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Among the list of initiatives of the CCP was the production of public murals and monuments affirming indigenous or folk imagery as symbols of national pride and history. See Patrick D. Flores, "Unholy Alliance Between Art and Philippines 2000," in *Pananaw* 1: 77.

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Poshyananda, "Traditional Aesthetics," 129.

and the need to develop pedagogical strategies based on conditions of society including class and gender relations. Endaya's remarks can be chiefly taken as an artistic statement rather than a description of a broad practice in the Philippines. However, this proposed dual but intertwined strategy reflected Endaya's appreciation of vital issues in Philippine contemporary art. Indigenous art practices should not fall simply into formalist categories of art making, but rather be rendered dynamic by insisting on their role with regard to socio-political matters. This is to be read in relation to tumultuous developments that took place in the Philippines in the 1970s and 1980s, and the logical emergence of political art. Social realism emerged as a popular artistic movement following the imposition of Martial Law in 1972, its leading proponent being the Kaisahan group of painters, established in 1977. The virility and relevance of the Kaisahan artists—which included Pablo Beans Santos, Edgar Talusan Fernandez and Nunelucio Alvarado, among others—contrasted against the relative aloofness of internationalist art presented at the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) during the 1970s. This development would prove significant in signaling the need to invest indigenous art with modes of conceptualisms sympathetic to political struggles if this "indigenous art" were to not be seen as a new wave of formalism that is socially alienating, or be relegated as part of the cultural language of a past regime.²⁰ At the same time, the perceived sterility of ASEAN cultural initiatives—that these are vehicles of diplomacy and brotherhood—had prompted Southeast Asian critics and artists to seek new vigor in locating and addressing social and political tensions regionally. In practice, ASEAN exhibitions tended to neutralize culture so as to seek commonalities and aid diplomacy. The efforts in mobilizing traditional aesthetics can be seen in this light in tandem with developing a language contributive to a larger international discourse. Endaya's proposal is significant for it recognizes that social and political critique forms part of a currency of internationalism. For Apinan, while positing the primacy of message, traditional aesthetics, however, should not be seen as a prerequisite of regional expressions:

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To reveal tensions and dislocations of cross-cultural, crossclass, crossgender relations, artists should be opened to all kinds of possibilities—drawing, painting, sculpture,

installation, performance, video, film and computer. If the message is conveyed successfully, oils on canvas, slabs of concrete or chunks of metal can be as potent as works made from indigenous art materials.²¹

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This is true as contemporary artists today are deploying a range of formal and conceptual approaches reflecting the variety of technologies and concerns. Yet this mix of tradition and social critique has proved successful in parts. Apinan, himself a curator in later years, would invoke tradition principally as a strategic way to solicit the Western gaze, conditioned by a particular cultural imagination of Asia and desires for Asia, and the West's general disdain for non-authentic Asian art. Exhibitions such as "Traditions/Tensions" (1996–98) and the first two installments of the APT (1993 and 1996) demonstrate considerable interest from within the United States and Australia for exotic/seductive/tragic Asians.

Conclusion

The limited discussion above describes regionality as a series of cultural interactions principally defined by larger forces of political and economic relations expressed through institutions and their mechanisms and their actions. Critical within these interactions is the currency of exchange proposed and articulated. These currencies, whether they were abstract art or traditional aesthetics, evolve and devolve in significance and circulation. There are also complementary and competing regionalities functioning like fluid blocs that expand, contract and mutate, and each may emphasize alternate forms of currency. The cultures of Southeast Asia continue to create platforms for expression and debates between members contingent on the significance and strength of their political and economic relations. This task is necessary as it provides a layer of identification correlating to community and nation while we acknowledge and address the shifts and tensions that permeate the various discourses of the individual, community and state. The promiscuity of international relations means however, that this will continue simultaneously amongst other tasks of regionality. Hence the plurality of internationality, which has to be expressed as a broad canvas with many oddly shaped circles—sharp and dotted lines, drawn, erased, and redrawn.

Cultural Transformations in the Asia-Pacific: The Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art and the Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale Compared

Caroline Turner

Caroline Turner is currently Adjunct Senior Research Fellow in the Research School of Humanities and the Arts, Australian National University. Previously she was Deputy Director of the Queensland Art Gallery and co-founder and Project Director of the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (1993, 1996, 1999). She has written extensively on contemporary Asian art. Her publications include *Tradition and Change: Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific* (1993), *Art and Social Change: Contemporary Art in Asia and the Pacific* (2005), and *Art and Human Rights: Contemporary Asian Contexts* (with Jen Webb, 2016).

The essay is interested in the processes of change in the field of culture in the Asia-Pacific. A vital aspect of this process is the effort to cross borders and binaries and to inhabit a shared space in both curatorial and discursive practice. The author characterizes this process as a “cultural transformation” and proposes a way to explain its complexity through the comparative approach. Caroline Turner is keen on two modalities of cultural transformation in two sites—Fukuoka in Japan and Brisbane in Australia—through their respective initiatives, namely the Asian Art Show, Fukuoka, and subsequent Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale, and the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art. These projects were conceived in the 1980s through the 1990s and exist to this day. This close reading of the Fukuoka and Brisbane initiatives fleshes out the circumstances and consequences of “artistic cultural exchange” and “cross-cultural encounters” arising from an environment of a “dynamic contemporary art.” Such an atmosphere of creativity deserves a “new intellectual framework” in order to revisit categories like “Asia-Pacific” and the “West.” The latter are not to be accepted as givens but are made to become part of the interrogation, as well as the reconstruction. In sketching out the comparative nodes that link Fukuoka and Brisbane, Turner surveys the theoretical positions of curators and historians and lays out affinities in terms of how the exhibition projects are based in museums; how they sustain a program every three years through exhibitions apart from their collections; the ambivalent ties of Japan and Australia to the region; and how the nexus to the region was shaped by war and trade. Fukuoka and Brisbane have invested and continue to invest in the research and the collection of Asian art, always aware of the critique of the Euramerican model of contemporary art and a “universalizing global culture.” These programs in the two cities have generated opportunities and communities amid the conflicts and chances to come together.

[PF]

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Author's Note

This essay focuses on a comparison of the Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale and the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art. Since first publication, both the Fukuoka Triennale and the Asia-Pacific Triennial have continued to hold exhibitions. As at 2016, there have now been eight Asia-Pacific Triennial exhibitions and five Fukuoka Triennales. There were of course also a number of Asian art exhibitions at the Fukuoka Art Museum between 1979/80 and 1999 (including four editions of the Asian Art Show, which was the forerunner of the Fukuoka Triennale). The Asian exhibitions at Fukuoka began earlier and are greater in number than the Asia-Pacific Triennial exhibitions.

01

Wang Gungwu, "Foreword," in *Tradition and Change: Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Caroline Turner (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1993), vii.

02

Zhang Qing, "Beyond Left and Right," introduction to *Shanghai Biennale 2000*, exh. cat. (Shanghai: Shanghai Art Museum, 2000).

03

See a discussion of this in relation to Latin America in Gerardo Mosquera, "Good-Bye Identity, Welcome Difference: From Latin American Art to Art From Latin America," *Third Text* 56 (2001): 25–32.

04

For a discussion of these issues see Glen St. John Barclay, "Geopolitical Changes in Asia and the Pacific" in *Art and Social Change: Contemporary Art in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Caroline Turner (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2005).

05

Chief Curator, the Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura & Hayama. [At time of writing, He is now director of the same museum.]

06

Mizusawa Tsutomu, "Opening Comment for Session I," in *The Japan Foundation 30th Anniversary International Symposium 2002: "Asia in Transition: Representation and Identity" Report* (Tokyo: Japan Foundation, 2002), 234–235.

07

Richard Austin, conversations with the author, 1990s; Adrian MacGregor, "Interview with Richard Austin," *The Australian*, December 10, 1999.

In 1993, the distinguished historian of Asia, Professor Wang Gungwu, wrote:

I would like to believe that artistic exchanges enrich the cultures involved. How enriching, however, depends on whether the imaginative and sensitive exponents of any art receive the respect of those who support and judge them.⁰¹

Professor Wang's comments are especially relevant to the aims of the Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale and Brisbane's Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art. Both projects are based on a philosophy of artistic cultural exchange and cross-cultural encounters between artists from different countries and local audiences in their respective countries—Japan and Australia. In this sense, both are more than art exhibitions, and both aspire to a much larger role in the art and culture of the region.

Among the many transformations in the Asia-Pacific in the decade of the 1990s has been the emergence of a dynamic contemporary art supported by museums, international exhibitions, commercial galleries and networks of scholars and artist-run spaces. Undoubtedly, a new intellectual framework for defining the art of this region is under construction.

