

BRUNEI
INDONESIA
LAOS
MALAYSIA
MYANMAR
PHILIPPINES
SINGAPORE
THAILAND
VIETNAM

ASEAN MASTERWORKS

An exhibition of
Masterworks from ASEAN countries
held in conjunction with the
ASEAN Summit 1997
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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ASEAN MASTERWORKS

14th -16th December 1997
at the Palace of the Golden Horses
Mines Resort City
Selangor

15th - 31st January 1998
at Balai Seni Lukis Negara
Kuala Lumpur

Officially opened by
YAB Dato' Seri Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad
Prime Minister of Malaysia
on 15th December 1997



Kementerian Luar Negeri
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Utusan Khas Perdana Menteri
Special Envoy of the Prime Minister

Wisma Putra
50602 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

26 November 1997

FOREWORD

Art has long been a means whereby individuals and entire societies see into their souls. Art can ennoble, invigorate, educate and at times even edify. When I first mooted the idea for this exhibition to Cik Rohana Mahmood and art dealer Valentine Willie earlier this year, it was in the hope of adding further lustre to the ASEAN Leaders' Summit.

All I can say is that they, along with the remarkably generous vision of Yayasan Al Bukhary have done us proud. The selection of paintings from all nine countries of ASEAN has been a prodigious business. The works range in style, subject matter and impact. Whatever the case they are an exquisite celebration of ASEAN, from the jungle fastness of Luang Prabang to the eclecticism of Manila and the serenity of Brunei Darussalam. Each of these paintings possesses a very definite spirit of place and reflects ASEAN's coming of age.

I have long seen cultural exchange and a growing sense of each other's artistic and spiritual heritage as a means of deepening and broadening our mutual understanding. But as Karim Raslan stresses in his essay, the process cannot begin unless we open our minds and our hearts.

Having served the Prime Minister of Malaysia, YAB Dato' Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for many years, I know that he for one has always had his mind and his heart open to ASEAN. A leader is a man of courage and foresight and Dato' Seri Dr Mahathir's leadership has helped make this ASEAN Informal Summit a truly memorable event.

Tan Sri Ahmad Kamil Jaafar



Association of South-East Asian Nations

Secretary-General

70 A, Jalan Sisingamangaraja
PO Box 2072 Jakarta

26 November 1997

FOREWORD

The ASEAN Secretariat, together with the Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is pleased, indeed, proud to be associated with the holding of the ASEAN Masterworks Exhibition.

Our idea was that we should take advantage of the gathering of our Leaders at the Second Informal Summit/Commemorative Summit to be held in Kuala Lumpur, December 14 - 16 1997, to show a very unique aspect of ASEAN's rich cultural heritage. This is the first time that classic and contemporary art from all the nine nations of ASEAN has been brought together. This priceless collection shows both the unity and diversity of ASEAN, the very reasons which have contributed to ASEAN's success.

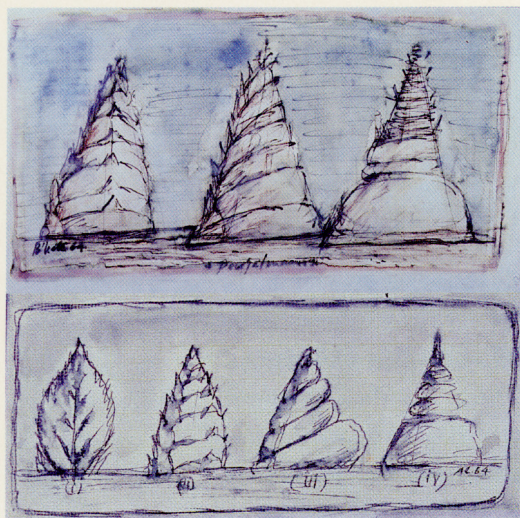
The Exhibition was put together at very short notice. This would not have been possible without the support and co-operation of the Governments of all the nine Member countries of ASEAN, the various Museums and individual collectors, the various donors and Valentine Willie Fine Art, one of ASEAN's leading private galleries. I am also indebted to writer Karim Raslan and to Cik Rohana Mahmood for their invaluable assistance and last, but not least, to my co-sponsor, Y Bhg Tan Sri Ahmad Kamil Jaafar, Special Envoy to the Prime Minister of Malaysia.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dato' Ajit Singh", is positioned above the printed name. The signature is stylized with a large, looping initial 'D' and a long, sweeping underline.

Dato' Ajit Singh

IN SEARCH OF THE ESSENCE OF ASEAN

BY KARIM RASLAN



Latiff Mohidin
(b. 1938)
*Penjelmaan/
Metamorphosis*
(1964)

snails' shells, bamboo shoots and Buddhist stupas was subjected to his scrutiny. In this way Latiff stumbled onto a recurring artistic motif - the triangle; a motif that was to assume a totemic role in his vision of the region's landscape.

In fact, in one delightful drawing of a butterfly alighting on a leaf and entitled simply, *For Angkarn* [1967], the artist paid homage to another regional genius, Thai painter/poet Angkarn Kalyaanaphong (b.1926), as if hinting at the aesthetic arguments that bound the two men's vision of the world together. Whatever the case, the triangle became a building block that allowed him to 'see' an object, deconstruct it and rebuild it wherever he was in Southeast Asia, whether it was in the presence of a butterfly, Goa Gajah in Bali, a beach on Pangkor island, Angkor Wat or Wat Phra Keow.

Similarly, in his poem *Sungai Mekong* which he wrote in 1966 in Vientiane, he deals with a conflict which for a few years threatened to engulf Southeast Asia in blood, exploring the tragedy through the vortex of his personal emotions.

"... to-night
a storm shall blow from the north
your banks shall burst
your waters shall run red
and your current shall rage more violent
than niagara."

[*Mekong River*, transl. Adibah Amin, 1971]

But that was much later and before I explain how I was able to bring sense to my understanding of the region and its art, I should be frank about my initial skepticism. In short, I went through the motions, a little bemused by the intractability of my material. I spent my time calling on artists, dealers, curators and collectors from Singapore to Manila, Ubud to Thonburi, forever haunted by a sense of the disparateness and disjunctiveness of the world that I was exploring and hoping to chart.

For example, in Yangon, I had sat in the orderly, antique-crammed atelier of the soft-spoken artist, Min Wae Aung (b.1960) as he displayed his calm, effortlessly graceful canvases. Sitting there sipping Burmese tea, whilst his boisterous three-year old son played on the floor I asked myself what possible connection his work could have with the rambunctious, crowded delights of I Wayan Bendi's (b.1950) Balinese cornucopia? Similarly, I wondered how the exuberant almost child-like zest of Brenda Fajardo's (b.1940) densely worked paintings with their Catholic-inspired iconography would hang next to the lyricism and splendour of Panya Vijnthanasarn's (b.1956) Buddha in *Sustentation* [1997] or Dang Xuan Hoa's (b.1956) domestic landscapes?

The contrasts and tensions were so many and so great that there were times when I almost gave up hope of finding any common themes. It was as if Southeast Asia and ASEAN's only common points of reference were its intrinsic and inherent differences. I would lurch one week from the court-infused, Islamic ethos of Brunei Darussalam to the rugged Fifties-style modernity of Bandung and Hanoi's curiously elegant fusion of mandarin China and the gallic *Grandes Écoles*.

Whatever the case, I knew I had to try to bridge the gaps. To this end I forced myself, just as T.K. Sabapathy, one of the region's leading art critics, had forced himself in the past, to read the 1971 Preamble to the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Co-operation. Replete with the hopefulness of ASEAN's founding fathers, I relished the confidence that sprang from their language. However, I was unsure of whether or not "the existing ties of history, geography and culture which have bound the people together" really did exist.

Finally, I decided that the political imperative and diplomatic fiat that had created ASEAN would not let me give up. Impelled by this I tried harder. Whilst I did see that we shared certain common interests the more important discovery lay in the realisation that I would only succeed if I resolved to look for the underlying similarities between our cultures rather than allowing myself to be lost in the all too apparent differences. It was only through stressing and comparing our common bonds that my understanding and hopefully yours too will be enhanced. ASEAN's future - whatever the level and or forum, lies in the firmness of our joint resolve.

As I rethought my approach, I discovered that there were common themes - themes which would emerge in one country only to pop up again in another. Similarly, art historical trends would seem to develop in one city and then recur elsewhere. As I traveled, I noted down these patterns much as a pilgrim circumambulating Borobudur would have noted recurring motifs and themes, in essence touching and touched by the ever present *bodhi* tree. And it is these themes that have become the source of my understanding of the region's art.

Among the most noteworthy of the themes were the following: the limiting and reductive definition of contemporary art employed by the art establishment, or art versus handicraft; the western art tradition and its absorption; the on-going conflict between nationalism and modernism in art; a sense of place and rootedness; the role of religious faith and devotion; the shock of the new; the art of collecting and finally, the emergence of a Southeast Asian aesthetic language and how Latiff Mohidin, my silent guide with his evocative *Pago Pago* series provided me with a sense of a complete entity when nothing more than fragments had existed initially.

I should say that I have set out on an unashamedly personal and subjective journey with this exhibition. To my mind, any understanding of what ASEAN is, or can possibly mean to us must, in the final analysis, be refracted through the prism of our own personal experiences.

ART VERSUS HANDICRAFT: THE ARTIST AND THE ARTISAN

Kuching in Sarawak forced me to rethink the distinctions that modern art had foisted on us. Was the artistry of an unidentified *pua* weaver or any other exponent of handicraft any less noteworthy than the painter at his easel? Given the magnificence of our regional textile heritage and the remarkable heights achieved in places as diverse as Lampung, Solo and Jogjakarta, why did we persist in defining our concept of art and artworks so as to exclude textiles and handicrafts?

