ALMINE RECH

The Archipelagic Imagination: Upland

Jun 11 — Aug 9, 2025 | Bao Room by Bao Foundation, Shanghai, China

Bao Room by Bao Foundation, a curatorial platform aligned with Bao Foundation's broader mission of reimagining the "East," presents 'The Archipelagic Imagination'—a two-part exhibition curated by Zong Han. As a site for exhibitions, artist-led collaborations, and cultural inquiry, Bao Room in Shanghai advances the Foundation's commitment to transregional expression and poetic resonance.

The exhibition convenes contemporary artistic positions rooted in Southeast Asia and its global dispersals, offering two spatial and conceptual chapters:
- 'Seaport', at Almine Rech Shanghai, features Citra Sasmita, Davy Linggar, Sylvia Ong, Tia-Thuy Nguyen, Jakkai Siributr, and Kawayan de Guia.
- 'Upland', at Bao Room by Bao Foundation, features I Gusti Ayu Kadek Murniasih, Nona Garcia, Thu-Van Tran, Tia-Thuy Nguyen, Jakkai Siributr, and Kawayan de Guia.

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

Departing from Glissant's notion of archipelagic thinking—which privileges relation over root, opacity over transparency, and networks over hierarchies— 'The Archipelagic Imagination' reconsiders 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 referred to as "the South."

Shanghai, as both a historical and symbolic node in this geography, becomes a bifurcated point of departure. Located on the Bund—once a treaty port connecting China to Southeast Asia through maritime trade, migration, and imperial encounters—Almine Rech Shanghai hosts 'Seaport'. a chapter defined by outward-facing works, maritime routes, and mythic projections. In contrast, 'Upland' begins not at the water' s edge, but from inland sediment—situated in a penthouse space atop a modernist-style building on Wulumuqi South Road (formerly Route Louis Dufour), at the crossroads of memory and elevation within the city' s former French Concession.

Here, the site itself functions as conceptual infrastructure: an upland of interior altitude. The penthouse, perched above the layered histories of colonial and postcolonial Shanghai, becomes a symbolic highland—an island-like formation suspended above the flows below. It recalls, in its spatial solitude, the mythic contours of Mount Kinabalu: in Sabahan lore, Aki Nabalu— "the revered place of the ancestors" —evokes a mountain both sacred and sovereign, a destination for spirits and seekers alike. In this way, 'Upland' models a geography of retreat and return. From the bustling port to the upstream tributary, the exhibition travels inland— toward grounding rather than navigation, toward intimacy rather than expansion. It is a mapping not of circulation, but of centering.

Across this interior landscape, six artists give form to the upland' s manifold conditions—quiet upheavals, ancestral hauntings, devotional labor, and states of psychic elevation. Their works do not announce themselves with spectacle, but emerge as thresholds: sites where memory thickens, ornament becomes cosmology, and materials behave like weather. These are not representations of place, but embodiments of relation—each offering a unique contour within a shared geography of ascent.

I Gusti Ayu Kadek Murniasih (1966—2006, Bali, Indonesia)

Murniasih' s practice—unapologetically autobiographical and visually unflinching—stands as one of the most vital feminist expressions in Post- Suharto Indonesia. Working against patriarchal silences, she developed a visual language that is at once grotesque, vulnerable, and defiantly erotic. The paintings on view, created between 1996 and 2003, channel personal trauma into mythic self-portraits: bold, psychologically charged figures navigate states of emotional implosion and ecstatic release. In *Hati Damai (Peaceful Heart),* 1996, *Jangan Membuatku Stres,* 2000, and *Keduanya Make Me Gila (Both Of Them Make Me Crazy)*, 2003, desire and defiance take monstrous form—each work a visceral act of survival and sovereignty.

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

A singular voice from the Philippine highlands, de Guia reconfigures vernacular aesthetics into critical hallucination. *Cabinet of Unearthly Delights*, 2024, his mirrored altar of repurposed materials and flickering illumination, appears here as a spectral twin to its Seaport counterpart. It resists devotional clarity, favoring the subversive and surreal. De Guia's hybrid cosmos—Catholic kitsch, animist trace, psychedelic distortion— offers no easy icon. Instead, it reflects belief as entanglement, and vision as refusal.

Nona Garcia (b. 19T8, Manila, Philippines)

Nona Garcia' s *Ascend III*, 2024 portrays a stone stairway deep in the Central Cordillera, where she lives. With its austere vertical composition and tones suspended between fight and absence, the work approaches abstraction while retaining an ascetic clarity. Garcia, a key figure in the lineage of Filipino realist painting, channels this tradition into a postcolonial inquiry—using painterfy precision to examine how memory, faith, and grief are inscribed onto landscape and perception. The result is both image and trace—poised between painting and reliquary, representation and afterimage.

Thu-Van Tran (b. 19T9, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; based in Paris, France)

Thu-Van Tran' s *Colors of Grey*, 2024 continues her long-term meditation on the aftermath of war and the spectral residues of colonial violence. Begun in 2012 as a response to the so-called Rainbow Herbicides used by the United States in Vietnam, the series transforms toxic chromatic excess into muted tonal singularities—where vivid differentiation collapses into near-indistinction. Made from natural pigment, lime, and binder, the work echoes crumbling walls and devotional frescoes, invoking both ruin and reverence. Tran' s practice, grounded in diasporic memory and the politics of abstraction, revisits landscape as both wound and witness. In *Colors of Grey*, history becomes atmospheric— dissolved yet persistent—hauntingthe surface as a quiet, unerasable inscription.

Jakkai Siributr (b. 1969, Bangkok, Thailand)

Sompong, 2023 was featured in the artist' s first institutional solo exhibition in the UK, held at the Whitworth in Manchester. The work takes the form of a tactile elegy—crafted with antique Burmese textiles, beads, feathers, and labor-intensive embroidery. It continues Siributr' s longstanding engagement with religion, queer identity, and collective mourning. By translating the visual lexicon of traditional belief into contemporary textile assemblage, the piece becomes a mobile altar: at once a site of grief and survival, sacred and resistant.

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

Nguyen's *The moment Cloud shines*, 2023 blends sculpture and textile into an ephemeral terrain of softness. Working with hand-dyed jute, bamboo yarn, and wool, she creates a hovering, atmospheric formation that suggests meteorological mood and emotional recovery. Known for founding The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, Nguyen's artistic practice is equally attentive to healing and haptic presence. This piece continues her interest in myth and femininity—textiles not as ornament, but as cosmology.

If 'Seaport' unfolded as a choreography of suspension—paintings, textiles, and sculptural installations hovering within an open field—'Upland' is composed through acts of elevation and support. Here, works are staged not only to be seen but to be held: grounded in corners, leaning against walls, rising from custom plinths. The spatial composition echoes the terrain it evokes—upland plateaus, sacred elevations, and quiet summits— suggesting interior altitudes that resist spectacle yet resonate deeply.

Together, 'Seaport' and 'Upland' propose a conceptual dyad: ocean and land, crossing and dwelling, fluidity, and sediment. From the treaty port to the high floor, from archipelagic flow to upland stillness, the exhibition reimagines Southeast Asia not as a place, but as a poetics—of relation, resistance, and elevation.

— Zong Han, Curator