The concept of the recurring international exhibition of contemporary art—the biennale and triennale—has been embraced in the region. Two of the earliest were the Triennale-India (established 1968) and the Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh (established 1981). Zhang Qing, one of the curators of the 2000 Shanghai Biennale, wrote in the catalogue to that exhibition:

Art exhibitions are springing up everywhere: [the] Yokohama Triennale, Kwang-ju [Gwangju] Biennale, Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (i.e., Brisbane), Singapore Biennale, Taipei Biennale [*sic*], opening up new possibilities on the international stage. Each show with a unique perspective and approach vigorously examines the status quo and discusses the future ... of Asia-Pacific culture.⁰²

What is "Asia-Pacific culture"? This question is complicated by the fact there is no cultural homogeneity in the region. The term "Asia-Pacific" is a construct, best defined similarly to "Latin America," without implying historical or cultural sameness.⁰³ "Asia-Pacific" is a problematic term. Some would say it includes the United States and the Americas; others would confine the region to Asia and islands in the Pacific. Some have suggested that Australia invented the term; others that Japan did so. The term was popular in the 1990s, but its usage is fading as new geopolitical realities merge into new, more complex regional groupings, especially in the 21st century, with the rising significance of interregional groupings related to the economic and

political power of China and India. The geopolitical tectonic plates have been shifting dramatically in the region and this will undoubtedly affect cultural exchanges and the terms of those exchanges.⁰⁴ A Japan Foundation forum in 2002 concluded that "Asia" is also a problematic concept. Speaking there, Mizusawa Tsutomu⁰⁵ said:

Nationalism and Asian self-awareness came together over a century ago and, as it were, caught fire, leading to the formation of many theories of the identity of Asia. The existence of these theories, besides raising the question of what Asia is in real terms, demonstrates the historical fact that Asia has been a form of discourse.⁰⁶

Many speakers at the same forum suggested that "Asia" is not so much a geographical entity as it is an idea constructed in counterpoint to "Europe" or the "West." But many contemporary writers—for example, John Gray—have suggested that there is also no such entity as the "West"—which, it can be argued, has ceased to have a definite meaning except in the United States.

When I presented a version of this essay at the "Our Modernities" conference in Singapore in 2004, I related a story which was relevant both to my subject and to the audience in Singapore. In February 1942, a young Australian army officer, Richard Austin, spent the night before Singapore fell to the Imperial Japanese Army looking for a Japanese dictionary. Having taught himself some Japanese, he passed years of internment in Changi prison camp and on the Burma railroad as a camp interpreter for his fellow Australian prisoners. On one occasion, he had to represent the prisoners in Burma in an approach to the Japanese commandant to request more food, telling him the men were too sick to work without extra rations. As he spoke he noticed in the jungle hut behind the Japanese soldier a piece of calligraphy hanging on the wall, with a single flower in a jar of water beneath it. The commandant asked him if he knew what the calligraphy meant, and Austin said he was not certain. "It means," the Japanese replied, "that life is transient and we must accept without complaint whatever fate holds in store for us. There will be no more food and the men must return to work." Austin would later recall that in that moment was born some understanding of an entirely different view of life and death and of the need for greater knowledge of another's culture.⁰⁷ Working as an Australian diplomat, Austin went on after the war to become fluent in Japanese, a collector of Japanese art and a great admirer of Japanese culture. Acknowledging his work in bringing the two countries closer together, in the late 1990s the Emperor of Japan awarded Austin one of Japan's highest decorations, the Order of the Rising Sun.

Why do I tell this story? Because in many

ways the Asia-Pacific Triennial was born in the prison camp at Changi and on the Burma railroad, not only because years later, when Austin became chairman of trustees at the Queensland Art Gallery in 1987, he threw his weight behind a policy of Asian exhibitions, but also because the Second World War forced a generation of Australians who became prominent in the postwar era to confront the reality of Australia's geographical position on the edge of Asia. In the same way it can be argued that the Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale, an exhibition created to show contemporary Asian art in Japan, and which began in 1979/80, was also, in part at least, a product of the Second World War.

By beginning with the war I do not mean to present a simplistic portrait of these two exhibitions as mere diplomatic exercises. Cultural exchanges are of course influenced by historical and political forces. As the late Edward Said wrote in *Culture and Imperialism*, we need to understand that other identities, peoples, cultures "have always overlapped one another, through unhierarchical influence, crossing, incorporation, recollection, deliberate forgetfulness and, of course, conflict."⁰⁸ Writing in 2003 in the introduction to the exhibition "Under Construction," in a piece entitled "The Possibility of a Collaborative Space," Furuichi Yasuko of the Japan Foundation observed:

Discussing Asia in Japan is a perplexing and awkward business, probably because the complex circumstances in the prewar days and the memories of war that follow have not been properly reconciled, and remain an issue. The historical past of Japan's aggressive war on, and colonial control of, East and Southeast Asia was an Eastern variant of modern Western imperialism, and has continued to have a subtle effect on Japan's relations with other parts of the region, preventing any real development in Asian cultural exchange. For example, art programs that promoted Asian art in Japan were initially regarded as Orientalism-based cultural imperialism on the part of an economically better off Japan by the relevant Asian countries, and were at times criticized by the arts professionals in the region. Both those criticizing and those being criticized could not help but be sensitive to the memories of the past.⁰⁹

Today, she argues, this is changing because of the interdependence of the region (i.e., Asia) and an expectation that the concept of "Asia" will help people in the region acquire a new identity in a globalizing world. On the other hand, as Ushiroshōji Masahiro, formerly chief curator at the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, has observed, Australia had its own problems with engaging with the region. "Japan and Australia," he wrote in 2000, "are located at the frontier in terms of geographical Asia. Not only that, they have their place at the frontier in terms of

history as well." He describes Japan's wartime role and the war's unfortunate legacy, but continues: "On the other hand, Australia is a descendant of a British colony built over the land of the Aborigines. It also has the negative history of the exclusive White Australia policy."¹⁰ Japan and Australia have both changed since the 1940s, but in relation to Asia throughout the last 70-plus years, both countries have in a sense been "outsiders" looking in.

The Fukuoka and Brisbane exhibitions are strikingly similar in many respects. Both are museum-based exhibitions, somewhat unusual in the world of biennales and triennales, and both are based on the concept that a museum has a responsibility to be a forum for opening up ideas about our changing world and a place for audiences to engage with other cultures and to learn about those cultures. Both exhibitions have stated objectives that are unashamedly about changing perceptions regarding Asia in the countries in which they originate. Both have attracted large audiences and have been audience-centered but also artist-driven. The two museums are based in two countries, Japan and Australia, neither of which has ever completely considered itself part of Asia, with both having ambivalent relationships to the region. Within these countries, Fukuoka and Brisbane are both provincial cities, each with a population of around one-and-a-quarter million people at the time the exhibitions were founded in the 1990s—one in the provincial south in relation to the great urban center of Tokyo, and the other in the subtropical north and distanced from the southeastern political and economic triangle of Sydney, Melbourne and the national capital, Canberra. Both cities are natural gateways to Asia, with trade and other economic reasons for engaging with Asia, and both are administered by provincial and city governments determined to make a distinguishing contribution to that engagement. Both have an interesting history as gateways. For example, Fukuoka is the site where archaeological objects showing the cultural influence upon Japan from the Asian mainland were discovered, and was the target of the Mongol invasion fleets of Kublai Khan that were destroyed by typhoons in the 13th century, while Brisbane was the headquarters of General Douglas MacArthur in the Second World War.

Both art museums embarked in the 1980s and 1990s on a major series of exhibitions to explore the contemporary art of the Asian region and in the process transformed themselves as institutions. Both gave prominence to research in each country and to partnerships with experts from the other countries involved, and both placed great importance on educational programs and community interaction with artists. One (Fukuoka) included in its exhibitions many more countries in Asia, especially poorer countries, but the other (Brisbane) included a major emphasis on Pacific, i.e., Melanesian and Polynesian art, and on art from Indigenous peoples. Both included as contemporary art works which normally would never

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Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 330–331.

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09

Furuichi Yasuko, "Asia: The Possibility of a Collaborative Space—Under Construction Project," in *Under Construction: New Dimensions of Asian Art* (Tokyo: Japan Foundation Asia Center, 2003), 13.

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10

Ushiroshōji Masahiro, "The Asia-Pacific Triennales [sic] and Fukuoka: A Comparison," *Artlink* 20, no. 2 (July 2000): 72.

11

Ushiroshōji Masahiro, "Emergence of Asian Art Gallery," trans. Stanley N. Anderson, in *Asian Contemporary Art Reconsidered* (Tokyo: The Japan Foundation, 1998), 156.

be seen in an international exhibition, and would be considered "craft" or folk art.

Both museums made a major commitment, as well, to collecting Asian contemporary art, and both have received new buildings (the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum and the Gallery of Modern Art in Brisbane, respectively) largely on the basis of the success of these Asian exhibitions. But while receiving much positive praise, both exhibitions have been criticized—one objection put forward by some critics being that the exhibitions are related to trade and economic issues and another that they are as much about cultural relations and diplomacy as about art. Both have faced the need for a refreshing of the original concepts. Nevertheless, both have had a major impact on their local audiences in developing community knowledge about the region in which both are situated—a region, both institutions admit, about which audiences were ignorant in terms of its history, cultures and especially the dynamic changes taking place there.

