

MEDIA RELEASE

LASALLE College of the Arts holds Singapore's first contemporary Asian art histories conference with *Art and Action: Contemporary Art and Discourse in Southeast Asia*

The conference is complemented by two specially curated exhibitions at LASALLE's Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore

Singapore, 7 November 2018

LASALLE College of the Arts will be hosting leading artists and academics in modern Asian art from 3 to 5 December 2018 at Singapore's first major international conference on Southeast Asian Contemporary art histories. *Art and Action: Contemporary Art and Discourse in Southeast Asia*. Co-convened by Jeffrey Say, Programme Leader, MA Asian Art Histories, and adjunct lecturer Iola Lenzi, the conference aims to advance art historical debates and will discuss the development of art practices in Southeast Asia over the last 50 years.

Highlights include an artists' panel with prominent Southeast Asian artists such as Dr S. Chandrasekaran (Singapore), Arahmaiani (Indonesia), Yee I-Lann (Malaysia), and Imelda Cajipe-Endaya (Philippines). There will also be a Comics panel where Eisner Award-winning comic artist Sonny Liew, author of *The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye*, will be speaking about his practice.

Organised by the MA Asian Art Histories Programme at LASALLE – the first taught Masters programme in the world to focus on Asian modern and contemporary art histories – the conference coincides with the Programme's 10th year in 2019 and is complemented by two specially curated exhibitions, *Moving Pledges*, curated by Lenzi, and *Dissolving margins*, curated by LASALLE's Melanie Pocock. Both contemplate the role of contemporary art in society, and are on at LASALLE's Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore.

"This conference represents the Programme's goal of building discourse in the relatively new field of Southeast Asian contemporary art, and to discuss themes and issues that are current in the field. What makes this conference unique is that it will be accompanied by a specially curated exhibition on Southeast Asian contemporary art to be held at LASALLE's Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore. Prior to attending this conference, I recommend that delegates head to the *Moving Pledges* and *Dissolving margins* exhibitions to understand the artistic practices and the theoretical articulations of Southeast Asian art," said Say.

"Response to the conference has been overwhelming. Our open call for papers attracted interest from all over the world, with the art of nine Southeast Asian countries being represented among the different panels. This shows not only that the time is right for Southeast Asian art to come into its own as a substantial area of study, but that Singapore and LASALLE are recognised as thought leaders in the field," said Dr S. Chandrasekaran, Head, McNally School of Fine Arts, LASALLE College of the Arts.

Art and Action will bring together leading international scholars on contemporary art discourse, including Professor Terry Smith, Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Contemporary Art History and Theory at the University of Pittsburgh, Professor John Clark, Professor Emeritus at The University of Sydney and leading scholar of Asian modern art, and Marian Pastor Roces, independent curator and social critic who works from a Cultural Studies background to

describe structures of power. Lecturer Gilles Massot from LASALLE's McNally School of Fine Arts will also be presenting at the conference, along with alumni from the MA Asian Art Histories Programme.

The conference programme is structured around six thematic panels that address specific issues and discourses arising from the particularities of Southeast Asian artistic practice. By connecting visual practices through empirical observation and contextual understanding (involving a grasp of regional peoples, politics, histories, and cultures), each panel represents a different vantage point from which to advance knowledge and the writing of recent art histories.

Old Codes New Meanings: Aspects of tradition in contemporary Southeast Asian art

The interrogation of the tradition/modern binary has remained a consistent preoccupation of the field, as underscored by Apinan Poshyananda's 1996 exhibition *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions*. This highlights that modernity and tradition are not antithetical in Southeast Asia. Drawing from these ideas, this panel re-examines the relevance of tradition to the study of Southeast Asian contemporary art. During the period of nation-building, tradition was often integrated into art as a positive emblem of national identity. Given the relationship between artistic practices and social realities, how can we evaluate contemporary artists' critical engagement with aspects of tradition, particularly when the latter have been exploited to represent nationalist ideologies?

'Stealing' Public Space: How Southeast Asian contemporary art engages with the city

In modernising Southeast Asia, the city has been represented either as an embodiment of progress, prosperity, and pluralism, or as a locus of moral decadence and social inequality, opposed to rural self-sufficiency and cultural 'authenticity.' This panel's papers examine the ways in which contemporary art critically engages with the city, and all it represents, as *res publica*.

Direct Dissemination: Comics and popular media as social practice in Southeast Asia

In Southeast Asian cultures, images, gestures, narratives and audience participation are frequently conflated into a single expressive genre. Extending from the panel *Public Space and Social Interventions*, this session addresses a lacuna in regional art histories which have yet to analyse the significance of mass media forms as flexible creative expressions that include both visual and textual elements.

