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[RESEARCH REPORT]

Terminologies of "Modern" and "Contemporary" "Art" in Southeast Asia's Vernacular Languages:

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THANAVI CHOTPRADIT, J PILAPIL JACOBO, EILEEN LEGASPI-RAMIREZ, ROGER NELSON, NGUYEN NHU HUY, CHAIRAT POLMUK, SAN LIN TUN, PHOEBE SCOTT, SIMON SOON AND JIM SUPANGKAT

Abstract

This research report offers introductory accounts of the terminologies of "modern" and "contemporary" "art" in nine Southeast Asian languages. The project asks: What are the words used to refer to "modern", "contemporary" and "art" in Southeast Asia? What do these terms denote and connote? When and how did they historically emerge? How do terminologies align or differ in the region's many vernaculars? How do ideas of modernity, contemporaneity and art itself become mobile and take flight when shifting between languages? There are many discrepancies in the nature of these nine languages, as well as in the sources available on them, and the style, tone and scope of each author's contribution. This report is offered as an epistemic and lexical resource for further research. It is anticipated that greater attention to terminological shifts in Southeast Asia's languages may facilitate new perspectives, including new possibilities for comparative work that remains attentive to local and linguistic specificities.

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Introduction

Roger Nelson

What was and what is modern and contemporary, in art in Southeast Asia? Art historical scholarship in and on the region has made great strides in addressing such questions over recent decades. Researchers from the region, and those trained in relevant linguistic skills, have been especially crucial in advancing our collective knowledge and understanding of modern and contemporary art histories here. Comparative approaches, in which the arts of different parts of the region are discussed in relation to one another, or to the arts of further afield, have also made important contributions.

Yet the *terms* in which the modern and the contemporary in art have historically been discussed in Southeast Asia—in Southeast Asian vernacular languages, that is—have been significantly less well understood. Moreover, art historically informed linguistic knowledge and ability only rarely transgresses nationally demarcated specialisations, which have thus often functioned like "silos".

Just what are the words used to refer to "modern", "contemporary" and "art" in Southeast Asia's many vernacular languages? What do these terms denote and connote? When and how did they emerge? How do the terminologies of modern and contemporary art align or differ in the region's many languages? How do ideas of modernity, contemporaneity and art itself become mobile and take flight when shifting between languages?

This article constitutes a humble first step toward addressing such questions, with a primary focus on visual art. Authored by ten researchers (all of whom currently live and work in Southeast Asia), and addressing nine Southeast Asian languages—Indonesian, Javanese, Khmer, Lao, Malay, Myanmar/

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Burmese, Tagalog/Filipino, Thai, and Vietnamese—the article constitutes a first scholarly attempt to consider the terminologies of modern and contemporary art in the region's vernaculars.

The purpose of this project, simply stated, is to serve as a resource for further research: an epistemic as well as a lexical resource. It is anticipated that a greater attention to terminological shifts in each of the major Southeast Asian languages may also facilitate new perspectives, including new possibilities for comparative work that remains attentive to local and linguistic specificities.

The article proceeds with the assumption that, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has proposed, "in every possible sense, translation is necessary but impossible".[1] Moreover, the following introductions to various vernacular terminologies demonstrate the importance of Suzana Milevska's observation that the translation of art history "from one language to another is, more than any other kind of translation, an issue of cultural translation … a question not of names, facts, or dates, but of different art concepts, cultural contexts, and geographic settings".[2] James Elkins effectively affirms this, noting of a 2005 book on Southeast Asian painting and Borobudur, written in Indonesian by Primadi Tabrani, that the "book wouldn't seem like art history if it were translated", suggesting that perhaps "it would read like very idiosyncratic art criticism".[3] As Elkins's misgivings here make clear, a certain grammar and vocabulary of art history has been codified in the Anglophone and Euro-American spheres, and writing in non-European languages may often misalign with this orthodoxy.

These perspectives from and of locations outside Southeast Asia may be productively read in light of discussions of terminology and language in and for this region. In 1993, Marian Pastor Roces called for "a calibrated terminology … that allows respect for cultures that structured the absorption of things from outside, with a system of meaning that managed to grow and survive violent encounters with global hegemonies".[4] Citing this plea in 1996, T.K. Sabapathy suggested that Pastor Roces's advocacy of "the need to deal with words, and to do so rigorously and purposefully" might effectively counter naïve understandings of terms like "modern", "modernism" and "modernity" as being words that are always necessarily "ill suited when applied in any other situation" outside the West.[5]

Such an overly simplistic understanding of the terminology of the modern—Sabapathy characterises it as "subscription to the tyranny of 'authentic origination'"[6]—may well be a product of the tendency for commentators on art in Southeast Asia to behave as if they are reinventing the wheel, including with respect to terminologies. This is one of Sabapathy's perennial laments. In 1996, he stated that "rarely do discussions of these issues acknowledge

and build upon extant writings in the countries within the region in a rigorous, sustained, and scholarly mode; every effort, every exegesis is, seemingly, a new beginning!” The consequences of this, as Sabapathy diagnosed them then, include “a marked absence of reflexivity in critical and art historical scholarship in Southeast Asia” which has “retarded the development of suitable and requisite methodologies”.[7] Much progress has been made since he made these comments in 1996, in no small part thanks to the efforts of Sabapathy and his students. Yet still in 2017, he regretfully observed that “writing is rarely undertaken by attending to existing writers and writing. Writers easily assume that each is writing the very first text on a subject.”[8]

Perhaps an aliveness to the richness of the region’s vernacular vocabularies of art might go some way toward redressing this.

This project was first conceived more than two years ago, in conversations between myself and Simon Soon, first in Kuala Lumpur, and continuing over several months in other locations, as well as in correspondence. The project was born of simple curiosity—a curiosity which Soon and I shared, and which we soon discovered was also shared by many others with an interest in the modern and contemporary arts of the region, including researchers, artists, curators, writers and so on. Conversations with many scholars have greatly enriched this project, and I thank my many interlocutors, especially Simon, Nora A. Taylor, May Adadol Ingawanij and others who are cited and acknowledged throughout what follows.

It is to our peers, colleagues, interlocutors and friends, in and of Southeast Asia, that this co-authored article is primarily addressed. Perhaps some readers will find in this something of utility for the larger intellectual and political project which is increasingly being referred to as “decoloniality” or “deimperialising”. As Taylor has noted, colonial “explorers”, upon observing that some Southeast Asian religions and writing systems were related to Sinitic and Indic ones, “concluded that the inhabitants of the lands lacked original culture, or that whatever culture they did possess was not theirs”.[9] The lie of this, and its violence, of course, hardly needs explication for those working in and on Southeast Asia.

It is further hoped that perhaps this project may also be of use to a wider readership, including those with an interest in what is now commonly (although not unproblematically) termed “global art history”. Spivak claims, impressively if perhaps somewhat boastfully, that she will “never teach anything whose original I cannot read”.[10] Such a stance is unavailable to many, and perhaps especially to those wishing to study or to teach the art history of Southeast Asia, a region of great linguistic diversity. It is thus that we venture that this effort may be of some utility.

On Unevenness

In a valiant attempt to characterise a pan-regional Southeast Asian aesthetic "sensibility", Rod Paras-Perez seized upon "the value attached to the fullness of things", citing numerous examples from various artistic media and other cultural domains of "the desire to accumulate … the sheer accretion … the compulsion to fill space".[11] Whatever one makes of this as an assessment of the region's arts and cultures, it certainly does not hold up as a description of writings on art in Southeast Asian vernacular languages. Such writings have been radically uneven.

In 2000, in a collection of essays titled *The Canon in Southeast Asian Literatures* which addressed the literatures of Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam, David Smyth observed "the uneven development of the study of the national literatures of South East Asia".[12] This unevenness has endured, and it is matched also in the study of other forms of art in the region, including visual art, which is the primary focus of this article.

Not only has the study of Southeast Asia's modern and contemporary arts been uneven, but the textual discourses in each of the region's vernacular languages have also been radically inconsistent, in terms both of scale and substance. During discussions held at a workshop on historical writings on the modern in Southeast Asian art, held in Singapore in October 2016 (while work on this article was already underway), the stark contrast in the number and nature of textual sources in different languages and settings was made plainly apparent.[13] In the Philippines, for example, could be found a greater number of texts relating to the modern in art, and these texts are of the greatest length, and appeared from an earlier period, when compared to other Southeast Asian nations. Most of these Philippine texts are, however, written in English or another European language. By contrast, in Cambodia and Myanmar, for example, texts on modern arts are much fewer in number, usually less substantial in length and in ambition, and first begin to appear at a later date. Many, if not most, of these texts are written in the vernacular.

This unevenness of textual discourse and of scholarship on it is reflected in the contributions on individual languages that follow in this article. They vary widely in length and scope, as well as in tone and style, and in their methodological and temporal focus. In part, this is due to the differing nature of the languages being discussed—more numerous and older sources are available about Tagalog/Filipino and Malay than about Lao and Myanmar/Burmese, for example, and the number of terms varies between languages. Yet it is also, unavoidably, an effect of the differing interests and specialisations of the ten authors here. Each has approached the task of contributing to this

research report in their own way, and that diversity has been preserved in this published version, rather than flattened through heavy-handed editing. For example, Simon Soon found it advantageous to frame his discussion of the terms “modern,” “contemporary” and “art” in Malay within a broader historical narrative of the Malay language (making his contribution by far the longest of those collected here), whereas Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez and J Pilapil Jacobo have, by contrast, elected to engage in a much more tightly focused discussion of a specific moment of debate within Philippine art discourse, between the artist-writers Victorio C. Edades and Guillermo Tolentino. In part as a complement to Legaspi-Ramirez and Jacobo’s discussion, Edades’ and Tolentino’s exchange is also republished in facsimile in the “Archives” section of this volume.[14]

The sources available to the ten contributors here differ not only in quantity and age, but also in nature. For example, in Thai, as Thanavi Chotpradit reveals, dictionaries and glossaries which specifically functioned to translate European art terms into Thai were published during the 20th century, which offer an invaluable resource for historical linguistic research. Such narrowly art-focused dictionaries are not found in the other languages discussed hereinafter. Nevertheless, Jim Supangkat, in his discussion of Indonesian and Javanese, as well as Soon in his discussion of Malay, and Legaspi-Ramirez and Jacobo in their discussions of Tagalog/Filipino, all draw on historical dictionaries as sources not only of etymological information, but also as texts which reward interpretation against the grain. In Myanmar/Burmese, a number of articles on modern artists written in the vernacular are drawn on by San Lin Tun, whereas in Khmer and Lao, as Roger Nelson and Chairat Polmuk indicate, very few such writings are available. In Vietnamese, as Phoebe Scott and Nguyen Nhu Huy reveal, when the terms related to art and artists were initially introduced into Vietnam, these terms were soon imbricated in debates about the status of the artist. This related not only to a politics of achievement within the colonial context, but perhaps also potentially played into pre-existing Confucian ideals of social hierarchy: ideals which may have been reflected and indeed enacted in language. This speculative interpretation of the terminological phenomenon appears to be specific to Vietnamese. Yet the question of hierarchy within language is also taken up in Soon’s discussion of the historical mobilisation of Malay as the basis for three national languages, and in several other contributions hereinafter.

Since colonial times, as Ashley Thompson has argued, commentators on “art” have identified the grafting of new conceptual objects—including ones understood to have been “exogenous”—onto ancient, already existing sociocultural and aesthetic-linguistic structures as a recurrent process familiar

across the region we call Southeast Asia, and since the time we call premodern. In her discussion of Paul Mus and the *linga*, Thompson notes that, for Mus, "the *linga* was not the ultimate source of creation but instead an heir to the indigenous ancestor-rock, which was only later to reinherit from the *linga*".[15] This process of adaptive redeployment, as Thompson characterises it based on Mus' earlier attempts, is age-old, and importantly is also cyclical. These are tropes that the reader may discern throughout many of the discussions of terminologies that follow. Indeed, in the case of Tagalog/Filipino, Legaspi-Ramirez and Jacobo argue, one term for the modern "is premised on nature, as '*bago*' is also the first fruit that emerges from a plant ('*primicias*')".

Despite their manifold divergences, the nine languages discussed below share some common attributes in their respective terminologies for the "modern" and the "contemporary" in "art".

One shared feature in all Southeast Asian languages under consideration is a general tendency to draw on loanwords, adapting their meanings in the process. Myanmar/Burmese, Khmer, Lao and Thai terminologies all draw on Sanskrit and Pali, as well as on English and French, as colonial and "crypto-colonial" languages. Vietnamese draws on Chinese and Japanese, and earlier in the 20th century also used French terms, too. In Malay, a shift from *sezaman* (which referred to the "contemporary" in art during the 1970s) to the loanword *kontemporari* (used since the 1990s) is traced by Soon, who finds an analogous shift in Indonesia from *seni rupa baru* to *kontemporer*. In Tagalog, *arte*—a loanword from Spanish—is proposed by Legaspi-Ramirez and Jacobo as "the work of language that strives to discipline *sining*", the Tagalog term which has come to refer to "art".

A second commonality, likely of more significance for the interpretation of art, is an emphasis in most Southeast Asian languages on temporality in their respective terminologies of the "modern" and "contemporary". Most languages use words relating to or predicated on newness, or else words conveying a sense of being up-to-date, to describe the modern and/or the contemporary.

Related to this central place of temporality in the terms of both the modern and the contemporary, each of the authors of this article suggest—albeit tentatively, with varying degrees of caution—that the distinctions between modernity and contemporaneity in Southeast Asia and in the region's vernacular terminologies are fluid, and far from fixed. For example, San Lin Tun notes that the term "contemporary" is used "together with modern," in Myanmar/Burmese. Nelson posits that "the Khmer terminology … points to an understanding of the contemporary as a conceptual category, rather than a periodising marker or historical moment, and moreover as a concept that inheres also in that which we call modern". Polmuk and Chotpradit both observe the frequent

slippage between terms for "modern" and for "contemporary," in Lao and Thai respectively. Polmuk notes that Lao terminologies in the mid-20th century functioned "to emphasize a presentist idea about Lao culture during the late colonial period". Chotpradit records that key figures writing in Thai in the mid-20th century "seem to have used the terms *samai mai* ("modern") and *ruam samai* ("contemporary") interchangeably, as both terms imply a sense of contemporaneity (*khwam pen patchuban*), as well as a sense of modernity as opposed to the traditional or the premodern". Scott and Huy also observe that the terms for "modern" and "contemporary" in Vietnamese are often used interchangeably, explaining that "both terminologies *nghệ thuật hiện đại* ('modern art') and *nghệ thuật đương đại* ('contemporary art') refer to the same phenomenon: something new, something that is most recent". Similar suggestions are made for other languages in the various contributions below.

Despite these commonalities in terminology—which are matched by a surprising degree of linguistic similarity between the grammars of several of the languages under consideration, even when they are of a different linguistic family[16]—differences abound. For example, Polmuk's observation of the presentism in Lao terminologies for the modern and contemporary sets that language apart. Moreover, Myanmar/Burmese and Tagalog/Filipino seem to be the only languages in which distinctly pejorative connotations are associated with the modern in art. Jacobo and Legaspi-Ramirez refer to a mid-20th-century debate in the Philippines over the desirability of distortion in modern art, citing "Tolentino's insistence on untarnished beauty, a perfection impermeable to time".[17] In Myanmar, as San Lin Tun describes, terms used for "modern" may also connote a range of undesirable characteristics, including being "impractical", being immodest or being excessively "westernised". In Myanmar/Burmese, other more idiosyncratic terms for the modern have also appeared, related not to time but rather to an ill-at-ease mental state: a phenomenon which seems not to have been replicated in the other languages under discussion. According to Yin Ker, a scholar of Myanmar modern and contemporary art, the term *seik-ta-za-pangyi*, meaning "psychotic or mad painting", is one possible way to refer to the modern in Myanmar/Burmese.[18]

Other differences in the development of art terms in the modern and contemporary context have been less pronounced, or may perhaps be better explained as being variations in emphasis in the process of interpretation. For example, the wide range of meanings associated with "art", while not unique to Khmer, does seem especially pronounced in Nelson's account of the Cambodian setting. The expansive regional spread of Malay, sketched by Soon, is quite particular to that language and its historic use for trade, yet Soon also attributes greater importance to trans-cultural exchange in his

account of terminologies than do some other authors here. The interaction between Tagalog terms and Spanish loanwords, and their eventual transfer to or replacement by English terms, adds a particular complexity to the Philippine context, as described by Legaspi-Ramirez and Jacobo. Some parallels may be found in the exchange between Javanese and Indonesian terms, as discussed by Supangkat.

These various differences notwithstanding, many of the terms for "modern" and "contemporary" in the nine languages discussed here, may strike readers as having a considerable degree of conceptual overlap.

By contrast, the distinctions between vernacular Southeast Asian articulations of "art" seem to be greater than differences between ways of discussing the "modern" and the "contemporary". In Tagalog, Jacobo and Legaspi-Ramirez propose the term *sining* (now used for "art") originally was described as synonymous with "thought". This, they argue, "determines cognition/sentience as a premise in the founding of Philippine art in its incipient phase". In Malay, a similar connotation of mindful mental activity is identified by Soon as inherent to the vernacular terms for "art". Supangkat points to the possibility for disagreement on this topic, in the context of Indonesian and Javanese. By contrast, in many of the other languages discussed here, the terms for "art" relate more closely to skill and/or beauty than they do to conceptual or intellectual labour. It is hoped that scholars will continue to examine these diverging conceptions of "art" in Southeast Asian languages, and their implications.

The many discrepancies in the nature of these nine languages, as well as in their art-related terminologies and in the textual sources available, is further reflected in the style and tone of the contributions that follow. As mentioned, together we have decided to preserve each author's individual voice, and her or his specialised areas of interest, in order to foreground this unevenness, and the unavoidably provisional and introductory nature of what follows. The widely varying lengths and differing focuses in the contributions that follow reflect the diverse approaches of the contributors, in this burgeoning but still relatively small and often self-contained field. We all hope that what we have offered here might prompt more research and reflection on questions of language and terminology in the histories of arts in this region.

On Resonances, and the Sequence of the Texts

The texts that follow have been arranged, in a deliberately arbitrary manner, in reverse alphabetical order of the English name of each language. Readers may, however, find it productive to read these texts in relation to each other. For example, Soon's account of the Malay language—which has for centuries

enjoyed an extraordinary geographic reach, due to its use as a language of trade—provides useful historical background to Supangkat’s account of Javanese and Indonesian. The texts on Khmer, Lao and Thai may also be mutually illuminating, given the close linguistic similarity between these languages, shared also (to a lesser degree) by Myanmar/Burmese and Vietnamese. Jacobo and Legaspi-Ramirez’s interest in the interaction between Tagalog and Spanish may be read productively in light of Supangkat’s discussion of the relationship between Indonesian and Javanese terms.

These are just a few examples of some resonances between the texts that follow. Readers may find their own connections, and are encouraged to read these texts in whatever sequence they prefer, not necessarily following the arbitrary sequence adopted here.

On Beginnings

It is important to note that this article is not intended as a definitive or conclusive statement; rather, it is proposed as merely a beginning. The following texts are introductory, and more work—more research, and more interpretation—can and should be done on each of these nine languages.

It is also worth noting that this project joins a number of others, in the region and beyond, which have recently taken terminology as their point of departure.[19] Ho Tzu Nyen’s *The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia* is an ongoing project which has appeared in various formats, including a kind of glossary. Ratna Mufida, Pitra Hutomo and Grace Samboh, under the collaborative platform of Hyphen, have produced a dictionary of terms relating to art and aesthetics in Indonesian, titled *Daftar istilah seni rupa*. Various museums, such as the Tate, have set up online glossaries of art terms. Shannon Jackson and Paula Marincola are editors of *In Terms of Performance*, an online “keywords anthology” with numerous contributors writing on terms such as “ephemerality”.[20] All of these projects, to a greater or lesser degree, position themselves as works-in-progress. When Samboh, in a recent exhibition catalogue essay, affirmed that “I like dictionaries because they are less political,”[21] perhaps she meant this in contrast to the act of translation or more theoretical definitions, which are always and necessarily provisional and incomplete.

The discussion in this article is limited to the terms “modern”, “contemporary” and “art”, and it is largely focused on painting and visual arts, insofar as is possible (although this is helpfully nuanced by Jacobo and Legaspi-Ramirez’s consideration of Tolentino, an artist especially known for his sculpture). The decision to curtail the article’s reach in this way was made in the interests of maintaining a manageable scope. Yet this limited focus here also leaves open

the possibility, perhaps even the necessity, for more work on the terminologies of artistic discourse in the region's languages.

To what extent has discourse on visual art in Southeast Asia (including in its vernaculars) been focused on painting, to the exclusion of, for example, sculpture or photography or "craft" or other practices? This question has been left for another time and place. Moreover, the questions asked here of the terms "modern", "contemporary" and "art" in relation to painting and visual arts could also be asked of many other art-related terms such as, for example, "abstract", "aesthetics", "beauty", "composition", "concept", "curator", "exhibition", "feminism", "installation", "style" and so on. These questions could also be asked of many other kinds of art, such as architecture, performance, literature and more. Moreover, special attention to women writers, whose contributions are infrequently cited—including in this article—would be valuable. Those, perhaps, may be projects for the future, and together with the other authors of this article, I enthusiastically welcome interested researchers to take up these questions.

Moreover, making sense of the terms on which modern and contemporary art is discussed in Southeast Asia's vernacular languages is a project that need not be limited to historical consideration of only terminologies alone. In a discussion of this project, during its earlier stages of development, May Adadol Ingawanij proposed that more research needs to be done into the aesthetic forms and literary textures which writing on art has taken in the region's languages.[22] As she insightfully suggested, art history, art criticism and other forms of textual commentary may be constituted in often radically different manners when they are written in Southeast Asian languages, rather than in English or other European languages.

Ingawanij's inspiring call for greater attention to the writerly inflections in vernacular texts on art echoes Ladislav Kesner's insight, that a writer's choice of language "often conditions the approaches and outcomes even more fundamentally than the limitations any given language necessarily imposes on the description or interpretation of art". Observing that English has become the lingua franca of art history as an international discipline, Kesner proposes that when writing in English, an author "at least implicitly intends to address the international community … and this may put different priorities into play than writing in one's native language, in which case one implicitly acknowledges that the readership will only consist of members of [a] given local art historical community".[23]

How has writing on art in Southeast Asia's vernacular languages differed from that written in English, French or other European languages? How have writers in and of Southeast Asia addressed differing publics—including,

in Kesner's terms, an "international community" and a "local art historical community"—by writing in the region's vernaculars, and thus using vernacular terminologies of the modern, the contemporary and art? It is beyond the scope of this article to answer such questions. This can be only a beginning. Yet the introductory accounts which follow might help to lay a basis for further inquiry along these lines in the future.

Sabapathy has argued that "the struggle to cultivate and, thereby, constitute ways that are conducive for talking and writing about art in the regions of the Asia-Pacific must revolve around language, including the language of the master discourse—however this is perceived and propagated".[24] It is hoped that this article may offer some modest contribution to this struggle to cultivate and constitute generative and embedded regional lexicons of art history and criticism.

In its preliminary attentions to terminologies in Southeast Asia's vernacular languages, perhaps this article may also be illuminating in some ways of the "master discourse", including of the very limits to that discourse's mastery.

BIOGRAPHY

Roger Nelson is an art historian and independent curator, and Postdoctoral Fellow, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He is co-founding co-editor of *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*. Nelson completed his PhD at the University of Melbourne, on "Cambodian arts" of the 20th and 21st centuries. He has contributed articles to scholarly journals, specialist art magazines, books and numerous exhibition catalogues. He has also curated exhibitions and other projects in Australia, Cambodia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Nelson's translation of Suon Sorin's 1961 Khmer nationalist novel, *A New Sun Rises Over the Old Land*, is forthcoming with NUS Press.

NOTES

1 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translation as Culture", *Parallax* 6, 1 (2000): 13. A similar notion has also been productively explored in several essays collected in Carol Gluck and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, eds., *Words in Motion: Toward a Global Lexicon* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009). This body of work extends geographically, culturally and linguistically that done by Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana Press, 1988 [1976]).

2 Suzana Milevska, "Is Balkan Art History Global?" in *Is Art History Global?* ed. James Elkins (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 218–9.

3 James Elkins, "Art History as a Global Discipline", in *Is Art History Global?* ed. James Elkins (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2007), p. 22.

4 Marian Pastor Roces, "Words", *Eyeline* 22–3 (1993): 46–7. Quoted in T.K. Sabapathy, "Developing Regionalist Perspectives in Southeast Asian Art Historiography (1996)", in *Contemporary Art in Asia: A Critical Reader*, ed. Benjamin Genocchio and Melissa Chiu (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), p. 48.

5 Sabapathy, "Developing Regionalist Perspectives", p. 48.

6 Ibid. John Clark characterises this assumption as "Modern^{a} ≠ Modern^{b} ≠ Modern^{c}" and suggests that it rests on "a set of values" commonly held by "fundamentalists or essentialists". Clark, *Asian Modernities: Chinese and Thai Art Compared* (Sydney: Power Publications, 2010), p. 28.

7 Sabapathy, "Developing Regionalist Perspectives", p. 51.

8 T.K. Sabapathy, "Introduction", in *Semsar Siahaan: Art, Liberation: An Exhibition of Works from 1977–2004*, ed. T.K. Sabapathy, exh. cat. (Singapore: Gajah Gallery, 2017), p. 9.

9 Nora A. Taylor, "Art without History?: Southeast Asian Artists and their Communities in the Face of Geography", *Art Journal* 70, 2 (2011): 7.

10 Spivak, "Translation as Culture", p. 23.

11 Rod Paras-Perez, "South-East Asian Sense and Sensibility", *Art and AsiaPacific* 1, 4 (October 1994): 67–8.

12 David Smyth, "Preface", in *The Canon in Southeast Asian Literatures: Literatures of Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam*, ed. David Smyth (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000), p. vii.

13 The workshop was hosted by the National Gallery Singapore, and convened by Patrick D. Flores and T.K. Sabapathy, who will co-edit a forthcoming anthology which will compile selected historical documents, in English translation.

14 See: *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia* 2, 2 (October 2018): 195–208.

15 Ashley Thompson, *Engendering the Buddhist State: Territory, Sovereignty and Sexual Difference in the Inventions of Angkor* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), p. 72.

16 N.J. Enfield, "Linguistic Diversity in Mainland Southeast Asia", in *Dynamics of Human Diversity: The Case of Mainland Southeast Asia* (Canberra: Pacific Linguistics, 2011), pp. 65–6. Enfield demonstrates that Khmer and Vietnamese are even more typologically similar than Polish and Russian, despite their being genealogically unrelated languages.

17 This is further elaborated in Tolentino's debates with Edades, reproduced in this volume.

18 Yin Ker, "A Short Story of Bagyi Aung Soe in Five Images", *Asia Art Archive: Ideas*, 1 Dec. 2013. https://aaa.org.hk/en/ideas/ideas/a-short-story-of-bagyi-aung-soe-in-five-images [accessed July 2018].

19 In a 2017 essay, Masahiro Ushiroshoji also notes that "with the introduction of the system of 'fine art' from the West, new terms were invented and added to the lexicons of local languages, gradually taking root in each area. In Chinese, this term was *meishu*; in Indonesian, *seni rupa*; in Malay, *seni lukis*; in Thai, *silpa*; in Vietnamese, *mỹ thuật*; in Tagalog, *sining* and so forth." In "The Birth of 'Fine Art' in Southeast Asia, 1900–1945", in *Charting Thoughts: Essays on Art in Southeast Asia*, ed. Low Sze Wee and Patrick D. Flores (Singapore: National Gallery Singapore, 2017), p. 130.

20 On *The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia*, see https://aaa.cdosea.org/#video/a and https://aaa.org.hk/en/ideas/ideas/ho-tzu-nyen-on-the-critical-dictionary-of-southeast-asia [accessed 20 Nov. 2017]. On *Daftar istilah seni rupa*, see http://hyphen.web.id/daftar-istilah-seni-rupa-2/ [accessed 20 Nov. 2017]. On the Tate's online glossary of art terms, see http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms [accessed 22 Nov. 2017]. For *In Terms of Performance*, see http://intermsofperformance.site/keywords/ [accessed 20 Nov. 2017].

21 Grace Samboh, "In Suspense: A Proposal to Alternate Perspectives", in *In Suspense*, exh. cat. (Jakarta: ROH Projects, 2017), n.p.

22 Ingawanij's comments were made in a semi-structured conversation I convened about this project, scheduled during On Attachments and Unknowns, a week of discussion with artists, curators and researchers, curated by May Adadol Ingawanij and Erin Gleeson, and held in Phnom Penh in Jan. 2017. I am grateful to Ingawanij, Gleeson and all the other participants in this discussion, especially Nathalie Johnston, Sidd Perez, Ruth Noack, Prumsodun Ok, Grace Samboh and David Teh, for their generous contributions which greatly assisted in the conceptualisation of this article.

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[23] Ladislav Kesner, "Is a Truly Global Art History Possible?" in *Is Art History Global?* ed. James Elkins (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2007), p. 84.

[24] Sabapathy, "Developing Regionalist Perspectives", p. 49.

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Vietnamese

Phoebe Scott and Nguyen Nhu Huy

The existing published literature on Vietnamese art has given little attention to questions of art terminology, and its translation and circulation. As a result, this text offers a preliminary foray into the subject, where some areas are still necessarily speculative and ambiguous. The approach has been to indicate how the usage of particular terms might relate to fundamental changes in the character of the Vietnamese art world in the 20th century—institutionally, ideologically and conceptually—and to link the Vietnamese terms for "art", "modern" and "contemporary" to wider features of the historical experience of Vietnamese modernity. Future linguistic research may reveal more precise details on the development of these terms in Vietnamese.

