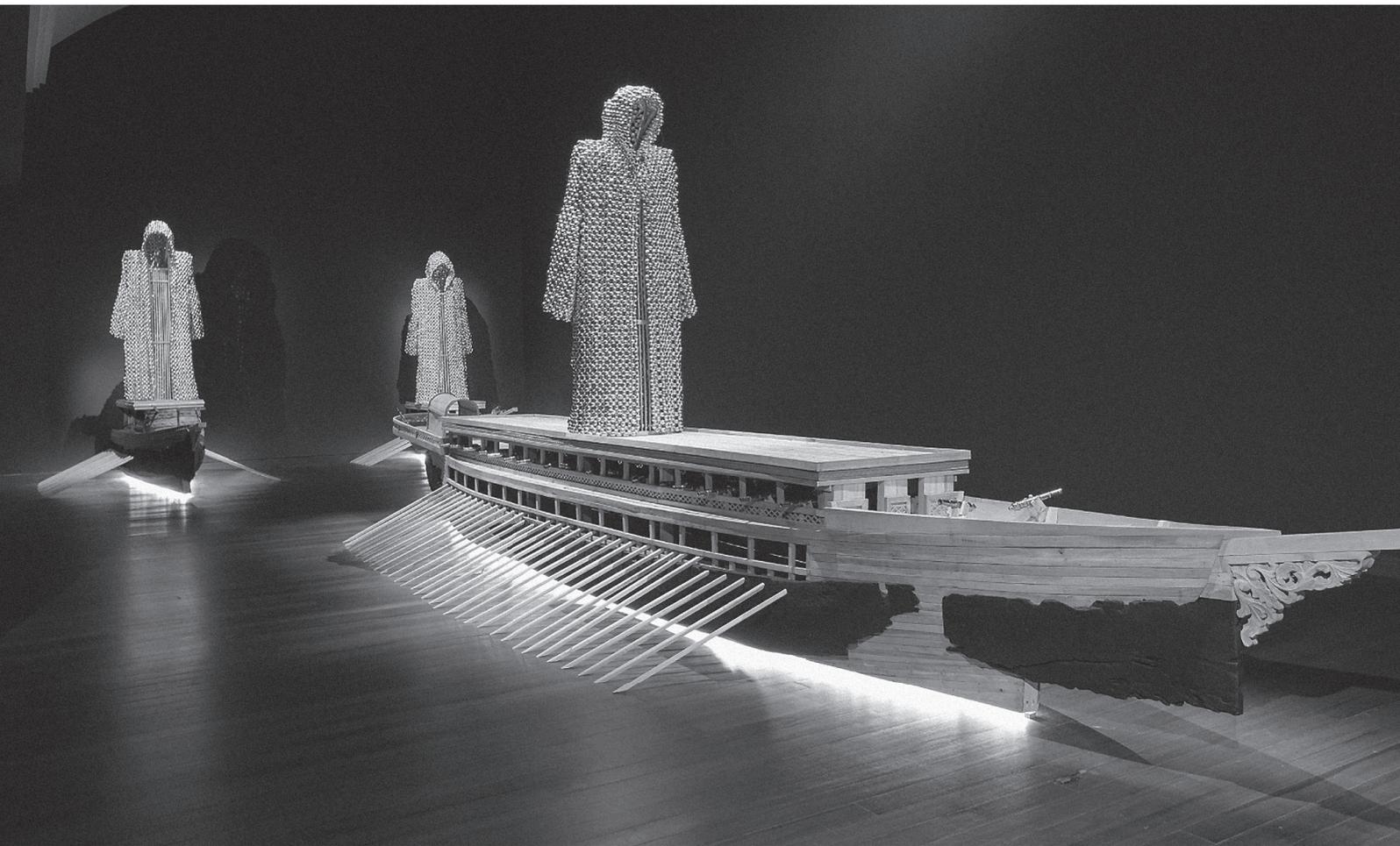


SUSIE LINGHAM

Sotto Voce: What If We Haven't Yet Asked The Right Questions?



BIENNALES WITHIN THE WORK OF THE ART MUSEUM

Real museums are places where Time is transformed into Space.

Orhan Pamuk, *The Museum of Innocence*

SAM will be pivotal among contemporary art museums in the region and on the region, inspiring humane and better futures.

