From Tradition to Modernity

In his published lecture, *Road to Nowhere*, the preeminent historian of modern Southeast Asian art T.K. Sabapathy recalls his early encounters with standard textbooks on Southeast Asian art and culture, finding that most have focused squarely on traditional art and architecture. He observes, of Philip Rawson’s classic *The Art of Southeast Asia* (1967), that modern art is given a mere two paragraphs of reflection at the close of the book with mention of only one modern artist, the revered Indonesian painter Affandi. Besides this exceedingly brief textual reference to modern art of the region is the inclusion of only one modern art reproduction on the very last page, referencing Affandi himself: a “Self-portrait by Affandi” from 1947, left without further context or explanation except for the caption text, which declares Affandi to be “modern Indonesia’s best-known painter.” This is the only hint of the wider array of artistic modernities in Southeast Asia, which have their genesis as far back as the late 19th century (notably, despite being revised and republished in the 1990s, Rawson’s history of art remains unchanged and thoroughly outdated in this respect). Perhaps, as Sabapathy implies, this condition (not confined to Rawson) stems from the inability to articulate the connections between the traditional and the modern but also from unease at the challenge of coming to terms with modern art emerging from Southeast Asian contexts which overlap and intersect with artistic forms of Euro-American colonial inheritance—art which demands a questioning of notions of authenticity and encourages visions of multiple modernities and worlds of art-making with shared influences and connectivities, yet also marked by Southeast Asian difference.

With the vital emergence of contemporary Southeast Asian art on the international landscape at the close of the 20th century, two long-standing impulses are finally surmounted: first, that locales such as Southeast Asia, once imagined as peripheral to the project of modernity and thus perpetually and exclusively marked by supposedly unchanging practices of tradition, are finally recognized as significant contexts of modern and contemporary art production; and, second, recognition that culturally cognate, and similar but different, processes and practices of modernization, occurring in the West and elsewhere, activate different manifestations of modern and contemporary art. By this reckoning, the notion of “tradition” can no longer be regarded simply as antithetical to modernity but must be seen, rather, as a constitutive part of what forges such modernity. In this vein, “contemporary art” must acknowledge the plural and manifold artistic practices of people the world over and recognize that the “traditional” may exist continguously and even find presence in contemporary art and life. Thus, contemporary Southeast Asian art offers the potential for pushing the parameters of contemporary art more generally (the means by which we define it, including its modes, media, styles and conditions of reception, among other formalist and affective considerations of aesthetics) so as to encompass those kinds of living “folk” or “traditional” art that are less readily translatable into pre-existing frames of “internationalist” avant-garde art practices with their Euro-American inheritances and biases. As the Philippine art historian Alice Guillermo has observed, the prevailing internationalism of the 1990s often “privileged forms and styles deriving from the West and marginalized the vital arts of the region by sustaining the academic distinction between ‘fine arts’ and ‘applied’ or ‘folk arts,’ thereby making ‘fine arts’ an elite and exclusive preserve set apart from the arts of the people.” Moreover, as Sanento Yuliman observed in theorizing modern art development in Indonesia, “avant-garde” tendencies might also be seen to coexist alongside the traditional, revealing a different set of discourses for modernist development within Southeast Asia. As Jim Supangkat also suggests,

- Indonesia’s modernist discourse did not include the rejection of tradition. … In Indonesia, modernism developed without tension alongside many other kinds of art that remained within a traditional framework.

The belated acknowledgement of Asia’s “living” artistic cultures occurs after a largely exclusive, Orientalist interest in premordern forms of Asian art such as Buddhist and Hindu stone carvings from Japan and Indonesia, traditional wooden masks and puppets from Malaya, Chinese ink woodcuts and calligraphic paintings, embroidered textiles of South and Southeast Asia, and ukiyo-e prints from the Edo and Meiji periods of Japan. Through the historical prevalence of these representations, “Asian art” has become anchored to a traditional past that continues to govern popular notions about “authentic” Asian cultures. In particular, Asia comes to signify the “primitive,” the “barbaric,” the “spiritual,” the “timeless,” and/or the “traditional.” By contrast, artistic movements of early modernity in the West regularly appropriated art styles and forms from Asian and other cultures—culminating in Western modern art styles such as Chinoiserie and Japonisme, and in art influenced by Japanese traditions of ukiyo-e, for instance. However, if the West acknowledged its ultimate sources for these as foreign, it concurrently—and problematically—claimed exclusive originality and authorship in the subsequent application of these foreign influences in generating artistic modernity: that is, in creating and advancing the new field of modern art.

