PROJECT MUSE®

Of Poems in a Recalcitrant Landscape: An Interview with Stanley J. O'Connor

Pamela N. Corey, Stanley J. O'Connor

Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia,
Volume 1, Number 1, March 2017, pp. 161-183 (Article)

Published by NUS Press Pte Ltd

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/sen.2017.0005>

➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/646480>

Of Poems in a Recalcitrant Landscape:

An Interview with Stanley J. O'Connor

PAMELA N. COREY | STANLEY J. O'CONNOR

Stanley J. O'Connor, 2010.
Courtesy of the Southeast Asia
Program, Cornell University

STANLEY J. O'CONNOR is considered a pioneer in the field of Southeast Asian art history and is credited with having shaped a new school of methods and approaches to the field, particularly in his emphasis on understanding the contexts in which objects have been, and continue to be, entangled in human lives. His former students, including Jan Mrázek, Pattaratorn Chirapravati, Nora A. Taylor, Kaja McGowan, John Miksic, Apinan Poshyananda, Hilda Soemantri and Astri Wright produced creative, ambitious and groundbreaking scholarship on such topics as votive tablets, ceramics, *wayang* puppets,

[**Southeast of Now**
Vol. 1 No. 1 (March 2017), pp. 161–83]

ritual deposit boxes, and modern and contemporary art. As witnessed in an anthology of essays published on the occasion of his retirement, there was no prevalent cultural or material focus among his former doctoral students, no chronological or geographical predilection.¹ This is what opened the doors of a sub-discipline that had, since its colonial-era institutionalisation, been cast around the monumental, permanent, epigraphic and iconographic. Centred around O'Connor, at Cornell University, in rural upstate New York, such studies expanded the horizons of a field that, at the time, occupied a place of "discomfort" in art historical studies within the structure of Euro-American academe.

Yet, to a certain extent, it was the very context of US relations with Southeast Asia in the 1950s and 1960s that enabled support for area studies programmes at schools like Cornell. Such programmes would create networks of enterprising faculty and students, ultimately establishing international communities striving to deepen and broaden interdisciplinary knowledge about Southeast Asia. As his biography and achievements are detailed in various other texts, I just note here—and he elaborates further in this interview—that it was through this encounter with Cornell's Southeast Asia Program (SEAP), from 1959–60, when he took a nine-month leave from the Central Intelligence Agency, that O'Connor decided to change his career path from government to art history.² In the field of art history he would bear a far-reaching influence, publishing texts in books, journals and exhibition catalogues, on topics ranging from archaeology, ceramics, iron working, art connoisseurship and education, and contemporary art.³ At Cornell itself he transformed the art history department, making it a central draw for students from around the world to come to study Southeast Asian art. As Director of the Southeast Asia Program, he also strengthened its scholarly outreach by initiating the *Southeast Asia Program Bulletin*, a now semi-annual and online compendium of announcements and essays that continues to be followed by SEAP alumni and colleagues around the world.

As someone who recently experienced his guidance on a doctoral committee, I can personally attest to the quality of O'Connor's presence as a scholar-teacher. Much of this impression is owed to his skill in word craft; it is no surprise that he writes poetry.⁴ This interview was, in large part, driven by the desire to record the history of his relationship with Southeast Asian art in his own words, to allow the pictures he weaves through language to emerge in his own voice. Through his powers of description, O'Connor has been known for his ability to make his students sense what cannot be seen, to see beyond the surface of the images projected on screens or reproduced in the pages of books—that is, when he was not teaching in the museum or overturning bags

of potsherds on a classroom table. His survey course on Asian art is imprinted in the memories of former undergraduate students who may have been majors in medieval art or modern art.⁵ Even former US State Department employees sent to Cornell for Southeast Asian language and area studies training rue having missed the opportunity to take his courses.⁶ It is with no theatrical excess that some of his former graduate students, now senior scholars in established institutions, point to him saying that this is where it all began, or that they owe their career to him.⁷

Despite having retired almost 20 years ago, O'Connor continues to serve on doctoral committees and raise acute suggestions, ranging from questions of language and representation to deeper inquiries of a more philosophical nature. He has been known to create shifts both subtle and profound in the very paradigms of his students' projects. To this day, whether they be foragers

Stanley J. O'Connor. Photograph by Sol Goldberg, Cornell University Photography. Courtesy of the Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University

of ancient beads or sherds or participant-observers of “the contemporary”, O’Connor’s students continue to be inspired by the way he has expressed our enchanted and perplexed relationship with the art we are studying from Southeast Asia.

Pamela N. Corey (PNC): *Oliver Wolters has described your undergraduate and graduate studies in government, and your subsequent work as a CIA analyst. Was it this work that first brought you to Southeast Asia? Can you describe the moment that incisively changed your life, in terms of deciding to leave government work in order to pursue a much more tenuous career path in Southeast Asian art history?*

Stanley J. O’Connor (SJO): When I began graduate study in 1951, there was no course offered on Southeast Asia. It was when I joined the CIA in 1952 that I first began to learn about the region. It would be difficult, now, to imagine how few scholars were doing research within Southeast Asia, how very limited our knowledge base in the US academy actually was. Once the region moved from the periphery of US policy to a central focus with both anti-colonial struggle and the developing military involvement with Vietnam, the situation became quite dire because of an imbalance between a growing national interest and diminished capabilities for assessing policy alternatives.

I was given a study leave in 1959 and I elected to spend the academic year at Cornell with its Southeast Asia Program. A few of its Data Papers had crossed my desk, and they offered fundamental studies remarkable for their acuity and which were based on informed encounters in the field. Very little prepared me for the intense, high-energy atmosphere of 102, West Avenue, SEAP’s building for graduate students, which was the centre of its intellectual life. I was soon caught up in the general fever.