Word-play as Clue and Cue: The place of text in contemporary Southeast Asian art

In recent decades, text has appeared as a recurring component of regional art practice. In such works, locality is registered using words or characters as decorative devices, the deployment of text within the image as a counterpoint or expansion of pictorial narrative, or the use of writing to invite audience involvement. This panel's papers explore usages and forms of textual integration in visual practices.

Not Lagging, sometimes Leading: Tracing the implications of technological parity

There is no doubt that modern art in Southeast Asia owes a debt to centuries of European representational painting. However, such a lag does not apply to photography, video and film, since these mediums were adopted in several Southeast Asian centres not long after their popularisation in Euramerica. Extending John Clark's theory of the decentred modern, this panel's papers explore works produced with visual technologies, including film, video, and photography.

Daring Canon: Assessing art historical narratives of Southeast Asian contemporary art

In this "Asian Century", historiographies of twentieth-century Asian art still contend with the problematic dominance of the Euramerican canon. If one subscribes to contemporary art being informed by context, is it legitimate to look explicitly at Southeast Asian practice to discern shared formal, conceptual, and processual traits across the region? Papers presented in this panel examine canon-making in Southeast Asia from a range of perspectives.

More information about the panels can be found in Annex A.

More information about *Art and Action: Contemporary Art and Discourse in Southeast Asia* can be found in Annex B.

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About LASALLE College of the Arts

LASALLE College of the Arts in Singapore is a leading tertiary institution in cutting edge contemporary arts and design education and practice. The college offers more than 30 diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in fine arts, design communication, interior design, product design, film, animation, fashion, dance, music, theatre, arts management, arts pedagogy and practice, art therapy, Asian art histories, and creative writing.

Its faculty is led by a community of award-winning artists, designers, educators and researchers, and their practice-led research sets LASALLE apart as an international centre of excellence. Critically acclaimed alumni form the core of the cultural and creative sectors in Singapore and increasingly, internationally.

Founded in 1984 by De La Salle Brother Joseph McNally – a visionary artist and educator – LASALLE is a not-for-profit, private educational institution. LASALLE receives tuition grant support from the Singapore Ministry of Education. Its degree programmes are validated by Goldsmiths, University of London.

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Annex A: Accepted Papers and Proposed Panels

Keynotes

Exit Points: Post-Categorical Art, and Art History Without Categories *Terry Smith*

An Australian-American academic, Smith became an art historian during the 1960s and 1970s, when the major battles had to be fought against Australian art's British heritage and its US entanglement—that is, in Smith's words, "before Australia realised that it was a nation within Asia." From the perspectives he developed while tracing the layered complexities, the divisive differences, and the thirst for freedom within of art's global contemporaneity, his talk will attempt to engage with the themes of the conference by exploring how certain artists, critics, curators and historians throughout Asia are grappling with the challenges and contradictions of this situation.

Conceptual Art and Authoritarianism in 1970's Southeast Asia *Marian Pastor Roces*

The paper draws from a chapter in a book-in-progress, "Conceptual Art and the 1970's Dictators." It is the chapter on the emergence of artists who self-ascribed the tag Conceptual Artist in various locations in Southeast Asia; however with greater focus on Manila, Philippines. Conceptual Art was affected by a handful of artists and received by tiny publics with little overt gestures to the ideological contest expressed as prolonged warfare in their vicinity. The apolitical qualities of the work, particularly in Manila, beg the question: was it, after all, as claimed, Conceptual Art at all?

Considering the turn to authoritarianism in many parts of the world, Roces suggests that it is important to inquire after the relation of contemporary art practice today to the practices of the 1970's ancestor figures. The exercise can at the very least look at the ascendance of autocrats and if art can have any conversation at all with these developments.

Panel 1

Old Codes New Meanings: Aspects of tradition in contemporary Southeast Asian art

The interrogation of the tradition/modern binary has remained a consistent preoccupation of the field, as underscored by Apinan Poshyananda's 1996 exhibition *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions*. This highlights that modernity and tradition are not antithetical in Southeast Asia.

Drawing from these ideas, this panel re-examines the relevance of tradition to the study of Southeast Asian contemporary art. During the period of nation-building, tradition was often integrated into art as a positive emblem of national identity. Given the relationship between artistic practices and social realities, how can we evaluate contemporary artists' critical engagement with aspects of tradition, particularly when it has been exploited to represent nationalist ideologies? And how are claims of cultural genealogy to be appraised in light of developments in international exhibitionary discourses, and Southeast Asia's would-be integration into a "global canon"?

