



Omar Chowdhury
Means
ALASKA Projects
9th — 20th July 2014

LIST OF WORKS

Untitled (video), 2014
TBC, ProRes 422, 16:9, mute, colour,
looped
Variable dimensions

Untitled (wire), 2014
Galvanised steel wire, wire stretcher, bolts,
hooks, battery, electrical components
Variable dimensions

Untitled (smoke print #1), 2014
Cooking smoke on cotton
180cm x 180cm (double sided)

Untitled (smoke print #2), 2014
Cooking smoke on cotton
180cm x 180cm (double sided)

Untitled (brush photo #1), 2014
Inkjet on archival paper
150cm x 100cm

Untitled (brush photo #2), 2014
Inkjet on archival paper
150cm x 100cm

Untitled (forest photo), 2014
Inkjet on archival paper
(framed in black wooden frame)
106cm x 71cm

Untitled (charred tree), 2014
Charred Eucalyptus tree trunk with moss
220cm x 70cm x 30cm

Untitled (fictional poem), 2014
Inkjet print on reclaimed paper (framed)
11cm x 17.8cm

Untitled (fictional journal), 2014
Inkjet print on reclaimed paper (framed)
11cm x 17.8cm

Untitled (fictional criticism), 2014
Inkjet print on reclaimed paper (framed)
12.8cm x 19.7cm

Untitled (sound), 2014
30m looped, WAV (delivered as AAC),
Media Player, Speakers
Variable dimensions

Means is showing at ALASKA Projects in conjunction with Omar Chowdhury's Ways
at 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Sydney until 2 August 2014.
<http://4a.com.au/ways/>

To make the works for Means the recently returned Australian-Bangladeshi artist Omar Chowdhury headed out into the Australian bush seeking a form of simple and focused sensing. Carrying stills and cinematic cameras, making paintings and sculptures, writing stories and finding objects, he ventured into the Southern Highlands of New South Wales, crossed the Great Dividing Range, and wandered out to the remnant Victorian gold towns, searching. Haunted by the 'weirdness' of the trees, the totemic termite mounds, the warbling creeks and dirt packed roads, he felt himself and his thinking seep into the darkening landscape. The traces of this spiritual ethereality inheres in his enigmatic photographs, minimalist sculptures, large canvases exposed to the elements, fictions and texts, and the strange and occult video footage of animals, rocks, branches, burnings, machines and the silence of the isolate people. In it, somewhere, lie the means of his being.

INTERVIEW

How did this show and the works originate?

I'd been away from Australia for a year and a half making the large moving image works for the 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art show so I wanted to reconnect to my history here, but in a personal, experiential way. The logistics, methodologies and theoretics of my practice had changed. I had changed. I wanted to take that change and immerse it into the Australian forests and bush—an unfamiliar, enigmatic place. An immigrant doesn't immigrate to just a country, more than that, they immigrate to a certain city, or a certain suburb and often stay there. So there's this huge unknown in my past that tentatively reflects what the early settlers and explorers felt about the unknown interior. I'd also seen a painting in the Art Gallery of South Australia by Isaac Whitehead, that shows a group of men resting whilst in the midst of logging some trees in the Dandenongs in Victoria and I was intrigued by that idea of people working in these vast natural expanses and I was particularly interested in the denseness of the forests. To get at this I took a path through the Southern Highlands, down to the lakes of Malla-coota and then back up through the Great Dividing Range and Mount Kosciuszko National Park to the Victorian gold towns. This immersiveness is a keystone for my practice but this time I wanted to experiment with a whole slew of mediums to re-present my consciousness. I'd always considered this show as one where I could take big risks. I had a relatively short period of time to make, although I'd been thinking about the works for a year. I was able to throw out a certain process

of slow, gradual development that I use in my long moving image works and instead rapidly prototype a lot of different ideas and permutations of works here and that's been really fascinating.

Could you talk about the mediums used for the works in the show?

