Charting Thoughts
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Published by National Gallery Singapore

Flores, Patrick and Sze Wee Low.
Charting Thoughts: Essays on Art in Southeast Asia.

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In Bahasa Indonesia and Melayu, address is alamat; in Filipino, alamat is lore or legend. In this universe of language, origin is more than just locus or inscription that hews, oftentimes even overdetermines, identity. It is a cosmological condition. It is a world conceived not in terms of possession or domain that condenses in discursive property; it rather ramifies in myth and tale, in a conjuring. It is more atmosphere than territory. In such a scheme, the art that must find its address does not necessarily have to take on the habit of identity, because it must not. It must, in fact, refuse it. After all, apart from being fable or saga or parable, address is speech (text, texture, context), a performative act that signifies as well as dissembles; its truth contingent on its telling and its teller, the very procedure of its history in an expressive public sphere.¹

Art history in Southeast Asia cannot be merely marked as a province of the “history of art” as conceived as an academic vocation at the Musée Napoléon in 1803 and at the University of Berlin in 1844.² It cannot likewise just be a fallout of the crisis of the discipline of art history, burdened by its 19th-century provenance and impedimenta, and at the moment diligently recalibrated in various algorithms by art history departments, research centres and museums in the West.³ An art history in Southeast Asia must revisit the address of whatever art history it has known, written, and continues to mediate, its declaration and its dream, its norm and its fiction, its écriture. In returning to this alamat, it must decidedly be deconstructive but at the same time true to the spirit of its legend and lore, to the integrity of its persistent cosmology. It must cherish and defend an incessant world.
This alamat is reckoned in the present. In Philippine dictionaries, alamat is a narrative of wonder and translation, generated from telling to telling and proves difficult to confirm at the moment of its utterance. (And for sure, it is uncanny that the alamat evades the very modus of verification.) This present is seductively and urgently depicted as the “now.” In this regard, it might be instructive to point to two evocations of the “now.” In 2015, an editorial collective was working towards a journal titled Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art. The brief for its inaugural issue invited contributions that “explore discomfort as a vehicle in the thinking of art histories and curatorial discourses connected to localities within the region known as Southeast Asia. It seeks to interrogate, recover, challenge, and redefine the ‘contemporary’ and ‘modern’ through new readings of art practices connected to the region.”4 In New York in the same year, the Museum of Modern Art opened the exhibition The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World. It presented the work of 17 artists whose paintings reflect a singular approach that characterises our cultural moment at the beginning of this new millennium: they refuse to allow us to define or even meter our time by them. This phenomenon in culture was first identified by the science fiction writer William Gibson, who used the term ‘a-temporality’ to describe a cultural product of our moment that paradoxically doesn’t represent, through style, through content, or through medium, the time from which it comes.

It defines its key term thus:

A-temporality, or timelessness, manifests itself in painting as an ahistorical free-for-all, where contemporaneity as an indicator of new form is nowhere to be found, and all eras coexist. This profligate mixing of past styles and genres can be identified as a kind of hallmark for our moment in painting, with artists achieving it by re-animating historical styles or recreating a contemporary version of them, sampling motifs from across the timeline of 20th-century art in a single painting or across an oeuvre, or radically paring their language down to the most archetypal forms.5

The “now,” therefore, is caught up in the logics of refusal, profligacy, reanimation and discomfort. On the one hand, the “region” that is Southeast Asia is almost painfully refunctioned so that it can hopefully “address” a particular presence. On the other, in an institution that professes to be “metabolic” or “self-renewing,” art is imagined to whirl in some kind of heady ether, in an “ahistorical free-for-all” that infinitely progresses.6 It is at this conjuncture of abandon, in the sense of both licence and recklessness, that the now is intuited. In the copious context of the now, we ask this: What happens to the past and how does the future transpire? Johannes Fabian speaks of “remembering the present” when he intertwines painting and popular history in Zaire while Hélène Cixous contemplates a “present passing.”7 The annotator of the intellectual history of art history, its historiographer, Michael Ann Holly, abides by melancholy, inviting us to “suffer the sting of loss” and relive the “incision” of the “aesthetic capacity of the work of art to wound, to pierce.”8 These are elusive phrases that at the same time bear the weight of the ethnographic art-historical and the feminist philosophical, or of a dense “historical,” but one that is partial and restive. It is a historical no longer en-sconced or captured. It can, in fact, overcome the pressure of its supposed fundament or be indifferent to a “futural horizon” or “coming community” altogether. In the mind of the Japanese critic Sawaragi Noi, “The world that is here now has nothing to do with the future.”
In other words, according to Kenichi Yoshida, the now can be an index of “severance” and “uselessness” and not only a metric of allegiance and productivity.9

