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. Like the Banana Tree at the Gate, an exhibition of new works presented at Tyler Rollins Fine Art from April 28 – June 17, 2016, takes 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 17th 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 21st 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known for her digital photocollage series that deftly employ a complex, multi-layered visual vocabulary drawn from historical references, popular culture, archives, and everyday objects – works that speculate on issues of culture, power, and the role of historical memory in social experience,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 (2008); the Singapore Biennale (2006); Thermocline of Art: New Asian Waves, ZKM I 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.
LIKE THE BANANA TREE AT THE GATE SERIES
2016
Giclee print on Hahnemühle PhotoRag® paper
three panels
dition of 8, 1 AP
LIKE THE BANANA TREE AT THE GATE: IBU OR THE BEAST
24 x 80 ¾ in. (61 x 205 cm)
LIKE THE BANANA TREE AT THE GATE: THE FLAMING WOMB
24 x 91 ¾ in. (61 x 223 cm)
LIKE THE BANANA TREE AT THE GATE: A LEAF IN THE STORM
24 x 62 in. [61 x 160 cm]
CONFEERENCE SERIES

2016
Giclée print on Hahnemühle PhotoRag® paper
three panels
dition of 8, 1 AP
GHOST IN THE BANANA TREE
2016
Giclee print on Hahnemühle PhotoRag® paper
238 pieces
each 10 ½ x 5 ¾ in. (27 x 14.5 cm)
full installation 42 ⅜ x 374 in. (107.5 x 950 cm)
edition of 3, 1 AP
LaNDSCaPE
2016
Giclée print on Hahnemühle PhotoRag® paper
19 ½ x 66 in. (50 x 168 cm)
edition of 8, 1 AP
IMAGINING PONTIANAK: I’VE GOT SUNSHINE ON A CLOUDY DAY

2016
three channel video
13:11 min.
edition of 3
Landscape
Shadowy figures with their long, black hair watch over the land at twilight.

Conference series
A series of three digital photocollages (entitled Panel 1, Panel 2, and Panel 3) that combine to form a continuous frieze. Shot in the artist’s home town of Kota Kinabalu in Borneo, the images feature men and women of different ethnicities and walks of life, their legs cropped off where their clothing begins. Tables are an ongoing motif in the artist’s work.

Imagining Pontianak: I’ve Got Sunshine on a Cloudy Day
In this 13 minute three-channel video, a group of women, their faces obscured by long, black wigs that evoke the image of the pontianak, sing snippets from popular folk songs, recite poems, and chat about topics ranging from relationships and sex to possession by ghosts. Intimate conversations between Malay women, usually relegated to the private sphere, are rarely shown in the media and popular culture.

Resource Room
The Resource Room features documentary materials relating to the pontianak, a vengeful female spirit with long hair, sometimes said to reside in the banana tree, who is a legendary figure throughout Southeast Asia. The 15 minute video on view, Pusaka Pontianak (The Accursed Heritage), is a montage of scenes featuring the pontianak, with clips of films from Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Poster: Like the Banana Tree at the Gate
Made in the style of old movie posters, this work is composed of elements taken from 19th century French lithographs of scenes from Southeast Asia, alongside a stereotypical image of the pontianak.

Poster: Like the Banana Tree at the Gate series
Each of the three digital photographs is composed of 100–200 collaged elements. The women playing the role of the pontianak responded to a public mobile studio set up in the Arts For Grabs market in Kuala Lumpur; many are well known activists and artists. The titles of each photo, from left to right, are:

“Ibu or the Beast”
Ibu or the Beast: “Ibu” is an affectionate term for “mother” (in Malaysia) or “woman” (in Indonesia). The title references an essay by Saskia Wieringa, “IBU OR THE BEAST: Gender Interests in Two Women’s Organizations,” that describes women’s political involvement in Indonesia, particularly the Gerwani feminist movement, at the time of the military coup in 1965.

“The Flaming Womb”
The title refers to a book by Barbara Andaya describing the history of women in pre-colonial Southeast Asia. It is one of artist’s favorite books.

“A Leaf in the Storm”
A Leaf in the Storm: the title refers to a biographical account by Ibu Marni ("I am a Leaf in the Storm," translated by Anton Lucas) describing her political leanings, involvement with Gerwani, and life during Indonesia’s 1965 coup.
YEE I-LLAN
SELECTED BIOGRAPHY


EDUCATION

1993 BA, Visual Arts, University of South Australia, Adelaide, Australia.

RECENT SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2016 Ayala Museum, Makati City, Philippines. 
"Like the Banana Tree at the Gate", Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, NY, USA.

2014 Picturing Power, Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, USA. 
Tabled by YEE I-LLAN, Silverlens, Singapore.

2011 Fluid World, MSAC Gallery, Taipei, Taiwan.
Fluid World, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, Adelaide, Australia.

