



Our photographer met with Kevin Chin on the banks of Merri Creek in East Brunswick and Coburg in Melbourne. Chin took her to places he visits on his daily walks for the photo shoot.

A sense of belonging

Jo Higgins speaks to rising art star Kevin Chin about painting, family and cultural exchange.

PORTRAIT BY JESSIE DIBLASI

Kevin Chin might only be 30 but he has worked incredibly hard to achieve as much as he has since finishing his Bachelor of Fine Arts at the Victorian College of Arts in 2006. “I come from a very working class, migrant

Chinese Malaysian family who had absolutely zero exposure to contemporary art when they first moved to Australia,” says Chin, who was two when his parents migrated in search of greater opportunities for their children. A career as an artist was probably not what they had in mind. Says Chin of his industriousness – multiple arts grants, significant solo exhibitions, a publication and two upcoming residencies in Japan – “It comes from even having to fight to be able to do it in the first place. I think you appreciate it more.”

Going to Art Stage Singapore as part of THIS IS NO FANTASY with Dianne Tanzer Gallery will be Chin’s first international exhibition. The work he is showing there, a series of quietly quirky, beautiful landscapes rife with discombobulated dream-like narratives, has been developed while living in Tokyo, where he moved in March 2013 with his partner.

“My work has always translated fragments of domesticity to investigate how we create a sense of belonging for ourselves but it’s really only because of my experiences this year that my focus has been on bringing this into the context of travel and global mobility.” Travelling around Japan has offered Chin a simultaneous sense of both belonging and placelessness: “It’s the first time I’ve ever lived anywhere where everyone looks like me! In Australia I’m used to people asking where I’m from, whereas in Japan it’s the complete opposite and people are shocked to discover I’m a foreigner.”

Says Chin, “Japan is one of the few places in the world that still ties ethnicity to nationality and as a theme in my work, how you create a sense of belonging, that was of real interest.”

The starting point for Chin’s paintings are often travel photographs and since moving abroad he has amassed some 30,000 images, collecting them obsessively and then looking back through them for things that resonate, “things that have some cultural ambiguity, or that give a sense of ontological security, like blankets or makeshift shelters,” like the ones that latterly appear in *Pass By*.

Chin creates each work from a distillation of these anomalous objects. He prints the photographs, cuts the images out and collages them



on the wall, re-arranging and testing the interplay and suggestiveness of the objects before settling on a final composition. This is then drawn, with added imaginative aspects, before being rendered on exposed linen in layers of oil. The exposed elements of the canvas that appear in each finished piece are integral to Chin’s work, influenced by the Chinese ink paintings that hang on the walls of his family home, but driven by his interest in retaining the integrity and texture of his materials.

For this particular body of work, Chin was interested in the Japanese connection to land and its concomitant rituals and millennia-old traditions, from the urban farms of Tokyo to the sumo wrestling rings made from clay and swept by groundsmen between rounds.

While Chin concedes that his paintings have an Asian sensibility about them, this Asian focus still surprises him and he is excited about the opportunity to exhibit his work in Singapore. He comments, “It’s my first international art fair and I’m really happy it’s in Singapore. Singapore is a four-hour bus ride from where I was born in Kuala Lumpur so in a sense, it’s not exactly like coming home, but it does feel a bit like that for me. And as a trading port, Singapore has historically also been a place of cultural exchange so it makes sense to me for these works to be there.”

1.
Kevin Chin, *Tend the ground*, 2013.
Oil on linen, 97 x 146cm.

2.
Kevin Chin, *Unseen*, 2013. Oil on
linen, 133 x 200cm.

COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND DIANNE
TANZER GALLERY+PROJECTS, MELBOURNE

Dianne Tanzer

Director, Dianne Tanzer Gallery
and Projects/THIS IS NO FANTASY,
Melbourne

Dianne Tanzer had several memorable encounters with **Kevin Chin**’s quietly quirky, dreamlike paintings before taking him into her stable in 2013. Such is her faith in his work she is now taking him to Art Stage Singapore.

Chin has accomplished a great deal since finishing his studies in 2006. According to Tanzer, “He’s only young but he’s had major shows every year since he’s left school. He’s done much more in his young career than a lot of mid-career artists. And that’s what impressed me, that he was so go-for-it.” These accomplishments include being a Finalist in the 2009 RBS Emerging Artist Prize, Finalist in the 2012 Gold Coast Art Prize and a 2013 Ian Potter Cultural Trust Grant for two residencies in Japan in 2014. Chin has also had significant solo exhibitions at Linden Centre for Contemporary Art and c3 Contemporary Art Space in Melbourne.

In describing Chin’s work, Tanzer notes the dreamlike quality and careful compositions with their often unpainted expanse of canvas. “It’s like he’s gone away and will return later to repaint the image but that’s not so - there’s a very considered intellect at play,” she says. Tanzer is taking Chin to Singapore, his first international show, as a means to help build his profile but she is confident audiences will respond to his Asian aesthetic and beautiful sensibility: “His work has got a quirky edge as well as being aesthetically very beautiful so he was a total package for us.”

Jo Higgins

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