

**WestminsterResearch**

<http://www.westminster.ac.uk/westminsterresearch>

**To be present with what we cannot see: Curating as a dialogical practice**

**Butt, Z.**

This is a PhD by published work awarded by the University of Westminster.

© Miss Zoe Butt, 2023.

<https://doi.org/10.34737/w627y>

The WestminsterResearch online digital archive at the University of Westminster aims to make the research output of the University available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the authors and/or copyright owners.



after darkness

southeast asian art in the wake of history

**after darkness**  
**southeast asian art in the wake of history**

Edited by  
Boon Hui Tan and Michelle Yun

With contributions by  
Aye Ko  
Zoe Butt  
Mella Jaarsma  
and  
Alia Swastika

Asia Society Museum

## Contents

<b>President's Foreword</b>	6
Josette Sheeran	
<b>Director's Preface</b>	7
Boon Hui Tan	
<b>Exhibition Funders and Lenders</b>	9
<b>Note to the Reader</b>	9
<b>After Darkness: The Perils and Promises of Art in Post-Transition Societies</b>	10
Boon Hui Tan and Michelle Yun	
<b>Post-Tradition, Imitative Institutionalization: Southeast Asian Developments as a Geopolitical Idea in Global Contemporary Art</b>	26
Alia Swastika	
<b>The Local Context and Visual Arts in Indonesia</b>	38
Mella Jaarsma	
<b>Enclosed Room</b>	52
Aye Ko	
<b>The Collective Development of Contemporary Art in Vietnam</b>	64
<b>A Critical <i>Struggle</i> to be Independent</b>	
Zoe Butt	
<b>Works in the Exhibition</b>	74
FX Harsono	
Angki Purbandono	
Tintin Wulia	
Htein Lin	
Nge Lay	
Dinh Q. Lê	
The Propeller Group	
Nguyen Thi Thanh Mai	
<b>Timeline</b>	131
<b>Selected Readings</b>	138
<b>Artist Biographies</b>	140
<b>Photography Credits</b>	144

# The Collective Development of Contemporary Art in Vietnam

## A Critical *Struggle* to be Independent

Zoe Butt

Artistic Director, The  
Factory Contemporary  
Arts Centre (formerly  
Executive Director and  
Curator, Sàn Art)

An exploration of Sàn Art's contribution to the development of a contemporary art infrastructure in Vietnam is, I think, more pertinently articulated as a continuing and critical socio-political *struggle*. The development of contemporary art in Vietnam continues today as a collective endeavor of resilience, kindled by friendships, and driven independently and passionately by artists, for artists, with artists. Thirty years since the economic reforms of *Đổi Mới* were introduced—the goal of which were to create a socialist-oriented market economy—and over forty years since the country was violently united under communism, the ability to experiment with and challenge the Vietnamese government's aesthetic regime requires an intricate balancing act: one must navigate its ambiguously defined laws and guidelines while courting a bureaucracy whose measure of approval is dictated by suspicion and personal gain. Despite this corrupt and negligibly ideological system of control, collaborative contemporary art forms in Vietnam continue to thrive within grassroots artist collectives beyond the government-approved commercial art market. In a local landscape devoid of venues for experimental art forms and faced with a languishing art education system, and not to forget the lack of public and private support, Vietnamese artists deserve respect for their commitment and belief in the power of and necessity for culture to be fluid, in flux, and ultimately to reflect the reality of their world. For the purpose of constructive debate, “contemporary art” will be defined as artistic production that reflects, challenges, and experiments with the tools and concepts generated in response to the current reality in which an artist lives and works. To understand why such a definition would not spark public debate in Vietnam—given that the display of contemporary art typically is subjected to government scrutiny across the country—we need to dig deeper into the history of this context.

### The Journey

In 2001 artist Tran Luong organized a “creative camp,” inviting eleven artists from his group of friends based in Hanoi for a two-week stay in Quang Ninh Province to work with and observe its coal miners. Through interviews and music, Tran documented this experience on video, providing a glimpse of the contrast between the optimistic spirit



of the workers and their impoverished living conditions. The resulting film reveals the different social attitudes of the artists and workers as they interact with each other under- and aboveground in an environment of little comfort, of which much of the public is unaware within the new order of Vietnam. Tran Luong has stated, “After the war, government-subsidized field trips on social care were more or less picnics for lazy artists. . . . [C]alled ‘field trips,’ they were no different from sitting in the artists’ studios, making up the works because ‘reality’ was censored. Almost all works were optimistic and the true breath of life was not reflected in art and culture.”<sup>1</sup> The work by Tran, titled *Mao Khe Coal Mine project* (2001–14), was one of the first experiments in Vietnam using video as an artistic tool (fig. 21). The artist’s approach to the documentary genre stood apart from the typical teleology of cinema at that time. Tran was part of an influential circle of artists who, in the late 1990s, helped carve out space for the growth of independent forms of artistic expression, or contemporary art, particularly through his co-founding of Nha San Duc, the first experimental art collective in Hanoi, in 1998.

The emergence of a fine art form in Vietnam began under French occupation when the *École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts d’Indochine* was founded in Hanoi in 1925. The traditional crafts of lacquer and silk were taught alongside the graphic arts of printmaking and illustration, in addition to the conventions of the plastic mediums of painting and sculpture. Prior to the successful defeat of the French in the Battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, artists were hired as illustrators for various independent publishing houses and were increasingly engaged in dialogue with European art movements. In the wake of colonial control, a newly independent Vietnam rode a wave of nationalism that was soon colored by communism, its artists becoming propagandist soldiers of the regime. The arts education system combined the inherited and institutionalized techniques of the plastic arts with communist doctrine, thereby embracing a social realism that denounced depictions of nudity, religion, and abstraction, and with it any artistic expression that challenged the government’s narrative of history

Fig. 21. Tran Luong. *Mao Khe Coal Mine Project*, 2001–14. Two-channel video with sound. Duration: 18 minutes 41 seconds.

and its systems of control. In essence, any form of experimentation with concepts and mediums was deemed an exploration of an independent spirit and this, above all, was deemed counterproductive to the realization of a unified Vietnam. By the early 2000s, as Tran Luong so eloquently described, such governmental dictation of approved artistic production had changed little, save for the fact that the depiction of the “real” world now increasingly served the financial interests of those permitted to deal with and sell to tourists.

This fragmentation of artistic motivations from ideological purpose to commercial output was in large part a result of *Doi Moi*, the economic reforms of 1986 that helped open up Vietnamese trade to foreign markets. With the influx of new technologies, popular media, and entrepreneurial relationships came a rise in tourism and a steady trickle of foreign curators, artists, and collectors, and inevitably the emergence of a commercial art scene. Reputable gallerists such as Suzanne Lecht (Art Vietnam Gallery in Hanoi) and Quynh Pham (Galerie Quynh in Ho Chi Minh City) were the key players engaged in a dialogue on contemporary Vietnamese art with both local and foreign collectors. It was a group of artists in Hanoi, however, that led the way for independent, and therefore contemporary, forms of artistic expression in the mid to late 1990s: Tran Luong and Nguyen Manh Duc (Nha San Duc); Vu Dan Tan and Natalia Kraevskaia (Salon Natasha); and Tran Luong, Dang Xuan Hoa, Hong Viet Dung, Ha Tri Hieu, and Pham Quang Vinh as the Gang of Five who claimed that their passion for art was intrinsic to their nature and they were driven to experiment. They led the exploration into artistic territory—in concept and technique—beyond what was officially permitted and available for purchase, and were inspired by contexts beyond their lived geography.<sup>2</sup>

When asked what motivated Nguyen Manh Duc to co-found Nha San Duc, he recalled an early artwork of Tran Luong: “I found it liberating, and realized that my thoughts and imagination weren’t limited to an existing framework.”<sup>3</sup> Nha San Duc was founded in Nguyen’s family home, a wooden house on stilts typical of Muong-ethnic minority homes, which was located in the outer suburbs of Hanoi, and it came to be a sanctuary for artists to play and test their ideas in relative freedom from restraint. Documentary footage of Nha San Duc’s activities in its first ten years of operation reveals just how diverse its audiences soon came to be, with gatherings of artists, composers, writers, musicians, and others, often held in a room lined with wooden Buddhist statuary (fig. 22), while the floor below became a flexible exhibition space that introduced what are now recognized as some of the most influential art projects that became the foundation of a contemporary art language in Vietnam. The first ten years of Nha San Duc were sustained by the spirit of generosity in that the gallery was financially dependent on the personal contributions of its artists. Exhibitions,



Fig. 22. The guest room of Nha San Duc, where Mr. Duc displays his antique collection, Hanoi, 2012.

performances, talks, and gatherings followed a loose and flexible schedule. Audiences were largely composed of the art community of Hanoi, though artists from across the country avidly followed the projects that stirred up controversy with the authorities.<sup>4</sup>

It is important not to forget that the journey of this struggle toward contemporary art is a complex tale, characterized by the uniquely different sociopolitical circumstances of North and South Vietnam. When artist Dinh Q. Lê returned to live in Vietnam in 1996—Lê had fled his hometown of Ha Tien in South Vietnam in 1978 with his family when he was eleven years old as a consequence of Khmer Rouge infiltration and the Viet Cong—he settled in Ho Chi Minh City. Lê was in awe of local artists in this city who “continued to create, even in a country where humid libraries without Wi-Fi access offered little glimpse of the world after 1954, and travel demanded so many queues, stamps, and seals that any hope of exploration beyond the borders was quickly extinguished by red tape.”<sup>5</sup> Ho Chi Minh City, previously known as Saigon, was considered the poor cultural brother compared to the northern national capital of Hanoi. The Saigon intelligentsia had mostly fled the communist regime in 1975, and the subsequent artistic landscape of the city suffered from a lack of foreign diplomatic funds and spaces supporting artistic experimentation. It was the establishment of Blue Space Contemporary Arts Center in 1997 by Tran Thi Huynh Nga that arguably activated and connected the artists of the South.<sup>6</sup> It was the first space of its kind in Ho Chi Minh City to independently showcase regional forms of art in Southeast Asia, particularly the art of the *Viet Kieu*, or overseas Vietnamese. Situated on the grounds of the Ho Chi Minh City Fine Arts Museum, it quickly became a beacon for emerging Vietnamese artists, especially those whose aspirations were not supported by the government’s communist-modeled Fine Arts Association, previously the only organization where graduating artists sought to show their work.

It was upon visiting both Blue Space Contemporary Arts Center and Nha San Duc in those early years of Lê’s return that he keenly felt the need for artistic camaraderie in his new locale. Critically aware that his status as a *Viet Kieu*—at the time this term for overseas Vietnamese had a derogative connotation, implying that they were

traitors—was a particularly alienating and awkward social identity with which his new home did not know how to reconcile. Such an image was made all the more problematic due to the government’s suspicions of Viet Kieu engagement with the local fabric, fearing their ability to stir social unrest. Previous artistic collaborations between foreign Viet Kieu and local artists had resulted in such collectives as a little blah blah and Wonderful District, whose activities focused on discreet, irregularly scheduled programs of artistic interaction and display. Aware and perhaps motivated by these earlier models, as well as alarmed by how few resources on the comparative history of art were available at the time, Lê’s initial ambition was to build a reading room on contemporary art. However, Lê frustratingly as a Viet Kieu could not find any local university willing to collaborate with him, thus prompting his realization that the only way to connect to his community was by initiating the project independently.

In order to address the difficulty in securing financial support for artistic production within Vietnam, Lê cofounded the Vietnam Foundation for the Arts (VNFA) in Los Angeles in 2006, a not-for-profit organization that raised the necessary funds to facilitate education about contemporary art and the exchange of ideas in and about Vietnam.<sup>7</sup> A year later, with funds that were raised via VNFA, Lê cofounded Sàn Art with fellow Viet Kieu artists based in Ho Chi Minh City—Tuan Andrew Nguyen, Tiffany Chung, and Phunam Thuc Ha. Sàn, meaning “platform” in Vietnamese, began as a little store-front space in District 1, comprising a small gallery and reading room. Such a dedicated publicly accessible exhibition space for a grass-root artist collective was unique at that time. Locally registered as a small family business—nonprofit status for cultural organizations still does not exist in Vietnam—Sàn Art was the first artist-initiated entity in the country to officially legalize its activities and employ staff. Prior to Sàn Art’s founding, most grass-root activity took place underground, that is, artists avoided seeking official government approval for their programs. Sàn Art opened on October 3, 2007, and began a journey of engaging and provoking local artists to explore the definition and potential of contemporary art (fig. 23). The founders quickly learned the intricacies of what was then called the Ministry of Culture, Sport, and Tourism and the Cultural Police: the personalities of the various officials, the inconsistent and arduous approval system and its paperwork, and the advantages and



Fig. 23. Inaugural opening of Sàn Art on Ly Tu Trong Street in District 1 of Ho Chi Minh City on October 3, 2007.

disadvantages of the government not having guidelines for perceiving and defining contemporary culture. The founders of Sàn Art were determined to abide by what would become the organization's contentious governing policy of refusing to engage in bribery. The Sàn Art founders believed that in order to affect change in the government's lack of understanding and suspicion of contemporary art in society, artists and cultural producers would have to try to engage, and thus educate, the officials in the system. This organizational stance would have significant impact on its sustainable operations in the following years.

In contrast to other artist collective activities in Vietnam taking place at the time of its founding, Sàn Art was the first to deliver curated exhibitions showcasing the work of local and foreign contemporary artists. It was also importantly *not* a space in which the founders sought to show their own work (unlike most other artist collectives in Vietnam that primarily showcased the work of members). During its first year, exhibitions at Sàn Art were curated by its founders on an alternating basis, with a roster of predominantly local artists. Educational programs featured visiting artists and curators willing to donate time to conduct workshops and talks on their research and work. One of the first educational programs was Ong Ken Seng's *Flying Circus* project, organized by Theatreworks, Singapore, which brought together a cross section of artists from abroad engaged in performance, theater, dance, and conceptual art. By the end of 2008, Sàn Art's meager finances could not accommodate the rise in rents in District 1 and thus the founders decided to move the reading room and gallery to a residential neighborhood across the river in District Binh Thanh. This move coincided with two other critical developments for the organization and its management. The first was organizing "Time Ligaments," an exhibition of nine contemporary Vietnamese artists for 10 Chancery Lane Gallery in Hong Kong. This was a coup for Sàn Art, for it placed contemporary Vietnamese art on the map of the Southeast Asian region, fulfilling Sàn Art's foundational desire for a more sustained and critical awareness of contemporary Vietnamese art within and beyond Vietnam. The second development was the appointment of a museum-trained curator as codirector.

Looking back at this particular juncture when the Sàn Art founders decided that Dinh Q. Lê and I would share the directorship of the organization starting in May 2009, I was enthralled by the invitation to challenge my understanding of curatorial work within an artist-run infrastructure in such a politically restrictive environment. It is in this regard that Sàn Art should be acknowledged as the first art space in Vietnam to realize and facilitate such curatorial expertise and training within its operations, a decision that would pave the way for the institutionalization of Sàn Art. In other words, this arrangement led to Sàn Art having a structure of specialized human resources for art, a professional staff who in turn could create and oversee a steady

Fig. 24. Inaugural speech by Professor Ngo Bao Chau to launch “Conscious Realities,” a program supported by a Network Partnership between Sàn Art and the Prince Claus Fund. Co-organized with Tri Viet Centre for Social and Educational Research. Hosted by University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University. August, 2013.



flow of funds and dedicate themselves to curated programming in pursuit of new audiences for art—characteristics that arguably established a set of critical standards of quality in the local community that were consistently sought in artistic production and its facilitation.

By 2011 the founders of Sàn Art were participating in many international exhibitions themselves and I thus took on the position of executive director and curator. This appointment was made possible by securing long-term sponsorship from private collectors Nicholas and Angela Curtis in Australia, whose support of Sàn Art had covered overhead costs for three years (2011–13); the ARTMON collection support of Sàn Art Laboratory<sup>8</sup> (Vietnam’s first ongoing artist-in-residency program which ran from 2012 to 2015) from 2012; and, last but not least, a Network Partnership with the Prince Claus Fund, whose support enabled “Conscious Realities,”<sup>9</sup> a three-year program, from 2013 to 2016, aimed at engaging Vietnam’s relationship with the Global South. These funding relationships, among many others, were initiated and nurtured by Sàn Art and proved essential to the rising interest in Vietnamese contemporary art, particularly from foreign collections and curators, relationships with whom Sàn Art facilitated and maintained through its local artist community. Interdisciplinary relationships between art, artists, and Vietnamese society have had a critical, and at times, controversial impact on the program development of Sàn Art, which embraces a cross section of comparative knowledge from urban planning, architecture, anthropology, bioengineering, and many other disciplines (controversial because the networking of knowledge that encourages an investigation of social history is particularly not encouraged by the Vietnamese government). It is important to note that the financial support for Sàn Art was instrumental in turning it into a networked hub providing opportunities for artists in Vietnam. Indeed I would argue that it was through providing access to expertise that Sàn Art greatly nurtured not only the critically thinking and productive artistic community, but also the audiences who attended public programs and experienced the role and function of an arts organization in contemporary life as a site of

creative reflection and provocation. Sàn Art delivered ongoing in-house curated artistic programs not found in any other institution or entity engaged with art in Vietnam.

To return to this question of the development of a contemporary art in Vietnam, while the struggle of financial sustainability cannot be underestimated as a factor that stymies artistic growth, it is not the financial limitations that ultimately affect development in Vietnam, but rather the political landscape created through censorship. In this regard, while securing foreign sponsorship of Sàn Art's activities was a blessing for its survival, it also heightened government suspicion of the growing capabilities such support enabled, particularly Sàn Art's educational mandate to engage international ideas of art and culture. The August 2013 launch of the "Conscious Realities" program, cohosted by the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam University, was celebrated with a lecture by renowned thinker Ngo Bao Chau (fig. 24). This was the first time an independent contemporary art nonprofit had organized such an official event, replete with government and community representatives of culture. While it was deemed a huge success because it rallied noted local and international colleagues around the relevancy of contemporary art and ideas to Vietnamese society, it also caused concern among the authorities as they regarded the growing ambitions of Sàn Art and its national following.

One key disadvantage to this increased visibility and institutionalization of Sàn Art's structure and activities was that our programs—our talks, artist critiques, exhibitions, and reading room—became targets for the Cultural Police. Sàn Art's activities came under increasing scrutiny, to the point that in 2015 it was forced to close its signature program, Sàn Art Laboratory. This initiative had become a center of artistic production, with artists from Vietnam and Southeast Asia communicating in new networks, nurturing friendships of trust, and ultimately building a regional consciousness that enabled Vietnamese artists in particular to learn about comparative histories (fig. 25). The government's refusal to grant licenses for the display of the video work of Nguyen Thuy Tien (Vietnam) and the performances of Ratu Rizkitasari Saraswati (Indonesia), coupled with the warning that any event with foreign attendance required a license, proved to be the final straw in Sàn Art's push to encourage experimental languages of art through this program. The institutionalization of Sàn Art also had other disadvantages in that it dismantled the possibility for artistic spontaneity and flexibility. Requests from local and foreign artists to hold impromptu events were challenging to realize due to limited human resources and to the government's licensing requirements for the majority of programs, which proved to be the most time-consuming and detrimental characteristic of realizing any public activity.

Despite the difficulties caused by the professionalization of arts facilitation and liaising with the government to administer a sustainable contemporary art organization



Fig. 25. Sàn Art Laboratory, an artist-in-residency program, was initiated, organized, and directed by Sàn Art between 2012 and 2015.

in a communist context, Sàn Art functioned as a unique platform that opened up a debate on the role of the curator in Vietnam, and thus explored the meaning and necessity of nurturing audiences for culture. While this conversation is still yet to receive official recognition within the relatively nonexistent state infrastructure for the arts in Vietnam, more and more artists in Vietnam have chosen to wear the hat of a curator in co-organizing artistic activity since the mid-1990s. Vietnam's artistic community has flourished with independent activity, particularly during the past decade, with artists as organizers and curators initiating exhibitions and establishing spaces for artists to show their work, including ZeroStation, founded by Nguyen Nhu Huy; Dia Projects, founded by Richard Streitmatter-Tran with Tran Thanh Ha as codirector; Sao La, managed by Nguyen Kim To Lan; The Factory Contemporary Arts Center, founded by Ti-A; New Space Arts Foundation, founded by Le Ngoc Thanh and Le Duc Hai; Then Cafe in Hue, founded by Tran Tuan; Manzi, founded by Bill Nguyen and Tram Vu; Six Space, founded by Le Giang; and the second generation of Nha San Duc as Nha San Collective<sup>10</sup> in Hanoi.

One of the most intriguing shifts in the development of a Vietnamese contemporary art scene in the past five years has been the growth of Ho Chi Minh City and Hue (Vietnam's ancient capital on its central coast). These two cities, largely omitted from the scholarly discussion of contemporary Vietnamese art,<sup>11</sup> have become hubs of artistic collaborations, larger, dare I say, than Hanoi. This is a significant fact, one already noticed by the Goethe-Institut and the French Institute, which will be opening their first ventures in Ho Chi Minh City in 2017. This migration of artistic activity to the South will be a challenge for the Vietnamese Ministry of Culture and Sport, whose southern departments are ill-equipped to understand, and thus approve, contemporary art. The arts educational curricula in Vietnam today have changed little since the 1950s, and in the South particularly, there is little local academic expertise on what constitutes contemporary artistic production—the rise of a conceptual drive behind a diverse array of experimental media across the country posing the most significant

conundrum for ministerial clerks, who have no training in understanding how such conceptual approaches married to social forms of enquiry can be considered an art form. No longer is the face of Vietnamese art just a decorative depiction of internal emotional struggle; today it is a rising tide of interdisciplinary engagement as artists dare to investigate and illustrate the reality put before them via multiple media.

The biggest challenge to the continued growth of Vietnamese contemporary art is securing local validity. Artists will continue the collaborative struggle to remain independent with their ideas and activities, searching for education and presentation opportunities locally and abroad, refusing to wait for their local elite to wake up to the realization that their voices are integral assets to the memory of today. It is with the private business sector and its young entrepreneurs that I personally hope governmental policy change will be pushed. It is through their collaboration with these independent artist collectives that contemporary art will hopefully gain a louder voice in Vietnam.

#### Notes

1. Unpublished interview between Hanoi researcher Le Thuan Uyen and Tran Luong, September 2016. See <http://embeddedsouths.org/mao-khe-coal-mine-project-2001-2014/>.
2. For example, Vu Dan Tan was educated in Cuba and Moscow; Tran Luong had an early interest in Chinese contemporary art; and in the late 1990s, German artist Veronika Radulovic was instrumental in introducing foreign ideas on performance and conceptual art to a small group of Hanoi artists (such as Truong Tan and Nguyen Manh Hung, et al.) in guest lectures at the Hanoi University of Fine Arts.
3. See *Nhasan15+* (01:13), a documentary video, produced by Nha San Collective, on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of Nha San Duc. See [https://youtu.be/HFxFVz\\_dYgXg](https://youtu.be/HFxFVz_dYgXg).
4. As an example, the exhibition "Uniforms" (2002) by Nguyen Manh Hung was shut down by government authorities at Nha San Duc. This was the first formal warning that the Cultural Police gave Nha San Duc, without any clear reason for its decision, though the exhibition did engage with the experiences of military personnel in Vietnam—a sensitive subject. There have been many such cases of government interference in artistic activities across the country.
5. See Zoe Butt, "Xe Om Drivers of the Mind: The Journey of San Art," in *Six Lines of Flight: Shifting Geographies in Contemporary Art*, ed. Apsara Diquinzio (San Francisco and Berkeley: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, University of California Press, 2012), 32.
6. See the Asia Art Archive collection for the digitized records from Blue Space Contemporary: <http://www.aaa.org.hk/Collection/SpecialCollections/Details/6>.
7. The Vietnam Foundation for the Arts is a 501 (c) 3 charity based in Los Angeles, cofounded by Dinh Q. Lê and one of his dealers, Wayne Blank. The initial support for the VNFA came from a small but dedicated group of collectors in support of Dinh Q. Lê.
8. Sàn Art Laboratory (2012–16) was an artist-in-residency program initiated by Sàn Art. Each session consisted of a six-month residency for three artists at a time. Initially targeting Vietnamese artists under the age of thirty-five through an open call, by 2014 it was also open to artists from Southeast Asia. Twenty-three artists participated in the program and all have gone on to become important artists across the region. For more information on Sàn Art Laboratory, see <http://san-art.org/about-2/>.
9. "Conscious Realities" (2013–16) was a series of discursive encounters that invited twenty-four guests of various cultural interdisciplinary backgrounds from South Asia, Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Africa to Ho Chi Minh City. From these lectures, workshops, an artist-in-residency program, exhibitions, and publications, specific ideas emerged questioning The Global South. For more information, see <http://san-art.org/conscious-realities/>.
10. See <http://nhasan.org>.
11. For further reading on this topic, see Nora Taylor, "Why Have There Been No Great Vietnamese Artists?" *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 44, no. 1: Vietnam Beyond the Frame, Part Two (winter 2005).

# CONSCIOUS REALITIES

*A series of discursive encounters*

Initiated and organized by Sàn Art, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Supported by a Prince Claus Fund Network Partnership, The Netherlands

Co-hosted in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam with University of Social Sciences and Humanities; Trí Việt Centre for Social and Educational Studies; Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology; Hoa Sen University.

‘Conscious Realities’ sought to stimulate creative activity in Vietnam, engaging differing ideas of contemporary artistic process.

‘Conscious Realities’ took place between 2013-2016, encompassing dialogue carried out through lectures, workshops and a residency program, inviting intellectuals, artists, writers and other cross-disciplinary culture workers to Ho Chi Minh City. This dialogue focused on the shared histories of the Global South, engaging the divergent reactions to those histories and the lessons to be learned in thinking laterally across these communities. These necessary dialogues are too often overshadowed by the vertical discourse in which cultural work from formerly colonized peoples is posited in relation to former colonial powers -- therefore ‘Conscious Realities’ imagined the primacy of lateral dialogues between South East Asia, South Asia, Latin America and Africa.

In Vietnam, there are few opportunities to engage with art historical or philosophical narratives due to a combination of lack of resources, infrastructure and strict government regulation. Despite this lack of educational access there is a growing creative community seeking knowledge and opportunity. Non-government organizations offer international pathways of knowledge exchange, and though these opportunities are valued, they largely echo colonial relations or diplomatic concerns,



*‘Conscious Realities’ is made possible by a network partnership between Sàn Art and the Prince Claus Fund*

*This report was completed in 2016.*



failing to provide an encounter with practitioners that hail from social and cultural histories analogous to the context of Vietnam. 'Conscious Realities' sought to address this lack.

In the Global South, a diverse region predominantly imagined and constructed by colonial empire, there are countless hidden histories not taught that illustrate a world of vastly different social relations and influences - the complicated journey of Indonesian batik techniques, through Dutch capital and industrialization to the markets of West Africa; or the way that Sanskrit functioned as a *lingua franca* across great parts of Asia, South East Asia and South Asia, creating a common root for widely diverse cultures. Such comparative histories illuminate and complicate the presumed borders of nation, ideas of cultural identity, the intention of history, ritual and custom, or reasons behind ethnic migration and economic trade. While acknowledging the paradox of colonial geographies, in which the very borders were tools of subjugation, 'Conscious Realities' seeks to engage creative interdisciplinary practitioners in a South-to-South relation, in an attempt to create alternate networks of knowledge exchange.

Traditional notions of center and periphery are outdated, particularly considering China and India are now global economic powerhouses; while former colonies like Angola are now providing aid and opportunities to their previous colonial powers. Thus, 'Conscious Realities' re-imagined geography as a visual/intellectual/cultural construct, seeking to define these new spaces through analysis of cultural production utilized through tropes of **mythology**, **social science** and the movement of **material resources and human ingenuity/labor**.

## PROGRAM STRUCTURE

### Encounter

Through exchange in dialogue, 'Encounter' sought the shared space of experience and expertise via lecture and informal discussion. Creative thinkers, from interdisciplinary backgrounds such as art, theory, architecture, literature, music or new media were invited to visit Ho Chi Minh City for a two week period. During this time, each thinker provided public lecture/s, sharing personal expertise and experience, in addition to two informal workshops with select participants. Participants (cross-disciplinary in study) were selected via an Open Call process across Vietnam and expected to attend all aspects of 'Encounter' each year. A local board of advisors adjudicated this Open Call and a new intake of participants were sought each year. Public lectures took place at co-host venues, while informal activities took place predominantly at San Art, or other external venue where audience numbers demanded.

*The 'Encounter' lecture series was presented in partnership with 'Trí Việt Centre for Social and Educational Studies', Ho Chi Minh City*

### Prod/Ponder

The space of production in a lived and shared environment can be one of the most dynamic and intimate forms of artistic collaboration, enabling a challenge of conceptual and technical ideas. For 'Prod/Ponder', six participants (visual artists/curators) were invited to undertake a one-month residency in Ho Chi Minh City, as part of 'Sàn Art Laboratory' – Vietnam's first homegrown studio/residency program. Each guest was expected to collaborate in some way with the artistic community in Ho Chi Minh City (eg. co-produce new work; workshop; performance; film screening etc.) with final showcase of work/ideas/challenges at Sàn Art.

### Other events

Four visual art exhibitions, one online video-art festival and one publication, were also realized in association with 'Conscious Realities', curated by San Art.

1. 'Unconditional Belief' by Art Labor
2. 'Conjuring Capital' : a group show of 6 artists
3. 'Dislocate' by Bùi Công Khánh
4. 'Sketching Vietnamese History' by Quách Phong
5. 'Embedded South(s)' : online video-art festival, featuring 30 artists and 14 hosts, from across the Global South
6. *Conscious Realities* reader : co-published with Hoa Sen University Press

### PROGRAM THEMATICS AND PARTICIPANTS

'Conscious Realities' was composed of three subject areas:

To examine the role and transformation of **mythology**, as an institutionalized form of spiritual guidance (such as Islam or Buddhism); as popularized contemporary phenomena (such as Bollywood); as a system of language constructed to signify meaning and value, exploring how creative visual vehicles utilize and reference historical narrative to speak about the complexities of contemporary life.

To examine the artistic employment of **social science** methodologies in contemporary visual culture, exploring the diverse and often traumatic impact of colonial histories, urbanization, racial formations and the consequence of ideology and armed conflict on the creation of collective memory and cultural archive.

To examine the origin and history of use of **material resource**, considering the migration of raw materials and **human ingenuity/labor** and how they have become key components employed and questioned within artistic practice. The creative innovation of natural and man-made materials as local symbol and the origin and subsequent conflict in international trade of goods (eg. coltan, a rare mineral, found in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Brazil, among others) were also artistically explored.

## **CURATORIAL ADVISORS**

**N'Gone Fall** (Curator and writer, Dakar, Senegal)

**Gridthiya Gaeweewong** (Curator; Artistic Director, Jim Thompson House, Bangkok, Thailand)

**Christopher Myers** (Artist and Writer, New York, USA)

**Hammad Naser** (Curator and Critic; Head of Research and Programs, Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong, P.R. China)

**Sharmini Periera** (Writer and Founder, Raking Leaves Publishing, Colombo, Sri Lanka)

**Jose Roca** (Curator and Co--Founder, FLORA, Bogota, Colombia; Adjunct Curator, Latin American Art, TATE Modern, London, UK)

**Kate Fowle** (Director at Large, Independent Curators International, New York)

## **GOALS & OBJECTIVES**

To create a critical platform of contemporary interdisciplinary artistic exchange in Vietnam between local, regional and international creative thinkers from South East Asia, South Asia, Latin America and Africa, encouraging awareness in Vietnam that their cultural and social histories carry great similarity with these regions.

To acknowledge that structures of value in cultural capital must be innovated, that creative producers rejuvenating historical pathways of knowledge and exchange will create new economic opportunities for the future

To use knowledge, dialogue and creative production, specifically relating to historical narratives as a crucial and constitutive part of the progress and innovation within a social community

To re-establish the primacy of creative thinking in the understanding of history, especially in contexts where archives must be read across purposes. For example in resurrecting colonial documentation to understand the lives of those for whom such documents were primarily tools of subjugation, or in contemporary politically repressive contexts, in which history itself can function as a closely guarded state secret.

To nurture the growth of an interdisciplinary creative community in Vietnam - artistic producers, facilitators and audiences - towards a more informed awareness of how individual action and innovation of concept, material and interpretation empowers meaningful change in social life

To create a new set of cultural pathways in exchange and dialogue in South East Asia, between this region and South Asia, Africa and Latin America, so as to encourage greater educational and economical ties for the betterment of cultural organization and individual growth

**\*With thanks to the following 'Encounter' workshop participants:**

2013-2014:

Archie Pizzini  
Đỗ Tường Linh  
Ed Weinberg  
Hanoi Untitled Collective (Lê Giang, Ngọc Nâu)  
Khôi Trần  
Lâm Lệ Thanh  
Lys Bui  
Phạm Diệu Quyên  
Phan Thảo Nguyên  
Phương Phan  
Quang Lâm  
Rachael Carson  
Rich Streitmatter-Tran  
Sita Raiter  
Trương Công Tùng  
Tu Mạnh Kỳ

2014-2015:

Phạm Diệu Quyên  
Lê Ngọc Chi  
Fabiola Bucheler  
Phan Trọng Nghĩa  
Nguyễn Văn Đủ  
Hoàng Minh Phúc  
Hai Minh Nguyen  
Lê Phi Long  
Jessica Lu  
Nhưng Đình  
Sita Raiter  
Rosanna Littooij  
Quyên Hoàng

## GUEST SPEAKERS / ARTISTS

### ENCOUNTER



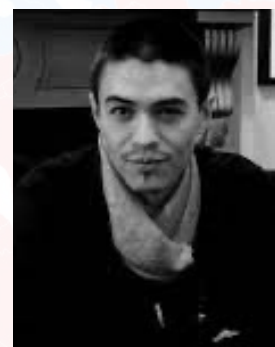
Ngô Bảo Châu



Trương Thị Kim  
Chuyên



Inrasara



David Teh



Nalini Malani



Thanés  
Wongyannava



Prasenjit  
Duara



Ute Meta Bauer



Chitra Ganesh



Kidlat Tahimik

## GUEST SPEAKERS / ARTISTS

### ENCOUNTER



Ravid Sundaram



N'Tone Edjabe



N'Gone Fall



Marco  
Kusumawijaya

## GUEST SPEAKERS / ARTISTS

### PROD/PONDER



Jompet  
Kuswinandanto



Khadim Ali



Than Sok



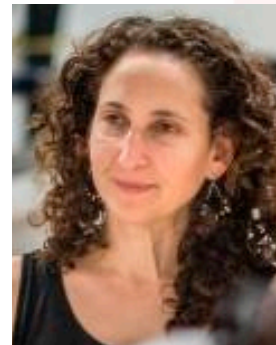
Arin Rungjang



Lena Copangbang



Adriana Bustos



Karen Fiss



Lê Giang



Art Labor

# ENCOUNTER

LECTURE AND WORKSHOP PROGRAM



## NGÔ BẢO CHÂU

Duration of stay:  
August 21, 2013



Ngô Bảo Châu is a mathematician who is best known for his proof of the Fundamental Lemma, an intricate problem in number theory. He was awarded the Fields Medal in 2010, which is generally regarded as the highest distinction in mathematics. He teaches at the University of Chicago and also serves as the scientific director of the Vietnam Institute for Advanced Study in Mathematics. He is an editor of "Inventiones Mathematicae", one of the best mathematical journals.

### Event 1 (public lecture)

*'Hidden Symmetries' - inaugural 'Encounter' lecture*

August 21, 2013 @6PM @ Auditorium D, University of Social Sciences & Humanity

Audience numbers: 503

Co-hosted with Tri Viet Center for Social & Educational Research

Translator: Chân Thiện Mỹ Translation & Consulting | Facilitator: Trà Nguyễn & Tôn Nữ Thị Ninh



Event 1: Public lecture

## NGÔ BẢO CHÂU

Professor Ngô Bảo Châu discussed the common ground between an artist and a scientist. He addressed how he perceives artists as seeking rigor in their work in a fashion equal to scientists, especially mathematicians, who similarly look for ideas of beauty. Discussing the role of perspectival composition in the development of a picture plane in art – looking at the likes of Leonardo da Vinci and Edvard Munch – Bảo Châu drew mathematical inspiration from such visual thinkers who were equally attempting to understand the world in which they lived. Ngô Bảo Châu is a celebrity and thus drew a large number of Vietnamese as audience, mostly students and young people, who admire his intelligence, achievements and critical opinions about Vietnamese politics, culture and education. The Q&A session was successfully conducted, with facilitation of Mrs. Tôn Nữ Thị Ninh from Trí Việt Center, former Vietnamese ambassador to the EU and a key figure in Vietnamese society, who advocates for innovation, creativeness and support of education and culture. An official dinner was held following this inaugural lecture, hosted by Mrs. Tôn Nữ Thị Ninh with department heads from the Vietnamese Ministries of Education; Information & Communication; Culture, Sport & Tourism. The President of the Prince Claus Fund, Ms Christa Meindersma was also in attendance with the Sàn Art Board, its staff and of course the guest of honour – Ngô Bảo Châu. This dinner was the first time Sàn Art had personally met these government department heads.

### KEY CONCEPTS DISCUSSED:

Plato's five solids; Metaphysical meaning in philosophy of five Platonic solids; Cosmos; Symmetry vs. Asymmetry; Beauty of mathematics; Symmetric perception through sub-consciousness



## UTE META BAUER

Duration of stay:  
November 2-5, 2013



Ute Meta Bauer is working as a curator of exhibitions and presentations on contemporary art, film, video, and sound, with a focus on transdisciplinary formats. Bauer was co-director with Hou Hanru of the World Biennial Forum No. 1, Gwangju, South Korea, 2012; curator of The Future Archive, Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (n.b.k.), Berlin, 2012; Artistic Director of the 3rd Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, Berlin, 2004; and Co-Curator of dOCUMENTA 11 (2001–2002). She is Associate Professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, USA where she served as the Founding Director of the Program in Art, Culture, and Technology (ACT) at MIT's School of Architecture and Planning (2009–2012) and as Director of the MIT Visual Arts Program (2005–2009). From 2012–2013 she was Dean of Fine Art at the Royal College of Art, London. Her most recent publications are World Biennale Forum No 1 – Shifting Gravity (co-edited with Hou Hanru) and AR – Artistic Research (co-edited with Thomas D. Trummer), both in 2013.



Audience giving questions to Prof. Ute Meta Bauer

## UTE META BAUER

### Event 1 (Public Lecture)

#### *'Other Knowledges'*

November 2, 2013 @ 6PM @ Room D404, University of Social Sciences & Humanity, HCMC

Co-hosted with Goethe Institut

Audience numbers: 198

Translator: Phương Nguyễn | Facilitator: Trà Nguyễn

Artistic practice has gone through significant changes in the last century. Today, the arts articulate themselves less through mastering skills, moving more towards a practice of reviewing and rewriting history as a way to reflect on today's societies through artistic expression and their means. As with the knowledge produced by scientists, artists contribute to our understanding of the complexities of an ever-changing world. Developing their own methodologies and language, artists contribute in a different but nevertheless substantial way to the global production of knowledge. This presentation introduced a range of recent examples of artists whose projects invest in transdisciplinary research and collaboration.

### Event 2 (2 day private Workshop)

#### *'Other Knowledges'*

November 3 & 4, 2013 @ 10AM-3PM @ SaigonHub

Audience numbers: 17

Translators: Lêna Bùi, Phan Thảo Nguyên, Arlette Quỳnh-Anh Trần

Facilitator: Zoe Butt

Nov 3 - Ute Meta Bauer presented and discussed with participants the various forms and disciplines, which can be utilized and collaborated within visual art, such as theater, film, dance, architecture.



Lecture hall seen from outside



Event 2: private workshop

## UTE META BAUER

Nov 4: Each participant gave a short 7-minute presentation about their keyword, which related or summed up their interest and concern, which could be also linked to the topics that Ute mentioned in the first workshop

### OBSERVATIONS (Zoe Butt):

Ute Meta Bauer's expertise as firstly an artist, and secondly as a teacher, was instrumental in kicking off the 'Encounter' workshop series. Her perspective on the need for interdisciplinary thinking in the visual arts and how important this is for the university program was particularly noted. One lecturer of Vietnam National University in the audience made a personal comment on how much he loved the program of MIT Boston and asked how such a program might happen in Vietnam. Ute answered immediately and very simply - 'The students must demand it'. The whole audience went very quiet, followed by loud applause.

### KEY CONCEPTS DISCUSSED:

Artistic research as social science; Biennale and its alternative; Public space; Collaboration between sciences and visual arts; Technology cultivated for art's sake and community service; Heidegger's concept of 'thea': theatricality and theory; Foucault's concept of 'heterutopia'; Ritual; Choreography; Theatrical field

### PARTICIPANTS' GLOSSARY:

Magic; Seeing; Condition; Right; Originality; Energy; Heritage; Arrival; Peace; Placelessness; Rhythm; Sickness; Traces; Collectivity; Post-Trauma; Loss & Gain; Saigon; Between/Space



## TRƯƠNG THỊ KIM CHUYÊN

Duration of stay:  
(local speaker)

Trương Thị Kim Chuyên obtained her PhD in Economic Geography at Saint Petersburg University, Russia (1992). Having been the Vice Rector from 2007-2012, she is the current Senior Lecturer in the Geography department at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam. Previously, she was a visiting scholar at Harvard University (2001-2002), a Fulbright scholar at California State University Fullerton (2005) and an exchange scholar at Millikin University (2007). Her research focuses on human geography and development studies, especially on gender and poverty reduction. She has been involved in different projects related to gender and poverty reduction funded by UNDP, CIDA and SIDA. In various NGO projects, she has participated as a researcher, consultant, coordinator and facilitator. She is the author of several papers and chapters on sustainable development and social issues in Vietnam.

### Event 1 (Public Lecture):

*'Reviving and Nourishing Material Culture for Creative Purpose'*

November 8, 2013 @ 6.30PM @ RMIT, Phạm Ngọc Thạch campus

Audience numbers: 60

Translator: Arlette Quỳnh-Anh Trần | Facilitator: Trà Nguyễn



Event 1: Public lecture

## TRƯƠNG THỊ KIM CHUYÊN

Originality and creativity are crucial attributes that encourage establishment and development of a locality's material culture. Through analysis of a particular material – here with the rare black silk from Tân Châu, An Giang Province - Dr. Chuyên discussed how to maintain and renew tradition by examining the crucial relationship between location, community, material and creative reality. Dr. Chuyên considers the challenges in nourishing and reviving local material culture, in the context of a society where there is strong interest in imported products. She provided example of how to nurture and sustain creative innovation in cultural material and object in order to encourage learning of their meaning and appropriation in modern life.

### Event 2 (Private Workshop)

*'Reviving and Nourishing Material Culture for Creative Purpose'*

November 11, 2013 @ 10AM-3PM @ Sàn Art Laboratory

Audience numbers: 11

Translator: Mifa, Trà Nguyễn | Facilitator: Zoe Butt

Participants were given the introduction of '6-thinking-hat' methodology of Edward de Bono, which describes a tool for group discussion and individual thinking involving six colored hats: Information (White), Emotions (Red), Discernment (Black), Optimistic response (Yellow), Creativity (Green) and The sixth meta thinking (Blue). Using this method, each group discussed and debated one cultural – political – social issue in Vietnam, under analysis of these 6 colored perspectives, in order to find solutions, which could help reviving and preserving the material culture.



Event 1: Public Lecture



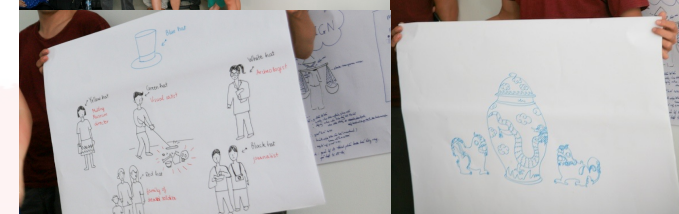
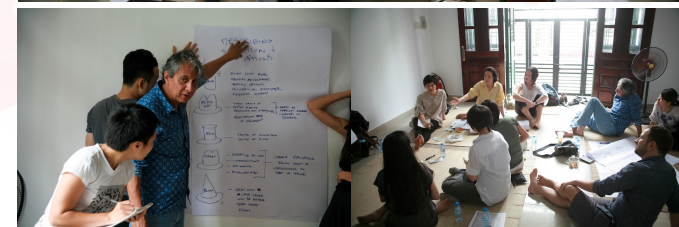
Event 2: Workshop

## TRƯƠNG THỊ KIM CHUYÊN

Particular discussion surrounding the ideas of Edward de Bono as outdated in method was particularly instructive, creating heated debate about the impact of such profiling on human character and how such pigeon-holing of personality and acumen follows a Colonial rubric of control.

### KEY CONCEPTS DISCUSSED:

Globalization; Originality; Material culture = material + its meaning / markers; Ethnocentrism; Xenocentrism; McDonaldization; 6 thinking-hat method of Edward de Bono



## NALINI MALANI

Duration of stay:  
December 9-19, 2013



Nalini Malani (b. Karachi (undivided India), 1946) is the recipient of the 2013 Fukuoka Art & Culture Prize. As a multimedia artist whose practice encompasses drawing, painting, projected animation, video and film, she is committed to the role of the artist as social activist. Her work is often based on the stories of those that have been ignored, forgotten or marginalized by history. Since 1995 she has participated regularly in international biennales including dOCUMENTA 13. Nalini has had several solo museum exhibitions: The New Museum, New York (2002), Peabody Essex Museum, Salem (2005), The Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2007), Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne (2010), Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney (2012). Her works are in various museum collections: Museum of Modern Art, New York; British Museum, London; Centre Pompidou, Paris.

### Event 1 (1/2 Public Lecture)

#### *'Global Parasites'*

December 10, 2013 @ 6PM @ Hoa Sen University, Nguyễn Văn Tráng Campus

Audience numbers: 86

Translator: Lêna Bùi | Facilitator: Trà Nguyễn



## NALINI MALANI

'In order to speak about Global Parasites, I would like to give an example from nature. There are certain families of wasps, that lay their eggs on or inside the living creatures like caterpillars that feed on spiders. Simultaneously the wasps inject the toxin into their victims which paralyses them but does not kill. When the eggs hatch, the larvae feed on the living prey, consuming the non-vital parts like fat and digestive organs first, keeping the vital items like the heart and central nerve system for the very last in order to prolong the time for which their food remains fresh. We may try to console ourselves that such gruesome behavior is limited to the lower creatures. But an analogous process of draining the substance from human communities has been refined to a conscious built-in device for subsisting and prospering at the expense of others, leaving the prey depleted, exhausted and impoverished. The powerful parasitical and predatory culture of global capitalism has preyed across the world of the last few decades. In the process, it has sought to devour all other cultures and civilizations, expropriating their substance, draining their wealth in order that it makes itself grow in comfort and opulence. The toxin that is used to mentally paralyze its victims is acclaim of universality, unique validity and exclusiveness. At the same time, it has endeavored to teach some of its victims the art of survival, in imitation of its own imperatives. These are the capitalist elites, the internal kind of parasites who prey on their own fellow species.'" (Nalini Malani promotional statement for this event).

This was the first of two lectures with Nalini discussing her performance work, beginning with her documentary film CASSANDRA'S GIFT'.



## NALINI MALANI

### Event 2 (1/2: Private Workshop)

*'Global Parasites'*

December 11, 2013 @ 10AM-3PM @ San Art Laboratory

Audience numbers: 17

Translator: Lêna Bùi | Facilitator: Zoe Butt

Unpacking the term 'Global Parasites' with particular examples of Nalini's artworks, her research process and the documentary 'The World according to Monsanto'; followed by a visit to the Museum of Southern Women

### Event 3 (2/2: Public Lecture)

December 13, 2013 @ 6PM @ Hoa Sen University, Nguyễn Văn Tráng Campus

Audience numbers: 71

Translator: Lêna Bùi | Facilitator: Trà Nguyễn

This was Nalini's final public lecture, discussing the impact of research for 'Global Parasite' on her practice, particularly focusing on the related subjects in her paintings

### Event 4 (2/2: Private Workshop)

December 14, 2013 @ 10AM-3PM @ San Art Laboratory

Audience numbers: 9

Translator: Lêna Bùi | Facilitator: Zoe Butt

By reviewing the visit to Museum of Southern Women, Nalini and the participants discussed the role of women in Vietnamese society throughout history, in comparison to Indian society, focusing on gender equality



Event 2: Public Lecture



Event 3: Workshop and visiting Museum of Southern Women

## NALINI MALANI

### OBSERVATIONS (Nalini Malani)

'It was enriching because I think it is important to connect Asian countries especially those that have undergone traumas like colonization and then of course the revolutionary spirit that is so much part and parcel of our histories. Although very different in Vietnam and much more traumatic than India. I was very happy to meet people at the university where I gave 2 talks and to have an exchange with young professionals and professors, and also the time at Sàn Art studio was very intimate. We had a very close encounter and very intense meeting of minds. This was especially the case because the people who were part of the workshop were themselves very well versed with their own subjects and they came with their own histories to the workshop, which became then an area of exchange, trying out our ideas and speaking about things that we ourselves have experienced in our professional fields'.

### KEY CONCEPTS DISCUSSED:

Hysteria; Collective unconsciousness; Monsanto's bio-chemical corporation; Global parasites; Spirituality; Suffering; Mural painting; Drawing as performance; Vanished history



Event 4: Workshop

## THANES WONGYANNAVA

Duration of stay:  
January 15-22, 2014



Thanes Wongyannava (b. 1957), Associate Professor of Political Science, and sociologist by training from Chulalongkorn University, Thailand; University of Wisconsin Madison, USA; and University of Cambridge, UK. He has been teaching politics and philosophy at the Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University for the past three decades. Apart from writing (predominantly in Thai) on social and political theory of the twentieth and twenty-first century, he has also covered other diverse topics such as social history, Italian food in Bangkok and film critique on weekly newspapers. Thanes has also written articles for Thai artists, including Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook and Natee Utarit.

### Event 1 (Public Lecture)

*"The art of Buddhocentrism"*

January 16, 2014 @ 6.30PM @ Hoa Sen University, Nguyễn Văn Tráng Campus

Audience number: 103

Translator: Lêna Bùi | Facilitator: Trà Nguyễn

Thanes discussed his ideas concerning 'Buddhocentrism', which embraced the idea of Buddhism as a system of ideas in contemporary life that has moved away from a focus on 'enlightenment' towards a belief in



Event 1: Public lecture

## THANES WONGYANNAVA

all things 'delightful' – meaning a focus on anything that entertains, satiates desire and is popularly in demand. He looked at how visual art illustrates such attitude, including an examination of how we understand the 'self' and 'truth' within such society.

### Event 2 (1/2: Private Workshop): 'Buddhocentrism'

January 18, 2014 @ 10AM-3PM @ San Art Laboratory

Audience number: 13

Translator: Lêna Bui, Trà Nguyễn | Facilitator: Zoe Butt

The concept of 'polizei' as an idea of how the modern state manipulates and controls its citizens (Thanes states that polizei was actually meaning something utterly different to the concept of 'police' as we know today)

### Event 3 (2/2: Private Workshop):

January 19, 2014 @ 10AM-3PM @ San Art Laboratory

Audience number: 12

Translator: Lêna Bui, Trà Nguyễn | Facilitator: Zoe Butt

What would happen to an art world if its objects are without name? Thanes referred to Las Meninas by Velazquez, an artwork that was named many years after the artist died.



Event 2 & 3: Workshop

## THANES WONGYANNAVA

**Event 4 (Public Lecture):** : *“Truth, Self and Buddhocentrism”*

January 21, 2014 @ 6.30PM @ Hoa Sen University, Nguyễn Văn Tráng Campus

Audience number: 81

Translator: Lêna Bùi | Facilitator: Trà Nguyễn

Thanes continued his first lecture discussion on ideas concerning ‘Buddhocentrism’, which embraced the idea of Buddhism as a system of ideas in contemporary life that has moved away from a focus on ‘enlightenment’ towards a belief in all things ‘delightful’ – meaning a focus on anything that entertains, satiates desire and is popularly in demand. He looked at how visual art illustrates such attitude, including an examination of how we understand the ‘self’ and ‘truth’ within such society.

### KEY CONCEPTS DISCUSSED:

Buddhocentrism; Thai aristocrats and their crisis; Mind-Body binary; Usage of Buddhism by nationalists; Usage of Buddhism by British colony to define India and Asia; Joy and Religion; Polizei (control from top to bottom) vs. Rule of law (nomology) (control from bottom to top); Civil society; War making vs. State making; The relation between habitus from every day's life and taste.



Event 4: Public lecture

## PRASENJIT DUARA

Duration of stay:  
February 25 – March 4, 2014



Prasenjit Duara is the Raffles Professor of Humanities, Director, Asia Research Institute, and Director of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences at National University of Singapore. He is a historian of China and more broadly of Asia in the twentieth century. Duara also writes on historical thought and historiography. Previously he was Professor and Chair of the Department of History and of the Committee on Chinese Studies at the University of Chicago. In 1988, he published 'Culture, Power and the State: Rural North China', 1900-1942 (Stanford University Press), which won the Fairbank Prize of the AHA and the Levenson Prize of the AAS, USA.

### Event 1 (Public Lecture)

*'Asia as network: futures of the past'*

February 26, 2014 @ 6.30PM @ University of Social Science and Humanities

Audience number: 154

Translator: Phương Nguyễn | Facilitator: Trà Nguyễn

'Historically this region known as Asia had no strict boundaries, it was densely interconnected by trade and religion, evidenced in cultural practice (their rituals, arts and crafts). These informal networks had profound implications on the relationship between culture and society across this region. Today, there is an emerging consensus that



## PRASENJIT DUARA

continuing our pursuit of existing modes of production, consumption and the political economic arrangements that underpin them will endanger planetary sustainability sooner than we realize' states Professor Duara, who in this lecture demonstrated how the intersection of differing cultural ideas can provide an alternate framework to rethinking the future of this regions' cultural cosmopolitanism.

### Event 2 (Private Workshop)

*'Asia as network: futures of the past'*

February 28, 2014 @ 10AM-3PM @ San Art Laboratory

Audience number: 19

Translator: Lêna Bui, Trà Nguyễn | Facilitator: Zoe Butt

Circular versus Competitive Histories: History is not only the history of nations and civilizations and History is not tunneled and bounded by the nation. Since the earliest times, events have had their impact far across the borders of their location. Duara raised the following questions: How can we understand this other view of history, which in some ways, existed before the modern era? What are the implications for understanding history in this way for an inter-dependent and sustainable planet?



Event 2: Workshop

## PRASENJIT DUARA

### Event 3 (Private Workshop):

*'Asia as network: futures of the past'*

March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014 @ 10AM-3PM @ Sàn Art Laboratory

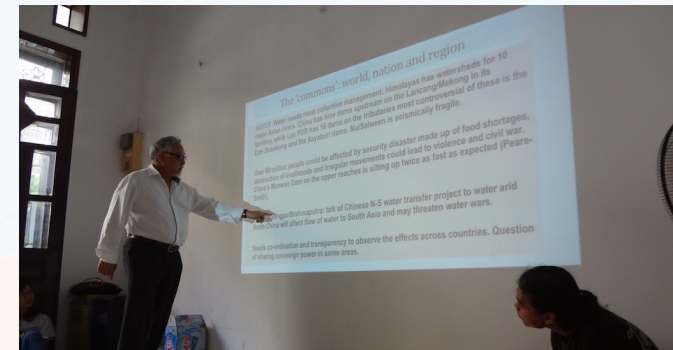
Audience number: 21

Translator: Lêna Bui, Trà Nguyễn | Facilitator: Zoe Butt

Focusing on sustainability and the 'Crisis of Transcendence: The Long View from Asia', Prasenjit introduced how the majority of scientists believe we are in the Anthropocene, when human activity on the planet shapes it more than any other force. Some believe it is already too late to do something about climate change. But humans cannot live without hope. This workshop looked at the social, political and economic forces that have brought about this situation over the last several hundred years, the role and position of Asian powers in it, and the social responses to it within Asia.

### KEY CONCEPTS DISCUSSED:

Circular transformation; Disenchantment; Figures of authenticity; Propaganda; Asian Maritime Technology; Universalism; Cosmopolitanism; Transcendence; Great Leap Forward; Win-Win Proposal; National Mitigation Obligation; Bio-diversity; Anthropocene



Event 3: Workshop

## INRASARA

Duration of stay:

April 8 – 13, 2014



Inrasara (b. 1957, Ninh Thuận province, Chaklen village, the oldest village of the Cham. He started writing poems and collecting traditional literature since high school, and published his first research 'Cham Literature Outline' (Sorbonne CHCPI Award), as well as his first poetry collection "The tower of sunlight" (1996, Vietnam Poets Union Award) in his 40s. He also works with several intellectuals to publish 'Tagalau', a unique publication comprised of writing and research on the Cham people and their traditions. After 12 years in circulation, 'Tagalau' has brought many new writers to the national literature forum. While Inrasara works primarily with poetry, in recent years he has taken up essay and literature critique. To him, the purpose of such endeavour is to demolish the wall between literature's 'external' genres at its core, fighting for the vocation of all genres for their rightful position in Literature.



Event 1: Public lecture

## INRASARA

### Event 1 (Public Lecture)

*'The mystery of Cham, an ancient journey'*

April 8, 2014 @ 6.30PM @ Venue: Hoa Sen University, Nguyễn Văn Tráng Campus

Audience number: 92

Translator: Inra Jaka, Trà Nguyễn | Facilitator: Trà Nguyễn

Inrasara unpacked the history of the three ancient kingdoms of Vietnam, to remark on why history must acknowledge not only the dominant narratives of the past, but also the smaller, ethnic narratives that are equally significant to the union of a people, of a community, of a nation. There are plenty of myths about Vietnam, historical and literary. A myth makes its home between an event and a dream, sometimes an exaggerated fact that lacks evidence. The myths of the Cham people – an ethnic group who today can be found in Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand – hold many stories not shared in history books. For this lecture, Inrasara shared his research, such as the contribution of the Cham to Vietnamese culture from ancient marine culture during the Champa Kingdom (c. 2nd Century - 1832), which gives brilliant illustration of these regions connections to present day Japan and Malaysia; to the moral tales of Ché Bồng Nga and Harok Kah whose folklore to this day provide caution against greed and self-indulgence, to name but a few tales. For Inrasara, uncovering myths and the integrity of literature, is not a process of destruction (eg. a readers desire to break down its facts), but to recognize their value in providing meaning and guidance to contemporary life.



Event 1: Public lecture

## INRASARA

### Event 2 (Public Lecture)

#### *'Open spirit – The Bini of Cham in Vietnam'*

April 10, 2014 @ 6.30PM @ Venue: Hoa Sen University, Nguyễn Văn Tráng Campus

Audience number: 82

Translator: Trà Nguyễn | Facilitator: Trà Nguyễn

The Champa Kingdom (c. 2nd Century - 1832) expressed great harmony between different faith and peoples. This kingdom was one of three ancient kingdoms in Vietnam, though it is sadly often overlooked for its significance to contemporary understandings of this country. Under the Cham, Vedic Brahmanism (ancient Hinduism), Buddhist and Islamic faith lived together, particularly evident in the architecture of its time. In this lecture, Inrasara focused on the role of Islam in the open ethos of the Cham, particularly how its beliefs provided means for openness towards difference. He shared the stories of ancient trade of the gypsies; the relationship between architecture and human behavior; questioning also why the Cham were so efficient at business and yet so markedly humble with their profits.



## INRASARA

**Event 3: (private workshop)**

April 12, 2014 @ 10AM-3PM @ Venue: San Art Laboratory

Audience number: 20

Translator: Lêna Bùi, Trà Nguyễn | Facilitator: Zoe Butt

Inrasara unpacked the relevancy of minority ethnic culture to Vietnam today and then also went into the issues facing the sustainability of Cham culture today.

**Event 4: (private workshop)**

April 13, 2014 @ 10AM-3PM @ San Art Laboratory

Audience number: 22

Translator: Lêna Bùi, Trà Nguyễn | Facilitator: Zoe Butt

The difference between Cham culture in Vietnam and that in other SEA countries, illustrated by performances and folk art.

**KEY CONCEPTS DISCUSSED:**

Marine culture; Nuclear power plants; Sacred sights; Bini; Brahmins; Crisis; Open spirit; Preserving and Restoring; Destroying and Creating



Event 3 & 4: Workshop

## DAVID TEH

Duration of stay:  
May 21 - 28, 2014



David Teh works at the National University of Singapore in the fields of critical theory and visual culture. His research centres on contemporary art in Southeast Asia. From 2005-09, he was an independent critic and curator based in Bangkok, where his curatorial projects included *Platform* (The Queen's Gallery and The Art Center, Chulalongkorn University, 2006) and *The More Things Change...* (5th Bangkok Experimental Film Festival, 2008). More recently David was co-curator with Gridthiya Gaweewong of *Unreal Asia* (55th Internationale Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen, Germany, 2009) and the convenor of *Video Vortex #7* (Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 2011). His latest exhibition, *TRANSMISSION*, is currently on show at the Jim Thompson Art Center, Bangkok (through August 2014). David's writings have appeared in *LEAP* magazine, *Art Asia Pacific*, [artforum.com](http://artforum.com), *Art & Australia* and *The Bangkok Post*. His recent scholarly essays have been published in *Third Text* and *Afterall Journal*. David is also a director of *Future Perfect*, a new gallery and project platform in Singapore's Gillman Barracks precinct.

### Event 1 (Public Lecture)

'What is an animate image?'

May 22, 2014 @ 6.30PM @ RMIT University, District 7, Ho Chi Minh City

Audience number: 79

Translator: Phương Nguyễn | Facilitator: Trà Nguyễn



Event 1: Public lecture

## DAVID TEH

“This lecture is about the poetics of mediation. It proposes a theory of the ‘animate image’ - an image that moves, that breathes, that remembers. I begin by considering the encounter between contemporary art and an older, ‘traditional’ kind of image, at an animist festival in Thailand’s northeast. The encounter serves as an entry-point into some of the challenges I have faced as a curator and a theorist, doing research on contemporary visual art in Southeast Asia. In Western scholarship, histories of media tend to be linear and teleological, each medium given a time and a place in a succession, before becoming obsolete; media theories tend to be techno-centric and determinist – media technology is thought to shape society more than society shapes it. But we know that these media are not the same everywhere. And in the art of Southeast Asia, we may be struck by a general disregard for formal limits or specifications, and by the general ease with which new, electronic media are integrated with what Rosalind Morris has called “indigenous technologies of transmission”. Photographs can have ritual functions, and accumulate ‘aura’; video gives rise to new kinds of performance and new connections with the past. As producers, critics or students of visual culture, how do we make sense of a contemporary image that mobilizes all the powers of mechanical reproduction, yet without surrendering a much older valence, grounded in local attitudes and practices? This challenge demands the revision of our basic media vocabulary – value, repetition, the archive, perhaps the very concept of the medium itself – but while the tide of images swells around us, locally informed art theory is hard to find. Fortunately, artists and anthropologists offer us some answers



Event 1: Public lecture

## DAVID TEH

and I shall introduce several who have guided my own thinking. Along with better description of Southeast Asian art, their insights provide critical perspectives on how the 'animate image' is framed and assimilated under the would-be global rubric of 'the contemporary'. With reference to some recent, large-scale international exhibitions, I will challenge popular curatorial assumptions about how artworks exercise their claims on the past" (Promotional summary by David Teh)

### Event 2 (Public film screening followed by Q&A)

May 27, 2014 @ 6.30PM @ Hoa Sen University, Nguyễn Văn Tráng Campus

Audience number: 87

Translator: Trà Nguyễn | Facilitator: Zoe Butt

Film screening of Joshua Oppenheimer's award winning film documentary 'The Act of Killing' (Duration: 115mins). Considered one of the most ethically challenging documentaries to have been produced in recent history, 'The Act of Killing' tells the harrowing story of the thousands who died in Indonesia in 1965 as part of an anti-Communist purge. Anwar Congo and his friends re-enact the violence they perpetrated on the innocent, their use of Hollywood and popular Indonesian musical genre to re-tell their crimes creating an uncomfortable sense of fiction and distance from reality. These once theatre ticket sellers who became gangster death-squad leaders lead us on a personal journey, carefully orchestrated by Joshua Oppenheimer. Over several months, Oppenheimer undertook extensive fieldwork across Indonesia in order to find, record and better reflect the tales of frail heroism that is controversially attached to local histories of genocide and reconciliation. Men like Anwar Congo are still feared to this day in Indonesia.



Event 2: Public film screening

## DAVID TEH

### OBSERVATIONS:

(Zoe Butt)

Dr David Teh is one of the most dynamic and personable lecturers to have participated in the program to date. He is a senior lecturer at NUS and it was evident that he is thus very familiar with the method of inquiry of young minds and is sensitive to their lack of familiarity with ideas, concepts and terminologies. He is an excellent lecturer and thus participants found his material really accessible, interesting and provocative. The screening of 'The Act of Killing' at Hoa Sen University saw the President of Hoa Sen stay for the entire film, including Q&A. She approached me at the close of the event and congratulated Sàn Art on its program and was adamant she was looking forward to a continued collaboration. She stated 'We need more of these kinds of events in Vietnam'. For Sàn Art it was also interesting to see collectors turn up to join our educational events.... An increasing and much desired occurrence. (Zoe Butt)

(David Teh)

'I was very impressed by the Sàn Art team, and the program. It was also great that so many people in Saigon are willing to come to such events – there seems to be a real appetite there for new ideas, and I sensed this amongst young artists in particular. There are few organizations in the region providing these sorts of opportunities for critical exchange and dialogue. One of the most encouraging things is the level of investment that past Sàn Art Laboratory residents and mentors of that program seem to be making – this is a sign that the value of the program is clear to all involved'



Discussion over a meal

## DAVID TEH

### Event 3 (Private Workshop):

#### *The animate image in The Act of Killing*

May 27, 2014 @ 8.30 – 10.30PM @ local restaurant over dinner

Audience number: 20

Translator: Lêna Bui, Trà Nguyễn | Facilitator: Zoe Butt

In discussing 'The Act of Killing' and its usage of the 'animate image', much of this open and organic discussion centered on the ethical responsibilities of the director in collaboration with people who are the perpetrators of violence. Dr Teh referred particularly to the advent of cinema across South East Asia where it is anchored in ideas of performance – in Thai 'Krea' means 'movies to sell medicine' – the idea of watching a film was a cathartic and mobile process where film was watched with the aid of mobile equipment which would travel from rural town and village. In Southeast Asia, movies are performances whereas in the west a movie is a commodity. David asked the workshop participants to examine Nam June Paik's 'TV Buddha', to tell him what media can they see in the work in order to understand what kind of 'animate' images are being played out in the piece.



Event 3: Workshop

## DAVID TEH

### Event 4 (Private Workshop):

*'What is an animate image?'*

May 24, 2014 @ 10AM-3PM @ RMIT, Phạm Ngọc Thạch Campus

Audience number: 20

Translator: Lêna Bùi, Trà Nguyễn | Facilitator: Zoe Butt

Unpacking the meaning of what David Teh describes as an 'animate' image in the contemporary art and culture of South East Asian new media and film practice. He broke down in very succinct and clear words why it is important to think about an image as something that carries its own sense of history and time and usage. In a very useful and easy to understand fashion, he broke down Walter Benjamin's ideas of art in the mechanical age of reproduction, which he further related to Marxist terminologies of exchange value, exhibition value and secular purposes of art making. He questioned what is an 'aura' in a cultural object, stating that Benjamin argued its presence as something that is unique, as something that is not reproducible. For David, he is interested in challenging Benjamin on this point, by outlining how South East Asia presents special case study where the spirit world is still to this today heavily present in contemporary life, in the tools that digitally reproduce.

### KEY CONCEPTS DISCUSSED:

Sculpture; Video (Live); CCTV; Installation; Icon; Photo; Performance; Light; Ambient sound; Space (Gallery) and Time; Plinth; Electricity



## CHITRA GANESH

Duration of stay:  
June 19-26, 2014



Chitra Ganesh is a Brooklyn based artist currently living and working in Delhi. Her drawing, installation, text-based work, and collaborations seek to excavate and circulate buried narratives typically excluded from official canons of history, literature, and art. Ganesh graduated from Brown University with a BA in Comparative Literature and Art-Semiotics, and received her MFA from Columbia University in 2002. Ganesh's work has been widely exhibited at venues including the Museum of Contemporary Art (Shanghai), Devi Art Foundation (New Delhi), Brooklyn Museum of Art, Museum voor Moderne Kunst (Netherlands), ZKM (Germany), Royal College of Art (London), Prince of Wales Museum (Mumbai), and Kunsthalle Exnergrasse (Norway). Ganesh has had solo exhibitions at Gallery Espace (New Delhi), Gallery Wendi Norris (San Francisco), Tilton Gallery (New York), Nature Morte Berlin, Chatterjee & Lal (Mumbai), & Thomas Erben Gallery (New York). Ganesh is the recipient of numerous awards and fellowships, including a 2012 John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship in the Creative Arts. In September of 2014 Ganesh will be the first Kirloskar Visiting Scholar at the Rhode Island School of Design.

### Event 1 (Public Lecture)

*Architectures of myth: the future is the past*

June 20, 2014 @ 6.30PM @ Hoa Sen University, Nguyễn Văn Tráng Campus



## CHITRA GANESH

Audience number: 62

Translator: Lêna Bùi | Facilitator: Trà Nguyễn

'In this lecture I will explore the power of key visual and storytelling devices central to mythological narrative and their particular ongoing legacy in contemporary visual and popular culture, looking at the architecture of the grand epics of classical Eastern and Western traditions, such as Homer's Odyssey, the Ramayana and the Monkey King story. Using such epics as lens, I will elaborate upon why and how particular mythologies focus on eroticism and violence, analyzing constructs of time and arrangements of power. I will offer examples drawn from my own artistic practice, while also sharing works of other contemporary artists to illuminate how artists respond to, and at times challenge aspects of mythic story structures in their own work. I will also look at images drawn from contemporary modes of storytelling to illuminate how ancient mythic architectures persist in the language of comics and graphic novels and how they are transformed in contemporary visual forms, examining such examples as the Amar Chitra Katha and Raj comics originating in India, Neil Gaiman's Sandman series and the graffiti and science fictional tales such as Battlestar Galactica' (promotional statement by Chitra Ganesh)

### KEY CONCEPTS DISCUSSED:

The hero's journey, or *mono myth*

*In Media Res* – literally, "in the middle of things"

The flexible story

Myth, the body, and excess

Female figures in myth: catalysts, not protagonists

myth as instruction, maintaining social codes



Event 1: Public lecture

## CHITRA GANESH

### Event 2 (Public Lecture)

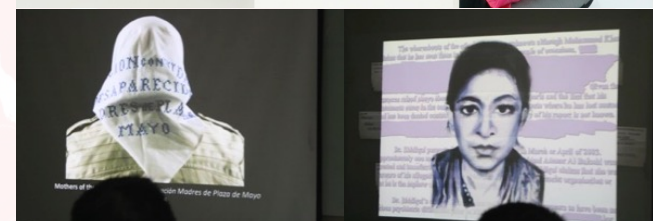
#### *Visualizing Absence*

June 24, 2014 @ 6.30PM @ Hoa Sen University, Nguyễn Văn Tráng Campus

Audience number: 51

Translator: Lêna Bùi | Facilitator: Zoe Butt

'This lecture will consider how contemporary art practices take up the problem of visualizing absence by archiving and creating around social and political erasure. As artists and thinkers, how do we identify and respond to stories, social histories, and conflicts which we experience as crucial to our understanding of our own history, nation, or family, but yet seem difficult to extract from the public domain, or remain mysteriously absent from official records? What are the limits and possibilities of counter narratives and radical archiving practices that might enable us to give material form to that which has disappeared? Questions at the core of this problem include: what unique role might contemporary art practices such as discursive platforms, site-specific installation, and web-based archives play in a project of archiving around erasure and absence? What is the role and responsibility of the artist in citing or documenting source imagery in the process of producing a counter-archive? How might we use specific visual platforms to collectively imagine a set of alternate histories, which are submerged in governmental histories and records? I will frame this discussion via projects, challenges and key questions that animate 'Index of the Disappeared', a ten year collaborative project that is both a visual practice and discursive platform that foregrounds



Event 2: Public lecture

## CHITRA GANESH

the difficult histories of immigrant, 'Other', and dissenting communities in the United States since September 11, 2001 - including a rapidly changing relationship to surveillance, illegal imprisonment and targeting extra-judicial killings. Through official documents, secondary literature, images, and personal narratives, we trace the ways in which censorship and data blackouts are part of a discursive shift to secrecy.' (promotional statement by Chitra Ganesh)

### Event 3 (Private Workshop)

*'Visualizing Absence as Image or Archive'*

June 21 & 22, 2014 @ 10AM-3PM @ RMIT, Phạm Ngọc Thạch Campus

Audience number: Day 1: 18 ; Day 2: 12

Translator: Trà Nguyễn | Facilitator: Zoe Butt

Chitra gave clear and succinct subjects of influence on her art practice, using contextual imagery from her childhood, images of journalistic culture that impacted her understanding of race, images of cultural myth from India that made her question what her own rituals and symbols were - such things were great to hear from an artist walking through the process of inspiration. In her workshops she also very clearly unpacked Michel Foucault's 'Archeology of Knowledge' and Rummana Hussein's 'Is it what you think?'. Chitra also asked each participant to present their own kinds of archives or images of absence.

### KEY CONCEPTS DISCUSSED:

Visualizing Absence, or towards a visual language of disappearance; Personal, social, official dimensions of the archive and its gaps; Seeing, or remembering, the unseeable; Archive as fragment, the archive, a constellation; Embodying / performing disappearance



Event 3: Workshop

## KIDLAT TAHIMIK

Duration of stay:  
November 18-24, 2014



Kidlat Tahimik (b. 1942, Baguio City, The Philippines) is a pioneer of experimental film in Asia, practicing as a film director, writer and actor. His films are commonly associated with the Third Cinema movement – a film movement begun in the 1960s-70s in Latin America that denounced neocolonialism, the capitalist system and the Hollywood model of cinema as mere entertainment to make money. He is considered the Father of Philippine Independent Cinema, entering the international stage in the late 1970s with 'Perfumed Nightmare', a release enabled with the support of filmmakers Werner Herzog and Francis Ford Coppola. Tahimik's work embraces the essayist form. He is considered a magician of the fragment with an aesthetic often described as whimsical, politically incisive and with a third-world self-consciousness.

As an obsessive cultural observer, Kidlat has been exploring his inner cultural contradictions by making his non-commercial films since 1975. Born Eric Oteyza de Guia in Baguio City, he was raised in this American enclave resort town, situated in the heart of the tribal highlands of Igorot Culture. Three decades ago, he began questioning his American education, (a.k.a "my benevolent assimilation"). This had begun with his Maryknoll nuns in primary school; followed by further immersion in high schools in The Philippines with US curricula, ending up in America for a graduate degree (Wharton School MBA). After five years as an economist in Paris, he tore up his MBA diploma in 1972, tuned-in to



Event 1: Public Lecture: The audience taking a look at the materials

## KIDLAT TAHIMIK

commune-culture lifestyle, and embraced an anti-Hollywood school of filmmaking. As a self-taught filmmaker, his works are recognized at home and abroad for their unique style and for their humorous deconstruction of his American education. In Baguio, he is an active artist (film, video-installation, performance), supporting the process/viewpoint of the 'undiploma-ed' artists. In 1997, his Sunflower Film Collective embarked on a project to share user-friendly video technology with tribal people, with the aim that responsibility for cultural documentation rests in their own hands.

### EVENT SCHEDULE:

#### Event 1 (Public Film Screening)

##### *Perfumed Nightmare*

November 19, 2014 @ 6.30PM @ Hoa Sen University, Nguyễn Văn Tráng Campus

Audience number: 33

Translator: Trâm Lương | Facilitator: Zoe Butt & Trà Nguyễn

This film is Kidlat Tahimik's most renown essay film, whose release in 1978 was made possible with the assistance of Werner Herzog and Francis Ford Coppola. After a lifetime in his somewhat backward hometown, Tahimik travels to Paris. His trip is motivated by his fascination with American technology (though this film does not see him go to America, which he claims typical of the spontaneous nature of the storyline). Once in the City of Light, Tahimik is both fascinated by and disillusioned with the "wonders" of the modern world. The film has a delightfully home-movie quality – literally so, since it was filmed in Super 8mm on a budget of less than \$10,000. The screening was followed with Q&A session.



## KIDLAT TAHIMIK

### KEY CONCEPTS OF DISCUSSION

Experimental film, non-linear narrative, post-colonialism, indigenous wisdom, Americanization, urbanization, modernization

### Event 2 (Public lecture):

#### *Presenting Kidlat Tahimik*

21 November, 2014 @ 7PM @ Hoa Sen University, Nguyễn Văn Tráng Campus

Audience number: 57

Translator: Trâm Lương

It was an extremely rare opportunity to hear one of the world's most under-recognized Third Cinema Movement practitioners speak about his films – his motivations, choice of style, his influences and method of practice. His anti-colonial gaze, evident in his commentary and choice of subject, embraces a love of his culture and the importance of the local who he believes must not be goaded into the global race for 'uniformity' of value.

### Event 3 (Private Workshop):

#### *'Duwende' and its importance in storytelling*

November 22 & 23, 2014 @ 10:00AM – 3:00PM @ Hoa Sen University, Nguyễn Văn Tráng Campus

Audience number: 20

Translator: Lêna Bùi | Facilitator: Zoe Butt

Kidlat put aside his reputation as filmmaker, and put on the hat of a spectator and a storyteller in this workshop. Engaging the participants in a myriad of visual scenes from his video diary 'Orbit 50',



Event 2: Public Lecture

## KIDLAT TAHIMIK

Kidlat discussed the concept of cinematography as a personal play with films and a diaristic method to train oneself on catching daily images, in a spontaneous manner, as opposed to the planned script in big Hollywood movies. He juxtaposed two styles of movie making, highlighting the video diary method's flexibility to capture, frame, and explore the local and intimate experiences of everyday life. As he shared his experience of making his autobiographical 'Orbit 50', he introduced the participants to his own transition in technological choices, filming techniques, philosophical ponderings, and his undisciplined interactions with the 'acting characters' on-film. Towards the end of the workshop, Kidlat brought our attention to the concept of *duwende*: a Filipino indigenous concept that celebrates a unique spirit inside us that guides us to tell our story. Formed by the personal growing-up experiences and the cultural context that one matures in, our individual *duwende* molds our viewpoints of the world and filters the images that get incorporated into our story. Kidlat advised the participants to analyze a filmmaker's *duwende* and explore life from their perspectives before passing judgment on their films. Through piquing questions and initiating open-ended discussions on *duwende* and the ethos of storytelling via films, Kidlat reminded the participants that they should allow their *duwende* to draw from their experiences and form the narrative naturally and spontaneously in their work, instead of insisting on the heavily scripted blockbuster filming style that is born out of lucrative motivations.



Event 3: Workshop

## KIDLAT TAHIMIK

### Event 4 (Public Film Screening)

December 27, 2014 @3PM @ Saigon Ranger, Nguyễn Siêu, Dist. 1

3PM:

'Why is Yellow the Middle of the Rainbow' (174mins) by Kidlat Tahimik

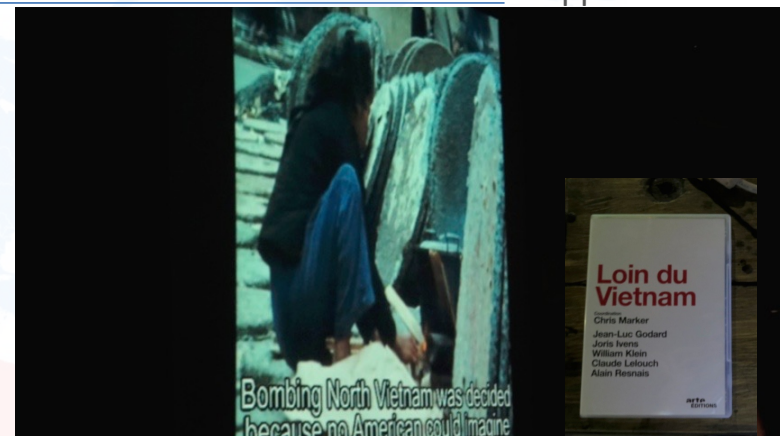
Tahimik's virtually unknown masterpiece chronicles Tahimik and his young son's lives as they traverse the tumultuous 1980s and early 1990s in The Philippines—a great democratic revolution deposes a dictator; a massive volcanic eruption covers the world in ash—to ask how one might build a new and better future out of disaster. Language: English

7PM:

'Far from Vietnam' (115mins) by Chris Marker

This epic 1967 collaboration between cinema greats Chris Marker, Jean-Luc Godard, Joris Ivens, William Klein, Claude Lelouch and Alain Resnais was made in protest of American military involvement in Vietnam “to affirm, by the exercise of their craft, their solidarity with the Vietnamese people in struggle against aggression (Marker).” This essayist film includes documentary footage in a fictional vignette with monologue that dramatizes the self-interrogation of European intellectuals; including interviews with Fidel Castro and Anne Morrison amongst others.

Language: French with English subtitle

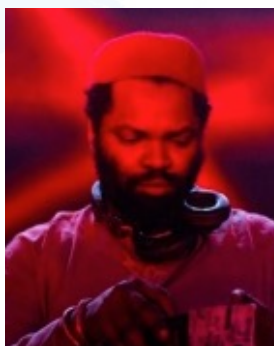


Event 4: Public film screening



## N'TONE EDJABE

Duration of stay:  
April 9-13, 2015



N'tone Edjabe is a writer, journalist and DJ from Cameroon, who currently lives and works in Cape Town, South Africa. In 2002, he founded 'Chimurenga' (which means 'revolutionary struggle'), an award-winning pan-African literary platform that addresses and embraces the continent's complexities. He is also the curator of the series of publications 'African Cities Reader' and co-presenter of influential radio programs in Cape Town. He is currently the curator of PASS (Pan African Space Station) and contributes to such publications as 'Politique Africaine', L'Autre Afrique and BBC Focus on Africa.

### Event 1 (Public Lecture)

#### *Diagnosing the Chimurenga Chronic*

April 9, 2015 @ 6.30PM @ Hoa Sen University, Nguyễn Văn Tráng Campus

Audience number: 54

Translator: Hoàng Trần Bảo Quyên | Facilitator: Zoe Butt

N'tone spoke of his role in establishing and directing the print and online pan-African platform called 'Chimurenga', which showcases art, society and culture. His presentation focused on Chimurenga's latest editorial project, 'The Chimurenga Chronic', which began as a one-off edition of a fictional newspaper published in October 2011, but back-dated to the week of 18-24 May 2008. This one-off edition of the



Event 1: Public Lecture

## N'TONE EDJABE

Chronic was a social sculpture that embraced the newspaper as a popular medium that raises the perennial question of news and newness, of how we define both the now and history. It invited its editors, writers, artists and readers to take it seriously as a time machine; to re-consider the past as a territory to explore, and the present as a precarious and elusive entry-point through which, hopefully, a radically different future might make its appearance. This fictional newspaper has since become a reality, as a quarterly publication which is distributed across the continent's main cities and further afield, and while continually exploring the possibilities of this old technology – the newspaper as art object, as curriculum, as cartography, and more.

### Event 2 (Public Music event)

#### *The Beats of Africa with N'Tone Edjabe*

April 10, 2015 @ 11.30PM @ The Observatory, Nguyễn Tất Thành, Dist. 4

Audience number: 150

The Observatory, a local bar on Saigon's port, hosted this unique event, which featured a bonanza of African sounds brought to the dance floor by one of the highest specialists in the field, who also specializes in African music in all of its vastly divergent inflections – from traditional percussion-focused rhythms to home-grown house. N'Tone has co-hosted the Soul Makossa programme on Bush Radio in South Africa and is considered a definitive authority on African culture and politics. The collection he has in his bag covers multiple regions of the vast African soundscape, an audio safari through past & present, urban & rural, traditional & avant-garde music from across the continent.



