

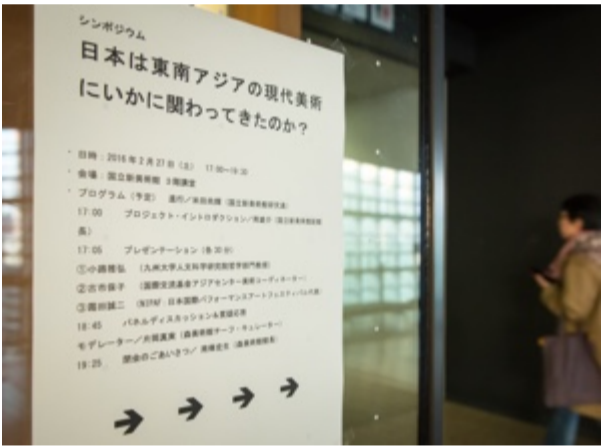
SEA PROJECT Symposium

How has Japan Engaged with Contemporary Art in Southeast Asia?

Summary of the Symposium

Summary

- Date: Saturday, February 27, 2016
Time: 5:00–7:30 p.m.
Venue: 3F Auditorium, the National Art Center, Tokyo
Program:
Host: Naoki Yoneda (Curator, the National Art Center, Tokyo)
- 17:00 Project Introduction: Yusuke Minami (Deputy Director and Chief Curator, the National Art Center, Tokyo)
- 17:05 Presentation 1 | Masahiro Ushiroshoji (Professor, Faculty of Humanities, Kyushu University)
- 17:35 Presentation 2 | Yasuko Furuichi (Art Coordinator, the Japan Foundation Asia Center)
- 18:05 Presentation 3 | Seiji Shimoda (Founding Director, Nippon International Performance Art Festival [NIPAF])
- 18:35 Break
- 18:45 Panel Discussion and Q&A
Panelist: Masahiro Ushiroshoji, Yasuko Furuich, Seiji Shimoda
Moderator: Mami Kataoka (Chief Curator, Mori Art Museum)
- 19:25 Closing Remarks: Fumio Nanjo (Director, Mori Art Museum)
- 19:30 Close



As one of the initiatives toward the exhibition on Southeast Asian art, scheduled to open in the summer of 2017, the Mori Art Museum, the National Art Center, Tokyo, and the Japan Foundation Asia Center organized the symposium to revisit how Japan and Southeast Asia had communicated (and still are communicating) with each other through the arts; to reflect on Japan’s role while Southeast Asia’s contemporary art scene was developing and to set up an arena for which to discuss how the accumulated experience and knowledge could be channeled and reflected into the exhibition-making process.

The first half consisted of the presentations by the three panelists. Prof. Masahiro Ushiroshoji introduced to us the long-running commitment in the research and cultural exchange projects in Asian art by the Fukuoka Art Museum (since 1979) and, later, the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum (since 1999) which succeeded the former museum’s engagements. Ms. Yasuko Furuichi presented on the Japan Foundation’s involvement in Asian art since 1990s when its ASEAN Cultural Center was established, and Mr. Seiji Shimoda, who had sparked the fire for performance art in Southeast Asia, shared with us the NIPAF’s projects since its establishment. As the research progressed for the SEA Project, the names of the three organizations appeared frequently in many of the conversations with artists, demonstrating their undeniable presence in Southeast Asia.

For the second half, a Q&A panel continued where members of the curatorial team joined in the discussion.

Panelists & Moderators



Masahiro Ushiroshoji

Professor, Faculty of Humanities, Kyushu University

Born in Fukuoka, Japan. Curated the first 4 editions of the *Asian Art Show* (1980 – 1994)——said to be the first contemporary Asian art exhibition——during his curatorship at the Fukuoka Art Museum. Continued to introduce modern and contemporary Asian art through exhibitions such as *New Art from Southeast Asia 1992* (1992) and *Birth of Modern Art in Southeast Asia* (1997). In 1999, appointed Chief Curator of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum and curated the *1st Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale 1999* (1999). Continued research on modern and contemporary Asian art since appointed professor at Kyushu University in 2002, all the while curating exhibitions such as *Modern Paintings of Mongolia: Its Origin up to Today* (2002), *Cubism in Asia* (2005), and *50 Years of Modern Vietnamese Paintings: 1925–75* (2005). Recently set up the AQA Project where he organizes exhibitions annually with his university students. Author of “The Other as the Lost Innocent Me: Gauguinism in Southeast Asian Art” (Bijutsu Forum 21, 2010), “The Diary of Luong Xuan Nhi: A Vietnamese Painters Journey to Japan 1943” (Tetsugaku Nenpo, 2010), “Art of Southeast Asia Under Japanese Occupation” (Tetsugaku Nenpo, 2013) among others. Lives in Fukuoka, Japan.



Yasuko Furuichi

Exhibition Coordinator, The Japan Foundation Asia Center

Born in Gifu, Japan. Exhibition coordinator at the Japan Foundation since 1990. In addition to exhibition projects, coordinated cultural exchange projects such as the “Asian Museum Curators’ Conference” (2006–2014) and also worked on publications of four editions of guidebooks on art spaces throughout Asia. Coordinated exhibitions include, *Lee Bul* (2003), *Heri Dono* (2000) , *Fang Lijun* (1996), *Asian Modernism* (1995), and *New Art from Southeast Asia 1992* (1992). Coordinated exhibitions that introduce Japanese contemporary art to Asia such as *Re:Quest* (2013), *Twist and Shout* (2009), *KITA!!* (2008), and *Beautiful New World* (2007). Coordinated collaborative curatorial exhibitions include, *Media/Art Kitchen* (2013– 2014), the *Omnilogue* series (2011–2012), *Cubism in Asia* (2005–2006), *Have We Met?* (2004–2005), *Out the Window* (2003), *Under Construction* (2002–2003), and more recently *Time of others* (2015 – 2016). Lives in Tokyo, Japan.



Seiji Shimoda

Founding Director, Nippon International Performance Art Festival

Born in Nagano, Japan. Artist and poet. Currently also lecturer at the Musashino Art University and Keio University. Began performance art in 1975 during enrollment at the Osaka City University, then, upon moving to Tokyo in 1977, began performance tours in Japan. Since his stay in Paris for three months in 1982 has annually participated in performance event in the U.S. and Europe. Founded NIPAF (Nippon International Performance Art Festival) in 1993 after organizing many art events in Japan, and, after multiple visits to Central Europe, extended his scope to Asia in the late 1990s. As well as participating in international festivals in over 50 countries, actively organizes performance art workshops to share with local artists the infinite possibilities in performance art. Received the prized Bessie Award (New York Dance and Performance) in 2000. Through 21 editions of NIPAF International Festival and 18 of NIPAF ASIA Performance Art Series, has presented the works of over 400 international and Asian performance artists from 50 countries. For 2016, he had organized projects in China and Bangladesh (April), Vietnam (May), and is currently working toward a project in Nepal (September). Lives in Nagano, Japan.

Organizer & Curators



Fumio Nanjo
Director
Mori Art Museum



Yusuke Minami
Deputy Director and Chief
Curator
The National Art Center,
Tokyo



Mami Kataoka
Chief Curator
Mori Art Museum



Naoki Yoneda
Curator
The National Art Center,
Tokyo



Vera Mey
Independent
Curator



Ong Jo-Lene
Independent
Curator



Grace Samboh
Independent
Curator



Merv Espina
Independent
Curator

Photo: Shinichiro Mikuriya
Photo Courtesy: Mori Art Museum, Tokyo

SEA PROJECT Symposium

How has Japan Engaged with Contemporary Art in Southeast Asia?

[Summary of the Symposium](#)

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SEA PROJECT Symposium How has Japan Engaged with Contemporary Art in Southeast Asia?

Abstract of Presentations



Deputy Director Yusuke Minami (National Art Center, Tokyo) introducing the SEA Project



Text by
Naoki Yoneda

The former curator of the Fukuoka Art Museum and later the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Prof. Ushiroshoji spoke about each of the museum's engagements with regards to Asian art. He began with the *Asian Artists Exhibition Part 1* (1979), the predecessor to the Fukuoka Asian Art Triennales, explaining that, back in the day, while access to information was limited, even information itself on Asian art was scarce. Instead of the Japanese museum curators taking the lead, this resulted in their reliance and dependence on curators and artists of Southeast Asia for the research and exhibition-making. Subsequently, the exhibition itself frequently turned out to be—to borrow the presenter's words—more of an “up-to-you (*anata-makase*)” type of show. As Asian art exhibitions continued to be held later into the 1990s, Prof. Ushiroshoji pointed out that there was a rising trend for artists to capture and incorporate, into their works, socio-political issues and problems which were more immediate to them, extending to the discussion that installation and performance art gradually but steadily spread during that time. He ended by stating that, through organizing exhibitions on Asian art, he was able to continuously keep in mind the attitude of (1) distancing himself from art as a Euro-centric discourse, and (2) reflecting on the function(s) or role(s) of a museum [within the larger, social context].

Ms. Furuichi Yasuko chronologically surveyed the projects the Japan Foundation's ASEAN Cultural Center (1990–1995), Asia Center (1995–2004), and the renewed Asia Center (2014–) had carried out over the decades. Set up as a special legal entity under the supervision of the Foreign Ministry in 1972 and restructured as an independent administrative institution in 2003, the Japan Foundation has pursued many cultural exchange programs as exemplified by the many projects carried out by the three Centers. Currently, the Asia Center's projects in the arts are designed to (1) encourage the Japanese audiences' understanding of Asian art, (2) build and strengthen professional networks within the Asian regions, (3) contribute to the discourse of Asian art through symposiums with the aid of scholars and critics, and (4) introduce Japanese contemporary art to Southeast Asia. The format and structures of the exhibitions are diverse ranging from solo, thematic, country-based, and to region-based exhibitions. However, what is worth noting is the fact that many of the exhibitions organized and/or supported by the Asia Center are co-curated, and it is through this collaborative process that comradery among Japanese and other Asian curators develop.

Showing clips on the screen for the audience, Mr. Shimoda introduced to us his performance projects he had continued over the years and across the globe. Having started his career in performance art in the late 1970s, Mr. Shimoda set up the Nippon International Performance Art Festival [NIPAF] in 1993, and later begun NIPAF Asia in 1996, which, either directly or indirectly, had greatly influenced performance artists in the Southeast Asian region. Introducing examples of Tran Luong's performances in Hanoi, Vietnam, and his own performance workshops in Yangon, Myanmar, he stated that one of the important reasons that artists reacted positively to performance art is the absence of a physical object (i.e. the artwork) and, thus, its ability to slip past the ever-encroaching reaches of censorship.

All of the three presentations, I think, touched upon issues that resonate with those inherent in the SEA Project, and, thus, the three also seemed to hint or point to us factors or methods we have to revise in carrying out the project. The lack of resource on contemporary Southeast Asian art, as Prof. Ushiroshoji mentioned, is due to accessibility and linguistic difficulties. Although the SEA Project is a collaboration among Southeast Asian and Japanese curators, these still remain as obstacles for us; an obstacle which we are nevertheless trying to overcome.

Seen from a larger perspective, alongside Fukuoka, museums in Singapore and Australia have actively organized exhibitions on contemporary Southeast Asian art since the 1990s. More recently, American and European museums have also widen their interests to introduce Southeast Asian art, examples of which are *No Country: Contemporary Art for South and Southeast Asia* (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2013), *Secret Archipelago* (Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2015), and *Open Sea: Artists from Singapore and South East Asia* (Lyon Museum Contemporary Art, Lyon, 2015).

Performance art, as Mr. Shimoda stated, is a popular means for artists in particular Southeast Asian regions since it does not leave material trace(s) or evidence, but, I assume, performance art's popularity is also fired by the fact of there being very few exhibition spaces or white cubes in Southeast Asia. To expand the discussion outside of Southeast Asia, rather than it being seen as simply another version of institutional critique against museums and galleries, it could be said that the worldwide tendency to re-evaluate artistic expressions that use the body—performance art, socially engaged art, and activist art—may be demonstrating the unquestionable

fact that these forms of expressions, in fact, currently exemplify another path within the realm of contemporary art.

Translator: Meiko Sano (The Japan Foundation Asia Center)

Editor: Juri Murakami (in between) , Meiko Sano

Photo: Shinichiro Mikuriya

Photo Courtesy: Mori Art Museum, Tokyo

SEA PROJECT Symposium How has Japan Engaged with Contemporary Art in Southeast Asia?

Panel Discussion and Q&A (1/4)



Kataoka

This symposium has been held in the firm concerns that, with a large Southeast Asian exhibition scheduled for 2017, it is necessary to revisit Japan's engagements in Southeast Asia in the field of contemporary art. We will continue to organize this exhibition fully taking into consideration the past accumulated knowledge and insights shared in today's discussion.

To overview the state of art in Southeast Asia very briefly, [the National Gallery Singapore](#) opened in November 2015, and with permanent exhibitions and large-scale exhibitions focusing on Southeast Asian art, momentum is gradually building from the institutional level in the arts of the Asian region. Ms. Furuichi discussed how Japan and Australia took a leading role in looking at Southeast and greater Asia during the 1990s, and with that in mind, I would like to think further about the significances of their engagements and how, from there, we can currently situate Japan in relation to other countries in Asia.

