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Editorial

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Editorial

What is “movement”? A change of position from one point to another. A transmission. A flow. A term in art history that describes groups of artists with common ideologies, sets of goals and artistic styles. The facets of meaning of the word “movement” multiply as the list goes on.

The previous issue of *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia* (Volume 2, Number 1), explored possibilities of reading and considering the theme “Movement” in relation to modern and contemporary art in the region. In this issue, we continue to think of Southeast Asia as zones of encounter. Within and beyond the geographical location, artistic styles and movements, artists, discourses, terms and concepts in art and art history, ideas and debates arose with interaction with others. Some of these intercultural inventions have faded away into recent history. Some remain contemporary. Our contributors bring us to reconsider the formation of various phases and forms of artistic production in Southeast Asia. Yet, here is not only a destination where Euro-American art discourses and practices arrived and were locally adapted, the presence of art and artists from Southeast Asia in the global arena points to the region as one of the places where fascinating creations have taken place for decades throughout history. Movement here signifies more than a linear flow of transfer and exchange. Mobility in the modern and globalizing world makes possible the faster circulation of ideas and people. A decentralisation?

We hope that this issue offers rigorous discussions of the complexities of the histories of the arts in and from Southeast Asia. In “Pictorialism and Modernity in Singapore, 1950–60”, Charmaine Toh counters a modernist art discourse that has traditionally positioned pictorialism in opposition to modern photography. Toh proposes that pictorial photography marks the start of a modern practice of photography in Singapore. The author refers to John Clark’s explanation of a transfer of artistic style and practice from one culture

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to another as a process of selection and assimilation (1998). Recognising pictorialism as an international style and artistic movement that originated in Europe, this article investigates how Singapore's social and political situation shaped pictorialism in the country in the 1950s–60s.

In the opposite direction, Joleen Loh's article titled "Relocating Kim Lim: A Cosmopolitan Perspective" centres on Kim Lim, a Singaporean-British sculptor and printmaker of Chinese descent who moved to London in the mid-1950s. Southeast Asia is not a destination here but a point of departure. Loh remarks that the absence of Lim in the institutionalised histories of post-war art in both Britain and Singapore poses a challenge for a re-evaluation of her works. The article presents a historiographical attempt on relocating Kim Lim's modernist art practices within the context of the international art community in cosmopolitan London, opening questions on diaspora subjectivities and their place in art histories.

The research report in this volume emphasises that a result of cultural transfer is an intercultural kind of invention. A joint effort by Thanavi Chotpradit, J Pilapil Jacobo, Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez, Roger Nelson, Nguyen Nhu Huy, Chairat Polmuk, San Lin Tun, Phoebe Scott, Simon Soon and Jim Supangkat, this inaugural report provides introductory accounts of the terminologies of "modern" and "contemporary" "art" in nine Southeast Asian languages. Translation implies transformation in communication. At the same time, the act of translating connotes struggle in movement. Transferring and transforming of terminologies to Southeast Asian vernacular languages lead to unavoidable changes and discrepancies. Just as with other artistic enterprises, terminologies in each language bear subtle differences or shades of meanings and connotations from the original.

In the archival section, this issue presents direct reproductions of clippings from a series first published in 1936 and then again in 1948 in the Philippines. With contributions by primarily artists Guillermo Tolentino and Victorio Edades—both of whom also wrote criticism as part of their practices—these clippings from the catalogue *Edades and the 13 Moderns* reveal the rigorous back and forth between various thinkers in the translation of the modern within a Philippine context. The movement of these terms is never without careful and rigorous inspection as well as adaptation into the local vernacular. These raw reproductions serve as source material that readers might pursue for their own research; they serve as a tool of measure that demonstrate a historical precedent for this kind of textual mining within a Southeast Asian context.

This notion of slippages in translation with terminologies is echoed in a review by Yvonne Low of Wulan Dirgantoro's recently published book,

Feminisms and Contemporary Art in Indonesia: Defining Experiences. Low draws attention to the author's argument citing the resistance against the term "feminist" as something that might run counter to existing discourses in Indonesia. The review draws attention to the etymology of this term as exogenous and discusses its application by Dirgantoro in facilitating a discourse on art by Indonesian women artists. Here, Dirgantoro tests the applicability of established feminist theory in her recovery of the art and subjectivities of women artists.