Event 1\_Public Lecture



Event 2: Public Music event

## N'TONE EDJABE

### Event 3 (Private Workshop):

*Regaining collective agency via conscientized publication*

April 12 & 13, 2015 @ 10AM – 3PM @ Sàn Art

Audience number: 25

Translator: Dương Mạnh Hùng | Facilitator: Zoe Butt

N'Tone began the discussion by sharing the colonial experiences of people in Cameroon (and Africa at large) that sets the context for the purpose of *Chimurenga*. He described the method in which the colonial power structure abolished indigenous beliefs by imposing the Western standards of 'becoming' human onto the natives, thus effectively reducing the mass of African people to the status of objects and annihilating their sense of self. N'Tone wanted his publication to decolonize the mind of this faceless mass and to help them regain their agency: essentially to learn to speak again and shift the hegemonic paradigm of society. He asked workshop participants to think about cartography and how classic approaches to map-making could perpetuate assumptions and stereotypes created by dominant powers. Discrediting traditional maps at best as subjective, ideological constructions based on a set of certain logic and at worst fundamentally anti-scientific creations serving a political agenda, N'Tone contested the belief of cartography as scientific, objective, and exact by engaging the participants with reinvented maps from his publication *Chimurenga*. He raised important questions about how we should incorporate human experiences such as emotions, sensations, sensibility, fear, and memories as cartographic data. The group reached the conclusion that cartography as ethnography is no longer desirable and artists as map-makers needed to produce rigorous and individualized methods to break down expectations of countries and visualize people's experiences in their publication.



Event 3: Workshop

## N'TONE EDJABE

The group attempted to define the concept of agency as collective freedom and not only as an individual quest. As a group, we defined agency as a philosophical space in which we assert and validate our existence: a space of control that is invisible to anyone outside of that space. The group discussed different ways to create collective agency, mainly to realize that collective agency was manifested by creating parallel structures to the visible dominant ones: looking at the Black consciousness and feminist movements to simple daily experiences, such as posting on a bullet board or speaking about politics in a coffee shop in Vietnam. In the end, collective agency became how we navigated and negotiated our situations, exploring how we are connected in and through particular conditions. Finally, N'Tone engaged us all in the experiment of imagining a publication in which the collective agency of Vietnamese artists can be empowered to discuss issues in the country using Vietnamese as the dominant language instead of English.



Event 3: Workshop

## MARCO KUSUMAWIJAYA

Duration of stay:  
June 23-27, 2015



Marco Kusumawijaya is an Indonesian architect and urbanist. He studied at Parahyangan University in Bandung (Indonesia), and at the University of Leuven (Belgium). He co-founded the Rujak Center for Urban Studies (RCUS) in 2010 and has been its director since. RCUS mission is to assist cities and regions to change towards ecological sustainability, based on co-production of knowledge. RCUS undertakes research, policy advocacy, as well as concrete projects in the field. Since 2013, RCUS owns and co-manages a sustainability learning center 'Bumi Pemuda Rahayu' in Yogyakarta. This facility runs programmes that intersects art, community and ecology. Personally, he works also as consultant for architectural designers, urban and rural planning, and development projects with emphasis on community participation, ecological sustainability and creative engagement. He has been involved with the arts as producer and curator, previously Chair and Director of Jakarta Arts Council (July 2006 – January 2010). He actively writes and talks on most issues related to urbanism.

### Event 1 (Public Lecture)

*Community as an Alternative way of Life*

23 June, 2015 @ 6.30PM @ Hoa Sen University, Nguyễn Văn Tráng Campus

Audience number: 62

Translator: Hoàng Trần Bảo Quyên | Facilitator: Zoe Butt



Event 1: Public lecture

## MARCO KUSUMAWIJAYA

Can community be a viable alternative way of life, economy and desire? A community is where certain commons are truly shared. Its advantage is in providing bounds that can be immediately and concretely felt by the individual and sensed by the state. But modern states and economies treat people as individual citizens and consumers: they call forth the modern idea of individual freedom, through a critique of 'oppressive' traditional communities. Nowadays an ecological consciousness — of limited resources and other species — is rising, it brings about the awareness and necessity of bounds. Can it lead to real changes towards sustainability? This lecture argued the emerging value of community in the context of urbanized environments, particularly in developing Southeast Asian countries.

### Event 2 (Public Lecture)

*Arts and Community: What's next?*

June 25, 2015 @ 6.30PM @ Hoa Sen University, Nguyễn Văn Tráng Campus

Audience number: 42

Translator: Hoàng Trần Bảo Quyên | Facilitator: Zoe Butt

Communities provide materials, inspiration, reason and worthy audience. Over the last few decades, from rural to urban contexts, artistic experiments with communities have been intensifying and spreading. An artist's engagement in a community can be as simple as serving community members. Environmental concerns are often important reasons for artists' interaction in the community. How can we evaluate these concerns, and what lessons are to be learned for the future, aesthetically, ethically and politically? How are they related to



Event 2: Public lecture

## MARCO KUSUMAWIJAYA

the idea of community? This lecture presented various successful projects initiated by Indonesian artists, collectives, art spaces and cultural workers who inspire, and receive inspiration from, living community.

### Event 3 and 4 (Private Workshop)

*Community-based arts and the role of artists as engineers of human relations*

June 27 & 28, 2015 @ 10AM – 3PM @ Sàn Art

Audience number: 25

Translator: Hoàng Trần Bảo Quyên | Facilitator: Zoe Butt

Marco continued to elaborate on his concept of 'commons', whether it is 'natural' commons or 'artificial' commons. Commons are believed to take on the form of shared commodities, values, and ideas in a community. The agent of mediation in the commons is a group of people who are in control of events in their community and sometimes create their own rules of engagement inside that space. Using different examples of urban issues in a city, Marco and participants analyzed how citizens of a city delegate the upkeep and development of public spaces (commons) to the state. As a result, they become dependent on the state's authority and forget their own capacity to practice their agency as individuals or as community. The conversation then progressed to the question of how these ideologies and discussion affect an artist's work and thinking as a cultural producer. How do artists respond to the socio-political atmosphere of their nation, their communities? Should they follow the regulations of the State or follow what they think? As contemporary art becomes more intertwined with the community, artists are realizing their agency to voice opinions about issues, to start a community to do something about it.



Event 2: Public lecture

## MARCO KUSUMAWIJAYA

The participants discussed how an artist could try to elevate the community by sharing his or her skills and sense of aesthetics, to develop a community's sensitivity toward the arts. Artists are often detached from community because community doesn't understand their art. So in order to be understood, artists must share their knowledge and aesthetics with all their integrity. This act of sharing is considered a service to the community, elevating their sense of beauty and ethics. In order to effectively carry out this service, artists must balance between their aesthetics and ethics, while adjusting their attitude and sensitivity. That's when a community-based arts can take shape. The 2-day workshop ended with a series of proposals for a project concept to engage community from the participants. A \$500-grant from Marco was awarded to the best ideas presented and implemented with the support of Sàn Art.



Event 3 & 4: Workshop

## N'GONÉ FALL

Duration of stay:  
August 27-30, 2015



N'Goné Fall is a Senegalese independent curator, an essayist and a consultant in cultural policies who graduated with distinction from the École Spéciale d'Architecture in Paris. She has been the editorial director of the Paris-based contemporary African art magazine 'Revue Noire' from 1994 to 2001. She edits books on contemporary visual arts and photography in Africa including: *An Anthology of African Art: The Twentieth Century* (Ed. DAP New York, 2002), *Photographers from Kinshasa* (Ed. Revue Noire Paris 2001), *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography: a century of African photographers* (Ed. Revue Noire Paris 1998). Fall has curated numerous exhibitions in Africa, Europe and the USA. As a consultant in cultural policies she is the author of strategic plans, orientation programs and evaluation reports for national and international cultural institutions. Fall is an associate professor at the Senghor University in Alexandria, Egypt (Masters Department of Creative Industries). She is also a founding member of the Dakar-based collective 'GawLab', a platform of research and production of art in public spaces and technology applied to artistic creativity.

### Event 1 (Public Lecture)

#### *Pan African Dream*

August 27, 2015 @ 6.30PM @ Hoa Sen University, Nguyễn Văn Tráng Campus

Audience number: 48



Event 1: Public lecture & N'Gone visiting artist studios of 'San Art Laboratory'

## N'GONÉ FALL

Translator: Dương Mạnh Hùng | Facilitator: Zoe Butt

N'Goné described the culture and contemporary art of Africa through the dream of an integrated continent, 'a site of negotiation', for various, complex cultures. Africa has 54 countries, all but Ethiopia have suffered from long-term colonial domination. After multiple annexations by colonial powers, Africa has undergone geographical fragmentation, its countries using art and culture as a tool for nation building and continental integration. Many intellectuals have been implementing the Pan-African ideology in their artistic productions – the intercontinental ideology and movement within Africa. From such inspiration, N'Goné presented emblematic artists who use Pan Africanism as a concept, in addition to sharing art projects that she and her colleagues have realised in Dakar to look at the countries and the continent through the prism of history, geography and politics.

### Event 2 (Public Lecture)

*Exploring African History, Geography and Politics through art projects*

August 28, 2015 @ 6.30PM @ Hoa Sen University, Nguyễn Văn Tráng Campus

Audience number: 45

Translator: Dương Mạnh Hùng | Facilitator: Zoe Butt

N'Goné shared the antecedents, challenges, and stakes of African contemporary art. The continent's culture has always been viewed under an "African stereotype", especially those imposed from Western perspectives. This obsolete "heritage" burdens and hinders living



Event 1: Public lecture

## N'GONÉ FALL

artistic and cultural producers. Then what should they do? N'Goné presented a series of profound and interesting examples by artists from diverse African countries, ones who reflect the history, the present and the future of Africa through visual art. Their projects are not confined within the boundaries of modernism but live, move, and breath with contemporaneity.

### Event 3 (Private Workshop)

*State power, nation branding, national-cultural representations and an artist's critical role*

August 29 & 30, 2015 @ 10AM – 3PM @ Sàn Art

Audience number: 25

Translator: Dương Mạnh Hùng | Facilitator: Zoe Butt

N'Goné openly reflected on her decision to become a curator. She argued that the countries of the Global South need to prevent its history and knowledge from being sidelined in Western-dominated global discourse by actively talking about it, and engaging with it. Her art productions aim to show how much the Global South intellect contributes artistically and intellectually to world history and culture. She urged the participants to detach themselves from Western-centric perspectives and decide for themselves who they are and what they stand for, as we need “more curators, writers, and art historians from our countries to talk about ourselves to ourselves”.

The conversation then expanded to focus on three questions. The first question analyzed the relationship between nation branding, state power, and cultural representation, and whether these three elements

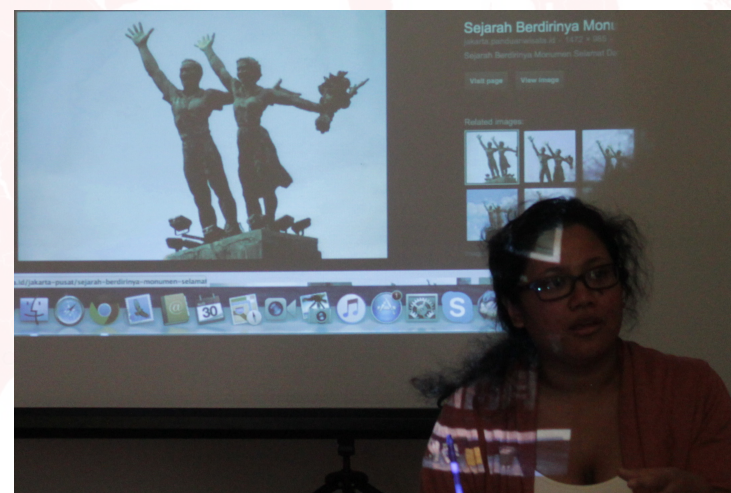


Event 3: Workshop

## N'GONÉ FALL

cement a nation. The participants dissected different national symbols as state-promoted cultural representations of Vietnam in nation branding strategies, and discussed how these symbols play a role in solidifying the state's economic and political power as well as assimilating the nation's minority groups into the majority. The participants came to the conclusion that nation branding is failing as the state is failing as structural support for its economy, and rejected the idea that they were mono-cultural within their nation.

The second and third questions dived further into the contentious topic of state-commissioned art and the role of artist-led independent projects in public urban space. Various examples of 'good' or 'bad' state-commissioned public art were presented and analyzed to understand how they influence the public's conceptualization of contemporary art: from state-sanctioned performance pieces during public Tết shows in Vietnam to the African Renaissance Monument in Senegal that exemplifies all the racist stereotypes against black people. The participants then discussed with N'Goné their personal ideas about mediums of presenting their art works to public space that evade censorship and still deliver a strong message to contemporary social issues.



Event 3: Workshop

## RAVI SUNDARAM

Duration of stay:  
December 17-21, 2015



Ravi Sundaram is a Professor at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi. In 2000 he founded the Sarai programme along with Monica Narula, Jeebesh Bagchi, Ravi Vasudevan and Shuddhabrata Sengupta. Sundaram has co-edited the Sarai Reader series, *The Public Domain* (2001), *The Cities of Everyday Life* (2002), *Shaping Technologies* (2003), *Crisis Media* (2004), and *Frontiers* (2007). He is the author of *Pirate Modernity: Media Urbanism in Delhi* (Routledge, London 2009) and the edited collection *No Limits: Media Studies from India* (Oxford University Press, 2013). His writings have been translated into many languages. Sundaram's current work is on contemporary fear after media modernity. Ravi is Visiting Professor at the School of Architecture and Planning, Delhi, Princeton University, Johns Hopkins University, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and the University of Oxford.

### Event 1 (Public Lecture)

*Culture, Infrastructure, and the Digital*

December 17, 2015 @ 6.30PM @ Hoa Sen University, Nguyễn Văn Tráng Campus

Audience number: 46

Translator: Lêna Bùi | Facilitator: Zoe Butt



Visiting art studios at 'San Art Laboratory' &  
Event 1: Public lecture

## RAVI SUNDARAM

This lecture explored infrastructures as material forms that connect populations, regions, and economies. Infrastructures of transport and communication for instance are crucial for the circulation of both economies and cultures. Infrastructures are at the center of media circulation by way of entangling people, objects, ideas and technologies. Digital infrastructures are dynamic environments; they break down, collapse and suddenly multiply in new ways through circulation and collaboration. In non-Western environments like Asia, infrastructures have a distinct 'poetics', with aesthetic and radical possibilities. This poetics is a significant part of Asia's move to the digital, with emerging cultural practices, and new cultural institutions.

### Event 2 (Public Lecture):

#### *Memory, Circulation, and the Digital Archive*

December 18, 2015 @ 6.30PM @ Hoa Sen University, Nguyễn Văn Tráng Campus

Audience number: 36

Translator: Lêna Bùi | Facilitator: Zoe Butt

This lecture discussed how images, sounds, and videos are being produced in contemporary Asia, more than ever in the past. People with smart phones and low cost gadgets take millions of images, sounds and videos and share them with friends on online networks. Our memories seem expanded exponentially, as we are now aided by digital storage on our media devices. New, digitally enabled archives of the past have burst into prominence, giving them a new life, and opening access to many. What are the consequences of enhancing our memories with artificial, digital aids? Is memory more enhanced or fragile, a fading glow as we rush to capture everything that exists with digital cameras?



Event 2: Public lecture

## RAVI SUNDARAM

### Event 3 (Private Workshop)

December 19 & 20 2015 @ 10AM-3PM @ Sàn Art

Audience number: 25

Translator: Lêna Bui | Facilitator: Zoe Butt

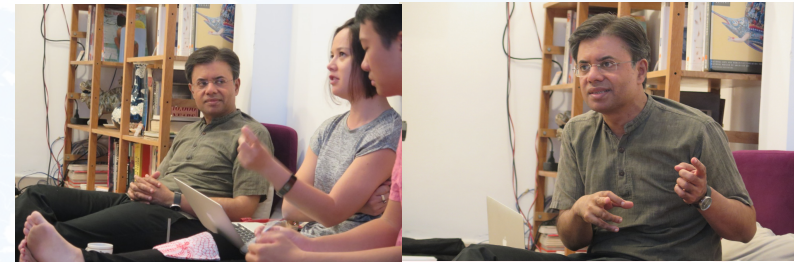
The final workshop of Conscious Realities became a space of dialogue about media, the public, and the aesthetics of contemporary social life. Media is defined here as a *condition of mediation*, an interactive space, a new language, a form of storage. Thus, media are materials that connect humans and objects meaningfully. The important question then is how artists, writers, and researchers produce a set of connections to the public using a body of diverse media. The conversation then proceeded to deconstruct important concepts about media from Ravi's two lectures using the Internet – one of the biggest forms of media created. With its ability to generate, spread, track, and store materials, the Internet has infiltrated the walls of private life and allows information there to leak into the public. Thus, it interferes with the sovereignty of state censorship. The Internet as well as other social media nowadays enables agency: it allows marginalized people to gather as a collective and comes up with creative strategies to take over the public sphere. Participants discussed different examples of where they have gone public with their opinions about social issues, the repercussions of their actions, and strategies to mobilize using Internet.



Event 3: Workshop

## RAVI SUNDARAM

The second day focused on the poetics and aesthetics of digital media in a contemporary context. Poetics of digital media is understood as its ability to help the marginalized people tell and record their own stories, without a researcher being present. This prompted the artists and participants to rethink how they would interact with their materials, people or objects, in the digital age. Participants agreed that artists must match their aesthetics with the context of their materials to produce works that are socially relevant and critical. The rest of the discussion was spent discussing strategies for artists to be the engineers who curate and scaffold communities in crafting their arts and narratives. This is how aesthetics of digital media produce conditions for infrastructure.



### The crisis of censorship(old style)

- police function of postcolonial sovereignty: management of public affect
- censorship played both police and patron, working with the 'open edge' of publicity, while asserting sovereign power
- This model has broken down since the 1990s

# PROD/PONDER

ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCY PROGRAM

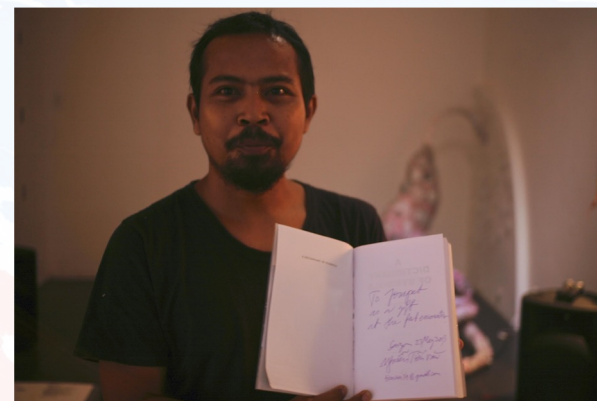


## JOMPET KUSWIDANANTO

Duration of stay:  
May 1-30, 2013



Jompét is a visual artist from Yogyakarta, Indonesia. He studied Communication at Faculty of Social and Political Science of GadjahMada University, Yogyakarta, trained by his local art community to be a visual artist in both traditional and contemporary forms. Besides working as a solo artist, he collaborates with 'TeaterGarasi', a Yogyakarta based contemporary theater group. His interest in theatre and music has contributed to an artistic practice largely inspired by the re-discovery of cultural historical texts. In much of his work, the idea of the ghost as a forgotten memory or haunting social presence has given birth to kinetic installations where symbols such as military costume come alive with sound and light. His recent solo exhibitions include On Asphalt, Project Fulfil Art Space, Taipei; Third Realm, Parasite Hong Kong and as Independent project at 54th Venice Biennale; Java's Machine: Phantasmagoria, Cemeti Art House, Yogyakarta and Osage Gallery in Singapore and Hong Kong. Jompét's works also featured in Taipei Biennale 2012; Phantoms of Asia, Asian Art Museum in San Francisco; Jakarta Biennale 2011; Global Contemporary, Art Movement Since 1989, ZKM Karlsruhe, Germany; Negotiating home, Nation and History, Singapore Art Museum; Lyon Biennale 2009; Yokohama Triennale 2008. Jompét was selected as finalist for Lecturis Award 2011, Art Amsterdam; Asia Art Award 2010, Loop Gallery Seoul and Academic Art Award 2008, Yogyakarta Institute of Art.



## JOMPET KUSWIDANANTO

### Event 1 (Workshop):

*'Ghost' in mythology, history, culture and contemporary art'*

May 25 & 26, 2013 @ 2-7PM @ Sàn Art

Collaborator: Nguyễn Tiến Văn (literature historian) & Inra Jaka (Performer)

Translator: Trần Minh Đức, Trà Nguyễn, Arlette Quỳnh-Anh Trần

Facilitator: Zoe Butt

Audience numbers: 20

In his one-month residency with Sàn Art, Jompét has continued his fascination with ghosts, with an intrigue for the historical Vietnamese stories such as *Truyện Kì Mạn Lục* and *The Case of Lychee Garden*. Participants were invited to hear more of Jompét's overall artistic practice; with guidance from Nguyễn Tiến Văn (translator, writer and literature critic) who gave insight into the role of mythology in Vietnam. Following this, an actor read a version of these historical texts, then inviting the audience to help the artist unpack its meaning and relevance to contemporary society today (international artist liaison, Trần Minh Đức)



## JOMPET KUSWIDANANTO

### Event 2 (Artist's Talk):

*Nguyễn Mạnh Hùng & Jompet Kuswidananto*

May 29, 2013 @ 6.30PM @ San Art

Collaborator: Nguyễn Mạnh Hùng

Translator: Arlette Quỳnh-Anh Trần | Facilitator: Zoe Butt

Audience numbers: 20

Over the past month, Hùng and Jompet have spent time together discussing their individual art practices and interests. They both realized they have an interest in the idea of ghosts as mythical presences that can reveal the past, but also as social symbols that have become lost tools who have forgotten their purpose. At this event, they spoke of their individual practice and concluded by sharing how their mutual fascination for the 'ghost' has taken new perspective over their last one month of discussion.'

(international artist liaison, Trần Minh Đức)



## JOMPET KUSWIDANANTO

**SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS:** (international artist liaison, Trần Minh Đức)

Although Jompét Kuswidananto and Nguyễn Mạnh Hùng could not realize a concrete collaborative outcome (initially desiring to work together during Jompét's residency), their limited time together nevertheless produced successful results. At this talk, Vietnamese audiences learned more about Indonesian contemporary art, especially the method of narrating alternative history via performing theater, dance and visual arts. They also had a great lesson in re-discovering Vietnamese historic texts and myths, which hid rich layers of differing cultural values. Jompét and Hùng confronted the challenge of immersing themselves in curiosity, then researching and utilizing history in their artistic practices. The more artists are curious about history, the more relevant and insightful their artworks can become.

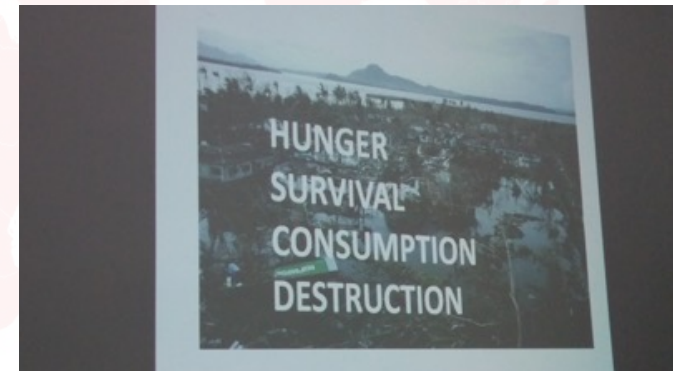


## THE WEATHER BUREAU

Duration of stay:  
November 14 – December 9, 2013



'The Weather Bureau is a social architecture and engineering conglomerate that designs propositionary structures and conditions in the idealized state of utopia. Founded in 2010 by Lena Cobangbang and Mike Crisostomo, their vision as 'The Weather Bureau' is to picture essences of the ideal as inherently dictated by the constraints of the form, illustrating perhaps an ideology in plasticity. Lena Cobangbang graduated from the University of the Philippines with a degree in Fine Arts. Her work is broad-ranging, moving across video, installation, and found objects to embroidery, cookery, performance and photography, in acts that are obsessive-compulsive, and at turns celebratory and macabre. She recently completed an artist/curator research residency exchange between Green Papaya Art Projects and Pekarna Magdalenske Mreze in Maribor, Slovenia in 2010. In 2005, she was nominated for the 3rd Ateneo Art Awards. She received the Cultural Center of the Philippines Thirteen Artists Award in 2006 and was one of the participating artists in the 2008 Singapore Biennale. Mike Crisostomo (b.1975, Manila) studied Fine Arts at The University of The Philippines and was into corporate managerial work before doing production design and graphics design which eventually lead to focusing on art whose themes revolve around sublimating Sci-Fi utopian/dystopian visions through painting and photography.'



## THE WEATHER BUREAU

### Event 1 (Artist Talk)

#### *The Weather Bureau*

November 30, 2013 @ 4.30-7PM @ Sàn Art Laboratory

Translator: Phan Thảo Nguyên

Facilitator: Zoe Butt | Audience numbers: 20

'The Weather Bureau' is prompted by the recent ravage of the Southern islands of Visayas in The Philippines. Lena Cobangbang represented 'The Weather Bureau' sharing their projects inspired by the overwhelming call for international awareness in coping with climate change and the everyday struggle one faces amidst the crisis brought on by natural disasters and social weathering (wars, economic embargos, economic policies).

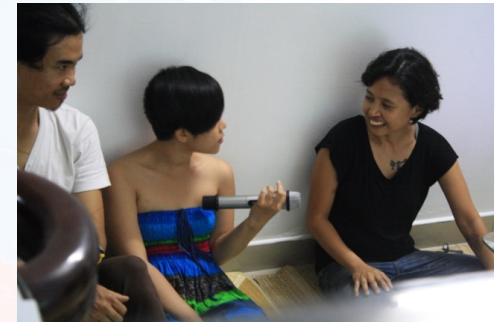
### Event 2: Pop-up exhibition

November 30, 2013 @ 6:30PM @ Sàn Art Laboratory studio

Facilitator: Trần Minh Đức, Zoe Butt

Audience numbers: 15

'The Weather Bureau' decided to make an installation that refers to the tenuous relationship between concepts of survival, preservation and consumption. In this installation the refrigerator is used as a metaphorical and visual platform for their objects and tableaux. Composed of jars of preserved and fermented vegetables and fruits, carved and composed as idyllic postcard rural landscapes; apocalyptic scenarios of cooked food (but sealed in the freezer compartment) - all is sealed in posterity for their picturesqueness or kept for future consumption. The wealth and diversity of the food culture of Vietnam provided a veritable source for exploration for this artistic duo.



Event 1: artist talk



Event 2: pop-up exhibition

## THE WEATHER BUREAU

**SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS:** international artist liaison, Trần Minh Đức

Lena Cobangbang at first found it difficult being in a foreign country with language and atmosphere differences but later she also figured out the best way to build the work within her research for idea development as well as neighborhood's acquaintance. One month is quite a short time for any better results, but the outcome was good. The number of people who stayed really enjoyed the discussions, questions and exchange. Lena regretted a longer residency was not possible, so that she could discuss deeper thoughts and social references - exploration of the city, art scene and social situations. According to Lena, the residency provided a veritable learning experience, being a source of practical education and introspection in the making and thinking of art contextually set in a place like Saigon.



## KHADIM ALI

Duration of stay:  
April 7-23, 2014



Khadim Ali is an Afghani Hazara (b. 1978 Quetta, Pakistan). From 1998–99, he studied mural painting and calligraphy in Tehran, Iran. He earned a BFA at the National College of Arts, Lahore, Pakistan (2003), where he studied traditional miniature painting. Having moved to Sydney in 2010, he earned an MFA at the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales (2012). Ali now lives and works in Sydney, Quetta, and Kabul.

### Event 1 (Artist talk)

April 12, 2014 @ 4.30 - 6.30PM @ Sàn Art Laboratory

Audience number: 28

Translator: Lêna Bui | Facilitator: Trà Nguyễn

Khadim's study of the art of the Persian miniature focuses on his re-reading of the 'Book of Kings', otherwise referred to as the 'Shahnameh' (the epic book of poems by Abul Qasim Ferdowsi c. 977-1010 CE). In this literary masterpiece of Persian literature, the hero named 'Rustam' represents the good of the people who always overcomes evil in the world, including many demons during his reign of 300 years.



## KHADIM ALI

Both this hero-god and the demons he chases fascinate Khadim particularly because today, Rustam is an icon used to support the mission of armed religion (ie. the Taliban) and the ethnic cleansing of the Hazara community (an ethnic minority of whom Khadim Ali is a part). His re-reading of this epic is visualized in large-scale meticulous paintings innovating the art of the 'miniature' style; through video, and in woven tapestries of a style traditional to Afghanistan.

**SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS:** international artist liaison, Trần Minh Đức

Khadim was very generous with his time during his residency, spending time with local artists such as Le Hoang Bich Phuong (a silk painter) sharing how his personal journey informs his cultural attachment to the skill of silk and miniature work (gold leaf application). As a result of this time both have used each other's techniques in their new projects. While Khadim was in Saigon he produced 2 new paintings taking influence from Cham stone statuary and its Islamic connections as reference to his own histories as a Hazara. These paintings he subsequently donated to Sàn Art's online auction which have significantly raised money for our future programming. Khadim also brought an assistant with him from Afghanistan to Saigon for the month, collecting photography and film footage of religious practice in Saigon, in addition to co-producing, with local Vietnamese artists, a mural for Sàn Art's courtyard. It was great that Khadim was here for the lecture of Inrasara, a Cham poet. Inrasara's stories of his people were of great interest to Khadim.



## ADRIANA BUSTOS

Duration of stay:  
March 6 – April 1, 2014



Adriana Bustos was born in Córdoba in 1965, and currently lives and works in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She is a graduate of the School of Fine Arts Figueroa Alcorta and Psychology at National University of Córdoba. The investigative and documentary nature of her work consists of photography, video and drawing. She has participated in many residencies all over the world: Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, the UK, France to name but a few; and more recently has done solo projects in ARCO, Madrid; Frieze New York and University of Alaska, USA

### Event 1 (Artist Talk)

*'An Artist's Method'*

March 16, 2014 @ 6.30PM @ Sàn Art Laboratory

Audience number: 41

Translator: Lêna Bui Facilitator: Trà Nguyễn

Adriana talked about her drawing, photography and video practice engaging investigative and documentary methods of research, evident in 'Proyecto 4x4' which looks at the lives of horses that belong to people who recycle cardboard in Argentina; to 'Anthropology of the Mule' which draws on the parallel stories of commercial colonial routes of trade and the drug trafficking routes in Latin America.



## ADRIANA BUSTOS

Since 2012, she has been working on a project consisting of a series of maps titled 'Imago Mundi'. In her artist presentation, Adriana shared the process of her research and production, with a particular focus on how her methods help shift her practice from one media/perspective to another.

### Event 2 (Exhibition):

Adriana Bustos was an artist participant in the 'Conscious Realities' associated exhibition titled 'Conjuring Capital' (see Appendix 2.96-97)

### SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS: Zoe Butt

Adriana Bustos is one of Argentina's most prominent female artists today, one of the rare producers working across the social sciences and the visual arts. She is an incredibly maternal and generous thinker who connected immediately to the artists at our 'Sàn Art Laboratory', eager to share ideas, particularly with Lại Thị Diệu Hà from Hanoi whose artwork engaged psychological means of treating clinical depression and personality disorder. Adriana also has a background in psychology and so these two artists particularly hit it off.



## ART LABOR

Duration of stay:  
(local residents of Saigon)



Art Labor consists of visual artists Trương Công Tùng and Phan Thảo Nguyên, with curator/ writer Arlette Quỳnh-Anh Trần. They work between the visual arts and the social/life sciences in order to produce alternative non-formal knowledge via artistic and cultural activities. They live and work in Saigon. Art Labor = art + laboratory = art + workforce. <http://www.artlaborcollective.com/>

### Event 1 (Art class)

#### *Exploring Art with Eyes & Colors*

Every Thursday between July 17 – Aug 21, 2014 @ 9-10 AM @  
HCMC Eye Hospital 280 Điện Biên Phủ, District 3, Ho Chi Minh City

Audience number: 15 to 30 children (patients) each class, plus some of their parents.

Facilitator: Art Labor

Within the exhibition project 'Unconditional Belief' (see Appendix 2.91-93), Art Labor organized the program 'Exploring Art with Eyes & Colors' at HCMC Eye Hospital. This series of art classes, designed specifically for children inpatients in the Pediatrics Department, where inpatients are under the age of 15 who are operated, treated and cared for at the hospital within 3-5 days.



## ART LABOR

Having decreased vision, these children observe their surroundings and objects differently from normal kids; therefore their ability to perceive color, shape, and line is also different. The program provided these young inpatients an opportunity to discover the art world in their unique way. Weaker vision does not mean their world is somber. Actually, they can acquire an artistic capacity that is even more liberal and eccentric, since their imagination is not limited in the things seen by normal eyes. Art Labor hoped to stimulate a belief in a colorful and inspirational world from these children inpatients.

‘Exploring Art with Eyes & Colors’ is the first step towards a bigger public artwork, which Art Labor produced at HCMC Eye Hospital. Art Labor took inspiration from these inpatient’s artworks, re-designing the interior of the Pediatrics Department, to make the patient reception area and treatment rooms more artistic and lively. If sickness is a burden causing people to lose faith, art may help re-fill their faith almost without any conditions, nurtured with an open-minded imagination.

This project forms part of the exhibition ‘Unconditional Belief’, a ‘Prod/Ponder: Conscious Realities’ project (See Appendix 2.91-93)

### Event 2 (Workshop):

*Visual symbols in art, anthropology and other sciences*

December 9 & 16, 2013 @ 9-10AM @ University of Social Sciences and Humanities, HCMC

Audience number: Between 15 to 30

Facilitator: Art Labor



## ART LABOR

Taking cue from the artworks produced for the project 'Unconditional Belief', which examined people's belief in both modern medicine and ideas of the supernatural simultaneously, Trương Công Tùng and Phan Thảo Nguyên showcased how social, religious, scientific and linguistic icons are transformed and interpreted in their art projects. The first day focused on visual symbols and their various disciplinary meaning. The second day focused on how participants can employ/combine such symbols, with their own knowledge and experience as students of anthropology and sociology. Group discussion was integral to collective reflection in these gatherings, where Art Labor shared their research process in creating the artworks that illuminated how the social sciences were of great source for artistic and curatorial research. With thanks to Dr Linh Trung for her hosting of this workshop in her classes.

### Event 3 (Artist Talk)

April 24, 2013 @ 6PM @ Sàn Art

Audience number: 31

Art Labor shared how their exhibition, 'Unconditional Belief' (see Appendix 2.91-93) started as a kind of laboratory of ideas that began with a particular hypotheses about simultaneous belief in modern medicine and spiritual healing. They shared how their original hypotheses changed as a result of undertaking research into such things as ophthalmology; the story of illiteracy in Vietnam; and the creation of a Vietnamese modern alphabetic script. This was compared to the occurrence of the 'Magic Garden' in Long An Province where people gather to heal their illness. Their research was an attempt to better understand the anthropological concept of 'suffering' in relationship to animist belief.



## ART LABOR

Art Labor also talked about their own collective's methodology — how their 'idea- laboratory' works as a think-tank, in which critical theorists and scientists are invited to consult, challenge and question their research. Such collaborations reflect how an artist's practice is akin to other interdisciplinary forms of enquiry such as anthropology, history, architecture and medicine, which critically contributes to progressive ideas of social value in everyday life. The crossover dialog between art and science within the methods of Art Labor seeks to reaffirm that artistic production and practice is not limited by the white-cube gallery context. Indeed their practice demonstrates that such a nexus of minds is actually functional, educational, and a catalyst that can connect various publics to enact social change.

### SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS: Zoe Butt

I was very impressed by what Art Labor has achieved as a result of their participation in 'Prod/Ponder'. Beyond the production of new artwork; the staging of an exhibition at Sàn Art; the organization and initiation of workshops at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities — they in addition produced a journal; were invited to teach regularly at the Art Design and Creativity Academy, teaching art history and interdisciplinary thinking. Trương Công Tùng's work was also invited to participate in the 'Media City Seoul' exhibition of 2014. Their journal was also featured at a book fair in Germany. This collective I have high hopes will continue to do great work.



## THAN SOK

Duration of stay:  
August 4 – September 4, 2014



Than Sok (born 1984, Takeo, Cambodia) investigates religious and spiritual beliefs, materials and rituals through sculpture, installation, video and performance. Than graduated from Reyum Art School in 2005 and Reyum Workshop in 2007, and is currently studying architecture at Norton University, Phnom Penh. Group exhibitions include Phnom Penh: Rescue Archaeology, ifa, Berlin + Stuttgart (2013), Video: An Art, A History, Singapore Art Museum (2011). Than was a resident with Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, NYC (2013), and S-AIR, Sapporo (2011). Than's work has been collected by the Singapore Art Museum.

### Event 1 (Artist Talk)

August 30, 2014 @ 4pm @ Sàn Art Laboratory Studios

Audience number: 31

Fascinated by spiritual ritual, its structures and meanings, wary of how contemporary social attitude is changing understandings of what it means to 'believe', Than Sok unpacked his artistic practice that encompasses installation, drawing, performance, video and sculpture. He also shared his experiences of his past month residency in Saigon, to finally conclude his presentation with a special performance.



Performance by Than Sok  
following his artist presentation

## THAN SOK

### Event 2 (Exhibition):

Than Sok was an artist participant in the 'Conscious Realities' associated exhibition titled 'Conjuring Capital' (see Appendix 2.98)

### SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS: Zoe Butt

Than Sok's original idea was to work with the Cambodian community here in Saigon, to better understand their relationship to their faith (Buddhism) within the Vietnamese context. However he realized that the Cambodian community here is quite different to what it is back home as they must deal with cultural prejudice on a daily basis. He worked with one generous Cambodian who has lived and worked in Vietnam for years and speaks fluent Vietnamese – he helped Than Sok try to engage this diasporic community but few were willing to go on camera or have performances about Cambodia take place outside their homes. It shed interesting light on the cultural stigma that continues to exacerbate cultural exchange between Vietnam and Cambodia.



## KAREN FISS

Duration of stay:  
January 5 – February 6, 2015



Karen Fiss is a writer, curator, and professor of visual studies at the California College of the Arts in San Francisco. Her current research examines the impact of nation branding on the visual production of citizenship and collective memory in the wake of political trauma and national “unification.”

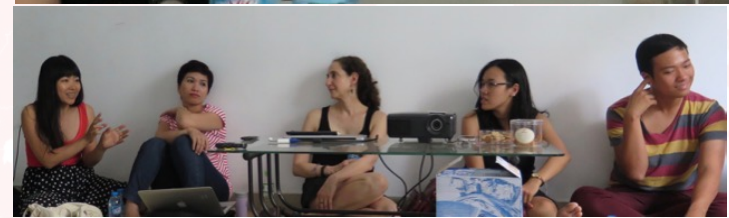
### Event 1 (Lecture)

*‘Brand the Beloved Country: Navigating global economies in contemporary South African art’*

January 10, 2015 @ 4.30PM @ Sàn Art Laboratory

Translator: Trâm Lương

Karen Fiss shared her current book project on ‘nation branding’, engaging postcolonial ideas and critiques of how a ‘nation’ is formed alongside an investment in integrating differing communities of people with vast networks of information technology and international trade. ‘My book examines the impact of government branding. In many respects, the book critiques the way in which globalization has been conceived within the dominant (often neocolonial) paradigms of the art world, and seeks to identify alternative frameworks with which to understand these mechanisms of exhibition, exchange, and cultural representation.’



## KAREN FISS

While my book considers a wide range of examples, my research abroad has concentrated on South Africa. After spending my last sabbatical there, I realized that current cultural practices in Vietnam would be a highly relevant and interesting comparative direction to take my research – hence my interest in Sàn Art’.

### Event 2 (Workshop)

January 11, 2015; 10AM- 3PM

Sàn Art Laboratory

Translator: Trâm Lương

In this one-day workshop, Karen further expanded on her research concerning postcolonial frameworks for defining nation and culture, looking at how the circulation of art operates in a system governed by the desires of a globalizing market. She looked at the role of cultural memory and the processes that determine the writing of histories, examining terms such as ‘transparency’, ‘knowability’, and ‘resistance’ in modes of social representation, particularly looking at the cultural economy of art biennials, Global south/Euro-US artworlds and curatorial exhibition frameworks. She particularly focused on the campaigns on conceptions of citizenship and the construction of historical narratives, particularly in the wake of political conflict and trauma. Karen states, ‘I place these “top-down” efforts in tension with the work of artists’ collectives and alternative spaces that offer competing ways of imagining “collective memory” and identity within local, national, and global contexts writing of two important postcolonial theorists – Edouard Glissant and Homi Bhabha – in an attempt to give window to how these prominent thinkers are offering unique insight into the dilemma of contemporary artistic representations of history and nation.’



## KAREN FISS

### SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS: Zoe Butt

It was a unique opportunity to have an academic researcher who specializes in South Africa choosing to spend a month in Saigon because she considers their 'nation-branding' to be of critical comparative study. For Vietnamese artists to have such expertise present in their residency space, whose care for artists in compromised contexts exuded generosity and interest (so many intimate and informal conversations), San Art was grateful for her political mind attuned to artistic values, giving time to asking questions of what artists were working on and why.

\*Karen Fiss, as an American researcher, was not applicable for financial support from Sàn Art's Prince Claus funds. Karen thus paid her own expenses. Zoe Butt decided to invite her to take part in 'Conscious Realities' for her research was utterly relevant to the geographies under discussion.



## ARIN RUNGJANG

Duration of residency:  
August 1-31, 2015



Arin Rungjang (born 1974) lives and works in Bangkok. His artistic practice involves different media, mainly video and site-specific installations. As he dives into the depths of history and day-to-day experiences, he skillfully dissects his material to propose a reinterpretation of major events, seen through the prism of more minor ones. By multiplying temporal and spatial references, he expects his public to reconstitute these different layers.

### Event 1 (Artist Talk):

August 8, 2015 @ 4PM @ Sàn Art Laboratory  
Translator: Dương Mạnh Hùng

Arin Rungjang introduced two of his most recent works *Golden teardrop* 2013 and *Mongkut* 2015. *Golden teardrop* is a work composed of a video and an intricate sculptural installation of teardrop-shaped brass, loosely but carefully, it layers the history of the sugar trade and personal narratives of Thai, Greek, Portuguese, and Japanese individuals in the fifteenth, seventeenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, with the traditional Thai egg-yolk dessert *thong yod* (literally, golden drops) as the starting point, presenting a reexamination of collective histories and memories and their formation. *Mongkut* puts one of Thailand's cherished symbolic forms, the crown, at the axis of Rungjang's inquiry. Rungjang's research recalls Franco-Thai relations



## ARIN RUNGJANG

during the parallel reigns of King Rama IV (1851–68) and Napoleon III (1852–70), a period marked by the expansion of the European colonial enterprise in much of the geographic region known today as Southeast Asia. In this video installation and sculpture work, he uses the present as a context for reopening a little-known history concerning Siam's relative sovereignty. (Note: Siam is the old name of now-Thailand)

### Event 2 (Workshop):

August 12, 2015 @ 3PM @ Sàn Art

Conducted in English (with translation assistance from participants)

Arin asked participants to share their opinions and stories of the Vietnam War, encouraged to also share their relative's perspectives. Arin, as artist, participated as a listener. There were 2 cameras and 1 sound recorder set up to document. Footage of this talk will be used as materials to develop Arin's new art project about South East Asia. Noteworthy participants were Mariam B. Lam, Associate Professor at University of California; Nguyễn Mạnh Hùng, Saigon based artist; Trần Minh Đức, Saigon based artist; Yoko Sakoda, Nagasaki - Sasebo Art Project, Japan coordinator; and Dang Bui, Saigoneer online magazine editor. Artist Nguyễn Mạnh Hùng, with his works very much related to his family background and father who served in the North Vietnam Army as an air force colonel, talked about his experiences growing up in the family and also in the Kim Lien neighborhood of veterans. Trần Minh Đức, Saigon based artist, was born in a family of naval engineer parents who also served the army during the war. Đức's artworks takes his memory and stories told by his parents as inspiration, which he



## ARIN RUNGJANG

shared in the workshop. Arin's impression of being in Saigon were heightened by Đức's narration of the city's changes recalled as childhood memories linked to specific site (e.g Bason Shipyard) – such stories added a special mark to Arin's note for future research. Mariam B. Lam gave perspective as a Việt Kiều Asian Studies Associate Professor. From her professional point of view, the workshop had a voice from the Vietnamese diaspora in U.S, which balanced out the discussion and gave useful counter, from 'the others' side' that is always cut down in official documents in Vietnam. Yoko Sakoda, born Nagasaki and based Saigon, made her opinions and comparisons of the involvement of US in Japan and Vietnam, and how the remnants (e.g US Naval Base in Sasebo Nagasaki) is still a wound affecting the country.

### OBSERVATIONS (Zoe Butt):

Arin is a fantastic story teller. With his global study of Thai history, his desiring to place himself in the shoes of another's gaze on his own country's history (his tales told through the lens of a great number of folk story) gave Vietnamese artists exposure to alternate means of engaging and narrating complex histories of little knowledge. It was also a coup to have someone so generous and caring of the next generation, eager to listen and give feedback, demonstrating his own research methods that enable his artistic practice. His workshop was particularly productive as Arin's gathering of minds to discuss the perspectives of the Vietnam War are recollections not possible for discussion in Vietnam's public sphere.



## LÊ GIANG

Duration of stay:  
September 1-30, 2015



Lê Giang was born in Hà Nội in 1988. She earned her BA in Art Education at Vietnam Fine Art University and MA in Fine Art at University of the Arts London. Lê Giang's point of departure is the question of the role of humans in nature and social structure. Intrigued by the concept of utopia, her practice is an attempt to research and depict how nature would react to the disappearance of humanity, what legacy would humans leave behind and what life form would take place henceforth.

Lê Giang's residency took place in Manila, in collaboration with 98BCollaboratory, in The Philippines. 98B's Project and Research Residency is an independent residency program geared towards establishing a creative network. It endeavors to assist and collaborate with artists, gallery and art managers, cultural workers and curators in the course of their research, project, presentation or production. The program aims to build a meaningful and multi-layered cultural exchange where an individual can explore his/her practice in a different environment with an uncommon set of resources. The residency is customized to their purposes, needs and requirements. Lê Giang's exhibition took place at the premises of 98B, First United Building, Escolta, Manila.

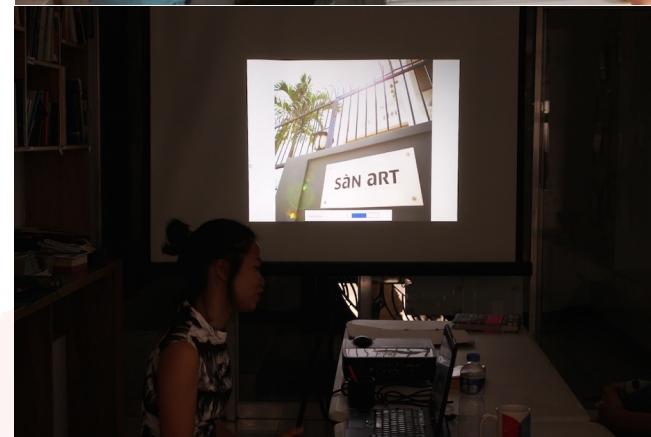


## LÊ GIANG

### Project:

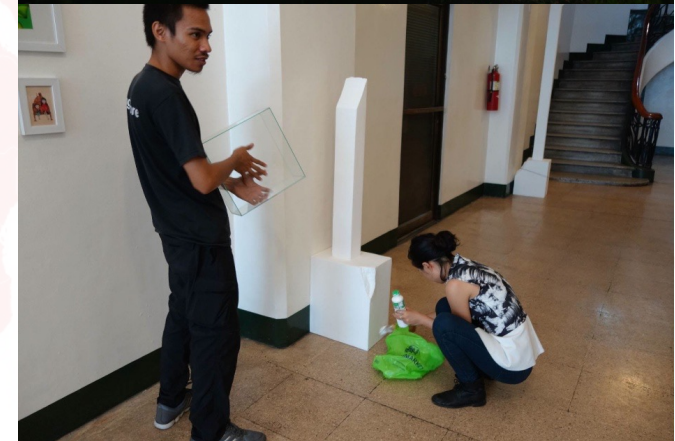
Lê Giang's current practice is based on the prospect of humankind's non-existence and nature's adaptation based on this absence as depicted in Alan Weisman's book 'The World Without Us'. Fascinated by the idea of a Utopia without the human race, her works probe nature's possible modes of adjustment if humanity is suddenly taken out of the picture; what legacy would man leave behind and what species would advance. For her residency at 98B, Giang investigated the relationship between nature and man and the connections of raw materials and manmade materials. She also looked into the mystical objects of The Philippines, most especially the natural ones. She was intrigued by how these ancient myths are still prevalent even today. Giang was drawn to particular realities, of how people exploit raw materials from nature to serve as their protection and personal desires while natural disasters occur constantly in this country. "Nostalgia is not the opposite of utopia, but, as a form of memory, always implicated, even productive in it." – Andreas Huyssen, 'Memories of Utopia'

Her exhibition 'Nostalgia from Nature' presented the sculptures as artefacts from her encounters in Mount Banahaw. 'Nuno sa Punso' is an object that implores respect for the land from its people. Mutya – the spirit of nature's light is a coconut shell, without germination pores, commonly referred to as "blind coconuts." This is considered a valuable amulet or "anting-anting" for its specific location can only be revealed in one's dreams. The posts are vestiges of a house ruined by a recent storm, found next to Banahaw's Jesu Salem. As theorist Ruth Levitas wrote "Representations of future utopias are always simultaneously dependent on the existing cultural resources."



## LÊ GIANG

The installations in the First United Building imply a Utopia or more accurately a heterotopia, where realities are divergent and with no apparent connection, yet implying relics of correlations that have been cast and molded through time. (Curatorial statement by 98B)



# ASSOCIATED EXHIBITIONS



## UNCONDITIONAL BELIEF

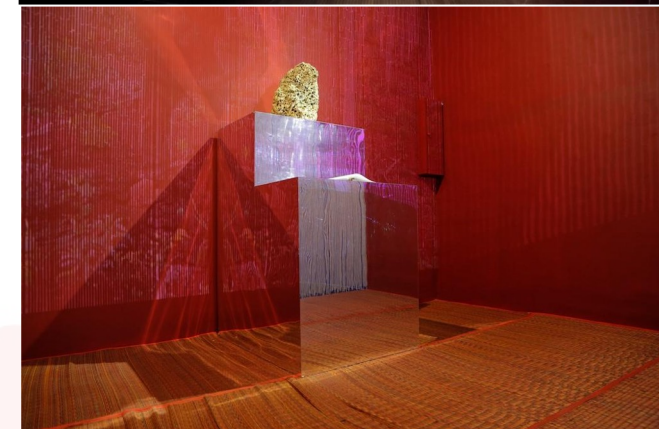
An exhibition by 'Art Labor'  
27 February – 29 April, 2014 @ San Art  
(See associated programs: Appendix 2.75-78)

### EXHIBITION STATEMENT

*"The traditional analysis of knowledge [...] takes knowledge to be a species of belief—specifically, justified true belief." (Eric Schwitzgebel)\**

*"[...] (dominant among psychologists and psychiatrists), delusions are belief states – it is an important diagnostic feature of delusions that they can lead to action and that they can be reported with conviction, and thus that they behave as typical beliefs." (Lisa Bortolotti)\*\**

Belief has been one of the broadest and most debatable topics of the study of humanity. Belief as a philosophical enquiry or a psychiatric study often employs the empirical sciences as a way to prove that belief's validity or impact. Belief is also a manipulative vehicle often utilized for political propaganda or in particular contexts seen as a threat to authority. 'Unconditional Belief' is an exhibition by collective 'Art Labor' (Trương Công Tùng, Phan Thảo Nguyên, Arlette Quỳnh-Anh Trần), who imaginatively explores the concept of 'belief' in Vietnam by examining particular site and historical account. The exhibition surveys different layers of belief – from human dependence on spiritual power or sacred object in healing sickness, to the usage of education to disseminate religious ideas.



## UNCONDITIONAL BELIEF

Trương Công Tùng studies Vietnamese people's belief in suffering, fate and ideas of the supernatural. Like an anthropologist, he carried out field trips and research in 'Magic Garden' in Long An Province (a private garden open to the public believed to have healing powers), where he looked into people's spiritual beliefs and rituals, practices yet to be verified by science as a cure. In his research, he discovered belief, or rather delusion is like dream and used as an effective tool to treat patients by psychiatrists. Công Tùng also expands his research to rituals of worshipping sacred objects believed to grant people wishes. His half-fictional, half-documentary artworks reveal layers of belief resulting from collective suffering or individual misery.

Phan Thảo Nguyên uses religious belief as a starting point to trace the history of modern Vietnamese script, a Romanized alphabet system supposedly first introduced in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by Alexandre de Rhodes – a French Jesuit missionary – as an alternative writing system to the traditional pictographic character. Thảo Nguyên creates her own imagined school named after de Rhodes, of which the curriculum is a place to experiment with the belief: in the un-seeable, the poetic and the beautiful. In this obscure school, where everyone is blindfolded, she showcases blindness and illiteracy as the real obstacles of learning for pupil and teacher. She asks what justifies belief when there is no literacy and knowledge, but only poetry and beauty?

Selecting each project's theme, curator Arlette Quỳnh-Anh Trần invites scientists from interdisciplinary fields to be collaborators and consultants for Art Labor. Their research process takes place like a laboratory of knowledge and artistic experiments. Besides organizing



## UNCONDITIONAL BELIEF

and designing art exhibitions, as collective curator, Arlette helps conduct educational workshops between the artists, and scientists with different kinds of public, from academic students to hospital patients and bringing art projects to unconventional spaces such as hospitals or universities. Consequently, with such curatorial and research approach, *Unconditional Belief* is not simply an artwork display; it also experiments with the possibility of reading an exhibition as an artistic research book. Entering this book / exhibition, the viewers can walk in, touch, see and read; they will encounter turning points of the artists' investigations, traces of their references from academic sciences, hints to decode the artworks and even the collective's plan for future projects. Art Labor's artistic productions for *Unconditional Belief* include artworks, texts, objects appearing in the exhibition, such as research materials and architectural, visual and audio sensations. Each of those elements contributes to the core concept of *Unconditional Belief*: the tension between belief, knowledge and delusion.

Written by Arlette Quỳnh-Anh Trần

\*Schwitzgebel, Eric, "Belief", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), forthcoming URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/belief/>

\*\*Bortolotti, Lisa, "Delusion", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/arc>



## CONJURING CAPITAL

August 8 – October 30, 2014 @ San Art

Participating artists: Adriana Bustos (Argentina), Christopher Myers and Hank Willis Thomas (USA), Nguyễn Hồng Ngọc (Vietnam), Sudarshan Shetty (India) and Than Sok (Cambodia)

Curated by Zoe Butt

*This exhibition would not have been possible without the additional support from Gallery SKE, New Delhi, India; Sa Sa Bassac, Phnom Penh, Cambodia; Ignacio Liprandi Arte Contemporáneo, Buenos Aires, Argentina.*

### EXHIBITION STATEMENT

The dominant economy with which we operate today is a system that fails to see the value in profit-less operations. The focus on economic growth, as opposed to the intangible benefits of giving, is the presumed driver of our industrial age. The lack of human and environmental ethical concern for the impact of today's system of accrual, profit and waste is exemplified in the mercantile expansion of empire in the 1600s and the violent assumption of race and class to occupy, divide and enslave foreign land and its peoples. Many of these colonized communities previously thrived as gift-giving societies, where the economic system was a reciprocal process founded on symbolic exchange. For example, in what is known as 'potlatch' to the Northwest American Indian community, they recognized that wealth was to be given and annihilated (sacrificed and thus destroyed). Wealth was not to be possessed (1). How are ideas of wealth manifest in contemporary society today? What are the systems that exploit human labor for betterment of those with power? What kinds of institutions take part in the corruption and abuse of human dignity and cultural tradition in their desire for efficiency and influence?



Christopher Myers & Hank Willis Thomas, 'Am I Going Too Fast?' (still) 2014; Than Sok with his work 'To Give is to Receive I' 2012

## CONJURING CAPITAL

More importantly, how can an artist's perspective provoke reflection on these issues? In this exhibition a select number of artists reveal five social contexts from the Global South (Cambodia, Kenya, India, Argentina and Vietnam), illustrating numerous dilemmas in the unequal social landscape of producing and consuming 'capital'.

What, exactly is 'capital'? Capital is considered wealth in the form of money or assets, which is socially taken as a sign of financial strength of an individual, organization or nation and assumed available for development of investment (2). According to economic theory, 'capital' is an exchangeable resource produced by human labor. Karl Marx in his landmark text 'Capital: Critique of Political Economy' critically outlines how the capitalist system argues a commodity's value according to its 'exchange-value' which is measured by how much labor power went in to its production. Marx specifically reveals the level of human exploitation incurred under such a system, arguing that the worker becomes a measured unit of energy where the idea of 'usefulness' is no longer about quality and skill, but about time.

Time becomes socially coded, constructed and controlled by how much labor can be quantifiably measured where profit is prioritized over need. Such an intangible system of control over resources – not only human labor but also the materials excavated, exhumed and melded as its task – is often an ethical challenge to the sustainability of our environment, cultural rituals and beliefs. Today, those who control and disseminate capital circulate the stories that *they* want its future labor force to hear.



Than Sok installation his 'To Give is to Receive I' 2012; Sudarshan Shetty, 'Waiting for Others to Arrive' (installation still) 2013

## CONJURING CAPITAL

We enter the exhibition 'Conjuring Capital', via the small library of Sàn Art, and we can hear the voice of artist Adriana Bustos as she sits within a whole other kind of collection. She sits behind glass as part of a diorama representative of the Salta jungle within a natural science museum in Argentina, near the border with Bolivia. Adriana is recounting the words of German writer Sabine Kuchler who poetically describes the mood of this jungle and its wounds as rotten, crumbling pieces of wood, where there is a deep absence of animal and human, where the trees seem tired of trying to reach for the sun. Such descriptions are in stark contrast to the myriad animals that lie physically poised and still around Adriana, where lush green vegetation in dappled light gives the mood of abundance. Adriana's choice of text metaphorically refers to the Argentinian government of the early 1800s who invited German scientists to document and catalog Argentina's natural environment. Their research effectively erased much indigenous local knowledge of flora and fauna, their categorizations becoming the basis of educational curricula across the country.

What is of particular interest to Adriana is that this jungle extends across the mountains of the Andes in Latin America and is the home of the coca leaf - that prized yet deadly plant that human greed distills into cocaine powder. Much of Adriana's research focuses on the motivations, systems of control and affect of cocaine production and consumption; her early paintings, photographs and collaborative installations exploring the exploitation of humans as 'mules' to carry this exorbitantly pricey white substance illegally across national borders (See Appendix 2.73 for Adriana's participation in 'Prod Ponder').

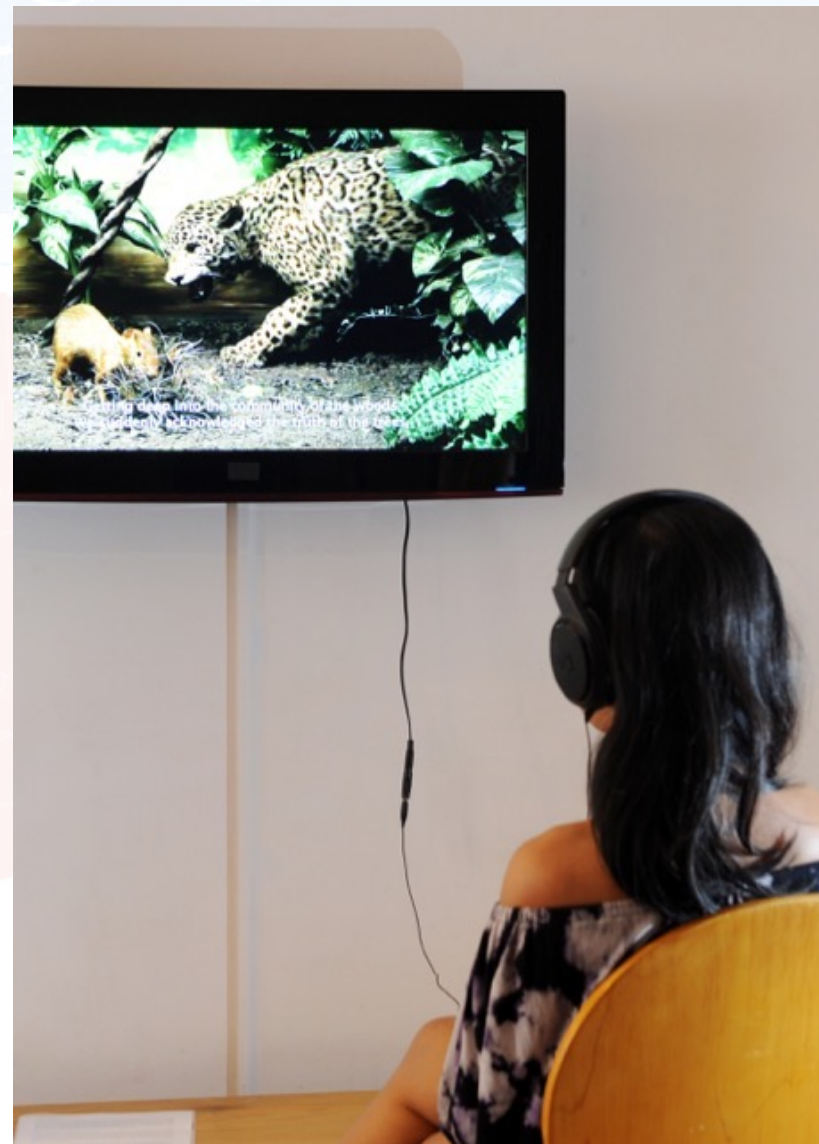


Adriana Bustos, 'Landscapes of the Soul' (still) 2011;  
Reading Room of Sàn Art

## CONJURING CAPITAL

'Landscapes of the Soul' takes place inside a museum, we can hear the guard admonishing a child for touching the exhibit and perhaps as viewers we wonder what is alive and what is dead, what is fact or part of the artists' illusion. Adriana attempts to make us think about how history presents particular images of the past that overlook the truth. This jungle infers great fear across Latin America today for the thousands of victims who continue to fall prey to drug cartels that demand their bodies as machines, in often-deadly missions, to deliver cocaine for a black market economy (3). Like the German scientists who re-categorized the flora and fauna of Argentina, similarly the drug mafia took over the wonder of this jungle again - she wonders if the museum curator understands their participation in this control of nature and culture by their failure to acknowledge this turbulent history in their display.

In the work of artist Than Sok, such a question of conscience is challenged through the religious practice of giving alms. 'To Give is to Receive I' is a reconfiguration of objects used in ritualistic practice between Buddhist monks and laity in Cambodia. A large radial LED disc representing the halo of Buddha is placed in the West corner of the gallery – in Cambodian temples, Buddha is always facing east towards the sun. In front of this multicolored light rests seven small mounds of sand on the floor. In each mound of sand the artist has placed several Cambodian riel – a common practice in Khmer Buddhist temples as a prayer ritual to release bad luck. Central to this installation is Sok's consideration of 'giving' as an act that expects to thus receive in return. He is critical of the institutionalization of religion and how Buddhist spiritual foundations of giving alms today have shifted into a non-spiritual labour. Traditionally, the more alms the laity gives to the



Installation view: Adriana Bustos, 'Landscapes of the Soul' (still) 2011

## CONJURING CAPITAL

monk, the more wealth the layperson is said to receive. This definition of 'wealth' is a spiritual value that heralds generosity, humbleness and respect desiring a higher reincarnation in the next life towards Nirvana. The halo of Buddha spins in a mesmerizing whirl in front of the viewer, the aura of divinity enshrined in technology. It is ironic to know that the giving of money at Buddhist holidays is considered good karma, as if the act of giving money alone is a 'good' enough deed, instead of attention to due diligence with an ethical character. Like the placing of a coin in a slot machine at a casino, faith in wealth is considered a hopeful act of chance, an opportunity to shift into a better cycle.

In a country where many young men from the countryside migrate to the urban centers, becoming monks as a way of earning an extra sum towards their future, the giving of alms has become a highly contested practice, a conjuring of wealth from faith that denigrates the principles of Buddhist thinking as something purchasable and thus expendable. If karma is considered the sum of a person's good deeds towards the next life, Than Sok queries the social architecture of contemporary life where the short sightedness of instant gratification fails to provide for future generations to come. (See Appendix 2.79 for Sok's participation in 'Prod Ponder').

In northern Vietnam, the insatiable desire by the French and Chinese for natural resources during the 1900s has left an indelible mark on the local community of artist Nguyễn Hồng Ngọc's hometown of Thai Nguyen. It was in 1910, during French occupation, that the French began mining coal in this area that by 1960 was fueling the nearby Chinese iron factory.



Than Sok 'To Give is to Receive I' (detail) 2012

## CONJURING CAPITAL

Needless to say this tiny village began to suffer the environmental impact of such industry and today is sadly a landscape of unusable coal, where massive mounds of black rubble rise behind domestic homes that were once an expanse of green. On a recent visit, Nguyễn discovered a derelict building with drawings of snakes on its inner walls and she was struck by the ominous portent it voiced by its presence – the snake as a symbol of a life force, of rebirth but also as a marker of darkness and vengefulness.

While Than Sok's Buddhist halo sits in warning of the gesture of giving, Nguyen's snake straddles the dualism of death and mortality, where coal as capital may bring warmth, light and energy it also consumes and emits a waste that cannot be recycled. In 'Sign of Reincarnation', Nguyen has drawn a series of images in charcoal where the snake weaves in and out. A sketch of an open-air coal-mining pit hovers in outline above the concentric circles of the 'wheel of becoming' or, 'wheel of life' according to Buddhist *thangka* paintings. This 'wheel of life' has numerous layers of meaning, its traditional inner hub representing the three poisons of ignorance, attachment and aversion its second layer representing karma, while the ferocious figure that typically holds this wheel together represents impermanence.

For Nguyễn, whose emerging practice has often employed and referenced coal as material and symbol, she is drawn to the fact that coal is a fossilized decomposition of living matter, that it is part of the cycle of living things and yet the systems of industrialized society have become so dependent on this substance that the 'wheel of life' has lost its balance. Nguyễn's project highlights how local economies become dependent on these destructive industries because an income must be generated to survive.



Nguyen Hong Ngoc, 'Sign of Reincarnation' 2014

## CONJURING CAPITAL

She points to the value of belief and tradition in providing hope and explanation for the impermanent world in which we live, the *thanka* cycles defying human idleness, that the only constant is change.

It is this hope that must be nurtured in the coal mining towns in remote areas of Vietnam and China, where the women above-ground living in squalor and immense air degradation work the coal-mining machines, organizing family and food in their make-shift steel shacks waiting for their men to re-surface from the privatized coal pits below. It is this same principle of hope that finds itself in another form in Kenya, as this nation attempts to innovate their access and distribution of income through *mpesa*, a microfinancing service that uses mobile phone technology to enable the transfer of funds easily from urban to rural communities. In the short film 'Am I going too fast?' Hank Willis Thomas and Christopher Myers focus on the cities of Nairobi and Nakuru where *mpesa* aids local forms of trade.

'We were tasked with making a film about people overcoming poverty. We wanted to stress that poverty isn't idle.... We were really devoted to showing people at work and in motion in Africa.... We wanted to show a 'normalcy' instead of an exotic. We were also interested in showing a complex story, a tapestry of converging lives, agendas, industries and technologies. Images of modern African metropolises are so few and far between.' (4) In this short film we see sleuth metal craftsman sculpt animals of myth and fantasy; we see immigrant families from India negotiate trade in traditional textiles through cross-continental family networks; we hear the observations and dreams of the local businessman who comment that their workforce is bigger than China, bigger than India; they speak of the revolution that *mpesa*, this informal banking system, has brought to their country and how it has enabled their own means of conjuring capital.



## CONJURING CAPITAL

'Am I going too fast?' speaks of the difference between perception and reality, begging the world to look at the transformation that is happening on the ground, to move beyond the persisting stereotypes of color and class to focus on the wonder of their historical context. Both Hank Willis Thomas and Christopher Myers are visual artists committed to troubling the image of the African-American, in turn examining how cultural attitude and social forms of memory are conditioned by the turbulent history of enslavement and occupation, desiring a recognition of how critical it is to insert new images and narratives of their people's past into the popular visual psyche of the next generation - to encourage them to challenge and rise up against the systems of power that presumes its control of representations of race, class, nation as capital.

In thinking of how images and objects are used as forms of capital to speak about our realities beyond our lifetime, Sudarshan Shetty presents 'Waiting for others to arrive', a single channel video work that focuses on the Tusildas Kunwarji chawl in Mumbai. A 'chawl' is a type of building found in India and literally means 'rooms' on each floor. The Tusildas Kunwarji chawl is named in memory of its benefactor whose act of philanthropy in the construction of this site assisted hundreds of poor migrant traders seeking to make a better life in Mumbai. During the 19th and 20th Century, such charity greatly contributed to Indian urban development. Sadly this chawl is to be demolished, its occupants to be resettled by the developer who bought the land.

In 'Waiting for others to arrive', Shetty provides three separate tableau: the interior of the chawl, its hallways, followed by its exterior. The sound of the *sarangi*, an ancient instrument of India, threads its



Christopher Myers & Hank Willis Thomas, 'Am I Going Too Fast?'  
2014

## CONJURING CAPITAL

presence with a 'raga' through all three sites – its mournful voice a reflection of the player's emotional state. It appears as if the musician is expectant of a guest as the cup and saucer edge closer and closer to the edge of the table in lieu of their arrival until it smashes to the floor – perhaps an omen of the community that will soon be thrown into fragments with the destruction of this building. The sound of this video is integral to the work and meant to be heard before it is seen. Hearing the montage of time through traditional instrument; the smashing of porcelain followed by the sound of the jackhammer in the rear alludes to the fragility of cultural and material capital, a fitting piece to conclude this exhibition for the video is placed on constant loop, reaffirming the cycle of creation and destruction. Sudarshan Shetty's art often conjures incongruous relationships between material and subject, where bathtubs lie water-filled containing clicking scissors or dinosaur bones are placed in replica like a rocking horse. His art poetically challenges the space between life and death, creating a space where the categories of reality and value are magically defied, where the realm of fiction allows for new readings of our world and its systems.

'Conjuring Capital' was inspired by the resourcefulness of these contemporary artists who challenge the notion that time invested in labor is an exchange value that can justify and determine wealth. These voices come from the Global South, a complex yet problematic set of geographies that endure the residual affect of coloniality and its current neoliberal face.



Sudarshan Shetty, 'Waiting for Others to Arrive' 2013

## CONJURING CAPITAL

Such a Global South is here desired as a social architecture with cultural, social and political historical platforms of similarities – a central focus of the 3-year San Art endeavor called ‘Conscious Realities’ to which this exhibition forms a part. What connects the artists in this exhibition are their sharp observations of the designed circulations of wealth – be they colonial, religious, capitalistic, entrepreneurial or cultural – bringing to light the smaller human tales of drug mules; monks as traders; coal landslides as residential back yards; the upward mobility of life amongst seeming poverty and the psychological affect of resettlement within urban gentrification. Their study of social systems and its symbolic languages are provocative statements that pose counter-memory to the official record.

Zoe Butt, July 2014.

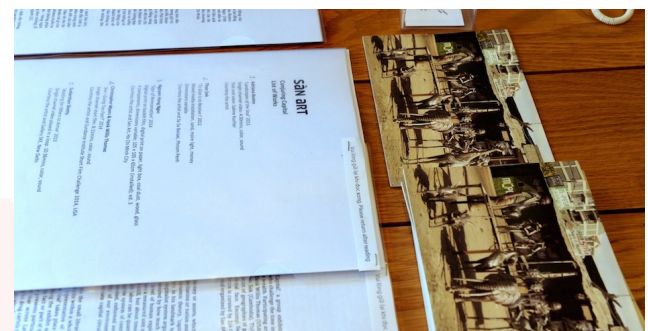
(1) Georges Bataille ‘The Accursed Share: Volume 1’ (trans. Robert Hurley), Zone Books, New York, 1991, pg. 67

(2) <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/capital.html>

(3) <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/capital.html>

(4) Interview between author and Adriana Bustos, March, 2014.

(5) Email interview between author and Hank Willis Thomas, 7 July 2014



## DISLOCATE

A solo exhibition by Bùi Công Khánh  
Organized by San Art. Curated by Zoe Butt  
June 21 – August 21, 2016 @ The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre

'Dislocate' by Bùi Công Khánh, is his largest and most ambitious art installation to date. Walk into the world of 'Dislocate' and the wood of the jackfruit tree springs to life referencing a myriad of social and cultural histories concerning Vietnam in style and subject. A stunningly carved fortress sits center-stage; its beams, decorative panels and windows recalling the magnificent architectural traditions of Hue (the ancient capital of Vietnam). Surrounding this fortress stand four spiritual 'guards' miniature pagoda ensconced within bonsai representing the cycle of the seasons.

Working with a team of senior expert wood carvers and carpenters from Hoi An over a two year period, 'Dislocate' embraces a complex interwoven set of narratives that pivots around this ancient city on the central coast of Vietnam a city at the heart of Bùi Công Khánh's practice and family history.

'I grew up in Hoi An, in the central coast of Vietnam, which was built by Chinese migrants in the seventeenth century. They arrived in Hoi An as political refugees. As a child I considered myself Vietnamese, until I turned 20, when my father revealed my true origins: my great-great-grandfather was from Fujian, China. Considering the ongoing political tension between China and Vietnam, I began to ask: Which place do I belong?



## DISLOCATE

'Dislocate' is an architectural installation made from the wood of the jackfruit tree – a species common across South East Asia. It is both a home and a fortress; a bunker and a shrine. It celebrates my family's carpentry skills from Fujian, whose exquisite stylistic contours have been combined with the local cultural identity of the central Vietnamese region, creating a distinctive art and architecture for Hoi An. It also hints at the religious and military mechanisms of Vietnam today, systems in part inherited from China, to reveal the complexity behind not only my own cultural identity, but that of my country. We may want to look at our reflection and see a 'Vietnam' but we must acknowledge how many differing narratives compose the idea of this nation.'

Bùi Công Khánh is an artist deeply fascinated with social assumptions of authenticity and cultural heritage. As one of the first local artists to gain an international reputation in the 1990s, with his performances questioning restrictions of individual expression in Vietnam, Bùi's multifarious practice has since embraced painting, sculpture, installation, video and drawing with successful showcase across the South East Asian region and beyond.

'Dislocate' is curated by Zoe Butt, Executive Director and Curator, Sàn Art. This exhibition forms parts of a larger artistic endeavor called 'Conscious Realities', initiated and organized by San Art in partnership with the Prince Clause Fund. San Art is pleased to cooperate with The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre in Ho Chi Minh City in the showcase of this significant work, which will next be showcased in the forthcoming Singapore Biennale 2016.

(Press release by Zoe Butt)

\*A full color catalog was produced for this project.



## SKETCHING VIETNAMESE HISTORY



Solo exhibition by artist Quách Phong  
July 9, 2016 @ 6pm @ Ho Chi Minh City Fine Arts Museum  
Curated by Đinh Q Lê, Zoe Butt, Trà Nguyễn

This exhibition showcases the remarkable ambition of a man who, as an artist, has witnessed major scenes of war; endured the struggle of a nation in its Communist cause; and assisted the growth of artistic networks between North, Central and South Vietnam – all of which he has drawn and painted, eventually becoming one of the first government arts administrators in post-war South Vietnam.

Born in 1938 in Vĩnh Long, in the Mekong Delta region of Southern Vietnam, Quách Phong was trained in the early 1950s at Gia Định Fine Arts and in the 1960s at the Hanoi University of Fine Arts, majoring in Oil Painting. Quách Phong subsequently followed Việt Minh soldiers along the frontlines, depicting their everyday life of battle. Determined to witness the 'Liberation of Saigon', Quách returned South, whereupon he was eventually tasked to help establish the Ho Chi Minh City-base for the National Fine Arts Association. While Quách Phong has been celebrated as a painter and war-sketch artist, his most recent undertaking celebrates the art of lacquer in a most ambitious manner.



## SKETCHING VIETNAMESE HISTORY

A project already 2 years in production, 'Sketching Vietnamese History' showcases but a fraction of what Quách Phong dreams this entire endeavor to be. On view you will find two paper scrolls, each between 50 - 70 meters long, with gouache sketch of events, beginning with the legendary era of Hung Kings 2000.BC until the early Lê Trung Hưng era in the 1500s. This exhibition will also include the first 12 lacquer panels that bring these scroll-sketches to life, alongside an extensive video interview with the artist sharing his motivations. This ongoing labor of love is envisaged to eventually depict the history of Vietnam to the present day, determined to produce these images in lacquer as a major public art piece – as a monument to Vietnam.

*'The history of a nation is critical to shape its culture. History is culture. If you don't know your country's history, you will fail to understand your country's culture. The history could serve as your compass. It allows you to know your origin, and thus would lead you on to the right direction. In this way I think it is important that we study our history. This country has entered a peace era and is changing from agricultural and manual labor to industrial manufacturing and automation. 80-90% of the rural areas have been industrialized. We are developing really fast. I say that before you welcome the guests into your house, we had better check if we are presentable. It's time that we take a look at ourselves as a nation in order to go far'. (Quách Phong, from an interview with San Art, May 2016)*

Believing in the power of the visual in the telling of history, this extensive body of work will portray the major battles of Vietnamese history; the key innovations of Vietnamese folk arts and culture; Vietnam's agricultural and urban developments; while also conveying the role of education in this country's growth.



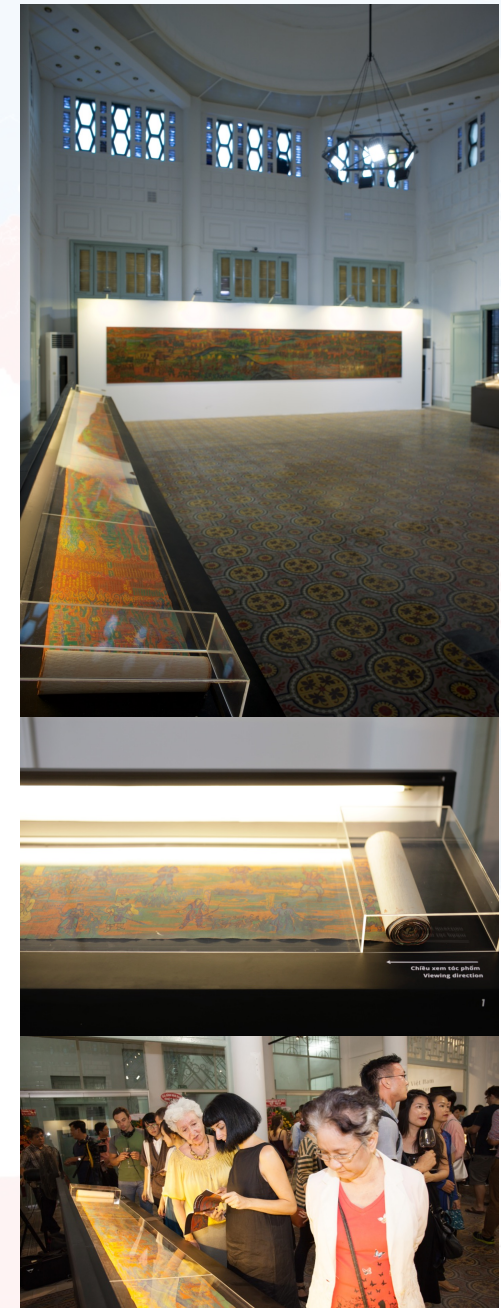
## SKETCHING VIETNAMESE HISTORY

While the brightly colored scroll-sketches are near calligraphic in technique and style, Quách has taken great lengths to research and study the various facts and costuming pertinent to each event and its era, with a style in lacquer hovering between social realism in figure, with a depth of field akin to traditional ink painting.

This small showcase of the beginning of 'Sketching Vietnamese History' is also a call for support for the project's final realization. Quách Phong dreams it to have its own public dedicated space, or, to be spread out as a series of mural, across the cities of Vietnam where the depicted events have historical relevance. The exhibition, in collaboration with the Ho Chi Minh City Fine Arts Association, is part of a larger endeavor called 'Conscious Realities', initiated and organized by Sàn Art and sponsored by the Prince Claus Network Partnership with Sàn Art. This exhibition would not be possible without the facility support by the Ho Chi Minh City Museum of Fine Arts.

Quách Phong (b. 1938, Vinh Long, Vietnam) attended Gia Dinh Fine Arts School (1953- 1954) and Vietnam College of Fine Arts (1960-1962); he has been a member of Vietnam Fine Arts Association since 1973. He participated in the revolution waves as part of the student activism and went to different battlefields to sketch until 1975. He used to be the General Secretary of Ho Chi Minh City Fine Arts Association. He has received numerous accolades from the government for his service, his contribution to the Vietnamese Literature and the Arts, Fine Arts, Culture, and the Youth development. Many of his sketches and lacquer works are in the permanent collection of the Ho Chi Minh City Museum of Fine Arts and Vietnam Fine Arts Museum.

\*Text from press release written by Tra Nguyen



# EMBEDDED SOUTH(S)

AN ONLINE MOVING IMAGE EXHIBITION

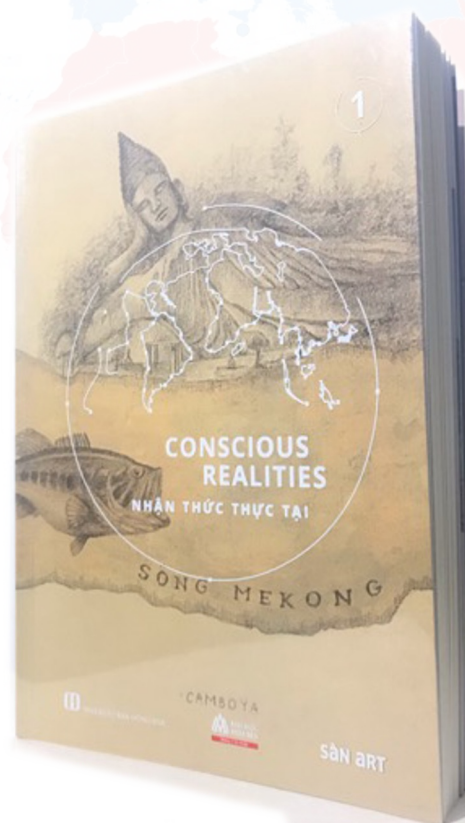
**3-6 NOVEMBER 2016**

REGISTER AT: [WWW.EMBEDDEDSOUTHS.ORG](http://WWW.EMBEDDEDSOUTHS.ORG)

● MYTHOLOGY ● SOCIAL SCIENCES AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY ● MATERIALITY ● SPECIAL FEATURE: VIETNAM

See 'Appendix 2a'  
for full program  
details

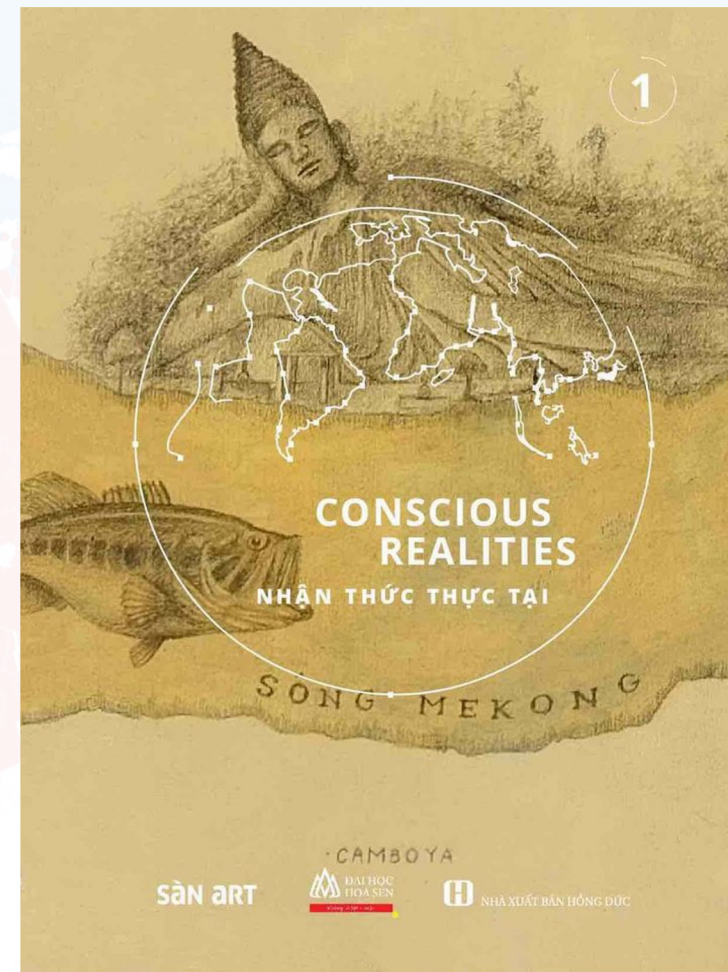
# ASSOCIATED PUBLICATION



## CONSCIOUS REALITIES – READER 1

The 'Conscious Realities Reader' aimed to be a two volume tome, each tome a record of 'Encounter' lectures and workshops that took place in 2014 and 2015 respectively. The Reader became critical to try and realize in knowing how little reference material was available in Vietnamese, on the topics engaged by our guest speakers – writers and theorists essential to understanding the post-modern, post-colonial human condition. Sàn Art thus put together a careful editorial, selecting key texts nominated/written by participating speakers. In 2015, the 'Conscious Realities Reader #1' (A5, 360 pages, in color, 1000 print run) was finalized in terms of content and translators (many of them high profile academics from across the world, who were very happy to work on this project at a much reduced fee than normal due to their knowing how important such texts needed to be translated into Vietnamese). The following texts were selected for re-print and translation:

1. Prasenjit Duara 'Asia Redux: Conceptualizing a Region for Our Times'
2. David Teh 'What is an Animate Image?'
3. Walter Benjamin 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'
4. Andreas Huyssen 'Shadow Play as Medium of Memory'
5. Michel Foucault 'Archeology of Knowledge'
6. Claude Levi-Strauss 'When myth becomes History'
7. Inrasara 'Literature of the Periphery / Literature of the Center – From a Viewpoint'



## CONSCIOUS REALITIES – READER 1

This 1<sup>st</sup> reader would not have been possible without Sàn Art's 'Conscious Realities' collaboration with Hoa Sen University Press. In 2016, The 'Conscious Realities Reader #1' was printed, with license, and national distribution across Vietnam (thanks to the tenacity of San Art staff to send boxes to various cooperative book stores across Vietnam).

