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Teaching the History of Modern and Contemporary Art of Southeast Asia

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[ROUNDTABLE]

Teaching the History of Modern and Contemporary Art of Southeast Asia

For this roundtable on pedagogy, the editorial collective of *Southeast of Now* has invited contributors to write a short text reflecting on the experience of teaching the history of modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art. We suggested that contributors consider the challenges and rewards of teaching, and reflect on methodological and/or other issues specific to this field. The format, style and tone of the text was left open for each individual author to decide.

Contributions relate to the teaching of both undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as the supervision of postgraduate research. We have invited teachers of the history of “art” in an expanded sense, encompassing not only visual art, but also cinema and video, theatre and performance, architecture and urbanism, design and related fields.

This roundtable follows numerous other roundtables on other topics relating to the history of modern and contemporary art, published elsewhere. It also follows previous publications relating specifically to the experience of teaching the art of Southeast Asia, including: Kevin Chua, “On Teaching Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Art”, *Third Text* 24, 4 (2011): 467–73.

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To Look, To See and To Find the Right Words

Yin Ker

Nanyang Technological University

Reflections on the teaching of modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art in this tour d'horizon are beholden to opportunities between 2006 and 2014 as a lecturer at the diploma level, a teaching assistant then an assistant professor at the undergraduate level and an interim supervisor of a Masters thesis at two art academies in Singapore and two universities in Singapore and India, and since 2015 as an assistant professor working with both undergraduate and graduate students in Singapore. In most instances, I have only taught the history of modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art within the context of survey courses including the premodern. My thoughts on this activity are nourished—and likewise conditioned—by my training and interest in South and Southeast Asian early, folk and Hindu-Buddhist arts, whose instruction at the introductory level I remain committed to, as well as an approach to knowledge-making owing to the Sorbonne University and INALCO. Before elaborating on what and how I have been teaching more recently, I shall address concerns whose implications—as shop-soiled or as trivial as they might be to veteran colleagues—have been determinant in the pedagogical strategies devised piecemeal. These strategies are far from being methodically defined and only serve to facilitate what I seek to achieve in each class.

Art institutional infrastructure in Singapore, scholarship on Southeast Asian art and academic culture have evolved considerably since my first class as a teaching assistant. Yet, in spite of the appreciable increase in scholarly publications, courses, lectures, exhibitions, internships and other avenues to deepen engagement with modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art, it is questionable if the rigour of its academic instruction has been commensurate.

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To date, no local or regional institution of higher learning offers a comprehensive structured training in art history at the undergraduate level, despite the rising number of students envisaging further studies or even a career in art history with a specialisation in Southeast Asia; graduate programmes are developed, marketed and run in the absence of any credible undergraduate curriculum, as if art history were a discipline of exception that required zero foundational studies. Admittedly, most of the graduate students I worked with had received training in neither art history nor Southeast Asian studies—as is the case of even some instructors—and the course on modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art could actually be their first and last art history class prior to entering the industry. With respect to the medley of art-related courses offered at the undergraduate level, if I am moreover right to observe the absence of any systematic curriculum delivery, along with any consistently rigorous evaluation designed to register a progressive assimilation, how do I teach that might be beneficial? Students who have completed core and elective modules in art history profess bafflement at the most rudimentary notions of iconography and style; graduate students writing theses on modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art still flounder with respect to the distinctions between art history and overlapping and adjacent fields of study like aesthetics, art criticism, visual studies and history.

In response to these circumstances, in addition to acquainting students with art historically significant episodes, individuals and works in modern and contemporary Southeast Asia, it has been urgent to familiarise them with the discipline's methods. Assuming that one who knows where to look, what questions to ask and what words to use are likely to be capable of approaching Jim Supangkat's *Ken Dedes* (1975) as diligently as he or she does the Singhasari Prajñāpāramitā that is its reference—or ancient Athenian red-figure amphorae, Habib Allah's *Conference of the Birds* (c.1600) or Yinka Shonibare's *Jardin d'amour* (2007), for that matter—in the instruction of art historical methods, the *how*, takes precedence over the *what* that is modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art. With undergraduate students, I consider it vital that they acquire a strong foundation in description and visual analysis beginning with Erwin Panofsky's method, and become aware that the deceptively simple description constitutes the first of a series of critical engagements with any work of art as well as one's own reading of it, and that, regardless of Panofsky's biases, it is a valid preliminary means of scrutinising a work of art, which ought to be learnt, even if only to be unlearnt.¹ It is precisely because it is unavailing for a conceptual work like Cheo Chai Hiang's *5' x 5' (Singapore River)* (1972) that it is a pertinent tool of thought: what does not work, why, how can it be adapted, and what other methods might remedy the inadequacies?

In parallel is the training of visual memory and the eye. Ready access to abundant (quality) visual, textual and oral resources does not systematically boost visual and critical acuity or even curiosity, and if the *idola temporis* denounced by E.H. Gombrich in his “Research in the Humanities: Ideals and Idols”—“newly developed intellectual and mechanical tools which seem to promise prestige to those who ‘apply’ them to the humanities”²—are quick to juggle, as is the completion of many Masters degrees today, the training of the eye is a prolonged endeavour that is probably best attempted from the undergraduate level. In class, selections of reproductions are arranged in such a way as to solicit comparisons and associations amongst them; weekly, students are asked to identify works of art seen in the previous class. The oral presentation through which they hone skills in description and are confronted with Panofsky’s method serves the same purpose: what do you see, and what terms and concepts best translate what is seen and known? Might the mindful study of images (and their contexts) additionally displace the indiscriminate bricolage of terms, concepts and arguments plucked from discourses *du jour* ranging from true erudition to *recherché* claptrap, which is often mistaken as the demonstration of criticality and intellectual energy?

Given that many Southeast Asian artists, whether purposefully or not, continue to draw on local thought systems and imagery of earlier origins, students are prompted to investigate their contexts and their interstices so as to be more mindful of nuances and liminalities which are otherwise conveniently obscured by fallacious terminology and facile frameworks, such as the recurrent reductive binary opposing the villain authoritarian regime and the heroic victim artist. When evaluating an artist’s bearing in the network of transfers of style, terminology, concepts, categories of representation, etc., they are urged to consult adjacent disciplines like history, religious studies, anthropology, sociology and aesthetics, as well as scholarship on the premodern that is likely to cross-examine and fertilise prevailing approaches and theses in modern and contemporary art. To unpack the “expressionism” imputed to Affandi or the “Buddhistness” of Montien Boonma, for example, they are enjoined to examine the artist’s practice and oeuvre in tandem with its contexts (life, culture, society, history, etc.). The aim is not to propose ‘original’ theses, but to apply oneself to the rigorous study of works of art within their multifarious contexts of production and reception; it is less to devise conjurations of Southeast Asian distinction, than to complicate our understanding of how modern and contemporary art in Southeast Asia has been created, consumed and made sense of.

At the graduate level, the advancement of befitting academic standards overrides the want of grounding in foundational concepts and skills. With students writing theses on modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art, the

goal is to expose them to a broad spectrum of approaches within and beyond the modern Western construct of 'art' and its categories, so as to augment their methodological 'toolbox' for thinking about and writing on their research topic. They are prompted to reflect on why art historians wrote the way they did, and eventually, to identify, adapt and synthesise appropriate tools of thought resourcefully. In one of my courses, for example, four categories of assigned readings are critiqued in view of their applicability to modern and contemporary works of art from Southeast Asia. The first consists of a selection of texts by scholars working within the region as well as from outside it. They are discussed at the beginning of the course and again at the end of it. The second comprises of texts by not only art historians from the Western world—beginning with Giorgio Vasari and ending with Michael Baxandall and Hans Belting—but also seminal thinkers like Claude Lévi-Strauss and Alfred Gell. This selection is not designed to lay claim to any interdisciplinary approach, but to facilitate the appraisal of how a range of approaches to studying the material world beyond art history might enrich our undertaking. For graduate students new to art history—practically the entire class this category of texts moreover dispenses an overview of Western art history.

Next are texts on modern and contemporary South Asian art by Nandalal Bose, Geeta Kapur, Iftikhar Dadi and Sonal Khullar, for example. From a neighbouring region with multiple shared historical and cultural experiences, they provide a compelling model to learn from. To further expand students' aptitude in seeing and experiencing modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art, they are introduced to taxonomies and theories of 'art' from ancient China and India where there is no lack of literary and historical texts on what has been loosely labelled 'art' only quite recently in the protracted history of humanity. Finally, returning to the texts on modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art, we ask: what are the prevailing approaches and narratives, how do they compare with those beyond the region and historical period, and what and how does one build on them? The proposed syllabus is deliberately overwhelming—an intimation of the wealth of tools of thought for studying 'art', a trove for subsequent study beyond the one-semester course, and a reminder that an enduring engagement with modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art demands an extensive culture beyond the modern and the contemporary as well as the construct of 'Southeast Asia' and its confines.

Before I end, I address the challenge that is the starkly uneven student capacity and commitment at the undergraduate and graduate level alike. To begin with, their unfamiliarity with the discipline's methods, and the strangeness of thought systems, imagery and events so close yet so foreign to them, necessitate the provision of support both in and outside the classroom. To pro-

vide guidance to those who have yet to gain proficiency in the subject, without neglecting those of a more advanced level who are keen to delve deeply into the subject, in addition to the topics covered in class, more 'difficult' materials are regularly posted onto a shared digital platform for optimal exploration and assimilation at the individual pace: publications, collections, exhibitions, symposiums, news, etc. These links opening up to a variety of perspectives and possibilities seek to fuel intellectual brio, encourage the exploration of potential research topics and promote an awareness of the field, including its politics. To foster a culture of dialogue and mutual support amongst them, students from different disciplines and cohorts are put into groups to work on reading assignments without the pressure of being graded.

From what I understood from my own teachers, my task as a teacher is to transmit and to nurture discerning eyes and minds that see, think, connect ideas and employ words conscientiously. It would be gratifying if it still is; or do I collaborate in awarding degrees to whoever has the resources and cleverness to thrive in a social circle where posturing and networking supersede? A growing awareness of my own limitations, the unevenness of nascent scholarship on modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art, and trends in an increasingly pragmatic and even mercenary culture in higher education have been revelatory. Regardless, I hope the students I work with might grow to exercise independent thought and to appreciate rigour as an effective means of distilling what could be real from the sea of shadows confounded with knowledge, a measure against sophistry and nonsense. I also hope that they might cultivate curiosity in other art forms—beyond the modern and the contemporary, beyond Southeast Asia—without which their appreciation of modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art is likely to be blinkered. To look, to pause, to look again and to think; to wonder, and to take the time to do so.

BIOGRAPHY

Yin Ker owes her training in art history to the Sorbonne University (Paris-Sorbonne) where she completed her PhD. She works mainly on Bagyi Aung Soe (1923–90) from Myanmar, whose practice and oeuvre bestride manifold spiritual, artistic and intellectual traditions and innovations. Her interests include 'art' and 'art history' as variable constructs; ancient and modern methods of knowledge- and image-making and their reception; 'art' and matrices of power and authority; and ways of telling (hi)stories of 'art'. In parallel with theoretical research within and beyond the discipline of art history, she explores image-making through drawing and painting.

NOTES

- ¹ On description and visual analysis, respectively, I use Michael Baxandall, “Introduction: Language and Explanation”, in *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 1–11; Erwin Panofsky, “Introductory”, in *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Westview, 1972), pp. 3–32.
- ² E.H. Gombrich, “Research in the Humanities: Ideals and Idols”, *Daedalus* 102, 2 (Spring 1973): 6.

When Students Become Lecturers

Thanavi Chotpradit
Silpakorn University

As a former undergraduate student (1999–2002) and a current lecturer (since 2015) of modern and contemporary art in Thailand in the Department of Art History, Faculty of Archaeology, at Silpakorn University, Bangkok, Thailand, I have observed closely, and also taken part in, the development of the pedagogical structure of the programme which had originally been rooted in the country's archaeological mission—to produce knowledge and trained professionals capable of working with historic monuments and other forms of pre-modern art.

When I was a student, the 'Contemporary Art in Thailand' course [ศิลปะร่วมสมัยในประเทศไทย *Sinlapa Ruam Samai Nai Prathet Thai*] was taught by a guest lecturer, Sutee Kunavichayanont, from the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Arts. Narawan Pathomvat of the Reading Room, a non-profit contemporary art library in Bangkok also spent a few years as guest lecturer before I returned from my studies at Birkbeck, University of London in early 2015. For several decades, there had never been any faculty member to facilitate courses in the history of modern and contemporary art in Thailand, let alone in Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, the scope of the programme has been slowly expanding to include modern and contemporary art with some new faces who received scholarships from the Thai government: Eksuda Singhalampong, Vipash Purichanont and myself. All of us are products of the department's undergraduate programme (Eksuda is an exception as she completed her MA here too) and now serve as full-time lecturers, all thanks to the Thai government. Our scholarships, which enabled us to study in the UK—Birkbeck, the University of Sussex and Goldsmiths—were part of the Thai Government

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Scholarship Program for the Humanities and Social Sciences, which has ceased to exist.

When we modified the curriculum for the 2016 academic year, I proposed some new courses on modern art in Thailand, Thai art and visual culture during the Second World War, and Thai art and visual culture during the Cold War for our undergraduate programme. Back when I studied with Sutee, the 'Contemporary Art in Thailand' course covered the entire Rattanakosin period (1872–present) with, nevertheless, a focus on contemporary artistic practices and a few gallery visits. We went from a public institution such as the National Gallery of Thailand to a private gallery like Tadu Contemporary Art and some commercial galleries in Silom Galleria Building. However, a period from the 19th century to the present is long, too long to cover within a semester of 16 weeks (with one week for mid-term exams and one week for final exams).

The problem with time frame, terminologies and methodological approaches towards the variety of artistic practices urged me to rethink and design how I should teach art history. Apart from the Second World War and the Cold War periods, which are my personal academic interests, the distinction between the modern and the contemporary needs to be made through two different courses, though it is not easy since the two entities often overlap. More challenges arose: while the topics and issues in the course 'Modern Art in Thailand' [ศิลปะสมัยใหม่ในประเทศไทย *Sinlapa Samai Mai Nai Prathet Thai*] are arranged chronologically from the reign of King Rama IV, with the arrival of 'realism' from Western pictorial tradition, to the 'Art for Life' of the 1970s, this could not be done for the 'Contemporary Art in Thailand' course, since I strongly believe that it is necessary to catch up with what is going on in the Thai art scene during the semester. But how to balance getting to know the contemporary/contemporaneity and learning about its beginning in the late 1980s with the names and works of artists and works students should know? I still struggle with attempting the historicisation of the contemporary while introducing students to the art circle. There is a need to develop both professional skills and networks, to show them the possibilities in working with contemporary art or continuing their studies at a higher level of art history or shifting to other related fields like art management, curating, art marketing or museum studies. Internship is not compulsory here, but I highly encourage the practice as it would help students to navigate their own direction, preparing them for life after graduation. The inclusion of Vipash Purichanont to the department in 2017 led to an opening of a new course on museums and art galleries, which provides additional opportunities for students to engage with the contemporary art world. The department is still very much at the beginning stages and is limited to an undergraduate programme, but it is gradually

growing, with new courses from Eksuda and Vipash, such as Occidentalism in Thai art, contemporary visual culture and contemporary art in Southeast Asia, being added to the curriculum, with the hope of moving towards graduate and postgraduate programmes. Archival materials, other resources and facilities may still be very under-developed here, but we hope to continue building up the field.

BIOGRAPHY

Thanavi Chotpradit is lecturer in the Department of Art History, Faculty of Archaeology, Silpakorn University, Bangkok. She completed her PhD in art history at Birkbeck, University of London, under a Royal Thai Government Scholarship. She has contributed essays to Thai and international journals including *Aan*, *Fah Diew Kan*, *Journal of Asia Pacific Pop Culture* and *South East Asia Research*, art magazines as well as exhibition catalogues. In 2015–16, she participated in the cross-regional research programme *Ambitious Alignments: New Histories of Southeast Asian Art*. Her research on photographs of the 6th October Massacre (1976) is funded by Thailand Research Fund (TRF). Thanavi's areas of interest include memory studies, war commemoration, Thai politics and archival practices.

NOTE

- ¹ Students also had a chance to observe, think and write about contemporary art in Thailand in a class on 'Art Criticism' [ศิลปวิจารณ์ *Sinlapa Wichan*] taught by Sayan Deangklor, but the course is not limited to contemporary art.

The Art Historian and the Sommelier

Stanley J. O'Connor

Cornell University

Art historians study the connection between visual form and human experience. They transfer the realities implied by sense and form into meaningful or propositional thought. Thus, because of its in-betweenness of focus, 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 criteria and theoretical discourses. Learning is fluid, interdependent, and is progressive or developmental only in the sense that it becomes more complexly linked to pertinent contexts and theoretical perspectives. The practical consequence is that an Art History curriculum, unlike accounting or chemistry, is typically loosely structured, neither sharply sequential nor zoned off by prerequisites. After an introduction to the discipline, its contours, typical fields, topics and characteristic modes of reasoning and demonstration, students should be able to grasp an art historical argument and respond to it critically.

Most students are drawn to study art history by the same impulse that makes them deepen their engagement with such other realms of absorbing human interest as religion or literature. The undergraduate teaching mission is not pre-professional, and it is this that I am concerned with here. Instead, it is directed towards broadly humane learning and the development of such fundamental skills as reasoned inquiry, logical argumentation, analytical rigor, appreciative discrimination and effective written expression.

We know now from discoveries of hand stencils on cave walls in Borneo and Sulawesi, that art has a long history in Southeast Asia: at least 40,000 years.¹ On the other hand, the 'art world' in which we participate, with its network of museums, commercial galleries, art schools, critics and journals, took its origin in Europe in the 18th century with the development of a new audience: the leisured, urban, middle-class.² To serve this emerging market, the concert hall was developed along with the museum, whose products were solely works

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of art 'as such', set apart from specimens of manufacture or natural history. The social forces that moved art from private collections to public institutions to serve this emerging market continue today under conditions of globalisation.

One of the features of this world is its organization into specialized realms of intellectual inquiry. The rise of disciplinarity is part of a general disaggregation of knowledge into separate realms in the 19th century.³ Art history is organized separately from the broader discipline of History because its primary focus is the artwork itself. It draws its warrant from specialized methods for assessing the authenticity, meaning and style of the work as a cultural document.⁴ In the United States, the professional society for ensuring scholarly norms, forums and professional advancement is the College Art Association founded in 1911.

If we return, however, to the evidence of reality as experienced, we find that cultural framing is inescapable: we are all art historians. I refer to that evening, now some months ago, when people all over the world watched Notre Dame Cathedral burning as falling ash exploded into red flowers and a forest of dried ancient timbers became a black, smoking ruin. We were experiencing a swerve of time, as a cultural afterlife became part of an uncertain present. The shape of time was altered and with it came a restatement of an ancient phrase, "the pathos of things, the tears of things".

So, how should we teach art history to undergraduates? We might wish to put knowledge into a wider perspective overcoming some of the compartmentalizing of inquiry. I suggest, too, that we introduce our subject in a relaxed conversational voice; that we adopt the wandering, digressive style of the personal essay rather than the scholarly article, which after all, is not much read for pleasure, and is largely of interest to specialists.

Do I have a model? Yes, it is a bit of a reach, but I would suggest something like the comprehensive focus, the quality of discrimination, the sense of tact, taste and judgement that the wine sommeliers bring to their practice. Wine, like art, is the spirit of matter and, yet, it is profoundly a product of the geologic and climactic regime of place. It is an agricultural product wholly at the mercy of weather, water and the social organization of the harvesters. As is the case with art, there are products of breathtaking quality which the sommelier is also able to identify and appraise in a series of exact discrimination, much like art criticism. Like art, wine is both immanent and potential: an exchange between the sun-filled leaves on the trellises and pneuma of the rich swelling spheres. Like art, wine is simply all the facts but always the product of something unaccountable by the facts. By embracing this wider perspective, we would encounter artwork, as such, but also see them in their environment, the manner in which they are entangled in the world.