Singapore Art Museum New Vision Statement, 2013

First caveat: these observations are written from a particular lived experience within lived contexts. To excise personal experience is not an option: how will others—and we who actually walked the journey—learn if we excise the very space of learning? Second caveat, some foreground: since 1996, the Singapore Art Museum (SAM), as Singapore's first, and for nineteen years until 2015, only art museum, has been collecting, presenting and representing the art (modern and contemporary) of the Southeast Asian region. From August 2013 to March 2016, as Director of SAM, I oversaw its transition from statutory board status (National Heritage Board) through the corporatisation process, and with a new mandate to focus on contemporary art was tasked to reshape its vision and mission in the context of the research, acquisition and presentation of contemporary art in Southeast Asia within the global context. The new National Gallery of Singapore, which opened towards the end of 2015, was mandated to focus on the collection, research and presentation of the modern art of the region.

SAM was appointed by the National Arts Council (NAC) to be sole organiser for the 2013 Singapore Biennale, *If the World Changed*, and 2016 Singapore Biennale, *An Atlas of Mirrors*—but was only informed of the latter after the previous presentation had ended and evaluative reports were submitted, which did not take into account the Museum's own need to plan long-term and for its own exhibition programming. Both utilised the entire space of the two separate buildings, as well as other spaces in the precinct. Both also deployed most of the staff for the organising, curating and overall management and realisation of all projects, while, apart from these demands, they attended to its ongoing major obligations as the newly mandated contemporary art museum. Bristling with steering, advisory and curatorial committees, co-chair representatives from the commissioner (NAC) and the SAM Board, Biennale operations from 2013 through to 2016 were run relentlessly at high octane-paced urgency, with accountabilities to government and related agencies. Staff had to undertake multiple duties following the Museum's transitioning to corporate status, and after. It was an extremely demanding time, even without factoring in long-term work and the everyday hydra-headed crises.

Art biennales are *all* about national representation—how nations see themselves and want to be seen; how cities position themselves and their aspirations as cultural centres of influence, whether regionally or globally; how different nations' and cities' representations co-exist against and alongside each other. Biennales are cultural investments as much as they are ostentatious generators of cultural—and to some extent—actual capital. And most biennales and triennials are named after the city rather than the country that hosts them; the one departure being the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (based in Brisbane) representing a vast region. Singapore, as a city-state island nation is quite anomalous in this instance—it is *all* centre—as such, and the nation's sense of its place in the art world is at stake here, with each edition of the Singapore Biennale.

Having to oversee these two Singapore Biennales, organising such projects was profoundly challenging in a myriad of ways. My approach—both for the Museum and the Biennale—was to aim to facilitate and support fair representation as much as possible, to provide scope for genuine artistic growth, vision, inquiry and experimentation, and to ensure similar conditions for capacity development for contemporary curatorial practice and research.

If the World Changed was ambitious—its aim, to focus almost entirely on Southeast Asia, requiring the appointment of curators from across the region, many of whom were artist-curators, in a deliberate strategy to not merely place the focus on country capitals, but to include research on art in provincial cities from different regions of the various countries involved. Ultimately, there were twenty-seven curators, twenty from Southeast Asian nations and non-institutional locals, and seven internal to the Museum. This mode of working was inspired by the early editions of the APT which focused on a noble vision, of *fair representation* regionally, and steered away from the more rigid country pavilion mode of curating and presentation.

I inherited this purposefully director-less Biennale in August 2013, with the opening scheduled for that October. Having been on the advisory committee I had met some of the Southeast Asian curators, and knew that workshops had been undertaken where the curators selected their artists and artworks, and found consensus in their various choices. What was unexpected was that there was no big picture concept and how the exhibition's content would be contextualised, and no apparent consideration about its structure and design.

At this later stage in the curatorial process, in brainstorming with SAM curators, key words were selected from the flow of discussions, words that persisted in the working process with their co-curators from Southeast Asia: *testimonies, histories, locus, spirit, cosmology, interruptions, ancestries, geographies, selves, futures, apocalypse, culture, exchanges, nature, activisms, prophecies, interoention, meridians, materiality and intercessions*. From the deeply personal, to the socially and contextually conscious, to the cosmological, speculative and ahistorical, these ideas were iterated throughout the artworks presented in *If the World Changed*—these words finding form in floor to ceiling wall graphics at the threshold of each zone in the various venues. They operated like indices to the spectrum of concerns and movements during the curating process, to help frame evocative entry points for the visitor's experience—evocative, in that they represented the sheer complexity involved in curating a biennale that set out to focus on the Southeast Asian experience. These keywords performed as discursive points of entry and departure for experience and consideration.

