



The Birth of Modern Art in Southeast Asia: Artists and Movements

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Ushiroshoji Masahiro, one of the exhibition curators, states the following in his catalogue essay: “The motive for organizing this exhibition springs from a feeling of apprehension about what could be called a veritable boom in contemporary Asian art in recent years, during which time contemporary art alone has frequently been singled out for introduction without an adequate understanding of modern art. The exhibition is motivated as well by a belief that the only way to transcend this superficial, destructive boom is to repeatedly and faithfully introduce Asian art on the basis of solid research.”^[1] The exhibition, which started from the Fukuoka Art Museum and then traveled to the Hiroshima Prefectural Art Museum, the Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art, and the Tokyo Metropolitan Teien Art Museum in 1997, introduced the art of six countries—the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Advisors from each of these countries, Rod. Paras-Perez, Jim Supangkat, Redza Piyadasa, Somporn Rodboon, Tran Viet Son, and Ushiroshoji selected approximately 150 paintings and sculptures from the late 19th century to the 1960s.

The exhibition catalogue, comprised of summaries of modern art in the respective countries, thematic commentaries in line with the time periods, and a plates section of the individual works with commentaries, enables us to trace how the artists pursued the idea of nation in their work and developed various art movements in the midst of independence movements and the rise of nationalism leading to the formation of nation-states. The catalogue also makes reference to how Japanese military rule impacted the art of these countries during World War II, for example, by closing the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts in Singapore and

establishing the Keimin Bunka Shidosho (Japanese Culture Center) in Indonesia. The research of Southeast Asian art based on the thorough understanding of the modern and contemporary histories of Japan and Southeast Asia has not yet developed to the extent of meeting Ushiroshoji's expectations, as expressed in his essay.

[1] Ushiroshoji Masahiro, "An Introduction: The seed will grow into a great Garuda with mighty wings that will bear you heavenward," *The Birth of Modern Art in Southeast Asia: Artists and Movements*, exhibition catalogue, Fukuoka Art Museum, Hiroshima Prefectural Art Museum, Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art, Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture, The Yomiuri Shimbun, The Japan Association of Art Museum, 1997, p. 217



Opening ceremony of "The Birth of Modern Art in Southeast Asia," Fukuoka Art Museum, 1997

Photo: Ushiroshoji Masahiro