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volume 03

Anthology
Shaping the History of Art
in Southeast Asia

Art 103 Studies



About
The Japan Foundation
Asia Center:
Art Studies 03

The Japan Foundation Asia Center Art Studies is published by the Japan Foundation Asia Center with the purpose of deepening artistic exchanges in Southeast Asia.

In our inaugural issue in 2015, *Cultural Rebellion in Asia 1960–1989*, we investigated different aspects of the avant-garde art movements in Asia spanning a period from the 1960s to the 1980s. For our second issue, *The 1990s: The Making of Art with Contemporaries* (2016), we reconsidered trends in artistic exchanges in the Asia-Pacific region from the 1990s onward through the perspectives of curators, artists and cultural administrators. Complementing the previous issue, this third issue, *Shaping the History of Art in Southeast Asia*, reviews the discourse on Southeast Asian art that developed in connection with new artistic practices over the same period by compiling 15 key texts by researchers and curators from the Asia-Pacific region.

The Japan Foundation began to seriously engage in artistic exchanges with Southeast Asia after the establishment of the Japan Foundation ASEAN Culture Center in 1990. Concurrently, Australian museums and specialists expanded their engagement with the region through international exhibitions, surveys/research, and symposiums. This was followed by the opening of the Singapore Art Museum in 1996. With the emergence of the IT industry later in the decade, the art infrastructure and Asia-Pacific networks that gradually emerged at this time would spread dynamically through diverse actors and practices. Initially, the seeds of artistic

exchange were planted through international exhibitions organized to strengthen ties within ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations), while now, with the sustained engagement of neighboring countries like Japan and Australia and the continued elaboration of "Southeast Asian art" in tandem with the geopolitical concept of "Southeast Asia," the art of the region has become a topic of research and analysis for art historians and critics in the United States and Europe, too, as part of a global art discourse.

In response, we at the Japan Foundation Asia Center felt an urgent need for an anthology of texts relating the development of Southeast Asian modern and contemporary art, and decided to produce this publication in both English and Japanese. Covering a period of over 30 years, the 15 texts assembled here were written by figures who have been deeply involved in regional art trends. In their commentary on the texts, guest editors Patrick D. Flores and Kajiya Kenji thoughtfully assess the texts and communicate their significance to readers. It is our hope that in addition to contributing to art historical research, this anthology will be of reference to future leaders in the field.

This anthology would not have been possible without the extraordinary efforts and cooperation of the authors and publishers who agreed to have their texts reprinted here; the direction of Patrick D. Flores and Kajiya Kenji; and the work of our English editor, Andrew Maerke, and the translators who contributed to the project. We once again express our gratitude to all involved.

The Japan Foundation Asia Center
March 2017

Art
Studies

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03

Shaping the History of Art in Southeast Asia

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The Japan Foundation Asia Center

Art
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Shaping the History of Art in Southeast Asia

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Shaping the History of Art in Southeast Asia

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Shaping the History of Art
in Southeast Asia

Chapter 1 | **Introduction**

Moments of the Modern in Southeast Asia: Art, Region, Art History

—
Patrick D. Flores

The texts in this anthology on Southeast Asia take up the daunting task of marking that vulnerable point at which a critique of the Western norm, or the norm universalized by the empire through colonialism, becomes a necessity for conceiving a productive afterlife of its conflicted aspirations. That afterlife may only be, for better or for worse, contemplated under the limit of the modern. Invoked under erasure, it is the modern that enables this pressure of representation to persist, the very same chance at legibility that must be resisted so that the project itself of representation, and critique, can be altogether rethought. This is the inevitable longing of modernity, if it must live elsewhere beyond the trail of both an unimaginable violence and a sensuous promise of progress. There may be no outside to this modern, only an imbrication within, only intersecting interiors, so to speak, only internal traversals. Its critique is at once timely and untimely, in emergency and in disruption, urgent and belated, in the thick of things and out of joint. The modern exasperates.

This critique is the negation of the West and simultaneously the negation of the Orientalist gesture to idealize, exoticize, marginalize, provincialize, nationalize, internationalize, regionalize and globalize. At the same time, the impulses of this negation—the ideal, the exotic, the marginal, the provincial, the national, the international, the regional and the global—are turned into the premises on which to politicize or radicalize these same impulses. The negation is finally able to expose the limit of the Western, implicating it in the production of what might be other than itself, and harnessing critique not only as a negative moment; it rather becomes a productive force for transformation in general.

The very idea of Southeast Asia as a region is an instance of this uneasy modern. Southeast Asia as a region was significantly shaped by Western colonial enterprises beginning in the 16th century. It was through colonialism that contact with the concept and practice of art as a distinct and autonomous act and object was enabled, and from which institutions and styles were eventually formed. A key site of this formation was the art school, in which the teacher and the student of art who taught and learned the techniques of depicting reality were reared and honed to become agents in an emerging art world of producers and receivers of art. Colonialism created the conditions for the colony to come into being, but it also paved the path of the postcolony. The postcolony prefigures the desire to be modern, to be free from colonial rule, and to aspire to a nation and a nation-state. Such an aspiration in the 19th century set the scene for an early modern world to find form and, with it,

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an aesthetic expression through an imitation and the mastery of the Western style; the critique of idealization; and a presence in art history through translations of the Western paradigm. In places where colonialism was absent, modernity was manifested in the reinvention of tradition and the anticipation of being part of a wider world configured by the expansion of empires. While the nation and the region are seen as indices of the modern, the seeds of the modern may have been sown elsewhere as well: in zones, routes and other crossroads where diverse people generate relationships and communities.