Not to Ignore Artists: Tang Chang as Recluse and Cultivator of the Audience and an (Alternative) Art Scene in Bangkok
Orianna Cacchione, Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago

A Debate between Tradition and Future: Art in Laos from 1991.
Anna Koshcheeva, MA graduate, LASALLE College of the Arts

Not Nostalgia: How Tradition is Coopted for Critical Function in Southeast Asian Contemporary Art— Indonesian, Thai, Vietnamese, Singaporean, Filipino and Burmese Examples Compared
Iola Lenzi, art historian and curator, adjunct lecturer, LASALLE College of the Arts

Panel 2

Stealing Public Space: How Southeast Asian Contemporary Art Engages with the City

In modernising Southeast Asia, the city has been represented either as an embodiment of progress, prosperity and pluralism, or as a locus of moral decadence and social inequality, opposed to rural self-sufficiency and cultural 'authenticity.' Beyond this representational duality, the city remains a site of competing ideological interests. This is often manifested in conflicts between citizens and governments over 'ownership' of public space. Practitioners are engaged in these debates through various expressive genres, including the performative. In so doing, they often co-opt the city—its physical zones and intangible institutions— in order to directly engage fellow citizens in a collaborative questioning of dominant social-political discourses. This panel's papers examine the ways in which contemporary art critically engages with the city, and all it represents, as *res publica*.

Visions of New Urban Space: Hanoi as an Art Subject

Natalia Kraevskaia, Vietnam National University (International School), Hanoi

Boundary Creeping in Anida Yoeu Ali's The Buddhist Bug: Intersections of the Body, Religion and the State in Singapore

Annie Jael Kwan, Independent Curator, London

Indonesian Environmental Art: Intersecting Nature, Politics and Cultural Heritage

Edwin Jurriëns, Asia Institute of the Faculty of Arts, The University of Melbourne, Visiting Fellow. School of Humanities and Social Sciences, The University of New South Wales (UNSW) Canberra

Panel 3

Direct Dissemination: Comics and Popular Media

In recent decades, text appears as a recurring component of regional art practice. In such works, locality is registered through the use of words or characters as decorative devices, the deployment of text within the image as a counterpoint or expansion of pictorial narrative, or the use of writing to invite audience involvement. Works that utilise text as a critical tool through word-play or local idioms may also use other languages, especially English as *lingua franca*, thereby adding a semantic layer. This panel's papers explore usages and forms of textual integration in visual practices.

Komiks in Campaigns: Consuming the 'Superhero'

Karl Ian Uy Cheng Chua, Director of the Japanese Studies Program and Assistant Professor of the Department of History of the Ateneo de Manila University

Transformational in Form, Socialist in Content: An Exploration of the Aesthetics and Content of Comics for Adults by Nguyen Thanh Phong

Bui Thi Thanh Mai, Lecturer and Researcher in Art History, Vietnam Museum of Fine Arts

"Making the Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye: Practical Applications of Comics Theory in the Formal and Narrative Experiments of The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye"

Sonny Liew, comic artist, painter and illustrator

Panel 4

Word-play as Clue and Cue: The Place of Text in Contemporary Southeast Asian Art

How Did Text Enter Indonesian Art? A First Approximation.

Werner Kraus, Director, Centre for Southeast Asian Art, Passau

Reading between the Lines: The Arabic Script in Contemporary Indonesian Art
Luke Chua, Independent Researcher, Singapore

Remembering Landscape: Tang Chang's Late Work
Chanon Kenji Praepipatmongkol, Marjorie Susman Curatorial Fellow, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.

Panel 5

Not Lagging; Sometimes Leading: Tracing the Implications of Technological Parity

The Archive as Producer: Abednego Trianto's Postcolonial Appropriation.
Dr Alexander Suparsono, Lecturer, Edinburgh Napier University

Beyond Representation: Action, Art, and Performance Art in Indonesia
Thomas Berghuis, Independent Researcher, The Netherlands

From Practice to Theory to History and Back, a Journey through Photographic time.
Gilles Massot, Lecturer, LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore

Panel 6

Daring Canon: Assessing art historical narratives of Southeast Asian contemporary art

In this "Asian Century", historiographies of twentieth-century Asian art still contend with the problematic dominance of the Euramerican canon. However, if one subscribes to contemporary art as being informed by context, is it legitimate to look explicitly at Southeast Asian practice to discern shared formal, conceptual and processual traits across the region? If such characteristics are found, and these works retain meaning as they move beyond locus or era of production, could one speak of a Southeast Asian contemporary canon? Papers presented in this panel examine canon-making in Southeast Asia from a range of perspectives.

