



Research: The Philippines 01

Manila

2015.01.08 - 01.11

The first research trip of the SEA PROJECT was conducted in Manila. The curatorial team interviewed artists and curators from different generations and also visited museums, galleries, and art spaces to find out how the art scenes and practices have developed in a culture that was formed through “300 years in a convent, and fifty years in Hollywood.” Having participated in the 57th Venice Biennale in 2015 as a national pavilion after a hiatus of fifty-one years, the curators explore how the arts of the Philippines continue to develop.



Haruko Kumakura



Minami Yusuke



Mami Kataoka



Naoki Yoneda



artbooks.ph

2015.01.08



Haruko Kumakura

The bookstore, artbooks.ph, was opened in April 2014 by artist Ringo Bunoan (1974-), the former head of Big Sky Mind Artists’ Projects Foundation, an artist-run space established in the 1990s. Working online and offline, artbooks.ph sells not only books on contemporary art but also publications of a variety of other topics. The bookstore was opened out of concern for the lack of art magazines, catalogues, and criticism in modern Philippines. Its goal is to revitalize the publishing sphere in the country and spread publications to both local and international readers. The parent organization of artbooks.ph is the Pioneer Studio photo studio, which provides high-quality printing for art works for exhibitions, as well as studio-space for rental. When we visited, the space was undergoing renovation in preparation for an exhibition. In the future, they plan to begin a cross-genre collaborative publishing program involving artists, writers, and designers.



Finale Art File

2015.01.08



Haruko Kumakura

One of the longest-running active gallery in the Philippines, Finale Art File was first opened in Makati in 1983. The gallery has often hosted exhibitions that give young artists and their experimental works numerous opportunities for exposure, including conceptual artist Roberto Chabet (1937-2013) and his many students whom he has taught at the University of the Philippines. In the 1990s, Finale Art File and fifteen to twenty other galleries moved to a shopping mall to hold well-attended Art Walk, but the rise in rent during the late 2000s led to the closure of galleries after galleries, prompting Finale Art File to move to a large 450 square meters new space in 2008. Today, this space is divided into three separate exhibition spaces where the gallery holds exhibitions for Filipino artists active both in the Philippines and abroad.



Jorge B. Vargas Museum and Filipiniana Research Center, University of the Philippines

2015.01.09



Mami Kataoka

The Jorge B. Vargas Museum features collections covering the history of modern art in the Philippines from the 1880s to the 1960s. Also offered are an archive on Philippine art and a reading room. The collection exhibits are a genealogy of paintings loosely thematically categorized while maintaining a historical perspective. Curated by Patrick Flores, Professor of University of the Philippines, the collections include works by nationally treasured painters such as Fernando Amorsolo, as well as photographs, videos, and printed material woven in as referential materials about modern art and each respective era of history. The special exhibit at the time of our visit featured works resulting from a workshop organized by the Japan Foundation for young curators, titled “RUN & LEARN.” Through this event featuring a number of artists curated by Con Cabrera, Ricky Francisco, Merv Espina, and Mayumi Hirano, we got a glimpse at the critical mindset and concerns of young artists in Manila. In residence in Manila from Japan, Yoshinori Niwa has implemented a participatory project focused on the city’s local waste disposal problems. The Working Artist Group also operated an excellent project out of the museum’s underground space, delving into the question of the function of the art museum.



Green Papaya Art Project

2015.01.09



Mami Kataoka

The first wave of alternative spaces occurred in Manila in the 1970s. Following this was the second wave beginning in the 1990s, in which alternative spaces and artists-run spaces served an important role, but most of these closed after only three to five short years. One of these spaces that ultimately lasted the longest was the Green Papaya Art Project founded in 2000. Co-founder Norberto Roldan (1953-), who once worked for a television station, stated, “in the year 2000, there was no art market like there is today. It was only natural to seek for a space and methods to exhibit works by ourselves, like activism. The market began to appear around 2008, but the work of the Green Papaya Art Project hasn’t changed.” They have hosted a variety of activities, including sound art, dance, spoken word, performances, and talks. Although they were concerned about how the eco-balance would be upset due to the rapid growth of the market, it still seemed to retain its character as a comfortable place where various discussions can flourish.



1335MABINI

2015.01.10



Naoki Yoneda

1335 MABINI is a gallery and alternative space located at 1335 A. Mabini Street in Manila. Operated jointly with Austria’s Galerie Zimmermann Kratochwill, the gallery not only actively displays artwork, but also actively hosts performances, workshops, and talk events. Since 2013, it also offers an artist-in-resident program. Kiri Dalena (1975-) who is affiliated with the gallery describes herself as being both an artist and an activist, and, through a combination of documentary film-making and sculpting, her interest lies in the human rights issues facing those involved in accidents and other incidents. Also with the gallery is artist Poklong Anading, who makes free and skillful use of various media including drawing, photography, and video, striving to expand the possibilities for viewer participation in his work. Japanese artists Niwa Yoshinori and Mohri Yuko also exhibit their works here at what could be called one of the most international-minded galleries in the Philippines.



[98B COLLABoratory](#)

2015.01.11



Naoki Yoneda

98B COLLABoratory is an artists-run space located in Manila. This space was founded in 2012 with artist Mark Salvatus (1980-) and curator Mayumi Hirano as the primary member to help accommodate Manila's increasingly diverse art scene. According to artist-curator Marika Constantino, one of the founding members, the space was originally established out of the desire for a space where young artists could gather and experiment in the midst of what was felt to be an exclusive and cliquish art scene in the Philippines. The space is open to a multiplicity of uses, serving as a studio, office, kitchen, shop, and also as a library usable by anyone. With its residency program and hosted talks and exhibits, 98B COLLABoratory seems to be striving to create a platform for network-building between those involved in art and the general people.



[Jose Tence Ruiz \(1956 –\)](#)

2015.01.11



Mami Kataoka

Jose Tence Ruiz is an artist who participated in the 2015 Philippines Pavilion of the 57th Venice Biennale, curated by Patrick Flores. In an interview, Mr. Ruiz described for us in detail the history of drastic political and social changes the Philippines has undergone in the last fifty years, including the 1965 – 1986 Marcos government, the cultural and internationalization policies of Imelda Marcos in the 1970s, and the EDSA Revolution of 1986. In this context, the world of contemporary art featured a struggle between European and American art with indigenous, popular Philippine art, as well as the parallel advance of works of socialist realism, abstract painting, and non-object art. Amidst the calls for democratization, there is great affinity between activism and artistic expression, and this tendency is also visible among modern young artists. "I have great concern for daily reality. Newspaper articles are my inspiration," says Mr. Ruiz. He conveys a social awareness rooted in his own social context.



[The Cultural Center of the Philippines \(CCP\)](#)

The Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) is a multi-purpose cultural center established in 1969 by the Ferdinand Marcos administration to promote art and culture. The CCP hosts

2015.01.11



Naoki Yoneda

domestic and international events in music, dance, theater, visual art, literature, film, and design. In the 1970s and '80s, the CCP grew further with a primary focus in theater. In 1973, the Philippine Philharmonic Orchestra became the first group formed to utilize the CCP as the foundation for its activities, and today there are a total of nine such groups in both music and the performing arts. The CCP also publishes materials such as magazines, books, and audio-visual media, publishing the ten-volume *CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art* in 1994. In the field of modern visual arts, especially noteworthy is the Thirteen Artists Award held every three years since 2009. Because the thirteen domestic artists nominated for this award participate in an exhibition held at the CCP, this award is becoming a gateway to success for contemporary Philippine artists.



Sanggawa (1994 – 1998)



Minami Yusuke

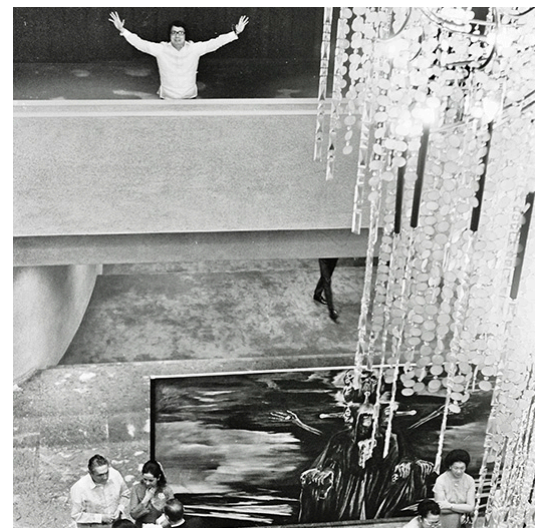
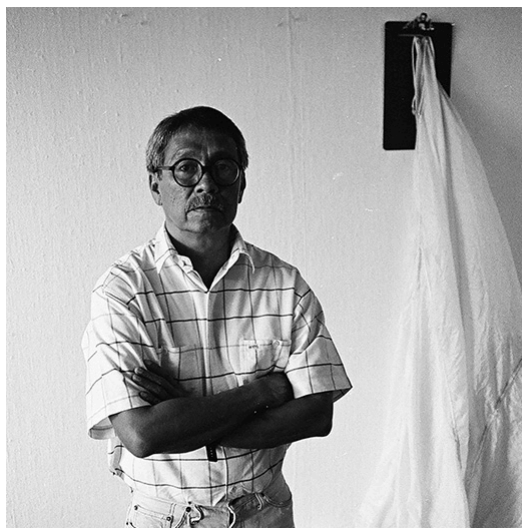
Sanggawa is a Manila-based artist collective that grew out of a group of University of the Philippines students, Grupong Salingpusa, active from 1988. Formed in 1994 by Elmer Borlongan, Karen Flores, Mark Justiniani, Joy Mallari, and Federico Sievert, the Sanggawa artists jointly created large, non-abstract paintings and murals characterized by their dynamic composition and fine detail. These works blended political and satirical themes with traditional Philippine myths and legends. Active as Sanggawa until 1998, it was certainly not a long-lived group, but they worked throughout the Philippines and abroad, even staying in Tokyo in 1997 to work at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo. Even though Sanggawa has come to an end, the individual members continue to be active and well-regarded artists.

Roberto Chabet (1937 – 2013)



Mami Kataoka

Roberto Chabet was a leading conceptual artist from the Philippines. Whereas conceptual artist David Medalla (1942-) moved to Britain in the 1960s, Chabet was appointed the gallery director of the Cultural Center of the Philippines in 1967 at the age of thirty. After observing the state of art in Europe and the Americas, Chabet worked almost entirely within the Philippines. Under his direction, the CCP organized numerous experimental exhibitions. His work extended beyond being an artist and curator, and into education where he began teaching at the University of the Philippines in 1971, and in this role he provided spiritual and moral support for young artists for their professional independence and spaces such as SHOP6 for their activities. Chabet's name came up repeatedly in the interviews with all kinds of artists and gallery directors, and even today many conceptual artists were in fact his pupils. He was and still is an essential presence in the development of Philippine conceptual art.



Special Thanks

Alice Sarmiento
Anjo Bolarda
Cesar H. Villalon
Con Cabrera
Derek Tvmala
Eric Zamuco
Evita T.Sarenas
Gabriel Barredo
Isa Lorenzo
Jose Tence Ruiz
Joselina Cruz
Joseph Gabriela
Joy Mallari
Karen Flores

Kiri Dalena
Senator Loren B. Legarda
Marc J. Ocampo
Marika Constantino
Mark Justiniani
Norberto Roldan
Patrick D. Flores
Poklong Anading
Ricky Francisco
Ringo Bunoan
Sidd Perez
Yael Buencamino
Yason Banal



Research: Brunei 01

Bandar Seri Begawan

2015.02.05 - 02.06

The second research trip started with Brunei, a new country for all members for this trip. Bountiful in both oil and natural gas, Brunei's GDP per-capita is the second highest among the ASEAN countries, and Japan has been one of the main trading partners by importing those natural resources. The curators met several artists who have participated in international art festivals in foreign countries with the generous help of Mr. Zefri Ariff, a writer/lecturer at University Brunei Darussalam. After spending only thirty hours in Brunei, the curators headed to Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, via Brunei airlines while listening to the prayers that were chanted as airplanes landed.



Haruko Kumakura



Mami Kataoka



Naoki Yoneda



Rain Forest Gallery

2015.02.05



Haruko Kumakura

The Rain Forest Gallery was opened in 2014 by Dato Sofri, artist and former Bruneian ambassador to the United States, for the purpose of establishing a place where one can purchase works by Bruneian artists. Workshops are also conducted within the gallery, primarily on practical topics like painting and drawing. Most participants are students and number around thirty per workshop. Since there are not many art museums or galleries in Brunei and the market is still small, the Rain Forest Gallery aims to promote the growth of not only artists but of viewers as well.



Jameq Mosque



Haruko Kumakura

The Jameq Mosque was completed in 1994 to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the enthronement of King Hassanal Bolkiah, the 29th Sultan of Brunei. Surprisingly, the mosque's construction was personally funded by the sultan himself. Its solid gold domes and blue-themed traditional Islamic mosaic tiles are extremely impressive to behold. This massive structure enables 5,000 people to pray together simultaneously and is

apparently the largest place of worship in the country. Non-Muslim visitors are also allowed into the building at certain times of day.



Water Village and Culture Gallery

2015.02.06



Haruko Kumakura

The Water Village and Culture Gallery in Kampong Ayer on the Brunei River exhibits handicrafts like woodwork, bamboo work, and textiles. Such exhibits are accompanied by informational panels on Brunei’s history and especially on aquatic lifestyles and culture. Over 30,000 people live in Kampong Ayer (water village) today, along with facilities including schools, hospitals, mosques, shops, and gasoline stands. Historically, too, this was an extremely important location as trade centered here did much to support the country’s development.



Kaleidoscope Studio

2015.02.06



Haruko Kumakura

Kaleidoscope Studio is a gallery founded by artist Lisa Ahmad in 2014. Vigorously active in a variety of activities, the studio offers art exhibitions for young artists and events featuring invited musicians. The studio also plans and administers charity auctions and the like. After studying abroad in the UK, Ahmad worked and lived in Malaysia’s Kuala Lumpur. She returned to Brunei in 2013, and she decided to open the gallery upon considering what she could do for the Bruneian art world. Her experience and international network are likely to have a great impact on the young generation of Brunei.



REGALBLUE Production

2015.02.06



Haruko Kumakura

REGALBLUE Production is a visual media production company. Its 2013 film *What's So Special About Rina* received the "Special Jury Award" at the ASEAN International Film Festival & Awards. This was actually the first feature film produced in Brunei in forty-five years (since 1968). Moreover, the film released at that time was supposedly an educational film created by the Ministry of Religious Affairs or a similar organization. On the other hand, *What's So Special About Rina* is a film about modern themes and featuring local actors, and its release was the first time Bruneians saw their daily speech used in a movie.

Special Thanks

Dato Sofri
Faizal Hamdan
Harlif Hj Mohamad
Hj Mahaddi Hj Mat Zain
Lisa Ahmad
Malai Yunus bin Malai Yusof
Nurain Peeraya
Osman Mohammad

Pg Khamarul Zaman Pg Hj Tajuddin
Pg Timbang Pg Hj Tuah
Putra Seri Group
Suip
Umi Zaty Bazillah Zakaria
Zakaaria bin Omar
Zefri Ariff



Research: Brunei 02

Bandar Seri Begawan

2016.9.25 - 9.26

This was the second research trip to Brunei. Joined this time by fellow curator Merv Espina, who grew up in Brunei until 11, the trip became an even more productive investigation into Brunei's art scene. Particularly impressionistic was the sight of young artists coming together and trying to expand venues for their artistic expressions.



Merv Espina



Haruko Kumakura



Sayuri Kida



Mami Kataoka



Naoki Yoneda



Yasmin Jaidin (1987-)

2016.10.25



Sayuri Kida

Yasmin Jaidin, born in Brunei in 1987, studied art in London from 2007-2010 and again from 2013-2014 and is now based in Brunei. Her work *Factory* (2008), which was the starting point for an ongoing series using sugar, takes advantage of the material's propensity to harden when a specific water: sugar ratio is made and then dried. She uses this technique to make sugar tiles of approximately 40 by 40 cm and piles them to form works of art. By using such materials, she defamiliarizes the familiar and presents it in a completely different form, a concept and approach which continue in her subsequent works. Inspired by displays in jewelry stores, *Our Habitat* (2014) is composed of four plinths. By casting parts of each plinth in sugar, she explores their function within gallery spaces. Despite there being several art spaces or galleries, Jaidin explained that it is still challenging to constantly exhibit works in Brunei as the understanding and appreciation of modern art is less than adequate.



Awang Bin Sitai (1949-)

2016.10.26



Haruko Kumakura

Awang Bin Sitai is an artist born in 1949. In 1970, he became one of the first artists to travel to England on a government-sponsored study abroad program. Until then, such programs were primarily catered toward art instructors. Sitai traveled to England three times in total, and he shared with us that it was extremely stimulating for him to study in Europe during a time when some of the great masters of the 20th century such as Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and Andy Warhol (1928-1987) were still alive. But he also said it was a difficult period in terms of establishing his own style. His abstract paintings were extremely rare in Brunei at the time, suggesting that he is one of the first generation of artists that brought modern art into Brunei. After his return, he held a job designing the art sets at the nationally-run television bureau that opened in 1975, but he continued to also paint. It was during this time that he founded the Brunei Art Association with more than 20 of his artist friends, holding exhibitions several times a year; a collective engagement that continued until the 1990s. It can be said that he is truly the figure who built the foundation for art in Brunei today.