Quietly, I had resolved this doubt by arguing in my mind that textile weaving, for example, was mechanical, lacking in personal creativity and expressionism. Months later when I was shown the equally complex handiwork of Laotian weavers by the textile specialist Carol Cassady, I conceded that I had been wrong. Carol explained how each Laotian woman in the past, much like her Iban equivalent, would have created her own personal artistic

'template', weaving into her skirt a compendium of dreams, hopes and stories. It was as if a simple skirt had become a text studded with meaning. With each motif a woman revealed her status, her tribal affiliation - in short, her world.

Similarly I had been overwhelmed by the brilliance of the silent, unnamed artisans of Borobudur, Angkor and Pagan - men and perhaps women whose work would forever hold the secret of their creator's identity even though they resonated with a devotional passion and an austere beauty that is unsurpassed. All the more so when I compared the quality and excellence of Khmer statues, for example with the work of their Southeast Asian contemporaries. Whilst we may well be living through an age of unprecedented technological innovation and progress there was no doubt in my mind that much present day sculpture compares very poorly to its antecedents.

Had we, I wondered, remembering the Van Gogh T-shirt that I had seen the Vietnamese artist, Dang Xuan Hoa wearing during my visit to his studio, merely

aped the West with its particular concept of artist as creator, magician and seer - extolling his individuated role beyond a Southeast Asian verity? It was ironic that here, in the supposed cradle of 'Asian values' and communitarianism, we still persisted in placing such undue emphasis on the artist as an individual.

There is no doubt that artworks produced by the silent artist, the weaver, the mason, the wood-carver and lacquer-painter deserve far greater recognition than they are given and in certain cases, there is no doubt that they exceed in beauty and power the work of those who work in what is now considered to be the accepted art forms of painting and sculpture.



Pua Kumbu
Iban, Sarawak

SOUTHEAST ASIA - A SYNTHESIS OF INFLUENCES LONG BEFORE THE ADVENT OF THE WEST

Long before the advent of the colonial powers, cultural themes and trends from outside the region shaped and were shaped in turn by the region's peoples. Contrary to what many people now think, the Europeans were by no means the first to affect and influence art and culture in Southeast Asia.

As a consequence, traditional art forms never remained static and unchanging. The rich Progo valley and the city of Jogjakarta in central Java are a clear example of this continuing flux. Caught between the pincers of the *abangan* and the *santri* world views this tiny region - a cultural treasury of sorts, dazzles a visitor with all the complexities and contradictions of Indonesian life.

On the one hand, there is the Javanese classical *Wayang* or shadow play, with its characters and narratives drawn from the Hindu *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* that I enjoyed one evening in the shadows of Borobudur surrounded at all sides by jostling villagers. On the other hand, I noticed that at night there are the small mosques that ring out with the call to prayer, reminding me of Java's Islamic *pondok-pesantren* culture. Over the centuries, Java and the Javanese had embraced not only Hinduism and Buddhism but Islam as well, enveloping one after another into a seamless web of custom and belief.

Neighbouring cultures and communities inevitably influenced and shaped one another and Southeast Asian societies were noteworthy for their porous boundaries and adaptable, syncretic cultures. New trading partners and political alliances also brought with them new ideas and techniques. For example there can be no doubt that Moghul miniature painting had a considerable influence on the art of both the Kon-baung and Chakri dynasties, expanding a devotional art form beyond the realms of edification into subtle social commentary. Interestingly the Kon-baung era's rich Court-patronised culture of *jataka* mural painting reflected two historical events: first, the growing Indian and Chinese presence and secondly, the Ayutthaya influence born of the sacking of that city by the Burmese in 1767. Wat Suthat Dhepwaram reveals, for example, the growing Chinese community in the architectural details included in the murals, intermingling at times the sacred and the profane.

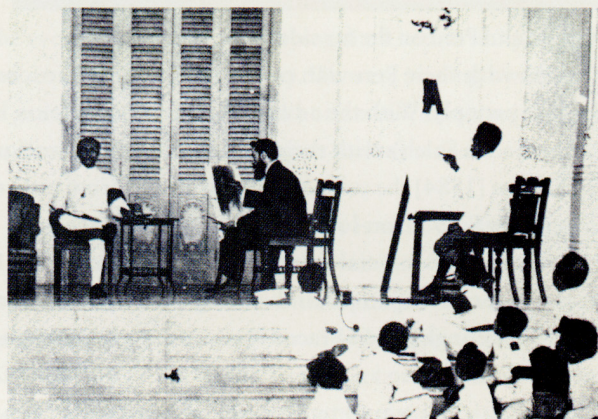
Similarly, Hanoi's much revered Van Mieu - Quoc Tu Giam (Temple of Literature - School for the Sons of the Nation) displays its strong Chinese influences whilst never being anything less than a proud symbol of Vietnamese cultural excellence and integrity. Witness the c15th scholar Nguyen Trai's confident and proud assertion of cultural and political autonomy:

Proclamation of Victory over the Ngo
"Our country Dai Viet has long since been a land of old culture
With its own rivers and mountains, ways and customs
Different from those of the North."

THE ABSORPTION OF THE WESTERN ART TRADITION

Nonetheless, in terms of art history, the advent of the Europeans was to be extremely dramatic. As U Ta Kha, a respected Myanmar artist and teacher says, "In the past artists drew a line and then added the colour. There was no perspective, no depth and painting possessed a certain stillness." The infusion of western art principles, teaching methods and subject matter shattered that stillness. The moving line and shadow altered, once and for all the way many artists looked at the world. In such an ethos, the strictures of line, tone and colour and their interaction with proportion, perspective and composition became increasingly important.

The political power and technological advances of the West undermined the credibility and confidence of many kingdoms such as Malacca and Burma. Some of the traditional Court-based cultures could not withstand the onslaught. In *Sejarah Melayu*, the unknown author describes the assault of the Portuguese troops on the great Malay entrepot, Malacca in 1511:



Cesare Ferro and Luang Soralaklikhit (Mui) painting portraits of King Chulalongkorn at the Abhisek Dusit Throne Hall, Bangkok, 1906

"And the noises of the cannon was as the noise of thunder in the heavens and the flashes of fire of their guns were like flashes of lightning in the sky.."

[*Sejarah Melayu*, transl. C.C. Brown, publ. Oxford 1970]

With so many clear and at times shocking instances of European might and intransigence, it was perhaps unsurprising that artists and writers would seek to emulate and copy European styles and practices. In the 1800s in particular as the Europeans cemented their stranglehold on much of Southeast Asia, their authority seemed unsurpassable.

Juan Luna
(1857-1899)
Spoliarium (1884)



Joseph Inguimberty
(1896-1971)
Working in the Rice Field (1930)



Raden Saleh (1816-1880) and Juan Luna (1857-1899) stand out from this period, pre-dating as they did the inception of local art-education institutions. Perhaps as a result their work is marked by an excessive slavishness to western ideals and subjects, a slavishness that was only to be overcome by later generations of artists.

The Javanese aristocrat Raden Saleh was one of the very first to be schooled in the western academic tradition. In many ways his vast, flamboyant canvases and their equally grand African-inspired themes, such as *A Head of a Lion* [1843] reflect both his cosmopolitan personality and exposure that included a five year stay at the court of Ernst I, Grand Duke of Saxon-Coburg-Gotha. Some might even argue that the sheer grandeur and imperiousness of his works and especially his portraiture was an ironic comment of a Java that was, at that time, yoked under the brutalities of the harsh Dutch administration and its *Cultuurstelsel* or Culture System, which had reduced the peasantry to little more than bonded labourers.

Nonetheless, Raden Saleh remained a solitary figure, engendering no school or movement. In the Philippines, however, a group of artists, led by Juan Luna, emerged who matched the Javanese aristocrat. These artists explored a wide variety of subjects drawing much of their inspiration from the decaying grandeur of their Castilian masters. A comparison of their paintings reveals many parallels with artists in

Mexico and Peru on the far side of the Pacific.

As with their Peruvian counterparts, Catholic iconography and devotional subjects loomed large in the Filipino panoply. With the advent of Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo (1853-1913) and Juan Luna, subjects began to mirror Raden Saleh's with their academic style and foreign-ness. In one particularly massive work of Juan Luna's, *Spoliarium* [1884] the subject is clearly drawn from rather arcane Latin sources and the figures are almost entirely alien to any Filipino on-looker, save perhaps a butcher.

Each of the colonial powers, from the French to the Dutch and British, brought with them their own particular artistic pre-occupations, influencing their colonies accordingly. Even in Thailand which remained independent, King Chulalongkorn embraced western art as an integral part of his attempt to modernise his kingdom. Artists such as Cesare Ferro and later, under King Vajiravudh, Corrado Ferocci (1893-1962) were invited to Bangkok to undertake large-scale commissions - projecting the Monarchy's ambitions for a reinvigorated Thailand. Ferro's



Fernando
Amorsolo
(1892-1972)
Planting Rice
(1921)

portrait of King Chulalongkorn in 1906 became a symbol of the changes the monarch wished to introduce. A photograph of that commission shows Ferro at work whilst behind him a young Thai artist also seeks to paint the monarch.

Decades later, the 1933 *coup d'état* set in train a series of events that led to Corrado Ferocci being called upon to set up what was to be Silpakorn University. Similarly in Vietnam, the painters Victor Tardieu (1890-1956) and later Joseph Inguimberty (1896-1971) were tasked in 1925 to set up Hanoi's École Des Beaux Arts. The ethos of each of the two schools differed quite considerably in that Ferocci was less willing than Tardieu to expose his charges to the vigours of western art, preferring to school them in a more academic and traditional approach, whilst Inguimberty, perhaps drawing on Paris' explosion of creativity, encouraged a more emotional and romantic approach commensurate with a quest for poetic realism.

I was reminded of all three art-teachers when, on the eve of my return to Malaysia, the Laotian sculptor and art-instructor Bounthanh Sommany talked of designer and art-teacher, Marc LeGuay. We were touring Vientiane's National School of Fine Arts, stopping for a minute to gaze up at a three-panel Laotian diorama executed by LeGuay that was hung above the administrative offices - a diorama that the French artist had turned into a treasury of Laotian symbols.