Aside from the brilliant students who had been drawn to a region that seemed to offer so much to explore, what was remarkable was the way an area and language programme brings people from varied disciplinary perspectives to work alongside each other on what they had in common: fascination with place, things showing up in a seemingly protean physical and social context. There was a present-mindedness about all this, a focus on actions done and actions undergone; an intertwining of the creative energies of the material environment with human wishes and imagination.

George McT. Kahin (left) and Stanley J. O'Connor (right), 1980s. Photograph courtesy of the Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University

I soon realised that I wanted to be part of this scene and especially to learn how the past of the region had prepared the shape of the present. After returning to Washington for a year to repay my study leave, I returned to Cornell in 1961 as a graduate student.

PNC: *Who were your teachers? What did each of them bring to bear on your own approach to the material and, later, your own pedagogical methods?*

SJO: Oliver Wolters was teacher, friend and a formative influence. He developed a constantly evolving and deepening picture of what it might have been to be alive in ancient Southeast Asia. He discriminated patterns of behaviour, of ruling tendencies, patterns that persisted in the region over many centuries. For example, he developed a subtle form of historical connection, something beyond influence and response, so that in studying the obvious embrace in Southeast Asia of categories of thought shared with India, he would trace the creative employment of these cognitive structures within local realities. We are familiar with this today in the nexus of the global and the local. No one before him had charted, so imaginatively, the contours of his chosen field of study or had employed, to such stunning effect, such a wide range of sources and methods.

I should add that my own work on the settlements and art of southern Thailand was inspired by his quest for the trading kingdom of Srivijaya and its kind of historical geography, with its sailing charts, Chinese diplomatic reports and inscriptions. I was already fascinated with Singapore before I became a student at Cornell. It is at the hinge between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea and thus as at the crossroads of world trade. The strategic importance also of the Straits of Malacca is an inescapable fact of geography, and add to this that something like half the world's tin supply is found in southern Thailand. I was naturally drawn to the region even before I began to look at archaeological reports with their massive debris of broken Chinese and Middle Eastern potsherds, which was the residue of international trade. This was the framework within which it was possible to believe that a search on the ground for ancient settlements and works of art would be an exciting thesis topic.

LEFT: Linga in Nakhon Si Thammarat, Thailand. Photograph by Stanley J. O'Connor; the subject of his essay is "Some Early Śiva Lingas in Nakhon Si Thammarat, Penninsular Thailand", *Journal of the Siam Society* 71 (1983): 1–5

RIGHT: Stone Viṣṇu from Si Chon. Collection of Charat School, Nagara Sri Dharmaraja. Photograph by Stanley J. O'Connor published in "Si Chon: An Early Settlement in Peninsular Thailand", *Journal of the Siam Society* 56, 1 (1968): 7

Singapore Harbour in the 1960s. Photograph by Stanley J. O'Connor

Aside from the writings of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, most of my other teachers have been friends and graduate students with whom I have worked. One who ignited my interest in seeing place as a web of inference in which the bits and pieces of the world are magnetised into a coherence by our actions, our attention and our habit of life was Tom Harrisson. By joining topographical fact with experience and imagination in his survey of the Sarawak River Delta, he was able to bring a muddy, irresolute and recalcitrant landscape into a compassable order. A great way to see the lives of things caught in the flow of existence. And, of course, since Harrisson was a naturalist, social scientist, archaeologist and museum director, everything gets connected to everything else. Sometimes the force, freshness and energy of his voice rather overwhelmed the sobriety of his intent, resulting in some passages of jittery, serpentine, figurative prose. What I found attractive was his pure beguilement by life, a hard, bright, vitalising core of wonder.

From Alexander Griswold, I had an example of iconographic and formal analysis employed in the service of large and important research questions. He contributed greatly in demonstrating that Southeast Asian art history could be a vital field of study. For example, Alex introduced me to cultural geography with his study of replications in Burma, Thailand and China of the sanctuary marking the actual site of the Buddha's enlightenment in India. While the Mahabodhi sanctuary was and remains a great pilgrimage destination, it was, nevertheless, possible to transpose the sense of a sacred landscape to the

Stanley J. O'Connor (far left) and Tom Harrisson (far right) with a group of Sarawak Government officials examining a petroglyph at Santubong, Sarawak, in 1966. Photograph © Sarawak Museum. Courtesy of the Sarawak Museum and Stanley J. O'Connor

Petroglyph and excavation team, with O'Connor on the right, Santubong, Sarawak, 1966. Photographs by the Sarawak Museum. Courtesy of Stanley J. O'Connor

fields, forests and villages of Southeast Asia by building faithful replicas of the shrine, which would shelter a cutting of the actual tree of enlightenment. This likely was not confined to Buddhism but is also a feature of toponyms in Southeast Asia drawn from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.⁸

The Wat Jet Yot (Wat Potharam Mahavihara) in Chiang Mai, Thailand, 1973. Photograph by Stanley J. O'Connor

In several essays, Alex described the procedures of the sculptors in the casting of a bronze Buddha image. Together with the consecration rituals, one experiences the intertwining of the perceptual, physical presence with the embodied sense of its reception as a living encounter. This is also made remarkably alive by Michael Ondaatje in his description of a consecration ritual in Sri Lanka in the concluding page of his novel *Anil's Ghost*.⁹

PNC: *In your writing, there is a strong attachment to metalworking and the phenomenology of molten and reconstituted materials. What was the source of this fascination?*

SJO: Under Tom's direction, the Sarawak Museum staff and local villagers spent many seasons excavating the ancient trading station and iron-working

centre that was under the ground at Santubong. He invited me to participate in the last season of work in 1966, and it was that experience that ignited my interest in the symbolic aspects of metallurgy. At one of the major sites, Jaong, the great tonnage of iron slag and ceramics was mixed in and around a series of enigmatic petroglyphs with their baffling messages. There were also a number of burials under an extensive plane of hornfels pebbles, some of which contained gold-foil covers for the eyes. Perhaps the dead were the viewers for whom the petroglyphs were intended. It was a bewildering mix of an industry of long duration and significant scale, empirical in process but touched seemingly with symbolic meaning. I began to see that the smith and the smelter, as masters of process and the transformation of matter, were also actors in spiritual salvation and release. It was not difficult to find that this intuition was widely shared in ancient Southeast Asia.