Art works as a catalyst for mediation in society, and biennales as catalysts for artworks, curatorial research and practice—together these catalytic presentations both reveal and bridge the ever-deepening cultural and national chasms so evident in our time. Both *If the World Changed* and *An Atlas of Mirrors*, the former with a mainly Southeast Asian focus, and the latter widened—with clear precision—to focus on South, East and Southeast Asia, advanced an understanding of the diversity of socio-cultural, pre- and post-colonial forces, as well as still-lived different colonial legacies being inextricably entangled and very present in the regional consciousness.

There has been much discourse and consideration over the apparent ongoing deficiency of a coherent and cohesive art history of Southeast Asia. Historians continue to debate if Southeast Asia as a region is only imagined or if it has not *yet* been imagined enough—how to hold Southeast Asian nations, historically and culturally diverse heterogeneities together, relationally? Southeast Asia is riddled with sociocultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious, economic, aesthetic and ideological complexities, and despite relative proximities, its sprawling geographies and still-recovering and

integrating psychologies do not allow for easy neighbourliness. With geographies profoundly shaping histories and psychologies, interdisciplinary and integrative research is needed to make sense of such dynamics.

Global cultures, either East or West, even as they evolve share *double-edged legacies* – and the concept of ‘values’ – inherited, appropriated or recast, has never been more in need of re-evaluation than at this time. Both the 2013 and 2016 Biennales were invaluable resources for their exploration of supposed ‘deserts’ of Southeast Asian research and art histories. It is now time to transcend narrow and agitated insistences on perceiving only recognisable familiar illusions conjured and categorised accordingly. They are not familiar; they are fey. What is required is genuine and new insights into the rapidly ensuing changes. We must be open to epiphany.

HISTORIES, SENSED

In an era of stress and anxiety, when the present seems unstable and the future unlikely, the natural response is to retreat and withdraw from reality, taking recourse either in fantasies of the future or in modified visions of a half-imagined past.

Alan Moore, *Watchmen*

In the context of deeper research, *If the World Changed* presented the opportunity for SAM, as organiser, to continue its ongoing focus, commissioning and collecting at a more intense level, its curatorial vision to reach beyond the familiar capital city-as-centre and connect with artists and communities in non-capital cities and rural centres of Southeast Asia – an approach both exhilarating and unwieldy. Through this approach, the Museum, as Singapore in microcosm, experienced hosting both our own and other nations’ and their cities’ expectations, aspirations, anxieties and contentions in quite an unprecedented way, with a constant proliferation of diplomatic frontiers. In the catalogue for *If the World Changed*, I wrote about the c.1504 ostrich egg-globe of the world, discovered in 2013, that was engraved with the map of the world as then-imagined in Europe, and the seas where Southeast Asia should be marked with the now ubiquitous term *Hic Sunt Dracones*: “here be dragons” – in a sense, these dragons surfaced during this Biennale.

Given that the 2013 Singapore Biennale imitated the APT model with the appointment of numerous Southeast Asian curators, the sense of regional difference was distinct, not just between, but *within* nations. This was particularly significant in the context of geographical terrain and size, given archipelagos with thousands of farflung islands, mountainous and rural regions, and urban capitals as centres of power: the variability of resource distribution was quite distinguishable. The intention nonetheless was for regional and *intra*-regional representation. The fact that many of the curators were also artists reflected the different conditions and initiatives for both artistic and curatorial practices across these regions. As with the APT in its early iterations, issues and expectations regarding what ‘contemporary art’ should look like also arose – what was on exhibition were not just artworks and artists, but also different curatorial practices. With *If the World Changed*, certain motifs recurred. Some of the realities of these differences were apparent in the idiosyncratic approaches that brought together particular artworks.

Based in Baguio City in the Philippines, and co-curated by Kawayan de Guia and Joyce Toh, AX(is) Art Project’s *Tiw-tiwong: The Odds to Unends* (2013) spanned thirteen art activities involving over 150 participants, through communities that stretched between Baguio City and along the infamously dangerous Halsema Highway in the Cordilleras mountains. The artworks embodied

investigative histories spanning various trades and individuals, from well-known artists from the region to an indigenous tattooist; soundscapes; film and *bulot* figures of the Ifugao culture untraditionally carved as self-portraits of the woodcarvers themselves, an immersion into a very different world of living precariously, sorrowfully yet joyously, on the edges. Also from the Philippines, Abraham Garcia Jr. curated the work of the indigenous Talaandig artists from Bukidon, mostly farmers and hunters working as a collective, who presented a large-scale soil 'painting' *Memories of the Peoples of the Earth: The Talaandig R/evolution* (2013), which depicted a landscape community-map integrating tribal cosmology with everyday ritual and living. What was apparent in this instance was that the curators from each intra-region performed critical intercessory roles for the works and their creators – as teachers, workshop facilitators, trusted allies and friends, as fellow sojourners and artists.

