

NAMING THE BRIGHT & DARK STARS

14 – 28 OCTOBER 2015

GALERIE SOGAN & ART + JADA ART GALLERY

REN ZI





ON FRONT COVER

codices from the future: slipstreamslide,
UV-resistant ink on clear acrylic & dichroic film,
80 × 80 cm, 2015

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A SOLO EXHIBITION BY **REN ZI**

When we first saw Ren Zi's collection from the *Topographies of Loss* series at Volvo Art space last year, it was with a sense of excitement as it had been when we saw his works several years ago. We were very impressed by the artist's demonstration of imageries and abstract concept. Ren Zi is a very insightful, bright and intelligent young artist. He is an exceptional artist to watch.

This debut solo exhibition, *Naming the Bright & Dark Stars* features Ren Zi's latest body of works. Rich in layering technique and new media experimentation, the artist draws representations from mythical characters. His latest *Codices from Our Future* and *Days of Our Burning* series engages audience with issues relevant in our contemporary societies as they illustrate various complex dimensions of our thoughts and emotions.

In align with both galleries' emerging artists program, it is with great pleasure that Galerie Sogan & Art and Jada Art Gallery present Ren Zi's first solo exhibition, *Naming the Bright & Dark Stars*.

Vera Wijaya & Valerie Cheah

THE COSMOS WITHIN

"What do stars do? They shine." - Neil Gaiman, Stardust

Ren Zi started drawing before learning to write, and 'light' was his first word. His fascination with illumination would progress beyond observable light sources to encompass a metaphysical lightness of being when he encountered the Buddhist concept of enlightenment. Starlight sustains biological life but to Ren Zi a life with meaning and direction seemed elusive without an illumination from within. The Buddhist/Taoist philosophy of living in harmony with all existence became a beacon in his inner cosmos, a guiding light that filled a void engendered by the apparent meaninglessness and senselessness of mere physical subsistence.

Scientific studies of physical phenomena and spiritual musings of transcendent growth may seem strange bedfellows, but they are threads Ren Zi adroitly weaves into a complex visual tapestry. Using his life experiences as a drawing board, he spins a mythos where the boundaries of the physical and spiritual, the self and the collective break down, and divinities both terrible and fair walk the earth. This is a journey that traces his own footsteps even as he muses of an alternate universe in which mankind traverses vistas of light and darkness. *'Naming the Bright & Dark Stars'* is a condensation of an ongoing narrative, a tale which is at once expansive in its scope yet quietly intimate in its telling.

Two quartets hold court in this *'Naming'*; they mark the starting and ending points of Ren Zi's cosmic trajectory. The opening sequence, *'days of our burning'*, takes us through his formative years. Framed in the Buddhist concept of Samsara, it describes his struggles with a world filled with rage, suffering and anguish. Ren Zi's eclectic range of interests is also on full display within this overarching Buddhist theme. References to Nordic myths depicting Fenrir the Monster Wolf and the coming of apocalypse, Ragnarök, can be found in *'hour of the wolf'*, whereas allusions to Shakespeare's *'Macbeth'* and The Furies, Greek goddesses of Judgment and Vengeance, play out in *'sound & the furies'*.

This dystopia, replete with ancient mythical iconography and classical references, is contemporised with a graphic treatment where clean lines and exacting composition studies dominate. Ren Zi's aesthetics is informed by his background in advertising and design, as well as his love for graphic novels and comics. The choice of working with acrylic panels – we live in an age of plastics - also brings a physical immediacy and relevance to themes that may otherwise seem arcane and esoteric to the modern-day viewer. The intense emotion that saturates the series could have easily overwhelmed the narrative but this is tempered by a colour palette comprising mainly soft pastels. In this respect, we are offered a glimpse of his collected, task-oriented detachment that permeates his visual sensibilities.