Relief of smithy at Candi Sukuh, central Java. On the left is a smith forging a weapon. In the centre is a dancing elephant-headed figure. On the far right is an assistant operating the traditional double-piston bellows of Southeast Asia. Photograph by Stanley J. O'Connor and the subject of his essay "Metallurgy and Immortality at Caṇḍi Sukuh, Central Java", *Indonesia* 39 (April 1985): 53–70

PNC: *I am also curious about the legacy of Claire Holt at Cornell and within the field of Indonesian and Southeast Asian art history. For many of those interested in Indonesian modern and contemporary art, Cornell is synonymous with Claire Holt. T.K. Sabapathy has said that Holt's Art in Indonesia was the first to really situate living traditions and the modern within textbook histories of Southeast Asian art,¹⁰ which resonates with your own philosophy regarding the mutual constitution of behaviours, beliefs and material production in the region.*

SJO: Claire Holt was a visiting faculty member in the Southeast Asia Program, which arranged for me to attend one course she organised on Indonesian art. Although she was a significant presence among the graduate students focusing on Indonesia, she was not a member of the art history faculty and I saw relatively little of her. Her wide embrace of the arts of daily life, including modern art, was much to be admired, and unusual for the period in which she was writing her book on Indonesian art.

It was not until the 1980s that students at Cornell were developing the nascent academic study of contemporary art in Southeast Asia. This is a subject pioneered by Claire Holt, but it took years before students found their way to making it the centre of their academic life. I was dragged along by their enthusiasm, despite previously attending to research on early Southeast Asia.

PNC: *In his essay for Studies in Southeast Asian Art, Oliver Wolters provided the following analogy: "At the time I likened him to a bomber pilot, flying serenely through bursts of flak."¹¹ What was it like to teach Southeast Asian art in the US university classroom in the 1970s and 1980s? Do you think institutional attitudes toward Southeast Asian art have significantly evolved since?*

SJO: Southeast Asian Studies grew in response to events following World War II and was dominated by the social sciences. The impetus for funding was the need for a knowledge base adequate to support initiatives in a region where US interests were engaged. Both private foundations and government support increased dramatically and social science faculty appointments came out of these funds.

In 1964, when I started teaching Southeast Asian art, the subject was not really visible in the American academy. In the 1960s and into the 1970s there was rather little graduate student interest in this field of art history, and it was not at all clear that teaching jobs would open up. Richard Cooler was a pioneering student and he wrote a valuable thesis, which was later published,

on the afterlife of bronze drums in the uplands of Burma and Thailand. John Miksic was an anthropology student who also studied art history. He has contributed greatly to our knowledge of early Southeast Asian culture. The same is true of Edmund Edwards McKinnon and Barbara Harrisson. The latter, it should be noted, earned the rare distinction of being awarded an honorary doctorate from Tulane University while still enrolled at Cornell as a PhD candidate.

In terms of pedagogy, at that time there was very little to read that would engage a broad undergraduate audience. Insofar as the subject was developed at all, it was treated as an annex to South Asian art. For example, Sherman Lee's *A History of Far Eastern Art* allotted 25 of its almost 500 pages to the subject.¹² The bibliography for that section lists nine books. That was in 1973. While colonial scholars had written brilliant specialised studies mostly focused on the major architectural monuments of the region, those in French and Dutch were not available to undergraduates.

At the beginning, the burning questions were pedagogical. I certainly did not have a clear vision of what art history could or should be. I was, however, greatly aware that the subject was framed at Cornell by its association with an area and language programme with its own energies and imagination, emphasising the present and offering the perspectives of several specialised disciplines, each churning in its own competence, but providing a rounded vision of human effort in a common space. Perhaps, as a consequence, I began to see art as a basic human impulse to give visibility to existence, to create a space of resonances between material fact and human consciousness. This conjunction is what art history studies. At its essence, it is a reasoned reflection on the connection between visual form and human experience. The questions that seem to me to matter are existential. The object of inquiry is a physically embodied form whose properties, meanings and effects only emerge in time through the interests and desires of those who view it, use it and value it. Because of its in-betweenness, art is never simply contained in its perceptual form but is framed by the social imagination. Thus art history is not governed by any single logic of inquiry or body of empirical theory but is, instead, a bundle of activities, each responsive to diverse critical and theoretical discourses that have proven productive in their employment. I should add that this last sentence is much influenced by M.H. Abrams' essay "What's the Use of Theorizing about the Arts?".¹³

As for your question about the evolution of institutional attitudes towards Southeast Asian arts, the answer is yes. Today, there are many people in universities and museums with a specialisation in that field. There is a lot being published and at a very high level of intellectual energy.¹⁴

PNC: Wolters also described how *“Some members of his department are believed to have thought that he resembled some kind of scavenger because he was interested in such heterogeneous objects.”*¹⁵ *It seems to me that your approach to Southeast Asian art, which embraced a more encompassing view of its scope, may have presented challenges in terms of methodological approaches, the same challenges that face scholars of contemporary art today. Robert Brown even noted that, “In part, perhaps, the desire to find art that can be spoken for by the people who made it has led O’Connor’s students to work on modern material, to study things that are part of everyday life, or at least modern life, and for which we thus have the written and oral evidence to treat it as part of people’s lives.”*¹⁶ *The avenue into modern and contemporary art seems to have been an inevitable outcome for many of your students.*

