology, digitization and the manufactured but many artists are returning to the special and the unique that can only be regained through the handmade so that the rediscovery of making an object in a tactile way is really important and something that she will continue in her practice.

SYJ: There was point in the performance when the performers were almost screaming. What was your response to that moment?

LA: It relates to Angie's interest in the human condition. We all live in such contained and constrained lives that there is very little opportunity these days for letting go. It is a sort of a cry or an experience to release that sense of emotion, which I connected to the situation of the world today.

Interjections: Wanissa

SYJ: Can you share your experience of the performance Water Ensemble?

Wanissa (W): I haven't seen a lot of performance art, so this was very new and intriguing to watch.

SYJ: How did the use of their voices by the performance artists strike you?

W: It was captivating, the voices started forming rhythm, and that started to form music. The door was open too so we could hear the birds chirping occasionally. The awkward silence in between pauses is realistic to real life too - it is similar to everyday encounters with strangers.

SYJ: Was the experience of the performance ritualistic and did it resonate with your own cultural background?

W: The performance certainly felt ritualistic, but it was an emotional release too; a release of repressed emotions through screaming and yelling into water. The kind of sounds made by Water Ensemble are the sounds people want to yell out when they feel frustrated or upset, but aren't able to express in public.

SYJ: What do you think is the relationship between the performance, Water Ensemble and the artworks in the exhibition?

W: Well I was lucky enough to witness the actual artwork progress and come to life – I live with my sister, Warisa, who contributed greatly to the artwork in this exhibition. I saw her sketch fantastic ideas on paper, planning out how Angie's clay pieces would come together with her weaving. Warisa's creative input has merged the weaving with the clay pieces very beautifully. All these elements are very human and organic – I think the exhibition is like the human body and the performance is the voice. It is all about nature, life and all things living.

Short biography of Interviewees

En-En See - Student currently pursuing her Bachelor of Fine Art, painting at the Victoria College of the Arts, University of Melbourne.

Jennifer Ferguson - First year student currently pursuing her Bachelor of Fine Art, painting at the Victoria College of the Arts, University of Melbourne.

Aniquah Stevenson - Third year student currently pursuing her Bachelor of Fine Art, painting at the Victoria College of the Arts, University of Melbourne.

Sarah Rudledge - First year student currently undertaking her Masters of Contemporary Art at the Victoria College of the Arts, University of Melbourne.

Wanissa - Graphic designer, illustrator and typesetter currently based in Melbourne.

Lesley Rose Louise Alway - Arts manager with experience in cultural organisations and special expertise in the visual arts in the government, non-profit and private sectors. Lesley is the Director of Asialink Arts based at the University of Melbourne.

Seng Yu Jin - Currently pursuing his PhD at the University of Melbourne, Asia Institute. He is also a Senior Curator at The National Gallery, Singapore. He was previously a Lecturer at LASALLE College of the Arts, MA Asian Art Histories and Fine Arts programmes.



A Sacred Channel
Clay tied with Yarn



Assorted Hearts for Different Occassions
Clay and Mixed Medium

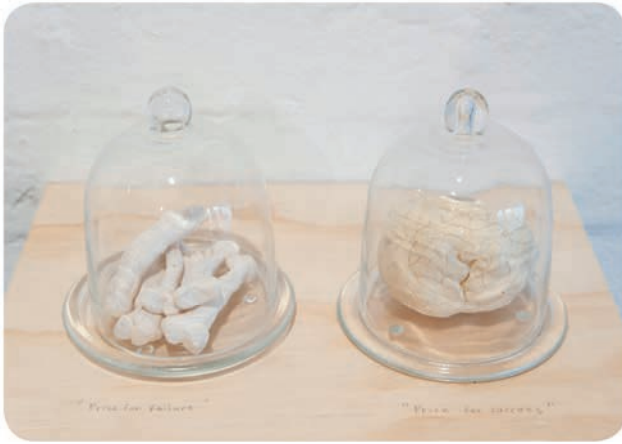


Day and Night Ritual

Clay with Weaving

Day and Night ritual's sound contains 9.30am, A cathedral space with high ceiling, echoes x 3 times, 1 voice and sound of the sand. *Night ritual's* sound contains whispering from a small group of people, heartbeat from a person, bells in an artist's studio, didgeridoo busker in South Melbourne and sound of the sand.





