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**Allan deSouza and Yong Soon Min: Arts from Multiple Borders**

A Thesis Presented

by

**Kyungso Min**

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

**Master of Arts**

in

**Art History and Criticism**

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Abstract of the Thesis

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This work seeks to examine how the experiences and memories of crossing national border lines are visually embodied in the art of two artists of Asian descent, Allan deSouza and Yong Soon Min. In both their individual and joint practices, which interpret the idea of boundaries in varied contexts, the “belonging to nowhere” idea is transformed into a powerful multisensory event. Framing deSouza and Min’s works within the narrative of borders, therefore, can help one appreciate the significance of cooperation for diaspora artists, particularly in embracing their displacement and replacement experiences. The first two chapters attempt to scrutinize the different tactics of each artist in investigating the border theme. If deSouza’s *Threshold* pictorially reenacts his own recollection of his encounter with the West through highly realistic images of empty air terminals, Min’s two archival installations inspired by the DMZ consider the politically demarcated border in an instinctive way by alluding to universal and personal understandings of crossing national frontiers. The last chapter focuses on the two artists’

collaborative multimedia installation, *Projectory*, exhibited at the seventh Gwangju Biennale held in Seoul, South Korea. Here, the way in which their individual artistic strategies are integrated into one shared concern through inviting audiences to participate in the narratives they have built is delineated. The ultimate aim of this thesis, thus, is to provoke dynamic discussion on the approaches that artists from different cultural and political backgrounds employ to establish a common ground.

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## Introduction

Viktor Navorski (Tom Hanks), the protagonist of Steven Spielberg's 2004 film *The Terminal*, had sojourned in New York's John F. Kennedy airport for nine months. Due to the military coup that has broken out in his home country of Krakozhia, the United States no longer identifies it as a sovereign nation and denies Viktor's entry to their territory, making him "a man of no country." Overlapping with his fragile nationality and invalid passport, the terminal building in this film metaphorically visualizes the place where borders of countries become obscure and even fluid. Spielberg's cinematic portrayal of the air terminal is an interesting mainstream example of the "belonging to nowhere," an idea that has been dynamically explored by diaspora artists who possess distinct memories and emotions for this in-between space. The present thesis discusses two such artists from Asian origins as exemplifications of this subject: Allan deSouza (b.1958) and Yong Soon Min (b.1953).

The artistic partnership between deSouza and Min resulted in a number of co-productions reflecting their shared concerns on the identities of the diaspora living in Western countries. Of special importance, one distinct thematic concept serves as a significant motif binding their practices together. It is the border, where their diasporic journeys began and continue to weave numerous narratives. Thus, an analysis of this leitmotif observed within deSouza and Min's bodies of works will allow us to discuss a possible way of understanding their affinities as participants of the diaspora and diaspora art.

deSouza's migrating route spans four continents, from Asia to Africa, from Africa to Europe, and from Europe to America. He was born in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1958, to parents who emigrated from Goa, the small state on the west coast of the Indian subcontinent that had been governed by Portugal for 450 years before India's invasion and reabsorption in 1961. However,

east Africa's growing hostility toward Asian immigrants stemming from its rapid decolonization and burgeoning patriotism forced his family to leave Kenya for England in 1965. In the early 1990s, deSouza came to the U.S. After living and working first in New York, he currently lives in California.<sup>1</sup> As art critic Margo Machida astutely detected, deSouza's experiences of living in the Indian diaspora and moving through multiple regions led him to constantly redefine his identity with regard to "different nation-states and cultural groupings."<sup>2</sup> It is also notable that he defined his hybridity as "an Americanized British Luso-Indo-African" and his case as "the norm in this world of mass migration."<sup>3</sup> To be short, deSouza's awareness of his multinational identity provides a glimpse of what sorts of characteristics he has fashioned as an artist living in the postcolonial era.

Participation in the third Havana Biennial for the group exhibition of British artists of Asian and African descent in 1989 was an instrumental moment in deSouza's artistic path, since it was there that he met his future partner, Yong Soon Min.<sup>4</sup> A Korean American conceptual artist, Min worked in New York at that time and helped deSouza to resettle in the U.S.<sup>5</sup> As an immigrant of the so-called "1.5 generation," her installations, performances, and curatorial

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<sup>1</sup> On deSouza and his family's multiple migrating history, see Allan deSouza, "My Mother, My Sight," in *The Oldest We've Ever Been: Seven True Stories of Midlife Transitions*, ed. Maud Lavin (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2008), 54-70; Margo Machida, *Unsettled Visions: Contemporary Asian American Artists and the Social Imaginary* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2008), 75-7.

<sup>2</sup> Machida, 228.

<sup>3</sup> Allan deSouza, "Name Calling," in *Looking Both Ways: Art of the Contemporary African Diaspora*, eds. Laurie Ann Farrell and Valentijn Byvanck (New York: Museum for African Art, 2003), 21.

<sup>4</sup> Along with deSouza, Sonia Boyce, Shaheen Merali, Pitika Ntuli and Keith Piper participated in the Havana Biennial. See Isobel Whitelegg, "Making Art Global (Part 1): The Third Havana Biennale," *Third Text*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (2012), 373.

<sup>5</sup> Two years later, deSouza came to New York for the *Interrogating Identity* exhibition, held in the NYU Grey gallery, and Min introduced him to her fellows of "Godzilla," a group of New York-based Asian American visual artists and arts professionals. Alexandra Chang, *Envisioning Diaspora: Asian American Visual Arts Collectives from Godzilla, Godzookie, to the Barnstormers* (Beijing; Shanghai: Timezone 8, 2008), 180.

projects have investigated how the formation of visual modes are influenced by cultural and geopolitical environment of race and national identification. Born in Seoul, South Korea, Min and her family boarded an airplane to Monterey, California, in 1960. After receiving her MFA from UC Berkeley in 1979, she moved to New York where she became associated with Asian American cultural activism. Encounters with numerous artists and activists from Asian heritages in the groups like “the Asian American Art Alliances,” “Binary,” “Young Koreans United,” and “Godzilla” nurtured Min’s awareness of her dually marginalized position as a colored woman living in American society. It also directed Min to explore her relationship with her native country and other immigrant groups in general.<sup>6</sup>

The artistic alliance between deSouza and Min is of significant interest in the phase in which their personal ideas around constant relocations and manifold boundaries are expanded into broader sociocultural issues. Surprisingly, although there are a number of prominent studies focusing on each artist, there has been almost no academic attention given specifically to their collaborations.<sup>7</sup> The present thesis, therefore, departs from the assumption that examining the way that the experiences and memories of crossing national border lines are embodied in their individual artistic practices will take us closer to grasp the significance of cooperation for diaspora artists.