The Russian Connection
Charles Mereweather, Curator, Georgian National Museum

Revision—Artists who Readdress Art's History
Vera Mey, PhD candidate, SOAS, University of London

Entry Points: Resonating Histories of Punk & Performance in the UK and Southeast Asia
Stephen Shukaitis, Senior Lecturer, University of Essex

Closing Lecture

'Tradition into Modern, Modern into Contemporary', a Habitual Interpretation via Thai examples.

John Clark, Professor Emeritus, University of Sydney

Panel 7

From the Rural to the Urban: A Place for The Artists Village in the city **Convened by Adrian Tan, Researcher, Nanyang Technological University**

This panel examines The Artists Village (TAV) and its shifting relationship to the city. In the late 1980s, TAV consciously situated themselves away from the urban centre in an attempt to rethink art-making in rapidly urbanising Singapore. The first paper posits the rural as a site for 'alternative' art practice and collaborative forms of art-making, examined in relation to engagement with the urban as a space for social and cultural action (*Seng Yu Jin, National Gallery Singapore*). When faced with a situation that was no longer rural, TAV's

relationship to the rural-urban conundrum shifted in an (after-all) city-state faced with a perpetual contestation for land use.

The second paper considers 'how' and 'why' TAV artists in the 'Post-Ulu' period engaged more directly with the city and its public spaces, for example, organising more critically engaged and issues-based public exhibitions (*Adrian Tan, NTU ADM*). In the last paper, a search for the 'collective' is mapped through the understanding of the interactions and friendship between members as important developments in the historical reading of TAV (*Wong Tien Wei, Post-Museum*). Through the discursive trajectories of each paper and considering the circumstances surrounding collective art-making—the socio-cultural contexts of a changing Singapore and the artistic strategies of The Artists Village—a place can then be found for TAV in the City.

The Artists Village: The Rural as Fringe and Alterity
Seng Yu Jin, Senior Curator, National Gallery of Singapore

The Artists Village: Negotiating and Engaging the City
Adrian Tan, Research Scholar, Nanyang Technological University

In Search of the Collective in The Artists Village
Woon Tien Wei, artist-curator, Singapore

Panel 8 **Artist's Panel**

Arahmaiani (Indonesia)

Arahmaiani (b. Bandung, 1961) is one of the leading figures in the contemporary art scene in Indonesia, working in performance, painting, drawing, installation, video, poetry, dance and music. She was one of the artists in the Indonesia National Pavilion at the 50th Venice Biennale. Her work has grappled with contemporary politics, violence, critique of capital, the female body and in recent years, her own identity, which although Muslim, still mediates between Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist and animist beliefs.

S. Chandrasekaran (Singapore)

Dr. S.Chandrasekaran is an accomplished artist, who has represented in major exhibitions, such as Havana Biennial (Cuba), 1st Asia Pacific Triennial (Brisbane), Asia-Pacific Performance Art Festival (Canada), International Performance Art Festival (Poland) and 49th Venice Biennale (organised by International Artist's Museum). His performance titled *Bioalloy and Body* was nominated for APBF Signature Art Prize (Singapore). Currently, he is Head, McNally School of Fine Arts, LASALLE College of the Arts. He is a Founder/Artistic Director for Biological Arts Theatre (BAT).

Imelda Cajipe Endaya (Philippines)

Imelda Cajipe Endaya's (b.1949) art focuses on women and people's culture. Her life work has been consistently clustered along themes of cultural identity, gender, race, nation, migration, displacement, people empowerment, and globalization from the point of view of an enlightened Filipina. She co-founded the feminist organization KASIBULAN, the Kababaihan sa Sining at Bagong Sibol na Kamalayan in 1987 and was its first president.

Yee I-Lann (Malaysia)

Yee I-Lann (b. 1971, Kota Kinabalu) lives and works in Kota Kinabalu. Her primarily photomedia based art practice speculates on issues of culture, power and the role of historical memory in our social experience. Yee graduated from the University of South

Australia (Adelaide, Australia) with a Bachelor of Arts (Visual Arts) in 1993 with a major in Photography and a minor in Cinematography.

Annex B:

Conference Information

Art and Action: Contemporary Art and Discourse in Southeast Asia

Conference Period

Monday, 3 December 2018 – Wednesday, 5 December 2018

Venue

LASALLE College of the Arts
1 McNally Street, Singapore 579820

More information and programme schedule

<https://www.asianarthistories.com/artandaction/>