

“The Imperial Ghost in the Neoliberal Machine (Figuring the CIA)”

Minouk Lim, Yoshua Okón, Ming Wong

30 April - 8 June, 2019

Curated by Asakusa

This exhibition takes place at e-flux (New York)

The Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) efforts to purge sites of communism was a global operation—and Japan was no exception. Key officials from the agency described acts of espionage and strategic coordination in the 1950s and '60s that ranged from the mobilization of controlled media and Yakuza mafia groups, to the violent suppression of socialist movements.^[1] With its title alluding to mind-body dualism, this exhibition contends with past machinations that are still corporeally present, albeit camouflaged in other forms of manipulation and continuing to shift control and coerce power under new terms.

Tracing the journey of the renowned labor anthem *The Red Flag* sung to the tune of the German folk song *O Tannenbaum*, **Minouk Lim** (b.1968, South Korea) suggests how this evocative and emblematic anthem became a vessel for otherwise conflicting beliefs. In this newly commissioned work, Lim extends her research to the transformation of the Japanese Utage, or singing voice, movement—socialist choral activities that strove to promote popular unity.^[2] Exhibited as a video and sound installation of the documented performance, Lim's work stages a car broadcasting live accordion music of Soviet workers' songs while driving around the Tokyo Imperial Palace, as such choreographing the deterritorialization of history via the subject in motion. The intervention also recalls Bloody May Day in 1952,^[3] when protesters clashed with police forces amidst unified chanting of proletariat hymns.

Known for his appropriation of popular culture and cinematic decoding of heteronormative scripts, **Ming Wong** (b.1971, Singapore) develops a new project on Japanese soft porn, known as “pink films.” Wong's ongoing research on the Nikkatsu Roman Porno probes the process of pornification in the Japanese film industry during the 1970s.^[4] His investigation touches on a generation of avant-garde filmmakers who began their careers in this genre in order to support themselves, while being engaged in furtive activist groups. From the epics of abrasive left-wing ultra-radicality to those of dirty, misogynist fantasies, the filmmakers incorporated their creative license to vent their frustrations and induce an aestheticized arousal of minds and loins for the market.

The CIA's covert relationship with Italy's Christian Democrats, which mirrors their veiled involvement with the Japanese Yakuza, supposedly lead to the assassination of Italian filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-1975). *Ostia* (2013), a video work by **Yoshua Okón** (b.1970, Mexico) depicts this imagined crime scene. On the other hand, Okón's *Salò Island* (2013) is a video and sculpture installation indicative of a sadistic and tortuous scene from Pasolini's film *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (1975). Situated in “a surreal late-night corporate labyrinth” in Newport, California, the characters reappear as desolate beings bereft of sentient life. It metaphorically infers the past and the future, and echoes how neoliberal capitalism salutes a reloaded fascism.

“The Imperial Ghost in the Neoliberal Machine (Figuring the CIA)” features works reacting to anti-communist rhetoric that has suppressed and repressed intellectuals since the 1950s. To ground this narrative within the exhibition, declassified accounts of covert operations by the CIA are displayed as archival documentation. A prominent personality within the chronicles is former Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi (1896-1987), an imperialist and a war criminal who was imprisoned and eventually released in exchange for his espousal of pro-American policies and reforms—further evidenced by his grandson's position as the current Prime Minister of Japan.

The CIA's clandestine activities succeeded in transforming economic policies, sovereign histories, and global perception, irrevocably altering the world's cultural and political landscape. The exhibition considers the incarnations and reverberations of their strategies, and how they continue to infiltrate today's political imagination.