The intellectual philosophies that came to underpin both exhibitions were also similar—a stated rejection of a Euro-Americentric framework for interpreting art, and an assertion of the need to develop new approaches for art that are grounded in the discourses of the region. This was, and indeed is, an unusual position in both Japan and Australia. What is very clear about the art that came out of the Fukuoka and Brisbane exhibitions is that it presented a fundamental challenge to the concept of a universalizing global culture, and for that reason, I think, there was an immediate resonance with local audiences. In other words, by stressing the local and the regional, these exhibitions also connected with resistance to forces of globalization. The Fukuoka project was more extensive in the sense that a whole museum was built around it and it has a longer history of research and commitment. But both these exhibitions share a commitment to engendering cross-cultural understanding in the region and both exhibitions were, in the 1980s and 1990s, radical projects.

The Fukuoka Asian Art Museum and Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale

I have said that the Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale had in part its roots in the Second World War and Japan's conquests in East and Southeast Asia, but its roots are also more ancient. In 1274, and again in 1281, the Mongol emperor Kublai Khan sent great invasion fleets to the part of Kyushu where the city of Fukuoka is now situated. On each occasion, a typhoon wreaked devastation on the invading armies. Today, Fukuoka is a dynamic modern city and still a major gateway from Japan to Asia. It is one of the few cities in the world with a museum devoted to contemporary Asian art. Fukuoka has been a world pioneer in exhibiting contemporary Asian art and in developing cultural relations with

Asia within Japan.

Officially opened in 1999, the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum is an offshoot of the Fukuoka Art Museum, and was constructed to house the parent museum's considerable contemporary Asian collections and be a site for the highly acclaimed Asian Art Show (now called Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale), begun in 1979/80. This was the first major exhibition anywhere in the world to focus on contemporary Asian art. It was held every five years until 1999, when it transformed into the Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale and shifted to the new location in the new museum. Developed over the period since 1979/80, the collection is the finest survey collection of contemporary Asian art in the world. Its main rivals would be the superb collection of mainly Southeast Asian art assembled at the Singapore Art Museum (and now National Gallery of Singapore) and the very significant collection of Asian art at the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art in Brisbane. The purpose-built Fukuoka Asian Art Museum (as explained on the museum's website, planning for the museum began in 1992 after an announcement by the mayor of Fukuoka that the city would build a designated museum for Asian contemporary art) is situated on the 7th and 8th floors of the Hakata Riverain complex, a magnificent shopping center in the upmarket and central downtown area of Kawabata, known for its cinemas, bars, restaurants and designer fashion boutiques. The Triennale is supported by the city government and a number of other organizations, including the Japan Foundation. The exhibition encapsulates a mission to overcome Japan's traditional isolationism from Asia (and contested history when it did engage with Asia) in a culturally inclusive art program of exhibitions and artist residencies.

The Fukuoka engagement predates the Japan Foundation's Asia Center in Tokyo, but has been substantially supported by the Japan Foundation, the Japanese government's international arts agency. Ushiroshōji Masahiro, for many years the curator in charge of the exhibition, described the origins of the Asian exhibitions in a paper presented in 1997.¹¹ They emerged from the request to hold such an exhibition from an association of Japanese artists—a request made to the Fukuoka Art Museum because of its strong historical links to Asia. The museum's staff eventually took over curating the exhibitions, creating a formal museum-based exhibition out of what was in effect a festival where artists could meet, and which originally had allowed each participating country to select its own artists and art (a similar process to many biennales which are not museum based). However, the emphasis on bringing artists together was retained to great effect. The exhibitions gradually became a focused commitment of the museum, and a collection and educational programs logically followed. This was unusual in Japan in the 1980s, where the emphasis in most museums in terms of international art was, and remains, on collecting and showing art from

Europe and the US. In the process, as Ushiroshōji has argued, the museum staff developed considerable expertise in, and knowledge of, Asian art. The museum also developed a policy of seeing and presenting the art works in their own contexts rather than, in his words, "in comparison to European or American works," and the audience overcame their original assumptions, again in Ushiroshōji's words, that Asian art was "exotic" and Asia culturally "backward."¹² Ushiroshōji notes that in the 1980s, Fukuoka staff were frequently asked if there was any contemporary Asian art.

Japanese art from the 1950s identified with international rather than with Asian regional art, thus reinforcing Japan's status as a first-world power. In this sense, by emphasizing a local and regional context, the Fukuoka Asian Art Shows went against the mainstream of post Second World War art in Japan. While the Fukuoka shows have not given emphasis to the minorities within Japan, such as the Ainu indigenous people of Hokkaido or the many Koreans living in Japan, they have introduced the idea of indigeneity from other cultures in Asia and addressed the contentious issue of multiculturalism. As well, the museum has curated historical exhibitions such as "The Birth of Modern Art in Southeast Asia," which raised issues about Japan's wartime role in the developing modern art of countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines.¹³

The work of the museum has been of profound cultural and scholarly significance for the region and internationally. Ushiroshōji has written of the need to move away from older definitions of art imported from Europe. Describing Japanese history over the 20th century, he wrote in an article for an Australian publication: "Japan aimed to build a modernized Western nation and carried out an imperialistic war of aggression in this region under the slogan: 'Extricate from Asia, Join in the West.' This is a negative legacy."¹⁴ Ushiroshōji urges a different model for art today. "The significance of an Asian art museum," he stated in one of the publications of the first Triennale in 1999, "lies in the attitude of re-questioning the European centralized value system that dominates the space and system for art."¹⁵

"The Birth of Modern Art in Southeast Asia," the Fukuoka Asian Art Shows and the Triennales have focused on issues of importance to Asia, not the West. Just how radical the Fukuoka Asian Art Shows and Triennales are in the context of Japan has not been clearly recognized in the art world. My contention is that the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum is without question a museum of the future, engaging with community but also addressing issues of social significance for that community's future, including multiculturalism. Japan's birth rate and population are falling¹⁶ and the question of immigration raises highly sensitive issues within the country. Programs such as the ones I have described at Fukuoka help create an understanding of other cultures which can have a long-term impact. In art terms, the value of

the museum's groundbreaking research into Asian art, which is not being undertaken to the same extent anywhere else in the world, is still not fully appreciated in an international context.

The programs at Fukuoka are aimed at community, schools and young people. Commendable emphasis has been placed on country visits and scholarship. While the Brisbane concept of the 1990s of co-curatorship has not been an explicit principle of the selections, there is a commitment to working with experts in the countries and to "dialogue," to use Ushiroshōji's term. One of the primary outcomes of the exhibitions is the residencies of the Art Exchange Program, which allow Asian artists to come to Japan for residencies and to engage with local citizenry, with the aim of giving local Japanese people a better understanding of their neighbors. Over 70 events were presented under this program in 1999 alone. These exchanges have provided many opportunities for Asian artists, curators and writers from poorer countries.

Countries whose artists were almost never seen in international exhibitions before recent times, such as Myanmar, Laos, Nepal, Cambodia and Mongolia, have had representatives in the Fukuoka exhibitions. Some of these artists had never before exhibited outside their home towns, and certainly not internationally. An example is the talented artist from Laos, Kham Tanh Saliangkham (born 1973), a teacher in Vientiane who participated in the Fukuoka residential program for three months in 2001 at Kyushu University. It is clear from his comments at the time how important this opportunity—the realization of a long-held dream—was to his new understanding of contemporary art.¹⁷ In the third Triennale in 2005, Kanha Sikounnavong, also from Laos, produced with minimal local funding a wholly charming venture in cartoon animation, as part of a project to offer Lao children the opportunity of watching Lao stories on Lao television, rather than the products of a foreign culture, alien, uncaring and unmeaning. It is interesting to note that he developed his skills in Bulgaria, rather than somewhere more noted for high-tech computer art in the West, and clearly the exchange with Japan was also of great value to his idealistic artistic objectives and to his technical expertise in animation.

The Fukuoka exhibitions have also explored political issues in different countries and internationally. In the 2002 exhibition the events of September 11, 2001, and their aftermath were the subject of several works. Political issues in the exhibitions have rarely been related to the legacies of the Second World War, however, or to political issues in Japan itself. An exception was in 2002 when Japanese artist Yanagi Yukinori used banknotes representing an imaginary united Asian currency folded into origami cranes by his audience—who had their own faces photographed and transferred by computer to the banknotes—to create an artwork in the form of a huge, musical baby mobile. Like all his work, it

12
Ibid., 157.

13
Ushiroshōji Masahiro et al., *The Birth of Modern Art in Southeast Asia: Artists and Movements*, exh. cat. (Fukuoka: Fukuoka Art Museum, 1997).