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<sup>6</sup> On detailed personal histories and artistic activities of Min, *ibid.*, 226-31; Jeongim Seo, “Korea and America, Cross the Boundary between Two Homes,” *Article*, Vol. 33 (April, 2014), 29-30.

<sup>7</sup> Hyeon-joo Kim, “Korean/American/Women: Diasporic Identity of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Yong Soon Min,” *Hyeondaemisulsayeongu*, Vol. 13 (2001), 61-101; Kobena Mercer, “Allan DeSouza: Let’s Get Lost,” in *Fresh Talk / Daring Gazes: Conversations on Asian American Art*, eds. Elaine H. Kim, Margo Machida, and Sharon Mizota (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 107-10; Steven Nelson, “Allan deSouza: Seeing is (not necessarily) Believing,” in *Looking Both Ways*, 74-83; Hwa Young Choi Caruso, “Art as a Political Act: Expression of Cultural Identity, Self-Identity, and Gender by Suk Nam Yun and Yong Soon Min,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (Autumn, 2005), 71-87.

Elaine H. Kim briefly introduced their joint practice in her catalogue essay written in the early 1990s. Elaine H. Kim, “A Different Dream: Eleven Korean North American Artists,” in *Across the Pacific: Contemporary Korean and Korean-American Art*, eds. Jane Farver et al. (New York: The Queens Museum of Art, 1994), 95.

Through scrutiny of their collaborative project along with their individual works, I will attempt to analyze how these artists' approaches toward the same question can be differentiated from each other. It will help us to see through their strategy and strength in joint production. Interpretation of their works based on critical concepts or ideas of postcolonial theories—particularly of Frantz Fanon, Homi K. Bhabha, Benedict Anderson, and Edward Said— will also be added for a more in-depth discussion. Finally, by building an organic linkage among the works under the development of the idea of boundary, the aim here is to provide a new framework for considering the ways that artists from different cultural backgrounds constitute a common ground for the discourse on shared concerns of diaspora, displacement and replacement.

## Chapter 1

### Border as Pictorial Encounter: Allan deSouza's *Threshold*

It was London where deSouza began to convey his ongoing concern with “the shifting terrains of diaspora” within his oeuvre.<sup>8</sup> While working in England prior to his settlement in the U.S. in 1991, deSouza was enthusiastically involved with the Black Arts Movements that had arisen in the 1960s by black British artists of African, Caribbean, and South Asian origins. As noted by Machida, the black power movement and the Harlem Renaissance in the U.S, accompanied by the anticolonial struggles in African and Asian countries, stimulated various non-white artists to take cooperative actions comprising “a common antiracist and anti-imperialist agenda” against hegemonic art institutions and conservative British art history.<sup>9</sup>

Highly motivated by this artistic and social milieu, deSouza performed some alternative activities, such as planning art exhibitions in an abandoned building and teaching artists how to use photocopiers and flyers. In 1988, deSouza contributed in the establishment of the artist collective, the Panchayt Arts Education Resource Unit, as well as working as writer and critic for art journals, including *Artrage* and *Bazaar*.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, his co-curated the *Crossing Black Waters* exhibition with Shaheen Merali in 1992 brought together South Asian artists based in Britain and in the Indian subcontinents. In order to examine the discourse on the diaspora and the politics of dislocation, deSouza and Merali introduced various artistic practices, primarily centering on their bicultural identity and the experience of relocation.<sup>11</sup> Briefly, some shared

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<sup>8</sup> Olaia Gallego and Juan Gallego, “Allan deSouza,” *View of the Times*, No.1 (2005), n.p.

<sup>9</sup> Machida, 77.

<sup>10</sup> *Artrage* is a London-based art magazine, published by the alternative nonprofit organization, Minorities Arts Advisory Service; *Bazaar*, published in London, mainly featured South Asian contemporary art. Chang, 180.

<sup>11</sup> It opened at the Leicester City Gallery in 1991 and toured several venues in Britain. For the details of this

consciousness on the peripheral status in Britain's cultural scene that gained from these active participations in the movement allowed deSouza to reconsider his approach to the themes on the diaspora.

In fact, during his art education at the Bath Academy of Art and then Goldsmiths College in London, he had mainly worked in painting. However, photography became his primary method of expression, during and subsequent to his immersion in the Black Arts Movements.<sup>12</sup> Particularly, his continued investigation on the formation of racial and colonial identities is visually specified in his pictorial images of borders, produced in the mid-1990s. His pictured spaces are closed to entrances or doorways connecting "here" and "there" of borders, whereas Victor's terminal in the film symbolizes "the third space" which is not belong to "here," nor "there."

Experiences on a border and the crossing of a borderline have been of particular appealed to artists of multicultural background as a creative inspiration. Kobena Mercer, an art historian, astutely linked the possible loss in illusions, attachments, and identities that are embedded in travel, to postcolonial artists' searching for their displaced self as result of "passing through the subjective spaces of migration, diaspora, and multiple belongings."<sup>13</sup> In the introduction of *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha also mentioned the ways some keywords in his discussion of cultural hybridity, such as "boundary," "interstitial space," and "in the beyond," are embodied in the practices of contemporary artists, Renée Green, Guillermo Gomez-Peña, Pepon Osorio, and Alan Sekula.<sup>14</sup> What is particularly noticeable in Bhabha's examples is Sekula's

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exhibition, see Allan deSouza, "The Flight of/from the Primitive," *Third Text*, Vol. 11, No. 38 (1997), 65-79.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Mercer, 107.