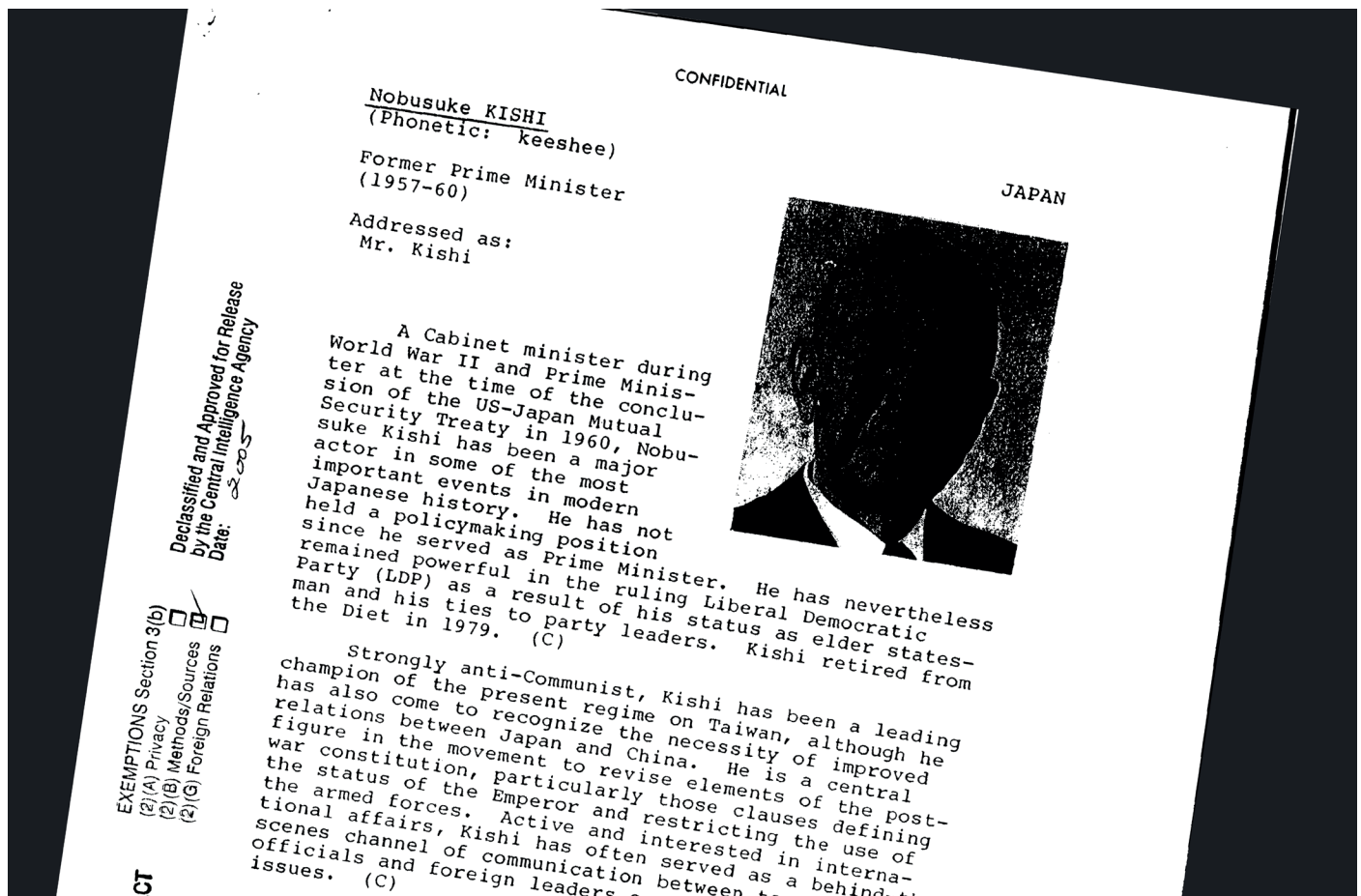


Image of a declassified document on former Japanese Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi from the CIA digital archives.

Footnotes to the press release

[1] See for example: Tim Weiner, "C.I.A. Spent Millions to Support Japanese Right in 50's and 60's," The New York Times, New York, October 9, 1994. <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/10/09/world/cia-spent-millions-to-support-japanese-right-in-50-s-and-60-s.html>

[2] The Utage, or singing voice, movement has its origin in 1947, when the Central Chorus Band of the Democratic Youth League of Japan (Minsei, 1923-present) was formed as a substructure of the Japanese Communist Party. This grassroots public choral activity of "workers' songs" gained nationwide popularity in the 1960s, spreading across Utage cafés with the slogan "Sing with Marx! Dance with Lenin!"