As the art historian Geeta Kapur remarked of the situation in tracing modern art currents for India, “Non-Western nations, though struggling with the
On the subject of histories of modern Asian and especially Southeast Asian art, see: Modernity and Beyond: Themes in Southeast Asian Art, ed. T.K. Sabapathy, exh. cat. (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 1996); John Clark, Modern Asian Art (Sydney: Craftsman House G-B Arts International, 1993); Geeta Kapur, When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India (New Delhi: Tulika, 2000); Apinan Poshyananda, Modern Art in Thailand: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1992); Alice G. Guillermo, "The History of Modern Art in the Philippines," in Asian Modernism: Diverse Development in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand, ed. Funuchi Yasuko and Nakamoto Kazumi, exh. cat. (Tokyo: Tokyo Foundation Asia Center, 1995), 234-231; Redza Piyadasa, "Modernist and Post-Modernist Developments in Malaysian Art in the Post-Independence Period," in Modernity in Asian Art, ed. John Clark (Sydney: Wild Peony, 1993), 169–181; Piyadasa, "Modern Malaysian Art, 1945–1981: A Critical Overview," in Tradition and Change: Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific, ed. Caroline Turner (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1993), 58–71; T.K. Sabapathy and Redza Piyadasa, Modern Artists of Malaysia, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 1983); Kwok Kian Chow, Channels & Crossroads: A History of Singapore Art (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 1996); the collected writings of Sanento Yuliman in Dua Seni Rupa (Jakarta, 2001); Jim Supangkat, "The Emergence of Indonesian Modernism and its Background," in Asian Modernism: Diverse Development in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand, 204–13; Jim Supangkat, Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond, exh. cat. (Jakarta: Indonesia Fine Arts Foundation, 1997); Asri Wright, Soul, Spirit, and Mountain: Preoccupations of Contemporary Indonesian Painters (Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 1998); the collected writings of Apinan Poshyananda, Emmanuel Torres and Alice Guillermo are among a formative group of first-generation scholars who have paved the way for rigorous scholarly meditation on modern Southeast Asian art. Theirs were pioneering attempts to activate and inspire new methods and perspectives, reflecting especially these scholars’ own locales, but some also considering the region as a whole. Importantly, a key objective of this pioneering generation of local writers was to excavate the suppressed or ignored art histories of indigenous modernisms throughout the region so as to develop a locally informed art scholarship, on Southeast Asian terms. Their efforts challenged the lack of attention in (Euro-American) art history to the specific existence and conditions of modernity and modern art in Southeast Asia. As much as this challenge responded to Euro-American modernity, it was also, as Sabapathy argues in Road to Nowhere, directed at local agencies within Southeast Asia itself who retain their own stereotypical visions of modern art and its Euro-American histories and thus remain resistant to understanding the relevance and significance of establishing art-history training programs in Southeast Asia. The "Nanyang" (South China Seas or Southern Seas) artistic style, for instance, was articulated for modern Southeast Asian art-historical discourse by Piyadasa and Sabapathy in the 1970s, subsequent to the work of the art critic Koh Chong Foo. In their articulations, Piyadasa and Sabapathy recall the significant role played by the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (founded in 1938 in British Malaya) in the formation of a particular and localized development of modern art within the region and one with relevance to and for the region. With respect to our present-day thinking on contemporary art, by foregrounding these currents of modern art history within the region, we perform reconnect our encounters with contemporary Southeast Asian art over a longer localized art history, even as it is in dialogue with international art beyond the region. Thus, modernisms within Southeast Asia are revealed to be not the mere mimicking of European or American modernizing projects, but unique in their own varied manifestations. Moreover, they gain currency as a potentially influential force in shaping Euro-American modernisms.

In asserting the specific development of modern art in Thailand, Poshyananda argues that "to understand Thai art it is necessary to trace the stages and layers throughout which modernism in the Thai context developed and dispersed." Similarly, in his seminal book, Modern Asian Art, pioneering art historian John Clark points to the existence of localized histories of modern art in Asia that trace contextual trajectories of modernization and should not be viewed as a simple transfer of "Euramerican" modernities but are, rather, "parallel modernities." In his tracking of the genealogies of modern Asian art, Clark theorizes a world of "parallel modernities" based on internal or "endogenous" forces at play with external or "exogenous" demands and models. In his subsequent scholarship Clark further takes up his comparative models for studying Asian art intraregionally and on Asian terms. Clark delineates parallel modernities not merely between Euramerica and Asia but also between Asian societies themselves. This intraregional platform, which is the practice of "Asia as method," enables comparisons of parallel modernities across Asia itself. By contrast, Supangkat advances the idea of "multi modernisms" to describe Asia-based modernisms that might have initially been influenced by Euro-American models of modernity but were subsequently transformed within and by their local Asian contexts in non-synchronous developments. This sees the decentering of a hegemonic modernism through its application to multiple, localized contexts. As has been famously argued by Edward Said and taken up by others, the idea of the "progress" of Western civilization underpins the Orientalist construction of the West's positional superiority, hence its Western-centric version of the history of modernity. While Western master-narratives such as these have since been problematized and largely discredited, there are some areas in which the continuing dominance of Euro-American paradigms may be witnessed. For Clark, this is registered, for instance, in the uneven positioning which occurs in discussions of modern and contemporary Asian art that rely exclusively on Euro-America and valorize discursive terms that originate there, thereby perpetuating the myth of Euro-American modernity as the primary and therefore universal model for understanding developments of modern and contemporary art in non-Euro-American locales. As Wang Hui argues in tracing the "West's" construction of "Asia" as an imagined cartography different from Europe's, "The question of Asia's modernity must eventually deal with the relationship between Asia and European colonialism and modern capitalism."
scholarship on the Song dynasty, Wang asks:

If the political, economic and cultural features of "Asian Modernity" appeared as early as the tenth or the eleventh century—three or four centuries earlier than the appearance of comparable features in Europe—were the historical development of these two worlds parallel or associated? 22

Wang foregrounds the early networks of trade, migration, infrastructure building and artistic and cultural exchange forged between Europe and Asia in order to make a compelling argument for their intermeshed histories of modernity.

Indeed, Western-centric narratives of modernity often erroneously assume a simple transfer or reproduction of modernities in Southeast Asia in the mimetic image of the West, especially following colonial encounter. Anne McClintock has argued, with regard to the use of postcolonial theory, that the continuation of scholarship based on a dialogue between colonizer and colonized simply replicates the hegemonic position of the West on such matters. 21

Similarly, in formulating local histories of art, insisting on a supposedly postcolonial moment might only serve to reassert colonialism as a primary point of reference for developments in Southeast Asian art. By contrast, Susie Lingham sees a need to acknowledge the "seductions" of the colonial past in the present:

That South East Asia navigates its direction, en route to "identity" and "national identities," through constant reference to the historical and mythical West as its "North" is inevitable. It bears the scars, the traces of the events that precipitated the cultural evolution over centuries of colonization. Let us say that it is one symptom of a shared colonial experience to be magnetized around an enchantment of desired influence, because the colonized imagination is a seduced one. 23

While admitting the continuing entanglements of historical colonialisms, Lingham also points to precolonial influences and their part in present-day cultural transformations in Southeast Asia:

