

17th September 1988

Dear Alenka,

I hope this letter finds you well. How did the rest of your summer go? Me and Leza had talked a lot about you since we last saw each other in Eindhoven. Leza has spoken to her boss here about the event that you proposed. I was told they were unclear as to what the nature of the show involved, but remain curious.

I for one remain excited by the tremendous prospects of seeing these great artists in Singapore. Our return here has been a mixed bag. I am glad that our travels had been in the warm summer months. Please don't misunderstand. It is not that I am afraid of the cold. Quite the opposite! But that the initial jolt from our return have been more forgiving. The climate was one less thing to contend with.

The air here is ever warm and the day while not as long as in Europe, takes an equal share of time with the night throughout the year. I suppose that's as close to fairness as we have here. Singapore remains a curious state of affairs.

I apologies for the digression. Leza just reminded me to ask you for more details of what you have in mind. The night beckons, from just north of the equator, we wish you well.

Sincerely,
Hong

p.s Do keep warm. I trust that it must be getting cold there.

27th September 1988

Dear Hong,

Thank you for the letter, I am doing well and hope you and Leza are too. It has indeed gotten colder in Ljubljana and I find myself needing a jacket now just to go out. Yes! I will need more time to think about the show, but I remain excited about bringing the video productions and musicians to Singapore!

Your letter seems to carry heavy thoughts. Do tell me more and about Singapore. I remain fascinated about the "tiny island" that you live!

I too have to apologies for this short letter. I felt it best that I wrote back to you as fast as I can. I will write again soon!

Warmly,
Alenka

p.s I am just about to go for an opening at the city gallery and will see meet some artists.

30th September 1988

Dear Hong,

How are you and Leza doing? Pardon my delays, but I wanted to give the show more thought before I wrote to you again. I had spoken to some artist friends and they would be very happy to be part of the show.

They are excited by the possibility of coming to Singapore to present their work. Do not worry, I understand that for now, it is just a possibility, but that makes a good start.

As you know from our previous conversations, there has been quite some artists making works with video and it is interesting the way many of the videos come in relation to other arts. Performance, music and mass media, but at the same time becomes its own aesthetics.

I believe this is an important emphasis for the show. It would be great if we could present not just the videos, but the art that they relate to! We could bring performances and musicians to Singapore with the videos. Would Leza's boss be keen on this proposal?

I want to add that the imagery of these videos have gotten more experimental in the last few years. With artists experimenting with new technology, the nature of the video image is no longer of reality (or not just), but of the manipulation of electronic signals, broadcast and transmissions. I think it is perfect that the show will be at a TV factory!

I have already a few artists in mind. But please let me know what you think so we could consider my next course of action.

It is beautiful in Ljubljana today, the sky is clear and the leaves are warm yellow. You should come visit with Leza, does she still miss here?

Best,
Alenka

4th October 1988

Dear Alenka,

First, I have to apologise for the tone of my last letter to you. I did not mean for it to communicate as morosely nor was it my intention to alarm you. I had simply caught up to date with affairs in Singapore from Leza and my time away in Europe.

In brief, we have had friends that over the past year has had run ins with the law, which we feel were unwarranted. Perhaps "unjust". Since then, there has been disagreements amongst friends as to whose council they should take and their course of action.

I apologise if this alarms you, it was again, not my intention. It's just that... it's not always sunny here, even this close to the equator! We assure you though, that this is just a one-off incident.

Don't worry about needing time, we understand that creativity takes time. I will communicate this to Leza and for her to speak to her boss. Rest assured that our interests remains just as high.

Also, how did the opening at the city gallery go? What kind of art was it?

We wish you well and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Hong

11th April 2018

Dear Alenka, dear Hong,

I apologise that this letter is coming in late as it is. Try as I may, it often seems that my letters would inevitably arrive late. I hope this doesn't render it inconsequential on the greater scheme of things.

Alenka, I'm wondering if the factory you speak of is the old Philips factory at Toa Payoh? Was that right, Hong? I have some recollection of this building from my childhood. I believe it was right around the block of flats that my grandmother used to live.

