

Symposium:

"Asian Contemporary Art Reconsidered"

Schedule

Day 1 October 10, 1997 (Fri.) 14:00-18:30

Session I: Issues for the Museums

Museum officials and curators will present reports reflecting their personal experiences on recent exhibitions of Asian contemporary art, how they were planned and the kind of response received, and on the practices of museums forming major collections of Asian art. Based on this information, the participants will identify and examine the practical issues and problems involved in exhibiting and collecting the contemporary art of Asia.

- 14:00 - 14:05 Opening Address:
Noro Masahiko
(Managing Director, The Japan Foundation Asia Center)
- 14:05 - 14:10 In Planning this Symposium:
Furuichi Yasuko
(Exhibition Coordinator, The Japan Foundation Asia Center)
- 14:10 - 14:20 Opening Remarks for Session I by the Chairman:
Apinan Poshyananda
(Associate Director, Centers of Academic Researches, Chulalongkorn University)
- 14:20 - 14:50 1. "East in the West: Presentations of Contemporary Asian Art in the U.S."
Vishakha N. Desai
(Vice President for Cultural Programs/Director of Galleries, Asia Society)
- 14:50 - 14:55 Questions & Answers
- 14:55 - 15:25 2. "Enriching Encounters"
Caroline Turner
(Deputy Director/Manager, Exhibition and Cultural Development, Queensland Art Gallery)
- 15:25 - 15:30 Questions & Answers
- 15:30 - 16:00 3. "Cultural Encounters through Contemporary Art"
Graeme Murray
(Director, The Fruitmarket Gallery)
- 16:00 - 16:05 Questions & Answers
- 16:05 - 16:25 Interval
- 16:25 - 16:55 4. "SAM Is Not a Foreign Name"
Kwok Kian Chow
(Director, Singapore Art Museum)
- 16:55 - 17:00 Questions & Answers
- 17:00 - 17:30 5. "Emergence of Asian Art Gallery"
Ushiroshoji Masahiro
(Chief Curator, Asian Art Gallery Project, Fukuoka Art Museum)
- 17:30 - 17:35 Questions & Answers
- 17:35 - 18:30 Plenary Session
- 18:30 - 20:00 Reception

Day 2 October 11, 1997 (Sat.) 13:00-18:30

Session II : Issues for Critics and Artists

Artists and critics will offer their observations and comments on the recent achievements of cultural institutions in exhibiting and collecting contemporary Asian art. The aim of this session is to develop a free-wheeling discussion, giving all the participants an opportunity to fully air their views, in order to identify the most effective aspects of current programs and explore ways for art institutions to become even more creative and flexible in their approach to Asian art.

- 13:00 - 13:10 Opening Remarks for Session II by the Chairman
 Mizusawa Tsutomu
 (Chief Curator, Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura)
- 13:10 - 13:30 1. "Modern Asian Art: Its Construction and Reconstruction"
 John Clark
 (Associate Professor, School of Asian Studies, University of Sydney)
- 13:30 - 13:35 Questions & Answers
- 13:35 - 13:55 2. "A Trap in Multiculturalism"
 Tatehata Akira
 (Professor, Tama Art University)
- 13:55 - 14:00 Questions & Answers
- 14:00 - 14:20 3. "In and Out of Focus"
 Hung Liu
 (Artist)
- 14:20 - 14:25 Questions & Answers
- 14:25 - 14:35 Interval
- 14:35 - 14:55 4. "Cultural Sentinels at the Crossroads"
 Apinan Poshyananda
 (Associate Director, Centers of Academic Resources, Chulalongkorn University)
- 14:55 - 15:00 Questions & Answers
- 15:00 - 15:20 5. "The Possibilities of Contemporary Art as Show Business"
 Murakami Takashi
 (Artist)
- 15:20 - 15:25 Questions & Answers
- 15:25 - 15:40 Interval

Session III: Plenary Session

The symposium will draw to a close in this session, by inviting all participants to revisit and discuss the issues raised in Session I, II. The aim of this session is to reflect on the issues and to explore the potential of Asian contemporary art from a global perspective.

