APT 10
The 10th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art

Curatorial Note by Reuben Keehan

Genevieve Chua draws from such disciplines as natural history and linguistics in her approach to abstraction as a mode of data visualisation. Major sources for her work have included Singapore's status as a 'garden city', its persistent atmospheric 'haze' and the rhythms of Singaporean English. Chua's paintings combine a number of mark-making techniques, including printmaking, and often take on sculptural forms. Experiments in symmetry and hard-edged abstraction have evolved into shaped canvases and typographic play. More recent bodies of work have included screen and relief prints, explorations of the optical effects of layered patterns, and kinetic elements such as hinged brackets. This physical aspect is described by Chua as an approach to painting as a 'two-and-a-half-dimensional' medium.

Chua's APT10 work, *Artificially intelligent* 2021, stems from her interest in computer algorithms within the high-tech context of contemporary Singapore. These graphic works resemble non-linguistic concrete poems, constructed from the non-alphanumeric characters on a computer keyboard, such as stops, slashes and brackets. For Chua, these punctuation marks create a sense of rhythmic notation. Removed from the syntax of sensible text, their visual form is amplified, repeated on the pictorial plane to form grids, arcs and radials, or to drift or stutter down the page. With the aid of illustration software, Chua introduces gradual perspectival distortions that make rows of backslashes appear to rotate, condense, zigzag and fire off elliptically. Superimposed patterns of dots and dashes enhance and complicate the depth of field created by these effects, inviting further perceptual illusions like moire patterns.

Chua realised the designs as a series of prints developed at the Singapore Tyler Print Institute (STPI). Challenging herself to make the work 'as invisible as possible' - while still evoking the sense of tactility - she arrived at a technique of lightly printed embossing, inspired by braille, the written language developed for the blind. As traces stamped into the surface
of the print, they also resemble the impressions made by manual typewriter strokes, recalling the materiality of pre-digital concrete poetry and conceptual art. Modest in scale, the prints are. accompanied by sculptures constructed from etched acrylic panels, as a reference to the plates used in the printing process. These fan out from the wall in stacked array inspired by the design of the cooling systems of computer central processing units - 'heat sinks' that moderate the high temperatures produced by churning through endless data streams.

For all their reference to automation and machine learning, and the element of alienation introduced by the use of non-linguistic characters from written text, Chua's works are arguably far less technological than those of her peers working in video and media art. Rather, they take technology as their subject, and focus on a particularly human response to it - expressed through the poetic devices of compositional and material artistic process. Where an algorithm is geared towards logic and efficiency, Artificially intelligent is fundamentally illogical and inefficient, the modestly scaled product of months of artistic labour, based in emotion rather than attempting to elicit a cursory, programmed emotional response. The aim, for Chua, is to 'break the efficiency of systems in order to humanise them'.[1]

Endnote
1. Genevieve Chua conversation with the author, February 2021.