

Photo credit: Heman Chong



HEMAN CHONG *Singapore*

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE | APRIL 17-MAY 31, 2007 | ART IN GENERAL

HEMAN CHONG'S artist residency project *Common People and Other Stories* was inspired by *Quantum Leap*, a short-lived American science-fiction television program about an imaginary physics experiment gone awry and its consequent ethical dilemmas. The name of the TV show's protagonist, Dr. Sam Beckett, is a thinly veiled allusion to the Irish playwright known for his pessimistic outlook on the human condition. In what has now become a television cult classic, Sam travels through time, randomly "leaping" into the bodies of other people, attempting to prevent history-altering catastrophes and all the while trying to make his way back to his own place and time.

Common People and Other Stories included multiple components and was on view from April 21 through June 30, 2007. The artist installed the first upon his arrival to New York, adhering 3,000 identical circular stickers of an ambiguous logo to gallery walls in a sprawling configuration. (Chong has presented similar work before, each time responding to the architecture of the space in which he presented his work.) A second artwork on display could only be viewed at night. *International Memories* consists of 25 slides of photographed black-and-white postcards projected on a gallery wall, and was turned on only when the gallery closed at 6 p.m. After dark and throughout the night, the slideshow could be viewed from street level through the gated large windows of Art in General's Project Space.

During his residency, Chong also created a large-scale, yellow neon sign that was installed in a window near Art in General's front entrance. Blinking on and off, it reads "SAM BECKETT COME HOME." This light sculpture will remain on exhibition indefinitely.

Additionally, Art in General commissioned Chong to create a printed project along the lines of interest of his residency project, to be published and distributed in Art in General's spring 2007 *INSIDE* newsletter. Rather than drawing a conventional map, Chong illustrated ideas for 99 future episodes of *Quantum Leap* by imagining dates and places for Sam Beckett's future (or past) time travels.

ART IN GENERAL'S ONGOING ARTIST RESIDENCY PROGRAM IS DESIGNED TO GIVE ARTISTS THE OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE NEW WORK ON SITE, ALLOWING THE PUBLIC TO INTERACT WITH ARTISTS WHILE EXPERIENCING A WORK IN PROGRESS.

HEMAN CHONG'S RESIDENCY IS SUPPORTED IN PART BY AN AWARD FROM THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS. ADDITIONAL SUPPORT HAS BEEN PROVIDED BY THE NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL IN SINGAPORE.

A TIMELINE, SCI FI EAST (MOSTLY)

Q: What is the most underrated book of the 20th century?

A: Underrated by whom? Literary critics? I have no idea. By the Peoples of the Earth? Even less.

Q: To which author (dead or alive) would you grant the Nobel Prize?

A: Mikhail Afanasevich Bulgakov, without any second thoughts!

From interview with Boris Strugatsky, Time Out St. Petersburg, July 13-26 2007.

1989, Pittsburgh: Read Mikhail Bulgakov's novel *Master and Margarita*.

1991-3, NYC: See Andrei Tarkovsky's films *Ivan's Childhood*, *Andrey Rublev*, *Solaris*.

1994, St Petersburg: Dream about a statue of a fat man on a horse. Later, I see it through the gates of the shuttered Marble Palace.

2001 October, NYC: Bulgakov's *Heart of a Dog*.

Q: Can you discuss the role of humor in your work?

A: Humor («Irony and Pity») is a remarkable thing: it makes an amusing text funnier, and a horrific one even more horrific.

From author's email interview with Boris Strugatsky, June 2007

2002 June, Turin: Mike Nelson's *A Forgotten Kingdom*, 2001, a compendium of excerpts as novel: Camus, Dick, Lem, Lovecraft, Conrad, Kafka, Borges, Strugatsky Brothers, Verne, Sturgeon, Bulgakov, Woolley.

2002 November, NYC: Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris*. (Soderbergh's remake of Tarkovsky's *Solaris* released.)