*My question has to do with the fact that these fields—Southeast Asian art and contemporary art—were, and are, in a sense, undisciplined fields by virtue of their interdisciplinarity. Some of this integration of approaches and disciplinary methods is discussed in your essay on humane literacy and Southeast Asian art.*¹⁷ *While the blurring of boundaries has certainly provided new lenses and enriched our understanding of such objects and their life-worlds, in my view, the line between anthropology and art history in relation to Southeast Asian art has been the finest and, at times, produced a space of discomfort. It is the overemphasis on context, a tendency to read contemporary artworks as signs of tradition and historical representation, that has fallen under criticism. Have you ever been concerned about the possibility that such studies of Southeast Asian art could be critiqued for falling under the purview of anthropology rather than art history, further undermining the case for it to be taught, in its own right, in academic departments of art history?*

SJO: It has been 29 years since the publication of *Writing Culture* by James Clifford and George Marcus,¹⁸ and since then many anthropologists are wondering about the boundaries between literature and anthropology. Archaeology, as a positivist science, is confronted with post-processual archaeologies that are influenced by recent continental thought with its anti-realist direction. Disciplinary boundary-keeping is why the culture conflicts of the recent past have been so heated.

Art history has not been untouched by these tensions in how we consider the work to exist in history or what potential agency it might have in shaping the world we make and share together. Whether as a critical or social practice,

or an interpretive strategy, art history is caught up in the creative destruction that characterises intellectual life. But what is central remains: the primacy of the created work itself. People are drawn to study about art by the same impulse that makes them deepen their engagement with such other realms of absorbing human interest as religion or literature. Learning here is fluid and interdependent, and is progressive or developmental only in the sense that it deepens and becomes linked to pertinent contexts and, usually, a plurality of theoretical approaches. Its study may be organised by period, place, medium or topic but I would urge that its aim should be preparation for engaging with the art of one's own time as part of the ongoing definition of the self.

I don't think the practice of art history would be confused with the anthropology curriculum. While two of the scholars I have worked with, Nora A. Taylor and Kaja McGowan, have an extensive background in anthropology, which is reflected in their approach, both of them place the aesthetic experience as the central focus of their work.

PNC: *What challenges did you face as an advisor when several of your students delved into the uncharted territory of scripting narratives of modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art? What did you learn from your graduate students working on those topics?*

SJO: The challenge was nicely put by Apinan Poshyananda when writing of the contemporary art scene in Thailand in 1993: "Everything is in a real mess but full of vivacity and vibrancy."¹⁹ He was writing in the book that accompanied the first Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art in 1993, which marked the fully realised appearance of an art world that was both centre-less and boundary-less. The title of the book was *Tradition and Change: Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific*, and acknowledged that contemporary art came trailing clouds of a rich tradition, located not in featureless space but at the nexus of the global and the local.

It was to be expected that the gifted students who came to Cornell during this time of ferment would find their way into the contemporary art field. Among the issues that they had to grasp were whether, in the face of such change, would today's art replenish itself from the extraordinarily vital achievement of tradition of which all of them had a considerable knowledge, or is the past fated to sink into memory. Would the cosmopolitan art of the present necessarily base itself on an adversarial relation with tradition? Would there be an irresistible homogenisation of art worlds under the pressure of instant communication, the spread of global capitalism and, with it, the high-octane fuel of fast money?

What I think we were all learning is that artworks are not self-subsistent entities sealed in their perceptual boundaries. Instead, they may be seen as

ไทยประเพณีให้กว้างขวางยิ่งขึ้น วงจำหน่าย
แล้วควมร้านขายหนังสือ และห้างสรรพสินค้า
ขึ้นนำในเขตกรุงเทพมหานคร

● คณะกรรมการโครงการสถาบัน
การศึกษาศาสนาและวัฒนธรรม หลวงปู่เทส
สุธัญโญ จัดงาน "มหกรรมวันดีด้า
ประเพณี" เพื่อหาทุนสร้างสถาบันการศึกษา
ศาสนาและวัฒนธรรมหลวงปู่เทส สุธัญโญ
ระหว่างวันที่ ๒๒-๒๔ มิถุนายน ๒๕๓๑
ที่กรมส่งเสริมการพาณิชย์ ถนนราชดำเนิน
(สี่แยกคลองวัว) กรุงเทพมหานคร

● ผลการประกวดจิตรกรรมเฉลิมพระ
เกียรติ ๖๐ ปี แห่งการสถาปนาชาติไทย เจริญวงศ์
๑.๖ ด้านภาพ ศิลปินอีสานคว้ารางวัลยอดเยี่ยม
“ผู้กันทอง” จากภาพ “แสงสว่างจาก
หลังबारमी” พร้อมเงินรางวัล ๓ แสนบาท
โดยมีศิลปินชั้นนำของไทยและศิลปินพื้นบ้าน
ด้านนาควารางวัลอีก ๑๑ คน

● **ทอม่อเจ้าขาววิ** ชักพันธ์ ประสาน
คณะกรรมการคัดเลือกและตัดสินประกวด
จิตรกรรมและดนตรีไทย ร. ๕ เป็นเหตุว่า
"การประกวดจิตรกรรมและดนตรี
ไทย ร. ๕ มีมติปี ๑๑๒๒ ส่งผลงานเข้า
ประกวดวันที่ ๑๔๔๔ และคณะกรรมการ
ตัดสินได้พิจารณาคัดเลือกพระพุทธรูป
พุทธ ๒๒ เมษายน ที่ผ่านมา ปรากฏว่า
ออกเยี่ยม "พุทธรูป" ได้แก่ นายสม
ไชยธรรม ศิลปินแห่งชาติ พุทธธรูป
จากผลงาน "แสงสว่างจากหลังร้าน"
ได้รับเงินรางวัล ๑๐,๐๐๐ บาท