Prof. Ushiroshoji, you are one the very first curators to dive into Asian art and have also mentioned several times of Asian and Southeast Asian art exhibition being hosted by Japan. What are your thoughts on their meanings, and could you also share with us the difficulties, if any, you faced while organizing such exhibitions?



Ushiroshoji

I was a curator for 25 years, and a great deal has changed over that period, so I'm afraid it is difficult to summarize in a sentence. But in the 1990s, when we were building off of prior work and preparing for the opening of [the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum](#), Japan was a rich country and it was oftentimes criticized for using its own abundant financial resources to hold exhibitions solely for Japanese audiences. Criticisms of this kind were regular back then; the Japan Foundation's symposiums also dealt with such topics. However, it must be said that these were Japanese municipalities and governmental bodies organizing exhibitions, so it was inevitable for them to use Japanese money for Japanese audiences. But I constantly asked myself, "is this really ok?" If there were a wrong dimension to this, it would be the structure itself where Japan alone had the means and relationships to pursue such a methodology. In other words, if each country were able to organize and hold exhibitions in their own countries and for their own people, it would be less of a problem. Japan simply stood out. But it was crucial [for curators such as myself] to be aware and reflect on that fact.



Cubism in Asia: Unbounded Dialogues exhibition (Installation view)

After [the Cubism in Asia: Unbounded Dialogues](#) held in 2005, South Korea and Singapore succeeded the relationships built and organized *Realism in Asian Art* in 2010. Japan did not participate in this exhibition, and I asked why this was the case when I visited Korea and it turned out that no one in Japan raised their hand to join in. I think that was when I felt Japan's presence weakening. Singapore's new national gallery, too, I think exemplifies the fact that the situation has become quite different from when Japan single-handedly controlled the hegemony in the 1990s. It is extremely difficult for municipalities to organize traveling exhibitions overseas so it is very meaningful to collaborate with foreign bodies on an exhibition—something that was largely made possible by the Japan Foundation's engagements—but I feel that we are no longer on par with foreign bodies.



Kataoka

I would like to pose the same question to Ms. Furuichi. You have worked on the majority of the Japan Foundation's Asian exhibitions, and I realized again that you had strategically incorporated advocacy planning into the structure of your projects. Including your own position, what changes have you observed over the past few decades in Japan's role in the arts?

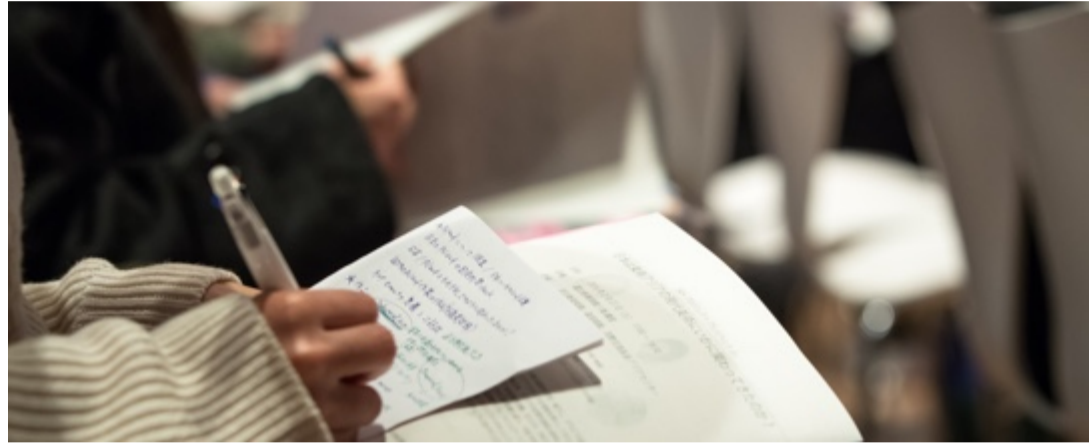


Furuichi

First of all, I think it is important for the Japanese people, myself included, to *not* think of it in terms of "how Japan has engaged with so-and-so," which,

ironically, is the title of this symposium. The question, for me, was always how, through making exhibitions and working together, can the people in the arts in both Japan and other Asian countries ultimately get to know each other and achieve a collaborative relationship. I think it is undeniable that Japan is currently in a relatively weak position within Asia, and, considering this, I think that it is unwise to work [with the region] from a Japan-centric perspective. It is a little vague, but an ideal working environment, for me, would be for one another to simply suggest, “do you want to work on this [with us]?”

[To Panel Discussion and Q&A \(2/4\).](#)



SEA PROJECT Symposium How has Japan Engaged with Contemporary Art in Southeast Asia?

Panel Discussion and Q&A (2/4)



Kataoka

Mr. Shimoda, your perspective may differ a little since you are here as an artist. Last year, while we were traveling across the ASEAN regions——meeting artists, art space managers, and key figures in the arts from the 1980s and '90s——we also met many performance artists. Asking them what triggered them to pursue their practices, nine out of ten responded, “Seiji Shimoda.” It was evident that you were the one who ignited the idea of performance in the region, and we saw that the fire still continues to burn today. What changes have *you* observed over the past twenty years? Can artists perform more openly and in “official” venues in Myanmar, for example, now that it is undergoing political transformation?



Shimoda

As you said, I am an artist, and I think that an artist is someone who does anything and everything. By that, I mean that it is enriching for any artist to pursue different methodologies of artistic expression, performance or otherwise. Today, we have the convenience of the internet; but back then, information that a freewheeling person like myself brought was very new for the people in Asia and Southeast Asia. Something as simple as showing videos and talking to them about what I had seen was enough for them to quickly initiate their own ideas. Information was something they craved.

Naturally, performance doesn't make a lot of money, so a lot of people chose to return to painting. Despite that, there are now definitely more artists who believe that performance art is the closest art form that epitomize the essential spirit of an "artist," so I am hoping to work closely with those people toward the next steps.



Kataoka

We saw a video earlier of [Tran Luong, a Vietnamese artist](#), who has been highly praised for his curatorial work in the [Mien Meo Mieng / Contemporary Art from Vietnam](#) exhibition held at Umeå University's Bildmuseet in Sweden in 2015. The fact that Tran Luong is an artist, curator, and organizer is, I found, a very interesting characteristic; that a single person serving more than role certainly opens up new ways of engaging with art projects.



Shimoda

Yes, you're right. It's also true for Japan; the ones who best know how to organize and plan performance events and exhibitions are, in fact, the artists. Museums can function well as *spaces*, but programs tend to end up being simply classical concerts or conventional dance shows.



Making Space: We Are Where We Aren't exhibition in Kuala Lumpur, part of RUN & LEARN: New Curatorial Constellations Workshop (Installation view)



Kataoka

Ms. Furuichi, you have been organizing [Run & Learn](#), a workshop geared for young curators and artists where you call for exhibition proposals, hold sessions with the applicants to polish them up, and finally select a few which are to be realized as exhibitions. Throughout the workshop, did you discover any new or different issues of interests from the applicants compared to, say, a few decades ago?



Furuichi

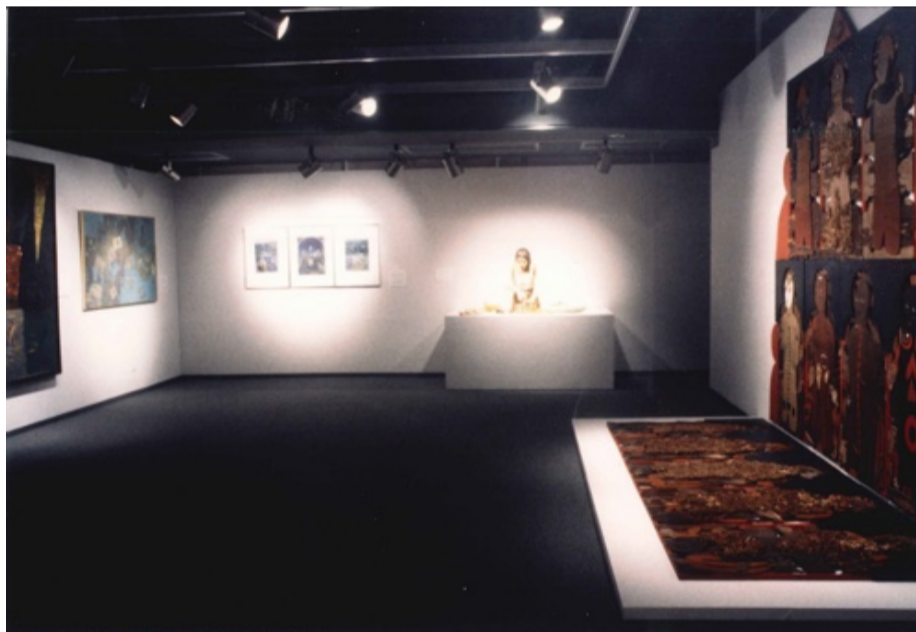
Yes, circumstances differed and *still* differ in each of the countries. When I began working in Southeast Asian art, ASEAN consisted of six countries——Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, Brunei, and Malaysia——but now there are ten. The backgrounds of the initial ASEAN members and those that later joined——Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia——obviously are different. Therefore the exhibition proposals submitted are also naturally different according to each country: some applicants incorporated socio-political issues, while more commercial ideas come into play for others who come from areas where commercialism is more dominant. Rather than saying that things have changed, I find that it is more interesting to exhibit each of their dispersed interests as it is. [The](#)

[Under Construction: New Dimensions of Asian Art](#) exhibition (2002-2003)

pursued that similar method; each edition (or local exhibitions) were themed according to their own socio-cultural characteristics. That is how the different conditions of Asia become apparent. Run & Learn simply operates the same way.

At the same time, however, we also need to all work on improving curatorship as a profession. Even if you organize exhibitions, unless the curators “amp up their game” they won’t get through to audiences of each country or region. Earlier, Prof. Ushiroshoji mentioned how, back then, Japanese curators visited countries for research and exploited their resources for the benefit of exhibitions that were to be held in Japan. We need to address the question of how to gain access to or engage with the audiences in each country in order to expand the horizons of art. Meanwhile, there are also people who face difficulties in starting or developing their careers despite there already being facilities or infrastructures for artistic practices.

So what is always in the back on my mind, is how to work with each of their specificities, and, through human resources development, to not *maintain* but *improved* the current conditions of the Asian region (including Japan) as a whole. It is important to reflect on the role we serve in that respect.



Narrative Visions in Contemporary ASEAN Art exhibition (Installation view)



Kataoka

We are, in fact, thinking of bringing those individual socio-historical and political differences to the fore in our 2017 exhibition. In “A Difficult Journey of Contemporary ASEAN Art”—written for the *Narrative Vision in Contemporary ASEAN Art* exhibition organized by the Japan Foundation’s then-ASEAN Cultural Center in 1990—, Prof. Ushiroshoji, you discussed the validity of grouping countries together as ASEAN. If I understood it correctly, you wrote that although each country pursued their own national identities and it seemed like that would result in a sort of dead-end, by grouping the countries as one unit, the complex cultural interactions among the countries may instead become visible. I believe there has already been a lot of discussion about the credibility of “ASEAN” and/or “Southeast Asia”, but what are your current thoughts on the issue?



Ushiroshoji

As I said earlier, national identity was, at the beginning, the main focus of interest. However, if you travel Southeast Asia, you realize that cultural currents that interact within and also transgress national borders very much exist. For example, I was speaking to a young Chinese-Malaysian artist about a famous female Malaysian singer; although the singer happened to

be Malay, the artist hadn't even heard of her. But, the Chinese-Malaysian artist writes lyrics for a Taiwanese rock band. Whether it be through the overseas Chinese or Islamic ties, there *are* cultural instances that cross national borders which we need to carefully observe.



Kataoka

Thank you very much for your answers. For our 2017 exhibition, we have asked four Southeast Asian curators who were born in the 1980s to work with us. The exhibition's timeframe extends from the 1980s to the present, and we intend to investigate this relatively-recent past through a historical lens. What are your reactions, Vera, Jo-Lene, Grace, and Merv, to today's symposium as curators and artists who literally grew up in this period we are historicizing?

[To Panel Discussion and Q&A \(3/4\)](#)



SEA PROJECT Symposium How has Japan Engaged with Contemporary Art in Southeast Asia?

Panel Discussion and Q&A (3/4)



Curators Vera Mey (leftmost) and Ong Jo-Lene (the second from the left)



Curators Merv Espina (left) and Grace Samboh (right)



Vera Mey

Thank you to all the speakers for their presentations. I have a basic question since the role of public institutions seems like the crux of this panel, especially Prof. Ushiroshoji: considering these previous exhibitions that brought and also current initiatives that are still bringing Southeast Asian artists to Japan, how do you think the Japanese public view their relationship to Southeast Asia? Are these foreign artistic practices seen as part of extensions of Japanese art history? I ask this because I see Japan appear in the various art histories of Southeast Asia. I'm thinking, in particular, about the modernist period in Cambodia; about how the Japanese painter Suzuki taught at the Royal University of Fine Arts [in Phnom Penh] back in the 1950s, and how the Japanese government continues to be involved in development projects in parts of urban Phnom Penh. It goes without saying that these factors affect Cambodian contemporary artists' engagement and practices in the arts. I am sure there are other kinds of examples across the region too, but I was interested in the ways the Japanese public view Southeast Asian art history in relation to their own.