15:40-18:15 Chairman: Mizusawa Tsutomu

Panelist : Nakahara Yusuke (Art Critic)

Lee Yongwoo (Professor, Korea University),

John Clark

Caroline Turner

Tatehata Akira

18:15-18:30 Concluding Session: Mizusawa Tsutomu, Apinan Poshyananda

18:30-20:00 Party

Panelists

John Clark

Born in Grimsby, U.K., 1946. Currently, Associate Professor at the School of Asian Studies, The University of Sydney, Australia. He studied in Japan at Faculty of Law, The University of Tokyo, as foreign research student, after graduating from Lancaster University, U.K. He obtained a postgraduate certificate in Fine Art from Croydon College, U.K. and a Ph.D. from University of Sheffield, U.K. His current research is on the development of modern art in China and Japan, and also the problems of modernity in India, Indonesia and Thailand. He has written extensively on art-related subjects in the Asian region, as editor and contributor to *Modernity in Asian Art* (1993), author of the forthcoming book, *Modern Asian Art* (to be published in 1998), and translator of Kuki Shuzo's *The Structure of 'Iki'* (1997), and is also widely involved in conferences and exhibitions related to the region. He is Co-Curator, with Mr. Mizusawa Tsutomu, of the "MOBO, MOGA / Modern Boy, Modern Girl: Japanese Modern Art 1910 - 1935" exhibition, which will be shown in Japan and Australia in 1998. He now lives in Sydney, Australia.

Vishakha N. Desai

Born in Ahmedabad, India, 1949; lives in New York. Director of the Galleries since 1990, and also Vice President for Cultural Programs at the Asia Society in New York since 1993. She obtained her Ph.D. in the History of Art from the University of Michigan—Ann Arbor, U.S.A., after graduating from the University of Bombay. She was with the Museum of Fine Arts Boston between 1981 to 1990 as the Assistant Curator in charge of the Indian, Southeast Asian, and Islamic collections. She organized the "Traditions/Tensions" exhibition in 1996 at the Asia Society, which exhibited contemporary works from India, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Korea. Also author of *Gods, Guardians, and Lovers: Temple Sculpture from North India, A.D. 700–1200* (1993), she lives and works in New York, U.S.A.

Kwok Kian Chow

Born in Singapore, 1955. He was involved in the opening of the Singapore Art Museum in January 1996 and became the first Director of the museum, which was established to promote national interest and also to function as an arts center for the Southeast Asian region. He obtained his M.A. from the University of British Columbia after obtaining a B.F.A. from Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. He served as Curator of the inaugural exhibition at the Singapore Art Museum, "A Century of Art in Singapore," and has worked as the Singaporean commissioner of the 23rd Biennale São Paulo in 1996. He now lives and works in Singapore.

Lee Yongwoo

Born in Seoul, Korea, 1947. He graduated from Yonsei University, obtained an M.A. in Art History from Hong-ik University, Seoul, and a Ph.D. in Art History from the University of Oxford, U.K. He is Professor in the Department of Art Education, Korea University. He is a prominent figure in contemporary Korean art, and served as the Artistic Director of the First Kwangju International Biennale, Korea (1995). He is active in curating contemporary Korean art exhibitions overseas, such as the "Information and Reality" exhibition at the Fruitmarket Gallery, Scotland (1995) and special exhibition "Tiger's Tail" at the 46th Venice Biennale (1995). Also author of *Nam-June Paik* (1992) and *Information and Reality* (1995), he now lives and works in Seoul, Korea.

Hung Liu

Born in Chuang Chun, China, 1948. She is a practicing artist now based in Oakland, California, and also Associate Professor of Art at Mills College, California. She initially studied in Beijing, China, at the Beijing Teachers College (B.F.A.) and Central Academy of Fine Art (M.F.A.), then obtained an M.F.A. from the University of California, San Diego, U.S.A. (1986). Her varied interest in genders, cultures, languages, and epochs in her works root from her experiences in China during the Cultural Revolution and her life in the U.S.A. as a Chinese-born American female artist. Her works have focused on Chinese women in historical photographs, but have recently shifted to photographs of everyday scenes. She has exhibited in Japan in "Gender: Beyond Memory" (1996) at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography and in "American Stories: Amid Displacement and Transformation" (1997) at the Setagaya Art Museum. She is now resident in California, U.S.A.

