

IN TRANSIT INTERVIEWS: YASMINE AMINANDA

Nineteen Forty – 2022

18 March – 19 April 2022

Elizabeth Low (EL): Talk to me about the project, 'January, February, and March 2022', (2022) – what is it, what was the starting point, and how did the name come about?

Yasmine Aminanda (YA): 'January, February, and March 2022', (2022) is part of an ongoing project that I started in 2018. I am really fascinated with the concept of mark-making with time and I have been using my practice to log my existence into time blocks; I title my works according to the months they were documented during. So, the name 'January, February, and March 2022' (2022) is essentially the work that I produced throughout the residency. It consists of three works, with a series of blogs under each month. These blogs feature text entries as well as moving image work.

When I was invited to join the residency programme, I found that I resonated with not only the structure of the programme but with the name of the platform, 'In Transit'. At this time, I was already planning to get away from London for awhile to 'rest up'. So naturally, this sparked the thought of constantly being 'in between' which is a familiar topic of conversation in my work.

EL: As you speak of this idea of being 'in between', I am reminded that you were a third culture kid. Having moved around and lived in different countries throughout your life, how would you define the word 'in transit' in your terms and experiences?

YA: I would define it as the in-between of marching time and staying still. To give you some context, I begin moving about as young as three months old when my family relocated to the USA. Later, we moved to France, and then to Malaysia where we were based for the longest time before I eventually moved to the UK to pursue my degree. My family, however, moved to Brunei. Hence, moving around has obviously shaped my perspective on the idea of being 'in between' and why I resonate with the term 'in transit'.

Growing up, I did experience an identity crisis due to not belonging anywhere and not feeling at home in my own country. But I find that the older I get, the more I embrace how borderless my experiences are. I have tried to break out of that whole, "I don't belong anywhere" narrative; instead I choose to say, "I enjoy being everywhere" because I have come to realise that I like not being settled in one place. So, when the opportunity with In Transit came along, I thought it was amazing because I was drawn to the name in itself. It was just a great opportunity to explore what it means to be 'in transit'.

EL: And your temporary relocation from the UK to Brunei during the period of the residency made it the perfect timing as well, did it not? What are your thoughts on that?

YA: Oh yes, one hundred percent. The thing about coming from a city like London to a country like Brunei is that they are polar opposites. London is just busy, busy, busy. While I absolutely love that, at some point I just could not breathe in that environment. Brunei as a country has a very different atmosphere, it's very peaceful, you know? I can tell the art scene here is even smaller than the one in Malaysia. So that period of adjustment between the two spaces, as

well as exploring the concept of resting up was something I wanted to document during the residency.

It was hard because I came here [Brunei] to rest, but I ended up freaking out because I had nothing going on for me. My sister told me that even then, without the hustle and bustle of a busy city, she did not feel like I had accomplished the goal of 'resting' – I was on an elevator carrying my laptop when she made that comment. But I realized that exploring the environment of a new city and country is the way I rest. Embracing that curiosity about my surroundings, and learning, discovering, and creating without that pressure or deadline is something that I thrive on; this probably has to do with my nomadic experience.

EL: I'm guessing that burnout you felt in London may have had to do with the fact that you had been in London for far too long and it gave you a bit of a creative block. That change of environment must have been needed since you have shared that you are not used to being in one place for too long.

YA: Yeah, I guess that makes sense.

EL: On the topic of moving away from the hustle and towards resting, I wonder if you can expand how the diaristic approach toward elements of your work plays into that? Diaries can be a medium to plan and organize time as well as to self-reflect. So how and when did you adopt that medium within your work? Perhaps you can also share more about the theme of time, and the act of documentation within your practice?

YA: The diaristic approach is something I have always done in some form or another. It is almost like a coping mechanism to stay, not productive, but constant you can say. I have a lot of journals with daily to-do lists from when I was studying at college back in Malaysia. While these to-do lists provided me with a sense of direction, I found that I would often not complete them, which would stress me out and have me feeling very guilty. Was I wasting time? Where was my time going? At some point I got obsessed with the question of, where does the time go and how do people pass time?

The diaristic approach started with me trying to understand the concept of time. The time stamps became a natural habit of how I mark my time and essentially, an understanding of how I pass my time in comparison to other people. The blog format provided by In Transit as a studio space allowed me to explore the linearity of time – sometimes I would write the thoughts I was having at the exact moment of writing, other times I was writing about thoughts I had hours before on that same day. So, in a sense, the studio updates became self-reflective and anxiety-free. And essentially, in documenting these thoughts and moments, and titling and organizing them into dates and months, my work became something like an active archive of some sort.