Price for Failure; Price for Success
Clay Piece in Glass jars

Light of Wisdom
Clay in glass jars



Studies of a Mind Blowing
Clay



Voice is Psychological Clay



Blow from a relic
Clay

Shadows and Echoes
Clay and yarn with
Warisa Somsuphangsri





From Shadow to Shaman Clay Pieces in Assorted Glass Jars

Hold and Breathe

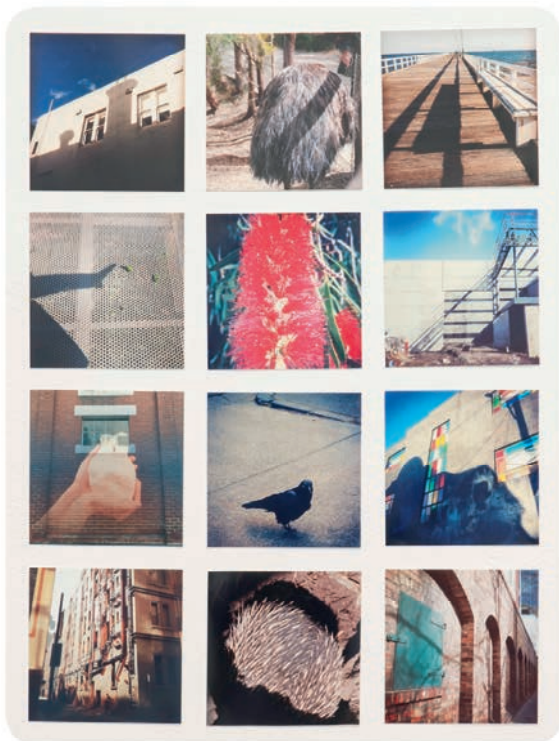
Photo Series in Limestone

Sketches From the Start

Ink Drawings



Of Roots and Routes
Photo series



Holy Places & Hollow Spaces Photo Series



1. "Eye-catcher"
with white, orange, black
and brown threads
on a white background



A collaboration with craft artist
Warisa Somsuphangsri

Warisa Somsuphangsri

Born in Bangkok, Thailand, Warisa moved to Melbourne, Australia in 2004. She completed the Bachelor of Creative Arts (Honours) in 2008 and Master of Arts and Cultural Management at the University of Melbourne in 2012. She is interested in the process of craft making, exploring materials and craft-based artistic practice. Her soft sculptures have been exhibited as part of solo and group exhibitions including 'CAE Regional Portrait Prize for Softies Exhibition', CAE Melbourne; 'Totems: Dolls with Souls', Fracture Gallery, Federation Square; and 'Avant Card We Love 3D Project', Sydney Opera House. Warisa is currently in the process of exploring techniques of wearable craft pieces.

Image on opposite page: *Fear Catcher*, Clay with weaved frame.

Above Left: *An Auspicious Talisman*, Clay with weaved frame.

Above Right: *The Introvert Plaque*, Clay with weaving & a candle light.



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Angie Seah was born in 1979, Seah is a Singaporean artist whose multidisciplinary practise traverses the mediums of drawing, installation, performance and sound to respond to the human condition in relation to the social environment.

In 2000, she was awarded an education bursary from National Arts Council, graduating from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology's Bachelor of Arts, with a major in sculpture. She was also awarded a culture scholarship from the Goethe Institute, Berlin in 2005.

Since 1997, Angie has exhibited works, taken part in artist residencies and participated in performance art festivals in locations such as Belgium (Les Halles de Schaerbeek) Germany

(ZKM centre for new media) Japan (NIPAF) Myanmar (Southeast Asia Art Exchange) Poland (Galeria Labirynt), Singapore (Singapore Biennale 2013) Sweden (Uppsala Art Museum) and Thailand (Bangkok Art center).

For a decade she has been active in initiating art projects and participatory workshop within communities in Singapore, supported by National Arts Council, Esplanade - Theatres by the Bay and People's Association.



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anGie Seah's multidisciplinary practise explores human nature in relation to the social environment, through encounters with the ephemeral realm of sound.

Her work playfully traverses the domains of drawing, performance and installation, giving form to the shapeless aural experience. anGie's intense and emotive performances evoke the complexities of the human psyche, breaking out of the limitations of spoken language in search of authentic expression and primal beauty; the unrestrained voice begins to embody a language with its own sacred vocabulary, synthesising new meanings, contexts and associations through its raw articulation.

Spontaneity is a key artistic strategy for anGie, allowing chance and intuition to navigate a range of shifting emotional resonances and psychological states.

She is currently developing an instinctive approach to site-specific performance that responds to her surroundings through the articulation of idiosyncratic ritual, using sound, voice and physical gestures.





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