Mizusawa Tsutomu

Born in Yokohama, Japan, 1952. Currently Chief Curator at the Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura, Japan, where he has worked since 1978. He obtained an M.A. in the History of Art from Keio University, Japan, and his main area of interest is German art and modern and contemporary Japanese art. He worked as the Japanese commissioner of the 6th and the 8th Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh (1993, 1997) and curated the Philippine section of the "Asian Modernism" exhibition (1995) at the Japan Foundation Asia Center in Tokyo. He is the author of *Kono Owari no toki ni mo* [Even Now at the End of Time] (1989) and co-author of *Tenzai suru Chushin* [Scattered Centers] (1992). He has also curated many exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura, including "Crisis of Art" (1995), "Anthony Gormley" (1996), and "Wakabayashi Isamu" (1997). He is currently preparing for the "MOBO, MOGA / Modern Boy, Modern Girl: Japanese Modern Art 1910 - 1935" exhibition as Co-Curator with Dr. John Clark. He lives in Yokohama, Japan.

Murakami Takashi

Born in Tokyo, Japan, 1962. He graduated from the Department of Japanese Traditional Painting (Nihon-ga), Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, then obtained a Ph.D. from the same university in 1993. He won the ACC (Asian Cultural Council) fellowship to the P.S.1 International Studio Program in New York during 1994 and 1995. His major debut as an artist coincided with the bursting of the bubble economy in Japan. His works empathize with the values shared by the *otaku* (geek) generation and uses icons of the postwar Japanese mass culture, such as cartoon and comic characters, plastic models, etc. He has exhibited widely in Japan, including "Which is Tomorrow?" (solo show, 1994), " and "Hinikuna Fantasy [Sarcastic Fantasy]" (The Miyagi Museum of Arts, 1996). His major exhibitions outside of Japan include "TransCulture" at the 46th Venice Biennale (1995) and participation in the Second Asia-Pacific Triennial (1996). Currently live in New York, U.S.A.

Graeme Murray

Born in Alyth, Perthshire, Scotland, 1946. He studied sculpture at Edinburgh College of Art and was the Director of the Graeme Murray Gallery in Edinburgh from 1976 to 1992. Director of the Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, since 1992. The Fruitmarket Gallery is a venue at which selected contemporary artists, including those from the Asian countries, are shown in exhibitions such as "Liquid Crystal Futures: Contemporary Japanese Photography" (1995), "Information and Reality: Korean Contemporary Art" (1996), and "Reckoning with the Past Chinese Contemporary Art" (1996). Co-Curators have been invited from Japan, Korea, and China for these exhibitions. He lives and works in Edinburgh, Scotland.

Nakahara Yusuke

Born in Kobe, Japan, 1931. He is the key art critic in Japan who has curated critical exhibitions in the history of postwar Japan. He initially graduated from the Faculty of Science, Kyoto University, where he studied theoretical physics in the classroom of Nobel laureate, Dr. Yukawa, and then turned to an art critic career in the mid-1950s. He curated the "Between Man and Matter" exhibition as the commissioner for the 10th International Art Exhibition, Japan (known as Tokyo Biennale '70), which is considered an important milestone in the history of postwar exhibitions in Japan. He has also worked as the Japanese commissioner in the 37th and 38th Venice Biennales (1976, 1978). He has written extensively and is the author of many books, including *Mirukoto no Shinwa* [Myth of Seeing] (1972), *Gendai Geijutsu Nyumon* [Introduction to Contemporary Art] (1979), *Brancusi* (1986), *Gendai Chokoku* [Contemporary Sculpture] (1987), and *Mekishiko no 1930-nendai* [Mexico in the 1930s] (1994). He lives in Kamakura. He is Professor at Kyoto Seika University in Kyoto.

Apinan Poshyananda

Born in Bangkok, Thailand, 1956. He has extensively researched contemporary art in Asia and is now one of the leading art critics in the region. He obtained a Ph.D. in the History of Art at Cornell University after obtaining an M.A. from Edinburgh University, Scotland. He was invited as Chief Curator of the "Traditions/Tensions" exhibition organized by the Asia Society in New York (1996), and has also been involved in many international exhibitions such as the Asia - Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (1993, 1996), Johannesburg Biennale (1995), and Istanbul Biennale (1995). His published books include *Modern Art in Thailand* (1992) and *Western-Style Painting and Sculpture in the Thai Royal Court* (1993). He lives in Bangkok, where he is Associate Director at the Centers of Academic Resources at Chulalongkorn University.