“รางวัลที่ ๑ ได้แก่ นายสุวิทย์
เฉาทอง ชื่อผลงาน “รวันด์เจ” ได้รับ
เงินรางวัล ๒๐๐,๐๐๐ บาท รางวัลที่ ๒ ได้แก่
นายสุวิทย์ เสาคุ้ม ชื่อผลงาน “พระพ่อ
ข้าหลวงของท้าวโศก” ได้เงินรางวัล

อภิรักษ์ โปษยานันท์ (คนที่ ๓ จากซ้าย)
ถ่ายรูปร่วมกับอาจารย์ที่ปรึกษา ที่หอศิลป
มหาวิทยาลัยคอร์เนล สหรัฐอเมริกา

● **อดินันท์ โปษยานนท์** นักศึกษาปริญญาเอก สาขาประวัติศาสตร์ศิลปะร่วมสมัย มหาวิทยาลัยลอนดอน ประเทศอังกฤษ เจ้าของผลงานชุด **"ตอเหลืงให้โลกดู"** เมื่อราว ๒ ปีก่อน ได้รับเกียรติจากพิพิธภัณฑ์ศิลปะ Herbert F. Johnson ของมหาวิทยาลัยชิคาโก ให้จัดแสดงผลงาน **"ศิลปะที่โล"** ชื่อ **"BLUE LAUGHTER"** ซึ่งเป็นงานแสดงศิลปะที่ใช้เทคโนโลยีใหม่เป็นงานแสดงที่โดดเด่นหรืออาจกล่าวได้ว่าแปลก

โดยปกติแล้ว พิธีภัณฑ์ Herbert F. Johnson ของมหาวิทยาลัยคอร์เนลจะจัดแสดงให้เฉพาะศิลปินที่มีผลงานยาวนานมาพอสมควร จึงนับเป็นเกียรติอย่างยิ่งสำหรับ อิกนัซ โพยานันท์ ซึ่งยังเป็นนักศึกษาอยู่ และยังเป็นความภาคภูมิใจของบรรดานักเรียน

ไทยในอเมริกาอีกด้วย

ผลงานชุดดังกล่าวนี้ จะนำกลับมา
แสดงที่เมืองไทยในชื่อ "เสียงหัวเราะสีฟ้า
ภาค ๒" ระหว่างวันที่ ๒๖ มิถุนายน - ๓๐
กรกฎาคม ๒๕๓๐ ณ พิพิธภัณฑ์สถานแห่ง
ชาติ หอศิลป์ ถนนเจ้าฟ้า กรุงเทพฯ

การใช้ “ตำนาน” ที่น่าสนใจมากกว่า
๒๐๐ ตำนาน พร้อมภาพประกอบเสริมความ
เข้าใจ ราคา ๔๑ บาท

● **"กลุ่มสิบโท"** จะเปลี่ยนชื่อมาจาก **"กลุ่มท่านดูจ"** แต่ก็ยังคงมีหน้าที่งานในลักษณะเดิม ทั่วประเทศ ได้รับอนุญาตจากท่านเจ้าอาวาสวัดเสมียนนารี เขตบางเขน กทม. ให้เขียนภาพจิตรกรรมฝาผนังไทยประเพณี

ในเนื้อหา พระราชพิธี ๑๒ เดือน และการ
สมโภชกรุงรัตนโกสินทร์ ๒๐๐ ปี เนื้อที่
ประมาณ ๑๖๐ ตารางเมตร ซึ่งคาดว่าจะต้องใช้
เวลาถึง ๓ ปีเศษจึงจะแล้วเสร็จ

นอกจากนี้ “กลุ่มสิบโท” ยังได้จัดพิมพ์
ไปสการ์ดิจรกรรมไทยจากวัดอุดมมงคล
กาญจนบุรี โดยได้รับทุนสนับสนุนจากสำนัก
พิมพ์ผู้ฝัน ออกจำหน่ายเพื่อเผยแพร่จิตรกรรม

embodied energies that become present in a socially imagined horizon. We are not referring to meaning at a theoretical level, but simply the way people get on in the world, the expectations they have of how things fit together. Ultimately this sense of the social imagination has its first formulation in the work of Cornelius Castoriadis, but has recently been restated by Charles Taylor in *Modern Social Imaginaries* and employed with brilliance in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*.²⁰

PNC: *Right now "Southeast Asian contemporary art" is developing a major presence on the global art stage, not in little part due to the role of Singapore in investing major capital in local institutions, biennials and art fairs to push its prestige as a major cultural (alongside economic) centre in Asia. But, as a result, we do see an unprecedented level of discursive activity and attentiveness to the subject throughout Southeast Asia, and in places like Australia and the UK. If you were, in large part, responsible for siting studies of Southeast Asian art history in Ithaca, New York in the 1980s and 1990s (drawing graduate students from Southeast Asia proper), what constellation of factors has sited such studies elsewhere?*

SJO: Let's turn this around and ask: Why was it difficult initially to persuade university administrators to expand Southeast Asian studies in the 1960s despite a growing US strategic involvement with the region? It was a hard sell because it was distant, not well known, and Asia itself was not the economic power it has now become. Globalisation and technological change have altered the condition of life everywhere; space has shrunk dramatically; Asia is on course to becoming the dominant economy in the world.

The rocket fuel for a commercial art world is disposable income and a market in which producers and patrons are brought together through a network of public institutions such as art galleries, critics, innovative curators, artists' associations, media, auctions and grandly visible occasions such as biennial exhibitions. But, of all these enabling conditions, money is the indispensable element, whether from the private sector, non-profit foundations or government.

A few statistics: Bangkok, in 2013, surpassed London as the world's most popular tourist destination. Its shopping malls are thronged. After Qatar and Switzerland, Singapore has the most millionaires per capita. There are more Louis Vuitton stores in Hong Kong than in Paris, and it has the highest per capita numbers of Mercedes Benz automobiles. Tiffany & Co. does 37 per cent of its business in the Asia-Pacific market.