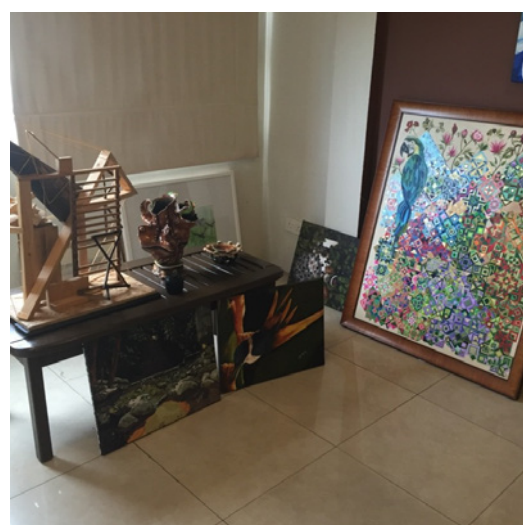
Creative Space

2016.10.26



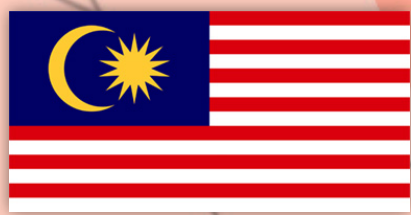
Haruko Kumakura

This is a new art space established by painter Osman Mohammad (1950-), whom we interviewed in the last round of research, and his daughter, Osveanne Osman (1989-) who works as a curator. Osveanne studied at Queensland University of Technology in Australia on a government-sponsored scholarship, and returned to Brunei in 2012 which was when she realized there was no platform in Brunei for modern art. This space was thus established as an environment conducive for artists' creative practices, a space where they can pursue their artistic expressions. Creative Space covers a wide range of activities, including hosting exhibitions and production workshops, holding networking forums with guest speakers from overseas, planning creative conferences, and creating a database and archives of Brunei artists. Osveanne Osman says that these activities are designed not only to further the production of artworks but also, by sharing the networks themselves and the art market with many artists, to generate economic conditions that will enable Brunei's artists to be active internationally and earn an independent living. Also, utilizing his experience and connections cultivated over the years through organizing exhibitions in Brunei for the Philip Morris Art Awards, he said that he plans to reach out to the government and private corporations to organize art fairs and international exhibitions such as biennales in Brunei.



Special Thanks

Ali Haji Abd Rahim	Maziyah Yussof
Awang Bin Sitai	Osman Mohamed
Azmina Ahmad	Osveanne Osman
Haruz Khalid	Redzuan Ruzli (wan)
Lisa Ahmad	Wan Zahidah
Mahaddi B.Hj.Matzain	Yasmin Jaidin
Marsidi Bin Omar	Zakaria Bin Omar



Research: Malaysia 01

Kota Kinabalu, Kuala Lumpur

2015.02.06 - 02.11

The curatorial team visited Kota Kinabalu and Kuala Lumpur during their Malaysia research. Kota Kinabalu is located in the southern area of Borneo Island, the largest island in Southeast Asia and only 200km away from Brunei. There are still a lot of indigenous ethnic groups living in an environment full of nature. Compared to Kota Kinabalu, Kuala Lumpur is a big city where many skyscrapers were built with a population of 1.6million.



Haruko Kumakura



Mami Kataoka



Naoki Yoneda



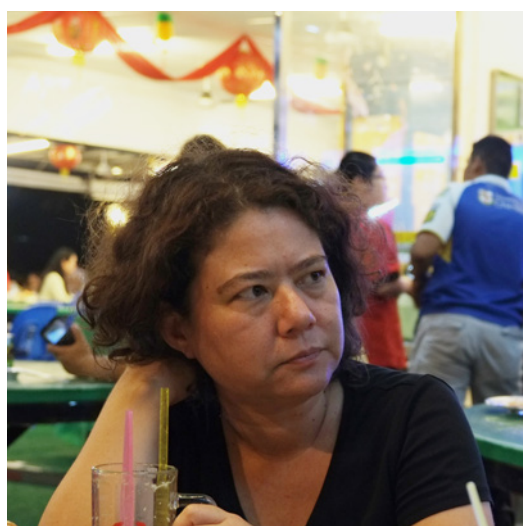
Yee I-Lann (1971 –)

2015.02.06



Mami Kataoka

Yee I-Lann was born in 1971 in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah state, Malaysia. She lived in Adelaide, Australia from her high school days through university. She now lives in Kuala Lumpur, although she still spends a few months of the year in Kota Kinabalu. Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, is located on the southern side of the Malay Peninsula, while Kota Kinabalu is located on the northern side of the island of Borneo. Although Kota Kinabalu is Malaysia's second-largest city, Borneo and eastern Malaysia have a relatively weak presence within the national framework of Malaysia as a whole. For this reason, Yee I-Lann is known as an artist who powerfully expresses the identity of Sabah. In 2013, she participated in the Singapore Biennale as a curator. She worked to send out into the world practices that do not fit under the traditional label of "contemporary art," including the practices of indigenous peoples, textiles, and the punk rock scene.



Sabah Art Gallery
"Being MAPHILINDO"

2015.02.07



Mami Kataoka

The Sabah Art Gallery is an art center that was founded by the state of Sabah in 1984. It is under the jurisdiction of the Sabah Cultural Board. The gallery collection contains 3,000 works, including paintings, sculptures, and crafts by local artists, and it also hosts special exhibitions. Of the exhibitions resulting from the Japan Foundation’s young curators’ workshops, we visited the opening of Harold’s (Harold Reagan Eswar) exhibition. The concept “MAPHILINDO,” also used in the title, was a very inspirational idea for a proposed confederation of Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia: three nations that became independent from the imperial powers after the Second World War. A man named José Rizal (1861-1896) had the dream of uniting the Malay peoples, and Maphilindo was the proposed realization of that dream. The creation of Malaysia in 1963 ended the Maphilindo concept, but this fascinating exhibition explored the idea once again. Participants in residence included those from Sabah and the Philippines, as well as Tsubasa Kato from Japan. He and others worked together with local artists and the community to create good works.



Pangrok Sulap

2015.02.07



Mami Kataoka

Pangrok Sulap is an artist collective based in Ranau, Malaysia. Pangrok refers to “punk rock,” and members are brought together through media like music and woodblock prints. Begun in 2010 as a community project to create art, members searched for a media that they could share with ordinary people, and they eventually chose woodblock printing. They were influenced in this by the Yogyakarta-based woodblock printing community Taring Padi, to which they were introduced by Marginal, an Indonesian group from Jakarta. For the exhibition’s theme, Pangrok Sulap drew out the president’s image and map of an imagined “Maphilindo.” Using mats of a kind used on a daily basis in Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia, woodblock prints were put on display with words representing ideals like “UNITY,” “RELIGION,” “SHARING,” “CULTURE,” and “IDENTITY” on the front, and images representing the current state of society on the back. The map incorporated messages from the younger generations on sharing natural resources, expanding the educational system, and other topics.



Center for Arts and Design (CAD)

2015.02.07



Mami Kataoka

The Center for Arts and Design (CAD) was founded in 2014 by Suchung Chong. In 2010, Chong returned from studying information systems in Australia and began a photograph printing workshop. Establishing an attached gallery space, CAD aims for high-quality presentation in a form that differs from the young collectives of Sabah who exhibit in places like cafes or their own studios. The Center hosts exhibitions, primarily in Sabah, for Malaysian artists. On the day of our visit, Adrian Ho (1980-) was exhibiting. Ho was a participating artist in Singapore Biennale 2013, and his exhibited work, *Mountain of the Gods*, portrays the sacred Mount Kinabalu. The work also takes a critical approach to environmental issues. We also met other artists including Awan Fadilah Bin Ali Hussein (1972-), a painter of naïve art; Tuang Young, who creates photographic series based on motifs of indigenous people; and Flanagan Bainon, who photographs the traditions and indigenous peoples of Sabah.



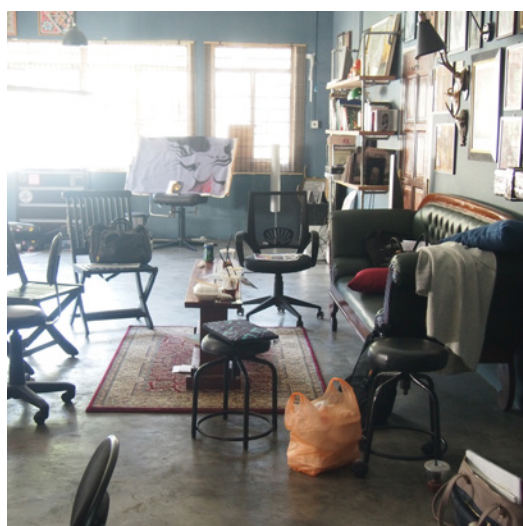
Cracko Art Group (CAG)

2015.02.07



Mami Kataoka

The Cracko Art Group (CAG) is a collective of artists, built around the artist Cracko Blabak, who work in graffiti, street art, tattoos, photography, and comics. CAG is comprised of a core of 10 members and was launched in 2010 by a group of artists who shared a common desire to avoid commercial and tourism-related activities. According to Cracko, “Even in considering one’s own identity, many different ethnicities and religions are intertwined such as China, Dusun, and Kalimantan. Western Malaysia typically includes Chinese, Malay, and Indian classifications, but Borneo has a more complex cultural context.” It also seemed like he found it significant that these statements come out of Sabah and Kota Kinabalu, and social media like Facebook are rapidly expanding such possibilities. Social media has enabled those in Sabah to connect directly with the rest of the world, without passing through the capital of Kuala Lumpur. This group seemed to be overflowing with energy and hope for the future.



Rumah Air Panas

2015.02.08



Naoki Yoneda

Rumah Air Panas which literally means “House of Hot Water” started as an independent art space located in Air Panas, Setapak, an area well known for its hot springs. Functioning as an artist studio and venue, the space ran from 1997 to 2006 and now RAP continues as a nomadic artist collective. Individual members continuously produce art while they also handle the management of the space that supports their activities. Among the members is Chuah Chong Yong (1972-), who participated in the 2nd Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale (2002). Another member, artist Yap Sau Bin (1974-), says that the group endeavors to create a platform for raising social and political issues through its hosting of exhibitions and talks. Of special note is that the group upholds community and social participation as one of its primary guiding principles, and it is very consciously involved in socially engaged art conducted outside the gallery, which is treated like an educational program.



HOM Art Trans

2015.02.09



Naoki Yoneda

HOM Art Trans is an independent art space that aims to support the development of visual art in Malaysia and to build a network of artists in the countries of Southeast Asia. Bayu Utomo Radjikin (1969-) currently serves as director of the space, which serves as a gallery, studio, and archive. In 1989, Utomo Radjikin formed the artist collective Matahati with friends from Universiti Teknologi MARA (The group dissolved in 2012). This HOM Art Trans space was created around Matahari in 2007, Mr. Utomo Radjikin explains, and it arose from concern that emerging artists had too few opportunities in the 1990s to present their work. The group’s residency program works to actively extend invitations to artists inside and outside the country, while also offering awards like the Malaysia Emerging Artist Award and Young Guns, thereby playing an important role in stimulating the art scene as a whole.



Five Arts Centre

2015.02.09



Naoki Yoneda

The Five Arts Centre is a company and an artist-producer collective founded in 1984 by playwright Chin San Sooi, playwright Krishen Jit (2005-), and dancer and choreographer Marion D'Cruz. After various changes in membership, the company is now comprised of fourteen members, but of the founding members only D'Cruz remains. According to her, language is an inseparable part of the performing arts, but when the company was first founded, the only English-language plays performed in the multilingual country of Malaysia were the classics. Hence, one of the tasks facing the group was to actively promote original dramatic works written in Malay. The collective's engagements include theater, dance, music, visual arts, and children's theater.



Wong Hoy Cheong (1960 –)

2015.02.09



Naoki Yoneda

Born on Penang Island in 1960, Wong Hoy Cheong is one of the most politically aware artist living in Kuala Lumpur who explores the colonial history of Malaysia and the social and political issues of modern Malaysia. However, in recent years Wong has distanced himself from visual art and pursues archival work, about which there was once little awareness in Malaysia. While doing this work, Wong became interested in the degree to which he could help political issues penetrate into the community, and in recent projects he has aimed to use political issues as a barometer for art and culture. For example, in a recent project, "Rage, Hope & Love: Working with Communities & Housing," Wong appeals in a variety of ways to those living in dilapidated housing complexes, attempting to improve and rejuvenate their lives. More than just symbolic, these community projects are a policy for Wong, he says, suggesting that art might therefore be a symbolic action from the perspective of society.



National Visual Arts Gallery (NVAG)

2015.02.09

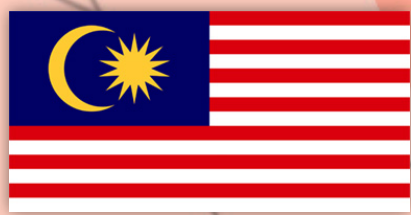


Naoki Yoneda

Opened in 1958, the National Visual Arts Gallery (NVAG) is located in northern Kuala Lumpur. It is one of the most influential and historic art institutions in Malaysia. Although built around Malaysian artists, it also contains works of foreign artists from Asia, Europe, Africa, South America, and elsewhere. NVAG not only displays art but sells these works as well, and through this it believes that it can help stimulate artistic activity in Malaysia. As part of this effort, in 1974 NVAG established the Young Contemporaries Award to recognize artists between the ages of twenty and forty who are selected from nominations submitted by the public. Most of the artists who were selected through this strict process today enjoy firmly established reputations both in Malaysia and internationally.

Special Thanks

Adam Kitingan	Ise (Roslisham Ismail)
Adrian Ho	Marion D'Cruz
Cracko Art Group	Phuan Thai Meng
Anurendra Jegadiva	Poodien
Awang Fadiyah Bin Ali Hussein	Rachel Ng
Bayu Utomo Radjikin	Shooshie Sulaiman
Beverly Yong	Su Chung Chong
Chang Yoong Chia	Tan Hui Koon
Choong Kam Kow	Tuang Young
Cracko Blabak	Wong Hoy Cheong
Eleanor Goroh	Yap Sau Bin
Flanegan Baimon	Yee I-Lann
Harold Eagan	



Research: Malaysia 02

Kuala Lumpur

2016.09.27 - 09.28

Kuala Lumpur means 'muddy confluence' in Malay. In late September during the team's visit, Kuala Lumpur was experiencing the wet season with sudden showers and muddy streams flooding the rivers that pass through the city. The two-day survey reminded the team of the diverse energy brimming over this global city, and afforded each of the members with stories of artists who call Kuala Lumpur their home.



Ong Jo-Lene



Haruko Kumakura



Sayuri Kida



Mami Kataoka



Naoki Yoneda



Overcoming Home



Ong Jo-Lene

Malaysia was formed in 1963 with the federation of Malaya, Singapore, North Borneo and Sarawak. Two years later, Singapore seceded and Malaysia today is spoken of and governed as two divisions, Borneo Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak) and Peninsular Malaysia (Malaya). The emotional distance between East and West Malaysia runs wider and deeper than the South China Sea that geographically separates the two. It was only in 2010 that Malaysia Day commemorating the formation of federation on 16 September 1963 was declared a public holiday as the nation continues to celebrate its National Day on Malaya's independence day on 31 August 1957.

This is one of the many issues festering in the undercurrents of Malaysian social, political, and cultural fabric that are always subtle and penetrating in its violence. Such is the specious deceit of social engineering, first by colonial British, then the ruling coalition that has held on to power since independence. Pick any one policy and it never seems very pernicious but it is in their imbrication over years that ensconced the behaviour of society. I am reminded of Ise (1972-)’s instructions when serving Nasi Kerabu, a dish of blue rice topped with assorted chopped herbs and greens, that one has to mess it all up together to get the “beauty.” While this has meant that Malaysia has missed out on currency prescribed by recent interest in contemporary art from Southeast Asia, it is perhaps a blessing that researchers are then required to swim a little closer if not deeper.

At the time of this project's first Malaysia research trip, the team had not yet included myself nor the other three independent curators from the region. The museum curators and facilitators from Asia Center visited Sabah, Penang and Kuala Lumpur. They met with a spectrum of practitioners in the local art ecology - HOM Art Trans gallery that has its roots in MATAHATI collective, Five Arts Centre collective and company exploring interdisciplinary approaches performing arts, established artists who are mediators and mentors such as Wong Hoy Cheong (1960-), Yap Sau Bin (1974-) and Yee I-Lann (1971-), and several emerging artists and curators challenging the space and role of art such as Tan Hui Koon, curator at National Visual Arts Gallery and Pangrok Sulap, DIY punk collective in Sabah. This trip has been detailed in their report [here](#).

Nearly two years after that, we came to the decision to make a second research trip to Malaysia. There are always works that require experiencing it in person and in the case of the Malaysian shortlist, quite a few had not been in the biennale circuit visited by many curators. We visited Liew Kung Yu (1960-)'s studio where his presentation gave us a better understanding of the context that gives the form of his kitschy photo-collage such power.

Chuah Chong Yong (1972-) who was a key member running the art space and studios of [Rumah Air Panas](#) had not been active since mid 2000s but had been making art whenever he found the time. Meeting him at his studio allowed us to walkthrough with him his archivist tendencies and keen apprehension of historical precedents that are key to better understanding the precepts underscoring his practice that engages with shared memory. We were fortunate to see countless slides documenting his ephemeral and relational works as well as folders of newspaper clippings entrusted to him by the family of his late mentor Joseph Tan (1941 - 2001).

Au Sow Yee (1978-) was co-founder and co-curator for 3 editions of KLEX (Kuala Lumpur Experimental Film and Video Festival). Her latest work, *Kris Project* is an expansive research and exploration of the mechanisms behind image-making and power. We met with her in Kuala Lumpur where she frequently returns to from Taipei and will soon launch Rumah Attap Library and Collective, to hear her talk about the strands of historical connections - cold war, nationalism, films, folklore, - that confluence into *Kris Project*.

Facilitating this trip for a group of professionals that consisted of curators of different specialisations including those who have worked in the region years before my own initiation to those visiting Malaysia for the first time, has given me emotional distance and many conversations that challenge and expand my understanding of art in my immediate and broader geography.



Chuah Chong Yong(1972-)

2016.09.27



Sayuri Kida

Chuah Chong Yong, born in Kuala Lumpur in 1972, presents performances and art installations that explore the theme of visualizing or materializing lost cultures such as pre-war memories and abandoned houses. *Meditation Painting* (2008) which hung in the studio is made using the canvasses that was left to Chong Yong by his mentor Joseph Tan. The work was a five-canvased piece, measuring over four meters in length, and Tan was an artist during the dawn of Malaysian contemporary art who participated in the 1st Biennale of Sydney. After much contemplation on what to do with the work, Chong Yong began burning incense on the painting's surface and using it for meditation from 2008. The surface of the canvas, upon close inspection, reveals grid-patterned burn marks left from the burned incense. Still ongoing, more than half of the canvas still remains untouched. When Chong Yong participated in the 2nd Fukuoka Asia Art Triennial (2002), he presented an art installation where several tens of houses made of incense were arranged in a circle and then lit on fire, revealing the frames hidden inside each of the houses. He then collected the ashes after the burned incense.