A: I must say, I did not get it at all. I was 16 or 17 years old. I simply didn't understand what was going on on the screen. Nevertheless, the film made me engaged and curious. I watched *Solaris* over and over again later on. I kept watching it until, having reached my 30's, I finally liked it lot. Perhaps that was also due to the fact that I started to lose people who were close to me.

Lithuanian artist Deimantas Narkevicius, from author's interview with about his film Revisiting Solaris, 2007

2002 December, NYC: Tarkovsky series at BAM. Fall asleep in *The Mirror*. *Stalker* favorite. *Solaris* second favorite.

A: ...I don't think of them as fictional. I find the movie *Solaris* not so good, because I could not escape from the genre, from the fictional details. But in *Stalker*, which was also based on a science fiction story, I managed to overcome the genre and get rid of all the science-fiction signs completely. This gives me great pleasure. The genre problem in cinema doesn't exist for me, because for me, cinema is an art that can cover everything: tragedy, happiness, sadness, fun, fortune. Only then is cinema able to reflect life. Anyway, I am not a fan of the science fiction genre. And while making a movie, I think of it without any genre at all.

Andrei Tarkovsky, From A Journey Through Time, 1983, dirs: Tonino Guerra and Andrei Tarkovsky.

2005 September, Cambridge, MA: Lem's Futurological Congress.

2006 March, Cambridge, MA: Join world's largest open stack science fiction library at MIT, run by the Science Fiction Society.

2006 March: Strugatsky Brothers' *Definitely Maybe*.

2006 April: Strugatsky Brothers' *Roadside Picnic*.

Realize on p. 5 that this is *Stalker*.

Q: And what about working with Tarkovsky?

A: The main difficulty was that he, being the director and, in addition, a genius director, saw the real world differently than we, constructed his imaginary world of the future of film differently than we, and to communicate his deeply individual vision to us he, as a rule, could not. Unfortunately, we did not record our conversations, and they remain neither in our memories, nor on paper, except for several lines of this kind: "19.12.75 Tarkovsky. Man = instinct + reason. And something else: soul, spirit (morals, morality). The truly great can be thoughtless and awkward—Christ."

From Commentaries on How it Went, 2003, by Boris Strugatsky

2006 December, Pittsburgh: Discover Lem's *Star Diaries* in my parents' bathroom. It has probably been there since childhood.

2007 February, NYC: read Lem's "The Seventh Voyage" aloud over and over and over in a corner at Dexter Sinister, Ludlow Street for book release: *Philip*.

2007 February, Cambridge, MA: Philip K Dick's *A Scanner Darkly*; Lem's "Philip K Dick: a Visionary Among the Charlatans" and "About the Strugatsky Brothers' *Roadside Picnic*."

2007 April, Cambridge MA: Make plans to visit my mother in St Petersburg. Yvonne Howell (author: *Apocalyptic Realism: The Science Fiction of Arkady and Boris Strugatsky*), puts me in touch with Boris Strugatsky. Slava Gerovitch, lecturer in MIT's Program in Science, Technology, and Society, translates letter of introduction.

Q: I am going to St Petersburg and would like to bring a gift to Boris Strugatsky, the famous science fiction writer.
A: If you think Mr. Strugatsky would like a shirt with the MITSFS logo, or a shirt with the Greek letters "psi phi" on it (sound it out...), we'd be happy to sell you one. We would also be happy to provide you with an electronic version of our logo, which you could have engraved or printed on some suitable object, eg. a rocket ship or a coffee mug. Or we could grant Mr. Strugatsky a lifetime membership in the Society and provide you with a genuine Society membership card for him, personally signed by the President and Skinner. He would be joining a Society that has counted Arthur C. Clarke, Larry Niven, and Isaac Asimov among its members.

From email btw author and Kevin Riggle, MIT Science Fiction Society

2007 June, Moscow: Bulgakov's house museum open till 11 pm. As we enter, a black cat jumps off a high shelf and runs under a chair.