The texts in this anthology patiently probe the problematic of the modern as a complex mediation of the Western or the imperial, and refunction it as a critique of its hegemonic project. The modern, therefore, bears plural codes of disjunction and reconstruction, always holding out the guarantee of a "space of appearance," on the one hand, and deconstruction, on the other. In this contentious process, the work of art tends to complexify, its "intelligence" thickening in light of mediations but at the same time lightening in the face of an "unfolding ontology." This is how T.K. Sabapathy regards the ties between expression, on the one side, and environment and expression, on the other. It is an interaction that forges a consciousness of history, a consciousness of art in history that is a symptom of the avant-garde, which should not be taken as the exclusive foundation of the modern. John Clark insists, however, on a "severe historical disjunction" effected by the modern, opening up a latitude to be inhabited by an "innerness" and an "outside." How the gap between the two is constantly crossed becomes the social life of the modern. I speak to this same problematic, only that I invest it with an intuition that surmounts the dialectic between local and Western through alternative idioms of exchange and reciprocation.

Sakai Naoki is keen to further complicate this situation by evoking Asia in the register of a "transitional predicament," freeing identity from the vise of cultural typification. He replaces it with historicized, co-figurative identifications and a consideration of postcoloniality as constitutive of an "irredeemable" colonial feeling, without which no "original identity prior to colonial reign" could be grasped or fathomed. The challenge is for a theorization of contact and relationality that evades the seemingly overdetermining postcolonial binary.

The modern in the course of time introduced a critique of itself as an institution that merely preserved allegiance to the Western model. Modernism as a stylistic repertoire in Europe and North America became privileged exemplars of modernity and affirmed the talent for plasticity and abstraction as markers of this technology. The postwar nation-state in Southeast Asia became increasingly authoritarian as it confronted the pressures of the Cold War and the need for it to

mutate into a developed economy so that it could be inserted into a new international order. These forces formed the basis for rethinking and remaking the modern. What lies beyond it? Is it the terminus of the legacy of art? Or is there something beyond the promise of modern art? It is at this juncture that a turn in the 1970s would be effected, a turn that prefigured the afterlife of the modern in ways that have been described as postmodern or contemporary. Important elements in this particular process were the manifestos of artist-led organizations that critiqued institutions of modern art; and the artist-curators who initiated exhibitions and wrote texts about the prospects of a different imagination of artistic practice. Several experiments with form and concept took place in the period, too.

The contemporary art scene in Southeast Asia is robust, animated by diverse practices of artists, publics, institutions, critics, curators, gallerists, cultural workers and other art world agents. Since the 1990s, the state and the market have invested in staking out the ground for contemporary art to be more sensitive to the demands of a changing world at the same time that artists have on their own explored models of action and sustained engagement with their communities that are either independent of the state and market or in critical conversation with the agenda of the institutions. Emerging from this lively interaction is a context that produces and circulates art that seeks to respond to the urgencies of the time. As a consequence of this heightened activity, different matrices of practice, relationship, commitment and reciprocation have played out and continue to test expectations. Increasingly, the art world has become transdisciplinary, with efforts in the field of object and image making intersecting with installative and performative gestures, video and cinema, and aspects of supposedly premodern but persistent traditions of craft. Also, modes of interconnection through peer-to-peer horizontal affiliations as well as solidarities catalyzed by digital mechanisms have transformed both the notion and the facture of art.

In light of the vitality of contemporary art there, art from Southeast Asia has generated interest and attentiveness in countries across the region, and beyond. This awareness of art in Southeast Asia can be gleaned in the various projects involving the formation of artistic platforms and networks; the initiation of curatorial projects; the movement of artists and curators across a global artscape; the activation of spaces beyond the perceived centers of art within nation-states; the production of discourses through symposia, conferences, publications and other gatherings; and the dialogues between artists in the region and their peers who have migrated abroad. All this has stirred the atmosphere of art, further inflecting the history of modernity; the representation of the region; the co-production of the extensive worldly locality across global circuits; the cherished assumptions of

autonomy and mixture; and the efforts of the various agents of the ecology to become current and responsible in the at-once delicate and volatile world of the contemporary sensible life. In this light, the question of presence must be foregrounded. What accounts for this recognition of Southeast Asian art? Is it part of the crisis of art history and therefore a function of mere inclusion or expansion? Or must the terms of belonging to and co-implication in the contemporary world be altogether revised?

The region looms like a specter in the production of the modern. Southeast Asia as a common ground and a shared history is reckoned in terms of a regionality, buttressed by a belief in affinities. These come in the form of the geographic and the geopolitical. By the former is meant the range of identifications with land and its yield and the sea and its trade, water and forest; ancestry through the Austronesian ethnoscape; the tropical monsoon, its storms, its ever-present decay and humidity; and dispositions woven around animism. The geopolitical, on the other hand, pertains to the interstate precolonial system characterized by the mandala; interregional trade; colonialism, war, revolution; nationalism and regionalism. Ahmad Mashadi, however, cautions us that such a regionality needs to be negotiated and should not be captured as a fully formed assemblage of disparities that is finessed by a collective uniqueness. Caroline Turner further fleshes out this regionality in a comparative study of institutions and initiatives in Fukuoka, Japan, and Brisbane, Australia, that have spent time and insight in defining the coordinates of the region through the exhibitions that gather the discrepancies and the similarities underlying the countries in the region.

In faceting an aspect of regionality, Tatehata Akira rethinks "oppositonality" as the medium through which to define difference or otherness. He strives for a strategy sustained by equivalence and recovers the critique inherent in the modern, casting art in Southeast Asia as a mode of compelling criticism, primarily through what is profiled as an Indonesian avant-garde. Kuroda Raiji, for his part, explicates the problem of the reception of Asian art in Japan and the impediments of circulating it to a public. He proposes ways to situate Japanese art within a broader Asian sphere and to work towards a pedagogical model around the knowledge and practice of Asian modern art.

