

### The Role of International Cultural Institutions in Asia

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Hoashi Aki

So I'd like to begin the discussions for Session 3. We had presenters speak about the overall picture of the situations in Singapore, Australia, and Japan during the 1990s. I think we have been able to see how different institutions and organizations events in Australia, Singapore, and Japan (particularly the Japan Foundation and Fukuoka Asian Art Museum) had engaged with the region. But I would like to take note of other cultural institutions and organizations that did not come up that were actively engaging in projects within the Asian region. One is Germany's Goethe-Institut, the second is France's Alliance Française, and third is United Kingdom's British Council. I think the Goethe-Institut and Alliance Française were especially active and influential in countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam. If my memory serves me correct, I think they supported expressions that dealt with "contemporary" issues and held positions that were "anti-authority." But I cannot remember if this was all in the 1990s or the 2000s. I wonder if Dinh could briefly speak about the situation in Vietnam in relation with the Goethe-Institut and Alliance Française?

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Dinh Q. Lê

I think that both the Goethe-Institut and the Alliance Française were very important in the 1990s; particularly the Goethe-Institut, I would say. But as I mentioned before, it depended on the director, too. I think it was 1997 when the Goethe-Institut opened in Hanoi, but even before then, the German government had already been active in Vietnam, by sending and placing German artists

in universities in Vietnam through the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) grants. Veronika Radulovic trained a group of very bright young artists and they did wonderful things in the early '90s. I think the international cultural organizations have been very important because they have the funding and their connection with the outside world that enabled them to bring in new artist and people, and to introduce new ideas to the Vietnamese. But I think now, the two programs seem to be floundering.

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Hoashi Aki

Thank you. Alison, did you have a question?

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Alison Carroll

I just wanted to add something about the Goethe-Institut. In my presentation, I was talking about the importance of funding and the relationship to a government policy, really, and its impact on the arts. We talked about the Goethe before this session. In Australia, it's not as high profile as it might be in a Southeast Asian country where there is overtly less government funding.

What I wanted to add about the Goethe is that, to me, despite its ups-and-downs of personnel, funding, or whatever—and it still seems to have an awful lot of money—is that its attitude is incredibly arm's length from government sensitivity. I heard the director in Sydney say, "If an artist wanted to do something that is critical of the government, we would accept that that is part of the way in which the arts work. That's one of the great virtues of the arts; they will be challenging to the status quo. We accepted it as a reality." I was really so surprised to hear this.

I don't know of another funding agency in the world that would be as



Hoashi Aki



Kishi Sayaka

accepting as that. I know in Australia we are very sensitive and our government is sensitive, so we tend to self-censor things that are going to get one of our main policy-drivers offside. I don't know about the situation *here*, but I don't know if others have had that experience with Goethe, but their principle is really impressive to me.

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Ahmad Mashadi

I think this is also in consideration of what you have spoken about, say, a country like Singapore with a certain general lack of resentment against its colonial past. In that sense, it is both practical and strategic—it was very conscious of not falling into this idea of “nationalism” based on ethnicity. For Singapore—being a multi-ethnic country—it will be extremely problematic to have a certain idea of “nation” centered on a specific ethnicity or competing interest of those ethnicities.

Going back to the issues of colonial institutions and locally-based Western institutions; there were continuities. For example, the Raffles Museum (renamed National Museum after self-rule); they are retained to and transformed to a post-independence institution. And the role of European cultural institutions and cultural centers such as the Goethe-Institut was very significant; significant, not necessarily in terms of the financial backing perhaps, but it provides to Singaporeans opportunities to exhibit and see other traveling exhibitions—an important link for what was to be “contemporary” in Singapore. For example, in 1991, then National Museum Art Gallery hosted a traveling exhibition “Joseph Beuys’ Drawings, Objects and Prints.” It was not a major exhibition, consisting primarily of his smaller-scaled works. But it was extremely important because it provided

Singaporean artists a material encounter with the contemporary. I think it catalyzed many things. At that point of time, of course, it intersected with many things that were going on, not just in Singapore, but broadly in Southeast Asia that turn towards the conceptual.

So there was a role there; there is a significant importance that we can attribute to the institutions like the Goethe-Institut and Alliance Française. I think broadly speaking, also, we have to think about these sites as sites of “programming” if not “curatorship.” And we also have to begin to think about what, in terms of curatorial philosophy or curatorial approaches, they have provided, which eventually shaped the way that we think about curatorship, today.

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Hoashi Aki

I see. So, international cultural institutions, like the Goethe-Institut, also exerted a certain level of influence on curatorial practice. Kishi-san, have you come across other cultural institutions that have pursued projects and programs in the regions in question? Have you encountered any in your research? Or could you share with us your analysis on the particular position of the Japan Foundation?

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Kishi Sayaka

Regarding the Japan Foundation, I have heard that prior to the establishment of the ASEAN Culture Center in 1990, their overseas offices in Jakarta and Bangkok had exhibition spaces where they provided young local artists opportunities to show their works. I would be interested to hear what the other presenters here see of their influences.

As for other cultural institutions, I would say the Goethe-Institut was one



Alison Carroll



Ahmad Mashadi

of *the* most important organizations in Southeast Asia from the 1970s and '80s, even before the "Asia-Pacific" framework emerged in the '90s. And I have also heard that the Alliance Française was very important in Thailand.

The Publications that Shaped  
the Discourse in Asia

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Hoashi Aki

So various institutions were playing their roles in the region. When we pick up cases in Japan, Australia, and Singapore, from around 1993, both Australia and Singapore started investing in the cultural projects that works in the regional context of Asia in a systematic way with some political interests, encouraging projects to flourish and develop. Simultaneously, in Japan, the former ASEAN Culture Center, which later became the Asia Center, began to initiate their projects, too.

I would like to ask, whether or not, for example, the publications that became available then enabled different countries to think about contemporaneity, or perhaps, "synchronization," a term I'm throwing in here out of convenience. Did publications, for example, play a role in synchronizing the different histories, traditions, cultures, ethnicities, national histories, and so on in the region?