While the material conditions of life are greatly altered and demand an art adequate to these new realities in Southeast Asia, changes in the global art world itself provide the grounds for its rise to international visibility. Nothing could be more important than the de-centring of the art world. It is, for example, no longer possible to produce a book on the triumph of American painting or to argue for the centrality of Paris, nor to invoke the spectre of derivativeness. In the new fluidity and entanglements of a multi-centric art world, Southeast Asia is not a transit hub for some metropolitan destination. It is to be expected that the study of Southeast Asian art will expand to meet this challenge.

PNC: *Contemporary art, arguably more so than any other subfield in art history, relies upon but also dialogically contends with its regime of representation, one that is constituted through a matrix of theoretical formulations that has an incisive role in deciphering, creating and presenting meaning. You have cited George Steiner's remark that "commentary breeds new commentary, not new poems".²¹ What, today, is the job of the scholar who writes about and teaches contemporary Southeast Asian art? What can we do, or continue to do, in our teaching and our research, to ensure that our own commentary does not cease to breed new poems?*

SJO: Criticism is always responsive to the work of its moment and is framed by one or another theoretical lens. When everything is possible all at once, as is the case today, art is no longer approached as a study in linked development. This rather diminishes the kind of formal criticism practised in the 1960s and 1970s. Given the quite promiscuous and entangled nature of a global art market and the speed with which it is made present everywhere, it is very difficult to see the artwork as a self-sufficient world of its own or as a heterocosm. Nor does art seem very distant from life, and it seems incapable of being a mirror of any tightly bounded fraction or section of reality but is, instead, to borrow a phrase from Wallace Stevens, "an insolid billowing of the solid".²² Some of the criticism that I do see is pragmatic. That is, it finds that through semiotic reading the work is instrumental towards effecting some end, usually of a change in political or moral consciousness.

Poets in the past have written some of the best art criticism. I once made lists of poet-critics and gave up when they became too lengthy. Baudelaire commands the 19th century, but today think of John Ashberry, Frank O'Hara, John Updike, Yves Bonnefoy, Zbigniew Herbert, Octavio Paz. If we turn to another great body of criticism, which is Chinese, and where there is a mutuality

of writing and representation, we also find that many literati painters were also poets. Much of the criticism was actually written on the colophons attached to paintings. Much of it has the compression, allusiveness and energy of poetry.

Perhaps there are poets in Southeast Asia who are writing art criticism. Is this the case? So is criticism employing the figurative resources of language or is much of it adopting the straitened rhetoric of the social sciences? Your question is practical because every classroom lecturer about art is also necessarily a critic. Somehow, there must be a crossing over from a realm of dense physicality through another medium that is language. Metaphor is itself a crossing-over of one thing into another, and figurative language seems to be inescapable in bringing people to see a coherence which is, of course, what critics and teachers do. Simply pointing to features of a work is also a critical argument, a way of making things show up so they can be experienced as attuned to a sense of a meaningful whole. Nor do I mean to suggest that neither art nor its criticism have a critical function. Knowing about art, or finding its meaning are not unworthy goals, but they are supervenient upon encountering it as presence.

BIOGRAPHIES

Pamela N. Corey is Lecturer in Southeast Asian Art at SOAS, University of London. Her writings have appeared in *Art Journal*, *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, *Udaya, Journal of Khmer Studies* and numerous exhibition catalogues and platforms for art criticism. She is currently working on a book project that examines the development of contemporary art in relation to urban form in Vietnam and Cambodia.

Stanley J. O'Connor is Professor Emeritus of History of Art and Asian Studies at Cornell University. He is the author of *Hindu Gods of Peninsular Siam* (Artibus Asiae Publishers, 1972) and co-author, with Tom Harrisson, of *Excavations of the Prehistoric Iron Industry in West Borneo* (Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1969) and *Gold and Megalithic Activity in Prehistoric and Recent West Borneo* (Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1970). He was Guest Editor of *Asian Art and Culture* 8, 1, Special Issue: Southeast Asia Today (Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 1995). He has also authored key articles in the field of Southeast Asian art history, including "Art Critics, Connoisseurs, and Collectors in the Southeast Asian Rain Forest: A Study in Cross-Cultural Art Theory" (*Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 1983) and "Humane Literacy and Southeast Asian Art" (*Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 1995). In 2000, a special festschrift (*Studies in Southeast Asian Art: Essays in Honor of Stanley J. O'Connor*) was published by Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications to honour his research and teaching.

APPENDIX

List of Dissertations Completed under Stanley J. O'Connor's Supervision at Cornell University²³

