



“MUNTADAS: ASIAN PROTOCOLS” at Three Shadows Photography Art Centre, Beijing

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An exhibition by photographer Antoni Muntadas explores unsaid, unspoken social rules in our daily lives.

Art Radar takes a look at the exhibition, which runs through 16 September 2018.



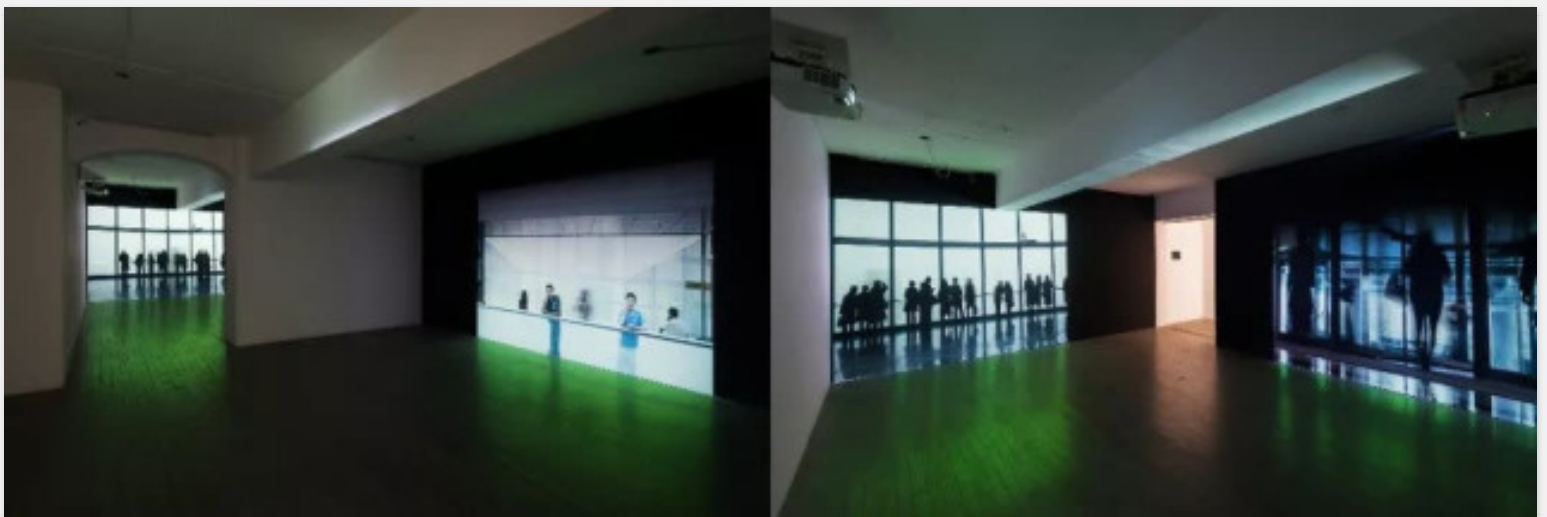
Antoni Muntadas, 'Chinese Fortune Cookies', 2018. Image courtesy the artist and Three Shadows Photography Centre,

Spain. For most of his four decade-long career, his projects have dissected what it means to live in the contemporary world, and how our lived experiences are created through a confluence of media, contextual information and discourse.

This summer, the **Three Shadows Photography Art Centre** in Beijing mounted Muntadas's research exhibition, entitled "**Asian Protocols**". The show consolidates the artist's research into the cities of Beijing, Seoul and Tokyo; previously, installments of Muntadas's project had been exhibited at the Total Museum in Seoul (2014) and the 3331 Arts Chiyoda in Tokyo (2016). This exhibition will be the last installment devoted to "Asian Protocols", and presents the full range of his research through a series of ten different sections.

Taking up the role of the "spectator", Muntadas positions himself as a person looking from the outside in. Throughout his body of work, Muntadas's purported aim was to explore the notion of "protocol" within various sectors of society – such as in education, public and private space, the economy, religion and politics.

Delving into cultures outside of his own is part and parcel of the artist's practice. In 2003, Muntadas created a series of stickers as part of his lengthy, multi-format project *On Translation*. The stickers each carried the same message: "perception requires involvement". Prying open the complications of translation and forging an equal understanding between different languages and cultures, Muntadas' work is often predicated on the slippages that occur between people – even if we all are, technically, cut from the same cloth. *On Translation* is, in fact, an extensive compilation of around 35 projects, all of which emphasise these multi-faceted cultural differences. *On Translation* was exhibited in the Spanish Pavilion at the 51st **Venice Biennale** in 2005.



