



LESSON **5**

Contemporary art  
of Southeast Asia

## Integrated essay

Dialogue between different cultures requires a great deal of time, experience, willingness and effort. The development of inter-cultural approaches often depends on people's openness and on the attitudes of political elites, especially with regards to how they introduce and facilitate the process of inter-cultural exchanges, both within their own societies and also at the international level. Education of youth is one of the most influential tools used to facilitate this important process of investing in long-term world peace. Through educational projects, youth from different cultures are encouraged to get to know each other, to exchange viewpoints by doing things together and to experience each other's cultures and ideas, thereby deepening mutual understanding and appreciation of the other.

The following lesson plan is designed to introduce the basic concept of shared cultures within ASEAN. Its main objective is to introduce a dialogue between different cultures of the region and between the past and the future. Through introducing art beyond its geographical and national boundaries, a collective sense of embracing cultural diversities is generated while promoting the cultural unity of Southeast Asia with its intertwined histories. This notion of collective consciousness will enable future generations to define who they are, understand what their societies have been through in the past, and think about where they are headed in the twenty-first century and how they can approach cultural diversities in order to live together in peace. In this sense, the main concern is to support the educators in fulfilling the challenging objective of educating young people as responsible citizens of their nations as well as responsible global citizens of the world who respect differences and understand the values of inter-culturalism.

**Lesson Plan 5: Contemporary Art of Southeast Asia** starts students in the process of thinking beyond national boundaries and geographical frontiers by introducing them to contemporary art as practised in Southeast Asia. The world of art, especially the world of contemporary art, can be very confusing. This confusion begins even with the definition of the term 'contemporary art' (please see the glossary section to view a definition).

A key challenge is how to introduce the contemporary art of Southeast Asia to the targeted age group. The lesson is written based on the assumption that students do not possess background knowledge of art theory, and are unfamiliar with the periodization of art history by experts. Thus, the main aim of the lesson is to introduce contemporary Southeast Asian art in such a way that students can be engaged in art via different activities and, at the same time, acquire basic knowledge about art in Southeast Asia as well. The lesson is inspired by respected art institutions and the educational materials created by educators and art experts specifically for students in different age groups.

Another challenge faced during the design of the lesson plan was related to the sensitive issue of copyrights. The National Gallery of Singapore as an institution has kindly agreed to share their educational materials for this curriculum. In particular, the artist Mr. Bui Cong Khanh has kindly agreed to the use of images of his artworks in the visual material prepared for the lesson. The artworks presented in the short documentary created by National Gallery, Singapore are all by artists who are from Southeast Asia. Their artworks, created using different techniques and different materials, tell us very different yet very similar stories. Teachers are encouraged to introduce the contemporary works of their countries' national and local artists as well.

There are variations across national curricula when it comes to teaching art and social studies, and in particular the teaching of history. Therefore, this lesson plan has been designed with alternative in-class and after-class activities. The teachers can decide which will be more suitable and applicable to their own teaching plans and styles as well as their own cultural and social settings. The lesson can be taught in history and social studies classes, and can also be covered in an art class.

## Supplementary resources

Bollansee, M. 2012. *Southeast Asian Contemporary Art Now*. Straits Times Press

Lewis, R. and Lewis, S. 2014. *Power of Art*. Third Edition. USA: Clark Baxter

The J. Paul Getty Museum. n.d. *About Contemporary Art*. [www.getty.edu/education/teachers/classroom\\_resources/curricula/contemporary\\_art/background1.html](http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/classroom_resources/curricula/contemporary_art/background1.html)

Wei Wei, Yeo (ed.). 2013. *Awesome Art: 20 Works from Southeast Asia Everyone Should Know*, National Art Gallery, Singapore, 2013

