BEN YAU

My interests concern the ways in which visual practice can engage in the research of global conflict, historical narratives, and the radical imagination.
Ben Yau (b.1992, Glasgow) is a Chinese-Scots visual artist based between London, UK and The Hague, NL. He graduated from Camberwell College of Arts in the study of Fine Art Photography in 2019 and in the same year was selected for Bloomberg New Contemporaries as well as Creekside Open. Selected exhibitions include his solo presentation Proximate Currents: When Everything Fuses Together, Iniva (online/London 2020); and group exhibitions The London Open, Whitechapel Gallery (London 2022), Bloomberg New Contemporaries, Leeds Art Gallery, Leeds, and South London Gallery, London (2019); We Breathe in the Space Between, MIR Project Space (London 2019); and Creekside Open 2019 Selected by Sacha Craddock, APT Gallery (London 2019). His work is cultivated from historiographical research of othered narratives: the repression of certain histories, and the imperial operations that are conducted to this end. These narratives are often left out of official accounts of history, and therefore demand a multi-modal approach beyond the scope of the conventional institutions of history. This approach involves intervening, mediating, and countering the archive, utilising the generative ambiguities of artistic research. From research led processes, he engages with a diverse range of materials. These materials include declassified intelligence documents, archival films, and newspaper clippings.

WEBSITES

Artist website

www.benyau.org

SOCIAL MEDIA

www.instagram.com/benyauhaus

EDUCATION

2021 - 2023 MA Photography & Society Den Haag, Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten diploma

2016 - 2019 Fine Art Photography University of the Arts London, Camberwell College of Arts diploma

EXHIBITIONS

2026 Positions: Unearthing Stroom The Hague, Netherlands
Group

2026 Prospects Art Rotterdam Rotterdam, Netherlands
Group

2026 TEXTING Het Archief Artspace Rotterdam, Netherlands
Group

2025 A Year in Exile Quartair Den Haag, Netherlands
Group

2024 In the Shadow of Ashes The Balcony The Hague, Netherlands
Solo

2024 Stuart Hall: Positions and Trajectories The Exchange Birmingham, United Kingdom
Group

2024 CounterArchive Gasworks London, United Kingdom
Group

2023 In Times of Trouble We Dream with Open Eyes The Grey Space in the Middle The Hague, Netherlands
Group

2023 Stilled Images Balaszi Gallery Palma, Spain
www.instagram.com/tube__gallery/
Group

2023 Unstill Royal Academy of Art The Hague, Netherlands
Group

2022 The London Open Whitechapel Gallery London, United Kingdom www.whitechapelgallery.org/the-london-open-2022-artists/

2022 Countercurrents Bunker at Waterkant The Hague
Group

2020 Source Materials Nadir Project Space Brighton, United Kingdom
Group

2020 Extractive Model Study Bloc Projects Sheffield, United Kingdom
Solo

2020 Proximate Currents: When Everything Fuses Together Institute of International Visual Arts London
iniva.org/programme/projects/proximate-currents-when-everything-fuses-together/
Solo

2019 Bloomberg New Contemporaries South London Gallery London, United Kingdom
www.southlondongallery.org/exhibitions/bnc19/
Group

2019 We Breathe in the Space Between MIR Project Space London, United Kingdom
Group

2019 Bloomberg New Contemporaries Leeds Art Gallery Leeds, United Kingdom
museumsandgalleries.leeds.gov.uk/events/leeds-art-gallery/bloomberg-new-contemporaries-2019/
Group

