

SOUTHEAST ASIAN ART

Auction Benchmarks & Market Insights

By Johnni Wong and Sarah Abu Bakar

THE **EDGE**
GALERIE

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TRACKING THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN ART MARKET

The idea for this publication came from The Edge Media Group chairman Datuk Tong Kooi Ong, who suggested that we come up with a set of benchmarks for Southeast Asian art, especially Malaysian works, that collectors could refer to.

The concept was for a listing that we are happy with and which we could publish and stand by.

The list of records would become a reference, thereby making the local art industry more transparent. The challenge is to track figures that are reflective of the market.

The Edge is well positioned to undertake such a task. Credibility and integrity are cornerstones in The Edge's reputation as Malaysia's leading and trusted financial publication.

Thus, the main objective of this publication is to compile a list of auction benchmarks that offers a credible source of reference for Southeast Asian art.

The records relate to works created by artists from Southeast Asia or foreign-born artists associated with the region.

The second aspect of this book is a series of interviews with personalities active in the Southeast Asian art market for their views on such records and (market) developments in their own locality.

Those we spoke to run the gamut of artists, collectors and consultants as well as dealers and gallerists to auction house operators and those involved in art fairs and people who track and study the market.

In fact, in our chapter on Malaysia, one of the respondents has allowed us to extract pie charts and tables that relate to the local market from his master's thesis. Nevertheless, we caution that sourcing data from online databases without knowing the inner workings of a certain market can lead to a distorted view and consequently lead to inconclusive statistics and/or conclusions. Such a

situation is by no means peculiar to the art market, which is widely considered to be opaque by insiders and prone to manipulation by forces with vested interests.

Statistical reporting

In spite of that, it is important to include diverse opinions on the subject for readers to have an idea of the difficulties and obstacles in tracking data in any financial or statistical reporting, especially in the art market.

And when we talk about the art market, we refer to the buying and selling of art, whether in the primary market handled mainly by galleries, artists and art fairs or the secondary market dominated by auction houses and other wheeler-dealers.

This is by no means an academic study. Rather it is a guide to help those involved in the art market in Southeast Asia – especially those new to the scene – and for them to gain a deeper insight into what is going on behind the scenes. For example, one perennial question is, how reliable or valid or even believable are auction or art fair figures?

In dissecting a subject such as the “Southeast Asian art market” one needs to call upon the very people who are involved in it either as a business or as a serious hobby.

For the purpose of this publication, we focused on countries with an established art market, namely Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam and the Philippines. Cambodia and Brunei were not considered as their artists have not made any significant impact in terms of price records in regional auctions.

In terms of Cambodian auction records, the only significant figures relate to the following:

- Sopheap Pich. *Untitled (Floors and Walk)*, 2011, sculpture, 82cm x 61.5cm x 7cm. Auction price with 25% premium: US\$25,491. Christie’s Hong Kong. 27 May 2018.

- Andrew Hem. *Smiley*, 2015, spray paint on canvas, 210cm x 256cm. Auction price 25% premium: US\$2,553. Digard Auction France. 27 June 2016.
- Sera. *Le temps de vivre*, p.33 et 34, undated, mixed media on paper, 42cm x 30cm. Auction price with 14.4% premium: US\$1,550. Millon & Associes S.A.S France. 31 May 2008

Artprice.com

Principally, the auction data that we track come from Artprice.com and the most significant records were set at Sotheby's and Christie's auctions in Hong Kong, particularly for prominent artists of South-east Asia. Prominence means based on their national reputation and importance as well as the highest price level established.

To be sure, there are artists of national and historical importance, yet their works have not reached a significant price level at auctions. And conversely, there are artists who are not considered of national importance yet have a remarkable price record set at a certain auction.

We also take into account records established at local auctions held in Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, Singapore and Manila. Nevertheless, we only track records that are generally perceived to be reliable and valid. Therefore, we have only included price records of selected auction houses – enough to present a credible overview of the market.

Respondents

As for the respondents, they were selected based on recommendations by collectors, consultants and other professionals known to us.

And in contrast to the general enthusiasm of the respondents selected from eight cities – Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Jakarta, Bangkok, Yangon, Manila, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City – we had a few

candidates who either did not reply to our request for an interview or declined to participate. That is to be expected. Nevertheless, the level of candidness displayed by the interviewees offers fascinating glimpses into various segments of the market. There were also respondents who were guarded in their answers.

An added advantage for us to embark on this “survey project” is that we are part of The Edge Media Group, which has a strong and credible presence in the world of corporate news and financial reporting. But this project was actually undertaken by a subsidiary – The Edge Galerie Sdn Bhd. This commercial entity operates a gallery and an annual auction known as The Edge Auction, both established in 2013.

Interviewers

The main advantage is that the background of the two interviewers in this project, is directly related to gallery and auction house operations. The project is led by The Edge Galerie general manager Johnni Wong. He has a social science degree from the National University of Malaysia and has been a journalist for 30 years. Wong has interviewed or worked with all the important artists and collectors of Malaysia. The other team member, Sarah Abu Bakar is assistant manager at The Edge Galerie. She holds an art degree from the University of Central England, Birmingham, UK (renamed Birmingham City University in 2007). She has worked in the art industry for 11 years and was directly involved in art auctions, art writing and curating art shows.

One of the difficult tasks in conducting interviews with highly knowledgeable respondents from all over Southeast Asia was keeping track of the numerous details of artists and institutes as well as art movements, national policies and dates plus the leading figures on their respective art scenes. The index in this publication offers an idea of the complexity of monitoring everything related to our topic.

Anomalies

Nevertheless, we are not too concerned about art movements and the careers of individual artists and the merits of their artworks. There are already plenty of art books that dwell on that.

We focus on auction benchmarks of the top-selling artists in the region, basically, due to the availability of such records. But we are also mindful that there are occasional statistical anomalies. And that there are certain market players who can “influence” auction figures by direct or indirect intervention.

Knowing the local market scene is crucial to understand whether such data is valid or even reliable. This is of particular concern to us, especially when it comes to any artist who does not have a discernible track record on the sale of his work in his home market, let alone in an international auction. The old saying, “one swallow doesn’t make a summer”, comes to mind.

In short, auction benchmarks are generally reliable; it is just that you have to look out for the occasional blips on the radar of records. In order to do that, you have to be aware of local market situations where the artist comes from and his career trajectory and accomplishments. Auction records don’t happen in a vacuum or on a whim. There are certain factors that lead to one being established. And our respondents have plenty to say about such factors.

Market reports

When one talks about the art market and transactions, it would necessarily encompass the whole ecosystem involving art galleries, private deals, auctions and fairs.

But the only readily available and trackable data comes from auctions. Such figures are supplied by online data providers that specialise in compiling and disseminating such statistics for a fee.

But the drawback of such data is that the compilation relies heavily on respective auction houses, voluntarily sending in their latest results. There is no verification of the validity nor transparency of such figures. It is almost impossible for the data compiler to be able to discern the veracity of each record, due to the sheer volume of such data coming in on a worldwide scale. On the other hand, there is also a significant number of auction houses that do not submit their auction results simply because they do not have the manpower or the inclination to contribute resources to an outside party that benefits commercially.

Another difficulty in tracking benchmarks is the need to be constantly vigilant in compiling new records, especially during the auction season, mainly twice a year.

Exaggeration

When it comes to art market reports commissioned by fair organisers, such reporting would obviously focus on bright market conditions that highlight the growing number of collectors, the mushrooming private museums and the latest sparks of the art world, be they gifted artists or clever curators.

Also, the total sales figures posted by art fair promoters are notoriously difficult to verify because they are only estimates and often an exaggeration. One art fair organiser divulged to an exhibitor that the figures he posted every year were based on credit card transactions recorded on their in-house machines for use by foreign exhibitors. Then, at the end of the day, the figures are totalled up and multiplied by the number of exhibitors at the fair, whether they have sales or not.

Art fair reports also highlight significant dealers and their take on the next big thing. And, of course, wealthy collectors with the Midas touch and the means to build an art museum are always good

to be featured and associated with the fair.

The art world notices who has the deepest pockets and who buys with impact. It is immaterial whether a collector knows what he is actually buying. When you have the means and a good appetite for art, there will be no lack of advisors or auction experts to tell you what you should have.

When it comes to Southeast Asian art – often described as the last frontier of the art world – there are those who would have you believe that it is a relatively untapped market waiting to be harnessed.

Fragmented

Although a useful reference, the term “Southeast Asian art market” is actually a misnomer as the people who are actually in the local art trade do not quite see a unified market.

In fact, the market in Southeast Asia is quite parochialistic and fragmented. The majority of collectors in each Southeast Asian nation, by and large, prefer to collect the works of their own country. But in every market, there are certain exceptions.

For example, a Malaysian collector may also collect Indonesian or Singaporean works but would not venture to buy Philippine, Vietnamese, Thai or Myanmar art. And an elite Indonesian collector who has enough works by Affandi, Hendra Gunawan, Lee Man Fong, and the likes, would rather buy works by Wu Guanzhong, Zhou Wouki and Zhang Daqian, than buy Malaysian, Singaporean or Philippine art. But such collectors only represent the elite segment of the market. Most collectors of Southeast Asian art confine themselves to a narrow band of artists whose works appeal to them. Therefore, auction benchmarks – or a lack of them – are useful indicators of market movements.

In compiling data and interviews for this publication, we are also mindful of the latest technology available in the publishing world.

Thus, this book is also available online at www.theedgegalerie.com for download. The online version includes web links to the sources quoted – primarily, articles and reports in digital form. All you have to do is to register your own details and log in to access this book. Registering and answering a few questions, will also help us build a database of your preferences when it comes to the subject of art. And this will guide us on what to feature or offer in our reports within The Edge Media Group.

Finally, we would like to thank all our respondents, supporters and collaborators for their invaluable contributions to this publication.

Ho Kay Tat
Publisher & Chief Executive Officer
The Edge Media Group
Malaysia

UNDERSTANDING AUCTION DATA

Auction data compiled in this publication serve to inform who's who among the leading artists of Southeast Asia.

Categorically, there are two basic sets of data.

The first set relates to auction transactions of selected auction houses that generally post reliable figures. The figures are ranked from the highest price recorded to the lowest figure charted among the best-selling artists of a country in terms of auction sales.

These price benchmarks pertain to the artists of each of the selected Southeast Asian countries. The figures are based on the respective hammer price and with the buyer's premium included, which can range from 10% to 25% depending on the auction house. The auction records are sourced from Artprice.com and based on online searches of specific Southeast Asian artists.

The second set of data charts the number of lots as well as the percentage and quantum of reported sales of notable auctions that involve Southeast Asian art at the regional and local levels. The auction houses include:

- Christie's and Sotheby's in Hong Kong
- Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, The Edge Galerie, KLASS and Masterpiece in Kuala Lumpur
- Salcedo Auction and Leon Gallery in Manila
- Borobudur, 33 Auction, Larasati Auctioneers, Masterpiece in Singapore and Jakarta
- Sidharta Auctioneer in Jakarta
- Poly Auction in China
- Other auctions held in Western countries

But merely looking at figures without knowledge of how each artist stacks up against his peers or fellow artists on the local and

regional scene only gives half the story or can even be misleading.

Auction data sources such as Artprice.com do not verify the records they receive. They merely upload the records as and when they receive them. Also, if an auction house does not subscribe or send their results to the online database then their data would not be included. Thus, a data subscriber can't access all the relevant statistics from such a source for a more meaningful analysis.

Also, omissions can and do occur when the works of an important artist of historical significance are unavailable for regional or local auctions. This could be due to reasons of scarcity or unresolved provenance. With such an omission, such as early artists who were once active in Vietnam, they may be erroneously regarded as insignificant or are ranked lowly. And when minor works do turn up and the prices recorded aren't high, their importance may be dismissed, especially when one just tracks auction records without reviewing other considerations.

Contrary to the notion that art auctions are public events, in full view of participants and observers, in many cases, actual sales transactions are quite opaque and shrouded in secrecy. Nominees can bid on behalf of consignors to establish remarkable records without having actually sold the works, especially with telephone or absentee bidders. Therefore, in some cases, relatively insignificant artists flying under the market radar can suddenly have works "sold" for a high price in regional auctions. Such an arrangement can happen due to "connections" with market players who are deemed important clients of the auction house.

One of the objectives of such market players, seemingly, is to help raise the profile of the artists in an attempt to help "develop" the art market for the chosen artists. This sort of market strategy is

not confined to any one country but is increasingly happening in Southeast Asia.

Whether it is shill bidding to inflate prices or a bidding ring colluding to keep prices low, all such dubious practices have existed since auctions started centuries ago.

The interviews published here are with art dealers and consultants, auction house operators, collectors and artists, among others, offer an insight into how each local art market operates in Southeast Asia.

Operating both an art gallery and an auction house ourselves, and being part of The Edge Media Group, we are in a unique position to observe and question how each level of the art market in Southeast Asia operates. We may not be experts on the art market in Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar and Singapore but we do have certain resources as a media company to conduct this survey.

As mentioned, auction benchmarks of established artists do not normally happen overnight. Price records of any artist need to be viewed and analysed from the perspective of his career development for those tracking such data.

This publication serves as a guide to understanding the validity of price benchmarks of Southeast Asian artists who have had a level of presence in local or regional auctions.

FOREWARNED IS FOREARMED

“Was he asked to leave or did he leave on his own?” is the common refrain among veterans in the art business whenever someone departs from an auction house.

Given the trend of constant comings and goings of auction personnel including auctioneers and “specialists” especially among senior staff, such developments seldom go unnoticed. Other than cost-cutting measures, the common reason for letting go of senior staff could be propriety or a departing employee/member of staff may join another auction house or set up his own art consultancy.

When it comes to personnel involved in the niche section of Southeast Asian art, where expertise is scant and mistakes are common, the level of staff turnover among auction houses is noticeable.

Given the nature of auction houses that commonly hold at least two auctions a year, there just aren’t enough resources or time allocated to conduct research to authenticate artworks especially works with an unproven provenance. Thus, expert advice is usually based on trust and on the reputation of the appointed advisor who has the experience and knowledge of a specific subject, like Vietnamese art. *(Please refer to page 444 for the interview with Adrian Jones, entitled Documenting Art from the Vietnam War Era).*

But if any expert advisor is unmasked as a fraud then the consequences can be quite disastrous. Needless to say, there have been reported instances.

Nowadays, it is common for Southeast Asian auction houses to disavow responsibility in the event that any work is suspected to be a counterfeit, forgery, fake or not authentic, especially after a sale. The onus is on the buyer to check the authenticity of an artwork before a sale.

Most clauses referring to claims for a refund are found in the company's conditions of business or sale. But usually, any aggrieved party will need to refer to a certified or known expert to vouch, or if necessarily testify in court, that the purchased lot is a forgery. And most third parties who are experts would not want to be drawn into such a dispute, particularly when the artist of the work is long deceased.

But usually, if there is irrefutable evidence to show a work is a counterfeit, the responsible auction house would normally settle the matter in private.

But, of course, an important client who habitually spends a small fortune on each sale has a better chance of a speedier settlement.

The spectacular case of the Knoedler Gallery in New York and the fake Rothkos that involved millions goes to show it can happen at any level of the market.

- *N.Y. art gallery, Sotheby's chairman settle fake Rothko case, Nate Raymond, February 21, 2016*
<https://www.reuters.com/article/art-trial-knoedler/n-y-art-gallery-sothebys-chairman-settle-fake-rothko-case-idUSL2N13P2TI>
- *Knoedler Gallery and Collectors Settle Case Over Fake Rothko, Colin Moynihan, February 10, 2016*
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/11/arts/design/knoedler-gallery-and-collectors-settle-case-over-fake-rothko.html>
- *Knoedler Gallery Heads to Trial in Sale of a Fake Rothko, Graham Bowley and Colin Moynihan, January 24, 2016* <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/25/arts/design/knoedler-gallery-heads-to-trial-in-sale-of-a-fake-rothko.html>

While one party may declare it an honest mistake in the transaction of a fraudulent work, others may condemn it as a wilful act to defraud the buyer, especially if it involves more than one fake work.

In Southeast Asia, there have been several interesting cases reported in the media, such as:

- *Dad and son sue art gallery for fraud, negligence*, Seline Lum, *The Straits Times Singapore*, September 19, 2017 <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/dad-and-son-sue-art-gallery-for-fraud-negligence>
- *Vietnamese Art Has Never Been More Popular. But the Market Is Full of Fakes*, Rick Paddocks, *August 11, 2017*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/11/arts/design/vietnamese-art-has-never-been-more-popular-but-the-market-is-full-of-fakes.html>
- *MAD museum shut after owing \$1.7m in rent*, *localnewsingapore@gmail.com*, March 21, 2017, <https://localnewsingapore.com/mad-museum-shut-after-owing-1-7m-in-rent/>
- *Art gallery owner gets 8 weeks' jail for contempt*, Selina Lum, *The Straits Times Singapore*, April 13, 2016, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/art-gallery-owner-gets-8-weeks-jail-for-contempt>
- *Art gallery owner admits keeping client's \$2m*, February 27, 2016, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/art-gallery-owner-admits-keeping-clients-2m>
- *Uncontrollable art forgery plagues Indonesia's art scene*, Novia D. Rulista, *The Jakarta Post*, November 15, 2015. <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/11/15/uncontrollable-art-forgery-plagues-indonesia-s-art-scene.html>
- *Tracing art forgeries*, Andreas Arditya, *The Jakarta Post*, May 12, 2014 <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2014/05/12/tracing-art-forgeries.html>

Whether a questionable work turns up in an auction or changes hands in a private sale, the transaction is not so easily nullified. First of all, the embarrassment of buying a fake work can be most distressful and humiliating to a high-profile collector. Certain collectors would rather not highlight the problem and quietly dispose of the work.

Even if the aggrieved party plans to go to court and sue the seller, it is not easy to get an art expert to testify and to prove the work is a fake. Unless the artist is still alive and is willing to be the expert witness. Generally, living artists would rather not spook the market

with claims that minor works attributed to them at auctions are fakes.

Fake works usually involve artists who are deceased, for obvious reasons.

To have an expert knowledge of a late artist's oeuvre, one must have handled plenty of his works. Ideally, the expert should be intimate with every series of work and phase of the artist's career. For example, a professional art restorer can be an expert witness, especially if he is familiar with the technicalities of paint pigments and art material of a particular artist of a particular series at a particular period. But an art collector who merely collects art does not necessarily have the expertise to determine the works of say, Bui Xuan Phai, a famous artist of Vietnam whose works are widely acknowledged to be forged.

Usually, the widow or children of the deceased artist are called upon to verify or authenticate a questionable work especially in Indonesia. And it is also not uncommon for such "experts" to be unsure and declare genuine works to be fake and forged works to be genuine, especially if a fee is involved or is solicited.

Legalities

Buying the work of a deceased artist in a private deal can potentially lead to complications when the seller does not have a "good title". One of our respondents – a lawyer by profession – gives his opinion on what that means. Please refer to the Pakhruddin Sulaiman interview, entitled *Keen Eye on Malaysian Art* on pg 64.

Although it seems like a wading through a minefield to suss out genuine works of Southeast Asian masters (for example, Indonesian and Vietnamese), one can take consolation from the fact so far, the forged works that have surfaced or rather, detected, appear to be rather amateurish in execution. Still, it is no laughing matter to

be fooled.

When there's good money to be made and greed overcomes propriety, anyone can succumb to the art of buying and selling fakes. People think they can get away with it but invariably, such shady deals do come to light. Nevertheless, the adage "caveat emptor" is always a useful guide.

It is always prudent to establish good relations with reputable art dealers, specialist curators, distinguished collectors and knowledgeable artists as well as other art industry professionals who have the time and inclination to know about the intricacies of the local art market.

But then again, not all personalities in the art ecosystem including those serving in government agencies that oversee national art galleries are in-tune with what's happening on the local art scene. Nor are they necessarily knowledgeable about their own country's art history.

There was once a senior government appointee who remarked that, Modern art in Malaysia can be traced to our cave paintings, no doubt referring to the Painted Cave of the Niah National Park of Sarawak, said to date back 1,200 years.

Such thinking is not uncommon. This is because in tracing the roots of a country's artistic expression, especially in Southeast Asia, we tend to look back at artworks or motifs executed either as a form of self-expression in prehistoric times or as religious devotion in cave murals in recorded history or even as folk art.

In this publication, we have tapped the experience and knowledge of our respondents who have generously offered their time and expertise to answer our questions. Some of our questions are common to several of the respondents but how they answer reveals significant details of themselves and how they see the local or re-

gional market situation.

And as we record the interviews and transcribe them into text, we try not to over-edit what they have to say. We want their voices to be heard and their individualistic expression to come across through time and space. But we are also mindful that sometimes strong opinions may not necessarily be backed by hard facts. Nevertheless, the cut-and-thrust Q&A format in this publication offers a more intimate engagement with the respondents. And often enough, they are challenged on what they have to say and they challenge us back.

Although the interviews were mainly conducted in 2017, the opinions and views of the respondents still offer useful and valid points of reference, especially to those who are involved in the art business or collectors who habitually buy art.

THE COLONIAL FACTOR IN SOUTHEAST ASIAN ART

In Southeast Asia, the development of fine art, as we know it today, would require tracing it to the advent of Western-style painting and other historical factors during the colonial era.

The development of the art scenes of the seven selected Southeast Asian countries – Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, Myanmar and the Philippines – can be traced to their socio-cultural history and colonial legacy in the development of their art history and market.

Colonisation brought with it far-reaching changes that affected the artistic expression of the local people and the immigrant communities that settled in the colonies of the Far East, as Southeast Asia was formerly known.

Far from looking at the colonial period of Southeast Asia with rose-tinted glasses, we have to acknowledge that with Western colonisation came ideas and influences, about education, social mobility and artistic taste.

When the Europeans arrived in Southeast Asia in the middle of the 16th century, there were well-established states across the whole of the region. The region did not have “nations” as we know them today but territories with local rulers or chieftains. It was competition for a lucrative share of the spice trade that drew Europeans to this region.

Portugal and Spain were fierce political and commercial rivals in Europe. And the Pope in 1494 ordered that the two major powers, split their colonising expeditions accordingly based on an imaginary north/south line in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Spanish expeditions were to sail westwards and the Portuguese ships were to head eastwards.

The Portuguese were the first to acquire outposts in Asia. In the 16th century they established trading posts and colonial outposts in places as disparate as Goa in India, Malacca in Malaysia, Ambon and Timor in Indonesia, and Macau in China.¹

The Philippines under the Spanish and the US

In the Philippines, the Spanish first arrived in 1521 but it was only four decades later in 1565 that Spanish colonial rule started with the establishment of a settlement on Cebu island. In 1571, the Spanish moved their headquarters to Manila. The Spanish colonial period stretched for 300 years until it ended in 1898. Thus, the Spanish were in the Philippines for over 300 years.

Then the Americans occupied the Philippines from 1899 to 1946. The US decided that occupation of the Philippines would provide it with a base in the western Pacific from which it could promote its political and economic interests in East Asia.²

Indonesia under the Dutch

The colonisation of Indonesia was not a straightforward invasion but with many twists and turns over a prolonged period of time. From the early 1600s, the VOC Dutch trading company (established in 1602) was a power house in trade in Asia. The VOC gained a foothold in Batavia (now Jakarta) and it became their headquarters in 1619.

To exert greater control, it started to interfere in local politics in Java in the 18th century. However, due to corruption and competition from the English East India Company (established in 1600) the VOC went bankrupt in 1799 and was taken over by the Dutch government.³

¹ Peter Church, 2017. *A Short History of Southeast Asia*, John Wiley & Sons Pte Ltd. Singapore. P. 49.

² Ibid., p. 145.

³ Jakarta History Museum, <http://www.indonesia-tourism.com/jakarta/jakarta-history-museum.html>

Thus, “properties” or rather territories within the Indonesian archipelago passed into the hands of the Dutch crown in 1800. By the 20th century, the Dutch had created the “Netherlands East Indies” as a centralised state, with power centred in the capital, Batavia.

The term “Indonesia” was first used in the early 1920s but by 1928 the idea of being Indonesian and to be free from Dutch colonial rule gathered momentum. The Japanese occupied Indonesia in 1942 with little resistance from the Dutch. And after the Japanese left in 1945, the Dutch reoccupied the country in 1946 but was met with fierce resistance with a guerilla war and diplomatic offensive. The Dutch ended their colonial rule of Indonesia in 1949. So, if we trace the presence of the Dutch occupation of Indonesian territories, they were there for at least 150 years.

Malaysia, Singapore and Myanmar under the British

In the Malayan peninsula, Malacca fell to the Portuguese in 1511 and the ruling elite and their followers eventually established the sultanate of Johor.

Then in 1641, with help from Johor, the Dutch captured Malacca from the Portuguese.

The British colonial period of Malaya began in 1786, when the Kedah ruler ceded Penang island to the East India Company that was looking for a trading base.

By 1819, the East India Company had also acquired Singapore island from Johor.

Then in 1824, an Anglo-Dutch treaty gave the British control of Malacca and the peninsula while the Dutch took Sumatra and all the islands to the south of Singapore.

By 1826, the British had established the Straits Settlements comprising Penang, Malacca and Singapore.

Eventually Malaya gained its independence in 1957, thus, ending British colonial rule of 171 years.

Malaysia was formed on September 16, 1963, as a new political entity from the merger of the Federation of Malaya with the former British colonies of north Borneo, Sarawak and Singapore.

This marked the end of British rule in Singapore of 144 years since 1819.

Singapore split from Malaysia in 1965 to become an independent nation.

The British colonial period in Myanmar, formerly Burma, can be traced to the British East India Company's presence in India in the 17th century. In 1822, Burmese forces invaded Bengal and threatened to march to Chittagong in a dispute over the return of political refugees from Ava.⁴

The response was a British expedition to Myanmar. Between 1824 and 1826 and in the 1850s, the First and Second Anglo-Burmese Wars ended in the loss of territory to the British East India Company. The Burmese Konbaung Dynasty eventually fell in 1885 when the king and his family were exiled to Calcutta. And Myanmar was formally annexed by Britain in 1886. Independence was granted in 1948 and the Union of Burma was formed, later to become Myanmar. British occupation of Myanmar territory lasted 124 years.

Vietnam under the French

France invaded Vietnam in 1847. And by 1885, a protectorate treaty signed between France and Indochina (Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia) was ratified with Cochinchina (southern Vietnam) accorded full colony status. French colonial authority ended in 1945. Thus, the French were in Vietnam for 98 years.

⁴ Peter Church, 2017. *A Short History of Southeast Asia*, John Wiley & Sons Pte Ltd. Singapore. Pp. 121-122.

Thailand

While Thailand was never colonised, the country's art history has to take into account the role Westerners played in the development of its art scene since the early 1930s.

Art clubs and academies

In each chapter focusing on a country's art market in this publication, there is an introductory text tracing the development of its art scene. The text includes the establishment of art clubs or academies and institutes. And later, the establishment of galleries and auction houses, if any.

Also highlighted is the rise of highly talented individuals who gained opportunities to study art within the colonial network. Some also gained a higher level of education in Western countries. And later, they rose to become celebrated national artists in their own homeland. The most obvious examples are Raden Saleh of Indonesia, Juan Luna of the Philippines, Ba Nyan and Ba Zaw of Myanmar and Le Pho of Vietnam.

Then there were Georgette Chen of Singapore as well as Datuk Syed Ahmad Jamal, Datuk Ibrahim Hussein, Latiff Mohidin and Jolly Koh of Malaysia.

As for Thailand, the most distinguished national artist would be Thawan Duchanee (1939-2014) who studied fine art at Silpakorn University in 1958. The university was originally established as a School of Fine Arts in 1933 under the Fine Arts Department of the Education Ministry. Its inception and development owed a great deal to the dedication of Italian sculptor Professor Corrado Feroci, later known as Professor Silpa Bhirasri. He was hired during the reign of King Rama VI to work in Thailand. The school became Silpakorn University in 1943.

It is clear from the aspect of art education, that the students learnt new concepts like perspective as well as light and shade. Western-style painting soon became the yardstick of fine art. There's no denying that oil paint and watercolour, easels and paint brushes as well as canvas and paper were the very tools of trade of Western artists and avidly embraced by artists in Southeast Asia and elsewhere.

For king and commoner, there was no tradition of hanging paintings or portraits on the walls. However, that changed with the arrival of westerners.⁵

Traditionally, Asians, especially the Chinese, do not hang portraits of themselves or living people on the walls of their homes. That honour or practice is confined to hanging paintings or images of revered ancestors at the family altars or shrines, usually of prominent families.

Within elite Chinese families, portraits of elders were usually commissioned after the passing of the patriarch or matriarch to honour them by placing the painting near the family altar.

Civic monuments and portraits

In Singapore, the funding and building of public monuments commemorating colonial rulers as well as visiting or deceased governors were carried out by donors that included both European merchants and local elites such as wealthy Straits Chinese and Arab families. Civic monuments were planned after the death of Sir Stamford Raffles in 1826 and to commemorate the visit of India governor-general Marquess of Dalhousie to Singapore in 1850 as well as to mark British Queen Victoria's 50th jubilee in 1887. A related form of civic patronage was the presentation of portraits in oil, a practice initiated in 1855 for governor William Butterworth.⁶

⁵ Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt, U Sein Myo Myint & Ma Thanegi, 2006. *Myanmar Painting: From Worship to Self-Imaging*. Education Publishing House, Vietnam. Pp. 37.

⁶ Daphne Ang, 2015. *The Straits Chinese And Civic Portraiture in Singapore, 1819-1959 in Great Peranakans, Fifty Remarkable Lives*. Asian Civilisation Museum. Singapore. P. 30.

The practice of presenting portraits of British administrators and merchants was especially favoured by Singapore's Chinese merchants in the late 19th century. The commissioning of portraits suggests a more intimate connection between the Chinese community and the colonial leadership.⁷

With increasing ship travel, the 1830s saw the arrival of the first painters and decorators to offer their services to Singapore residents. Among them were Jacob Jansen, Andrew J. Zechariah, Gaston Dutronquoy, Beyerhaus and John Edmund Taylor.⁸

Wealthy Straits Chinese also visited painting workshops on their travels to Chinese ports. Many Chinese trade artists painted portraits of ships, as these commemorative images were popular among merchants and traders.

Like the early Chinese settlers, artists and photographers not only established themselves in Singapore and other Straits Settlements but also in many parts of the Malay archipelago.

The 1890s saw the emergence of a style of painting that seems to have been popular in Singapore, Malaya and Java. These appear to be painted reproductions of studio portrait photographs of the type common in Guangzhou, Hong Kong and Shanghai in the 1850s.⁹

With the advent of photography, such black-and-white portraits became popular. Chinese photographers from Guangzhou and Shanghai, previously employed as painters, became active in Singapore and the Malay archipelago as early as the 1840s.

Photography studios such as Lee Brothers, G.R. Lambert & Company and Yong Fong Studio produced portraits of prominent local residents, as can be seen in the 1923 publication, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore* by Song Ong Siang.¹⁰

⁷ Ibid., p. 31.

⁸ Ibid., p. 32.

⁹ Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 41.

Many 19th century painted portraits of Straits Chinese were commissioned posthumously, suggesting that they were based on photographs or constructed purely from imagination.

Painted photographs were popular before the advent of colour photography. Singaporean pioneer artist Low Kway Song (1888–1982) was one of the forerunners of an early colouring process. Kway Song and his eldest brother Kway Soo (1881–1961) received numerous commissions for painting the portraits of prominent Straits Chinese in the later stages of their careers. Kway Song is credited with being the first artist to charge a four-figure fee for a portrait. It was for a life-size oil of the sugar tycoon Oei Tiong Ham, commissioned in 1927. However, the most acclaimed work of Kway Soo was his portrait of Tan Jiak Kim, painted in 1917.

A century later, the tradition of commissioning artists to paint posterity portraits was revived by Singaporean artist, Alvin Ong, who received numerous commissions from the Peranakan (Baba Nyonya) community.¹¹

And when we look at the well-furnished homes of the wealthy Baba Nyonya families of Malacca, we can still find early 20th century photographs of a funeral procession to commemorate the passing of a patriarch or matriarch. The landscape images would probably be black-and-white photographs of a grand burial site or of a steamship that the patriarch made his fortune from.

But with increasing exposure to Western culture due to a Western education or trips to Europe by local elites in the early 20th century, the practice of commissioning portraits and paintings began to become popular in Southeast Asia right up to present times when corporate and social elites hang such paintings in their sumptuous homes or offices.

But such old school taste has been supplanted by the relatively

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 35 & 41, 45–46.

newer habit of upper middle-class professionals and self-made millionaires who buy art as an investment. The more passionate collectors go on to build private “museums”.

And with Western education, the educated class cultivated a Western sense of aesthetics and the concept of philanthropy and support of the arts also took shape with the advent of national art galleries.¹²

With colonisation, the European concept of fine art became even more entrenched as the “educated” artists of that period took to it with great passion. And later with the advent and rise of modern art, the artistic legacy of that period is seen today at the auctions of works of the 1950s and 1960s by modernists of the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and increasingly, Myanmar. The art scenes of Myanmar and Vietnam were largely interrupted by the political circumstances that gripped those countries in the 1950s and 1960s.

In Vietnam, the fall of the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954 to the Vietminh military signalled the end of French colonial rule. Vietnam was partitioned into North Vietnam and South Vietnam at the 17th parallel at a meeting in Geneva. And the Vietnam War lasted from 1954 to 1975.

In Myanmar, a military coup led by General Ne Win in 1962 overthrew the elected government and ushered in a period of military rule that lasted more than 40 years.¹³

An understanding of a nation’s history will enable art collectors and curators appreciate the circumstances that give rise to extraordinary artists within or outside their homeland. There are many stories of highly individualistic talents who overcame odds or benefited from rare opportunities to become who they were or are.

¹² James Goodwin, consultant editor, 2008. *The International Art Markets, The Essential Guide for Collectors and Investors*. Kogan Page. London and Philadelphia. P. 201.

¹³ Peter Church, 2017. *A Short History of Southeast-East Asia*, 6th Edition, John Wiley & Sons. Singapore Pte Ltd. Pp. 127 & 213.

But what were the historical forces or circumstances that enabled such artists to rise?

According to veteran art educationist and senior Malaysian artist Jolly Koh, although the main interest of the colonial powers was to extract as much economic gains from their colonies in Southeast Asia, certain colonialists left behind an artistic legacy.¹⁴

The Spanish, Dutch and French colonialists came from a civilisation of high culture with great artistic and cultural achievements, says Koh. Thus, they were inclined to spread their cultural and artistic values based on their own traditions.

The Spanish established the University of Santo Tomas, the Philippines' oldest institution of higher education in 1611. The first initiative to establish a formal support system for the modernists was the opening of the Atelier of Modern Art in 1938 in Manila during the American colonial period.

When the French occupied Vietnam, an applied arts school, L'Ecole d'Art de Biên Hoà, was founded in 1903 in the South. In the north, l'École des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine (EBAI) was founded in 1925. The Western concept of fine arts was introduced and the institute facilitated the training of professional artists.

During the Dutch colonial era in Indonesia, pioneer local artist Raden Saleh (1807-1880) studied art with Caspar Reinwardt (1733-1854) and Belgian artist A.A.J. Payen (1792-1853). In 1829, at the urging of the Dutch government, Raden Saleh went to Holland to further his art studies. In his career in Europe, he was even appointed a court painter of the Dutch Palace by King Willem II. He returned to Java in 1851 and lived in Bogor until his death in 1880.

Established in 1902, the Bataviaasche Kunstkring (Batavia Art Circle) organised exhibitions by European artists with their Dutch

¹⁴ Conversation between Jolly Koh and Johnni Wong, 26 June 2018. Petaling Jaya, Malaysia

Indies landscape works. The Mooi Indie era of landscape paintings influenced a number of local artists.

The first local art organisation, PERSAGI, was set up in 1938 and focused on social reality in art in contrast to the Mooi Indie group of artists.

After the Japanese occupation of Indonesia from 1943 to 1945, three cities played a major role in the commencement of formal education in fine art.

In Bandung, from 1947, a fine art school started as Universitaire Leergang voor de Opleiding van Tekenleraren. It then became Balai Pendidikan Universiter Guru Gambar, which was part of Fakultas Ilmu Teknik Universitas Indonesia. All its teachers came from the Netherlands.

In 1950, Akademi Seni Rupa (ASRI) was established in Yogyakarta by Hendra Gunawan and other prominent artists.

In Jakarta in 1970, Lembaga Pendidikan Kesenian Jakarta (LPKJ) was established. Following that, Akademi Seni Rupa LPKJ was set up by local artists and adopted the studio-style education system.

Civil service

While the British left Malaysia and Singapore with an established civil service and strong bureaucracy, it left very little artistic legacy.

During the colonial period, the Chinese community in the Malaya, especially in Singapore, was more active in setting up schools that also taught art rather than the British. For example, art education was first introduced at Kuen Cheng Girls' High School in Kuala Lumpur in 1909.

In Singapore, the Amateur Drawing Association was established in 1909.¹⁵

¹⁵ Kwok Kian Chow, *Amateur Drawing Association and the Low Brothers*. Online article. This document is part of a joint-project of the Singapore Art Museum and the Honours Core Curriculum, National University of Singapore. <http://www.postcolonialweb.org/singapore/arts/painters/channel/2.html>

The first professional art school, the Singapore Overseas Chinese Art Academy, was founded in 1922. The curriculum included Chinese and Western painting.

In 1929, the first formal art organisation in Singapore and Malaya, the United Artists Malaysia (or Nanyang Society of Calligraphy and Painting) was established. At the time, Chinese art students who wanted to further their education typically enrolled in art institutes in Shanghai in China.

The British did not start any art academies in these two former colonies. They did send art superintendents but such officials were more involved in the curriculum of primary schools, says Koh.

In Singapore, Richard Walker served as art superintendent in the Department of Education between 1923 and 1951. Walker was one of the founding members of the Singapore Art Society in 1949.

It was only in 1951 that Peter Harris arrived in the Federation of Malaya and was appointed superintendent of art education to the ministry of education. Harris's most notable contribution to the local art scene was that he founded the Wednesday Art Group in 1952. According to Koh, who was a founding member of the group, Harris went to the West of England Art Academy and obtained the national diploma of arts which was a general qualification. He never studied painting as a major subject.