Regrettably, the 'Conscious Realities Reader #2', which aimed to translate research material shared by guest participants in 2015, remains unfinished due to San Art's unfortunate enforced hibernation in 2016 (due to government interference), which saw many staff depart Sàn Art (including Zoe Butt). Hoa Sen University Press also underwent significant government scrutiny since the departure of its founding president, thus lack of publishing partner has thrown significant obstacle to the securing of sufficient translators to complete the outstanding necessary tasks.



# EMBEDDED SOUTH(S)

AN ONLINE MOVING IMAGE EXHIBITION  
**3-6 NOVEMBER 2016**

REGISTER AT: [WWW.EMBEDDEDSOUTHS.ORG](http://WWW.EMBEDDEDSOUTHS.ORG)

● MYTHOLOGY ● SOCIAL SCIENCES AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY ● MATERIALITY ● SPECIAL FEATURE: VIETNAM

# **CONTENTS**

**Introduction..... 3**

**Programs..... 6**

**About the curators..... 50**

**Acknowledgement..... 51**

# EMBEDDED SOUTH(S)



*Embedded South(s)* is an online exhibition of moving images by artists (short-film, documentary and video art) that provides a window onto particular shared realities within an *embedded* south – such a context imbued with a set of attitudes and beliefs that integrally interweave, respond and cling to particular mutual experience and value (the word ‘embedded’ being also a reference to film where images are strung together and contained). By context it refers to communities previously colonized, understanding that their forced and voluntary journeys of migration today contribute to vast mobile diaspora whose tales disturb the assumption of a ‘south’ as mere geographical or economic coordinates.

This online exhibition engages 29 perspectives concerning South Asia, South East Asia, Latin America and Africa, via 32 works, screened over the course of four consecutive evenings, from 3-6 November 2016. Each evening is curated according to a particular theme (explained further on), each theme being central to **Conscious Realities**, the overarching endeavor that embraces this online exhibition as but one of numerous programs organised by Sàn Art over the course of the last three years.

Initiated by Sàn Art in 2013, **Conscious Realities** is composed of predominantly discursive encounters carried out through lectures, workshops, exhibitions and an artist-in-residency program in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Inviting

artists, journalists, musicians, urban planners, filmmakers, curators, historians, theorists, poets and scientists from the 'Global South' to engage the central themes of the endeavor with Sàn Art's local artistic and cultural community. Each guest challenged the understanding of locality, of time, of space, of participants relation to History, expanding the concept of 'regionality'<sup>[1]</sup>, bringing differing reference points to what was ordinarily circulating Vietnam's official cultural agenda, offering an alternative narrative to dominant propagandist or neocolonial mandate instituted by government and diplomatic entities (Goethe Institute, Alliance Francaise among others).

So why 'Global South'? In 2013, Sàn Art felt it more politically correct a term to use than the outdated 'Third World' or 'developing countries' label; it seemed fitting socio-economically in its grouping of geographies less developed, for it was considered one way to better understand other cultural contexts as akin to its own – politically fragile, spiritually in-repair, socially traumatized and economically struggling.

However over the course of spending time with the many varied intelligence throughout **Conscious Realities**, who were incredibly patient and generous with the participants' lack of familiarity, Sàn Art learnt/were reminded of how critical it is to use words and perceptions carefully and wisely. It became utterly clear that this notion of a 'Global' South only served to re-emphasize the have-nots against the haves; that such a dualism was not at all in the spirit of the project which sought to reveal multiple mutuality and reliance in motion<sup>[2]</sup>.

---

[1] Referring to 'regionalism' – the theory or practice of regional rather than central systems of administration or economic, cultural, or political affiliation.

[2] For further reading, see Thomas Hylland Eriksen 'What's wrong with the Global North and the Global South?' <http://gssc.uni-koeln.de/node/454>

Thus *Embedded South(s)*, in its very naming, celebrates the physical, philosophical and collaborative trajectories of artists whose work challenges the presumption of identity, ritual, custom and belief in its existence, value and relevance today. It highlights the tension in sustaining traditional ways of cultural life in the face of industrializing societies; it reveals the ongoing trauma of being spoken for and categorized, not only from colonial residual habits but also the military regimes left in its wake; it highlights the abuse of power in taking abundance of resource for granted, revealing the fragility between the privileged elite and the struggling resource-dependent – and it does so by giving each evening's screening the central thematic of **Conscious Realities**, namely: *Mythology; Social Science and Collective Memory; and Materiality*.

.....

In conclusion, it is important to share that *Embedded South(s)* is a collection of stories curated initially for a hopeful public audience in Vietnam. However due to complicated and restrictive government regulations on film and foreign content, we, the curators, decided that rather than let this defeat our motivations, we would find alternate means of sharing.

Thus *Embedded South(s)* became an online exhibition, with the added and much desired ability to significantly increase our audiences by seeking like-minded communities across this 'south(s)' to co-host the event. From Jaffna to São Paulo, from Mumbai to Manila, from Phnom Penh to Cali to Kampala and more; we are ever grateful to these independent and grass-root organizations who all too well identify and celebrate the motivations and thematics of this *Embedded South(s)*.

© Zoe Butt, Uyen Le & Gabriela Salgado, 2016.

————— curatorial text continues along respective themes —————

# PROGRAMS

FOUR CONSECUTIVE EVENINGS

AVAILABLE FROM ANYWHERE  
IN THE WORLD

SCREENINGS START AT 3 TIMES EACH DAY  
SPECIFIED HEREUNDER:



**SAIGON, VIETNAM**  
19:30



**KAMPALA, UGANDA**  
17:00



**SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL**  
19:30

## LOOKING FOR YOUR LOCAL SCREENING TIME?

### STEP 1:

CHOOSE THE SCREENING TIME  
OF THE CITY THAT IS CLOSEST TO YOU

### STEP 2:

CONVERT IT INTO YOUR LOCAL TIME  
BY **USING ONLINE TIME ZONE CONVERTER**  
(e.g. <http://greenwichmeantime.com/time-gadgets/time-zone-converter>)

# NOVEMBER

# 3

THURSDAY

# 4

FRIDAY

# 5

SATURDAY

# 6

SUNDAY

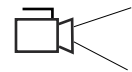
REGISTER AT: [WWW.EMBEDDEDSOUTHS.ORG](http://WWW.EMBEDDEDSOUTHS.ORG)

Thursday, 3 November 2016

EMBEDDED  
SOUTH(S)

THEME:

# Mythology



PLEASE FOLLOW THE SCREENING TIME OF THE CITY THAT IS CLOSEST TO YOU. PLEASE NOTE THESE SCREENING TIMES ARE FIXED. YOU MUST BEGIN WATCHING AT THE TIMES SPECIFIED PER TIMEZONE. THANK YOU



**SAIGON, VIETNAM**  
19:30



**KAMPALA, UGANDA**  
17:00



**SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL**  
19:30

——— continued from curatorial text ———

*“One of the achievements of imperial reason was to affirm itself as a superior identity by constructing inferior entities (racial, national, religious, sexual, gender), and expelling them to the outside of the normative sphere of “the real.”*

*I agree that today there is no outside of the system; but there are many exteriorities, that is, the outside constructed from the inside in order to clean and maintain its imperial space. It is from the exteriority, the pluri-versal exteriorities that surround Western imperial modernity that de-colonial options have been repositioned and emerged with force.*

- Walter Mignolo<sup>[1]</sup>

The notion of conscious realities evokes a sense of recovery, a re-appropriation of what was previously perceived as fleeting phenomena, lived without the allowance for deep examination. Through such process of recovery we are invited to consider aspects of reality that had been submerged or denied in benefit of other versions presented as pre-packed truths. Colonised people of the world understand such predicament, which unites a diversity of cultures under a similar historical paradigm.

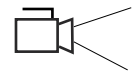
[1] Walter Mignolo, *Epistemic Disobedience: The De-Colonial Option and the Meaning of Identity IN Politics*, Duke University and Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, 2007

**Thursday, 3 November 2016**

**EMBEDDED  
SOUTH(S)**

THEME:

# Mythology



PLEASE FOLLOW THE SCREENING TIME OF THE CITY THAT IS CLOSEST TO YOU. PLEASE NOTE THESE SCREENING TIMES ARE FIXED. YOU MUST BEGIN WATCHING AT THE TIMES SPECIFIED PER TIMEZONE. THANK YOU



**SAIGON, VIETNAM**  
**19:30**



**KAMPALA, UGANDA**  
**17:00**



**SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL**  
**19:30**

In order to illuminate areas of human experience that have been obscured by imposed narratives, humans seek refuge in immaterial legacies such as ritual, language and practices handed down by oral transmission.

Throughout history, mythologies and other knowledge systems have unequivocally been at risk of extinction during colonial processes, so the articulation of life's mysteries and the transmission of ancestral beliefs in ceremonial performance need to be preserved as hidden treasures. Furthermore, in popular culture, mythologies are safeguarded and emerge often as subtle mementos, frequently merging with elements adopted from the oppressor's cultures, as seen in the film *Some Dead Don't Make a Sound* by Claudia Joskowicz. In South America, a move to the centre-left took place from the start of the 21st century establishing new policies that reflect de-colonial re-valorization of ancestral indigenous knowledge systems. Among the most remarkable examples of such epistemological moves was the inclusion of the rights of the earth in the Bolivian constitution in which emerged - from the concept of *sumac kawsay* (well being) a holistic philosophy that defines the interconnectedness of all members of a community and the environment.

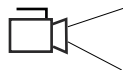
In Brazil a process of *re-ethnization* - as expressed by anthropologist Rita Serato - redefined the national paradigm by rehabilitating new inclusion policies based on discourses on identity that question the ones inherited from the creole elites of the 19th century during the post colonial period. In relation to these social and intellectual shifts, the films *Iemanjá* by Renata Padovan and *FunFun* by Ayrson Heráclito focus on spiritual practices of African matrix in Brazil, while *Umaturka* by Giovanna Miralles observes the ancestral practice of calling for water, traditionally practiced by the Aymara communities of the Andes, and its relation to recent desertification in light of climate change. As seen in Andrew Esiebo's work *Crazy World Crazy Faith* and Lázara Rosell Albear and Sammy Baloji 's collaborative work *Bare-Faced*, the transnational connections activated by both organized religion and syncretic spiritual practices destabilises the modern concept of culture, identity and territory in favour of a highly complex global phenomenon.

**REGISTER AT: [WWW.EMBEDDEDSOUTHS.ORG](http://WWW.EMBEDDEDSOUTHS.ORG)**

Thursday, 3 November 2016

THEME:

# Mythology



PLEASE FOLLOW THE SCREENING TIME OF THE CITY THAT IS CLOSEST TO YOU. PLEASE NOTE THESE SCREENING TIMES ARE FIXED. YOU MUST BEGIN WATCHING AT THE TIMES SPECIFIED PER TIMEZONE. THANK YOU



**SAIGON, VIETNAM**  
19:30



**KAMPALA, UGANDA**  
17:00



**SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL**  
19:30

## ORDER OF SCREENING

ARTISTS:

**NGUYỄN TRINH THI** (VIETNAM)

**SASHA HUBER** (HAITI/ SWITZERLAND)

**BANI ABIDI** (PAKISTAN)

**RENATA PADOVAN** (BRAZIL)

**TRƯƠNG CÔNG TÙNG** (VIETNAM)

**AYRSON HERÁCLITO** (BRAZIL)

**LAZARA ROSELL ALBEAR / SAMMY BALOJI**  
(CUBA /DR CONGO)

**CHULAYARNON SIRIPHOL** (THAILAND)

**ANDREW ESIEBO** (NIGERIA)

**CLAUDIA JOSKOWICZ** (BOLIVIA - US)

**BAKARY DIALLO** (MALI)

**NGUYỄN THỊ THANH MAI** (VIETNAM)

FILMS:

**Letters From Panduranga**

**KARAKIA - The Resetting Ceremony**

**Death at a 30 Degree Angle**

**Iemanjá**

**Magical Garden**

**Funfun**

**Bare-Faced**

**Planking/Blinding**

**Crazy World Crazy Faith**

**Hay Muertos Que No Hacen Ruido**  
[Some Dead Don't Make a Sound]

**Dankumba**

**Day by Day**

DURATION (mins)

35:00

5:20

14:59

3:36

8:21

4:08

23:16

3:02

2:38

10:30

12:14

58:01

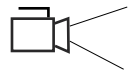
REGISTER AT: [WWW.EMBEDDEDSOUTHS.ORG](http://WWW.EMBEDDEDSOUTHS.ORG)

**Friday, 4 November 2016**

**EMBEDDED  
SOUTH(S)**

THEME:

# Social science and collective memory



PLEASE FOLLOW THE SCREENING TIME OF THE CITY THAT IS CLOSEST TO YOU. PLEASE NOTE THESE SCREENING TIMES ARE FIXED. YOU MUST BEGIN WATCHING AT THE TIMES SPECIFIED PER TIMEZONE. THANK YOU



**SAIGON, VIETNAM**  
19:30



**KAMPALA, UGANDA**  
17:00



**SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL**  
19:30

—— continued from curatorial text ——

Emile Durkheim's influential philosophical thinking (a sociologist of the late 19th Century), claimed memory as a matter of how minds work together in society based on a unified commitment to a common objective; 'collective memory' subsequently becoming a crucial study of the social sciences, leading to such terms as 'historical memory'; 'historical consciousness' or 'collective psychology'. It is perhaps not coincidental that Durkheim's study rose in tandem with the great economic expansion of the Colonial Empire, where the value systems of the West (its understanding of morality, deviance, class, religion, filial piety eg.) were assumed superior and thus forced onto the colonized whose livelihood, resources and dignity they stripped. These colonized were presented as alien and 'other' (to eventually become citizens of the 'Third World', of the newly independent 'developing' nations of the South), whose geography, customs, beliefs and value systems were subsequently collected, recorded, analyzed, written and spoken for, visually represented, showcased and ultimately judged and then governed within a particularly denigrating system of categorization.

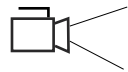
Since the collapse of the colonial rubric, artists have been crucial in rendering the collective memory of this 'south', illustrating the persistence of local systems of culture, while also giving voice to the ongoing tension between industrialization and the desire to renew/return/remember traditional ways of life (though such return is often met with unease in communities where tradition is so official/culturally inculcated that it is very difficult to challenge, as seen in the work of Nguyễn Hương Trà). These artists often illustrate using the style of documentary (Giovanna Miralles, Nguyễn Trinh Thi) and

**Friday, 4 November 2016**

THEME:

# Social science and collective memory

**EMBEDDED  
SOUTH(S)**



PLEASE FOLLOW THE SCREENING TIME OF THE CITY THAT IS CLOSEST TO YOU. PLEASE NOTE THESE SCREENING TIMES ARE FIXED. YOU MUST BEGIN WATCHING AT THE TIMES SPECIFIED PER TIMEZONE. THANK YOU



**SAIGON, VIETNAM**  
19:30



**KAMPALA, UGANDA**  
17:00



**SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL**  
19:30

montage (Mikhail Karikis), at times manipulating analog (Kidlat Tahimik) and digital (Amar Kanwar) techniques of film to give contrast or focus to fact or perhaps its fiction. At other times, the camera stands in as orator and thus the viewer stands in the traumatic place of the artist (Vandy Rattana), or the use of sound connects historical footage with that of today (Renata Padovan).

What connects this selection of artists, within this thematic, is not only their skill in crafting narrative, but their near ethnographic methodologies of social and artistic investigation (at times with great personal risk), often working with local communities whose rituals and memories have taken great detective work to locate, spending extraordinary amounts of time to gain their trust and confidence so as to be granted permission to record what they have witnessed, endured or suspected.

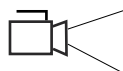
These artists ask from where does the science of the social resist or subvert the official archive; can the artist provide alternate articulation or translation?, and for whom? Ironic, playful and poetic answers may be found in the showcase and distribution of these filmic testaments, where the contexts of Bolivia, Korea and Brazil remember cultural rituals respecting water and its bounty; where the tale of a Filipino slave is the memory that writes the history of his country's colonization; where a democratic India ironically invites a General of the Burmese military junta to pay respects to Gandhi; where issues of gender and sexuality struggle in the face of custom and ideology in Vietnam; where in Cambodia collective memory has been so destroyed by the Khmer Rouge that humanity appears to merely persist, in amnesia.

Friday, 4 November 2016



THEME:

# Social science and collective memory



PLEASE FOLLOW THE SCREENING TIME OF THE CITY THAT IS CLOSEST TO YOU. PLEASE NOTE THESE SCREENING TIMES ARE FIXED. YOU MUST BEGIN WATCHING AT THE TIMES SPECIFIED PER TIMEZONE. THANK YOU



**SAIGON, VIETNAM**  
19:30



**KAMPALA, UGANDA**  
17:00



**SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL**  
19:30

## ORDER OF SCREENING

ARTISTS:

- GIOVANMNA MIRALLES (BOLIVIA-UK)
- MIKHAIL KARIKIS (GREECE-UK)
- RENATA PADOVAN (BRAZIL)
- KIDLAT TAHIMIK (PHILIPPINES)
- VANDY RATTANA (CAMBODIA)
- AMAR KANWAR (INDIA)
- NGUYỄN HƯƠNG TRÀ (VIETNAM)
- NGUYỄN TRINH THI (VIETNAM)

FILMS:

- UMATURKA The Call of the Water
- SeaWomen
- Aral Mermaid
- Memories of Overdevelopment Redux I
- Monologue
- The Face
- Marriage Prayer
- Love Man, Love Woman

DURATION (mins):

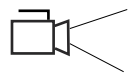
- 45:00
- 16:02
- 4:12
- 33:00
- 18:55
- 4:35
- 8:48
- 50:00

**Saturday, 5 November 2016**

THEME:

# Materiality

**EMBEDDED  
SOUTH(S)**



PLEASE FOLLOW THE SCREENING TIME OF THE CITY THAT IS CLOSEST TO YOU. PLEASE NOTE THESE SCREENING TIMES ARE FIXED. YOU MUST BEGIN WATCHING AT THE TIMES SPECIFIED PER TIMEZONE. THANK YOU



**SAIGON, VIETNAM**  
**19:30**



**KAMPALA, UGANDA**  
**17:00**



**SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL**  
**19:30**

—— continued from curatorial text ——

'Material' is commonly understood as the physical aspect of things, yet there are alternatives to understanding the notion of 'material'. Martin Heidegger, in his essay 'The thing', argues that materials also go beyond objecthood. They are as much immaterial as they are material; as much how they interact with their environment, and react to their social context, to continuously redefine their own values as they are allocated a function/ a meaning. This multivalence of material in modern culture is charged in the term '*materiality*', which bears philosophical, political, symbolic and aesthetic implications. How do artists explore and question ideas of the material (*materiality*), in places where resources both raw and laborious in extraction are known to be zones of socio-political conflict?

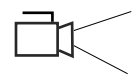
*Materiality* has long been centre stage in various arms of conflict, be it a tussle for control between individual and authority, industrial progress and nature, local governance and global strategies. Tension between individual vs. authority is illuminated through artists' examination of physical materials as symbols for the resilience, and bravery, of individual persons enduring government negligence, as seen in Kannan Arunasalam's *Kerosene* documentary from Sri Lanka. The need for raw materials is all too often a tale of exploitation with damaging effect on local living conditions (evident in Phan Thảo Nguyên's reference to the jute plant, usurping rice crops, causing great famine, during the Japanese occupation of Vietnam); while in other circumstances, its abundance aids communities in need (as seen in Tiffany Chung's documentary sharing first hand experience enduring Vietnam's rationed economy following the Vietnam War).

**Saturday, 5 November 2016**

THEME:

# Materiality

**EMBEDDED  
SOUTH(S)**



PLEASE FOLLOW THE SCREENING TIME OF THE CITY THAT IS CLOSEST TO YOU. PLEASE NOTE THESE SCREENING TIMES ARE FIXED. YOU MUST BEGIN WATCHING AT THE TIMES SPECIFIED PER TIMEZONE. THANK YOU



**SAIGON, VIETNAM**  
**19:30**



**KAMPALA, UGANDA**  
**17:00**



**SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL**  
**19:30**

After World War II, a new world order was established, which saw the formation of new nation states struggle to control local and foreign trade in resources, predominantly acquiescing to global market demand for their societies to modernize their economy, ultimately of multinational company gain. This strategy has resulted in far reaching effects on the natural habitat of many sanctuaries and societies, made visible in the work of Renata Padovan and Sutthirat Supaparinya, illustrating the irreparable evicted riverscapes caused by the building of power plants to feed its country's energy demand on the Xingu River in Brazil and Ping River in Thailand respectively.

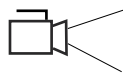
*Materiality* is also referred to in this selection of moving images as critical commentary on the disturbance of local social structures by external political forces (such as former colonial powers, terror units, guerrilla armies seeking to expand their territorial influence through the veil of trade or assumed cultural superiority). This is evident in Douglas NT employment of fictional narrative in his documentary-styled film *Mines de Rien* following the footsteps of under-aged, contamination-exposed cobalt miners in the Congo; and Shanaka Galagoda's *Possession*, where the tools of a journalist and a militiamen are dangerously perceived as interchangeable in the wake of Sri Lanka's civil war.

Saturday, 5 November 2016



THEME:

# Materiality



PLEASE FOLLOW THE SCREENING TIME OF THE CITY THAT IS CLOSEST TO YOU. PLEASE NOTE THESE SCREENING TIMES ARE FIXED. YOU MUST BEGIN WATCHING AT THE TIMES SPECIFIED PER TIMEZONE. THANK YOU



**SAIGON, VIETNAM**  
19:30



**KAMPALA, UGANDA**  
17:00



**SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL**  
19:30

**ORDER OF SCREENING**

ARTISTS:

- JOMPET KUSWIDANANTO (INDONESIA)
- KANNAN ARUNASALAM (SRI LANKA)
- RENATA PADOVAN (BRAZIL)
- SUTTHIRAT SUPAPARINYA (THAILAND)
- PHAN THẢO NGUYỄN (VIETNAM)
- FERNANDO ARIAS (COLOMBIA)
- TIFFANY CHUNG (VIETNAM)
- DOUGLAS NT (DR CONGO)
- SHANAKA GALAGODA (SRI LANKA)

FILMS:

- War of Java, Do you Remember? #2
- Kerosene
- The Scale of the Disaster
- My Grandpa’s Route Has Been Forever Blocked
- Uproot rice grow jute
- Enjoy Your Meal
- Recipes of necessity
- Mines de Rien [Mines of Nothing]
- The Possession

DURATION (mins):

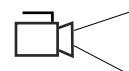
- 5:53
- 18:00
- 9:41
- 15:49
- 6:31
- 16:00
- 33:00
- 13:31
- 7:36

**Sunday, 6 November 2016**

**EMBEDDED  
SOUTH(S)**

THEME:

# Special Feature: Vietnam



PLEASE FOLLOW THE SCREENING TIME OF THE CITY THAT IS CLOSEST TO YOU. PLEASE NOTE THESE SCREENING TIMES ARE FIXED. YOU MUST BEGIN WATCHING AT THE TIMES SPECIFIED PER TIMEZONE. THANK YOU



**SAIGON, VIETNAM**  
**19:30**



**KAMPALA, UGANDA**  
**17:00**



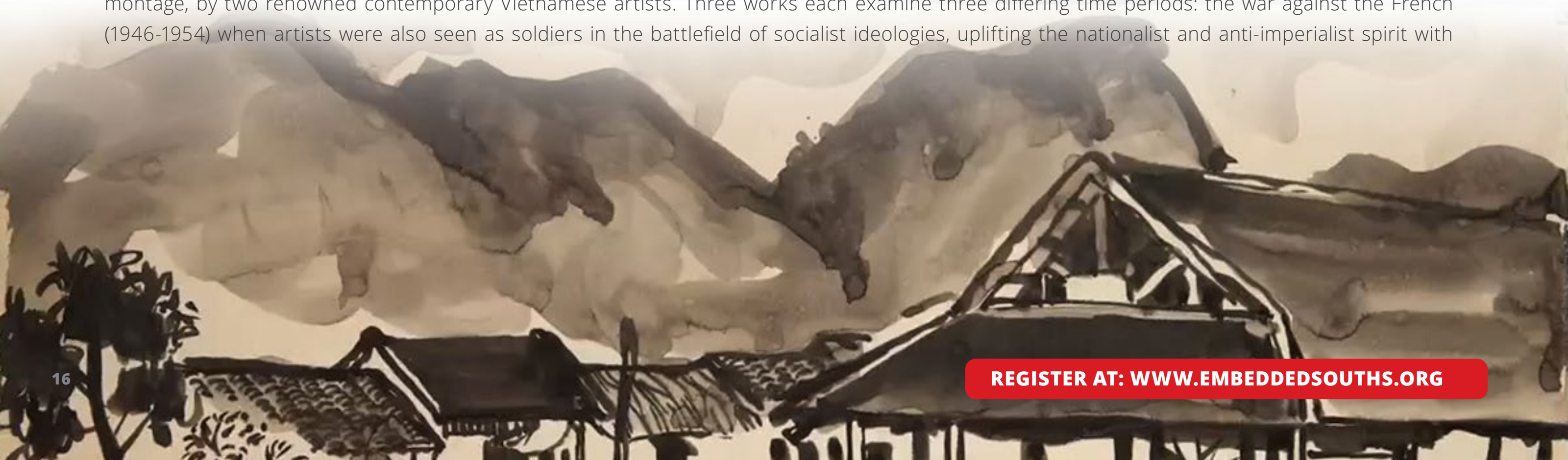
**SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL**  
**19:30**

—— continued from curatorial text ——

This special feature is unique to *Embedded South(s)*, an additional supplement to *Conscious Realities* thematics, curated to give unfamiliar audiences a wider perspective of an artist's role in society in Vietnam.

In Vietnam, a nation that has undergone a myriad of interweaving socio-political shifts and cultural influences (French colonial occupation, Vietnam War, establishment of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1975 eg.), where its artists have endured and witnessed the great impact of political upheaval on the motivation, definition and value of artistic production - a history that continues to determine and control official Vietnamese understandings of art today.

This *Special Feature* offers a chronology of the development of a modern and contemporary Vietnamese art, through the lens of documentary and montage, by two renowned contemporary Vietnamese artists. Three works each examine three differing time periods: the war against the French (1946-1954) when artists were also seen as soldiers in the battlefield of socialist ideologies, uplifting the nationalist and anti-imperialist spirit with

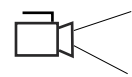


Sunday, 6 November 2016

EMBEDDED  
SOUTH(S)

THEME:

# Special Feature: Vietnam



PLEASE FOLLOW THE SCREENING TIME OF THE CITY THAT IS CLOSEST TO YOU. PLEASE NOTE THESE SCREENING TIMES ARE FIXED. YOU MUST BEGIN WATCHING AT THE TIMES SPECIFIED PER TIMEZONE. THANK YOU



**SAIGON, VIETNAM**  
19:30



**KAMPALA, UGANDA**  
17:00



**SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL**  
19:30

sketches of non-violence (seen in *Light and Belief: Voices and Sketches of Life from the Vietnam War* by Dinh Q Lê); the dilemma of a newly independent state post 1954, when artists struggled to reconcile their creative minds with an encroaching communist party control of freedom of expression (exemplified in *Vision and Darkness: Tran Trung Tin* by Dinh Q Lê); and finally the aftermath of Doi Moi (economic reforms instituted in 1986) when artists began to experiment with a community-oriented approach to artistic work, to question the state's fabricated historical narrative, blending both realism and abstraction (analyzed in *Mạo Khê Coal Mine Project* by Trần Lương). It is important to provide the artistic perspectives from both North (Trần Lương) and South (Dinh Q Lê) Vietnam, two distinctly different artistic communities as a consequence of historical political divide, but particularly between these two artists, showcasing the indelible imprint of their personal experiences - of one who remained in Vietnam following the Vietnam War (Trần Lương) and of another who fled as a boat refugee (Dinh Q Lê).

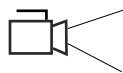


Sunday, 6 November 2016



THEME:

# Special Feature: Vietnam



PLEASE FOLLOW THE SCREENING TIME OF THE CITY THAT IS CLOSEST TO YOU. PLEASE NOTE THESE SCREENING TIMES ARE FIXED. YOU MUST BEGIN WATCHING AT THE TIMES SPECIFIED PER TIMEZONE. THANK YOU



**SAIGON, VIETNAM**  
19:30



**KAMPALA, UGANDA**  
17:00



**SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL**  
19:30

## ORDER OF SCREENING

ARTISTS:

DINH Q LÊ (VIETNAM)

DINH Q LÊ (VIETNAM)

TRẦN LƯƠNG (VIETNAM)

FILMS:

**Light and Belief: Voices and Sketches of Life from the Vietnam War**

**Vision in Darkness: Tran Trung Tin**

**Mạo Khê Coal Mine Project**

DURATION (mins):

36:50

27:50

18:41



# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)



## AMAR KANWAR (INDIA)

**Amar Kanwar** (b. 1964, New Delhi, India) is a filmmaker and artist with a deep social conscience. His work, both activist and poet in nature, compelled to tell stories that reveal the complex and contradictory terrain of political injustice, religious fundamentalism, ecological negligence, indigenous rights, and gender discrimination. Working across photography, installation, video and sound, Kanwar's most recent artistic practice involves working with particular disenfranchised communities of Odisha, his art serving as testament and memorial to those whose land rights have been ignored.

Kanwar studied at the Department of History, Ramjas College, Delhi University (1982-1985), and at the Mass Communication Research Center, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi (1985-87).

Amar Kanwar continues to live and work in New Delhi.

---  
[amarkanwar.com](http://amarkanwar.com)



AMAR KANWAR

## FILMS THE FACE



**Theme:** Social Science and Collective Memory  
**Friday, 4 November 2016**

**Year:** 2004  
**Duration (mins):** 4:35

*"The Face juggles, dissects, and accelerates images of General Than Shwe, the Supreme Head of the Burmese military dictatorship, as he tosses rose petals an extra time for the press photographers at the cremation memorial site of Gandhi in Delhi. Footage for this film was clandestinely shot at the ceremony at Rajghat on the 25th of October 2004. The General had been invited by the Indian government and was on a state visit to India. The film literally unveils 'the face' of military representation by zooming in on the features of the General who is known for the distance he keeps from cameras. The manic repetition of the general's pose in front of the media reveals the tragic ludicrousness of the act as it critiques the support of the Indian Government to the Burmese military."*

(by Amar Kanwar)

---  
**Country:** India. **Language:** English. **CREW:** **Production:** Amar Kanwar. **Cinematography and Camera:** Amar Kanwar. **Editor:** Anupama Chandra

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)



## ANDREW ESIEBO (NIGERIA)

**Andrew Esiebo** (b. 1978, Lagos, Nigeria) started out in photography by chronicling the rapid development of urban Nigeria as well as the country's rich culture and heritage. Soon, he began integrating multimedia practice to pursue the investigation of sexuality, gender politics, football, popular culture, migration, religion, and spirituality. Recently, his work has evolved beyond freelance photography and begun exploring video and multimedia work

Esiebo earned his Diploma in Journalism at the International Institute of Journalism, Ibadan, Nigeria in 2005. He is currently based in Lagos, Nigeria from where he works around the world.

---  
[www.andrewesiebo.com](http://www.andrewesiebo.com)



## ANNALISA BUTTICCI (THE NETHERLANDS)

**Annalisa Butticci** is Assistant Professor of Cultural Anthropology at the University of Utrecht, the Netherlands. She received her MA from the University of Padua, and her PhD from the Catholic University of Milan, Italy. Her areas of research include visual and material culture of religions, religious aesthetics and politics, religions and societies of West Africa and African diasporas (with a special focus on Ghana and Nigeria), and methodology for social science research especially qualitative methods.

## FILMS CRAZY WORLD, CRAZY FAITH



**Theme:** Mythology  
**Thursday, 3 November 2016**  
**Year:** 2013  
**Duration (mins):** 2:38

An evangelical church in Lagos, Nigeria is the set where many interconnected narratives unfold, as the believers take part in a gigantic collective ritual. Once a month, at the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Prayer City, the special service 'Power Must Change Hands' – popularly known to Lagosians as PMCH – promises salvation, cleansing, and above all, material prosperity. Such deliverance appears to be intrinsically linked to a monetary exchange performed by the priests, who orchestrate the exchange of spiritual salvation for money with the support of the alimony collectors.

The short film is structured as sequences that show a number of trance-like episodes. We witness private moments of enlightenment and surrender to the faith, alongside intense chanting and dancing, bouncing and occasional fainting. Salvation is linked to the logic of value exchange, as sacrifice and good will become the rhetoric that feeds the well-oiled machinery of Pentecostal churches and their massive spread throughout Africa and Latin America where they hold multi-million businesses. In irreversible detriment of other epistemologies, the evangelical expansion is invested in the demolition of ancient belief systems, heavily condemned as fetishism by new-born Christians on both sides of the Atlantic.

To reach a wider audience and gain followers beyond Nigeria, PMCH is also broadcast live on satellite TV and over the Internet. The incidence of the evangelical phenomenon beckons an updated version of the old missionary-colonisation paradigm as corporate organised religion in the 21st century.

---  
**Country:** Nigeria. **Genre:** religion/spirituality. **Language:** Yoruba-English

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)

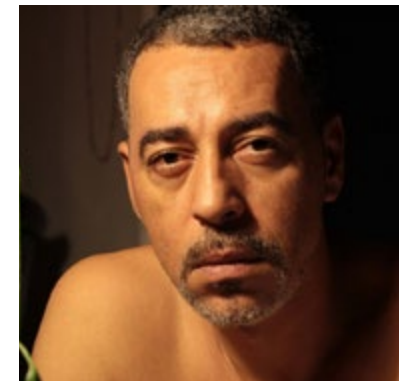
EMBEDDED  
SOUTH(S)

## I AYRSON HERÁCLITO (BRAZIL)

**Ayrson Heráclito** (b. 1968, Macaúbas, Bahia, Brazil) is an artist, curator, and professor who deals with elements of Afro-Brazilian culture in installation, performance, photography, and video. He often incorporates culinary elements with local significance to reference Bahia's regional history and makes transnational references to Africa and its influences on Brazilian society through his use of palm oil, sugar, and dried beef. Through his installations and performances, Heráclito draws from many of the familiar signs and themes of the Afro-Brazilian religion Candomblé, while taking a more conceptual approach to the subject matter.

Heráclito obtained a Master in Visual Arts at the Universidade Federal da Bahia (UFBA), Salvador and PhD in Communication and Semiotics at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo (PUC-SP), Brazil.

Heráclito lives and works between Cachoeira and Salvador, Bahia, Brazil.



AYRSON HERÁCLITO

## I FILMS FUNFUN



**Theme:** Mythology

**Thursday, 3 November 2016**

**Year:** 2012

**Duration (mins):** 4:08

*Funfun* is a requiem based on shots from the wake for Estelita de Souza Santana, lifetime leader of the Sisterhood of Our Lady of the Good Death from Cachoeira, Bahia, who passed away at the age of 105.

In the two-channel video installation, the image's double nature is far more than an aesthetic choice: it obeys significant concepts that emerge from Ayrson Heráclito's artistic and spiritual practices. The artist's recurrent employment of pairs generates symbolic associations through split screens, photographic diptychs, and mirror images. In the film *Funfun*, such strategy materializes in the kaleidoscopic editing of the image, revealing a connection between the herons and the black priestesses as inspired by a local myth.

The imagery is embedded in the symbology of the colour white (funfun in Yoruba language), commonly associated with purity, maturity, and wisdom, and present in the garments worn by the black god Obatalá, who reigns over the Yoruba deities' pantheon.

Out of a profusion of symbols and signifiers deeply rooted in the culture of Bahia, the association of white beads and the line of the horizon become the poetic expression of the artist's own funeral rite.

---

**Country:** Brazil. **Genre:** Video installation. **CREW: Production:** Ayrson Heráclito. **Cinematography and Camera:** Ayrson Heráclito. **Edition:** Ayrson Heráclito. **Music:** João Omar. **Soundtrack mix:** João Omar. **Image post-production:** Ayrson Heráclito. **Coordination of post-production:** Ayrson Heráclito. **Graphic Design:** Ayrson Heráclito

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)



## BAKARY DIALLO (MALI)

**Bakary Diallo** (b. 1979, Kati, Mali/ d. 2014) engaged with various socio-political themes such as superstition and the mystery of faith, violence and confusion of war, and the movement for democracy in West Africa, as well as his native Mali. His cinematographic works took a symbolic approach to daily life objects and viewed them as building blocks for narratives. With emotive and precise footage, Diallo's stories boasted a profound yet simplified logic in their structure by seizing the essential moment when actions occur. It was this strict reduction of the story, sometimes to an abstract or enigmatic level, that gave his works an original narration.

Diallo studied Visual Arts and Film at the Conservatory of Arts and Multimedia Balla Kouyate Fasseke in Bamako, Mali. In July 2014, he passed away in the Air Algerie plane crash while traveling to Salvador, Brazil for a residency with Videobrasil.



BAKARY DIALLO

## FILMS DANKUMBA



**Theme:** Mythology

**Thursday, 3 November 2016**

**Year:** 2011

**Duration (mins):** 12:14

*"My interest in the subject of superstition that emerges in the film is related to the fact that I come from a culture where the belief in mystical phenomena is culturally and deeply present. What is the role of the superstition as a phenomenon inherent to society?"*

– from Bakary Diallo's artist statement

The film *Dankumba* is a minimalist tale of small gestures, which convey the connection between the visible world and the invisible energies that lie beneath. In its poetically crafted scenes, we witness how spiritual practices anchored in ancient belief systems make the meeting of the two worlds possible. The filmic sequences exude a rich visual array of references to the symbolic universe of ritual, while the narrative's slow tempo seems to pay homage to still photography, a greatly developed form of expression in the artist's native Mali.

Surfaces and textures appear in sharp focus in a rhythmic sequence of camera angles and seductive close-ups that take us from mundane routines in a Malian village to a multitude of miniature fragments. Occasionally, the camera goes close to the ground to deliver insect views and record succulent sounds that capture the slow pace of village life, rendering a world of humans in close contact with nature, where the sacred is allowed to emerge. As in other films by Bakary Diallo, rituals and omens are often performed silently, amidst a succession of quotidian gestures that exist alongside a deep sense of mystery.

---

**Country:** Mali

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)



## BANI ABIDI (PAKISTAN)

**Bani Abidi** (b. 1971, Karachi, Pakistan) is a visual artist whose practice revels in the art of the ‘stage’ between fact and fiction, playing with political representations of space and behavior that exacerbate power relations between what is diasporic, popular, or nationalized in character. Utilizing humor, Abidi’s predominant experimentation in video and photography often presents absurd vignettes that jar with ideas of social normalcy.

Abidi graduated in 1994 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from National College of Art, Lahore. In 1998, she completed a Master of Fine Arts from the School of the Art Institute, Chicago.

Bani Abidi currently lives between Berlin and Karachi.

---  
<http://www.baniabidi.com>



BANI ABIDI

## FILMS DEATH AT A 30 DEGREE ANGLE



**Theme:** Mythology  
**Thursday, 3 November 2016**  
**Year:** 2012  
**Duration (mins):** 14:59

*"Death at a 30 Degree Angle is a work about the commissioning of a monumental statue by a small time politician. Located in present day India, the film is shot in the atelier of a sculptor who is renowned for large statues of politicians and national heroes. The politician, along with his cronies, experiments with a variety of costumes and poses, actively participating in the writing of his own memory and myth making.*

*Death at a 30 Degree angle is a reflection on self portraiture, megalomania, and monumentality. Today, statues of erstwhile leaders, rulers, and heroes lie scattered in graveyards and public squares all over the world. Communist leaders of all sizes, colonial explorers with hands thrust forward in righteous motivation, glowering facsimiles of African dictators made in Korea, fists, boots, disembodied heads, all lie relegated to remote tourist parks or to overgrown backyards of palace museums. These are objects that once controlled and impressed upon public space and imagination, but overnight became mere proxies, subjected to torture, ridicule, and public vengeance."*

(by Bani Abidi)

---  
**Country:** Pakistan

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)

EMBEDDED  
SOUTH(S)

## CHULAYARNNON SIRIPHOL (THAILAND)

**Chulayarnnon Siriphol** (b. 1986, Bangkok, Thailand) is a filmmaker and visual artist. Experimenting with the moving image as video installation, short film, and documentary, Siriphol is an urban voyeur capturing human behavior as both absurd and wondrous, drawn to collective myths as fragile facts that are blindly enforced and followed.

Siriphol has won many short film international awards. In 2008, he graduated from King Mongkut Institute of Technology Ladkrabang, Bangkok with a Bachelor of Fine and Applied Arts (Film and Video). In 2013, he completed a Masters of Fine Arts (Visual) from Silpakorn University, Bangkok.

He currently lives and works in Bangkok.

---  
[www.chulayarnnon.com](http://www.chulayarnnon.com)



CHULAYARNNON  
SIRIPHOL

## FILMS

### PLANKING / BLINDING



**Theme:** Mythology

**Thursday, 3 November 2016**

**Year:** 2012-2014

**Duration (mins):** 3:02

In Thailand today, it is prohibitive to criticize the Thai royal family. Any such act, on or off-line, is punishable by imprisonment; a ruling with promotional media campaigns across the country which state 'Worship, protect, and uphold the monarchy'.

On 22 May 2014, the Royal Thai Armed Forces launched a coup d'état against the caretaker government that had been created in the wake of Yingluck Shinawatra's failed general election. A military junta was formed, called the 'National Council for Peace and Order', declaring martial law, arresting numerous politicians, taking control of the media and censoring the Internet, citing the violence on the streets as grave cause for their actions. People were not allowed to gather in public areas during the enforced curfew (10pm – 5am).

In this work, the right hand screen – 'Blinding' – shows the artist with his own public intervention during this curfew. The left hand screen – 'Planking' – is another public intervention of the artist, performed in 2012 during the daily 8am and 6pm public broadcast of the Thai national anthem (ironically such verse mentions nothing of the King), when people are expected to stand still, united for their country. In this work, Siriphol subtly refers to the absurdity of human behavior, in its near blind following of the masses in the myth of what is demanded by its national narratives, using video as a discrete documentary tool.

The artist states *"In Thailand, our government has previously tried to create a single Internet gateway system to control people's activity. That is why we have to find different ways to speak out when we don't agree with them. For me, art is a tool to say something indirectly when we have limited freedom of speech. Planking/Blinding is a kind of protest action."*

---  
**Country:** Thailand. **Genre:** Video Art. **CREW: Production:** Chulayarnnon Siriphol. **Cinematography and Camera:** Chulayarnnon Siriphol, Wachara Kanha. **Edition:** Chulayarnnon Siriphol. **Image post-production:** Chulayarnnon Siriphol

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)



## CLAUDIA JOSKOWICZ (BOLIVIA/ USA)

**Claudia Joskowicz** (b. 1968, Santa Cruz de la Siera, Bolivia) makes poignant and unsettling video works that form a palimpsest of public and private histories. Blending documentary with fictional narrative, Joskowicz recreates episodes of violence—both latent and eruptive—excavated from Bolivia's past to reveal hidden traumas and tentatively offer the possibility of catharsis. On the whole, her work addresses the way technology mediates and redefines concepts like history and memory.

Joskowicz received a Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Houston, Texas in 1991 and an MFA in studio arts from New York University in 2000.

She lives and works between New York, USA and Santa Cruz, Bolivia.

---  
[www.joskowicz.com](http://www.joskowicz.com)



CLAUDIA JOSKOWICZ

## FILMS

# HAY MUERTOS QUE NO HACEN RUIDO [SOME DEAD DON'T MAKE A SOUND]



**Theme:** Mythology

**Thursday, 3 November 2016**

**Year:** 2015

**Duration (mins):** 10:30

Claudia Joskowicz's work looks at history and its repercussions on landscape. In her videos and installations, historic events and personal stories with a historic dimension are revisited and anchored in her native Latin American landscape. On the whole, her work addresses the way technology mediates and redefines concepts like history and memory.

*Hay muertos que no hacen ruido* [Some Dead Don't Make a Sound], uses the Mexican legend of the Weeping Woman, 'La Llorona', as a metaphor for a nation in mourning.

The Weeping Woman is a broken symbol, a melange of pre-Hispanic myths and various representations of mother goddesses. In its different versions, the legend preserves elements of its indigenous essence and represents time, the road to the underworld, death in the supernatural, and hopelessness in the everyday. Therefore, she is emblematic of the despair of a nation. In the last scene, the voices emerging from the radio deliver the harsh reality of collective mourning as we hear an interview with the parents of the 43 disappeared students of Ayotzinapa.

Registering shots of everyday life of the city of Oaxaca and juxtaposing the mundane with the mystical, this video captures the messy reality of urban life reflected in the media, which used to trivialize it.

---  
**Country:** México. **Genre:** Video Art. **Language:** Spanish. **CREW: Production:** LARA 2014, an ASIACITI TRUST Project. **Cast:** Rosario Ordóñez Fuentes and Christian Rasgado. **Cinematography:** Antonio Turok. **Camera:** Benjamín Cabral. **Photography Assistant:** Ángel Jara Taboada. **Editor:** Claudia Joskowicz. **Director's Assistant:** Alejandro Reynaud. **Production Assistant:** Bruno Varela. **Grip and Dolly:** Gustavo Mora and Fredy Rubio. **Music:** Stefano Scodanibbio, Canzoniere messicano - Canzone popolare: La Llorona, Quartetto Prometeo, EMC NEW 2013. **Los Sleepers**, Al ritmo de la lluvia, Peerless, 2008. **Radio:** Radio Plantón, Oaxaca, México, 2006; **Ventana Pública:** Entrevista a padres y estudiantes de Ayotzinapa, [www.eskucharadio.com.mx](http://www.eskucharadio.com.mx), November 4, 2014

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)



## DINH Q LÊ (VIETNAM)

**Dinh Q Lê** (b. 1968, Ha Tien, Vietnam) possesses a diverse practice that is mindful of the complex interweaving of official and non-official histories, particularly in the minds of those who have undergone events whose facts are given little humanity. He is concerned with how history is recorded and institutionalized, how these archives fail in the telling of pain and loss, of the ensuing absence felt not only in the physical destruction of object and place, but also in the psychological battle of the exile, the refugee or the asylum seeker. Lê's work challenges the digital age in its surplus of representational data, using his art to press pause on its minefield of images to force, expand, and reflect upon the significance of each individual image.

Lê received his BA in Art studio at UC Santa Barbara in 1989 and his MFA in Photography and Related Media at The School of Visual Arts in New York City in 1992. In 2007, Lê co-founded Sàn Art (alongside Tuan Andrew Nguyen, Phu Nam Thuc Ha, and Tiffany Chung). This non-profit art organization remains committed to furthering dialog, expertise, production and showcase of critical experimentations in contemporary art from Vietnam and abroad.

Dinh Q Lê is considered one of Vietnam's most established artists whose practice has an extensive exhibition history worldwide. He lives and works in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.



DINH Q LÊ

## FILMS LIGHT AND BELIEF



**Theme:** Special Feature: Vietnam  
**Sunday, 6 November 2016**

**Year:** 2012  
**Duration (mins):** 35:00

*"Arts and culture also form a battlefield. And artists are the warriors in that battle. Like any other warriors, artists have specific responsibilities, namely: to serve the revolution, to serve the Nation, and to serve the people, here means the soldiers, the farmers, and the industrial workers [...] Arts and culture, like any other activities, cannot separate from but must integrate into economics and politics."*

Those are the words of Ho Chi Minh in his letter to Vietnamese artists during the Fine Art Exhibition in 1951. Taking his advice to heart, many artists from different backgrounds entered the war to become soldiers on the field of culture and ideology. Using their pencils, colors, and artistic talent as weapons, they arduously recorded the war scenes: the battles, the artillery, and the everyday life of people in the war. *Light and Belief* takes us through a journey with narratives from senior artist-soldiers, beautifully embellished with their animated sketches from wartime to shed light on a difficult and haunting period of a country in transition towards independence.

Dinh Q Lê has delicately led the conversations with the seniors artists about their experiences witnessing the fate of the Vietnamese people who entered the war with determination and bravery. The artists shared with Lê their process of depicting life during battles (grieving and acknowledging the pain, but choosing to focus on positive scenes instead) and their sense of responsibilities in uplifting the spirit of soldiers (via both heartfelt conversations and propagandic arts). Most importantly, many artists expressed their anxiety about histories being lost as they grow older and their sketches deteriorate. To them, these war sketches are a way to document histories – the events and people that contributed to the liberation of Vietnam. Lê has blended scenes of the senior artists themselves becoming animated sketches in between interviews, to convey the message that the artists are history-weavers – a generation that silently contributed to their country. The story of Le Duy Ung, the volunteer artist who was blinded while recording sketches on battles, reverberates through the film as a testimony to the artists' sacrifices.

*Light and Belief* is a documentary of a chapter in Vietnamese art history– where arts intertwine with socio-political and historical happenings to tell the story of a nation and its people, who have suffered but still stand firmly to hope and reach towards a better future.

---  
**Country:** Vietnam. **Genre:** Documentary. **Language:** Vietnamese, English. **CREW: Producer:** Tuấn Andrew Nguyễn. **Executive producers:** Dinh Q Lê, Shoshana Wayne Gallery, 10 Chancery Lane Gallery, Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation. **Unit production manager:** Nguyễn Hoàng Quân. **Research and Interviews:** Lêna Bùi, Dinh Q Lê. **Director of photography:** Phunam. **Camera operators:** Phunam, Matt Lucero, Nguyễn Nhật Nam, Tuấn Andrew Nguyễn. **Editor:** Tuấn Andrew Nguyễn. **Color grading and Online:** Phunam. **Animation supervisor:** Sunha Yoon Salaff. Animation: Sunha Yoon Salaff, Andres Salaff, Esther Shin, Eddie Moreno, Melvina Wong, Joshua Dotson. **Score:** Richard Horowitz. **Re-recording mixer and Dialogue editor:** Glen Alger Schrickler. **Production assistant:** Huỳnh Ngô Văn Anh. **Post-production assistant:** Nguyễn Bích Trà. Artists: Lê Lam, Phan Oánh, Nguyễn Thu, Trương Hiếu, Dương Ánh, Nguyễn Toàn Thi, Kim Tiên, Vũ Giáng Hương, Quách Phong, Huỳnh Phương Đông, Minh Phương. **Artworks by:** Dương Ánh, Kim Tiên, Huỳnh Phương Đông, Lê Lam, Minh Phương, Nguyễn Toàn Thi, Phan Oánh, Phan Thanh Châu, Quách Phong, Quang Thọ, Trương Hiếu, Vũ Giáng Hương

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)



DINH Q LÊ (VIETNAM)

FILMS

## VISION IN DARKNESS: TRAN TRUNG TIN



**Theme:** Special Feature: Vietnam  
**Sunday, 6 November 2016**

**Year:** 2015  
**Duration (mins):** 27:50

*Vision in Darkness* reveals the life and work of Vietnamese artist, Tran Trung Tin (1933-2008), a short-film that begins with Tran's bold public announcement from the Hanoi Film Studio in 1975, via telegram, 'I withdraw from the state official workforce. I withdraw from the Communist Party'. Born in Saigon along the Mekong Delta, Tran's unique life journey traverses his trials and tribulations as soldier, actor, Communist Party Secretary, and artist, whose movement from South to North Vietnam (and back) was deeply and traumatically colored by firstly his passion, disillusion, and eventual resignation with and from the Communist cause.

As director, Dinh Q Lê interviews several individuals in this documentary – intellectuals, fellow colleagues from the film industry, art historians, and Tran Trung Tin's widow – who reveal Tran as a character of principle, who was not only socially ostracized from family and friends for his disavowal of Vietnam's dominating political ideology, but also was never accepted as an artist by his artistic community due to his revelry in abstraction (an experimentation they blamed on his lack of a formal art education).

Throughout this short film, Lê interweaves images of Tran's art – painted abstractions often on newspaper – these heavy gestural works suggestive of human figures in torment where bold swathes of color emotively reveal the medium as Tran's only freedom of expression. During Tran's era, the official art establishment of Vietnam did not permit experimentation in abstraction or nudity, instead demanding that artists follow 'social realist' motivation and technique to serve the country's propaganda machine. It was Tran's frustration with this control of artistic expression and production, its lack of truth in reflecting the dilemma's of the Vietnamese people, that emboldened his immersion in abstraction – a practice today arguably finally recognized as an influential precursor to the growth of conceptual experimentation in Vietnamese post-war painting.

---  
**Country:** Vietnam. **Genre:** Documentary. **Language:** Vietnamese, English. **CREW: Production:** Tuấn Andrew Nguyễn – TANQs Studio. **Line producer:** Nguyễn Xuân Phương. **Cinematography and Camera:** Phunam. **Audio Recorder:** Hồ Huy, Đỗ Vũ. **Edition:** Erik Truong, Tuấn Andrew Nguyễn. **Music:** Bình An Tất. **Soundtrack mix:** Trần Mạnh Hoàng, Otherworld Sound, Phù Hoàng Quân. **Color and Effects:** Erik Truong. **English Subtitles:** TANQ Studio. **Production assistants:** Nguyễn Thụy Diễm, Huỳnh Ngô Văn Anh. **Artists:** Trần Thị Huỳnh Nga, Trịnh Tú, Trịnh Thái, Tự Huy, Phạm Toàn, Sherry Buchanan, Lê Thiết Cương, Bùi Như Hương

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)



## DAVID-DOUGLAS MASAMUNA NTIMASIEMI (DR CONGO)

**David-Douglas Masamuna Ntimasiemi** (b.1977, Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of Congo) discovered the arts of moving image through comics and animation. After he finished his studies in economics, Ntimasiemi returned to continue his exploration and experimentation with videos and the performing arts. He then devoted his practice to documentaries, occasionally producing fiction films. His country DR Congo remains his source of inspiration and the subject matter of his works, which occasionally possess satire and metaphor overtones.

Ntimasiemi lives and works in DR Congo.



DAVID-DOUGLAS  
MASAMUNA NTIMASIEMI

## FILMS

### MINES DE RIEN [MINES OF NOTHING]



**Theme:** Materiality

**Saturday, 5 November 2016**

**Year:** 2015

**Duration (mins):** 13:31

In the eastern region of Katanga in Democratic Republic (DR) of Congo, thousands of children toil away in its cobalt and copper deposits – the ‘blood minerals’ central to the manufacture of cell phones and computer components. David-Douglas Masamuna Ntimasiemi begins *Mines de Rien* with a naming exercise through which the children become real: individuals submitted to a terrible fate, for once not a number among faceless masses, or question marks in vague NGO declarations of principles. Shortly after, we hear one of the children making wishes for a possible future, expressing a devastating insecurity on his right to live: *Si je grandis... 'If I grow up...'*

Scenes of the children working on the mines are blended with alarming statistics about their living condition. Official records establish that 34% of the children population in Katanga province works the mines. Each and every one among them is daily exposed to illness from contamination, fatal accidents, and even death. The children in the film tell us that they must work a minimum of ten hours per day, manually cracking small stones and collecting cobalt and copper residues by their naked hands in acid infested waters. Their daily wage is 3 US dollars.

Ntimasiemi's film brings a realistic perspective into the hegemonic relationship between foreign companies, society's thirst for technology, and violation of human rights, especially children's. Society's high demands for modern technology have pushed companies to expand their search for cheap labor and materials. In this squandering process, children become exploited and their dreams sacrificed for the world's latest phone brand. The issues of mining in DR Congo have become part of environmentalist and political activists agendas in the last years. However, how much of the conversation is turned into real action is dubious...

---  
**Country:** DR Congo. **Language:** French. **CREW: Thanks to:** Dally (11), Chadrack (12), Meshak (12), Jenovic (10), Aristotele (12), Giresse (12), Christian (5) – who have agreed to share their daily life with us. **Idea by:** Gabriele Salmi. **A Production of:** Alba Onus. **Coordination Technique:** DL Multimédia. In collaboration with: UNICEF, Framework for Consultation and Community Supervision of Kipushi. **With the participation of:** Katanga Dimanche/Production. **Camera:** Douglas Nt, Gulda El Magambo. **Sound:** Blaise Pelos Musaka. **Montage:** Sam Nkaya, Douglas Nt. **Executive Production:** Douglas Nt, Gabriele Salmi, Carine Kalunga. **Music:** Maje and Christelle. **Production:** ALBA ONUUS, Katanga Dimanche, DL Multimédia. **Equipments:** DL Multimédia, El Jah Peace and Work Studio, Dossie Design. **Narrated by:** Tim Masamuna, Lionnel Magambo, Chris Masamuna, Naomie Binti, Rose Masamuna. **A Special Thank to:** Framework for Consultation and Community Supervision of Kipushi

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)

EMBEDDED  
SOUTH(S)

## FERNANDO ARIAS (COLOMBIA)

**Fernando Arias** (b.1963, Armenia, Colombia) explores the human condition through video, photography, installation, and actions. Recurring themes include social and environmental issues, conflict, politics, sexuality, and religion. In addition to his personal practice, Arias involves other artists and professionals on projects through his Foundation Más Arte Más Acción (More Art More Action). Here, Arias devises interdisciplinary projects to explore challenging social and environmental issues. The foundation generates critical thinking through cultural exchanges.

Arias received his BA in Creative Publishing from University of Bogotá Jorge Tadeo Lozano in 1987, followed by a Master in Graphic Design from the City of London Polytechnic (now London Metropolitan University) in 1991. He works between Bogotá and the remote Colombian Pacific coast of Chocó.



FERNANDO ARIAS

## FILMS

## ENJOY YOUR MEAL



**Theme:** Materiality

**Saturday, 5 November 2016**

**Year:** 2008

**Duration (mins):** 16:00

The sound of a western restaurant with its soft murmur of socializing and eating is followed by the view of a trawler's ropes dragging its nets along an ocean bed. The scene then switches to a local fisherman named Magiver teaching his youths how to carve an essential tool to keep them alive – a wooden fishing canoe. Meanwhile, another local fisherman arrives at the trawler's side on his carved canoe, offering bananas in return for prawns, or perhaps searching for work. On the trawler, the catch is landed and a mountain of squirming life falls on deck. The crew begins their task of sorting through the best prawns. They are then weighed, boxed, and placed in a freezer room, waiting to be shipped off to A Coruna in northern Spain.

*Enjoy Your Meal* explores three interlacing narratives in the global food chain: industrial fishing of prawns destined for Europe; depletion of sea creatures caused by trawling; and the struggle of indigenous fishing communities within the chain. The restaurant's consumers, in their own way, are blind to the reality of how the food arrives at their tables. As they satisfy their hunger, the local fishermen continue suffering as the ocean gradually becomes void of resources. Fernando Arias combines footages from Coqui village (Colombia) and its Pacific coast to give us a glimpse into the repercussions of the developed world's craving to eat whatever it wants whenever it wants it.

Arias' short poetic documentary offers his contemplation on the search for food and the arduous tasks involved in retrieving it. This poetic rumination of image and sound reveals the means by which food reaches our table and the social and human impact of such economic practices. His documentary is a foreboding message about a fragile ecosystem, mined for its riches, is on the cusp of irreversible change.

---  
**Country:** Colombia. **Genre:** Environmental film. **Crew: Director, Camera, & Edition:** Fernando Arias. **Crew & Translator:** Jonathan Colin

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)



## GIOVANNA MIRALLES (BOLIVIA)

**Giovanna Miralles** (b. Oruro, Bolivia) is an artist, writer and independent filmmaker who studied film at the International School of Film of San Antonio de los Baños, EICTV, Cuba. She has worked in diverse areas of filmmaking, learning her craft from Jorge Ruiz, pioneer documentary filmmaker for indigenous themes in Latin America and with Bolivian director Jorge Sanjinés. These experiences led her to immerse herself in the indigenous world, living for three years in Guatemala as an apprentice of the Mayan Elder Cirilo Perez, to learn the oral tradition and rituals of the Mayan people and becoming an Aj'quijab', 'the bearer of time' or Mayan priestess.

She has directed documentaries and organised workshops for members of indigenous communities and university students in Guatemala and Bolivia. Giovanna also works as a performance artist in ritual ceremonies that link to her expression in contemporary art.

Giovanna Miralles currently lives and works in the UK.



GIOVANNA MIRALLES

## FILMS

# UMATURKA THE CALL OF THE WATER



**Theme:** Social Science and Collective Memory  
**Friday, 4 November 2016**

**Year:** 2016  
**Duration (mins):** 45:00

In the rapidly changing environment of the arid Bolivian Andean plateau, *UMATURKA The Call of The Water*, follows a community who call for the clouds to return, for rain, for survival. Every year the people of the town of Quillacas celebrate the tradition of the *Umaturka* to call for clouds and rain. The ancient rituals are performed to keep the delicate balance between life and environment, in a metaphor of humanity's survival, where life depends on water.

The documentary depicts the reality of a community's continuation of their tradition in a modern world. Through their own voices we penetrate the identity and culture of one of the oldest ethnic groups that inhabit the Andes, to understand their beliefs and the importance to continue with their tradition and way of life. We share the difficulties that arise at the time of electing a new *Pasante*, a person to take charge of the festivity in the coming year. Who will take the pledge and the flag? Who will continue the tradition for the rain to come?

---  
**Country:** Bolivia/UK. **Language:** Spanish and Aymara. **Crew: Directed and Written by** Giovanna Miralles. **Produced by** Peter Wilkin & Giovanna Miralles. **Music:** Luzmila Carpio. **Cinematography and Camera:** Peter Wilkin. **Edition:** Rosa Sophia Rodríguez. **Soundtrack Mix:** Manuel Hernandez. **Image Post-production:** Luis Ochoa. **Coordination of Post-production:** Alvaro Carranza. **Auxiliar Materials:** Theobald Wilkin-Miralles. **Graphic Design:** Andrés Marquínez Casas

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)



## JOMPET KUSWIDANANTO (INDONESIA)

**Jompét Kuswidananto** (b. 1976, Yogyakarta, Indonesia) is a visual artist first trained as a musician. He is well known for his mechanized theatrical installations, often incorporating video and sound. Jompét's diverse art playfully responds to the memory and ceremony of a nation, often utilizing little-known historical texts to provoke representations of social control as a militarized, religious, and culturally restrictive phenomenon.

Jompét studied Communications at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta with the Faculty of Social and Political Science. Since 1998, he has been a member of 'Teater Garasi', an interdisciplinary performance collective built on the belief that the performing arts is a way to process and produce knowledge that dialectically engages its social-political environment. Jompét currently lives and works in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.



JOMPET  
KUSWIDANANTO

## FILMS WAR OF JAVA, DO YOU REMEMBER? #2



**Theme:** Materiality

**Saturday, 5 November 2016**

**Year:** 2008

**Duration (mins):** 5:53

In this work, shot in black and white, a man performs the Jathilan dance – an Indonesian trance of folk origin that invites the ancestor spirits to enter the body of the dancer and occupy his consciousness. It is said that the power of dance and music are used in the jathilan to channel powerful, sometimes terrifying, forces.

Shot on the island of Java within an old sugar cane factory, this dancer moves between huge iron machines – the first, it is said, that began Indonesia's modern industrial era. The jathilan dancer presents a different kind of order from the spiritual world, which appears at odds with the size and sound of the contraptions surrounding him – a chilling reminder of the human cost of industrialization.

From the early 1600s, the Dutch East India Company monopolized the sugar trade in Java, until the Dutch crown in the late 1700s claimed colonial right to rule the industry. The technology of iron imports to Java consequentially accounted for rapid growth in sugar production – a success that relied on enforced labor under the Dutch-imposed 'Cultivation System'\*. In pre-colonial Java, those who worked iron were considered people with magical powers. The voice-over narration recalls the Dutch importation of iron, interspersed with an ancient Javanese spell:

'To those who come to strike, change to a generous one  
To those who have bad intention, stay afar  
To those who create hunger, make into state of proper  
To those who carry poverty, be a welfare carrier  
To those who bring sin, be of a benefit  
To those who bring war, be a peace maker'  
*(excerpt from the 'Kalacakra' spell addressed to Kala – the god of time in Javanese myth)*

---

Note: \*The cultivation system was primarily implemented in Java, the center of the colonial state. Instead of land taxes, 20% of village land had to be devoted to government crops for export. Alternatively, peasants had to work in government-owned plantations for 60 days of the year. To allow the enforcement of these policies, Javanese villagers were more formally linked to their villages and were sometimes prevented from travelling freely around the island without permission. As a result of this policy, much of Java became a Dutch plantation.

---

**Country:** Indonesia. **Language:** Javanese, English. **CREW: Cinematography and Camera:** Jamalludin Latief. **Edition:** Jompét Kuswidananto. **Soundtrack mix:** Jompét Kuswidananto. **Image post-production:** Jompét Kuswidananto. **Coordination of post-production:** Jompét Kuswidananto

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)



## KANNAN ARUNASALAM (SRI LANKA)

**Kannan Arunasalam** (b. 1972, Jaffna, Sri Lanka) is a filmmaker who uses documentary, photography, and multimedia forms of storytelling. He possesses extensive experience of working in media restrictive, conflict and post-conflict environments, during which he conceptualized and developed award-winning documentary and new media narrative projects.

Arunasalam studied psychology at the University of Cambridge; and International Human Rights at the University of Oxford, UK.

Kannan Arunasalam currently lives and works in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

---  
kannanarunasalam.com



KANNAN  
ARUNASALAM

## FILMS KEROSENE



**Theme:** Materiality  
**Saturday, 5 November 2016**  
**Year:** 2012  
**Duration (mins):** 16:00

*"In the 1990s, the Sri Lankan government's embargoes on fuel, medicines, and food items in the north and east of Sri Lanka (in an effort to frustrate the operations of a separatist militant group known as the Tamil Tigers) reached their peak. In the face of dearth and hardship, the locals resorted to increasingly inventive ways of making do."*

And thus Arunasalam opens a filmic window onto the lives of dedicated mechanics and publishers in Jaffna, whose ingenious strategies of survival remain the focus of *Kerosene*. In this short documentary, the automobile and the printing press become instruments of endurance, machines that persist through humanity's greed and neglect. As engines are reconfigured to run on cooking oil and ink is cajoled onto exercise paper, Arunasalam's emotively framed lens carefully pans in and out of focus, caressing objects and people, giving an everyday perspective to a memory of conflict that persists still today.

*"These stories of everyday, utilitarian aspects of a survivor's life are in fact narratives that drive home the nature and experience of war. My film, supported by Groundviews, a 'citizen journalism' website, were all shot in Jaffna, where the current political climate and restrictions on the media made filming a challenge. So I decided to use a smaller camera and a 'guerrilla'-style approach to film-making, keeping a low profile.... At its core is an acceptance of the dangers that comes from living in a conflict zone, and a deep-rooted conviction to remain there. Despite the fear and insecurity that led others to emigrate to join the growing Tamil diaspora, they chose to remain. I was born in Jaffna but grew up in England, since the age of six. So for me, my journey in making these video portraits felt almost like a tribute to those who continue to dedicate their lives to Jaffna when so many others have left for safe havens abroad."*

(by Kannan Arunasalam)

---  
**Country:** Sri Lanka. **Genre:** Documentary. **Language:** English, Tamil. **Crew:** Cinematography and Camera: Kannan Arunasalam. **Editor:** Kannan Arunasalam. **Soundtrack mix:** Jeremy Hogg. **Image post-production:** Jeremy Hogg

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)

EMBEDDED  
SOUTH(S)

## KIDLAT TAHIMIK (PHILIPPINES)

**Kidlat Tahimik** (b. 1942, Baguio City, The Philippines) is a pioneer of experimental film in Asia, practicing as a film director, writer, and actor. His films are commonly associated with the Third Cinema movement – a film movement begun in the 1960s-70s in Latin America that denounced neocolonialism, the capitalist system, and the Hollywood model of cinema as mere entertainment to make money. He is considered the Father of Philippine Independent Cinema, entering the international stage in the late 1970s with *Perfumed Nightmare*, a release enabled with the support of filmmakers Werner Herzog and Francis Ford Coppola.

Tahimik's work embraces the essayist form. He is considered a magician of the fragment with an aesthetic often described as whimsical, politically incisive, and with a third-world self-consciousness.

Kidlat Tahimik lives and works in Baguio.



KIDLAT TAHIMIK

## FILMS

# MEMORIES OF OVERDEVELOPMENT REDUX I



**Theme:** Social Science and Collective Memory  
**Friday, 4 November 2016**

**Year:** 1983  
**Duration (mins):** 33:41

*Memories of Overdevelopment Redux I* is an ongoing film project that began over 30 years ago. Shot initially on 16mm film, it imaginatively embellishes the true-life tale of Enrique, the Filipino slave of Portuguese explorer, Ferdinand Magellan (c.1480-1521) who was the first to circumnavigate the Earth. Bought in Malacca and taken to the Spanish court, Enrique becomes the favored object of Princess Isabella, their intimate liaison ultimately signing Enrique's return to the Philippine islands. Tahimik's voice shares Enrique's 'memories of overdevelopment' as he returns to his hometown in The Philippines with his collection of European souvenirs.

Tahimik casts himself as Enrique, through a montage of analog and digital techniques of recording sound and image, where the set design and narration is a spontaneous assemblage of historical artifact, artistic prop, and anecdotal reflection. This short film splices the process of memory between the stage and everyday life, where Tahimik's family often stands in for differing characters.

This short-film is a unique window onto indigenous Filipino life and belief, while also a clever and humorous provocation of History, where the colonized subject is with power to re-define and visualize his experience as a re-telling of the progress and value of Empire.

*Memories of Overdevelopment Redux I*, as it is shown here, is a stunning miniature tale that is ongoing and continues to be elaborated, extended and re-worked – such a process being a signature of Kidlat Tahimik's oeuvre.

---  
**Country:** Philippines

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)

EMBEDDED  
SOUTH(S)

## SAMMY BALOJI (DR CONGO)

**Sammy Baloji** (b. 1978, Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of Congo) is a conceptual photographer whose works explore the culture, architecture, and the material heritage of the Katanga region of DRC, questioning the narratives of colonialism by exploring archives, among them at the Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale in Tervuren. His employment of photographic documentation in his celebrated series of photomontages has gained him widespread international recognition.

Baloji received a Bachelor degree in Literature and Human science at the University of Lubumbashi. Since the beginning of his studies, he has been interested in film. Later on, he actively dedicated himself to photography and film.

Baloji lives and works between Lubumbashi and Brussels.



## LÁZARA ROSELL ALBEAR (CUBA)

**Lázara Rosell Albear** (b. 1971, Cuba) is a Cuban-Belgian artist with a cross-medial practice, ranging from the research of sound and performance to the production of events and films. She explores movement, migration, transformation, interactivity and its effects on the human condition through a mix-media approach using dance, music, and theater. Albear strives for a contrapuntal togetherness and total immersion in her performances – both on the inside and outside.

In 2000, Albear received a Master in Medium Film from the School of Arts (KASK) at University College Gent in the Netherlands. She currently lives and works in Brussels.

### FILMS

## BARE-FACED



**Theme:** Mythology

**Thursday, 3 November 2016**

**Year:** 2015

**Duration (mins):** 23:16

*Bare-Faced* is a transdisciplinary three-part project consisting of experimental video, photography, and performance. Sammy Baloji & Lázara Rosell Albear's collaboration marks an attempt to overcome the divisions imposed by colonial history, which obscures the intrinsic connection between peoples of the African diaspora in the Americas and the root cultures they emerged from. Started in 2011, their joint project signifies a fruitful meeting of two artists from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Cuba in search of a common history and its imprint in contemporary culture.

The film begins with the voice over of a historian delivering an anthropological record, which refers to the issue of restitution of relics – particularly the skull of Congolese chief Lusinga Congo – and largely addresses Belgian colonizers' cruelty and its link to museum collections built from bounties appropriated during massacres. Constructed as a collage, the narrative assembles historical evidence with personal memory to disentangle the West African spiritual heritage kept alive in Rosell Albear's Cuban family environment. In a Skype call between Cuba and Belgium, the artist queries her mother about the tradition of Palo Monte – an exclusively male religion originated in Congo called Palo Mayombe. Mother and daughter share details of the rituals performed by family members, spanning from commands to scarification – a subject central to Sammy Baloji's archival research. From the mother's account, which incarnates the repository of tradition and memory, the practice is kept alive to the present despite financial and gender constraints.

Through performative action, the film also metaphorically enacts historical moments in the creation of bridges between the American diaspora and Africa. Such is a symbolic reenactment of the mega event 'The Rumble of the Jungle', organized by promoter Don King in Kinshasa on the occasion of heavyweights Muhammad Ali vs Georges Foreman boxing match under Mobutu in 1974. The concurrent concert presented the likes of super star Cuban performers Celia Cruz and Fania All Stars and Puerto Rican singer Hector Lavoe, alongside James Brown and other African American bands in a memorable attempt to reconcile historical relations otherwise tinted by Mobutu's totalitarian rule. Additionally, the film includes a performance composed of a video screening of Congolese dancers sketching moments of trance, alongside the artist's intense drumming session.

---

**Country:** Democratic Republic of Congo - Cuba

**REGISTER AT: [WWW.EMBEDDEDSOUTHS.ORG](http://WWW.EMBEDDEDSOUTHS.ORG)**

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)

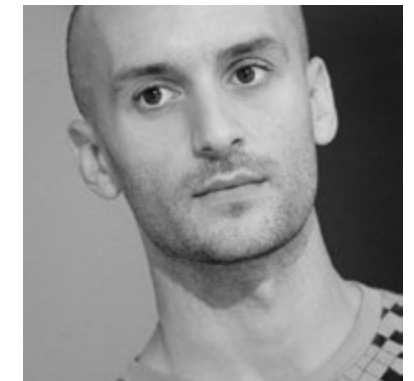
EMBEDDED  
SOUTH(S)

## MIKHAIL KARIKIS (GREECE/UK)

**Mikhail Karikis** is a Greek-British artist. His works embrace moving image, sound, performance and other media, and emerge from his long-standing investigation of the voice as a sculptural material and a socio-political agent. His projects explore the energies that create collectivist dynamics while resonating people's economic, cultural and psychological circumstances. Karikis often collaborates with communities with whom he creates site-specific performances to camera, which highlight alternative modes of human existence and action.

Karikis received his BA in Architecture from Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London (UCL) in 1997, then went on to achieve his MA (2000) and PhD (2005) in Art at the Slade School of Art, UCL. He is currently based in London and works internationally.

---  
[www.mikhailkarikis.com](http://www.mikhailkarikis.com)



MIKHAIL KARIKIS

## FILMS

## SEAWOMEN



**Theme:** Social Science and Collective Memory  
**Friday, 4 November 2016**

**Year:** 2012  
**Duration (mins):** 16:02

Mikhail Karikis's *SeaWomen* focuses on a fast vanishing community of elderly female sea workers living on the North Pacific island of Jeju – a jagged patch of black volcanic rock which belongs to South Korea and floats between Japan and China. It observes a group of women called haenyeo (sea-women), now in their late 70s and 80s, who dive to great depths with no oxygen supply to find pearls and catch seafood.

This ancient female profession became the dominant economic force on the island by the 1970s, establishing a matriarchal system in an otherwise male-dominated Confucian society.

The film follows the old women's work: diving deep from the rocks; going out to sea on boats in stormy weather, selling and sharing their catch; returning from the depths to their coastal base and sorting their nets, and vending seafood on the cliffs.

Amid the noise of the sea, *SeaWomen* records the unique sound subculture of this community. We hear the women's rhythmic work songs; the reverberant hubbub of their communal baths and the striking high-pitched and dolphin-like whistling noises of the diving women's traditional breathing technique (the *sumbisori*) which have been recorded for the first time for this work. At once alarming and joyous, the *sumbisori* punctuates each dive and marks the horizon between life and death; often mistaken for noises produced by sea-mammals, this unique breathing technique is a trans-generational skill transmitted from mother to daughter when a new pearl-diver began her training at the age of eight.

This soundscape, along with the women's profession are on the verge of disappearance. *SeaWomen* witnesses the diving women's insistence on sustainable eco-feminist work practices operating outside the trend of industrialization. It observes the reversal of traditional gender-roles, the women's deep sense of community and egalitarianism, their collective economics, and their sense of professional identity, purpose, fun and independence in later age.

---  
**Country:** South Korea and England. **Genre:** Video Art. **Language:** Korean. **CREW: Director:** Mikhail Karikis. **Production:** Mikhail Karikis, Hyun DongHak and Ahn HyeKyoung. **Cinematography and Camera:** Mikhail Karikis. **Edition:** 5. **Soundtrack Mix:** Mikhail Karikis. **Image Post-production:** Storm HD

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)



## NGUYỄN HƯƠNG TRÀ (VIETNAM)

**Nguyễn Hương Trà** (b. 1985, Hanoi, Vietnam) was a former student at Hanoi Doclab (a center/lab for documentary filmmaking and video art based at the Goethe Institute in Hanoi). Tra graduated from the Vietnam National University – School of Languages in 2007 and continued her studies within the university in the School of Social sciences and Humanities, researching Vietnamese cinema.



NGUYỄN HƯƠNG TRÀ

## FILMS MARRIAGE PRAYER



**Theme:** Social Science and Collective Memory  
**Friday, 4 November 2016**

**Year:** 2012  
**Duration (mins):** 8:48

*Marriage Prayer* is a short film about the expectation of marriage imposed upon Vietnamese women. In many cultures, including Vietnam, the idea of happiness is attached to having a family of one's own. As a matter of fact, marriage is a frame through which women are 'measured' and 'defined' in the social sphere.

The film follows a female character and her daily encounters with family's expectations of finding a husband, from listening to her relatives' advice on dating to subjecting herself to a shaman's marriage ritual. The scenes are dominated by two strings of thoughts: one shows the personal contemplation where the woman is by herself, while the other speaks of the unnecessary and intense social pressure that she has to undergo. Despite the woman's reluctance to rush into marriage, the relentless pressure from her surroundings creeps in, making the main character question her own opinion on the matter. Through the protagonist (also played by the director), Nguyễn Hương Trà exposes the micro-aggression foisted on Vietnamese women and stakes out a personal space where her opinions about marriage and happiness can be heard.

This work was the result of attending Doclab's filmmaking course (Doclab is the centre for documentary and experimental films and video art based in Hanoi). <http://www.hanoidoclab.org>.

---  
**Country:** Vietnam. **Genre:** Short Film. **Language:** Vietnamese. **CREW: Director and Writer:** Nguyễn Hương Trà. **Producer:** Doclab.  
**Cinematography and Camera:** Phạm Thu Hằng and Nguyễn Hương Trà. **Edition:** Nguyễn Hương Trà. **Image Post-production:** Phạm Thu Hằng.  
**Coordination of Post-production:** Phan Thảo Nguyên. **Company Credits:** Doclab

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)

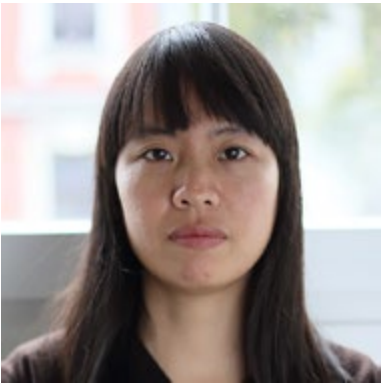


## NGUYỄN THỊ THANH MAI (VIETNAM)

**Nguyễn Thị Thanh Mai's** (b. 1983, Hanoi, Vietnam) practice focuses on issues of the female body, sex, and constructed social values that affect women. Nguyễn's works challenge and open up these issues, confronting the power relations between fear, and desire, through experimentations with particular material and the evocation of bodily transgression. Most recently, her interests have shifted to examine the cause and affect of human migration and statelessness.

Nguyễn is a graduate of Hue College of Arts, Hue University (2006). In 2012, she earned a MA in Visual Art from Mahasarakham University, Thailand.

Nguyễn is currently living and working in Hue, Vietnam.



NGUYỄN THỊ THANH MAI

## FILMS DAY BY DAY



**Theme:** Mythology  
**Thursday, 3 November 2016**

**Year:** 2014-2015  
**Duration (mins):** 58:01

What makes a community leave everything behind in search of a new land? Is it the perpetual hope for a better life? These are questions that Nguyễn Thị Thanh Mai wishes to explore in her film *Day by Day*.

In 1975, Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge army marched into Phnom Penh and effectively seized control of Cambodia. Many Vietnamese people who resided in Cambodia up until that point decided to flee the oppressive regime and return to Vietnam, deciding to return after Pol Pot was deposed in 1978. Such border-crossing, taking place without official paperwork, becomes the central theme of the lives of these communities, and with it comes unforeseen consequences: absence of governmental support and thus lack of identity papers, unstable livelihood, and a bleak future for their undocumented, uneducated children. *Day by Day* is a phrase that Nguyễn Thị Thanh Mai heard everyday from the villagers while undertaking her extensive research in the two Vietnamese communities in Tonle Sap Lake, Cambodia and Long An province, Vietnam. It draws the picture of their precarious future, working hard only with the goal of surviving until the next day.

While the film presents a set of circumstances that are specific to the ongoing political tensions between Vietnam and Cambodia, it also intersects with broader, more universal, concepts of nation/state boundary, power of citizenship, and impact of human migration - all melancholically portrayed through the artist's sympathetic lens.

---  
**Country:** Vietnam/Cambodia. **Genre:** Documentary. **Language:** Vietnamese with English and Khmer subtitles. **CREW: Writer, Director, Producer:** Nguyễn Thị Thanh Mai.  
**Director of Photography, Editor:** Tạ Minh Đức. **Technical Specs:** 1920 x 1080

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)



## NGUYỄN TRINH THI (VIETNAM)

**Nguyễn Trinh Thi** (b. 1973, Hanoi, Vietnam) is an artist, filmmaker, and documentarian. Her diverse practice has consistently investigated the role of memory in the necessary unveiling of hidden, displaced or misinterpreted histories, often making use of original documentary footage or undertaking extensive investigative field work. Her moving image work is diverse, moving between documentary and experimental film, alongside multi-channel installations and performance.

