

The Roles and Responsibilities of Museums in Civil Society

CIMAM 2017 Annual
Conference
Proceedings

Singapore
10–12 November
2017

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Day 1

Friday 10 November

National Gallery
Singapore

Art and the City: From
Local To
Transnational?

Keynote 1

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Museums and their Spaces: From the City as Sanctuary to a Molecular Confederation

This is a revised and expanded version of the author's presentation at the CIMAM Annual Conference 2017.

<https://vimeo.com/249053192>

Cities are formed out of the need for security, in the pursuit of commerce, and through the expression of culture. The idea that the city, or at least a sacred portion of it, is a place of sanctuary is equally ancient. However, in general the city offers protection against invaders, fosters industries for processing raw products, and through the evolution of rituals and protocols it distinguishes itself from the ways of the barbarians. The city is a place of foication, assembly, and deliberation. By allowing people, things, and ideas to come together in a concentrated manner, it stimulates exchange, translation, and innovation. If we are to uphold that these values are best served in a concentrated form, and if the intensities afforded by urban life are maximized through a careful oscillation between proximity and distance, then we need to consider: who are the invaders and barbarians that threaten the contemporary city? Does the revolution

need to happen in the city in order, as Marx and Engels suggested, that it also rescues us from the “idiocy” of rural life?

Today cities are interpenetrated by a complex array of global and local forces that are creating new divisions and hierarchies. The threats are not necessarily found from rival neighbors, or even in the internal difference between urban and rural demands. Over two decades ago, Saskia Sassen (1991) commented that global cities like New York, London, and Tokyo have more in common with each other than with other cities in their immediate regions.¹ As this globalizing trajectory has intensified there are now even more cities that are reconfiguring their priorities as they are becoming decoupled from their states. This may sound odd in Singapore, because the city is both state and region. But of course, the island polis of Singapore is both an outlier and in a way

1 Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991).

a paradigmatic version of the global city. Everywhere else the contradictions of globalization and urbanization are more pronounced.

Recently, the former mayor of New York City, Michael Bloomberg stated that Brexit was the most stupid thing a nation has ever done, with the exception of voting for Trump.² It was not his former constituents that supported Trump. The President's personal tower is in New York, but his political base lies in that territorial rump that is known as "fly over America". The turn to a populist right wing and neo-nationalist agenda, that was also evident in regions such as the former East Germany and the deindustrialized pockets of France, is now seen as the most pronounced threat to global capital and urban civility in the West. These interior regions are splitting further and further way from the coastal mega cities and metropolises across the world.

Is this what the West has come down to: a showdown between Trump and Clinton? City vs Country? These are two wrong options. They are not equally bad, just as Macron is not the same as Le Pen. However, the reduction of choices to these wrong options only confounds those who are right to register that their lives are hollowed out by ontological insecurity and environmental degradation. Globalization has generated unprecedented levels of mobility. Neo-liberalism did a stunning job in decoupling state power from economic control. In the name of freeing the market to deliver services, it transferred state-controlled assets into private companies, and in the name of deregulation it commodified the infrastructure for public service, environmental care and social protection. However, it failed to provide a suitable platform for the deliberation and redistribution of public goods, and it effectively produced levels of inequality that the West has not seen since the 1910s and 1920s. In short, almost all the gains in the welfare state, democratic accountability, and human rights have rolled back, and new environmental threats, xenophobic fears and illiberal modes of governance have become indistinguishable from one another.

The rhetoric of globalization was stitched into the modern promise of mobility. Modernity was driven by technical transformations and massive migrations. Movement underpinned the era of industrialization and increased the mixture of peoples and their cultures.

The diasporas and networks have created alignments which exceed the conventional structures and feelings of belonging within the parameters of the nation state. The brutal changes were often glossed over by the success stories that either celebrated the heroic examples of migrants rising from rags to riches, or that trumpeted the huge leaps forward in life chances. Globalization drew on this modernist commitment to a forward momentum and the transgression of borders. It was against closed markets, impatient with institutional procedures, and opposed to the inhibitors of traditional cultural values. Globalization promised to mobilize vitality and innovation through willful disruption. Yet, how many have been enlivened, enriched and emancipated by this process? Has the nation withered away, or does it matter even more than ever before.

A decade ago many of us expressed a wide-eyed optimism about the possibilities of mobility extending the forms of cultural exchange and cross-cultural translation. As Craig Calhoun noted, "all the talk was about cosmopolitanization of everyday life, cosmopolitan democracy, and the ever-greater advance of supra-national unity in Europe."³ The new technologies in communication and significant decline in the cost of travel also fostered a kind of naïve cosmopolitanism:

So now that everyone is able to journey to distant countries, to experience other cultures and traverse geographical barriers; now that obstacles in the form of political systems, languages, cultures, differences between countries and regions are disappearing, and perpetual transformation is perhaps the one constant of our contemporary modernity, especially now that the foundations of national governance, in the sense of belonging to a nation-state, is becoming increasingly weaker. Nationalism is regarded as a feeling that doesn't fit the time, and people are starting to construct a new identity based on the city where they live. This is what characterizes the world we live in and artists are undoubtedly one of the social classes that possess more freedom of movement in this era.⁴

2 Graham Ruddick, "Michael Bloomberg: Brexit is Stupidest Thing Any Country Has Done Besides Trump", <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/oct/24/michael-bloomberg-brexit-is-stupidest-thing-any-country-has-done-besides-trump> (accessed 10 May 2018).

3 Craig Calhoun, "Public Spectacle: Is There Anything Left after Global Spectacles and Local Events? Craig Calhoun in conversation with Peter Beilharz and Nikos Papastergiadis, 15 May 2017", (Melbourne: RUPC pamphlets, 2017).

4 Barbara Vanderlinden, "'Re-Used Modernity' Brussels Biennial 1", (Cologne: W. König Verlag, 2008), 34.

In a relatively short time, such emphatic declarations have disappeared. Sociologists, political theorists, and curators who predicted the appearance of a post-national identity—one that could find sanctuary in the cosmopolitan city, or generate new horizons of connectedness through globalizing networks—have now adopted more circumspect perspectives and redefined the relationship between mobility and belonging. The discourse is now more jagged as the violent extremes have come closer to our attention. In terms of political rights, the proliferation of flexible citizens and stateless refugees mark the two ends of this spectrum. In relation to the cultural condition, there is a growing despair that mobility is fueling the McDonaldization of culture. When we see that humanitarian challenges have stumbled in the face of the neo-militarization of border controls, or note that new thinking on cultural hybridity has also stoked old fantasies of ethnic purity, then there is a strange sense of how the political is merging with the cultural. The political backlash against globalization has now been interpreted as the end of the cultural ideals of cosmopolitanism. This is not just a consequence of the debunking of the hype on mobility and hybridity that, in some instance had blurred deeper inequalities and produced a chain of equivalence between people with platinum frequent flyer cards and stateless refugees. It is more fundamentally linked to the material and symbolic questions of building a viable community and defining the forms of solidarity that can deliver, not just promise, institutions for the distribution of pleasure, justice and opportunity. Unless we take comfort in platforms like Facebook, we cannot believe that globalization is aiding the cosmopolitanism of society. On the contrary, the global condition is now registered not just in terms of accelerated flows, but also as a looming anxiety over endless crisis. In Greece crisis is now a way of life, and this is just the tip of a wider freezing up of the political imagination. Throughout the world one crisis merges with another. Causes that lay in economic inequity have morphed, with anti-humanitarian consequences. It no longer makes sense to talk about a crisis. Crisis is not only plural it is ambient.

However, I will argue that globalization and cosmopolitanism are neither equal nor co-dependent. This would be obvious to Immanuel Kant. Apart from two very short trips, Kant never left his home town of Königsberg. Reflecting on the current landscape, we can assert that globalization has an integrative logic that seeks to facilitate flows by establishing transparent pathways, standardized classification services, consistent platforms and totalizing networks. In short, to enable mobility and lubricate exchanges

it requires a hermetic, flat, homogenized world. This smooth machine has nothing to do with cosmopolitanism. In my view, to be cosmopolitan is to be open to the world in all its differences. There is a wonderful paradox at the heart of cosmopolitanism—it creates a radical equality among all people, but it accepts that the encounter with different people can only be meaningful if both our similarities and our differences are articulated, thus the tendency of cosmopolitanism is toward heterogeneity: it is a vivid world of generative differentiation. From this perspective, we can note not only a critique of the global commodification and instrumentalization of culture, but also glimpse another way of making the world. The “globe” in globalization is not the same as the “cosmos” in cosmopolitanism.

In this lecture, I want to step back and reroute the links between globalization and cosmopolitanism. It will involve not just a clarification of the contrasting orientation between globalization and cosmopolitanism, but also a rethinking of the role of cultural institutions which were once founded to, either provide a coherent identity of the cultures within their civic space, or to elevate the city as a repository for the world's cultures. I will argue that these institutions are increasingly seeing themselves as part of a wider trans-national dialogue on the cosmopolitan. In this context, I want to rethink the way cultural values are also linked to institutional capacities. Cities and nation states are mediating forces between the cultural ideals of cosmopolitanism and ideology of globalization. Cities and nations are not neutral players: they come with their own baggage that includes primordial prejudice, and hierarchies of exclusion.

Cities that proclaim the vitalism of diversity cannot function as a sanctuary for difference. If diversity is trapped in the principle of sanctuary, then it would spin the city into multiple spirals of withdrawal. Each difference would take sanctuary in its own sphericle. Dialogue would cease and an infinite regression would reign. However, in the context of diverse publics and networked public spaces the traffic in culture cannot survive is a relative isolation. No city can last for long if it installs rigid barriers on exchange, just as the endless fracturing of the public sphere is a surrender to noise. Once again, we seem stuck before bad options. In the neo-liberal-hyper-communicative-city the choices for a museum are often reduced to either hanging on as a relic from the quaint past, or emerging as a service provider in the market place of spectacles. However, rather than either resigning myself to the pragmatic concession that civic ideication is not as bad as neo-colonial corporatism, or indulging in the

simplistic opposition between bad nationalism and good cosmopolitanism, I want to re-examine the basis of a cosmopolitical venture. This will involve a closer exploration on the way people mediate between different systems, and the existence of institutions that realize collective cultural practices. Otherwise we are entangled in a dance of dependency and disavowal—the cosmopolitan agents are dependent on national institutions but disavow their dependency. Meanwhile the national imaginary is dependent on cosmopolitan values but disavows any binding force to anything that compromises its sovereign independence. How can we break out of these stuying oppositions?

Collaboration is one of the most important concepts for opening up the space for dialogue and exchange in contemporary culture. It is a term that has special significance in the museum and arts sector. From an instrumental perspective, it is a tool that coordinates the multiple roles that are necessary in cultural production. At a conceptual level, it is also useful to both debunk the mysterious hierarchies of artistic genius, and highlight the creative interplay that occurs in the mess of cultural production. However, this still offers a small view on collaboration. It simply tracks the difference between the vertical process of implementation and command that emanates from above, to the horizontal activity of collaboration that proceeds from the middle. Apart from the recognition that collaboration spreads outwardly, there is the further challenge of understanding it in a wider social space.

A decade after Maria Lind observed the accentuation of collaborative techniques in contemporary artistic practices, she proposed that it was also necessary to rethink the “systematization” of museums and contemporary art institutions.⁵ Given the scope and speed of flows in a globalizing world, and the entangled complexities of cosmopolitanism, it is a crucial moment to reflect on the utility of the museum. The capacity to offer a space for contemplation and reflection, as well as engagement and entertainment has been stretched to breaking point in recent times. However, its privileged status as the platform for deliberation and the destination for “fine art” also goes against the emergent trend of collective, ephemeral and interactive practices in contemporary art. In this context, collaboration is not organized via a vertical command structure, but unfolds through a horizontal process of experimentation.

The willingness to play together can only proceed if there is also an ambient process for generating trust. As artists connect their practice to the idea that the city—or, in more general terms, the urban condition—is the site of production and the zone for contestation, it also prompts double-edged questions about institutional roles and boundaries. On the one hand, it widens the museum as it embraces agents from outside the institution. On the other hand, it fractures the evaluative frame as it disperses the event of art into an unbounded zone. In either case, there is no more sanctuary for the world in the museum, and the museum is less and less a sanctuary for the history of the city.

L'Internationale: Decolonizing the Institutions of Art

As a step towards confronting the challenges that are posed in the era of precarious neoliberalism and complex globalism, I will turn towards L'Internationale, the confederation of six modern and contemporary art institutions in Europe, as an example in rethinking the function of the museum as part of a trans-institutional collaboration. L'Internationale is an ongoing collaboration initiated by six directors Vasif Kortun, Zdenka Badovinac, Bartomeu Mari⁶, Manuel Borja-Villel, Bart De Baere and Charles Esche, and brings together staff and resources from Moderna galerija (MG+MSUM, Ljubljana, Slovenia); Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS, Madrid, Spain); Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA, Barcelona, Spain); Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen (M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium); SALT (Istanbul, Turkey) and Van Abbemuseum (VAM, Eindhoven, the Netherlands). While anchored in Europe, L'Internationale is connected with partners in different parts of the world. It formally commenced in 2010 and took its current form in 2013 with the project *The Uses of Art—the legacy of 1848 and 1989*.

The idea of a confederation is a response to the limits of both the museum and the city as a space of sanctuary. Even the Reina Sofia is too small to offer a genuine base for artistic refuge, and today, all cities are culturally already too big to be represented by any singular institution. In an age of mobility collaboration is inevitable. However, the counter-force of

5 Maria Lind, “Collaboration: Ten Years Down the Line”, in *Greater Together*, exh. cat., ed. Annika Kristensen (Melbourne: Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 2017).

6 L'Internationale commenced in 2010 but SALT and Reina Sofia did not join until 2013. In 2016 Ferran Barenblit replaced Bartomeu Mari as director of MACBA. Julius Koller Society (SJK), a collection site and archive of Julius Koller's work, a research center and a place for public debate and reflection, was also a founding member but is no longer part of the confederation.

globalization and the ideology of neo-liberalism prioritize competition and tethers creativity to the dictates of instrumental benefit and commercial return. At a time in which the European Union is being dominated by cannibalistic economic and political objectives, the proposition of a new confederation, one that elevates the cultural values of difference and opens a new frontier for the exchange between local and global agents, seems to not only to be going against the grain of history, but also reiterating the faith in cosmopolitanism. As H.G. Wells pointed out, there is no evidence that the cosmopolitan city has ever been built, but it is also equally clear that, in each era, the dream of cosmopolitanism has been expressed anew.

So, what would a confederation look like, and how does it differentiate itself from either mega-institutions such as the Tate, which has consolidated its central base through the development of satellites, or the strategies of the Guggenheim, which structures its growth through a horizontally distributed franchise system? Manuel Borja-Villel stressed that the emergence of the confederation was moved by the radical disruption of the bases upon which museums were established. “Neoliberalism”, he claims, “has taken away our ground,” leaving us “trapped between a past in which we don’t recognize ourselves and a present we don’t like”.⁷ It is a kind of cultural version of prosopagnosia—you stare at something familiar but none of the features are discernible. In Eastern Europe an old joke still circulates: “the situation is catastrophic, but not yet serious”.⁸ The aim is not to laugh off the causes of lamentation, but to start again and imagine an alternative self-image. Thus, L’Internationale has adopted a molecular structure and a transversal orientation as the basis for their confederation. In order to distinguish this collaboration from either a temporary project, or a tactical alliance, they refer to their practice of working

together as a confederation. This structure is defined as “a space for art within a non-hierarchical and decentralized internationalism, based on the values of difference and horizontal exchange among a constellation of cultural agents, locally rooted and globally connected.”⁹ This loose and dynamic structure is intended as a point of departure from both the unrecognizable past and the unlikeable present. It is an effort to gain differentiation from the classical museum’s accumulative logic that aspires to maintain an encyclopedic grasp on world culture, and the already noted corporatist agenda. Manuel Borja-Villel’s self-described aim is for L’Internationale to become a “monster” transnational institution, too big to be controlled by any local power base, and diffuse enough to defy any singular aesthetic style.¹⁰

In the past five years, this confederation has yielded countless publications, conferences, and projects. However, the significance of this collaborative turn cannot be measured in terms of increased productivity, it must generate new knowledge about the historical place of the museum, adopt alternative models of institutional governance, rethink the spaces of aesthetic production, and ultimately accept the role of the publics as constituents. Across each of these four domains, we can also identify the need to pursue three aims that have been palpable for some time across the whole of the sector but remain unresolved. Thus, there is a zig-zag process of practical ideation and testing, as well as a mercurial method of conceptual articulation and reflection, that transpires in the pursuit of these three aims: decolonizing the imagination, democratizing the institution, and instituting the commons.

Decolonizing the imagination compels a departure from the colonialist orientations and modernist attitudes. The cultures of the South can no longer be seen as if they were mere “raw” materials that could be extracted and processed

7 Manuel Borja-Villel, personal email communication with Nikos Papastergiadis, 7 February 2017.

8 Mladen Dolar, “The Crisis” in *The Final Countdown: Europe, Refugees and the Left*, ed. Jela Kre i (Ljubljana: IRWIN & Vienna: Wiener Festwochen, 2017), 77. Published on occasion of the NSK State Pavilion curated by Charles Esche and Zdenka Badovinac and organized in conjunction with the 57th Venice Biennale of Art.

9 L’Internationale, “Confederation”, <http://www.internationaleonline.org/confederation> (accessed 6 November 2017).

10 “I have used the word monster on different occasions, but I am not sure I would use it now here. We do not seek to resurrect an old colonial order, because we are in a new colonial order. We are a privileged part of it. That’s why self-reflection and a permanent form of interpellation is necessary. I have always been very uncomfortable with the word ‘confederation’. It reminds me too much of a former order, of a bourgeois structure. That’s why, even if we are transnational, I think it would be more important to say we are a molecular structure. Also, our problem is more than with a ‘local power base’, it is the national structure as well as with the art system as such. In a moment, when self-precarization [sic] is the rule, it is difficult to think that by escaping local powers we are just escaping the system. Transnationality might give us some advantages, but it may be naive to think that it is a major factor of freedom.” Borja-Villel, op. cit.

By contrast, Ferran Barenblit, the newest member of L’Internationale, argues that its structure is emergent from aspirations and affects: “L’Internationale bases itself on coordinates that are different to other trans-national organizations. From the beginning it has refused to operate in many of the fields in which others have worked. Basically, because they are already covered, so no new actions in these directions are needed, but also because they are predictable, flat and in many times they reinforce the enemy that they are announcing as they are fighting. L’Internationale focuses on people rather than organizations; in emotions rather than juridical status; in aspirations rather than quaiable results. L’Internationale is much more about ‘who you are’ rather than ‘what you do’, even when it considers that there is no action with a meaning... There is also the importance of sheer endurance and ‘being’. Our violence is to exist.” Ferran Barenblit, personal email communication with Nikos Papastergiadis, 6 Feb 2017.

by the agents of the North. It calls for an appreciation that the interpenetration of the world's cultures has also brought forth new demands of equality and respect, as well as greater understanding of the hybridity in all forms of cultural production. The decolonizing of the institutions of art, is more than an attitudinal shift, it has also spurred a rethinking of the organization of collections, the ideication of multiple historical narratives, the partnership with artists to expand the archival sites, the development of trans-national curatorial programs, and in more general terms—the re-orientation of historical knowledge around issues of urgency and the exploration of affects. In the era of global mobilities, it no longer makes sense to evoke either a singular world culture, or a homogeneous public culture. If such a construct was adopted in the era of the nation state, then this was more as an expression of cultural narcissism that privileged the dominant national cultures as the apex in a global hierarchy, and a political ideology that masked the differences within the nation. Today, the presence of difference is both unavoidable and ineradicable. The challenge for L'Internationale is to generate pluriversal narratives in which identity is defined in a relational rather than fixed manner, and the interplay between the part and the whole is an opening towards multiple worlds rather than confirmation of singular nation-centered perspectives. Hence, the plurality of publics is neither an adjustment phase, nor an extension of the normalized formatting of culture. The formation of a pluriversal configuration between the other and the self, and the construction of a new common occurs through the realignment of the flows between the locals, regions and global centres, that not only “favors the bridging between local specificities”¹¹, but also consolidates the “desire to be a bridge between the localized anchors and the world”.¹² However, these “bridges” between localized specificities, regional connectivity and worldliness do not merge into a new totalizing framework, or fold back into a nationalist microcosm.

Democratizing the institution is not just a matter of expanding public access to the museum, it has also meant a radical rethink of the public as a constituent whose presence shapes the museum. This expanded notion of public agency was at first evident in the evolution of artistic practice, in the shift of emphasis from creative autonomy to cultural collaboration. In opposition to the vertical hierarchy, or pyramid like

structure of creative agency, that positions the artist at the peak, as the sole creator, and appends the curatorial and education staff as mediators whose function is to transfer and translate the message that is embedded in the artwork for a general audience, L'Internationale embraces an alternative model where creativity is distributed more openly and the artist collaborates with curators, mediators and the public to co-produce the realization of an aesthetic proposal within a collective and reflexive context. “It is about putting the artist in play as a creative figure in a constellation, rather than holding them up as an omniscient oracle... the artist is necessary to create any capacity to imagine the world otherwise. But it is the artist no longer in the service of “ART” but in the service of social transformation.”¹³ This horizontal dispersal of creative production both liberates the artist from being the sole provider of meaning and acknowledges that change occurs in the interaction between different participants. The function of mediation is thus no longer confined to transmitting the artist's intention to the public, but is expanded to embrace the wider dynamic of social interaction and institutional responsibility. In this context, the distribution and authorship of ideas also spreads outwardly. The place of the artists is “taken seriously” but it is neither automatically at the centre, nor at the top of this process.¹⁴ Everyone has responsibility to shape the message. Or as Deleuze said, creativity occurs in the “middle”, and from this position the potential for democratizing culture is enhanced.

Instituting the commons is distinct from both an imaginary proposition of alternative culture, and the modernist hierarchy that elevated a specific worldview as the pinnacle of universal culture. Instituting the commons is produced through the coming together of diverse agents to interpellate a shared agenda, and in the context of L'Internationale it has found its most vivid articulations through initiatives such as “Archives of the Commons”, where multiple stories are generated through tactical pooling of resources and people in artistic collectives, social movements and universities. This practice of instituting the commons cuts against both the generic formation of museological narratives, and the phantasmagoric ideal that Europe is founded on a common culture. In both of these hegemonic formations difference is at best tolerated in so far as it enters as an equivalent to an already validated and pre-existent form of

11 Charles Esche, personal email communication with Nikos Papastergiadis, 5 February 2017.

12 Bart De Baere, personal email communication with Nikos Papastergiadis, 5 February 2017.

13 Esche, op. cit.

14 De Baere, op. cit.

cultural identity. Instituting the commons is not posed, once again, as if culture possesses a fixed and enclosed shape, or as if it arose from a singular origin and trajectory. On the contrary, insofar as there is a discernible shape that comes from instituting the commons, it is marked by protruding misfits, and signs of work in progress. It assumes an ambiguous form by remaining open and responsive to the other. It is for this reason that instituting the commons inspires anguish and dread to those who prefer distinct institutional boundaries, agreed categories for classification, and fixed position from which to measure and survey adjacent cultural domains. Instituting the commons is not a system that either conforms to these conceptual certitudes, or leads to convergence through a familiar linear perspective. It is a modality that embraces the commons as an ongoing process that is instituted through robust dialogues with difference.

Conclusion: collectives that don't want to be collected

Testing the aims of a confederation will also require an evaluative framework that goes beyond the conventional approaches in Museum Studies. The impact of museums is usually measured in terms of their support of artistic practices, development of cultural knowledge, interaction with local communities, influence on national culture, or economic partnership in cultural tourism. In the first instance, any examination of a transnational collaboration requires more than widening the frame and extending the points in a comparative evaluation. Therefore, the study of L'Internationale should not be confined to a longer list of artistic programs, and a wider network of cultural impact. The point of a confederation should be more than either the scaling up to generate greater purchasing power, or shielding the partners from the turbulent forces of change. Museum knowledge in a confederation is not just the sum of the contents in six-silos. Such a confederation should open new horizons and confront some of the old problems. For instance, in the first publication that L'Internationale produced, they set out to examine a number of jagged questions on the means, status and context of art. What is the purpose of dialogue in a relational field of visual practice, is it a means to more object-based work, or a material end in and of itself? How do issues that figure on a planetary scale fit with the old

discourse of the local and the global? What is the status of ephemeral debris, and does the sacred still require a protective barrier in a contemporary art institution? Is it possible to reconstitute the common in the context of radical plurality?¹⁵

I will end with a brief reflection on a vexed issue: the imbrication between esthetics and politics. This issue has been central to a number of projects that have been pioneered by L'Internationale, and a brief examination of how it has been tackled may provide some insight into the conceptual advances of this collaborative project from which benefits have emerged. From the outset of modernity, artists, curators and theorists have pursued this issue along one of two diametrically opposing trajectories. On the hand, there is the claim that the beauty of art has no other function than its pursuit of the autonomous and internal logic of disinterested spectatorial pleasure. On the other hand, there is the equally widely held claim that art acquires beauty through the subordination of form to function, so that it becomes the expression of an externality—such as a pre-existing conceptual parameter, or the will inherent in a political ideology. In a recent response to this conundrum the philosopher Jacques Rancière has offered the contention that “life is the notion that allows us to overcome those contradictions”.¹⁶ This contention is tested through his examination of a surprising alliance of sources—the writings of Immanuel Kant and John Ruskin, as well as the visual practices of the Soviet avant-garde. Through these high points in modernist thinking and aesthetic practice he finds a twist in the conventional definitions of beauty, claiming that it is neither the consequence of mechanical integration, nor the outcome of formal resolution. Beauty is neither measured against its resemblance to organic perfection, like a flower, nor in its abidance to an *a priori* conceptual form. On the contrary, the function of art arises from its capacity for expanding and intensifying communication. All forms of communication are necessarily oriented outward. They point toward the social and are enhanced by collective practices of exchange and translation. Thus, the beauty of art is not defined by internal criteria that are derived from either aesthetic autonomy or political utility, but in the “coupling” or the “socialization” that occurs through communication. Art and life are brought together in the unconstrained conjunction of social utility and sensory pleasure. It produces

15 Christian Höller, *Post-War Avant-Gardes Between 1957 and 1986*, e-book, http://www.internationaleonline.org/bookshelves/linternationale_post_war_avant_gardes_between_1957_and_1986 (L'Internationale, 2012; accessed 1 November 2017), pp. 38–39, 96–105.

16 Jacques Rancière, “Art, Life, Finality: The Metamorphoses of Beauty”, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 43, Spring (2017): p. 597.

a space, that we could call a *heterocosmoi*, that is both inviting for the other, and affirmative as a “place for life”.¹⁷ Rancière is insistent that this is not a form of unification in which art and life dissolve into each other, but a concordance that is represented as a “supplementary”, and therefore it yields a perpetually open space.

Rancière’s formulation of the emancipated spectator stands in relation to the idea of the disinterested spectator that was so influential in early modernity. It must be noted that the use of avant-gardist visual techniques to disrupt the normative order and rattle sensory modalities were most effective in a context of relative visual sparsity. Given the condition of hyper-visibility in late modernity, the condition of spectatorship is as much ironic as it is critical. In response to this shift, theorists and curators linked to L’Internationale have noted a paradigm shift in the function of art—from spectatorship to usership. Steven Wright has referred to artistic practices that are indistinguishable from social activities, where there is no attempt to use art as a representation of society, but rather, the social and artistic actions are coterminous with each other, as examples of “double ontology”. Wright argues that these practices, such as shared meals, have a “primary ontology as whatever they are, and a secondary ontology as artistic proposition of the same thing.”¹⁸ This conceptual framing is different to Rancière’s. While Rancière stopped with avant-garde’s aim to produce a “concordance” between art and life, one of the challenges for L’Internationale is the quest for “meaning in relationships”. As early as 1994 Bart De Baere collaborated with artists in an exhibition where the artworks did not simply summon the spectator’s attention, but made a space for the other works that co-existed in the same time and space. This complex spatial overlapping and temporal co-presence opened the field to the importance of relations. De Baere noted that the artists were not just “process artists—but artists with process”.¹⁹

In relation to the recent trends of collective and collaborative practices that are engaged with everyday life, the aim is not to overcome polarization by making a place that is attractive for the other, and finding in art a place for life, but rather for art to both flee from the institutional constraints and to be in the

instituting of the common. Where the avant-garde sought to overcome separation by means of a radical supplement, the contemporary assemblages constituted by collectives like *ruangrupa* make the boundaries between art and life both redundant, because there is no representation of anything, and at the same, the material conditions of everyday life, which are inevitably bounded, are used as they are. Hence, the relationship between art and life operates on a 1:1 scale. This orientation towards usership, rather than bringing up yet another critique of spectatorship, is important for Wright, and for many of the projects initiated by L’Internationale, because it marks a break with modernist claims on the function of art, and also speaks to both collective practices that disrupt the institutional expectations on authorship, and the artistic constitution of environments that refuse the museal logic of collection, classification and commodification. Amidst these practices there is no audience, because they do not stand before it, they must be involved in it. They are made of, and contribute to the making of the spatial-temporal of the project, which is, at one and the same time, the stuff of the artwork. Wright defends this re-orientation of conduct toward usership, whether it occurs inside or outside the walls of the museum, as a means of liberation from the corrosive delusion of exceptionalism:

To gain use value, to find a usership, requires that art quit the autonomous sphere of purposeless purpose and disinterested spectatorship. For many practitioners today, autonomous art has become less a place of self-determined experimentation than a prison house—a sphere where one must conform to the law of permanent ontological exception, which has left the autonomous artworld rife with cynicism.²⁰

It is uncertain whether this monstrous anti-capitalist option is in itself sustainable. To date, it thrives because it has found ways to exploit the contradictions within European funding structures. I cannot predict whether the confederation is like a temporary eddy formed by an outgoing current, or whether it will thrive as it outruns its rivals. However, as a bare minimum, this structure alerts us to what Vasif Kortun defines as an “existential problem within the museum field”.²¹ The lines of fracture between the interests of artists and civic movements such as Gulf Labor Coalition, and institutions like the Guggenheim

17 Ibid., 603.

18 Steven Wright, *Toward a Lexicon of Usership*, e-book, <http://museumarteutil.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Toward-a-lexicon-of-usership.pdf> (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2013; accessed 10 May 2018), 22.

