**Still Like a Humming Bird**

by Gilles Massot, Lecturer

Anyone old enough to have escaped being raised on a regime of iPad pacifiers will probably readily agree that the pace of today’s lifestyle has transformed so radically over the last 20 years or so, that memories of life in the last century seem to belong to another world.

It is probably no mere coincidence that the first mobile phone camera was launched in November 2000, just as the first year of the new millennium was drawing to a close, or rather, technically speaking, the last year of last century. Dates and calendar might well be nothing but constructs meant to enable human society to function, but still… it is somewhat thought provoking, especially now that we can reflect on the radical impact this tiny device has on our everyday life, to consider how timely its apparition was in the grander scheme of things. The new millennium needed a new tool: it turned out to be a pocket computer that could record and communicate instantly with the world.

The desktop computer had been diligently fulfilling its envisioned function for sometime already: it computed steadily on a desk. But instead of creating more free time as idealistically, or rather, naively prophesied in the last century, it has in fact filled up life with more data and subsequently, more things to do, since faster processing also means more processing.

Then emails arrived. Ho! Wonder! We could communicate almost instantly with the whole world, send and receive images and text in virtually limitless quantities and faster than ever. Ok, modems might have been a bit slow at first, but once all this found itself in the pocket, bundled as a device that could be taken and worked on anywhere, it was total bliss, or so it seems.

Last but not least, the attached camera, at first innocently convenient, finally reveals the full power of its distorted and distorting nature when it forcefully entered the virtual arena of the social media, giving birth to a range of new virtual phenomena, the selfie being only the most prominent.

Suddenly, images, text, data, info, work, leisure, study all came at once, in one go, at the touch of the screen, anywhere, anytime, instant data for the instant me. Eventually, the level of business resulting from the amount of information reaching us daily and the speed at which we are expected to process it turned out to be a bit of a surprise, in fact an overwhelming one, although it was pretty clear from the start that a fuller time-space would logically generate more entropy. But that realisation came too late. And what could we do about it anyway… since this was PROGRESS.

For many people, contemporary urban life seems to have turned into an endless race against time to fulfil expectations and requirements, be they professional or personal, imposed or chosen. And we all feel the pressure in one way or another. Taking or finding time to do things that are not directly task orientated has become a luxury… finding time to do things such as… art works for example. The making of art works demands a subtle type of time-space in which stillness can give birth to fluidity and reflection produce spontaneity. Accessing such a refined dimension has always required great discipline, will, and effort. But as a result of the loud technological lifestyle in which we are now constantly immersed, the task seems to have become more daunting than ever.

The main challenge for an artist today might well be this unavoidable obligation to negotiate the mounting presence of continuous stimulation generated by the digital society, the need to control it in order to keep the creative practice alive and focused despite the constant onslaught of distractions. And as a result of this evolution, it appears that among the many questions concerning the creative process that have emerged in the 21st century are the following:

How do we embrace and exploit purposefully this permeating agitation, at once both physical and psychological, to stay socially “connected” but still find ways to harmonise its pressing requirements with the unbounded freedom of a personal space of peace and quiet in which an artistic process can grow and unfold at its own pace?

How to adapt to business and favour being?

How to be at once flustered and yet focused? Scattered and yet fluid?

How to be still like a humming bird?

Still Like a Humming Bird *was written as an exhibition proposal for the Mc Nally School of Fine Arts staff group show held in the Indonesian gallery Ikan, Jogjakarta, in February 2018.*

*The exhibiting artists were: Adeline Kueh, Gilles Massot, Hazel Lim, Ian Woo, Jeremy Sharma, Lim Bee Ling, Salleh Japar, S.Chandrasekaran, Vinson Phua, Wang Ruobing, Zarina Muhammad.*