2010 Boogymann, Black Box, MAP, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. 
Masculinities Exhibition, Artspace@Helutrans, Singapore.

2008 Suto Stories, Kathmandu Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand.

2007 Galeri Petronas, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

RECENT GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2016 Love Me in My Batik, Ilham, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. 
On Sweat, Paper, and Porcelain, part of Moves & Countermoves, CCS Bard Hessel Museum, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, USA.

2015 Open Sea, Musée d’art contemporain de Lyon, Lyon, France. 
On Sweat, Paper, and Porcelain, part of Moves & Countermoves, CCS Bard Hessel Museum, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, USA.

Selected works on exhibition, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, MN, USA.

2014 Sous la lune/Beneath the moon, Gallery 1, Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, Singapore. 
Curator’s Series #7: A Special Arrow Was Shot In The Neck… Like The Banana Tree at the Gate, Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, USA. 
Orioles, Museum of Art, Kobe, Japan.

2012 Like The Banana Tree at the Gate, Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, USA. 
Tabled by YEE I-LLAN, Silverlens, Singapore.

2010 Arter: Artistic, Political and Social Movements in Turkey, Taksim Square, Istanbul. 
Sous la lune/Beneath the moon, Gallery 1, Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, Singapore.

2009 Picturing Power, Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, USA. 
Tabled by YEE I-LLAN, Silverlens, Singapore.

RECENT SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2016 Hari Malaysia 50th Anniversary, MAP B Publika, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. 
Art of Memory: Contemporary Textile Expressions, Jim Thompson Art Center, Bangkok, Thailand.

2015 CONVERGENCE: Allegories of the Malaysian Landscape, Galeri Petronas, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. 
Abu(d)ai(ly), National Visual Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

2013 Welcome to the Jungle: Contemporary Art in Southeast Asia, Yokohama Museum of Art, Japan.
Art For Grabs, Annexa Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Kembara Jawa - The Traveling Soul, Selasar Sunaryo, Bandung, Taman Budaya, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.


Contemporary Art, Sunderland, United Kingdom.


Mandalay, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore. 
Like The Banana Tree at the Gate, Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, USA. 


Encounter: The Royal Academy in Asia, Institute of Contemporary Art, a Royal Academy exhibition in association with Fortune Cookie Projects and the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, LaSalle College of the Arts, Singapore.

2009 Tokyo Museum of Photography, Tokyo, Japan.

Encounter: The Royal Academy in Asia, Institute of Contemporary Art, a Royal Academy exhibition in association with Fortune Cookie Projects and the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, LaSalle College of the Arts, Singapore.

2008 Karachi, Pakistan. 
Noorderlicht PhotoFestival 2013, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

RECENT GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2016 Mali, Dakar, Senegal. 
"Like the Banana Tree at the Gate", Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, NY, USA.

2014 Berlin, Germany. 
"Like the Banana Tree at the Gate", Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, USA.

2013 Jakarta Biennale 2015: Neither Back Nor Forward: Acting in Performance, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.

2012 Waktu dan Ketika, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

2011 We are the People, Artissima: International Fair of Contemporary Art, Turin, Italy.

2010 "Like the Banana Tree at the Gate", Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, USA.

EXHIBITIONS

2016 MAFA: History and Heritage, Asia Society, New York, USA.

2015 "Like the Banana Tree at the Gate", Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, USA.

2014 Art of Memory: Contemporary Textile Expressions, Jim Thompson Art Center, Bangkok, Thailand.

2013 "Like the Banana Tree at the Gate", Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, USA.

2012 "Like the Banana Tree at the Gate", Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, USA.

2011 "Like the Banana Tree at the Gate", Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, USA.

2010 "Like the Banana Tree at the Gate", Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, USA.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2016 "Like the Banana Tree at the Gate", Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, USA.

2015 "Like the Banana Tree at the Gate", Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, USA.

2014 "Like the Banana Tree at the Gate", Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, USA.

2013 "Like the Banana Tree at the Gate", Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, USA.

2012 "Like the Banana Tree at the Gate", Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, USA.

2011 "Like the Banana Tree at the Gate", Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, USA.

2010 "Like the Banana Tree at the Gate", Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, USA.

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2016 "Like the Banana Tree at the Gate", Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, USA.

2015 "Like the Banana Tree at the Gate", Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, USA.

2014 "Like the Banana Tree at the Gate", Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, USA.

2013 "Like the Banana Tree at the Gate", Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, USA.

2012 "Like the Banana Tree at the Gate", Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, USA.

2011 "Like the Banana Tree at the Gate", Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, USA.

2010 "Like the Banana Tree at the Gate", Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, USA.

SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA.

Griffith University, Queensland, Australia.

Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan.

National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia.

Petronas Art Collection, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Singapore Art Museum, Singapore.

UBS Art Collection, New York, USA.

Universiti Sains, Pulau Penang, Malaysia.

©2016 TYLER ROLLINS FINE ART, LTD.