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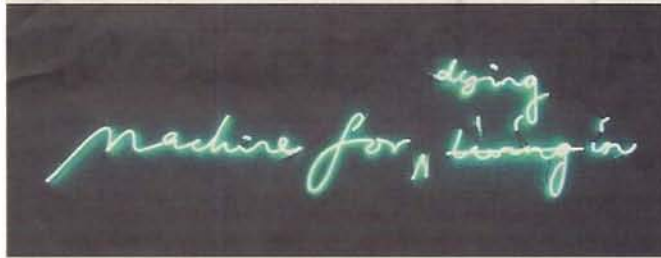
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Exploration: In 'Machine for (Living) Dying In', Michael Lee's overall aim is to look into the notion of Home as well as the uncertainties surrounding its concept

Reflections on life, death and solitude

By **CHEAH UI-HOON**
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MAYBE it was because he was alone in Berlin in the middle of a harsh winter, but when artist Michael Lee heard of an army mate who died alone at home in Singapore, that got him thinking about death and solitude.

For his exhibition at the end of the year-long residency at Kunsterhaus Bethanien, Lee made a video "obituary" of 45 places where people have died alone, or were last seen alone. "The theme centred on solitude," he explains. He includes this video as part of his new solo exhibition at Yavuz Fine Art, titled *Machine for (Living) Dying In*, where the overall aim is to look into the notion of Home as well as the uncertainties surrounding its concept.

Home is as specific as the 20th place of residence he's stayed at in Singapore. Or it could be the sense of comfort one might find in less homey places, like public spaces you encounter on your travels. "Home doesn't have to be defined in a physical way," he notes.

But how does the video, with its macabre theme, mesh with the notion of Home? Lee chuckles, saying that in his view it's actually a very optimistic piece. "For a start, we need to understand why people are not comfortable or don't like to engage in the topic of death. And then there's the idea that one of the KPIs (key performance indicators) of a good life is to die with friends and relatives surrounding you on your deathbed."

What spurred this video work was news of the death of his former army mate in 2012. "He was younger than me. It was winter in Berlin when I read the report, cold and alone. In a sense, I was in a situation that could have landed me in the same predicament," he recalls.

His exhibition title was inspired by the two architects Le Corbusier and Douglas Darden, and their definitions of house and home. Le Corbusier, for example, defined a house as a "machine for living in". Darden, 70 years later, said that a house is for dying in. That morbid thought came from his unbuilt proposal for a client with chest injuries, who requested that an oxygen pump be built into the house that



Deviation:
In 'Hazards', Lee's message is that one is not safe anywhere, even in one's own home

could be connected to his chest, so that when he died, the pump would stop.

"On the one hand, we often think of home as being safe and comfortable, but the other aspect of reality is that it's the place where we die a bit each day," muses Lee.

Focusing on space as a metaphor for physical existence and as a reflection of humanity, Lee's show is deliberately raw. He's also deviated from his usual style with a collage series titled *Hazards*, with a message that one is not safe anywhere, even in the sanctity of one's own home. In *Slab*, he rearranges everyday furniture into three-dimensional puns, such as a reference to public housing blocks. *Script for an Unperformed Performance* features a hammock tied across two pillars in the gallery and text that is painted on the wall describing a series of mundane activities or actions.

If it all looks very disparate, it's meant to be. After all, by creating collages, "I collect information and make connections between unrelated things - hopefully, there's some sense of reality that can be felt by the audience".

'Machine for (Living) Dying In' by Michael Lee will show at Yavuz Fine Art, 51 Waterloo Street, #03-01, from Aug 16 to Sept 21. The artist will hold a tour of the exhibition on Aug 14, from 2-4pm.

For inquiries and to RSVP for the exhibition tour, please contact Irene Fung at irene@yavuzfineart.com or at (65) 6338-7900