2019 On Power Central Saint Martins London, United Kingdom
Group

2019 Camberwell Degree Show Camberwell College of Arts London, United Kingdom
Group

2019 Creekside Open APT Gallery London, United Kingdom
www.aptstudios.org/creekside-open
Group

2019 Meanwhile Four Corners Gallery London, United Kingdom
Group

2019 The Spectre of the Real Socially Engaged Art Salon Brighton, United Kingdom
Group

2019 Co-op(t) FarGo Village Coventry, United Kingdom
Group

2019 P2 Copeland Gallery London, United Kingdom
Group

2018 Pic.up Prints The Tea Building London, United Kingdom
Group

2018 Unspoken The Stash Gallery London, United Kingdom
Group

2018 Plane of Immanence Safehouse London, United Kingdom
Group

2018 Over Capacity CGP London, United Kingdom
Group

2017 Decade Zero Greenwich West London, United Kingdom
Duo

PROJECTS

2026 In the Shadow: Inherited Silences The Hague,

INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGES/RESIDENCIES

2024 Malaysia Design Archive Kuala Lumpar, Malaysia

Netherlands In the Shadow: Inherited Silences follows from the long-term project In the Shadow of Ashes, now focusing on how different forms of colonial suppression have shaped personal and political memory of the British colonisation of Malaya (now Malaysia). This immersive installation moves through three vignettes, each evoking a distinct mechanism of historical suppression. Audiences navigate a series of three illuminated scenes that tell stories of silence. These non-linear vignettes give testimony to the weaponised propaganda of the colonial Malayan Film Unit, the use of public spectacles of punishment, and the internalised silence of unspoken trauma. The work is anchored by the intimate testimony of Eddie Wong, a Chinese Malaysian whose family suffered at the hands of the colonial regime. Without a prescribed beginning or end, the connections between these vignettes are left for the viewer to trace. The term 'vignette' is employed in its dual sense: as a short, potent scene within the dramaturgy of the space, and as the faint, marginal shadow at the edge of a historical frame – the very details obscured by official records. In the Shadow: Inherited Silences operates through counter-archiving, approaching history 'from below' to piece together a narrative from oral testimony, family stories, and personal artefacts. The work traces how British colonial rule in Malaya operated across bureaucracy, spectacle, and the psyche, and how its legacies of obfuscation continue to cast a shadow on living memory.

2023 In the Shadow of Ashes The Hague, Netherlands www.benyau.org/In-the-Shadow-of-Ashes What is erased in the editing process of history? History smoulders with flames that sanitise official narratives, reducing to ashes certain accounts that threaten authority. In the Shadow of Ashes is an immersive, multi-media installation that sheds light on potential histories that British colonial forces have attempted to incinerate. The assemblage and interplay of the original research prompts renewed reflection on atrocity and its subsequent erasure from official narratives. Visitors are encouraged to flip through the declassified documents – numbering over a thousand pages – presented in archival boxes. The installation is set into motion by an audio composition that includes dialogue between artist Ben Yau and one of the last surviving direct relatives of a victim of the Batang Kali massacre, Lim Kok. The exchange centres around the killing of Lim's father by British colonial officers in Malaya in 1948, and recent revelations of a cover-up in the form of mass burnings of sensitive documents known as Operation Legacy. This conversation calls attention to the arrangement of materials presented on overhead projectors that turn on and off during the exchange, highlighting various dynamic elements. Once the medium of choice for disseminating colonial propaganda, projection has been employed in the installation as a form of 'anti-redaction'. In the Shadow of Ashes subverts the interrogative spotlight, redirecting its beam towards declassified government documents copied from The National Archives of the UK, newspaper clippings, and newly unearthed archival footage of top-secret files being burned in Aden (now Yemen). As surrogate for erased histories, this diachronic installation aims to generate novel reflections of this atrocity, its subsequent obfuscation by successive British Governments, and the amnesiac consequences of these injustices.

2020 Extractive Model Study Bloc Projects Sheffield, United Kingdom Commissioned by Bloc Projects, Extractive Model Study arranges images from the archive of the Ministry of Defence with illustrations depicting machinery used in the extraction of gold, silver, and diamond. These images and illustrations are imagined together as a visual blueprint for extractive capitalism, tracing the contours of new forms of British imperialism. In their original use cases, these constituent elements fit into a process of concealing and supporting imperial dominance. The diagrams reveal a structure of territorial conquest and dispossession of indigenous people's lands, while the photographs showing military demonstrations disguise violence under a veil of awe and sublime. Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0.

2020 Proximate Currents Institute of International Visual Arts London, United Kingdom iniva.org/programme/projects/proximate-currents-when-everything-fuses-together/ Echoing Stuart Hall's 2011 essay "The Neoliberal Revolution", the project collages a wide range of clips, focusing on moments of historical rupture and settlement in Britain. The work fuses together disparate footage with various sound clips from political speeches and interviews with Hall, in an attempt to capture fugitive images of past and present crises. Footage of the Brixton Riots, military airstrikes in Iraq, the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, as well as vehicle crash tests, wildlife documentary and televised advertisements, are conjoined in a mass of "proximate currents", moments that brush up against each other. Slowly, they trace a non-linear narrative from the Thatcher Era to the present moment, of "the long march of neoliberalism".

2019 The Spectre of a World Which Could Be Free London, United Kingdom "If there was a founding event of capitalist realism, it would be the violent destruction of the Allende government in Chile by General Pinochet's American-backed coup." -Mark Fisher In Eros and Civilization, Herbert Marcuse highlights a phenomenon in which the closer a society comes to liberating the individual, the greater the need for the established order to protect itself against "the spectre of a world which could be free". This is the lens through which the eponymously titled project investigates covert CIA operations within Chile in the 1970s. For the first time, period-appropriate declassified documents, newspaper articles, print ads, and archival images and video are reproduced and compiled, corroborating the narratives of public knowledge and top-secret activity into a parallel flux. Through such examination, questions arise of the neoliberal motives behind acts of tyranny and its contemporary relevance.