- John Miksic, Professor of Southeast Asian Studies, National University of Singapore (NUS). "Archaeology, Trade, and Society in Northeast Sumatra", 1979
- Richard M. Cooler, Professor Emeritus of Art History, Northern Illinois University. "The Karen Bronze. Drums of Burma: The Magic Pond", 1980 (Chair)
- Robert Wicks, Director, Miami University Art Museum. "A Survey of Native Southeast Asian Coinage circa 450–1850: Documentation and Typology", 1983 (Chair)
- Barbara Harrisson (1922–2015), former Director of the Princessehof Museum in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands. "Pusaka Heirloom Jars of Borneo", 1984 (Chair)
- Edmund Edwards McKinnon, Affiliate, Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore. "Kota Cina: Its Context and Meaning in the Trade of Southeast Asia in the Twelfth to Fourteenth Centuries", 1984 (Chair)
- Apinan Poshyananda, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Thailand. "Modern Art in Thailand in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries", 1990 (Chair)
- Astri Wright, Professor of Art History and Visual Studies, University of Victoria. "Soul, Spirit and Mountain: Preoccupations of Contemporary Indonesian Painters", 1991 (Chair)
- Caverlee Cary, Assistant Director for Program Planning, Institute of East Asian Studies, UC Berkeley. "Triple Gems and Double Meanings: Contested Spaces in the National Museum of Bangkok", 1994 (Chair)
- Toni Shapiro-Phim, Director of Programs, Philadelphia Folklore Project. "Dance and the Spirit of Cambodia", 1994
- Pattaratorn Chirapravati, Professor of Asian Art History and Curatorial Studies, California State University, Sacramento. "The Cult of Votive Tablets in Thailand (Sixth to Thirteenth Centuries)", 1994 (Chair)
- Hildawati Soemantri Siddhartha, artist (1945–2003). "The Terracotta Art of Majapahit", 1995 (Chair)
- Kaja M. McGowan, Associate Professor of the History of Art/Asian Studies, Cornell University. "Jewels in a Cup: The Role of Containers in Balinese Landscape and Art", 1996 (Chair)
- Nora A. Taylor, Alsdorf Professor of South and Southeast Asian Art History, School of the Art Institute, Chicago. "The Artist and the State: The Politics of Painting in Hanoi, Vietnam 1925–1995", 1997 (Chair)
- Jan Mrázek, Associate Professor of Southeast Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore (NUS). "Phenomenology of a Puppet Theatre: Contemplations on the Performance Technique of Contemporary Javanese Wayang Kulit", 1998 (Chair)
- Brita Renee Heimarck, Associate Professor of Music, Boston University. "Balinese Discourses on Music and Modernization: Village Voices and Urban Views", 2003

- Soumya James, independent scholar. "The Symbiosis of Image, Monument and Landscape: A Study of Select Goddess Images at Prasat Kravan, Kbal Spean and Banteay Srei in Cambodia", 2010
- FNU Sumartono. "A Museum under the Settings of the Kraton and Power: The Displayed, Undisplayed, and Forbidden Objects in the Royal Palace of Yogyakarta", 2011 (Chair)
- Wannasarn Noonsuk, Assistant Professor, Wailalak University. "Archaeology and Cultural Geography of Tambralinga in Peninsular Siam", 2012
- Pamela N. Corey, Lecturer in South East Asian Art, SOAS University of London. "The Artist in the City: Contemporary Art as Urban Intervention in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, and Phnom Penh, Cambodia", 2015

NOTES

- ¹ Nora A. Taylor (ed.), *Studies in Southeast Asian Art: Essays in Honor of Stanley J. O'Connor* (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2000).
- ² Oliver Wolters, "Stanley J. O'Connor", in *Studies in Southeast Asian Art: Essays in Honor of Stanley J. O'Connor*, ed. Nora A. Taylor (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2000), p. 16. For other texts on O'Connor's biography, career and academic influence, see Patrick D. Flores, "Southeast Asia: Art History, Art Today", 11 Oct. 2012, *Guggenheim UBS MAP: Perspectives*, <http://blogs.guggenheim.org/map/southeast-asia-art-history-art-today/> [accessed Feb. 2016]; George McT. Kahin, "Stanley J. O'Connor Retires", *Cornell Southeast Asia Program Bulletin* (Fall 1996): 4–5; and Nora A. Taylor, "Who Speaks for Southeast Asian Art?" *Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Art: An Anthology*, ed. N.A. Taylor and B. Ly (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University 2012), pp. 1–14.
- ³ A comprehensive list of his publications can be found in *Studies in Southeast Asian Art*, ed. Taylor, pp. 241–3.
- ⁴ For O'Connor poetry is a means of research, as—in his words—it opens the mind. E-mail correspondence with the author, 5 Feb. 2016.
- ⁵ E-mail exchange with Asa Mittman, Professor of Art History at California State University, 13 July 2015.
- ⁶ From exchanges with former State Department colleagues of Wayne L. Corey, Jr, a retired foreign correspondent for *Voice of America*.
- ⁷ Comments made by John Miksic ("The Palace Sites, Bagan: Tales Told by Potsherds", SEAP Brown Bag Lecture, 20 Mar. 2015) and Nora A. Taylor ("Subversion or Experimentation: Vietnamese Contemporary Performance Artists", SEAP Brown Bag Lecture, 22 Apr. 2010).

- ⁸ A.B. Griswold, "The Holy Land Transported: Replicas of the Mahābodhi Shrine in Siam and Elsewhere", in *Paranavitana Felicitation Volume on Art & Architecture and Oriental Studies: Presented to Professor Senarat Paranavitana as a Tribute of His Colleagues, Friends, Well-wishers to a Lifetime Spent in Interpreting the Culture of a Corner of Asia*, ed. N.A. Jayawickrama (Colombo: M.D. Gunasena, 1965), pp. 173–222.
- ⁹ Michael Ondaatje, *Anil's Ghost* (London: Vintage Books, 2000), p. 320.
- ¹⁰ T.K. Sabapathy, *Road to Nowhere: The Quick Rise and the Long Fall of Art History in Singapore* (Singapore: National Institute of Education, 2010), pp. 2–4.
- ¹¹ Wolters, "Stanley J. O'Connor", p. 21.
- ¹² Sherman E. Lee, *A History of Far Eastern Art* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964).
- ¹³ M.H. Abrams, "What's the Use of Theorizing about the Arts?" in *In Search of Literary Theory*, by M.H. Abrams and Morton W. Bloomfield (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972), pp. 3–54.
- ¹⁴ Note by Corey: On the growing discourse surrounding modern and contemporary art from Southeast Asia, see, for example, Joan Kee and Patrick Flores (ed.), *Contemporaneity and Art in Southeast Asia*, special issue of *Third Text*, 25, 4 (2011); Taylor and Ly (ed.), *Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Art: An Anthology*, Lee Weng Choy et al., *Comparative Contemporaries: A Web Anthology Project* (Hong Kong: Asia Art Archive, 2013), <http://comparative.aaa.org.hk/> [accessed Feb. 2016]; and Michelle Antoinette, *Reworlding Art History: Encounters with Contemporary Southeast Asian Art after 1990* (Amsterdam: Brill/Rodopi, 2015). Academic or curatorial appointments with a focus on Southeast Asian art have been established or maintained at such institutions as Cornell University, University of California Los Angeles, University of California Santa Cruz, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, SOAS University of London, Goethe University of Frankfurt, University of Sydney, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Freer and Sackler Galleries of the Smithsonian Institution and, most notably, the National Gallery Singapore. Events that have borne a strong impact on the visibility and deepening of discourse on modern and contemporary art from the region include exhibitions organised in Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore, such as *Telah Terbit (Out Now): Southeast Asian Contemporary Art Practices during the 1960s to 1980s* (Singapore Art Museum, 2006), *No Country: Contemporary Art for South and Southeast Asia* (Guggenheim, 2013), the symposium "Contemporary Art from Cambodia: A Historical Inquiry" (MoMA, 2013) and, most recently, the Getty Foundation-funded programme, *Ambitious Alignments: New Histories of Southeast Asian Art* (2015–16).
- ¹⁵ Wolters, "Stanley J. O'Connor", p. 18.

