

Dalam_Layar_Zine/Volume_1/The_Starter_Issue

Architecture of The Virtual

The Virtual of Architecture

[Redacted]

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We have been meaning to ask Sintra Tantra

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Virtuality (or a digital Vitruvian Manifesto)





More

Sinta

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British artist of Balinese decent – Sinta Tantra, held her exhibition on a physical and online platform, both at the same time. Her exhibition was inspired by one of Charlie Chaplin's film 'Modern Times' (1936) - the exhibition itself was named after it, and his rather raw documentary of his visit to and through Asia, in particular the island of Bali (1932) in prior to the film. Her works tried to encapsulate what the modern times meant for Chaplin and how Bali (to him) was the epicentre of exactly its opposite; spirit surrounding the Balinese culture emanating an anti-modern sentiment. Written as part of the introduction to his on-line exhibition on Kristin Hjellegjerde's website: "A boy smoking a cigarette. A man playing with forest monkeys. Men and women barefoot and partially clothed walking and freely dancing along dirt paths and through crowded markets. [...] These are some of the sights experienced by Charlie Chaplin and his brother Sydney upon arriving in Bali in 1932. These rare moments of natural life were documented in black-and-white film by Chaplin and recall "the golden age" in Balinese history before its Westernisation and fondly remembered by Sinta Tantra's family."

about Tantra



Sinta Tantra at her studio in London

Throughout the years with more than 50 exhibitions held worldwide (from Asia-Europe-USA) and collections mainly placed in the UK, Sinta Tantra's works has always glowed with a sense of playfulness described through an array of abstract geometries, popping colours, and various materials moulded and shaped, which are built to capture a deeper meaning related to various phenomenon she finds important to voice out. On May 18, 2020, our team conducted a virtual telephone interview session via WhatsApp. Described in the interview, her works were always tailored closely to the 'physicality' of things: space, atmosphere, the human scale. Unfortunately, all this was partly forced to be taken away by the dawn of Coronavirus and laws applying the practice of self-isolation. In this interview, we will explore more about the response, adaptation, and what is done to keep running the exhibition. What is a virtual exhibition according to an artist and how we can bring out the positivist essence of this situation, while diving into the process of conceptualization, synthesis, and the realization of her art works?

I understand you based your paintings and exhibition on Charlie Chaplin's movie Modern Times. What was the process like, in terms of breaking down the movie into parts, choosing which scenes to analyse, and your journey in conceptualizing/building the idea and pouring it into your painting?

Initially, my interest in the Charlie Chaplin film was when he went to Bali in 1932. I sort of knew about this for a long time and I've always wanted to incorporate this idea of Charlie Chaplin's time in Bali into one of my shows. It just so happens that it worked quite well together; a good concept for the solo show I was having. Modern Times was made in 1936 and some would say that his movie was inspired from his travels through Asia and in particular,

the island of Bali..



verall, I was quite interested in the history of modernism in 20th century Europe because it was a start of perhaps, seeing the world in a new light, from having this ability to produce objects and items in an industrial scale; changing the way of living and also, in this age where we are now which we have technology.

We Have Been Meaning to Ask #1

This idea of a 'work day', is quite modern. You work 9 - 5 from Monday to Friday, on your days off you buy things and go out and spend money. I guess in those days and still now in Bali, you would spend time with other people making offerings, cooking food, partaking in festivals, praying, meditating.

Why were you particularly inspired by the movie and how did you tailor the idea together with Balinese culture?

I wanted to incorporate this idea that what might've made Charlie Chaplin inspired by Bali was because it was anti-modern. It wasn't a society like America or UK, London where he grew up where you were struggling to eat or survive and in order to do that, you'd have to work VERY hard. You'd have this sort of hard life and a hard existence and this sort of hand-to-mouth whereas I think he saw this idea of Bali, not just something quite exotic but an idea where money doesn't necessarily have to make us happy. I think that was why Charlie Chaplin was essentially inspired by Bali – an anti-modern sentiment.



Charlie Chaplin in Bali
(Above)

Why did you choose to incorporate light and sound into the exhibition? How did the idea come about?