The Vietnamese language is considered part of the Mon-Khmer language family, but also contains a high proportion of loanwords from Chinese (borrowed over a period of 2,000 years), as well as loans from Tai languages, French and English.[1] At the beginning of the 20th century, thousands of new words entered Vietnamese in order to describe concepts associated with modernity. These words were frequently "Sino-neologisms", or "words created by Chinese and Japanese utilising Chinese morphs to translate newly introduced western concepts and terms, and then brought into Vietnamese".[2] The enthusiasm that reformist Vietnamese intellectuals showed for modernising texts from China and Japan in the early 20th century was an important source of new terminology.[3] Shawn McHale has noted how, from the 1920s, Vietnamese public discourse was transformed by this new vocabulary, which included such Sino-neologisms as well as borrowings from other languages like French and Russian.[4] This was also the period in which there was widespread change in the Vietnamese writing system, due to the popularisation of *quốc ngữ*, the romanisation of

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Vietnamese written language. Prior to this, Vietnamese was written by means of characters (from Chinese, *chữ Hán*, or in a vernacular script, *chữ Nôm*). While the *quốc ngữ* script had been created in the 17th century, it did not come into widespread use until the early decades of the 20th century.[5] Initially a tool of the colonial education system, *quốc ngữ* became popularised within Vietnamese modernising movements, as it was seen as a means of disseminating modern learning, and distancing intellectuals from the pre-existing education system of the mandarinate.[6]

The terms currently used to mean "art" in Vietnamese appear to date from this early 20th-century period of widespread borrowing and transformation. There are two Vietnamese translations of the term "art". The term *nghệ thuật* refers to art in a more generic sense, and includes a wide field of production. The term *mỹ thuật* corresponds more closely to the English term "fine art". It is analogous to the Chinese term *měishù* 美術, which was itself derived from a Japanese neologism *bijutsu*, used to translate the French term *beaux-arts*.[7] Like *měishù* and *beaux-arts*, *mỹ thuật* also has a connotation of beauty, as the word *mỹ* means "beautiful", and also appears in terms like *thẩm mỹ* ("aesthetics" or "taste") or *mỹ học* ("aesthetics"). On the other hand, *nghệ* suggests more of the idea of a skill or technique, and *nghệ thuật* is the equivalent to the Chinese term *yìshù* 藝術. The suffix *thuật* also implies an idea of a method or technology. Despite these differences in association, the terms *nghệ thuật* and *mỹ thuật* are today used quite interchangeably in Vietnamese, although contemporary artists tend to use *nghệ thuật*, as it can refer to a broader field of disciplinary practice, and to refer to themselves as *nghệ sĩ* ("artist"). That professional designation, *nghệ sĩ*, can accommodate artists working in a variety of media, including performance as well as visual arts.

Based on the current state of research, it appears that the terms like *nghệ thuật* ("art"), *nghệ sĩ* ("artist") and *mỹ thuật* ("fine art") did not appear in dictionaries or come into usage until around the 1920s.[8] An interesting 19th-century example can be found in the dictionary of the Vietnamese scholar, translator and linguist Petrus Trương Vĩnh Ký (1837–98). Ký's 1878 French-Vietnamese (in *quốc ngữ*) dictionary translates "art" as *nghề* ("profession" or "occupation") or *tài* ("talent" or "skill"). He also distinguishes between *beaux-arts*, which is defined as "*nghề khéo*", or a "skilled occupation", with examples like painting, sculpting or music, and *arts liberaux*, which he defines as "*những nghề thuộc trí*", or "occupations of the intellect", such as poetry.[9] He translates both *artisan* and *artiste* as *thợ* ("artisan" or "worker").[10] This suggests that even though the French term *beaux-arts* was already in circulation, the idea of "art" did not yet have strong intellectual and aesthetic connotations in its Vietnamese translation. Generally speaking, precolonial Vietnam did not have a

socio-professional role equivalent to the concept of the "artist", in the western, Romantic sense of the creative individual. There was, however, a professional class of artisans who produced images (including prints and paintings) decorative and luxury objects, or religious sculpture. At the Nguyễn-dynasty court (1802–1945), for example, artisans were organised into handicraft units under the direction of the Ministry of Public Works, which served the needs of the court. This included a painter's unit (*họa tượng cục*).[11]

From the turn of the 20th century, the French colonial administration began to open art schools in Vietnam (then part of French Indo-China). Many of these were professional training for artisans, some of which built on existing local specialisations, such as ceramics or lacquer.[12] These earlier schools were distinct from the École des beaux-arts de l'Indochine (Indochina School of Fine Arts, or *Trường mỹ thuật Đông Dương* in Vietnamese), which opened in 1925 in Hanoi under the directorship of the French artist Victor Tardieu (1870–1937). This school—which operated on a westernised academic curriculum in fine arts—disseminated new ideas about the professional status of the artist. Vietnamese artists became strongly invested in this discourse, and reacted in protest when a later director tried to reorganise the school to concentrate more on artisanal products.[13] In a petition he wrote about the issue, painter Nguyễn Đỗ Cung noted the distinction between "artists" (which he referred to as *nhà nghệ sĩ* or *hoạ sĩ*), as opposed to "artisans" or "craftspeople" (for which he used the terms *thợ mỹ thuật* or *thợ mỹ nghệ*, no longer in current usage).[14] These professional terms mirrored a status distinction between "art" and "craft" or "artisanry". This distinction was not only a western import: historically, in Vietnam, an idealised sense of a Confucian social structure also recognised four hierarchically distinct classes, in descending order: scholars (*sĩ*), peasants (*nông*), artisans (*công*) and merchants (*thương*).[15] It is telling that the words for artists—*nghệ sĩ* and *hoạ sĩ*—contain the suffix *sĩ*, which traditionally was used for the scholar class or degree holders. While these social distinctions would have been apparent to the generation of colonial-period Vietnamese artists, they do not maintain the same significance today.

The École des beaux-arts introduced new ways of approaching image-making, such as painting in oil, and using Vietnamese lacquer or silk as painting materials. The subject-matter of art often reflected the changing nature of urban Vietnamese life, especially in the images of modern women. The changes in art were paralleled by wide-ranging developments in literature and poetry, where writers rejected traditional forms and structures. The rise of a Vietnamese-language press in this period also ushered in a stringent social critique of Vietnamese traditions, as well as western mores. These changes have been theorised as modernity within the Vietnamese context.[16] Today, art from this

period until approximately the 1980s is commonly referred to as modern art (*mỹ thuật hiện đại*). In current usage, the term "modern" is translated as *hiện đại*, which has the connotations of referring to the present era or generation. In the 1920s–40s, while the term *hiện đại* was sometimes used in relation to art, the word "modern" was also implied by other terms, such as the Vietnamese term *mới* and the Sino-Vietnamese word *tân*, meaning "new".[17]

These terms continued to be used following the 1945 revolution. This was despite the fact that, in the north, the function of art and artists changed radically to fit the new ideological agenda. Artists—now working almost exclusively within the stylistic realm of socialist realism—were now organised into propaganda units or other governmental teams, and drew their salaries from the state rather than private sales.[18] While new terminologies and phrases did emerge to capture the evolving ideological environment, the terms for "art" and "artists" seem to have remained consistent with the previous period. The northern situation is symbolised well by the letter written by Hồ Chí Minh to the painting exhibition of 1951, where he instructed artists that:

> Văn hóa nghệ thuật cũng là một *mặt trận*.
> Anh em là chiến sĩ trên mặt trận ấy.
> [Culture and art is also a *front*.
> You are soldiers on that front.][19]

The distinction between modern and contemporary art in Vietnam emerged not only as a result of conceptual shifts relating to the function and purpose of art, but critically, also because of changes in the infrastructure, institutions and circulation of art. From the early 1980s, there was a loosening of the stylistic parameters associated with socialist realism, as artists began to take a more expressive and formally experimental approach to their work, even within conservative and government-sponsored art spaces and organisations.[20] These changes anticipated the official government policy change of *Đổi Mới* ("new change", commonly translated as "renovation"), in which aspects of the market economy were introduced into Vietnam. In the arts, the introduction of a private market, with new art spaces and commercial galleries, fundamentally changed artists' working conditions, as did greater opportunities for exchange with artists outside Vietnam. Art critic Nguyễn Quân noted that this period was characterised by an exploration of individual expression, as well as a flowering of interest in previously proscribed modernist styles.[21] Similarly, in Ho Chi Minh City, an interest in abstraction marked the return of a mode of repressed modernist practice previously associated with that city.[22] While stylistically these practices might appear as a kind of late modernism, in the Vietnamese

context they are markers of a profound underlying shift in the art world that can be understood as the beginnings of the contemporary. Nguyễn Quân characterises this as the "first generation of *Đổi Mới*".[23]

However, it was only at the end of the 1990s, that Nguyễn Quân suggests that a terminological change took place. He refers to this younger generation as *nghệ sĩ thị giác* ("visual artist") rather than, for example, as *họa sĩ* ("painter", sometimes used also as a more general term for "artist"), perhaps suggesting the widening ambit of their modes of practice.[24] He also associates this generation with new independent art spaces in Vietnam, with experimental practices and media, and with greater international exchange and awareness.[25] A similar paradigm shift to that implied by Nguyễn Quân's use of *nghệ sĩ thị giác* is also suggested by the growth of the term *đương đại*, meaning "contemporary". This term became widely used for art in the 2000s, reflecting changes in the materials, practices and concepts of art in this period. The rise of new media in art in Vietnam, such as installation, video and performance, reflected a break from the classical, fine-arts media such as painting and sculpture and the conservative curricula of the fine art academies, and these new tendencies were described as *nghệ thuật đương đại* ("contemporary art").

This term is, however, subject to misunderstandings and slippages in popular usage. The phrase *mỹ thuật đương đại* ("contemporary fine art"), for example, is sometimes used, even though much of the distinction between *đương đại* ("contemporary") and *hiện đại* ("modern") in art relies on the rejection of precisely the kind of "fine arts" model implied by the term *mỹ thuật*. In popular usage, *nghệ thuật đương đại* ("contemporary art") and *nghệ thuật hiện đại* ("modern art") are also often used interchangeably, which could be explained in terms of the meaning of the components. In the compound *đương đại*, *đương* means "currently" or "present" and *đại* means "age" or "time". It is interesting that to note that in the combination *hiện đại* to translate the term "modern", *hiện* also means "currently" or "present". Both the terms *nghệ thuật hiện đại* ("modern art") and *nghệ thuật đương đại* ("contemporary art") refer to the same phenomenon: something new, something that is most recent. These slippages suggest a new kind of life in the language of such relatively recent terms, which are variously recombined and resituated as they become part of Vietnamese.

BIOGRAPHIES

Nguyen Nhu Huy, b. 1971, is an art critic, translator, poet and independent curator. Huy was co-editor and one of the authors of *Essays on Modern and Contemporary Vietnamese Art*, published by Singapore Art Museum in 2009. Huy was one of the authors (Vietnamese section) of *Video, an Art, a History 1965–2010: A Selection from the Centre Pompidou and Singapore Art Museum*, a catalogue accompanying an exhibition of the same title, which brings together studies on video art from Western Europe, the Americas and East Asia. Nguyen Nhu Huy was co-curator of Singapore Biennale 2013, the curator of Brand New Art Project 2015 (initiated by Bangkok Creative University), and co-curator of Kuandu Biennale 2016. Huy is founder and artistic director of the interdisciplinary and trans-Asian art and culture project Asian Invisible Station, which was co-organised and co-curated by ZeroStation and Asia Center, Japan Foundation (2016–18). Since 2010, Huy is founder and director of ZeroStation (www.zerostationvn.org)

Phoebe Scott is a curator at the National Gallery Singapore. She recently curated the exhibition Radiant Material: A Dialogue in Vietnamese Lacquer Painting (2017) and co-curated Reframing Modernism: Painting from Southeast Asia, Europe and Beyond (2016), in collaboration with the Centre Pompidou. Prior to joining the Gallery, Phoebe completed her PhD on the subject of modern Vietnamese art at the University of Sydney. She is an adjunct lecturer in art history at the National University of Singapore.

NOTES

This text refers to Hanyu Pinyin system for Romanisation of Chinese words in English. All translations are by the authors, unless otherwise noted.

1 Mark J. Alves, "Loanwords in Vietnamese", in *Loanwords in the World's Languages: A Comparative Handbook*, ed. Martin Haspelmath and Uri Tadmor (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2009), pp. 617–27; K.W. Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 4–6, 19.

2 Alves, "Loanwords", p. 624.

3 On the influence of Chinese and Japanese modernising movements on Vietnamese intellectuals, see Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1992) and David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism 1885–1925* (Berkeley, CA, Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 1971).

4 Shawn Frederick McHale, *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), pp. 11, 32. McHale notes terms like "public", "politics", "society" and "doctrine" were all borrowed from Chinese (using translations of western concepts into Japanese) at this time.

5 Tai, *Radicalism*, p. 22; Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese*, pp. 287–8, 503, 521.

6 Tai, *Radicalism*, pp. 22–3, Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese*, pp. 466–7, 488–9; Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism*, pp. 164–84, 214–5.

7 The Japanese-language term *bijutsu* was originally coined in the 1872, to describe the Japanese exhibit at the Vienna Exposition of 1873. However, it only attained a meaning closer to the western term in the 1880s; see Michele Marra, *Modern Japanese Aesthetics: A Reader* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), pp. 17, 70n16. It was later translated into Chinese in the May Fourth era; see Aida Yuen Wong, *Parting the Mists: Discovering Japan and the Rise of National-Style Painting in Modern China* (Honolulu, HI: Association for Asian Studies and University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), pp. 35–6, 136n4.

8 The authors would like to thank researchers Nguyễn Tuấn Cường and Trần Trọng Dương from the Institute of Han-Nom Studies, Hanoi, Vietnam for providing this information from their own research.

9 P.J.B. Trương Vĩnh Ký, *Dictionnaire français-annamite* [French-Vietnamese Dictionary] (Saigon: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1878), p. 102. Note that "*annamite*" was the French colonial-period term connoting what is now Vietnamese. Petrus Trương Vĩnh Ký was a Vietnamese Christian, who studied at mission schools in Southeast Asia, and later travelled to France. He was an early advocate of *quốc ngữ*, in which he wrote and published extensively, see Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese*, p. 466.

10 Trương Vĩnh Ký, *Dictionnaire*, pp. 102–3.

[11] On the products of the Nguyễn-dynasty handicrafts units, see Kerry Nguyễn-Long, *Arts of Vietnam: 1009–1945* (Hanoi: Thế Giới publishers, 2013), pp. 186–200.

[12] For a survey of the different art schools in French Indo-China, see Nadine André-Pallois, *L'Indochine: un lieu d'échange culturel? Les peintres français et indochinois, fin XIXe-XX siècle* [Indochina: A Site of Cultural Exchange? French and Indochinese Painters, end 19th–20th centuries] (Paris: Presses de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1997), pp. 209–36.

[13] See the letter of protest written by selected Vietnamese artists of the period, Nguyễn Đỗ Cung, "Những sự cải cách của Trường mỹ thuật Đông Dương" [Reforms of the Indochina School of Fine Arts], *Ngày Nay* 144 (1939): 9.

[14] Cung, "Reforms". In today's terminology, "artisan" is typically translated as *nghệ nhân* and "craftsperson" as *thợ thủ công*. Nguyễn Đỗ Cung's use of different terminology perhaps suggests that vocabularies to describe these distinctions were still emerging in this period.

[15] Alexander Barton Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of Vietnamese and Chinese Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 30. Woodside notes that this Confucian ideal applied imperfectly to Vietnamese society in practice.

[16] For a detailed analysis of these social changes as a form of modernity, see Nguyễn Văn Ký, *La société vietnamienne face à la modernité: Le Tonkin de la fin du XIXe siècle à la seconde guerre mondiale* [Vietnamese Society Facing Modernity: Tonkin from the End of the 19th Century to the Second World War] (Paris, L'Harmattan, 1995).

[17] Nguyễn Văn Ký, *La société vietnamienne*, pp. 105–6.

[18] On the transformations in art systems during this period, see Nora A. Taylor, "Chapter 3: National Heroes and Artistic Heroes: Artists under the Revolution", in *Painters in Hanoi: An Ethnography of Vietnamese Art*, 2nd ed. (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), pp. 42–62.

[19] Hồ Chí Minh, "Thư Hồ Chủ Tịch gửi Triển lãm hội họa 1951" [Letter of President Hồ to the Painting Exhibition of 1951], *Văn nghệ* 35 (Apr. 1952): 3.

[20] Taylor, *Painters in Hanoi*, pp. 77–93.

[21] Nguyễn Quân, *Mỹ thuật Việt Nam thế kỷ 20* [Vietnamese Art in the 20th Century] (Hanoi: Nhà xuất bản Tri thức, 2010), pp. 126–7.

[22] Pamela Nguyen Corey, "The Artist in the City: Contemporary Art as Urban Intervention in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and Phnom Penh, Cambodia", PhD dissertation (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 2015), pp. 35–60.

[23] Nguyễn Quân, *Mỹ thuật Việt Nam thế kỷ 20*, p. 130.

[24] Nguyễn Quân, *Mỹ thuật Việt Nam thế kỷ 20*, p. 130. The authors would like to thank Pamela Nguyen Corey for drawing our attention to this reference.

[25] Ibid., pp. 114–5.

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Thai: Keeping Up with the Times and the West

Thanavi Chotpradit

Understanding what are modern and contemporary art in Thailand, and how to define them, have long been quests in Thai art history. The trajectory of modernism in Thai art is a result of a transcultural process in which ideas and practices of western art have been transformed, localised and hybridised in several phases of Siamese/Thai modernisation.[1] The complications concerning the meaning and the usage of terms such as *samai mai* (สมัยใหม่, "modern") and *ruam samai* (ร่วมสมัย, "contemporary") in relation to *sinlapa* (ศิลปะ, "art") that have manifested throughout the past two centuries ran parallel with the adaptation of western art styles in the pursuit of being *siwilai* (ศิวิไลซ์), a Thai transliteration of the English word "civilised", and *than samai* (ทันสมัย), meaning to "keep up with the times".

Unlike in many of its neighbouring countries, the formation of modernity and modernism in Thailand was initiated by the royal elites. The influx of western cultures through diplomats, missionaries, merchants as well as seafarers created the conditions for cultural transfer between the Siamese and the Europeans, especially among the royal elites and the high-ranking court officials. King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V, r. 1868–1910), known as the "moderniser", had a strong desire to make the country as "civilised" (*siwilai*) as Europe. As a result, modernisation was equivalent to westernisation. The term *siwilai* has been widely used and discussed since the middle of the 19th century. It refers to refined manners and etiquette, as well as development and progress. *Siwilai* relates to another two terms, *charoen* (เจริญ, "progress" or "prosperity") and *than samai* ("keeping up with the times"), as these terms also indicate

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"the sense of transformation into the new age, or modernity, as opposed to the traditional, the ancient, or the bygone era".[2]

In the realm of arts, modernisation marked a paradigm shift in visual representation. The rise of a realistic style in portraiture imagery was part of the establishment of the Siamese modernity. Before sustained contact with the West, producing an image of a living person was forbidden due to spiritual and supernatural beliefs; people feared having a portrait made because they thought it might take their lives away from them, or that someone could harm them by using "black magic" with their portraits. The convention changed with the creation of realistic royal portraits. Photographs, paintings, and statues of European kings and their royal families were sent as tributes to the Siamese court. The Siamese elites adopted this tradition as a diplomatic strategy for strengthening the relationship with western monarchies and as a sign of the modern nation. This policy was intended to present Siam as an equal counterpart in international relationships, and its king as a head of state comparable to European monarchs. The state of modernisation can be seen in the court's acceptance of the practice of taking photographs of the reigning monarch, as well as having the king's portraits painted and sculptures produced. Here, to be *siwilai* ("civilised") is to be as *samai mai* ("modern") and *than samai* ("keeping up with the times") as the European.

Nevertheless, modernity in the art of this period—the late 19th and early 20th centuries—was a reverse of European modern art, which was then turning towards abstraction. As King Chulalongkorn preferred classical realism, he expressed his distaste for (European) modern art in a letter that he sent from Europe during his second voyage in 1907 to his daughter Princess Nibhanabhatala; the paintings that he described as *pen yang modeon* (เปนอย่างโมเดอน, "being modern") were incomprehensible.[3] The king used the transliterations *modeon* (โมเดอน) for "modern" and *at* (อาต) for "art".

The second stylistic phase of modernisation in Siamese/Thai art took place decades later, after the People's Party's Revolution in 1932. The chief impact of the 1932 Revolution on the development of modern art was the shift of art patronage from the royal court to the commoners' government. Although realism remained the official artistic style, the art of the revolutionary regime (1932–47) highlighted the strong, muscular body of the commoner as a marker of the new cultural paradigm. Heroic realism in the art of the People's Party centred on the working class and its capabilities as a working body. This new ideal body was perceived as an object contributing towards the goal of modernity, civilisation and a powerful new nation.

Modern art education was established during this period. In Bangkok, Rongrian Pranit Sinlapakam (now Silpakorn University) was founded in 1934

as an institution that generated systematic art education. Silpa Bhirasri (born Corrado Feroci, 1892–1962), an Italian sculptor who had been employed by the state since the period of King Vajiravudh (King Rama VI, r. 1910–25), was the first head of the art school as well as an important art consultant to the People’s Party government. Under his supervision, the school curriculum followed that of the Italian academy, L’Accademia di Belle Arti di Firenze, where Feroci had studied and taught prior to his arrival in Siam.

In the early 1940s, Bhirasri collaborated with Phraya Anuman Ratchathon (Yong Sathiankoset), the then Director General of the Fine Arts Department, to translate art terms and concepts from western art and art history into Thai. *An Aid to Arts: An English-Siamese Glossary* was first published as a series of glossaries in *Silpakorn* journal between 1942 and 1944. Phraya Anuman Ratchathon later compiled these, and published them together under the title *Sinlapasongkhro (Photchananukrom Sap Sinlapa Tawan Tok)* [An Aid to Arts (Dictionary of Western Art Vocabularies)], when he was serving as President of the Royal Society (*Ratchabanditsabha*) in 1957.[4] The dictionary aimed to foster understanding of art for art students as well as the general public. Starting with A, “Art” (*sinlapa*), “Artisan” (*chang*) and “Artist” (*sinlapin*) are all explained at length with examples and related terms: *sinlapa* means the work of a human, created by hand with careful thought. It is categorised into “fine arts”, “applied art”, “industrial art”, “commercial art” and “decorative art”. Phraya Anuman Ratchathon also discussed art vocabularies and word definitions with Prince Narisara Nuvadtivongs, a court painter and an architect during the reigns of King Rama V (1868–1910) and King Rama VI (1910–25). For Phraya Anuman Ratchathon and Prince Narisara Nuvadtivons, *sinlapa* refers to an object of craft and skill, which belongs to the realm of the beautiful as well as the realm of spiritual and emotional emanation. There are five branches of “fine art” or *wichitsinlapa*: architecture, sculpture, painting, music and literature (with the last two categories also including dance).

Silpa Bhirasri also wrote numerous articles on art between 1935 and 1963.[5] His writings and their Thai translations display an ambiguity in distinguishing between the “modern” or *samai mai* and the “contemporary” or *ruam samai* in Thai art. The article “Modern Sculpture and Painting in Siam” (1938) appears in Thai as *Pratimakam Lae Chittrakam Khong Siam Nai Yuk Putchuban* [Sculpture and Painting in the Contemporary Siam], while another article titled “Contemporary Thai Art”, which was published in *Modern Art of Asia: New Movement and Old Tradition* (edited by Japan Cultural Forum in 1961), was translated as *Sinlapa Ruam Samai Nai Prathet Thai* (ศิลปะร่วมสมัยในประเทศไทย, “Contemporary Art in Thailand”).

Like most Thais, Bhirasri and his translators seem to have used the terms *samai mai* ("modern") and *ruam samai* ("contemporary") interchangeably, as both terms imply a sense of contemporaneity (*khwam pen putchuban*, ความเป็นปัจจุบัน) as well as a sense of modernity as opposed to the traditional or the premodern. Nevertheless, Bhirasri once used another set of terms, *loe samai* (เลอสมัย) and *loei samai* (เลยสมัย), both meaning "ahead of the times", when referring to various modern art movements in Europe in an article written in 1950.[6] This article was written following his voyage to Europe in 1949, when he observed that abstraction was popularly practiced. Bhirasri warned Thai artists not to "go astray" and follow the European trends.

While the terms *loe samai* and *loei samai* ("ahead of the times") faded away, Bhirasri's disapproval of European abstraction remained influential until around the time of his death in 1962. In the early 1960s, Thai artists—many of whom were returning from education in Europe—began to experiment with semi-abstraction and abstraction. The foundation of the Department of Graphic Arts and a new class called "Creative Painting" at Silpakorn University in 1966 contributed greatly to the development of abstract art in the country.[7] The third phase of modernisation in Thai art thus occurred in the 1960s, when the local stylistic practice finally aligned with that of European modern art, albeit a few decades delayed.

While the usage of the terms *samai mai* ("modern") and *ruam samai* ("contemporary") in art academia has shifted since Bhirasri's time of writing, they remain interchangeable for the general public: in Thai, "modern" connotes both newness and contemporaneity. In the general understanding, both during Bhirasri's time and today, the terms *sinlapa samai mai* ("modern art") and *sinlapa ruam samai* ("contemporary art") are interchangeable as both terms are loosely used to refer to the art of the present day, and recent past. In art academia, the debates on the origin, definition and end of modern art in Thailand, as well as the beginning and definition of contemporary Thai art, have not yet been settled. Thai art historian and curator Somporn Rodboon uses the term *sinlapa ruam samai* ("contemporary art") for Thai art practices from the 1980s onwards, while another Thai art historian and curator Apinan Poshyananda has suggested the term *sinlapa samai mai yuk lang* (ศิลปะสมัยใหม่ยุคหลัง) or "postmodern art" (*yuk lang* means "post") for arts that display a revival of cultural traditions, multiculturalism, urbanisation and alienation.[8] The term *sinlapa samai mai yuk lang* is not widely used, having appeared only in Apinan's influential book *Modern Art in Thailand. Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (1992). Another term for "postmodern art", *sinlapa lung samai mai* (ศิลปะหลังสมัยใหม่), has been used by other scholars such as Sutee Kunavichayanont. In Kunavichayanont's book *Jak Siam Kao Su Thai Mai: Wa Duai Khwam*

Phlik Phan Khong Sinlapa Jak Prapheni Su Samai Mai Lae Ruam Samai [From the Old Siam to the New Thai: Changes in Thai Arts from Traditional to Modern and Contemporary] (2002), the term *sinlapa lung samai mai* ("postmodern art") has the same meaning as *sinlapa ruam samai* ("contemporary art").

By the early 21st century, the term *sinlapa ruam samai* ("contemporary art") replaced *sinlapa samai mai* ("modern art"), as well as *sinlapa samai mai yuk lung* and *sinlapa lung samai mai* ("postmodern art"). The establishment of the Office of Contemporary Art and Culture (OCAC) in the Ministry of Culture in 2002 suggests a change in terminology at the official level.[9] However, it should not be simply concluded that the emergence of the OCAC precipitated the shift in terminology and usage.

While it may not be possible to trace the precise period of time or the specific agents of this terminology change, one could say that in present-day Thailand, the use of the term *sinlapa ruam samai* or "contemporary art" has finally indicated a state of being *siwilai* ("civilised") and *than samai* ("keeping up with the times") with the arts of elsewhere.

BIOGRAPHY

Thanavi Chotpradit is a lecturer in modern and contemporary Thai art history in the Department of Art History, Faculty of Archaeology, Silpakorn University, Bangkok, Thailand. She is a member of the editorial collective of *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art*. She received her PhD in art history from Birkbeck, University of London, under a Royal Thai Government Scholarship. Her areas of interest include modern and Thai contemporary art in relation to memory studies, war commemoration and Thai politics.

NOTES

1 This text refers to the "General System of Phonetic Transcription of Thai Characters into Roman" devised by the Royal Society, Bangkok, in 1999 for romanisation of Thai words in English. In the case of a name which is widely known or which can be checked, the owner's transcription has been adhered to. All translations are by the author, unless otherwise noted. The author refers to Thai people by their first names as in Thai convention.

Siam was officially renamed as Thailand in 1939.

2 Thongchai Winichakul, "The Quest for 'Siwilai': A Geographical Discourse of Civilizational Thinking in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Siam", *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59, 3 (Aug. 2000): 531.

3 The letters of King Chulalongkorn to Princesss Nibhanabhatala were later compiled and published under the title *Klai Ban* (known in English as *Far From Home*). See King Chulalongkorn, *Phraratchaniphon Ruang Klai Ban* [Far From Home], Vol. 1–2 (Phra Nakhon: Kurusapha, 1954), p. 298.

4 This dictionary publication was part of a broader translation project initiated by then Prime Minister Field Marshal Plaek Pibunsongkhram, also known in English as Phibun, who ruled from 1938 to 1944 and from 1948 to 1957.

5 Many of the more influential of Bhirasri's texts have been published in translation in one anthology, and it is to this edition that this essay refers. See: Silpa Bhirasri, *Bot Khwam, Kho Khian Lae Ngan Sinlapakam Khong Satsatra Chan Silpa Bhirasri* [A Collection of Articles, Writings and Artworks of Professor Silpa Bhirasri], trans. Phraya Anumanrajadhon, Mom Chao Subhadradis Diskul and Khien Yimsiri (Bangkok: Art Centre Silpakorn University, 2002).

6 Silpa Bhirasri, '*Samruat Wichan Sinlapa Putchuban Nai Yurop Kiao Nueng Kap Sinlapa Thai*' [A Survey and Criticism of Contemporary European Art in relation to Thai Art], in *Bot Khwam, Kho Khian Lae Ngan Sinlapakam Khong Satsatra Chan Silpa Bhirasri* [A Collection of Articles, Writings and Artworks of Professor Silpa Bhirasri], trans. Phraya Anumanrajadhon, Mom Chao Subhadradis Diskul and Khien Yimsiri (Bangkok: Art Centre Silpakorn University, 2002), pp. 224–29. The original English manuscript of this text has not been found.

7 See further information in Sutee Kunavichayanont, *Jak Siam Kao Su Thai Mai: Wa Duai Khwam Phlik Phan Khong Sinlapa Jak Prapheni Su Samai Mai Lae Ruam Samai* [From the Old Siam to the New Thai: Changes in Thai Arts from Traditional to Modern and Contemporary] (Bangkok: Ban Hua Lam, 2002), pp. 69–73.