Tatehata Akira

Born in Kyoto, Japan, 1947. Art critic and a poet. After graduating from Waseda University, he worked as Curator at the National Museum of Art, Osaka, from 1976 to 1991. He is now Professor at Tama Art University in Tokyo. He has curated many exhibitions at the National Museum of Art, including "Action and Emotion: Paintings of the 1950's" (1985) and "Drawing as Itself" (1989), and has also worked as the Japanese Commissioner for the 44th and 45th Venice Biennales (1990, 1993). He was been invited by the Japan Foundation Asia Center as Guest Curator for the Indonesian section of the "Asian Modernism" (1995) exhibition and a one-man show of the works of "Fang Lijun" (1996). He has published a book of his collected poems, *Yohaku no Rannah* [Runner in the Marginal Field] (1991). His new essays in criticism, *Toi Naki Kaito* [Answer without Question] is forthcoming. He lives in Kawasaki, Japan.

Caroline Turner

Born in Pretoria, South Africa, 1947. She joined the Queensland Art Gallery in Australia in 1979 and became Deputy Director and Manager, Exhibitions and Cultural Development in 1987. She has worked as Manager and Co-Curator of the Asia - Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (1993, 1996) since its inception. She obtained an M.A. with honors from the Australian National University and was awarded a Ph.D. from the University of Queensland. She has written extensively on modern and contemporary art in the Asian and the Pacific region, including *Tradition and Change: Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific* (1993). She is now preparing for the "Asian Modernism" (tentative title) exhibition for the year 2000, to commemorate the birth of modern and contemporary Asian art. She lives and works in Brisbane, Australia.

Ushiroshoji Masahiro

Born in Kita-Kyushu, Japan, 1954. Curator of the Fukuoka Art Museum since 1978, after obtaining a degree in the History of Art from Kyushu University. He has been responsible for the past four Asian Art Show, Fukuoka of the museum. He is currently working on the Asian Art Gallery Project (scheduled to open in 1999) and concurrently preparing for the First Fukuoka Asian Art Triennial, which will be held as the inaugural exhibition. The most recently exhibition he curated is "The Birth of Modern Art in Southeast Asia: Artists and Movements," which has been on tour since its first showing at the Fukuoka Art Museum in May 1997. He has contributed many articles to exhibition catalogs and journals in the field of modern and contemporary Asian art. He lives and works in Fukuoka, Japan.

East in the West: Presentations of Contemporary Asian Art in the U.S.

Vishakha N. Desai

Vice President for Cultural Programs and Director of Galleries, Asia Society

The Asia Society galleries, one of the leading institutions in the U.S. to promote better understanding of Asian arts, cultures, and societies, have been known to present the finest of traditional Asian arts for the last forty years. In 1990, when I was invited to join the Society as the Director of the Galleries, it was very clear that there was a dire need to begin to think about presenting the considerable accomplishments of Asian artists in this century and explore the reasons for their significant absence on the world scene. From 1990 onwards, the Society made a commitment to include exhibitions by Asian and Asian American artists as part of its programmatic goals. In the ensuing seven years, much has happened, not only at the Society but also elsewhere in the world to promote the cause of contemporary Asian arts.

This brief presentation will focus on the planning, presentation, and analysis of the exhibition, "Traditions/Tensions: Contemporary Art in Asia" as well as on the efforts to create an institutional change where by Asian arts would not be seen or understood solely in terms of a traditional past but also for their very vibrant present. The emphasis will be not simply on the narrative of the exhibition but more on the critical analysis of the context in which the initiative was initially received in New York and of the reception of the exhibition when it finally opened in New York. An evaluation of the audience and critical response to the exhibition will form an important part of the presentation. In this sense, my presentation will not focus on the curatorial issues involved in the Traditions/Tensions exhibition. Since Dr. Apinan Poshyananda, the curator of the exhibition is also a central player in this symposium, I have no doubt that he will be able to amplify my remarks with his curatorial experience.

