

## YEE I-LANN



Yee I-Lann's primarily photomedia-based practice engages with archipelagic Southeast Asia's turbulent history, addressing, with wit and humanity, the socio-political impact of current politics, neo-colonialism, and globalization. Her recent exhibition of new works, *Like the Banana Tree at the Gate* (April 28 – June 17, 2016), took inspiration from two motifs that are iconic in her native Malaysia and throughout Southeast Asia: the ubiquitous banana tree; and the *pontianak*, a vengeful female spirit with long black hair who is sometimes said to reside in that plant. With a series of her characteristic digital photocollage works, along with a three-channel video, Yee captures the potency of female power derived from local knowledge and folkloric traditions, reframing it in a contemporary context informed by an active socio-political engagement. She conflates legendary tales with the memory of mid-twentieth century feminist movements such as Indonesia's Gerwani organization, which gained enormous popularity in the 1950s and '60s before being suppressed by the military. The exhibition's title references a 17<sup>th</sup> century sultan in southern Borneo who advised his subjects not to plant a banana tree near their front gates so as not to advertise their wealth to potential colonial exploiters. This story is cited as an example of an early form of anti-colonial resistance in Michael Dove's academic study, *The Banana Tree at the Gate: A History of Marginal Peoples and Global Markets in Borneo*. "The *pontianak* continues to haunt us in 21<sup>st</sup> century patriarchal Southeast Asia," Yee explains. "She is the woman standing at the gate like the banana tree in full view. She is potential and power and resource. A banana plant lives only briefly, bearing just one bunch of fruit before it dies. Its root structure, however, grows a new plant immediately – and so the cycle continues, ever present with a memory of the past."

Born in 1971 in Kota Kinabalu, capital of Malaysia's northern Borneo province of Sabah, Yee received her BA in Visual Arts from the University of South Australia, Adelaide, in 1993. Now based in Malaysia's capital city, Kuala Lumpur, she has established herself over the past 20 years as one of the region's leading contemporary artists, known for her digital photocollage series that deftly employ a complex, multi-layered visual vocabulary drawn from historical references, popular culture, archives, and everyday objects – works that speculate on issues of culture, power, and the role of historical memory in social experience, often with particular focus on themes and motifs that reference the indigenous cultures of Borneo. Yee has exhibited widely in museums and biennials around the world. Selected highlights include: the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Brisbane, Australia (2015 and 1999); the Jakarta Biennale, Indonesia (2015); *The Roving Eye*, ARTER Space for Art, Istanbul, Turkey (2014-15); *Finding your place in the world: Asian photomedia*, at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (2014); *Afterimage: Contemporary Photography from Southeast Asia*, Singapore Art Museum (2014-15); *Suspended Histories*, Museum Van Loon, Amsterdam, the Netherlands (2013-14); *Contemporary Commonwealth*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia (2006); the Singapore Biennale (2006); *Thermocline of Art: New Asian Waves*, ZKM | Museum of Contemporary Art, Karlsruhe, Germany (2007); and the Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale, Fukuoka, Japan (2009). *Fluid World*, a solo exhibition surveying her major works to date, was presented at Adelaide's Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia in 2011. She was a member of the curatorial team for the 2013 Singapore Biennale.