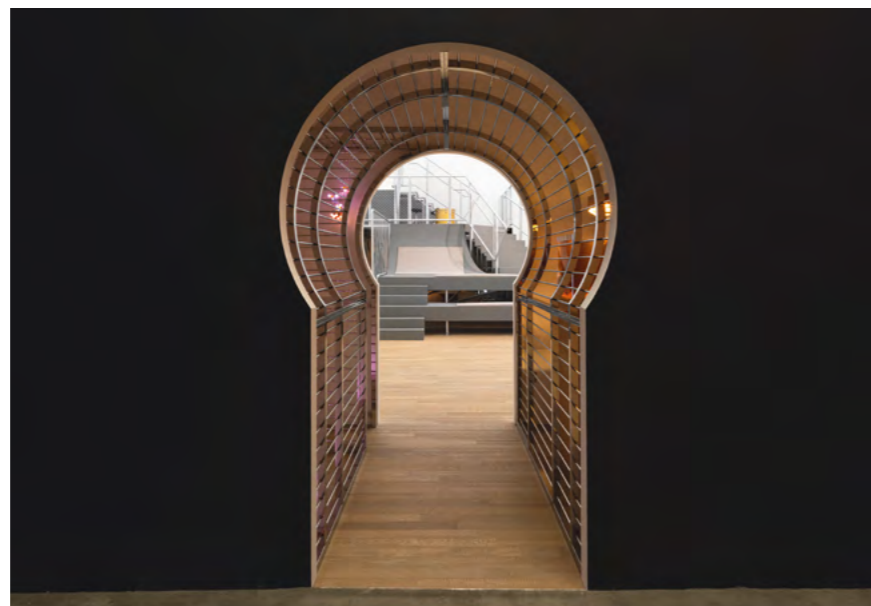


## But What About Magic?

**"TRUST & CONFUSION"**  
**TAI KWUN CONTEMPORARY**  
**5 MAY – 5 DEC 2021**

In recent years, we have been pondering in Hong Kong and elsewhere about the various possibilities of interpersonal and cross-species connections, alliances, and solidarities. From anthropologist Anna Tsing's suggesting contamination as a survival tactic to artist Shirley Tse's presentation of an expanding network of objects, lives, and their negotiations; from discussions about leaderless movements to the proliferation of community projects: the "starry" sky in Hong Kong dotted by laser pointers, the raucous banging of pots and woks in the streets of Myanmar – all sinking into



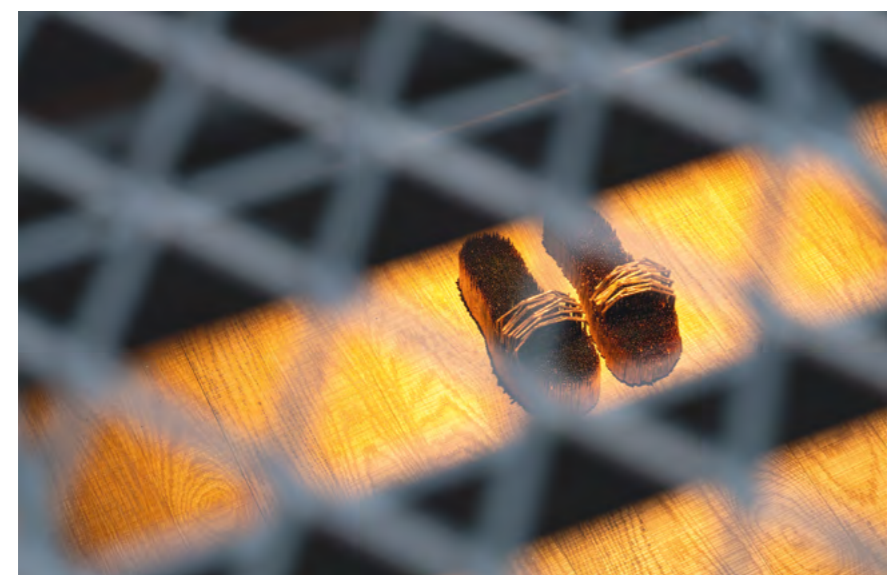
Trevor Yeung, *Learning to be a tree lover*, 2021

staircases to the third floor where the exhibition unfolds, one is greeted by Sriwhana Spong's (\*1979) musical

movements are reconfigured and triggered by either the audience via touch, fixated eyes, digital data, electrical currents, or unknown forces of natural decay.

The fragility of life is the first thing that these rituals announce. Lit by a mix of sun rays and museum lighting, the exhibition hall presents a vast, open space with Félix González-Torres's (1957–1996) cascade of light bulbs from 1993 as prelude. Ready to burst or burn out at any moment, the light bulbs mourn the unnamed passing of an individual life during the AIDS crisis, another pandemic that brought a tremendous mixture of loss, fear, and divisions. Softly gazing at the light bulbs from the back of the space is Yoko Mori's (\*1940) kinetic light sculpture, reminiscent of a beating heart, that grows bigger in size as the exhibition continues. Its warm light flickering slowly in a mechanical cycle of gears spinning and delicate metal parts touching. Once during every cycle, Serene Hui's (\*1992) sound performances with explosions and sirens and Nile Koetting's (\*1989) butoh enactment of a museum emergency evacuation, are activated respectively.