2018 To Lose This Wonderful Feeling London, United Kingdom To Lose This Wonderful Feeling is a collaboration with Aysen Dennis, a resident of the Aylesbury Estate who faces the prospect of losing her home. In 2005 Southwark Council announced that they would demolish the Aylesbury Estate - the largest social housing estate in Europe. This would displace thousands of residents from their homes and communities. The planning proposals expose that the council homes would be replaced by private housing, deemed unaffordable according to the council's own classifications. The council and property development partner Notting Hill Housing

have been in battle with the remaining residents ever since. The series of three prints use pages of the redevelopment planning permissions, downloaded from the website of Notting Hill Housing. Words have been selectively erased, and images of Aysen in her home have been placed on them, with her silhouette cut out. Accompanying the prints is a sound installation in which Aysen speaks about her memories of living in her home and what the future brings for her. The series was created for the group exhibition 'Over Capacity' at Southward Park Galleries, 1 mile from the Aylesbury Estate.

2017 Oil Spill London, United Kingdom Oil Spill makes use of a traditional marbling technique of floating oil-based inks on top of water, with an alteration of using printed market data instead of plain paper to capture the ink. The market data used correspond by date to thirty oil spill events in the past five years, collected from the Financial Times archive. In this way, the aqueous patterns created by the floating black ink "recreate" the oil spills, while becoming part of the data material.

2016 The Council London, United Kingdom The Council was created in the period between 'Brexit' and the Trump presidency, and considers the escalating climate of tense anti-establishment feelings in 2016. Traditional, light-sensitive photographic paper is placed directly against a computer screen in complete darkness, and exposed as a result of turning the screen on and off, resulting in unrepeatable, one-of-a-kind prints. The sources used are videos obtained from the internet of world leaders speaking at the UN general assemblies. Leaders of the UK, US, Russia, China, and France are the focus in this work for their controversial positions as unelected, permanent members of the UN Security Council.

COMMISSIONS

2020 Extractive Model Study Bloc Projects Sheffield, United Kingdom Commissioned by Bloc Projects, Extractive Model Study arranges images from the archive of the Ministry of Defence with illustrations depicting machinery used in the extraction of gold, silver, and diamond. These images and illustrations are imagined together as a visual blueprint for extractive capitalism, tracing the contours of new forms of British imperialism. In their original use cases, these constituent elements fit into a process of concealing and supporting imperial dominance. The diagrams reveal a structure of territorial conquest and dispossession of indigenous people's lands, while the photographs showing military demonstrations disguise violence under a veil of awe and sublime. www.blocprojects.co.uk/exhibitions-events/2020/bloc-billboard-ben-yau finished

2020 Proximate Currents: When Everything Fuses Together Institute of International Visual Arts London, United Kingdom Echoing Stuart Hall's 2011 essay "The Neoliberal Revolution", the project collages a wide range of clips, focusing on moments of historical rupture and settlement in Britain. The work fuses together disparate footage with various sound clips from political speeches and interviews with Hall, in an attempt to capture fugitive images of past and present crises. Footage of the Brixton Riots,

PUBLICATIONS

2022 Reputation Regimes Book Art Monthly Emily Rosamond London www.artmonthly.co.uk/magazine/site/issue/november-2022

2020 Bloomberg New Contemporaries 2019 Book Studio International Rosanna McLaughlin London, United Kingdom www.studiointernational.com/index.php/bloomberg-new-contemporaries-review-south-london-gallery

military airstrikes in Iraq, the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, as well as vehicle crash tests, wildlife documentary and televised advertisements, are conjoined in a mass of “proximate currents”, moments that brush up against each other. Slowly, they trace a non-linear narrative from the Thatcher Era to the present moment, of “the long march of neoliberalism”. iniva.org/programme/projects/proximate-currents-when-everything-fuses-together/ finished

REVIEWS

2026 Against Erasure: Remembering Otherwise – Positions: Unearthing at Stroom Den Haag Magazine Maria Chiara Miccoli The Hague, Netherlands metropolism.com/nl/recensie/against-erasure-remembering-otherwise-positions-unearthing-at-stroom-den-haag/