Q: To me, the most interesting science fiction books and films are the ones in which "futuristic" gadgets are woven incidentally into the text, never explained but simply used, and everything is just as messy as it is in real life. These are the most convincing portrayals of the future because we are not conscious of "our times" as we live our lives.

From author's interview with Deimantas Narkevicius

A: It is not a question of «literary techniques,» but of a completely new literary principle, which HG Wells «taught» us: «The subject of science fiction must be the ordinary man in extraordinary circumstances.» Or—in its

contemporary formulation: «Science fiction describes the real world, distorted, deformed, dumbstruck by a Wonder.» Science fiction must be realistic. And this is not a play on words.

From author's interview with Boris Strugatsky

2007 June, St Petersburg: Olesya Turkina, curator at State Russian Museum, tells me the famous Pulkovo Observatory outside of St Petersburg was Boris Strugatsky's place of employment.

Q: My wife and I are going to Novosibirsk, to check on sites for a solar eclipse expedition a year later, with time in Moscow and St. Petersburg en route. We'd be glad of any off the beaten track recommendations.

A: One thing you must do is visit Pulkovo Observatory outside of St Pete. It's a world heritage site, the first observatory in Russia. Perhaps you already know about it?

Q: As a student at Harvard, I used the 15" twin to their refracting telescope, both made in 1845 in Germany. I will give a talk there on Aug 6.

A: In that case, I have a few books to recommend.

From an email btw author and Jay Pasachoff, professor of astronomy, Williams College, Williamstown, MA July 2007

All Strugatsky material translated from the Russian by Jane Harris. Thanks Mom!

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HEMAN CHONG BORN IN 1977, LIVES AND WORKS IN BERLIN AND SINGAPORE

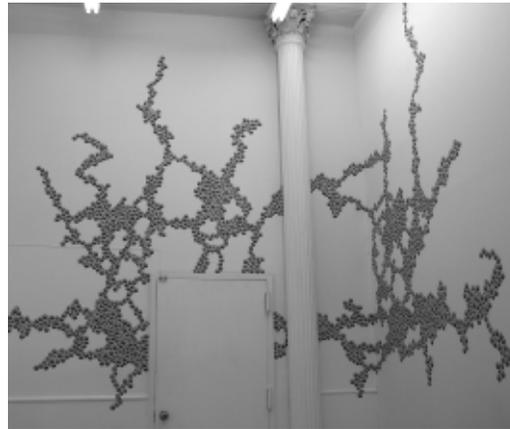
HEMAN CHONG is an artist and a curator based in Berlin and Singapore. He received his MA in communication art and design from The Royal College of Art, London (2002). His practice involves an investigation of the reasons for and methods by which people imagine the future, and how it can be represented as a series of conceptually generated objects, situations and texts.

His solo exhibitions include, among many others, *The Silver Sessions*, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, Germany (2003); *Snore Louder if You Can*, The Substation, Singapore (2004); *Vexillogy, Cartography and other Stories*, Ellen de Bruijne Projects (Dolores), Amsterdam, Holland (2005); *Philip*, Project Arts Centre, Dublin, Ireland (2006); *The Sole Proprietor and other Stories*, Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou, China (2007); and *Common People and other Stories*, Art in General, New York, USA (2007).

Heman Chong represented Singapore in the *50th Venice Biennale* in 2003 and currently is represented by Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou, China. For more information on his work, please visit www.hemanchong.com.



Photo credit: Julio Grimblatt



Founded in 1981 in Lower Manhattan, Art in General is a nonprofit organization that assists artists with the production and presentation of new work. It changes in response to the needs of artists and informs and engages the public about their work. In 25 years, the organization has emerged as one of New York City's leading nonprofits devoted to supporting and stimulating the creation of contemporary art, providing an environment in which artists can exhibit unconventional work and exchange ideas with their peers. Art in General has exhibited the work of nearly 5,000 artists working across a wide range of media.

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