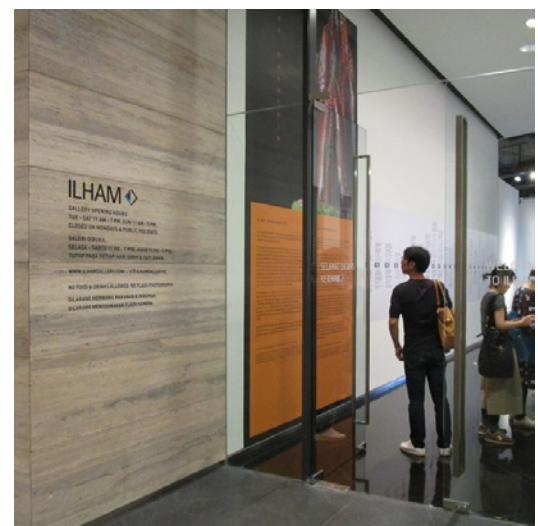
Ilham Gallery, the “*ERA MAHATHIR*” exhibition

2016.09.27



Sayuri Kida

The Ilham Gallery, located between the 3rd to 5th floors of the Menara Ilham Tower and directed by Valentine Willie, hosts all kinds of [public] programs including exhibits and a small, free public art library. The *ERA MAHATHIR* exhibit held there during our visit was themed on the urban development and media reform during Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad’s (1925-) administration (1981-2003). The Mahathir era was an important period of prosperity for art in Malaysia which represented the then-social environment in which artists pursued their artistic practices responding to the socio-political issues of the time. In the exhibition were Chuah Chong Yong and Liew Kung Yu, whose studios we visited, as well as Yee I-Lann (1971-) and the artists of [the Five Arts Centre](#), whom the team interviewed during its previous visit to Malaysia. In addition, a wide variety of works were also featured from the newer works by rising artist Ise to masterpieces in Malaysian art history by Ismail Zain (1930-) and Zulkifli Yusoff (1962-). This exhibition, which gives a multi-layered reading of Malaysian history, engages with the complex reality of that time.



Liew Kung Yu (1960-)

2016.09.28



Naoki Yoneda

Born in 1960, Liew Kung Yu is an artist based in Kuala Lumpur. Using a wide variety of artistic means, such as painting, sculpture, and installations, he uncovers issues surrounding nationalism and identity. He is also involved in the preservation of Malaysian cultural properties and numerous community projects in cooperation with regional communities. Consisting of four works, each measuring more than five meters in width, his representative series *Proposals for My Country* (Cadangan-Cadangan Untuk Negaraku, 2009) is a massive, quasi-sculptural piece that consists of multiple layers of photo-collages and prints. For example, one work among the series is composed of photo-collages of public sculptures dispersed throughout Malaysia. By layering many of these images, Liew Kung Yu literally multiplies the public sculptures creating a unique perspective of the Malaysian cityscape. He was originally trained in graphic design, the influences of which are visible in many aspects of his works.



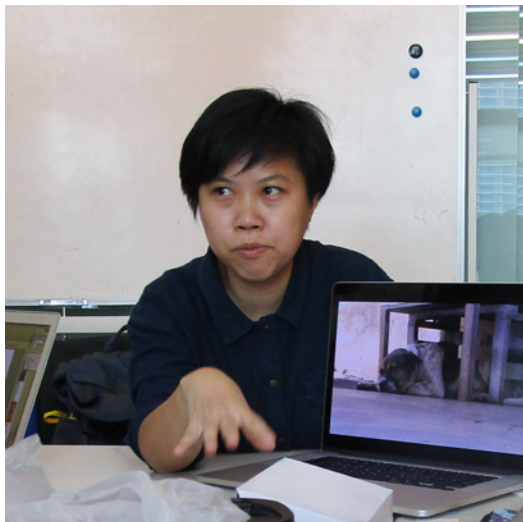
Au Sow Yee (1978-)

2016.09.28



Naoki Yoneda

Born in 1978 in Malaysia, Au Sow Yee's practices consist primarily of video installations. After graduating from the Chinese Culture University, she earned her MFA at the San Francisco Art Institute. Once based in Taiwan, she currently continues her work in Kuala Lumpur. Using a video technique that fuses documentary and fiction, she revisits the history of Malaysia and Southeast Asia by connecting political issues, which were dominated by post-Cold War ideologies, with artistic expression. Actively participating in individual and group exhibitions in Asia, Au Sow Yee has also presented her works in the *Ko Nien-Pu "Flags, Transnational—Migrants and Outlaw Territories"* exhibition held at Tokyo Wonder Site hongo in Japan in 2016. Her particular eye as a video artist allows her to expose or bring to the fore dimensions of history that had been overlooked or hidden throughout the years.



Special Thanks

Au Sow Yee
Chuah Chong Yong
Jaafar Ismail (Jeff)
Koichi Horikawa

Kyoko Kugai
Liew Kung Yu
Poodien
Rahel Joseph



Research: Myanmar 01

Yangon, Mandalay

2015.10.24 - 10.29

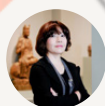
The SEA PROJECT flew to Myanmar right before the historic general election which brought Aung San Suu Kyi's NDL to its current political position. The streets were filled with campaign cars, thriving in anticipation of the election results only two weeks ahead. In such a hot, political climate, the curators listened carefully to artists' voices who were both hopeful and anxious of the change that was to occur.



Merv Espina



Reiko Tsubaki



Mami Kataoka



Naoki Yoneda



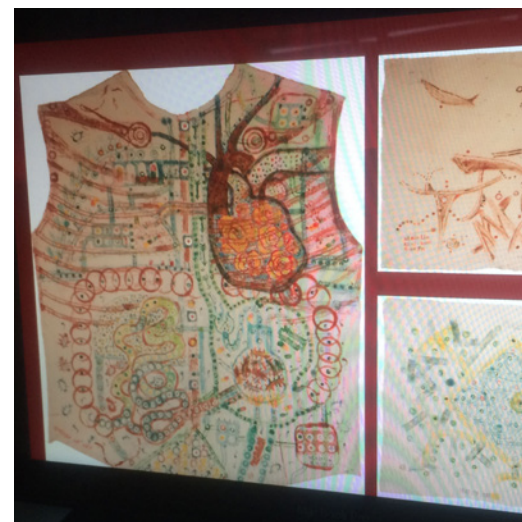
Htein Lin (1966 –)

2015.10.24



Reiko Tsubaki

Htein Lin was one of the leaders of the 1988 anti-military regime student protests, and also one of the first artists to carry out performances in Myanmar. After escaping to the border between India and China (1988-1992), he was captured and tortured by the military. Since 1996 he has been channelling this experience through performances in which he paints his upper body in blood-like red paint. Even while he was held in prison (1998-2004), he continued to produce political newspapers and some 300 anti-governmental *Prison Paintings* using prison uniforms and syringes. He hid these in places such as his pillow, under his bed, or in holes he'd dug, and successfully managed to send all of his work out of the prison. After his release from prison, he married a European woman and lived in London before returning in 2012 to Myanmar, which had then been democratized. Since then, he has been actively producing works. In *A Show of Hands*, he tracked down 460 of the 5,000 or so prisoners and asked for plaster casts of their hands. Together with these hands casts are records of each of their stories from prison. *Soap Blocked* are blocks of soap he carved into sculptures while in prison in 1999 which he continues to work on. From our conversation, we felt the difficulties of democratization and free expression, but also Htein Lin's unyielding spirit against such obstacles.



New Zero Art Space

2015.10.25



Reiko Tsubaki

Aye Ko participated in the 1988 anti-military regime protests, for which he was imprisoned. Since the late 1990s, he earned international recognition as a performance artist and in 2008 he established New Zero Art Space which houses an exhibition space, artist studios, residencies, a kitchen, and a library. As well as fundraising projects and classes for the 100,000 civil war orphans in Myanmar, workshops and residence programs for the general public and artists are also held there.

One special feature of New Zero Art Space is that they hold an exhibition after each workshop. They have already held exchange projects with Korea and Japan, and are planning an exchange exhibition with Germany for 2016. Alongside these engagements, New Zero Art Space is setting up a crafts promotion project aimed at creating interesting and innovative craftwork, and an art education project for children organized in cooperation with a Japanese telecommunications company, KDDI.

Aye Ko states, "the people of Myanmar need to enliven contemporary art themselves, and not rely on foreign capital so much." We look forward to his many activities.



Po Po (1957 –)

2015.10.26



Naoki Yoneda

Self-taught artist, Po Po, began his activities in the late 1970s and is now a leading Myanmar (Burma) artist. The geometric, abstract paintings he largely produced in the 1980s incorporated Buddhist philosophies which he was especially interested in. From 1982 to 1986, he participated in the Gangaw Village Art Exhibition, and was active as one of the main members of the Gangaw Village Art Group. Since the 1990s, Po Po's work has shifted from painting to the field of conceptual or performance art. In recent years, as one of the participating artists for the 8th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (2015-2016), he has further extended his field of practice to overseas and is now considered one of the most influential artists in Myanmar's contemporary art scene. At the same time, lamenting the lack of information on art in Myanmar, he is also active as an art critic and published Conceptual Art Manifesto in 2005.



Aung Myint (1946 –)

2016.10.26



Naoki Yoneda

Aung Myint is a self-taught artist who was active as one of the central members of the Gangaw Village Art Group. He is known for his abstract paintings that incorporate Myanmar’s (Burmese) letters and dance as their motifs, but he was also one of the earliest to experiment with new forms of expression such as performance and installations in around 1992. Censorship was a very serious problem for artists when Myanmar was under military rule, and because paintings are more likely to convey messages clearly they were easy targets for censorship. It can be said that the shift towards performance—by Aung Myint as well as other artists— was closely related to Myanmar's political system. Furthermore, as he continuously held Gangaw Village Art Exhibitions, Aung Myint was confronted with Myanmar's shortage of art exhibition venues. He therefore established the Inya Gallery in 1989 with friends from the Gangaw Village Art Group, and to this day it remains a gallery where many artists gather.



Suu Mying Thein (1970 –)

2015.10.27



Mami Kataoka

Performance artist Suu Mying Thein founded the Alin DaGar Art School in Mandalay, Myanmar's second largest city after Yangon in 1992, so that art could be studied more freely by all. He himself was born in the northern Kachin State and studied painting and sculpture at the State School of Fine Art, Mandalay. Students of a wide range of ages from 5 to 35 are currently studying at the school, and they also hold exchange exhibitions with children overseas. Suu Mying Thein’s first encounter with performance art was when NIPAF (Nippon Performance Art Festival, director: Seiji Shimoda) visited Mandalay in 2001. Suu Mying Thein believed, in the midst of many restrictions and censorship, "performance art that uses the body as a form of expression is the best medium." In 2012, while the civil war between the Kachin minority and the military government continued, he carried out a performance and was as a result restrained. Alongside mentoring his students at the School, Suu Mying Thein is one of the few who are active as performance artists in Mandalay.



[Ludu Library and Archive](#)

2015.10.27



Mami Kataoka

Ludu Library and Archive, established in 2002, houses the donations and collection of Ludu Daw Amar and Ludu U Hla, who were both journalists reporting on Myanmar's post-World War 2 military regime and dissident groups. It is an unregistered private library with a collection of around 50,000 publications dedicated to academic research, journalism, and activism in Myanmar. Its name, Ludu, means "the people" in Burmese, and was taken from Ludu Journal (People's Journal) started by U Hla in 1945 and published every other month. In 1961, he came to Japan on an invitation from a Japanese newspaper company, and became close friends with the Japanese novelist and poet Jun Takami. Myanmar has a culture that promotes pious acts through its Buddhist traditions. However, after experiencing multiple arrests and magazine discontinuances, U Hla decided to create a library for the people instead of giving donations to temples. The current chief librarian is his son, Nyi Pu Lay (1952-).



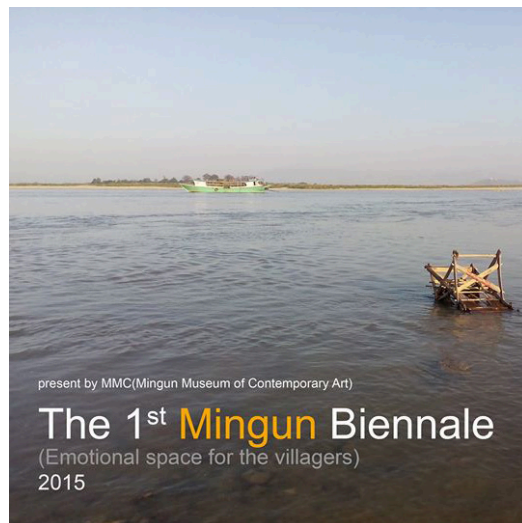
Phyoe Kyi (1977-)

2015.10.27



Mami Kataoka

Phyoe Kyi was born in Taunnyi, a town in central Myanmar with a population of 200,000, and is currently still active there as a performance and installation artist. In 2003 he started the workshop Mingun Museum of Contemporary Art, and he held "Museum Project #5," the 5th such workshop, with artists-couple Wah Nu and Tun Win Aung. Mingun is a town located about ten kilometres up the Ayeyarwady River from Mandalay. It is known for having Myanmar's largest bell, and the snow-white Hsinphyumae Pagoda. Phyoe Kyi's first experience of performance art was when he saw Yangon artists participate in NIPAF in the 1990s. In 2003, artists from places like Yangon and Mandalay performed for the first time in Mingun, where there was little censorship compared to the two cities. In the 2005 edition of NIPAF, held in Mingun, Phyoe Kyi performed Once upon a time, there was nothing, a work in which he changed from a thakin costume to a child's costume. In the performance, he used soap bubbles as a symbol for frailty as they burst instantaneously when touched. He also participated in the 3rd Fukuoka Asia Art Triennale in 2005, and in 2015, hosted the 1st Mingun Biennale, in which four artists as well as local villagers participated.



Maung Day (1979 -)

2015.10.28



Reiko Tsubaki

Maung Day is a poet, artist, and social activist who also does graphic design. He moved to Bangkok, Thailand in 2008 to earn his M.A (International Development Studies) at Chulalongkorn University, and until recently worked on eco-village designs and participatory projects for the empowerment of people at Eco-village Transition Asia (ETA). He first discovered contemporary art around the year 2000 through libraries such as ones located in the American Embassy. Maung Day did not miss the opportunity to experiment with performance art, which had then become a popular way to elude censorship, and also got involved in the establishment of Beyond Pressure (2008 -), one of the well-known performance art festival of Myanmar. From 2010, he has collaborated with poets and worked on installations. In his felt-tip drawings, he attempts to redefine the images of Buddhism and mythology, and likewise with his poems he plays with the notions of metaphors and images.

"We need a community that discusses the Myanmar art scene from a global perspective. I want to create an art scene where NGOs and art unite, where NGOs provide more support for artists and artists are able to have more influence on society" Maung Day stated with conviction.



Gangaw Village Art Group



Naoki Yoneda

The Gangaw Village Art Group is a Myanmar (Burma) artist group formed by approximately 20 students from Rangoon College (present-day University of Yangon). The group’s formation was triggered by the Gangaw Village Art Exhibition in 1979. With the exception of an interruption for several years due to the influence of the pro-democracy movement, the Gangaw Village Art Exhibition has been held consecutively to this day. Gangaw (or the Ceylon Iron-wood) is an evergreen grown on campus at the University of Yangon, the symbol of the university, and as such is also used for the group's logo. At the time, the art scene in Myanmar was hardly existent thus making is extremely difficult for artists to make a living out of their art practices. For this reason, it was important to create an artist community where they could support each other. Among the original members are Kyeen Myintt Saw, Aung Myint, and San Minn whom are considered the founders of what is known as contemporary art in Myanmar today, and also Po Po, who has now gained international recognition.

Special Thanks

Aung Myat Htay	Nathalie Johnston
Aung Myint	Nyi Pu Lay
Aung Myint Oo	Phone Myint Min
Aye Ko	Phyoe Kyi
Cho Cho Aung	Phyu Ei Thein
Daw Tint Tint	Po Po
Htein Lin	Sandar Aung
Khin Zaw Latt	Suu Myint Thein
Kyi Wynn	Takayuki Kasuga
Maung Day	Than Htay
May Phue Thet	Thihazan
Min Thein Sung	Thyitar
Mrat Lunn Htwann	



Research: Indonesia 01

Jakarta, Surabaya, Yogyakarta
2015.11.13 - 11.23

The curatorial team visited Jakarta, Surabaya, and Yogyakarta where biennales were held in each city during the visit. From the trip, the curatorial team discovered the many art historical relations between Indonesia and Japan from the interviews with artists, from each of the biennales, and from learning about the histories of each city.



Grace Samboh



Haruko Kumakura



Minami Yusuke



Mami Kataoka



Naoki Yoneda



FX Harsono (1949 -)

2015.11.14



Haruko Kumakura

Born in 1949, FX Harsono was one of the earliest members of the Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia (GSRBI, “Indonesia New Art Movement,” 1975-1989) that helped give birth to contemporary art in Indonesia. During the years of the Suharto regime, FX Harsono was an early participant in researched-based art projects that are now common, such as working in cooperation with environmental NGOs. He has also produced a great many works relating to his origins and identity as a Chinese Indonesian. Our interview was conducted at the alternative space, Dia.Lo.Gue, the exhibition venue for the open project, “EXI(S)T.” Focusing on young artists and curators under thirty, this project is one of FX Harsono’s recent main engagements. FX Harsono shared with us how important the conversations and discussions pursued through the project and support for the younger generation are to him. In 2014, he received the Prince Claus Award from the Netherlands’ Prince Claus Fund.



[Ruangrupa](#)

2015.11.14



Haruko Kumakura

Ruangrupa is an alternative space in Jakarta founded in 2000, two years after the collapse of the Suharto regime, by six artists: Ade Darmawan (1974-), Hafiz, Ronny Agustinus, Oky Arfie Hutabarat, Lilia Nursita, and Rithmi. Today, it is one of the most long-standing artist spaces and collectives in Jakarta. Ruangrupa works toward exposing contemporary art to a wider audience; to make it familiar to more people of the younger generation in particular than to keep it contained within a limited people. With such an aim, they emphasize sharing the production process with the audience together with exhibiting their works. Engaging in a wide range of activities including the OK Video Festival that has been held biannually since 2003, workshops for curators and artists, exhibitions, radio broadcasts, and production and sale of goods, Ruangrupa could be said to be a central presence not only in Jakarta but in Indonesian contemporary art as a whole. The group holds many exhibitions and shows in Japan and abroad as Ruangrupa, but there are many individual artists and collectives that exist within the collective as well. Ruangrupa has also assumed a central role in the planning and administration of Jakarta Biennale 2015.



