Artist Biography

Loo Zihan is a performance and moving-image artist and educator based in Singapore. He is interested in the affectual transference and transmutation of shame in his work. His recent body of work strives to expose the tension between the flesh of the body with the bone of the archive.

Zihan graduated with his Master of Fine Arts from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2011. He was granted a merit scholarship upon admission to the programme and was awarded a graduate fellowship upon graduation.

He was part of the pioneer batch of students to pursue a Bachelor of Fine Arts in the School of Art, Design and Media, Nanyang Technological University. He was named valedictorian and represented his cohort in their convocation ceremony, delivering a passionate speech on the topic of artistic compromises and censorship.

Zihan's moving-image works have been selected and screened at various international film festivals such as the Pusan International Film Festival (South Korea). His co-directorial debut feature 'Solos' has also been selected for competition in AFI Festival (Los Angeles) and Deauville Asian Film Festival (France). Most notably, 'Solos' was awarded the 'Nuovo Sguardo' award at the 23rd Turin GLBT Film Festival (Italy).

Beyond his moving-image works, Zihan's solo performances have also been presented at various performance events such as the Macau International Performance Art Festival and Rapid Pulse International Performance Art Festival (Chicago).

In 2012 he presented his solo performance Cane at the M1 Singapore Fringe Festival. Cane was part of a two-year research into the 1993 performance of Brother Cane by artist Josef Ng Sing Chor. The events that followed Brother Cane led to a ten year restriction on the licensing and funding of performance art and forum theatre in Singapore. Eventually, his research was also consolidated into his debut solo exhibition Archiving Cane, presented at The Substation Gallery in December 2012.

In 2013, Zihan was invited to participate in the Associate Artist Research Programme at The Substation. For this two-year long residency, Zihan decided to further his investigation into the visual and textual documentation of the contemporary art scene in Singapore during the early 1990s.

As an educator, Zihan has taught modules at various institutions such the National Institute of Education and his alma mater – the School of Art, Design and Media, Nanyang Technological University. Since 2012, he has also been teaching at the School of the Arts, Singapore where he encourages these future artists to create a critical and consistent body of work for their International Baccalaureate assessment.
Beyond his own work, Zihan also participates actively as a performer and collaborator in projects by other artists. He has appeared as lead actor in two sold-out mandarin productions, Bondage and A Language of Our Own. In 2007, he acted in Pleasure Factory, an independent feature film which had its world premiere at the 60th Cannes Film Festival. With these performance opportunities, he has performed in various cities such as Chicago, Zurich and Hamburg.

Artist Statement

My work is anchored in the moving image and extends to performance and mixed-media installations. I deploy these divergent mediums to address fundamental societal and artistic questions, such as the relationship between the artist and participant, the role of the “proper” and the still under-recognized pervasiveness of shame. A quiet lyricism and poetic rhythm couches my explorations of shame, sexual content and the dangers and pleasures of self-exposure. In submitting to my own self-exposure, I propose my work as a gift to the viewer.

My nation-state of Singapore provides the impetus for my questions. Equally known for its immaculate streets and brutal suppression of difference, Singapore proved a challenging place to emerge as an artist, where politically challenging work is often subjected to censorship. It strives towards a pragmatic utopia but is plagued with a history of amnesia. My work is an attempt to locate myself within this society where queer sexual practices are reflected back as criminal. I refuse to conform to regulations laid down by my country, creating work from the manipulation and exposure of my body in order to reclaim authority over myself. This act of self-determination serves to exemplify the survival tactics that we all must use to make our individual lives liveable.

I confront the performance of ethnic and gay self-shaming with the intent to transform it, co-opting and re-purposing its power for alternative ends. That is, I take on the humiliations of public scrutiny and remake them as acts of conscience performed for others. By doing this, I hope to transform shame into a nexus of criticality, politics, and meaning in the face of personal presence.

I commit to my work, rigorously following the logical conclusions and needs of my performance practice and my construction of interactive installations and sites. This has meant diving into shame and presenting it back to others’ peering eyes — no matter what the personal consequences. The formality of these presentations of transgressive and proscribed emotions and acts confront the viewer with a contradiction between their presumptions of what is appropriate and a validation of the personal experience of the shamed. In order to bring these paradoxes to the viewer, I use both performance and installation to establish a ritualistic experience of space, time, and the social and physical relations between them, my own performing body, and the objects I use. This remapping of relations implicates them, humanizes my own self-exposure, and challenges the “common sense” presumptions of social hierarchy and behaviour.
LOO Zihan
Moving-Image Artist, Performer and Educator

My home context of Singapore places great emphasis on these categories of social ordering (spawned, in part, from Singapore's past under British colonial rule and the current cultural hegemony of the ethnic Chinese majority), and I create my work with an awareness of its shifting meanings in different global contexts. In Singapore, it is asserted that propriety is worth sacrificing for. I confront the costs of that sacrifice to those who are excluded from that propriety and its power.