19 Bart de Baere, “Joining the Present to Now”, *Kunst & Museumjournaal*, Vol. 5, Issue 4 (1994): p. 68.

20 Wright, op. cit., 12.

21 Vasif Kortun, “The Museum Is Not What It Used to Be”, lecture at the Museum of Contemporary Art Toronto, 1 October 2017.

are evident on a global scale. This conflict is also playing out in Europe. Can L'Internationale's pursuit of democratic equality and open cultural exchange gain any traction in a time in which the European project is moving towards increased forms of fragmentation and inequality? If the European Union is embracing neoliberal economic rules for competition, can a confederation of museums realize the cultural project of unity through diversity? Charles Esche and Bart de Baere argue that the tensions and contradictions that are threatening the European project are making the case for the existence of L'Internationale all the more pressing: "It makes a demand on the EU to see itself not only in legal and economic terms and to remember something it seems to have forgotten in its desperation to service the market".²²

If we were to map the activities and aspirations in contemporary art, what would it really look like? It is not hard to draw the lines of movement that plot the sites of origin with the places of work.²³ This would produce a familiar map, one that is not that different to the global flight paths of the major airlines. However, we are equally familiar with the resistance that artists generate when critics and curators categorize them according to regional identities. Can we therefore produce a different mapping of the structures of belonging, one that flows from a sense of place in the world in relation to three scales—our body, a community, and the world as a sphere—and then overlap this with civic, national, and cosmopolitan forms of belonging? I am sure this kind of map would resemble a kind of wobbly Venn-diagram. However, beyond a diagrammatic sense of inter-connectedness, this image also speaks to the complex forms of political solidarity and institutional networking that is necessary in the art world. Contemporary art now operates in a bundle of social relations and is entangled in a multiplicity of cultural references and artistic media. This has produced a radical challenge in both aesthetic evaluation and normative critique. The good and the worthy are neither equivalent nor impervious to each other. Given that museums are no longer sanctuaries for the preservation of art for art's sake, and they are implicated in the global crisis of deindustrialization, decolonization, migration, and climate change, as well as having to both navigate through the ideological terrain of neo-liberalism, and interactive communication platforms, then surely, it is time to develop tools that enhance trans-national-trans-institutional collaborative practices.

22 Esche, *op. cit.*

23 Christiane Bernes and Joost Groot, "Data Visualisation on Artists' Migrations. Research in Progress", L'Internationale, http://www.internationaleonline.org/research/politics_of_life_and_death/94_data_visualisation_on_artists_migrations_research_in_progress (accessed 12 November 2017).

Perspective 1

Ute Meta Bauer

Founding Director,
NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore

The Making of an Institution, NTU CCA Singapore and Its Context

*This is a revised and expanded transcript of
the author's presentation at the CIMAM 2017
Annual Conference.*

<https://vimeo.com/249054380>



Figure 1. Gillman Barracks, Singapore.



Figure 2. NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, Exhibition Hall, Block 43, Gillman Barracks.



Figure 3. Jam Session #1 by Brian O'Reilly, 24 October 2015, part of Tomás Saraceno- Arachnid Orchestra, NTU CCA Singapore. Image courtesy of Studio Tomás Saraceno.

I would like to thank National Gallery Singapore and the CIMAM conference committee 2017, for inviting me to talk about curating in Southeast Asia. I am particularly glad that so many artists of this region are here to present. We all work with art and it is crucial to have artists with us at such global gathering of institutions that write art history, not only because artists are so knowledgeable, but often they are much more aware of the particular conditions of a locale. They know the place in which they are situated and their works are generated, and that informs their practice.

But let me come to "The Making of an Institution". CIMAM, as we all know, is dedicated to museums and collections. But not all societies around the world have the privilege to enjoy public collections or possess museums for art. Therefore, in Southeast Asia it often comes to other entities or organizations to lay the ground. In Singapore, as part of the recent expansion and strategic planning in the arts sector, with the arts precinct Gillman Barracks (fig. 1), the presence of international art is now integrated on a regular basis rather than just presenting global art on special occasions, as for example through biennials or special touring exhibitions. As Singapore's

art museums have the mandate to collect mainly the art of Southeast Asia or Asia, this led to the need to establish a cluster of galleries from around the globe at the Barracks as the first international arts hub of this country. This effort meant encouraging international galleries to relocate or run a franchise in Singapore addressing the private and corporate sector as potential buyers.

The NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore (fig. 2) is, like many other art institutions in Singapore, located in a former colonial building. Gillman Barracks was one of Singapore's British Army camps created in the 1930s. The university center was founded to serve as an anchor institution for this newly established contemporary arts cluster, with one of its mandates to host artists from different parts of the world through a well-supported artist residency program (fig. 3) next to the commercial galleries from Japan, United States, China, Italy, Australia and Singapore.

Nevertheless, the core question is, what do we mean when we say our mandate is "international"? Are we talking about presenting art from beyond



Figure 4. National Gallery Singapore, Padang Atrium. Image courtesy of National Gallery Singapore.



Figure 5. Performance by OFFCUFF (ila, Bani Haykal and Wu Jun Han); Part of Free Jazz, official inauguration of NTU CCA Singapore, 23 October 2013.

a nation-state, are we speaking beyond the local, or do we mean connecting with an international mandate all the locales across nations and cultures? And is the local not also international at the same time? What can a recently founded institution like ours contribute to the local condition? Through a debate that expands the local?

An art institution is like any other living entity: it grows, it develops; it transforms itself. It goes through cycles of change and transformation. But it is also part of a larger cultural, social and political environment; an institution does not develop in isolation. On the contrary, it is shaped by forces and actors that contribute to its making, its staff, artists, stakeholders, multiple publics and, increasingly, a virtual audience.

Our Centre embodies the complexity of any other contemporary art institution in times of knowledge economies and a globally expanded art market; it arrives at a moment of institution building in Southeast Asia. The Centre's first exhibition, "Engaging Perspectives", was already presented in January 2013 prior to its October inauguration

and was curated by Dr Eugene Tan, Director of the National Gallery Singapore, who was at that time in charge of thinking and developing Gillman Barrack as an art cluster. This happened in parallel to the launch of the first edition of Art Stage, Singapore's largest art fair dedicated to the contemporary art of Southeast Asia and the wider Asia Pacific created and led by Lorenzo Rudolf, previously director of Art Basel who had developed Art Basel Miami. The ambition to internationalize the art sector came on a bigger scale and included the ten-year project to develop the National Gallery Singapore as a museum dedicated to the modern art of Singapore and Southeast Asia, the institution where we gather today (fig. 4). The National Gallery Singapore involved a SGD530 million renovation of the former Supreme Court and the adjacent former City Hall of Singapore. It indeed houses the largest collection of Southeast Asian modern art in the region.

The NTU CCA Singapore's inaugural program in October 2013 (fig. 5), conceived by its newly appointed and modest start-up team that included myself and curator Anca Rujoiu with writer Lee Weng Choy, President of the Singapore chapter of the International Association of Art Critics (AIICA), (who previously served as co-director of The Substation) nominated as its Deputy Director. Instead of an exhibition, we decided to begin our program with an open-ended format that we called *Free Jazz* to address the foundational question: "What can this new institution be?" As an institution, we wanted to take a more subjective approach bringing together a diversity of voices that mirrored the complexity of the region itself: its various curatorial spaces, infrastructures and political systems. This included inviting a wide range of actors from the local scene, artists, and directors of other institutions from abroad. We asked ourselves, our guests and audience what it meant to be engaged in art and



Figure 6. Incomplete Urbanism—Attempts of Critical Spatial Practice, 2016–2017. NTU CCA Singapore.

what an institution founded in 2013 could have as a mandate. What could the CCA contribute to the existing local and regional art ecosystem while acting internationally? Through this practice of *Free Jazz*, improvisation and “free play”, we tried to figure out our potential role and to give form to our mission—in short, to develop a vision. At a moment where the art world is expanding globally it is indeed important that art and cultural institutions evaluate their roles, tasks and also the wider impact of their action.

Now, four years later into our existence as a center, new questions are to be raised. What is our role within this multi-ethnic, multi-religious local, regional and global cultural landscape with its complex colonial history? When more museums—public and private, including Museum MAIiAM in Chiang Mai and Museum MACAN in Jakarta—are emerging in Southeast Asia? How can an institution, a research center dedicated to contemporary art with the size of a small *Kunsthalle* contribute to a wider understanding of art as knowledge production within an academic setting, while reaching out to the diverse publics of Singapore? What are the criteria to evaluate our achievements, our impact, and how can we determine the scale and scope of our outreach locally while being “international” and yet a national research center?

As an art institution that is also embedded in a university environment, it is logical to place research at the core of our mission, and although our work is dedicated to the field of contemporary art, our attempt is also to focus on a wider notion of “Spaces of the Curatorial”. We also engage in evaluating the processes that occur within an institution, and the role of curating in different institutional settings throughout Southeast Asia. But what “curatorial research” means is still less known to the public. Hence, we regularly hold “Behind the Scenes” tours and talks, to provide some insight into the processes and “invisible” activities of artistic and curatorial ways of working.

Many museums today face the same issue: what should be their core focus? The front stage or the backstage? Most likely both. As institutions, we are increasingly evaluated by our visible parts, but not by research done behind closed doors, or by all-important day-to-day important routines such as conservation, preservation of collections and archives, the migration of databases and media works and the increasing complexity of dealing with loans. All operational matters that are indeed crucial to the “care-taking” of the works entrusted to us, the amount of work and required staff are most often not in the awareness of the public and therefore less important to address by politicians and sponsors.

As much as I treasure my profession as a curator, we have to expand our understanding of cultural knowledge and diverse landscapes beyond the current framework. This is also something I would like CIMAM to consider, to provide “mentorship” to the art infrastructures of regions that have not the same access to education in museum studies and curatorial practices or technologies of conservation and preservation, collection management, etc. At the same time, learning from each respective region on how to further develop a pluralistic way to approach art histories beyond the “Western Canon” would lay the ground for a fruitful exchange respecting one another’s knowledge. How to support but not patronize regions that only more recently are taking part in the exchanges of a globalized art world? I very much hope that CIMAM and its members will be open and not exclusive in its definition of what is considered an institution, and to include other entities in their mandate as well. It is important how we set the tone for such interregional exchanges. Together we can develop discursive and critical thinking by training the next generation and hopefully empower not only curators and institutions, but all components that form a cultural sector.

Traditionally, the practice of curating has been defined through its main medium of activity and format of articulating: the exhibition (fig. 6). However, such a restrictive approach would replicate a traditional western model while new approaches and formats open up around the globe. One requirement of our Centre is capability development and therefore in addition to our extensive trainee program, we created together with NTU’s School of Art, Design and Media the first MA course in Museum Studies and Curatorial Practice. To understand and embrace the possibilities of “Spaces of the Curatorial” implies the reinforcement of curatorial practice in the wider cultural sphere. In this light, we approach the curatorial as a strategy for the production of meaning and a mode of thinking and working that traverses the complex field of cultural production and articulates itself in different formats and temporalities. The rapid shifts in cultural production subjects any attempt of a definition to an ongoing revision, however, requiring of the curatorial a specific way of drawing connections between different materials, bodies of knowledge, histories, places and people. Having the support of a wealthy nation such as Singapore, our Centre has to reflect on how privileged we are within the Asia Pacific and bear in mind the responsibility that comes with the fact that we have sufficient public funding while others do not.

Our Centre is therefore indebted to artist-run spaces such as: The Substation, Koh Nguang How's Singapore Art Archive Project, Lee Wen's Independent Archive Ltd and Grey Projects here in Singapore; Cemeti Art House (fig. 7) and KUNCI in Yogyakarta; Sàn Art in Ho Chi Minh City; Sa Sa Bassac and Sa Sa Art Projects in Phnom Penh and also, artist-collectives such as Post Museum in Singapore, Ruangrupa in Jakarta, just to name a few. Most of these smaller self-organized entities play a substantial role in their local art scenes as they reach out to different audiences from museums and galleries. Most of them operate with little or no public funding, but in return have a wider freedom in terms of approach and content.

Larger-scale institutions such as the Singapore Art Museum that was inaugurated in 1996, or the National Gallery Singapore that opened its doors to the public just recently in 2015, or the Jorge B. Vargas Museum in Quezon City, Manila, Philippines, inaugurated in 1987, and their museum peers across Southeast Asia, ensure that artistic production of their respective regions remains in the public realm. These institutions contribute on a larger scale to the formation of new audiences, informing about the rich, complex and not always pleasant cultural histories of Southeast Asia and contribute to rewrite global art

history. At the same time, to research and work in this region calls for various levels of exchanges, it requires more than the curatorial "care" and as my colleague Zoe Butt, from The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre in Ho Chi Minh City pointed out, it requires also a network of friendship and trust that forms the basis of many art spaces across Southeast Asia and its widely dispersed archipelagos—a network that makes them resilient and keeps them connected.

The commitment of artists and cultural producers in this context of rapid political and economic change is sustainable and resistant. Hopefully, this will remain the same in future. It is a great opportunity that CIMAM members have the opportunity for the 2017 edition of the Annual Conference to visit a variety of institutions and initiatives on a Pre-Conference Tour to Vietnam and a Post-Conference Tour to Indonesia, which will provide you with an insight to the scope of "geographical curation", as art historian and curator Patrick Flores from the Philippines defines it. I feel privileged to work in and contribute to this region, as so much is happening here and deserves to be further researched and explored. Thank you.



Figure 7. Cemeti Art House, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Image courtesy of Timoteus Anggawan Kusno and Cemeti Art House.

Perspective 2

Chen Chieh-Jen

Artist (Taiwan)

Void City

This is a translated version of the author's presentation at the CIMAM 2017 Annual Conference

<https://vimeo.com/249612988>

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to the organizers for inviting me to take part in this discussion.

The theme of today's discussion is "Art and the City: From Local to Transnational". It is a very meaningful topic, but not one easy to respond to, which is why I would like to intimate my perspectives from my series of works from 2014 to 2017, *Realm of Reverberations*.

The series of works *Realm of Reverberations* takes main inspiration from the historical setting of the famous Losheng Sanatorium and "Losheng Preservation Movement" in Taiwan. Before I proceed to talk about my work, let me briefly introduce the background to the Losheng Sanatorium and the "Losheng Preservation Movement".

After the Japanese colonization of Taiwan in 1930, the Japanese colonial government established (fig. 1) the Rakusei (Losheng) Sanatorium for Lepers of the Governorate-General of Taiwan in Taiwan's Xinzhuang district to impose a mandatory quarantine, together with a ban on marriage and reproduction on patients with Hansen's disease (leprosy), arresting and confining them within the sanatorium. The facility was also surrounded with a barbed wire fence to prevent patients from fleeing.

In 1945, after the Nationalist party retook Taiwan, the party retained the policy from the

Japanese colonial government. It was not till 1961 that the quarantine mandate was officially abolished. However, due to the stigma attached to Hansen's disease, residents in the Losheng Sanatorium were unable to reintegrate into society.

When the Korean War broke out in 1950 and the Cold War spread to East Asia, the United States began to influence and intervene in Taiwan's political, economic, military and public health policies. Other than providing funding for the expansion of the Losheng Sanatorium to ensure the healthy supply of soldiers and cheap labor that the first island chain required against the Communists, the United States imported newly discovered drugs between the 1940s and 1960s, such as DDS, to treat the Hansen's

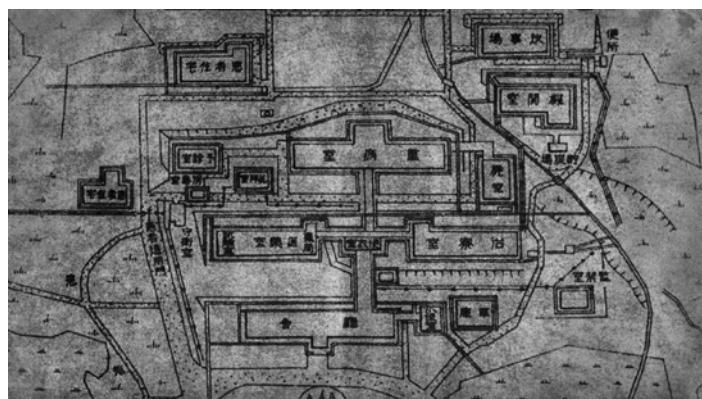


Figure 1. Losheng Sanatorium, Design Drawing.



Figure 2. The morning of December 3rd, 2008 at the Losheng Sanatorium

disease. To test the efficacy of these drugs, actual human testing was conducted, which resulted in many patients dying from an overdose of DDS.

In 1994, bureaucrats in the Taiwanese government and local political forces colluded to have the Taipei Department of Rapid Transit Systems (DORTS) relocate their metro depot operations in Xinzhuang to the site of the Losheng Sanatorium and evict all patients. This was met with a campaign in 1995 by residents who ideied the hospital as their home to resist eviction and defend it.

In 2002, the “Losheng Preservation Movement” went into full swing when DORTS conducted their first phase of building demolition, triggering intense resistance from the patients and other activists. Apart from the voluntary organisations set up by residents and students, there was widespread participation in the campaign by many academics, lawyers, engineers, cultural workers, etc.

At the end of 2008, after the police had driven away residents, students and the masses who were gathered to oppose the eviction (fig. 2), DORTS immediately set up a construction fence and started demolition works. To date, 70% of the Losheng Sanatorium has been demolished and the “Losheng Preservation Movement” has since lost public attention.

Although the initial purpose of the “Losheng Preservation Movement” was to protect the human and housing rights of the patients, it also recalls how various structures to suppress dissent were put in place during the Japanese colonization of Taiwan using “public health” as a pretext. During the Cold War, the United States and the Nationalist government similarly utilized “public health” to establish new exclusionary policies. When Taiwan lifted Martial law in 1987 and a series of neoliberal policies were implemented, factories near the Losheng Sanatorium re-located en masse; this resulted in many people who live in the area around the Sanatorium losing their jobs.

To simplify, the “Losheng Preservation Movement” was not only a campaign to safeguard the human and housing rights of patients with Hansen’s disease: it is also a movement that involves anti-colonialism, anti-neocolonialism and anti-neoliberalism.

In interest of brevity, I will not expand on the complicated history behind the Losheng Sanatorium and the “Losheng Preservation Movement”. This ongoing social movement has lasted more than 20 years, as many historical factors have inextricable links to the Losheng Sanatorium.

I knew friends devoted to the “Losheng Preservation Movement” as early as in 2006, and their intention to establish an alternative “Losheng



Figure 3. Still of *Realm of Reverberations*, 2014.



Figure 4. Still of *Realm of Reverberations*, 2014.



Figure 5. Still of *Realm of Reverberations*, 2014.

Museum” to highlight a different perspective from the official version of the incident. The plans never came to fruition due to setbacks experienced by the “Losheng Preservation Movement” at the end of 2008, and the failure to obtain any information locked up in official archives. This became a key reason to why I started working on *Realm of Reverberations* in 2014.

In 2013, I met a young girl who had continued staying on the remaining grounds of the Losheng Sanatorium despite the setback of the movement to assist residents with their daily errands. Her name was Chang Fang Chi; she was also one of the team members who contributed to the concept of the alternative “Losheng Museum”.

It was her persistence that got me thinking. Maybe the alternative “Losheng Museum” should

not be replicating the model of a traditional museum, which would be to exhibit official files that were impossible to obtain, or present oral recordings of former residents.

On the contrary, to encourage the audience to reflect on the sort of power structures preventing us from knowing this part of history, we should emphasize the “blanks” behind what the officials were trying to obliterate and hide.

What I am trying to convey is—although “the unseen” may seem like a wall that blocks our path of understanding, “the unseen” may at times inspire us to change our original ways of thinking and open up alternative epistemology.

Therefore in 2014, when it seemed like there were no longer any “incidents” to film in the remnants of the Losheng Sanatorium, I created a four-channel video work *Realms of Reverberations* (fig. 3, 4 & 5). Through the perspectives of the elderly patients, of Chang Fang Chi—a young girl who has been accompanying the residents—a caregiver from mainland China who had been through the ordeal of the Cultural Revolution, as well as a fictional female political prisoner who lived through the Japanese colonization, the work asks: do past events that seem settled actually ever end? Or do they form the departure points for multiple dialectics or other divergent imaginaries?

In the first video *Tree Planters*, we see resident Chou Fu Tzu riding a mobility scooter up the hill, singing a wistful tune of her own invention, as well as a bird’s eye view of the sanatorium which had been made into a gaping hole by construction. The lights from the construction site create on her face a chiaroscuro of violence and conflict as she rides down the mountain in the evening. In other parts of the video, the residents are in situated in pitch darkness, or from time to time when remnants of the sanatorium appear on screen, they look like a never-ending stretch of uninhabited land. The only narration in the film is a monologue by resident Li Tien Pei, who recounts stories of the residents who used to live there and the story of how they planted more than 800 trees on the ground that had served to prevent landslides.

The second video *Keeping Company* documents young Chang Fang Chi, who has accompanied the residents even after the setback of the movement, and continually returns to the remains of the sanatorium, collecting detritus from the narrow passages, roof mezzanine, dark basements, empty rooms and rubbish dump. She eventually arrives at the hospital bed of the patient she took care of up until his death, and futilely attempts to gather with her bare hands the dust before her.



Figure 6. Event photo of film projection ceremony of *Realm of Reverberations* at Losheng Sanatorium, 2015.

The third video *The Suspended Room* features a caregiver working in the terminal ward from mainland China who had been through the Cultural Revolution, named Liu Yue Yin. Because she could no longer bear the misery of watching patients under her care depart one by one, she decided to leave her job to become a cleaner. Although she passes by the site of the metro depot every day, she never learns that this was the site of the most important chapter in the history of Taiwan's social movement, the "Losheng Preservation Movement", just as how no one knew that she had lived through the even more complicated

Cultural Revolution. In her daily routine as a cleaner, she repeatedly wipes and cleans up stains, dust and rubbish in different spaces day after day, seemingly unendingly as the stains, dust and rubbish recur.

In the last video, *Tracing Forward*, a young theatre actress named Hsu Yi Ting plays a fictional female political prisoner with no idea of when or where she came from. She walks from the ruins of the "Taipei Prison" in downtown Taipei to a heavily polluted industrial area. She sees factories discharging waste water, even as images of colonial and neo-colonial history are discharged in a nonlinear fashion from an old factory incinerator. She even sees herself passing through although lit, but empty rooms. Thereafter, outside the construction site of the depot operations she runs into a Beiguan ensemble, commonly seen during a Taiwanese folk religion processions. But this procession is not escorting any deity: it is as if it were a declaration that this place was now devoid of master, god, ghost, and people. The four-channel video work, *Realm of Reverberations*, does not provide the audience with a linear narrative. The videos are unsynchronized, allowing the sound from each video to impinge and distract the viewing experience, such that the audio track of each video is always constituted by that of the others.



Figure 7. Still of *Wind Songs*, 2015.

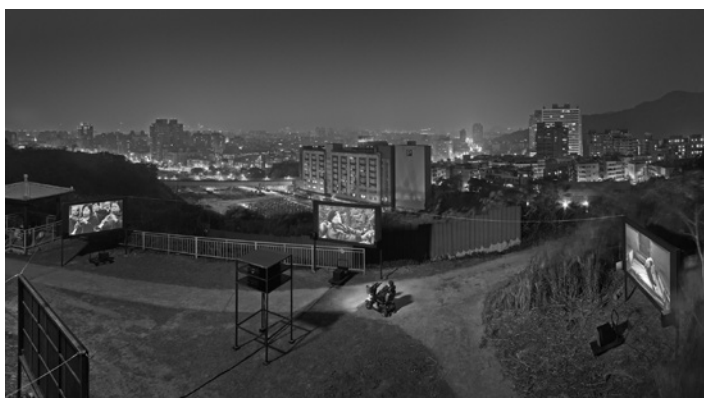


Figure 8. Still of *Wind Songs*, 2015.



Figure 9. Lecture performance at Tokyo's Shibaura House, 2016.

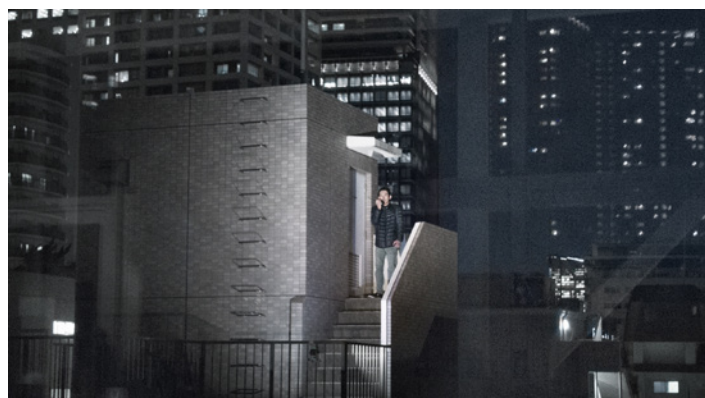


Figure 10. Lecture performance at Tokyo's Shibaura House, 2016.

After completing *Realm of Reverberations*, on the evening of 18 January 2015, I returned to the Losheng Sanatorium to organize a film projection ceremony in the style of a temple festival parade (fig. 6). This is roughly how the screening session was conducted: invited guests followed a truck with a screen installed on foot from the Losheng Sanatorium to an open space next to a columbarium at the top of the hill, former residents recounted the history of the “Losheng Preservation Movement”, and thereafter we watched together *Realm of Reverberations* in its four-channel version. After the screening, the truck sets off from the sanatorium, located at the margins of the city, to the ruins of the “Taipei Prison” located in downtown Taipei. The evening wrapped up with a screening of *Tracing Forward*, the fourth video of *Realm of Reverberations*.

The image we are seeing now is of a video of this screening, entitled *Wind Songs* (fig. 7 & 8).

In early 2016, at the invitation of Arts Commons Tokyo, I gave a lecture over three nights at the fifth floor of Tokyo Shibaura House, titled *Dissenting Voices of the Unwashed, Disobedient, Non-Citizens, and Exiles in Their Own Homes* (fig. 9). The lecture discussed the reason behind the film *Realm of Reverberations*, and the process of evolution of colonialism and neo-colonialism, and linked it to Japan’s harsh Worker Dispatch Act and whether it was in fact a new Losheng Sanatorium, now without walls.

At the end of my speech, the curtains surrounding the space were slowly opened and I invited the audience to look at the familiar night skyline of Tokyo city. When the curtains were fully drawn, a 30-year-old Japanese dispatched laborer was standing on the roof of an adjacent building in the cold winter night. Using a wireless microphone, he then spoke to the audience about his various part-time working experiences since the age of 18 (fig. 10).

Afterwards, I adapted this performance into an audio recording and combined it with the videos from *Realm of Reverberations* and *Wind Songs* to complete the series also known as *Realm of Reverberations* (fig. 11 & 12). When it was on display at the 2016 Taipei Biennial curated by Corinne Diserens, the audience could open the doors to a transparent room in a glass partition, and express whatever was on their mind into a lone microphone. However, when opening the glass door, a loud and ear-piercing feedback would cause most of the audience to immediately close the door again (fig. 13).

During the Biennial, residents of Losheng Sanatorium and some youths who participated in the “Losheng Preservation Movement” came to visit the exhibition.



Figure 11. Installation view of *Realm of Reverberations* at the Taipei Biennial, 2016.



Figure 12. Installation view of *Wind Songs*, 2016 Taipei Biennial.

In March 2017, the members of the “Losheng Preservation Movement” decided to organize another large-scale event (fig. 14). At this event, I provided a timeline compiled by a few young friends and myself since 2014. This timeline was a record of the various milestones, large and small, that had taken place during the “Losheng Preservation Movement” between 1994 to 2016.

From this timeline, we realized that the heterogeneity and complexity of organizations and related issues involved in the “Losheng Preservation Movement”, went far beyond our original understanding.

The lesson from the case of the Losheng Sanatorium and “Losheng Preservation Movement” tells us that there is no place in the world where you can have an isolated incident involving no other place or party. In fact, we might say that every local story, is always at once an international one.



Figure 13. Installation view of *Dissenting Voice s of Unwashed, Disobedient, Non-Citizens, and Exiles in Their Won Homes*, 2016 Taipei Biennial.



Figure 14. Event photo of the discussion of *What is Today's New Losheng Sanatorium* at the protest site of Losheng Preservation Movement, 2017.

Perspective 3

Andrea Cusumano

This is an edited transcript of the author's presentation at the CIMAM 2017 Annual Conference.

<https://vimeo.com/249054770>

Thank you, Elizabeth Ann MacGregor and also to the board of CIMAM for inviting me to talk about the experience of Palermo in the last few years.

I bring greetings from the Mayor Mr Leoluca Orlando, who was supposed to be here but could not make it in the end, and from one of my friends and a curator, Paolo Falcone, being a member of CIMAM, actually made the connection. It was impossible for him to be here, because he is opening a new center for photography in a couple of days, directed by Letizia Battaglia with an exhibition of Isaac Julien.

I'm not going to be talking about the museum, because I'm not a curator myself, and I do not run an institution. But I think it might be interesting in the context of the CIMAM Conference to view an example of how the city or municipality is contributing to the debate and the strategies through which local and global can connect together via culture.

Being European, I personally think that we are experiencing a lack of vision, politically speaking, in consideration of the huge paradigmatic changes that we are experiencing, especially in connection to human mobility. I think that what politics should have, before anything else, is vision and the capacity to anticipate and govern changes in reality.

Palermo is a relatively small city—about 650,000 people and 1 million in the metropolitan area. In its recent past, sadly, it has been very well known for its history of mafia. It was the capital of the mafia indeed: there was a particularly notorious period Palermo experienced in the late '70s to the mid-'80s, when the Second Mafia War took place. It is quite interesting to realize how after World War II, the mafia started to gain power in Sicily, and how

a global or international event is connected to something local, like the mafia.

Between 1978 and 1984 there have been nearly 1,000 cases of murder by the mafia, mainly as a result of disputes between different families. Victims include important magistrates, prosecutors, policemen, politicians and journalists. It is known that the mafia acquired more power after World War II because of the strategic position of Sicily given the newly born political balances in the Mediterranean area, in regard to the opposing blocs of the Eastern and Western worlds.

I'm not going to elaborate, but let me just provide a couple of dates. The Berlin Wall fell on 9 November 1989; 26th December 1991, the Soviet Union was officially dismantled. In 1992, the Christian Democracy party in Italy, after being the absolute majority in government for nearly 50 years, lost their first election before dissolving and disappearing completely in 1993.

After dominating the political scene in Sicily for several decades, the leader of the Christian Democracy party in Sicily, Salvo Lima, was killed by the mafia on the 12 March 1992. The Second Mafia War began when the Palermitan families from criminal organizations started trafficking drugs—heroin in particular. The mafia used to be organized almost like provincial area, with different delegation; they still are, but slightly different today. The strategic position of the Palermo harbor in the Mediterranean formed a port of entry for drugs for basically all of Europe—fortunately it is no longer so.

With the rising power of mafia and its enormous economic power, and the political and institutional

connections related to its geographical position, has sadly shaped not only the history of Palermo, but also has enormous impact on its urban design. During the 70s, the city changed entirely its urban design, lifestyle, culture and citizen identity—both within the city, meaning citizens had a different understanding of what it meant to belong to the culture of Palermo.