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Ahmad Mashadi

I am not sure whether we can talk about it in terms of "synchronization," but "collaboration" and "networks," certainly, yes. I think in the 1990s, of course, you have an emergence or plethora of new writings, new publications that was significantly important. The slides from my presentations mentioned very few of them. The 1993 publication by John Clark, *Modernity in Asia*, is really

significant in providing a survey of issues and ideas that writers were grappling with across Southeast Asia. These are not necessarily written in the same consistency, but, nevertheless, they are significant as a kind of a gauge to the questions and issues. For John Clark, he was attempting to find ways in which they could be collectivized meaningfully as ways to indicate emerging trends, ideas, and perspectives. I think you see those names again and again in many different publications.

Apinan Poshyananda, obviously, features quite a bit, and then you have other writers like Redza Piyadasa or Somporn Rodboon. These are crucial in developing a building block that facilitates a whole range of transaction.

I think what we also want to think about, though, is the fact that publications do not exist in a vacuum; they are not an end product of an exhibition. Rather, they are beginnings of other things. What I was trying to say about the 1996 "Modernity and Beyond" exhibition was that it was extremely crucial for this exhibition to look at all those publications. In fact, it could not have been realized without all the publications that were issued prior to it.

I was talking a little bit about "curatorial parachuting" in the early developments of the Singapore Art Museum. Yes, there was quite a bit of parachuting, but they were in some ways informed by the many publications that were emerging both from the centers of Australia, Japan, and even ASEAN. I think although there had been writings that critiqued ASEAN, its work in the 1990s are worth mentioning. It is part of ... accumulations are our way to feel through the histories, and these histories are really complex and rich. For example, I was referring to Julie Ewington's idea about

the “installative” in “Five Elements: Is installation the medium of South-East Asia” (*Art and Asia Pacific*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1995) as a device that defines a pan-South-east Asian practice that—I am simplifying—the conceptual and the traditional or the shamanistic. It was also something that could have been said by those like Brenda V. Fajardo or Flaudette May Datuin who had done lot of work with the Baguio Arts Guild. These were emerging through the forums of the ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information (ASEAN COCI) workshops and aesthetic symposiums (like one organized in Manila in 1993, “The Aesthetics of ASEAN Expression”) which were discussed some of these issues, in particular ways to understand traditions in terms of their comparabilities at that point of time.

So, I think we have to find ways to reflect also on things like the ASEAN COCI publications and the symposiums/workshops that were taking place, not just with the ASEAN, but also the SEAMEO Project in Archeology and Fine Arts (SPAFA). These were extremely important.

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Hoashi Aki

Yes, looking back at the 1990s, there were a lot of “surveys,” and I think there was a situation in which many professionals were accumulating and analyzing information, but that was not the means to an end itself but, rather, a mid-point in an ongoing process of analysis, towards something, towards creating something.

In this context—the term “informant” had come up a couple of times but—Australia’s APT, I think, maybe had several sources from which to collect information. This is somewhat related to the “parachuting” curators from the Philippine’s case in May’s presentation yesterday, but even though it is doubtful

that anyone can understand everything about a region from a two-to-three day research trip, I think APT was initially trying to correspond with many local informants in order to pursue and look at the many possible forms it could become. Alison, could you share with us how the initial stages of APT was like?

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Alison Carroll

Well, I think if you are looking at the early days of the APT, I would say that our information gathering was pretty minimal. One of the reasons for that was apart from going there and talking to people in the *very* early days, there was very minimal published information around. I was talking to Dinh last night about Vietnam in the early days. I went to Vietnam for the APT in 1991 and there was a book that had just come out of Hong Kong—*Uncorked Soul; Contemporary Art from Vietnam*—and there was a *Time* magazine article. Those were the two things that I had as my research tools. Then, it was just meeting people on those very quick visits.

One of the things that I was very conscious of, if I can just follow on from that, was what Kishi-san said about the 1990s being an era of formation. It started on very simple terms; with people just stepping off that cliff of saying, “Yes, we are going to do this, and we are going to try and see if it works.”

I know for the APT, there was a very real sense, before it had even opened, that the first one might be a disaster. I remember being in a taxi in Jakarta with Doug Hall, the then-director of the Queensland Art Gallery, saying, “Doug, if this fails, you’re not going to be in the best books with the people that have put money into this, i.e., your bosses, the government of Queensland.” But he was very aware of that. He took it on

his shoulders and I pay tribute to him for that. It was brave. The rest of us were going along for the ride and having a very good ride as it was. And *then* the ball got going; the small number of people that Ahmad has talked about were known to everybody, the small number of publications gradually got bigger and bigger, and slowly that sense of something forming steadily turned into the *really* complex nest of activities that happen across the region today, not just in Southeast Asia—on one level, that is a part of it—but all the sort of connections *between* Southeast Asia and the rest of everywhere.

It has got to the stage now where I keep hearing of things happening. In the past I would know everything that was going on, so I thought. Now, there is revelation after revelation of activity after activity. All those young people—and I *do* think there is an age factor here, certainly in Australia who were in those days under thirty, now maybe under forty-five—who were excited by it. They realized that it was exciting and they just ran with it and they are *still* running with it. We heard about Zoe Butt yesterday who is in Saigon now; she is a young Australian. Likewise, there is Roger Nelson in Cambodia; Russell Storer is the new senior curator at the National Gallery Singapore. People are doing all these things and it is that *web* of complexity that keeps developing and growing. Thank goodness and how exciting.

Just to take from there: one of the things that grew was something that Ahmad said about moving into the thematic. That is certainly something that happened through the 1990s. We started off knowing that the audience needed to come along with us, and were starting from a very basic level of information. So we started off country-by-country just to give people a sense of what was going

on. Then, gradually, that became too obvious for the audience and then these themes started to emerge. We now have a show like the one that's on here about the "time of others" that can be presented across all these ideas and locales and personalities. I also wanted to pick up on "time," because that was an issue to come out of *this* show. But I am interested in that concept.

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Hoashi Aki

Alison just mentioned a few names of people who were young in the 1990s, but became key players in the 2000s that probably are worth a quick introduction. You mentioned Suhanya Raffel in your presentation; she was one of the curators for the APT, and is currently the Director of Collections at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. She has continued to do comparative research between Asian and Western art. There is Professor John Clark whom I personally think have been also influential as an educator. I have heard of many curators in Singapore and others who work in other parts of the Asian region to have studied under him.