Another important point I noticed was that Prof. Ushiroshoji spoke about it being different from a Western art history. From my own understanding and

research, I feel that Japanese art and art history is perhaps seen as closer to the Southeast Asian paradigm or history than the Western one. Could you elaborate a little on those points?



Ushiroshoji

As I briefly mentioned, I think Southeast Asian art was definitely viewed as “exotic” and rare in the 1980s. As the artworks exhibited in Japan changed, however, Japanese people came to better appreciate the arts of their Southeast Asian counterparts, learning about their anxieties, pain, and joys experienced over the years. It doesn’t necessarily mean that *everyone* feels that way now, but attitudes have, to some degree, been changing.

Unfortunately, however, I don’t think that Japanese art historians are even interested in the question of how Japan has engaged in this particular field. The existence of Mr. Suzuki in Cambodia, whom you just mentioned, is completely unknown. There are a few Japanese people other than myself who have worked in the field, but overall there is a lack of interest on the part of art historians in Japan; and that, I think, is a very big problem.



Kataoka

Thank you very much. Our next question is from Jo-Lene.



Ong Jo-Lene

Thank you. This is for Prof. Ushiroshoji again. In the *Asian Art Shows*—especially the early editions—I noticed that, as you said, artists were picked out from each country, and the points of contact were usually curators who were affiliated with national institutions. I am curious to know if this was a deliberate decision given that, at the time, the formation of a “national identity” was one of the main concerns. Did this influence the decision to have curators specifically from the public sectors as the points of contact? Having constructed some form of national identity, this then gets imposed upon the citizens soon after. What emerged from this, however, are attitudes that challenge this dominant narrative which, I believe, often takes place in art.

So my question is: considering this issue of national identity, to whom do you think we can turn to for our point of contact knowing that, as a The New York Times reporter, once wrote, “But I despaired at the venality of the elites and the corruption that engulfed the lives of so many people I interviewed. I came to see Southeast Asia as a land of great people and bad governments, of remarkable graciousness but distressing levels of impunity.” (*1)



Ushiroshoji

When you oversimplify things, I guess that part of that statement could be true. But when we were working with an Indonesian artist group, there were cases when our counterparts literally couldn’t handle the custom clearance for exporting artworks. Moreover, due to the lack of information, prior to our departure we first had to visit the Embassies of the countries we’d planned on visiting and asked them for advice of where to go, who to visit and so on. Then, once we were there, we would visit the local Japanese Embassies for advice too. Looking back, I think it was inevitable for us to seek help through governmental bodies, but I personally don’t think that that played such a large role on the issue of building a national identity. National identity wasn’t exclusive to government-associated artist; it concerned *all* artists.

Moreover, as we amassed our research on each country, we began to speak directly and choose specific artists with whom to work. In that way, the types of art displayed in our exhibitions began to change significantly. We began to be able to select artworks that reflected the imminent social problems of that period, but I must say that it took a long time to get there. So, rather than national identity, or governmental involvement for that matter, creating a bias and being criticized for it, I think it was more about suddenly diving into the then-current socio-political concerns that was contemporaneous throughout Southeast Asia.



Furuichi

If I could add to that: I think the *New Art from Southeast Asia* exhibition (1992) was one of the responses to that kind of 1980s circumstance; I think the flow of organizing an exhibition by seeing works and choosing them ourselves really began from here.



New Art from Southeast Asia exhibition (Installation view)

National identity, too, was one of the emphasis Prof. Ushiroshoji made at that time, but I was always very doubtful of that; I wasn't convinced that Southeast Asian artists' motivations were solely national identity. When trying to decipher *how* to discuss an issue, such an argument makes invisible the various other alternatives, making the discussion a linear and singular. The *New Art from Southeast Asia* exhibition was really an output of that doubt of mine. When asked who the Southeast Asian art historian is in Japan, even after two decades, it is still Prof. Ushiroshoji and his words or studies are considered "legitimate." I'm not criticizing you personally, Prof. Ushiroshoji. But I *do* want to say that we need to pay just as much attention to alternatives. Despite our various projects and rise of younger curators, the fact, for example, we hear only Prof. Ushiroshoji's name in Singapore exemplifies how Japan's academia is still lagging behind.

[To Panel Discussion and Q&A \(4/4\)](#)



[*1 Thomas Fuller, "Reporting on Life, Death and Corruption in Southeast Asia", The New York Times, February 21, 2016\)](#)

SEA PROJECT Symposium How has Japan Engaged with Contemporary Art in Southeast Asia?

Panel Discussion and Q&A (4/4)



Fumio Nanjo (Director, Mori Art Museum) closing the Symposium



Kataoka

I think we would like to have a question from the floor.



Audience

I have a question for the young Asian curators here today. The first is: are there many audiences of modern art in your own country or field? And second: are there possibilities for Japanese artists to participate and work with fellow artists in your own art scene not simply as donors or supporters but as *independent* artists?



Grace Samboh

Hello. I'm Grace from Indonesia. To quickly answer your questions: yes, there is a large pool of modern art audiences in each of our countries which is nothing new. I don't think that needs explanation; you can try Google. And two: of course there are possibilities for Japanese artists to be individually involved in our local art scenes. I think there are actually quite a lot of Japanese individuals who have careers here in Japan and also are building

careers in Indonesia. I'm sure it the he similar situation for the others from the region.

(Post script: Grace felt it is ironic to receive such a question after all the presentations today clearly demonstrated that modern and contemporary art activities existed in the region since then.)



Merv Espina

I think exchanges have already been happening, especially since the '80s, from a very grassroots-level among individual artists in the region and in Japan. In the Philippine context, actual artist-initiated exchanges were really more late 80s because of Baguio International Arts Festival and VIVA EXCON.

With this panel, we see a very institutional kind of support structure (The Japan Foundation and Fukuoka Asian Art Museum) and also the very grassroots approaches (NIPAF), both of which are supporting different kinds of art practices.

As for performance art, in the region, is like a gateway drug: it is the first kind of experimentation for a lot of Southeast Asian artists to develop and explore other forms of practices. So it's the entry point to a larger contemporary art vocabulary. It's not surprising that some young artists that Mr. Shimoda helped train eventually find themselves in more established institutions.



Kataoka

Thank you. Unfortunately, we are running out of time. We hope to organize another opportunity like this before July next year to better understand Southeast Asia as we work toward our exhibition. We are considering how best to communicate the knowledge and experience accumulated here to the next generation, so we hope that you will join us again for our future public programs.



Yoneda

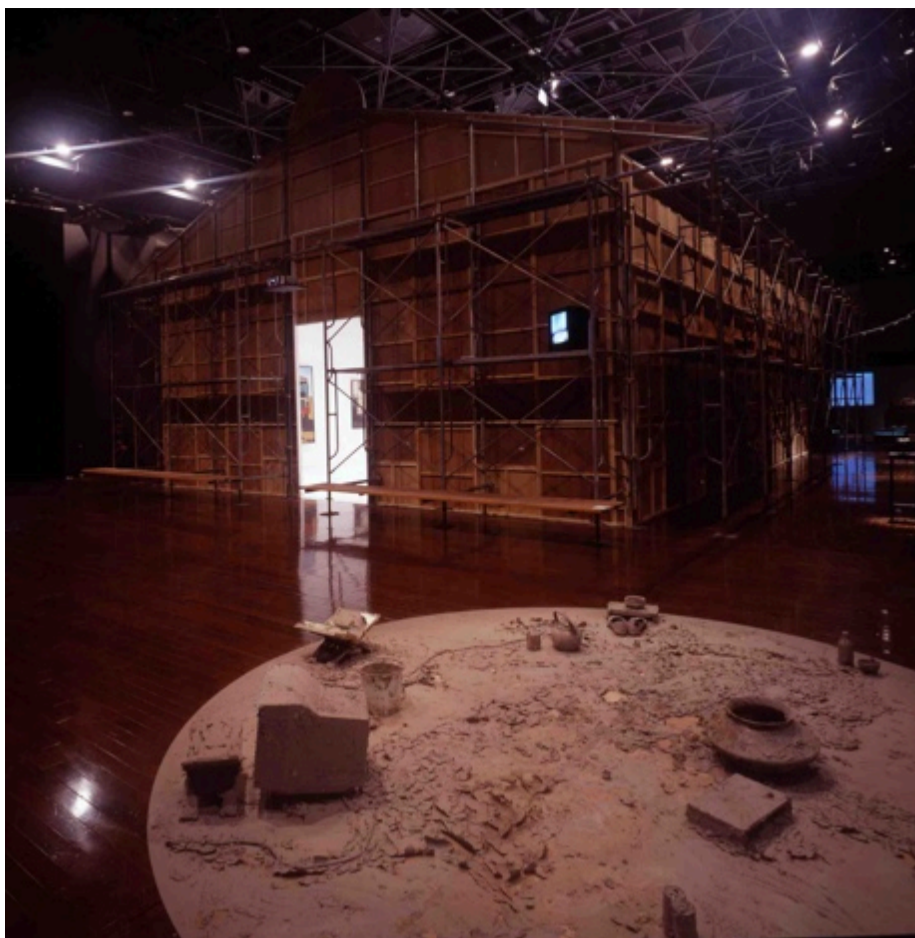
Thank you very much. Director of the Mori Art Museum, Mr. Fumio Nanjo, will deliver his closing remarks.



Nanjo

Thank you for a day of very interesting discussion. I, too, had been at the Japan Foundation for about ten years, so I was reminded of my time in the organization.

The ASEAN Culture Center was launched in 1990. I was no longer at the Japan Foundation at that time, but I remember seeing the exhibitions hosted there. Although there were not many visitors, I still had the strong feeling that something very meaningful had begun, and, after a few decades and some gradual changes over time, I genuinely feel that these various Asian exhibitions have been woven together to form a strong thread within the history of Asian art in Japan and also history of artistic interaction between Japan and Southeast Asia.



Under Construction: New Dimensions of Asian Art exhibition (Installation view)

Prof. Ushiroshoji's talk struck me with vivid memories of the time. Considering the type of resources subsidized to an organization like the Japan Foundation, there *are* limits to what it can do. Prof. Ushiroshoji stated that “municipal art museums don't have the resources to take their exhibits overseas,” and given the Japan Foundation's governmental nature, it only follows that it ought to propagate *Japanese* culture overseas. In that context, when the concept for the *Under Construction* exhibition was underway, Mr. Akira Tatehata and I—Ms. Furuichi was with us, as well—wanted to do something that was reciprocal; not simply a one-way streak of taking Japanese culture abroad or bringing in overseas culture to Japan or vice versa. For instance, there are cases where Thai curators gather artists from its neighboring countries to organize exhibitions in Thailand. And we wondered whether we might be able to support something of the similar. Meanwhile, difference and particularities among countries—the issue of identity—was definitely a major concern for the arts of Southeast Asia at the time, but I, too, remember wondering whether we should be focusing on that alone.

In other words, we must not merely focus on difference, but rather must think about how we can work together and what we have in common. Looking at the global political climate, assertions of difference have become extreme that generate trends of exclusion. But the world cannot be like this. We ought to discuss our commonalities *while* recognizing our differences and identities. Culture plays an extremely important platform in this regard, and precisely because of this, we should pursue such perspectives and discussions through cultural exchange.

There was much discussion today of the past. However, there is also a lot of worry concerning whether discussions of the past are being properly archived and historicized for the future. I think that it another discussion which is just as important; discussions like those conducted here today must be documented to be shared among a larger audience. Finally, I would like to end by, once again, thanking our speakers and the audience here today.



Yoneda

On that note, we would like to bring today's symposium to a close. Thank you to you all.



Editor: Juri Murakami (in between) , Meiko Sano (The Japan Foundation Asia Center)

Photo: Shinichiro Mikuriya

Photo Courtesy: Mori Art Museum, Tokyo

SEA PROJECT Event2 Performance and Talk by Heri Dono + Report of the SEA PROJECT Research in Indonesia

Summary

Summary

Date: Saturday, November 24, 2016

Time: 7:00~9:00 p.m.

Venue: Auditorium, Mori Art Museum

Organizer: Mori Art Museum, the National Art Center,
Tokyo, the Japan Foundation Asia Center

Cooperation: [Mizuma Art Gallery](#)

Program:

Host: Eise Shiraki (Educator, Mori Art Museum)

19:00 Part 1: Performance and Talk by Heri Dono

Performer: Heri Dono (Artist)

20:00 Part 2: Report of the SEA PROJECT Research in
Indonesia

Speaker1 Mami Kataoka (Chief Curator, Mori Art
Museum)

Speaker2 Naoki Yoneda (Curator, the National Art
Center, Tokyo)

Speaker3 Haruko Kumakura (Assistant Curator,
Mori Art Museum)



Throughout the research trips to the ten ASEAN countries, some of the artistic phenomena that stood out for the SEA PROJECT team were the artist collectives amidst rapid urbanization and modernization and the performative practices that emerged from within the insufficient infrastructure for the arts.