I have two practical suggestions. The art history programme should be oriented toward engaging with the art of one's time and place as part of the ongoing definition of the self. I would suggest that, in the senior year, students might be offered a seminar designed to cause them to look back on their experience, integrate what they have learned in courses ordered diversely by period, place, medium or topic, revise what they now see to need revision, and to gain some sense of how what they have learned can be fitted to their lives. Such a seminar could be the Great Books course referred to below. Alternatively, the same aim might be met by a broad topic such as 'Art and the Sources of the Contemporary Self', built around a major book such as Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self* or Zygmunt Bauman's *Liquid Modernity*. The aim is to cause students to engage with their own time as part of the ongoing definition of the self.

Art criticism is the intellectual frontier of the art world: to see something as something, to discuss the meaning or value of what we see, to connect that to other regions of concern, we are required to see from some perspective, with a focus of attention and some procedures for making distinctions and judgments about what we see. Theoretical perspectives shift with time, but critics must inevitably adopt one or more.⁵

But art criticism is also the literature of art history. It is rarely prescribed to undergraduates, if it all, as anything more than asides supporting an art historical argument. In the Western canon, works by Vasari, Diderot, Goethe, Ruskin, Pater, Baudelaire, Rilke, D.H. Lawrence could form the equivalent of a Great Books seminar. And, of course, many contemporary poets also write art criticism. But, an equivalent Asian canon could be developed and become part of art history programmes in Southeast Asia. It might ultimately lead to a more complex way to talk and think about art wherever we are encountering it.

BIOGRAPHY

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 Harrison, 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 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" (1983) and "Humane Literacy and Southeast Asian Art" (1995).

NOTES

- ¹ M. Aubert et al., “Paleolithic Cave Art in Borneo”, *Nature* 564 (2018): 254–7; and M. Aubert et al., “Paleolithic Cave Art from Sulawesi, Indonesia”, *Nature* 514 (2014): 223–7.
- ² M.H. Abrams, “Art as Such: The Sociology of Modern Aesthetics”, in *Doing Things With Texts*, ed. Michael Fischer (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1989), pp. 135–58.
- ³ The emergence of disciplinarity is discussed by Elizabeth S. Goodstein in *Georg Simmel and the Disciplinary Imagination*, Stanford University Press (2017). See especially pp. 34–5, but the topic of disciplinarity is threaded throughout the entire book.
- ⁴ The problems and frustrations attending collaboration of Historians and Art Historians is in full view in the volume, *Art in History, History in Art: Studies in Seventeenth Century Dutch Culture*, ed. David Freedberg and Jan de Vries (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1987).
- ⁵ M.H. Abrams, “What’s the Use of Theorizing about the Arts,” in *In Search of Literary Theory*, ed. M.H. Bloomfield (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972), pp. 3–54.

Learning from the Region; Learning in the Region; Learning from the Internet

Simon Soon
University of Malaya

I came to join the Visual Art Program, Cultural Centre, University of Malaya, about three-and-a-half years ago, in mid-2016. At that point, I was still considering the option of a career in institutional curating. But it was Patrick Flores (Professor of Art Studies, University of the Philippines) who told me prophetically that I would find my home in the university, and so I should give this teaching opportunity a go. Having never been trained in a local Malaysian public university, naturally I was concerned. Not only have Malaysian public universities acquired the reputation of academic mediocrity, I was afraid that collegial life would be less than stimulating. I was of course proven wrong on all counts.

To get to a place where I have begun to finally feel comfortable with the subjects that I am to teach, took me about three years. The first year was really laying out the plan, and getting over my prejudices and expectations, so that I too could begin to learn from the journey that I take students through when I teach modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art for one semester each year, as well as a pre-modern to early modern Southeast Asian art survey in the next semester. Because our program does not offer the study of art and architecture at an undergraduate level, students enrolled in our MA program are generally required to take a number of survey courses that serve as an introduction to art in Malaysia and the region. We have inherited this focus from the program's founder, Redza Piyadasa.

Established in 2003, the Visual Art Program at the Cultural Centre was originally a one-man teaching institution. Piyadasa taught every single subject,

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and that testified to the comprehensiveness of his interests and knowledge. Upon his passing in 2006, the program was sustained by an appointed successor, who kept it running, albeit without the level of care and fiery commitment that defined Piyadasa's singular passion for the arts. I joined the university in mid-2016. In the few years since then, teaching has also become a process of learning.

A lot of what I have gained from teaching has depended on the size of each class. When I have a bigger class, it is enlivened by a desire to undertake group activities. Normally, this means planning a study trip to one or more of our neighbouring countries. Often, I am required to rely on the kindness and hospitality of colleagues from around the region, who display nothing but generosity in accommodating us by taking time out of their busy schedule to speak to my students and share with them the knowledge and the excitement that they find through the study of art.

Other times, with a smaller group, the activities tend to turn inward, to explore what the students' main interests are. This happened in my second year into the job. There was one semester in which the only student enrolled in the pre-modern and early modern Southeast Asian art class was an Iranian. While providing her with the general overview of Southeast Asia, we also spent a good part of the semester exploring Persianate cultural history and its connection to Southeast Asia. It was that focused exchange with one student that spurred my interest in the topic, which then allowed me to develop subsequent teaching materials on the Persianate cosmopolis and Islamic arts in the *Zirbadat* (the land below the winds).

Learning has taken place in diverse settings, including a dragon kiln in Perak, a *mamak* coffee shop, the conservator's lab at the Islamic Arts Museum of Malaysia, the entrance steps of the National Museum of Malaysia, the Ceylonese Bar in Ipoh, the wooden gazebo (Wakaf) in the courtyard of the Cultural Centre, along the circular pathways towards enlightenment at the Borobudur stupa. Most of the time though, the students sit in a dim air-conditioned classroom and allow the projection of slides on the screen to take them across universes. Time travelling doesn't stop there.

By the time I reached my third year, I had acquired a solid understanding of the 'quantum psychics' of the digital world. Today we have innumerable digital archives out there awaiting the discovery of future scholars. This allows us to access innumerable resources at any one time, which marks a real shift in reckoning with the question of parity in knowledge access. This is all the more pronounced in art history, a discipline of inquiry that historically was obfuscated by elitism. It was seen as the exclusive domain of 'gentlemen' and 'girls with pearls'. But it doesn't take a Kantian to agree that the transformative,

humbling and levelling power of beauty or other sensorial experiences through our encounter with objects made by other humans, are essentially common.

In the past few years, what I have been doing is also relearning how to find resources. Rather than complain about the lack of institutional funding in building up the perfect 'classical' art history facility, I have learned how to rely on the kindness of strangers (digital archivists, librarians, hackers, nerds) to build up a vast reservoir of teaching resources and research materials. In this way, whenever a colleague overseas asked if I have found the condition of working in a less-than-perfect public university wanting, it often makes me remember what was the anxiety that drove that line of questioning.

In my teaching, 'Southeast Asia' exists as a term only to allow this narrow idea of the region to be taken apart, so that other networks and circulations that overlap in Southeast Asia can be explored. On this note, the region is not a centripetal frame that moves inward. Rather, the region provides a centrifugal force that invites students to explore how our locality is connected to our neighbours, and to many different parts of the world. Two larger orbits are relied upon here.

For the pre-modern and early modern course, Southeast Asia is discussed through the Indian Ocean at one end, the Nanyang in another instance, and also the Pacific. Besides elucidating the basic religious principles or world-views that underpin these cultural geographies, thematic inquiry encourages students to think about questions of power (how does it manifest itself? What role does art play in this?), gender (what is the role of women? How does sexual difference inform artistic practices?), memory (how is the past recorded? How is art a technology of remembering? What are the politics of memory?) and translation (what are the adaptive principles that inform cultural encounters? What is retained and what changes?).

For the modern and contemporary art course, Southeast Asia is by turns inflected not only by high imperialism and resistance against European powers, but also by the desire to forge new political affinities. The Third World therefore also informs the cultural aspirations of Southeast Asian artists and their circulatory pathways. Under this expanded trans-continental regionality, the course then explores the modern as a procedural engagement with the continuities and discontinuities of visual knowledge systems from a pre-modern or early modern past. In the process, we explore various theoretical apparatuses to provide explanatory accounts of modernism, neo-traditionalism and the avant-garde, as these phenomena have emerged in many worlds besides that of mainstream movements from Europe/North America.

You might say that teaching Southeast Asian art through these expanded scopes is overly ambitious and overwhelming. I can only answer that I cannot

imagine a history of Southeast Asia that isn't so. Given such circumstances, what is left for me to do is to learn how to tell this story convincingly, powerfully, persuasively. While I am nowhere close to succeeding, each year offers me a chance to move towards that goal.

BIOGRAPHY

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Undergraduate Teaching of Art History in a Studio Context

Sarena Abdullah
Universiti Sains Malaysia

At Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), art history papers are offered as core papers to Fine Arts students at the School of the Arts. Thus, I have developed Art History courses for Fine Arts, rather than Art History students. This required me to re-strategize the approach and learning outcomes of my classes to suit the needs of studio major students. Most of these Fine Arts students are accepted based on their Form Six Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia (STPM) results or diploma certificates. Besides their academic qualifications, they are screened by way of a drawing assessment and an interview process. Thus, developing art history pedagogy subjects for Fine Arts students required further consideration of whether their backgrounds and interests are based on studio rather than art history.

Every year, around 30 students majoring in Fine Arts have to take ‘Introduction to Fine Arts’ and ‘Theories and Methods of Art History’ courses, both of which I teach. As these classes are the first few introductory classes to fine arts and art history, building knowledge on an already established knowledge of art and art-making can be slightly challenging.

First, most first-year students majoring in Fine Arts have a very limited knowledge of art history and, in particular, Malaysian art history. As a case in point, their knowledge of modern artworks and Malaysian artists are limited to a few artists like Hoessein Enas and Dzulkifli Buyong—the former was a realist painter who is mostly known for his realistic portraiture, and the latter rendered his childhood memory of playing with boats and the common night scene of siblings putting up a mosquito net in the room at night. As for

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international artists, the only name that is known by most of the students is Leonardo da Vinci, which I suspect is due to the Mona Lisa and perhaps the movie *The Da Vinci Code*.

Second, their knowledge of the mediums used in visual arts is limited to drawing and painting. Hence art is merely seen as representation-making, rather than as an attempt of media exploration or visual communication to portray critical and conceptual thinking. Thus, it is very common for a first-year bachelor degree student to not have any idea what installation, conceptual and performance arts are. Their knowledge of art and art-making does not go beyond producing likenesses and cartoonish and/or manga-like sketches—as seen in their high school portfolios during entrance interviews. Cartoons and manga are the more popular forms of ‘art’ among teenagers. Their knowledge in crafts-making techniques is also limited and fundamental; thus art appreciation, aesthetic discourse and knowledge are very limited in their first-year of studies.

As a way of re-strategizing my approach and to make art history relevant and interesting to studio students, I had to approach Art History pedagogy by systematically building on the students’ own experiences and knowledge of art and art-making. Art history pedagogy has to be built around their limited studio knowledge of the first semester of undergraduate studies. In the first semester, ‘Introduction to Fine Arts’ is set as a survey that looks into both studio practice and art history in general at a very fundamental level. In the second semester, another course called ‘Theories and Methods of Art History’ introduces students to a few main theories that underline and discuss what art is, and the changes of the meaning of art through several selected readings, such as Plato, Hegel, Danto, Pollock and others. On top of that, students are also introduced to the writing of research papers: elements such as citation, references and bibliography are discussed and practised in exercises to equip students with the skills that are very much needed at a tertiary level. In both of these classes, the theories and histories of Asia/Southeast Asian/Malaysian art are not directly included in the curriculum; nevertheless, a few Malaysian examples are included in the ‘Introduction to Fine Arts’ class.

The twofold Malaysian Modern Art course is offered in the second year. The first part of the course is to introduce modern Malaysian art in terms of historical periodization—from the visual renditions already produced in the late 19th century in local Malay manuscripts and early print media, to the forms of current practices of modern and contemporary art. The second part of the course, with a special focus on Malaysian art since the 1990s, concentrates on discussing Malaysian art practice in terms of mediums used, subject matters and thematic approaches. Although this second section does not concentrate

on situating the post-1990s practices in a regional or international context, the idea of a Malaysian 'art world', especially in the relations between artists, dealers, curators, critics, collectors and auction houses, is introduced.

Besides the usual lectures, presentations and discussions, students are given a major group assignment that involves fieldwork. If theory classes provide students with an introduction to several theoretical approaches in art, as well as the academic aspect of writing, this assignment introduces students to fieldwork. These Fine Arts students interview artists or other figures who play a significant role in Malaysian art such as curators, gallerists, art historians, etc. This fieldwork is not only for the sake of doing research—getting first-hand information—more importantly, it exposes the students to various visual artists, their studio practices and the Malaysian art scene in general. Although this seems like a simple task, it actually exposes the students to the idea of becoming professional artists. Thus, an art history course actually boosts their studio practice knowledge and exposure to the different kinds of art scenes out there.

Another class that I am teaching at the level 200, 'Modern Asian Art', is yet another take on the building of these scaffoldings of knowledge. As these students have prior knowledge of Malaysian art history and the Malaysian art scene in general, this class tries to expand and link their knowledge in the context of Asia, or Asia-Pacific at least. Besides the active learning that requires students to present their understanding of assigned readings, students are asked to investigate the functions of art galleries and art museums across Asia. Of course, because these students cannot afford to travel far, the coursework tasks have been designed so that the students find out about various galleries and museums by way of the Internet. They are required to examine the websites of three to four selected museums and/or galleries, then present their findings in class. As such, the students would learn about the programming of these institutions—past and upcoming exhibitions, educational activities, administrative structures and others. Although this exercise does not require the students to examine any artworks in particular, they are exposed to how works circulate and the economical exchanges in the art market. On top of that, the value of art in a collection and the question of loans between institutions is discussed in class.

Besides the main approach of assignments for each class as discussed above, other pedagogical approaches, such as flipped classrooms and even the use of technology, are also applied. Students are required to upload their research on an assigned art history topic in the form of three-minute video presentations on YouTube channels. Whether we like it or not, various technologies are here, and sometimes alternative approaches can be more relevant

and effective to art students who can be quite poor in writing. Synthesising and communicating their research on art history can be more challenging through this exercise, as they have to converse and display their comprehension verbally through videos that could be viewed by others on online platforms.

After undergoing art history courses at 100 and 200 levels, students have to take a 'Western Modern Art' course at the 300 level, and subsequently an internship in the same academic year. Although I do not teach at this level, it is hoped that the base of knowledge of art history acquired in my classes enable the students to see themselves working and partaking in the Malaysian art scene, even if they decide not to pursue their artistic endeavour after graduation. It is hoped that the discussions on galleries, art institutions, art markets, exhibitions and others, will open their minds in seeking internship placements and subsequently job opportunities within the industry.

As I have discussed here, various approaches in teaching art history to Fine Arts students are needed to sustain their interest and, most important of all, to place their art history knowledge in the context of studio practice. Although assignments such as research-based term papers are still required, the approach of art history studies must not be limited to the analysis of artworks or to an art historical study through discussions of art styles and movements. As these are trained fine arts studio students, for whom art history and art theory subjects are seen as uninteresting, a slightly different approach in teaching art history has to be introduced.

BIOGRAPHY

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Some Questions on the Relationship between Institutions that Teach and Institutions that Exhibit, in Southeast Asia

Roger Nelson
National Gallery Singapore¹

It is often observed that museums, galleries and other venues for display have generated much—perhaps most—of the published writing on modern and contemporary art in Southeast Asia. T.K. Sabapathy, for example, observes that “[e]xhibitions are dominant sites for the production of discourse on contemporary art in Southeast Asia”.² This is true also for modern art, as evidenced by Sabapathy’s own role in organising and writing for numerous widely-cited exhibitions (and accompanying publications) relating to modern art, held at state-funded institutions such as Singapore Art Museum and various university galleries, as well as in commercial galleries and other venues. The texts produced by or on the occasions of exhibitions may vary in tone, but it is clear that this “production of discourse” includes many catalogues: texts which are generally briefer and more tightly focused than other forms of essayistic discourse such as journal articles, comparative essays, and so on.³

Yet, although there is a clear relationship between exhibiting art and writing about art, in Southeast Asia, there remains, perhaps, more work to be done to think through the implications and effects of this relationship on the nature and shape of scholarship. For example, have ephemeral artworks, lost or destroyed artworks, or artworks housed within inaccessible collections been under-studied, or less often taught, compared to extant artworks that are available for exhibition? Has the growing market (and rising prices) for modern and contemporary art in some (but not all) locations within Southeast Asia affected the nature and volume of writing published, even outside of explicitly

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commercial settings? Have either of these (or other) factors worked to isolate discussion of 'visual art' and 'fine arts' from discourses on other aspects of 'visual culture' and 'material culture' including performance, cinema, design, craft and so on? These and other questions may reward further consideration.

If matters arising from the relationship between exhibitions and scholarship demand more attention, then the question of what relationship exists between exhibitions—and institutions that organise and host them—and *pedagogy* is even less often discussed. I do not have sufficient experience teaching the history of modern and contemporary art of Southeast Asia to feel qualified to venture a position on this. However, my limited experience of teaching Southeast Asia's modern art history (in Singapore, briefly, and in guest lectures in Australia, Cambodia and Thailand) and Australia's modern art history (in Melbourne, briefly), as well as my conversations with colleagues much more experienced in teaching than I am, has raised for me some questions I will share here.⁴ First, I will briefly offer a reflection on teaching the history of 'Australian art', which has brought some of these questions into focus for me.

In Australia, it is common practice among many teachers of Australia's modern art history to substitute examples of works by canonical artists given in reading materials for other examples of works by the same artists that are available for students to view in person, in local museums or galleries. Would this be possible—or desirable—when teaching histories of Southeast Asia's modern and contemporary art, in Southeast Asia?

In Australia, this is possible due to the existence of substantial collections of 'Australian art' exhibited in state, national and university museums in most Australian cities. I adopted this practice myself when teaching an undergraduate survey course on Australia's art history at the University of Melbourne in 2016. I found that students engaged more deeply and with greater enthusiasm with artworks that they could see in person, probably for a range of reasons having to do with their increased attention to embodied, affective experiential reactions to the work, rather than only intellectual responses to it. This seemed to be the case even if the artworks students saw in person were different from the works that had been discussed in the texts that they had read. This made for more rewarding discussions in class, and better essays. It also had the added benefit of encouraging students' engagement with the art institutions of their city, beyond the classroom.

Another rewarding result of this approach was that it made it feel possible for me, at least in some instances, to simultaneously teach students the canon of 'Australian art', while also interrogating that canon (and by extension, the concept of canons more broadly). I attempted to do this, for example, by facilitating discussions about why it is that some works by any given artist may be more often written about than other works by the same artist, or why some

artists are extensively studied, but others whose work appears similar or comparable have been rarely written about. Would such discussions be possible—or desirable—when teaching ‘Southeast Asian art’ in Southeast Asia?

It should be noted that these discussions that attempted to at once teach and question Australia’s canon were only possible for two reasons quite specific to the teaching of ‘Australian art’ in an Australian university. First, the students had already been introduced to (mostly, but not entirely, Euro-American) art history as an (ever-changing) discipline and (expansive) set of methods, through compulsory prerequisite introductory survey courses. Second, there exists an established and relatively stable canon of ‘Australian art’, consisting of artists who are represented in most major museum collections, are written about substantially from multiple and often opposing perspectives, and who are, in many cases, widely known outside of specialist circles.

These circumstances are, in my experience, not shared in many Southeast Asian contexts. First, many universities do not equip students with an introduction to art historical methodologies or disciplinary debates before immersing them in the study of Southeast Asia’s modern and contemporary art. This can cause particular challenges for those teaching at universities that offer postgraduate courses to students who have no undergraduate training in art history, or sometimes even in any studies in the humanities or social sciences. Examples of such courses are Nanyang Technological University’s MA in Museum Studies and Curatorial Practice, where I briefly taught in 2017, and the University of Malaya’s MA in Visual Arts, where *Southeast of Now* editorial collective member Simon Soon teaches. Second, there is not an established canon of modern and contemporary art in Southeast Asia. There are nationally-specific canons, to varying degrees—more so in Indonesia and the Philippines, for example, and less so in Cambodia and Laos—but there is not a widely accepted set of artists who are extensively written about and exhibited throughout the region and widely known across the region outside of specialist circles.