So, even while the "surveys" of artistic practices of Asian regions and publication ventures developed, both serving to accelerate the dissemination of information, I also feel that, simultaneously, the seeds of individual, more personal ties were fostered and sown back then, and have continued to grow until today.

In Japan's case, then Kishi-san, you brought up two cases in your presentation—the Japan Foundation and the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum—but have you detected similar situations or forms of ties that are more personal and individual through your research of these institutions and organizations? What do

you think were the roles of individuals, in Japan, within the framework of institutional exchange with those in the Asian region?

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Kishi Sayaka

I would say the members of the ASEAN Culture Center and Asia Center helped in maintaining ties with Asia into the 2000s, not to mention the specialists such as curators and art historians. From before then, the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum has, of course, held exhibitions whose curators have contributed to the art historical discourse of the regions in question.

#### Singapore as an Entry Point to Asia

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Hoashi Aki

I think that those individual networks did work, and have encouraged exhibitions like the current “Times of others.”

To bring the discussion back to Singapore, Mashadi-san, being a curator of the Singapore Art Museum during the 1990s, you witnessed the making of history of art in Singapore and Asia. Later with the Singapore Biennale, “Asia” was viewed in a biennale context as well. Singapore is currently developing its new national gallery, in addition to the Singapore Art Museum, to perhaps research and collect artworks in Asia.

While these developments are ongoing, as you critically point out in your presentation, I agree that there may be a sense of outward “spectacularization” of Singapore. Interestingly, Dinh’s presentation yesterday and your presentation today, there was a photo of the cityscapes with skyscrapers towering next to a Ferris wheel, et cetera, that were glistening in the night.

So what is the role that Singapore is aspiring to play in this new decade? Is

it the continuum of the 1990s, or is it a departure into something different?

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Ahmad Mashadi

That is quite a complex and evolving situation. The entry point into Southeast Asia was in particular ASEAN; ASEAN is a very specific political collective.

I think the question from them was to build up a kind of complexity that will go beyond that initial attempt of foregrounding. The broader task, here, is to deal with or struggle with this broader contrast between the kind of practical issues and the vastness of the subject we are dealing with. For example, firstly, there is accumulating collections. These are expensive undertaking where most of the things that you wish to acquire are not available anyway. Secondly, there is the question of the kind of histories that you need to represent. I think in Singapore, in some ways, we have yet to articulate what it is we want to represent in the collection, and how do we want to negotiate with the national histories of the various countries. I think APT has done that very well in a sense that the collection in Brisbane is very much marked by the interest in terms of engaging and negotiating directly with artists.

In Singapore, it was an attempt to engage with national histories, and therefore it can become frustrating if the right Juan Luna is simply unavailable. In Australia, I think this kind of anxiety is less so. I think that’s very interesting. And of course, by extension, the struggle involves the question of what sort of curatorial modalities do you create, do you develop out of this contingency, out of this situation. Therefore, I think what is interesting with the current situation is that Singapore is bringing in all kinds of curatorial talents, energies, ideas. The eventual systems can potentially be very

open-ended, and the question is, what sort of frameworks to make this productive? Do we want to remain subservient to an interest that is articulating very specific histories and stories? Or do we need to find ways that articulate a curatorial proposition that is open-ended not overdetermined by specific expectations? I think what is crucial here is for us to think about curatorial process that is a way to accommodate a plurality of individual curatorial energies. What does that mean? I think we need to pluralize our institutional purposes across museums; we should pluralize curatorial thought, decenter approaches, and allow for differing institution to function in very specific ways. Basically, it may not be enough to have an institution like a modern art museum and a contemporary art museum. That's not enough. We must have other institutions that allow ourselves to develop multiple approaches. This is where, I think, when we begin to think about "sites of curation," we have to think about it in the broadest terms possible and to think about it in terms of finding ways to ensure that many things are possible.

So the outcomes are not irreducible. Curatorially, they involve ways in which we can, perhaps, recuperate testimonies, memories, ways in which we deal with the past which we are not able to do today. Very specifically in Singapore, as I was showing the last slide, we have

to think about ways in which we begin to engage with the effective population of Singapore; "effective" meaning to be inclusive. The very fact that there are people living in Singapore, whether they are Singaporean citizens or contracted professionals and labor, they form an important social fabric with issues and predicaments that condition their stay. And, as museums, how do we begin to relate to these. How to address them as an audience, I think, is important. As museums, we struggle to understand that, and perhaps, to articulate certain policies and curatorial actions.

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Hoashi Aki

I see. So we need to figure out systems within and outside museums where we can be receptive to those versatile, diverse forms of practices, maintaining a plural format, and not be narrowed down into one or singular mode of practice.

Mashadi-san spoke a little about the audience, too, toward the end, but while there were those who earlier admitted that audiences were not their concern, how to address the audience in the contexts of museums is an interesting issue and have come up a couple of time today. I hope we can possibly touch upon that in the final session, when we have everyone up on stage, but for now, I would like to close Session 3.

Thank you very much.





## Plenary Discussion

Moderator  
**Hoashi Aki**

Hoashi Aki

Session 3 was on the roles institutions played specifically in the 1990s, so I would like to begin by asking Gridthiya or Ade, as individual practitioners who were already active then, to share with us how you dealt with institutions, yourselves. As we have heard throughout the session, there were artistic engagements that were individual as well as institutional, whether it was political, systematic, or involving museums or other cultural institutions such as the Japan Foundation. So as individuals who worked in the arts back then, what were your relationships with these institutions like?

Gridthiya Gaweeewong

Before I go into that, I thought I would add a little comment on the last session's discussion about the significance of the international cultural organizations, especially in Thailand and in relation to Southeast Asia. In Thailand, during the Cold War, the important international cultural organization was the United States Information Service (USIS), which is part of the State Department of the United States. Most of the art activities and exhibitions came from this organization. I think that the first experimental film laboratory and workshop were conducted in the 1960. Later, as already discussed, the British Council and Goethe-Institut played pivotal roles to develop the art scene, especially the Goethe-Institut, because they helped bring in many workshops and important artists to the country.

