

‘Between 01’: A haunting art installation highlighting isolation during pandemic lockdown, part of George Town Festival 2021

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BY OPALYN MOK



This hauntingly beautiful art installation perfectly captures the feeling of isolation we all felt while sheltering in place throughout the pandemic. — Pictures by Sayuti Zainudin

GEORGE TOWN, Nov 21 — The national lockdowns due to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and this year meant long periods of isolation for many people.

Regular social interaction was prohibited during this period and this changed the dynamics of human relationships.

This “new normal” has been perfectly depicted by visual and performing artist Tan Lay Heong’s art installation titled *Between 01* at Jetty 35 in George Town.

The art installation is made up of 800 upcycled clear plastic boxes that are suspended in midair featuring human figures, hands and feet cut out of dried leaves in various poses.



A close-up look at some of the plastic boxes in the art installation. Each box contains one cut-out leaf, of a human figure or a hand or a foot to represent the isolation that we feel during this pandemic.

The boxes, suspended at different heights, are close together and some are not touching to signify that everyone can see each other but are still within their own “boxes” or spaces.

“This exhibition is to showcase the relationships between us, ourselves and our family, our friends, our relatives and between different countries, to show that this does not only affect us but everyone in the world,” Tan said.

She said the separate boxes are also a way to show how the gaps between people are widening due to the pandemic.

Tan said there are 400 empty boxes among those with cutout human figures inside.

“The empty boxes are to represent those we lost to the pandemic and it also signifies the emptiness we feel within ourselves due to the pandemic and prolonged isolation,” she said.



Tan Lay Heong pictured here with her art installation titled 'Between 01.'

Tan, known for upcycling plastic for her art, started collecting the plastic boxes, commonly used for food takeaways, in April this year for the installation.

“The use of the plastic boxes is also to show how much we relied on takeaway food during the lockdowns when we couldn’t eat out,” she said.

She posted requests for spare plastic boxes on her social media channel and within a week, she had collected 1,500 boxes.

“I kept getting a lot of calls to collect the boxes so I ended up getting more than I needed,” she said.

As for the leaves, she collected large leaves along the roadside and on the grounds of the Penang Botanic Gardens.

The leaves were dried and placed between books for about two weeks before she cut out the human figures and shapes for the installation.



This haunting art installation also features a video dance performance within this white plastic cocoon.

The art installation is accompanied by a video dance performance, played within a white cocoon made from upcycled plastic bags.

Tan collected large plastic bags from laundry shops and crinkled them using heat from an iron before stretching them over a bamboo frame shaped like a cocoon.

The video dance performance, titled *Here Now*, is projected on a screen inside the cocoon along with a haunting surround music system.

The video dance performance, featuring performers Chloe Tan and Silver Yee, showcases the dancers' interpretation of the pandemic and also some of the poses featured in the art installation.

"The dance is linked to the art installation, some of their dance poses are featured in the installation and the dancers also used some of the poses in the installation," Tan said.



Many of the boxes contain cut-out shapes depicting us as we lived in isolation during the many lockdowns.

The resulting overall art installation and performance is a play of light highlighting an almost ethereal-like quality of the transparent boxes suspended in mid-air enhanced by the haunting music and dance performance within the cocoon.

According to Tan, the cocoon is to signify changes that society has to undergo to come out with new hope for the future.

“It is to signify the transformation we have to undergo with hope for something better to come,” she said.

Tan is the key artist for the art installation while Tan Wah Chew provided the artwork setup technical support, Chong Ley-Lynn is the video editor, Fish Lim is the sound and music designer and Goh Choon Ean is the lighting designer.

Between 01, which is part of George Town Festival 2021, is free and open to the public from November 20 to 28 daily between 12pm and 8pm.

The exhibition is only open to fully vaccinated individuals and all visitors will need to book an appointment [here](#)

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