Another date to better illustrate this: in Palermo we have the third largest opera house in Europe, which is slightly disproportionate for a city that is not that large. It had been closed for 24 years during the mafia period. I witnessed as I grew up during this period, that although the building lies right in the center of the city, it appeared almost invisible. Nobody realized that the place was closed—it was just a fact.

The opera house reopened in the '90s and once again drew the parallelism between a global history of criminality and a local cultural event, and how Palermo has been perceived from without: by Italy, Europe and the world. There was a defining moment in 1995 when then and current Mayor Leoluca Orlando led a civil political project called the Spring of Palermo. There was a civic movement of powerful rebellion against illegality. Palermo became a symbol for illegality and for legality in Italy with renowned magistrates, for example Falcone, Borsellino, and so on and so forth.

It is not largely by chance that the current President of the Italian Republic, Sergio Mattarella, is the brother of Piersanti Mattarella, who was the President of the region killed by the mafia during the '80s. The second in-charge of the state, President of the Chamber of the Parliament is Pietro Grasso, is also from Palermo; he was a young magistrate during the time of Palermo's mafia war.¹ In a way, the history of criminality in Palermo intersects with and had an impact on Italy's national history.

I don't usually speak on the mafia. I had moved out of Palermo because of the mafia, and moved back after living 15 years in the UK and 4 years in Austria when the Mayor approached me to assist him in the second phase of his vision to make Palermo the City of Culture. It is the second time that Mayor Leoluca Orlando has caused an impact on this history of the city with his vision. The first time, like I mentioned, was during the *primavera*—the Spring of Palermo when the idea of legality became sort of a master plan which was realized by using culture as a factor for change.

It was a defining moment where cultural activities were extremely promoted—to inculcate a strong sense of pride and identity within citizen, that every individual was required to overthrow the mafia. Now, I would say that the actual agenda, although might sound wrong, was probably to go beyond legality.

When I was a child, I always used to hear that Sicily that was located in the center of the Mediterranean. It was something that always made me either laugh or cry because in reality, what I was experiencing was a place that was extremely provincial, and submissive to local arrogance and criminality, etc.

However, something has happened in the last decade. From the beginning of the '90s, the age of globalization where the communication/information has reached an incredible speed, and caused geography to become less relevant—considering that we live in parallel with a virtual world. It is a fact that humans have physically moved in masses through the Mediterranean Sea; the physicality of these human beings and the physicality of Sicily, located in the center of the Mediterranean area, made clear to me for the first time that we were really in the center of the Mediterranean.

This is very simple and might sound stupid or banal, but actually has a revolutionary impact on the development of our city and region. Back to the topic of the vision, we have realized that human needs today require re-envisioning of the law, which is why I say it is beyond "right"—it is about human rights.

In 2015, we held a conference in Palermo entitled "I am a Human Being" during which we proposed the charter of Palermo—a complex document requesting for human mobility around the world, particularly to the Italian government to ask for an abolishment of the resident's permit.² You can't decide that a human being is illegal based on where he or she was born. A passport serves as an identity card; a resident permit is something that gives legal status. This has had obvious huge implications on the way criminals have perceived this, often quicker than legal and political organizations have, and has become one of the major illegal businesses especially in the south of Europe.

Through this renewed vision to become a welcoming city, a city of intercultural dialogue to form a bridge between the different Mediterranean countries, we have understood that this was actually the identity that was taken away from Palermo during the decades of mafia domination.

¹ Pietro Grasso was President of the Senate of the Republic of Italy from 16 March 2013 – 22 March 2018.

² <https://www.comune.palermo.it/noticext.php?id=6820> (Italian)

In 2015, the Arab-Norman monument, Monreale Cefalù, in Palermo was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Let me just read the motivation briefly: “the whole of the buildings, the constituents, the property of Arab-Norman and the cathedral churches of Cefalù and Monreale represent a material example of coexistence, interaction and interchange between different cultural components of heterogeneous historical and geographical origin. Such syncretism has produced an original architectural artistic style of outstanding universal value in which Byzantine Islamic and Latin elements are melded, enabling each time to produce itself in unique combination of sublime artistic value and extraordinary unity. The Arab-Norman syncretism has a strong impact in the Middle Ages contributing magnificently to the formation of Mediterranean *koine*, a fundamental condition of the development of modern Mediterranean-European civilization.”³

There was a court in the early Middle Ages in Palermo which humanism started before the rest of Europe. In this court, the intellectuals were Arabs from the Islamic regions, Jewish, Latin and all over the world. We had almost forgotten all that and it is via the arrival of hundreds of thousands of people in Palermo from all over the world via the Mediterranean that the city has rediscovered its transpersonal identity. I would say this is a case where globalization has helped a local city to recover and recognize a neglected and forgotten identity.

This is probably the reason why Palermo is hosting Manifesta 12 in 2018—the itinerant biennial of Europe founded by Hedwig Fijen to investigate the DNA of Europe via contemporary art. It means that to understand the DNA of Europe today, you have to be at the border of Europe in the Mediterranean area: the limits tell you about the center.

Going back to human rights, Europe after World War II and UNESCO itself was created—before anything else—so that we would not forget that human dignity and human rights are the foundation for civil living and coexistence. This is not what is happening in the Mediterranean area these days. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there are 65 million people forcibly displaced worldwide, of which 22.5 million of refugees come from countries such as South Sudan, Afghanistan and Syria. 10 million people have been denied nationality and access to basic rights such as education, health care and freedom of movement; approximately 20 people are forcibly displaced worldwide every minute.

In Italy, we have had an influx of migrants from the Mediterranean Sea since the beginning of 2000—2016 brought 164,822 people, and 114,411 this year in November, of which more than half came through the harbors of Sicily, and of Palermo. An estimated 40,000 people have died since this influx of migrants began.

These numbers reflect an emergency and a structural change of a world paradigm; we cannot only mention emergency and security. We need to be prepared for a paradigmatic change. And sustainable and structured project cannot deny and avoid the fact that among the other 3 elements of sociability—economical, ecological and social, there also has to be cultural and outside beauty as well.

Beauty is a duty—that is what UNESCO tells us. Thank you.

3 <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1487>, (accessed 08 May 2018).

Day 2

Saturday 11 November

National Gallery
Singapore

Re-learning
Southeast Asia

Keynote 2

Patrick D. Flores

Professor of Art Studies, University of the Philippines, Manila (Philippines)

“Time to Unlearn”: Urgency and Practical Intelligence in the Southeast Asian Museum

This is a revised and expanded version of the author’s presentation at the CIMAM Annual Conference 2017

<https://vimeo.com/249055124>

I wish to say at the outset that this conference is right to reclaim a sense of the common ground of responsibility. Because we are made to confront responsibility, the common ground is necessarily intersubjective and therefore difficult to inhabit because it is exceptionally social. Whether we regard this ground as the public sphere or the civil society, what is raised in high relief is the desire for collective thoughtfulness. This desire entails a process of persistent persuasion that prepares those who take part not only to be different or differentiated, but more importantly to be patiently deliberative and daringly comparative, to be strongly poised to unsettle the security of the self. In light of this prospect, I thought: what could be a better place to begin this reflection on the mediation of the museum, and therefore, of the modern identity of the reflexive self than the nineteenth-century classroom in the Southeast Asian colony. It is a classroom that morphs into a museum, or what its precursor might resemble, in the form of the cabinet or vitrine that contains the equipment of science. The Philippine polymath patriot Jose Rizal, who later would become the National Hero, writes in the 1891 novel *El Filibusterismo*, translated as *The Reign of Greed* by Charles Derbyshire, a chapter titled

“The Class in Physics.” Rizal first describes the nearly clinical classroom and then zeroes in on an intervening substance of both enigma and disdain that reveals and obscures, excludes and invites, under the auspices of the curate-curator who presides over this precinct of learning. The school is the University of Santo Tomas, which began to be formed in 1605 and became a university in 1645. According to Rizal:

The walls, painted white and covered with glazed tiles to prevent scratches, were entirely bare, having neither a drawing nor a picture, nor even an outline of any physical apparatus. The students had no need of any, no one missed the practical instruction in an extremely experimental science; for years and years it has been so taught and the country has not been upset, but continues just as ever. Now and then some little instrument descended from heaven and was exhibited to the class from a distance, like the monstrosity to the prostrate worshipers—look, but touch not! From time to time, when some complacent professor appeared, one day in the year was set aside for visiting the mysterious laboratory and gazing from without at the puzzling apparatus arranged in glass cases. No one could complain, for on that day there were to be seen quantities of brass and glassware,

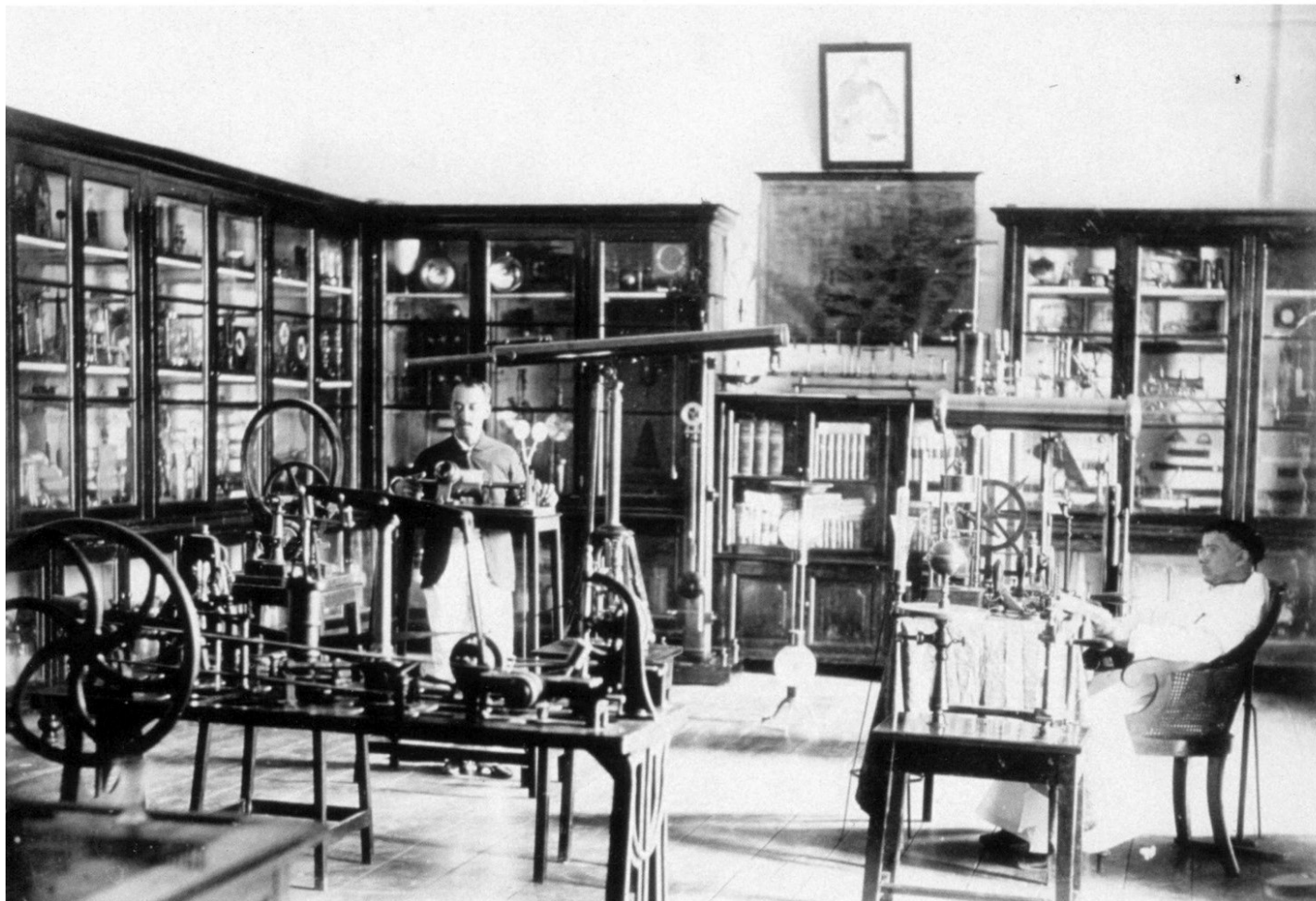


Figure 1. Universidad de Manila: Gabinete de Física (Álbum Vistas de la Universidad y Colegios de Santo Tomas, San Juan de Letrán, San José y Santa Catalina), 1887. Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid.

tubes, disks, wheels, bells, and the like—the exhibition did not get beyond that, and the country was not upset.

Besides, the students were convinced that those instruments had not been purchased for them—the friars would be fools! The laboratory was intended to be shown to the visitors and the high officials who came from the Peninsula, so that upon seeing it they would nod their heads with satisfaction, while their guide would smile, as if to say, “Eh, you thought you were going to find some backward monks! Well, we’re right up with the times—we have a laboratory!”¹

This is an exemplary situation of learning, relearning, and unlearning. It can be read as an allegory of regulated seeing and representing, of being in the same place of the device but is distanced from it as if the thing were a religious monstrosity and the person, a prostrate secular subject. Rizal here juxtaposes colonial pretensions to a supposedly transparent enlightenment with the opacity of sensory prohibitions and privileges. A key element in this

moment is the simultaneously alienating and alluring glass, the modern surface that offers the illusion of transparency and heightens the desire for property. This “vitreous view,” according to the art historian Lihong Liu, becomes a site to analyze both “materiality and mediality”: how the object predisposes the body in space to think of its presence in the world.² Lihong Liu meticulously annotates this instance in the context of Chinese art and argues: “Viewers would encounter this paradox with constant decision making and bodily coordination as their embodied eyes move between the enclosure and open space, adjusting their positions between distant looking and close scrutiny.”³ Such allegory takes on a political layer when it threatens the discourse of enlightenment and demystifies the latter as a discourse of denial, or at least an ambience of temptations and appearances, of merely beholding and not touching and not using. This unnerving proto-museological moment anticipates what we call in our time the “economy of

1 Jose Rizal, *El Filibusterismo* (The Reign of Greed), trans. Charles Derbyshire (Manila: Philippine Education Company, 1912), 115.

2 See Lihong Liu, “Vitreous Views: Materiality and Mediality of Glass in Qing through a Transcultural Prism,” *Getty Research Journal*, no. 8 (2016), 17-38.

3 *Ibid.*, 30.



Figure 2. Raymundo Albano.

enrichment,” defined by Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre as “forms of wealth creation that are based on an economic exploitation of the past, in the form of craft, heritage, tradition, identity or, more largely, culture. The idea of enrichment refers to the act of improving the value of something, but we should also understand it in its material connotation, as when we speak of the enrichment of mineral ore.”⁴ The economy of enrichment, therefore, takes us to the heart of the nature of the historical, the mycation of culture in the museum, and its valuation as a “collection form.”⁵

I begin with the episode from José Rizal’s novel that is tangential to the birth of the Philippine nation because it implicates a range of institutions of the modern, of art, of the museum, of the modern art



Figure 3. Imelda Marcos at an opening ceremony, assisted by Raymundo Albano (in black)

museum, and the civil sphere of responsibilities. Public instruction in Rizal’s fictional classroom was an achievement of the nineteenth century, and the University of Santo Tomas, the oldest existing University in Asia, mobilized both secular and religious authority that came together in the Catholic and colonial university (fig. 1). An order on secondary education in 1865 prescribed that only the Royal College of St. Thomas Aquinas of the Dominicans and the Ateneo Municipal of the Jesuits could have “a Gabinete de Fisica, a Laboratorio de Quimica with machines and instruments indispensable for good teaching, and a Museo de Historia Natural, in which besides the local products, there must be a classified collection of Zoology and another of Mineralogy.”⁶ The rearing of nature and the extraction of earth for industry and their relationship with the priming of culture as the principal medium of subjectivity are implicit here. José Rizal attended the said schools and then traveled to Heidelberg to become a physician of the eye.

What should be worth exploring finally is that the incident of the student looking at the scieic aice through the glass leads us to the image and its political theology and not to art and its aesthetic. I think this is a more productive way to initiate the history of art: not to commence with art and the theory of its autonomy, but with image and the ways in which it is animated and alienated at the same time by the mediation of the classroom-museum and its promise of emancipation. After all, as alluded to by Rizal, the Catholic university had the potential of being breeding ground of a post-colonial

4 Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre, “Enrichment, Profit, and Critique: A Rejoinder to Nancy Fraser,” *New Left Review* 106 (July-August 2017), 69.

5 *Ibid.*

6 Fidel Villarröel, O.P. *A History of the University of Santo Tomas: Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines (1611-2011) Vols. I-II* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2012), p.114.

consciousness that would upset the colonial order.⁷ As one bishop had observed: “Every student from Manila who returns to the town of his province is a rebel.”⁸ The interrelationship between the critique of colonial pedagogy in the classroom that leads to the ferment of the national and nationalist mind in the student is salient in the argument that the classroom-museum is a laboratory of the history of art, history of nature, history of science, history of industry, and history of nation. By viewing these as modes of extracting and tracing birthrights, of abstraction and human intervention, we can reflect on the nature of the history of art and the modern museum in Southeast Asia as a formation of both material and medium like the glass that is the delicate surface of contact between the gaze and the ideal.

This might have been quite a circuitous way to reach the phrase in the title of this paper. I needed the birth of the museum in the colony to reflect on the gaze and its history and make it co-extensive with the birth of other structures of visibility. For instance, the birth of the clinic, or the teaching hospital in the eighteenth century, in the work of Michel Foucault, refers to the medical gaze. It was a gaze, according to Foucault, that was not “bound by the narrow grid of structure [...] but that could and should grasp colors, variations, tiny anomalies, always receptive to the deviant [...] it was a gaze that was not content to observe what was self-evident [...] it was calculating.”⁹ Foucault is led to conclude that “the technical armature of the medical gaze is transformed into advice about prudence, taste, skill: what is required is ‘great sagacity,’ ‘great attention,’ ‘great precision,’ ‘great skill,’ ‘great patience.’”¹⁰ The aesthetic and the scientific, therefore, condensed in the gaze in the classroom and the teaching hospital.

It is only through a reconsideration of seeing that we can propose a process of relearning, as the theme of this session indicates. And as it was place that proved central in the class in physics in nineteenth-century Manila, it is time that is required to relearn the physics of art and culture in the seventies, also in Manila. This brings me to the practice of Raymundo Albano (fig. 2). By 1970, Albano was the director of the museum at the Cultural Center of the Philippines. He looked after borrowed collections of ethnographic materials; programmed interdisciplinary

spaces; published a serial; and curated a variety of exhibitions. In 1979, he curated *A Decade of Developmental Art* for which he wrote an essay assessing what he meant by “developmental art”: that is, expression that was experimental and advanced. According to Albano, the museum:

established an image of contemporariness, high [on] risks, low on establishment shows [...] It is this image of risk-taking that brought 58,000 paying visitors to the Center last year, and more this year, most of them coming back for the next ‘puzzling’ shows. The apparent interest is in keeping with our motives of providing didactic material—something that tries to involve the intelligence of the artist and the audience, a fine curatorial control, but still leaving some fringes that fascinate our desire for the Beaul Unknown.¹¹

The latter may have taken:

the form of hardly tested materials. Earth, sand, raw wood, and other by-products of nature serve as oils and canvasses. Arrangements and methodologies spring from enlightened polemics. Any which way new ideas receive accusations [...] The need to introduce more contemporary ideas is logical as the activities of an art community become more developed. The measure of an institution is its contribution to the development of its concerns. Art, in this sense, is developmental.¹²

Albano, aside from administering the museum, wrote poetry and criticism, designed theater sets and posters, painted, and made prints. His artistic and curatorial inclinations interpenetrated. In another essay, Albano explicates the historical context of the developmental:

Philippine Art in the seventies went into the crossroads. Art became big business. It promoted all sorts of styles and disciplines. But it bred a new group of artists who were more responsive to the time, meaning, to the social, economic, and [esthetic] requirements of the people.

7 Rizal, op. cit.

8 Quoted in John Schumacher, S.J., “The Philippine Higher Education and the Origins of Nationalism,” *Philippine Studies* 23, no. 1-2 (1975): 57.

9 Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Clinic: An Archeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A.M. Sheridan (London: Routledge, 2003), 89.

10 Claude Roucher-Deratte, *Leçons sur l'art d'observer* (Paris: 1807), 87-99. Quoted in Foucault, *ibid.*, 121.

11 Raymundo Albano, “A Decade of Developmental Art,” exh. cat., (Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1979), n.p.

12 *ibid.*

It was a time of questioning roots—a time to once again, as in our government and people, assert the Filipino identity. And so it was a time to unlearn.¹³

I am drawn to the phrase “time to unlearn” because it offers layers and senses of time. Time here could be of the present and therefore of the position of the present. Time could be opportunity, a chance to take action. And time could be an imperative, an urgency: that it is not just a matter of present-ness or position; opportunity or chance, but the ethical response of an agency to a critical condition, or *krisis* in Ancient Greek that is the root of the modernist critique. Time, therefore, is performative and political. In Albano’s mind, it was timely to question. But it was at the same time untimely, as the gesture of unlearning went against the prevailing pedagogy, against the teaching, or the scripture, of the time. These calibrations between timeliness and untimeliness meant that the curatorial intervention was set within a particular

duration, rhythm, and a direction or cycle. It might have been alternating, scalar, serial, and not necessarily emerging from the coveted rupture or radical break of the western avant-garde. A performative, or even a trickster institutionality, enacts this alternating dynamic—successive but not necessarily progressive, reversible but not immediately subversive.

Albano worked at the Cultural Center of the Philippines, opened in 1969, that was envisioned by the First Lady Imelda Marcos as a “Parthenon” built on a “land reclaimed from the past.”¹⁴ The abstractionist and cultural administrator Arturo Luz thought of the Cultural Center as the main node in the network of spaces for art radiating across the country. Luz sketched out a plan for access to what he called “community or neighborhood centers of art.”¹⁵ To overcome the “stigma of elitism,” the design was low-cost, easily constructed, accessible, informal, flexible, and conducive “to active use and participation by the entire community.”¹⁶ Albano found his place in Imelda Marcos’s institution and harnessed his

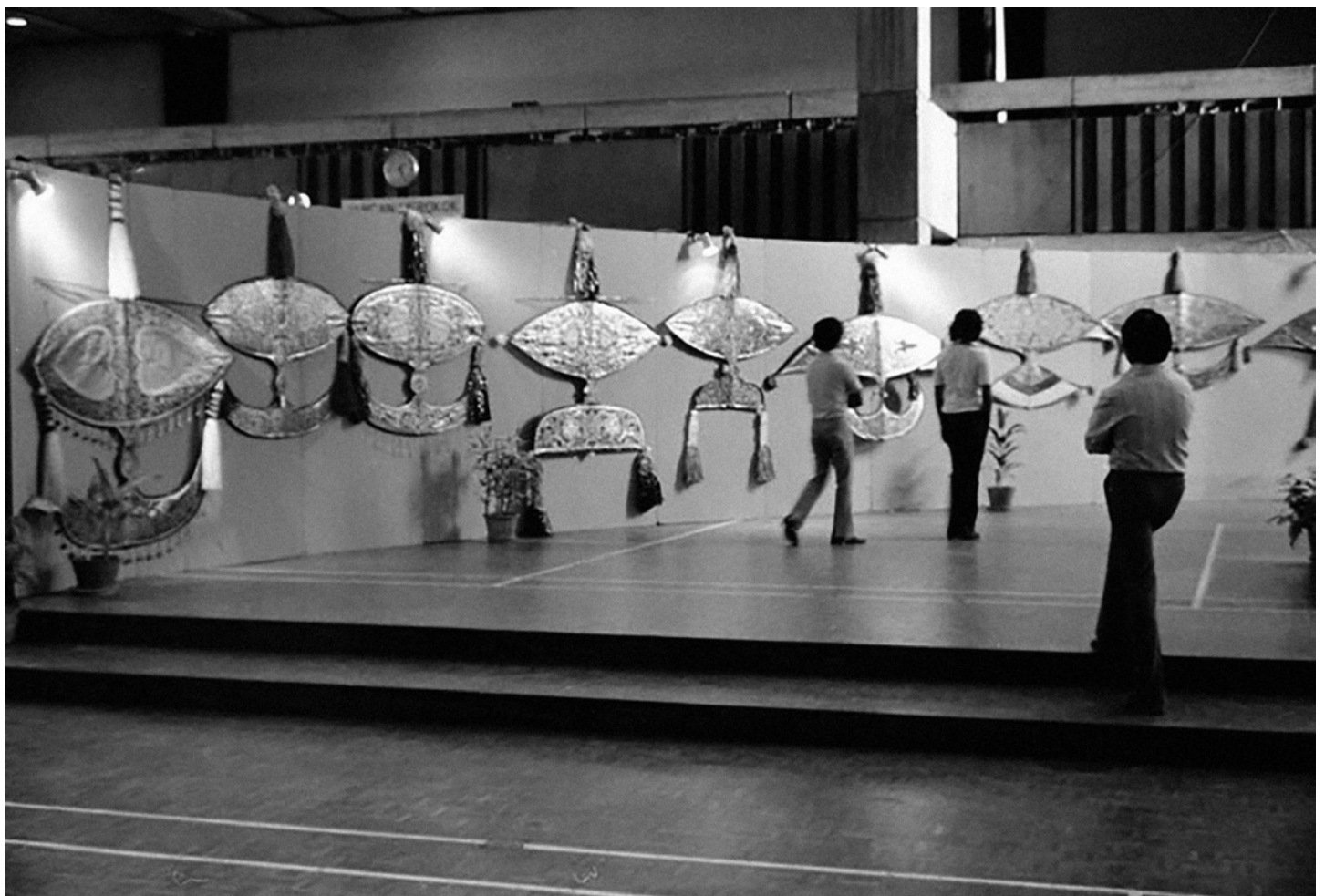


Figure 4.1 View of exhibition *Rupa dan Jiwa* (Form and Soul).

13 Raymundo Albano, “Developmental Art of the Philippines,” *Philippine Art Supplement* 2, no. 4 (July to August 1981): 15.

14 Imelda Marcos, “Sanctuary of the Filipino Soul”, in *The Compassionate Society and Other Selected Speeches*, (Manila: National Media Production Centre: 1977), 18-19. This speech was delivered at the formal dedication of the Cultural Center of the Philippines on 10 September 1969.

15 Arturo Luz, “Multi-purpose building for housing the arts and the role of the cultural center,” *Archipelago VII*, no. 2 (February 1980/A-64): 14.

16 *Ibid.*



Figure 4.2 View of exhibition *Rupa dan Jiwa* (Form and Soul).

subjectivity to mediate the tension between a Martial Law regime that suppressed the body politic and the desire for experiment that emancipated art from its “artness” or “arthood”. He sharpened his instincts in relation to the incipient unrest of the social and the institution that tried to be as restive as it unsettled the complacencies of art. Do we say then that Albano was torn between these sympathies? I will not use the word “complicit”; instead, I would say he was “co-implicated”. In Albano’s program, three aspects interspersed: the artists and their community; the audience; and the museum. In his mind, the presentation of contemporary ideas should transpire in the context of a “learning public.”¹⁷ While the public was imagined to be in a state of learning, the art was thought to be in a condition of unlearning.

Moreover, the developmental might best be performed by the reclamation itself of land from the sea and the production of space for the arts, cultural events, and international conventions on the waterfront as it had happened in Phnom Penh in the sixties and is progressing in Hong Kong and Abu Dhabi as we speak. The Cultural Center of the Philippines was part of a massive reclamation project that also saw the relocation of slums in the area so that an international metropolis could rise. Here, the modernity of development intersected with the nature of artistic experiment and the ideology of beauty embodied by a prominent political patron. The way Imelda Marcos projected herself as an incarnation of mythological beauty absorbed in the sign system of Philippine national identity cohered with the internationalist brutalism that

her favored architectural style flaunted (fig. 3). Both the sculptural Imelda and brutalist architecture, while surely modes of aice, appeared natural. In fact, Leandro Locsin, architect of the Cultural Center, was remembered by his son as saying that “reinforced concrete is our country’s ‘natural material’ because of its ample supply, economy, durability, beauty, and the skill that the Filipino craftsman inherently possesses to render it artistically.”¹⁸

Albano appropriated the term “developmental” from the government, a term for activities “that had the nature of being under fast-action plans. The building of roads[,] population control or the establishment of security units for instance, have to be done quickly, within a period of days.”¹⁹ According to Albano: “The implication of a fast-action learning method is similar to that of developmental art” by way of “stimulating public minds and the same time allowing the artists to question and investigate with their work. [...] It made one relatively aware of an environment suddenly turning visible.”²⁰

In trying to speak to this session’s intentions to relearn Southeast Asia, the region that must be simultaneously reconceptualized with the modernity of the modern art institution, I would like to constellate Albano with three other figures who had been engaged with the thinking through and making of institutions, discourses, and relations. These figures express and work on the anxiety to release the local from its nativism; invest it with distinction; and dispose it to possess equivalent integrity. They translate worldliness in different registers.

The first figure is Syed Ahmad Jamal, an artist who in 1979 curated an exhibition titled *Rupa dan Jiwa* (“Form and Soul”), at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur (fig. 4.1 & 4.2). According to T.K. Sabapathy: “It was to be an attempt at constructing a tradition—the authentic Malay tradition in visual form. Aacts from Malay culture were presented as objects for aesthetic contemplation; here was a rich, culturally and emotionally charged, reservoir of resources.”²¹ Ahmad Mashadi walks us through the contexts of the exhibition. First is the belief of Ungku Aziz, then Vice Chancellor of the University of Malaya, in “the indelible qualities of the Malay design and creation [...] the uniqueness of the Malay form.”²²

17 Albano, “Developmental Art of the Philippines,” 15.

18 Devi De Veyra, “Leandro Locsin’s Brutal Opera,” *Rogue*, October 2015.

19 Albano, “Developmental Art of the Philippines,” 15.

20 *ibid.*

21 T. K. Sabapathy, “Vision and Idea: Afterthoughts,” in *Vision and Idea: ReLooking Malaysian Modern Art*, ed. T. K. Sabapathy (Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery, 1994), 108.

22 Ahmad Mashadi, untitled paper presented in Panel 5 “Gaps in Southeast Asian Art History: Methodologies and Pedagogies” of the colloquium “Histories of Art History in South East Asia”, Manila, Philippines, March 21-23, 2013.

Malay visual form was thought to be signified by “584 objects consisting of weapons, textiles, earthenware, silver ornaments, and implements.”²³ The second context is “the rise of global Islam in the 1970s—highlighted by the 1973 oil crisis and the 1979 Iranian Revolution” that “prompted newer interests in Islamic art and Muslim cultures.”²⁴ The undercurrent of these contexts would be the 1971 National Cultural Policy that declared Malay and indigenous culture as primordial and yet interacting with the outside world; and that Islam was central in the national culture.