Given the long and diverse history of modernist tradition in most parts of Asia, often due to the colonial presence of the western powers in the region, it is significant that the 20th century Asian traditions and visual practices have been largely ignored in West, especially in the U.S. As James Clifford has pointed out, one of the fundamental characteristics of the orientalist legacy is to privilege the ancient past of the non-western civilizations and perceive them as non-changing, distant, and some how pure, so that they can provide a perfect foil for the dynamic, ever changing, industrialized west. Thus, ironically, just as Asian countries began to come in closer contact with the West, often not of their own volition, their art began to lose their position as the objects of fascination. The lack of interest in the study of 20th century Asian art, and the corresponding lack of curators and other scholars, along with a thorough disdain for the developments in modern and contemporary Asian art was very much at the heart of the skepticism that I first encountered when I expressed my desire to begin to present contemporary Asian and Asian American art at the Asia Society. The Advisory committee of the Galleries, made up of distinguished Asian Art historians was initially unwilling to wade in these uncharted waters. I was told fairly pointedly that there could not be enough well trained curators or scholars in the field, and that without properly trained curators, the whole exercise would be a moot point. Thus, my first task, while charting a course for contemporary Asian arts in New York, was to assemble a group of scholars and curators from Asia and from the U.S. who could help us in developing a long range plan to present contemporary Asian art and become a part of the network. It was this group of specialists, assembled for the first time in 1992 in New York, that helped the staff

of the Asia Society in creating a framework for presenting the contemporary art works from Asia on an ongoing basis. Their advice was also invaluable in thinking through the organizational strategies in developing the first major trans-regional show of contemporary Asian art in the United States: "Traditions/Tensions: Contemporary Art in Asia."

Planning

One of the key decisions reached at the first roundtable was to have one curator for the first exhibition, and to have multiple countries. As several of the Asian participants at the first round table pointed out, there is often a tendency to have nationalist curatorial teams when presenting the non-western contemporary art, which stands in stark contrast to the general practice for western contemporary shows, which routinely have single curators. This practice often results in a weak or non-existent curatorial vision. In contrast to the practice of other contemporary Asian art exhibitions elsewhere to that date, thus made a conscious decision to have the single curatorial voice come from the region rather than asking a western curator to travel the region and organize the show. Thus, all of the crucial decisions regarding the formation of this first show--a single curator, from Asia, dealing with multiple Asian countries - were made consciously and with a strong commitment to create an alternative model to think about contemporary Asian art in a western context.

The selection of five countries - India, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Korea--was also very conscious: to purposely suggest the diversity of Asia, and to present the works from countries that were less known in the western art world but with rich and mature artistic traditions. The seemingly arbitrary selection of the countries was also to break the mold of the regionalisation of Asia into East Asia (China, Japan and Korea), South East Asia or South Asia. At the same time, there was a strong attempt to suggest that many of the issues that are tackled by artists in the region, are indeed transnational and could benefit from interesting and imaginative juxtapositions in an exhibition with a loose thematic structure. It was hoped that by organizing the show not according to the countries, but in a flexible conceptual framework, it would be possible to simultaneously suggest culturally specific nuances of the individual work while referring to their transnational relationships.

The selection of a single curator for the show, (with a team of curatorial advisors), was also designed to provide a strong visual and conceptual focus that could go beyond the constraints of the nation/state representation. In our initial discussions, Dr. Apinan Poshyananda and I agreed that we would also restrict the exploration of the ideas and images to those artists who were actively engaged in creating a dialogue with or critiquing perceived notions of traditions in their respective cultures in the context of the dynamically changing, globalizing trends that are evident in all parts of Asia. The title of the show, "Traditions/Tensions", with a slash between the two words was to suggest the dynamic fluidity of the relationship between the two words, rather than to separate them in two discreet concepts. As Dr. Poshyananda has described so aptly in the catalogue, we were very aware that by creating certain conceptual constraints, we were suggesting that this was not *the* show of contemporary Asian art, but an initial attempt to present some of the more vibrant trends in diverse parts of Asia. We were also cognizant of the fact that while there had been no major shows of Contemporary Asian art (except for two shows dealing with Japanese art) in the U.S., Japanese museums had taken a lead in presenting numerous exhibitions, and Australia, through Brisbane's Queensland Museum had begun to take an initiative in making their audiences familiar with the work of artists from Southeast and South Asia. Thus, we felt that we could afford to have a slightly different organization and a somewhat narrower focus for our exhibition.