8 There has not been a serious debate on the usage of these differing Thai terms for "postmodern art".

9 The OCAC is responsible for developing and promoting Thai contemporary art and culture which includes visual art, performing art, music, literature, architecture, interior design, graphic design, film and fashion design.

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Tagalog/Filipino

J Pilapil Jacobo and Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez

This paired account on the stirrings of Philippine modernism and a number of the Tagalog/Filipino lexical placeholders that enabled its encoding and circulation articulates an explicit belief in interdisciplinary framing. In juxtaposing philology and art history, the author-researchers also hope to possibly embed the modest study in other fields such as cultural studies, philosophy and literature. The disciplinal crossing seems logically embodied in the famed artist-academic-translator-librettist-spiritist and Philippine National Artist for sculpture, Guillermo Tolentino (1890–1976), and it is through a quick scan through his individual creative journey that we pose a plausible typicality in the working through of tradition and change that confronted his pre-World War II generation of Filipino artists.

Shifting senses of art in the Philippines are intimated in tensions transcribed in lexicons particularly between the late 19th and early 20th centuries.[1] The *Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala* [The Vocabulary of the Tagalog Language] (1860) cites a curious meaning for *sining*, "*pensar*", with its infinitive form *pagsiningsiningin*, "to think".[2] While the *UP Diksyonaryong Filipino* (2010) preserves this sense, the lexicon privileges contemporary notions of "*sining*" as "art": as object, skill, method and mode of production.[3] Lexicographers Juan de Noceda and Pedro de Sanlucar refer the reader to *isip* ("thought") as a synonym.[4] In the same lexicon, *pensar* indexes *isip* further with *panimdim* ("thinking"), *anacala* ("calculation"), *alaala* ("remembrance"), *angang* ("introspection"), *andam* ("a method of thought to aid memory"), *dilidili* ("doubt") and *haca*[5] ("imagination").

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In this moment of the history of the Tagalog language, the word *sining*, which we perceive to be the signifier for "art" in the modern/contemporary scene, a sense that was perhaps only consolidated in the *A National Language-English Vocabulary*,[6] instead summons a divergent set of concepts as far as late Spanish imperial/early Philippine modern culture is concerned.

This early emphasis on *sining* as "thought" is instructive, nonetheless, as it not only determines cognition/sentience as a premise in understanding Philippine art in its incipient phase; *sining* as "thought" posits conceptuality itself as a genealogical node in the discursive formation[7] of *sining*, or "art", as we now perceive it to be in the present. Furthermore, the ambit of *sining* as a variously cognising feature of the human mind, with a range that can intuit, for example, the unfolding of an image or its idea, proposes *sining* as always already a site of creation and, if one wills, craftiness. The interiority (*loob*)[8] that such thoughtfulness entails, consolidates conceptual matter and assembles within it the modes of thinking from which all manner of materiality *sining*/art would be perceived in the Philippines.

In the same lexicon, *arte* is "*catiponan nang manga otos at panoto*",[9] an anthology of instructions and directions, usually a book of grammar that accompanies the vocabulary of a language written by *sacerdote*-scholars to assist future friar-curates in their project of converting townships of an ethnolinguistic group in the archipelago to the Catholic faith. *Arte*, in this sense, is the work of language that strives to discipline *sining*, without seeking to establish its disciplinarity, its field of practices, through the labours of thought, conceptuality being an inherent aspect of art-making.

The idea of thought as a productive force in Philippine art can be traced in the originary form of *likha*, the "*estatua*" (statue) sculpted from an element of earth worshipped as "*idolo*" (idol), according to Noceda and Sanlucar.[10] The sentence which exemplifies the entry transcends the denotation by demonstrating a moment of creation: *Linic-ha ang catao-an sa tubig*,[11] or "The body was created in water". Transfigured in its depths: conceived within, it emerges from the waves, from fluid to skin. *Pinagsiningan* ("Transformed through thought"), like a tropic isle that rises in mid-ocean. Similarly, *cat-ha* signifies composition (*componear*) and ideation (*idear*),[12] where truth can be unreliable (*cat-hang uica*/*falso testimonio*),[13] the authorship of a work can be located (*Sinong may cat-ha nitong tula?*/*quien composo*)[14] and the sociality of an institution can be traced (*Ponong cumatha*/*fundador*).[15] In Tagalog idiom, art is possible from this speculation, *likhang-isip*/*kathang-isip (*"created by thought"/ "crafted in the mind"). Fictive, and yet true: born and raised, from concept to matter, the thing fulfilling itself as an object in the world. The statue is not empty, it is auratic indeed, all because of vibrancy.[16]

Charles Nigg's *A Tagalog-English and English-Tagalog Dictionary* (1901) points to an epistemological break in this conceptual history. While "aesthetics" is attributed to *lasa* ("taste") and *lasap* ("enjoyment")[17], notions of the subject as discursively formed in colonial conventions of art surface; the "artful" and the "artless" are identified. The latter is described as *banayad*, *mababang loob*, *walang muang* and *walang wasto*,[18] and the former portrayed as *tuso* and *matalas*.[19] Here, art is indeed *sining* as thoughtfulness, but only when it pertains to intelligence; one without such predilection is judged as "meek", "lowly", "ignorant" and "errant", but another under its spell "cunning" and "sharp". With art establishing its disciplinarity at the turn of the 20th century, even the disciplined must be disciplined further in this regime; already knowing sublimity, consciousness and refinement, the "crafty" (*tuso*) and "incisive" (*matalas*) can only be dangerous and risky.

Philologist Pedro Serrano Laktaw traverses *sining* as "thought", *arte* as "book" and art as "subjectivity", through his two-part lexicon published in the Spanish and American colonial regimes.

In Laktaw's *Diccionario Tagalog-Hispano* (1914), *sining* is still esconced as *reflexion* (reflection) and *meditacion* (meditative thought), and its synonymy with *isip* is supplemented with *bulaybulay* (contemplation), *dilidili* (rumination) and *gunamgunam* (introspection).[20]

The *Diccionario Hispano-Tagalog*'s (1889) entry on *arte*, on the other hand, is *katipunan ng mga aral at regla nang magaling na paggawa nang anoman*[21] ("anthology of rules on the efficient work of anything"); the book disciplines to refine its instructee according to an ideal of "ability" (*galing*), the training one derives from it premised on *lalang*, "the act of creation", *ingat*, "a sense of tactfulness" and *katalasan*, the attribute of "sharpness" that is finally related to the art of war.[22]

The second sense of *arte* is linked with *nobles artes o bellas artes*, the "fine arts", as it were, and cites *pagpipinta* ("painting") and *[p]ag-eeskultor* ("sculpture"); fields of forms are finally demarcated.[23] The last sense returns to Noceda and Sanlucar: *[y]aong ang lalong gamit ay ang pagiisip at talino*[24] ("that which employs the mind and intelligence").

With Rosendo Ignacio's *Diccionario Hispano-Tagalo* (1922), the disciplinarity of the book is revised through a consideration of refinement: *katipunan ng mga alituntunin sa pagpapabuti ng isang bagay* ("guide for the refinement of a thing"), with a postcolonial sense of "artistry" imminent: *kagalingan sa pagyari ng isang bagay* ("the talent to craft something") through "meticulousness": "*butingting*".[25] *Arte* is no longer about the method that determines the form of the object but the means by which the propensity to mediate the rule of making emerges, in order to create art itself. Here, *sining* as "thought" is by

turns cognised and embodied, the hands of the artist appear to break open the discourse of how art is transfigured by the vernacular where it is imagined to be bear the burden of a universal language.

What happens to "*sining*" when it turns modern, becomes contemporary?

In Tagalog/Filipino, the modern is *makabago*, an attitude that is predisposed toward the new. With a root in *bago*, it is the thing imbued with newness (*cosa nueva*) as well as the act of making something new (*renovar*).[26] It also refers to a chance to begin again (*hacer alguna cosa de nuevo*)[27], and an attempt at deploying something for the very first time (*estrenar*).[28]

This concept of the new in the *Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala* (1860) as something that precedes, indeed an instance of initiation, is premised on nature, as *bago* is also the first fruit that emerges from a plant (*primicias*).[29] As an adverb of time, *bago* announces a temporality that is present before all else (*antes*, *como sea que*) or the time that remains (*luego*, *despues*, *con todo eso*).[30]

When perceived as a person, the new nominates itself through the *bagongtauo*, a young lad (*mozo soltero*),[31] one who shall witness such emergence of time and becomes part of the passage.

The new finds its immediacy in *ngayon*, *ahora*,[32] which reverts to the modern as we know it—now. As it unfolds, the new is *kasalukuyan*; its root *salocoy* refers to *fuerza o rigor de tiempo*, the happenstance of time itself, that vital passage where the contemporary can be imagined to emerge.

According to Rosendo Ignacio, *modernismo* is the acute inclination towards things that are mutable (*hilig na malabis sa mga bagay na nababago*)[33]; and the *moderno* is that which is mutable, new and has yet to endure time (*nagbabago, bago, hindi pa naluluatan*).[34]

Emerging from *novedad* is the new, and is premised on newness itself (*kabaguhan*), the newly sprung (*bagong litaw*), the mutable event (*pangyayaring nababago*) and the news that covers it (*balita*), but most intriguing is the wonder (*pagtataka*) or astonishment (*panggigilalas*) towards things which remain invisible (*hindi pa nakikita*).[35] There remains something uncertain about the modern; this element is what makes its arrival thrilling.

One who has recently come to town can only be called *nuevo* (*kadarating sa isang bayan*).

The *contemporaneo* is one who is simultaneous (*kapanabay*) because of one being in time (*kapanahon*)[36], while *contemporizar* pertains to a desire to harmonise with the will of community (*makibagay sa kagustuhan ng kapuwa*) or to move with the passage of time (*makisunod sa lakad ng panahon*).[37]

Hence, we can intuit that the modern emerges, and whether one can cope with its arrival or not, it must fulfil its will to appear; the contemporary seeks

to be synchronous with such terms of becoming. Thought and object may converge, in time.

The coordinates presented by Pedro Serrano Laktaw are more diverse. For *bago*, he cites the figure of the neophyte/amateur, with *baguhan sa mundo* (*novicio en el mundo*), summoning an array of possibilities for the change that make the new happen in *pagbabago* (*cambio*, *variacion*, *variedad*, *mudanza*, *mutacion*, *modificacion*). For *metamorfosis*, change of all changes, there emerges a procedure of rectification (*pagpawi nang anomang mali*), which is related to a sense of reversal, and even destruction, in *enmienda* (*pagbago nang anomang yari na*. Repetiton is key in *panibago* (*otra vez*), a sense echoed in *volver* or *voltear* (*ulitin*). *Tornar* points to an entire shift in locus (*ibago nang lugal*), which is also in *transponer* (*ilipat*).[38]

Such novelty of the *bagongtawo* as a figure of the human partaking in the passage of time and onto the confluence of time with things themselves returns through *soltero* (young man), *joven* (youth), *mozo* (lad) and *celibe* (virgin), but the gender of one’s modernity is negated: *tila babayi at walang kabuluhan*[39] (“like a woman and without sense”). And yet this *bagongtawo* intimates a portrait of the Filipino artist as a young person!

Their intensity matches the *fuerza* and the “vigour” of time that can only be welcomed through *sagsag*, of running with time, rushing through its duress, and even raging against it, which delineates sheer contemporaneity with mere transit, *kasalukuyan*.

It is telling that almost 75 years after the Philippines formally cut the apron strings of its last colonial master, America, that we still find ourselves addressing residual lament about overstated art historical polemics and the caricaturist figuring of art’s agents. Post-nation discourse notwithstanding, there is no denying the long-standing postcolonial traumas that keep revisiting a fragile nation-state such as the Philippines.

One supreme irony that surfaces, for instance, is that the invoking of National Artist for Sculpture Guillermo Tolentino (1890–1976), the staunch classicist apologist that he was, in a text such as this dealing with the earliest stirrings of Philippine modernism, still churns up anxieties from the pre-war and World War II print debates in which he was a prominent purveyor. Born just six years short of the Philippine revolution, Tolentino makes for an interesting study of transition dynamics. Born while the Philippines was still in the empiric grip of the United States and witness to the building up of several post-independence republics, Tolentino may not have always had tacit knowledge

of where he stood in regard to the whirlwind strains of modernisms being foisted within the various spheres of socio-economic and cultural life in his country, but he was undeniably entangled in the wrestling about tradition and change, and certainly in the project of materially and figuratively shaping an idea of the Philippine. While not aspiring to any singularly framed account, this specific taking on of Tolentino again is instead posed as indicative of typical negotiations of such critically charged ideas, particularly given the contextual signifiers of Tolentino's practice cutting across the historical junctures during which he worked and lived.

His primary field, definitely sculpture more than painting, dramatically instances the shift from the votive-artisanal impulse behind the crafting of objects towards the cash economy-driven work taken on by what would now be called "creative labour".[40] Tolentino's emergence and internal and external navigating of the scapes within which artists would be defined beyond being merely paid makers, this arguable shift to a greater sense of authorship, along with a more obvious openness to genre as opposed to the solely sacred, signal such morphing of ideas operating within the bounds of the art world and art history.

But to backtrack and in the interest of supplying more context, it ought be stated that Tolentino's way into modernity was, at least initially, indeed through western antiquity.[41] Even as a student, Tolentino earned his keep in the making of *marmoleria*, in memoriam statuary, and this is where the visible shift from the precatory to the secular object (including casino facades!) would most dramatically surface. Yet despite his avowed classicism, one could argue that Tolentino's artist's sense of "not yet being a sculptor"[42] was tinged by the modernist yearning for a more evolved sense of self. Again, this was brimming up even as he devoted himself to turning out grave markers, and other funerary appurtenances honouring one saint after another.

This possibly *arriviste* compulsion would be tended to by Tolentino's own unflinching determination to abide by the worn adage "all roads lead to Rome". He doggedly made the pilgrimage to this haven of antiquity and classicism over an extended period of three years (1921–23), during which he arguably soaked up and made up his own history of practice amidst Rome's ruins and proffered immersive spatial experiences. Much has already been said about Tolentino's missing out on the vaunted modernist marker, The Armory Show, in the US when he was a struggling *pensionado* there (1919–21), but despite, or contrapuntal to, this was Tolentino's own self-paved road to nationalism. This would be marked off by a dialectical inclination to universal beauty, just as he was sympathetic to an avowedly patriotic spiritism manifested in his alliance with the Filipino Independent Church.[43] This propensity to wearing

his country on his sleeve even extended to the naming of his children with recognisably Filipino names: Liwanag, Lualhati, Dalisay, Soliman, Magligtas, Marikit, Isagani and, of course, this also took material form in the nationalist tropes Tolentino would embed in such works as the aborted Commonwealth arch (c. 1935–38),[44] the Bonifacio monument (1933) and, perhaps most famously, the University of the Philippines’s *Oblation* (1935).

Living through two world wars, Tolentino was caught in the Filipinisation drive championed by the American Governor-General Francis Burton Harrison who not only encouraged vernacular cultural production, but overtly worked for the replacement of American officials with Filipinos. Seen in this light, this asserting of self/nation almost simultaneously emerges in an even more aggressive modernising impulse among artists (both painters and sculptors) who would study and later become prominent after the generation of Tolentino. And so, while the elder sculptor’s preoccupation with human scale suggests a grounded, rather than ethereal perspective, he would also get caught in pondering such polarities, so to speak, between verisimilitude (what he asserted was a Filipino predilection to realism) and ideality anchored on classicism.

It is within Tolentino’s published debates[45] with another National Artist, Victorio Edades (1895–1985) that we find the most problematic association to modernity made in regard to Tolentino’s insistence on untarnished beauty, as perfection impermeable to time. In fact, he is still most broadly associated with a stream of classicism staunchly opposed to then emergent Philippine modernism, but even research and writing published as recently as the 1970s reveal Tolentino ought not be so singularly and one-dimensionally imagined. Tolentino, in fact, endorsed the posting of his debating adversary, that vaunted “Father of Philippine Modern Art” Edades as professor and eventual Dean of the College of Fine Arts and Architecture at the University of Santo Tomas. Similarly, Tolentino’s pupil, the modernist and also National Artist for Sculpture, Napoleon Abueva (1930–2018), would curry favour with the elder mentor-artist. And so, while the printed rhetoric may have been highly polemic between Edades and Tolentino, the social interactions and intimacy of the still small art world of that time appear to have mitigated against impermeable orthodoxies of thinking and practice.

Tolentino could be seen as navigating a shifting divide then, not just between a preference for the achingly lifelike and the always factless ideal in his own art but between the insistence on the past as anchor. As he was indeed an artist himself, hankering for degrees of flex in stylisation, specifically in the direction of rendering an imagined perfection as a means to truth, the resulting work was redolent with functionality rather than idealisation for its own sake.

Artist, critic and art historian Rod Paras-Perez (1934–2011) does, in fact, align Tolentino with the "genre generation", and it is this reference to genre or the everyday and banal as trope that may further underline the dormant modernity in the sculptor's oeuvre:

> It is within this context-–of synthesis and change, that Tolentino's assertion of being a modern day classicist attains meaning. For while he felt committed to the precepts of classicism, assimilating only too well the rhetoric of its forms, Tolentino nonetheless imbued such forms with a sense of immediacy which made them all the more alive. And while the imagery and structural force of his compositions dipped into the tradition of art, he was able to make his works speak with the specificity of a national identity.[46]

BIOGRAPHIES

J Pilapil Jacobo is Assistant Professor and Associate Chair of the Department of Filipino in the School of Humanities of the Ateneo de Manila University. She holds a PhD in Comparative Literature and MA in Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies from the State University of New York, Stony Brook, through a scholarship from the J. William Fulbright Foundation, and an A.B.-M.A. in Filipino Literature from the Ateneo de Manila University, where she teaches theory, criticism, popular culture and literary modernism in Filipino and English. She is a member of the Film Desk of the Young Critics Circle and a founding co-editor of *Queer Southeast Asia: A Transgressive Journal of Literary Art*. She has written on the 19th-century Tagalog novel, contemporary Filipino cinema, and tropology and tropicality, and publishes her poetry in Filipino, Bikol and English. At the University of the Philippines-Diliman, she is currently the Postdoctoral Researcher of the GlobalGRACE (Gender and Cultures of Equality) Philippine Project, funded by the Research Council of the United Kingdom, based at Goldsmiths College, and with partners in Bangladesh, South Africa, Mexico, and Brazil.

Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez teaches at the Department of Art Studies of the University of the Philippines. Her most recent writing includes "Southeast Asia in a Crawl Space: Tempering Curatorial Hubris", in *Southeast Asia Spaces of the Curatorial* (Singapore: NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore/Sternberg Press, 2017; and "Embodied Subjectivities: Accounts of Affect in Lani Maestro's Site-Specific Work", in *Ambitious Alignments: New Histories of Southeast Asian Art, 1945–1990* (Sydney and Singapore: Power Publications and National Gallery Singapore, 2018). She is a member of the editorial collective of *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia* and also edits *Pananaw, Philippine Journal of Visual Arts*.

NOTES

1 This reflection on art, its modernity and contemporaneity in the Philippines is indebted to critic and art historian Patrick D. Flores. See his "Other Worlds: The Native, the National, the Non-Objective", in *Archival Turn: Contemporaneity of the History of East Asia* (Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum and Spring Foundation, 2017), p. 24, but the primary sources of my meditation are his unpublished manuscripts "Image, Ornament, Art: A History of Creative Form" and "The Intimate Image". I would also like to thank the young scholar Ian Harvey A. Claros for his most valuable research assistance—J Pilapil Jacobo.

2 *Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala*, s.v. "sining".

3 *UP Diksyonaryong Filipino*, s.v. "sining".

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 *A National Language-English Vocabulary*, s.v. "sining".

7 See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, tr. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1972).

8 See Albert E. Alejo, S.J, *Tao pô! Tulóy! Isang Landas ng Pag-unawa sa Loob ng Tao* (Quezon City: Office of Research and Publications, Ateneo de Manila University, 1990). On the *loob* as a rubric to understanding reciprocity, see Vicente L. Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society Under Spanish Rule* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1988), pp. 122–35.

9 *Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala*, s.v."arte".

10 Ibid., s.v. "lic-ha".

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., s.v. "cat-ha".

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 See Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

17 *Tagalog-English and English-Tagalog Dictionary*, s.v. "aesthetics".

18 Ibid., s.v. "artless".

19 Ibid., s.v. "artful".

20 *Diccionario Tagalog-Hispano*, s.v. "sining".

21 *Diccionario Hispano-Tagalog*, s.v. "arte".

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 *Diccionario Hispano-Tagalo*, s.v. "sining".

[26] *Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala*, s.v. "bago" (I).
[27] Ibid., s.v. "bago" (II).
[28] Ibid., s.v. "bago" (III).
[29] Ibid., s.v. "bago" (IV).
[30] Ibid., s.v. "bago" (V).
[31] Ibid., s.v. "bagongtauo".
[32] Ibid., s.v. "ngayon".
[33] *Diccionario Hispano-Tagalo*, s.v. "modernism".
[34] Ibid., s.v. "modern".
[35] Ibid., s.v. "novedad".
[36] Ibid., s.v. "contemporaneo".
[37] Ibid., s.v. "contemporizar".
[38] *Diccionario Tagalo-Hispano*, s.v. "bago".
[39] Ibid., s.v. "bagongtawo".
[40] See Alice Guillermo's foundational essay, "Art and Society" in *Humanities: Art and Society Handbook* (University of the Philippines College of Arts and Letters Foundation and the Commission on Higher Education: 1998), where she parses these shifts in parallel to patent changes taking place in the evolving economy of the Philippines from the pre-colonial to post-independence periods.
[41] Paras-Perez, Rodolfo, *Tolentino* (1976) The National Art Foundation of Malolos, p. 22.
[42] Ibid., p. 28.
[43] The Philippine Independent Church or Iglesia Filipina Independiente formally broke with the Roman hierarchy of the Catholic Church in 1902, during the end term of the American occupation of the Philippines.
[44] Paras-Perez, p. 108.
[45] These impassioned exchanges between Edades and Tolentino on nascent Philippine modernism appeared in the *Herald Mid-Week Magazine*, *Sunday Times Magazine* and *This Week* in the late 1930s through the 1940s. Digitised reproduction of the texts appear in the archive section of this issue of *Southeast of Now*.
[46] Paras-Perez, p. 152.

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Myanmar/Burmese

San Lin Tun

Modern (*maw dan*)

The words *khit thit* or *khit paw* (ခေတ်ပေါ်/ခေတ်သစ်) are used in the sense of "modern", because the English-Myanmar dictionary published by Directorate of Myanmarsar defines them in this way.[1] Some people use the word "modern" with Myanmar transliteration *maw dan*. In all of these terms, "modern" means new thoughts and views, and a modern approach will be with new thoughts, views and presentations.

People believe that the modern will deviate from conventional thoughts and things, and that it will bring about new tastes, views and experiences. Therefore, those who want to be modern, those who want to keep up with the times and those who want to approach the present age with new views, use the words for "modern" widely.

However, to use the expression "You look modern" in addressing someone does not usually give a sense of praising him/her when the word "modern" is used in normal communication. Rather, it can suggest the meaning of "impractical" or "not getting along well with society or the community". If one says "You look modern", many people do not feel that this is satisfactory or desirable because, in social communication, when people are addressed as "modern", this means that they do not have any decorum or modesty, and they are trying to adopt "westernised style".

But the "modern" is not the enemy of the old age, or of old systems and old thoughts. It is a revolution. It comes from the old. Sayar Panchi Aung Soe (1924–90) once wrote "From Traditional to Modern" which means that, based on tradition and convention, the creation should direct towards modernity with new style and new thoughts.[2]

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This is the view of the leading Myanmar modern artist on "modern" or *khit thit*. In artists' circles, the use of "modern" means that artists will approach their art/painting with modern thoughts and views. Indeed, viewing the works of modern artists will instigate a new experience which has not been felt before.

Artists believe that people find it hard to comprehend the works of modern artists. For those who do not understand modern art, they really think of it as a difficult form of art. Their comments might include: What are they? Colours? Where are the figures? What kinds of brushes are they? Where are the themes? Is this a human figure? A female figure? The artistic skills are coarse.

In Myanmar, especially in Yangon, modern art has existed since the early 1950s, and became common in the 1980s.[3] Some artists came in contact with foreign countries and, through western art, modern art was utilised and materialised.

In fact, there was a modern movement in early 1969–70, and again in 1980. These are mentioned by artist San Myint in one of his interviews with author Khet Mar in *Pan Art Magazine* in July 2005.[4] San Myint mentioned that the modern movement of the 1970s included other artists such as U Aung Aung Taik, Dr San Myint, U Nyunt Myat, U Tin Maung Than, U Khin Maung Than, Daw Anna Aung Myint, Daw Tin Tin San, Daw Khin Khin Myint and Daw Myint Myint Tin.

In a book titled *What is Art?* artist Pe Nyunt Way says that Khin Maung (Bank) wrote and published a book called *Modern Art* in 1960, so that it can be supposed that discourse on modern art had started by that time.[5]

Some well-known modern artists include (U) Khin Maung(Bank), Panchi Aung Soe (U) Khin Maung Yin, Maung Di, Khin One and others. They are the forerunners of modern art. This group of artists uses the word "modern" in their circle. Some of them translate the word "modern" directly by using the terms *khit thit* or *khit paw*, but some prefer to use *maw dan*, because they find it hard to translate, or because the translation will blur the real sense of the word "modern". Therefore, most people who are not familiar with art or painting will consider modern art as a form of art which normal people cannot understand.

In order to understand the modern, people began to raise the question of "art for art's sake" or "art for the public's sake", which is imbued with a sense of paradox, and results in a long-lasting division even among artists themselves. But, in artist Khin Maung Yin's view, "if the artist sacrifices his life for drawing, that painting/art is meant for other's sake".[6]

Some believe that art is only art if it can be understood by people. If not, it cannot be art. Others believe that art is art because it is created and, in this definition, has nothing to do with it being understood or not. Because of the

criterion of ambiguity, it is often thought that most people do not understand art. In the same way, they do not understand well about the modern.

According to Lwin Aung, to understand the modern it is essential to know the nature of time and space.[7] In that sense, it is quite different from conventional perspectives.

Contemporary (*khit pyaing*)

These days, the term "contemporary" or *khit pyaing* has become popular, together with "modern". "Contemporary" has come to be used more often than "modern" since the early 2000s. People understand the word "contemporary" to mean happening at the same time with the era or keeping abreast with the times, and creating art alongside with the age or era. Actually, "contemporary" means that the artists are living in the time, experiencing the times, and interpreting what they see and feel in that time. They are trying to express their experiences in contemporary art forms such as performance art, installation art and so on.

As with modern art, there is some debate around when contemporary art first emerged in Myanmar. Nathalie Johnston argues that contemporary art started to appear in the Myanmar art scene in 1988.[8] Elizabeth Rush mentions that, in the late 1990s, some Myanmar artists had a chance to come into contact with arts from abroad, and thus began taking the first tentative steps towards contemporary art.[9]

In art, there are different kinds of "ism" or movements, and some artists like to use the term "contemporary" when they do not want to put themselves into the category of any certain "ism" or movement. They create contemporary art, and describe themselves as contemporary artists.

Contemporary artists express the events and feeling of the age in which they are living. They feel the reality of contemporary phenomena such as burgeoning urban culture, global village, suffocation of urban life, urban night life and so on. This means that contemporary art has a sense of being more free, more open and more modern than modern art. But there are few usages/exhibitions expressing contemporary art shows. This means that though artist exhibit their works, they usually use the terms for "solo show" or "group show" rather than "contemporary art show."

For most people, *khit pyaing* is a catchy term, both in terms of meaning and phonetics. Moreover, the active economic nature of contemporary art permits competition in a market economy. This is another reason why the term "contemporary art" is more often used than "modern art" these days.

As contemporary artists, people recognise Min Wae Aung, Htein Lin, Po Po, Aye Ko, Nyein Chan Su and Soe Naing, among many others.[10]

Art (*pan chi*)

Since the 11th century, Myanmar people use the term *pan chi* for "art". *Pan chi* is included in the ten kinds of Myanmar art and craft such as *pan pu* (sculpture), *pan to* (masonry), *pan htein* (goldsmith), *pan yoon* (lacquerware) and so on. *Pan chi* has several different origins. Myanmar scholar U Poe Latt says that *pan* means that work done by hand, and it is an art.[11] In other words, *pan chi* suggests gentle beauty. At first, the term was *pan che*, which can be found in classic writings, which later became *pan chi*, in which *chi* refers to "painting". Even during the time of Myanmar royalty in the mid-19th century, they used to have royal *pan chi taw*, or royal artists. That means that the artists were given a proper role in the Myanmar community. Though there are several treaties on traditional Myanmar arts and crafts, proper textbooks on aesthetics and art in modern ways are rare. But later, around 1962, a learned man named Let Wel Min Nyo wrote a book titled *A Nu Pannyar Gon Yee* [The Quality of Art]. In that book, he uses the term *anupanna* for "art". He describes *anapunna* as arts which can attract the visual, audio and mental spirit of people, and which get along well with the environment, and have a basic nature.[12] There are different kinds of *anupanna*, including *sarpay* (literature), *gita* (music), *yote shin* (cinema) and so on.

In a book titled *Anupannasan* [The Criteria of Art], artist Khin Maung Yin says that art (*anupanna*) is something which can be created freely, and it cannot be an art if it cannot be created freely.[13]

So, every *pan chi sayar* ("painter") can be a *annupannashin* ("artist"), but not all *annupannashin* can be a *pan chi sayar*. *Anupanna* has a broader and more holistic meaning.

BIOGRAPHY

San Lin Tun is a freelance English-Myanmar writer who writes fiction and non-fiction. He was the coordinator/translator of My Yangon My Home Art and Heritage Festival, and curator of La Casa 7. As a licensed tour guide, he also runs the Literature/Art Walk in Yangon. Currently, San Lin Tun is working on a novel on an English writer who lived in Burma in 1947. He is a graduate of the 2015 Link the Wor(l)ds literary translation programme. Some of his writings can be read at writersanlintun.blogspot.com. He completed his MA in Buddha Dhamma studies in 2016.