<sup>14</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 4-12.

photograph series capturing landscape of harbors, *Fish Story* (1996). Bhabha read these pictures of trade ports as a metaphor for the stage where “the borderline condition of cultural translation” is at its “global limit.” At the same time, he pointed out that transnational exchanges and exploitation conveyed in these in-between locations are not simultaneous, in terms of time and space. Based upon its attention on the hybridity and fluidity immanent in global harbors, *Fish Story* seems to parallel with deSouza’s pictorial presence of interstitial space in *Threshold* (1996–8) [Fig. 1]. Contrary to Sekula’s works, which concentrated on documenting places of trade and consumption associated with the act of international trade, however, deSouza’s camera lens was mainly focused on emotional and physical experiences of people who pass the border line.<sup>15</sup>

*Threshold*, which illustrates transitional spaces, consisted of 24 chromogenic color prints, equal to the number of frames in one second of film.<sup>16</sup> deSouza took pictures of various inner spaces of air terminals—gates, escalators, ceilings of the terminal building, airplanes seen through the windows, wall decorations, waiting areas, and signboards—in a hyper-realistic manner, by heightening the light and the color variation. The airports photographed in this work are located in international metropolises, such as Belfast, London, Lisbon, and Tokyo, as well as in major American cities, like Burlington, Washington D.C., New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, points on the flight routes familiar to the artist. Especially for the present-day immigrants or global nomads, like deSouza, these places embody not just the first entries to new country, but also the points of crossing and re-crossing. As he commented, these spaces denote “the ambivalence of travel: anticipation and loss; excitement and frustration; the desire for new futures, the escape from a past.”<sup>17</sup> To put it differently, these temporally passing spaces, in

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<sup>15</sup> On the details of Sekula’s works, see Alan Sekula, *Fish Story* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 1996).

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Allan deSouza via Email. April 14, 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Allen deSouza, unpublished slide notes, n.d., quoted in Machida, 229.

which a lot of contradictory emotions and memories cohabited, act as the pictorial allegory for both contemporary migrations in general and, more specifically, the artist's personal wandering to negotiate his own position within the world.

In one interview, deSouza remarked, "everything you imagine the West is going to be.... Everything seems so wealthy, everything is so clean."<sup>18</sup> Assumed from this account, these glamorous and well-arranged interiors of the terminals captured by him could be understood as indicating a sense of the distances that emigrants and exiles must have felt in these spaces of arrival, departure, and transition. These elegant, sterile, unfamiliar interiors foreshadow the immigrants' future life as strangers in their adopted society, as well. According to Machida, there is a strong interrelation between the institutional quality of airports and the way the attitude of the third world emigrants and the perception on their arrival moments are formatted.<sup>19</sup> On this aspect, deSouza stated,

[T]he crossing of such borders is an act often entailing a degree of violence and trauma. ... I refer more to the migrant, the refugee, and the victim of assault or subjugation; those whose views of life have changed due to threat to their own, those for whom life has become precious or overburdened by the awareness or proximity of difference and/or mortality.<sup>20</sup>

Arguably, deSouza's photographic imageries exhibit the intricate relationship inherited in the supposedly neutral sites—anxiety not only for those hoping to cross borders, but also for those already living inside the borders.

The complete absence of people and life is the most notable characteristic found in

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<sup>18</sup> Machida, 230.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 229-30.

<sup>20</sup> Allan deSouza, "Sushi Deluxe: Star Trek, Oedipus and the Native Informant," *New Observations*, Vol. 107 (1995), 27.



*Threshold*. It seems the artist's intention to force viewers into an encounter with sheer architecture, which is usually covered by human activity.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, this manipulation evokes both the allure and the terror such spaces can hold for migrants, since such "threshold" spaces between the entering and the leaving guide migrants to form their first impression on the new country, as the artist explained,

I wanted to depict these spaces almost as a "first encounter;" almost as though the viewer had entered into these spaces alone and was seeing them for the first time without the interference of other passengers/travelers. In some ways, they are a fictional re-enactment of my own first encounter with "western" spaces, which was with an airport, Frankfurt airport, actually, during my family's migration from Kenya to England. I was also interested in the architecture and signage of these spaces, and wanted these to be the subject, rather than the presence of people.<sup>22</sup>

In order to call attention to the architectural features, deSouza printed the images in saturated tones. As seen in the depiction of the waiting room in JFK terminal and its ceiling structure extending from the circular pillar, the saturated tones of the images underscore the impersonal and highly utilitarian nature of the settings [Fig. 2]. Thanks to his strategic elimination of all references to humanity, furthermore, the long escalators and the moving walks in London's Heathrow airport, primarily designed to expedite the movement of large masses of people from point to point, seem almost useless here [Fig. 3]. It tells us that what are trapped in these in-between spaces for good are not human, but the lifeless objects filling the space for them. Losing their sole function, therefore, these architectural elements' seeming firmness and permanence make a stark contrast with the fluidity and instability of migrating people who constantly are in and out of these places.

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<sup>21</sup> See his introduction of the works. <http://allandesouza.com/index.php?/photography/threshold/>.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Allan deSouza via Email. April 14, 2014.

In the words of Steven Nelson, deSouza's pictorially reenacted spaces represent "structures of vision to play with the boundaries erected between the artificial and the real."<sup>23</sup> Nelson also found the strength of deSouza's photographs to lie in their possibilities of "multiplicity, ambivalence, and open-ended readings," which are unfettered from "one metanarrative" that is no replaceable.<sup>24</sup> Taken from this regard, the in-transit areas pictured by him symbolize the artificial boundaries resulting from the recent history of a given nation. Echoing Benedict Anderson's idea of "Imagined Communities," which raised the questions on the present nation concept, deSouza's manipulated illustrations of transitory places make us to question our previous notions of border.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Nelson, 75.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>25</sup> According to Anderson, a "nation" is a socially constructed community that the people who perceive themselves as part of that group imagined. For the detailed interpretation, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York; Verso, 2006).