Kuala Lumpur and Kota Kinabalu-based artist Yee I-Lann, curated the work of Jainal Amambing from Sabah: five oil paintings titled *My Longhouse Story* (2013). If we look at how cities represent nations, e.g., Kuala Lumpur, as a significant fragment of an unwieldy whole, Sabah, the massive rainforested island of Borneo, is literally another world entirely. The artist referenced his own life experience of growing up in a longhouse community in north Sabah, depicting the separation anxiety involved in the transition from the *kampong* and its way of knowing and doing, to the larger world of formal schooling, away from home. Yee I-Lann spoke of how this was very much the life she lived, and vividly described how she too, rode on buffalos as a child. There were critical observations, as there were of the Filipino projects, that these oil paintings could not be classified as 'contemporary art', a critique which certainly bears examining – as with many other works – but, they need to be considered in the context of the objectives of the Biennale itself.

Indonesian sculptor Tony Kanwa's *Cosmology of Life* (2013) was also exemplary in this regard. Hailing from Tasikmalaya, his work bears witness to his research into indigenous cultural and spiritual practices across Indonesia. His installation of over 1000 tiny woodcarved splinters and slivers of wood – so needle-thin and minute that magnifying glasses were provided to enable viewers to observe the detail that went into the carving of each figure – emerged as somewhat human, yet with otherworldly features. They were strange and fey and uncanny, whether as single pieces, or amassed. Unabashedly, Kanwa frames his work as a sculptor as spiritual work.

Also a sculptor who carves in wood, marble and other materials, Singapore artist Leroy Sofyan, married the readymade to the painstakingly handwrought. His three-dimensional *tromp l'oeil* objects *Chalk & Cheese* (2013), were humble everyday mops and brooms, but with carved marble mopheads and long bars of heavily weathered carbolic soap floor-sponges. Deeply critical of both how labour is valued and what is implied by cleaning work, in the context of national identity and how certain official histories are derived, Leroy Sofyan pushed his materials to breaking point, testing their resilience and frailty, his sculptures as ironic measures of society, witnesses to how society undervalues the labourer. Significant in this instance was that Sofyan was untried in the so-called artworld, discreetly making his socially critical artworks; from a curatorial perspective, a risk well taken.

And, Indonesian architect-artist Eko Prawoto, and his commissioned bamboo-constructed 'volcano', *Wormhole* (2013), its organic, curvilinear splendour sited outside the stately National Museum of Singapore, a visible juxtaposition to colonial legacy. Prawoto works in Yogyakarta, and this work could be viewed to reference the relationship between the earth and sacred landscapes, e.g., the very sculptural manmade mountain, Borobudur in Central Java, the enormous stepped

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stupa with Buddha figures and reliefs built near the actual volcano Merapi, but which references the mythic sacred Mount Meru, first imagined in Hindu mythology as the centre of the world axis. *Wormhole* had several oculi, where the sunlight streamed in and cast beautiful light-shapes on the grass below. The title is very significant too, alluding both to cosmic theories on spacetime and time travel, and also to that most earthly of creatures, the earthworm, whose deep tunnellings are essential to all plantlife and forests. Both sculptural and architectural, *Wormhole* was an outstanding example of the cross-disciplines referencing and integrating traditional practice with contemporary approaches. These particular Southeast Asian and Singaporean artworks were held in sharp relief to one of the few works that did not hail from this region: the Japanese work *Peace Can Be Realised Even Without Order* (2012) produced by teamLab, was a strikingly sophisticated high-tech work by these 'ultra-technologists', complete with motion sensors, holograms and sound. Yet the phantasmagoric figures referenced ancient indigenous dance, a sensibility resonant with many of the Southeast Asian artworks. It was only possible to present such a high-cost production through appropriate sponsorship. Technologically, the Southeast Asian artworks might be perceived as having been 'cast into the shade' by this project; such a comparison reflects upon the differently paced legacies, histories and lived realities co-existent in the contemporary art of Asia and the region.