After all, England or the UK, was long known derisively as a “nation of shopkeepers” since the 18th century. The phrase first appeared in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) book by Adam Smith, who wrote: “To found a great empire for the sole purpose of raising up a people of customers may at first sight appear a project fit only for a nation of shopkeepers. It is, however, a project altogether unfit for a nation of shopkeepers; but extremely fit for a nation whose government is influenced by shopkeepers.”¹⁶

16 Adam Smith. *The Wealth of Nations*. 1976 Glasgow edition. Book IV, section vii. C.

The Dutch, French and Spanish had a rich painting tradition which they imparted to their colonies. For example, the setting up of art schools in Jakarta and Hanoi in the 1920s in contrast to Malaysia and Singapore.

And in Myanmar, another former British Crown colony, the foreign experience of the country's early artist U Ba Nyan is quite revealing. He managed to make his way to England to study art in the 1920s. Subsequently, he embarked on his grand tour of Europe, and he found that there were no British equivalents to the works of Monet, Renoir, Van Gogh, Degas, Picasso, Rubens, Van Dyck, and, most important of all, Rembrandt.

According to Andrew Ranard in his book, *Burmese Painting, A Linear and Lateral History*, "The British School (of art), though generally regarded as inferior to its European counterparts in oil painting, had earned a reputation for brilliance in the area of transparent watercolor and was possessive of this reputation." Watercolour painting remains a common and popular genre of art in Myanmar, Malaysia and Singapore with active watercolour art societies.

Is it any wonder then why the artistic legacies of the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam are far superior to those of other Southeast Asian nations?

For example, in Malaysia, the first art school that was established was the Malaysia Institute of Art but only in 1967. And a few months later, in the same year, the MARA Institute of Technology with a school of art and design was set up. Jolly Koh was among the first group of art educators who taught at MARA.

Besides the colonial legacy, two other factors explain the disparate level of development of the respective art scenes in Southeast Asia – the size of the population in each nation and the relative wealth of the elite class of society. Without wealth and the means,

INTRODUCTION

RANK	COUNTRY	POPULATION IN MILLION	GDP NOMINAL US\$(MIL)	GDP NOMINAL PER CAPITA US\$	GDP (PPP) US\$(MIL)	GDP (PPP) PER CAPITA US\$
1	Indonesia	265.316	1,074,966	4,051	3,492,208	13,162
2	Thailand	69.182	483,739	6,992	1,310,573	18,943
3	Malaysia	32.474	364,919	11,237	1,002,062	30,857
4	Singapore	5.661	349,659	61,766	554,855	98,014
5	Philippines	107.411	332,449	3,095	955,219	8,893
6	Vietnam	94.575	240,779	2,545	705,774	7,462
7	Myanmar	52.832	70,715	1,338	359,374	6,802
8	Cambodia	16.253	24,360	1,498	70,242	4,321
9	Laos	6.777	18,337	2,705	53,752	7,932
10	Brunei	0.434	14,438	33,233	34,637	79,726

The above table shows GDP and GDP per capita data according to International Monetary Fund's April 2018 estimates.

Gross domestic product (GDP) is a monetary measure of the market value of all final goods and services produced in a period (quarterly or yearly) of time. Nominal GDP estimates are commonly used to determine the economic performance of a whole country or region, and to make international comparisons. Nominal GDP per capita does not, however, reflect differences in the cost of living and the inflation rates of the countries; therefore using a basis of GDP per capita at purchasing power parity (PPP) is arguably more useful when comparing differences in living standards between different nations.

Source: International Monetary Fund (IMF)

there can be no art patronage. And without a sizeable population to support economic activities and the accumulation of wealth, there would not be a significant elite class to support the career of artists.

In contrast to what can be seen in Malaysia and Singapore, the sheer number and excellence of portraits and other oil paintings in the National Art Gallery of the Philippines attest to the level of art patronage in that society. The collection covers Philippine art from the 17th to 20th centuries as well as feature modern and contemporary Philippine art from the 20th to 21st centuries.

And in today's auction benchmarks of Southeast Asian art, it is not surprising that the works of artists from the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam – whether pioneer, modern or contemporary – generally surpass the works of artists from Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand and Singapore.

MALAYSIA

ART DEVELOPMENT OF MALAYSIA

The evolvement of Malaysian art can be traced back to the British Malaya period, when a number of states on the Malay Peninsula and the island of Singapore were brought under British control between the 18th and the 20th centuries.

Kelvin Chuah in *The Practice of Watercolour at the Dawn of Modern Art in Malaya* writes that “the watercolour medium was introduced in Malaya during the 18th and 19th centuries through the works of maritime artists”, who had depicted Malaya’s exotic landscapes as well as its botanical specimens.¹

Chuah writes that civil servants like Frank Swettenham travelled all over the peninsula (c.1880s) to capture picturesque views of its landscapes and mountains.²

It is also important to note the shared history between Malaya and Singapore during the British Malaya era. Following the fall of the British colony in the Second World War on Feb 15, 1942, Singapore was occupied by the Japanese from 1942 to 1945.

Singapore then became the Colony of Singapore as part of the British Crown colony that existed from 1946 until 1963, when Singapore became part of Malaysia. Singapore declared independence on Aug 9, 1965. Up until then, art activities in Malaysia included Singapore.

In this brief introduction to the history of Malaysian art, we are highlighting significant events that occurred mainly in Kuala Lumpur and Penang.

¹ Kelvin Chuah, *The Practice of Watercolour at the Dawn of Modern Art in Malaya* in *Imagining Identities: Narratives in Malaysian Art Volume 1*, edited by Nur Hanim Khairuddin, Beverly Yong and T.K. Sabapathy. 2012. RogueArt. Kuala Lumpur. P. 53.

² Ibid.

Art education and art groups

Art education was first introduced at Kuen Cheng Girls' High School in Kuala Lumpur in 1908.³

In the 1920s, an expatriate art group called the Penang Impressionists was formed, whose members comprised British housewives. The exclusive group only allowed the participation of two local individuals, one of whom was Abdullah Ariff, who later became the group's art instructor.⁴

Redza Piyadasa wrote in *The Treatment of the Local Landscape in Modern Malaysian Art, 1930 – 1981*:

*"The origins of a Malaysian commitment to easel-painting endeavours can be traced to humble beginnings and dates to the 1930s. A small group of self-taught watercolourists based on the island of Penang attempted to depict the more salient features of the local landscape in their works and thereby heralded the beginnings of a modern art tradition in this country. These painters included Abdullah Ariff, Yong Mun Sen, Kuo Ju Ping, Khaw Sia and Tay Hooi Keat. Their preference for watercolour was influenced by the availability of the medium during the pre-war years and also by their attitude toward creativity."*⁵

Syed Ahmad Jamal also conceded that Malaysian art can be traced to the 1930s in his writing entitled *25 Years of Malaysian Art, 1957-1982*: "Malaysian art as we know it goes back to the 1930s."⁶

The Penang Chinese Art Club was formed in 1936 and was active until the advent of the Second World War.⁷

Mun Sen Gallery was opened in Penang in 1930 by artist Yong

³ Ibid., p. 138.

⁴ Ibid., p. 54.

⁵ Ibid., p. 26.

⁶ Syed Ahmad Jamal, *25 Years of Malaysian Art, 1957-1982 in Infrastructures: Narratives in Malaysian Art Volume 3*, edited by Beverly Yong, Nur Hanim Khairuddin, Rahel Joseph and Tengku Sabri Ibrahim, 2016. RogueArt. Kuala Lumpur. P. 22.

⁷ Kelvin Chuah, *The Practice of Watercolour at the Dawn of Modern Art in Malaya in Imagining Identities: Narratives in Malaysian Art Volume 1*, edited by Nur Hanim Khairuddin, Beverly Yong and T.K. Sabapathy. 2012. RogueArt. Kuala Lumpur. P. 54.

Mun Sen, who had proposed setting up the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) in Singapore in 1937. The Singapore Society of Chinese Artists accepted this proposal and NAFA was set up in 1938 with Lim Hak Tai as the principal.⁸

In 1951, the arrival of English painter Peter Harris, who was appointed superintendent of art education to the ministry of education, boosted art activities in Kuala Lumpur.

Harris founded the Wednesday Art Group in 1952. Members of the group included Patrick Ng Kah Onn, Cheong Laitong, Zakaria Noor, Ismail Mustam, Dzulkifli Buyong, Ho Khay Beng, Liu Siat Moi, Grace Selvanayagam, Jolly Koh, Phoon Poh Hoon and Abdul Halim Mat as well as Syed Ahmad Jamal, who joined at the end of the 1950s upon returning from his studies abroad.⁹

Another significant impact that was brought by Harris to the art education sector was influencing the government “to send talented art teachers to English art colleges for periods of up to four and five years.”¹⁰

“Tay Hooi Keat and Syed Ahmad Jamal were the first two Malaysian artists to return during the fifties with the National Diploma in Design and the Art Teachers Diploma from English art colleges. They both joined the Ministry of Education.”¹¹

In 1956, Majlis Kesenian Melayu was formed and then established as Angkatan Pelukis Semenanjung (later Angkatan Pelukis SeMalaysia, APS) by Hoessein Enas in 1957.¹²

The School of Art and Design was established at MARA Insti-

8 Beverly Yong, Nur Hanim Khairuddin, Rahel Joseph and Tengku Sabri Ibrahim (editors). *Infrastructures: Narratives in Malaysian Art Volume 3*. 2016. RogueArt. Kuala Lumpur. P. 438.

9 Redza Piyadasa, *The Treatment of the Local Landscape in Modern Malaysian Art, 1930-1981* in *Imagining Identities: Narratives in Malaysian Art, Volume 1*, edited by Nur Hanim Khairuddin, Beverly Yong and T.K. Sabapathy, 2012. RogueArt. Kuala Lumpur. Pp. 30 & 31.

10 Ibid., pp. 35 & 36.

11 Ibid., p. 36.

12 Ibid., p. 32.

tute of Technology in 1967, followed by the Malaysian Institute of Art that same year.¹³

In 1968, the Kuala Lumpur College of Art was founded. The Petaling Jaya College of Art and Design was established in 1985 followed by the Equator Academy of Art and Design in 1987. Limkokwing Institute of Creative Technology was established in 1991. While the Dasein Academy of Art was established in 1996.

National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

“The historical establishment of the National Art Gallery was the result of the initiation mooted between 1954 and 1956 by the Malaya Arts Council, helmed by the late Tan Sri Mubin Sheppard¹⁴ and Frank Sullivan,” according to the National Art Gallery’s website.

The website also states that “on 27 August 1958, a two-storey building at No. 109, Jalan Ampang, Kuala Lumpur, adjacent to Malaysia’s first parliament building (then known as the Federation of Malaya), was officially allocated by the government to the National Art Gallery.”

Frank Sullivan was appointed as the first administrator of the National Art Gallery. Being the former secretary to Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj, he held a concurrent position as the Secretary of the BSLN Board of Trustees until 1970. On 28 January 1987, a groundbreaking ceremony for a new building of the National Art Gallery was held at a site in Jalan Tun Razak, Kuala Lumpur. The construction of the new building was done through a privatisation project between the Malaysian government and YTL Corporation. It was completed in 1998.

¹³ Nur Hanim Khairuddin, Beverly Yong and T.K. Sabapathy (editors). *Imagining Identities: Narratives in Malaysian Art Volume 1*. 2012. RogueArt. Kuala Lumpur. P. 139.

¹⁴ Tan Sri Dato’ Dr. Haji Abdul Mubin Sheppard was a renowned historian and academic in Malaysia. Born Mervyn Cecil Frank Sheppard in Ireland in 1905, he served as a Company Commander in the Federated Malay States Volunteer Force (FMSVF) from 1941 until 1942, in which he became a prisoner of war during the Second World War. He retired as a Major in the FMSVF in 1945, deciding to stay on his job in the civil service until his retirement in 1963. He converted into Islam in 1957, taking on the name of Abdul Mubin Sheppard. He passed away in Selangor in 1994.

On 13 November 1998, the National Art Gallery moved to its own building at No. 2, Jalan Temerloh, off Jalan Tun Razak, Kuala Lumpur, in concurrence with the launch of the 13th Asian International Art Exhibition. The new National Art Gallery building was officially opened by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad (now Tun) on 27 September 2000.”¹⁵

Non-profit art galleries

The Bank Negara Malaysia Museum and Art Gallery has been acquiring Malaysian and Southeast Asian art for the central bank since 1962.¹⁶

Universiti Sains Malaysia’s Humanities and Fine Art programme started its art collection in 1972¹⁷ while Esso Malaysia built a collection of Malaysian art in 1980.¹⁸ Sarawak Art Museum was established that same year.¹⁹

The USM Museum and Gallery (later renamed Muzium dan Galeri Tuanku Fauziah) was opened in 1982 while Maybank Gallery was founded in 1988. Galeri Petronas was established at Dayabumi Complex in 1993.²⁰

Commercial art galleries

Frank Sullivan, the Australian press secretary to Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, opened Samat Gallery, Malaysia’s first commercial gallery for contemporary art, in 1967 with the support

¹⁵ National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur. http://www.artgallery.gov.my/?page_id=3740

¹⁶ Bank Negara Malaysia Museum and Art Gallery. <http://www.museumbnm.gov.my/about/>

¹⁷ Beverly Yong, Nur Hanim Khairuddin, Rahel Joseph and Tengku Sabri Ibrahim (editors), 2016. *Infrastructures: Narratives in Malaysian Art Volume 3*. RogueArt. Kuala Lumpur. P. 439.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Galeri Petronas, <http://www.petronas.com.my/sustainability/community/arts-culture/Pages/arts-culture/galeri-petronas.aspx>

of Tan Sri P G Lim, a distinguished lawyer, Malaysia's first female diplomat and fellow patron of the arts.²¹

However, in the book *Infrastructures: Narratives in Malaysian Art Volume 3*, it is stated that Samat Art Gallery was opened in 1966, the same year that Gallery 11 was opened (which was then closed in 1970).

The APS Gallery was established in 1967 while Saujana Fine Arts and AP Galleries opened in 1983. Galeri Citra was founded in 1987.

Galeri Wan, Gallerie Taksu and The Art Gallery, Penang, were opened in 1989 while the Artfolio Gallery and Art Salon were established in 1991. In 1996, NN Gallery and Valentine Willie Fine Art opened in Kuala Lumpur. The latter ceased the operations of its five galleries across the region in 2014.²² The Wei-Ling Gallery opened in 2002 while Richard Koh Fine Art was established in 2005. The Edge Galerie was established in 2013.

KL Biennale

Organised by the National Art Gallery in Kuala Lumpur, the inaugural Kuala Lumpur Biennale was staged in 2017 from November 1 to March 30. According to the media release dated November 23, 2017, the curatorial team was led by local artist and academician Zulkifli Yussoff and National Art Gallery curators Faizal Sidik, Tan Hui Koon and Baktiar Naim.²³

The event featured 114 artists – 103 from Malaysia and 11 “international” artists. The featured names included Awang Damit Ahmad, Sharmiza Abu Hassan, Bibi Chew Chon Bee, Ahmad Zakii

²¹ 60 Years Australia and Malaysia, Chapter 4, A Vibrant Tradition of Artistic Exchange, Nurturing the arts, <http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/international-relations/60-years-australia-in-malaysia/chapter4-a-vibrant-tradition-of-artistic-exchange.html>

²² Ilham Gallery, Gallery Management. <http://www.ilhamgallery.com/management> Adeline Chia, 30 Sept 2012. *Art dealer Willie exists*. <https://www.thestar.com.my/lifestyle/women/2012/09/30/art-dealer-willie-exits/>

²³ National Art Gallery. www.artgallery.gov.my/?p=5845

Anwar, Jeganthan Ramachandran, Hayati Mukhtar, Bayu Utomo Radjikin, Jalaini Abu Hassan, Shooshie Sulaiman, Noor Azizan Paiman, H.H. Lim, K. Thangarajoo, Lisa Foo, Abdul Muid Abdul Latif, Saiful Razman and Anniketyni Madian.

Art Auctions & Fairs

The first major art auction in Malaysia was organised by Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers in August 2010. In September 2012, KL Lifestyle held its first auction in Kuala Lumpur. In June 2013, The Edge Auction and Masterpiece held their inaugural auctions in Kuala Lumpur. The latter was founded in Jakarta, Indonesia, where it held its first sale in 2003. Masterpiece then held its first auction in Singapore in 2008.

Art Expo Malaysia is Kuala Lumpur's main art fair, founded by Datuk Vincent Sim Tiak Choo in 2007. The family-run art fair is currently managed by Vincent's sons, Pojinn (co-founder and executive director) and Polenn, who became a partner of Art Expo in 2009 and executive director of Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers in 2016.

Local galleries and companies that participated in the 2018 edition included A+ Gallery, Artemis Art, Aureo Gallery, Collectors' Showcase, Gr3 Gallery, Gallery Des Artistes, Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Jeth Art Gallery, Masterpiece Auction, NN Gallery, Richard Koh Fine Art, Secret Garden (TSG 1895), Segaris Art Centre, TAK-SU, The Art People Gallery, V' Art Space and Wei-Ling Gallery.

Foreign exhibitors included Art Porters, Art Seasons, Art Xchange Gallery, Artblue Studio, Asian Art Platform, ATR Gallery, Bernardaud (featuring Jeff Koon's works), Chit Fung Art, CUC Gallery, DC Arte, Embassy of Brazil, Embassy of Croatia, Embassy of Ecuador, Embassy of Italy, Embassy of Russia, Estyle Art Gallery, Gajah Gallery, Galerie Bruno Massa, Gallery Ishikawa, Gallery Hanakagesho, Gallery Seek, Gallery Suiha, Gallery UG, Gnani Arts,

Hakkendo Gallery, Kinoshō Kikaku, LSD, Mazel Galerie, Mookji Art Collaboration, Number 1 Gallery, Nyicas, Redsea Gallery, Shaanxi Artists Association, Smart Ship Gallery, Spence Gallery, Srisasanti Gallery, Trish Gallery, Wang Xijing/Li Chi Mao Art Museum and White Space Art Asia.

There are proposals for two new art fairs in Kuala Lumpur next year. One foreign-initiated proposal seems to have hit a snag with funding issues. And the second event, Art KUL is proposed along the lines of Yogyakarta's ArtJog event where artists sell directly to collectors. But planning is still in the early stages at this point in time.

Established in 2017, the ArtEDecor fair promotes the works of lesser-known local artists as well as designers and craftwork.

The event was held at the MATRADE Exhibition and Convention Centre (MECC) Kuala Lumpur. The third edition will be from March 7-10, 2019.

Among the serious art collectors in Malaysia, one eminent collector stands out from the rest. Over the past several years, he has amassed an impressive range of works by distinguished artists such as Zhou Chunya, Dan Flavin and Anselm Kiefer, among others. Housed in his private art space, his Southeast Asian cache include works by Syed Ahmad Jamal, Ahmad Zakii Anwar, Khalil Ibrahim, Thawan Duchanee, Chatchai Puipia, Hendra Gunawan, Heri Dono, Ronald Ventura and Anita Magsaysay-Ho.

Top 10

Based on auction benchmarks compiled and in chronological order, Malaysia's top 10 artists are Yong Mun Sen (1896-1962), Huang Yao (1914-1987), Datuk Hoessein Enas (1924-1995), Chia Yu Chian (1936-1991), Datuk Ibrahim Hussein (1936-2009), Latiff Mohidin (1938), Lim Hooi Hwa also known as H.H. Lim (1954), Ahmad Zakii Anwar (1955), Awang Damit Ahmad (1956) and Chang Fee Ming (1959).

AUCTION BENCHMARKS OF ARTISTS IN MALAYSIA

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
1	Ibrahim Hussein, Datuk (1936 – 2009)	Red, Orange and Core 1984, Acrylic on canvas 198cm x 271cm Hammer price: US\$240,482 With premium (10%): US\$264,530 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 5 June 2012	The Dream 1969, Acrylic on canvas 121cm x 121cm Hammer price: US\$143,734 With premium (10%): US\$158,107 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 8 August 2012	Kuala Lumpur IX Months 1970, Acrylic on canvas 152cm x 122cm Hammer price: US\$142,245 With premium (10%): US\$156,469 Auction House: The Edge Galerie, Kuala Lumpur Date: 29 June 2013
2	Latiff Mohidin (1938)	Samarkhand 3 1994, Oil on canvas 152cm x 114cm Hammer price: US\$182,765 With premium (10%): US\$264,530 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 5 June 2012	Pago Pago Forms 1968, Oil on canvas 88cm x 69cm Hammer price: US\$171,236 With premium (10%): US\$188,359 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 19 June 2011	Seascape 2013, Oil on canvas 166cm x 110.5cm Hammer price: US\$161,252 With premium (10%): US\$177,377 Auction House: The Edge Galerie, Kuala Lumpur Date: 10 May 2014
3	Lim Hooi Hwa also known as Peter H.H. Lim (1954)	Sign Language Series 2009 Mixed media on canvas 80cm x 120cm Hammer price: US\$79,700 With premium (15%): US\$91,655 Auction House: Poly International Auction Co Ltd, Beijing Date: 2 December 2012	Jet Image on Paper 2009 Mixed media on paper 100cm x 150cm Hammer price: US\$63,759 With premium (15%): US\$73,322 Auction House: Poly International Auction Co Ltd, Beijing Date: 2 December 2012	Flying Image in Blue Project 2011, Acrylic on canvas 99cm x 152cm Hammer price: US\$34,881 With premium (10%): US\$38,369 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 3 November 2013
4	Huang Yao (1914 – 1987)	Riding the Dragon 20th Century Mixed media on paper 140cm x 74cm Hammer price: US\$71,611 With premium (25%): US\$95,482 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 26 November 2012	Playing Chess 1980 Mixed media on paper 140cm x 74cm Hammer price: US\$70,840 With premium (25%): US\$87,584 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 29 May 2012	Mountains Are Not Mountains, Water Is Not Water 1980 Mixed media on paper 44.5cm x 44.5cm Hammer price: US\$33,488 With premium (25%): US\$41,860 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 28 May 2013

* The artists are ranked according to their auction records in the first column. The second and third columns show their second and third most expensive artworks sold in auctions.

** NA : not available

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
5	Chia Yu Chian (1936 – 1991)	By the River 1954 Oil on canvas laid on board 65cm x 80cm Hammer price: US\$70,950 With premium (25%): US\$88,687 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 29 November 2015	Paris 1959, Oil on board 62.5cm x 51.5cm Hammer price: US\$23,361 With premium (10%): US\$25,587 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 28 October 2012	Penang 1957, Oil on cardboard 65cm x 91cm Hammer price: US\$20,640 With premium (25%): US\$25,800 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 28 May 2013
6	Chang Fee Ming (1959)	Mandalay 1993 Watercolour on paper 56cm x 76cm Hammer price: US\$69,011 With premium (22%): US\$84,193 Auction House: Larasati, Singapore Date: 26 January 2013	Monsoon Has Gone 1990 Watercolour on paper 56cm x 76cm Hammer price: US\$60,248 With premium (12%): US\$66,272 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 10 May 2014	At Dusk... Nanyang 2012 Watercolour on paper 56cm x 76cm Hammer price: US\$59,364 With premium (12%): US\$65,300 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 21 April 2013
7	Awang Damit Ahmad (1956)	Garis Mega (Iraga Series) 2008 Mixed media on canvas 172.5cm x 172.5cm Hammer price: US\$61,871 With premium (25%): US\$77,338 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 6 October 2014	Payarama Baru "Pagar" 2014 Mixed media on canvas 183cm x 183cm Hammer price: US\$45,150 With premium (25%): US\$56,437 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 5 October 2015	Apa Khabar Ledang (Essence of Culture) 1992 Mixed media on canvas 183.5cm x 162cm Hammer price: US\$45,150 With premium (25%): US\$56,437 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 31 May 2015
8	Ahmad Zakii Anwar (1955)	Bayon 8 2007, Oil on canvas 122cm x 244cm Hammer price: US\$59,745 With premium (22%): US\$71,697 Auction House: Borobudur, Singapore Date: 17 May 2008	Angkor 2 2006, Acrylic on canvas 66cm x 198cm Hammer price: US\$45,010 With premium (25%): US\$54,976 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 25 November 2007	Man 2005, Acrylic on linen 99cm x 187cm Hammer price: US\$39,594 With premium (% NA): US\$47,512 Auction House: Sotheby's, Singapore Date: 29 April 2007

AUCTION BENCHMARKS OF ARTISTS IN MALAYSIA

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
9	Hoessein Enas, Datuk (1924 – 1995)	Morning Mist 5 1992, Oil on canvas 121cm x 80cm Hammer price: US\$59,274 With premium (10%): US\$65,201 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 19 June 2011	Silat 1991, Oil on canvas 76cm x 102cm Hammer price: US\$32,890 With premium (10%): US\$41,655 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 19 June 2011	Javanese Girl 1954, Oil on canvas 51cm x 38cm Hammer price: US\$36,644 With premium (10%): US\$40,308 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 8 August 2010
10	Yong Mun Sen (1896 – 1962)	Looking at Kedah Point from Penang Beach 1946, Oil on canvas 100cm x 138cm Hammer price: US\$58,050 With premium (25%): US\$72,562 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 25 May 2014	Boats through the Nets 1936, Oil on canvas 49cm x 58cm Hammer price: US\$32,890 With premium (12%): US\$36,836 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 9 November 2014	Hilly Coastal Scene with Fisherman in Rowing Boat 1948, Oil on canvas 54cm x 64cm Hammer price: US\$26,256 With premium (12%): US\$29,406 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 13 April 2014
11	Syed Ahmad Jamal, Datuk (1929 – 2011)	Gunung Ledang Series (Cherryvale) 1985, Oil on canvas 91cm x 91cm Hammer price: US\$55,981 With premium (10%): US\$61,579 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 19 June 2011	Malam Marang 2001, Oil on canvas 91cm x 122cm Hammer price: US\$51,419 With premium (10%): US\$56,554 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 6 May 2012	Berenang 1965, Oil on canvas 123cm x 77cm Hammer price: US\$47,840 With premium (12%): US\$53,580 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 9 November 2014
12	Noor Mahnun Mohamed also known as Anum (1964)	Am Abend 1993, Oil on canvas 200cm x 180cm Hammer price: US\$53,612 With premium (12%): US\$60,045 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 29 April 2018	Girl Skipping 2002, Oil on linen 90cm x 180cm Hammer price: US\$12,914 With premium (10%): US\$14,141 Auction House: The Edge Galerie, Kuala Lumpur Date: 11 March 2018	Elephant 2002, Oil on linen 60cm x 89cm Hammer price: US\$4,628 With premium (10%): US\$5,090 Auction House: The Edge Galerie, Kuala Lumpur Date: 11 March 2018

* The artists are ranked according to their auction records in the first column. The second and third columns show their second and third most expensive artworks sold in auctions.

** NA : not available

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
13	Chuah Thean Teng, Datuk (1912 – 2008)	Bathing Baby 1992, Batik 90cm x 87cm Hammer price: US\$53,168 With premium (10%): US\$58,484 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 28 October 2012	Feeding Durian 1988, Batik 90cm x 87cm Hammer price: US\$51,041 With premium (10%): US\$56,145 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers Kuala Lumpur Date: 19 June 2011	Durian Sellers 1990, Batik 87cm x 87cm Hammer price: US\$41,462 With premium (10%): US\$45,608 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 6 May 2012
14	Jalaini Abu Hassan (1963)	Halal 2007 Mixed media on canvas 152cm x 153cm Hammer price: US\$41,152 With premium (25%): US\$50,346 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 25 November 2007	The Hallucination of Facts in Ungrounded History 2012 Mixed media on canvas (diptych) 244cm x 305cm Hammer price: US\$34,771 With premium (10%): US\$38,248 Auction House: The Edge Galerie, Kuala Lumpur Date: 29 June 2013	Beluing Temah Didik 1999 Mixed media on canvas 183cm x 122cm Hammer price: US\$22,426 With premium (10%): US\$24,668 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 21 April 2013
15	Jolly Koh (1941)	The Plough 2013 Oil and acrylic on canvas 122cm x 214cm Hammer price: US\$37,932 With premium (10%): US\$41,725 Auction House: The Edge Galerie, Kuala Lumpur Date: 29 June 2013	Untitled 1960, Oil on canvas 127cm x 100cm Hammer price: US\$20,204 With premium (12%): US\$22,628 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 6 November 2016	Jiuzhaigou Landscape 2011 Oil and acrylic on canvas 94cm x 174cm Hammer price: US\$16,745 With premium (10%): US\$18,419 Auction House: The Edge Galerie, Kuala Lumpur Date: 10 May 2014
16	Siew Hock Meng (1942)	The Loft 1996, Oil on canvas 72cm x 91cm Hammer price: US\$37,352 With premium (25%): US\$46,690 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 29 May 2016	Dancer with Gamelan Orchestra 1998, Oil on canvas 91cm x 183cm Hammer price: US\$35,896 With premium (25%): US\$42,895 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 25 April 2004	Resting 1998, Oil on canvas 92cm x 127cm Hammer price: US\$35,886 With premium (% NA): US\$43,063 Auction House: Sotheby's, Singapore Date: 4 April 2004

AUCTION BENCHMARKS OF ARTISTS IN MALAYSIA

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
17	Bayu Utomo Radjikin (1969)	Infinity IX 2009, Acrylic on canvas 200cm x 200cm Hammer price: US\$36,351 With premium (10%): US\$65,201 Auction House: The Edge Galerie, Kuala Lumpur Date: 29 June 2013	Untitled 2010 Mixed media on canvas 230cm x 166cm Hammer price: US\$17,440 With premium (10%): US\$19,184 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 3 November 2013	Portrait XI 2009 Mixed media on canvas 200cm x 145cm Hammer price: US\$13,900 With premium (10%): US\$15,568 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 13 April 2014
18	Ivan Lam (1975)	Three Buses 2008, Synthetic polymer on canvas 64cm x 254cm Hammer price: US\$33,514 With premium (25%): US\$41,892 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 6 April 2014	A Yellow Diamond 2012, Mixed media on canvas, 122cm x 76cm, 122cm x 51cm, 122cm x 147cm (triptych) Hammer price: US\$33,488 With premium (25%): US\$41,860 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 9 November 2014	Home (We Are Finally Home) 2007, Acrylic on canvas 122cm x 304cm Hammer price: US\$20,640 With premium (25%): US\$25,800 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 6 October 2013
19	Rafiee Ghani (1962)	The Beginning of the Red Sea 2016, Oil on canvas 184.5cm x 155cm Hammer price: US\$33,462 With premium (25%): US\$41,827 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 3 April 2017	The Book of Two Rivers 2017, Oil on canvas 183cm x 152cm Hammer price: US\$32,005 With premium (25%): US\$40,006 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 1 October 2017	Blood Cherries by the Black River 2016, Oil on canvas 208cm x 182cm Hammer price: US\$21,912 With premium (25%): US\$27,390 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 3 October 2016
20	Yee I-Lann (1971)	Kinabalu Series Huminodun Undated, Digital print on Kodak endura paper 106.5cm x 204.5cm Hammer price: US\$30,768 With premium (25%): US\$37,883 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 24 May 2008	Kinabalu Series Huminodun 2007, Digital print on Kodak endura paper 106.5cm x 204.5cm Hammer price: US\$11,610 With premium (25%): US\$14,512 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 7 October 2012	Kerbau 2007, Digital print 60cm x 279cm Hammer price: US\$10,320 With premium (12%): US\$11,558 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 29 March 2015

* The artists are ranked according to their auction records in the first column. The second and third columns show their second and third most expensive artworks sold in auctions.

** NA: not available

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
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21	Yusof Ghani (1950)	Hydrafinity (Wajah Series) 2008, Oil on canvas 183cm x 152cm Hammer price: US\$29,664 With premium (10%): US\$32,602 Auction House: The Edge Galerie, Kuala Lumpur Date: 11 March 2018	Siri Tari VII 1984 Oil and charcoal on canvas 163cm x 236.5cm Hammer price: US\$28,194 With premium (10%): US\$31,013 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 6 May 2015	Durian Sellers 1990, Batik 87cm x 87cm Hammer price: US\$41,462 With premium (10%): US\$45,608 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 6 May 2012
22	Hamir Soib Mohamed (1969)	The Stitches 2016 Mixed media on canvas 200cm x 240cm Hammer price: US\$28,380 With premium (25%): US\$35,475 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 4 April 2016	The Eruption of Desire 2009 Mixed media on canvas 157cm x 168cm Hammer price: US\$17,279 With premium (10%): US\$19,006 Auction House: The Edge Galerie, Kuala Lumpur Date: 28 October 2012	A Board Game 2007 Mixed media on canvas 122cm x 183cm Hammer price: US\$13,318 With premium (10%): US\$14,649 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 3 November 2013
23	Khoo Sui Hoe (1939)	Around the Moon 1972, Oil on canvas 88cm (diameter) Hammer price: US\$26,953 With premium (10%): US\$29,648 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 3 November 2013	Three with Crescent Moon 1970, Oil on canvas 89cm x 75cm Hammer price: US\$14,827 With premium (12%): US\$16,606 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 13 April 2014	Two Divers II 2000, Oil on canvas 68cm x 114cm Hammer price: US\$13,580 With premium (12%): US\$15,209 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 29 March 2015
24	Kow Leong Kiang (1970)	Market Series 1998, Oil on canvas 83cm x 66cm Hammer price: US\$25,288 With premium (10%): US\$27,816 Auction House: The Edge Galerie, Kuala Lumpur Date: 29 June 2013	Daydream 2014, Oil on canvas 120cm x 200cm Hammer price: US\$21,930 With premium (25%): US\$27,412 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 25 May 2014	Malay Maiden 2005, Oil on canvas 120cm x 120cm Hammer price: US\$21,591 With premium (10%): US\$23,750 Auction House: The Edge Galerie, Kuala Lumpur Date: 22 March 2015

AUCTION BENCHMARKS OF ARTISTS IN MALAYSIA

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
25	Khalil Ibrahim (1934 – 2018)	Reclining Nude 1965, Oil on canvas, 100.5cm x 75.5cm Hammer price: US\$24,444 With premium (12%): US\$27,377 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 29 March 2015	Untitled 1987, Acrylic on canvas, 90cm x 120cm Hammer price: US\$23,865 With premium (12%): US\$26,728 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 12 November 2017	Fishermen 1992, Acrylic on canvas, 101cm x 123cm Hammer price: US\$21,560 With premium (10%): US\$23,716 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 6 May 2012
26	Chong Siew Ying (1969)	L'été 2006, Oil on canvas 150cm x 150cm Hammer price: US\$23,920 With premium (12%): US\$26,790 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 9 November 2014	Run Baby Run 2012 Mixed media on canvas 137cm x 259cm Hammer price: US\$20,078 With premium (12%): US\$22,487 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 13 April 2014	The Champion (Laugh 1) 2002, Acrylic on canvas 150cm x 150cm Hammer price: US\$20,074 With premium (10%): US\$22,060 Auction House: The Edge Galerie, Kuala Lumpur Date: 11 March 2018
27	Tew Nai Tong (1936 – 2013)	Golden Time 12 2004, Oil on canvas 183cm x 152cm Hammer price: US\$22,197 With premium (10%): US\$24,416 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 3 November 2013	Fruits Season 1995, Oil on canvas 122cm x 122cm Hammer price: US\$9,884 With premium (12%): US\$11,070 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 13 April 2014	Malacca River 1991, Oil on canvas 91cm x 122cm Hammer price: US\$7,606 With premium (22%): US\$53,580 Auction House: Larasati, Singapore Date: 24 August 2014
28	Abdullah Ariff (1904 – 1962)	The Hill Spring, 12th Milestone, Penang 1944 Watercolour on paper 36.5cm x 58.5cm Hammer price: US\$20,640 With premium (25%): US\$25,800 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 25 November 2012	Jungle Scene 1956 Watercolour on paper 38.5cm x 56cm Hammer price: US\$14,168 With premium (25%): US\$17,710 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 27 May 2012	Through Jungle Waterways, Malaya 1956 Watercolour on paper 39cm x 56cm Hammer price: US\$14,102 With premium (25%): US\$17,627 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 24 May 2008

* The artists are ranked according to their auction records in the first column. The second and third columns show their second and third most expensive artworks sold in auctions.