## Chapter 2

### Border as Narrative Engagement: Yong Soon Min's DMZ

While deSouza explored the concept of border in a somewhat conceptual way, Min tried to present the politically demarcated border in an intuitive way by alluding to universal and personal experiences of crossing national frontiers. In the mid-1990s, she produced a number of installations inspired by the DMZ.<sup>26</sup> The DMZ is a “Demilitarized Zone,” a geopolitical imposition that bisects two warring factions; one had once divided Vietnam, and one still exists in South and North Korea. Despite its name, the DMZ is regarded as the most militarized area in the world, a constant reminder of the political, ideological, and military tensions continuing in the Korean peninsula. Min actually visited the DMZ in 1995 and traveled North Korea in 1998.<sup>27</sup> Thus, for her, the DMZ emblemizes the ambiguous and fragmented border, given that she is now in a rather neutral position between her two native countries. In one interview, Min defined her practices as the “questions of positionality,” and two installation works discussed in this chapter show her efforts to find her own “position” within the world around her.<sup>28</sup>

To begin with, *DMZ Xing* (1994) [Fig. 4] is a large scale installation, commissioned by Real Art Ways, a non-profit arts organization based in Hartford, Connecticut. In 1994, Real Art Ways asked Min to create an artwork about a segment of Asian Americans. She began her work by interviewing local Southeast Asian refugees—Laotian, Hmong, Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Amerasian—who had been resettled in the state. Through intensive interviews conducted over

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<sup>26</sup> Hong-hee Kim, “Yong Soon Min’s Movement,” in *Movement* (Northampton, MA: Smith College Museum of Art, 2008), n.p.

<sup>27</sup> Hyeon-joo Kim, 88.

<sup>28</sup> David Joselit, “Ring of Fire: Interview with Joe Lewis and Yong Soon Min,” *Art Journal*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (Winter, 1998), 87.

several months, she was able to collect a large body of textual and visual materials. The materials covered the stories of five communities, like the situations in refugees' homelands during war, the ways in which they had come to the U.S., and their circumstances since settlement. Remarkably, her own immigrant story and similarity between the Vietnam War and the Korean War, alongside these communities' recollection of war and relocation and their current bicultural life, constituted the core of this work.<sup>29</sup>

The multilayered and intersecting memories and histories of migrants were displayed within a rotunda-like structure in which the spatial interplay of the various elements of the structure was heightened. An 8ft tall circular construction was fabricated to display texts, images, and historical references, reflective of the life trajectories of many Asian refugees and migrant families. On the sixteen vertical panels made in translucent glasses, photographs and texts that Min collected from her interviews and preliminary investigations on sociopolitical events relevant to their dispersal were attached. She sequentially arrayed these panels such that each is bound up with a different theme and made them densely overlaid with texts which are lightly engraved into their radiant surfaces. Followed by the geometric lines on the floor, these glass panels were converged to the freestanding octagonal pillar situated at the heart of the edifice.

Significantly, by presenting an experimental space, Min intended to make viewers physically negotiate with the work. Here, audiences were led to enter this DMZ-like arena; explore it, appreciating the pictures and reading the texts; and finally, emerge from the structure and the associated catharsis. As a consequence, staying inside the piece offered viewers an experience at the forbidden border line. In this sense, Machida's assertion that Min purposed "to jolt audiences by making the process of engaging with the installation physically uncomfortable"

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<sup>29</sup> For the larger discussion on this project, see Yong Soon Min, "DMZ XING," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (1997), 134-9. Also see Caruso, 83-4; Machida, 159-67.

is also applicable. She goes on to stress Min's intention of using glass and mirrors whose "transparent and reflective properties" turned the personal and historical memories into "the elusive, fragmentary, and temporary" ones.<sup>30</sup> That is, the artist sought to transform an encounter between the piece and the viewer into an instinctive and physical experience, and not to confine it within a mere apprehension of the narratives.

*Bridge of No Return* (1997) [Fig. 5] also borrows its central motive from the DMZ. The title denotes the bridge that crosses on the military demarcation line, drawn between South and North Korea. This bridge was used for the exchange of prisoners at the end of the Korean War. The war prisoners were given the choice to go either to South or North Korea; once the choice was made, it could not be reversed, nor could the bridge be re-crossed.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the coexistence of two opposing concepts—linking and isolating— within this bridge turns it to a border line that can never be crossed.

This mixed media installation is an S-shaped wall, constructed of translucent aluminum wire and wood frame. On either side of this huge partition, culturally charged photographs and texts are hung. Pale pink images facing one way were placed on one side of the fence, representing the South Korean territory. The images include South Korea's national flower, the mugunghwa, the traditional fan dance, and pictures of historical events. On the reverse side, which is symbolized by a pale blue color, propagandist clippings, image of North Korea's national flower (the magnolia), and scenes of children who are suffering from starvation stand in juxtaposition. Around these visual materials, lots of small magnets are attached in floating forms, as if they reject fixation in a particular moment or place. Some specific words referring time,

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<sup>30</sup> Machida, 164.

<sup>31</sup> Hyeon-ju Kim, 90-2.

space, movement, and history, like “day,” “degree zero,” “arrivals,” and “final frontier,” are put on the magnets, amplifying the intended mood. Accordingly, as noted by Holland Cotter, *Bridge of No Return* requires audiences to engage with the work through “slow looking and reading.”<sup>32</sup>

Seen in my view, the most intriguing part of this work is that the netting of the wall and a serpentine form make this wire structure look like the cease-fire line installed at the DMZ rather than the bridge itself. Made with barbed wire entanglements, this fence horizontally divides the DMZ. Based upon this parallel in shape, it can be argued that the work turns the entire gallery space into the bordering place that belongs to neither South Korea nor North Korea, as the DMZ actually does.<sup>33</sup> Both sides are head toward each other, because of the magnetic power. However, the encounter never takes place due to the very narrow gap between the two walls. It is possible to observe the other side; however, the perspectives inevitably become refractive and incomplete. Hence, the concept of a border is represented as the space of aperture in *Bridge of No Return*, in both visual and conceptual ways, since these mutually penetrating walls metaphorically indicates the difference between the bifurcated nations from the same culture and history.