<b>Subject</b>	History/Social Studies/Art
<b>Topic</b>	Contemporary Art of Southeast Asia
<b>Level</b>	Lower secondary
<b>Key idea</b>	<p>Regional identity in Southeast Asia can and has been created out of diversities and commonalities by regional organizations and through regional events as well as everyday activities such as popular sports, art, and culture. This identity is continuously evolving and contributes toward the envisioning of Southeast Asia as a region for the future.</p> <p>Through contemporary art, artists expressed themselves on topics that were meaningful to them, not only focusing on aesthetic style but more importantly on political, social, and environmental issues. Throughout Southeast Asia, contemporary art has played an important role in advancing new ideas when newly-independent countries were in the process of defining their identities.</p>
<b>Key concepts</b>	<p>Art and politics</p> <p>Contemporary art</p> <p>Concept</p> <p>Installation</p>
<b>No. of periods/lessons</b>	1–2 periods/lessons (1 period is approximately 50 minutes)
<b>Facilities needed</b>	<p>A/V equipment and Internet access to play the video clips (or hard copy with similar content)</p> <p>Sources and handouts for distribution</p>
<b>Prerequisite knowledge</b>	No prerequisite knowledge required

### Learning objectives

By the end of the lesson, the students will be able to:

KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	ATTITUDES
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Understand contemporary art and its different practices.</li> <li>2. Identify names, works and shared themes of selected contemporary artists from Southeast Asia.</li> <li>3. Demonstrate awareness of national, regional and global political issues which may be relevant to understanding the art.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Conduct basic analysis of contemporary art.</li> <li>2. Conceptualize a work of art based on the theme of sustainable environment for the region of Southeast Asia.</li> <li>3. Engage in discussion and debate about contemporary art.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Better appreciate art in general and its universal language.</li> <li>2. Realize the importance and relevance of contemporary art in the political and cultural context of Southeast Asia.</li> <li>3. Have a greater interest in creating and/or studying art/art history.</li> </ol>

Section	Lesson Development	Resources	Rationale
	<p><b>Notes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While this lesson plan provides suggestions of artworks and artists from Southeast Asia, these are not compulsory. Teachers are encouraged to make their own selection of artworks relevant to their country and sub-region within Southeast Asia, as long as they fit the overall objectives of the Lesson Plan.</li> <li>Teachers are strongly encouraged to collaborate with their colleagues who teach art while offering this lesson. Alternatively, this lesson can be taught by art teachers alone, since they have expertise on the concepts, history and definitions of different styles in art history, such as contemporary art.</li> </ul>		
Introduction [25 minutes]	<p><b>1. Teacher talk</b></p> <p>1.1 Introduce contemporary art in Southeast Asia as the focus of the lesson.</p> <p>1.2 Present the scope of the lesson: introducing several art works of artists from different countries in Southeast Asia.</p> <p>1.3 Share that there are different and shared themes in these artworks.</p> <p><b>2. Hook activity: Students meet the artists</b></p> <p>2.1 Ask students to read Source 1 and show the video clip on the Vietnamese artist Bui Cong Khanh.</p> <p>2.2 Ask the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Why does the artist like working with children?</li> <li>Can one feel the art as the artist suggests? If yes, how?</li> <li>If you are asked to create an art piece which is supposed to tell a story of your city, what would you create?</li> </ul> <p>2.3 Students share their thoughts either orally or in written.</p> <p>2.4 Introduce the photograph of the 39,900 year-old cave painting found in Sulawesi, Indonesia (Source 3). Talk briefly about the beginnings of art and introduce the widely accepted definition of 'contemporary art' while touching briefly on the complexity behind the definition (see Glossary and Source 4).</p> <p>2.5 Students work either individually or in groups to find similarities between the artwork of Bui Cong Khan that was introduced in the film and the Sulawesi cave painting. They present their findings/ thoughts with the class in oral presentations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Source 1: Bui Cong Khanh – About the artist</li> <li>Source 2: A video on Bui Cong Khanh artist residency (7 m 35 s) <a href="https://youtu.be/pZuh1RNe-T8">youtu.be/pZuh1RNe-T8</a></li> <li>Source 3: 39,900 year-old cave painting found in Sulawesi, Indonesia</li> <li>Glossary</li> <li>Source 4 : Contemporary Art, an introduction</li> <li>Or alternative links: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/classroom_resources/curricula/contemporary_art/background1.html">www.getty.edu/education/teachers/classroom_resources/curricula/contemporary_art/background1.html</a></li> <li><a href="http://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-1010/beginners-guide-20-21/a/contemporary-art-an-introduction">www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-1010/beginners-guide-20-21/a/contemporary-art-an-introduction</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>The teacher talk puts the lesson in context – where does it stand in relation to the curriculum the students are following?</p> <p>This learning activity exposes students to a piece of contemporary art from Southeast Asia as a Hook activity to introduce them to the lesson. The activity encourages students to exercise their imaginations, provides them with the opportunity to work in groups or individually, and allows them to practise their oral presentation skills in sharing their thoughts or discussion outcomes with the rest of the class.</p>