Following the closure of *If the World Changed*, the Singapore Art Museum conducted an evaluation session to have curators share their experiences and thoughts on key subjects – curatorial, operational and organisational issues as well as their individual perspectives on how *If the World Changed* contributed to their understanding of Southeast Asian contemporary art. Whether or not these discussions were beneficial in their various contexts there was an attempt through this Biennale to cultivate understanding and appreciation of the very unique sensitivities in the contemporary art of Southeast Asia, sensitivities alert and alive to all its influences, anxieties, and evolutions.

EVERY MAPPED 'HERE' IS A MIRRORED 'THERE'

What does a mirror look at?

Frank Herbert, *Chapterhouse: Dune*

Having left the position of SAM Director in 2016, I was appointed the Creative Director of *An Atlas of Mirrors*, and worked with the Museum to strategically develop and implement its vision, framework, concepts, presentation and positioning, leading curatorial workshops with four associate curators from India, China, Malaysia and Singapore, and the SAM curators, and developed frames of reference for all the international participating artists. Considering the content and modes both individually and in the wider context, I worked with the curators to define what held the selection of artworks together. *An Atlas of Mirrors* spanned geometry, geography and psychogeography; histories, ahistories and stories; nature and culture; national identities and selves; home, walls, migration and gaps in the maps of society's consciousness. Featured on the catalogue cover of *An Atlas of Mirrors* was a map of (the prehistoric supercontinent) Pangea, with a printed indication where Southeast Asia would have been: an allusion to the fact that both its nations and the region are in continuing drift and collision, both literally and metaphorically. We share histories and our worlds continue to collide. Every mapped 'here' is a mirrored 'there'; we bear each other's imprints. Significantly, for this iteration, the Benesse Prize inaugurated its Asian Edition after focusing for the previous decade on the Venice Biennale, allowing for the first time Southeast Asian artists to be recognised and supported in a wider context, a much needed validation.



An Atlas of Mirrors was conceived differently to *If the World Changed*, but with the same objectives of highlighting Southeast Asia; as stated in the curatorial statement, “the arc of our shared histories encompasses East and South Asia.” In this instance, within the context of South and East Asia, we followed the flow of influence within and between these geographical regions, their histories and socio-political conditionings. With creative and curatorial processes clearly in accord through a series of workshops and working processes the emergent wide-ranging content was conceived thus – An Everywhere of Mirrorings: *space*. An Endlessness of Beginnings: *time*. A Presence of Pasts: *memory*. A Culture of Nature: *nature*. A Share of Borders: *boundaries*. A Breath of Wills: *agency*. A Flow of Identities: *identity*. A Somewhere of Elsewheres: *displacement*. A Past of Absences: *absence*.

This zoning of content was critical as poetic structure, both in the actual exhibition space allocation and in the chapter structuring of the exhibition’s publication. This meant that all curators could work with each other across their own roles and SAM portfolios, representing regions and countries. Through their curatorial essays, they could contribute to and learn from each other’s research that traversed these representations. The main focus for *An Atlas of Mirrors* was to give contemporary art its scope within the fractal realities experienced in living and working in Asia, and Southeast Asia in particular. From the emotional to conceptual dimensions of human experience, art has always been the means through which both hopes and fears, a sense of the spiritual, and everyday realities find expression. Across the Biennale, artworks reflected upon a sense of histories and omissions, resistance, trauma, reclamation, identity and belonging. The following artworks for example, presented recurring themes and ideas, and how these might offer a sense of our times.

Singapore sculptor and painter David Chan was commissioned to create the twenty-four metre work, *The Great East Indiaman* (2016), a whale skeleton handcarved in wood within a welded steel and concrete ship’s ‘skeleton’. Here Chan referenced the founding of Singapore in 1819 by Stamford Raffles, but re-imagined in a fantastic tale, in the context of the British East India Company. He conflated the colonial merchant ships, all known by the generic name of ‘East Indiaman’, and a ‘recast’ in wood of the Indian fin whale skeleton that used to hang in the National Museum of Singapore. The National Museum was in the past many museums in one, presenting natural history, culture and art. *The Great East Indiaman* was sited on the lawn outside the now Singapore history-specific National Museum. The original whale skeleton, remembered by many Singaporeans, has been returned to Malaysia, where it was found in Malacca in 1892. Chan encountered many difficulties in its realisation as there are very few places where artists can make and store such large artworks, and for that reason the sculpture had to be broken up post-Biennale.¹ Despite Chan’s own attempts to save his artwork through approaching various institutions, and given that the Singapore Bicentennial, of Raffles’ founding of Singapore, the very subject of Chan’s work, would occur in 2019, there was no governmental-institutional foresight to consider it as important and relevant to purchase. This somewhat myopic mindset is a recurring local motif. To date this is the largest commissioned sculpture that poetically embodies Singapore’s founding. Intriguingly, it is significant to consider that there were a number of history-referencing boat-centric artworks in *An Atlas of Mirrors*, reflecting perhaps the islandic and archipelagic nature of the region’s historical consciousness.