In counterpoint to the intensity of *'days of our burning'* is the meditative *'codices from the future'* where we encounter a projection of an older, wiser Ren Zi. In the distant future, he comes to understand and transcend the illusory nature of physical attachment, thus gaining a newfound sense of equanimity and peace. The Mandala, a radial geometric pattern which represents the Buddhist concept of cosmic harmony, lends symmetric balance to this series. As with the *'days'*, there are surprises hidden among the Buddhist iconography in the *'codices'*. The Virgin Mary holding court with the Goddess of Mercy opens up a discussion on the universality of compassion and salvation in *'allunion1'*, while a child blowing soap bubbles in *'slipstreamslide'* adds a dimension of returning to innocence within the broader framework of meditative clarity.

While Ren Zi's preoccupation with the metaphysical aspects of lightness is realised through the use of Buddhist iconography in the *'codices'*, his observations on the physical properties of light is materialised through the application of dichroic film upon his acrylic works. The dichroic film is a filter designed to reflect unwanted light and let in specific wavelengths. This dichroic overlay enhances colour perception of the underlying print, resulting in the ethereal tableaux of shimmering lightness which make up the hallmark of this series.

If *'days'* and *'codices'* denote the past and future, then the other works bridging these terminal points are reflections of an uncertainty-filled journey being undertaken at present. The pain and fury from the *'days'* past has ignited a panoply of blazing eyes within this sub-series, an analogy to an awakening self through suffering. These eyes have yet to gain the composed clarity of

those found within the 'codices'; Ren Zi has chosen the eye to represent the 4 states of consciousness according to Tibetan Buddhism: wakefulness, deep sleep, dreaming and rapture. The use of stylised fire, a trademark of traditional Chinese designs, around the eyes is a reference to Taoist mythology. In particular, the deities Erlang Shen and Sun Wukong, who would come to possess celestial eyes capable of piercing deception and illusion, had to undergo trials by fire to awaken these ocular powers.

An examination of 'days' and 'codices' would draw out clear studies between darkness and light, chaos and order. In contrast, the bridging works reside on a shifting middle ground astride these polar opposites. From a psychological standpoint, a person's grasp of reality can be a tenuous one; it is limited by our sensory perceptions and frequently coloured by cognitive bias arising from past experience and emotions. Because of these all-too-human limitations, it is possible that our *perceived* reality may be manipulated to bear little or no resemblance to the actual objective event. Accordingly, the images depicted here seem to languish in an ambiguous no-man's land. Littered within these works are detritus lifted from pop culture references: a Tyrannosaurus Rex, seemingly a reference to the '*Jurassic Park*' film franchise, roams an indeterminate backdrop of sky and ground in '*gone gods, deep museum*', while Ultraman and a Japanese bomber plane track a tentative path through '*elsewhere, a negative mirror*'. Enigmatic beings parade before the unsuspecting traveller in '*the years given and taken*', dazzling with their apparent divinity but betraying none of their allegiances to either light or darkness.

Ren Zi's works present a transcendent framework, an alternative to prevailing societal structures which have stagnated and are stymied by the preoccupation with amassing and consuming material minutiae. His alternate cosmos is borne of an intense self-reflection while resisting the modern-day obsession with individualism in favour of communion with existence-at-large. Ren Zi's meditations are not as far-fetched as one would think. Astronomers, in their argument for the immediacy and practicality of cosmic sciences to everyday existence, like to point out that we come from the stars. We are made up of elements seeded by the death of countless stars before us. In having named the stars that make up who he is, perhaps Ren Zi might have paved the way to our own cosmic journey.