Section	Lesson Development	Resources	Rationale
Development [35 minutes]	<p><b>3. Group discussion</b></p> <p>3.1 Divide the students into groups.</p> <p>3.2 Students watch the documentary 'Redefining Art in Southeast Asia – The 1970s and After,' which features the works of artists from Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Philippines, and Thailand.</p> <p>3.3 In their groups, students debate the question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Option 1: 'Can art be regional?'</li> <li>• Option 2: 'As you have observed, art is always changing in both subject matter and technique. Thinking ahead, what do you think art might look like in a hundred years from now and what might it say?'</li> </ul> <p>3.4 Groups share the outcome of the debate.</p> <p><b>4. Teacher talk</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on the similarities in the works of art that were covered in the documentary.</li> <li>• Emphasize shared themes in contemporary art, showing students how these shared themes reflect regional commonalities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Source 5: Video Transcript – 'Redefining Art in Southeast Asia – The 1970s and After,' <a href="https://vimeo.com/165111694">vimeo.com/165111694</a> (password to access film: redefinart.sea) Video length: 15m 54s</li> </ul> <p><b>Notes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of the artworks showcased in the video may be deemed age-inappropriate, as it contains a scene of nudity with sexual connotations. Teachers may wish to pause the video at 5:06 and resume the video again at 6:11.</li> <li>• The Singapore National Gallery generously provided access to this video for educational purposes only. The password should be shared for this purpose only.</li> </ul>	<p>The idea behind this activity is to get the students to identify similarities in the artworks through exercising their skills of interpretation and observation. The teacher talk in this part of the lesson focuses the students' attention to the commonalities within the region in the field of contemporary art. This helps demonstrate to the students that shared themes and values are not restricted to the past but are equally relevant to their lives, as shown by the pieces of contemporary art.</p>

Section	Lesson Development	Resources	Rationale
Development 2 [variable]	<p><b>5. Curating an exhibition</b></p> <p>5.1 After multiple viewings of the video (possibly assigned as homework), students work in groups to choose a specific theme and curate an 'exhibition' of at least three artworks from three different artists that appear in the documentary.</p> <p>5.2 Students make an oral presentation of their selected artworks and explain the reasons for their choice.</p> <p><b>6. Suggested home extension activity</b></p> <p>6.1 Students imagine that they are artists who are invited to exhibit their art works with other artists from Southeast Asia. The theme of the exhibition is 'Shared histories – Shared environment.'</p> <p>6.2 Students choose an object from their daily life or from the past to display or re-imagine as their artwork. Students need to answer the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What object (as used in daily life or in the past, such as a historical artefact) would you choose? Why?</li> <li>• How would you recreate and/or display it as an art installation? You may choose to use technology to help you.</li> </ul> <p>6.3 Students write a brief paragraph and draw a sketch representing their imaginative art work or create a poster presentation that can be used as a general showcase in the classroom or in the wider school community.</p> <p><b>7. Suggested follow-up activities</b></p> <p>7.1 Field trips can be organized to visit a gallery or a museum that has a contemporary art collection.</p> <p>7.2 An artist, locally known with her/his contemporary artworks, can be invited to the classroom as a guest of honour for the exhibition opening.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Display area within the classroom or in their school (for a wider audience)</li> <li>• Boards to display the images that students create</li> </ul>	<p>To curate the 'exhibition', the students need to work collaboratively with their peers, exercise selection, and negotiate and come to a consensus about their choices.</p> <p>They would also be given the opportunity to practice their oral presentation skills in the sharing of their choice.</p> <p>The teacher could opt to provide feedback on their oral presentations.</p>