Following the symposium held last February, the second public program of the SEA PROJECT focused on Indonesia where artist collectives are thriving in particular and international art exhibitions are held in three of its cities.

The team welcomed renowned Indonesian artist Heri Dono for an artist talk and also his performance using Wayang Kulit. After which the curators who visited Indonesia in November 2015 presented progress reports on the theme of “Now in Indonesian Contemporary Art.” Mami Kataoka spoke about the diverse ethnic, linguistic, and cultural relationships between Japan continuing from the wartime period and surveyed the artistic environments of Java of Java. Naoki Yoneda focused on artists active during the 1980s and 1990s, and Haruko Kumakura took up the relatively younger artists from the 2000s. The curators’ report about the current state of contemporary art thriving in Indonesia impressed the audience

Performer



Heri Dono

Born in Jalarta, 1960. His works often employ monstrous or even frightening figures that originate from Indonesian traditional shadow-puppetry theatre known as wayang. At a glance, these figures might feel overwhelmingly negative, but when we look closely at the works’ details, comical elements start to emerge. These at times grotesque, at times pantomimic or Pierrot-like figures are analogues of Heri Dono’s socio-political criticism of contemporary Indonesia. They also resemble a parodic reflection of global contemporary politics. This winning combination of a highly intellectual critical sensibility and a humorous, smiling outlook on life has now become characteristic of Heri Dono’s artistic practice which allows us to easily identify him on the global stage as one of Indonesia’s foremost contemporary artists.

Speakers



Mami Kataoka
Chief Curator
Mori Art Museum



Naoki Yoneda
Curator
The National Art Center,
Tokyo



Haruko Kumakura
Assistant Curator
Mori Art Museum

Photo: Shinichiro Mikuriya

Photo Courtesy: Mori Art Museum

SEA PROJECT Event2

How has Japan Engaged with Contemporary Art in Southeast Asia?

[Summary](#)

[Part 1: Performance and Talk by Heri Dono](#)

[Part 2: Report of the SEA PROJECT Presentation 1](#)

[Part 2: Report of the SEA PROJECT Presentation 2](#)

[Part 2: Report of the SEA PROJECT Presentation 3](#)

SEA PROJECT Event2 Performance and Talk by Heri Dono + Report of the SEA PROJECT Research in Indonesia

Part 1: Performance and Talk by Heri Dono



Text by
Sayuri Kida

Indonesian artist Heri Dono was invited to speak at the first preview event held for *SUNSHOWER: Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia 1980s to Now*, the exhibition scheduled to open in the summer of 2017. Dono, whose works will be included in the exhibit, presented a performance of the Indonesian traditional *wayang* puppet theater, and then gave a presentation titled “Perspective of Mandala”.

Born in Jakarta in 1960, Heri Dono now stands at the forefront of Indonesia’s modern art scene. His works span a diverse range of media, including painting, illustration, and performance art. Linking traditional culture with modern sensibilities, Dono’s works have consistently and sharply critiqued governments and societies while enthralling audiences with his unique and humorous perspectives. His career began in storytelling as he used methods such as *wayang* and animation to tell tales. After starting his career in the 1970s, Dono was drawn to animation as a form of artistic expression. “*Wayang* in some way is simple animation and we actually can use the structure of *wayang kulit* for making cartoon films(*1),” he explains. His research into *wayang* led him to explore a diverse range of media, including painting and kinetic sculpture.

For the *wayang* performance, a white screen illuminated with spotlights was installed in the venue. Dono narrated a monologue in his native Indonesian language, accompanied by mysterious *gamelan* percussion music. By manipulating the puppets, changing the relative size and sharpness of the projected shadows, the comical figures of the play took on a life of their own. The story of the play centered on two artists: the impressionist Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890) and Ki Sigit Sukasman, a distinguished master of *wayang*. On van Gogh, Dono explained, “Van Gogh was interested in Japanese *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints – yet these graphic works were not only source of interest for him in Japan, but so too was Zen Buddhism. Van Gogh began to create works mimicking the techniques of wood block printing, but using the method of broken brushstrokes, In the West, he was not accepted as an artist attempting to introduce concepts of Asian spirituality. (*2)”

Sukasman, the other subject of the play, started his artistic career when he dropped out of ASRI (Academy Seni Rupa Indonesia), which is now known as ISI (The Indonesian Institute of the Arts) to study in Yogyakarta, and has since become a distinguished *wayang kulit* performer. “Sukasman, who lived in Europe for ten years. Sukasman introduced Art Nouveau within his works, and he also included that concept in the creation of his *wayang* creations. However, within Indonesia this led to him being considered as one who had destroyed tradition. Sukasman felt isolated because he was not accepted into the traditional arts, and yet neither was accepted within modern circles because he was considered to be a traditional artist, (*3)” he continued. On how he conceived his play, Dono explained, “Van Gogh and Sukasman has some similarities in their journey of art-making and the ironic elements of their biographies.” and “I am bringing the two of them together through this *wayang* story. In my show, they enter the cartoon world. In this *wayang* story, I narrate how they met and they painted sunflowers together. Both of them tried to commit suicide, but failed. Sukasman used *chakra* weaponsm whereas van Gogh used a pistol firearm. They tried to kill themselves again by exchanging weapons. This time round, it was successful. In the supernatural world, dead van Gogh turned into Mickey Mouse, and Sukasman turned into a *wayang* puppet. In the puppet world, everything is possible. (*4)”

After the performance, a peek behind the screen revealed that the puppets used to project monochromatic shadows for the audience are actually vividly-painted works of art in themselves; their existence in this other world behind the screen is startling. The traditional perspective of *wayang* holds that this colorful, hidden world behind the screen can only be perceived in black-and-white by those that exist in our world. *Wayang* performers breathe life into their puppets, manipulating them while also voicing their lines, but in Dono’s work, the puppets are moved by electric motors and combined with lighting and sound effects, incorporating aspects of his kinetic sculptures and the figures that appear in his illustrations. His particular style comes into focus if you survey his paintings and view them in sequence. Not unlike *kami-shibai*, a Japanese storytelling method that uses a series of pictures, these singular images come together to tell a story.

In the second half of the program, a presentation by Dono titled “Perspective of Mandala” used the example of the Borobudur Temple Compounds in Indonesia as an exploration of an East-West combined worldview arising from comparisons between the two sets of cultures. The concept of existence as borrowed space and time, one strongly prevalent in many Asian cultures, is also an underlying theme of the pluralistic culture of Indonesia, which is comprised of a multiplicity of languages, and a myriad of islands and tribes. This diversity is also evident in Dono’s low-tech installations that make use of recycled materials. He summarized his in-

depth presentation with some comments on a work of his titled *Voyage Trokomod*, a giant tank that dominated Indonesia’s exhibit space at the 56th Venice Biennale held in 2015. Please come and explore the “SUNSHOWER” exhibition opening in summer 2017. Heri Dono’s humorous narrative works will reveal his interpretation of life in modern society and his worldview encompassing both Eastern and Western perspectives.

*1. Jim Supangkat, “Context,” in [*Heri Dono: Danving demons and Drunken Deities*](#), ed. Yasuko Furuichi (Tokyo: The Japan Foudation Asia Center, 2000), 101.

*2. Heri Dono, *WAYANG LEGENDA “Vincent van Gogh and Sukasman,”* (Handout received at the “Performance and Talk by Heri Dono, National Arts Center, Tokyo, Sept. 24, 2016).

*3. Ibid. Heri Dono.

*4. Ibid. Heri Dono.

Photo: Shinichiro Mikuriya
Photo Courtesy: Mori Art Museum

SEA PROJECT Event2 Performance and Talk by Heri Dono + Report of the SEA PROJECT Research in Indonesia

Part 2: Report of the SEA PROJECT Presentation 1



Indonesian Contemporary Art and International Exhibitions



Mami Kataoka

For the SEA Project, I conducted research in ten Southeast Asian countries for about a year and a half beginning in 2015. What I thought was most difficult after starting this project was that the history, politics, and social conditions of the ten member countries of ASEAN all differ, and so I wondered how we are to share each of their contexts with the Japanese audience. Some works require our understanding of their contextual backdrop for us to fully appreciate them, so I think it is necessary to also reflect the dynamic political, economic, social, and cultural changes in the exhibition.

I will be talking about Indonesia, which occupies an enormous area in Southeast Asia. With a population of 260 million, it is the largest of the ten ASEAN countries. It has an area of 190 square kilometers, its official language is Bahasa Indonesian, and it is extremely diverse in terms of religion, with Islam, Christianity, Hindu, and Buddhism. What I find fascinating is that the average age in Indonesia is 27.8, while Japan's is about 45. So I think one characteristic we can point to is that there are a lot of young people in Indonesia. Furthermore, its islands number more than thirteen thousand, there are about seven hundred forty different ethnic

groups, and there are nearly six hundred languages besides the official one. So I want to stress the level of cultural diversity that pervades this single country; something that is hard for someone in Japan to imagine.

The main centers of art are Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, and Bandung. Jakarta has a population of over ten million people, but its area is only one-third that of Tokyo, so just by making that comparison we can tell that the population density is incredibly high. Bandung and Surabaya are also large cities in their own right. Yogyakarta as a town is not as large, but in the art world, it is safe to say that it plays an enormous role as a hub for contemporary art. The city centers, like in Jakarta for instance, are resplendent towns lined with high-rise buildings just like Tokyo. While having this side, they also have an extremely long cultural history which can be seen in architectures such as the Prambanan Temple (ninth to tenth century) near Yogyakarta, and Borobudur, the world's largest complex of Buddhist temple ruins (eighth century).

In terms of Japan's relations with not only Indonesia but Southeast Asia, the fact is the Japanese army occupied many countries during the war from 1941 to 1945. However, it is difficult to say that this is common knowledge in Japan. While it has been called a peaceful nation for seventy years since the war ended in 1945, if we turn our eyes to Southeast Asia, it is impossible to understand its art without considering that during the [same] seventy years Southeast Asia had undergone a variety of political changes. I will give a simple introduction of those that are particularly noteworthy.

During its occupation in Indonesia, one of Japan's policies was establishing cultural centers called *Keimin bunka shidosho* throughout Indonesia. Japanese artists, designers, musicians, and such were sent to these *Keimin bunka shidosho* to teach the locals about the diverse artistic genres and host exhibitions of works by the general public. This policy is considered an important part of history among the Indonesian contemporary art community, which is demonstrated by how these centers have retained their Japanese names and continue to be called "*keimin bunka shidosho*."

After the Japanese army withdrew, Sukarno, the first President of Indonesia, declared the country's independence. But the Dutch Empire only recognized it in 1949 at the time of the Hague Agreement. The 1955 Asian-African Conference known as the Bandung Conference was a meeting held primarily for countries that gained independence after World War II, such as India, Indonesia, the People's Republic of China, and Egypt. These newly-independent countries that were not superpowers during the Cold War gathered to debate their respective positions and issued a joint declaration. Ten years later in 1965, tensions rose between the military party and the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) which culminated in the September 30 Movement. The coup d'état itself failed, but as a result Sukarno ceded power to Suharto whose reign lasted for many years. Until the expansion of the democratization movement in 1998 and Suharto's resignation, there was oppression against many forms of [artistic] expression under the military regime. Heri Dono, who performed today, was born in 1960 so he is of the generation who lived through this period of change. As such, it is important to understand how he embeds his own experiences into his practices and forms of expressions .

Looking at the art scene in Asia as a whole, a very large number of art museums have newly opened, biennales are held all over the place, and art fairs are also organized in a variety of locations. The SEA Project's research on Indonesia's art galleries first consisted of a visit to the National Gallery of Indonesia that opened in 1999 as a facility for visual culture. However in

Indonesia, the momentum for private art museums is strong; one such example in Jakarta is [the Akili Museum of Art](#) that Rudy Akili opened in 2006 to display his personal collection. In addition, [the Museum MACAN](#) is scheduled to open next year in Jakarta. It will have a remarkable 3,800-square meters exhibition space, roughly equivalent to the Mori Art Museum and the National Art Center, Tokyo combined. I believe this will function as an extremely important art museum.

During our visit in November 2015, there were three international exhibitions being held in Indonesia. First, we have [the Jakarta Biennale](#), which initially began in 1974 as Indonesia's domestic painting exhibition but underwent transformations to become a biennale that now garners attention worldwide. The Development of a managing parent organization is also underway, with a Biennale Foundation now in place, for example. When we visited the opening, there were about five thousand young people who had gathered. The Biennale itself was held in a warehouse, so there was hardly any ventilation. Air conditioning was available only in the video room, and all the other spaces were left humid and hot. It was in this kind of casual environment that we saw [the artists] pursuing their practices unhindered.