That is, I contend, there is no canon of ‘Southeast Asian art’: a circumstance which I believe should not be lamented, but rather can be embraced as an exciting opportunity that facilitates new, inventive, challenging and (multiply, transversally) connected ways of thinking—and of teaching. To be sure, in recent years there is a growing consensus among specialists about the importance of certain artists, institutions and other narratives, but this sense of scholarly and curatorial agreement does not (yet) constitute a Southeast Asian canon, in my opinion, for two reasons. Firstly, the number of specialists interested in pan-regional art histories is very small, and the people and stories they agree to be regionally (rather than nationally) important remain largely unknown outside of these specialist circles. For example, while Juan Luna may be well known by diverse publics in the Philippines, he remains almost totally

unknown, even among artists and art historians, in Cambodia. Secondly, the sense of growing consensus even among that small group of specialists is very recent, and continues to shift swiftly, without the anchoring force of long-established academies or museums taking on a pan-regional purview.

And yet, a relationship certainly exists between institutions that exhibit and institutions that teach, in many parts of Southeast Asia. For example, students from teaching institutions in Singapore such as LASALLE College of the Arts, Nanyang Technological University and the National University of Singapore routinely visit the National Gallery Singapore, as well as other museums and galleries, as part of their studies. Students of art history from universities elsewhere in the region, from Bangkok to Kuala Lumpur, have also visited National Gallery Singapore with their teachers since I began working there in January 2019. I also know that art history teachers at universities in these and other Southeast Asian cities routinely ask students to make use of online materials as part of their syllabus. These include online materials made available by National Gallery Singapore, as well as other museums and galleries and archives, such as artworks digitised in high resolution as part of the Google Arts and Culture project.

Therefore, might decisions about the artworks (and publications) that the National Gallery Singapore and other museums and galleries (and libraries) choose to (and are able to) collect, exhibit, and—importantly—digitise and make available online, have an effect on the teaching that takes place in universities elsewhere in the region? What role might digitisation—be it legally and officially carried out by institutions, or individually done and informally circulated through private or pirate networks—have in teaching? Are artworks that cannot be found online less likely to be taught? Or perhaps less likely to be studied or written about by students? Academics often lament that students are more likely to cite texts that are available to them digitally than those only found in books and printed publications. Surely the same might be the case when students are selecting artworks to investigate? Might it be the case that artworks made by women, or by artists from minority populations, are less likely to be digitised or made available online? What of the fact that auction houses and other commercial institutions make many images of artworks available online which may then be used in teaching?

Might the fact that nationally-funded museums in most Southeast Asian cities other than Singapore usually exhibit only the art of their host countries serve to perpetuate nationally-siloed studies and interests? What about cities—like Manila and Kuala Lumpur—in which commercial galleries regularly exhibit contemporary art from other parts of Southeast Asia, but in which nationally-funded museums usually exhibit only modern art from the Philippines and

Malaysia, for example? What effect does this have on teaching and studying art history, if students are exposed to examples of modern art from the rest of the region only in reproduction, but are regularly able to experience in person examples of contemporary art from other parts of Southeast Asia?

Might the ready availability of illustrated publications from some other nationally-funded museums in Southeast Asia—such as the Vietnam Museum of Fine Arts in Hanoi, for example—mean that teachers are more likely to include modern artworks from their collections in their syllabus? Or perhaps not, if they are not available digitally? Might modern artworks held in the collections of museums that do not issue illustrated publications featuring modern artworks—such as the National Museum of Cambodia, for example—be less likely to be taught elsewhere in the region, for this reason (perhaps among others)?

Might it be mutually productive for there to be more dialogue, exchange and sharing of resources between institutions that exhibit and institutions that teach? If curators and others working at museums and galleries are already often reliant on scholarship produced by universities, and scholars are in turn already often reliant on exhibitions for the production of discourse, then a clear relationship between exhibitions and scholarship can be established—albeit one that raises many questions which might reward further attention. But what of the mutual reliance between exhibitions and *pedagogy*? Is it not the case that museums and galleries already rely on teachers to educate their audiences, and that teachers already rely on museums and galleries for their teaching materials (including images, as well as texts)?

If so, then how might people in institutions that exhibit and people in institutions that teach potentially work together to make this circumstance of co-dependence more fertile, fortuitous and perhaps even liberatory?

BIOGRAPHY

Roger Nelson is an art historian, and a curator at National Gallery Singapore. He was previously Postdoctoral Fellow at Nanyang Technological University. He is the author of *Modern Art of Southeast Asia: Introductions from A to Z* (National Gallery Singapore, 2019) and translator of Suon Sorin's 1961 Khmer novel, *A New Sun Rises Over the Old Land* (NUS Press, 2019). His writing also appears in edited volumes, scholarly journals, specialist magazines and exhibition catalogues. Roger completed his PhD at the University of Melbourne, on 'Cambodian arts' of the 20th and 21st centuries. He is co-founding co-editor of *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*.

NOTES

- ¹ I thank Simon Soon and Clare Veal for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this text.
- ² T.K. Sabapathy, "Introduction to Intersecting Histories: Contemporary Turns in Southeast Asian Art" (2012), reprinted in T.K. Sabapathy, *Writing the Modern: Selected Texts on Art and Art History in Singapore, Malaysia and Southeast Asia*, ed. Ahmad Mashadi, Susie Lingham, Peter Schoppert and Joyce Toh (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 2018), p. 318.
- ³ By contrast to published writing, oral discourse on modern and contemporary art may be generated by a more diverse range of other encounters with art, in addition to exhibitions; this is a topic for further investigation on another occasion.
- ⁴ I will frame these questions around the teaching of the histories of Southeast Asia's modern and contemporary art within Southeast Asia. Of course, I recognise the importance of teaching 'Southeast Asian art' outside of this region, and suspect that some of these questions may also be pertinent to other contexts. However, given the historical dominance of Euro-American scholarship and pedagogy, which may now be superseded, I will focus my attention here only on teaching within Southeast Asia.

How Should I Watch Today? Reflections on Film Programming and Pedagogy

Patrick F. Campos
University of the Philippines

I.

I do not know how, but I grasped what the woman in *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) felt as she chased the hooded figure with a mirror for a face in circles. Among many students before the time of digitalization in the 1990s, I imagine that my experience in film school of being awed by a work I could not fully explain was common. I was a movie fan before entering the university; I became a cinephile before I completed my studies.

The change was not instantaneous like a religious conversion, although moments of epiphany did occur, as when I experienced films like *Meshes* or *Solaris* (1972) for the first time. It was rather a slow process of following what I reckon to be a familiar pedagogical path, accompanied by fits of anxiety and anticipation, as our professors initiated us into ‘modern’ films—modern, like *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929) or *Tokyo Story* (1953), in that they represent the harshness and exhilaration of urban and industrial life, and modern, too, like *Blow-Up* (1966) and *Close-Up* (1990), in that they are reflexive, medium-specific in their innovation and political in their disposition. Such a process of education—by ‘new’ exposure to ‘old’ films—was arguably nothing more than a regimented academic fiction, but one that worked for me and for countless others before me.

Professors had good reason to present us with the masterpieces: these have stood as examples of quality and served as landmarks of cinema history. But more practically, a course that covers vast ground was taught for only 15 weeks and library access to works was inadequate. Thus, it made sense with a limited

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amount of time to discuss Lino Brocka illustrated by the quintessential *Manila in the Claws of Light* (1975); Ishmael Bernal, by *Miracle* (1982); Mike de Leon, by *Sister Stella L.* (1984); and Kidlat Tahimik, by *Perfumed Nightmare* (1977).

Quests for films beyond the classroom established one's own canon, as one moved from film-school choices to personally resonant ones. In these excursions, I decided I liked Brocka's *Jaguar* (1979), Bernal's *A Speck in the Water* (1976), de Leon's *Batch '81* (1982), and Kidlat's *Why is Yellow the Middle of the Rainbow?* (1994) more than the standards. Embarking on such quests was challenging. One had to carve time to attend screenings, frequent rental shops like the legendary Video 48 in Quezon City, and spend money for dubbing from laser discs.

The latter was a costly undertaking, peculiar to the times. I would travel by bus to another city to visit Greenhills Shopping Center where, tucked in between stalls that sold imitation clothes and shoes, boxes containing enviably selected films by world cinema auteurs were displayed. At the shop, I would leave a blank VHS tape that recorded six hours' worth of material at extended-play mode and pay a hefty sum of Php450 for copying three films. A week later, I would come back for my fix, leave another blank tape, and repeat the cycle. What I invested in time, effort and money was tuition fee for my personal film education.

II.

"This is what a destabilizer looks like." These words, stenciled on a T-shirt, open John Torres's *Todo Todo Teros* (2006), one of the films in the 2000s that signalled the arrival of a new Filipino cinema. The allusion is both political and cinematic, in an experimental film whose protagonist is a filmmaker and also a terrorist. The work was released in the post-9/11 world, in a year that saw coup attempts and bomb blasts and a historic low in industrial film production. Digital filmmaking was disrupting film practice while cineplexes showed only 35mm films that boxed out the cinema of mavericks who were off to destabilize the system.

I was a young instructor and researcher at the University of the Philippines at this time of transition from the old cinema to the new, teaching film history, theory, criticism and genres, and every semester I struggled to design my syllabi in the undergraduate level to reflect history and capture the contemporary. I felt I had the obligation to pass on my own education—showing films by Ingmar Bergman, Satyajit Ray, Zhang Yimou—but I also exhorted my students to be *out there*, where films by the likes of Torres, Khavn, Ditsi Carolino and Lav Diaz were being shown and discussed.

Mainstream and alternative cinemas in the Philippines followed separate but parallel histories in the postwar period. But with the introduction of cheap and accessible cameras, the digital filmmakers of the 2000s not only defied conventions of form, their inventive works also prophesied of a time of convergence when categories like mainstream and alternative would be exploded.¹ It was crucial, therefore, to understand how new Filipino cinema might change the trajectory of history, and more important, how stakeholders, including scholars, critics and future filmmakers, could actively contribute to defining present developments.

Throughout my film school years, the storied University of the Philippines Film Institute Film Center was for me a haven. There, I caught both classics and contemporary works on the big screen. By the 2000s, the Film Center was hosting exclusive premieres of digital films and festivals like Cinemalaya and Cinema One Originals. I brought my classes to the Film Center and opened my courses to films I had not seen, a practice that I decided was necessary but nevertheless made me feel uneasy.

I went through fits of anxiety and anticipation. Anxiety came from the guilt that I was not putting enough time for old films and was too trusting that my students would do as I did—pay their dues and go on their personal quests beyond the classroom. Meanwhile, the excitement was contagious. You could catch its buzz in email message boards and the rhapsodies of love-struck bloggers. The Film Center was frequently full with students and cinephiles during festivals, and audience anticipation was palpable—silence fell on the theatre as new films played instead of rolled. Part of film education, then, was for students to attend and actively participate in the screenings.

In a pedagogy centred on classics, films remain immovable from their pedestals on the passive side of an educational exchange. Contemporary films are precluded from the course design because institutions have not judged, categorized and fixed their value yet. In a pedagogy centred on new works, the learner does not climb up a prefabricated ladder built of film after film, but navigates an uncharted territory at the same time as her instructor. In this way, both student and teacher share in the way posterity sifts through a crop of contemporary films. Both of them can look back in time and decide if their evaluation of a work has changed.

III.

A stern soldier in a starched uniform is grasping for words to make an impression on a calm and composed art gallery staff. This scene in Aditya Assarat's contribution to the omnibus *Ten Years Thailand* (2018) fits the premise of a

romance film, but its narrative context is chilling. Soldiers are raiding a gallery because they have received complaints about certain photographs in an exhibition that are open to misinterpretation. The seemingly tender conversation between the young man and woman is actually blanketed by an atmosphere of irrational repression.

I programmed *Ten Years Thailand* at the Film Center in 2019 in an atmosphere not unlike the one in Bangkok portrayed by Aditya, but certainly no longer like the atmosphere in which I first saw *Todo Todo Teros*.

These days, many students make their own films before entering film school, and their hunger for the new, whetted by a thousand choices at any given moment, no longer destabilizes but normalizes. The thoroughly digitalized assemblage of cinema has introduced an attention economy, where students are consumers, moving images are content, and the potential exposure to awe in either canonical or contemporary films is harder to come by—because they are easily accessible in such high supply.

But the teacher is not immune to these changes. My own watching habits were transformed by the new forms of access. I found myself expanding my choices to accommodate the unknown and incorporate the yet-to-be-known in the purview of my own interests, as for example when I began to watch Southeast Asian films. I understood the implications better when I started programming for festivals and for the Film Center.

I saw how selecting classics for class and enjoining students to participate in screenings are what a film programmer does—that is, to anticipate an outcome in the interaction between a film and its imagined spectator without foreclosing, but occasioning, the unforeseen. Film students are actually engaged in programming their screens all the time, and so the pedagogical task is no longer centred simply on showing them films but on sharpening the criticality and creativity in their process, and honing their ability to make their film-watching productive and purposive.

The students' programming skills are sharpened whenever they construct and deploy a self-aware interpretative framework that allows them to make connections among aspects of films and critique these films within larger contexts like aesthetics, identities, histories and political economies. Reflexive framing provides students the opportunity to actively perceive and conceive of a film in more ways and on more levels than before.² Such reflexivity and ability to critique is what I hope to cultivate in potential viewers when I programme films like *Ten Years Thailand* in the Philippines.

A few months before I programmed the film, the Armed Forces of the Philippines red-tagged our screenings in the context of their intensifying counter-insurgency operations.³ The situation reminded me of how the act

of showing and watching films—not necessarily the films themselves—could threaten the state. Clearly, the most urgent pedagogical task today—as it has always been—is not to programme films as if they are all-important but to programme encounters between films and people that would create space for media-saturated students to come forward, uncowed by terrorists and hooded figures with mirrors for faces, as a critical public.

BIOGRAPHY

Patrick F. Campos is Director of the University of the Philippines Film Institute. He co-programmes Cinema Rehiyon and programmes the annual Tingin: Southeast Asian Film Festival in the Philippines. He was also a guest programmer at the Guanajuato International Film Festival and the Image Forum Festival, Tokyo. He is the author of *The End of National Cinema: Filipino Film at the Turn of the Century* (UP Press, 2016).

NOTES

- ¹ Cf. Patrick F. Campos, *The End of National Cinema: Filipino Film at the Turn of the Century* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2016), pp. 217–44, 287–96.
- ² Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), p. 9.
- ³ “UP Film Institute denounces AFP claim screenings used to recruit rebels”, *Philstar.Com*, 5 Oct. 2018, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2018/10/05/1857502/film-institute-denounces-afp-claim-screenings-used-recruit-rebels#QWkw343To8EHPeZQ.99> [accessed 1 Nov. 2019].

Teaching Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Art in the US

Nora A. Taylor

School of the Art Institute of Chicago

The question is not only how do I teach Southeast Asian art history, but also why? In the era of global contemporary art, one may question the purpose of using the geopolitical entity of Southeast Asia to identify an art historical subject. I teach it because I still believe in what Southeast Asian art history can teach us about art history. Sure, the field has changed and what PhD students in Southeast Asian art history are studying today differs vastly from the curriculum 30 years ago, when I first entered the PhD Program at Cornell University. In 1989, shortly after the Tiananmen Square massacre and as I watched the Berlin Wall collapse in my first semester, I was fortunate to have studied with the pioneering and relatively unconventional art historian Stanley O'Connor. His approach to Southeast Asia corresponded to my recently discovered interest. We were likely attracted to the region for the same reasons. We understood that it was one of the most diverse and interesting areas of the world to study, partly because of its artificiality as a Cold War construct, but also because of its constant state of flux. As a discursive site by definition, it was a perfect field for challenging Western assumptions of art historiography.

Far ahead of his time, before the advent of global art history, O'Connor considered Southeast Asian art to be a living art, as opposed to a repository of inanimate objects sealed in museum vitrines. This approach enabled my classmates and I to think more broadly about what kind of art we could study. Even though he exposed his students to wayang, textiles, ceramics and other so-called traditional art forms that continued to be made in the

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present, that he encouraged us to “learn the language and go to the field”, gave us the opportunity to consider living artists as subjects of research. It is no surprise that he counted among his students Apinan Poshyananda, who wrote the first study of modern art in Thailand for his dissertation, and Astri Wright, who was among the first scholars to focus on contemporary Indonesian artists. It was Stanley O'Connor's open-mindedness that also convinced me to take the scholarly pursuit of modern painting in Hanoi seriously, even though when I was doing research in Vietnam, contemporary Asian art had not yet entered academia.

After completing my doctoral studies in 1997, there were very few jobs for Southeast Asianists and I was lucky to land a position in the history department at the National University of Singapore. I was thrilled to be teaching Southeast Asian Art in Southeast Asia but was immediately faced with the dilemma that students in Singapore, although they knew everything about the region, knew nothing about art history. The university did not have a slide collection and I had to make black-and-white transparencies from a photocopy machine, which was not very conducive toward teaching contemporary art. Thus, my syllabus veered more toward visual and material culture and less toward art. It also covered more ancient than modern history. In 1998, I moved back to the United States to teach at Arizona State University and although in 1999, I organized a symposium on colonial and post-colonial Southeast Asian art, it still proved difficult to teach modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art because of the lack of digital access to updated scholarship. It was not practical to assign texts from exhibition catalogues. It wasn't until the year 2000 that I could assign chapters from John Clark's edited volume *Modern Asian Art* published in Sydney in 1998. Still needing to rely on slides, my classes remained somewhat interdisciplinary and thematic, covering Indonesian shadow puppets, Cambodian statuary, Vietnamese ceramics, but very little contemporary art. It took me a while to collect enough material to properly teach modern and contemporary art. The dilemma that presented itself was the reverse of the situation in Singapore, whereby most students knew about art history but very little about Southeast Asia. In 2004, I was invited to teach a graduate seminar on modern and contemporary Southeast Asian Art at UCLA and was finally able to cover the region's art from colonialism to the present. That year was also when ASU also finally acquired a high-speed scanner and I was able to create Powerpoint presentations from a growing array of books and exhibition catalogues, including my own *Painters in Hanoi* published that same year. It was also gratifying that ASU's first PhD in Art History was produced by Deborah Boyer on the topic of Filipino artists at the 1904 World Exposition in Saint Louis, Missouri.

Fast forward to the present, since 2007, I have been teaching at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and have been able to incorporate much more innovative and contemporary material. Aside from a few Bachelor and Master's degree seekers in art history, my students are mostly artists. Since my institution only grants BA, BFA, MA and MFA degrees, I have not had the opportunity to supervise doctoral theses at SAIC. But I have been working with doctoral students working on Southeast Asian art history topics at other universities such as Cornell, the University of Sydney, Nanyang Technological University and the University of Michigan, thanks to inter-collegial networks. At SAIC, while I aim to teach American students about Southeast Asian art, my most rewarding pedagogic experiences come from teaching Southeast Asian students who come to the US to study. This includes one of my first MA in art history students, Vipash Purichanont, who has gone on to join curatorial teams for the Thailand and the Singapore Biennales; Loo Zihan, an interdisciplinary artist who is now starting a PhD in performance studies at the University of California Berkeley; and two artists from Vietnam, Ly Hoang Ly and Phan Thao Nguyen. To them, studying Southeast Asian Art history is one of critical engagement with the art of their own countries without the pressures of national bias. In turn, for me, it is a means of inserting their art practices into the discourses of art history.

For the other students, classes in modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art encourage them to think critically about the category of Asian art and its exclusion in the canon of modern and contemporary art. We question the practice of segregating artists by their place of national origin so as to expand themes across borders and not restrict artists to an interpretation based on their ethnicity. My classes often start with the founding of colonial art schools in Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand. I continue with independence movements and national art discourses in Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam. I also cover themes such as Buddhism and Islam with artists such as Montien Boonma and A.D. Pirous. I discuss the rise of Biennales and the impact of diasporic identities. Since I do not teach exclusively Southeast Asian art—I take turns teaching a graduate survey of modern and contemporary art for example—I try to insert Southeast Asian content whenever I can. I also look at the issues that concern contemporary artists such as politics, gender and religion.

