

James Tapsell-Kururangi

In response to *Thus the Blast Carried It, Into the World* 它便随着爆破, 冲向了世界 by Qianye Lin and Qianhe 'AL' Lin

We went home after the night and watched a video of when the bubbles started blowing through the space, and the sound came back on. And recalled a vague intense feeling. The following day, we awoke, opened the curtain and the sun was bright, maybe hot. We cried and thought: we are now in the world.

1. Qianye Lin and Qianhe 'AL' Lin in conversation with James Tapsell-Kururangi, at Papatūnga, several days after the celebration, *What a thrill, WHAT A SUCCESS!!*

Foreword

On the evening of 17 October 2020, siblings Qianye Lin and Qianhe 'AL' Lin were waiting for their celebration to begin at exactly 7pm. The crowds that had passed through Parnell Train Station earlier that day had gone, leaving an empty carpark and a cool wind which ruffled the series of flags flying on the platform: screen printed bright orange silk. We had spent a week installing in the gallery space of Papatūnga. Hanging three projectors from the ceiling, a pair of speakers and amp, a large, welded metal gate with the words "A THRILL" and "A SUCCESS," and one bubble machine. AL and Qianye had inscribed the text, which was to be spoken during the celebration, in acrylic paint in a line around the gallery walls. The line ended with the character 大 where the celebration would begin and end.

What a thrill, WHAT A SUCCESS!! could be described as an installation, and within the rubric of art history it could be seen as performance art. It resembled an ephemeral happening. However, all these associations in some sense undermine what took place that evening, and the motivation for their party. For me, there is a difference in their approach: the desire to pause, and assess their position. AL was about to graduate from Elam School of Fine Arts, and Qianye was only recently out of art school. They were young artists who were not drawn to "celebrate nothingness" (to use their sentiment). Instead they spoke about tanukis, a group of animated creatures, who transformed into a ship, and celebrated sailing toward their own destruction. As I watched them on the days leading up to their celebration, the party, they care-

fully covered the gallery floor in metallic tape to emulate the graphics on adjacent train ticket offices. They painted a large giant peach, and a pair of hands. They decided not to erase any mistakes while painting. They purchased a slide projector, like the ones they had seen in restaurants, used as marketing on a busy street: They playfully photoshopped an image of their faces. I enjoyed that it was a bit of a thrill. It brought to the gallery a reinvigorated spirit. 2020 had been a very tough year for Aotearoa, and for the world, with Covid-19, Black Lives Matter, President Donald Trump. These things prompted me to ask, where do I fit? Or perhaps what is my position on art? What is art's use to me, and my friends and family?

Interview

Who are you?

My name is Qianye, my name means a thousand leaves. AL is my sibling, their name is Qianhe and they go by AL, they are two years younger than me.

We can start with big questions like can you tell me about the work? Or we can start with little questions like what are we seeing behind us? What is this video work?

We do not call the video itself a work. It is more like a texture that goes with the space. We do not know if it stands alone as a work. We kept saying when we were making it that it is a backdrop. It sets the tone of what is happening. It is not intended to be seen by itself but it is a really vital component that defines what the space is. We used a lot of found footage and we have a lot of personal history and connection to these materials. Which is why bringing them here and showing them in this context is important.

Tell me about this texture.

A lot of the found footage are cartoons we watched as kids, but if you look at the list, the earliest video was from the 1970s and the latest was last year, 2019. So, some of the materials are new to us. The cartoons, or seeing them through the eyes that we are seeing through now, for this space, it is quite important to say that this work is not about our childhood. It is through living here, and growing up, that the way that we see now has been established.

The pause between initially seeing and then revisiting this material has shaped our relationship to it. Being in New Zealand, in Aotearoa and, having a fluency in

meaning here, revisiting material from our childhood was a moment of extreme excitement and almost ecstasy. The important thing is this form of “seeing” didn’t exist when we were kids. It is not purely nostalgic, or something to do with the past, or the context that we were in. We have moved away from it, geographically, mentally, linguistically.

All the little clips we have, none of them form any sort of storytelling or linear narrative. They are simply what constitutes this envelope/painting/thing. A discontinued narrative.

We have talked about it before, about this particular time. It is not just nostalgia, I’m getting the idea of locality, or of being located within something: within time and space, and in a further sense within Aotearoa, within the art institution, within the framework of the art institution. Furthermore, when we are thinking of the duration of the show, it was important for you to have it only for one day, and one time – why?

It is funny, now that it is after it has happened, it was important because firstly what was happening in the space needed to happen, and secondly because we were there, and also we were there with other people. It was a destructively energetic moment we have shared. And now, this space is a static ruin. Which is similar to the time before the celebration, before people gathered here. This was a space anticipating that destructive energy. The destruction of time, of space, of language, of perception, of being together. The celebration only exists collectively when it’s shared. The sharing cannot be articulated because it is so bodily. The celebration has ended.

AL, you wrote the text which Qianye read during the celebration, which we see painted on the gallery walls. Can you tell me about the process?