[Jakarta Biennale 2015](#)

2015.11.14



Haruko Kumakura

Beginning in 1974 as the Indonesian Painting Exhibition, Jakarta Biennale 2015 is the 16th iteration of the international exhibition. The curatorial team for this iteration consisted of Charles Esche (1963-) and six young curators from different regions of Indonesia. Under the theme of “*Maju Kena, Mundur Kena* (Neither forward nor back): Learning in The Present,” the exhibition avoided escaping into nostalgia or visions of an utopian future, instead, focusing on works pertaining to the current socio-economic, psychological, and emotional statuses of the people living in the here and now. Jakarta Biennale 2015 featured forty artists and artist groups from Indonesia and thirty from overseas. The exhibition was full of life, with approximately 5,000 visitors attending the opening, and we watched as attention from both within and outside the country focused on Indonesian contemporary art.



2016.11.16



Mami Kataoka

Located on the east coast of the island of Java, Surabaya is the capital of the East Java province. With a population of approximately 3 million, it is Indonesia's largest port city and second largest city. The Japanese community here was established in the early 20th century with the founding of Indonesia's first school for Japanese people in Surabaya in 1925. There is still a Japanese cemetery there to this day. First held in Surabaya in 2005, Biennale Jatim has been hosted in the city ever since. Being a biennale held for artists in Indonesia, the website announcements and displays for the exhibition are in Bahasa Indonesian only, the official language of Indonesia. A curator is selected from both Surabaya and Yogyakarta who each select artists. In addition to this, artists selected through open call also take part in the biennale, thus allowing the two sets of artists to ultimately participate on the same stage. In all, over eighty artists and groups participated in the event, filling the multipurpose hall which was subdivided by temporary partitions. The methods and qualities of the works on display varied, but there definitely was an air of the "biennale" format steadily taking hold in Indonesia.



C20 (Se Dua O)

2015.11.16



Mami Kataoka

Named after the street it is located, C20 is a collective founded in 2008 that also runs a bookstore, archive, and public library. The library began as an individuals' private collection then grew to include publications on Indonesian history, culture, and anthropology which are oriented more for scholars and researchers. In August 2015, a gallery space was additionally established in its backyard. At the time of our visit, an exhibition curated by Antariksa, a Yogyakarta-based researcher, was being held on graphic designs made during the Japanese rule in Indonesia to which the younger Indonesian designers responded to. The activities of Surabaya-based collectives of young generation, including WAFT Lab, Serubuk Kayu, Holopis, and Surabaya Tenpu Dulu, are not limited to contemporary art but extend also into the field of science, technology, environmental problems, history, traditional culture, and cuisine. We observed a common attitude of striving to tackle a variety of issues shared across modern Indonesia.



Agung Kurniawan (1968-)

2015.11.18



Naoki Yoneda

Agung Kurniawan is a Yogyakarta-based artist. He received the Phillip Morris Art Award in 1996, and while he has been internationally recognized, he still continues to be active throughout the world. Frequently dealing with themes including violence, politics, and [social] taboos, Agung Kurniawan develops his work through his social and cultural activities; as well as creating artworks themselves, he recognizes that it is just as important for the artist to respond to society. In his performance for the opening of Jakarta Biennale 2015, Agung Kurniawan recited a poem from the crowd with such a presence that it stirred the crowd. His posture and manner seemed to be more of an actor or director than an artist, which he said was based on his intention to involve the audience into the work. According to Agung Kurniawan, the recent trend in Indonesian contemporary art is for many artists in Jakarta to be engaged in participatory works pertaining to social problems. By contrast, he explained, many artists in Yogyakarta produce strongly object-oriented works with shape and form.



[Indonesia Visual Art Archive \(IVAA\)](#)

2015.11.19



Naoki Yoneda

The Indonesia Visual Art Archive (IVAA), located in Yogyakarta, was founded in 1999. Consisting of both online and printed material, IVAA's goal is to build an Indonesian art history and relationships between art experts through written, oral, and visual documents. The archive gathers materials pertaining to artistic activities on a comprehensive scale, focusing not only major cities but also on accomplishments in regional cities overlooked by public institutions. Works that we now label "socially engaged art" were not widely recognized by society until about 2000, and, since these works do not necessarily remain as physical objects, the problem of there being no historical documentation has risen in the recent years. Moreover, as new alternative spaces and galleries began to open, there was a pressing need to build and develop archives. In particular, IVAA has grown rapidly since Farah Wardani (currently an archivist at the National Gallery Singapore) became director in 2007, and it continues to take on an ever more important role in Indonesian contemporary art.



Cemeti Art House

2015.11.19



Naoki Yoneda

Cemeti Art House is an alternative space in Yogyakarta founded in 1988 by artists, Nindityo Adipurnomo of Indonesia and Mella Jaarsma (1960-) of the Netherlands. Cemeti showcases artists from Indonesia and abroad. The art house began in 1988 as the Cemeti Gallery, focusing on exhibiting, documenting, and propagating contemporary art. In 1995, the gallery renamed itself to become the Cemeti Art Foundation. In order to further subdivide the Cemeti Art Foundation's objectives, it was split into two smaller organizations: IVAA, which specializes in documentation, education, and data archiving; and the Cemeti Art House, which specializes in exhibition, art projects, residencies, and art management. Today, the Cemeti Art House plans ten exhibitions a year and offers a residency program.



How the Indonesia Research Trip List was Generated



Grace Samboh

Since I generated the list of people to meet and places to go to, I will explain the reasoning behind its making.

For those who come to shop or resell art, there is a "usual suspect list," And, for those who come for "research," there is another "usual suspects' list" which simply show how our current contemporary art scene is typically seen.

Indonesia is such a big country. In the ASEAN context, we are 30% of its size and 40% of its population. However, contemporary arts' development is only known in certain cities (by clusters of priority): (1) Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta; (2) Surabaya, Bali, Surakarta, Semarang; and (3) Padang, Aceh, Makassar. The majority only visit the first cluster, which our Cultural Ministry has termed, "the Golden Triangle."

Through different organizations, it is safe to say that Japan was one of the first foreign countries that invested their attention and energy to pursue cultural exchange in Indonesian modern and contemporary art. With that in mind and the core idea of the SEA PROJECT being a survey show from 1980s, I skipped any type of usual suspects lists as most of them began their international career through/from Japan.

At the time of our visit, there were three biennales on show: the Jakarta Biennale, Biennale Jogja, and the young Jatim Biennale (East Java Biennale). Coming to Indonesia at such a time meant that the artists participating in the biennale(s) are busy, but I suspected that by allocating our visits and time within the biennale would mean that the team would cross paths with the artists and would have the chance to have a conversation in the biennale sites.

After our first curatorial meeting in August 2015, we, the SEA curators, were asked to generate a list of artists that we would want to work with for SEA PROJECT and are relevant from the 1980s to now. Assuming that the list is read and studied by all curators, I consciously tried to not arrange meetings with those artists and I thought we should look as far and wide as we could.

Regarding the selection of collectives and artists, I was aiming more into younger artists with a variety of practice that are collaborative and tend to involve other (non-art) people. The community-oriented, collaborative, collective practices are more mature in the sense that they are self-critical and more prone to changes.

Special Thanks

Ace House	Melani W. Setiawan
Agung Hujatnika	Mella Jaarsma
Agung Kurniawan	Mellisa Angela
Alia Swastika	Natasha Abigail
Antariksa	Natasha Sidharta
Bakudapan	NEMU
Cut&Rescue	Nicolas Borriaud
Enin Supriyanto	Rudi Akili
Eri Rukmana	Serubuk Kayu
FX Harsono	Sunarto Tinor
Gunawan Setokusumo	Surabaya Tenpu Dulu
Holopis	Takashi Kuribayashi
Imelda Setokusumo	Thomas Berghuis
Jakarta Wasted Artists	WAFT Lab
Jompét Kuswidananto	XXLab
Leonhard Bartolomeus	Yohana Irawan
Lina Koswara	Yustina Neni
Manic Street Walker	Yustoni Volunteero



Research: Vietnam 01

Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City

2015.12.13 - 12.20

The sixth country for the SEA PROJECT to visit was Vietnam. For the majority of the people—especially in the West—there is no avoiding the Vietnam War when speaking of the country. Ironically, however, this war is referred to as the “American War” in Vietnam. Once divided into Northern and Southern Vietnam, each with their own socio-cultural characteristics, it is not uncommon for people to still feel that the now-united country consists of “two different countries.” Flying to Hanoi and to Ho Chi Minh City, the team was able to get a glimpse into the different cultures and learned from artists and gallerists about the past and current situations in contemporary Vietnamese art.



Merv Espina



Natsumi Araki



Mami Kataoka



Naoki Yoneda



Nha San Collective (NSC)

2015.12.14



Natsumi Araki

Begun by artists Tuan Mami (1981-), Nguyen Phuong Lin (1985-) and several other artists in 2013, Nha San Collective inherited the spirit of the Nha San Studio as an experimental space for avant-garde art. Their goals are to support young artists, expand the audience for the visual arts, facilitate cultural exchange at home and abroad, and promote creative activities in Vietnam through their exhibitions, public programs, and educational activities. Although they had been relocating, without a specific space of their own, they have moved into Hanoi’s new commercial building, Creative City since August 2015. As part of the building’s incentive to bring in cultural enterprises, their rent has also been waived. Run by volunteers, they gain their operational funds from donations, entrance fees, sales of artwork and related goods, and sponsorships of projects. The group emits a youthful energy focused around artists and has been attracting attention as a venue for generating new culture in Hanoi.



Hanoi DOCLAB

2015.12.14



Natsumi Araki

Hanoi DOCLAB is a film art institution founded in 2009 by artist Nguyen Trinh Thi (1973-), inlocated inside the Goethe-Institut in Hanoi. It serves an important role in Vietnam as an educational institution focused on video production with an emphasis on documentaries, reflecting Nguyen Trinh Thi's studies in journalism and international relations in the United States. They perform a variety of activities, such as providing video equipment for filmmakers, organizing workshops on technical topics, and lectures and screenings led by artists invited from overseas. The accompanying library houses resources including classical movies, contemporary documentaries, experimental films, and video art. Since 2012, they have annually hosted Mini DocFest, a festival that showcases documentaries and films by young Vietnamese artists, which has been well received. Videos produced by those who studied at DOCLAB were also screened at the 5th Yebisu International Festival for Art & Alternative Visions in 2013. The educational backgrounds of DOCLAB members interviewed varied, ranging from IT to communications and international studies, exemplifying DOCLAB's diverse body of members.



Tran Luong (1960-)

2015.12.15



Naoki Yoneda

Based in Hanoi, Tran Luong is a prominent Vietnamese artist who has participated in many international exhibitions. He is also active as a curator with the aim of fostering the growth of young artists. In 1983, he founded the artist group Gang of Five (1983-1996) with four other friends from art school. He said they started the group activities because they were dissatisfied with the education offered by Hanoi Fine Arts University, and also because the Vietnamese government's support for the arts was weak. Although their activities were exposed to censorship, they gradually started exhibiting abroad in places such as Hong Kong and Amsterdam, expanding the area of their activities. In addition to these overseas experiences, Veronika Radulovic, a German scholar who had been teaching at Hanoi Fine Arts University from the early '90s, introduced the German artistic trends of that period to Vietnam. This allowed them to become familiar with performance art, which was a fairly new method of expression at the time. Tran Luong continues to be active as an individual artist after the dissolution of the Gang of Five, recently concentrating on the question of how to approach communities that have been alienated from art.



Salon Natasha

2015.12.15



Naoki Yoneda

An alternative space founded in 1990 by Russian-born Natalia Kraevskaia (1952-), whose husband is the renowned Vietnamese artist Vu Dan Tan (1946 - 2009). Vu Dan Tan was deeply versed not just in visual arts but in music as well: documentations of his performances of composing and playing the piano are kept on LP records. During his lifetime, Salon Natasha served as a studio as well as a space where artists and intellectuals could gather, and young artists could exhibit their experimental works. During the early '90s, after the space opened, Salon Natasha was one of the few spaces that did not succumb to the threats of censorship, and they have hosted a number of exhibitions and art projects since. It is an important space in telling the story of art in Hanoi since 1990, and Natalia Kraevskaia holds a vast collection of photos as a record of the exhibitions and events that they have organized. A portion of the Salon Natasha archive can be seen on the [Asia Art Archive website](#).



Nha San Studio

2015.12.15



Naoki Yoneda

An alternative space in Hanoi founded by artist Nguyen Manh Duc (1976-) and artist/curator Tran Luong in 1998. The space also serves as Nguyen Manh Duc's home. In addition to installations and video art that had been on the rise in Vietnam at the time it was founded, they have experimented with sound art and performances, and have also hosted lectures and workshops. Although those who initially gathered there were artists such as co-founder Tran Luong and those who already had been recognized internationally such as Truong Tan (1963-), they were forced to close in 2011 under pressures from the authorities. However, in 2013 a younger generation of artists, having embodied the spirit of Nha San Studios, founded the Nha San Collective. Although they did not have a permanent exhibition space until 2015, they continued their activities while relocating. Nguyen Manh Duc's daughter, Nguyen Phuong Linh, is one of their key members of the Collective.



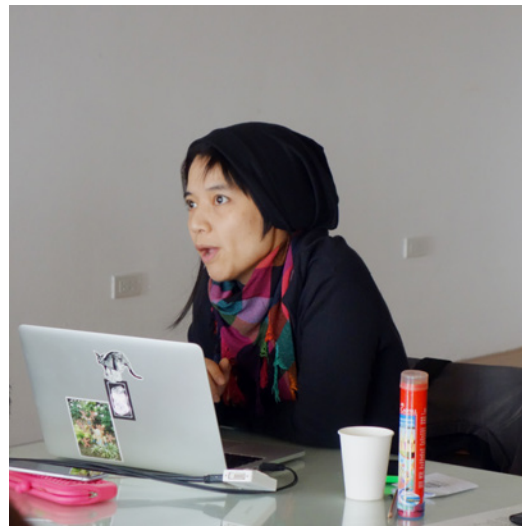
DomDom

2015.12.16



Natsumi Araki

DomDom was founded in 2012 by artist and composer Tran Thi Kim Ngoc as Vietnam's first NGO focused on experimental music. Kim Ngoc became interested in expressing visual images with sound while studying at Hanoi Conservatory of Music, and had already carried out a highly experimental performance at Nha San Studio in 2002 when she was twenty years old. Afterwards, she studied composition and improvisation in Germany, and was influenced by figures such as Pina Bausch into organizing a performance where she managed everything from stage design to composing and lighting. Not limiting herself to the genre of music, she pursues an array of artistic expressions that span from visual arts to performing arts, and has exhibited her diverse range of work all around the world. In February 2016, she visited Japan to participate in Performing Arts Meeting in Yokohama 2016 (TPAM 2016), and spoke about the Hanoi New Music Festival which specializes in experimental music and mixed media art for which she serves as artistic director.



Art Labor

2015.12.18



Mami Kataoka

A collective created by Phan Thao Nguyen of Berlin, Arlette Quynh Anh Tran of Chicago, and Troung Cong Tung of Ho Chi Minh City after completing their residencies with San Art at the end of 2012. Art Labor focuses on the intersections of art, society, and life sciences. As such, rather than expressing their feelings and ideas, they are interested in problem-solving rooted in research-based investigation and knowledge. They strive to create art and exhibitions in different environments outside of the studio, for which their activities go beyond the format of “contemporary art” and span across cultural anthropology, history, medicine, religion. Not limiting themselves to conventional art exhibits, their research are used for children's workshops in hospitals and publication of books. When we interviewed them, they discussed their recent projects/publications such as *Unconditional Belief* (2012-2014) and *Jarai Dew*.



Galerie Quynh

2015.12.18



Mami Kataoka

A contemporary art gallery founded by Quynh Pham in 2003 in Ho Chi Minh City, focusing on domestic and international contemporary artists. Quynh Pham sought asylum in the United States at the end of the Vietnam War and studied art history and criticism in California before returning to Vietnam in 1997. Since, she has situated contemporary art of her home country within the global context and markets from a variety of methods. At the time of our visit, she was hosting the two-person exhibition, *1972-2015: Works by Hoang Duong Cam and Trong Gia Nguyen*. Trong Gia Nguyen, born in Ho Chi Minh City and now based both in Ho Chi Minh City and Brooklyn, was exhibiting works that conceptually combined the scenery of then-Saigon (current Ho Chi Minh City), iconic American landscapes, and the American Dream. Meanwhile, Hoang Duong Cam specifically selected online images of 1972, the year in which there was a large bombing of North Vietnam prior to the Vietnam peace agreement (Paris Peace Accords). The images were first obscured through a pinhole camera, after which maps were superimposed onto them to convey the difficulties of narrating and preserving the memories of history.



San Art

2015.12.18



Mami Kataoka

San Art is an NPO founded in 2007 by multiple artists including Dinh Q. Le (1968-), one of the most internationally renowned Vietnamese artists. As the executive director, Zoe Butt both organizes exhibitions and workshops for the space. While situating the Vietnamese art scene and artists on an international platform, they also host residency programs, exhibits, discussions, and educational programs to expose the domestic art community to a wide range of “art.” San Art engages in a wide array of activities and have the strongest reputation abroad of Vietnamese organizations. The building which also houses their office consists of a studio for artists undergoing their residency program. These artists reside in a different building, San Art Laboratory, which has unfortunately closed since May 2016. Their reading room is occasionally used for lectures by international curators and scholars. We were able to borrow the space to ask six artists share their works and practices with us. We were also lucky to be able to see *Laboratory Session 7*, an exhibition held at Saigon Domain which was part of San Art’s residency program. Although this exhibition was prohibited from being open to the public (due to “license” issues), it demonstrated San Art’s active and effective use of spaces other than its own for exhibitions and curatorial engagements.



