

# MATT GOLDEN

**Vernacular in the Contemporary - An Economy of Means**

18.12.12 – 14.01.13

SHALINI GANENDRA FINE ART  
@ Gallery Residence

Shalini Ganendra Fine Art (SGFA) applauds *Vernacular in the Contemporary* in the spirit of meaningful cultural exchange that is the aim of the gallery's Vision Culture Art Residency. Through this residency, we host award winner, Matt Golden, on his first visit to Malaysia.

All works in this exhibition, save for Golden's iconic 'sculpture', *Looking at a Scottish Lake, Dreaming of Mount Fuji*, have been collected, crafted, photographed, printed and framed – in Malaysia. Consequently, during the course of the six week residency at SGFA, we have been fortunate to witness some of Golden's preparation and practice methodologies.

He has met with artists, journalists, academics and a variety of observers, to learn and exchange ideas. He has generously shared time to speak at UITM (MARA), the Malaysian Institute of Art, University Malaysia Kelantan and the Multimedia University. He spent one vital week on the East Coast for an introduction to wood carving practices, healing ceremonies, batik and numerous communal meals.

The process of his practice during this residency has involved intense consideration, reflection and discussion, with the to-and-fro of this dynamic resulting in the visuals. Whether two dimensional or three, the works in *Vernacular in the Contemporary* reflect cultural sensitivity and humility. He has created art that is a gentle contact point between his past and present experiences, underscoring the possibilities of discovery - and all within a six week period and all applying commitment to an '*Economy of Means*'.

Many thanks to the British Council, Professor Najib Noor, Tan Sri Wan Azmi Hamzah, Puan Rosnawati Othman and Encik Norhaiza, for their interest and support of this wonderfully meaningful project – and to Matt Golden for delivering the beginnings of his vision for vernacular in the contemporary.

*Shalini Ganendra*

# BIODATA

Born in 1974, Matt Golden lives and works in London. He studied sculpture at The Royal College of Art and in 2008 founded The Russian Club Gallery, which he ran, until 2012.

In 2011 he won the prestigious Arts Foundation Yoma Sasburg Award for Sculpture, was nominated for a Paul Hamlyn Award and was Artist-in-Residence at Kyoto Zokei University, Japan.

Golden was awarded The Vordemberge-Gildewart Scholarship in 2007. In 2008 he exhibited at Museum Wiesbaden, Germany and Kyoto Art Walk, Japan with residencies at Insel Hombroich and Wohnung Felix Rehfeld, both Germany. Recent solo exhibitions include 'House of Nguyen', Limoncello, London, 2012, 'More Bit Parts In Little Theatres', Bischoff/Weiss, London, and 'Sensitivity To The Impermanence Of Being', Art House Foundation, London, both 2011. Recent group shows include 'Matt Golden & Richard Paul', The Russian Club Gallery, London, 2012, 'Keeping Up Appearances', Nassauischer Kunstverein, Wiesbaden, Germany, 2012, 'Young British Art', Limoncello Gallery, 2011, curated by Ryan Gander, and 'Freies Material', Weltraum, Munich, Germany, 2011.



*Looking at a Scottish Lake, Dreaming of Mount Fuji, found photograph, Ed. 5 (22.5cm x 29cm), 2008*

# MATT GOLDEN'S METAMORPHOSES



Work in Progress

*'Looking at a Scottish Lake, Dreaming of Mount Fuji'* illustrates the metamorphoses which abound in the work of award-winning UK artist, Matt Golden. Anachronistically pragmatic and playful, Golden's innovation transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary by turning both the image and our expectations upside down. Like this work, a found photograph, which was borrowed, copied, re-titled and turned, Golden constantly invites the viewer to re-examine what they see, exposing the beauty, humour, and poignancy of everyday objects. *'Some people look at it, and start turning their head'*, Golden recounts. *'To start with, they can't see it as anything more than an upside down picture. But I look at the image, and I see a solid mountain.'* We are encouraged to join him in the *'imaginative belief'* which allows an entirely different picture to emerge.

