

MARTHA ATIENZA

EQUATION OF STATE

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M A R T H A A T I E N Z A

E Q U A T I O N O F S T A T E

EQUATION OF STATE:  
PERSPECTIVES ON AN ISLAND IN TRANSITION

Martha Atienza's *Equation of State* comes at a time when Bantayan Island's future is fraught with uncertainty. The recent removal of the island's Wilderness status indicates the political nature of law-making and the value it attributes to the sustainable management of human activity. Beyond economics, the island's Wilderness status and other laws governing land ownership, ultimately become a matter of who controls the future of the island and its residents.

Grounding Atienza's latest exhibition in Bantayan Island's legislation is paramount in a nuanced conversation about climate change impacts she hopes her work is able to initiate. Video documentation of the island's periphery presented in *Equation of State* gives witness to policy in action. Here, audiences see churches, bangkas, and homes all in a state of decay. The images ask the viewer to consider: Who lives on the coast? Who owns the land? Why is the ocean encroaching coastal areas? Combining video and relocated mangrove plants, Atienza's four-piece installation is not so much a response to Bantayan Island's legislative paradigm, but functions within this context.

The various pieces in the exhibition bring attention to Bantayan's rather silent struggle over land-use that ultimately led to the removal of its Wilderness status. Signed into law by former president Ferdinand Marcos in 1981, Presidential Proclamation No. 2151 declared over 51 islands and other parts of the Philippines as Wilderness Areas. Considered as lands of public domain, the Wilderness status prohibits its "sale, settlement, exploitation of whatever nature [...] subject to existing recognized and valid private rights" (1). Following a November 2019 Congressional vote to remove Bantayan Island's Wilderness status, around 13,313 hectares will now become available for "agricultural, commercial, residential, tourism, and other similar productive" activities (House Bill No. 3861). Land titles will also become available, granting conclusive ownership of land to individual entities (Anonymous).

While removal of Bantayan's Wilderness status has been criticized, equally controversial is the capacity of protected areas to mitigate impacts of economic growth. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has consistently been under pressure for questionable approval of construction projects in easement zones (Lagura-Yap). While removing the Wilderness status ultimately aims to stimulate investment opportunities, it can be argued that the island has already seen significant construction (paved roads, airport) and infrastructure (residential buildings, resorts, restaurants) projects despite its previous protected status.



Atienza's video *Panangatan 11°09'53.3"N 123°42'40.5"E 2019-10-24 Thu 6:42 AM PST 1.29 meters High Tide 2019-10-12 Sat 10:26 AM PST 1.40 meters High Tide* (2019) follows the coastline of the islet Panangatan in Bantayan Island. By showing the state of the coastline's decay, the film illustrates the complexity of land ownership and privatization. Following the harsh impact of Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) in 2013, the local government has made a consistent effort to relocate its population of fisherfolk to government and nongovernment housing projects. Given the rising of tides, relocation efforts also attempt to comply with DENR regulations prohibiting permanent occupation in easement zones. While some have moved, some 240 residents remain on this 8,489 sqm island, refusing to leave a place they consider home.

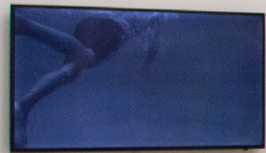
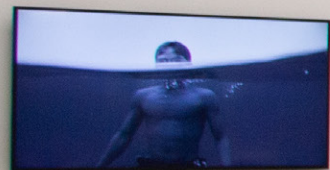


Panangatan 11°09'53.3"N 123°42'40.5"E  
2019-10-24 Thu 6:42 AM PST 1.29 meters High Tide  
2019-10-12 Sat 10:26 AM PST 1.40 meters High Tide, 2019  
single channel HD video  
shown as a single projection  
307 minutes  
Edition 1 of 6 + 2AP

Preview: <https://vimeo.com/379740093>  
Password: martha atienza



Despite Bantayan Island's visible changing coastline, attributed in part to rising tides, the artist says that for fisherfolk "the ocean is not a thing to be feared, it's something you're a part of". In *Tarong 11°16'12.0"N 123°45'23.4"E 2019-08-06 Tue 2:27 PM PST 1.50 meters High Tide Kaongkod 11°16'12.0"N 123°45'23.4"E 2019-08-03 Sat 12:14 PM PST 2.03 meters High Tide* (2019), two generations of fishermen are filmed as they visibly breath heavily in rough waters. The video depicts a resiliency amidst impacts of an already changing natural and legislative environment. As the tides are rising, so is the pressure from government and land owners to push fishing communities away from the coastal areas they, culturally, belong to.