Henry Lee
Artist

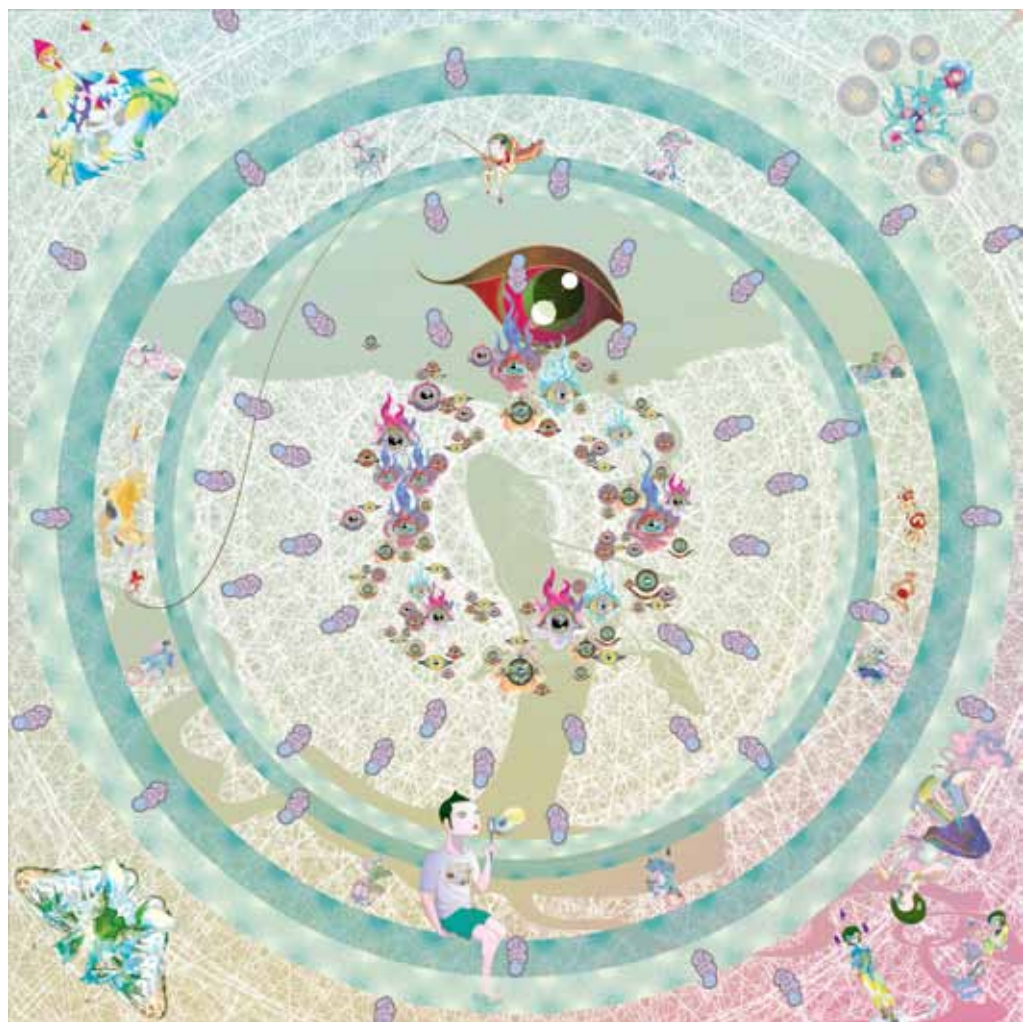




LEFT
brightskyye,
UV-resistant ink on clear acrylic &
dichroic film,
80 × 80 cm, 2015

RIGHT
disnuclearday,
UV-resistant ink on clear acrylic &
dichroic film,
80 × 80 cm, 2015