Golden is in Malaysia for the Vision Culture Art Residency organised by Shalini Ganendra Fine Art. As Artist in Residence, he has spent six weeks developing an understanding of local culture in Kuala Lumpur and researching traditional crafts in East Malaysia. Having previously undertaken international residencies in Germany and Japan, Golden is aware that cultural nuances run deep and he will only be grazing the surface of Malaysian identity. His work therefore aims to strike up a dialogue between East and West, assimilating and channelling the corresponding processes of observation, comprehension and understanding into his art.

The residency is based in the gallery's new public premises, which provide accommodation and studio space for one resident artist. The selection process is rigorous and highly competitive. Ganendra had followed Golden's career with interest since he won the Yoma Sasburg Award for Sculpture in 2011, and invited his participation in the program, which aims to foster cross-cultural and exploratory work of an exceptional nature. *Vernacular in the Contemporary - An Economy of Means* documents Golden's Malaysian experience.

Describing his art as ‘intervention’ work, Golden metamorphoses whatever space or object is to hand. In doing so, he also metamorphoses our perceptions. This transformation is an interactive process, which constructs the viewer as part of the work. Discussing the sparse aesthetic of the *Maverick* series, which consists of antique picture frames delicately pinned together to reconstruct fragile memories of chairs, Golden points out: *‘if you leave room in a work, it allows people to fill it. If you don’t, then the viewer has no place’*.

This was clearer than ever in his recent solo show *House of Nguyen*, at Limoncello Gallery, London, which consisted of three large wooden dragonflies based on small Vietnamese toys. Audaciously scaled up, with wingspans of over five metres each, they balanced precariously on their plinths, filling the entire gallery. What *Modern Painters* called a ‘poetic potential of monumental proportions’ was physically, as well as visibly tangible; Rosalie Doubal, in *Time Out*, noted the ‘ever so slightly stressful’ experience of walking among the dragonflies, offering up evidence that their ‘finesse makes the viewer feel clumsy’. This epitomizes one aspect of what Golden’s work so frequently does: it asks us to reconsider our own position in the context of our surroundings.



*Work in progress*

Using found objects has always been a key part of Golden’s practice, but here it becomes especially appropriate, not only for its local relevance, but also as a solution to the challenges of working in a compacted timeframe, with limited tools and materials. The *‘Economy of Means’* here applies to the methods used to create the show, as well as its subject. ‘Economy’ exists in Golden’s artistic practice and the visual language of Malaysia in a double sense; as well as the literal economy of working with found and recycled materials, Golden describes his work as being necessarily economical and reductive in order to pierce right to the essence of an experience or object.

It is these processes of intervention in, and reconsideration of, place and space that make Golden so well suited to international art residencies. Art, he claims, is about '*striving to create a visual language that is distinctly yours*', but, Golden adds: '*you're wanting to be part of a visual dialogue, you're creating a bigger language than that of the individual artist*'. Creative communication transcends language barriers, forcing us to engage on a more meaningful level than the forms of everyday interaction. This intelligent approach brooks no cultural compromise. It aims towards an interaction of individualised cultures, whilst keenly avoiding the kind of bland and homogenised global fusion responsible for eroding traditional customs and national identities worldwide.

Golden's work in Malaysia has sought out these instances of cultural communiqué, and in Kelantan, Golden's dialogue with Malaysian heritage grew deeper and more complex. Continuing the Juan Carlode *FIELD RECORDINGS* which, during residencies in Japan and Germany, distilled wealths of discovery and the essence of experience into the '*purity of a single image*', Golden documented a *Main Puteri* healing ceremony on one of his first evenings in Kelantan.

After such an intense and immersive introduction to local customs and heritage, Golden set about creating an artistic dialogue with traditional Malay wood carvers. Exercising his talent for liberating beauty from unexpected sources, Golden has been creating intricate butterflies from dried leaves, with wings that flutter in the breeze of the open-walled Gallery Residence. These adorn plinths created from carefully selected unfinished panels crafted by the master carvers of the peninsular East coast, including the famed Norhaiza Noordin. The works, entitled *Conversations on Nature*, offer traditional Malay interpretations of nature alongside Golden's own. Their two distinct visual languages are juxtaposed to highlight the beauty of each.