## Sources

### Glossary

Contemporary art: Strictly speaking, the term **'contemporary art'** refers to art made and produced by artists living today. Today's artists work in and respond to a global environment that is culturally diverse, technologically advancing, and multifaceted. Working in a wide range of **mediums**, contemporary artists often reflect and comment on modern-day society. When engaging with contemporary art, viewers are challenged to set aside questions such as, 'Is a work of art good?' or 'Is the work aesthetically pleasing?' Instead, viewers consider whether art is 'challenging' or 'interesting'. Contemporary artists may question traditional ideas of how art is defined, what constitutes art, and how art is made, while creating a dialogue with – and in some cases rejecting – the styles and movements that came before them.

**Source:**

The J. Paul Getty Museum. n.d. *About Contemporary Art*.  
[www.getty.edu/education/teachers/classroom\\_resources/curricula/contemporary\\_art/background1.html](http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/classroom_resources/curricula/contemporary_art/background1.html)



## Source 1: Bui Cong Khanh – About the artist

Born in 1972 in Danang, Vietnam, Bui Cong Khanh lives and works in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam.

Bui Cong Khanh's work explores historical and contemporary issues in Vietnam. As one of the first local artists to gain international recognition during the 1990s, Khanh has embraced painting and sculpture to express his fascination with the complex history of Viet Nam. More recently, his works are reflective of the dichotomy of his fast changing nation. Deeply philosophical and reactive to the world around him, Khanh is one of Vietnam's most intriguing artists.

Bui Cong Khanh's work is in institutional collections including the Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane and the Koc Foundation, Istanbul.

**Source:**

Lenzi, Iola. 2015. 'Fortresstemple: Recent Art By Bui Cong Khanh'. *10 Chancery Lane Gallery*. [www.artnet.de/galerien/10-chancery-lane-gallery/fortresstemple-recent-art-by-bui-cong](http://www.artnet.de/galerien/10-chancery-lane-gallery/fortresstemple-recent-art-by-bui-cong)

## Source 2: A video on Bui Cong Khanh artist residency

### Bui Cong Khanh Artist Residency

Video clip (7 m 35 s)

[youtu.be/pZuh1RNe-T8](https://youtu.be/pZuh1RNe-T8)

**Source:**

Playhouse Square.

### Source 3: 39,900 year-old cave painting found in Sulawesi, Indonesia

A hand painted in an Indonesian cave dates to at least 39,900 years ago, making it among the oldest such images in the world, archaeologists reported Wednesday in a study that rewrites the history of art.

The discovery on the island of Sulawesi vastly expands the geography of the first cave artists, who were long thought to have appeared in prehistoric Europe around that time. Reported in the journal *Nature*, the cave art includes stencils of hands and a painting of a babirusa, or 'pig-deer,' which may be the world's oldest figurative art.

'Overwhelmingly depicted in Europe and Sulawesi were large, and often dangerous, mammal species that possibly played major roles in the belief systems of these people,' says archaeologist and study leader Maxime Aubert of Griffith University in Queensland, Australia.

The finds from the Maros cave sites on Sulawesi raise the possibility that such art predates the exodus of modern humans from Africa 60,000 or more years ago.

'I predict that even older examples of cave art will be discovered on Sulawesi, and in mainland Asia, and ultimately in our African homeland,' says human origins expert Chris Stringer of the Natural History Museum in London, who was not on the study team.



**Source:** Ramadhani, Cahyo. [commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hands\\_in\\_Pettakere\\_Cave\\_detail\\_3.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hands_in_Pettakere_Cave_detail_3.jpg)



**Source:** Abroad, Joel. [www.flickr.com/photos/40295335@N00/4409150010](https://www.flickr.com/photos/40295335@N00/4409150010)

*The oldest dated hand stencil in the world (upper right) and possibly the oldest figurative depiction in cave art – a female babirusa (a hoglike animal also called a pig-deer) – were found in Leang Timpuseng cave in Sulawesi, an island east of Borneo.*

*(continued ➔)*

### Oldest art

Since the 1950s, scholars have reported hundreds of hand stencils and images of animals in caves on Sulawesi, which were assumed prehistoric but thought to be no more than 12,000 years old, dating to a hunter-gatherer migration to the island.