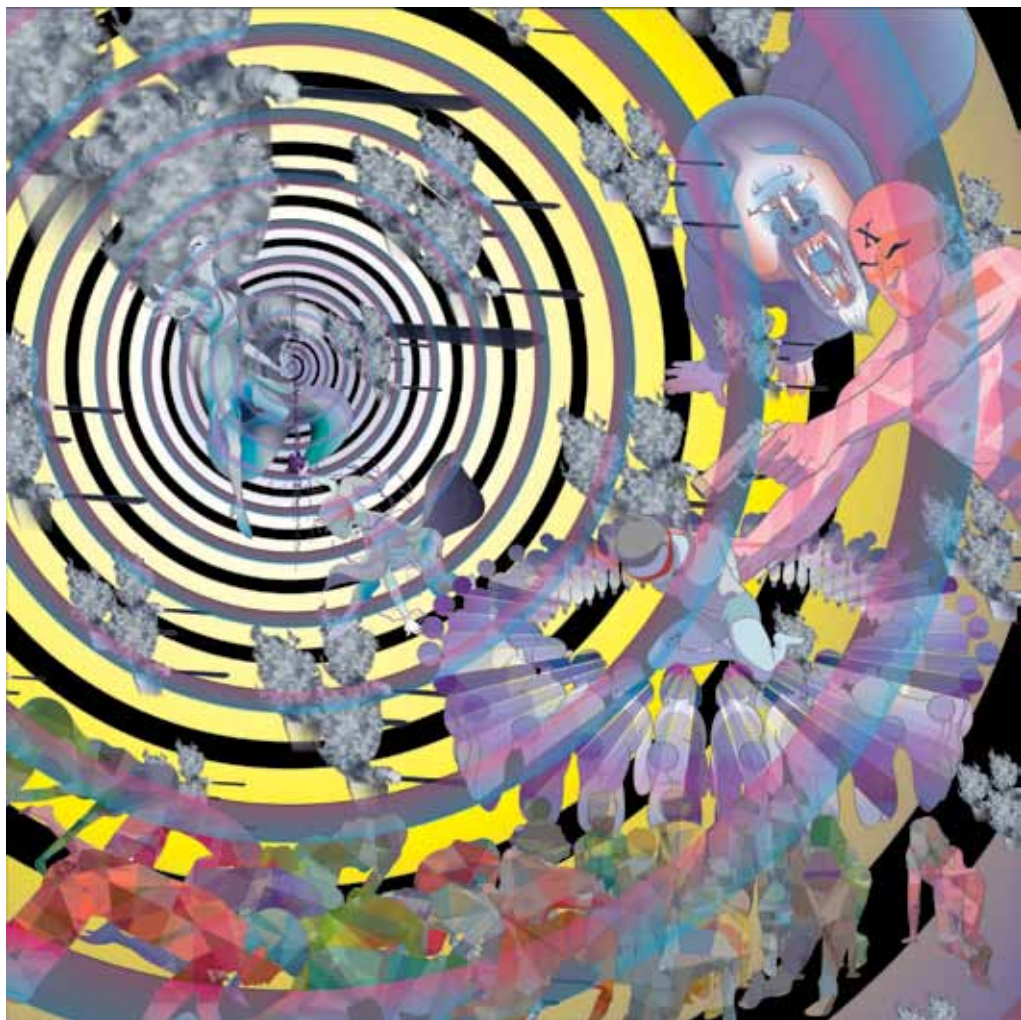




LEFT
allunion1,
UV-resistant ink on clear acrylic &
dichroic film,
80 × 80 cm, 2015

RIGHT
slipstreamslide,
UV-resistant ink on clear acrylic &
dichroic film,
80 × 80 cm, 2015





LEFT
hour of the wolf,
UV-resistant ink on clear acrylic &
archival photopaper,
80 × 80 cm, 2015

RIGHT
sound & the furies,
UV-resistant ink on clear acrylic &
archival photopaper,
80 × 80 cm, 2015

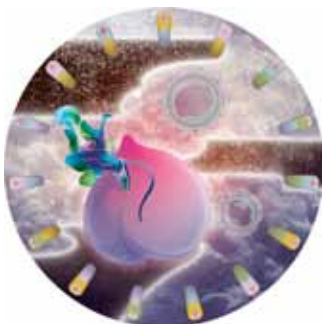
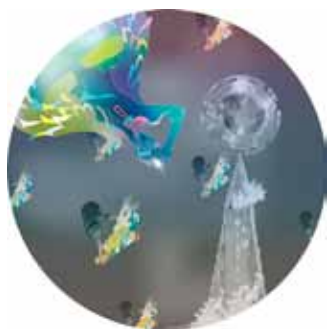




LEFT
introducing the night,
UV-resistant ink on clear acrylic &
archival photopaper,
80 × 80 cm, 2015