The flair of the Vietnamese artists who emerged from the École Des Beaux Arts is with hindsight quite remarkable. Men such as the driven and dynamic To Ngoc Van (1905-1954) and Nguyen Tu Nghiem (b.1922) stand out to this day. Nguyen Sang (1921-1988) despite his well-known fracas with Inguimberty was a major talent. His work ranged with equal confidence across many different genres. His *Portrait of Mrs Lam* is both subtle and understated in the way it presents the 'châtelaine' of Café Lam to the world - imbuing her with all the calm, dignity and intelligence of a society lady and reminding me of Picasso's famous portrait of Gertrude Stein.

The strong academic training that formed the basis for many of the artists of this period engendered a vision of the world that could at times seem overly contrived and naïve. The works of the University of Philippines-trained Fernando Amorsolo (1892-1972) presented an idealised Philippines - a rural idyll of bathing beauties and contented farm-workers quite at odds with the poverty and squalor of the vast sugar-growing estancias of Negros. Even after an extensive tour of Europe sponsored by a scion of the wealthy Zobel family, he returned to his easel unchanged.

In his day, his paintings, whilst adored by the public at large, were at times pilloried by critics such as Ignacio Manlapaz as being "... too saccharine. The sentiment is too disagreeably feminine. They lack vigour". At other times however, he revealed a darker and more compelling vein such as in *Ruins of Rizal and Ascaraga* [1921]. Nonetheless, despite his vision of "sweetness and light", Amorsolo's corpus of work with its languorous sensuousness has seeped into the Filipino psyche, becoming as much a part of a national myth of identity as Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* had become half a century earlier. Similarly, the Burmese artist, U Ba Nyan's (1887-1946) personality and talent somehow encapsulated and exemplified both art and the art-world's perceptions of Myanmar.

It could be argued that much of the art in Laos and Brunei Darussalam for example is still passing through this stage of development. The work of Khamsouk Keominmoung (b.1942) [*Ho Chi Minh Trail*, 1991] and Datin Maimuna Mohamad (b.1946) [*Keringat Ibu*, 1991] with their emphasis on the delicate and the superficially beautiful may well be matched by more intellectually and emotionally charged work such as Kong Phat Luangrath's (b.1950) *Racing* [1992].

Burmese artists also received a significant boost with the formation in 1914 of the Burma Art Club. Men like U Ba Nyan who later went to study at the Royal College of Art in London returned to Yangon fully imbued with all the very latest techniques and ideas. U Ba Nyan's talent was prodigious. His drawings and water colours are exquisite. Delicately composed, superbly drawn and almost expressive in their colours they reveal an artist who took his inspiration from a close observation of nature.

U Ba Nyan
(1887-1946)
Self-Portrait
(1937)



To this day many younger Burmese artists trace their artistic lineage from the 'Master' - U Ba Nyan, claiming to have been the pupils of his pupils. Two contemporaries - U Ba Kyi (b.1912) and U Ngwee Gaing (1901-1967), applied their considerable talents in recreating a Burma that was still a redoubt of traditional values - proud, noble and independent. In U Ba Kyi's *Duel* [1942] and U Ngwee Gaing's *King Munhkata and Princess Pabamadi* [1951], Burmese history and legend is celebrated as an invading Chinese warrior is struck down outside the walls of Mandalay in a near-mythic conflict as love triumphs in a courtly setting.

But U Ba Nyan with his maestro-like flair remains pre-eminent. And, justifiably proud of his ability, his *Self Portrait* [1937] asserts the extent to which the 'cult' of the individual painter, artist and 'master' had superseded and supplanted the silent, unknown artisan. Standing in front of his easel, in an elegant, rather foppish gown and palette in hand, the artist has become a gentleman - a figure in society and an authority in his own right.

NATIONALISM VERSUS MODERNISM

As more and more artists were trained in colleges and schools of art across the region, they also became increasingly aware of the intellectual and political trends sweeping much of Asia in the 20s and 30s. The cry for 'Independence' that was led by men such as Gandhi and Sun Yat Sen was taken up by artists and writers across the region. As Neil Jamieson says of Vietnam during the same decades:

"a new, westernised, individualistic poetry exploded...entirely displacing traditional forms and content. Similar changes took place in short stories and novels, in newspapers, and in historical writings."

[*The Evolving Context of Contemporary Vietnamese Painting*, publ. 1996 Siam Society]

In Indonesia and Vietnam in particular the fervency of the struggle for Independence permeated and invigorated the entire society. Years later in the 1960s, the Indonesian *Manikebu* or *Cultural Manifesto* exemplified the didactic and political imperatives that many felt should propel art and culture - "*Culture is part of the battle to improve the man's living conditions.*" In aesthetic and philosophical terms the challenge left artists with a tussle that remains as pertinent today as it was then.

As artists began to assume a more pronounced and considered role in society (prefigured by U Ba Nyan's stylish self-portrait), the question of identity became moot. Artists working in a predominantly European and western medium of oil painting found themselves caught in a dilemma. How could they say they were nationalists if the art they practised and sought perfection in was entirely alien and foreign? How could they be modern artists on the other hand and up-to-date if they turned their backs on the artistic developments taking place in London, Paris and New York?

The philosophical challenge forced many of the artists to address the issue of the materials and medium they worked in. In Vietnam, for example, a long-cultivated and highly-developed tradition of lacquer work drew many modern artists in search of an artistic resolution of this issue of identity. However, lacquer is a complex and intractable medium. Nguyen Gia Tri's (1910-1993) lacquer panels in Hanoi's elegant Fine Arts Museum display the technique at its finest hour. To my mind, Gia Tri understood that the density of tropical foliage and the harshness of the light at midday demanded a treatment of nature that accentuated form and texture over colour.

In this respect he matched the Balinese-expatriate Walter Spies (1895-1942), whose works have influenced so many of Bali's artists. Spies interpreted the Balinese landscape in terms of form. Certainly his colour palette is extremely subdued. His dense jewel-like canvases stand out for their incredibly rich layering, as tree after tree and bush after bush is crammed into the vertiginous Balinese terrain.

For artists of Chinese origin, at this time, the challenge in terms of materials and medium was con-



Walter Spies
(1895-1942)
River Landscape
(1938)



Victorio Edades
(1895-1969)
The Builders
(1928)

According to prevailing art historical lore, the two artists' trip to Bali was to resolve these dilemmas and rein-vigorate both their colour palettes and their passion for painting. There is no doubt that the island enveloped them in its beauty and its exoticism. Enraptured by Bali, both men painted with renewed dynamism - witness Soo Pieng's *Tropical Life* [1959] and Wen Hsi's *Whales* [c1960s]. But I should add that their much vaunted trip has perhaps been over-hyped, to the detriment of the work they completed at home. I say this because their approach to Bali's sultry charms reminded me, having read Edward Said's *Orientalism*, of the gentlemen artists such as Delacroix who when visiting the harems and baths of Algiers and Tunis sought merely to distance themselves from and isolate the unusual and different, without really understanding or comprehending their subjects.

Vicente
Manansala
(1913-1981)
Madonna of the
Slums (1950)



In Indonesia the struggle for Independence unleashed a torrent of politically-charged creativity that continues to dwarf the nation's present artists much as the poetry of Chairil Anwar with its avowed cry for personal freedom shocked and enlivened Jakarta's intellectual circles. In the midst of these troubled years, a trio of artists were able to reconcile the tussle between modernity and nationalism, creating in turn some of the most impressive paintings in the region as well as a new and yet intrinsically Javanese aesthetic language of painting.

Hendra Gunawan (1918-1983), S. Sudjojono (1913-1986) and Affandi (1907-1990) drew on the energy and turbulence all around them. All three men portrayed the everyday world, the street life of peddlars, prostitutes, farmers and workers. Their vision was diametrically opposed to the world of Amorsolo or Dato' Hoessein Enas (1924-1995) [*Harvesting Tobacco*, 1962] - perhaps reflecting their greater emphasis on the need for truth in art and other more ideological imperatives.

Filipino art also experienced a period of radical change as the faux gentility of Amorsolo was further lambasted by a new breed of artists such as Victor Edades (1895-1985), Cesar Legaspi (1917-1994) and Vicente Manansala (1910-1981). Emboldened by their greater foreign exposure to New York trends such as abstract expressionism and the work of Mexican artists Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros, not to mention their greater socio-political awareness, they sought to shake up the Filipino art-world.

Employing distortion and contrasts of colour, tone, shape or line, they attempted to alter the way people looked both at art and their world around them. Edades' social commentary shocked many with its unblinking portrayal of poverty, hunger and death. Arturo Luz (b. 1926) mined the modernist idiom that his countrymen had introduced. Without aping their styles, his distended figures and minimalist canvases still managed to retain a distinctly Filipino character.



Hendra
Gunawan
(1918-1983)
War and Peace
(late 1950s
early 1960s)

Similarly, Sudjojono had little but disdain for the idealised landscapes of the *Mooi Indië* (Beautiful Indies) school. Artist Basoeki Abdullah (1915-1994) was among the chief objects of his scorn. Sudjojono, a teacher at the prestigious Bandung Art Academy wrote:

"...Every artist must take as his starting point his own nature. An artist must be courageous in all things, especially when it comes to offering his ideas to the world, even if he does not receive any public recognition at all... Each and every artist must embody these two qualities, truth and beauty. Not beauty in the sense recognised by the public at large, but from the point of view of aesthetics as understood by the artist himself."

[*Seni lukis, Kesenian dan Seniman*, publ.1946 Jogjakarta, transl. Astri Wright and taken from her essay "Painting the people", *Modern Indonesian Art*, publ. 1990 Jakarta]

Hendra Gunawan's *War and Peace* [c1950s] reveals the artist's extraordinary ability to reinvent and distort colour and line for emotional effect - turning a lurid green swirl into a finger and a blue dot into an eye. Seemingly anarchic, Hendra's work contains its own artistic verities not to mention a lofty disdain for the qualities so highly praised by the Javanese priyayi élite of *halus* and *kebatinen* - delicacy, breeding and decorum.