By exposing myself in and through performance to transactions and relations of power, sexuality, and voyeurism, I offer viewers a means to circumvent assumptions they bring to the otherwise private content of sexuality, shame, and personhood. A queer lens is held up to the viewer’s eye, momentarily refracting their perception of the world and asking them to see otherwise. Via this refraction, I urge compassion and tolerance for the marginalized and the exiled.
Selected Works

**Chancre (2011) – Essay Film**

Country of Production: USA / Singapore  
Duration: 17 minutes  
Language: English  
Shooting Format: HD Video / 16mm / Super 8

Chancre – a painless ulceration formed during the primary stage of syphilis. A transmission and transmutation of a private memory couched in shame.

This essay video includes, among others, excerpts of text from *The Writings of a Savage* by Paul Gauguin (1848–1903) detailing his experiences in Tahiti and a passage from *Malay Magic* (1900) by Walter William Skeat, which describes a female vampire known in Malay folklore as a ‘Pontianak’.

The video is bookended by performance documentation from Zihan’s first re-enactment of Josef Ng’s *Brother Cane* at a performance art event in Chicago. Clips in the video includes 8mm family films archived and scanned by the artist, spliced in with original digital video footage shot with various equipment, including a pinhole lens and macro close up lenses.

Link to Online Video: [https://vimeo.com/99071777](https://vimeo.com/99071777) (Password: gauguin)
Cane (2012) – Performance

Performance Details: 19 February 2012, 8pm
Venue: The Substation Theatre, Singapore

Presented by The Necessary Stage (TNS) as a Fringe Highlight for M1 Singapore Fringe Festival 2012: Art and Faith.

In 1993, Singaporean artist Josef Ng’s performance of Brother Cane resulted in a public debate over obscenity in performance art and led to a ten-year restriction of the licensing and funding of performance art in Singapore from 1994 to 2004.

Cane consisted of six testimonials of Josef Ng’s performance which seeks to re-construct and fragment the memory of the event. This includes a ‘live’ re-enactment of Brother Cane, an eyewitness account, video documentation of the initial performance, and excerpts from press clippings among others.

Link to Online Video: [https://vimeo.com/37993908](https://vimeo.com/37993908)
Documentation Duration: 110 minutes
Archiving Cane (2012) – Exhibition

Exhibition Date: 7 to 16 December, 2012
Exhibition Venue: The Substation Gallery, Singapore

“In privileging an understanding of performance as a refusal to remain, do we ignore other ways of knowing, other modes of remembering, that might be situated precisely in the ways in which performance remains, but remains differently?” – Rebecca Schneider, Archives Performance Remains

On 1 January 1994, Singaporean artist Josef Ng performed Brother Cane, a performance that triggered a ten-year restriction for the licensing and funding of performance art in Singapore.

On 19 February 2012, Loo Zihan presented six testimonials of Josef Ng’s performance in a performance titled Cane at The Substation Theatre. (see p. 5) Archiving Cane is an installation and durational performance that consolidates and present performance remains and documentation from the re-enactments of Josef Ng’s work by Loo Zihan.

The exhibition space includes 12 selected performance remains from various interpretations and re-enactments of Josef Ng’s performances. The artist was present throughout the duration of the exhibition to provide context on the significance and function of each object displayed. Visitors were encouraged to interact with the artist and the performance remains.
The exhibition also included a resource library, where documents from Zihan’s research of periphery events around *Cane* were displayed, this included programmes, newspaper articles, academic theses, critical writing and license application forms among others. Access was also made available to a Facebook page which details in chronology digital documents and online articles referring to Zihan’s re-enactment and Josef Ng’s performance. The website can be accessed via this link: [https://www.facebook.com/archivingcane](https://www.facebook.com/archivingcane)

*Archiving Cane* was given a Restricted (21) rating by the Media Development Authority of Singapore and it was a requirement by the licensing authority to inspect and verify that all visitors were above the age of 21. The artist decided to choreograph this gesture of inspection into an integral part of the exhibition experience. All visitors were given an editioned folio of critical texts assembled on site and the folio of each edition was personalized with a photocopy of the visitor’s identification card.