RIGHT
no world order,
UV-resistant ink on clear acrylic &
archival photopaper,
80 × 80 cm, 2015





LEFT
the years given & taken,
UV-resistant ink on archival photopaper
signed & numbered edition of 5 + 1 AP,
60 × 60 cm, 2015

ABOVE LEFT TO RIGHT
heirs of a half-fired heaven,
sudden aurora,
the density of darkness,
if death were never to seek our
twilight shore,
the hours, the fates,
a question for tomorrow,
scarred trajectory of a stymied fury,
against the wind & winding of time,
UV-resistant ink on archival photopaper
signed & numbered edition of 5 + 1 AP,
40 × 40 cm, 2015





LEFT
gone gods, deep museum,
UV-resistant ink on clear acrylic & gold
acrylic mirror,
60 × 90 cm, 2015

RIGHT
elsewhere, a negative mirror,
UV-resistant ink on clear acrylic, opaque
acrylic & moire optical film,
60 × 190 cm, 2015



TOP

mnemosyne #2,

pine box, labels, assorted toys, cling
film, digital print on clear adhesive &
acetate film,
dimensions variable, 2015

BOTTOM

mnemosyne #3,

pine box, labels, assorted toys, cling
film, digital print on clear adhesive &
acetate film,
dimensions variable, 2015



REN ZI

B. 2006

Having read psychology at the national university of singapore, the artist spent half a lifetime in the "business of words" before returning to art-making in 2006.

Ren zi's digital & mixed-media works received their first public showing in 2013, funded through a kickstarter campaign.

With their leitmotif of flux & transformation, they interrogate the malleability of "reality" by re-scripting the mythic blueprints that underlie social & personal narratives.

Drawing on semiotic layering as well as mimetic & visual sampling & splicing, his works invite a multiplicity of readings – & misreadings – that, for the artist, serve as a rorschach probe into the inner universe of the viewers themselves.

Ren zi's practice is informed by buddhist-taoist philosophies, phenomenological psychology, fractal theory, mythology, comics & science fiction.

He is an autodidact who claims to have been schooled through youtube & "art for dummies".

Education

1991-1995	National University of Singapore, Bachelor of Social Sciences (Hon.)
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Residencies

2015	New York Art Residency & Studios (NARS) Foundation, New York, USA
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Group Exhibitions

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2015 | Reality Override, Charles B Wang Center,
Stonybrook University, New York, USA*

Open Door Discourse, NARS Foundation,
New York, USA |
| 2014 | Art Taipei 2014, Taiwan
Büffel Art Project, Ion Art Gallery, Singapore
Bring Your Own Beamer, Instinc Gallery, Singapore
Our Elusive Here, Volvo Art Loft, Singapore |
| 2013 | The Affordable Art Fair 2013, Singapore
The Art of Shopping, Marina Bay Sands, Singapore
between earth & void, The Factory, Singapore* |

*Solo show

Media Mentions

- | | |
|---------------|--------------------|
| 9 June 2013 | The New Paper |
| 19 April 2013 | The Business Times |
| 4 April 2013 | Imagine Network |
| 15 March 2013 | The Business Times |

Grants

- | | |
|------|--|
| 2015 | Presentation & Participation Grant,
National Arts Council, Singapore
Singapore Internationale,
Singapore International Foundation |
| 2014 | Capability Development Grant,
National Arts Council, Singapore
Presentation & Participation Grant,
National Arts Council, Singapore |

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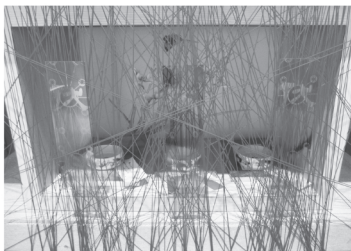
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Addendum



mnemosyne #5 (2015)

Dimensions variable

*Installation: shelving, poetry
books, ceramic saucers, rice
paper, blood-tinted ink, cotton
cord, digital print on acetate film*