** NA: not available

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
29	Suzlee Ibrahim (1967)	Wall Series: Masterpiece II 2008/09 Acrylic and oil on canvas 152cm x 236.5cm Hammer price: US\$24,212 With premium (25%): US\$30,265 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 1 April 2018	Festival (Ombak Series) 2009 Mixed media on canvas 102cm x 158cm Hammer price: US\$13,318 With premium (10%): US\$14,649 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 3 November 2013	Ombak Merah 2009, Oil on canvas 102cm x 158cm Hammer price: US\$11,872 With premium (10%): US\$13,059 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 21 April 2013
30	Chong Ai Lei (1985)	True Romances II 2013, Oil on canvas 125cm x 168cm Hammer price: US\$7,740 With premium (25%): US\$9,675 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 24 November 2013	Love, Romance (True Romance Series) 2014, Oil on canvas 125cm x 168cm Hammer price: US\$5,676 With premium (25%): US\$7,095 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 25 May 2014	Indonesia 5 2009, Oil on canvas 97cm x 130cm Hammer price: US\$5,382 With premium (12%): US\$6,027 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 9 November 2014
31	Hamidi Hadi (1971)	Menakung Di Muka Bumi I 2016 Mixed media on canvas 140cm x 110cm Hammer price: US\$7,681 With premium (25%): US\$9,601 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 3 April 2017	Bloated I 2010 Mixed media on canvas 140.5cm x 135cm Hammer price: US\$6,177 With premium (25%): US\$7,721 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 3 April 2017	In the Eye of the Beholder No 3 2007, Industrial paint on unprimed canvas Hammer price: US\$1,670 With premium (12%): US\$1,870 Auction House: Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Kuala Lumpur Date: 12 November 2017
32	Raduan Man (1978)	True Love 2017, Oil on jute 152.5cm x 213.5cm Hammer price: US\$7,645 With premium (25%): US\$46,690 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 1 April 2018	1978 2010, Oil on canvas 203cm x 203cm Hammer price: US\$7,095 With premium (25%): US\$8,868 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 5 April 2015	Virgin River 2015, Oil on canvas 152.5cm x 152.5cm Hammer price: US\$7,089 With premium (25%): US\$8,861 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 3 October 2016

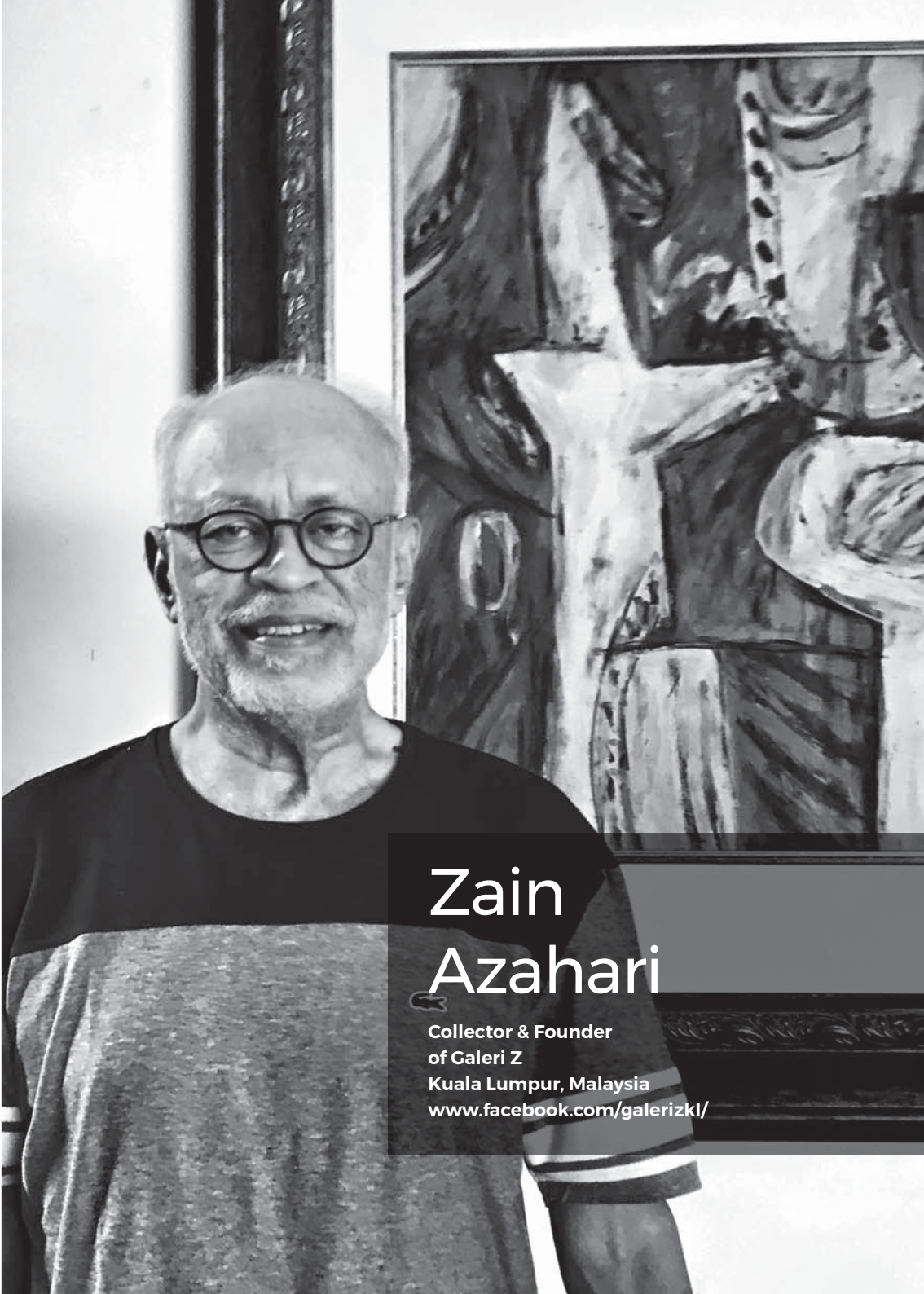
ART AUCTIONS IN MALAYSIA, 2010-2018

AUCTION HOUSE	YEAR	DATE	CITY	LOTS	TOTAL SALES IN RM	TOTAL SALES IN US\$	SOLD BY LOT (%)
The Edge Auction	2013	June 29	Kuala Lumpur	33	2,532,200	801,593	84.8
	2014	May 10	Kuala Lumpur	83	1,524,050	474,406	51.8
	2015	March 22	Kuala Lumpur	136	1,537,470	414,302	56.6
	2016	March 20	Kuala Lumpur	150	1,154,980	289,130	45
	2017	March 5	Kuala Lumpur	118	1,340,063	301,005	57.6
	2018	March 11	Kuala Lumpur	124	1,490,987	375,516	51.6
Henry Butcher Art Auctioneer	2010	Aug 8	Petaling Jaya	63	1,737,910	552,603	80.9
	2011	June 19	Kuala Lumpur	104	3,171,710	1,045,547	94.2
	2012	May 6	Kuala Lumpur	86	4,018,300	1,321,377	100
		Oct 28	Kuala Lumpur	92	3,746,540	1,233,023	97.8
	2013	April 21	Kuala Lumpur	102	3,451,140	1,137,288	99
		Nov 3	Kuala Lumpur	113	3,514,140	1,108,043	97.3
		Dec 5	Kuala Lumpur	40	572,500	177,434	92.5
	2014	April 13	Kuala Lumpur	116	3,007,626	929,206	97.4
		Aug 24	Singapore	-	-	-	-
		Sept 21	Kuala Lumpur	181	889,970	275,338	72.2
		Nov 9	Kuala Lumpur	125	2,978,717	890,219	92.8
	2015	March 29	Kuala Lumpur	88	2,256,957	612,808	90.9
		Oct 4	Kuala Lumpur	111	2,344,888	531,421	92.7
	2016	April 17	Kuala Lumpur	102	1,069,011	274,073	82.3
		Nov 6	Kuala Lumpur	131	1,409,958	334,794	77.8
	2017	April 23	Kuala Lumpur	144	1,412,145	321,008	77.1
		Nov 12	Kuala Lumpur	141	1,919,905	457,954	89.3
	2018	April 29	Kuala Lumpur	181	2,240,511	571,599	80.7

AUCTION HOUSE	YEAR	DATE	CITY	LOTS	TOTAL SALES IN RM	TOTAL SALES IN US\$	SOLD BY LOT (%)
KL Lifestyle	2012	Sept 30	Kuala Lumpur	118	2,704,250	883,548	87.3
		Dec 2	Kuala Lumpur	108	2,499,490	822,607	87.9
	2013	April 7	Kuala Lumpur	112	3,009,550	984,815	90.1
		July 7	Kuala Lumpur	109	1,431,440	449,014	88.9
		Sept 21	Kuala Lumpur	99	2,317,950	732,052	87.8
		Nov 10	Kuala Lumpur	76	1,868,960	588,095	94.7
	2014	Jan 19	Kuala Lumpur	97	1,475,690	447,694	93.8
		April 6	Kuala Lumpur	107	1,753,980	534,788	74.7
		June 21	Kuala Lumpur	77	1,515,195	470,165	93.5
		Aug 10	Kuala Lumpur	84	707,280	220,508	78.5
		Sept 28	Kuala Lumpur	95	2,382,148	726,263	83.1
		Nov 8	Kuala Lumpur	70	1,151,472	341,451	85.7
	2015	Jan 18	Kuala Lumpur	100	1,980,892	515,524	92
		March 22	Kuala Lumpur	95	1,583,028	424,649	82.1
		May 24	Kuala Lumpur	90	2,253,384	625,059	77.8
		June 14	Kuala Lumpur	32	352,679	93,671	81.3
		Sept 13	Kuala Lumpur	90	1,334,260	311,425	81.1
		Nov 8	Kuala Lumpur	60	678,816	155,747	81.7
	2016	Jan 31	Kuala Lumpur	85	1,428,106	300,950	78.8
		April 24	Kuala Lumpur	88	2,773,247	711,168	84.1
		June 26	Kuala Lumpur	82	1,166,684	288,966	69.5
		Sept 4	Kuala Lumpur	88	977,677	239,864	78.4
		Oct 23	Kuala Lumpur	90	1,525,721	365,379	72.2
		Nov 13	Kuala Lumpur	59	531,576	120,556	94.9
	2017	Jan 15	Kuala Lumpur	63	670,155	150,163	77.8
		March 12	Kuala Lumpur	68	755,898	177,192	77.9
		May 14	Kuala Lumpur	70	586,820	138,363	84.3
		July 30	Kuala Lumpur	69	1,246,357	301,555	72.4
		Oct 15	Kuala Lumpur	70	961,446	227,627	60
	2018	April 15	Kuala Lumpur	80	1,248,664	321,743	86.3
		July 8	Kuala Lumpur	88	1,165,298	288,516	75

ART AUCTIONS IN MALAYSIA, 2010-2018

AUCTION HOUSE	YEAR	DATE	CITY	LOTS	TOTAL SALES IN RM	TOTAL SALES IN US\$	SOLD BY LOT (%)
Masterpiece	2013	June 9	Kuala Lumpur	160	4,534,750	1,464,724	97.5
		Oct 13	Kuala Lumpur	160	3,610,750	1,135,580	96.2
	2014	March 2	Kuala Lumpur	195	3,077,800	939,067	83.6
		June 22	Kuala Lumpur	198	2,713,984	841,877	92.9
		Oct 12	Kuala Lumpur	225	3,142,272	965,054	88.4
	2015	March 8	Kuala Lumpur	210	2,996,672	815,424	85.5
		Aug 2	Kuala Lumpur	227	2,700,544	707,002	81.5
	2016	March 6	Kuala Lumpur	201	2,702,224	665,233	87.1
		July 24	Kuala Lumpur	237	2,089,024	512,145	84.8
		Oct 30	Kuala Lumpur	213	2,056,096	489,905	80.2
	2017	Jan 08	Kuala Lumpur	113	500,192	111,872	85.8
		Feb 26	Kuala Lumpur	203	1,869,280	421,111	82.2
		July 16	Kuala Lumpur	210	1,490,384	347,021	87.1
	2018	April 22	Kuala Lumpur	192	1,164,296	294,098	65.5
		July 15	Kuala Lumpur	170	1,074,864	265,244	64.1



Zain Azahari

Collector & Founder
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THE GENTLEMAN COLLECTOR

Zain Azahari Zainal Abidin founded the law firm, Zain & Co, in 1970. The firm's website states, "Zain Azahari was called to the Bar of England and Wales in 1958. There he had trained under Radhakrishna Ramani – an internationally-renowned lawyer who once served as president of the United Nations Security Council."

Zain & Co is the sole Malaysian member of Meritas – a professional services network consisting of a global alliance of business law.

Now at 83, Zain Azahari is still listed as a consultant at his firm. But his greatest passion is collecting art. And he is widely regarded as an important buyer at local auctions and galleries. He now boasts a grand collection of over 400 artworks that span nearly half a century.

Zain Azahari recently loaned six of his Pago Pago artworks to the prestigious Centre Pompidou exhibition in Paris. The exhibition (February 28 to May 28, 2018), held in collaboration with the National Gallery Singapore, features the works of Malaysian modern artist Latiff Mohidin.

The Edge: How did National Gallery Singapore (NGS) approach you about borrowing the artworks?

Zain Azahari: In 2016, I received a call from NGS director Dr Eugene Tan requesting a meeting. We met over tea at his hotel in KL. He told me that Centre Pompidou was bringing part of their collection from Paris to Singapore and he wanted to borrow three pieces for the show.

(The Reframing Modernism exhibition in Singapore in 2016 was NGS' first international collaboration with Centre Pompidou. Works by Southeast Asian artists were exhibited alongside collections by European masters such as Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse.)

Were you surprised by the request?

I was a little surprised. I only lend my paintings to national institu-

tions. If I start lending privately, there would be no end to it. I have rejected other requests from galleries. But Singaporeans are very professional and they had done their research.

After I agreed, they drew up the contract. Of course, Dr Tan explained that there would be heavy security to protect the artworks. Subsequently, one of his assistants contacted me and brought along their haulers and packers.

Latiff was very happy because his artworks were displayed next to a Picasso. Earlier this year (2017), they wanted to borrow an Ibrahim Hussein painting from me. This iconic piece is called *Farewell to New York*.

For the Paris show, NGS wanted to borrow six pieces, including a rare sculpture from the *Pago Pago* series.

This will be an exciting show.

Yes, Latiff doesn't [normally] fly. So it's a bit of a joke. He takes the bus even from Penang to KL. I don't know how he's going to get to Paris. Obviously, it's a feather in his cap to have his art exhibited there.

What do you think of Southeast Asian art?

I know Malaysian and Indonesian art but have little or no knowledge of art from Thailand, Myanmar and Vietnam. Malaysian art has developed since the 1960s. We had earlier works by Abdullah Ariff and Chinese artists from Penang such as water-colourist Yong Mun Sen and Khaw Sia.

Sixty years ago, the market was very small compared to what it is today. Collectors then included Datuk Dr Ronald McCoy (past president of the Malaysian Physicians for Social Responsibility and past co-president of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War who opened Galeri Z in 2015), [Datuk Seri]

Lim Chong Keat, [Datuk] PG Lim, my brother (the late Tan Sri Zain Azraai), Chen Voon Fee and Prof Ungku Aziz.

There is a greater number of collectors today. An auction can have about 200 attendees, but I don't know how many of them actually participate or just spend the afternoon there. The prices of artworks are almost laughable today. I bought a *Pago Pago* piece for RM150 to RM200 (about US\$38 to US\$50 in today's exchange rate) between 1965 and 1968. I bought another one for RM100 (about US\$25), which is now going to Paris for the show at Pompidou. I don't know how much it would fetch today (laughs).

There are only a few auction houses that I trust. A number of them, here and in Indonesia, push up prices or just want to get rid of their own collection. For example, the works of the young artist Raduan Man all sold out at their auction. I would take the prices at the auctions with a pinch of salt. I don't believe that the value of the works are anywhere near that kind of price.

We are getting almost as bad as Indonesia in terms of fakes as well. Somebody mentioned that the fakes are better than the original (laughs). In Indonesia, I would worry about buying major artworks of masters such as Affandi, Hendra Gunawan, Sudjana Kerton or Sudjojono in private sales or auctions.

What about auctions in Hong Kong?

I've never been to Hong Kong auctions, so I don't know. But I heard that, however careful Sotheby's or Christie's may be, a few problematic works may slip through. I'm not saying that all the works you see are not genuine. I bought two of Sudjana Kerton's works from a collector who had kept them for the last 40 years, but needed the money.

It's really difficult to assess what is a fair price for Malaysian or Indonesian art. You have to decide for yourself. If I want the artwork and make an assessment that it is a reasonable price, I would go for it.

At The Edge Auction 2017, I wanted Datuk Sharifah Fatimah's painting (see pg xxv). I told everyone I must *mati-mati* (obstinately) get it! (Laughs.) I paid about RM60,000 plus – a fair price for that quality and size. If the price had gone up to RM100,000, I wouldn't have pursued it. I might have paid RM90,000 because I wanted it desperately.

Which auction houses send you their catalogues?

In Indonesia, I receive catalogues from Masterpiece, Larasati, Borobudur and Sidharta. I get a lot from Malaysia and receive notifications on my phone almost every day from artists and galleries.

What was the first auction you attended?

The first auction I attended was in Borobudur, Indonesia, in the late 2000s. I remember buying an Arie Smit painting. I hope it's genuine because I was very raw then.

Subsequently, I bought a Popo Iskandar cockerel painting at another auction for a reasonable price. I think it's genuine. I attended other auctions in Singapore and got seriously interested in Chang Fee Ming paintings. I paid quite a high price for a Fee Ming piece.

How did you hear about Fee Ming's artwork?

I read up a bit and [art dealer] Richard Koh said the *Mandalay* series was the best of Fee Ming's work. I generally make my own decisions. I don't bother too much about investment. I wouldn't advise people to look too much at auction house results because when you are bidding, emotions are involved. Sometimes, it's an ego trip.

If you decide to buy an artwork by a deceased artist, you can find information from the market, from friends and make an assessment on what you think is fair.

You have an expression: ‘*Mati-mati* I must have’, which everyone quotes you with.

It depends on the works. There are only a few I can think of – Fee Ming and Sharifah Fatimah.

But then you wanted Ahmad Zakii’s *Equus* (see pg xxiv) from The Edge Auction in 2015.

Yes, I wanted that but I was sharp enough to bid first. Since I’m an elderly person, it would be awkward for the rival bidder being a young man to bid for it knowing that I wanted the painting. It’s Malay culture to respect your elders and I exploited that fact (laughs). Besides, I knew his father-in-law. He was a very good friend of mine for the last 50 years. He would have found it almost impossible to bid against me.

There were other works that I wanted, like Kow Leong Kiang’s* work. I went up to a point. I wanted the Patrick Ng’s* piece too but I was not prepared to go up. I heard it’s now hanging in (property developer) Datuk Kenny Tan’s new museum. After the price went up to RM35,000, I stopped bidding. I have three of Patrick Ng’s pieces and two of them are very beautiful.

So, for certain works, you don’t have a limit. It’s just how you feel.

Yes, I have a limit. Initially, when I first started going into the art market, I was clueless. Sometimes, emotions can get a hold of me. I remember paying too much for a Chia Yu Chian* painting. I wouldn’t say that I wanted it desperately either, but it was out of pure emotion. Otherwise, I’m quite rational.

You paid RM300,000 for Latiff’s artwork at an auction.

He (auction house owner) keeps sending me reminders and catalogues. *Debris* (see pg xxv) was a painting I wanted. It was the last painting by Latiff in the *Pago Pago* series and I was desperate to have it.

* Malaysian artist

What are your thoughts on Art Fairs like Art Stage in Singapore and Jakarta?

I think it's useful. It gives you an insight into the art market. There are so many visitors and people who have influence in art would be guided by the prices of the paintings on offer. You get to see new works and new artists too.

You buy from galleries, auctions and artists. Do you buy from art fairs?

No, but I also buy from owners who need money. Recently, I acquired a Buden* [Samsuddin Wahab] artwork. When he was in Rimbun Dahan (an art residency programme), he told me that he was sitting down to have dinner and saw these flying insects swarming around a light bulb. Their wings would fall off and they would crawl on the floor and die. He painted that to show that light can also be bad for you. I bought it from [late art dealer] Syed Nabil at NN Gallery.

You don't have any restrictions on collecting artworks. Do you collect figurative as well as abstract art?

I have no restrictions. I know Muslims are not supposed to collect figurative works, but I always pray and say: 'God, please forgive me. I can't resist these things!'

I appreciate art for art's sake. Absolutely. When people talk to me about investment, it means you must sell, right? Otherwise, you will not make money. But 10 years down the road, they may not be worth anything. Artworks that I don't want to keep go into storage.

* Malaysian artist

A black and white photograph of Pakhruddin Sulaiman, a man with long dark hair and glasses, wearing a white shirt with small dark polka dots. He is standing with his arms crossed in front of a bookshelf filled with books. Above the books are two cabinet doors with horizontal slats. To the left, a framed artwork is partially visible. A semi-transparent dark grey box containing text is overlaid on the lower left of the image.

Pakhruddin Sulaiman

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KEEN EYE ON MALAYSIAN ART

A lawyer by profession, Pakhruddin Sulaiman is one of the foremost art collectors in Malaysia with an equally impressive collection of art publications and archival material. He has been collecting Malaysian contemporary art since the 1990s together with his wife, Datuk Fatimah Sulaiman, who passed away in 2016 after an illness.

Armed with an almost encyclopedic knowledge of Malaysian art, Pakha, as he is popularly known, is an important source for lending contemporary art to institutions in Malaysia and Singapore. His collection of several hundreds of paintings, drawings, sketches, installations and sculptures is particularly significant for works from the early 1990s when he embarked on his collecting endeavours. He was at the right place at the right time to acquire pivotal works by the likes of Ahmad Fuad Osman, Ahmad Zakii Anwar, Jalaini Abu Hassan, Bayu Utomo Radikin and their contemporaries from the now defunct Matahati group. The late 1990s was also a period that gave rise to schisms that forever impacted the political landscape of the country. In 1998, when the Reformasi political movement burst forth, certain artists reacted quite spontaneously to what was going on.

Pakha and Fatimah, who was also a lawyer, were regular buyers at local galleries in those days when Malaysian artworks were just beginning to be noticed by local collectors, especially when the Singapore Art Museum started to intensify collecting art from the Southeast Asian region. Armed with a relatively small budget, the couple somehow managed to select and amass an enviable collection. Today, the artworks are stored in their private art space in the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. Named Ruang Pemula (or RuPé in short), it is accessible by prior appointment. The art space is a must-visit venue for any curator or collector who wish to gain an understanding of Malaysian contemporary art.

Here, Pakha, who is in his early sixties, talks about why he is not entirely happy about one of his acquisitions and offers advice for artists.

Copyright and moral right

At the time of this interview in July 2017, Pakha had just acquired an artwork by Malaysian artist Zulkifli Yusoff (Zul) from a local auction house. The triptych artwork comes with a third panel, which Pakha also subsequently acquired after the auction.

Pakhruddin Sulaiman: At the auction, only two pieces from the triptych were put up for sale – titled *Planters 1* and *Planters 2* respectively. I managed to successfully bid for the two pieces thinking at that time that they were indeed two separate works. After the auction, I learnt from a colleague who knew the owner of the artwork that it's a single work but comprising three panels which made it a triptych. I also learnt that the third piece was retained by the owner. I then proceeded to confront the auction house with this revelation and they promised to procure for me that third piece from the owner for the same hammer price. About three days later, I acquired the third piece which unwittingly helped to preserve the sanctity and integrity of Zulkifli Yusoff's triptych work as originally conceived by the artist.

Later I did a bit of research and found the image of the triptych in a Penang Art Gallery exhibition catalogue where its title is clearly stated as *The Planters*, 2008. Fortunately, I managed to get all the three panels that comprised *The Planters* as otherwise, I would have called off the sale on the grounds of misrepresentation.

To me, it's simply irresponsible and outrageous for the owner and the auction house to break up Zul's triptych work into three separate individual works and sell them as such. This is, to put it bluntly, a blatant disregard of the artist's original intention to treat it as a single work. More importantly, it needs to be highlighted here that it is indeed a clear violation of the doctrine of the sanctity of an artwork, which has been embedded in our Malaysian Copyright

Act, 2012, under what is called the moral right of the artist. This moral right is separate from another more widely known right, that is, copyright. I am afraid many artists do not know about these twin rights — copyright and moral right — that have been conferred upon them under the Act. Under this particular provision of the Act, the artist is entitled to the right that his works must be presented, displayed and sold in the original state it was conceived by him. In other words, it must not be altered by way of distortion, modification or mutilation, for example, which would adversely affect the integrity of the work.

This moral right of the artist has been upheld in the landmark case of Syed Ahmad Jamal versus Dato Bandar Kuala Lumpur (2011) where the late artist successfully sued the Dato Bandar of Kuala Lumpur for making an alteration to his *Lunar Peaks* public sculpture. In this case, that is, before it was sadly demolished, DBKL (Kuala Lumpur City Hall) had altered the ceramic glass [surface] to stainless steel without the consent of the artist¹.

Therefore, artists can threaten to take legal action against anyone for presenting their incomplete works for sale. In the case of Zul's *The Planters*, this is tantamount to alteration or modification of an artwork under the Act. I was lucky because a friend who knew about the work chose to share the knowledge with me and that I could easily verify it from the exhibition catalogue issued by Penang Art Gallery where the work was first exhibited. Otherwise, its fate would have been [the same as] Francis Bacon's triptych, which only many years later reappeared in its entirety at an auction and broke the record for the artist's work.

The reason why I acquired *The Planters* is because I had missed out on this particular series by Zul. This triptych may probably be among

¹ www.apaaonline.org/pdf/APAA_59th_council_meeting_Manila/CopyrightCommitteeReports2011/2-MALAYSIA-CopyrightCommitteeReport2011.pdf

the earliest works in which Zul had employed a new medium – resin and fibreglass. Zul had shown me a prototype of the fibreglass and resin very much earlier when I interviewed him at his studio for an essay I had to contribute to the 30 *Art Friends 2* book. At the time, the prototype was all white, so I couldn't imagine how it would turn out.

The Edge: What do you think about local auction houses resorting to 'without reserve' or 'no reserve' prices at their sales?

Auction houses have their own strategy. Most of the smaller, 'no reserve' works, especially the Chinese ink pieces, sold [in a recent auction in Kuala Lumpur] for between RM500 and RM2,000. They went like *pisang goreng* (fried banana), *panas* (hot)!

[Apparently, the operator of a certain auction house had told Pakha that the sale of the Chinese ink works helped to keep it going. He had said, "It might not be feasible to only sell Malaysian works. The market is soft now. A lot of people criticised me for introducing these Chinese works. But you saw the results today!"]

And for Pakha, his motivation for buying art at local auctions is to fill the gaps in his collection.

For me the primary purpose is to fill the gaps in my existing collection and to enhance it.

On the subject of artists who constantly change their style and subject matter due to pressure from their patrons or gallerists, Pakha is not amused.

Influential collectors and galleries will, of course, tend to keep asking artists to come up with something new. So, the artists are under tremendous pressure here. Those who succumbed to this, would have no or little time to pause and reflect on the works they keep churning out.

In this regard artists need to know their own pace in producing

works and their strength and capabilities. They should not therefore be dictated by the demands of the gallery and collectors. If you have three or more solos in a year, how can you develop and produce quality and refreshing works? The quality of those works would no doubt suffer and I think most discerning collectors can see that clearly.

What do you look for when you're buying works by young artists?

I look for new, refreshing and interesting works from young artists that are capable of 'grabbing my neck' so to speak. If they show promise in one solo show but there's no improvement in the next, then I'll pause for a while or even stop buying their works. They must evolve as an artist.

Collectors would normally look for the artist's consistency and discipline in producing quality works. They should not produce works just because they are highly demanded.

Artists must offer the public something new and interesting for their next show, especially in a solo show, and not repeat themselves or churn out mediocre works. Those who churn out artworks like a factory will face the wrath of collectors and thereby, weaken their collector base in the process.

Do you buy at exhibitions as well as at auctions?

Yes, mostly from exhibitions because most of the artists I collect are relatively young and still producing works. Some artists don't exhibit at galleries and so you have to buy directly from them or from auctions when their works become available.

At auctions, I can pick up bargains especially works by artists who may not be considered as the 'favourites' or 'darlings' of the auction scene. In this connection, I managed to pick up some good charcoal works by Wong Hoy Cheong at very good prices.

On the issue of ownership of works of deceased artists, Pakha offers his legal opinion.

For works from the estate of a deceased artist, one must first of all establish whether a legal administrator (without will) or a legal executor (with will) for the estate — who would normally be appointed from among the heirs — has been duly appointed, in order to legally sell or deal with the works inherited by the estate upon the death of the artist.

Hence, there is a danger here if one were to buy from any member of the family who is not a legal administrator or executor of the estate. Under the law, he cannot pass a good title of the artwork to any prospective buyer even if the buyer is a bona fide one, with value. In this regard, one must therefore deal only with the legal administrator or executor of any deceased artist's estate. In the absence of any administrator or executor, one may have to obtain the consent of all the heirs entitled to the estate, which may prove to be quite problematic especially when there are disputes among them. One who buys an artwork from a member of the deceased artist's family runs the risk of his ownership to the artwork being challenged by other members of the family entitled to the estate.

Pakha adds that declaring any sale — whether private or by public auction — of a work of disputed ownership null and void is “very easy” because the law is clear on that.

The mere possession of an artwork does not guarantee one to its legal ownership, says Pakha. If one does not have a good title to it, it would be akin to possession of a property one does not own and therefore, subject to a valid claim by its true or legal owner. In the case of an artwork belonging to an estate, the legal administrator or executor may institute legal proceedings to claim such work, he adds.

And when it comes to a family member of a deceased artist authenticating a work as commonly practised in Indonesia by paying a typical fee of US\$5,000 — that is no real guarantee of authenticity.

Even if the son or daughter of the deceased artist has authenticated the originality of the artworks, this may not by itself be clear proof of authenticity. It may not hold water in court because he or she is not the artist. It can, however, be persuasive but in the absence of other evidence or documents, it can still be challenged.

On the subject of certificates of authenticity, Pakha advises art buyers to be vigilant whether there is a certificate or not.

In the case of Zul's triptych work, although there is no certificate of authenticity, it was however documented in an exhibition catalogue but I was rather complacent by not checking up on it before bidding. Hence, the moral of the story is that one has to be on guard and extra careful when buying works in the secondary market.

A black and white photograph of artist Jalaini Abu Hassan. He is a middle-aged man with a beard and mustache, wearing a dark baseball cap, round glasses, and a dark t-shirt with a white logo. He is smiling and gesturing with his hands. He is sitting in a studio filled with art supplies, including paint cans, brushes, and a large painting of a horse's head in the background. A stack of books and papers is visible in the foreground.

Jalaini Abu Hassan

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ADAPTING TO CHANGES

Artist and educator Jalaini Abu Hassan or Jai, 54, discusses the state of the local art market following a slowdown and how artists are strategising to survive during difficult times.

Having established himself as an artist since the 1990s, Jai acknowledged that the media as well as the auction houses have helped advance the Malaysian art market today. According to Jai, not only are art collectors more knowledgeable, but art professionals such as independent transporters are also well versed in the market. Insuring works of art is also a standard practice for art galleries.

“People are well informed about art now. Before auction houses, art had no secondary market value. Auction houses can drive the art market, but they can also trigger disasters,” says Jai.

In his opinion, the “disaster” triggered by auction houses refers to an art collection built entirely from secondary market purchases. This means that most auction enthusiasts have already viewed the works sold at auctions. In this respect, transparency could be the collector’s main focus, which is a positive approach to acquiring artworks. However, sometimes works of questionable provenance still get sold. And if the same collector keeps buying such works then a disastrous collection could arise.

Jai also observes that some art collectors have taken the role of “dealers”, that is letting go of artworks to other private or corporate collectors.

“This is an interesting phenomenon of collectors becoming art dealers. Like a prominent art collector who has been selling my work to a property developer. I know it’s not to make money because it’s not part of his business. But I’m not sure of his reason for selling,” says Jai.

Jai also follows auctions and tracks their results. “I used to attend auctions regularly. But recently I stopped going. It’s awkward to be the only artist there and see your own work being auctioned. I liked to go to obtain data and meet people. I used my experience as lessons for my students.”

The art business

A layperson may be curious to know why certain artworks are worth as much as diamonds or even a piece of property. When asked about how artists put a price on their artworks, Jai said that the market sentiment is a contributing factor. In an ideal world, artwork appreciation is expected to increase each year. According to Jai, “Ideally, it should appreciate 10% every year. But I don’t follow that rule. It depends on the economy and the sentiment of the market. I used to sell my work for RM50,000. Now I reduce the size and look for different clientele. People can’t afford to spend RM50,000 or RM60,000. It’s tough.”

For an established artist like Jai, decreasing his price point means producing smaller works. He explains: “I’ve created works below RM50,000. My small watercolour paintings are priced less than RM10,000. It’s a matter of surviving as an artist. When the market is stagnant, you become more flexible. I am more productive now than before perhaps because the economy is not good. I’ll be in the studio producing every day – in watercolour, charcoal, bitumen, on paper. Despite the economic downturn, artists find a way to adapt.”

For emerging artists, their price level starts low. “I’m always being asked about how young artists price their works,” Jai points out. “I have my own method based on my experience. A fresh graduate can sell below RM1,000, which covers the cost of their materials. In a group show, you can go below RM5,000. (Local contemporary

artist) Fadilah Karim started like that. With a solo show, you can set the price below RM10,000.

When discussing the Malaysian art market, it is natural to recognise certain art dealers and galleries which have been actively promoting contemporary art.

On how the art market has changed since being represented by the Valentine Willie Fine Art (now defunct) and Taksu galleries, Jai says, “I started with Taksu in the mid-1990s and worked with Valentine in the 2000s. Valentine capitalised on my dispute with Taksu. When Taksu increased their commission to 50%, I decided to leave. When I left, so did (fellow artists) Ahmad Zakii and Ivan Lam. The artists are all getting younger and younger. Now, of course, a 50% commission is commonplace.”

Based on this experience, Jai has become aware of the importance of negotiating with galleries that show and sell his work. The Edge Galerie collaborated with Jai and presented his 27th solo exhibition entitled *Siang & Malam – The Landscape in Mind* in 2016. As an established artist, Jai is familiar with the costs involved in organising an exhibition. He organised his own solo exhibition entitled *Dato Rock* at Art Printing Works, Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur, in 2014.

We posed further questions pertaining to the art market.

The Edge: Do you consider yourself a savvy negotiator when dealing with galleries?

Jalaini Abu Hassan: I’m not savvy but I’m very particular because galleries have this idea that they are helping you. They forget that you are helping them as well. It works both ways.

I always tell young artists to read the agreement terms. What does their commission cover? Sometimes, the artist ends up having to pay the transport fees. It has to be a win-win situation. I learned

my lesson from a certain gallery. I had a show where I sold about six or seven works. When the bill came, I had to pay for the microphone (sound system usage) and food. I ended up with only RM75 from the sale. That's why I called it the RM75 show. I'll never forget that.

Art education

What are your thoughts on tertiary education in fine arts at Universiti Teknologi MARA or UiTM where you teach? Can a degree help fine art graduates become better artists upon graduation?

When you graduate, it doesn't mean that you are a great artist. The degree is like a certificate; it's just basic knowledge.

The UiTM Fine Art degree course in Shah Alam requires three years of study while the UiTM Masters in Fine Art and Technology programme at Jalan Othman, Petaling Jaya, takes one and a half years.

We offer sculpture, painting and printmaking programmes. I have 20 students just for painting alone. Ramlan Abdullah (artist and art lecturer) has another 20 for his sculpture course and we have another 20 in the printmaking course. On average, about five students proceed to the master's programme.

What can art graduates do to pursue full-time employment upon completing their courses?

Art is not like architecture where you graduate to become a better architect. Commerce and profession are not linked. Sometimes the A students cannot even sell their work after graduation.

Most of them proceed with an art education, others get involved in art management and work in a museum. If you register for a master's programme, it means that you are really focused. I have students who just want a degree. They don't care if they become an artist or not. Within a year, they are out. There's no passion for or commitment to art.

What about other institutions such as Universiti Selangor or Unisel?

The other institutions don't even call their programmes "fine art" although MIA (Malaysian Institute of Art) offers a diploma programme. Unisel offers video art while Dasein Academy of Art has a generic visual art programme so parents are more willing to enrol their kids there. They don't want their kids to become artists because there is no future.

As an art educator, Jai also shares with his students his experience in management in art and commerce.

Do you inform your students about what to expect when dealing with galleries?

Yes, the basic thing is not to be calculative but to know your rights. Sometimes no one wants to pay for the lorry transport. The artist thinks the gallery will pay and vice versa. It's a mess. Gallery owners now know to pay the lorry fees if they want to display my works. But they don't do that for young artists. So these artists end up getting together to hire a lorry. It should be the gallery's responsibility.

From The Edge Galerie's perspective, artists and even consignors are responsible for delivering the artworks to the gallery for insurance purposes. The gallery's insurance policy covers artworks that are on the premises and when they leave the gallery. So when the exhibition is over, the gallery is responsible for returning the artworks to the artist. Upon hearing our reasoning, Jai says, "The lorry driver should have insurance coverage."

Tell us about your PhD course.

I am at the last stage of completing my PhD course at UiTM. My adviser is from Wollongong, New South Wales, Australia, because we don't have a practice-based PhD in Malaysia. I have already presented my paper in Wollongong. Not many people know that you are not given a topic for your PhD. The topic is about you and

your work. Most universities cannot accept that because it is not substantial enough. But art is self-indulgent. You look at your work and criticise it. Your research is about your own art-making. I had a hard time at UiTM because they didn't consider that a scholarly achievement.

At the recent fine art degree show at UiTM, many people were buying the artworks. Who were they?

They are not collectors but they appreciate art. They want to buy original artwork rather than have posters in their house. But they don't want to spend. This is the best way to look for original artworks. These students may become big one day. We have CEOs, Astro staff and young architects who buy the works for restaurant projects.

Art establishment

Having stepped down from his role as director of Segaris Art Center in 2016, Jai talks about the challenges of the role of a commercial art gallery of UiTM Holdings and how political interests can hamper the growth of an establishment.

That's why I pulled out from Segaris. My concept of Segaris, which I established, is to capitalise on the alumni members. They include influential people in the art world such as Datuk Sharifah Fatimah, Datuk Tajuddin Ismail and Awang Damit. It was a clear vision.

Now, we have to help young artists. But when you start helping the young, you will bring down the gallery's original mission. There's nothing wrong with helping the young but other galleries like Chandan, G13, Taksu and HOM are doing that. So, UiTM Holdings doesn't have a clear focus. They want to help young artists, students and promote the established alumni at the same time. I told them my mission is done, so I'm backing away.

As far as Segaris is concerned, it is under the UiTM Holdings' policy/view/plan/business and is not linked or associated with UiTM as an academic institution (university). Segaris is governed by UiTM Holdings, a separate commercial (not academic) arm of the university (UiTM). To generalise the purpose/policy/plan/view of Segaris/UiTM Holdings as belonging to UiTM (university) is totally misleading.

Some established artists don't want to sell through Segaris anymore. You need to either focus on the cream of the crop or establish another gallery to help young artists. Now Nizam Rahmat is running Segaris and I'm just an advisor.

Does the mission statement still state that it promotes the alumni?

That was the original statement. I told them you cannot only show Malay artists' works. People see UiTM as university Umno (United Malays National Organisation, political party) and know it has a Malay agenda. I brought in (local artists) Chong Siew Ying and Kow Leong Kiang. Half of the collectors are Chinese and Indian so you have to open it up to other races.

In Galeri Petronas, nobody will ask you how much you will make. When I was a director at Segaris, I had to think about how much Segaris was making. I don't want to do that. Even if I have a solo there, I have to worry about who's buying my work. I shouldn't be doing that; I'm not a businessman.