14
Ushiroshōji, "The Asia-Pacific Triennales [sic] and Fukuoka," 72.

15
Ushiroshōji, "In Search of 'Channels of Hope': The Art Exchange Program of the 1st Fukuoka Triennale," in *The 1st Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale [The 5th Asian Art Show]: Document of Art Exchange Program* (Fukuoka: Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, 1999), 5.

16
An article in the *Straits Times* of February 24, 2004, emphasized the demographic dilemma facing Japan in the future.

17
Kong Phat Luangrath, "Kham Tanh Saliangkham," in *The 2nd Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale 2002* (Fukuoka: Fukuoka Asian Art Museum), 130. The artist Kham Tanh Saliangkham's works were a documentation of customs in his home country, together with social comment, as in *Miss Lao Contest* (2001), in which contestants in traditional costume are depicted against sponsors' logos, such as those of Shell, Honda and Suzuki.

is ambiguous in its meaning. The idea of a "united Asia" connects with his previous works on the Second World War (a theme unusual in Japanese art) by evoking the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere," and also refers to the domination by wealthy countries of poorer ones. Cranes also evoke memories of the folded paper cranes that form a symbol for Hiroshima and the effects of the US nuclear attack. There were no works, however, on this subject in 2005—the 60th anniversary of those attacks.

The third Triennale in 2005 was more focused on contemporary political tensions, for example those between India and Pakistan, mostly conveyed in the form of ultra-high-tech video art. An extraordinary work in 2005 was that by Young-hae Chang Heavy Industries from South Korea. What they presented was a confronting series of ostensible news items, including a fictional but alleged dissertation by Kim Jong-il on sexual themes, which culminated in a meticulously detailed and appalling account, with every possible visual and literary emphasis, of the effects of a (so far) imaginary United States pre-emptive strike against North Korea, and the consequent North Korean response in destroying South Korea. What makes it truly appalling is the fact that it is clinically accurate in its account of the weaponry that would be deployed by both sides and the effect of that weaponry on its targets, including human targets.

The Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT)

This second part of the essay focuses on the three Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT) exhibitions in the 1990s for which I was project director. I left the Queensland Art Gallery in 2000.

Located in a purpose-built building opened in 1982 on the banks of the Brisbane River as part of a substantial Cultural Centre complex, the Queensland Art Gallery was the result of significant prosperity in the state of Queensland—a wealth created by the mining and agriculture industries as well as tourism (a significant proportion of which consists of Asian and especially Japanese tourists). As a result of the success of the first three APT exhibitions, a new addition—a free-standing annex, the Gallery of Modern Art—was built alongside the existing building to house in part the growing contemporary Asian collections and to be a home for the APT.

It is an important fact that in the 1990s Australia had more exhibitions of contemporary Asian art and more cultural exchanges of contemporary art with Asia than any other Western country. The result has been the building of a strong network of contacts with and knowledge of contemporary Asian cultures within Australia. The transformation in contemporary Asian literacy in Australia has operated at many levels, and not simply in contemporary art. Now there are exhibitions and exchanges all over Australia, and the APT is certainly not isolated,

nor is Brisbane alone in this focus. For example, the National Gallery of Australia announced in 2005 that it will also have a strong regional emphasis, and has advertised staff positions in Asian and Pacific art. The beginning of this Asian interest within Australia was the pioneering artist exchanges in Perth—the Artists' Regional Exchange (ARX) in the 1980s—while the Biennale of Sydney also included Asian artists from the 1970s, although not in great numbers until recent times. Since the early to mid-1990s, there have been important exhibitions of contemporary Asian art held at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the Art Gallery of Western Australia and the National Gallery of Australia. Over the same period, the Melbourne-based organization Asialink has had as its mission the development of Australian-Asian connections, and the Australian Chapter of the Asia Society, also based in Melbourne, has organized exhibitions of contemporary Asian art. Nevertheless, the Queensland Art Gallery's 1989 exhibition of contemporary Japanese art developed with the Saitama Museum of Modern Art (which I helped to organize) was the first large-scale museum-based exhibition concentrating on contemporary Asian art held in Australia.

The APT was initiated by the Queensland Art Gallery in the early 1990s with the stated objectives of informing Australians about the dynamic and changing societies of Asia and the Pacific, opening up a dialogue among artists, art critics, academics and writers in the region, and building bridges to Asian and Pacific cultures, including within Australia's own multicultural society. It was the first exhibition in the world to focus on the contemporary art of Asia *and* the Pacific, and the first major museum-based project in Australia to focus on the contemporary art of Asia as a whole. Nothing could have been more logical than for Australians in the 1990s to attempt to learn more about the societies and cultures of our neighbors. That was and is a subject of concern for Australian society as a whole, which now includes significant numbers of immigrants from Asia and the Pacific. From the beginning the APT was conceived as more than an art exhibition. It was equally about the education of our audiences, creating a network of contacts with artists and art institutions, building a research base for further exhibitions and a permanent collection, and serving as a forum for discussion about the art of the region. The project was always seen in the 1990s as a national project with a national advisory committee and, while it changed and evolved over the decade, there were consistent elements to the first three exhibitions, for which I was the project director in addition to also serving, from the early 1980s, as deputy director of the Queensland Art Gallery. An important part of the APT concept was the conferences held in 1993, 1996 and 1999. All three—the largest art conferences held in Australia to the time—were developed in conjunction with

university scholars as well as artists and curators from throughout the region. Another critical emphasis has been on artists coming to Brisbane and engaging not only with local audiences but traveling elsewhere in Australia in a program somewhat similar to the Art Exchange Program in Fukuoka.

The APT project originated in the late 1980s from a policy direction of the new chairman of trustees at the Queensland Art Gallery, Richard Austin, whose wartime experiences I have already related. But the gallery's engagement with Asia had already begun by the time Austin became chairman and Doug Hall director in 1987. Brisbane, like Fukuoka, as I have argued, is a natural gateway to Asia. Although the city was General MacArthur's headquarters in the Second World War, it very quickly established strong trade-based relations with Japan from the 1950s. In the 1980s, these extensive relationships resulted in three major historical exhibitions from the renowned Idemitsu collection. In 1982 I went to Japan and began the process of negotiating an exchange of contemporary art with Queensland's new sister state, Saitama Prefecture. Homma Masayoshi, then the director of the Museum of Modern Art, Saitama, was a magnificent mentor, and the exchange exhibitions we set in process became the seeds of the APT, in that they instigated the principle of co-curatorship. The philosophy and shape of the APT was put together by Austin, Doug Hall and myself. I wrote the briefing paper which argued that the Queensland Art Gallery could never catch up in historical Asian art, which was Austin's preference, and that there was a significant gap in Australia in collecting in the area of modern and contemporary Asian art (and Hall had already signaled a greater interest by the gallery in contemporary Australian art). I argued we could do a series of contemporary exhibitions from different countries, as we had done with Japanese art, or we could do a series of major survey exhibitions covering the whole region. The arguments for the latter were strengthened, I believed, by the fact that the Biennale of Sydney had recently turned down a proposal that it concentrate more on Asian art. I argued also for a commitment to three exhibitions in a decade so that we would be taken seriously in the region. For us, that region needed to be defined as the Asia-Pacific, not only Asia.

I have written elsewhere that the beginnings of the APT were "a journey without maps" or a "leap in the dark."¹⁸ We had no idea if artists in the region would want to be included and how our venture would be perceived. A strong impetus to the intellectual side of the project was provided by a conference convened by Professor John Clark at the Humanities Research Centre (my current institution) in 1991,¹⁹ although the decision to undertake the APT had already been announced. Clark had invited many experts from the region to speak; we formed many important contacts there and began to understand more clearly the issues we would need to address. The Saitama exhibitions

were our main model. I have not mentioned the Fukuoka exhibitions as a model—although it would have been extremely logical to view them as such. However, we knew little of the Fukuoka experiment in the early planning stages of the APT, and what we did know was based on the very earliest Asian Art Shows from the 1980s. It is interesting in retrospect to see how similar the two exhibitions were in the 1990s, but this was not because of initially close collaborations—those would not occur until later in the decade.

The APT curatorial teams traveled to specific countries, where they worked with local curators in determining the selection of the works. This model of co-curatorship was an essential part of the APT philosophy in the 1990s, but a different model, with Queensland Art Gallery staff selecting the works, was adopted after 2000. I make the point that we did not adopt a country focus in terms of the selections out of some obsession with national frameworks, but rather because few curators in the region could at that time have selected across countries. We were surprised how little cross-country curatorial work was being done in Asia in the early 1990s, except by Japan and to an extent within ASEAN. However, there was also another practical consideration. In attempting to dispel the notion in Australia of a monolithic place called "Asia" (or, for that matter, "the Pacific") it was necessary to seek to present different histories and different contemporary contexts. Context was vital. In many cases for the APTs this meant selecting artists dealing with critical issues of political power and human rights. Many extraordinary works were presented in the APTs in the 1990s related to these issues, perhaps none more memorable than Dadang Christanto's *For Those Who Have Been Killed* (1993), about the killings in Indonesia in 1965–66 when the artist's own father lost his life, and the same artist's *Fire in May*, about events in Indonesia and East Timor, shown in 1999.