The worlding of forms requires a timely response, of being in time for the retrieval of a repressed ecology of making things, of people making and receiving things, of self-conscious thinkers writing about these things. Michelle Antoinette lays out the contours of this worlding, of configuring Southeast Asia as an art historical world, with its own art-historical methodologies. David Teh, by way of a seminal history of video in the region, calls out particular articulations of this world, infusing forms with "structuring structures" that make them distinct.

For instance, he calibrates notions of medium-specificity with the concept of remediation; and he repositions the central role that orality performs in video, a kind of mediumship that does not restrict video to artifice and its ceaseless innovations.

Ushiroshōji Masahiro's commitment to the study of Southeast Asian art as an art historian, a professor and a curator has been remarkable and exceptional. In his texts in this publication, he posits a nexus between the modern and the postmodern in Southeast Asia. Interestingly, he foregrounds "Gauguinism" and "realism" as the languages through which the art in Southeast Asia instantiates a swerve away from its custom of image making and towards something that resembles the Western, from an academic tradition to the modern and even against the modern. The highly mediated form, therefore, becomes something almost but not quite the customary or the Western, the source of tradition and the concretization of change. It is a trace of both its provenance and its fantasy.

Finally, these forms in the world become art in art history. Julie Ewington identifies "installation" as an exemplary form in which condenses a gamut of interests: the urgency of the local; the desire to be international; the materiality of the social; the translatability of the particular; the elasticity of the global. In this regard, the manner by which Apinan Poshyananda locates selected art works from Southeast Asia in the context of "global conceptualism" is instructive. It creates the domain within which these works play out in an art history beyond the "national" and come to reside in the realm of the so-called "global."

Shioda Junichi turns to the exhibitionary to accommodate art in time and space, in other words to curate it. Guiding him in this venture is not only the politics to represent art in Southeast Asia but also to offer interpretive schemas within which to understand it. In this way, Southeast Asia becomes a locus of delineated artistic production, embodied by artists and art from the locale and made coherent in terms of a coming together in an exhibition in Japan. It thus ceases to be merely random incidences of Western imitation or the scattered phenomena of failed modernisms.

This anthology endeavors to sharply limn the silhouette of Southeast Asia by dwelling on texts that take risks in claiming a region, regardless of how fraught that claim may prove to be in the long haul. The risk is largely supported by the perspectives of art history, curatorial practice and cultural theory, and has to be historicized in terms of its exigencies, inadequacies and excesses. An attentive look at the authors represented in this volume reveals that they come from varied intellectual persuasions. Clark is mainly a systematist, parsing the language of the modern with rigor and drawing up templates in which to lodge the specificities of practice that materialize concepts and logics. Sabapathy's knowledge in archaeology

prompts him to subject the work of art to close readings, distilling it as an iconographic substance in synchronic relationship with its multiple sympathies. Their Japanese colleagues are, on the other hand, basically curators or art historians who have extensively engaged in curatorial practice. Except for Sakai, the Japanese contributors, along with the Australians Ewington and Turner, are in one way or another curators of museums, large exhibitions and biennales. Apinan may be arrayed alongside them, although like Ushiroshōji he is a trained and accomplished art historian—one of the few in Thailand. The younger writers Teh and Antoinette are professional art historians, reared in academic programs on art history and visual culture.

What surfaces in this set of texts are the procedure of comparison and the potentials of comparativity. Comparing articulations from different contexts is a tricky undertaking, requiring a firm grip on the articulations and the contexts as well as a lively mind in setting up the hectic relationships. This may start with a survey of works, a presentation of a horizon that would later be deepened and textured by practices, which may be by turns orthodox and idiosyncratic. Part of this comparativity is the constellative nature of curation, which has increasingly represented Southeast Asia in the global contemporary through curatorial

interventions. It is, therefore, the art historian and the curator who have been responsible in sketching out the forms of knowing the region in the terrain of a postcolonial art history in crisis and the curation of contemporary art in flux. Finally, it is worth noting that in this comparative project, a level of generalization is useful and indispensable in the theorization of inveterate rubrics like the modern, the region and art history. That said, the sediment of these rubrics is likewise dissipated by adverbs: they are loosened art historically, curatorially and aesthetically.

How this regionality interrogates its relations with formations like the national and the global; with tropes such as the local, the Western and the contemporary; and with shifts away from and across lifelong obsessions through the various guises of the transregional, the hemispheric or the archipelagic heralds the work in the years to come. The mediation of Japan is critical in this respect, because it further performs Southeast Asia through a history of Oriental colonialism and the difficult passage of belonging to an Asia it had once occupied. Surely, beyond this orbit of texts and their proposed readings lie future elaborations to be carried out by a successor generation of scholars and intellectuals in more pointillist, granular detail, and, we hope, in more intimate interlocution with artists and the other workers in the vast field of contingent, present life.

Learning from Modern and Contemporary Art in Southeast Asia

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Kajiya Kenji

Shaping the History of Art in Southeast Asia brings together essays on Southeast Asian modern and contemporary art written primarily from the 1990s onwards.⁰¹ As co-editor, I will use this introductory essay to address the significance of thinking about Southeast Asian modern and contemporary art in Japan, while also offering context on the background and scope of the compilation process, and introducing the main features of the publication and collected texts.