Maps figured noticeably as well, from Sri Lankan artist Pala Pothupitiye with *Other Map Series* (2016); Qiu Zhijie (China), *One Has to Wander through All the Outer Worlds to Reach the Innermost Shrine at the End* (2016); Ryan Villamael (Philippines), *Locus Amoenus* (2016); Made Wianta (Indonesia), *Treasure Islands* (2012); and Titarubi (Indonesia) with *History Repeats Itself* (2016).



Pothupitiye's handworked framed maps of Sri Lanka, from Ptolemy's of Ceylon, to current day, overlaid historical moments and periods with the geography, encompassing colonialism, civil unrest and religious extremism, even redrawing maps as animals to symbolise the ethnic wars between the Singhalese, as lions, and the Tamils, as tigers.

Qiu Zhijie's maps were large-scale traditional Chinese ink drawings draped on the gallery walls, with calligraphic witticisms annotating and tale-tagging figures, drawing upon speculative and alternative histories – like the pre-Columbian trans-oceanic contact theory of China and the New World – through engaging commentary. These maps were accompanied by a glass-blown bestiary of chimerical monsters, a reference to all that was unknown and wildly imagined in the various ages of discovery. Amidst this cartography of histories, Qiu humorously inserted an image of islands in the South China Sea being claimed by his own country, positioning them as contested.

Made Wianta's *Treasure Islands* (2012) were large organic-shaped buffalo-hide maps, studded with mirror fragments and nails. The moment in history he mapped is especially significant, when New Amsterdam became New York: this was a tale of two islands, starting in 1667 with the Treaty of Breda, when the Netherlands exchanged New Amsterdam for the spice island of Rhun in Maluku. Wianta's maps spoke of land and islands, 'skinned' of their treasure. Fellow Indonesian, Titarubi's *History Repeats Itself* (2016), of sensational gold-plated nutmeg-cloaked spectres standing upon longboats, also made reference to the colonial looting and burning of ships by the Dutch East India Company, but with a sense of redress in an imagined future.

Ryan Villamael's paper sculptures of the creeping vine *Monstera deliciosa*, made up of maps from the sixteenth century to the present, turned the oldest part of SAM (made visible from its first retrofit in 1996) into a greenhouse of history, through geography as flora. This was imagined as nature taking over the Museum, the museum as repository of culture. Nature versus Culture, and vice versa. All the double-sided leaves of the vine made reference to the Philippines being the longest-colonised Southeast Asian country, and its most visibly, psychologically resilience.

Singapore artist Zulkifle Mahmud's *SONICreflection* (2016) was a sonic map of the cultural urbanscape of contemporary Singapore. An insightful representation of its increasingly cosmopolitan cityscape, it posed the query, what does 'difference' sound like? Singapore cannot function competently without migrant workers. Through its dire need for external labour and expertise, it might be concluded that Singapore is *necessarily* much more diverse and complex, and increasingly so, than its politically presented 'four races' (Chinese, Malays, Indians and Eurasians) living in harmony. This work was a paced sound recording of the micro-colonies of other Southeast Asian communities, of Thais, Burmese, Filipinos and others living and working in Singapore.

As a final example, and as an interesting contrast to SB2013's Japanese representation by teamLab, Nobuaki Takekawa's *Sugoroku-Anxiety of Falling from History* (2016) consisted of quaint hand-drawn maps, woodblock prints and old-school objects including Sugoroku board games that recalled the 1950s and 1960s—the critical reference to this period in Japanese history being significant—that post-war Japan was in denial of its failure to become a world power by colonising Asia, and displaced its own historical anxieties with the pursuit of economic success. The slightly self-deprecating charm of this work could be seen as a psychological mirror addressing the apparent gap between defeated post-war Japan and the state of art technologies that we've come to associate with this country since the 1980s.