In discussing tendencies in how art history has been and is being written in the region that is carved out as Southeast Asia, central is the concept of timeliness, which implicates the crisis in art history with regard to the region in terms of omission, absence, misrepresentation, orientalism, denigration and outright negation. It is the task of a timely art history to question the basis of this lapse in art historical judgment through intense critique and an equally intense effort to move beyond the absolutely essential critique. Thus, in tension with the timely is the untimely. This art history should be committed in the same vein to anticipate the untimely, to altogether lift itself off the time that it has suffered for so long but cannot seem to find the means of a proper parting.10

And so, one of the strongest tendencies in the writing of art history in Southeast Asia or in Asia for that matter is the postcolonial critique of the normative text that springs from a perceived Euro-American intelligence. Partha Mitter, for instance, looks at how texts on Indian sculpture and architecture such as Fergusson’s A History of Indian and Eastern Architecture and A.M. Hocart’s Decadence in India regard Indian form in terms of decadence. Mitter offers an alternative approach through the concept of ornament; in Sanskrit, the verb alamkar is to decorate and literally means “to make enough,” to complete, or accomplish the form. A profound shift takes place when decadence is replaced with ornament.11

T.K. Sabapathy, for his part, dwells on how art historiography in Southeast Asia would be conditioned by a strategically non-Western knowledge system. Sabapathy probes this problem through the texts History of Indian and Indonesian Art by Ananda Coomaraswamy and The Indianized States of Southeast Asia by George Coedes. His main point is that Southeast Asia gains the privilege of identity through India; in fact Coomaraswamy calls the region Farther India. Coedes for his part would reduce Southeast Asia to the process of Indianisation or Sankritisation, prompting Sabapathy to argue that he “has imposed a programmatic design of Indian influence onto Southeast Asia [...] tantamount to propounding a colonial doctrine.”12 It is here where we can tease out the strand of the Great Tradition or oriental antiquity that privileges the Hindu-Buddhist sphere as the space of Southeast Asian art history and the impulse of the creative life it encompasses, something that a Philippine moment can challenge through its peculiar and precocious mediations of the West and the region beyond the pale of this highly Sinitic and Indic Great Tradition.

The second tendency pertains to the formation of a national modernity in which art history distributes its attentiveness to the modernity of art and the modernity of nation and the historical form that is aesthetically mediated through the artefact of art and the artefact of nation. In other words, the history of art is braided with the history of modernity in the context of the emergence or the “unfolding ontology” of the nation. In this scheme, modernity may be construed as a consciousness of art; modernisation as the rationalisation of art; and modernism as a refinement of the sensibility for the potential of art. What is therefore paramount in this regard is the anxiety of context and the fear of repeating the anti-context which is the universal, on the one hand, and the necessity of worlding in which a notion of the outside is posited and then transformed so that context may be wrested from the universal, on the other. The said context is almost already understood as “country” and as Clifford Geertz has asked: “What is a country if it is not a nation?”13 And more often than not, this country that is a nation is made to characterise the category of art as if no problematic or frisson inhered in the conjuncture. Thus, the terms

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Indonesian or Cambodian art present themselves almost naturally, with the presumption that the proposition of art is as transhistorical or transcultural as the rubric of aesthetics. A cognate situation would be appending the term “aesthetics” to a cultural conception like the Yoruba or Inuit to form another naturalised phrase such as Yoruba or Inuit aesthetics, as if the constitution of Yoruba or Inuit could not resist the aesthetic to render itself sensible.\(^\text{14}\) In these formulations, it is as if the category of country did not mediate the category of form (or sensible life), found in or in fact constituting, the country.