Interest in Southeast Asian modern and contemporary art has been growing across the world in recent years. In 1996, the Singapore Art Museum was opened with a focus on modern art from Singapore and Southeast Asia, while in 2015 the National Gallery Singapore was founded to collect Singaporean and Southeast Asian modern and contemporary art from the 19th century onward, establishing in Singapore the world's largest collection of Southeast Asian modern and contemporary art. And interest has been apparent not only in the collection and display of works, but also in the production of discourse. In 2011, the journal *Third Text*, which approaches art and visual culture from a global perspective, dedicated a special issue to the theme of "Contemporaneity and Art in Southeast Asia,"⁰² while in 2012 the Cornell University Southeast Asia Program published *Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Art: An Anthology*.⁰³ It appears an anthology on Southeast Asian contemporary art is currently being prepared in Singapore, too. And this publication is itself a manifestation of the interest in discourse.

In Japan, attention turned to Asian contemporary art in the 1980s.⁰⁴ Interestingly, while China was always the focus of "Oriental art," the emphasis of "Asian contemporary art" ended up on Southeast Asia. In the 1990s, organizations like the Japan Foundation and the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum (along with its predecessor, the Fukuoka Art Museum) led the way in organizing exhibitions of Southeast Asian contemporary art. These included "New Art from Southeast Asia 1992" (1992), "Asian Modernism: Diverse Development in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand" (1995–96), "Art in Southeast Asia 1997: Glimpses into the Future" (1997), and "The Birth of Modern Art in Southeast Asia: Artists and Movements" (1997).⁰⁵

The focus subsequently shifted to Chinese contemporary art, but recent years have seen a revival of interest in Southeast Asian contemporary art. The reestablishment in April 2014 of the Japan Foundation Asia Center is still a recent event.⁰⁶ As indicated by its resulting from the new Asian cultural exchange policy announced at the ASEAN-Japan

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01

There are a few exceptions: T.K. Sabapathy's paper was published in 1983, while Caroline Turner and Kuroda Raiji address Asian art rather than Southeast Asian art, and Sakai Naoki, who deals with the self-awareness and perception of Asia, expands his discussion beyond art-related issues.

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02

"Contemporaneity and Art in Southeast Asia," *Third Text* 25, no. 111 (July 2011). The co-editors were Joan Kee and Patrick D. Flores.

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03

Nora A. Taylor and Boreth Ly, eds., *Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Art: An Anthology* (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2012).

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04

For more on the reception and evolving discourse of Asian contemporary art in Japan, see also: Kajiya Kenji, "Asian Contemporary Art in Japan and the Ghost of Modernity," trans. Edan Corkill, in *Count 10 Before You Say Asia: Asian Art after Postmodernism*, ed. Furuichi Yasuko (Tokyo: Japan Foundation, 2009), 208–221. On Japan's involvement with Southeast Asian art during World War II, see: Ushiroshōji Masahiro, "Nihon gunsei to Tōnan Ajia no bijutsu" [The Art of Southeast Asia Under Japanese Occupation 1942–45], in *Tetsugaku Nempō* [Annual of Philosophy], the Graduate School of Humanities, Kyushu University, No. 72 (March 2013), 49–72. Books published in Japan during the war period tended to focus on the past arts of Southeast Asia, with one exception being Kishimoto Saiseidōjin's *Nanpō kyōei ken no mingei* [Folk Craft of the Southern Co-Prosperity Sphere] (Tokyo: Zōkei geijutsu sha, 1943), which introduced the writer's own collection of Southeast Asian folk crafts. (I am grateful to Kataoka Mami for telling me about Kishimoto's book). Publications such as *Nanpō bunka tenrankai mokuroku* [The Catalogue of the Southern Culture Exhibition] (Tokyo: Imperial Household Museum, 1942) and *Kyōei ken no bunka: Nanpō no bijutsu* [The Culture of the Co-Prosperity Sphere: Art in the South] (Tokyo: Futami shobō, 1942), which was written by the French literature scholar Narita Jūrō in the manner of Élie Faure's *Histoire de l'art*, dealt exclusively with the arts of the past. In the latter publication, Narita states that, "Setting aside the task of art history, the common cultural issue of the Co-Prosperity Sphere is how to produce a new culture in tandem with the establishment of a new Greater East Asian order. This will be an undertaking for the next millennium" (258), suggesting the author's ignorance of and indifference to the contemporaneous practices of people in Southeast Asia. After the war, the Japan branch of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, the Japan Cultural Forum, held a "Young Asian Artists Exhibition" including Southeast Asian artists in 1957 at the Tōyoko department store, but such initiatives were rare, and it must also be acknowledged that they had an ideological context.

05

Organized in 1992 by the Japan Foundation and collaborating institutions, "New Art from Southeast Asia" was held at venues including the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Space, the Fukuoka Art Museum, the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art and Kirin Plaza Osaka. Organized by the Japan Foundation Asia Center, "Asian Modernism" was held in 1995 at the Japan Foundation Forum before touring in 1996 to the Metropolitan Museum of Manila, the National Gallery, Bangkok, and the Art Gallery of the Indonesian Department of Education and Culture in Jakarta. "Art in Southeast Asia 1997" was organized in 1997 by the Japan Foundation Asia Center and collaborating institutions, and held at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo and the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art. "The Birth of Modern Art in Southeast Asia" was organized in 1997 by the Yomiuri Shimbun, and toured from the Fukuoka Art Museum to the Hiroshima Prefectural Art Museum, the Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art and the Tokyo Metropolitan Teien Art Museum. Catalogues were published for all the exhibitions.

06

In 1990 the Japan Foundation launched the ASEAN Culture Center to introduce the cultures of ASEAN member states and deepen mutual understanding in Asia. In 1995 the institution was reorganized as the Asia Center, and its remit expanded to include places like China and India as well. The Center worked to promote regional exchange and collaborative projects in Asia, but in 2004 it was reintegrated into the Japan Foundation, which took on the aim of promoting trans-regional cultural exchange.