One anecdote I would like to share is from the early 1990s. They invited the artist Rainer Wittenborn for a workshop organized by the senior curator, Somporn Rodboon at Silpakorn University in Bangkok and there he met Montien Boonma. From there, Wittenborn introduced Montien to his artist and curator friends, who were based in Brazil and his curator friends invited him to Arte Amazonas, where he met Marina Abramović, and so on. So this

was how his connections grew. The same artist introduced Montien to René Block, who invited Montien to participate in the 4th Istanbul Biennial in 1995. As a side note, this was the first time a Thai artist participated in the Istanbul Biennial.

It is very interesting how important a role the small workshops played in taking artists to the next level, and I am interested in such connections and the impact they had on their subsequent careers. The Goethe-Institut, indeed, played a vital role for the artists. The British Council is not *that* exciting for me, even though they played a vital role in the 1980s. They are very nationalistic but, of course, so are the other international cultural organizations.

The mid-1970s, was the time when Thailand established its first non-profit organization, the Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art, which is also the first so-called "modern art museum." It was run by an independent foundation and it lasted until in the '80s. Since the Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art was established, the influence of the Goethe-Institut and the British Council had declined. But the art community gave moral support to these organizations. All the important international exhibitions had come through them during the height of the Cold War. Due to the omnipresent policy of Thailand, our country had to be friends with everyone then, so we got many very interesting exhibitions from both the free world and the communist countries. With the USIS, through the Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art, we had exhibitions of Alexander Calder and Henry Moore in the early '70s, and we also had exhibitions from Russia, and the Eastern Bloc. It is very interesting just to see the history of exhibitions throughout this single institution in the '70s.

Then the French Embassy and the Alliance Française played quite interesting roles in the late 1990s, too. They are the ones who brought "Cities on the Move" to Bangkok. Later, towards the 2000s, the Office of the Contemporary Art and Culture, and Ministry of Culture (OCAC) was

established in Thailand, so now, everything (official) is being monopolized by these organizations.

Ade Darmawan

Actually, it's really interesting how, for example, several international cultural organizations worked in Indonesia. It's really interesting to see how Erasmus Huis, Goethe-Institut, Center Culturel Français (CCF) or the current Institut Français Indonesia (IFI), the Japan Foundation, and also the British Council have changed the way they operate since the 1990s until now.

For example, the British Council hasn't been really interesting for the last couple of years because, as far as I know, they have become to operate like a corporate entity rather than a cultural center. Also, they create minimal difference because of their relation with the government. I think the Goethe-Institut has been more progressive, because their tradition has been to not directly depend on the government. As far as I know, Germany has the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (IFA), for example, just as the Netherlands have the Mondriaan Fund. Their visions are to support artists from their own countries to have their projects outside the country. Erasmus and the CCF have been more conservative in a way because they are directly aligned with the government. I mean, they are actually like a part of the foreign affairs division of their own administration. So, they are really different; a lot of the State's agenda is reflected in their programs.

In the 1990s, the organizations became a little bit like alternative spaces as well, which is, again, interesting. When I was a student, for example, I couldn't go to the Jakarta Arts Council to consult about exhibition spaces. We didn't have any space to exhibit our works. So, we went to the Japan Foundation instead, for example. When we [ruangrupa] published *Karbon Journal* in 2003, with a special feature on alternative spaces in Jakarta, we also included several foreign culture centers because we thought they

worked exactly like alternative spaces. That's where we gathered and also held our meetings.

Kamiya Yukie

I'd also like to add that experience was accumulated on both the personal and institutional/organizational levels, and what may be called networks—or even friendships—were built in the 1990s.

The Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art (Hiroshima MOCA), established in 1989, was the first public museum devoted exclusively to contemporary art. While assigning ourselves with the concept and tasks of this new museum, the Japan Foundation helped organize the Asian art exhibitions in 1992, '94, and '97. This is all before I joined Hiroshima MOCA, but Hiroshima at the time pursued projects related to Asia, not limited to just cultural endeavors, so as to establish economic partnerships and expand Hiroshima's networks in the region. One such project was the 12th Asian Games Hiroshima in 1994. To build on the partnership, Hiroshima City built new railways (the Astram Line) throughout the city, expanding transportation to the suburbs, and took various other measures in the attempt to "brand" itself widely within Asia—an approach similar to the one that Fukuoka took earlier.

However, Asia's tourist industry had not yet matured enough to induce the expected economic outcomes, and the entire project failed. This entailed a slight slow-down in our building the Asian collection as well. However, the Japan Foundation's endeavors later, somewhat, triggered a come-back of working on the Asian artworks in the Hiroshima MOCA's collections. And from that, the method of commissioning artists to produce new works and incorporating them into our own collection developed.

In 2000, in trying to reconsider Japan not only as a partner *outside* Asia, but as a collaborative member *within* Asia, through the Under Construction project, the Japan Foundation

gave me the opportunity to think of Asia, not as a holiday resort, but as an object of research and investigation. Back then, there was Gridthiya as our partner, Ahmad, as well for the first meeting, when we were all proposing the artistic conditions and situations specific to each other's regions. As you can see, that friendship continues as well as our pursuit in researching Asia.

Interestingly enough, the Goethe-Institut was mentioned earlier, but I am currently involved in a project that, again, seeks collaboration with curatorial counterparts from Korea, China, and Taiwan. Previously, the Japan Foundation may have been the only international cultural organizations to work on projects related to Asia in this way. But now, there are opportunities to work with different organizations. And with funding from the Goethe, free of political influences, as Alison explained, the project allows artists to seek socio-historical issues such as the China-Taiwan-Hong Kong divide and the North and South Korean peninsula divide with the involvement of Japan who was once the occupier—but with Hiroshima as simultaneously having the side of being the victim—to pursue more complex and convoluted cultural-historical dimensions of Asia. There is that cycle—I think Gridthiya used the term “reincarnation”—of returning or revisiting again; that our trajectories are still entwined. I feel that very strongly even now.