NOTES

1 A note on Romanisation in this text: In Myanmar, there is a saying, "When you write, you write in correct spelling or form, when you read out, you read out with pronunciation the word gives" [ဖရေးတော့အမှန်၊ ဖတ်တော့အသံ]. So, one can read ပန်းချီ ("art") in two ways. The first one is ပန်းချီ (*pan chi*) and the second one is ဗဂျီ (*bagyi*). In these two words, the first one ပန်းချီ (*pan chi*) is used for standard writing form, the second one ဗဂျီ (*bagyi*) is used for speaking.

In the name of the artist Bagyi Aung Soe, one will see ဗဂျီ (Bagyi) before his name, because he did not want to follow the standard or formality, and instead simply preferred the spoken form.

This dictionary is published in 2001 in Yangon by U San Lwin (Director, Directorate of Myanmarsar).

2 Panchi Aung Soe is considered a father of Myanmar modern art. Panchi Aung Soe, *From Tradition to Modern* (Yangon: Sandar Win Press, 2006), p. 12.

3 Paw Thit, *Ahlasharpontaw Vol. 2* [In Search of Beauty] (Yangon: Seikku Cho Cho Press, 2016), p. 23.

4 Khet Mar, "A Yaung Twe Ko Kyauk Te Thu" [The Man Who is Afraid of Colours], *Pan Art Magazine* (2005): 32.

5 Pe Nyunt Way, *Pan Chi So Ta Ba Le*? [What is Art?] (Yangon: Sarpaylawka Press, 2012), p. 67.

6 Khing Maung Yin and Zaw Zaw Aung, *Anupannasan* [The Criterion of Art] (Yangon: Pan Aung Offset, 1997), p. 6.

7 Lwin Aung is an architect and columnist on modern art. See Lwin Aung, "A Myin Thit A Nu Panna Tha Nyar Thi" [The Knowledge on a New Perspective Art], in *From Tradition to Modern* (Yangon: Sandar Win Press, 2006), p. 140.

8 Nathalie Johnston, "Art and Artists", in *The Best of Myanmar*, ed. Jaffee Yee Yeow Fei (Bangkok: Darnsutha Press, 2017), p. 72. Nathalie Johnston is the founder/curator of Myanm/Art, a gallery in Yangon.

9 Elizabeth Rush, *Artist Aye Ko* (Yangon: Aung Thein Than Press, 2013), p. 13.

10 Min Wae Aung is the founder of New Art Treasure Art Gallery. Htein Lin is a former political prisoner, and a leading figure in modern art. Po Po is an installation and performance artist. Aye Ko is an artist engaged in performance art and installation art. Nyein Chan Su is also known as NCS. Soe Naing is well known for his semi-human figures.

11 Pan Chi Tin Tun, *Panchi Panbu Sarsaung* [Art and Sculpture for the Benefits of the Nation] (Yangon: Soe Moe Meit Sett Press, 1979), p. 154.

12 Let Wel Min Nyo, *A Nu Pannya Gon Yee* [The Quality of Art] (Yangon: Shwe Pyi Tan Press, 1962), p. 2. Let Wel Min Nyo was a retired Indian civil servant.

13 Khing Maung Yin and Zaw Zaw Aung, *Anupannasan* [The Criteria of Art] (Yangon: Pan Aung Offset, 1997), p. 29.

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Malay: The *Hikmat* [Inner Workings] of *Seni* [Art]: *Gambar* [Picture], *Lukis* [to Paint or Draw], *Moden/Moderen* [Modern], *Sezaman* [of this Age], *Baru* [New], *Kontemporer/Kontemporari* [Contemporary], *Kagunan* [Beneficial Refinement], *Imajan* [Imagery]

Simon Soon

One cannot speak of art terminologies in the Malay language, even on the most surface level, without turning to the history and politics of the language. This history is a complex one, for the Malay language would, by the 20th century, seed three national languages: in Malaysia (which vascillates between Bahasa Melayu and Bahasa Malaysia), Indonesia (Bahasa Indonesia) and Brunei (Bahasa Brunei). This article, however, primarily concerns itself with the development of art terminologies in Malaysia and Indonesia, because when language policies and developments were in question, Brunei and Singapore (where Malay is one of the four official languages) tended to follow the lead of the two larger countries.[1]

Tales of origin for the Malay language have often traced the history back to a kingdom called Melayu (also spelled Malayu or Mlayu), or else traced the etymology of the word to the Melayu River.[2] Both polity and geographic feature are located on the east coast of central Sumatra, Indonesia. Due to retaliatory internecine generational warfare between various Javanese and

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Malay kingdoms, the vanquished ruling households were often compelled to take flight. The Malaccan Sultanate was established by an exiled prince from Palembang at the start of the 15th century. In a short span of time, Malacca became the busiest and largest entrepôt in the region.

As the sultanate grew in stature and power, Malay identity came into wider circulation as a means to distinguish the Malaccan population from the Javanese and the Siamese. At the same time, the Malay language's popularity also began to spread. Two factors contributed to this. First, the conversion to Islam amongst the Malays opened new linguistic possibilities under the influence of Islamic literature, resulting in new Arabic and Tamil words enriching the Malay vocabulary, and a growing system of court patronage for the production of literary manuscripts. Second, due to Malacca's importance as a centre for international trade in the 15th century, Malay also became a trade language, evolving into a Creole form separate from the courts, which became the lingua franca of the archipelago.

The long 19th century marked two significant shifts in Malay literary cultures. In the first half of the century, the emergence of new patrons for the collecting and commissioning of Malay manuscripts greatly expanded their circulation.[3] Amid the hustle and bustle of colonial port cities, scribes and other men of letters found a new concentration of audiences, intellectual companionship and economic opportunities. Located a fair distance away from the purview of its customary patrons in the Malay Royal Court,[4] the port city's cosmopolitan character meant that exposures would result in changes and experimentation to manuscript design. At times, manuscript-keeping conventions of Indo-Persian or Ottoman origins might have informed the manner in which a text was copied for a colonial port city clientele connected to a mercantile network across the Indian ocean.[5]

The new patrons came largely from either the Peranakan (Creole) communities who were gradually shaping a distinct cosmopolitan urban culture, or from a growing breed of officer-scholars, belonging to either the Dutch or British East India companies. In the former, circulation of manuscripts, while predominantly court-centred in the previous centuries, saw new channels emerge with the setting up of lending libraries in port cities, as new urban cultural institutions catering to a largely cross-Peranakan population.

For European patrons, Malay literary manuscripts were commissioned either for personal collections or for institutions of learning back in Europe. These historical shifts contributed to changes in the body of literature, even as new institutions (such as the lending libraries and European collections) created new cultures of circulations—in part replacing the royal palace's central role as custodian of manuscripts—with new points of access that facilitated the

creation of a broad-based literary culture. In turn, stakeholders of this literary culture played a principal role in supporting the growth of a print culture by setting up presses in port cities like Penang, Singapore and Batavia (today's Jakarta). The printing presses would flourish in the second half of the 19th century in the Malay world.[6]

The Inner Workings of *Zaman*

Alongside this huge shift and expansion in the cultural ownership and production of Malay literary texts, the colonial enterprise of the 19th century also saw the replacement of what was perceived as older worldviews with new ideas that shaped new understandings of the world, and new technologies that reorganised customary social formations and conducts, and rewired individuals cognitive and sensorial faculties.

To be modern was, therefore, to be sensitive to these changes. In Munshi Abdullah's 1849 biography, the *Hikayat Abdullah*, the phrases *zaman itu* [that time] and *zaman ini* [this time] were used to describe present-day changes as witnessed first-hand by the author.[7] On first impression, unlike classical *hikayat*s that were recited in public and therefore tell their stories from a third-person perspective, Munshi Abdullah's text speaks of his life in the first-person. The autobiographical format also provides us with a glimpse into his individual personality, and private views on what he experienced.[8]

But *Hikayat Abdullah*'s form of narration was not entirely autobiographical. For example, he also relayed his experience of electricity, an encounter with the printing press and his puzzlement over Raffles's interest in collecting Malay artefacts. Though told from the perspective of the author, the stories often concluded with a shift in tone that turns solemn, in an attempt to testify and bear witness to the time, by offering a reflection, a plea, an exhortation or a note of encouragement on various topics, pointedly at an imagined Malay readership.

In this sense, *Hikayat Abdullah* is not so different too different from classical *hikayat*s. Stories do not prescribe and determine the values which one has to abide by. Instead, the form of a narrative is to move through a plot that is punctuated by the complex moral choices people make in life that would shape their values, principles and futures.

A passage from *Hikayat Abdullah* is instructive in conveying his unique point of view. In a scene of encounter with the newly invented camera, Munshi Abdullah described the technical workings of the daguerrotype photographic process as he had observed in great detail and wonderment. In Abdullah's account, upon being shown an image reproduction of a view of Singapore, Munshi characterised what he saw as a "shadow image" (*bayangan gambar*).

His curiosity then compelled him to immediately ask, "Sir, what is its [the daguerrotype's] inner workings (*hikmat*)? Who is its maker (*tukang*)?"[9]

This line of questioning encapsulated the complex epistemological reckoning that local language had to face in describing new cultural practices imposed by colonialism. Munshi Abdullah's use of the Malay word *hikmat*, of Arabic origin, suggests a realignment of values that went hand in hand with the shaping of a modern Malay subject. Here an epistemological term normally used in Islamic law, already familiar to the Malay world, served as a parallel framework for the munshi to validate European empiricism and rationalism. Moreover, other passages in his autobiography confirm that the munshi discriminated between different kinds of knowledge (*ilmu*). Languages and scientific inquiry based on observation are attributed with *gunanya* (usefulness) and *faedah* (benefit), while superstitious beliefs were regarded as *bodoh* (ignorant/stupid).

The munshi's follow-up question—"Who is its maker?"—then establishes the importance of attributing the product to a maker. The word used here is *tukang*, which translates normally as a "person with a skilful trade"[10] but can be broadly thought of as a maker of things based on the following response that described the camera as a *ciptaan* (invention). By the mid-19th century, when the munshi published his autobiography, attribution of creative acts to individual authors was slowly being tested. That *Hikayat Abdullah* is an autobiography, a new genre in Malay literature, alongside the example about the invention of the camera, is a demonstration of this. A recent discovery of two manuscripts dated to the late 18th and early 19th centuries, with the illumination design attributed to a Perlis prince, suggests that ideas of authorial attribution were also making their way into manuscript-producing communities further inland.[11]

What the above discovery also confirms is the different usage of the word *tulis*. Like its Thai counterpart *khien*, the word *tulis* did not translate specifically to writing; it also meant illustrating or drawing or designing. Since writing as a calligraphic art possesses these qualities, the meaning of *tulis* would later evolve to exclusively mean writing. The older usage persists in the description of hand-drawn batik as *batik tulis*. In turn, penmanship was described with the word *menyurat*, conjugated from the root word *surat* (letter).[12]

Tulis came to signify artistic forms that tended to be graphic or decorative, with strong associations with pattern-making. It could be suggested that *tulis* could have been deemed unsuitable for describing the change in meaning attributed to the word *gambar* (image/picture). Even if the word *gambar* or *peta* meant a picture with representational qualities in the past, the onslaught of photography and other mimetic forms of picture-making from the mid-19th century onwards rendered the word *tulis* unsuitable for the latter's either

abstract or symbolic qualities. Instead, the term that gained currency was *lukis*, when it comes to describing an image created by hand with the use of tools, which was not simply schematic or functional in what it represents. An image rendered in this manner also possesses qualities that are descriptive and evocative. From this root word, we have the activity (*melukis*), the agent (*pelukis*) and the form (*lukisan*).

The *Lukisan* and Imagination; *Gambar* and Human Progress

The word *lukis* can be found in the Malay, Minangkabau and Javanese languages. In Javanese, the term *anglukis* was used to describe a form of image-making. The Javanese manuscript *Tantu Panggelaran* tells the story of Batara Guru (an incarnation of the Hindu god Shiva) instructing a number of gods to descend upon Java island to teach the people of Java various kinds of knowledge (*kepandaian*). Amongst those who heeded the instruction was a demigod (*deva*) who received the following instruction: "Create an image O Bagawan Ciptagupta, compose a wonderful form based on that which appears in your mind, with the use of your thumb; thereby you will be known as Lord Ciptangkara the image-maker."[13]

In Sanento Yuliman's analysis, he notes *lukis* here is understood as an undertaking that involves creating something that did not exist prior into an evocative form that originates in *cipta*. *Cipta* here translates as one's mind, ideas or imagination. This was realised, in turn, with the thumb, which allows tools to be gripped by the hand.[14] The example here suggests that when knowledge is seen through the qualities of *kepandaian*, *kepandaian*'s concept of what it means to know, predicated on giving form and shape to what one imagines, is unlike the prevailing modern-day division between thinking and doing. Instead, the very act of thinking (or the imagination) is ultimately predicated on the physical dexterity of creating an attractive or evocative image from what appears in one's mind.

Lukis was also found in older Malay texts, such as the *Hikayat Amir Hamzah*, thought to enter circulation not long after the Malay language adopted Jawi or the Arabic script, following from the spread of Islam in the Malay popular imagination.[15] Amir Hamzah was the uncle of the Prophet Muhammad and tales of his exploits in early Islamic warfare were compiled as the *Hamzanama* in the Persian/Mughal realm, of which the *Hikayat Amir Hamzah* is a translation.

In a scene in which Amir Hamzah received an audience from a Khoja, who claimed to be his godfather, he was shocked to see the Khoja looking pale and emaciated. Upon inquiry, he learned that the Khoja encountered a

princess in the city of Barda and was smitten by her beauty. When the Khoja realised he would not stand a chance of marrying her, he devised a way to ease his heartache:

> From the beauty of her visage, I really wanted her. Because I was not able to own her, I am always in pain and longing … I called someone to capture her likeness (*melukis*) and the portrait (*gambar*) is in my safekeeping; because when I see the portrait, it eases my longing.[16]

When the Khoja finally took out and presented the image to the company of Amir Hamzah, he gained immediate sympathy from those who saw the image. Thus, the parable accounts for the affective power that mimetic images of humans possessed. Not only can the *gambar* (portrait) of a person, imbued with lifelike qualities through the skill of *melukis* (painting), assuage human longing by serving as a substitute of a person, the *gambar* also helped in garnering sympathy. A *lukisan* was therefore implicitly tied into the larger question of *guna*, its usefulness. More than the image, it also hints at what descriptive illustration could potentially do. The *hikayat* itself, a story about the courageous exploits connected to early Islamic warfare, was one of the two *hikayat*s used in a public recitation to inspire moral courage amongst the Malaccan army during the Portuguese naval attack that brought about the fall of the Malacca Sultanate in 1511.[17]

Though the terms *lukisan* and *gambar* were used rather interchangeably, the term *lukis* retained a stricter association with an image that is made with the hand. The image need not be in two-dimensional form. *Lukis* was also used to describe carving and sculpting. In a late 19th-century translation of the Christian bible by the Dutch scholar Klinkert, the word *pelukis* was to describe a sculpture, *lalu diukirnya dengan pelukis satu teladan* (thereupon it was carved by an image-maker as an example).[18] In turn, the word *gambar* translates approximately as "representational image". This would include a human portrait, and older usage of the term also referred to statues. It could also refer to a whole range of different images: television shows, films, maps, photographs or even a "mental picture".[19]

When the *gambar* or *lukisan* with its quality of verisimilitude in representing the phenomenal world gradually gained prominence in the 19th century, the Malay community was not entirely sure what to make of a visual approach that was previously deemed religiously and customarily unacceptable. After all, image-making in this case was a very different kind of visual discourse compared to the customary *tulisan*, inclined towards an abstract and ornamental sensibility.

The cultural polemics in the early 20th century suggest that popular acceptance was curtailed by widespread popular belief that Islam proscribed image-making, for the reason that the activity ultimately leads to the sin of idolatry. It would take a new generation of religious reformists, loosely described by the term *kaum muda* (the youths) as opposed to the *kaum tua* (the elders who follow customary conventions) who, upon returning from Al-Azhar in Egypt, sought to introduce new religious ideals and practices that were professed to be more true to the spirit of Islam. In turn, this claim of authenticity was also seen as a mark of progress.

Syed Sheik Al-Hadi was a principal figure who published the Malay journal *Al-Ikhwan* from Penang in the 1920s. In the third issue, published in 1929, an unsigned editorial titled "Gambar atau Lukisan" [Image-Picture or Painting] suggests that arguments made in favour of *gambar* had strong progressivist undertones, recognising the *gambar* as a vehicle for modernisation. The editorial pleaded with its readers that the benefits of picture-making outweighed customary reservations that pictorial representation automatically constitutes idolatry.

Like Abdullah Munshi before, the editorial favoured pictorial representation in terms of its usefulness (*sangat-sangat berguna*). *Gambar* was argued to be useful because it could be used to commemorate significant dates (*memperingatkan tarikh*). Moreover, the article suggested that image-making practice is thousands of years old and that, if we consider past and present image-making endeavours, there is a correlation between image-making and the notion of "human progress" (*kemajuan manusia*). In effect, what is implied here is a belief that pictorial representation brought with it a sense of historical consciousness, which doubly served as an engine for human progress.

The pictorialisation of the human figure was therefore ineluctably linked to a wider desire in the modern project of picturing the nation. This desire was, and still is, a means through which an imagined community could be prospected, to use a phrase coined by Benedict Anderson in his study of print nationalism. Moreover, in Ahmad Suhaimi's *Sejarah Kesedaran Visual di Malaya* [History of Visual Awareness in Malaya], he underlines the significance of print media in helping forge a new "visual awareness" amongst the Malay public, facilitating the acceptance of illustrative representations of the human figure, which was foreign to its customary visual repertoire.[20] The growth of periodicals during the early 20th century not only facilitated textual knowledge; circulated alongside textual discourses were also pictorial visions, fostering a growing sense of collective national identity.

As debates ensued following the proliferation of Malay presses from the 1920s onwards, the growing acceptance of pictorial representation amongst

the Malay people went hand in hand with the growth of cultural nationalism. In British Malaya, a 1934 newspaper reporting on the experience of the Malay regiment described their experience: "no words [*tulisan*] can paint [*lukis*] because no one knows except those who suffers for the race, the King and the country in all corners of this realm".[21]

Modernity and its Poets

Also significant were attempts to translate the word "modern" in the popular Malay presses. In a 1935 article titled "The Malay People and Modern Influences", the author Hamdan notes that the word "modern" came from the English language but carries similar meaning to the Arabic word *aridiyah*. Though not a new word, Hamdan notes that it had gained currency in the Malay language over the past two years, to the extent that even children from the deep rural countryside were found to be using the word.

Though he is critical of its tendencies, which Hamdan perceives as flying against Malay customary practices more aligned to Islamic values, the author nevertheless provides one of the more complex and time-sensitive definitions. Hamdan notes that the "modern" is the "result of the intermingling of all races, all customs, all religions; [it is] compelled by the forceful flow of our time that moves from one moment to the next". He further adds,

> What can be said of the "modern", according to the understanding of this writer, is that it is "new." This can be applied to a phenomenon, a feeling, an idea, progress, actions, or behaviour, even if they are considered norms or customs, as these things were professed by our ancestors before. These things are then changed or modified, whether improved or diminished in certain aspects, so that these things fit into the forward flow of our time, that is constantly moving.[22]

Modern time, in this sense, was future-oriented. During this period, the adoption of Malay as Bahasa Indonesia or the national language of a future independent Indonesia during the Youth Pledge of 1928 further expanded the use of Malay in public discourse. In turn, modernist painters in Java began to refashion this neighbouring language into a discursive field that would accommodate new hybrid Javanese-Malay terminologies that accounted for their artistic volition, characterised poetically by S. Sudjojono as their *jiwa ketok* or "making visible their spirit".

Under the spell of nationalism, nationalists at the 2nd Youth Congress of 1928 proclaimed three ideals that would foster unity: one homeland, one nation and one language. When choosing which language to adopt, the Malay

language was selected for two main reasons: first, the absence of hierarchy markers (when compared to Javanese) was an important feature of Malay as it developed into a trade language. This absence was thought to embody the egalitarian principles of democratic nationalism. It is important to note that the spread of the Malay language across a vastly spread-out archipelago had to do with the adoption of Malay as the administrative language of the Dutch colonial government. Previously, the Dutch East Indies Company had simply adopted Malay since it was in their commercial interest, but the language policy remained when the Dutch government took over the colony, preferring to use Malay as a language to control the spread of European liberal ideas and values to the colonies. Even so, the language offered the nationalists the best chance of communicating new ideas to the largest possible public as the language of trade had, by the early 20th century, also served as a language of education, democracy, modernisation and social mobility.

To track changes to the terms in which the artist-subject was called forth is, therefore, also to identify the perceived potentialities offered by words and terms in the Malay language used by various writers over the past century. The hope is to catch glimpses of the demands a language makes on how art was understood, and the role it played in cultivating a community around the relentless and lifelong pursuit of knowledge, proceeding from the promise of imagination and creativity.

An article written by Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana in 1934 profiles the life and times of Mas Pirngardie by proclaiming him as an “Indonesian artist”. The term used here for artist is *ahli-gambar* which, following from the discussion above, translates rather as “picture-maker”. The blue-blooded Mas Pirngardie benefited in part by the change in attitude towards colonial governance following the implementation of the Ethical Policy in 1901, in which the colonial government not only took on responsibility for the welfare of their colonial subjects, but also increased opportunities for education and exposure to new knowledge.

In a newly adopted national language that had never been the mother tongue of nearly all the inhabitants of Java, the term *ahli gambar* was at the very outset to serve as a direct translation of the Dutch word for painter, *schilder*.[23] At the same time, writing in *Poedjangga Baroe* [New Poets], Sutan Takdir’s text conveyed an idea that Mas Pirngardie’s life trajectory as an artist was propelled by destiny. His profile did not only focus on his accomplishments in naturalistic and technical drawings. These had a metaphorical subtext. Mas Pirngardie’s exposure to mapmaking at a young age was meant to convey his mastery of a science of representing space that can be transformed into an intimate knowledge of homeland. Later in life, aside from Mas Pirngardie’s renown as a landscape painter, Sutan Takdir also profiled the

ahli gambar's interest in and study of ornamental design and craft, resulting in a commissioned five-volume study on "The Native Craftwork in the Dutch Indies (1912–1930)".[24]

The literary magazine *Poedjangga Baroe* [New Poets] became an important forum in which intellectuals published their views on the constitutive characteristics of an Indonesian national identity. The tensions between modernity and tradition, the self and the other, nationalism and cosmopolitanism were axial points that allowed nationalists to collectively prospect what the features of this national culture could be. Sutan Takdir as the founding editor clearly had in mind that the figure of Mas Pirngardie could be moulded to give a sense that the modern subject was constituted by occupying a complex range of positions, beliefs and values. Ultimately, Sutan Takdir laments that Mas Pirngardie's accomplishments are hardly acknowledged amongst locals. In a vividly described visit to the old painter, Sutan Takdir recalled a moment when he noticed that the wooden ceiling board at Mas Pirngardie's office had bent because it was supporting the weight of a huge painting tied with ropes to a nail stuck onto the ceiling board.

Sutan Takdir saw a metaphor in that scene. He described the wooden ceiling board as representing Indonesian society, for whom the stature and achievements of Mas Pirngrardie as representing the ideal modern national subject for Sutan Takdir symbolised by the unfinished painting itself, described as being washed in an iridescent red and yellow glow of the glorious twilight, which rendered the Indonesian homeland vibrant and full of possibilities. The story ends with an image flashing before his eyes, of the dismaying craftspeople who hawked their handiwork along the street as they continued to observe the coming and going of an apathetic crowd at the Gambir marketplace in Jakarta. Suddenly, in a dismissal of this pessimistic image, Sutan Takdir enjoins, "but now is not the time to feel sad over livelihood; for the young Indonesians, the time to fight has come. We will leave this darkness behind, advancing towards a glorious new dawn."[25]

In a sense, the purpose of Sutan Takdir's profile essay is to flesh out a position for the modern subject outside of Europe. If the subject is no longer colonial, and instead belonged to the future, examples drawn from the present time needed to suggest a position that would be enabled by new opportunities, yet at the same time limited by the prevailing attitudes restricting free association and social mobility in a colonial universe. The essay found a complex personality in the life story of Mas Pirngardie.

In turn, unlike Sudjojono's later diatribe against the *Mooi Indie*, or "beautiful Indies", genre of landscape that Mas Pirngardie belonged to, Sutan Takdir saw in Mas Pirngardie's landscape painting an agency that was able to shift one's

perception from the question of inheritance towards a strategy of appropriation. Untroubled that the materials and principles that make *schilderkunst* ultimately a European inheritance, Sutan Takdir opines that what is fascinating is the way that even as Mas Pirngardie had stayed faithful to the conventions of academic painting, it is in his depiction of clouds that one sees the normally calm and orderly world transform into an intimately warm bloom of purple, red, yellow and crimson, like in a dream. At this point, Sutan Takdir imagines that the challenging environment of the colony for Pirngardie the *schilder* is momentarily forgotten: "His spirit expands outward to absorb the inner peace that the landscape embodies. So that when the time comes, the painter will be able develop a sensitive and evocative poetics to channel this great feeling."[26]

When a group of younger painters began organising themselves as a community of artists in 1938, they set up PERSAGI (short for *persatuan ahli-ahli gambar Indonesia*) as a society for *ahli gambar* (picture makers). In just a few years' time, they would discard the term in favour of *pelukis* and *seniman*, a neologism that is usually attributed to Sindudarsono Sudjojono. While it is commonplace to suggest that the relationship between a previous generation of painters and the modernists is constituted by an aesthetic rupture, recent scholarship has complicated this narrative by pointing to other contexts that could account for the ideological divide.[27] In exploring the changes to terminologies, even as the term *ahli gambar* was thereafter abandoned in favour of *pelukis* (which carried older Hindu-Buddhist ideas of artistic knowledge as discussed above) and *seniman* (a new term introduced by Sudjojono), what the account by Sutan Takdir suggests was that the *polemik kebudayaan* (cultural polemic) of the 1930s played an instrumental role in locating the position of the modern subject in the artist.[28] The ability to critically revalue the cultural legacies of colonialism informed Sudjojono's notion of *seni* as a vehicle that would unleash the Indonesian imaginary in the art of a time to come.

Seni: A New Sensibility

In publishing two anthologies of his essays, *Seni Lukis, Kesenian dan Seniman* [Painting, Art and the Artist] (1946, and an expanded edition in 1949) and *Kami Tahu Kemana Seni Rupa Indonesian Akan Kami Bawa* [We Know Where We Are Taking Indonesian Art] (1948), Sudjojono set out to define the future direction of Indonesian art, even as he introduced new terminology to characterise the creative act of image-making. The word here, *seni*, in traditional usage had come to be used as an adjective to describe something small in size or something that possesses qualities that convey refinement as a sensibility. In the latter instance, it could also convey that an object is elaborate

or minuscule in character. *Seni* was used in a range of contexts: to describe the size of an ant, the size of boats, trees or women, the voice of a person, urine, a gold necklace, the patterning on stones and metalware.[29] By the 1930s, it was also used in an article titled "The Progress of Muslim Women" to describe a kind of knowledge, *ilmu seni*, possibly to mean "etiquette" or "comportment".[30]

Therefore, when Sudjojono first used the word *seni* to mean "the arts", what did he hope the word would convey besides providing us a sense that the labour of creativity is envisioned to be painstakingly fussy and conscionably fastidious? There are two possibilities.

The first can be sensed in the moral impulses that have shaped Sudjojono's understanding of art. In coming up with a definition of *kesenian*, which translates as "an embodiment of artistic qualities", he equates *kesenian* to *jiwa ketok* (visible spirit).[31] For an artist to "possess a greatness of spirit" (*berjiwa besar*) is the precondition of creating works of art that have staying power. In turn, Sudjojono suggests that art's usefulness (*berguna*) needed to be measured on terms that are not strictly utilitarian. Instead of creating propaganda for party politics, Sudjojono saw the revolutionary war against the Dutch as irreducibly centred on the value of independence as a means to transform both society and the world. "Usefulness", in this sense, was centred on the recovery and return to the principles of art (*kesenian*) that embodies the spirit of independence.[32]

An artist possessing a "generosity or greatness of spirit" would likewise attract a following of like-minded people.[33] This method of harnessing spiritual charisma held out promise of transformation in a society and the world. This ideal lies at the heart of his design for the studio/workshop as a *sanggar*, broadly conceived of as both a physical and spiritual space for introspection, tutelage and community building.

Reflecting on Sudjojono's adoption of the word '*seni*'[34] alongside developments in his thinking on art gives us reason to believe in *seni*'s plasticity. On the one hand, *seni* conveys that which is not apparent, and could refer to things such as *jiwa* (spirit or soul) that are the veiled. On the other hand, *seni* also alludes to laborious undertaking, whereby the older usage of the word could refer to sweat beads, but in this context speaks of the exertion of creative labour as a sensibly overwrought form of commitment to an ideal. The work of cultivating, designing, arranging and organising a *sanggar* as a collective guided by a vision offers one productive way to think about *seni* as a term that allows for many possible associations and meanings.

The second is the manner in which *seni* is joined with another term to create a compound word like *seni lukis*. Unlike *lukisan*, which refers to a painting (as a specific object or activity), *seni lukis* envisions a notion of

artistic progress that is constituted by a collective search for a national style (*corak*).[35] The promise of the national *corak* (style) links the concept-driven making of an affective image (*lukis*) to an attitude towards creative of expression (*seni*) that is shaped a desire to communicate the otherwise private way of experiencing the world to a public (*jiwa ketok*) and attained its spiritual meaning and moral force through the cultivation and nurturing of a creative community (*sanggar*) alongside the self.