[3] Bloody May Day (1952) occurred at Tokyo's Imperial Palace (Kokyoaien) between government and multi-sectoral leftist forces composed of Japanese and Koreans (reportedly led by Minsei and Zengakuren—a communist/anarchist league of students), following the country's release from American Occupation and the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty (1951).

[4] "Pink films" are low-budget feature-length films made under tight negotiations between cinematic quality versus commercial demand, typically shot over three back-to-back days and nights. The established movie company Nikkatsu Corporation (1912-present) followed this trend and launched the Roman Porno series (1971-1988) which focused on sex, violence, S&M, and romance.

Artists:

As an artist of many forms, **Minouk Lim** (b.1968, Daejeon, South Korea) has been creating works that are beyond the boundary of different genres and media, deepening the scope of questions while encompassing writing, music, video, installation and performance as her means of artistic expression. Lim has been paying strong attention to the marginalization and the discrepancy generated during the process of rapid democratization and industrialization of South Korea, which also affected the lives of the many in the system of global economy. As such, Lim seeks to find ways to examine objects embedded with performativity, different methods of performance and imaginative modes of creating records. Lim participated in a number of group exhibitions and biennials including the Setouchi Triennale(2016) Sydney and Taipei Biennial 2016, Paris Triennale 2012, Liverpool Biennial (2010), Political populism (Kunsthalle Wien 2015), The Time of Others (Museum of Tokyo, 2010) and Your Bright Future: 12 Contemporary Artists from Korea (LACMA, 2009-2010).

Yoshua Okón (b.1970, Mexico City, Mexico) is known for his near-sociological experiments executed for the camera, which blur the distinctions of staged situations, documentation, and improvisation. His practice explores communal and national boundaries, and questions the issues of labor, as well as authority and its legitimacy in an geo-political event. He received a MFA from University of California, Los Angeles in 2002. Okón's work has been shown internationally and his work is placed in the permanent collection of Tate Modern, LACMA, Colección Jumex and MUAC, among others.

Questions of identity and gender, as well as the queer politics of representation, are at the core of **Ming Wong's** (b. 1971, Singapore) filmic practice. Wong often reworks scenes drawn from world cinema classics – from directors Fassbinder to Pasolini to Polanski to Wong Kar-wai – frequently 'miscasting' himself in multiple roles irrespective of language, gender, ethnicity, nationality or historical period. He studied Chinese art at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts in Singapore, and has a MFA in Fine Art Media from the Slade School of Art in London. Numerous solo exhibitions include those at: Ullens Center of Contemporary Art, Beijing (2015); Shiseido Galley, Tokyo (2013); REDCAT, Los Angeles (2012); and the 53rd Venice Biennial (2009) where he was awarded a Special Mention.

Curators:

Asakusa is a 40-square-meter exhibition venue for contemporary art programmes committed to advancing

curatorial collaborations and practices.

Since its inauguration in October 2015, Asakusa has worked with international artists including Yoshua Okón, Thomas Hirschhorn, Santiago Sierra, Rikrit Tiravanija, Yoko Ono, Hito Steyerl, Anton Vidokle, while constantly negotiating with local contexts. The archival exhibition "1923" traced the footsteps of early Japanese avant-garde in the 1920s, with a particular focus on the influence of Dada in Tokyo. "Kino-Pravda: A Tribute to Prokino" combined screenings of news-reels by Prokino (Japan Prolet-Kino Unio: 1929-34) and today's documentaries that explore the notion of political "truth".

Project Members:

Asakusa Director: Koichiro Osaka
Project manager: Mariko Mikami
Curatorial assistants: Marika Constantino, Sanghae Kwon

e-flux Programs Director: Amal Issa
Office manager: Hallie Ayres
Coordinator: Elysia Tuohy

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Exhibition Facts:

Title: "The Imperial Ghost in the Neoliberal Machine (Figuring the CIA)"
Artists: Minouk Lim, Yoshua Okón, Ming Wong
Curated by: Asakusa

Dates: 30 April - 8 June, 2019
Venue: e-flux (New York)
Location: 311 E Broadway, New York, NY 10002
Opening hours: Tuesday–Saturday, 12–6pm

Opening event
Tuesday, April 30 from 6:30–8:30pm

URL: www.asakusa-o.com
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