But it is more than just interpretations of nature which find voice here. Golden was deeply moved by the extent to which age-old carving techniques really are a dying craft. The resulting works exude an acute sense of *aware* (哀れ), the Japanese concept of *Sensitivity to the Impermanence of Being*. This is a familiar concept in Golden's works, having been the title of his solo show at the Art House Foundation in London. There is, in this disappearing art, a sense of the impermanence of even the most established traditions in the face of globalisation. Golden's additions, the butterflies crafted from local foliage, emphasise the melancholic findings underlying his journey by imbuing the work with an accelerated transience, and indicating the ephemerality of all natural cycles.



One of the many points of contact Golden found in his dialogue with Norhaiza was artistic process. Norhaiza is the one-time protégé of the late master carver Nik Rashidden Nik Hussein, who taught himself the craft by examining unfinished antique panels and painstakingly working out how they were created. Utilising elements of old, antique carvings, which they named their ‘texts’, these master-carvers contributed to the evolution of their craft with original additions and interpretations, making contemporary work from the rich history of their trade. The parallels are wonderfully evident in Golden’s developmental, transformative practice, which takes something already extant and alters it, including, ironically, Norhaiza’s own panels.



A master class from Norhaiza Noordin in his workshop

These transformative powers are put to use in *Kingdom of Little Theatres – Life, Love, Song, Death*. In this series of C-prints, antique quail traps (*jebak puyuh*) are reassigned in a literally theatrical role through a frontal and stark photographic composition. The trap becomes a potent symbol of the fragile position of local traditions including shadow puppetry and traditional dance theatre. With a dialogue already consisting in the works between the crafts of basket weavers and carvers, Golden fed off the dramatic story behind the traps to reimagine them as stages for scenes which ‘*had everything of a great Shakespearian tragedy – and life – in them*’.

Used on royal lands, the elaborate quail traps caged a female bird at the rear. Her singing would unwittingly lure male birds into the trap. Cruelly captured, yet still separated from each other by a net, these birds were destined to death for the caprice of royal entertainment. Their sombre fate is echoed in the fate of these now obsolete, broken contraptions. There is no longer any demand for these intricately carved cages, and like the quails they used to stage, these objects too, must take their final bow and be consigned to the history books.

Golden’s work is bold and considered, documenting the beginning of his engagement with Malaysian culture. *Vernacular in the Contemporary* showcases the moments of beauty that arise from such cultural exploration, and in doing so, refreshes our own eyes so that we might see afresh too.





*Conversations On Nature* (Height 50cm)  
Carved Panel / Leaves. (Panel carving from the  
studio of Norhaiza Noordin, Terengganu, MY)  
2012



*FIELD RECORDINGS, MAIN PUTERI (HEALING CEREMONY), KELANTAN, MY, C-Print, Ed. 5 (34.5cm x 46.5cm ), 2012*



*Kingdom Of Little Theatres. Life, Love, Song, Death 1, C-Print, Ed. 5 (29cm x 33cm), 2012*





*Kingdom Of Little Theatres. Life, Love, Song, Death 2, C-Print, Ed. 5 (29cm x 33cm), 2012*



*Kingdom Of Little Theatres. Life, Love, Song, Death 3, C-Print, Ed. 5 (29cm x 33cm), 2012*



*Kingdom Of Little Theatres. Life, Love, Song, Death 4 , C-Print, Ed. 5 (29cm x 33cm), 2012*





*Kingdom Of Little Theatres. Life, Love, Song, Death 5, C-Print, Ed. 5 (29cm x 33cm), 2012*



*Kingdom Of Little Theatres. Life, Love, Song, Death 6, C-Print, Ed. 5 (29cm x 33cm), 2012*



*Kingdom Of Little Theatres. Life, Love, Song, Death 7, C-Print, Ed. 5 (29cm x 33cm), 2012*





*Study For House Of Nguyen, KL, wood/palm tree fronds (175cm x 175cm), 2012*

*Conversations On The City* (Height 80cm),  
Found Scrap Metals / Leaves,  
2012



*For more information*

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