07

Also of note is the exhibition "Dinh Q. Lê: Memory for Tomorrow," held in 2015–16 at the Mori Art Museum and the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art.

08

One of the venues of the "Welcome to the Jungle" exhibition, the Yokohama Museum of Art, has been pursuing collaborations with other regional art museums as part of the Yokohama city government's policy of deepening ties with Asia, while the Contemporary Art Museum Kumamoto hosted the same exhibition in conjunction with the 11th Asian-Pacific City Summit. Ōsaka Eriko and Sakurai Takeshi, "Foreword," in *Welcome to the Jungle: Contemporary Art in Southeast Asia from the Collection of Singapore Art Museum* (Yokohama: Mo chuisle, 2013), 6.

09

The command was moved to Colombo the following year.

Commemorative Summit Meeting of 2013, this institution seeks to promote Japanese cultural exchange with Asia, with a focus on ASEAN member states. Among more recent exhibitions of Southeast Asian art is "Welcome to the Jungle: Contemporary Art in Southeast Asia from the Collection of Singapore Art Museum," organized in 2013 in collaboration with the Singapore Art Museum, and held at the Yokohama Museum of Art and the Contemporary Art Museum Kumamoto, respectively. And Tokyo's National Art Center, Mori Art Museum and Japan Foundation Asia Center are collaborating on an exhibition of Southeast Asian contemporary art that is scheduled for the summer of 2017.⁰⁷

Of course, these signs of change in Japan and abroad are informed by political circumstances related to the agendas of national and regional governments.⁰⁸ Rather than a resurgence of interest in Southeast Asian art as such, it might be more accurate to say that the groundwork is being laid to foster that interest. But it is also undeniable that the appreciation for and understanding of Southeast Asian contemporary art is advanced by holding exhibitions where large amounts of people can encounter the works. At the least, with opportunities to see works by Southeast Asian artists at museums and in triennale exhibitions no longer so rare in Japan, this trend will only continue to gain momentum. And since it is being published in Japan, this collection of essays can also take advantage of that momentum.

Our aim in compiling this publication has been to present important discussions that may be of use in thinking about Southeast Asian contemporary art. Before proceeding to the details of the publication, I would first like to address the concept of Southeast Asia itself. The region known as Southeast Asia currently encompasses 11 countries: Brunei, Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar (Burma), the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. The prevailing theory is that Southeast Asia is a relatively new concept. When Southeast Asia was partitioned by the Euro-American Great Powers, few people saw the need for a comprehensive understanding of the region. It is said that the term "Southeast Asia" only came into use during World War II, when the Allied Forces Southeast Asia Command was established in 1943 in Kandy, Ceylon (current Sri Lanka).⁰⁹ However, Southeast Asia specialists have two reservations about this explanation. First, Donald K. Emmerson of Stanford University argues that "Southeast Asia" was already in use in the mid-19th century. He states that, entering the 20th century, ethnologists in two countries without possessions in the region, Germany and Austria, began to research Southeast Asia as a cultural entity.¹⁰ Although the establishment of the Allied Command in Ceylon certainly played a large role in popularizing the term "Southeast Asia," the fact that this academic interest provided an alternate perspective to the political situation deserves better recognition.

Second, according to Shimizu Hajime, a specialist in the history of Japan and Southeast Asia relations, the term *Tōnan Ajīya* (essentially, Southeast Asia, although the transliteration differs from the current *Tōnan Ajia*) was used in elementary and middle school geography textbooks following World War I,¹¹ even though the area was more commonly referred to as the geographically undefined Nanyō (South Seas),¹² and "Southeast Asia" only came into widespread use after World War II. Shimizu writes that the occupation of the German-held Pacific islands north of the equator during World War I provided a new stimulus to the Southern Expansion Doctrine (*nanshin ron*) advocated since the Meiji era, and encouraged views of Southeast Asia as the objective of further expansion. Geographically, the regions of "Indochina" and the "Malay Archipelago" (or the "East Indies"), each belonging to Asia and the Pacific, respectively, were perceived as *Tōnan Ajīya*. Even if the appellation of *Tōnan Ajīya* in wartime Japan may seem neutral due to its use in geography textbooks, Shimizu makes clear that it actually had political implications. It is important to note that, beyond its international usage, the term Southeast Asia has this additional historical background in Japanese.

In examining these basic assumptions, I hope to establish that the concept of Southeast Asia is not neutral, and contains numerous issues within it. In compiling a publication with the term Southeast Asia in its title, we have striven to select essays that take a conscious and critical stance toward the issues inherent in the category of Southeast Asia, as opposed to viewing it as a self-evident and cohesive region.

Furthermore, this publication has two factors that distinguish it from the above-mentioned anthologies on contemporary Southeast Asian art. First, instead of newly commissioned and written texts, the 15 essays collected here were all originally published in Japanese and foreign exhibition catalogues, journals and monographs between the years 1983 and 2015.¹³ They span a wide range of articles, from the latest research to historically important papers that are now hard to obtain. Of course, 15 is hardly an exhaustive number, and there were some important texts that could not be included. Even so, the essays collected here should provide the reader a basic overview of research into Southeast Asian contemporary art.