- ¹⁶ Robert L. Brown, "Studies in Southeast Asian Art: Essays in Honor of Stanley J. O'Connor", *Asian Perspectives* 40, 1 (Spring 2001): 145.
- ¹⁷ Stanley J. O'Connor, "Humane Literacy and Southeast Asian Art", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 26, 1 (1995): 147–58.
- ¹⁸ James Clifford and George Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986).
- ¹⁹ Apinan Poshyananda, "The Future: Post-Cold War; Postmodernism; Postmarginalia (Playing with Slippery Lubricants)", in *Tradition and Change: Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Caroline Turner (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1993), pp. 3–24.
- ²⁰ Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987); Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press); and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991).
- ²¹ O'Connor, "Humane Literacy", p. 50.
- ²² Wallace Stevens, "Reality is an Activity of the Most August Imagination", in *The Oxford Book of American Poetry*, ed. David Lehman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 270–1.
- ²³ This is not a comprehensive list, as it does not include those students who began graduate studies under O'Connor's supervision but were unable to finish due to varying circumstances. Pamela N. Corey would like to thank Stanley J. O'Connor, Kaja McGowan, Nora A. Taylor, Pattaratorn Chirapravati, Soumya James, Amanda Rath and Keeley Boerman for their assistance in reviewing this list.

REFERENCES

- Abrams, M.H. "What's the Use of Theorizing about the Arts?" In *In Search of Literary Theory*, by M.H. Abrams and Morton W. Bloomfield, pp. 3–54. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London and New York: Verso, 1991.
- Antoinette, Michelle. *Reworlding Art History: Encounters with Contemporary Southeast Asian Art after 1990*. Amsterdam: Brill/Rodopi, 2015.
- Brown, Robert L. "Studies in Southeast Asian Art: Essays in Honor of Stanley J. O'Connor". *Asian Perspectives* 40, 1 (Spring 2001): 145–6.
- Castoriadis, Cornelius. *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987.
- Choy, Lee Weng, et al. (eds.). "Comparative Contemporaries: A Web Anthology Project" (Hong Kong: Asia Art Archive, 2013), <http://comparative.aaa.org.hk/> [accessed Feb. 2016].

- Flores, Patrick D. "Southeast Asia: Art History, Art Today." 11 Oct. 2012. Guggenheim UBS MAP: Perspectives, <http://blogs.guggenheim.org/map/southeast-asia-art-history-art-today/> [accessed Feb. 2016].
- Griswold, Alexander B. "The Holy Land Transported: Replicas of the Mahābodhi Shrine in Siam and Elsewhere". In *Paranavitana Felicitation Volume on Art & Architecture and Oriental Studies*, pp. 173–222. Colombo: M.D. Gunasena, 1965.
- Holt, Claire. *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967.
- Kahin, George McT. "Stanley J. O'Connor Retires". *Cornell Southeast Asia Program Bulletin* (Fall 1996): 4–5.
- Kee, Joan, and Patrick D. Flores (eds.). *Contemporaneity and Art in Southeast Asia*, Special Issue of *Third Text*, 25, 4 (2011).
- Lee, Sherman E. *A History of Far Eastern Art*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964.
- O'Connor, Stanley J. "Humane Literacy and Southeast Asian Art". *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 26, 1 (1995): 147–58.
- Poshyananda, Apinan. "The Future: Post-Cold War; Postmodernism; Postmarginalia (Playing with Slippery Lubricants)". In *Tradition and Change: Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Caroline Turner, pp. 3–24. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1993.
- Sabapathy, T.K. *Road to Nowhere: The Quick Rise and the Long Fall of Art History in Singapore*. Singapore: National Institute of Education, 2010.
- Stevens, Wallace. "Reality is an Activity of the Most August Imagination". In *The Oxford Book of American Poetry*, ed. David Lehman, pp. 270–1. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Taylor, Charles. *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Taylor, Nora A. (ed.) *Studies In Southeast Asian Art: Essays In Honor of Stanley J. O'Connor*. Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2000.
- . "Who Speaks for Southeast Asian Art?" *Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Art: An Anthology*, ed. Nora A. Taylor and Boreth Ly, pp. 1–14. Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2012.
- Taylor, Nora A. and Boreth Ly (eds.). *Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Art: An Anthology*. Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2012.
- Wolters, Oliver. "Stanley J. O'Connor". In *Studies in Southeast Asian Art: Essays in Honor of Stanley J. O'Connor*, ed. Nora A. Taylor, pp. 15–31. Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2000.