Second, we have [Biennale Jogja](#). Since being held in Yogyakarta since the 1990s, Biennale Jogja has changed its form in many ways, and now, under the theme of the "Equator," it is held in equatorial countries.

Third, Biennale Jatim in Surabaya. This was relatively "domestic" in that there was a large number of Indonesian artists that gathered. Communication was primarily in Bahasa Indonesia so it was difficult for us to collect information. However, since Surabaya is the second largest city in Java we were able to see lots of works by young artists.





Curators visited three biennales. From above, the Jakarta Biennale, Biennale Jogja and Biennale Jatim.

In Indonesia, the conditions of art museums and such are not as advanced as in Japan, so there are a variety of institutions supported by individual artists or sponsors, one example of which is [the Cemeti Art House](#) founded as a gallery in 1988 by Nindityo Adipurnomo (1961–) and Mella Jaarsma (1960–). These play an important role in the Yogyakarta (Jogja) art scene by providing [artist] residencies and spaces for artists to create new works. [The Indonesia Visual Art Archive \(IVAA\)](#) which became an offshoot the Cemeti Art House stores a vast collection of materials on Indonesian visual art. Although it is obviously impossible to see all the documents in such a short visit, many extremely important materials for researchers are housed there. In addition to their collection, IVAA features activities by artist groups of the younger generation, and it plays the role of providing space for them to hold exhibitions. These artist groups are more frequently called “collectives,” the representative of which is [Ruangrupa](#) based in Jakarta. Ruangrupa carries out exhibitions, events, community-oriented projects, and also partly managed the running of the Jakarta Biennale Foundation. Furthermore, Singapore’s Art Stage has also ventured into the country this year with Art Stage Jakarta 2016, proving that the art market is gradually expanding to encompass Jakarta.

That was my very brief survey of the artistic infrastructure in Indonesia. But I’d like to end by saying that there are definitely new occurrences brewing in tandem with the country’s economic growth; occurrences that I expect will further grow in the future.

Photo: Shinichiro Mikuriya

Photo Courtesy: Mori Art Museum

SEA PROJECT Event2 Performance and Talk by Heri Dono + Report of the SEA PROJECT Research in Indonesia

Part 2: Report of the SEA PROJECT Presentation 2



Memorandum on Indonesian Contemporary Art



Naoki Yoneda

I would like to speak today about two artists in particular who have been active since the 1980s and '90s: [FX Harsono](#) and [Mella Jaarsma](#).

With regards to the history of Indonesia's art scene, as Ms. Kataoka mentioned, there was the Jakarta Art Show in 1974 that served as the predecessor for the Jakarta Biennale. However, at the 1974 Art Show, there was an extremely large number of works that retained the formal conditions of paintings and sculptures which left the more radical or cutting-edge artists feeling dissatisfied. Thus, in the same year, a protest called the Black December took place where protestors staged an art show as a funeral, delivering eulogies and offering flowers. Consisting mostly of the members of that movement, from 1975 onward, a movement called the Indonesia New Art Movement (Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru) emerged, and one of the figures who played a particularly central role and participated in these shows from the early days was Mr. Harsono whom we interviewed during our research. As a Chinese-Indonesian based in Indonesia, he incorporates his [ethnic] lineage—being of Chinese descent—into his own art practice.

For example, *Pilgrimage to History* (2013). After the Japanese Occupation, many Chinese became victims of Indonesia's path toward independence; victims who are now buried in shared graves that serve as monuments. Harsono created *Pilgrimage to History* using frottage*, transferring the uneven surface of these graves onto a white cloth and highlighting the names of the dead. The act of recording is one of the important themes in Harsono's works, so he also records these shared gravesites by registering them on Google Map.

Another of his recent works is *Writing in the Rain* (2011) which shows him having difficulty writing his name [on a transparent wall] as the rain repeatedly washes the ink away. As part of [Indonesia's] stance on nationality and the Suharto administration's Chinese Assimilation Policy, Chinese-Indonesians were forced to change their Chinese names to Indonesian ones. Harsono himself gave up his Chinese name at the age of eighteen and had an Indonesian passport issued. This work is motivated by his experience of this. Hu Fang Wen, Harsono's Chinese name, is the only thing he can write in Chinese, thus he writes those characters repeatedly.

Also, from about four years ago, Harsono has been working on a project called "EXI(S)T" at a place named Dia.Lo.Gue which was set up to nurture not only artists but also curators. Indonesia has a limited number of public cultural facilities compared to Japan, so there are not many curators either. According to Harsono, "Universities hardly offer that kind of [curatorial] education; no one teaches you what you should do to become a curator." So this project was launched so that experienced artists like Harsono could help to train curators.



The Meeting with HX Harsono at Dia.Lo.Gue in Yogyakarta.

Moving onto Mella Jaarsma; Jaarsma was born in the Netherlands and, after marrying an Indonesian artist, she is now active in Indonesia. She is an artist interested in the social problems that lie at the peripheries of Indonesia's highly diversified society; problems such as those who are excluded due to certain discriminations against [ethnic] identities, and other social incidents and phenomena that are relatively marginalized.

One such example is *High Tea* (2014). Tea, as you know, was brought to Europe at the beginning of the seventeenth century by the East India Company. At the time, the best-quality tea leaves made in West Java, the leading production area, were all exported to Europe and the local people were left with low-quality tea. High Tea addresses and criticizes this fact.

Another signature work of Jaarsma is an installation series using the skin of creatures such as animals and reptiles. The title is *Lugang Buaya/ (Crocodile's Pit, 2014)*. In the September 30 Movement, the military coup d'état attempt that occurred in 1965, six military officers were killed and

their bodies were abandoned in a well in the Lugang Buaya village located in the suburbs of Jakarta. Lugang Buaya means “alligator hole.” By using the skin of an alligator which literally refers to the name of the village where this incident took place, Jaarsma jars people’s memory about the incident and demands them to reconsider it. Clothing a guest with this alligator-skin costume, she filmed an interview with the guest about the incident and exhibited it as a video work.

Jaarsma is one of the founders of [the Cemeti Art House](#), which was also mentioned in Ms. Kataoka’s talk earlier, and she puts together about ten art exhibits every year. Separately established from this exhibition category is [IVAA](#), the Indonesia Visual Arts Archive. Around 2000, a new form of contemporary art emerged that involved practices that do not leave a work behind in the form of an item or object. This is what we call today “socially engaged art” or “performance.” The IVAA began archiving such practices out of the need to historicize these events and record them in the form of documents.



at the Cemeti Art House in Yogyakarta.

*Frottage: A technique of transferring the surface texture of an object by placing paper on top and rubbing over it with instruments such as a pencil.

Photo: Shinichiro Mikuriya

Photo Courtesy: Mori Art Museum

PROJECT

SEA PROJECT Event2
Performance and Talk by Heri Dono
+ Report of the SEA PROJECT Research in Indonesia

Part 2: Report of the SEA PROJECT Presentation 3



Collectives in Indonesia



Haruko
Kumakura

During my ten-day research in Indonesia in November 2015, the most characteristic was that a large number of artists were also engaged in activities as a collective or group beside each of their individual work. A collective is a group in which several artists come together and make a single piece or carry out a project collectively. Here, I will introduce some of the activities of collectives that I learned about through our research in Jakarta, Surabaya, and Yogyakarta.

First, I will talk about **Ruangrupa**, a collective based in Jakarta whom Ms. Kataoka mentioned as well in her talk. Ruangrupa is a collective founded in 2000, so it has a long history of sixteen years. A variety of artists are a part of it, and it is structured in a way that several other collectives exist within Ruangrupa. Furthermore, Ruangrupa is both the name of the collective as well as the name of the place where it carries out a wide range of activities including art exhibitions, the OK Video Festival, workshops for curators, and its own radio broadcast station. Its engagements are based on the premise that art should not be only for a limited number of people but should be more open and accessible to a larger audience. It can be considered the

center of the art scene of Jakarta and One of the most important places of Indonesia as a whole.

During the 2015 research, we heard presentations by other collectives at Ruangrupa's gallery space. This method of research happened not only in Jakarta but also in Surabaya and Yogyakarta, and this format where you could gather in a certain collective's space and hear from several others was characteristic of our Indonesian study.



At Jakarta, Ruang Rupa Gallery in November 2015. Presenter is the Jakarta Wasted Artist.

From among the collectives we encountered in Jakarta, I'd like to introduce Jakarta Wasted Artist. In the 2015 work *Graphic Exchange*, the artists visited stores of various sizes on a street in Jakarta and offered to make them signs. The collective's members have a variety of different backgrounds in painting and design, and, as they begin working on the designs, they asked the store owners questions such as when the store opened and what inspired them to go into business, etc., which are reflected in the new store signs. In exchange for making the signs for free, the Jakarta Wasted Artists request that they exchange the new sign for the old signs. The old signs and a video recording of the interviews are exhibited as the work, and it serves to archive the operation of family-run stores and the scenery of these neighborhoods which are gradually being lost amidst the large cityscape.

Next, I will introduce two collectives we met with in Yogyakarta. First, *Ace House Collective* that was established in 2011. By using the pop culture of the young people, it is aiming for a wide-ranging approach to contemporary art. In a project called "Ace Mart", the gallery space was decorated to look like a convenience store, and they made it function as a store that actually conducted sales. By selling everyday necessities and art objects at the same time, it was an attempt to break the border between art and everyday actions. It is a project that aimed to get people more involved with art and to engage with the community by maximizing the potential of art.

The other is a collective called *XXLAB* formed only of women. Even in Yogyakarta, a hub for art, the fact is that there are fewer female artists than male ones. These women also come from a variety of different backgrounds; designers, programmers and such come together to form the collective. Rather than simply engaging in arguments about gender and feminism, their projects think about being a woman from various perspectives. They use open source software and assemble everyday materials that are found in any household to produce works. For example, in a project titled "Soya C(O)U(L)TURE", they focused on the water contamination caused from the drainage water that occurs when making tempeh, the Indonesian soybean product. They made dresses using the thin, tissue-like material made from that drainage water which won them an award at Ars Electronica*, and they

said their hope was for it to lead to a social movement that would draw attention to water contamination.



The Meeting with XXLAB in Yogyakarta.

Lastly, I will introduce two more collectives from Surabaya. First one is **WAFT Lab**. “Waft” means to flutter softly, and I felt that their artistic engagements have a very relaxed feeling that can be considered extremely Indonesian. They are a collective that produces art works using materials such as electronic devices and also holds events. Surabaya has a famous market for electronic parts, similar to Akihabara, and it has an enormous influence on their activities. The works they displayed in the Biennale Jatim were based on the theme of the relationship between human bodies and devices. Inspired by Prestin, a gene inside the ears that adapts sound and which is said to be what allows us to hear, the work was made so that it changes the sound it produces as people interact with it.

Another collective is **C2O**, which is also the name of the space. It also has a second-hand bookstore and a gallery space, and when we visited they were holding an art exhibit. Most Indonesian people use cars or motorcycles for transportation, while, in Japan, we are mostly familiar with walking on foot. But in Indonesia, especially Surabaya where it is extremely hot, walking is not a mode of action that is familiar to people. With this in mind, they were conducting an experiment where they seek to better understand their town through the basic action of walking around the city of Surabaya.

So far I have introduced several collectives, but there are many others that exist besides these, and some artists are members of more than one. There are collectives where the members rent a house together and use it as a studio while also living there. For these artists, art and life are integrated into one, and I felt that they have a common desire to share that not only with people involved in art but with more diverse communities. It was very interesting that socially engaged art which is drawing attention now is being exercised in the most natural and habitual manner in Indonesia.

***Ars Electronica** : A worldwide celebration of media art. It is held every year in Linz, Austria.



Photo: Shinichiro Mikuriya
Photo Courtesy: Mori Art Museum

Special Screening+Talk Show Identity Issues in Singapore and Malaysia Seen through Films

Summary

Summary

Time and Date : January 22 (SUN), 2017 13:00-17:55
January 29 (SUN), 13:00-16:40

Venue: Auditorium, The National Art Center, Tokyo

Program :

Host: Sayuri Kida (Associate Curator, the National Art Center, Tokyo)

22nd

13:00 introduction

13:05 *Sandcastle*

14:50 Talk-show

Yumi Matsushita (Film presenter, curator and producer)

Ken Takiguchi (Deputy director/ translation editor, Asian Shakespeare Intercultural Archive)

Mami Kataoka (Chief Curator, Mori Art Museum)

Naoki Yoneda (Curator, the National Art Center, Tokyo)

Moderator : Yasutaka Takeda (The Japan Foundation Asia Center)

16:05 *Sepet*

18:00 closed

29th

13:00 introduction

13:05 *Sepet*

14:55 break

15:10 *Sandcastle*

16:40 closed



Less than six months until the opening of the SUNSHOWER: Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia 1980s to Now exhibition, the third pre-event was held on January 22nd and 29th with screenings of the Singaporean film *Sandcastle* (2010) and Malaysian film *SEPET* (2005). Multiple ethnicities, languages, and religions exist in both two countries which divided soon after their unification as a single country; differences that their inhabitants must face whether conscious or not. On the other hand, due to the different paths that each country has taken since their separation, the [social and personal] issues that have risen have taken different forms. The male and female protagonists in the two films are both around twenty years of age, a susceptible period in their lives, and their inevitable confrontation with issues of identity while threading their own stories of adolescence drew the audiences' emotions. On the 22nd, a one-hour talk show was held that delved into topics surrounding art and performing arts using the films as an entrance. Mr. Takiguchi, one of the panelists, epitomized *Sandcastle* well, stating, "While watching the film, I could feel the difficulties that Singapore deals with; the burden of having to establish a nation by yourself, and of always having to establish your own identity." This

also applies to Malaysia, and it became clear from the discussion that these particular conditions permeated throughout various forms of [artistic] expression.

