

## Navigating Multiplicity (Kassel, 23–25 May 25)

Fridericianum, Friedrichsplatz 18, 34117 Kassel, May 23–25, 2025

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Navigating Multiplicity: Artistic exchanges in East, Southeast, and South Asia 1950s-1980s.

Conference and workshop co-organized by documenta Institut (Mi You) and Goethe-Institut.

This symposium, *Navigating Multiplicity: Artistic exchanges in East, Southeast, and South Asia 1950s-1980s* explores the artistic and cultural exchanges that shaped narratives and subjectivities in East, Southeast, and South Asia in the second half of the 20th century.

The Bandung Conference of 1955 often serves as a reference point for the solidarity among "Third World" countries in Asia and Africa. Against the backdrop of decolonization, Cold War realignments, and transnational solidarity movements, art was inevitably colored and co-opted, but artists also strove to maintain and exert agency. Researchers in this symposium map the border-crossing trajectories of individual artists, institutional practitioners and policy makers, and inquire into the extent to which artistic endeavors within these states aligned with, or diverged from, the nation- or block-centric political, ideological and cultural frameworks of the time. By linking the accounts of artists and artworks that are at once personal and serve a public purpose, the project hopes to unearth differentiated layers of dialogues between the self and the other, without losing sight of the shifting political grounds, political-economic realities, and institutional formations.

The research unfolds in a time of polycrisis and with a heightened awareness of its consequences for contemporary art policy. By revisiting and reassessing untold stories, it aims to provide not only the scholarly and artistic community, but also cultural policy practitioners with a balanced understanding of artistic claims and aspirations, political ideologies, and economic transformations.

The symposium consists of a two-day conference (May 23–24) featuring presentations and discussions by invited scholars, including Arlette Tran Quynh-Anh (Hanoi), Grace Samboh (Yogyakarta), Kathleen Ditzig (Singapore), Koichiro Osaka (Kyoto), Merv Espina (Manila), Maria Neuman (Kassel), Michelle Wong (Hong Kong), Mi You (Kassel), Nikolay Smirnov (Kassel), Priya Jaradi (Singapore and Mumbai), Sooyoung Leam (Seoul), and Su Wei (Beijing). This symposium marks the conclusion of the three-year research project *Watch on a Promontory: Artistic Exchanges in East, Southeast, and South Asia in the 1950s-1980s* initiated by Su Wei (independent curator and art history researcher) and Mi You (Professor of Art and Economies, University of Kassel/documenta Institut), supported by Goethe-Institut China, Hanoi, Jakarta/Bandung, Kyoto, Manila, Mumbai/Kolkata and Seoul.

Following the two-day conference, the Emerging Scholars Workshop on May 25 will offer early-career academics a platform to explore the symposium's themes in depth, present their research, and engage in collaborative discussions.

## PROGRAM

Friday, May 23– Conference

10–10.30 am | Opening Remarks

Welcome Words by documenta Institut and Goethe-Institut

10.30 am–12 pm | Ice-Breaking & Collective Timeline Making

Group activity: constructing a collective timeline from 1955–1989

12–1.30 pm | Lunch Break

1.30–3.30 pm | Panel 1: Cold War Cultural Networks & Institutional Influences

(Chaired by: Mi You)

Kathleen Ditzig: US Cultural Cold War Capital in the Southeast Asian Art World: The 1963 Asian-American Assembly in Context

Sooyoung Leam: Networks (un)exhibited: UNESCO, The Asia Foundation, and Korean art in Southeast Asia, 1960-61

Koichiro Osaka: Paperwork and Affect: Can Bureaucracy Repair?

3.30–4 pm | Coffee Break

4–5.30 pm | Panel 2: Art, Ideology, and Transnational Solidarity

(Chaired by: Su Wei)

Merv Espina

Arlette Tran Quynh-Anh: A Heterogeneous Identity - The Search For Vietnamese Civilization In Relation With Asia / Southeast Asia During The Early Years Of The Cold War

Film Screening – Arlette Tran Quynh-Anh, The Curator Ghost (2024)

5.30–5.40 pm | Timeline Reflection

Short notes and questions added to the collective timeline from Panel 2 discussions

From 6 pm | Buffet dinner and Get-together

Saturday, May 24 – Conference

10.30 am–12.30 pm | Panel 3: Alternative Modernities and Artistic Subjectivities

(Chaired by: Sooyoung Leam)

Michelle Wong: "Ink Art" as Category: Curatorial Impulse or Cold War Legacy?

Priya Jaradi: Revisiting India's artefact donations to Southeast Asia (1950s–1980s)

Su Wei: Unimagining Asia: when Asia Wasn't a Reference for China

12.30–12.40 pm | Timeline Reflection

Short notes and questions added to the collective timeline from Panel 3 discussions

12.40–2 pm | Lunch Break

2–3.30 pm | Panel 4: Artistic Strategies and Geopolitical Shifts

(Chaired by: Kathleen Ditzig)

Grace Samboh: A roundabout: Blooming mementos, towards monument

Mi You: Parameters and Methodologies of Comparison

3.30–3.40 pm | Timeline Reflection

Short notes and questions added to the collective timeline from Panel 4 discussions

3.30–4 pm | Coffee Break

4–5 pm | Closing discussions

Open floor for reflections, connections across sessions, and collective remarks

Sunday, May 25– Emerging Scholars Workshop

With coffee break and lunch

Participants: Cristina Moraru, Lee Keying Sheryl, Lena Lan-Chen LIU, Max Boersma, Myra Mentari Abubakar, Olja Triaška Stefanović, Rebecca Hanna John, Wiktor Komorowski

Registration required for the workshop: Please contact [office@documenta-institut.de](mailto:office@documenta-institut.de).

Reference:

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