Aside from “country,” the other mediating category of context is “culture,” which is seen to endow the art with distinction or even authenticity. This is a tricky operation basically because culture, in the way it tends to reify the mess of lived practice, is actually a corruption, a fiction and facture of coherence and not a fact of field work. It is supposedly culture that animates the particularity of art from Southeast Asia. We can perhaps trace this anthropological turn in Southeast Asian art history to Cornell University’s Stanley O’Connor who has expressed the belief that the “aesthetic attitude” is not so much a study of privileged objects; it is rather “rooted in social customs concerning death and a speculative investigation into the nature and the destiny of the soul.”\(^\text{15}\) It can be noticed that the work of Nora A. Taylor and Astri Wright who came from the same programme of art history at Cornell is committed to the description of culture that surrounds the art.\(^\text{16}\) In fact, Taylor characterises the story of painters in Hanoi as an ethnography. Needless to say, such a turn to and of the ethnographic needs to be subjected to the thoroughgoing critique within the discipline of anthropology itself. For instance, it is fair to ask: How far can a trained art historian really do ethnography and how can this art historian not instrumentalise the ethnographic just to sustain the art historical? It is in the realm of culture that the binary, and the potential dialectic, between tradition and change, temporality and cosmology tend to overdetermine postcolonial practice. The...
work of Claire Holt (continuities and change),
the First Asia-Pacific Triennial in Brisbane,
Australia (tradition and change), and Apinan
Poshyananda’s travelling exhibition
Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions for Asia Society based in New York are helpful in this
respect.17 Alongside culture, there is likewise
an insistence on the coordinates of the social
and the historical in the projection of the con-
text of art as thought through by the art critic
and historian Alice Guillermo; she locates art
within iconic, contextual and evaluative planes.
Through the contextual, she clears a relatively
autonomous space for art as, in her own fel-
licitous phraseology, “reverberating in the real
world,” revealing “numerous ramifications of
meaning,” grounded in the circumstances of
its production.18 In these various elaborations
of context, of material conditions and mate-
rialities, the discipline inevitably dissolves to
give way to the interdiscipline or the transdisci-
pline, with various epistemes infiltrating the
premises of the study of art, from the social sci-
ences to visual culture, and on to the hybridi-
ties, to which a so-called new art history would
become hospitable.

The said national modernity, however, is
not fated to stasis; it is, rather, in flux, always
inclining outward, open to belong to a broader
assemblage of forces. It is at this point that a
corollary tendency arises in the writing of art
history in Southeast Asia, and this is largely
about the history of transfer and translation,
investing agency in the region as a locus of
critical mediation and not just passive accept-
ance of so-called influence or diffusion. Here,
the procedure of comparison is set in high relief
so that the possibility of a comparative modal-
ity can be made to play out through a survey
or comparison of national modernities (the
Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the
Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, the Singapore Art
Museum/National Gallery Singapore, the Ja-
pan Foundation, and the exceptional work of
John Clark over time) or a scanning of social
practice through a thematisation of, let us say,

\[17\] Claire Holt, Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change
\[18\] Alice G. Guillermo, Image to Meaning: Essays on
Philippine Art (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University
\[19\] John Clark, Modern Asian Art (Honolulu: University
of Hawaii Press, 1998); Flandette May Dutuin &
Patrick Flores, eds., Women Imaging Women: Home,
Body, Memory (Manila: Ford Foundation, Art Studies
Foundation, Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1999);
and Simon Soon, “What is Left of Art: The Spa-
tio-Visual Practice of Political Art in Indonesia, Sin-
gapore, Thailand and the Philippines 1950s–1970s,”
(PhD diss., University of Sydney, 2016).
\[20\] Sakai Tadayasu, “Was Japanese Fauvism Fauvist?”
in Modernity in Asian Art, ed. John Clark (Sydney:
\[21\] Patrick D. Flores, “Turns in Tropics: Artist–Curator,”
in Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Art:
An Anthology, eds. Nora A. Taylor & Boreth Ly
\[22\] Hans Belting, “Contemporary Art as Global Art: A
Critical Estimate,” in The Global Art World: Audi-
ences, Markets, and Museums, eds. Hans Belting &
Andrea Buddensieg (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz), 38–73;
Reiko Tomii, Radicalism in the Wilderness: Inter-
national Contemporaneity and 1960s Art in Japan
(Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016).
\[23\] See Afterall Books series on exhibition histories.
\[24\] Patrick D. Flores, “The Exhibition as Historical Prop-
osition: An Introduction” Yishu: Journal of Contempo-
\[25\] June Yap, “Retrospective: A Historiographical Aes-
thetic in Contemporary Singapore and Malay-
sia,” (PhD diss., National University of Singapore,
2014).
gender or politics. The production of monographic projects around artists or forms that tend to represent a national expression or tradition is well within this tendency. These include efforts that prop up a stylistic category as a node or transmitter of artistic technology from the West, such as Cubism by way of the exhibition *Cubism in Asia*, or realism via *Realism in Asia*. Another case in point is Sakai Tadayasu’s essay in which he asks if Japanese Fauvism was truly Fauvist and to which he answers: its “strangeness” became so “adjusted to the Japanese ‘climate of sensitivity’ that in the end it really does not seem so strange anymore.” To be noted here is ambivalence, of a condition of almost, but not quite, strange.

