

# Persistent Visions

Erika Tan



## Artist Statement | Erika Tan

### Persistent Visions

*A film term for the production of moving images from still pictures. The process of creating a moving image is dependent upon the eye/brains persistence of vision, whereby the memory of the image is retained by the viewer.*

Persistent Visions marks a pause in my journey through the Moving Image archives of the Empire and Commonwealth Museum and the histories encapsulated there. My initial proposal of “illuminating hidden meanings and messages, unearthing personal and subjective histories hidden by the grander structures of empire” has not fully been realized, or indeed has changed. The actual physicality or materiality of the archive and the process of navigating indexes, accessing film clips, identifying content, moving between past and present formats and meanings has been overwhelming. But even more so has the question of the archives status as historical ‘evidence’ and my ‘take’ on the imagery viewed.

A few decisions have been key to the way the work has developed. The first is the use of ‘amateur’ film footage held by the archives rather than ‘professional’ footage. In the main, this has meant working with less highly edited material and no explicitly overarching authoritative story lines. The material stretches across a time frame of about 50 years (1930’s to 70’s) and is geographically unbounded. The content acts as personal recordings of both the domestic and the public lives and contexts of the filmmakers. The development of film technologies and mediums such as 8mm, 9.5 and super 8 provided much more accessible and transportable cameras. This can be seen in the diversity of material and film locations.

My second decision was to try and include the materiality of the archive and the experience and process of research within the work. I became interested in both the status of the archival material in terms of its references to the past but also its material existence as fragile film, collated into ‘collections’, indexed, notated. Many of the film reels within collections have been spliced together, not necessarily chronologically, and jump from location to location. Without the guidance of a sound track or the original film makers intentions, or knowledge and experience of the specifics of a place and its history, the remaining ‘film evidence’ is left in a liminal state of indeterminacy.

‘Who is that person?’ ‘Where is this place?’ ‘What is happening?’ ‘What status does this material have in terms of history and understanding?’ These are questions asked, but not necessarily answered in the work.

In foregrounding the actual experience of working with an archive and placing the materiality of the film as central, it has meant that rather than going into the archive looking for material to support a predetermined narrative, I have instead sought to explore the archive with an appropriate openness and respond to the narratives perceived within the material itself. What this has actually thrown up was not the ‘hidden meanings and messages’ as anticipated, but instead a persistence of visions, images that kept reoccurring over time and space, and remained with me on my departure from the archives. The piece has resolved itself to become a reference to the centrality of the film medium and to history as memory.



Installation shot, Manchester Chinese Art Center, 2005

## Background Information | Persistent Visions

Erika Tan will be showing new work from her research with the Moving Image Archive at the Empire and Commonwealth Museum, Bristol, which is the culmination of a research project commissioned by Picture This, a Bristol-based moving image projects agency.

Tan will be working with super 8 film taken and donated to the archive by individuals and families who were once stationed in the former British Colonies as part of the colonial elite. The filmic explorations cover vast regions, from Malaysia to Kenya, The Suez Canal to Hong Kong, the political to the personal.

Cine cameras were used to record a personal response to family and working life in a particular place and time. By interrogating the vaults of stored material culture Tan will illuminate hidden meanings and messages, unearthing personal and subjective histories hidden by the grander structures of empire. Having grown up in a commonwealth country, Singapore, and her with her background in anthropology Erika's interest is in museological issues such as the nature, status and classification of archive collections. Her work is often informed by specific cultural, geographical or physical contexts - exploring different media to excite and confront an audience.

Commissioned by **Picture This** as part of *Ghosting*, a series of research-based commissions on the themes of archive, memory and ethnography funded by Arts Council England.

A publication charting artists' use of archives and archival material will be published by Picture This and launched in 2006.

Persistent Visions will be shown in Manchester Chinese Art Center (solo show) in March 2005; Chapter Gallery, Cardiff as part of Ghosting in November 2005; Angle Row Gallery, Nottingham as part of Ghosting in February 2006.





### **Technical Information** | Persistent Visions

Equipment: 3 x Pioneer DVD Players. 1 x DVD synchronizer  
3 x screens (currently just over 3m wide- but can be shown in different dimensions)

Sound: Currently there is not sound track, however I am working on a surround sound track for the piece in which case the following would be needed:

1 x 5.1 capable AMP with 5 speakers - Or dependant on sound track produced:  
3 amps and 6 to 15 speakers

### **License** | Persistent Visions

Much of the copyright of the material used in Persistent Visions is still held by the original owner of the footage or the Empire & Commonwealth Museum. I do however have the necessary licenses/permissions to show this work internationally.

### **Contact** | Persistent Visions

Artist:

Erika Tan

130 Kelson House, Stewart Street, London E14 6RH.

Tel: +44 (0)207 5151510 or mobile +44 (0)7957 468 123. Email: Tan904@aol.com

Commissioner:

Jo Lanyon

Picture This Moving Image, Spike Island Studios, 40 Sydney Row, Bristol, BS1 6UH.

Tel: +44 (0)117 9257010. Email: jo.lanyon@picture-this.org.uk