Special Thanks

Arlette Quynh-Anh Tran

Bill Nguyen

Bui Cong Khanh

Bui Thi Thanh Mai

Celine Alexandre

Dang Xuan Hoa

Dao Anh Khanh

Dinh Q. Le

Dinh Thi Than Poong

Do Ha Thai

Gabby Miller

Ha Tri Hieu

Hoang Duong Cam

Hoang Nam Viet

Hong Viet Dong

Lai Dieu Ha

Le Brothers [Le Duc Hai & Le Ngoc Thanh]

Le Giang

Le Hoang Bich Phuong

Le Thanh Uyen

Lena Bui

Liar Ben [Phan Minh Tuan]

Ly Hoang Ly

Natalia Kraevskaia

Ngoc Nau (San Art)

Nguyen Duc Quang

Nguyen Kim To Lan

Nguyen Manh Duc

Nguyen Manh Hung

Nguyen Minh Phuoc

Nguyen Nhu Huy

Nguyen Quang Huy

Nguyen Quoc Thanh

Nguyen Thai Hoa

Nguyen Thanh Truc

Nguyen Tuan Anh

Nguyen Uyen Minh

Nguyen Van Cuong

Phan Quang

Quang Lam

Quynh Pham

Richard Streitmatter-Tran

Son X

Suzanne Lecht

Tiffany Chung

Tra Nguyen

Tram Vu

Tran Duc Nam

Tran Luong

Tran Minh Duc

Tran Nguyen Trung Tin

Tran Thanh Ha

Tran Thi Kim Ngoc

Trong Gia Nguyen

Truong Cong Tung

Truong Minh Quy

Tuan Andrew Nguyen

UuDam Tran Nguyen

Vu Kim Thu

Vu Nhat Tan

Zoe Butt



Research: Singapore 01

Singapore

2016.01.21 - 01.23

The first of the triple-country tour, the SEA PROJECT flew to Singapore. Currently the economic and cultural hub in Southeast Asia, Singapore marked its 50th anniversary of independence and also experienced the loss of its founding father in 2015. Singapore's presence within the region is epitomized by the impressive city scape that visitors encounter when arriving into the city center. With the recent opening of its new national museum and the hosting of Art Stage Singapore in January 2016, its art scene was thriving with hundreds of art-related professionals flocking there. On this occasion, the team met with many artists and saw many artworks in the little time they had available.



Vera Mey



Ong Jo-Lene



Kenichi Kondo



Mami Kataoka



Naoki Yoneda



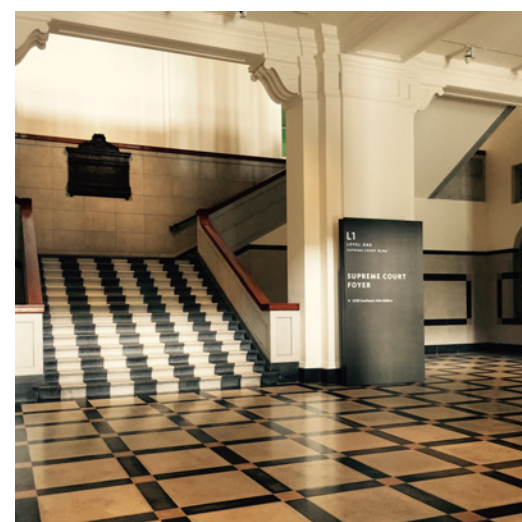
National Gallery Singapore

2016.01.22



Kenichi Kondo

The National Gallery Singapore opened in November 2015. Housing approximately 8,000 artworks of contemporary art from Southeast Asia, it is the largest art museum in the region with a total area of 64,000 square meters. The museum was created integrating the former city hall built under British rule in 1929 and the former Supreme Court built in 1939. It is an ambitious art museum that aims to make Singapore the hub of the Southeast Asian art world. Exhibitions held in commemoration of the museum's opening include *Siapa Nama Kamu? Art in Singapore since the 19th Century (What Is Your Name?)*, featuring Singaporean art from the 19th century to the present day; and *Between Declarations and Dreams: Art of Southeast Asia since the 19th Century*, which features around 400 works of Southeast Asian art dating from the 19th century onwards. The latter exhibition is based on four themes: "Authority and Anxiety: 19th Century to early 20th Century," "Imagining Country and Self: 1900s to 1940s," "Manifesting the Nation: 1950s to 1970s," and "Re: Defining Art: 1970s and After." Organized in chronological order, it portrays regional artistic expression born in concert with socio-political changes including modernization, colonization, and independence.



Amanda Heng (1951-)

2016.01.22



Kenichi Kondo

Amanda Heng is a female Singaporean artist who began to work and perform in the 1980s. Some of her art is a reinterpretation of Western feminist discourse and protests against Singapore's male-dominant society. She is relatively already well-known in Japan as well, having been an artist-in-residence in Fukuoka in 1999 on the invitation of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, and participating in exhibitions including *Women In-Between: Asian Women Artists 1984-2012* (2012 -2013), which toured four art museums in Japan. She also curates exhibitions, and organizes workshops and public forums. At the time of our visit, Heng's work was being displayed in the National Gallery Singapore exhibition, *Siapa Nama Kamu? Art in Singapore since the 19th Century*, including the image- and video-based *Singirl* (2000) and *Let's Walk* (2000), and the photography series *ANOTHER WOMAN* (1996 – 1997). One of Amanda Heng's most outstanding works, *ANOTHER WOMAN* documents the artist and her mother in various acts, the famous of which is of them embracing one another. Realizing that her relationship with her mother had been estranged within their Chinese patriarchal family structure, she embarked on this project to rebuild their mother-daughter relationship.



[NTU Center for Contemporary Art Singapore \(CCA\)](#)

2016.01.22



Kenichi Kondo

The NTU Center for Contemporary Art Singapore (CCA) was opened by Nanyang Technological University in October 2013. In addition to regularly holding exhibitions, the Center also hosts artist-in-residence and education programs. Ute Meta Bauer, who was one of the co-directors of documenta XI (2002), serves as gallery director. At the time of our visit, veteran American artist Joan Jonas was holding a solo exhibition—a reconstruction of her exhibition at the 56th Venice Biennale United States Pavilion (2015) and also featuring video recordings of performances by artists in Venice. The Gillman Barracks art complex, where CCA is located, contains many galleries including branches of the Mizuma Art Gallery and Ota Fine Arts of Japan. The day featured the annual Singapore art fair, Art Stage Singapore, as well as the opening of Gillman Barracks at night and various events bustling with people. CCA hosted open studios for their artists-in-residence, including Indonesian artist Jompet Kuswidananto (1976-), who participated in Yokohama Triennale 2008 (2008), and Saleh Husein (1982-), who participated in *Time of others* (2015) which travelled from Tokyo, Osaka, Singapore, and to Brisbane. Also at CCA, we met with and interviewed Singaporean artist Ho Rui An, who participated in the Performing Arts Meeting in Yokohama 2016 (TPAM 2016).



Loo Zihan (1983-)

2016.01.23



Naoki Yoneda

Loo Zihan is a Singapore-based artist active in a wide variety of different fields including film production, acting, performance, and dance. He is one of the few artists whose works touches on sexual minority's lives. In Singapore, homosexuality is a taboo subject due to condemnation from increasingly strong conservative voices. The 2007 film *Solos*, which he both co-directed and acted in, received high acclaim at the Busan International Film Festival and the 23rd Torino Gay & Lesbian Film Festival. His performance of *Cane* at Singapore's alternative space, The Substation, in 2012 was a re-enactment of *Brother Cane*, a performance previously done by Thai-born artist Josef Ng in Singapore's Parkway Parade. At the time, *Brother Cane* was controversial due to its "excessive obscenity," which resulted in Josef Ng being banned from performance art for ten years between 1994 and 2004. Loo Zihan re-enacted this historical incident in *Cane*, an extremely realistic work that deals with the censorship against homosexuality and the problems of documentation that arise when reproducing a performance.



Bani Haykal (1985-)

2016.01.23



Ong Jo-Lene

Bani Haykal is an artist, composer, and performer experimenting with text and music. His practice traverses and intercrosses art, music, sound, performance, theatre, poetry, and research. His research questions our perceptions on music, particularly jazz, by investigating the politics at play behind the history of the genre and its effects in Singapore and the region. During his two years as Associate Artist with The Substation, he developed his ongoing research "Rethinking Music." He continued this line of inquiry with a research on the Cultural Cold War during his residency at NTU Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA). Haykal's approach is imbued with a strong spirit of experimentation and sensitivity to social history. Constantly looking for new ways of collaboration, he is part of Offcuff, a collective focusing on multi-disciplinary performance and soundpainting ensemble Erik Satay & The Kampong Arkestra. As a composer and performer, he has collaborated with Ho Tzu Nyen (*The Cloud of Unknowing*, *Ten Thousand Tigers*), T.H.E Dance Company, and The Necessary Stage. Haykal is also a member of experimental rock band b-quartet and was part of the immensely influential art rock band The Observatory. He has participated in exhibitions and festivals including "Media/Art Kitchen" (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Japan, 2013-14), *SOUND: Latitudes and Attitudes* (Institute of Contemporary Art Singapore, 2014), and *RRREC FEST* (Indonesia, 2014). Haykal is the recipient of Singapore's "2013 Young Artist Award" and "2015 President's Young Talent Award."



Sherman Ong (1971-)

2016.01.23



Naoki Yoneda

Sherman Ong is a filmmaker, photographer, and visual artist active in Singapore. He is one of the founding members of the film collective, 13 Little Pictures, and was also an associate artist of The Substation. He is internationally active, participating in the 53rd Venice Biennale Singapore Pavilion (2009) and the 5th Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale (2014). Sherman Ong is interested in the problems that arise from the history of immigration and colonialism in Southeast Asia: questions of international borders, diversity, identity, and interracial relationships. He shared with us that this his interest derives from the fact that he himself belongs to the Peranakan (Chinese immigrant) minority group and, by nature, the concept of the “Chinese (people)” continues to be important to him. Although they are said to be multiethnic nations, in reality, both nations, Malaysia and Singapore, have a highly polished veneer of being multicultural, but in reality its governance is riddled with identity politics, and it was once difficult for Chinese people to find ways to build a life in the latter. His 2009 work depicting immigrant life, *Flooding in the Time of Drought*, clearly reflects this stance.



Lee Wen (1957-)

2016.07.23



Naoki Yoneda

Lee Wen is a Singaporean performance artist. After working at a bank, he entered LaSalle-SIA College of the Arts in 1988, where he became friends with Tang Du Wu and Amanda Heng. He is a member of the artist group, The Artist Village, founded by Tang Du Wu in 1988. Lee Wen first discovered the art of performance while studying abroad in London in 1990. He is now best known for his performance series *Yellow Man*, in which he paints his entire body yellow. He has also transformed these performances into installations under the title *Journey of a Yellow Man*. Lee Wen became a focus of international attention overnight for this series, and he began to participate internationally in the Gwangju Biennale (1995) and the 3rd Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (1999). He also has a deep connection with Japan, displaying *Journey of a Yellow Man No.5: Index to Freedom* at the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum's 4th Asian Art Show (1994), performing also at Musashino Art University. He is still active with his ongoing work at his independent archive in central Singapore.



Special Thanks

Amanda Heng	Lee Wen
anGie Seah	Loo Zihan
Bani Haykal	Michael Lee
Corine Chan	Ray Langenbach
Genevieve Chua	Saleh Husein
Guo-Liang Tan	Shabbir Hussein Mustafa
Ho Rui An	Sherman Ong
Jompet Kuswidananto	Shubigi Rao
June Yap	Yu Jin Seng
	Zulkifle Mahmod



Research: Singapore 02

Singapore

2016.11.08 - 11.11

The last research trip of the SEA Project was conducted in Singapore again. The 2016 Singapore Biennale was held and Singapore was more vibrant than at the first research. The curators visited ateliers and galleries and talked about the contemporary art in Singapore. They visited each venue of the Biennale and saw many artworks by artists gathered from the world, mainly in Southeast Asia. Those works were expressed in various ways utilizing the characteristics of the exhibition space, stimulated the curiosity of the appreciator and gave many suggestions to the curator.



Yuiko Mukasa



Ong Jo-Lene



Haruko Kumakura



Hirokazu Tokuyama



Naoki Yoneda



Notes on An Atlas of Mirrors: Appearances and Disappearances



Ong Jo-Lene

“An Atlas of Mirrors” is the 6th edition of the Singapore Biennale. Launched in 2006 to coincide with the IMF/World Bank meeting in Singapore, the first 2 editions “Belief” and “Wonder” were organized by the National Arts Council and lead by the Director of Tokyo’s Mori Art Museum, Nanjo Fumio as artistic director. Subsequent editions of the biennale have been organized by Singapore Art Museum (SAM). This edition’s curatorial team comprises of five SAM curators and four external curators hailing from India, China, Malaysia, and Singapore working under the creative direction of Dr. Susie Lingham, a well-known artist who was the Director of SAM from August 1, 2013 to March 31, 2016. “An Atlas of Mirrors” explores shared histories and current realities within and beyond the region through nine conceptual zones, each accompanied by three key words/phrases. Spanning eight venues anchored around SAM, the biennale showcases sixty three artists and art collectives from nineteen countries and territories across Southeast Asia, East and South Asia, expanding the arc of its curatorial inquiry from the last edition’s focus on the Southeast Asian region. It instead strives to position Southeast Asia as a vantage point through which we recognize our world anew, reflecting on and navigating through how we picture the world and ourselves in it. The expansive and universal themes may at times sound overwhelming and confounding, but the flow of the exhibition that rhythmically intersperses contemplative and spectacular works offers an open-ended experience.

The following are three artworks that emphatically resonate with the theme of biennale.

1. Zulkifle Mahmud (1975-), *SONICreflection*, 2016

Consisting of nearly two hundred wok lids in a dark room, arranged on grid and bathed in glowing neon amber and blue light, the futuristic machine-like appearance of *SONICreflection* belies the material of its structure. This condition is not unlike isolation and drudgery of migrant lives behind many exuberant cities, not to mention the billions they send home in remittances. This sound sculpture utilizes recordings from various “sonic territories” in the city state, some of which are the Lucky Plaza on Orchard Road which has long been home to the Filipino community, the Peninsula Plaza’s congregation

of Burmese shops, the Joo Chiat neighborhood that hosts many Vietnamese, and the City Plaza in Geylang Serai which is popular with the Indonesian community.

2. Martha Atienza, *Endless Hours at Sea*, 2014, 2016 (Photo: left)

Using material recorded from four journeys on cargo ships, Martha Atienza presents an immersive multimedia installation of projected images and sound to explore psychological and emotional states in sea travel, our relationship with water, and human migration. This artistic journey is a personal one as her parents met while working on cruise ships. The term “Overseas Filipinos” refers to the large number of Filipino citizens working abroad across the globe, estimated at approximately 10.2 million people, with 400,000 employed in the global shipping industry. This condition and the work allude to a certain deterritorialization, displacing prevailing ideas of settlement.

3. "Witness To Paradise 2016: Nilima Sheikh, Praneet Soi, Abeer Gupta & Sanjay Kak"

Dense and quiet, "Witness To Paradise" is a thoughtful curatorial project presenting reflections of memories, imagination, and narratives inscribed in the landscape of Kashmir, a land beset in one the longest territorial conflict that is still ongoing since 1947. Hanging embroidered garments from Abeer Gupta's *The Pheran* (Photo: right) in the centre of the room and Praneet Soi's *Srinagar* installation of papier-mâché tiles and a slideshow on a nearby table explore the material culture of Kashmir. *Srinagar* elucidating the plurality of cultural influences while *The Pheran* considers the widely worn garment by both men and women as symbol of Kashmiri identity and witness to the conflict and the changes that have taken place. Nilima Sheikh's tempera paintings take inspiration from Kashmiri poets and architecture to produce a meditation on the nature of destroyed beauty. On the opposite end of the room, Sanjay Kak curates photographs by five photo-journalists to destabilize popular tropes around Kashmir.



Observations on Singapore Biennale 2016



Yuiko Mukasa

Entitled An Atlas of Mirrors, the 2016 Singapore Biennale features works from a total of sixty-three artists and artist collectives across multiple venues including the Singapore Art Museum. Among these sixty-three are those we hope to include in the SUNSHOWER exhibition. So, in addition to interviewing and talking with artists and art dealers about the possibility of their participation, one of the purposes of this Singapore trip was to visit to the Biennale to see their works in their exhibition spaces. Out of the many works we saw, here I will introduce those by Araya Rasdjarmreasoook (1957-) and Htein Lin (1966-).

Araya Rasdjarmreasoook is an active Thai artist who has been participating in international exhibitions such as the 51st Venice Biennale of 2005. This time, in a large, separated room, she set up an installation with furnishings and video projections onto five screens. When entering the room, one passes through many long strips of white cloth hanging from the ceiling, until the screens, also hung from the ceiling, come into view. Images are projected on both sides of these screens—a close-up of someone's hand

writing letters on one side and the lapping of waves on the other, for example—which suggest the overlapping layers of many stories progressing in synchronization with the passage of time. Through imageries of animals, nude female figures, coffins borne by pallbearers, and the like, Rasdjarmreasoook embodies in this work her previous preoccupations, such as women in society and life and death, while also reflecting the particular theme of this Biennale.

Htein Lin’s installation composed of his numerous soap sculptures placed on the floor in the form of a map of Myanmar, his home country. This is a representative work of the artist and we had hoped to exhibit it at the "*SUNSHOWER*" exhibition. Since we had not yet obtained its details, this became a good opportunity for us to re-evaluate how exactly we were going to exhibit it. Upon seeing the work, we were convinced that it would need more space than we had thought; our tentative space would unfortunately not allow viewers to appreciate his work up close or from a slightly distant position. In light of this, we are exploring a different route, paying more attention on his drawings and reducing the scale of his soap sculptures. These works of Htein Lin reflect his experiences of imprisonment after joining the All Burma Students' Democratic Front in 1988. As these works narrate the political currents of Myanmar—its dictatorship, democratic movement, and military oppression—and the artist’s engagements as an activist, it is extremely important to figure out how to best present them in our show. Thus, visiting the Singapore Biennale marks a very important step in organizing the "*SUNSHOWER*" exhibition.



Singapore Biennale 2016: An Atlas of Mirrors



Hirokazu Tokuyama

Its 6th iteration, the 2016 Singapore Biennale exhibited fifty-eight artworks and projects from nineteen countries focused on Southeast Asia but also including South and East Asia. It comprised of seven venues, with the Singapore Art Museum as the main venue, all with exhibitions based on nine different “zones” or sub-themes.

The curatorial team consisted of nine in total led by Susie Lingham of the Singapore Art Museum (SAM): five curators from SAM and four guest curators, each from India, Singapore, Malaysia, and China. This Biennale was characterized by many new art commissions, many of which were site-specific based on thorough research or local residencies. Furthermore, some works took up Singaporean or Southeast Asian history as their subject matter which gave the Biennale an overall consistency.