Both Hendra and Affandi [*Man with Fighting Cock*, 1980] were bold and daring in the face of artistic strictures. This courage was as revolutionary as the times they lived in. I would not hesitate to label the two men as giants of the region's art-world. Moreover, both men also managed to resolve the twin, often conflicting pulls of modernity and nationalism with bravura and style. Looking at their work with its raw expressionism one is left somehow with a sense of their sheer recklessness. Too busy to pontificate they painted, and in painting they created the most compelling visual language that their island home and their people had ever seen.

A SENSE OF PLACE OR ROOTEDNESS

Affandi
(1907-1990)
Ibuku

With each pit-stop on my travels I found myself switching gear and slipping into the pattern of life in that community. In Bali, for example, I Wayan Bendi's Ubud became my Ubud. Whereas, in the Philippines, the frenetic, ear-splitting cacophony of the artist's co-operative Sanggawa's tumultuous canvases became my Manila.



But a question began to haunt me. Had any of the artists captured their world, their homes and their dreams in their art? As I traipsed through Ubud from gallery to gallery, passing women bearing offerings, ATM machines and padi fields, I felt myself falling into a world where the divide between art and life was hard to discern. Gazing from the terrace outside Pak' Neka's Museum across emerald green padi fields, as the man himself in full Balinese regalia threw up his arms in his casually flamboyant manner, I wondered what it was that gave each of these communities I had visited their distinct flavour, their genus of place? Furthermore how did the artists capture this mysterious transient quality?

The greatest artists or writers, I realised, are able to recreate and conjure up in their works a living, breathing city, province or nation, peopling it with characters who are both instantly recognisable and yet somehow more illuminating than our everyday interlocutors. Gabriel Garcia Marquez' Machado, Tolstoy's Moscow, Velasquez' Madrid and Mahfouz' Cairo - the list appears endless, but it isn't. These artists have turned an art form to their own very definite ends, stamping their character, vision and in certain cases humour on a work.

Artists of this stature 'tap' into the popular psyche of their community and mine the rich vein of associations that lie there, often untouched. An excellent example of this is Vietnam's Bui Xuan Phai (1921-1988). Phai explored the Hanoi of the 'War' years. He converted his impressions into a series of elegiac visual poems, neat unpeopled haikus - as elegant as one of Ho Chih Minh's four-lined poems from his *Prison Diary*. Of course one might say that Hanoi is one of the most beautiful cities in the world and therefore relatively easy to portray and thus lionise.

I would disagree. A thing of beauty and love is often much more difficult for an artist to render into art. Hanoi - an intensely urban, and yet feline creature, resists easy definition. Ancient and troubled, the city's streets, especially in winter are shrouded with an aura of romance. Phai was able to capture this magical quality in his deceptively simple oils. Steeped in pathos and leached of happiness, his Hanoi assumes a personality that engages the viewer's emotions directly. If Dickensian London is that city's artistic 'truth' then, Phai's Hanoi is the Vietnamese equivalent.

Another aspect of Phai's connection with the real world are his paintings and drawings of the *Cheo* popular opera. Tackling the vernacular and everyday with an unflattering eye he sought to 'root' his art in his cultural environment just as Hendra Gunawan, Affandi (witness his *Ibuku*) and Sudjojono had done in Indonesia. These works have a direct parallel with Degas' work amongst Parisian ballerinas and Toulouse Lautrec's amongst the café singers of Montmartre. Evoking a popular and essentially 'low' art form, the artist reached out beyond the conventional confines of the art world as he followed the actors behind the screens and stages into their changing rooms.

Similarly in Malaysia and in the Philippines, Anita Magsaysay-Ho (b.1914) and Dzulkifli Buyong (b.1948) concentrated their attention on a rural, small-town cosmos - working and reworking over a period of decades the same themes. In delicate works such as *Hantu* [1984], Dzulkifli recreated the intimately observed world of a small child, shot through with a sense of foreboding and threat. In *Harvest* [c1956], Anita evoked the semi-rural world of *barrios* and without any concession to the supposedly serious nature of art, once again opening up a host of keenly felt associations and memories.

Colour, by way of comparison, is Srihardi Soedarsono's (b.1931) point of reference. Bright, glaring blocks of colour - reds, white, yellow and blue anchor the viewer in the Nusantara. Strangely, Srihardi is one of the very few artists in the region that seem to have captured the glare of the harsh midday sun - and the way it bleaches colour from the surroundings. Floating above these blocks in the painting *Dua Penari* [1975] are isolated figures, dancers in the main, who act as a counterpoint to the expanse of pure colour, their scale somehow perplexing to the eye.

Just as Srihardi explored the spirit of place in terms of colour, artists such as Vietnam's Nguyen Trung (b.1940) much like Latiff conjured up a monochrome world where shapes and forms were juxtaposed in a gentle painterly fashion that reminds one of the Indonesian artist Ahmad Sadali's (1924-1987) work. Hovering midway between the two is Tran Luu Hau (b.1928) whose work, whilst discernibly in homage of the great Phai, is a marriage of colour and form in a most traditional of abstract expressionist styles.

No artist, seemingly, could have been more different from Dzulkifli Buyong than Georgette Chen (1907-1922). The epitome of glamour and style as she shuttled from Paris to New York, Shanghai to Singapore, Georgette, the quintessential *Nanyang* Chinese painted and exhibited as she moved. Notwithstanding her glittering life, she was still able to achieve in her work a sense of place and rootedness. Her anchorage was provided by her intensely private and intimate portraits. Intuitive and expressionistic, she delved into her subjects. In *Mother and Child* [1960], for example, she loses herself in the mother's maternal embrace.

The manner with which these artists handled their subject matter, the delicacy of sensibility and the acute observation of detail, indirectly revealed another way of tackling the twin challenges of modernism and nationalism. By exploring their own emotional responses to the world, they achieved an art form that was intrinsically true to its subject matter, an art form that was rooted in Southeast Asia.



Bui Xuan Phai
(1921-1988)
Ancient Street
(1963)

THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS FAITH

I sat in Yangon's magnificent Shwedagon Pagoda at dawn as devotees made their way to their prayers, some carrying flowers, others fruits. As I watched, I saw on their faces the same look of rapt concentration and peace that I had seen in the mosques of Kuala Lumpur and the cathedral in Manila's Intramuros. Religion and religious faith remain a central part of people's lives and the art of the region could never hope to be true to the region if it ignored the spirituality and mysticism of all our lives.

Devotional art of one kind or another suffuses Southeast Asia whether we are in Luang Prabang, Manila or Ubud. Faith has long played and continues to play a central role in all Asian societies and most art, at least until

very recently, was made to edify, uplift and educate. The subject matter of most Thai mural paintings such as those in Wat Phra Keo as well as the temples of Pagan are drawn from the Buddhist *janaka*.

With their extremely public role, many of these murals were viewed upon as an amalgam of all things Thai, Laotian or Burmese. Their flat, unmodulated surfaces, devoid of shading and perspective but arrayed in gold and labyrinthine in composition, became another avenue for artists seeking to capture that elusive national spirit. The same process could also be said to be the case in the Philippines with its strong Catholic, iconographic tradition. The Virgin Mary, Christ on the Cross and the stories of the Bible were symbols of both spiritual and national identity. There was no division of



Thawan
Duchanee
(b. 1939)
Worship (1964)

church and state in the Philippines - the two had become intertwined in the national psyche. Brenda Fajardo exemplifies this in the way she synthesises Catholicism with native Filipino myths in her gorgeously detailed paintings such as *Nag away-away and mga aso't pusa, kalabaw at agila* (*The Dog, Cat, Carabao and Eagle Fighting Each Other*) [1989].

In Thailand, Silpakorn University actually set up a special Faculty for Thai Traditional Art and thereby encouraged the artists to acquaint themselves with these art forms. However, sitting in art historian Somporn Rodboon's crowded office, jam-packed with glossy art catalogues that tumbled on the floor as I tried to peek at them, it seemed hard to reconcile the MTV-coolness of the student body outside with the School of Thai Traditional Art. Despite my quiet confusion, she assured me that the quest for Thai identity as exemplified by Thai ideologue Sulak Sivaraksa was still very much a force.

The work of the neo-traditionalist school led by Panya Vijinthanasarn (b.1956) and Chalermchai Kositpipat (b.1955) attempted to update a centuries-old mural painting tradition - just as the unnamed mural artists of the past had incorporated new themes and styles in the murals Wat Suthat Dhepwaram. With their famous joint commission at the London Thai Buddhist temple of Wat Buddhapadipa [1984-87], the two men expanded upon the motifs they had been schooled in at Silpakorn University. The extraordinary appeal of both men's work in Thailand is testament to the power of such icons as symbols of faith and nationalism.

Panya's depiction of the theme of the *Defeat of the Mara* juxtaposed the contemporary with the traditional. He expanded the Buddhist artistic pantheon, using new colours, techniques (spray paint and acrylic) and forms. Similarly, his vast, elegiac Buddha [*Sustentation*, 1997] reveals the artist's concerns about materials in his usage of mangosteen peel - a treatment that projects a luminosity that is almost spiritual in its effect. Much as the Laotian artist Kham Tuan (1925-1997) portrays his *Buddha* [c.1950] half reclaimed by its jungle environs, suggesting

perhaps the serenity of the 8th-century *Maitreya Buddha* of Prakhorn Chia.

However, much of the neo-traditionalists' work can appear effete when set alongside Thawan Duchanee's robust draughtsmanship. Even his *Buddha* [1965] possesses a certain virility. There is no doubt that much of the artist's work ripples with self-professed masculinity and testosterone which would be obnoxious were it not for the man's incredible dexterity and the rawness with which he rips his way through the Buddhist pantheon. Thawan's *sangha* or community of the faithful is comprised of the hardy men and women of his Lanna Thai origins. To see Thawan's work, such as *Worship* [1964] is to be confronted by man's worldliness (*lokiya*) as opposed to the transcendental (*lokutarra*). Given the region's chequered history and the blood that has been spilt, one shouldn't flinch from his muscular, warrior-like vision.

