ALMINE RECH

The Archipelagic Imagination: Seaport

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Almine Rech Shanghai is pleased to present 'The Archipelagic Imagination: Seaport', the first chapter of a two-part group exhibition curated by Zong Han, featuring works by Kawayan de Guia, Davy Linggar, Tia-Thuy Nguyen, Sylvia Ong, Citra Sasmita, and Jakkai Siributr. The exhibition convenes contemporary artistic positions rooted in Southeast Asia and its global dispersals.

The unity is not that of a single root, but that of a network of branches.
— Édouard Glissant

Departing from Glissant's notion of archipelagic thinking—which privileges relation over root, opacity over transparency, and networks over hierarchies—this exhibition reimagines Southeast Asia not as a fixed region, but as an unfolding matrix of routes, fragments, and entangled affiliations. In this vision, the archipelago is not merely a metaphor, but a historical infrastructure: a living network of seaports, river deltas, and inland uplands that have long shaped the movement of people, images, and ideas across what is often reductively called 'the South.'

Shanghai, as both a historic and symbolic node in this geography, becomes a point of departure. Located on the Bund—once a treaty port linking China to Southeast Asia through maritime trade, migration, and imperial encounters—Almine Rech's gallery space serves as the staging ground for 'Seaport'. This chapter centers outward-facing works charged with formal clarity, visual urgency, and mythic reconstruction.

This first chapter unfolds through a choreography of suspension: paintings, textiles, and sculptural installations hover within the gallery like signals across water—each work a point of encounter, constellation, or crossing. What follows is a closer look at the artists and works that anchor 'Seaport'.

Citra Sasmita (b. 1990, Tabanan, Bali, Indonesia)

At the core of 'Seaport' is Citra Sasmita's *Timur Merah Project IX: Beyond the Realm of Senses (Oracles and Demons)*—three monumental scrolls previously exhibited at the 35th Bienal de São Paulo. Painted on traditional Kamasan canvases, a centuries-old Balinese storytelling format, Sasmita reworks this narrative structure through a contemporary feminist lens. The scrolls conjure a cosmology of female oracles, spectral hybrids, and transgressive bodies. Vivid in palette and architectural in scale, the works rupture patriarchal mythologies and colonial visual codes, translating ritual imagery into insurgent myth-making. Their horizontal procession invites physical and narrative engagement— positioning the viewer within a choreographed vision of a living archipelago.

Davy Linggar (b. 1974, Jakarta, Indonesia)

Linggar contributes two interwoven series created specifically for 'Seaport': *Ocean Dance*, a suite of oil-on-photographic prints, and *Terra*, a pair of abstract diptychs. In *Ocean Dance*, painterly gestures animate photographic stillness—turning sea surfaces into layered movements of memory. In *Terra*, sedimented earth tones evoke ecological and psychic erosion. Together, these works form a dual cartography of land and sea, surface and depth, rendered not as fixed terrain but as shifting, unstable zones. They pulse with elemental rhythm—embodying an oceanic imagination attuned to rupture, transformation, and the porousness of place.

Jakkai Siributr (b. 1969, Bangkok, Thailand)

Siributr presents embroidered textile works composed of repurposed uniforms, talismanic objects, and dense hand-stitching. His piece *CG20*—first shown in his 2023 survey 'Everybody Wanna Be Happy' at CHAT/Mills, Hong Kong—functions as both protective textile and psychic reliquary. Weaving together visual codes from Buddhism, military regalia, and animist ritual, Siributr creates intricate constellations of protest and devotion. The formal and material density of his works resists easy interpretation—offering opacity as resistance and cloth as a charged site where belief, memory, and state power converge.

Sylvia Ong (b. 1987, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; based in Dubai, UAE)

Ong contributes *Cerulean Aria*, a luminous oil painting immersed in tonal fields of blue. A self-taught artist and filmmaker, Ong draws from cinematic language—rhythm, atmosphere, and duration—to construct chromatic environments that are felt before they are interpreted. Her brushwork unfolds in breath-like movements, evoking inner climate, transience, and unanchored belonging. As a Malaysian Chinese artist shaped by diasporic movement from Southeast Asia to the Gulf, Ong's painting becomes a vessel of liminal subjectivity. Within 'Seaport', her work introduces a tonal countercurrent: quiet yet emotionally charged, offering a moment of meditative pause.

Tia-Thuy Nguyen (b. 1981, Hanoi, Vietnam; based in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam)

Nguyen contributes *In this moment forever*, a composition in oil and raised textile that continues her inquiry into time, memory, and the epistemologies of ornament. Trained in classical painting and deeply rooted in Vietnamese material culture, Nguyen interlaces painterly surface with textile relief, transforming the canvas into a suspended emotional field. Tonal gradations of crimson, ochre, and rose unfold like a horizon at dusk—evoking both celestial atmosphere and inner topography. Embroidered sculptural forms rupture the surface with quiet persistence, conjuring drifting landforms, weather traces, or psychic sediment. Here, ornament functions not as embellishment but as a sensory archive— where matter holds memory. Within 'Seaport', the work hovers as a cartographic fragment: part threshold, part echo—mapping a passage through vulnerability, erosion, and return.

Kawayan de Guia (b. 1979, Baguio, Philippines)

De Guia contributes *Cabinet of Unearthly Delights*, an illuminated installation of mirrored glass, neon, and scavenged devotional materials. Drawing on the layered visuality of Filipino roadside altars, Catholic kitsch, and postcolonial spectacle, de Guia constructs a shrine to absurdity and inheritance. His radiant assemblage collapses the sacred and the spectacular, parody and faith, into a kaleidoscopic visual field. At once seductive and jarring, the work detonates the gallery space into a fractured theatre—where power, belief, and image collide in radiant dissonance.

The exhibition continues at Bao Room by Bao Foundation, a penthouse space nestled within Shanghai's former French Concession. Situated above the city's colonial strata, the site becomes both literal and symbolic upland—a conceptual and spatial counterpoint to 'Seaport.' While 'Seaport' is anchored by suspended works—paintings, textiles, and installations that hover within a field of visual urgency—'Upland' is shaped through acts of elevation and support. Works are staged not only to be viewed but to be held, lifted, and grounded in space.

Entitled 'The Archipelagic Imagination: Upland', this second chapter features work by I Gusti Ayu Kadek Murniasih, Nona Garcia, Thu-Van Tran, Kawayan de Guia, Tia-Thuy Nguyen, and Jakkai Siributr—artists whose practices probe psychic landscapes, cultural memory, and geographies of interiority. Here, the mood turns inward: toward personal cosmologies, spiritual residue, and subterranean consciousness. While 'Seaport' traces maritime crossings, 'Upland' gathers what remains—histories that settle into the body, images that rise from below.

Together, 'Seaport' and 'Upland' form a conceptual dyad: one suspended, the other upheld; one oceanic, the other terrestrial. From tidal edges to inland plateaus, from mythic departure to emotional sediment, the exhibition composes an archipelagic map drawn not by borders but by relation—gesturing toward a South imagined through circulation, depth, and shared inheritance.

— Zong Han, curator

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