What's in the name? What if there's no person behind the name so it's just the name? If the name evokes more than one person, who is going to answer when it's called? Why do we name the unnameable or the unnamed? Who still remain nameless and stay with us?

1. Natasha manifests when we undo the world as we know. By undoing them, we arrive at the “matrix” of life: home, family, and other relations—whether of friendship, love, hate, or simply womb. Simultaneously, by undoing, we also land at home as earth—that is, the family of and in relationship with other species, non-animate beings like stones, or invisible presences like ghosts or spirits. A biennale is an exhibition of contemporary art—along with other programs—taking place biennially and mostly organized in large scale, grabbing many resources including attention. It’s a festivity, a ceremony, a statement, a momentum, or all of them. The Singapore Biennale 2022 is named Natasha. Given a name, Natasha pushes against our normative knowledge and ways of knowing—even including the biennale itself—to become minor, small, nothing, and to be something again. It’s the invitation for an encounter, as in a journey to face the meaning of life again.

Likewise, the life of the artist matters in relating to their works. It’s life before art or art in life. The encounter may enable us to practice different ways to relate to one another, ultimately towards what I would like to call “impersonal fellowship.” This idea is borrowed from theoretical physicist and theorist of mind David Bohm. He said, “The point is that we would establish, on another level, a kind of bond, which is called impersonal fellowship. You don’t have to know each other. In England, for example, the football crowds prefer not to have seats in their football stands, but just to stand bunched against each other. In those crowds very few people know each other, but they still feel something—that contact—which is missing in their ordinary personal relations. And in war many people feel that there's a kind of comradeship which they miss in peacetime. It’s the same sort of thing—that close connection, that fellowship, that mutual participation. I think people find this lacking in our society, which glorifies the separate individual. The communists were trying to establish something else, but they completely failed in a very miserable way. Now a lot of them have adopted the same values as we have. But people are not entirely happy with that. They feel isolated. Even those who “succeed” feel isolated, feel there’s another side they are missing.”

2. Note to take: it may well be that, without names, a family, a community or any other relationship can maintain their relationship of love. There’s something immense behind the names, not in the names. The names, not in the names. The names of love. There’s something immense behind a relationship can maintain their relationship or invisible presences like ghosts or spirits.

3. “While the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we used to live by suspending ordinary life, and causing the loss of many, we now witness a process of normalization, whether voluntary or forced. Many biennales have also celebrated this 'return' of post-pandemic, with a renewed hope for a world different from what we live[d] in. Visiting Natasha is not only to return, but to be conscious of the values most intensely experienced during the pandemic: intimacy, living the unknown, the capacity to adapt, realizing other possibilities of living and relating to the world.” – A collective voice from us, co-artistic directors of Singapore Biennale 2022