In the new study, the researchers investigated mineral layers less than 0.4 inches (10 millimeters) thick covering images in seven caves, and in some cases sandwiching them. Trace amounts of radioactive uranium in these mineral layers reveal when water carried the minerals over the cave wall. Finding the ages of these deposits narrows down the time when the images were painted.

The age discovered for the oldest hand stencil in the cave – 39,900 years old – is therefore merely the minimum age of the minerals coating the image, meaning the art could be thousands of years older.

A red disk painted in Spain's El Castillo cave is at least 40,800 years old according to the same dating method, making it the oldest known cave art, and a hand stencil there is 37,300 years old. The Sulawesi cave paintings mineral these finds in age and appear to belong to a tradition that persisted there as recently as 17,000 years ago.

'We've been shown here that our views have been too 'Euro-centric' about the origins of cave painting,' says archaeologist Alistair Pike of the University of Southampton in the United Kingdom. 'Absolutely this changes our views, and is going to make us ask a lot of questions about the causes rather than the origins of cave art.'



**Source:** Ramadhani, Cahyo.

[de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Hands\\_in\\_Pettakere\\_Cave.jpg](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Hands_in_Pettakere_Cave.jpg)

**Source:**

Vergano, Dan. 2014. 'Cave Painting in Indonesia Redraw Picture of Earliest Art'. *National Geographic*. [news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/10/141008-cave-art-sulawesi-hand-science/](https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/10/141008-cave-art-sulawesi-hand-science/)

**Vocabulary**

Depiction:	picture.
Deposit:	accumulation.
Euro-centric:	focusing on European culture or history to the exclusion of a wider view of the world.
Exodus:	migration.
Hoglike:	looking like a pig.
Limestone:	sedimentary rock.
Merely:	only.
Mineral:	from rocks.
Overwhelmingly:	with a great majority.
Rival:	to compete with.
Stencil:	a device for applying a drawing to a surface with paint or ink. Usually, it consists of a thin sheet of metal, cardboard or plastic with holes. Here it refers to a hand.

## Source 4: 'Contemporary Art, An Introduction'

### 'Getting' contemporary art

It's ironic that many people say they don't 'get' contemporary art because, unlike Egyptian tomb painting or Greek sculpture, art made since 1960 reflects our own recent past. It speaks to the dramatic social, political and technological changes of the last 50 years, and it questions many of society's values and assumptions – a tendency of postmodernism, a concept sometimes used to describe contemporary art. What makes today's art especially challenging is that, like the world around us, it has become more diverse and cannot be easily defined through a list of visual characteristics, artistic themes or cultural concerns.

Minimalism and Pop Art, two major art movements of the early 1960s, offer clues to the different directions of art in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. Both rejected established expectations about art's aesthetic qualities and need for originality. Minimalist objects are spare geometric forms, often made from industrial processes and materials, which lack surface details, expressive markings, and any discernible meaning. Pop Art took its subject matter from low-brow sources like comic books and advertising. Like Minimalism, its use of commercial techniques eliminated emotional content implied by the artist's individual approach, something that had been important to the previous generation of modern painters. The result was that both movements effectively blurred the line distinguishing fine art from more ordinary aspects of life, and forced us to reconsider art's place and purpose in the world.

### Shifting strategies

Minimalism and Pop Art paved the way for later artists to explore questions about the conceptual nature of art, its form, its production, and its ability to communicate in different ways. In the late 1960s and 1970s, these ideas led to a 'dematerialization of art,' when artists turned away from painting and sculpture to experiment with new formats including photography, film and video, performance art, large-scale installations and earth works. Although some critics of the time foretold 'the death of painting,' art today encompasses a broad range of traditional and experimental media, including works that rely on Internet technology and other scientific innovations.

Contemporary artists continue to use a varied vocabulary of abstract and representational forms to convey their ideas. It is important to remember that the art of our time did not develop in a vacuum; rather, it reflects the social and political concerns of its cultural context. For example, artists like Judy Chicago, who were inspired by the feminist movement of the early 1970s, embraced imagery and art forms that had historical connections to women.