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Alison Carroll

As the talk was about the Goethe-Institut before, in a more general sense, it was going through my mind that I did some work while ago trying to set up an Australian cultural center in Indonesia, because we have nothing like that there. I went through the list of those who had centers: *everybody* except Australia has a cultural center in Indonesia; *everybody* except us next door, with some money as I have been saying and who is interested—and the Americans. That was really interesting: the one who doesn't put

money into cultural centers or activities from their government was the United States. Everyone else believes in doing these things. *We sort of* believe in it, but we don't do as much as we should. But the Americans just don't do much.

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Ade Darmawan

They have Hollywood.

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[Laughter]

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Alison Carroll

True; they have Hollywood. Hillary Clinton came by, I think, and suddenly there was some interest in America doing something cultural in Indonesia. But it just struck me how interesting that was, and it made me wonder whether America's reputation in the world, which is very contested, complicated, and controversial, changed at all. They used to [work on cultural centers]—as Gridthiya said—they used to have the USIS, but not anymore.

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Gridthiya Gaweeewong

I think they don't need it because they have Hollywood and McDonalds.

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Alison Carroll

But their reputation doesn't go further than that, does it?

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Ade Darmawan

They opened the @america,now. When they came to do a survey, I actually said exactly what you said, “What you are going to do with it?”

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Hoashi Aki

I think it may be a good time to ask Furuichi-san to talk about the projects of the Japan Foundation, as one of the involved parties. Kishi-san gave us a summary already, but is there anything you could add to the discussion in terms of projects in the 1990s, the 2000s, and now, one like the exhibition on show now, “Time of others,”

which was initiated by the Japan Foundation, bringing in partners and so on. Could you tell us if an exhibition like "Time of others" would have been possible or not in the '90s? Or, what are the differences from back then, if any?

Furuichi Yasuko

We were involved in an exhibition on Southeast Asia about two decades ago, and of course, the situation in Southeast Asia has changed vastly since then. The curators of the "Time of others" exhibition is Hashimoto Azusa from the National Museum of Art, Osaka, Che Kyongfa from this museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, Michelle Ho from the Singapore Art Museum, and Reuben Keehan from the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art. They have been working and looking at Asian art at different phases for over ten years, even though they come from a relatively younger generation. In other words, although they are young, they have been interested in Asia and when they got together, they were able to discuss in depth the current situations and conditions in art. Thus this particular exhibition materialized.

I think we got to this stage because we had accumulated some experiences through the 1990s and the 2000s.

I am very curious how the art world and art professionals in general are evaluating this kind of situation of these young curators. Formerly, the Fukuoka Art Museum, before the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum branched out, kindly recommended Asian artists [from the exhibitions held before the 1990s], meaning others were not equipped with enough information to do research and organize an exhibition on Asian art. However, the situation has changed since. Now that there's the Internet, information on Asia is more accessible and we can pursue our own researches independently and organize an exhibition on our own.

### Becoming a Hub in Asia

Hoashi Aki

So I think the question leads us to turning our eyes back to the "now." I think it can be said that there is a rising development in institutionalization/systematization [of the arts] in the region; we already talked about Singapore's new national gallery and Doryun spoke about Hong Kong's M+. Queensland Art Gallery has steadily increased its collection from its years of organizing the APT.

I think the term "art hub" also came up from Singapore, but Gwangju, Korea, is also planning to construct a large art center that is to function as an art-hub, too. I think it is expected to open this year. So with all of these kinds of movements, Doryun, could I ask you what your thought are on Southeast Asia seen from the perspective of M+?

Doryun Chong

The simplest and most correct answer is that it's very important. But we haven't really done *that* much, to be honest. The person who has been there longest M+ is five years and I have been there for less than two years. But it's important to put in the context.

The collecting activities began in mid-2012 and really started in earnest mid-2013 or so, so we have been doing this just for a couple of years. And thanks to some large donations and the very quick purchases that we have made over the last three years or so, we have a collection of over four thousand objects at this point. All of this is useful, but also misleading information.

The most important point in relation to your question, or at least what I often wonder, is why Hong Kong shouldn't be understood more as a juncture between East and Southeast Asia. In fact, just to put in the simplest way, Hong Kong is closer to Hanoi or Bangkok than Seoul or Tokyo. But, of course, we know why it is understood as part of East Asia, because, of

course, it is part of the Chinese civilization and it is very much a Confucian, Chinese-character and culture-based region. But when you look at the really fascinating history of how Hong Kong was made into what it is today, from the time when the British arrived, is that there is much contributions from Southeast Asia and South Asia as part of the larger British Empire network. I think that, even to the present day, the largest non-Chinese population in Hong Kong is mostly Filipino and Indonesian domestic workers. So, there is population representation there that doesn't have socio-political and cultural representation that matches the population economic contribution. So as a public institution, is that a big blind spot? Of course it is. But is it our job to correct that? Not exactly.

I think what we have to do institutionally as a place that is located there, within the landscape of museums, institutions, art scenes, and culture scenes in general, vis-à-vis Southeast Asia, is slightly different from what we have to do for our immediate audiences and constituencies. So, these are all the extra questions that come along to the very simple answer of, "Yes, Southeast Asia is, of course, very important for us."

Hoashi Aki

That made me wonder, while institutions that are to emerge from now on are most likely going to have to endure the burden of taking many responsibilities and being questioned about their fairness about the system of museology itself, there will be a burden of accountability from different directions.

On another note, then, there were cultural centers—or overseas offices—of the Japan Foundation in Bangkok and Jakarta, which functioned as hubs. But how about in the Philippines where the American influences, both cultural and historical, are deep-rooted? May, what do you think about the relationships with Southeast Asia or institutions? What I mean is, you spoke about how your projects were "under the radar"

yesterday, explaining that while it did not receive wide attention it allowed for more freedom. How do you situate the Philippines, or yourself, within these issues, may I ask?

Flaudette May Datuin

I think that it is already well-known that we are the only catholic nation in Asia and, geographically, we are oceans away from the main area that are called Southeast Asia. We have four hundred years of the convent and fifty years of Hollywood in our history; that's a cliché, of course. So, popular culture is soaked with Americanism and, anime also; the Japan Foundation need not behave like an outpost when it comes to the popular mind.