To download a pdf copy of the folio of texts which was distributed free to all attendees please access: [http://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/20209495/Archiving_Cane_Folio.pdf](http://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/20209495/Archiving_Cane_Folio.pdf)
A copy of each visitor’s identification (with sensitive personal information blacked out) was also included as part of the display in the gallery space with their consent. Over the duration of the exhibition, this display grew to serve as a record of attendees, transforming this licensing requirement into part of the artwork.
This exhibition is an extension of Zihan's research into Josef Ng’s *Brother Cane*, with a focus on the week-long interdisciplinary art event that hosted *Brother Cane*. The *Artists’ General Assembly* took place from 26 December, 1993 (Sunday) till 1 January, 1994 (Saturday) at 5th Passage Contemporary Art Space in Parkway Parade Shopping Centre, Marine Parade, Singapore.

*Artists’ General Assembly – The Langenbach Archive* contains a selection of approximately 150 documents from performance artist and academic Ray Langenbach's visual and text based archive of the arts scene in Southeast Asia from the late 1980s to the present. The exhibition also includes approximately 8 hours of video documentation on 5 television monitors from the original event itself captured by Ray Langenbach.

Langenbach moved to Singapore from Malaysia in 1993 and taught at the National Institute of Education until 1996. He completed his PhD thesis in 2004 titled *Performing the Singapore State: 1988-1995*, which details the controversy surrounding *Artists’ General Assembly*. He is currently based in Helsinki.
The installation/archive evolved over the duration of the exhibition as the artist/archivist alters and re-threads connections between documents. Viewers were invited to participate by leaving corrections, comments or opinions about the archive on post-it notes and adding them to the installation with critical consideration. These notes were collected, documented and archived after the deinstallation of the show.

For a complete documentation of the post-it contributions please access: http://on.fb.me/1obGCvP
On 24 January, 1994, National Institute of Education lecturer Ray Langenbach received an anonymous letter in his mailbox that called for the removal of Performance Art from the Visual Art syllabus, and a boycott of classes featuring this ‘forbidden art’.

We are a group of BA and Dip.Ed students who do not wish to attend Ray Langenbach classes. If we are taught by him next year we will not go to his classes. His teaching is too political and is about sensitive issues. He teaches performance art which is now forbidden in Singapore and we are quite right not to go. How can it that a forbidden art is being taught on campus. It should be banned.

We will now write to the press and the director.

BA and Dip.Ed students (National Institute of Education, Singapore)
24 January, 1994
LoO Zihan
Moving-Image Artist, Performer and Educator

This letter followed the National Arts Council's (NAC) statement on the restriction of the licensing and funding of performance art in Singapore on 22 January, 1994. NAC's statement was in turn triggered by media reports of two performances at the Artists' General Assembly, one of which was Josef Ng's *Brother Cane*.

*Education & Emancipation* is the second phase of a two-year research project that delves into the periphery events surrounding the *Artists' General Assembly*. The focus for this phase is on the gesture of proscribing politically-charged art in 1994 and an attempt to measure its impact on arts education in our present time.

The three main questions the exhibition proposes are as follows:

1. Do educators have the responsibility to trigger ideological emancipation in their charges, and how do they gauge the ethical and moral repercussions of the position they choose to perform?
2. How do the roles of an artist and educator intertwine, and how can one role potentially influence the creative re-visioning of the other?
3. Can the transference of emancipation be offered up as a gift by the educator or does it necessitate a violent gesture of possession enacted according to the volition of his charges?

Using Jacques Rancière’s 1981 text *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* as a critical foundation, the exhibition includes a durational performance with the artist manifesting an unconventional teaching method proposed by Joseph Jacotot in 1818.

Rancière not only proposes that can one teach something that one does not know, but most importantly that only through not knowing what one is to teach can true intellectual emancipation occur in both the educator and his charges.

Zihan interpreted the teaching methodology by attempting to learn French throughout the exhibition via the comparative analysis of both the English and French text of Jacques Rancière’s 1981 text *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*. The blackboard served as a record of his progress.
During the exhibition run, Zihan invited a group of current National Institute of Education, Singapore students who are in training to become art teachers to the exhibition space for a dialogue session and discussion. This board records their response to the exhibition.

Other documents displayed in this text-based exhibition includes surveys conducted with arts educators on their pedagogical ethos and the teaching of art with a social, political and cultural reference, an anonymous interview with a present Ministry of Education art educator on her opinion of the state of art education, an interview with Ray Langenbach on his memory of the incident, along with the Teacher's Creed and Teacher's Pledge by the Ministry of Education, Singapore.