But prior to Western colonization, South East Asia was under the influence of other Asian immigrant and imperial cultures, religion and philosophical thought. Western colonial rule did not efface these earlier marks of influence. The heritage of the region is rich and varied, accruing over time and gradually, strata by strata, translated, transposed, rediscovered and assimilated into a still evolving "selfness." 23

Through the process of retracing the contingent construction of Asia and the West as mutually dependent cartographic imaginaries, we are prompted to reorient our conceptions of world history and review the established story of modernity. By recalling the world processes and cultures that have permeated each other in shaping modernity across the world, and by acknowledging that modernity is not an exclusively Euro-American project but the result of myriad cultural interactions, we participate in the project of "provincializing" Euro-America. 22 The Euro-American metaphor of modernity and modern art is thereby unsettled and must admit the reality of multiple contributions to modernity that are the historical consequence of cultural alignments and contingencies.

**Precedents of the Southeast Asian Contemporary**

The pioneering work of earlier-generation historians of modern Asian art not only carves a space for the documentation of modern art practice in Asia and draws attention to its distinctiveness, but also indicates that today's art practices to be found across Asia have art-historical precedents of their own, with continuities and relations to local pasts—for all their concurrent inheritances from and affinities with Euro-American currents of contemporary art practice. As Sabapathy argues, this suggests that modern Asian art ("the traditions of the new") does not emerge from a vacuum, but is the result of historical continuities, relational discourses which "do not respect neat, cultural, historical, artistic boundaries and territories." 23 (It is precisely these continuities of histories that Piyadasa brings into view in his artwork,
Entry Points, of 1978.)

In the context of Southeast Asian art history itself, selected art practices of the 1970s might more accurately offer specific instances of the initial ruptures or tensions with modernist art traditions (aligned to national art histories) and a turn to experimental, “postmodern,” or even “post-avant-garde” ventures into the contemporary. In his exhibition “Telah Terbit” (2006), the Singaporean-based curator Ahmad Mashadi traced the local currents of contemporary art in Southeast Asia to seminal artists of the 1980s and 1970s. Indeed, during this period significant artists dared to break new ground in their local art contexts, indicating: Redza Piyadasa and Sulaiman Esa of Malaysia (with their joint conceptual-art exhibition project of 1974, “Towards a Mystical Reality”), advancing Eastern philosophies as a basis for art practice in Asia; the Kaisahan Group of the Philippines (established in 1976), with their particular brand of social-realist styles promoting a Philippine nationalism in art; the radical artforms introduced by the Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru (New Art Movement) in Indonesia (1975–79), which expressed urgent social concerns at a time of political repression under Suharto’s Orde Baru or New Order government (1965–98); in Singapore, Cheo Chai-Hiang, with his experimental conceptual art practices (of the mid-1970s), and Tang DaWu’s innovative installation and performance art practices addressing environmental and social concerns (from the late 1970s); and, in Thailand, the activist artforms introduced by the activist art groups Dharma Art Group (1971) and Artists’ Front (1974) were influential, both emerging from the Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art in Bangkok and engaged in experimental art practices driven by political protest. In examining art practices of this earlier period, the genres of installation, conceptual and performance art, often presumed to be indices of internationalist contemporary art practice marked by Euro-American art traditions, must also be seen as emerging in dialogue with their own local contexts and social concerns, some arguing for even deeper and long-standing Southeast Asian cultural influences in cultivating such art, including Filipino sculptural traditions and the Indonesian performing-arts traditions of wayang kulit theater and puppetry. While the art of Rirkrit Tiravanija—often linked to the Thai context—has been given prominence in the early 21st century as part of a wider international engagement in “relational aesthetics,” we should not overlook prior regional currents of differently configured, “socially engaged,” “participatory art,”-inclined practices situated in Southeast Asia itself, which stem from the 1960s and 1970s, but by the 1990s coincide with wider international interest in similar kinds of contemporary artforms. Importantly also, as Patrick Flores has discussed, in this earlier context of the 1960s and 1970s, the instrumental hybrid figure of the Southeast Asian “artist-curator” also emerges, with important future consequences for the future exhibition of contemporary Southeast Asian art in the decades to follow, especially against a backdrop of rising Asian curators with increasing presence in international exhibitions. Significantly, Flores regards this regional pattern of professional turning—from artist to curator—as one current marking an emblematic shift from “the modern” to “the contemporary” in Southeast Asia.

Importantly, however, as I have previously intimated, the contemporary art of Southeast Asia is not always a “break” with modernity following a chronology of avant-garde developments, but finds overlap with and oppositionality to modernity in its concurrent constitution and existence in Southeast Asian contexts. In other words, modern art may coexist alongside contemporary art in Southeast Asia, as elsewhere. As the Malaysia-based artist Wong Hoy Cheong observed in the context of an ASEAN COCI conference in 1989:

In the West, modern necessarily precedes contemporary. And modern or modernism refers to a period, a sensibility essentially different from that of the past, the classical period. In our context, both words are not that clearly differentiated chronologically…. For us, contemporary art is a reaction to modernism while contemporary art in the West is a result of modernism.

Similarly, Indonesian art critics have also pointed to the different meaning and changeable utility of the term “contemporary art” when applied in the Indonesian context. Sumartono observes a difference in “the popular use of the term [contemporary art] to signify both modern and alternative art, which are seen as one and the same thing” against a view of contemporary art as, more specifically, “alternative art”: that is, a “counter to modern art” referencing “installations, happening and performance art pieces” in particular. Meanwhile, Asmudjo Jono Irianto encourages a view of contemporary Indonesian art through a paradigm of “postmodern art” that need not refer to a modern art narrative that came before it. For Irianto, this opens the way for engaging with contemporary Indonesian art now as an immediate presence while the narrative of modern Indonesian art continues to be probed and defined. It also provides a means of “positioning Indonesian contemporary art in the larger constellation of the international art world.”