Between González-Torres and Mori's light sources, the almost empty, stage-like setting confounds a viewing



Lina Lapelyt, *Study of Slope*, 2021, Sound Installation

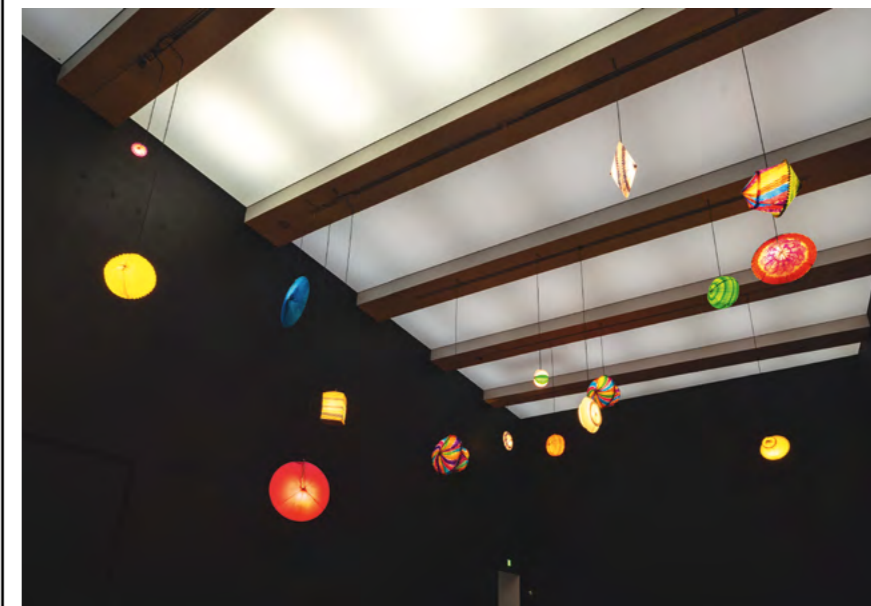
physical and mental fatigue. The inevitable realisation that imagination is just plain exhausted. Serendipitously, as I strolled around "trust & confusion", a different question came to mind: What about magic?

Following Pan Daijing's (\*1991) imbricated fragments of opera singing up Tai Kwun Contemporary's spiralling

instrument composed of a chain of chicken bones cast in bronze hung next to the gallery entrance on one side, and Liliana Porter's (\*1941) large poster of three hands forming an occult triangle on the other. This appears to be a site of ritual, no doubt. Throughout, the artworks' sound, light, smell, tactility, and

experience that might otherwise move systematically from artwork to artwork. When confused, Scarlet Yu (\*1978) and Xavier Le Roy's (\*1963) performance piece *Still in Hong Kong* (2021) awaits with a conversation in which a performer shares a personal memory about Hong Kong, then strikes a pose or quick motion as a still of the memory, however fleeting. Looking up, another set of some five hundred black-and-white stills by photographer Kazuo Kitai (\*1944) reveal themselves in a two-screen projection. Spanning six decades of projects from political protests to documentation in rural China and Japan, the image series presents an accurate record of social conditions mixed with the idiosyncrasies of Kita's own personal trajectory.

Throughout the exhibition, magician Ricky Jay's (\*1946) dice collection rolls onto the floor and into the exhibition booklet, leaving holes and perforations



Claudia Fernández, *Constellation*, 2015

and left on the floor. Lying down and looking up, one sees a constellation of colourful Mexican lanterns collected by Claudia

determines winners and losers, rituals exist against the backdrop of asymmetry and death, aimed at consoling and accomplishing symmetry through choreographed actions. But how does one present an exhibition as a ritual without replicating a ceremony in a literal sense? "trust & confusion" provides a possible answer with its choreographed tribute to the power of magic and life. As the curators Raimundas Malašauskas and Xue Tan told me, "it is a live exhibition about being alive."

Still, against all the magic and enchantment, I ask myself: how to make sense of the timeless quality in the mostly newly-commissioned works, bearing in mind our present crises and deadlocks? Or is it reductive to think of the past, present, and future as categorisations when speaking about magic? Could an exhibition led by cycles of the unknown further embrace other forgotten cultures and beliefs? Or do the relational and minimalist aesthetics of Western-dominated contemporary art function as part of the charm? Soon, my thoughts are intercepted by the tidal waves; it is utterly magical to see trust in one another, as well as kindness, care, and action. I'm waiting for the next full moon.

**QU CHANG**



View of "trust & confusion", Tai Kwun Contemporary, 2021

that signal the codes of both chance and fate. Moving with them and passing through various sounds and chantings summoned by the artists, one enters a dark space where a set of photographic stills by Algirdas Šeškus's (\*1945) showing everyday trivia follows. Tarek Atoui's (\*1980) murmuring is wrapped in a black foam pillow

Fernández (\*1965). Time to sleep.

I recall that curator Chus Martínez once described Claude Lévi-Strauss's interpretations of "the game" and "the ritual" to argue that exhibitions should embrace ritualistic forms. Unlike games that begin with the equal status of all participants and end with an asymmetry that

Photos: Kwan Sheung Chi