

## PRIVATE PATRONAGE IN MODERN & CONTEMPORARY SOUTHEAST ASIAN ART ECOLOGIES & ART HISTORIES, 20<sup>TH</sup>–21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURIES

Saturday, 24 February 2024

Bangkok Art & Culture Centre, Bangkok

With the support of Ambassade de France en Thaïlande

Convenors: Thanavi Chotpradit, Silpakorn University, Bangkok

Yin Ker, Musée national d'art moderne - Centre Pompidou and amis du Centre Pompidou, Paris

Jérôme Samuel, Institut de recherche sur l'Asie du Sud-Est contemporaine (IRASEC), Bangkok

Since the inception of art—as defined in modern Europe—in Southeast Asia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the ecologies and histories of modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art have been forged by a host of homologous actors and factors: artists, scholars, critics, curators, dealers, collectors, patrons, educators, art writers and museum professionals, together with vernacular aesthetico-ethical sensibilities, national cultural policies (or the absence of them) and so forth. Hitherto, art historical discourse has however remained centred around the producer, production and produce of art. This symposium shifts the focus to another node in the industry: private patronage. In paying critical attention to private patronage's role in art ecologies and art historical narratives in various parts of Southeast Asia in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, it seeks to initiate comparative perspectives on the topic within the region.

In most parts of Southeast Asia where public patronage has been weak or precarious, if not quasi-absent, private patronage has been instrumental in mobilising financial and human resources to spur the production of art, the celebration of artists and the development of art worlds. In addition to building historical collections and rendering them accessible to the general public through donations to public institutions or the creation of private museums, enlightened private patrons have founded spaces and platforms lending to the recognition of lesser known artistic practices and communities, as well as promoted scholarship by way of funding research, translation and publication projects, and public programmes, among other initiatives, hence nourishing ecologies of art and charting the course of histories of art.

In *Private Patronage in Modern & Contemporary Southeast Asian Art Ecologies & Art Histories, 20<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> Centuries*, to investigate and open up debate on the historical import of private patronage in modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art, we ask: who are some of these patrons; what motivates them; what have they done and how so? How has their philanthropy impacted modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art and its prominence at the national, regional and international levels? How have their priorities and activities evolved over time from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and what of their role in the future? Lastly, how might a shift in focus to their roles in the history of Southeast Asian art revise the ways in which we write nascent critical histories of art in the region?

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- 10:00am: Registration
- 10:15am: Opening
- 10:30am: Nathalie Heinich | Research Director, Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS) / École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS)  
*Keynote*
- 11.45am: Low Sze Wee | CEO, Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre  
*Art for a New Nation: Artists and Patrons in the Making of Singapore's First Local Art Movement*
- 12.15am: Patrick Flores | Professor, University of the Philippines Diliman; Deputy Director, National Gallery Singapore  
*Land and Region, Culture and Nation: Collecting in the Islands*
- 12.45pm: *Lunch*
- 2:00pm: Sitthidham Rohitasuk | Assistant Professor, Srinakharinwirot University  
*Princess Pantip Paribatra Chumbhot and the Development of Contemporary Art in Thailand, 1960s–1980s*
- 2.30pm: Roger Nelson | Assistant Professor, Nanyang Technological University  
*Dissolved and Dispersed: Unstable Categories of Private Patronage (Notes Toward a Comparative View)*
- 3:00pm: *Break*
- 3:20pm: Patricia Chen | Independent art writer and producer  
*Models of Patronage of Art: Indonesia Versus Singapore, a Comparative Survey*
- 3:50pm: Pamela Corey | Associate Professor, Fulbright University Vietnam  
*Beyond the Image: Cultivating Publics for Contemporary Art in Vietnam*
- 4:20pm: Q&A
- 5:00pm: Closing

10:30am: **Nathalie Heinich** | Research Director, Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS) / École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS)

### Keynote

In the history of Western art, private patronage has played an essential role in the life of the arts, but this role has varied considerably according to artistic genres (from history painting and portraiture to minor genres) and according to periods: it does not take the same forms or assume the same functions in the “classical paradigm” dominant from the Middle Ages to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the “modern paradigm” dominant in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and in the “contemporary paradigm” which emerged in the 1950s and has become increasingly present in the art world over the last two generations. This keynote speech aims to answer the following questions: why, in Western art, have artists needed patrons? Why have patrons needed artists? What is the respective share of public support and private patronage in contemporary art, in France and throughout the Western world? How has private patronage evolved in the short history of contemporary art? And what are its specific features?

**Nathalie Heinich** is a sociologist at Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS) in Paris. In addition to numerous articles, she has published some forty books translated into fifteen languages on the status of artists and authors (*La Gloire de Van Gogh, Du peintre à l'artiste, Le Triple jeu de l'art contemporain, Etre écrivain, L'Elite artiste, De l'artification, Le Paradigme de l'art contemporain*) as well as on identities in crisis (*Etats de femme, Ce que n'est pas l'identité*), the history of sociology (*La Sociologie de Norbert Elias, Pourquoi Bourdieu*) and values (*Des valeurs, La Valeur des personnes*). She has also published several statements, including *Le Wokisme serait-il un totalitarisme?*, and three autobiographical stories: *Une histoire de France, Maisons perdues* and *La Maison qui soigne*. She has lectured in various European countries, and in North and South America, Asia and Africa.