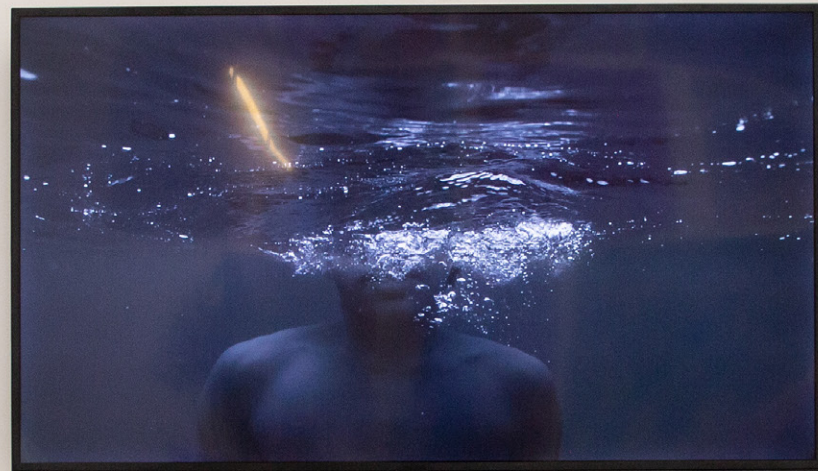


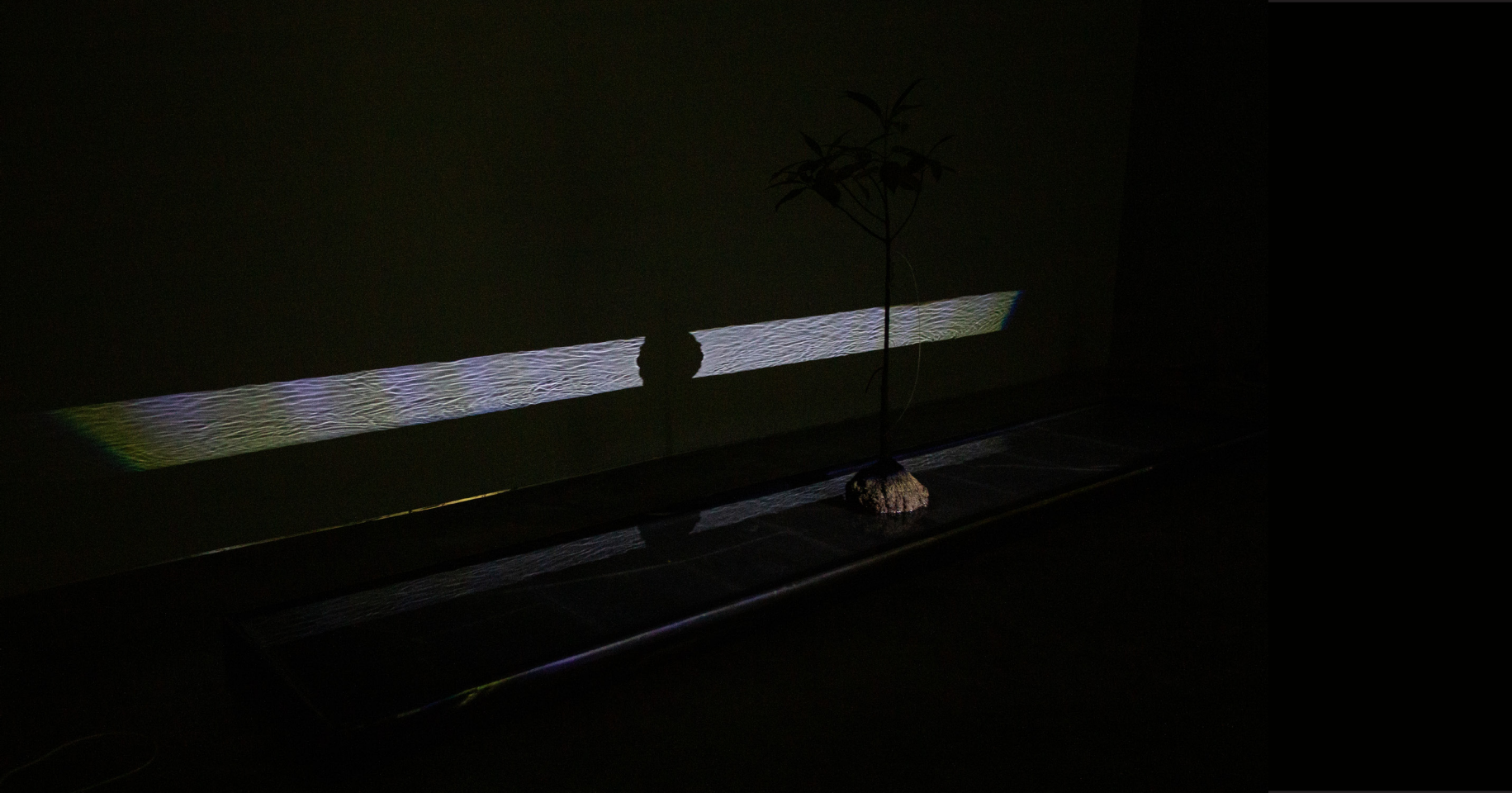


Tarong 11°16'12.0"N 123°45'23.4"E  
2019-08-06 Tue 2:27 PM PST 1.50 meters High Tide  
Kaongkod 11°16'12.0"N 123°45'23.4"E  
2019-08-03 Sat 12:14 PM PST 2.03 meters High Tide, 2019  
3-channel HD video installation  
shown on 3, 55" flat screens  
79 minutes  
Edition 1 of 6 + 2AP

Preview: <https://vimeo.com/386628114>  
Password: martha atienza







The composite material of *Equation of State I Rhizophora stylosa* (2019) sees Martha Atienza furthering a language she has developed since exhibiting *Study in Reality #03* (Silverlens Galleries, 2015) and *Endless Hours at Sea* (Singapore Biennial, 2016). In what she describes as “island systems”, these complex and frail mechanisms are made of water, steel, nylon, pvc, filters, transformers, pumps, car wipers, microswitches and relays integrated in the workings of the installation. Working together with a Manila-based Arduino programmer and a karaoke machine maker, an electrician and a machine operator from Bantayan Island, she has created an Arduino-based system that operates a mechanism that physically — perhaps violently — pulls 24 mangrove plants in and out of water. In *Equation of State II Rhizophora stylosa* (2019), one of the plants is singled out, as it hangs above a water-filled pool, its reflection projected on the wall creating a pattern of light moving with the water. This physical intervention, Atienza says, is a portrayal of “human interference and control over mangrove systems as protective systems for shores and large carbon holders” (Atienza). Through these pieces, she is very deliberate in ways of playing with ideas around control within the exhibition.



Equation of State I  
*Rhizophora stylosa*, 2019

single mangrove, water, nylon, rope, seabul, pulleys, filter, arduino,  
transformer, relay, car wiper, wood, trapal, cement, lenses, floodlight  
dimensions variable

Preview: <https://vimeo.com/377939167>

Relocating the *Rhizophora stylosa*, Philippines' most planted mangrove species, to the confines of a white space challenges the mismanagement of coastal areas Atienza has documented in *Equation of State*. Despite various protective measures, mangrove deforestation has taken place at a significant rate throughout the country (de Leon and White). Among the most carbon-rich forests in the tropics, mangroves contain an average of 1,023 Mg of carbon per hectare. Given that the Philippines holds at least 50% of the world's approximately 65 mangrove species worldwide, sound management of mangrove forests can potentially alleviate impacts of climate change in coastal areas (García, Gevaña, & Malabrigo). Bearing the removal of the Wilderness status in mind, this means that only easement zones will be protected. In Bantayan Island's urban areas, easement zones will only safeguard areas three meters from where the sea water reaches its highest point. In Agricultural and Forest Areas, this is limited to 20 and 40 meters respectively (Pablo).