But that's the political reality because it's UiTM's funds. So you have to have the Malay agenda whether you like it or not.

Exactly. But you don't have to mention it or they will politicise it. That's why I said as a gallery, you cannot work under an institution like that. There's a conflict.

Jai held a three-man show with Ahmad Zakii Anwar and Indonesian artist Jumaldi Alfi at a new space called Cult Gallery in Bukit Tunku from May 13 to June 12, 2017.

We know that there is another market out there. These are people who don't go to art galleries and can't get access to the artworks. We sold works on paper for below RM20,000. Zakii used to sell for RM70,000 to RM80,000 and I sold for RM40,000 to RM50,000. But times have changed. That doesn't mean that we cannot produce. We have to change our strategy.

Who were the buyers at Cult?

There was a bunch of new buyers so pricing the works below RM20,000 was a good price for them. We were sceptical about Alfi because nobody knew him here. His price was quite high, RM15,000 for a small piece. Zakii sold for RM18,000 per piece while my artworks went for RM13,000 to RM15,000.

After a week, everything was sold. Suryani (Senja, wife of Ahmad Zakii) has a showroom upstairs and her (Senijari) jewellery were all sold. Zakii and I told her she should pay us commission because she was taking our clients. Or she should close her shop when we have a gallery opening. But she's running the show.

Alfi was surprised to see that his work had received such good response here. And now, he's thinking about a second show. For Indonesians now, KL is the place to be. It wasn't like that five years ago.

Although people are buying, they are spending less. I noticed that important collectors are going for young artists now. Why would you spend money on one of Zakii's work when you could buy three young artists' works?

We have noticed a recurring trend on the gallery scene in Kuala

Lumpur recently whereby Indonesian artists are showcasing their works again. The last time Indonesian artists exhibited here was in the early 2000s at Valentine Willie Fine Art.

Agus Suwage probably learned about Jumaldi Alfi's good response (sold out) at the Cult show. He planned to display his works at (new gallery owner) Joshua Lim's gallery (A+ Works of Art). So, the Indonesians seem to be 'lowering' their standards by coming to KL where previously they would go to Singapore.

The whole Indonesian (contemporary art) market has collapsed. Alfi told us that even Jakarta Biennale was tough. The young artists were devastated. Because the market is up now, they are reviving their spirit.

Do you think that the Malaysian art scene is very small and the number of collectors is also limited?

Yes, small and limited. We see a few young lawyers who are familiar with our works. They feel intimidated by big collectors, but they don't want to compete with the big names. They are curious about the work and want to know more. So, that night at Cult, we had a different crowd of people, which is a good thing.

Art fairs

What are your thoughts on ArtJog 2017?

Artists run art fairs now like ArtJog. They have a community programme where senior artists set up a fund to support the young artists. That's the good thing about Indonesia. The artists support each other unlike in Malaysia. We don't have that spirit. Alfi is taking care of a programme called *Membantu Komuniti Seni Kampung* (Helping the Art Village Community).

I have been invited by the organisers and management to participate in ArtJog 2018.

Jai exhibited his *Picisan Sejarah* or *Fragmented History* series at Art Jog 2018 comprising a set of 100 postcard-size ink drawings and watercolour with bitumen, which was acquired by the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia, for US\$18,000. The postcard-size images were of historical figures and scenes from the colonial era and Japanese occupation of Malaya. Other works in the series include a set of 48 similar drawings and a 91cm by 122cm (3 ft by 4 ft) drawing of school children.

What do you think of art fairs and have you participated in any?

The exhibition *Being Human — Figuratism of Sixteen Malaysian Painters* at Art Stage Singapore in 2015 was Bayu Utomo Radjikin's project. I was supporting HOM for the F Klub. I was never Biennale material, although I wish I had the opportunity to exhibit there. A residency is also beyond my reach. That's why I was labelled *jaguh kampung* (village champion) by one of my former collectors. But I'm looking forward to visiting Art Basel Hong Kong. I never miss the Singapore Biennale. But to participate is a different game. You have to be under a gallery to participate.

Do all these claims about young artists participating in international fairs get to you?

No, not at all because I'm a teacher; I don't compete. Zakii got a residency in Cuba, I wanted to do that but I cannot just leave my job for three months so I have to compromise. I have come to terms with that already. Although, I would love to visit the country. That would be a treat!



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LASTING IMPACT

Periodically featured in society magazines dressed in designer outfits, art gallerist Lim Wei-Ling cuts a glamorous figure on the Malaysian art scene.

She graduated from the School of Visual Arts, Charles Sturt University, in New South Wales, Australia, in 1990 with a BA in Jewellery and Silversmithing. She worked as a stockbroker before setting up Townhouse Gallery in 2002 in Kuala Lumpur, together with her husband, Yohan Rajan, a lawyer. Later, the art space was renamed Wei-Ling Gallery and offers modern and contemporary art.

In 2011, Lim's second gallery in Kuala Lumpur, Wei-Ling Contemporary, opened at The Gardens Mall. Her third art space opened in 2013 in Penang but closed in 2016.

According to the Wei-Ling Gallery website, the objective of the gallery is to promote and cultivate the best of contemporary art in Malaysia, working with a core stable of artists who are dedicated to their artistic journey and vision. Today, they represent some of the country's remarkable contemporary artists.

Wei-Ling Gallery is one of a handful of Malaysian galleries that participate in overseas art fairs and has built quite a reputation for itself.

Lim shares her views on participating in art fairs, especially Art Stage Jakarta in 2017.

Lim Wei-Ling: Art Stage Jakarta has a boutique feel as there are fewer galleries taking part. This is our second time participating. The fair has been a lot better for us because of the strategic groupings of the galleries. They put certain galleries in a different hall. Traffic has been really good. There have been some sales so we are very happy. The difference between Art Stage Jakarta and Art Stage Singapore is that this is more intimate. The programmes put together for the exhibitors have been wonderful. We also had the opportunity to

visit private collections, which is not something that we normally have access to. That was a wonderful experience.

The Edge: When was the first time you participated in an art fair?

We were the first gallery and the only one from Malaysia to take part in the China International Gallery Exposition 2008 in Beijing. We showed a selection of works by Malaysian artists such as Amin Gulgee, Anurendra Jegadeva, Chin Kong Yee, Choy Chun Wei, Chong Choon Woon, Ivan Lam, Juhari Said, Yau Bee Ling, Yusof Ghani and Zulkifli Yusoff. We can lay claim to the fact that we were the first gallery to start doing international art fairs.

We have done Art Basel Hong Kong a few times, Art Taipei, BolognaFiere SH Contemporary in Shanghai, Korea International Art Fair, Art Kaohsiung in Taiwan, Volta NY in New York, Art Stage Singapore and Art Stage Jakarta.

What are the challenges of exhibiting in art fairs?

Obviously, one of the key factors is not really knowing what the market is going to be like. When we participate in fairs, it's more about showing the best of what we have got – artists' works or a tightly curated exhibition. We have done projects which are not necessarily commercial, but they give us a platform to showcase our artists to our best advantage. We do projects specifically for fairs that have led us to curators from various galleries, museum directors and so on.

One of the challenges is managing logistics leading up to the fair. We are thankful that we have done quite a number of fairs now. We are getting good at coordinating, framing and packing, insuring the artworks, clearing customs and managing paperwork. But we feel that it's worth it. Our objective was to take Malaysian art to an international arena where we felt that we didn't have enough representation.

Apart from art fairs, we have also done a lot of collaborations with other galleries in Singapore, India, Pakistan and various other countries.

What is in store for Wei-Ling Gallery in terms of collaboration with different galleries?

We have done America so we would like to try Europe next. Whether it's a commercial art fair or collaborating with a gallery in Europe or London. We are more compelled to take on projects which will give a more lasting impact. It would not be so commercial, but it would present the gallery in a serious light in promoting artists through projects.

A black and white photograph of a man with short, dark hair and glasses, smiling at the camera. He is wearing a dark, short-sleeved button-down shirt. His arms are crossed. Behind him is a large, abstract painting with visible brushstrokes and a figure in the upper right corner. The lighting is soft, casting a shadow on the wall to his left.

Kenny Teng

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MARKET POSITIONING AT ART FAIRS

Entrepreneur Kenny Teng, 44, has been in the art business since 2005 when he set up the Art Village gallery in Kelana Jaya, Selangor, but has branched out into more serious undertakings with the establishment of G13 Gallery in 2010.

His original gallery offered an “affordable range” of decorative artworks mainly from Indonesia. But this aspect of the business has been “scaled down”, according to Teng.

G13 Gallery was set up to focus on more serious art, particularly Malaysian art. This gallery occupies three ground floor shoplots that span 372 sq m within the same building as Art Village.

And in order to compete with other established galleries to gain the attention of up-and-coming as well as established artists, Teng adopted the strategy of showing works of collaborative artists to a wider audience at art fairs, especially overseas.

The gallery, which also deals in other Southeast Asian contemporary art, has been participating in regional and international art fairs since 2014. They include Art Expo Malaysia, Art Taipei, Art Kaohsiung and Art Formosa Taipei in Taiwan, Bazaar Art Jakarta, Art Stage Singapore and Art Busan Korea.

Teng talks about the Southeast Asian art market, his experience at art fairs and how he fosters young talents.

The Edge: Is there a common Southeast Asian art market?

Kenny Teng: The Southeast Asian market is fragmented with a lot of national markets. While the collector base for Malaysian art is growing, its focus remains local.

Collectors are very selective. Indonesian collectors are more interested in their own artists' artworks, although some may buy from

Thailand and Malaysia. They look for unique artworks that are not expensive, usually priced below US\$5,000. They may also not be interested in the artists' background.

The best sales strategy is to collaborate with local artists. If you are bringing any Southeast Asian artist to Jakarta, work with one or two Indonesian artists to pull in the crowd. Even though most of the Indonesian collectors are only interested in their own artists, there is no harm in showing them artworks from other countries. There is a certain tier of collectors who don't mind paying more for pieces by Japanese artists such as Yayoi Kusama. But they will not pay more for artists they are unfamiliar with.

The same thing applies to other countries like Taiwan and Korea. However, Singaporeans, as Art Stage has proved, share the same tastes and perceptions as Malaysians. They feel they know Malaysian art and understand our local culture. They are also keen on artworks from other countries as they have a limited art scene.

International art fairs

Why did you decide to participate in international art fairs?

After running the gallery for more than eight years, I have noticed that the market here is quite stagnant. In terms of collectors, you're talking to the same group of people over and over again. We need to venture outside the country and give our artists international exposure. In this way, we get to know the international art scene, how our local artworks fare and of course, to create new markets for our artists.

Have art fairs helped with the positioning of G13 Gallery?

Yes, although art fairs are not actually easy avenues to sell or promote artists or artworks. It takes time to generate interest. When you enter a new market for the first time, you can't expect to get

good sales. You need to be there every year. It requires a lot of investment in time and money.

Of course, the main objective is to push our artworks to new collectors. We also want to promote our gallery. Only a handful of Southeast Asian art galleries actively engage in art fairs outside their home countries. In fact, we are considered latecomers in this business. Indonesian and Philippine galleries began venturing abroad 15 years ago. So they have already done their groundwork.

At international art fairs, how many of your buyers are actually foreigners and have you established a collector base of non-Malaysians?

When we go overseas, our priority is to sell the artworks to foreign collectors. We accept reservations in Malaysia but we don't take any orders or confirmation until we return.

Do you think the demand for Southeast Asian art is on the rise, in decline or has plateaued as far as art fairs are concerned?

We need to work to create demand. Malaysian artists have not been [widely] exposed yet. We have only just started. We are in the promotion stage, so the demand is not that high. But the upside is that collectors are now interested in Southeast Asian art. For them, it's something new.

You mentioned that when you participate in art fairs abroad, you work with the local artists there. Is there a two-way programme for them to show their artworks here as well?

Yes, besides promoting Malaysian artists, we also position ourselves as a regional gallery. At least 20% of our programme targets Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines. We also bring in artists from other countries for variety. We have an opportunity to collaborate and exhibit in Taiwan, for example. The Taiwanese Min-

istry of Culture provides a special grant to promote collaboration in Southeast Asia. This region represents untapped potential for Taiwan.

What do you think of the Art Stage platform?

It's a good platform to get contacts. It's relevant to have a presence there. But we are also concerned that the Southeast Asian art scene has slowed down and the quality of art shows has declined.

In terms of approaching or selecting your artists, is there a criterion for the gallery to select certain artists?

We plan to work long term with the artists because we don't have one-off projects. We look for artists who are really serious and have the right attitude to collaborate. Of course, the artworks need to be unique and original.

As a gallery owner, do you participate in auctions by consigning artworks to promote certain artists?

I'm not really into auctions, although auctions fetch higher prices than private sales.

What type of Malaysian artworks are collectors buying?

Contemporary art by young and mid-career artists whom I represent or from Richard Koh Fine Art gallery. Pieces that are priced below S\$10,000 sell well. We sold Nik Hazri's artworks in Singapore and Khairuddin Zainudin's pieces to a local collector. He is one of the artists we represent. However, the price was among the lowest in the entire fair. We were selling as low as S\$4,000 to S\$6,000. The price matters in any market. The buyers were also looking for unique and affordable artworks. In one year, we participate in about four art fairs.

Young talents

Do you go to art schools and determine which artists have potential or go to their shows?

We usually let these artists enter the market for one or two years and see if they can sustain their work and if their ideas have developed. But we did notice one or two artists who were very good even when they hadn't graduated yet like Yuki Tham and Nik Hazri.

We don't aggressively try to get them into our gallery when they graduate. We have a platform called Project Room, which is about 250 sq ft (about 23 sq m), for artists to showcase their new creations – sculptures or paintings. They can be mid-career or established artists who want to exhibit a new body of work. The idea is to promote a new series but on a smaller scale.

Has anyone showcased their works at the Project Room yet?

Yes, we have showcased Raimi Sani (2016); *Kembara Mergasatua* by Azizul Nasir (2017); *Boxes of Life* by Thai artist Trirat Sriburin (2017); *Construction of Creativity* by Hidayat Arshad (2017); and *Transformation* by Hug Yin Wan (2017).

What is the duration for this kind of exhibition?

It lasts two weeks. We provide an e-catalogue as well. The price range is below RM10,000 as we are dealing with young artists. Last year [May 25 to June 8, 2017], we did a show for Thai artist Trirat Sriburin.

Southeast Asian art

What other aspects of Southeast Asian art have you observed lately? Is there demand for contemporary works in other media such as installation, video and so on?

A group of art enthusiasts is collecting in different media. But Southeast Asian artworks lag 10 years behind. Most of our artists

are still drawing and painting in charcoal, oil and so on. We do encourage the artists to explore different media, but creating art is still very personal. When we give too many suggestions, it may appear like commissioned work. So, I try not to get involved in that area.

Secondary market

As a gallery, do you track auction prices of Malaysian artists?

Yes, we also keep records on the price range for certain artists. Sometimes, we become a reference point for collectors who don't have access to all this data. The easiest and more documented data come from auctions.

We keep results from auction houses such as KL Lifestyle, Masterpiece, The Edge Auction and Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers. Not many Malaysian artists are involved in Christie's and Sotheby's.

Promoters can project artists as top-level or highly in demand at auctions, but the local market decides whether their works can be sold. Getting an artist's work of art on an international auction block establishes his credentials and enhances sales.

For example, Gan Chin Lee was featured at Christie's. You need to create a perception that this artist has been recognised worldwide. But the question is, how long can they sustain the interest? The artwork has to be seen at every single auction or have a good track record.

What do you think of art fairs, in Singapore for instance, when they bring in foreign works? Do you think they are competing with other galleries that promote Southeast Asian works?

I don't feel it's competition. Art is very subjective. By bringing overseas artists into this region, the collectors have more choices to choose from. It's good for the art ecosystem. It opens up the market and adds more variety. Otherwise, the art fair will be saturated.

Do you think the art fair module will continue to grow?

Yes, I think so. It's the current, relevant method of promoting art. Galleries, which participate in art fairs, make quite a big percentage of their total sales from art fairs. We put in a lot of work for this gallery, curate shows and so on.

Dark side of auction

What do you think of unremarkable artworks that seem to fetch remarkable prices at auctions?

The sales results of some auctions are always good with 80% to 90% sold. But these could be inflated figures. It's all about their people making sure that their track records look interesting. It's good for future consignments and to secure paintings. At The Edge Auction, however, if the artworks can't sell, it means they can't sell. There is no manipulation behind the scenes; it's a genuine scenario.

Certain auctions include works by young artists. These artists are just starting out and haven't even held solo exhibitions. What's your take?

That's a bit risky for young artists because as a gallery, we are still selling and promoting at the current price. The price is [usually] cheaper when the artwork is put up at an auction. This affects our sales and record prices. The artists are probably desperate for money, so the gallery will buy at a higher volume at a very low price. If it's not handled well, the price does not move or the artwork remains unsold, it becomes a permanent reference point for collectors. And they will lose confidence in the artist. We should promote established artists; that's the whole idea of auctions.

Most of the people attending the local art fair are familiar faces. Why are there hardly any new buyers?

Expatriates are the new faces. They may not be buyers or genuine

collectors, but they like art. There are almost no collectors from Indonesia and Singapore. It's still a very localised art scene. But we need to have a presence there to capture more collectors who may not come to our gallery. Art fairs are huge exhibitions displaying thousands of artworks. You must have strong art pieces to compete with other galleries and attract visitors to your booth.

It's a slow process. Perhaps, I may get 10 or 20 collectors who are already regulars at other galleries.

Gallery openings

Is there an increase in the number of visitors attending art openings these days?

Since we started, the crowd has been different. Sometimes, the artists we represent are popular and have a lot of fans and friends. The number of people who come to our openings is increasing. They consist of collectors, art lovers, students, artists and their friends, whereas the focused group of buyers is not growing that much. But more people are now interested in art. And of course, we serve good food which draws the crowd (laughs).

Other projects

Our Bali residency programme brings artists away from their usual environment into new areas to produce something fresh. Artists such as Najib Bamadhaj, Hisyamuddin Abdullah, Yuki Tham, Faizal Suhif and F Klub members have benefited from the programme. The residency programme was initiated out of our passion to nurture young artists and give them a chance. This is done at our own expense.

Are the artists showing at G13 signed with you or are the shows just a loose collaboration?

There are artists who have signed with us. The programme is for

two years and after that, we will review it. We also maintain a close working relationship with other artists who haven't signed with us. We are among the few galleries that participate in art fairs overseas, so the artists can take advantage of this promotion.

MANAGING AN ARTIST'S LEGACY

Christopher H. Tung



This chapter contains excerpts from Christopher H. Tung's thesis for an Executive Master in Art Market Studies programme at the University of Zurich entitled *Artist Estate Management in Malaysia: A Recommendation for Jin Leng Yeoh and Family*, dated 8 June 2017.

Born in Stockholm, Sweden, and currently residing in Zurich, Switzerland, Tung, 46, is the son-in-law of Malaysian senior artist Yeoh Jin Leng. He has a BA in Asian Studies from Dartmouth College and an MA in Art Market Studies from the University of Zurich. Tung is currently researching artist estate management in Southeast Asia.

Due to the limited scope of this publication, only relevant parts of the thesis are reproduced. Certain paragraphs have been edited for clarity and conciseness.

INTRODUCTION

Artists are in constant dialogue with their surroundings. Their works highlight perceptions, big or small, of the world we inhabit. These perceptions enrich our individual lives and our societies as a whole. Their explorations often look to the past and the future, and their achievements are often part of an evolution of thought. Evolution is only possible if the wisdom of a past generation is made available to the present.

Helping an artist preserve his legacy for posterity is an often practical and profane exercise that nevertheless is crucial for the advancement of the arts and our societies as a whole. Helping Jin Leng Yeoh¹ keep his legacy alive does seem important. Yeoh is one of Malaysia's pioneer artists². He has spent a lifetime not only creating works, but also working to make art an important part of Malaysian society.

The ambition of this paper is to provide a guide for Yeoh and his family, for simple and ambitious steps they can take to make his achievements known to future generations. In order to understand how this can be done, it is important to first understand the context in which the work would be carried out.

Part I of this paper provides an overview of the current Malaysian art world by looking at: The rise of domestic auction houses and the arrival of a bustling marketplace for art; the roles played by the two most important public institutions in the region, the National Visual Arts Gallery in Kuala Lumpur (NVAG) and the National Gallery Singapore (NGS); two private initiatives to manage artist estates, the Huang Yao Foundation and Fergana Art; and by recounting the difficulties faced by the Ibrahim Hussein estate.

¹ Chinese names will be written with the family name last in this paper.

² A term used to describe the small group of artists active at the time of Malaysian independence.

Part II makes the case for Yeoh's importance to Malaysian art history and discusses his place in the market, in two brief chapters.

Part III summarises Loretta Würtenberger's theories on artist estate planning and management, so as to provide an overview of how the various aspects of legacy management relate.

Part IV lets Yeoh express his thoughts and ideas on how to manage his legacy.

Part V is the author's recommendation to Yeoh and his family on what they can do to realise Yeoh's wishes for preserving his legacy.

Defined Terms

For the sake of simplicity and clarity, this paper will refer to Yeoh, his family (wife and five children), and the property of Yeoh as the 'estate'. This is different from the often-used legal sense of the term 'estate', which refers to the property of a deceased person. The term 'estate management' will be used interchangeably with 'legacy management' in a general sense or specifically to mean all efforts undertaken by Yeoh, his family and affiliates to define, safeguard and promote Yeoh's legacy.

PART I - THE MALAYSIAN ART WORLD

The Marketplace and the Arrival of Domestic Auction Houses

In the past 20 years, the Malaysian art market has rapidly evolved from a quiet place with a handful of collectors and a few institutions buying art, to a bustling marketplace with a new generation of collectors bidding up prices at auctions and speculating on the works of artists both young and old. The arrival of domestic auction houses has opened up a previously closed world inhabited mostly by artists, to speculators, entrepreneurs and a curious general public. In the wake of booming sales at auction, Malaysia has in a very short period of time seen the arrival of art dealers, art galleries, private museums, for-profit artist estate management, an art fair, a biennale, gallery weekends, and a generation of young artists that can support themselves entirely through the sale of their art.

The story of the Malaysian art market is predominantly the story of its auction houses. The situation in Malaysia is similar to that seen in China, where “the art market is still dominated and driven by auction houses”³. Like in China, Malaysia’s auction houses are home to both the primary and secondary markets. Other businesses have only recently come on stream, and have just started to carve a niche for themselves.

This chapter will chronicle the rise of domestic auction houses in Malaysia.

Methodology

To better understand the evolution of the Malaysian auction market, the author decided to look at publicly reported auction results.

3 Olav Velthuis, “The Market Carousel, how markets for modern and contemporary art emerged in Brazil, Russia, India and China,” (lecture at the University of Zurich, Executive Master in Art Market Studies, 26 November 2016).

A list of 23 Malaysian artists (a cross-section of artists from different generations) was compiled with the advice of Malaysian art market participants,⁴ to represent the market as a whole. All auction data available on these artists was entered into a spreadsheet, and the data was used to generate graphs on various aspects of the market, the auction houses and the artists. (See Appendix A on page 121 for a complete list of the artists.)

To interpret the data, the author turned to nine Malaysian art market insiders for their comment. Four of nine responded, and this chapter is based partially on their comments, and partially on interviews conducted in Malaysia and Singapore in October 2016.

⁴ (Former) Journalist and auction house manager Johnni Wong, gallerist Syed Nabil and artist Jin Leng Yeoh.

The Data

At the suggestion of Fabian Bocart of Artnet Analytics, each artist's annual per square centimetre price was averaged and those averages were then averaged to produce the graph below.⁵

AVERAGE SQUARE CENTIMETRE PRICE

Since 1994

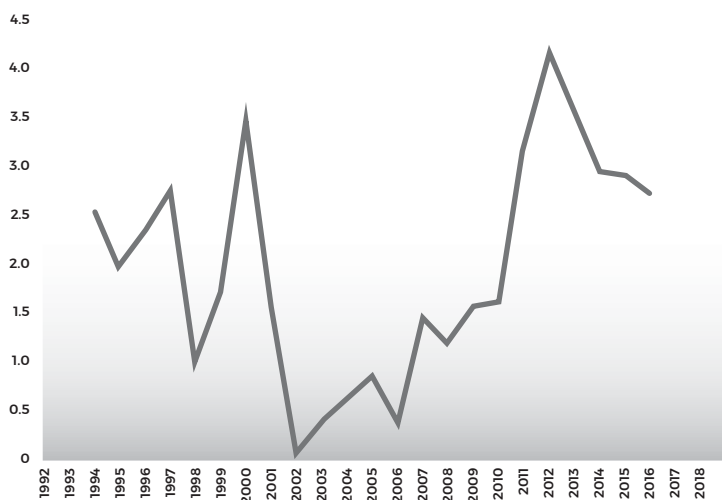


Figure 1

As seen in the graph in Figure 2, there were very few lots for sale prior to 2006. The data sample is therefore much too small to reveal any reliable price trends before 2006. The following graph, figure 3, excludes data prior to 2006.

The graphs reveal a dramatic increase in both the price and the trade volume of Malaysian art over the past 10 years. Between 2006 and 2012 the average per square centimetre price went up 1,119% and the number of lots for sale at auction went up 3,057%.

⁵ Fabian Bocart, "Art Indices," (lecture at the University of Zurich, Executive Master in Art Market Studies, 26 November 2016).

NUMBER OF LOTS
For Sale At Auction

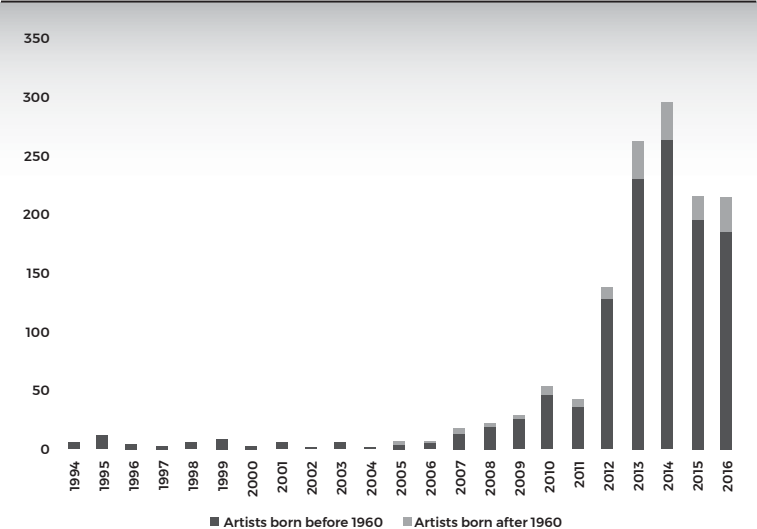


Figure 2

AVERAGE SQUARE CENTIMETRE PRICE
Since 2006

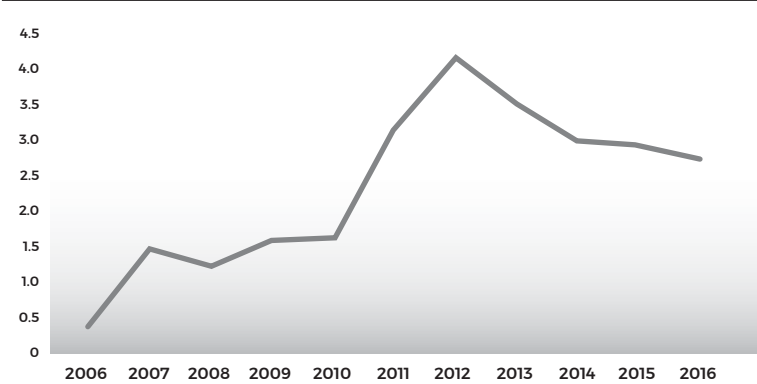


Figure 3

The Early Years – Christie's and Sotheby's

Christie's and Sotheby's were pioneers in trying to create an auction market in Malaysian art. They began holding auctions in Singapore in the 1990s.

According to Christie's [2007] Southeast Asian art department head Keong Rouh-Ling, Malaysian paintings were sold at the first Christie's sale of Southeast Asian Paintings on 27 March 1994 in Singapore. There were 14 works offered during this first sale and 36 per cent of lots were sold or five paintings in total, including the works of Siew Hock Meng (b.1942), Yeh Chi Wei (1915-1981) and Latiff Mohidin. The most expensive painting sold was a Latiff Mohidin, *Malam Merah* (Red Night) for S\$57,500.⁶

It is important to note that Indonesian and Philippine art dominated the Southeast Asian sales at Christie's and Sotheby's and that the volume of Malaysian works was relatively small. As Keong said in 2007:

The main reason for this imbalance in representation is because there is still not enough regional awareness and appreciation for both Malaysian and Thai works outside their respective countries. And even within one's own country, and particularly with Malaysia, we find that the culture of promoting and collecting works from one's own country is not as strong as in the Philippines or Indonesia at this time. So, without more local support of artists and their work, it is very difficult to build awareness of them not only in the region but also on an international scale.⁷

As we shall see later, this changed after 2007 when Malaysia's domestic collector base broadened.

Online auction results reveal that Christie's continued to hold auctions in Singapore featuring Malaysian artists every year until

⁶ Johnni Wong, "Malaysia," in *International Art Markets*, ed. James Goodwin (London: Kogan Page, 2009), p.203.

⁷ Wong, "Malaysia," 203.

2001, and that they moved their auctions to Hong Kong in 2003. Sotheby's, on the other hand, held auctions in Singapore from 1998 to 2007, and then moved its Southeast Asian auctions to Hong Kong in 2008.

Syed Nabil⁸, owner of one of Malaysia's premier art galleries, the NN Gallery (art space closed and rebranded as a consultancy), recalls these early auctions in Singapore. They "included textiles, porcelain, watches, jewellery and paintings" and Malaysians saw it as an opportunity to buy rare works. In the early years, the auctions were seen as "prestigious and buying at Christie's meant a secure provenance and had a cachet". Works were consigned by "dealers, collectors and...family estates".⁹ Artist Jin Leng Yeoh recalls being approached by a representative from Christie's Singapore at his home in Kuala Lumpur in 1998 and being encouraged to put one of his paintings up for sale. "At the time, there was no market for art in Kuala Lumpur and I decided to try selling in Singapore. Unfortunately, no one was interested in buying my painting."¹⁰

Christie's and Sotheby's Move to Hong Kong

Although Christie's and Sotheby's auctions in Singapore did generate some initial excitement among collectors in Malaysia and Singapore, the data shows that they failed to stimulate a steady growth in volumes traded and a rise in the value of Malaysian art. It could be that Malaysian society was not yet ready to start collecting art for cultural and social reasons. What is certain is that the late 1990s were economically difficult for Southeast Asia. The 1997 Asian financial crisis caused a general fall in confidence in the markets and as Johnni Wong, arts & culture general manager of The Edge Galerie and prolific writer on the art market for The Edge Media Group, adds,

⁸ Syed Nabil passed away on June 20, 2018.

⁹ Syed Nabil, questionnaire by author, e-mail message to author, 13 December 2016.

¹⁰ Jin Leng Yeoh, interview with author, personal interview, Zurich, 15 December 2016.

“the expatriate community in Southeast Asia left the region in increasing numbers due to economic changes, [auction] sales were declining.”¹¹ This economic turbulence compromised Christie's and Sotheby's early efforts to establish a market in Southeast Asian art and contributed to their decision to move their sales to Hong Kong. Also, at the time, there was growing demand from mainland Chinese collectors¹² and Christie's moved their Southeast Asian sales to Hong Kong to be “more accessible to Chinese buyers”¹³. Polenn Sim, public relations director of Art Expo Malaysia (Malaysia's first art fair inaugurated in 2007) and director of Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, concurs that Christie's and Sotheby's decided to move to Hong Kong as it was “far more reasonable, practical to be based near the incoming largest art market” with a much higher potential than in Southeast Asia¹⁴.

Nabil¹⁵ explains that Sotheby's decided to keep their Southeast Asia sale in Singapore until 2008, to let Christie's “test the waters” in Hong Kong before they decided to move. Eventually Christie's and Sotheby's also changed the name of their sales from the Southeast Asian Sale to the Asian Sale and they included Japanese and Chinese works, but the focus remained on Chinese and Southeast Asian works.¹⁶ Moving the sales to Hong Kong did not stimulate a more international interest in Malaysian art however. Even today the consignors and buyers continue to be Malaysians and Malaysian art [continues to be] quite insignificant to Christie's and Sotheby's auctions in Hong Kong.¹⁷

11 Johnni Wong, questionnaire by author, e-mail message to author, 8 December 2016.

12 Kim Karlsson, “Chinese Contemporary Art and Its Market,” (lecture at the University of Zurich, Executive Master in Art Market Studies, 10 October 2015).

13 Nabil, questionnaire, 13 December 2016.

14 Polenn Sim, questionnaire by author, WhatsApp message to author, 18 December 2016.

15 Muslims are referred to by their first name rather than by their family name. All Muslims will be referred to by their first name in this paper.

16 Nabil, questionnaire, 13 December 2016.

17 Wong, questionnaire, 8 December 2016.

The Arrival of Malaysian Auction Houses

As seen in Figure 2, the market in Malaysian art remained sluggish until 2007, when there was a sudden up-tick in trading volumes. This increased activity in the market could be because of a contagion effect from the frenzied art market in China. The ensuing years, 2004-2008, saw a 2,000% increase in the business done by Christie's and Sotheby's in Hong Kong.¹⁸ Nabil believes that more "activity and a steady interest in art [in Malaysia were] a result of the stratospheric rise in Chinese art prices."¹⁹ Wong believes that the market in Malaysian art was "not at all" affected by the Chinese auction market because of its "different characteristics and factors".²⁰ Sim concurs with Wong that there is very little correlation between the Chinese art market and the Malaysian art market.²¹ The author believes that Nabil, Wong and Sim could all be right in that there might not be a strong direct correlation between the Chinese and Malaysian art market, but that the success of the Chinese art market was further evidence (on top of the global rise in art markets) to Malaysians that art can be interesting as an object of investment.

After having remained sluggish from the very beginning in 1994, the appetite for Malaysian art at auction was finally showing signs of growth. But Hong Kong is far from Kuala Lumpur (where most consignors and buyers of Malaysian art reside), and it was not until an auction house opened up in Kuala Lumpur that things really took off.

Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers

The year 2010 saw the first art auction held in Malaysia by a local auction house, Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers. Henry Butcher Art

¹⁸ Karlsson, "Chinese Contemporary Art and Its Market," 10 October 2015.

¹⁹ Nabil, questionnaire, 13 December 2016.

²⁰ Wong, questionnaire, 8 December 2016.

²¹ Sim, questionnaire, 18 December 2016.

Auctioneers is a subsidiary of Henry Butcher Malaysia Sdn Bhd, an international property investment company founded in 1987 with its headquarters in Kuala Lumpur.²² Wong believes that Henry Butcher saw an opportunity to broker an alternative investment to their already existing customer base for their property related investments.²³ Nabil adds that Henry Butcher's decision to open was further encouraged by the fact that they would be the first in the market.²⁴ And indeed, as both Wong and Nabil attest, the auctions were very successful, and the Malaysian auction market saw a second significant up-tick in 2010. Nabil does stress, however, that the Kuala Lumpur art world was initially a bit sceptical as the first auctions were organised without in-house art professionals.²⁵ This soon changed, however, and Henry Butcher eventually built a team of art experts.

Sim, director of Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, says, "Malaysia need[ed] an art auction house, the industry need[ed] this infrastructure to reach full bloom and to promote the secondary market. Datuk Vincent Sim [Sim's father], Mr Lim Eng Chong and Mr Long Tian Chek partnered up to co-found Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers to fill this need, and it was a great success as the market had been longing for the birth of an art auction house."²⁶

Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers continues to be one of the most important players in the Malaysian market, but has recently been superseded in trade volume by another home-grown auction house, KLAS Art Auction.

KLAS Art Auction

KLAS Art Auction opened in 2012, "jumping on the bandwagon as a result of Henry Butcher's success"²⁷.

²² "Who We Are," Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, accessed 22 December 2016, www.hbart.com.my/index.php/about.

²³ Wong, questionnaire, 8 December 2016.

²⁴ Nabil, questionnaire, 13 December 2016.

²⁵ Nabil, questionnaire, 13 December 2016.

²⁶ Sim, questionnaire, 18 December 2016.

²⁷ Nabil, questionnaire, 13 December 2016.

CEO Gary Thanasan has a background as a radio DJ and TV personality and his charisma is a main driver of the success of the auctions. KLAS, under the leadership of Thanasan, has always been very ambitious in the number of auctions it holds every year and the amount of works it puts up for sale. It held two auctions in its first year of operation, four the second year and six the third year. Syed Hafiz Syed Muhammad, curator at the National Gallery Singapore, explains how Thanasan aggressively pursues artists and collectors in order to fill these auctions, even buys whole groups of paintings that he later offers for sale.²⁸

Yeoh has heard from collectors from as far as New York and London that Thanasan has been “chasing” his paintings.²⁹ He says, Thanasan told him he visited a restaurant in Singapore for the express purpose of finding out the whereabouts of Yeoh’s paintings. The restaurant had earlier been home to 12 of Yeoh’s paintings but by the time Thanasan visited the restaurant, the paintings had been moved.³⁰

KLAS continues to hold up to six auctions a year and in Thanasan’s own words, we are just trying to help artists by creating a market for their works.³¹ The auctions themselves bear all the hallmarks of a serious international art auction, with a charismatic auctioneer, a long table to the side with staff standing and sitting, representing telephone and absentee bidders. Paintings are displayed on a large screen behind the auctioneer. At a KLAS Art Auction in October 2016, lots moved swiftly, although quite a few pieces had no visible bidders in the room.³²

28 Syed Hafiz Syed Muhammad, interview with author, personal interview, Singapore, 17 October 2016.

29 Jin Leng Yeoh, interview with author, personal interview, Kuala Lumpur, 23 October 2016.

30 Gary Thanasan, interview with author, personal interview, Kuala Lumpur, 23 October 2016.

31 Thanasan, interview, 23 October 2016.

32 KLAS Art Auction, Edition XXIII, Kuala Lumpur, 23 October 2016.

Sales at KLAS Art Auctions were initially very strong but are rumoured to have weakened recently (despite the numbers reported on artprice.com). The auction house is believed to be suffering from the general decline in the art market since the 2013 peak. It is viewed by many to be responsible for the decline by flooding the market with art works.