11.45am: **Low Sze Wee** | CEO, Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre

### **Art For a New Nation: Artists and Patrons in the Making of Singapore's First Local Art Movement**

The history of private art collecting in Singapore dates back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In that early period, wealthy ethnic Chinese merchants in the British colonial port-city of Singapore collected antique Chinese paintings as markers of cultural identification, and also bought works from living artists to support worthy causes in China. The end of the Second World War stirred nationalist sentiments and ignited calls for decolonisation across Southeast Asia. This had immense impact on the art scene in British Malaya (of which Singapore was a part of) in the 1950s and 1960s. While much research has been done in terms of how local artists grappled with their evolving identities at the time, less is known about the roles played by art patrons of the same period. Like the artists, they also held strong and sometimes, influential, views on what art should be like in a new Malaya, free from British rule. Two of the most prominent art patrons of the post-war period were government press officer Frank Sullivan and cinema magnate Dato Loke Wan Tho. Despite being from the establishment, both art lovers were also ardent advocates for Singapore's self-determination. This paper will examine the roles played by the two individuals and consider their impact on the art scene in the critical years leading to Singapore's independence in the 1960s.

**Low Sze Wee** has been the Chief Executive Officer of the Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre since April 2018. He is an award-winning curator with management experience. He was previously Director (Curatorial, Collections and Education) at the National Gallery Singapore and involved in strategic arts planning and policy in the former Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts. Sze Wee is the first Singaporean to be selected as a Fellow for the Clore Leadership Programme in 2013. He was a practising lawyer prior to his transition into the arts and cultural sector.

12.15pm: **Patrick Flores** | Professor, University of the Philippines Diliman; Deputy Director, National Gallery Singapore

### Land and Region, Culture and Nation: Collecting in the Islands

This talk initiates a conversation on the character of collecting and the social profile of collectors in the Visayas, a cluster of islands forming the central part of the Philippine archipelago. It focuses on key collectors such as Jorge Vargas, Purita Kalaw-Ledesma, Eugenio Lopez, Luis Ma. Araneta, Leandro and Cecilia Locsin, Roberto Villanueva, Ramon Hofileña, Imelda Marcos, and Philippe Lhuillier. It broadly surveys their private collections, spanning the war years in the Pacific through the present, and the modes by which these would become public through the institutions of the museum and the industries of heritage. Moreover, the discussion looks into the intricate links between the commerce of sugar plantations and real estate, on the one hand, and the formation of the canon of culture, the identity of nation, authoritarian and developmentalist government, and the remittance economy, on the other.

**Patrick Flores** is Professor of Art Studies at the Department of Art Studies at the University of the Philippines and concurrently Deputy Director at National Gallery Singapore. He is the Director of the Philippine Contemporary Art Network. He was a Visiting Fellow at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. in 1999. Among his publications are *Painting History: Revisions in Philippine Colonial Art* (1999); *Past Peripheral: Curation in Southeast Asia* (2008); *Art After War: 1948-1969* (2015); and *Raymundo Albano: Texts* (2017). He was a Guest Scholar of the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles in 2014. He was the Artistic Director of Singapore Biennale 2019 and Curator of the Taiwan Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2022.

2:00pm: **Sitthidham Rohitasuk** | Assistant Professor, Srinakharinwirot University

### **Princess Pantip Paribatra Chumbhot and the Development of Contemporary Art in Thailand, 1960s–1980s**

This research studies the developments of contemporary art in Thailand through Princess Pantip Paribatra Chumbhot's patronage of young avant-garde Thai artists from the 1960s to the 1980s. Her establishment of the Suan Pakkard Palace Art Gallery and the Mekpayab Art Centre provided vital platforms for works rejected by the National Art Exhibition and avant-garde artistic expressions beyond the biases and constraints of state-organised exhibitions. The diversity of works presented in these alternative art exhibitions contributed in marked ways to the growth of contemporary expressions in Thai art. She also made significant contributions to the establishment of the Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art, which provided many opportunities for avant-garde artists to exhibit without being affiliated to any educational institution. The Institute allowed artists to explore ideas and to apply the principles of postmodernism, which was popular in the Western world, to art in Thailand.

**Sitthidham Rohitasuk** is Assistant Professor in the Visual Art Department at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Srinakharinwirot University. He holds a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in Visual Arts from Srinakharinwirot University, and a Ph.D. (History) from Chulalongkorn University for his dissertation titled "History of Art Competitions in Thailand from the Late 1930s to 1980s" (2014). He has published three books in Thai: *Art and Culture Groups in Thailand: The Survey of Status and Movement 1973–1987* (2009), *Modern Art in Thailand: Looking Through the Movement of Private Art Galleries and Commercial Art Trading in Bangkok, BE. 2500 to decade BE. 2530* (2017), and *Development of Concept and Creation in Thai Contemporary Art* (2021).