The stability of such a national modernity and its comparativities may be uninged or suspended if a certain turn were initiated, for instance by a polytropic agency, like the artist–curator, or the production of a provocative text, like the manifesto. The work of Jim Supangkat, Redza Piyadasa, Raymundo Albano, and Apiyan Poshyananda and the seminal role of the manifestos in Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and Malaysia in the 1970s are important ciphers in this landscape. It is at this critical crossing that a break with the modern may have been effected, or if not a break, at least a complication or a critique, or a movement towards the global contemporary or international contemporaneity in the register of Hans Belting or Reiko Tomii respectively.

The third tendency in the writing of art history in Southeast Asia can be found in the exhibition and the history of exhibitions, from 19th-century expositions to the biennales of recent time. Many exhibitions have endeavoured to configure the history of art of the region and have proposed periods, themes, artists and ecologies of art worlds. And there have been incipient attempts to historicise the exhibitions and to regard as discursive, the exhibitionary gesture and aesthetic; and they are in conversation with the global interest in the history of exhibitions. The question that needs to be asked in the face of these initiatives pertains to method. Is the history of exhibition just a supplement of the history of art? Or is it another realm of inquiry altogether? With this privileging of the exhibitionary comes the intervention of the curatorial, and its exceptional talent to convene an intersubjective space and to form various responses from various constituencies. It is the curatorial that can dissipate the sedimentation of data in the archive of the art historical. It is also the curatorial that transforms the art historical in more idiosyncratic ways and is the project that is inclined to erode the tenacity of art historical knowledge in the atmosphere of engagement, institutional critique and activism, critical institutionality, speculation, space making, political action, reflexive social research, and a range of intersubjectivities. Finally, it is through the curatorial that a contemporary subjectivity may be able to shape the art historical. Related to this predilection in the writing of art history is the production of art that tends to write art history itself as embodied in a “historiographical aesthetic” in which “the aesthetic purpose may be conjectured as examining the production of history,” including art history.

The fourth tendency in the writing of art history in Southeast Asia is articulated through the archive, such as the Asia Art Archive and the Indonesian Visual Art Archive. The archive in this case has become a mutating apparatus: a repository of documentation, an exhibition platform, and a discourse generator through research, publication, and dissemination. As a place of accumulation, the archive is an enchanting forest of data, but by the very nature of its temperament to amass that underlies its political economy, its authority to programme the terms of the discussion and inability as yet to cut through the thickets of local discourse may actually flatten the history it collects in the guise of merely documenting it.

And the last tendency is the writing of the history of art history in Southeast Asia, a kind
of metacommentary on both methodology and material. T.K. Sabapathy has charted that history in Singapore by implicating the germinal texts *The Art of Southeast Asia: Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, Burma, Java, Bali* by Philip Rawson and *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change* by Claire Holt. The former would proceed from the history of art; the latter from the polemics on culture, but both nevertheless would distend the term “art” into a transcultural and transhistorical category with only a shift in orientation—one of possession (of Southeast Asia), the other of location (in Indonesia). This device of the polemic, which in the 1970s refigured as a manifesto, is of interest because it introduces a particular diction and tenor of the crisis in art history as it converges with “aspirations towards the formation of new nations or states and at other times revolving around heightened claims of individuality and the self.”