For example, *SONICreflection* by Singaporean artist Zulkifle Mahmod is a sound installation that uses sounds sampled from the streets of Singapore. Through the raucous city-sounds, Mahmod addresses the layers of social issues that Singapore is faced with such as multiculturalism and economic development. In addition, *Aftermath* (2016) by Pannaphan Yodmanee (1988-) of Thailand, a young female artist, is a massive mural installation composed of concrete walls, Buddhist sculptures, and other waste materials. It was a substantial and impressive work that contrasted the artist's own personal memories and fantasies with the history of Southeast Asia.

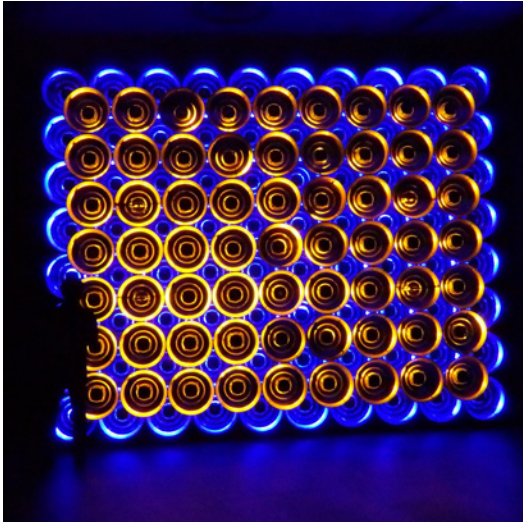
I surmise that the title of this Biennale, An Atlas of Mirrors, refers to both the overview of this exhibition and issues that reside beneath it. The word “atlas” indicates a “collection” of maps, and “mirrors” is also in its plural form. “Mirrors” function as a metaphor for the works exhibited, and what they “reflect” are each of the artists and audiences themselves, and, by extension, they reflect the individual’s realities as well as the illusions that lie at the opposite end of the spectrum. In other words, “an atlas of mirrors” signifies the set of mirrors on and from which reality reflects off of each other, creating a multitude of reflected realities.

Further, from “atlas” we get a glimpse of the exhibition trying to signify a certain direction. But what is important is that the direction presented here is not simply that of a single map but of a collection of maps bound together; possibly a [curatorial] statement that there is no single, consistent direction. In this age of multiculturalism, this itself seems to represent, as it is, the state(s) of Singapore and Southeast Asia as a multiethnic state and region.

Just as Susie Lingham used the word “fractal”^{*} to describe its curation, this Biennale is a reflection of the complex reality that repeatedly re-iterates and reflects off of itself; a process of “self-similarity” one might even say. Conversely, this character also seems to separate the Biennale from international exhibitions that are based on one specific theme, and also demonstrates the difficulties in the curatorial methodologies themselves which are based on the assumption of common, similar, shared issues across the region.

^{*}Fractal is a geometrical concept introduced by the French mathematician, Benoît B. Mandelbrot (1924-2010). A fractal exhibits the whole even while being only a portion of it. Replicating itself, it’s property is called “self-similar.” It is said that fractals appear ubiquitously in the natural world.

ref. [Fractacal Foundation](#)



Special Thanks

Andrea Fam
Bruce Quek
Can Yavuz
Fredy Chandra
Joyce Toh
Kai Lam

Koh Nguang How
Lee Wen
Louis Ho
Suzann Victor
Syaheedah Iskandar
Zulkifle Mahmod



Research: Cambodia 01

Phnom Penh

2016.01.24 - 01.26

After the research in Singapore, the curatorial team flew directly to Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia. As urban development accelerates in the city center, the team witnessed those that still remained as part of the city's history: the national museum that functions like a temple for the local people; the modern architectures designed by Vann Molyvann (1926-); and apartment complexes which are home to many families. In such an environment, the curatorial team saw artists' practices that attempted to archive those parts of the city for the next generation.



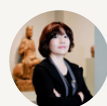
Vera Mey



Ong Jo-Lene



Kenichi Kondo



Mami Kataoka



Naoki Yoneda



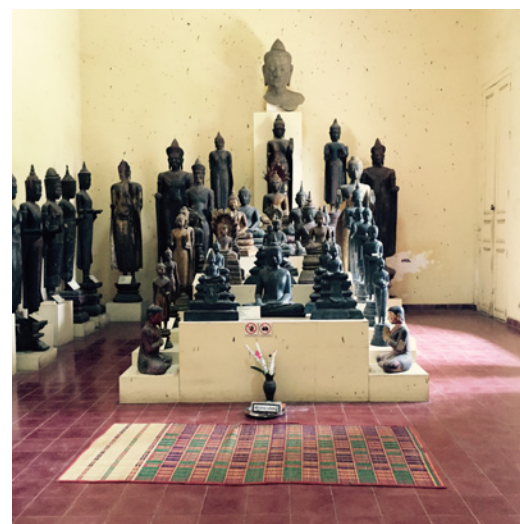
National Museum of Cambodia

2016.01.24



Mami Kataoka

Built in the style of "traditional" Khmer architecture, the national museum opened in 1919 as Musée du Cambodge. After Cambodia secured its independence, it was renamed Musée national de Phnom-Penh (National Museum of Phnom Penh). Although the museum closed its doors during the Khmer Rouge rule in 1975-1979, it re-opened in 1979 and remains open to this day. Exhibits at the museum are displayed in an open-air setting without walls, focusing primarily on Hindu art and Buddhist sculptures of the Khmer Empire (802-1431). Lotus roots and votive offerings of money are placed in front of the several statues of Buddha, and there are also mats in place for prayer. Although it is common for objects used in prayer or communication with the gods to be studied and admired as works of art in modern-day museums, we found it deeply fascinating that such objects retained both characteristics in this museum. The museum also sells flowers for offerings and a fortuneteller is present to read palms.



S-21 Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum

2016.01.24



Mami Kataoka

Pol Pot was one of the most brutal dictators in human history. Traces of his regime, the Khmer Rouge, are preserved at the S-21 Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. Originally a senior high school, during the rule of the Khmer Rouge (1975-1979) this building became a concentration camp for intellectuals and government officials who were detained, tortured, and finally executed here. The rooms used for solitary confinement, portrait photographs of the prisoners and victims, and also piles of skeletons are all left vividly within the Museum walls.



White Building: Art Archive and Library

2016.01.24



Mami Kataoka

Built in 1964, the White Building was prepared as a low-rent residential complex that contains 468 apartments that stretches for 300 meters on 24 hectares of land. Immediately after its construction, the White Building was inhabited by government employees, teachers, staff members of the nearby national theater, and many artists. Consisting of six blocks connected by outdoor stairways, the building used to be completely white, and a few photographs that remain of the time make viewers recall the Unité d'habitation housings built by Le Corbusier in Marseille and other areas. After the fall of Phnom Penh in 1975, residents were forced to evict and the White Building became an empty husk. In the present, with the return of people to the city, the White Building has become homes for low-income residents, and small shops and stalls have become to surround the area. The White Building: Art Archive and Library is a project that seeks to archive the history of the White Building from an architectural and community-based perspective. Underway since 2014, this is one of the Sa Sa Art Projects, which have the most international character of contemporary art projects in Phnom Penh. Their office is located in one of the White Building’s rooms, and in addition to the archive, they also host artists-in-residence programs. Our guide during our visit was artist Lyno Vuth, who works to archive changes in the city and the lost and forgotten memories of its residents through a variety of methods, including collecting photographs, conducting interviews with people born and raised in low-income communities, and creating documentary films. In the photographs and videos that are viewable online, one can gain a glimpse into the everyday lives of the individuals who live in this historical apartment complex.



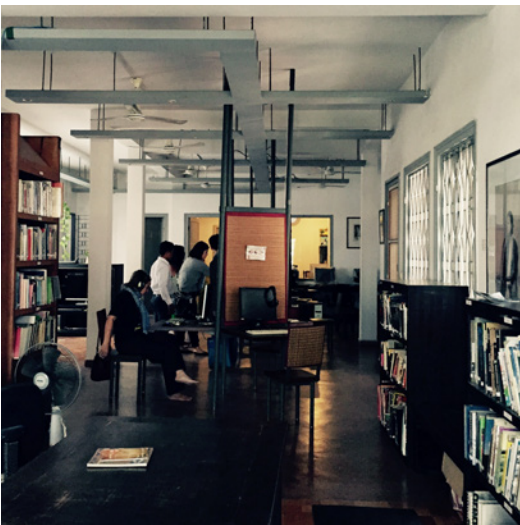
Bophana Audio Visual Resource Centre

2016.01.25



Kenichi Kondo

The Bophana Audio Visual Resource Centre was co-established in 2006 by prominent Cambodian film director Rithy Panh and the Cambodian government with a grant from the French government. The Resource Centre’s goal is to collect and digitize films, television programs, photographs, audio recordings, and other audio-visual materials pertaining to Cambodia, and to provide these materials free of charge to the public. Although Cambodia enjoyed a golden age of box office films in 1960s and ’70s, this was almost completely destroyed during the reign of the Khmer Rouge (1975-1979), and this history of lost audio-visual materials forms part of the backdrop of the Centre’s founding. In addition to film screenings, photograph and video installation exhibits, and the digital publication of the Centre’s collection, it also works to train young filmmakers through the hosting of workshops and lectures. The Resource Centre also enjoys a relationship with Japan, having Japanese staff on board and Japanese researchers participating in research in the past.



SA SA BASSAC

2016.01.25



Mami Kataoka

Sa Sa Bassac is an organization that works on exhibiting, selling, archiving, and providing material on contemporary art and culture in Cambodia. It is one of gatekeepers that for contemporary Cambodian artists to be recognized abroad. Sa Sa Bassac has formed a variety of partnerships with international institutions, residencies, museums, and galleries, and has greatly expanded its network. The Sa Sa Art Project was founded in the same year as an artist-led NPO operated by the artist collective Stiev Selapak, which was formed in 2007 (current members of Stiev Selapak are Khvay Samnang, Lim Sokchanlina, Lyna Kourn and Lyno Vuth) , and four years later, in 2011, Stiev Selapak established Sa Sa Bassac in collaboration with curator Erin Gleeson. Sa Sa Bassac deals with many of Cambodia’s political and historical problems, including the refugee crisis and resettlement and also the Cambodia-United States relations. For example, many Cambodians who fled to the United States as refugees did not possess valid identifications, which made it difficult for them to seek help from the police when in need. Sa Sa Bassac invites artists who pursue such stories in the United States, as well as American-Cambodian and Cambodian-American artists to Cambodia.



Lim Sokchanlina (1987-)

2016.01.25



Kenichi Kondo

Lim Sokchanlina is a photographer and videos and installation artist creating works pertaining to themes of social, political, and economic change in his home country of Cambodia. Lim Sokchanlina is a member of the artist collective Stiev Selapak and also works in the commercial photography industry. His photograph series, National Road Number 5 (2015), exhibited in the Southeast Asian Forum section of this year's Art Stage Singapore, records the severed residential buildings along the 400-kilometer national highway no. 5 running northeast from Phnom Penh to the Thai border. This national highway is being improved and repaired through development aid from Japan and other countries, but according to the artists, the owners of houses along the highway have sometimes been demanded to cut their houses in half due to the road expansion, yet they continue to live in those houses regardless.



Khvay Samnang (1982-)

2016.01.25



Kenichi Kondo

Khvay Samnang produces work containing messages about society, utilizing a range of artistic methods including photography, videos, installation art, three-dimensional works, and performance. He also enjoys a deep relationship with Japan, having lived and worked in Tokyo in 2010-2011 for Tokyo Wonder Site's creator-in-residence program. His work, *Enjoy My Sand: Samnang Cow Taxi in Singapore* (2013-2015), is a record, in both photograph and video, of a performance in which Samnang wore cow horns made of human hair and transported strangers on his back like a taxi service along the Singapore beach. This serves to humorously question the fact that sand exported from Cambodia is being used as landfill in Singapore.



Sopheap Pich (1971-)

2016.01.26



Naoki Yoneda

Sopheap Pich is a Phnom Penh-based artist. He is one of the most internationally active artists in Cambodia, having participated in many international exhibitions including the 4th Asian Art Show (2009), the 6th Asia Pacific Triennale of Contemporary Art (2009-2010), Singapore Biennale 2011, and documenta XIII (2012). Born in Cambodia, Sopheap Pich fled with his family to the United States to escape the Khmer Rouge at the age of 13, and he acquired his MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1999. He returned to Cambodia in 2002, attracted by the urban development of Phnom Penh and the resulting revitalization of people's lives. He stopped painting in 2005 and began to produce sculptural pieces works, making skillful use of traditional weaving techniques and local Cambodian materials such as bamboo and rattan. These biomorphic structures made of bamboo and rattan have become his most prominent series of works. He explains that his artistic process does not involve any draft drawing; instead, he works in tandem with the organic form of the material and slowly transforms their shape with his hands and fingers.



Amy Lee Sanford (1972-)

2016.01.26



Naoki Yoneda

Amy Lee Sanford is a Phnom Penh-based artist active in a wide range of genres, including drawing, sculpture, installation art, and performance. Born in Phnom Penh, Sanford moved to the United States in 1974 with her American mother to escape the Khmer Rouge, leaving her Cambodian father behind. She majored in the visual arts in university, minoring in biology and engineering, and returned to Cambodia in 2009 to continue to work as an artist. In her six-day performance, *Full Circle* (2012) at the Meta House, the artist sat on the floor surrounded by a ring of forty vases. During the six days, she repeated the process of dropping the vases then repairing them every half-day. The artist said that this action represented concepts including war, trauma, loss, migration, and crime. These are concepts important to her work, as can be seen again in her 2015 work *Cascade* where she tears into pieces the hundreds of letters her father in Cambodia had sent to her mother in America over the years, and reassembles them into a giant jigsaw puzzle.



Cambodia Research Trip Report



Vera Mey

Approaching Cambodia felt different because I am half Khmer. It is always a burden when you feel a sense of responsibility to represent a place, and a difficulty more pronounced because I don't speak Khmer and represent one of the many thousands of diaspora due to forced migration under the Khmer Rouge Regime (1975 – 1979). Many Cambodian refugees, along with neighboring Vietnamese (due to conflict induced by the American War in Vietnam) were dispersed around the world, so our experiences vastly differ from those who remained and endured. These junctures of knowledge are only heightened by the limited education of these various histories reproduced in Cambodia itself, something we were given insight into through the many artists we met. This also exposed itself through the impressive range of self-generating, non-custodian based knowledge transference we experienced through many independent initiatives.

Many of the more established artists within the art scene were playing active roles as mentors, running workshops and seminars. During Our visit to the White Building Collective and Archive, we overheard a screening led by artist Khvay Samnang with students from the White Building which housed artists, writers, and dancers alongside public servants in the heart of central Phnom Penh. Another artist Lyno Vuth, also Director of Sa Sa Art Projects, actively runs workshops and seminars, including those on art history (in lieu of more formalized courses) taking extra care to provide all content in Khmer. Given the scarcity of artistic resources that are translated, this is an overwhelmingly progressive gesture.

Of course this legacy of knowledge transference has a precedence through initiatives such as the Reyum Institute where we encountered many in-depth, researched resources on various Khmer arts and learned that some of the initial instances of fostering contemporary art exhibitions were through this institute. The way the Institute seem to drive critical inquiry of the local context was certainly seen through the conceptual practices and material investigations of artists such as Than Sok and Lyno Vuth. The Bophana Audiovisual Archive was also incredibly impressive in its active nurturing of young talent and the strength of lens-based media as seen through artists Sok Chanrado, Lim Sokchanlina dialogue within this. Rithy Pahn, founder of the Audiovisual Archive, and his gesture in building up the next generation is in line with the Archive's mandate of preserving cultural memory. Our Japanese colleagues were also delighted to find an early prewar footage of the Japanese presence in Cambodia with archival footage of Japanese soldiers on bikes riding past Angkor Wat.

The growing momentum of activity in an already-active scene was further evidenced by the professionalism and polish of the artists at Sa Sa Bassac who devote their program to solo commissions and discursive platforms as well as interesting and rigorous group exhibitions. We were also privy to hearing about the Boat Project from Java Arts Director Dana Langlois who has also been active in showing new work from Khmer, in particular by women and "repats" (repatriates), a term I had occasionally heard about.

Our final day ended in an inspiring architectural tour by Pen Sreypagna, an architect who crosses over into the art scene quite seamlessly and who is dedicated to the preservation, study, and empowerment of Phnom Penh's incredible architectural heritage. Sa Sa Bassac also hosted the Vann Molyvann Summer School which saw Pagna leading students towards making scale models of modernist architect Vann Molyvann.

Despite the more conventional and popular image of Cambodia being laden with Khmer Rouge references, our research trip was exposed to the Golden Era before this period—a time of visionary optimism and a dedication toward the arts in an opulent sense. Beautiful, grand modernist buildings, the glamour of films and the romanticism of boulevards for walking down, an energized city with inhabitants who were passionate and vital. This was Phnom Penh.

Special Thanks

Amy Lee Sanford
Chea Sopheap
Chum Chanveasna
Dana Langlois
Kazumi Arai
Khvay Samnang
Lach Ratana
Lim Sokchanlina

Lyno Vuth
Neak Sophal
Pen Sereypagna
Sok Chanrado
Sopheap Pich
Svay Sareth
Than Sok



Research: Laos 01

Vientiane

2016.01.27 - 01.28

The last trip for FY2015 ended with Laos. When the curatorial team arrived from Phnom Penh, the country was experiencing an unusually cold weather, enough to bring snow to northern regions. The curators saw quite a different art scene compared to other countries by meeting artists and visiting museums and galleries with the generous help of artist, Souliya Phoumivong.



Vera Mey



Ong Jo-Lene



Kenichi Kondo



Mami Kataoka



Naoki Yoneda



Summary



Vera Mey

Compared to the other countries of Southeast Asia, the Laos art scene is a collective unknown. We consulted various colleagues about activities there, searched through catalogues of past exhibitions for names, but the void in knowledge only expanded. It is in these positions where you can really, truly understand the nature of what curatorial research can and should be—an openness to whatever you might find without pre-conceived notions of what is or should look like.