Antoni Muntadas, 'Three Projections: On Translation: On View (2004); On Translation: Listening (2005); On Translation: Go Round (2013)'. Exhibition view, Total Art Museum, Seoul, Korea, 2014.

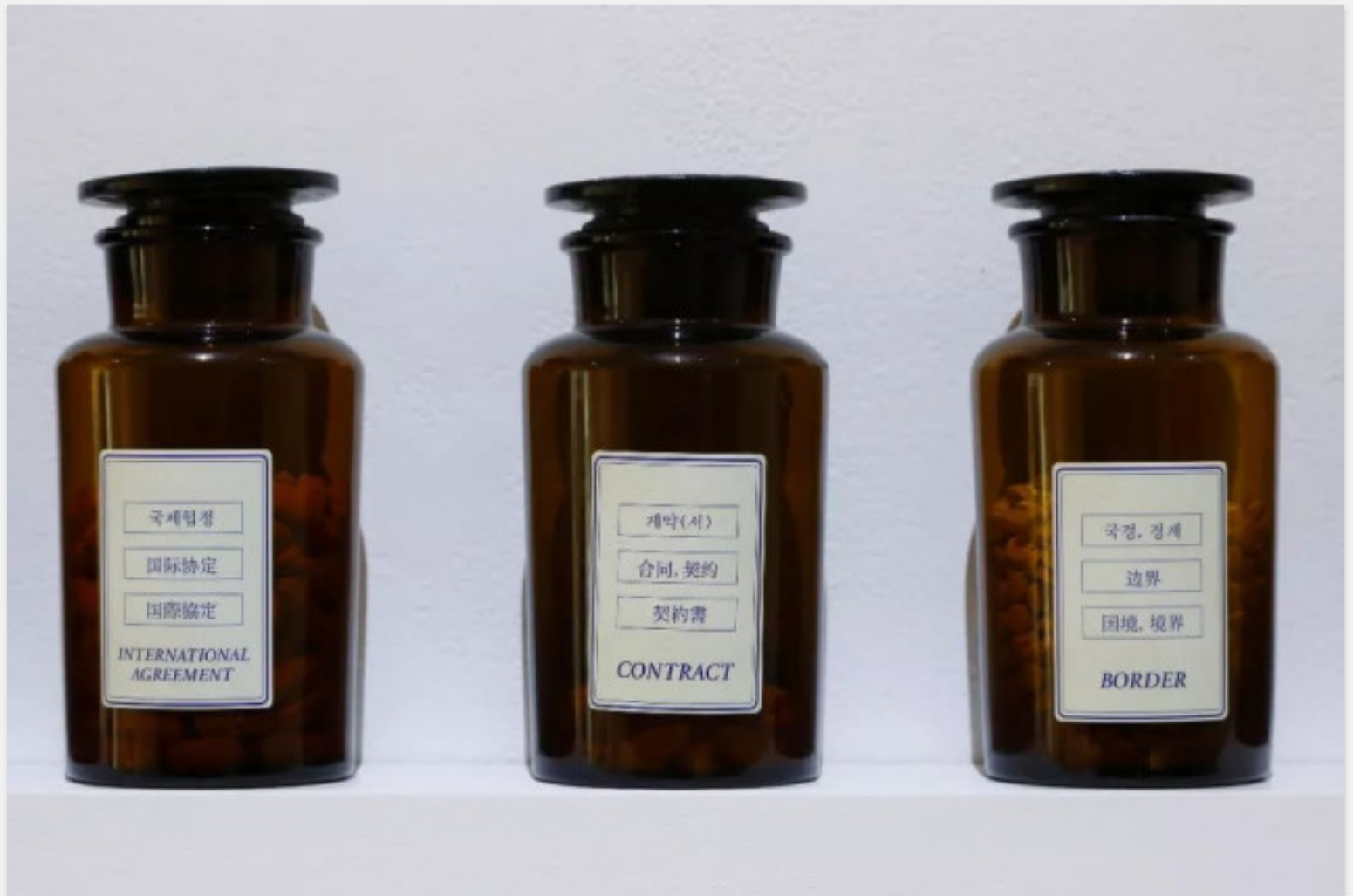
Image courtesy the artist and Total Art Museum.

