

Chok Si Xuan, bani haykal, and Ong Kian Peng: *Nothing has to be the way it is*

NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore



[1] Exhibiting artists. From left: bani haykal, Chok Si Xuan, and Ong Kian Peng. Photo: Eunice Lacaste. Courtesy of NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore. [2] Ong Kian Peng, *Cloud Traces*, 2025. Digital image of custom software. Courtesy of the artist. [3] Chok Si Xuan, *Morpho*, 2025. Silicone, nylon, umbrella arms, phone grippers, linear actuators, electronics, detail of work in progress. Photo: Eunice Lacaste. Courtesy of the artist and NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore. [4] bani haykal, *broadcast stations by the ruins*, 2025. Digital image of program interface. Courtesy of the artist.

January 15, 2025

Chok Si Xuan, bani haykal, and Ong Kian Peng
Nothing has to be the way it is
 Communities of Practice. Techno
 Diversions
 January 17–26, 2025

Curator tour: January 18, 3–6pm,
 starting at 3 and 5pm

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Artist tour: January 25, 3–4pm

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NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore presents *Nothing has to be the way it is*, an exhibition featuring the artistic propositions created by **Chok Si Xuan, bani haykal, and Ong Kian Peng** as part of their involvement in **Communities of Practice. Techno Diversions**, a five-month programme curated by **Anna Lovecchio** that interlaces artistic research, transdisciplinary encounters, and the formation of communities to propel transformative understandings of technology.

The uncanny symbiosis between humans and the digital devices, interactive interfaces, online platforms, and global infrastructures that increasingly operate our lives is a defining feature of contemporary society. In these wired times of machine intelligence and computational acceleration, microchip wars and platform powers, the artworks featured in this exhibition cast a sideways look at techno-driven progress. Moving across different frameworks and mediums, Chok Si Xuan, bani haykal, and Ong Kian Peng share a common investment in reclaiming agency within the technosphere. They divert, possess, possibly disrupt the streamlined existence of technological artefacts through gestures that question the escalation of technological sovereignty. These artists do not position themselves at the edge of advanced technologies. Rather, they interfere with existing apparatuses and instil them with worldviews other than those that originally brought them about. The systems they envisioned proceed by appropriations and approximations, frictions and forays, scrambled codes and enigmatic conjectures. In the essay “It Doesn’t Have To Be the Way It Is” that inspired the title of this exhibition, Ursula K. Le Guin remarks that the subversive power of the imagination “gnaw(s) at the very foundation of the belief that things have to be the way they are”. *Nothing has to be the way it is* hints at the endless permutations of how things can be.

The exhibition will take place in **The Hall**, NTU CCA Singapore’s programme space nestled at the heart of the Research Centre and launched in September 2024. This event marks the first time The Hall hosts a group exhibition, bringing home the Centre’s commitment to dwell upon and experiment with the spaces of the curatorial.

As participants in **Communities of Practice. Techno Diversions**, Chok Si Xuan, bani haykal, and Ong Kian Peng are conducting a residency at NTU CCA Singapore from October 2024 to February 2025. Revolving around critical engagements with the material, political, and conceptual layers of technology, this multidimensional programme is a generative platform that provides artists with time, space, and resources to unravel their aesthetic inquiries and catalyse communities around their creative processes.

Public programmes

The exhibition is couched between two series of public programmes—**Empirical Workshops** and **Transdisciplinary Lectures**—developed in conversation with the artists themselves. Steeped in a do-it-yourself ethos, the Empirical Workshops took place in December 2024. Each workshop germinated by each artist’s research and was aimed at creating knowledge through the creative dabbling with raw materials. In *Temporal Oscillations*,

Chok Si Xuan dived into the physics of circuitry and erratic electronics. With *METAL MACHINE MISCHIEF (or how to make noise music with bicycles)*, bani haykal took workshop participants on an unconventional group ride reconfiguring discarded bicycle parts into unorthodox musical instruments, while a different range of wavelengths resonated in Ong Kian Peng's *Natural Radio* workshop that explored low frequencies emitted by natural electromagnetic phenomena.

Next February, the Transdisciplinary Lectures will bring the artists in conversation with philosophers, sociologists, scientists, and other creatives deepening the ramifications of their research in different disciplines. The Transdisciplinary Lectures will feature contributions by: **Tiziano Bonini** (Associate Professor, Sociology of Culture and Communication, University of Siena, Italy), **Eugene Yew Siang Chua** (Nanyang Assistant Professor of Philosophy, School of Humanities, NTU, Singapore), **Lee Pooi See** (Professor, School of Materials Science and Engineering, NTU, Singapore), **Emiliano Treré** (Beatriz Galindo Distinguished Professor, Language Theory and Communication Sciences, University of Valencia, Spain and Reader, Data Agency and Media Ecologies, Cardiff University, United Kingdom), and **Boedi Widjaja** (interdisciplinary artist, Singapore).

About Communities of Practice

Conceived as a seedbed for experimentation, *Communities of Practice* is a shapeshifting research platform that brings forth communities at the intersection of artistic practices. Holding a space where artistic research can develop through interdisciplinary encounters, and exchanges, *Communities of Practice* advances the role of NTU CCA Singapore as convener, capacity builder, and incubator in the arts sector.

About NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore

NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore is a national research centre of Nanyang Technological University. From 2013–21, the Centre was unique in its threefold constellation of exhibitions, residencies, and research and academic education, engaging in knowledge production and dissemination. In its former exhibition hall, the Centre featured leading artists presenting their work often for the first time in Asia or Southeast Asia, which made it one of the few spaces in Singapore to present contemporary art from around the globe. Its ongoing residencies programme facilitates the production of knowledge and research, engaging and connecting artists, curators, and researchers from Singapore, Southeast Asia, and beyond, across disciplines.

For more information, visit ntu.ccasingapore.org.

About Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

A research-intensive public university, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (NTU Singapore) has 35,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students in the Business, Computing & Data Science, Engineering, Humanities, Arts, & Social Sciences, Medicine, Science, and Graduate colleges.

NTU is also home to world-renowned autonomous institutes – the National Institute of Education, S Rajaratnam School of International Studies and Singapore Centre for Environmental Life Sciences Engineering – and various leading research centres such as the Earth Observatory of Singapore, Nanyang Environment & Water Research Institute and Energy Research Institute @ NTU (ERI@N).

Under the NTU Smart Campus vision, the University harnesses the power of digital technology and tech-enabled solutions to support better learning and living experiences, the discovery of new knowledge, and the sustainability of resources.

Ranked amongst the world's top universities, the University's main campus is also frequently listed among the world's most beautiful. Known for its sustainability, NTU has achieved 100% Green Mark Platinum certification for all its eligible building projects. Apart from its main campus, NTU also has a medical campus in Novena, Singapore's healthcare district.

For more information, visit www.ntu.edu.sg

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