ATE IN THE EVENING SHE WONDERING WHAT CLOTHES TO WEAR  
ITS ON HER MAKEUP AND BRUSHES HER LONG BLONDE HAIR  
WHEN SHE FEELS ME POT TO ALL RIGHT AND I SAY YES YES  
WONDERFUL TONIGHT TALKING I AM SAILING HOME AGAIN  
THE BEST I AM BRINGING STAY WATERS I LOVE BEING TO  
I AM LEAVING YEAR YEAR I LOVE YOU MORE THAN I CAN SAY  
I LOVE YOU TWICE AS MUCH I AM PROUD OF YOU I LOVE YOU MORE  
I WANT TO KNOW HAVE YOU EVER SEEN THE RAIN I  
I KNOW HAVE YOU EVER BEEN THE RAIN COMING DOWN ON A  
DRY I CANT LIVE IF LIVING IS WITHOUT YOU I WANT LIVE I  
I LOVE ANYMORE CANT LIVE IF LIVING IS WITH YOU I CANT  
I WANT GIVE ANYMORE MAYBE I DIDNT TREAT YOU QUITE AS  
GOOD AS I SHOULD HAVE MAYBE I DIDNT LOVE YOU QUITE AS OFTEN  
AS I COULD HAVE LITTLE THINGS I SHOULD HAVE SAID AND DONE I  
JUST NEVER TOOK THE TIME YOU WERE ALWAYS ON MY MIND YOU  
WERE ALWAYS ON MY MIND YO ALL TELL YOU WHAT I WANT WHAT I  
REALLY REALLY WANT SO TELL ME WHAT YOU WANT WHAT YOU  
REALLY REALLY WANT I WANNA I WANNA I WANNA I WANNA I WANNA  
REALLY REALLY REALLY  
I WANNA I WANNA I WANNA



Equation of State II

*Rhizophora stylosa*, 2019

24 mangroves, water, steel, seabul, plywood, nylon, rope, pulleys,  
filter, pump, arduinos, trapal, transformers, relays,  
car wipers, wood, pvc, zinc, led lights, wiring, cement  
dimensions variable

Preview: <https://vimeo.com/377945991>

ITS LATE IN THE EVENING SHE WONDERING WHAT CLOTHES TO WEAR  
SHE PUTS ON HER MAKEUP AND BRUSHES HER LONG BLONDE HAIR  
AND THEN SHE ASKS ME DO I LOOK ALL RIGHT AND I SAY YES YES  
LOOK WONDERFUL TONIGHT I AM SAILING I AM SAILING HOME AGAIN  
CROSS THE SEA I AM SAILING STORMY WATERS TO BE NEAR YOU TO  
BE FREE WHOA WHOA YEAH YEAH I LOVE YOU MORE THAN I CAN SAY  
ILL LOVE YOU TWICE AS MUCH TOMORROW WHOA OH LOVE YOU MORE  
THAN I CAN SAY I WANT TO KNOW HAVE YOU EVER SEEN THE RAIN I  
WANT TO KNOW HAVE YOU EVER SEEN THE RAIN COMING DOWN ON A  
SUNNY DAY I CANT LIVE IF LIVING IS WITHOUT YOU I CANT LIVE I  
CANT GIVE ANYMORE CANT LIVE IF LIVING IS WITHOUT YOU I CANT  
GIVE I CANT GIVE ANYMORE MAYBE I DIDNT TREAT YOU QUITE AS  
GOOD AS I SHOULD HAVE MAYBE I DIDNT LOVE YOU QUITE AS OFTEN  
AS I COULD HAVE LITTLE THINGS I SHOULD HAVE SAID AND DONE I  
JUST NEVER TOOK THE TIME YOU WERE ALWAYS ON MY MIND YOU  
WERE ALWAYS ON MY MIND YO ILL TELL YOU WHAT WHAT I  
REALLY REALLY WANT SO TELL ME WHAT YOU WANT WHAT YOU  
REALLY REALLY WANT I WANNA I WANNA I WANNA I WANNA I WANNA  
REALLY REALLY REALLY  
WANNA ZIGAZIG AH



Through documentation of Bantayan Island's coastal conditions, both human and environmental, and the relocation of mangrove plants, *Equation of State* depicts both the decline and resiliency of this small island group. Bringing together the material and immaterial, the exhibition fosters an experience asking the viewer to question environmental management and the almost invisible hand of legislation that governs territorial land and waters.