The SUNSHOWER: Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia 1980s to Now exhibition will include art from the ten ASEAN nations, and will be comprised of nine thematic chapters. Given the nature of the films, this screening program provided a reflection on Singaporean and Malaysian identities, raising the expectations for the exhibition itself.

Screening

Sandcastle, Boo Junfeng



2010/ Singapore/ 91 min/Subtitled in Japanese and English

Sepet, Yasmin Ahmad



2005/ Malaysia/ 107 min/Subtitled in Japanese and English

Speaker



Ken Takiguchi

Ken Takiguchi is the deputy director and translation editor of the online digital archive, *Asian Shakespeare Intercultural Archive* (A|S|I|A). He is also working as a dramaturg and translator, and is a founding member of Asian Dramaturgs' Network.

His earlier appointments include; assistant director of the Japan Foundation, Kuala Lumpur, consultant (international programme development) of Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre, board member of The Necessary Stage (Singapore) and research fellow of Theatre Studies Programme at National University of Singapore. Takiguchi was awarded the Cross-cultural Champion of the Arts Award at the Boh Cameronian Arts Award 2002 (Malaysia).



Yumi Matsushita

Yumi Matsushita grew up in Indonesia, Singapore, and Japan. While majoring in Political Science/International Relations at Sophia University in Tokyo, she studied in Austria. She spent time in Berlin to make a documentary and was awarded a scholarship to be an intern in the Netherlands. Upon returning to Japan, she has been working on media/film productions and acted as a consultant and line producer for films such as *FOODIES*.

Matsushita is a moderator, interpreter, curator and writer for film festivals and served as director of Sintok Singapore Film Festival Tokyo in 2009 and 2012.

She currently works as a lecturer and organizer to connect and raise social awareness of youths through films and to promote multi-lingualism and diversity in Japan.

Speakers and Host



Mami Kataoka
Chief Curator
Mori Art Museum



Naoki Yoneda
Curator
The National Art Center,
Tokyo



Sayuri Kida
Curator
The National Art Center,
Tokyo



Yasutaka Takeda
the Japan Foundation Asia
Center

Photo: Seiya Kawamoto

Special Screening Identity Issues in Singapore and Malaysia Seen through Films

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Special Screening+Talk Show Identity Issues in Singapore and Malaysia Seen through Films

Abstract of Screening



Text by
Sayuri Kida

The pre-event of the *SUNSHOWER: Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia 1980s to Now*, “Identity Issues in Singapore and Malaysia Seen through Films” was held during the 10th Anniversary Week of the National Art Center, Tokyo, to introduce the exhibition itself and also the cultures and history of Southeast Asia to a broader audience. The reason for focusing on “Diverse Identities” among the nine chapters is that many of the artists the curatorial team met during its research frequently and ardently produced works surrounding the issues of identity. In addition, we ended up selecting many Singaporean and Malaysian artists for this particular chapter, thus the pre-event itself paid attention to the circumstances of these two countries. Furthermore, in light of the fact that most of these participating artists work on videos and several of them are film directors, we chose to screen commercial films and not limit our scope to art films. By introducing films that are popular but also reflect various aspects of society during the 10th Anniversary Week of the National Art Center, Tokyo, which reels in many visitors, we wanted to expand the audience-base for Southeast Asian contemporary art and attract a more diverse range of visitors.

The films screened were *SEPET* (2005), an early work by Malaysian director Yasmin Ahmad, and *Sandcastle* (2010), the first feature film by Singaporean director Boo Junfeng who is also one of the participating artists for the “*SUNSHOWER*” exhibition. In between the two screenings, a curator from each of the venues, the National Art Center, Tokyo, and the Mori Art Museum, held a talk show with film presenter Yumi Matsushita and performing arts researcher Ken Takiguchi.

In Boo’s *Sandcastle*, set in 1990s Singapore, the eighteen-year old protagonist enters military service, learns the past of his late father who had been involved in anti-governmental protests, and confronts the nation’s unknown history and also familial conflicts. As the title states, this film portrays the stifles of living in a sandcastle-like place, and also lures the audience with its carefully woven narrative and entertaining aspect; a quality of realism that will present-day Japanese audiences to related to it. Boo’s style of extracting the history and stories forgotten by countries and individuals and turning them around onto the viewers as a form of questioning is not limited to his films but appears in his artworks as well. *Happy and Free* (2013), which we are currently negotiating to show at the “*SUNSHOWER*” exhibition, is a karaoke-room installation in which “Happy and Free,” the song celebrating the Malaysian Federation’s independence of 1963, plays. Under the hypothetical setting of “if Singapore had not gained independence,” the installation provides a unique twist in the fictional celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Federation.

SEPET by director Yasmin is a love story between a Malay girl named Orked and a Chinese boy named Jason who makes a meager living by selling VCD of Hong Kong movies on the street. Yasmin had produced many stories that smoothly cross over the religious, ethnic, and linguistic boundaries that exist in Malaysia, but she passed away in 2009 at the age of fifty-one. While *SEPET*, an early work of hers, is a youth film, it also envelops the social issues inherent in Malaysia, and realistically portrays the deep divisions between Malays and Chinese, and how multiple languages pour through between families and friends. By depicting a fictional society that is without discrimination, I think that Yasmin, who showed Malaysian society with its mixture of diverse people, was searching for a way to bring the non-fictional, real society closer to it. How we can accept conflicts and differences is a pressing issue that is not limited to Malaysia. Thus, we chose *SEPET* for the screening.

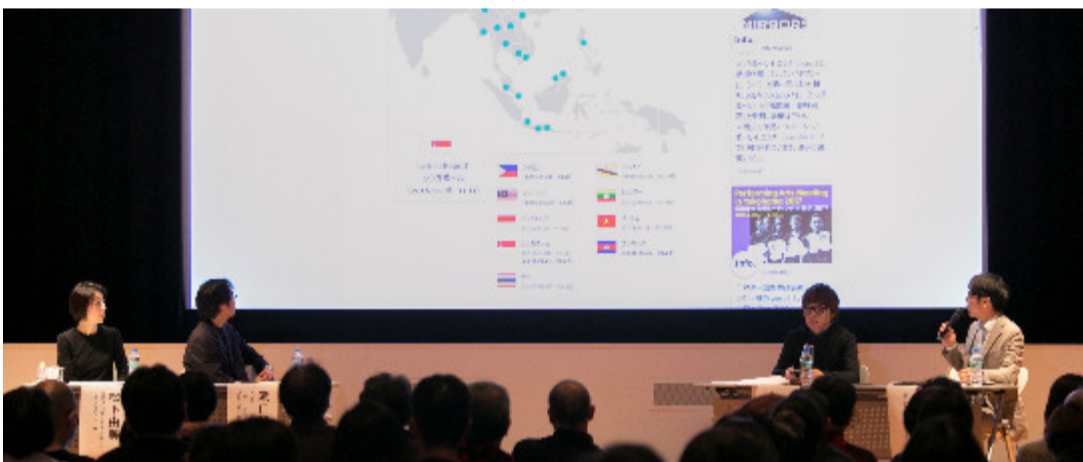
During the talk show, Ms. Matsushita, who was the key figure in introducing both films to Japan and grew up in Southeast Asia, spoke about the social conditions and actual circumstances of film production in the region. Mr. Takiguchi, a performing arts researcher who has lived in Malaysia and Singapore for a total of seventeen years combined, showed precious videos of performing arts in the region, and shared his wide range of insight into identity.

Questionnaires collected showed many of the audience were satisfied, expressing opinions such as, “explanations on Southeast Asia’s social structures and historical background were easily understandable and I was able to gain a deep knowledge [on the subject].” Also, we read that many people were “now interested in the contemporary artists introduced in the talk,” and that they are, “looking forward to seeing the “*SUNSHOWER*” exhibition.” Such reactions convinced us of the effect of advertising for visitors who came for reasons other than interests in the arts.

Special Screening+Talk Show

Identity Issues in Singapore and Malaysia Seen through Films

Talk show (1/3)



Takeda

Welcome, everyone. Thank you for joining us for “Identity Issues in Singapore and Malaysia Seen through Films.” Today and next week, we will be screening Singaporean and Malaysian films as the pre-event for the *SUNSHOWER: Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia 1980s to Now* exhibition which will be held this year simultaneously at the National Art Center, Tokyo and Mori Art Museum from July to November. Today, along with the screenings, we will have a talk featuring two guests who are well-acquainted with the culture and social circumstances of Singapore and Malaysia, as well as curators from the two venues of the exhibition.

First, Mr. Naoki Yoneda, the curator from the National Art Center, Tokyo, will present a summary of the exhibition and its relationship with “identity.”



Yoneda

We are planning to have nine thematic chapters in totals for the exhibition, one of which is “Diverse Identities.” We, the organizers of the event, have conducted research in each ASEAN country for the past two years in preparation for the “*SUNSHOWER*” exhibition. These were divided among the fourteen of us—ten curators from both the National Art Center, Tokyo and

Mori Art Museum, and four young curators from the Southeast Asia region. Ms. Kataoka and I both visited all ten ASEAN countries, and through our research, we found that many artists in each country were addressing the issues of “identity” in many forms of their practices. Inevitably, we ended up choosing this theme. In fact, there are many Singaporean and Malaysian artists in this “Diverse Identities” chapter, and my personal impression was that many Singaporean artists in particular were questioning their own identities through their works. Boo Junfeng, who is the director of *Sandcastle* that we screened just now, is one of those artists. Boo is active as a film director and artist, and we plan to exhibit his work at the “*SUNSHOWER*” exhibition.



Kataoka

For the “Diverse Identities” chapter, we turned our eyes toward different identities such as national, cultural, ethnic, and individual identities. Many countries in Southeast Asia gained their independence after World War II, and “nation building” has been their major theme for the past seventy years. The region also has a diverse range of cultures, languages, and religions, so we hope to introduce this diversity from various angles at the exhibition. One of these angles is represented by the “Diverse Identities” chapter.



Takeda

I’d like to start by speaking about *Sandcastle*. Boo is thirty-three years old, born in 1983, and is a young director who is leading the film industry in Singapore. Personally, I felt that *Sandcastle* is a work that includes many elements relating to identity, including the challenges faced by the country of Singapore, its inhabitants, and the relationship between society and identity. Ms. Yumi Matsushita, who has joined us today, was the first to screen *Sandcastle* in Japan in 2012, as the producer of [Sintok Singapore Film Festival in Tokyo](#). Ms. Matsushita, having watched it again today, how do you see this work from the perspective of identity?



Matsushita

I invited Boo to the first Sintok held in 2009, and screened his short film collection. At the time, he told me, “Dementia is one of the themes of the feature film that I am working on now, from my experience of seeing my grandmother suffer from the illness.” *Sandcastle* was completed after this. The process of the protagonist following his family’s tabooed past is portrayed, intertwined with Singapore’s history. The protagonist’s grandparents have roots in the Fujian Province—region in southern China where the majority of Chinese-Singaporeans come from—and they speak Hokkien. However, the younger generation speak Mandarin and/or English.

Sandcastle also depicts Singapore’s practice of National Service (NS: military conscription). NS starts after finishing high school or the equivalent level of education, and occupies a large role in the identity construction of Singaporeans. The song with lyrics that inspire patriotism, made for Singapore’s National Day, is used as a motif. *Sandcastle* also contains footages of when Singapore became an independent country, and of when students protested against the prohibition of the Chinese language in schools.

When *Sandcastle* was being filmed, Boo was still in his early twenties, but it is a mature film. While it is loaded with the challenges that Singapore faces,

it simultaneously incorporates stories of personal growth and love, making it an enjoyable film about youth and adolescence.



Takeda

Mr. Ken Takiguchi has spent a total of seventeen years in Malaysia and Singapore, and is deeply familiar with performing arts in Singapore. Mr. Takiguchi, what are your thoughts on *Sandcastle* from a performing arts point of view or from your own experience living there?



Takiguchi

I was a faculty member at the National University of Singapore until last year, so I have had many opportunities to speak with Singaporean students in their twenties. The year 2015 was the 50th anniversary of Singapore’s independence. Throughout the year, there were many discussions on, “What is Singapore?” and there were lively debates held at the university as well.