Nguyen Trinh Thi studied journalism, photography, international relations and ethnographic films in the United States. She graduated with a BA in Russian and English, Hanoi Foreign Studies College, Hanoi (1994), a Master in Professional Journalism, University of Iowa, Iowa (1999), and a Master of Pacific International Affairs, University of California, San Diego (2005).

Based in Hanoi, she founded and directs Hanoi DOCLAB, a center for documentary films and the moving image since 2009.

---  
[www.hanoidoclab.org](http://www.hanoidoclab.org)



NGUYỄN TRINH THI

## FILMS LETTERS FROM PANDURANGA



**Theme:** Mythology  
**Thursday, 3 November 2016**

**Year:** 2015  
**Duration (mins):** 35:00

In 1832, Panduranga, the last remaining territory of the Champa kingdom, was annexed by emperor Minh Mang of Dai Viet (ancient Vietnam). Now renamed Ninh Thuan province, the spiritual heart of this two-thousand-year matriarchal Hindu culture is again facing existential threats as the Vietnamese government plans to build the country's first two nuclear power plants on its site. *Letters from Panduranga*, reflecting the form of a letter exchange between a man and a woman, responds to the plight of the Cham people, an ethnic minority culturally struggling under a government that refuses to acknowledge and respect its legitimization.

The silent, captured images of the Cham people carry a powerful desire for an open discourse about power and conflicting ideologies in the everyday. Narrated in the voice of two outsiders (both are Kinh people, the dominant voice of present-day Vietnam), the film also raises the crucial question of who is authorized to tell the stories of a community? The participant, observer, or conqueror?

This film shifts between documentary and fiction, carrying audience's attention from foreground to background, between intimate portraits and distant landscapes. By implementing an ethnographic gaze in her film, evident in the portrait-oriented documentative techniques, Nguyễn Trinh Thi offers reflections around the interconnected relationship between scientific fieldwork and art, while also emphasizing the role of the artist in their capacity to provide important perspective on vulnerable communities.

---  
**Country:** Vietnam. **Genre:** Documentary/Fiction. **Language:** Vietnamese

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)



■ NGUYỄN TRINH THI (VIETNAM)

FILMS

## ■ LOVE MAN, LOVE WOMAN



**Theme:** Social Science and Collective Memory  
**Friday, 4 November 2016**

**Year:** 2007  
**Duration (mins):** 50:00

Nguyễn Trinh Thi's documentary *Love Man, Love Woman* is about the lives of gay men in Vietnam, with focus on repression of identity in society. The film portrays Hanoian master Lưu Ngọc Đức, a famous spirit medium of the indigenous religion Dao Mau (*Mother Goddess*) in Vietnam, whose communities offer a haven to many gay Vietnamese. Here, the shamans, titled 'dong co', perform rites and rituals that include many celebratory elements such as dazzling altars, flamboyant costumes, and sumptuous rituals with candles, incense, sequins and feathers.

Nguyễn's documentary sheds a light on a very unique group of religious practitioners whose gender and sexual identities don't adhere to society's binary standards. Like shaman Đức, many gay men turn to the Mau religion as a tolerant space where they can live true to themselves and appease their daily grief and struggle by serving as medium between the Mau deities and their followers. As Nguyễn followed the everyday life events of shaman Đức, he shared with her his understanding of the Mau religion and of himself as a gay man in Vietnamese society: a somewhat somber existence, always burning with the desire to find love and family, while resigning himself to a solitary fate. Shaman Đức acknowledges his 'differences', bemoaning them while taking pride in them at the same time. His perspectives on individual identities and expressions opens up discussions about how Vietnamese society adheres to dominant and mainstream social expectations for men and women to perform, revealing how indigenous religions can alleviate such norms with alternate space of meaning.

---

**Country:** Vietnam. **Genre:** Documentary. **Language:** Vietnamese. **Production:** Nguyễn Trinh Thi. **Cinematography and Camera:** Nguyễn Trinh Thi and Jamie Maxtone-Graham. **Edition:** Nguyễn Trinh Thi. **Soundtrack Mix:** Nguyễn Trinh Thi. **Image Post-production:** Nguyễn Trinh Thi. **Coordination of Post-production:** Nguyễn Trinh Thi. **Graphic Design:** Nguyễn Trinh Thi

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)



## PHAN THẢO NGUYỄN (VIETNAM)

**Phan Thảo Nguyễn** (b. 1987, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam) is a multimedia artist who uses painting, installation, video and performance to provide alternate readings of traditional and contemporary human behavior. Through a study of literature, philosophy and observing daily life, Phan's art revels in exploring the oblique tension between social convention and aesthetic narrative, seeking to disturb the presumption of History as a single tale of truth.

Phan Thảo Nguyễn graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Lasalle College of Arts in 2009 and obtained her Master of Fine Arts at the Art Institute of Chicago in 2013.

Phan Thảo Nguyễn is a member of the collective Art Labor. She currently lives and works in Ho Chi Minh City.

---  
[www.thaonguyenphan.com](http://www.thaonguyenphan.com)



PHAN THẢO NGUYỄN

## FILMS CURVE OF THE HORIZON



**Theme:** Materiality  
**Saturday, 5 November 2016**

**Year:** 2013  
**Duration (mins):** 6:32

*Curve of the Horizon* interprets the recurring tragedy of a Vietnamese phenomenon, through the symbolic phrase 'uproot rice grow jute'. This phrase refers to a campaign by the Japanese during their occupation of Indochina (1941 – 1945). Jute was used to make sacks and clothing for the armed force, a crucial material for the Japanese war industry. During Japanese occupation, the jute supply from India was interrupted, leading to the forced replacement of rice with jute in Vietnam. This act was partially blamed for causing a severe famine that took away the lives of nearly two million Vietnamese. Almost 60 years later, history repeated in the South of Vietnam. Local farmer once again uprooted rice to grow jute, hoping to feed the demand of a planned factory in Long An province (southern Vietnam). A machinery defect in the production line resulted in the discontinuation of production and the factory's inability to buy jute from farmers.

Filmed in Long An province in 2013 at an un-harvested jute field, the artist created a piece of land art by bending each jute plant to form a curve, an image evocative of a bowing gesture - a symbol of respect, politeness and obedience in many East Asian countries (prominent in China, Japan, Thailand, Vietnam, Korea, Taiwan). Jute in the Vietnamese context is a symbolic witness to the tragedy of past and present, the curve of the jute a metaphor for the passive position of the farmer.

---  
**Country:** Vietnam. **Genre:** Video Art. **Language:** Vietnamese. **Production:** Phan Thảo Nguyễn. **Camera:** Trương Công Tùng. **Editor:** Phan Thảo Nguyễn. **Music:** Anton Webern. **Sound:** Phan Thảo Nguyễn. **Image Post-production:** Phan Thảo Nguyễn. **Coordination of Post-production:** Phan Thảo Nguyễn. **Graphics:** Phan Thảo Nguyễn

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)



## RENATA PADOVAN (BRAZIL)

**Renata Padovan** (São Paulo, Brazil) is a Brazilian artist living and working in São Paulo.

Graduated with a BA degree in Social Communications from FAAP São Paulo, later followed by an MA in Fine Art from Chelsea College of Art and Design in London (2001), she has participated in several artists in residency programs and in exhibitions worldwide.

Padovan lives and works in São Paulo, Brazil

---

[www.renatapadovan.me](http://www.renatapadovan.me)



RENATA PADOVAN

## FILMS IEMANJÁ



**Theme:** Mythology

**Thursday, 3 November 2016**

**Year:** 2010

**Duration (mins):** 3:36

Every year on the 2nd of February, thousands of people make offers to the sea goddess Iemanjá\*, by lighting candles and taking offers of food and flowers to the shores. Although most cultures possess a pantheon of entities representing the natural forces, a remarkably complex example of a spiritual system can be found among the Yoruba of West Africa. The Yoruba people arrived in the Americas during the infamous slave trade that followed colonization. In Brazil, the Yoruba cult of the orixás – sacred representations of primal natural elements – took root strongly in the city of Salvador, where great numbers of followers pay homage to the goddess of the sea on her day.

*Iemanjá* is a visual allegory of the commemoration of the sea entity Iemanjá, an important cultural event in Brazil, and particularly in the northeastern estate of Bahia. Iemanjá is a female entity, represented by the color blue, worn in the beads donned by her followers. Within the orixás belief system, the entity is a motherly and protective force that lovingly looks after her children, and like the ocean, is a provider of life.

Renata Padovan's film was captured with her mobile phone camera during the festival in Bahia. She focuses on the symbolic materials and the body movement of the women participating in the celebration: white robes and colorful beads are at the center of the images, bringing to mind African and Arab influences. Both the aesthetic synthesis achieved through a selection of few composition elements and the sounds taken from the percussion track are slowed down to reflect the intensity of the moment, evoking the spell of ecstasy. Rhythmic circular movements performed by the women induce an incantation and reverence that are at the core of the annual ritual, where people honor the sea in gratitude, surpassing class, ethnicity, and age divisions. The syncretic celebration highlights the coexistence of a multitude of belief systems, which encompass Catholicism, Umbanda, and Candomblé.

---

Note: \*One of the orixás of the Yoruba pantheon, Iemanjá is The 'Mother', the 'Queen of the Ocean' in Umbanda religion.

---

**Country:** Brazil. **Genre:** Video Art

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)



RENATA PADOVAN (BRAZIL)

FILMS

## ARAL MERMAID



**Theme:** Social Science and Collective Memory

**Friday, 4 November 2016**

**Year:** 2015

**Duration (mins):** 4:13

*"During a visit to Uzbekistan, in Central Asia I went to visit what is left of the Aral Sea. I was greatly affected by the desolated landscape, one of the biggest ecological disasters caused by the equivocal ideas of progress and economic development."*

*Aral Mermaid* is a short poetic documentary assembled with still images, video footage and historical footage. It refers to the social and ecological degradation caused by the Soviet excessive implementation of cotton monoculture in the area.

---

**Country:** Uzbekistan/Brazil. **Genre:** Video Art. **Language:** English. **Director and Writer:** Renata Padovan. **CREW: Production:** Renata Padovan and Otavio Machado. **Cinematography and Camera:** Renata Padovan. **Edition:** Renata Padovan. **Voice-over:** Claire Rigby. **Soundtrack Mix:** Renata Padovan

FILMS

## THE SCALE OF DISASTER



**Theme:** Materiality

**Saturday, 5 November 2016**

**Year:** 2013

**Duration (mins):** 9:41

*"Traveling along the Xingu River in the northern estate of Pará in Brazil, I was very impressed with the grandeur of nature while, at the same time, bewildered by the fact that without a reference the sense of scale is completely lost. It was only when I approached the construction of the Belo Monte power plant that the real scale of nature became clear to me. Based on the sizes of men and machinery, the immensity of the forest became evident."*

*The process of destruction of a previously untouched region of the Brazilian forest in the name of a doubtful progress makes us aware of the real scale of what is being lost forever."*

(by Renata Padovan)

---

**Country:** Brazil. **Genre:** Video Art. **CREW: Production:** Renata Padovan and Otavio Machado. **Cinematography and Camera:** Renata Padovan and Otavio Machado. **Edition:** Renata Padovan. **Music:** Chants by Murakawa recorded at the margins of Xingu river at Kwatinemu Village. **Soundtrack Mix:** Renata Padovan.

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)

EMBEDDED  
SOUTH(S)

## SASHA HUBER (HAITI/SWITZERLAND)

**Sasha Huber** (b. 1975, Zurich, Switzerland) is a visual artist of Swiss-Haitian heritage. Her work is primarily concerned with the politics of memory and belonging, particularly in relation to colonial residues left in the environment. Sensitive to the subtle threads connecting history and the present, she uses and responds to archival material within a layered creative practice that encompasses video, photography, collaborations with researchers, and performance-based interventions.

Huber holds an MA from the University of Art and Design Helsinki, and is currently undertaking doctoral research on racism through the lens of art at the Department of Art at Aalto University, Helsinki, Finland.

Huber currently lives and works in Helsinki, Finland.

---  
sashahuber.com



SASHA HUBER

## FILMS

### KARAKIA - THE RESETTling CEREMONY



**Theme:** Mythology

**Thursday, 3 November 2016**

**Year:** 2015

**Duration (mins):** 5:20

Using her voice and body to mediate the unfinished business of history, Huber's work attempts to heal environmental ruptures caused by colonial inheritance. Her long-term project "Demounting Louis Agassiz" is aimed at removing nineteenth century Swiss-born naturalist and glaciologist Louis Agassiz's\* name from a number of sites around the world. The initial project of a worldwide campaign consisted of the official renaming of the Swiss Alps peak Agassizhorn, as Rentyhorn, in tribute to Renty: an enslaved person from the Congo whom Agassiz photographed in 1850.

The film *KARAKIA - The Resetting Ceremony* is part of such series of works in different media that address renaming sites as a decolonial act. The work was specifically made to record a cleansing ritual conducted by Māori chief Jeff Mahuika in June 2015, at the Te Moeka O Tuawe (Fox Glacier), in South Island, New Zealand. In the film, we see Huber and Jeff walking towards Agassiz glacier, so named by German geologist sir Johann Franz 'Julius' von Haast in an attempt to locate New Zealand within white European culture while ignoring the Māori perspective. Upon arrival to the site, Jeff Mahuika offers a Karakia blessing to symbolically un-name the glacier, thus freeing it from its association with Agassiz and his racism.

Here, the artist, in collaboration with a member of the community, performs ritual cleansing as an act of appropriation of the wounded land, while unearthing and redressing the little-known history of the Swiss-born naturalist and glaciologist Louis Agassiz. Huber's research for the film was done in collaboration with Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu officials, who proposed new and appropriate Māori place names for the "Agassiz Glacier" and another South Island feature, the "Agassiz Range", as there are currently no known Ngāi Tahu names for these landmarks.

---  
\*Agassiz was an influential proponent of scientific racism who advocated for segregation and "racial hygiene" – a set of state-sanctioned policies in the early twentieth century by which certain groups of individuals were allowed to procreate and others not, with the expressed purpose of promoting characteristics deemed desirable. The most extensive implementation of such policies occurred in Nazi Germany, but similar policies were implemented throughout Europe, North America, and southern Africa.

---  
**Country:** New Zealand. **Genre:** Environmental issues, Body image and culture. **Language:** Māori. **Writer:** Jeff Mahuika. **Production:** Sasha Huber.  
**Cinematography and Camera:** Max Bellamy and Petri Saarikko. **Image Post-production:** Tam Webster. **Coordination of Post-production:** Tam Webster.  
**Graphic Design:** Sasha Huber

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)

EMBEDDED  
SOUTH(S)

## SHANAKA GALAGODA (SRI LANKA)

**Shanaka Galagoda** (Sri Lanka) is an emerging self-taught filmmaker. In Sri Lanka, the absence of film schools means to learn the industry you must gain knowledge through practice, and for Galagoda that was on set working as a commercial television director since 2012. Sensitive to the social and political changes of his country and the mirroring of its upheaval across the world, Galagoda turns to film as a lens to reveal the complexity of the human condition, compelled to document its character, which both astounds and endears.

Shanaka Galagoda currently lives and works in Colombo, Sri Lanka.



SHANAKA GALAGODA

## FILMS

## THE POSSESSION



**Theme:** Materiality

**Saturday, 5 November 2016**

**Year:** 2015

**Duration (mins):** 7:36

A reporter and her cameraman, stranded by the roadside after their van broke down, are given a ride by a passing military tractor. As they make their journey, the camaraderie that develops between the two parties ends in the exchange of their 'tools' – instruments of obvious excitable interest despite their capacity to manipulate, control, and destroy. This short film examines how the exchange of the materials of each person's trade reveals their differences in societal and doctrinal attitudes, here most hauntingly illustrating the human glee for machines regardless of how they are utilized.

The Sri Lankan Civil War (1986-2009) was a 26-year military campaign that caused tremendous human and environmental devastation. Upon encountering a Sri Lankan journalist recounting with great excitement his holding of a gun while traveling with a military squad, Galagoda was deeply unnerved, dismayed at how materials can 'possess' human beings. This experience motivated him to create this debut film (selected for Festival de Cannes in 2016).

---

**Country:** Sri Lanka. **Genre:** Social Drama. **Language:** Sinhala. **CREW:** **Producer:** Shanaka Galagoda and Prasanna Kithalagama. **Cast:** Sanjeewa Upendra, Mayura Perera, and Tracy Jayasinghe. **Cinematography and Camera:** Priyantha Malawige. **Edition:** Rangana Sinharage. **Music:** Nisho Fernando. **Soundtrack Mix:** Hasitha Maduranga Wedage.

**Image Post-production:** Roshan Edward. **Coordination of Post-production:** Xten Post. **Graphic Design:** Madhuka Gunasekara and Chamishka Gamage. **Company Credits:** Xten Productions - Law and Society Trust Sri Lanka.

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)

EMBEDDED  
SOUTH(S)

## SUTTHIRAT SUPAPARINYA (THAILAND)

**Sutthirat Supaparinya** (Som) (b.1973, Chiang Mai, Thailand) is a visual artist and writer working in a wide variety of mediums encompassing installation, photography, video and sculpture. Through her work she questions the interpretation of images, text and sound, enabled and yet also burdened by our technological, media-oriented environment. Questioning how we value what is 'natural' or 'man-made'; of what is 'truth' or 'fiction', her most recent projects study the social and environmental impact of industrial activity and governmental control in Thailand.

Som is a founding member of 'Chiangmai Art Conversation', established in 2013 to promote contemporary art in Chiang Mai (<http://www.cac-art.info>). She earned a BFA in painting from the Faculty of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai University (1996); and is a post-graduate in Media Arts from Hochschule Fuer Grafik und Buchkunst, Leipzig, Germany (2001).

Sutthirat Supaparinya currently lives and works in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

---  
[www.atelierorange.info](http://www.atelierorange.info)



SUTTHIRAT  
SUPAPARINYA

## FILMS

# MY GRANDPA'S ROUTE HAS BEEN FOREVER BLOCKED



**Theme:** Materiality  
**Saturday, 5 November 2016**

**Year:** 2012  
**Duration (mins):** 15:49

*"The Ping River is a historic route for teakwood exports (Siamese-European trade) and also an important part of my family's history. My grandparents lived along the Ping River. It was their hometown, their work and their life. My maternal grandfather once was a cargo boat trader on this route. His life was mysterious to us, since he often traveled away from home. I have followed my grandfather's route, until only upstream from the Bhumibol Dam in the Tak, until Lamphun and Chiang Mai provinces. However, since the Bhumibol Dam was built in 1958 as well as the expansion of the road network, the Ping river was blocked. Hence, the river-scape in his time and mine are completely different. The journey along, and on, the Ping River helped me to understand what my grandfather had experienced; at the same time I could observe other issues that have arisen in my time – such as the impact of electricity generation on rural communities."*

(by Sutthirat Supaparinya)

In *My Grandpa's Route Has Been Forever Blocked*, the screen on the left invites viewers to reflect on small weirs, floodgates, and dikes lying sequentially from the source of the river to the Bhumibol Dam. While the screen on the right documents a local cruise operator on the subsequent reservoir of Ping River (Bhumibol Dam) – the creation of this huge lake saw a vast stretch of teak forest submerged under water forever.

In 2011, an enormous amount of water was released from the dam (compounded by the urgency of tropical storms), which resulted in devastating floods in central Thailand, and Bangkok. This human mismanagement was an unforgettable water disaster in Thailand.

---  
**Country:** Thailand. **Genre:** Documentary. **Language:** Thai. **CREW: Production:** Riverscape IN FLUX, Goethe-Institut Bangkok. **Cinematography and Camera:** Chatchai Suban. **Edition:** Sutthirat Supaparinya. **Music:** Nakarin Rodput. **Soundtrack Mix:** Nakarin Rodput. **Image Post-production:** Sutthirat Supaparinya

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)

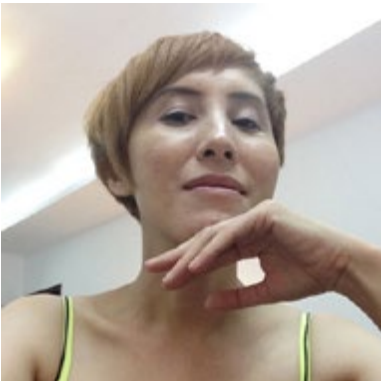


## TIFFANY CHUNG (VIETNAM)

**Tiffany Chung** (b. 1969, Da Nang, Vietnam) is internationally noted for her exquisite cartographic drawings and installations that examine conflict, migration, displacement, urban progress and transformation in relation to history and cultural memory. Conducting intensive studies on the impacts of geographical shifts and imposed political borders on different groups of human populations, Chung’s work excavates layers of history, re-writes chronicles of places, and creates interventions into the spatial and political narratives produced through statecraft.

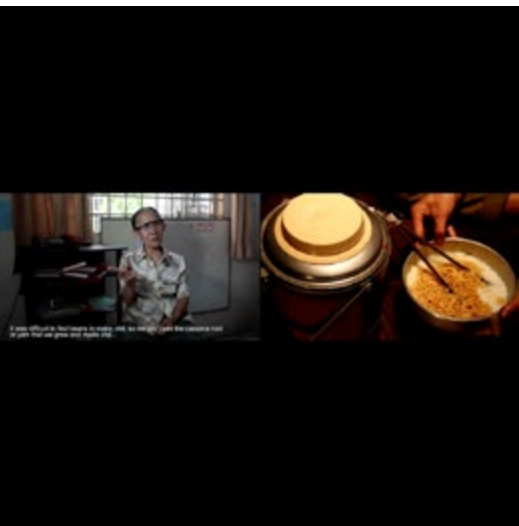
Chung holds an MFA from University of California, Santa Barbara (2000) and a BFA from California State University, Long Beach (1998). Chung is a co-founder of Sàn Art, an independent, artist-initiated gallery space and reading room in Ho Chi Minh City, that is committed to furthering the development of contemporary arts and artists in Vietnam through various public programs.

Tiffany Chung currently lives and works in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.



TIFFANY CHUNG

## FILMS RECIPES OF NECESSITY



**Theme:** Materiality  
**Saturday, 5 November 2016**

**Year:** 2014  
**Duration (mins):** 33:00

*Recipes of necessity* begins with members of Tiffany Chung’s community sitting around a typical dinner table, sharing their lives during the Subsidy period (1976 – 1986) – a period that witnessed ambitious economic reforms by the Vietnamese Communist Party to build ‘a socialist economy under communist principles’. No private enterprises were allowed, while all national production was centralized and disseminated by the state. In the realization of this short film, the participants share their tearful and humorous stories about ways to make both ends meet, such as: improvised recipes with cassava roots (the staple starch at that time due to the lack of rice), navigation within black markets to sell and buy goods (due to lack of jobs and basic necessities), or the worthlessness of money in a system where currency changed overnight and everything was sold with rationed stamps.

The film shares memories of daily navigation of both Northern and Southern Vietnamese in an economically struggling country in political turmoil. The screen is split into two channels: one focuses on the community’s poignant testimony of their constant hunger, frustration with the system, and confusion about their future; the other displays sequences of a dance (directed by Chung) inspired by the stories they shared.

Tiffany Chung captures the resilience of her community, caught in the midst of a rising nationalism that is blinded by an ideological dream.

---  
**Country:** Vietnam. **Language:** Vietnamese with English subtitles. **CREW: Producer:** Tiffany Chung. **Line Producer:** Nguyễn Tăng Minh. **Camera:** Nguyễn Đức Tú, Nguyễn Văn Chung, Phan Tuấn Khoa and Trần Quan Thanh. **Editors:** Nguyễn Đức Tú and Nguyễn Ngọc Đức. **Production coordinator:** Nguyễn Kim Tố Lan. **Assistants:** Nguyễn Hưng Nam and Trương Tuấn Kiệt. **Transcriptionists:** Lê Ngọc Chi, Lưu Thúy Ngân, Nguyễn Kim Tố Lan. **Participants:** Đặng Ái Lệ, Đặng Thị Kiêm, Huỳnh Thị Thu Thủy, Lưu Đức Lộc, Nguyễn Chí Công, Nguyễn Thị Dung, Mike Nguyễn, Nguyễn Hữu Nghĩa, Nguyễn Đặng Minh Phương, Nguyễn Thị Kim Tố, Nguyễn Tuyết Trinh, Phạm Thanh Vân, Tiêu Lộc, Trần Thị Như Tuyết, and Trương Công Tùng

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)



## TRẦN LƯƠNG (VIETNAM)

**Trần Lương** (b. 1960 in Hanoi, Vietnam) is a performance and visual artist, independent curator, and major figure in creating space for critical contemporary art in North Vietnam. Among the first local artists to experiment with performance and video, his artwork is grounded in local experience. Challenging socio-political legacies and policies that repress individual expression, his work offering moving reflections on the impact of ideology on the body, particularly the internalization of political repression at a young age.

Active in making opportunities for artists, Trần co-founded the Gang of Five (1983-1996), which organized monthly exhibitions in alternative spaces. In 1998, he co-founded Nhà Sàn Studio, the country's first artist-led, experimental art space, and curated the majority of its exhibitions in the initial four years. He was Founding Director of the National Hanoi Contemporary Art Centre in 2000; he resigned in 2003 in protest at government corruption.

Trần Lương graduated from the Vietnam University of Fine Arts in 1983. He currently lives and works in Hanoi, Vietnam.



TRẦN LƯƠNG

## FILMS MẠO KHÊ COAL MINE PROJECT



**Theme:** Special Feature: Vietnam  
**Sunday, 6 November 2016**

**Year:** 2001-2014  
**Duration (mins):** 18:41

*Mạo Khê Coal Mine Project* documents a creative camp initiated by Trần Lương in 2001, where he invited 11 visual artists from Hanoi to participate. In response to the many costly and superficial 'field trips to make artwork' organized by public state institutions, Mạo Khê project was a reaction to the bureaucracy that had increased in the local art scene. According to the artist, "After the war, governmental subsidized field trips were more or less picnics for lazy artists on social care. Being called 'field trips', they were no different from sitting in the artists' studios, making up the works because 'field trip' or 'reality' was censored". Thus, almost all works were created in a rosy direction, the true breath of life not reflected in art and culture."

This video follows the artists' two-week long journey, where they lived and worked under the same conditions as the coal miners in Quang Ninh province. Two channels juxtapose two streams of narratives: past vs. present/ the harsh working conditions vs. the optimistic spirits of the coal miners/ the serious, nervous miner-artists vs. the fun-loving, passionate artists. Using on-site recording footage and personal interviews, *Mạo Khê Coal Mine Project* brings to life a field trip (often called also creative camp) where artists took art outside of its traditional exhibition-room bubble, bringing art to the less privileged, therefore generating debate on ways of living and making art.

---  
**Country:** Vietnam. **Language:** Vietnamese. **CREW: Project Curator, Editor:** Trần Lương. **Camera:** Triệu Minh Hải, Trần Lương, Nguyễn Trí Mạnh, Vũ Thuy, Lê Vũ. **Technical Assistant:** Triệu Minh Hải. **Artist Participants:** Đinh Công Đạt, Lê Quảng Hà, Hà Trí Hiếu, Đào Anh Khánh, Trần Lương, Phạm Ngọc Minh, Nguyễn Trí Mạnh, Đinh Quân, Lê Hồng Thái, Nguyễn Bảo Toàn, Lê Vũ. **English Subtitle:** Lê Thuận Uyên. **Music:** Maryanne Amacher, Trần Lương

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)



## TRƯƠNG CÔNG TÙNG (VIETNAM)

**Trương Công Tùng** (b. 1986, Dak Lak, Vietnam) is a visual artist, with practice spanning painting, video and installation. Intrigued by unexplainable occurrences in society and nature, Trương draws a lot of his inspiration from spiritual culture, oral history, and the smaller histories unknown, bringing them into his art to continuously explore themes such as social change, ethnicity, and religion.

Trương graduated from the Ho Chi Minh City University of Fine Arts in 2010 with a degree in lacquer painting.

He is a member of the collective Art Labor, and currently lives and works in Ho Chi Minh City.

---

[www.truongcongtung.tumblr.com](http://www.truongcongtung.tumblr.com)



TRƯƠNG CÔNG TÙNG

## FILMS MAGICAL GARDEN



**Theme:** Mythology  
**Thursday, 3 November 2016**

**Year:** 2012-2014  
**Duration (mins):** 8:21

This video presents an unusual phenomenon at the “magical garden” in Long An province, a province in the Mekong Delta region of southern Vietnam. This garden is said to possess healing power for the sick, who visit and bathe in its pond. It was so popular in 2004 that thousands of people were visiting per day, forcing local authorities to intervene to control the crowd and restore order.

Trương Công Tùng collected videos taken by visitors to the garden, who believe they can capture the rainbow and the heavenly halo as their energy increases according to their length of stay in the magical place, to create a semi-fictional documentation of the occurrence. According to the artist, he “*could not take pictures nor videos with the same rainbow effects. They (patients and believers) said that only people with belief could capture those effects.*” In Magical Garden, Trương lived and worked on site for several weeks in order to study the visitors and the owner of the garden, thus presenting his own perspectives onto these people’s unconditional belief.

In the video, ritual gestures in the water (performed by the garden owner) lies in aesthetic contrast with the shaky footage of the amateur hand of the patients, whose lens seems able to magically capture the light as a rainbow. Trương’s work subtly refers to the collective wish to find a source of assurance in human well-being.

---

**Country:** Vietnam. **Genre:** Video Art. **Language:** Vietnamese. **Cinematography and Camera:** Collected footages from visitors at the Magical Garden.  
**Graphic Design:** Trương Công Tùng and Phan Thảo Nguyên

# ARTIST(S) & FILM(S)



## VANDY RATTANA (CAMBODIA / JAPAN)

**Vandy Rattana** (b. 1980, Phnom Penh, Cambodia) began his photography practice in 2005 concerned with the lack of physical documentation accounting for the stories, traits, and monuments unique to his culture. His serial work employed a range of analog cameras and formats, straddling the line between strict photojournalism and artistic practice. Rattana is interested in filmmaking as a method of historical documentation.

In 2014, he co-founded Ponleu Association, which aims to provide access to international reference books, through their translation and publication in Khmer. It also publishes its own books, focusing on various fields of knowledge (philosophy, literature, science, etc.) <http://ponleu.org/en/>

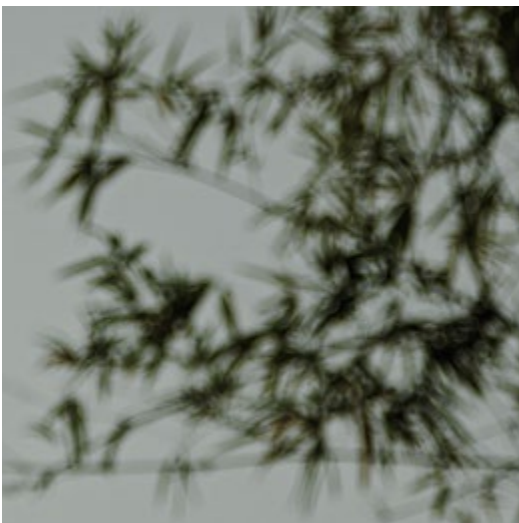
In 2009, he co-founded Sa Sa Art Gallery. In 2011, he helped establish SA SA BASSAC, the first dedicated exhibition spaces for contemporary art in Cambodia. <http://sasabassac.com/>

Vandy Rattana lives and works between Phnom Penh and Tokyo.



VANDY RATTANA

## FILMS MONOLOGUE



**Theme:** Social Science and Collective Memory  
**Friday, 4 November 2016**

**Year:** 2015  
**Duration (mins):** 18:55

In *Monologue*, the only sound – the artist’s voice – is directed toward his sister whom he has never met. Killed during the ‘cultural’ cleansing of the Khmer Rouge (1975– 79), she rests somewhere beneath a small measured plot of land alongside his grandmother and five thousand Cambodians, marked by two Pum Sen mango trees. As he visits their gravesite, the monologue narration shifts between experiences of his family during the Pol Pot\* genocide to his almost trancelike murmur of the wounds that it left behind.

Piecing together personal narrative and historical record, Rattana’s film is a tribute to the victims of a political catastrophe. His sister’s grave resembles thousands of others across the country: unmarked, fertile agricultural land. As Cambodia struggles as a developing economy after the Khmer Rouge regime, the remnants of the victims become but a faint echo of the past, slowly disappearing without any documentation. The towering mango trees symbolize post-genocide Cambodia, slowly gaining nutrients from blood-soaked soil, its foliage covering a dark patch of Cambodian history.

*Monologue* is Rattana’s act of witness, and subversive testimonial against the corrosive tide of national development and human forgetfulness. The film invites the audience to join a conversation about the need for historical documentation and collective healing in a post-traumatic community.

---

Note: \*Pol Pot (1925 – 1998), born Saloth Sar, was the leader of the Khmer Rouge – the Communist party of Cambodia. Under his totalitarian dictatorship, his government forced urban dwellers to work in collective farms and labor projects in the countryside. The combined effects of executions, strenuous working conditions, malnutrition, and poor medical care caused the deaths of approximately 25 percent of the Cambodian population during his short 4 years in power.

---

**Country:** Cambodia. **Genre:** Fiction. **Language:** Khmer. **Co-Production:** Jeu de Paume and CAPC Musée d’art contemporain de Bordeaux. **Cinematography:** Vandy Rattana. **Camera:** Yin Touchmony. **Image Post-production:** Vandy Rattana. **Coordination of Post-production:** Vandy Rattana

## CURATORS



**ZOE BUTT**  
(VIETNAM)

Zoe Butt is a curator and writer. Currently she is Executive Director and Curator of Sàn Art, Vietnam's most active independent contemporary art space in Ho Chi Minh City. From 2007-2009 she was Director, International Programs, Long March Project, Beijing, China. From 2001-2007 she was Assistant Curator, Contemporary Asian Art, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia where she assisted in the development of the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT); key acquisitions for the Contemporary Asian art collection, and other associated gallery programs. Her curatorial referral work is pan-Asian, working with private collectors and researchers, independent curators and major museums globally.

Zoe possesses a Bachelor in Art History and Theory from University of New South Wales, Australia. She is a member of the Asian Art Council for the Solomon R. Guggenheim, NYC; a member of 'Asia 21 Young Leaders' of the Asia Society, NYC and in 2015 became a Young Global Leader of the World Economic Forum.

Beginning February 2017, Zoe will become Artistic Director of 'The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre', a private social enterprise in District 2, Saigon – Vietnam's first purpose built space for contemporary art.



**UYEN LE**  
(VIETNAM)

Lê Thuận Uyên is an independent researcher and curator. She spent 7 years in the UK, where she obtained her BA in Politics from the University of York and her MA in Cultural and Creative Industries from King's College London, while simultaneously working in art fundraising at the British Museum and Barbican Art Centre.

Captivated by critical and evocative artworks by local Vietnamese artists upon her return to Việt Nam in 2014, Uyên started working in the artistic community: engaging as an art administrator, curator and archivist. She has worked for a broad range of curatorial projects including Miền Méo Miệng (Umea, Sweden, 2015), Skylines with flying people 3 (Hanoi, 2016), Condition Report (Jakarta, 2017), and the Gang of Five retrospective exhibition (Hanoi, 2017). Uyên is an ACC (Asian Cultural Council) grantee.

Uyên lives and works in Hanoi.



**GABRIELA SALGADO**  
(UK)

Gabriela Salgado is an Argentine-born curator based in London, where she obtained an MA in Curating Contemporary Art from the Royal College of Art. She has curated a large number of exhibitions and has lectured in over twenty countries.

She specialized in Latin American art as Curator of the Collection of Latin American Art at Essex University, UECLAA (1999-2005) and was curator of Public Programmes at Tate Modern (2006-2011).

She curated La Otra Bienal in Bogotá, Colombia (2013) and the 2nd Biennale of Thessaloniki, Greece (2009).

She works internationally as curator and consultant and is currently directing a programme of exchanges between African and Latin American artists.

[www.gabrielasalgado.co.uk](http://www.gabrielasalgado.co.uk)

# EMBEDDED SOUTH(S)

## CO-HOSTS

**98BCOLLABoratory** and **Los Otros** (Manila, The Philippines); **New Zero Art Space** (Yangon, Myanmar); **32 Degrees East** (Kampala, Uganda); **Lugar a Dudas** (Cali, Colombia); **Videobrasil** (São Paulo, Brazil); **Sa Sa Bassac** (Phnom Penh, Cambodia); **Sri Lanka Archive of Contemporary Art, Architecture and Design** (Jaffna, Sri Lanka); **Clarkhouse Initiative** (Mumbai, India); **'Asia Culture Station'** (Chiang Mai, Thailand); **Sinema Kolekan** (Jakarta, Indonesia)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The curators wish to thank the following artists, individuals and organizations whose help and support have made this project possible; Artists: Bani Abidi; Fernando Arias; Kannan Arunasalam; Sammy Baloji/ Lazara Rosell Albear; Tiffany Chung; Bakary Diallo; Andrew Esiebo/Annalisa Buttici; Shanaka Galagoda; Ayrson Heráclito; Sasha Huber; Claudia Joskowicz; Amar Kanwar; Mikhail Karikis; Jompet Kuswidananto; Dinh Q Le; Giovanna Miralles; Nguyen Huong Tra; Nguyen Thi Thanh Mai; Nguyen Trinh Thi; David-Douglas Masamuna Ntimasiemi; Phan Thao Nguyen; Renata Padovan; Chulayarnnon Siriphol; Sutthirat Supaparinya; Kidlat Tahimik; Tran Luong; Truong Cong Tung; Vandy Rattana; The San Art Team: Dương Mạnh Hùng, Đặng Thị Nhã, Đỗ Thị Ngọc Trâm, Lê Xuân Hồng Nhung, Nguyễn Bích Trà, Nhật Q. Võ, Tuyền Bui; Chou Lê, tikiubi, Nguyễn Hoàng Thiên Ngân; and Sharmini Pereira (Sri Lanka Archive of Contemporary Art, Architecture and Design, Jaffna); Nalini Malani; Prateek Raja (Experimenta, Kolkata); Maria Abegail Lara; Tyler Rollins, New York; Estelle Lacaille; Gerges Senga; Mariam Kone; Natalia Trebik; Nguyễn Quốc Thành; Gesyada Annisa Namora Siregar; Norberto Roldan and Merv Espina (Green Papaya, Manila); Erin Gleeson and Ben Ve (Sa Sa Bassac, Phnom Penh); Sumeshwar Sharma and Yogesh Barve (Clarkhouse Initiative, Mumbai); Sally Mizrahi (Lugar a Dudas, Cali); Ana Paula Vargas (Videobrasil, Sao Paulo); Teesa Bahana (32 Degrees East, Kampala); Shireen Seno (Los Otros, Manila); Marika Constantino (98B); Haymann Oo (New Zero Art Space, Yangon)

## ABOUT THE SPONSORS

Sàn Art ([www.san-art.org](http://www.san-art.org)) is an artist initiated, non-profit, contemporary art organization in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, committed to the exchange and excavation of cultural knowledge within an interdisciplinary community. Sàn Art is the most active independent arts organization in Vietnam dedicated to promoting, facilitating and showcasing contemporary art through production, exhibition, discourse and education.

[www.san-art.org](http://www.san-art.org)

In 2013, Sàn Art initiated 'Conscious Realities', a series of lectures, workshops, exhibitions, publications and an artist-in-residency program, inviting cross-disciplinary cultural workers to Ho Chi Minh City, from South Asia, South East Asia, Latin America and Africa, in an attempt to engage what a 'Global' South means from the perspective of Vietnam. <http://san-art.org/conscious-realities/>

'Conscious Realities' is made possible through Sàn Art's Network Partnership with the Prince Claus Fund. Based on the principle that culture is a basic need, the Prince Claus Fund's mission is to actively seek cultural collaborations founded on equality and trust, with partners of excellence, in spaces where resources and opportunities for cultural expression, creative production and research are limited and cultural heritage is threatened. The Prince Claus Fund is based in Amsterdam and is supported by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Dutch Postcode Lottery. <http://www.princeclausfund.org>

CO-HOSTS:



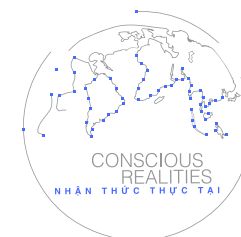
Sri Lanka Archive of Contemporary Art, Architecture & Design



ស-សបាសាក់ SA SA BASSAC



SPONSORED BY:



Fondation Prince Claus pour la Culture et le Développement

sàn art

# pollination

## OF HUNTERS AND GATHERERS

INITIATED, ORGANIZED & CO-SPONSORED BY:

**THE  FACTORY**  
CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTRE

CO-ORGANIZED AND CO-SPONSORED BY:

  
**SAM** | Fund for Arts and Ecology

 **MAIAM**  
CONTEMPORARY  
ART MUSEUM

 **SELASAR SUNARYO**  
ART SPACE

**graycenter**  
FOR ARTS AND INQUIRY

# What is 'Pollination'?

## BACKGROUND

In Southeast Asia we possess a dynamic independent landscape of artistic initiatives, the majority of contemporary art activity occurring outside of state-sponsored cultural institutions. Also, within our region, the role and understanding of 'curatorial' work is varied and often misrepresented (eg. Most state institutions are yet to employ curatorial staff and there are only few tertiary programs that offer any study of curatorial practice). Since the late 1990s, curatorial practices and exhibition-making in the region have mostly developed outside traditional institutional museum frameworks. Contributions from artist-cum-curators as well as artist-run initiatives have also been central in this particular development, including the emergence of a new generation of curators as a result of different projects offering internships, as well as one-on-one mentorships.

On the one hand, the particularity of the art world's infrastructure in Southeast Asia has diversified curatorial methodology in the region with unique individual practices. On the other, 'curating' remains largely misunderstood as the majority of general audiences have insufficient exposure and understanding of the differences and complexities of contemporary art in the region. Over the last decade there have been numerous attempts by foreign art and diplomatic institutions to better 'network' emerging curators from Southeast Asia. While these have been productive in introducing these players to one another's work, there has been little further practical and physically realizable collaborations between them. 'Pollination', a residency and project-driven program for emerging curators and artists of Southeast Asia, attempts to address this lack of opportunity, in providing organizational collaborative platforms with which emerging curators of the region can continue to network, produce and contribute.

Aiming to set up a regional community of producers linking talent to network, space and opportunity, 'Pollination' seeks to nurture artistic practice via curatorial enquiry, with the view that deeper connections between artists and curators enable critical reflection, writing and dialog – a discourse greatly needed as an intra-regional comparable accessible resource. 'Pollination' is envisaged as a long-term collaborative exercise between different institutions/community groups across Southeast Asia, with the aim of offering emerging curatorial and artistic talent the chance to work with other like-minded entities in their region. As one of the first private/non-governmental initiatives of this kind, 'Pollination' aims to develop and nurture the skills and relationships between artists and curators interested in working (and questioning) institutional structures of display in Southeast Asia.

## **'POLLINATION'**

'Pollination' is a platform that attempts to address this lack of opportunity in providing collaborative platforms for emerging curators and artists of this region to learn, and work, each other's networks at an organizational / institutional level. For each edition, a new set of funders, hosts, advisors are sought in which participants curators and artists are nominated and secured. 'Pollination' aims to develop and nurture the skills and relationships between emerging artists and emerging curators interested in working / re-modelling institutional structures of display in Southeast Asia.

Initiated by The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, in Ho Chi Minh City, the inaugural edition in 2018 was co-developed and co-sponsored with SAM Fund for Arts and Ecology (Jakarta). The second edition was co-developed and co-sponsored with ILHAM Gallery (Kuala Lumpur). The third edition was co-developed and co-sponsored with SAM Fund for Arts and Ecology and MALLAM Contemporary Art Museum Chiang Mai).

## **CONDITIONS OF PROJECT**

Each chosen curator is to select an artist and curatorial model that suits the nature of this opportunity and involved contexts, taking into consideration practicalities of working at a distance, time limits for production, with the intention to spend at least 4 weeks in each other's contexts so as to learn each other's respective art scenes

Chosen curators must understand the focus of this project is the nurturing of artistic practice towards the realization of a specific output (eg. Exhibition, publication, performance, event), and that this journey of making necessarily focuses on artistic methods of research to which a subject of synergy is found between each context (as opposed to subject of interrogation following curator's individual area of study).

Chosen curators and artists must be willing to share their process of generating their project with their Curatorial Advisors and staff/funders of 'Pollination' on a regular basis. These meetings are crucial to the shared learning of practice and motivations, aimed to hone the articulation of creative intent and the theoretical, cultural and artistic underpinnings of the investigation.

An average budget of USD20-30,000 is sought for the realization of each edition. This budget is to cover the following: Research Travel and Accommodation | Artist and Curator Fee | Artwork production | Shipping and Crating | Publication (writing fee, printing costs, copyright etc) | Installation and deinstallation labor and fit out for exhibition | Support material (books, archival material etc) | Equipment (audio visual or others) | Promotion (and its design) | Opening Night | Public programs (speaker fee, translator fee, venue hire) | Photography (documentation) | Security | License requirements (if necessary) | General administration

## WHO IS INVOLVED

### ORGANIZER

The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

### FUNDERS (past and present)

The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre (Ho Chi Minh City), SAM Fund for Arts and Ecology (Jakarta), ILHAM Gallery (Kuala Lumpur)

### CURATORIAL ADVISORS

Vipash Purichanont (Bangkok), Rahel Joseph (Kuala Lumpur), Agung Hujatnikajennong (Bandung), Zoe Butt (Ho Chi Minh City)

### HOST INSTITUTIONS (past and present)

The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre (Ho Chi Minh City), Galerie Lorong (Yogyakarta), Cemeti Institute for Art and Society (Yogyakarta), ILHAM Gallery (Kuala Lumpur), Selasar Sunaryo Art Space (Bandung), MAIAM Contemporary Art Museum (Chiang Mai), Grey Centre for Arts and Enquiry, University of Chicago (Chicago)

### PARTICIPATING CURATORS (past and present)

Grace Samboh (Yogyakarta), Bill Long Nguyen (Ho Chi Minh City), Khatijah Rahmat (Kuala Lumpur), Le Thuan Uyen (Hanoi), LIR (Mira Asriningtyas and Dito Yuwono, Yogyakarta), Kittima Chareeprasit (Chiang Mai)

### PARTICIPATING ARTISTS (past and present)

Julia Sarisetiati (Jakarta), Vicky Do (Ho Chi Minh City), Izat Arif (Kuala Lumpur), Hoang Minh Duc (Melbourne/Hanoi), Maryanto (Yogyakarta), Ruangsak Anuwatwimon (Bangkok)

# Of Hunters & Gatherers

## INDEX

Project summary: 'Of Hunters and Gatherers'

Full programs

Project participants (with bio)

Project motivation

Project documentation (research)

Project documentation (final 'works')

Public programs (online and offline)

Promotion (audience attendance, media reportage)

Sponsorship

Reflection (Success and Failure, what could be improved for next time?, what have you learned from the process of Pollination?)

# Project Summary

The third edition of 'Pollination' curated by LIR and Kittima Chareeprasit, titled 'Of Hunters and Gatherers', is composed of an exhibition, symposia and dedicated website.

'The Hunters', is an exhibition featuring the work of artists Maryanto (Yogyakarta) and Ruangsak Anuwatwimon (Bangkok), which took place firstly at MAIAM Contemporary Art Museum, Chiang Mai, (19 March to 30 June 2021), and then toured to MAELIE Art Space (Khon Kaen, late 2021); resulting from extensive collaborative research undertaken from March, 2020 to May, 2021. Traveling beneath the volcanic activity of Mount Merapi, Yogyakarta and along the increasingly dammed river routes of the lower Mekong, on the border between Thailand and Laos.

As the curators walked with the artists, they found themselves recalling specific artists, artworks, performances and social research that are as equally concerned with their local environmental degradation, due to realities of government oversight, colonial extraction and corporate greed. Thus they explored relatable scientific findings and ideas of 'local embodied knowledge' (folktales, mythologies, bedtime stories and local methods of ecological survival), the curators realizing a need to listen from not only one side of a story, but a need to listen to more than 'one site' of a story. These different bodies of lore are presented as online symposia from 28-30 May 2021, titled 'The Gatherers', hosted by Selasar Sunaryo Art Space (Bandung).

The symposia marks the launch of this dedicated website 'www.ofhuntersandgatherers.com'. Ranging from newly written contributions to republished existing texts; from exhibition documentation to video interview, this site aims to prompt alternate study of 'local embodied knowledge' and its relevance in re-thinking ecological sustainability. Featuring interdisciplinary contribution by LIR (Mira Asriningtyas & Dito Yuwono), Kittima Chareeprasit, Ruangsak Anuwatwimon, Maryanto, Prilla Tania, The Forest Curriculum, Elizabeth D. Inandiak, Wut Chalanant, JJ Rizal, Tita Salina, Napak Serirak, Sutthirat Supaparinya. Edited by Zoe Butt and Lee Weng Choy. Designed by Rukpong Raimaturapong and Yonaz Kristy Sanjaya.

A series of public programs were conceived to build bridges between 'The Hunters' and 'The Gatherers' programs in April 2021; including 'The Plus Partnership Series' hosted by Art Curator Grid titled "Curator Conversation: Of Hunters and Gatherers" on 1 April 2021; in addition to participating in the 'FarBar' series hosted by The Gray Centre for Arts and Inquiry (University of Chicago), titled "Land, River, and Sea: The Moving Landscape 'Of Hunters and Gatherers'" consisting of a 3 week screening program, featuring the work of Maryanto, Nontawat Numbenchapol, Prilla Tania, Tita Salina, and Wut Chalanant (21 April – 12 May 2021), with online discussion on 28 April 2021.

# Full Programs

**Onsite Curatorial Meeting:** Bandung, 3 – 6 March 2020

**Research phase:** March 2020 – January 2021

**Exhibition:** “The Hunters” at MAIAM Contemporary Art Museum – Chiang Mai featuring Maryanto and Ruangsak Anuwatwimon | March 19 – June 30 2021 → The exhibition will travel to MAIELIE Art Space in Khon Kaen | in 19 September – 28 November 2021

**Symposium:** “The Gatherers: Online Pollination Symposium” hosted by Selasar Sunaryo Art Space – Bandung | May 28 – 30 2021

**Dedicated Website:** [www.ofhuntersandgatherers.com](http://www.ofhuntersandgatherers.com) (with commissioned essays by Adam Bobbette, Elizabeth D. Inandiak, JJ. Rizal, Kittima Chareeprasit, Mira Asriningtyas, Napak Serirak, Prilla Tania, Sutthirat Supaparinya, The Forest Curriculum, Tita Salina, and Wut Chalanant.

## Public Programs:

1. “Curator Conversation: Of Hunters and Gatherers” hosted by Art Curator Grid featuring conversation between Zoe Butt, Kittima Chareeprasit, and LIR (Mira Asriningtyas and Dito Yuwono) | April 1 2021
  
1. ‘FarBar’ series hosted by The Gray Centre for Arts and Inquiry (University of Chicago) titled “Land, River, and Sea: The Moving Landscape ‘Of Hunters and Gatherers’”, consisting of:
  - a. Screening program, featuring the work of Maryanto, Nontawat Numbenchapol, Prilla Tania, Tita Salina, and Wut Chalanant (21 April – 30 May 2021)
  - b. Online discussion on 28 April 2021

# Project Participants

## CURATORS

### **Kittima Chareeprasit (THAI)**

Kittima Chareeprasit received her MA in Curating and Collections from Chelsea College of Arts and is currently curator at MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum in Chiang Mai, Thailand. In 2016, she co-founded the Waiting You Curator Lab, focusing on curatorial approaches within contemporary art practices. Her interest lies mainly in contemporary art and culture that revolve around critical history, social and political issues. She has worked on numerous projects with both emerging and established artists within the realm of Southeast Asian Art and its cultural context. Her recent curatorial work includes 'House Calls: Pinaree Sanpitak', 100 Tonson Foundation (2020); 'Breast Stupa Cookery: the world turns upside down', Nova Contemporary (2020); 'Temporal Topography: MAIIAM's New Acquisitions; from 2010 to Present', MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum (2019); 'In search of other times: reminiscence of things collected', JWD Art Space Bangkok (2019); 'Occasionally Utility', Gallery VER, Bangkok (2017); 'The Thing That Takes Us Apart', Gallery Seescape, Chiang Mai (2017).

### **LIR (INDONESIA)**

LIR (Yogyakarta) is an art institution cum curator collective consisting of Mira Asriningtyas (b. 1986. based in Yogyakarta) and Dito Yuwono (b. 1985. based in Yogyakarta). Since 2011, LIR's program ranges from exhibition laboratories and research-based art projects to public programs, residencies, and alternative art education platforms. LIR's projects are characterized by multidisciplinary collaboration and often performative exhibitions; fostering continuous transgenerational transmission of knowledge, memory, and history. LIR's most recent projects including "Curated by LIR" exhibition series (KKF – Yogyakarta, 2018 – 2020); "Transient Museum of a Thousand Conversations" (ISCP – New York, 2020); and "900mdpl" (Kaliurang – 2017, 2019, & 2021), a long-term site-specific project in Kaliurang, Indonesia—an aging resort village under an active volcano—with the aim of preserving collective memory of the space.

# Project Participants

## ARTISTS

### **Maryanto (ID)**

Maryanto creates evocative, black and white paintings, drawings, and installations that undermine the romantic language of traditional landscape painting to examine socio-political structures in the physical sites that he situated his works. Through fable-like and theatrical settings, these landscapes are subjected to the whim of colonizers and capitalists through technological development, industrialization, pollution of the land and exploitation of its natural resources. Maryanto graduated from the Faculty of Fine Art, Indonesia Institute of the Art, Yogyakarta in 2005, and completed a residency at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam in 2013. Recent notable exhibitions include 'Permanent Osmosis', LIR Space, Yogyakarta (2019, solo); 'A Journey of Forking Paths', Yeo Workshop, Singapore (2019, solo); 'On the Shoulders of Fallen Giants: 2nd Industrial Art Biennial', Labin, Croatia (2018); 'Behind the Terrain', Koganei Art Spot Chateau, Tokyo (2018). Maryanto was born in Jakarta. He now lives and works in Yogyakarta.

### **Ruangsak Anuwatwimon (TH)**

Ruangsak Anuwatwimon is a Bangkok native and resident, driven and inspired by political issues and social situations that he has experienced in his own life. His artistic practice investigates the protagonist's relationship humans have with the natural world. Employing diverse media which challenge the parameters of what constitutes an 'artwork', Ruangsak's conceptual projects explore the social, cultural, and moral grounds of human societies. Notable recent projects include 'Monstrous Phenomenon', 1Projects, Bangkok (2019, solo); 'Temporal Topography: MALLAM New Acquisitions from 2010 to Present', MALLAM Contemporary Art Museum, Chiang Mai (2019/2020); 'Every Step in the Right Direction – Singapore Biennale' 2019, Singapore (2019); 'Post-Nature – A Museum as an Ecosystem: 11th Taipei Biennial', Taipei (2018). In 2020, Ruangsak will participate in the Bangkok Art Biennale.

---

# Project Participants

## ESSAY CONTRIBUTORS

### **Adam Bobbette**

Adam Bobbette is a geographer and research fellow in the New Earth Histories research program, University of New South Wales, Sydney.

### **Elizabeth D. Inandiak**

Writer, translator and public servant; born in France. From the age of 19, she began traveling the world as a journalist, writing several literary books, including the life story of Marceline Loridan Ivens, a Jewish woman who had been exiled in the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp during the second world war, and various film scenarios, including "A Tale of the Wind", with Dutch documentary director Joris Ivens (Indonesian Calling). In 1989 she settled in Yogyakarta. She recompiled Serat Centhini, a great Javanese literary work, into a 21st century version entitled "Kekasih yang Tersembunyi". After the earthquake on 27 May 2006, she built the Giri Gino Guno studio in Bebekan, Bantul (DIY). During the eruption of Mount Merapi on October 26, 2010, she collaborated with the Al Qodir Islamic Boarding School to accompany the residents of Kinahrejo until they got back on their feet. From the experiences of these two natural disasters, the story of "Babad Ngalar-Ngidul" was born with illustrations by artist Heri Dono— a continuation of the book *Lahirnya Kembali Beringin Putih* (1999). Her latest work titled "Mimpi-Mimpi dari Pulau Emas", was produced together with the people of Muara Jambi Village, in Sumatra, who used local wisdom, fairy tales, and the third eye as a means of excavating this extraordinary Buddhist ancient site. There, with them, she built a house of wisdom and peace: Rumah Menapo.

### **JJ Rizal**

JJ Rizal is an academic, historian, and founder of Penerbit Komunitas Bambu, a publishing house specializing in humaniora, history, and culture. His research is focusing on the history of Batavia-Betawi-Jakarta and his research has been published extensively in *MOESSON Het Indisch Maandblad* (2001-2006) magazine based in Netherlands. In 2009, he received the DKI Jakarta Governor Cultural Award. His writings about Junghuhn in *National Geographic Indonesia* were selected as "The Best International 2010" by *National Geographic International Magazine*, setting aside hundreds of articles from 36 *National Geographic* magazines outside of America. In 2011, he received the Jakarta Book Awards IKAPI (Indonesian Publisher Association) Jakarta for being considered to have "shared knowledge and change lives through books". Some of his published books are "Politik Kota Kita" (2006); "Onze Ong: Onghokham dalam Kenangan" (2007); "Sejarah yang Memihak: Mengenang Sartono Kartodirdjo" (2008); and "Raden Saleh: Anak Belanda, Mooi Indie dan Nasionalisme".

# Project Participants

## **Napak Serirak**

Napak Serirak received his BA in Economics and MA in Anthropology from Thammasat University. Drawing from the history of sexuality, medical anthropology and linguistic anthropology, he wrote extensively on the cultural history of sexology in Thai society. In addition, his interests include colonial scientific expedition writing on Southeast Asia as well as environmental history and political ecology of nature conservation in/of the region, amongst others. He was a lecturer in Sociology and Anthropology at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus from 2013 to 2017. Napak is currently an independent researcher.

## **Prilla Tania**

Prilla Tania is a multi-disciplinary artist whose works include soft sculpture, installations, videos and photos. Prilla's works are influenced by the idea of food sovereignty and the sustainable relationship between humans and nature. Recent notable exhibitions include 'In To The Future', National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta (2019); 'Jogja Biennale XII: Not A Dead End', Yogyakarta (2013); 'E', Selasar Sunaryo Art Space, Bandung (2013, solo). Currently she is managing a garden called Leuwigoeng in Bandung focusing on organic farming and sustainable living.

## **Sutthirat Supaparinya**

Working across media, Sutthirat Supaparinya (Som)'s artistic practice questions and interprets public information with a focus on the impact of human activities on other humans and the landscape. Through her works, she questions and interprets public information and reveals or questions what's structure affects her/us as a national/ global citizen. Sutthirat seeks to cultivate freedom of expression through her art practice.

# Project Participants

## **The Forest Curriculum**

The Forest Curriculum (Bangkok/Yogyakarta/Manila/Seoul/Berlin/Santa Barbara) is an itinerant and nomadic platform for interdisciplinary research and mutual co-learning, based in Southeast Asia, and operating internationally. Founded and co-directed by curators Abhijan Toto and Pujita Guha, and with Rosalia Namsai Engchuan, it works with artists, collectives, researchers, indigenous organizations and thinkers, musicians, and activists, to assemble a located critique of the Anthropocene via the naturecultures of Zomia, the forested belt that connects South and Southeast Asia. The Forest Curriculum organizes exhibitions, public programs, performances, video and multimedia projects, as well as an annual intensive in a different location around the region, which gathers practitioners from all over the world to engage in collective research and shared methodologies: The Forest And The School, Bangkok (2019); The Forest Is In The City Is In The Forest I, Manila (2020) and II, Online (2020-2021). The platform collaborates with institutions and organizations internationally, including Savvy Contemporary, Berlin; Ideas City, the New Museum, NTU CCA, Singapore, Nomina Nuda, Los Baños, and GAMeC, Bergamo among others.

## **Tita Salina**

In Tita Salina's practice, intervention, installation and moving image come together in response to site-specific issues that have global resonance. 1001st island – the most sustainable island in archipelago 2015 explores transnational issues of community disenfranchisement, environmental pollution and government corruption as they manifest within the Indonesian government's grand plan for the restoration and redevelopment of Jakarta Bay. Recent notable exhibitions include 'Bangkok Art Biennale', Bangkok Art and Culture Center, Bangkok (2020); The Coming World: Ecology as the New Politics 2030-2100, Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow, Russia (2019); Irwan Ahmett and Tita Salina: The Ring of Fire (2014 – ongoing), NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, Singapore, Singapore (2019); From Bandung to Berlin: If all of the moons aligned, SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin, Germany (2016), among others.

## **Wut Chalanant**

Wut Chalanant's artistic approach involves research into the historic, political and economic based activities and a physical exploration of these spaces on the edge of the normal experience, and he is working around the theme on the relationship between humans and space in the modern age. He is also interested by the ideology of urban development and how it alters space. Transformation of the land, through the shifting demands of the global economy, creates a void of context and opens up room for new interpretations. In order to search for the statement of our trace, he captures elements of the realities, which are later reconstructed.

---

# Project Participants

EDITOR

**Lee Weng Choy**

Lee Weng Choy is an independent art critic and consultant. He has done project work with various arts organizations, including Ilham Gallery and A+ Works of Art, both in Kuala Lumpur, as well as the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore and the National Gallery Singapore. He writes on contemporary art and culture in Southeast Asia, and his essays have appeared in journals such as *Afterall* and anthologies such as *Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Art*, *Over Here: International Perspectives on Art and Culture and Theory in Contemporary Art* since 1985. Lee is the president of the Singapore Section of the International Association of Art Critics. Previously, he was Artistic Co-Director of *The Substation* in Singapore. He has taught at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chinese University of Hong Kong and Sotheby's Institute of Art, Singapore.

**Zoe Butt**

(BIO ON NEXT PAGE)

# Project Participants

## CURATORIAL ADVISORS

### **Agung Hujatnika**

Dr. Agung Hujatnika, aka Agung Hujatnikajennong, is a freelance curator and full-time lecturer at the Faculty of Art and Design, Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB). Amongst other exhibitions he has curated are 'Fluid Zones, Jakarta Biennale ARENA' (2009); 'Exquisite Corpse', Bandung Pavilion for the Shanghai Biennale (2012); 'Not a Dead End', Jogja Biennale – Equator #2 (2013); 'Passion/ Possession' (2014), and; Tintin Wulia's solo project, '1001 Martian Homes', for Indonesian Pavilion at Venice Biennale (2017). He was the initiator and artistic director for 'Instrumenta', an international media arts festival in Jakarta (2018-2019). Agung has been involved in several research projects on Indonesian and Southeast Asian art, including 'Ambitious Alignments' (2013- 2015), and 'Shaping Indonesian Contemporary Arts – Role of the Institutions' (2014-2017). His book, 'Kurasi dan Kuasa', on curatorial practice and power relations in the Indonesian art world, was published by Jakarta Arts Council (2015).

### **Vipash Purichanont**

Vipash Purichanont is a curator based in Bangkok. He is a lecturer at the department of Art History at the faculty of Archeology, Silpakorn University. His curatorial projects include 'Kamin Lertchaiprasert: 31st Century Museum of Contemporary Spirit' (Chicago, 2011), 'Tawatchai Puntusawasdi: Superfold' (Kuala Lumpur, 2019) and 'Concept Context Contestation: Art and the Collective in Southeast Asia' (Bangkok, Yogyakarta, Hanoi, Yangon, 2013-2019). He was an assistant curator for the first Thailand Biennale (Krabi, 2018), a curator of Singapore Biennale 2019 (Singapore, 2019), and a co-curator of the second Thailand Biennale (Korat, 2021). He is a co-founder of Waiting You Curator Lab, a curatorial collective based in Chiangmai.

### **Zoe Butt**

Zoe Butt is a curator and writer who lives in Vietnam. Her curatorial practice centres on building critically thinking and historically conscious artistic communities, fostering dialogue among countries of the global south. Currently Artistic Director of the Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam's first purpose-built space for contemporary art, Zoe formerly served as Executive Director and Curator, Sàn Art, Ho Chi Minh City (2009-2016); Director, International Programs, Long March Project, Beijing (2007-2009); and Assistant Curator, Contemporary Asian Art, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane (2001-2007) – this latter post particularly focused on the development of its Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art. Her work has been published by Hatje Cantz; ArtReview; Independent Curators International; ArtAsiaPacific; Printed Project; Lalit Kala Akademi; JRP-Ringier; Routledge; and Sternberg Press, among others. Her curatorial projects include interdisciplinary dialogue platforms such as Conscious Realities (2013-2016); the online exhibition Embedded South(s) (2016); and group exhibitions of Vietnamese and international artists at various international venues. Recent exhibitions include Sharjah Biennial 14: Leaving the Echo Chamber – Journey Beyond The Arrow, (2019); Empty Forest: Tuan Andrew Nguyen (2018); Spirit of Friendship and Poetic Amnesia: Phan Thao Nguyen (both 2017); Dislocate: Bui Cong Khanh (2016), Conjuring Capital (2015). Zoe is a 2021 MoMA International Curatorial Fellow; a member of the Asian Art Council for the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York and in 2015 was named a Young Global Leader of the World Economic Forum.

# Project Motivation

On the day when our first in-situ meeting for Pollination #3 started, the first Covid-19 case in Indonesia was announced. In Thailand, it was announced a few weeks before. The crisis escalated to a global pandemic status and a global collective experience, highlighting the performance of a system and governments' capability in facing critical moments. At the same time, the pandemic cannot be separated from the environmental crisis of the earth. As borders close and lockdowns are imposed, mobility is restricted for a better cause. Instead of widening the geographical scope of our research, we try to dig deeper and primarily focus on 'local embodied knowledge' and how to balance human desire with its object that measures impact sustainably to both human and non-human alike. Instead of flying across the sea and widening the geographical scope of our research, we follow local trails of rivers and mountains, sinking island and backyard cemetery, to the home garden and deforestation cases across South East Asia, and other environmental issues closer to home.

Our curatorial method for this project is to exploring relatable scientific findings and ideas of 'local embodied knowledge' (folktales, mythologies, bedtime stories and local methods of ecological survival), the curators realized a need to listen from not only one side of a story, but a need to listen to more than 'one site' of a story. Thus, this symposium will gather brilliant minds living in from Indonesia and, Thailand , India, (artists, historians, filmmakers, curators, writers, social scientists and more) to share their work and opinions, expanding what it means to 'hunt' for our needs, taking the time to 'gather' differing perspectives in order to better guide a future forward. This project is an opportunity to learn and exchange experience about various cultural and social context in other places within the region.



## 'Curator on-site Meeting: Bandung'

*physical meeting and studio visit with artists in Bandung*

**Date: 3 - 6 March 2020 | Location: Bandung**

**Number of participants: 3**

**Target audience: Bandung Artscene**

Reflection:

We did this meeting before the borders are closed and this became the only physical meeting that the curators did during the year-long project. In our preliminary meeting, we were discussing the possibilities to create a platform of long-distance residency and online residency platform during the research period. It is also crucial to do the meeting to get to know each other better and to become friend. In time of COVID-19 and during the time when cross-nation mobility is limited, we try to rethink about the idea of an on-site visit and whether it is essential to do amidst the pandemic or is there an alternative to that. The goals of the research on-site is more to engage with the local scene in each city and it is possible to do it during the preparation of the exhibition.

That is when we decided to use two channels for knowledge and experience exchanges:

1. Internal use: Google Drive working folder, skype meeting, whatsapp group.
2. External (open access): daily durational exchange via social media platform (following the intended duration of the residency) → Pollination PENPAL-20

# Project Documentation

On-site Meeting: Bandung (3 - 6 March 2020)



We took a day tour to the KAA museum. KAA (Asia Africa Conference) was the first large-scale meeting of Asian and African states, most of which were newly independent, which took place on 18–24 April 1955 in Bandung, Indonesia. The conference was an important step towards the eventual creation of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The museum is located in a historical building at a beautifully preserved old town. This museum is filled with spirits of solidarity and autonomy. We left the building with a mix feeling but we will leave you a quote of Indonesian 1st president Soekarno's inaugural speech of the conference that inspired us a lot.

"In your deliberations, Sisters and Brothers, I beg of you, do not be guided by these fears, because fear is an acid which etches man's actions into curious patterns. Be guided by hopes and determination, be guided by ideals, and, yes, be guided by dreams! .

We are of many different nations, we are of many different social backgrounds and cultural patterns. Our ways of life are different. Our national characters, or colours or motifs - call it what you will - are different. Our racial stock is different, and even the colour of our skin is different. But what does that matter? .

Mankind is united or divided by considerations other than these. Conflict comes not from variety of skins, nor from variety of religion, but from variety of desires. All of us, I am certain, are united by more important things than those which superficially divide us."

# Project Documentation

On-site Meeting: Bandung (3 - 6 March 2020)



Our first studio visit is with Muhammad Akbar, a video-artist from Bandung. We know him personally since 2012, when he had a solo exhibition in Selasar Sunaryo Art Space in Bandung. Before that, we only knew Akbar by his reputation as one of the co-founder of VideoLab in Bandung.

After that, we decided to meet Deni Ramdani (Ackay Deni) in a restaurant that is not so far from the high school where he teaches. We were very impressed by his practice and his persistence in not only addressing the environmental issues at his neighborhood in collaboration with local people, but also how his environment activism practice is deeply rooted in local belief and wisdom. As a result, his artwork not only presented as an object but often as performances and a form of protest.



The first meeting with the curatorial advisor of The Pollination #3, Agung Hujatnika in Selasar Sunaryo Art Space.



## 'Research: Merapi'

*several walks under the active volcano: Mt.Merapi*

**Date: September - October 2020**

**Location: three villages under Mt.Merapi**

**Number of participants: 5**

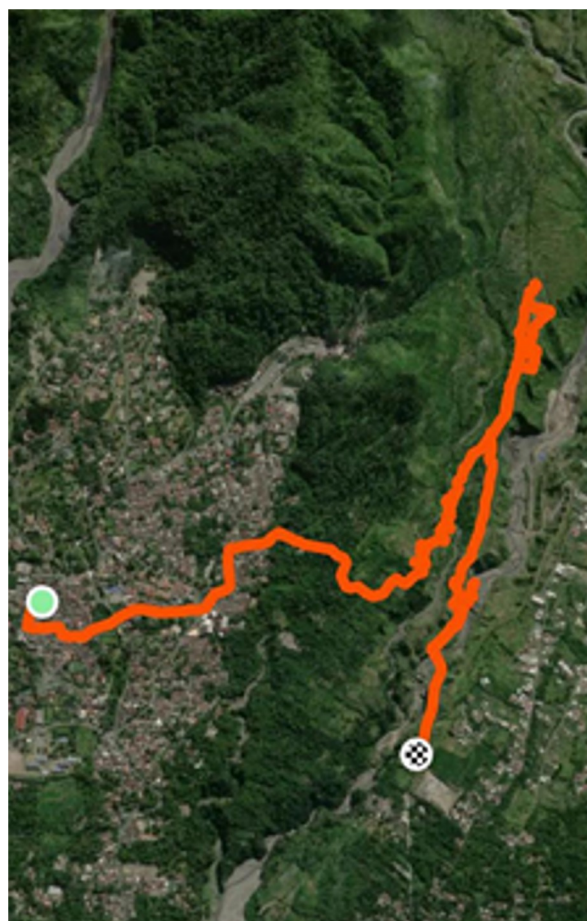
Reflection:

In Indonesia, we took the trail down the active stratovolcano, the forest, the sacred water source, the sand mining industry, and the different tourism sites under an active stratovolcano, Mt.Merapi in Yogyakarta. Local people believe that they are sharing the living space with not only animals and plants but also with the ancestor spirits, deities, and supernatural beings and protectors of nature. Living side by side, it is important to respect and protect each other to keep balance and reciprocity. Every volcanic eruption, earthquake, natural disaster, and pandemic is suggesting a new equilibrium is being scaled and through the stories passed down between generations, the world is resistant and humans have the tendency to try to conquer.

One of our field research under the volcano took us to the forest that got struck with pyroclastic flow ten years ago in one of the biggest Mt.Merapi eruptions. There, we found how tree trunks were burnt and the tree fell but the roots are resilient and growing—some, horizontally before going up to find more sun. After awhile, the landscape changed. We arrived at an open field that leads to a pasturage. There we found a big tree on the ground. The old white bark was like that of an elephant's wrinkled skin. It reminds us of the story of Barata the elephant hunter and it intrigued us. It is difficult to imagine that once upon a time, in the very same island now home to over 148 million people and considered as the world's most-populous island, elephants run free. It is unsettled when did the Javan elephant (*Elephas maximus sondaicus*) were extinct but their presence was described in the carving of Borobudur and in the semi-fictional book, *Merapi Omahku* (Merapi My Home) written by Elizabeth Inandiak. For the research, we went on three different walks under Mt.Merapi: to the forest, to two different villages and sand mining industry, and to the ancient water source. The story of Barata becomes a cue and starting point of this research; following the shifting idea of a 'hunter' which initially pointed to the figure of "Barata the elephant hunter" to the different figures of 'the hunter' today: from the water company, tourism industry, to illegal sand mining industry depicted in Maryanto's landscape painting.

# Project Documentation

RESEARCH: MERAPI



# Project Documentation

RESEARCH: MERAPI



LINK TO RESEARCH REPORT:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1iG6uUD5UXzbyEGwSHFq5StCx1Pdmd\\_ZC/view?usp=drivesdk](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1iG6uUD5UXzbyEGwSHFq5StCx1Pdmd_ZC/view?usp=drivesdk)

# Project Documentation

RESEARCH: MERAPI



# Project Documentation

RESEARCH: MERAPI



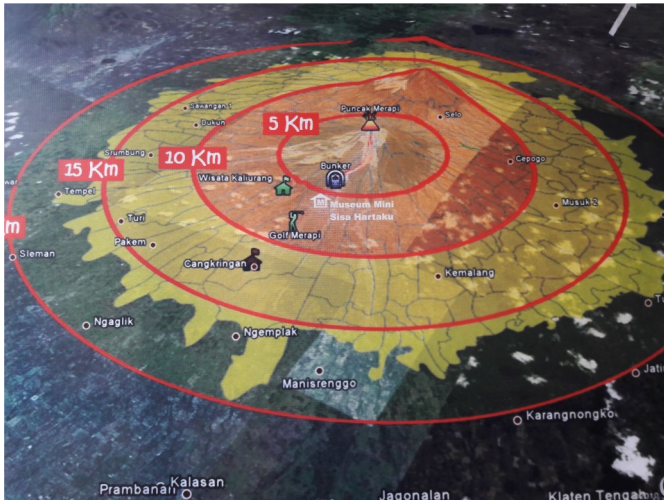
# Project Documentation

RESEARCH: MERAPI



# Project Documentation

RESEARCH: MERAPI





# 'Research: Mekong'

*Road trip along the Mekong river*

**Date: early July 2021 | Location: Loei province - Bueng Kan province, thailand**

**Number of participants: 1 artist, 1 curator, 1 assistant, 2 followers**

reflection:

In Thailand, we follow the natural trail to the majestic streams of the Mekong River where a watercourse is being developed, along with numerous dams constructed throughout the length of the river, with additional plans to blast rocky outcrops to facilitate transport of commodities, agricultural uses, as well as using the river as a power supply. The rapid rate of industrialization for the purpose of economic gain has unfortunately led to the neglect of ecological conditions, however, with myriad organisms now facing the threat of mass extinction. Ruangsak uses the story of Ta Jung Khung Dang Daeng - a hunter from the local folklore of the Chiang Khan district who destroyed the natural splendour of his local river by blocking off its flow-- as an allegory for the various forms of natural exploitation seen today. The construction of dams for the purposes of agriculture and power generation have become new forms of hunting, bringing with them the rapid and unchecked overexploitation of natural resources, causing the imbalance in the natural order and disruption of thousands of lives that rely on it.

This disruption in the natural process led to a phenomenon known as 'hungry water', where the color of the Mekong river turned blue as a result of the lack of minerals and silt. The newly-operational dam isn't the only factor influencing the Mekong, with 11 more dams located upstream in China, which have affected the water's flow for the past decade. In July of 2020, we were able to travel to the site of the Ta Jung Kung Dang Daeng folktale, to see with our own eyes the changes that are occurring, looking to Google Earth for our next destination. From the site of the myth's origins to what is considered to be the deepest segment of the Mekong - known locally as 'Mekong's Belly Button' - in the Bueng Kan province. Many areas we observed have become utterly transformed compared to the satellite images, with testimony from the local populace as a testament to the changes that are merely beginning, with an endpoint no one can predict. The construction of the dam is therefore an example of the mass-exploitation of nature that has been perpetuated by humans as 'hunters'.

# Project Documentation

RESEARCH: MEKONG



LINK TO RESEARCH REPORT:

[https://ofhuntersandgatherers.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/OFHUNTER\\_visual-journal-EN-R3-2.pdf](https://ofhuntersandgatherers.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/OFHUNTER_visual-journal-EN-R3-2.pdf)

# Project Documentation

RESEARCH: MEKONG



# Project Documentation

RESEARCH: MEKONG



# Project Documentation

RESEARCH: MEKONG



# Project Documentation

RESEARCH: MEKONG



# Project Documentation

RESEARCH: MEKONG





# 'The Hunters'

*the exhibition*

**Date:** 19th March 2021 | **Location:** MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum, Chiang Mai, Thailand

**Number of participants:** 2 artists, 3 curators

**Visitor:** 869

reflection:

This year long project allow us to have good amount of time to develop the project together, the artist and curator can work on the concrete exhibition layout that make the exhibition process went well. Restriction due to COVID-19 unable us to travel and even after every project, it makes project feels like it's not enough. This feeling of 'not enough' requires a proper closure in the form of a final exhibition and as a moment of celebration at the opening.

However, It is hard to have an exhibition opening during the pandemic time, since there are a lot of restriction and the museum have to close after the exhibition had been open for 2 weeks. Even the exhibition period had extended, not so many people can visit the show during the exhibition period.

# Project Documentation

EXHIBITION VIEW: THE HUNTERS - MARYANTO



# Project Documentation

EXHIBITION VIEW: THE HUNTERS - MARYANTO



# Project Documentation

EXHIBITION: THE HUNTERS - MARYANTO



# Project Documentation

EXHIBITION: THE HUNTERS - MARYANTO



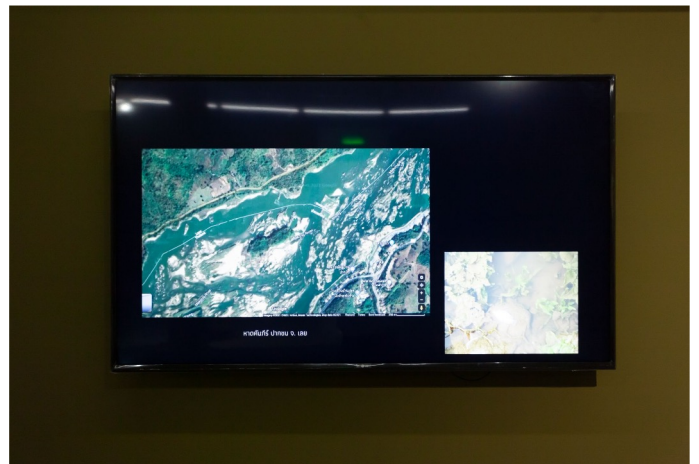
# Project Documentation

EXHIBITION VIEW: THE HUNTERS - RUANGSAK ANUWATWIMON



# Project Documentation

EXHIBITION VIEW: THE HUNTERS - RUANGSAK ANUWATWIMON



# Project Documentation

EXHIBITION: THE HUNTERS - RUANGSAK ANUWATWIMON



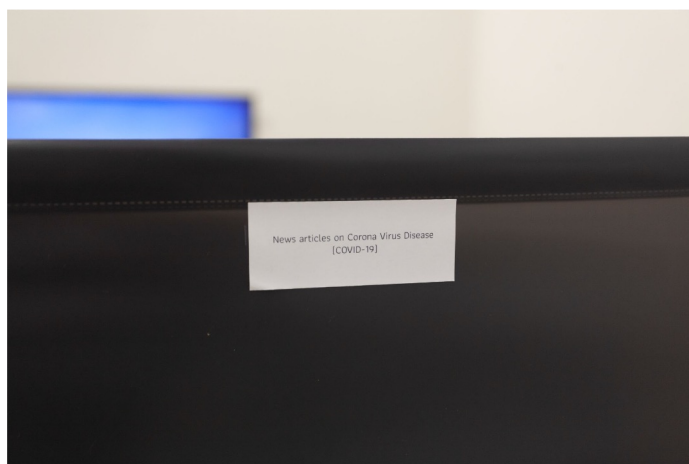
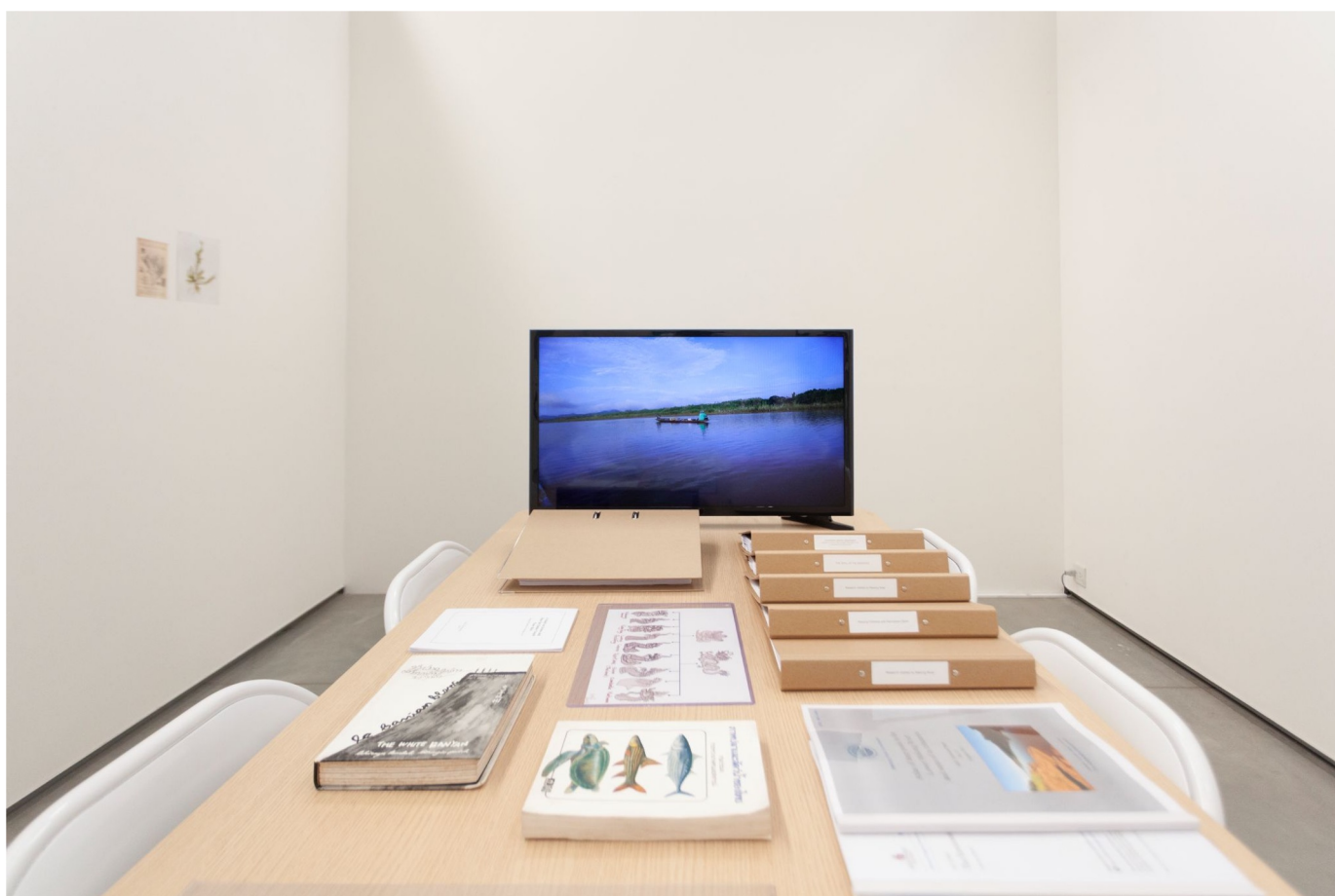
# Project Documentation

EXHIBITION: THE HUNTERS - RUANGSAK ANUWATWIMON



# Project Documentation

EXHIBITION: THE HUNTERS - READING ROOM



# Project Documentation

EXHIBITION: THE HUNTERS - READING ROOM



LINK TO READING MATERIAL: <https://ofhuntersandgatherers.com/research-materials-of-hunters-and-the-gatherers/>

# Project Documentation

EXHIBITION: THE HUNTERS - RESEARCH AREA



# Project Documentation

EXHIBITION: THE HUNTERS - RESEARCH AREA



LINK TO RESEARCH VIDEO:

<https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=11N2bEyGX4B8T-inPESJnpZ4Ciy8wx1MX>

# Project Documentation

THE HUNTERS: EXHIBITION - THE BRIDGE



LINK TO VIDEO CONVERSATION: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4hv\\_iEPVzE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4hv_iEPVzE)

LINK TO VIDEO CONVERSATION (WITH INDONESIAN TRANSLATION):  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yfYxmfzIBOPv3X-5ijSAXl8sbzKy015E/view?usp=drivesdk>



## 'The Gatherers'

### *the online symposia*

**Date: 28 - 30 May 2021 | Location: online**

**Number of participants: 248 audience on YouTube Live &**

**165 audience on Zoom for 3 days**

**Target audience: the general public**

#### Reflection:

Several technical issues occurred throughout the symposia, but all was descriptively handled well. The audience who registered proactively reply our reminder emails during the preceding event but at the same time, people more comfortable to join via Youtube Live than Zoom platform or people might find it easier to access Youtube rather than to sign up for the Zoom session; accessibility and ability to be casual viewers. Zoom fatigue might also be a factor that makes less people join the online symposium because by the time we have the symposium, it's already a year after the pandemic where a lot of art activity migrate online.