There are some canvases that have been exposed to cooking smoke; a set of photographs of various sizes displayed in different ways, in their format, or their hanging; there are two sculptures, one found, one highly constructed that's very referential to the Minimalists and Fred Sandback in particular, a sound work of the Snowy Hydro electric project; some textual works, fictions, that refer back to experiences of others in the bush or Australian artist experiences, and there's a video, of course. So there's a whole mix of mediums and each medium is a lens to look out towards the bush and of course when I mean looking out towards the bush I also mean that it's a lens turned towards me, my emotional and physical reaction, but in this environment which is unfamiliar to me. I wanted to see if these mediums could capture the intellections and emotions that I had during my immersion: my lostness and confusion. But this show isn't just a collection of works, it's very much about how an experience is put together as a whole and what it means to put objects next to each other and how they interrelate, their dialogic, discursive nature, and how they become one thing rather than separate parts and then what that one whole is or can do. Or can make me feel or someone else feel. The feelings and moods waft from one work to another. Here, I wanted to make a real show.

Can you tell us about the individual works in more detail?

A lot of the works combine art historical research or research on artists or my feelings towards artists with the very practical affairs of making art in the way that I do which is out in the world, and certainly this trip was very much art made *en plein air*. Photographs have been part of my practice from the very beginning and there are a number of references to the New Topographic photographers; that very blank stare towards a certain thing but a blank stare that's intense and structured. But there are lots of references in the works to a gaggle of Australian painters that I was looking closely at, the Heidelberg school of course, but earlier painters too. Those photographs capture a certain momentary intensity. The video refers a lot to contemplative cinema work but are probably most referential to my works in the Ways show at 4A (Torsions, Locus I and II, and Vastness in Eclipse), and seeing the continuities and the discontinuities between the two is fascinating but again the mood of this show is something different to anything I've done before. There's a mysteriousness, perhaps even open fear to it all which is quite obvious, perhaps even theatrical. With the sculptures, Fred Sandback whose practice and theoretical ideas, and those of the other minimalists, around what intentions and contexts in art are, mattered. A line through a gallery of acrylic string—is it just a line through a gallery of acrylic string without any reference to emotion or to any other meaning beyond itself? The wire piece questions that quite directly. There's a reaction to Arte Povera and found object work. Some of the key people in conceptual art dominated my thinking. There are some paintings in the

show which are an extension of ideas Yves Klein had when he took a car around France exposing paintings to things and to Lawrence Weiner and how he interjected himself into gallery spaces. Then there are textual works which refer to ideas of lies and truth that are often in photography, or in film, but that appear now in textual work and the different kind of neural path that text takes. So again it is this wholeness I'm trying for because you're using so many facets, lenses and aspects that come from acting in the space and the world but they also come from art knowledge. Of course when I say art, with Gombrich, I mean artists and their singular, merged consciousness of the world.

What's next for you?

After this show I'm off to Berlin for a residency in August and solo show in September. Then after some art-travel around Europe I'm back in Bangladesh to begin two very large moving-image works one on the nature of labour and another which is a panoptic view of agricultural life and history.

*5 July 2014
Blackbeath, Australia*

BIOGRAPHY

Omar Chowdhury produces detailed installations created in extended spiritual and empirical immersions into sites that are conceptually and experientially demanding.

His formalist yet deeply felt works hold in generative tension various polarities: narratives and the surreal, materiality and the immaterial, rhythm and chaos, humour and melancholia, power and weakness, and memory and forgetting. Out of these frictions and cohesions he creates a densely woven and deeply metaphoric language of moral inquiry.

Often working with small crews and cinematic infrastructure, he spends years in both isolated and crowded ecologies to detail epistemological and ontologic questions that are centred on the ambiguities of our consciousness, of time and materiality, and their representations in thought and history.

In 2014 he has current and upcoming solo exhibitions at 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art and MOMENTUM, Berlin. He is the recent recipient of a Bengal Foundation Commission (2014), a finalist for the John Fries Award (2014), received an Australia Council Skills and Development Grant (2014), an Edward M. Kennedy Grant for the Arts (2013), and an Australian Cinematographer's Society Gold Award. He has shown works in galleries, institutions, and festivals in Australia, Asia, and Europe. He was born in 1983 and studied at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. He currently lives and works both in Sydney, Australia and Dhaka, Bangladesh.

<http://omarchowdhury.com/>

ALASKA PROJECTS

Alaska Projects is a Sydney based Artist Run Initiative established to exhibit contemporary visual art in unused or disused spaces.

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