2.30pm: **Roger Nelson** | Assistant Professor, Nanyang Technological University

### **Dissolved and Dispersed: Unstable Categories of Private Patronage (Notes Toward a Comparative View)**

Attempts to study private patronage in Southeast Asia are important, but may encounter conceptual and theoretical challenges, alongside empirical issues. My preliminary studies of modern and contemporary art in Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand from the 1940s to the 2020s suggest that the conceptual categories of *private* and *patronage* are both potentially unstable. This paper will tentatively consider this issue, with reference to historical examples including Sihanouk's collecting in 1950s–60s Cambodia and Emiria Sunassa's supporters in 1940s Jakarta, as well as contemporary cases including a private museum in Chiang Mai, and a non-governmental organisation in Phnom Penh.

How confidently can we distinguish between a Head of State's personal collection, and one amassed as the collective property of a nation? Or between an individual benefactor of a temple mural painting, and a community's sponsorship? When a private museum or NGO is headed by a single individual, should their patronage be considered *private*, or *institutional*? Perhaps the delineation may dissolve.

Ordinarily, individuals acquiring a small number of artworks would not be significant in a study of patronage. But how should we account for foreign diplomats who have acquired important artworks by artists in Southeast Asia, since at least the 1940s, often as one-off purchases that are then dispersed internationally? Perhaps we must enlarge our definition of *patronage* in this context.

**Roger Nelson** is an art historian and curator, and Assistant Professor of Art History in the School of Humanities at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He was the 2022 recipient of the A.L. Becker Southeast Asian Literature in Translation Prize, for his translation of Suon Sorin's 1961 Khmer novel, *A New Sun Rises Over the Old Land*. He researches modern and contemporary art in Southeast Asia, with a recurrent concern with questions of historiography and method. His current book project considers how art histories have been (re)imagined within artistic practices across the region during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. He is co-founding co-editor of *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*.

3:20pm: **Patricia Chen** | Independent art writer and producer

### **Models of Patronage of Art: Indonesia versus Singapore, A Comparative Survey**

Indonesia and Singapore have been active members of the Southeast Asian art scene, notably since the 1990s, with Indonesia taking up the lion's share of combined art market activities, and Singapore, one of the smallest. When looking through the lens of art patronage, one too, sees differences in intents and motivations as well as *modi operandi* between the two countries and understandably with varied outcomes. The acts of acquiring artworks, contributing financial resources and getting involved in art projects, in both institutional and private capacities, determine what gets collected, preserved, studied and circulated. The presentation discusses how Indonesians approach art patronage by focusing on circulation and archival, and contrasting it to the infrastructure-driven Singaporean approach.

**Patricia Chen** is an independent art writer and producer of *Leading Patrons of Asian Art in Conversation* series of art films. Patricia has contributed to various international art publications including *ArtAsiaPacific*, *The Art Newspaper*, *Flash Art*, and *Financial Times* on the Asian art, art market and scene. In the last decade, she has focused her research on private museums in Southeast Asia and patrons of art with strong social footprints. Her work have been screened in France, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Singapore and the Netherlands, including film presentations at symposiums focused on Art Authentication and Art Histories organised by the The Authentication in Art Congress in the Hague in 2016 and the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2022.



3:50pm: **Pamela Corey** | Associate Professor, Fulbright University Vietnam

### **Beyond the Image: Cultivating Publics for Contemporary Art in Vietnam**

Today, in the post-internet era of the digital producer/consumer, the work of art is more than ever at risk of vanishing into the consumable image. In contexts that lack developed public art infrastructures, how then can the collector of contemporary art play a role in cultivating critical publics for art? This talk focuses on two private initiatives in Vietnam: the Nguyen Art Foundation (Ho Chi Minh City) and the Outpost (Hanoi). I share some reflections on how the two projects navigate the relationship between collecting and communication, toward the intended—or even unintended—effects of cultivating art publics (rather than audiences), and more broadly, a critical understanding of art beyond the image.

**Pamela Nguyen Corey** is an associate professor of Art History in the Art and Media Studies program at Fulbright University Vietnam. She researches and teaches modern and contemporary art history, focusing on Southeast Asia within broader transnational Asian and global contexts. Formerly an assistant professor in the History of Art and Archaeology department at SOAS University of London, Corey has published in numerous academic journals, exhibition catalogues, and platforms for artistic and cultural commentary. Her first book, *The City in Time: Contemporary Art and Urban Form in Vietnam and Cambodia* (University of Washington Press, 2021), was the recipient of a Millard Meiss Publication Fund from the College Art Association. Recently she co-edited 'Voice as Form,' a special issue of *Oxford Art Journal* (2020), and she is currently lead editor for a critical reader on contemporary art in Vietnam, and member of an editorial collective for a sourcebook on global modernisms.