His analysis of these micro-conflicts that happen between cultures are, once more, applied to *Asian Protocols*, where Muntadas attempts to visualise differences between the three countries. His works attempt to parse differences in perceptions between what can be mistaken as a monolithic entity, and in fact, continues to be misconstrued as such to misguided outsiders. Japan, Korea and China may share close geographical proximities, and may also share some common histories; yet, stark differences in culture, language and even tense historical flashpoints underscore a nuanced, complicated relationship that the three countries share with each other.



Antoni Muntadas, 'Asian Protocols: Cartographies', 2014. Exhibition view, 331 Art Chiyoda, Japan, 2016. Image courtesy the artist and 331 Art Chiyoda.

Muntadas claims his project as an “objective research and subjective approach to the issues related to protocols in Asia”, using methods of observation and analysis. The exhibition is comprised largely of installations, where Muntadas places objects that he has collected from these countries close to one another, allowing the visitor to draw their own conclusions. *Cartographies* (2014), for example, is a wall-sized installation where Muntadas has circled out broad terms and themes, such as “military”, “bureaucracy” and “diplomacy”. A plethora of different images hang on the wall as broad definitions of what each term means in its respective country. A quick look will reveal to the visitor the range of different meanings that are evoked from a similar word.



Antoni Muntadas, 'On Translation: Pille', 2006-2014. Image courtesy the artist and Three Shadows Photography Centre.

Another significant work is *On Translation: Pille* (2004 – 2013). Comprising 43 bottles half-filled with pills, this silent, meditative installation is a testament to the shifting boundaries involved in the act of translation. On the labels of the pill bottles is an English word, followed by the same word written in Japanese, Mandarin and Korean. Muntadas uses words that run the gamut from the innocuous to the political: including terms like “scotch”, “etiquette”, “religion”, “contract” and “border”. The installation bears witness to the fact that four different sets of symbols all share the same referent, making visible the unseen and overlooked fact that meaning does not exist in the same form the world over. The visitor is left to contemplate the implications of this: that the stability of meaning, which is so often taken for granted is often only an illusion.



Antoni Muntadas, 'Blackboard Dialog: Redefining Asian Protocols', 2014-2018. Exhibition view, 331 Art Chiyoda, Japan, 2016. Image courtesy the artist and 331 Art Chiyoda.

Most of the works on view in this exhibition have been conceived over several years, due to the research-intensive process that Muntadas often employs. One project Muntadas recently concluded is *Blackboard Dialogue* (2014 – 2018), also within this exhibition. *Blackboard Dialogue* reveals the results of a questionnaire that was designed to illicit deeper insight into the discourses that happen within each country. Muntadas asks a series of open-ended questions related to fashion, marriage, gender, family and other topics which structure and make meaning of day-to-day life in society. In some ways, the project resembles an anthropological study. Confronting visitors with floor-to-ceiling blackboards, with answers to his questions scrawled in chalk, the installation points out the fact that discourse around the same topics take various forms. "Gender" is surrounded by a different discourse in Japan than it does Korea. The agenda can be, and has been, set in other ways.



Antoni Muntadas, 'Public/Private Space [Seoul, Beijing, Tokyo]' , 2014. Exhibition view, 331 Art Chiyoda, Japan, 2016. Image courtesy the artist and Art Chiyoda.

Perhaps one of the most thought-provoking works is *Public/Private Space [Seoul, Beijing, Tokyo]* (2014). Three different desks are set out, each with a computer desktop and chairs. The desktop looks out into a panoramic skyline; the images of these skylines, however, are pixelated and not quite real. Looking at these settings, we are reminded of the many contexts in which we have seen these settings before: the quiet cubicle of a salaryman's office, a teenager's bedroom in a high-rise flat or an internet cafe. The installation provokes our imagination, causing us to think about the many times we have encountered set-ups like this before. But it also hints at the broader infrastructure that is now tying all of us closer together. The internet is a ubiquitous phenomenon that brings the three cultures in touch with one another, no matter where one is.

The exhibition at Three Shadows Photography Centre serves to augment dialogue about what it means to encounter a culture different from one's own in today's world. Revealing the breadth and depth of Muntadas's experience of the three different countries, the various content and formats present insights that he gathered from his vantage point as an entrant into something he may have not previously been familiar with.

Junni Chen

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"Asian Protocols" by Antoni Muntadas is on view from 18 August to 16 September 2018 at Three Shadows Photography Art Centre, 155A Caochangdi, Chaoyang District, Beijing.

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