I would like to answer your question by following up on Ahmad's call for "curatorial modalities" and "pluralism." Since I was not able to do so as clearly in my paper, I'd just like to briefly say that there are a range of curatorial modalities in the Philippines.

Baguio Arts Guild has, as I said, morphed into different directions. There is the BenCab Museum already by our national artist; BenCab [Benedicto "BenCab" Cabrera] has become a national artist. Tam-Awan, is a faction of BenCab; it was founded by BenCab, but there was a conflict, so Tam-Awan went its own way. The Tam-Awan features traditional houses as hotels and they also have very interesting cultural activities, including the Tam-Awan Festival. Kidlat Tahimik also has his own, very interesting spaces, and they are also based on food. So they deal with food and other activities, but mainly food. And there is also Café by the Ruins, which, instead of having any trace of the ruins, has become very established in that region. VIVA EXCON continues to be a force, which is in itself, very interesting. I meant to say that collaborations such as those between Baguio Arts Festival and VIVA EXCON created a multiplier effect; groups were created as a direct or indirect result of the BAA and VIVA EXCON. For example, those who

attended the BAA.

If you are talking about “Cities on the Move” as a mainstream exhibition, for example, we have the Waiting Sheds, which is a project being done in Lucban, a town in the south of Luzon. Although Lucban is a very sleepy town and has now given homes to groups of artists who are doing very low-profile residencies, it also may be the result of all the jet setting, globetrotting, and collaboration that were funded and instigated by all the other institutions that are being mentioned here.

The theme of environment, environmental hazards and disasters are being much attention in the curriculums of the University of the Philippines. For example, there is now a course called Disaster Mitigation, Adaptation and Preparedness, offered by the College of Engineering, but taught with an interdisciplinary team. I represent the Art Studies Department in that team. We are visited by disasters, and the most devastating was Typhoon Haiyan, local name Yolanda; disasters have become very much an academic preoccupation that extends beyond academe. We collaborate with artists for example, and last semester, a group of artists installed, performed and interacted with various sites in the UP campus in Diliman. The project was entitled Bakawan, or mangrove. It’s a good collaboration; a group of ragtag artists collaborating with UP along with the Vargas Museum, which also conducts curatorial projects with the Japan Foundation. They have yearly calls for exhibition proposals from curators and a lot of projects have emerged from that.

The Museum of Contemporary Art and Design or MCAD is part of the structure of the DE LA SALLE College of St. Benilde (DLS CSB) and is housed in the building of the DLS CSB School of Design and Art or SDA. To my knowledge there is no such other museum of its kind—one that combines Art and Design—in the Philippines. We also have exhibitions based on smaller themes such as “mangroves” and “disasters,” but we also have larger, art historical themes.

The Metropolitan Museum of Manila had an art historical survey curated by Patrick Flores titled, “The Philippine Contemporary: To Scale the Past and the Possible” in 2013.

So, we *do* have a range of curatorial sites and what I would like to say, here, is that we often talk about “audiences,” but I felt I would rather talk about the “publics.” The “public” should not be thought of as a large cluster, but as little niches instead. It’s better, I think, to have a long-term model of economy where you don’t have blockbusters but little niches. Maybe that’s the model that is being followed now in the Philippines.

#### Politics, Public, and the Audience

—  
Hoashi Aki

I see. Picking up the issue of the “audience” and the “public,” I had an image of the “public” as being a larger terrain that consists of these very small, niches groups, when you spoke of them.

Sadly, we are running out of time, so I would like to open the discussion up to the floor. Would any one like to ask a question?

—  
Questioner

I would like to ask a similar question for others. In her presentation yesterday, there was a discussion on how artists can continue their practices within the control of the state. Artworks displayed with the support of organizations, such as the Japan Foundation, Goethe-Institut, or other foreign organizations seems, I think, to serve the public interest or have political agendas.

But how about showing them in a public museum in one’s own country? I have the impression that each country has its own obstacles in showing politically-driven works in public institutions.

Yesterday, as opposed to this tendency, I think there were discussions on how these works with socio-political commentaries can be shown with the support from the international cultural organizations. But there are still places

where artists do not have that luxury. In those cases, artists find other means to work within the state boundaries by teaching in universities, for instance. What do you think curators can do to inform the works of these kinds of artists, who do not have the freedom or means to show socio-politically-driven works, to wider audiences? To put it short, how can curators help to show works that might have political problems with the authorities?

—  
Gridthiya Gaweeewong

I cannot show political controversial works by Thai artists in Thailand. But I can show works by Burmese or Vietnamese artists there. It has to do with censorship. There are the limits, but I think it's important for artists to make works despite those limitations and constraints. As you say, the distribution is very tricky. For example, it's unclear whether Apichatpong Weerasethakul's film recently screened in Cannes Film Festival can be shown in Thailand. But we will try to make it happen at some point. It has to be a collaborative effort, too. People around the world universally share the mentality and the dangers of censorship, so that really is the challenge.

—  
Alison Carroll

You remind me of the time of the first Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art in 1993, when the Suharto was still in the government in Indonesia and Dadang Christanto made a work called *For Those Who Have Been Killed*. He couldn't have made and shown that work, I think, in Indonesia. I remember the Indonesian Ambassador coming by and all of us were nervous about how he was going to respond, and he said, "It's fine here, but not at home." He coped with that.

The other side to it was that it was also the time when things were very difficult in Timor; the mood of the folk in Australia was very pro-Timor, anti-Indonesian. We had to brief the visiting Indonesian artists about how to do deal with

any protest. As it happened, that didn't eventuate because people saw the work and realized what was going on.

The one final comment I would make is that there was a discussion about artists making controversial work for a place like Australia, where it's not going to be an issue that is inappropriate as the way they might express themselves. There was a question about whether they were doing work for its controversial nature per se, so I think they were taking it a step further than was acceptable.

—  
Ahmad Mashadi

I agree with what Gridthiya has just said about it being very difficult to show your own works in your own country when it comes to political content. But I also think that the broader question of practice is this separation between curator and artist. In my experience, while there is a certain convention in separating those roles—curators can only pick it up after the artist have completed his work—I think part of the answer is attempting to come to terms with the idea of the possibilities in which curators and artists *co-develop* ideas—not co-develop the *work*, but co-develop the ideas—as such that one can begin to think about form versus the effective content.