Second, all the essays in this volume are being presented in both English and Japanese. Regardless of whether they were originally written in English or Japanese, all have been translated into the other language (although as some of the writers wrote in both English and Japanese, this distinction is more of an expedient). With all the essays available in English, this volume should help international researchers to deepen their knowledge of Southeast Asian art. Although there are a number of articles on Southeast Asian art in Japan, some were published in books that are unobtainable to foreign researchers, while

others can be read only in Japanese. Albeit only a fraction of the total, some of those essays are included here. Conversely, Japanese readers can now read essays on Southeast Asian modern and contemporary art that were written in English. To date, although some of the English literature on Southeast Asian modern and contemporary art has been published in translation in Japanese exhibition catalogues, there have been far too few translations of academic papers or essays from foreign exhibition catalogues. Now Japanese readers can get a glimpse into how Southeast Asian modern and contemporary art is discussed in places like Australia and Singapore or the Philippines and Thailand. Most of the writers of the English essays collected here are specialists in Southeast Asian and Asian art who were educated at English-language institutions. In contrast, the Japanese writers were educated in Japan and include non-specialist critics and curators. Yet irrespective of the differences in thinking and writing styles, reading the papers in chronological order reveals strong correspondences in their arguments.

The lone essay from the 1980s included here was written in 1983 by the pioneering Singaporean specialist in Southeast Asian modern and contemporary art, T.K. Sabapathy. In his essay, Sabapathy advocates the need for an alternative approach to the avant-garde model of Western modern art history when studying modern art in Southeast Asia, and stresses the necessity of thinking about both the “relationship between existence and expression” and the “relationship between environment and expression.” That is, he says it is important to consider both entities like the work and the artist as well as contexts like society and social thought. At a time when Western modernism was no longer such an influence on how works were made, but still had a strong influence over how they were discussed, Sabapathy was investigating an alternate methodology to modernism.

In his essay from 1993, one of the foremost writers on Asian modern art, Sydney University’s John Clark, identifies the existence of traditional European representational painting as a commonality linking Southeast Asia, even as he articulates the difficulty in addressing Southeast Asian modern art as a single entity due to the “severe historical disjunction” of the region. Clark states that after the end of colonial rule, Southeast Asian artists obtained “the sovereignty of consumer choice” to use Europe and the United States as “an immense cultural warehouse.” Taking back the forms of European representational painting for themselves, they began to produce diverse creative voices rooted in their own localities. This perspective on Southeast Asian representational painting as a form of appropriation opens up the potential for an alternative approach to Western modern art history.

In his essay for the catalogue of 1994’s Asian

Art Show, Fukuoka, Ushiroshōji Masahiro, who was then a curator at the Fukuoka Art Museum and is now a professor at Kyushu University, observes that since the late 1980s there has been an increase in works based on social awareness and an attention toward ordinary events—a stance he calls “realism as an attitude.” Applied to contemporary styles that emerged since the end of modernism, this term can be considered an early instance of approaching trends in contemporary Asian art from a conceptual perspective.

In her essay from 1995, the Sydney-based contemporary art historian Julie Ewington notes the prevalence of artists making installations in Southeast Asia, which she considers “a fine example of the successful indigenization of imported cultural practice.” Arguing on the other hand that art using indigenous materials “may support political opposition to the established regime, or may be invoked in the name of the state,” she also comments on the ambivalent role of such art. Statements regarding the prevalence of installation art in Asia could also be seen in Japan in the 1990s,¹⁴ but Ewington’s critical view of “indigeneity” distinguishes her from the rest.

While fundamentally approving of multiculturalism, Tama Art University’s Tatehata Akira uses his catalogue essay for 1995’s “Asian Modernism” to address the problems that can arise from cultural relativism. Tatehata’s concern is that, in its vigilance against cultural exploitation, the relativistic stance of multiculturalism could actually lead to reductive claims that the only acceptable approach to understanding the culture of the other is by assessing it in its original context. Tatehata says that in order to avoid this, Asia should not be upheld as a counter value to the West. A warning about the “Asian contemporary art boom” then happening in Japan against the backdrop of multiculturalism, Tatehata’s essay also echoes Ewington’s caution regarding “indigeneity.”

In 1999, Apinan Poshyananda, who was teaching at Bangkok’s Chulalongkorn University at the time and went on to become permanent secretary of the Thai Ministry of Culture, wrote in the catalogue for “Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s” that the conceptual art that emerged in Southeast Asia in the 1970s was not driven solely by “inspiration from abroad or the need to catch up to the West.” He explains that the New Art Movement in Indonesia was galvanized by “social and political pressures within the local art scene,” and that artists used conceptual art projects as “vehicles for critique and reflection on their rapidly changing societies.” Apinan comments that despite its origins in Western conceptual art, Southeast Asian conceptual art follows a different trajectory, even “dismiss[ing] Western versions of conceptualism.” At the same time that it historically traces an alternate lineage of contemporary art in Southeast Asia, this essay skillfully describes a postcolonial

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Donald K. Emmerson, “‘Southeast Asia’: What’s in a Name?,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 15, no. 1 (March 1984), 1–21. However, as I will mention later, Germany possessed the Carolines, the Marianas, the Marshall Islands and Palau. See also Ishii Yoneo, “Tōnan Ajia no shi-teki ninshiki no ayumi” [The Development of Historical Awareness in Southeast Asia], in *Kōza Tōnan Ajia gaku dai 4 kan: Tōnan Ajia no rekishi* [Course on Southeast Asia Studies, vol. 4: The History of Southeast Asia] (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1991), 1–14; and Ikehata Setsuho, “Tōnan Ajia shi e no apurōchi” [Approaches to Southeast Asian History], in *Kawaru Tōnan Ajia shi zō* [The History of Southeast Asia in Transformation] (Tokyo: Yamakawa shuppansha, 1994), 3–22.

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Shimizu Hajime, “Kindai Nihon ni okeru ‘Tōnan Ajia’ chiki gainen no seiritsu: Shōchū gakkō chiri kyōkasho ni miru” [The Emergence of the Regional Concept of ‘Southeast Asia’ in Modern Japan: A Study Based on the Geography Textbooks of Japanese Elementary and Middle Schools during the Prewar Period], in *Ajia Keizai* [Asian Economy], vol. 28, no. 6 (June 1987), 2–15, and vol. 28, no. 7 (July 1987), 22–38.