I looked online for images of the factory and found a picture of an old TV made into a cake (or was it just a really tall and large cake). It had a cream top with many candles strewn upon it. I was wondering why only some were lit, then I noticed a young lady behind the cake in a blue dress and maroon trench coat blowing at it. The picture was taken at the moment of her breath. Maybe it's her wearing a trench in the tropics, but she looked really stylish for that time, and probably now too.

Whose birthday was it you might ask? The TV cake had the words "100M TVs" on it's screen so I guess it wasn't anyone's birthday, but the factory's 100,000,000 TV birth. I find it hard to imagine how a country of just under three million could give birth to that many TVs.

These days Singapore doesn't produce TVs anymore, it's simply not manpower/space/cost-efficient. But perhaps the TVs you used there were from here. Did you see a label that says "Made in Singapore" somewhere?

I must admit that I find the idea of a video art exhibition in a TV factory during the 80s oddly contemporary in its thinking.

Best regards,
Kent

p.s Hong, I must say I am curious to find out what is it you do.

10th October 1988

Dear Alenka,

How are you? I am writing in response to your follow-up letter dated 30th September. I hope that my overzealousness in response to your previous letter (dated 27th September) does not confuse our correspondence. These letters do in fact have continents to cross!

What you propose sounds fantastic! It would indeed make for a wonderful event in the factory. Leza said the videos could be shown at the factory's showroom and there is also an event hall for staff gatherings that could be used for the performances you suggested. Would this be a suitable arrangement?

Leza has already sounded this out to her boss and she mentioned that they seem interested and that venue-wise, it is a possibility. Though they would again like to have more details as to the nature of these performances and videos. As you say, it's a good start!

Not to curb our enthusiasm, but Leza added that, this is of course still the early stages of planning. As far as travel and budgets are concerned, we will have to wait to hear from upper management.

Now, as for Leza, I think she has taken well to Singapore and perhaps more importantly, the region altogether over the last few years. As an engineer, working at Philips was always going to be a good opportunity for her and the vastness of an exotic Asia only added to its appeal. She likes to joke that as an engineer it was the most straightforward choice and so no choice at all.

I apologise for the roundabout answer to your question. But yes, she of course still misses Ljubljana, it is where she grew up. Though it took a while, but she genuinely seems to feel at home here. I think it's Europe she misses or so the idea of it. And that is something we both share. Indeed, I still look back to my time in London fondly, but that is perhaps a conversation best left to another letter.

Our warmest regards, from the "tiny island" with no seasons.

Sincerely,
Hong

22th October 1988

Dear Hong,

You are right, our responses to each other seem confused. I believe it was my fault. I am now replying to your letter from 10th October 1988.

I hope that now the problems with your friends have been sorted out. Do not worry, I was not alarmed... and I apologise too that I was not more alarmed. As you know, the Republics here have its own history of problems with authority. So I am not more surprised. Though things have become better now. It is obvious the Republics have changed since Tito.

In fact, the opening at the city gallery that I mentioned. There were some problems. A band was performing in the gallery and a nationalists gang tried to disrupt the performance. We closed the gallery and kept them out, but they started to create trouble outside.

Finally, the police arrived and made them leave. But then the police wanted to come in too and we did not allow them in either. The point is, maybe a few years ago we would not have been able to do that.

If you do not mind my asking, what "unjust" problem does your friends have?

I think an artist that I am definitely keen on is Neven Korda. He has made many of his videos with rock bands from the Slovene underground scene and I think that is something that the show could explore further. The underground scene has been very active in questioning the social and political culture. And this energy spreads across music, art, theatre and activism..

Perhaps now we should look more closely at budget to see what we can do? It will decide how I will approach the artists and bands.

I am glad to know that Leza has taken to Singapore so well. And I must admit, what you explained to me about Asia in your last letter has only strengthened my desire to explore Asia. Now I am really looking forward to visiting with the show!

All the best to you and Leza.

Regards,
Alenka

1st November 1988

Dear Alenka,

Where do I begin? It feels as if this problem we speak of have far deeper roots than what afflicts my friends, which it does. Perhaps allow me to reach briefly into history to explain the situation.

You see, long after Singapore's founding as a trading port, it was a British colony. And as with many other colonies after the war, we were granted independence in part, based on our promise to keep out the waves of communism that had crashed over much of Asia continent. We were born a market and you could say that capital is in our blood, if not our creed. However, any serious threat of a communist takeover had all but ended by the 60s and in the last two decades, almost altogether from public consciousness. We have happily gone on with our own business (pun intended, of course).