In light of these tendencies in the writing of art history in Southeast Asia, the succeeding initiations should cluster around the reconceptualisation of the region that is Southeast Asia. To think of the region or regionality is to think of the vaster world of which it is a vital part. In many ways, therefore, the region is a moment of a constant worlding, a “process geography” in the words of Arjun Appadurai who warns us of reducing places to stable characteristics or traits, “driven by conceptions of geographical, civilizational, and cultural coherence […] with more or less durable historical boundaries and with a unity composed of more or less enduring properties.” On the contrary, Appadurai looks at geographies in terms of “precipitates of various kinds of action, interaction, and motion—trade, travel, pilgrimage, warfare, proselytization, colonization, exile, and the like.” Moreover, according to him, “regions are best viewed as initial contexts for themes that generate variable geographies, rather than fixed geographies marked by pre-given themes.” Thus, Southeast Asia as a setting should be seen as a level or a layer in the conception of a shifting geography and should not be made to overdetermine or colonise the domain of a region in the process of constant forming across different scales from river to street, from hemisphere to archipelago. There is a need to hold out this possibility because the prevailing imagination of Southeast Asia was forged by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations beginning in 1967, which was in cadence with a larger sequence of efforts to bind the region in some kind of defence and trade alliance. This is a restrictive geopolitical imaginary, one that must be transcended because the geopolitical is one thing; but the geopoetic, the mediation of the earth through the aesthetic and the aesthetically mediated initiations to gather, is another. A more reflexive geopolitical and geopoetic rendering of Southeast Asia should be able to open up the region, or the problematic of the southeast, to other axes and coordinates, such as Southeast Europe, for instance, or South America. It could re-enter the sphere of the Pacific and re-engage with Austronesian archaeology and the Silk Route past and present, and it could deepen the relational links to migrant communities across the world as well as intersections that lie beyond the compass of the nation-state or the inter-nation regional assemblage; the Sulu Zone comes to the fore as an instance.

If one were to take the case of a national art history like Singapore’s and ventilate it, so to speak, it would be helpful to track the dispositions of the discipline, or the habits of its writers. In this volume, we can glean some symptoms of the struggle to write art history in Southeast Asia by way of Singapore. For certain, the spectre of historiography hovers at the outset; to critically reflect on the intellectual history of the art-historical modality is an essential exercise. This becomes acute if seen in relation to the more popular, more mediagenic appraisals of art that preponderate in the art market or the leisure industry. What must be attended to is a rigorous conceptualisation of
the “historical moment” so that the history of art, or its movement “through time,” becomes less vulnerable to the appropriation of the “latest.” From such a historiographic approach, the temptation to render time in terms of periods is difficult to resist. But again, with a firm grasp of the historical moment, one does not merely “periodise,” to lapse into an infelicitous word; one rather, historicises the geography of art, which extends to diasporic formations. In this volume, we see Singaporean scholars grapple with the temporalities of the 19th century and the contemporary, with the thrill of origins/beginnings and the bedeviling prospects of termination as referenced by the prefix “post.” It is uncanny, of course, that the 19th-century and the contemporary thicken and thin out in the face of the self-metabolic modern.

In this context of interrogation, monographic excursions are charted. In this respect, the oeuvre of Lim Hak Tai and reprographic practice (cartoons, woodcut) are furnished ample realms in which to unfold. Deepening this surface are efforts to stake out the ground with problematics such as “gender” and the “global”—how to foreground it; how to undo it. Finally, the institutionalisation of art through the museum and art history is enfolded into the critique, subjecting it to equivalent reconsideration. The challenge perhaps is not to tarry with the institutional critique but to rethink its governementality so that its institutionality could become more redemptive. Otherwise, the threat of the Futurists to destroy all museums would become the only politics with a chance.

In light of this, further work in Southeast Asia needs to be pursued still. And here are some aspirations:

First, there is a necessity to surmount the idea of an alternative art history and try to create instead a conceptual space for an art-historical alterity, a deconstructed art history that is so radically different from a supposedly originary Western discipline that it does not only include the excluded, but shifts the parameters of what to exclude and where to begin the inclusion, which need not be in the postcolonial modern nation-state or through the aporetic process of decolonisation. The latter tends to inscribe alterity, or subalternity for that matter, in a national folklore (or the folklore of nation) and makes it legible through the tropes of authenticity, syncretism, or hybridity, thus foreclosing the possibility of a third moment beyond the native and the colonial. Here, the problematics of naming; the obligation to overinvest in the category of art to embrace even the archaeologi-
cal and the ethnographic; and even the privileging of aesthetics as a supposedly transhistorical and transcultural term are foregrounded alongside the procedure of what Gayatri Spivak calls the “enablement” of a “violation” from which renegotiated techniques of inquiry may arise and which should at the same time reiterate that no “total undoing” could ever be realised.\(^\text{30}\)

Second, it is imperative to build up a lexicon of inclinations, words and phrases emerging in Southeast Asia that reference extensive localities and vectors of region. The imagination of the national, the international, and the global has been sufficiently mediated by difficult, sometimes eccentric, words and phrases crafted and circulating in Southeast Asia, and several of these are catechetical, willfully or inadvertently straining language to the point of near error or errant signification, such as “developmental art,” “mystical reality,” “visible soul,” and “preter-national.” This disposition to spin words and let them unravel in practices is a full-bodied sign that the discursive context in the locality is dense, open to play and keen on urgency, and that its word makers are unafraid to both mix and master with the patience and the agency of a native and a migrant.