Masterpiece Auction

In 2013, the Indonesian house Masterpiece Auction opened for business in Kuala Lumpur. It was motivated in part by a desire to participate in the boom in Malaysian art and in part to reach new collectors for the Indonesian art in which they specialised.³³ By the time Masterpiece opened for business, the market felt that there were simply too many auction houses holding too many auctions.³⁴ The opening of Masterpiece Auction coincided with a decline in the Malaysian auction market.

The Edge Galerie

The year 2013 also saw the opening of The Edge Auction house under The Edge Galerie by The Edge Media Group. The media group publishes business and financial newspapers in Malaysia and Singapore. As general manager of The Edge Auction, Johnni Wong explains that the auction house was opened to offer clients and associates of The Edge Media Group another upmarket event to participate in. Also, to tap into the rising affluence of Malaysian consumers who aspire for the finer things in life like art appreciation.³⁵ The Edge Galerie tries to set itself apart by offering a higher degree of professionalism. Wong notes that the Malaysian auction

³³ Nabil, questionnaire, 13 December 2016.

³⁴ Nabil, questionnaire, 13 December 2016.

³⁵ Wong, questionnaire, 8 December 2016.

market is still very young and many of the auction houses have yet to reach the standards of integrity and professionalism associated with, for example, well-established European auction houses. Wong believes that a more professional approach will pay off over the longer term as buyers become more sophisticated and discerning in how art is bought and sold.³⁶

The Malaysian Auction Market Today

According to data gathered from artprice.com, the Malaysian auction market is currently dominated by KLAS Art Auction. The data available on artprice.com is self-reported by the auction houses however, and exactly what and how it is reported can vary greatly from auction house to auction house. Wong believes that the pie chart in Figure 4 is seriously flawed. Certain sales data reported are not credible and post-auction sales are also included in such figures. The figures do not include the refunds that certain auction houses have to make when confronted by buyers.³⁷ There is no doubt however that KLAS Art Auction does hold six auctions a year (at the time of writing), and even though many works may remain unsold at these auctions, it is a very important part of the current marketplace.

The chart in Figure 5 shows that Malaysian art is auctioned mostly in Malaysia. As we heard from Wong earlier, there is no international market for Malaysian art. Singapore does see some demand for Malaysian art with a few Singaporean collectors interested in Malaysian art and with the National Gallery of Singapore and the Singapore Art Museum always looking to expand their collections.³⁸ But Nabil confirms that Malaysian art bought or sold

³⁶ Wong, questionnaire, 8 December 2016.

³⁷ Wong, questionnaire, 8 December 2016.

³⁸ Hafiz, interview, 17 October 2016.

AUCTION HOUSE MARKET SHARE
by Total Sales in 2015

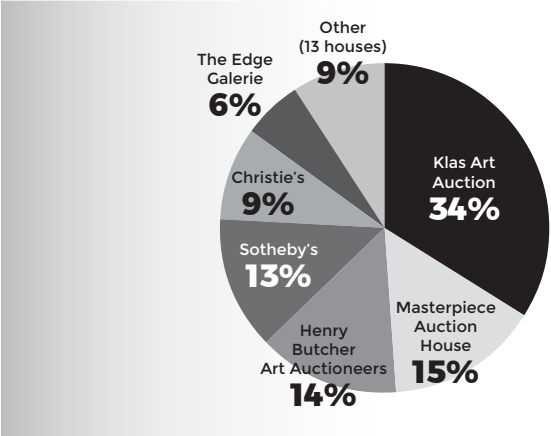


Figure 4

LOTS SOLD
by Country in 2015

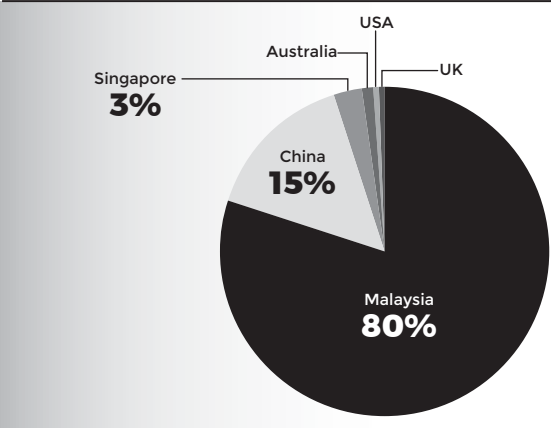


Figure 5

outside Malaysia is typically bought or sold by Malaysians. Their decisions to transact abroad may be motivated by a desire to keep money and assets off-shore, or it is a way to better conceal market manipulation.³⁹

Problems Facing the Malaysian Auction Houses

The Malaysian auction market is very young and its rapid growth has brought with it stories of unsavoury characters, fakes, market manipulation and nonpayment. Wong elaborates, "When collectors end up buying fake paintings in dodgy auctions, they [will] not continue...[The market] will eventually experience a 'correction' like all market situations. Especially when buyers wise up to the tactics in market manipulation."⁴⁰

Wong and The Edge Media Group have played an important role in educating new collectors on the inner workings of the market. They regularly publish open and frank articles on market manipulation and market irregularities. They go on to give practical advice to their readers, such as the following excerpt: "Reputable art gallerists will have the means to verify with a living artist. And this should be done before any sale is transacted. However, if there is no way to get an answer, it is always best to buy from a reputable gallery or auction house which has done due diligence."⁴¹

Irrational Exuberance

The period between 2010 and 2012 saw a dramatic price increase followed by a four-year decline. Wong explains that this rapid rise was a result of inexperienced bidders getting emotionally carried away by the competitive atmosphere in the auction room. In many cases prices exceeded what was reasonable for any particular artist. But by 2012 these new market participants had already learnt to maintain

³⁹ Nabil, questionnaire, 13 December 2016.

⁴⁰ Wong, questionnaire, 8 December 2016.

⁴¹ Johnni Wong, "Fresh to the Market," *The Edge Galerie*, accessed 20 December 2016, <http://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/fresh-market>.

a cooler head in the auction room, and started bidding on works with greater caution, paid more attention to estimates and above all respected what art experts considered to be reasonable price levels for any given artist.⁴² Nabil adds that the Malaysian art market has cooled off generally as the initial hype of domestic auction houses and the idea of Malaysian art as an object of speculation, and the general slowdown of the Malaysian economy have put downward pressure on prices.⁴³

The Future of the Malaysian Art Market

The future of the Malaysian art market does look bright. The fact that four auction houses have successfully launched their businesses between 2010 and 2013 is evidence that there is considerable demand in the market. Part of their success is the expanding collector base and a generally increased interest in investing in art. Nabil explains that although Malaysia has always had a few reliable patrons of the arts, mavericks that consistently supported artists when the general public showed no interest, there is now a new (and) younger generation of collectors, typically entrepreneurs in their 30s or 40s who see art collecting as a natural part of their cosmopolitan lifestyle.⁴⁴

Although prices have been falling since 2012 and the market remains volatile and fraught with problems, the broader collector base and increase in the number of individuals with a vested interest in the art market have strengthened the Malaysian art world.

The larger the number of people that can make a career within the art ecosystem and the larger the number of people that invest in the art ecosystem, the larger the number of people who want to see it succeed, and, the more likely it is to keep growing strong and autonomous and continue to enrich society as a whole.

⁴² Wong, questionnaire, 8 December 2016.

⁴³ Nabil, questionnaire, 13 December 2016.

⁴⁴ Nabil, interview with author, personal interview, Kuala Lumpur, 25 October 2016.

PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

The “arrival” of an art market has put pressure on the Malaysian art world to professionalise. The private sphere has been relatively quick to adapt whilst the public sphere lags behind. The sluggishness of the public sphere is due mostly to a lack of political will. Malaysia’s national museum for art, The National Visual Arts Gallery (NVAG), still acts more like a temporary exhibition hall for contemporary art than an institution with the mandate to preserve Malaysian art and art history for posterity. Comparatively, the recently opened National Gallery Singapore (NGS) has the ambition, political support and funding to become the centre of excellence for the whole of Southeast Asia. The NGS is building a collection of works of art from the region, and courting artists and their families to build an archive, to preserve and to facilitate research on the history of Southeast Asian art.

The National Gallery Singapore

Singapore is the wealthier, better educated and more advanced “little brother” of Malaysia. They have a shared history and for a few years after gaining independence from the British, they were one country. Political relationships between the two countries have always been tense but people travel freely between the two countries and many Singaporeans seem to have relatives living in Malaysia and vice versa.

Singapore has for decades tried to position itself as the economic hub of Southeast Asia and in recent years this effort has come to include the arts. Over the past 10 years Singapore has staged the Singapore Biennale, the International Festival of the Arts and Art Stage. It has also opened Nanyang Technological University’s Center for Contemporary Art, and turned an entire neighbourhood, Gillman Barracks, into a centre for internation-

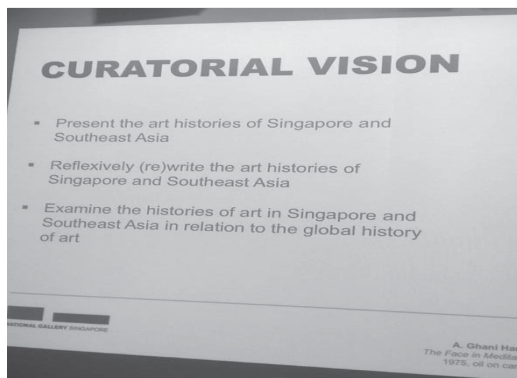


Figure 6

al art galleries. With trademark efficiency backed by hundreds of millions of state dollars, cultural landmarks were opened or renovated one by one: The National Museum of Singapore in 2006; the Peranakan Museum of local culture in 2008; and the Victoria Theater in 2014.⁴⁵ But it was the 2015 opening of “the titanic National Gallery that most clearly signal[ed] Singapore’s ambition in the fields of art and education. When it opened... the gallery became the largest museum in Singapore and, at 690,000 sq ft, is nearly a third larger than London’s National Gallery”⁴⁶. It houses the largest collection of Southeast Asian art in the world and has the curatorial vision to write the art history of the region. (The picture in Figure 6 is of a slide shown at a press briefing before the opening of the museum.⁴⁷)

For the relatively young nations of Southeast Asia, forging national identity is not only a recurring theme among artists but also the central mandate given to its art institutions. The National Gal-

⁴⁵ Joyce Lau, “In Singapore, a New Cultural Vision,” *The New York Times*, 8 December 2015, accessed 13 January 2017, www.nytimes.com/2015/12/09/arts/international/in-singapore-a-new-cultural-vision.html.

⁴⁶ Tash Aw, “Singapore’s Artistic Experiment,” *The New York Times*, 9 February 2016, accessed 13 January 2017, www.nytimes.com/2016/02/10/opinion/singapores-artistic-experiment.html.

⁴⁷ Hyperallergic, accessed 13 January 2017, www.hyperallergic.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/WP_2_curatorialvisionPro.jpg

lery Singapore is no different and in his speech at the opening of the museum, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said:

“Singapore Art will of course take pride of place in the Singapore Gallery, as these pieces tell the history of our young nation. Southeast Asian art, where Singapore has one of the most comprehensive collections in the world, will also occupy a significant part of the gallery because Singapore is not an island unto ourselves. To understand where we come from, we have to appreciate our neighbourhood and our context.”⁴⁸

The National Gallery Singapore wants to become the unrivalled centre of excellence for Southeast Asian art and art history. In addition to continually acquiring works for its collection, the museum is dedicating significant resources to build its archives. The museum actively reaches out to artist families to build good relationships in the hope of buying art works that are of interest to the collection and of gaining access to the artists' archives. The museum appears incredibly accommodating when it comes to helping artists to organise their archives, and they have helped artists in the past.

PRIVATE INITIATIVES IN ARTIST ESTATE MANAGEMENT

Despite its young art market, Malaysia already has private initiatives in artist estate management. The writer spoke to two of them – the Huang Yao Foundation and Fergana Art. The idea for the Huang Yao Foundation had its origins in the late 1990s and even though the China-born artist and calligrapher Huang Yao had lived in Malaysia and had Malaysian citizenship, the family turned to Singapore for help and expertise. By contrast, Fergana Art which came about only a few years ago has done tremendously well while staying in Malaysia.

⁴⁸ Lee Hsien Loong, National Gallery Singapore Opening Celebrations, 23 November 2015, *The Prime Minister's Office Singapore*, accessed 13 January 2017, www.pmo.gov.sg/newsroom/pm-lee-hsien-loong-opening-celebrations-national-gallery-singapore.

CONCLUSION

These are exciting times for art in Malaysia. The opening of domestic auction houses has led to an extraordinary boom in the art market, and art has become an established part of the urban lifestyle of Kuala Lumpur. Art-related projects, private museums and businesses are springing up across the city.

The opening of the National Gallery Singapore on 24 November 2015, with its ambitious goal to write the history of art for Southeast Asia, has created a unique opportunity for artists and their families to present their case to curators that are eager to gather information and create a narrative for the art history of the region.

The Malaysian government has yet to show an interest in the arts, but this might be the right moment to restate the case for the importance of art to Malaysian society. Art education disappeared from the national curriculum in the 1990s. The art curriculum that Yeoh had developed and implemented in the nation's schools was more or less discarded. But now interest in art in Malaysia is at the strongest it has ever been. This makes it the perfect time to tell the stories of Malaysia's pioneer artists who already understood 60 years ago that art can and should play a vital role in a developed society. Their stories, told through books, articles, exhibitions, and living artist museums, might just inspire the political will to support the arts and eventually lead to the reintroduction of art education in Malaysian schools.

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APPENDIX A

Auction results of the following artists as reported on artprice.com and KL-lifestyle.com.my were used to compile data yielding approximately 27,000 discrete entries:

Yong Mun Sen	1896-1962	Abdul Latiff Mohidin	1938
Abdullah Ariff	1904-1962	Jolly Koh	1941
Kuo Ju Ping	1908-1966	Yusof A Ghani	1950
Tay Hooi Keat	1910-1989	Ahmad Zakii Anwar	1955
Khaw Sia	1913-1984	Awang Damit Ahmad	1956
Lee Cheng Yong	1913-1966	Jalaini Abu Hassan	1963
Chuah Thean Teng	1914-2008	Kow Leong Kang	1970
Mohd Hoessein Enas	1924-1995	Yee I-Lann	1971
Syed Ahmad Jamal	1929-2011	Mohd Raduan Man	1978
Jin Leng Yeoh	1929	Samsuddin Wahab	1984
Khalil Ibrahim	1934	Chong Ai Lei	1985
Ibrahim Hussein	1936-2009		

The list above might have a slight bias for artists that are currently popular in the market and might leave out artists that were popular in, for example, the 1990s. None of the respondents to the questionnaire thought this was a big enough issue to change the names on the list, although they agreed that a slight bias might exist.

SINGAPORE

SINGAPORE'S JOURNEY TO MODERNITY

At the inaugural and ongoing exhibition at National Gallery Singapore entitled *Siapa Nama Kamu? Art in Singapore since the 19th Century*, visitors can expect to view nearly 400 works from the 19th to 21st centuries.

The show was launched in November 2015, in conjunction with the opening of the refurbished former Supreme Court and City Hall and to celebrate Singapore's 50th year of independence.

Categorised in six segments: *Tropical Tapestry* (1819 – 1930s), *Nanyang Reverie* (1930s – 1970s), *Real Concerns* (1950s – 1970s), *Tradition Unfettered* (1940s – 1980s), *New Languages* (1960s – 1980s) and *Shifting Grounds* (1980s – present), each section is devised to navigate the viewer through the historical evolution of art in Singapore.

The significance of this exhibition as a reference point to the beginning of art in Singapore lies in the extensive “archival or oral research” and “complexities of each historical moment and theme”¹ never before undertaken by other institutions.

Starting point

The year 1819 became the starting point in tracing the evolution of Singapore art. According to Low Sze Wee and Shabbir Hussain Mustafa, this was, “when Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles founded modern Singapore and this date has assumed critical significance in popular, governmental and scholarly discourse of Singapore. It is also the year when Captain Daniel Ross, a ship commandant on the fleet that brought Stamford Raffles and William Farquhar to Singapore, commissioned one of his fellow sailors to sketch an outline of

¹ Low Sze Wee & Shabbir Hussain Mustafa (editors), 2015. *Siapa Nama Kamu? Art in Singapore since the 19th Century – Some Introductory Remarks*. National Gallery Singapore. Singapore. P. 12.

the Singapore harbour, to date, considered one of the earliest visual impressions of the Singapore landscape”.²

Singapore’s early history precedes the arrival of the British in 1819 when they established a trading settlement on the island. There were already signs of Chinese inhabitants there, when Sir Stamford Raffles arrived. Based on reign marks stamped on ancient Chinese coins dug up in 1827 by John Crawfurd, second British Resident of Singapore, the Chinese could have been active on the island as early as 1085 CE ³.

And Singapore-based American archaeologist John Miksic has dug up celadon ceramics dating to the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) at the site of the present-day Asian Civilisations Museum at Empress Place. Other archaeological excavations at Fort Canning, Old Parliament House, St Andrew’s Cathedral and Victoria Theatre grounds yielded further proof. The artifacts prove that Singapore formerly known as Temasek (which means “sea port” in Old Javanese) and founded in the 13th Century, was an active trading settlement in the 14th Century⁴.

Farquhar, former Resident of Melaka (1803-1818) and first Resident of Singapore (1819-1823), was a keen naturalist and had commissioned Chinese artists to document and illustrate the flora and fauna of the Malay peninsula during his tenure in Singapore. There is a set of 477 botanical watercolours in the collection of the National Museum of Singapore.

Nevertheless, a wood engraving print by Heinrich Leutemann entitled *Unterbrochene Straßenmessung auf Singapore (Interrupted Road Surveying in Singapore)* circa 1865 was another one of the early visual interpretations of infrastructure in Singapore.

² Ibid., p. 13.

³ Kang Ger-Wen, 2013. *Decoration & Symbolism in Chinese Architecture, Understanding Singapore's Historic Chinese Buildings*. Editions Didier Millet Pte Ltd. Singapore. P. 11.

⁴ Wall text and ceramic artifacts. July 21, 2018. Asian Civilisations Museum, 1 Empress Place, Singapore.

The following is the description of the artwork on National Gallery Singapore's website:

*"This print recreates a purported incident involving George Coleman, the first Government Superintendent of Public Works. In 1835, a tiger attacked Coleman and his group of Indian labourers conducting a road survey. The incident is captured here at its most dramatic moment. The tiger has jumped out from the thick jungle. Taken by surprise, the men drop their equipment. This print dramatises the encounter and represents a different perspective of Singapore. Some colonial depictions portray Singapore from distant, picturesque views, but here we see a close encounter with the dangers hidden in the interiors of the island."*⁵

This work by Leutemann alongside other prints, sketches, drawings, hydrographic charts and photographs by other artists, whether known or unknown, form the *Tropical Tapestry* section of the exhibition to illustrate Singapore's early environs.

Life in the South Seas

When discoursing art history in Singapore, it is essential to reference the term "Nanyang". Not just as a geographical or "pre-modern trading term used by the Chinese for the Southeast Asian region, taking its compass direction south of China", but also as "an impression of a landscape and resource – a region rich in cultures with its various languages, ethnicities, customs, traditions and syncretic belief systems – that Chinese migrant artists encountered anew"⁶.

The establishment of Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) in 1938 marked the enthusiasm and appreciation for the arts, particularly as the earliest examples of a localised school of painting.

⁵ *Unterbrochene Straßenmessung auf Singapore (Interrupted Road Surveying in Singapore)*, <https://www.nationalgallery.sg/artworks/artwork-detail/2000-06610/unterbrochene-stra%C3%9Fenmessung-auf-singapore-interrupted-road-surveying-in-singapore>

⁶ Low Sze Wee & Shabbir Hussain Mustafa (editors), 2015. *Siapa Nama Kamu? Art in Singapore since the 19th Century*. National Gallery Singapore. Singapore. P. 15.

Those involved in the formation of the academy consisted of teachers at NAFA, namely Kao Fei Tse, Chang Meng Tse, Lin Deshan, Chiu In Wei and Lim Hak Tai⁷.

Referred to as first-generation Nanyang artists, they are pioneer artists who emigrated from China and settled in Singapore. NAFA was temporarily closed during the Japanese invasion in 1941 and re-opened in 1946.

Between the Forties and Sixties, influential artists such as Chen Wen Hsi, Chen Chong Swee, Cheong Soo Pieng, Georgette Chen, See Hiang To, Tchang Ju Chi and Chong Pai Mu were invited by Lim Hak Tai to teach at NAFA.

However, the first professional art school, the Singapore Overseas Chinese Art Academy was founded in 1922. The school offered lessons in Chinese painting in addition to Western painting.⁸

The first formal art organisation in Singapore and Malaya, the United Artists Malaysia (or Nanyang Society of Calligraphy and Painting), was established in 1929.

If Kuala Lumpur had Peter Harris as the superintendent of art for the Federation of Malaya in 1951, Singapore's art superintendent was Richard Walker, who served the Department of Education between 1923 and 1951.

Walker taught art in the local British schools and was one of the founding members of the Singapore Art Society in 1949. He contributed to the development of the watercolour tradition in Singapore and his student, Lim Cheng Hoe became "one of the most prolific and renowned watercolourists in Singapore."⁹

⁷ Emelia Ong, *The Nanyang Artists: Eclectic Expressions of the South Seas in Imagining Identities: Narratives in Malaysian Art Volume 1*, edited by Nur Hanim Khairuddin, Beverly Yong & TK Sabapathy, 2012. RogueArt. Kuala Lumpur. P. 60.

⁸ Cai Heng, *Tradition Unfettered: The Story of Singapore Ink* in *Siapa Nama Kamu? Art in Singapore Since the 19th Century*, edited by Low Sze Wee & Shabbir Hussain Mustafa, 2015. National Gallery Singapore. Singapore. P. 68.

⁹ Melinda Susanto, *Tropical Tapestry* in *Siapa Nama Kamu? Art in Singapore Since the 19th Century*, edited by Low Sze Wee & Shabbir Hussain Mustafa, 2015. National Gallery Singapore. Singapore. P. 37.

In 1956, the Equator Art Society (EAS) was formed by artist Lim Yew Kuan. Members of the group included Lai Kui Fang, Chua Mia Tee, Ong Kim Seng and Koeh Sia Yong. EAS was a nationalist and anti-colonialist society and proponents of the social realist art style in Singapore.

Prior to that, the Chinese Middle Schools' Graduates of 1953 Arts Association (SCMSGAA), comprising students from the local Chinese middle school, championed Social Realism as a way to represent the realities of the working class.¹⁰ The SCMSGAA ceased its activities after a fund-raising exhibition at the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in 1956, probably due to its strong criticisms of the colonial administration and its perceived left leanings in its artworks.¹¹ Most members of EAS were previously from SCMSGAA.

The Modern Art Society was established in 1964 and its first chairman was Ho Ho Ying. The Singapore Watercolour Society was established by 13 artists in 1969 that included Chen Chong Swee and Lim Cheng Hoe. In 1971, Alpha Gallery was established, whose artists called for a fresh perspective of what a painting or sculpture could mean.¹²

Art institutions

The National Museum of Singapore is the nation's oldest museum, with a history dating back to 1887. According to its website, the museum uses cutting-edge technology to present the nation's legacy and development.¹³

¹⁰ Seng Yu Jin and Cai Heng, *The Real Against the New: Social Realism and Abstraction in Siapa Nama Kamu? Art in Singapore Since the 19th Century*, edited by Low Sze Wee & Shabbir Hussain Mustafa, 2015. National Gallery Singapore. Singapore. P. 54.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 55.

¹² Low Sze Wee & Shabbir Hussain Mustafa (editors), 2015. *Siapa Nama Kamu? Art in Singapore since the 19th Century*. National Gallery Singapore, Singapore. P. 37

¹³ National Museum of Singapore, Overview, http://nationalmuseum.sg/shared-content/exploremuseumtopmenu/about-us-top-menu/overview?sc_lang=en

In 1989, the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts was formed to study the role that arts and culture could play in Singapore's national development.

The National Arts Council (NAC) was formed in 1991 from the incorporation of the Singapore Cultural Foundation, Cultural Division of Ministry of Community Development, Festival of Arts Secretariat and the National Theatre Trust. Its mission is to “champion the creation and appreciation of the arts as an integral part of our lives.”¹⁴

The Singapore Art Museum opened its doors in 1996 as the first art museum in Singapore. Also known as SAM, the museum is now a contemporary art museum, which is housed in a restored 19th century Catholic boys' school named St Joseph's Institution, run by La Salle Brothers.

Renaissance City Plan

The beginnings of the Renaissance City Plan (RCP) was outlined in the third edition of RCP's report published by Singapore's Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts in 2008.¹⁵

The report indicated that “in 1999, the Cabinet approved a five-year Renaissance City Project (RCP I), injecting an additional \$10 million per year into NAC and National Heritage Board's operational budgets to strengthen the development of Singapore's cultural ‘software’ – capabilities, audiences and vibrancy.

“The RCP vision was to transform Singapore into a Distinctive Global City for the Arts, where arts and culture would make Singapore an attractive place to work, live and play, contribute to the knowledge and learning of every Singaporean, and provide cultural ballast for nation-building efforts.

¹⁴ National Arts Council Singapore, <https://www.nac.gov.sg/aboutus/mission-vision.html>

¹⁵ *Renaissance City Plan III*, <https://www.nac.gov.sg/dam/jcr:18cf2883-7907-4938-9931-384333e210ce>

“In 2005, Renaissance City 2.0 (RCP II) was introduced as part of a broader Creative Industries Development Strategy, and articulated an industry approach to developing arts and culture. RCP II raised funding to \$12 million per year in 2005-2006 and \$15.5 million in 2007.”

RCP II introduced “major arts events to market Singapore holistically to the world, namely the inaugural Singapore Season in London, and the Singapore Biennale, coinciding with the 2006 International Monetary Fund and World Bank Meeting” that was held in Singapore.¹⁶

Art historian and curator Patrick D. Flores has been appointed Singapore Biennale 2019’s artistic director by the Singapore Biennale Steering Committee, comprising representatives from the arts community.¹⁷

Secondary art market

In 1993, Christie’s International launched its art auctions in Singapore. Sotheby’s first auction in Singapore was held in 1996, 11 years after establishing an office in Singapore in 1985.¹⁸ The Sotheby’s Modern & Contemporary Southeast Asian Paintings auction was moved to Hong Kong from Singapore in 2008.¹⁹

In 2002, Christie’s moved to Hong Kong. And since then, Singapore has welcomed new players such as Raffles Fine Arts Auctioneers and Bonhams Glerum Auctioneers but both have ceased

¹⁶ Ibid., p.6.

¹⁷ The National Arts Council commissions Singapore Art Museum as organiser of the next two editions of the Singapore Biennale, <https://www.singaporebiennale.org/press-releases/the-national-arts-council-commissions-singapore-art-museum-as-organiser-of-the-next-two-editions-of-the-singapore-biennale.html>

¹⁸ Lindy Poh, *Singapore in The International Art Markets, The Essential Guide For Collectors And Investors*, edited by James Goodwin, 2008. Kogan Page Limited. United Kingdom. P. 271.

¹⁹ Adeline Chia, September 2, 2013, *Top 10 Southeast Asian Works at Sotheby's HK Fall Auctions*, <http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/952765/top-10-southeast-asian-works-at-sothebys-hk-fall-auctions>
Alexandra A. Seno, October 30, 2009, *Art Wars, Hong Kong vs. Singapore*. The Wall Street Journal. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB125678376301415081>

operations. Others that have entered the Singapore market are Indonesian auction houses, Larasati Auctioneers in 2003 and Borobudur Auction which started in 2005 up till 2016.²⁰ In 2009, 33 Auction held its first auction in Singapore.

Commercial galleries

The Gillman Barracks visual arts cluster, which is located in a former military barracks dating back to 1936, was launched in September 2012. The current tenants include Sundaram Tagore Gallery, Yavuz Gallery, Sullivan + Strumpf, Pearl Lam Galleries, Ota Fine Arts and Chan + Hori Contemporary.

The Bras Basah Complex near the Singapore Art Museum also includes a few commercial galleries. Among those that also feature Chinese ink art as well as Western-style local art, are the Artcommune Gallery and Cape of Good Hope Art Gallery.

Artcommune Gallery was founded in 2009 by artist Ho Sou Ping. The gallery is said to represent the finest and most important artists in Singapore's visual art canon. The gallery lists artists such as Cheong Soo Pieng, Chen Wen Hsi, Lim Tze Peng, Ong Kim Seng, Tan Choh Tee and Wong Keen.²¹

The Cape of Good Hope Art Gallery was established in 1989 by artist Terence Teo. According to the gallery's website, it exhibits "outstanding" second-generation Singaporean artists. The artists include Ang Ah Tee, Chieu Shey Fook, Chua Boon Key, Choy Weng Yang, Chua Ek Kay, Eng Siak Loy, Foo Chee San, Goh Beng Kwan, Koeh Sia Yong, Lee Choon Kee, Leo Hee Tong, Lim Tze Peng, Lim Yew Kwan, Lim Leong Seng, Lim Choon Jin, Ling Yang Chang, Low Puay Hua, Nai Swee Leng, Tan Choh Tee, Terence Teo, Tew Nai Tong, Thang Kiang How, Tung Yue Nang, Wang Fei

²⁰ Ben Rush, October 9, 2016. *Auction Houses in Singapore*. <https://asianartplatform.com/auction-houses-singapore/>

²¹ <https://www.artcommune.com.sg/>

and Zhu Hong.²²

One of Asia's one-stop fine art logistics service provider, He-lu-Trans Group, is headquartered in Singapore with representation in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing, Yogyakarta and Tokyo. Established in 1979, the company also provides space for exhibitions and art storage at Tanjong Pagar Distripark.

It was reported in www.artdaily.org that Christie's Fine Art Storage Services (CFASS) opened its facilities in Singapore in May, 2010.

"CFASS Singapore is housed within the new Singapore FreePort, a large-scale freeport facility supported by the Singapore Economic Development Board (EDB) with the Singapore National Arts Council and the National Heritage Board of Singapore among its shareholders. In addition to the customizable roster of services offered at CFASS New York and London, CFASS Singapore also offers specialized facilities for the storage of fine and rare wines and jewellery. Given its location within the Singapore FreePort, CFASS Singapore also offers clients the added advantage of a round-the-clock free-trade zone for the tax-free storage, display, and exchange of property. CFASS Singapore comprises roughly 40% of the FreePort's Phase 1 floor area available for lease with an option to add capacity in Phase 2 when the Singapore FreePort is completed in early 2014. As one of the most advanced of its type in the world, the building is among the first in Singapore to fully integrate systems for solar power, water recycling and energy efficiency and utilize landscaping features and innovative technical systems for climate control. CFASS Singapore is headed by Ms Billie Soh, general manager, CFASS Singapore."²³

²² <http://www.capeofgoodhope.com.sg/page/aboutus>

²³ *Christie's Fine Art Storage Services Announces New Facilities in New York and Singapore*, <http://artdaily.com/news/37684/Christie-s-Fine-Art-Storage-Services-Announces-New-Facilities-in-New-York-and-Singapore#.WzB2SVUzM8>

On CFASS New York's website (<http://www.cfass.com/new-york/>), it is stated that Christie's sold all its shares and interest in CFASS (Singapore) to Asia Freeport Holdings Pte. Ltd. in 2018. CFASS has been renamed Fine Art Storage Services Pte. Ltd. Please visit fass.com.²⁴

Art fairs

Tresors 1993 was the first international fine art and antiques fair in Singapore that tested whether Western art could sell in an Asian environment, whether Oriental collectors would buy from Western dealers, and how many would come to such an event.²⁵ Organised by William R. Burris, managing director of Bradbury (Int'l) Services, plc, London, the fair was held in a 2,700 sq m space at the World Trade Centre at the piers of Singapore's bustling harbour.

In 2000, ARTSingapore was established with the intention of becoming "the leading contemporary Asian art fair where cutting-edge contemporary Asian art and museum-quality artworks are showcased in one place."²⁶ The fair has since closed.

Affordable Art Fair was first held in Singapore in 2010.²⁷ The fair was first launched in London's Battersea Park in October 1999.²⁸

Art Stage Singapore, known as "the flagship show of the South-east Asian art world" was first held at Marina Bay Sands in 2011. The eighth edition of the art fair was held in 2018. The participating galleries were 1Projects, AAA supported by Warehouse Terrada, Aicon Gallery, Arario Gallery, Art Agenda, S.E.A., Art Collective WA, Art Porters, Art Seasons, Art Sohyang, Artinformal, Ashok

²⁴ There is a notice announcing the sale by Julien Pradels, director of Christie's International Singapore Pte Ltd.

²⁵ Tresors Singapore, <http://biotechnics.org/tres.html>

²⁶ <http://www.artinasia.com/institutionsDetail.php?catID=7&galleryID=1004>

²⁷ Nabilah Said, August 31, 2017. *Affordable Art Fair returns in November with focus on new media works*, <https://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/affordable-art-fair-returns-in-november-with-focus-on-new-media-works>

²⁸ *About Affordable Art Fair*, <https://affordableartfair.com/about>

Jain Gallery, Bbuzz Art, Blink Gallery, Cape of Good Hope Art Gallery, Ching Yan International Art Company, Chini Gallery, Clear Edition & Gallery, Commonart Center, CUC Gallery, D Galerie, Emmanuel Fremin Gallery, Fernando Botera (honorary invited artist), Flowers Gallery, G13 Gallery, Gajah Gallery, Galeria El Museo, Galeria Fernando Pradilla, Galerie Gaia, Galerie OVO, Gallery Apple, Gallery Kassi Tokyo, Gallery Khankhalaev, Gallery Kogure, Gallery Sun, Numthong Gallery, Ode to Art, Omer Tiroche Gallery, Opera Gallery, Palma Arte Gallery, Parkview Green Art, Regina Gallery, Rich Art, Richard Koh Fine Art, Roh Projects, S.A.C Gallery Bangkok, Sakurado Fine Arts, Sanchit Art, Schueb-be Inc., Shinseido, Sicas, Srisasanti Gallery, Standing Pine, STPI – Creative Workshop & Gallery, Sundara Tagore Gallery, Taksu, Tang Contemporary Art, Tembusu Art Gallery, Tiroche Deleon Collection, Tree & Me Art Space, Ujung Gallery, Watanuki Ltd | Toki-No-Wasuremono, Wei-Ling Gallery, White Space Art Asia, Whitespace Gallery Bangkok, Whitestone Gallery, Yeo Workshop, Yewin, YOD and Zemack Contemporary Art.²⁹

New commercial showcase

STPI Creative Workshop & Gallery and Gillman Barracks are collaborating on a pop-up showcase during Singapore Art Week 2019.

STPI will organise a new curated showcase of art galleries. This will be located in one of the open spaces in the Gillman Barracks visual arts precinct from January 23-27. The inaugural platform is said to be an intimate boutique showcase that is expected to feature over 30 galleries in a specially designed pop-up structure.

And according to ArtAsiaPacific.com³⁰ as well as artnet.com³¹, a

²⁹ <https://www.artstage.com/singapore/pages/7/exhibitors>

³⁰ ArtAsiaPacific.com

³¹ Artnet.com

new art fair, named ART SG, will be held from Nov 1-3 in 2019 at the Sands Expo Convention Centre, Singapore. The same venue used by Art Stage Singapore.

Targeting 80 galleries from Singapore, Southeast Asia and other countries, this fair will be organised by MCH Group, Tim Etchells and AngusMontgomery Arts. The organisers are said to be synonymous with the most renowned fairs in the world. The magazine added that the parties concerned are the driving force behind Art HK, Art Central in Hong Kong, India Art Fair, and Art Basel, among others.

ArtAsiaPacific adds that Art Stage Singapore shrank from 170 galleries in 2016 to 84 in its January 2018 edition and did not proceed with its Jakarta edition this year. It also says Affordable Art Fair has returned from two to a single edition per year while the Singapore Contemporary Art Show “quietly folded” early this year before its third edition.

“As a stopgap measure for the possible non-return of Art Stage Singapore, there is the inaugural edition of SEA Focus, the National Arts Council-sponsored showcase of galleries at Gillman Barracks, which will be held over four to five days during Singapore Art Week 2019.”

ART SG is said to be supported by the Singapore Tourism Board, the National Arts Council and the Singapore Economic Development Board – the same government agencies supporting Gillman Barracks and Art Stage Singapore, states ArtAsiaPacific.³²

“It is the right time for Singapore, as a flagship art city and key art center in Southeast Asia,” reported artnet quoting Angus and Etchells in a joint statement. “It is less than a two-hour flight from every major city in the Asean zone which represents a collective market of 620 million people, significantly larger than that of North

³² Reena Devi, July 13, 2018. *Art SG to Launch November 2019*. ArtAsiaPacific. Hong Kong. <http://artasiapacific.com/News/ArtSGToLaunchNovember2019>

America, the Eurozone, or the Middle East.”³³

Among the serious collectors in Singapore are Dr John Chia and Yeap Lam Yang, who have been acquiring art for the past 20 and 30 years, respectively. In a public show at the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, LASALLE College of the Arts in Singapore, they jointly exhibit 40 contemporary works by 35 artists.

The artists are Aida Makoto, Alfredo & Isabel Aquilizan, Elmer Borlongan, Chang Fee Ming, Dadang Christanto, Tiffany Chung, John Clang, eX de Medici, Heri Dono, Le Quang Hua, FX Harsono, Jeremy Hiah, Ho Rui An, Michael Lee, Lee Wen, Li Shurui, Phuan Thai Meng, Sopheap Pich, Qiu Zhijie, Alwin Reamillo, Chanelle Rose, José Santos III, Hiraki Sawa, Semsar Si-aahan, Shi Hu, Shooshie Sulaiman, Manit Sriwanichpoom, Sun Xun, Tang Dixin, Inga Svala Thorsdottir & Wu Shanzhuan, Natee Utarit, Vandy Rattana, Wong Hoy Cheong, Zai Kuning and Robert Zhao Renhui.