Most of the previous interpretations on Min’s oeuvre dealing with the DMZ motif laid their emphasis on the political aspects regarding the war experience rather than more the general idea of borders.<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, for present purposes, it is of interest to grasp how and why she tried to visualize the space where the ideological border is physically materialized, in comparison to deSouza’s strategy found in the *Threshold* series. This is because both artists widened the meaning of a “border” into a certain kind of psychological field in their artworks.

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<sup>32</sup> Holland Cotter, “Art in Review: Yong Soon Min ‘Bridge of No Return’,” *The New York Times*, June 19, 1998.

<sup>33</sup> In this sense, Min associated this work with “the third space,” the term discussed by Bhabha. Seo, 32.

<sup>34</sup> Hyeon-ju Kim, 90-2; Caruso, 82-4; Machida, 159-67; Chang, 228.

Akin to deSouza's photographs of empty terminals, Min's DMZ-like installations dynamically coped with the dichotomous sentiments involved in the frontier line: aspiration / disappointment, attachment / detachment, and expectation / fear.

## Chapter 3

### Expanded Boundary

#### 1) Participatory Collaborations by deSouza and Min

deSouza and Min have worked together since the early 1990s. Min recalled their first meeting as interesting vehicle “to share information about the Black British movement and the multicultural movement in the U.S.”<sup>35</sup> Particularly of their relationship, they say, “collaboration involves negotiation, sometimes compromise, but it can also be a joint exploration that can lead in different directions that we, working individually, would not otherwise take.”<sup>36</sup> It implies that they, as a team, have different approaches and artistic tactics toward the same topic from the vantage point of their individual visual languages. Above all, their cooperative projects largely concentrate on art’s interactive possibility, by inviting spectators to participate in the narratives they built.

For instance, in *alter idem/performing personae* (1994) [Fig. 6], deSouza and Min drew various elements from visual art, performance practice, and ethnography, and juxtaposed them to question the notion of “native informant.”<sup>37</sup> It was installed in a setting reminiscent of an archeological field study or a tourist site. In a dark room of the gallery, a white tent was set up and pictures of native subjects were aligned on the wall and the floor. Providing flashlights, the artists let spectators enter and observe the tent and gallery space, as the ethnographers or

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<sup>35</sup> Chang, 228.

<sup>36</sup> Yong Soon Min and Allan deSouza, “Will \*\*\*\* for Peace,” in Allan deSouza Website <http://allandesouza.com/index.php?/installation/will--for-peace/>, 3.

<sup>37</sup> This show was exhibited at Camerawork, London, from August 26 to September 24, 1994. The artists mentioned that the term “alter idem” could be roughly translated as “second or other self.” It was employed by them to refer to the construction of ethnicity. Yong Soon Min and Allan deSouza, “alter idem/performing personae,” *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1995), 86-9.



anthropologist from the Western culture had done in the primitive world that they “discovered” or “excavated.”<sup>38</sup> According to the artists, this work proposed to “unpack the various interpretations of identity within anthropological, ethnographic, performance, and visual culture research which produce indigenous people as ‘primitive’ in opposition to a ‘civilized’ West.”<sup>39</sup> That is, they introduced viewers to reconsider the hegemonic nature immanent in the ethnographical practices by positioning them in the experimental venue.

Another joint performance of both artists, titled *Will \*\*\*\* for Peace* (2002–3) [Fig. 7], is a remake of *Bed-ins for Peace* performed by John Lennon and Yoko Ono in 1969.<sup>40</sup> Whereas the original version contained a message against the Vietnam War, deSouza and Min used it as a way to comment on contemporary sociopolitical issues, like the bombing of Afghanistan and the invasion of Iraq. The environment of the exhibition space was articulated to accentuate the interactivity and simultaneity of the performance. To explain, in a 2003 version performed at Montreal’s Oboro Gallery, the front area was occupied with sound and various installation elements. As the couple’s bed was backed by a large mirrored wall, viewers had to turn the corner to see it. Masqueraded as Lennon and Ono, the artists, sitting on the bed, had conversations with audiences on various topics, including the U.S. policies, peace, spirituality, art, and performance. People were asked to cut deSouza and Min’s long black hair or fill the blank of the phrase “will \*\*\*\* for peace” printed on the handouts. In addition, deSouza and Min

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<sup>38</sup> The exhibition also included plenty of images in which the artists are wearing T-shirts with words such as “Native” or “Informant” printed on them. They were posed within different backdrops throughout Los Angeles, such as Mann’s Chinese theater or a car dealership with a marquee indicating “Domestics” and “Exotics.” Chang, 228.

<sup>39</sup> Min and deSouza, “alter idem/performing personae,” 87.

<sup>40</sup> It was firstly performed at the Mezzanine Gallery at the University of Minnesota in February, 2002 and then at Oboro Gallery in Montreal in 2003. Min and deSouza, “Will \*\*\*\* for Peace,” 1; Adele Chong, “Yong Soon Min and Allan deSouza,” *Parachute*, Vol. 112 (2003), n.p.

set up a digital recorder to project these interactions on to the opposite gallery wall.<sup>41</sup>

To sum up, these performances gained their dynamic and widening of meanings with the participation of the viewers. It is possible to conclude that the exchange between the artists and viewers plays a vital role in their collaborating works. More importantly, given that these works lead audiences to do a certain kind of acts, the ways of creating collaborative art by deSouza and Min can be regarded as very political in nature. Their joint installation, *Projectory* (2008) [Fig. 8], exemplifies what sorts of experiences and narratives are generated when politics is linked to the theme of a border.

## **2) MY DADA's *Projectory***

*Projectory* was exhibited at the seventh Gwangju Biennale, which was held in Gwangju, South Korea, in 2008. This biennale, directed by Nigerian-born American curator, Okwui Enwezor, was comprised of three sections under the title of “Annual Report”: “On the Road” was a report on the 36 exhibitions that have occurred or have been shown within a one year; “Position Papers” was a platform dedicated to curatorial proposals and experiments in exhibition practices by curators from Southeast Asia, North Africa, the U.S., and South Korea; lastly, “Insertions” presented a series of new and independent projects, either commissioned specifically for the biennale or called as proposals into the exhibition framework.<sup>42</sup> On the basis of the “Insertion” section, deSouza and Min formed a group with their fellow artist Abdelali

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<sup>41</sup> Min and deSouza, “Will \*\*\*\* for Peace,” 1-3.