I have said that the concept of co-curatorship and curatorial teams based on Australians working with experts in the region came from the Saitama model, but we were also warned by one of the keynote Asian speakers at the Clark conference not to go into the region as "mainly white European" curators and choose only the art that interested us. We needed to learn from, and engage with, the issues and approaches to art thought important in the region and in specific countries. This meant, I believed, using writers from the region to write about the art, rather than only Australian or Western writers. I wish to make a point, also, regarding the large number of curators from Australia on the selection teams. The Australia Council, the Australian Government's arts funding body, gave a specific and large amount of funding to allow research travel with the intention of using the APT to build an Asia-literate generation of young curators. Every curatorial team of the APTs in the 1990s was composed of Australians and curators from the

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Caroline Turner, "Journey without Maps: The Asia-Pacific Triennial," in *Beyond the Future: The Third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, ed. Caroline Turner, Rhana Devenport and Jennifer Webb (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 1999).

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"Modernism and Postmodernism in Contemporary Asian Art," Humanities Research Centre, Australian National University, Canberra, March 22–25, 1991. Most of the papers were subsequently published in John Clark, ed., *Modernity in Asian Art* (Sydney: Wild Peony, 1993). See also John Clark, *Modern Asian Art* (Sydney: Craftsman House & Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998).

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Charles Green, "Beyond the Future: The Third Asia-Pacific Triennial," *Art Journal* (New York) 58, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 81. For further discussion of the APT see Jen Webb and Tony Schirato, "The Asia-Pacific Triennial: Synthesis in the Making," in "Synthesis," special issue of *Continuum* 14/3 (November 2000): 349–58; and Pat Hoffee "A New Tide Turning: Australia in the Region, 1993–2003," in Turner, *Art and Social Change*.

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Nicholas Jose, *The Bulletin*, September 7, 1999.

region, and each curatorial team had a younger Australian curator attached. The number of projects now being initiated from Australia shows that strategy was successful. I count this as one of the most important successes of the APT, and I think that it is unfortunate that the concept of team-based selections is so often underutilized in an art world where a "star" curator is seen as a necessity. Neither the APT nor Fukuoka have used this "star" curator approach, and I believe the team-based approach, de-emphasizing the individual curator and eschewing personality, has been highly important in the success of both exhibitions. The truth is that large-scale exhibitions such as biennales and triennales are based on teams. The issue is how much the team as a whole is given credit for the outcome.

Over three exhibitions in 1993, 1996 and 1999, nearly 300 artists and 350,000 visitors (60,000, 120,000, and 152,000 to each edition, respectively, but with additional numbers through online activities and forums) participated in the APTs. As Charles Green has noted, "a fiercely supportive Queensland audience has adopted the APT with great enthusiasm."²⁰ The number of curators and writers involved from the region has also been in the hundreds. The project has had bipartisan political support from successive Queensland and Australian governments (with strong support from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Australia Council for the Arts). The funding for the first exhibition was, however, largely raised by Richard Austin from Japanese companies with which he had worked, and it was only after the first APT's extraordinary success that the state government gave a regular (although not extravagant) amount through the enthusiastic endorsement of the then arts minister and premier, Wayne Goss.

The APTs were never lavishly funded, and it was a constant struggle to keep the project going, although we were buoyed by a tremendous spirit of enthusiasm and commitment within the gallery, as also happened in Fukuoka. Like Fukuoka, this was not our only exhibition project. We kept up a program of other exhibitions from Europe and the US as well as Asia. For example, while directing the 1996 APT, I was also curating an exhibition of the works of Matisse from 50 collections (the original Australian curators for the APT, including myself, were trained in Western, not Asian art). As at Fukuoka, I and others chose to work on the APT because we believed in the project and in the artists. The response of local and international audiences underscores the quality of the art. The enthusiasm from art experts, after initial predictions by some that the art would not be interesting or would be of poor quality, was equally exhilarating.

One of the most successful outcomes of the APT project was undoubtedly the educational component. The exhibition kits were included in the school curriculum in Queensland and elsewhere. Young children aged three to twelve became a target audience for education programs. The "Kid's APT"

was a personal response by many of us to the rise in Australia in the 1990s of Pauline Hanson's "One Nation" party, with its anti-Asian immigration rhetoric. The enthusiasm of teachers for using the APT to create a positive understanding of our neighbors in Asia and the Pacific undoubtedly derived from a motivation to combat racist elements in Australian society. More than 30,000 children participated in the Kid's APT at the gallery in 1999 alone, with many more involved through online activities.

As with Fukuoka, the fact that such a large proportion of the artists were invited to Queensland was a critical factor in both the education programs and the audience response, as well as the gains for the individual artists who participated from countries where the opportunities for artists were often much poorer. This was particularly true in Queensland's case for the Pacific artists, especially those from Melanesia. Here, Indigenous Protocols were important, including Welcome to Country and involvement from local Aboriginal people. Cross-cultural engagements are never easy, but the remarkable fact is that in both Queensland and Fukuoka, real friendships and more productive engagements were the normative result of the exhibition.

The interdisciplinary art forms in "Crossing Borders" were one of the successes of the third APT. The team of curators chose artists from a large number of countries to include those who were not only globally mobile in a geographical sense, but also those who represented collaborations between artists and fusions of art forms, or cross-disciplinary work as between music and art (extending to the Web-based "Virtual Triennial"), as well as art that redefined distinctions between high art and popular culture. This latter concept had also been an interest of Fukuoka, seen especially in the second Triennale, "Imagined Workshop," which focused on hand-made art. Fukuoka had also included exhibitions of folk art and popular culture. As Nicholas Jose commented, the works in the APTs in the 1990s "discover[ed] a contemporary visual language that speaks across boundaries ... because they evoke traditional ways of making art linked to handicraft, home and hearth."²¹

One of my intentions early on as project director was to establish a research center for Asian art and to do other exhibitions in association with the APT which would explore the history of modern art in Asia, as has been done in Fukuoka (and of course at other institutions in the region including the Singapore Art Museum). This was not achieved in the 1990s, but elements of the research completed then for a historical exhibition on modernism were included in the fourth APT in 2002.

In recent times both exhibitions have also reflected the changing nature of artistic production and the rise of new media art including video and the Internet. The first Fukuoka Triennale in 1999 focused in this direction, and it was also particularly evident in the third Fukuoka Triennale in 2005, while

the third APT in 1999 had a "Virtual Triennial" as one of the key elements in "Crossing Borders."

Nothing in the first 10 years of the curatorial process was more controversial than the decision in 1999 to open up the APT to some artists living outside their home countries (something Fukuoka has not done)—the objection being that artists within the region still had too few opportunities. Yet the reality is that many artists today are global travelers. The art in the APTs has also not been concerned so much with national art movements or artists "representing" nations, as some critics have tried to suggest because of the country-based teams. It has, nevertheless, had a strong emphasis on art about local issues and regional societal change and the personal idealism of the artists (which in turn has greatly affected audiences) to contribute to their local communities in building new and better futures. That there have been and continue to be great inequalities in the region, including in Australia, only makes this emphasis more pertinent. This same idealism has permeated the Fukuoka exhibitions.

Conclusion

The Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale and the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art have crossed many boundaries, which has enabled them to recognize the vital nature of living traditions in art in the region as well as the dynamic changes in art and life. Peoples and nations take their pasts with them into the future, and museums have a central role to play in preserving intangible heritage and living culture and encouraging communication between cultures. This is the hope that was expressed in the title of the first Fukuoka Triennale, "Communication: Channels of Hope."

These exhibitions have also provided a lens by which to evaluate globalization and modernity. As Webb and Schirato have argued in relation to the APT, but which applies as well, I believe, to Fukuoka, "globalization, rather than 'overpowering,' or being accepted uncritically by, local cultures, has produced effects . . . which are both postmodern and antimodern."²²

Both projects have provided artists with vital opportunities. Both projects have made a significant difference in their communities, and both have revealed the power of artistic exchanges to function in aesthetic and cultural contexts to enrich those communities through greater knowledge of their neighbors and the changing nature of the region.

The chief curator of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Kuroda Raiji, conveyed the essence of his museum's third Fukuoka Triennale in 2005 when he declared that instead of "setting the aim of the exhibition at realizing an 'exchange based on' a presumed 'pre-established harmony,' we should convey the 'real' Asia that includes those relentless situations in Japan, Asia and other parts of the world." And this concept may well be summed up in the title of that exhibition, "Parallel Realities: Asian Art Now."²³

Similarly the APTs, in the 1990s especially, specifically focused on the dynamic and changing nature of art and politics in the region and on art produced in the three years prior to each triennial. In this sense, both exhibitions provide a mirror to the process of change in the region in that decade. It is surely one responsibility of artists to respond to the tragedies and tensions of the human predicament. And both the APT and Fukuoka Triennale exhibit artists engaged with concerns of humanity.