If the effective content is important, then we find ways and means in which the forms are negotiated. So, I believe it requires us to break free from that framework where artist and curators are separated.

—  
Hoashi Aki

Thank you. On the note of encouragement in breaking through existing conventions, I think we would like to end the symposium. Thank you very much for joining us on over the course of these two days. I think we were able to revisit some important factors to think about the arts of Southeast Asia.



## The 1990s: Building Platforms through Creative Thinking

**Kamiya Yukie**

Chief Curator,  
Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art

Translated by Andrew Maerkle

Where was the urgency located in the art scenes of Southeast Asia in the 1990s?

The answer is that the urgency lay within the personally-scaled, grass-roots activities of the artist-led initiatives that simultaneously emerged throughout the decade, but it could also be found in the three distinct cases of the pioneering art scenes of Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia, which came to define artistic practice in the region.

In a region where art infrastructure was poor or nonexistent, there was a pressing need to create platforms for artistic activity, and the energetic practices of the organizers who tried to address that lack through creative thinking have had a major influence on people's shared sensibilities, extending to the present.

Against the backdrop of economic development in Southeast Asia in the late 1980s, and within a world map undergoing restructuring as it entered an age of rapid modernization following the end of the Cold War, there were major changes in the political and economic frameworks of the Asian region as well, and new developments could be seen in regional exchanges that had formerly been cut-off by US-oriented relations. The creatives of the time who saw and closely engaged with these developments amid such socio-political fluctuations were conscious of the need to respond to this situation on their own terms. It could be said that the 1990s were the moment when these small but independently minded first steps, propelled through art by individual volition, became dynamically linked to new social movements.

The speakers from Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia who established emerging art spaces and projects generally had experience studying overseas, something also shared by the creatives who became the central figures behind artist-led initiatives. What links them is neither the study abroad in Western "art centers" as an elite chosen to acquire progressive methods and theory in Western "art centers," nor emigration for the sake of escaping political turbulence and repression. Viewing their own countries from an objective position overseas, these people came to doubt the singleness of their culture that aspires to the American culture, and strongly recognized the need for other options (Gaweewong), or perceived through their experience from afar of their countries' political changes—such as the student movement and collapse of the Suharto regime in Indonesia in 1998—the need for establishing socially committed, continued sites for activity alongside peers with whom they could share and discuss urgent issues and a sense of crisis, as well as sentimental feelings (Darmawan).

Returning to their home countries and launching their activities in the 1990s, these people brought with them questions about how to build up the art infrastructure, and sites and conditions for expression that their countries lacked, exercising as organizers a mobilizing force behind these ideas and their realization.

### Connections Supported by the Network of Friendship

In the 1990s, curatorial practices that turned toward communities and society and invited the participation of ordinary people started gaining currency as a resisting force against limitations that would confine the sites for exhibitions to institutions such as museums. One

01

A gathering of alternative spaces at the Gwangju Biennale in 2002, "P\_A\_U\_S\_E," and "Fixing the Bridge" in 2003 in Yogyakarta provided opportunities for alternative spaces dispersed around the region to come together and deepen exchange in one place.

02

The eight organizers were led by Nakamura Masato, as well as Ozawa Tsuyoshi and Murakami Takashi, and participants numbered a total of thirty-four artists and groups, including Aida Makoto.

factor in this was the rise of international exhibitions like biennales and triennales, which may have been temporary, but nevertheless sought to establish local connections—a phenomenon that spread across the world all at once. Here, the unique practices in an Asian region with no infrastructure became a mirror for reflecting a flexible, experimental and socially attuned consciousness. This produced a situation that enabled both the United States and Europe, which were capable of sustaining museum systems, and Asia, which was not, to share concerns and issues about curation.

Along with political and economic changes, what drove the networks in this alternative art scene were the increasing proliferation of information and stimulation of movement that began at the end of the 1990s. Far from beginning as public institutions, these small-scale initiatives started in isolation for all manner of reasons—from regional gaps to differences in language or limitations of visibility due to limitations in funding—but their organizers, who shared similar ambitions and embodied a DIY spirit of making whatever they didn't have, gradually expanded their circles of solidarity and cooperation. Through their activities, a network of friendship, which may have been somewhat naïve but was also underpinned by trust, began to emerge. This also became a strategy of survival for small organizations to support each other for the sake of coexistence. <sup>01</sup>

Evoking what Darmawan has described as a “constellation of networks,” individual points were connected into lines, linking and encouraging organizers in Asia and beyond. At this time, the multicultural scene where talents who shared ideas and interests converged, such as universities and the curatorial programs that were then starting up, as well as international touring exhibitions, became a seedbed for fostering individual connections.

#### **Sustainability and Being Alternative**

But as small-scale organizations grew more and more successful, they also became a mainstream representing the region, leading to the danger that they could fall into the contradiction of growing more conservative in opposition to the goals they had when they were established. What does it take to be alternative?

For the artistic practices in Southeast Asia in the 1990s that responded to conditions without art infrastructure, the ad hoc yet unavoidable choices in whatever spaces they could find, which did not conform to precedents for what an art space should look like—as in the case of *ruangrupa* (Jakarta, 2000–), which was set up in a residence rather than in a more expensive business district, or *Café by the Ruins* (Baguio), which was established in a derelict building left over from the 1990 earthquake—produced a form and spirit that were filled with organic humor and could be called an alternative to existing conventions. These platforms were the successors to *FOOD*, the restaurant founded by Gordon Matta-Clark and other artists in the 1970s in New York's SoHo district out of the combination of the desire for expression and the necessities of living.