Our interlocutor was crucial and we were guided by the caring hands of Souliya Phoumivong who introduced us to the Vientiane art scene. We began at the center of current activity, the National Institute of Fine Arts where Souliya is one of the faculties. Through him, we met the head of school who fondly walked us through his work including his studies in neighboring Thailand and through cross-national, communist connections studying art in Russia before the fall of the Soviet Union. This is an artist who was active in creative sculptures for the revolution and saw two nations through his own eyes. We learnt that he was the artist behind many of these grand bronze sculptures around the city and that the school was largely divided into medium specializations.

Unlike other major centers of former Indochina, Vientiane was relatively quiet. This could in part have been due to the freak cold snap the country was experiencing during our visit there where temperatures dropped to historical lows to 10.4 degrees Celsius in a usually sub-tropical climate. Despite the relative unknowns and isolation of the art scene, this was a reminder that larger global forces are having an affect here. Souliya gave us a brief history on the development of the art scene whereby artists initially sold artworks down by the riverfront weekend market. These were largely paintings to fuel demand from tourism. Gradually, artists began opening commercial gallery spaces in the city center and this in turn opened up a space for more typical touristic depictions, whereas more experimental works were shown at the back of the galleries. At times the audience for these experimental pieces was limited as evidenced in Bounpaul’s land art pieces which only survive through documentation. With the north of Thailand’s Chiang Mai being nearby and the resounding focus on social installation, one cannot help but draw

connections between this kind of outdoor experimental practice and it’s precursors across the border.

Laos is a very culturally diverse nation with the ethnic group of Laos itself only comprising amount of the population. Through the National Museum, which unfortunately is severely under-funded despite its incredible collection, we learned that it is a civilization which stretches back to first century AD and some of the first human remains in Asia were found on this territory we currently know as Laos. These were all new facts. Clearly, we still have a lot to learn about a place which felt relatively uncharted by the contemporary art world. And this is possibly what made it all the more enjoyable to encounter.

National Institute of Fine Arts (NIFA)

2016.01.27



Ong Jo-Lene

The centricity of Laos’ contemporary art community lies in the National Institute of Fine Arts (NIFA); all nine artists we met are alumni with many going on to be part the teaching staff. NIFA grew from what was the National Faculty of Fine Arts that ran schools in Vientiane, Savannakhet, and Luang Prabang and continues to house the Lao Fine Arts Association (LFAA), run by the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism. At this first stop of our visits, we were welcomed to NIFA’s large new complex completed in 2015 by Director and National Artist, Dr. Maysing Chanbouthdy (1957-).

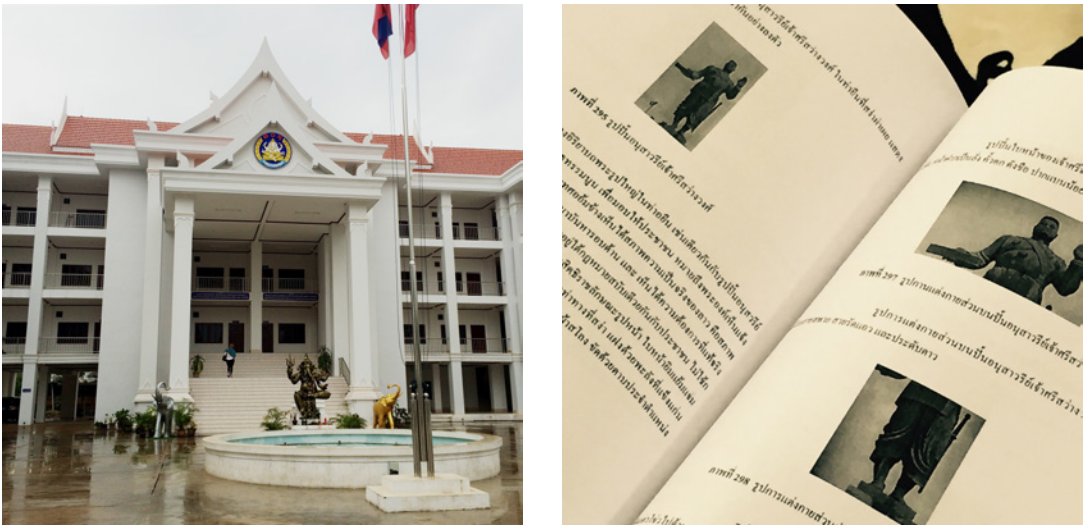
Maysing Chanbouthdy (1957-)

2016.01.27



Mami Kataoka

Maysing Chanbouthdy is a national artist and director of the National Institute of Fine Arts in Laos. Primarily a sculptor, he has also made monuments and similar works for the government. After graduation from the National Institute in 1981, Chanbouthdy began teaching at the school’s Department of Painting. He studied abroad in Moscow from 1984 to 1990, and in that period he shifted from painting to sculpture. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, he returned to Laos and began to teach sculpture. He also conducts research on the state of Laos’s monuments, drawing from his own work as an artist in which he created sculptures based on the wars between Laos and Vietnam, and bronze statues of Fa Ngum, the founder of the Lan Xiang Kingdom in the 14th century. In 2011, Chanbouthdy was named a national artist of Laos by the Laotian government. In Laos, he continues to engage in exchange activities in recent years with Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore, and other countries.



Eastern Art Gallery and Academy

2016.01.27



Ong Jo-Lene

After showing at both Art Stage Singapore and Singapore Biennale and in 2013 Bounpaul Phothyzan opened his own gallery this year. The front of the newly opened Eastern Art Gallery and Academy caters to the tourist market, showing paintings of landscape and multi-ethnic Lao women. In a smaller room at the back, documentation of Phothyzan's installations and performance were on show including the two works shown in Singapore, "Controlled Desire" and "We, Live" a collaborative project with the villagers of Phnonkham Village that resulted in a land-art installation based on the environmental issues faced by the community. Drawing and painting lessons are also offered here for youths who wish to pick it up on the side.



Souliya Phoumivong (1983-)

2016.01.27



Mami Kataoka

Souliya Phoumivong graduated from Laos's National Institute of Fine Arts in 2010, and then traveled to Japan on the Japan Foundation's JENESYS Program (Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youths). In Japan, he visited animation production schools and has been studying animation independently. Today, he teaches in the Media Department of the National Institute while creating stop-motion animation at his home studio. As part of his work on an educational television program, he is also working on the production of a show that uses clay animation. He said that he would like to contribute to the education of the next generation.



COPE Visitor Centre

2016.01.27



Kenichi Kondo

In Laos, there remain to this day many undetonated bombs dropped during the Indochina Wars. It is said that Laos is, per-capita, the most bombed country in the world. With this social problem as its backdrop, the COPE (Cooperative Orthotic and Prosthetic Enterprise) was founded in 1997 as an NPO by the Laos Ministry of Health and several NGOs to provide aid and support for victims of undetonated bombs. The COPE Visitor Centre, located in downtown Vientiane, features photographs of victims' daily lives, documentary films, and exhibits combining illustrations and prosthetic limbs. Although small in scale, one can come to understand here how the war is still not over for the people of Laos.



MASK Gallery (The Maison de la Culture de Ban Naxay)

2016.01.28



Mami Kataoka

The Maison de la Culture de Ban Naxay is a gallery owned by the city of Vientiane. The gallery is housed in a building that was originally the home of French artist Marc Leguay, who came to Laos via Cambodia in 1932. Leguay taught painting until 1945 at an art school he established in southern Laos. In 1945, he was arrested by Japanese forces and taken to Phnom Penh. However, after escaping from prison and returning to Vientiane, he was hired by the government to teach art such as drawing and watercolor painting at junior and high schools. As Leguay moved to Thailand in 1975, the house was temporarily deserted, upon which the French embassy stepped in to refurbish the building, and it is currently managed by the city of Vientiane. Called the MASK Gallery, named using the initials of the four Vientiane artists who founded it, this gallery holds exhibitions for local artists. There are no restrictions placed on the types of artists on display there, and the

large numbers of tourists who visit the MASK Gallery include Laotians living abroad and visitors from Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, and Europe.





Ong Jo-Lene

This charming wooden house on stilts surrounded by a lush garden was the residence of well-known businessman turned painter, Marc Leguay (1910-2001) . One could also venture to say he was well-liked as locals refer to him as a “Lao-French” when recalling how he refused to sell his paintings and only ever gave them away to friends. The house was given to Leguay by the government but he left for Thailand soon after the 1975 revolution (Pathet Lao Revolution) — or take-over, depending on your chosen vantage point.

The house is now rented out by the city municipal’s cultural department at USD135 (approximately 1 million Kip) per month. Its long-time tenant is the artist-run MASK Gallery that insists on not selecting but accepting all artists’ proposals thereby serving as a platform for the young, the lesser known, and the more experimental to exhibit their works. It also maintains a small permanent exhibition dedicated to Leguay.



Artists’ responses to life amidst Unexploded Ordnance (UXO)

2016.01.28



Ong Jo-Lene

After walking us through MASK Gallery’s history, artist and Executive Committee Member of LFFA Khongphat Luanglhat and National Artist May Chandavong shared with us about their participation in *A Different Outlook: Life Amidst UXO*, a fundraising exhibition organized by Handicap Laos and supported by LFFA in commemoration of the First Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions. From 1964 to 1973, over 2 million tons of ordnance over Laos in 580,000 bombing missions; the equivalent of one planeload every 8 minutes, 24 hours a day, for 9 years. A Different Outlook brought twenty established Lao artists to Savannakhet—Laos, most Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) affected province—to develop their responses to the UXO crisis that Laos continues to be burdened with. One memorable impression was May Chandavong’s oil painting *War Devastation* depicting a village amidst a concentric cluster of bombs: its red center radiating gloomy blue over the scene. The influence of this former Deputy Director of the National School of Fine Arts with a distinct painting style was most apparent when we visited Sivilay Souvannasing in his home studio.

Marisa Darasavath (1972-)

2016.01.28



Kenichi Kondo

Marisa Darasavath is a female artist residing in Vientiane whose paintings focus on femininity and its symbolism in the mother and child. She participated in the 4th Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale 2009. Combining traditional Laotian techniques with the techniques of Western painting, she utilizes extreme distortion and curves in her decorative and richly colored work. Peaceful and graphic, her work has established a unique presence in world of mainstream Laotian painting which is often of gentle realism. Due to stylistic differences, her work was in fact poorly received by teachers when she was a student at the National Institute of Fine Arts. However, it was at this time that she says she became determined to paint in exactly the way she wanted to paint. Although she is dissatisfied with the way Laotian men disapprove of busy Laotian women, she says that she does not create art with any feminist intention; rather, she is simply assessed as such within the confines of the current dominant discourse.



Epilogue



Ong Jo-Lene

While we were ushered to the back room in Eastern Art Gallery, the opposite scenario happened at the studio of Hongsa Kodsuvan and Mick Saylom. Both artists laid out a selection of works in preparation of our visit but it was the ones they hid behind their selection that caught our attention. Were we looking for the wrong thing, or the right thing in the wrong place, or were we just plain wrong?

We had also been trying to expand our survey beyond our affinity network but to no avail this time round. Of the ten ASEAN countries, Laos’s art scene is the one most segregated from the rest of the region. This is changing with the increasing participation of Laotian artists in exhibitions abroad and cross-cultural collaboration programs.

Case in point is our amazingly generous and resourceful interlocutor, Souliya Phoumivong who is often called upon to play this role to visiting arts practitioners.

Throughout our trip, Phoumivong matter-of-factly points out challenges the scene faces mainly from authorities and tourist demands. I get the impression that he never loses sight of what can be done, not unlike the young man in Phoumivong’s photo work, *Time Never Comes Back*, sitting on a stairs imbued with momentum that he looks like he could get up and walk out of the frame any time.

Special Thanks

Bounpual Photisan
Hongsa Kodsouvanh
Khongphat Luanglath
Maysing Chanbouthdy

Marisa Darasavath
May Chandavong
Mick Saylom
Sivilay Souvannasing
Souliya Phoumivong



Research: Thailand 01

Bangkok, Chiang Mai
2016.05.06 - 05.13

Several weeks after Songkran, the Thai New Year, the daytime temperature seemed to rise beyond our body temperatures. In the capital city, forests of skyscrapers and its infamous traffic jam accelerated the heat and hot air. As expected, Bangkok’s food, massages, and warm “smiles” made foreigners, such as ourselves, feel very welcomed. This country, however, possesses another face; its continuing military regime, for example. What allowed us to glimpse into the depths and layers of this country was the conversations with and practices by Thai artists born out of the outstanding contemporary art scene that is like no other in Southeast Asia.



Grace Samboh



Hirokazu Tokuyama



Sayuri Kida



Mami Kataoka



Naoki Yoneda



The Reading Room

Bangkok

2016.05.06



Mami Kataoka

The Reading Room is a private, non-profit library and archive center in Bangkok that houses approximately 1,000 publications and materials on contemporary art of Thailand and other countries. Established in 2009 by Narawan Pathomvat (1980–), the Reading Room is not merely a library; it is also highly aware of and sensitive to the relationships artistic and cultural practices have vis-à-vis Thai politics, economy, and society which it pursues through hosting film screenings and talk events for artists and those in the art world. In a very private setting with sofas and cushions, this small “reading room” is surely to become one of the valuable spaces to encounter global theories pertaining to contemporary art. The exhibition underway at the time of our visit was one showcasing the work of Chiang Mai-based artist Sutthirat Supaparinya (1973–). The exhibition title, *Paradise of the Blind*, was taken from the title of a book that is still banned in Vietnam. Som picked up fifty-five books which are banned in the Asian and Oceanian regions, shredded them, and left their remains in a heap on the floor. Suspended above the mountain of shredded books were bullets, sold as souvenirs at military museums, creating a sense of tension in the work.



Bangkok Art & Culture Center (BACC)

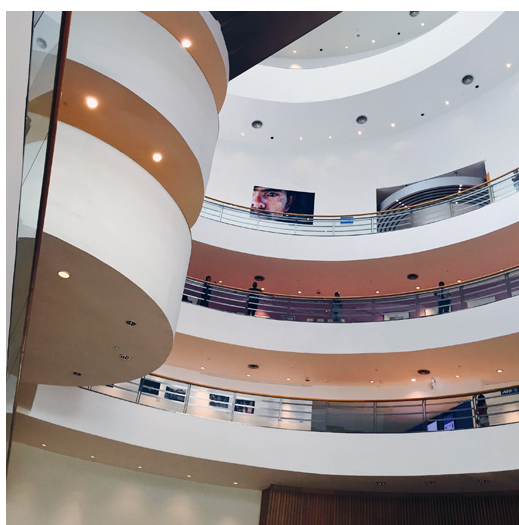
Bangkok

2016.05.06



Mami Kataoka

The Bangkok Art & Culture Center (BACC) is a cultural complex established in 2009 after artists strongly appealed the need for such a facility to the government. Curator Pichaya Suphavanij (1972–) kindly showed us around. BACC is a nine-story cylindrical building with a spacious, open atrium. The first to fifth floors of the building are for multipurpose use where art and design shops reside and community projects are held. The art gallery which Pichaya curates is located on the seventh to ninth floors. The art gallery has an exhibit space of 12,000 square meters and it hosts twelve exhibitions a year. The gallery's base budget is provided by the city of Bangkok but it also co-organizes exhibitions which are jointly sponsored with foreign government agencies. Due, in part, to its location in downtown Bangkok, most of the gallery's visitors are between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five, and the number of visitors for each exhibition, for an average of a three-month period, is forty to fifty thousand. The exhibitions at the gallery range from retrospective exhibitions for veteran artists, solo exhibitions for mid-career artists, to many thematic exhibitions featuring younger artists. Among its Southeast Asian exhibitions, the gallery hosted Concept *Context Contestation: Art and the Collective in Southeast Asia* in 2013, which also traveled to Hanoi, Vietnam, and Yogyakarta, Indonesia. At the time of our visit, the *Thailand Eye* exhibition was held, an exhibition which had returned to Thailand after its time at London's Saatchi Gallery.



Jim Thompson Art Center

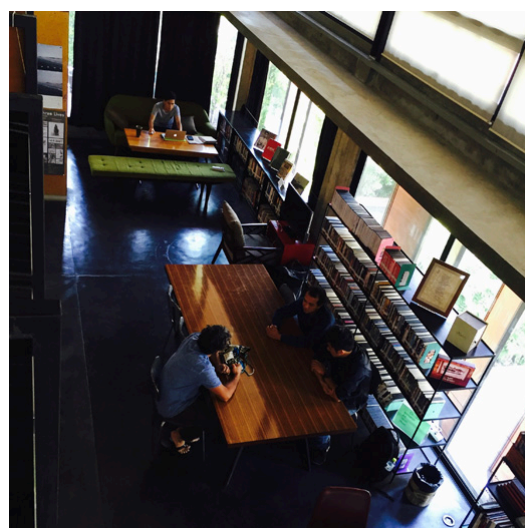
Bangkok

2016.05.06



Mami Kataoka

James Harrison Wilson "Jim" Thompson contributed to the revival of the Thai silk industry as an American businessman in the years after the Second World War. His residence, the design of which incorporates Thailand's traditional architectural style, is known as the Jim Thompson House and has become a tourist attraction in Bangkok. The Jim Thompson Art Center is located on its grounds, and has been hosting international and, especially, Thai contemporary art exhibitions featuring solo shows of prominent artists such as Apichatpong Weerasethakul (1970–), Montien Boonma (1953–2000), and Pinaree Sanpitak (1961–). Together with these, the Art Center also actively organizes educational programs, conferences, workshops, and publications for a wide range of audiences from professionals to the general public. At the time of our visit, a solo exhibition of Korakrit Arunanondchai (1986–), a Thai artist currently gaining international attention as an artist of the next generation, was being held. One of Korakrit's representative works involves a series of videos that skillfully fuses popular youth cultures with Thai traditional cultures and myths. This is projected onto a few large screens and he creates an installation where audiences are made to view the piece seated on bleached denim cushions. Jim Thompson Art Center's Art Director, Gridthiya Gaweewong (1964–), also gave us a lecture on the history of contemporary Thai art. Her views of always connecting the development of contemporary art and art education to their political, social, economic, and cultural contexts was very much relatable.