Clearly, a heavy burden was placed on this first major exhibition, in terms of the expectations in the Asia-Pacific region itself, as well as in the U.S. While we had tried to be clear about what the exhibition could and could not do, the fact that on a number of counts, it was organized differently from other major exhibitions of contemporary Asian art, also created major challenges.

For example, I shall never forget an evening dinner in Korea where a number of my colleagues who are senior art historians at prestigious universities in Korea, questioned me for more than two hours why Korea was included in a group of countries that did not include Japan or China. The general notion that the exhibition was trying to go beyond the nation-state boundaries and to create what Saskia Sasan has called "strategic, trans-national geography" where new relationships between local and global agendas could be raised and addressed, was indeed an idea that had not been fully embraced by most of the colleagues in Asia. Their reference was still very much oriented to the old models of biennials and triennials with national representation.

Similarly, the idea of a single Asian curator making selections in all of the participating countries, was also received with a certain amount of skepticism. It is both ironic and significant that if a western curator had come to any of the countries to make a selection for a major international art exhibition, there would have been a more open welcome and positive receptivity. But the choice of Asian curator in the same role created more of a question than we had anticipated. It became clear that even in the post-colonial, post-modern world that we are all a part of, the privileging of the Western curatorial voice still continues to be a part of the international art world. The desire for the validation by Western critics and artists continues to play an important part of the psyche of the contemporary art world else where. (This issue of validation by the recognized centers of the art world in the west was also brought up at a recent meeting of the directors of various Biennials around the world). Clearly the problematics of the relationship between contemporary art practices in the non-western world and Western art, is an important issue as we develop a new methodology for understanding contemporary Asian art in the next millennium and need to be discussed at our gathering.

Politics of nationalism and even regionalism, can affect not only the structure of the show but also its finances, as it became clear to us in the process of organizing the show and finding support for it. Unlike most other big efforts that had preceded the Asia Society exhibition, we were not supported by major governmental drives that coincided with the efforts to have stronger economic ties with countries in Asia. Given the fragile nature of giving for special projects in the U.S., we could not count on major support from the U.S. government. And given the potentially politically sensitive nature of some of the art work, it was unlikely that we could get much support from the individual governments of the representative countries. It was significant that the trans-national or transregional nature of the exhibition was actually a bit ahead of its time and not very appealing to potential individual donors who wanted to emphasize the uniqueness or special contributions of the artists from their own countries. The supposition that the multinational corporations who work in transnational arenas would support this exhibition since it matched their own interests was also some what difficult to translate into reality. Most multinationals were reluctant to sponsor an art form that they thought may be controversial in the country that they wanted to do business in. In the American multinational setting, there was also an unspoken prejudice against the contemporary art work - seen alternatively as either provincial, derivative or too controversial. Indeed, in terms of sponsorship of the exhibition,

it turned out to be more complicated than we had initially envisioned. Preconceived notions of traditional Asian art as being the truly authentic art form, prevalent nationalistic pride for individual countries, and innately conservative nature of many corporations and their philanthropic arms, were part of our challenges. Indeed, if it were not for some of the internationally minded foundations, individuals, and corporate foundations that came to our support, it is doubtful that we could have undertaken such an ambitious project.

Organizational and Institutional Context:

For more than forty years, the Asia Society has been known for presenting the best of traditional Asian arts. As has been true of most major U.S. institutions with a history of interest in and scholarship of Asian arts, rejection of the Asian artistic traditions of the 20th century has been an ingrained part of the institution's history.

I have been told that in the early 60s, there was a small exhibition of modern Japanese art at the Asia society and that it received rather poor press. This further fed the prejudice that modernist traditions were at best impure - hybrid - and at worst provincial and derivative echoes of the west. Clearly, this is an issue that all of us have dealt with in various forms and much has been written by scholars on this issue.

Given our history, for the Asia Society, this was a particularly interesting challenge. Our audience base has also been geared toward traditional arts. People come to the Asia Society galleries to see 10th century temple sculptures from India or 18th century painting masters from Japan. These visitors are not likely to visit the SoHo galleries in search of contemporary art, and they definitely don't seek out contemporary art from Asia.