At the same time, art festivals intervening into the city and society as events, rather than as spaces or organizations, were also proliferating. These were especially notable in regional cities like Chiang Mai (Chiang Mai Social Installation), Baguio (Baguio Arts Festival), Bacolod and Yogyakarta. Even in Japan, which saw a museum building boom in the late 1980s, and where it looked as though infrastructure had been consolidated through new museums opening in prefectures and cities across the nation, there were cases of young artists who, not receiving opportunities to work with museums, organized their own interventions into urban space. For example, in 1993, artists organized the guerilla art event “The Ginburart” <sup>02</sup> as a free public space in the pedestrian zone of Tokyo's Ginza district, while in 1994, 85 artists, including those responding to an open call, participated in “Shinjuku Shōnen Art,” held in the nightlife area of Shinjuku's Kabuki-chō, and the NPO Command N organized the project “Akihabara TV” (1999–2002), turning the TV monitors of the Akihabara electronics district into vessels for display.

It was difficult for such spaces and festivals without any public-administration base to sustain their funding, and many of them were short-lived. Even where they could obtain funding from international sponsors, or create businesses such as shops and cafés for supplementing their income, sustainability was a major challenge. Yet, conversely, social awareness and criticality reside precisely in the kind of provisional and flexible mode of existence that does not allow organizations to ossify, and from my personal viewpoint, there is an important significance in constantly questioning one's existing conditions, or even in being short-lived, and irresolvable contradictions with sustainability are contained in that existential meaning.

As for the initiatives that sensitively filled in the gaps in artistic infrastructure, not only their continuation as organizations, but also their transmission of professional knowledge point to the importance of their educational aspects. It could be said that the academic study and archiving of documentation from these highly dynamic initiatives is also essential for the future of continuing the practice of Asian art itself. <sup>03</sup>

### **Education and the Future of the Alternative Art Scene**

It is also important to understand the above mentioned alternative art scenes from the perspective of educational platforms. Organized by the Japan Foundation, the project "Under Construction" (2000–2003) bears noting, as it created a model for collaborative exhibitions in Southeast Asia. Instead of more academically oriented curators, the project invited the organizers of small art spaces across the region and art professionals in their twenties and thirties who were deeply engaged in the regional art scene to come together for an intensive discussion on Asia, starting out with eight participants from seven countries—myself among them.

Inspired by the exchanges of ideas that began with a roundtable event, concerns that were heightened through research trips to previously unknown neighboring countries ultimately took shape, over a three-year process, in the form of a series of exhibitions. At the time, "Cities on the Move," which became a landmark exhibition of contemporary Asian art, had been internationally touring since its debut in 1997 at the Vienna Secession, and its venues in the United States and Europe, as well as the articles and dissemination of information about it through major art magazines, in addition to the recognition for its curators, exerted a powerful influence that could be picked up on all kinds of radars.

Starting with exchanges between young professionals who had spent their careers in Asia, "Under Construction" was in contrast under the radar, but it produced significant results as an opportunity for developing new curatorial practices. It is important to not only introduce current art scenes and emerging artists, but also to continuously engage in discussions on how to approach Asia as a whole, what that would entail and what needs to be said about Asia now. It is no exaggeration to say that the development of professionals who can confront Asia through art in an age of globalization and post-colonialism is the challenge for the next level of energizing the Asian region. The familial, intimate relations of the alternative art scene have an educational function of preparing the next generation of professionals to carry on its critical awareness and sense of mission.

The presentations by the symposium's speakers testify to the idea that art can be a medium for transnational dialogue, rather than an object of exploitation by the privileged nations, and confirm the importance for the future of platforms for professional development that can encourage flows of talent across Asia, as well as the building of systems that do not limit such talent flows.

03

The Asian Cultural Complex (ACC), a cultural complex opening in Gwangju, Korea in the fall of 2015, will include a center for collecting art-related archives that addresses the entire Asian region, and not just one specific country. This may provide an impetus for shifting the understanding of art movements in Asia away from isolated, provisional "points" toward a connected, historical line.

## The 1990s: Asia as Medium

### Hoashi Aki

Art Coordinator / Project Manager,  
Organizing Committee for Yokohama Triennale

The last session entitled "Artistic Engagements of Public Institutions: The Visualization and Discourse of 'Asia'" aimed to first review the roles of public institutions, including public museums and government-sponsored cultural institutions, in shaping the infrastructure and art scene of contemporary art in Asia during the 1990s. Ahmad Mashadi, Alison Carroll, and Kishi Sayaka, each presented their analytic views on key issues, events, and institutions that were significant in the '90s in Singapore, Australia, and Japan respectively. After going through the presentations, what became apparent was actually not so much how Asia became visualized or contextualized in discourses as originally anticipated, but how the concept of Asia functioned as a media with which each country interacted to find their own new paths.

One of the obvious findings was that the initiatives, led by public institutions, especially the government-sponsored cultural institutions, had informed and encouraged cultural exchange under the political climate that enabled them to inject the necessary financial and organizational resources to activate the existing artistic interests, and more significantly, invest in the potential artistic resources that may bear fruit in the future. However, needless to say, each country had different interests in the region and took back different experiences.

Singapore has always stood in the geographically center of Asia, whereas Australia and Japan have been located in the peripherals. Singapore has always been more in-synch and contemporary with its surrounding countries than Australia and Japan, both of which have had a longer duration of modernization that have enabled them to build cultural infrastructures, such as museums and cultural policy, by the 1990s with the support of strong democratic societies.

As Mashadi stated in his presentation, it is perhaps true that "Singapore's current position of privilege is remarkable." Being in the geographical center did not automatically grant Singapore any special role. It was Singapore who found it necessary to represent Asia in its high-speed nation-building scheme, especially as "it was very conscious of not falling into this idea of 'nationalism' based on ethnicity." Also, in a way conveniently, "a sense towards the region was embedded" in its national collection, which had its origins in the colonial institutions predating its emergence as a nation. The founding of ASEAN in 1967, which came only two years after the birth of the country, also provided the city-state to form into a nation-state in tandem with Asia forming its regional alliance and identity. As in the case of the inaugural exhibition of the Singapore Art Museum in 1996 in which the exhibited artists and artworks corresponded to the composition of ASEAN, ASEAN gave a reason for its members, such as Singapore, to work with the region. Furthermore, an organization like the ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information (ASEAN COCI) held workshops and aesthetic symposiums which provided forums for understanding and comparing traditions of its member countries.

Australia took its stride into the region during Paul Keatings' premiership from 1991 to '96. 1993, which marked the mid-term of the Keatings' term in the government, saw the