Supangkat, on the other hand, demarcates a clearer beginning for contemporary art in Indonesia stemming from significant changes in the Indonesian art scene in the 1970s: more precisely, this is underlined by a tension between modernism (and its formalist avant-garde impulse) and artists’ renewed commitment to representing Indonesia’s “social context” or “cultural identity.” After the so-called depoliticization of art from the late 1960s following the alleged communist coup attempt and the anti-communist mass killings in

Michelle Antoinette
1965–66, a new generation of Indonesian artists increasingly sought to recuperate the social significance of art. In this sense, for Supangkat, who nods to Klaus Honnef’s scholarship, contemporary art is postmodern and post-avant-garde and (at least for Indonesia of the 1970s) emerges from a “questioning of the tradition of modern (Western) thinking and its domination, discussions of diversity, differences, plurality, localness, traditions of ‘the other’.” It is also, for Supangkat, necessarily related to the development of modern art in Indonesia, and to the acknowledgement of modernism as a plural development in the world. Notably, while Supangkat underlines the socio-political significance of “contemporary art,” he is also careful to recognize the essentializing capacity of the socio-political in distinguishing non-Western contemporary art from Western art. In the context of the seminal exhibition “Contemporary Art of the Non-Aligned Countries,” held in Jakarta in 1995, Supangkat remarked:

A perception that places too much emphasis on the socio-political content of artwork when observing the creations of Third World artists will inevitably return to the domination of the Euro-American perception. ... Whereas there was once a distinction made between “modern society” and “traditional societies” using progress as parameter, now the division is that of “developed societies” and “not-yet-developed societies” using democracy as parameter.

In other words, Supangkat draws attention to the “potential that the analyses of [cultural and socio-political] difference will be trapped in elaborating otherwise.” In his catalogue essay for the exhibition, he observed the responses of outside audiences:

After seeing the works exhibited, after analyzing them, after judging them, most curators, critics and art historians who have been involved in international art events came to the question: Is this contemporary art? ... For them the works were difficult to identify. Are they modern art works, do they show Modernist principles, are they [a] continuous development of traditional arts?

The social dimension of contemporary art is also registered by Ismail Zain in observing the application of the word “contemporary” to describe Malaysian art. In his review of the 1998 Californian exhibition “Contemporary Paintings of Malaysia,” Zain highlights how a lack of curatorial agency in foregrounding the specific relevance of the term “contemporary” to the Malaysian context can lead to misleading generalizations and misperceptions on the part of outside audiences:

The usage of the term “contemporary” in art or culture varies considerably from its lexical meanings. In art or culture, the term implicitly imposes unto itself, most crucially, a notion of currency. In essence, it is a societal state ... it is not a measure of linear time but of space, ... a zone in which imposing new values within a society are beginning to manifest themselves as conceptually and contextually relevant.

As with Piyadasa’s concern to recognize Malaysian art’s temporal and spatial dimensions, Zain discerns a new consciousness by artists of the socially situated contexts of art production and reception in Malaysia which is, in turn, reflected in art itself from the late 1980s.

Indeed, “the contemporary” in Southeast Asia is a developing field of diverse and contesting manifestations. Historically, the “modern” and the “contemporary,” as well as the “postmodern,” have often been used synonymously in Southeast Asia. Accordingly, a neat periodization can never fully capture the currents and temperament of contemporary Southeast Asian art, at least for now. Nevertheless, the chosen period and art practices central to this book aim to register a more forceful coalescence and converging pursuit of “contemporary art” endeavor by artists from across the region more broadly, even as it remains an ongoing and differentiated project, characterized by the specific coordinates of individual artists’ localities in Southeast Asia and beyond. This notion
of a gathering density in contemporary Southeast Asian art has been confirmed since the 1990s by its parallel institutionalization (museum collections and art exhibitions, art writing and scholarship) and commercialization (interest by art markets and private collectors), as well as by the concurrent development of contemporary art and its histories worldwide.

What we may more confidently discern as a characteristic of contemporary Southeast Asian art is its revaluation of established modernisms in the region and a reconsideration of the significance, purpose and means of art practice for rapidly changing Southeast Asian societies. Dominant concerns of early contemporary art practice include the questioning of "internationalism" as a hegemonic framework for art practice, particularly in its preoccupation with the fashionable styles of abstraction and formalism, a consequent turn to social and political contexts, and an insistence on reflexivity as part of the very constitution of art. What becomes clear in undertaking art-historical inquiry into the region's art is that the range of contemporary Southeast Asian art during the period concerned should also be viewed against the tremendous political, economic, social and cultural change across the Southeast Asian region itself and in the light of its shifting local art histories.

As Southeast Asia underwent the massive political changes that accompany decolonization and struggles for independence, along with the global politics of the Second World War and the rise of communism, art in Southeast Asia reflected a multitude of antinomies and intersections about the proposed course for art development in the region. By the 1960s and 1970s, as students returned from art institutions in Europe and the USA, a turn to "internationalism" and "formalism" saw the dominance of abstract and conceptual, non-figurative artforms. However, this trend provoked a backlash by the late 1980s from other artists concerned to communicate the local socio-political realities of Southeast Asia through realist representation.

The infamous rivalry between the Bandung and Yogakarta art schools in Indonesia from the mid-1960s through to the late 1970s exemplifies this. While the Bandung art school promoted abstractionism as the cutting edge of art in Indonesia, and in line with international trends, the Yogakarta art school promoted social themes in art through figurative forms that sought to reflect the realities of Indonesian society. But a re-examination of that history reveals that the situation is further complicated by abstract forms whose contexts were not the West but were inspired by local spiritual and religious traditions, seen especially in Islamic-inspired paintings of the time. Coinciding with developments in the "new art history" and a renewed engagement with the international art world, by the 1990s the social contextualization of art had become the dominant point of interpretative entry into contemporary Southeast Asian art. The decorative and geometric tendencies of abstract painters lost favor within the currents of international art practice, while forms of installation and performance art gained popularity, particularly with their addressing of local traditions and indigeneity within these internationally accessible forms. Enmeshed in the worldly circuits of international art in the 1990s, Southeast Asian art found itself being "rediscovered" by new audiences outside Southeast Asia with generally scant knowledge of the region and its existing modern and contemporary art and the developing art histories associated with them. While it gained global visibility as a valid area of contemporary art practice, it was also acutely mindful of doing so on its own terms, in tension with the hegemonic Euro-American exhibitionary gaze and its exoticizing lens.