It is in Jamal’s breathtaking encyclopedia that we see the effort of a Southeast Asian artist to strike a stance in relation to the politics of identity as formulated by the state or the religious establishment, or by both. Jamal likewise attempted to reference

civilizational discourse to critique the primacy of the colonial or the western without necessarily being its binary opposite. The civilization here is coded as Malay and Islamic. But Jamal in his own practice as an abstractionist cites American modernism as compatible with the Malay character (fig. 6). He wrote that the Malaysian artists gravitated around abstract expressionism because its “immediacy and mystical quality” suited the “Malaysian temperament, sensitivity and cultural heritage, and with the tradition of calligraphy found the idiom the ideal means of pictorial individuation.”²⁵ He considered Abstract Expressionism a “catharsis, a direct form of release” and that it was not a “borrowed idiom” but rather a “natural means [...] a natural development from the loose atmospheric forms of the early watercolors.”²⁶



Figure 5. Syed Ahmad Jamal, *Umpan (The Bait)*, 1959, oil on canvas. Collection of Balai Seni Visual Negara.

23 *Ibid.*

24 *Ibid.*

25 Syed Ahmad Jamal, *Seni Lukis Malaysia—25 Tahun* (Kuala Lumpur: Balai Seni Lukis Negara, 1982), n.p.

26 *Ibid.*

Interestingly, Raymundo Albano would characterize “installation” as akin to childhood urges and that it was more Philippine than painting or sculpture. The international, therefore, was perceived to liberate the local from the western and allowed agents like Jamal and Albano to struggle with the language of an inter- or trans-local discourse. The said struggle simultaneously absorbs and sublimates the expectations of this discourse, and in the process, helps them enliven an immune system that mediates any foreign stimulus and renders its effect self-limiting and not necessarily pathogenic or pathological, a vector of disease, contaminating, and corruptive.

In the excursions of Jamal as artist and curator, we get a sense of how a geopoetic imagination through craft or a cosmology of making can unhinge the modern from western modernism without refusing it altogether. We are reminded as well of the Indonesian artist Sudjojono who advances the phrase “jiwa ketok,” or visible soul. To intertwine “rupa dan jiwa” with “jiwa ketok” is to introduce a different art historical and curatorial outlook: to visualize the soul, or to make it visible and endow it with form, or subject it to what the art historian Stanley O’Connor calls the “speculative investigation” into its “nature and destiny.”²⁷

The next figure is Chumpon Apisuk, an artist and organizer who, after his studies in the United States, worked for the Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art in Bangkok in Thailand. The Institute, named after the influential Italian mentor Silpa Bhirasri²⁸, was founded in 1974 as it merged with the Mekpayab Art Center set up by the Princess Pantip Chumbhot. It was mainly a space for presentations of artistic projects from Thailand and elsewhere. Around 1984, Apisuk was appointed assistant director and, through his collaboration with the director of the Institute, started Wethi Samai or “Contemptre”, which consisted of experimental theater and workshops on art, drama, poetry, and music. Artists were able to carry out performance, happenings, open-air sculptures, and related expressions. A crucial creative agent in this matrix was Apisuk whose initiations in Thai public life had been exemplary. According to him, his “expressive principle is based on the operational method [...] I express as I make a step. I express something meaningful to myself as I walk along. What I present reflects my expression. That thing is not art, nor is it non-art.

My presentation is but an interpretation of my research work that transforms itself into a concept, or an object or a set of data.”²⁹ From this framework, he would proceed to explore trajectories into what he calls “happening—pure communication.”³⁰ What is important about discussing the work of Apisuk is that, alongside his artistic acumen, is the history of the Institute itself that emerged at a time of political crisis and compelling activism in 1973 when a Thai military dictator was deposed. Among the cogent presentations at the Institute were: the Third Dhamma Group exhibition in 1976 titled *Art of the People*, which opened the day before the October 1976 massacre; the exhibition of Apinan Poshyananda in 1985 titled *How to Explain Art to A Bangkok Cock* comprising objects, video, silkscreen, and live chickens and turkeys; the exhibition of Kamol Phaosavasdi in 1985 *Song for the Dead* which included firecrackers, sound sculpture, and his act of throwing black paint on Andy Warhol projections.

As it was in the turbulent seventies, a similar flash point of violence occurred in 1992 to which Apisuk’s work acutely responded. He helped organize the City Art League that staged communicative action in the streets, shopping centers, parks, and public paces. In the same year, he opened The Concrete House, a performative space managed by the Naam Che-Wit project for persons with HIV and AIDS, a severe problem at that time in Thailand. According to Apisuk:

The combination of AIDS and Art at The Concrete House is a new phenomenon in art circles. It is also a new element in the handling of AIDS to intermingle it with with movement in art. More importantly, it is one more effort that helps Thai contemporary art circles to develop broader perspectives and more diverse themes and to be in step with the brave and alert new generations.³¹

Earlier in 1985, he worked with Empower with his partner Chantawipa on the human rights of sex workers and in 1988 formed the Tap Root Society in Chiang Mai. In 1998, Apisuk set up Asiatopia, a performance art festival that has been instrumental in creating a network of practitioners in the field in the region (fig. 7).

27 Stanley J. O’Connor, “Art Critics, Connoisseurs, and Collectors in the Southeast Asian Rain Forest: A Study in Cross-Cultural Art Theory,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 14, no. 2 (September 1983), p. 408.

28 Thai name of Italian-born sculptor Corrado Feroci.

29 Vichoke Mukdamanee, *Mixed Media and Installation in Thailand*, trans. Chantima Ongsuragz (Bangkok: Art Centre, Silpakorn University, 2002), 80.

30 *ibid.*

31 Chumpon Apisuk, “Unpredictable Repercussions,” *Artlink* 13, no. 3 & 4 (December 1993), 24.



**Performance of Asiatopia
at Saranrom Garden,
Bangkok, 1998**

Figure 6. Asiatopia performance, 1998.

What the practice of Apisuk demonstrates is the impulse of the artist-curator to heighten the relationality of the public of art by widening the entry points of possible interest and participation. One way to do this is to restore the ecology of creative practice through an expansive field of disciplines. Apisuk endeavored to convene different disciplines in one space and made porous the aicial boundaries of artistic categories. A central dynamic in Apisuk's program was extensity and an experiment with what can be intuited as civil society or the public sphere by way of the copious term "movement," either through non-government organizations or artist collectives.

The last figure of the presentation is meant to follow through Raymundo Albano's work at the Cultural Center. When the Center opened in 1969, David Medalla staged a lightning protest within striking distance of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos and their guests then Governor Ronald Reagan and his wife Nancy. He unfurled the banner, "A bas la myication, Down with Philistines" (fig. 8). The first line is instructive to the extent that it centralizes the construction of culture, the modes by which it

naturalizes a way of life. To resist myication is to deconstruct the myication of the cultural authority that represents the social person or to fix the person in the uniqueness of heritage that is then assimilated into a nation-state identity and a global economy of enrichment. I bring in Medalla primarily because I want to generate tension between the institution and the subjectivity of the agents who mediate it. Medalla accomplishes this task exceptionally well because aside from inciting the necessary frisson to expose the contingency of the institution, he reconstructs the public sphere through his own practice of art-world bricolage. As a maker of relations beginning in the mid-Sixties, of which the work "Stitch in Time" (1967) was emblematic, the migrant Medalla was involved in global constellations of collaborations between art and science such as the Centre for Advanced Creative Study that led to the space Signals Gallery in London and the *Signals Newsbulletin*. Artists from different parts of the world converged in Medalla's orbit in London through convergences such as Artists for Democracy and The Exploding Galaxy. Finally, Medalla conceived the elusive, improvisational

London Biennale that was first held in 2000. Medalla confides that it was during the 2nd Johannesburg Biennial directed by Okwui Enwezor in 1997 that he thought of the London Biennale. According to him: "At Cape Town in 1997, I thought it was time to create a viable and memorable platform for the world's 'marginal artists' [...] a biennale that would be open to every artist regardless of age, sex, ethnic origin, and artistic language or style."³² In the words of Guy Brett, the London Biennale "carnivalizes" the biennale institution in which "to participate [...] was a poetic rather than a bureaucratic act."³³

The work of Raymundo Albano, Syed Ahmad Jamal, Chumpon Apisuk, and David Medalla forms an arc from the sixties through the nineties in Southeast Asia. This is an arc of both artistic and curatorial practice by interlocutors, assemblagists, cultural workers, and intrepid initiators who sorted out the apprehensions of modernity but were able to do more than merely secure its negation. They were able to overcome the critique and redistributed criticality across what Albano called an "ecumenical situation" in which they recovered the "integrity and intelligence" of the local or the personal, positioning it in relation to that which exceeds it, and in the process achieving depth, density, latitude, edge, and risk as artists, in a text that may have been co-written by Albano, become "inventors, magicians, aicers, seers, thinkers, even clowns in constant search of renewal, discovery, and accomplishment."³⁴

What we might relearn from these Southeast Asian figures is that the idea of learning itself is honed within multiple agencies within the structure. I call this intense co-implication in which the person who assumes curatorial roles and gains curatorial effects refunction, translate, or remediate structural prerogatives. The agency here becomes polytropic, taking on different figurations and is in the process of variable turning. In many ways, this modality of learning is self-teaching. Where in most parts of the region, curatorial or museological education is not fully formalized, many of the most interestingly idiosyncratic curators had been self-taught, a condition that

has enabled them to embody the bureaucracy and not oppose it as if it were a burden or an impediment. The nimbleness, agility, or artfulness of this agent reveals a *metis*. James Scott turns to the word *metis*, which he translates as practical knowledge that is decisively local and that is related to mutuality derived from the anarchist lexicon. He concludes that democracy rests on the "assumption that the *metis* of its citizenry should, in mediated form, continually modify the laws and policies of the land."³⁵

As I began this presentation with the university and the museum, so will I end it with the university museum where I work both as an art historian and a curator. It revisits the exceptional question of Jacques Derrida: "Today, how can we not speak of the university?"³⁶ Derrida makes an urgent plea for reflection or critique that the university guarantees, something that "must make its way through the very objects we work with, shaping them as it goes, along with our norms, procedures, and aims."³⁷ While it needs to be intimate with the society it performs, the university can only aspire to this intimacy if it offers the chance "for dissociation."³⁸ As Derrida puts it: "Keep the memory and keep the chance."³⁹ The university, therefore, may be described as being all over, timely and untimely, an ubiquitous, or a professor-at-large in Derrida's grammar, an agency that is embedded and emergent. The curator Clementine Deliss proposes the notion of a museum-university, invoking Joseph Beuys who states: "I want to turn museums into universities that have a department for objects... The museum could offer the first model for an ongoing (or permanent) conference on cultural issues."⁴⁰ This permanent or ongoing conference is crucial in carving out practical intelligence and urgency.

The museum-university or the classroom-museum or the museum-laboratory should inform the relearning procedure in Southeast Asia, instilling among agents a highly engaged intellectual position and a curatorial instinct that eludes the easy capture of either liberal affirmation or critical negation. We had felt this dynamic in the alternative and artist-initiated spaces in the region beginning in the late

32 Quoted in Camille Anne Arcilla, "London Biennale to be held in PHL," *Business World*, September 7, 2016.

33 Guy Brett, "David Medalla: On a General Attitude and Two Works in Particular," in *Carnival of Perception: Selected Writings on Art* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 2004), 77.

34 Unpublished manuscript attributed to Johnny Manahan in the Johnny Manahan Archives located at the Resource Centre of the National Gallery Singapore.

35 James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 357.

36 Jacques Derrida, "The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eye of its Pupils" *Diacritics* 13, no. 4 (Autumn 1983): 3.

37 *Ibid.*

38 *Ibid.*, 19.

39 *Ibid.*, 20.

40 Joseph Beuys quoted in Clémentine Deliss, "Collecting Life's Unknowns", essay presented at the seminar "Decolonising the Museum", curated by Paul B. Preciado, at MACBA, Barcelona, in November 2014 L'Internationale Online, http://www.internationaleonline.org/research/decolonising_practices/27_collecting_lifes_unknowns (accessed 21 May 2018).

nineties. And we are currently sensing in Southeast Asia a strongly motivated generation of practitioners who have explored the time and space of the collective, the residency, the archive, and the discourse platform as vehicles of relearning.

I end this presentation by coming back to Jose Rizal's "The Class in Physics" in which a derisive friar-professor unravels the lesson of the day by probing his students on the classification of mirrors as being strictly either of metal or of glass. He asks: If a particular surface like wood or marble were to acquire a certain sheen or polish, would it be considered a mirror? Or if mercury were to be scraped off the back of the mirror and replaced with another substance, might the mirror still exist? The students are understandably confounded, even made more so when the teacher tosses into the discussion a specific kind of wood, the *kamagong*, or a specific kind of substitute, the *bibingka* or rice cake. I think Rizal here allegorizes the teacher's painful technique of diminishing colonial subjects by transposing them into things that cannot fit into categories and therefore cannot be represented through the colonial optic. In other words, they cannot be mirrors and represent

themselves, because they are impenetrable like hard wood and glutinous or viscous like rice cake. But the students reinscribe the materiality and mediality of the racialized hard wood and rice cake in the current ecology and the post-colonial future. This compellingly comes through when one of the students offers something totally unknown or unknowable. According to him: "The mirror of kamagong (the hard wood) is among the mirrors of wood." With this utterance of both impossible *langue* and *parole*, genus and species, that overturns the inviolable taxonomy, the nature of the historical intervenes in the production of a different world; and the metaphysics of the teacher dissolves in the physics of the student, in his ability to take physics to its word as an experimental science of how the world behaves relationally from force to force. Surely, this episode in the classroom-museum touches on the difficult deeds of sensing, representing, speaking on behalf of others, comparing, recognizing, and so on. Jose Rizal saw the laboratory in the university as tending to the "altura del siglo," or peak of the century, translated into Tagalog by Patricio Mariano as "kapantay ng mga kasalukuyan," or "equal with contemporaries,"

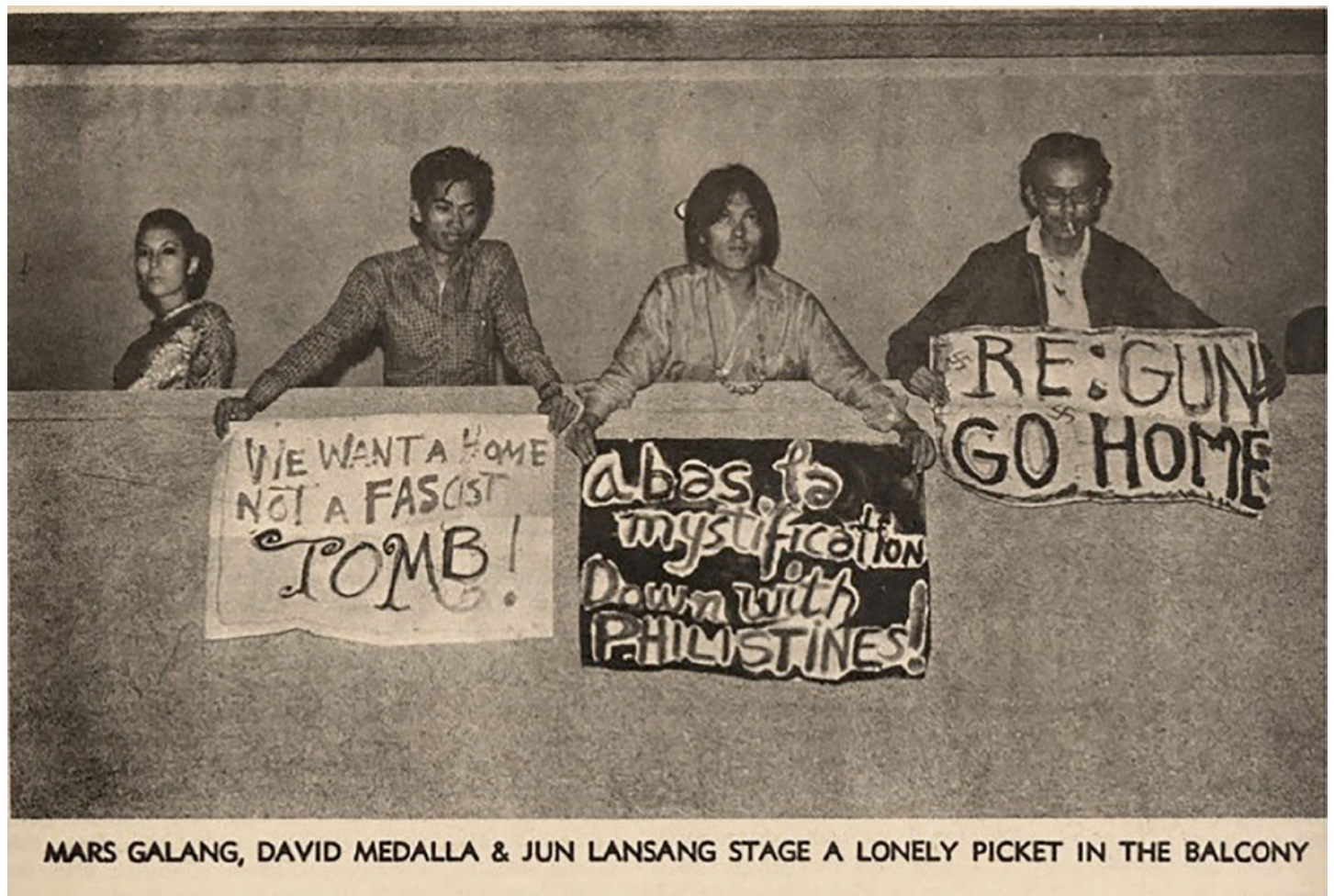


Figure 7. David Medalla protesting at the opening of the Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1969.

a “parity among equals,” a “co-presence” of present-day people.⁴¹ Like the much-maligned students of the curate-curator and the inspiring personas of Albano, Jamal, Apisuk, and Medalla and their mutating, calibrating, incremental, wide-ranging, sociable, kinetic, and provocative practice, we have to take risks when we decide to return the gaze and become co-present and impertinent, when we relearn the order of things and become persons who order things differently. Only by doing so that we will be able to take hold of the time to unlearn and finally let go, or unlearn, the time itself of the modern, its art, and its museum. Distracted from that time, we will find another physics and another class, another cosmos of learning, nothing less than another nature of how we play out our work.

41 José Rizal, *Ang Filibusterismo* (El Filibusterismo), trans. Patricio Mariano (Manila: I.R. Morales, 1911), 114.

Perspective 4

Ade Darmawan

Artist, Curator and Director, ruangrupa (Indonesia)

Living Room Sub-Institute

This is an edited transcript of the speaker's presentation at the CÌMAM 2017 Annual Conference

<https://vimeo.com/244011369/53b3c32a86>

I thank you guys for coming and thank you CÌMAM, Eugene Tan and of course Patrick Flores for this morning's speech. I will start with how ruangrupa started, focusing on how we started as a space.

The living room is sort of where we started. In our house that we rented from 2000 to 2001, I can still remember the VHS recorder where I recorded 9/11 live on TV. We used the space for exhibitions and presented a lot of things including archives. We moved again in 2003 and lived there for 2 years; it was 200 square meters (fig. 1). We changed the living room into an exhibition space (fig. 2), we changed the bedroom into an office, bedroom into a library, bathroom into an office, bathtub into bathtub.

On our fourth move, we stayed for about 7 years. Somehow, it was quite a good space and size; 480 or 500 square meters. We used the living room for meetings, for gatherings, for exhibitions. We just put in the lights, painted it white and called it "gallery" (fig. 3). And the young artists came queuing, easy as that. We used it also as a meeting place, a gathering place. You know when we closed the door, it becomes private, domestic; and when we open it every time there is an opening, 400 or 500 people will come.

We used the back for "hangout meetings". This kind of structure, gathering in circles as can be seen from many photographs that we have, is like endless conversation, endless dialogue and exchange; and also sometimes without any direction—distraction is



Figure 1. Ruru house (2003–2005).



Figure 2. Ruru exhibition space 2003–2005.



Figure 3. Exhibition space at ruangrupa—2008.



Figure 6. Workshop at ruangrupa.



Figure 4. Gigs at ruru space.



Figure 7. Jatiwangi art factory.



Figure 5. The Kuda — ruangrupa project in Asia Pacific Triennial.

a bliss. We can have a meeting from 7pm until midnight or 2 or 3. I think that's how we like to do it—with no time binding it.

We also used the space many times for gigs and rehearsals (fig. 4). We are really close to the music scene, because a lot of us also play and produce music. If you remember the Asia Pacific Triennial, there was *The Kuda*, a band that existed in the 70's in Indonesia that influenced the 70's punk scene in Brisbane (fig. 5). The band never existed, we just made it up, but we actually produced and launched an album.

We also do a lot of workshops and discussions (fig. 6) on curating and art writing. The classes that we have are with this kind of environment, with an atmosphere coming from the energy of the people and also the objects. How a house is used shows this energy, the initiative of the artist—working and living with the society, with the community, with the neighbors.

Another example of a collective is the Jatiwangi Art Factory in West Java, 4 hours from Jakarta (fig. 7). They have really crazy programs and projects as well. ruangrupa has organized a video festival; they have organized a village video festival. They have residencies in the village as well where the villagers become the programmers and the selection committee for the artists. There is *Hysteria* in Semarang, *Sarueh* in West Sumatra, *Serrum* in Jakarta. *Lifepatch* in Yogyakarta, *Mes56* in Yogyakarta—they've moved now from their original house.

So I see [us] as working, living with the community, and at the same time, contributing to one another because a lot of inspiration comes from one's neighbors. I was imagining how an institution or organization constituted in one locality can really become localized.



Figure 8. Gudang Sarinah Ekosistem.

And then in 2015 *ruangrupa* moved again, after the Jakarta Biennale. We found a big warehouse that we used for the Jakarta Biennale. This is Gudang Sarinah Ekosistem Warehouse which was actually a department store, and the oldest department store in Jakarta (fig. 8). It was built under Sukarno in 1962 or 1963. We rented 2 units and moved from the house to this big warehouse of 6,000 square meters in total.

We use a model we are experimenting with other collectives. We bring 8 collectives together in a collective pot. We use a *lumbung* model which refers to a rice barn. We put all the resources that we have in the center—in this collective pot—including money, equipment, books, resources, human resources and also programs (figs. 9.1 & 9.2). It's an exciting model because for the first time, we can sit together with other collectives and talk about how we manage everyone's programs, and how we can collaborate. We still keep this ecosystem going.

We also have a business unit—I mean we've been working on that as well for some years, it's like a profit for non-profits. We look to generating income from that unit and spending it on programs. We have funding from outside, but we know it's not going to last forever. Sustainability is something that we experiment with from time to time.

In the first year, we hosted 200,000 people. We had a big market (fig. 10) and we did an open call and asked everyone not to sell anything for more than \$20. So you see, it's like an enlarging, or a collection of small things we put together—festivals, music, projects. This is what we do, supporting the art ecosystem, but again, as a collective, we also work with creating spaces offsite.

At the Choja-machi site in Aichi Triennale in Nagoya, 2016, we experimented with creating a school. We had an open call for students and at the same time for neighbors in the area who would like to teach. So it was not only us who taught—we just mediated [for] everyone in the neighborhood who wanted to teach. It was very organic; of course it was quite different and not without difficulties because the students were so quiet. But they drew a lot, and they drew everywhere, which was amazing (figs. 11.1 & 11.2). We had 5 or 6 projects like this that we

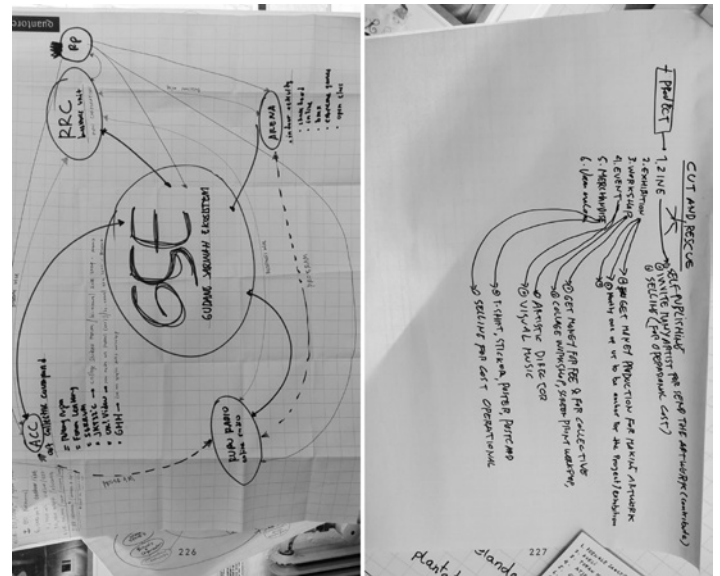


Figure 9.1. "Lumbung" collective pot scheme, produced at Ruru huis, SONSBECK — transACTION, Arnhem, Netherlands, 2016

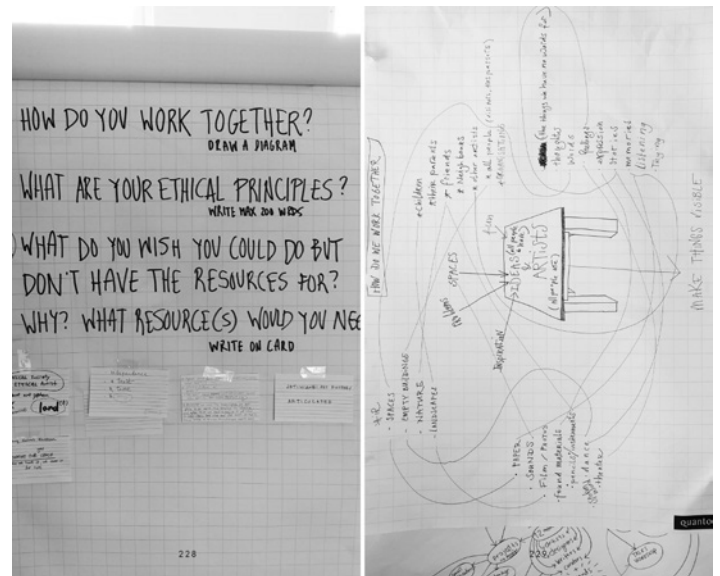


Figure 9.2. Collective pot mapping, produced at Ruru huis, SONSBECK —transACTION, Arnhem, Netherlands, 2016

executed in the city. Some people were working on a city spot for kids, and others about the environment in the city or neighborhood. So it was different sorts of approaches, not necessarily into art. We had a guy for example, who asked everyone in the neighborhood what they thought of or expected in the future for the neighborhood. We also asked the owner of a textile shop to do a lecture about the history of the area.

Cosmopolis #1: Collective Intelligence at the Centre Pompidou, 2017 is very recent, it's still going on, so if you are around in Paris, you can stop by. It's quite similar to what we were doing in São Paulo. For this one, we are doing research into the inside of the museum. The research includes interviewing the heads the staff, and then really breaking down what's going on—what they have produced, and also leftover from exhibitions. In this project, we sort of become parasites using leftovers of the museum.

All the things in the exhibition come from the museum's storage or garbage, like all the books. For the screening, we used what was a Cy Twombly banner.

We also invited people; again, we were trying to create a common space where people can join in and fill the space with programs and activities. We also worked with an artist collective in the exhibition. We collected books from the participants coming from all over the world, and we are going to donate

them to the library because we don't think that they have those kinds of references in the library. For the first time, people can write on Pompidou's glass, even from the outside (figs. 12.1 & 12.2). People can see the map from the outside and they read the stories from the outside. For the map, we dissected a few parts of the city and then we asked people to add on their stories using icons and writing. We've done this before in many places.

In 2016, ruangrupa was invited for the first time as a curator not as an artist collective, to *SONSBEEK*, a public art exhibition taking place within the city of Arnhem. I was thinking what we should do, and then I jokingly suggested a sort of "reverse-colonization". What we proposed as a curatorial model as well as an artistic model was to open a space for use for one year leading up to the event. We would generate ideas that would become the "brain" of the event, and of the exhibition. We worked on this pretty sporadically until we found a space which used to be a camera shop, and we used that. We used the theme of "transaction" and were also interested in the idea of "living sculpture" and approaching ideas of sculpture, objects, and



Figure 10. Monthly market at Gudang Sarinah Ekosistem.



Figure 11.1. Ruru gakko, Aichi Triennale, 2016.



Figure 12.1. Cosmopolis #1: Collective Intelligence, Centre Pompidou, 2017



Figure 11.2. Ruru gakko, Aichi Triennale, 2016.



Figure 12.1. Cosmopolis #2: Collective Intelligence, Centre Pompidou, 2017

installation differently since Sonsbeek is traditionally an exhibition of public sculpture. Again, we changed the camera shop into a meeting place, and it became a common space that people could fill with anything that they wanted. We also used a lot of charts, where people could write down anything about what they think (figs. 13.1 & 13.2). From there we generated a lot of questions.

I would summarise by saying that what *ruangrupa* does is *nongkrong*, or hanging out. This is a nice note from Nuraini Juliastuti explaining what it is—basically a very organic platform where we gather and have a conversation. It's really surprising that these 2 platforms—the school in Japan and also the Arnhem project—are actually ongoing. The platform continues, and the Arnhem artists also continue this platform nomadically.



Figure 13.1. Ruru huis, SONSBEEK — transACTiON, Arnhem, Netherlands, 2016.



Figure 13.2. Ruru huis — SONSBEEK — transACTiON, Arnhem, Netherlands, 2016.



Perspective 5

Gridthiya Gaweewong

Artistic Director, Jim Thompson Art Center
(Thailand)

Reconnecting Southeast Asia: Contemporary Art and Private Institutions in Thailand

This is a revised version of the author's presentation at the CIMAM 2017 Annual Conference

<https://vimeo.com/249055840>

Museums in this part of the world did not arise from the Enlightenment, but from colonization and, in Thailand's case, crypto-colonization. The first to open was a private museum in the royal palace in the late 19th century, with public museums only coming after the Siamese revolution in 1932. According to the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre, today there are more than 1,000 museums in Thailand¹. Most of them are national and local museums, focusing more on preserving cultural heritage than interpreting and exhibiting of collections and sharing knowledge.

A quick outline of institutions: the first art school in Bangkok was established in as early as 1933 by Italian sculpture Corrado Feroci (who later adopted a Thai name, Silpa Bhirasri, giving his name to the Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art). In the 1960s, for want of venues to display their art, artists showed their works at constitutional fairs², cultural institutions and in artist-run spaces. Private and public art institutions only began to be established in 1974.

The multi-functional Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art was a private institution started by the arts community and expats, with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation and bilateral agencies. Bhirasi's students were the core members and exhibitions displayed works by local and international artists. It closed in 1988 following the death of the main patron and a lack of financial support.