As contemporary artists from Southeast Asia have received increased attention from art collectors, curators and museums around the world, I am able to include a greater variety of artists. I teach a class, for example, called 'Post-Asia' that looks beyond the framework of the category of Asian art and includes Asian and diasporic artists who challenge cultural assumptions and stereotypes. I look at historiography and meta-art histories; how art history has

been constructed; and transmissions of knowledge from one generation to the next, such as the more recent debate surrounding the 2011 re-performance by a young Singaporean artist of a 1994 work by another and the debates that ensued. This new work that references an earlier work provides an opportunity to revisit a time period when the Singaporean government imposed restrictions on artists and discuss the role of state politics in the shaping of contemporary Singapore. It also provides an example of how artistic ideas flow from one generation to the next in complicated ways, much like how Stanley O'Connor had taught us to look at artworks across time and space that defy logical chronological time. Finally, an aspect of teaching Southeast Asian art that has fundamentally changed over the decades is the increased access to scholarship written by Southeast Asians, either in translation or because many of them publish in English. Since I teach in a non-traditional art history department in art school and am not beholden to the category of 'Southeast Asian Art', I want students to understand the complexities of art historical canon formations and be aware of the history of the field of Southeast Asian art history and why it matters, precisely because it defies categorization.

BIOGRAPHY

Nora A. Taylor is Alsdorf Professor of South and Southeast Asian art at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She is author of *Painters in Hanoi: An Ethnography of Vietnamese Art* (2004 and 2009), as well as numerous articles on modern and contemporary Vietnamese and Southeast Asian art. She recently co-edited a special issue of *Art Journal* (Winter 2019) titled "History as Figure", on contemporary South and Southeast Asian artists' use of historical tropes. She is also co-editor of *Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Art: An Anthology* (2012). She has curated *Changing Identity: Recent Work by Women Artists from Vietnam with International Arts and Artists, 2007–2009*, as well as *Breathing is Free: 12,756.3 New Work by Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba*. In 2014, she was the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship to research the politics of performance art in Vietnam, Burma and Singapore.

Teaching a ‘Dangerous’ Subject: The History of Malay Political Cartoons

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Introduction

I got flak from all over when I started this class. There’s been criticism on the faculty and from some grad students that this hasn’t anything to do with art. I think that’s bull.¹

Those are the words of Gary Schwindler, my lecturer in Art History during my studies at Ohio University, Athens, USA (1987–88), in response to the comments and criticisms of the faculty and some postgraduate students when he introduced the ‘Art History 535: Comics Seminar’ course in the study session of 1988. During that time, I was enrolled in the Master’s in History of Art programme in the Faculty of Arts and joined the class due to my interest in comics and cartoons. Moreover, I was a cartoonist and continued sending and publishing cartoons in various magazines and newspapers in Malaysia even while I was studying in the US.

Professor Schwindler’s words reflect the negative perception of some academics and art students towards comics and cartoons as compared to other forms of art, and how any effort to teach it as a subject was considered meaningless. However, Schwindler’s effort was successful, as can be seen through the publication of *401: For the More Complex Imagination*, a magazine that comprised works of cartoons, comics and writings by students of the class, who came from various areas of specialization such as journalism, fine art, graphic design, performance art and art history.

More than that, Professor Schwindler’s effort has inspired me to teach the same type of class after I completed my studies at the end of 1988 and started

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teaching art history at the School of Art & Design, Institut Teknologi MARA (ITM), now known as the Faculty of Art & Design, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) in Malaysia.

In 1994, I was awarded an academic staff scholarship from UiTM to pursue a doctorate degree in Cartoon Studies at the Centre for the Study of Cartoons and Caricature, University of Kent, Canterbury, England. The fact that my research was about the history of political cartoons in Malaysia prompted an interesting remark from a Saudi Arabian engineering student during a reception of new students by the university: “Muliyadi, you are dealing with a very dangerous subject!”

Challenges

The stigma about comics and cartoons was one of the biggest challenges in introducing cartoon art as a university subject in the 1980s. This also affected various aspects of academic activity as teaching, research and publication.

I was constantly asked by my colleagues what could comics and cartoons contribute to the development of society as compared to the fields of engineering, science or technology. When I published a book on cartoons in 1999, it was so difficult for me to find bookstores willing to sell my book. They doubted anybody would buy this kind of book. Even a friend of mine jokingly called me “Doctor Doraemon” after I completed my PhD in cartoon studies. In fact, when I was promoted as Professor of Cartoon Studies by UiTM in 2008, many people had already dubbed me the “Cartoon Professor”.

Even though there was a stigma attached to this field of study, I am grateful that the university where I taught understood and appreciated my interest and consequently awarded me a scholarship to further my studies in 1994. Earlier, I had introduced some topics on comics and cartoons in several art appreciation courses at the undergraduate level, upon returning from the US in 1988. I believe that these efforts had somehow contributed to the faculty and university’s acknowledgements of the prospects of this discipline.

Upon completing my PhD in 1997, the two courses on comics and cartoons that I taught during my tenure at UiTM were ‘Introduction to Cartoons and Caricature Studies’ for undergraduate students and ‘Malay Editorial Cartoons’ for postgraduate students. From time to time, I was also invited to give a lecture entitled ‘Issues in Contemporary Political Cartoons’ in a core course entitled ‘Contemporary Art and Design Issues’ for Master’s students.

I noticed that the students were interested in this topic as it was different from their art and design courses that emphasized studio practices in design and fine art. Even though my lecture focused on cartoons and caricatures as

the main subjects, the approach was based on art history methodologies that emphasize the aspects of chronology, style, time and space. The appreciation of the artworks was also done based on a formalistic and contextual analysis.

In general, there are many acts, rules and regulations regarding the media in Malaysia that influence the publication of comics and cartoons, especially political or editorial cartoons. For instance, the Printing Presses and Publication Act grants the Home Minister the power to revoke the printing licence of any printing company or publisher that publishes any materials deemed to be racially sensitive to multiracial Malaysian society. This basically determined the limits—culturally and politically—of what can and cannot be published, including political cartoons.

Basically, this limitation also influenced what I taught in class, as it could not cross the line that was determined by the government. This was due to the fact that political or editorial cartoons deal with socio-political issues that are related to the government and political parties, in the form of criticism, documentation, or propaganda, and can serve as political weapons. During the emergence of Political Reformation in Malaysia in the late 1990s, there were many political cartoons that were critical of the government, especially by cartoonist Zunar and the Independent Cartoonists Group (Kumpulan Kartunis Independen) and other pro-opposition cartoonists.

Although I was invited by Zunar to write the foreword of his cartoon book entitled *Lawan Tetap Lawan* in 2000, and also gave lectures on political cartoons in the university, I had to be very objective and deliver them with great care, considering that the university where I taught is fully owned by the government. Even so, I was summoned by the Dean of the faculty to explain about my writing and my involvement in the launching of Zunar's book, as a photo of me with Zunar and several opposition politicians appeared in the opposition newspaper *Harakah*.

Eradicating the stigma and negative perceptions of comics and cartoons as unimportant and merely humorous, seemed to be one of the toughest challenges in locating this discipline as a legitimate area of academic study. Specifically, an academic who plays the role of mediator in a cultural system has a vital role to play in creating confidence among other cultural players—be it the government or policy-makers, artists and audiences—to accept and regard comics and cartoons as an important subject.

Methodologies

Both courses on cartoons that I conducted in the university used the approach of art history. In other words, both were actually art history courses that

focused on cartoons. In this context, art history methodologies by such well-known Western scholars and art historians as Erwin Panofsky, Arnold Hauser, Meyer Schapiro, E.B. Feldman and E.H. Gombrich were used as the foundation for teaching these courses.

Cartoons were discussed formalistically and contextually from the aspects of chronology, style, time and space, and the analysis was conducted from the aspects of form and content, relating them to contextual factors such as the background of the society; historical, socio-political and cultural factors; in addition to the policies and ownership of the media.

In addition, important literature on comics, such as *Understanding Comics* (1993) by Scott McCloud and the graphic novel *A Contract with God* (1978) by Will Eisner, were used as references, especially in viewing comics and cartoons as a form of visual literature: creative works that comprise narratives, characters, space and draughtsmanship. Besides that, all the books on cartoons that I have written, especially *The History of Malay Editorial Cartoons (1930s–1993)* (2004), which is part of my doctorate thesis, were used as texts and references by the students. Cartoonists were also from time to time invited as guest speakers or forum panellists on the subject.

The contents of both courses were global and local in nature, emphasizing firstly the history of world cartoons before focusing on the history of Malaysian cartoons. In this context, exaggerated and stylized prehistoric cave paintings were considered as the beginning of cartoons, before the emergence of a similar stylistic treatment in the traditional shadow play (*wayang kulit*).

The emphasis on socio-political cartoons was traced to the works of Hogarth, Daumier and Philipon, finally focusing on the development of local political cartoons that started in the 1920s, in line with the development of newspapers such as *Warta Jenaka*, *Utusan Zaman* and *Majlis*. The role of cartoons as social and political weapons was discussed, such as instilling the spirit of nationalism before Independence; the use of cartoons as propaganda to promote racial harmony after Independence; and finally the functions of cartoons as entertainment and political instruments in the contemporary era. Some of the cartoonists discussed were Ali Sanat, Peng, Raja Hamzah, Rejabhad, Lat, Nan, Zunar, Reggie Lee and Rossem.

The main objective of both courses was to educate the students with knowledge of the historical development of global and local cartoons by emphasizing the form and content of the art forms and their relationship to the sociocultural development of society. At the end of the semester, the students were expected to be able to appreciate, research, analyse and write about local cartoons based on formalistic and contextual approaches, either focusing on specific cartoonists or any issues related to cartoons. Consequently, the

evaluation of both courses was both theoretical and practical, based on the approaches of art appreciation and criticism that are translated in the forms of essay writings, seminar and presentation.

Among others, the success and popularity of these two courses can be measured by the increase in student enrolment every semester. Usually, the maximum number of students for any course at postgraduate level is around 15, but for the course 'Malay Editorial Cartoons', the number could reach 30–35 each semester. In addition, there is also increased interest among postgraduate students in doing research about cartoons, focusing on the biography of cartoonists, the history of cartoons and humour magazines, as well as the roles and contributions of editorial cartoons in the society.

It is my hope that more literature and references on cartoons will be produced, and more importantly, that this phenomenon will enhance the status of comic art and cartoons as an important academic field of study.

Rewards and Contributions

I retired from teaching on 15 May 2019 after serving UiTM for more than 30 years. The opportunity to teach the history of cartoons was one of my most memorable experiences as well as a meaningful contribution from my part. The success and contributions can be viewed from the academic perspectives and activities of teaching, research and publication.

Concerning teaching, the effort to introduce cartoons as a core subject has been a success, after being merely taught as a topic in art appreciation courses for a long time. Cartoon art has been accepted as an important component of art history that should be studied, especially by students of art history and cultural management, as well as visual culture studies.

This has enabled more research to be conducted at postgraduate level, in addition to more research grants awarded by the Malaysian Ministry of Education and the university, such as the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS) and the Supervision Incentive Grant Scheme. The findings of the research have been presented in various local and international conferences as well as as books, monographs and journal essays.

Conclusion

Personally, teaching the history of political cartoons has widened my networking and cooperation with many local and global cartoonists, colleagues and institutions. I have been involved in various publication projects with well-known comic scholar Professor Dr John A. Lent from Temple University, US,

and I support the Cartoonists Rights Network International (CRNI) association's efforts to protect cartoonists' freedom of speech. All these, together with my research and publications, have been some of the factors that have allowed me to be honoured with the National Academic Award awarded by the Ministry of Education of Malaysia in 2012.

BIOGRAPHY

Muliyadi Mahamood, PhD is a retired professor of cartoon studies from the Faculty of Art & Design, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). He is the author of *The History of Malay Editorial Cartoons (1930s–1993)* (Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publications and Distributors Sdn. Bhd, 2004). He obtained his PhD in Cartoon Studies from the University of Kent, Canterbury, United Kingdom in 1997 and has published extensively on the subjects of cartoons and Malaysian modern art, both in Malaysia and abroad. He was awarded the National Academic Award (Anugerah Akademik Negara) in 2012. He can be contacted via email: muliyadi2004@yahoo.com

NOTE

- ¹ Gary Schwindler, *401: For the More Complex Imagination* (Athens, Ohio: GS Comics Ltd., 1988), p. 3.

Falling Off the Edge: Teaching Modern Southeast Asia and Architectural History

Lawrence Chua
Syracuse University

In architecture, edges are critical to understanding space. They define not only the hard parameters of a territory but also the transitions between different places and activities. For historians of architecture, pushing the edges of the discipline are a crucial part of developing a liberatory pedagogy that emphasizes acts of cognition over transferring information.¹ Describing the stakes of writing what she calls “universal history”, historian and political scientist Susan Buck-Morss has written:

Liberation from the exclusionary loyalties of collective identities is precisely what makes progress possible in history, which is not to say that global trade fosters understanding, peace, or universality (it connects directly with the sale of arms, the initiation of wars, and the degradation and displacement of laboring people). Instead, it is to argue that one of the feared ‘risks’ of long-distance trade (exploited by imperialists and anti-imperialists alike) is the fear of falling off the cultural edge of one’s own world and its self-understanding.²

To fall off the edge of the modern is to see beyond the flat terrain of a narrative that organizes the local and the global into centre-periphery relations. Those of us who study geographies that have been deemed peripheral to the

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history of modernity know well that critical historical scholarship of a place requires not only knowledge of local histories but a broader understanding of where the local sits within global narratives of the built environment. This requires an extensive knowledge of the ways the modern metropole was forged in the crucible of imperialism, slavery and genocide. The myopia of conventional art and architectural histories rarely allows for the centrality of the colonial project in the development of modernism and the rise of the so-called West. How then does one teach the history of architecture and urbanism in a narrative that has traditionally emphasized the rise of the industrial ecumene as an insular phenomenon? Specifically, where does one locate regions like Southeast Asia in the global history of modernity?

The lectures and seminar courses on the history of architecture that I teach for both undergraduate and graduate students in a professional school emphasize the ways that the built environment has emerged not only in response to contemporary local conditions but developed out of a global dialogue between the past and the present. In the survey lecture I teach, students encounter Southeast Asia through case studies that are part of a larger history of the global built environment from 1500 to the present. This is the second part of a two-semester required sequence that students encounter in their first and second years of a five-year programme. The two survey courses comprise about half of the required history courses that students must take in a diverse curriculum that includes building systems, theory, and—the mainstay of their education—design studio. These examples of architecture in Southeast Asia that make their way into the survey are not intended as additions to the canon of modern architecture (“Add Southeast Asia and stir...”), but rather as provocations to disrupt preconceived understandings of the development of modernism. Because Southeast Asia is where the confluence of multiple approaches to modernity can be taken apart, discussed and critiqued, these case studies offer a way of looking at the dominant narrative of modernity from the transitional zones of the edge.

In the survey, I have used Swati Chattopadhyay’s concept of the “colonial uncanny” to frame discussions of the circulation of neo-classical and Gothic revival idioms across European empires.³ This allows for not only a formal comparison of St Martin in the Fields cathedral (James Gibbs, London, 1720–26) with cathedrals that were built in South and Southeast Asia like St John’s (James Agg, Calcutta, 1784), but a discussion of the ways colonial networks facilitated the circulation of forms, expertise and labour. We examine the use of *chu nam* (a plaster made of shell lime, egg white, coarse sugar, water and coconut husks) by convict labourers brought to Singapore from India to build St Andrew’s Cathedral (Ronald McPherson/J.F.A. McNaire, Singapore,

1856–62). Further introducing case studies like Saigon’s Notre Dame Cathedral (1863–80) and the *ubosot* hall of Wat Niwetthamprawat (Joachim Grassi, Bang pa-in, 1878), a Buddhist ordination hall built in the Gothic idiom, into the comparison expands the discussion to understand the ways architectural forms were transformed into a stylistic appliqué through this movement. By looking at how the design process is embedded within larger social, economic and political events, we are able to better understand the relevance of Adolf Loos’ early 20th-century critique of ornament as primitive, degenerate and criminal to not only European modernism but to the colonial project as well. Contextualizing the career of architects like Kenzo Tange within Japan’s mid-century imperial project in China and Southeast Asia enables us to discuss the import of Metabolism after World War II, as well as the exploded, fragmented forms that their innovations have engendered in cities around the world, including Mahanakhon (Ole Scheeren, Bangkok, 2011–16). Examining the complex agency and authorship of art and architecture in this way places the history of formal and intellectual innovation within global histories of economic and political modernization. This not only gives students access to a rich set of global historical precedents and design approaches for the studio, it also creates an intellectual base for them to project into the future and imagine beyond accepted cultural borders to speculate on the kind of world in which they want to practise architecture.

To fall off the edge is to push at the boundaries of the known world, a world that has been constructed through disciplinary knowledge. Implicit in the project of decolonizing knowledge is the need to interrogate the borders of the disciplines that have ordered our worlds rather than simply enrich and entrench their canonical repositories. Architectural history has long been dominated by narratives of the triumphant rise of modernity, driven by an avant-garde of mostly-white, mostly-male practitioners and their portfolio of exceptional works. This historiographical approach might be traced back to the 16th century and Giorgio Vasari’s *Le Vite de’ più eccellenti pittori, scultori, e architettori* [*Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*] and suggests that many of the problems of the discipline were inherited from its long subordination to art history. In the intervening four centuries, architectural history has become increasingly autonomous of art history’s biases and its purpose more recently re-defined in relation to the study of architectural design. This is due, at least in part, to the increasing number of historians like myself, who are embedded within professional schools of architecture.⁴ Teaching history within a professional school is not without its own interesting set of problems, like the operative use of history to idealize an era as a model for design, but it has also been accompanied by critical self-examination and the development

of rich inter-disciplinary methods.⁵ As the profession acknowledges the rising importance of regions like Southeast Asia to the global building economy, architectural history as it is taught in professional schools has had to expand its focus.⁶ Our students, many of them from outside of the United States, are aware of the importance of achieving cultural competencies as the key to succeeding in an increasingly diverse and global marketplace, but they are also eager to learn about the ways the building sits within larger world networks of power, society and commerce in diverse historical circumstances. Because many of our students are attuned to the ways architecture today sits within an expanded field, it opens up the possibility of moving beyond the building as the primary focus of teaching history, and to examine the political role of infrastructure space, the reformulation of the so-called vernacular, and the influence of diverse forms of knowledge of space (like the *Traiphum*, the Indic cosmology of the Three Worlds prevalent throughout Southeast Asia) across different historical periods and geographic locations.

Area studies, the field that has structured Southeast Asian studies, has also had to confront its borders, often literally. Does Southeast Asia incorporate only the territories defined by the strategic concerns of post-World War II imperialism? To fully analyse the complex ways architecture and urbanism have developed in Southeast Asia requires a deeper understanding of the ways transregional discourses on culture, politics and economy have been rooted in the circulation of forms, labour, capital and ideas. To understand the ways the region was historically understood by the populations that inhabited it further requires rethinking the colonial as a rigid framework that ties back to a European (or North American) metropole and instead understanding its multiple centres and relationships to overlapping empires and spheres of cultural influence. The lecture course that I teach on so-called 'Buddhist architecture' attempts to do this as it presents a diverse image of ecclesiastical architecture that draws on multiple periods and regions. Here, Southeast Asia is placed at the intersection of multiple historical trajectories and considered as an extension of sacred landscapes that have been reproduced throughout the Theravada (and Mahayana) Buddhist ecumene. These landscapes tie the region to other places, both symbolically, intellectually and formally, as in the case of relic stupas that are based on material and ideological exchanges across regions and periods not defined by Cold War-era geographies. In this way, Southeast Asia becomes not just a field rich with case studies but a "method" for what cultural studies scholar Chen Kuan-hsing has described as "deimperialization".⁷ Understanding the ways the development of Southeast Asian architecture and urbanism has been embedded within translocal exchanges of ideas, forms and labour, on the one hand, and unequal global power relations, on the other,

reframes disciplinary and geographic boundaries as transitional zones. By softening these borders, we can challenge students to 'fall freely' off the edges of the known world and imagine new modes of space and social relations beyond late capitalism.