The future for both projects, I believe, is to extend this concept and the process of exchange across borders and so lead the exhibitions to become increasingly about cultural meetings, based on mutual respect, that create more opportunities for debate and dialogue about more pluralist, as well as more equal futures. As Ushiroshōji Masahiro put it in 2002, "In an age flooded with digital images, when terrorist acts and wars are broadcast live via satellite around the world, we need to take another hard look at the appeal and potential possessed by art." He observed that the world is still permeated with hatred, violence and misunderstanding, and that, "we must work to heal those rifts through an ongoing effort to understand each other's culture, worldview and values (even if it is no longer possible to naively and simplistically believe that art is able to do so)."²⁴

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Jen Webb and Tony Schirato, "Synthesis in the Making," 350.

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Kuroda Raiji, "Diving into Parallel Realities: Notes on the Theme for FT3," in *The 3rd Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale 2005: Parallel Realities: Asian Art Now*, exh. cat. (Fukuoka: Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, 2005), 16.

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Ushiroshōji Masahiro, "Hands and Collaboration: Asian Art at the Start of the 21st Century," trans. Janet Goff, in *The 2nd Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale*, 140–141.

The Other as "Lost Pure Self":Gauguinism in Southeast
Asian Art**Ushiroshōji Masahiro**美術のオナー
特集：アジア美術的〈近代〉

See p. 24 for author bio.

[仲介の感性論] 世界におけるヴィジュアル・エッセイ
[資料紹介] 古蹟研究(二)・画僧明譽古蹟(1)

This essay was published in May 2010 in the academic art journal *Bijutsu Forum 21*. It was written for a special issue on "Modernism in Asian Art," which was also edited by the author. Ushiroshōji Masahiro argues that from the 1930s to the 1950s, when modern art influenced by Western culture made its appearance in the region, Southeast Asian artists explicitly referenced Paul Gauguin in developing their practices. The South Pacific depicted by Gauguin was similar to the local scenes and landscapes that Southeast Asian artists were painting. Ushiroshōji thinks that these artists were aware that in turning to Gauguin as a paradigm of Western art, they could integrate their own paintings into the institution of art. However, he also asserts that their reception of Gauguin took many forms. In the collaborative works of the "triumvirate of modern art" in the Philippines—Victorio Edades, Galo Ocampo and Carlos Francisco—an influence can be seen not only in terms of style but also in symbolism, although the group differ from Gauguin in their expression of gratitude and admiration for the blessings of nature. It is also possible to see Gauguin's influence in the compositions and motifs of the artists Tchang Ju Chi and Yong Mun Sen, active in Singapore and Penang, respectively. Tellingly, rather than depicting the overseas Chinese with whom they shared their origins, both instead painted the local Malays, who represented a foreign culture. As with Gauguin, these artists depicted a "savage" and "primitive" other from the viewpoint of their own "civilization." In the case of the Philippines, which had been a colony of first Spain and then the United States, there was a tendency to seek out a self-image predating the Spanish arrival in the traditional cultures of the regions that had escaped Spanish domination. This search for the "pure image" overlaps with the European stance, embodied by Gauguin, of seeking out the pure, savage spirit that was lost to civilization, but Ushiroshōji states that the search for a self-image on top of this was unique to the Philippines. What is remarkable about the Bali field trip of the four big painters of Singapore—Liu Kang, Cheong Soo Pieng, Chen Wen Hsi and Chen Chong Swee—is that it became an attempt to discover a "homeland" in the Nanyang region, which was marginal in relation to both the West and to China. That is, even as they sought out the savage other, they were also searching for their selves, as well as a new homeland. Amid the movements to establish new multiethnic, multicultural nation-states in the countries of Southeast Asia, there was a demand for the formation of national identity. Ushiroshōji argues that the unique issues of Southeast Asian modern art lie in this unification of self and other, whereby the discovery of the "savage" could also become the discovery of the "nation."

[KK]

Source: Originally published as "Ushinawareta muku na watashi" to iu tasha—Tōnan Ajia bijutsu ni okeru Gōgyanzumū" in "Ajia bijutsu teki 'kindai'" [Modernism in Asian Art], special issue of *Bijutsu Forum 21* 21(2010): 50–56. Translated from the Japanese for this publication by Andrew Maerke, 2016.

Introduction: The Brown Skinned Madonna

The painting depicts a mother holding an infant in her arms [fig.01](#). Around the pair can be seen tropical-looking vegetation. Both mother and child have brown skin, and someone familiar with ethnic dress might be able to tell by their clothes that they are from the Philippines. Looking closer, one sees the halos of light above their heads, indicating that they are the Madonna and child. In the Madonna's hand there is a banana leaf upon which is inscribed, alongside signature and date, the phrase, "Binabati Kita Maria." This is the Tagalog for "Ave Maria," but in fact the artist translated the words from the Tahitian, "la Orana Maria."

For anyone with knowledge of Western art, these Tahitian words recall Gauguin's famous painting of the same name. Painted by an artist who had tired of Western civilization and was seeking the brilliance of "wild" vitality in the South Pacific, the painting incited controversy in European Christian society for its depiction of a Tahitian mother and child as the Madonna and child [fig.02](#).⁰¹ It was Galo Ocampo, one of the pioneers of a Philippine modern art that was still in its nascent stages, who adapted Gauguin's painting to depict the Madonna as a Filipino woman.

Ocampo painted his *Brown Madonna* (University of Santo Tomas Art Museum) in 1938. Attacked by critics who believed the Madonna must be a white woman, Ocampo is said to have retorted: "Raphael ... used [a] local maiden as his model for the Madonna. So why not the Filipina for the Madonna?" At the same time, he added, "I am, above all else, a Filipino painter. I express myself in the culture of which I am a part, and I am proud of it."⁰²

One senses in Ocampo's emphasis on and pride in his own identity as a "Filipino painter" the nationalistic spirit of an artist living in an American colony, and it is on this point that he differs from Gauguin even as he references him.

The Birth of Modern Art and the Different Aspects of Gauguin's Reception in Southeast Asia

Influenced by European modernism, Southeast Asian modern art first began stirring to life in the 1930s, when almost the entire region was under the control of the Euro-American Great Powers. There are differences between countries and regions, but this was a time when things like rigid academicism, simplistic naturalism and paintings of idealized, exotic tropical landscapes were being criticized, while inherent self-expression and the autonomy of painting started to be consciously pursued and artist groups and art schools linked by a common purpose were formed against the backdrop of rising nationalism.

After a hiatus caused by World War II and the Japanese occupation of the 1940s, followed by the chaos of postwar independence, the seeds

laid in the 1930s would truly bear fruit in the 1950s. In this early period of Southeast Asian modern art spanning from the 1930s to the 1950s, one of the Western artists who was explicitly referenced by Southeast Asian artists was Paul Gauguin, who had gone to Tahiti in search of the "noble savage." The world of Gauguin's painting became a paradigm for the pioneering generation of Southeast Asian modern painters confronting the challenge of what and how to paint.

This reveals not only the problems of early Southeast Asian modern art's absorption of a single Western artist's style and motifs, but also the complex issues faced by Southeast Asian painters in the context of national identity formation. The reception of Gauguin in Southeast Asian modern art can be seen across the region, but first we should consider the case of the Philippines.

Indigenous Madonna and the Triumvirate of Modern Art

The Philippines was ruled as a colony by Spain for over 300 years. In contrast to the colonial administrations of the British and Dutch East India companies in other Southeast Asian countries, in the Philippines the Spanish carried out colonial rule by building churches across the land and converting the indigenous people to Christianity. For the Filipinos, Christianity had an ambivalent status as both an object of devout faith and at the same time a symbol of colonial rule itself.

Amid rising nationalism, the Philippines briefly established independence at the end of the 19th century, only to undergo another half-century of subjugation by the United States. During the early 20th-century American era, artists like Fernando Amoroso and his followers reached their height in the 1920s [fig.03](#). Employing an impressionistic *plein-air* aesthetic, they achieved tremendous popularity by exoticizing and idealizing as a southern paradise the local scenes and women of the Philippines, along with its rural landscapes. This was just the thing to meet the desires of the colonial ruling class, as well as those of tourists from the United States.

It was at the end of the 1920s that the man who would be revered as the "father of Filipino modern art," Victorio Edades, returned home from studying in the United States, and held a solo exhibition in Manila to show off his overseas achievements. Among the works on display was *The Builders* (1928, Cultural Center of the Philippines [fig.04](#)), considered a



fig.04

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Peggy Vance notes that, until 1951, the Vatican considered this work to be heretical in its depiction of a non-Western Madonna and child. See *Iwanami sekai no kyoshō: Gōgyan* [Iwanami World Masters: Gauguin] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1992), 106.

