



# DONNA ONG

## *The Caretaker*

2008

Multimedia installation

Dimensions variable

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

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## Did You Know?

1. *The Caretaker* was inspired by the Friendship Doll Project initiated by American missionary, Reverend Sidney Gulick, in 1927. Prompted by the Immigration Act of 1924, the Reverend's project began with the gifting of blue-eyed dolls from America to Japan to promote goodwill and friendship between the two countries. In return, Japan sent lavishly adorned kimono-clad dolls to America. However, the subsequent bombing of Pearl Harbour and World War II caused the relationship between the two countries to sour. Consequently, these dolls, which were viewed as ambassadors and representatives of their respective countries, were destroyed, removed from museum collections or kept out of sight.
2. In Ong's return to and re-imagination of this historical moment, a caretaker emerges and appears to be watching over the dolls. The scene also includes videos in which the dolls finally meet on amicable terms after some time.



## Let's Talk!

1. The friendship dolls were gifted as a gesture of goodwill and friendship between America and Japan. How do gifts help to strengthen the relationship between countries?
2. In this artwork, the artist depicts the friendship dolls finally meeting on amicable terms. Imagine a conversation taking place between two friendship dolls. What do you think they might say to each other?
3. Observe how the work is presented. How does it make you feel? Why do you think it is presented this way?
4. Recall the gifts you have given to others in the past. What were the intentions behind these acts of gifting? Have their meanings and significance remained the same over the years?
5. Recall the gifts you have received over the years. Which is the most memorable? Why?
6. Gift giving is a common practice among different cultures and societies. Look into gifting practices from different parts of the world. Do you notice any similarities and differences between these practices? What societal expectations are they shaped by?



## About the Artist:

**Donna Ong** (b. 1978) is an installation artist in Singapore who is best known for her evocative and thought-provoking environments created using furniture, found objects and original artworks. Her works have been exhibited locally and internationally in shows such as the inaugural Singapore Biennale (2007), Jakarta Biennale (2009) and the Children's Biennale at National Gallery Singapore (2019); and institutions including Singapore Art Museum; National Museum of Singapore; Hara Museum, Tokyo; and the Djanogly Art Gallery, Nottingham University, UK. Ong received her bachelor's degrees in Fine Art and Architecture at Goldsmiths College London and University College London respectively. She completed her master's degree in Fine Arts at LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore in 2012. In 2019, she received the National Arts Council's Young Artist Award and the People's Choice award in the President's Young Talent Competition.



## Find Out More:

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