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It was also referred to as “nanpō” (the South) and “nanpō ken” (the Southern Sphere). Yano Tōru, “Nanshin’ no keifu: Nihon no nanyō shikan” [The Genealogy of ‘Southern Expansion’: Historical Views of Nanyō in Japan] (Tokyo: Chikura shobō, 2009), 9.

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The exception is Kuroda Raiji’s paper, which is adapted from the English draft of a speech given at the international symposium “Locus Redux: Speaking Across Contexts, Learnings and Negotiations in Writing and Teaching on Art,” held in May 2012 at the Yuchengco Museum in Manila.

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Sugawara Norio, “Ajia gendai bijutsu: Kaiga chōkoku no waku koe, seiyō ni nai dokujisei” [Asian Contemporary Art: Uniqueness That Transcends the Realm of Painting and Sculpture and Cannot Be Found in the West], *Yomiuri Shimbun*, October 18, 1994, Tokyo evening edition; Yamamori Eiji, “Insutarēshon: Jiyūna hyōgen, nihon ga tokui” [Installations: Free Expressions That Japan Presents with Pride], *Asahi Shimbun*, November 6, 1999, evening edition.

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Ushiroshōji Masahiro, "The Labyrinthine Search for Self-Identity: The Art of Southeast Asia from the 1980s to the 1990s," in *New Art from Southeast Asia 1992* (Tokyo: Japan Foundation, 1992), 21–24.

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Patrick D. Flores, "Turns in Tropics: Artist-Curator," in *The 7th Gwangju Biennale: Annual Report: A Year in Exhibitions*, ed. Okwui Enwezor (Gwangju: Gwangju Biennale Foundation, 2008), 262–285.

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For the special feature, Ushiroshōji wrote about not only modern art in Southeast Asia but also that of the Indian subcontinent and China/Mongolia (the latter co-authored with Rawanchaikul Toshiko). In addition to the above cited "Art of Southeast Asia Under Japanese Occupation," the following paper is also of interest: Ushiroshōji Masahiro, "Tōnan ajia ni okeru 'bijutsu' no tanjō to nihon no sensō" [The Birth of 'Art' in Southeast Asia and Japan's War], in *Nihon bijutsu zenshū dai 18 kan: Sensō to bijutsu* [The Complete Works of Japanese Art, vol. 18: War and Art] (Tokyo: Shōgakusan, 2015), 215–217.

situation in which contemporary art becomes "ambivalent" through the process of "mimicry," to use Homi Bhabha's word.

In his capacity as the chief curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, Shioda Junichi (now director of the Niigata City Art Museum) worked on the exhibition "Art in Southeast Asia 1997: Glimpses into the Future," which presented contemporary art from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. In his catalogue essay, Shioda divides the participating artists into three categories: artists who reference local ethnic culture in the wake of modernism; those who investigate their own identities in fluid social environments; and those who actively engage with social and political issues. The second of these categories perhaps references the "search for self-identity," a tendency Ushiroshōji found in Southeast Asian contemporary art in a 1992 paper.¹⁵ Like Apinan, Shioda identifies an alternative modernism that seeks its basis in community, rather than the individualism extolled by Western modernism. Drawing upon the claims of multiculturalism, Shioda's text is an attempt at a further reading of multiple trends in Southeast Asian art.

Entering the 2000s, research into contemporary Southeast Asian art began to expand both in terms of subject matter and approach. Although it concerns Asia rather than Southeast Asia as such, the paper by Cornell University's Sakai Naoki is of great relevance for thinking about Southeast Asian art. It is adapted from the keynote speech Sakai presented at the Japan Foundation Symposium in 2002. Sakai argues that the concept of "Asia" was created by Europeans as a means for distinguishing themselves from the others to the east. Asserting that the self-awareness of "Asia" results from European colonization, he questions whether it is possible to engage in self-referential interrogations like "we Asians" without getting caught up in such binary oppositions and postcolonial genealogies. While historically examining the same problematics of "counter values" raised by Tatehata through a yet broader epistemological framework, Sakai confronts the difficult challenge of considering the potential of terms that could contain such values, such as "we Asians."

In his paper from 2004 Ahmad Mashadi, who was then senior curator at the Singapore Art Museum, and is now head of the National University of Singapore Museum, underscores the negotiations entailed in considering Southeast Asia as a region. Closely identified with nation building projects at the time, abstract art was the rage at the Southeast Asian art exhibition held in Manila in 1957, but at the ASEAN art symposium held in the same city in 1993, appeals for regional unity were made through the use of traditional aesthetics. Describing how such assertions are shaped within political and economic relations, Mashadi reveals the subtleties that are necessary for discussing the region of Southeast Asia. Even when assumptions

about regional identity based on some concept or other have problems, it is important to gain a historical understanding of how such theories are articulated. Historically evaluating discourses about the region in terms of their political and economic relations, Mashadi's text presents an effective approach for thinking about Southeast Asia.

In her text from 2006, the Australian National University's Caroline Turner compares the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum's Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale (along with its predecessor, the Asian Art Show, Fukuoka) and the Queensland Art Gallery's Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art. She identifies multiple parallels between the two, including their retention of memories of war, their positioning on the margins of Asia, their being held at art museums, and their connections to economics and politics. This kind of analysis of international exhibitions, including more recent events like the Singapore Biennale, is increasingly important for thinking about Southeast Asian contemporary art.