Since the event happened in English, for Thai audience, they may find it difficulty with the languages. The curators were suppose to give an introduction of the pollination project and shall give an conclusion of each day discussion, however since the event is live it make us feel nervous and forget to cover some details.

# Project Documentation

THE GATHERERS: PRE- SYMPOSIUM (DINNER GATHERING)

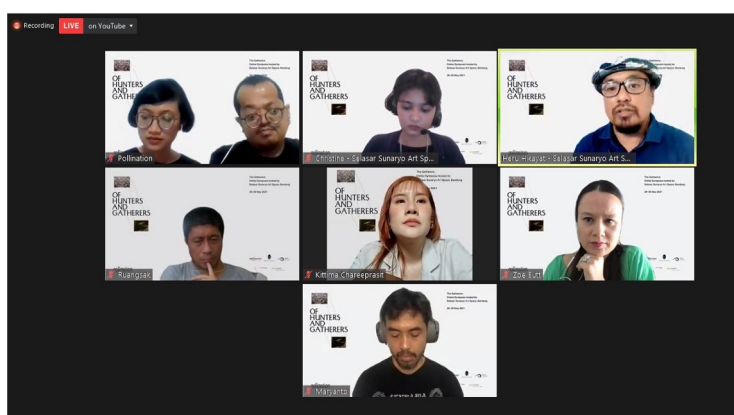


LINK TO PDF (SYMPOSIUM SCHEDULE AND INFO): <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1fK2x-0F-IJtOeZD7JoR3U4KqMhxb8TAK?usp=sharing>

LINK TO OTHERS:

<http://LINKTR.FE/POLLINATION3>

## THE GATHERERS: SYMPOSIUM DAY 1



LINK TO VIDEO RECORDING: DAY 1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hfTABSpqp28>

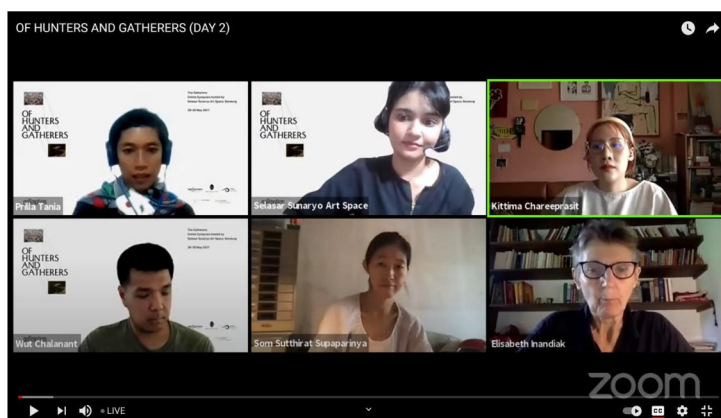
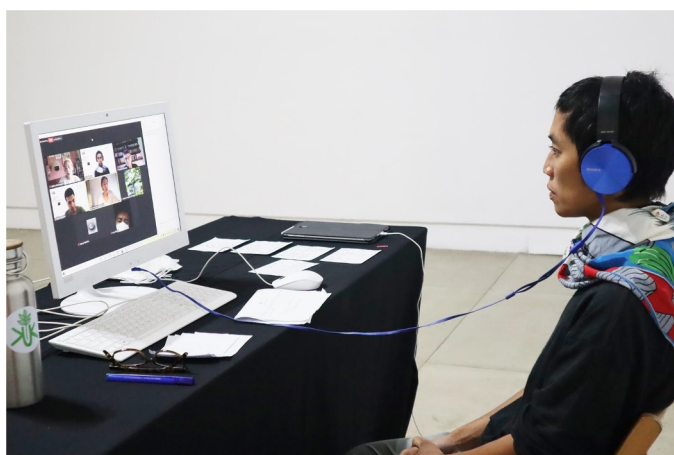
### STATISTICS (YOUTUBE VIEWS)

Video	Views	Watch time (hours)	Subscribers	Impressions	Impressions click-through rate (%)
Total	97	19.1609	1	1539	2.6

Date	Views
2021-05-28	65
2021-05-29	16
2021-05-30	14
2021-05-31	1
2021-06-01	1

# Project Documentation

## THE GATHERERS: SYMPOSIUM DAY 2



LINK TO VIDEO RECORDING: DAY 2 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKdKSoBDfPc>

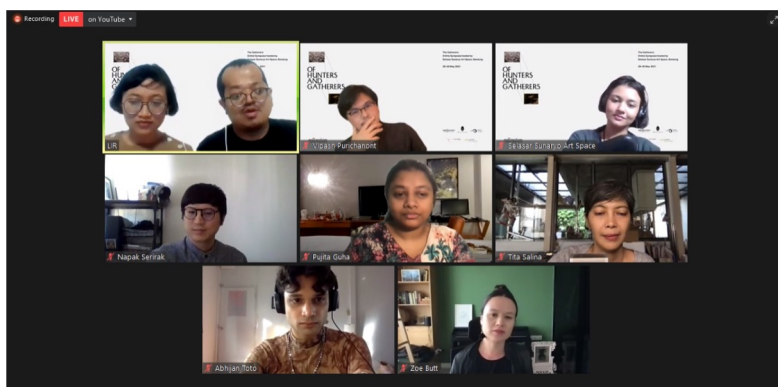
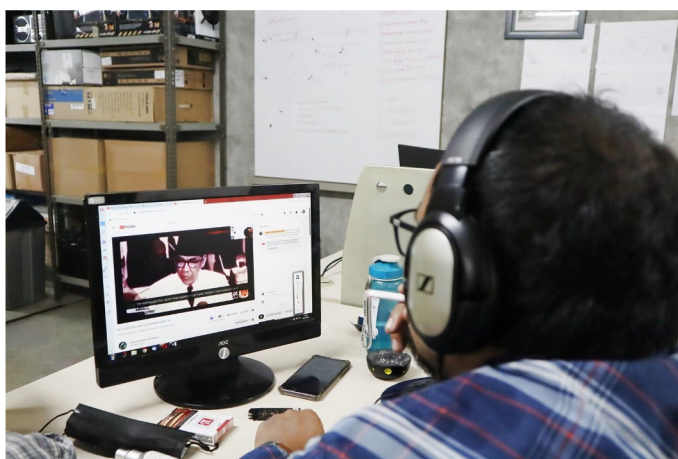
### STATISTICS (YOUTUBE VIEWS)

Video	Views	Watch time (hours)	Subscribers	Impressions	Impressions click-through rate (%)
Total	54	11.7663	3	279	8.96

Date	Views
2021-05-29	35
2021-05-30	17
2021-05-31	2
2021-06-01	0

# Project Documentation

## THE GATHERERS: SYMPOSIUM DAY 3



LINK TO VIDEO RECORDING: DAY 3 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nwnmE00jyUs>

### STATISTICS (YOUTUBE VIEWS)

Video	Views	Watch time (hours)	Subscribers	Impressions	Impressions click-through rate (%)
Total	87	22.7103	1	411	5.35

Date	Views
2021-05-30	76
2021-05-31	9
2021-06-01	2



## **'www.ofhuntersandgatherers.com'**

*the online publication*

**Date: Launched on May 2021 | Location: online**

**Number of participants: 15 (artist+curator+writer+editor)**

**Target audience: the general public**

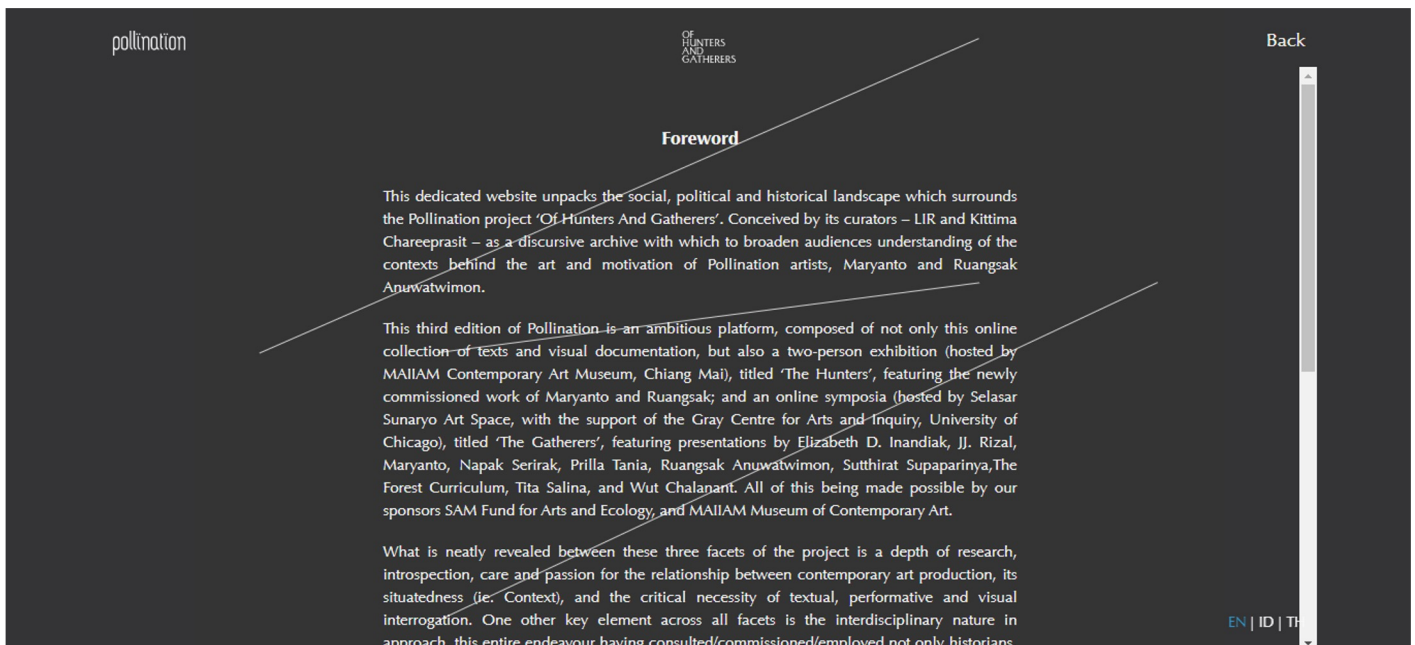
Reflection:

Easier to disseminate the knowledge. Nice to have discursive text about our own context written by writers from Southeast Asia and those who are well familiar with the context. It is also a good thing to make it accessible to everyone by having three different languages and having it online, even with freely downloadable PDF shall anyone wants to print the text. The website also allows us to archive the whole projects from beginning to end and compile everything from the exhibition, online presentations, symposia, and text contribution.

Working with for unfamiliar languages for the graphic designer, could be difficult and took longer time than usual. Also with writer, translator and editor require a lot of trust, when your text has been translated to others. This is a good exercise for us as well.

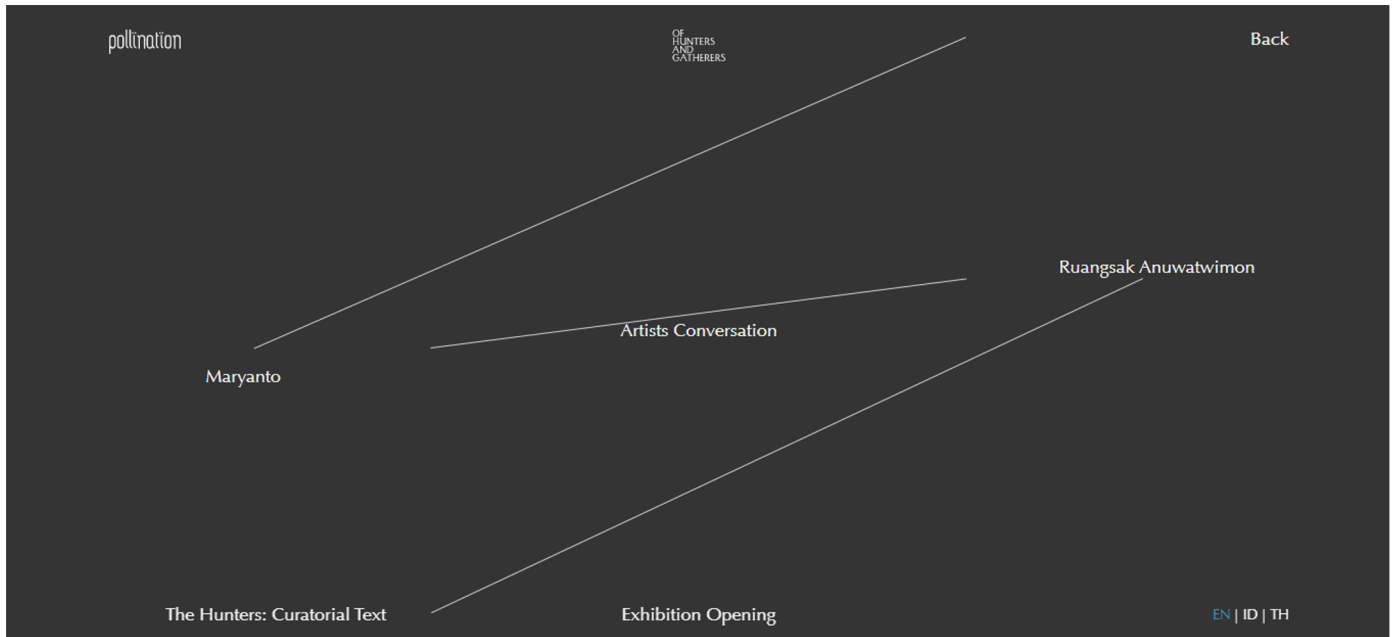
# Project Documentation

WEBSITE: [WWW.OFHUNTERSANDGATHERERES.COM](http://WWW.OFHUNTERSANDGATHERERES.COM)



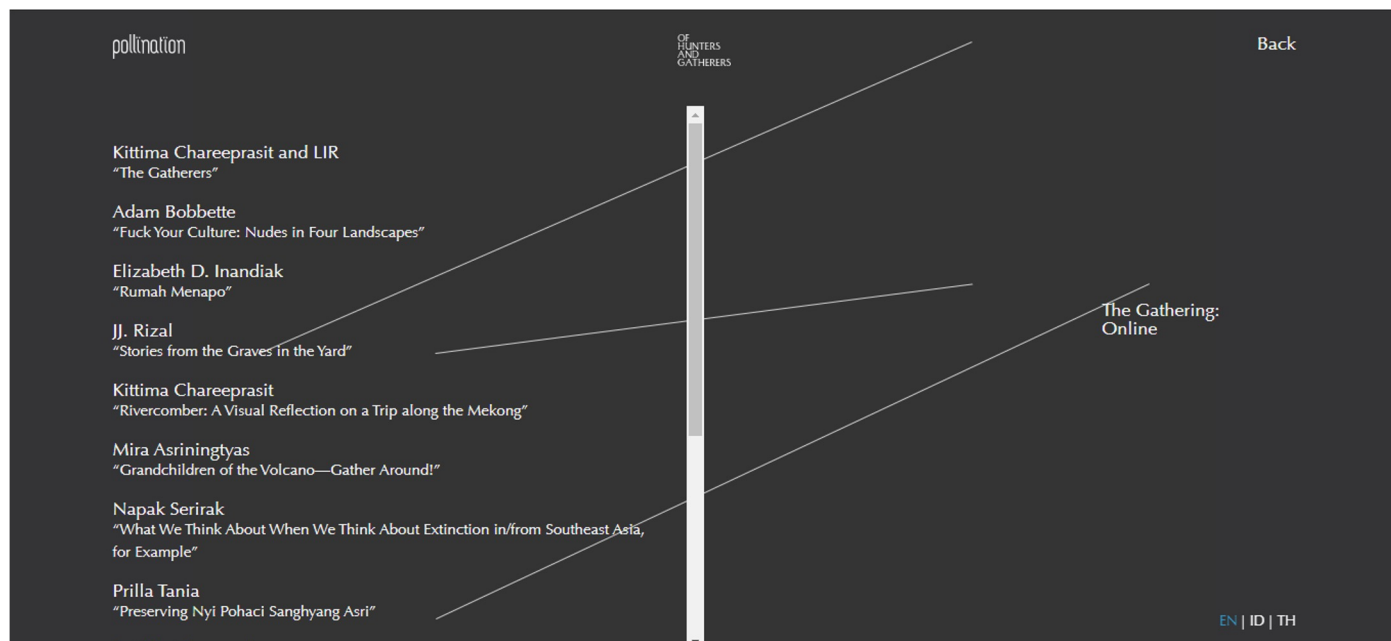
# Project Documentation

WEBSITE: [WWW.OFHUNTERSANDGATHERERES.COM](http://WWW.OFHUNTERSANDGATHERERES.COM)



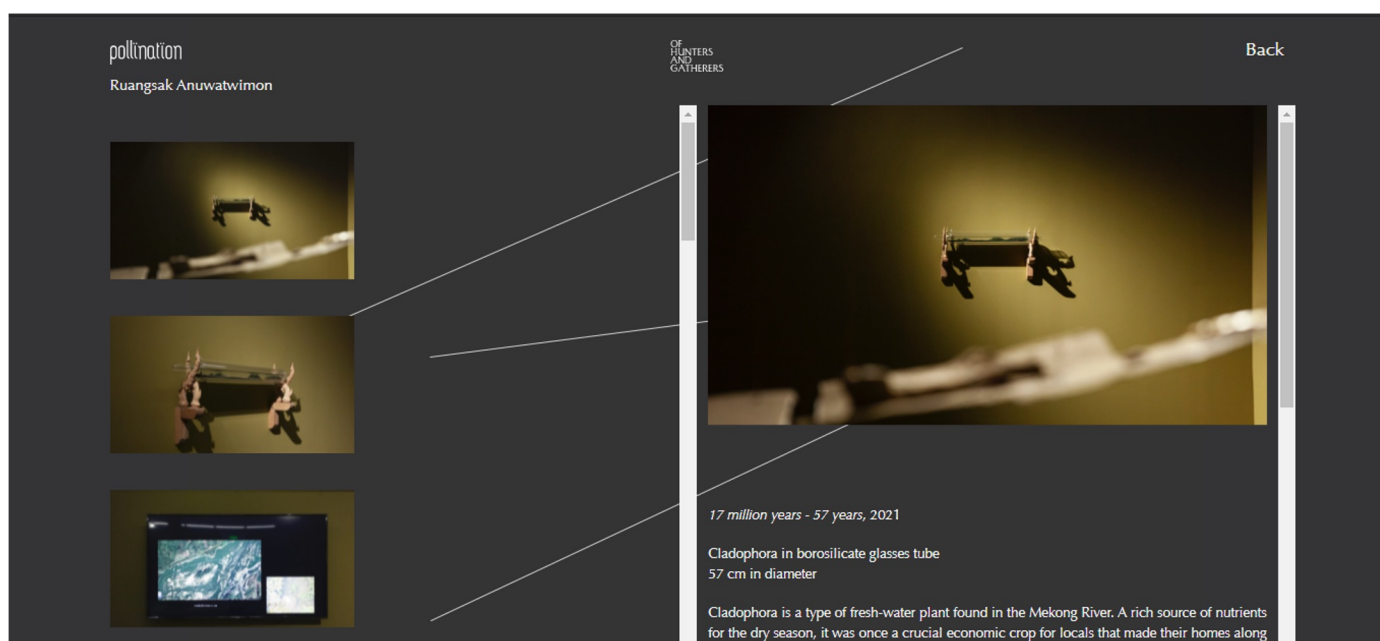
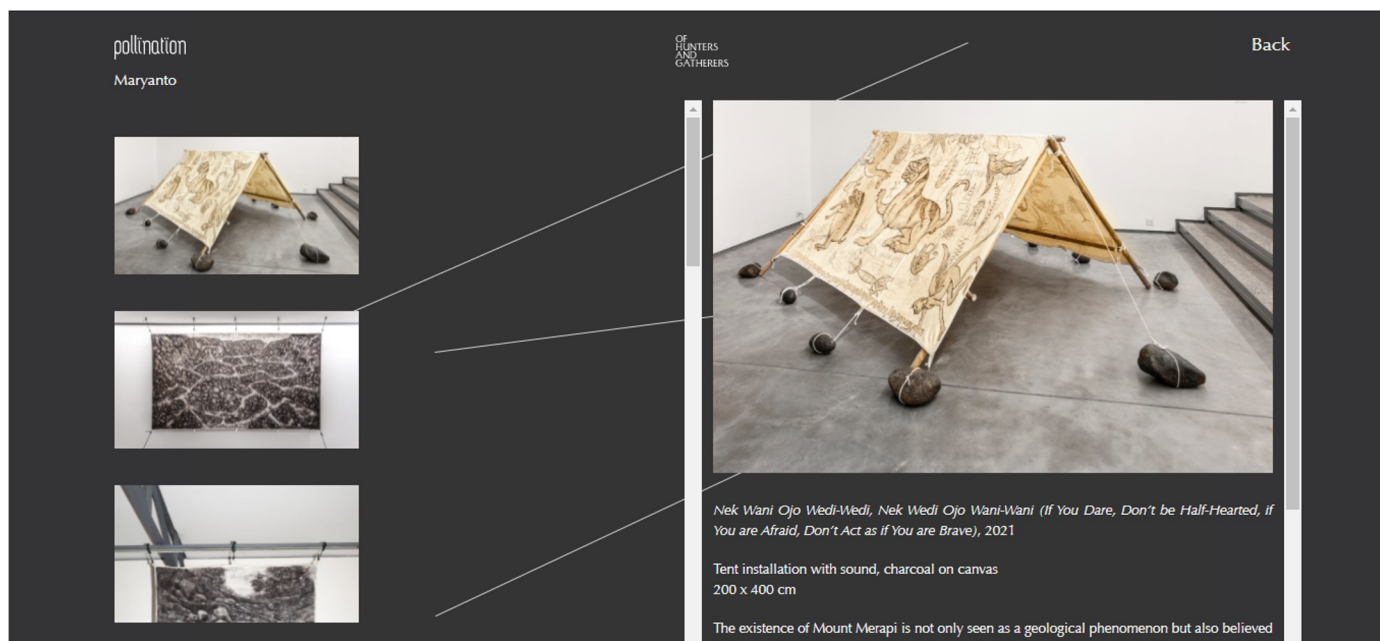
# Project Documentation

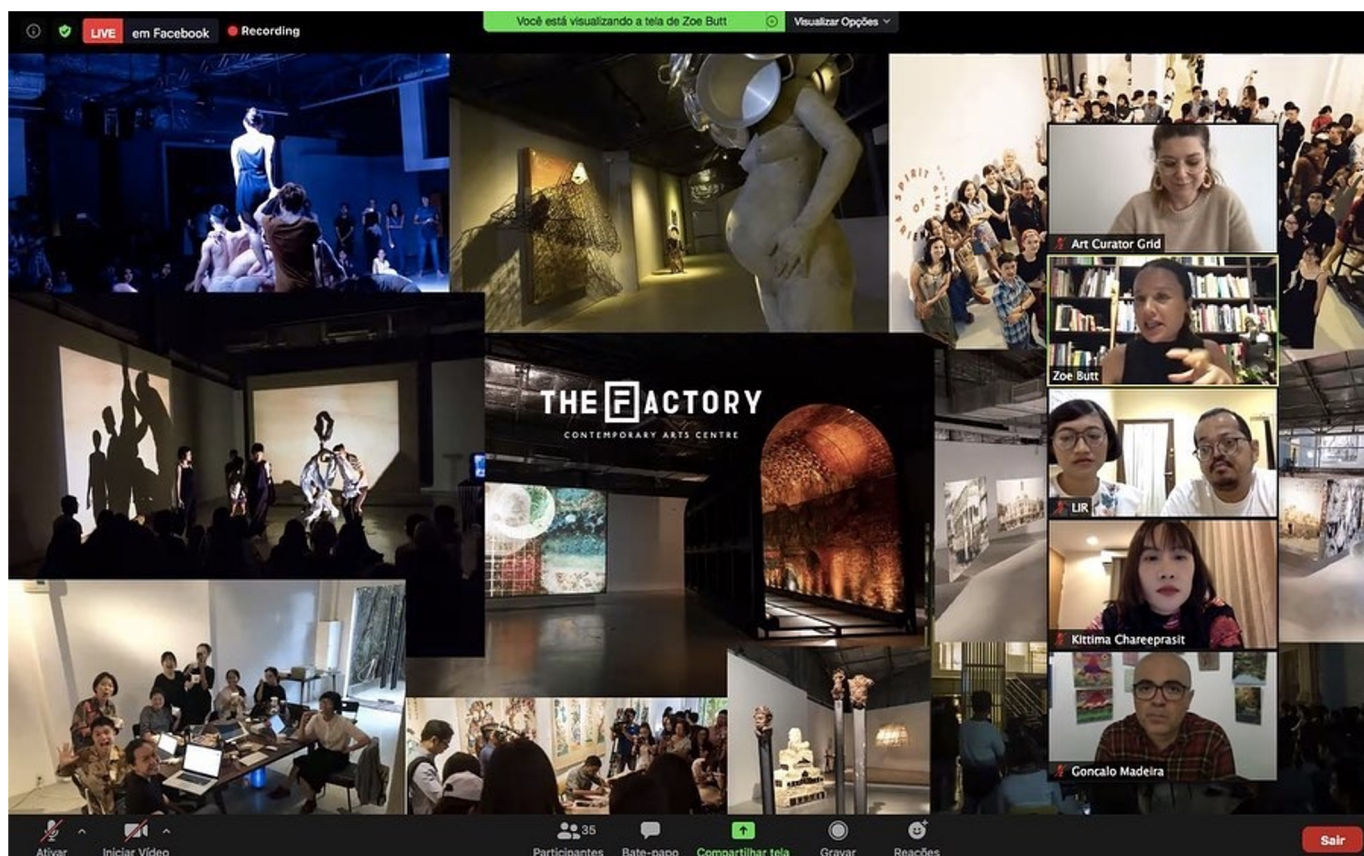
WEBSITE: WWW.OFHUNTERSANDGATHERERES.COM



# Project Documentation

WEBSITE: WWW.OFHUNTERSANDGATHERERES.COM





# 'The Plus Partnership: ArtCuratorGrid'

*Curator talk*

**Date: April 1, 2021**

**Location: Art Curator Grid Online Platform**

**Number of participants: 100 attendance sign up for ZOOM**

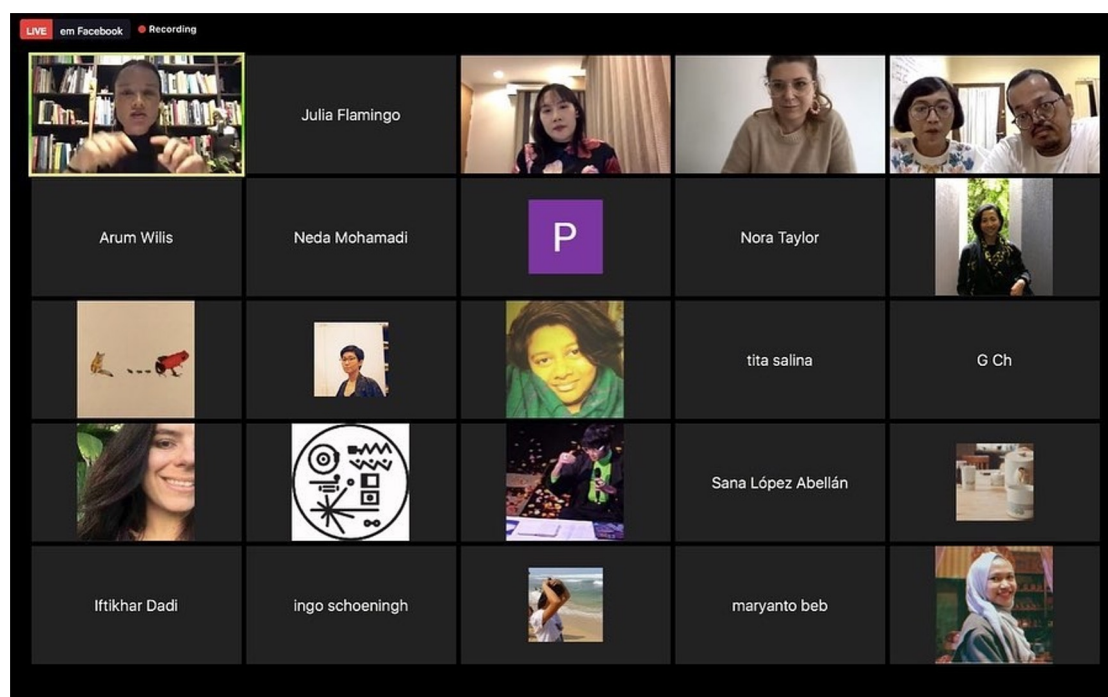
**Target audience: General Public**

reflection:

This was our very 1st public talk where we can present about the curatorial platform and field research--combined with Zoe's critical questions, this make the talk become a rich, exciting, and stimulating. By far, this is our favorite public talk. It helps us to rethink our process and the progress. In the other platform, we talk less about the behind the scene but this platform allows us to share the curatorial behind the scene of the whole project, on why we come up with everything.

# Public Program

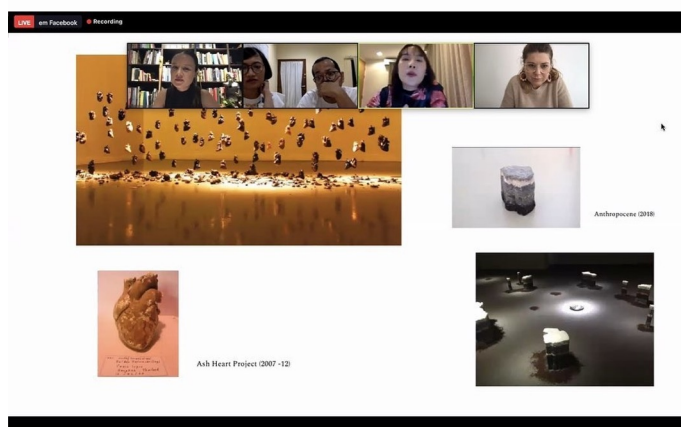
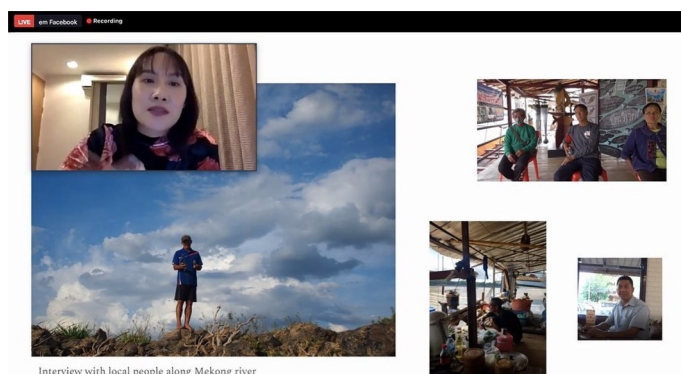
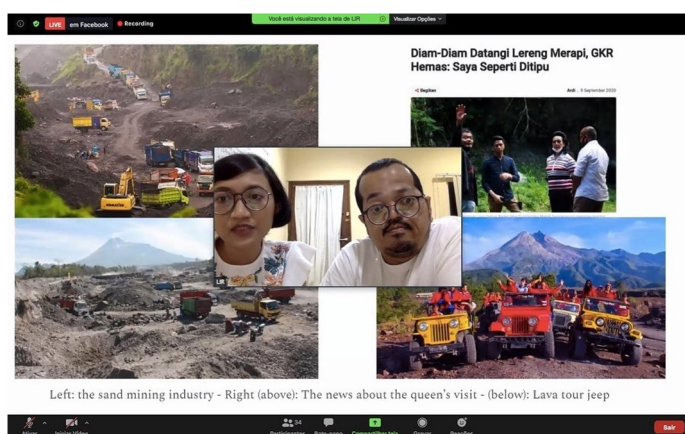
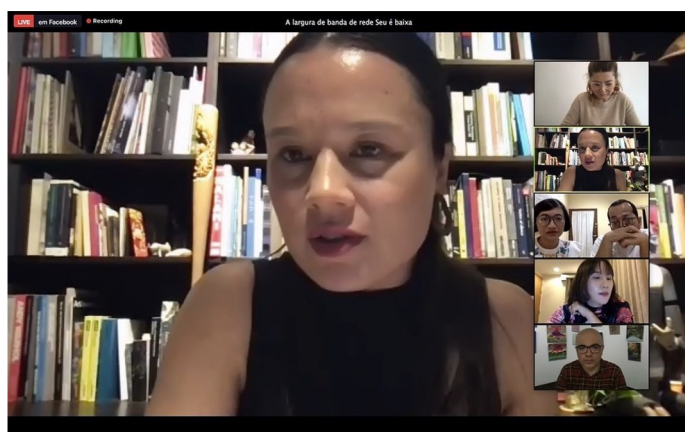
ART CURATOR GRID



# Public Program

ART CURATOR GRID

LINK TO VIDEO DOCUMENTATION  
STATISTIC:





# 'FAR/BAR'

*Online Video Screening*

**Date: 21st April - 30th May 2021**

**Number of participants: 5**

**Target audience: General Public**

Reflection:

This screening program investigates the ecology of land, water and community, drawn to the plurality of knowledge in local experience, particularly the depth of memory such wisdom affords in the face of change. Featuring artists/filmmakers Tita Salina, Prilla Tania, Wut Chalanant, Nontawat Numbenchapol and Maryanto. It is also good to use the Gray Center platform to widen the outreach of the audience.



## 'FAR/BAR'

*Artist & Curator Conversation*

**Date: 28th April 2021**

**Number of participants:6**

**Target audience: General Public**

reflection:

It allows us to reflect on other outputs on the discourse of ecology, not only from the invited artist for Pollination #3 'The Hunter' exhibition but also the thinkers and videomakers who are part of the symposium and 'The Gatherers' as well as those who have been research and working on the topic of ecology issue for the longtime in Southeast asia.

# Public Program

Gray Centre - Screening

LINK TO THE EVENT:

<https://graycenter.uchicago.edu/events/farbar-zoe-butt-with-pollination-curators-kittima-chareeprasit-and-lir-mira-asriningtyas-and-dito-yuwuno>

# Promotion

Audience attendance: described on each events above.

Media reportage:

Art Curator Grid blog:

[Expedition art: three curators, two artists and the search for modern hunters In South-East Asia](#)

Zoe's text in Terremoto:

<https://terremoto.mx/revista/encontrar-espiritus-afines-mas-alla-de-la-sangre-o-la-frontera/>

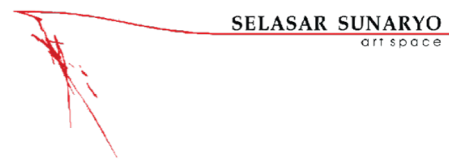
In Thailand, the news about the exhibition including the interview with curators was featured on local media such as BOTS word, Chiang Mai City life and Stay Happening .

# Sponsorship

INITIATED, ORGANIZED & CO-SPONSORED BY:



CO-ORGANIZED AND CO-SPONSORED BY:



---

# Reflection

## Success

1/ Being super curator in Southeast Asia.

Although we learn it the hard way, we learned to balance between managerial and intellectual skills at once: working on curatorial notes and shipping/ display while being the liaison agent to other organisation and contributors, while conducting research with artist and accompany their art making process and also create our personal essays and check other people's essays, all at the same time. Being curators in this country means working with everything ourselves but we learned a lot in the process.

2/ Opportunity to support the local art ecosystem especially during pandemic.

Able to create work, employ people who recently lost jobs during pandemic and financially support artists, academics, rent art space for the exhibition opening that look for a way to extend their rent → possible due to availability of funding.

## Failure

One contributor bailed (Ackay Deni) and one speaker (JJ Rizal) bailed at the last minute. Ackay Deni was ghosting us for 2 months before he finally canceled the contribution due to personal reasons (moving city, the pandemic, etc). But in the case of JJ Rizal, he managed to create a last-minute video presentation.

## What have you learned on the process

1/ The Mentors/ Advisor

The criticality of our mentors made us feel like we are going back to school and it shaped us in a way that only an education can do. It was a valuable lesson.

2/ Although it is slightly overwhelming, the many platforms of the project provide opportunities to learn from different ways, and connect to different organisations. Learn how to have different types of platforms (exhibition, essay commissioning, symposium) and different online presentations and articulation (conversational, panel style, presentation, etc); different ways of connecting with different organizations, and we have to be concerned about different types of audiences from different localities/ context and background.

Ute Meta Bauer, Brigitte Oetker (Eds.)



SouthEastAsia  
Spaces of  
the Curatorial  
Räume des  
Kuratorischen  
Jahresring

SternbergPress 

# Contents

## Inhalt

9 Preface

11 Vorwort

### Ute Meta Bauer

13 SouthEastAsia—Spaces of the Curatorial

22 SouthEastAsia—Räume des Kuratorischen

### Patrick D. Flores

31 Within and Across: Troublesome Propositions

43 Drinnen und draußen. Unbequeme Vorschläge

### Seng Yu Jin

58 Framing Contemporary Art in Southeast Asia through  
Exhibitionary Discourses

70 Ausstellungsdiskurse in Südostasien und ihre Wirkung auf  
die Wahrnehmung des Zeitgenössischen

### Gridthiya Gaweewong

84 The Mekong as a Site of Artistic Production

94 Orte künstlerischer Produktion entlang des Mekong

### Yin Ker

105 Why Play? An Outsider's Point of View on Making and Seeing  
Art in Myanmar Today

116 Why Play? Entstehen und Verstehen von Kunst im heutigen  
Myanmar – eine Außenseiterperspektive

### Nora A. Taylor

127 The *Singapore Art Archive Project* and the Institutions of  
Memory in Southeast Asia

136 Das *Singapore Art Archive Project* und die Institutionalisierung  
des Erinnerns in Südostasien

Kevin Chua

- 145 The Curatorial as Buoy and Beacon
- 156 Das Kuratorische als Boje und Leuchtfeuer

David Teh

- 170 Who Cares a Lot? Ruangrupa as Curatorship
- 179 Wen kümmert es wirklich? Das Ruangrupa-Kollektiv als kuratorische Plattform

Tony Godfrey

- 191 Tuesday in the Tropics
- 199 Dienstags in den Tropen

Zoe Butt

- 207 Practicing Friendship: Respecting Time as a Curator
- 213 In Freundschaft arbeiten. Zeit im kuratorischen Prozess

Simon Soon

- 220 Rethinking Curatorial Colonialism
- 230 Ein anderer Blick auf den kuratorischen Kolonialismus

Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez

- 240 Southeast Asia in a Crawl Space: Tempering Curatorial Hubris
- 252 Südostasien im Zwischenboden. Ein Plädoyer gegen die kuratorische Hybris

266 Art Spaces

269 Kunsträume

272 Authors

275 Autorinnen und Autoren

280 Text Credits/Textnachweis

282 Image Credits/Bildnachweis



Hyungsang Yoo, *Destruo*, 2013  
 Nhà Sàn Collective, Hanoi, Vietnam



Artist talk by Tuan Mami  
 "The Clouds Will Tell," 2014  
 Nhà Sàn Collective, Hanoi, Vietnam

Zoe Butt

## Practicing Friendship: Respecting Time as a Curator

Every day I take a moment to quietly reaffirm my motivations for working in the arts, for I've got to be frank, I once nearly quit on my passion. Utterly. At a too-early point in my career, I had grown oh-so-tired of the way neoliberal systems of institutional approval were dictating how artistic innovation was allowed to take form and be interpreted—a stance touted to respect the inspiration of artists from far-flung locales with differing determinations of “contemporaneity,” but sadly felt more like a colonization of their productive processes. What sustained my practice within these particular glass-encased white cube bureaucracies of museology was the critical intimacy cultivated in my curatorial department<sup>1</sup>—these were rare and special friendships of regional artistic knowledge. Indeed, management was wary of our closeness.

Ever since, the presence of friendship in my field has been of key consideration in the work I have chosen to do. I value this space of intimacy as the most discerning base of knowledge in the arts. In my decision to exit the “professionalized” landscape of government-supported arts infrastructure in Australia for the ideologically monitored, commercially hoodwinked terrain of China and Vietnam, I came to understand just how significant friendship is to sustaining the development of artistic languages and forms—how it can provide political autonomy with a powerful organized presence. Thus I have gleaned much about the purpose of art and its relevance from the social spaces of artists; indeed, these domestic environments of friendship crucially shape my work.

And what is this “work”? It's the building of care towards independent houses of culture that are rooted in the formal and vernacular artistic languages of their localities today. They are immaterial and concrete, often small in size yet

holding dreams as vast as the sky, whose charge of memory is grasped as living souls that count for a collective consciousness—a never-ending social network of differing pulse whose objects and ephemerality deserve constant re-categorization. I'm talking particularly about houses of culture built by artists that dwell together in landscapes of psychological pain and political poverty; where to be visible and publicly interactive is to incur possible conflict; where the power in friendship is an alliance, a crucible of remembering and resilience; where the power in friendship becomes the means to politically challenge those who seek to define you.

My work is referred to as “curating,” for me it is the dialogical intertextuality of engaging artists and their art to create encounters between aesthetics and politics<sup>2</sup>—it's about facilitating time, performing time, imprinting time, and, dare I say, producing time. It is about caring for the way memory is locally visualized and responsibly provoked; it's about interpreting, describing, and collecting the adhesive presence of time between memory and emotion, between form and its political legitimacy, between shadows opaque, liquid, and porous. Time that only those in friendship can truly critically understand. For it is within friendship that the *production* of representation—the journey towards that final destination called an artwork by an artist—is able to remain nameless. I say nameless for it is in naming that we are coded, thus presumed spoken for. I say nameless for it is in friendship (that code, that bond, beyond law) that the face<sup>3</sup> of the artist, the author, is permitted the space to be. It is within this space of friendship—the qualities of respect, trust, reliability, credibility, constancy, openness—that namelessness can look with unconditioned eyes on its surroundings, can learn of its interdependency on the facts and legends of its people (perhaps the Filipina would call it *kapwa*<sup>4</sup>), allowing the idea to learn how to breathe, to figure its own relationship to the world, to beg friendship to make introduction to discursiveness sturdier, to come up with a name that reflects the dreams inherent to its conjuring, to hope that its eventual interface does not enter the aesthetic regime with only one stride.

But this profession of mine is a deeply uneven one in definition and practice, and ultimately hinges on the geographies and social networks with which we live and devote. In this wondrous calamity of difference, I believe the context of art and culture must be facilitated, and I believe such facilitation requires physical and psychological space that is carefully weighted between local and global meaning. Some curators believe their key task to contribute to a history of exhibitions; in an ecology of cultural lack, however, I believe my key task is to sustain critically thinking creative communities of friendship.

But let's revisit time. If I click “yes” on a friendship request on Facebook, am I thus now a “friend”? If I set up an art project in Saigon as a social enterprise engaging victims of human trafficking along the border region with China, yet I've never spent time with such a victim, do I truly believe in my work? If I curate an art exhibition in London of Syrian contemporary art with artists I don't

even physically recognize, am I demonstrating care in knowing the depth of my naming their dreams into words has consequence, particularly considering the global depravity of their ongoing civil war? How important is the investment of shared experiential time to build interpersonal networks that responsibly define who we are and what we do as curators working transnationally in the twenty-first century?

In speaking of this occupation of mine—curating—I'd like it to invest more "time" in understanding an artist and the conditions with which their art is given meaning, presence, and value in the sites that gave birth to its existence. With the current speed of the global systematization of art, and its palate to collect and showcase the "global" within museum and biennial platforms, I think it crucial that such systems care about the impact of its tourism on local communities struggling to sustain criticality with their own cultural knowledge. The attitude with which we produce, display, consume, and interpret contemporary art should be supportive of sustaining its diversity in production and meaning.

And here I must return to friendship, for it is sadly not the acclaimed venue notches of an artist's curriculum vitae that a depth of exchange with artistic sites of production is practiced—not the likes of MoMA or the Tate; not the Venice Biennale, nor Art Basel. Their showcase-driven, marketable (and thus time-tabled) arms hold the interface (the artwork) aloft from the context of its production as opposed to considering how to give those arms increased dimension, to give physical articulation to such context. It is rather within the smaller, grass-roots, guerilla-like, "alternative" collective spaces of action, at the local level, that arms and hands are found in provocative swat and caress, where time is of currency in encouraging patient constructive thinking.

If only these two planets of social capital could sit at a regular table and share a meal of time, perhaps then we could discuss the impact of shifting the situatedness of an exhibition;<sup>5</sup> or perhaps better implement a research strategy for collecting art by which knowledge networks from the local ecologies' major museums seek to acquire are integrated as friendships into departmental structures of museum life.<sup>6</sup> I must emphasize here again why I say "friendships," as opposed to "professional appointments"; for friendship demands a respect for time, a deference for the longterm in building social forms of knowledge, a respect for the role of honor in failure while searching for success. In contexts of suppressed psychological pain and political poverty particularly—think Syria with Doxbox; think Cuba with Immigrant International; think Congo with Studio Kabako; think Cambodia with SaSa Art Projects; think Vietnam with Sàn Art; think Sri Lanka with Sri Lanka Archive of Contemporary Art, Architecture, and Design and so many more—it is the silken thread of friendship that sustains, gives purpose, and ultimately breeds a respect for knowledge and memory that is nurturing and under constant re-evaluation. The physical walls of these houses of culture are often crumbling, contested,

mobile, virtual, or publicly inaccessible and thus trust is of urgency to ensure survival.

This is not to say that professional appointments are void of such bonds, and I am sure I will find readers thinking I am overly idealistic with my romance of friendship in the context of art and its production/facilitation here, but what I am trying to say is that a curatorial address book needs to remember the impact of context on human intelligence and its cultural underpinnings. Speed dating parachute meetings by visiting curators turn art into a factory of showcase with no depth, and I have witnessed first-hand just how many of these visits critique and leave young artists utterly gutted, confused, and helpless. We need to practice friendship across our transnational planets of differing understandings of time to give structures of social capital the chance to interlock.

“Only primary friendship is stable (*bebaios*), for it implies decision and reflection: that which always takes time [...],” Derrida says.

A decision worthy of the name—that is a critical and reflective decision—could not possibly be rapid or easy, as Aristotle then notes, and this remark must receive all the weight of its import.<sup>7</sup>

I wonder what Derrida would say if tasked to comment on the interpersonal networks of “*guanxi*,” for it is in this system of social reciprocity and mutual benefit in China and Vietnam—an interpersonal network of friendship anchored in nurturing *long-term* exchange<sup>8</sup> that I have witnessed respect and knowledge expand, opportunities facilitated, and contacts of social currency gained. I am speaking particularly of my experiences in China and Vietnam, these countries that were violently thrown into a globalizing industrial competition, where local “culture” has been systematized by paranoid political surveillance mechanisms who argue patriotism, nationalism, and profit as key determinants of approval. In such environs (and there are many other similar landscapes of cultural control—think the divisive and brutal religious doctrines that have mired Afghanistan, India, and Myanmar, for example), the infrastructure for the arts is incredibly lacking in funds, facilitation, and space, and it is thus the interpersonal networks of artistic friendships that enable and innovate this lack, who invoke historical consciousness embedded within artistic languages “[...] by courting, by creating [...] that *begging bowl* to which the gift is drawn.”<sup>9</sup>

Of course the instrumentalization of such a “begging bowl” can be dark, intelligibly limiting, and hauntingly violent (corruption in business; cronyism in politics), but that is where the agency of such networks has been foiled by ego, and where reciprocity has lost its mindfulness. Yes, I say “mindfulness” as opposed to “utility,” and now perhaps we have Buddha sharing a cup of tea with Aristotle in this little duel, but I say mindfulness for its being “present,” for its acknowledgment of interconnected cyclical dependencies and, thus, the interwoven urgency to be held responsible for its cause and effect. Friendships can

be useful in practice—we take advantage of what the Other can provide—social introductions to beneficial people, sharing of skills, a sage for advice, but friendships are also virtuous bound beyond profit, beyond “use.”

I may be impractical in my plea for time, for friendship, to be respected within the showcase and collection of art, but I think in the increasing entertainment frenzy of event management and a rationalized capitalistic system of cultural accountability, we must remember “[t]he mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.”<sup>10</sup>

- 1 I refer to my time working at the Curatorial Department of Contemporary Asian and Pacific Art at Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia from 2001 to 2007.
- 2 “Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time,” Jacques Rancière and Gabriel Rockhill. *The Politics of Aesthetics: the Distribution of the Sensible* (London: Continuum, 2004). (Loc 278, Kindle).
- 3 “Is relationship with Being produced only in representation, the natural locus of evidence? Does objectivity, whose harshness and universal power is revealed in war, provide the unique and primordial form in which Being, when it is distinguished from image, dream, and subjective abstraction, *imposes itself* on consciousness? Is the apprehension of an object equivalent to the very movement in which the bonds with truth are woven?”; “A relation whose terms do not form a totality can hence be produced within the general economy of being only as proceeding from the I to the other, as a *face to face*, as delineating a distance in depth—that of conversation, of goodness, of Desire [...],” Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 24, 39.
- 4 “*Kapwa*” is an indigenous Filipino (Tagalog) term of psychology whose root is anchored in pre-Hispanic, pre-colonial thinking, a cultural ethnic attitude of “the self in the other.” This is a relational attitude between generations where each individual acknowledges their relevance and responsibility to carry forward their ancestral collective significance, in particular respect to their local community and natural environment, <http://glossary.mg-lj.si/referential-fields/subjectivization/kapwa>, accessed October 23, 2015.
- 5 For example, to study the impact of Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev’s DOCUMENTA (13) in her extending the exhibition presence to Kabul with her “Kabul-Bamiyan: Seminars and Lectures” program; to better understand the impact of such global surveys on the sites in which its thematics are inspired, to beg the question, “how can such showcase platforms be continuous and long-term in their critical cultural exchange?”
- 6 The Tate Modern has curatorial adjunct appointments that allow these individuals to remain in the contexts they specialize, live, and work (José Roca and now Inti Guerrero as Estrellita B. Brodsky Adjunct Curator of Latin American Art); it also possesses an “Asian Acquisitions Committee” of rotating expertise and social status within the region it claims to care. How can such models of curating and collecting be better discussed in impact and formation so as to improve its work and relevancy, in order for other institutions of enabling capacity to learn and innovate?
- 7 Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship* (London: Verso, 1997), 15.
- 8 Xiaoying Qi, “Guanxi, Social Capital Theory and Beyond: Toward a Globalized Social Science,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 64, no. 2 (2013).
- 9 Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World (25th Anniversary Edition)* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 186.
- 10 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface-abs.htm>, accessed October 23, 2015.



Artist talk by Rudy Atjeh  
 “Jeumpa,” 2014  
 Sàn Art, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam



Artist talk by Nguyen Thi Thanh Mai  
 “Day by Day,” 2015  
 Sàn Art, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam



# SPIRIT OF FRIENDSHIP

29 September – 26 November, 2017

Curated by Zoe Butt, Bill Nguyễn, Lê Thiên Bảo | Organized and hosted by The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, Ho Chi Minh City

[www.spiritoffriendship.org](http://www.spiritoffriendship.org)

‘Spirit of Friendship’ seeks to highlight the role and contribution of artist friendships in furthering the development of experimental languages in Vietnam, since 1975. As an educational display, it gives recognition to how ‘friendship’ continues to further the testing and encouraging of ideas among artists, beyond what was officially understood, taught, or predominantly exhibited in Vietnam at that time, believing their artistic practices as more than catering to ideological/formal and touristic (commercial) demand. Conceived as an ‘educational display’ as introduction, it commands the ground floor galleries of The Factory, providing a general map of activity outlining 22 artist groups, from across Vietnam, focusing primarily on the visual arts. This endeavour was initiated particularly for the local audiences of The Factory, aware that access to the history of contemporary art in this country is incredibly limited, due to Vietnam’s lack of diversity in cultural infrastructure operating with comparative and interdisciplinary experience and expertise.

‘Spirit of Friendship’ as an ‘educational display’ is divided into four parts. A timeline mapping the establishment of relevant artist groups; ‘Leaving a Mark’ highlighting four artist groups who have significantly shaped the development of experimental artistic thinking; ‘Strategies of Survival’ sharing the various ways artists have fought for space and means to share their ideas; and ‘Artists looking at Artists’, a program of documentary film illustrating how artists investigate and respond to the history of their artistic community.



This exhibition is by no means comprehensive of the breadth of such artistic activity across Vietnam, rather it is conceived as the first chapter of an ongoing research project of The Factory (with dedicated website: [www.spiritoffriendship.org](http://www.spiritoffriendship.org)), desiring a deeper and broader exploration of this country's art history, so as to better understand from whence we come and from here, where and why do we move forward.

*\*Please note the introductory wall text in Vietnamese did not mention the word 'exhibition' in its explanation for reasons of license approval (See Chapter 4). Please note all text included in this document are the wall texts that were found within the physical display. For in-depth analysis of this entire undertaking please see Appendix 6.*





## CURATORIAL DEVELOPMENT

**QUESTIONNAIRE TO ARTIST-GROUPS**

The following questionnaire was sent to all known artist-groups across Vietnam so as to finalize selection of participation in 'Spirit of Friendship'. Answers to these questions followed specific curatorial criteria (see next slide)

.....

\*Please note that your responses will be kept confidential. Should any of your answers be sought for publication on an exhibition wall, or inside a published text, we will make sure to ask your permission first.

Your answers to the below we consider preliminary research towards the exhibition 'Spirit of Friendship'. Your answers will help prompt how to best curate and display the subjects, people and objects concerning the journey of Vietnamese contemporary art. Feel free to answer any of the questions with imagery if you like!!

1. When was your group founded? If your group is no longer operating, when did it end?
2. Who were the members of your group at its founding? (Please also indicate any new members since then)
3. Did you have a physical location for your group? If yes, please state the founding address..
4. Was 'friendship' crucial to your creation / sustaining of your group? Please elaborate on why your group formed
5. Describe a scene (eg. object, room, activity) that best represents/represented the energy of your group?
6. What was the most memorable event you organized that was of particular significance? Explain why
7. What was the key event (either private or public, most damaging occurrence or inspiring development) that happened to or within your group that was the 'game-changer' for how you practiced as a group, or caused things to move backwards or forwards? (This is a question seeking to know more about the working methods of your group...)
8. Did you collaborate with any other artist group in Vietnam? (Collaborate could mean hanging out, send art or communication between Saigon and Hanoi, or work on a specific project together?)

## CURATORIAL DEVELOPMENT

**CRITERIA FOR ARTIST GROUP INCLUSION**

- Artists who share time and space in the mutual thinking of artistic ideas, and known by their community as a group who work, play and think together
- Friendship between artists, as a means of initiating artistic activity under one identity, but also sustaining the group's existence
- Pushing the language of experimentation in contemporary art practice
- Creation of physical projects together (more than once)
- Focus on the visual arts
- Focus on post 1975
- Active for at least two years

This criteria was made publicly known within the educational display of 'Spirit of Friendship' and on the project's dedicated website: [www.spiritoffriendship.org](http://www.spiritoffriendship.org)

## EXHIBITION SECTION 1:

# A TIMELINE MAPPING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF RELEVANT ARTIST GROUPS

**Participating artist groups:** Gang of Five (Hanoi); Group of 10 (Saigon); Salon Natasha (Hanoi); Hanoi Triad (Hanoi); Nha San + Nha San Collective (Hanoi); a little blah blah (Saigon); Wonderful District (Saigon); Zenei Gang of Five (Hanoi); The Propeller Group (Saigon); HanoiLink (Hanoi); San Art (Saigon); OM (Hanoi); New Space Arts Foundation (Hue); Hanoi Doclab (Hanoi); Hanoi Saigon Sculpture Group (Hanoi/Saigon); Phu Luc (Hanoi); Chaap Collective (Hanoi); Then Group (Hue); XEM (Saigon); Sao La (Saigon); Chaosdowntown (Saigon)



All artist stories and the historical timeline can be found here: [www.spiritoffriendship.org](http://www.spiritoffriendship.org)

## A TIMELINE MAPPING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF RELEVANT ARTIST GROUPS

\*Please note, perspex shelves beneath each artist-group held translations in English



## EXHIBITION SECTION 1 (DETAIL):

**A TIMELINE MAPPING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF RELEVANT ARTIST GROUPS**

## EXHIBITION SECTION 1 (DETAIL):

**A TIMELINE MAPPING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF RELEVANT ARTIST GROUPS****GANG OF FIVE**

Hanoi

Established 1983

Disbanded 1997

Members: Hồng Việt Dũng, Phạm Quang Vinh, Đặng Xuân Hoà, Hà Trí Hiếu, Trần Lương

‘As members we are almost the same age, and have known each other for a very long time, ever since we applied to go to the University of Fine Arts. And because of that, establishing the group was really honestly based on friendship. After we graduated, we realized how rough and cramped the conditions were for making art. So we decided to start the group with a simple reason which was to nourish our desire to create. The other way was to quit art and go to Eastern Europe (which was the most promising place for those who wanted to escape from poverty and war. Western Europe was riskier and more expensive since you had to travel by ship). The group met up, drank tea and wine almost daily, we also went on picnics, visited some studios and went dancing! (which was illegal at that time)’.

Trần Lương



Gang of Five in 1992  
(Photograph courtesy of Gerhard Joren)



Gang of Five: Party at  
Đỗ Dũng's house, Hanoi, 1992  
(Photograph courtesy of Gerhard Joren)

## EXHIBITION SECTION 2:

**LEAVING A MARK****NHÀ SÀN COLLECTIVE: CURATING AS ARTISTS**

Over the last two decades, Nhà Sàn (established 1998, Hanoi) has expanded the scope of art and artists, encouraging an address of the specificity and obstacles of the social and educational contexts of North Vietnam, thus challenging the practice of curating and documenting art history. This domestic kitchen table belongs to Mẹ Lương (Mother Luong) who regularly cooked meals for artists when they gathered to discuss and display at the traditional stilt home of Nhà Sàn.



## EXHIBITION SECTION 2:

**LEAVING A MARK****GROUP OF 10: THINKING IN NONFORM(AL)**

'Group of 10' (established 1989, Saigon) was a community of artists who pioneered abstraction as a valid artistic language in the art scene of South Vietnam in the 1990s, predominantly researching and working on abstract paintings (an aesthetic style initially not acknowledged within the local art education system at the time); members included Nguyễn Trung, Ca Lê Thắng, Đào Minh Tri, Nguyễn Tấn Cương, Nguyễn Thanh Bình, Hứa Thanh Bình, Nguyễn Trung Tín, Đỗ Hoàng Tường, Trần Văn Thảo and Vũ Hà Nam.



## EXHIBITION SECTION 2:

**LEAVING A MARK****SALON NATASHA: INDEPENDENT EXCHANGE**

Salon Natasha (1990-2005, Hanoi) is arguably the first to initiate independent artistic exchange and collaboration, working with limited funds to realize projects locally and abroad, between Vietnamese and foreign artists. Founded by Vu Dan Tan and his wife Natasha Kraevskia, activities were held in their street-facing lounge room on Hang Bong Street in the centre of Hanoi.



## EXHIBITION SECTION 2:

**LEAVING A MARK****SÀN ART LABORATORY: ARTISTS DEVELOPING ARTISTS**

Sàn Art was the first organization in Vietnam to independently organize and manage an artist-in-residence program. 'Sàn Art Laboratory' (2012-2016) generated an active community of artists, curators and interdisciplinary thinkers from across South East Asia, each resident paired with a 'talking-partner' in our local community, whose expertise was of relevance to the artistic research at hand. Comprised of 3 residents on a rotation every 6 months, each worked towards a final exhibition at San Art of new work. In this display Session 1 is re-enacted, with artworks by Tuấn Mami, Nguyễn Thị Thanh Mai, Trương Công Tùng.



## EXHIBITION SECTION 3:

**STRATEGIES OF SURVIVAL**

All over the world artists seek audiences for their art, their experiments often coming alive when placed in space that a public can observe, interact, learn and comment. Their desire to know that someone is listening and needing their art is akin to a designer in need of a client, or a doctor responding to a patient, or a guide in need of a tourist. But what do you do when you cannot find the space to speak to your community when there are no advertising agencies, clinics or tours? You create your own!

In Vietnam, where there are very few museums and galleries catering for contemporary art, there have been innovative solutions undertaken by artists creating specific space to display and engage their art. Whether it was due to limited funds ('Atelier Wonderful' by Wonderful District); a critical need to engage public community spaces (a little blah blah); a desire to create a 'journey' in the experience of art (Sao La's 'Art Walk'); the partnering with foreign government initiative in an effort to maintain artistic experimental autonomy (Nhà Sàn's 'occupation' of the Japan Foundation with 'Skylines With Flying People 2', 2012); or the conversion of a hostel's lobby into a gallery space (Chaosdowntown) - such artistic strategies (without commercial imperative) arise in response to a broader social scene's unawareness of the existence and value of such creative spirit, this experimental community with next to no promotional space in the public eye.



## EXHIBITION SECTION 4:

**ARTISTS LOOKING AT ARTISTS**

In a community that does not possess public archive of its artistic history, with a lack of institutions that critically collect and catalogue artistic production (the result of ideological and economic limitations), whereby access to living expertise and experience is also limited (a consequence of post-war migration); it is increasingly prevalent that creative talent has sought to research and document influential figures of Vietnam's past and present artistic landscape. In this educational zone, various documentaries are shared:



## EXHIBITION SECTION 4:

**ARTISTS LOOKING AT ARTISTS***Nguyễn Trung*

By Trần Mỹ Hà – Đỗ Hoàng Tường

2017, 28mins

This documentary, 3 years in development, reveals the practice, personality, and life of artist Nguyễn Trung through candid discussions, spontaneous moments captured in his daily life via multifaceted interviews about his legacy with Ca Lê Thắng, Lương Xuân Đoàn, Trịnh Cung, Trần Văn Thảo, Đỗ Hoàng Tường and Phạm Phương Cúc (CUC Gallery).

*The Essence of Spring*

By Trần Mỹ Hà

1996, 27:53mins

Realizing the lack of acknowledgement and record of artists working in Saigon since 1975, film maker Trần Mỹ Hà made this documentary to showcase the art scene of the South following Đổi Mới, featuring painters: Diệp Minh Châu, Cổ Tấn Long Châu, Đỗ Quang Em, Nguyễn Trung, Nguyễn Lâm, Hồ Hữu Thử, Trần Trung Tín, Ca Lê Thắng, Đào Minh Tri, Trần Văn Thảo, Nguyễn Tấn Cương, Đỗ Hoàng Tường, Huỳnh Phương Đông; sculptors Nguyễn Hải, Phan Gia Hương and Nguyễn Hải Nguyễn.



## EXHIBITION SECTION 4:

**ARTISTS LOOKING AT ARTISTS***Le soir est tout soupirs*

By Nguyễn Quang Huy

2005, 30mins (in French and Vietnamese only)

Video experimentations by Nguyễn Quang Huy exploring the legendary poet Dương Tường's creative processes of performing, writing and translating poetry. Originally shown as part of the group exhibition 'Le soir est tout soupirs' (L'Espace, Hanoi, 2005) with poems by Dương Tường, music improvised by Vũ Dân Tân, clothes by Trương Tân, and sculptures and installation by Nguyễn Minh Thành.

*15+*

By Tạ Minh Đức, commissioned by Nhà Sàn

2013, 46mins

The ups and downs of Nhà Sàn, told from the perspective of its co-founders and generations of artists, partakers and supporters. This documentary was made on the occasion of Nhà Sàn's 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary (2013), including interviews and rare footage of early exhibitions, events and gatherings.

*Viet Nam The World Tour with El Mac*

By The Propeller Group

2013, 11:17mins

El Mac shares his personal inspiration for creating art, and along the way, we get to see him doing what he does best in public, working with local Vietnamese graffiti artists, mutually learning new techniques in Vietnam.





## PUBLIC PROGRAM

**SPIRIT OF FRIENDSHIP: A TALK - FEST**

This series of panel discussions engaged the landscape of experimental contemporary art practice in Vietnam, since 1975, inviting key figures from across the country – artists, art dealers, collectors and arts workers – to share their experience and motivation, to further unpack the ongoing dilemmas faced in Vietnam, which sorely lacks supportive cultural infrastructure.

Recordings of proceedings can be found here: <https://factoryartscentre.com/en/event/spirit-of-friendship-a-talk-fest>



## PUBLIC PROGRAM

**SPIRIT OF FRIENDSHIP: A TALK - FEST****VIETNAM IN THE LATE 1990S: DISCOVERING NEW MEDIA, NEW BODIES, NEW SPACE**

Speakers: Trần Thị Huỳnh Nga, Ly Hoàng Ly, Richard Streitmatter-Trần

Moderated by Bill Nguyễn

November 4, 2017 @ 10-11.30am

---

What was it like to be an artist in late 1990s Southern Vietnam? What were the catalysts for thinking 'experimentally'? How did artists support each other in their desire to work with new media, their own bodies and the creation of space for such art? How has the landscape changed – are we now with a more open and critically-thinking artistic community that supports experimental practice? What are we still lacking?



## PUBLIC PROGRAM

**SPIRIT OF FRIENDSHIP: A TALK - FEST****I'M AN ARTIST AND I CURATE**

Speakers: Trần Lương, Trương Quế Chi and Nguyễn Mạnh Hùng

Moderated by Arlette Quỳnh-Anh Trần

4 November 4, 2017 @ 11.45am – 1.15pm

---

The concept of 'curating' manifested in North Vietnam, largely through the activities of Nhà Sàn – artists in Hanoi working together to create events that are often conceptual experiments, working with visual artists, musicians, filmmakers, literary wonders and much more. Nhà Sàn Studio became Nhà Sàn Collective, and a second generation of this community took the helm. What are the intergenerational differences in approach with the telling of such stories inside Nhà Sàn? What triggered the need to 'curate'? Can we consider 'curating' a 'medium' for artists (in the same way we might refer to sculpture or painting)?



## PUBLIC PROGRAM

**SPIRIT OF FRIENDSHIP: A TALK - FEST****CAN COMMERCIALISM SUPPORT EXPERIMENTATION?**

Suzanne Lecht, Quỳnh Phạm and Tuấn Andrew Nguyễn

Moderated by Zoe Butt

November 4, 2017 @ 2.30 – 4pm

---

Has the market for art in Vietnam been a positive influence on its development? What is the responsibility of the art dealer to the artist when it comes to experimentation within an artist's practice? What are some of the dilemmas dealers face in supporting artists with the lack of cultural infrastructure in Vietnam?



## PUBLIC PROGRAM

**SPIRIT OF FRIENDSHIP: A TALK - FEST****DOES VIETNAM CARE ABOUT AUDIENCES FOR ART?**

Speakers: Trần Lương, Natasha Kraevskaia and Nguyễn Thế Thanh

Moderated by Zoe Butt

November 4, 2017 @ 4.15 – 5.30pm

---

Do artists care about their art having an audience? Is exhibition-making necessary or are there other ways of an artist becoming 'visible'? Is it important to have established spaces for culture as a part of contemporary society? What legacies of friendship exist, who think and act as entrepreneurs in the creation of formal autonomous entities, who have successfully bridged the divide between public and private domains of art?



PUBLIC PROGRAM

## SPIRIT OF FRIENDSHIP: A TALK - FEST

### SUMMARY REFLECTIONS OF THE DAY

Speaker: Lee Weng-Choy

November 4, 2017 @ 5.30 – 6.00pm



ORGANIZED AND SPONSORED BY:

**THE FACTORY**  
CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTRE

CO-SPONSORS:

**vietjet air.com**

  
**HÔTEL DES ARTS**  
SAIGON





PROJECT MUSE®

---

## Spirit of Friendship: Artist Groups in Vietnam Since 1975

Zoe Butt, Bill Nguyễn, Lê Thiên Bảo

Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia, Volume 2, Number 1, March 2018, pp. 145-179 (Article)

Published by NUS Press Pte Ltd

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/sen.2018.0005>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/690547>

# Spirit of Friendship:

## Artist Groups in Vietnam Since 1975

---

**ZOE BUTT, with the assistance of BILL NGUYỄN and LÊ THIÊN BẢO**

Translated to Vietnamese by Dương Mạnh Hùng, and available at

<http://www.spiritoffriendship.org/resource>

September 2017

### Abstract

*This curatorial text was written to accompany an exhibition of the same name, which also launched an online timeline and resource platform, and ongoing research project. The focus of this text and its associated projects is “artist groups” in Vietnam since 1975. The authors and curators emphasise friendship between individuals in the formation and functioning of these “artist groups”, and note that many were not officially recognised or named as “collectives”. Notions of experimentation and independence in artistic practice are emphasised, as these demonstrate how these artist groups extended the possibilities for contemporary art in Vietnam beyond what was taught or officially endorsed by state institutions, and also by the emergence of a tourist-oriented market. “Spirit of Friendship” is presented here as a resource for further research.*

This curatorial text, and the exhibition it accompanied (held at The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre in Ho Chi Minh City from 29 September to 26 November 2017), seeks to highlight the role and contribution of artist friendships in furthering the development of experimental languages in Vietnam, since 1975. As an educational display, the exhibition gave recognition to how

[ **Southeast of Now**  
Vol. 2 No. 1 (March 2018), pp. 145–79 ]

“friendship” continues to further the testing and encouraging of ideas among artists, beyond what was officially understood, taught or predominantly exhibited in Vietnam in the years following 1975. As curators and researchers, we believe these artists’ works to be worthy of more than catering to ideological/formal and touristic (commercial) demand.

Conceived as an introduction, this text (like the exhibition it accompanied) provides a general map of activity outlining 22 artist groups<sup>1</sup> from across Vietnam, focusing primarily on the visual arts. This endeavour was initiated particularly for the local audiences of The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre in Ho Chi Minh City, aware that their access to the history of contemporary art in this country is incredibly limited, due to Vietnam’s lack of diversity in cultural infrastructure operating with comparative and interdisciplinary experience and expertise.

Beginning with the Gang of Five<sup>2</sup> who started working together in the 1980s (arguably the first example of artist friendships mutually identifying themselves as driven by shared motivation in the post-American War era), this exhibition’s chronology charts until 2017, and provides a diverse range of evidence—such as quoted testimonials, documentary photographs and videos, exhibition catalogues and artworks from the artist groups themselves—illustrating the rise of independent<sup>3</sup> artistic activity across the country.

From the utilisation of domestic living rooms to the reappropriation of traditional architecture; from public activation of artists’ studio space to the phenomenon of the bar-cum-studio; from the hostel as art host to the occupation of diplomatic zones as sites of artistic production—what we observe in this landscape is an entrepreneurial flair for strategic survival as artists strive to be heard in a community greatly underestimating their role in society. In addition to highlighting such “do it yourself” pro-activism in locating space and means, the Spirit of Friendship project shares how artists pay homage to the lives of artists before them, as a means of learning, and remembering their legacy. We focus on the practices of four artist groups—Salon Natasha, Nhà Sàn, Group of 10 and Sàn Art—for their facilitation of differing means and modes of making, thinking, talking and disseminating artistic ideas, thus influencing their community’s capacity to participate and understand the experience of art as a conduit for grappling with differing perceptions of contemporary life.

Sustaining a shared feeling of motivation for a mutual contribution as a group of friends labouring together is not easy, however, and when the financial realities and career opportunities of life become all too overwhelming, it is often only friendship that fires the tendrils of collective endurance, and even then it can be fraught with differing levels of commitment and

belief. The Spirit of Friendship exhibition visually focused on the memorable moments of kindling trusting friendships through art; while its associated public programme, a one-day symposium held on 4 November 2017 at The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, sought critical reflections and observations of the struggles of sustaining such grassroots infrastructure. In that event, we created a constructive discursive space where enduring dilemmas were shared, debated and hopefully given insight for creative improvement.

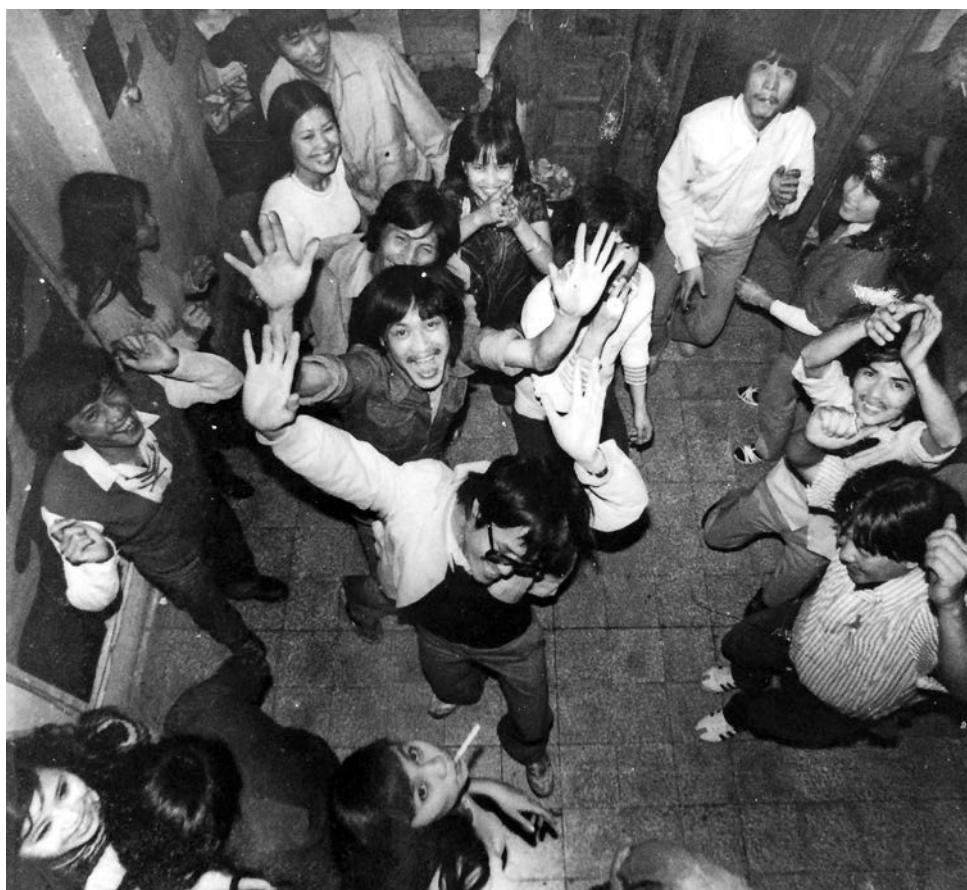
Spirit of Friendship is by no means comprehensive; rather, it is conceived as the first chapter of an ongoing research project (with a dedicated website: [www.spiritoffriendship.org](http://www.spiritoffriendship.org)), which desires a deeper and broader exploration of Vietnam's art history, in order to better understand from whence we come—and from here, where and why do we move forward.

As a research and archive programme, it celebrates the Vietnamese artistic community's resilient ingenuity, which has sought innovative means of building audiences for art within a socio-political context that clandestinely monitors their public (and at times private) activity. The project is marked by individual reflections of collective artistic labour and its supportive networks. This in turn evidences how these perspectives are propelled by—and operate in response to—the tensions between internal and external social assumptions, between those who remained and those who fled, between honesty and (self) censorship, between ambition and earning a livelihood: these being but a few of the persistent dilemmas that continue to characterise Vietnam's experimental art scene today.

### Conjuring “Spirit”

As members we are almost the same age, and have known each other for a very long time, ever since we applied to go to art school. And because of that, establishing the group was really honestly based on friendship. After we graduated, we realized how rough and cramped the conditions were for making art. So we decided to start the group with a simple reason, which was to nourish our desire to create. The other way was to quit art and go to Eastern Europe (which was the most promising place for those who wanted to escape from poverty and war; Western Europe was riskier and more expensive since you had to travel by ship). The group met up, drank tea and wine almost daily, we also went on picnics, visited some studios and went dancing! (which was illegal at that time)

—Trần Lương, Gang of Five<sup>4</sup>



These were the early days of the Gang of Five. Gazing at a black-and-white photograph that Trần Lương has shared of that moment (top), observing as youthful glee dances beneath arms raised, eyes drawn excitedly towards a camera overhead, it is striking to recall that this was a group of artists who had survived a protracted ideological war.

In another image (p. 149), we see a staged group portrait of five handsome young men dressed in black, all looking away from the lens, except Lương, who is armed with his signature stare that, to this day, continues to challenge assumed understandings of power. Much of the photographic documentation featured within the bilingual chronology of the *Spirit of Friendship* exhibition and website is similarly confident and celebratory in tone. From the openings of events that approximated “exhibitions”, to the processes of collaborative artistic production; from impromptu gatherings in song, to artists gathering and engaging in pointed group critique: what these small windows offer is but a glimpse into what might be similar experiences anywhere in the world’s diverse landscape of artistic communities.



In Vietnam, however, these artists who were and are committed to pushing differing modes and concepts of art-making beyond official or commercial dictates, continue to endure a landscape in which government and influential figures of wealth perceive such experimentation as suspicious for its cultural subversion, or as not a socially palatable economic investment. As a consequence, Vietnam today does not possess museums, libraries or universities with critical comparative expertise and resources on the history of art, either local or international. Thus, for better or worse, there are very few experienced curators, dealers, collectors and scholars who can readily argue for the validity and value of the experimental pioneers of Vietnamese art.

Given these circumstances, just how do these artists survive, and what motivates them to continue their work?

In an attempt to answer these questions, it is necessary to share a little background on the social and historical specificity of this country's experimental artistic landscape, and perceptions of it. As Trần Lương alludes to above, escaping poverty and war was the ultimate dream for a survivor who endured the international conflict between 1955 and 1975 (the collapse of the French Empire and the ensuing bloodbath that gave way to the establishment of the Communist State of Vietnam). Whether living in the north or south of the country, all artists faced some kind of battle of conscience with their ideas following the end of the American War. After 21 years of partition,<sup>5</sup> there

were stark differences in artistic leanings between the divided communities of north and south. North Vietnam had been ensconced in socialist realism since 1945,<sup>6</sup> as a vehicle to serve the ideology of Marxism and the growing dialogue with international communism. In the south, however, up until 1975, the extensive contact with American culture, the remnants of French philosophical attitudes in the translation of existential European thinkers (such as Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Friedrich Nietzsche), and the proliferation of printing houses (particularly in Saigon), all meant that southern artists were more exposed to western art movements, playing with form and composition in ways that were not permitted for their northern counterparts. In 1966, the first Fine Art Museum in Vietnam was established in Hanoi, but only after museums addressing political issues had been first set up, such as the Museum of Revolution, in 1959. It is revealing that northern artists who had relocated to South Vietnam, following the ousting of the French at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, were no longer considered worthy of its halls.<sup>7</sup>

With the Fall of Saigon in 1975 came the move towards “re-education”, which saw the artistic communities of the south conscripted into the armed forces by the Fine Art Association (Hoi My Thuat), often to violently detrimental ends.<sup>8</sup> For the first decade of Vietnam as a one-party state, life was incredibly tumultuous for artists. Friendships were integral to propelling commitment to artistic experimentation. The members of the Gang of Five in Hanoi felt compelled to work off the official grid, exploring a life of art beyond the socialist realist official dictum, and feeling an urgent need to conceptually and critically reflect on the nature of their everyday. Other groups of artists in the renamed southern city of Ho Chi Minh (formerly Saigon) were living amongst northern artists whose belief in the nationalist (and thus communist) cause had awarded them senior positions in the newly established Ho Chi Minh City Fine Art Association (Hoi My Thuat Thanh Pho Ho Chi Minh). In the early 1990s, the Group of 10<sup>9</sup> found themselves friends under such circumstances precisely because of their commitment to art (particularly to the language of abstraction, which was not officially accepted at the time), despite their differing political attitudes, which will be discussed in more detail below. While the political ideology of the state may be a key influence in the generation of an artistic aesthetic, also of critical importance for mutually motivated experimentation in art in post-1975 Vietnam was the introduction of national economic reforms in 1986. Following what is locally referred to as *Doi Moi*,<sup>10</sup> artists found increasing access to technology and international opportunity, thus fragmenting the dominance of a socialist worldview about the purposes, materials and meanings of art. Artist and filmmaker Nguyễn Trinh Thi (founder of Hanoi Doclab) says of this time:

until the early 2000s, artists mainly used video as an additional element to art installations or documentation of performances (in much the same way that video entered China in the early 1990s, where video art was first seen as a social tool of documentation, as opposed to an exploration of the form itself). In the 1990s, and even to this day, knowledge of the conceptual history of art and the exploration of abstraction beyond the “Abstract Expressionists” is not found in universities. Thus it was due to the popularity of television and film that artists studying and working in Vietnam were introduced to the potential of video as an artistic medium, largely drawn to its artistic potential as opposed to its structural capabilities.<sup>11</sup>

From the early 2000s, the artist’s toolbox began to engage the digital realm.<sup>12</sup> Digital cameras (still or moving) became a more affordable medium that immediately captured a “truth”, which questioned the role of artists and the purpose of their expression in society. An example is the establishment of HanoiLink in 2006.<sup>13</sup> The questioning of the construct of “truth” was further deepened with access to the World Wide Web,<sup>14</sup> enabling comparative thinking on issues such as identity (thus explorations of sexuality in the subversive installations and performances of Trương Tân and Nguyễn Minh Thành); the role of spirituality (in dialogue with questions of ideological belief, as evidenced in the work of Trần Lương, Nguyễn Quang Huy and Nguyễn Minh Phước); or the prevalence of social corruption and immorality (illustrated in the graphic figurative work of such artists as Nguyễn Văn Cường and Lê Quảng Hà). It is important to note that, even today, still none of these critical experimental (and conceptual) art histories are taught in the secondary or tertiary levels of education in Vietnam.

The economic reforms of *Doi Moi* did, however, afford educational exchange opportunities. In 1987, artist Vũ Dân Tân found himself with the offer of study abroad, first in the Soviet Union and then Cuba. He was drawn to the compositional quality of music and the art of the stage, and succumbed to the thrall of animation, eventually returning to Hanoi with his Russian wife, Natasha Kraevskaia. Emboldened by the spirit of *Perestroika* and the way artists in the USSR had removed the ideological shackles from their artistic energies and outputs, Salon Natasha was born in 1990 (essentially the front room of Tân and Kraevskaia’s family home<sup>15</sup>), within which a multitude of music nights and “salon”-style exhibitions of local artist friends began to regularly occur.

