Art Historiographical Introduction to Important Sources and Selected Further Reading on Modern and Contemporary Asian Art

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The references below are mainly English language sources and some critical sources in Indonesian. The focus is on publications in English that examine Indonesian modern and contemporary art, but an extended set of readings on Southeast Asian and Asian modern and contemporary art more broadly is also provided. For a more detailed discussion of Indonesian art historiography, see the Introduction to this volume and essays throughout this book.

Indonesian art history today is inevitably part of the larger art historiography still being written on Southeast Asian, Asian and global art histories. National art histories were dominant and are still important but regional art histories and attempts to develop a new global art history are increasingly widening the focus of research and writing. Chaitanya Sambrani has indicated that sophisticated traditions of art historical scholarship already existed in many Asian nations, but were largely confined to national boundaries until recent times.¹ Yet there were historical artistic connections between Asian nations in art, as Sambrani

and Singaporean scholar T. K. Sabapathy have noted. There are many issues to be explored within this larger framework of regional art, including questions of overlapping and parallel art histories, especially in relation to modern art, as addressed by speakers at John Clark’s groundbreaking 1991 conference, a project of the Humanities Research Centre at The Australian National University, entitled ‘Modernism and Post-Modernism in Asian Art’. This was the first such international conference outside Asia to address the history and current developments in Asian modern art. While much debate has focused on modern and contemporary art, it has long been realised by scholars that there is a need to link historical, modern and contemporary art histories in Asia.

There have been connections and exchanges in the Asian region through the centuries. T. K. Sabapathy has commented in relation to Southeast Asia (but his comments can also be applied to the whole region of Asia and to art and culture): ‘Movements of peoples, languages, technologies, and belief systems across boundaries and seas within South-East Asia have been continuous over the millennia’.

In the postcolonial world that emerged at the end of World War II, the Asian region developed its own exhibitions and forums for art. It is now accepted that exhibitions are important sites for art historical formation and that the role of art museums, both public and private, has also been critical in the new art histories under construction in Asia. In the last 30 years, biennales, of which there are now a significant number in Asia, have become key sites for audiences to view contemporary art across the Asian region. Selected key biennales are listed below.

The 1990s, in particular, witnessed a rethinking of cultural frameworks, including the previous domination by Europe and North America of modern and contemporary art debates—often referred to at the time

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3 Sabapathy, ‘Developing Regionalist Perspectives’, 17. An early example he cites was the connections between Indonesia and Cambodia and the influence of Borobudur on Angkor Wat.


as the ‘Euro-American paradigm’. For a discussion of this issue, and the beginnings of a more global art history, see the discussion and references in Chapter 7 (this volume).

One of the critical questions is whether a new global art history can be written. John Clark points to ‘the still largely absent discourse of a worlded art history that takes account of Asia’.6 But, increasingly, those writing on global art today, such as Hans Belting and Terry Smith, are including art from Asia as well as Africa, South America and art from other areas that used to be considered on the ‘periphery’ of the art world. Smith makes the convincing point that contemporary art is no longer one kind of art, but is ‘becoming—perhaps for the first time in history—truly an art of the world’, meaning it comes from the whole world.7 The selection of the Indonesian group _ruangrupa_ to curate the 2022 iteration of one of the postwar world’s most influential contemporary art exhibitions, _Documenta_ in Germany, is another indication of a substantial change in the art world, although the exhibition proved controversial.8

New definitions of the ‘modern’ and the ‘contemporary’ in Asian art remain a source of debate in conferences and symposia, exhibitions and publications in the region and beyond.9 This is a complex task, as Philippines’ curator Patrick Flores notes in a foreword, ‘An Art History to be Named’, to John Clark’s monumental new book, _The Asian Modern_.10

## Some Key Bibliographies

For Indonesian art, see resources listed in the Introduction and more generally throughout this volume. See also the bibliography in Elly Kent’s new book, _Artists and the People: Ideologies of Art in Indonesia_

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8 See Wulan Dirgantoro and Elly Kent, ‘We Need to Talk! Art, Offence and Politics in Documenta 15’, _New Mandala_, 29 June 2022, accessed 11 September 2022, newmandala.org/we-need-to-talk-art-offence-and-politics-in-documenta-15/.
9 Japan has been an early leader in these debates and more recently Singapore. In the Australian context, the conferences held in 1993, 1996 and 1999 in association with the Asia Pacific Triennial exhibitions were also important early platforms for connecting to Asian discourses.

The majority of authors in this book place the subject of their chapters in the context of the literature on that subject. Some chapters have extensive bibliographical references to politics, society and history as well as art. See, for example, Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 7 and 9.

On Asia, see, in particular, the bibliographies in the John Clark Archive at the Asia Art Archive Hong Kong.