For a complete documentation of the exhibition please access: [http://on.fb.me/1plVUaQ](http://on.fb.me/1plVUaQ)
LOO Zihan
Moving-Image Artist, Performer and Educator

Curriculum Vitae

Telephone +65 9752 1330
Email loozihan@gmail.com

Education

2011 Master of Fine Arts
Studio Practice (Film, Video, New Media and Animation)
The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL

2009 Bachelor of Fine Arts
Digital Filmmaking (with a minor in Drama and Performance)
School of Art, Design and Media
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

Exhibition and Performance Record

2014 *Notes on Performance*
Group exhibition
Objectifs, Singapore

*Names, Texts & Trouble: Education & Emancipation*
Joint exhibition, part of the *Associate Artist Research Programme* at The Substation
The Substation Gallery, Singapore

2013 *Artists' General Assembly – The Langenbach Archive*
Durational performance installation
part of *Ghost: The Body At The Turn Of The Century* group exhibition
a parallel event of *Singapore Biennale 2013*
Sculpture Square, Singapore

*No Approval*
Group exhibition, part of *Indignation 2013*
Grey Projects, Singapore

2012 *Cane*
Solo performance, Fringe Highlight
*M1 Singapore Fringe Festival*, Singapore

*Archiving Cane*
Solo exhibition
The Substation Gallery, Singapore

*Marking Cane*
Solo performance, part of *Rapid Pulse International Performance Art Festival*
Defibrillator Gallery, Chicago, IL

*Singapore Survey: New Strange Faces*
Group exhibition
Valentine Willie Fine Art, Singapore
LOO Zihan
Moving-Image Artist, Performer and Educator

Still Building: Contemporary Art From Singapore
Group exhibition
S.S.A.S, Bandung, Indonesia

Landing Places
Group exhibition, part of Indignation 2012
Objectifs, Singapore

2011
Mong Ha: Looking at Tall Buildings
Solo performance, part of Currents: From Singapore, in Macau group showcase
Macau International Performance Art Festival, Macau

Performing Josef... It's Not Safe
Solo performance, part of R.I.T.E.S (Rooted In The Ephemeral Speak) #6
Goodman Arts Center, Singapore

Manhood: Masculinity, Male Identity and Culture
Group exhibition
Helen Day Art Center, Stowe, VT

Abject Systems: Artists Who Love The Unlovable
Group exhibition
Studio Bibliothèque, Singapore

Taman Negara
Performance installation, part of Singapore Survey: Imagine Malaysia
Valentine Willie Fine Art, Singapore

Reading Carrie, Watching Yvonne
Solo performance
part of Shiftchanges, Defibrillator Gallery, Chicago, IL
and Magnetic Affinities & Altered Relations, Outer Space Studio, Chicago, IL

Legal Tender
Performance collaboration, part of Tender Exchange group showcase
Next: Invitational Exhibition of Emerging Art, Art Chicago, IL

Brother Cane: 2011
Performance re-enactment
part of Touch then push or pull and maybe nothing group showcase
Defibrillator Gallery, Chicago, IL

The Dispensary
Solo performance installation, part of Sexier group exhibition
Zhou B Art Center, Chicago, IL

Coda
Durational performance installation, part of aWay group exhibition
Boomerang Shopfront Space, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL

2010
Annuit Coeptis: For He Who Approves Of Our Undertakings
Solo durational performance, part of Stories of Relativity group exhibition
Sullivan Galleries, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL
LOO Zihan  
Moving-Image Artist, Performer and Educator

### Selected Moving-Image Screenings

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2nd <em>Singapore Short Film Awards</em> (Nominated, Best Experimental Film for <em>Aemaer</em>)</td>
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| 2010 | 7th *Singapore Short Cuts*, National Museum of Singapore  
15th *Chicago Asian American Showcase*, Chicago, IL  
1st *Experimental Film Forum*, Singapore |
| 2009 | Solo Focus Program, Democrazy Theatre Studio, Bangkok, Thailand  
14th *Pusan International Film Festival*, South Korea  
ExiS (*Experimental Film and Video Festival*), Seoul, South Korea  
5th *InDPanda International Short Film Festival*, Hong Kong |
| 2008 | 23rd *Turin LGBT Film Festival*, Turin, Italy  
10th *Deauville Asian Film Festival*, France (Nominated, Best Feature Film for *Solos*)  
5th *Singapore Short Cuts*, National Museum of Singapore  
*Frameline32*, San Francisco LGBT Film Festival, CA  
*NewFest*, New York LGBT Film Festival, NY  
*Mardi Gras Film Festival*, Sydney, Australia  
22nd *London Gay and Lesbian Film Festival*, United Kingdom |
| 2007 | *AFI Festival*, Los Angeles, CA (Nominated, Best International Feature for *Solos*)  
21st *Singapore International Film Festival* (Nominated, Best Feature Film for *Solos*)  
12th *Pusan International Film Festival*, South Korea |