In the 1980s, artists appropriated the style and methods of mass media advertising to investigate issues of cultural authority and identity politics. More recently, artists like Maya Lin, who designed the Viet Nam Veterans' Memorial Wall in Washington D.C., and Richard Serra, who was loosely associated with Minimalism in the 1960s, have adapted characteristics of Minimalist art to create new abstract sculptures that encourage more personal interaction and emotional response among viewers. (continued ➔)

These shifting strategies to engage the viewer show how contemporary art's significance exists beyond the object itself. Its meaning develops from cultural discourse, interpretation and a range of individual understandings, in addition to the formal and conceptual problems that first motivated the artist. In this way, the art of our times may serve as a catalyst for an on-going process of open discussion and intellectual inquiry about the world today.

**Source:**

Spivey, B. n.d. 'Contemporary Art, An Introduction'. *Khan Academy*. [www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-1010/beginners-guide-20-21/a/contemporary-art-an-introduction](https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-1010/beginners-guide-20-21/a/contemporary-art-an-introduction)

## Source 5: A video documentary on contemporary art in Southeast Asia

### Redefining Art in Southeast Asia - The 1970s and After

(15 m 54 s)

[vimeo.com/165111694](https://vimeo.com/165111694)

**Password:** redefineart.sea

**Source:** National Gallery, Singapore

#### Notes:

One of the art works showcased in the video may be deemed age-inappropriate as it contains a scene of nudity with sexual connotations. Teachers may wish to pause the video at 5:06 and resume the video again at 6:11. The corresponding section is highlighted in the transcript below.

The Singapore National Gallery generously provided access to this video for educational purposes only. The password should be shared for this purpose only.

#### Video Transcript

- Noor Effendy Ibrahim: There was an empty canvas on which so many shadows had fallen.  
There was an empty chair on which many have sat. Burnt-out mosquito coils.  
An empty birdcage, after the release of a bird.  
A sample of human hair collected from a barber shop.  
There were two half-drunk Coca-Cola bottles.
- Adele Tan: These were artworks by Malaysian artists Redza Piyadasa and Sulaiman Esa. The year was 1974 and the exhibition was called *Towards A Mystical Reality*.
- Noor Effendy Ibrahim: How did all that become art?
- Adele Tan: The 1960s and '70s were politically volatile times and artists were reacting to what was happening then. Think Kuala Lumpur, 1969.
- Noor Effendy Ibrahim: The race riots and the National Cultural Congress in '71. It championed for Malay culture and Islam to be the subject of artistic expression in Malaysia and for art to have a nationalist function.
- Adele Tan: Piyadasa and Esa rejected these ideas and they were after new ways to express contemporary Malaysian art. So they turned to Eastern philosophy, like Zen and Taoism and they even produced a manifesto for the exhibition. For them, these objects, the Coke bottles do not only exist at a single point in time. They have entire histories of experience through time.
- T.K. Sabapathy: The practice of art and the representation of art have decisively moved away from the conventions and the principles of studio practice in which painting was the reigning medium. Commonplace, common looking objects that may not readily qualify as aesthetic objects in the art world were now being transacted and negotiated within the art spaces.



Here was an occasion which ostensibly set out to turn the whole art establishment on its head in Malaysia.

A gesture, yes, I guess that's what it is, a rude gesture, a crude gesture was introduced by Salleh Ben Joned.

He placed a manifesto on the floor, unzipped his pants and urinated on it.

And his gesture was, according to him, prompted by the very spirit of 'towards a mystical reality.' This he thought was the most immediate, proper, intuitive thing to do if one were to read the spirit of *Towards a Mystical Reality* in its authentic true sense.

Adele Tan: An equally ground-breaking exhibition took place in Indonesia in 1975. It was organized by the Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru- GSRB for short – or in English, the New Art Movement.

The group made art in opposition to Suharto's New Order.

Noor Effendy Ibrahim: He tried to systematically remove politics from art and even arrested left-leaning artists during the '60s.

Adele Tan: The GSRB put politics back into art.

Jim Supangkat: The contribution of GSRB is of course the awareness of the importance of idea.

FX Harsono: One day before the opening, at night, all of the installations were still not finished. But we are just only sitting and making jokes, something like that. Sometimes we feel very frustrated, or very desperate. I don't know, maybe this was art, maybe not.

