

Documentation and Performative Practices in Contemporary Southeast Asian Art

Since the 1990s, Southeast Asia has become a site of prolific artistic experimentation, with a notable turn towards performative practices in the visual arts. Yet, the medium of performance art remains largely historically uncharted. Best understood as the use of action or inter-action in the context of the visual arts, performance art encompasses a broad range of practices, including body-based gestures, site-specific enactments, and interactive digital activities. While a growing international interest in the medium has been fuelled by the dissemination of images, videos and other forms of performance documentation, there is an absence of historical and critical writing on the topic. The scholarship of Nora Taylor, Thomas Berghuis, June Yap, Ray Langenbach, Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez and David Teh, among others, exploring issues of censorship, community-building, tradition and ritual, has only recently begun to scratch the surface of how this medium came into existence across the region. There remains much room for discussing how its diverse manifestations relate to the differing national histories and cultural contexts comprising the contested unit of 'Southeast Asia'.

This panel looks to understand how performance art – whose history in Southeast Asia in fact predates the 1990s, going as far back as the 1960s – has been produced, recorded, circulated and studied, both within the region and internationally. In doing so, it aims to highlight the extent to which this 'performative turn' has rendered Southeast Asian contemporary art an influential actor in global discourses around identity, memory, the body, site, trauma, and history. It invites papers dealing with the following topics:

- Individual and collective performance art practices in Southeast Asia and its diasporas
- Artistic strategies for documenting and disseminating performance art
- The impact of 'remediation' (using photography, video etc.) on the meaning of performance art
- The role of the media and the public in documenting and disseminating performance actions
- The appropriation of 'performance documents' for social and political purposes
- Private archives containing materials on individual and group performance art practices
- The role of digital platforms in the international circulation of performance documentation
- Recent institutional drives (particularly by public archives and museums) to collect and archive performance documentation
- The ways in which art historians and curators have adopted documentation in order to assert national and regional histories of the medium
- The possibilities and limitations arising from accessing the works only via their documentation

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