### Awards and Honors

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Award</th>
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| 2011 | Awarded the *James Nelson Raymond Graduate Fellowship*  
The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL |
| 2010 | Awarded 'Best Script' for *Threshold* (Film)  
1st *Singapore Short Film Awards*, The Substation, Singapore  
Awarded 'Special Mention' for *Frozen Angels* (Video artist for theatre production)  
The *Straits Times, Life! Theatre Awards*, Singapore |
| 2009 | Awarded Trustee Full-Tuition Merit Scholarship  
The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL  
Awarded Valedictorian for the School of Art, Design and Media  
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore |
| 2008 | Awarded, Best Debut Feature 'Nuovo Sguardi' Award  
23rd *Turin GLBT Film Festival*, Turin, Italy |
LOO Zihan
Moving-Image Artist, Performer and Educator

Teaching Experience

2012 – 2014  Instructor, Media Arts
Visual Arts Department
The School of the Arts, Singapore

2011 – 2013  Lecturer, Time-based Media, Foundation Year
School of Art, Design and Media
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

2012  Lecturer, Digital Media and Visual Arts: The Moving Image
Visual and Performing Arts, Department
National Institute of Education, Singapore

Instructor, Introduction to Film Studies
Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

2010 - 2011  Teaching Assistant
Graduate Seminar: Theory into Practice
Abandoned Practices: Summer Performance Institute
Directing Actors for Film and Video
Media Practices: Moving Image
The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL

Selected Professional Involvements

2014  Being Behold: Notes on Recent Projects
Artist talk, Independent Archive and Resource Center, Singapore

Materiality, Performance and the Spectator
Public lecture, Singapore Art Museum

2013  Shifting Dialogues II: Objects of Desire: Sexual Artifice in Asian Art and Performance
Symposium presenter, University of the Arts, Helsinki, Finland

Performance: To Be Reviewed
Presenter, Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong

Now: Then, Performance Studies international #19
Conference presenter, Stanford University, Stanford, CA

Associate Artist Research Programme
Associate artist, The Substation, Singapore

2012  Artist-in-Residence and artist presentation
The Unifiedfield, Granada, Spain

2011  The Public Shaming of Loo Zihan
Artist presentation, 24th Singapore International Film Festival, Singapore

Mythic Reincarnations: The Films of Apichatpong Weerasethakul
Curator, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL (Filmmaker in Attendance)
LOO Zihan
Moving-Image Artist, Performer and Educator

2010
Queer/Art/Film Series (Curated by filmmaker Ira Sachs)
Presented and introduced Toshio Mastumoto’s *Funeral Parade of Roses*
IFC Center, New York City, NY

Selected External Artistic Contributions

2014
*Retrospective by Xavier Le Roy*
Performer / collaborator in durational performance, conceptualised by Xavier Le Roy
Theatreworks, Singapore

*Watch Me Strip!*
Performer in experimental theatre production, directed by Thom Truong
150% Made in Hamburg Festival, Hamburg, Germany
Zürich Tanzt Festival, Zurich, Switzerland

2012
*A Language of Our Own*
Lead actor in theatre production, directed by Casey Lim
Singapore Arts Festival, Singapore

*Crossings*
Video artist for theatre production
The Necessary Stage, Singapore and Trafik, Croatia

2011
*The Precession*
Performance collaboration with Mark Jeffrey and Judd Morrissey
Hyde Park Art Center and Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL

2009
*Frozen Angels*
Video artist for theatre production
M1 Singapore Fringe Festival, The Necessary Stage, Singapore

*Past Carin’*
Video artist for theatre production
The Necessary Stage, Singapore and The Tony Yap Company, Melbourne, Australia

2008
*Bondage*
Lead actor in theatre production
Festival of Emerging Playwrights, Dramabox, Singapore

*Gemuk Girls*
Video artist for theatre production
The Necessary Stage, Singapore

2007
*Pleasure Factory*
Lead in independent feature film, directed by Ekachai Uekrongtham
Premiered in the *Un Certain Regard* section of the 60th Cannes Film Festival, France