Finally, in this issue, a photo essay on a mural, *Getting Into the Out* (1995) at the University of New South Wales, in Sydney by an "ad hoc group of painters" called Sanggawâ is revisited in a conversation between curator Matt Cox and two artists that were part of the group, Joy Mallari and Mark Justiniani. This short response draws attention not only to how the mural was collectively made, but also to a period of extended exchange between the artists and cultural practitioners of Southeast Asia and Australia beginning in the early 1990s. Such exchanges resonate with larger-scale events such as regional collaborations and biennial culture and prompt us to rethink how politically charged objects might speak over time beyond the temporary nature of exhibitions.

Acknowledgement

Editorial collective, *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*

(Isabel Ching, Thanavi Chotpradit, Brigitta Isabella, Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez, Yvonne Low, Vera Mey, Roger Nelson, Simon Soon)

Recently Completed Doctoral Theses

If you have recently completed a PhD research thesis in art history, visual culture, cultural studies, art theory, film history, architecture history or related studies, we would like to share your work with our readers in the Editorial. We are keen to promote research that demonstrates sustained historical/critical inquiry and to grow a collegial network.

Write to us at southeastofnow@gmail.com

Entanglement, Individual and Participatory Art Practice in Indonesia

Elly Kent, Australian National University

This thesis addresses the joint practice of participatory and individual art, asking why these practices are so prevalent among contemporary Indonesian

artists. This is the first body of research on individual and participatory art in Indonesia, utilising research into primary and secondary written resources, translations, field observations, interviews with artists and with other experts in Indonesia. Sanento Yuliman described the “artistic ideology” of Indonesian modernism as simultaneously autonomous and independent, and heteronomously tied to tradition and society’s needs. From these foundations modern art discourse in Indonesia involved artists in the lives of the people (*rakyat*) and defended artists’ right to individual expression. I show how participation consistently features alongside individuality in discourses from those early modernists; during art’s instrumentalisation in development discourses; and when contemporary artists begin involving the *rakyat* in participatory art. Case studies from five contemporary artists (Arahmaiani Feisal, Made “Bayak” Muliana, I Wayan “Suklu” Sujana, Tisna Sanjaya and Elia Nurvista) demonstrate contemporary artists extending this continuum to involve people in the making of art while maintaining significant individual practices. This occurs in particular contexts and networks of production that engage with early modernist concepts of autonomy and heteronomy, as well as exogenous and originary endogenous discourses.

The Third Avant-garde: Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia Recalling Tradition

Leonor Veiga, Leiden University

The third avant-garde investigates postmodern manifestations in Southeast Asia, which took place since the mid-1980s. It proposes that, in a Southeast Asian context, postmodernism is anchored in the materiality of traditional arts. This study suggests that works which use traditional arts radically manifest a double dismantle—first, against local patronising forces that were enforcing artists to practise academic art and western media and second, a distancing attitude from western art intelligentsia, who acted as “owners of the discourse”, and regarded “non-western” practitioners as followers rather than as trendsetters. The artworks analysed reveal how the reprocessing of traditional arts can be regarded as avant-garde. These gestures are novel, and result from practising art in a certain location, and bound to a specific sociopolitical context.

Mnemonic Communities: Politics of World War II Memory in Thai Screen Culture

Natthanai Prasannam, University of St Andrews

This thesis examines the politics of World War II memory in Thai screen culture

with special reference to films and television series produced between the 1970s and the 2010s. Framed by memory studies and film studies approaches, the thesis hopes to answer, first, how World War II memory on screen is related to other memory texts: monuments, museums and commemorative rituals and second, how the memory is coded by various genres: romance, biopic, combat film and horror. The project relies on a plurimedial network which has not yet been extensively studied by film scholars in Thailand.

Through the lens of memory studies, the on-screen memory is profoundly intermingled with other sites of memory across Thailand and beyond. It potentially is counter-memory and vernacular memory challenging the state's official memory. The politics of World War II memory are also engaged with cultural politics in Thailand in terms of class, gender and ethnicity. The politics of commoners and trauma are given more voice in World War II memory compared to other moments of the national past, which are dominated by royal nationalism.

From a film studies perspectives, the genres mediating World War II memory are shaped by traditions of Thai-Thai and transnational screen culture; the Thai World War II combat film is a newly proposed genre. The thesis also explores directors, the star system, exhibition and reception. The findings should prove that World War II memory on the Thai screen serves its role in memory institutions which construct and maintain mnemonic communities as well as its role in entertainment and media institutions.

Another crucial implication of the research is that politicising World War II memory on the Thai screen can illuminate how memory and visual texts travel. The research likewise manifests contributions to a better understanding of how Thai screen culture can be positioned within both global memory culture and global screen culture.