Entitled, *Two Houses*, the exhibition from July 20 to October 10, 2018, explores the theme of “political connections” — social justice, labour politics, human rights and freedom, nationhood and the mechanisms of government.

But are there too many competing art fairs in Singapore? That is precisely the question posed by The Straits Times of Singapore. In an article, *Too many art fairs?*, the daily polled the opinions of various personalities involved in the art business.

Frank Lasry, managing director of MCH Design and Regional Art Fairs, one of the parties behind ART SG, is “cautiously and reasonably confident” of succeeding. However, Art Stage Singapore

³³ Henri Neuendorf, July 13, 2018. *Art Basel's Parent Company Is Launching A New Art Fair in Singapore Next Year*. artnetAG. Berlin. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/mch-group-singapore-1318208>

founder Lorenzo Rudolf is not optimistic.³⁴

Top 10

Based on auction benchmarks compiled and in chronological order, the top 10 artists of Singapore are Chen Wen Hsi (1906-1991), Georgette Chen (1907-1992), Lui Kang (1911-2004), Chuak Ek Kay (1911-2008) Cheong Soo Pieng (1917-1983), Lim Tze Peng (1923), Tan Swie Hian (1943), Tang Kiang How (1946) and David Chan (1979).

³⁴ Akshita Nanda, July 24, 2018. *Too many art fairs?*. Life Section, The Straits Times. Singapore. P.1.

AUCTION BENCHMARKS OF ARTISTS IN SINGAPORE

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
1	Tan Swie Hian (1943)	Portrait of Bada Shanren 2013, Ink on rice paper 233cm x 106cm Hammer price: US\$3,369,546 With premium: NA Auction House: Poly International Auction, Beijing Date: 30 November 2014	When The Moon Is Orbed 2014, Oil on canvas 140cm x 206cm Hammer price: US\$3,047,005 With premium: NA Auction House: Poly International Auction, Beijing Date: 2 December 2012	The Nelson Mandela Unity Series: Struggle/ Imprisonment/ Freedom/ Unity/Future/Motivation, 2004, Mixed media on monochrome lithography 65.5cm x 50cm Hammer price: US\$373,520 With premium (20%): US\$453,376 Auction House: Bonhams, Hong Kong Date: 29 May 2016
2	Chen Wen Hsi (1906 – 1991)	Pasar (Market) Circa 1950, Oil on board 130cm x 104.5cm Hammer price: US\$1,419,000 With premium (20%): US\$1,707,960 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 10 May 2013	Puppets Circa 1960, Oil on canvas 152cm x 121cm Hammer price: US\$1,095,650 With premium (20%): US\$1,319,936 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 5 April 2014	Gibbons (猿) 1969, Mixed media on paper, 145cm x 366cm Hammer price: US\$967,500 With premium (18%): US\$1,141,650 Auction House: Poly Auction, Hong Kong Date: 5 October 2015
3	Georgette Chen (1907 – 1992)	Lotus Symphony 1962, Oil on canvas 58cm x 114cm Hammer price: US\$980,400 With premium (20%): US\$1,181,640 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 5 October 2013	Still Life with Tropical Fruits 1967, Oil on canvas 54cm x 64cm Hammer price: US\$540,960 With premium (20%): US\$653,016 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 25 May 2013	Still Life with Rambutans, Mangosteens and Pineapple 1960, Oil on canvas 54cm x 65cm Hammer price: US\$446,109 With premium (20%): US\$548,076 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 26 May 2018
4	Cheong Soo Pieng (1917 – 1983)	Balinese Dance 1953, Oil on canvas 134cm x 97.5cm Hammer price: US\$825,600 With premium (20%): US\$995,880 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 29 November 2015	Making Up 1951, Oil on canvas 81.5cm x 66.5cm Hammer price: US\$631,609 With premium (20%): US\$763,086 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 22 November 2014	By the River II Undated, Oil on canvas 102cm x 72.5cm Hammer price: US\$33,488 With premium (25%): US\$41,860 Auction House: Christie's, Shanghai Date: 26 September 2013

* The artists are ranked according to their auction records in the first column. The second and third columns show their second and third most expensive artworks sold in auctions.

** NA : not available

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
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5	Tang Kiang How (1946)	The Fantastic Galaxy Series n° 2848 2014, Oil on canvas 98cm x 112cm Hammer price: US\$195,720 With premium (18%): US\$225,078 Auction House: Poly International Auction, Beijing Date: 30 November 2014	Galaxy 0752 (银河 0752) 2003, Oil on canvas 122cm x 150cm Hammer price: US\$163,900 With premium (18%): US\$188,485 Auction House: Poly International Auction, Beijing Date: 3 June 2015	Dreamful Galaxy (梦幻银河系列 2854) 2014, Oil on canvas 200cm x 100cm Hammer price: US\$103,632 With premium (15%): US\$119,176 Auction House: Canton Treasure Auction, Guangzhou Date: 12 June 2016
6	Jane Lee (1963)	In You, In Me 2015 Mixed media sculpture 220cm x 327cm x 23cm Hammer price: US\$127,431 With premium (25%): US\$159,288 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 31 March 2018	Fetish Beige 2011 Mixed media on canvas 180cm x 180cm Hammer price: US\$122,550 With premium (25%): US\$153,187 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 3 April 2016	Gift II 2009 Mixed media on plywood 122cm x 152 Hammer price: US\$103,200 With premium (25%): US\$129,000 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 5 October 2015
7	Liu Kang (1911 – 2004)	View of Arab Street 1962, Oil on board 79cm x 105cm Hammer price: US\$116,100 With premium (25%): US\$144,480 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 25 May 2014	View of the Palace 1951, Oil on canvas 74cm x 98cm Hammer price: US\$103,200 With premium (25%): US\$129,000 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 24 November 2013	Balinese Maidens Resting 1957, Oil on board 73cm x 95.5cm Hammer price: US\$92,664 With premium (25%): US\$115,830 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 3 April 2017
8	Chua Ek Kay (1947 – 2008)	Archipelago 1, 2 & 3 1999 Mixed media on rice paper 68cm x 68cm Hammer price: US\$90,300 With premium (25%): US\$112,875 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 17 May 2008	A Pause for Silence 2006, Ink on paper 87.5cm x 180cm Hammer price: US\$54,054 With premium (25%): US\$67,567 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 3 April 2017	Lotus Pond – The Summer Happenings 2005, Acrylic on linen 99cm x 187cm Hammer price: US\$39,594 With premium (% NA): US\$47,512 Auction House: Sotheby's, Singapore Date: 28 May 2017

AUCTION BENCHMARKS OF ARTISTS IN SINGAPORE

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
9	Lim Tze Peng (1923)	Street Scenes Near Boat Quay 1980 Mixed media on paper 66cm x 136cm Hammer price: US\$83,784 With premium (25%): US\$104,730 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 6 April 2014	Singapore River Scene 1979 Mixed media on paper 138cm x 67.5cm Hammer price: US\$64,400 With premium (25%): US\$79,856 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 27 May 2012	Boat Quay 2010 Mixed media on paper 122cm x 244.5cm Hammer price: US\$54,180 With premium (25%): US\$67,725 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 6 October 2013
10	David Chan (1979)	You Are So Special, Just Like Everyone Else 2011, Oil on linen 200cm x 200cm Hammer price: US\$83,239 With premium (25%): US\$104,048 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 26 November 2017	Modern Journeys – Cruising West/Modern Journeys 2006/07, Oil on canvas 180cm x 145cm Hammer price: US\$47,046 With premium (22%): US\$57,396 Auction House: Borobudur Singapore Date: 19 January 2014	Foreplay Perhaps 2012, Oil on canvas 200cm x 200cm Hammer price: US\$41,280 With premium (25%): US\$51,600 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 24 November 2013
11	Ong Kim Seng (1945)	Nepal 1945, Acrylic on canvas 170cm x 300cm Hammer price: US\$74,600 With premium (25%): US\$93,307 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 3 April 2017	Bali 1995, Oil on canvas 100cm x 150cm Hammer price: US\$28,380 With premium (25%): US\$35,475 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 4 April 2016	Morning Ritual in Ubud, Bali Undated, Acrylic on canvas 80cm x 111cm Hammer price: US\$20,534 With premium (25%): US\$24,640 Auction House: 33 Auction, Singapore Date: 21 November 2015
12	Chua Mia Tee (1931)	Prosperity 2008, Oil on canvas 100cm x 150cm Hammer price: US\$62,480 With premium (20%): US\$74,151 Auction House: 33 Auction, Singapore Date: 17 January 2014	Koi Fish and Lotus (錦鯉 和荷花) 2009, Oil on canvas 100cm x 150cm Hammer price: US\$45,532 With premium (20%): US\$55,549 Auction House: 33 Auction, Singapore Date: 4 February 2018	Singapore River Scene 1983, Oil on canvas 61cm x 91.5cm Hammer price: US\$35,966 With premium (20%): US\$43,159 Auction House: 33 Auction, Singapore Date: 23 January 2015

* The artists are ranked according to their auction records in the first column. The second and third columns show their second and third most expensive artworks sold in auctions.

** NA: not available

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
13	Tay Bak Koi (1939 – 2005)	Door Deities Undated, Oil on canvas 97.5cm x 118cm Hammer price: US\$61,920 With premium (25%): US\$77,400 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 4 April 2016	Till the Cows Come Home 1996, Oil on canvas 118.5cm x 178.5cm Hammer price: US\$61,574 With premium (22%): US\$73,888 Auction House: 33 Auction, Singapore Date: 21 May 2016	At the Market 1967, Oil on canvas 64cm x 104cm Hammer price: US\$54,180 With premium (25%): US\$67,725 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 25 November 2015
14	Tan Oe Pang (Chen Youbing) (1947)	Mother and Child 2014 Mixed media on paper 220cm x 114cm Hammer price: US\$57,470 With premium (20%): US\$71,837 Auction House: Christie's, Shanghai Date: 25 April 2015	The Church/Indian Temple at Pagoda Street/Temple, at Serangoon North/ Mosque, at Sultan Road 2005 Mixed media on paper 138cm x 35cm Hammer price: US\$30,960 With premium (25%): US\$38,700 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 29 November 2015	In the Bustling Metropolis Undated Mixed media on paper 52.5cm x 253cm Hammer price: US\$23,184 With premium (25%): US\$28,960 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 26 May 2013
15	Choo Keng Kwang (1931)	Pasar Burung 1991, Oil on canvas 100cm x 190cm Hammer price: US\$53,380 With premium (20%): US\$62,988 Auction House: 33 Auction, Singapore Date: 1 September 2013	Pigeons Undated, Oil on canvas 71cm x 11cm Hammer price: US\$21,075 With premium (20%): US\$24,868 Auction House: 33 Auction, Singapore Date: 5 May 2013	Koi 1984, Oil on masonite 122cm x 81cm Hammer price: US\$19,641 With premium (20%): US\$23,176 Auction House: 33 Auction, Singapore Date: 3 November 2012
16	Jimmy Ong (1964)	Farquhar Descend Forbidden Hill 2008, Charcoal on paper 147cm x 483cm Hammer price: US\$30,912 With premium (25%): US\$38,640 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 5 April 2010	Nelli's Dowry 2003, Charcoal on paper 107cm x 160cm Hammer price: US\$23,111 With premium (25%): US\$28,696 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 29 November 2015	Nelli's Dream 2001, Charcoal on paper 91.5cm x 400.5cm Hammer price: US\$22,587 With premium (N/A%): US\$27,104 Auction House: Sotheby's, Singapore Date: 9 October 2005

AUCTION BENCHMARKS OF ARTISTS IN SINGAPORE

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
17	Chen Chong Swee (1910 – 1986)	Village Scenery Undated Ink and colour on silk 83.5cm x 60cm Hammer price: US\$25,148 With premium (20%): US\$30,177 Auction House: 33 Auction, Singapore Date: 11 October 2014	Nanyang Landscape 1970 Indian ink and colour on paper 70cm x 103cm Hammer price: US\$21,930 With premium (25%): US\$27,412 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 29 November 2015	Fruit Seller in Market (市集裡的水果攤販) Undated Watercolour on paper 56cm x 76cm Hammer price: US\$18,971 With premium (20%): US\$23,144 Auction House: 33 Auction, Singapore Date: 4 February 2018
18	Tan Choh Tee (1942)	Singapore River II 1978, Oil on canvas 56cm x 73cm Hammer price: US\$21,861 With premium (22%): US\$26,218 Auction House: 33 Auction, Singapore Date: 15 October 2017	Singapore River I 1983, Oil on canvas 50cm x 65cm Hammer price: US\$19,563 With premium (22%): US\$23,505 Auction House: 33 Auction, Singapore Date: 15 October 2017	Smith Street, Chinatown 1978, Oil on canvas 56cm x 74cm Hammer price: US\$16,500 With premium (25%): US\$19,800 Auction House: 33 Auction, Singapore Date: 21 June 2015
19	Lim Cheng Hoe (1912 – 1979)	Boats in the Singapore River Undated Watercolour on paper 72cm x 26cm Hammer price: US\$20,640 With premium (25%): US\$25,800 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 29 November 2015	Still Life with Rambutan 1962 Watercolour on paper 52cm x 67.5cm Hammer price: US\$15,467 With premium (25%): US\$19,333 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 6 April 2014	Kampung by the Riverside Undated Watercolour on paper 39cm x 52cm Hammer price: US\$12,880 With premium (25%): US\$16,100 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 26 May 2013
20	Tang Da Wu (1943)	Untitled 2014 Mixed media on paper 235.5cm x 139cm Hammer price: US\$20,623 With premium (25%): US\$25,778 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 3 October 2016	Towering Rocks Pierce into the Clouds, Raging Waves Smashed Against the Shores 2014 Mixed media on paper 258cm x 138.5cm Hammer price: US\$18,018 With premium (25%): US\$22,522 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 3 April 2017	True Story 1986, Oil on canvas 122cm x 92cm Hammer price: US\$14,113 With premium (16.2%): US\$16,653 Auction House: Est–Quest Auctions Co., Hong Kong Date: 28 May 2017

* The artists are ranked according to their auction records in the first column. The second and third columns show their second and third most expensive artworks sold in auctions.

** NA : not available

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
21	Fan Chang Tien (1907 – 1987)	Plums, Orchid, Chrysanthemums and Bamboo Undated Mixed media on paper 136cm x 34cm Hammer price: US\$19,350 With premium (% NA): US\$22,252 Auction House: Chinese Paintings & Art Auctioneer Hong Kong Date: 30 November 2013	Kampong Scene with Cyclist 1964 Mixed media on rice paper 138cm x 34cm Hammer price: US\$19,334 With premium (25%): US\$24,167 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 27 November 2016	The Hollow Stem Bamboo Undated, Ink on paper 141cm x 69cm Hammer price: US\$17,983 With premium (20%): US\$21,579 Auction House: 33 Auction, Singapore Date: 26 January 2015
22	Thomas Yeo (1936)	Abstract Undated Mixed media on paper 105cm x 151cm Hammer price: US\$16,750 With premium : NA Auction House: Christie's, Singapore Date: 1 October 1995	Landscape Undated Mixed media on paper 60cm x 80cm Hammer price: US\$10,537 With premium (18%): US\$12,433 Auction House: 33 Auction, Singapore Date: 5 May 2013	Flight Circa 1980 Acrylic on canvas 100cm x 151cm Hammer price: US\$10,475 With premium: NA Auction House: Sotheby's, Singapore Date: 16 May 1998

ART AUCTIONS IN SINGAPORE, 2010-2018

AUCTION HOUSE	YEAR	DATE	CITY	LOTS	TOTAL SALES IN S\$	TOTAL SALES IN US\$	SOLD BY LOT (%)
Larasati	2011	March 12	Singapore	90	1,734,420	1,369,133	75.6
	2012	Jan 12	Singapore	15	3,013,400	2,336,439	93.3
		July 28	Singapore	53	1,315,099	1,054,367	93.2
	2013	Jan 26	Singapore	33	2,476,783	2,007,284	100
		July 14	Singapore	81	1,514,935	1,200,464	90.1
	2014	Jan 18	Singapore	96	1,309,487	1,026,938	73.9
		Aug 24	Singapore	87	1,116,185	892,914	93.1
	2015	Jan 24	Singapore	50	1,498,770	1,113,211	88
		July 5	Singapore	50	664,529	492,309	90
		Nov 21	Singapore	50	454,590	321,854	92
	2016	April 23	Singapore	60	459,391	339,195	75
		Oct 29	Singapore	52	261,629	187,993	84
	2017	April 8	Singapore	45	309,087	220,122	62.2
		Aug 26	Singapore	43	283,467	207,772	79.1
	2018	March 10	Singapore	41	521,768	396,293	80.5
33 Auction	2016	Oct 15	Singapore	-	-	-	-
		Dec 10	Singapore	55	141,337	97,945	43.6
	2017	Jan 21	Singapore	86	947,208	664,362	49.4
		May 14	Singapore	145	1,853,302	1,319,977	56.6
		Sept 24	Singapore	11	18,300	13,592	54.5
		Oct 15	Singapore	115	1,286,368	953,365	46.1
	2018	Feb 4	Singapore	144	1,638,234	1,239,831	50.7
		May 20	Singapore	145	1,258,670	937,633	46.2

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EVALUATING THE REGIONAL ART MARKET

The most significant auction transactions and private sales of Southeast Asian artists in the past five years, according to Wang Zineng, include top modernists such as Indonesia's Affandi and Lee Man Fong, Vietnam's Le Pho and Singapore's Cheong Soo Pieng and, of late, Indonesian contemporary stars like Christine Ay Tjoe.

The most important modern artists in Singapore would be Cheong Soo Pieng, whom one would count as from the first-generation, and the generation that comes after, such as Tay Bak Koi. A significant number of their works have appeared at auction, says Wang, who was with Christie's from 2011 to 2016 — eventually becoming its head of sales of Southeast Asian art — before he set up his own art consultancy.

Wang Zineng: If you think about Indonesia, if you think about trading in Affandi, there is a lot more, it is a much bigger market. But instinctively and anecdotally, with all this accumulation of knowledge, you would think that the works of Affandi and Lee Man Fong are the most widely traded. And in terms of the Vietnamese market, definitely it is Le Pho. Some of the fastest-moving prices are for Christine Ay Tjoe's works. There is interest all around and when there is interest, there will be movement and there is demand. And people will be [encouraged] to sell.

So, really, the most obvious thing about the market is that there is great demand. Supply is extremely limited (for good works), so whenever a piece comes out, there is a great deal of price movement, compared with, say, the previous buyer, for example, in 2007 versus 2012 versus 2017. And particularly from 2012 to 2017, there has been a great deal of price movement.

The perception of the health of the art market in Southeast Asia relies a lot on how the Indonesian segment is faring.

If you look at the entire region as one conurbation, if there is a big movement in one market, it will affect the sentiment of the entire market.

Indonesian art, in terms of auctions as well as private sales, contributes about half of the total volume and numbers we are dealing with in Southeast Asia.

So, Indonesian artists' works at auction would account for 60% to 65% or 70% of what is traded — sold to Asian collectors or beyond. Generally, when we look at the products, specifically Indonesian works, they account for at least 60% of any auction focusing on Southeast Asian art. Unless it was a special sale, for instance, of Singapore art.

Generally, Indonesian art sales are significant whenever there is a big shift in the market, but we have not really seen a big shift in the emerging market. Therefore, Indonesian art in the market could be stable in that sense.

Auction seasons in Hong Kong, with either Christie's or Sotheby's, in the past five years have averaged US\$15 million to US\$20 million in sales per season.

In April, Sotheby's would have sold about US\$16 million to US\$17 million and Christie's about US\$16 million to US\$18 million as well. So, US\$16 million, multiplied by four times a year, is US\$64 million.

If you include the regional houses - León Gallery or Salcedo or the Indonesians - and added all of them up, it would probably amount to a total of US\$80 million per year.

In 2013, the total figure was probably about US\$100 million but, on average, if you take 2012 to 2017, you would find it is about US\$80 million.

So, for Southeast Asian art, that means publicly traded auction numbers for the entire year would amount to US\$80 million

to US\$100 million, excluding the private sales market.

After Indonesian art, the second highest-grossing category of art would be Singaporean and Vietnamese works. But in the past three years, it has been more Vietnamese works.

In 2012 and 2013, Singaporean works were more dominant, followed by Vietnamese art. In 2014, 2015 and 2016, Singaporean art took up a slightly smaller portion of the total pie. Vietnamese art is coming up. So now, Vietnamese art accounts for about 15% to 20% of sales at auction. Singapore contributes about 10% of sales and art from the Philippines is generally about 10%.

As for Myanmar art, we just have not got the hang of it yet. Nobody has really explored Myanmar art yet.

Malaysia is an extremely developed art market in terms of structure. There is openness to exhibitions of foreign artists as well. You have got decent museums. Any art infrastructure has its problems but the look of the Malaysian art infrastructure is much more developed.

The Edge: But why is there not much more demand?

It's hard to say. Perhaps, there are fewer external sources of Malaysian art, fewer collections of Malaysian art outside the country. Having external sources always helps. When you think about options and the priority for auction houses to source from overseas, such as the US, Malaysian works would be extremely interesting. And works sourced from the UK tend to be more attractive - usually they command 20% to 30% more in value, on average, than identical or similar works sourced locally.

Probably, the only name that can be sourced internationally is Datuk Chuah Thean Teng.

When Chuah Thean Teng's works come up, and if sourced from overseas, they are more likely to sell. But to my knowledge, in terms

of his numbers, you probably do not get a very good representation at Christie's or Sotheby's sales.

Other than for the works of Cheong Soo Pieng, Georgette Chen, Chen Wen Hsi, Chen Chong Swee, Liu Kang and the earlier generation of artists, Singapore art has limited demand beyond its borders, especially contemporary art. Why is that?

I don't think the demand is limited. It is just that prices are not high, merely a fraction of the modern artists'. Hence, we don't really pay that much attention.

If you look at the market for the two hottest names in Singaporean contemporary art right now — Jane Lee and Ruben Pang — there is great volume and prices are still buoyant and significant compared with the overall Singapore market. But there is less exposure, less news about it. But it does not mean there is no demand.

Do buyers go to the primary market to get works by these names rather than at auction?

For contemporary, definitely. There is very little secondary market trade.

In 2012, at Christie's auction in Hong Kong, Lim Tze Peng's Chinese ink and colour on paper work, titled *Singapore River Scene*, fetched HK\$620,000 (S\$101,800 / US\$79,000).

Yes, I remember that one.

This sale was significant as it was the first time that a work by a living Singaporean artist crossed the S\$100,000 (US\$74,000) mark at an international auction. Was this a one-off occurrence? Subsequent sales did not seem to attract as much buyer interest. Why is that?

I do not have hard data right now, but I think the living artists who have exceeded S\$100,000 or US\$100,000 would be Tan Swie Hian, Chua Ek Kay and Jane Lee (in the evening sale at Sotheby's Hong

Kong on April 3, 2016). And probably, a couple more but Lim Tze Peng's was the first. *(Please refer to the auction records achieved by artists identified with Singapore.)*

And since then, Lim Tze Peng has not achieved that kind of price level at auction?

Yes, one more [time]. One more piece from the 1980s, a street scene. That would have broken the HK\$620,000 record.

Was that work bought by a Singaporean?

Yes. I remember, we had an over-subscription of phone bids, which was very rare for that lot. There were 20 people wanting to be on the phone. And many more people in the room. But unfortunately, and I remember it very well, I missed out on the moment as I was not one of the phone bidders because I had to go for a meeting.

Were the phone bidders mainly Singaporeans?

Primarily. Yes. The bidding took about 90 seconds. And everyone told me it was very intense and that the auctioneer was entirely overwhelmed, which was very good. Yes, the one you were talking about is this piece (shows work on laptop) HK\$620,000 with premium. At that point in time, the premium was still 25% for the first HK\$400,000 (US\$51,000) and 20% of the next amount, however much, so that was why it was HK\$620,000. But now, where the April 2014 sale was concerned, it was HK\$650,000 (US\$83,000) on the hammer. This was also the 1980s street scene. One was 2012 and one was 2014. But both are larger format works.

At this 'very moment in time', says Wang, auction demand for works by Singaporean artists would still be focused on Cheong Soo Pieng.

And if you ever have a great Georgette Chen picture, it would be

sought after as well. But if you are talking about broad-based buyers, then it would be Cheong Soo Pieng.

What type of artworks, and from which country, generally generate the highest value at auction?

If you are thinking about just Asia, abstract works from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, across Japan and South Korea. We are talking about generating the highest value. In Art Basel Hong Kong, for example, one of the nicest displays was a Kabinett section display of a South Korean artist, Kwon Young-woo (1926-2013). Prior to 2015, he had no market. In 2015, a market demand was created and by 2017, his prices were maybe 70, 80 or 90 times his prices in 2014.

Would you say that art fairs help artists, directly or indirectly, push their prices up?

No, it is a combination of factors. Marketing by dealers and gallerists, proper placement at auction, promotional efforts by the collectors and patrons and, correspondingly, any institutional shows of the same artists. All of that would help.

Generally, in terms of auction value, artists from which country are perceived to be the top grossers in a sale?

Are you talking about Southeast Asia? Well, the flavour of the month now is Vietnam. Le Pho has just broken US\$1 million at auction.

As an independent art consultant, what are the challenges you face in sourcing works for sale?

You are fighting the big auction houses to get resources — their marketing resources and the lure of big money from the auction houses. And you are also working in a context where the markets for certain modern artists are moving very fast at this moment, like in the case of Le Pho.

An average silk painting in 2015 would be US\$250,000 to US\$350,000. In 2016, it has risen to US\$350,000 to US\$550,000 and we are talking about average works. And right now, this past auction, I feel if you had a good silk painting, you would not be asking for anything less than US\$700,000. So, working in the market for private sales, you have to be nimble and be able to adjust really quickly. Auction houses don't have to. Their estimates can stay at US\$100,000 or US\$200,000 all the time, be it 2015, 2016 or 2017. The market and the number of leading works in the sale will ultimately decide the final price. But in a fast-changing market like that, private dealers have to price things very realistically. We have to price things in a fast-changing market. That would be the challenge.

How would you convince consignors to sell works privately instead of through an auction house?

There are ways. Discretion, for one. Some people do not like the risk of offering a work at auction. Some people like transactions to be private ... [or] to take place at a certain time. So, there are various reasons why anybody would want to sell privately, as well as at auction, so we have to identify those reasons and emphasise them.

Knowing what you know about the auction system and gallery sales, what would you advise your clients when they have a major work for sale?

It really depends on what sort of risk profile they have. What do they ultimately want to do with the work? What kind of artwork it is also determines the sale strategy. If an artwork has been seen in the public domain and at auction in the past five years, we generally would not advise somebody to put it back into auction. You generally would not advise a risk-averse client to offer something at auction. You generally wouldn't advise a public figure, when people

know an artwork belongs to them and they don't want to be seen as a seller, to put the work into an auction. So, it depends on the client and the artwork really.

On average, what percentage - in terms of auction sales - do you reckon Southeast Asian art figures in the category of Asian art?

Between 15% and 25%. We are talking about 20th century and 21st century art. It varies by season, in 2014, it reached up to 25% at Christie's and Sotheby's.

So, if at that moment, it was US\$100 million for Southeast Asian art overall, then it would be about US\$350 million to US\$400 million for Asian art.

Is the demand for Southeast Asian art on the rise, in decline or has plateaued as far as auctions are concerned?

It is a pretty straight line at this moment but I wouldn't call it a plateau. It has been going in a straight line because, going back to your first few questions, Indonesian art has not really moved. Nothing has been happening in Indonesia. There is a pulling away of quality in the market. So, when great Affandi works come out now, they are seen at the US\$1 million price level, but when an average Affandi comes out, it is still pretty much US\$70,000 to US\$80,000. And that has not changed in the past 10 years. Though the top end of the market continues to grow, there is a very thin supply at the top end. So, we are not exactly seeing any real price movements in the Indonesian market.

Which segment of Southeast Asian art do you feel has the greatest capacity to increase in demand in the next five years?

You cannot pull rabbits out of a hat with this kind of thing. There needs to be a basis, some observable trends in the last couple of

years. It would probably be the expansion of the Vietnamese market. Because supply is plentiful, with the works of Le Pho, Mai Trung Thu (Mai Thu) and Vu Cao Dam. If you take these three names and then you take three artists in Singapore, say, Chen Wen Hsi, Cheong Soo Pieng and perhaps another artist who has sufficient volume. But it is really hard to say who else. In Singapore, there are really only two names.

And if you take another three artists from the Philippines — Amorsolo, Manansala and Ang Kiukok — and three from Indonesia — Hendra Gunawan, Affandi and Lee Man Fong. And if you take three from Malaysia, who are modernists with significant market volume — like Latiff Mohidin, Ibrahim Hussein and, who else? Of these artists, either a couple of them or three artists from each country, the ones who have the greatest quantity of works in the market would be from Vietnam. Le Pho and Vu Cao Dam, in particular, between 1945 and the immediate post-war period to when they died in the 1980s or 1990s, they were working with galleries and were highly prolific.

So, the single artist who has the greatest number of works transacted at auction in the past 20 years is actually Le Pho, with more than 1,300 works.

For many years, most of the consignors have not been Vietnamese. They come from all over the world — from the US and France, in particular.

Lee Man Fong and Affandi come close, with 1,497 transactions between them which would probably mean 1,300 unique artworks transacted at auction.

So, the figure of 1,497 would include individual works but certain works have been sold twice over, which would be excluded. Therefore, transacted works would amount to more than 1,300. I believe the second most transacted artist would be a toss-up between Affandi

and Lee Man Fong. Affandi's transacted works would be over 900. No, actually 894 works.

The buyers

The buyers are also extremely diverse, geographically. We have had more Vietnamese buyers in the past two years than ever before. Over the past 20 years, we have always had a constant number of Hong Kong and Singapore buyers. It is a very diverse collector base.

I have three images you can look through, where we are dividing the market into several periods.

This picture here achieved a record in the 1990s. It is in the collection of the National Gallery Singapore. The top price at the time was about US\$40,000 for a Vietnamese work. And today, we have registered US\$1 million. At that time, buyers were pretty much coming from everywhere. There were many Viet Kieus, or overseas Vietnamese, and Indonesians as well. The first half of the 2000s was quiet, market-wise. There weren't any seismic shifts in the market. But from 2006 to 2008, when contemporary art was coming up, there was a corresponding number of buyers from Hong Kong who were keen on this genre and aesthetics of Vietnamese artists. Taiwanese buyers were as well. So at that point in time, there was a short-lived spike in prices from 2006 to 2008, which was interrupted by the global financial crisis at the end of 2008. But between 2013 and maybe continuing until now, we are seeing more and more home buys by Vietnamese buyers from Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, who are beginning to transact out of their country. In a way, this situation is almost like Chinese buyers buying back their cultural heritage. There were so many newspaper reports in the 2000s about the rise of Chinese buyers everywhere in the world, especially in London, Paris, Amsterdam and Geneva, the traditional European art market capitals. It was like collectors were going there to buy back anything

that was remotely Chinese. So, in a way, this is what is happening on a smaller scale in Vietnam.

What kind of demand among Southeast Asian art collectors is there for Chinese ink artists and calligraphers such as Chen Wen Hsi, Cheong Soo Pieng, Chen Chong Swee, Huang Yao, Pan Tian-shou and Pan Shou?

It is a subset of collectors here in the region. You don't expect ink works to be found in every collection. Only important collections have ink works and, even then, most likely very few really collect ink works exclusively. There are some notable individuals who collect only ink art — the best known in Singapore and Malaysia would be Whang Shang Ying of Lam Soon Group. Generally, though, nobody really collects ink works as a distinct category on its own.

Wang believes Chinese contemporary ink is a niche-collecting category. Incidentally, he staged a show in 2017 entitled, *Virtuoso in Ink*, comprising the works of a 'cross-generational group' of seven Singaporean artists – Zhuang Shengtao, Henri Chen Kezhan, Hong Sek Chern, Oh Chai Hoo, Tan Oe Pang, Cheong Soo Pieng and Chua Ek Kay. The show was held from March 9 to April 2 at the Shop-house 5 art space in Geylang, Singapore.

I wanted to select a group of artists who were pretty much born in the 1940s and included third-generation as well as first-generation artists, to kind of round it off. But this was just in the Singapore context, the extent of modern abstract ink art.

The response was pretty okay. The marketing could have been much better. It was a selling show. The sales were fine but I wish more people had seen it.

The prices of the works ranged from S\$18,000 to S\$65,000 (US\$13,400 to US\$48,000), with Tan Oe Pang's work being the most expensive.

In May 2017, Wang also collaborated with a gallery in Hong Kong on a selling show there that featured some 40 works of modern Vietnamese art from the 1930s to the 1970s.

Anything after that period would be considered the late works of the first-generation artists. Or, a time period when there would be more works by the second-generation artists. The 1930s was the formative period of the very first batch of graduates from the Hanoi Fine Art School. We are talking about Vietnamese art, but Vietnamese art produced outside of Vietnam. From the French art school, the first batch of graduates, in 1931 and 1932, were given opportunities to exhibit in Europe and by 1937 and 1938, Le Pho, Mai Thu and Cao Dam decided to settle in France, where they spent the rest of their lives, painting there and working with galleries. So, this show really was from this period — when they went to France and their production throughout their lives in France.

Post-1963, these artists produced a lot, but these were late works. So, if you are looking for excellent works by Le Pho, you are looking at silk works. This is a simple breakdown of the three periods of his artistic production. There is great volume here of the 1,300 to 1,400 Le Pho works that have sold at auction. The prices range from a few thousand US dollars to US\$150,000 and up to US\$1 million.

Wang participated in Art Stage Jakarta in August 2017, offering works by Indonesian artists such as Mochtar Apin, Popo Iskandar, Nashar, Oesman Effendi, Zaini and Rusli.

At Art Stage Singapore in January 2018, Art Agenda S.E.A.'s curated booth was given a title, Counterpoints: Post-War Modern Asian Abstraction — which featured two exhibitions: Modern Indonesian Abstraction: Connecting to the Global Post-War Art World and Taiwan Post-War Modern Abstraction: Revolution & Inheritance.

Art Agenda S.E.A. also presented Li Chen: Above the Clouds and

Classic / Contemporary: An Indelible Chinese Aesthetics as well as collaborated with iB2G, specialists in the collection of furniture and lighting by 20th century Danish designers.

A selection of mid-century Danish design furniture was displayed at Art Agenda S.E.A.'s booth to complement the artworks on offer, in line with the fair's recent transformation to "innovate and augment its position as the flagship art fair of Southeast Asia" – according to Art Stage's press release – by including art and design.



Talenia Phua Gajardo

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CATERING FOR THE ASPIRATIONAL GROUP

Talenia Phua Gajardo is the Singapore-based founder of The Artling, an online platform for Asian art, and Luxglove, a digital marketplace for luxury goods. The Artling works with artists around the world to provide consultancy services to private and corporate clients, including Twitter, Google, GIC and the Four Seasons Hotel.

The 32-year-old entrepreneur of Singaporean Chinese-Chilean heritage reveals that selling art online is the way to go.

The Edge: How did you get involved in art?

Talenia Phua Gajardo: My background is architecture. I worked for Zaha Hadid Architects in London (Zaha passed away in 2016). I started doing more interior design work and sourcing for clients. That's how it started. I used to do projects for Loh Lik Peng, the Singaporean hotelier who works on conservation properties. My first project was a restaurant in one of his hotels in Bethnal Green (Town Hall), London. I began buying and sourcing objects, artworks and all sorts of things. After that, Loh got me to do a renovation project in Liverpool Street.

We wanted to line the corridors with black-and-white photography from all over the world and at the same time highlight Asian or Singaporean photographers. But there was no way to find a good online platform that aggregated the best from the region. That's where the idea to start Artling came about. I started building the website and it took off.

I began with photographs and a handful of photographers whom I knew. They supported the website early on and now we have over a thousand others from galleries and artists. We recently launched a new category 'Design' on the platform, which features

limited edition, handmade, unique pieces and ceramic works that are not mass-manufactured.

A year ago, we launched a secondary market platform (Luxglove). That started because we had a few clients who said, “I bought this piece five years ago, what do I do with it? I don’t want it anymore.” And it’s not necessarily a Christie’s or Sotheby’s level of work. There isn’t a marketplace for these pieces. Even for auction houses that have unsold works, there’s a lot of inventory floating around that is of value to the next person. That’s the idea behind Luxglove.

We also have a ‘white glove’ service to help clients photograph and upload an item on the website. The categories on the website include art, design, collectibles, classic cars and rare whiskies – our top performing category at the moment.

How do you connect the respective buyers to the products?

If a viewing is necessary, we’ll arrange it here or in a neutral place. Otherwise, most of the purchases are done sight unseen. The biggest challenge for online platforms is customers trusting the quality of the products as seen online. So, the depiction and accuracy of the condition of the item are important.

How do the buyers choose their collection?

It’s quite eclectic especially with the younger collectors. If you look at the 2017 Collectors’ Show at Art Stage [Singapore] that we supported, it was an under-50 age group. It was a contemporary collection, a mix of Western and Southeast Asian art. It really depends on the type of collectors. Collectors like Filipino-Singaporeans Michelangelo and Lourdes Samson have strict guidelines on their collection. They only collect Southeast Asian art and this has helped them create a focused kind of collection. Others such

as Kenneth Tan and his wife Penny have a varied collection. They collect Theaster Gates, Thomas Houseago and Singaporean and Malaysian artworks.

Do you think art market reports are generally skewed towards the West?

I agree that the art market reports are generally skewed towards the West, especially if you look at the online numbers. They are mainly talking about Christie's and Sotheby's which give a good sense of the market size. But they don't give a breakdown of Asia. They look at Asia as mainly China. The UK, the US and China are the biggest consumers, but in terms of honing in on the Southeast Asian region, a lot more is not documented.

Would you say your buyers are the younger generation?