Jim Supangkat: In the first exhibition we already made a statement: the will to communicate. So the viewer is quite important.

FX Harsono: I heard that a lot of people were very angry. They said that this is not art. This is vandal. But there were also some young art critics who were very glad that maybe this show can . . . , maybe this is the new art which can give a new idea about the arts in Indonesia.

*Teachers, please exert caution before including the boxed section below in handout for students.*

Adele Tan: Ken Dedes.

Noor Effendy Ibrahim: Ken Dedes was a legendary Javanese queen, famous for her beauty.

Adele Tan: In Jim Supangkat's Ken Dedes, the head and upper part of her body are sculpted in the classical Majapahit style.

Noor Effendy Ibrahim: But the lower half of the figure is replaced by a rectangular box.

Adele Tan: On which is drawn, in a comic book style, the torso of a woman, her tight jeans unzipped, exposing her pubic hair.

FX Harsono: So that made old art critics very angry. This is a vandal. This is pornographic.

Jim Supangkat: There were stories about her sexual appeal, Ken Dedes. She's not only just clever, but beautiful and sexy. And it just came to my mind that sex appeal is also important in the power of women.

FX Harsono: I tried to find ready-made objects which can be a metaphor for a social and political issue at the time like a plastic gun or toy gun that maybe can be a metaphor for the military. And then to put the plastic gun inside a box. And I cover the box with the wire. The pistol is the military. Military must be back to the barracks, not in our daily life. So that's the way I make an artwork.

Noor Effendy Ibrahim: It was a challenging and uncertain time in Southeast Asia. I can see why artists chose to work in a collective way.

- Adele Tan: Besides GSRB in Indonesia, The Artist Village in Singapore in the '80s, in the Philippines there was Shop 6, which was started by the artist Roberto Chabet.
- Ringo Bunoan: I can describe and situate Chabet's practice in three words, it's 'out of place'.
- Boots Herrera: Roberto Chabet as a conceptual artist introduced different ways, processes and materials in art-making. In fact, he would kid around by saying, 'I can give you a list of materials that you can buy in the hardware to do one of my installations.'
- Ringo Bunoan: From the '70s until the very end, he was using plywood. Plywood was very close to him, being an architect. Plywood is a building material and it's very common, you can find it anywhere. Here in the Philippines, plywood is also used for a lot of makeshift architecture.
- Boots Herrera: Installation art, I think that is one form that Roberto Chabet was quite instrumental in introducing. But at the same time, his idea was very much grounded on the daily life of the Filipino.
- Adele Tan: Fifty six pieces of raw and unpainted bakawan suspended from the ceiling.
- Noor Effendy Ibrahim: Walls and Hook activities were painted white for maximum contrast between objects and the background.
- Adele Tan: The installation is a staged landscape, which we can only see through a glass door from the outside.
- Boots Herrera: The bakawan is the source of charcoal that families would use for their daily cooking.
- Ringo Bunoan: The material is so present, not just conceptually but physically, so his work is abstract but it's very sensual.
- Boots Herrera: What he wanted was really to say that a lowly bakawan branch can be an art material.
- Adele Tan: In 1976, the Singaporean artist Cheo Chai-Hiang also put out a lowly tree stump in the gallery.
- Noor Effendy Ibrahim: The tree stump had a washing board attached to it.
- Adele Tan: And it opens to reveal lines from a poem by Robert Frost.
- T.K. Sabapathy: Miles to go before I sleep, that log of wood came from his grandfather's yard, where the wood was being stored and being chopped off and used to feed the fire, and to cook the food. And he just sees one of these logs and says, I will use it for something else besides cooking food.
- How biographical do you want things to get? I mean, there is a terrific wellspring and of course the citation of the Robert Frost poem, I think, is symptomatic of his life at that time.
- Forever traveling, wandering, where is the point of rest, where is the moment of rest. Not self-pityingly, not at all. But almost in a matter-of-fact way.
- Apinan Poshyananda: I think we have to look at Montien as one of the important artists who was trying to consider viewers' actions as well as perceptions. For him viewers have to be reciprocal to the artworks. That's why he invites viewers to touch, smell and be able to participate, similarly to circumambulation, meditation-walking and mindfulness.
- He introduced new ways of aesthetics and vocabulary language not only in Thai art but also in Southeast Asia, whereby he challenged and redefined concepts such as indigenous art, conceptualism, as well as his looking through art by ways of Buddhist philosophy.
- He actually told me that he was not a Buddhist artist. He was inspired by Buddhist philosophy and how Buddhist philosophy moulded his ideas and took him, whereby his definition of universal language or interpretation of art as self or non-self. This is a kind of redefinition he was looking at.