The National Gallery opened the same year in the former mint factory under supervision of the Department of Fine Arts of Thailand. It housed collections of early and late Thai modern art, showcased art works, and hosted the national art competition, local and international art shows, depending on who reserved gallery space. There was no curatorial team, and there were no public programs due to lack of funding.

University galleries and artist collectives served as the catalyst for the contemporary art scene and led to the emergence of contemporary art in the 1990s. One of the most important art movements took place in Chiangmai along the lines of Arjun Appadurai's notion of grassroots globalization. It was called

¹ "Thai Museums Database", Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre, <http://www.sac.or.th/databases/museumdatabase/index.php> (accessed 31 May 2018).

² Fair organized by Thailand's People's Party government to promote their interpretation of the constitution and their ideology after having overthrown the absolute monarchy in 1932. Akin to a world exposition writ small, many Thai public and private institutions participated with booths displaying products and inventions. The first one was organized at a park in 1933; it featured the first "Miss Thailand" beauty queen competition organized by the government and art exhibitions organised by the Fine Arts Department.



Figure 1. Pinaree Sanpitak, *Temporary Insanity*, Jim Thompson Art Center, 2004.

Chiangmai Social Installation (CMSI) and its very existence was born from a lack of infrastructure and immature institutions. Artists, lecturers and students of Chiangmai University's new faculty of fine art were so frustrated at having nowhere to show their works that they took over temples, graveyards and public spaces. This project attracted many artists from the local, regional and international art communities during its short-lived operations. The situation also led to the proliferation of artists collectives and alternative spaces elsewhere, but especially in Thailand's north.

In the mid-1990s, Thailand was hit by the Asian economic crisis but the artists collective movement continued to rise even as the economy declined. Bangkok became home to collectives, alternatives spaces and independent projects. Many Thai artists had been actively engaged with global art exhibitions and biennales in the Asia Pacific area, with the interaction among artists, scholars and region was mainly facilitated by two main players: Australia with the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art which started in 1993, and Japan, with the Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale, which started in 1999 but has its roots in the Asian Art Show of the 1980s.

In the 2000s, private art institutions started to play critical roles, among them the Jim Thompson Art

Center (JTAC). Set up in 2003, JTAC is part of the Jim Thompson House Museum with pre-modern art collection from the region. The JTAC shows featured traditional textiles, ethnological and research-based projects, alternating with contemporary art exhibitions by both local and international artists (fig. 1).

The Bangkok Art & Culture Centre (BACC) was founded to respond to the needs of major art institutions in the city and was proposed to the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) by the arts community. Years of debate and negotiations followed and the centre finally opened in 2005 with partial funding from the BMA. It has both multi-purpose programs and spaces for exhibiting art and for commercial uses; it does not have a permanent collection.

Modern and contemporary art in Thailand has been nation-centric while maintaining aspirations of joining the global art stage; it had little interest in regional issues. For Thailand, local versus internationalism became the main discourse for the art community and curators like Apinan Poshyananda conceived such shows as *Thai Trends*. It was rare to see exhibitions in Thailand tackling regional issues or with regional perspectives.

In this decade we are seeing some shifts on the museum scene, with private collectors like

telecommunications tycoon Boonchai Benjarongkakul opening the Museum of Contemporary Art, Bangkok in 2014, with collection of neo-traditional Thai art.

In 2016, MAIiAM Contemporary Art Museum opened in Chiangmai showing contemporary Thai and regional art (fig. 2). An initiative of the collectors Eric Bunnag Booth, and his family, it aims to share the works of local artists and hold temporary exhibition of artists in the region.

In the near future, another private museum with local and international collections will open in Bangkok, the SANSAB Museum of Contemporary Art. Owned by long-time collector Petch Osathanugrauh, it has been in the planning stages since the early 2000s.

On the public side, the Office of Contemporary Art and Culture (OCAC), Ministry of Culture is building the National Contemporary Art Museum in the Rachadapisek area.

So while the recent cycle of artistic activities has been similar to 1990s during the economic crash, the difference is that development focuses more on private initiative institutions, and large-scale international exhibitions. In 2018, there will be three biennales—two in Bangkok and one in Krabi in the south of Thailand. It may be interesting to note that the Bangkok Art Biennale is funded by corporations while the Bangkok Biennale is independently organized by artist-run spaces and collectives; the Thailand Biennale—in Krabi—is funded by the state.)

The emergence of these biennales raises questions as to the role of the extant museums and art institutions in the country. What's wrong with the current art institutions now? With the number

of museums and art spaces in the country, do we do a good job in bringing art to the public? What can't we do that the biennales can? Will the biennales be able to bring a new dimension and value to the community, reconnecting us to the region and beyond?

Just as in the past, most shows still feature local and international artists. It is still rare to see an exhibition with a regional perspective. This leads to another question: how does Thailand locate itself in the regional context? How can it integrate itself into the area, which is so diverse in culture, social values, politics and economies? Historically, Thailand has isolated itself from the region based on the grand narrative of exceptionalism: it is not post-colonial" unlike its neighbours because it remained independent. But that's not true, as one might say that it has been internally colonized by the elite through "Crypto-Colonialism", as theorized by Michael Herzfeld³. Additionally, during the Cold War, it was Americanized, leading the country to fight against its neighbors in the Mekong sub-region.

This raises additional questions about Thailand's knowledge of Southeast Asia, as Thongchai Winichakul pointed out, referring to Charnvit Kasetsiri's statement that it is "very Thai centric"⁴. One could argue that Thailand's geographical imagination of its regional neighbors, grounded in imperial discourse of the Thai state, has remained largely unchanged for a long time. From this perspective, Thailand's neighbors have rarely been considered regional companions, but rather enemies or dependents of Siam. There have been problems with historiography and the perception of locals towards the



Figure 2. MAIiAM Contemporary Art Museum.

3 Michael Herzfeld, "The Absent Presence: Discourses of Crypto-Colonialism," in *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101.4 (2002), 899–926.

4 Thongchai Winichakul, "Beyond Borders: An Overview of Southeast Asian Studies in Thailand," in *Siks cakr: The Journal of Cambodia Research* No. 6 (2004): 119.

relatively new terms like “Asia” and “Southeast Asia”. For Winichakul, the Thai kingdom and its people did not conceive itself as part of these two cartographic entities, as mainland Southeast Asia conceived of itself as the golden land or *Suwannaphum*, a term which was also used by outsiders from South and West Asia.⁵

With these internal contradictions and an entrenched nation-centrism, it would be a challenge to attempt to shift Thailand towards a more regional perspective.

An exhibition is not only about show and tell; it is an important tool for Thailand to reconnect with Southeast Asia and beyond. The emergence of global exhibitions has allowed us to engage in dialogue with the region both at home and away since the early 1990s. Exchanges and main players have moved from Japan and Australia to Singapore in the last ten years. Our curatorial community in the region questioned whether we could connect and collaborate. Is it possible for us to work together through institutional exchanges of exhibitions, programs, resources and so on? Seemingly to answer this question, institutions have initiated more regional art exhibitions and programs, through which we are managing to exchange shows with regional perspectives within Asia.

For example, from MAIAM, the exhibition *The Serenity of Madness* (2016), by Apichatpong Weerasethakul has travelled to the Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, Manila, to Parasite, Hong Kong in 2017; a show about the Deep South of Thailand, the Patani Semesa, will travel to ILHAM Gallery, Kuala Lumpur in 2018.

The BACC has organized the exhibition *Concept, Context and Contestation*, curated by İola Lenzi (Singapore), Agung Hujatnikajennong (Indonesia) and Vipash Purichanont (Thailand), which explored cross-national and cross-generational expressive dialogues to reveal the region’s deployment of conceptual approaches in the making of art with a social agenda. The exhibition travelled to Indonesia and Vietnam.

JTAC has organized regional shows in the past. This year we have invited guest curators such as Roger Nelson (Australian curator previously based in Phnom Penh, Cambodia) to curate *People, Money, Ghosts (Movement as Metaphor)* (2017) a show about the mobility of artists in the global era, focusing on artists working in the Cambodian and regional



Figure 3. POLA — Patterns of Meaning, installation view, Jim Thompson Art Center, 2017. Image courtesy Photogenic, 2018.



Figure 4. POLA — Patterns of Meaning, installation view, Jim Thompson Art Center, 2017. Image courtesy Photogenic, 2018.

context. Also held was *Soil and Stones, Souls and Songs* (2017) curated by Cosmin Costinas and İnti Guerrero. The show was based on several intertwined lines of tension and narratives found today in the realities of living, the artistic and cultural production, and contemporary thought in the Asian sphere and beyond.

For our recent show, *POLA — Patterns of Meaning* (15 November 2017 to 28 February 2018), we are collaborating with the Danar Hadi Batik Museum in Surakarta, Indonesia, and invited Mella Jaarsma to curate contemporary artists from Indonesia to respond to the Surakarta museum’s collection of batik and to rethink the role of batik in the cultural, social, political context (figs 3 & 4).

In summary, despite the context of Thailand’s historical perception of region, and how we remain stuck within a dichotomy of “local and international”, we are trying to break through by shifting to a regional perspective, and reconnecting through exhibitions and

5 Ibid, 120.

collaboration. We hope this will help us get to know one another better. And perhaps finally, we can have better understanding about our relationship to the region and the world.

Perspective 6

Post-Museum

Artists (Singapore)

Working in the Real of the Dead and Undead: Land Contestation in Singapore

This is an transcript of the authors' presentation at the CIMAM 2017 Annual Conference

<https://vimeo.com/249056036>

Thank you.

We will be sharing about the kind of work we have been doing and hopefully the sharing will reflect our position—through our work we seek to expand the discourse on the roles and responsibilities that the field of art could play in a world that is increasingly unjust and unfree.

We begin with the “Renaissancing” of Singapore as an impulse to formulate our position. By this we are referring to the cultural and social policies introduced by the Singapore Government which has transformed the cultural landscape: changing our skyline and “culture” and permeating into the everyday life through the increasing number of art festivals and art venues.

This cultural shift has been a subject of study by Singapore Studies scholars who critique the cultural development as economically driven. With that we see a bureaucratic middle management who has increasing power and play a decisive role in shaping the cultural landscape—who tend to have an appetite for art which create spectacle and which are plugged into the global—with a distaste for art that is critical or not aligned with what is perceived as the nation’s value.

Singapore’s Renaissance may have elevated the position of the arts but it has been limited in its reach. We believed that art should change the world—it should participate in shaping a better world.



Figure 1. Post-Museum space at Rowell Road, Singapore.

Post-Museum emerged out of that impulse in wanting art to play a more proactive role in society. Our practice really took shape during the Rowell Road Period, when we operated a cultural space in two shop houses on Rowell Road in the Kampong Kapur area of Singapore between 2007-2011 (fig. 1).

We wanted Post-Museum to be independent. By this, we didn’t want to take any funding from government agencies in order to maintain autonomy in our programmes and activities.

With time, Post-Museum became a place to ‘haunt’ for a network of cultural practitioners (from



Figure 2. The Café Project, Food #03, Post-Museum.



Figure 3. Activists campaigning against the development plans for Bukit Brown Cemetery



Figure 4a. Index #108, Post-Museum. MOCA Taipei, 15 June to 28 June 2015.

students to academics, artists to activists). The Café Project—*Food #03* (inspired by Gordon Matta-Clark’s artist-run restaurant, Food in Soho)—was an artist-run bar and café which was an important element for the success of getting people to hang around and talk to each other (fig. 2).

That confluence of people and their practices, which were shared in Post-Museum during those 4 years, allowed us to see how diverse practices could convene and learn from one other: how people could come together, find something in that encounter and go forth and make something out of that. In that way, we were not trying to establish an art “center” but a peer-to-peer network.

In 2011, we ended the lease because of financial problems. Since then, Post-Museum has continued as a nomadic “entity”. Currently, we do not have a permanent space but we continue to be inspired by and collaborate with this network of allies from the Rowell Road Period.

We are interested in how we can “practice the city” in more meaningful ways. To “practice the city” for us meant asserting and claiming the “right to the city”. Becoming nomadic has been an interesting challenge that shaped our practice in a different way.

Bukit Brown Index

Almost immediately after we became nomadic, the Bukit Brown Cemetery incident happened. The Bukit Brown cemetery contestation story begins with the government authorities announcing a new road to alleviate congestion on Lornie Road and future development plans in the area—hence would require the exhumation of 5000 tombs from an old cemetery in 2011.¹ This was to be a project we worked on for the next few years. We became involved as heritage “activists”—participating in the campaign to save the cemetery from being destroyed for a new highway.

Even though we did not manage to save the cemetery, these 2 years gave us insights into the issues of heritage conservation, collaboration and the commons. This led to a new work called *The Bukit Brown Index*. For us, the incident is really a case of land contestation in Singapore—a story about the struggle over a nation’s Soul.

Here is an image of Lornie Road where contestation begins (fig. 3). As you can see—the road is hardly congested—and many people could not understand why the urban planning imagination could not envision a possibility of adding a lane or 2 on the left or the right to spare the cemetery from the clutches of development.

Bukit Brown is a cemetery for cemeteries. Many cemeteries in Singapore were exhumed for development and some of the tombs were moved to Bukit Brown (figs. 4a, 4b, 4c, 4d).

1 http://www.singaporeheritage.org/?page_id=1352 (accessed 08 May 2018).



Figure 4b. *Index #108*, Post-Museum. MOCA Taipei, 15 June to 28 June 2015.

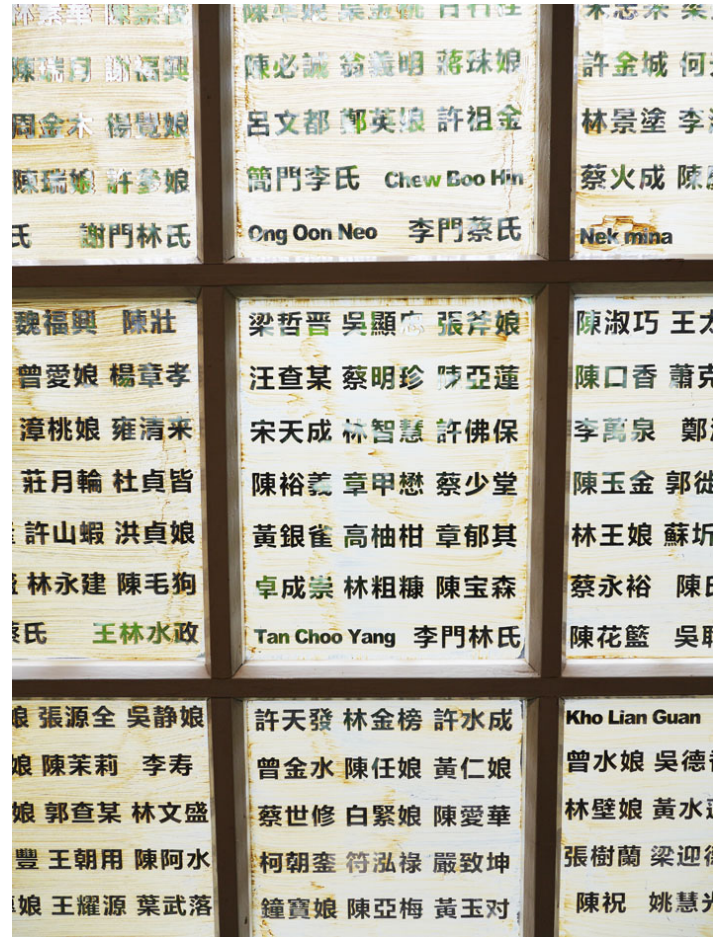


Figure 4d. *Index #108*, Post-Museum. MOCA Taipei, 15 June to 28 June 2015.



Figure 4c. *Index #108*, Post-Museum. MOCA Taipei, 15 June to 28 June 2015.

Here is *Index #108*—a list of the 2,000-plus names of the unclaimed tombs. This means that these dead here have no descendants claiming them so they would be exhumed and cremated before being placed in a crematorium for 2 years, after which, if nobody claims them, their ashes would then be scattered in the sea. For this index, a layer of clay was applied to the windows and then partially removed, thus revealing the names of the unclaimed. We were interested in the act of removing and letting the names re-emerge. It also sought to humanize the statistics.

Index #101 featured a group of volunteers/activists who called themselves the “Bukit Brownies” photographed at their favourite spot in the cemetery. Because of Rowell Road, we knew most of the activists in Singapore. What was fascinating was that the Bukit Brownies consisted of many new people and who came out and collaborated with us because they found connection to and meaning to this space (figs. 5, 6, 7 & 8).

By showing diverse people coming together based on their own interests, we want to show the potentiality of heritage conservation and land contestation movements to be a process of “communing” through their collective and collaborative activities, the participants of these movements formed their own subjectivities to the land. In this way, everyone could find a way to own it and the Commons become real.

During the advocacy campaigns, we noticed that the narrative of the supernatural was left out in the contestation process. Interviews with some of the activists in this regard (e.g. paranormal investigators/religious heritage enthusiast)—revealed that many felt the involvement of the supernatural would undermine the conservation efforts as the government officials may as a result not take them seriously.

One of the most successful book series—titled True Singapore Ghost Stories now on its 25th volume



Figure 5. Kwok Peng from Nature Society Singapore, a nature conservationist and a nature spot with the fallen leaves of the Mahang tree.

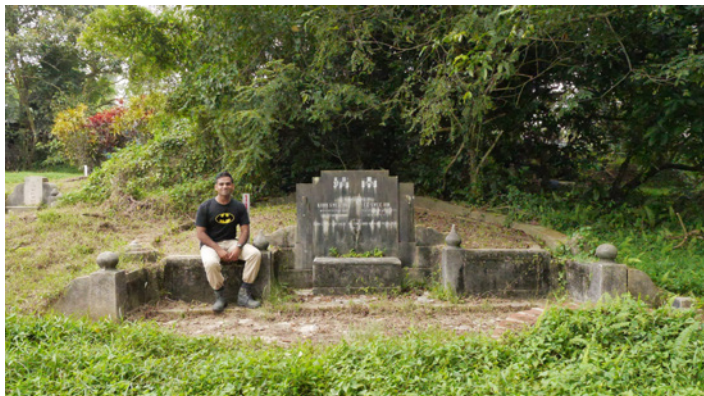


Figure 6. Sugeng, who is a teacher, lion-dancer and interests in Chinese culture. His chosen place is the tomb of Mr and Mrs Ee, a rare Western style tombstone which is now already removed. Because he is not Chinese, he has randomly chosen different surnames to research on.



Figure 7. Claire, ex-journalist, co-founder of the website All Things Bukit Brown and organizes tours at the cemetery, her favorite spot is a Peranakan tiled tomb, which has been removed.



Figure 8. Raymond, Co-founder of Asian Paranormal Investigator, tomb whisperer, with a cluster of tombs from the 1830s which were moved over from another cemetery.

is still a best seller. If you don't already know—Singapore is one of the most haunted country in the world. How could a contested cemetery have no hauntings!

For *Index #100*, we collected stories, first- and second-hand accounts of any supernatural occurrences in Bukit Brown, and mapped them. The map showed Bukit Brown as a vibrant hub for supernatural activities (fig. 9). Deities would join the guided tours by the volunteers; we were told in a few accounts that the gateway to hell was located at the doorstep of the Land Transport Authority's temporary office.

We met Oribel Divine, who is an interspecies communicator and we invited her to Bukit Brown to interview whoever was out there. She brought her class to the field and conducted interviews with whichever species willing to communicate. Through that we got interviews with a flower who did not understand what was happening but felt a general sadness in the air; a tree who was not affected by the highway was sad for his friends who stood in the way of progress.

We also indexed the episodes of the web series, "Ghost Files SG" that were shot in Bukit Brown, in which guests used "Electro Magnetic Frequency Meters" to communicate with the spirits. They would ask the spirits how they feel about their homes being disturbed due to the road.

Our obsession with the supernatural in this contestation story is inspired by scholars like Joshua Comaroff, Terence Heng and Kenneth Dean's work on spectral geography in Singapore. Hauntings can be understood as a tactic of emplacement. The supernatural have their own borders and logic which resist and evade official politics. The realm of the supernatural is messy and problematic because it crosses the boundaries of State space.

Hauntings allow the enchantment of place—it allows what we fear, what we cannot say and what refuses to go away—to take place.

What fascinated us about the Bukit Brown case was the diversity and complexity of the contestation. As a way of understanding the currents and ideologies which shape our right to the city. As David Harvey has proposed in his work *Rebel City: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, the city tells us who we are, and if we don't like who we are now, we can re-make it.

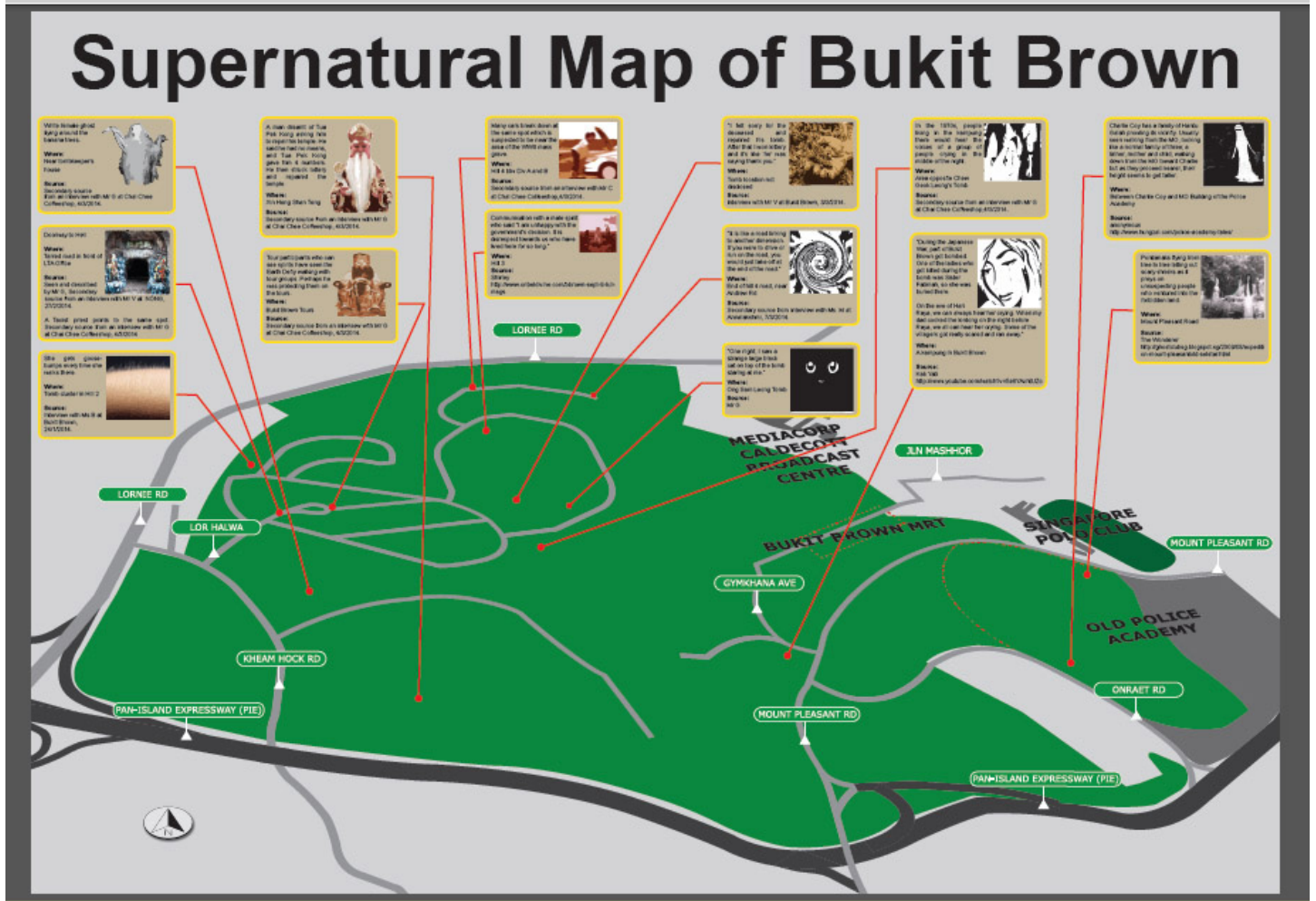


Figure 9. Supernatural Map of Bukit Brown.

Beyond Creative Placemaking

In recent years, Singapore has adopted the strategy of “place management” to inject “heart and soul” into the city.² This strategy refers to similar strategies adopted in other cities like New York and Paris, known as “placemaking”, and aimed to develop participatory places and improving the quality of life for their residents. The Singapore Government seems to engage in a softer form of urban planning, calling it Creative Placemaking, which often involves cultural elements that—according to Minister for Culture, Community and Youth, Grace Fu—help make “concrete buildings our homes” and gives people a “collective sense of place and identity.”³

Practicing the city responds to the dialogue of urban planning. An observation about creative placemaking in Singapore is that arts and culture is used to create a “visual and decorative” effect and customised to produce a positive attachment

to “home”. In this way, “creative placemaking” seemed rather different to the concept of placemaking in human geography.

On the position of “practicing the city” in relation to the concept of place we should be asking: “Where is our place in all this?”

We create places so that our projects can take place, and the activity of placemaking is how we help make the world or conjure a reality.

In that sense, we see the making of place as a process in all of Post-Museum’s projects: projects like the Soup Kitchen, reading groups, Really Really Free Market series, urban camping rehearsals and extreme picnics are no different to the large street festivals, arts and cultural districts, the Formula 1 Grand Prix. From the humble independent projects to national ones by government and statutory boards, we are all making places—because we enable a project to take place even though they are happening on different scales.

2 Su Fern Hoe and Jacqueline Liu, “Full Report on Roundtable on Place Management and Placemaking in Singapore,” in *IPS-SAM Spotlight on Cultural Policy Series Two* (Singapore: Institute of Policy Studies, 2016), 3-12.

3 Cheryl Teh, “World Cities Summit to explore creative place-making,” *Straits Times*, July 10, 2016.

I wish to introduce the concept of moral geography by the geographer Robert Sack, with which he argues that places which allow people to see the world as clearly and as deeply as possible, and places that promote variety and complexity, are “good” places that expand our knowledge of the good and hence our ability to do good.

It is important to clarify here that I am not saying that official places are bad and grounds-up places are good. I think that this reading is too narrow, cynical and not helpful. Instead, we need to understand that there is rarely a place that is so bad that it produces evil and similarly it is difficult to find a place that is purely good. Places tend to have both the good and bad.

No matter what the scale of these places are at, we need to read and unpack these projects critically. It is essential for us to be able to evaluate the virtues enmeshed in these places—we need to ask if these places are “good” for the world we want to create.

We advocate for the idea that every single one of us is a geographical agent capable of transforming the world because we are always engaged in some process of placemaking.

I know many of you work within an entity—some form of institution, corporation or cultural ministry. Within these entities, it may seem impossible for a single person to be able to effect any change.

If places can have a moral quality, it is not impossible to imagine us humans, institutions or corporations as having moral qualities too. Hence, we too embody some good and some bad. The problem often happens when corporations have too much bad and we learnt to accept them to be inherently evil and deny their potentiality for being good.

The one thing we learnt from our contestation is that every one of us has the potential to do “good”—we are appealing to the “good” in the humans who work within institutions, governments and corporations to find enough allies within and to co-operate with the allies on the outside to shift these entities directing it towards the “good”.

We conclude on a hopeful proposition—how can we create an alliance and work together to make a future that is just and free for everyone?

Day 3

Sunday 12 November

National Gallery
Singapore

*What Do Museums
Collect, and How?
(Title in Italics)*

Keynote 3

Donna De Salvo

Deputy Director for International Initiatives and
Senior Curator, Whitney Museum of American Art
(USA)

America Is Hard to See

This is an edited transcript of the author's presentation at the CIMAM 2017 Annual Conference

<https://vimeo.com/249137398>

I am going to speak about the inaugural installation in the Whitney Museum of American Art's new downtown building, "America Is Hard to See" and give you a bit of context and somewhat of a timeline of how we got there. So, some background about the new Whitney Museum of American Art.

For more than three decades, the Whitney has been trying to expand its building on Madison and 75th Street. This was largely driven by the growth of the museum's collection. There had been several attempts over many years, some of you probably know the different architects, but each of those plans had met with tremendous resistance from the neighborhood and the Landmarks Commission, regarding demolishing the buildings next the Marcel Breuer building which would have allowed the museum to maximize the space.

In the end, the trustees took a very courageous decision and decided to go elsewhere. They abandoned the expansion project uptown and looked for a parcel of land to purchase and found here, on the west side of Manhattan, a disused site owned by the city of New York in what is still known as the Meatpacking District. This is our new building that was designed by Renzo Piano and opened on May 15th, 2015 (fig. 1).

You can see in the architecture, there is a porosity that I think in many ways, we hope, signals



Figure 1. The Whitney Museum of American Art. Photograph © Ed Lederman.

the ethos of the institution... Inside, outside, windows that open out, look out west, look out east, terraces that you can walk

via the exterior stairs. We run parallel to the High Line.

One of the great things that Renzo Piano did, and I had the great privilege of working with him along with the director on the design of the building, was the engagement with the neighborhood. Because one of the things we asked was "Why do you want to put the terraces on the east side and not look out on the west



Figure 2.1. Installation view of *America Is Hard to See* (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, May 1-September 27, 2015). From left to right: Louise Lawler, *Does Marilyn Monroe Make You Cry?*, 1988; Charles Ray, *Boy*, 1992; Lari Pittman, *Untitled #16 (A Decorated Chronology of Insistence and Resignation)*, 1993. Photograph by Ron Amstutz.

side and the river?" and Piano said, "You don't turn your back on the neighborhood."

We opened this new building in May 2015 with a presentation that was drawn from the museum's permanent collection; I would say there were two loans amongst the 600 works by 400 artists that occupied the whole building.

The exhibition ran throughout all floors of the building, including the 5th floor, which is the museum's main exhibition space and included works principally from the 70s up to the present (fig. 2.1). On the right (fig 2.2) is a work by Félix González-Torres called *America* which we decided would look fantastic in the stairway but also be symbolic. And we titled the presentation "America Is Hard to See". I will tell you a little bit more about where that title derives from in a minute. Today I would like to talk about this multi-year initiative that we engaged in, which really got us to this point.

A little bit of background about the history of the Whitney, some known, some not as well known: the Whitney really began as a studio for Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, yes that Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney of the Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney lineage. She was an artist herself and had little interest in living the kind of life that might have been expected at that time of a woman of her position. She chose not to be a society lady but instead moved down to Greenwich Village where she had a studio to pursue her own work. In that studio, she eventually presented the work of other artists, principally, American artists.



Figure 2.2. Installation view of *America Is Hard to See* (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, May 1-September 27, 2015). From left to right: Felix Gonzalez Torres, *Untitled (America)*, 1994; Robert Henri, *Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney*, 1916. Photograph by Ron Amstutz.