Around that same time in Ho Chi Minh City, the Group of 10 (a group of artist friends who were also teachers and students) began to embrace abstract ideas in painting, demonstrating a mutual desire to technically and conceptually explore the painterly surface beyond the limited scope of the plastic arts schooling inherited from the French, and the heavy-handed dictum of socialist realism. Members of this group were to become instrumental in arguing to the cultural authorities for the need to officially approve such abstract artistic language.<sup>16</sup> In the 1990s, the trickle of foreign curators, dealers and collectors with interest in Vietnamese art slowly turned into a steady stream, introducing the lucrative idea that being an artist could be a “career” or a form of livelihood (as opposed to a professed tool of the state). This shift also had a fundamental effect on the development of contemporary art. A private and commercial landscape for art began to flourish, where the apprehension of tourist demand—a desire for something “Vietnamese”—particularly pushed a language of art, opportunistically supported by the Vietnamese government, as a series of undebated cultural stereotypes propped up as national symbols of culture (such as the conical hat, the *ao dai* dress, the lacquer box or the lotus flower).

It was in 1994 that American art dealer Suzanne Lecht decided to establish her commercial gallery Art Vietnam in Hanoi, initially drawn to the inexplicable energy of the individual projects realised by the artists within Gang of Five, and also the artists who would eventually be regarded as the Avant Garde Calligrapher Group (locally referred to as the Zenei Gang of Five<sup>17</sup>). Art Vietnam was a commercial initiative with productive collector networks beyond Asia, thus increasing recognition of these experimental pioneers, supporting the production of artworks and organising exhibitions by such artists whose aesthetic language extended beyond the stereotypes made for the growing tourist market. This support of experimental artists was furthered that same year by the arrival of German artist Veronica Radulovic, who came to Vietnam to study lacquer art, becoming the first international lecturer since 1975 to be employed at the Hanoi University of Fine Art, supported by the German Academic Exchange Service. Artist Nguyễn Minh Thành, from Hanoi Triad,<sup>18</sup> comments:

At that time, seeing Trương Tân's novel and daring paintings, looking at artworks of Veronika Radulovic, along with foreign books and videos on contemporary art that she brought to Vietnam, and engaging in discussions and talks—all of these were inspirations for us to practice drawing and creating art. At that time, we were tired of the formal education at school and had started slacking.<sup>19</sup>

With Doi Moi also came a stronger and more active cultural diplomacy between Vietnam and foreign governments, with Alliance Française (later renamed L'Espace), Goethe Institut, British Council, Japan Foundation and, later, the Cultural Development Exchange Fund (CDEF) of the Danish government (mainly operating in Hanoi), all evidencing strong advocacy of experimental art practice in Vietnam. These foreign-funded initiatives predominantly demanded that Vietnamese artists engaged or collaborated with an artistic expertise from their respective country, however, and thus directed (and limited) the cultural and historical directions of artistic enquiry by Vietnamese artists.<sup>20</sup>

It is instructive to glance in comparison at Ho Chi Minh City in the early 1990s: a city whose intellectual and creative intelligentsia had largely fled in 1975, following the communist stitching of the country into one. In the early 1990s, Ho Chi Minh City was considerably quieter than Hanoi, devoid of any foreign NGOs or cultural diplomacy programmes. However, in 1995, this slowly began to change, as Vietnam and the USA restored diplomatic relations, with Vietnam also becoming a full member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the same year. These political shifts proved to be significant, for they opened the door for Vietnamese artistic exchange with the Southeast Asian region, and even more critically for the former South Vietnam, the chance for those who had fled to return home.

The return of artists who are celebrated today, such as Đinh Q. Lê (who was one of the first artists to relocate in 1996 from the USA to Ho Chi Minh City), was indicative of a growing wave of Viet Kieu,<sup>21</sup> determined to return and contribute to the competitive growth of Vietnam's financial, social and cultural platforms. It was also in 1996 that Trần Thị Huỳnh Nga decided to establish Blue Space Contemporary Arts Centre within the grounds of the Ho Chi Minh City Fine Art Museum. This little gallery, nestled within the decaying ground floor of a state institution, was the first space in the former South Vietnam to gather a network of an array of artists from across the country, indeed the Southeast Asian region, in Ho Chi Minh City. It was through the artistic gatherings at Blue Space that artistic friendships were furthered beyond the local, at times inspiring initiatives to do something on their own.<sup>22</sup>

A unique character of Ho Chi Minh City, differing greatly from Hanoi, was the mingling of Viet Kieu, foreign and local artist communities.<sup>23</sup> The social tensions between these groups manifested in particularly fraught relationships. For example, the assumption that Viet Kieu had access to wealth and mobility functioned as a prime source of social stigma at the local level.<sup>24</sup> Thus such artist initiatives as “a little blah blah”<sup>25</sup> (formed 2004), Wonderful

District<sup>26</sup> (formed 2006) and Sàn Art (formed 2007) were influential amalgamations of friendships that effectively bridged such social divide, demonstrating the beneficial networks afforded from such partnerships (results also reflected in the growing private business sector).

The growth in such artist-friendship activity was arguably also spurred by the growing international attention afforded to Vietnamese art. Major exhibition platforms associated with museum collections in the 1990s, such as the Fukuoka Asian Art Triennial (since 1979, previously referred as the Asian Art Show); and the Queensland Art Gallery's Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (established 1991) were engaging curatorial research into Vietnamese experimental pioneers, and acquiring their artworks. Similarly, art dealers (such as Plum Blossom Gallery in Hong Kong<sup>27</sup>) and freelance curators (such as Sherry Buchanan, the first curator to give recognition to the work of Trần Trung Tín<sup>28</sup>) were actively pushing Vietnamese experimental practices abroad.

Alongside these efforts, within Vietnam collectors such as Lê Thái Sơn, Adrian Jones (Witness' Collection, formed in 2002); Dominic Scriven (DOGMA Collection and Art Prize, formed in 2009), and Post Vidai (a group of three collectors, formed in 1993) were vital in their support of experimental explorations by Vietnamese artists. By the early 2000s, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City possessed a heady number of commercial galleries (predominantly tourist-focused), though glaringly few were willing (and equipped with necessary collector and exhibition networks) to represent artists of this experimental scene.

While financial instability is a reality faced by experimental artists all over the world, a crucial concern for the sustainability of experimental art practices in Vietnam is the urgent need for reform of its educational curricula and expertise. Vietnam inherited an *École des Beaux Arts* system of studying the Plastic Arts, introduced by the French in 1925, with a curriculum that, since the 1950s, has had little innovation, and lacks any critical comparative engagement of local or foreign developments in aesthetic ideas and theories. Thus, artists who seek to successfully engage with international markets must be incredibly proactive and strategic (similarly to this country's economic and tourist industries). Addressing the lack of educational opportunities for artists is especially central to the activities of artist groups such as Nhà Sàn in Hanoi and Sàn Art in Ho Chi Minh City. Their projects not only challenge themselves with historical and conceptual approaches to art-making, but also engage in critical dialogue between local and non-local forms of interdisciplinary cultural knowledge.<sup>29</sup>



FIGURE 1: “Leaving A Mark”, installation shot from Spirit of Friendship exhibition, 2017, The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Photograph courtesy of Phan Quang

It is in acknowledging this complicated and socio-politically nuanced artistic landscape that the curating of this exhibition was physically divided into four sections on the gallery floor of The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre. The first section—also replicated on the project website at [www.spiritoffriendship.org/artists](http://www.spiritoffriendship.org/artists)—comprised a lengthy timeline, which attempts to provide a basic map of this experimental artistic landscape, noting particular social, economic and cultural milestones within and beyond Vietnam. The exhibition’s second section, *Leaving a Mark—Finding the Way Forward*, presented four mini-exhibitions dedicated to specific artist-friendship groups whose projects left indelible marks on the development of an experimental artistic thinking in Vietnam. *Strategies of Survival*, the third section, focused on how particular artist groups have innovated the use and access to space, in order to display and share their art, despite financial or political limits. Finally, a section titled *Artists Looking at Artists* consisted of a screening programme of moving image works, including documentaries, short films and videos. In these films, artists examine the lives and methods of other artists, not only in an act of memorial, but also as a means of recording—and thus providing access to—the legacy of art and artists to be remembered by a broader community.

The following sections of this curatorial text expand on these various sections of the Spirit of Friendship exhibition.

### Leaving a Mark—Finding the Way Forward

Situated at the spatial centre of this exhibition was a focus on the work of the Group of 10, Salon Natasha, Nhà Sàn and Sàn Art, four artist groups specifically chosen for their demonstration of how artist friendships have addressed the lack of networked support, opportunity, expertise and educational resources available for artists in Vietnam, through unique means of artistic exchange and production, exhibition making and the creation of dynamic learning environments.

Group of 10 (as they came to be named)<sup>30</sup> was a unique group of artists who, beginning in 1989, started to exhibit in the ground-floor offices of the newspaper *Van Nghe*, gathering together as friends in Ho Chi Minh City over a table, ten chairs, a few bottles of vodka and a sardine box. This scene was soon enriched by leaflets about their annual group exhibitions, and recent issues of *My Thuat*, a magazine on fine art published by the Ho Chi Minh Fine Art Association, which two of the Group of 10 members, Ca Lê Thắng and



FIGURE 2: A part of Group of 10 in an exhibition in Hanoi, 1993. From left to right: Nguyễn Tấn Cương, Đỗ Hoàng Tường, Nguyễn Trung, Ca Lê Thắng, Đào Minh Tri, Trần Văn Thảo. Photo courtesy of artist Nguyễn Tấn Cương and Nguyễn Kim Tố

Nguyễn Trung, were partly responsible for publishing. This was an unusual yet significant group of people, for its members hailed from both North and South Vietnam, making Group of 10 arguably the first group of artists to work together across this previous ideological divide.<sup>31</sup> This was partly a consequence of the communist-appointed Fine Art Association forming national membership, and in the process sending significant artistic talents south to lead its initiatives. But it also reflected the artists thinking practically about the chances of a better livelihood.<sup>32</sup> Leaving aside their ideological leanings and (perhaps intimidating) official appointments,<sup>33</sup> these artists came together in the spirit of art, particularly for an exploration of abstraction: a mode of painting not officially permitted (and thus not taught or supported) at the time. Their first group show in 1989 came to be an annual event in Ho Chi Minh City, and the January 1992 edition was recognised as the first to display abstract art in the country.<sup>34</sup>

Within the Spirit of Friendship exhibition, nine paintings are on view, representative of the Group of 10 artists' practice from the 1990s, and demonstrating their abstract explorations. Đỗ Hoàng Tường remembers,

In 1993, the exhibition 'Tác Phẩm Mới' [Recent Works] at 29 Hang Bai, marked a grand introduction of Saigonese artists in Hanoi,



FIGURE 3: A corner of the exhibition The Recent Works (1990) at the gallery room of Văn Nghệ newspaper, 462 Xo Viet Nghe Tinh Street, 1990. Photograph courtesy of artist Nguyễn Tấn Cương and Nguyễn Kim Tố

proposing a different perspective on art practice at the time. This pioneering encounter formed many friendships and collegial connections between North and South (such as our information and art discussion exchange with the 'Gang Of Five')<sup>35</sup>.

In Hanoi, Salon Natasha was also a scene of exchange and community support in the 1990s, with evenings often given over to improvisational experimental performances between poets, musicians and visual artists (amongst others). Natasha Kraevskaia recalls a visit by artist Bonny Bombach (co-founder of the Community Printmakers Murwillumbah or CPM in Australia), who stumbled into the street-front studio of Salon Natasha in 1996 while holidaying in Hanoi. He happened to catch a glimpse of a recently arrived letter from the Queensland Art Gallery, which was an invitation for Vũ Dân Tân to participate in the forthcoming Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, a national flagship exhibition in Australia, not far from where Bombach lived. Excited by the prospect of meeting again, Bombach, Vũ Dân Tân and Kraevskaia promised to get in contact if and when they came to Brisbane. This meeting spurred the creation of Crosscurrents, a project in which single artworks by multiple authors were created across two continents between artist-friends of Salon Natasha and CPM. Artworks in ink, watercolour or acrylic on paper were sent back and forth between Vietnam and Australia by mail, with the receiver embellishing and reinterpreting what they were sent with their own response. Sometimes, the artwork would travel back and forth more than twice.

In the Spirit of Friendship exhibition, a dedicated room presented a selection of these artworks and documentation from this exchange, with the Crosscurrents project illustrating the pre-digital era of envelopes, letters and printed photographs that enabled the process. Kraevskaia comments, "It is worth a mention that the Hanoi Post office was very supportive, they let the project go on, satisfied by my explanation that it was just a children's game instead of demanding official authorization for posting artworks, as was determined by law at the time."<sup>36</sup> The fact that a private initiative between two individuals, beginning as a kind of friendship, a game of exchange and exploration could result in a collaborative exhibition attracting support for its showcase in Hanoi (27 March–8 April 1998) and a regional touring show throughout New South Wales, Australia (1998–2000) demonstrates the power of commitment between artists to share their experimentation despite the limits of finance and the significant geographical distance between them.

The year 1998 was significant for the local art scene in Hanoi, as it marked the birth of one of Vietnam's most resilient independent art spaces—

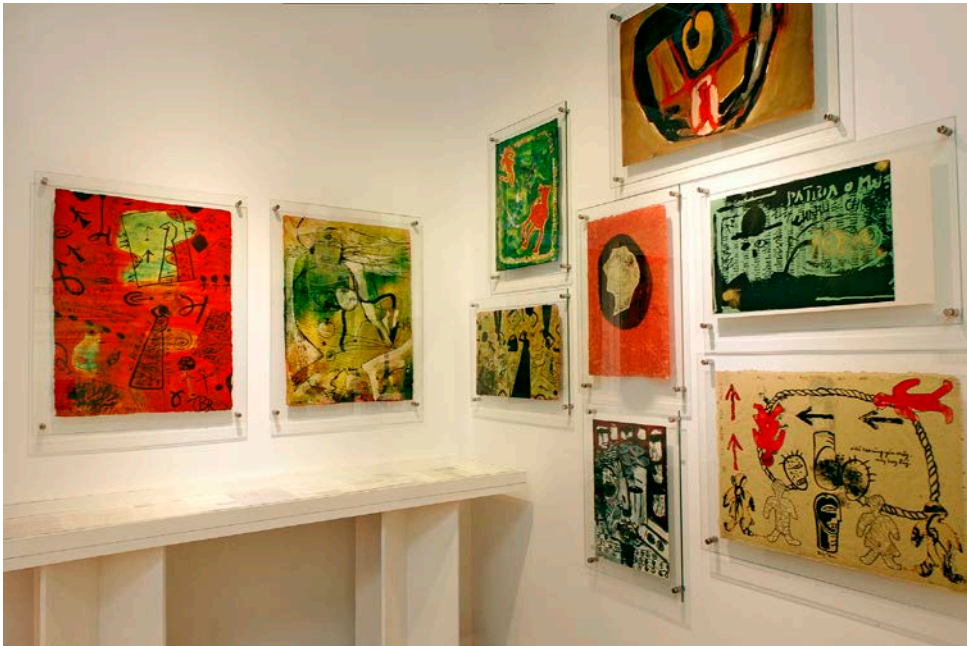


FIGURE 4: "Salon Natasha", installation shot from Spirit of Friendship exhibition, 2017, The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Photo courtesy of Phan Quang



FIGURE 5: Vũ Dân Tân and Natasha Kraevskaia sitting in the front gallery space of Salon Natasha, 1998. Photograph courtesy of Salon Natasha



FIGURE 6: Sound performance by Vũ Dân Tân, Lê Hồng Thái and Vũ Thị Nhusha, at the opening of the exhibition Thanh Sac, 4 March 2000. Photograph courtesy of Salon Natasha

Nhà Sàn.<sup>37</sup> Over the last two decades, Nhà Sàn has initiated and staged some of Vietnam's most critical experimental projects, having nurtured generations of artists, while always keeping its doors (and minds) open to those curious enough to step in. Aware that the status of art and artists in Vietnam continued to be officially challenged, and that more artists were responding to contentious historical issues in their work, Nhà Sàn understood early on the necessity of thinking like a "curator". This was a role that was little understood or practised in Vietnam at the time, and not found in any of its state institutions. In Vietnam, a curator takes on myriad other roles besides an "exhibition maker", often working as a study partner who shares knowledge, researches and debates with artists; and as a mediator who negotiates and connects artists with the public, the authorities and other agents in the cultural field.

Nhà Sàn perceived that it was no longer a question of what or who to curate, but rather, *how* to curate. Nhà Sàn continue to take the multiple roles and functions of a curator in Vietnam as the starting point for their curatorial approach and artistic work. They offer different ways to think about the longevity and sustainability of an art space: relocating four times



FIGURE 7: “Nhà Sàn Collective”, installation shot from Spirit of Friendship exhibition, 2017, The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Photograph courtesy of Phan Quang

in nearly 20 years and overcoming financial limitations by securing sponsorship from the business sector whilst continuously challenging the nature of curating and documenting art history.

For Spirit of Friendship, Nhà Sàn Collective proposes a different look into their history by presenting one of the often little-discussed micro-histories of a woman named Lê Thị Lương and widely known as Mẹ Lương, the wife of Nguyễn Mạnh Đức (one of the co-founders of Nhà Sàn Studio), and her kitchen space. Lovingly called “mẹ” (“mother”) by all, Mẹ Lương welcomes, cooks and tends to all artists, visitors or any passers-by, her motherly presence maintaining the organic and family-oriented environment of Nhà Sàn. Located on the ground floor, beneath the living room, her kitchen space opens up an additional meeting point within the architecture of Nhà Sàn Studio itself, enabling for the more private and humble but no less significant chit-chat to take place. Inviting Mẹ Lương to represent the space and the group, and using her kitchen space and self-curated cookbook as source materials, Nhà Sàn Collective metaphorically points to—and to a certain extent reiterates—what it means to make art and to be artists in the context of Vietnam today.

The final project exhibited in the Leaving a Mark section of the exhibition was Sàn Art Laboratory (2012–16), which was the first independent and locally



FIGURE 8: Artist Lại Thị Diệu Hà performing “Flying Up” in IN:ACT international Performance Art Festival, 2010, Nhà Sàn studio, Hanoi, Vietnam. Photograph courtesy of Phan Quang

driven artist-in-residence programme in Vietnam, initiated and organised by Sàn Art in Ho Chi Minh City.<sup>38</sup> With a focus on the production of art as a space of knowledge creation via talking, the Sàn Art Laboratory programme ultimately responded to Vietnam’s education system and its lack of encouragement for critically sharing artistic ideas via comparative reading, writing and speaking. The first session of Sàn Art Laboratory took place in 2012, with artists Tuấn Mami (Hanoi), Nguyễn Thị Thanh Mai (Hue) and Trương Công Tùng (Ho Chi Minh City) as “residents” of the lab (as they locally came to be called). They met their nominated “talking-partner” at least twice a month: Mami with artist collective The Propeller Group; Mai with artist Tammy Nguyễn; and Tùng with artist/designer/writer Sita Raiter. In addition to these conversations with assigned “talking partners”, the “lab” residents carried out artist talks, open studio gatherings, group critique and a final group exhibition at Sàn Art. Many impromptu parties were had at the lab, with a constant flow of visitors (resident artists, visiting guests from out of town and the local community) also spending time at the main gallery space and reading room of Sàn Art.

Through an open call process of application, the focus of the lab was initially Vietnamese artistic production; however, by 2014, it was extended to artists across Southeast Asia. Assessed by an international jury, applicants

FIGURE 9: “The Lab”, installation shot from Spirit of Friendship exhibition, 2017, The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Photo courtesy of Phan Quang



under 35 who had portfolios which demonstrated their commitment to experimentation with ideas and materials in their practice were considered—particularly those willing to take part in critique and discussion. Sàn Art Laboratory consequently generated an active community of artists, curators and interdisciplinary thinkers who came together with the pointed purpose of learning from each other’s experience and expertise. Trương Công Tùng shares:

In the Lab, while other artist residents were focused on developing their personal projects into full-fledged exhibitions, I was going from one experiment to another with various materials: from painting with powdered paint, video art, sculpture using polyester, to artworks that are induced from field-work method. Troubled by my confusion, I feared that I could not form a stable approach for myself. But after the Lab ended, it dawned on me that the Lab environment had provided us with an opportunity to experience new media, materials, and art forms—a counter-curriculum to what was being taught at the Fine Art University. It also taught us to be unafraid and pursue our postponed ideas.<sup>39</sup>



FIGURE 10: Sàn Art lab #4 group critique in 2014. Photograph courtesy of Sàn Art

Inside the Spirit of Friendship exhibition, a dedicated room showcased three artworks that these artists from Session 1 of the “lab” consider “transitional” for their practice, sharing how their methods and approach to art-making has changed since their “lab” residency. Interestingly, all three artists have since engaged with the impact of context on behaviour, whether it is human or animal in nature, a characteristic also present in their group exhibition realised in 2012. Like many of the 24 alumni of Sàn Art Laboratory, Tuấn Mami, Nguyễn Thị Thanh Mai and Trương Công Tùng have gone on to do significant projects with international presence and critical acclaim.

### Strategies Of Survival

... We formed through a combination of frustration, vision, passion, excitement, democratic openness and tact. a little blah blah's program was increasingly dedicated to the powerful 'friction zone' created by: art and public space; or whacky, unexpected space; or engaging the unlikely public and everyday people directly. There was a tremendous amount of energy in that. You have to remember how groaningly dusty institutional art was in Vietnam at the time.

Sue Hajdu, “a little blah blah”, Ho Chi Minh City

We were renting this small apartment on Nguyen Trai (District 1) and we built a mezzanine for our bed and let the rest be totally empty. It was here that Atelier Wonderful was born ... We had no incomes at all ... We had big pots of white paint and every week we would repaint the apartment. Everyone coming from a mix of the creative communities of architects, designers, composers, artists, art students understood that we were doing this for the community and that we had no money.

Sandrine Llouquet, Atelier Wonderful, Ho Chi Minh City

Throughout the world, cultural expression—its objects and rituals—is experienced via particular social gatherings, and the transference of so-called traditional languages into contemporary modes of being has given rise to some of the most dynamic artistic production in the 20th century, particularly (such as the influence of *wayang* puppetry on the art of Indonesian artist Heri Dono and the re-engagement of Ming Dynasty architectural techniques in the art of Chinese artist Ai Weiwei). In tandem with this transfiguration of tradition (particularly across the Asian region from the 1970s onwards) was a grappling with the socio-political changes of the time as the industrialisation of economy wrought tension with understandings of cultural identity and its representation. Thus, for example, following the demise of the Cultural Revolution in China where visual art was largely a propagandist vehicle, “Apartment Art”<sup>40</sup> became a trend whereby experimental artists took to turning their domestic spaces into one-night exhibition spaces. Elsewhere, such as in Indonesia, artists were inspired by the New Order regime’s propagandist cinema sites which they turned into their own artistic zones, such as Ruangrupa’s public programme “The Gerobak Bioskop (Cinema Cart) Network”<sup>41</sup> in 2013. Such strategies of survival are what energise cultural languages, reminding us that “tradition” is an evolving language, its transformation into contemporary modes (such as through usage of contemporary media and subjects) one means of ensuring, and testing, its social relevance.<sup>42</sup>

Thus it is not surprising that artistic communities in Vietnam which do not satisfy the criteria for commercial or official opportunities—and thus often feel very much the minority in a society that largely does not acknowledge their creative worth—have similarly striven for strategies to remain visible to a dedicated few. This has been partly in order to give hope and purpose to their need to be artists; partly, also, it reflects a belief that their ideal community can be found—and many of them did succeed in finding or creating this community, anchored in spaces that were unconventional and unexpected.



FIGURE 11: Artists participated in March: Art Walk, 2015. Photograph taken after a screening session at studio #1 Lê Công Kiều, D.1, Ho Chi Minh City, one of the public programmes associated with the exhibitions. Photograph courtesy of Sao La

As Sue Hajdu and Sandrine Llouquet describe above, their desire to create their respective entities/projects was in response to having identified a collective need for it.

In the Strategies of Survival section of the Spirit of Friendship exhibition, a collection of documentary material lines one wall. Including photographs, video, a website blog and a printed handmade book, this display shares candid shots and, at times, humorous footage of artists daring to challenge the definition of “public” through the repurposing of domestic, commercial and spiritual spaces.

Whether it was due to limited funds (as in the case of the Atelier Wonderful project of Wonderful District), a critical need to engage public community spaces (as for “a little blah blah”); a desire to create a “journey” in the experience of art (as in the Art Walk project by Sao La<sup>43</sup>); the partnering with foreign government initiatives in an effort to maintain artistic experimental autonomy (via the “occupation” of the Japan Foundation by Nhà Sàn Collective with the festival of exhibitions and other projects titled “Skylines With Flying People 2”, 2012); or the conversion of a hostel lobby into a gallery space (as with the project and group Chaosdowntown<sup>44</sup>): these are artistic strategies without commercial imperative. They are strategies that have arisen



FIGURE 12: Guests and artists Nguyễn Phương Linh (in white hat) and Tuấn Mami (in pink top) inside Tuấn Mami's MAC-Hanoi (Mobile Art Center), as part of *Skylines With Flying People 2*, Japan Foundation, Hanoi (December 2012)

in response to a broader social scene's unawareness of the existence and value of such innovative creative spirit, this experimental community with next to no promotional space in the public eye.<sup>45</sup> Thus rental of property continues to predominantly cater to commercial purposes, with minimal private investment in culture (a situation made all the more complicated by an official landscape that is suspicious of independent non-commercial activity). Whilst there have been commissioned reports and forums<sup>46</sup> aimed to encourage public debate of the positive and lucrative value of culture to economy, Vietnam is yet to see sustained and committed interest in alternative models of support for experimental contemporary art.

### Artists Looking at Artists

In a community with few art historical archives, suffering a lack of institutions critically collecting and cataloguing artistic production<sup>47</sup>—a result of political instability, economic limitations and ideological directives—whereby access to living expertise and experience is limited due to the dispersal of much of this intelligence in 1954, and then in 1975, it is increasingly prevalent that independent creative talents have sought to research and document influential figures of Vietnam's past and present artistic landscape. In the Artists Looking at Artists section of the Spirit of Friendship exhibition, a select



FIGURE 13: An artist talk by Tuan Andrew Nguyễn about graffiti art during a weekend dedicated to graffiti. Photograph courtesy of Atelier Wonderful

number of films were screened in a loop, showcasing particular artistic communities and individuals of notable aesthetic impact. The Propeller Group<sup>48</sup> provided a documentary (2013) on the graffiti scene of Ho Chi Minh City via the perspective of American graffiti extraordinaire El Mac, whose visits to Vietnam have been of mutual influence. Nguyễn Quang Huy (of Hanoi Triad) explores the legendary poet Dương Tường's creative processes of performing, writing and translating poetry in the experimental video "*Le soir est tout soupirs*" (2005). The young filmmaker Tạ Minh Đức traces the history and celebrates the pioneering spirit of Nhà Sàn in the documentary *15+*, made on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of Nhà Sàn in 2013. Also included was *Essence of Spring* (1996), a documentary by filmmaker Trần Mỹ Hà, showcasing the art scene of South Vietnam in the 1990s after Doi Moi. As a complement, this exhibition premiered the filmic documentary *Nguyễn Trung* (2017), also by Trần Mỹ Hà, revealing the art practice and life of artist Nguyễn Trung, an influential figure within Group of 10 who is increasingly attributed as the leading pioneer of abstract painting in South Vietnam.

### Concluding Remarks

The attempt in this text, and in the exhibition that it accompanied, to collate, notate, reflect and archive the history of artistic friendships as "group" activity across Vietnam would not be considered credible were we not also attempting to provide access to these unique facts, thus a dedicated bilingual website has been created—[www.spiritoffriendship.org](http://www.spiritoffriendship.org)—which offers the beginnings of an archive documenting the artistic friendships presented within this physical exhibition, and which is also envisaged as an ongoing curatorial platform for The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, whereby future projects related to the memory of this experimental community are commissioned and recorded.

To accompany this exhibition which inaugurates the ongoing "Spirit of Friendship" project, an essay by art historian and critic Lee Weng Choy has been commissioned, which shares his perspectives on the role and process of friendship as an influential negotiation in the frame of artistic production. Moreover, curator and researcher Đỗ Tường Linh has written a personal letter to an alter ego, reflecting on her own involvement in and observation of the local art scene of Hanoi. Finally, Zoe Butt offers a philosophical pondering on the nature of "friendship" in the structure of the global art world today, questioning the level of curatorial care for motivation, method and means behind artistic production today.

It must be reiterated that our ambitious desire to create an exhibition as a window onto this landscape of friendship in the experimental arts of Vietnam constitutes the first attempt by any institution or individual in this country. It is motivated by a sense of responsibility, on the part of The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, as the first purpose-built space for contemporary art, to raise public awareness about the significance of this artistic community. The decision to include these 22 “artist groups” was based on a particular set of questions we posed to each group, seeking personal reflections on the kinds of spaces and activities they created, and their acknowledgment of friendship as the basis of their mutual encouragement of artistic production.

While other recent exhibitions held in the region, such as *Concept, Context, Contestation* (hosted and commissioned by Bangkok Art and Culture Centre, 2014) and *Sunshower: Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia 1980s to Now* (organised by the Japan Foundation and ASEAN in 2017, and hosted by Mori Art Museum and National Art Centre, Tokyo) have (partly) focused on the idea of the “collective” in contemporary artistic production of Southeast Asia, the term “collective” is deliberately not used for *Spirit of Friendship*, as many of the participants included in this exhibition and referred to in this text did not conceive themselves as a branded group identity. For example, the Gang of Five came to be referred as such due to the reviews and critical support of art historian Nguyễn Quân while the artists of Then Group in Hue have suggested that the promotion of a collective independent identity as experimental artists would draw unwanted official scrutiny of their activities, and thus they are promoted as a business.

By providing a threshold into this landscape, it is hoped that “*Spirit of Friendship*” brings greater awareness of the particularities of artistic relationships, and their impact on furthering the development of experimental artistic thinking in Vietnam. The exhibition and text do not, however, have the capacity to do justice to the immense labour, commitment and contribution of the diverse set of players involved. “*Spirit of Friendship*” seeks to highlight the role of friendship as a space of trust, in which artistic integrity is cultivated and nourished, despite a political environment that stifles diversity in creative expression. We have conducted this research, mounted this exhibition and written this text with a spirit of respect and awe at the growth of experimental thinking that has arisen as a dynamic, and increasingly internationally recognised, scene in Vietnam. The support between friends has motivated the conception, production, display and distribution of these experimental practices. It is in this community that the methodologies of artists stand as a particular framework with which to re-categorise and re-interpret an art history for Vietnam.

## BIOGRAPHIES

**Zoe Butt** is a curator and writer based in Vietnam. Currently Artistic Director of the Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, she formerly served as Executive Director and Curator of Sàn Art, both in Ho Chi Minh City. Her curatorial projects include interdisciplinary platforms such as *Conscious Realities*; the online exhibition *Embedded South(s)*; and group exhibitions of Vietnamese and international artists at various venues locally and abroad. Butt is a member of the Asian Art Council for the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York and a Young Global Leader of the World Economic Forum since 2015. In 2019, she presents *Journey Beyond the Arrow*, one of three exhibitions, as part of the 14th Sharjah Biennial.

**Bill Nguyễn** is an artist-curator interested in developing an alternative, locally-driven method and platform for curation in Vietnam. After graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the School of Art and Design, Nottingham Trent University (UK), Nguyễn returned to Hanoi, re-entering the scene through multiple trajectories in the art community: engaging as an artist, curator and educator. In 2012 he co-founded Manzi Art Space, and started collaborating with Nhà Sàn Collective as guest curator. Nguyễn is an alumnus of the 8th Berlin Biennial Young Curators Workshop and a participant of the CuratorsLAB, and is currently curatorial assistant at The Factory.

**Lê Thiên Bảo** is a self-taught curator, who moved from Communications into the Fine Arts to pursue her curatorial passions. From 2010–15, she focused on observing and developing her own artistic approach in a diverse community of local artists, concentrating her attention on the role of the artist as well as the investment in art in today's society. Since April 2016, she has become Curatorial Assistant at The Factory and been actively involved in arts projects and critical discussions. Some of her recent curatorial projects include *Chain* (2017), a solo exhibition by Lê Hoàng Bích Phượng, The Factory, Ho Chi Minh City; co-curator of *I, Me, Mine* (2017) with Saigon Artbook 7 publication, a group exhibition of five artists, The Factory, Ho Chi Minh City.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> This article was commissioned for the Spirit of Friendship exhibition, which was organised by, and held at, The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, from 29 Sept. to 26 Nov. 2017. For more on The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, see [www.factoryartscentre.com](http://www.factoryartscentre.com).

This text was first published as part of the Resource library of the Spirit of Friendship online platform, an ongoing programme and research website initiated in 2017 by The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, at [www.spiritoffriendship.org](http://www.spiritoffriendship.org). The text has since been edited by the editorial collective of *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*. Its authors submitted the text for publication in order to reach a wider international audience, and also in the interests of posterity, so that this text and the materials it refers to may be more readily available as a resource for further research in future. Diacritics have been used for names of people only. Should you have any enquiry regarding this project and its research or activities, please contact: [info@factoryartscentre.com](mailto:info@factoryartscentre.com).

We refer to “artist groups”, as opposed to “collectives”, as we recognise that many artists who gathered to work together in Vietnam (particularly in the 1980s and 1990s) did not label themselves with a specific name, mission or vocalised purpose. Rather, we chose to acknowledge how friendship was what brought about a furthering of testing and encouraging ideas. Where possible, in this curatorial text we will indicate how an artist group came to be given an actual name.

- <sup>2</sup> This group of artists—Hong Việt Dũng (b. 1961), Phạm Quang Vinh (b. 1960), Đặng Xuân Hoà (b. 1959), Hà Trí Hiếu (b. 1959) and Trần Lương (b. 1960)—came to be known as the Gang of Five, named by supporters (and friends) Dương Tường, Thái Bá Vân and Nguyễn Quân who encouraged their practice at that time. From e-mail conversation between Lê Thuận Uyên, a researcher of Gang of Five, and Zoe Butt, July 2017.
- <sup>3</sup> The use of the word “independent” in this endeavour refers to artists who sought to challenge their ideas and concepts beyond the national educational curriculum: an inherited interpretation of the “plastic arts” from the French colonial era (1887–1954) that was then fortified as an ideological vehicle (which continues to prevail today), with the establishment of the entire country as a communist state in 1975. Nora A. Taylor comments on the colonial education system of Vietnam:

The EBAI [Ecole des Beaux-Arts de l’Indochine] officially opened in 1925 ... [This institution] had helped to base France’s presence in Indochina not only on economic and administrative authority but on educational and cultural interest. Through [this institution], France convinced itself that it cared for the education of the local Indochinese and for the preservation of the cultural heritage of

ancient Indochina. At the time of the EBAT's inauguration, the policy that the colonial administration adopted toward the school fell along those lines and was known as the policy of association. In spite of some reluctance on the part of more conservative colonial officials, the administration believed that in building an art school it would help local "artisans" become educated in the "fine arts"... The school curriculum followed that of l'École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts, founded in Paris in 1873, and included classes in anatomy, composition, life drawing, and art history. The course load was rigorous, with classes being conducted over the course of a forty-hour week ... The choice of subjects varied depending on the interest of both the students and the teachers, but predominant themes included peasant women, farmers at work, village temples, and rice fields.

See Taylor, Chapter 2, "Orientalists or Occidentalists? 'Indochinese' Artists under Colonialism" in *Painters in Hanoi. An Ethnography of Vietnamese Art* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), pp. 27–9.

- <sup>4</sup> Interview between Trần Lương and Zoe Butt, June 2017.
- <sup>5</sup> On 27 Apr. 1954, the Geneva Agreement was signed, with the French relinquishing any claim to territory in the Indochina peninsula. Vietnam was divided into northern and southern zones into which opposing forces were to withdraw. Elections in 1956 were supposed to take place to unify the country; however, this never occurred, with the divide between north and south instead exacerbating ideological tensions and ultimately giving way to civil strife that became internationally known as the Vietnam War. Within Vietnam, it is referred to as the American War.
- <sup>6</sup> With the closing of World War II and the weakening power of France in Indochina, Hồ Chí Minh's Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN) seized power in North Vietnam in 1945. With his Viet Minh army (formally known as the Vietnam Independence League: a coalition of communist and Vietnamese nationalists), a socialist society was thus adopted. South Vietnam remained under French control.
- <sup>7</sup> "Rarely were the works of artists who fled to the South ... selected and hung, particularly during the second Indochina war. The history, as well as the art history is written for the 'just cause'." See Bội Trần Huỳnh-Beattie, Chapter 3, "Vietnamese Socialist Realism: The Arts of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (The North) 1945–1975" in "Vietnamese Aesthetics 1925 Onwards", unpublished PhD thesis, (Sydney: University of Sydney, 2005), p. 175.
- <sup>8</sup> "... artist-lecturers were removed from teaching and detained in camps for two or three years. Upon release, many found it difficult to recommence creative

activities ...” See Bội Trần Huynh-Beattie, Chapter 5, “The Construction and De-Construction of Vietnamese Aesthetics of the Post-War Period 1975–1990” in “Vietnamese Aesthetics 1925 Onwards” unpublished thesis (Sydney: University of Sydney, 2005), pp. 274–6.

- <sup>9</sup> The Group of 10 comprised: Nguyễn Trung (b. 1940), Ca Lê Thắng (b. 1949), Đào Minh Tri (b. 1950), Nguyễn Tấn Cường (b. 1953), Nguyễn Thanh Bình (b. 1954), Hứa Thanh Bình (b. 1957), Nguyễn Trung Tín (b. 1956), Đỗ Hoàng Tường (b. 1960), Trần Văn Thảo (b. 1961) and Vũ Hà Nam (b. 1962).

- <sup>10</sup> ... when the country faced economic crisis, at the 6th Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party in December 1986 the Vietnamese government launched a bold new policy of social, economic and political reform under the rubric of *doi moi* (“renovation”), aimed at transforming the old command economy into a market-based one. Since that time free enterprise has been encouraged and foreign investment and dollar-spending tourists welcomed ...

See Tim Doling, “Arts Management Curriculum Development: A Case Study of Viet Nam in a Market Economy”, *Asia Pacific Journal of Arts and Cultural Management* 1, 1 (Dec. 2003), University of South Australia International Graduate School of Management, p. 35.

- <sup>11</sup> Nguyễn Trinh Thi, “Discourse on the Moving Image in Vietnam in the 21st Century”, in *Moving on Asia*, ed. Jinsuk Suh (Seoul: Alternative Space Loop, 2013), pp. 414–9.
- <sup>12</sup> Hoa Nguyễn (co-founder of HanoiLink) recalls acquiring her first digital device in 2002—the Panasonic Lumix F150 (2.0 megapixel)—with such machinery being a particularly important (and affordable) tool for experimental artists in Hanoi at that time. Conversation between Hoa Nguyễn and Bill Nguyễn, July 2017.
- <sup>13</sup> HanoiLink was established in 2006 with Hoa Nguyễn, Nguyễn Hoài Văn, Nguyễn Trần Nam, Trương Thiện and Nguyễn Ban Ga as its core members.
- <sup>14</sup> In 1997, Internet access was enabled in Vietnam (as comparison, it arrived in Japan in 1984), an era when Chinese contemporary artists were particularly gaining international attention (Harold Szeeman curating 20 Chinese artists in his 48th Venice Biennale in 1999—one of the first curators to give art of contemporary Asia such prominence). The engagement of conceptual ideas of chance, exploration of existential questions of mortality through material, and the usage of the body as site of resistance (of reference to the work of artists Xu Bing and Zhang Huan and in turn their looking towards the art movements of Fluxus and Dadaism through such work as Joseph Beuys and Marcel Duchamp) deserves more research of its impact on the development of conceptual art practice in Vietnam in the early 2000s.

- <sup>15</sup> Vũ Dân Tân's father Vũ Đình Long was a well-known playwright and translator and, already during his time, the front room of this house had been a popular "hangout" for intellectuals in Hanoi.
- <sup>16</sup> The first official abstraction exhibition was organised at Hong Hac gallery, 20–31 May 1992 (No. 2 Le Duan Street, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City) inside the South East Armed Forces Museum, organised by the Ho Chi Minh City Department of Culture & Information, Ho Chi Minh City Fine Art Association and South East Armed Forces Museum—a conversation largely facilitated by Colonel Phan Oánh, art historian Nguyễn Quân and Group of 10 artist members Ca Lê Thắng and Đào Minh Tri. Interview between artist Nguyễn Trung Tín and Lê Thiên Bảo, July 2017.
- <sup>17</sup> Established in 2006 by artists/*Nom* scholars Trần Trọng Dương, Nguyễn Đức Dũng, Nguyễn Quang Thắng, Phạm Văn Tuấn and Lê Quốc Việt. *Nom* is the system of writing Vietnamese using Chinese characters, which was starting to be replaced by the modern system of romanisation in the early 1900s.
- <sup>18</sup> Established in 1993, Hanoi Triad comprises of Nguyễn Minh Thành, Nguyễn Quang Huy and Nguyễn Văn Cường.
- <sup>19</sup> Interview between Nguyễn Minh Thành and Bill Nguyễn, June 2017.
- <sup>20</sup> These foreign NGO cultural institutes should not be underestimated for their role in furthering experimental concepts of art-making in Vietnam. As foreign government entities, they were able to host activities of a more challenging nature (that is, an "eased" license process with the Vietnamese Ministry of Culture) and thus stand-out initiatives occurred such as the renowned group show Green - Red - Yellow (Goethe Institut Hanoi, 2003), celebrating the works of 16 artists who were said to have marked the transformation of art from modern to contemporary; the series of seminars, workshops and performances in Open Academy (curated by Veronika Radulovic and Andres Schmid, in collaboration with Goethe Institut Hanoi, 2010–11); the first performance art festival Lim Dim (co-organised by the British Council, Goethe Institut Hanoi and Nhà Sàn Studio, 2004–05); and the Performance Art Young Talent Prize (initiated by Cultural Development and Exchange Fund, 2008) to name but a few.
- <sup>21</sup> The term "Viet Kieu" literally means "Vietnamese sojourner" or "overseas Vietnamese" and, in the 1990s, when the term was first in usage, it referred primarily to the Vietnamese community of boat refugees. Today it is a regularly used phrase with differing connotations: from those who lived outside Vietnam before 1975, to those who fled after 1975, and to those who studied/worked abroad and returned. For further information, see <https://www.asialifemagazine.com/vietnam/face-face-viet-kieu/> [accessed Jan. 2018].
- <sup>22</sup> For example, the performance-based artist group Project One by Ly Hoàng Ly, Ngô Thái Uyên, Bùi Công Khánh, Richard Streitmatter-Trần and Nguyễn Phạm Trung Hậu was formed in 2003 as the result of the project "Pushing through

Borders” (initiated by Anida Yoeu Esguerra [now Anida Yoeu Ali] and Ly Hoàng Ly, hosted by the Blue Space Contemporary Art Centre). The group disbanded in 2005.

- <sup>23</sup> The majority of overseas Vietnamese returning to Saigon had been “boat refugees” from South Vietnam, thus it is to the former south that these “Viet Kieu” returned home.
- <sup>24</sup> For further reading see Việt Lê, “Many Returns: Contemporary Vietnamese Diasporic Artists-Organizers in Ho Chi Minh City”, in *Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Art: An Anthology*, ed. Nora A. Taylor and Boreth Ly (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2012), pp. 85–115.
- <sup>25</sup> Originally launched by three artists, “a little blah blah” was directed by Sue Hajdu and Motoko Uda through its most active years.
- <sup>26</sup> Wonderful District was co-founded by Sandrine Llouquet and Bertrand Peret.
- <sup>27</sup> Plum Blossoms Gallery organised the group exhibition *Uncorked Souls* in 1991 in Hong Kong, featuring the work of 15 Vietnamese artists. One of the first international showcases of Vietnamese contemporary art to take place in a non-communist country, it included works by Bùi Xuân Phái, Nguyễn Tư Nghiêm, Lê Công Thành, Phạm Việt Hải, Trần Lưu Hậu, Trịnh Cung, Nguyễn Trung, Hoàng Đăng Nhuận, Đỗ Thị Ninh, Bửu Chi, Nguyễn Quân, Nguyễn Thân, Bùi Suối Hoa, Đặng Xuân Hoà and Trần Trọng Vũ. See Jeffrey Hantover, *Uncorked Souls: Contemporary Art from Vietnam*, exh. cat. (Hong Kong: Plum Blossoms Gallery, 1991), <http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/586406> [accessed Jan. 2018].
- <sup>28</sup> For further information, see the video installation by artist Đinh Q Lê, “Vision in Darkness: Trần Trung Tín” (2015), featuring an interview with Sherry Buchanan.
- <sup>29</sup> See the ongoing series of workshops and group exhibitions for young emerging artists and students organised by Nhà Sàn; and the Sàn Art Laboratory residency programme (2012–16) and Conscious Realities series of talks and other programmes (2013–16) organised by Sàn Art.
- <sup>30</sup> In 1992, Nguyễn Tấn Cương designed the catalogue cover for the third Recent Works exhibition by the Group of 10 Artists. Since then, the community called them Group of 10 and they took it as official name for the group with ten core members: Nguyễn Trung, Ca Lê Thắng, Ngô Đồng (who withdrew from the group in 1993 and was replaced by Đào Minh Tri), Nguyễn Tấn Cương, Nguyễn Thanh Bình, Hứa Thanh Bình, Nguyễn Trung Tín, Đỗ Hoàng Tường, Trần Văn Thảo and Vũ Hà Nam. Other artists known to subsequently exhibit with them were Bùi Suối Hoa, Kim Bạch, Hoàng Minh Hằng, Phan Gia Hương, Quỳnh Hương, Hồ Hữu Thử and Lê Kim Thư.
- <sup>31</sup> Ca Lê Thắng and Đào Minh Tri were part of the Red Seed movement (they were educated in Hanoi before 1975, and appointed to come south post-1975 to teach at the Ho Chi Minh City Fine Art University). In contrast, Nguyễn Thanh Bình,

Nguyễn Trung Tín and Vũ Hà Nam were born in the north, moving to Ho Chi Minh City for living and to complete their studies; while Nguyễn Trung, Nguyễn Tấn Cường, Hứa Thanh Bình, Đỗ Hoàng Tường and Trần Văn Thảo all grew up and studied in the south.

- <sup>32</sup> It is important to remember that, since 1954, the Communist Viet Minh dominated the north, while the south was precariously controlled by French and American backing of Ngô Đình Diệm's Republic of Vietnam. Artistic communities of north and south were thus in little contact in the 21 years before 1975. Additionally, the influence and presence of French and American political ambitions brought economic openness to the south, thus greater employment opportunities. Art historian Bội Trân Huỳnh-Beattie states,

While southern artists put up with losing the war, northern artists, especially in Hanoi, benefited from reunification ... Northern artists appointed to administrate culture in the South, were fascinated by the expressive vitality and variety of southern arts ... These friendships [eg. Ca Lê Thắng, Đào Minh Tri as members of the 'Group of 10'] and the social context of de-colonization of the South influenced art practices.

See Bội Trân Huỳnh-Beattie, Chapter 5, "The Construction and De-construction of Vietnamese Aesthetics of the Post-War Period (1975–1990)", in "Vietnamese Aesthetics 1925 Onwards", unpublished PhD thesis (Sydney: University of Sydney, 2005), pp. 284–7.

- <sup>33</sup> For example, Ca Lê Thắng was appointed Deputy General Secretary of the Ho Chi Minh City Fine Art Association (1988–2000). Interview between Ca Lê Thắng and Lê Thiên Bảo, July 2017.
- <sup>34</sup> See Nguyễn Trung Tín, "Trừu tượng trên đất Sài Gòn" [Abstraction in Saigon], *The Fine Art Information* (Ho Chi Minh City University of Fine Art, Sept. 2010), pp. 17–8.
- <sup>35</sup> Interview between Đỗ Hoàng Tường and Lê Thiên Bảo, June 2017.
- <sup>36</sup> Interview between Natasha Kraevskaia and Zoe Butt, June 2017.
- <sup>37</sup> The name Nhà Sàn (which translates as "stilt house") refers to a group of artists who originated from, and have forged close connections with, Nhà Sàn Studio and Nhà Sàn Collective. Simultaneously, it refers to an actual space for artists to gather, labour and exhibit over the last 20 years at the private home of Nguyễn Mạnh Đức (who, together with Trần Lương, founded Nhà Sàn Studio in 1998 at Buoi Street, Hanoi). In the minds of many, Nhà Sàn Đức is the original name of Nhà Sàn Studio. Continuing the spirit of Nhà Sàn Studio, the young artists associated with it founded Nhà Sàn Collective in 2013, co-run by a community

of Nhà Sàn Collective supporters' including managers, assistants and volunteers. The collective rented a space at Zone 9 (Tran Thanh Tong street), relocated in 2014 to LACA–Ly Quoc Su Art and Culture Area (Ly Quoc Su street) and, since Aug. 2015, has been based at Hanoi Creative City (Luong Yen street), Hà Nội.

- <sup>38</sup> Sàn Art was co-founded in 2007 by artists Đinh Q. Lê, Tuấn Andrew Nguyễn, Tiffany Chung and Phunam. Zoe Butt was Executive Director and Curator from 2009 until 2016.
- <sup>39</sup> Trương Công Tùng's e-mail response with Bill Nguyễn, June 2017.
- <sup>40</sup> For further information see Minglu Gao, "Apartment Art", in *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art*, Minglu Gao (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), pp. 269–310.
- <sup>41</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-jyE0qDPiw> [accessed Dec. 2017].
- <sup>42</sup> See Apinan Poshyananda, ed., *Traditions/Tensions: Contemporary Art in Asia*, exh. cat. (New York, NY: Asia Society Galleries, 2003).
- <sup>43</sup> Sao La was founded in 2014 with the sponsorship of Galerie Quynh; its original core members include artists Tùng Mai and Nguyễn Kim Tổ Lan; later the group extended to include Nguyễn Đức Đạt, Đỗ Thanh Lãng, Đỗ Sỹ Tùng, Đào Duy Tùng, Ngô Đình Bảo Châu and Trần Phương Thảo (Sunny).
- <sup>44</sup> Chaosdowntown was established by Thanh (Nu) Mai and Xuân Hạ in 2016.
- <sup>45</sup> Across Vietnam today, there is no regular print or online magazine, newspaper or journal that caters to critical comparative writing and review on experimental contemporary art in Vietnam. The official *My Thuat* magazine, published bi-monthly by the Vietnam Fine Art Association, covers a limited range of practices with next to no international perspectives on the history of art. Credit should, however, be given to the influential online platform [www.talawas.org](http://www.talawas.org) [published 2001–10, accessed Dec. 2017], which published articles and discussions on the arts, culture and politics of Vietnam, including contributions by well-known Vietnamese and foreign authors, writers, researchers and scholars from inside and outside the country. Credit is also due to [www soi.today](http://www soi.today) [published 2010–17, accessed Dec. 2017], who attempted to translate select foreign materials and provide some critical reviews of local artistic practice.
- <sup>46</sup> See the British Council's commissioned reports from 2014 to 2017 on the creative industry of Vietnam: <https://www.britishcouncil.vn/en/arts/resources> [accessed Dec. 2017].
- <sup>47</sup> Vietnam is yet to possess a museum with purview to critically collect the diversity of Vietnamese contemporary art.
- <sup>48</sup> The Propeller Group was established in 2006 by Phunam, Matt Lucero and Tuấn Andrew Nguyễn.

## REFERENCES

- British Council. Commissioned reports from 2014 to 2017 on the creative industry of Vietnam. <https://www.britishcouncil.vn/en/arts/resources> [accessed Dec. 2017].
- Doling, Tim. "Arts Management Curriculum Development: A Case Study of Viet Nam in a Market Economy". *Asia Pacific Journal of Arts and Cultural Management* 1, 1 (Dec. 2003): 35–41. Adelaide: University of South Australia International Graduate School of Management.
- Duara, Prasenjit, David Teh, Nalini Malani, Chitra Ganesh, Inrasara, Walter Benjamin, Andreas Huyssen, Michel Foucault and Claude Lévi-Strauss. In *Conscious Realities—Reader 1*, ed. Zoe Butt (Ho Chi Minh City: Sàn Art and Hoa Sen University Press, 2016).
- Ferrian, Elijah. "Face to Face with Viet Kieu", *AsiaLife* (Mar. 2017). <https://www.asialifemagazine.com/vietnam/face-face-viet-kieu/> [accessed Dec. 2017].
- Gao, Minglu. "Apartment Art". In *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011.
- Hantover, Jeffrey. "Uncorked Soul: Contemporary Art from Vietnam", accompanied an exhibition held at Plum Blossoms in Hong Kong, 1991. <http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/586406> [accessed Dec. 2017].
- Huynh-Beattie, Bội Trân. "Vietnamese Aesthetics 1925 Onwards", unpublished PhD thesis. Sydney: University of Sydney, 2005.
- Nguyễn Trinh Thi. "Discourse on the Moving Image in Vietnam in the 21st Century". In *Moving on Asia*, ed. Jinsuk Suh. Seoul: Alternative Space Loop, 2013.
- Nguyễn Trung Tín. "Trừu tượng trên đất Sài Gòn" [Abstraction in Saigon], *The Fine Art Information* (Sept. 2010). Ho Chi Minh City: Ho Chi Minh City University of Fine Art, pp. 31–2.
- Poshyananda, Apinan, ed. *Traditions/Tensions: Contemporary Art in Asia*, exh. cat. New York, NY: Asia Society Galleries, 2003.
- Taylor, Nora A. *Painters in Hanoi: An Ethnography of Vietnamese Art*. Singapore: NUS Press, 2009.
- Việt Lê. "Many Returns: Contemporary Vietnamese Diasporic Artists-Organizers in Ho Chi Minh City". In *Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Art: An Anthology*, ed. Nora A. Taylor and Boreth Ly. Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2012.

---

*From  
a History  
of Exhibitions  
Towards  
a Future of  
Exhibition-Making:  
China and  
Southeast  
Asia*

---

---

*The Burden (?)  
of Artistic Visibility  
in Vietnam Today:  
The Dilemma  
in Measuring  
Artistic and  
Curatorial Success,  
by an “Exhibition”  
History  
Zoe Butt*

---



Ta Minh Đức, *Evenfall*, 2019.

Visiting the Ho Chi Minh City Fine Arts University is like walking into a dilapidated and forgotten cemetery. The rituals of its departments remain—the students attending class, the teachers diligently attending their meetings—but the purpose of the rituals are lost (classrooms have no teachers, teachers fail to institute critical curricula). These departments have become mere tombs that have lost their family, memories lost in an unfortunate tide of indifference. This university has become a re-purposed gravesite for the Communist State to demonstrate its disregard, for that's the thorn in its side, it seems—Culture—its activators today can want to re-visit the past in order to move forward. Alas, this country's troubled socialist economy can't afford such a critical gaze, for there are too many ghosts vying for justice, too much apathy depended upon to feed the country's hoodwinked materialistic gaze. No, this state wants its robots (its people) to flood the market with formulae, to march onwards, and thus Vietnam is dangerously becoming the treasure trove of all things successfully mass produced. Sadly too many artists here graduate with the “repeat” button (artists who repeat the motif of what sold, or at times the successful motif of others) as the green light of success—and thus

there are so many copycats that the State is now in fear of its people infringing on copyright to the point that students can no longer enter their Fine Arts Museum to sketch what is (moulding and) on view. This described context is relevant as I've arrived to meet with a senior lecturer in the Drawing Department upon the advice of a colleague who says he has hidden gems. Ever eager to find more local talent I've come to his "studio" (aka his office). What I'm shown however is rather typical of the popular tourist shops on the main streets of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City—images of traditional architecture with street vendors in conical hats; women in classical ao dai lounging seductively under a window—I nearly give up if not for a set of drawings at the very back of a cupboard that peek out at me, that he is very reluctant to share. I prod and cajole—just a look . . . please?—and with a glance of near shame they are unearthed and lo! Their line work was loose, their abstraction of human feature intriguing! Now this reticence to share may sound like a standard experience for any curator visiting a young artist's studio; however this is a senior lecturer whose sense of pride insisted these were just sketches, not "art," gesturing proudly towards his mastering of the painterly national stereotype. I departed with a familiar disappointment in realizing that as a curator, I had no ability to sway a man who believed his skill to be something other than what he thought. But this now requires a bit of contextual background. For surely you might say—why not?

In order to answer this question, let's take a look at what typically motivates an artist (and thus in turn, the curator) when it comes to the fruits of their labor.

In a well tended cemetery there are caretakers and gardeners, there may be a mortuary and priest (and a catalog that plots which grave belongs to whom), there may be a plot of land dedicated to a particular family (whose descendants attend to the upkeep of their graves), there may be a plot of land dedicated as memorial to a particular tragic event (which prompts annual remembrance by way of public gathering each year). These are visible public moments and monuments with symbolic and ritualized collective value and respect—memorials of destination, the final resting place for the mortal remains of a lifetime of achievement, often with/in memory of their commitment to a cause.

Cemeteries may be rather a morbid comparison to the systematization of art, however in Vietnam I find it a pertinent (yet a sad)

analogy for, just as cemeteries are at times visibly overlooked (unkempt or evicted), similarly the cultural bodies of Vietnam—its artists, their art, their galleries, writers, critics, museums and libraries—are denied visible cultural respect. Such "bodies" (alive or dead) possess the desire to speak and to act, to provoke experimentation, which smacks of a critical individuality that raises the alarm bells of the Vietnamese Ministry of Culture—this Ministry's lack of understanding and regard for contemporary art a product of ideological fear, suffering a clergy of administrators who care naught for the history or livelihood of art and its authors, considering their job more surveillance than innovative development (and perhaps the savior to this death malady is the art market, for without it, ironically, I do fear that we would have no "visible" artists to speak of, for yes of course, this Ministry does understand the neoliberal motivation of money, but I'm sorry, pardon? you are prioritizing your story behind your art? You don't care about profit? Ah so there must be something that you are saying that we must monitor . . .).

So . . . to answer that aforementioned question . . . why is it a challenge for an artist in Vietnam to think and work beyond the visible given? It is precisely *because* we have so little tended infrastructure to beg an artist to reconsider their path. Our museum collections are rotting, their spaces largely for hire; our universities grossly under-funded and without expertise; our Ministry of Culture in bureaucratic ignorance and quagmire; our landscape of "gallerists" predominantly hawking the power of exoticism in tourism and making unregulated millions (and that's not hard with the Vietnamese dong).

In a society with a fear of individuality, that prefers the formula to the deviation, Art sadly becomes art (decoration)—thus losing its family, its historical lineage, its disciplinary memory, its cultural valency. Now this may again appear/sound all rather glib—but actually this is where the point of this essay gets rather interesting, for if we consider the world of the visible in the sphere of "Art" (the above-ground ritual to continue the mortuary metaphor)—particularly the "exhibition" as the historic marker/maker of an artist and curator's international success—I think it is crucial to ask about what we cannot see (what is "underground," private, not publicized, catering for a very particular niche community) to beg a consideration of how this hidden landscape motivates, and thus re-defines, artistic and curatorial production, hence contributing to the construction of society for the individual.<sup>1</sup>

The growth and development of contemporary art in Vietnam has depended upon independent collective activity, the majority of this without accessible public identity, and thus to chart exhibition making as *the* barometer of that collective activity is to deny the labor behind countless gatherings offline and out of sight that have had crucial impact on an artist and curator's ability to commit to their practice. For example, the staging of a solo show for three days in a soon-to-be-demolished house;<sup>2</sup> the staging of protest in a remote monastery for the clandestine honoring of books of history;<sup>3</sup> the performance of protest in the wearing of fish masks in defiance of State neglect of the local environment;<sup>4</sup> the group critiques within friendship networks;<sup>5</sup> the "open studios" for private Facebook communities;<sup>6</sup> the "internal" presentations by international guests to select local community of influence.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps all such forms sound typical of much artistic production globally, but here in Vietnam, such activity is deemed potentially illegal due to official sensitivity towards the content under discussion. Thus it is fear of visibility that sets the scales of ambition. Such a statement is not only directed at artists, but also to the hosts of art, its curators, dealers, museum directors, for in Vietnam it is the host who is interrogated and held responsible for potential illegitimate action (not the artist, despite their authorship). This surveillance and oppression quite obviously hinders and marginalizes the growth and relevance of artistic production to a local community.

To better understand the Vietnamese government's attitude towards the visual arts, let's take a look at the literal translation of the

word "exhibition" in the Vietnamese lexicon, which is "triển lãm":

triển—to open, to lay out.

lãm—something close to peruse, to look fully, to watch.

triển lãm—also invariably means to dominate, to occupy or have something in its totality.<sup>8</sup>

What strikes me with this definition is the conjunction of these two words as domination and totality—concepts of command (almost militaristic in tone) that when in the hands of the people, without the governance and dictation of the State, is thus perceived as a threat to the ruling order—and it must be reminded that the Ministry of Culture is a descendant of the Ministry of Propaganda in Vietnam. Such politicization of the "exhibition" somewhat resonates with Christophe Cherix's statement that "Exhibitions are the primary site of exchange in the political economy of art, where signification is constructed, maintained, and occasionally deconstructed. Part spectacle, part socio-historical event, part structuring device, exhibitions – especially exhibitions of contemporary art – establish and administer the cultural meanings of art."<sup>9</sup> Cherix largely defines the presence of the exhibition in the context of Western modernist histories and their infrastructural connections to expertise (the curator, dealer, museum director, critic, collector); and while such networks are instrumental to the historical memory of the "exhibition" according to the Western art historical canon, I am aware that this contextualized definition sits at odds with my

1. "Individuation is not opposed to society, but only develops through it. One does not need a desert island to become an individual, but, on the contrary, an entire city." Jason Read, "The Individuation of The Common," in "The Commons / Undercommons in Art, Education, Work," *TkH, Journal for Performing Arts Theory* 23 (April 2016): 26.
2. In 2017, Saigon artist Phan Anh held a solo show for one week, called *Museum of Mind*, in a dilapidated and soon-to-be-demolished domestic home in District Binh Thanh in Ho Chi Minh City.
3. In 2008, Hanoi artist collective Zenei Gang of Five realized their installation *Book Grave* in a remote Buddhist temple outside of Hanoi, bemoaning Vietnam's fragmented and suspicious relationship with literature.
4. In 2016, Hue artist Tran Tuan distributed pollution masks with a printed stamp of a fish on each, asking artist friends to help distribute them across Vietnam, in provocative protest at the marine-life disaster in 2016, which saw tons of ocean life die, subsequently severely jeopardizing the livelihood of the country's fisher-folk. The

Taiwan-owned steel company Formosa was eventually held responsible.

5. First staged by San Art, as part of San Art Laboratory residency program, and now a regular feature across Saigon's artistic community today.
6. As part of San Art Laboratory, San Art held "Open Studios," a gathering point for established artists to interact with emerging talent to showcase and share their observations and ideas. It was also where local and foreign academia often met; sadly it also came to be an event monitored by the Vietnamese Cultural Police.
7. Much of Saigon's artistic community has grown from these "word-of-mouth" announcements of intimate gatherings of friends who came to listen to international expertise (often visiting town on holidays) who generously (continue to) share their ideas with our eager thirsty locals.
8. With thanks to artist and translator Luong Ngoc Tram, Ho Chi Minh City, 2019.
9. "Christophe Cherix," in Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating* (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2008), 7.

experience in Vietnam and its triển lãm (and dare I say much of South-east Asia particularly). Alternatively, I'm drawn to the writing of Gao Minglu on the receding of Chinese artists from the public eye following the Tiananmen Square massacres in China, who under great political discrimination had to retreat to the confined spaces of their homes to create and share their work. Gao termed this "Apartment Art (gongyu yishu)" or "Proposal Art (fangan yishu)," whereby artists turned to the everyday materials at hand, in the spaces of domesticity, in order to continue their artistic practices. For these artists (think Zhang Huan, Song Dong and Yin Xiuzhen), this was about reconnecting with a social realm: "In this way, their unsellable and unexhibitable works mirror the social environment and constitute a close investigation of society."<sup>10</sup>

In synergy I similarly recall the early pioneering work of Vietnamese artists Tran Luong (*Mao Khe Art Project*, 2001), Truong Tan (*Hidden Beauty*, 2007) and Nguyen Minh Phuoc (*Unhappy Dragon*, 2007), who in the 2000s in Hanoi were working with disenfranchised communities or particular social forms of discrimination, creating artworks deemed at the time beyond marketability (and showing them privately); their sculptures, videos, and installations reflections of the social order at the time, their "art" first becoming known as banned or politically contentious activism. While it is grossly unfair to juxtapose the developmental histories of art of China and Vietnam, for quite simply their artistic communities are so vastly different in scale, ideology, and training, what is stunningly different is that these early stories of resistance to the political and market-driven ends of artistic production in China and Vietnam have moved in quite opposite directions today. While China capitalized on the early-2000s love affair with the West and the ensuing swathe of international survey shows on Chinese contemporary art that followed (a landscape today composed of a competitive and diverse art scene with public and private, local and international investment in the construction of museums and cultural centers, replete with fine art universities with international exchange and dialog and critical awards, possessing a significant global commercial art market—all with its own complexity of official red tape of course). In compari-

son Vietnam's cultural sector is doggedly suspicious of foreign-funded exhibitions/projects/organizations and continues to squander progress with ideological fear and economic woe, stuck in a mental pathology of coloniality, more determined to prevent than to build, to defend rather than lead, instead prioritizing aesthetics as dictated by the consumer class (a rather laughable communism with capitalist characteristics).

So to return to this "burden" of visibility, you might ask why an artist/curator would want to endure such a context? Quite simply, for most they have little choice, but for me, as a privileged invited individual with choice, to endure in tandem (to collaboratively prod, corral, nurture, and listen) in such conditions offers unique learning, every day, a questioning of methodology and terminology for the survival of culture in such a society. I am struck (and thus inspired) by just how many communities across the Global South contend with a similar degree of this reality (Cambodia, Senegal, Nigeria, Malaysia, Ecuador, Iraq, Afghanistan, and so many more), compelled by how little our distributable books surveying the industry of art picture and theoretically engage with their brilliance in surviving today's socio-political upheavals and uneven social values. If I believe in building communities for art (which I do), then I must understand that there can be no uniformity to this artistic production (in just the same way that we cannot expect humanity to operate culturally in the same way). I thus hope, in the future, for an expansion of study of artistic and curatorial careers beyond the notches of curriculum vitae that focus on an exhibition history, award accolades and art-fair participation. What I would like to see, side by side with these achievements (for I acknowledge we must not dismiss the relevance of such accomplishment), is a celebrated awareness of what is not publicly visible in artistic and curatorial labor, to acknowledge in our exhibitions and texts that there is differing pledge in the process of making art when artists are committed to consistent showcase in a prohibitive local community—the negotiations we undertake to gain safe access to subjects and people; the political relationships we must delicately maintain in order to keep our businesses registered; the private mentoring we personally nurture with emerging community; the lobbying we muster towards potential supportive donors; the emotional counseling we take on in order to encourage practice; the business partnerships we enter in the hope of sustainability; the educational access programs we devise in the hope

10. Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art* (London: MIT Press, 2011), 7.

of building criticality . . . and I could go on. Again such a catalog might sound like a given for the culturally serviced and networked part of the world, but here again I must reiterate that undertaking such labor in disenfranchised contexts of political poverty is a teetering between legitimate and illegitimate action, between vague guidelines of official access and social expectation, between personal relationships of trust and obligation.

If there is anything that I have learnt from living this brilliant diversity of a decolonizing society, it is the resilience of cultural and spiritual ritual, of the deep respect for social codes of conduct between the living and the dead, and to that end I do hope that we soon, in Vietnam, possess leaders who understand it is better to live with ghosts culturally reconciled than ghosts multiplying in defiance.



Đỗ Thu Vân, *New Lunar Year 2019 at Thái Bình Hamlet Cemetery in North Vietnam.*

*From a History of Exhibitions Towards a Future of Exhibition-Making:  
China and Southeast Asia*

Editor: Biljana Ciric

Contributions by Zdenka Badovinac, Maggie J. Zheng, Seng Yu Jin,  
Patrick D. Flores, Biljana Ciric, Erin Gleeson, Julia Hartmann,  
Nikita Yingqian Cai, Wei Yu, Wang Ziyun, Nathalie Johnston, Eric Goh,  
Carlos Quijon, Jr., Zoe Butt, Alice Sarmiento, Yuling Zhong, Di Liu

The Editor would like to thank the following individuals for making the project  
happen: Charlotte Huddleston, Vera Mey, Larys Frogier, Billy Tang, Pan Min,  
Nikita Yingqian Cai

Translation: Texts translated from Chinese to English are courtesy of  
*Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*

Intervention in the book by Pratchaya Phinthong with work Line and Fold  
2019

Proofreading: Caren Wilton, Charlotte Huddleston, Steven L. Bridges  
Design: Toby Tam

Co-published by Rockbund Art Museum, Guangdong Times Museum,  
and St Paul St Gallery, AUT.



ST PAUL ST



ISBN number

Published by  
Sternberg Press  
Caroline Schneider  
Karl-Marx-Allee  
78 D-10243 Berlin  
[www.sternberg-press.com](http://www.sternberg-press.com)

***TO BE PRESENT WITH WHAT WE CANNOT SEE: CURATING AS A DIALOGICAL PRACTICE***

**ZOE BUTT**

**PhD by Published Works**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Westminster  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Submitted 1 October 2022

## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping horizontal strokes and a small vertical flourish at the end.

Zoe Butt

## LIST OF CONTENTS

Abstract	4
Acknowledgements	6
Portfolio summary	8
Preface - A contextual window	9
Introduction	12
Chapters:	
1. Sustaining contemporary artistic practice – The significance of independent artist-initiatives in Vietnam	22
2. The affective economy of art – Embodying the dialogic	28
3. Where lived experience and local embodied knowledge informs methodology	44
4. Intangible labor – Curatorial praxis as infrastructure building	61
Conclusion - Where does an artwork begin and end?	77
List of Illustrations	84
Bibliography	87
Appendix	
<i>*Please note the appendix is a separate series of files to this document</i>	

## ABSTRACT

This experiential, self-reflexive study of the curatorial advocates the response-ability of curatorial labour in the nurturing of artistic practice, particularly in socio-political restrictive contexts of cultural and educational disenfranchisement. Such advocacy is given context in the portfolio of this PhD by Published Works —consisting of four texts and three curatorial projects — where the struggle of Vietnam’s independent art scene is of study, a fragile community whose resilient friendships have given birth to a tenuous arts infrastructure, historically shaped by its endurance of oppressive ideological realities and its ensuing regulation, surveillance and at times, denial, of artistic visibility.

In my living, working and caring for this community, via my directing of two artist-initiated organizations in Ho Chi Minh City, it examines *how* Vietnamese artists have sustained their commitment to practice amidst conditions of censorship, lack of comparative education and economic support by asking: What is curatorial labour in such affective conditions? How can curatorial strategy benefit from the study of artistic method in such context? Why do such circumstances demand scrutiny of the privileging of the visible within the global systematization of art? What parallel models, to the global exchange ecology of art, can be thus proposed?

This commentary critically responds to such enquiry by exploring my portfolio as a dialogical, situated and relational curatorial practice, facilitating the knowledge within artistic production, building supportive community from its trusted networks, designing the collective individuation of artistic intent. This is where artists and curators interlocate their meaning and purpose, together, towards an artwork being made visible, understanding an artist’s context may possess socio-political paradigms with political repercussion to their artwork’s display. Such ethos is demonstrated via collaborative projects and their associated texts, which sought to alleviate, and give map to, the affective symptoms of such context, illustrating how this community’s bonds of friendship sustain commitment to practice beyond the public eye; of the collective impact of curatorial invitation to artists (near and far) to share their interdisciplinary, intergenerational memory in private spaces of trust; where the mutual

learning of a local embodied knowledge between artists and curators instigates social agency with which artistic communities can thrive and survive.

This PhD by Published Works argues curatorial labour not only be measured by the conventional appraise of a 'final object' for exhibition, but by its capacity to network the intangible capital of its artistic production, nurturing the social transmission of lived historical consciousness on the terms of its makers, towards the creation of a sustainable and responsive arts ecology. Such motivation is given comparative example, from across much of the Global South, where educational systems and cultural infrastructure are similarly mired by political restriction, acknowledging how such border dwelling affords unique opportunity with which to engage, and thus challenge, the hegemonic valuing of art, by **being present with what we cannot see.**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to the artists and curators who dare to experiment with their ideas in landscapes of great political poverty, who continue to find imaginative ways to nurture each other's ideas, to give record to their hidden historical realities.

It is inspired by innumerable thinker – both living and passed – for their interdisciplinary practices evincing inquisitiveness, resilience, determination and belief in the worlding of culture and its imagination, whose knowledge I have eagerly mined, predominantly online, in the great dearth of accessible resource in Vietnam, made all the visceral during a COVID-laced pandemic.

Utmost gratitude, admiration, respect and relief (!) must go to my supervisor May Adadol Ingawanij for her adroit introspection, thoroughness and critical consideration of me as an ever-evolving text and context.

To my father, for his always avid interest in the details of my work, who crucially supported my curatorial journey when too-few thought my career decisions sane, whose belief that a PhD would professionally cement my reputation gave me gumption to complete.

To my Rushdi Anwar, my comrade-in-life, whose careful tolerant engagement of my intellectual remonstrations with this PhD deserves a medal in patience, love and discipline.

To Roger Nelson, for his friendship in parlaying curatorial queries into presence, who slid CREAM at UoW under my nose, insisting I had enough published material as critical contribution to a 'body of knowledge' to achieve this 'PhD by Published Works'.

To Walter Mignolo, for his belief in my work and principles, whose letter of recommendation for my application to undertake this study is a prose I will frame for life.

To Suhanya Raffel, for her giving me my first foray into the curatorial world, a mentorship I treasure in its continuing dance between institutional and independent provocation, for she has engaged my journey ever since.

To Lee Weng Choy for his nurturing of my curatorial practice as a writer, a skill I consider tantamount to the longevity of this profession.

To the artistic community of Vietnam, particularly in Saigon, especially my adopted family, at San Art and The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre – your resilience, strength, intelligence and formidable 'can do' attitude is not only inspiring but humbling – special shout out to Nhung Lê, Arlette Quỳnh-Anh Trần, Trà Bích Nguyễn, Trần Minh Đức, Ngọc Nâu, Bill Nguyễn, Lê Thuận Uyên, Vân Đỗ, Lê Thiên Bảo, Lêna Bùi, Dương Mạnh Hùng, Tuan Andrew Nguyen, Tiffany Chung, Dinh Q Le, Phu Nam Thuc Ha, Matt Lucero and Tia Thuỷ Nguyễn.

To the innumerable artists whom I have had the delight of working to date – *I wish there was room to list you all* - thank you for opening up your worlds to my (rather incessant) queries, you will always be my teacher.

To the participants, hosts, sponsors and supporters of this commentary's portfolio, your foresight, integrity and acknowledgment of my community's needs was crucial and is deserving of greater awareness.

To the myriad curator-kin in my life who continue to guide, cajole, provoke, encourage and collaborate in my commitment to this practice of 'curating', particularly Roger Nelson, Kate Fowle, Renaud Prouch, Omar Kholeif, Erin Gleeson, for their listening to my PhD conundrums.

To the friends dotted across the world, whose ideas and laughter have embraced and sustained my global trotings as soundboards/co-conspirators in helping me keep life balance.

And finally, last but not least to my family, whose tolerant embrace of my nomadic life, at a constant 'distance', has been my bedrock of stability.

## PORTFOLIO SUMMARY

\* = curatorial projects I have conceived

### CHAPTER 1

#### Appendix 1:

Butt, Zoe. "The Collective Development of Contemporary Art in Vietnam: A Critical Struggle to Be Independent." In *After Darkness Comes the Light: Art in the Wake of History*. New York: Asia Society, 2017

### CHAPTER 2

#### Appendix 2a

#### Appendix 2b

\* 'Conscious Realities' (2013-2016)

Lecture, workshop, residency, film program, exhibition program initiated by Zoe Butt, co-curated by Sàn Art and program advisors in collective collaboration with select community; made possible via Prince Claus Fund Network Partnership with Sàn Art (Ho Chi Minh City), in collaboration with 'Trí Việt Institute of International Studies and Exchange' (Ho Chi Minh City); various hosts in Vietnam and abroad  
(This portfolio written by Zoe Butt unless otherwise stated)

### CHAPTER 3

#### Appendix 3:

\* 'Of Hunters and Gatherers', The 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of 'Pollination' (2020-2021)

Mentored residency, artist production and regional collaborative exhibition and public program; organized by The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre (Ho Chi Minh City); co-sponsored by SAM Fund for Arts & Ecology (Jakarta), MALLAM Contemporary Art Museum (Chiang Mai); co-hosted by Selasar Sunaryo Art Space (Bandung), MALLAM Contemporary Art Museum (Chiang Mai), MAELIE (Khon Kaen)

<https://ofhuntersandgatherers.com/>

(This portfolio written in collaboration with LIR and Kittima Chareeprasit)

### CHAPTER 4

#### Appendix 4a:

Butt, Zoe. "Practicing Friendship: Respecting Time as a Curator." In *South East Asia Spaces of the Curatorial*. Edited by Ute Meta Bauer, Brigitte Oetker. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016

#### Appendix 4b:

\* 'Spirit of Friendship' (29 September – 26 November, 2017)

An 'educational display', co-curated by Zoe Butt, Bill Nguyễn and Lê Thiên Bảo; Organized and hosted by The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre (Ho Chi Minh City)

[www.spiritoffriendship.org](http://www.spiritoffriendship.org)

(This portfolio written in collaboration with Bill Nguyễn and Lê Thiên Bảo)

#### Appendix 4c:

Butt, Zoe. Nguyễn, Bill. Lê, Thiên Bảo. "Spirit of Friendship: Artist Groups in Vietnam since 1975." *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia 2*, no. 2 (2018): 145-79

#### Appendix 4d:

1. Butt, Zoe. "The Burden (?) of Artistic Visibility in Vietnam Today: The Dilemma in Measuring Artistic and Curatorial Success by an Exhibition History " In *From a History of Exhibitions Towards a Future of Exhibition-Making : China and Southeast Asia*. Edited by Biljana Ciric. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2020.

## PREFACE

### A window on context

*It is the morning of the opening of Phan Quang's exhibition in Saigon<sup>1</sup> at Sàn Art and the show is fully installed. The bamboo cage is his signature motif, appearing not only in the suite of photographs where classrooms and car showrooms are staged under bamboo 'prison', but also architecturally - with the entire building of Sàn Art encased in a bamboo cage. Typically, we have just received word from the Vietnamese Ministry of Culture that we are only allowed to show one photograph of the 11 submitted. Sàn Art decides to take a risk. We remove the censored photos, placing signs in their stead stating 'Not allowed for exhibition'. We open to a curious public accustomed to political interference, who think nothing of the fact that the image of being caged is prohibited – but the experience of entering one is not. The next day, artist and staff are interrogated by Cultural Police. San Art is fined and its business license nearly revoked because we made public the official (censoring) license of the show. (2011)*

*A group of artists and interdisciplinary thinkers have gathered for a private group critique for an emerging artist at 'Sàn Art Laboratory', our artist-in-residency program. Artist Nguyễn Kim Tố Lan turns up late. She has been under house-arrest and wasn't sure she would be able to attend. The cultural police are suspicious of her involvement in the dissemination of 'fish masks' designed by local artists in Huế, in protest of the recent environmental catastrophe at the negligent hands of Taiwanese/Chinese steel industries whose toxic run-off had caused tons of dead sea-life across Vietnam's vast coastline. Such group critique is always invitation only – comparative critique on a public scale Sàn Art knows draws unwanted official attention; but on this day, the Cultural Police are lured by Tố Lan. They wait for her downstairs. They then ask Sàn Art for the list of foreigners who have attended this private event. (2015)*

*Đạt Vũ is an artist with a candid eye photographically capturing the ritualistic habits of Vietnam – both spiritual and psychological. One image, from 60, is integral for him. It shows a typical Vietnamese countryside, refuse burning in front of a painted propaganda image on a crumbling brick wall. The photo has been shot as if the message of the State is what is burning – cunningly 'framed' as rubbish. This image was deliberately left out of the exhibition's official license request. But Đạt is pleading with me. Just the opening night. Please. It's a small image. As curator/director I acquiesce. The morning after the opening, the Cultural Police turn up, with Public Security officials, demanding to see the business owner of The Factory – not the artist. A new law is in place. The host is responsible for artwork content, not the artist. (2017)*

*I've been invited to attend a student group 'critique' of the Painting department of the Ho Chi Minh City Fine Arts University. Paintings of repetitive imagery are set up on easels around the disheveled room. Landscapes and domestic interiors abound in different sticky texture and hue. I ask a student, whose annotated photographs are*

---

<sup>1</sup> 'Saigon' became 'Ho Chi Minh City' in 1975. Today, the Vietnamese people continue to refer to their city as 'Saigon'. In this commentary, 'Saigon' is used unless referring to legal title.

*strewn across his 'space', why he does not include the photograph as an element in his work. His eyes side-glance his teacher, his head cast down in silence. The teacher neatly moves on without answer. One of my staff whispers 'Students are forbidden from working in any medium other than oil or acrylic'. Teachers emphasize technique over concept. Any artist daring to be critical or experimental with their imagery will not find faculty support. (2019)*

These are just a few of my experiences that inform the portfolio of this 'PhD by Published Works'. They illuminate my directing artist-driven, artist-initiated organizations in Saigon, for living and working the Communist context of Vietnam, as an individual seeking to question reality and experiment with ideas and concepts, is like enduring a never-ending dodge ball game<sup>2</sup>. In Vietnam, to want to make and publicly speak/showcase necessitates strategic thinking at every move for its government arbitrarily violates civil and political rights<sup>3</sup>. In the arts, particular topics are deemed taboo though there is no official guideline – such as the questioning of political governance/policy and State historical narrative (particularly the life of Ho Chi Minh), religion, sexuality, ethnic discrimination and much more. Public gatherings of more than five must be approved by the State, which include such activities as exhibitions, talks, workshops, screenings and performances. Any material to be released to national press must be vetted, while online networks of public debate are closely surveilled, with the visual arts sitting experientially third in line to firstly film and secondly literature, in suffering State scrutiny. Within this monopolized bureaucracy, arts university curricula deem comparative histories as politically sensitive with the government openly acknowledging their tertiary institutions are without 'contemporary' art expertise, where foreign employees are forbidden (requiring official permission to be even guest on site). There are no State or private museums dedicated to acquiring, critically engaging/displaying and disseminating comparative ideas of contemporary art to the general public, while commercial gallerists predominantly attend to

---

<sup>2</sup> This dodge-ball game is informed by my curatorial journey, which is elucidated throughout this commentary.

<sup>3</sup> See 'US Department of State 2020 Country Report on Human Rights Practices in Vietnam', <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/vietnam/>; Thomas A. Bass, *Censorship in Vietnam : Brave New World* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2017), Kindle.; Syme de Leon Manojna Yeluri, Gabriel Fine, Frances Rudgard, and Julie Trébault, *Arresting Art: Repression, Censorship, and Artistic Freedom in Asia* (PEN America's Artists at Risk Connection (ARC), Mekong Cultural Hub (MCH), and Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM- ASIA), 2021).; Nora A. Taylor, "Sedimented Acts: Performing History and Historicizing Performance in Vietnam, Myanmar and Singapore," *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia* 6, no. 1 (2022), <https://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1353/sen.2022.0001>.; Samantha Libby, "The Art of Censorship in Vietnam," *Journal of International Affairs* 65, no. 1 (Fall/Winter, 2011), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24388192>.

the tourist (profit) market, encouraging artists repeat successful (saleable) motif. As a consequence of such disenfranchisement of the arts, the role of the curator is little understood, thus little employed. Collectors are few and the majority prefer what is decorative rather than provocative, where funding support towards nurturing expertise and ambitious experimental artistic production relies on private initiative – to which there is a small, yet significant, growing community. Ultimately, to be publicly critical, comparative, or analytical, is to ignite official suspicion, such insidiousness a near impenetrable prison on the conscience of many Vietnamese who seek reform of their reality. For artists and curators, this incurs a complex web of metaphorical references in the dance between uttering criticism and reflection.