<sup>42</sup> Enwezor explained that the seventh Gwangju Biennale was planned to provide a forum where reorientation of the role of cultural and institutional networks of contemporary art is widely debated, by focusing on of art creation and curatorial works produced both at global and local levels. For more details on the agenda of this exhibition, see Okwui Enwezor, “The Politics of Spectacle: The Gwangju Biennale and the Asian Century,” *Invisible Culture*, No. 15 (Fall, 2010), 12-39.

Dahrouch. The group's name, "MY DADA," is a combination of each member's reverse initials —"Min, Yong," "Dahrouch, Abdelali," and "deSouza, Allan." Grouping the three different non-European artists with the Dada label involved some play or punning on the term that had originated from European aesthetes and art history.<sup>43</sup>

MY DADA's multimedia installation, *Projectory* consists of two wedge-shaped areas; one is closed room and the other is open space confronting the surface wall of that room. These two parts were bridged and divided by a clear plastic screen. On the open side, a throwing-machine like a baseball pitcher that shoots projectiles against the screen was installed, while a video was projected from the viewers' side inside the room. This video contains numerous paragraphs that are changed depending on the strength of the gun shot-like sound generated by the pitching machine. Collected from different sources, the texts dealt with the controversy over the notorious photograph of Edward Said, who is well known for his postcolonial critical theory of Orientalism. In the picture, Said is throwing a stone over the Lebanon-Israeli border made with a wire fence. The outer wall covering the closed room was also decorated with this iconic picture, which was blurred to the extent of that it was comprised of halftone dots. Similar to *Threshold*, where the airport photographs serve as a reminder of deSouza's past and current memories on foreign spaces, Said's images was adopted in *Projectory* as a visual medium connecting the viewers and the subject of the work.

Interestingly, the artists inserted a part of Said's statement into both their proposal of *Projectory* and its screen.<sup>44</sup> It describes the day when the picture was taken. According to Said, during his family tour of southern Lebanon in 2000, he visited the recently evacuated "security

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<sup>43</sup> Interview with Allan deSouza via Email, April 14, 2014.

<sup>44</sup> MY DADA, "When is Throwing a Stone, Free Discourse," in *The 7th Gwangju Biennale: Annual Report*, ed., Gwangju Biennale (Gwangju: Gwangju Biennale, 2008), 440.

zone,” which had been militarily occupied by Israel for twenty years by that point. When he arrived, he saw large numbers of Lebanese visitors throwing stones across the still–heavily fortified border. Carried along by the atmosphere, he pitched a pebble towards an Israeli watchtower. This behavior was captured by a news photographer and his picture appeared in an Israeli newspaper, and it was soon spread all across the world. This image provoked immediate controversy, and Said was horribly described in such terms as “a rock throwing terrorist,” and “a man of violence.”<sup>45</sup> He released an official statement two days later in an attempt to explain his actions that had infuriated so many Israelis. Said wrote that members of the crowd near the border were throwing stones merely to “see whether in this disputed area they could reach the barbed wire” and defined it as just a “symbolic gesture of joy.”<sup>46</sup> This happening around his actions and the picture informs us that a trivial matter could effectively create social ripples when they occur in a symbolic space such as a border.

On further reflection, it is possible to suppose that the Israelis on the other side of the border take it such actions as a message of violence or an attack, even though Said officially denied any political implications of his action. In this sense, one may consider Frantz Fanon’s argument that only a decolonization process concomitant with violence can bring about political transformation, fundamentally overthrowing a colonial state. His seminal text, “On Violence” (1961), asserted that violence is regarded as a strategic mean in the recognition of colonial reality, when fragmented subjugated groups form a common class consciousness. Hence, it was the colonial politicians and intellectuals advocating peaceful decolonization who exposed the

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> On Said’s “throwing the stone” scandal, see Dinitia Smith, “A Stone’s Throw is a Freudian Slip,” *The New York Times*, March 10, 2001; Sunnie Kim, “Edward Said Accused of Stoning in South Lebanon,” *Columbia Spectator*, July 19, 2001.

colonized to the violence of a colonial authority.<sup>47</sup> Viewed from this stance, Said's behavior captured in the picture could be interpreted as symbolic resistance—or even Fanonian gesture—against the brutal circumstances that Palestine, his native country, has experienced in its recent history.

MY DADA maintained that *Projectory* pursued an examination of “the discourse surrounding Said's act, the resulting controversy, and its implications for political thought and action,” not just by mirroring the image itself. They further claimed,

[T]he act of throwing was a precursor to finger pointing, directing an observer's attention towards an object and ushering the abstract notion of 'it', of starting to differentiate between self and environment. In this regard, the point and the throw can be seen as articulations and boundary markers of identity, community and territory.<sup>48</sup>

This comment by the artists implied that Said's acts represented in their installations prompted audiences to consider the way this particular space is devised to bring about related issues. It also allows us to observe why MY DADA selected this picture as their main reference. In *Orientalism* (1979), Said showed his insights on the mechanisms of Orientalism in which geopolitical knowledge is distributed as a form of aesthetic, economic, social, historical, and philological texts.<sup>49</sup> By visually, materially, and psychologically repeating the author's intellectual attack on certain fixed ideas, *Projectory* aptly displayed the powerful relationships between geopolitical conceptions—the national boundaries as artificial markers— and artistic creations.

What makes this work more fascinating is that MY DADA literally built an architectural space that visualizes the concept of a border, reminiscent of Min's *DMZ Xing* and *Bridge of No*

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<sup>47</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 1-62.

<sup>48</sup> MY DADA, 440.

<sup>49</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979).

*Return*. A long diamond-shaped installation is separated into two contrasting triangles: One is bright and open, the other is dark and covered; one produces sound, and the other receives it. These divisions within the work help *Projectory* expand the dimensions of the experience by applying a wide range of materials that stimulate the viewers' multiple senses.