Thus, the cultural tensions implicit in the modern art histories of Southeast Asia carry through into the latter half of the 20th century, with debates about contemporary Southeast Asian art reflecting the overlaps, intersections and antinomies of local and worldly concerns, form as opposed to content, art in contrast to craft, social-realist and abstract or conceptual concerns, and colonial and indigenous inheritances. Path-breaking artists of the 1960s and 1970s, with interests in experimental performance and in conceptual and installation art, opened new avenues for rethinking these tensions and the values and modes of art-making for postcolonial Southeast Asian societies. In so doing, they challenged hegemonic aesthetic codes and conventions, often explicitly questioning the production of art itself and its relevance for Southeast Asian societies. Accompanying this was the introduction of new themes expressed in art reflecting the changing Southeast Asian social landscape: issues of politics, gender, religion, the environment, urbanism, social inequality, violence, capitalism and commercialism were conveyed through a return to figurative and narrative forms. As already mentioned, others pursued more abstract geometric and decorative styles to reflect spiritual or religious tendencies and/or aesthetic concerns.

A more recent generation of scholars and art writers from the region, whose work concentrates more on the contemporary art that has emerged since the 1990s, includes Patrick Flores, Marian Pastor Roces, Flaudette May V. Datuin, Dwi Marianto, Sumartono, Amudjo Joni Irianto, Hendro Wiyanto, Rizki A. Zaelani, Agung Hujatnikajennong, Ahmad Mashadi, Lee Weng Choy, Susie Lingham, Ray Langenbach and Niranjan Rajah. In many ways, their writing is a mandate from the pioneering work of the earlier generation. Across both generations, the history of modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art has been accorded its own trajectory and its own methods, rather than being sited as an adjunct to the art practices and histories of China or India, or as a mere derivative of Portuguese, Dutch, English, American or other colonial influences.
As with the earlier generation, more recent writing has tended to be undertaken by locals commenting on their respective national art contexts. Other than the important work of this collection of individuals, there has been a relative lack of sustained and vigorous scholarly attention to Southeast Asian art (whether nationally or regionally), and while there is now a significant accumulation of writing, it largely remains scattered and sporadic, hence little referenced and studied as part of a continuing discourse for Southeast Asian art. Much extant writing takes the form of light exhibition reviews and reportage, with in-depth exhibition catalogue essays by “curator-art historians” also a regular outlet; more recently, we see a gradual increase in art criticism within the frame of scholarly international art journals. Lee cites “the persistent lack of support for art publications and the consistent lack of interest from the mainstream media in reporting seriously on the arts” as key reasons for this situation. Against this backdrop, a number of committed individuals dedicated to promoting the art of the region have recently harnessed the liberating potential of the Internet to activate a freely available space for public art discussion and the dissemination of art writing, and a handful of Southeast Asia-based art-focused publishers have emerged. Nevertheless, as Sabapathy and Clark have cautioned, we must not dismiss the substantial and important body of art-historical writing which has paved the way for a developing contemporary art history for the region. There is sometimes “historical amnesia” when addressing contemporary art from the region, displaced from its historical modern-art contexts so as to support new ideological or political positions of one kind or another. Writing about contemporary art has occurred almost simultaneously with the documentation of modern art histories of the region, reflecting the overlap of the modern and the contemporary in Southeast Asia. It is perhaps because of this situation of concurrent art currents that, insofar as art-historical documentation is concerned, contemporary art has often continued to be positioned within national frameworks that are the legacy of modern Southeast Asian art histories with their connection to the modern colonial institutionalization of art throughout much of the region but also the anti-colonial nationalist movements. The vexed issue we are forced to address here is how to distinguish a differentiated field of contemporary art which, on the one hand, allows us to situate contemporary art within a longer legacy of local modernisms which emerges in the context of colonial and postcolonial nation-building, and, on the other, to recognize those instances of contemporary art that are born out of an oppositionality and intended rupture with modernism and which at the same time find strong resonance in the new “global-art” context of the late 20th century. But there is also a third stream we might distinguish, which is the combined effect of these dual currents, whereby Southeast Asian modernities might actually be regarded as a concurrent, vital and contingent force in the ongoing constitution of the Southeast Asian contemporary. This bears deep implications for a larger universal project of “contemporary art” history, challenging the neat chronological narrative of changing avant-gardes with its basis in Euro-American histories of art. It demands a much more differentiated art-historical field for understanding contemporary art as a practice with relevance for the world but which at the same time retains very specific socio-historical and locative conditions of production.

A Changing Region, in a Changing World

The beginning date for this enquiry—“after 1990”—indicates the enormous socio-political shifts occurring internationally at this time, reflected in the “art world” itself with its postmodern turn to non-Western contemporary art practices and a shift from Euro-America to “Other” localities once considered peripheral to the project of contemporary art. Prior to the 1990s, there was scant art-historical, curatorial or market interest in earlier forms of contemporary art practice from Southeast Asia. Instead, only first- and second-generation modernists and “traditional” artists from Southeast Asia were given attention and, as I have previously intimated, often to suggest a mimetic influence of Euro-American modernism on the development of modern art in Southeast Asia, or, in the case of the traditionalists, to reify exotic artistic traditions. The influence of conservative governments and national galleries in Southeast Asia itself was also a determining factor in the suppression of contemporary art and the elevation of modern and traditional arts, not least because of contemporary art’s potential for symbolic and actual political radicalism.