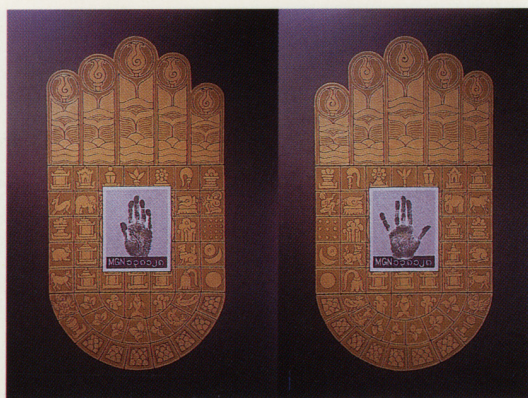
Montien Boonma manages to balance questions of faith, identity and intellectual challenges better than most. In fact, no Southeast Asian artist has been as successful as Montien in overcoming the challenge of the suitability of one's materials and their relevance to the subject matter. As one of the world's leading proponents of installation art, Montien elicits the most elegant and arresting of results from the most unpromising of materials. Dirt, mud, glue and gravel constitute his *Black Stupa* [1989]. In doing so he seems to prove the transcendence of faith whatever the circumstance or form.

Younger Burmese artists have also explored issues of identity in the context of religion. In M.P.P. Yei Myint's (b.1953) work, *Buddha and His Son* [1997] both the Buddha's palm and the sole of his feet are studded with a host of traditional Burmese motifs and zodiac symbols. Once again the boundary between what is art and what is devotion is unclear. Fascinated by the intermingling of Buddhism and traditional folklore in the form of spirits called 'nats', his work is chock-full of interpretations. Min Wae Aung's (b. 1960) paintings are as spare and elegant as M.P.P. Wei Myint's are packed. In *Towards Monastery* [1996] the artist suggests spiritual purity as well as the endlessness of the quest for nirvana. His wandering monks traipse across a bare, desert-like landscape, suggestive of the trials of life in pursuit of The Way. Interestingly, a host of allusions and a sense of spiritual release springs from both works despite their contrasting styles and approaches.

Islam's clear prohibition on the figurative has resulted in many Muslim artists from Ahmad Sadali and Sulaiman Esa (b. 1941) through to Syed Ahmad Jamal (b.1929) and Pg. Timbang bin Pg Hj Tuah (b.1959) working with the abstract. Not all have been successful. In the case of Sulaiman Esa and Syed Ahmad Jamal, a robust understanding of the aesthetic foundations of abstraction have given their work greater force - especially in their exploration of Islamic themes and motifs, many of which appear to be based on the triangle.

Interestingly the *Gunung Ledang* series that has pre-occupied Syed Ahmad in recent years may have a symbolic throw back to Buddhist or animistic symbolism in that the stupa is itself a symbol of the mystical Mount Meru. As such, mountains recur in many works as a focus for devotion and power. Nonetheless abstraction has come to predominate Malaysian art, with painters such as Ibrahim Hussein (b.1930) and Latiff Mohidin becoming key proponents.

Religious faith continues to underscore a great deal of Southeast Asian art. This distinguishes it from much contemporary European and North American art which has largely ignored the role of faith. How regional artists will develop their art with its predominantly western focus on self-expression alongside the more conformist nature of these faiths remains to be seen. Certainly the centrality of devotional themes in all our art is also matched by the paucity of paintings that delve into the intimate, private world of human love and emotion.



MPP Yei Myint
(b. 1953)
*Buddha and His
Son* (1997), detail

THE SHOCK OF THE NEW AND THE POST-MODERNIST FUTURE

The post-modernist future is upon us. Southeast Asia is a Blade Runner-like miasma of languages, cultures, technologies and religions. Perhaps the most astute chronicler of this phase of our art history is the Thai art historian, Apinan Poshyananda whose recently curated exhibition at New York's Asia Society, *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions and Tensions* presents some of the complexity and layering of themes. However, one might argue that the fashions of New York and London, Kassel and Venice do not necessarily present the best options for Southeast Asian artists. As trends sweep through the art-world with growing speed, the schucksterism and hype can overwhelm the art. But an MTV-reared generation that feeds off five-minute videos and a barrage of images will extract its toll.

To Ngoc Van
(1906-1954)
*Taking a Rest on
a Hill* (c1950s)

Or is it a toll? I am unconvinced that globalisation is such a threat to the region's art. Traveling through ASEAN I found that my personal odyssey or Latiff-like rantau was accompanied by the familiar face of VJ Trey of *Channel V* and the relatively unknown voices (at least to me) of Indonesian pop idol Gessy Ratnasari, the delectable Thai model-singer Yooyee, Rocker 'Queen' Ella and Dangdut 'Princess' Amelina. If anything, wasn't this mix

- this eclectic Southeast Asian *smorgasborg* or *rijsttafel*, a most exciting and invigorating mix?

Despite the avowedly avant-garde nature of Apinan's exhibition, it reveals once again the long-running dilemma of nationalism versus modernism and the quest for an indigenous art form, notwithstanding the "-isms" being bandied around. Swirling through a tsunami of influences and random references - art's role in society has become an increasingly important question. The juxtapositioning of references is perhaps best exemplified by Ibrahim Hussein's *My Father and the Astronaut* [1969].

The politicisation of art has long been a regional reality. Sudjojono and To Ngoc Van have never been shy in hiding their didactic intent. Present day artists are similarly upfront with Wong Hoy Cheong



(b.1960), Truong Tan (b.1960), Nirmala Shanmughalingam (b.1941) and Vasan Sitthiket (b.1957) amongst the most assertive and at times shocking, witness the latter's *Sinners* [1991] and its scathing comment on religious hypocrisy. The vast tapestry of references Hoy Cheong presents in his Nanyang Chinese odyssey, entitled the *Migrants Series* [1996] accords with the post-modernist reality where all influences large or small are valid. His earlier, less didactic canvases such as *Fear of Falling, Joy of Flying* [1985] manage quite gracefully to interweave politics and art without lapsing into bleakness.

Having said that, one of the region's most brilliant artists and perhaps its bleakest, at least superficially, is Filipino Ang Kiukok (b.1931). His scabrous nightmare of a Manila being ripped apart by wild dogs is disturbing to say the least. However, a measure of humanity and salvation is afforded by the aesthetic process by which these angular, cubist forms are created on the canvas. Much like Latiff, whose singularity of vision he more than matches, his is an architectonic art-form that one can construct and deconstruct in like manner. Nonetheless, in *Crucifixion* [1983], his methodology is applied in a devotional context to remarkable effect.

Not all young artists have reacted to the post-modernist future in like fashion. For every Chatchai Puipia (b.1964), Agnes Arellano (b.1949) and Dadang Christanto (b. 1947) with their gruesome vision of the present

there are countless artists who have seen both release and sustenance in their cultural and spiritual heritage. Hanoi's 'Gang of Five' lace their works with a more humanist, gentle touch. Ha Tri Hieu (b.1959) and Hong Viet Dong (b.1962) [*Girl with Lotus*, 1997] yearn for a future that incorporates Vietnam's rural traditions in a tranquil, almost rustic fashion.

Of course, in Malaysia where race is a particularly potent issue, artists such as Hoy Cheong have been unafraid of tackling it, head on. Redza Piyadasa's *Baba Family* [1986], distorts and manipulates colour and tone in a comment on racial ancestry, just as Patrick Ng Kah Onn in *Spirit of Earth*,

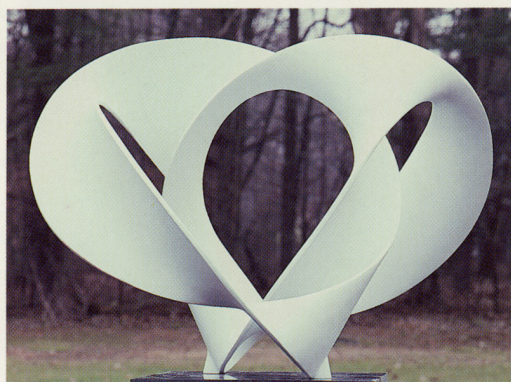
Wind and Air [1958], tried to appeal to an over-arching pantheism in his apprehension of race and humanity.

But not all political commentary in art need be heavy-handed. Humour is a hallmark of much Indonesian political art with Heri Dono's (b.1960) comic puppet figures and I Wayan Bendi's panoramic vision of Bali. In Bendi's world - perhaps the ultimate post-modernist fantasy, temple festivals dazzle, tourists click on cameras and airplanes transmuted into garudas zip across a sky dotted by clouds lifted out of a Cirebon batik. Bali, he seems to suggest, is nothing more than an organised tourist show, an extravaganza for the senses.

Similarly there is a certain delicious cheekiness and understated intellectualism about F.X. Harsono's (b.1948) work and more especially in Kungyu Liew's (b.1960) comment on the Asian penchant for urban desecration. In his photomontage *Perayaan Cheng Beng '96* [1996], his sly cheekiness is extremely welcome after the leaden portentousness and ugliness of so much political art. Art can and does implode under the weight of too many texts and sub-texts, concepts and ideas. Execution, as artists such as Montien Boonma have shown, is all and a firm grounding in the disciplines of drawing and painting can at least provide a starting point. Nowhere is the paucity of ability clearer than in the world of sculpture. Poorly conceived, disastrously fabricated work seems to be the hallmark of Southeast Asian sculpture with the notable exceptions of sculptors such as Indonesian expatriate Ahmad Osni Peii (b.1926), Filipino Ramon Orlina (b.1944) and Raja Shahrman (b.1965).