The co-editor of this volume, Patrick D. Flores of the University of the Philippines, has published numerous important articles—not least of which is his analysis of the phenomenon of the "artist-curator" that emerged in the late 1970s and the 1980s.¹⁶ In the text chosen for inclusion here, he reflects upon how art in Asia was shaped by political factors after independence and amid national fervor, using painting in India, Indonesia and the Philippines as examples. Flores pays particular attention to intimacy, improvisation and suffering, describing how they can disrupt both individual and collective identity. Finally, turning to the contemporary painting of Japan and China, he argues that postcoloniality subverts the nation-state and nationalism by turning them into hybrids. Understanding art as something which produces new political situations more so than it responds to existing political situations, Flores's argument opens up new perspectives on the research of Southeast Asian art.

In 2010, Ushiroshōji edited a special feature on "Modernism in Asian Art" for the Japanese academic art journal *Bijutsu Forum 21*, as part of which he wrote an article on the reception of Gauguin in Southeast Asian art—his second article in our compilation. Expanding the scope of his research from contemporary to modern art, Ushiroshōji has published several fascinating papers in this vein, although they could not all be included here.¹⁷

In his essay from 2012, National University of Singapore's David Teh addresses video art in Southeast Asia and Singapore. According to him, there are three characteristics of Southeast Asian video art. First, given the number of works incorporating multiple media, it is defined by "remediation" in contrast to the "medium specificity" of Western modern art. Second, it also has a role as an oral medium, and as such connects to oral traditions. Finally, it is often used as a response to authority, giving it a political and

social function. Teh says that these characteristics do not apply to video art in Singapore. Already “always transnational,” Singaporean video art is often made with high-tech materials, and shows a concern for the geopolitics of the island. Such analyses of individual fields of practice will only be of increasing necessity going forward.

In the paper he presented in Manila in 2012, the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum’s Kuroda Raiji attempted to rethink modernity as a target of rote criticism. According to Kuroda, while everyone knows about the elite “modernity as style,” we should also be aware of the democratic “modernity as resistance.” He is critical of the current state of research, saying that works representing the former category have commanded all the attention because they are preserved in forms that can easily circulate and are easy to discuss in terms of Euro-American discourses. Stating that the modernism of Asian art should be understood as the synthesis of diverse ideas and practices, Kuroda warns against setting up modernity as a strawman.

Like Kuroda, Australian National University’s Michelle Antoinette also seeks to reevaluate modernity. Her essay here is excerpted from the first chapter of *Reworlding Art History: Encounters with Contemporary Southeast Asian Art after 1990*, published in 2015. Citing a range of discourses on Southeast Asian modern and contemporary art, Antoinette advocates the need to study the development of Asia’s diverse modernities, which differ from Eurocentric modernity, and in so doing relativize the positions of Europe and the United States. She comments that the contemporary in Southeast Asia is just one response to modernism rather than a result of modernism, and that modern and contemporary art exist together simultaneously.

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This gives some sense of the background and scope of the compilation process as well as the characteristics of the publication and its collected papers. In response to the rising interest in Southeast Asian modern and contemporary art both in Japan and abroad in recent years, our goal in assembling these important texts was to present discussions that may be of service in learning about Southeast Asian modern and contemporary art.

The first thing one realizes from reading the collected texts is that the discussions that emerged by the end of the 1990s all shared the following points of emphasis: 1 | the importance of art’s connection to the social context (Sabapathy, Apinan); 2 | the need to examine the category of Southeast Asia itself (Clark); 3 | the difference in histories and rationales from the West (Sabapathy, Clark, Ushiroshōji, Apinan, Shioda); and 4 | the need for cautious inquiry into the problematics of difference (indigeneity) (Ewington, Tatehata). Although there is some overlap,

the papers from the 2000s onwards expand the discussion by addressing the following points: 1 | individual genres of expression (Apinan, Teh); 2 | the display context (Turner, Mashadi); 3 | post-coloniality (Sakai, Flores); and 4 | the reevaluation of modernity (Ushiroshōji, Kuroda, Ewington).

What also becomes apparent is that in most of the studies on contemporary Southeast Asian art that were written in English, both the arguments and methodologies are Westernized, and academic perspectives predominate. This is a key difference even from the discussion of postwar Japanese art in Japan, where critics remain influential. This is not to say there is no problem with the Westernization of the discourse, but we can anticipate that the study and discussion of Southeast Asian contemporary art will be increasingly pursued and deepened within a Western academic discourse. That we could assemble some of the most relevant discussions in this vein is one of the achievements of this volume.

On the other hand, the discussions written in Japanese are also evolving. Although we did not include them here, there are more and more examples of critics writing frankly about Southeast Asian contemporary art in Japanese. With an increase in the number of researchers and curators now entering the field, the disparity with the English literature is shrinking. Behind this is certainly the shift in emphasis of exhibitions and events from cultural exchange to research-based projects. It goes without saying that, far from suggesting cultural exchange is on the decline, these changes are leading to deeper levels of exchange created by increased opportunities to share issues and engage in discussion. As one of its editors, I hope this volume can contribute to that process.

Finally, I would like to conclude by touching upon the significance of studying Southeast Asian art in Japan. To date, the interest toward Southeast Asian art in Japan has had an economic and political emphasis. Southeast Asia has been valued as a target of economic expansion and as a counterweight to China, and cultural exchange with Southeast Asia promoted because it was thought it would also reinforce the building of relations on economic and political levels. But as we have seen, cultural interest is creative and diverse, and not just a facilitator for developing economic and political relations. Building recognition through learning about each other’s thoughts and feelings can also lead to the creation of other, new kinds of relations. To that end we can find much guidance in the works of the Southeast Asian artists who have pursued their practices amid diverse social conditions. It is our hope that this collection of essays can also help to show the way forward.

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Translated by Andrew Maerke.

**Shaping the History of Art
in Southeast Asia**

Chapter 1 | Essays