The gallery in London is a new space which used to be a factory, so it has very high ceilings and it's literally a glass house. Which means it gets a lot of light into the architecture, and I think you're also much more aware of the temperature more when you're in a greenhouse. The greenhouse which is such a vast space – height wise and with all this extra space I needed to fill it somehow. And that's where I got this idea where the light, cutting through the architecture – the coloured light and also sound cutting through the space.

I treat the whole thing as an installation with individual elements like painting, light, and sound. I think of the space first then the painting elements come in later.

We Have Been Meaning to Ask #1



Sinta Tantra in front of her Modern Times Exhibition
(Above)

How did your curatorial processes go from start to finish? were there any challenges and/or aha! moments leading up to the creation of artworks and exhibition?



A lot of my process is quite inside-out, which I think comes from working in the public arts earlier on in the career where you'd consistently get feedback, because I'm able to share it very easily with other people where as if I was painting in a direct way with the canvas that's more of a personal and intimate process. That's why I was able to share the process and discuss with the people I involve in the project and get feedback from the curator.

I'd watch and re-watch the film and go back to scene again and again. It's sort of figuring out what story I want to tell, take the essence or the things I'm really keen on and mould it into a new version or a new way of seeing into my work somehow.



I would reference the 3D model and do print outs of the paintings and Google Sketch Up. For that particular space it was important to have a narration of how you'd get into the space. Going back and forth between the painting I had made in the computer. We had to figure out the light, how the sun sort of travels at this time of year to figure out how much vinyl we cover, how much window we cover. What I enjoy most is probably the placement of the paintings and sculpture – the architecture intervention where they would be placed. Placement of artworks in relation to the architecture. How you physically walk around the space, how the light falls this time of day, etc.

From a technical POV,

what did your BTS look like?

How many teams were

working with you, what roles did

they contribute into the making,

and what was the communica-

tion like in creating this

exhibition?

*could you describe
the process?*

I work with a small team, it's important to be flexible in the structure of the team with small parts with a kind of role and in terms of how I work with people (because she travels to and from between London and Bali).

Paintings were made by me; design and make blueprints of them and executed by Inga my painting assistant. Then I had Natalie who does more of the architectural stuff and then I'd give them to Guillaume, my curator and I would be getting feedback about my works. I had a company help me with the vinyl installation. The sound installation was produced by sound engineers, they would help me with things like that. The textile pieces were from a Balinese weaving workshop, I gave them designs and they executed the piece, then I'd have sculptural brass and glass production. Some of the special collaborations varies depending on the projects, through the connections I had with other people who are specialists.

Mid-exhibition, your exhibition had to move online. What was your initial reaction to this and how did you managed to adapt to it?



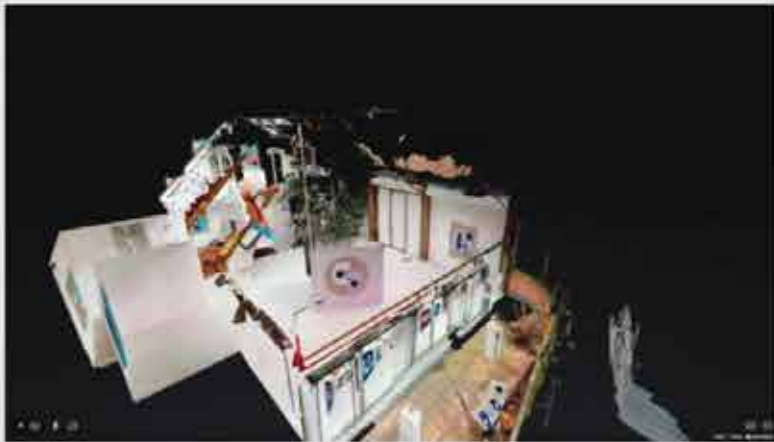
My exhibition had to go online straight away; it took my 2 weeks to edit. The reason why I recorded a walk-through for the online exhibition is that while I knew most galleries and exhibition are going online yet I wanted the viewers to be engaged by seeing me physically being there, with my personality being shown too which would make more sense when explaining the artworks. It helped the exhibition to become a bit more physical when seeing a body going through the space as opposed to hearing an audio and a still photograph which flattens it. I thought it would also be interesting to display some footages from the film just to add a bit of layering and mention or display archive footage some of the references I had for the artworks and exhibition, which were Charlie Chaplin's film in Bali, architect Berthold Lubetkin's Penguin House in London, and Isamu Noguchi which inspired me to bring the artworks outside and make a sculpture garden. I wanted to treat it as kind of a sketchbook with references and explanations.

