TROMARAMA, *Panoramix*, 2015, single-channel video: 1 min 29 sec. Installation view of "Panoramix" at Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong, 2015. Courtesy Edouard Malingue Gallery.

PANORAMIX
TROMARAMA

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INDONESIA   HONG KONG

Much ink has been spilled (or, perhaps more truthfully, words have been typed) about the increasingly proximal relationship that people have with digital screens. The bond is a tenacious and dependant one—we spend far more time looking into the digital world than we do making eye contact with others. The upending tragedy of a lost or broken smartphone leaves us positively terrified at the idea of having to try to remember how to read paper maps or locate a landline. Screens have become so normalized in visual culture that we barely realize when the line between virtual reality and "real" life begins to blur, or perhaps swap places without notice. The Indonesian video collective Tromarama addresses the meshing of realities in a group of sleek new media works in their exhibition "Panoramix" at Edouard Malingue Gallery in Hong Kong.
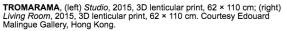
Tromarama is comprised of artists Febie Babyrose (aka Baby), Herbert Hans (aka Ebet), and Ruddy Hatumena. The trio met while studying at the Bandung Institute of Technology, where Hatumena and Hans were studying graphic design, while Babyrose was studying printmaking. Their first collaboration began during their final semesters of university, in an extracurricular workshop on music video production, held by a group of alumni artists who would later go on to form the video production collective Cerahati Artwork. In search of a material process that broke from the tired tropes of the genre, the three young artists carved 450 woodcut blocks by hand to make a graphic, stop-motion video titled *Serigala Militia* (2006), set to the beats of Indonesian hard rock band Seringai. From this project, their name was born: "Tromarama" is semi-homonymous with the word "trauma," which they felt aptly described their experience of having to cut hundreds of wooden blocks by hand.

For years, the trio continued working with stop-motion, a process which they saw as a way of giving a second chance to overlooked, inanimate objects. The video *Ting** (2008), which depicts a range of white chinaware taking a walk through the city, was exhibited for the first time with an installation of real china pieces. Also in 2008, the original woodcut blocks used for *Serigala Militia* were exhibited at the 2nd Singapore Biennale, where they were met with widespread, favorable reception. The collective has since exhibited in their own country and abroad and become one of the best known new-media collectives hailing from Bandung, where they continue to work and live.

TROMARAMA, (left) *Studio*, 2015, 3D lenticular print, 62 × 110 cm; (right) *Living Room*, 2015, 3D lenticular print, 62 × 110 cm. Courtesy Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong.

TROMARAMA, *Studio* (detail), 2015, 3D lenticular print, 62 × 110 cm. Courtesy Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong.

Indonesia is well-known for being home to video and new-media artists of remarkable quality, represented in large part by a generation whose proclivity to digital artmaking is traceable through the country's recent political past. In 1997, economic crisis hit Indonesia, bringing down the authoritarian New Order regime of then president Suharto. The country entered a period of social, political and economic stress which put pressure on the youth of the middle class, who dealt with the crisis by taking part in a range of creative industries, effectively creating the foundation of what is now known as Indonesia's "creative economy." The affordability of cheap computers and pirated software gave people access to the tools necessary to experiment with film, sound, animation and video. This expanded access to technology resulted in a generation of artists with strong IT skills who disseminated their work across their own vast social networks. Meeting a demand for public exhibition of this work, 2003 saw the inauguration of OK Video, an international-scale biennial for Indonesian media arts held in Jakarta.

Tromarama's recent work extends beyond stop-motion and animation. In addition to video, their show at Edouard Malingue includes five forays into lenticular printing—a technology that replicates an illusion of depth, or flipping of images, as the viewer moves around the printed product. Three of these works, *Unsettled, I do* and *Promise* (all 2015), look like hyper-thin, black plasma televisions showing white subtitles at the bottom of their screens. Lenticular prints, though stagnant objects, emulate time-based media by their peculiar ability to change appearances based on the viewer's positioning, a quality that is capitalized in this series. The subtitles shift as one walks by, creating three-line narratives similar to isolated moments in films. Offering only fractured micro-narratives, one reads: "I will never ever leave you/ever/you and I." Two other lenticular prints in the exhibition, titled *Studio* and *Living Room*, depict interior scenes as described by their respective titles, shown from slightly different vantage points depending on where the viewer stands. Backward text at the bottom of each image (again, as subtitles) reads: "I see what you see/I think what I think," and "I see what you see/I feel what you feel." While the text may refer to the duality of emotional perspective, the experience of viewing the lenticulars is similar to that of shutting one eye after the other to make objects appear to move back and forth in space. Perhaps the words also allude to the imitation of this ocular phenomenon made possible by technology.

Across the room is the work *Panoramix* (2015), comprising a single-channel video projected on a hanging screen, which shows a close-up shot of lush grass and untamed vegetation rustling gently in the breeze. However, when a particularly strong gust blows through the greenery, the entire image itself flutters and retreats backwards into a gray background, as if itself were a soft curtain. The effect, of course, is a digital manipulation, and the physical projection surface does not move. The sudden jolt from the "real" likeness of the plants to the "unreal" illusion of the receding image exposes the extent to which we willfully suspend our disbelief when looking at screens. Tromarama's concern with the complicated consequences of living in between two realms—virtual reality and actual reality—is evident in the work, which interrupts presumptions about how both territories are supposed to behave.

Also utilizing wind is the installation *Intercourse* (2015), consisting of a freestanding screen playing footage of a whirring fan, which faces a large projection showing stacks of everyday objects on the opposite wall. As if the image of the fan really does possess momentous power, napkins, plastic cups, bubble wrap, muffin wrappers and towels in the video across the roomn are blown over one by one. This work, along with *Panoramix,* acts as a fine example of the treachery of images in contemporary life. Daily consumption of visual culture is ubiquitously touched by technically enhanced optical illusions; films are screened in three-dimension more often than not and even app icons on mobile phones are designed to appear to have volume. By disrupting and expanding the expected nature of screens and still images, the works in the exhibition alert the audience to the fallibility of perceptive habits, which are rapidly acclimatizing to the expanding ability of technology.

TROMARAMA, *Intercourse*, 2015, two-channel video: 4 min 10 sec. Installation view of "Panoramix" at Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong, 2015. Courtesy Edouard Malingue Gallery.

Tromarama: "Panoramix" is on view until January 23, 2016, at Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong.