

continues to locate and relocate its place in the world, informed by the fluctuations, trends and dynamics of global economics and its shifting centres, where cultural articulations are rendered pragmatically prescient. The biennale in such sense symptomise pivots, even as it function within its own logic of cultural decentering and associated emancipatory impulses.

## Part I

The Singapore Biennale, the first launched in September 2006, is one of many that had emerged throughout Asia since the 1990s. Like others, it may be regarded as general attempts in global marketing or enhancing Singapore's tourism potential, and in doing so consolidating, if not justifying investments into cultural infrastructure made over the many years. Where myths of nation and nation-building are crucial as a historical arc or motif, the biennale in this case forms part of a crucial narrative of 'becoming,' the transformation from a British colonial outpost into an independent and vibrant city-state. This is expressed variously across economic, social and cultural turns, with the modern, made precise and measurable, as its indicator. The Singapore Biennale was declared to have "positioned Singapore strongly as a vibrant global city for the arts"<sup>05</sup> and for Fumio Nanjo the Biennale's founding artistic director, "it created a network of audiences and professionals connected with art in Singapore, assembled a mass of information about contemporary art and artists, and made it possible for the city to become an art hub in the future."<sup>06</sup> This emancipative struggle for Marchart, "is no longer merely a format in which former colonial nations of the West bask in the glamour of their own artistic production. On the contrary, worldwide biennialization has instead contributed to decentralizing the West,"<sup>07</sup> defined by an emergence of a Global South through the evolving regionalities, and the networks of newer biennales including those organized in Brisbane, Gwangju and Johannesburg. Borrowing from Ranjit Hoskote, they form "sites of cultural production sharing common questions, themes, and indeed common [geo-political] precariousness" and collectively, as "Biennales of Resistance mark a cumulative counterpoint to the Venice Biennale as the universal template for the biennial as form and medium."<sup>08</sup> In this regard newer biennales emerge from an anti- or postcolonial impulse, setting themselves as propositions that simultaneously eschew the structure of historical dominance and control, but yet deploying the same mechanisms to celebrate forms of idealized relationships. The effect, if not its known potentials, is double edged. For Singapore Biennale, Marchart has this to say:

It is becoming increasingly difficult to seriously refer to some of the more recently founded biennales as Biennales of Resistance, even if they do favour local and national artistic production over that of the West. For instance, in 2006, the Singapore Biennial was founded during a meeting between the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Although Singapore's intention had been to signal openness, for the duration of the biennial, a general ban was placed on demonstrations in public places. Similarly, the recent wave of newly founded biennales in Gulf States with authoritarian governments hardly has anything in common with postcolonial struggles for independence on a national, regional or continental level. Authoritarian regimes utilize the biennial format to glamorize their image and prepare the tourism industry for the post-oil era.<sup>09</sup>

Writings about cultural production and its contexts in Singapore are relatively new. An emerging motif however is a pattern of instrumentalisation serving the need to sustain and advance its capitalist development, cognizant to the turns of the global economy.

Wee Wan-ling's *The Asian Modern: Culture, Capitalist Development, Singapore* (2007) argued about the incongruity of Singapore's post-independence economic transformation compared to that of its neighbours in Southeast Asia. This anomaly had arisen as an outcome of its continued "valorisation of the colonial past as part of the *telos* of progress and freedom," pragmatically sustained since achieving self-governance in 1959 to manage the inter-related challenges and strategies of colonial devolution, communist threats, multi-ethnic frictions, the Cold War politics and continued dependence foreign capital, all in all moving

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An interview question from Janet Kaplan to Geeta Kapur. See Lars Nittve, Ivona Blazwick, Janet A. Kaplan, Olu Oguibe, Paolo Venancio Filho, Donna De Salvo, Reiko Tomii, Geeta Kapur and Emma Dexter, "Century City: Conversations with the Curators," *Art Journal*, 60:3, 2001, pp.48–65.

02

Approaching its fiftieth anniversary of its independence, headlines such as "Singapore races to become Southeast Asia-Pacific's art hub" are not infrequent, the consumption of arts and culture—the yearly Art Stage and the launch of Gillman Barracks art galleries in 2012—often positioned to reinforce its arrival into the fraternity of global cities. "Once a marshy and malarial island, it is now one of the four 'Asian tigers—with a concentration of wealth (it is home to 16 billionaires, according to Forbes), it is one of the richest countries in the world." See *Financial Times*, March 6, 2015.

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Oliver Marchart, "The globalization of art and the 'Biennales of Resistance': a history of the biennials from the periphery," *World Art*, 4:2, 2014, p.264.

04

Ibid.

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Lee Suan Hiang, "CEO's Message," *Belief: Singapore Biennale 2006*, exh. cat. (Singapore: National Arts Council, 2006), p. 6.

06

Three curators working alongside Nanjo were—Roger McDonald, Sharmini Pereira and Eugene Tan. Nanjo's accounting is instructive: "41 networking curators," "95 artists and groups," "60% were of Asian origin and five were from the Middle East," "60% of the artists were under 40 years of age ... mainly from Southeast Asia," "Europe, America, Africa and Oceania, so this could also be an encounter with international art." See Fumio Nanjo, "About the Singapore Biennale," *Ibid.*, p.9.

07

Marchart, "The globalization of art," p.265.

08

Ibid.

09

Ibid., p.266.

a successful attempt towards a First World modernity, rather than settling for the Second World version. By the 1980s, the city-state had moved from a modernity committed to the industrial and technological, to a discourse of "New Asianism and Asian modernity inspired by the [example of] 'unique Japan'... marked by a culturalist orientation," a participant in the "story of a burgeoning East Asian capitalism" characterized by developments of regional and global economic networks.<sup>10</sup> Wee describes this outcome:

The 'developmental' city-state of Singapore in many respects has contributed towards the now-established image of an Asian modern urban formation in which, it has become almost predictable to say, East meets West, and in which centre and periphery, old and new, are conjoined. Looking at one representative critical response to Singapore allows us to ponder why the East Asian modern could be perceived as an inauthentic modernity, or perhaps as a distorted form of modernity.<sup>11</sup>

Singapore remained celebrated for its achievements, but at times, as observed by Wee, grudgingly, as critics quipped its "quasi-authoritarian, petit-bourgeois and sometimes smug and priggish modernity that smoothed the path to economic success." This ambivalent regard for Singapore and its modernity is a mixture of amazement and repulsion, Wee sums up the receptions of critics like Benedict Anderson:

The 'new' model has come to stand for a dynamic and even iconic, if bland, multicultural utopianism adapted from and yet still dependent upon the West, but one in which both democratic impulses and cultural difference and historico-racialist 'irrationalities' were suppressed, homogenised or sanitised in the name of industrial-capitalist modernity's pure truths.<sup>12</sup>

This "pure truths," as both enablers and outcomes, Wee continues, had necessitated a "deculturated version of modernity," and a reversal of Néstor García Canclini hypothesis of Latin American modernity, Singapore experienced "an exuberant socio-economic modernisation with a deficient cultural modernism."<sup>13</sup> Here we may turn to the interests into the idea of "Asian values," and later, as if to claim its arrival, "Asian Renaissance." Singapore and its political leadership were among the most vocal advocates of the notion of Asian Values and its role in the rise of capital in Asia. Finding resonance to the economic developments of East Asia in the 1980s, it centred around ideas associated to Confucianism. The focus on Confucianism began to wane by the mid-1990s to make way for a more inclusive and pragmatic version based on Singapore's multi-ethnic composition. Yet "Asian values" as a rhetorical instrument of governance remained in place in the form of "Shared values." According to sociologist Chua Beng Huat, "Shared values," introduced around 1991 provides a way for the government to "rationalise public policies and shape social order," even if it may not have an institutionalized legal status. Further, it is to be understood in relation to its other, the West, coded to reference its flawed cultural emphasis on individualism and a sense of entitlement and welfarism, and in doing so to position the "collective" and "community" responsibilities and "acceptance of a hierarchical social order" as central in its ongoing success. For Chua, it offers an entry point into concepts of Asia or "Asianness," reinforced crucially by Singapore's geographical position, its ethnic composition, and its smallness that effectively demonstrates mechanisms of interaction and coalescence. Chua further argues that its effective deployment across a broadest range of public discourse allowed for a naturalized self-identification among Singaporeans as Asians, and well defined social relations — i.e. "reinvented traditions are not without cultural currency."<sup>14</sup>

Governmental role is defined in terms of maintaining the efficacy of such values towards economic competitiveness, and resources allotted accordingly defined by "supply-side socialism" that transforms and advances the human capital. This project of culture as such, returning to Wee, "represent a *distorted* modernity ... that covers up or disavows the fact that capitalism is *one* phenomenon ... [albeit] neither monolithic nor unified," revealing a conflict not necessarily ideological in nature, but rather the positioning of Asian capitalism

and its continuing negotiation within in a hierarchy of global capitalist societies. This period of the 1980s and '90s, highlighted by the assertion for geography and regional networks, can be contrasted from Singapore earlier phase of industrialization and modernization, and may be described as a *reterritorialising* of the city-state. 'Culture,' reintroduced into the discourse of nation and what it may embody, is subjected to the rationalizing imperatives of the economic project as was the past. Evolving and newer economic platforms like ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, established 1967) and APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, established 1989) provide stable referents in conceiving geo-cultural terrains. By 1993, following the establishments of the new Ministry of Information and the Arts (MICA, 1990 – now MCCY: Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth) and the National Heritage Board (NHB, 1993), a series of state museums were launched including the Singapore History Museum, the Asian Civilisation Museum and the Singapore Art Museum, ostensibly as an outcome of a reorganization and expansion of the National Museum, a predecessor institution of the NHB. The museum in Singapore is not without a history, having its roots in the formation of the Raffles Museum (1874) and obliquely, the University of Malaya Art Museum (1955). As colonial institutions useful in the technologies and collections accumulated, they may be regarded not only as prototypal, but the very basis in which newer propositions of nation and regionalities are being proposed: the ethnographic collection of the Raffles Museum became a core collection of the Singapore History Museum and the Asian Civilisation Museum. Having been transferred and displayed at the National Museum from 1973 to the late 1980s, the collection of the University of Malaya Art Museum, provided an early proposition of Singapore and Malayan modern art and as ways to regard the traditions and living cultures of Southeast Asia, displayed alongside materials from India and China. Various as collections residing in Raffles Museum (1876–1960), National Museum (1960–1993) or University of Malaya Art Museum (1955–1973), materials accumulated portends forms of regionalities, subjected to the contingencies of statist cultural policies. For example, separating the zoological and ethnographic collections of the National Museum in 1972 allows for a distinct pursuit of a national history unencumbered by the colonial conflation of human developments into natural history. A sense towards the region was embedded, although not necessarily formalized into a cohesive programme across the fields: "The change came on 1 April 1972, when the National Museum became a museum of ethnology, history and art of Singapore and Southeast Asia. Thus the National Museum becomes an institution devoted to the science of man, to focus attention on cultures, the artistic and creative manifestations of the peoples of Singapore and the surrounding region."<sup>15</sup>

## Part II

It is here that we can turn perhaps to the establishment of the Singapore Art Museum in 1996. But before we get to this we must perhaps be mindful of the repeats, as if to say, thinking about the last quote, "we have been here before" in a different incarnate, traversing the colonial, our nascent *technicist* post-independence beginnings, 1996, its coming futures in 2006 and now. It was in 1889 that, after the momentous opening of the new Raffles Museum and Library building at Stamford Road (current home of the National Museum) that William Davison, its curator declared:

It would be advisable, I think to confine the contents of the Museum to the products of the Malay Peninsula and the adjacent countries which are zoologically affined to it, and this is best indicated by what may be termed [Alfred Russell] Wallace's 50-fathom line, which includes only Sumatra, Java, Bali and Borneo, to the South. As specimens from any of these localities are obtained they will replace the Australian and other specimens from places beyond the shallow sea line. One exception to this should be made with regard to the Cocos-Keeling Islands, which lie well out of the 100 fathom sea, and which, as might be expected, show an affinity with the Australian fauna; but being connected with the Government of the Straits Settlements, it would be interesting to get as complete a collection from there as possible.<sup>16</sup>

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C. J. Wan-ling Wee, *The Asian Modern: Culture, Capitalist Development, Singapore* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), p.5.

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Ibid., p.2.

12

Ibid., p.6.

13

Ibid., p.7.

14

Chua Beng Huat, "Asian values: Restraining the logic of capitalism?," *Social Semiotics*, 8:2-3, 1998, pp.217-218.

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The National Museum (1976), commemorative booklet published on the occasion of its official opening National Museum Art Gallery on August 21, 1976, unpaginated.

16

"Report on the Raffles Library and Museum for the Quarter Ending 30th September 1889," quoted by Kevin Y. L. Tan, *Of Whales and Dinosaurs: The Story of Singapore's Natural History Museum* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2015), p.45.

It is based on an unerring attention to scholarship into natural history of its day, but also politically prescient—the geo-political informs categories. The new building for the Singapore Art Museum was opened 20th January 1996 and along with it, an inaugural exhibition titled *Modernity and Beyond: Themes in Southeast Asian Art*. How was the region prospected and conceived? What were the sources—from informants to publications—that aided a regard for Southeast Asia and its modernity? What is the legacy left by this inaugural exhibition, within Singapore and beyond?

The exhibition featured artists and artworks from seven Southeast Asian countries: Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. This listing corresponds with the composition of ASEAN at the time, Vietnam being the latest to join in 1995. By 1999, with the successive memberships of Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, ASEAN was constituted into its current form. A team consisting of curators from the Singapore Art Museum was led by art historian T.K. Sabapathy. Preparations started in 1993, as Singapore Art Museum ventured into an active acquisition programme, and building up networks of informants and consulting art historians across Southeast Asia, guided by the available and emerging writings. Events that took place elsewhere, such as the Asian Art Show series (Fukuoka Art Museum, 1979 and after), the first Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art in Brisbane in 1993 and “Asian Modernism: Diverse Developments in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand” (The Japan Foundation Asia Center, 1995) were important as referents to prospect curatorial approaches, each varying in its manner of engagements or participations of local curators, and the roles the hosting institutional curators may perform. But significantly, it was the growing number of publications, written in English, emerging during the early 1990s that prompted T.K. Sabapathy and his relatively young curatorial team to consider developing a project independently conceived and developed in Singapore. These publications, including monographs and journals, introduced the national histories, and indirectly highlighting their varying in depths and intensities, as well as the nascent attempts to read across these histories, proposing common themes and prospecting emerging trends. The year 1993 was particularly significant:

- Caroline Turner, ed. *Tradition and Change: Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific*, University of Queensland Press
- John Clark, ed. *Modernity in Asian Art*, University of Sydney East Asian Studies Number 7, Wild Peony
- *Art and Asia Pacific*, Inaugural Issue

I have highlighted these publications as they more than others had ambitiously assembled a range of writers, many whose writings remained previously entrenched within the confines of national readership and interests. The position which Australian institutions and scholars find themselves in is in itself interesting, which points toward a dramatic shift taking place in geo-economic order and the necessity to regard and engage the emerging economic centres in Asia.<sup>17</sup> Yet this necessity to apprehend Asia, at least in cultural terms, requires that writings by Apinan Poshyananda, Emmanuel Torres, Alice Guillermo, Redza Piyadasa and Jim Supangkat were not mere country entries, but by way of affinities and common experiences, active propositions into modernities, their contexts and trajectories of artistic productions. Through these publications, and others too, a mapping of common thematic features begin to emerge. Consider Julie Ewington’s article “Five Elements: An Abbreviated Account of Installation Art in South-East Asia,” which appeared in *Art and Asia Pacific* (Vol. 2, No. 1) in 1995 which prospected the emergence of installation art as a contemporary strategy that “found a receptive environment” in a region where as a turn to *tropics* the indigenous and the artist-shaman acquires international currency in an emerging global practice characterized by communications, access and travel. [Elsewhere we may also consider Astri Wright’s “Women and Contemporary Painters,” written as a chapter in *Soul, Spirit, and Mountain: Preoccupations of Contemporary Indonesian Painters* (Oxford University Press, 1994) that assessed gender, representation, and agency.<sup>18</sup>] Broadly, the writings that emerged over the period of the early 1990s allowed a prospecting into modernities, their emergence and ways they

were understood, cultural contexts through which they may be received and advanced, decolonization and nationalism that at once particularise and universalize responses. As such, a thematic approach was advanced, qualified accordingly by Sabapathy:

A thematic approach was settled upon as I was discerned to provide grounds for describing and analyzing artworks, and speculating upon art historical issue in ways that can be pertinent to Southeast Asia in some depth and in relation to historical circumstances particular to the region. Of course the choice and formulation of the themes can be debated and disputed, as they should be. Indeed, the interpretative essays in this [exhibition] publication emerge from a sense of wariness towards the given task. In this connection, the writers adopt interrogative stances in dealing with the brief as specified by the themes, questioning its efficacy with quite persistence. What is more, they proceed beyond the brief and prospect terrains which points to more fecund approaches to regarding and reading art productions in Southeast Asia. All these signal marked reflexive attitudes, even if they are raw and untested. The themes are:

- Nationalism, Revolution and the idea of the Modern
- Traditions of the Real
- Modes of Abstraction
- Mythology and Religion: Traditions in Tension
- The Self and Other
- Urbanism and Popular Culture <sup>19</sup>

Significantly, the exhibition "Modernity and Beyond" is paired with another exhibition "Channels & Confluences: A History of Singapore Art" as part of the Museum's inauguration. Curated by its founding director Kwok Kian Chow, the exhibition framed Singapore art chronologically, outlining its beginnings among the early photographic ateliers, the itinerancy of artists across colonial networks of Europe and China, formation of local and expatriate groups and their interactions, traditional genres and the introduction of Western and modern styles, movement towards a discernable and authentic form in the shape of "Nanyang regionalism," consolidation of a Singaporean modernity highlighted by ethnic plurality and continuities of the Nanyang legacy, and the emergence of contemporary practice. Crucially, the establishment of artist groups, schools, and institutions were highlighted to aid, if not to facilitate comparability and compatibility with the arc of nationhood, art history; a history that is subjected to the project of nation, in the criticism of cultural theorist Lee Weng Choy. Whether deliberate or not, Kwok, as a director of the Singapore Art Museum finds efficacy in positioning the Museum in the centre of a "new regionalism" that facilitates international interaction. In his concluding remarks in the exhibition publication, he lamented on the role of the market in determining high-points of Singapore art (obliquely referencing to the commercial successes of artists like Cheong Soo Pieng, Chen Wen Hsi and Liu Kang in the 1950s and the patronship they enjoyed). The "new regionalism" of the Singapore Art Museum is aspirational, offering a staging ground for internationalizing Singapore art and by extension the development of Singapore artists, mediated accordingly along the programmatic and the institutional. <sup>20</sup> In this regard, T.K. Sabapathy's remarks in "Modernity and Beyond" appears as a premonition:

... it must be remembered that these [museological and curatorial] aspirations [toward Southeast Asia], even as they are understandable, cannot be satisfied by the inauguration [of the Museum] alone; there will be great and continuing expectations beyond the inauguration and attending the entire lifetime of the institution. <sup>21</sup>

By October of the same year, "Modernity and Beyond" was de-installed making way for "Masterpieces from the Guggenheim Museum," and accordingly bringing to light the brutal complexity of a state institution struggling to sustain its coherence and critical focus in the face of competing and times contradictory demands.

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John Clark wrote in his Preface: "This book comes at a crucial time in which the curious relationship between Australia and Asia being redefined by new, but as yet unformed attitudes. ... Yet our political leaders exhort us that we must 'get into' Asia or assert that we 'are part of Asia'." John Clark, ed., *Modernity in Asian Art* (University of Sydney East Asian Studies Number 7, Sydney: Wild Peony, 2003), unpaginated.

18

Patrick D. Flores proposes a comparative reading alongside Nora Taylor, "Why Have There Been No Great Vietnamese Artists?" *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 44:1, 2005, pp.149-165. Flores comments, "What is at stake here is the stability of the canon which is pried open, so to speak, and unsettled by the critique of patriarchy and orientalism. From this process emerge the contours of alternative histories, peopled by different subjects in different places like Vietnam and Indonesia, which have in postcolonial retroaction formed." See Patrick D. Flores "Field Notes From Artworlds," *Third Text*, 25:4, 2011, p. 388.

19

T.K. Sabapathy "Introduction," ed. T.K. Sabapathy, *Modernity and Beyond: Themes in Southeast Asian Art*, exh. cat. (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 1996), p.7.

20

Kwok Kian Chow, *Channels & Confluences: A History of Singapore Art*, exh. cat. (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 1996), pp.150-155.

21

Sabapathy, "Introduction," p. 5.

### Part III

Assessing the Singapore Art Museum, Nora Taylor remarked:

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Its inaugural exhibition in 1996, “Modernity and Beyond,” was the first comprehensive survey of modern Southeast Asian art to be exhibited in the region. It is still the only pan-Southeast Asian art museum in the region. [However] The museum is still embroiled in Singapore’s bureaucratic quagmire and periodically suffers from flawed policies, shifts in leadership, weak programming, and lack of vision. Still, it has succeeded in creating a number of milestone exhibitions and has proven itself an invaluable resource for international curators and collections in the region. It can now more positively claim to have an impact on the integration of Southeast Asian artists on the stage of world contemporary art. <sup>22</sup>  
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Of particular interests for Taylor are the series of exhibitions that advance readings into art history of the region, marked by the exhibitions’ ability to gather key artworks and collections as indexes of material culture for scrutiny and study, and measure their affinities and distances bringing forth perspectives into subjects and interests, collective and alternative histories, general tendencies and idiosyncracies. She highlighted exhibitions “Vision and Enchantment: Southeast Asian Paintings” (Singapore Art Museum, 2000), and more recently the pan-Asian collaborative exhibitions “Cubism in Asia: Unbounded Dialogues” (2006) and “Realism in Asian Art” (2010).

So far, my discussion had been centred on institutions, exhibitions, and their operational contexts. Its attendant project of art histories, access to networks, infrastructures and to a significant extent material resources afforded through policies, if not enabled through capitalistic ideologies, are crucial predicates. But this view also offers little to the question of the curatorial, seemingly passive to contexts, and largely unable to articulate its agency. Even as the Singapore Biennale of 2006 reveled in its relational play, populating Chinese and Hindu temples, Muslim mosques, Christian churches, former military barracks and Supreme Court with art and as such inter-textual potentials, it could not removed itself from suspicion of the state’s ability to instrumentalise and discipline. “Belief” as a theme reverberates as a liberal democratic cry, but also confounding for not attempting to problematise difference, plurality and the contested truths—all of these arguably lost in between the spectacle and the carnival. After all, according to sociologist Chua Beng Huat, multiculturalism as a form of public discourse in Singapore, the very referent adopted by the curators of the 2006 biennale has been effectively neutralized in its early post-independence history as a site of intellectual, cultural and political contestation. In fact, through recognition of the needs of the various ethnic groups and careful state provisions and allocations, multiculturalism became an effective instrument of order and control. <sup>23</sup> These “divisions,” the ethnic and religious spaces we saw in the 2006 biennale had already form the idea of the Singapore state. If the curatorial is to be seen in terms of its potential and intellectual agency, this predicament needs thinking through.

What of the curatorial future? We turn to Lee Weng Choy’s provocation:

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Singapore is *Sign-apore*, a society of the spectacle par excellence, the all appropriating agent, modernity’s idealized *tabula rasa*. Singapore imagines itself not just as taking the best from the East and the West—the inheritor of the great traditions and the latest technologies—it also stakes a claim as part of the avant-garde of the next stage of global capitalism. Whenever I visit other places, my experience is of multiple temporalities; there are always neighbourhoods that seem significantly unchanged. In Singapore, there appears to be only one time-frame—a peculiar present, in a hurry, on the verge of tomorrow. ... I know of no other place where it feels like everyone marches in the same step. Practically everything here is subjected to economic development—hills have been flattened, cemeteries unearthed. <sup>24</sup>  
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The curatorial, if it is not to be a function of the institution, requires articulation, by this I mean a practice reflexive to Singapore's self-conscious regard to the place of the individual, society and the defining features of its capitalistic drive, ways that it approaches and manages global interactions. I return to Wee so as to Singapore and its condition:

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 Singapore remains a humourless morality lesson as an economic success story, as a paternalistic-pragmatic modernity, and as a managed and generally benign multicultural society that created a measure of respect for ethnic and religious differences. It notably increased equity in socio-economic opportunities. As a consequence of the elevation of petit-bourgeois values, it also became a "cultural desert" known abroad as a land of shopping centres. Historical amnesia—the inevitable by-product of modernisation—is prominent and surpasses, one suspects, the level of dehistoricisation in developed Euro-American societies. In many ways, this radical experiment in modernising a small Asian locality into a sort of hyper-petit-bourgeois modernity is unique. <sup>25</sup>

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 This uniqueness include the co-optation of the Western "metropolis" into a new vocabulary of its Asianness, hyper-rationalized marshalling and use of space; skyscrapers, museums, casinos and a giant wheel gloriously choreographed into a landscape. We can only defer the question of the curatorial to another occasion but end with Rustom Barucha's call for an Asian museum, characterized by a "new socialization of its radical possibilities":

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 The "Asia" therefore, that is being celebrated in the recent inter-Asian collaboration has less to do with the propagation of democracy through people's movements or emergent struggles in civil society, than with the creation of spectacles and events which "Asia" becomes a new manifestation of cultural capital itself. ...

[The] "new Asian museum" cannot be separated from its larger implications in global culture. The museum offers a particularly embattled site to study the tensions between the global and the local, the intercultural and the multicultural, "Asia" in Asia and the "Asia" supported by the increasingly privileged hegemonies of Diaspora. <sup>26</sup>

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Nora Taylor, "Art without History? Southeast Asian Artists and Their Communities in the Face of Geography," *Art Journal*, 70:2, 2011, pp.12–13.

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23

Chua Beng Huat, "Multiculturalism in Singapore: An Instrument of Social Control," *Institute of Race Relations*, vol. 44:3, 2003, pp.58–77.

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Lee Weng Choy, "The Future Was When: Art Criticism and the Comparative Tenses of Hong Kong and Singapore," *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 6:3 (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi and Singapore: SAGE Publications, 2007), p.345.

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Wee, *The Asian Modern*, pp.12–13.

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Rustom Barucha, "Beyond the Box: A View from India," *Contemporary Art and the Museum*, ed. Peter Weibel and Andrea Buddensieg (Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2007), p.216.

## The Political and the Personal: Australia's Experience in Visual Arts Exchange in Southeast Asia through the 1990s

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The focus of this paper is the two streams of the political and the personal, which interflow into something that might be called "culture." The paper evaluates what has gone well and what badly with Australian art exchanges with Asia, particularly Southeast Asia in the 1990s. It is clear that what has failed is political and what has succeeded is personal.

First, some context about Australia and Asia, as it is not widely known and it sets the scene for what will follow. Politically, Australia the nation is based on white settlement, or invasion if you like, in 1788, overtaking all existing structures. The new mix of cultures gathering in Australia was depicted around 1867 by Englishman J. C. F. Johnson in his beguiling painting of a European, a Chinese and a man of dark skin playing the card game of euchre on the Australian gold fields, [fig.01](#) an image matched by others, including Indigenous artist Tommy McRae's similarly nonjudgmental drawing of a Chinese man, carrying his burden across his shoulders, wearing his conical hat and queue, alongside a European man in a high hat and waistcoat standing about with his hands in his pockets, and Indigenous men posing with their weapons held aloft. <sup>01</sup> Both images show a more benign situation than the very harsh reality of the day. Immigration from Asia was mainly Chinese gold miners, with the rare Afghan cameleer and Japanese pearl diver. The various colonies were federated (or brought together) as one new nation in 1901, the same year as the White Australia Policy was introduced, mainly directed at deterring Chinese immigration.

We had our share of mercenaries, missionaries, and misfits living in Asia through these years who often collected Asian art, which became the source of some excellent collections of historic art in our museums. <sup>02</sup> In World War II, Australians endeavoured to keep Japan from invading militarily, and then Communist China from invading ideologically, which extended to sending troops to fight alongside the United States in Vietnam through to the 1970s. World War II was a turning point politically, separating Australia from the United Kingdom and turning us more to Asia. The Colombo Plan of scholarships for students in Asia to come to Australia was instituted in 1950, a significant program at the time; gradually Asian languages were introduced to tertiary institutions—I learnt Indonesian in the 1960s—and, in 1966, the White Australia Policy was finally rescinded. In this period, our main arts funding and advisory program, the Australia Council for the Arts, was established. Then in 1972 the Whitlam Labor government was a new broom sweeping us towards a new future: Whitlam recognized the People's Republic of China, brought the troops home from Vietnam, and encouraged greater economic ties with Japan and our region. Then, the final cherry on the Australia-Asia political cake was Paul Keating, Prime Minister from 1991 to '96, making an overt policy that Australia's economic and cultural future was in Asia and that all moves in this direction would be supported.

Everything about visual art exchanges with Asia really started to happen then. The Australia Council under the Keating Government decreed that by 1993, fifty percent of its international budget would be for projects in Asia. The other funding partner, the Department of Foreign Affairs, also turned its clout to artistic exchanges with the region. State or in Japanese terms, prefectural—Governments have funds for the arts, and this, too, was turned to Asia. Even some local governments, particularly the City of Melbourne, put support into Asian art exchanges. It should be said that not everyone in the arts



responded positively or quickly. Our art museums had received exhibitions of traditional Asian art for many decades—"The Chinese Exhibition of archaeological finds" (1977), "The Sculpture of Thailand" (1976–1977), "The Art of the Japanese Package" (1979), "Japan: Masterpieces from the Idemitsu Collection" (1982–1983), and so on—but contemporary Asian art did not have an automatic welcome. I remember, in the 1990s, a senior curator at the National Gallery of Australia telling me that, if anything was going on in Vietnam, his dealer in Paris would tell him. Asian art departments in our major institutions are still, mainly, staffed by curators expert in traditional art, often uncomfortable with contemporary work. This is not unique to Australia—I suspect it has echoes in Europe, the United Kingdom, and, even, Japan.

However, outside these departments, in the 1990s, within Australian art circles more broadly, things really *did* change, with more exhibitions and projects about contemporary Asian art being shown in Australia, no longer separating Asian culture from immediate relevance. A pioneer event had been the Artists and Regional Exchange (ARX), coming out of the network of Contemporary Art Spaces, run from Perth, and by 1987 including artists from Southeast Asia. Then the Queensland Art Gallery started the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT) around 1991, leading to the first exhibition in 1993, with funds from the Queensland State government, encouraged by the mood of the times. Among the artists coming to Brisbane was Indonesian artist Dadang Christanto, making a major installation, *For Those Who Have Been Killed*, which captured everyone's attention. <sup>02</sup> The importance of this exhibition was immediately understood by the art world, with one critic writing, "The Triennial is the most important exhibition of recent art to be shown in Australia for a long time." <sup>03</sup> For culturally Euro-centric Australia, this was a big change. The magazine *Art and Asia Pacific* (currently, *ArtAsiaPacific*) started in Sydney in 1993. <sup>04</sup> <sup>03</sup> The first major exhibition of contemporary Chinese art seen outside China and Hong Kong, "Mao Goes Pop," was held at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney also in 1993. The Adelaide Festival in 1994 was devoted to Asian work, and included Thai artist Montien Boonma who made a place for individual contemplation between rows of fir trees in the Botanic Gardens. <sup>05</sup> <sup>04</sup> The political became personal and it was very successful. I look back on exciting times indeed.

It was the period where gradually Australian art started to be seen in Asia. Visual art institutions in Asia were starting to want to engage *within* the region—organizations in Asia began to accept residencies and exhibitions from Australia, and to want to co-curate projects. In 1994, the Australia Council was behind *Cultural Organisation in Southeast Asia*, a guide written by an experienced arts diplomat Jennifer Lindsay to give help to Australians who might want to understand working in the region better. <sup>05</sup> In 1990, I was also able to get funds primarily from the Australia Council and Foreign Affairs to start the Asialink program, which focused



fig. 01



fig. 02



fig. 03

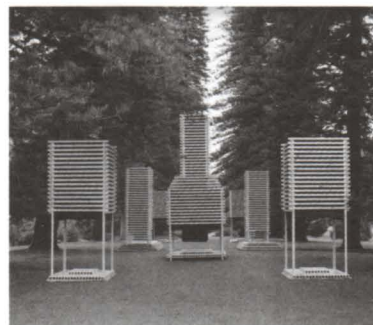


fig. 04

01

Tommy McRae, *Untitled*, 1890, ink on paper, 20.2 x 16.2 cm, Collection of National Gallery of Australia. See <http://artsearch.nga.gov.au/Detail.cfm?IRN=19166>

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02

Herbert Wade Kent, merchant in China and Japan from 1905–1936, who gave his collection of Chinese art to the National Gallery of Victoria, is one of these. See <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/kent-herbert-wade-10721>

Obviously, the phrase of "mercenaries and misfits" is rhetorical—many of these people were motivated by genuine interest and altruism.

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03

Joanna Mendelssohn, "Asia Pacific Triennale in Brisbane," *The Bulletin*, Vol. 115, October 12, 1993, p.107.

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04

I was the editor of this first trial edition, which included articles by Apinan Poshyananda, Leon Paroissien, Marian Pastor Roces, Tatehata Akira, Chang Tsong-Zung, Nicholas Thomas, and myself.

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05

The exhibition, "Adelaide Installations," under the umbrella of the Art Gallery of South Australia, included major commissioned site-specific work by Montien Boonma, Santiago Bose, Endō Toshikatsu, Heri Dono, Kim Soun-gui, Lu Shengzhong, Shim Moon Seup, and Roberto Villanueva.

fig. 01

Joseph C.F. Johnson (Australia) 1848-1904, *Eucyre in the Bush*, c.1867, oil on canvas, 42 x 60.2 cm, Collection of Art Gallery of Ballarat, Bequest of Clarice May Megaw, 1980.

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fig. 02

Dadang Christanto, Performance and installation, *For those: Who are poor, Who are suffer(ing), Who are oppressed, Who are voiceless, Who are powerless, Who are burdened, Who are victims of violence, Who are victims of a dupe, Who are victims of injustice*, The First Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, September 1993. Photograph: Christabelle Baranay, Image courtesy: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art

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fig. 03

*Art and Asia Pacific*, Sydney, 1993, vol.1, no.1.

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fig. 04

Montien Boonma (1953-2000, Thailand), *Room*, wood, cloth, area: c.19 x 8 m, Adelaide Botanic Gardens, Adelaide Festival, 1994.

at first on touring exhibitions and a residency program in Asia.<sup>06</sup> In the 1990s, we sent ninety-four artists to Southeast Asia (and many more of course to North and South Asia, and many more since). We worked with the premise that each individual artist would be best able to work with their peers through a local institution, so we set up arrangements with, mostly, art schools at first as they had experience of engaging with foreigners, and then spread from there. We did a lot of touring exhibitions from Australia, which were not so hard to do, but also collaborative curatorial projects with work from both places and touring to both places. These *were* harder to do and took longer to set up, but always were better in terms of engagement and outcomes. "Rapport" (1996) was created with co-support from Singaporean curators, artists, and funds; "Giao Luu (Confluence)" (1997) in Vietnam, and "Patterning" (1997) with input from Indonesian artists, followed by "Kawing (Link)" with regional centers of the Philippines, and then "Saisampan (Soul Ties)" with Thailand. We held an exhibition in Malaysia, "Sekali Lagi (Once Again)" in 1999, based on Australian artists revisiting Malaysia, all creating new works there, hosted at Rimbum Dahan outside Kuala Lumpur. <sup>fig.06</sup> These Southeast Asian programs led us to other joint ventures with India, Korea, and, especially in the early 2000s, with Japan. Again, it was an exciting time.

All of these ventures came from people working together: talking to artists, visiting studios, and discussing ideas and concepts with curators and writers, getting institutions involved and raising funds. It was about people engaging. The two institutions I knew well, Asialink and the Asia Pacific Triennial, certainly had government backing, financially, and also, in the region, the support of our embassies and officials, but they worked because people who were committed to making things work got together.

I have five principles based on this, established at the beginning of the 1990s and remaining realities today:

- 1 Artists working in the region worked, and it worked for them.<sup>07</sup> Asialink regularly got four hundred applicants from individual artists to work in the region each year, for what in the end were forty places.
- 2 Partnerships worked. We tried to have equal management, equal finances, and equal work in each project—not always achieved with countries where funding was much less available, but even a small amount made a difference to the principle.
- 3 A general flexibility worked. That you do what you could to make something work as you think it should, then you went with the flow.
- 4 Keeping bureaucracy to a minimum worked. We had two-page contracts—putting down what is agreed for both sides and keeping it simple. Then we relied on trust. No contract will cover the gaps that happen in cross-cultural projects if you have no trust.
- 5 Relying on people like this created links that kept developing into the future.<sup>08</sup>

Overall this is an attitude of interest—being interested in the other culture, and showing it. However, in Australia since the mid-1990s, over this personal building up of relationships has hovered a political failure to continue the level of energy or thinking of the Keating government. A financial graph is an easy demonstration, showing the percentage of the international funding of the Australia Council for performing arts projects in Asia from 1992 to 2011. <sup>09 fig.07</sup> It goes down from fifty percent at the beginning of the period to ten percent in 2011. Recently Arts Victoria, the most advanced of the State bodies, stopped its stand-alone international program. Arts leadership in education is part of this, and I report, sadly, there is no expert Asian art historian teaching at my university, the University of Melbourne. In 2012, still, no performing arts tertiary educational institution in the country had a course which included Asian cultural practice in dance, theatre, or music as part of its core curriculum.<sup>10</sup> And, most important, we have no politically-supported structure to do better. We have no international arts agency; Japan has the Japan Foundation with an active professional arts staff, which is experienced and proactive in the region. We need the international arts experts to be given responsibility for this part of the agenda for the arts, not left in the hands of political or economic experts of the Foreign Affairs department, nor in the hands of

officers at the Australia Council who have little experience of working in Asia.

I have been asked to add my thoughts about Japan and Singapore in relation to Australia's experience in this arena, particularly in the 1990s when our political system did provide more support. My memory is strongly that the two proactive and financially supported countries in the region able to do this were Australia and Japan with, through the '90s, a parallel program of activities with the rest of the region. This was the same period as the Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale started and the Japan Foundation Asia Center. There was a similar sense of positioning, both aware of the need to be more proactive culturally with the region.

We both were very aware of a similar sized "issue" in Asia to deal with, to live with, and for both of us, to live beyond—us for our White Australia Policy and our white Western, non-Asian cuckoo-in-the-nest status, and Japan because of its old arm's length identity with "Asia" generally and then its actions in World War II. It means politically motivated art ventures have this lurking in the background, even today. While the last thing I want it to say is these issues were positive actions in themselves, they do add layers of complexity to understandings, and I think that is not a bad thing: art was being used by both governments for political ends, but it gave opportunities for personal actions and engagements based on a more nuanced understanding of identity and place.

If there is an issue that the Singaporeans faced with cultural exchange, such as the White Australia Policy is for us, then it would be the perception in the West, including in Australia, of uniformity, censorship, and a lack of democracy. That had truth in the 1990s, including an infamous censorship issue with an art event, and I so clearly remember the tension between the artist community, pushing against this, and the power of the government, really rather shocked by such rebellion. As a foreigner trying to set things up in Singapore, I remember having to deal with bureaucrats who focused, if not on censorship, then, on the economics—all arts ventures had to have a financial income attached. That was a problem for the sort of thing we were trying to do. But, through these years, Singapore really changed from within. The demands of those young, protesting students, artists, or whoever insisted on their voices being heard and, now, the openness of critique, the level of research into their past, their un-ending curatorial energy, their lack of colonial resentment, and their speed of response and adaptability, all speak of the political morphing into a new, creative, personally-rewarding environment.

Both Australia and Singapore are, obviously, predominantly immigrant nations: multi-layered groups of peoples of the world coming together in, by and large, a good-willed grouping. In Japanese terms, maybe these are difficult-to-define groups of people, with many allegiances to past lives and local ethnic groups under a wider Australian or Singaporean



fig.05



fig.06

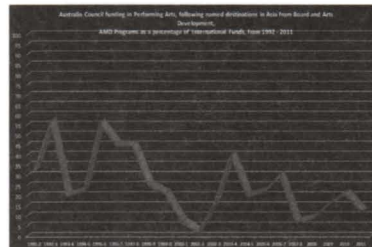


fig.07

06

See [www.asialink.unimelb.edu.au/arts](http://www.asialink.unimelb.edu.au/arts). A fuller discussion of the program is given in "People and Partnership: An Australian Model for International Arts Exchanges—The Asialink Arts Program, 1990–2010," chapter 9, in *Contemporary Asian Art and Exhibitions; Connectivities and World-making*, ed. Michelle Antoinette and Caroline Turner (Canberra: Australian National University Press, Asian Studies Series Monograph 6, 2014), pp. 199–217. See <http://press.anu.edu.au/?p=298341>.

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07

Asialink conducted a questionnaire in 2005 for past residents in visual arts, performing arts, writing and arts management. One question about the importance of the experience on their work had 86 percent reporting it was "extremely" or "very influential."

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08

Another part of the questionnaire asking about follow-up projects reported 93 percent of residents had continued with written contact leading to 54 percent having follow-up projects between the artist and their host country.

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09

This graph was published in, Alison Carroll and Carrillo Gantner, *Platform Papers no. 31: Finding a Place on the Asian Stage* (New South Wales: Currency House, 2012), p.52.

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10

*Ibid.*, pp. 49–53.

fig.05

Jennifer Lindsay, *Cultural Organisation in Southeast Asia*, Australia Council, 1994.

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fig.06

"Sekali Lagi (Once Again): Australian Artists Revisit Malaysia," Rimbun Dahan, Kuala Lumpur, 1999.

Photograph courtesy: Asialink.

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fig.07

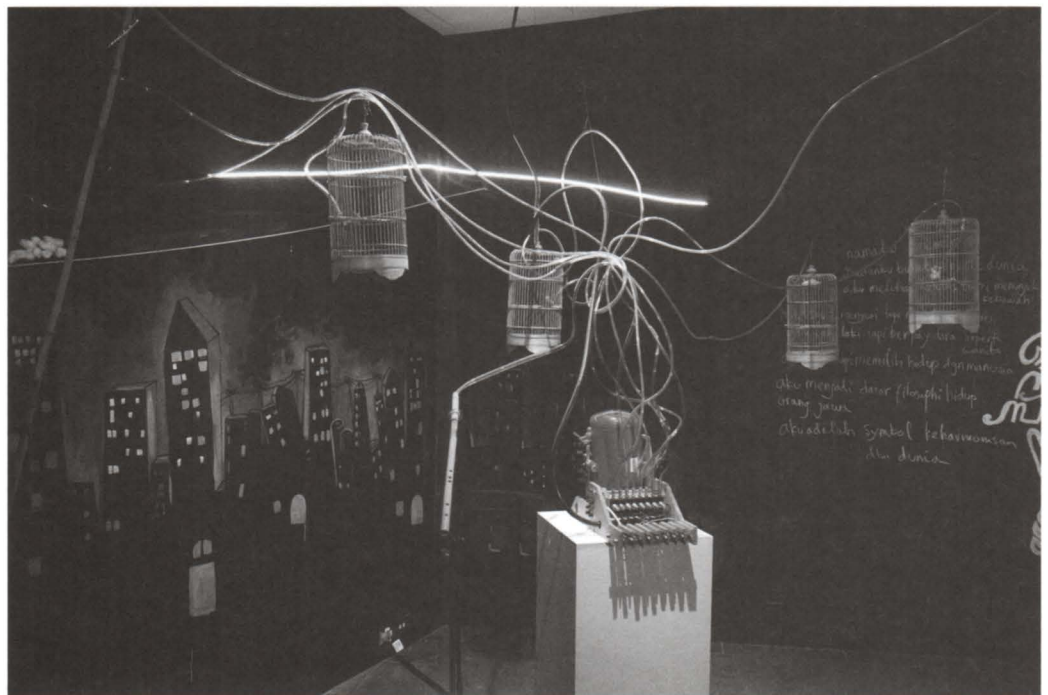
Australia Council funding for Performing Arts projects in Asia, as a percentage of "international" funds spent, from 1992–2011.

umbrella, coming together in very recent times. I like to think, though, that the idea of multiple times is as interesting here as multiple cultures—that for us, our short, two hundred and thirty years of immigrant society has been lived in fast time compared with slow, or—a term I heard recently—“deep” time in a culture like that of our Indigenous people, which looks back to the ancestors. Indigenous Australia has little interest in this Western Enlightenment compulsion of “forever forward.” Australia’s position in this discussion today, in Asia, in ourselves, and in our time, remains unsettled. Cultural commentators speak of the spaces between cultures as areas of uncertainty and discomfort, but also of energy and possibility. Australia is such a space, at least in the way it relates to those outside it.

Australia has sophisticated Western-based arts infrastructure, as does Japan, and much of the rest of North Asia. However, in those days, this did not exist in the visual art institutions in Southeast Asia, nor, for that matter, in South Asia. Hong Kong curator Oscar Ho has recently written about this succinctly, talking about Asia’s, “under-developed infrastructure, conservative administrative cultures, prolongation of the colonial mindset, and Western cultural domination arising from the continuing imbalance of power and influence of curatorial practices that are led by Western thinking.”<sup>11</sup> He questions whether this Western model of arts infrastructure is the most useful.

Certainly, the reality in Southeast Asia in the 1990s showed an alternative way of thinking. In fact it had been flagged in Australia by the engagement between artists of Southeast Asia through the 1987 ARX project in Perth, which was noted before. The top-down, Western-derived, government-supported institutions of Southeast Asia were resistant to change—even in the face of the general feeling through the region at the time that the art world itself was changing, and that opportunities were arising and exchanges were possible. It meant locally-relevant alternatives were created: artists groups, collectives, NGOs (or NPOs), private foundations, and small galleries bloomed. Art naturally made in the streets became celebrated in the street. So-called “popular art” was taken up with enthusiasm by all sorts of practitioners. The community ruled. I had thought at the beginning that gradually

fig.08  
Dale Gorfinkel, Michael Candy  
and Wukir Suryadi (Australia and  
Indonesia), *Bird Organ*, mixed media,  
from “The Instrument Builders Project;  
Collaboration in Sound by Indonesian and  
Australian Artists,” National Gallery of  
Victoria, November 2014.



I would gain more professionally-trained curatorial colleagues within the major institutions, but no, I gradually realized—against my will, really—that my new colleagues were everywhere else. It meant we, in Australia, had to be more agile to realign our thinking to this—not easy for some in Australia where the demarcation between the publicly and privately funded is fairly sacred. It is one of the areas that people in Asia can teach those of us based in Western thinking. Writers like Dipesh Chakrabarty in *Provincialising Europe*<sup>12</sup> and Kuan-Hsing Chen in *Asia as Method*<sup>13</sup> have been looking for new ways of thinking about the world, different sorts of knowledge systems, and intra-regional links.

One excellent example of this thinking, always there in Southeast Asian arts practice, was the Instrument Builders project recently in Yogyakarta and Melbourne. It was of young creative people building programs together, organically, across old media silos. It was full of inspiration, intelligence and creativity, and everyone—artists and audience—loved it. <sup>fig.08</sup> A great example of another way was shown by Sugimoto Hiroshi in his exhibition “The End of Time” at the Mori Art Museum in 2005. As those who saw it would remember, he expected the audience to enter the work and walk through his series of spaces—like entering a literati ink painting and walking through that landscape. It enforced a different reality of time and space, and inner harmony, on the traveler through his world. It still resonates for me as an alternative to a Western-derived external, static or didactic museum display. It was noted before that our main museums have been resistant to changing their ways with Asian art. However, another example of a different way of thinking is the exhibition during early 2015 at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, led by Suhanya Raffel, Deputy Director of that museum, from their collection. <sup>14 fig.09</sup> It puts contemporary and traditional work in marvellous dialogue. But, again, Suhanya is an individual driving a different agenda within that place, able to do it because of her seniority, and also her background and skill.

I'd love to see these creative, flexible, local, personal outcomes more around the region and the world. I'd love to see Southeast Asian countries thinking flexibly in terms of space as well: either laterally outwards, geographically, if they were so inclined, or celebrating their own internal, personal, and local interpretation of culture, presented in a thoughtful and positive way. There is no *one* way. I personally really like the Museum of Fine Arts in Hanoi, proudly introspective about its Socialist Realist collection.

Australia, Japan, and Singapore remain having among the most developed arts institutions in Asia, and there remains the desire from above to keep this internationally accepted professionalism flying high. An instance is the increasing number of curatorial and art museum training places in Australian tertiary institutions being for students from Asian countries. Against this, is the growing rejection of the model.

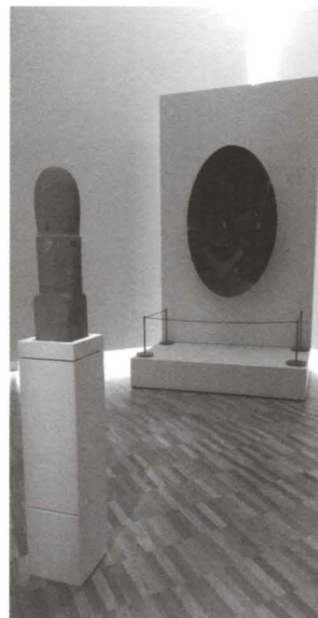


fig. 09  
Conversations through the Asian Collections,  
Art Gallery of New South Wales, March 2015.  
left: *Mukha-linga* (Cambodia) 600s-700s, stone  
right: Anish Kapoor, (India/UK), b. 1954,  
*Untitled*, 2002, stainless steel and lacquer

11  
Oscar Ho, “Under the Shadow: Problems in Museum Development in Asia,” *Contemporary Asian Art and Exhibitions: Connectivities and World-making*, ed. Michelle Antoinette and Caroline Turner (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014), p. 180.

12  
Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincialising Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007).

13  
Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

14  
“Conversations through the Asian Collections,” curated by Suhanya Raffel, Deputy Director, and Justin Paton, Head Curator International Art, and the Asian curators of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2014–2015.

## Cultural Diplomacy and Museum Management: Beyond an Imaginary Asia

**Kishi Sayaka**

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Translated by Andrew Maerkle

The 1990s was the decade in which contemporary art saw widespread diffusion in Southeast Asia. This is also the period during which Japan launched a new vision of cultural diplomacy, and public-run museums began to engage seriously with contemporary art. For the first time since the end of World War II, the Japanese art world, partly in response to various negative legacies of the past, gave full attention to a broader Asian context—one undergoing both geopolitical and generational transformation. This entailed attempts in the creation of artistic values with local art practitioners across the region, as well as the development of proposals for a new historiography of art stemming from the initiative of public institutions.

In this presentation, I would like to examine the contexts in which, firstly, the Japan Foundation instigated a cultural diplomacy to build confidence and trust in the arts and academia; and secondly, how the Fukuoka Art Museum aimed to differentiate itself from other museums through its managerial and curatorial endeavors. These contexts, and how they related and functioned in the formation of the intra/extra-regional art system, will be investigated by retracing a trajectory of relevant exhibitions and collections of the period.

Currently, the Asia-Pacific region is attracting the interests of sociology and economy in the arts as a site for the “glocal” production of contemporary art, and as a market that can affect the direction of the international art market.<sup>01</sup> Japan’s involvement with the Asia-Pacific art world in the 1990s, which had become linked to the mainstream art world by virtue of globalization, had its limits. Nevertheless, it can be said that it succeeded in challenging existing constructions of “Asia” while also generating new indicators and values. This paved the way toward a new stage for the “Contemporary Asian Art” market whereupon existing notions and fixtures were questioned and overcome.

### **A Prehistory of “Asian Art” – The Context of the 1970s and '80s**

In Japan in the first half of the 1970s, the political repression in Korea under the military regime there, the normalization of relations between Japan and China, and the anti-Japanese demonstrations in Southeast Asia all contributed to heightening concern for Asia. Then, in 1979–80, the “Asian Art Show” was held at the Fukuoka Art Museum.

Having become a government-designated city in 1972, Fukuoka quickly began to catch up with the modern political center of Kumamoto and the neighboring industrial center of Kitakyūshū in the hub-based urbanization of Kyūshū. In 1979, the city built an art museum on the same scale as the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Art of the time, and designed, in fact, by the same architect, Maekawa Kunio. For its inaugural exhibition, the museum organized an exchange with art academies from across Asia affiliated with UNESCO’s International Association of Art (initially thirteen countries).<sup>02</sup> Although it’s not as if there were no signs of a revival of the pre-war pan-Asianism among Japanese art professionals, what is remarkable is that it was this exhibition that sparked an interest, among the museum’s post-war generation of curators, in Asian artists of the same generation.

In the latter half of the 1980s, Fukuoka rolled out the concept of the “focal point of exchanges

within Asia," and established new events inspired by the city's hosting of the Asia-Pacific Exposition (also known as "Yokatopia"), like the Fukuoka Asian Prize (now the Fukuoka Prize) and the Focus on Asia—Fukuoka International Film Festival. At the Fukuoka Art Museum, the "Asian Artist Today—Fukuoka Annual" series of solo exhibitions introducing "Asian contemporary artists" began in 1988, while starting with the 3rd Asian Art Show Fukuoka: "Symbolic Vision in Contemporary Asian Life" in 1989, the museum began to take part in the selection of artists, which to that point had been delegated to representative organizations from each country. Moreover, in 1991 the Asia collection was made a priority area, which would lead to the establishment of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum. The artist chosen for the first exhibition in the "Asian Artist Today" series, Roberto Feleo, whose works were acquired by the museum, became an overnight sensation in the Philippines. Gradually, the museum took on the role of giving emerging artists their first exhibitions outside their homelands.

In the latter half of the 1980s, when the Fukuoka Art Museum was strengthening its engagement with Asian art, there was a construction boom of art museums throughout Japan, and subsequently diversification of exhibition contents. This phenomenon, described by Kitazawa Noriaki as "overcrowding of art museums" pushed those museums to become the new "cultural leaders."<sup>03</sup> With the museums searching for materials in different area for their exhibitions, "Asian art" became one of such materials worth pursuing.

On the other hand, the Japan Foundation approached Asian contemporary art from the context of cultural diplomacy. Established in 1972 as an auxiliary organization of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and against the backdrop of the sudden rapprochement between the United States and China (the "Nixon shock") and rising anti-Japanese sentiment in Southeast Asia, the Japan Foundation set up offices in Washington, Jakarta and Bangkok, prioritizing projects addressing the United States and Southeast Asia. With its initiation in 1976 of the Asian Traditional Performing Arts (ATPA) exchange program for researching, performing and documenting ethnic music, and the organization in 1982 of the Japan Foundation Film Festival: A Panorama of South Asian Films, the Japan Foundation produced rank after rank of Asian theater and film specialists.

With such professionals in a central role, the ASEAN Culture Center was established in Tokyo's Shibuya ward in 1990.<sup>04</sup> The main attraction of the opening was a performance by the Bengkel Teater, led by the Indonesian anti-establishment poet and dramatist, W. S. Rendra. In 1994 the Japan Foundation Forum was established as an event space in Akasaka, and in 1995, the ASEAN Culture Center was reorganized as the Asia Center, expanding its scope of activity and target countries. Following the ASEAN Culture Center's establishment, specialized exhibition staffs were added to those for theatre and film, and exhibitions and symposiums focusing on contemporary art were periodically organized and introduced to the Japanese audience.

What was being advocated here was a "bilateral intellectual exchange" differing from the kind of "one way" public diplomacy predicated on national interest pursued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs? It was understood that, without excluding statements and expressions that could be considered critical by the Japanese government and its counterparts, the building of mutual trust and respect through academic and artistic fairness and neutrality contributed to the broader national interest.<sup>05</sup>

#### "New Art from Southeast Asia 1992" as Turning Point

In 1992, the exhibition "New Art from Southeast Asia 1992" was organized as the outcome of the collaborative initiatives of public museums and the cultural diplomacy outlined above. A team comprising curators from the Fukuoka Art Museum and the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, as well as art critics with extensive international experience, was appointed and sent to conduct field research with the help of local informants, coordinated by the Japan Foundation's overseas offices and by Japanese embassies.<sup>06</sup>

01

For example, *Cosmopolitan Canvases: The Globalization of Markets for Contemporary Art*, ed. Olav Velthuis and Stefano Baia Curioni (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

02

Kishi Sayaka, "Bijutsukan ga 'Ajia' ni de' au toki: Fukuoka Ajia Bijutsukan no setsuritsu to tenkai (When Art Museums Encounter Asia: The Establishment and Development of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum)," *Sengo Nihon no kokusai bunka kōryū* (International Cultural Diplomacy in Postwar Japan), ed. Sengo Nihon Kokusai Bunka Kōryū Kenkyūkai/Hirano Kenichiro (Tokyo: Keisō Shobō, 2005), pp. 240–278. In the 1970s, a handful of Korean contemporary artists were shown at privately operated venues like Tokyo Gallery, but the term "Asian art" itself essentially meant things like Korean porcelain and Southeast Asian Buddhist art. See also *Tōkyō garō 60-nen* (60 Years of Tokyo Gallery), Tokyo Gallery, 2010.