By the early 1990s, however, externally based art curators, collectors and institutional officials began to circumvent the direction of government institutions by travelling to Southeast Asia to meet contemporary artists independently; this has much to do with the subsequent international publicity granted to artists with more progressive or politically sensitive orientations, who would otherwise have had to devote their ingenuity to evading the net cast for artists by conservative government institutions. This period marks an unprecedented degree of energetic engagement with contemporary Southeast Asian art in international exhibition contexts, particularly in Japan (exhibitions undertaken by the Fukuoka Art Museum/Fukuoka Asian Art Museum and the Japan Foundation), as well as in Australia (the Brisbane-based Queensland Art Gallery).

Alongside these developments, the privileging of Western modernism came to be vehemently contested; art historians and curators increasingly sought to revise the Western bias of modern art history so as to also reflect the intercultural exchanges.

Taylor and Borett Ly, eds., Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Art (2012)—which makes an important contribution in this regard; a collection of essays on Indonesian fine art has been edited by Bambang Bujono and Wicaksono Adi, entitled Semi Rupa Indonesia: Dalam Kritik dan Esa (Jakarta: Dewan Kustiteran Jakarta, 2012), and the first of an important four-volume collection of historical materials on developments in the visual arts in Malaysia has been published in Narratives in Malaysian Art: Volume 1: Imagining Identities, ed. Nur Hamid Khasruddin and Beverly Yong (Kuala Lumpur: RogueArt, 2012).

For instance, C-Asia: Asian Contemporary Art and Culture magazine (since 2007, online and print), DHF Journal for Contemporary Art (online since 2006), and SEARCH (Southeast Asia Resource Channel, online since 2011) established by RogueArt (established in 2011, RogueArt is also dedicated to hard-copy publishing of modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art histories). The English-language print magazine artAsia was founded in 2005 in Malaysia to encourage wider art criticism on Southeast Asian art. The journal FOCAS: Forum on Contemporary Art & Society (2000–07) offered critical essays on Southeast Asian art and culture. At the national level, javaweb.net has been a long-standing electronic database for Indonesian art, while more recently the Indonesian Visual Art Archive (established 1995; formerly Ceretl Art Foundation) offers both an online and a physical space for documentation and discussion of contemporary Indonesian art; the journal Panasaw (since 1996) is dedicated to the development of discourses around “Philippine Visual Art”; SingaporeArt.org is an online, nonprofit art research archive for Singapore art (1995). Other journals which have come and gone but remain important documents of contemporary Southeast Asian art include Velek (Singapore), Transart and Art Manila Quarterly (the Philippines), and Art Comidor and Tanpaタイ (Malaysia).


For instance, Ray Langenbach notes that officials from such government ministries and national galleries often selected artists from their own generation for international exhibitions. See Langenbach, “Performing the Singapore State 1988–1995” (doctoral dissertation, Centre for Cultural Research, University of Western Sydney, 2003), 186.

For instance, 1–3, contacts in government institutions remained a crucial springboard to further scouting of artists, particularly through the cultural embassies of individual countries (especially Australian diplomatic missions) as well as the country’s public education institutions (public universities and art schools.)
which have shaped modern art and to acknowledge its unique trajectories of development in non-Euro-American societies such as those of Asia; and the "art world" showed an increased engagement with Asian artists, a heightened exposure of contemporary Asian art on the international arts scene, and a turn in international curatorial practice to a postmodern politics of "inclusion" rather than "exclusion." So, too, the late 1990s and the 2000s saw the establishment and dramatic proliferation of Asia-based biennales and triennales as well as unprecedented growth in Asian art markets, the latter a consequence of new Asian economic prosperity, a rising Asian middle class and the new cultural capital attached to Asian art.

Certainly, strengthening economies in Asia during the mid-to-late 20th century also helped to bring renewed global attention to the region, with Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Southeast Asia all experiencing phenomenal economic growth in this period. In the 2000s, following the earlier opening of its economy to the world, China became an economic and political force to be reckoned with, as did the next most populous country in the world, India. By the beginning of the 21st century, China's art market had overtaken that of the USA, and it became impossible to ignore the significance of Asia and Asian art to the world, with some heralding the 21st century as "the Asian Century." The combined new might of China and India has no doubt again unsettled any presumed Euro-American economic but also cultural authority in the global landscape, including the sphere of art.

With regard to Southeast Asia in particular, there was very little participation by Southeast Asian artists in international exhibitions prior to the 1990s. However, earlier if often limited exposure of modern Southeast Asian art occurred in exhibitions including the São Paulo Biennial, the Venice Biennale, the Triennale-India, the Biennale of Sydney and the Havana Biennial, notably with the Indonesian painter Affandi a frequent participant. Large-scale exposure of modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art did not occur until the late 1980s with the Fukuoka Asian Art Show series in Japan, and not until the early to mid-1990s did contemporary Southeast Asian art receive significant Euro-American and Asia-Pacific exposure with the international exhibitions the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT, from 1993), "Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions" (1996–98), and "Cities on the Move" (1997–2000). While not including Southeast Asian art, the 1989 exhibition "Magiciens de la terre" is now commonly cited as a watershed in the international exhibition of contemporary art for its conscious positioning of multivalent, coexisting forms of "contemporary" art practice from different cultures of the world and for engaging with issues of globalization in art exhibitions.

