

ANGELA

TIATIA

THE

FALL



The Margaret Lawrence Gallery is thrilled to exhibit Angela Tiatia's major work *The Fall*. Operatic in scale and vision *The Fall* is an emotionally charged work rich in symbol and nuance. We are indebted to the artist and her representatives Sullivan + Strumpf Sydney for their assistance in developing this exhibition and we thank guest writer, Sabrina Baker for her insights in this publication. Last but not least, we thank and congratulate Angela for her extraordinary capacity to generate intense and impactful imagery that profoundly fuses events of the past with interpretations of the present and visions of the future.

Dr David Sequeira
Director, Margaret Lawrence Gallery

Angela Tiatia's compelling video *The Fall* draws from oral and written accounts of the survivors of the fall of Singapore in February of 1942. Commissioned by The Australian War Memorial and The National Museum of Singapore, Tiatia was asked to respond to the Battle of Singapore, a military retreat described by Winston Churchill as 'the worst disaster'¹ in British history. *The Fall* extrapolates this moment by speaking to contemporary geographical, ideological, environmental politics and concerns.

Whilst undertaking extensive research in Singapore, Tiatia collated written records and oral accounts from survivors. The common thread amongst these stories is the eerie quiet that settled over Singapore before and during the event. In a single slow-motion take, Tiatia's camera pans along unfolding chaos. Men run past with machetes, soldiers eat flowers for virility and young women age themselves by applying flour to their hair. The artist deftly weaves scenes of terror and distress amongst moments of tenderness and care. Visually rich and detailed, there is much to take in and the constant roll of the lense instills an urgency to the film. A second channel/screen presents a more tightly focused view of the main projection, heightening the intensity of the characters as their social fabric crumbles around them.

Whilst commissioned with a specific brief, Tiatia's response is more expansive than a historical or literal depiction of military failure – she focuses on the experience of individuals and communities surviving amongst chaos. Although the disintegration of a past social order is the starting point for *The Fall*, the work has resonance within the current political and environmental landscape, offering a dystopian vision of the future.

In the final moments of the video, Tiatia and her crew are reflected, signalling her own (and the audience's) complicity as witnesses and participants in uncertain times. The politics of Pacific communities and people are central to Tiatia's art practice. More specifically Tiatia is interested in the challenges faced by these communities around the ongoing reverberations and aftershocks colonisation, and the impact of climate change.

Tiatia often places her body in the centre of her work making the political personal. *Dark Light* references one of Australia's most iconic photographs, Max Dupain's *The Sunbaker* (1937)². Originally commissioned by the Australian Centre for Photography for the exhibition *Under the Sun*³, Tiatia inserts her own body amongst a lush tropical grove of plants and an enormous crystal chandelier. The white male body of Dupain's *Sunbaker* is replaced with an indigenous female body, a sandy beach is replaced with a forest and the bright natural sunshine is replaced with dimmed studio lights. The chandelier embodies the opulence and decadence of the west. This idea is echoed in the current Australian government's policy around reliance on coal for electricity which leaves Pacific nations exposed to greater risk of climate disaster.

Both the *The Fall* and *Dark Light* demonstrate Tiatia's commitment to story-telling through video. Through these works Tiatia articulates a complex layering of multiple ideas, themes and narratives with clarity and immediacy. In relief to traditional viewpoints of contemporary culture, connected with colonialism, gender and commodification Tiatia offers a place to reflect. In the artist's own words 'we now live in uncertain times, and the choices that we and our leaders make can have far-reaching consequences'.⁴

Sabrina Baker
Guest Writer and Artist
Program Manager, West Space



1. Gleuckstein, Fred, "Churchill and The Fall of Singapore", International Churchill Society. Accessed 11 May 2019. <https://winstonchurchill.org/publications/finest-hour/finest-hour-169/churchill-and-the-fall-of-singapore/>

2. Art Gallery of New South Wales "Sunbaker (1937, printed 1970s) Max Dupain". Accessed May 13, 2019. <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/115.1976/>

3. Australian Centre for Photography "Under the Sun: Reimagining Max Dupain's Sunbaker". Accessed May 13, 2019. <https://acp.org.au/pages/under-the-sun-re-imaging-max-dupains-sunbaker>

4. Tiatia, Angela, "The Fall: An Artist Statement by Angela Tiatia", *After The Fall catalogue*, National Museum of Singapore 2017

All images:
Angela Tiatia *The Fall* 2017
two-channel high definition video
4 minutes 58 seconds

Courtesy Angela Tiatia,
Sullivan+Strumpf Sydney



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