02

"Brown Madonna," in *A Portfolio of 60 Philippine Art Masterpieces* (Manila: Department of Education Culture and Sports, 1986), 93–96.



fig.01



fig.02



fig.03

fig.01

Galo Ocampo, *Binabati Kita Maria* (Brown Madonna), 1938, Collection University of Santo Tomas Museum, Manila.

fig.02

Paul Gauguin, *la Orana Maria*, 1891, Collection Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

fig.03

Fernando Amoroso, *Women Bathers*, 1933, Collection Central Bank of the Philippines (from *Art Philippines*, Manila: The Crucible Workshop, 1992).

fig.04

Victorio Edades, *The Builders*, 1928, Collection Cultural Center of the Philippines, Manila (from *The Birth of Modern Art in Southeast Asia: Artists and Movements*, exh. cat., Fukuoka: Fukuoka Art Museum, 1997).

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Ibid.

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Santiago Pilar states that *Brown Madonna*, which depicts Mary and Jesus standing before a local house, surrounded by native plants and wearing Filipino dress, was chosen for the cover because of the artist's indigenization or, in other words, Orientalization of the subject matter. Santiago A. Pilar, "The Visual Arts (1941–1945): Orientalism and the Longer War," in *Panahon ng Hapon: Sining sa Digmaan, Digmaan sa Sining* (Manila: Sentrong Pangkultura ng Pilipinas, 1992), 152.

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See Redza Piyadasa, "The Development of Early Modern Art in Malaysia and Singapore (1920–60)," in *The Birth of Modern Art in Southeast Asia: Artists and Movements* (Fukuoka: Fukuoka Art Museum, 1997), 229–233.

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From an interview by the author with Yeo Hwee Bin, February 26, 1995. See also Yeo Mang Thong, *Xinjiapo zhan qian huaren meishu shi lun ji* [Essays on the History of Prewar Chinese Painting in Singapore] (Singapore: Xinjiapo Yazhou Yanjiu Xuehui, 1992).

landmark in the development of modern art in the Philippines. The work was modern in its pursuit of a more autonomous form, and in terms of subject matter, too, it depicted neither the coquettish females nor the sedate and romantic pastorals so often found in Amorsolo-style paintings, but rather the labor of the workers constructing the city—a city which, in 1920s Manila, was actually starting to emerge in the form of modern buildings rising up from the countryside.

Edades was frequently commissioned to paint murals for such modern (mainly Art Deco) buildings. He vigorously took up these commissions with the assistance of two young graduates from the University of the Philippines, Galo Ocampo and Carlos "Botong" Francisco. The three would come to be known as the "triumvirate" of modern art, and, far from working as a master and his assistants, they developed a collaborative practice. Gauguin was their "lodestar," and they are said to have "admired his bold use of color and surface."⁰³ The triumvirate painted murals in a style that complemented the Art Deco architecture in which they primarily worked. The source of that bold flatness and decorativeness can certainly be found in Gauguin.

It is unfortunate that almost all the triumvirate's murals were destroyed in the chaos of the war in the Pacific, and can no longer be seen. But in the one remaining work, *Interaction/Mother Nature's Bounty Harvest* (1935, private collection [fig.05](#)), the influence of Gauguin's masterpiece, *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* (1897–98, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston [fig.06](#)), is clearly evident. More than a stylistic influence, one can see the effect of Gauguin's symbolic language. However, where Gauguin's work poses philosophical "questions" about human existence, the triumvirate's work differs in that one finds in it more an expression of gratitude and admiration for the blessings of the natural cycle, rather than questions.

And so the "indigenous Madonna" painted by Galo Ocampo was a replacement of the Amorsolo-style sweet and exotic female figure—the coquettish woman, favored by foreigners, which had been the mainstream at the start of the 20th century—with the Philippines' own Madonna. This motif would become the emblem of young artists seeking to create a new art. Within the next year, H.R. Ocampo would paint his own variation, *Madonna of the Well* (1939, Paulino Que Collection [fig.07](#)). After the war, another leading figure in Philippine modern art, Vicente Manansala, used a Cubist approach to portray a mother and child from a Manila slum in *Madonna of the Slums* (1950, private collection [fig.08](#)). Here, without any halo, the figure is not explicitly identified as the Madonna. But picking up where Galo Ocampo's version left off, an ordinary mother and child from the slums are made synonymous with the Madonna and child in this painting.

In this way, the "indigenous Madonna," with all its variants, became one of the defining

themes of Filipino modern art. Moreover, during the Japanese occupation, *Brown Madonna* would be reappraised from the pro-Asian perspective of the military administration, and given new significance as a symbol of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere through its placement on the cover of the magazine *Shin Seiki* [New Century, vol. II, no. 6, December 1943] [fig.09](#), [04](#)

The Prewar Straits Settlements: Tchang Ju Chi and Yong Mun Sen

Gauguin was a paradigm for artists in prewar Singapore and Penang, too. Since the British colonial government prioritized economic gains, respected traditional culture, and clearly stipulated (in the Pangkor Treaty of 1874) that there would be no interference in local religion and customs, there were no "art" activities taking place in the Malay Peninsula in the modern sense of the word ⁰⁵. This point differs from the Philippines, which quickly took up the "local production" of Christian art. In terms of art, there was only the traditional calligraphy produced by the overseas Chinese in the British Straits Settlements (Penang, Malacca and Singapore).

But, entering the 1930s, art activity began to flourish with the appearance of mainland Chinese painters seeking to escape the chaos of the Sino-Japanese War, and the return of artists from study abroad in Shanghai. Moreover, major mainland painters like Xu Beihong and Liu Haisu held exhibitions on their frequent trips south to raise funds in support of the anti-Japanese resistance movement. ⁰⁶ It was at this time that the Singapore Society of Chinese Artists was formed, and the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts established for the purpose of educating subsequent generations of overseas Chinese.

As the chairman of the Singapore Society of Chinese Artists, Tchang Ju Chi was a leading figure in the prewar Singaporean art scene. The composition of his *Return from Harvest* (c. late 1930s, location unknown [fig.10](#)), with a pair of women in ethnic dress dominating the foreground, recalls works by Gauguin (for example, *Two Tahitian Women*, 1899, Metropolitan Museum of Art [fig.11](#)). Although the style is naturalistic, the composition and motif could be said to follow Gauguin. Another work by the same artist, *Malaysian Women* (1930s, location unknown [fig.12](#)), evokes Gauguin's *Tahitian Women* (1891, Musée d'Orsay [fig.13](#)), with the clothes and/or figures in Gauguin's painting apparently transposed from left to right. This work also feels stylistically close to Gauguin.

Having left China to study in France, Tchang Ju Chi was unable to return home due to the Sino-Japanese War, and ended up settling in Singapore. In this British Straits Settlement, he painted the Malays from the perspective of an overseas Chinese person encountering a foreign culture. Although here it could be said that he followed Gauguin in depicting the "savage" or "primitive"—that is, the

Other—while positioning himself on the side of “civilization,” there is no sense in his work of exoticizing excess or sexualization. Instead of passive recipients of the gaze, the women here appear as strong-willed agents, with a more prominent presence than the figures in Gauguin’s work.

As in Singapore, a group promoting modern art was also established in Penang, the Penang Chinese Art Club. One of the core members, Yong Mun Sen, was also a member of the Singapore Society of Chinese Artists, and kept in contact with the painters in Singapore. His works also make frequent reference to Gauguin. Although the themes are different, his *Rest* (1941 [fig.14](#)) clearly references Gauguin’s *Te Tamari No Atua* (*The Birth of Christ*) (1896, Neue Pinakothek, Munich), illustrating the power of Gauguin’s influence. Even where it is not so obvious, there are many other works that evoke Gauguin in motif and composition. Like Tchang Ju Chi, Yong Mun Sen painted Malays instead of his fellow Chinese, and, in light of the traditional hierarchy between Chinese and barbarians, his stance of painting people on the margins of Chinese civilization has some overlaps with Gauguin.

It is of course no coincidence that these two leading painters in Singapore and Penang should both have an interest in Gauguin during this period. This would be more clearly recognized as a topic to address by the post-independence painters—by which time Tchang Ju Chi had already died in Changi concentration camp during the Japanese army’s Sook Ching extermination campaign—but this is something for later discussion.

The “Savage” as Image of the Lost Pure Self

Although they were relatively few in number, Victorio Edades, the center of the Philippines’ triumvirate of modern art, also made works of his own referencing Gauguin. In its pairing of a seated female figure with another reclining figure, *Two Igorot Women* (1940, the Vargas Museum and Filipiniana Research Center, the University of the Philippines [fig.15](#)) recalls Gauguin’s *Aha Oe Feii* (1892, Pushkin Museum). Aside from the surface expression of its color fields and its simple forms, the work also mirrors Gauguin’s attitude in its depiction of people who appear marginal in relation to the mainstream—in this case, the Igorot minorities living in the highlands of Luzon. But, neither looking for sensuality in the “savage” like Amorsolo, nor attempting to capture the brilliance of wild vitality like Gauguin, this work seems to be driven more than anything by formal concerns.

