

## ***JOHN CLANG: READING BY AN ARTIST***

Gibbes Museum of Art, Campbell Rotunda

March 25 – April 10, 2026

Text by Tushara Bindu Gude, Ph.D.

Curator, Foundation for Spirituality and the Arts

### EXHIBITION INTRODUCTION

#### *John Clang: Reading by an Artist*

John Clang (b. 1973) is a Singaporean artist acclaimed for his photography and endurance performances. *Reading by an Artist*, his latest performance work, is based on Clang's mastery of *zi wei dou shu* (Numbers of the Northern Dipper in the Palace of Purple Sublimity), a tenth-century imperial Chinese metaphysical art that traces its roots to the ninth century BCE *Yi Jing* (Book of Changes). Through his readings, Clang creates a likeness, but without the apparatus of a camera. His metaphysical portrait comes into focus, like a print in a darkroom, as his interactions with the sitter provide clarity regarding destiny and the choices that shape it.

Using a sitter's date and time of birth, Clang produces a destiny chart (*ming pan*) through which he intuits interrelationships between various core "palaces" of life—such as health, career, or family. Clang's readings are linked to spiritual practices in China that, historically, sought to align the human and natural worlds, and to establish a moral and religious consciousness that was in harmony with the heavens. Clang views human destiny as an epic codex that can be interpreted and translated into personal empowerment and tangible action.

Since 2023, Clang has expanded *Reading by an Artist* visually, spatially, temporally, and digitally, with the addition of *The Testimonial Series* (on view downstairs), *Nine Chairs*, and *Table of Inquiry*. As visitors engage with all four artworks, they encounter themselves and others, reflect upon parallel lives, share moments of care, and become part of an unfolding collective encounter. The online presence of the artist in this performance is an extension of Clang's

photography work, which is concerned with “third spaces” connecting people across time and space.

Here in the Gibbes Campbell Rotunda, *Reading by an Artist* resonates in an especially meaningful way with *Rodin: All the Truth of Nature*. Both artists explore the inner human condition, Clang through the invisible systems that give it shape, and Rodin through its physical expression in bronze.

## INDIVIDUAL ARTWORKS

1.

John Clang (b. Singapore, 1973)

*Reading by an Artist (The Testimonial Series)*, 2023–ongoing

Digital prints on paper

From its inception, John Clang’s *Reading by an Artist* has elicited numerous comments from participants, and the artist regularly installs these testimonials as visual components of his performance. Collectively they represent a subversion of the professional critic’s role, allowing ordinary people to review art from a highly subjective perspective. They are also a reflection of contemporary culture, in which online reviews and opinions inform everyday thought and decision-making. Clang views these testimonials both as heartfelt records of connection and a mirror of our times.

2.

John Clang (b. Singapore 1973)

*Reading by an Artist*, 2023–ongoing

Remote performance

Using a sitter's date and time of birth, Clang produces a destiny chart (*ming pan*) integrating complex considerations of astronomy, astrology, geomancy, and cosmic energies, among other things. Through the chart he intuitively interrelationships between various core "palaces" of life—such as health, career, and family—in order to produce a metaphysical portrait of his sitter. Clang's practice challenges artistic conventions, yet reminds us that aesthetic experiences can provide profound forms of emotional guidance and support.

The salt on the sitter's chair is associated with purification and protection in Chinese traditions. Before their readings, participants should place the bowl on the table and touch the salt with both hands. Museum visitors who chance upon the readings are also invited to participate in this act of cleansing and renewal.

3.

John Clang (b. Singapore, 1973)

*Nine Chairs*, 2025–ongoing

Locally borrowed chairs, ceramic bowl, salt

*Nine Chairs* is an enactment of care and healing that extends *Reading by an Artist* into a temporal and spatial form. Each chair, witness to countless domestic moments and memories, has been borrowed from a Charleston family. The artist directs the movements of the chairs according to a complex set of Chinese philosophies. Every hour, the chairs will be reoriented to align with the most auspicious direction at that moment, channeling a positive energy. Visitors are encouraged to sit on the chairs, receiving their alignment. In doing so, they participate in a collective act of renewal that links them with others across time and space.

The anchor chair will, at times, be occupied by participants in Clang's readings and remain stationary. The salt on this chair (placed on the table during active readings) is considered a purifying substance and visitors are encouraged to touch it before sitting on any of the chairs.

4.

John Clang (b. Singapore, 1973)

*Table of Inquiry*, 2025–ongoing

Canvas, graphite pencil

John Clang developed *Table of Inquiry* in order to share his *Reading by an Artist* performance with a wider audience. As scheduled readings occur at one end of the table, condensed versions play out across the canvas scroll covering the rest. The artist invites museum visitors to submit a single question, along with relevant birth details, via QR codes on the nearby wooden blocks. Clang's answers—which can be identified only through context and given dates—will be handwritten across the canvas, transforming the table into an evolving archive of reflection. Viewers will encounter themselves amidst others, recognize parallel lives, share moments of care, and become part of an unfolding collective encounter.

The QR code contains a link through which participants can learn when their answer can be viewed.

5.

John Clang, (b. Singapore, 1973)

*A Portrait of the Gibbes Museum of Art*, 2026

Digital print on paper

Based on its opening at 5:30PM on April 11<sup>th</sup>, 1905, John Clang has produced this destiny chart (*ming pan*) for the Gibbes Museum of Art. The Chinese metaphysical philosophy that Clang employs in his *Reading by an Artist* performance is not just reserved for living individuals. It can be applied to institutions, buildings, and geographical places. The twelve circles in the Gibbes' chart correspond to "palaces" governing such things as the museum's operating nature, staff, visitors, and reputation. The chart is based on complex analyses of the positions, interactions, and strengths of planets and various celestial bodies, both at the time of the museum's birth and in successive temporal intervals.