We can’t remember how it began, but yes AL wrote the story, and thought that it was good. Oh and Qianye expanded the story in English, while at the same time AL extended the story in Mandarin, so two versions were created out of this expanded version. And then we compressed these expanded versions in Mandarin. Then, from the compressed version and the expanded version, there was this subtext that emerged that resulted in not words, and that became the slideshow.

The celebration was a story which was read aloud, along with a slideshow and sound design by AL. Perhaps that was the first time we encountered the final story. As AL goes away and writes in their book, and they always read it aloud. The whole process of translation and expansion turned it into something beautiful.

The story is about Pig. And what happens is Pig wakes up in the day, and it forgets about the celebrations that happened the night before, the day described as this bright, quiet place. Where there is nowhere to hide. And Pig adopts human-like behaviours. Pig learns to greet, Pig learns to nod, Pig learns to handshake, and then the story goes on to when sunset starts to happen, and things start to change and blur. The story has a lot of descriptions of the world during that time and describes the night when Pig gets onto all fours, which is an important moment, when Pig runs towards the celebration. The celebration is described as chaotic and blurry. An experience where things are thrown away. Pig eventually learns to fly.

But the key to the story is it comes back to the beginning. Pig wakes up again. On the same field. And everything is the same. And it goes through the same motions of learning the human-like behaviours and the structures, and the sun, and the night happens again.

Is the question then, what are we celebrating?

Well in the story Pig does not know what the celebration is about, but there is this force that's pulling Pig into the celebration, and Pig has no time to analyse it, and has no other options but to join in the celebration. Also no one actually asked that question on the night, and that's cool.

2. Qianye Lin and Qianhe 'AL' Lin in conversation with James Tapsell-Kururangi, at AL's home in Tāmaki Makaurau, on *Thus the Blast Carried It, Into the World* 它便随着爆破, 冲向了世界.

Foreword

I had flown down to see Qianye and AL's newly commissioned work at The Physics Room and was excited as I hadn't been down to Christchurch since the devastating earthquakes of 2010-11. The last time was for my father's graduation at Lincoln University. We stayed at the Crowne Plaza and went to dinner below the town hall facing the Ferrier Fountains. The Crowne Plaza has since been demolished and the Town Hall has only recently been restored after suffering earthquake damage.

I had flown down with a colleague for the opening of *Thus the Blast Carried It, Into the World* 它便随着爆破, 冲向了世界 as part of *Monitor 3.1*, but had missed it, so we were relieved to attend the public talk with Sean Kerr, Qianye, and AL. Sitting adjacent to the three-channel video, I noticed that the space evoked a feeling of stillness. The destructive energy that inhabited Papatūnga has been replaced by cool grey paint and refined video edits.

Interview

What was the process like when you made this new work, *Thus the Blast Carried It, Into the World* 它便随着爆破, 冲向了世界? Was it similar to the process for making *What a Thrill, WHAT A SUCCESS!!?*

In *Thus the Blast Carried It, Into the World* 它便随着爆破, 冲向了世界 the text exists in many different forms. There was text that already existed as part of the found footage, animated text, digitally handwritten text, and there is the monologue performed by AL. Regardless of the form, the texture of these texts is one that lives in a moving image work, so we decided on a more pared back installation and not to recreate what we did for *What a Thrill, WHAT A SUCCESS!!*. This new work is a moving image work; the last one, despite having a big moving image component, is not. The video was mainly made in AL's house in Tāmaki Makaurau, leading up to the show we were working 12 hours a day. So we had to make a very strict schedule with deadlines for set making, filming, rendering, and editing. We made the decision to put in the "oracle host" as a very very last touch, about two weeks before we were going down to Christchurch. It was really the final piece of the puzzle that we needed.

Thus the Blast Carried It, Into the World 它便随着爆破, 冲向了世界. wouldn't have been possible without all our friends. Ningyi Hu did the costume, makeup, and set design. Alex Su also worked on the set and makeup and rendered the mountain background and the final scene where the stars started to sparkle. JingCheng Zhao was our videographer superstar, and Jack Kettley helped with the rendering.

This time a three-channel video?

It did start out as a single-channel video, but it felt very linear, something you watch from start to finish and we didn't want the work to be like that. At that point there were parts of the video that were just blank with the monologue spoken, and we were really drawn to them. So we wondered if the video could be like an orchestra, visuals coming in only when needed. Could less footage serve the entire experience?

You chose to include the reading of the text within the work this time?

The whole work is an amplification of a very small moment. Which is what we called in the video "the first day." An enclosed experience that derived from, but is not reality. *What a thrill, WHAT A SUCCESS!!* was a lot about gathering, whereas this work was about amplifying an abstract moment. That is something that I think everybody knows or could resonate with. It is an encapsulated world of its own. The end is when the viewer steps out of this little enclosure we built, into reality where meaning structures are stable and sound. It is important that there is a distance, a distinction between the experience of viewing the work of what you step out of, and back into.

What fascinates you about the sun? Why have you selected those images of the sun? Or perhaps where are those images from? Lately I have been reconsidering my relationship to the sun ...