It seems very far away now, but at that time, in the 20s and early 30s, there was no great affinity for American art or for collecting American art. In fact, many American collectors were drawn more to European culture and had little interest in supporting the work of American artists and this motivated Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney to begin supporting artists.

Their club had 400 members, which included Edward Hopper, Alexander Calder, Agnes Pelton, Stuart Davis—many of the great American artists—and she supported their work by purchasing works from them, some of which she donated to American museums. She was also a supporter of the Armory Exhibition. Mrs. Whitney had no intention of founding a museum and so, having amassed this sizable collection, offered it as a gift with a major endowment to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The offer was promptly refused by its then director Edward Robinson who responded, and I quote, "What will we do with them, my dear lady? We have a cellar full of those things already."¹

So, in 1930 she decided to turn her studio club into the Whitney Museum of American Art which opened its doors in 1931. This building on 8th Street is now the New York Studio School; it looks pretty much the same now except it doesn't have Whitney Museum over the doorway.

At the time of its opening, the critic Henry McBride said, "The freedom and lack of convention that has guided these purchases are the greatest

1 Adam D. Weinberg, "From the Artist's Hand to the Public Eye," in *Whitney Museum of American Art: Handbook of the Collection*, ed. Dana Miller (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2015), 12.



Figure 3.1. Installation view of *Singular Visions* (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, December 16, 2010-August 5, 2012). From left to right: Eva Hesse, *No title*, 1969-70; George Segal, *Walk, Don't Walk*, 1976. Photograph by Sheldan C. Collins.



Figure 3.2. Installation view of *Real/Surreal* (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, October 6, 2011-February 5, 2012). From left to right: Kay Sage, *No Passing*, 1954; Edward Hopper, *Seven A.M.*, 1948; Edward Hopper, *Early Sunday Morning*, 1930; George Tooker, *The Subway*, 1950. Photograph by Jerry L. Thompson.

possible auguries for the future liveliness of the Museum. A contemporary museum that is stilted and pedantic is—well, it is not a museum but a morgue.”²

Over time, the Whitney outgrew the 8th Street location. At one point, it moved to 54th Street, on the other side of MoMA; later in a campaign led by Mrs. Whitney’s granddaughter, Flora Biddle Whitney, a new location was secured on Manhattan’s Upper East Side which at that point was home to many galleries. The architect Marcel Breuer was commissioned to design the building, which opened in 1966.

The Whitney is quite distinct among New York museums as it was founded by an artist—the only one in the city—with that mission or point of view behind it. Again, she had not intended to create a museum and so prior to this opening of the Breuer Building, Mrs. Whitney, along with Juliana Force, who had become the first director, began to look at what they had acquired because it was a rather idiosyncratic group of things.

Sometimes, Mrs. Whitney didn’t even buy the best work, but she wanted to support the artist. Together, they began to work more systematically to fill in gaps of the collection. The biennials that



Figure 4. Working boards of *America Is Hard to See*.

started very early on were defined by medium. And I will tell you that many works entered the collection because they had been in biennials, and of course. The Whitney Biennial that exists today has its roots here. This approach was unlike some places such as MoMA which had a more formal methodology and was also mapping international modern art, as demonstrated by Alfred Barr's famous diagram.

The Whitney's collection was not only more idiosyncratic, but of course, it was also defined by the term "American." It also worked very closely with artists, and in our thinking we looked a lot at this Ad Reinhardt cartoon, which is in the collection, which has a very satirical view of the art world; and of questions such as "where does influence come from?" Reinhardt's famous tree that branches out includes a weight that holds down the branches. I encourage you, if you have never looked at Ad Reinhardt's cartoons, to check them out. They are still very relevant today.

This precise definition of American art still remains a complex and unsettled one for the Whitney. We looked at previous attempts at the Whitney and what it had done. At the close of the 20th century, of course, there was a major series mounted called "The American Century". But when we began our work, we felt that this organizing principle was no

longer relevant. We also looked very closely at some of the landmark exhibitions that the Whitney had presented. In many ways, these exhibitions helped establish narratives in the collection as some of these works were acquired.

I think many of these exhibitions, from Marcia Tucker and James Monte's *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* (1969) to Thelma Golden's *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art* (1995) to Elisabeth Sussman's 1993 Whitney Biennial, punctured the monolithic read of American art. The museum acquired some of these things, including Fred Wilson's "Guarded View" where you see the museum guards, the headless museum guards—are all people of color. Daniel Joseph Martinez's piece sparked enormous controversy in 1993: the buttons you were given added up to "I can't imagine ever wanting to be white." Because the museum didn't have a dedicated space for showing the permanent collection, to a large extent, it has had a more *kunsthalle* way of operating and part of the work that I found myself faced with was how to move from being a *kunsthalle* to being a museum, but to not lose the *kunsthalle* attitude—to maintain a certain degree of openness.

While we were still in the Breuer Building, I asked the curators to test out ideas they were

interested in. We basically used the galleries as a sort of laboratory and this included varying methods of display. Here is one of them in the upper left—*Singular Visions* (figs. 3.1 & 3.2), which just had one work per gallery—and *Real/Surreal*, an exhibition that tried to blur the lines between -isms such as realism and surrealism.

Over a two-year period, I then asked a group of curators of different generations to join a team. We called ourselves the “core team,” we never really knew what to call ourselves, but somehow that seemed to work. It really was a team to research the collection, the history of exhibitions and to engage in a very, very thorough analysis of it.

I will say that I learnt much in my time at Tate Modern: the displays teams had a very dynamic approach to looking at the collection; more on that later. This lack of a clear narrative, and without having permanent collection displays where there was an established story, a canon that we would be burdened by, was quite liberating, but it was also somewhat destabilizing because we were figuring out “What do we do?”

We started in a very, very simple way. We made little pictures of all the things in the collection, pinned them up on a board and had discussions about what they were (fig. 4). There were many things we had never seen, we went to look at them. Some of them were discoveries when we saw them, we were so excited by some of the themes that began to emerge. (There were also some things that we thought “Well... it’s probably why it’s still in storage”—we all know that story.) We also invited scholars, many of them people passing through town, to come and look at these boards and to ask in very informal conversations, often times over lunch, what they thought in the collection was of greatest interest.

It was quite interesting that we had some people who said “Well, really you mostly have Calder and Hopper right?” The complexity and the depth of the collection was not well known; and then there were others who focused on certain areas of the collection who said “But you have this, and you have this.”

It was just a way for us to gauge the external perception of what people thought of this collection. We also held a roundtable conversation, which was incredibly revealing, with Robert Slifkin from NYU, Negar Azimi, Senior Editor of *Bidoun*, the artist Paul Chan, and long-time Whitney curator Barbara Haskell; which focused again on the term “American,” what do we mean by it and who’s an American artist: really trying to dig down on, “What is the guiding force here?” And you know, over the history of the museum, it has changed so often in terms of what the require-

ments were to enter the collection. I’ll talk a little bit more about that as we go forward.

One of the things we came to acknowledge was what we did not know. And we retained three outside consultants—Thelma Golden from the Studio Museum, Alexandra Chang from NYU, and Rita Gonzales from LACMA, all experts in particular areas—and we asked them to do an analysis of our holdings, to submit written reports about its strengths, its weaknesses and where the gaps existed. For where the gaps existed we asked them to be as specific as possible and to idey artists and if possible, even idey specific works.

I will tell you that these finding, their findings, constituted a roadmap for us and continues to be as we move forward. We worked with all of our museum acquisition committees in a very concerted effort to determine what we absolutely had to have when we opened this museum. Although we had just completed a major building project which would enable us to display more of the collection, we were faced with the Whitney’s limited acquisition funds, and growing those funds is now the next stage for us.

By working across committees—our committees are defined by media—by joining forces with everyone, first of all it was a great way to get buy-in from the curators because they could really feel part of something. The second thing is we could maximize our funds, some works came as gifts, some from co-purchases between, say, the Film, Video, and New Media Committee and the Painting and Sculpture Committee. We just barreled forward—it continues to this day.



Figure 5. Installation view of *America Is Hard to See* (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, May 1-September 27, 2015). From left to right on pedestal: John B. Flanagan, *Elephant*, 1929-30; William Zorach, *Bunny*, 1930; John B. Flanagan, *Chimpanzee*, 1928; Paul Fiene, *Fish*, 1929; Reuben Nakian, *Seal*, 1930; Paul Fiene, *Snail*, 1929. From left to right on wall: Carl Walters, *Bull*, 1927; Duncan Ferguson, *Squirrel*, c. 1930; Wharton Esherick, *Goslings*, 1927; Emma Lu Davis, *Cock*, 1932. Photograph by Ron Amstutz.



Figure 6. Max Weber, *Chinese Restaurant*, 1915. Oil, charcoal, and collaged paper on linen, 40 x 48 1/8 in. (101.6 x 122.2 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase 31.382.

I want to take you through the exhibition, and one of the things I think all people here who are working with permanent collections and exhibition displays grapple with—is how do you present these things, how do you contextualize them, what are the labels that you put on these sections. And so coming back to the title, we thought long and hard: there was no way we would call this show “American Visionaries”, “American Masters,” these were a few titles that were suggested to us—not by my colleagues, I might add.

“America Is Hard to See” is a title that we felt really signaled something: there are two sources for the title. One—and the one I knew—was from the political film maker Emile de Antonio’s film about Eugene McCarthy’s failed bid for the democratic nomination in 1968 and of course is associated with a very, very powerful—not just in the U.S. but globally—year of dissent and revolution. This was the name of his film, which I later learned he had

borrowed from Robert Frost’s poem of the same title, in which Frost talks about Columbus’ failure to really see America. And so with that as a title it sort of left the question open and I still think it is a valuable title in many ways.

We decided, given the Whitney’s great history working closely with artists, that we would choose chapter titles derived from works in the collection. Each work had a symbolic meaning within the section, but also was broad enough to encompass many of the other works in the section. For example the “Rose Castle” section takes its name from a Joseph Cornell work, “Racing Thoughts” from a Jasper Johns painting, and “Guarded View” from a work by Fred Wilson.

We needed to decide the methodology: was this going to be a thematic display? A chronological display? We had a lot of debates around that topic and we thought it was very important to keep it loosely chronological. This was a first—for many

people the first time—to see this much of the collection and certainly the first time to see it in a new building. The chronology was useful in navigating through a new building, it was something of a thread, the breadcrumbs you could follow, and that felt like the right thing to do for the public.

Beginning on our lobby level, this is “Eight West Eighth” (fig. 5) which of course is references to the Whitney Studio Club. The interesting thing about Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney is that she was very attracted to aspects of the American avant-garde and in particular the Ashcan School, collected the work of John Sloan whose realism was quite radical when considered against the backdrop of much academic painting.

But we also have a very big collection of animal figures which reflect the influence of folk art on the evolution of early 20th-century art. If you go to our storage facility, you see them—of course we have many people who said, “Are you really going to show the animals?” We felt that it was very important because there is no single read. To show process, to show how things evolve, it’s important to do a kind of warts-and-all story; I will tell you that at the end of this show we had many people who said, “When are you going to show the animals again?”

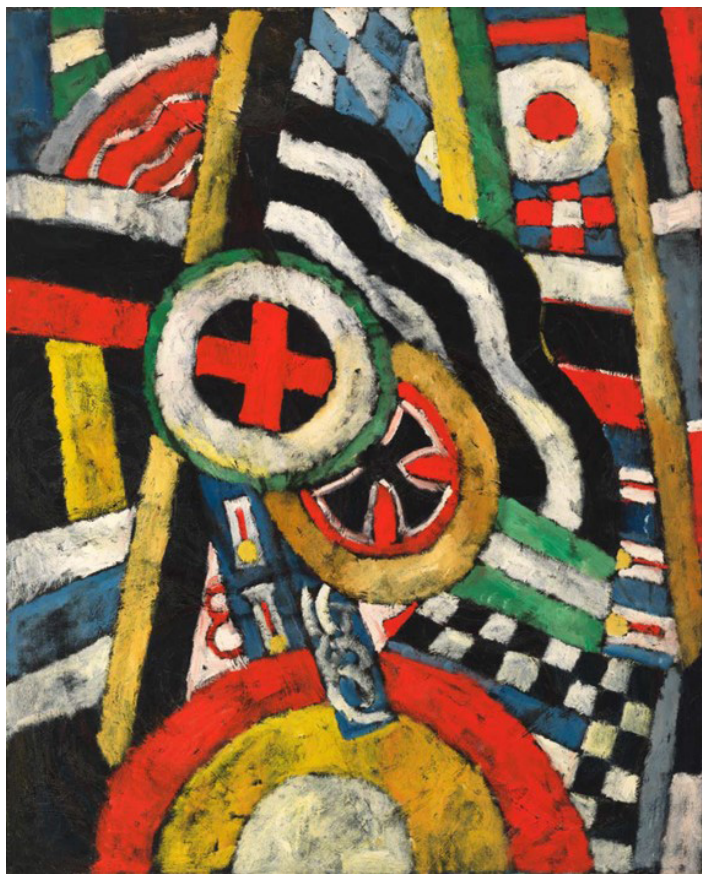


Figure 7. Marsden Hartley, *Painting, Number 5*, 1914-15. Oil on linen, 39 1/4 x 32 in. (99.7 x 81.3 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; gift of an anonymous donor 58.65.

There is a wonderful show that will open very soon in January at the National Gallery of Art that Lynne Cook is organizing that looks at the influence of folk art on the development of the American avant-garde. As I said earlier, our research process took us through this collection and this is where we really learned a lot about how different administrations had defined who an “American artist” was. This a work by the artist Stuart Davis and you see this great precisionist style that looks at an American landscape; but then we also saw this work by Yasuo Kuniyoshi.

Both of these works were included in the museum’s founding collection and we were surprised to learn that Kuniyoshi, who was born in Japan in 1906 and attended school in Los Angeles and later the Arts Students’ League, was not an American citizen when Mrs. Whitney acquired his work in 1931. She was less interested in geography and more interested in the art. He was working in New York, and she liked his work and she felt that it should be in the collection. And in fact as a Japanese immigrant, he was prohibited by a variety of laws and the Exclusion Act from becoming a citizen. His wife, who was American, was stripped of her citizenship when she married him. And sadly, by the time the ban was lifted in 1952, Kuniyoshi had died, while waiting for his application to be processed.

We discovered that Mrs. Whitney has done a series of exhibitions in the early days of the museum that looked at the immigrant in American culture. She had a great interest in looking at this new generation of immigrants coming to the U.S. Taking you now through the building—we’re going up to the top—is the section on “Machine Ornament”. This encompassed many works by artists such as Joseph Stella, Elsie Driggs, Charles Demuth, Charles Sheeler; who were looking at ideas of the American landscape in terms of war, industry, the development of commerce.

And in this section, we were able to insert one of our new acquisitions—a work by Toyo Miyatake. This was one of the artists that our consultants brought to our attention and we were very fortunate to be able to acquire the work.

Miyatake was born in Japan and he’d come to Los Angeles where he worked under the pictorial photographer Harry Shigeta and then later Edward Weston, and had a studio in little Tokyo. In fact, if you go to Los Angeles, there is a little marker that shows where his studio had once been. And he made portraits of many notable figures, such as Thomas Mann and the dancer Michio Ito; but with the U.S. declaration of war in ‘42 he was, along with more than 100,000 Japanese Americans, relocated to internment camps.



Figure 8. Installation view of *America Is Hard to See* (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, May 1-September 27, 2015).

Miyatake and his family were taken to the camp in Manzanar, California. There have been many documentary photographs made of Manzanar by photographers, though of course not in the camp. This was an opportunity to look at a work made from inside the camp. Immediately the point of view is a very, very different one. By adding this to our section, by incorporating him into the collection, we have taken on another idea of American art and of course what is so interesting is that he was an American citizen. We also get the great complexity of the U.S. and its changes politically and its attitude toward those who were not born in the United States.

For a section about early 20th-century modernism, also on this floor, we had a very serious debate about this painting by Max Weber. I think one of the great things about the displays team that we had at Tate, and certainly our core team at the Whitney—and I think it was something highlighted over the past couple of days [of the CĪMAM 2017 Annual Conference]—is what is actually discovered through debate and a certain negotiation. Meaning is not a fixed thing but, to a large extent, really depends on the people debating what the meaning is.

Now, this painting by Max Weber, is regarded by some of my colleagues, as well as many people associated with the museum, as one of the Whitney's great paintings (fig. 6). But there was a faction of colleagues—I must confess I was one of them—who thought it was a kind of second rate cubism. Our discussion centered much on Weber and the merits of this painting. Was it derivative? Was it really American? Was it radical? What was it?

And I think what it led us to, was to look at the subject matter of the work. The subject matter is a hybrid of forms and ms from cubism, but also from Russia which was where he was born, along with some native folk traditions, and the Chinese restaurants that had opened in New York at the beginning of

the century as a result of new waves of immigration. Here is a work made by Marsden Hartley, one of the great works of our collection (fig. 7). that was not made in the U.S., but, as many of you know, was made while the artist was living in Berlin. He was quite enthralled by the pageantry of the city, the artists in Der Blaue Reiter group and also his love for a German Royal Officer; and you can see this in his inclusion of the officer's badge.

This raised the question of “Well, what do you do about works not made in the United States but made by an American artist?” Every time we encountered something, it problematized what American art was, and this is exactly what we wanted and we did it, in many instances, through the works that have been in the collection for many years, including this work by Richmond Barthé. This is a work that was part of the founding collection purchased by Mrs. Whitney. Barthé is an extremely important figure in African-American art and we have one of his major works.

Barthé, like many black American artists, looked to Africa for subject matter and his nude female has this expression, an African dancer responding to music which could be compared to works by Stanton Macdonald-Wright, Georgia O’Keeffe—other artists who were associated with synesthesia. We have this opportunity—and whether these -isms stay or not, they’re guideposts in a way—to once again, expand, to rethink and to give artists their place in history.

We were also very intent on looking at how to create context for visitors as they went through the exhibition; and the great thing about our collection is that we were able to do it with the works we had. Moving down to the 7th floor of the building, and once you went past Calder’s Circus—you came to a section called “Fighting with All Our Might” that examined the U.S. in the 1930s and between the two World Wars (fig. 8).

That’s our Ben Shahn at the center: *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti*, after they had been executed for their radical work as anarchists; we also found in the collection works on the right by Alice Neel. Most people idey her work, or many people idey her work, with her later portraits. But this is one of Pat Whalen who was a major union organizer in 1935, and you can see he’s holding a newspaper that talks about the miners’ strike. And on the left we found a big cache of works by white artists who made prints in support of anti-lynching legislation before Congress at the time. These were searing images to see and this one is probably one of the most difficult because it is a man who has been castrated and crucified—a black man. I’m sad to say that that anti-lynching legislation was not passed by the American Congress.

Another artist that had been ideied for us by our consultants was Chiura Obata who was born in Japan and came to the United States to San Francisco in 1903. And his work presented another interesting question. He was trained in Japanese *sumi* ink and brush technique and produced more than one hundred watercolors of the American West, which was a major subject for him. These prints were then made in Japan at the Takamizawa Print Works. So here you have an American subject as articulated in a technique that is distinctly Japanese. Is it a hybrid? Is it Japanese? Is it American? Does that matter? They're beaul, absolutely stunningly gorgeous works.

And the important thing then is how you use these works. So we decided to install them, and it may feel a little didactic, but we showed them with Ansel Adams' view of Yosemite *Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico*; because right away it sets up a dialogue and disrupts expected notions of the American artist's view of the West.



Figure 9. Installation view of *America Is Hard to See* (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, May 1-September 27, 2015). From left to right: Fred Wilson, *Guarded View*, 1991; David Hammons, *Untitled*, 1992; John Currin, *Skinny Woman*, 1992. Photograph by Ron Amstutz.

Of course, Abstract Expressionism is one of the major moments in American art and certainly the moment that made American art of greater interest on an international stage. We have terrific holdings of artists in this area and yet this was probably one of the most difficult sections for us to figure out. We thought long and hard and looked at works in the collection and this is where the use of space—what I would call “real estate”—has real impact. This is a fantastic work by Lee Krasner, called “The Seasons”; it was the anchor for a room that then had Franz Kline and Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock. The simple gesture of where the work is positioned immediately conveys something that can't necessarily be put in a text panel.

Another thing was our interest in a work by Hedda Sterne. Sterne was an interesting artist who was working as a contemporary to all of the Abstract Expressionists. There is a famous photograph called “The Irascibles” that pictures Newman and all the major male artists of Abstract Expressionism, and she was the only woman who is pictured. What was interesting was how amazingly contemporary this work started to seem because of the way it was made with spray paint.

One of our curators wanted to purchase a work by Michelle Stuart and this is an amazing piece, *Moray Hill*, made by rubbing the actual paper on a rock surface—and we were able to insert her work into a gallery called “Rational Irrationalism” that pursued ideas of post-Minimal art. And so there you have Richard Serra, the piece with the neon is a piece by Rafael Ferrer that had been included in the *Anti-illusion* show; we do not think it had been shown for more than 20 years; and then of course the Michelle Stuart piece.

Continuing on that thread of politics and context, on the 6th floor that introduced Pop and Minimalism we featured a salon wall with work by Charles White, Peter Saul and of course this great Warhol “Vote McGovern” campaign with a very devilish looking Richard Nixon.

In this section, we juxtaposed two works; Andy Warhol's “Before and After, 4” based on a diagram for nose surgery, and a very potent image for discussing certain ideas about American assimilation, and Malcolm Bailey, an African-American artist who had been shown at the museum in the 1970s.

In Bailey's work, which is similarly based on a diagram, his source is an abolitionist tract with a diagram of how slaves were transported in the hold of a ship. And so, seeing these two works together already poses questions: was Bailey a pop-artist? Was he part of a more conceptual movement? I didn't know and that's the great part of it. You start questioning “known” things. We installed it on a wall that also featured Jasper Johns, “Three Flags” one of the more iconic images in the Whitney's collection.

Carmen Herrera was also an artist we began to pay attention to; even though she has lived in New York since the 1950s, she was born in Cuba and lived in Paris at the same time as Ellsworth Kelly. This was a work we were able to purchase through the museum's Painting and Sculpture Committee, and we were very excited to be able to install it in a great room about non-composition called “White Target”, and to unite her with Ellsworth Kelly, her one-time neighbor.

When we get to the 5th floor, this was particularly challenging, because we were coming closer to

our own time. And the culture wars in the U.S. (as is seen in much of the work in the '93 Biennial) was something we wanted you to see immediately as you came out of the 5th floor elevator. So you see Barbara Kruger's "We Don't Need Another Hero" and on the other side, David Salle and a print turned into wall-paper by Donald Moffett which calls out Reagan's unwillingness to acknowledge the AIDS epidemic that took away a generation of creative individuals that are not here—we have no idea how our culture both nationally and internationally may have changed had we not lost them.

We had a room that explored the AIDS epidemic with works by Peter Hujar, Felix Gonzalez-Torres; also a gallery that looked at the Pictures Generation; we also looked at American painting in the period after Minimalism.

By looking at our history, we saw that the Whitney had done a series of exhibitions in the late 60s and early 1970s organized by a curator named Robert Doty. Now, these exhibitions of black artists

were done after protests that happened at the museum and much has been stirred by a show done at the Metropolitan Museum of Art called "Harlem on My Mind." This was an attempt by the Met to look at the community of art and artists in Harlem. However, there was not one work of art. It was all done through photographs and it was much more of an ethnographic presentation, as if Harlem were some far-off country. Jack Whitten was one of the artists that was included in the show with the Whitney and we were able to purchase this work; a work that had actually been shown at the Whitney Museum.

Beyond context, and issues of biography etc.—we really looked at the formal properties in these works, and what became apparent was how each of these artists (Alma Thomas, Cy Twombly, Elizabeth Murray) explored the notion of surface in paintings. They each had very different approaches, but we could unite them in terms of their approaches to painting. Another group, the collective ASCO, a Chicano Group that was working in Los Angeles, was ideied to us and we



Figure 10. Installation view of *America Is Hard to See* (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, May 1-September 27, 2015). From left to right: Glenn Ligon, *Rückenfigur*, 2009; Aleksandra Mir, *Osama*, 2007. Photograph by Ron Amstutz.

were able to include this work in a section that looked at performance that had Martha Rosler, Hannah Wilke—and much conceptual photography (fig. 9). “Guarded View” which I mentioned earlier, had a major piece by Fred Wilson, there it is with David Hammons and this was the section that looked at issues of representation and cultural identity in that 90s moment.

Here we were going back to a history that had already been written, but had never been fully absorbed into a sustained narrative of the museum. As I said earlier, the hardest section was the end—so to speak—or the beginning. This was a tough one to talk about and to decide “what do we do,” and particularly in a post 9/11 world.

And so we had a lot of discussion about this moment and luckily we had a number of works in the collection that addressed Hurricane Katrina and that showed a certain degree of political activism on the part of the artists. We had a section called “Course of Empire” and the title comes from a series of paintings by Ed Ruscha that references Thomas Cole’s series, “The Course of Empire,” based on the rise and fall of the Roman Empire. Here’s a juxtaposition of a work by Glenn Ligon, “America” with a work by Aleksandra Mir that pictures Osama bin Laden (fig. 10).

What was the outcome of all this? We had not done a handbook for many years and so we produced a new handbook. And we made a big change, a subtle one that was quite big. The Whitney in the past had on its label copy always listed artists as American, with their birth date—and their death date (if they were no longer alive). We made a very subtle change to indicate where the artists were born and then where they died. What we began to see was the number of artists in the collection that were foreign born. In our new handbook, we featured artists that came from 42 states, 31 countries, and more than 70 of the artists that were in the handbook were actually born outside the United States.

I don’t think we realized at that time how symbolic the exhibition was going to be. For those of you who work with national collections—the Whitney is a private museum, we’re not a national gallery—we have “American” in our title and so there is a level of responsibility we feel that comes with this, because we have an opportunity to message a view about the elasticity of that term “American”.

Paul Chan said in our roundtable that for him (and he was born in Hong Kong), “America is an idea.” And that became a very, very interesting way to think about how elastic that term can be and how much artists could participate in that conversation, as well as the public.

When we opened the building, it was inaugurated by then First Lady, Michelle Obama. And it was a very powerful moment when she spoke and talked about the exhibition and what it would mean for many people who did not feel that they belonged in the museum. She spoke as someone who grew up on the South Side of Chicago. Now it’s easy to rest at this moment of great celebration and think we’ve accomplished it; but really the work has just begun. And I think it’s a lot of the work we have tried to continue and are doing now. It garnered also—very unusual for the New York Times to devote an editorial to an exhibition—an incredible piece written by the editorial board that looked at the way the Whitney was positioning American art, and particularly the acknowledgment of where American art came from and the back-and-forth flow that has happened between the U.S. and other parts of the world.

Continuing along those lines of exploration through our exhibition program, and of course through our collection, we’ve collectively organized many exhibitions of artists such as Sophia Al Maria; many artists who have come from outside the U.S., we have people in the collection who’ve lived in the U.S. and then they left. We often would say “Does that mean we get rid of them from the collection?” Or, what about artists who are more nomadic? One of the projects is part of a five-part series we did, where we gave the entire 18,000 square foot 5th floor of our building to a single artist and they had up to two weeks to present a work.

And the one I worked on was with the British-born artist, Steve McQueen. What was so compelling about this work is that it comprises the FBI file of the actor and singer, Paul Robeson. Robeson was very sympathetic to communist teachings, went to Russia on many occasions and he had a voluminous FBI file. McQueen projected the entire scanned file on each side of the floor, and you can see redacted material, and listen to voices reading from the files. The voices were out of sync with the text on the screen which added a degree of discord and destabilization; it gave a tiny idea of what it must have been like for Robeson and his wife to live this life—being followed—which eventually led to the failure of his career, the black-listing that destroyed his life.

Here’s a project that we did with Njideka Akunyili Crosby, who is Nigerian-born, and lives in L.A. This is a billboard we had outside the museum.

It’s working it through, it’s the process of doing it; that’s where you learn. We can be abstract, we can think about it, we can write about it, but it’s getting your hands into it all, I think, where much becomes possible; and it’s the exciting work.

Now I'd be remiss if I didn't talk about what happened in January or in the November elections. After all the excitement of opening the building and this sense of openness, we had the election of Donald Trump as President. On the day of the inauguration, an organization called J-20 wanted to disrupt or call attention to this. They called for museums and galleries to close, but we decided to remain open and become a place for people to come: the museum was open free-of-charge; it was packed that day.

We had protests going on, people brought their banners, we had discussions, we also hosted a series of discussion groups on different topics such as immigration, and many people came. And I will tell you there was not always agreement: there was some heated debate; we worked with people who were experienced in dealing with conflict negotiation—it was a very powerful day.

And most recently, we have an exhibition on view inspired by a gift of posters we received from the Vietnam War era. It's called "An Incomplete History of Protest". It was timely in ways—you plan these things well in advance—but it's interesting to see how timely it is.

We continue our work, we continue to learn, we learn from others, and I think that the elasticity and openness of how we define American art is really a way we think. And I think that's also what art allows us to do; this incredible space to negotiate, to debate, to get excited, to get enjoyment—all those things, I think, is probably what brings us all together here.

Note: America Is Hard to See was presented at the Whitney Museum of American art from May 1, 2015 – September 27, 2015. The curatorial team, led by Donna De Salvo, included: Carter E. Foster, Steven and Ann Ames Curator of Drawing; Dana Miller, Curator of the Permanent Collection; Scott Rothkopf, Nancy and Steve Crown Family Curator and Associate Director of Programs; Jane Panetta, Assistant Curator; Catherine Taft, Assistant Curator; and Mia Curran, Curatorial Assistant. Special thanks to Christie Mitchell, Curatorial Assistant, for her help in preparing this edited transcript.

Perspective 7

Adriano Pedrosa

This is an edited transcript of the author's presentation at the CÍMAM 2017 Annual Conference.

<https://vimeo.com/249056548>

Thank you all. Good morning. First of all, many thanks to Frances Morris and Eugene Tan for the wonderful invitation and opportunity to speak here today to so many colleagues.

Thank you all for coming and for your attention here today. I would like to take up some of the questions around collections that were suggested for the panel, and reconsider some of the work we have been developing at MASP—Museu de Arte de São Paulo, where I have been Artistic Director since 2014.

Particularly in relationship to collection display, but also in terms of programming and how these intersect with collection. I focus on collection display not only because at MASP we have a very unique and particular display system for the collection which, one could argue, transforms the works and their perceptions or experience, but because, often the most impacting move is not to simply acquire a work, bringing it into the museum's collection, but in fact to exhibit the work—to put it on display.

As we know, most museums can only display a small fraction of their collections and often, works spend decades forgotten in storage and sometimes never get exhibited at all, sitting as they do in deep storage.