BIOGRAPHY

Lawrence Chua is a historian of the global modern built environment with an emphasis on Asian architecture and urban culture. He is an assistant professor at the School of Architecture, Syracuse University and a Scholar-in-residence at the Getty Research Institute for 2020–21. He was a fellow at the International Institute of Asian Studies in Leiden and a Marie S. Curie Junior Fellow at the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies at the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, Freiburg. He is the author of *Bangkok Utopia: modern architecture and Buddhist felicities* (forthcoming from University of Hawai'i Press). His writing has also appeared in the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, *Journal of Architecture* and the *Journal of Urban History*.

NOTES

- ¹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970), pp. 79–80.
- ² Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), p. 150.
- ³ Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta: modernity, nationalism, and the colonial uncanny* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), pp. 21–75.
- ⁴ Christian F. Otto, “Program and Programs”, *Rethinking Architectural Historiography* (London and Axon: Routledge, 2006), p. 50.
- ⁵ Manfredo Tafuri declared operative history to be one that “plans past history by projecting it towards the future”. Manfredo Tafuri, *Theories and History of Architecture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), p. 141; see also Carol Keyvanian, “Manfredo Tafuri: From the Critique of Ideology to Microhistories”, *Design Issues* 16, 1 (Spring 2000).
- ⁶ Graduates of programmes that are accredited by the National Architecture Accrediting Board in the United States must possess knowledge “of the parallel and divergent histories of architecture and the cultural norms of a variety of indigenous, vernacular, local, and regional settings in terms of their political, economic, social, ecological, and technological factors” and “of the diverse needs, values, behavioral norms, physical abilities, and social and spatial patterns that characterize different cultures and individuals and the responsibility of the architect to ensure equity of access to sites, buildings, and structures”.
- ⁷ Chen Kuan-hsing, *Asia as Method: Towards Deimperialization* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010).

Reflections on Teaching Art of Southeast Asia

John N. Miksic

National University of Singapore

For six years (1994–99), I taught a course on the art of Southeast Asia in the Department of Southeast Asian Studies, National University of Singapore. I approached the subject from a multidisciplinary perspective, with an analytical framework mainly taken from anthropology and sociology. My objective was to inspire students to think about the relationship between art, artists and society, rather than arts in isolation. Music played a major role in the course. I had assistance from other scholars who gave guest lectures. These included ethnomusicologists Prof. Geoffrey Benjamin, then in the Department of Sociology, Joseph Peters (then assistant director, Centre for Musical Activities, later subsumed under the Centre for the Arts), and Dr Nancy Cooper. For several years, before NUS had its own gamelan, tutorials on gamelan were held at LASALLE/SIA Institute of Art. Mas Widyanto, visiting scholar, led a gamelan workshop there in 1996.

Architecture was covered by Prof. Pina Indorf (Architecture, NUS: visual dynamics of Southeast Asian architecture) and Prof. Roxana Waterson, sociology of Southeast Asian architecture (especially houses). T.K. Sabapathy taught contemporary issues regarding creative practice, including live theatre. Patricia Pelley, visiting lecturer from Cornell University, taught modern Vietnamese art, including Chinese influences. Kate Crippen contributed lectures on textiles. I discussed the gardens of Southeast Asia (which I later expanded into a complete module); Islamic art; textiles; jewellery; and books (including book design). I took students to visit the Singapore Art Museum, especially when the exhibition *Modernity and Beyond* was there.

Some of my goals included the importance of social engagement by Southeast Asian artists and the continued influence of past artistic traditions

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in contemporary art. The following are some of the questions I asked students to think about.

What is the meaning of the social, ritual and economic matrix of a work of art?

What should be the goal of the student of Southeast Asian art: to learn to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' art, or to understand the intentions of the artists? What role should the study of aesthetics have?

How can the study of Southeast Asian art help to illuminate other aspects of Southeast Asian societies?

What are some of the main themes of Southeast Asian contemporary art?

What is Southeast Asian about contemporary Southeast Asian art?

How do contemporary Southeast Asian artists make use of the past? Anthropologists such as Gregory Bateson have argued that artists of all cultures share common traits. One of these traits or skills is the ability to communicate on a non-verbal level, which might be termed subconscious or subliminal. How have Southeast Asian artists manipulated artistic media in order to communicate on this non-verbal level?

Many Singaporeans do not visit art museums. How can adult Singaporeans who avoid museums be educated about and exposed to art? In Singapore, the Art Museum is separated from the Museum of Asian Civilisations and the Singapore History Museum. What are the advantages and disadvantages of such an organizational structure?

Stanley O'Connor has argued that:

the place of Southeast Asian art in America and in the liberal arts college...is in the museum. ...The university as a learned community has said that a museum belongs where it does at the centre of the campus because it is more than merely a facility to house, to preserve, and to exhibit discrete objects; that it is more than an efficient machine for the housekeeping of curious treasures and marvels. The museum stands there because it is a sign of relationship, of things in relation to one another, and how if taken all together, as a collection, they embody a meaning.¹

Would you agree that this statement applies with equal validity to Singapore?

Discuss the limitations and potential misconceptions associated with the expressions 'traditional Southeast Asian art', 'primitive art', 'ethnic art'.

Claire Holt divided her book *Art in Indonesia* into three sections: The Heritage; Living Traditions and Modern Art. Are these appropriate divisions of the subject? How can these (or alternative) divisions of the study of art be justified?

A 'sound group' is a group of people who share a common musical language, together with common ideas about music and its uses.² With this suggestion in mind, and citing two or more relevant examples, discuss how the different musical languages (both Asian and Western) found in Southeast Asia relate to other social categories (such as ethnicity, nationality, age, educational level, degree of modernity).

Can the same intellectual categories that are used to study Western art be applied to the analysis of Southeast Asian traditional art? Why, or why not? What new categories or approaches must be developed to understand the indigenous arts of Southeast Asia?

In learning the basics of Javanese gamelan music, what have you learned about cross-cultural encounters that might help you to understand and adjust to other cultural environments? [The objective here was to show students how music has been traditionally taught in Southeast Asia, which is quite different from the Western style of education.]

In this course, we studied many examples of continuity in Southeast Asian art of the 19th and 20th centuries with the art of earlier centuries. How much influence will tradition exert over Southeast Asian art produced in the 21st century? Different parts of Southeast Asia may display different characteristics.

In what ways are the Indonesian films *Akibat Kanker Payudara* and *Kawin Lari* alike, and in what ways are they different? *Kawin Lari* and *Surat Untuk Bidadari* are seen by critics and the filmgoing public as being somewhat outside of mainstream film-making. In what ways is this true? In what ways are these films similar and different in their approaches to alternative cinema?

The concept of a 'national cinema' is especially important in such multi-cultural nations as Indonesia. In what ways do (and/or don't) these films reflect Indonesian culture? Are any of the films more 'Indonesian' than the others?

I am happy that the study of Southeast Asian art has expanded at NUS, with two professors (Irving Johnson and Jan Mrazek) teaching a range of courses on the topic.

Some Key Works Used in My Classes (this list would obviously be updated if I were to teach this course now):

- Becker, J. *Gamelan Stories: Tantrism, Islam, and Aesthetics in Central Java*. Arizona State University, Monographs in Southeast Asian Studies, 1993.
 Chua Soo Pong, ed. *Traditional Theatre in Southeast Asia*. Singapore: UniPress for SPAFA, 1995.

- Firth, R. "Art and anthropology". In *Anthropology, Art, and Aesthetics*, ed. J. Coote and A. Shelton, pp. 15–39. Oxford: Clarendon, 1992.
- Fischer, J. *The Folk Art of Java*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford, 1994.
- Geertz, C. " 'Popular art' and the Javanese tradition". *Indonesia* 50 (1990): 77–94.
- Gittinger, M. *To Speak With Cloth: Studies in Indonesian Textiles*. Los Angeles: Museum of Cultural History, 1989.
- Holt, C. *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change*. Ithaca: Cornell, 1967.
- Kumar, Ann and J.H. McGlynn. *Illuminations: The Writing Traditions of Indonesia*. Jakarta: Lontar Foundation, 1996.
- Kwok Kian Chow. *Channels and Confluences*. Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 1996.
- Pemberton, J. "Musical politics in central Java (or how not to listen to a Javanese gamelan)". *Indonesia* 44 (1987): 17–30.
- Sabapathy, T.K. *Modernity and Beyond*. Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 1996.
- Tan Sooi Beng. *Bangsawan: a social and stylistic history of popular Malay opera*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Wright, A. *Soul, Spirit and Mountain*. Oxford University Press, 1994.

Some of My Relevant Publications:

- Lombard, Denys. *Gardens in Java*. Translated from French by John N. Miksic. Jakarta: Pusat Penelitian dan Pengembangan Arkeologi Nasional, 2008. Reprinted Jakarta: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2010.
- "Archaeological studies of style, information transfer and the transition from Classical to Islamic periods in Java". *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 20, 1 (1989): 1–10.
- Old Javanese Gold*. Singapore: Ideations 1990. 2nd revised edition, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.
- Pusaka Art of Indonesia*. Singapore: Archipelago Press, 1992.
- "The art of Cirebon and the image of the ascetic in early Javanese Islam/ Kesenian Cirebon dan Citra Pertapa pada Islam Jawa Awal". In *Crescent Moon: Islamic Art and Civilisation in Southeast Asia*, ed. James Bennett, pp. 120–44. Adelaide: Art Gallery of South Australia, 2005.
- "Singapore: Where Eastern and Western Oceans Meet". In *Singapore Biennale 2016: An Atlas of Mirrors*, ed. Yu-Mei Balasingamchow. Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 2016.
- Miksic, John N., R.P. Soejono, Roxana Waterson, Jacques Dumarçay, R. Soekmono and Ronald Gill. *Indonesian Heritage. Volume Six. Architecture*. Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 1998.

BIOGRAPHY

John N. Miksic is Professor in the Southeast Asian Studies Department, National University of Singapore. He holds an MA in International Affairs from Ohio University, and an MA and PhD from the Department of Anthropology, Cornell University. He has taught at the National University of Singapore since 1987, and has received awards from Singapore and Indonesia for contributions to the study of Southeast Asian culture. Miksic's current research projects include the archaeology of ancient ports on the shores of the Straits of Melaka, early cities in Indonesia, Cambodia and Myanmar, and ceramic analysis. He has supervised 20 MA and PhD theses, and he manages the Archaeology Laboratory for the Department of Southeast Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, NUS.

NOTES

- ¹ “Humane Literacy and Southeast Asian Art”, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 26, 1 (1995): 150–1.
- ² John Blacking, *How Musical is Man?* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973).

Teaching Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Art

John Clark

University of Sydney

I retired from postgraduate supervision in 2013, which is very distant to make comments, but I have some observations.

Choose a good supervisor. It is more important to have someone committed to seeing you through to final thesis submission than someone who is theoretically compatible or necessarily sympathetic.

Aside from the normal requirements of PhD research including a prior grasp of local history and literature, I should stress that a *sine qua non* is linguistic acquisition through family background, private tuition or some larger public course. Usually the latter is most effective for the postgraduate, requiring intensive teaching to above-intermediate level reading capability. The two Southeast Asian languages I am most familiar with—Thai and Indonesian—also require considerable personal help from friends or academic advisors in acquiring everyday speech for the understanding of linguistic games, including those used in advertising, newspaper articles and the cross-linguistic puns deployed by artists in their verbal and online communications. This is necessary when making artist interviews. Despite learning the language, PhD students may also need to make honest provision for use of interpreters and transcribers.

PhD output often requires demonstration of prior reading and fluency with theory. This requires considerable skill and time in integrating with in-country literature reading or interview-based field research, and a simple methodological transfer is likely to be unrewarding for the final thesis and other publishable research outcomes.

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PhD research on modern and contemporary art in Southeast Asia is on the front line of art historical engagements with the modern outside Euramerica, and all prospective students should be encouraged that they are entering an area with great potential for their own intellectual growth and institutional acceptance.

Your invitation to make comments about undergraduate teaching are beguiling despite my long separation from it (having ceased teaching at undergraduate level in 2006). But the status of art history undergraduate courses from first year through to honours graduation is so problematic in each institution—and I have not followed these changes in any detail—that making statements about them may be misleading in the absence of any administrative and financial capacity to implement them.

Perhaps the best way into Southeast Asian art history, in addition to survey courses designed to make the student aware of very complicated art histories which are non-Euroamerican, is a dedicated field course in-country at senior level whereby the student realizes this depth in situ. After that, specialized honours thesis writing from available sources that increase every year about particular art cultures in particular time frames could fix a topic for postgraduate research. The language training should ideally start in the first undergraduate year, perhaps enabling the undergraduate to do interviews with artists from the culture by their third year for local contemporary art publications. But training could also be accomplished as part of an intensive course at Honours level, prior to in-country PhD research. These are really teaching and student resource issues depending on the home institutional context.

BIOGRAPHY

John Clark is Emeritus Professor in Art History at the University of Sydney, the author of five books, and editor or co-editor of another five. His *Asian Modernities: Chinese and Thai Art of the 1980s and 1990s* (2010) won the Best Art Book Prize of the Art Association of Australia and New Zealand in 2011. His most recent book is *Modernities of Japanese Art* (2013), and he is currently working on a two-volume study, *The Asian Modern, 1850s–1990s*. Also active as a curator, he devised and co-curated *Modern Boy, Modern Girl: Modernity in Japanese Art, 1910–1935*, at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1998. In 2014 he co-curated an exhibition of the work of Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook in Sydney and Canberra.

Some Critical Reflections on Designing and Teaching an Asian Modern and Contemporary Art Histories Programme

Jeffrey Say

LASALLE College of the Arts

When I convened what was then—in 2010—a pioneering programme in Asian modern and contemporary art histories (the MA in Asian Art Histories Programme at LASALLE College of the Arts in Singapore), there were many questions relating to terminologies, pedagogical structure, philosophical positioning, as well as methodological challenges that needed to be addressed. As Asian modern and contemporary art histories was a new field of academic study, there were virtually no precedents to benchmark it against. But this also provided an opportunity to generate new discourses, new knowledge and new methodological approaches from the research done by faculty and students.

At the core of these questions is the term ‘Asia’, itself a historical and political and indeed discursive construct as much as a geographical entity. The Programme circumvented the limitation imposed by this term by adopting a thematic or topical approach as a pedagogical strategy, rather than a country-based one as with most programmes that deal with pre-modern Asian art. Lessons for each theme or topic are supported by visual examples drawn from Southeast Asia, South Asia (notably India) and East Asia. By doing so, it ran the risk of pre-supposing a certain ‘regional coherence’. The Programme is conscious of this conundrum and the challenge has been to navigate between and across local, national, regional and global narratives, and understanding the particularities of individual contexts as much as any cross-cultural currents. One of the aims of the Programme is also to allow further interrogation of the

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connectivities between the art, artists and art worlds of the countries that make up Asia and Southeast Asia.

In recent years, the Programme has come to focus increasingly on the Southeast Asian region as it is where its knowledge, expertise and resources lie. The opening of the National Gallery, Singapore in 2015 has also made artworks, exhibitions and archival materials of the Southeast Asian region much more accessible, and such experiential learning will undoubtedly have pedagogical and research implications on the way that Southeast Asian modern and contemporary art histories are being taught and received.

The MA Programme was structured to move beyond the Western epistemic tradition and ontological definitions of art as well as its limitations in understanding the diverse art practices of the region. This becomes all the more challenging in a modern and contemporary art history programme in terms of trying to appropriate these paradigmatic concepts and contextualizing them within the art writing, histories and practices of the region. It became necessary as a result to foreground and problematise these concepts at a theoretical level (together with alternative concepts developed to explain local and regional contexts such as multimodernisms, neo-traditionalism and decoloniality), so that students understand that the unique local conditions and contexts of the region, such as the encounter with colonialism and belatedness in art historical developments, mean that the 'modern' and the 'contemporary' cannot be discussed in strictly Euro-American terms.

The use of the plural 'histories' rather than the singular 'history' was much debated. The use of the plural 'histories' in the title of the Programme represents its philosophy and, in many ways, its theoretical position. The plural 'histories' is an assertion that the diverse traditions, cultural specificities as well as complex racial, ethnic and religious mix of the region do not conform neatly to preconceived and stereotypical ideas of a homogenous 'Asia', the 'Orient' or 'Other', as seen through the lens of Western paradigms. It suggests the intersecting histories (and art histories) of the region, as well as the engagement of the countries in the region with one another, their shared historical experiences and confrontation with the West. By taking this approach, the Programme affords variegated and multilayered readings and considerations of Asian art, reflected in the complexities of the historical specificities and cultural traditions and complicated by the specificities of social and political contexts within and beyond national boundaries. The use of the plural 'histories' thus defies any attempt to homogenise Asian art into a singular history' that does not take into account the complex processes of tradition and change that have shaped and continue to re-shape it.

There was also the question of time frame. Although the Programme's scope covers the modern and contemporary periods from the 19th century to the 21st century, such a linear sequencing is avoided in the module structure and pedagogical approach of the Programme. For example, both modern and contemporary examples are juxtaposed during lessons to illustrate a particular issue or case study, which also reflects the rather ambiguous relationship between these two terms in the context of the region's art historical development. Being an art history programme, there is also the question of the historicization of the contemporary. What should the historical distance be between the time of what is produced and what is being taught and how does this impact on what students can or cannot research? As such, there is this tension between the need to keep current of the art scene and the need to maintain a certain distance in order to research, write and evaluate with a more critical eye.

The pedagogical approach of the Programme is predicated on the position that Southeast Asian art histories should be taught on its own terms as far as possible. But how do we do this without falling into essentialist tendencies and still be able to engage in a global discourse? The Programme had sought to develop pedagogical strategies that tried, in very deliberate and selective ways, to move away from the Western lens of looking at art history by, for example, privileging the reading of texts by Asian scholars (or Western scholars who have formulated alternative models of studying Asian art), by provoking students to think of the possibilities and limits of Western methodologies in framing Southeast Asian art and by recontextualizing theories and terminologies that have a Western point of origin.

The year 2019 marks the 10th year of the MA in Asian Art Histories Programme. The Programme continues to evolve in a rapidly changing art ecosystem of the region. In the first few years of the Programme's existence in the early 2010s, where discourse of the field was under-developed and secondary materials were scarce and were approached via Western art theory and other non-regional material, students needed to do fieldwork as a primary form of research. Writing and research in the field have grown exponentially in the past decade. However, I am still of the view that field research such as interviews and archival research are vitally important in building up discourse in a relatively new field. Primary fieldwork will also allow students to research and write about Southeast Asian art histories from the perspective of the various players and practitioners of the region. I am delighted to say that students and graduates of the Programme have made and continue to make original contributions to the field through their primary research, which have helped to build up the regional art historical discourse.

The final point of reflection is the challenges of running an MA programme with students from a diversity of background and of not having a corresponding BA programme that could have provided students with the relevant training and knowledge. This is mediated by instituting a bridging course that offers a series of introductory lectures and basic texts to build up the foundational knowledge of students before they start the actual programme. The lectures include pre-modern Asian art, Western modernism as well as basic art theory and key art historical concepts that will equip students with the necessary knowledge to cope with the more intellectually challenging readings and lessons when the programme starts.

BIOGRAPHY

Jeffrey Say is the programme leader of the MA in Asian Art Histories Programme at LASALLE College of the Arts. As an art historian, Say undertook pioneering research on the history of sculpture in pre- and post-war Singapore. His co-edited work, *Histories, Practices, Interventions: A Reader in Singapore Contemporary Art* (2016), remains a critical anthology for researchers, curators and students on Singapore art. He is currently working on a second volume, which is a reader on Singapore modern art. Say is a public advocate of the importance of art and art history to Singapore. He is a frequent speaker at the National Library, museums and art spaces.

Teaching Southeast Asia's Architecture: A Cursory Survey of Challenges and Prospects

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The question of teaching Southeast Asia's architecture, in part, concerns the search for appropriate resources for a survey course. What are the useful texts to use at an introductory level? Trying to answer this simple question entangles us in an examination of the state of research on architecture in Southeast Asia, however we may define this.