Third, essential is a kind of critical writing that resists the requirements and customs of Western academic writing in the social sciences and in the course of this experiment recover the animus of the material of the field. Arjun Appadurai reframes the research imagination and revisits possible ways to generate knowledge without depending too much on a “prior citational world and an imagined world of specialized professional readers and researchers.” Appadurai finds wisdom in the “virtuoso technique, the random flash, the generalist’s epiphany, and other private sources of confidence.”\(^\text{31}\) It is likewise important to avoid the capture of meaning and cognition, refuse the temptations of thematisation, and finally restore the potency of the act of sensing and the activity of a mindful body. An art historian has likewise reminded us of the need to “frustrate perception” and instead foster the “elements of surprise and encounter that signify that a rearrangement of mind […] has occurred” in the sensible mediation of art.\(^\text{32}\) Crucial here is a kind of writing that is performative and ludic and takes liberties with orthodox syntax; it is generative and idiosyncratic and if English is appropriated as a medium, it is not smoothed
over. It is rather made to sound like a strained second or third language, prone to error and improvisation, made to enunciate a theoretical vernacular. Moreover, data should be engaged with critical theory and a theoretical imagination and constellate these data with ideas and speculations through a kinetic curatorial sensibility, or the instinct to gather persons and things in a “sudden vicinity” in the cogent words of Michel Foucault.

It is only by taking up these challenges that art historians in Southeast Asia can become true interlocutors of the history of art who significantly threaten the narrative of art history and so cease to remain as native informants summoned from provincial art worlds to merely supplement the fantasy of an ever-renewing modernity and its global permutations. In other words, this art history, aside from being resolute in its timeliness, could also be spiritedly untimely, that is, out of the time along which it has been made to decline or progress. In this tension between the timely and the untimely, art history may be able to survive what Geeta Kapur calls civilizational hubris on the one hand, and the crisis of representation, on the other; or the deconstructive and the dialectical; or the negation of the centric and the normative—and finally risk the play of extensive local modes of sensing, quirky semantic formulations, and discrepant ways of being in and remaking the ways of the world in relation to the conditions of the new, the demands of the now, and the persuasions of the not-yet.

In this matrix of art history, it is essential to grasp the instance of art as an affective interest within a historical and cognitive horizon, so that when taken as a repertoire it becomes a sensible responsibility that demands and deserves explanation. The art historian Michael Baxandall proposes that: “If we wish to explain pictures, in the sense of expounding them in terms of their historical causes, what we actually explain seems likely to be not the unmediated picture but the picture as considered under a partially interpretative description.”

In Filipino, to explain is to shed light (magpaliwanag). The revolutionary and organic intellectual Emilio Jacinto had written a tract titled “Liwanag at Dilim” in which he distinguishes between what is likely an emanating light from within, on the one hand, and brilliance or sparkle on the surface, on the other. For him, the latter mediates and therefore is prone to misrecognition or tempts beholders to misrecognise. Because it is glare, it blinds and impairs vision (nakasisilaw at nakasisira sa paningin). Moreover, it is bent, distorted, deceitful (maraya), and so in a way, it can be compared with the apparatus of the ideological, or the force of doxa as contrasted to episteme.

Liwanag for its part requires the “eye,” or a discriminating seeing (kinakailangan ng mata), to discern the total truth of things (upang mapagwari ang boong katunayan ng mga bagay bagay). Those who are lured and enchanted by the glitter are condemned to a life of grief and misery (hinagpis at dalita). Seemingness and representation, or “what at first appears (or presents itself) to sensation has to be subjected to reflective analysis in order for an accurate comprehension to be had of relations whose apparent immediacy or self-evidence is deceptive.” Liwanag is an ethical substance, an armature rather than a carapace, a kind of truth that addresses an emergent lifeworld, spreading and scattering towards a climate, light in light, as it were, ever imminent: an alamat, the lore like the letter that always arrives and is actually the destination.

Parts of this paper were delivered as a keynote address titled “The Art-Historical World of Southeast Asia” for the conference Southeast Asia and Taiwan: Modernity and Postcolonial Manifestations in Visual Art, 21–22 November 2015, Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Republic of China.