When we specifically concentrate on the viewers' experiences, they may feel some senses of violence from the repetitive sounds, thrown balls, and the flickering screen images in the claustrophobic setting; it is in parallel to the physical and psychological violence that Said provoked at the Lebanon–Israel border. These uncomfortable and uneasy senses evoked in the inner space of *Projectory* seem to result in part from the separation of certain “relations.” Two exclusive spheres, disconnected by the screen, create an ongoing “tension,” rather than a sense of “reconciliation,” making this work analogous to a type of participatory art, what Claire Bishop calls “relational antagonism.”<sup>50</sup> Its intended experiences, thus, are deeply involved with the issue of making connections between the two different groups or individuals, and how those relations are irrationally structured in both personal and national contexts. In brief, deSouza and Min were successful in inducing dynamic responses from spectators toward not only the specific boundary they built here, but also toward much broader issues that the traumatic history of colonialism has generated.

To conclude, by reenacting the very moment when Said was about to throw a stone, the artists led viewers to form their own experience of facing a border, and the experience's potential for violent repulsion. deSouza and Min attempted to evoke a sense of how one specific border—the border between Lebanon and Israel— can evolve into a universal context. In a nutshell, although their investigation originated from one distinct event, they developed it into

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<sup>50</sup> Claire Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” *October*, Vol. 110 (Fall, 2004), 51–79.

more general concern in *Projectory*. It suggests that the diasporas of different backgrounds can share the sensibility and the experience of displacement and replacement through their experimental and interactive practices.

## Conclusion

The *Threshold* series by deSouza perceptively captured the area where countless “passings” occur, in the motionless moment, by alluding to the set of ambivalent feelings inherent in those in transit, or between zones, as sensed by immigrants. Presenting pictures such as “the first encounter” with foreign cultures stems from the artist’s personal histories as part of a diaspora living in multiple locations. As the intentional removal of the human presence and activities in these airport photographs signified, he perceived national borders as the artificial boundaries that restrict free interaction between people and different cultures.

Investigating the same concept and working in a similar context, Min chose a bit different approach. By bring the DMZ motif into her works, she tried to shape experiential structures, offering information that reflected her concerns about the life of Asian immigrants and the trauma of the Cold War. In her mixed-media installations, the audience can enter a space that reminds them of the border that actually exists in the DMZ. It requires them to be more active and physically involve themselves with the work.

Lastly, in *Projectory*, deSouza’s shrewd insight into the subjectivity of photography was combined with Min’s self-contained installation, which induced spectator participation and the use of documentary materials. Said’s picture serves as a vital catalyst that initiates the narratives surrounding the borders that the artist have continuously explored. In the space specifically designed to evoke the moment that Said threw the stone over the border, viewers are guided to consider and use their own means of engaging with the idea of boundaries. For these reasons, it can be contended that deSouza and Min’s conception of a border went through several stages of evolution, which came to completion in their collaborative project, since the border formed in *Projectory* extended into a more universal concept, beyond their personal experience.