The Land Foundation

Chiang Mai

2016.05.07



Naoki Yoneda

Established primarily by leading Thai artists Rirkrit Tiravanija (1961–) and Kamin Lertchaiprasert (1964–) in 1998, the Land Foundation is an art project, community, and residence located in a rural area approximately 20km southwest of Chiang Mai. This area experiences extreme rainfall in the rainy season making it unsuitable for cultivating rice, and hence it was developed as a combined space for art and agriculture where artists can pursue discussions and their artistic experimentations. In the past, artist Pratchaya Phinthong (1974–) and Copenhagen-based artist group Superflex have worked in residence at the Land, viewing it as a kind of experimental laboratory. Buildings necessary for everyday life on the grounds of the Land plays an important role in this project. Small, two-story sheds, designed by Rirkrit Tiravanija, Thai artist Mit Jai Inn (1960–), and German artist Tobias Rehberger (1966–), encircle the Land’s center. Works produced here from the late 1990s that embody the everyday life of this particular environment are situated, in the history of contemporary art, as embryos of so called project art.



Udomsak Krisanamis (1966–)

Chiang Mai

2016.05.07



Naoki Yoneda

Udomsak Krisanamis is a Bangkok-born Thai artist currently based in Chiang Mai. After graduating from Chulalongkorn University, he traveled to the United States to attend the School of Art Institute of Chicago. He then continued his work in New York before moving in 2008 to Chiang Mai, a city where artists gathered. At the beginning of his artistic career, he became well-known for his two-dimensional works where he would paste rice noodles, such as those used in Pad Thai, onto his canvas. In the late 1990s, he began to make collages using newspaper. Crossing out or painting over the words he was familiar with in English newspapers, an irregular geometric pattern would emerge on the newspaper’s surface. Having an affinity for music, he also names his paintings after existing song titles such as *How Deep is the Ocean?* (Irving Berlin, 1932), and has also used circular motifs on his paintings inspired by the shapes of percussions. Today, Udomsak Krisanamis teaches at Chiang Mai University and displays his works in solo and group exhibitions at distinguished art galleries. In Japan, too, he participated in the *Art and Music—Search for New Synesthesia* exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo (2012–2013).



Mai lam Contemporary Art Museum (MICAM)

Chiang Mai

2016.05.08



Hirokazu Tokuyama

The Mai lam Contemporary Art Museum (MICAM) is a private art gallery in the outskirts of Chiang Mai that was planned to open on July 4, 2016. With 3,000 square meters of floor space, MICAM is the largest contemporary art gallery in Chiang Mai, organizing temporary exhibitions as well as exhibitions of their collection. MICAM's inaugural exhibition will be *Serenity of the Madness* (July 4– Sept. 10, 2016), a retrospective of the Chiang Mai-based, globally active hatpong Weerasethakul, curated by Gridthiya Gawewong of the Jim Thompson Art Center. MICAM was founded by collectors Patsri Bunnag and Jean-Michel Beurdeley who are parents to Eric Bunnag Booth, the current Chairman of the Jim Thompson Art Center. The museum's name, Mai lam, features *Mai*, meaning “new” in Thai (also in “Chiang Mai”) and a part of Eric's great grand aunt's name, Jao Jom lam. lam was the royal consort to King Rama V, the fifth monarch of Siam under the House of Chakri, and a room is dedicated to her in the museum, introducing her life. As *lam* also means “new” in Thai, *Mai lam* takes on a double meaning of “brand new.” The reason behind building MICAM in Chiang Mai was the city's significance as an artistic and cultural alternative to Bangkok. That is to say, many internationally active artists live in Chiang Mai, and there also exists a genealogy of artistic culture, specific to the city, that began with the Chiang Mai Social Installation (CMSI) Project, an outdoor sculpture exhibition, in the 1990s. Chiang Mai also features a strong culture of traditional crafts, and the area in which MICAM is located is famous for its woodworking, silverwork, paper, and umbrella craftsmanship. Chiang Mai is certainly the source of spreading Thailand's contemporary art scene to the world. Located in such a rich cultural environment, MICAM is a museum I would very much like to revisit after its opening.



Mit Jai Inn (1960–)

Chiang Mai

2016.05.08



Hirokazu Tokuyama

Mit Jai Inn can be said to be a pioneer of the Thai contemporary art scene. One the founders of the Chiang Mai Social Installation (CMSI) Project, he is involved in running the Land Foundation started by Rirkrit Tiravanija and is also busy working on political activities. No need for a visa, Mit flew to Vienna while a college student, and he studied there for six years (1987–1992) while doing odd jobs, one of which was the assistant of Franz West (1947–2012). During this period, he visited documenta VIII and IX, the Venice Biennales, and other such events, and it was through these experiences that he became interested in artists collectives and socially engaged activities. Thus, after returning to Thailand in 1992, he set up CMSI and Midnight University. Midnight University was a public educational program held outside the institutional walls, shifting its venue from temples, vacant lots, and to bars. It is said that a wide range of participants attended including students, monks, sex workers, and young artists young and old, some of whom were artists Navin Rawanchaikul (1971–), Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook (1957–), and Montien Boonma. University professors and others were invited as lecturers, primarily discussing politics and the like. The Chiang Mai Social Installation Project was founded by artists who felt an antipathy against Bangkok's dominance as the center of contemporary art and thus of culture in Thailand. The Chiang Mai Social Installation Project was primarily an outdoor sculpture festival intended to situate Chiang Mai—with its rich culture of traditional craftsmanship and a large population of the Yao group, Thailand's ethnic minority—as Bangkok's alternative and, furthermore, to distinguish itself from art

museums and other white-cubed galleries. Artist Navin Rawanchaikul and curator Gridthiya Gaweewong have become the core members of the Project and have kept it alive since 1995. These activities of Mit’s are the cornerstone of Chiang Mai’s art scene today.

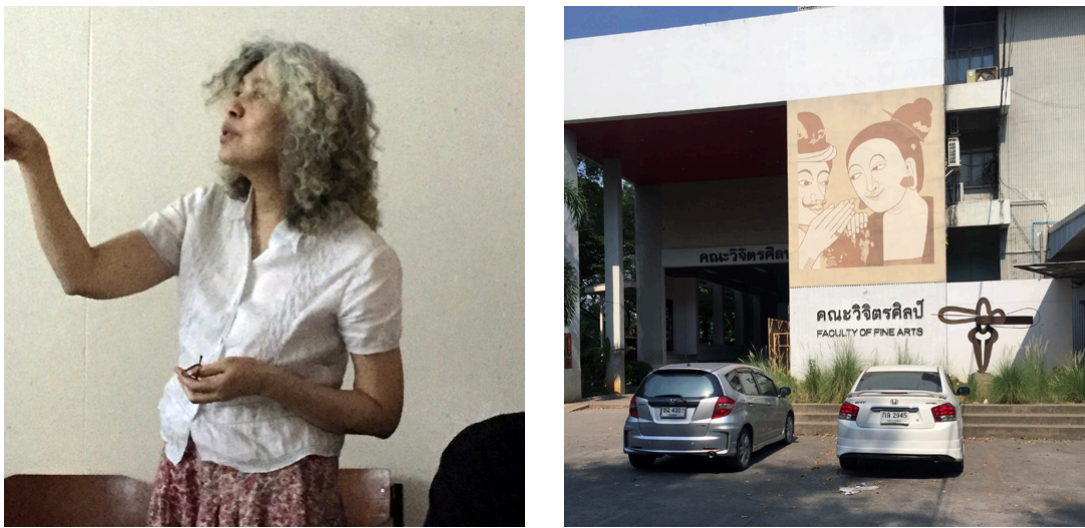


Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook
(1957–)
Chiang Mai
2016.05.09



Sayuri Kida

Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook is a Chiang Mai-based, internationally active artist born in Thailand’s Trat Province. At Chiang Mai University, where she continues to teach, she described her past for us in chronological order. Upon earning her MA (Fine Art) from Silpakorn University, she continued to study woodblock printing at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste Braunschweig (Braunschweig University of Art) with the aid of funding such as the German educational exchange scholarships which led her to produce monochrome woodblock prints that evoke landscapes. It was also after this period that she began to produce films and installation art dealing with themes such as death, gender, and identity, leading to her participation in the 51st Venice Biennale (2005) and documenta XIII (2012). Araya’s most representative works include the *Conversation* series, in which she converses with silent corpses lying in a cold and barren room, and *Two Planets* series, where she shows famous works of Western art to rural farmers and villagers, and records the ensuing free discussion about their thoughts on the works. Her works also frequently feature dogs, and, indeed, a great many dogs snuggled up to her when she visited Chiang Mai University. Her works expose the vague and ambiguous boundary between the living and the dead, and humans and animals.



Navin Rawanchaikul (1971-)

Chiang Mai

2016.05.09



Sayuri Kida

Navin Rawanchaikul is a Chiang Mai-born Indian-Thai artist whose grandfather emigrated from the Punjab communities of present-day Pakistan. In 1993, he founded Navin Production Co., Ltd. in Chiang Mai, and since has been vigorously active in a wide variety of genres including sculpture, painting, performance, photography, and film. After graduating with a degree in Art from Chiang Mai University and studying under Montien Boonma, Rawanchaikul participated in the 2nd Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (1996), the 4th Fukuoka Asian Art Show (2009), and the 54th Venice Biennale (2011), and has come to be known for his style which constantly questions the relationship between art and society. During our visit, his large-scale retrospective was taking place in three venues: his father's store in the Warorot Market, the DC Collection Art Gallery operated by a private collector, and his studio, Navin Productions. The retrospective included works such as music videos featuring his family members, large paintings resembling commemorative photographs of local people in a style reminiscent of a film advertisement billboard, and video installations based on his memories with Boonma. From all of these works, we were able to comprehensively see Thailand's leading contemporary artist's engagements.



[Bangkok University Gallery \(BUG\)](#)

Bangkok

2016.05.11



Naoki Yoneda

The Bangkok University Gallery (BUG) was founded in 1996 where artist-teacher Nipan Ornniwesna (1962–) served as its first director. Until the Bangkok Art & Culture Center (BACC) opened in 2000, BUG was the only gallery in Thailand that specialized in contemporary art. Today, the gallery is led by Ark Fongsmut (1964–) who studied curation at Goldsmiths, University of London. BUG schedules approximately five exhibitions per year including both solo and group exhibitions, but the recent most notable of these is perhaps the series *Brand New Art Project* where curators are invited from various Southeast Asian countries to organize exhibitions. In the past, Gridthiya Gaweewong of Thailand's Jim Thompson Art Center and Ringo Bunoan (1974–) of the Philippines have participated in this exhibition as guest curators. Although the exhibitions focus primarily on Thai artists, Ark Fongsmut explains that there are no restrictions on nationality or age, and that students enrolled in Bangkok University have also participated in the past.



Bangkok CityCity Gallery

Bangkok

2016.05.11



Hirokazu Tokuyama

Bangkok CityCity Gallery is a commercial gallery that opened on August 23, 2015, headed by two young individuals, Op Susanna (1978–) and Supamas Phahulo (1980–). The exhibition on display when we visited was *Painting with History in a Room Filled with People with Funny Names 3*, a solo show by the up-coming Thai artist Korakrit Arunanondchai. Op studied filmmaking in Los Angeles and Supamas studied art history, after which the two assisted artists with their art production, publications, and video productions. A short while later, Op and Supamas developed an interest to acquire their own space and form a business to support artists who interested them. Hence they opened the Bangkok CityCity Gallery. They decided to open a commercial gallery because they could not think of a better business model that enabled them to secure revenues *and* still pursue working with artists and projects of their interest. They devote themselves entirely to working with the artist for her/his solo exhibition, providing both curatorial and managerial support, spending a good six month for its preparation. This is an approach which they have yet to change. Artists who have had and will have solo exhibitions include Wisut Ponnimit (1976–), Beejoir (1979–), Kornkrit Jianpinidnan (1975–), Nawapol Thamrongrattanarit (1984–), and CEO Books' Chris Grisana (1992–). A broad definition of “art” is used by the Gallery and they do not limit their focus to just the contemporary art scene, with artists in a wide variety of genres being represented, including those working in conceptual art, street art, animation, commercial films, and publishing. They explained that their goal is to expand the interests of their audience and thus grow the Thai art scene itself. We look forward to the future of this space with great anticipation.



Daytrip to Ratchaburi

Ratchaburi

2016.05.13



Grace Samboh

The team had flew back to Tokyo. With curator Anothai Oupkum and artists Shinya Akutagawa (1980–) and Henry Tan (1986–), I went to Ratchaburi to look forward to seeing how art is located within and amongst the community sphere. Within the past year or two, I have been hearing about the growth of interest towards community art practices coming from Ratchaburi. Other than the government-endorsed festival "Art Normal", there is also a residency program ran by Tentacles—a Bangkok-based artist-led initiative—with a local university. I was picked up at the hotel and then we stopped by to pick our friends at Henry's house.

Our first stop was at [Baan Noorg](#) to meet Jiradej (Ji, 1969–) and Pornpilai (Yin, 1968–) Meemalai. The partner is currently running a 365 days project on collaboration with artists from the neighboring countries and their own neighborhood. They are located a bit outskirts of Bangkok city and slightly before Ratchaburi. Like many suburban areas, the place that they live in is surrounded by factories. That also means that many people from neighboring countries migrate there to become labors. Ji and Yin was explaining how some people don't even need to learn Thai language because there are so many people that also come from where they come from. People can basically survive speaking Burmese or Malay.

I was surprised to learn Ji and Yin's knowledge of Indonesia. Apparently they have been working for quite some years with WAFT Lab, a collective based in Surabaya, East Java. I immediately thought of several keywords: suburban, non-central, peripheral. [The SEA Project team met WAFT Lab during our Surabaya visit.](#) They seemed like hardcore noise geeks with an infatuation to design rather than artists. But since they have been around for almost ten years now, I think they somehow represent the character of their place. This is also how I see Ji and Yin's artistic practice. Their lifetime collaboration does not necessarily need a place or a location, yet they decided to leave the city and work where they are at now. With the freedom from art world trend, they have more space to explore their artistic practice and more time to build long term relationships and engagements with similar practitioners.

Like a lightning to that thought in my mind, Ma Ei (1978–) arrived at Ji and Yin's house where we were sitting down and conversing. Ma Ei is a performance artist from Myanmar. I once saw her performance in "Undisclosed Territory" (Solo, Indonesia)—a performance festival run by Melati Suryodarmo. She was as surprised to see me there. We said hi. And Ma Ei started telling us how happy she is to come back and work with Ji and Yin.

It was too hot. Even I cannot stand. Haha. We all went out for ice cream nearby. In the ice cream place, Ji and Yin showed a cabinet that had some drawings and photographs. It was one of their projects with the ice cream owner's family that is considered the first family to process milk into ice cream in the area. Oh, yeah. The factories in that part of Thailand are mostly milk factories. Milking cow farming and the factories. The ice cream was super! They even have ice cream with the flavor of 'Thai Ice Tea'!

Without Ma Ei, Ji and Yin, we continued to Ratchaburi and went to see the residency project that Tentacles organized. I saw the actual piece of Saksit Khunkitti (1989–) at the basketball field, as well as Pitchaya Ngamcharoen's (1989–) traces of ants and story of a local dog. It was good to see them well installed and taken care of by the neighborhood.

We then went to the headquarter of "Art Normal". "Art Normal" is a festival invented by Silpathorn Award-winning artist and Ratchaburi local Wasinburee Supanichvoraparch (1971–) that takes over the entire town and fills it with art. They want to blend art into people's daily lives. They work with people around public spaces and owners of market booths, local shops, restaurants and hair salons. In 2016 they worked at seventeen spaces in collaboration with leading Thai architects such as Duangrit Bunnag (DBALP), Attaporn Kobkongsanti (T.R.O.P.), Nithi Sathapitanon (A49), Vipavee Kunavichayanont (Design for Disaster) and Suriya Ampansirirat (Kyai-Suriya).

We visited all the sites one by one. Each and everyone still have the artworks nicely installed. The owners of the places also happily explained their process in working with each artist. A lot of the forms are not of my preference, but I really appreciate the fact that these people who on day-to-day basis live and use the space actually like the artworks and try to make visitors engage with it.

We dropped by the market to buy snacks before we went back to the city. After crazy amount of traffic, we managed to arrive at the Silpakorn University Gallery that was showing their very last exhibition. I met and conversed with artists Ruangsak Anuwatwimon, Bo Wasinonadh, Eiji Sumi (1970–), Unchalee Anantawat (Speedy Grandma, 1982–) and curator Brian Curtin there. The show that was opening that night is curated by Lyno Vuth (by whom the SEA Project team was guided during our Phnom Penh trip).

*Photo: left
(Left to right)Ma Ei, Jiradej Meemalai, Pornpilai Meemalai, Grace Samboh, Benyatip Tiraviriyapol, Anothai Oupkum at the Baan Norg Headquarter where the collective Ji and Yin works.

*Photo: right
The owner of Sam Larn Kesa Barber telling us the story of his life and showing us his recent pictures of the third customer of the day who gets a free haircut. In collaboration with artist Jessada Tangtrakulwong, barber Songkram Budthwong would take photos of his customers and put them on a board at the back wall for display.



Special Thanks

Akapol Sudasna and Supamas Phahulo
Angkrit Ajchariyasophon
Apichatpong Weerasethakul
Apirak Jianpinidnun
Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook
Ark Fongsmut
Arnont Nongyao
Atikom Mukdaprakor
Be Takerng Pattanopas
Chalarak Rueanchomchoei
Chartchai Suphin
Chulayarnnon Siriphol
Dusadee Huntrakul
Gridthiya Jeab Gaweewong
Grisana Eimeamkamol
Henry Tan
Jakrawal Nilthamrong
Kamin Lertchaiprasert
Kittima Chareeprasit
Kornkrit Jianpinidnan
Michael Shaowanasai
Mit Jai Inn
Miti Ruangkritya
Namfon Udomlertlak
Narawan Pathomvat
Navin Rawanchaikul

Nipan Oranniwesna
Nuttapon Swasdee
Orawan Arunrak
Paphonsak La-or
Pathompon Tesprateep
Pichaya Aime Suphavanij
Pisitakun Kuantalaeng
Pitchaya Ngamcharoen
Piyarat Piyapongwiwat
Pornpilai and Jiradej Meemalai
Prapat Jiwarangsan
Pratchaya Phinthong
Saksit Khunkitti
Santiphap Inkong-ngam
Surajate Tongchua
Surasi Kusolwong
Sutthirat Supaparinya
Tada Hengsapkul
Taiki Saksipit
Tawatchai Puntusawasdi
Thasnai Sethaseree
Torlarp Larpjaroensook
Udomsak Krisanamis
Virada Banjurtrungkajorn
Wit Pimkanchanapong