In a place that had experienced over three centuries as a Spanish colony, followed by another half-century under American rule, the root question was, where was the “original Philippines,” free of foreign influence? In general, the borders of the Southeast Asian countries that achieved independence after World War II were determined by the framework of the colonial rule of the Euro-American



fig.05

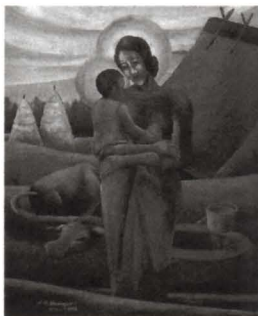


fig.07



fig.10

fig.05

Carlos Francisco, Galo Ocampo, Victorio Edades, *Interaction/Mother Nature's Bounty Harvest*, 1935, Private Collection (from *Modernity and Beyond*, exh. cat., Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 1996).

fig.06

Paul Gauguin, *Where Do Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?*, 1897–98, Collection Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

fig.07

H.R. Ocampo, *Madonna of the Well*, 1939, Collection Mr. and Mrs. Paulino Que, Manila (from *The Birth of Modern Art in Southeast Asia*, 1997).



fig.06



fig.08

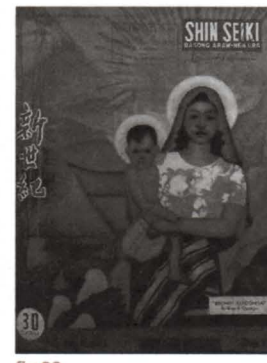


fig.09



fig.11



fig.12

fig.08

Vicente Manansala, *Madonna of the Slums*, 1950, Private Collection (from *Art Philippines*, 1992).

fig.09

Ocampo's *Brown Madonna* on the cover of *Shin Seiki* (New Century), vol. II, no. 6 (December 1943), Collection Lopez Museum & Library, Manila.

fig.10

Tchang Ju Chi, *Return from Harvest*, late 1930s, location unknown (from *Nanyang 1950–65: Passage to Singapore Art*, exh. cat., Fukuoka: Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, 2002).

fig.11

Paul Gauguin, *Two Tahitian Women*, 1899, Collection Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

fig.12

Tchang Ju Chi, *Malaysian Women*, c.1930s, location unknown (from *Zhonghua meishu yanjiuhui shuhua ji: Qingzhu chengli wu shi wu zhounian jinian* [In Commemoration of the 55th Anniversary: The Society of Chinese Artists], Singapore: The Society of Chinese Artists, 1990).

Great Powers from the 19th century onwards. In the Philippines, which had never been nationally unified before Spanish colonization (the name itself comes from the then-Prince Philip of Spain), there was a tendency to seek an originary self-image that pre-dated the Spanish period in the traditional cultures of the regions that had escaped Spanish domination.

Even though the “authentic Philippines” and



fig. 13



fig. 14



fig. 15

fig. 13
Paul Gauguin, *Tahitian Women*, 1891,
Collection Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

fig. 14
Yong Mun Sen, *Rest*, 1941 (from *Social
Responsibility in Art Criticism*, Bellisa Row,
Pulau Tikus: The Art Gallery, 1998).

fig. 15
Victoria Edades, *Two Igorot Women*,
1940, Collection Vargas Museum and
Filipiniana Research Center, University of
the Philippines, Manila.

07

As quoted in Rawanchaikul Toshiko,
"Nanyang 1950–65: Passage to
Singaporean Art," in *Modern Artists
II—Nanyang 1950–65: Passage to
Singaporean Art*, exh. cat. (Fukuoka:
Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, 2002).

08

For more on this point, see Rawanchaikul
Toshiko's "Nanyang bijutsu kō: 'Tasha'
saishisan to 'jiko' no kakutoku" [Theory
of Nanyang Art: The Reproduction of the
"Other" and the Acquisition of the "Self"]
in *De Arte*, no. 17 (2001), in addition to the
citation above.

09

Lim Hak Tai, "Juan shou yu" [Foreword],
in *Nanyang meishu zhuanke xuexiao
huakan* [Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts
Pictorial], vol. 1 (Singapore: Nanyang
Academy of Fine Arts, 1951). As cited in
the original Chinese in Rawanchaikul,
"Theory of Nanyang Art," 86.

the "pure Filipino untainted by outside influence" were themselves fantasies, there was an urgent desire to seek them out. Called "highlanders," the Igorot were a minority group living in the inaccessible mountain regions of northern Luzon, and they put up continuous resistance to Spanish rule. Edades, for his part, was an urban elite who had studied in the United States, and he depicted these minorities and savage others from a fairly Westernized perspective. But at the same time they also represented his lost, pure self. Here we can see the ambiguous position of the colonial elite.

This in a sense overlaps with what the Europeans had sought in the South Pacific from the 18th century onwards—the image of the pure savage that had been lost to advanced civilization and which represented, from the progressivist viewpoint, a stage of pre-civilization—but that it should also become a search for one's own lost self was an issue particular to the Philippines. Just as Edades focused on the ethnic minorities of his own country, the discovery of nearby savages—or at least the reevaluation of such savages—was another instance of Gauguin's reception in Southeast Asian modern art. Its significance would change in this sense as a result of the political transformations following World War II. Of particular note on this point is the so-called "Bali field trip" of the "four leading artists" of Singapore.

Did the "Four Leading Artists" Find Anything in Bali?

In 1952, the four Singaporean painters Liu Kang, Cheong Soo Pieng, Chen Wen Hsi and Chen Chong Swee set off for the Indonesian island of Bali in search of "Nanyang-ness." According to Liu Kang, the trip was inspired by Gauguin. He recounted, "There were two places we desperately wanted to visit at the time. One was the capital of our homeland, Beijing, where a lot of traditional culture and historic sites remained. The other was Tahiti, where Gauguin spent his late years and made his tropical works. But the political situation in China was no good, nor did we have any way of traveling to Tahiti. So Bali was the replacement for Beijing and Tahiti. The customs and old buildings and dance and music of Bali were very charming, and full of Nanyang atmosphere. We were also able to paint female nudes."⁰⁷

Even as they went there in search of refined traditions, they were also looking for savage power, and vigorously applied themselves to making works. A number of works that would go on to define Singaporean modern art were produced in Bali, among them Liu Kang's *Mask* (1953, private collection) and Chen Chong Swee's *Balinese Women* (1952, Singapore Art Museum). This was exactly the same thing Gauguin did as a "civilized" person seeking primitive, savage vitality in the South Pacific. Replicating the structure by which China or Asia was the savage as viewed from Europe, the "four leading artists" positioned themselves within the center of Chinese civilization and reproduced a

Gauguin-style othering, as it were, by discovering their own savages, along with themselves.⁰⁸

Following this there were repeated attempts at making field trips into "primitive lands" by the "four leading artists," as well as by young artists like those in the "Ten Men Art Group." In these instances, it was not just that new "savages" were discovered and turned into paintings; there was at the same time a search for Asian traditions and the origins of Asian culture. Among the four leading painters, Liu Kang was the most affected by Bali, but Cheong Soo Pieng also went to Sabah and Sarawak in northern Borneo (Kalimantan, now East Malaysia) to discover a new kind of "savage." In *Iban Girls* (1953, Shell Singapore Collection [fig. 16](#)), which was painted there, and *Balinese Girls* (1954, Shell Singapore Collection [fig. 17](#)), the theme of pairs of seated women in ethnic dress indicates Gauguin's influence, but the residue of naturalism that can be found in Gauguin is no longer apparent, resulting in decorative and formalistic works with a strong awareness of the flatness of painting. In light of this experience, Cheong Soo Pieng's attention, which had sought out the "savage" in "Nanyang," would eventually return to Malay themes.

Behind the Reception of Gauguin: The Birth of a Nation

This visualization of the other by Southeast Asian modern artists might appear to reproduce the repressive structures that the West employed against Asia, but there are specific historical and regional issues behind this phenomenon—issues that are deeply connected to the establishment of nation-states and the formation of national identities by multiethnic, multicultural societies in the wake of the colonial system.

The context for the Bali field trip of the four leading painters can be seen in a series of statements by Lim Hak Tai, who in 1938 established the first educational institution for art in prewar Singapore, the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts. The "Nanyang" in the school name refers specifically to Singapore, but also more broadly to the island and coastal areas of Southeast Asia. Historically, the word had referred to southern China, but its definition broadened as more Chinese emigrated to Southeast Asia. As suggested by its literal meaning, "South Seas," Nanyang is defined as a (southern) margin in relation to the center, based on Chinese ideology and the Chinese–barbarian hierarchy. Seeking to reverse the doubly alienated position of the Straits Settlement of Singapore—which as part of Asia was marginal to the West, and as part of Nanyang was also marginal to China—and turn the demerit of distance from the cultural center into a merit, Lim called for the creation of a new axis of culture, one that would provide an alternative to both East and West.

Lim argued, "Nanyang, or specifically,