It is in this sense that I would like to shift or unfold the question from what one collects to what and how one displays the collection. Before I delve into our *Picture Gallery in Transformation*, which is the title of our ever-changing collection display on the second floor of MASP, I would like to show an image as an epigraph for this presentation: a work by the Guerilla Girls, a collective that I am sure we all know here. This is a recent work made in 2016 and is now currently on display in a retrospective exhibition we organized of the work by the Guerilla Girls at MASP.

The message could be understood as a piercing response to some of the questions that we are debating here: “Don’t let museums reduce art to the small number of artists who have won a popularity contest amongst big-time dealers, curators, and collectors. If museums don’t show art as diverse as the culture they claim to represent, tell them that they are not showing the history of art, they are just preserving the history of wealth and power”.

I will now go back to my story around MASP. Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand is a private museum founded in 1947 and which takes its name from its founder, the Brazilian media mogul, Assis Chateaubriand, “Chatô”, as he was nicknamed. One of the most powerful men in mid-century Brazil, controlling much of the Brazilian media, and owner of many newspapers, magazines and radios at the time in the country. A biography written on him has a compelling subtitle “The King of Brazil”.



Figure 1. MASP.

Assis Chateaubriand invited Pietro Maria Bardi, an Italian dealer, journalist art historian and exhibition organizer to be the founding director of MASP and to steer the museum's program and acquisitions. Along with Pietro Maria Bardi, came his wife, Lina Bo Bardi, who worked in the architecture and exhibitions design of the museum including the one of our current building, which opened in 1968 (fig. 1).

MASP is not a modern museum nor a contemporary art museum. In fact, there was much discussion around its name between Bardi and Assis Chateaubriand and the latter proposed the name Museu de Arte Antiga e Moderna, a museum of ancient art and modern art, yet Bardi counter proposed a more simple, straightforward name: "Museu de Arte"—museum of art or a museum without objectives, therefore one without limitations concerning the objects it would exhibit and collect. It was only after Chateaubriand's death in 1968, a few months before our iconic building inaugurated, that the museum acquired its full name in his honour—Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand.

The collection today includes art from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, from ancient Egyptian art to pre-Columbian art, from fashion to a quite singular collection of kitsch objects as well as so-called *arte popular* as we say in Portuguese—popular art as we call it in Brazil—a term perhaps close to vernacular art but also connected to folk art or made by self-taught artists.

The collection also includes drawings made by children, drawings made by patients of a psychiatric hospital, as well as over a half a million documents that are housed in our research centre. Although we collect objects from several different geographies, temporalities and typologies we do not understand ourselves as an encyclopedic museum. As it has been argued, the pretension to collect all fields of arts and knowledge is a deceptive one—as if it were possible to collect the world in such a manner. The totalising and all-encompassing spirit of the encyclopedic museum seems quite authoritarian these days, if not irremediably colonialist.

The typologies, geographies, and temporalities that we collect make up what we call a *museu múltiplo, diverso e plural*—the multiple, diverse and plural museum, which is a denomination we prefer rather than the encyclopedic. With all the rather poetic redundancy and incompleteness that the expression suggests. Thinking through the "diverse and multiple and plural museum", means that art itself might become too limited a notion to be applied to the objects we are interested in.

In this sense, we have thus been playing with the notion of *trabalho*--or work in English as opposed to art or artwork--*trabajo* in Spanish. In order to include different typologies of human-made objects beyond art itself: from a painting by Paul Gauguin for example to the receipt of its sale.

But MASP is indeed quite well known for its European collection, which is considered the most important one in the southern hemisphere. Most of that was acquired between 1947, the year the museum was founded, and 1958, with the keen eye of Pietro Maria Bardi and the astute funding abilities of Assis Chateaubriand, our media mogul, and "King of Brazil".

The European collection includes all the major figures of the canonical narrative of European art history up until the early 20th century with a particular focus on figurative art. Raphael, Bellini, Botticelli, Mantegna, Titian, El Greco, Velázquez, Poussin, Goya, Van Gogh, Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec, Monet, Gauguin, Picasso and many others. In this sense, we are the only museum outside of Europe and America that actually holds fine examples of the European canon, and thus can in fact attempt to challenge it—or decolonize it. I should say that we are very much in the territory of investigation and speculation here, learning and experimenting throughout the process. There is certainly no recipe for decolonizing the museum and there are many understandings around it. In any event, I do suspect that the project of decolonizing the museum would possibly never be fully completed. Unless we perhaps extinguish the museum and this apparatus itself—and by all means that is not what I am proposing here, at the meeting of the International Committee for Museum and Collection of Modern Art.

Yet it is interesting to think that the ethnographic museum for example has indeed capitulated: disappearing or approaching extinction, doomed to be anachronic. The only possible way it could survive, would be as a museum of itself—the museum of the ethnographic museum. Which is the case of the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. I'm curious to see how the Royal Museum of Central Africa—*Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale*, in Belgium, will refashion itself next year when it opens after five years of renovations: the last of the great or grand ethnographic museums to have shut down in an identity crisis.

I call attention to that identity crisis because perhaps we will face one ourselves. I wonder, then, if the modern museums will go through a revision also in terms of their identity in the near future, and the challenge might be precisely to challenge or decolonize the modern.



Figure 2. Paul Gauguin paintings paired with archival material, 2015, MASP.

In this context it is interesting to consider the reflections of Argentine critic and semiotician, Walter Mignolo, who argues that it is not a matter of seeking an alternative modernity—plural modernities—but also, in fact, a question of finding alternatives to modernity itself. This would imply the difficult task of decolonising parameters, languages, models, and vocabularies deeply rooted in the history of art and the museum.

But let's step back a little bit from that and go back to my story around MASP. As we understand it, decolonising the collection does not imply taking down the entire edifice of the museum, but it could mean to challenge established categories, fields of research, hierarchies, typologies, which is in tune with our multiple, diverse and plural approach. I would like to show a few concrete examples of how we've attempted to decolonize the collection in different ways.

First in 2015, we organized a series of shows around the collection that paired the work with documents from their archives. Here you see two Gauguin pictures, *Self Portrait in Golgotha* and *Poor Fisherman*, both from 1896, paired with the correspondence about the price of the works and their acquisitions with the galleries (fig. 2). Such documents had never been displayed in an exhibition, let alone next to paintings. In juxtaposing the paintings with the documents, both exhibited on the same level or plane, one could argue that a certain desacralization of art unfolds, something Lina Bo Bardi was very much interested in.

On the other hand, both types of objects, paintings and documents, can be considered as

trabalhos—works—*trabajos*, as I have referred to earlier—and become equally, acts or material culture.

Of course, the paintings are properly framed and glazed and have much higher insurance values, whereas the documents are displayed in simple transparent plastic bags, which may implicate a hierarchy of treatment between the two artefacts. Yet they are still displayed in equal footing. With the document, another layer of history was added or made visible beyond the history of art. This history of the relationship of the painting with the museum, with São Paulo, with the collection, with social and political implications.

Yet the principle decolonizing tool that we have at hand at MASP is the exhibition display system itself, with the glass easels designed by Lina Bo Bardi. This is a picture of the display system introduced with the museum when it opened on Paulista avenue in 1968 (fig. 3).



Figure 3. Picture Gallery, 1971, MASP.



Figure 4. Details of original glass easel designed by Lina Bo Bardi (right) and the reconstruction (left).

The system of the glass easel owes much to Franco Albini, the Italian architect, and his experiments with exhibition display, such as the ones in the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan in the 1940s. The system of the glass easel was introduced in MASP in 1968, put aside in 1996, and reconstructed and brought back in December 2015. The glass easel consists of a sheet of glass inserted into a concrete cube composing a free-standing panel onto which a painting or picture (or more recently, in fact, a video screen) is hung (fig 4). It is therefore not a vitrine, in which an object is placed—I say that because often this gets mixed up.

In taking the works off the walls and placing them on the floor the viewer is able to walk through the picture gallery and view the works from different angles. A closer rapport is established between the visitor and the works. The experience—and it is most important to underline the idea of experience here—becomes more humane, democratic, accessible, open.

The spectator-viewer may become more of a participant in that sense and hopefully will not feel as intimidated as he or she often does with artworks in a museum setting. There is a sense of transparency and permeability in the open-floor plan gallery where there are no dividing walls or partitions. The viewers are not dominated by an imposing architecture and in fact, he or she at all times understands and is able

to perceive the space in its entirety, controlling his or her path throughout it.

It is interesting to note that Lina Bo Bardi uses common simple and raw material in the construction of the museum as opposed to refined or luxurious materials. Lina Bo Bardi, in fact, mentioned that she was interested in architecture that was poor and ugly. There is no marble or stainless steel, and instead we find concrete, glass, rubber flooring. The air conditioning structure is seen throughout the space. The black rubber flooring is quite striking because it was one of the cheapest and most durable materials at the time—used in industrial kitchens and bathrooms, in outdoor areas and gyms, yet never in a museum space as you see here.

With the pictures off the wall and glass easels distributed throughout the floor plan, the viewer is able to cross the space in many directions as in a forest of pictures. Although we organized the works chronologically in a meandering path, in an open permeable space without the partition walls, there is no imposed narrative or curatorial direction and the viewer is free to encounter and develop his or her own narratives throughout the gallery.

Most of the works on display, particularly up till the 19th century, are European and most of our works after 1950 are Brazilian. So our challenge is to insert works that may establish friction within that narrative

on both ends—that is, non-European art up until the early 20th century and international art in the post-war period.

The Landmann Collection of Pre-Columbian art came to the museum last year, allowing us to frame our Raphael—*The Resurrection of Christ*—with two wonderful Brazilian Marajoara urns that are pre-conquest or pre-Portuguese-invasion (fig. 5).

The Marajoara culture flourished in an island called Marajó in the northern state of Pará in Brazil. The island sits right at the encounter between the Amazon River and the Atlantic Ocean. The Marajoara were active between the 8th and 14th centuries, possibly surviving into the colonial era—which starts in the end of the 15th century, in the Americas at least—and produced extraordinary pottery that have survived.

In the 17th century, we brought out from storage a wonderful Cuzco painting, which is the painting you see on the left, depicting Our Lady of the Remedies (fig. 6).

From the 16th through to the 18th centuries, Spanish Jesuit missionaries commissioned and taught indigenous artist to paint religious figures in Peru, but also in Bolivia and Argentina, though they are often ideied generically as being from the Cuzco school, referring to the city in Peru. The Cuzco tradition is probably the most complex pictorial traditions in the Americas.

We have also done quite a lot of work with the work of self-taught artists, artists working outside the traditional circuits of the art world. I would like to bring two examples here. One is Agostinho Batista de Freitas (1927–1997), from São Paulo. Our Italian director Bardi “discovered” Batista de Freitas, as it were, selling his paintings on the street and gave him a solo show at the museum in 1952. The artist was 25 years old; the museum was merely five. Batista de Freitas painted above all views of the city of São Paulo, and Bardi called him “the Utrillo of São Paulo”, in reference to the French painter Maurice Utrillo, son of Suzanne Valadon, who painted scenes of Paris.

We organized a solo exhibition of Batista de Freitas last year and published a monograph with



Figure 5. Picture Gallery in Transformation, 2017, MASP.

many commissioned essays; something his work had never had. Although strikingly no works of his were in the collection, we have since acquired five of them including three views of MASP from the 70s, which are now on display at the Picture Gallery in Transformation, this is a recent picture (fig. 7).

Another artist that we have been working on is Maria Auxiliadora (1935–1974), also a self-taught artist, whose work again we found resting in deep storage when we came to MASP. Auxiliadora worked as a housekeeper and sold her paintings in the centre of São Paulo. She depicted above all images of her daily life and Afro-Brazilian culture: carnival, capoeira, Candomblé, the Orishas—elements from Afro-Brazilian religion—but also herself in many self-portraits. This painting, *The Bride’s Wake*, in fact is considered a self-portrait (fig. 8)—she died of cancer in 1974, the year this work was made.

Again, as Batista de Freitas, a very important artist for the history of the collection and the history of the museum. Auxiliadora was featured on the cover of *Feast of Colours (Festa de Cores)*, a group exhibition in MASP in 1975, and *Capoeira*, the first painting to enter the collection, was gifted by Pietro Maria Bardi himself. He also edited the only monograph on the artist published in Italy and curated her posthumous exhibition at MASP in 1981. Again, we are organizing a monographic exhibition of hers, with a full monograph and 12 commissioned essays for the publication.

In the spirit of “transformation” in the picture gallery, in opposition to the collection display that is more perennial living almost in the *longue durée* of the museum in a more sedimented time, we have kept our exhibition always in flux. The glass easel system allows us to bring a picture, if it is duly prepared, in and out of the exhibition quite easily without having to rehang an entire wall or room for that matter.

We started the exhibition with some 130 works and now have expanded to 170 works; we are often being able to be quite generous with loan requests in that sense. The density of the forest of works gives it a certain livelihood and intensity; the emptier the



Figure 6. Picture Gallery in Transformation, 2017, MASP.



Figure 7. Picture Gallery in Transformation, 2017. MASP.

decolonization of our picture gallery itself: “Do women need to be naked to get into the Museu de Arte de São Paulo? Only 6 percent of the artists on display are women, but 60 percent of the nudes are female.” This work is now on view at the first and second sub-level gallery as it is being gifted to us. We do plan to show it soon in our *Picture Gallery in Transformation*. Thank you very much.

space, the more sacred, solemn it becomes, much like a space of reverence and if not intimidation, much like a church or a minimalist temple. The *Picture Gallery in Transformation* is always in flux due to loans and acquisition, but also because of experiments of different sorts.

In 2018, we will start a yearly exchange program with different museums around the world and the Tate will be the first one. Lending us a group of works to be featured in the *Picture Gallery in Transformation*, taking into consideration the many gaps we have in the collection, which seem quite out of reach in terms of acquisition.

I would like to finish my presentation with another work the Guerrilla Girls did, pointing at a necessary



Figure 8. Maria Auxiliadora da Silva, *Velória da noiva* [Bride's Wake], 1974.

Perspective 8

Tiffany Chung

Artist (Vietnam/USA)

Understanding Art and Institutions in Asia: A Case Study of Negotiating the Non-Negotiable

*This is an edited version of the author's presentation
at the CIMAM Annual Conference 2017*

<https://vimeo.com/249056889>

In order to discuss the roles and responsibilities of museums in civil society through their collections or programs, it is important to ask whether all museums bear the mission of serving their constituencies. Approaching this question as an artist, I began by learning about different types of museums. John Cotton Dana, upon establishing the Newark Museum, said “he wanted the building near the city center, which he defined as ‘the center of the daily movement of the citizens.’”¹ In the book *Museum Masters: Their Museums and Their Influence*, Edward P. Alexander wrote that Dana was a pioneer in applying the ideal of community service to the public library movement and founded the Newark Museum under the same public service philosophy. Dana curated “temporary, changing exhibits [that] explored all parts of the community, making much of areas with immigrant and racial backgrounds”² which Alexander called “The Museum of Community Service”.³ Samuel Johnson’s dictionary (1755) defined the word “museum” as “a Repository of

learned Curiosities.” Alexander wrote: “Dr. Johnson’s ‘learned curiosities’ also suggests the audience the museum was reaching: collectors, connoisseurs, scholars—the educated, wealthy elite”⁴ as opposed to Dana’s type of museum. He argues that the museum masters discussed in his book have changed the nature of the museum and museum collections are now “divided between those exhibited for the general public and those reserved for study and research”.⁵ In my limited knowledge of museology, I see another distinct type of museum—the university art museums and galleries. They constitute a large group of institutions and are thought to have more freedom in pushing boundaries with their exhibition programs and collections, in contrast to those bearing the stigma of having their programs and acquisitions shaped and influenced by their patrons or board of trustees. However, with the recent incident of Cambridge University Press being accused of complying with the Chinese government’s censorship, we can no longer be absolutely certain

1 Edward P. Alexander, *Museum Masters: Their Museums and Their Influence* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 1995), p.398.

2 *Ibid.*, p.10.

3 *Ibid.*, p.337.

4 *Ibid.*, p.3.

5 *Ibid.*, p.11.

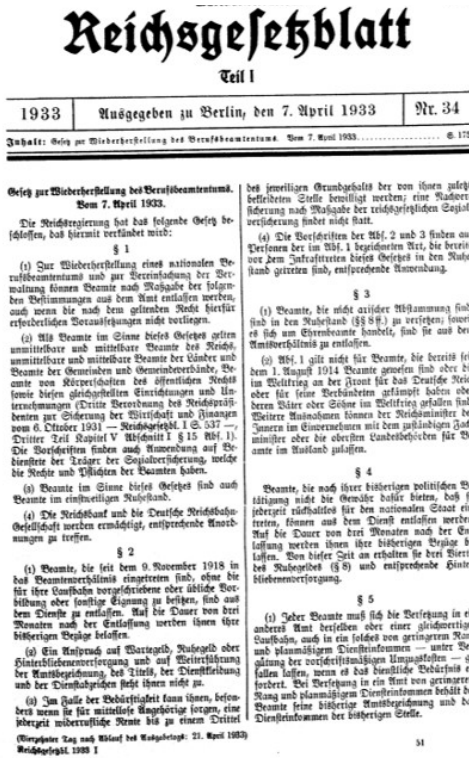


Figure 1. German Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service from 7 April 1933, full text on German Wikisource (7).

that freedom of expression is being exercised even in such liberal and Ivy-league universities.⁶ Universities are not alone in facing political interventions: art institutions have also been instrumentalized for political agendas, traditionally but not limited to the state- run or state-funded ones. This phenomenon can be observed in countries under dictatorship ruling as well as in so-called democratic nations. Authoritarian regimes have historically been exercising their control over national art galleries or museums in different parts of the world. In the book *Die Alte Nationalgalerie*, Peter-Claus Schuster mentioned the 1933 case of the Nazi authorities' dismissal of Ludwig Justi, former director of the Old National Gallery in Berlin (1909–1933), for not being politically suitable under the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service (fig. 1). Ironically, the civil service idea and ideal that western art institutions strived for, as in Newark Museum's "idealistic aim of service to society and its development and the emphasis upon the public,"⁷ took an interesting twist under Hitler's regime.

Similar policy was carried out under the communist regime in Vietnam after 1975, where many people were let go from their posts in various sectors.



Figure 2. Vietnam Fine Arts Museum, Hanoi (9).

As a socialist-communist country, Vietnam advertises itself as a society based on equality and led by the working class, where the people take the ownership of the nation and the government embodies a group of civil servants who answer to the people. But as mirrored in other authoritarian ruling societies, art museums in Vietnam are assigned a different kind of "civil service": to function as part of the government's propaganda machinery. In Wikiwand, the display of the Vietnam Fine Arts Museum in Hanoi is described as such: "much of the 20th century art presented in the museum is concerned with folk narratives of a nation in defense. As a collection it draws on themes of martyrdom, patriotism, military strategy and overcoming enemy incursion".⁸

I recall visiting the Ho Chi Minh City Fine Arts Museum and seeing war aacts such as guns, grenades and the like. All museums in Vietnam are state-run—private museums practically do not exist—and the two largest art museums described above do not have programs designated for contemporary art. Despite the lack of venues and institutional support, Vietnamese artists continue to strategize and strive for their works to reach local communities through self- initiated projects and spaces. While Nha San Studio (later Nha San Collective) and San Art were established to lay down the critical groundwork, other artist-initiatives and privately-owned art spaces increasingly serve as significant platforms for local artists and their audience, functioning as a crucial conduit for knowledge exchange on social, political and cultural issues.

6 Tom Phillips, "Cambridge censorship U-turn is censored by China", *The Guardian*, 22 August 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/22/cambridge-university-censorship-u-turn-china> (accessed 09 May 2018).
 7 Alexander, p.3
 8 VietnamFineArtsMuseum, http://www.wikiwand.com/vi/B%E1%BA%A3o_t%C3%A0ng_M%E1%BB%B9_thu%E1%BA%ADt_Vi%E1%BB%87t_Nam (accessed 09 May 2018; Vietnamese)

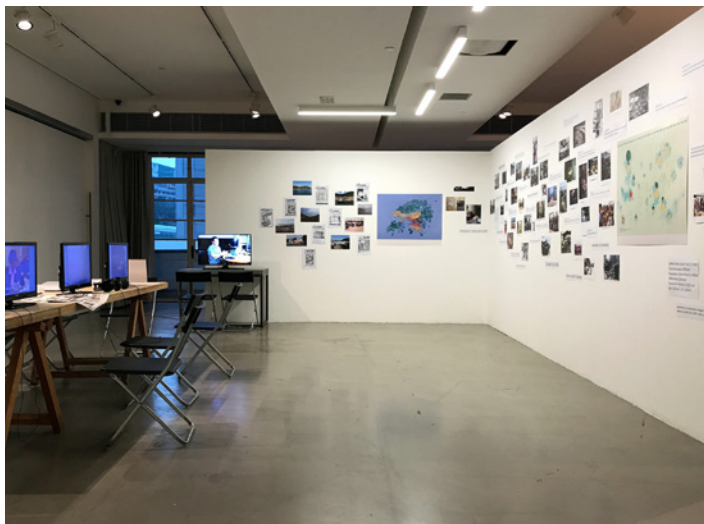


Figure 3. *the unwanted population*—The Vietnam Exodus Project (2009/2014–ongoing,) Hong Kong Chapter, 2017 (Research lab at Spring Workshop, Hong Kong)

Throughout my career many museums and art spaces have proven instrumental in supporting my quest for knowledge of hidden histories, as opposed to the grand narratives produced through statecraft that have been embedded in school education and that have bombarded people through television, newspapers and banners of slogans in the street.

The decision of the museum M+ to acquire the debut installation of my *Vietnam Exodus Project* is in the effort of supporting that very endeavor and making sure that this chapter in the history of both Vietnam and Hong Kong would not vanish into oblivion, as it has already been erased in Vietnam.

Spring Workshop in Hong Kong hosted my stay when I conducted fieldwork on Vietnamese refugee history in Hong Kong over the past three years. They recently produced a presentation of this project and facilitated a panel discussion, in which I was able to bring together the former Vietnamese refugees and the human rights lawyers that worked on their cases

in the past. The panel unpacked asylum policies and gave testament to the impact they had on refugee conditions. The result was a powerful and emotionally charged discussion that helped me and Spring Workshop to see the meaning and purpose in our work: we simply started with art but it has gone beyond that. After three years of doing fieldwork and some lobbying, I was able to generate interest and lawyers have decided to take on the stateless Vietnamese cases during my last meeting with them this week.

The Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark has in their collection an installation from my *Syria Project* and includes me in their twelve-years-and-ongoing program that teaches refugee students from the Danish Red Cross schools. Together, these truly highlight the importance of institutional response and commitment to the world's refugee crises. Perhaps I am not knowledgeable enough about museums' civil responsibilities, but I can only speak for what I have been doing and how even a non-profit, undefined but effective space like Spring Workshop has contributed to the efforts of making changes in society.

While institutions can play a crucial role in supporting and providing a platform for artists to express their voices and concerns, as well as particularly political viewpoints and activities that might be banned in their home countries, the utopian discourse of museums is a precariously ontological one. In reality, museums struggle to sustain themselves. Relying on state funding or the financial support of patrons has direct influence on a museum's programs and directions, which can be evidently seen in its exhibition history and discourse. Great visitor-ship numbers are now essentially critical to a museum's survival. The expectation for a museum

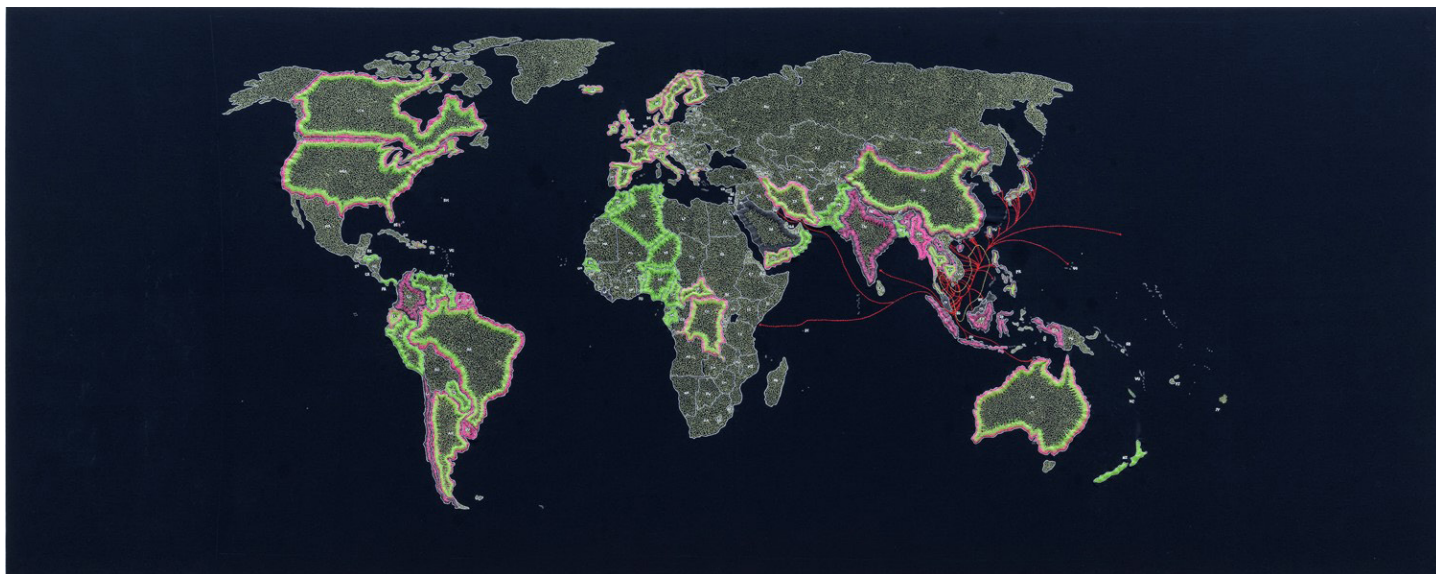


Figure 4. *between darkness and light, water and dry land: boat trajectories, ports of first asylum and resettlement countries*, 2017, embroidery on fabric, 135 x 340 cm.

to serve its constituencies, be they the audience or artists, is valid but at times proven to be an idealistic notion. Therefore, solely depending on institutions to give us a voice and a platform can be problematic, as I have learned the hard way in a recent experience.

What would happen if a state-run cultural agency instrumentalized art exhibitions for diplomacy while lacking an in-depth understanding of other countries' political situations? What would happen if cultural diplomacy backfired? What would be at stake when the exhibition organizers, perhaps due to unacknowledged assumptions, presented artworks that actually do not represent the official narrative put forth by a regime that this government agency is assigned to maintain diplomatic relations with?

On June 26 2017, prior to installing my work on the post-1975 Vietnamese exodus in the exhibition *SUNSHOWER* in Japan, I was informed that the Vietnam Embassy in Tokyo had asked for my work to be censored after receiving from the Japan Foundation a requested list of Vietnamese artists and their artworks slated for the exhibition.

The organizers suggested keeping a map work in the exhibition while excluding other sensitive components. I told them if that were the case, then they should keep a blank space where the work would have been so people would be aware of the censorship incident, which I also insisted that the organizers publicly acknowledge.

On June 27, after the first meeting between the organizers and the Vietnam Embassy, the embassy then contacted Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to request the exclusion of my work. The organizers informed me that they had proposed to the Vietnam Embassy to keep my map work in the show while excluding other sensitive components, which the embassy was not very enthusiastic about. The organizers were to meet with the Vietnam Embassy again on June 28 to continue the negotiation.

After an initial period of confusion and fearing for my safety, as Vietnam has been known for clamping down on those who dared to speak out against the official narrative and government diktat, I regained for myself some clarity on my preferred course of action.

On June 29, I emailed the organizers two requests/options. 1) keep the map, but also install the shelf and monitors that were meant to display other components, even without the artworks; 2) remove all components including the map, but keep an empty wall with just my name on it.

After several days of internal meetings on the Japanese side, as well as on the Vietnamese side, I received an email from the organizers on July 1,

which repeated their decision of keeping the map no matter what the outcome would be. The email did not discuss my requests.

On July 2, I emailed and asked the organizers to officially inform the Vietnam Embassy that it was the organizers' decision to display the map—and that I had not made the request or been involved in the decision-making. During the entire time I also repeatedly requested for the organizers to publicly acknowledge this incident after the opening.

On July 3, one day before the exhibition opening, I received an email from Japan Foundation to inform me that the Embassy of Vietnam had agreed to the organizers' proposal of keeping the map in the exhibition under a list of conditions. Japan Foundation asked for my understanding regarding the situation and requested that I not come to Japan during the exhibition period, as well as not make any statement.

In the morning of July 4, I sent an email to Japan Foundation to officially request the withdrawal of my participation in the exhibition *SUNSHOWER* under such conditions. In the same evening, the organizers tried to make contact, to which I wrote that I had already stated my requests and now needed to focus on packing and leaving Vietnam.

On July 6, the organizers replied in an email that my work had already been revealed to the press and art professionals, and, considering the importance of my presence in this group of artists to represent the Southeast Asian region, they would like to continue discussing the possibility of showing this piece. At this point, I found it pointless to engage in a one-sided decision-making process and no longer wanted to be in conversation with the organizers.

My map was not removed from the exhibition and the organizers remained silent throughout the entire period of the show.

I do not seek to sensationalize the local context, or to use the oft-repeated rhetoric of domestic oppression and crisis. By citing this incident, I hope we can unpack issues and challenges that artists and art organizations often face within the larger context of regional and international politics, as seen through cultural, economic and political diplomacy. The encounter with cultural diplomacy as described above has shown that even the most reputable art institutions in Asia are constrained to submit to the state's power. It has forced me to learn about cultural diplomacy and to ask myself certain questions about each and every exhibition that I am now asked to participate in.

Ironically, during this time, I was invited to show in two other diplomatic exhibitions, one by Korea Foundation and another by the Chinese government, to commemorate their relations with ASEAN (the

Association of Southeast Asian Nations). By this point, I was less horrified at their instrumentalization of art to promote diplomatic and economic relations but more at their lack of understanding for artworks like mine and the assumption that this was an honor for artists—as stated in one of the invitations.