This essay asks the questions: What is the state of the field(s) of Southeast Asian architectural history, how has its component entities been defined, and what foundational and critical literature provide the fodder for a survey course? It will be apparent that we are dealing not with a singular domain but multiple circles of scholarship, each springing from entirely different concerns and looking at various artefact categories. Next, and perhaps more crucially, given the state of the field(s), what are the challenges in trying to teach across disciplinary domains and national boundaries for a more integrated understanding of the production of architecture via transregional and cross-cultural flows?

Part I: Delineating a Variegated Field and Its Constituent Domains

By conventional standards, 'Southeast Asia' rarely forms the focus of a survey of architecture, and is often altogether excluded in global surveys.¹ In invoking the term 'architecture', we need to qualify the scope and terms of reference.² We may distinguish at least five categories relevant to Southeast Asia, each being the domain of entirely different knowledge ecosystems. They are here cursorily surveyed as discrete categories, and their overlaps are discussed later.

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Vernacular architecture, primarily a domain of anthropological research, is a tradition of scholarship with its own history of revised perspectives and critical introspection; it is now at pains to emphasise that the vernacular is not static and also accounts for contemporary developments.³ The only substantive region-wide surveys to date remains Roxana Waterson's *The Living House* (1990) and Gaudenz Domenig's *Religion and Architecture in Premodern Indonesia*. In two recent global surveys,⁴ Southeast Asia is split into two halves: the Austro-Asiatic is treated with Asian landmass, while the Austronesian is grouped with Oceania.

What constitutes the classical—Indic in much of Southeast Asia, Sinic in northern Vietnam—is perhaps most memorably encapsulated by the two definitive, magisterial surveys of this period of Southeast Asia's 'monumental' architectural history: the first being the historical urban geographer Paul Wheatley's *Nāgara and Commandery* (1983), and the second by Daigoro Chihara *Hindu-Buddhist Architecture in Southeast Asia* (1996).

The early modern (roughly the mid-14th to early 19th centuries) designates the period of the late- and post-classical architecture of Southeast Asia. Its developments occurred alongside the rise of European empires and their networks beginning in the early 16th century. Yet, the 'early modern'—whose usage for Southeast Asia is not without contestation—is not reducible to the colonial. Its study remains the purview of historians who peruse sources not otherwise consulted by architecture historians, and the description of architecture and urbanism occurs within broader discussions of the political, economic and social histories of the major maritime-oriented polities and port-capitals. Anthony Reid and Denys Lombard are the most notable scholars of this period of study; their respective multi-volume works attempt to capture the complexity of the temporal and geographical interconnections that characterise this period.⁵

The colonial is traditionally the domain of historians of imperial histories—the British, French, Dutch, Portuguese—working out of the former colonial metropolises. Notwithstanding exhortations to look beyond the deck of the colonial ship,⁶ the primary focus of such studies is still on colonial records, including those of dominant trading companies with massive archival documentation. Meanwhile, projects looking at colonial architectural history as 'shared heritage'⁷ emphatically reframe the colonial project as a shared venture. However, this area of scholarship continues to foreground the monumental and employs Eurocentric frames upon architectural and urban histories,⁸ or narrows its perspective on architecture beyond the colonial project to the informal built environments of the "poor and illiterate" among the indigenous,⁹ ignoring the historical urban wards of regional-indigenous mercantile groups.¹⁰

National Surveys: Architecture Pressed into Service for Identities, and Documentation Frameworks

A fifth category, modern architecture, overlaps across the late colonial and post-independence periods (except Siam/Thailand, where formal colonialism does not apply). Here, national surveys dominate the writing of Southeast Asia's architecture (REFs), including as component chapters for region-wide surveys.¹¹

Criticisms of 'methodological nationalism' are well known, as are the reasons for its emergence as an epistemological frame.¹² National surveys of architecture project present-day political boundaries (largely inherited from 19th-century colonial demarcations) into the past to construct their narratives, and are inadequate to account for transnational circulations even in the historical, pre-modern period, and even more so for more recent and contemporary technologically augmented flows and rapid communications. National identities are read into a story of architectural culture, and the compartmentalisations can be particularly unhelpful for the study of earlier periods.¹³

National surveys also perform epistemological violence when the architecture of certain groups become judged against a presumed (racialised) national ethos. Thus, as Abidin Kusno observes, the association between ethnic Chinese and shophouses in Indonesia carries a negative connotation.¹⁴ In contrast, in Malaysia and Singapore, Malays are presumed to have been rural, and shophouses—being urban—are regarded as Chinese, even though Malays (peninsular, Sumatran, coastal Bornean), Javanese, Bugis and other maritime Southeast Asian groups were involved as owners, tenants, or architects and builders of shophouses and other urban dwelling forms.¹⁵

Meanwhile, minority groups that become the 'Other' in the new nationalist frames of ethnicities through conquest or other forms of incorporation into a nation-state dominated by a different ethno-nationalist core group are occluded in national architectural histories. Examples include the architectural histories of the Chams in 'central and south Vietnam', Malays in 'southern Thailand', Mons in 'central Thailand', 'Moros' in 'the southern Philippines', and the Chinese, Arabs, Tamils and urban (and rural) minorities across the region. They are reduced to subsets of national stories dictated by the dominant ethnicity and subjected to judgment against a national teleology, rather than as part of networks that extended far beyond the modern nation (and the late colonial era).

Alternative Frames and Ambivalent Positions

Teaching and writing architectural histories are thus activities enfolded in political-economic construction, contestation and negotiation, whether overtly

or unwittingly. Concomitantly, architectural histories have also served as sites of resistance. The study and recovery of vernacular traditions in Indonesia and in Thailand, and of shophouses in Malaysia, for instance, can render visible the identities of groups that are otherwise excluded or marginalised in national narratives.¹⁶ But there is also a tendency towards the romanticisation and fixing of architectural 'tradition' as unchanging and timeless signifiers of identities—in the impulse to exoticise the Other, architecture becomes the site to consume material culture and ethnography.¹⁷ Still, the recovery of skills and techniques that would otherwise be completely forgotten is invaluable from at least the building culture point of view,¹⁸ not to mention the impact it has as a form of cultural capital that can be appropriated to the benefit of the community.¹⁹

Teaching architectural history critically, however, requires fostering an attitude of sceptical inquiry into the politics of knowledge production. Students' attention could be brought to understand ambivalences through the positionality of scholars, and the politics behind canonisation in documentation practices and the choice of one community or category over another.²⁰ Studies that celebrate the houses of wealthy minorities or colonial-era elites tend to focus on visual splendour and meticulously retrace the networks of privileged elites.²¹ Critical discussion of the processes behind the accumulation of wealth and political power that underpin such edifices should be included, however cursorily.²²

Part II: Foregrounding Liminalities and Transgressing Boundaries

The complex nature of the 'local' in Southeast Asia's material cultural histories, involving palimpsests, translations and reworked elements from previous localisations and syntheses of transregional and global cultural flows in both architecture and urban form, means that it might be more plausible to speak of Southeast Asia's architecture—Southeast Asia as site, rather than as denominator or adjective. Such diversity stemming from extensive cultural contact is not peculiar to Southeast Asia; however, it is arguably more keenly foregrounded in the region.

Consequently, recognising these complex histories reminds us how the five received categories mentioned earlier, each neatly bounded within their respective disciplinary domains, pose methodological challenges. One tendency is towards caricatured portrayals of other domains. For instance, we may cite the instrumentalising, reductive or generic treatment of the 'traditional' or vernacular in works on modern or colonial architecture,²³ and how urban geographers and modern architecture historians are disconnected from the architectural and urban histories of early modern Southeast Asia, or are dismissive of it.²⁴

By way of closing, I offer three suggestions that, to my mind, impinge upon the larger motivations for discussing and teaching Southeast Asia's architecture, in connection with globalising the study of architectural history. These are, first, attending to liminality and overlaps; second, transcending disciplines; and third, engaging beyond Euro-American networks and Anglophone scholarship to acknowledge Southeast Asia's own local-regional diversities.

Liminality and overlaps: The artefact categories surveyed earlier overlap in time, but they are treated separately as discreet domains of study. Buildings that straddle the categories are ill served by this situation. Conversely, artefacts of a particular domain of study tend to be half-understood or even misrepresented when they are mentioned in another domain.²⁵ This is a shortcoming that particularly needs to be addressed in teaching/studying Southeast Asia's architecture. An example would be the 'bungalow'. Jacques Dumarçay makes a poignant observation that there is "a certain kind of Malay architecture" that was "parallel to, yet separate from, colonial architecture" in the Straits region and mainland Southeast Asia. Indeed, such urban/suburban houses are called by different names in each nation-state narrative.²⁶ Such transgressive cases that traverse nation-state boundaries and transcend the 'colonial' and the "vernacular" pose a challenge to existing frameworks of architectural history and its simplistic ontological assumptions, such as 'colonial bungalow' versus 'traditional house'.

Cross-disciplinary conversations: Southeast Asia's 15th- to early 20th-century Islamic architecture—epitomised by its tiered-roof mosques, elaborate mausoleum complexes, royal gardens with hydraulic constructions, and architectonic gravestone forms, to name just a few examples—has not received sufficient scholarly discussion in frameworks open to both serious scholarship and for use as teaching texts.²⁷ It lies in limbo amongst the five broad architectural categories—the mosques bear embellishments reworked and translated from the preceding Indic synthesis of Southeast Asia, and the form of the *mimbar* (Ar. *minbar*, pulpit) and Muslim gravestones of the region employ motifs ranging from woodcarving motifs of indigenous 'animist' cults to foliated *kalamakara* to the plinth profiles of Javanese and Sumatran *candi* (temples). The study of Islamic architecture in Southeast Asia also requires transregional approaches that are not well developed in the scholarship on the region's historical architecture.²⁸ These complex art and architectural formations are only very inadequately discussed using received premises and frameworks of studying (and teaching) Southeast Asia's architecture.

Linguistic and academic diversity beyond Anglophone scholarship and Euro-American frames: The preparation of teaching resources for a survey course on Southeast Asia also has to contend with the linguistic diversity of the

region. This is especially the case for grounded/field scholarship in languages other than English, for the region is home to numerous languages from different linguistic families. Further, the region possesses diverse colonial histories—Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, English, French, American—each leaving enduring legacies in what is deemed the normative core of ‘national cultures’ (particularly amongst the postcolonial elite in East Timor, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore).

Going beyond Anglophone scholarship involves not just translating and connecting to works in other languages, but also acknowledging that globally dominant scholarship remains disconnected from other forms of knowledge production among more localised research and fieldwork circles that possess more nuanced understandings of ground conditions and whose perspectives are not necessarily pressed into service to demonstrate proficiency in the latest academic trends emanating from the established (and hegemonic) Euro-American (and ANZ) academia. Indeed, one might mention in closing, the very different approach of Japanese scholarship on Southeast Asia,²⁹ including work by Southeast Asians trained in Japan.³⁰

Closing Observations: Regimes of Knowledge and New Comparative Bases

There is no space here to discuss the connection between the observations above to regimes of knowledge production and Southeast Asia’s own academic predicaments, as I’ve discussed elsewhere.³¹ I proffer that developing the faculty of humanistic reasoning in relation to the issues I have suggested is an underlying reason for teaching architectural history in general, and the value of teaching ‘Southeast Asia’ through lateral-thinking comparative perspectives, in particular. This might even open the discipline up in future through the kinds of provocations that teachers always endeavour to provide.

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BIOGRAPHY

Imran bin Tajudeen researches architectural encounters in maritime Southeast Asia across the *longue durée*. He examines the vernacular city and its contemporary representational and heritage tropes. His doctoral dissertation on this topic (NUS, 2009) won the ICAS Book Prize in 2011. He is co-editor of *Southeast Asia's Modern Architecture* (2018). He was postdoctoral fellow at MIT's Aga Khan Program (2009–10) and the IIAS in Leiden (2010–11). His research into mosque forms in transregional interactions and translations across vernacular and Indic architecture is published in *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), and in *Journal18* (2017). He is currently a Visiting Fellow at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, writing a monograph on Southeast Asia's Islamic architecture.

NOTES

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- ² See Robert Brown and Daniel Maudlin, “Concepts of Vernacular Architecture”, in *The SAGE Handbook of Architectural Theory*, ed. C. Greig Crysler, Stephen Cairns and Hilde Heynen (London: SAGE, 2012), pp. 34–55; and Gulsum Baydar, “The Cultural Burden of Architecture”, *Journal of Architectural Education* 57, 4 (2004): 19–27.
- ³ Marcel Vellinga, “The End of the Vernacular: Anthropology and the Architecture of the Other”, *Etnofoor* 23, 1 (2011): 171–92.
- ⁴ Paul Oliver, *Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); John May and Anthony Reid, *Handmade Houses & Other Buildings: The World of Vernacular Architecture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010).
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- ⁶ J.C. van Leur (1934, 1955) for the Netherlands East Indies; John Smail’s (1964) call for autonomous histories; Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (1991).
- ⁷ These include the Netherlands project KNAW, led especially by Leonard Blussé; and Alex Bremner’s architectural/urban rejoinders to the New Imperial History of Britain.
- ⁸ C J van Dulleman, *Tropical modernity: life and work of C.P. Wolff Schoemaker* (Amsterdam: SUN, 2010); Cor Passchier, *Building in Indonesia 1600–1960* (Amsterdam: KIT publishers, 2016).
- ⁹ Freek Colombijn and Joost Coté, eds, *Cars, conduits and Kampongs: the modernization of the Indonesian city, 1920–1960* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).
- ¹⁰ Imran bin Tajudeen, “Colonial-vernacular houses of Java, Malaya, and Singapore in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: architectural translations in the Rumah Limas, Compound House, and Indische Woonhuis”, *ABE Journal* [Online] 11 (2017), DOI: 10.4000/abe.3715.
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- ¹³ Robert Nelson, "The map of art history", *Art Bulletin* 79, 1 (1997): 28–40.
- ¹⁴ Abidin Kusno, "The Shophouse and the Chinese: Space, Politics, and Jakarta", in *After the New Order: space, politics and Jakarta* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016), pp. 28–48.
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- ¹⁶ See, for instance, the relevant chapters in Ronald Knapp, ed., *Asia's old dwellings: tradition, resilience, and change* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- ¹⁷ See the guides and publications for open-air vernacular house museums around Southeast Asia, for instance *Guide to Muang Boran* (Bangkok: Muang Boran, 2007) and Mike Reed and Wayne Tarman, *A short walk through Sarawak: the Sarawak Cultural Village revealed* (Kuching: Travelcom Asia in association with Sarawak Cultural Village [and] Sara Resorts, 1998).
- ¹⁸ See the Indonesian documentation series on vernacular architecture bearing titles beginning with *Arsitektur Tradisional Daerah*.
- ¹⁹ For instance, see the impact on the *mbaru niang* restoration in Manggarai, Flores, which was awarded the Aga Khan Award, 2011–13 cycle: <https://www.akdn.org/architecture/project/preservation-mbaru-niang>.
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- ²¹ Jon Lim, *The Penang House and the Straits architect, 1887–1941* (Penang: Areca Books, 2015).
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colonial urbanism's narrative, see Robert K. Home, *Of planting and planning: the making of British colonial cities* (London: Routledge, 2013); on the dismissive treatment of the vernacular, see Peter James Rimmer and Howard W. Dick. *The city in Southeast Asia: patterns, processes and policy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009).

- ²⁵ Compare, for instance, the nuanced discussion of Peninsular Malay houses in Lim Jee Yuan, *The Malay house: rediscovering Malaysia's indigenous shelter system* (East Petersburg, PA: Fox Chapel Pub., 2010) and Abdul Halim Nasir and Wan Hashim, *The traditional Malay house* (Kuala Lumpur: Institut Terjemahan Negara Malaysia, 2014), versus their reductive characterisation in Norman Edwards, *The Singapore house* and Robert Home, *Of Planting and Planning*.
- ²⁶ Maria Virginia Yap Morales, *Balay ukit: tropical architecture in pre-WWII Filipino houses* (Mandaluyong City, Philippines: Anvil Publishing, 2013); Abdul Halim Nasir and Wan Hashim, *The traditional Malay house*; Imran bin Tajudeen, "Colonial-vernacular houses".
- ²⁷ Imran bin Tajudeen, "Trade, Politics, and Sufi Synthesis in the Formation of Southeast Asian Islamic Architecture", in *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture, Vol. 2, From the Mongols to modernism*, ed. Finbarr Barry Flood and Gulru Necipoğlu (Hoboken, NJ, USA: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), pp. 996–1022. A rare exception is Denys Lombard, *Gardens in Java* (Jakarta: Ecole Française d'Extreme Orient, 2010).
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- ²⁹ Koji Sato, "Menghuni lumbung: beberapa pertimbangan mengenai asal-usul konstruksi rumah panggung di kepulauan Pasifik", *Antropologi Indonesia: majalah antropologi sosial dan budaya Indonesia* 15, 49 (1991): 31–47.
- ³⁰ See various articles on mosques by Bambang Setia Budi, who was trained in the Toyohashi Institute of Technology.
- ³¹ On more general questions of the ecosystem of the (Southeast) Asian scholar, see Imran bin Tajudeen, "Old and new knowledge regimes and the public milieu", *The Newsletter* (IIAS Leiden) 72 (2015): 32–3, https://www.iias.asia/sites/default/files/nwl_article/2019-05/IIAS_NL72_3233.pdf.

On Teaching the Demystification of Early Modern Thai Art under Royal Patronage

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Since the second semester of the 2016 academic year, I have contributed to undergraduate teaching on early modern art in Thailand, particularly during the mid-19th to early 20th centuries. Chronologically, this course sits between the Ayutthaya and Rattanakosin art and the modern art in Thailand courses, within the art history programmes of the Silpakorn University. It could also be related to the art in the Thai royal court course. Arguably, the early modern and the modern art of Thailand are still situated in the Rattanakosin period. However, the teaching of Rattanakosin art as well as art in the Thai royal court primarily discusses traditional-styled works of art—respectively Buddhist art and Thai handicrafts—whereas the early modern art in Thailand course aims to examine so-called non-traditional and secular subjects.

Works of art created during the early modern period of Thailand display forms, elements and aesthetics of the Western style, which differs greatly from those of traditional Thai art. Westernised art generally does not meet the criteria of ‘traditional Thai art’. The majority of Thai art represented in ‘classical’ Thai art history textbooks is that of a traditional style, i.e. Buddhist and Hindu art.¹ There is a Thai custom of stepping over a threshold to the sacred place, which can also be applied to the position of Westernised art in Thai art historiography in my view. Few cases of Westernised art that make their way to textbooks or other conventional medium are the work of art under royal patronage, for instance, palatial and governmental buildings.

Western-style Thai art of this period had scarcely been examined until recently. This course, which is one of the newest ones, offers wider approaches to investigate and reinvestigate the works of art, to put it broadly, in Western

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style and ideology. These comprise palatial architecture, shophouses, governmental and infrastructure buildings, portrait paintings and public monuments. Nevertheless, art is not exclusively concerned about forms, styles or aesthetics, as all art historians are well aware of; the Western style exhibited in early modern Thai art thus could not be seen as a mere stylistic influence. They were the products of socio-cultural and, to a lesser extent, political changes in fin-de-siècle Thailand.

Considering that arts in the 19th and 20th centuries were largely commissioned by the royal court, the non-traditional or Westernised art taught in my course can fill in the gap left by the teaching of traditional Thai art, Buddhist art and handicrafts, as well as art under royal patronage, in the Rattanakosin period within the courses mentioned above. Since it could be said that early modern Thai art stands on the threshold of a new movement which embraced the styles and ideology of Western art, I consider that this course is also another approach to the understanding of modern art in Thailand.

From my experience researching the field for over half a decade, early modern Thai art poses as complex and challenging questions as its historical background to many Thais, including scores of my undergraduate students. During the course of the 19th century, the Thai monarchy under the Chakri kings was immensely active in commissioning artworks. This royal endeavour has been interpreted and linked to Thailand's modernisation by scholars. But how does this present a complication in studying the history of art?