WHAT IF WE HAVEN'T YET ASKED THE RIGHT QUESTIONS?

But should we only tell stories that reflect our own background? Should we refrain from telling stories that originated elsewhere, on the grounds that we don't have the right to annex the experience of others? Absolutely not. A culture that never encounters any others becomes first inward-looking, and then stagnant, and then rotten. We are responsible... for bringing fresh streams of story into our own cultures and from all over the world, and welcoming experience from every quarter, and offering our own experience in return.²

How do cultures imprint upon each other? What divides society? Who and what do we identify with, and why does a sense of belonging drive us? What belongs to you? What is your story? Who tells your story? Mirrors, maps, and changing worldviews: to evolve artistically in a socio-cultural context, there must be trust in the relevant lived experience, expertise, and vision. In determining the conditions for art to flourish, there is no 'safe pair of hands': only those who tacitly make sense of things and with creative, responsive and responsible risk-taking, or those that have been disciplined into submission or self-preserving caution. For a small island city-state, with its cultural practitioners and administrators having to continue to circumvent the same barriers after nearly three decades of determined and heartfelt work, this suggests a lamentable lack of faith in the evolving, creative forces that drive artistic processes. If one person's freedom of expression is another person's experience

of oppression, how does an evolving society balance these rights *and* responsibilities, i.e., the right to express, *and* the right to *experience*? How does responsibility intercede for freedom, and freedom develop a sense of responsibility? As many of these issues overlap with the critical subject of art in Asia and Southeast Asia, I cite from my own research,

[*Identification*] *Do the deeper psychological dimensions of the ideas of 'belonging to', 'belonging with', 'what belongs', need more focus in the contexts of art historical writing, art critical and theoretical writing, curatorial work, collection building, and the roles of museums, cities, and nations?*

[*Relationships: Sensitivities and Responsibilities*] *The many strands in relationship making include the diplomatic, economic, political, cultural and academic. Given that these realms are inhabited relationally, and intertwine, how can a common set of rules of engagement for the research of Asian/Southeast Asian art be initiated, arbitrated and negotiated? What are the most productive ways of sustaining these relations while developing research?*³

What was the nature of the return from the intense and often difficult processes that realised *If the World Changed* and *An Atlas of Mirrors*? What is the value of meaningful artistic engagement and production in Southeast Asia? How is it socially *and* art historically evaluated? How does experience develop into expertise and methodologies? There is a sense that underlying this spectrum of concerns there are legacies that are shared—of type, not necessarily of kind: indigenous, cultural, colonial legacies. Gains amidst the losses, histories and stories, state, nation, city, ethnicities, ethics, aesthetics, all concatenating into each other. Spectres from the East-West balance of power—postcolonial and imperial—lingering amidst newly arising imperial powers, with their own postcolonial vendettas, responsibility, structure, restructuring, ambitions, fears.

How are the disparate histories and their variable trajectories sensed, experienced and shared—resistances, trauma, reclamation, need for representation, agency, address and redress? While the experience may be shared, colonial inheritances do differ—the influences and imprints of language, law, structure, religion, value systems, aesthetics and psychology all contrast in very real ways. Aspirations are syncopated and speeds and rhythms are moderated accordingly. Resilience varies greatly. Where one thinks the centre is, there is another and another, and exerting diverse push-pull forces. There remain gaps in these maps still, and unknowns remain unknown. Time for further quest(ion)s: there is no purely objective space or pace to begin from; a crucial illusion. A delusion. For those who dare, learn to ride those unruly dragons. At their pace.

Notes

¹ The irony is that the Singapore Art Museum, as the only contemporary art museum in Singapore, is neither a purpose-built space to present or store large scale artworks. Currently SAM is being refurbished, a development to which as Director I submitted multiple proposals

² Phillip Pullman, *Daemon Voices: Essays on Storytelling*, Oxford: David Fickling Books, 2017, pp 14-15

³ Response to the 'Asian Art Research in Australia and New Zealand: Past Present, Future' Symposium, University of Sydney, 15-16 October 2015, published in *Our Geographies Map Our Histories: A Response to 'Asian Art Research in Australia and New Zealand: Past Present, Future'*, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, Volume 16, Issue 2, 2016, pp. 236-246. Published online by Taylor & Francis, 10 November 2016; <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/raja20/16/2>