Penguin Pool of London, Berthold Lubetkin
(1934)
(Left)
Garden Musum in Long Island, New York,
Isamu Noguchi
(Right)



What virtual tools did you use to support the online exhibition?

I'm not a professional video maker but I personally learned all of this on the job. I filmed on the iPad – and it's sort of amazing seeing the quality of the iPad! I think next time I might use it as well. I had to work with the editor in Indonesia to edit it for 2 weeks. I almost had to make a chart and I had to score the whole thing for him to understand what I'm saying; which images go with what I'm saying through zoom and GoogleDocs.



The gallery made a 3d photography of the space with a camera that rotates 360 degrees, then they stitch the photographs together. In a time like this it's useful to have something like that so you could walk through it, the same through SketchUp. It's animated, kind of like a 3D game so you could scan and view the artworks through a sort of digital 3D animated way.

How did the particular situation affect your exhibition — major changes?

Business has been kind of slow because of the Covid-19. Within the creative industry that's one of the most difficult things to sustain a living. I've done more online stuff other than change the exhibition physically. Major change would be rethinking of how we see exhibition and how we tell the story and present to the world the artwork. It doesn't only exist in the physical space of the exhibition, but the story could exist even outside the gallery. I think it's more of a thinking thing.

What major differences did it have with an offline exhibition?

For someone that works in painting, Instagram flattens paintings. It doesn't bring out that 3dimensional feel because human scale is pretty important in my work. The physicality from my work isn't expressed that well in the virtual space. Also, the energy we get from live conversations gets lost because it's really difficult to engage people into art.

Could we go back to how you mentioned about energy? What kind of energy is in a virtual exhibition as opposed to an offline physical exhibition?

Energy happens when we're being physically there with other people, in real life there could be overlaps in conversations, eye contact, body language, we might shift our gaze or our bodies to indicate that we want to shift closer to them or maybe away from them. I think all that gets lost in a virtual exhibition. The parts that make us human and not robots or machines.



In your personal opinion, what are the pros of a virtual exhibition?



Pros are that it makes it more accessible having this information online and you don't have to physically come into the space. You could physically layer things like in the video: clips, references, footage, and other artworks. The pros are all what kind of enhances the exhibition but actually the thing itself is an exhibition part of the physical thing. It highlights the exhibition but without the exhibition there wouldn't be an exhibition.

How do you get the most out of a virtual exhibition without eliminating the essence of your artworks within the exhibition?

This is the first time I had to really push the virtual side of things. The feedback I got is that people like the walk-through video a lot, it helps having a bit more personality behind the work. Perhaps, I could've gone more into the behind the scenes of my work and the process of how I made it.

I have a love-hate relationship with Instagram, pros are that you could increase and engage with your audiences and the con is sometimes what it does to other people's mental health, in terms of comparing themselves to other people.

TIPS

Embrace some of these new technologies but also be aware of the limitations, that's how you get the best of it because you don't become a slave to it.

I don't know how I would answer that because I think I'm too involved to know what that means exactly. We had to make it virtual because of the situation but I don't think I would want to make an exclusively virtual exhibition. I'd like to think of it as secondary and it wouldn't replace the physicality of an offline exhibition.

*From
1-10 how
effective is a
virtual
exhibition?*



Sinta Tantra in front of her work *Bali Birdsong (Evening)*
(Above)

As an artist, seeing this pandemic and the laws surrounding it aren't going to change anytime soon, do you have any plans for the near future? Could you share with us some tips on how to keep creating art that's relevant and pertinent in these uncertain times? Is there any way of sustaining in the next year or so?

In some ways it's quite liberating because why do we have to work 9 - 5? Why do these working days exist? We could totally restructure that. It's good to look after yourself and look after your mind. In whatever way that is, it's also good to talk to friends and what helps also, is to have some sort of structure; create a structure for yourself that works and you could be as invented or creative as you like. Why not start the day with yoga or running in the park?

