



Why Southeast Asian Art, Now?

BY DARRYL WEE // DECEMBER 10, 2014

Made up of disparate scenes that are culturally distinct although geographically close to each other, Southeast Asian art has recently gained a firm foothold on the global art circuit, with paintings by Indonesian artist I Nyoman Masriadi or Filipino painter Ronald Ventura routinely changing hands for several hundred thousand dollars at fairs like Art Stage Singapore, where artists, dealers, collectors, and curators from Southeast Asia converge.



Art Stage Singapore 2014
Source: ArtRepublik

It wasn't always this way. Back in the 80s and 90s, there was scant interest from either private collectors or public institutions in the region's contemporary artists — one exception, and early adopter, being the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum in Japan, which actively exhibited and acquired pieces by Southeast and East Asian artists. Today, dealers in the region and further afield, like New York-based gallery Tyler Rollins Fine Art, actively promote Southeast Asian art at fairs and events around the world, whether it's Heri Dono from Indonesia, Pinaree Sanpitak from Thailand, Sopheap Pich from Cambodia, or Manuel Ocampo from the Philippines.



Sopheap Pich's 'Seated Buddha' (2011) Source: [Art Asia Pacific](#)



Heri Dono's "Three Presidential Candidates" Source: [NY Times](#)



Manuel Ocampo's 'A Pretend Monument for a Still Life Honoring Fried Eggs, Beer, and Post-Colonialism' (2013) Source: [Marie Kirkegaard Gallery](#)



Pinaree Sanpitak's "Temporary Insanity"

In the past two years, large corporate players have also been angling for a piece of Southeast Asia. "No Country: Contemporary Art for South and Southeast Asia", the first in a series of regional surveys sponsored by UBS, kicked off at the Guggenheim in New York before traveling to the Asia Society in Hong Kong and the Center for Contemporary Art in Singapore, introducing local audiences to works by the likes of Poklong Anading (Philippines), Ho Tzu Nyen (Singapore), and Navin Rawanchaikul (Thailand).



Ho Tzu Nyen's 'The Cloud of Unknowing' (2011) at "No Country: Contemporary Art for South and Southeast Asia"
Source: [The Jakarta Post](#)

When global banks and financial institutions start sponsoring something, you know they're on to something big. More astute observers will surely make the connection between UBS's sponsorship and their desire to win over a burgeoning financial elite in these emerging markets: after South and Southeast Asia, UBS will then turn its attention to the contemporary art scenes of Latin America, and then the Middle East and North Africa. As exhibitions of Southeast Asian art roam the world and find new audiences in unexpected regions, the issues that draw the viewer in move further away from national or culturally specific concerns, and closer towards a shared idea of multicultural cosmopolitanism that has long characterized this varied region. Case in point: curator Iola Lenzi's "The Roving Eye: Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia", which is currently on show at ARTER in Istanbul until January 4, 2015. Featuring some 36 artists, including Singapore's Lee Wen and Indonesia's Mella Jaarsma, "The Roving Eye" is an introduction to the region's artistic output that resonates with Istanbul's own hybrid cultural heritage as a port city with a burgeoning economy, standing at a historical crossroads between Europe and Asia. Perhaps these echoes and similarities, proliferating early on in a new Asian century, will in turn prompt Southeast Asia itself to reexamine its own artistic heritage in a global context.



Lee Wen's interactive installation "Ping-Pong Go Round" at "The Roving Eye: Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia"
Source: [The Straits Times](#)

As the playing field for Southeast Asian contemporary artists slowly grows more saturated and more "global", where should one look for the next generation of emerging artists?

Art Stage Singapore may be the marquee event of its kind in the region, but seasoned art lovers have already pronounced the fair far too commercial, and started decamping for the likes of Art Fair Philippines (February) and Art Fair Jogja (June), where a self-starter culture and strong sense of local community supported by enthusiastic collectors and patrons have created a scene that is kinder to younger artists who are just starting to find their feet. If you haven't already, now's the time to mark these fair in your calendar for 2015!



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