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ACC Exhibition "Waters • Dreams • Realities"

Curatorial Statement

In *Invisible Cities*, the Italian writer, Italo Calvino, explores the kaleidoscopic world and the secrets behind different places. Landscapes witness all the changes in the lands. They also record how human beings transformed the natural environments in response to their desires, emotions, and memories. Visible sceneries reflect our inner selves, shedding light on our imaginations and expectations towards the times, the cities, and ourselves. Years later, Calvino recalled his creative motivations and said,

"What is the city today, for us? I believe that I have written something like a last love poem addressed to the city, at a time when it is becoming increasingly difficult to live there. It looks, indeed, as if we are approaching a period of crisis in urban life; and *Invisible Cities* is like a dream born out of the heart of the unlivable cities we know."

The "crisis" to which Calvino refers never leaves us. We live in a world with climate changes, wars, and epidemics. His words remind us to review the distance between our dreams and realities to create landscapes that connect dreams and realities.

The ACC Hong Kong alumni exhibition explores aquatic landscapes where oceans, rivers and waterways converge and examines how cross-regional exchanges can inspire the future development of human civilizations. The water landscapes outline the interaction between cultures and natural ecology and highlight how the world is interconnected and sometimes conflicts. Behind the rippling water, it not only points to the reality that water resources are depleted due to excessive development but also reveals reflections on a utopian world and the dreams of floating in the sea. Between dreams and reality, this exhibition invites five artists to sail in different waters and ask what the aquatic landscapes have brought to human civilizations in the era of globalization.

No one civilization lasts - they are tides that rise and fall every day. So, how can people hold onto something that will last between dreams and realities? Fiona



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Wong's work, *Sea Brick*, documents a fleeting moment of sea wave onto a ceramic brick. Bricks are the essential material that built ancient cities. Having records in durable clay, perhaps we can trace the past and not let the stories pass by.

Pondering on her memories, Au Hoi Lam's *Reminder (Oblivion 2015002)* transfers seascape on a handkerchief creating a tint of black, pale grey, and dull yellow in geometric shapes. We see this landscape every day, but we can hardly recognize it. So now, if the sea no longer shapes like a sea, will it still be meaningful to us?

Water itself is a crucial resource for sustaining human civilization. We have invented and built various engineering systems to manage water resources use better. Yet, we forget that it is never possible to control nature. If the systems fail, we will have to re-learn everything and know how to live in harmony with nature. How do we view the landscape around us? Conceptual artist Vibha Galhotra references the myth of the battle between the gods and demons churning the ocean to extract the elixir of life. Her video work, *Manthan*, reimagines this legend at the Yamuna River in India. Navigating the black, polluted waters of the Yamuna on rafts made of discarded plastic and waste, the artist shows thousands of tons of rubbish and waves of dense and snowy foam in the river. Dredging the river by dipping a white cloth into the water, black sludge is extracted. What have humans churned when we are pursuing economic development?

We have extracted our great nature through modernized projects like urbanization and land reclamation. Multi-media arts artist Lee Kai Chung found that most of the marine sand used in Hong Kong reclamation projects is from Qinzhou, Guangxi. Extracting marine sand unavoidably destroys ocean ecology, eventually leading to coastal erosion and rising sea level. Also, the chloride ions in the sand corrode steel and are most likely to destroy building structures. Lee's artwork, *The Sea Sand Home*, examines the consequences of resource exploitation on our environment and can be seen as an allegory for the expansion, conquest, depletion, and even collapse of cultures.

The imagination of art opens our eyes to the surrounding environment and encourages us to think about the use of natural resources from different perspectives. Kingsley's *Horizon* is a participatory installation in which audiences fill their chosen vessels with water and collaborate with others to keep water levelled



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across different containers. How can we fill the vessels in different shapes to create a shared horizon through pouring and sharing? Here, the artist motivates audiences to rethink the concept of “resource allocation” and encourages them to solve problems through communication and collaboration.

In this exhibition, the participating artists share various waterscapes and the human stories behind the landscapes. They either tell us the reality or wish for a promising future, which means people love their place. The artworks invite us to embark on a journey to seek the waters that connect dreams and realities. We may not necessarily be in the picturesque landscape of this generation, but we can create a great one with our imaginations, memories, and emotions.