For both platforms, we have different demographics. The Artling has a mainly female database aged 25 to 34. Luxglove has a slightly older, mostly male base. If you buy a whisky, you don't have to see the bottle. You know what you're getting - whether it's rare, sold out, limited edition or from 1936. It's whether you want to pay that price. Luxglove is a negotiation platform, not an auction platform.

We are not listing pieces to bring the prices up, but to bring prices down so that people can let go of their pieces. We have only arranged three viewings. It's not as much as you would expect.

How much Southeast Asian art do you transact?

We transact much more in the primary [market]. Artling is very focused on Asian contemporary art, so we don't do Western at all. This is how we've been able to stand out in the market because there are many online art galleries now. Obviously, the biggest is in the US and the UK. No one has actually focused on Asia. Our

consultancy work is also part of our business model for corporate clients, developers and private individuals looking into acquisitions and bespoke commissions. We just won our biggest project so far from a developer. We also have a sizeable budget for some sculptural work. In that sense, we are essentially an online-offline model.

People need to see the consultant because they are spending a million dollars with you. Even if it's 50,000 dollars, it's still money, right? You provide customer service, so you need that interaction. The online platform serves as the discovery point to disseminate information through interviews and articles. You see the latest stuff and browse by region. You can click on Malaysia, Thailand and see what the others are creating from those regions.

It's very much a combined model. For The Artling, it's South-east Asia; for Luxglove, it's the art. It has probably not been our best performing category, even though it was built because of the art, ironically. We have art from Damien Hirst and Kusama to Malaysian artists and so on. We're refining it further because we don't want to restrict it to Asia.

So your online platform is for people to discover you, then you work on a project basis?

We have people who frequently click and buy.

What's the price range for that?

The price ranges from US\$2,000 to US\$5,000. We just sold a Chinese contemporary artwork for US\$30,000. That's because the buyers know the artist. But the works come from other galleries and consignors.

How do you keep track of the transaction on your online platform? Wouldn't they be able to contact the seller directly?

No, because we deal with the sale from beginning to end. The pay-

ment goes through us. It's not based on the classifieds model. For Luxglove, the sellers are private. For The Artling, some of the pieces are with the galleries. Technically, they can go directly to the gallery if they want to. But we have agreements with the galleries. Of course, if we have spent money, invested time in bringing this client to you, then there is a sales commission. We don't charge to list the item on our platform. If we can help the gallery make a sale, why not?

That's why some people don't understand your business model. They wonder how are you going to make money? People don't normally buy art online if it's really expensive like US\$50,000 or US\$100,000.

That's a misconception because collectors buy online from galleries in New York, Los Angeles (LA), London and Berlin. The week before the exhibition opens, they pick their pieces through a pdf [catalogue] via email. They don't see the actual works, which cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. So, it's not a new thing.

People think, how can you spend a quarter of a million dollars if you don't see the piece? If you know the gallery and your source and have a relationship with that brand, you trust it. These buyers are not going to fly over to New York or LA for the opening. They just want the piece. It has already been happening for a while but many people don't realise that. There are many ways of buying online. You can buy through email but it is how that translates into e-commerce later.

Some think that they would want to see the artwork before they commit so much money.

Although that hasn't been the case for a while, it helps. This is why art fairs are still the number one expense for galleries everywhere. On average, galleries participate in a minimum of six art fairs a year.

So, it is still necessary to have that offline presence to communicate with your existing customers and potential customers. The biggest challenge for all art galleries and start-ups is growing your database and reaching out to new people. And art fairs are the best way to do that.

Isn't hiring people your biggest expense?

We don't participate in art fairs, but we do media partnerships with them. From the gallery side, we do pop-ups and events, collectors' dinners and collaborations with other galleries and artists. In terms of the art industry, that's their biggest expense. For us, obviously it's very different. It's the technical, staffing and customer service et cetera.

Are those your main operational costs?

Yes, because we don't have an artist programme to maintain or an exhibition to put on. We don't have to deal with institutional shows. It's a different kind of cost.

You mentioned that you have just launched a new site. How many websites do you maintain?

'Design' is a new category within The Artling comprising design objects, limited edition pieces and furniture. We work with interior designers and architects to put together proposals for their projects. We just finished The Four Seasons in the Maldives. We were brought in early and the decisions were made fast. They knew their budget and what they wanted. So, we just had to find them the right pieces. Other projects include Four Seasons show-apartments in Thailand, Google, Twitter and GIC.

We go to our database of galleries and artists to see what fits that project. For an architectural or an interior [design] practice, our

service is usually lumped into a furniture, fittings and equipment package. People see it as décor. But we want to have a more curated collection or at least a selected collection that adds more value to the space.

How did you establish contacts with the Four Seasons?

Through networking. There are a few other independent consultants or galleries that do consultancy work, but they're generally limited to their own stable of artists. We come from a neutral perspective. It depends on what the clients are looking for.

Is consultancy the bread and butter of your business?

Yes.

Transactions online are not easy.

It's not easy and online transactions are still in their infancy. This is something we have to be ready for because it will come. Look at where fashion was six years ago. I would never have thought the only place to shop is on Net-a-porter or Outnet like these online websites. And I do not shop from bricks-and-mortar shops anymore. A long time ago, it was not even conceivable for people to buy shoes and clothes online.

It's an investment of passion. Your average order value is generally higher because it's a luxury product. But it's only a matter of time before it changes. If you had come too late in the game, you wouldn't have been able to have all these years to build up your database of artists or galleries. In the meantime, we have to find other ways to see how we can grow the community and get people together.

We still push out information through Instagram, one of the biggest changes in the art world. Collectors can go directly to artists. It's now one of the most important marketing tools for gallerists,

start-ups or even the artists themselves. There are over 500 million people on Instagram, so the potential is huge. It's about making sure that we are future ready in that sense. The most important thing is that we got there first.

Do you track prices of artists online?

Yes, but not just for our reference. We don't advise clients to invest but we have individuals or corporates who ask for their history.

Are there sources of data that you rely on or ignore?

We take whatever is on Artprice as reliable. We cherry-pick key figures from a legitimate auction house.

Do you keep track of numbers that are not what they seem?

We keep track if we have to but it's rare. Our clients are younger and are not in the market as speculators. They are from the aspirational group. We don't deal in blue-chip art at the moment unless it's the developer or architectural projects where they are looking for big pieces. But those are bespoke pieces by established living artists. We don't deal so much in acquisitions from the secondary market.

What price range is the younger generation of collectors looking at?

It depends. We have clients who start off with a US\$15,000 budget. By the end of the year, they're spending US\$500,000. It's like a sickness which is great. The thing about encouraging or growing a community from a young age is that their disposable income grows along with you. If you can establish that relationship early on, it's worth it. But it does take time. It's the same for both our platforms. If we find that someone may be buying a US\$5,000 bottle [of whisky] this year, next year they may be buying a US\$15,000 bottle, so it changes.

We have developer clients who have a US\$3 million budget and corporate clients with a US\$50,000 budget. So it depends. Let's say a client like Google wants to support young emerging artists. They will go for fresh graduates, newly represented or fresh out of school. It depends on the company's corporate ethos because there is a rationale behind how they want to build that collection.

Google has Tilt Brush, VR with binoculars, one of the growing number of programmes for creating virtual reality. I tried it at Art Basel in Hong Kong where they had a pop-up space for Tilt Brush. You can paint in 3D, in real time and potentially have other people in the same virtual space watching you as you paint in 3D; it's amazing! Imagine if you are going to art fairs in VR. Zoom in and see the resolution. The only thing that's missing is the smell, the tactile experience and contact. But it has still not been translated into sales. We are not there yet but it's already changing.

The Google Art Culture Institute has 1,200 museums and cultural heritage sites. You can do a 360° virtual tour of a ruin in Pakistan. It enhances your experience and changes your world view on things. But how does that ultimately affect the bottom line? It's education, that's why it's a non-profit project.

Collecting starts from education, so we look at the traffic to our website. The main driver is content - it's always organic through articles and interviews versus paid for e-commerce websites. People generally want to learn and that's converted into sales. People actually search for an artist or a particular exhibition and are genuinely interested. You get the network effect when people start to share. There's still so much technology to explore. But it will never replace the physical experience. It can simulate, but it cannot duplicate it. Although it will advance in many ways, you can never replace human interaction and contact. It's something that we acknowledge being online.

So, what about old school gallerists not believing in online sales?

It's fine. But they still have to be online to be discovered. People want to find out where they are, when is the next show, what's their address, what's their Instagram account. You want to see what they're doing because you like their product or their artists. It's very difficult to avoid that in today's age. If people are pretending that it doesn't exist, it's their loss. It's a matter of time.

What online entrepreneurs deliver is a certain level of trust because what clients buy should meet their expectations. There's so much fraud online that if the items don't turn out the way they expect, people won't buy again.

Yes, that's why customer experience is very important. Thankfully, we've never had returns. We do have a disclaimer that says it depends on the calibration of your screen. Generally, it's been okay. Obviously, if something is damaged or there's a scratch, we'll take it back and resolve it. It's the same as any other marketplace. Whether it's eBay or Amazon, you have to know your source. You have to look at the ratings and reputation of the seller. As a consumer, you make your best judgement on the information that you have. We have chatbots for live chats on both our platforms where people ask for extra photos, information or certification if the price is slightly higher. And they make their decisions based on that.

You have to place a certain level of trust in your consignors because how sure are you that, let's say, a Yayoi Kusama work is the genuine item?

You have to vet your sellers, so we are careful with our sources.

Do you approach them or they approach you?

Both. Either we know them, we have met them or seen their stores. We have rejected people trying to upload 15 Rolexes because we

don't know them. And that's going to affect our reputation. I'd rather not do the listing. It's definitely quality over quantity. If you're a classifieds model, that's different because it's a volume game where you want to get as many listings as possible. You don't really care where it's coming from. Your revenue model is taking a fee for the actual listing or for the sale.

Were the sales at Art Basel Hong Kong as good as it was reported?

Sales were good. It's getting better every year. Art Basel is a good example of how it has changed Hong Kong. Hong Kong during that week became a zoo. The number of brands not in the art industry which have jumped on the bandwagon are unbelievable. You have Audemars Piguet, UBS, Gucci which got into the arts. That's how you get the masses interested. And the outreach is much wider than it used to be.

What do you think about Art Stage?

We can't compare Art Stage as it's not a like-for-like comparison. The constant comparison between Hong Kong and Singapore is not a fair one. We don't have the Chinese collectors coming here. We don't have White Cube, Gagosian, Perrotin and Lehman. It's very different. That's why it's a Southeast Asian fair.

The art market in Singapore is still young. The boutique fair (Art Fair Philippines) in the Philippines had 40 galleries and a car park; it's one of my most favourite fairs in Asia because it's casual and community-based. In the first three hours, most of everything was snapped up by Filipino collectors. It shows you that Filipino collectors support Filipino artists. It's the same way with the Indonesians. We don't have the same thing here because we don't have that history. The Filipino artists have a history and international exposure. They've done shows over the years and have patronage and support from the museums and institutions.

It's great that we have our government throwing money at Gillman Barracks, National Gallery, and all these things. But you cannot force people to be interested. It has to happen organically.

Jiuxianqiao Road in Beijing happened organically. It started as one little gallery and then more galleries mushroomed. It's hard to expect that to happen in a six-year period. This is something that happens over 50 years. We're only at the beginning.

Are you optimistic or pessimistic about Art Stage?

It's the only fair that we have here, so we have to remain optimistic that it has and will contribute to the art ecosystem. You already see that more and more things are happening during that week. There are some galleries that are not even part of the fair but they still come back and do pop-ups. Helutrans has their art space and has activated their space with all sorts of programming. So, things are starting to happen. That's what we try to stimulate and encourage interest as well. But it will take time. I think people here are very impatient.

Can they last another six years? It's a money game as well. You've burned the money, the investment and you don't have the returns, so you can't sustain in the long run. Lorenzo Rudolf has said they have to change their business model if it's not working. He tried it in Jakarta.

Perhaps they have to change their angle. We partnered Art Stage a couple of years ago in Jakarta and Singapore. The VIP programme was interesting. We could see people's collections and how crazy the Indonesians were about collecting. It reflects so much about their culture. If you walk into a collector's home in the Philippines, paintings would be hung salon-style. In a Singaporean collector's home, one piece would be hung on one big wall and everything else would be in storage. It's a different way

of collecting which I think is super interesting about Southeast Asia.

At the end of the day, it is business. It has to be financially viable. If it's not, they'll have to figure another way to make it so. After Art Basel, it's the biggest fair in the region.

What do you personally collect?

It's very eclectic. Handiwirman Saputra is a favourite. I think he's one of the most amazing Indonesian artists. The interesting thing about a Southeast Asian artist is not being able to tell their origin from their work. That's when there's a potential to become international. If it's too ethnic, or too linked to a particular culture, it's limiting to put it in front of a Western audience. The thing about Handi's work is that you have no idea where he's from. It's about the ideas behind it.

More and more Southeast Asian contemporary artists are going down that abstract route and are therefore more palatable to the Western audience. The main mission for me, especially having lived in London for 10 years, is to introduce Southeast Asia to the world. The easiest way to do that is to put it online as the first contact point. Whether it's in London or New York, it's a new audience. We'll do that at some point.

Did you attend the ID fair in Milan? (Salone Internazionale del Mobile di Milano, April 4 to 9, 2017)

I could spend every week going from fair to fair for the rest of the year but I think my team would kill me. So, I have to try and spread it out a bit more. We're doing a collectors' event with our investor in Chengdu and planning something in Shanghai. We just acquired a company based in Hong Kong, which was similar to The Artling. This is why we never went to Hong Kong because they were there.

They focused on China, so the acquisition provided a database for us because we want to get our foot in that region as well.

What's the website called?

It's called Artshare, which we now own.

Will the name change to The Artling too?

We'll probably absorb it and start diverting traffic at some point but we've already merged the databases.

Was that part of the partnership with Tatler?

It was done in the same span of time, but the acquisition was done at the same time we raised the money.

They put in US\$2.5 million for the deal? Was it unusual for Tatler to be involved in that sort of venture?

The Edipresse Media group that owns *Tatler* gets involved in start-ups. They have already invested in luxury marketplaces before but not in Asia. Media companies like Burda are also snapping up lifestyle companies. This is something you see happening with traditional publishing media companies as they are trying to get a foothold in other parts of the luxury industry. The best way to do that is to connect with start-ups.

What's the partnership like with Tatler?

Edipresse has other publications like *Home Journal* and a few others. The main one is *Tatler*, which is in eight different regions.

Are they going to make use of the connection to do events?

Yes, we'll definitely collaborate. We just did our first event in Hong Kong last week. It was a pop-up with cocktail for collectors and gallerists. It was during the Art Basel, but it's not affiliated to it. Art

Basel does not collaborate except with approved companies such as UBS, AP (Audemars Piguet) and Google. There was a lot to be done because they haven't been active in the arts. If you look at the last cover, it was Zeng Fanzhi and Larry Gagosian, so they're really pushing that angle. It is going to be quite interesting to see how that evolves. So, definitely there will be a lot of collaborations.

There was a contrarian view about what Art Basel has done for Hong Kong. There was an article that said, 'To get the very rich to part with their money is to sell art to the uncultured...' It was quite a provocative article published online.

There's always going to be all sorts of opinions. Ultimately, galleries want to sell. It's about access and relationships. They want to be careful with who the painting goes to, who's the collector and where it is going to be placed. They want to be careful with a Mark Bradford from Hauser & Wirth. They're not going to sell it to anybody, right? A Bradford starts from US\$3,000,000. At the other end of the spectrum, you have artworks under US\$50,000. They want to improve the career of the artist and get the works out. So, it really depends on the strategy of the gallery. I don't think it's for us to judge whether someone is cultured or not cultured. If they want to own an artwork, whether they're a speculator or not, first-time or seasoned buyers, they're just selling art.

The writer or the editor used the title, *Art fairs a means of parting Hong Kong's uncultured rich from their money*¹, to be provocative.

Click bait and it worked. We have probably too many artists, considering how small and recent the market is, but it's also about education. Just because it's very expensive doesn't mean it's good.

¹ Jason Wordie, March 31, 2017. *Art fairs a means of parting Hong Kong's uncultured rich from their money*. www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/article/2083441/opinion-art-fairs-means-parting-hong-kongs-uncultured-rich

And just because it's very cheap doesn't mean it's bad. So you can get limited editions of signed prints from STPI by Ronald Ventura for US\$300 or Eko Nugroho for US\$300. People don't really know about them. You can get rubbish at crappy fairs for US\$20,000. How do you navigate this? That's why it goes back to education; putting out as much information as you can, so people don't buy without knowing. For a young market, the danger is with affordability. That's a very relative term. Ten thousand dollars is not affordable to a lot of people. And you can get a really great painting at US\$5,000 from Art Fair Philippines or Jakarta.

The perception of equating price to value needs to change. This is why the online platform is so important. If you don't have the resources to travel, that's fine; you can find everything online now. You can watch interviews, zoom in on the works, look at hi-res images, do 360° tours – all these things are online now. You can visit places you could never visit before and that's been a major change. Without that, we'll all be living under our coconut shells.

There are many places I've never been to like Pakistan and Doha. You learn about them by reading online. I was in an Australian boarding school and wrote my thesis on the Louvre before I even saw the iconic museum. You have access to all this information. It's just how proactive you want to be.



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FACING THE BURST BUBBLE SYNDROME

33 Auction, founded in Singapore in 1998, is an offshoot of Linda Gallery in Jakarta, a significant player in the region's art scene. The auction house specialises in contemporary Asian art and was named one of the top auction houses in the region in 2013 by Blouin Artinfo.

David Fu, 34, of 33 Auction talks about the auction house business in Singapore and the artists to look out for. Fu is the nephew of the owner-operators, Linda Ma and her husband Ali Kusno Fusin.

"The main concern about doing auctions in Singapore is the cost," says Fu. "Holding previews and auctions in hotels was the trend from 2010 to 2013, at the height of the auction activities, and they were lavish affairs.

"But renting a ballroom is not cheap. In Singapore, we sell 68 to 150 lots and hold previews at our office. In October 2007, Borobudur collaborated with Valentine Willie¹ to hold an auction for 400 to 500 lots of Southeast Asian and Chinese art. Our auctions are usually held at the Hyatt hotel, but the cost of renting a ballroom is high at S\$20,000 to S\$30,000 (about US\$15,000-US\$23,000) per day. Previews in a hotel setting require renting partitions, lighting and so on, and this can easily set you back S\$100,000 (US\$75,000).

"The end of 2008 was the start of the global financial crisis. We came into the market in May 2009. That was risky business. We started by auctioning close to 200 pieces in the first auction. For the second auction, we sold a lot in the evening sale, something not really seen in the Singapore market. High-end pieces by (I Nyoman) Masriadi and Hendra (Gunawan) went for S\$30,000 onwards. The auction did very well with more than 80% sold. In 2014 and 2015, most of the auction houses cut down on their lots and the scale of their previews due to the slowdown in (demand for) Indonesian contemporary art."

1 www.vwfa.net/Borobudur/index.html

The Edge: Why has the demand for Indonesian contemporary art declined?

David Fu: Various factors attributed to the decline. Even at the big auction houses like Sotheby's and Christie's, a lot of the Indonesian contemporary art failed to find buyers. Only established names like Masriadi and Christine Ay Tjoe sold well. But for others like Agus Suwage, Putu Sutawijaya, Jumaldi Alfi, prices tumbled by 50%. There was support for Hadiwirman while Ugo Untoro and Pramuhendra works were a hit-and-miss phenomenon.

Was it because of speculators and no real market demand?

I think the bubble had burst. The situation was similar to what had happened to Chinese contemporary art in 2009. In 2008, they were selling at record prices and suddenly in 2009, during the economic crisis, prices came tumbling down. A lot has to do with macroeconomic conditions. But of course, it could be some microeconomic factors such as support from galleries, patrons and collectors.

How many auctions do you hold in Singapore and in Jakarta?

We hold three auctions a year in Singapore – in January, to coincide with Singapore Art Week, May and August. In Jakarta, we stopped for four to five years and only re-entered the market in 2016².

We held the second auctions in March, August and November, that year. So three in Jakarta and three in Singapore. We stopped doing auctions in Jakarta as the market was not doing as well as Singapore. At the time Masterpiece was doing its auctions every week. So the market was saturated. Borobudur and Larasati Auctioneers also cut back on their auctions and concentrated on Singapore.

² <https://auctions.33auction.com/auctions/past>

Who are the buyers in the Singapore market?

Buyers in Singapore are mostly Singaporeans with a sprinkling of Chinese, Indonesian and collectors from other parts of the region.

What kind of works do your auctions sell?

In the last three years, we have sold mainly Singaporean art along with Indonesian, Southeast Asian and Chinese works. The works of Singaporean second-generation artists such as Choo Keng Kwang, Chua Mia Tee, Tay Bak Koi, Tan Choh Tee and Ang Ah Tee have sold at record prices.

What is the price range for their works?

The record-breaking prices for the works of Choo Keng Kwang, Chua Mia Tee and Tay Bak Koi came close to S\$100,000. The average price was in the S\$30,000 to S\$50,000 range. Tan Choh Tee's work sold for S\$20,000 to S\$30,000. However, Iskandar Jalil's pieces cost below S\$10,000. In our past auction, we had works by Lim Yew Kuan and Lim Hak Tai in the range of S\$20,000 and above.

In the last two seasons, we also brought in Singaporean ink and calligraphy art. Ink and calligraphy is a traditional Chinese art form that has always been neglected by collectors. Although Southeast Asian collectors identify with the oil medium, ink and calligraphy works also form an integral part of the art movement in Southeast Asia. Artists such as Pan Shou, See Hiang To and Fan Chang Tien are undervalued so we want to promote them.

These are factors in business development. You have to look at what is lacking, which new products can be promoted and move on to the next thing. For instance, it is difficult to acquire the works of Cheong Soo Pieng and Chen Chong Swee. Christie's and Sotheby's have cornered the market on Cheong Soo Pieng.

Sellers prefer to sell at international auction houses. For example, Georgette Chen's work is impossible to get.

Quite impossible. It's part of business development where auction houses figure out who or what products sell well and the supply in the long term.

Even Larasati started with impressive works such as Yue Min-jun's. When all their prices went sky high, they couldn't afford to source for them.

How many Singapore-based auction houses are active now?

I would say 33 Auction, Masterpiece and Larasati. There are other auction houses that focus on ink paintings and artefacts such as Singapore International and Gianguan Auctions.

Can Chinese ink and calligraphy works develop further in the market or do they have limited demand?

There is always room to grow. Most ink paintings are collected by the older generation, but it's about time they are passed on to the next generation. It depends on how receptive the younger generation is to collecting ink and scroll paintings. There would be a better response with more secondary market activity.

How do you deal with problems like reputation when buyers return works due to certain issues?

We have to understand why the buyers return works and the evidence provided. We accept evidence from qualified sources, for example, curators and the artist's family. These two are the main considerations.

Do you require them to give evidence in black and white or just by word of mouth?

Black and white if possible but of course we will cross-check with the curators to help identify works or clarify provenance.

They must offer specific proof from a credible source that the work has problems. The refusal to accept it does not imply that it is fake. That is also another (issue) that is not so clear-cut. We have accepted returns and rejected claims about returned works.

Do you conduct market research or read art market reports? And do you look at the results of other auction houses?

When we are not sure about an artist, we look for the auction results. We, as an auction house, know the pulse of the market. Art market reports only supplement our understanding of the wider market.

When an artist's work goes on auction for the first time, there is no record of this artist, but the price jumps high. What are your thoughts about this?

It is worth understanding the artist's background and who represents him and so on. You cannot deny that there are instances where the price of a young artist's work suddenly skyrockets. It could be because it is his masterpiece or one of his better works. Many galleries or young dealers put up the best works to stimulate the market. It doesn't rule out the possibility that it is a genuine transaction.

Would you regard auction house records as generally reliable or unreliable?

I would say most are reliable. The point of doing auctions is to give transparency to the market. So, whatever price recorded in the auction record becomes a barometer for the art market to operate.

Coming back to Singapore artists, who are the younger contemporary artists doing well in the current market situation?

We don't really auction a lot of Singaporean contemporary art-

works. It is an issue of supply. Their body of work hasn't really matured and does not warrant secondary market activity. The only notable artist is Ruben Pang. We were the first auction house to sell his work in 2012. Most of his works have been doing quite well.

Do you intend to focus on this market?

We will review this in a few years' time. The second-generation Singapore artists have the potential to grow and the supply is there. The primary collectors haven't collected many contemporary works for more than five years.

You sell more visual art and traditional medium works like acrylic, oil and so on. Do you sell installation art?

The demand for new media works is not as good as the traditional medium. It's something that we need to be aware of. Paintings are more widely transacted while sculptures and prints are easier to sell compared to the new medium.

How many of your buyers are Singaporean?

Typically about 60% of buyers at auctions are Singaporean.

In 2014, you had a dedicated sale of Singaporean art. Did you follow up with another?

There were Singaporean artefacts in the main catalogue, but it wasn't a separate sale.

The quality of works wasn't top notch. Since the market reaction was just so-so, we decided to discontinue.

Was that the first time anyone had a sale dedicated to Singapore art?

Yes. I think the highest price sold for that auction was Tan Swie

Hian's piece. The hammer price was S\$190,000. We sold about 60% to 70% of the works.

How much was your premium?

We charged a 20% buyer's premium and a 10% seller's commission for the public versus 6% for trade.

It's similar to Indonesia. Is 20% buyer's premium the highest among the auction houses in Singapore?

It's one of the lowest charges. Borobudur and Larasati charge 22% to 23%.

Malaysian auction houses charge 10% to 12%. Buyers already consider that high. Do you charge GST?

We don't charge GST on the buyer's premium. The hammer price depends on whether the works are imported into Singapore or sold by a GST-registered trader. An Indonesian work brought in for sale is subject to 7% GST. Works already in Singapore are not subject to GST.

What about the other auction houses?

Most of them charge GST as their works are sourced from overseas.

All the art fairs have market reports like Art Stage and Art Basel. What do you think of those reports?

I don't really follow them. I think a lot of people are interested in the top-line art fairs. Art fairs only give an estimate of the sales as they are just three to four days long and clients can't really make decisions in that short time.

Have you participated in art fairs?

We operate under Linda Gallery at Art Stage. Linda Gallery be-

gan in Singapore in 1998. In Jakarta, our owners Linda Ma and her mother Sumiati started the business in 1990, which was then called Malinda Art Gallery. My uncle Ali Kusno Fusin, Linda's husband, got into the gallery business after their marriage. Both are ethnic Chinese. Linda studied in Penang from primary to high school.

Alice Zou & Ben Rush

Directors

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ONLINE IS THE WAY TO GO

Husband-and-wife art entrepreneurs, Ben Rush, 32, and Alice Zou, 29, have a certain fascination for Myanmar art.

In their gallery on the first floor of a shophouse at River Valley Road, they prominently display a large painting by distinguished Myanmar impressionist U Lun Gywe, among other artists from that country and China.

“Myanmar is such a new market, it’s untouched,” remarks Zou, who was born in China and has made Singapore her home. “Indonesia and Vietnam [art], for example, have major backers and have been heavily promoted,” she adds.

“Previously, Myanmar was not politically stable, so not many people were willing to spend on that kind of investment and on promoting the artists in the country. That’s why the market is untouched. Now you get to see more and more artists coming into the art market because of the political stability. Myanmar is also a poor country. You see senior artists and emerging artists, but there’s nothing in between. So, it’s a very interesting market.”

“Every country goes through such a process,” says Rush, an Englishman who has also settled in Singapore.

“Myanmar is establishing its cultural industry and that’s where the market will go because artists such as U Nyunt Tin, U Lun Gywe and a few others are the masters.”

“National artists, as we call them,” chips in Zou. “At some point, they’ll establish a national gallery that brings everything together,” says Rush.

Asian Art Platform opened in 2015 to provide an online platform (www.asianartplatform.com) for artists and collectors to connect. It also operates a brick-and-mortar gallery. Although the couple’s business focus is on emerging and established Chinese

artists, they regularly feature other artists from across Southeast Asia.

Zou and Rush also provide a private and corporate art consultancy service and offer professional advice on selective artwork dealing, sourcing and brokerage. They help clients select or commission sculptures and works of art.

When it comes to tracking the Southeast Asian art market, their website periodically analyses and compares auction records of well-known artists, especially those from Singapore.

Rush explains: “I would consciously filter out [certain] fictitious auction records. But not for Singapore. The auction houses coming up are reputable ones.

“Sometimes, I will call out an artwork that looks fake. But the high price might be due to emotional bidding or something else. Say, an artwork is sold for a million dollars, but the next one below only sold for 300,000 dollars. It looks fishy. There is also the annual growth rate of some artists that is fixed. It could be well controlled by a group of collectors buying the work and making sure that next year, the price goes up by 10% and the following year after that. The graph looks too perfect. If the graph is not doing a bit of this (waving his hand up and down), then it suggests something might not be right. The reality is, sometimes artists do get genuine collectors who want to promote the artists. They will buy the artwork at the auction. So, it’s not always fishy.”

Referring to Ong Kim Seng’s record of HK\$725,000 (including buyer’s premium) at Sotheby’s Hong Kong on April 2, 2017, Rush says the Singaporean artist wasn’t even included in their top 10 list. “In this instance, I would perhaps update the auction list this year. I would call out on that jump by saying, ‘This number is impacted by a singular sale of dot dot dot’. Generally, we want to be open and honest in our content.

“Singapore galleries sell Singaporean artists. Since we are a Singapore-based gallery, we don’t want to turn off the entire nation by saying ‘all the artists here are nose-diving’. We want to tell the truth and say ‘look, the percentages are going down’. But if somebody wants to talk to us about it, then we might present a slightly different message or a harder message. We want to play that fine balance of not being too negative towards other businesses.”

The Edge: Which auction houses do you track for Southeast Asian art transactions? Why?

Alice Zou (AZ): We track those auctions that we physically attend, either in Singapore or Hong Kong.

Ben Rush (BR): Yes, including auctions in China, Indonesia, the US and the UK, like the Phillips auction house that is selling Asian works in the West. I don’t see much at Larasati, Masterpiece or the smaller auctions. I don’t really see Masterpiece come up in the auction data.

Do you think the demand for Southeast Asian art is on the rise, in decline or has plateaued as far as auctions are concerned?

BR: The Singapore art market is over-saturated.

AZ: There are so many galleries. With the low barriers to entry, it’s easy to set up a company in Singapore. Some expats’ wives who are art lovers don’t think straight and set up the galleries to keep themselves occupied. They are not very serious. You meet them when you go around Singapore.

BR: We’re not too concerned about publicity. We’re more focused on the online side. It’s like the whole push-and-pull thing. It’s great

to have an article in the newspaper, but do the readers care about buying art?

AZ: We focus on private clients and offer anything they ask for. It's like managing their investment stock. We have one French buyer who buys from us every year. We offer something other galleries don't offer, that is, keeping track of the buyers' investments like a banker or oil trader who does a market review every year.

None of the Singapore galleries are able to offer that. There are many companies in the US that offer that service but it's expensive. We do it free for our existing collectors. The traditional galleries, which have been in Singapore for many years, and the older generation who don't understand technology... they have gallery assistants whose job is just to be there. You don't really get professional and accurate information from these people. That makes the whole art market super traditional. Basically, people go to their galleries, like an artwork and buy it.

It's called mark to market*. Basically, it's saying, 'You bought something at this price, and it's now worth this much.' So they can adjust their portfolio.

BR: Singaporeans are very asset rich because the country grew so fast. The real estate is now worth millions. They are focused on buying assets like art or houses for investment.

Singaporeans are much quicker to ask me about the sales price and investment potential of artworks. We don't see that much from people outside of Singapore. It's a good business model to focus on that angle in Singapore. But there lies the problem for the art industry. There are many people doing dodgy things, which reflects on all of us. So when somebody genuinely gives their honest opinion

* Mark to market is an accounting practice that involves recording the value of an asset to reflect its current market levels. Source: www.investopedia.com

or some supporting data and observations, it's like 'why should I believe you?' Because there are so many people who are unreliable.

From your own business undertaking, what have you learnt about selling art? What type of services do you offer?

AZ: The online gallery is not our first priority. We believe that the art gallery will remain traditional in that sense. For the online gallery, we provide a platform for the artists. Or we find them from various platforms. But we do get a lot of attention from ID (interior design) companies. There might be opportunities for emerging artists to work with ID companies because they are looking for unique and cheap art pieces to decorate their offices or homes.

As you can see on our website, we have artists from all over the globe – Japanese, American, Spanish artists...

BR: It's a way for us to expand our coverage of different media, styles and nationalities without having in-house stock.

Have you managed to sell any painting online?

AZ: The online platform has only been out two months.

BR: It depends on what you define as 'sell online'. You could argue that we sold to our customers online because they came to us and we 'sold' to them. The website drives a lot of enquiries to us. But the transactions are done offline. I still think 99% of those sales will be offline and I don't envisage that changing anytime soon. That's from somebody who has spent the last 11 years of their career on digital. A company that is not strong online is going to die, which is a real risk for many companies in Singapore. I don't think this industry will feel the same impact as any other industries. We try to make sure that the images online are as close as possible to the real thing.

AZ: For convenience sake, they buy a piece costing US\$200 to US\$300 online. But for an artwork worth US\$20,000 to US\$30,000, you need to make sure this work is authentic. Even with a certificate, it doesn't prove anything. In that case, you need to see this work in person, which an online gallery cannot provide.

How many online art galleries or websites are there and which do you regard as competitors?

BR: We don't understand how The Artling makes any money and how they get investments. Being a socialite is not a business. Where do you find these people who are willing to invest?

AZ: But some people buy into that. They have too much money to spare. Perhaps, they are investing for their relationship. You don't know what their agenda is, for example, you have so many companies to sponsor you.

BR: The point is that, the barriers to entry are non-existent. I could set up a website like that in a week. But what's the business model? Why would you invest money in that?

AZ: Ben did an analysis for one of the big sites, Artsy. They sell artworks online, but 5% of the annual visits are from Asia - that indicates Asian clients do not buy art online.

BR: The Artling lists super expensive works on their website, so again you're not going to buy online. How do you track somebody seeing it on Artling and going to the gallery and buying it? In theory, should we pay a commission or not? Unless someone physically transacts online and you get a confirmation, I don't understand how you could make any money from that business. I don't see any

change in the market in the next decade that's going to push people to spend US\$20,000 to US\$50,000 online.

AZ: She needs the number of galleries on The Artling site to approach other investors. 'Look this is what I have.'

BR: It's a scale game like any property or car listing website. They need stock to look big. A car listing website has a business model which is to take money from dealers or from private listers to list it. A business model to bring in revenue is to have a bidding system where you pay money to pump up the listings. You make more money by scaling up the number of listings, dealers and bringing in more customers. But the problem with The Artling is there's only a small number of potential customers. There are not many funky things you can do to drive revenue away from the galleries and the dealers, so where's the business model? I'm not convinced.

AZ: The Indonesian market is an interesting one. It's a lesson for any Southeast Asian country that wants to develop art. All the artists' prices got affected in 2008 and 2009. But the difference is, the good artists survived and the bad artists just died completely.

During that time, I was part-timing at an auction house called Ziani, which was in Singapore for only two auctions¹. They were the first one doing Singaporean art.

Back then, we were talking about four to five thousand dollars for Singaporean artists. Now, they're selling for 20,000 to 30,000 dollars. That was in 2009. The first auction did all right and was mainly supported by friends and family. The second one focused on local artists and unfortunately, it didn't do well. They decided to close the company.

¹ Marion Maneker, October 15, 2009. *Singapore Is Full of Auction Houses*. Art Market Monitor. www.artmarketmonitor.com/2009/10/15/singapore-is-full-of-auction-houses/

Were you involved in the sourcing of the artworks for the auction?

AZ: Yes, but I was sourcing only for Singaporean artworks. I visited all the local artists.

What parameters do you use in analysing auction data? Do you look at an artist, let's say U Lun Gywe or Cheong Soo Pieng over two years, and compare the prices transacted?

BR: Pretty much, but there are certain artists who obviously have media that are significantly more expensive than others such as prints. If I didn't filter out the 'outliers' or the items that wouldn't give a fair representation, it would tell a different story. I make sure that I take out what is not a genuine reflection of the artist. It's like saying, 'This art is the preferred medium at an auction.' Anything else is stripped away. For example, you have 10 works that sell for 100,000 dollars each. You might also have 30 prints that sold for 1,000 dollars each. We still went to the auction and pull the numbers down. So, I try to strip out as much of that noise as possible.

AZ: Cheong Soo Pieng is the perfect example. People remember his Balinese style ink on paper or oil painting. There are so many sketches in the market which sell for four to five thousand dollars.

BR: Yes, I would filter those out.

When you say 'filter them out', does that mean you compare the Cheong Soo Pieng paintings based on the medium or just the prices?

BR: I'm looking at the price comparison, but I make sure that I get rid of the outliers that would drastically pull down the price.

AZ: Such as sketches.

So, you only focus on canvas works. Does the size matter like a big or small painting?

BR: At the moment, I'm not filtering out different sizes. I can't cover every base. That's why sites like Artprice and Artnet exist so people can go in and filter auction prices, different media and different sizes.

AZ: Based on our experiences, sizes are one of the key elements to determine how much the work should cost. For masterpieces done by Cheong Soo Pieng, who passed away years ago, size does not matter that much. We're talking about the quality, the condition of the work and the subject matter. Obviously, the works of trending subject matters will go much higher. If you base on size alone, you could have oil on canvas 16cm by 16cm and a sketch 30cm by 30cm, so in that sense, sizes don't really matter.

BR: When it's the data, the devil is in the details. The data can be used to spin any kind of story.

AZ: The auction price of an artist is an indication. Then again, it's very limiting especially when the market is bad. From last year to early this year, the market dropped because not many collectors were selling their works. Chen Wen Hsi was really productive and many people were collecting his works. Whatever appeared in auction, people already had his works. It wasn't necessary to buy another piece unless the price and quality were good. That's why you saw a lot of his works getting sold in auctions. That doesn't indicate that his market is dropping, it just indicates that the market is already stagnant and plateaued a bit.

BR: Most Singaporean artists went down in 2016 compared to 2015.

I've looked at the data. We see works sold in 2014 and then resold in 2016 and they're losing money.