03

Kitazawa Noriaki, "Bijutsukan no jidai: 1970 nendai kōhan—1990 nendai (The Age of Art Museums: From the Late 1970s to the 1990s)," *Bijutsu no Nihon kin-gendai shi: Seido, gensetsu, zōkei* (The Japanese Modern and Contemporary History of Art: Institutions, Discourse, Practice), ed. Kitazawa Noriaki and Mori Hitoshi (Tokyo: Tokyo Bijutsu, 2014), pp. 631–680. Around this time, art museums specializing in contemporary art opened in Iwaki (1984), Hiroshima (1989), Mito (1990) and Tokyo (1995), and began to engage in artistic exchange with Asia.

04

Wada Jun, "Higashi Ajia ni okeru Nihon no kokusai bunka kōryū to bunka gaikō: Sengo Nihon no seifu kikan no katsudō to kadai (Japanese International Cultural Exchange and Diplomacy in East Asia: The Activities and Challenges of Postwar Japan's Governmental Organizations)," *Gendai higashi Ajia to Nihon 1: Nihon no higashi Ajia kōzō* (Contemporary East Asia and Japan 1: The Japanese Conception of East Asia), ed. Soeya Yoshihide and Tadokoro Masayuki (Tokyo: Keiō University Press, 2004), pp. 59–109.

05

Oka Mariko, "Kokusai kōryū kikan to bunka gaikō (The Japan Foundation and Cultural Diplomacy)," *Geijutsu to Kankyō: Gekijō seido, kokusai kōryū, bunka seisaku* (Art and Environment: Theater Institutions, International Exchange and Cultural Policy), ed. Itō Yasuo and Fujii Shintarō (Tokyo: Ronsōsha, 2012), pp. 194–213.

06

For more on the experiences of those on the receiving end of the "parachuting" curators, see Flaudette May Dautin's presentation paper in this publication (p. 14).

On the basis of this research, the team was able to introduce the work of young ASEAN artists who were just beginning to emerge at the time.

Organized as part of Southeast Asia Festival 1992, commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the Japan Foundation and twenty-five years since the formation of ASEAN, the exhibition toured from Tokyo to Fukuoka, Hiroshima and Osaka, and its works addressing social issues caused a stir in the Japanese art scene. For example, Wong Hoy Cheong's *Sook Ching* (The Purge) (1989) dealt with the massacre of overseas Chinese committed by the Imperial Japanese Army in British Malaya during World War II, as well as the oppression of ethnic Chinese in contemporary Malaysia. The work's inclusion can be seen as an instance of the thinking at the time that no art exhibition about "Asia" could be complete without such direct forms of expression.<sup>07</sup>

07

Kishi Sayaka, "90 nendai Ajia bijutsu ni okeru 'dai tōa sensō' no kioku: Wakaki hangyakusha tachi no tabū e no chōsen (Memories of the 'Pacific War' in the Asian art of the 1990s: The Young Rebels' Assault on Taboos)," *Semegiau kioku: Rekishi no saikōchiku o meguru hikaku bunka ron* (Competing Memories: Theses on Historical Reconstruction in Comparative Culture), ed. Tsuru Bunka Daigaku Bungaku Bu Hikaku Bunka Gakka (Tokyo: Kashiwa Shobō, 2013), pp. 55–84.

08

Kuroda Raiji, "Ajia gendai bijutsu 'būmu' no omote to ura (The Ins and Outs of the Asian Contemporary Art 'Boom')," *ArtEXPRESS* no. 6, March 1995, pp. 32–42.

09

Tatehata Akira, "Yaguchi Kunio no kokorozashi o tsugu tame ni (Carrying on the Vision of Yaguchi Kunio)," *Yaguchi Kunio bijutsu ron shū: Bijutsu no uchi to soto* (The Collected Criticism of Yaguchi Kunio: Art Inside and Out), ed. "Yaguchi Kunio Bijutsu Ron Shū" Hakkōlin Kai, Bijutsu Shuppan-sha, 2006, p. 18.

10

Brenda V. Fajardo, "Rethinking ASEAN Aesthetics: An Overview of the Symposium Topics and Discussion of Emerging Issues," *The Aesthetics on ASEAN Expressions: Second ASEAN Workshop, Exhibition and Symposium on Aesthetics* (Jakarta: ASEAN COCI, 1994), pp. 60–75.

11

Tanaka Sanzō, "Ajia gendai bijutsu būmu—Fukuoka, Hiroshima nado kakuchi de tenrankai: Seiyō to no tairitsu kara dappi, genjitsu no naka de 'jibun sagashi' (The Asian Contemporary Art Boom—Exhibitions in Fukuoka, Hiroshima and elsewhere: Sloughing off binary relations with the West, and 'searching for the self' in reality)" in the *Asahi Shimbun*, October 5, 1994. Incidentally, the same year, the social phenomenon of Japan's exhibition culture was confirmed as an object of consumption after the Barnes Collection exhibition organized by the National Museum of Western Art and the Yomiuri Shimbun saw the third-largest number of visitors to an exhibition in history, at 1,070,000. But it was also a year when, with the approach of fifty years since the war's end, art became politicized through events like protests in Seoul against the "Works of Japanese Traditional Craft" exhibition organized by the Japan Foundation and the Korean National Museum of Contemporary Art.

Among the seventeen artists who were exhibited at the Fukuoka Art Museum, thirteen had their works acquired by the institution, and the sensibilities of these works would inform the theme of the 4th Asian Art Show Fukuoka, "Realism as an Attitude."<sup>08</sup> To this point, Japanese museums had generally depended on the financial support and know-how of newspaper sponsors, and the name-appeal of masterpiece works, to attract visitors to their exhibitions. The collaboration with the Japan Foundation, with its vast connections in Asia—centered on Southeast Asia—showed the potential for creating unique initiatives and networks that did not rely on pre-existing institutions.<sup>09</sup> "New Art from Southeast Asia 1992" had a considerable effect on Southeast Asia as well, and the following year, 1993, saw even more momentum build for reforms in cultural exchange across the ASEAN region at the 2nd ASEAN Workshop, Exhibition and Symposium on Aesthetics, held in the Philippines, as well as in light of the inaugural opening of the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art in Australia.<sup>10</sup>

In September 1994, the Fukuoka Art Museum and the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art (Hiroshima MOCA) respectively held two group exhibitions, the 4th Asian Art Show Fukuoka and "Asian Art Now," using the curatorial and organizational know-how they had gained through their experiences of holding "New Art from Southeast Asia 1992" exhibition. Among the works produced locally in Hiroshima, Yanagi Yukinori's *Project Article 9* stuck to the theme of issues of war-and-peace in Asia, while Cai Guo-Qiang's explosion project, *Earth Has Its Black Hole Too*, was a celebration of that year's Asian Games, held in Hiroshima, as well as a requiem for the dropping of the atomic bombs. In Fukuoka, too, socially critical works dominated the exhibition, to which an impressive eighteen artists had been invited, and public workshops, performances, talks and community exchange events were held over the course of a month on the basis of numerous supporters.

The same year, the Asahi Shimbun would report on the "Asian contemporary art boom (compelling reconsideration of the rhetoric of Japanese advancement)."<sup>11</sup> Inspired by the symposium organized at the same time by the Japan Foundation, "The Potential of Asian Thought," this led to debate in the Japanese art world among both the old and the young generations. Although there's no room to go into detail here, with voices warning against Japanese hegemony rising from among even the advocates of Southeast Asia, the position that a "Japan" which had always been under the sway of the West could learn something from "Asia" came into conflict with the position that "Japan" should avoid invoking "Asia" (as it would lead to "Japanese" cultural aggressions).<sup>12</sup> In this way the peculiar understanding in Japan of "Asia" as "exotic/resort/poverty-stricken" came to be challenged. Simultaneously, there were attempts to find a new role for "Japan" as a facilitator that could connect "Asia" with the "international art world." It may not have been fully appreciated at the time, but the arrival of an age of contemporary art with "Asia" at its forefront would gradually lead to a reconsideration of the concepts of "Asia" and "Japan" themselves.

In 1995 and '97, both the Japan Foundation and the Fukuoka Art Museum organized exhibitions of Southeast Asian modern art, beginning their engagement with the recounting of



a regional art history. The Japan Foundation's "Asian Modernism: Diverse Development in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand" exhibition (1995) toured to the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand, setting the stage for collaborative initiatives in Asia from the 2000s onwards. Similarly, the Fukuoka Art Museum's "Birth of Modern Art in Southeast Asia" exhibition (1997) was anchored by the modern art collection of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, leading to a unique vein of research into modern art. In 1996, the Singapore Art Museum's inaugural exhibition, "Modernity and Beyond," called for the necessity of engaging in research of a regional scope, while following developments in Japan, Australia and the United States, as "art writing by Southeast Asians has developed along lines circumscribed by national boundaries"<sup>13</sup> While research on the modern art histories of neighboring countries like China and Korea remained difficult, it could be said that by involving public organizations from different countries in Southeast Asia, these exhibitions provided a foothold for the establishment of thematic frameworks and comparative analysis of a regional scope.