The complication starts from terminology. One major issue is the subject of colonialism. Many Thais believe in the deep-seated notion that Thailand narrowly avoided being colonised in the late 19th century by the machinations of 'royal modernisation', a perception that is difficult to question, especially with the country's strict *lèse-majesté* law. In addition, the non-colonial status of Thailand is perceived as a nationalist as well as royalist concept, which further complicates the issue. Another issue that has often been discussed is the Western aspirations of the Thai royalty and aristocrats, and its effects on art. In my point of view, this is where the complication begins. Despite its lack of criticism in the grand narrative of Thai art history, this type of Westernised art occupies a special position frequently related to the subjects of modernity and the independence of Thailand. The Westernised art commissioned by the royalty has always been shrouded in mystification and glorification, presenting another challenge for examining the history of the early modern art of Thailand without venerating the makers.

My frequent warm-up question in the classroom is: can we describe Westernised art in Thailand as a colonial style? By interrogating the political climate, urban development and socio-cultural changes of Thailand at that time, the certainty on the 'non-colonial' side gradually diminishes over the

coursework. Challenging the grand narrative or conventional plot of Thai national history—i.e. Thailand is the only non-colonised country in the region—can be achieved through the criticism and investigation of the artworks and the roles of the monarchy in their art commissions. This line of questioning also clarifies the ideology behind the structure of Thai art historiography as mentioned earlier, whereby the Westernised art has been generally excluded due to the polarisation in teaching Thai art history between East and West. Westernised art has usually been discussed only for its roles in the glorification of the monarchy, which feeds the royalist-nationalist concept.

In this spirit, teaching the history of art in the early modern period of Thailand should help broaden the horizon of understanding the role of art as the result of transcultural exchange navigated by the colonial encounters between Thailand, the colonies and the West. This is also another challenge and a reward in itself. Colonial and post-colonial conversations in Thai art history are almost nonexistent. The understanding of our neighbouring countries' colonial pasts is also a rarity in orthodox Thai academia. However, the issue of colonialism in other disciplinary fields such as Thai cultural studies and history is quite well developed. Thai art history of the early modern period could profit from these conversations among prolific Thai studies scholars, namely, Michael Herzfeld, Thongchai Winichakul, Rachel Harrison and Peter Jackson. By deploying related methodologies and theories on colonial and post-colonial issues, Thai art history may become less isolated from its neighbours, as has previously been the case; the notion of 'Thai uniqueness' in terms of art could cease to be a prominent narrative.

I also consider that teaching this class at the Silpakorn University, Wang Thaphra campus benefits greatly from the campus' location in the heart of the old quarter, where the 19th-century Westernisation programmes mostly occurred. Not only can accompanying field trips be easily conducted, one is also able to immerse oneself in the centre of this historic space. This gives an advantage and in-depth understanding of early modern Thai art history to Silpakorn students.

BIOGRAPHY

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NOTE

- ¹ An exception is the works of Khura In Khong, the master of mural painting from Petchaburi province who was active in the 1850s–60s. His works in Bangkok include the mural paintings in the ordination hall of Wat Bowonniwet and Wat Borom Niwat.

Art, Nation and World: Reflections on Teaching Indonesian Art in South-Eastern Australia

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Preliminaries

These reflections start from the assumption that it is important, necessary and rewarding to teach the history of modernism and contemporary art in Asia at Australian universities. I will not therefore seek to justify the enterprise. I started teaching the history of modern art in South Asia at the (erstwhile) Art Theory Workshop at the ANU on a sessional appointment in 2001. Following a continuing 0.5 appointment in 2002, I developed the course to encompass India, Indonesia and Japan, and after becoming full-time in 2005, added a separate course on contemporary art in Asia, adding China to the list. In 2018 I introduced an in-country intensive on Indonesian art, where the bulk of teaching takes place during a two-week field school with seminars on campus before and after travel. This field school enables personal encounters with museum collections and display conditions in Indonesian cities, with art and architecture in situ at Central Javanese locations such as Borobudur, Prambanan and Mendut, as well as visits to collaborative art and design spaces, art schools and artists' studios, leveraging my wide network of contacts. Needless to say, none of these experiences can be adequately delivered in classrooms. These courses are offered to undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students, following a two-year cycle consistent with teaching schedules at the Centre for Art History and Art Theory, ANU School of Art and Design. Postgraduate

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students attend the same lectures and tutorials but are given separate assessments and in my teaching practice, offered additional tutorials. A number of students have gone on to write their Honours theses on topics addressing 20th- and 21st-century art in Southeast Asia, with four more starting in 2020. HDR candidatures specifically researching modernism or contemporary art in Southeast Asia have been rare in my experience. However, several HDR candidates have addressed examples from this subject in relation to wider discussions, especially as points of comparison or contrast in relation to their work on other areas in Asian art.

The Subject-Field

That my teaching on Southeast Asian modernist and contemporary art remains limited to Indonesia is deliberate. Expectations of broad surveys of Asian art remain present in Australian university contexts, with a relatively small number of continuing academic appointments—reflected in the relatively small number of long-standing courses—in the field. I have chosen to restrict my teaching in relation to countries whose art I have studied in some depth, and where I have a record of professional practice and ongoing connections through fieldwork. Further, the India-Indonesia-Japan focus of the Asian modernism course is designed to offer students an appreciation of three kinds of relationships with the world: through the distinct cultures that arose due to or against British and Dutch colonisation in South and Southeast Asia, and through the lens of post-1868 Japan's role in Asia and the wider world before and after the Pacific War. The expansion of the field to include China in the contemporary art course is almost inevitable, given the international prominence of Chinese artists since the 1980s, but also backed up by my own professional practice. With regard to Indonesia, the focus of my teaching remains on the relationship of art to belonging in personal, national and global contexts, most ambitiously spelled out by writers of the *Surat Gelanggang* in 1950.¹ The claim to world inheritance in the context of the birth pangs of a nation of profound diversity—as spelled out in Indonesia's national motto of *bhinneka tunggal eka* (unity in diversity)—remains to my mind a signal for reflection and debate in Indonesia, Southeast Asia and other post-colonial settings today. Within a twelve-week semester with two-hour lectures and one-hour tutorials per student, fully half of the time is consumed by country-specific narratives. This time is by necessity devoted to the task of providing students with key historical data including names, places and historical events, and making them familiar with the practices of major artists, the average Australian (or British, or Chinese, or Sri Lankan) student being only faintly aware, if at all, of these specificities. My teaching

also emphasises the relatively recent origins of national borders as we know them now, and seeks to give students an appreciation of deeper histories of cross-cultural contact, emphasising that silk roads and spice routes were responsible for much cross-pollination predating the consolidation of colonial relations in the 19th and 20th centuries. Indonesian art history is thus presented as both interesting and rewarding to study in terms of a national narrative, and as characterised by both pre- and post-national adventures.

Three Methodological Reflections

1. Frameworks: National, Intra-National and Extra-National Histories

Histories of art are entangled with histories of the nation in most colonial and post-colonial contexts. In the Indonesian case, these entanglements are at times overwhelming, given that the archipelago was only unified in dimensions approximating the present-day nation-state until the apogee of Dutch colonial rule in the early 20th century, that the very name of the country is unknown before the 20th century,² and that the national language is a hybrid formalised as late as 1928 in response to the need for national unity against colonialism.³ The majority of Indonesian modernist artists were born in the Dutch East Indies, as were the earliest artists' associations including Persagi (1937). The active presence of European-born artists who settled or spent extensive periods of time in the archipelago attends the story of modernism: Walter Spies, W.G. Hofker, Simon Admiraal, Ries Mulder among others, played important roles in fostering indigenous modernisms. During the period of Japanese occupation (1942–45), this internationalism was further flavoured by the introduction of Japan's long-standing relationships with European modernism via the Keimin Bunka Shidōsho (Institute for People's Education and Cultural Guidance), as noted by Antariksa.⁴

The extent to which the history of modernism and contemporary art in Indonesia is engaged with the world inside and outside the archipelago is very substantial, if not extraordinary. It is a historical condition that most university art schools as well as museums, galleries, biennales and art fairs dealing with modernist and contemporary art are concentrated around a few urban locations in Java and Bali. This has had implications in the migration of art students and artists from other parts of the archipelago, as well as a broadly Java-centric historiography, with that most populous and authoritative of all Indonesian islands frequently standing in for the entire archipelago.⁵ And then there are issues of majoritarianism and the rise of conservative Islamism that further impinge on art historical discussion in relation to the visual culture and art practice of marginalised ethnicities, as the work of FX Harsono, among

others, has repeatedly shown. Adding to inter-island migration, the contemporary scene also sees prominent presences, such as the Dutch-born Mella Jaarsma and Malaysian-born Nadiah Bamadhaj (both based in Yogyakarta) and others, including Barbados-born Ashley Bickerton in Bali. Discourse around centrality and peripherality in relation to the world outside Indonesia therefore gains an added layer of complexity within Indonesia.

2. Gender

A primary issue that frequently arises in the study of Indonesian modernism, and art history more generally, is that of phallogentric history. It is important to stress that this is not an exclusively Indonesian (or even Asian) quandary. While the majority of students in classes are frequently female, the historiography of modernist and contemporary art in Indonesia has remained stubbornly male-dominated. The careers of trailblazers such as Emiria Soenassa are not well documented or commented upon; neither are such careers consistently followed by women exemplars in succeeding generations.⁶ Mainstream art historiography in Indonesia frequently omits Emiria or other contemporaries such as Mia Bustam. The first move in redressing historical imbalance is to recognise the insult, as our feminist intellectual forebears taught us. This is followed, in my teaching practice, by encouraging students to investigate Indonesian modernism through a restitutional critical lens. The practice of more recent practitioners such as Umi Dachlan (1941–2009), Farida Srihadi (1942–) or (German-born) Rita Widagdo (1939–) remains wedded to a broad church of abstractionism that reached its apogee during Suharto's *Orde Baru*. As in the case of Umi, the work has overtones of a generally formalist approach to landscape and tradition, not unlike work that her male contemporaries Ahmad Sadali, A.D. Pirous and to some extent, Srihadi Sudarsono are celebrated for. It is often not possible to isolate a particularly gynocentric or feminist intention in their practice. Furthermore, with the exception of Emiria and Umi who remained unmarried, the careers of many women modernists are often overshadowed by that of their husbands, Farida Srihadi being a striking example. It was not until the 1990s that it became possible to present coherent and continuing narratives of feminist practice in Indonesian art.

3. Materials

Modernism in Indonesian art is characterised by the dominance of canvas-based painting well into the 1980s, with only occasional forays into mixed-media, printmaking and textiles. Sculptural or other kinds of three-dimensional

practice is relatively rare. This has to do firstly with the dominant ideology of modernism as manifested in Indonesia, which assumes the painted image as supreme manifestation of *jiwa ketok* (visible soul), as valorised by S. Sudjojono (1913–86). Subsidiary factors exist in the general paucity of studio facilities for art practices that are infrastructure-dependent, including relief printing, casting and foundry, until more recent decades. The second issue in materials is that of publication, with relatively little available in English, especially by way of scholarly books and journal articles. In a small but significant number of cases in my experience, research by students has yielded more thorough and rigorous work than is currently available in print or online in English. Ongoing research into archival materials in Indonesia, including in Bahasa Indonesia, has made me further aware of the need for systematic scholarly investment in the historiography of modernism and contemporary art in Indonesia—a situation doubtless paralleled in other Southeast Asian contexts.

BIOGRAPHY

Chaitanya Sambrani studied at the M.S. University, Baroda (MA) and the Australian National University (PhD). He has developed and taught courses on modernist and contemporary art in Asia at the ANU since 2002. His curatorial projects include *Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India* (Australia, USA, Mexico, India, 2004–07), *Place. Time.Play: Contemporary Art from the West Heavens to the Middle Kingdom* (the first contemporary exchange and exhibition involving Indian and Chinese artists, 2010) and *Savanhdary Vongpoothorn: All that Arises* (25-year survey of the Lao-Australian artist's work, 2019). His current project is "International Affiliations and Cosmopolitan Aspirations in Indian and Indonesian modernism".

NOTES

- ¹ The text was first published in the Jakarta journal *Siasat* on 22 October 1950. Writer and dramatist Asrul Sani was the primary author. It begins “We are the legitimate inheritors of world culture...” and goes on to declare “Our national character as Indonesians does not merely derive from our dark brown skins, our black hair or our protruding foreheads, but rather from what we emphasise in the expression of our feelings and thoughts...”
- ² Nusantara was seriously considered in place of Indonesia as the name for the incipient independent republic during the 1930s. The National Museum of Indonesia devotes prominent signage-centimetres to the question. See also Hans-Dieter Evers, “Nusantara: History of a concept”, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 89, part 1, no. 310 (June 2016): 3–14.
- ³ Bahasa Indonesia is characterised by its multifarious ancestry and counts Javanese, Sanskrit, Arabic, Dutch and English among its forebears. The language was formally adopted in 1928 by means of the *sumpah pemuda* (youth pledge).
- ⁴ See Antariksa’s essays in Bahasa Indonesia on the subject: “Seni Dan Propaganda Pada Zaman Jepang” [Art and Propaganda in the Japanese Period] available at biennalejogja.org/2015/artikel/seni-dan-propaganda-pada-zaman-jepang/ and “Seni, Desain dan Propaganda pada Masa Pendudukan Jepang di Indonesia” [Art, Design and Propaganda during the Japanese Occupation in Indonesia] in *3 ½ Tahun Bekerja: Kuratorial Arsip Seni & Propaganda Pendudukan Jepang, 1942–1945* (catalogue of archival exhibition at Taman Ismail Marzuki) (Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 2018), pp. 35–47.
- ⁵ What, if anything, the proposed move of the capital from Jakarta to East Kalimantan may mean for this scenario remains to be seen.
- ⁶ Wulan Dirgantoro, *Feminisms and contemporary art in Indonesia: Defining experiences* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017). See especially Chapter 3: “Haunting in the Archipelago: Emiria Sunassa and Mia Bustam”, pp. 77–188. As Dirgantoro notes, “Heidi Arbuckle’s (2011) doctoral thesis on the life and work of Emiria Sunassa constitutes the first detailed academic research that links the issues of gender, art and nationalism in Indonesian art history.” See also Carla Bianpoen, Wulan Dirgantoro and Farah Wardani, *Indonesian women artists: The curtain opens* (Jakarta: Yayasan Senirupa Indonesia, 2007).

Choreography as Play: Playing It as Filipino

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You have to know the rules...before you can play the game, so it also brings discipline.... That is not about submitting to a particular power but ... enables you ... to participate in the loss of power ... to lose yourself and the illusion of an undivided unified self.... ... As play ... which also has the power to undo and reconfigure power relations ... in ... a more just and free world.¹

Once I was asked what I value most. I replied, “How children taught me to teach. To reckon with their bodies and minds, be one like them. To share dance—its time and space—with them. They could only walk and run, turn and roll, skip and leap, sometimes over me. It was a game—with rules—we played together.”

Now with college students, I still do this, a strategy by which they take off on their own. It’s a class in improvisation and composition that leads to choreography.

In the past, choreography only meant to record movement. There are systems and I trained in one.² Now it means making a dance, a time-consuming work of imagination and experimentation, of research and collaboration. A societal act.

At its base, choreography deals with time and space, shape and energy. With just these, how do we make a *dance*? To do that, you further deal with concepts or themes, situations or narratives, furthered by music and designs.

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A choreographic work may be jocular or serious, mythical or historical, political or spiritual, even controversial. How do we do these?

Philippine Choreographic Resources

Filipinos have their own indigenous or folk dances. They created them as a people, expressive of their lives, but these are now not called choreographies. Francisca Reyes Tolentino, later Aquino, did the first extensive research in our folk dances. Among others, she authored eight pivotal books in her notation system, which was mainly verbal. To many, this mode captures the dimensions of a dance. Members of the Philippine Folk Dance Society, which Aquino founded, continue to use this system to claim the authenticity of the dances they recorded. Yet when these go on stage—a different space—they are often re-staged for better legibility and projection. Thus some re-stagers also call themselves choreographers.³

From the 1930s, Leonor Orosa Goquingco “stylized” (her term) those dances into theatrical dimensions and billed herself as a choreographer. Beside folk dance, she also studied ballet and theatre. Using her own scenarios, she plotted dances into related suites to compose her full-evening *Filipinescas* (Filipino or of the Philippines): *Life Legend and Lore in Dance*, which was worked on over several years and premiered as a full folkloric performance in 1961 in Manila, prior to its performance abroad at the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier in Paris in the same year. In its heightened style and integrated form, the whole composed a ballet.

Today, we still see this strategy but not always with Goquingco’s all-unified flow. The Bayanihan Philippine Dance Company stages a panorama of segmented scenes, each in climatic progression. In contrast, the Ramon Obusan Folkloric Dance Group sustains a thematic flow in *Pastores de Belen* (Shepherds at the Manger), as it is indigenously known, which was first staged as *Vamos de Belen* (Come to the Manger) in 2000, and then again in 2001, 2002 and 2006. The piece links traditional Christmas rites, folk music and dances in a unified conception and construction.

Manila has three leading ballet companies: Ballet Philippines, Philippine Ballet Theatre and Ballet Manila. All perform ballet classics and original works by Filipinos and foreigners. Most Filipino works are set to Filipino music, scenarios and designs. Their repertoires exemplify the choreographic output of Filipinos today.

Basic references can be found in the *Cultural Center of the Philippines Encyclopedia of Philippine Art* (1994 and 2018 editions). It includes theatre’s *comedia/moro-moro* (dramatic comedy about the Moors/Muslims) [with *batalla* (battle or staged battle in a play), a combat-dance between Christians and

Muslims], the *zarzuela* (dramatic musical with dancing), and the vaudeville (*bodabil*), a skit with singing and dancing. Originating from abroad, they have acquired local dimensions.

Self and Society in Choreography

Filipinos started choreographing what we call ballets or modern/contemporary dances mainly in the 20th century. Today there are three colleges with dance programmes that include dance composition in their curricula: College of Music at the University of the Philippines (UP) in Quezon City, a state university; La Salle St. Benilde College; and Guang Ming College, both in Manila. Graduates from the first programme formed the first faculty of the other two.

The College of Music at UP has two semesters of dance improvisation and composition. To graduate, students also have to choreograph or restage a production thesis. Before that, they will have had ballet, modern dance, Filipino and Asian dances, dance notation, dance theory and history, music theory and practice, and general education courses.

When teaching improvisation and composition, I still hark back to my children's class. At its base, this means exploring space and shape, time and dynamics. Space and shape can be extended with a walk, run or leap, and use of a prop. Time and dynamics can be explored by tempi, accents, expansion, suspension and story. These acquire emotive or symbolic effects, which range from playful to serious.

These studies move from solo to duet and more, with each modifying the intent and dimension of a study. The students and I comment on the result, and this provides clues for revision. Both studies and responses create a dialogue to help each other. This exchange exemplifies the social nature of dance practice. Sometimes there are 'accidental' moves that may spice up a piece. Once, postmodern dance exploited *chance* for an ever-morphing performance, to sustain interest by the unexpected for both dancer and viewer.

From my literary studies, I also think of choreography as a language. In fact, a dance guru in Mary Wigman wrote *Language of Dance*. It can tell a story but not literally. Choreography is poetic in means, more suggestive than realistic. This is true even of folk dance. If mimetic, this is stylized while intending to tell a story.

The students also work with rhymes, lullabies, folk songs, etc., with the dancers themselves drumming, reciting and singing. These auditory elements help intensify or amplify a dance's appeal or resonance. In fact, most dances are structured musically, in repetition, recapitulation, rondo, chorus, theme and variation, or sonata forms. Some use literary devices as in poetry.

Students do character sketches of a self (one's own or another's), and from there move on to relationships to make a plot. All these prepare them for

their full recital productions, where some elect to do stories—mythic, folkloric, historic or contemporary—told through various angles in time and place. After Goquingco's strategy, this is now called *transcreation*, whereby traditional plot and folk dance are explored afresh while intimating their sources.*

To recapitulate, the dance language is close to poetry, be it lyrical or epical. It moves like words and images in a poem, and explores roles and emotions with or without plot. Again, music is its closest ally to sustain feeling and structure for its own embodiment. In fact, all these arts invent and reinvent themselves through the agency of play, as scansion and rhyme do in poetry, counterpoint in music, and improvisation and juxtaposition in dance. Moreover, the understanding of these is also aided by courses in dance history, criticism and semiotics.