Thus, it was from the early 1990s that contemporary "Southeast Asian" art first gained significant international visibility as part of a broader global interest in the contemporary art of Asia. While the art of Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Indian artists dominated most contemporary "Asian" art selections, there was a steady rise in international art exhibitions that included art by Southeast Asian artists. Indeed, a number of Southeast Asian artists are now among the most prominent Asian artists internationally (such as Heri Dono, Navin Rawanchaikul, Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba, the late Montien Boonma, and Rirkrit Tiravanija). However, international group exhibitions focusing exclusively on contemporary art by Southeast Asian artists remain fewer in number and the art of Southeast Asian artists often continues to be subsumed under the broader rubric of "Asia" in many Asia-focused exhibitions. Significant exceptions to this are found in the exhibiting and collecting practices of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum (FAAM, Fukuoka, Japan), Queensland Art Gallery (Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA, Brisbane, Australia), and Singapore Art Museum (SAM, Singapore), unrivalled for their attention to Southeast Asia. Besides the important work of these institutions, in the past two to three decades Southeast Asian art has been gathering momentum, as scholars, curators and critics, mostly from or based in the region, draw increasing attention to the region's art.

In exploring contemporary Southeast Asian art and its representation, Reworlding Art History traces a formative stage in the development of Southeast Asian art history. It responds to the vital presence of "contemporary art" in Southeast Asia, but also in the global context, where invocations of the region's past offer powerful interventions into the rootless and disorienting tendencies of global art.
Afterword

Although the idea of compiling an anthology of texts on art in Southeast Asia had long been under consideration, we were always held back by reservations about the politics inherent in entrusting someone to make editorial decisions based on some overarching principle. But social conditions change so quickly. With the rising importance of building knowledge both in Southeast Asia and beyond, and in light of the Japan Foundation's engagement in Asian art so far—especially in terms of relations between Japan and Southeast Asia—we set to work on this third issue of Art Studies motivated by a sense of responsibility to create a "document" that future generations could reference.

Meeting at every opportunity, guest editors Patrick D. Flores and Kajiya Kenji established the direction of the anthology in reflection of discourses both in Southeast Asia and in Japan. Continuing their discussions over email, they eventually selected 15 key texts for inclusion here. We acknowledge that this is hardly a definitive number, but our intent was to choose texts that would be indispensable to this moment. It is our hope that, when read in tandem with the experiences and reflections of art practitioners in the region collected in Art Studies vol. 2, these texts will allow for a more three-dimensional image of the era. We look forward to the frank opinions and comments of our readers.

Over the year spent preparing this anthology, the texts were reviewed multiple times not only by our guest editors but also by the translators, starting with Hirayoshi Yukihiro. Throughout the entire process, we received tremendous support from Hoashi Aki and Kurokawa Ran, while the work of Andrew Maerkle, who joined the team as our English editor, was also essential. I would like to express my thanks to all here.

I would like to conclude with the words of the Japanese art critic Nakahara Yusuke (1931–2011), who was speaking as a commentator at the symposium organized by the Japan Foundation Asia Center in 1997, "Asian Contemporary Art Reconsidered":

In my way of thinking, "Asian art" is not a valid concept. Of course, there are works of art made by artists living in the countries that are part of the region known as Asia. There are reasons, though, for wanting to say, or wanting to have others say, that it does exist.

It has already been 20 years since the symposium. Perhaps now "Asian art" could be replaced with "Southeast Asian art." We remain constantly aware of the prudent and level-headed caution in Nakahara's statement about the violence that hides beneath the surface of words like "conviviality," "collaboration" or "network." And for all the more reason, we believe we still have much to contribute going forward.

Furuichi Yasuko
Art Coordinator
The Japan Foundation Asia Center

Shaping the History of Art in Southeast Asia
国際交流基金アジアセンターは、東南アジア地域の美術交流の深化を目的に「The Japan Foundation Asia Center Art Studies」を刊行しています。
第1号は、アジアの60〜80年代の前衛芸術運動の諸相を明らかにするため、アジア各国の研究者を招聘して国際セミナーを実施し、「Cultural Rebellion in Asia 1960〜1989」(2013年)として出版しました。第2号は、90年代以降活発になったアジア太平洋地域の美術交流の動向をキュレーター、美術家、文化政策者の視点から検証し、「はじまりは90s: 東南アジア現代美術をつくる」(2016年)として出版しました。
そして、第3号である本書は、第2号と対を成すもので、美術活動と連動して展開された同時代の東南アジア美術をめぐる言説とその流れを追及し、アジア太平洋地域の研究者、キュレーターによる論考15編を厳選し、「東南アジア美術の歴史を形づくる」(2018年)として出版しました。
国際交流基金が東南アジアとの美術交流による本格的な展開は、1990年代アンモール文化センターの設立以来です。時を同じくしてオーストラリアの美術館や専門家が国際展、調査・研究、学術会議を通じて東南アジアと深く関わるようになりました。また1996年には東南アジア地域内シンガポール美術館が開館し、90年代を通じて徐々に整備された美術制度とアジア太平洋のネットワークは、90年代後半のIT技術の出現とともに多様な新しい手法と実践方法を獲得し、積極的に発展します。当初、地域の美術交流の萌芽はASEAN（東南アジア諸国連合）の結束を強化するための美術交流展として始まり、日本やオーストラリアなど周辺地域の継続的関与や、政治的な地域概念の「東南アジア」をも連動し、「東南アジア美術」という概念を形づくつつあり、今日では、グローバルアートの思潮に、欧米の美術史家・批評家からも研究や批評の対象として捉えられています。
国際交流基金アジアセンターは、そのような状況を踏まえ、これまで東南アジア美術について語られてきた言説を集めたアンソロジーの必要性を痛感し、本論文集を日英両言語で制作することになりました。所収の15編の論考は、30年以上にわたりたる期間に、各々の立場からこの地域の美術動向に深く関わってき方々の重要な論考を構成され、企画監修のバットリック・D・フローレス、加治屋健司両氏のインタロダクションと解説は各論考を的確に分析し、その意義や読者にわかりやすく伝えています。本論文集が、現在の美術史研究に寄与するとともに、また見の将来の担い手の方々にも届き、役立つことを願っています。
最後に、本論文集に貴重な論考の再録をご好意のご協力をいただきました執筆者と出版社の皆様、企画監修のバットリック・D・フローレス氏と加治屋健司氏、英文編集のアンドリュー・マークル氏と翻訳者の方々には、編集段階でひとかたならぬご尽力とご協力をいただきました。ここに改めて厚く御礼申し上げます。
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Chapter 2 | Introduction
東南アジアにおける近代的なものと遊契機
芸術、地域、美術史
= パトリック・D・フローレス

