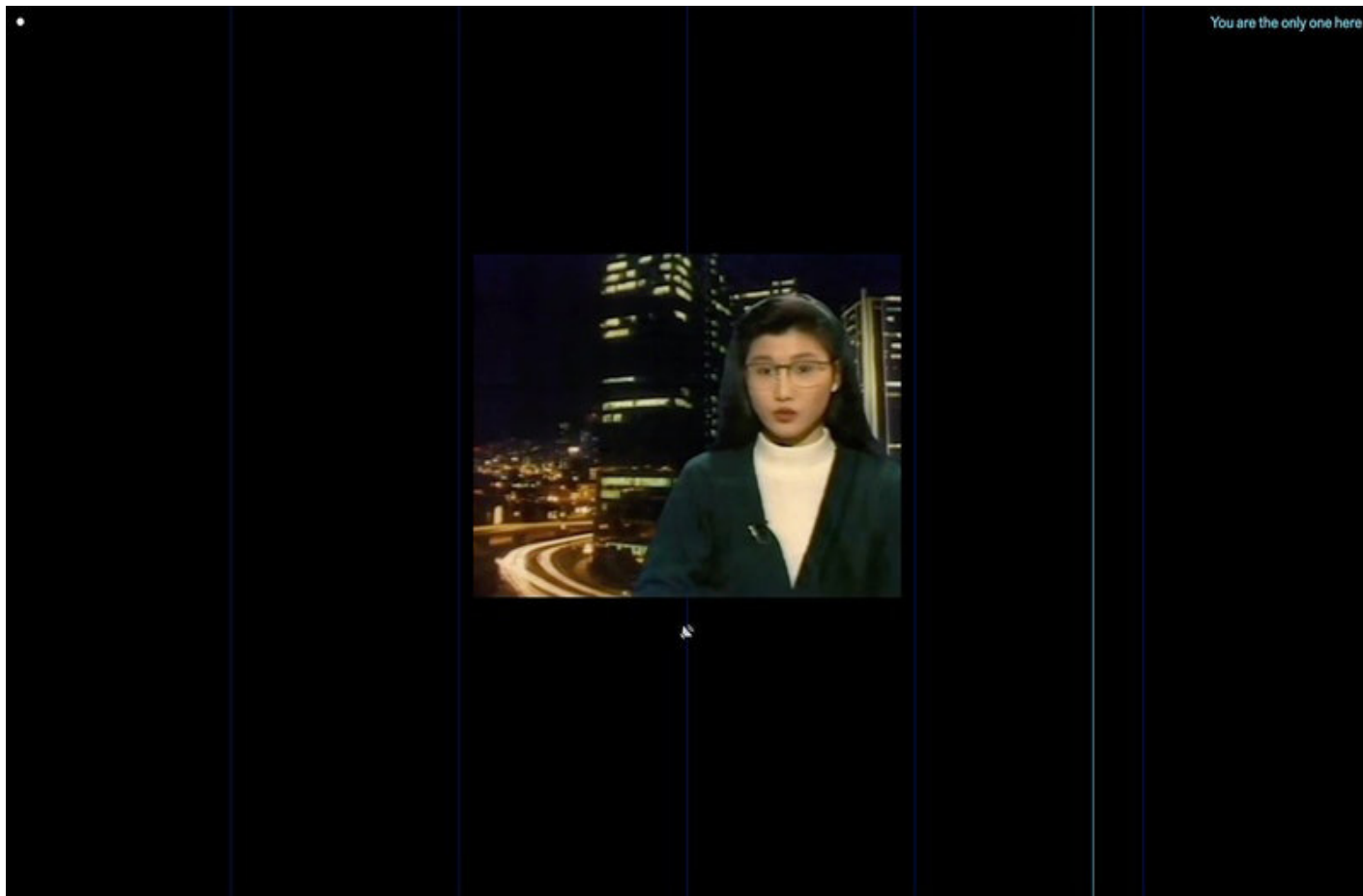


BROOKLYN RAIL

Maddie Klett

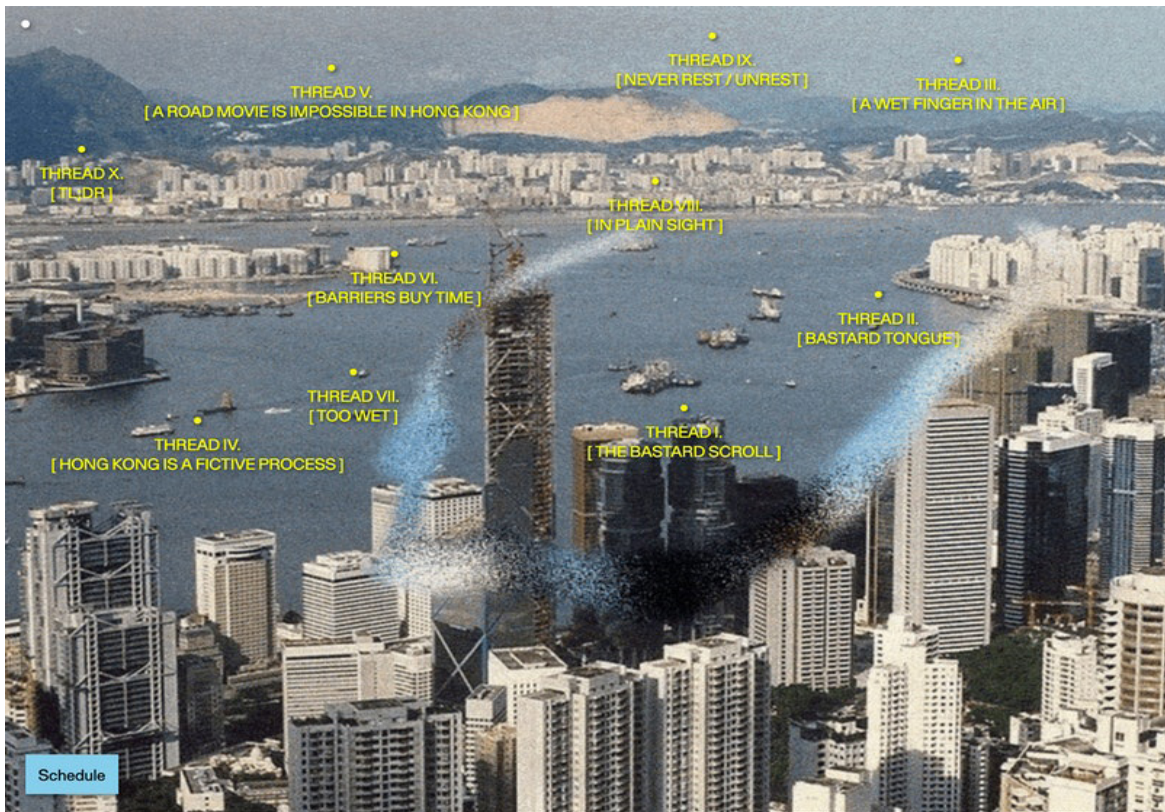
Tiffany Sia: *Slippery When Wet*



Website view: *Tiffany Sia: Slippery When Wet*, Artists Space, 2021. Courtesy Artists Space, New York.

"Just what is it that makes the term 'global-local' so widely cited, yet so annoying?" Lee Weng Choy asks in the title of his 2000 essay. Problematizing the use of the trendy moniker "global-local" (glocal?) to describe Singapore, Choy wrote at a moment when biennials of contemporary art were prized cultural currency and proliferated in cities across the world. The problem with the term, according to Choy, is that the tensions it implies are not *new* but instead "signify the further penetration of global capitalism into the 'local' as *authentic*."¹ Much like "New Asia" (popularized with the formation of APEC in the late 1980s), the term, he argues, coalesces arts and cultural discourse with national and regional economic performativity.

Tiffany Sia's solo exhibition at Artists Space, *Slippery When Wet*, prompted me to reread Choy's essay from 20 years ago. Her ontological approach to the "glocal" (although she never mentions the term in the show—maybe it died out in the early aughts?), spectacle, and landscape at/from/through her home of Hong Kong recalls this same a-historical, locality-driven condition.

