



Dhavinder's *Test Tanah* installation (acrylic case, metal, nylon string, pulley system, water, black soil, salt, yellow pigment dye, red pigment dye, castor wheels, 2019). — Photos: PUAH CHIN KOK



Dhavinder working on his *Test Tanah* project, which he intends to take to other locations in KL.

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CONTEMPORARY artist Dhavinder Singh's *Test Tanah* installation art project is set to go places. Like the relentless development that finds its way into every corner of Kuala Lumpur, this project will pop up where cranes and construction converge.

This touring exhibit, which comprises two installation pieces fashioned out of bricks, soil, wood, cranes, a wheelbarrow and several other everyday curiosities, is currently on display on a rooftop venue in Chinatown that overlooks part of the city.

"The *Test Tanah* project has been an ongoing project since 2016, where it has been documented in various locations which are scheduled for redevelopment," says Dhavinder, 36, in a recent interview.

"The concept came from observation of urban landscapes, and how the tower crane has become a prominent structure.

"It appears as a symbol of development and also destruction for some, as lands are taken over by developers without the consideration of proper urban planning. Hence, the idea of using the tower crane as a subject matter came about."

How fitting then, that *Test Tanah* is shown against the backdrop of an example of the circumstances it is protesting against: Over-development.

It is set up on the rooftop of the Moutou Artist-Run Space in KL. This rooftop farm, which is a perfect for *Test Tanah*, aims to create space for diverse projects through collaborations within the spec-

A vanishing landscape

An outdoor exhibit on a KL gallery rooftop weighs in on the cost and consequence of rapid development and displacement.



Dhavinder's *Grave For Barrow* (wood, tarpaulin, compost soil, grass, found wheelbarrow, brick, 2019).

trum of arts, activism, community and sustainability.

Moutou is just a stone's throw away from the bustle of Petaling Street.

"*Test Tanah* is a silent protest of sorts," the artist confirms, noting that the work absorbs the surroundings and contrasts the construction happening around it.

Dhavinder's project gets its name from soil tests to assess the suitability of the soil for proposed constructions works.

If these tests are inadequate or inaccurate, the implications can

be disastrous.

Dhavinder's *Test Tanah* was born out of an urgent need to voice out against over-development.

As a person who grew up in the Chan Sow Lin neighbourhood in the heart of KL, an industrial area dotted with factories and car workshops, he has witnessed how the city has changed.

Back then, he lived with his grandparents in a factory quarters, they used to be caretakers of the factory.

As a child, he was also fasci-

nated by his seamstress mother's tailoring techniques in which she would meticulously visualise, measure, draw, cut and stitch her creations.

With the development (and destruction) of the areas he grew up in, *Test Tanah* is Dhavinder's personal investigation and exploration of his sentiments on the ever-changing skyline of KL and its surrounding areas.

He intends to take the *Test Tanah* installations to other locations in KL this year.

This project also carries with it the sense of loss that comes with displacement.

Dhavinder's art studio was previously located at Razak Mansion, a 50-year-old low-cost development in KL that housed more than 600 people, that was demolished in 2017.

"The people who lived there were displaced from their home once the order to demolish (the building) came through.

"While new plots (of housing) were offered, the spirit of the older, lived-in spaces that made them dear to the people who lived there were destroyed as the bulldozers, excavators and tower cranes appeared," shares Dhavinder on how *Test Tanah* came to a realisation.

In his second solo exhibition *Recollectus* in 2017, Dhavinder

presented nine paintings triggered by the redevelopment of KL's historic Razak Mansion. His first solo *MO:Form(land)scapes* in 2014 also concerned itself with urban landscapes.

Dhavinder, a fine arts graduate from the Cardiff School Of Art And Design in Britain, hopes that this *Test Tanah* project will encourage people to ponder on the effects of over-development and how it is destroying our natural habitat and heritage.

It is far-fetched idea, he concedes, especially given how things seem to be going at the moment. But Dhavinder remains optimistic.

"I believe if we try to stand against it, we surely will receive what we want," he says.

So head on over to the rooftop and watch the sun set on yet another day of skyscrapers, cranes and construction sites - and ask: What is the price of progress?

To view *Test Tanah*, take the Moutou Artist-Run Space rooftop (No. 8, Lorong Panggong, KL) access via a back entrance located next to the Chinese restaurant there. Visiting hours: 5pm-10pm (Monday-Friday) and 11am-10pm (Saturday-Sunday) by appointment. Call 012-666 6124. Exhibit runs till June 21. FB: Moutou.

Holocaust survivors' tales

A POLISH artist has brought the horrors of the Holocaust to life in a graphic novel based on survivors' testimonies, published to mark the 75th anniversary of a museum on the site of the concentration camp where they were interned.

Chleb Wolnosciowy, or *The Bread Of Freedom*, combines the accounts of 11 prisoners at the Majdanek camp in eastern Poland, where 80,000 people, mainly Jews, are estimated to have died. In all, more than three million Polish Jews perished in the Holocaust.

"I wanted it to tell real stories, just like how today we also often don't want to see things that con-

cern us. Similarly in those days, the world didn't want to see what was happening in the camps," said the book's creator Pawel Piechnik.

The phrase "Chleb wolnosciowy" was used by camp prisoners to refer to bread baked outside, evoking their yearning for home.

"(The book) shows the bestial conditions in which the captives were held, but it also shows that even in the face of hunger, they were able to demonstrate empathy, cooperation (and) compassion," said Agnieszka Kowalczyk-Nowak, press officer of the State Museum at Majdanek.

The museum was founded in

November 1944, just months after the Nazis liquidated the camp, on the outskirts of Lublin, as Soviet forces neared.

Fifteen placards with pages from the book have been erected in Lublin's city centre, and the graphic novel format caught the eye of young passers-by.

"People need to be reached by means of images Text might not be interesting to (the younger generation)," said 18-year-old high school graduate Paulina Szyszko.

"Maybe it has the potential to stay in their memory and reach them deeper in its own way." — Reuters



Artwork from *The Bread Of Freedom* graphic novel about the Majdanek German Nazi concentration camp in eastern Poland. — Reuters