4. Shin Beomsun is one of the 'artists' contributing to the Singapore Biennale 2022. Shin is Professor Emeritus of Korean Literature at Seoul National University. He never made or exhibited an artwork, but he has an expanding collection of an unedited) taken by Kyoungtae Kim shows a stone tablet as part of the collection by Shin Beomsun where the Queen Shyashya and her princess make their appearance. One of them is what’s presented in Figure 1 (photograph by Youngtae Kim).
of small stones that he found over last few years. Everyday he sketches them, one after another, in order to read them carefully and closely. They show beings – numerous beings – whether they are shaman, cheonso (angels in Korean), princess and queen, or mythical bird-cum-lion like a Griffin. Shin, however, named them somewhat differently: “shuyamnon” rather than shaman, “tenshy” rather than cheonso, “gyurfrin” rather than griffin. A queen is named, or has the name, Shuyamnon. Queen Shyashya is composed of multiple and endlessly weaving lines of griffin. There’s no foreground or background. One form of being lends to another to make a multitude of forms or beings. One could say, a joyful and vital form of existence is Queen Shyashya. The story of Queen Shyashya is a redemption of the lost old language or lost “paradise” as told by the wise Kins Shin. She believes the birth of a fairy tale prior to myth. The tales are the stories that honor the creators or creating powers of the world and all of human beings. The pre-text of such tales. Small ancient stone tablets make the stories travel, available for no one but those who seek for them. Natasha draws artists from the edge of – or even outside of – the field of current artistic and visual art. It’s not to insert the “outsiders” into the “inside.” Rather, it’s asking all to be outsiders from what we are used to or used to do. Natasha is a means of undoing knowledge or ways of knowing as we know, to say it again. Thus ask: What do you want to draw about art? What is the process of drawing? Where to find art and artists? Shin guides us back to the basics yet the fundamental: a world of art, the questions of reality and how this “world” is created. We journey into other kinds of temporality and in different directions, e.g., we trace back to ancient economy that essentially functions by outsourcing work to a remotely located crew of individuals who are unable to know or interact with each other. Existing images of the physical locations that people inhabit while performing click work via digital platforms, which are also highly designed to keep them invisible and negate their existence, introduces a crack in a seemingly totalizing system. Aarti received around 20 submissions in response to the assignment she posed, which was none or not one that caught her attention. When I saw these photographs, I was struck and perplexed, one after another, which is not how I consciously since. What did these pictures want, exactly? In that preliminary discussion, the image seemed to open a space for attributing language to what they were doing. And even Aarti’s subsequent text in Art Juxtaposition analysis indicates that what they represent is that which supersedes what can be seen. These photographs are rendered here as sketches that Aarti has made by hand, and their handmadeness is a significant aspect (Figs. 1-4). The reason she turned to drawing in this particular instance is that she is unsure about releasing the images as a public domain in photographic form. This might have something to do with what she calls their potentials, that derive from invisibility, which is their immediacy.

How does this relate to Natasha, the biennale we are making? During one of our early curatorial discussions, Alia flashed a website called This Person Does Not Exist onto a screen and June helped me identify my extreme unease – or was it terror? – in response to the image content of the unseen subject. This Person Does Not Exist is a repository of high-resolution images of seemingly real people generated by powerful artificial intelligence technology. Each photograph is a composite of many other people, and the single person it portrays is not of this world in the way that you and I might be. Who or what is the referent? Our relationship to the experience of looking at the representation of a visage is undone and that which is indexed about the genre of portrait photography. The forms of incapacity, the ideas on the image do not possess the capacity to have them.

In aesthetics, the uncanny valley denotes a negative emotional response to an image, with regard to one’s relation to an object, based on the object’s degree of indistinguishability from a human being. One of the things we have hoped to do by giving the Singapore Biennale 2022 a name that is generally associated with a person is to think our assumptions of the fundamental conceptual category of the stable unity subject that person implies, to think of our relation to the earth and the cosmos in more material and temporal terms. Sometimes we insist in public discussions that this “Natasha” is not a person, but we maintain that visiting Natasha is an invitation to encounter a presence nonetheless. What is this presence composed of? How is it felt? From where does it come and to what end? Or am I merely stepping on a crack in a seemingly totalizing system? While This Person Does Not Exist opens onto a terrain I am hesitant to enter, Aarti’s project seamlessly stopped us to confront the hidden and opaque forms of labor” called ghostwork and to feel its presence across various platforms that claim to be computer-operated. It is widely understood that the commonplace notion of artificial intelligence rests on negating the material and economic costs that have gone into machine learning.

“The word ghost here,” she writes, “indicates that it is not just the physical absence of a person doing a particular job, but the pretense that such a person does not even exist; the alert laboring hand behind the magic of technology, the silence that requires spontaneity, creativity, and cultural interpretation.”

In one of our initial conversations with Aarti Sunder, she showed us a set of four photographs she had procured by posting a high-paying HIT, or human intelligence task, on a notorious online marketplace she’s been researching called Amazon Mechanical Turk — a crowdsourcing website that businesses use to hire geographically dispersed workers to perform discrete on-demand labor that computers are unable to do.