There were also steady increases in the holdings of Asian art in museum collections. Works exhibited in Fang Lijun's solo exhibition organized by the Japan Foundation Asia Center were acquired by the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo (MOT), the Okinawa Prefectural Museum & Art Museum, and the Tokushima Modern Art Museum, in addition to Fukuoka Art Museum. In the "Art in Southeast Asia 1997: Glimpse into the Future" exhibition held at the MOT and Hiroshima MOCA in 1997, even younger artists were included, and of the seventeen participating artists, more than half had works acquired by Tokyo, Fukuoka and Okinawa, while in Hiroshima, the commissioning of works had been undertaken the previous year.

Internationally, exhibitions like "Traditions / Tensions," organized by the Asia Society in New York, and "Cities on the Move," which toured Europe in 1997, followed on the heels of the 2nd Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art in Brisbane in 1996. At a symposium organized in 1997 by the Japan Foundation, the issue of (the work's inherent) "quality" was one of the subjects that caught attention, and questions were raised about the (artistic) "value" of Asian art as artwork.<sup>14</sup>

Around this same time, Japanese contemporary art galleries began to explore places like Vietnam and Taiwan, and gallerists appeared who would promote Japanese and Asian artists at Western art fairs and among Asia-Pacific public organizations, eventually becoming important leaders in the "Asian contemporary art" market. As the art scenes of the Asia Pacific linked up with the mainstream art scenes of Europe and the United States, global artistic production, allowing artists to address the broader world while staying in their own localities, would at last become possible.<sup>15</sup>

### On Engagement in the Construction of Artistic Value

Established to focus on the modern and contemporary art of twenty-one Asian countries and territories, the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum opened in 1999. The core of the collection was centered on works that had been acquired essentially from the end of the 1980s onward. Then, in 2000, the Japan Foundation started the inter-regional exchange program "Under Construction." That same year's Gwangju Biennale (with its Asian section curated by Tani Arata) and the following year's Yokohama Triennale (which featured numerous Asian artists) were the culmination of these Asian art projects in the Japanese art scene, but almost immediately, due to repercussions from the economic situation and administrative and fiscal reforms, the 2000s saw the arrival of the "period of winter-like hardships for museums."

Amid great remorse, the Japan Foundation Asia Center was dissolved in 2004, while the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum's budget was slashed. As the Asian art projects of Japanese cultural diplomacy and public museums were rapidly scaled back, it became apparent in hindsight that what had been reported on as a "boom" was in fact the presumption of

12

Kishi Sayaka, "Bijutsu ni okeru 'Aija' no hyōshō: Fukuoka Aija bijutsukan no tenji katsudō (Representations of 'Asia' in Art: The Exhibition Activities of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum)," *Kokusai bunka kankei shi kenkyū* (Research on the History of International Cultural Relations), ed. Hirano Ken'ichiro, Furuta Kazuko, Tsuchida Akio, and Kawamura Yoko, Tokyo University Press, 2013, pp. 234–254. The history of discourse on Asian art was addressed in the Japan Foundation symposium of 2008. See Kajiya Kenji's "Nihon ni okeru Aija no gendai bijutsu to kindai no bōrei (Asian Contemporary Art and the Ghost of Modernity in Japan)," as well as "Session 1: Discussion," *International Symposium 2008: Count 10 Before You Say Asia: Asian Art After Postmodernism*, ed. Furuichi Yasuko (Tokyo: The Japan Foundation, 2009).

13

T.K. Sabapathy, "A Regional View: Themes in Southeast Asian Art," *Supplement to ArtAsiaPacific* 3, No. 2, 1996, p. 6. For the details on the planning and preparation of the same exhibition, see Ahmad Mashadi's presentation paper in this publication (pp.61–63).

14

From the exchange between Tatehata Akira and Nanjō Fumio in Session 2, *Symposium: Asian Contemporary Art Reconsidered Report*, ed. Furuichi Yasuko and Hoashi Aki (Tokyo: The Japan Foundation Asia Center, 1997).

15

Regarding the attraction toward the "Asia Pacific" as a new framework, see Fajardo, "Rethinking ASEAN Aesthetics". The Thai artist Montien Boonma said, "Japan and Australia are supporting exhibitions of Southeast Asian art" (*Asia Center News* no. 6, Summer 1997), while there are also assertions that young Thai artists have started choosing to pursue their careers in the Asia-Pacific region, rather than going to study in Europe, as had previously been the convention (Annabelle Boissier, "De l'art moderne à l'art contemporain. Un transfert de monopole dans le monde de l'art thaïlandais," *Aséanie, Sciences sociales et humaines en Asie du Sud-Est*, n° 24, 2009, pp.91–109).

government organizations and art museums, as well as journalists, and cannot be said to have aroused great interest among the general audience.<sup>16</sup>

In postwar Japanese society, art museums had functioned largely as sites for broad cultural consumption based on their coordination with “newspapers, journalists, department stores and the market.”<sup>17</sup> It has been pointed out that where works of modern art and those by mainstream academic-style artists—already confirmed in their value—had established markets and could obtain a broad base of social appreciation, it was difficult for contemporary art to build a stable basis from which to support a constituency and market. Additionally, the above-mentioned bipolar stance of the 1990s art scene may also have made it difficult to engage with Asian art in an optimistic way. The Asian art projects by Japanese public institutions could not overturn the pre-existing system, nor could they directly connect to the formation of a contemporary Asian art market driven by China and India.

Even given the above limits, I still think that the 1990s are worth studying as the formative period of Asian art. For one thing, in the open atmosphere of the early period, a small but new audience began to appear along with a new generation of specialists. For example, inspired by her interactions with the artists in the exhibition, one of the volunteers supporting the 4th Asian Art Show Fukuoka started sending out regular updates on the museum, and other related information, earning the gratitude of many of the artists. Similarly, a citizen’s group from Fukushima has become known for its continuous support of new works by Cai Guo-Qiang, after the artist held his solo exhibition at the Iwaki City Art Museum in 1994. Audiences in Tokyo also began to pay attention to Asian art after the 4th Asian Art Show toured to the Setagaya Art Museum in 1995. A collector who describes himself as “salaryman collector,” first took interest in Asian art around then and is now known as the collector and the spokesperson for Asian art.

According to those who were exposed to these artists’ events, Asian artists have a “different wavelength from that of Western artists.”<sup>18</sup> At the symposium for the Heri Dono exhibition at the Japan Foundation Forum in 2000, one of the guests, Ozawa Tsuyoshi, recalled of Heri Dono, “We first met in 1994 in Fukuoka, and I was overwhelmed by his vitality... it was really enjoyable being together in the same exhibition.”<sup>19</sup> Perhaps the sense of solidarity and sympathy toward one another’s works shared by artists who lived in the same region, and the expectations toward artists who seemed to have bright futures, were producing a sense of a new art as the object of an engagement or “investment” that had not been possible in the traditional artistic viewpoint centered on enlightenment and patronage.

In the realm of contemporary art, public institutions provide objective indicators via the production of exhibitions and publications, and the formation of collections, thus functioning as the authorizing body, and conferring artistic value upon artists and artworks by way of reciprocal interaction with the art market.<sup>20</sup> In the production of contemporary art, the new principles of cultural diplomacy described as “bilateral intellectual exchange” played a role in the production of artistic value on a regional and international scope, alongside the invigoration of art museum management. And the exhibition, publication and collection activities of public museums would contribute to the formation process of universal values that went beyond the “local” or the “regional” levels, but which were at the same time more grass-roots than the affirmation of pre-established values or the mechanisms of enlightenment.

In this way, it can be seen how the isolated, ossified concept of “Asia” that was formed by modernity was gradually loosened and unpacked through the involvement of the public organizations of the 1990s. This is a question that even now continues to add vitality to artistic production in the Asia Pacific, but in the age of the “Asian contemporary art” market, which since the latter half of the 2000s has allowed for the participation of ever more diverse players, it is dissolving into an even larger framework of artistic production. Perhaps what is needed now is the provision of an environment for reevaluating the spirit of artistic production in the 1990s, and carrying it forward in a critical way.

16

Nakamura Hideki, “Who ‘introduces’ What to Whom and Why?”, *International Symposium 1999—Asian Art: Prospects for the Future Report*, ed. Furuichi Yasuko (Tokyo: The Japan Foundation Asia Center, 2000), pp.150–151.

The merits and demerits of projects by public institutions are also debated by Nakamura Hideki, Tani Arata and Nakamura Masato in “Teidan: Ajia no naka no Nihon, Ajia no soto no Nihon (Three-Way Talk: Japan in Asia, Japan Out of Asia)” in *REAR*, 2005.

17

Satō Dōshin, *Bijutsu no aidentiti: Dare no tame ni, nan no tame ni* (Identity in Art: For Whom, and For What?) (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kō Bunkan, 2007).

18

For example, Kakizaki Takao, “Gyarari 75 shūnen: Tsune ni atarashiī jidai no kachi ni furenagara (75 years of galleries: Constantly touching upon the values of a new age),” *Ajia gendai bijutsu Report No. 7* (Asian Contemporary Art Report No.1) (Tokyo: Bijutsu Nenkansha, 1994), pp. 30–34. It’s common to hear people say that views on art have changed due to the works of Asian contemporary artists.

19

*Asia Center News* no.17 (Tokyo: The Japan Foundation Asia Center, March 2001), p.8.

20

Nathalie Moureau and Dominique Sagot-Duvauroux, *Le marché de l’art contemporain* (Paris: La Découverte, 2010); Raymonde Moulin, *L’artiste, l’institution et le marché* (Paris: Flammarion, 1992); Nathalie Heinich, *Le Triple jeu de l’art contemporain* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1998).

## Discussion | Session 3

Moderator  
**Hoashi Aki**