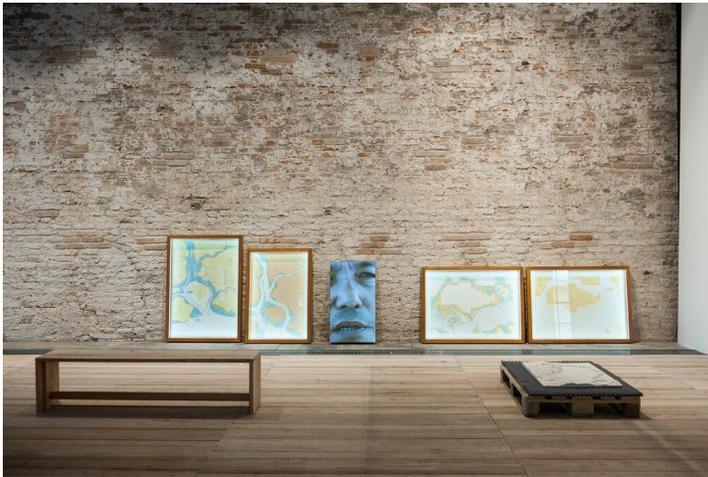


# ARTNEWS

2015 VENICE BIENNALE NEWS

## **IN DEEP WATER: THE PAVILIONS OF HONG KONG, SINGAPORE, INDONESIA, AND TUVALU IN VENICE**

BY *Barbara Pollack* POSTED 05/07/15 4:54 AM



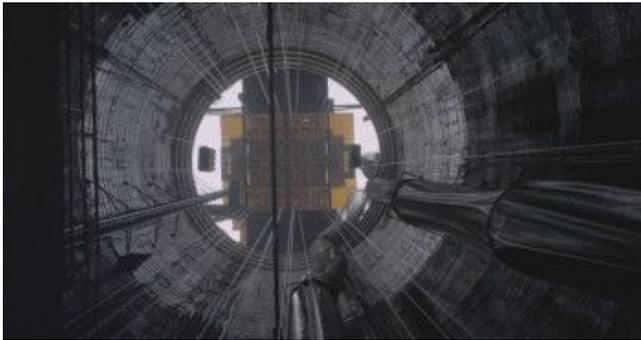
Installation view of Charles Lim's show in Singapore's pavilion.

The Venice Biennale, with its global array of national pavilions, allows visitors to make like Marco Polo and sail east, while remaining rooted in the West. The Korean and Japanese pavilions in the Giardini are a good place to start, but going a little further afield to the back streets of the Arsenale can provide a glimpse into the art worlds of China, Turkey, Singapore, Indonesia, Hong Kong, and even the little-known island nation of Tuvalu.



Installation view of Tsang Kin-Wah's "The Infinite Nothing."

“Go see the Asia pavilions because that’s where the future is,” said Doryun Chong, the chief curator of M+ museum in Hong Kong, which will not open its doors until 2017 but is making sure to make a mark with nomadic exhibitions. M+, with the Hong Kong Arts Development Council, organized the Hong Kong Pavilion as a collateral event in Venice, located just across from the Arsenale, by filling four chambers of a ground-floor building with video works by Tsang Kin-Wah, who is well represented on the biennial circuit. Tsang is an expert at creating tornadoes of words that flow from multiple projections, in this case cribbing text from the Bible, Nietzsche, and other sources on good and evil. But the best room here is the almost silent cell with projections on windows conveying the sensation of a summer storm taking place outside. Those looking for work that might reflect the street protests taking place in Hong Kong last year will have to think long to make the connection to this work. “He is quite astute politically but embodying the political situations in Hong Kong was not part of his concern,” said Chong.



Charles Lim, *SEA STATE: phase 1* (production still), 2014.  
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND FUTURE PERFECT, SINGAPORE

Singapore’s pavilion is equally concerned with water, looking at how globalization is impacting our appreciation of the seascape. An official participant in the Biennale this year, it is presenting *Sea State*, by artist and former Olympic sailor Charles Lim Yi Yong. The artist was first inspired by the details of the island of Pulau Sajahat, which ceased being cited on maritime maps in 2002. He sailed out to find that the island had virtually been absorbed by the mainland, with piles of sand being dumped at its shores to expand its size. This coincides with the fact that, while other countries and cities like Venice are disappearing into the sea due to global warming, Singapore has in fact increased 25 percent in the past decade by shipping in

sand from Malaysia and Vietnam to expand its size, and its economic strength. Lim's pavilion had stunning videos of transport ships filmed horizontally, but running vertically, as if sailing up and down the wall. Its most remarkable artifact was a 20-foot-tall buoy, towering in the center of the room, encrusted in barnacles and mussels. With windows at the end of the room opening up to the Canal, this stunning exhibition literally brought the sea indoors.

As did the Tuvalu Pavilion, flooded the Arsenale, quite literally, with tons of water, allowing visitors to traverse the space through watery footbridges. Tuvalu, located in the South Pacific between Hawaii and Australia, with a population of 9,000, is predicted to be the first nation to disappear due to global warming. On the brink of extinction, it nonetheless has its own official pavilion in Venice due to the fact that its collateral event in 2013 attracted 250,000 visitors, proving popular beyond its population. The artist then and now is Vincent J.F. Huang, of Taiwan, who has devoted his career to the predicament of Tuvalu, joining an official delegation to the United Nations convention on climate change in 2012. "This is a sinking pavilion by a sinking nation in a sinking city," said Guggenheim curator Thomas Berghuis, who served as curator of the pavilion. He noted that many of the Asian pavilions are worth seeing for the connections that they make about climate change.



Heri Dono's *Voyage-Trokomod* for the 2015 Venice Biennale.  
LUCIANO ROMANO

A dragon in the guise of a warship by artist Heri Dono beautifully dominated the Indonesian pavilion co-curated by Carla Bianpoen and Restu Iman Sari Kusumaningrum. Entitled *Voyage-Trokomod*, the installation envisioned the

combination of the Trojan Horse and the Komodo Dragon, coming equipped with a periscope and portholes containing mini-dioramas. From the ceiling, the artist hung a bevy of smaller war-ready winged ships, piloted by cherubim—it looked like an unfair match was taking place between these miniature models and the giant ship in the center of the room. Having a pavilion in Venice is a relatively new project, Bianpoen noted. Indonesia has had only three or four since the 1960s, most recently in 2013. “Now is the moment that we want to make a statement, to show we have a lot to offer,” said Bianpoen, “and though Henri Dono has worked frequently in the West, he reflects the spirit of Indonesian culture, rather than just copying traditions.”

These contributions from Asian nations at Venice demonstrated that these artists were not only in tune with their home nations, but with the site they were entering, a zone situated on water and threatened by water. With waterviews surrounding every one of these pavilions, it was hard to ignore the call to pay attention to global warming, and the call to pay attention to artists from this part of the world.

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