With *SUNSHOWER*, I cannot explain the reasons certain decisions were made and why there have been no institutional efforts until today to publicly address this incident. This is not the first time censorship has been imposed on exhibitions organized by Japan Foundation while it remained silent. On Feb 26 2017, Japan Foundation Kuala Lumpur (JFKL) decided to take down an artwork by the Malaysian collective Pangrok Sulap from the exhibition *ESCAPE from the SEA* due to a “misreading of the artwork” (according to JFKL) and replaced with a video of the making of this work. No official statement from JFKL was ever released.⁹

When such censorship is imposed on artists, curators and museums, although there are no guidelines as to how we should handle the situation and keep the integrity of the artworks, of the exhibition and of ourselves, transparency and public acknowledgment are expected. I personally needed the time to process, reflect and figure out what lessons I should learn from this. In this particular incident, cultural diplomacy was shaped by and interwoven with economic and political diplomacy. ASEAN-Japan Dialogue Relations informally began in 1973, were formalized in 1977 and have since progressed in areas of political security, economic- finance and



Figure 5. 15th Asian Art Festival, Multi Posture. Art from Asia with three themes: Original Form, Beyond Space, Limitless (24 September – 23 October 2017) (10)

socio-cultural cooperation. ASEAN-Japan relations have been built upon the Free Trade Agreement and the Economic Partnership Agreement, as the ASEAN-Japan Strategic Partnership for Prospering Together was again declared at the 14th ASEAN-Japan Summit in Bali in 2011, among others.¹⁰

Cultural diplomacy as a form of soft power has become an intrinsic and significant component of political diplomacy. “Soft power,” first described by political scientist Joseph S. Nye, might be summarized as the ability to persuade through culture, value and ideas, as opposed to ‘hard power’, which conquers or coerces through military might. In other words, the ability to attract and co-opt rather than by hard power, which is the use of force and payment as a means of persuasion. Governments worldwide have increasingly used “soft power” approaches in conducting international and regional relations. The top ten “soft powers” in the world according to the annual index “Soft Power 30”¹¹ are France, the UK, USA, Germany, Canada, Japan, Switzerland, Australia, Sweden and the Netherlands. As a form of power, soft power can certainly be used for nefarious purposes. It is not uncommon for states to exercise hard power through the use of representational force that appears as soft power.

American scholar specializing in International Relations, Political Theory and Political Economy, Janice Bially Mattern, argues that “the notion of soft power is delusional—that any piece of art for cultural attraction and other forms of public and cultural diplomacy has a ‘representational force’ behind it, which is responsible for the representation of the country.”¹² Understanding this representational force, Vietnam did not want to be represented by an artwork that examines the failure of the state’s policies in the aftermath of the Vietnam War—policies that resulted in the exodus of almost two million Vietnamese (by some estimates)—the history that it has officially erased and does not want to be resurrected in any form or shape.

This is not the first time censorship has taken place in an art or cultural institution. Whether it’s the censorship that points to the power play between governments through cultural diplomacy, or a socio-political movement of almost a million people taking to social media to censor the works related to animals

9 Carmen Nge, “No escape from the C: Reflections on Censorship and Curation in the Pangrok Sulap case”, *Arts Equator*, 22 June 2017, <https://artsequator.com/reflections-on-censorship-pangrok-sulap/> (accessed 27 July 2018).

10 “Overview of ASEAN-Japan Dialogue Relations”, 08 March 2017, <http://asean.org/storage/2012/05/Overview-ASEAN-Japan-Relations-As-of-8-March-2017.pdf> (accessed 08 May 2018).

11 An annual index published by Portland Communications and the USC Center on Public Diplomacy.

12 Janice Bially Mattern, quoted in Abhinav Dutta, “The Concept of Soft Power: A Critical Analysis,” *International Affairs Forum*, <http://www.ia-forum.org/Content/ViewInternalDocument.cfm?ContentID=8393> (accessed 09 May 2018).

from the Guggenheim's exhibition *Art and China after 1989: Theater of the World*, this is when we must confront all the issues and generate questions that might otherwise not be openly discussed. I am not sure if we can come up with all the answers at the CIMAM conference, but there is an urgency to tackle such problems in reflecting museums' civil responsibilities—and the kind of solidarity that art and cultural institutions are to show to the curators and artists they work with.

This reassessment is not to deny the significant contribution of art institutions in the cultural and political landscape of our time, but to address issues that hinder them to function effectively, as well as accepting the limitations that come with any cultural entities. As artists, we do not want to lose sight of what our work is about. Our tenacity in constructing counter narratives is to defeat certain erasures of history. This censorship incident is only to reaffirm the relevance of our work—that political imagination should turn into participation in ways that we find work for us—that our work should already embody an institution in itself and therefore, ongoing, self-initiative projects and actions are what we must continue even when institutions cannot support us.

Perspective 9

Suhanya Raffel

Executive Director, M+
(Hong Kong)

What and How Do Museums Collect? Case Studies from Brisbane and Hong Kong

This is an edited transcript of the author's presentation at the CÌMAM 2017 Annual Conference

<https://vimeo.com/249138716>

It's an honor to follow on from Tiffany. As Frances said, she has articulated such a significant issue that we are all facing across the world in terms of how we deal with local pressures as we engage as global institutions. I am going to present two case studies, one from Brisbane and the other from Hong Kong (fig. 1).

I want to begin by acknowledging that in this room are a whole range of people: artists, advisors and fellow curators who journeyed on this project—the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT) at the Queensland Arts Gallery in Brisbane—beginning in the early 1990s and still continuing.

I was there for 20 years and so I felt, when I was invited to present here, I couldn't ignore that experience because it was such a transformative experience for that museum. I am starting with some images and I am going to whip through these while I speak of the early APTs. I am showing these because of what happened at that institution, namely that it was transformed by artists, who come into the museum spaces and worked with the institution on the project and on commissions for the exhibition, many of which entered the museum collection.



Figure 1. Suhanya Raffel. © National Gallery Singapore.

People always asked me why is it that it was Brisbane, Queensland that initiated this project. The institution was a hundred years old at the time the first APT in 1993. It was an institution which, up until the Triennial, was configured as a state museum with a predominantly national dialogue within Australia, albeit a very important one and of its place.

But in the early 1990s, then director Doug Hall with his Board, with his Deputy Director Caroline



Figure 2. APT 2012.

Turner initiated a Triennial inside the collecting institution and it was an initiative that was extraordinarily forward-thinking decision for a museum. We've heard of the Whitney Biennale of course, one of the oldest of its kind. But in 1993 these major recurring contemporary art survey exhibitions were exceptional to collecting institutions. At that time most biennales and triennales sat outside the institution, although we now know that this is changing.

When Brisbane began to do it, they decided to define the exhibition project through geography—Asia Pacific. Why Asia Pacific?

I think it had to do with who we are in Australia, post mid-20th century Australia. The make-up of Australia was changing rapidly. Up until then, a mostly European- and British-centred migrant program expanded rapidly. By the 1990s one in four Australians was born somewhere else and that somewhere else included people coming from the Pacific, from New Zealand, Samoa, Tonga and also Asia—China, Vietnam, Korea, and South Asia—India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Afghanistan and now Iran.

So, "who we are" was explored through the Asia Pacific Triennial, and through this project the institution's collection itself was transformed.

The rationale of the collection was formed and framed by the triennial while the triennial itself performed an important networking and research function as it needed to be mounted every three years. Being in the institution allows you to take your time in the development of new work. This slide illustrates an example, a major project with the East Sepik communities in Papua New Guinea, was five years in the making (fig. 2). Even though the triennial returns every three years, the advantage of the project being cited in the institution allows for this kind of major commission development.

It also made sure that the pedagogy, the learning programs, were express distinctly

and developed in close conversation within the curatorial team, establishing a very collaborative approach to all public programs.

Another example, I know the National Gallery Singapore had a Yayoi Kusama exhibition recently, and one of the key works in that display was *The Obliteration Room* (2002), a commission made by the Queensland Art Gallery for the 4th Triennial and which entered the museum collection.

I worked with Kusama and her studio on that commission and it has had several lives including at Tate and at many other museums around the world. What is important to say here is that participatory potential of art that this commission embodies was explored with many artists through the Queensland Art Gallery's pedagogic impulse.

Audiences at the Triennial grew from 30,000 at the first triennial in 1993, to the last one in which I was involved with the 7th edition—700,000 people. This was a phenomenal change for the institution in a city of 2 million people, in a country of 22 million people. In the context of Asia and Asian cities, these are very small cities yet in the Australian context very impressive. Importantly, it expanded the local audience base who have begun to be a highly alert informed passionate base interested and alive to the content being shown.

We know from exit surveys that visitors were returning up to four or five times, and that these were all local Brisbane based audiences. International audiences make up between 10 to 12 percent, and have remained at that percentage, but of course a 12 percent of 700,000 people is a lot more people than a 12 percent of 30,000 people.

As the Triennial grew in scale and ambition, so did the collections. And these holdings were developed by working very closely with artists to reflect local histories, regional histories and framed as a global project.



Figure 3. Heri Dono preparing his work for APT 2002.



Figure 4. Artist rendering of M+. © Herzog & de Meuron.

The first 10 years of the exhibition were devoted to looking at work made immediately within the first three years of the exhibition date. By the end of the first decade it became very clear that the audience base had begun to assume that contemporary Asian and Pacific works emerged in the 1990s onto the global platform with no formal understanding of the art histories that underpinned the practice. The museum understood that this needed to be addressed and a change to the curatorial premise was required.

The following set of triennials began with a commitment to presenting artists' work in depth, so that the 2002 triennial, the 4th iteration, was structured around four singular artists with very long international and local careers; the project just grew from there (fig. 3). In this way, what you present, the strategies around collecting, the presence of the artists in the institution, and audience interaction all formed the bases of the Queensland Art Gallery being transformed.

M+, Hong Kong, case study two. Unlike the Queensland Art Gallery which was a hundred-year-old institution, M+ is brand new (fig. 4).

From nothing, to something. This reality underscores a challenge of a different magnitude. I think this sentence "the historical balance between the local

and the international" is a very, very important aspect to the work of this new museum when we consider M+, its collections, its positioning, its pedagogy.

This new museum is dedicated to collecting, exhibiting, and interpreting visual culture of the 20th and 21st centuries. Visual culture is defined as design, architecture, moving image and visual art. It is cross-disciplinary and transnational. This is a global museum.

The cosmopolitan heart that is Hong Kong is reflected in a collection strategy, in its interpretation strategy, its Asian context shaping its activities and programs. Our voice is distinctive, embodying the diversity of our time and place.

The first groups of works that entered the museum in 2012, was a phenomenal collection of avant-garde Chinese work as a gift from Dr Uli Sigg, 1,510 works in all (fig. 5). Lars Nittve, who was the M+ Inaugural Director, negotiated this founding collection with Uli while employing the first group of curators who started to come on to develop the collections and programs.

The Duchamp Collection¹—why did we collect this group? Because we can re-present and de-center Duchamp through the M+ avant-garde collections of contemporary Chinese art. We can do something with

1 This is a rare collection of 63 readymades, unique objects, original editioned objects and prints, collaborative designs, and publications.

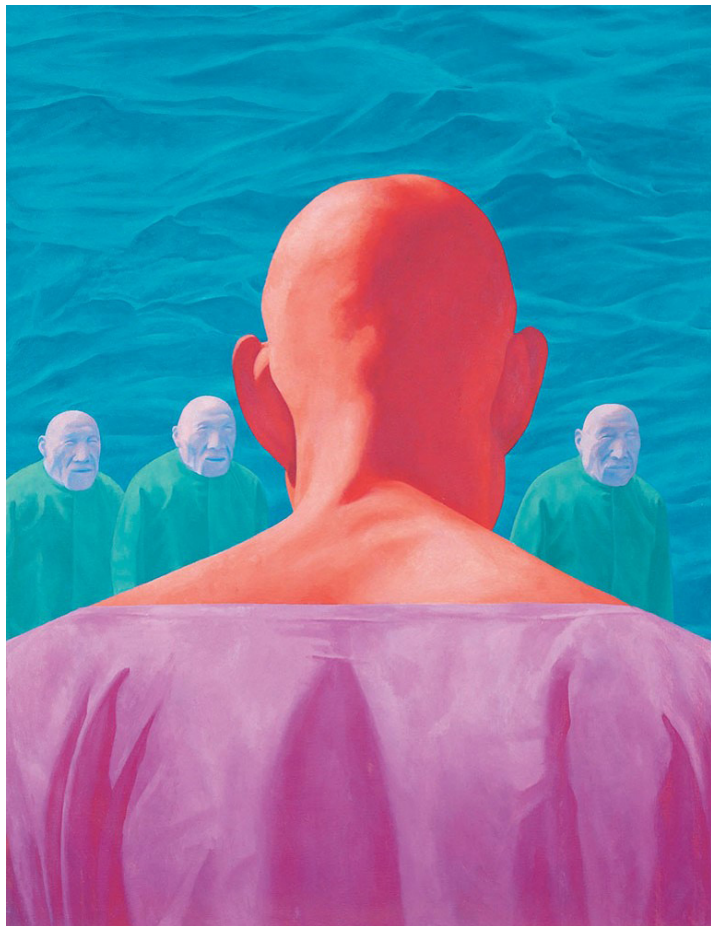


Figure 5. Fang Lijun, Untitled, 1995, M+ Sigg Collection.

Duchamp, reconsider and reposition historical references in a way no other institutions can do precisely because so many contemporary Chinese artists looked to Duchamp almost as a historical tool (fig. 6). So when we say ‘global art museum’ at M+, it provides us with a basis to present different stories through the lens of our location and to develop other canonical readings of known historical figures.

Of course, Hong Kong artists remain central to the collection as we work with international artists.

M+ currently holds almost 6,000 objects in the collection which has been assembled together over a period of six years. This is exceptional collecting energy. The Archigram archive, another recent major acquisition. The British architects that make up Archigram were very interested to place their archive in Hong Kong, because for them Hong Kong is an Archigram city.

I want to spend the last few minutes talking about, “what it means to make exhibitions without the museum’s walls”, as we have been doing this through our Mobile M+ a series of pop up exhibitions across Hong Kong over the last 5 years. Over the last year and a half we have a small pavilion on the West Kowloon site, M+ Pavilion, just on 300 square meters, which we use as a laboratory space for ideas as we introduce the collection to our audiences.

Audience development is of course, crucial for us. We think of our audiences as international as well as local. We present the Hong Kong Pavilion at the Venice Biennale with the Hong Kong Arts Development Council and we also do a very important symposium program called M+ Matters where we explore what, how and why we at M+ build the collections we do. We have an annual summer camp for high school students; we also initiated the M+ Rover, a travelling artist studio in a container which goes out into Hong Kong primary and secondary schools and community centres.

I do need to talk about our location and what connectivity actually means.

Hong Kong is one of the most visited cities in the world with 70.5 million people coming in through the Hong Kong airport every year and the M+ metro (MTR) stop, which serves the airport through the Airport Express, is within 5 minutes’ walk.

We are just about to open the Express Rail Link into mainland China and we are expecting 109,000 people to come in to Hong Kong every day, and this station is also 10 minutes’ walk away. Just south of us at Harbour City, the ferry terminal serves 80 million people a year. Again within a bus ride to M+. And we are well served with a multitude of buses from across all of Hong Kong with stops within minutes of M+.

So what does that mean for M+ in terms of our future audiences? This is a big question for us and something we explore and think about very intensely. We work with three languages—English, Cantonese and P t nguà. We know we need to build an informed audience base that is local while we can see that there is a very mobile international audience that moves through the city. Of that 70.5 million that comes in every year, it’s been said that there are 18 million of these who are described as global influencers, many I imagine, are people interested in culture.

That Hong Kong decided to be establish one of the most ambitious cultural infrastructure projects in the world through the West Kowloon Cultural District is extraordinary for Asia. It is funded by the Hong Kong government through a single endowment, which we then have to work with across the whole of the site to deliver a number of cultural institutions.

M+ will need to self-generate a significant part of its operational funding and is looking at its business model that must include ticketed exhibitions, commercial enterprise, benefaction and so on. This is not something that is known in Hong Kong. Most art museums in Hong Kong are run by what’s called the Leisure and Cultural Services Department which does not need to make any profit at all: they are completely funded.

There is a level of “arm’s length” from government for M+ as we move forward, as most recently with the appointment of the West Kowloon Cultural District Board Chairman Henry Tang, the project has decoupled from being directly linked into government in its governance structure. Prior to that, it was the Chief Secretary of Hong Kong who was the Chairman of this Board.

M+ now has its own Board, as a subsidiary West Kowloon Cultural District Board, so we function like any other major international museum. We are expecting our museum building program to be completed by 2019. It is one of the largest museums under construction in the world at 65,000 square meters, with 15,000 square meters of display space. It will take us a year to install it. So we’re looking at a public opening sometime in 2020.

I believe M+ to be one of the most necessary and important museums not just for Hong Kong or even the region but for the world because it will seek to present new possibilities. That cosmopolitanism that Nikos spoke about earlier today is an essential element of M+. It is outward-looking; it is transnational and cross-disciplinary in spirit.

Thank you.



Figure 6. M+'s Duchamp Collection.

Biographies

Nikos Papastergiadis

Nikos Papastergiadis is the Director of the Research Unit in Public Cultures, based at The University of Melbourne. He is a Professor in the School of Culture and Communication at The University of Melbourne and founder — with Scott McQuire — of the Spatial Aesthetics research cluster. He is Project Leader of the Australian Research Council Linkage Project, “Large Screens and the Transnational Public Sphere,” and Chief Investigator on the ARC Discovery Project “Public Screens and the Transformation of Public Space.”

He was educated at The University of Melbourne and the University of Cambridge. Prior to joining the School of Culture and Communication, he was Deputy Director of the Australia Centre at the University of Melbourne, Head of the Centre for Ideas at the Victorian College of Arts, and lecturer in Sociology and recipient of the Simon Fellowship at the University of Manchester.

Throughout his career, Nikos has provided strategic consultancies for government agencies on issues relating to cultural identity and has worked in collaborative projects with artists and theorists of international repute such as John Berger, Jimmie Durham and Sonya Boyce. His long involvement with the ground breaking international journal *Third Text*, as both co-editor and author, was a formative experience in the development of an interdisciplinary and cross cultural research model, which continues to inform his research practice.

His publications include *Modernity as Exile* (1993), *Dialogues in the Diaspora* (1998), *The Turbulence of Migration* (2000), *Metaphor and Tension* (2004) *Spatial Aesthetics: Art Place and the Everyday* (2006), *Cosmopolitanism and Culture* (2012). He is also the author of numerous essays, which have been translated into over a dozen languages and appeared in major catalogs such as those of the biennials of Sydney, Liverpool, Istanbul, Gwangju, Taipei, Lyon, Thessaloniki and documenta 13.

Ute Meta Bauer

Ute Meta Bauer is the Founding Director of the NTU CCA Singapore and Professor at School of Art, Design and Media, Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. Prior to that she was Associate Professor (2005–2012) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Cambridge, United States where she served as the Founding Director of the MIT Program in Art, Culture, and Technology. Bauer was Co-Curator for documenta 11 (2001–2002), Artistic Director for the 3rd Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art (2004), and the Founding Director of the Office for Contemporary Art Norway (2002–2005). She recently co-curated with MIT Visual Arts Center Director Paul Ha the US Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale (2015), presenting eminent artist Joan Jonas, and developed the concept for *Cities for People* (2017), the pilot edition of the NTU CCA Ideas Fest. She co-edited with Brigitte Oetker *Southeast Asia: Spaces of the Curatorial* (2016) published by Sternberg Press.

Chen Chieh-Jen

Born in 1960 in Taoyuan, Taiwan, Chen Chieh-Jen currently lives and works in Taipei, Taiwan. Chen employed extra-institutional underground exhibitions and guerrilla-style art actions to challenge Taiwan’s dominant political mechanisms during a period marked by the Cold War, anti-communist propaganda and martial law (1950–1987). After martial law ended, Chen ceased art activity for eight years. Returning to art in 1996, Chen started collaborating with local residents, unemployed laborers, day workers, migrant workers, foreign spouses, unemployed youth and social activists. They occupied factories owned by capitalists, slipped into areas cordoned off by the law and utilized discarded materials to build sets for his video productions. In order to visualize contemporary reality and a

people's history that has been obscured by neo-liberalism, Chen embarked on a series of video projects in which he used strategies he calls "re-imagining, re-narrating, re-writing and re-connecting."

Andrea Cusumano

Andrea Cusumano is Deputy Mayor of Culture of the city of Palermo, Italy. He is a visual multimedia artist and theater director. Since 1998 he has been chief conductor of the Theatre of Orgies and Mysteries of Hermann Nitsch in Vienna. As councillor for cultural activities of the municipality of Palermo, he is supervisor of Manifesta 12 in Palermo, responsible of the Palermo project "Italian Capital of Culture 2018." He launched ZAC (Zisa Zona Arti Contemporanee), a center of contemporary art which hosted projects and exhibitions by Ai Weiwei, Letizia Battaglia, Mustafa Sabbagh, Regina José Galindo, Shay Frisch, Hermann Nitsch, and Sislej Xhafa, amongst others. He was previously a lecturer of scenography at Goldsmiths College-University of London, and in the BA in European Theater Arts at Rose Bruford College, and senior lecturer in the BA/MA in Performance Theory and Practice at Central Saint Martins in London.

Patrick D. Flores

Patrick D. Flores is Professor of Art Studies at the Department of Art Studies at the University of the Philippines, which he chaired from 1997 to 2003, and Curator of the Vargas Museum in Manila. He was one of the curators of *Under Construction: New Dimensions in Asian Art* in 2000 and the Gwangju Biennale's "Position Papers" in 2008. He was a Visiting Fellow at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. in 1999 and an Asian Public Intellectuals Fellow in 2004. Among his publications are *Painting History: Revisions in Philippine Colonial Art* (1999); *Remarkable Collection: Art, History, and the National Museum* (2006); and *Past Peripheral: Curation in Southeast Asia* (2008). He was a grantee of the Asian Cultural Council (2010) and a member of the Advisory Board of the exhibition *The Global Contemporary: Art Worlds After 1989* (2011) organized by the Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe and member of the Guggenheim Museum's Asian Art Council (2011 and 2014). He co-edited with Joan Kee the Southeast Asian issue of *Third Text* (2011). He convened in 2013 on behalf of the Clark Institute and the Department of Art Studies of the

University of the Philippines the conference "Histories of Art History in Southeast Asia" in Manila. He was a Guest Scholar of the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles in 2014. More recently he curated the Philippine Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (2015) and an exhibition of contemporary art from Southeast Asia and South East Europe titled *South by Southeast* (2016).

Ade Darmawan

Ade Darmawan lives and works in Jakarta as an artist, curator and director of ruangrupa. He studied at Indonesia Art Institute (ISI) in the Graphic Art Department. In 1998, a year after his first solo exhibition at the Cemeti Contemporary Art Gallery, Yogyakarta (now Cemeti — Institute for Art and Society), he stayed in Amsterdam, for a two-year residency at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten. Back in Jakarta in 2000, with five other artists from Jakarta he founded ruangrupa, an artist-run initiative, which focuses on visual arts and its relation with socio-cultural contexts, especially urban environments.

His works range from installations to objects, drawings, digital prints, and video. His solo exhibition *Magic Centre* was staged in 2015 at Portikus in Frankfurt, Germany and in 2016 at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, Netherlands. In 2016 he was a participating artist in the Gwangju Biennale and Singapore Biennale. He has also collaborated curatorially in projects like *Riverscape IN FLUX* (2012), *Media Art Kitchen* (2013), and *Condition Report* (2017) with several curators and artists working in Southeast Asia.

With ruangrupa as an artists' collective platform he has participated in Gwangju Biennale (2002), and Istanbul Biennial (2005), Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (2012), Sao Paulo Biennial (2014); in 2016 they curated "transACTION," SONSBECK. From 2006–2009 he was a member of the Jakarta Arts Council. In 2009 he became the artistic director of the Jakarta Biennale, and since 2013 he has been its executive director.

Gridthiya Gaweewong

Gridthiya Gaweewong received her MAAA (Arts Administration and Policy) from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) in 1996, and her DFA at Chulalongkorn University, in 2017. After her graduation from SAIC, Gaweewong co-founded independent arts organization Project 304 with her colleagues from the SAIC and local artists.

Her curatorial projects address globalization, migration, social issues and small narratives raised by contemporary artists from Thailand and beyond.

She has curated and co-curated major exhibitions and events including *Under Construction: New Dimensions of Asian Art* at the Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery and Japan Foundation Forum in Tokyo (2002), *Politics of Fun* at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin (2005), the Bangkok Experimental Film Festival (1997–2007), *Bangkok, Bangkok* for the Kunstenfestivaldesarts, in Brussels and La Capella in Barcelona (2005), *Saigon Open City* in Ho Chi Minh City (2006–2007, with Rirkrit Tiravanija), “Unreal Asia”, the thematic program for the 55th Oberhausen International Short Film Festival (2009, with David Teh), *Between Utopia and Dystopia* at Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo in Mexico City (2011), *Bang-kok 2011* at the Seoul Museum of Art (2011), the Kuangdu Biennale “Artists in Wonderland” (2012), *Missing Links: A Series of Moving Images from Southeast Asia* at the Jim Thompson Art Center (2015) and *The Serenity of Madness*, a survey of Apichatpong Weerasethakul at MAIAM Contemporary Art Museum in Chiang Mai (2016).

Post-Museum (Jennifer Teo & Woon Tien Wei)

Post-Museum is an independent cultural and social space which aims to encourage and support a thinking and proactive community. It is an open platform for examining contemporary life, promoting the arts and connecting people. In addition to their events and projects, they also curate, research and collaborate with a network of social actors and cultural workers. Post-Museum aims to respond to its location and communities as well as find ways to create Micro-Utopias where the people actively imagine and create the cultures and worlds they desire. In its first phase, Post-Museum ran a physical space along Rowell Road (in the historic district of Singapore’s Little India district) in two 1920s shophouses. The premises included a restaurant (Food #03), 2 multi-purpose rooms, artist studios and offices. Post-Museum ran a program of talks, exhibitions, residencies and other events, as well as functioned as a venue for hire. Currently, in its second phase (from Sep 2011), Post-Museum is a nomadic space which continues to organize and host events and activities. It also

develops Social Practice art projects including Singapore Really Really Free Market, The Bukit Brown Project, and Awaken the Dragon Festival. Post-Museum has been included in various international exhibitions and events, including Jakarta Biennale (2015), Next Wave Festival in Melbourne (2010) and the 4th Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale (2009). Post-Museum was founded in 2007 by Jennifer Teo and Woon Tien Wei.

Donna De Salvo

Donna De Salvo joined the Whitney in 2004 and was appointed the museum’s first Chief Curator in 2006, a post she held until 2015. As Chief Curator and Deputy Director for Programs, De Salvo oversaw the museum’s artistic program, was instrumental in the design of the Whitney’s new Renzo Piano building, and led the curatorial team for the museum’s inaugural presentation, *America Is Hard to See* (2015).

In 2015 De Salvo assumed the role of Deputy Director for International Initiatives and Senior Curator, and is leading the museum’s efforts to communicate an expanded notion of art in the United States, both domestically and internationally. Additionally, she organizes exhibitions and collection displays, co-directs the Painting and Sculpture Acquisition Committee, and oversees the Andy Warhol Film Project. Recent exhibitions include: *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium* (2017), *Open Plan: Michael Heizer* (2016), and *Open Plan: Steve McQueen* (2016). Presently, she is working on a thematic retrospective of the work of Andy Warhol, opening at the Whitney in November 2018.

De Salvo has held curatorial positions at Tate Modern; Dia Art Foundation; the Wexner Center; and the Andy Warhol Museum. Notable past exhibitions include: *Lawrence Weiner: As Far as the Eye Can See* (2007); *Open Systems: Rethinking Art c. 1970* (2005); *Anish Kapoor: Marsyas* (2002); *Century City: Art & Culture in the Modern Metropolis* (2001); *Hand-Painted Pop: American Art in Transition, 1955–62* (1992); *A Museum Looks at Itself* (1995); and *Success is a Job in New York: The Early Art and Business of Andy Warhol* (1989).

Adriano Pedrosa

Artistic Director of the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP — Museu de Arte de São Paulo). He was adjunct curator of the 24th Bienal de São Paulo (1998), curator in charge of exhibitions and collection

at Museu de Arte da Pampulha, Belo Horizonte (2000–2003), co-curator of the 27th Bienal de São Paulo (2006), curator of InSite_05 (San Diego Museum of Art, Centro Cultural Tijuana, 2005), artistic director of the 2nd Triennial de San Juan (2009), curator of the 31st Panorama da Arte Brasileira—*Mamõyaguara opá mamõ pupé* (Museu de Arte Moderna, São Paulo, 2009), co-curator of the 12th İstanbul Biennial, and curator of the São Paulo pavilion at the 9th Shanghai Biennale (2012). Other exhibitions include *F[r]icciones* (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, 1999); *Desenhos: A-Z* (Museu da Cidade, Lisbon, 2008); *The Traveling Show* and *El Gabinete Blanco* (Colección Fundación Jumex, Mexico, D.F., 2010); *Conversations in Amman* (Darat Al Funun, The Khalid Shoman Foundation, Amman, 2013); *artevida* (Casa França Brasil, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, Escola de Artes Visuais e Cavalariças do Parque Lage, Biblioteca Parque Estadual, Rio de Janeiro, 2014); *Histórias Mestiças* (Instituto Tomie Ohtake, São Paulo, 2014).

Tiffany Chung

Tiffany Chung 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. Her ongoing comparative study of forced migration through the current Syrian and Mediterranean humanitarian crises and the post- 1975 Vietnamese mass exodus unpack asylum policies and refugee experiences, providing insights into the impact of the constant shifts in asylum policy making on already traumatized and distressed people.

Tiffany Chung received her MFA from UC Santa Barbara. In 2013, she was awarded the Sharjah Biennial Award.

Selected museum exhibitions and biennials include: *Insecurities: Tracing Displacement and Shelter*, MoMA, New York (2016); "IMPERMANENCIA Mutable Art in a Materialist Society," the XIII Bienal de Cuenca (2016); 10th Taipei Biennial (2016); "Still (The) Barbarians," EVA International — Ireland's Biennial (2016); *Illumination*, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art (2016);

"transACTION," SONSBECK, Arnhem, (2016); "All The World's Futures," the 56th Venice Biennale (2015); *Our Land/ Alien Territory*, Central Exhibition Hall Manege, Moscow (2015); *My Voice Would Reach You*, Rice University & Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (2014); *Residual: Disrupted Choreographies*, Carré d'Art — Musée d'Art Contemporain, Nîmes (2014); 11th Sharjah Biennial (2013); 2013 California Pacific Triennial, Newport Beach; 7th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Brisbane (2012); and *Six Lines of Flight*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2012).

Suhanya Raffel

Suhanya Raffel is the Executive Director of M+ in the West Kowloon Cultural District of Hong Kong.

Previously, she was at the Deputy Director at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney. Prior to this role, she worked at the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, where she held many senior curatorial positions including Acting Director and Deputy Director of Curatorial and Collection Development. At the Queensland Art Gallery she was instrumental in building its contemporary Asia Pacific collection and led its Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (2002–2012).

Raffel is an advisor for the 2017 Yokohama Triennial, Japan, a trustee of the Geoffrey Bawa Trust and the Lunuganga Trust, Sri Lanka, and is on the Board of CIMAM.

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Travel grants funded by

Getty Foundation
MALBA–Fundación Costantini
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Additional travel support

Lee Foundation
Yoma Strategic Holdings Ltd and First Myanmar
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National Gallery Singapore
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and Collections of Modern Art

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