EL: Yeah, I can see how the concept and essence of archival are very much present in your work. I noticed that during the residency, you looked into some of your family archives too, such as videos from your childhood. I see snippets of those videos made it into some of your moving image work. How has your family archives come to inform your work?

YA: Okay, so I find this interesting because one of the other resident artists, Pablo, talked about how many artists have gone back to look at their family archives due to the lack of

accessibility to public and private archives – I resonated with that. So, how I came across my family archives has to do with the fact that I am back with my parents for the first time in a while, and also that there are not many resources in Brunei.

Anyway, I found myself going through these archives and being transported back to my childhood. I just wanted to soak up all these memories and videos of my family. The insane thing is these archives go back to before I was even born. Most of my life has been on video – I saw myself coming into this world and on that same tape, I can hear my relatives and my grandfather just talking about me outside this glass door. It just really puts things into perspective for me as I got to see my life in different spaces and periods of time. As a person who's 'resting', I just really want to understand my place of being 'in transit'; and there's just a whole archive of my life for me to explore that too.

EL: There is a snippet from a home video that you included in the moving image 'March 2022: Intransit', (2022). Based on one of your other moving images from your studio entries, I know it was taken from the home video where your mother was asking if you were *senang* in Bandung. I understand that the term *senang* means easy in Malay, but from what I gather, *senang* means happy in Indonesian. The word 'happy' is also present in your use of text in this moving image. So, perhaps you can share more about why you chose to emphasize on that word in 'March 2022: Intransit', (2022) and how the idea of happiness ties into your work.

YA: I feel like most of us human beings are constantly searching for meaning and happiness in our lives. But I'm glad you brought up the difference between the meaning of the words in Malay and Indonesian because the duality of meaning behind the word is exactly why I chose it. I did not want it to just mean one thing; it means happy, but also easy. And while I am native to Indonesia, I lived in Malaysia longer than I did in my own home country.

With my very nomadic upbringing, I spent most of my life just adapting. Settling in one place just does not feel like an option anymore. I remember after being in Malaysia for over three years, I was constantly asking my parents, "when are we moving? Why are we here for so long?", and I think it just speaks to how I can't stay still. So yeah, I think it sort of leads to idea of contentment – what is it or where is it for me?

EL: I notice that the act of collaboration is present within your work; I wonder if you could share more on how inviting your friends, Nurin and Ning, to participate in your performance work has informed your practice?

YA: So, Nurin and Ning have been long time collaborators of mine, they work mainly with performance and text. The reason I asked them to join me is that collaboration is really important to me. I constantly work with the community and environment I am connected to better understand the concept of 'belonging'. And I think my interest in working with communities speaks to why In Transit was so relevant to me because it felt like a community. I really enjoyed having the opportunity to work with the curators as well as with the other resident artists. Even though we only got to meet online during accessibility sessions and critique sessions, I got to know the other artists just by sharing a virtual studio and seeing what everyone else is up to and seeing how their work is developing. While there are some differences between a physical and virtual studio, it is not so different in terms of community and intimacy.

EL: It's great to hear how you have had a positive experience with In Transit's residency programme. As you have just noted how there are some similarities in the physical and virtual studio spaces, I wonder if you could expand on how you responded to the structure of the residency being virtual.

YA: I personally feel that I gained a lot from it because, for one, it allowed for some flexibility in location among other things. I was able to shape my residency experience to my situation and my environment and that made it very accessible for me. It just perfectly worked with the nature of my work. I enjoyed how I was able to explore the environment I was in physically, as well as the website itself. The virtual studio became a space and medium for self-reflection, and it just resonated with the documentation aspect of my practice.

EL: On the topic of your experience with the residency, how do you feel that it has informed the way you understand and view accessibility within the context of the arts?

YA: It's crazy because my understanding of accessibility was zero before this. I did my bachelor's degree in printmaking and time-based media work – much of my practice includes moving image work. And as someone who engages with moving images as a medium, I had absolutely no knowledge of accessibility in the digital media realm.

When I first came across image descriptions, I did not understand what it was or why it was necessary until I joined the In Transit residency. Attending the training and being more aware of these tools gave me a lot to think about how I could view my work and accessibility as a whole; how can I approach it in a way that would not make it an additional feature but as one with my work.

EL: I just want to wrap up this interview with one last question; do you think that moving forward, accessibility is something that you would continue to explore in your practice outside of In Transit?

YA: Oh, for sure, especially with my text-based, performance, and moving image work. As someone who does not know if they have a disability, I think being aware of the different tools and including them in my work can be helpful. Personally, being educated about said tools made me realise that there are a lot of things I took for granted. I found that by exploring accessibility features like close and open captions, among other things, I actually found certain things more accessible for myself. So I'm just really grateful to have had the chance to learn more about this and I really want to continue to build on what I have learned from In Transit.