**Archives, Collections and Resources**

The Galeri Nasional Indonesia and the new Museum MACAN (Modern and Contemporary Art in Nusantara) have major collections of Indonesian art. The Claire Holt Archive at Cornell University in the US is a significant source for Indonesian art. The Asia Art Archive based

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in Hong Kong is a critical source of resource material on modern and contemporary Asian art.\textsuperscript{18} Also see the previously mentioned Indonesian Visual Art Archive.\textsuperscript{19}

Japan was an early leader in bringing Asian artists together in the postwar world and the Japan Foundation Asia Art Archive\textsuperscript{20} provides extensive resources on exhibitions and conferences of great interest in the history of Asian modern and contemporary art. The Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia, has an extensive collection of art and an archive on that art from different parts of Asia collected from the Asia Pacific Triennial exhibitions since the early 1990s, which it has begun digitising.\textsuperscript{21} The Fukuoka Asian Art Museum in Japan\textsuperscript{22} has been collecting for even longer and also has a superb collection, while the National Gallery Singapore\textsuperscript{23} and Singapore Art Museum\textsuperscript{24} are collecting and documenting Southeast Asian art in-depth. Singapore has been a key force in intra-Asian art and cultural exchange. Southeast Asian art exchanges grew out of ASEAN exhibitions and Singapore also has strong links with East Asia.

The list of sources that follows contains scholarly publications and important recent doctoral dissertations; names of influential regional art institutions; art exhibition catalogues from critical exhibitions; and websites for archival and research resources in Asian art, both within art museums and institutions, and also from independent research collectives.

Museums in Asia have played a vital role in initiating new exchanges, exhibitions and scholarship. The hundreds of new museums and art institutions that now exist or are in planning across Asia have rich resources, providing significant infrastructure and with the potential to be shapers of culture through art networks and exhibitions across the region. For example, networks were developed by the Japan Foundation through its Asia Center in Tokyo for exhibitions and conferences in the 1990s. ASEAN has provided opportunities for exchange. The Singapore Art

\textsuperscript{19} Indonesian Visual Art Archive, ‘Home’, accessed 22 January 2022, archive.ivaa-online.org/.
Museum has, since 1996, been a centre for Southeast Asian contemporary art, complemented by the National Gallery, Singapore, from 2015. A crucial source of knowledge about contemporary Asian art is the many biennales that have emerged in Asia. For a listing of Asian biennales and world biennales, see the Biennial Foundation’s extensive web listing.\(^{25}\) In Indonesia, for example, the Jakarta- and Yogyakarta-based biennales have played a central role in Indonesian contemporary art. The Jakarta Biennale grew out of the *Grand Exhibition of Indonesian Painting* (Pameran Besar Seni Lukis Indonesia) at the Jakarta Arts Centre, Taman Ismail Marzuki (1968). The name was changed to the Jakarta Biennale (painting) in 1975, then Biennale Fine Arts in 1993. The Biennale Jogja began in 1988 but was restructured in 2011. For Asian biennales, see the listing of world biennales below.

**Key Exhibitions Exploring Similarities and Differences in Asian Art**

- *Asian Modernism: Diverse Developments in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand*, Japan Foundation, Tokyo, 1995
- *Visions and Enchantment: Southeast Asian Paintings*, exhibition catalogue, Singapore Art Museum in Association with Christie’s Singapore, 2000
- *SUNSHOWER: Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia 1980s to Now*, National Art Center, Tokyo, Mori Art Museum, and the Japan Foundation Asia Center, 2017

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Biennales (by Starting Year)

Early biennales in Asia included:

- Tokyo Biennale (1952–70; revived in a different form in 2020)\(^{26}\)
- Indian Triennial (1968)
- Jakarta Biennale (1975, changed form in 1993)
- Bangladesh Biennale (1981)

The Fukuoka Art Museum initiated recurring exhibitions of contemporary Asian art from the late 1970s.

Important biennales and triennales in the last decade of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century included:

- Asia Pacific Triennial, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane (1993)
- Shanghai Biennale (1996)
- Taipei Biennale (1998)
- Fukuoka Triennale (1999)
- Yokohama Triennale (2001)
- Busan Biennale (2002)
- Guangzhou Triennial (2002)
- Beijing Biennale (2003)
- Singapore Biennale (2006)
- Kochi-Muziris Biennale (2012)

A World Biennial Forum in Gwangju, South Korea, in 2012 had representatives from all over Asia and there are now at least 150 biennales worldwide, many of them in Asia.\(^{27}\)

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27 See ‘Directory of Biennials’.
Selected Further Reading on Modern and Contemporary Asian Art


*Art Asia Pacific* (1993–).


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28 See also references in the individual essays in this volume.


ART HISTORIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION TO IMPORTANT SOURCES

Girard-Geslan, Maud, ed. *Indonesian Gold: Treasures from the National Museum, Jakarta*. Published in association with an exhibition held at the Queensland Art Gallery from 26 March – 16 May 1999 and at the Art Gallery of New South Wales from 3 June to 1 August 1999.


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Zaelani, Rizki. ‘Contemporary Art in Indonesia: Beware! After the Big Chance’. In *Awas! Recent Art from Indonesia*. Yogyakarta: Cemeti Art Foundation, 2002.
