

# TODAY'S ZAMAN

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## Arter exhibition connects Southeast Asian art to a global perspective



"Political Clowns," a 1999 installation by artist Heri Dono, on display at the exhibition "The Roving Eye: Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia," which runs until Jan. 4, 2015 at Arter Space for Art in İstanbul.

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**The Arter Space for Art in İstanbul has opened the new season with a comprehensive exhibition of contemporary art from Southeast Asia that marks, by far, the most extensive artistic representation of the region in Turkey.**

Bringing together over 40 works, from mixed-media installations to photography, and enriched with interactive and participatory works, "The Roving Eye" captures the various topics and situations prevailing in current Southeast Asia from the eye of contemporary artists from Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, Singapore, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam and Malaysia.

Spread over five floors of the exhibition space, "The Roving Eye" brings the contemporary art wave from Asia to the audience in Turkey, allowing them to make connections, mark the similarities and understand the contemporary art practices and contexts in a more global perspective.

As the exhibition catalogue suggests, curator Iola Lenzi, who is a Singapore-based researcher and critic of contemporary Southeast Asia art, has conceptualized this extensive exhibition through "aesthetic codes commonly featured in the artistic production of the region, while trying to offer critical insights into today's regional culture and the many tensions

cleaving the societies of Southeast Asia.”

Indeed, many works included in the show present valuable information about the region and speak to concepts that can relate to a larger audience.

While some works masterfully point out the recent developments, conflicts and changes in the socio-political milieu of the region, others capture the long-standing artistic and aesthetic codes with a more contemporary perspective.

These works stand out in terms of their masterful rendering of a specific region's history and culture while at the same time becoming striking references to prevailing issues on a global scale.

To give some examples of these works that operate on different levels of the local and universal, one can start with the three-channel video work titled “Thai Medley” by artist Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook. This video, the sole work exhibited on the basement floor of the gallery, is about Thai Buddhist funeral practices and the artist's response to these customs. In this video installation, Rasdjarmrearnsook sings to the unclaimed cadavers in a provincial morgue. She sings about love to those corpses that were rejected by their relatives or not claimed by anyone. By creating a ritual of her own, she produces a connection between the living and the dead, love and desertion. By building up a hypnotic, transcendental atmosphere with both the sound and the conventional codes of the cremation rites, Rasdjarmrearnsook speaks about a specific culture through a subjective perspective that invites the audience to interpretations.

In the entrance, the audience meets Philippine artist Alwin Reamillo's ongoing grand piano project, which is an interactive work that can be enjoyed by the visitors. Reamillo, in this work titled “Nicanor Abelardo Grand Piano Project” transforms the piano previously produced by his late father, the only locally made grand piano. With the help of his father's crew of craftsmen, Reamillo reconstructs the piano from the beginning and presents it to the audience to play as a response to the wiping away of many local businesses in the 1990s. Standing as a reminder of the many causalities of trade liberalization of the region can be directly associated with causalities of capitalism and the disappearance of small local businesses elsewhere. The work is especially valuable for encouraging people to think about small-scale businesses under the threat from competitive and corporate markets, especially on Istiklal Street, where the gallery is located.

On the second floor, another outstanding work is exhibited in a relatively larger area that speaks to both local and global concerns of history, its consequences and effects. Thai artist Sutee Kunavichayanont's “History Class Part 2,” which is adapted from its original outdoor version, creatively reproduces a classroom environment with single-person wooden desks on which various historical moments are engraved. Consisting of 23 desks, each covering a theme and narrative chosen from a long period from Thailand's early constitutional era to the present Thaksin period, the work allows the audience to learn about various aspects in history and lets them copy the “lessons” on the desk by putting paper on the desks and rubbing crayons over the engraved images. By this, the audience actively participates in the lesson and reproduces it. Although the narratives on the desks are specific to the region, the work catalyzes many associations since history is shaped by formal education everywhere in the world. In the context of Turkey, the work presents multiple readings, with Turkey's huge gap between the official discourse offered by education and alternative histories of more controversial issues. In that sense, “History Class Part 2” is a great work, reminding us of the atrocities that took place in history and how states choose to transmit them to next generations.

A total of 36 artists are featured in the show, which invites the audience to discover more

about the arts scene of Southeast Asia.

Each floor offers a new experience not only in the sense of perceiving art, but also participating in it. The audience is always encouraged to take an active role throughout the show, especially in Lee Wen's interactive game installation "Ping-Pong Go Round," and in Josephine Turalba's "Scandals," where the audience can put on painful footwear made out of bullet cartridges. This certainly helps to create more subjective narratives, experiences and viewpoints, which seem to be one of the main ambitions of the exhibition.

Overall, "The Roving Eye" works on many different levels of engaging the audience with art. It brings a relatively faraway spot in the global contemporary art circle to the attention of art enthusiasts in Turkey, while wisely setting connections and necessary intersections to build up a multiple layered perspective in order to better make sense of the present-day world.