2023 Decade Zero: Ben Yau and Zaneta Zukalova Interview Website Angela Chan London, United Kingdom

2022 Ben Yau Interview with Inês Costa Website Inês Costa London, United Kingdom www.whitechapelgallery.org/exhibitions/the-london-open-2022-2/

2022 Against climate imperialism Blog/Vlog Progressive International

2020 Ben Yau Interview by David McLeavy Website David McLeavy Sheffield, United Kingdom youngartistsinconversation.co.uk/Ben-Yau

2020 Sheffield billboard display for work by exciting new artist Ben Yau Newspaper Julia Armstrong Sheffield, United Kingdom www.thestar.co.uk/arts-and-culture/art/sheffield-billboard-display-for-work-by-exciting-new-artist-ben-yau-2947250

2020 Interview with Ben Yau Website Kitty Bew Brighton, United Kingdom nadirproject.space/projects/source-materials

2020 Proximate Currents Reading Group Website Annie Jael Kwan, Languid Hands (Rabz Lansiquot & Imani Robinson) London, United Kingdom iniva.org/programme/events/proximate-currents-reading-group/

2020 Ben Yau in conversation with Benjamin Cook Website Benjamin Cook London, United Kingdom iniva.org/programme/events/proximate-currents-reading-group/

2020 Bloomberg New Contemporaries 2019 Magazine Rosanna McLaughlin London, United Kingdom www.studiointernational.com/index.php/bloomberg-new-contemporaries-review-south-london-gallery

SECONDARY ART-RELATED ACTIVITIES

2023 - 2023 Talk the Talk Symposium: Design as World Travelling

2022 - 2022 Coutnercurrents Panel Discussion

AWARDS AND GRANTS

2024 Artist Start Mondriaan fonds, Amsterdam Amsterdam, Netherlands

2022 Participating Artist Grant Whitechapel Gallery London, United Kingdom

2020 Commission Institute of International Visual Arts London, United Kingdom

2020 Commission Bloc Projects Sheffield, United Kingdom

2019 Participating Artist Grant Bloomberg New Contemporaries London, United Kingdom

2019 - 2019 Leeds Art Gallery Artist Talk



In the Shadow: Inherited Silences, 2026
Archive boxes, collage, one channel video, audio installation, Variable



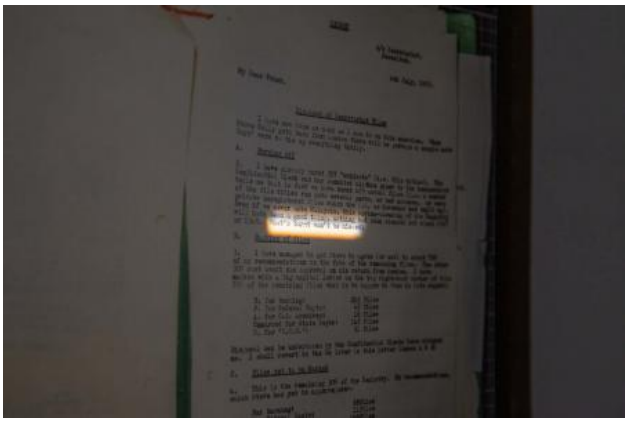
In The Shadow of Ashes, 2023
Overhead projectors, Hahnemühle glossy, Hahnemühle rice paper, IBO, newsprint, archival boxes, copy paper, one-channel video, sound installation, Variable



In The Shadow of Ashes, 2023
Overhead projectors, Hahnemühle glossy, Hahnemühle rice paper, IBO, newsprint, archival boxes, copy paper, one-channel video, sound installation, Variable



In The Shadow of Ashes, 2023
Overhead projectors, Hahnemühle glossy, Hahnemühle rice paper, IBO, newsprint, archival boxes, copy paper, one-channel video, sound installation, Variable



In The Shadow of Ashes, 2023
Overhead projectors, Hahnemühle glossy, Hahnemühle rice paper, IBO, newsprint, archival boxes, copy paper, one-channel video, sound installation, Variable



Extractive Model Study, 2020
Billboard, 170 x 474cm



The Spectre of A World Which Could Be Free, 2019
Photocopy paper, newsprint, semi-gloss photo paper, acetate, vinyl, book, video, Variable



The Spectre of A World Which Could Be Free, 2019
Photocopy paper, newsprint, semi-gloss photo paper, acetate, vinyl, book, video, Variable



The Spectre of A World Which Could Be Free, 2019
Photocopy paper, newsprint, semi-gloss photo paper, acetate, vinyl, book, video, Variable



The Spectre of A World Which Could Be Free, 2019
Photocopy paper, newsprint, semi-gloss photo paper, acetate, vinyl, book, video, Variable