I watched *Sandcastle* while reminiscing on this and it made me feel somehow stuffy. What I mean is, I have a strong impression that Singapore is trying very hard to run itself and exist as a nation. It is a very peculiar country; an island that is only the size of the twenty-three central wards of Tokyo with very limited natural resources. When it declared independence from Malaysia in 1965, there was a famous instance in which the first Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew (1923 – 2015), started crying at a press conference . He had believed that if Singapore became independent, it could not make it on its own. Singapore, as a nation state, started from an extremely difficult state of affairs, in which it had no choice but to detach itself from the Federation of Malaysia, as if thrown out. This fact was mentioned repeatedly during the year of the 50th anniversary. When living in Singapore, I frequently encountered remarks tinged with a sense of crisis that if Singaporeans let down their guard for even a moment, their country could disappear.

Songs were created every year to celebrate Singapore’s independence. In *Sandcastle*, these “National Day Songs” such as “Stand Up for Singapore” which was made in 1984 and is still greatly loved today, and “Home” which is played at the beginning and the end of the film are used very effectively. I think that Singapore makes use of these songs that appeal to people’s sense of patriotism to shape its country, and that this experiment is repeated over and over again. While watching *Sandcastle*, I was thinking about all of these things: the difficulties that Singapore faces, the sense of constant urgency or burden of how they must make their country for themselves, and how they must always establish their own identities.



Takeda

Ms. Matsushita, through actually working with Boo, what impressions did you get about the director’s motivations behind the film? You mentioned Singapore’s military conscription, but could you give us some more details on what [you think] he was trying to communicate [to the audience]?



Matsushita

In Singapore, “conscientious objection” is not accepted, and apparently you could be penalized or fined if you don’t comply. Even if you go on a study abroad, you must either fulfill your NS or a jail sentence once you return. And, even after you complete your service, you are summoned every year as a reserve soldier. The country is small, so some can commute from their homes, and it is said that it isn’t as severe compared to other countries. Nevertheless, this NS to which Singaporean men must offer their youths to plays a major role in their lives.

Next there is the theme of language and identity. When Singapore declared independence, Prime Minister Lee believed that globalization was indispensable in order for Singapore to survive and he officialized a bilingual policy that promoted English and the other languages of each ethnicity. However, even among Chinese-Singaporeans there are several different dialects and no common language among [all of] them. That is why the “Speak Mandarin Campaign” started in 1979. Through this effort to get everyone to speak Mandarin, although it was artificial, Chinese-Singaporeans started to speak a shared, common version of the Chinese language. I have heard that when they travel to mainland China, they are called foreigners because of differences in accents, and so they started to wonder exactly what nationality they were. On the other hand, immigrants from China have also been pouring into Singapore. The protagonist of the film has a line in which he says, “We are immigrants as well, aren’t we?” Although they are of Chinese origin, there still seems to be friction between recent immigrants who grew up in a different environment with a different education system. Furthermore, the younger generation has become unable to speak the regional dialects of China. In Sandcastle, even though the grandchild [protagonist] can understand what his grandparents are saying, he cannot speak their dialect. However, since the “Speak Mandarin Campaign,” the number of Mandarin-speakers has risen, and the policy has worked to strengthen cultural and economic ties and influence as a part of Greater China.



Takeda

That’s fascinating. I felt that the protagonist of Sandcastle faces various other identity issues besides the military and linguistic problems that you just spoke of. Mr. Takiguchi, do you think these are general trends among Singaporeans of the same age?



Takiguchi

I cannot say that I have completely grasped how my students feel, but one thing I can say is that Singapore is still a young country, as it has only been fifty years since its founding. Just as Ms. Matsushita was saying, I think that Singapore has definitely implemented various sorts of experiments. Be it their language [policy], as soon the country declares a national policy for their students to “Speak English,” English became a sole medium of education. In Sandcastle, the protagonist’s father participated in a movement protesting against the abolishment of the Chinese-speaking curriculum in schools, and I think this is really characteristic of Singapore: to make these kinds of extremely drastic changes at the discretion of the

nation. However, repeating such changes results in a certain discontinuation, I think, such as different generations no longer sharing the same language, or several different languages being spoken in a single household. I think the students I met fully accept the fact they are a product of such “experiments.” Especially the male students; as they all enter university after completing their military services, they fully think through their paths from being a soldier to a university student. I could see their resolve from their attitudes. In that sense, I feel that the protagonist’s thoughts very accurately depict what young Singaporeans are going through today.

To Talk-show (2/3)



The audience of approximately 150 was asked for reasons for coming to this talk. The majority raised their hands for their “Interest in film” and “Interest in Singaporean and Malaysian culture and society.”

Special Screening+Talk Show Identity Issues in Singapore and Malaysia Seen through Films

Talk show (2/3)



Takeda

Ms. Matsushita, could you please tell us how Boo is situated in the Singaporean film industry? To what level is he recognized and reviewed?



Matsushita

Boo works earnestly on his films; sometimes he can be a little too serious. He doesn't make commercial advertisement, and you can really feel that he has his own beliefs and convictions in making film. He has the skills to tackle various issues in Singapore head on while also making highly entertaining works, and this applies to *Sandcastle*. You can also see this in *Apprentice*, his second feature film that was screened at the Tokyo International Film Festival last year. Singapore carries out the capital punishment system, and if you are involved in drugs, even as a drug courier, you can be sentenced to death. Even if the starting point of the film was to question this reality, Boo does not portray this directly, but rather connotes it through the story of the executioner-apprentice relationship. Boo's exceptional ability of expressing his objection against such issues by incorporating them into the story without any direct reference is also demonstrated in fields other than film. He is one of the members promoting LGBT rights through the movement "Pink Dot Sg. Rather than shouting from

the rooftops or carrying out demonstrations, this annual movement takes a softer approach by gathering in a par wearing pink.



Takeda

Just as Mr. Yoneda mentioned, Boo plans to exhibit his artwork at the “*SUNSHOWER*” exhibition?



Kataoka

We are currently discussing this internally, but are moving in the direction of exhibiting *Happy and Free* (2013) at the “*SUNSHOWER*” exhibition. The background behind *Happy and Free* (2013) is that Malaysia, including the states of Sabah and Sarawak on the island of Borneo, declared independence and became the Federation of Malaysia in 1963. Boo made a variety of works, in the form of related-materials, hypothesizing a world where Singapore did not declare independence two years later in 1965, and where it celebrates, as a part of Malaysia, the 50th anniversary of Malaysia’s unification with Sabah and Sarawak. This work was produced for the Singapore Biennale 2013. Behind the display of materials, there was a karaoke room where visitors could sing the song “Happy and Free,” celebrating the union in 1963. It is a work that situates Singaporean visitors in this hypothetical situation created by the artist where they are made to celebrate and also think about what could have happened if Singapore had not declared independence. When speaking about exhibiting this work, Boo said, “Japan is the birthplace of karaoke, and this work has some fun elements too, so I think it would be good to display it.”



Takeda

Does that mean that visitors like us can sing at the venue? That sounds like fun. Ms. Kataoka, what other Singaporean artists and works are planned for the exhibition?



Kataoka

There is an artist called **Lee Wen** (1957 –) who became famous in the 1990s for a series of works titled *Yellow Man*. I saw his performances when I was young, and he was walking in public with his entire body painted in yellow as a representation of the “yellow race.” The kind of identities that is made apparent or is evoked depends on the context, but considering his performance started in England, he was emphasizing the fact that he was self-aware of being “yellow” amidst a “white” society.

We also plan to introduce **Amanda Heng** (1951 –). She is from approximately the same generation as Lee, and was also active as a member of The Artists Village. In her practice, she pursues her identity as a woman and an individual, and in 1996 she presented the Another Woman series which confronts her relationship with her mother. It is a photographic series that shows the transition from a mother-daughter relationship to a relationship between two women and dives into a deeper understanding of the identities [of both subjects]. Fast forward two decades, she produced a series called *20 Years Later* (2016). Amanda, who by now has gone gray, is photographed with her mother in the same pose as the previous series. We plan to juxtapose both series in the exhibition.



Takeda

Mr. Takiguchi, as I said earlier, I believe that you may be the one who is most familiar with Singapore’s performing arts scene in Japan. From your

perspective, do you think that there are methods for expressing the issues of “identity” that are specific to performing arts and differ from film or fine arts? And if so, what are they?



Takiguchi

I had received this topic in advance, so today I have prepared a video of a performance. It is a play titled *Hotel* by Singaporean theatre company WILD RICE, which I also participated as a script translator. When I saw the credits at the end of *Sandcastle*, the names of Alfian Sa’at, who was the playwright for *Hotel*, and WILD RICE both appeared. *Hotel* covers the fifty years prior to and after Singapore’s independence; so it covers the duration of one hundred years.

The video playing now is of the first act, which is set in 1915 and depicts an era when Singapore was still under British rule. A British Couple come to Singapore to run a plantation. In this scene, they arrive at the hotel that is the setting for this play, and speak with the bellman. The wife says, “I see that you can speak English, too,” to which the bellman—a man born in India whose native language is Urdu—replies in broken English.

The next scene takes place ten years later in 1925.



photos courtesy of WILD RICE

In this scene, a woman working as a maid in the home of a rich family in Penang serendipitously encounters someone from her village who worked at this hotel. The maid is being abused by her master, but an English nun steps into the room to put a stop to it. Since the nun can only speak English, a locally-employed Malay officer and Chinese soldier accompany her to act as interpreters, but information is lost in translation, and a telephone game ensues. This is a very humorous scene, but the similar problem is commonly seen in reality in Singapore since long ago.

And this is the final scene of the first act.



photos courtesy of WILD RICE

It depicts the night before Singapore declares independence from Malaysia in 1965. It is a symbolic scene in which the Singaporean flag is hoisted to replace the Malaysian flag. The employees of the hotel express their uncertainty about the declaration in Malay, which was their national language then. But as soon as only the staff members of Chinese-descent are left, they switch to speaking Cantonese.



Takeda

So “language” is a very important element in this play.



Takiguchi

That’s right. As you can see, many different languages are used in this play. To be precise, there are nine in total: Malay, Tamil, Mandarin, English, Japanese, Hokkien, Cantonese, Urdu, and Tagalog. There are scenes where people sing the national anthem every time the ruler changes, and [throughout the play] a total of four different national anthems were sung: Britain’s “God Save the Queen”; Japan’s “*Kimigayo*” for during the occupation period; Malaysia’s “Negaraku [Our Country]”; and finally Singapore’s “Majulah Singapura [Onward Singapore]” for the now independent Singapore. This play candidly depicts how there have always been multiple languages coexisting in Singapore, and that communication in such conditions is itself very difficult. In fact, only eleven actors appear in this work, but they memorized all the lines in nine different languages—so in average, four to five languages for each actor, including some that were completely alien to them. An ensemble of eleven actors speaking lines in so many languages on stage itself performatively represents the diversity of languages experienced by Singapore over the past hundred years, as well as the struggles of forming an identity that comes with this.

[To Talk-Show \(3/3\)](#)



Special Screening+Talk Show Identity Issues in Singapore and Malaysia Seen through Films

Talk show (3/3)



Takeda

We are touching upon a lot of interesting topics, but I'd like to move the discussion from Singapore to Malaysia. Malaysia and Singapore, both which used to be under British rule, once declared unification, but later developed as two separate countries. Present-day Malaysia's ethnic composition and methods of economic development differ from those of Singapore, but, Mr. Takiguchi, what distinguishing characteristics do you think there are in terms of culture?



Takiguchi

Singapore is a country founded on the principle that each ethnic group is equal. Malaysia, on the other hand, clearly stipulates the special position of Bumiputras [Malays and indigenous ethnic groups] in its constitution. This, I would say, is the biggest difference between the two countries. As for culture, Malaysia has the National Culture Policy, enacted in 1973, which clearly states that the national culture must be based on the indigenous culture, i.e. Malay culture. This National Culture Policy has continued to exist as the only official cultural policy in Malaysia, and there have been no amendments to it since. In a sense, other than those of Malay-descent, ethnic groups in Malaysia must always be aware of Malay culture and the Malay people, who represent the majority, while forming their own identities. I think this is the most important characteristic.



Takeda

Mr. Yoneda and Ms. Kataoka, how do you see Malaysian artists from the perspective of identity, having conducted your research in Malaysia?



Yoneda

Just like Singapore, I got the impression that Malaysia has many works of art and artists who revisit identity on various levels. For example, one of the artists we plan to exhibit is **Yee I-Lann** (1971 –). Born to a Malaysian father who is ethnically of Chinese- and Kadazan-descent, and a mother from New Zealand, she was educated in Australia and developed her artworks focusing on photographs. For example, this *Malaysiana Series* (2002) is a work that continuously exhibits a variety of people, all who take photographs at a particular photo studio, who were gathered and grouped into different ethnicities, age, class, gender, or race. Many of her works express hybridity or diversity. Another work of hers is titled *Fluid World* (2010). She created this work inspired by the indigenous ethnic groups who once lived around waterways. It is made with batik dye, and you can interpret many different things from it. For example, you can see issues surrounding femininity and gender from the fact that batik was the work of female craftsmen. And, there is also the motif of “water.” Yee I-Lann’s home state of Sabah, on the island of Borneo, has very distinct rainy and dry seasons, and there are some towns where houses become flooded when the rainfall is especially heavy. Water damage has become such a problem in these towns that they are becoming depopulated. As shown in the title of the work, “Fluid”, this work suggests how culture can be fluid, and how things are fundamentally subject to constant flow.