Having been clear from the outset that our goal was nothing short of reformulation of the image and study of Asian art in the U.S. , and the belief that by being an institution that has been known for its Asian expertise, we could play a significant role in bringing the Asian contextual understanding to the contemporary works that may superficially resemble their western counterparts. We therefore began addressing the issue of audience preparation even before the exhibition opened. One of our goals was to attract new audiences - younger audiences that are used to going to the Whitney Museum of Art or to the downtown galleries, but may not think of us as a likely venue for contemporary arts. We developed two successful strategies to deal with this issue. First, as early as in 1992, we began a series of public programs that featured well known contemporary artists in the West to talk about their close relationship to Asia or to Asian arts. Early guests included Francesco Clemente, Joel Shapiro, Mary McFadden, and Nam Jun Paik. This program, called View Points Forum, served as a bridge between traditional and contemporary art audiences. An active series of films and performing arts focusing on Asian American artists, along with a nationally traveling exhibition of Asian American contemporary art, also served to send the message that the mission of the galleries had drastically expanded. Business was definitely not as usual. Both our traditional audiences and our new visitors came to expect something different and new from the Asia Society. We continued to present traditional art exhibitions but they also had more of a basis in "new" art history that sought to revise the notions of Asian art and to problematize the idea of the Western gaze upon Asian works of art.

We also realized that it was important to have collaborative relationships with other institutions - institutions with experience in presenting contemporary art and engaging the audience. It was also clear that our current gallery space - designed for traditional objects and some what intimate in scale - would also not be adequate for the kind of shows we

planned to organize. Consequently, the presentation of the "Traditions/Tensions" exhibition became a collaborative effort among three New York institutions - The Asia Society, The Grey Art gallery of New York University and the Queens Museum of Art. Each institution has a distinctive profile in New York - The Grey Art gallery has been known for presenting cutting edge-contemporary shows as well as historical shows and has an audience that comprises of students and the downtown art community. The Queens Museum, traditionally known for its neighborhood appeal and for its programs into the Asian American community, has begun to be an active player in presenting contemporary non-western shows in the New York area. The mixing of audiences, institutional contexts and different organizational approaches was thus an integral part of the exhibition strategy. It was done deliberately and with an awareness that artworks, when made in one place and presented in another place, especially in another culture and in particular kinds of institutions can have what some scholars refer to as "disjunctive" auras. Depending on where they are seen and how they are presented in an institutional context, a different meaning can be distilled from the work. We decided to make the divergence of the institutional context quite transparent and go beyond the inherent assumption that museums are "neutral contact zonex" or the "white cubes" in which art simply floats without any contextual apparatus.

Organizational & Interpretive Strategies:

Our organizational and interpretive strategies for the show were very much in keeping with our commitment to creating a serious show that would go beyond nation-bound issues of cultural identity while addressing very particular and culturally specific issues of a given community or a given place. Since the emphasis was on the dynamic interaction of the locally specific predilections and the fast changing global patterns in a new international world order or disorder, a loosely thematic structure of the show seemed more desirable. Given the fact that the show was to be divided among three venues and needed to have some visual and conceptual cohesion, we decided to divide the works by some general themes and by the interesting relationships suggested by juxtaposition of certain works in close proximity to one another. We also agreed that each venue would have work from multiple countries, but artists would not be organized by countries.

In contrast to the current practice in the contemporary art world which generally shuns any interpretation of a work of art and expects the audience to know ahead of time or do all the work of confronting a new work, we decided that it would be important to provide some context for the work. After discussions with artists, with our curators, and with the Asia Society staff, we decided that the purpose of the interpretive labels would not be to provide a singular point of view. Some times the artists wrote the labels, at other times the information was provided by the curator, and yet other times we used quotes from other authors who had provided insight into the artists' work. Text panels, and brochures also provided additional information along with a major catalogue which included essays by the curator as well as by the members of the curatorial advisory committee with representatives from all the five countries. Realizing the need for some national information and the dearth of historical information about art movements in the 20th century in Asia, we also decided to create a selective chronology of significant art events in all five countries and place them on a comparative time scale.

A slightly different organizational order of the catalogue from the exhibition was expressly designed to have the book serve as a complementary volume and to serve a more academic audience.