Seni lukis, in this sense, held out terms that were not always congruent. In part, what *seni lukis* meant had genealogical origins in the Beaux-Arts (Fine Arts) as a model of knowledge that privileges the autonomy of art as a site for aesthetic contemplation over its use-value.[36] Equally so, Sudjojono had avant-gardist aspirations and consistently argued for art's inextricable links and ties to other spheres of activities, through his involvement in the founding of a *sanggar*, his role as an active member of Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat (LEKRA, a national leftist cultural organisation) and then as a politician who ran under the Indonesian Communist Party's ticket to obtain a seat at Indonesia's national legislative assembly, the People's Representative Council.

In the end, one other tendency of the "modern" determined how *seni lukis* was used. The modernist search for underlying principles ultimately carved into *seni lukis* a new belief in the affective power of the image made by specialised knowledge and skills (*kepandaian*) to convey truths would lead to social transformation and progress. Therefore, one is hard-pressed to find the term *seni lukis* in the 1950s and 1960s being qualified with the word "modern", since it was already a given. This was the case until much later, when the association of modern with *seni lukis* became lost from the 1990s onwards. From the 1960s to around the 1970s in Indonesia, if a painting was described as *moderen* or "modern", what the term conveyed were abstract or non-objective stylistic tendencies in painting.[37]

Therefore, when the Kuala Lumpur-based Malayan Arts Council advocated for the establishment of a National Art Gallery in 1958, the art institution's name was translated into Malay as Balai Seni Lukis Negara. Though not the first national art gallery in the region, it is the oldest continuously running national institution of modern art in Southeast Asia. When the term *seni lukis moden* was used for the first time at the Balai Seni Lukis Negara in 2000 for an exhibition titled Rupa Malaysia: Meninjau Seni Lukis Modern Malaysia (Malaysian Visual Form: A Survey of Malaysian Modern Art), it suggests that *seni lukis* had, by the start of the new millennium, lost something of its original meaning.[38]

If *seni lukis* meant "modern art", which assumes the primacy of painting in this domain of artistic pursuit within a tradition constituted from the European academic tradition of "fine art", then in what manner was *seni rupa* deployed?

Unlike *lukis*, *rupa* simply means "visual form". Its usage was meant to be accommodating and broad. If *seni* simply meant "the arts", then *rupa* qualifies that this creative inquiry is directed primarily at the visual form of the arts. The term was first used during the Japanese occupation of Java,[39] but came into wider circulation with the establishment of Akademi Seni Rupa Indonesia (ASRI) as the first national art school in 1950.

This was, however, not the first art school. A programme to train art teachers opened in 1947 at the Faculty of Technical Knowledge at the Bandung Campus of the University of Indonesia. Known as Balai Pendidikan Universiter Guru Gambar, it retains *gambar* as the descriptor for art. Ironically, because of the historical use of the word *gambar*, it retains a closer connection to the Dutch term *schilderkunst*, even when the term *seni lukis* itself is a more direct word for word translation of the latter.[40] It was later in 1956 that the teaching of art was combined with architecture to form an Architecture and Art Section (Bagian Arsiketur dan Seni Rupa), in which the areas of study offered were divided into *seni rupa* and *seni lukis*.

In this example, we see that *seni rupa* offers two more meanings. On one level, *seni rupa* circumscribes a range of creative engagement with visual form that do not fall under what is considered as *seni lukis* (modern painting). What it meant in 1956 Bandung was design or applied arts. On another level, it also functions as an encompassing term that characterises this branch of art as primarily invested in the visual form (*rupa*).[41]

Two of the most important art schools in Indonesia had secured *seni rupa* as a term that encompasses all creative practices that are focused on the visual form. When the opportunity to stage a survey exhibition came about on the occasion of the 1955 Afro-Asia Conference held in Bandung, it was broadly conceived with the title Kesenian Indonesia [The Arts of Indonesia]. With its longue durée approach covering the ancient past (*dimasa purba*), colonial period (*dimasa pendjajahan*) and post-independence (*didjaman sesudah merdeka*), the arts were divided into branches (*tjabang*): visual arts (*seni rupa*), dance (*seni tari*), literature (*seni sastera*), music (*seni music*) and theatre (*seni drama*).[42]

Five years later, the first published book on *The History of the Arts in Indonesia* [Sedjarah Kesenian Indonesia] (1960) by S. Saripin, offered itself as an educational textbook for high school students. It defined the arts into three clusters—visual art (*seni rupa*), aural art (*seni suara*) and movement art (*seni gerak*)—and finally offered the meaning of art (*seni*) as, "an emotional force that is transformed into a concrete creation".[43]

Seni rupa never had quite the same currency in Malaysia. A possible reason has to do with the naming of the National Art Gallery as Balai Seni Lukis

Negara. Even as I suggested that modern art retained primacy of place shaping the institution's concept of art, the National Art Gallery nevertheless had to square up with what falls outside of the remit of "modern art". Therefore, Balai Seni Lukis Negara's use of *seni lukis* in its name eventually developed into a more encompassing term, to refer to all forms of visual art.

As a result, usage of *seni rupa* began to gain momentum from the mid-1970s, possibly due to a renewal of cultural ties and exchanges with Indonesia following the 1971 National Cultural Policy (discussed later in this article), that prescribed a formulation for the creation of Malaysian culture principally on broadly conceived "Islamic" and "nativist" terms. Some early textual examples in Malaysia point to usages that prospected visual forms that cannot be qualified as modern, including "Islamic art",[44] "Malay Art",[45] and "Contemporary Art".[46]

By the late 1990s, *seni rupa* increasingly became a preferred term, evolving, over the next decade, into the portmanteau SERUM, which stands for *seni rupa Malaysia*. The change can be attributed in large part to the work of the Yayasan Kesenian Perak arts foundation, based in Ipoh city, two hours from Kuala Lumpur. Yayasan Kesenian Perak not only offered itself as an alternative cultural hub, and the organisers would also later play an active role as publishers of numerous art zines and journals, alongside establishing a successful translation company.[47]

In British Malaya, attempts to wrest back control of former British territories from their former communist collaborators against the Japanese occupation had been fought through the cultural imaginary. The work undertaken was called the "Grand Design",[48] and other than a reorganisation of territorial governance, it sought to engineer a "Malayan" culture and identity premised on its multiracial demographics. Though informed by political expediency (the fight against a new enemy, communism) and motivated by resource efficiency (economically, the UK was in a bad shape after World War II), the engineering of the national imaginary of "Malaya" was by no means the sole undertaking of the British.

The "Malayan" imaginary was, from its very start, a contested one, since each ethnic community defined this "Malayan culture" differently. While the British had dismissed these contestations as communal in character, the perspective ultimately failed to acknowledge there were other cosmopolitan trajectories that informed other definitions of Malaya.[49] Amongst the Malays, the "Malayan" sentiment both drew inspiration from and rejected aspects of pre-war Malay nationalism. The defeat of the left meant that the broader movement rejected the nationalist goal of uniting Malaya with Indonesia to form a larger national polity called Indonesia-Raya (Greater Indonesia) or

Melayu-Raya (Greater Malaysia). On the other hand, it drew on the possibilities of Indonesia as an imaginary to construct a Malay-centred Malayan one. Viewed in this light, government politics was really a proxy for a much larger contestation at stake: that of a national culture.

This backdrop gives a cause to the proliferation of Malay texts that explored the value of art in magazines aimed at general readership in Malaya. Separated from the Federation of Malaya as a crown colony, Singapore nevertheless became the publishing hub in British Malaya. Perhaps because of its relative autonomy as a port city, it was also politically neutral as a site for the facilitation of ideas across boundaries. It was in Singapore, during the post-war years, that intellectual exchanges across the Malay-Indonesian divide increased exponentially.

A brief survey of essays about art can be roughly divided into four categories.[50] First, there were general surveys of Euro-American art history, often in the form of artist profiles. There were also attempts at explaining to readers what modern art is. Essays looking at more specific issues were also published. For example, a later essay even considered the debates surrounding American abstraction. Second, these essays highlighted the important cultural ties between Malay and Indonesian modern art. Not only were Indonesian artists closely profiled, some of these artists were also exhibiting their works in Malaya. Third, there were essays that attempted to define *seni lukis kita* ("our art"). These were essays that prospected the direction of Malay or Malayan art, as well as its shape, scope and constitution. Finally, there were also articles that addressed the broader question of Malay culture.

These categories demonstrate how a field of ideas and discourses shaped the thinking of Malay-speaking artists and their interest in defining the role of modern art (*seni lukis*) in society to a growing reading public. This cultural field also possessed nationalist ambitions and had the broader populace in mind. Just a year before the independence of the Federation of Malaya, the 3rd Malay Language and Literature Congress (*Kongres Bahasa dan Persuratan Melayu*) was held in 1956. Mohd Salehuddin reported on his participation at the Congress where, as part of the proceedings, he also contributed a tentative glossary of Malay translations of art terms. Though the listing was, by and large, technical, he concluded with the question of whether these terms would be simply transliterated or translated, and weighed the pros and cons of both approaches, without coming to a conclusion. The Congress also hoped for the future translation of art books into the Malay language as well as further research into Malay art and culture.

On the whole, the Congress marked a significant turning point in the politics of the Malay language and culture. It was also at the Congress that language

reformers reaffirmed an earlier decision made at the 2nd Congress in 1954 to adopt the Roman script for Malay language in Malaya. In doing so, they adopted a strategy that resonated with the move spelled out in the Youth Pledge of 1928 for Indonesia. In effect, it was a cultural convocation that signalled a desire to transform the Malay language from a communal tongue belonging specifically to one ethnicity into one that would belong to a multi-cultural nation.

Sezaman: Ways of Being in Time with Others

This dream was not to last. Two years after the formation of Malaysia in 1963, founding member state Singapore was forced out. The nation's delicate and temporary peace lasted another four years. When the race riot broke out on 13 May 1969 in Kuala Lumpur, a state of emergency was declared. When parliamentary democracy returned in 1971, the government argued that, to achieve national unity, the social-engineering work of addressing economic disparities and opportunities (National Economic Policy) needed to be complemented by a national cultural policy. A National Cultural Congress was also convened at the University of Malaya.[51] Artists, cultural workers and thinkers representing different practices (art, music, film, architecture, fashion and so on) came together for the occasion, during which 52 papers were presented. Topics largely revolved around how might different artistic forms and practices contribute to nation-building and unity, to shape the character of a national culture.[52]

In the Congress report published in 1973, Malay and indigenous cultures as well as Islamic principles were prescribed as foundational to a Malaysian national culture on which other suitable cultural forms, that are not opposed in values to the native customs and the official religion, could be incorporated. Ultimately, though, the National Cultural Policy functioned less as a parliamentary act, or even a concrete action plan, than as a state-sponsored ideal that compelled artists to negotiate their sense of belonging, redefine their relationship to the state and ownership over the national imaginary and cultural patrimony. As Kathy Rowland observes, "By calling for a conference as an antidote to the fragmented community, the state was able to locate the source of the riots within a community 'divided' by cultural differences, rather than in a historically constructed political system based on ethnicity."[53]

Insofar as the National Cultural Policy failed to offer concrete directions in creating national unity through culture, the policy marked a moment whereby differences—cultural, historical, economic, racial—informed how the state and its institutions viewed their relationships with the other, regardless of

whether the other included political or cultural communities belonging to the nation-state.

This has implications on how the "contemporary" is translated. On the one hand, the contemporary has emerged to mean *masakini*, a compound of "time" and "now" that means "the present time" and prioritises what is going on now, over the future.[54] On the other hand, the term *sezaman* also emerged as a viable alternative to mean the "contemporary", especially in describing the arts. I suggest that *sezaman* would qualify what we understand of as "contemporary" in a discursive context whereby a state cultural institution had to redeem from the entrenched fragmentation of the National Cultural Policy to think of how works of art can be meaningfully viewed as constituted by differences in historical consciousness.

Prior to the 1990s, the term "contemporary" was used in three instances. The first of these was an exhibition of Singapore paintings at the National Art Gallery in Kuala Lumpur. The show was interestingly billed as Seni lukis Singapura Se-zaman, with the English title Contemporary Art of Singapore. This was the first translation of "contemporary" into *sezaman* in art. The usage in this context suggests that by and large what it conveyed was that the exhibition showcases "recent artworks" from Singapore. At the same time, the usage only makes sense if *sezaman* also works as a qualifier that marks Singapore's art historical consciousness as distinct from Kuala Lumpur's.

Though Singapore was yet to leave Malaysia to become an independent nation-state when the exhibition opened, the curator clearly felt that if there was an art scene in Singapore at that time, it was not only constituted by a very different art community, but also by a different historical consciousness that was cotemporaneous to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

This manner of thought would continue to linger even when "contemporary" is used simply to mean "the present time" or the "now". In the second instance, the usage of the word "contemporary" was not translated into Malay. It was used in the title for an anthology of artist interviews—*Contemporary Artists of Malaysia: A Biographic Survey* (1971). Written by American Dolores Wharton from interviews conducted in 1966 and 1968, the book was not meant to be solely biographical. Instead, Wharton invited artists to also speak about what kept them alive—their visions, ambitions and ideals. Wharton had accompanied her husband to Southeast Asia, and spent the first half the 1960s based in Kuala Lumpur. She would have witnessed the formation of Malaysia and recognised what it meant as a political imagination. In this sense, her book dispensed with critical analysis altogether, for she felt "it is a mistake for foreigners to take on the mantle as *the* arbiters of taste".[55]

At the same time, Wharton, who is of African-American descent, would likely have been doubly conscious of the civil rights movement taking place in

the United States, and may have calibrated her questions to Malaysian artists to explore the power of political imagination. Through a series of carefully crafted questions such as “What is the role of the artist?” “What are the needs of Malaysian art?” or “Is there a Malaysian school of art?” Wharton encouraged artists to reflect on the relationship between nation-building and artistic creativity. What transpired was less a definitive statement than a multiplicity of voices and highly individual personalities coming through to stake out an individual definition that characterised the registers of Malaysian art as constituted by multiple perspectives, aspirations and goals.

Because the published interviews were largely conducted in the late 1960s, all of the featured artists would be, according to art historical convention, classified under the “modern” period. The use of the term “contemporary”, in this respect, was faithful to its original usage, to suggest that the artists featured were of the present time. In this usage, one could qualify one’s practice as both “modern” (a historical movement professing progressive values and innovative forms) and “contemporary” (artistic works of the present moment).

Even so, “contemporary art” came to be used since the late 1960s to mark a growing ideological and historical shift away from modernism, that principally challenged aesthetic conventions primarily on representational grounds. Ideological debates on visual principles did nothing to question what the mechanisms in place were institutionally, ideologically and economically, that contributed to art being recognised as a sphere of human activity with a larger than average public visibility, financial patronage and cultural privilege. Turning to these questions spurred artists to orient their art practice towards exploring the potentials and limits of art, from conceptual art to institutional critique, earth art to happenings and performance art. What transpired were exhibitions that experimented with new forms of display and immersion, collaborations that introduced new materials and technologies into art-making, as well as returning the social dimensions of art to be considered alongside aesthetics. These ineluctably resulted in changes to the way art is written about.

What “contemporary” makes us recognise is the “cotemporaneous” nature of time, meaning that our historical condition has recognised that the different ways we situate our being in time occurs simultaneously in the present moment. Therefore, even as the term “contemporary art” gained new meaning and currency during the 1970s in the USA, something else was happening to how the term was being subsequently deployed in Malaysia. Part of this was compelled by a desire to historicise recent art practice along a nationalist line. Efforts can be seen in the seldom-discussed table diagram found in the closing pages of the catalogue for *Towards a Mystical Reality*.[56]

The 1974 conceptual art exhibition by Redza Piyadasa and Sulaiman Esa is widely known for its display of found objects as an index that nevertheless

recorded previous human interactions on the objects solely through text labels that describe these activities. Marrying avant-garde attraction with non-rational forms of cognition and Zen Buddhism's notion of enlightenment as something obtained through a flash of insight, the artists suggested what was displayed offered a different paradigm, which they qualified as "eastern", to comprehend reality. The purpose was to propose a direction in the reframing of western metaphysics and Cartesian approaches to time and reality that over-determines our experience of art.

Yet, scholars seldom explore what was the goal of this elaborate conceptual conceit. The answer in part is located in the table diagram featured in the catalogue. Here in its most primitive form is Redza Piyadasa's attempt to produce a chronology of "major landmarks and key figures in the development of modern art in Malaysia from 1930–1974". Aside from the unabashedly immodest attempt to write the artwork into a national art history, the table suggests that in naming the movement "Mystical Conceptualist" that emerged from a national chronology, they were also strategically suggesting that the nation offered an alternative form of historical consciousness.[57]

It can be argued that the basis for this historical consciousness is rooted in a kind of double-consciousness. This was described by African American writer W.E.B. Dubois as "spiritual strivings" that produce conflicting demands on African American subjectivities.[58] On the one hand, African-Americans aspire towards the liberal ideals promised by America while, at the same time, they are also constantly reminded that their sense of self-worth has little value in a wider society that continues to discriminate against a person based on skin colour and cultural background.

This notion of double-consciousness sheds light on what is at stake in the writing of *Towards a Mystical Reality* into an historical account of the "development of modern art in Malaysia".[59] Its anxieties stem from a realisation that existing frameworks to produce a universal narrative of modern art meant that institutions in Europe and America had hitherto no theoretical paradigm to account for a global history of modern art that could grapple with other forms of artistic subjectivities that are geographically distant and racially different from a predominantly white art world, that shifted after the war from Paris to New York City. As discussed by Paul Gilroy in his study of the Black Atlantic, double-consciousness did not result in political inertia but offered a new imaginative imagery to redefine the potential of blackness as a discourse to produce forms of symbolic resistance.[60]

Equally so, what *Towards a Mystical Reality* makes a case for is the re-imagination of art historical time. If "Mystical Conceptualists" were positioned in relation to a national art history, the exhibition used everyday found objects

as a signifier of the local environment to produce a different cognitive model for the calling forth of a new historical consciousness into being. The appeal to avant-garde strategy intimates earlier exchanges of ideas between East and West in the early 20th century, but ultimately also gains meaning and clarity not by rejecting the past, but through contextualising the banal objects exhibited as being politically charged. In doing so, the exhibition addresses larger questions about the history of art, in order to say something about art's future.

The shifting undercurrents contributing to changes in perceptions of art would have bearings on the decision of Kuala Lumpur's National Art Gallery to establish an award competition for artists under the age of 30. The Young Contemporaries Award was initiated in 1974, the same year that *Towards A Mystical Reality* was staged. The Malay title for the award translates as *Pelukis-Pelukis Muda Sezaman*, which more accurately means "Young Artists of Our Times". "Contemporary" translated as *sezaman* brought into relief a temporal discourse that shifted from Dolores Wharton's 1971 use of the term "contemporary" to describe art produced in the present moment. Here the prefix *se* transforms the Malay word of Turkish origin, *zaman*, which broadly means "time, era, period, epoch", to produce a conjugation that suggest the phenomenon of cotemporaneousness. In using the term *sezaman*, the award organisers were implicitly locating Malaysia's art as distinct and embodying its own historical consciousness, while also being cotemporaneous with the arts of elsewhere.

This is to say that built into the use of the word *sezaman* is an attempt to recognise that many other different events, phenomena or views of the past can simultaneously exist. Unlike modernism's future-oriented and militantly progressive imagination of a singular temporal order, the historical condition that characterises "contemporaneity" locates the present as temporally complex and constituted by different types of historical consciousness, that contribute to what art historian Terry Smith describes as "the experience of multiple ways of being in time with others".[61] Nevertheless, the usage of *sezaman* here is specific. Its application is to call forth another set of practices as embodying their own sense of time. The perspective is always that one is never *sezaman* with the other, the others are *sezaman* with one. In the examples above, the centre is therefore always the nation embodied by the national institution. It is also important to highlight that, in the context of the Balai Seni Lukis Negara, the central historical consciousness was "Malaysian modern art" through which the geographic (Singapore) and generational (artists under 30) "other" (since they possess different historical consciousness) can be accommodated.

Kontemporer

At the same time, artistic discourse in 1970s Indonesia centred around a re-evaluation of terms. On the one hand, the "modern" had become closely associated with *tjorak abstrak* or abstraction, to the extent that when an art academic suggested that perhaps realism could be qualified as modern in a public forum, his views were strongly opposed.[62] Moreover, the term "modern" had gained currency as a marker of prestige. Art critic Soedarmaji notes that, "A person being described as modern is something to be proud of. It should be appreciated. It shows he possesses modern thinking, a modern house and furniture, and a modern lifestyle. And if he becomes an artist, he should therefore be modern."[63]

For that reason, what was seen to be antithetical to abstraction (therefore the modern) had no prestige or value during the 1970s in Indonesia. Soedarmadji contested this simple equation through an appeal to etymology. In his view, "modern" originates from the Latin root *modo*, which means "now". This was then used as a guiding definition to make a case that earlier generations of painters, from Raden Saleh to Sudjojono, had equal claims to this prestigious qualifier. In doing so, the term "modern" was not thought predominantly as a marker of progress, but approximates a sentiment that addresses what is present.

On the other hand, there was an increasing push to rethink the terms of *seni rupa*, to outline the limitation of its scopes, concepts and institutions and, in doing so, imagine what might a different idea of *seni rupa* encompass. This led art critic Sanento Yuliman to suggest that there exist not just one but two *seni rupa*s.

Sanento characteried the first of these as *seni rupa atas*, which translates as "high" or "fine arts". This category includes modern paintings and sculpture as well as design (in terms set by the industry), whereby standards were defined and accredited through institutions that had its origins in Europe. Sanento even went so far as to suggest that this had such a strong hold on the imagination of the growing middle class, that we all lived under the shadows of "design imperialism".[64]

The second of these is *seni rupa bawah* or the "low arts", which he argued had the urban lower middle class as their public. The range of examples cited here include paintings on *becak* (pedalled rickshaws), glass paintings, cottage industries and popular forms of visual expression, forming a diverse constellation of objects that would today be called "visual culture". In naming this other *seni rupa*, the artist, curator and critic Jim Supangkat suggests that the concerns of *seni rupa* as fine art were replaced by that of *seni rupa* as visual art. In the case of the latter, it was aimed at creating a new art (*seni rupa baru*)

to speak directly against the effects of "design imperialism or, in order words, forms of western hegemonies resulting from economic inequality between countries and globalisation.[65]

This re-evaluation of terms provides a context to "contemporary" when transferred as the loanword *kontemporer*. While the word *kontemporer* was still used to refer to art made in the present, Soedarmadji notes in his article, "Contemporary Art Begins to be Doubted", that suspicion stemmed from the speed and volume at which "modern" art was being produced.[66] This usage highlighted that artists and critics were also searching for an alternative.

This was the basis on which Gregorius Sidharta would mount the First Indonesia Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition (Pameran Pertama Patung Kontemporer Indonesia) in 1973.[67] Whereas Soedarmaji used the term *kontemporer* to mean the present moment, focusing only on "modern art", Sidharta expanded this usage by including also sculptural works that are considered "traditional" or "customary" in the exhibition alongside modern works. If the modern saw the configuration of tradition into principles that would guide art-making to question representation, thereupon distinguishing itself as artistic pursuit, the *kontemporer* made the temporal present a continuum whereby cross-inflection would challenge the very institutions, circulation and disciplinary boundaries of art.

In a forum organised to explore issues raised by the exhibition, Sudjoko attempted to frame these as issues around "Indonesian modern art", even if they hint at changes to come.[68] Sudjoko pointed to larger questions about conditions pertaining to "tradition and change", "westernisation and nationalisation", "universalism and identity", "the individual and the social body". He argued that these were not only background issues, but were the very tensions that shaped new questions about "traditional art", "art that is Indonesian", "art that is western", "artists' refusal to engage in discourse", "the role of the critic", and "art's public".[69]

Gregorius Sidharta attributed this shift in consciousness to conversations with his brother that began in 1970, about his sense of loss and feeling of emptiness, resulting in the two of them embarking on a cultural tour of Java and Bali, in an attempt to peer across the modern-traditional divide.[70] The year 1973 also marked Sidharta's involvement with DECENTA (Design Center Association).[71] While the involvement began with exploring design principles of craft traditions, the expressed purpose was to apply this knowledge in designing products for mass production. Nevertheless, alongside his questioning of the limits of the "modern", Sidharta's exploration expanded to a different way of thinking about the very epistemology of art. If the future-oriented "modern" carves out a new distinct mode of aesthetic inquiry, the *kontemporer*

turned to the present and the now as a space of accommodation. In a foreword to a catalogue, he would note, "I wish to return to the lifelines of traditional life, while at the same time stand firmly in the world of the now, which is to say it is a desire to dissolve the distance between traditional life and the present time."[72]

In turn, the term *kontemporer* itself was not taken up to describe a kind of change that would take place in 1975. It provided a snapshot of the conditions that would give rise to a new artistic license that would be qualified as *seni rupa baru* (new visual art). Controversy erupted at the very first Indonesian Painting Exhibition in 1974, when a group of artists protested against the jury's decision to award based on "methods and tendencies of painting that has long been established may still provide valuable meaning and experience".[73]

The response to this establishment of the "modern" as a canon and measure of meaning was to bestow upon the organiser "the honour of a cultural pensioner",[74] thereby signalling its irrelevance to what was current. In turn, the renewal as *seni rupa baru* would spelled out along five lines of attack in the following year. These then offered a direction for a new concept of *seni rupa*:

(1) the abandonment of distinction between painting, sculpture and graphic arts
(2) the abandonment of specialisation that produces "elite language" under the pretext of vanguardism
(3) To explore new horizons and potentialities without limits and to oppose a tendency towards conformism prevalent in the discipleship model of art-making.
(4) To expand the possibilities of an art that is "Indonesian in character" through prioritising knowledge of the history of New Indonesian Art, which can be traced back to Raden Saleh. To cultivate the growth of art based on theories by Indonesians, from critics to historians to other thinkers. Opposed to folding Indonesian art into a singular/universalist world art history.
(5) Aspire for an art that is livelier, and more widely engaged and present amongst the people.[75]

When comparing the exhibitions Patung Kontemporer Indonesia [Indonesian Contemporary Sculpture] and Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru [New Art Movement, GSRB] with Towards a Mystical Reality and Bakat Muda Sezaman [Young Contemporaries], a number of differences come to mind. In the former, the *kontemporer* re-centred the present time as a space for accommodation,

whereby traditional and modern exist in a continuum and are mutually constitutive of a field, rather than the modern's attitude to tradition as a resource for aesthetic reconfiguration. GSRB built on this new awareness to explore creative possibilities without limits, at the critical juncture of modern art's institutionalisation in the form of a bi-annual national salon exhibition. In the case of Indonesia, the nation as a framework was seen as productive and expansive, offering possibilities rather than limitations.

In the latter, the *sezaman* as a platform aspired towards parity with ongoing artistic trends globally, while the "mystical" qualifies a double-consciousness as a new strategy to question the linearity of modern art history as canonised. Here, following from the 1971 National Cultural Policy that has given pre-eminence to a broadly conceived Malay culture and Islamic values in a nation with a highly multicultural demographic, the exhibitions had a more transactional relationship to the nation. In this instance, the nation offered an alternative art historical consciousness for Towards a Mystical Reality and an institutional base for Bakat Muda Sezaman (Young Contemporaries) to co-locate themselves, cotemporaneously, in relation to the world.

At the same time, even while the contemporary discourse of the 1970s sought to renew art-making by prospecting new forms and language, it sought its raison d'etre through an active commitment to writing modern art history through a consciousness that is national in character. Whether this was regarded as primarily essential or transactional, it signalled a shift in time consciousness towards the present as a space, which on the one hand allowed for a renegotiation of the relationship between the old and new, and on the other, the unsettling of the centre-periphery by repositioning the local in parity with the elsewhere.

Seni Kontemporari/Kontemporer

It would not be until the early 2000s that the term "contemporary art" achieved widespread usage in the terms we understand it in today. "Contemporary art" often refers to a network of discourses that uses art as a locus for critical or imaginative forms of inquiry that circulates through institutions ranging from established museums, to non-profit centres, to artist collectives, to other innovative forms of self-organising. By and large, these discursive networks are mediated by the emergence of a new figure, the contemporary art curator. In turn, the broader phenomenon has shaped how we understand and translate contemporary art as *seni kontemporari* and *seni kontemporer* in the Malay and Indonesian languages. As significant as this post-2000 inflection is, I argue that it is not at the expense of the kind of shift that took place in the 1990s when *seni kontemporari/kontemporer* became widely used.

While the end of the Cold War brought about an "end of history", the triumph of the free-market economy meant that the 1990s existed as a fascinating window period, in which reinventions of culture through capital on a global scale meant that institutional consolidation of practice and entrenchment of prestige was still at its nascent/discovery phase. The Japan Foundation, the Asia Pacific Triennial at the Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art in Brisbane and the Singapore Art Museum all stepped up as new institutions that saw an opportunity during this period to reframe art along the lines of a "region" that had new geopolitical stakes, requiring discursive validation through culture and history.

In doing so, the Asia-Pacific, Japan-Asia and Singapore as Southeast Asian cultural hub produced new regional imaginaries that were dynamically different from those proposed by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). If ASEAN's participatory framework is still largely validated and determined by nation-states that make up its membership, the region as imagined by these new institutions was marked not by territorial boundaries but by shifting and fluid imaginations, even if these were often conditioned by geopolitical and economic interests. Nevertheless, they offered systems of legitimisation outside that of the nation, short of the "global", that didn't yet have the economic incentive to train its attention outside of Europe and America.

What these new institutional centres mediated was also widespread adoption of contemporary art as a category that represented recent practices reflecting the present moment. In turn, when the term "contemporary art" was translated into the Malay or Indonesian language, it not only gained widespread usage and replaced older terms like *sezaman* or *seni rupa baru*, it also allowed for the constellation of a whole range of meanings and investments in the respective contexts of Malaysia and Indonesia.

In the case of the Malay language, changes in sensibility were marked by the gradual replacement of *sezaman* with *seni kontemporari*.[76] At the same time, Pelukis-Pelukis Muda Sezaman's (later changed to Bakat Muda Sezaman) importance as the primary competition and exhibition platform through which artists sought legitimacy and recognition gradually diminished. But the *kontemporari* also signalled something else altogether, other than what artist Wong Hoy Cheong observed as the contradictions faced by young artists, "critical of power structures and yet dependent on these very powers to legitimise and evaluate the worthiness of your work".[77] Rather than dwell on this impasse, the *kontemporari* could be said to have come into use, although I have not been able to pinpoint when this first emerged, to qualify artistic undertakings predicated on the present as having the special purchase to convey multiple truths for the future.