S. Sudjojono
(1914-1986)
Guerilla
Vanguards
(1949)



Ahmad Osni Peii
(b. 1930)
Moon Rhyme
(1996)

THE ART OF PATRONAGE

As I passed from one country to another, I was to be hosted by two almost separate sections of society. On the one hand there were the artists, who like all artists tended to live rather ramshackle lives. Or else there were the art historians, dealers and younger collectors, some of whom collected art catalogues because that was all they could afford. On the other hand, there were a succession of rather grand homes and enthusiastic patrons who would whisk me through their collections personally rather than allow anyone else the pleasure of display and ownership. The more interest and knowledge I displayed would soon be matched by an unfailing generosity.

From Yusuf Wanandi's magnificent mansion in Jakarta Selatan with its vast cross-section of Indonesian art to Paulino Que's incredible treasury of the very best of Filipino art, P.G. Lim and her heirlooms and Lim Chong Keat with his beagles, his palm leaves and his Balinese paintings, I soon began to realise that being a collector and patron was in itself a bit of an art.

In the past, of course, all patronage emanated from the monarch. And indeed, the same is in many ways still the case in Brunei Darussalam where His Majesty's centrality to life is reflected in his being the subject of so many portraits, witness Pengiran Asmalee's (b.1941) *Portrait of His Majesty Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah* [1995].

In much of the rest of Southeast Asia, however, political realities under the colonial powers resulted in a diminution of the traditional rulers' authority. As the powers of patronage were curbed artists who had once depended on royal patronage were forced to make do by selling their work to the new colonial masters, or the emerging élite of local businessmen and administrators. Understandably this altered the kind of art that was created and commissioned with a very substantial increase in paintings and drawings for the 'tourist' trade.

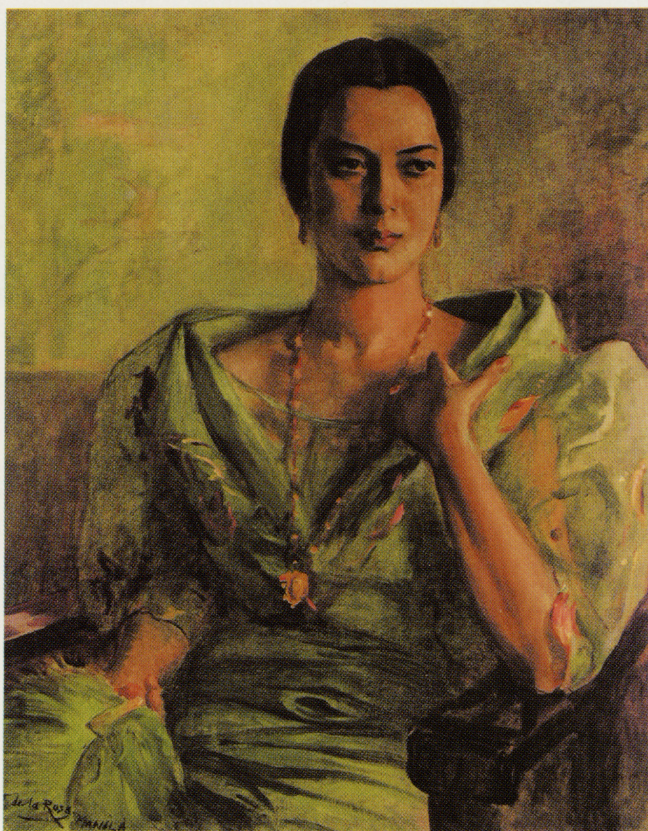
In many countries such as Myanmar and Indonesia, quite sizable communities of artists could be supported

on this source of business. However, it wasn't until the wave of Independence that a real culture of collecting began to pervade the traditional élites. The bourgeois class with their love of finery slowly began to appreciate the attractions of art, having in the past preferred traditional artifacts or carvings. Most tended to gravitate towards the less challenging works as they aped their colonial masters in terms of taste and fashion.

But slowly things began to change and one discovers a growing band of enlightened collectors such as Purita Kalaw-Ledesma of the Philippines whose portrait by Fabian de la Rosa (1867-1937) reveals a woman of great sensual beauty in the fullness of womanhood. In Indonesia President Soekarno and Vice-President Adam Malik were both avid collectors, with the president becoming the patron of a host of artists including Lee Man Fong (1913-1988). Their very public act of collecting was to enhance social desirability of 'collecting' - a society trait that still remains the case in Jakarta's *haute monde* as anyone visiting the citadels of art in Bali and the resplendent, charming and utterly sophisticated Pak' Neka will soon realise.

In Malaysia, another great society beauty and outspoken social activist, P.G. Lim personally sponsored many artists, including Latiff Mohidin who she housed in her garage for a few months never realising that his *Pago Pago* series was coming to

Fabian
de la Rosa
(1869-1937)
*Purita Kalaw-
Ledesma* (1934)



fruition amongst her oil cans and dust rags. The milieu in Kuala Lumpur in the 1960s was particularly rich given the patronage of the powerful politician and intellectual Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, who in turn encouraged his protégés such as the debonair diplomat Tan Sri Zain Azraai both to collect and to nurture other artists. In fact Zain's elegant silhouette became a fixture of the KL art-scene until his untimely death last year, when virtually the entire country's art-world went into mourning.

Similarly in Thailand, the respected technocrat Puey Ungpakhorn along with Princess Chumbhot, for example collected art and patronised artists. Princess Chumbhot moreover went a few important steps further in that she set up the remarkable Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art that was to become such a magnet for artistic creativity. Meeting its Director, the architect Chatvichai Promadhattavedi, one can still sense the excitement in his voice whenever he described the atmosphere of the Bhirasri.

Not all collectors were as socially well-connected and wealthy as Princess Chumbhot. In the Hanoi of the 'War' years, perhaps the most important collector was the owner of a small coffeeshop, Café Lam, not far from the Hoan Kiem Lake. Nguyen van Lam traded his rich oily coffee for paintings, sustaining an impoverished Bui Xuan Phai amongst many other artists. Even today the musty, darkened interior of the coffeeshop seems to be haunted by the presence of young, 'tortured' souls - neophyte artists in search of inspiration.

So the role of collectors in the region shouldn't be under-estimated. In years to come, as the documentation around our art becomes more comprehensive, it will be interesting to trace the patterns of collecting. Has, for example, the art followed the money - as it has in Europe and North America? What do patrons do with their collections as they grow older? And how will the corporate collectors marshal their substantial resources in the years to come? Social trends reveal themselves remarkably clearly through the art world and the steely smiles of the international auctioneers reflect their present contentment with the healthiness of regional markets.

Certainly the institutional framework is by no means of uniform strength. After many visits to Singapore I came away very impressed by the depth of knowledge and insight that the Singapore Art Museum's director Kwok Kian Chow and curator Joanna Lee displayed and especially thankful to Joanna for alerting me to Sudjojono's over-looked strengths. I did note with some concern the fact that curators from Fukuoka Art Museum seemed to have visited everywhere I'd visited and bought what I had only been able to gaze at.

That doesn't mean that people won't buy the difficult avant-garde work. They do. At an exhibition given in Kuala Lumpur given by a young artist of the future called I-Lann Yee (b. 1970), I watched as Generation-Xers in ponytails and wielding handphones scratched their goatees before buying.

In Bangkok, at Suan Pakkad Palace over lunch with MR Sukhumbhand Paribatra I met another young artist turned curator called Maymay Jumsai. She had just returned from that citadel of the shock, Goldsmiths' College in London, assuring me rather firmly that it was the idea in art that was important, not the act of painting. Besides which she was looking to hire someone to paint. Sophistication, I soon realised, was a Thai hallmark and later I stumbled across a lady, 'Miow' Yipintsoi who had surely inherited the spirit of Princess Chumbhot whilst also being the grand-daughter of renowned Thai artist Misiem Yipintsoi (1906-1988). An art dealer herself she took me way across the Chao Praya river to the home of Kamin Lertchaiprasert (b.1964) where we fought over who would buy both his works and the works of renegade artist Mitjai In (b.1960) who, in a show of contempt for the art business charged for his exquisite colourist canvases by the square inch. At Baht 3.56 per square inch I can assure you that I bought many square inches worth of his work.

Similarly in Hanoi, I whizzed through those city streets, enthused by the city's beauty. Creeping through alleyways in the dead of night I visited artist after artist and gallery after gallery - some so rapacious one wondered whether the city's underworld had been depleted of their members. Perhaps the most delightful was the Salon Natasha, which I first mistook for a shoe-repair shop. But there again the Inya Gallery of Art in Yangon, presided over by the laconic artist U Aung Myint (b. 1942), had no floors or walls to speak of ...

BACK HOME

Any description or analysis of the state of the arts in Southeast Asia cannot help but be patchy and impressionistic. There is certainly a body of curators and collectors out there darting from artist to artist, including one or two that I know who would willingly fire up their private jets to make that all-important purchase. The collecting of art is a passion and like all passions it knows no bounds, though as with all things it can wilt with time. As the passion takes hold of more collectors, I hope they will look out across their national boundaries with a regional vision tracing the themes and trends that I have outlined.

Returning to KL, my head spinning with paintings and interviews I resolved to make some sense of what I had seen and heard. In an attempt to clear my head I turned to Latiff's notebooks, *Line - from Point to Point*, and rediscovered that he too, some thirty years before had made his fabulous trek across the region. He had traveled for months on end, as if impelled to find the artistic and cultural parallels that could link the Nusantara with mainland Southeast Asia - Sri Vijaya and the Champas, Islam and Buddhism.

His search had been successful because he had wanted it to be successful. He had opened himself up to his environment, he had talked and joked, drawn and composed poetry. As he had worked he had stumbled across his personal interpretation of the world around him - developing a way of seeing that opened up a host of associations. His aesthetic approach was one that spanned mere boundaries of time, place, language, religion and class - realising that we would never be able to achieve even the merest fragment of unity if we dwelt overlong on these divisive forces.

Latiff's example made me realise that a regional vision such as his required a deliberate decision to broaden your world view. His act of opening himself up to both nature and people had allowed him to make sense - at least for him, of the region. A willingness to see had to precede the 'seeing'. And, in seeing, one would inevitably begin to see many more threads linking our remarkable region ever closer. Thus, in order for me to succeed in drawing the parallels that exist across ASEAN I too was required to open my eyes, my ears and my heart.

