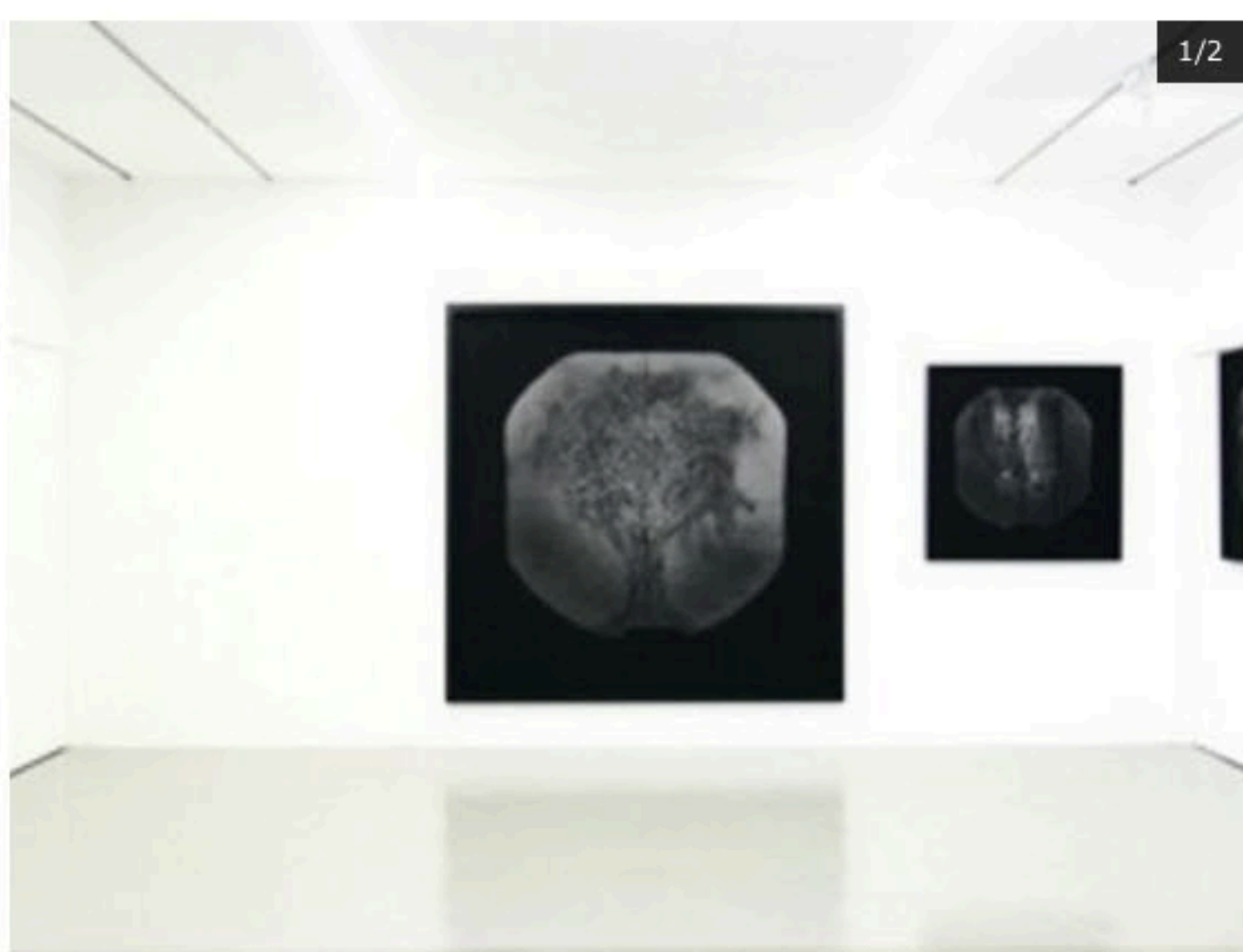


## Art review: The World Surrounding an Indoor Plant



John Clang's exhibition The World Surrounding An Indoor Plant at FOST...

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*John Clang's new exhibition shows his observations of the people around him*

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SINGAPORE — Drawing might not be the first thing you would associate with Singaporean photographer and visual artist John Clang, so his apparently drawing-focused exhibition, *The World Surrounding an Indoor Plant*, adds a layer of curiosity with its whiplash-inducing turnabout, in terms of Clang's apparent medium.

While at first look it seems like he is displaying works that portray charcoal drawings on paper, upon close inspection, one realises that they are actually photographs of drawings.

It is the end result of a process in which Clang projected an image using a vintage magic lantern, drew an impression of that projection, re-photographed it, and printed it at a larger scale. As far as Clang is concerned, this is not a departure from his established work, but an extension, quipping that those who feel otherwise "only say that because it doesn't look like a photograph".

In reaching back to the technologies predating both digital and film cameras, this exhibition bucks the trend of ever-increasing technological sophistication. Rather than the ubiquitous digital wizardry of image manipulation, his method foregrounds the material fact of images, their production and their subjects. Whittling down an image to an impression highlights the subjectivity of photography as part of image-making in general, and not an objective exception to the norm.

Clang's inspiration comes not from literary sources or other artists, but "from what I see and experience; what I've witnessed from the people around me, be they family, strangers, or friends". The images, fittingly, are derived from people such as Clang's god-daughter, wife, parents, and so on. However, their abstraction, through the artist's process, generalises these intimate glimpses — and allows us to project our own experiences and relationships onto these images.

Just as these still images are reduced or abstracted to impressions, a number of video works presented in the show reverses the process, beginning with an impression and extrapolating from there. They take the form of tiny projections on screens the size of a postcard, like a stripped-down, miniaturised cinema. These impressions, to be specific, are snatches of conversations overheard by the artist, cut from their original context and cultured, so to speak, into a sort of mutant offshoot.

Lasting anywhere from 43 seconds to just over two minutes, these looping scenarios come across as alternately surreal, wistful and even erotically charged; for instance, "Are you bored of being with me" features a woman in bed, contorting herself to get her legs behind her head, while "It's raining outside. Bring an umbrella" is a video portrait of the artist in Taoist robes of mourning, posing with his parents.

It may seem tricky to reconcile all of these observations, impressions and evocations with the rather odd exhibition title, but it is simple enough to Clang. "Oh, the indoor plant is me. I spend most of my time on my own, looking around quietly. Being the indoor plant is like observing family and friends in a very residential kind of frame, because they don't really go out, and they need very little water and sun. All they do is just look."

*The World Surrounding an Indoor Plant will run until Sept 4. From 11am to 7pm, Tuesdays to Saturdays, and 11am to 6pm on Sundays. Mondays and public holidays by appointment only. At Fost Gallery, #01-02, 1 Lock Road. Admission is free.*

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