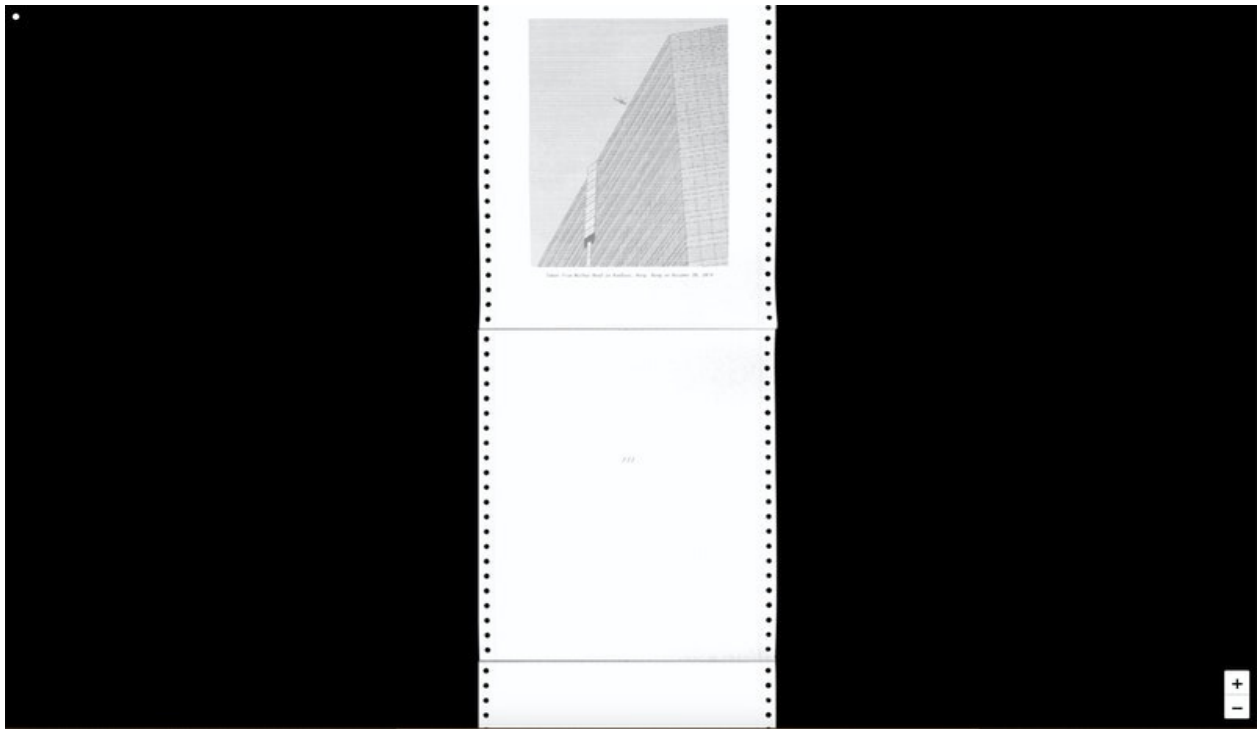


Website view: *Tiffany Sia: Slippery When Wet*, Artists Space, 2021. Courtesy Artists Space, New York.

The Bastard Scroll (2020) is a text printed on dot-matrix paper—that rolled, perforated stuff with holes for feeding through printer cogs. Paper culled from the recent past; there is something uncanny when new technology becomes visibly old. A child of the '90s, I remember a large box of it in my basement. Disposed from its initial purpose (hello inkjet printers), it became wonderful material for room-length crayon drawings and maps. Sia utilizes the continuous quality of the paper and drapes a long length of it over a dining room table positioned in the center of the gallery. She suspends another portion down Artists Space's two-floor stairwell.

Printed on this are sections of *Too Salty Too Wet* 更咸更濕, the artist's 2021 book-length text, which is also bound in thin, Mylar-covered volumes shelved in a bright, mirroring, monochrome row (*Barriers Buy Time*, 2021). Sia is a writer, so it isn't surprising that original texts populate the show. In an accompanying brochure, she discloses her intent to "leak" the texts and videos online. Everything is accessible via Artists Space's website, where scrolling with a finger or cursor mirrors following the continuously printed *The Bastard Scroll* text IRL. The construction and lived experience of historical time, specifically in Hong Kong, is the subject of the paragraphs readable on the tabletop: "Historical time is typically understood as chronological, as events that precipitate. But here we live in upside-down time. We know not what happens *now* or *in-between* 2047, but we know what happens in the end ... how must we kill time?"

On July 1, 1997, the United Kingdom handed Hong Kong to China after over 100 years of British rule. Mainland China instituted "one country, two systems," with a plan for a "second handover" to take place in 50 years. The 2019 protests, which Sia reflects on, were led by youths campaigning for the self-determination of the Hong Kong of their future. This "upside-down time," or limbo, defines the lived experience of this generation.



Website view: *Tiffany Sia: Slippery When Wet*, Artists Space, 2021. Courtesy Artists Space, New York.

Sia astutely points to how, ideologically, this resistance is a fight over the identity of the city, which, like any city, is an identity based on time. Choy describes what distinguishes the singularity of contemporary cities—especially as downtown metropolises increasingly look the same: “Whenever I visit the San Francisco Bay area, a place where I used to live, I experience multiple times—decades. If I were to visit, say, London or Beijing, I’d expect to experience centuries; in Delhi, maybe millennia. But in Singapore, there seems to be only one time, the present, a hurried one, on the verge of tomorrow.”² Sia’s work feels distinctly of-this-moment in that she calls attention to how Hong Kong youths recognize both the political and psychological impact of the fifty-year timeline and are taking it into their hands.

The work in the show is discursive, with certain videos only available online, or only during particular times. I found most compelling the stack of three cube monitors of *A Wet Finger in the Air* (2021), each playing a newscaster giving a weather report tinged with jingles and animated flourishes (a sun, a rain cloud, etc.). From the image quality and the hairstyles, the videos are noticeably dated. I sat on the installation’s sofa, which volubly crinkled when I lowered, and was transfixed for at least 20 minutes by the women’s evenly toned voices.

Weather in Hong Kong is the central throughline of the show, appearing in the exhibition’s title but also in the fogged film covering the windows (*Too Wet*, 2021). Sia writes about how images and reporting on the protests rarely captured the stifling heat and humidity, which feels like a metaphor for the condition of feeling politically trapped and disenfranchised. But I also saw this as acknowledgment of the ultimate timeline, one that can’t be characterized by the “glocal”: the natural, unwieldy one that, maybe in a comforting way, makes its power and presence known when forces in the human world call for systemic change.

1. Lee Weng Choy, “Just what is it that makes the term global-local so widely cited, yet so annoying,” *Artlink* 20, no. 2 (June 2000).

2. *Ibid.*