

Call for Papers

National Imaginations in Southeast Asian Art Workshop

ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute

20th January 2017

The role of art in nation-building is not new. From French history paintings which glorified Napoleon's reign to Soviet Socialist Realism, art has not only been yoked to the political objectives of the elite but also served as a narrator of nation. In this context, art has been deployed as sophisticated means to express political values and ideals seeking to capture the spirit and mentalities of successive periods.

Southeast Asian nations emerged from a whirlwind of ideologies such as anti-colonialism, communism, and socialism, with the Cold War as backdrop. These postcolonial nations have produced iconic art works and discourses that have captured the aspirations and struggles of the day. Indeed the political transitions and shifting ideologies experienced by many societies in the region progressively changed the way modern art was produced and perceived in terms of styles, subject matter, iconography, idioms and genres.

Many young Southeast Asian nations sought a new artistic identity inspired by western idioms and genres. Suffice to say early concepts of 'modernisms' were not unanimously embraced as 'national'. In Thailand in the late 1950s the second National Exhibition of Art was rejected by local critics for being "imitations of Western art". Indeed, tension and conflict often accompanied the emergence of modern art. Some Indonesian artists, for example, emerged through the dispute over representations of the "Indonesian identity" between the so-called "pro-West" Bandung School and the "anti-West" Yogyakarta School. Furthermore, the position of the artists and art in the canon is under constant reevaluation. So-called "proto-nationalist" or "nationalist" works such as Raden Saleh's *The Capture of Prince Diponegoro* (1857) or Juan Luna's *Spoliarium* (1884), for instance, may be argued to have been less concerned about creating a sense of local or indigenous identity than the artists' own desire to create work in colonial idioms.

We seek to critically evaluate the ways in which Southeast Asian nations are imagined by artists and other cultural agents such as art critics, gallerists, collectors, independent curators or museums, and the state. This workshop comes at a time when 'national art' is being redefined while more public and private institutions in the region are erected to re-imagine the narratives of nationhood. Whether through modern or contemporary art which interrogates the consequences of global capitalism, scholars are invited to explore how art is deployed either as a coalescing force for the imagination of the nation or a critical expression of its flaws and strains.

The workshop welcomes papers that explore, though not limited to, the following questions:

1. How did 'national art' take socially shape in Southeast Asia?
2. How was art used to build "national consciousness" by political programmes?
3. How have iconic works of art captured national aspirations and the interests of the political elite?

4. How do national art collections contribute to forge or undermine imaginations of the nation?
5. What roles do cultural agents such as artists, art critics, curators, patrons and teachers from the region and beyond play in imagining the nation?
6. How have institutions such as art academies, exhibitions and biennials, galleries, museums and the state framed 'national art' for the nation? What are the tensions and contradictions?
7. How has contemporary art engaged with the consequences of neocapitalism in Southeast Asian societies?
8. What is the impact of private collections and museums to the building of 'national art'?
9. How were western idioms and genres used to address 'national art', and is there a common Southeast Asian modern and national art specificity?

Submission and Deadlines

Please send your abstract (250 words) and brief biography (150 words) to the following address: helene_njoto@iseas.edu.sg

Deadline for abstract submission is 31 Oct 2016. If your abstract is selected for the workshop you will have to submit your full-length paper by 9 January 2017.

Convenors: Dr Terence Chong and Dr Helene Njoto