Now, imagine the sturm und drang when late last year we were told that the government had accused a group of our friends of subversion as parts of a Marxist conspiracy! The Catholic church they claimed were in cahoots. Our friends were detained and only released weeks after.

Now, I wish not to dwell on this matter here and as it stands the matter seemed to have died down. However, my friends are aggrieved and contemplating issuing another press statement to make public their side of the story. I for one am against this and have tried to persuade them to do otherwise. The matter is past, is it not better to move on and let history speak for them instead?

Coming back to the show, it would be amazing to have both the bands and videos in the show. We could use a good dose of rock and roll in Singapore. Bands don't make their way here much, but I remember fondly David Bowie's concert a few years back. What kind of rock and roll does these bands play?

As for the budget, Leza has asked her boss about it, which she said would probably take another week or so before they come to a decision. I will update you accordingly.

This is perhaps cynical of me, but I admit that I am glad that you were not too alarmed and remain excited about coming to Singapore. We too are excited for you to come!

Till we speak again.

Best,
Hong

15th April 2018

Dear Alenka, dear Hong

I had a look at the videos in your selection a little while back and the impression I got was that they've aged well. Although, I am perhaps a little unsure about my own perspectives.

Would it be wrong to describe these as imageries borne out of electronic signals, in both raw and also highly-manipulated forms? The combination of animations, video effects and superimpositions that were employed in the videos have been revived. It's different, but definitely back.

The aesthetics you spoke of has received a digital upgrade. In much of today's videos, that (80s) aesthetics rooted in nihilism has been updated with contemporary cynicism. That past sense of idealism is gone.

What then: were you contemporary or are we retro? Have I been judging aesthetics or history?

Is this the same cynicism that you saw in Hong as well? Maybe we Singaporeans were ahead of the times, and stayed remarkably consistent.

After all, unlike Slovenia, in all these years since we have yet to change government.

Best regards,
Kent

13th November 1988

Dear Hong,

Thank you again for your letter and explaining your friend's situation. It must be a very difficult situation to be in and I am very sorry to hear about it.

I do not know much about Singapore so it is hard for me to speak of the problem, but I find your point about history speaking for your friends interesting. I have always thought that history remembers, but speaks for no one but itself. If something needs to be said, then better to not wait. I understand that is not always possible or maybe it is just better to not do so. This is just my own opinion. It's like the videos in the show, I do not think the artists wants to wait fifty years to show them.

The bands that I am interested in play different kinds of rock music. Electro funk, metal and many of them are punk bands. Especially with the punk bands, there is a sense of urgency in these music. Are these music common in Singapore?

No problem, I will work out my selection of artworks in the meantime while the budget is being decided.

I look forward to their decision. My regards to you and Leza.

Best,
Alenka

2nd December 1988

Dear Alenka,

I hope this letter finds you well. Sorry for the long delay since your last letter. I felt it was best that I wait for Leza's updates before writing to you again.

We have some updates from upper management. They like the idea of the show! They thought it would be something interesting (and more cultured) for the employees than the factory's usual song and dance events.

The employees will have a glimpse of how the television sets they manufacture are used for art. If we could get the papers to write about the show, it could even help raise the company profile over its competitors in Singapore! That's how Leza sold it to them. She seemed particularly proud about that.

Leza said that they're willing to sponsor about 5,000 Dinars for the show. I know it is not much, but it should at least cover a trip for you to Singapore and perhaps some other costs.

On a separate note, I'd like to return to our other conversation. I gave it some thought and perhaps it is true when you say that history only ever speaks for itself. It seems that you and I hold rather different opinions as to what my friends' course of action should be.

It is not that I do not believe in right or wrong. I do, and very much so, but I too value the present. And given that choice, would probably want nothing more than to have my life given back to me. It's not an urgency, but an immediacy towards a life just around me. Am I being too self-centred and shortsighted to say so? Perhaps. But neither do I need to be remembered.

Maybe my trust in history lies in the very fact that history does not need me.

The monsoon has arrived and the days here are just as grey as they are in Europe right now. I hope sunlight finds its way into the skies soon.