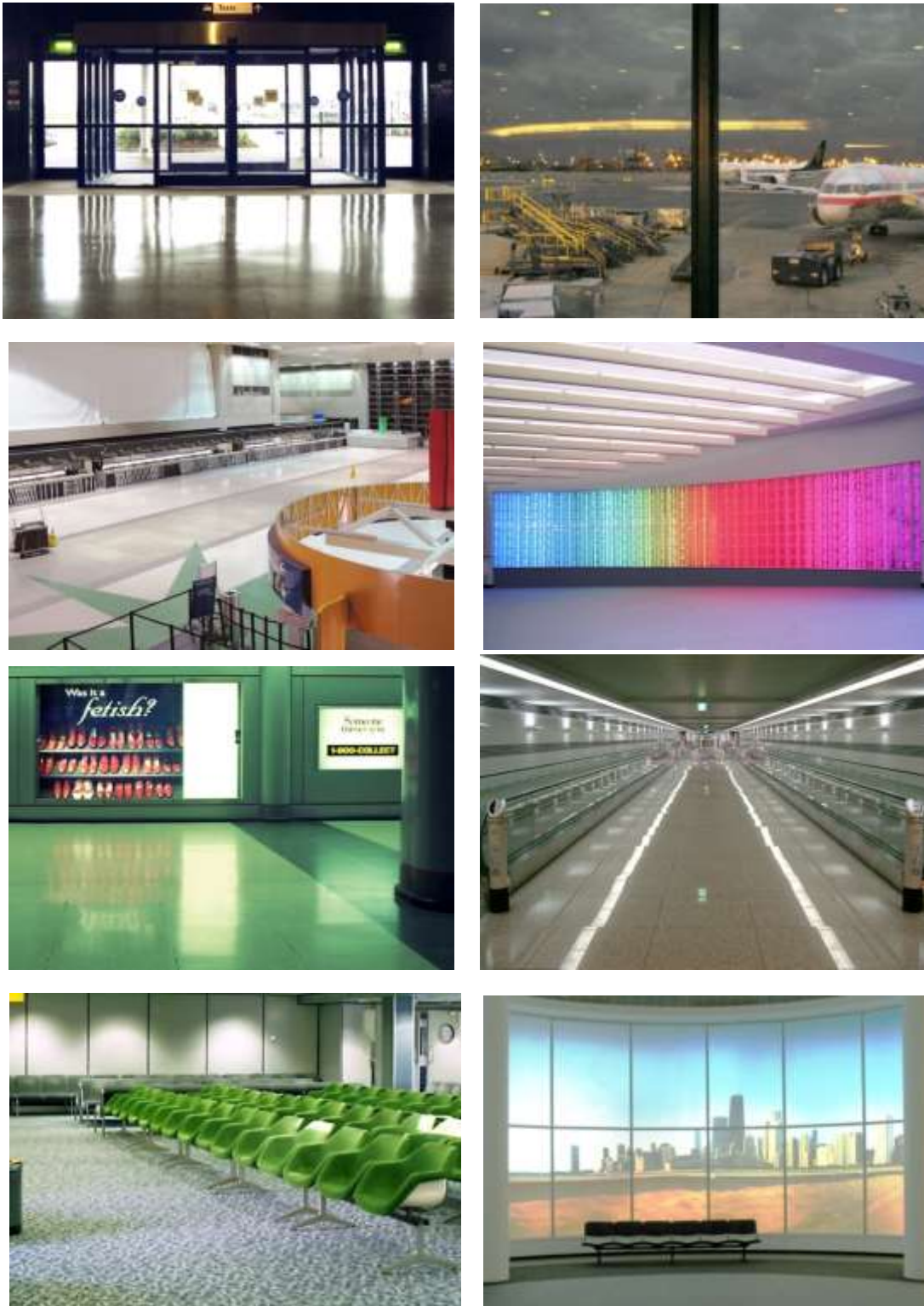


What is more, the exploration of deSouza and Min's collaborations leads us to consider how this "team making" has functioned as a strategy to bring their presence before the public and widen the influence of their art. As mentioned earlier, there have been significant and successful collective movements initiated by artists from the so-called "third world," such as the Black Arts Movements or Asian American Cultural Activism. For this couple, these movements signify critical turning points, not only because they met each other through this mingling, but also because they became aware of their shared peripheral identity as immigrants living in the West. deSouza once stated that the value of diaspora artists is "not simply that they construct for themselves for identities, but that they also expose and deconstruct those preexisting identities that would otherwise remain naturalized under the cloak of the nation."<sup>51</sup> His insight on the potential of the art of diasporas, from my perspective, was displayed by the collaborative works created with his fellow artist that dealt with the theme of the border.

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<sup>51</sup> deSouza, "Name Calling," 21.

## Illustrations



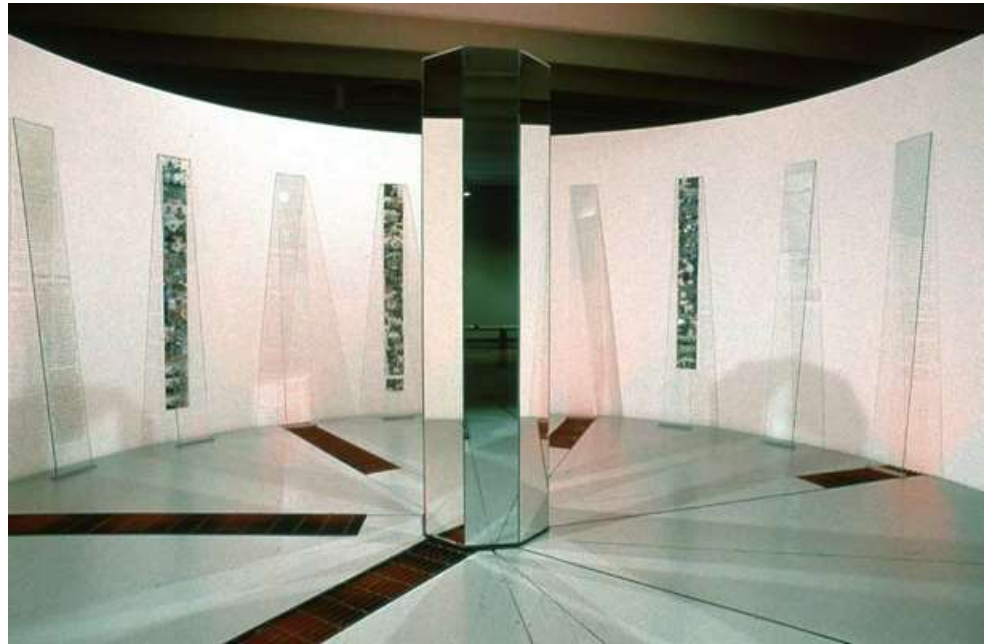
**Fig. 1** Allan deSouza, *Threshold*, 1996-8.  
Chromogenic color print on paper, 16 x 16 in. Courtesy of the artist.



**Fig. 2** Allan deSouza, *JFK*, from *Threshold* series, 1996-8.  
Chromogenic color print on paper, 16 x 16 in. Courtesy of the artist.



**Fig. 3** Allan deSouza, *Heathrow*, from *Threshold* series, 1996-8.  
Chromogenic color print on paper, 16 x 16 in. Courtesy of the artist.



**Fig. 4** Yong Soon Min, *DMZ-XING*, 1994.  
Mixed media installation, dimensions variable.  
Photo: Courtesy of the artist.





**Fig. 5** Yong Soon Min, *Bridge of No Return*, 1997.  
Mixed media installation, 94 x 283 x 59 in.  
Photo: Courtesy of the artist.

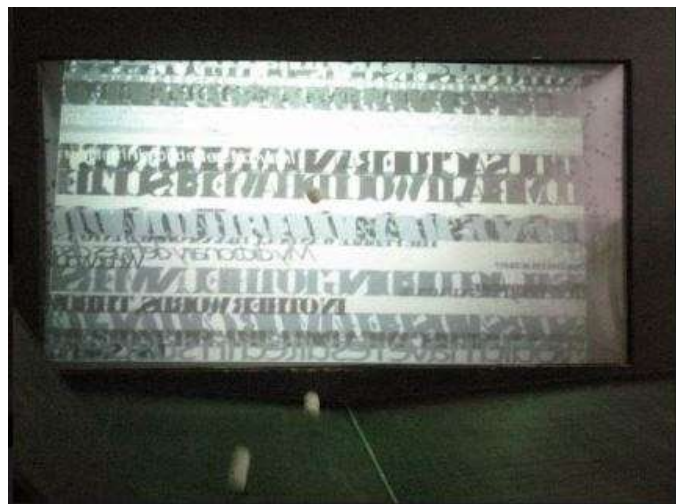


**Fig. 6** Allan deSouza & Yong Soon Min,  
*alter idem / performing personae*, 1994.  
Mixed media installation, dimensions variable.  
Photo: Courtesy of the artists.



**Fig. 7** Allan deSouza & Yong Soon Min  
*Will \*\*\*\* for Peace*, 2003.  
Mixed media installation and performance  
Oboro Gallery, Montreal, Canada  
Photo: Courtesy of the artists.





**Fig. 8** My DADA, *Projectory*, 2008.  
Installation with lexan, wood structures, baseball pitcher, mural color print, synthetic screen,  
Photo: Courtesy of the artists.



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