- Adele Tan: The Pleasure of Being, Crying, Dying and Eating is a sculpture made of hundreds of ceramic bowls stacked to form a tower.
- Bowls had many meanings for Montien Boonma. They were used by monks to collect alms, as utensils in daily life, and also in birth and death rituals.
- After the work was installed in a gallery, some pieces smashed to the ground accidentally. Montien Boonma put it down to chance, to the impermanence of life.
- That was part of the work.
- Noor Effendy Ibrahim: Speaking of interruptions, there was Singaporean artist Tang Da Wu's performance.
- Adele Tan: He put on a jacket.
- Ray Langenbach: When Da Wu did Don't Give Money to the Arts, what he was reacting to, was not that the government shouldn't give money to the arts. He was reacting to the government giving money to relatively safe art events. And they were bringing outside artists but they were not supporting local talent.
- And then he takes the coat off his arm and says,  
'Mr. President, can I put on my jacket?'
- Of course, what are you going to say – 'No, you can't put on your jacket?'
- And then he puts on his jacket and it says,  
'Don't Give Money to the Arts', and he turns  
and shows it to the President and shows it to the surrounding audience.
- So the President was in a fix– what do you do in that situation? And I believe that Da Wu says: 'I am an artist' and 'I am important'.
- Adele Tan: How did all that become art?
- Because of the times in which we live, and how art is now made, art cannot function as an aesthetic object defined by rigid principles.
- Art had to be reconstituted. It had to become something different.
- The everyday object is now political.
- Actions by the artist stimulate thought, reaction.
- The viewer, you, are built into the artwork.
- By breaking the rules, a new freedom in art-making emerged.
- In place of certainty, we have plurality.

### Interviewees:

Noor Effendy Ibrahim, Presenter

Ringo Bunoan, Artist

Adele Tan, Presenter/Curator

Boots Herrera, Art historian & Curator

T.K. Sabapathy, Art historian

Apinan Poshyananda, Art historian & Curator

Jim Supangkat, Artist

Ray Langenbach, Artist & Writer

FX Harsono, Artist

**Vocabulary**

Aesthetic:	beautiful, artistic.
Barracks:	military camps.
Biographical:	relating to a person's life.
Circumambulation:	act of moving around a sacred object.
Collective:	as a group.
Conceptual art:	art in which the emphasis is on the idea or concept of the artwork rather than the finished, tangible art object. In some cases the importance of the idea leads to the complete elimination of the object.
Crude:	vulgar.
(to be in a) Fix:	in a difficult situation.
Impermanence:	lasting only for a limited period of time.
Installation:	an artwork in which the artist transforms space, creating a new environment that is intended to directly involve the viewer.
Instrumental:	influential.
Intuitive:	instinctive, not calculated.
Lowly:	humble, inferior, of low class.
Manifesto:	a public declaration of intentions, opinions, or objectives issued by a group (here a group of artists but it can also be by a government or an organization).
Makeshift:	temporary.
Medium:	material or technique with which an artist works.
Metaphor:	image.
Mould:	to shape.
Ostensibly:	evidently.
Plurality:	the state of having several diverse elements.
Plywood:	strong thin wooden board made of several layers glued and pressed together.
Reciprocal:	complementary.
Reigning:	main.
Sensual:	pleasant for the senses.
Staged:	arranged in advance.
Stump:	trunk.
Symptomatic:	representative, characteristic.
Transacted:	exchanged through business deals.
Vandal:	destroyer.
Volatile:	unstable.
Wellspring:	source.
Wire:	metal cable.