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Title: untitled  
By: Yukie Kamiya  
From: New York back from visit to San Diego



Quanlan Island, Vietnam (2005)  
Mark Langelaar (collaboration by Mark Manders and Marije Langelaar)

My cell phone was completely ruined. It happened right after my flight to San Diego. The disaster came about when my cell phone became completely submerged in a pool of water that had formed in my bag thanks to a loose cap on my water bottle. I couldn't get a single beep or blip from my phone—it was completely dead. I didn't recall a single number that had been recorded in my phone book. There was no way for me to contact a soul.

Thinking that I could easily get information on a web browser, I didn't even bring a map or a guide book with me. I was planning that I could simply call my friends who were traveling by car, meet up, and then all go to see inSite, a multi-faceted arts project that was held in San Diego and Tijuana, the two cities that mark the border between the United States and Mexico. Yet, sure enough, thanks to this new predicament, I had no idea what to do. I assumed that I could stay connected with other people and other places even though I was on the move. It's extremely easy to do these days. However, as a consequence of losing my main means of communication, all of a sudden I was completely marooned from the everyday network and I became utterly aware of our position within the greater scheme of the continuum known as "transit."

For example, sites and places are connected to one another via airplanes and airports, trains and stations, and we can easily move between the two. To a certain degree, it has also become possible to connect moving points using cell phones and the Internet. As a result, a "terrain in flux" exists across the sphere of our daily lives.

From a fixed point of contact between places and sites, boundaries have become rather fluid constructs that can change at a moment's notice. This site of ubiquitous transit jolts our understanding of the binaries of site/non-site and center/remote. This boils down to the fact that where we stand and where we view the world from is solely dependent on one thing alone: change.

The now long process of the art museum changing from a place of exhibiting art practice to the functioning hub of connecting artistic practice with the outside world has made us reflect on the connections between ourselves, our daily lives, and our lived environments with contemporary artistic expression. It has called for a necessary reaction to this theme, and as a result, the role of the museum has had to change in response. From the role of introducing various cultures and expressions in a one-way directive, the museum today features exhibitions that aim to take on the role of mediator between the presenting institution and a number of different sites. The museum has therefore moved from a fixed position to that of the entrance point to "transit."

In one of responses to this new methodology, I'm co-curating a project, which features works created by artists who were inspired by World Heritage Sites scattered around the globe. This project is a collaboration by four museums in the US: the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, the Contemporary Art Museum Houston, the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; and the tropical conservation organization, RARE, in this endeavor that will continue over a long period of time. At the New Museum, we are currently working with

four artists on the project: Olafur Eliasson is focused on Simien National Park in Ethiopia; Kim Sooja is looking at the Royal Chitwan National Park in Nepal; and Mark Manders is fascinated with Ha Long Bay in Vietnam. All of these artists have made initial visits to their sites of interest. Tacita Dean will take a trip to explore the deserts of Oman.

Places like the seascape of Ha Long Bay that is composed of a multitude of limestone rocks and over 1500 islands, and Royal Chitwan National Park that is situated at the base of the Himalayas and home to the rare Bengal tiger might populate our imaginations as paradises that etch lasting impressions onto our souls and make us breathe with excitement, yet in reality these areas are suffering from social and economic conditions and many are in need of conservation aid. This project hopes to instill the dreams of an adventurer into the participating artists' projects with the main goal of creating an alternative relationship between the site and the art produced through expanding the space of visual art practice while at the same time reconsidering latent post-colonial relationships.

These sites may conjure up a longing to travel but at the same time refer to an Internet Web page that one may use to surprisingly easy ends to arrange an actual voyage. Beatriz Colomina has noted, "The railway transforms the world into a commodity. It makes places into objects of consumption and, in doing so, deprives them of their quality as places." If we examine this concept a bit further, things like airplanes, the Internet and cell phones become indispensable tools that swarm around us in the here and now, and they no doubt spur on the world into a commodity. This project will also bring to the surface the issue of the exploitation of remote sites at the hands of widely popularized tourism.

What will the participating artists make and where will they make their works? Who will see the works and where will they be shown? The dichotomous comparisons and contrasts between "sites" in the great outdoors and in the gallery space of museums brings to the surface questions on the topics of site/not-site, indoor/outdoor, and center/remote that were first posed by land artists in the 1960s and 1970s. All of these can refer to a perceived opposition, however, our contemporary condition that is itself situated in the midst of movement on a global scale can simply not be put into one or another distinct category. Artists and their artistic practices are attempting to lay down an imaginary route that connects differing realities in divergent places.

*Translation: Eric C. Shiner*

<sup>1</sup> Colomina, Beatriz, Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), p. 47.