Kataoka

In addition, there is a group named **Pangrok Sulap** from a generation younger than Yee I-Lann. This group is also from Sabah, and they live in a town just inland from the state capital of Kota Kinabalu. We were told that from Sabah, the Malaysian peninsula appears to be at the center even though Sabah is very much a part of Malaysia. That is, despite the fact that Sabah and Sarawak joined Malaysia in 1963, the people strongly feel that their existence have been forgotten, and that there is a hierarchy between them and the mainlanders. Pangrok Sulap have created a work titled *MA=FIL=IND* (2015). In 1963, there was a plan called “Maphilindo” to consider Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia as a single country. Although this plan was not realized, these [artist]-curators from the younger generation posed a question to artists of their own generation: “What would have happened if Maphilindo had been realized?”



Takeda

Finally, I would like to discuss *SEPET*, which we will screen after this talk. Yasmin Ahmad, the director of *SEPET*, was born in 1958 but passed away suddenly in 2009 at the age of fifty-one, leaving us with five feature films. Ms. Matsushita served as an interpreter when Yasmin’s film was screened at the Tokyo International Film Festival, and I have heard that Mr. Takiguchi was a close friend of the director when he lived in Malaysia and Singapore. Could you please tell us what her position was in the history of Malaysian film, and what kind of impact she left?



Matsushita

Although she also made the debut feature *RABUN* in 2002, *SEPET* gained a lot of attention as one of her early works. In one scene of *SEPET*, there is a line that goes, “Malaysia once had a golden age of cinema, but what about now?” Indeed, Malaysian cinema was stagnant for many years. I think that

you could say that under such circumstances, Yasmin created a trend that triggered the world to pay attention to Malaysian film. She had already made unique and outstanding works as the artistic director of an advertising agency, so that may have made it easier for her to make her debut as a film director. Without any commercial backing, she gained all this attention, and that made it easier for other people to follow her. Malay is the official language of Malaysia, and films made in other languages are given the cold shoulder, being treated as foreign films and even incurring extra taxes, or never making it to an actual premiere. It's not as though Yasmin overcame such a state, but you could say that she created a sense of solidarity regardless of race, and opened the gates for people who have not graduated from film schools, even Chinese and Indians, to make films too.



Takeda

Mr. Takiguchi prepared some images of a Malaysian performing arts work. While introducing this, could you please talk about what Yasmin was aiming for and how she is regarded in Malaysia where Malay-, Chinese-, and Indian-Malaysians have created a society where they hardly interact with each other?



Takiguchi

First, the images I have prepared are from a performance titled *Break-ing 擊破 Ka Si Pe Cah* which also toured to Japan and staged at Setagaya Public Theatre after its premier in Malaysia. In Malaysia, because of the language barriers, it is not very common to create plays that go beyond ethnic groups. This work, however, was made as a sort of intercultural collaboration by actors who perform in Malay, Chinese, and English. What's happening in this scene is an experiment in which young Chinese actors perform the exact same actions and lines as *Between Two Classes (Antara Dua Dariat, 1960)*, a film directed by P. Ramlee (1929–1973) who was active during the golden age of Malaysian film. Of course, they all learned Malay in schools, and thus are fluent in the language. But this very interesting experiment shows that, even while they converse naturally in Malay, the remnants of their Chinese physicality awkwardly seeps through from within their bodies. Such instances show that there are some things that are very difficult or impossible to overcome or even reconcile. I think this is the same in both Malaysia and Singapore, but when your everyday life is in a country where so many cultures and languages exist, you can never really assume that everything, 100 percent of what you think or communicate will get across to the other person. Everyone is very well-aware of that limit, and various people in the world of theater, film, and visual arts are experimenting and trying to figure out how to live together, how to get along as a single country. I think that Yasmin's series of works relentlessly question how people with diverse cultures could live side by side.



Takeda

Our time has gone by so quickly. Even during the “*SUNSHOWER*” exhibition, we are hoping for visitors to enjoy the exhibition itself at both venues, and also the related lectures and seminars focused on the cultures, societies, and livelihoods of each country and region in Southeast Asia. In closing, Ms. Kataoka, could you give us a taste of what we can look forward to in the exhibition?



Kataoka

As I mentioned in the beginning, the “*SUNSHOWER*” exhibition is the largest exhibit ever to introduce the contemporary art of Southeast Asia. In this

exhibition, artists and works from all ten ASEAN countries are introduced. While the exhibit spans from the 1980s to the present day, we hope to not only introduce the newest and youngest generations, but also encourage visitors to think about how concerns have shifted due to generational changes, and what sort of social, economic, and historical transformations can be read through these works from the 1980s to the present day. In that sense, I think this exhibition will have many elements that are worth figuring out for the visitors. We often tend to look at “Southeast Asia” or “ASEAN” as a single entity. But circumstances vary in each country, and I think it is important to understand those differences. Moreover, I think visitors will be able to strongly feel the cultural ties among Asian regions, including Japan, and I hope to make this an exhibition present that kind of perspective; a perspective that shows how each of the differing circumstances are in fact connected to the region as a whole.



Takeda

Thank you very much. That brings an end to this talk. Thank you to the speakers and to you all for joining us today.



Photo: Seiya Kawamoto

SEA
PROJECT

Curatorial Meeting 01

2015.08.03 – 2015.08.04

In August, 2015, the curators from the National Art Center, Tokyo, the Mori Art Museum, and those from Southeast Asia all gathered in Tokyo for the inaugural curatorial meeting. This marked the very beginning of the “SEA PROJECT.”



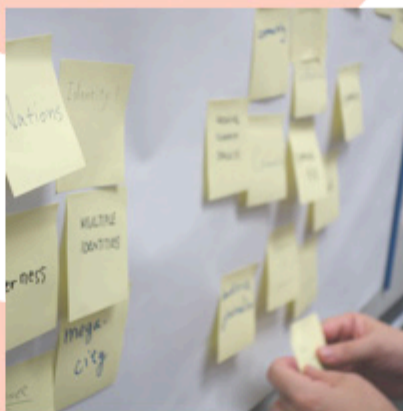
Performance

Time

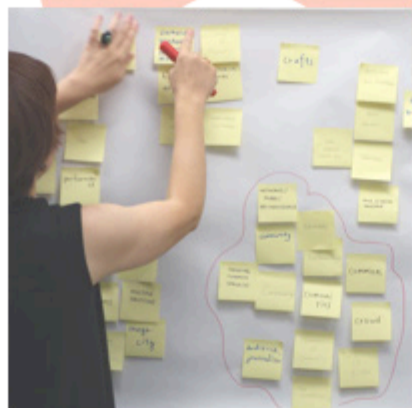
Community

Library

Transforming Cities



History



Identity

Mapping

Conceptualism

Collectivity

Teaching, Learning, Sharing

Curatorial Meeting 02

2016.02.29 – 2016.03.02

All the curators gathered to the National Art Center, Tokyo, at the end of February 2016 to further discuss the exhibition concept, structure, and artists. Different key terms popped up here and there, as the curators debated back and forth about the exhibition.



Energy of the Streets



*Mapping
&
Migration*

*Spirituality
&
Nature*



*Non-museum
Practices*



What Matters?

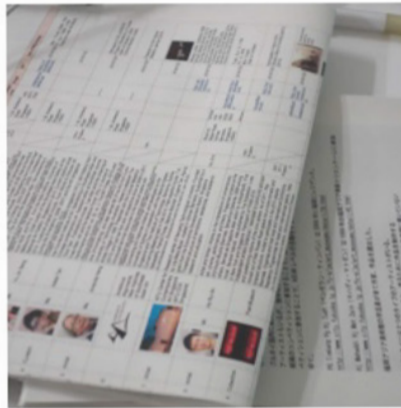
*Belief System
&*



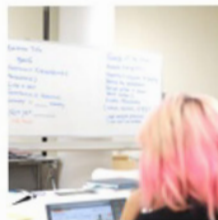


What Matters?

*Belief System
&
Power*



*Kinship
&
Relationship*



*More Urgent
than the Museum*



*Memory
&
imagination of Hardship*



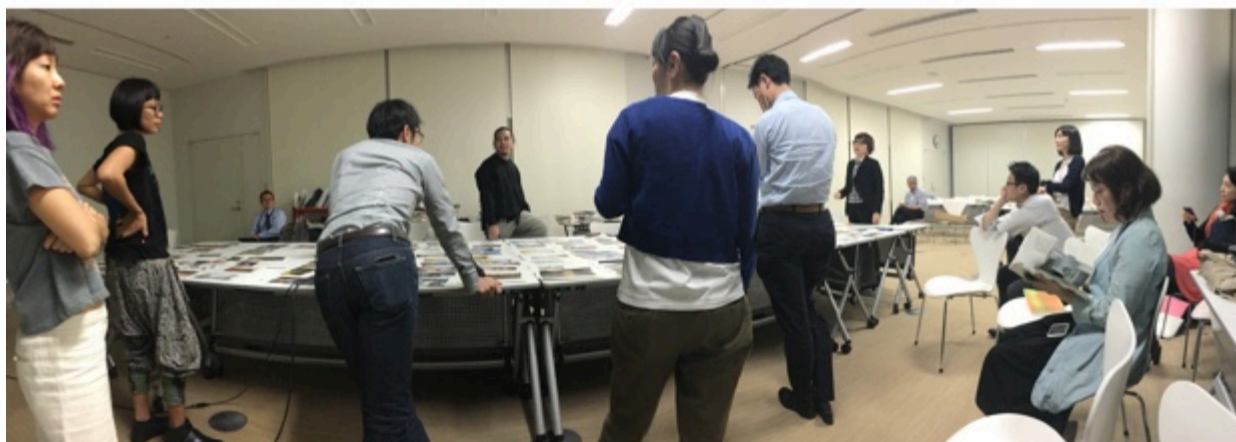
Behind the Development

Curatorial Meeting 03

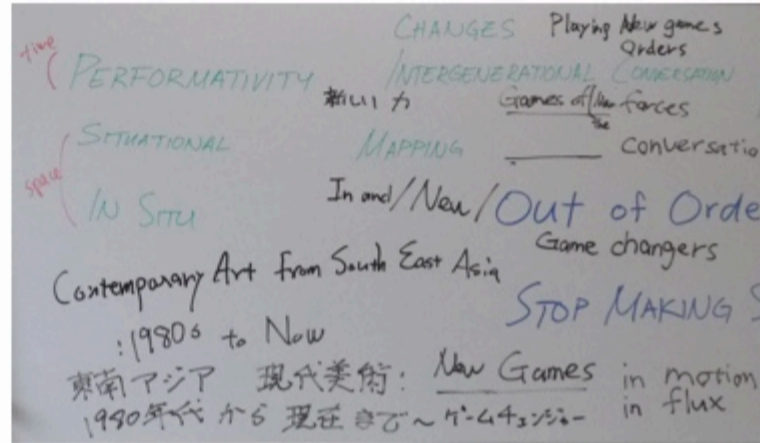
2016.05.23 – 2016.05.26

The third Curatorial Meeting was held at the National Art Center, Tokyo, toward the end of May 2016. Over the course of four days, the curators briefly shared with each other the Thai research trip and revisited the themes and artists selected at the last Curatorial Meeting on days 1 and 2, reshuffled and re-organized the artists according to the newly set themes on day 3, and finally, on day 4, worked on the floor plan for the exhibition for both venues. Expanding on and deepening the discussions from the previous meetings and exposure to Southeast Asia's art from the research trips in the ten countries made the four-day meeting all the more productive toward next year's exhibition.

day 1



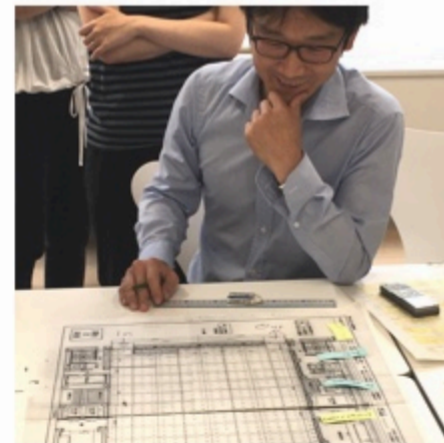
day 2



day 3



day 4



Curatorial Meeting 04

2016.12.21-2016.12.22

The forth Curatorial Meeting was held at the National Art Center, Tokyo, at the end of December 2016. The curators reviewed the artist, artworks, the floor plan for the exhibition for both venues, and had a discussion about the schedule up to Opening, Public Programs and events during the exhibition and catalog. While thinking about the exhibition “SUNSHOWER: Contemporary Art in Southeast Asia 1980s to Now” in next July, 2017, it became meaningful two days that the curatorial team exchanged opinions multidirectionally and continued discussion.



Curatorial Meetings

- Curatorial Meeting 04
- Curatorial Meeting 03
- Curatorial Meeting 02
- Curatorial Meeting 01