LIST OF EXHIBITS

BRUNEI
INDONESIA
LAOS
MALAYSIA
MYANMAR
PHILIPPINES
SINGAPORE
THAILAND
VIETNAM

ASEAN MASTERWORKS



INDONESIA

TOP

Raden Saleh (1807-1880)

A Head of A Lion

1843

Oil on canvas

85.5 x 100 cm

Lippo Art Foundation,

Museum Universitas Harapan, Jakarta

BOTTOM

Affandi (1907-1990)

Man with Fighting Cock

1980

Oil on canvas

100 x 130 cm

Neka Museum, Ubud, Bali

S. Sudjojono (1914-1986)

Aunt Misi

1979

Oil on canvas

90 x 70 cm

Neka Museum, Ubud, Bali

Hendra Gunawan (1918-1983)

Gerilya Berbelanja (Guerilla at the Marketplace)

1952

Oil on canvas

188 x 138 cm

Lippo Art Foundation, Museum
Universitas Harapan, Jakarta

Srihardi Soedarsono (b. 1931)

Dua Penari

1975

Oil on canvas

125 x 100 cm

Neka Museum, Ubud, Bali

I Wayan Bendi (b. 1950)

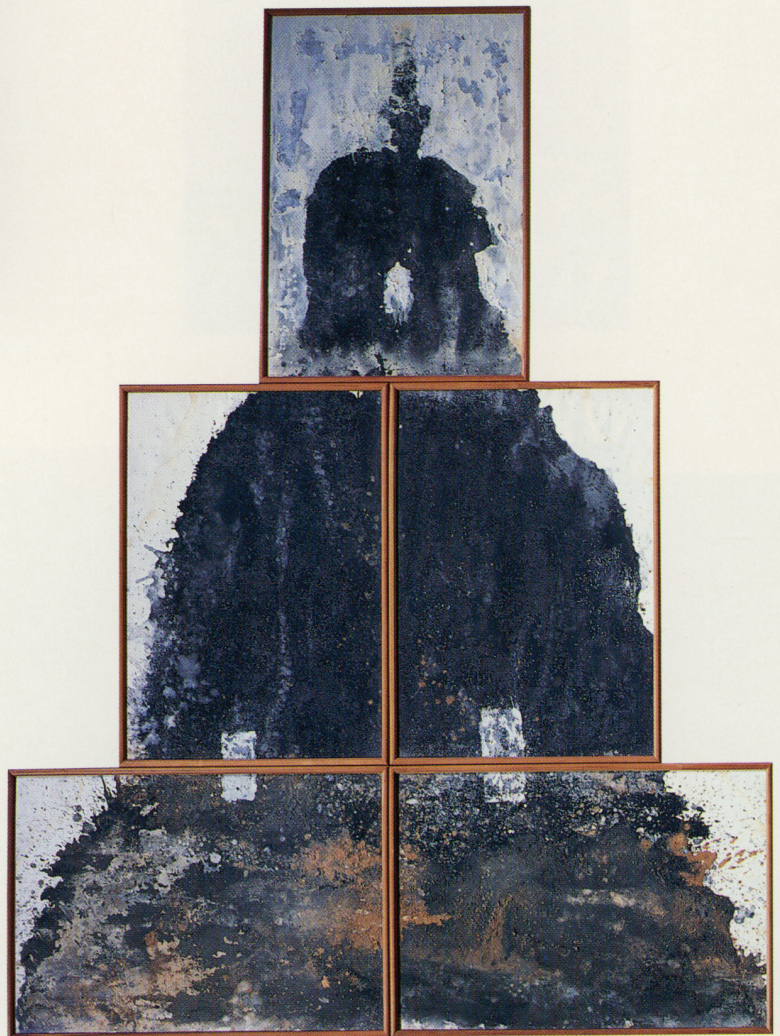
War of Independence

1986

Acrylic on paper

54 x 75 cm

Neka Museum, Ubud, Bali



THAILAND

LEFT

Thawan Duchanee (b. 1939)

Buddha

1965

Oil on canvas

173 x 150 cm

Private Collection

RIGHT

Montien Boonma (b. 1953)

Black Stupa

1989

Mixed media on paper

288 x 198 cm

Private Collection

Fua Haripitak (1910-1993)

Professor Silpa Bhirasri

1962

Oil on canvas

106 x 85 cm

Silpa Bhirasri Memorial Museum,
Bangkok

Pichai Nirand (b. 1936)

Mantra

1982

Oil on canvas

60 x 60 cm

Visual Dhamma Collection, Bangkok

Vasan Sitthiket (b. 1957)

*Simmers are sinful holy men who eat free
rice, commit immoral deeds. They will
hold the bowl, outer robe and body
burning afloat indefinitely*

1991

Synthetic polymer paint on canvas

210 x 210 cm

Collection of Chatvichai
Promadhattvedi, Bangkok

Panya Vijjithanasarn (b. 1965)

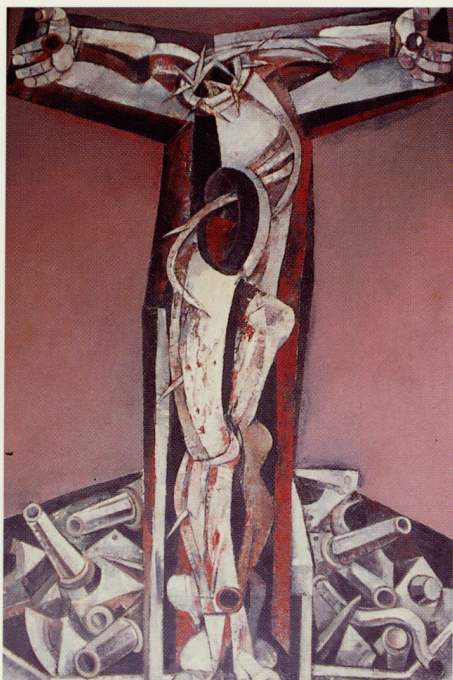
Sustentation

1997

Acrylic, mangosteen peel on canvas

200 x 150 cm

Artist's Collection



PHILIPPINES

TOP

Ang Kiukok (b. 1931)

Crucifixion

1983

Oil on canvas

142 x 90 cm

Artist's Collection

BOTTOM

Fernando Amorsolo (1892-1972)

Ruins of Rizal and Ascaraga

1921

Oil on canvas

35 x 51 cm

Collection of Mr & Mrs Paulino Que, Manila

Vicente Manansala (1913-1981)

Kabig

1973

Oil on canvas

80 x 96.3 cm

Collection of Ambassador JV Cruz, Manila

Anita Magsaysay-Ho (b. 1914)

Harvest

c1956

Egg tempera

38 x 48 cm

Collection of Doris Teresa Ho, Manila

Arturo Luz (b. 1926)

Carnival Forms I

1956

Enamel on panel

58 x 115 cm

Ateneo Art Gallery, Ateneo University, Manila

Brenda Fajardo (b. 1940)

Nag away-away ang mga aso't pusa, kalabaw at agila (The Dog, Cat, Carabao and Eagle Fighting Each Other)

1989

Mixed media on paper

52.5 x 72 cm

Private Collection



SINGAPORE

TOP

Georgette Chen (1907-1993)

Mother and Child

1960

Oil on canvas

64 x 80 cm

National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

BOTTOM

Cheong Soo Pieng (1917-1983)

Tropical Life

1959

Ink and gouache on paper

43.5 x 92 cm

National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

Chen Wen Hsi (1906-1992)

Whales

c1960s

Oil on canvas

100 x 80 cm

Private Collection

Goh Beng Kwan (b. 1937)

Dotting the Eye

1991

Mixed media

105 x 120 cm

Singapore Art Museum

Tan Swee Hian (b. 1943)

Ocean Tide Voice

1986

Acrylic on canvas

167 x 198 cm

Singapore Art Museum

Goh Ee Choo (b. 1962)

The Word

1991

Pigment ink on paper

113 x 153 cm

Singapore Art Museum

VIETNAM

LEFT

Nguyen Gia Tri (b. 1908)

Vietnamese Girls

1944

Lacquer

56 x 41 cm

Collection of Nguyen Van Lam, Hanoi

RIGHT

Nguyen Sang (1923-1988)

Portrait of Mrs. Lam

1964

Oil on canvas

88 x 65 cm

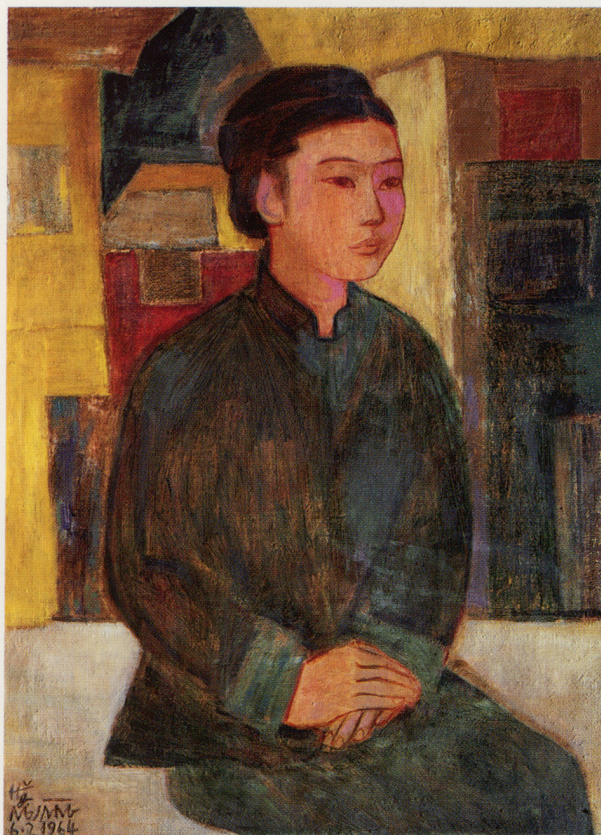
Collection of Nguyen Van Lam, Hanoi

Bui Xuan Phai (1921-1988)
Ancient Street
 1963
 Oil on canvas
 79 x 89 cm
 Collection of Nguyen Van Lam, Hanoi

