ARTISTS' INITIATIVES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROJECT

What defines an institutional model built as a first-person narrative? What narratives do artists’ initiatives construct through their practice and historicisation? How have artists’ initiatives been historicized within and outside their locality? To what extent, do artists’ initiatives influence the process of their representation?

Drawing on the use of first-person narrative connecting personal experience with social causes in feminist and critical literature, this research introduces a new framework through which to think about artists’ initiatives in Southeast Asia by focusing on the subjective foundation of their practice and historicisation. The term "artists' initiatives" encompasses a range of formats, including artist-run spaces and publications. Within the institutional landscape of Southeast Asia, artists’ initiatives play an essential role in filling the gaps in the art system and providing platforms for experimentation as well as regional collaborations.

Artist initiatives have received in the past years increasing attention. Yet an in-depth analysis is needed for a critical as well as imaginative exploration of artists' initiatives' conceptual framework and organizational mode, their diverse range from short-lived spaces to periodicals, their mode of address, their convergence into artistic practices, and their historicisation. Lastly, while such literature covered widely the Western context, the dynamic institutional context of Southeast Asia and the role of artists’ initiatives as a constitutive force in the emergence and development of contemporary art in the region have been scarcely explored.

Focusing on the construction of subjectivity in an institutional process gives leeway to reflect on the dialectic relation between individual and institution, on the relation between the public and private self, subject formation and agency. Artists’ initiatives emerged as platforms for artists to claim spaces of presentation, offer an alternative to existing power structures or became the mainstream there was no alternative. The parallel between a first-person narrative and an artist’s initiative lie in their ability to create a space for the other as well as foreground personal experience in the creation of a community. Many of the artists’ initiatives took shape in private spaces and through informal networks. Subjective identity markers such as “self-determined,” “autonomous,” “independent,” “self-sufficient,” “self-reflexive,” personal attachments and affinities are often ascribed or self-ascribed to artists’ initiatives. While these narratives serve as a framework for self-presentation, they are also part of the currencies that bestow visibility and recognition on such spaces in global discussions.

This research will depart from several case studies from Southeast Asia that were established in the 1990s and early 2000. This decade is significant as it marks an array of cultural changes in the region, as a result of intensified cultural agenda in case of Singapore as well as economical development and political openness in other parts of the region. The case studies include: 5th Passage in Singapore established by artists Suzann Victor and Susie Lingham in early 1990s with the aim to provide a platform for community-based interventions in public spaces; Women in the Arts, established in 1999 in Singapore by artist Amanda Heng as an informal education platform for women’s artists, Salon Natasha established in 1990 in Hanoi by Natasha (Natalia) Kraevskaia and Vu Dan Tan in their home; two periodicals initiated by artists: Pananaw, an art journal established in 1996 in the Philippines and sentAPI!, a magazine established in 2005 in Malaysia by curator Nur Hanim Mohamed Khairuddin and artist Roslisham “Ise” Ismail.
The student will be expected to produce a significant contribution to the study of artists’ initiatives in Southeast Asia, an original, publishable research. Student will be expected to develop a systematic account of the variety of artists’ initiatives in the region by conducting a thorough research and present the findings through a significant and original contribution. It is expected from the student to identify and analyse relevant literature in a scholarly context, use and describe in detail the appropriate methodology for the research work undertaken, communicate and present the research within various platforms, including conferences, panel discussions, archival projects. To develop and complete the research, student will be expected to conduct archival research, collect and document materials in field work in the region, conduct interviews, analyse the content of collective data.

In agreement with the supervisory team, the student will be expected to develop a research plan and manage progress according to it. The student will maintain regular contact with the supervisory team, attending formal meetings as requested, implementing feedback and guidance in the research work and undertake any research tasks as required by the supervisory team.