In the use of *sezaman*, one detects a desire to achieve geopolitical parity with art scenes elsewhere, the term was in equal measure shaped by post-colonial discourse of the recovery of authenticity, resulting in tendencies to reinscribe aspects of the cultural past as formal elements for artmaking. In a sense, the First ASEAN Symposium on Aesthetics, convened at the National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur in 1989, had an instrumental role in bringing together scholars to consider the relationship between traditional aesthetics and contemporary art with the theme of "Tradition, the Source of Inspiration".[78] These would help characterise an impulse in the *kontemporari* turn inheriting an earlier framing of the relationship between tradition and modernity as a continuum, that can be traced back to Sidharta's use of the term *kontemporer* in the early 1970s in Indonesia.[79] In turn, the growth in corporate patronage saw in these artworks a simulacrum of the nation, an empty signifier that could mean all things, and also nothing at all. Art served as a cipher that, on the one hand, aspired for the local-global transaction to be on terms that are unprejudiced, even as it also served as a backdrop in boardrooms, as silent witness to flows of capital that bridge the national and international.

Arguing against this tendency, on the occasion of the first ASEAN symposium on Aesthetics, Wong Hoy Cheong stood out to question the superficial manner in which aesthetic traditions had, over the past decades, informed art-making. Instead, he marked out a new direction for contemporary art in his presentation, "Contradictions and Fallacies in Search of a Voice: Contemporary Art in Post-Colonial Culture".

What is clear in Hoy Cheong's understanding of the contemporary was that the present moment is reprioritised as urgent.

> We forget that our cultural past was made by men and women. And in forgetting this, we have (unintentionally) objectified and reified culture: the past has been reduced to a trail of shapes and colors, motifs and symbols, materials and textures. Humanity has become tangential to culture and to our search … if we do not begin to record the present with … empathy and honest, we will be finally leading ourselves without a past. A future without any truths.[80]

In the case of the Indonesian language, GSRB lasted primarily from 1975–79 as a movement, only to be reactivated again in 1987 as an exhibition called Pasarraya Dunia Fantasi [Fantasy World Mall], to re-examine its original idealism and its applicability in the late 1980s. In this sense, Sanento Yuliman's *seni rupa baru* caught the imagination of a new generation of artists, who held onto its idealism centred on creative permissibility.

The Pasaraya Dunia Fantasi exhibition expanded the scope of inquiry from art to culture-writ-large by producing an immersive installation through collective effort that simulated the environment of a mall.[81] The passing of the decade saw an amplification of visual cacophony, and the irreverent disregard for the distinction between "high" and "low arts". But freedom understood on such abstract terms by GSRB also meant that Pasarraya Dunia Fantasi ultimately revealed that like consumer capitalism, symbolised here by the mall, the idealism of possibilities was ultimately limited by the illusion of choice.

In turn, the abandonment of *seni rupa baru* for *seni kontemporari* by the 1990s was to prospect for new grounds on which mass culture could be critically assessed. In refashioning himself as a curator following from his 1990 participation at the Artists' Regional Exchange (ARX) in Perth,[82] former GSRB mouthpiece artist Jim Supangkat came to the 1993 Jakarta Biennale as curator. Likening the act of curating to the old Malay proverb *dijemba-jemba bagai bersiang, dihela surut bagai bertanam* (reaching out one's hands to remove the weeds, dragging the hoe to plough the field), farming here is used as a metaphor for curatorial cultivation that replaced the previous format of award competition. A change in name was in order too, from the (Great) Indonesian Painting Exhibition to a biennale.

In turn, it sought to explore the tendencies that have surfaced in public discourse as postmodernism, by examining art from the 1980s. These were then considered to fall under what is now called *seni rupa kontemporer* instead of *seni rupa baru*. The term *seni rupa kontemporer* therefore accommodated "alternative idioms": installation, video, performance art, mixed media and photography. In conclusion, Supangkat summarised that "if the three art forms (painting, sculpture and graphic) reflected the aesthetic principle of modern art, then the tendency towards one extreme (exceeding all limits) that grew in the 1980s captured the principles of postmodernism".[83] Most significant of all, what this new era heralded for Supangkat was a new internationalism. This position demonstrated a departure from GSRB's earlier convictions.

Kagunan and *Imajan*: Moving into Another Language

There is a phrase used for a period of time in Malay language periodicals in Malaysia around the 1960s–80s that described the act of translation as *alih bahasa*, which roughly characterised the labour as "moving into another language" or "transferring language". On its most visible register, the phrase conveys this transference with a sense of ease and facility. Yet think of the scale that facilitates the migration of meaning from one word, one text, one world into another. To imagine how one moves into another language and

resettles in a different pattern of communication comes with the realisation that ideas would have to necessarily adjust to a whole new range of possibilities and limitations in this new home. This is to say nothing of the kind of work that needs to be taken as a critical response to a global system of political, economic and cultural subjugation, known today as colonialism or Euro-American imperialism.

Such a critical response has today crystallised itself under the banner of decolonisation, alongside seeding a related but distinguishable critical discourse of de-coloniality. At its most succinct form, I have suggested, using an example of Sutan Takdir's profile of Mas Pirngardie, that decolonisation is the project of creating a new position for the modern subject outside of Europe, in all its complexities.

Similarly, to write a history of art terminologies in the Malay language (informed by a critical understanding of their genealogy) requires that equal attention be paid to both ruptures and continuities. Supangkat suggested that the formulation of *seni* as a new Bahasa Indonesia word was inflected by a 19th-century Javanese term *kagunan*.[84] The basis for this line of inquiry began with an essay titled "Visual Art and its Day by Day Combat Against Elitism". Supangkat co-wrote the essay with Sanento Yuliman, whose interest and contribution in etymology has already been demonstrated earlier in this article. The essay mentions *kagunan* as a mediating term in which the concept of "fine art" was first translated into Javanese. On this point, Sanento and Supangkat suggest, "The impression of beauty comes from its root word, which is 'useful' in the sense of: characters, skills, creations, which one may take advantage of."[85]

This points to the idea that when the European concept of "fine art" was translated into Javanese as *kagunan*, it was mitigated by an aesthetic code of morality centred around the idea of "usefulness". In what can be described as a sophisticated counter-move, by re-establishing affinity between *seni* and "fine art", the dialecticians of Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru were able to achieve two things at once.

The first was to propose a new concept of art (*seni rupa baru*) to replace a former typological scheme introduced by Sudjonono and critics that followed on. Supangkat and Sanento demonstrated scepticism about the effectiveness of the post-independence project of decolonisation, whereby a change of terminology or switch in language would effectively produce a break with an unwanted legacy or mentality. In turn, *seni*'s disavowal of the colonial past had ironically deepened its epistemological links to the European concept of "fine art", and this article has expanded on this argument by pointing earlier to Sutan Takdir's use of the word *gambar* to profile the painter Mas Pirngardie

as an alternative method that locates agency in the artist as an outlier with a more complex means of engaging with the legacy of colonial knowledge production.

This played out again in Supangkat and Sanento's reclaiming of *seni* as a zone of contact that facilitated the transference of "fine art", deriving from a classical Greek concept of the *mousike techne*, that later developed into *artes liberale* and subsequently *beaux-arts* and *schilderkunst*. In doing so, they were able to achieve a second goal. What they did was also to claim a rightful place to participate in a global discourse of art through this line of descent, and set forth a new concept of art that would exceed the hegemonic centralisation of discourse which Sanento Yuliman evoked with the imaginative phrase "design imperialism".[86]

The new concept was *seni rupa baru*. In its renewal of *seni rupa*, its fourth line of attack calls for a new approach to writing Indonesian art history. In a sense, this is marked by a desire for return: returning to moments in which the nation is not defined by essence but shaped by contacts. Such a return would also provide a historical consciousness no longer framed by a history of influence, or framed by a history of rupture. Rather, it returns to moments where the "useful" became generative. After all, *kagunan* conjugates from the root word *guna* (useful), an idea which I have suggested framed a number of earlier texts on what purpose does the image serve.

In 1980, Malaysian artist Ismail Zain concluded his sprawling lecture "Seni dan Imajan" [Art and the Imagery] with the following passage:

> In the East Coast of [Peninsular] Malaysia, around the month of October or November (depending on when the monsoon season begins), one sees an arching, seething wave of clouds rolling in from the South China sea, heading towards the beach. The traditional community of the East Coast often connected the shapes and forms of the incoming cloud, flooding the sky that is still presently blue, with the imagery of the procession of Semar and his military cavalcade.[87]

The figure of Semar in *wayang* Jawa, patronised by the Kelantanese court, is often recognised as that indigenous regional clown or trickster figure introduced into an epic cycle of South Asian origin. It is a figure who embodies liminality, between opposing poles, male/female, wisdom/fool, divine/profane. As a hermaphrodite, Semar is both servant and counsellor to the hero of the tale and, at times, also recognised as an incarnation of divinity in his own right. For Ismail Zain, the appearance of Semar in the form of rolling clouds to the people of the peninsular East Coast signifies a moment of recognition. Here is an example of how a cultural community is able to identify new visual patterns

as they learn to see the natural world through language, or mythology. In this sense, what Ismail Zain is also suggesting is that acquired visions are produced through the "perceptual psychology" of the "chance image".[88]

By ending his lecture with this dramatic imagery, Zain is in turn summarising what he had been trying to do with the lecture that carries the title "Seni dan Imajan". For the lecture appears, on first impression, to be ambitious, sprawling and inconclusive. A number of ideas prevailed, principally the privileging of the local over the nation, and prospecting cosmologies instead of country. Instead of advancing a theory about Malaysian art, "Seni dan Imajan" locates the conditions in which artistic vision is able to fulfil a kind of understanding that he calls "syncretistic" as opposed to "analytic". Marshalling examples from cave paintings, Dong Son drum wares to Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra*, from Zen paintings to Rorschach inkblot test cards, Zain's cultural references not only span geography and time, they also span the neat divisions of art, craft and popular culture. In turn, this store of cultural resources was viewed as the inheritance of the contemporary artist.

Zain had a different take about such assemblage in "Seni dan Imajan", in which he describes such deployments of cultural references from different contexts and sources as a "syncretistic vision". For Zain, such a vision is characterised by "the reception of wholeness because it is multi-focus, without the need for the analytical, in which visual concentration is directed at one specific spot. Instead, it is an all over effect with the aim of embracing everything at once."[89]

By exploring vision, giving emphasis to the psychological process in which one sees a spirit or an animating force in a tree or a rock or a cloud, Zain is suggesting that how we learn to see in this context is responding to a different pattern recognition principle. In the lecture, he would use the word "syncretic" to describe this mode of vision. Learning to see the world in "syncretic" terms also then leads to the recalibration of our understanding of when is art and what is culture. In doing so, Zain proposes is that the re-imagination of creativity contributes to the critical undoing of the power of modernity and coloniality, in over-determining the production, reception and redistribution of art and culture.

In the two examples cited above, separated by the gulf of what is called the nation-state, is an underlying rhizomatic sympathy that in popular Malay and Indonesian parlance is called *serumpun* (of the same clump/cluster). "Moving into another language" created an avenue for pioneering attempts at theorising a new historiography of art in the 1980s, following from the avant-garde practices of the 1970s, which called for a critical revaluation of terminology. This resulted in an overhauling of what the project of decolonisation needed to come to terms with, if it were to confront the after effects of colonialism.

These led to a re-privileging of zones of contacts and a formulation of vision as syncretic as key ideas that shape the modern subject in the multiple.

Like Supangkat and Yuliman's counter-move, this article concludes by asking: Might we not perhaps return to consider art history's inventive past as a queer body of knowledge in all its forms of epistemic disobedience? Whether in Johann Wincklemann's *Geschiste der Kunst des Althertums*, in which homoerotic qualities of Greco-Roman classicism became a body political map for the struggle of universal freedom; or the *kulturwissenschaft* (study of culture), through which Aby Warburg writes a redemptive history of human pathos which he makes the afterlife of antiquities yield; or the 美育 (*meiyu*), a pedagogical dream that Cai Yuan Pei argues was to replace religion by producing a modern Chinese subject through the transformative aesthetic experience of what is skilfully rendered beautiful;[90] or the *sejarah kesenian*, the search for the vocabulary of the spirit (*jiwa*) for those who were not only inheritors of a world culture,[91] but also took it in another direction.

In this sense, the term "Melayu" itself is enriched by another layer of meaning. Etymological conjecture suggests one possibility in the word *melaju*, used to describe the strong current of a Sumatran river that later gained the name Melayu. Even after the Malay language later became Bahasa Malaysia and Bahasa Indonesia, the language creatively retains the agility, flexibility and verve through which it could locate itself in the strong currents and flows of modern times. In doing so, the language called forth new subject positions, and calibrated new vocabularies, in order to explore the archipelagic condition of *serumpun* that binds through a concept of aesthetic refinement, in instances when the nation-state ultimately divides. This was premised on the creative labour over the infinitesimally miniscule and the morally refined, from which a new spirit (*jiwa*) can be made manifest in time.

BIOGRAPHY

Simon Soon is a researcher and senior lecturer in Southeast Asian art history at the Visual Art Department of the Cultural Centre, University of Malaya. He completed his PhD in Art History at the University of Sydney under an Australian Postgraduate Award scholarship. His dissertation, titled "What is Left of Art?" investigates the intersection between left-leaning political art movements and modern urban formations in Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines from the 1950s–70s. His broader areas of interest include comparative modernities in art, spatial-visual practices, history of photography and art historiography. He has written on various topics related to 20th-century art across Asia, and occasionally curates exhibitions.

NOTES

[1] I acknowledge the generous assistance of Roger Nelson in helping shape this article to its current form.

It is important to note here that many Indonesians consider Bahasa Indonesia as categorically a new language and not "Malay language". The latter is considered to be a language belonging to a region's people of Indonesia (Bahasa Suku). Be that as it may, Bahasa Indonesia's syntactical and grammatical structure as well as vocabulary primarily possesses Malay language roots, primarily in the form instituted by the Dutch East Indies colonial government as the official language of the colony, though not exclusively given that the creole (Peranakan) cultures of colonial port cities in the archipelago contributed just as much to its enrichment. See A. Teeuw, "The Impact of Balai Pustaka on Modern Indonesian Literature", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 35, 1 (1972): 111–27.

[2] Abdul Rashid Melebek and Amat Juhari Moain (2006), *Sejarah Bahasa Melayu* [History of the Malay Language] (Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publications & Distributors, 2006), pp. 9–10. The following paragraphs that provide a background for the Malay people and language are drawn principally from two key texts: Anthony Milner, *The Malays (The Peoples of South-East Asia and the Pacific)* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); and Timothy P. Barnard, *Contesting Malayness: Malay Identity across Boundaries* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2004).

[3] Teuku Iskander, "Some Manuscripts Formerly Belonging to Jakarta Lending Libraries", in *Papers on Indonesian Language and Literatures*, ed. Nigel Phillips and Khaidir Anwar, Cahier d'Archipel 13 (London: Indonesian Etymological Project, 1981), pp. 145–52; E.U. Kratz, "Running a Lending Library in Palembang in 1886 A.D.", *Indonesia Circle* 14 (1977): 3–12; Henri Chambert-Loir, "Malay Literature in the Nineteenth Century: The Fadii Connection", in *Variation, Transformation and Meaning: Studies on Indonesian Literatures in Honour of A. Teeuw*, ed. J.J. Ras and S.O. Robson (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1991), pp. 87–114.

[4] See Annabel Teh Gallop, "Palace and Pondok: Patronage and Production of Illuminated Manuscripts on the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula", *Warisan Seni Ukir Kayu Melayu/Legacy of the Art of Malay Woodcarving*, ed. Zawiyah Baba (Bangi: Institut Alam dan Tamadun Melayu, University Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2010), pp. 143–62.

[5] Annabel Teh Gallop, "Indian Ocean Connections: Illuminated Islamic Manuscripts from Penang", *Penang and its Networks of Knowledge*, ed. Peter Zabielskis, Yeoh Guan Seng and Kat Fatland (Penang: Areca Books, 2017), p. 118.

[6] Annabel Teh Gallop, "Early Malay Printing: An Introduction to the British Library Collections", *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 63, no. 1 (258) (1990): 85–124.

7 Munshi Abdullah, *Hikayat Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, Munshi. Jil. 1* (Singapore: Malayan Publishing House, 1932), pp. 13–18.

8 See Hadijah bte Rahmat, "The Printing Press and the Changing Concepts of Literature, Authorship and Notions of Self in Malay Literature", *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 69, 1 (270) (1996): 64–84.

9 Munshi Abdullah, *Hikayat Abdullah* (Kuala Lumpur: PTS Publications, 2007), p. 364.

10 It can be used to describe a craftsperson or even a doctor, as in *tukang ubat*.

11 Annabel Teh Gallop, "Audiences and an Artist", *Indonesia and the Malay World* 45, 132 (2017): 146–78.

12 Annabel Teh Gallop, "The Language of Malay Manuscript Art: A Tribute to Ian Proudfoot and the Malay Concordance Project", *Iman* 1, 3 (Sept. 2013): 11–27.

13 Suyami, *Kajian Mitos dan Nilai Budaya dalam Tantu Panggelaran* [An Investigation into the Myth and Cultural Value of Tantu Panggelaran] (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI, 1999), p. 11. The original Javanese reads, "Bagawan Ciptagupta manglukisa, hamarnah-manarhalengkara sakarupaka ri cipta masarana mpune tangata; matangnya mpu Ciptangkarangarananta nglukis". This was translated by Sanento Yuliman into Malay as "Bagawan Ciptagupta melukislah, gubahlah hiasan menurut wujud dari cipta, dengan menggunakan empu tanganmu; maka empu Ciptangkara namamu sebagai pelukis".

14 Sanento Yuliman, "Tradisi Lukis di Indonesia: Lukis Dalam Pengertian Sediakala [The Tradition of Lukis in Indonesia: The Evidential Meaning of Lukis]", *Dua Seni Rupa: Serpihan Tulisan Sanento Yuliman* [The Two Types of Visual Arts: An Anthology of Writings by Sanento Yuliman], ed. Asikin Hassan (Jakarta: Yayasan Kalam, 2001).

15 A. Samad Ahmad (ed.), *Hikayat Amir Hamzah* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1987).

16 "Daripada kecantikan rupa parasnya itu, aku ingin mempolehnya. Disebabkan aku tidak berupaya memilikinya, aku sentiasa dalam kedukaan … Aku menyuruh seseorang melukis rupa puteri itu dan gambarnya aku simpan baik-baik; kerana apabila aku melihat gambarnya, dapatlah aku lepaskan kerinduan."

17 The other text used for recitation on this occasion was *Hikayat Hanafiah*. See A. Samad Ahmad (ed.), *Sulalatus salatin (Sejarah Melayu)* [Malay Annals] (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1986).

18 H.C. Klinkert, *Het Oude Testament, dat is al de Boeken van het Oude Verbond of de Wet, de Psalmen en de Profeten, vertaald in het Maleisch* [The Old Testament, that is all the Books of the Old Covenant or the Law, the Psalms and the Prophets, translated into Malay] (Amsterdam, 1879) (KSPL Kel 32:4).

19 See Sanento Yuliman, "Peristilahan Gambar" [The Meaning of the Word "Gambar"], *Dua Seni Rupa: Serpihan Tulisan Sanento Yuliman* [The Two Types

of Visual Arts: An Anthology of Writings by Sanento Yuliman], ed. Asikin Hassan (Jakarta: Yayasan Kalam, 2001), pp. 3–6.

20 Ahmad Suhaimi Mohd Noor, *Sejarah Kesedaran Visual di Malaya* [History of Visual Awareness in Malaya] (Tanjung Malim: Penerbit UPSI, 2007).

21 *Majlis*, 13 Dec 1934, p. 7. "… tiada tulisan hendak dilukiskan tidak ada siapa-siapa yang mengetahuinya melainkan orang yang menderitanya sahaja ialah kerana hendak mengenal nama Bangsa, Raja dan Tanahairnya ke mana alam ini" ("… no writing can picture—except those who know and have truly experienced the suffering of—a desire to recognise one's race, King, and homeland in this world.")

22 Daripada hasil pergaulan daripada bermacam-macam bangsa, bermacam-macam adat, bermacam-macam ugama, daripada kekuatan tarikan aliran zaman yang dikatakan beredar dari semasa ke semasa ini … Apa yang dikatakan Modern itu menurut yang terdapat di fahaman penulis ialah sebagaimana yang telah disebutkan di atas tadi, "Baru", yakni satu-satu perkara perasaan, fikiran, kemajuan, kelakuan dan keletah-keletah yang baru terangnya satu-satu pergerakan atau anjuran yang dilazimkan atau diadatkan, dilakukan oleh datuk nenek kita yang dahulu, mengubah atau dipinda sama ada ditambah bagi memperelokkan atau dikurangkan pada tempat-tempatnya supaya secocok dengan kemaraan aliran zaman yang beredar itu. Hamdan, "Orang-orang Melayu dengan Pengaruh Modern [The Malay People and Modern influences]", *Majlis*, 27 June 1935, p. 4.

23 Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana, "Mas Pirngardie—Ahli Gambar Bangsa Indonesia" [Mr Pirngardie—Indonesian Painter], *Majalah Poedjangga Baroe* [New Poets Magazine] 2 (Nov. 1934). Republished in *Seni Rupa Indonesia dalam Kritik dan Esai* [Criticism and Essays on Indonesian Visual Art], ed. Bambang Bujono (Jakarta: Jakarta Arts Council, 2012), pp. 7–20.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 See Matt Cox, "Sudjojono: Private Face and Public Persona", *The Journal of the Asian Arts Society of Australia* (June 2012): 22–3; Adrienne Fast, "Exaggerated Enmity in Early Modern Indonesian Painting", Asianart.com, 23 Feb. 2004, https://www.asianart.com/articles/fast/index.html [accessed 13 June 2018].

28 Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 211–50.

29 "The Malay Concordance Project is developed by Ian Proudfoot and hosted by the Australian National University. Its main feature is a growing corpus of classical Malay texts, now comprising 165 texts and 5.8 million words, including 140,000 verses. These texts can be searched online to provide useful information about

the contexts in which words are used, where particular terms or names occur in texts, patterns of morphology and syntax." See http://mcp.anu.edu.au/Q/mcp.html [accessed Aug. 2018].

30 Nasidah S.A., *Majalah Guru* (Sept. 1935), pp. 357–9.

31 This is often translated as "visible soul", which does not quite accurately capture what is meant. *Jiwa ketok* can be elaborated as "the spirit manifested in visible form".

32 *Kesenian*, brochure (Jakarta: Ministry of Information, 1949).

33 S. Sudjojono, "Kesenian, Seniman dan Masyarakat" [The Artistic, Artist and Society], *Seni Loekis, kesenian, dan Seniman* [Fine Art, the Artistic, and the Artist] (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Indonesia Sekarang, 1946).

34 Sindudarsono Sudjojono, "'Untitled Letter to Editor', Jakarta, 25 December 1942", translated by Matt Cox, *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia* 1, 2 (2017): 165–78.

35 Sudjojono, "Menuju Corak Seni Loekis Persatuan Indonesia Baru" [Towards a New Indonesian Art Style], *Seni Loekis, Kesenian dan Seniman* [Fine Art, the Artistic and Artist], *Yogyakarta: Penerbit Indonesia Sekarang*, 1946, "Carilah cara mewujudkan kita, agar corak Indonesia bisa terlihat. Marilah kita bersama-sama mencari. Pakailah cara saudara sendiri-sendiri untuk mendapatkan nasionalisme seni lukis kita itu" ("Find a way to make us visible, so that the Indonesian style can be seen. Let us find this together. Use your own method to obtain the national quality of our art").

36 S. Sudjojono, "Seni Loekis Indonesia Sekarang dan yang Akan Datang", *Seni Loekis, Kesenian dan Seniman*, Penerbit Indonesia Sekarang, Yogyakarta, 1946. "Seni lukis tidak boleh mendengarkan dan menurut suatu grup moraliserender-mensen4 atau menjadi budak dari partai ini atau itu. Seni lukis harus merdeka semerdeka-merdekanya, terlepas dari segala ikatan moral mau pun tradisi agar dapat hidup subur, segar dan merdeka." ("Art cannot listen to or follow a group of people who moralise or become a child of this or that party. Art has to be independent, and independent at all cost, detached from all moral ties as well as tradition, in order for it to flourish, healthy, and free.")

37 This survived into the characterisation of modern art by members of Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru in the 1980s. See Siti Adiyati, "Gerakan Seni Rupa Sesudah Perang Dunia II" [Visual Art Movements After the Second World War], *Kompas* (10 May 1987), n.p.

38 Redza Piyadasa, *Rupa Malaysia: Meninjau Seni Lukis Modern Malaysia* [Malaysian Visual Form: A Survey of Malaysian Modern Art], Kuala Lumpur: Balai Seni Lukis Negara, 2000.

39 Jim Supangkat and Sanento Yuliman, "Seni Rupa Sehari-hari Menentang Elitisme" [Visual Art and its Day by Day Combat Against Elitism], *Seni Rupa Baru Proyek 1—*

Pasaraya Dunia Fantasi [New Visual Art Project No. 1—Fantasy World Mall] (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1987), p. 15.

40 This led Trisno to write the famous denunciation against the "Bandung school". See Trisno Sumardjo, "Bandung Mengabdi pada Laboratorium Barat" [Bandung Enslaves Itself as a Laboratory of the West], "Seni Rupa Modern Indonesia: Esai-esai pilihan" [Indonesian Modern Visual Art: Selected Essays], first pub. 1954, ed. T.H. Siregar dan Enin Supriyanto, (Jakarta: Nalar and Asosiasi Pencinta Seni, 2006), unpaginated; see also Helena Spanjaard, "The Controversy between the Academics of Bandung and Yogyakarta", *Modernity in Asian Art*, ed. John Clark (Sydney: Wild Peony, 1993), pp. 85–90.

41 Sudjoko, "Kritik terhadap Pelukis-Pelukis Bandung" [Criticism Levelled against the Bandung Artists], *Seni Rupa Modern Indonesia: Esai-esai pilihan* [Indonesian Modern Visual Art: Selected Essays], first pub. 1954, ed. T.H. Siregar and Enin Supriyanto (Jakarta: Nalar and Asosiasi Pencinta Seni, 2006), unpaginated.

42 *Kesenian Indonesia*, exh. cat. (Jakarta: Art Department, Cultural Office, Ministry of Education and Culture, Republic of Indonesia, 1955).

43 S. Saripin, *Sedjarah Kesenian Indonesia* [The History of the Arts in Indonesia] (Jakarta: Pradnja Paramita), pp. 6–10.

44 Johan Jaaffar, "Seni Rupa Dalam Tamadun Islam" [Arts in the Islamic Civilisation], *Dewan Sastera* [Hall of Literature] (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Dec. 1976), n.p.

45 Syed Ahmad Jamal, *Rupa dan Jiwa* [Form and Soul] (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya, 1979); Syed Ahmad Jamal, "Estetika Seni Rupa Melayu" [Aesthetics in Malay Visual Arts], *Tamadun Melayu* [Malay Civilisation], ed. Ismail Hussein, A. Aziz Deraman and Abd. Rahman Al-Ahmadi (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1995), pp. 2010–21.

46 Syed Ahmad Jamal, *Perkembangan Seni Rupa Sezaman dalam Malaysia: Sejarah Proses Pembangunan* [The Development of Contemporary Art in Malaysia: A History of the Process and Development] (Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, 1979); Khatijah Sanusi, *Identiti Islam dalam Senirupa Malaysia: Pencapaian dan Cabaran* [Islamic Identity in Malaysian Art: Achievements and Challenges] (Kuala Lumpur: Balai Seni Lukis Negara, 1992); Sulaiman Esa, *The Reflowering of the Islamic Spirit in Contemporary Malaysian Art/Pameran Manifestasi Jiwa Islam dalam Senirupa Malaysia Sezaman* (Kuala Lumpur: Balai Seni Lukis Negara, 1993).

47 See Baha Zain, *Mencari Imej Malaysia: Dialog Sastera, Seni Rupa, Seni Bina* [In Search of the Malaysian Image: Literature, Visual Art and Architecture in Dialogue] (Perak: Yayan Kesenian Perak, 1998).

48 Tan Tai Yong, *Creating "Greater Malaysia": Decolonization and the Politics of Merger* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008), p. 29.

[49] For example, see my text, Simon Soon, "Place of Learning: The Contested Cultural Topographies of Nanyang University and The Chinese University of Hong Kong", *Ambitious Alignments: New Histories of Southeast Asian Art, 1945–1990*, ed. Stephen H. Whiteman, Sarena Abdullah, Yvonne Low and Phoebe Scott (Sydney and Singapore: Power Publications and National Gallery Singapore, 2018), pp. 139–63.

[50] A selection of these articles can be found in a transliteration project from Malay Jawi script to Romanised script at http://www.malaysiadesignarchive.org/visualarts/ [accessed 13 June 2018].

[51] Mohd Taib Osman, *Bunga Rampai: Aspects of Malay Culture* (Kuala Lumpur: DBP, 1988), p. 113. The National Cultural Congress was jointly organised by the Cultural Division of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports and the Malay Studies Department of the University of Malaya.

[52] Syed Ahmad Jamal, "Syor-syor untuk mencapai objektif-objektif seni rupa dalam perkembangan kebudayaan Malaysia" [Ideas for Achieving the Visual Art Objects in the Development of Malaysian Culture]; Redza Piyadasa, "Perkembangan Senilukis Malaysia Kini [Recent Developments in Malaysian Art], *Asas Kebudayaan Kebangsaan* [Foundations for a National Culture] (Kuala Lumpur: KKBS [Kementerian Kebudayaan Belia dan Sukan], 1973).

[53] Velerie Kathy Rowland, *The Politics of Drama: Post-1969 State Policies and their Impact on Theatre in English in Malaysia from 1970 to 1999*, unpublished MA thesis (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2005), pp. 41–54.