Nguyen Tu Ngheim (b. 1922)
Ancient Dance
 1988
 Lacquer
 60 x 80 cm
 Collection of Nguyen Van Lam, Hanoi

Dang Xuan Hoa (b. 1959)
The Artist and His Family
 1990
 Oil on canvas
 80 x 100 cm
 Artist's Collection

Hong Viet Dung (b. 1962)
A Girl Holding Lotus Flower
 1997
 Oil on canvas
 80 x 80 cm
 Artist's Collection





BRUNEI

LEFT

Malek Metarsat (b. 1956)

The Poles #2

1986

Oil on canvas

135 x 120 cm

Artist's Collection

RIGHT

Zakaria Hj Abdul Hamid (b. 1955)

Sun Painting

1986

Acrylic on canvas

181 x 151 cm

Artist's Collection

Pengiran Dato Paduka Asmalce
(b. 1941)
Portrait of Sultan Hassanah Bolkiah
1995
Oil on canvas
76 x 101 cm
Artist's Collection

Datin Hj Maimuna Hj Mohamad
(b. 1946)
Keringat Ibu
1991
Oil on canvas
34 x 44 cm
Artist's Collection

Awang Sitai (b. 1949)
The Dilemma of a Pawn
1985
Oil on canvas
152.5 x 183 cm
Artist's Collection

Pg Timbang bin Pg Haji Tuah (b. 1959)
Genting ke Langit (Vision)
1993
Mixed media on canvas
114 x 98 cm
Artist's Collection



MYANMAR

TOP

U Ba Nyan (1887-1946)

Self-Portrait

1937

Oil on canvas

122 x 71 cm

National Museum, Yangon

BOTTOM

U Ba Kyi (b. 1912)

Duel

1942

Oil on canvas

91 x 155 cm

National Museum, Yangon

U Ngwee Gaing (1901-1967)
King Munkhata and Princess Pabamadi
1951
Oil on canvas
87 x 87 cm
National Museum, Yangon

Aung Myint (b. 1942)
6 A.M.
1997
Oil on canvas
86 x 86 cm
Art-2 Collection, Singapore

M.P.P. Yei Myint (b. 1953)
Buddha and His Son
1997
Acrylic on canvas
117 x 86 cm [x 7]
Art-2 Collection, Singapore

Min Wae Aung (b. 1960)
Towards Monastery
1996
Acrylic on canvas
90 x 120 cm
Art-2 Collection, Singapore



LAOS

TOP

Kham Tuan (1925-1997)

Buddha

1959

Oil on board

61 x 42 cm

Lao Gallery Collection, Vientiane

BOTTOM

Kong Phat Luangrath (b. 1950)

Racing

1992

Acrylic on paper

30 x 40 cm

Artist's Collection

Lam Phone Insixiangmai (b. 1940)
Lao Village
1965
Oil on canvas
38 x 45 cm
Lao Gallery Collection, Vientiane

Khamsouk Keominmuong (b. 1942)
Ho Chi Minh Trail
1991
Oil on canvas
52 x 92 cm
Artist's Collection

Anoulom Souvandouane (b. 1948)
Laotian Scene
1970
Oil on board
97 x 97 cm
Artist's Collection

Kan Ha Sikounnavong (b. 1957)
Rocket Festival of That Luang
1995
Oil on canvas
84 x 184 cm
Lao Gallery Collection, Vientiane



MALAYSIA

TOP

Wong Hoy Cheong (b. 1960)

Fear of Falling, Joy of Flying

1985

Oil on canvas

142 x 198 cm

Private Collection

BOTTOM

Dzulkifli Buyong (b. 1948)

Hantu

1984

Oil on canvas

135.5 x 80 cm

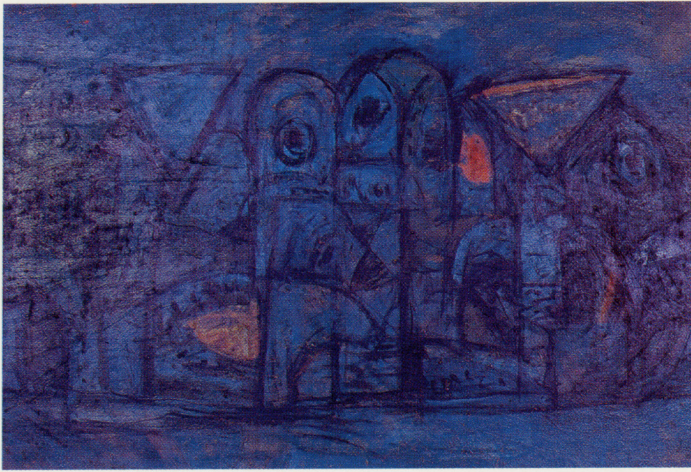
Private Collection

Dato' Hoessein Enas (1924-1995)
Harvesting Tobacco
1962
Oil on canvas
96 x 121 cm
National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

Datuk Syed Ahmad Jamal (b. 1929)
Tikar Tenaga (Energy Mat)
1981
Acrylic on canvas
199 x 199 cm
Securities Commission, Kuala Lumpur

Ismail Zain (1930-1991)
The Marriage of Sultan Mansor Shah
1991
Acrylic on canvas
152 x 121 cm
Private Collection

Datuk Ibrahim Hussein (b. 1936)
My Father and the Astronaut
1970
Acrylic on canvas
127 x 198 cm
Artist's Collection



TOP

Latiff Mohidin (b. 1938)
Nocturno (Pago Pago Series)
 1967
 Oil on board
 58.5 x 87.5 cm
 Private Collection



BOTTOM

Patrick Ng Kah Onn (1932-1989)
Spirit of Earth, Water and Air
 1958
 Oil on board
 137 x 122 cm
 National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

Redza Piyadasa (b. 1939)
Baba Family
 1986
 Silkscreen on mounting board
 102 x 82 cm
 Collection of Jaafar Ismail,
 Kuala Lumpur

Sulaiman Esa (b. 1941)
Garden of Mystery
 1992
 Yarn and Acrylic
 121 x 180 cm
 Artist's Collection

Nirmala Shanmughalingham (b. 1941)
Vietnam II
 1980
 Acrylic on canvas
 122 x 122 cm
 Artist's Collection

Kungyu Liew (b. 1960)
Perayaan Cheng Beng '96
 1996
 Mixed media
 113.5 x 143.5 cm
 Artist's Collection

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Indonesia

Neka Museum
Mr & Mrs Suteja Neka
Koman Wahyu Suteja
Amir Sidharta
Lippo Art Foundation/Museum
Universitas Pelita Harapan
Mr & Mrs Agung Rai
Agung Rai Museum of Art
Pak Yusuf Wanandi
Dani Wanandi
Michelle Chin
Tara Sosrowodoyo
Fikri Jufri
Asri Ghafar

Philippines

National Museum, Manila
Metropolitan Museum
Ateneo Art Gallery, Ateneo
University
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Professor Emmanuel Torres
Evita Sarenas
Sylvia Gascon
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Brenda Fajardo
Eduardo V Cruz

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MR Sukhumbhand Paribatra
Professor Somporn Rodboon
Silpakorn University
Maymay Jumsai
Marsi Gallery
Chatvichai Promadhattavedi
Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art
Panya Vijinthanasarn
Klaomard Yipintsoi
Yipintsoi Memorial Garden
About Studio
Kamin Lertchaiprasert
Albert Paravi Wongchirachai
Kavi Chongkittavorn
Micheal Vatikiotis
Natayada Na Songkhla

Singapore

Kwok Kian Chow
National Heritage Board
Singapore Art Museum
TK Sabapathy
Joanna Lee
Ahmad Mashadi
Barby Chhohan
Stephanie Choo

Myanmar

U Aye Lwin
Tyew Tin Sawe
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Yangon
U Kyaw Win
U Ta Kha
National Museum, Yangon
HE Ambassador Dato' Abdul
Wahab Harun
Rosli Bin Osman
San Minn
Art-2 Gallery, Singapore
SeahTzi Yan
U Soe Thein
Aung Myint
Min Wae Aung
New Treasure Art Gallery
M.P.P. Yei Myint

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Parameswaran
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Café Lam, Hanoi
Nora Taylor
Jeffrey Hantover
Red River Gallery, Hanoi
Salon Natasha
Dang Xuan Hoa
Thanh Chuong
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Mdm Ha Khanh Luong
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Kongphat Luangrath
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Bounthanh Sommany
Mitsuda Heuangsoukhoum
Dara Viravongs Kanlaya
ThongMy Heuangsoukhoum
Lao Gallery
Mohd Nizar Nuruddin
Fukuoka Asian Art Gallery
Masahiro Ushiroshoji
Mr. & Mrs Ernest Dobbs
James Michener
Mohd Nizam bin Mohamad

Brunei

HE Pehin Orang Kaya Lim Jock Seng
Timothy Ong
HE Ambassador Pengiran Dato
Paduka Asmalee Ahmad
Datin Hj Maimuna Hj Mohamad
Lisa Bte Dato Paduka Hj Ibrahim
Sheraton Utama, Bandar Seri
Begawan
Brunei Museum
Hj Fadzil Hj Ahmad

Malaysia

Datuk Syed Mokhtar Albukhary
Yayasan Al Bukhary
Wairah Marzuki
National Art Gallery
Tan Sri Lee Kim Yew
The Mines Resort
Palace of Golden Horses
Zain Azahari
Hani Ahmad
Jaafar Ismail
Redza Piyadasa
Mohd Yusof Ahmad, Wisma Putra
Syed Sultan Idris, Wisma Putra
Maleia Marsden, Palace of the
Golden Horses
Paul Loo, The Mines Resort

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