## INTRODUCTION

**To be present with what we cannot see** is a study that examines the nature of curatorial labour in a context where the ability of an artist to produce, and share their work publicly, cannot be assumed. My living and working the ideological context of Vietnam (since 2007) is critical to this commentary's determination of curatorial labour - a vocation little understood in the cultural landscape of Vietnam – a career that has fundamentally sought ways to nurture artistic commitment to practice in the face of educational neglect, nascent and inexperienced arts infrastructure, a lack of financial support and, most insidiously, socio-political surveillance. This commentary's accompanying portfolio of published works embraces four texts and three curatorial projects, realized between 2013 and 2021, during my employ in curatorial/directorial roles with artist-driven initiatives, firstly 'Sàn Art' and 'The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre', both in Saigon.

At the heart of this commentary is the question of curatorial response-ability in enabling historical consciousness as an embodied sensorial knowledge. My prompting of artists in how and why the historical privileging of the visible has eluded the interconnectedness of the tangible and intangible, is informed by Donna Haraway in her 'situated knowing', that we need to 'learn in our bodies... to attach the objective to our theoretical and political scanners in order to name where we are and are not...'<sup>4</sup>. Such approach has been crucial in my easing artistic participation in the globality of the art world's disciplinary exhibitionary complex, which '... has woven itself over the past two centuries through such massive vehicles as international expositions, department stores, and museums'<sup>5</sup>, dominating the determination of how we value artistic and curatorial practice. *My conundrum?* Such visibility is politically compromised for my community, where subjects of artistic narratives are often officially restricted by the State, where artists often employ materials of little symbolic or historical learning; thus, their participation in this globality often entranced with unfair judgement for their assumed naivete.

---

<sup>4</sup> Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 582, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3178066>.

<sup>5</sup> Terry Smith Maria Lind, "Stirring the Smooth Surfaces of the World: The Curatorial and the Translocal," in *Talking Contemporary Curating*, ed. Terry Smith (New York: Independent Curators International, 2015), 326.

‘... to communicate to the world, was a must for the art community in Vietnam’<sup>6</sup>, shares Vietnamese art historian Boitran Huynh Beattie, commenting on post- Đổi Mới<sup>7</sup> Vietnam and its flowering commercial landscape that gave ground for artistic expression beyond propagandized exhibitions of the State. However, the impact of the market (its art fairs and galleries which continue to feed the ‘biennale’ frenzy of art) on not only Vietnam, but a great many artistic community in the Global South, suffering a lack of educational and infrastructural support, has created an overly exotified (or entirely absent) artistic context in the presentation of its contemporary art abroad,<sup>8</sup> whereby the sustainability and competency of its artistic sites of production – the very community that motivates and inspires their artwork’s birthing – remains largely marginalized and overlooked<sup>9</sup>. Such extractivist processes of the international art world is a purchasing that mirrors the accrual of colonial wealth, now capitalistically systematized in our neo-liberalizing global economy, which rarely institutes curating with deep conscience of its organization and claims of representation<sup>10</sup>.

My perspectives arise from first-hand experience. As an Australian of Chinese/British ancestry, whose Chinese family lineage is dotted with the consequences and experiences of political exile and social alienation as refugee, I have been long compelled by the legacy of cultural material in sharing the little-known histories and contexts of those who must choose to flee or fight. As an Art History student, I became quickly frustrated however, at the lack of representation and context of Australia’s multicultural community in its museums and educational curricula. In 2000, I joined the curatorial team of the ‘Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art’ with great zeal and anticipation, this flag-ship event of the Queensland Art

---

<sup>6</sup> Boitran Huynh Beattie, “Vietnamese Aesthetics from 1925 Onwards” (PhD diss, University of Sydney, 2005), 324-25, unpublished.

<sup>7</sup> Đổi Mới (“renovation” or “innovation”) is the name given to the economic reforms initiated in Vietnam in 1986.

<sup>8</sup> See Erin Gleeson, *Mutualism for the Future, Who Cares? 16 Essays on Curating in Asia* (Hong Kong: Parasite, 2010).; Elizabeth Dee, “Context Collapse Is Threatening the Future of Big Art Fairs. Here’s Why We Should Be Very Concerned,” *Artnet*, August 26, 2019, <https://news.artnet.com/opinion/context-collapse-ruining-art-fairs-heres-us-art-business-concerned-1633852>.

<sup>9</sup> See Zoe Butt, “Practicing Friendship: Respecting Time as a Curator,” in *South East Asia Spaces of the Curatorial*, ed. Ute Meta Bauer Brigitte Oetker (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), 209.

<sup>10</sup> Such extractivism given innumerable case study in Tom Holert, *Knowledge Beside Itself : Contemporary Art's Epistemic Politics* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2020).; T. J. Demos, *Beyond the World's End : Arts of Living at the Crossing* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), Kindle.

Gallery (QAG)<sup>11</sup> with international recognition for its historical provocations of what can be defined as ‘contemporary’ art, excited to be a part of an institution whose commitment to the context and expertise of the Asian region was critically lauded.

During seven years of employment, I was given unique opportunity to learn the diverse political context of great bearing on the motivations of innumerable artistic pioneer, undertaking field-work towards major commissions of art with various communities across the Asia-Pacific region (much of which was subsequently acquired by the QAG). I became greatly concerned however, by the lack of depth to context we were permitted to communicate and record our research. Exhibition audiences were given highly filtered context of an artwork’s birthing, while collection records were with debilitating digital word count. I found myself in ethical conflict with the commission and acquisition process, which engaged deeply personal and highly traumatic historically-hidden occurrences, whose showcase was rarely seen by the communities whose context gave birth to such critically important cultural memory. To what extent was I, as a curator, responsible for the writing of History and the circulation of its perspectives? I could not shake the feeling that I was contributing to an Art History that remained colonized by museological systems of categorize, display and collect. This extractivist attitude – a lack of care for our impact on *their* world - is what ultimately prompted my decision to accept the artistic invitation by artists in Saigon, Vietnam (‘San Art’) to assist their dreams in building their own artistic infrastructure<sup>12</sup>.

In my commitment to further the artistic showcase of their community to local and foreign audiences - working with innumerable foreign institution, biennial, university, art fair, gallery across the globe – I became viscerally aware of the impact of such project’s foreign interpretation (and thus valuing) of my adopted local, witnessing how their words, definitions, research methods and display requirements, were rarely seeking local validation

---

<sup>11</sup> In 2006, the Queensland Art Gallery opened an additional new building, inaugurated by the ‘5<sup>th</sup> Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art’. It subsequently changed its institutional name to the ‘Queensland Gallery of Modern Art’.

<sup>12</sup> At the opening of the 5<sup>th</sup> Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art’ (2006), I was invited to co-direct the building of ‘San Art’ in Saigon, an invitation arising from over 2 years of curatorial liaison with artists Dinh Q Le and Tuan Andrew Nguyen in the commissioning of new work for this exhibition. This invitation was not the only one however. The ‘Long March Project’ in Beijing were also eager to have me as their Director of International Programs. I thus lived between Beijing and Saigon from 2007-2009 (committing fully to ‘San Art’, as its Executive Director, from 2009).

(contribution?) and respect. Engaging international networks of display, while struggling with artists in the building of arts infrastructure in the politically compromised sites of their production, continues to greatly re-align my curatorial compass in what matters with my work.

### Curating in the contemporary

So, what does 'curating', today, mean? Maria Lind is particularly instructive in her conversation with Terry Smith, where she states,

'... "Curating" encompasses the technical side of things, and can take different shapes and forms: making an exhibition, commissioning an individual artwork, organizing a screening or seminar series, a workshop etc. But "working curatorially" implies doing these things with a sensibility and urgency as to why they are being done *precisely* this way, *precisely* right now in relation to *this* art and the questions that it raises or proposes. And it is based on an ambition to go beyond the status quo.'<sup>13</sup>

Such technical application of 'curating' informs a nefarious list of popular terms positing curators as 'medium, midwife, DJ, agent, manager, platform provider, self-promoter and scout...'<sup>14</sup>, monikers that are dressed in the assumed business of 'post-production'<sup>15</sup>, arguing what art 'is' in the display of the final object in the *public* sphere. However, the curatorial 'precision' that Lind goes on to refer, which this commentary commits, is anchored in the informal and *private* spaces of artistic production, studying the 'who, what, where, when, why, how' of the collective formulation of artistic intent, gearing towards Irit Rogoff's claim, that curating is an expansion of knowledge-nodes in community. Such practice (ie. the curating of minds and memory in the germination of an artistic work) understands curating as seeking to make a contribution, rather than enact representation, '... not to conclude or to act, but rather to speculate and to draw a new set of relations ...' supporting a realm of the curatorial that does not evince theory, philosophy or history, but rather how these '... arenas could greatly benefit from the modes of assemblage which make up the curatorial at its best, when it is attempting to enact the event of knowledge rather than to illustrate those knowledges'<sup>16</sup>.

---

<sup>13</sup> Maria Lind with Terry Smith, "Stirring the Smooth Surfaces of the World: The Curatorial and the Translocal," in *Talking Contemporary Curating: ICI Perspectives in Curating No. 2*, ed. Terry Smith (New York: Independent Curators International, 2015), 321.

<sup>14</sup> Paul O'Neill, "Introduction," in *Curating Subjects*, ed. Paul O'Neill (London: Open Editions, 2011), 13.

<sup>15</sup> Maria Lind, "Performing the Curatorial: An Introduction," in *Performing the Curatorial: Within and Beyond Art*, ed. Maria Lind (New York: Sternberg Press, 2012), 12.

<sup>16</sup> Irit Rogoff, *The Expanding Field, The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 45.

Again, however, the context of my conundrum looms large. By curatorially investing in knowledge-nodes of artistic relations it is absolutely crucial, as N'Gone Fall explicates while taking part in 'Conscious Realities' (See Appendix 2a.55-58), that such investment gives agency to their desire to be represented on their own terms. But how? It is not that my local community are utterly rendered void in their politically restricted public sphere, but to officially publicize their desire to experiment means to self-censor — or be doctored, monitored and cajoled into compromise.

In knowing how Vietnam's affective economy conjures a crisis in sustaining critical knowledge relations (see Chapter 2), evidenced in the lack of engaged institutional interdisciplinarity typically advocated by the museum, the university, the library, in a social landscape where its local cultural memory is buried or hidden, Irit Rogoff concurs that such absence of disciplinary knowledge systems can offer opportunity for alternate means of artistic learning, but that '... while such absences allow for a flexibility of operating and for the possibility of considerable invention, be it of archives or subjects or methodologies — there is an ongoing demand for an end product that coheres around an exhibition, around the act of revealing and concretizing, and that belies all the loosening that had gone into its curatorial operations.<sup>17</sup>' In addressing this, what she refers as an opportune 'epistemological crisis', she argues curatorial labour can '... rethink the very notion of platform and protocol... to further the shift from representation to investigation.... To rethink the relations between resources and manifestations'<sup>18</sup>.

It is precisely this 'epistemological crisis' that motivates the heart of what makes this curatorial portfolio tick - the realm of the dialogical - in the excavation of integrity in artistic production and its situated knowledges. If artists are affectively hindered in the making and showing of their art, then I believe curators must nurture the intentions and ideas of artists towards strategizing solutions to perceived invisibility (such solution ranging from the installation of an exhibition that is on display for private audience only; the careful narrativization/collage of metaphor and poetry in an artwork's content so as to elude the censors; or the classification of objects as 'documentation' and not 'Art', thus not requiring official license approval). Such curatorial address crucially explores what Glissant refers as 'relation', a process of change in

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 47.

imagination via a generosity in perception, an 'errantry' that is not about aimlessly wandering the world, but a knowing that we *know* why and where we are in the world, a (conceptual or physical) movement that is perhaps motivated by survival, but also a desire to go against expected norms, such '... duality of self-perception (one is citizen or foreigner) has repercussions on one's idea of the Other (one is visitor or visited; one goes or stays, one conquers or is conquered). Thought of the Other cannot escape its own dualism until the time when differences become acknowledged'<sup>19</sup>. Engaging such difference in the context of this commentary necessitates creation of a dialogical space of 'interlocation' and 'collective individuation', following the respective thinking of Mikhail Bakhtin and Gilbert Simondon (See Chapter 2), which is powerfully activated in curatorial design of predominantly private and informal spaces of trust in speech, within listening, in silence, as witness. It is a collective space of learning, of locating one's self in the embodied presence of another, situated in particular place and time. It is a collective realm of engaged invited community, from all manner of human worlds, in the building of trust in imagination that hones artistic argument towards that final representation of an artist's intent – the artwork<sup>20</sup>.

Such curatorial mode of facilitating the relation of artists - reminding my adopted local of their need to recall the immense comparative depth of their historical consciousness - has been crucial in the development of my curatorial practice. It is via my participation in, and critical contribution (as a Western museum-trained curator) towards the production and display of art by my local artistic scene in Saigon, that my internationally networked practice has re-assessed its defaults of what constitutes curatorial labour, compelled by the resilience of artists, in continuing to want to challenge what can be displayed, under such socio-political restriction.

---

<sup>19</sup> Édouard Glissant, and Betsy Wing, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 17. Publisher description <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/description/umich051/97006997.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Whilst it perhaps obvious that artistic practice has greatly contributed to the pedagogical realm of the history of art education (think the influence of 'Black Mountain College' as one of the first liberal arts institutions in the USA; or Rabindrananth Tagore's 'Santiniketan' school in India as the first in Asia to re-assess the impact of colonial structures of education on the arts in the instituting of a practice-based relationship to land and rurality); this commentary however, is anchored in the sphere of the curatorial and the impact artistic method engineers on *its* labor, rather than an exploration of artistic educational disciplinary method per se - though a study of curatorial labor as pedagogical instruction is worthy of further study, particularly from zones of political poverty.

## Art ecology as border thinking

In commenting on the birthing of curating in Southeast Asia (c. 1970s) and the socio-political moments these newly independent economies faced in their striving to articulate the 'nation' (which often instrumentalized the space of the museum), Patrick Flores notes the power of curatorial intervention,

'The issue in the case of curatorial history is that the modes of display constitute the artifice itself, with the curator as site of artistic agency. "Display" or the act of making art visible, therefore, becomes a context, not only because it is the environment within which art makes sense; but also because it enables the social practice of art to be a communicative event, to assume sensible sociality'<sup>21</sup>

It is this nebulous zone of 'sensible sociality' that this commentary specifically addresses, experientially aware that such 'making art visible' to an unknown public in Vietnam, demands particular political strategy and foresight. Flores further notes,

'Curatorial agents emerge within interesting contexts of social unrest arising from tension between citizens and authoritarian regimes, largely a turning away from institutional habits and a moving towards a conception of an alternative creative sphere at the frictive fringes of law and freedom'<sup>22</sup>

It is to this historical phenomenon of curatorial emergence on such 'frictive fringe' that this commentary is anchored, seeking to deepen the purview of what that creative sphere is motivated by, and must undertake, in order to survive. It is a sphere that in its local may be determined alternative (operating with its own value system outside the official governmentality of art), however I would argue their initiatives a parallel ecosystem to the dominant hegemonic systems of the globality of art — *for they continue to seek validity by re-linking to its dominant gaze*. Walter Mignolo speaks of the necessity to 'de-link' from the injustice of the narratives that control our reality (eg. Capitalism, Communism), that we must 're-exist' by finding our own place in our own local histories that have been disavowed, and that then we must 're-link' with the '...legacies one wants to preserve in order to engage in modes of existence with which one wants to engage'<sup>23</sup>. Such decolonial method (See Chapter

---

<sup>21</sup> Patrick D. Flores, *Past Peripheral : Curation in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: NUS Museum, 2008), 25.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 180.

<sup>23</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, "Coloniality Is Far from over, and So Must Be Decoloniality," *Afterall Journal* 43 (2017), <https://www.afterall.org/article/coloniality-is-far-from-over-and-so-must-be-decoloniality>.

3) ‘... focuses on changing the terms of the conversation and not only its content’<sup>24</sup>, thus, the urgency to collectively form art ecologies that are dialogical in recall of their historical consciousness, in order to nurture agency in the crafting of appropriate signs and symbols that dignify such artistic representation.

This follows what Mignolo terms ‘border thinking’, embracing the struggle of dwelling in the presumed margins of the ‘colonial matrix of power’<sup>25</sup>, as the necessary epistemological challenge of hegemony – in my case, the lived wrestle between a perceived ‘lack’ and ‘abundance’; setting up different coordinates of default in cultural comparison that complicate the presumed cause and effect of our current social worlds; towards a redetermination of purpose (and thus labour) in the sharing (and inheritance) of cultural memory and its myriad materiality. But this troubling of ‘default’ as a museum-trained curator, in the context of Art and its insatiable global circulation, is with innumerable pot-hole (ie. such ‘default’ often relegating comparison to what is known, as opposed to unknown; demanding comparative gaze in a direction that satisfies the market, the funder and so on). I wonder how the dwelling of such infrastructural fragility can offer practicable insight (solution?) to the vast differences between facilitating and connecting, an ‘upstairs’ and a ‘downstairs’ (See Chapter 4). For the value systems of aesthetic judgement in the world of Art are still led by the financial infrastructures of the colonial matrix - its museums, universities, benefactors, foundations, collectors, biennales - predominantly holding the trump cards of an artist’s road map to success.

And what is this *success*? This is success built upon such edifice of ecology and its gatekeeping of access to visibility. To be an artist that is extensively exhibited (ie. within art institutions of Western repute), critically discussed in written and spoken form (ie. in English), collected by public collections (ie. museums) is *the* dominant art world’s value assessment of international success; which is in tandem, tethered to an increase in market price (ie. a complex network of vying commercial gallery where local expertise usually always lucks out to the foreign blue-

---

<sup>24</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, "Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing: On (De)Coloniality, Border Thinking and Epistemic Disobedience," *Postcolonial Studies* 14, no. 3 (2011): 275, <https://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2011.613105>.

<sup>25</sup> Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity : Global Futures, Decolonial Options, Latin America Otherwise: Languages, Empires, Nations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 16-17.

chip). For the aforementioned geographies that I am situated and care about the most, such *success*, such *visibility*, is accrued far-far-away from the lived realities of its sites of artistic production.

## Questions

This commentary, via study of my Vietnamese artistic community, thus asks:

- + What is curatorial labour within communities whose histories/beliefs/identities are officially repressed?
- + What lessons can curators learn from studying artistic methodologies within such a context?
- + Why do such circumstances demand scrutiny of the privileging of the visible within the global systemization of Art and its value judgements?
- + What innovations, or parallel models, to the global exchange ecology of Art, can be thus proposed?

Chapter 1 gives insight to the birthing of a contemporary art landscape in Vietnam and the impetus of its independent art scene (ie. operating outside the official regulations of the Vietnamese Ministry of Culture), outlining the advantages and disadvantages of public and private spheres of cultural activity under ideological imprimatur; with reference to David Teh and Patrick Flores amongst others, on how artists (often wearing the hat of curator) have created space for experimental thinking, working with specific artistic strategy: explored via the essay 'The Collective Development of Contemporary Art in Vietnam: A Critical Struggle to be Independent' (See Appendix 1).

Chapter 2 unpacks the impact of socio-political restriction on the production and display of artistic practice as an affective landscape, informed by Sara Ahmed, giving insight to what such context looks and feels like for my community. It outlines an alleviation of symptoms via specific curatorial interactive design of intelligence, following Mikhail Bakhtin and Gilbert Simondon's respective 'dialogical' and 'collective individuation' theories of human subjectivity, where private activities relied on the collective talking and listening and 'inter-locating' of historical consciousness: explored via the international curatorial project 'Conscious Realities' (See Appendix 2, 2a).

Chapter 3 gives outline to the implications/instrumentalization of an artwork's institutionalized interpretative display, what Tom Holert asserts as art's shaping of the 'political economy of knowledge', in comparison to the dialogical excavation of an artist's lived experience, exploring how their methodologies evince what Patrick Flores infers as 'non-knowledge', or what curators LIR (Indonesia) and Kittima Chareeprasit (Thailand) alternatively define as 'local embodied knowledge' – a situated multiplicity of belief, language and memory in particular time and place that challenges hierarchical scientific discipline. Such slippage between perceptions of the real and the fictive/spiritual/folkloric in artistic production is curatorially highlighted as a localized political imagination, its activation a building of effective translocal terminology and intelligence as responsive soft-infrastructure for the arts: explored via 'Pollination' (See Appendix 3).

Chapter 4 highlights the intangible labour of artists, conveyed in their dialogical re-assessment of the communities, histories and objects they collect and care for, impressing the mode of friendship as key resilience that binds and sustains artistic methods, particularly in sites of political poverty. Such ethos is demonstrated in the development of contemporary art in Vietnam, since 1975, challenging the writing of an art history according to an artist's exhibition history, as opposed to the history of artistic exchange in practice, art historically supported by Roger Nelson: explored via the essay 'Practicing Friendship: Respecting Time as a Curator, and the curatorial project and accompanying essay, 'Spirit of Friendship', surveying 22 artist-groups in Vietnam (See Appendix 4a, 4b, 4c). Such responsive curatorial praxis to the limits of artistic visibility in such clime is mapped as not only pivotal to my work, but also my peers in the Global South, who similarly endure socio-political limits in the generative building of a social and cultural ecology for the arts that critically nurtures networked intelligence of artistic methodology: explored via 'The burden (?) of artistic visibility in Vietnam today: The dilemma in measuring artistic and curatorial success by an exhibition history' (See Appendix 4d).

In concluding this commentary, I argue why it is necessary to ask of where an artwork begins and ends in the interest of building transnationally translocal sustainable arts infrastructure that ethically connects and cares for the diversity of its producers and their non-uniform contexts of production, thus challenging the privileging of the visible in the global systematization of Art.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **SUSTAINING CONTEMPORARY ARTISTIC PRACTICE - THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INDEPENDENT ARTIST-INITIATIVES IN VIETNAM**

*(See Appendix 1)*

The ethical deliberation of artistic production and its display has taught me much, learning greatly from the artistic resilience in my midst, inspired by how artists problem-solve the innumerable obstacles that arise in their desire to be aesthetically critical with their social-political historical realities. In Vietnam, I argue this has taken great collective work to ensure ‘the fragmentation of artistic motivations from ideological purpose to commercial output’<sup>26</sup> does not erase individual motivations of what it means to be an artist.

In ‘The Collective Development of Contemporary Art in Vietnam: A Critical Struggle to be Independent’ (See Appendix 1) I outline how, for a small yet significant artistic community in Vietnam, the desire to create in response to lived experience<sup>27</sup> has fueled the artistic determination to build supportive independent arts infrastructure for experimental artistic practice in Vietnam; to which artist-initiated entities ‘Nhà Sàn Đức’ or Nha Sàn Studio, in Hanoi (now known as ‘Nhà Sàn Collective’, established 1998) and ‘Sàn Art’ in Saigon (established 2007) are particularly emblematic with differing approach. I emphasize the term ‘independent’ in this essay, referring to a fragile art scene who understands ‘... any form of experimentation with concepts and mediums (is) deemed an exploration of an independent spirit and thus, above all... deemed counterproductive to the realization of a unified Vietnam.’<sup>28</sup> When I first started researching the Vietnamese art scene in 2004, I was struck by the number of artists who introduced themselves as ‘independent’ artists, their email signatures (and occasionally name cards) proud of such claim. Upon questioning such title, they explained they are experimental artists who seek to explore beyond what is officially taught and touristically marketed. To be ‘independent’ was to embrace the conceptual realm of such mediums as installation, performance, video, or new media (not taught within official

---

<sup>26</sup> Zoe Butt, "The Collective Development of Contemporary Art in Vietnam: A Critical Struggle to Be Independent," in *After Darkness Comes the Light: Art in the Wake of History* (New York: Asia Society, 2017), 66.

<sup>27</sup> Artist/co-founder of Nhà Sàn, Trần Lương shares: ‘After the war, government-subsidized field trips on social care were more or less picnics for lazy artists... (called) ‘field trips’, they were no different from sitting in the artist’s studios, making up the works because ‘reality’ was censored. Almost all works were optimistic and the true breath of life was not reflected in art and culture’. Ibid. 65

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 66

arts educational curricula) with many choosing to discuss topics considered sensitive by the State such as sexuality, religion or revisionist histories, to name but a few.

### **Independence and the private sphere**

Thinking comparably within the region, David Teh refers to the 'autonomous' status of Ruangrupa<sup>29</sup> (an influential artist collective in Jakarta established in 2000, also curators of dOCUMENTA15) as championing the artistic space beyond the confines of local collecting institutions and commercial rubrics<sup>30</sup>. However, within Vietnam, such infrastructure remains nascent, thus to be considered autonomous as an artist (framed in the Vietnamese context as 'independent') is an entirely other kind of politics, which Nora Taylor alludes flourished in '... private homes ... free of the requirements set forth by the government that permitted exhibitions only with the government's authorization'<sup>31</sup>.

The historical site of independent artistic experimentation in Vietnam is predominantly the informal gatherings of makers in residential spaces legally categorized as 'private'. Such gatherings are invitation-only (extended via social media, printed invitation, text message) within like-minded known community, with no announcement of such gathering on official media (ie. organizational website; online or offline news agency, television or radio). In contrast, where public events were/are desired with audiences not known, where official media is utilized/sought for promotional purpose (ie. seeking more than five people on a single premise, whose host is a private citizen or a commercially registered entity), a government license is required whereby all content (textual, visual, artistic) must be detailed in size, design, concept, alongside the activity's purpose, location, schedule, participants, duration and promotion – all of which must be submitted for approval, in Vietnamese, to the Ministry of Culture / Information & Communication. To be public is to be seeking the attention of the masses, and under such rubric, terms such as 'exhibition', 'lecture', 'artwork' are of particular

---

<sup>29</sup> "Ruangrupa," accessed 24 August, 2022, <https://ruangrupa.id/en/>

<sup>30</sup> See David Teh, "Who Cares a Lot? Ruangrupa as Curatorship," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* 30 (2012). See David Teh, *Where Monsoons Meet: Curatorial Currents in Southeast Asia, Afterall: Artist as Curator Symposium* (Central St. Martins, London: <https://www.afterall.org/article/artist-as-curator-symposium-where-monsoons-meet-curatorial-currents-in-southeast-asia-by-d>, 2013).

<sup>31</sup> Pamela N. Corey Nora A. Taylor, "Doi Moi and the Globalization of Vietnamese Art," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 14, no. 1 (2019): 11, <https://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1525/vs.2019.14.1.1>.

scrutiny in the visual arts (such mode deemed sensitive for their ability to spread information that may potentially misrepresent the State to the People). What is most critical to consider in light of this commentary is precisely *how* this understanding of ‘private’ space as site for conceptual artistic experiments in Vietnam – acts organized as ‘independent’ – continues to struggle in its quest to re-assess lived experience.

In ‘The Collective Development of Contemporary Art in Vietnam’ I give window onto this ‘how’, giving outline to the impact of two particular artist-initiatives and their collective strategies in sustaining Vietnam’s artistic community (since the early 2000s) in the face of educational lack and government interference - such independent spirit evident in Nhà Sàn Đức choosing to predominantly nurture the practices of its artist members, keeping a private, flexible, and un-official status of organization in its delivery of local and foreign cultural practice (not registering as a business with the Vietnamese authorities, its activities running on a volunteer basis). Whilst on the other hand, Sàn Art sought to publicly express their desire as Việt Kiều<sup>32</sup>, to connect and deepen their shared historical memory with their Saigonese community in its delivery of also, international comparative cultural practice (thus officially registering their activities with business license and legally employing its staff). These two particular entities demonstrate a commitment to artists in purpose and mission, for building general public appreciation for art under such political surveillance and economic circumstances was not of priority, rather the nurturing of artistic practice and its commitment to self-critical / cultural / historical reflection was of prime concern. The facilitation of such consciousness was achieved by artists supporting artists, individuals stepping in as curators and art infrastructure builders in an attempt to sustain and argue their cultural and social relevance.

### **The artist as curator/infrastructure builder in Southeast Asia**

The phenomenon of the ‘artist -curator’ holds particular historical significance in Southeast Asia for its contribution to the development of a contemporary art across the region, what

---

<sup>32</sup> ‘... at the time this term [Việt Kiều] for overseas Vietnamese had a derogative connotation, implying that they were traitors – was a particularly alienating and awkward social identity...’ See Butt. ‘The Collective Development of Contemporary Art in Vietnam’, 67-68.

David Teh describes as the ‘... professional norm, rather than hybrid exception<sup>33</sup>’. Seminal artist/curators of the 1990s, such as Roberto Chabet in The Philippines; Apinan Poshyananda in Thailand and Jim Supangkat in Indonesia were critical figures in activating/historicizing the characteristics of a ‘contemporary’ art in their locale (indeed, to some extent, that of the region) via curated projects for university/foundation/publishing infrastructures<sup>34</sup>. In Vietnam however, while the artist was similarly responsible for facilitating an awareness of the ‘contemporary’, it was a curatorial mode given capacity not via such official spaces, but rather via singular artists taking on curatorial responsibilities in generating experimental exhibitions within the informal operations and spaces of independent artist initiatives<sup>35</sup>.

How such individuals and initiatives gave capacity to the curatorial mode is of central concern here. In the case of Nhà Sàn Đức, they officially declared their activities as ‘art in process’<sup>36</sup>, as opposed to generators of ‘exhibitions’. While such terminology was a means of deterring government scrutiny, it was not by any means a misnomer - mentoring artistic experiments in the process of production being a core signature of their activities. For example, artist and co-founder of Nhà Sàn Đức, Trần Lương, is well-known for his coaching of artists in the production process of art, encouraging articulation of the conceptual link between idea and material, engaging comparative expertise/example in demonstrating the relevance and impact of site specificity in the staging of contemporary art, whilst encouraging artists in their excavation of local historical memory/ritual/belief – such teaching not present in State arts educational curricula.

---

<sup>33</sup> See Teh. ‘Where Monsoons Meet: Curatorial Currents in Southeast Asia’.

<sup>34</sup> See the Roberto Chabet Archive which holds Chabet’s writings, exhibition notes and personal photographs, since the 1960s, reflecting his influence as artist/lecturer/curator at the University of the Philippines College of Fine Arts: *Roberto Chabet Archive* ([https://aaa.org.hk/en/collections/search/archive/roberto-chabet-archive:Asia Art Archive](https://aaa.org.hk/en/collections/search/archive/roberto-chabet-archive:Asia%20Art%20Archive)).; Asia Society Galleries Apinan Poshyananda, *Contemporary Art in Asia : Traditions, Tensions : India, Indonesia, Philippines, South Korea, Thailand* (New York: Asia Society Galleries, 1996).; Jim Supangkat, *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond* (Jakarta, Indonesia: Indonesia Fine Arts Foundation, 1997).

<sup>35</sup> Artist Trần Lương became well known as the organizer/leader of much of Nhà Sàn Đức’s first decade of exhibition activities (to which his own work formed part); while at Sàn Art each artist-founder curated-in-turn exhibitions of local artists (which did not include the art of the curator). It is worth pointing out that much of Nhà Sàn’s history of exhibitions is without critical written reflection, a direct consequence of artists curating artists (thus their ‘speech’ utilizes the visual as opposed to the textual).

<sup>36</sup> Bui Kim Dinh highlights the Vietnamese Ministry of Culture’s differentiation between the terms ‘exhibition’ and ‘display’, pointing out Nhà Sàn Đức’s claiming of ‘art in process’ as a means of deterring official scrutiny. See Ian Tee, “Conversation with Vietnamese Curator Bui Kim Dinh,” *Art and Market* (Singapore)2020, <https://www.artandmarket.net/dialogues/2020/9/18/conversation-with-vietnamese-curator-bui-kim-dinh>.



#1



#2

Figure 1: Trần Lương (artist/curator, Nhà Sàn Đức) leading an artist workshop at Nhà Sàn Đức, Hanoi. 2009 © Nhà Sàn Collective

Figure 2: Jay Koh (artist/curator, Myanmar) sharing his artistic strategies of 'artist-led participatory process' with artists of the Nhà Sàn Collective community, Hanoi, 2018. © Nhà Sàn Collective

Nhà Sàn's predominantly successful deterring of official attention by laying claim to their work as 'process', lies in stark differentiation to the mandate of Sàn Art, to which I claim its '... organizational stance would have significant impact on its sustainable operations...' <sup>37</sup>. In 'The Collective Development of Contemporary art in Vietnam', I underscore the advantages and disadvantages of Sàn Art's making official (and thus visible) its engagement with foreign ideas and funds, believing the only way to reform government perspectives on what 'contemporary' art can be is by directly engaging their systems <sup>38</sup>, to which I argue 'one key disadvantage being

<sup>37</sup> Butt. 'The Collective Development of Contemporary Art in Vietnam', 69.

<sup>38</sup> Sàn Art insists on not participating in the practice of bribery, a common syndrome across the country when engaging all levels of government. This refusal would also prove difficult in San Art's seeking official approval for various artistic forms of expression not applicable to government systems of the categorization of art.

increased visibility of Sàn Art's programs – our talks, artist critiques, exhibitions, and reading room – becoming targets for the Cultural Police'.<sup>39</sup>



Figure 3: 'Pupils' 2011 by artist Phan Quang. One of 11 of 13 photographs censored for his 'Space/Limit' solo show, Sàn Art, HCMC, 2013. ©Phan Quang

Figure 4: The government permitted the bamboo cage that was built around the internal and external gallery spaces of Sàn Art. Ironically the audience experience of being 'caged' was allowed, but not the representation of its occurrence. © Sàn Art

The socio-political consequences of making the work of artists 'visible' in Vietnam prompted the biggest shift in my understanding of what it means to curate. In departing employ of public state institution, where my labour was consumed by the research, receipt and display of an artwork; to leading artist-driven independent infrastructure in a politically-compromised context with no comparative arts educational curricula, it became crucial to attend to the *nurturing* of artistic practice and its vocation, which in turn compelled my closer study of the purpose, role and agency of the practice of curators as facilitators of such labour.

---

<sup>39</sup> Butt, "The Collective Development of Contemporary Art in Vietnam: A Critical Struggle to Be Independent," in *After Darkness Comes the Light: Art in the Wake of History*, 71.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE AFFECTIVE ECONOMY OF ART — EMBODYING THE DIALOGIC**

*(See Appendix 2a, 2b)*

Living and working in Vietnam has made the struggles artists face in their chosen sites of production particularly apparent, often as consequence of their address of specific histories, or phenomena, that are of great political sensitivity – such as the destructive famine of Northern Vietnam (1944-45) during Japanese occupation (evidenced in the work of Thao Nguyen Phan<sup>40</sup>) and the plight of Vietnamese wives left in the wake of their exodus (Phan Quang<sup>41</sup>); the role and presence of the boat-refugee generation in defining a Vietnamese national identity (Ly Hoang Ly<sup>42</sup>); the state-less, post-war Vietnamese community floating on Cambodia's Tonle Sap (Nguyen Thi Thanh Mai<sup>43</sup>); or the clandestine exploitation of endangered animals for the sake of spiritual reincarnation despite ideological prohibition (Tuan Andrew Nguyen<sup>44</sup>), to name but a few. Such artistic re-assessment requires great courage, which often incurs anxiety, fear, anger, doubt and at times, trauma, in their artistic deliberation of what can be presented as fact or fiction. For the public realm of Vietnam, such art is often self-censored; at worst, resulting in the official display of compromised artworks (and even on occasion consequentially followed by personal prolonged political surveillance by the Cultural Police).

Such disenfranchised socio-political context has deepened my awareness of the habitual ways emotion is embedded in the relationships we assume with power and authority, that such an affected landscape is reliant on the repetitive circulation of potential harm, a fear of personal reprise hinged on the penalties others have faced for their picturing / vocalizing / performing a challenge to the official status quo. Sara Ahmed in her study of emotion speaks of the necessity to understand the 'reading' of 'contact' between object and subject: our attribution of feeling to an object (the 'reading') as dependent on the nature of our encounter (the 'contact') with that object and the impression it leaves of it, and of ourselves. She highlights

---

<sup>40</sup> "Mute Grain," Thao Nguyen Phan, accessed 22 August, 2022, <http://www.thaonguyenphan.com/mute-grain>.

<sup>41</sup> "Re/Cover," Phan Quang, accessed 22 August, 2022, [phanquangartist.com/re-cover/](http://phanquangartist.com/re-cover/).

<sup>42</sup> "Boat Home Boat," Ly Hoang Ly, accessed 22 August, 2022, <http://www.lyhoangly.com/boat-home-boatpublic-art/>.

<sup>43</sup> Nguyen Thi Thanh Mai, "Day by Day," Vietnam Art Archive, accessed 22 August, 2022, <https://vietnamartarchive.vn/artworks/day-by-day-project/>.

<sup>44</sup> "My Ailing Beliefs Can Cure Your Wretched Desires," Tuan Andrew Nguyen, accessed 22 August, 2002, <https://www.tuanandrewnguyen.com/myailingbeliefs>.

the phenomenon of affect as psychologically and cognitively experienced, observed, instructed and not an innate state of being (a child is not born knowing to fear a bear), stating ‘Fear shapes the surfaces of bodies in relation to objects’, that such impressions are ‘dependent on histories that remain alive insofar as they have already left their impressions’<sup>45</sup>. For example, in the opening preface, I share how Đạt Vũ pleaded with me for the inclusion of one of his 60 photographs (see Fig. 5) that was deliberately omitted from the license request for approval, as we were both aware of the sanctity of the propagandist message in this photographed scene.



#5

Figure 5: Đạt Vũ ‘Untitled 39’ from ‘Muted Conversations’ (2016 – ongoing). Inkjet print on paper. Dimensions variable. The message of the propaganda poster in the rear of this photograph reads: ‘Toàn Đảng, toàn dân, toàn quân thi đua lập thành tích chào mừng cuộc bầu cử đại biểu Quốc hội khóa XIV và đại biểu Hội đồng nhân dân các cấp nhiệm kỳ 2016-2020! (The entire Party, people and army are emulating to celebrate the election of deputies to the 14th National Assembly and People’s Councils at all levels for the 2016-2020 term!) © Đạt Vũ

In this image taken in a rural locale, a Communist government poster in social-realist style sits in the rear. Its ideological slogan heralds the union of the people, the Party and its army, in celebrating the ‘election of deputies to the 14<sup>th</sup> National Assembly and People’s Councils’. It is a message found illustrated across the country’s metropole and rural village every five years, rallying the nation to election<sup>46</sup>. To craft a photograph that hints such system is not only burning, but that it is akin to a pile of garbage is a dangerous rebellious message, and my own

<sup>45</sup> Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 8.

<sup>46</sup> The 2021 term uses similar language: ‘Guidelines on propaganda for the election of deputies to the 15th National Assembly and People’s Councils at all levels for the 2021-2026 term’. See <https://tuyengiao.vn/tu-lieu/huong-dan-tuyen-truyen-cuoc-bau-cu-dai-bieu-quoc-hoi-khoa-xv-va-dai-bieu-hoi-dong-nhan-dan-cac-cap-nhiem-ky-131814>

fear in being personally and professionally associated with such attitude arose not only because of my staff's anxieties, but that I understood such ideological ethos as governmentally instrumentalized as a form of social control and that its perpetual circulation infers its political importance (even the roaming community radio on the streets of the country blast such Communist message near daily at this time). Following Ahmed, the 'object' here is not only the artwork, but the poster it inflames; my 'contact' with official online news media particularly insidious for their denigrating crimes against the State by various blogger, law-maker, journalist for their daring to proffer differing perception of government regulation, highlighting the ensuing surveillance their families suffered<sup>47</sup> (thus I was incredibly wary of the impact such showcase would have on the The Factory and its community; indeed the arrival of the Cultural Police with officials from the Department of Public Security, the morning following this exhibitions' opening, alarmingly revealed to me that not only was my Founder being interrogated, but also her husband, a prominent Vietnamese banker, was also consequently under scrutiny). Ahmed refers to such circulation of emotion as an 'affective economy',

'... insofar as psychoanalysis is a theory of the subject as lacking in the present, it offers a theory of emotion as economy, *as involving relationships of difference and displacement without positive value*. That is, emotions work as a form of capital: affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity, but is produced as an effect of its circulation.'<sup>48</sup>

So, what does this affective economy look and feel like within my Vietnamese artistic community? It is a landscape of hesitation with artistic intent, a debilitating subconscious denial (fear?) towards knowledge making - a consequence of not being encouraged to critically explore one's relationship to reality, where fear of the State and its wariness of individual opinion thus wields control via propagandizing social norms.

---

<sup>47</sup> See Vietnam Department of Public Security, "Detention of Blogger 'Mother Mushroom'," 10 October, 2016, accessed 22 August 2022, <https://vietnamnet.vn/bat-tam-giam-blogger-me-nam-333295.html>.; Danh Trọng, "Pham Thi Doan Trang Was Sentenced to 9 Years in Prison," 14 December, 2021, accessed 22 August 2022, <https://tuoitre.vn/ba-pham-thi-doan-trang-bi-tuyen-phat-9-nam-tu-20211214151051676.htm>.

<sup>48</sup> Ahmed, 45.

Such 'affective economy' of the arts in Vietnam is controlled by a complex web of polite and in-direct social discernment. For example, in an artistic landscape with few spaces to experiment, pro-active artists and curators often approach private enterprise for support, and while interest may be gauged, few are willing to sponsor/host anything beyond what is decorative in subject-matter, for fear they may jeopardize their reputation/community relations. If you seek to independently publish (eg. a zine, a personally designed book, a community gazette), increasingly private printers will refuse to accept the job for fear of government fine for printing what is not licensed. As a moving-image maker seeking to shoot a location in a rural or urban locale, a government license must be sought detailing purpose, subject and means of distribution ensuing content; while the prominence of the art market is extolled in State media as the benchmark value of an artistic practice, whereby value is far too often determined by domestic sale price point alone, rather than an artist's message-making. In the popular realm of cultural tourism, if you fly Vietnam Airlines, you will find its in-flight 'Heritage' magazine repetitively celebrating the eternal in its features on Vietnam's natural and cultural wonders<sup>49</sup>; its fashion industry extolling femininity as decorative (ie. passive) via the timelessness of the country's national dress - the áo dài<sup>50</sup>. Questioning how 'heritage' or 'fashion', engages the contemporary from a global comparative perspective is difficult to find (at times controversial<sup>51</sup>) in the cultural and educational realm (eg. 'Fine Art' university departments are licensed as 'technical' institutions, the teaching of comparative history – thus concept – not permitted).

Conversely, this 'affective economy' is wielded by the control of social memory as a fixed, even absent state: evidenced in the eviction of Cham burial sites (left unmarked); the violent impact of famine as a result of Japanese occupation in the 1940s (not taught in educational curricula); the unrecognized population of Vietnamese women who married French/Senegalese soldiers during French occupation (whose children find themselves with descendants in Dakar); the

---

<sup>49</sup> See "Heritage," Vietnam Airlines, accessed 22 August 2022,

<https://heritagevietnamairlines.com/en/publications/>. <https://heritagevietnamairlines.com/en/publications/>

<sup>50</sup> "Ao Dai Week 2022 to Take Place from March 1-8," *The Voice of Vietnam*, 3 March, 2022, accessed 22 August 2022, <http://vwu.vn/tin-chi-tiet/-/chi-tiet/-034-ao-dai-week-034-year-2022-to-take-place-from-march-1-8-45025-4807.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Fashion designer Thuỷ Nguyễn was criticized for her design of an off the shoulder aodai, showcased at a Vietnam Culture Day in Rome in 2015. See "Dolla Merrillies in Conversation with Thuy Nguyen," in *Thuy Nguyen: An Everyday Dream (Forthcoming)*, ed. Zoe Butt Le Thuan Uyen (Ho Chi Minh City: The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, 2022).

lack of written context of artwork in museum display (due to lack of scholarly expertise and permitted comparative study); the absence of magazine or journal of cultural editorial critique (thus rendering invisible experimental art forms that dare to question cultural traditions - a political ploy to limit critical public debate) where publicly-accessible/university library rarely holds comparative text on the humanities (and particularly not in Vietnamese).

I am compelled by the implications of such an affectual landscape on an artist's ability to sustain and speak of a historical consciousness, aware that my own curatorial situatedness within such an oppressed cultural context must dialog (often also whilst self-censoring) with this ideologically governed society whose officials deem the narrativizing effect of an artwork (no matter how ephemeral or abstract) a 'contact' that must be closely monitored for its perceived ability to galvanize social change. Such affective economy posits the 'independent' artist and its supportive community as the Other, a presence to be suspicious of for their potential challenge of State control, thus the surveillance of civilian clothed 'Cultural Police' - the watch-dog of the Ministry of Culture (previously titled the 'Ministry of Propaganda'). For the independent artist, their ensuing fear of the State inculcates social isolation and alienation with their artistic practices – by daring to add collage to the image and memory of their culture, are they automatically considered a pariah of the nation by Vietnamese society at large? To what end can they effectively intervene in the binding of bodies in fear as the mode to which ideas of the nation are wrought?

### **Dialogically re-connecting historical consciousness**

In light of this highly surveilled and affected visible landscape, I conceived the multi-dimensional project 'Conscious Realities' (2013-2016) (See Appendix 2a, 2b) with Sàn Art, which took the discursive format as its *modus operandi*. Knowing that funders require public promotion of sponsored programs, in addition to understanding the Cultural Police would be looking to the Ministry of Culture to confirm our current (thus licensed) activities, a curated series of public *and private* activities were realized - these private undertakings being of particular study in this commentary for they sought artistic proximity with the doubt and fear in how we do things, why we do things, where we do things; engaging the emotively subjective realm in the production of art as a critical site of experimentation in motivation, ideas, attitude and form.

Collaborating with various local organization as hosts - composed of guest lectures, workshops, a residency program, group critiques, a publication, three public exhibitions and an online video-art festival – ‘Conscious Realities’ unpacked Vietnam’s presence in the histories and contexts of the globalizing souths<sup>52</sup>. Taking place in Saigon, inviting key intellectuals and artists of diverse interdisciplinary backgrounds from this previously colonized geography, Sàn Art and select core participants<sup>53</sup> spent time talking, listening and making, undertaking particular reading in preparation for workshop discussions, recording words and concepts in the critical re-assessment of three themes surrounding: 1) the role of mythmaking in art; 2) the impact of the social sciences in historical readings of culture; and 3) the motivations of movement in materiality and peoples across this diverse geography. The space of informal dialog – the university performance theatre, the gallery-cum-seminar room, the residency studio, the lounge-room, the downtown bar, amongst others - were all utilised in a casual atmosphere, with the majority of this discussion taking place privately, working across at least two languages (predominantly Vietnamese and English).

In inviting artists near and far, to share their methodologies, mentally walking the journey of their tussling with concepts, materials, techniques and historical/theoretical concerns, I witnessed how such a dynamic oral space with such guests, in conversation with invited community, can build and activate what Karl-Ernst Jeismann defines as ‘historical consciousness’, ‘... the relationship between our interpretation of the past, understanding of the present and perspectives on the future’ whereby ‘historical consciousness is what we use to create meaning in history’<sup>54</sup>.

---

<sup>52</sup> Within ‘Conscious Realities’, the term ‘globalizing souths’ embraced Latin America, Africa and Asia (though the Middle East and Oceania are also deserving of such study). My phrasing ‘globalizing souths’ is an attempt to embrace the diaspora of peoples hailing from predominantly previously colonized geographies acknowledging the deterritorialization of geo-political divides in today’s era of mass enforced migration; extending Anne Garland Mahler’s thinking ‘... the Global South may productively be considered a direct response to the category of postcoloniality in that it captures both a political collectivity and ideological formulation that arises from lateral solidarities among the world’s multiple Souths and moved beyond the analysis of the operation of power through colonial difference towards networked theories of power within contemporary global capitalism’. See Ann Garland Mahler, "Global South," Oxford Bibliographies, accessed October 25, 2017, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780190221911/obo-9780190221911-0055.xml?rskey=eMzKAW&result=16>.

<sup>53</sup> An annual ‘Open Call’ across Vietnam sought up to 15 participants for ‘Encounter’, a two-year program of guest lectures and workshops as part of ‘Conscious Realities’. Participants hailed from across the country and consisted of not only artists, but social workers, architects, designers, historians, writers and more.

<sup>54</sup> See R. Thorp, "Deconstructing Karlsson, Part 1: Historical Consciousness," *Hist. Encounters Historical Encounters* 4, no. 2 (2017): 2-3,

I am particularly compelled by Klas-Göran Karlsson's reading of Jeismann's work who states 'Through our historical consciousness we gain an insight that we are part of social and cultural communities with historical dimensions and that we have a role to play in these communities' whereby historical consciousness is '... the basis of orientation, sense-making, and identity construction'<sup>55</sup>.

What I learnt from 'Conscious Realities' was the power of artists (not just their artwork) in transmitting such historical consciousness – a lived experience that was emotively attune, anchored to site/s, comparably sensitive to the differing social clime of past and present. In a landscape of little individualized introspection on artistic motivation and purpose, my Vietnamese audiences were in wonder, a consequence of our guests sharing *how* and *why* they work, their power being the contextualized navigation of knowledge on their own terms, respectful of their own communities. Their informal ruminations on their own practices – a deeply personal and often at times, emotional connection to a cultural landscape - was in stark contrast to my institutionalized exhibition experiences of their artworks abroad, to which the curatorial practice of the standard word-restricted art label, curatorial essay, or curatorial tour, seemed to greatly lack the experiential realm of historical context in comparison. Social anthropologist, Alfred Gell, may agree such museum formulae equates to the 'abduction' of an artwork's agency (its social world) via predominant rhetorical explanation of its 'authored' form and concept<sup>56</sup>.

### **The 'dialogic' as curatorial intervention**

Popular mainstream critics today may rightly bemoan the expectations of the artist to 'represent' and 'explain' their work<sup>57</sup>, arguing the creative right for visual intuition, beyond language. I am wary however, of the showmanship behind a great many 'blue-chip' artists

---

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315459207\\_Deconstructing\\_Karlsson\\_Part\\_1\\_Historical\\_Consciousness](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315459207_Deconstructing_Karlsson_Part_1_Historical_Consciousness).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> 'I propose that 'art-like situations' can be discriminated as those in which the material 'index' (the visible, physical, 'thing') permits a particular cognitive operation which I identify as the abduction of agency'. Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency : An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford ; New York: Clarendon Press, 1998), 13.

<sup>57</sup> See Christopher P. Jones, "What Artists Talk About When They Talk About Their Art," *Medium*, August 24, 2019, <https://christopherpjones.medium.com/what-artists-talk-about-when-they-talk-about-their-art-14373a87b452>.

today, whose 'pitch' to commercial gallerists comes glistening with all manner of trend. Conversely, in ruminating on the art world assumptions that it is the duty of the curator to explain (value) the reception of a work of art, I agree with Mark Hutchinson who states:

'The problem with curation is not that it mediates the reception of art (how could the reception of art not be mediated?) but that it so often adopts a position of expertise in a way that implicitly asserts an authority over art. This is the assigned position of curation within the dominant modes of distribution for art: a practice that deals with cultural capital. But it is not the only possibility for curation.... A critically self-aware curation would have to enter into a mutual and dialogical relationship with artists. It might not even be clear that such a practice was curation at all. Such a practice would have to live with doubt and conflict.'<sup>58</sup>

It is my entering into a mutual and critically self-aware curatorial relationship with my artistic community that I advocate for the artist's sincerity and vulnerability in the dialogical transmission of their uncovering of historical consciousness. This is an explorative experiential memory that is spoken, written, with silence, listened to, annotated, rehearsed, performed, narrativized, constantly in a process of translation (both in-person and online), read and re-read and re-phrased: it is a space of testing ideas between curators and artists and other forms of knowledge in the wrestling of individual artistic intention, towards the collation of experience, information, opinion in the conceiving of an art object.

Such theory of the 'dialogical' follows Mikhail Bakhtin and his study of human subjectivity and the unique situatedness of one's perceptions that can only be understood as whole once one's perceptions are understood from another's perspective. He draws distinction between experience, and the reflection of experience, that we must simultaneously assess 'things' and the relations between them - 'We not only interrogate each other, we interlocate each other'<sup>59</sup>. Bakhtin is compelled by the architectonics of perception (the 'ordering of meaning'), which he deems the activity of relations between entities (material and immaterial) and how they are built, perceived and articulated, believing the conceptual whole of a text (or an artwork, for example), must be inclusive of what the artist *does not* render as part of the artwork itself because the interlocation that informs its existence – the 'dialogic' – is a form of labour that has enabled that 'whole', that 'text'. The curation of 'interlocation' proved

---

<sup>58</sup> "Dave Beech Mark Hutchinson," in *Curating Subjects*, ed. Paul O'Neill (London: Open Editions, 2011), 57.

<sup>59</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, Michael Holquist, and Vadim Liapunov, *Art and Answerability : Early Philosophical Essays*, 1st ed., *University of Texas Press Slavic Series*, vol. no 9 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), xxvi.

crucial to the success of ‘Conscious Realities’, inviting a complementary match of passions, expertise and personal experiences in the creation of predominantly private spaces of trust that attempted to dialogically ease the conditions of this invisible affective economy. For example, the one-month residency of ‘Conscious Realities’ artist, Adriana Bustos (see Appendix 2a.73-74), was deliberately timed to coincide with the residency of Vietnamese artist Lại Thị Diệu Hà (who was participating in a parallel program called ‘Sàn Art Laboratory’<sup>60</sup>). Both artists I was aware came from complex personal histories of violence, both queer artists with problematic love-lives (Vietnam not quite tolerant of homosexuality in mainstream society); both with artistic practices rooted in a fascination with scientific evidence (though from opposite spectrums in content). I was particularly aware that Diệu Hà was having a hard time, psychologically, as a single mum, whilst also seeking validity as an independent artist in Hanoi.



#6



#7

Figure 6 and 7: Group critique with Adriana Bustos, participants of Sàn Art Laboratory and select community. Lounge room and studios of ‘Sàn Art Laboratory’, HCMC, 2014. © Sàn Art.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Sàn Art Laboratory’ (2012-2016) was a 6-month artist-in-residency program I co-founded, which focused on artist mentoring towards realization of new work for exhibition, each participant paired with a ‘talking partner’ of relevant expertise to the artist’s subjects of interest (this ‘talking partner’ a member of Sàn Art’s creative local community, online or in person). Offered via Open Call across initially Vietnam, and then Southeast Asia; taking place every 6 months (3 artists for each session), providing accommodation, studio and modest funds for production and living. It came to be dubbed the Mini MA of Vietnam. See here for more information: <https://san-art.org/programs/san-art-laboratory/>

Both Adriana and Diêu Hà were given living quarters and studio in the same buildings in Saigon, and numerous private discussions were arranged between the three of us and in group critique with our local artistic community, where the sharing of their life and method and reason was a central talking point of their past artworks and those currently in motion. Adriana (born 1965) hailing from Cordoba (Argentina), with a background in psychology, detailed drawings launching from the history of colonisation on the gendering of History from the perspective of Latin America; and Diêu Hà (born 1976) hailing from Hanoi, her performative-sculptural art engaging the gendered realm of healing, exploring 'psychodrama' therapy as means of reconciling her past. They openly shared their anxieties, deemed mistakes and consequent traumas (which at times brought tears and visible wariness/doubt, both having endured sexual acts that were not of their own volition, suffering clinical forms of depression as a consequence of judgmental and exploitative social brutality). Adriana's projects explored the repetitive violence of the colonial regime on women in Latin America (turning much of her research into her own kind of cartography); while Diêu Hà was questioning the world of science and the primacy of the digital in deciphering fear on the brain. Though they both came from very differing subject orientations, both were concerned with the way modern science (ethnography for Adriana and the medical sciences for Diêu Hà) continues to govern their societies, particularly sensitive to male understandings of a woman's place in the world; our conversations not only engaging the historical context of such subjects between Argentina and Vietnam, but also engaging the symbolic representation that each area of science relied, and thus controlling its subjects – ie. the cartographic map of the colonial era for Adriana / the scientific x-ray for Diêu Hà.



Figure 8: Adriana Bustos 'Official Territory 2018' from 'Vision Machine' 2019. Acrylic, graphite, silver leaf on canvas. 180 x 180cm. © Adriana Bustos.



#9

Figure 9: Installation view of Lại Thị Diệu Hà in 'Mind, Flesh, Matter: Session 4 – San Art Laboratory'. 13 May – 31 July, 2014, Sàn Art. © Sàn Art

As a consequence of witnessing and participating in their sharing of such vulnerabilities, I was afforded unique introspection of their chosen subjects and methods, not to mention a psychogeographical insight into their intangible cultural contexts. Whilst their ensuing artworks gave but a fraction of visibility to the depth of discussions afforded, what was most valuable to me as a marker of success was a) the ensuing confidence in Diệu Hà towards her artistic practice, b) unique observational data with which to curatorially give meaning and relevance to their respective practice; and c) the friendship that bloomed between Diệu Hà and Adriana - a space of trust and continuing mentorship, which I witnessed between many participants of 'Conscious Realities' and my community.

Such qualities of presence - seeing oneself through the interlocation of another - can inform motivations of not only how and why an artistic practice remains committed to particular subject or form, but also provide an understanding of the terms with which identity is meted through an object's materiality – 'Are you the artist who created this painting? Why do you place this text beside this image?'. In contexts like Vietnam, when authorities ask such question, it is rarely posed out of a desire to learn about art, but rather to place your identity as friend or foe. It is thus incredibly valuable to nurture the dialogical mode of artistic intent so as to nurture confident preparedness in publicizing connection between author and subject/object, particularly in the face of potential governmental coercion/cultural protocol (evident in 'Pollination', see Chapter 3).

### The concept of the 'dialogic' in contemporary art

The concept of the 'dialogic' in contemporary art has been historically argued in firstly survey of the practice of artists, and secondly within institutionalized forms of curating (as opposed to the independent nature of arts practice and infrastructure focused in this commentary) from predominantly two differing perspectives. Firstly, an examination of the shifting role of the artist as authorial power to a figure of collaborative social agency, utilizing the 'dialogic' as artistic *medium* of institutional critique in what is termed a 'socially-engaged' artistic practice, where, as Grant Kester argues '... artists are 'context providers' rather than content providers'<sup>61</sup>; and secondly, the role of the 'dialogic' as the curatorial devising of institutionalized activity/event so as to better educate, inform, diversify visiting public understanding of a displayed/collected work of art as discussed by Scott Marsden<sup>62</sup> and Leanne Unruh<sup>63</sup>.

Much 'socially-engaged' artistic practice arose in the late 1990s<sup>64</sup>, in response to avant-gardist determinations of Art abhorring the instrumentalization of its materiality, a position ironically paving the way for the conceptual reification of the art object to an extent of institutionalized market excess. The elitism of this art world prompted a retaliative, and often collaborative, 'social' turn, in art, the political activism of artists engaging public critique of the hegemony of not only the art market and its nepotistic institutions, but also the larger social structures of power determining civic and labour rights, sovereignty, gender equality, thus empowering an art 'at work', as a space of collective social justice.

---

<sup>61</sup> Grant Kester, "Conversation Pieces: The Role of Dialogue in Socially-Engaged Art," in *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985*, ed. Zoya; Leung Kocur, Simon (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 153.

<sup>62</sup> Scott Marsden, "An Insurgent Curatorial Strategy Using Dialogue and Collaboration to Create Meaning in Public Art Galleries and Museums," *International journal of lifelong education* 2018 (2018): 134-36.

<sup>63</sup> Leanne Unruh, "Dialogical Curating: Towards Aboriginal Self-Representation in Museums," *CURA Curator: The Museum Journal* 58, no. 1 (2015): 77-89.

<sup>64</sup> 'It is tempting to date the rise in visibility of these practices to the early 1990s, when the fall of Communism deprived the Left of the last vestiges of the revolution that had once linked political and aesthetic radicalism'. Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn Collaboration and Its Discontents," *Artforum international* (2006), accessed 22 August 2022, <https://www.artforum.com/print/200602/the-social-turn-collaboration-and-its-discontents-10274>.

While I agree with Kester in his deference to artist's employment of the dialogical that favours the locally responsive as opposed to the universal human condition, whereby '... discourse is not simply a tool to be used to communicate an *a priori* 'content' with other already formed subjects, but is itself intended to model subjectivity... '65, his determination of a socially-engaged 'dialogical' art assumes visible engagement of a public sphere as a critical part of the work of art – indeed this process often conceived as its aesthetic medium.

The context of this commentary however argues the *curatorial* benefits of dialogical practices engaging the process of artistic *production*. This is a non-public space that cares for privacy within select collective community – towards the wrestling of intentionality in artistic practice, learning from relatable knowledge systems in and beyond its community, that contribute to the shape of an artwork's materiality, as it unfolds towards its negotiated showcase. Such dialogic practice is necessary precisely because of how much the public sphere *is denied* to the artist, that it is the often-times *prohibition* of being visible that this artistic community must thus devise and strategize collaborative space with which to critically learn from, and support each other, in order to sustain and commit to their practice (as made particularly evident in 'Spirit of Friendship', see Chapter 4).

### **Collective individuation**

Curating within such milieu demands nurturing the 'becoming' of artists as individuals towards a collective consciousness, a belonging that recognizes their experiences, their knowledge as an inherent interdependent element of their community relation to the world, and that such 'collective individuation' (the necessity to give space to the transformation of the self through its relation to the collective) as Gilbert Simondon infers, is a networked knowing relative to the times in which we live, for it '... is not perception but affectivity which permits a true appreciation of how the relationship between the consciousness and the individual comes about'<sup>66</sup>. Simondon asks that we '... bypass the question of social as a question of form, which

---

<sup>65</sup> Kester, in *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985*. 157.

<sup>66</sup> David Scott, *Gilbert Simondon's Psychic and Collective Individuation : A Critical Introduction and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 66.

is also a question of norms, and consider it as dynamics of energy distribution<sup>67</sup>, that we understand the elements of the world not as fixed singularities, but in disparation - as starting points of relation to other differing relations in infinitum. 'For true change to occur it is less a matter of bodies acting on other bodies than it is a reformulation of matter along the lines of a constellation of information<sup>68</sup>', thus in light of this commentary, such approach empowers the curator to conceive an environment of information that transforms the artist's anxiety in the prohibition of self-expression as a social finality, towards a relation of such control as one of many, thus giving hope (agency) to the seeking of alternate visibilities. The participation of writer/editor/cultural commentator/DJ, N'Tone Edjabe (Douala, now Cape Town), in *Conscious Realities* is particularly instructive in this regard. N'Tone delivered a public lecture and three-day workshop engaging the purpose of his publishing platform 'Chimurenga' and the motivations behind its various editorial initiatives (see Appendix 2a.47-50).

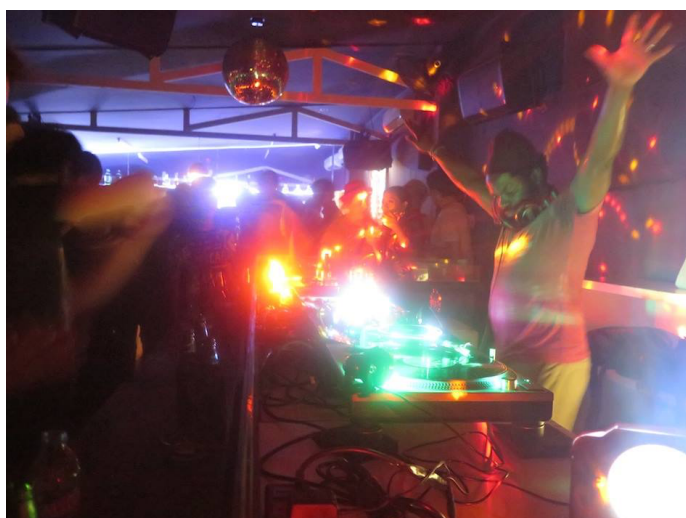
---

<sup>67</sup> Yuk Hui, "Collective Individuation: A New Theoretical Foundation for Social Networks," CCCBLAB Cultural Research and Innovation, last modified 21 June 2011, 2011, accessed 17 August, 2022, <https://lab.cccb.org/en/collective-individuation-a-new-theoretical-foundation-for-social-networks/>.

<sup>68</sup> Andrew Iliadis, "A New Individuation: Deleuze's Simondon Connection," *MediaTropes eJournal* IV, no. 1 (2013): 94, <https://mediatropes.com/index.php/Mediatropes/article/view/20385>.



#10



#11

Figure 10: N'Tone Edjabe ('Encounter: Conscious Realities') delivering 'Diagnosing the Chimurenga Chronic' workshop at Sàn Art, April, 2015. © Sàn Art

Figure 11: N'Tone Edjabe ('Encounter: Conscious Realities') on stage for the official public event, 'The Beats of Africa' at The Observatory, HCMC Port, April, 2015. © Sàn Art

For the workshop N'Tone emphasised his desire for Chimurenga to offer a differing pictorial and textual cartography of an 'Africa' than what Empire's notions of 'exactitude' had created, believing it imperative that the human experiences of emotion, sensation, sensibility, even fear, are treated and considered elements worthy of being 'mapped'. Edouard Glissant and his concepts of opacity and transparency were also engaged - which was overall, a particularly challenging, yet incredibly rewarding experience, for the majority of participants had never studied Glissant, let alone the history of Empire, or any postcolonial or decolonial theory. We tussled between French, English and Vietnamese, as N'Tone anchored his own words in his own experiences, attempting to open up this intimate audience's understanding of the impact of coloniality and the power in collective agency in overturning social and cultural

assumptions. As a group activity, N'Tone asked participants to conceive their own Vietnamese publication to demonstrate their own collective agency towards particular local cause or issue.

There were moments during N'Tone's workshop where tears were shared, frustration burst forth, with great confusion on the part of the participants whose desire to grasp such concepts was not easy as the Vietnamese language is with little expertise in translating such conceptual thinking, an unease that N'Tone reveled for its demonstration of Glissant's insistence on the wonder of 'opacity', to embrace what we don't understand in our own way. These participants had also never before been asked to conceive such a collective task, let alone think individually of their own agency in this regard. What emotionally saved the day was N'Tone's vinyl decks of Pan-African beat, which he played to packed fan-fare, in a downtown port dive-bar in Saigon (See Appendix 2a.48). After a night of dizzying foot-work, dancing the rhythm and struggles of many other colonized landscapes, my Vietnamese audiences came to understand the multiplicity of relations, beyond the world of orality, attune to sensing with their bodies (and not just their minds).

### **CHAPTER THREE**

#### **WHERE LIVED EXPERIENCE AND LOCAL EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE INFORMS METHODOLOGY**

*(See Appendix 2a and 3)*

My curatorial efforts to alleviate the fear, doubt and insecurity in my artistic community took great inspiration from what is physically experienced by artists, rather than what is textually/visually/theoretically evidential, attempting to balance the academic/art industry default in prioritizing the final representation of an artist's ideas (the artwork), to rather give emphasis to the embodied experience of an artwork's physical and conceptual birthing and production via dialogical engagement.

In prioritizing the dialogical realm within 'Conscious Realities', guest artists revealed a self-criticality in their methodologies, honed via study of lived memory, evident in the concepts and strategies they employ. For example Khadim Ali shared how he worked with particular government agents in Bamiyan to secure collaboration with secondary girl's schools (Bamiyan being the only province in Afghanistan at the time supporting education for women) demonstrating the tenacity of artists in engaging hidden/overlooked realities of social impact (see Appendix 2a.71-72); Than Sok went to great length to engage Cambodian immigrants in Saigon however few were willing to put experience to camera, indicative of unreconciled historical trauma between these two neighbouring communities, highlighting the people artists struggle to collaborate in an effort to re-write assumptions (see Appendix 2a.79-80); Trương Công Tùng spent months with inhabitants of Long An's 'Magic Garden', believed to hold healing powers, which he managed to capture, with permission, on film, demonstrating how the materials artist's experiment often require the permission of particular social worlds (see Appendix 2a.91-93); Bùi Công Khánh needed to wait for the spirit of a jackfruit tree to give permission for its wood to be used for his sculpture, revealing the religious/cultural codes that artists adhere to so as to respect particular community (see Appendix 2a.104-105).

The uncovering of such relation via dialogical activities sought not to address our perceived lack of information access to a hierarchical study of textual academic citation, but rather through the situated relation of people whose creative practices are committed to what knowledge may be absent and in need of localized response. As protocol 'Conscious Realities'

asked for time, openness, and reciprocity. This was not about usurping the physical visual representation of artistic ideas into mere prisms of immaterial social-engagement (as Kester extrapolates); this was about working towards a more nuanced and rigorous artistic representation of ideas that can stand up with critical local awareness of its potential impact - a generative process of thinking and making that is historically conscious of the relations between resource and manifestation, and that relaying such consciousness can be a powerful and infective collective experience.

‘Conscious Realities’ exposed disparate artistic resilience engaging varying social worlds beyond the contractable and the regulated world of economic/political transaction. What was ultimately made clear for me is the depth of knowledge afforded in expanding my definition of an artistic practice beyond its displayed objecthood, towards the experiential embrace of its intangible labour, to learn from artist’s networks, which connect, collect and transmit disparate human and non-human knowledge and experience.



#12

Figure 12: Jompet Kuswidananto (‘Prod/Ponder: Conscious Realities’) discussing with Vietnamese artists his research into the ‘ghost’ in mythology, history and contemporary culture, in discussion with Nguyễn Tiến Văn (writer, translator, Vietnam). Sàn Art, HCMC, 2013. © Sàn Art

Taking a historical glance at the impact of curatorial focus on the reception of art as expertise of an object, as opposed to the critical self-awareness that Hutchinson entails as curatorially dialogical between curator and artist, Patrick Flores explores the dilemma of the ‘exhibitionary’ complex via the seminal work of Filipino artist, Roberto Feleo. Feleo’s artistic practice has crossed the international prisms of biennale, museum exhibition and government endorsed shows since the 1990s, Flores reveals how these various sites of display circumvented his identity through concepts of nationhood, contemporaneity and tradition.

He gleans much from the curatorial/art historical writings that exist on Feleo's exhibition history, describing the inclusion of Feleo's 'Shiva Doing The Twist' in the Third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art:

'In acknowledging Feleo's practice, curators almost by default name the work installation. He, however, prefers to call it *tao-tau*, a secondary funerary vessel made in the pre-colonial locale to be later named the Philippines, to reference an animist medium of collective memory...'<sup>69</sup>

While this short vignette can hardly stand in for the extent of Feleo's relation to his culture, what strikes me is how different the history of 'installation' might have been written and categorized in Southeast Asia had the artist been dialogically sought and respected in the determination of his historical memory. In this vein I recall Filipino filmmaker/artist Kidlat Tahimik who was invited to participate in 'Conscious Realities' to share his journey as 'Third Cinema' man, whose study of Economics in America drove him back to The Philippines in search of the images that Hollywood had successfully driven away from his people. After sharing his epic essay films ingrained with the narrative of the slave as the voice who can write History, he deftly delivered a lecture where he wove (performed) the story of his 'duwende', his inner spirit, which he relayed holds him to account for why it is important that we tell our own stories, our own lived experiences, rather than capitulate to the blockbuster formulae of the movie script for lucrative purpose (See Appendix 2a.42-46).



#13

Figure 13: Kidlat Tahimik ('Encounter: Conscious Realities') surprising his audience with a performative response to audience questions during his lecture, hosted by Hoa Sen University, HCMC, 2014. © Sàn Art

<sup>69</sup> Patrick Flores, "The Exhibition Problematic and the Asian Dislocal," in *From a History of Exhibitions Towards a Future of Exhibition-Making : China and Southeast Asia*, ed. Biljana Ciric (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2020), 351.



#14

Figure 14: Khadim Ali ('Prod/Ponder: Conscious Realities') sharing his past and current projects in Afghanistan with Sàn Art's artistic community in the lounge room of 'Sàn Art Laboratory' – an 'artist-in-residence' program, HCMC, 2014. © Sàn Art

I also recall the visit of Afghani artist Khadim Ali for 'Conscious Realities' (see Appendix 2a.71-72), whose people – the Hazara – have been persecuted for millennia due to their ethnicity and Zoroastrian faith. Khadim compelled us with his paintings, embroideries and sculptures containing stories of the god Rustam, espoused as both benevolent but also as victim. In the 'Shahnameh' (the Persian 'Book of Kings'), Rustam champions the people, but today his symbolic image has been usurped and armed by the Taliban, their propaganda claiming Rustam their hero and thus terror has become synonymous with fortitude for the Afghan people.

I wonder what might our art history hold in its linguistic structuring of an imagination if words such as 'duwende' and 'propaganda' could be curatorially inserted/inflected with such lived experience. While particular glossary/anthology has been commissioned/created in the last two decades in an attempt to expand the purview of Art and the discourse of our diverse social worlds – such as L'Internationale's 'Glossary of Common Knowledge'<sup>70</sup>; Roger Nelson's 'Modern Art of Southeast Asia: Introductions from A to Z'<sup>71</sup>; Lee Weng Choy's 'Comparative Contemporaries'<sup>72</sup>; not to mention the numerous artistic projects that have explored the need

<sup>70</sup> *Glossary of Common Knowledge*, <https://www.internationaleonline.org/glossary/> (Ljubljana: Moderna galerija, 2018).

<sup>71</sup> Roger Nelson, *Modern Art of Southeast Asia: Introductions from a to Z* (Singapore: National Gallery Singapore, 2019).

<sup>72</sup> "Comparative Contemporaries - a Web Anthologies Project," Asia Art Archive, accessed 22 August, 2022, <https://aaa.org.hk/en/programmes/programmes/comparative-contemporaries-a-web-anthologies-project>.

to re-determine the words that describe time and peoples, such as Ho Tzu Nyen's 'The Critical Dictionary of South East Asia' (2012-ongoing)<sup>73</sup>; N'Tone Edjabe's 'Chimurenga Chronic' (2002-ongoing)<sup>74</sup>; Erika Tan's 'Repatriating the Object with No Shadow: along, against, within and through' (2013)<sup>75</sup> or DAAR's 'Permanent Temporariness'<sup>76</sup> – my point here being that while such 'documents' are crucial, they sadly too often remain 'objects' without social interpolation.

I think it thus incredibly useful to curatorially attend to the knowledge within zones of artistic production (which embraces the terms with which artists identify their work) as a collective sociality with which to leverage historical consciousness, particularly in politically fragile contexts that lack a competent and critical ecology of art.

### **Knowledge and lived experience**

Tom Holert has written much on contemporary art's '... active role in the shaping of the political economy of knowledge', he asserts the necessity '... to ask in which terms and discursive frameworks contemporary art and artists are implicated, ideologically and materially, in the "production of life" and the "collective brain activity" of the knowledge-based polis'<sup>77</sup>. While much of his thinking circles the impact of 'cognitive capitalism' and its digital infrastructures on artistic valorization of knowledge by users and consumers of art, his predominant focus is that of artists and the 'performativity of artistic research' in an artwork's display, calling for 'a type of critique that effectively addresses the epistemic prowess (or lack thereof) present in specific works and practices'.<sup>78</sup>

While Holert is ultimately concerned with how such knowledge can be prevented from serving hegemonic systems of global knowledge markets in the public sphere, he grants cursory mention of the role and responsiveness of the curator in this prevention, his extrapolation of

---

<sup>73</sup> Ho Tzu Nyen, "Critical Dictionary of South East Asia," 2017 ongoing, accessed 22 August, 2022, <https://cdosea.org>.

<sup>74</sup> "Chimurenga Chronic," Chimurenga, accessed 22 August, 2022, <https://chimurengachronic.co.za/>.

<sup>75</sup> Erika Tan. "Repatriating the Object with No Shadow: Along, against, within and Through", 2013, Accessed 22 August 2022, <https://vimeo.com/85377549>.

<sup>76</sup> *Permanent Temporariness*, ed. Sandi Hilal Alessandro Petti (Stockholm: Art & Theory, Royal Institute of Art, 2018).

<sup>77</sup> Holert, 39.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 27.

'knowledge' (the artistic application and representation of collation and analysis) emphasized as being often instrumentalized by those who commission, host, or purchase.

He makes particular reference to Catherine David's international multiple-venue, touring expose 'Contemporary Arab Representations' (2002-2006), to which 'knowledge' of the Middle East was made accessible via 'representations' which require its images and texts be decoded in order to be made intelligible for the foreign spectator. He goes on to quote curator Pablo Lafuente who states '... there is a gap between what an artist from Cairo is expected to produce and what an artist from Cairo actually produces... (art is) not really a knowledge, in the strong sense of the word, but something closer to fiction that is in conflict with the dominant representation'.<sup>79</sup>

It is indeed this gap between what has been produced and what is displayed that is of concern (but also fascination) to me, having had first-hand experience that what an artist institutionally presents as the representation of their 'research', is barely given just consideration of its limited embrace of the complex material recorded, collected, intuited, made manifest<sup>80</sup>. My concern not only arises in knowing the fallibility of the system of artistic visibility that Holert focuses his predominant study (eg. the compromise placed upon artists by museums, galleries, funders that exploit an artist's need to be made visible by them), but is also triggered by the ethical dilemmas in making artistic 'research' visible in contexts where artworks are conceived with differing versions for local and international audiences, so as to combat government censors. Thus, the representation of an artist's 'knowledge' hedges between the real and the fictive in their dance between legitimate and illegitimate action, to which a critique, were Holert seeking to make one, would find a markedly different 'prowess' in its epistemology, embracing a collage of the mythic and the folkloric within the spiritual and superstitious realms of life.

---

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 236.

<sup>80</sup> 'With the current speed of the global systematization of art, and its palate to collect and showcase the 'global' within museum and biennial platforms, I think it crucial that such systems care about the impact of its tourism on local communities struggling to sustain criticality with their own cultural knowledge'. Butt, "Practicing Friendship: Respecting Time as a Curator," in *South East Asia Spaces of the Curatorial*, 209.

Via the sharings of 'Conscious Realities' artists, this differing prowess was significant; such as Arin Rungjang who divulged folkloric tales of the exploited sugar trade in Thailand, embracing Thai, Greek, Portuguese and Japanese traders since the 15<sup>th</sup> Century (see Appendix 2a.84-86); Chitra Ganesh questioning how we archive absence in an era of surveillance, illegal imprisonment and extra-judicial killings, asking what is the role of the artist in creating counter-archive through comic caricature (see Appendix 2a.38-41); Jompet Kuswidandanto and his reliance on the stories of ghosts as a means of learning residual social traumas today (see Appendix 2a.64-67); or Bùi Công Khánh and his fengshui fortress, sharing discovery of his Chinese roots via concealed Buddhist shrine, hidden from him by his father who feared social persecution (see Appendix 2a.104-105) – here political narrative is embedded within artistic method caring for traditional skill, cultural knowledge and social memory, where the realization of that tangible artwork is hinged on a great many interpretation of intangible folklore, spiritual tradition and anecdote, such 'fiction' being a crucial means of articulating a historical consciousness on their own terms, in their own ways.

Curator Chuz Martinez is instructive in this regard who shares,

'Sustaining... that meaning emerges from fiction implies realizing that it is not philosophy that makes an emancipated viewer possible, but rather an artistic practice that has made an unprecedented effort to understand itself before the figure of the viewer... That is what artistic research consists of, and that is why an institution that wants to think through, rather than from, art, is now inconceivable. The production of space is an art of trust, of future-ness'<sup>81</sup>.

This space of trust is crucial. As is the understanding that 'from' art can we, as curators, truly facilitate an artwork, meaning to address and care for its birthing, its social index, its sites of production. Such care would then acknowledge the obstacles an artist faces in attempting to 'understand itself', that such a process of excavation and access may socially rely on the mode of fiction as relay of truth, for otherwise their art may present personal undue harm.

It is in this vein of creating space for an encounter, or a provocation, with knowledge as lived experience that curatorially prompted my invitation to Kidlat and Khadim (amongst others) to articulate their own cultural memory (which they chose to perform and visualize). Their

---

<sup>81</sup> Chuz Martinez, "Clandestine Happiness: What we mean by Artistic Research?". *index magazine by MACBA* (Autumn, 2019): 13, [https://issuu.com/macba\\_publicacions/docs/01\\_index\\_eng/1](https://issuu.com/macba_publicacions/docs/01_index_eng/1).

tenacity gave wonder to the hardships of cultural alienation and ethnic violence, opening a window for my Vietnamese artist community to contemplate how they can empower their own histories. It was also an incredibly useful set of deliberations (for there were many more) as these invited speakers were somewhat ‘guests’ in their chosen homes (Kidlat Tahimik from Manila now living as adopted member of the Ifugao in Baguio; Khadim Ali an exiled Hazara descendent of Bamiyan, refugee from Quetta, now living in Sydney; N’Tone Edjabe from D’oula now living in Cape Town). This was a particularly pertinent errantry and hospitality to explicate in the context of Vietnam whose cultural attitude towards ‘Việt Kiều’, alongside their derision towards ‘người nước ngoài’ (foreigners), was often a divisive factor in the fabric of Vietnam’s social life. While the distilling of such terms into discriminatory judgement can hardly be remonstrated considering the great lack of public and educational debate permitted in Vietnam’s assessment of their colonially conflicted, war-torn past; what is important to note here is the power of shared artistic reflection in creating space for such dialog from broader cultural diaspora, on their own experiential terms.

The power of such situated knowledge, anchored in the lived understanding of particular space and time, echoes Glissant and his poetics of Relation which ‘... remains forever conjectural and presupposes no ideological stability. It is against the comfortable assurances linked to the supposed excellence of language. A poetics that is latent, open, multilingual in intention, directly in contact with everything possible. Theoretician thought, focused on the basic and fundamental, and allying these with what is true, shies away from these uncertain paths’<sup>82</sup>. My curatorial desire to build trust in this community, to seek those ‘uncertain paths’, to explore the depths of an artist’s situatedness is in order to generate collective learning, to move beyond the prism of nation, race and faith as origin, in order to create a dialogical space that Alfred Gell would recall as an artwork’s ‘index’ – the intangible social worlds of its birthing, to which ‘... is itself seen as the outcome, and/or the instrument of social agency’.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> Glissant, and Wing, 32.

<sup>83</sup> Gell. 15.

Such situated study of historical consciousness via artistic method as curatorial imperative is similarly present in the practice of my peers; such as Erin Gleeson, whose 'Sa Sa Bassac' gallery in Phnom Penh was instrumental in nurturing artistic commitment to practice, creating informal meetings with artist/s in discussion (often in historical sites of trauma), and at times, co-producing artist's works in Cambodia. Similarly, the practice of Jose Roca, whose 'FLORA Ars+Natura' outside of Bogota, Columbia gave social and intellectual capacity to innumerable emerging Latin American artist examining the relationship between art and nature, exploring the realm of the residency as situated space for thinking and making, together, in a rural locale. While the influential work of Christine Tohme as founder and director of Ashkal Alwan in Beirut with her 'Home Works Forum' program has greatly empowered her local artistic community in generating political awareness of local terms for local causes that are informed by an interdisciplinary regional body of cultural expertise via discursive activities embracing the lecture, the performance, the theatre and more<sup>84</sup>. These initiatives are examples of curatorial kindred spirits, where the space of the dialogical was/is sought as a means of building trust and social agency, where the curatorial nurturing of an artist's commitment to their practice seeks their methodology as space of collective instruction.

It is telling that such curatorial practices are also, as am I, greatly responding to compromised political histories in our local, whereby support of culture, particularly experimental voices, remains incredibly fragile. It is also crucial to note that a great amount of this curatorial labour does not focus on the stereotypical valuing of an artist's visibility – the display of their artwork within an 'exhibition' – but rather stirs the mentoring of artists and curators in comparative historical consciousness, from a localized interdisciplinary perspective, as key task. Such mode and exploration is a central commissioning mechanism of the 'Pollination' platform (see Appendix 3), that I initiated and organized with The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre. It collaborates with a rotation of independent art institutions/organizations in Southeast Asia, as funders and hosts, who are similarly invested in nurturing '... artistic practice via curatorial enquiry, with the view that deeper connections between artists and curators enable critical

---

<sup>84</sup> 'Sa Sa Bassac' (operated 2011-2018) and 'FLORA ars+natura' (operated 2013-2019) - sadly, both these entities have respectively closed/currently dormant. 'Ashkal Alwan : The Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts', was founded 1993. See: "Sa Sa Bassac," accessed 24 August, 2022, <http://sasabassac.com/index.htm>.; "Ashkal Alwan," accessed 24 August, 2022, <https://www.ashkalalwan.org/>.

reflection, writing and dialog – a discourse greatly needed as an intra-regional comparable accessible resource’, addressing the uneven understanding of curatorial labour within institutional formats of artwork display in the region<sup>85</sup> (thus their little competent and competitive employment by museum and gallery).