- J A K E A T I E N Z A

*Documentation video link: <https://vimeo.com/415984938>*

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**leusef Santillan**; camera technician and post-production

**Herogene Araño**; mangroves, fish and filters

**Avelino Villarosa**; electrician

**Gladys Regalado**; arduino

**Jozef Michael Heij**; audio visual

**Jasper Niens**; build up

# MARTHA ATIENZA

Born to a Dutch mother and Filipino father, Martha Atienza (b. 1981) has moved between both countries and cultures throughout her life. Currently she resides both in the Netherlands and the Philippines, dependent on where her projects bring her.

Atienza's practice explores installation and video as a way of documenting and questioning issues around environment, community and development. Her work is mostly constructed in video, of an almost sociological nature, that studies her direct environment. Often utilizing technology in the form of mechanical systems, Atienza explores the immersive capacity of installation in generating critical discourse. Her work tends to be collaborative in nature, working with people from different backgrounds and expertise as well as residents of Bantayan Island, where her family is from, whose narratives are intricately woven into issues such as environmental change, displacement, cultural loss, governance and socio-economic disparities.

Since graduating with a Bachelor in Fine Arts from the Academy of Visual Arts and Design in the Netherlands, Atienza has exhibited internationally at various art spaces, galleries, and video festivals. In 2017, Atienza won the Baloise Art Prize in Art Basel (Switzerland) for her work, *Our Islands 11°16'58.4\_N 123°45'07.0\_E*. In 2016, she was one of the five shortlisted artists for the Benesse Art Prize (Japan) in the Singapore Biennale. In 2015, Atienza was awarded the Thirteen Artists Awards by the Cultural Center of the Philippines. Martha Atienza has also had residencies all over the world: in 2005, she was a part of Kuvataideakatemia's art program in Finland. In 2016 and 2012, she won the prestigious Ateneo Art Award with studio residency grants in Liverpool, Melbourne, New York and Singapore. In 2016, she was the recipient of the first Mercedes Zobel/Outset Residency at Gasworks in London. In 2018, Atienza was a part of the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art's residency program in Singapore.

Recent exhibitions include *2018 Asia Project: How Little You Know About Me*, MMCA, Korea (2018); *No Man's Land*, MUDAM, Luxembourg (2018); *Fair Isles*, solo exhibition, Nassauischer Kunstverein Wiesbaden, Center for Contemporary Art, Germany (2018); *Bienal de Mercosul*, Porto Alegre, Brazil (2018); *Taipei Biennale: Post-Nature - A Museum as an Ecosystem*, Taipei Fine Arts Museum (2018); *9th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, QAGOMA, Brisbane (2018); *Honolulu Biennial: To Make Wrong / Right / Now*, Honolulu, Hawaii (2019); *Equation of State*, solo exhibition, Silverlens, Manila (2019).

## AWARDS & GRANTS

2017	Winner, Baloise Art Prize, Art Basel Basel, Switzerland
2016	Shortlisted, Benesse Prize, Singapore Art Museum Winner, Ateneo Art Awards, Manila
2015	Winner, CCP Thirteen Artists Award, Manila
2014	Sovereign Asian Art Prize nomination, Hong Kong Ontwikkeling- en Onderzoekssubsidie, Centrum beeldende kunst, Rotterdam Bijdrage Werkbudget-standaard, Mondriaan Fonds, Amsterdam New Media Fund, National Commission for Culture and Arts, Manila
2012	Bewegend beeld, dienst kunst en cultuur Rotterdam, Rotterdam Winner, Ateneo Art Awards, Manila
2010	Bewegend beeld, dienst kunst en cultuur Rotterdam, Rotterdam New Media Fund, National Commission for Culture and Arts, Manila Social Innovation in Culture Experiment, Office of Culture and Design, Manila
2009	Ateneo Art Awards Nomination, Manila