[54] *Masakini The Contemporary: A Journal of Art and Literature* in the Malay language was a periodical published throughout the 1970s by the Malaysian Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports. It was a platform that favoured the translation of the term "contemporary" as *masakini*.

[55] Dolores D. Wharton, *Contemporary Artists of Malaysia: A Biographic Survey* (Petaling Jaya: Asia Society 1971), p. 38.

[56] *Towards a Mystical Reality: A Documentation of Jointly Initiated Experience by Redza Piyadasa and Sulaiman Esa*, exh. cat. (1974), p. 29.

[57] Ibid.

[58] William Edward Burghardt Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago, IL: A.C. McClurg, 1903), pp. 1–2.

[59] See Simon Soon, "An Empty Canvas on which Many Shadows have Fallen", *Narratives in Malaysian Art Vol. II* (Kuala Lumpur: Rogue Art, 2013), pp. 55–69; see also T.K. Sabapathy, *Piyadasa: An Overview, 1962–2000* (Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery 2001), p. 64.

[60] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995). See Chapter 1, "The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity".

61 Terry Smith, "Contemporaneity in the History of Art: A Clark Workshop 2009, Summaries of Papers and Notes on Discussions", *Contemporaneity: Historical Presence in Visual Culture* 1 (2011): 5.

62 Soedarmadji, "Senirupa Indonesia Moderen—Jang Manakah Itu?" [Art and Culture: Indonesian Modern Art—Which One?], 3 July 1972.

63 Ibid.

64 Sanento Yuliman, "Dua Seni Rupa" [Two Kinds of Visual Arts], *Dua Seni Rupa: Serpihan Tulisan Sanento Yuliman* [The Two Types of Visual Arts: An Anthology of Writings by Sanento Yuliman], ed. Asikin Hassan (Jakarta: Yayasan Kalam, 2001), p. 26.

65 Jim Supangkat, "Foreword", *Dua Seni Rupa: Serpihan Tulisan Sanento Yuliman* [The Two Types of Visual Arts: An Anthology of Writings by Sanento Yuliman], ed. Asikin Hassan (Jakarta: Yayasan Kalam, 2001), p. xix.

66 Soedarmadji, "Perkembangan Seni Kontemporer Indonesian Mulai Dicurigai" [Contemporary Art Begins to be Doubted], *Sinar Harapan* [Shining Hope] (8 Dec. 1973), n.p.

67 Sanento Yuliman, Hadiwardoyo, Sudjoko, *Pameran Pertama Patung Kontemporer Indonesia 1973* [First Indonesia Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition] (Jakarta: Panitia Pamera, 1973).

68 Sudjoko's sympathy would be spelled out clearly when he sat in the jury for the highly controversial First Indonesia Painting Exhibition, which resulted in a protest and gave rise to the New Indonesian Art Movement, or GSRB.

69 Sudjoko, "Issues in Indonesian Modern Art", *Diskusi Patung Kontemporer* [Discussion on Contemporary Sculpture], moderated by D.A. Peransi, held at Teater Arena, Taman Ismail Marzuki, organised by Yayasan Indonesia and Dewan Keseninian Jakarta, 14 June 1973.

70 Gregorius Sidharta, "Bab 7", Autobiography (unpublished), 2006.

71 Ibid., "Bab 6".

72 Sanento Yuliman, "Tradisi dan Kekinian" [Tradition and Nowness], *Dua Seni Rupa: Serpihan Tulisan Sanento Yuliman* [The Two Types of Visual Arts: An Anthology of Writings by Sanento Yuliman], ed. Asikin Hassan (Jakarta: Yayasan Kalam, 2001), p. 133. Quoted from Gregorius Sidharta, 1975: "Saya ingin mengaitkan diri kembali dengan jalur kehidupan tradisi, di samping sekaligus tetap berdiri di alam kehidupan masa kini yang berarti satu keinginan untuk menghilangkan jarak antara kehidupan tradisional dan masa kini." ("I wish to reconnect myself with the path of tradition, simultaneously I want to stand in the living world of the present time, which means that this is a desire to do away with the distance between what is traditional and what is current.")

73 Jury's Statement, *Pameran Seni Lukis Indonesia* [Indonesian Painting Exhibition], 1974: "Sehubungan pula dengan diatas harus segera dinyatakan bahwa cara-cara

dan kecenderungan-ecenderungan melukis yang sudah lama dikenal tetap dapat menyumbangkan makna dan pengalaman yang berharga." ("In regards to the above, it needs to be immediately stated that the ways and inclinations of painting that are recognised for a long time can continue to offer valuable meaning and experience.")

74 *Penyataan Disember Hitam* [Black December Statement], 1974.

75 "The New Indonesian Art Movement's Five Lines of Attack", *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia* [Indonesian New Art Movement] (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1979), p. xix.

76 It is important to note that *sezaman* continued to be used until sometime around 2005, principally to describe other present-day creative practices that possesses cotemporaneous historical origins to that of modern Malaysian art. For example, see Sulaiman Esa, *The Reflowering of the Islamic Spirit in Contemporary Malaysian Art Pameran Manifestasi Jiwa Islam dalam Senirupa Malaysia Sezaman* (Kuala Lumpur: Balai Seni Lukis Negara, 1993); Raja Ahmad Aminullah Raja Abdullah, "Kata Pengantar" [Foreword], *Isu-isu dan Cabaran Tradisi & Seni Sezaman: Dialog Budaya, Sastera, Seni Rupa* [Issues and Challenges in Tradition and Conteporary Art: Culture, Literature and Visual Arts in Dialogue], ed. R.A. Aminullah (Ipoh: Yayasan Kesenian Perak, 1999); Hasnul J. Saidon, *Persoalan Seni Rupa Sezaman: Cetusan Rasa Seniman Malaysia—Contemporary Visual Arts Discourse: Vignettes by Malaysian Artists* (Ipoh, Perak: Yayasan Kesenian Perak, 2003). By the second half of the 2000s, *sezaman* became an art historical subject matter in Safrizal Shahir, "Kritikan Dalam Pemahaman Seni Sezaman" [Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Art] (SentAp, 2006) (Ipoh: Rumah YKP Perak Arts Foundation, 2010); Safrizal Shahir, "Era Seni 1970-an Sebagai Pemula Kepada Sikap dan Bentuk Seni Sezaman" [Attitudes and Forms of Contemporary Art originates from the 1970s] (SentAp) (Ipoh: Rumah YKP Perak Arts Foundation, 2010); Muliyadi Mahamood, *Seni Lukis Sezaman* [Contemporary Art] (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2007).

77 "New Art, New Voices: Krishen Jit talks to Wong Hoy Cheong on Contemporary Malaysian Art", *What About Converging Extremes?* exh. cat. (Kuala Lumpur: GaleriWan, 1993), p. 8.

78 *First Asean Symposium on Aesthetics, Workshop and Exhibition Held in Kuala Lumpur, 9–27 October 1989* (Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta: Balai Seni Lukis Negara and Committee on Asean Youth & Culture, 1989).

79 B.M. Arus, *Seni Arca dalam Budaya Malaysia Persoalan Tradisi & Kemodenan: Pameran Seni Arca Kontemporari Malaysia* [Sculpture in Malaysian Culture: A Question of Tradition and Modernity: Exhibition of Contemporary Malaysian Sculpture] (Kuala Lumpur: Balai Seni Lukis Negara, 1996); H.R. Kamarun, *Pameran Seramik Kontemporari Alam, Seni dan Perjalanan* [Contemporary Ceramics Exhibition—Nature, Art and Journey] (Perak: Yayasan Kesenian

Perak, 1997); M. Mahamood, *GERAKRASA: Tradisi dan Kemodenan Dalam Gaya Seni Lukis Kontemporari* [Movement Feeling: Tradition and Modernity in Contemporary Art] (Kuala Lumpur: Muzium Negara, 2002).

80 Wong Hoy Cheong, "Contradictions and Fallacies in Search of a Voice: Contemporary Art in Post-Colonial Culture", *First ASEAN Symposium on Aesthetics*, ed. Delia Paul and Sharifah Fatimah Zubir (Kuala Lumpur: ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information, 1989), pp. 122–3.

81 See *Seni Rupa Baru Proyek 1—Pasaraya Dunia Fantasi* [New Visual Art Project No. 1—Fantasy World Mall] (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1987).

82 For a short history of the Artists Regional Exchange, see Pamela Zeplin, "The ARX experiment, Perth, 1987–1999: Communities, Controversy and Regionality", *ACUADS Conference Proceedings* (Perth: Edith Cowan University, University of Western Australia, Curtin University and Central TAFE, 2005).

83 *Biennale Seni Rupa Jakarta IX*, exh. cat., pp. 10–1 (Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 1993).

84 Jim Supangkat, "Foreword", *Dua Seni Rupa: Serpihan Tulisan Sanento Yuliman* [The Two Types of Visual Arts: An Anthology of Writings by Sanento Yuliman], ed. Asikin Hassan (Jakarta: Yayasan Kalam, 2001), p. xiv.

85 Jim Supangkat and Sanento Yuliman, "Seni Rupa Sehari-hari Menentang Elitisme" [Visual Art and Its Day by Day Combat Against Elitism], *Seni Rupa Baru Proyek 1 – Pasaraya Dunia Fantasi* [New Visual Art Project No. 1 – Fantasy World Mall], (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1987), p. 14.

86 Sanento Yuliman, "Dua Seni Rupa" [The Two Types of Visual Arts], *Dua Seni Rupa: Serpihan Tulisan Sanento Yuliman* [The Two Types of Visual Arts: An Anthology of Writings by Sanento Yuliman], ed. Asikin Hassan (Jakarta: Yayasan Kalam, 2001), p. 30.

87 Ismail Zain, *Seni dan Imajan: Suatu Pandangan Umum* Terhadap Imajan dan makna kontektuilnya [Art and Imagery: A General View of Imagery and its Contextual Meaning] (Kuala Lumpur: Kementerian Kebudayaan, Belia dan Sukan, 1980), unpaginated. It is unclear why Ismail Zain has chosen the Javanese appellation, Semar, instead of its folk version, Pak Dogol, which appeared in the folk theatre common to the folk version Wayang Siam, compared to Wayang Jawa, which had the Kelantanese Royal Court as its patron. Be that as it may, Semar and Pak Dogol are often used interchangeably. In any case, both Semar and Pak Dogol shared similar attributes, as trickster figures, recognised to be indigenous to the region, and were additions to the original list of characters from Indian epics.

88 Ibid.

89 Ibid.

90 Johann Winkelmanns, *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* [History of Art and Antiquities] (Wien: Im Akademischen Verlage, 1776); Aby Warburg, *The Renewal of*

Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance, first pub. 1932, tr. David Britt (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Publications, 1999); Cai Yuan Pei, "Yi meiyu dai zhongjiao 以美育代宗教" [Replacing Religion with Aesthetic Education", *Xin Qingnian* 新青年, first pub. under the name Cai Jiemin 3, 6 (1917).

91 This idea was first articulated in the column titled "Forum Gelanggang" [Arena Forum] as "Surat Kepercayaan" [Statement of Belief], *Siasat*, 1950. The Statement of Belief encapsulated the aspirations of a group of literati and artists such as Asrul Sani and Rivai Apin, who noted: "Kami adalah ahli waris yang sah dari kebudayaan dunia dan kebudayaan ini kami teruskan dengan cara kami sendiri" [We are the legitimate heirs to world culture, and we are furthering this culture in our own ways].

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Lao

Chairat Polmuk

The question of Lao political and aesthetic contemporaneities often evokes a sense of belatedness. Characterised by the late historian and anthropologist Grant Evans as a "backwater" to both the colonial metropole and subsequently the socialist metropolis, Laos has been historically perceived as lagging behind major modernising movements during the colonial period and the Cold War.[1] The sphere of Lao art attests to this historical as well as sociocultural time lag. Lao contemporary art, for example, continues to assume a relatively marginal place in the global and regional discourses of aesthetic contemporaneity compared to neighboring countries such as Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia.[2] In this brief reflection, I trace the use of Lao terms for "contemporary" and "modern", and the ways they shape understandings of Lao art. Due to the scarcity of written sources on Lao art both in Lao and any other languages, I seek not to offer a comprehensive account of Lao contemporary art but rather a provisional survey on local articulations of aesthetic categories and periodising frameworks.

To begin with, the widely accepted Lao term for "contemporary art" is *sinlapa huam samai* (ສິນລະປະຮ່ວມສະໄໝ) or *silapa huam samai* (ສີລະປະຮ່ວມສະໄໝ). While most English-Lao dictionaries, such as the Lao-American Association dictionary published in 1962 and Allen Kerr and Sing Bourommavong's comprehensive work first published in 1972, spell the term "art" as *sinlapa*, more recent publications by Lao officials render the term as *silapa*.[3] This orthographic inconsistency, however minor, reflects not only a difficulty of transliterating a Sanskrit word into Lao but also how "art" as a categorical concept is rather new for Lao readers. Strikingly, many standard Lao-Lao dictionaries such as Sila Viravong's *Vatchananukom Lao* [Lao Dictionary] do not include the word *sinlapa* or *silapa* despite the ubiquity of Sanskrit and Pali loan words in such

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corpus.[4] The Lao term *huam samai*, itself also a neologism, is a combination of the Lao *huam* "to combine, to unite, to be affiliated with, to share, to participate, to join"[5] and the Sanskrit *samaya* "appointed or proper time, opportunity, time, season".[6] In its regular usage, *samai* can refer to a particular historical period such as *samai falang* (ສະໄໝຝະລັ່ງ [the French period] or the present time. This latter meaning is evident in a Lao term for "modern", *than samai* (ທັນສະໄໝ), which can be translated as "keeping up with the [present] time". As such, the Lao term *huam samai*, corresponds well with the English word "contemporary", in its literal meaning of being together with the time.

It should be noted that the word *huam* alone often conveys a sense of togetherness in a markedly relational sense. Kerr and Sing list several compounds with the word *huam* that illustrate the inherent sense of intimacy of the term *huam chit huam chai* (ຮ່ວມຈິດຮ່ວມໃຈ) or "united in mind and purpose, to collaborate" or *huam sivit* (ຮ່ວມຊີວິດ), "to share the same life" or *huam thuk huam suk* (ຮ່ວມທຸກຮ່ວມສຸກ), "to share joys and sorrows" or *huam paveni* (ຮ່ວມປະເວນີ), "to have sexual intercourse" and *huam mue* (ຮ່ວມມື) or "to join hands, to cooperate."[7] In this regard, we might understand the notion of "*huam samai*" or the contemporary as what Lionel Ruffel describes as being a "comrade" or a "companion in time."[8]

Due to limited written sources, it remains a puzzle when exactly the Lao term for "contemporary", let alone "contemporary art", was first introduced to the Lao language. The first Lao newspaper, *Lao Nhay* (ລາວໃຫຍ່), published in 1941 by the French-Lao cultural campaign of the same name, offers a glimpse into debates surrounding a related term such as "modern".[9] With the colonial discourse of modernity in Laos during World War II and modernising projects in neighbouring countries such as Thailand in the background, the term "modern" or *than samai* became a discursive framework for cultural production, especially in the fields of literary and performing arts. The word *khwam than samai* (ຄວາມທັນສະໄໝ "modernity") was introduced as an overarching framework for aesthetic expressions that, according to colonial cultural authorities, needed to be relevant to the present time, or *patchuban samai* (ປັດຈຸບັນສະໄໝ).[10] Here the term *patchuban*, from a Pali word *paccupanna* or "present", is combined with the term *samai* to emphasise a presentist idea about Lao culture during the late colonial period.

It should be noted, however, that while there existed an effort to promote novel forms of aesthetic expressions, Lao cultural production during the French period was largely governed by a nostalgic desire for the idealised past fuelled by the colonial discourse of cultural restoration.[11] The terms *than samai* or *samai mai* (ສະໄໝໃໝ່ or "new era") were often used to suggest social and moral decline and were thus subject to criticism. This is explicitly expressed in a

FIGURE 1: “Old Time versus New Era”. Source: *Lao Nhay*, 15 May 1941.

cartoon published in the *Lao Nhay* newspaper in 1941 that depicts a woman and a man dressed in traditional styles, criticising modern young men and women for wasting their time and energy with trivial activities such as ballroom dancing.[12] The caption reads “Old Time Versus New Era” (*Bohan Lae Samai Mai* or ໂບຮານແລະສະໄໝໃໝ່), a juxtaposition that exemplifies a modern temporal consciousness of a historical break.

It was also during the 1940s that the visual arts, especially painting or *huptaem* (ຮູບແຕ້ມ), became part of colonial education.[13] This is relatively late compared to the inception of art schools in other parts of former French Indo-China, such as the founding of the colonial School of Cambodian Arts in Phnom Penh 1917 and the Indochina School of Fine Arts in Hanoi in 1925.[14] In Laos, formal art training was almost the work of an individual. The French painter Marc Leguay (1910–2001), who arrived in French Indo-China in 1936, has been regarded as a founding figure in a history of modern Lao painting.[15] According to Leguay’s biographer Francis Benteux, Leguay founded the School of Applied Arts in the southern province of Pakse not long after his arrival in Laos.[16] In 1947, Leguay moved to Vientiane and founded a school of applied arts, which lasted only two years due to a lack of funding. He then spent more than 25 years teaching at Lycée Auguste Pavie (later known as Lycée de Vientiane), where he mentored a new generation of Lao painters, including the well-known Canada-based Lao artist Thép Thavonsouk (1947–).[17] Again, according to the limited written record, it remains unknown if the Lao term for art, *sinlapa*, was invented as a localised framework for such institutionalised art

FIGURE 2: A cartoon depicting a man, dressed in a half-modern, half-traditional style with a caption that reads, "He studied with the French and he also ordained [i.e. received monastic education]. He does not know which custom he should conform to. He is caught between two things." Source: *Lao Nhay*, 15 February 1941.

practices during this time. Also, while Leguay's curriculum included works of modernist painters such as Claude Monet, Paul Cézanne and Salvador Dali,[18] there is no evidence of whether the terms *than samai* or *samai mai* were used to introduce novel forms of artistic expressions to Lao artists, like what we have seen in the domains of literature and performing arts. Leguay's paintings, moreover, demonstrate the dominant theme of nostalgia in the colonial discourse of modernity and modernism, as can be seen from the artist's pre-occupation with pastoral landscapes, traditional ways of life and female figures.

In his article on contemporary Lao painting, the Thai art historian Burin Plengdeesakul suggests that modern art or *sinlapa samai mai* became well-established in Laos in the late 1950s when the US-supported Royal Lao Government (RLG) sent Lao students to study in art schools in Thailand, South Vietnam and Cambodia. Lao artists from this period such as May Chandavong (1943–) and Kongphat Luangrath (1950–) were familiar with impressionist, Cubist and abstract paintings. Until today, their paintings continue to influence a younger generation of Lao artists, and represent pioneering works of "contemporary" art in Laos. The victory of the communist party in 1975 further changed the direction of Lao modern art with the promotion of socialist realism through formal exchange with other socialist states, such as the Soviet Union and northern Vietnam. Khamsouk Keomingmuang (1942–), who was trained in Hanoi and returned to teach at an art school in the liberated zone, was representative of socialist artists whose paintings often emphasise the lives and struggles of the working class.[19]

It was not until the 1990s, a decade after Laos reopened the country, that the notion of "contemporary art" began to gain currency and finally became locally recognised as a practical and conceptual framework for artistic practices in the past decades. The major force for this emerging discourse was a search for "contemporary art" in Southeast Asia supported by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).[20] Beginning in the 1980s, artists from more economically developed countries such as Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia joined the ASEAN-supported artistic collaborations and became representatives of contemporary Southeast Asian artists. However, artists from Laos, as well as Myanmar and Vietnam, were latecomers to the regionally defined field of contemporary art, as Laos became a member of ASEAN in 1997. In 1994, artists in Vientiane led by Bounthieng Siripaphanh, then the director of Laos' National Institute of Fine Arts, formed an artists' collective with the shared goal of promoting contemporary Lao art to the same level as other ASEAN countries.[21] During this time, Lao painters who were active in the late 1950s returned to the Lao art scene with an awareness of a new approach to painting.

Despite the prevailing concepts of *than samai* ("keeping up with the times") or *huam samai* ("being together with the times"), contemporary Lao painting has been marked with a sense of belatedness. As my discussion has shown, an explanation for such a temporal lag can be both historical and aesthetic. From a historical point of view, Laos' entrance into the regional and international circuits of contemporary art is relatively late due to political and economic constraints under the socialist regime. Aesthetically, contemporary Lao painting demonstrates neo-traditionalist elements and a lack of experimental or politically progressive aspects. The theme of nostalgia, for example, features

quite prominently in art historical and curatorial discussions of Lao art. At the 2014 exhibition We Are Lao!: Contemporary Art In Lao Today at M Gallery in Singapore, curator Joyce Fan addressed this issue by claiming that although nostalgia has given rise to "stereotypical touristy paintings", it can also be a "driving force of consciousness, a barometer of change" as well as a "questioning of one's identity and self amidst a changing social and economic environment".[22] Anna Koshcheeva argues that the rise of neo-traditional art in Laos in the early 1990s and its uninterrupted hegemony in today's art scene is by no means accidental. Rather, the persistence of neo-traditional art in post-socialist Laos can be understood as a response to the state's ideological agendas and political re-legitimisation.[23] Whether the new generation of Lao painters is successful in mobilising a critical understanding of neo-traditionalism or not is beyond the scope of this discussion. However, the notions of belatedness and anachronism in contemporary Lao art raise important questions for the conception of contemporaneity that further shed light on an intricate relationship between politics and aesthetics.

BIOGRAPHY

Chairat Polmuk teaches Southeast Asian languages and literature at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand. He received his Masters and PhD degrees from the Department of Asian Studies at Cornell. His research focuses on notions of affect and materiality in post-Cold War literature, film and visual culture in Southeast Asia, especially Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia. He has published book chapters on contemporary Thai cinema and Lao literature, including "Labor of Love: Intimacy and Biopolitics in a Thai-Burmese Romance" (2016) and "Old Tales in a New World: Lao Literature and Cultural Movements under French Colonialism" (2015, in Thai), both with Chiang Mai University Press. His articles on Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Rithy Panh are currently available online at *Oxford Bibliographies in Cinema and Media Studies*.

NOTES

1 This text refers to the American Library Association-Library of Congress system for Romanisation of Lao words in English. I follow scholars who simplify the ALA-LC system by making no distinction between short and long vowels and by using Roman letters instead of phonetic symbols. Names of individuals are rendered according to established transliterations in available published materials in English. All translations are by the author, unless otherwise noted.

Grant Evans, *A Short History of Laos* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2002), pp. 39, 190.

2 Sylvia Tsai, "Laos at Singapore Biennale 2013", *ArtAsiaPacific*, 1 Nov. 2013, http://artasiapacific.com/Blog/SpotlightLaostSingaporeBiennale2013 [accessed 26 Nov. 2016].

3 See Bunthom Bunnyavong and G. Edward Roffe, *Vatchananukom Angkit-Lao* [*English-Lao Dictionary*] (Vientiane: Lao-American Association, 1962); Allen Kerr and Sing Bourommavong, *Lao-English Dictionary* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1992 [1972]).

4 Sila Viravong, *Vatchananukom Lao* [Lao Dictionary] (Vientiane: Division of Literature, 1957). For an updated version see Sila Viravong, *Vatchananukom Phasa Lao* [Lao Language Dictionary] (Vientiane: Dokked, 2006).

5 Kerr and Sing, *Lao-English Dictionary*, p. 1222.

6 Monier Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2008), p. 1164. It should be noted that meanings of *samaya* also include "coming together, meeting or a place of meeting, intercourse with, coming to a mutual understanding, agreement", to give some examples.

7 Kerr and Sing, *Lao-English Dictionary*, p. 1222.

8 Lionel Ruffel, *Brouhaha: Worlds of the Contemporary*, tr. Raymond MacKenzie (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), p. 13. Ruffel refers to the prefix *con-* (from the Latin *cum-*) in the word "contemporary", which contains a sense of an accord, an accompaniment, and an adhesion, and the German term *Zeitgenössisch* (contemporary), which brings together *Zeit* (time) and *Genosse* (partnership, camaraderie).

9 For comprehensive studies of the *Lao Nhay* newspaper and its significance in Lao historical and cultural movements during World War II, see Søren Ivarsson, *Creating Laos: The Making of a Lao Space Between Indochina and Siam, 1860–1945* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2008) and Chairat Polmuk, "Invoking the Past: The Cultural Politics of Lao Literature, 1941–1975", MA thesis (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 2014).

10 "Prakat Samkhan" [Important Announcement], *Lao Nhay*, 15 Feb. 1944, Microfilm Collection, National Library of Australia. This announcement is specifically for a novel contest in which the Lao Nhay literary committee address an urgency for a new mode of writing that tells stories of current events in an ordinary language.

[11] See Chairat Polmuk, "Invoking the Past", pp. 6–10.

[12] "Bohan Lae Samai Mai" [Old Time Versus New Era], *Lao Nhay*, 15 May 1941, Microfilm Collection (Canberra: National Library of Australia).

[13] For a study of colonial education system in Laos, see Marjorie Emling, "The Education System in Laos during the French Protectorate, 1893 to 1945", MA thesis (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1969).

[14] See Gabrielle Abbe, "Le Développement des Arts au Cambodge à l'Époque Coloniale: George Groslier et l'École des Arts Cambodgiens" [The Development of the Arts in Cambodia during the Colonial Period: George Groslier and the School of Cambodian Arts], *Udaya: Journal of Khmer Studies* 12 (2014): 7–39; and Nora A. Taylor, "Orientalism/Occidentalism: The Founding of the École des Beaux-Arts d'Indochine and the Politics of Painting in Colonial Viet Nam, 1925–1945", *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 11, 2 (1997): 1–33.

[15] See Francis Benteux, *Marc Leguay: Le Peintre du Laos* [Marc Leguay: The Painter of Laos] (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2001) and Burin Plengdeesakul, "Ponlawat khong chittrakam ruamsamai Lao chak yuk ananikhom thueng patchuban" [The Dynamic of Lao Contemporary Painting from the Colonial Period to the Present Time], *Journal of Fine and Applied Arts, Khon Kaen University* 4, 1 (Jan.–June 2012): 30–57.

[16] See Benteux, *Marc Leguay*, p. 18.

[17] See also, Bernard Gay and Bounthieng Siripaphanh, *Lao Contemporary Art* (Singapore: Treasure of Asia, 2007), pp. 10–1.

[18] Sabine Ludwig, "Thép Thavonsouk: Between Serenity and Light", *The Huffington Post*, 20 May 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sabine-ludwig/thep-thavonsouk-between-s_b_7341636.html [accessed 27 Nov. 2016].

[19] Burin, "Dynamic of Lao Contemporary Painting", pp. 41–3.

[20] See Pamela N. Corey, "Metaphor as Method: Curating Regionalism in Mainland Southeast Asia", *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 13, 2 (2014): 72–84.

[21] Gay and Bounthieng, *Lao Contemporary Art*, pp. 12–3.

[22] Joyce Fan, "We Are Lao!: Contemporary Art In Lao Today", http://www.mgallery.com.sg/exhibitions/we-are-lao-contemporary-art-lao-today [accessed 27 Nov. 2016].

[23] Anna Koshcheeva, "Art of Post-Socialist Laos: Contesting the Motherland, Her Past, and Future", MA thesis (Singapore: LASALLE College of the Arts, 2018), pp. 3–4, 43–61.

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Khmer

Roger Nelson[1]

In Khmer, the terms used to refer to the "arts", and to the "modern" and the "contemporary", are elastic, and they denotatively and connotatively refer to a broad range of meanings. Although very little textual information about the emergence of these terms has been found, it is probable that this flexibility in terminologies dates to (at least) the early- to mid-20th century. It was at this time that many new kinds of art began to emerge in Cambodia, which announced themselves and were perceived as modern—and it was also at this time that new modes and sites for discourse about them took form, such as the first *lycée*, established in Phnom Penh in 1933, and the first Khmer print periodical, published in 1926.

Here I propose two key arguments about the Khmer terminology of "modern" and "contemporary" in "art". First, in Khmer as in many other languages, "art" (*silpa*, សិល្បៈ) may refer to many kinds of arts, including: visual arts such as painting; architecture; performance such as dance, theatre and music; and literature of various kinds. Moreover, intersections within and between these various kinds of art have been crucial to the development of modern and contemporary "Cambodian arts" in the 20th and 21st centuries.[2] Second, in Khmer the several terms for both "modern" and "contemporary" are all predicated on a special fascination with temporality. When used adjectivally in reference to art, each of the various Khmer terms for "modern" and "contemporary" thus place art in a complex relationship to time, and to the present era. Both the terms "modern art" and "contemporary art" in Khmer thus convey a sense of contemporaneity, as well as usually a sense of newness.[3]

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Art and Fine Art

"Art", or *silpa*, the Cambodian scholar Neak Srei [Ms] Troeung Ngea wrote in 1974,

> means any kind of work or skill that is made by hand and that is *artful* [ដែលមានសិល្ប៍ *dael mān silp*], which is to say, which makes people feel desirous and interested, and want to look and want to listen. Art has a very broad meaning, and there are many kinds of art …[4]

She concluded thus, before proceeding to introduce examples of various kinds of art—including architecture, dance and literature—which are *purān* (បុរាណ), another word of very broad meaning encompassing the ancient, classical, premodern and traditional.

Neak Srei Troeung Ngea's book articulates a widely held understanding of "art" in Khmer which seems to have been established by the early 20th century, and which continues to be largely unchanged today. The Khmer conception of "art" likely draws on much older notions, given that the word *silpa* and most other art-related terms are ancient, and derived from Sanskrit. Modern and contemporary neologisms, in art as in other domains, are also usually devised from Indic linguistic components. The modern understanding of "art", as Ngea defines it, centres on three points: first, that art involves "skill"; second, that art is aesthetic in nature (it "makes people feel desirous and interested, and want to look and want to listen"); and third, that art takes many forms, encompassing the visual and the literary, the temporal and the spatial.