We Have Been Meaning to Ask #1

Look after yourself and put together a list of things that you make sure you do every day: eat or drink, call someone.

On my list of things – I've got it on my wall somewhere, or maybe I've taken it down... but some of the things are do a bit of exercise, make delicious food, call a loved one, wear a fabulous outfit. Make a little list not only for me to focus on the things I want to do professionally, but also all of the things that could help us feel alive, because this (quarantine/lockdown) situation is making a lot of people upset, depressed, and a bit lost so always be sure to make a little list of things to do to make you happy and look after yourself.

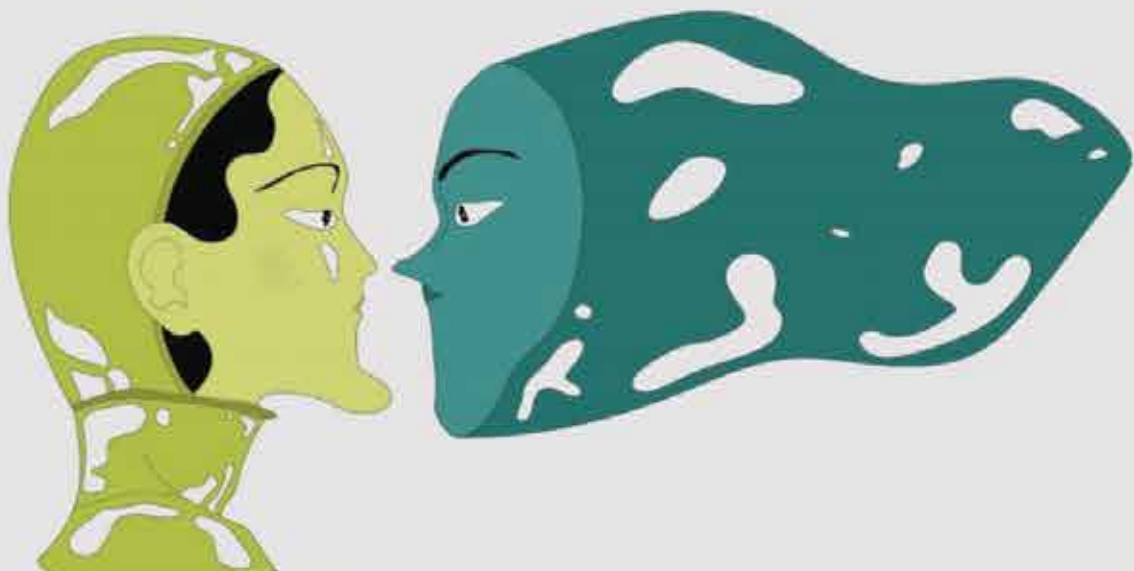


Do you have any tips you'd like to advise to other people on how to stay productive although we all are cooped up in our homes?

How does the New Normal look to you?



It's funny, before you I had a conversation with someone saying that we should all get a t-shirt saying "The New Normal" or something [laughs]. I think the new normal is almost like a re-birth of the existing world as we know it. In the kind of like thinking of higher power, this idea of nature telling us to stop – reflect on: drive less, go on the plane less, work more on self-care. Perhaps its nature way of telling us and not in a sense of environmental groups telling us to stop, but something like this (quarantine/lockdown) is literally telling people to stop because they can't go anywhere. So, I think it's a period of reflection and for people thinking about their actions and affects other than doing, doing, doing The New Normal = New Thinking.



Conclusion

For the artist, moving her exhibition into a virtual form wasn't an easy task. It provided her with added insight on how physicality took a much more important role for her exhibitions, how to incorporate that 'physicality' into a space that limits it, and how these strange times can ultimately be a good thing underneath our loss of freedom. A time where nature could heal itself and for us as a society to recuperate and shift our efforts into things that matter. In other words, a moment to **stop and breathe in these Modern Times**, as it is depicted by Chaplin in his film. Furthermore, she added that we needn't let ourselves to be pulled so much into the digital and virtual world, because we have to achieve some sort of balance between the virtual and the actual:

"embrace some of these new technologies but also be aware of the limitations, that's how you get the best of it because you don't become a slave to it."