### **The dialogic and translocal relations/connections**

‘Pollination’ is a unique ongoing curatorial model of collaboration within Southeast Asia, which aims to build a more robust working relationship between artist, curator and host, believing such embodied research and dialogical production enables political awareness of regional historical consciousness, engineering localized terminologies of curatorial interpretation and necessary supportive translocal intelligence as infrastructure.

For each edition, ‘Pollination’ connects emerging artists and curators working across two different cities within Southeast Asia in a joint year-long study of a subject in synergy, critically challenging site, choice of material and interpretative outputs (the resulting outcome deliberately left open in form for participants to decide). Each undertaking is mentored by select established regional curators who (virtually) dialogically connect/observe participant travel to each other’s locale, visiting relevant site and community, undertaking innumerable formal and informal, collective and private in-person meetings; while audio-visual documentation, critical essays, creative presentations, new artwork and endless online and in-person conversations are generated in critical assessment of production and display.

The curators of the third edition of Pollination (2020-2021), titled ‘Of Hunters & Gatherers’ (See Appendix 3 & <https://ofhuntersandgatherers.com/>) – namely LIR (curator/artist duo, Mira Asriningtyas and Dito Yuwono, Yogyakarta) and Kittima Chareeprasit (curator, Chiang Mai) – deepened their existing respective study of their community, reflecting what they refer as a ‘local embodied knowledge’, a cultural space of respect and assurance in the guiding of society’s relationship to the external world. They adopt this term as a loose translation of

---

<sup>85</sup> June Yap, "Curatorial Connections, Southeast Asia: Three Panels, Two Books," *IDEAS Journal, Asia Art Archive* (April 2009), <https://aaa.org.hk/en/ideas-journal/ideas-journal/curatorial-connections-southeast-asia-three-panels-two-books>.

‘kearifan lokal’ and ‘ภูมิปัญญาท้องถิ่น’, in the Indonesian and Thai languages respectively, which they describe as a ‘... practice of learning, whereby the body receives ‘practice’ in specific sites, with specific rituals. It is understood that the experiential knowing of knowledge and its continuous presence in community – via oral storytelling, spiritual or religious ritual, folkloric superstition – are undervalued or little taught within the dominant cultural memory of both countries.’<sup>86</sup> Social scientist, Muhammad Obie Lahaji refers it as ‘local wisdom’, which ‘... can manifest in various forms such as ideas, values, norms, and rules in the realm of culture, while in social life can be in the form of religious systems, social systems and organizations, knowledge systems, livelihood systems, and systems of technology and equipment’<sup>87</sup>.



Figure 15: Artist Maryanto and LIR trailed a near erupting Mount Merapi, a volcanic haven for illegal sand mining exacerbated by governmental corruption, learning from local villagers of the ghosts and animal spirits who guard this volcano, collecting oral histories as sound and image recordings along the way. © Pollination

<sup>86</sup> Dito Yuwono Mira Asriningtyas, Kittima Chareeprasit, "Of Hunters and Gatherers: Pollination #3," The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, 2021, accessed July 21, 2022, <https://ofhuntersandgatherers.com/thegatherers/>.

<sup>87</sup> Obie Muhammad Lahaji, "Local Wisdom of the Bajo Tribe and Its Acculturation on Islamic Sharia: A Case in Tomini Bay Indonesia," *HSSR Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews* 8, no. 1 (2020): 814-20.



#16

Figure 16: Artist Ruangsak Anuwatwimon and Kittima combed the depleting shores of the Lower Mekong (the border between Thailand and Laos), spending time with local fisherfolk who shared their woe of livelihood as the balance of the river spirits had been endangered due to Chinese damming projects, collecting animal carcass and dying plant life along the way. © Pollination

During much of the COVID-laced germination period of this third edition, artistic research with site and community was hindered, but thankfully not halted. Innumerable online meetings were held (a format already in place with prior editions) between artists, curators, advisors and hosts. These discussions arranged to variably discuss and mentor curatorial and artistic strategy, engaging critical assessment of artistic methodologies, the dilemmas with site(s), sharing of issues with community liaison, historical narratives of local synergy, logistical nightmares of material resource and shipments, and the unpacking of individual vulnerabilities and doubts concerning the comparative conceiving of ideas and their visual/textual delivery.

Despite the imposed distances enforced under a global pandemic, these conversations gave birth to commissioned texts and field reports, in addition to online collaborative presentations with 'Art Curator Grid' in Lisbon (See Appendix 3.57-59); 'The Gatherers' event in Bandung (See Appendix 3.47-56); 'Far Bar' with the Grey Centre for Arts and Enquiry at the University of Chicago (See Appendix 3.60-62); It also fine-tuned the strategizing of promotional and curatorial analysis — the wording of press release between local and international audiences, the theoretical terms of the curatorial essay, or the translation of public presentation and consideration of which research materials to display. Such critical dialogical reflexivity gave

armor to the articulation of motivation and purpose with not only the work at hand, but the situated practices of all involved, improving writing and speaking skills and depth of comparative research.

Most telling was that such situated experiential focus on a local embodied knowledge revealed a 'translocal' social network, which offered a differing political imagination anchored in a lived historical consciousness, in synergy with Ulrike Freitag and Achim Von Oppen, who identify 'translocality' as '... a more open and less linear view on the manifold ways in which the global world is constituted: through the *trans*-gression of boundaries between spaces of very different scale and type as well as through the (re-)creation of 'local' distinctions between those spaces'<sup>88</sup>. Such translocality connecting cultural memory beyond the learned borders of nation, race and faith, embracing ritual and folkloric/spiritualistic belief as key guide in the face of corporate greed and political corruption, mapping a sustainability of not only community, but environment. In this latter regard, by focusing on such intangible networks of artistic production wrought the worked experience of a social map that politically leveraged and gave access to restricted site and subject, the team wary of their collaborators hesitancy in sharing their realities due to fear of governmental reprisal, the undertaking of their research demanding particular sensitivity as to who was involved, respecting local power structures in being granted access to place and community, knowing that the sites of their investigations were of great political volatility. For example, LIR and Maryanto sat with Merapi community to discuss 'strategic invisibility' in order to visit particular site, so as not to alert the authorities unnecessarily of their desire to document the damage being wrought by mafia control of illicit sand-mining. For both artistic projects, the treatment of the non-human landscape was also requiring careful consideration of the spirit worlds, understanding what is removed, displaced, or carried out in particular sacred spaces deserves respect, often with particular ritual.

---

<sup>88</sup> Ulrike Oppen Achim von Freitag, *Translocality : The Study of Globalising Processes from a Southern Perspective* (Leiden [The Netherlands]; Boston: Brill, 2010), 6.

Such deep comparative cultural awareness was similarly echoed in the commissioned texts of the project, such as Adam Bobette<sup>89</sup> and Elizabeth N. Inandiak<sup>90</sup>, reflecting on their respective research on how the official care for heritage and environment has similarly learnt from 'local embodied knowledge'.



#17



#18

Figure 17: Sit under Maryanto's tent-like installation and the ghost stories of the animal spirits of Mt Merapi can be heard, this tent covered in illustrations of these spiritual guardians. Installation view, MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum © MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum

Figure 18: Walk beside Ruangsak's suspension of a miniature Mekong, its bark body painted with a line of toxic blue, as animal carcass line its dwindling body. Installation view, MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum © MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum

<sup>89</sup> Adam Bobbette, "Fuck Your Culture: Nudes in Four Landscapes," The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, 2021, accessed July 21, 2021, <https://ofhuntersandgatherers.com/fuck-your-culture-nudes-in-four-landscapes/>.

<sup>90</sup> Elizabeth D. Inandiak, "Rumah Menapo: The Refuge of the Deer During the Floods of the Batanghari River," The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, 2021, accessed July 21, 2021, <https://ofhuntersandgatherers.com/rumah-menapo/>.

## The curatorial and local embodied knowledge

Curators LIR and Kittima Chareeprasit explain,

‘... how the practice of ‘local embodied knowledge’ seeks to balance human desire with awareness of repercussion, attempting to present ways in which the impact of human production can/should be measured sustainably... The question on how to cope with our ecological crisis might be hard to answer, but we must acknowledge it as a consequence of an accumulation of our extractive habits, our reliance on industrialized society deemed a fundamental element of modern life. How to cope may be answered by studying the multiplicity of context that we decided to leave in order to attain the singular concept and knowledge of modern living, this multiplicity of context, which we refer here as ‘local embodied knowledge’ becoming largely marginalized by the imposition of Western scientific thinking<sup>91</sup>

Patrick Flores echoes their sentiments of multiplicity, speaking of the various localized characteristics of entering institutions of ‘so-called culture’ in Southeast Asia, where guests of the National Museum of Cambodia come not to see the art but to give offering to the Buddhist statuary, or the attending of a film screening in Thailand where audiences must stand to sing the King’s anthem before it begins:

‘If we were to meditate on the constitution of knowledge, we might want to chart territories other than those cleared in exceptional ways by the likes of Foucault or Spivak or Bourdieu. We might want to move beyond the imbrication of knowing and naming in power and seek other speculations on knowledge. For instance, we might want to contemplate non-knowledge, or the ways in which the sensible slips away from discourse.’<sup>92</sup>

What is particularly crucial to the success of the Pollination model is the role of dialog in revealing this ‘local embodied knowledge, or ‘non-knowledge’ as Flores surmises, as a ‘... desire for universality... related to the desire for culture and its particularity, giving rise to notions of the “transcultural”...’<sup>93</sup>. Such knowledge differentiates memory between lived experience and disciplinary hierarchies of sense and reason, empowering the slippage between systems of power and their often-failing stop-gaps of social control. Such slippage is a realm many artists revel for its giving agency to a re-alignment of the power-structures of

---

<sup>91</sup> Dito Yuwono, Mira Asriningtyas, Kittima Chareeprasit "Of Hunters and Gatherers: Pollination #3".

<sup>92</sup> Patrick D. Flores, “Within and Across: Troublesome Propositions,” in *South East Asia: Spaces of the Curatorial* ed. Oetker Brigitte Ute Meta Bauer (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), 32.

<sup>93</sup> Flores, in *From a History of Exhibitions Towards a Future of Exhibition-Making : China and Southeast Asia*, 32.

the rationalized world, embracing the *practice* of things (eg. traditional skill, cultural knowledge, social memory) as an interdependent, responsive and situated occurrence. The artistic excavation of this 'non/local embodied' knowledge, builds a kind of political awareness between artists, curators, mentors and respective involved community in the mutual collective learning of historical consciousness, collapsing presumed borders of national divide in a multiplicity of time, language, belief and ritual.

In Flores' study of curatorial praxis in the history of Southeast Asia, he notes 'a discernible obsession to effect an epistemic break from the "Western"' <sup>94</sup>, referring to particular artist-groups in Thailand and Indonesia in the 1970s, his analysis via predominant historical study of artist manifesto (and the terms of their art's textual interpolation into a written art history via the exhibition of their art). Such determination to break away from Western hierarchies of knowledge has eventuated in what Flores terms the 'sociality' of curating the contemporary today (its workshops, happenings, criticism and discourse) which he warns 'The reification of process in the present may, in fact, be in cadence with the neoliberal impulse of production, the customization of preference, the privatization of the reciprocal...' <sup>95</sup>

However, in the context of this commentary, I would argue that such processes of sociality situated in the production of a work of art, can excavate a 'local embodied knowledge' honed via a study of artistic methodology. Such social activation can be a crucible for the collective learning of a political imagination that can curatorially build a constructive and effective intelligence as responsive soft infrastructure for the arts (an understanding of who to turn to for advice and community leverage; the necessary governance required to legitimate your associations in speech and funding; the relationships required for access to cultural memory beyond the physical archive). Such focus on process creating unique productive relationships of depth and capacity between artist, curator and context, is evidenced in the ongoing projects of LIR carried out beneath Merapi for the '900mdpl biennial' (to which the research accrued in Pollination was invaluable <sup>96</sup>). I would argue it is also evident in the historical mapping of the

---

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 35.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. 36.

<sup>96</sup> Mira Asriningtyas of LIR comments '900mdpl 3 aimed to centre around the idea of "local wisdom" but it wasn't until Pollination and its collaborative discussion did the concept sharpen to become "local embodied knowledge". Pollination introduced us to the books surrounding this idea (whilst we were amazingly getting

artistic Vietnamese landscape within 'Spirit of Friendship' (See Appendix 4b), where independent spaces of artistic production not only contributed and sustained a social network of support for the arts, but also offered a differing art historical voice (which I discuss in the following chapter).

Pamela N. Corey, in observing the role of metaphor in the thematic generation of regionally-focused exhibitions in Southeast Asia, comments 'With the shift towards project-based exhibitions, the focus on networking and social engagement via artistic production is further emphasized, and the exhibition as an art historical site appears less relevant. What we see a lot of now is the prioritizing of educational discursivity over exhibitionary objecthood, effectively situating the virtual archive or the exhibition Web site as the base for knowledge production and exchange'<sup>97</sup>. While I agree with Corey's assessment of prioritizing educational discursivity and its resulting online focus, she does not outline why this shift has occurred. I would argue that due to the porosity of arts and educational infrastructure in this region (ie. its political and economic restrictions, in Vietnam particularly), its cultural ecology must thus adapt to the limits of its visibility, thus the primacy of the exhibition as physical site must be re-assessed (though not deleted) in order for artistic commitment to practice to be sustained.

The unique impetus of 'Pollination' is its focus on embodied artistic process as motivation for curatorial dialogical enquiry (as opposed to an overarching thematic umbrella to which artists and their art must align), thus the characteristics of a translocality can be responsively determined. Dialogical praxis of enquiry connects the interpretation of art to the lived circumstances of an artwork's birthing, such embodied memory informing/creating an intangible social infrastructure for the arts, across presumed borders, that I sincerely hope can aid the connective growth of responsive houses of culture that can be sustained by its local embodied knowledge, thus less reliant on foreign aid and *its* terms of participation.

---

paid to do the reading and research) with access to critical mentoring and comparative conversation with our fellow curator, artists, advisors, that was especially useful in making our questions gain shape and sharpen.' Whatsapp conversation between Mira Asriningtyas and Zoe Butt, 13 July, 2022. See "900mdpl," accessed 24 August, 2022, <http://www.900mdpl.com/p/900mdpl.html>.

<sup>97</sup> Pamela N. Corey, "Metaphor as Method: Curating Regionalism in Mainland Southeast Asia," *YISHU: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 13, no. 2 (March/April 2014): 82.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **INTANGIBLE LABOR – CURATORIAL PRAXIS AS INFRASTRUCTURE BUILDING**

(See Appendix 4a, 4b, 4c, 4d)

In the commissioned essay ‘Practicing Friendship: Respecting Time as a Curator’ (See Appendix 4a) I celebrate my respect for this networked sphere of intangible labour with a focus on friendship in the arts in Vietnam, for its nurturing of creative intent in the face of political restriction particularly, ‘... to beg friendship to make introduction to discursiveness sturdier, to come up with a name that reflects the dreams inherent to its conjuring, to hope that its eventual interface does not enter the aesthetic regime with only one stride.’<sup>98</sup> Here, I lament the vast distance between an artist’s local context and the hierarchical engine room of institutional international display that an artist is expected to attend in order to raise the bar of their artistic relevance, particularly noting that such display is rarely with expertise that understands its agency to broaden critical awareness of the complex intangible worlds that have helped give birth to the artwork in question, such benchmarking overlooking: the political ramifications of artist’s material usage or reference to site; the financial support via friendship required to ensure sustainable traditional craftsmanship; the social risks behind commissioning particular subjects; the differing knowledge worlds of orality and performativity that have fed intellectual artistic sustenance in a landscape with differing interdisciplinary archive, and more.

It is this intangible context of artistic labour – the orated/performed expression of its journey, of its learning through movement, its errantry and relation to the world – that I learnt must be given agency (an activated presence) in my curatorial responsibility to making art with my community. Argentinian artist collective Colectivo Situaciones<sup>99</sup> may refer such intangibility as *experiencia*, a Spanish term that loosely translates as an accumulation of knowledges anchored in experiment as practice. Susan Kelly interprets ‘This *experiencia* might involve pedagogical, institutional and structural experimentation of all kinds, linked to analysis that does not just look at what is said, but that takes up the forces that are at play in given situations in order to both trace and experiment with the subjective and affective conditions

---

<sup>98</sup> Zoe Butt, “Practicing Friendship: Respecting Time as a Curator”, 208.

<sup>99</sup> See Thom Donovan, “5 Questions with Colective Situaciones,” in *Art 21 Magazine*, March 16, 2011, <http://magazine.art21.org/2011/03/16/5-questions-with-colectivo-situaciones/#.YrOwfexBw-Q>.

at work'<sup>100</sup>. This situated proximity to materiality is powerful in how its existence matters to the artist, this experience (and thus relation), to space, place and people being a consciousness, that, as Alfred Gell would rouse '... is an activity, the deed of actively responding to others' speech both in listening and in talking'<sup>101</sup>.

### **Activating friendship as resilience**

Drawing on Spinozan ethics, Nick Montgomery and Carla Bergman ask 'what are we capable of here and now, together at this time, in this place, amid the relations in which we are embedded?' going on to speak of seeking kinship as a 'precarious' and 'radical' act in its creating 'intergenerational webs of intimacy'. They anchor perspectives of care and friendship in resistance to the monolith of Empire and its insidious twin of Capital in its systematized control and determination of how we socially relate and value each other across physical and psychological divide; seeking a 'relational freedom' that is not about an absence of restriction but '... the capacity to become more active in shaping our attachments'<sup>102</sup>.

The question of what sustains and stymies such radical ethos of 'shaping our attachments' in sites of political poverty is my primary concern in 'Practicing Friendship', advocating for greater curatorial attention to the intangible conditions of artistic production, to not extract, assume and categorize what we see, but rather to learn the differing entanglements of situated knowledge that is often endangered due to its lack of supportive infrastructure, sensitive content or relations with particular people/entities. 'Forest Curriculum' (Pujita Guha and Abhijan Toto) propose consideration of such artistic labour as 'indisciplinary',

'To move indisciplinarily is to move away from praxis; it is to shift towards the emergent. To move indisciplinarily is to move with the rhythms of the 'undercommons'; to not replicate their form into one that becomes governable, but rather to create situations of enactment and also of potentiality. It is here that we turn to forms of artistic research as a model for interdisciplinary thought – to view these forms as not merely devices for the production of artworks, but rather as possible templates for collective speculation. It allows us to imagine expertise otherwise – no longer bound by inherited knowledges – and to recognize expertise in multiple registers, and

---

<sup>100</sup> Susan Kelly, "What does a Question Do? Micropolitics and Art Education," in *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*, ed. Jean-Paul Martinon. (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2013); 141.

<sup>101</sup> Gell. xlv

<sup>102</sup> Carla Montgomery Nick Bergman, *Joyful Militancy : Building Thriving Resistance in Toxic Times* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2018), 79.

in different forms – in care work, in indigenous knowledge, and embodied knowledge, amongst others’.<sup>103</sup>

In believing the examination of an artwork’s index reveals its social agency, such ‘indisciplinary’ valuing of artistic research empowers differing cultural networks of resilience - such shaping of attachments (ie. the dependency of artistic production on trust, on kinship, on lived experience, on political like-mindedness) being far too often sacrificed (ignored) in the instrumentalization of an artwork’s final form in order to be officially approved/internationally marketable. What gives capacity to such ‘indisciplinary’ is crucial to understand and acknowledge, and in Vietnam I have learnt it is often via the prism of friendship that the ‘production of representation – the journey towards that final destination called an artwork by an artist... can provide political autonomy with a powerful organized presence’<sup>104</sup>.



#19

Figure 19: Opening night of ‘Spirit of Friendship’ at The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, HCMC, 2017. © The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre

It is in following such frame that the curated platform ‘Spirit of Friendship’ was incubated in 2017 (See Appendix 4b) in an attempt to give a historical view to the legacy of kinship in Vietnam’s intangible independent artistic community and their generative social practices enabling the development of contemporary artistic languages across the country. Under the

---

<sup>103</sup> Pujita Guha and Abhijan Toto for the Forest Curriculum. “Notes Towards Imagining a Univers(e)ity Otherwise,” in *Institution as Praxis : New Curatorial Directions for Collaborative Research*, ed. Bill Balaskas Carolina Rito (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2021), 253.

<sup>104</sup> Zoe Butt, “Practicing Friendship: Respecting Time as a Curator”, 207-208.

aegis of The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, ‘Spirit of Friendship’ was launched as an ‘educational display’ (as opposed to the category of ‘exhibition’) so as to avoid official license scrutiny of this project’s necessary historical purview, introducing the history of artist-group activity across Vietnam, since the close of the Vietnam War (1975) to the present day, focusing on solidarity in friendship as the mode which had motivated artistic production in Vietnam, moving out of war-torn fatigue into an ideologically-governed social landscape. ‘Spirit of Friendship’ is also an on-going curatorial research program, replete with dedicated website ([www.spiritoffriendship.com](http://www.spiritoffriendship.com)), continuing to archive the history of the development of this ‘independent’ artistic scene; featuring public programs, essays, interviews and conversations that engage community memory and current explorations of what motivates and sustains artistic collaboration, with a predominant focus on Vietnam.



#20



#21

Figure 20: Installation view of ‘Spirit of Friendship’, The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, HCMC, 2017. © The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre

Figure 21: Installation detail of ‘Spirit of Friendship’ chronological timeline of the emergence of artist groups (top wall register); with relevant socio-political events placed on particularly designed cards labelled by year (bottom wall register) © The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre

As an educational display, it featured 22 artist-groups from across Vietnam, seeking to give testament to the social bonds of resilience within friendship that generated new individual expressions of art, despite affective conditions of living official regulatory limitations in educational curricula and government license. It was an introductory survey of such landscape, where artists shared their stories rather than their artworks (See Appendix 4b.10), attempting to demonstrate to our audiences, particularly to our youth, of how previous generations collectively engineered new artistic phenomena under socio-political limits, to prompt how sharing critical ideas within bonds of trust had spurred differing understandings of *how* to be an artist (and that such innovation was with international recognition). In the accompanying curatorial essay, titled 'Spirit of Friendship: Artist Groups in Vietnam since 1975'<sup>105</sup> (see Appendix 4c) the project is given historical context, alongside arguments behind the thematic divisions of the display – a chronological timeline of the emergence of these artist groups in conjunction with relevant socio-political events (see Appendix 4b.7-10); an examination of how artists refer to senior artists as mentors (see Appendix 4b.16-18); artistic strategies of garnering publics beyond State-sanctioned space (see Appendix 4b.15); and, the heart of the display, which highlighted four artist-groups whose influence on the development of an experimental art in Vietnam was deemed particularly significant. Here each artist-group was invited to show a project or object that best symbolized their mode of operation (see Appendix 4b.11-14). In the associated essay (written with the support of fellow curators Bill Nguyễn and Lê Thiên Bảo) I contextualize each group's unique mode of operation that was highlighted within the exhibition – expressions of resilience via international exchange, residency or collaboration.

My usage of the word 'resilience' here in 'Spirit of Friendship' (and within 'The Collective Development of Contemporary Art in Vietnam' and 'Practicing Friendship') resonates with Natasa Petresin-Bachelez in her call 'For Slow Institutions'<sup>106</sup>, where creative community mutually rely on each other, in response to the crisis of their situated living, opening up the

---

<sup>105</sup> Bill Nguyễn Zoe Butt, Lê Thiên Bảo, "Spirit of Friendship: Artist Groups in Vietnam since 1975," *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia* 2, no. 2 (2018).

<sup>106</sup> 'Applied more narrowly in the sphere of cultural work, resilience is more than just the ability to adapt, as promoted by the concept of the flexible subject over the past two decades, which was adopted by corporate capitalism and neoliberalism and which triggered the mass movement of precarious labour. Resilience encompasses reciprocal dependence and the finding of one's political and socio-ecological place in a world that is out of balance and that creates increasingly disadvantageous living conditions... Resilient thinking looks

presumption of an 'institutional border' for collective action, so as to better re-align artistic purpose in an international Art world detrimentally dominated by neoliberal, progress-driven imperatives of an 'event economy'. I echo Petresin-Bachelez's need to find sustainable sanctuary in what she refers as 'commoning practices' – '... community gardens, sharing of public space, new forms of crowdsourcing and new ways of collaborating ...' acknowledging how artists document the struggle of their humanity in the face of various localities in material scarcity, climate crisis and corruption. I would add however that such artistic 'resilience' is also about finding ways to nurture historical consciousness in the absence of knowledge systems suffering educational neglect/ideological restriction and that such resilience begs dialogical forms of interdisciplinary, intergenerational, inter-class engagement as a means of building accessible knowledge in community.

In this regard, one particular theme of 'Spirit of Friendship' is demonstrative. Titled 'Artists Looking at Artists' (see Appendix 4b.16-18), this dedicated space on the gallery floor screened a rotation of documentary films produced by Vietnamese artists/filmmakers, on other artists of historical influence in their artistic community. To paraphrase its wall text,

'In a community that does not possess public archive of its artistic history, with a lack of institutions that critically collect and catalogue artistic production (the result of ideological and economic limitations), whereby access to living expertise and experience is also limited (a consequence of post-war migration); it is increasingly prevalent that creative talent has sought to research and document influential figures of Vietnam's past and present artistic landscape'.

Demonstrating intergenerational reflection, DIY ethos and interdisciplinary collaboration, film-maker Trần Mỹ Hà and artist Đỗ Hoàng Tường (of the 1960s generation), reflect on the life and practice of pioneering abstract Saigonese painter Nguyễn Trung (b. 1940) via 'candid discussion and spontaneous moments'; artist Nguyễn Quang Huy explored the 'creative

---

at the critical and dystopian near future; unable to anticipate or postpone it, it can only react by adapting to it' See Natasa Petresin-Bachelez, "For Slow Institutions," *e-flux journal* 85 (October 2017), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/85/155520/for-slow-institutions/>.

processes of performing, writing and translating poetry' of legend Hanoian Dương Tường (key collaborator of pioneer conceptualist Vũ Dân Tân and co-founder of 'Salon Natasha' (see Appendix 4b.13), amongst others. The majority of this moving image program sought the subject's personal reflections and community member observations of influence, their stories giving rare insight into particular socio-political conditions of art historical significance little known to our local. The exposure of such historical consciousness is integral to the 'Spirit of Friendship' ongoing online platform, particularly in the ethos of community speaking of their community, within a dialogically reflexive mode (eg. the mode of 'conversation', as opposed to essay or historical review).

Such artistic resilience, compelled by the lack of arts infrastructure addressing lived historical memory, is also found further afield in a plethora of artistic forms, such as CAMP (founded by artists Shaina Anand and Askok Sukumaran)<sup>107</sup> in New Delhi, India, who create online productive archives of South Asian cinema – instructional spaces for the making of film online - many of these socio-political documentaries enabling critical interrogation of marginal issues in a cultural scene dominated by commercial regulation; or the artistic practice of Rahima Gambo and 'A Walk Space'<sup>108</sup> beginning in Abuja, Nigeria as a mobile 'studio' in initial collaboration with a school-group of young women who suffer surveillance of Boko Haram, this 'walk space' emphasizing the collaborative exchange of words in movement (resulting in videos and publications).

To return to Rogoff's acknowledgement of the hegemonic art world's privileging of a final end product (ie. the exhibition) in its valuing of artistic practice, despite the immensity of artistic labour beyond its tangible commodification, I would argue that 'Spirit of Friendship' demonstrates curatorial responsibility in challenging the institutional presumptions of where such artistic practice begins and ends through such display. Roger Nelson highlights our curatorial efforts with 'Spirit of Friendship' in this regard as exemplary of an 'expanded' field of 'scholar-curating' in Southeast Asia particularly, noting our emphasis on *practice* as

---

<sup>107</sup> Askok Sukumaran Shaina Anand, "Camp," accessed 24 August, 2022, <https://studio.camp/>.

<sup>108</sup> Rahima Gambo, "A Walk Space," accessed 24 August, 2022, <https://www.awalkspace.com/>.

opposed to *exhibition* histories for each artist group<sup>109</sup>. His observation particularly responding to academic art historical opinion regarding the date with which arguably the first artist-group in Vietnam, the 'Gang of Five', were established in Hanoi, outlining the definitive claims of Nora Taylor and Pamela N. Corey that it was 1993 (the year of their first exhibition), rather than the year 1989 (the date the artists shared with us when this group of friendship began to make and play together<sup>110</sup> – a date stated in the chronological timeline of the establishment of artist-groups in 'Spirit of Friendship', displayed along a continuous set of walls in the central ground floor gallery space – See Appendix 4b.10). Our curatorial argument was that the 'Gang of Five' were the first artist-group in the country to be working with abstract languages (State prohibited at the time) and were instrumental in influencing Southern Vietnamese artists via their friendship networks well before they began to exhibit their work in 1993. In our eyes, their practice and not their exhibition history prompted artistic innovation in the art scene of Vietnam.

The curatorial research for 'Spirit of Friendship' was crucial in determining our emphasis on practice, as opposed to exhibition histories in acknowledging the contribution of artist-groups to the development of contemporary art in Vietnam. Questionnaires (See Appendix 4b.5) were sent to all known artist-groups across the country, in order to seek satisfaction of key criteria we had set for the project (criteria which was publicly announced within the display and remains present on its dedicated website):

---

<sup>109</sup> Roger Nelson goes on to argue our strategies a direct challenge to academic perspectives of art historical value, noting our curatorial referral to *literary* tropes to define the shape and structure of the undertaking itself (indeed we referred to 'Spirit of Friendship' as an 'educational display', as opposed to declaring it an 'exhibition'; its key visual highlights claimed as sitting spatially 'centre-fold'). See Roger Nelson, "Curating as (Expanded) Art History in Southeast Asia: Recent Independent Projects in Ho Chi Minh City, Luang Prabang, and Phnom Penh," *ARTMargins* 9, no. 2 (2020): 55-56.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. 43.

#### CRITERIA FOR ARTIST GROUP INCLUSION

- Artists who share time and space in the mutual thinking of artistic ideas, and known by their community as a group who work, play and think together
- Friendship between artists, as a means of initiating artistic activity under one identity, but also sustaining the group's existence
- Pushing the language of experimentation in contemporary art practice
- Creation of physical projects together (more than once)
- Focus on the visual arts
- Focus on post 1975
- Active for at least two years

Following the answers received, further interviews were conducted, which gave unique map of how artists across the country were aware, or even in collaborative conversation about artistic ideas and techniques. This emphasis on 'a group who work, play and think together' was deliberately conceived in knowing the obstacles artists face in staging their visibility – understanding the economic hardships, political ramifications and lack of available space with which to make their art visible continues to this day.

#### **The burden (?) of artistic visibility**

In 'The Burden (?) of Artistic Visibility in Vietnam Today: The Dilemma in Measuring Artistic and Curatorial Success by an 'Exhibition' History' (See Appendix 4d) my argument lies in how artists and curators are impacted by such impoverished and compromised arts infrastructure, whose labour, I thus argue, should not be thus solely measured by its compromised 'exhibition history', particularly highlighting that in Vietnam, a 'triển lãm' ('exhibition') infers a command to 'dominate', 'to occupy or have something in its totality' – a definition I argue prompts near militaristic surveillance for fear of any challenge to what can only be a State 'totality'. Though this text recalls artistic strategies in defiance within Vietnam – gestures often without audience, existing online for friendship networks only, or staged in sites soon to be demolished (and thus with no eventual physical trace); the emphasis by extension here in this commentary is the impact of a disenfranchised socio-political context on the growth of an art ecology in general.

It is important to recognize that it is not just Vietnam that faces such oppressive conundrum in the face of governmental oversight, economic woe, or cultural instrumentalization/disenfranchisement, but an increasing number of art communities across the Global South, whose artists/creatives seek to strategize the sustainability of their local cultural memory. This is evidenced in the consequent innovations of artist/curatorial initiatives such as 'Wekalet Behna' in Alexandria, Egypt committed to art, music, translation and cinema, with their 'Behna Study Program' whose Visual Art workshops 'consist of engaged discussions around readings, visual material, case studies, and field visits aimed to ask questions around the future of art spaces and artistic production through themes central to contemporary arts in Egypt and the world'<sup>111</sup>; 'Raw Material Company: Center for Art, Knowledge and Society' in Dakar, Senegal with their international 'Akademie' program which focuses on 'off-the-beaten-track' artistic and curatorial practice and thought, 'dedicated to a dynamic reflection on artistic research, curatorial practice and critical writing'<sup>112</sup>; 'Sa Sa Art Projects' in Phnom Penh, Cambodia and their 'Pisaot: Experimental Art Residency' which focuses on regional dialog and a 'two-way knowledge sharing', asking residents (who do not have to make new work) to engage their artistic community via artist talks, workshops and skill-sharing<sup>113</sup>. Such independent peer initiatives, reliant on bonds of friendship, equally concerned with a comparative relationship between production and display, similarly tending to the nurturing of situated artistic and curatorial relation via dialogically anchored activities, have been instrumental in boosting my own respective team's morale in knowing we are not the only organization struggling to devise programs that nourish and provoke our community's commitment to a historical consciousness.

Such programs by peers, alongside 'Conscious Realities' and 'Spirit of Friendship', demonstrates how nascent forms of artist/curator driven initiatives are attempting to challenge the interpretative systems of the dominant art world, by not only according value to the methodological strategies of their creative producers, but also undertaking the

---

<sup>111</sup> See "Behna Study Programme," Behna El Wekalah, accessed 13 July, 2022, <https://www.behna.org/en/behna-study-programs>.

<sup>112</sup> See "Raw Akademie," RAW Center for Art, Knowledge and Society, accessed 13 July, 2022, [http://www.rawmaterialcompany.org/\\_About\\_RAW\\_Academy?lang=en](http://www.rawmaterialcompany.org/_About_RAW_Academy?lang=en).

<sup>113</sup> See "Pisaot: Experimental Arts Residency," Sa Sa Art Projects, accessed 13 July, 2022, <https://www.sasaart.info/pisaot.htm>.

necessary tasks to enable and sustain such focus. Such responsive strategies acknowledged in 'The Burden (?) of Artistic Visibility in Vietnam Today' as:

'... the negotiations we undertake to gain safe access to subjects and people; the political relationships we must delicately maintain in order to keep our businesses registered; the private mentoring we personally nurture with emerging community; the lobbying we muster towards potential supportive donors; the emotional counseling we take on in order to encourage practice; the risky business partnerships we enter in the hope of sustainability; the educational access programs we devise in the hope of building criticality.... Such a catalog might sound like a given for the culturally serviced and networked part of the world, but ... undertaking such labour in disenfranchised contexts of political poverty is a teetering between legitimate and illegitimate action, between vague guidelines of official access and social expectation, between personal relationships of trust and obligation'.<sup>114</sup>

N'Gone Fall further advocates such strategies,

'... new art protagonists from developing countries have created a salutary domino affect challenging the need for proper stages and keys to understand the mechanisms of artistic productions, the dynamics of the diverse art communities and more precisely, how contemporary visual arts from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Arab countries are resonating in the world'<sup>115</sup>

Such challenge of 'proper stages and keys', is where I would argue Flores' proposition of 'non-knowledge' is of reliance, indeed a force within much curatorial labor in the fraying margins of globality, where artistic communities struggle to empower the demands of both local and international imperatives of display in knowledge-stricken, financially tenuous, culturally instrumentalized contexts. For in sites where what is visible is a potential political or social risk, it is not only imperative to ethically consider the ramifications of an artwork's visibility on the artist's civic rights, but also that of the community which supports it (eg. in Vietnam, it is the host of a public event - be it an exhibition or talk or screening - who is now held criminally responsible for content deemed prohibitive: not the artist/author). It thus becomes curatorially crucial to think strategically on how your actions and decisions are given picture in community and to what extent such ensuing visibility places you in infrastructural, or even personal, jeopardy (the Japan Foundation's organization of the ASEAN project, titled

---

<sup>114</sup> With regard to legitimate and illegitimate action, many license applications from The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre were handled 'back-door' with a 'friend' of our lawyer who 'advises' on what his boss will say, this personal relationship maintained with innumerable dinners and drinks; whilst myriad artist will go to great risk to access, document and display forbidden site.

<sup>115</sup> N'Gone Fall 'To the Danes' in *Curating Global Art : Positions and Voices : Essays and Art from Images 16* (Copenhagen: Centre for Culture and Development (CKU)), 34.

‘Sunshower,’ hosted by the Mori Art Museum and the National Art Centre, Tokyo in 2017, mishandled the details of the Vietnamese shipment, prompting Vietnamese authorities to threaten diplomatic action if particular artworks were not removed from display, to name but one of many as example)<sup>116</sup>.

### **Dispositions and their interplay**

The social architecture that sustains critical and experimental artistic visibility under such limitative social rubric must carefully strategize the pros and cons of artistic/curatorial endeavours – the political sensitivities of its subject (potential surveillance?); the impact of alliance in collaboration (personal relations and its consequent favours?); the sites with which materials are resourced (are they politically permitted to be accessed?); the communities that must be engaged for access to information (cultural hierarchical respect?); the emotional impact of financial requirements (does the artist’s family support their practice?) and so on. Navigating such a landscape is akin to what Keller Easterling refers as the *dispositions*<sup>117</sup> between activities and objects, understanding the agency in an ‘arrangement’ (eg. the varying materials and skills needed in developing and sustaining artistic projects within artist-initiated organizations), that it is through understanding the relations between dispositions that an artist/curator enables capacity/leverage/opportunity between objects, community, power structures, emotions and memory.

Innovating creative potential for engagement in the arts, in contexts like Vietnam, demands activating dispositions as priority, evidenced in ‘Conscious Realities’ and ‘Pollination’, employing what Easterling would refer as their medium design, or ‘interplay’, engaging the ‘...

---

<sup>116</sup> Vietnamese artist Tiffany Chung had her ‘Vietnamese Exodus’ project censored by Vietnamese authorities due to mishandling of sensitive information by the Japan Foundation who were the organizers of this exhibition. Chung was consequently placed under surveillance. Further to this, Chung’s request that the artwork be removed from display in a particular way was ignored by the organizers. I am a close friend of Tiffany Chung and attended to her ensuing panic attacks and subsequent re-location to the US. This issue was raised at the CIMAM 2017 conference: See CIMAM, *Cimam 2017 Annual Conference Report, CIMAM 2017 Annual Conference: The Roles and Responsibilities of Museums in Civil Society* (National Gallery Singapore), 71.

<sup>117</sup> ‘The chemist, cook, parent, dog, or urbanist is considering the activities and dispositions of objects, where ‘disposition’ describes the agency or potential immanent in an arrangement – a property or propensity within a context or relationship. You might assess the disposition of someone’s personality over time or the disposition of a house in relation to the weather or landscape, just as you might describe the disposition of an organization’ Keller Easterling, *Medium Design : Knowing How to Build the World* (London/New York: Verso, 2021), Preface, Kindle.

parameters for how things interact with each other'<sup>118</sup>; such curatorial models were/are careful assessments of particular dispositions, working between official and grass-root action, between government and private advocacy groups, not only concerning the impact of studying particular subject matter, but also the choosing of various individuals, organizations, sites of realization, scheduling and articulating purpose towards an effective and sustainable (political and financial) delivery of each project – such negotiation often requiring particular introduction, bribe, gift, meal, drink or favour (all of these actions anchored in differing utterance from the space of the official, the domestic, of entertainment or deemed 'professional' in business).

For example, 'Conscious Realities' could not have realized its dialogically-driven program (composed of a select number of public events, the majority of the program being invite-only) were it not officially inaugurated by the nationally-lauded scientist and Fields Medalist, Professor Ngô Bảo Châu, co-hosted with the Vietnam University of Social Sciences and Humanities and Hoa Sen University (such organizational hosts manoeuvred by Ngô Bảo Châu who is a popular 'intellectual' celebrity). His lecture was moderated by Madame Tôn Nữ Thị Ninh, founder of *Conscious Realities* co-host 'Tri Viet Centre for Social and Educational Studies' (Madame Ninh is a previous diplomat well-respected in Vietnam, her allegiance to Sàn Art anchored in our mutual need to raise the awareness of the Ministry of Culture in the social and intellectual role artists can play in contemporary society, a delicate suite of meetings and 'gifts' enabling the process). In addition, an international advisory committee was set up to advise on the foreign intelligence invited to take part over the course of its four years of delivery, paid for by the Prince Claus Fund of The Netherlands, such financial capacity a rare coup for participating host universities to include international expertise within their student programming. Sàn Art knew that a project being launched by such individuals, with such institutions, was a coup for all involved and would ultimately mean Sàn Art's granted access to their facilities (and thus their students) for the duration of the program. Most crucially, it also gave reasonable assurance that the Cultural Police would be more lenient towards our activities (though we knew, sadly, that launching 'Conscious Realities' did not mean these tertiary institutions continued intellectual engagement in the program – for indeed they

---

<sup>118</sup> Easterling. 10.

barely attended). I have learnt that the curatorial activation of dialogical space, expanding the political imagination of historical consciousness (as evidenced in 'Conscious Realities' and 'Pollination'), requires, to paraphrase Easterling, '... designing of interplay (so) as not to fix positions but to initiate interactivity – to disrupt loops and binaries. There may be no single new technology or magic bullet but rather a shift in the relationships between things... The designer is then temporarily manipulating the chemistries of assemblages and networks'<sup>119</sup>.

Such interplay is an ethos similarly found in the variable scale of curatorial practices that are/have been greatly driven/informed by artists, such as: 'Gudskul'<sup>120</sup> (Jakarta); 'Common Wealth'<sup>121</sup> (Cardiff); '31<sup>st</sup> Century Museum of Contemporary Art'<sup>122</sup> (Chiang Mai); 'DAAR: Decolonizing Architecture Art Research'<sup>123</sup> (Palestine/Stockholm); 'MADEYOULOOK'<sup>124</sup> (Johannesburg) including previously discussed organizations 'Ashkal Alwan' (Beirut); 'Wekalet Bahna' (Alexandria); 'RAW Material Company' (Dakar); 'Sa Sa Art Projects' & 'Sa Sa Bassac' (Phnom Penh); 'FLORA ars+natura' (Bogota) and 'LIR' (Yogyakarta); to name but a few. The common thread that these initiatives hold is a commitment to the responsive modeling of the relationship between art, society and the sustaining of historical consciousness, believing artists have crucial agency in holding accountable variable power structures who seek to benefit from societal control and regulation. Such institutional challenge to the theoretical

---

<sup>119</sup> Easterling. 10-11.

<sup>120</sup> 'GUDKSUL' in the devising of course curricula whereby all forms of human labour, from the garbage collector to the village chief to the local doctor, contribute to the worlding of artistic method and knowledge sustenance in re-distributing social forms of economy in the name of Art. See "Gudskul," accessed 24 August, 2022, <https://gudskul.art/en/beranda/>.

<sup>121</sup> 'Common Wealth' in the working with disenfranchised communities whose traumatic experiences are globally repetitive, inviting experiential memory to contribute to the formation of a theatrical transformative production. See "Common Wealth ", accessed 24 August, 2022, <https://commonwealththeatre.co.uk/>.

<sup>122</sup> '31<sup>st</sup> Century Museum of Contemporary Art' (<https://31century.org/>) in Kamin Lertchaiprasert's relating of everyday perception of human habit as an aesthetic form that reveals contradiction/compassion, where an artistic object is but a memory prompt to such experience. See Kamin Lertchaiprasert, "31st Century Museum of Contemporary Art," accessed 24 August, 2022, <https://31century.org/>.

<sup>123</sup> 'DAAR: Decolonizing Architecture Art Research', founded by Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti , for their belief that architecture is socialized and thus built upon the rights of its human constituents, and thus their collaborative articulation of agency in light of the refugee camp, the detention centre, the stateless community. See Alessandro Petti Sandi Hilal, "Daar: Decolonizing Architecture Art Research," accessed 24 August, 2022, <http://www.decolonizing.ps/site/>.

<sup>124</sup> 'MADEYOULOOK', founded by Molemo Moiloa and Nare Mokgotho, re-observes and re-familiarizes the everyday in South Africa, questioning social relations in memorializing blackness, '... engaging hierarchies of knowledge creation and dissemination, and the socialities of land and relationships with plant life. MADEYOULOOK engages different approaches focused primarily on intertextual installations, gatherings, discursive programs, research, and publishing. See Nare Mokgotho Molemo Moiloa, "Madeyoulook," accessed 24 August, 2022, <http://www.made-you-look.net/>.

valuing of a work of art can only be born from the margins of globality, what Walter Mignolo would embrace as aesthesis in 'border-thinking', embodying time as sensorial, rather than observing/analyzing documentation from afar. By such dwelling in the margins we can give agency to '... change the terms, not just the content of the conversation'<sup>125</sup> of the hegemonic world (such words/concepts collected during 'Conscious Realities', and 'Pollination' as evidenced in 'local embodied knowledge'), to which I agree with Mignolo's irrevocable inscription of this as imbibed in the experience of colonial difference, which we must understand and hold to account. Mignolo vouches for pluriversality that can only inhabit the border, not just observing and describing it, but thinking in language as a reflexive praxis '... because the very education project is built on border epistemology'. He goes on to say, 'Border thinking is taking the effort to combine the body with writing, writing with the body and not just in the body', where the pluriverse is 'convivial, dialogical' and that 'pluri and multi-verse exist independent of the state and the corporations and it is the work of the emerging global political society, eg. the sector of society organizing themselves around specific project one they/we realize that neither the state nor the corporations have room for multi- or pluriverses'<sup>126</sup>.

I believe it crucial that curatorial praxis be responsive and embrative of artistic methodology in their endeavors to build appropriate intelligence as infrastructure, that it is an ethical imperative to understand the conditions of its artistic production and the ramifications of its visibility. Curators must challenge international institutionalized practices of artistic 'display', to resist the default to presumed (marketable) categories of (universal) definition in our decision to include and interpret an artwork's significance, to rather better understand our own agency in evoking the critical role of an artwork's index – the social worlds of its maker. While this responsiveness is tantamount in the consideration of care towards the livelihood of artists and their respective communities, it should also be an inclusive reciprocal translation of the local forms of intangible situated and embodied cultural knowledge — its rituals,

---

<sup>125</sup> Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs : Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton / Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017), Location 1965, Kindle.

<sup>126</sup> Walter Mignolo, "On Pluriversality," Walter Mignolo, accessed July 22, 2022, <http://waltermignolo.com/on-pluriversality/>.

superstitions, spiritual practices, indigenous customs — that informs, substantiates and motivates artistic method.

## CONCLUSION - WHERE DOES AN ARTWORK BEGIN AND END?

In light of the fact my community continues to endure an affective landscape where artists are not encouraged to be critically responsive to their lived reality; where thinking with an individual opinion is with limited social support; where the 'official' landscape of education, resource and cultural display is governed by fear and ideological surveillance, where the parameters of what can be defined as 'Art' must meet the aesthetic determinations of the State (thus the courage to be 'public' with your ideas that may be daring and experimental can garner extreme anxiety and doubt, ultimately crippling comparative criticality) - why does such a context necessitate curatorial expansion of where an artwork begins and ends?

By way of conclusion, I shall return to the four initial questions posed in my introduction, while also reminding the key theoretical and historical entanglements previously discussed, in order to answer this final query.

*Firstly*, what is curatorial labor within communities whose histories/beliefs are officially contested? Curatorial labor, in such threatened context, is ethically compelled to explore responsive means of sustaining and nurturing artistic practice via the building of supportive human networks of intelligence, beyond the domain of the publicly visible. Such curatorial prompting of historical consciousness, via study of artistic methodology, as outlined in this commentary's portfolio, propels that an artwork begins in sustaining via what Gilbert Simondon describes as the 'collective individuation' of artists and curators, via the shared learning of what it means to be a constantly transforming 'individual', to create the space of learning ourselves from another's perspective, to provoke, explore and question ones' relation to and with community, to question its environment, its structures and operations, asking 'What if... we attempted to grasp individuation in the fullness of the unfolding of its reality?'<sup>127</sup>, as opposed to presuming an individual (and their tangible labour) as fixed information.

I have generated (and participated) in this collective individuation as an independent process of mutual sharing (outlined via 'The Collective Development of Contemporary Art in Vietnam', 'Conscious Realities' and 'Spirit of Friendship') through private conversations between artist

---

<sup>127</sup> Scott, 5.

and curator relating intentionality behind a work of art, the debates/group critiques organized with particular invited relevant expertise that can expand pre-occupations of discipline with lived realities; the nurturing of mutual learning within artistic production in the rehearsing/testing/experimenting with bodies and theories and materials (eg. introductions to relevant research, archives, organizations) – such curated labour generating activities predominantly taking place privately towards the realization of an individual artistic object/creation and its interpretation, all holding one prime mode in common, what Mikhail Bakhtin refers as the ‘dialogical’<sup>128</sup>. This shared space of ‘interrogation’ and ‘interlocation’ of the self through language in its reflection of multiple imagination, is not only a pedagogical space of embodied performativity (for enunciation of words takes effort of mind and body), it is also what Donna Haraway refers as a highly *situated*<sup>129</sup> space of trust and privacy, a learning in our bodies of how to navigate the various affective power structures in confrontation of fear, as Sara Ahmed infers, in order to create space that readies and strategizes all potential outcomes for an artistic imagination to be given physical entrance as artwork onto the ‘visible’ (public) stage of discernment.

*Secondly*, what lessons can curators learn from studying artistic methodologies within such a context? In extending curatorial investment in an artwork’s display by valuing the social index of its birthing (its production), I have learnt how curators come to better intuit artist’s intentionality with their art, thus building a reciprocal space of mutual respect and trust in the critically generative task of curatorially interpreting their labour. I agree with Bakhtin, who determines ‘aesthetics’ as much more than form or composition of an ‘object’, arguing it a situated study of ethics and ontology, he goes further to speak of the relationship between an ‘author’ (the ‘artist’) and his ‘hero’ (the ‘artwork’), as a need to fully understand the life-world of this relationship, that ‘... we evaluate ourselves from the standpoint of others, and through others we try to understand and take into account what is transgredient to our own consciousness’<sup>130</sup>.

---

<sup>128</sup> Bakhtin, Holquist, and Liapunov, xxvi.

<sup>129</sup> Haraway 582.

<sup>130</sup> Bakhtin, Holquist, and Liapunov, 15.

It is thus, in taking Bakhtin's ideas on the dialogic further, that I see the benefits of this discursive space of sharing ideas and intentions as not only a necessary part of an artwork's creation, but a necessary process in curatorially determining an artistic practice and the sustainability of its supportive (often intangible) infrastructure, what Edouard Glissant refers as its relation, its mondialité or worlding<sup>131</sup>. The curatorial projects I have conceived with my community, which form part of this commentary's portfolio (eg. 'Conscious Realities', 'Spirit of Friendship', 'Pollination') have nurtured and engaged differing experience and expertise (eg. the shaman, the village elder, the journalist, the anthropologist, the family relative), inviting such local and global intelligence to a kind of 'classroom' not present in Vietnamese educational institutions, a critical space of imagination that connects a community's ancestral ghosts with its living intergenerational memory. It is a translocal space that not only prompts useful artistic possibilities in 'object-making', it also deepens curatorial interpretation of artistic practice with greater clarity and introspection, a relation that can open up alternate narratives of site/sight beyond dominant hierarchical disciplinary understandings of Art and History (and its reliance on what is made visible), to encapsulate local forms of wisdom and sensorial understandings of cultural memory.

*Thirdly*, why do such circumstances demand scrutiny of the privileging of the visible within the global systematization of Art and its value judgements? Official scrutiny of the visible in such contexts as Vietnam curatorially necessitates a hidden dialogical space that is networked with differing human production, affording the contextualization of mutual investment in careful hunting for verification of fact *beyond* what is officially displayed and archived (as outlined in 'Practicing Friendship' and 'The Burden (?) of Artistic Visibility'). I am crucially aware that many artists and curators in Vietnam are deeply wary of the violence of their 'archives' and cultural institutions in their blindness, historical linearity and teleological assumptions of what is predicated as past, present and 'will be' the future, aware such precepts serve mechanizations of power that insidiously hide, delete, or re-configure 'fact' for political benefit and governance of the status quo.

---

<sup>131</sup> See Manthia Diawara, "Edouard Glissant's Worldmentality: An Introduction to One World in Relation," *DOCUMENTA14* (2017), [https://www.documenta14.de/en/south/34\\_edouard\\_glissant\\_s\\_worldmentality\\_an\\_introduction\\_to\\_one\\_world\\_in\\_relation](https://www.documenta14.de/en/south/34_edouard_glissant_s_worldmentality_an_introduction_to_one_world_in_relation).

The historical implementation of curatorial strategies devising dialogic processes in their practices have been predominantly argued and carried out within the visible institutionalized public spaces of the Western Museum or gallery, the desire to engage conversation and debate between artists and audiences prompted by the educational impetus of an exhibition and its organizational mission to expand public awareness of the historical relevance of an artwork and its maker. However, in Vietnam (and to a great extent across the Global South), where public-facing institutions are predominantly politically instrumentalized, where 'curating' is a little understood profession thus exhibition histories are with little accessible archive (as organizationally argued in the generation of 'Pollination') the few curators who subsist and persist suffer similar censorship syndrome to artists, in that most exhibitions showcasing contemporary art that is critical of its reality, is prohibitive. Exhibitions granted license come with a myriad of conditions that not only do not permit certain artworks for display, or an artwork must remove this or that image/word/material in order to be approved – but additionally a curator's text cannot say this or that (eg. press release, curatorial essay, information sheets explaining works of art to a public). If historians, in the valuing of an artistic or curatorial practice, give primacy to an exhibition history, then in Vietnam they would be studying a history of artistic and curatorial intention under great duress (See 'The Burden (?) of Artistic Visibility').

In analysing the dilemma art historians face in the great dearth of concrete documentation of exhibition histories (particularly referring to Southeast Asia), David Teh observes 'For it is not exhibitions, but independent *organizations* that are the more significant and influential forms in the landscape. And it is the social architecture of those platforms, not the grammar of display – much less the postures of an authorial curator – that makes contemporary art's local emergence visible...'<sup>132</sup>

*Fourthly*, what innovations, or parallel models, to the global exchange ecology of Art, can be thus proposed? It is in the praxis of 'local embodied knowledge' or 'non-knowledge' as Patrick Flores infers that artists provide inspiration to curatorial processes of building community, and

---

<sup>132</sup> David Teh, "Obstacles to Exhibition History: Institutions, Curatorship and the Undead Nation-State," in *The Curatorial Conundrum : What to Study? What to Research? What to Practice? (Pre-Publication Draft)*, ed. Mick Wilson Paul O'Neill, Lucy Steeds. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016). Unpaginated.

thus accordingly the networking of a soft infrastructure for the sustainability of historical consciousness. As highlighted throughout this commentary, the innumerable artistic initiatives across the Global South carry out much of their work through dialogical processes of recalling/re-valuing cultural memory, exploring an artist's production processes as resilient in living and negotiating social/political inequity. Steinbock, Ieven and de Valck share,

'One way in which the arts build up civil resilience is through fostering our political imagination. Presenting us with alternative forms, practices and experiences, art (or more exactly the *work* or *practice* of artists) has the ability to stimulate our political imaginations and populate it with new, perhaps revolutionary ideas. Moreover, it tends to do so by explicitly or implicitly taking issue with the social, aesthetic, and civic context in which it situates itself, and as such it provides the viewer-participants an enriching starting point for their own reflection on the political and civic context'<sup>133</sup>

I would take such perspective on how the arts builds civil resilience further by emphasizing how critical the situatedness of curatorial/artistic practice is in giving agency to political imagination, for it can crucially re-network what Keller Easterling infers as its interplay of dispositions (its re-arrangement of knowledge, skill and access) seeking a localized and sustainable social infrastructure. Furthermore, I believe that were the purchasing power of the artworld to give recognition to an artwork's value beginning with the dialogical birthing of its ideas and its interpolated contexts of production (in an attitude akin to how consumer conscience is sought today to consider their own support of how their desired products are produced - where, and by whom, do they, perhaps exploitatively, originate), we would then see a more ethical and sustained ecology for the Arts globally. Were curators able/willing to strategise the benefits of deep time in better facilitating (in 'collective individuation') with the immense wealth of intangible labor undertaken in the realization of an artwork, understanding such immensity is rarely with full inclusion in a final work of art that has been made visible, perhaps then we would find private and public collection more intimately connected, and thus caring, thus constantly re-assessing, the immateriality of cultural memory

---

<sup>133</sup> Eliza Ieven Bram Valck Marijke de Steinbock, *Art and Activism in the Age of Systemic Crisis : Aesthetic Resilience* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 3.

and context connected to their collections – *thus an artwork's social index pointed as not only its 'beginning' but also its 'end'.*

Such dwelling in the intangible zones of artistic production, which acknowledges the constantly transforming self, is to be understanding the necessary pluriversality of our historical consciousness (as evidenced in 'Conscious Realities' and 'Pollination'), dialogically unraveling our sensorial relation to fact and fiction, understanding that we may want to be read, to be visible with that 'there' in our art (seeking theoretical and historical inclusion in a dominant frame of exhibited value), but we are 'here' in what Akbar Abbas would infer as a culture of 'disappearance' (not an effacement, 'but of replacement and substitution'). Such 'dislocation', as Abbas infers, is the 'transformation of place'. In speaking of such dislocation, Flores states 'I am drawn to this idea of 'the transformation of place' and to the fact that these transformations may frustrate recognition, which instills doubt in the project of the exhibition itself'<sup>134</sup>.

I would argue such doubt in the finality of an artwork's display as crucial to the reconstitution of curatorial labour, especially in zones of socio-political disenfranchisement, where the building of our own historical consciousness must leverage its zones of intangibility, its social capital. Such doubt — as Okwui Enwezor phrases 'creating a space of vulnerability'<sup>135</sup> — is also crucial to the project of decolonizing our minds and questioning our representations, to which the primacy of the visual continues to be held hostage, isolated from its interdependent sensorium, in the value-making mechanisms of our global cognitive economy whose Art circles hinge on the disciplinary memory of its science.

What this commentary and its associated portfolio reveals is the entangled capacity of embodied dialogical knowledge as a social software of support that is crucial to artistic production, an intangible *practice* (not a hardware) whose 'Culture as resistance is the untamed force from the ocean of memory that erodes all constructions of education along

---

<sup>134</sup> Flores, in *From a History of Exhibitions Towards a Future of Exhibition-Making : China and Southeast Asia*, 337.

<sup>135</sup> Michael Brenson, "The Curator's Moment," *Art Journal* 57, no. 4 (Winter 1998), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/777925>. 19.

the shore of knowledge'<sup>136</sup>, to quote Katrin de Guia, the long-time companion/collaborator of artist Kidlat Tahimik; to which I can hear Kidlat Tahimik chime in, 'Whewwww!!! Be gone! Let our homegrown heroes and heroines regreen our voices!'<sup>137</sup>.

Knowing from whence you and your language (your perspective) derive is, I believe, a lifetime commitment; and it should go, hand-in-hand, with understanding how such language impacts the *representation* of our errantry – our speech, our thoughts, our writing, our principles, our ethics. And I hear Donna Haraway nodding in agreeance, relaying 'It matters what worlds world worlds. It matters what stories tell stories.'<sup>138</sup> As a curator, writer and speaker, I have come to consider it negligent if I cannot be critically comparative with my work, that the 'precision' Maria Lind speaks of (as a curatorial urgency in understanding why we do, where we do) is still of great critical absence in the knowledge and ethical conduct of this profession. We, as curators, must address how our movements and actions across this vast globe – physically and intellectually – are of impact in an incredibly uneven social world, one that for many is violently inculcated as politicized defence of border, race, faith and more; and that above all, we must ***be present with what we cannot see.***

---

<sup>136</sup> Katrin De Guia, *Kapwa : The Self in the Other : Worldviews and Lifestyles of Filipino Culture-Bearers* (Pasig City, Philippines: Anvil Pub., 2005), 84.

<sup>137</sup> Writes Kidlat Tahimik as he quotes his leading lady, Inhabian, the indigenous goddess, who is fighting Hollywood's Marilyn M in his large-scale diorama installation *Ang Ma-bagyong Sabungan ng 2 Bathala ng Hangin, A Stormy Clash between Two Goddesses of the Winds (WWIII – the Protracted Kultur War)* 2019. See Kidlat Tahimik, "Kidlat Tahimik," in *Journey Beyond the Arrow : Sharjah Biennial 14 - Leaving the Echo Chamber*, ed. Zoe Butt (Sharjah/London: Sharjah Art Foundation; Prestel Publishing, 2019), 146.

<sup>138</sup> Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble : Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham (N.C.); London: Duke University Press, 2016), 35.

## **LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS**

PG. 26

Figure 1: Trần Lương (artist/curator, Nhà Sàn Đức) leading an artist workshop at Nhà Sàn Đức, Hanoi. 2009. © Nhà Sàn Collective

PG. 26

Figure 2: Jay Koh (artist/curator, Myanmar) sharing his artistic strategies of 'artist-led participatory process' with artists of the Nhà Sàn Collective community, Hanoi, 2018. © Nhà Sàn Collective

PG. 27

Figure 3: 'Pupils' 2011 by artist Phan Quang. One of 11 of 13 photographs censored for his 'Space/Limit' solo show, Sàn Art, HCMC, 2013. ©Phan Quang

PG. 27

Figure 4: The government permitted the bamboo cage that was built around the internal and external gallery spaces of Sàn Art. Ironically the audience experience of being 'caged' was allowed, but not the representation of its occurrence. © Sàn Art

PG. 29

Figure 5: Đạt Vũ 'Untitled 39' from 'Muted Conversations' (2016 – ongoing). Inkjet print on paper. Dimensions variable. The message of the propaganda poster in the rear of this photograph reads: 'Toàn Đảng, toàn dân, toàn quân thi đua lập thành tích chào mừng cuộc bầu cử đại biểu Quốc hội khóa XIV và đại biểu Hội đồng nhân dân các cấp nhiệm kỳ 2016-2020! (The entire Party, people and army are emulating to celebrate the election of deputies to the 14th National Assembly and People's Councils at all levels for the 2016-2020 term!) © Đạt Vũ

PG. 36

Figure 6 and 7: Group critique with Adriana Bustos, participants of Sàn Art Laboratory and select community. Lounge room and studios of 'Sàn Art Laboratory', HCMC, 2014. © Sàn Art

PG. 38

Figure 8: Adriana Bustos 'Official Territory 2018' from 'Vision Machine' 2019. Acrylic, graphite, silver leaf on canvas. 180 x 180cm. © Adriana Bustos.

PG. 38

Figure 9: Installation view of Lại Thị Diệu Hà in 'Mind, Flesh, Matter: Session 4 – Sàn Art Laboratory'. 13 May – 31 July, 2014, Sàn Art. © Sàn Art

PG. 42

Figure 10: N'Tone Edjabe ('Encounter: Conscious Realities') delivering 'Diagnosing the Chimurenga Chronic' workshop at Sàn Art, April, 2015. © Sàn Art

PG. 42

Figure 11: N'Tone Edjabe ('Encounter: Conscious Realities') on stage for the official public event, 'The Beats of Africa' at The Observatory, HCMC Port, April, 2015. © Sàn Art

PG. 45

Figure 12: Jompet Kuswidananto (Indonesia) discussing with Vietnamese artists his research into the 'ghost' in mythology, history and contemporary culture, in discussion with Nguyễn Tiến Văn (writer, translator, Vietnam); as part of 'Prod Ponder' artist in residence program, as part of 'Conscious Realities'. Sàn Art, HCMC, 2013. © Sàn Art

PG. 46

Figure 13: Kidlat Tahimik ('Encounter: Conscious Realities') surprising his audience with a performative response to audience questions during his lecture, hosted by Hoa Sen University, HCMC, 2014. © Sàn Art

PG. 47

Figure 14: Khadim Ali ('Prod/Ponder: Conscious Realities') sharing his past and current projects in Afghanistan with Sàn Art's artistic community in the lounge room of 'Sàn Art Laboratory' – an 'artist-in-residence' program, HCMC, 2014. © San Art

PG. 54

Figure 15: Artist Maryanto and LIR trailed a near erupting Mount Merapi, a volcanic haven for illegal sand mining exacerbated by governmental corruption, learning from local villagers of the ghosts and animal spirits who guard this volcano, collecting oral histories as sound and image recordings along the way. © Pollination

PG. 55

Figure 16: Artist Ruangsak Anuwatwimon and Kittima combed the depleting shores of the Lower Mekong (the border between Thailand and Laos), spending time with local fisherfolk who shared their woe of livelihood as the balance of the river spirits had been endangered due to Chinese damming projects, collecting animal carcass and dying plant life along the way. © Pollination

PG. 57

Figure 17: Sit under Maryanto's tent-like installation and the ghost stories of the animal spirits of Mt Merapi can be heard, this tent covered in illustrations of these spiritual guardians. Installation view, MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum © MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum

PG. 57

Figure 18: Walk beside Ruangsak's suspension of a miniature Mekong, its bark body painted with a line of toxic blue, as animal carcass line its dwindling body. Installation view, MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum © MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum

PG. 63

Figure 19: Opening night of 'Spirit of Friendship' at The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, HCMC, 2017. © The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre

PG. 64

Figure 20: Installation view of 'Spirit of Friendship', The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, HCMC, 2017. © The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre

PG. 64

Figure 21: Installation detail of 'Spirit of Friendship' chronological timeline of the emergence of artist groups (top wall register); with relevant socio-political events placed on particularly designed cards labelled by year (bottom wall register) © The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- "900mdpl." Accessed 24 August, 2022. <http://www.900mdpl.com/p/900mdpl.html>.
- "Ao Dai Week 2022 to Take Place from March 1-8." *The Voice of Vietnam*. 3 March, 2022. Accessed 22 August 2022, <http://vwu.vn/tin-chi-tiet/-/chi-tiet/-034-ao-dai-week-034-year-2022-to-take-place-from-march-1-8-45025-4807.html>.
- "Ashkal Alwan." Accessed 24 August, 2022. <https://www.ashkalalwan.org/>.
- "Behna Study Programme." Behna El Wekalah. Accessed 13 July, 2022. <https://www.behna.org/en/behna-study-programs>.
- "Boat Home Boat." Ly Hoang Ly. Accessed 22 August, 2022. <http://www.lyhoangly.com/boat-home-boatpublic-art/>.
- "Chimurenga Chronic." Chimurenga. Accessed 22 August, 2022. <https://chimurengachronic.co.za/>.
- "Common Wealth ". Accessed 24 August, 2022. <https://commonwealththeatre.co.uk/>).
- "Comparative Contemporaries - a Web Anthologies Project." Asia Art Archive. Accessed 22 August, 2022. <https://aaa.org.hk/en/programmes/programmes/comparative-contemporaries-a-web-anthologies-project>.
- Curating Global Art : Positions and Voices : Essays and Art from Images 16*. Edited by Maria Bierbaum Oehlenschläger. Copenhagen: Centre for Culture and Development (CKU).
- "Dave Beech Mark Hutchinson." In *Curating Subjects*. Edited by Paul O'Neill. London: Open Editions, 2011.
- "Dolla Merrillees in Conversation with Thuy Nguyen." In *Thuy Nguyen: An Everyday Dream (Forthcoming)*. Edited by Zoe Butt Le Thuan Uyen. Ho Chi Minh City: The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, 2022.
- Glossary of Common Knowledge*. <https://www.internationaleonline.org/glossary/>. Edited by Jesus Carrillo Zdenka Badovinac, Bojana Piskur, Ida Hirsensfelder. Ljubljana: Moderna galerija, 2018.
- "Gudskul." Accessed 24 August, 2022. <https://gudskul.art/en/beranda/>.
- "Heritage." Vietnam Airlines. Accessed 22 August 2022. <https://heritagevietnamairlines.com/en/puplications/>.
- Institution as Praxis : New Curatorial Directions for Collaborative Research*, edited by Bill Balaskas Carolina Rito. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2021.

- "Mute Grain." Thao Nguyen Phan. Accessed 22 August, 2022.  
<http://www.thaonguyenphan.com/mute-grain>.
- "My Ailing Beliefs Can Cure Your Wretched Desires." Tuan Andrew Nguyen. Accessed 22 August, 2002. <https://www.tuanandrewnguyen.com/myailingbeliefs>.
- Permanent Temporariness*, edited by Sandi Hilal Alessandro Petti. Stockholm: Art & Theory, Royal Institute of Art, 2018.
- "Pisaot: Experimental Arts Residency." Sa Sa Art Projects. Accessed 13 July, 2022.  
<https://www.sasaart.info/pisaot.htm>.
- "Raw Academie." RAW Center for Art, Knowledge and Society. Accessed 13 July, 2022.  
<http://www.rawmaterialcompany.org/AboutRAWAcademy?lang=en>.
- "Re/Cover." Phan Quang. Accessed 22 August, 2022. [phanquangartist.com/re-cover/](http://phanquangartist.com/re-cover/).
- Roberto Chabet Archive*. <https://aaa.org.hk/en/collections/search/archive/roberto-chabet-archive>: Asia Art Archive.
- "Ruangrupa." Accessed 24 August, 2022. <https://ruangrupa.id/en/>
- "Sa Sa Bassac." Accessed 24 August, 2022. <http://sasabassac.com/index.htm>.
- South East Asia: Spaces of the Curatorial* edited by Oetker Brigitte Ute Meta Bauer. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016.
- Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge, 2015.
- Apinan Poshyananda, Asia Society Galleries. *Contemporary Art in Asia : Traditions, Tensions : India, Indonesia, Philippines, South Korea, Thailand*. New York: Asia Society Galleries, 1996.
- Bakhtin, M. M., Michael Holquist, and Vadim Liapunov. *Art and Answerability : Early Philosophical Essays*. 1st ed. *University of Texas Press Slavic Series*, vol. no 9. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990.
- Bass, Thomas A. *Censorship in Vietnam : Brave New World*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2017. Kindle.
- Beattie, Boitran Huynh. "Vietnamese Aesthetics from 1925 Onwards." PhD diss, University of Sydney, 2005. unpublished.
- Bergman, Carla Montgomery Nick. *Joyful Militancy : Building Thriving Resistance in Toxic Times*. Edinburgh: AK Press, 2018.

- Bishop, Claire. "The Social Turn Collaboration and Its Discontents." *Artforum international* (2006). Accessed 22 August 2022. <https://www.artforum.com/print/200602/the-social-turn-collaboration-and-its-discontents-10274>.
- Bobbette, Adam. "Fuck Your Culture: Nudes in Four Landscapes." The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre. 2021. Accessed July 21, 2021. <https://ofhuntersandgatherers.com/fuck-your-culture-nudes-in-four-landscapes/>.
- Brenson, Michael. "The Curator's Moment." *Art Journal* 57, no. 4 (Winter 1998). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/777925>.
- Butt, Zoe. "The Collective Development of Contemporary Art in Vietnam: A Critical Struggle to Be Independent." In *After Darkness Comes the Light: Art in the Wake of History*. New York: Asia Society, 2017.
- Butt, Zoe. "Practicing Friendship: Respecting Time as a Curator." In *South East Asia Spaces of the Curatorial*. Edited by Ute Meta Bauer Brigitte Oetker. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016.
- Butt, Zoe Nguyen Bill Thi n Bao L. "Spirit of Friendship: Artist Groups in Vietnam since 1975." *sen Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia* 2, no. 2 (2018): 145-79.
- CIMAM. *Cimam 2017 Annual Conference Report*. CIMAM 2017 Annual Conference: The Roles and Responsibilities of Museums in Civil Society. National Gallery Singapore.
- Corey, Pamela N. "Metaphor as Method: Curating Regionalism in Mainland Southeast Asia." *YISHU: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 13, no. 2 (March/April 2014).
- D.Inandiak, Elizabeth. "Rumah Menapo: The Refuge of the Deer During the Floods of the Batanghari River." The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre. 2021. Accessed July 21, 2021. <https://ofhuntersandgatherers.com/rumah-menapo/>.
- De Guia, Katrin. *Kapwa : The Self in the Other : Worldviews and Lifestyles of Filipino Culture-Bearers*. Pasig City, Philippines: Anvil Pub., 2005.
- Dee, Elizabeth. "Context Collapse Is Threatening the Future of Big Art Fairs. Here's Why We Should Be Very Concerned." *Artnet*. August 26, 2019, <https://news.artnet.com/opinion/context-collapse-ruining-art-fairs-heres-us-art-business-concerned-1633852>.
- Demos, T. J. *Beyond the World's End : Arts of Living at the Crossing*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020. Kindle.
- Department of Public Security, Vietnam. "Detention of Blogger 'Mother Mushroom'." 10 October, 2016. Accessed 22 August 2022, <https://vietnamnet.vn/bat-tam-giam-blogger-me-nam-333295.html>.

- Diawara, Manthia. "Edouard Glissant's Worldmentality: An Introduction to One World in Relation." *dOCUMENTA14* (2017).  
[https://www.documenta14.de/en/south/34\\_edouard\\_glissant\\_s\\_worldmentality\\_an\\_introduction\\_to\\_one\\_world\\_in\\_relation](https://www.documenta14.de/en/south/34_edouard_glissant_s_worldmentality_an_introduction_to_one_world_in_relation).
- Easterling, Keller. *Medium Design : Knowing How to Build the World*. London/New York: Verso, 2021. Kindle.
- Flores, Patrick. "The Exhibition Problematic and the Asian Dislocal." In *From a History of Exhibitions Towards a Future of Exhibition-Making : China and Southeast Asia*. Edited by Biljana Ciric. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2020.
- Flores, Patrick D. *Past Peripheral : Curation in Southeast Asia*. Singapore: NUS Museum, 2008.
- Freitag, Ulrike Oppen Achim von. *Translocality : The Study of Globalising Processes from a Southern Perspective*. Leiden [The Netherlands]; Boston: Brill, 2010.
- Gambo, Rahima. "A Walk Space." Accessed 24 August, 2022. <https://www.awalkspace.com/>.
- Gell, Alfred. *Art and Agency : An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford ; New York: Clarendon Press, 1998.
- Gleeson, Erin. *Mutualism for the Future*. Who Cares? 16 Essays on Curating in Asia. Edited by Michael Lee Alvaro Rodriguez. Hong Kong: Parasite, 2010. Originally published as <https://www.para-site.art/publications/who-cares-16-essays-on-curating-in-asia/>.
- Glissant, Édouard, and Betsy Wing. *Poetics of Relation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997. Publisher description  
<http://www.loc.gov/catdir/description/umich051/97006997.html>.
- Haraway, Donna. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575-99.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3178066>.
- Haraway, Donna Jeanne. *Staying with the Trouble : Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham (N.C.); London: Duke University Press, 2016.
- Holert, Tom. *Knowledge Beside Itself : Contemporary Art's Epistemic Politics*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2020.
- Hui, Yuk. "Collective Individuation: A New Theoretical Foundation for Social Networks." CCCBLAB Cultural Research and Innovation. Last modified 21 June 2011, 2011. Accessed 17 August, 2022. <https://lab.cccb.org/en/collective-individuation-a-new-theoretical-foundation-for-social-networks/>.

- Iliadis, Andrew. "A New Individuation: Deleuze's Simondon Connection." *MediaTropes eJournal* IV, no. 1 (2013): 83-100.  
<https://mediatropes.com/index.php/Mediatropes/article/view/20385>.
- Jones, Christopher P. "What Artists Talk About When They Talk About Their Art." *Medium*. August 24, 2019, <https://christopherpjones.medium.com/what-artists-talk-about-when-they-talk-about-their-art-14373a87b452>.
- Kester, Grant. "Conversation Pieces: The Role of Dialogue in Socially-Engaged Art." In *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985*. Edited by Zoya; Leung Kocur, Simon. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.
- Lahaji, Obie Muhammad. "Local Wisdom of the Bajo Tribe and Its Acculturation on Islamic Sharia: A Case in Tomini BayIndonesia." *HSSR Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews* 8, no. 1 (2020): 814-20.
- Lertchaiprasert, Kamin. "31st Century Museum of Contemporary Art." Accessed 24 August, 2022. <https://31century.org/>.
- Libby, Samantha. "The Art of Censorship in Vietnam." *Journal of International Affairs* 65, no. 1 (Fall/Winter, 2011). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24388192>.
- Lind, Maria. "Performing the Curatorial: An Introduction." In *Performing the Curatorial: Within and Beyond Art*. Edited by Maria Lind. New York: Sternberg Press, 2012.
- Mahler, Ann Garland. "Global South." Oxford Bibliographies. Accessed October 25, 2017. <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780190221911/obo-9780190221911-0055.xml?rskey=eMzKAW&result=16>.
- Mai, Nguyen Thi Thanh. "Day by Day." Vietnam Art Archive. Accessed 22 August, 2022. <https://vietnamartarchive.vn/artworks/day-by-day-project/>.
- Manojna Yeluri, Syme de Leon, Gabriel Fine, Frances Rudgard, and Julie Trébault. *Arresting Art: Repression, Censorship, and Artistic Freedom in Asia*. Edited by Susan Chumsky: PEN America's Artists at Risk Connection (ARC), Mekong Cultural Hub (MCH), and Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM- ASIA), 2021.
- Maria Lind, Terry Smith. "Stirring the Smooth Surfaces of the World: The Curatorial and the Translocal." In *Talking Contemporary Curating*. Edited by Terry Smith. New York: Independent Curators International, 2015.
- Marsden, Scott. "An Insurgent Curatorial Strategy Using Dialogue and Collaboration to Create Meaning in Public Art Galleries and Museums." *International journal of lifelong education* 2018 (2018): 134-46.

- Mignolo, Walter. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity : Global Futures, Decolonial Options. Latin America Otherwise: Languages, Empires, Nations*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.
- Mignolo, Walter. *Local Histories/Global Designs : Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. Princeton / Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017. Kindle.
- Mignolo, Walter. "On Pluriversality." Walter Mignolo. Accessed July 22, 2022. <http://waltermignolo.com/on-pluriversality/>.
- Mignolo, Walter D. "Coloniality Is Far from over, and So Must Be Decoloniality." *Afterall Journal* 43 (2017). <https://www.afterall.org/article/coloniality-is-far-from-over-and-so-must-be-decoloniality>.
- Mignolo, Walter D. "Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing: On (De)Coloniality, Border Thinking and Epistemic Disobedience." *Postcolonial Studies* 14, no. 3 (2011): 273-83. <https://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2011.613105>.
- Mira Asriningtyas, Dito Yuwono, Kittima Chareeprasit. "Of Hunters and Gatherers: Pollination #3." The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre. 2021. Accessed July 21, 2022. <https://ofhuntersandgatherers.com/thegatherers/>.
- Molemo Moiloa, Nare Mokgotho. "Madeyoulook." Accessed 24 August, 2022. <http://www.made-you-look.net/>.
- Nelson, Roger. "Curating as (Expanded) Art History in Southeast Asia: Recent Independent Projects in Ho Chi Minh City, Luang Prabang, and Phnom Penh." *ARTMargins* 9, no. 2 (2020): 33-60.
- Nelson, Roger. *Modern Art of Southeast Asia: Introductions from a to Z*. Singapore: National Gallery Singapore, 2019.
- Nora A. Taylor, Pamela N. Corey. "Doi Moi and the Globalization of Vietnamese Art." *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 14, no. 1 (2019): 1-34. <https://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1525/vs.2019.14.1.1>.
- Nyen, Ho Tzu. "Critical Dictionary of South East Asia." 2017 ongoing. Accessed 22 August, 2022. <https://cdosea.org>.
- O'Neill, Paul. "Introduction." In *Curating Subjects*. Edited by Paul O'Neill. London: Open Editions, 2011.
- Petresin-Bachelez, Natasa. "For Slow Institutions." *e-flux journal* 85 (October 2017). <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/85/155520/for-slow-institutions/>.
- Rogoff, Irit. *The Expanding Field. The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*. Edited by Jean-Paul Martinon. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015.

- Sandi Hilal, Alessandro Petti "Daar: Decolonizing Architecture Art Research." Accessed 24 August, 2022. <http://www.decolonizing.ps/site/>.
- Scott, David. *Gilbert Simondon's Psychic and Collective Individuation : A Critical Introduction and Guide*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014.
- Shaina Anand, Askok Sukumaran. "Camp." Accessed 24 August, 2022. <https://studio.camp/>.
- Smith, Terry; Fowle, Kate; Badovinac, Zdenka; Bishop, Claire; Butt, Zoe; Celant, Germano; Christov-Bakargiev, Carolyn; Enwezor, Okwui; Groys, Boris; Hoffmann, Jens; Kataoka, Mami; Lind, Maria; Obrist, Hans-Ulrich; Ramirez, Mary Carmen. *Talking Contemporary Curating*. New York: Independent Curators International, 2015.
- Steinbock, Eliza Ieven Bram Valck Marijke de. *Art and Activism in the Age of Systemic Crisis : Aesthetic Resilience*. New York: Routledge, 2022.
- Supangkat, Jim. *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond*. Jakarta, Indonesia: Indonesia Fine Arts Foundation, 1997.
- Tahimik, Kidlat. "Kidlat Tahimik." In *Journey Beyond the Arrow : Sharjah Biennial 14 - Leaving the Echo Chamber*. Edited by Zoe Butt. Sharjah/London: Sharjah Art Foundation; Prestel Publishing, 2019.
- Tan, Erika. "Repatriating the Object with No Shadow: Along, against, within and Through". 2013. Accessed 22 August 2022. <https://vimeo.com/85377549>.
- Taylor, Nora A. "Sedimented Acts: Performing History and Historicizing Performance in Vietnam, Myanmar and Singapore." *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia* 6, no. 1 (2022): 13-31. <https://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1353/sen.2022.0001>.
- Tee, Ian. "Conversation with Vietnamese Curator Bui Kim Dinh." *Art and Market* (Singapore)2020, <https://www.artandmarket.net/dialogues/2020/9/18/conversation-with-vietnamese-curator-bui-kim-dinh>.
- Teh, David. "Obstacles to Exhibition History: Institutions, Curatorship and the Undead Nation-State." In *The Curatorial Conundrum : What to Study? What to Research? What to Practice? (Pre-Publication Draft)*. Edited by Mick Wilson Paul O'Neill, Lucy Steeds. . Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016.
- Teh, David. *Where Monsoons Meet: Curatorial Currents in Southeast Asia*. Afterall: Artist as Curator Symposium. Central St. Martins, London: <https://www.afterall.org/article/artist-as-curator-symposium-where-monsoons-meet-curatorial-currents-in-southeast-asia-by-d>, 2013.

- Teh, David. "Who Cares a Lot? Ruangrupa as Curatorship." *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* 30 (2012): 108-17.
- Thorp, R. "Deconstructing Karlsson, Part 1: Historical Consciousness." *Hist. Encounters* 4, no. 2 (2017): 1-10.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315459207\\_Deconstructing\\_Karlsson\\_Part\\_1\\_Historical\\_Consciousness](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315459207_Deconstructing_Karlsson_Part_1_Historical_Consciousness).
- Trọng, Danh. "Pham Thi Doan Trang Was Sentenced to 9 Years in Prison." 14 December, 2021. Accessed 22 August 2022, <https://tuoitre.vn/ba-pham-thi-doan-trang-bi-tuyen-phat-9-nam-tu-20211214151051676.htm>.
- Unruh, Leanne. "Dialogical Curating: Towards Aboriginal Self-Representation in Museums." *CURA Curator: The Museum Journal* 58, no. 1 (2015): 77-89.
- Yap, June. "Curatorial Connections, Southeast Asia: Three Panels, Two Books." *IDEAS Journal, Asia Art Archive* (April 2009). <https://aaa.org.hk/en/ideas-journal/ideas-journal/curatorial-connections-southeast-asia-three-panels-two-books>.
- Zoe Butt, Bill Nguyễn, Lê Thiên Bảo. "Spirit of Friendship: Artist Groups in Vietnam since 1975." *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia* 2, no. 2 (2018): 145-79.