This sense of art as taking multiple forms which are interrelated is especially important when considering modern and contemporary "Cambodian arts" of the 20th and 21st centuries. The approximately concurrent appearance—within just two decades, between the late 1930s and the late 1950s—of the first Khmer modern novels, the first realist representational easel paintings made by Cambodians, the first Cambodian-designed modern concrete architecture and the first Cambodian films, is an extraordinary concentration of new artistic forms that is best understood through the mutually informing relationships within and between these various forms. Artists of various kinds overlapped in personal, professional, educational and exhibitionary contexts, and their works in various media often engage with one another. For example, the painter Nhek Dim (ញឹក ឌឹម, 1934–78) collaborated on numerous occasions with the singer Sinn Sisamouth (ស៊ីន ស៊ីសាមុត, 1932–76), including by writing lyrics and painting record covers.[5]

The relative paucity of sources and scarcity of artwork from the decades before 1975 poses a significant challenge for art historical research. Unlike

in several of the other languages discussed in this research report, Khmer dictionaries do not include detailed discussion of the terms of “art” or of the “modern” and the “contemporary” and, more significantly, no texts specifically related to art-related terminologies in Khmer are known to have been produced. Moreover, only a small fraction of modern artwork produced before 1975 is known to survive, with paintings and films being especially scarce. A methodology addressing intersections within and between different artistic media thus also helps to redress the problem posed by a relative scarcity of textual sources and surviving artworks.

The notion of “fine art” (*vicitr silpa*, វិចិត្រសិល្បៈ) was formalised and popularised in Cambodia later than elsewhere in former French Indo-China, and it took on broad connotations which were not specific to any medium. When the first colonial art school was established in Cambodia in 1917, under the leadership of Phnom Penh-born French administrator George Groslier (1887–1945), it was named the École des Arts Cambodgiens, or School of Cambodian Arts, in clear contradistinction to the École des Beaux-Arts de l’Indochine, or Indochina School of Fine Arts, established in Hanoi in 1925 by Victor Tardieu (1870–1937).[6] “Cambodian arts” were not yet “fine arts”. Whereas in Hanoi, as elsewhere in the region, artists were encouraged by colonial authorities and their interlocutors to “modernise” and innovate in their artistic practices, including by drawing on “tradition”, in Cambodia such deviation from “tradition” in “Cambodian arts” was discouraged and usually forbidden.[7] It was not until 1965 that the School of Cambodian Arts was transformed into a degree-conferring university, under the leadership of Vann Molyvann (1926–2017), who was at the time Minister of Culture, and also an acclaimed architect and urban planner.[8] With the institution’s change in name to *Sākalvidyālay Bhumind Vicitr Silpa* (សាកលវិទ្យាល័យភូមិន្ទវិចិត្រសិល្បៈ) or “Royal University of Fine Arts”, the modern concept of “fine arts” was formalised and popularised in Khmer and in Cambodian cultural discourse, although Khmer usage of the Sanskritic term *vicitr silpa* (“fine arts”) predates this.

Importantly, with its formalisation and popularisation in the naming of the school in 1965, the term *vicitr silpa* (“fine arts”) referred to many art forms, including painting, sculpture, architecture, performance including theatre, dance and music, and so on. This is despite the use of a related neologism *vicitrakar* (វិចិត្រករ) in the preceding decade to refer specifically to modern artists who did realist representational painting (and drawing) (គំនូរមើលឃើញ, *gamnūr moel ghoeñ*), which was also synonymously known in Khmer as “modern painting (and drawing)” (គំនូរសម័យ, *gamnur samay*). This neologism, *vicitrakar*, was first used by artists who were among the first generation to be taught these skills

of drawing and painting from life at the School of Cambodian Arts, in the years following 1945. Several of these artists formed a collective during the 1950s, which they named the Association of Cambodian Modern Painters (សមាគមសិល្បៈវិចិត្រករខ្មែរ, *samāgam silpa vicitrakar khmaer*). Other Khmer terms for "artist" (such as *silpakar*, សិល្បករ; *nâk silpa*, អ្នកសិល្បៈ; as well as *jāng silpa*, ជាងសិល្បៈ, which means "artisan" or "art worker") can refer equally to dancers, musicians, sculptors and so on. By contrast, new term *vicitrakar*, as in the name of the Association, was used during the decades between independence in 1953 and the Khmer Rouge takeover in 1975 specifically and solely to refer to modern representational painters. One senior member of the Association, artist Pann Tra (1931–2009), later recalled that "*vicitrakar* means *artiste peinture* [*sic*]"—using French loanwords to refer specifically to a "modern artist"—and that "old teachers didn't know how to use the word *vicitrakar*" during the decades before 1975.[9] The significance of this account is twofold: first, the emergence of the new Khmer term *vicitrakar* at some point during the 1950s initially referred solely to realist representational painters, and second, it had a very limited circulation. Yet by 1965, the term *vicitr silpa* ("fine art") emerged with a much wider currency and prominence, as evident in the renaming of the art school as the *Sākalvidyālay Bhumind Vicitr Silpa* or "Royal University of Fine Arts" and, importantly, the term was no longer limited to the visual, but rather encompassed all the various arts taught at the institution.

Modern and Contemporary

There are several different terms used in Khmer to describe the modern, all of which are predicated on a sense of its temporality.

The words "new" (*thmei*, ថ្មី) or "new era" (*samay thmei*, សម័យថ្មី) are commonly used to mean "modern", and the French loanword *moderne* was also popular before 1975. The word for "era", *samay* (សម័យ), is also used by itself as an adjective, to refer specifically to arts of the modern era. As in Thai, the expression "up to date with the times" (*dān samay*, ទាន់សម័យ) also means "modern" in Khmer. Perhaps the most common and striking of the terms for modern is *damnoep* (ទំនើប), also used together with the word for "era", as *samay damnoep* (សម័យទំនើប). The word *damnoep* may be literally translated as "recentness", and it derives from *doeb* (ទើប), which is a common conjunctive morpheme used to indicate recentness, such as in a phrase like "I recently arrived". Therefore, to use the word *damnoep* to describe the modern is to characterise something that is modern as being recent; to describe the modern era as *samay damnoep* is, literally, to describe the modern era as "the era of recentness".[10]

It cannot be stated with certainty when the various terms for “modern” first emerged or became popular, and neither their history nor etymology are discussed in Khmer dictionaries; however, it seems certain that the terms were in usage since at least the 1930s. Novels published from the late 1930s onwards, and with escalated frequency from the mid-1950s until 1975, suggest that all of these terms were commonly used during that time. The terms also appear in Khmer periodicals from earlier, in the late 1920s and 1930s, including *Kambujasuriya* (កម្ពុជសុរិយា) and *Nagara Vatta* (នគរវត្ត). One scholar has suggested that discussion of modernity appears in religious manuscripts from several decades prior.[11]

The most commonly used Khmer term for “contemporary” is *sahasamay* (សហសម័យ). It is not known when this word was created or by whom (and this information does not appear in standard Khmer dictionaries), but it seems to have first appeared in the 21st century. Comparisons could also be made, of course, with other languages using similar or related words; in the interests of focus, I will limit discussion here to English and Khmer.

Sahasamay is a neologism “translated” or adapted from English and/or French.[12] The components this term are thus identical to its Anglophone equivalent. In the Khmer word *sahasamay*, the Pali word *saha* (សហ) means “together with”, whereas *samay* means “period” or “era”, as noted above. In the English word “contemporary”, the prefix “con” also means “together with”, and the origin of “temporary” is *tempus*, the Latin for “time”, “season” or “portion of time”. So, one understanding of the term “*sahasamay*” or “contemporary”, in Khmer as in English, could be “together with the time” or, even more pertinently in Khmer, “together with *this* time”, since the word *samay* on its own is generally understood in context to refer specifically to the present era.

Terry Smith has discussed the implications of the Anglophone etymology of the word “contemporary”. He argues that “*con tempus* came into use, and remains in use, because it points to *a multiplicity of relationships between being and time*”.[13] Moreover, Smith insists that “the concept of the ‘contemporary,’ far from being singular and simple—a neutral substitute for ‘modern’—signifies multiple ways of being with, in, and out of time”.[14] This applies to the Khmer term *sahasamay* near-identically as it does to English word “contemporary”, since the former is derived from the latter, and both terms mean “together with this time”.

Moreover, the Khmer terminology—and its colloquial usage—actually points to an understanding of the contemporary as a conceptual category, rather than a periodising marker or historical moment, and moreover as a concept that inheres also in that which we call modern. The word *samay*, on its own, literally means “age”, “period” or “era”, and is usually specified by an adjoining adjective—as in *samay Angkor* (សម័យអង្គរ, “the Angkorian period”). Yet, in

current vernacular usage, *samay* on its own is also understood to refer particularly to the current era: that is, the word *samay* also means "contemporary". Significantly, this usage was also common during the decades before 1975, as mentioned above, when the word *samay* on its own was used by artists to mean "modern": it is also found in interviews with artists active at that time.

That the word *samay*, which means "period", can be used to refer either to the modern or to the contemporary—or to both—suggests that the two terms, "modern" and "contemporary", are intuitively understood in Khmer as coextensive. In English too, as is many other languages, there is often slippage between the terms "modern" and "contemporary", in common usage outside of specialised art discourses. What is striking about the Khmer case, however, is that the word *samay* is used to refer to either the modern or the contemporary—or both—not only by laypeople, but also by artists, writers and those most specifically invested in art-related discourse. This also means that to regard either the modern or the contemporary as a discrete or distinct era (in history or in art) is nonsensical in Khmer, linguistically and therefore also conceptually.

BIOGRAPHY

Roger Nelson is an art historian and independent curator, and Postdoctoral Fellow at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He is co-founding co-editor of *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*. Roger completed his PhD at the University of Melbourne, on "Cambodian arts" of the 20th and 21st centuries. He has contributed essays to scholarly journals, specialist art magazines, books and numerous exhibition catalogues. He has also curated exhibitions and other projects in Australia, Cambodia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Nelson's translation of Suon Sorin's 1961 Khmer nationalist novel, *A New Sun Rises Over the Old Land*, is forthcoming with NUS Press.

NOTES

[1] Some sections of this text draw on my doctoral dissertation, completed in 2017 at the University of Melbourne. For their generous and insightful comments, I thank my examiners, Patrick D. Flores and Ashley Thompson. I also thank my supervisors Edwin Jurriens, Lewis Mayo and Nikos Papastergiadis, as well as David Chandler, whose assistance and support has been invaluable.

This text refers to the Library of Congress system for the Romanisation of Khmer words in English, with some diacritical marks omitted. All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

It should be noted that Khmer is not my first language. There is thus an insurmountable and unavoidable distance between me and the language, one that is often compounded by various forms of privilege that inhere in my person. I am very grateful to many speakers of Khmer who have generously discussed with me the issues in question here: exchanges held over a period of several years, from which I have learned immensely. These people include, among others: David Chandler, Chin Setha, Khvay Samnang, Pen Sereypagna, Ashley Thompson, Tith Kanitha and Vuth Lyno.

[2] The phenomenon of trans-media intersections is, however, by no means unique to the modern or contemporary moment. Dynamic inter-animating engagements between different forms of "art" are also spectacularly displayed in "premodern" temples in Cambodia, for example, where the literary (inscriptions), visual (sculptures and reliefs), performed (dance and theatrical arts as depicted in sculptures, and rituals as enacted within the temples), and spatial (architectural form and scale) are inextricably combined with profound effect.

[3] Thanavi Chotpradit makes a similar observation in her discussion of Thai terminology, in this article. My articulation of this idea has benefited from her discussion of the Thai case.

[4] Neak Srei Troeung Ngea née Laay Hunki, *Ariyadham Khmaer* [The Khmer Civilization] (Phnom Penh: Editions Angkor [1974] 2007), p. 71, emphasis in original.

[5] Roger Nelson, "'The Work the Nation Depends On': Landscapes and Women in the Paintings of Nhek Dim", in *Ambitious Alignments: New Histories of Southeast Asian Art, 1945–1990*, ed. Stephen H. Whiteman, Sarena Abdullah, Yvonne Low, and Phoebe Scott (Sydney and Singapore: Power Publications and National Gallery Singapore, 2018), pp. 19–48.

[6] Caroline Herbelin, "Deux conceptions de l'histoire de l'art en situation coloniale: George Groslier (1887–1945) et Victor Tardieu (1870–1937)" [Two Conceptions of Art History in in Colonial Situations: George Groslier (1887–1945) and Victor Tardieu (1870–1937)], *Siksacakr: The Journal of Cambodia Research* 12–3 (2011): 206–18.

7 Ingrid Muan, "Citing Angkor: The 'Cambodian Arts' in the Age of Restoration 1918–2000", PhD dissertation (New York, NY: Columbia University, 2001), esp. pp. 72–183.

8 Vann Molyvann, "A Conversation with Vann Molyvann", in *Cultures of Independence: An Introduction to Cambodian Arts and Culture in the 1950's and 1960's*, ed. Ly Daravuth and Ingrid Muan (Phnom Penh: Reyum, 2001), pp. 3–23.

9 Pann Tra (Romanised in the text as Pen Tra), "A Conversation with Pen Tra", in *Cultures of Independence*, ed. Daravuth and Muan, pp. 286–7.

10 Terms such as "Sangkum period" (*samay sanggam*, សម័យសង្គម) or "Sihanouk period" (*samay Sihanouk*, សម័យសីហនុ), referring to the years 1955 to 1970, are effectively synonymous with modernity. Yet these terms are not used specifically in relation to art. Also not generally used in art discourse are quirkier terms from before 1975, such as "era of Apollo" (*samay Apollo*, សម័យអាប៉ូឡូ), in reference to the US space exploration program, or more recent terms such as "computer age" (*samay kumbyūdar*, សម័យ កុំព្យូទ័រ).

11 Anne Ruth Hansen, *How to Behave: Buddhism and Modernity in Colonial Cambodia, 1860–1930* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007).

12 I am grateful to Ashley Thompson for alerting me to this.

13 Terry Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 4. Emphasis in original.

14 Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art?* p. 6.

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Indonesian and Javanese

Jim Supangkat

Preamble

1. Art history, which serves as a base for modern art, is still regarded as knowledge that brings about universal truths, despite looming debates.
2. Art history expands itself globally, alongside modern art, as a form of knowledge.
3. Modern art is becoming a part of modern discourse, that has disseminated itself during the formation of the modern world, all over the world.

The formation of the modern world cannot be utilised as a point of justification for the fact that art history has been one of the fundamentals of modern art as it has emerged throughout the entire world. The reason being, the formation of this modern world and the emergence of modern art outside of Europe and The United States—especially in postcolonial countries in Asia—exhibit the same dilemma.

Despite fundamentals of the modern world having been applied outside of Europe and the United States—fundamentals which include basic civil rights, power of the people (*res publica*), public welfare and democratic concepts that share power to governmental institutions, judicative bodies and the parliament—these fundamentals of the modern world have not been completely comprehended. Due to this fact, the difficulty of witnessing signs of the modern world outside of Europe and the United States are enormous. There still are questions being asked: whether it is correct that power truly rests in the hands of the people, whether the concept of democracy can really prevent the pooling of centred power, and last, whether the judicial system functions in reality to serve justice rather than merely the extensive influence

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of the ruler, as it had happened in the western world before the emergence of modern world?

These questions are parallel to the questions of whether art history as one of the fundamentals of modern art can be understood outside of Europe and the United States. In parallel to the dilemma of the modern world outside of the West, it is very difficult to appraise signs of modern art outside of the western world.

On the "Modern World"

The notion of the modern world in the West and its emergence in the 18th and 19th centuries is part of western history. Through the mind of John Locke (1632–1704) and Montesquieu (1689–1755), the modern world gave rise to the concept of a state currently being applied everywhere in the world, since there is no alternative.

At the same time, the modern world marks the inclinations of an economic system, capital accumulation and industrialisation in Europe. Such developments are inseparable from the ensuing second wave of colonialism, the Age of Mercantilism, one that based itself on the mind of Adam Smith (1723–90). The objective of this being: stabilising financial conditions through positive trade balance by way of colonial expansion in order to increase export commodities (spices) and also to put into operation trade monopolies in the occupied Asian colony.

When the modern world appears outside of the West, especially in postcolonial countries in Asia, its formation also brings about two signs of the modern world. The second sign is the one that brings forth issue. Mercantilism that involved repressive politics in colonial governments sparked a head-on conflict from the farmers in Asia. Indonesian history has noted a string of rebellions, not to mention wars. These flurries of conflicts since the 19th century gave birth to the sense of nationalism that underlines the struggle towards and demand for freedom—postcolonial countries in Asia quickly gained their freedom after the end of World War II.

Conflict caused by the second sign of the modern world, mercantilism, renders the formation of the modern world in Asian countries overshadowed by doubts. In Indonesia, repressive colonial politics caused mercantilism to kickstart socio-cultural conflicts, as well as religious clashes. The result is the celebration of the unacknowledged local identity during the colonial time as a national identity that is pulling in anti-western symptoms.

It is from this that the perspective that perceives the modern world as western emerged. This spectacle underlines an unwillingness to problematise

the modern world: by evaluating its history and the birth of its philosophical ideas which, then, formulated the fundamentals of the modern world. The idea that the Republic of Indonesia is a nation that arose from modern discourse is nonexistent, let alone the musing of an Indonesian modernism, which could be specifically different to that of modernism claimed to contain universal truth(s).

On "Art" and "Modern Art"

It is from such a background that "modern art" in Indonesia stopped at its nomenclature, and has become a term nearly devoid of connotative meaning. Modern art, on one side, refuses signs of modern art and modernism as it is commonly understood in the West, while on the other side, nationalistic modern art has no path to pave towards Indonesian modern art. This development was greatly influenced by the unfolding and conditions of the sociopolitical landscape, that does not head towards artistic issues.

The basic idea was to find an "Indonesian modern art" which was different from modern art as it was commonly understood, that is, as "Western modern art". It is a matter of course that people behind this idea refused art history and its influence in the practice of art-making, and other discourses related to modern art development. This caused a development without discourse, without clear thoughts. The development of "Indonesian modern art" in the mainstream between the 1950s and the 1970s was mostly under the influence of a kind of humanism introduced by S. Sudjojono in the 1930s. This humanism emerged in the context of criticising Dutch colonialism. It was a kind of socialism mixed with nationalism, and tended to defend poor people. The artistic language mostly used was a kind of expressionism first introduced by an exhibition at Bataviasche Kunstkring in the 1930s. In this mixed-up condition, finding an "Indonesian modern art" proved impossible.

Despite this, it is worth noting that there were a handful of artists who had made an attempt to adapt western modern art, which they believed was the modern art of the world. These artists were marginalised. The city in which they gathered (Bandung) was stricken as "the West's laboratory". Despite their attempt, such adaptation has undergone a difficult process, since the term "art" in Indonesia denotes a different predication.

In Indonesian, the term for "art" is *seni*. The Indonesian language (originated from the Malay language) is a modern language that appeared at the beginning of the 20th century, which was also concurrent to the initiation of the idea for the nation of Indonesia (a postcolonial country consisting of 497 ethnic groups).

Though unrecorded, under the shadow of a particular discourse, the adaptation of the term "art" into *seni* in Indonesian demonstrated an interpretation

that made the understanding of *seni* not entirely similar to art. This is a symptom that shows that the understanding of the *seni*/art phenomenon in Indonesia retains a distinctiveness, which has not been fully researched even now. Through daily usage—from the need to indicate an activity to the realm of reason—the understanding of the word *seni* has influenced the Indonesian perception of art.

Although based on Malay, the Indonesian language is different from Malay, especially in its idioms and creation of new words. The word *seni* in Malay, for example, means "fine" and has no connections with art. In Indonesian, this term *seni* means "art". Considering its definition, in Indonesian *seni* should be understood as "art *per se*" or "art within the domain of philosophy". This is why *seni* should be connected with sensibility in the forming of perception (which is higher than sensitivity), and further with artistic sensibilities when it comes to the need of expressing an understanding. *Seni rupa* ("visual art"), *seni tari* ("dance art"), *seni sastra* ("literature") and so on are all discourses of artistic sensibilities.

The definitions of *seni* in Indonesian are:

1. The skill to make or create something that is pleasant or beautiful. Here, "skill" here can be elaborated as "technical skill", even "craftsmanship". In *seni* (and also in the Javanese word *kagunan*, which we turn to soon), since the 19th century, we can see that craft is not excluded. (Meanwhile, when Kant defined "art" for the first time, also in the 19th century, craftsmanship along with narrative and the human body was clearly excluded and considered as evil.)
2. A work that is made or created using great skill (such as poetry, painting, carving and so on).

Seni should be understood as a sensitivity in human mental condition that can recognise the sense of beauty. In other words, *seni* is an artistic sensibility that gains its form after it becomes seen in various artistic creations.

In Indonesian, the denotative meanings of *seni* are further emphasised through the formation of other terms that are derivatives of the root word *seni*: such as *seni rupa* ("visual art"), *seni tari* ("dance art"), *seni musik* ("music art"), *seni teater* ("theatre art") and so on. In a linguistic sense, the word *seni* within these derivatives is the subject, known as the "head". Meanwhile the other words, *rupa*, *musik*, *sastra*, *teater* and so on, in linguistic terms are known as "modifiers"—they function to explain the subject.

These modifiers, in linguistic terms, include adjectives as well as nouns. In describing artistic expressions, the terms "music", "literature" and "theatre"

are nouns. Meanwhile “dancing”, “painting” and “sculpting” are verbs, whereas *rupa* (“visual”) is the only adjective.

The Indonesian language does not tend to differentiate between these modifiers when judging artistic sensibilities. Visual art is not at all more meaningful in comparison with, for example, dance art, music or literature. This shows that the extraordinary nature of artistic creation is not determined by the type of artwork produced, but rather by the artistic sensibility that appears in artistic creations. In English, the adjective is distinct. As such, the adjective “visual” when used as a modifier in English occupies a special position. Thus, “visual art” is seen as more essential in its ability to show artistic sensibility (described clearly in art history). This special provision led to the creation of terms in English such as “high art”, “fine art” or “art” that is differentiated from “the arts”, which may also refer to music, theatre, dance and so on.

This kind of distinction between “the arts” and “fine art” was discussed by Dennis Dutton in his text “But They Don’t have Our Concept of Art”, which questioned the understanding of “art” in “ethnic cultures”, or the non-western world. Although he did not dismiss the notion that there may be some art-related activities in non-western cultures, Dutton could not find any artistic reasoning or cognitive process underlying artistic activities. He argued that the identification of art in non-western cultures is “adverbial” in nature, in the sense that they only record the traits of art, without looking deeper into what are behind these symptoms—in a linguistic sense none of the art-related terms in non-western cultures has a subject (a noun) known as the “head”. As such, Dutton argues, there can never be any word or term comparable to the word “art” in English, or to the comprehension of art within a western framework. Dutton insists that no one could ever know what non-western traditions comprehend about the phenomenon of art. In other words, there exists no cognition about art outside of the West.[1]

Of course, unknown to Dutton, there exists in the Indonesian language an identification of art that resulted in the word *seni*. The denotation, which is adverbial in nature, can refer to either the product of art in “ethnic cultures”, or to the art product in a modern world (that is, “modern art”) as well as to art products in their most current developments—video art, installation art, digital art (*seni video*, *seni instalasi*, *seni digital*) and so on. This adverbial identification has a subject, which is the noun *seni*, the linguistic “head”.

Thus, behind the terms used to describe various artistic activities in the Indonesian language, there are thoughts not only on the phenomenon of art (visual art and its materiality) but, importantly, also on artistic sensibilities. To date, no research has been done on when the terms *seni* and *seni rupa* were

used for the first time, and who introduced them. However, these and other terms related to *seni* already existed in the *Dictionary of Indonesian Language* when it was first published in 1952.[2] In that dictionary, the term *seni rupa* was described as painting, sculpture and architecture. Thus, *seni rupa* is no other than "fine art". However, the practice of fine art known in Indonesia in the first half of the 20th century was only the art of painting. This is why most artists, including Sudjojono, only talk about paintings. But when art academies emerged in Bandung and Yogyakarta in 1950, the term *seni rupa* was already in use. For example, the name of ASRI art school in Yogyakarta, is an acronym of Akademi Seni Rupa Indonesia or Indonesian Visual Arts Academy.

The Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru movement (GSRB: New Art Movement), which emerged in the mid-1970s was, of course, a criticism of fine art. It was clearly proclaimed as an attempt to break the boundaries between painting, drawing, printmaking and sculpture, sections known in art academies. Because in dictionaries, *seni rupa* was described as painting and sculpture, the GSRB movement considered this as an old and outdated definition.

The Javanese language term for art is *kagunan*. I have done a linguistic analysis, and found that this term already circulated in the 19th century, and was a translation of *mousike techne* in Greek.[3] It was intended to refer to art-making which since the 16th century—considering Giorgio Vasari's research—had been seen as a genial ability of artists in developing a naturalistic language of expressions which are beyond solely the technical ability of making something.

In the 19th century, the understanding of *kagunan* was criticised by well-known Javanese philosopher Ronggowarsito. In identifying art, he tended to see "art *per se*" as the basis of expressing beauty, and refused to acknowledge that it was a very special ability of making that could bring beauty to reality.

The term *kagunan* can be found in a dictionary of high Javanese (*Bausastra Jawa*) first published in Javanese and Dutch in the 1930s.[4] The definition of *kagunan* here does not follow the understanding of *mouzike techne*. The meaning of this term follows Ronggowarsito's perception. In this dictionary, *kagunan* is "art per se".

It is quite obvious that the definition of *seni* in the Indonesian language adapted the definition of *kagunan* in high Javanese. In everyday life today, one can immediately feel that this understanding is the common understanding of art among artists and the people in Indonesia.[5]

Such an assessment did not appear in the development of Indonesian modern art, whether it be within the mainstream, which was the nationalistic tendency, nor the adaptive modern art that attempted to adopt fundamentals of western modern art which were believed to be the world's modern art.

Due to this, modern art in Indonesia developing from the early 20th century up to the 1980s did not show clear signs.

On “Contemporary Art”

The term “contemporary art” is not yet considered to be part of the Indonesian language, let alone acknowledged or absorbed by it. I introduced the term “contemporary art” in 1993, when curating Jakarta Biennale IX. Before then, the term was unknown in Indonesia. Because a strong refusal prevailed in the art world at that time, around ten years was needed before the term was clearly understood, in the early 2000s, in art academies and among a limited number of people in the art world. Seeing the connection between the Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru movement in the 1970s and contemporary art from the 1990s on is still a continuing discussion today in art academies. It is based on a vision that sees a connection between late modern and contemporary art. There are three signs of contemporary art.

1. Contemporary art emerged as a part of the rebellion of the Europeans and Americans, set off by the European scholars’ protests at the end of the 1960s. The movement challenges rational truth as legitimised by the sciences. The counter-culture birthed from this rebellion showed new signs for democratic life in Europe and the United States.
2. Contemporary art cannot be separated from modern art, because contemporary art is an antithesis to modern art, that hinges on the power negation that appeared out of the weakness of modernism and art history as a field of knowledge.
3. Since the year 2000, contemporary art has been carrying signs of globalisation marked by the end of the Cold War in 1991, the emergence of a global economy and the development of global networks of communication. From these signs, contemporary art signals a kind of “global youth culture”, showing the mindset of a new generation—those born after 1991—unburdened by the worries of global destruction that could have been caused by the use of nuclear intercontinental ballistic missiles in World War III.

This latter sign of contemporary art, its globalisation, is the symptom most easily understood throughout the world—including in Indonesia—because its sign appears as it is in reality.

The first sign, connecting the emergence of contemporary art to developments in democratic life and the upheaval of specific reasoning in Europe and North America, was understood and read in other parts of the world—and

especially in Asia—as an ideal, narrative and form of knowledge that was not reflected in reality.

The second sign of contemporary art, its inseparability from modern art, to date still stands as a discourse in the search of the fundamentals of contemporary art. This discourse is still regarded as a "common ground" in global contemporary art: in continuation with global modern art. This discourse, however, is not easily understood and developed outside of Europe and North America, since the symptoms and discourses of modern art—which cannot be dismissed in this discourse—are not clear outside of Europe and the United States.

Only time will tell how these discourses of contemporary art will develop in a global context. There are signs suggesting that historicist theory, contextual theory and essentialist theory, all bound to art history, are gradually being left behind. On the other hand, there appears to be an attempt to develop a naturalist theory that sees art as a universal and central human practice, even though it may take different forms in different cultures. The development of this theory—taken to be simplistic and too generic—opens a new discursive parameter described as "ratification", which is an attempt to explore and frame artistic activities which had previously been overlooked, or been dismissed as not being "art".[6]

BIOGRAPHY

Jim Supangkat is an artist, curator and writer based in Jakarta. In 1975, he founded Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru (Indonesian New Art Movement), a group of artists who, in their artworks, exhibitions and manifesto rejected the prevailing definitions of art in Indonesia, and hailed the possibility for art to relate to society. Since the 1990s, Supangkat has played an important role in the circulation of Indonesian and Southeast Asian contemporary art internationally. His artworks are collected in museums internationally, and he has curated significant exhibitions in Indonesia, the region and beyond. Supangkat's numerous writings have been published by major institutions around the world.

NOTES

1 Dennis Dutton, "But They Don't Have Our Concept of Art", in *Theories of Art Today*, ed. Nöel Carroll (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), pp. 217–40.

2 W.J.S. Poerwadarminta, *Kamus Umum Bahasa Indonesia* [Dictionary of Indonesian Language] (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1952).

3 The definition of *mousike techne* is similar to the definition of *artes liberales* in Latin: the work of free men. See Thomas Munro, *The Arts and Their Interrelations*, 2nd edn (Cleveland, OH: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1969), pp. 38–40.

4 W.J.S. Poerwadarminta et al., *Bausastra Jawa* [Javanese Dictionary], Javanese edition (Groningen: J.B. Wolters, 1939).

5 Since the discourse of art and its definitions is not influential in Indonesia, the only understanding of art that has spread among the society is the understanding related to the definitions of art in Indonesian dictionaries. This is my basic thinking.

6 Pauline von Bonsdorff, "Pending on Art", *Contemporary Aesthetics* 4 (2012): n.p. http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=644 [accessed May 2018].

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