

# SINGAPORE BIENNALE 2019

22 Nov 2019 –  
22 Mar 2020

EVERY  
STEP  
IN THE  
RIGHT  
DIRECTION

EDUCATION KIT

## ARTIST FOLIOS

PART OF  
THE BALIK  
BARRACKS  
TRAIL!



# ROBERT ZHAO

*QUEEN'S OWN HILL AND ITS ENVIRONS*

2019

SINGAPORE

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## THE ARTIST ROBERT ZHAO

- (b. 1982, Singapore) A multi-disciplinary artist who blends reality and fiction through the presentation of images together with documents and objects.
- Received his B.A and M.A in photography from Camberwell College of Arts and London College of Communication respectively.
- His artistic practice is strongly informed by his observations and ongoing research into the natural world. He unravels the intertwining relationship between humans and their habitat in this work and creates convincing narratives to invoke doubts regarding the concept of truth and its portrayal.



### DID YOU KNOW?

There used to be a swimming pool at Gillman Barracks that was built as part of the British military camp. However, barely any signs of a pool exist today. Find out where the pool was once located!

## THE ARTWORK *QUEEN'S OWN HILL AND ITS ENVIRONS* 2019

**Photographs, video and found objects in display cabinet with artist-led tours | 240 x 500 x 60 cm**  
**Collection of the Artist | Singapore Biennale 2019 commission**

- **MEDIUM:** An assemblage of the artist's findings from a secondary forest in Gillman Barracks to create a historical narrative of the site. This is complemented by unconventional walks into the forest.
- **TECHNIQUES:** The artist spent a year observing the rich natural and cultural history of the forest, studying its significance. This resulted in an installation that investigates the history of the hill, such as its past as a plantation, military barrack and many others. The walk sheds light on how one can approach an abandoned wasteland with new narratives, and how nature has her own narrative that seldom conforms to what we have planned.
- **IDEAS / INSPIRATIONS / CONTEXT:** The title is inspired by the former name of the hill at Gillman Barracks. There was a collection of 100 small hills around the region in 1892 but they have mostly been flattened. The hill behind Nanyang Technological University Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore (NTU CCA) is one of the only hills remaining that feeds the nearby Berlayer Creek. Through this artwork, the artist showcases a system and history that talks about our continued existence together.



## STEP BY STEP

### SECONDARY:

ART / HISTORY / GEOGRAPHY

#### STEP 1 :: PRE-VISIT

Gillman Barracks was a former British army camp that was built on a jungle and swamp in 1936. It was named after Webb Gillman (Sir), an officer of the British army who was sent from London to Singapore in 1927 to prepare a report on the defence requirements of the new naval base in Singapore. (National Library Board Singapore, 2019)

Find out more about the different identities and names of Gillman Barracks from its iteration as an army camp to today's arts cluster.

\*Print a map of Gillman Barracks for a visit to Gillman Barracks.

#### STEP 2 :: AT THE ARTWORK

##### DESCRIBE:

What can you see or recognise in specimens, photographs and found objects displayed in the installation?

##### INTERPRET:

Look at each artefact closely and think about the iteration/parts of Gillman Barracks the artefact relates to. Take out the map of Gillman Barracks and mark out where you think it was discovered/found. Share your interpretation with your friends.

##### EVALUATE:

The artist has a penchant for creating convincing narratives which may or may not be true. Which object/story do you think is a true reflection of the history of Gillman Barracks and which object/story do you think is fictitious? Why do you think so?

#### STEP 3 :: POST-VISIT

##### EXPLORE & EXPAND 1:

Attend the nature walks led by the artist and come up with additional found objects/ photographs/specimens that will fit into his existing artwork. Explain why and how it fits into his current narrative.

##### EXPLORE & EXPAND 2:

Find out more about the history of the neighbourhood of your home/school. Narrate its past using a combination of objects/ photographs/specimens. Add in a fictional story or two in your creation and challenge your friends to take a closer look and wonder, "Is that fact or fiction?"

## FIND OUT MORE

### THE ARTIST

- [https://www.instagram.com/robert\\_zhao/](https://www.instagram.com/robert_zhao/)
- <https://www.facebook.com/criticalzoologists>
- <https://twitter.com/zhaorenhui?lang=en>
- <https://www.criticalzoologists.org/main.html>
- <https://sg.asiatatler.com/society/inside-the-curious-world-of-robert-zhao-renhui>
- <https://www.luxuo.com/culture/art/interview-artist-robert-zhao-renhui.html>
- <http://underscoremagazine.com/robert-zhao-martin-wittfooth-singapore-inside-out/>
- <http://artradarjournal.com/2016/02/22/singapores-robert-zhao-renhui-and-the-institute-of-critical-zoologists-interview/>
- <https://www.photobookmelbourne.org/news/robert-zhao-renhui/>
- <https://www.naimamorelli.com/robert-zhao-renhui-studio-visit-goodman-arts-centre/>

### OTHERS

- <https://mizuma-art.co.jp/en/artists/robert-zhao-renhui/>
- <http://artasiapacific.com/Magazine/88/RobertZhaoRenhui>
- <https://ocula.com/artists/zhao-renhui/artworks/>
- <https://www.singaporebiennale.org/sb2016/the-natural-history-of-an-island.php>
- <https://www.nationalmuseum.sg/our-exhibitions/exhibition-list/singapore-very-old-tree>
- <https://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/arts/artists-go-big-for-bicentennial>
- <https://www.singaporeartmuseum.sg/art-events/exhibitions/unearthed>
- <https://www.singaporeartmuseum.sg/art-events/exhibitions/sap2014>

### REFERENCES

- National Library Board Singapore (2019). *Gillman Barracks*. Available from: [http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP\\_1395\\_2008-12-06.html](http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_1395_2008-12-06.html)