PROJECT MUSE®

Forthcoming Emerging Writers Fellowship Recipients

Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia,
Volume 5, Numbers 1 & 2, October 2021, pp. 439-444 (Article)

Published by NUS Press Pte Ltd

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/sen.2021.0018>

➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/838738>

Forthcoming Emerging Writers Fellowship Recipients

Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia is committed to supporting the development of new writing in the region, and to providing an opportunity for emerging writers to develop their research and writing skills, and to engage with a broad readership in a new special section of the journal.

Inaugurated in 2018, our *Emerging Writers Fellowship* was initiated and funded by two anonymous donors, to support writing in English by emerging writers (with no more than three years of publishing experience), who are citizens or permanent residents of any country in Southeast Asia.

This year, the *Emerging Writers Fellowship* has been awarded to two outstanding emerging writers, who were selected from a very strong pool of high-quality applications received from across Southeast Asia in an open call.

The successful applicants are awarded the following:

- A grant of up to USD 1,000, to facilitate in-depth research and writing for a period of six months;
- Mentorship by one leading arts writer and one leading international curator, usually based in Southeast Asia. Successful applicants will be matched with appropriate mentors by the selection committee;
- Editing and advice from the *Southeast of Now* editorial collective; and
- Publication of selected essays (of between 3,000 and 5,000 words in English) in *Southeast of Now*, in a special Emerging Writers Fellowship section, to appear both in print and online.

It is with great pleasure that we announce the following two recipients of the *Emerging Writers Fellowship*:

- Ariana Chaivaranon, based in Kansas City, whose research project is presently titled “Afterimage of the Future: The Iconography of the 2020 Uprisings in Thailand”

- Myint Myat Thu, based in Yangon, whose research project is presently titled “The Search for Self: What is Holding Back Myanmar Artists from Putting Their Deepest Self on Canvas Coherently?”

We congratulate them both, and we thank all the other applicants as well as our generous anonymous donor.

Afterimage of the Future: The Iconography of the 2020 Uprisings in Thailand

Ariana Chaivaranon

In 2020, protesters in Thailand organizing for democracy attempted to negate and hijack state-sponsored, highly regulated symbols of Thainess with global pop imagery. Unlike stable, resilient royal iconography designed for national unification, the lifespan of most of the highly legible images utilized in the protest movement was short. Nonetheless, a handful of symbols became codified through museum exhibitions or took on new life. What is the emergent image of democracy born of the mosaic of voices that rejected traditional Thainess as an aspiration? Did the standards of legibility of the grassroots political movement have an enduring effect on the practices of politically engaged artists in institutional settings?

This essay investigates the characteristics that may be shared among the iconographies that recur across diverse geographic and experiential contexts. Which images crossed the threshold from cutting-edge street imagery to museum and gallery displays? I will analyze the stickiness of iconographies across three axes: historic precedent vs. ingenuity, functional flexibility vs. specificity, and legibility among local vs. international audiences. As artists work to propose forms for a globalized Thai identity, this paper attempts to chart the ripple patterns that transform poor images into resonant icons.

This essay aims to document a fraction of the contributions of a new generation of Thai artists who updated and expanded traditional ความเป็นไทย (Thainess) images and proposed icons of a globalized Thai identity in 2020. In some ways, their practices honor, deconstruct and update Thai iconographic traditions for contemporary audiences, rather than shirking them for the

[**Southeast of Now**
Vol. 5, Nos. 1 & 2 (October 2021), pp.441–42]

broad-brush of globalism. In an era characterized by neo-fascistic and myopic nationalism, artists involved in the 2020 protests in Thailand may have modeled a future for responsible nationality.

BIOGRAPHY

Ariana Chaivaranon is an artist, educator and museum professional. Born in Thailand, Chaivaranon studied Visual and Environmental Studies and the History of Art at Harvard University. As a Schwarzman Scholar at Tsinghua University, she is studying Global Affairs. Chaivaranon's interpretive work dethrones hegemonic narratives in museums, including the National Gallery of Art, the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Hirshhorn Museum, Harvard Art Museums, and Frick Collection. Chaivaranon is a board member of Plug, a curatorial collaboration and exhibition space supporting emerging artists in Kansas City. Chaivaranon has exhibited with the H&R Block Artspace, Charlotte Street Foundation and Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts. She creates and supports art that intersects with activism, through collaborations with Rirkrit Tirivanija, Tania Bruguera and Lee Mingwei.

The Search for Self: What is Holding Back Myanmar Artists from Putting Their Deepest Self on Canvas Coherently?

Myint Myat Thu

When light also goes out at the night-like moments of life, what would a Myanmar artist see from his window? This metaphorical musing, which I embark on in search of complex expression of artist's psychology in Myanmar paintings, leave me in an unknown void. The perpetual production of comfortable religious images, idyllic sceneries and aesthetic people, straightforward presentations of political and pop-cultural ideologies and all, which are outwardly stimulated subjects, suggest to me that when it comes to drawing inspiration from inner life experiences and portraying them coherently on canvas, Myanmar artists never seem to venture far.

The insurmountable difficulties of life in a war-torn country could give birth to not only a few Edvard Munchs or Yayoi Kusamas, but many artists with deep psychological wounds. But so far the scanty examples to be found, such as Kye Myint Saw's acute mid-life crisis in his *Self-Portrait With An Empty Canvas*, and the late artist Khit Bhone Mo's chronic deterioration of health in his skeleton monks, lay bare the fact that most Myanmar artists are poorly in touch with self-awareness. The perception is not confined to a particular style of art; the elusiveness of Myanmar paintings infused with artists' profound psychological states is even recognizable in abstract styles—if the domination of urgency and secrecy of emotions in abstract expressionism is considered separately, for it allows an artist to obscure his feelings instead of articulating them.

[**Southeast of Now**
Vol. 5, Nos. 1 & 2 (October 2021), pp.443–44]

However, the paradox is that the very social, political, cultural and religious forces that play a significant part in forming artists' existential angst can also mislead them to repress it. My research will explore how much these outside factors bolster Myanmar artists' self-censorship and the "unconscious" repression of themselves, that is, what prevent them from opening their window when light goes out at the night-like moments of life.

BIOGRAPHY

Myint Myat Thu is an award-winning arts and cultural journalist from Myanmar. With great faith in creative approaches to exploring the socio-politics of her country, she writes in-depth analysis and commentary on Myanmar's art scene and film industry, two of the least developed and often the most heavy-handed sectors in the country. Her works have appeared in the leading presses and media in English, such as *Frontier Myanmar*, *The Myanmar Times*, and *The Irrawaddy*. Always a labour of love, she tries to make certain in her writing that culture is given an important place whenever there are social, political and economic conversations about Myanmar.