As Rafael also says, a “playful” strategy makes history more engaging and relevant. Choreographers too are real people who launch themselves in an unrealistic, game-ruled medium, even if with realistic content. To dance is to leap into it—losing and finding yourself—to embody the dance, perhaps to say something darn playful or serious.

In research, you have what's between insider and outsider, between past and present. With one's own body, time and space, there are “two circles of tension” (Mary Wigman), “contraction and release” (Martha Graham), and “fall and recovery” (Doris Humphrey). Now business and industry make a model of art-making, described in *Artful Making* by Rob Austin and Lee Devin.

BIOGRAPHY

Basilio Esteban S. Villaruz is Professor Emeritus in the College of Music, University of the Philippines, whose dance programme he established. He danced and choreographed for companies such as Dance Theatre Philippines, Movement Men-Manila, CCP Dance Company, now Ballet Philippine, etc. His choreographies number more than 100. He majored in English, history, Asian studies, comparative literature and Benesh movement notation. He has been an arts critic since the 1960s. He has received awards from Philstage, Manila and Quezon City, the Cultural Center of the Philippines, the National Research Council, the National Commission for Culture and Arts and the US Congress on Research in Dance, among others.

* Some UP students explored this strategy in their recital productions after doing fieldwork on the lives and rites of the Subanon (Zamboanga), Bla-an (Cotabato) and Bukidnon (Panay). Others deconstructed ballets like *La Sylphide*, *Giselle*, *Cinderella*, *Petrushka*, *Les Noces*, etc., and reset them in the Filipino social context.

NOTES

- ¹ Vicente L. Rafael, *Motherless Tongues* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2016), pp. 197–8.
- ² I studied the Benesh movement notation system at the Benesh Institute of Choreology in London in 1968–70. My terminal project was to notate my ballet, *Mosque Baroque*, to a sonata by Antonio Vivaldi. It was mainly abstract, but referred to folklore in the Philippines, primarily as rendered in dance by the native Maranao, some of whom converted to Islam but retained their indigenous traditions. It was made with their costuming, including a display of a tubular cloth called *malong*, the use of an ornate umbrella over a supposed princess, as well as the use of ankle bells for the male dancers (although in the folk tradition, these are worn by women). Even if I choreographed this dance before I studied notation, I did this as my terminal project in notation, with the music in sonata form, thus departing from the previous choreographic formulation into folk dance rendition in the Philippines. Moreover, as I teach dance composition now, one of the forms I urge my students to do (in two semesters) is the sonata form: ABA or ABC, and other musical forms. Moreover, choreography deals with time, space and dynamics, which in choreography are primary considerations aside from a narrative or personification sketch. Movement textures or details are materials for choreography, not only as abstract or pure elements, but also as modes of characterisation and narration—chronological, *en media res*, or recapitulation. I am also aware of this due to my literary and historical studies, with one of my major works juxtaposing time(s).
- ³ Today the staging of folk dances researched by Tolentino are adapted for modern stages, which are spacious, better lit and with stage-legs at the wings. This allows for expanded projections of the dancers (where the original dancers had limited space), for more dancers to be variously deployed in space, and for calibrating entrances and exits in terms of the number of dancers, etc. As such, performing dynamics (energies) were expanded. Some stagers of folk dances called themselves ‘choreographers’. This is the case in folk dance companies in the Philippines, and one prominent international example was Moiseyev in Russia. Inspired by the style of Bayanihan Philippine Dance Company, Folklorico Mexico followed this style and attribution.

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Becak, Bike and Beyond: One Story of Teaching Modern Southeast Asian Art Abroad

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An inveterate margin dweller throughout life and here on the western-most edge of Canada, it is an honour to be invited to submit a piece here. I do so as a member of a small, fine community web and in anticipation of reading what everyone else shares. In particular, I am excited to hear what the younger generation of art historians of/in/from Southeast Asia have to say. As we enter the third decade of the 21st century, this roundtable offers a rare overview of post-secondary teaching within our young field, born into action and global visibility in the last 30 years.

I will share some reflections on my teaching story, as perhaps the earliest outsider-scholar of modern and contemporary (mo-co/glo-mo-co¹) Southeast Asian art history in North America to have developed annual undergraduate and graduate courses, birthing this part of the field shoulder to shoulder with Australia-based colleagues. A year before finishing my PhD in Art History and Southeast Asian Studies at Cornell in 1991, I had somewhat miraculously landed a job as a tenure-track Assistant Professor in Canada. The University of Victoria (UVic)'s position in South Asian art had just been reframed to Southeast Asian art history, and the first people on the short list—more senior and experienced than myself, all researching historical topics—were not chosen. UVic's History in Art Department was ready for global mo-co: perhaps not surprising, giving this Department's history.

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A Full Professor since 2007, I have now been teaching undergraduate and graduate students (totalling around 3,500), at the University of Victoria, in the city of Victoria (*not* the Australian state), on Vancouver Island (*not* the metropolis of Vancouver on the mainland), in British Columbia, Canada (*not* the USA, though inexplicably our two nations' telephone country codes are the same) for 28 years. Invited to develop regular courses in modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art history from my first term on, I knew, off the bat, that I would want to present these courses as part of a story of multiple modernisms, developing at their own pace and incentives, starting in the colonial period and coming into their own after independence, within a dialectic of local and international conversations.² While the department still had the traditional 'silos' of separate specialities, it also fostered conversations between us, in particular in our introductory art of the world course. The students in the 1990s were curious and open to new courses, including Southeast Asian art history.³

The first big challenge for the modern art courses was finding reading materials. In 1991, with the grand exception of publications from the Philippines (mostly artist monographs, dating to the previous three decades), there were hardly any texts available in English. For Indonesia alone, there was Holt's pioneering section of her book *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change*. There were my own dissertation chapters and additional case studies (and after 1994, my book). There were articles in the 1991 Festival of Indonesia exhibition catalogue edited by Joseph Fischer (for which I had been honoured to be co-curator with Joe and three Indonesian art world experts) and some articles buried in popular media, in English or Indonesian (which I could translate for students).

For Asia as a region, there was soon John Clark's edited volume *Modernity in Asian Art* (1993) and his later publications. While Southeast Asian art history has always easily been overshadowed by the art histories of India, China and Japan, writing the modern art histories of any and all parts of Asia had in common that it demanded a whole new paradigm shift from the Euro(derived)-academic mindset. But the snowball was rolling: each year brought new exhibitions and publications for our field. In 1993, the Asia-Pacific Triennial in Brisbane broke exciting new curatorial ground, offering excellent catalogues and also contextualizing Southeast Asia in the larger Asia Pacific region; other biennials in Asian and African venues began to sprout up. All of this planted the seed for Western museums to pick up the challenge of looking further afield than before. And, alongside all of this, a viable, publicly accessible thing called the Internet was coming into itself. We were living in dynamic times.

Not having much reading material in the beginning kept space open in students' weekly readings for some of the area studies materials (history, anthropology, political science, gender studies, etc) to help them better understand a region they had never studied before. Having more images than texts available from my research and from sources in languages other than English (for example, Vietnamese artist books or catalogues borrowed from a new friend who collected Vietnamese art), opened up the possibility for us to look more closely at artworks without verbal intervention. We looked at artworks that had not yet been incorporated into any canon or discourse, and came up with descriptions and interpretations in preliminary, collective as well as individual, visual and interdisciplinary analyses.

This multi-pronged method rehearsed not only the visual analysis skills so fundamental to art history and visual studies, but also inspired an assignment I have continued to use over the years, where I ask students to write short personal responses about a work of art they choose from a collection of unknown images. Without researching them, they write, essay-style, about the work's visual and evocative qualities, posing questions while drawing on free-ranging associations, personal reflections or memories. This brings us into a role-play experience of open-ended fieldwork, laying aside assumptions and 'knowledge', and looking at a work of art from many angles. This method also rehearsed students to not always lean on published authority, but to trust that they themselves are, or have, the 'instrument' to respond to art directly, without intermediaries, as a valid point of entry and enrichment (the very thing that drew them/us to art in the first place). In short, it rehearses them to explore new knowledge from their own authentic place.

Other pedagogical methods I developed for my courses involved storytelling (histories, biographies and cultural stories) and guiding students in visualizations, eyes closed, as we 'travel' back in time to 'see' performers, rituals, pilgrims, vendors, preachers, the poor, the rich, the sick seeking cures, etc. This offers contextually informed enlivening of historical monuments devoid of life in archaeological photos or transformed into tourist-laden piles of stone.

As I developed undergraduate courses and graduate seminars alongside the historically focussed courses on South and Southeast Asia, colleagues around the world were collectively making a dent in the European art historical canon. We all contributed to the emergence of discussions of how to frame a global art history, notably featured by the Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art (CIHA)'s conference, "Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence", held in Melbourne in 2008. And so, quite naturally, 15 years into teaching,

I began including case studies from China and Africa, exploring how modern art worlds in these places were also instigated by artists and artist groups. The Artists Alliance and Gallery in Accra, Ghana, started by Ablade Glover, became one favourite case study.⁴ And as I trace international and globally expanding careers of artists I had written about in the late 1980s, like Heri Dono, Dadang, Semsar and Arahmaiani, that of Nigerian El Anatsui is added into the picture.

By now, teaching mo-co Southeast Asia has become a matter of choosing between so much material, both in print and online, including video art and film footage of performance events, interviews and conferences. It has become hard to select what to assign for a 14-week seminar or undergraduate course. (With good mental wushu, one rises to each new challenge and only puritans complain about abundance.) I can now bracket my Southeast Asian history courses with Ho Tzu Nyen's video art problematizing how one defines the region and how one ascribes the founding of any given place, like Singapore, as a single historical moment in time.

Nearly 30 years since its beginnings, our field has made huge leaps forward, online and in print, in exhibitions and documentaries, as well as in the establishment over the last decade of curatorial positions at major art institutions throughout the world. Publications by new generations of scholars abound. I thrill to the names and ideas: the region is producing its own discourses as well as engaging new outsiders. The processes of decolonization have come a long way. And they still have a long way to go, in questioning the allegiance to certain styles of scholarship, curation and teaching.

* * *

The reality of teaching at a university without a strong, continuing Southeast Asia component to an Asian Studies programme, also limits the opportunity to teach a variety of courses in this area so students can build expertise. UVic has neither the infrastructure nor the demand to make more, or more in-depth, Southeast Asian art history courses viable. Sadly, the disciplinary push away from national or regional definition and towards thematic world or global art histories has also pushed Southeast Asia towards invisibility, again, beyond the limited circle of regionally involved scholars.

While Southeast Asian art history remains a marginal area of art history in the Western Academy (unfortunately, as the only Southeast Asian art historian in Canada, I will not be replaced when I retire, as the position will be reconfigured as "South Asia"), these decades of teaching in a secure institutional home has allowed me to continue unsettling established institutional patterns

of art history. Instead of, like my Western-art colleagues, covering 150–300 years in their teaching and research, within which frames we both teach and research, we ‘others’ get to cover 5,000 years or more of art histories in regions far larger and a thousand times more diverse than the European areas of specialization upon which art history was built. Teaching modern and contemporary art of Southeast Asia can also unsettle departmental hierarchies and territories, where colleagues teaching Western modern art, for example, have trouble embracing the idea of multiple modernisms in practice.

One thing that stands out as a general contribution I’ve made to every student who has listened over my years of teaching, is to have added another mental pattern less commonly cultivated in European(-derived) thought. By the mid-1980s, my studies of Chinese and later South and Southeast Asian world views had lifted me out of the ‘either-or’ mental syntaxes I had grown up with, liberating me into a more inclusive ‘both...and’, and fostering a deeper understanding of the three (not two) dimensions of *yin* and *yang*. Understanding that which is often dismissed as binary fails to ‘see’ that third space, the space of the whole, the space where all shades in between and any combinations thereof are negotiated.

My commitment to expanding the Southeast Asian art history curriculum has run in two directions. In retrospect, both of these were initially inspired by Claire Holt, as well as Stanley O’Connor’s article on collectors in the rainforest of Borneo. I strived to include not only the modern period, but also to give attention to the temporal co-existence of, and diverse conversations between, indigenous arts and outsider-influenced arts in the region. Along the way, while bending and enlarging the frames of the conventional (European-derived) definitions of ‘art’ and ‘history’, I learned that such views were pioneered by the founder of my now 51-year-old department at the University of Victoria—Alan Gowans.⁵ Sometimes younger institutions are less encumbered by tradition. But then, as institutions mature, many want to climb to higher positions on the totem pole of convention and in these times of generalised backlash, we see the commitment to global representation fading in some areas. But the clock cannot be turned back, even as the centres of activity shift, something this journal demonstrates.

Today many measures show how teaching and featuring our discipline has changed and grown. The sheer number and quality of scholars, teachers, curators and artists active in Southeast Asian art/history in the region and globally is one such measure. The opening of the National Gallery in Singapore, the Sunshower exhibition in Japan in 2017 spanning 30 years of contemporary Southeast Asian art, curatorial positions in major Western museums are but a few.

* * *

Teaching, when related to one of your passions, happens in both formal and informal contexts. Inside the university, the enthusiasm of colleagues and students to learn about arts of Southeast Asia was heartening.

Outside the university, sharing stories led to other surprises; two vignettes will suffice here. This year, a local painter who makes a living as a small town postman, won an honorable mention at the most important local annual art show for a painting inspired by the work of Hendra Gunawan, Widayat and other Indonesian artists featured in a book I had lent him, *The Five Maestros!*⁶

In the early 1990s, I was surprised by the first reactions to my book, *Soul, Spirit and Mountain: Preoccupations of Modern Indonesian Painters*. From the people in Victoria's best photo lab who prepared the plates for the book, to my Oxford University Press editors in Malaysia, the responses to the modern Indonesian art from people who had grown weary to the point of no interest in modern and contemporary Western art were superlative. They had had it with the ideological exclusivity of how Western Modernism and conceptual art movements were presented, with artists and works featured in increasingly rarified discourses accessible mainly to initiated insiders and not to the public at large. (We each serve some of the many circles, audiences, mandates and truths).

All along, the making of art and the studying of art history have intertwined in my life, though the latter surfaced as the path to a more secure livelihood. Since my late teens growing up in Europe, I resented the gap imposed between the makers and the thinkers. This clearly also inspired how I chose to work closely with artists (and teach art history), seeing the artist as just as important as (but not necessarily identical with) the work. In the larger world both within and beyond academia, it was also always clear to me (and made clear to the students) that this work was connected with anti-racist work for equal visibility and respect for all.

Immersing in Southeast Asian contemporary art from the angles that interested me most intensively, the ways artists carve out dynamic, communicative works that speak to our urge to create positive change for the benefit of more people, opens one up to parallel efforts everywhere, across time and space. Storytelling and art are sometimes cited as the most powerful tools we have to change the world. "You cannot legislate compassion," but art and stories reach people.⁷ I would also say that both history and the present show us that you cannot legislate tolerance and inclusivity. But teaching about Southeast Asia, which has been in active dialogue and exchange with such large parts of the globe for millennia, offers vivid and multiple portals of entry for our ongoing work.

Travelling, looking, writing and teaching, as a life-long student and practitioner of PSP (Plain Spoken Praxis), I celebrate having been part of a small group who threw out maps and offered new pathways relevant, above all, to outsiders like myself. I am now no longer up to date on broad sectors of contemporary Indonesian art and new generations of Indonesian artists, let alone Southeast Asian artists. I revel in seeing the 'old friends' from the region, alongside new and exciting art makers featured at major exhibitions worldwide. Will I renew my knowledge and insight after retirement? I do not know. This will depend on funds and other matters. For now, I am deeply grateful that Southeast Asia and Indonesia so generously gave me both a passionate professional field and taught me fundamental life-lessons.

Archetypally, I start fires: I don't need to tend them after others find them. They can creatively and systematically take the looking, gathering, analyzing and story-sharing from there, offering different skillsets than I. By then, I am onto new journeys, though always trailing precious, pulsating threads connecting me to the old ones. *Selamat*/Greetings to all, at each junction in this beautiful web.

BIOGRAPHY

Astri Wright is Professor of Southeast Asian Art History in the Department of Art History and Visual Studies at the University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. With her 1991 PhD dissertation (Cornell) and 1994 book, *Soul, Spirit and Mountain: Preoccupations of Contemporary Indonesian Painters* (Oxford University Press), and more than 50 publications for academic and general readerships, including bilingual English/Indonesian art books, Wright contributed to the growing awareness of modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art as a global academic and curatorial field. A Norwegian-Australian-American-turned-Canadian global nomad descended from academics, engineers, fishermen and farmers, bridging gaps and translating across cultures remains at the core of her life.

NOTES

- ¹ I play with the term ‘mo-co’ to refer to the internationally inspired, multiple and often interlinking streams of modern-contemporary art (as opposed to the contemporaries in other trajectories, such as indigenous arts, where there also exist other ‘contemporaries’ not necessarily or fundamentally hybridized with ‘international-modern’ histories). Perhaps, considering the Chinese, Japanese and Oceanic-and-African (and other) roots of European modernism, a term like glo-mo-co—honestly owning the global roots of what was ‘owned’ by a limited geography to the exclusion of visibility to real parts of the story of what nurtured these new chapters in art history—would fit best.
- ² Even though this framework had not yet been formulated as well as it has been today, anyone doing fieldwork could not have missed that point researching even partial histories of modern and emerging contemporary art in China, Japan, India and Southeast Asia.
- ³ During the first few years, I had three MA students who wrote theses for which I urged them to seek general readership publication; these were subsequently picked up by White Lotus in Bangkok: Beth Louise Fouser wrote about Wat Chai Watthanaram in Thailand (MA thesis, 1993; published by White Lotus in 1996); Wilhelmina Remke Raap wrote about the Great Mosque of Banda Aceh (MA thesis, 1994, published by White Lotus in 2009); and Claire Ann Fossey wrote about Rangda, Bali’s queen of the witches (MA thesis 2001; published by White Lotus in 2008). Due to the general paucity of Southeast Asian studies and financial support for graduate student research at UVic, with regret but more determination, I sent several talented graduate students who had applied to UVic on to better equipped university programmes. I fully enjoyed working with the two I could not inspire in this manner: Izmer Ahmad’s 2008 PhD dissertation was titled “Tracing the Mark of Circumcision in Modern Malay/sian Art” and Genevieve Gamache’s 2010 PhD dissertation was “Between Localism and Nationalism: Two Contemporary examples of Thai Temple Art and Architecture in Northern Thailand”. Currently, my first love in Asian art is being revisited as I work with Yang Liu on his dissertation “Human, Nature and Beyond: The Transformation of Chinese Landscape Representation since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China”, which has both an academic and an art component to it.
- ⁴ Future research topic for someone (or has it already been done?): the international culture of art instruction at Ohio State University in the 1960s and 1970s. Affandi was there as visiting faculty in 1962; Abladi Glover got his PhD there in the mid-1970s. Srihadi, on the other hand, was at the University of Ohio. Who else from Southeast Asia and the world were in Ohio during these decades? Sudjana Kerton studied at the Art Students’ League in New York; who else from Southeast Asia studied there?

- ⁵ Alan Gowans coined the departmental name History in Art, which in recent years has been renamed the Department of Art History and Visual Art. With that change, we gained something but also risked losing an important institutional and disciplinary history. Yet, as long as this history is remembered, and the learning goal of ‘increasing worldmindedness’ remains part of our mandate, nothing is lost. For some quick readings on Gowans, see, for example <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/2001/08/21/architecture-historian-alan-gowans-dies-at-77/079872b6-6c5b-430a-a74c-0168988af7ae/> [accessed Dec. 2019].
- ⁶ Hong Djien Oei, *The Five Maestros of Modern Indonesian Art: Affandi, S. Sudjojono, Hendra Gunawan, H. Widayat, Soedibio* (Magelang: OHD Museum, 2012).
- ⁷ Ivan Coyote, a Canadian non-binary transperson writer, storyteller and activist, interviewed on CBC Radio, 7 Nov. 2019.