## RESIDENCIES

2018	NTU Centre for Contemporary Art, Singapore
2017	La Trobe University Visual Arts Centre Melbourne, Residency Program, Melbourne
2016	Gasworks, Mercedes Zobel/Outset Residency, London
2014	Artesan Gallery Studio Grant, Singapore
2013	Art Omi International Artists Residency, New York La Trobe University Visual Arts Centre Melbourne, Residency Program, Melbourne Liverpool Hope University, Residency Program, Liverpool
2009	Green Papaya Art Projects Residency Program, Arts Network Asia, Manila

## BIENNALES, TRIENNALES

2019	<i>Honolulu Biennial 2019: To Make Wrong / Right / Now</i> , Oahu, Hawaii
2018	<i>9th Asia Pacific Triennale of Contemporary Art</i> , Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA), Australia <i>Taipei Biennale: Post-Nature: A Museum as an Ecosystem</i> , Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei <i>Visayas Islands Visual Arts Exhibition and Conference (VIVA EXCON)</i> , Roxas City, Capiz <i>Bienal do Mercosul</i> , Porto Alegre, Brazil

2016	<i>Singapore Biennale: An Atlas of Mirrors</i> , Singapore
2013	<i>Anito</i> , Sharjah Biennale 11, United Arab Emirates
2012	<i>Anito</i> , Viva Excon Biennale, Dumaguete

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2019	<i>Equation of State</i> , Silverlens, Manila
2018	<i>Fair Isles</i> , including Anito I and World Premiere of Anito II, Nassauischer Kunstverein Wiesbaden, Center for Contemporary Art, Germany <i>Our Islands</i> , Tower One and Exchange Plaza, Manila <i>Martha Atienza</i> , Mind Set Art Center, Taipei <i>Our Islands</i> , Art Basel Statements, Switzerland <i>Anito</i> , Silverlens, Manila
2017	<i>Study In Reality No.3</i> , Silverlens, Manila <i>Endless Hours at Sea II</i> , Ateneo Art Gallery, Manila <i>Endless Hours at Sea I</i> , Artesan Gallery, Singapore Access Gallery, Visual Arts Centre Melbourne, La Trobe University, Australia <i>My Navel Is Buried In The Sea</i> , Pablo Gallery, Manila <i>My Navel Is Buried In The Sea</i> , Gallery Orange, Bacolod <i>My Navel Is Buried In The Sea</i> , Madridejos, Bantayan Island, Cebu <i>Man In Suit</i> , Green Papaya Project Space, Manila <i>Abe Reina Si Maria</i> , Wolfart Projects, Rotterdam
2016	<i>Man In Suit</i> , Weijerkapel Boxmeer, Boxmeer
2015	<i>Man In Suit</i> , Loesje, Berlin
2014	<i>Man In Suit</i> , Perron 1, Delden <i>Passage</i> , Het Torentje, Almelo
2013	
2012	
2011	
2009	
2008	
2006	

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2020	<i>Constructions of Truths</i> , The Museum of Contemporary Art and Design (MCAD), Manila <i>Inundation: Art and Climate Change in the Pacific</i> , University of Hawai'i, Manoa Art Gallery, Hawaii
2019	<i>Fracture/Fiction: Selections from the ILHAM collection</i> , ILHAM Gallery, Kuala Lumpur <i>Far Away But Strangely Familiar</i> , Danubiana Meulensteen Art Museum, Bratislava <i>Good Space - Communities or the Promise of Happiness</i> , Villa Merkel, Galerien der Stadt Esslingen am Neckar





## **ABOUT SILVERLENS**

Through its artist representation, institutional collaborations, art consultancy, and exhibition programming including art fairs and gallery partnerships, **SILVERLENS** aims to place its artists within the broader framework of the contemporary art dialogue. Its continuing efforts to transcend borders across art communities in Asia have earned it recognition from both artists and collectors as one of the leading contemporary art galleries in Southeast Asia. **SILVERLENS** was founded by Isa Lorenzo and Rachel Rillo in 2004.