The sun is important. The found footage is from the movie *Mo Ku Zhong De Huan Xiang* 魔窟中的幻想 (1986) by director Jixing Wang, which we feel like we need to honour and not appropriate out of context. It is set within a prison, where a young girl, Xiaoluobotou (Little Turnip) and her mother were imprisoned. The film is perhaps a kind of magical realism. A lot of the footage gives us the feeling of terror as well as desire. The film is seen through the imagination of the young girl and one scene that interested us was her birthday celebration. The character stands on top of a piano in a nice dress. Hundreds of people circle round the young girl, all wearing identical dresses. Each with a birthday cake.

The sun was a significant motif in *Mo Ku Zhong De Huan Xiang*. We were particularly interested in the scene where she is in the courtyard, within the four walls, and she looks up, she sees the sun. In the end, she is killed after escaping the prison. The last scenes are of a watercolour drawing depicting the sun, with her hand holding it, and a soldier trying to pull the drawing away but her hand was not letting go. We see the sun speaking to hope and desire, which also heightens the feelings of terror and hopelessness; the sun being the only channel to the outside, as she lives in this courtyard with four towering walls.

Although we use footage from this film, we want to reference the gesture without claiming its significance in the original work. It helped us to think about how we see the world around us. The coexisting terror and desire spoke to us.

Finally, the sun was also significant to our previous work *What a thrill, WHAT A SUCCESS!!*. The protagonist Pig resisted the sun. The day was a metaphor that Pig was resisting, as when the day began, Pig transformed into a human. In this work the sun is kind of scary, it represents a feeling of being overwhelmed. Moreover, the timeline in *What a thrill, WHAT A SUCCESS!!* could be seen as being zoomed out, we were observing the sun at a distance. Whereas in this new work, we took on the perspective of the sun, or perhaps we are right next to the sun. Looking outward into something which is vast, and beyond our understanding.

What was it like writing about the character “It”? Last time the protagonist of the story was Pig, and you spoke of Pig going towards the celebration. Did you work in the same way as before when writing? Can you tell me a little about “It”?

We used the same process for writing, once again, the text came first which we wrote. We were heavily inspired by the beginning of the Japanese manga series *To Your Eternity* (2016), by Yoshitoki Ōima. The story goes ...

“A circular thing, a ball, was dropped by an extraterrestrial being into the world, to learn about the world. At first it was by a rock. So, it transformed into a rock. Spring came, and moss grew on the rock, so then it was moss. After a while, a wolf died next to the moss and the rock, so then it became the wolf. And so, the story continues.”

So, the protagonist “It” encounters the world in a similar fashion and learns about the world from a blank slate. Moving forward, when we started writing we were thinking about human birth. In the second stanza of the text, we thought about the meaning structures and the physical and substantial impact of birth on your body ...

“It flew high and landed heavily, if it had understood the operating mechanisms of the body, it’s bones must have been crushed, but fortunately it didn’t understand so everything healed before it was crushed.”

So, in this new work, we are taking perception—the way you perceive—and manifesting that moment in the writing. Manifesting it into reality. Moreover, “It” is like a parallel narrative to us. “It” is oblivious to the physical and linguistic structure in our world: the multiplicity of human sensories. For example, “It” uses its skin to look out into the world to see, as opposed to singling out senses, like how we use our eyes to see, and our ears to hear.

“At first it used its skin to look out, at the time there was no part of it that was not skin. So its skin connects to the skin of the world into one piece, together they wrap up a huge mystery.”

Finally, in making the work we were wanting to honour our own sensibilities, relating, on a very physical bodily level, to the materials we were using; the text we were using; what we are writing. It is a celebration of a process that in some ways is very private and genuine. *Thus the Blast Carried It, Into the World* 它便随着爆破, 冲向了世界 does not describe the whole world or the universe, but instead enacts and enlarges a particular moment; what our sensorial perceptions can reach to understand. “It” is speaking as though it is not in the world, but we are.

James Tapsell-Kururangi

Te Arawa, Ngāti Whakaeue, Ngāti Pikiao, Ngāti Mākino, Tainui, Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Porou, Te Whānau-a-Rākairoa

James Tapsell-Kururangi is Assistant Curator for Te Tuhi. He runs Papatūnga in Tāmaki Makaurau. James graduated from Massey University with a Master of Fine Arts (First Class Honours) in 2019. He graduated with a Bachelor of Design (First Class Honours) specialising in photography in 2017. James is an emerging artist and writer; he has exhibited at ST PAUL St Gallery *How to live together* (2019); *He waiata aroha* was exhibited at Enjoy Contemporary Art Space in Wellington (2021), and at Adam Art Gallery, *Crossings (a group show about intimacies and distance)* (2021). His writing has been published with Lieu Journal; Pantograph Punch & Gloria Books.

Thus the Blast Carried It, Into the World 它便随着爆破, 冲向了世界 was shown as part of the exhibition *Monitor 3.1* at The Physics Room from 30 January - 21 February 2021. See our [website](#) for more details.

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