Warmly,
Hong

17th December 1988

Dear Hong,

I hope you and Leza are doing well and thank you for the updates. The figure seems low, but maybe I can work something out. Enclosed with the letter you will find a short write up for the show and a list of artists.

I have put together what we had already discussed and I think you would find the selected videos very interesting. They represent an energy that have possessed the republic the last few years. Videos that are concerned with the spread of media while a part of it. Speaking of society by those that speak it best – youths. The youths who inherit our society speaks truest.

In the last few months, I had to think about what it is that appeals to me about these videos. Maybe the lack of formality that it has a visuality that exist as a constant stage of experimentation.

It isn't the same as improvising that focus too much on what happens at the moment. These are videos where their transmission is always delayed. Perhaps how I write is too romantic, but what feels important for the video imagery is that they always exist as a precedence for their makers. Charged with unimagined possibilities, they ravel being in the 'now'.

For all its flaws, it is the attitude that becomes image, not the other way round. Are you curious too of how the show would be received?

It is nearly new years and I am looking forward to the snow and Singapore!

Sincerely,
Alenka

Let the Music Revolve (1989 exhibition in Singapore)

Let The Music Revolve is an exhibition showcase of recently-made video works from the Socialist Republic of Slovenia (part of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia).

A relatively new art form, video art in the the last few years has been subject to increased experimentation. Often used as a means to document performances and happenings, the medium is coming into its own in terms of formal experimentation. With the development of new equipment and technology that allowed the techniques of colour keying, compositing and 3D animation, opening a new vista of moving image making.

The title of the exhibition is a reference to the video selection – primarily videos made with rock and roll songs from the alternative, underground music scene in Slovenia. Like the music unfolding together, the video images created are charged by the same countercultural, rebellious energy. As a reflection of the current social climate and influence of mass media.

The exhibition has been made possible by the kind support of Philips Electronica (Asia Pacific).

Video list:

Neven Korda - YU sen / Yugoslav Dream (00:03:26)
Marijan Osole - Max, Irma Mežnarič - Linije sile (0:04:18)
Neven Korda - Disko FV 82-83 (00:42:27)
Neven Korda - Slike iz družinskega albuma / Pictures from the Family Album (00:06:34)
Barbara Borčič, Irma Mežnarič - Back to the USA (00:20:33)
Zemira Alajbegović, Neven Korda, Dario Seraval (Borghesia) - Tako mladi / So Young (00:30:50)
Neven Korda - Iskanje izgubljenega časa / In Search of the Lost Time (00:25:40)
Andrej Lupinc (Keller) - Kriki in vreščanja / Screams and Shouts (0:20:13)
Miha Vipotnik - Space 2 (00:01:53)
Miha Vipotnik - Avtovizija / Auto-vision (0:14:54)
Neven Korda (Tožibabe) - Dežuje / It Rains (00:02:29)
Neven Korda - Venceremos
Jurij Korenc - Oddaja o Radiu Študent / Show On Radio Študent
Rok Sieberer Kuri, Media Teror - Kriza / Crisis
Mirko Simić (Skinny Puppy) - Assimilate

2nd May 2018

Dear Hong, dear Alenka,

Pardon me, but I'd like to know more about the exhibition. I've found little mention of it anywhere. Did any of the artist or musicians step foot in Singapore?

I'm curious what audiences thought about the videos. I realised that much has been written about the imagery, the technology and the songs, but I have yet to understand a word of Slovene.

Is/was that the case for you as well, Hong?

I suppose that says much about the potency of the moving imagery and the music that it's in tandem with. I think I "get" the videos, but perhaps only because of hindsight. What of my fellow countrymen then?

Were images of the many youths in the video an arresting sight for them as well? Bodies that behaved in manners almost inconceivable of youths in 80s Singapore. Youthful, liberated, raging, rebellious, care without care.

Are bodies read as such, universal?

I'd like to evoke that once more. In recalling your show, could I rouse today's youths into movement again with our take of the music of yesteryear?

I'm not sure if you made posters for your show. While in the process of making my own, I've taken the liberty of making one for you. I hope you don't mind.

I seem to have been caught in an echo.

Best regards,
Kent

p.s Hong, I apologise, but perhaps history did not forget you.