東南アジアとこのアンソロジーに含まれるテクストたちが
担っているのは、ある危なっかしい地点をマーキングするという恐る
べき事実である。その地点とは、西洋の規範あるいは植民地統治
によって帝国が普遍化した規範への批判が不可欠となる地点
だ。そうした規範が描いた、矛盾を生む野心の来世を生産的に
思い描けるようにするためである。書かれ也许かし、そのような来
世が熟考されるのは、近代的なものの限界のもとではならないのか
かもしれない。近代的なものが、抹消線を引かれながらも、この
表現をいう圧力、読解可能性を確保するチャンスを生き永久
させているのだから。表現する、批判するという企図そのものがま
ること再考されるようになるためには、まさにこの読解可能性に抵抗
しなければならないのだが。近代性はこうしたことを希求しないわ
けにはいかない。想像不可能な暴力と言能的な進歩の約束の、
両者の轍を踏えて、別のどこかで生きなければならないのだった
から。この近代的なものにはいかなる外部もないのかもしれない。あ
るのは内側の巻数の重なり、いわば交差する内部だけ、つまり内
的な絶対だけなのだ。近代なるものの批判は時宜を得ていると同
時に時期外れであり、緊急事態であると同時に分断されており、
急速を要求する同時に遅れており、物事の真っ只中にあると同時に
つながりを失っている。近代性とは絶望せずにいられないようなも
のである。

この批判は、西洋と折り合いをつけることができる同時に、理想化
し異国化し周縁化し地方化し国家化し国内化し地域化しグロー
パル化するオリエンタリズムの身振りを否定することである。また
同時に、この否定を聞き動くもの——理想的なもの、異国的な
もの、周縁的なもの、地方的なもの、国家的なもの、国際的な
もの、地域的なもの、グローバルなもの——は変容し、これらの同じ
衝動が政治化し過激化する前提にもなる。この否定は最終的に
は、西洋的なものに限界を露呈させることができ、西洋的なもの
自身ではないかもしれないものの生産の中に巻き込む。そして、
否定的な契機としてだけでなく、もしこの生産的な力に変容するもの
として批判を利用する。

ひとつの地域としての東南アジアという概念それ自体が、この不安
定な近代的なもの——実例である。地域としての東南アジアは、
16世紀に始まる西洋の植民地戦略によってかなりの部分が彫作
られた。他と切り離された自律的な行為やオブジェとして芸術を
捉え実践するようになったのは、植民地を通過してのことであり、
最終的にはそこから諸機関や諸様式が形成されただけであった。
この形成にあたって鍵となった場はアートスクールで、そこで写実
の技術を教えわたす教員たち生徒たちが、美術の生産者と享受
者からなるアート・ワールドが成長しつつあるに合わせて、そこ
での行為主体となるべきがそれされてきたのである。植民地主
義は、植民地が生まれ出るための諸条件を作り出したが、それと
同時にポスト植民地への道筋もつけて。ポスト植民地が議論の形となって現れるのは、近代的であろうとする願い、つまり、植民地統治から解放され、国家や国民国家を求める願いの中である。19世紀のそのような縄は、初期近代世界が形成されゆく状況を模倣。そしてそれとともに、模倣をした美術表現を学び、西洋の様式を習得し、理想化した美を築き、西洋のバリュームの翻訳を通して美学史への参入が行なわれた。植民地支配が存在しなかった場では、近代性は、伝統を再発見する、また諸国の拡張によって目を定めた、より広い世界の一部となることを想定するという形で顕在化した。国家や地域が近代的なものと見なされる一方、近代的なものの種族は、他の方々にも拡がされていなかった。つまり、さまざまな人々が関係性やコミュニティを形成する区画、道筋、交差点においてある。

このアンソロジーでは、近代的なものの問題系が、西洋的なものの、あるいは帝国的なものの複雑な媒介として、忍耐強く探求されている。そして近代的なもの、観察的であったそのプロジェクトを批判する新たな機能を与えられることがなるだろう。近代的なものはそれまでも、切断と再構築の複数のコードを帯びており、常に、一方で「存在の実霊」を「保存」を目指しながら、他方で「破壊」を回避し続ける。この論争に対し、芸術作品が複雑化する傾向にあり、その「美しさ」は媒介の元に重負になるのだが、同時に、「展開する存在論」に直面して転換する。これこそが、T.K.サラマンダーや一方で表現をおき他方に環境をおいて、それぞれの間のつながりを検討する仕方である。それは、歴史的意味を構築する相互作用であり、このように芸術を歴史の歴史のものとして意識するのとは単なるメトロロジーだけではなく、そうした意味は現代的なものの唯一の基盤と見なされるべきではない。しかしながらジョン・クラークは、近代的なものが「敵意の歴史的断絶」を及ぼすことを主張し、「内部性」が保存するような許容域が切り開かれたとする。この両者の間が広がり横断されるさまが、近代的なものの社会生活となる。私はこの同じ問題系に言及しているが、ただしその交換を応援する別の立場をとることも一つの解決策である。このように社会的なもの、および西洋的なものの間の共存を乗り越えるような道筋をそこに生むことによって、醸成されようとするものが、それらを含むものと見なされる。このように活動が高まった結果として、実践、関与、そして広範なさまざまな表現が発表を経て行ったのであれば、それは今も諸人の期待を満たしているのである。美術界はますます間隔を縮めてきており、物体とイメージづくりの領域における話として、インタラクションの新たな場合までと交渉するものであり、ビア・アートへの新たな運営を踏まえている。