AZ: That was Tay Bak Koi.

Buyers here also have certain prejudices against some artists. When we asked Singaporeans in 2014 what they thought of a certain artist, they said 'third-rate artist, no value'. Suddenly his price rose in 2015, but not in 2016.

AZ: The quality of work is really important. As I always tell my clients, you have an emotional attachment to a piece of art. When you own a piece of art, it's very personal. You always like the art first and think about investment second. Any investment value to the artist is a bonus. We both collect art as well. In fact, I started collecting at a very young age. We used to have a lot of Singaporean artists' works. At the end of 2015, the market was really good, so we sold everything and made a good profit. We had mostly first and second-generation artists such as Chua Mia Tee and Chen Wen Hsi.

BR: I think there's still opportunity for them to rise again. The timing played a big part. Also, the National Gallery [Singapore] opened and interest waned. The prices of Singaporean artists are relatively low compared to those of other countries. But in time, the prices will go up.

But works of your major artists like Cheong Soo Pieng and Georgette Chen are already in the million-dollar level.

BR: Yes I know, but nobody sells. I never see Liu Kang or Georgette Chen [works] at auctions anymore. But the auction houses in Southeast Asia are flooded with the works of Chen Wen Hsi, Cheong Soo Pieng and Tay Bak Koi, and there are loads more in the market. But if you compare the top 10 grossing Singaporean artists

with the top 10 Chinese ones, there's no competition. It still has a long way to go potentially.

AZ: But I do see an increase in appreciation from Chinese and European buyers in Singaporean art. Especially when we're talking about the first-generation artists such as Georgette Chen, Liu Kang and Cheong Soo Pieng and emerging artists. We are trying hard to find emerging artists' works to represent; it's so difficult.

Don't the galleries at Art Stage have works by Ruben Pang and Jane Lee?

AZ: Yes, Ruben Pang is an exception. He's lucky to be picked by Benjamin Hampe, director of Chan Hampe Galleries (rebranded in 2017 to Chan + Hori, with new partners). He's passionate about what he does and through Benjamin, he was introduced to a very wealthy collector in Istanbul. It just snowballs once you have a major supporter. Arie Smit and Affandi are other examples. Affandi had wealthy people supporting him.

BR: It's 50% talent, 50% luck. Two things that drive [the success of an artist] are wealth and education. Wealth moves people away from wanting to be an artist. And fine art education includes sculpting, wood-crafting or painting. The good artists in terms of technique go back to the education system. It's a constant cycle of the talented generating the next generation of talented artists. In Singapore, how many of the artists go back to teaching the next generation?

AZ: Then again, it's just a small number. Being an artist is not promoted in Singapore. Parents want their children to be doctors and lawyers. You don't see many artists in Singapore. What kind of chil-

dren go to art school? People with low grades. As long as they have an interest in art, that's good enough.

Culture is not being promoted regardless of what the government is doing but I see an improvement.

BR: There are not many visitors at the National Gallery, but it's a very beautiful building. It has done a good job with its collection of artworks.

AZ: It's definitely on the right path, but the fundamental structure is not changing. We have a 13-month-old daughter and all my Singaporean friends are already asking me, 'so, which school are you going to send her to?' It's not our culture to plan that far ahead. For Singaporeans, it's important for their kids to get into a good primary school. These are six-year-olds who have two days off a week in which they take Chinese, English and Math classes to help them get good grades to get into a top primary school. Do you think they have time to do any art? No, that's not their parents' priority. So, the fundamental system hasn't changed and won't make a difference in the nation's art culture.

BR: I don't think that's going to change. People come here to work and make money. It's just commercialised and art does not fit into that.

How long have you two been married?

AZ: Three years, after we established the company. We're just very driven in our business. I love art and grew up in Shandong, northern China, in a creative environment where we learned to appreciate art. I was trained in traditional Chinese ink painting by my uncle at the age of 11.

I'm proud to say that our website and gallery are good. We do a lot of content marketing and write articles to offer information to

our readers. We try to make the information as accurate and transparent as possible. Not many people, our competitors for example, like the way we do things. But I think art will remain traditional in the sense that you need to have an establishment. You need to have people come to see the artwork. We only recently launched our online platform, so it's a new feature on the website. We get a lot of artists writing to us because we have a very visible website. Some of the artists are really talented, but I can't represent their works in the gallery because they don't fit my theme. We created a platform with great visibility for them to feature their pieces.

What theme does it have?

AZ: The Asian Art Platform gallery promotes Asian artists. But we also take in artists with an Asian background. We have an American artist, Heather Goodwind, who has spent a lot of time in China studying Chinese ink painting. Her works are a mix between the East and the West. So when we are in Asia and talk about the East and West influence, you always see it from an Asian perspective. We bring something different. You see the Asian influence in a Western person's art. Since this is our gallery, we can be flexible.

Our main focus is to promote post-Eighties emerging Chinese artists. They are a unique generation and have such an interesting story to tell. In the Chinese contemporary art history, the artists who sell for millions are from the 1960s - the Cultural Revolution generation. Their prices are already so high, so I feel we should look for the next generation. The Eighties is the best generation to explore because they experienced the one-child policy, and that is so unique, internationally. And secondly, they experienced China's opening up in 1979. We also have nine years of free compulsory education. They are the first generation to experience all that. You have

a closed country for so many years that suddenly opened up to have all the ideas coming in.

BR: Cai Jun's work was integrated in Japanese comics, so that's interesting.

AZ: Southeast Asia is vibrant. You don't see a trend. Whereas in China, art follows the culture and political trend. China is such a big, isolated nation. Everybody had to be forced to act a certain way. Recently, an article said that people in Xinjiang have to cut their beards² and get rid of their veils. That only happens in China. Imagine if any other country were to do that. It shows how extreme that nation can be. In Southeast Asia, each individual country has different trends. It's very hard to pick up trends in Southeast Asia, but just embrace the vibrancy.

In your analysis of art and artists in Southeast Asia, which country would you rank the most vibrant and the least vibrant?

AZ: The least vibrant is Myanmar, just because the market is not even up.

BR: We definitely think that Myanmar is a good country to get into. The only challenge is people's tastes compared to the art produced. U Lun Gywe's work is really nice, but much of the art is traditional such as landscape paintings. I don't know whether people will want that necessarily in their rooms for the next decade.

AZ: That's when the art galleries need to come in to promote the art.

² Sophie Williams, March 30, 2017. *Chinese Muslims are banned from having 'abnormal' beards or wearing veils as the nation calls for a 'people's war' against Islamic extremism*. The Daily Mail. www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4363728/China-bans-abnormal-beards-wearing-veils-Xinjiang.html

The artists and art gallery are important to create that trend - to expose more artworks to collectors and let them appreciate what the artists are doing there. At the same time, that trend would influence the artists in Myanmar to create more international art pieces. It's a new thing in Myanmar. Artists who have been exposed [internationally like Min Wae Aung] can be counted with 10 fingers. Artists from Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia are in the hundreds. But I'm not sure how the artists will handle the sudden fame. Many galleries can get into Myanmar to discover new talents.

Then there are cultural differences. From 2005 to 2007, there were many good artists coming out, but then the number dropped immediately and you don't see them anymore. The problem was that the galleries were too ambitious to bring those people out. And because it was such a new thing, they didn't know how to handle themselves. So they ruined their own market.

BR: Yes, you see that a lot where the artists themselves or their family will start 'fire saving'. And then they destroy the market.

What are your backgrounds?

AZ: I have been working in the art industry my entire life. My first job was with Opera gallery where I spent a year there. I didn't really like the culture so I left. I was with 33 Auction for a very long time. 33 Auction and Linda Gallery are sister companies. I was transferred to Linda Gallery and was managing the gallery for about four years [in Singapore]. Back then, Linda Gallery had galleries in Beijing and Jakarta, so we used to travel between the three countries. I left Linda Gallery at the end of 2014.

I started our company in early 2015. Linda Gallery was a wonderful training ground to get into the art business. The bosses were very supportive. We used to do hands-on projects. We brought

in the top 15 contemporary Chinese artists to hold exhibitions in Singapore, so that was really exciting. I left because I saw the focus shifting to auctions.

I started to bring in exciting artworks from China. At the same time, we were also dealing with artists within the region. Part of my job is very similar to what [Wang] Zineng does. We provide a consulting service, give our opinions on art investment and provide data on promising artists. We offer something that you don't see in the market – young emerging artists.

BR: I worked in e-commerce businesses doing website developments, marketing, web analytics – analysing data and looking at trends in the market. I'm basically a data-driver person.

Are you both based here?

AZ: Yes we are based in Singapore, but we travel a bit. I've been living here for over 10 years and we have PR here.

BR: I'm from north England and have been here seven years.

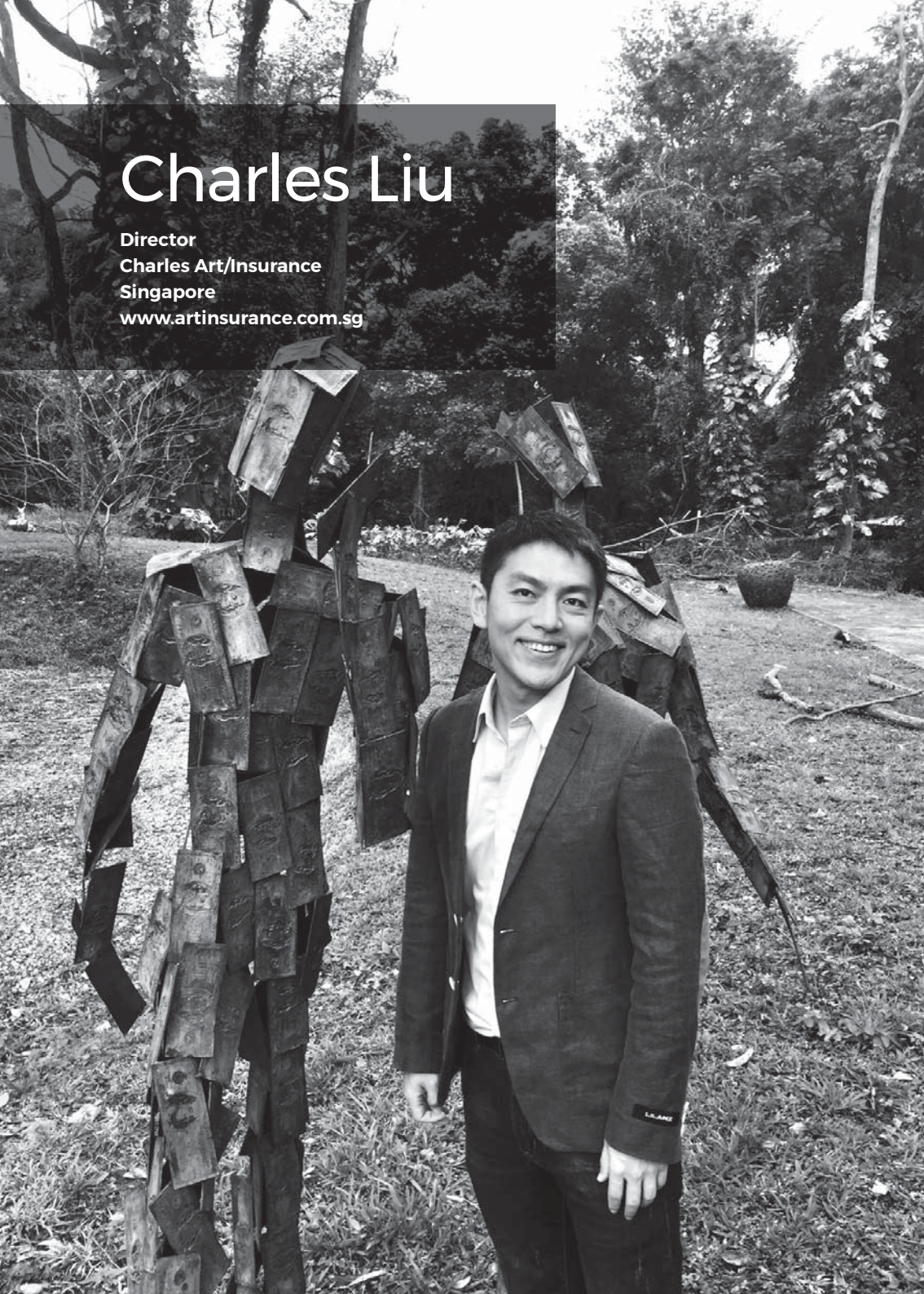
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www.artinsurance.com.sg



ESTABLISHING FAIR MARKET VALUE

Art insurance consultant Charles Liu, 37, tracks auction prices of notable artists to look for trends and anomalies to fine-tune his evaluations. Keeping up to date on such data enables the consultant to help his clients safeguard the value of their assets.

On auction anomalies, Liu says he is cautious about the “shooting stars” of the art world who have no discernible track record at auction. The professional says he mainly uses auction prices to track an artist’s market performance.

“For an artist whose works have not been offered at auction before, I am not confident of evaluating their price level unless I obtain their transaction prices from art galleries or the primary market. Even with artists whose works don’t frequently appear at auction, I would refrain from an evaluation because the transaction data may not be sufficient to establish the fair market value.

“I did an evaluation for an Indonesian collector for a Fernando Botero work, which I based on fair market value. So, if the artwork changes hands between a willing buyer and a willing seller — neither being under any compulsion to buy or sell and both having reasonable knowledge of the relevant facts — the transaction price is fair because they know what they are buying and what they are selling.

“In terms of evaluation, I look at a few factors: subject, medium, shape, size, colour, year and condition. These are the physical characteristics. In terms of value characteristics, I look at the style, rarity, provenance, authenticity, beauty and so on.

“In an evaluation, I first look at the medium — is it a sculpture or a painting, an oil painting or an ink painting. After confirming the

medium of the artwork to be appraised, I then zoom in on the subject for further examination.

“My initial assessment would be based on the medium, subject and size. In my research, I refer to the most recent auction data of a similar piece. Generally, if the medium and subject are the same and all other physical and value characteristics are equal, although the work is bigger in size, the price is higher.”

The Edge: Certain dealers price or evaluate a work based on an aggregate size. That is, they use an auction record for a particular work and base the evaluation on a per square centimetre or square inch calculation. Thus, all artworks by the same artist are evaluated on that basis. Is this normal?

Charles Liu: It could be that when it comes to the works of certain living ink artists, their paintings are mostly average in terms of quality. When such artists sell to a gallery or dealer, they sell based on per square inch or centimetre for easy calculation of the ‘whole-sale’ price. These artists may take out their best works and assess them separately from the works that are average in quality. When the gallery or dealer sells the works individually to collectors, they normally adjust the price of each piece based on certain physical characteristics. But for oil paintings or sculptures, artists don’t usually use the per square inch or centimetre formula.

When evaluating an oil painting, it depends on the physical and value characteristics, in which the subject matter is a key consideration. For instance, if you examine a small painting and the subject is rare and sought after, the price can be much higher than that of a bigger work.

For example, when you compare Wu Guanzhong’s oil painting titled *Plum Blossom* (89.6cm by 70cm), which fetched US\$8.6 million, to his oil painting, *Mount Kilimanjaro* (100cm by 180cm, see

pg xxviii), which sold for US\$4.7 million, the difference is apparent. So, the 'per square inch rule' doesn't apply to oil paintings or to ink paintings either.

Did the per square inch formula originate in China?

Probably. Ink painting originated in China and the Chinese art market deals a lot in ink paintings. It would not be accurate to use this calculation for oil paintings. But even for ink-on-paper works, it depends on the physical and value characteristics.

On the basis of composition, the more complex the subject, the more valuable it is?

Yes, provided that all other physical and value characteristics are equal, the more complex the work is, the higher the value. If it is a simple work that the artist has put less effort into, of course, the value will not be as high.

How would you evaluate abstract works?

It depends on how well the abstract work is executed. You look at the overall painting and the effort. When I do an evaluation, I compare the painting with a few similar works. But I choose one that is most similar to the work that I am appraising as a key consideration. So, if that piece is most similar to the one appraised in terms of physical and value characteristics, then the value of the painting under appraisal is about the same. The rest of the works are used only as a reference.

Auction prices are usually sourced from Artnet.com and Artprice. For example, this Wu Guangzhong is a very small work of 61cm by 80cm. But if you look at the transacted price, it was quite high at US\$1.8 million. This is because the painting is a more complex work and well executed. That is why this work sold for

US\$1.8 million, including the buyer's premium. Otherwise, this size of work of average quality would probably fetch US\$1 million to US\$1.2 million.

When prospective buyers attend an auction, do they actually consider such factors? Or, is it just a matter of whether he wants it, he can afford it and how much he is willing to pay for it?

Experienced collectors know what they are buying. In fact, they also buy according to the physical and value characteristics instinctively. They know the market. They have a profound knowledge of the artist's past works and they know the current market value. They also have an idea of what the value will be in the future.

Different subjects come at different price levels. In my analysis, I first look at the subject matter corresponding to market supply and demand. I don't really look at the size. Even for Chinese ink paintings. The subject is the key. And secondly, I would consider how well the work is executed. Whether it is done really well or is just a run-of-the-mill type of work. For example, an artist may paint simply and quickly to sell when there is market demand for his or her work and when they need money. Or, when they paint for people as a 'treat' or out of courtesy, or for the purpose of entertaining guests and so on.

Many works of Southeast Asian artists that come to auction are of average quality. Collectors tend to keep the best works and sell the average ones. Sometimes, collectors may sell their better works in the primary market because of market demand, between willing buyer and willing seller, and because they save on the commission to the auction house. So, the value of such works are lower than the ones sold in the primary market.

The market value of an artist's work may change suddenly. For example, the market price of Vietnamese artist Nguyen

Sang (1923-1988) has gone up significantly in the past two years. His work, *Cats*, sold for US\$30,471 at Christie's Hong Kong in May 2017. The estimated price was US\$8,981 to US\$11,547, so the transacted price was 196% above the estimate. Another example is *Man With Rooster* (see pg xxviii) that sold for US\$61,226 through Christie's Hong Kong in November 2016. Its estimate was US\$10,311 to US\$12,889. The transacted price was 427% above the estimate. As an art valuer and art insurance consultant, I need to monitor such transactions and advise my clients appropriately.

Jimmy Chua

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ASSESSING ARTISTS OF SINGAPORE, VIETNAM, MYANMAR & THE PHILIPPINES

Collector turned art consultant Jimmy Chua, 60, is well known among fellow collectors in Vietnam, Singapore and Malaysia for his uncanny knowledge of the various art scenes in the Southeast Asian region.

As a former diplomat, Chua is particularly familiar with the art of Vietnam, Myanmar and Singapore and has maintained close ties with artists and art dealers involved in such art. He frequently travels to those countries to catch up with friends there.

The Edge: What are your thoughts on the Singapore artists in our list of auction records of Southeast Asian art?

Jimmy Chua: After Cheong Soo Pieng's works took off, it reached a point where people found the prices too high. So, they looked towards the second-generation artists such as Tan Choh Tee, Lim Tze Peng and Tay Bak Koi. Their works became sought after and prices moved up. The auction prices in Hong Kong in the last year or so revealed a softening of the market for Nanyang artists. However, the exceptional pieces, especially those by Soo Pieng, Chen Wen Hsi and Georgette Chen, can still sell for very high prices. Certain second-generation artists like Choo Keng Kwang and Thomas Yeo are very undervalued, and represent good buys at the auctions.

Soo Pieng has the support that goes beyond Singapore collectors. There are bidders from Taiwan and even from China. Georgette Chen is big in the market. She gave most of her works to the museum and sold very few works during her lifetime. At one time, Chen Wen Hsi's market was badly affected because there were many fake works around. His oil paintings are popular while his ink works are also beginning to fetch high prices.

Singapore ink paintings enjoy good support among local collectors. The likes of Lim Tze Peng and Chua Ek Kay continue to perform well at auctions, selling at respectable prices. The next generation of ink painters to watch are Henri Chen [Ke Zhan], followed by the younger ones like Hong Sek Chern, Tay Bak Chiang and Anthony Chua. Jane Lee is another popular contemporary artist who is enjoying auction success and one to watch. Jimmy Ong's works are supported but his prices have not appreciated as much.

What about the Vietnamese artists?

You must be very careful with Vietnamese artworks. The problem is that there are many fakes around. Confidence among buyers of Hanoi-based old masters like Bui Xuan Phai has been affected by dubious works circulating in the market. Today, wealthy Vietnamese collectors prefer to buy works of Vietnamese masters like Le Pho and Mai Trung Thu who had left Vietnam for Paris in the early years. Their early works, especially those done on silk, are most sought after. Lacquer painting is another medium favoured by Vietnamese collectors. Nguyen Gia Tri's works lead this segment of the market.

With pioneer artist Le Yen, you're not sure whether the record is a one-off thing. You may want to get a few more prices to compare his price level. I'm not familiar with Thai Van Ngon but Do Quang Em is another artist whose prices were very high at one point. The price level came down when buyers lost interest.

I don't consider French artist Evariste Jonchere as important as, say, Victor Tardieu and Joseph Inguimberty, and his prices have not really moved up. Tran Luu Hau's works are very accessible and sell well in Vietnam. They are collected by many local collectors and also Taiwanese. It will be interesting to see in time to come how he performs in Hong Kong auctions. Another senior artist who is

receiving good support at the Hong Kong auctions lately is Nguyen Trung. At the moment, it is his paintings of Vietnamese women that are in demand. Actually, his abstract paintings are far better. Trung is widely regarded as Vietnam's most important abstract painter. Lacquer painter Dinh Quan is a fine artist, but his prices have not really shot up.

I would give more weight on the transactions done at Christie's Hong Kong and Sotheby's Hong Kong because they are, at present, the leading players for the Southeast Asian market.

What do you think of the benchmarks set by the Hong Kong auction houses?

The big players in the region would go to Hong Kong to buy artworks. If you take the artworks to Europe, the European market wouldn't be as familiar [with them] and would likely price them much lower. Some dealers buy the works in France and put them up for auction in Hong Kong where they can get higher prices. Hong Kong is the market leader for Southeast Asian art. Of course, Malaysia and the Philippines have their own auction houses with the latter's domestic market doing very well.

The same collectors in the Philippine market also surface in Hong Kong. But Malaysia is a little different. Many Malaysians generally don't go to Hong Kong, preferring to buy at local auctions. The local auction houses in Singapore don't do as well. The key works still go to Hong Kong. I would consider the two auction houses (Christie's and Sotheby's) as the major players. But Phillips auction house has come up now. Recently, Phillips transacted one work by Christine Ay Tjoe that sold for S\$2.3 million¹. It was a staggering price which took many analysts and collectors by surprise but buyers are interested in her works.

¹ www.phillips.com/detail/CHRISTINE-AY-TJOE/HK010117/29

Several of Ong Kim Seng's works, including his acrylic works, have achieved high prices at auctions. I personally prefer his early *Kathmandu* watercolour series. Many of Ong's award-winning paintings are of this subject. He is a very talented en plein air painter. I went with him for a trip to Myanmar. If you want to buy his painting, try to buy the en plein air ones. He prices the subjects differently. Lately, collectors are showing interest in Chen Chong Swee's works. This could be attributed to the survey of his works organised by the National Gallery Singapore recently.

For French artists in Vietnam, Joseph Inguimberty and Victor Tardieu were considered important in creating the Indochine Art Academy. Inguimberty has more paintings than Tardieu, so there are more auction records on Inguimberty. Tardieu has fewer works and he's the one most people want. The one at the National Gallery Singapore is a sketch of a mural that he did. But it's hard to find Tardieu's works.

Do you think Inguimberty should be on our list?

You cannot ignore Inguimberty if you talk about art history. Tardieu and Inguimberty influenced a whole generation of pioneer Vietnamese artists. Tardieu was great as a teacher because he encouraged lacquer and silk works while Inguimberty's big works fetched good prices.

What do you think of the Philippine artists on the list?

If you look at Philippine art history, Juan Luna is undisputedly more important than Hidalgo. His works are more sought after and sell at higher prices but in my opinion, Hidalgo is probably a better painter. Filipino-American abstract artist Alfonso Ossorio was a patron of American painter Jackson Pollock, a major figure in the abstract expressionist movement. Pollock counted him as a good friend and

his works influenced and were influenced by Ossorio. Pollock had a colourful history and his work was influenced by that period.

How about Myanmar artists?

There were no real auction market for Myanmar art until very recently when Sotheby's in Hong Kong started promoting it in the second half of 2017. These prices don't mean very much to me. Sometimes, you see pieces coming up in Borobudur or small local auction houses - I don't know what to make of it. People are testing the market. Sometimes, collectors try to push the artist a bit, but if the market doesn't take off, they give up.

The recent strong prices achieved at Sotheby's for works by U Ngwe Gaing and U San Win did not come as a surprise to me. For example, the two Gaing paintings fetched S\$90,000 to S\$100,000 each. Art generally follows the economy. With the opening up of Myanmar, the rich will eventually turn to their art, especially their old masters. It is no different from the other more established Southeast Asian art markets. U Ba Nyan and U Ngwe Gaing are the two most important old master painters of Myanmar. Ba Nyan is widely regarded as the Father of Western style painting in Myanmar. He has fewer works in the market as he died relatively young at 48, and most of his works are in the Myanmar National Museum. Min Wae Aung, of course, is the highest-priced living artist.

Burmese Painting: A Linear and Lateral History by Andrew Ranard is a good book for reference. It gives you an idea of the artists of importance. There are two branches of Burmese paintings – the Western and the modernist styles. Bagyi Aung Soe is considered one of the important modernists of Burmese art and does a lot of illustrative work. He studied in India and was Affandi's classmate.

Paw Oo Thet was one of the leaders in the first generation of Burma's modern art movement together with U Win Pe and Khin

Maung Yin. He paints cartoonish watercolours which initially I found difficult to appreciate. Apparently, he captured the Burmese sensibility and humour. The Burmese love his illustrative watercolours. He is an important artist, although there are also a lot of fakes around. Like other Southeast Asian markets, fakes are a problem that Myanmar is also experiencing.

Khin Maung Yin, who passed away in 2014, was very prolific and did a lot of abstracts. He painted many portraits of Aung San Suu Kyi. The last one is U Win Pe, a colourful figure. He was the principal of the Mandalay art school and was eventually exiled for his outspoken views. For the last 20 years, he lived in America before returning to Myanmar. While the others have passed away, he is like the last living modernist.

For contemporary art, you can view Aung Myint and San Minn's works at Inya gallery in Yangon. Aung Myint is considered the Father of Performance Art in Myanmar. A frail man, he is also famous for his mother-and-child paintings, using flowing lines. His pieces are collectibles now. Both are pioneers in experimental and cutting-edge works. Then, there are the younger artists such as Aye Ko, Aung Ko, his wife Nge Nay and Po Po, who also does installation work.

There are some good galleries in Yangon that one should visit: New Treasure Art Gallery, Nawaday Tharlar Art Gallery, New Zero gallery and River Gallery near the Strand Hotel and Annexe. Annexe is more interesting. The one in the hotel is more commercial. Nathalie Johnston, an American lady, is considered the leading curator of Myanmar contemporary art. In fact, she just produced an authoritative book on contemporary art entitled *Myanmar Contemporary Art 1*. She also runs Pyinsarasa art space in downtown Yangon.

Myanmar art is probably the last frontier. You have to look at the old masters first. Just like any other country, it's always the old

masters that attract the buyers. Some of them are found in Europe while the ones in Myanmar are generally in poorer condition. The auction houses are trying to create excitement with the old masters, which is what is happening in Vietnam.

At Christie's Asian 20th Century Art (Day Sale) on 27 May 2018 in Hong Kong, there were a number of artworks by Vietnamese and Burmese artists on offer such as works by Le Pho, Vu Cao Dam, Mai Trung Thu and Nguyen Tu Nghiem as well as U Saw Maung, U Ngwe Gaing, U Lun Gywe and Min Wae Aung.

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FAIR GAME IN THE ART BUSINESS

Art fair promoter Lorenzo Rudolf, 59, is a well-known figure on the Southeast Asian art scene as his company has elevated the art fair business in Singapore and Jakarta to a more visible level among collectors and the public.

Established in 2010, Art Stage Singapore has achieved a significant level of success in a tough market environment where many collectors prefer to buy direct from artists rather than from galleries.

Nevertheless, despite the continuing challenges, Rudolf has forged ahead. Recently, changes have been made to his art fair business model with the inclusion of exhibitors dealing in the decorative arts rather than only fine art at Art Stage Singapore 2018.

In this interview conducted in November 2017, Rudolf speaks matter-of-factly about what he has faced over the years and what he continues to grapple with.

The Edge: Tell us about the exhibitors and visitors that have participated in Art Stage from 2011-2017. What are the numbers like?

Lorenzo Rudolf: First of all, the exhibitors more or less over the years are the same due to the architecture. That means we have a hall. We fill this hall. The hall has a certain space, no more, no less. There are always around 120 and 150 galleries depending on the size of the booths, and depending on maybe certain special projects we do, on what space we need. That is the concept. Visitor-wise, it is increasing a bit every year except in 2016, there was a small reduction, which surely had a lot to do with economic conditions.

(For another source of figures, please refer to The Straits Times report, Smaller Art Stage Singapore will go on, says founder, published on Feb 1, 2018: www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/arts/smaller-art-stage-singapore-will-go-on-says-founder)

You have contributed immensely to uplifting the professionalism and standard of staging art fairs in Southeast Asia. All the people we have approached say that's the best. There is no comparison.

It's not so difficult.

Based on Southeast Asian conditions, what were the main obstacles that you faced when you first started and even now?

I would not want to speak about obstacles, it is much more (than that and) you have to adapt to reality. It is logical, if you come from Europe or America to Southeast Asia, I cannot expect that there will be the same quality, criteria in building up an art fair. It starts with operations, with the technical stuff and with infrastructure. The other route (to consider) is that you have to adapt to serve in a certain way, the reality (of the situation). Even between Singapore and Jakarta, as close as these two cities are, they are totally of other levels of working and of quality.

As a result, wherever you go, it is clear you know where you want to be, where you want to go, you know what kind of quality levels you want to achieve. You try to squeeze the lemon in the best way but you have to be aware it's not happening like that, it is the process. And that happens everywhere. If you see the market itself then it is very simple to answer you. Southeast Asia has quality in every country (with) a lot of creativity, which means really interesting artists, especially in the last 10 to 20 years, everywhere, to get some logic, there is economic growth.

You had social liberalisation and out of that, you had an art scene, which was growing. It is no more the case we had 20 years ago when an artist who wanted really to express himself had to leave the country and go to New York, Berlin, Paris or wherever. They stay and they can express themselves and out of that, the art scene is growing. On the other side, what we have, everywhere (else) maybe except in Singapore, there is a big 'contrary'

situation.

But out of all these countries, Indonesia, even the Philippines, surely also Thailand, not to speak about Vietnam and so on, we have (seen) everywhere, a lack of professional infrastructure. As a result of it, you have a lot of creativity, but you don't have, for example, a lot of really professional and serious, good museums. Or you do not have a lot of really professional, internationally competitive galleries.

So, that's the aim where we have also to support and to help and we think that an art fair like Art Stage is not only a marketplace itself. We also have a responsibility to help to build the infrastructure because if Southeast Asia wants to be or to become more competitive, on the international stage, we need infrastructure that is also competitive. It needs not only art, which is on the level to be competitive, but also infrastructure. And looking back when we first started here, our fair in 2011 and the situation now, we had a great big influence on the entire region and a lot of things happened.

First of all, Southeast Asia is recognised much more today than 10 years or let's say eight years ago when we started internationally. Today, you have museums all over the world looking to Southeast Asia. You have museums organising exhibitions with Southeast Asian artists or even collecting Southeast Asian art like the big museums, such as Guggenheim and Tate. You have private collectors who now look to Southeast Asia. That is surely something (positive), which has (impacted) not only the locals who deal with our fair but, you see all the countries that have new galleries opening. Galleries, especially new ones, which really, from the beginning, try to be professional according to international standards. It is another way to do a gallery business than what was done in the past, especially if you see countries like the Philippines or Thailand, you have a lot of new galleries coming up. It's a totally another way of thinking or understanding what art is. You have in these last years, a lot of new museums or projects of new artists,

which are really very serious and professional. Mainly like everywhere (else) based on private initiatives.

Another thing is, we have to be aware that in this entire region again, except for Singapore, all these countries, they are not supporting art, contemporary art in a really strong way, with public funds. In other words, they need the money for other more important things than to support contemporary art. So, all such development is privately based, but you have more and more collectors, for example, who really understand that maybe they have also or can have a certain responsibility in this entire ecosystem. They did museums, they did institutions and so on.

The second thing is what happened all these years, we are still far away from the ideal situation but already a big step was taken. Southeast Asia, even if it is not such a big region, if we see all these countries, it was still, when we started, very segregated that means you have everywhere a national scene, loads of national scenes.

Now, increasingly (each country) begins to open, that means artists from Malaysia begin to cooperate and communicate with artists from other countries and so on. And we have to be clear about two things. First of all, contemporary art has nothing to do with the national culture. Contemporary art is global. A good artist, a good contemporary artist from Malaysia is understood in New York. A good contemporary artist from Yogyakarta is understood in Sao Paolo and so on. As a result, the work, it is an expression, which has nothing to do with the national culture. Every artist has his roots and every artist with his roots has also certain influence. But the contemporary artist, in the end, how he expresses himself is an individualistic way to find an expression, which has nothing to do with his national background.

Southeast Asia begins to interact more and we also have to be clear if Southeast Asia wants to become competitive in an inter-

national art world, especially in the art market, it cannot happen on a national basis. It can only happen as an entire region. There is a reason why the Guggenheim or the Tate, they are not collecting Malay art, or Thai or Indonesian art. They look for Southeast Asian art and that means they look for single (individualistic) artists in this region, who are really interesting. That works for us from the beginning, and now we'll see how it goes. Also, we have to unify, we have to match-make this region. And that means to match-make it on the level of galleries, level of artists, level of collectors and level of curators. And all that is moving. If I say that we always have this big exception of Singapore, because Singapore is the only country designed in this entire context, which is a bit contrary. That means it is a country that does not have a big strong art scene, creative scene; it is too small but it has infrastructure. So, that is the reason why we did the first fair here. And Singapore was or is a place that is multicultural. The only place where at the end these things come together. So in other words, coming back to the quintessence of this question. We are on track, especially some of these countries in Southeast Asia, some more some less but it is still far away, let's say from the (level of) professionalism, from the seriousness of the scene. And if we speak about the scene, it's not only about the art but also the entire infrastructure as we have in the West. But it's still a long way to go and the more we work on that, the more we cooperate and support that, probably the easier it gets. And the way is right because we see growth everywhere.

So, what's your estimate of the value of the Southeast Asian art market? From the perspective of art transactions that involve the galleries, auctions and art fairs. What's your take on that?

That is very difficult to say. First of all, you have to be very clear in many countries, (there is) a system and the worst of all these coun-

tries is probably Indonesia, which is by far the biggest market in Southeast Asia.

Well, you have a system which (is based) on the direct contact and transactions between artist and collector. So, you don't know all these numbers but what is really clear is that the market in the Philippines was growing extremely (fast) last year. The market in Indonesia was also growing even though it was already very strong before. The market in Malaysia is also slowly growing, the market in Thailand the same. If we see Vietnam, it's like China 15 years ago, as a result of it, things move but we have another problem, due to the fact that many of these markets were mainly mainland markets. That means, there are only Indonesians buying the Indonesian art.

If you have such a mainland market, which is mainly based on the fact that nationals are buying national artists, you create prices, which are no more competitive in an international market. For example, if you have to pay US\$4 million or US\$5 million for a (I Nyoman) Masriadi, or US\$2 million or US\$3 million, let's take an example in the Philippines, a (Ronald) Ventura, for the same price I can buy a superstar in New York. Why should I? Because otherwise, now there is also a situation where this market has to adapt itself to an international reality. And I think all that is happening at the moment. On the other side, we also have to be clear, we are in an economical situation, which is surely not the strongest one, and that means the market has calmed down a bit in all these countries.

Where the art fair market is concerned, what is your estimate of the value of that?

The art fair market... (pause). It is massively growing logically because you have more art fairs, and after we started our fair in Singapore, (there is another fair) in the Philippines, which is functioning very well, but that means it is moving a bit away from auction hous-

es to art fairs but still the auction houses are still quite big, a big part of the cake.

If we think about this market, we have to distinguish between the modern (art) market and the contemporary (art) market. The modern markets are like everywhere in every country. More or less in the hands of auction houses. This is especially (so) because it's a secondary market and you don't really have a lot of galleries and dealers who are working or were working in this market (segment). In other words, the auction houses and many collectors also, if they sell, they think (by consigning at) auction houses, they get the best price. On the other side, in the real contemporary market or the primary market but you already have on sale new products, there, increasingly, art fairs and also galleries are taking more of the cake, more positions.

Coming back to your point about the prices of Southeast Asian artists, are you saying that they are pricing themselves, like Masriadi, out of the market compared to international artists?

The problem is you have a local market and demand, which was so strong that the price is (at) a level that is too high for the international market. As a result of it, if I am an international collector or a museum or whatever, a buyer, and I put together a global collection and they have an artist from Indonesia, which is known in Indonesia or internationally placed in the world, and this artist has the same price as an important artist from America whose (artwork) is in all the most important museums everywhere, why should I buy that? I don't have any understanding but that is because the local market was so strong, you see? And the same thing in the Philippines. If you see today, the prices for Ronald Ventura, (his works) remain in the Philippines because the demand is so big there.

But now to go into the international context, to go in competi-

tion with the global market, they have to adapt themselves. All the consequences of this situation of having this closed national market, but as I said before, now also many of these artists are not happy only to be (known) nationally.

They want to be recognised, they want to be in the best museums of the world, the best collections. Like every artist in this world, that means in a time where a lot is defined by the market, they have to also adapt themselves to the market.

When it comes to the value of the market and sales turnover, what is your take on the average value annually when you do your art fair? What is the sales turnover?

We don't know the sales turnover. We are in the same situation as you are. The galleries, many of them don't tell you. You know certain sales, and you know what is sold. Secondly, an art fair does not function like a mall. You don't go in an art fair, buy and bring out your piece. You deal, you discuss and sometimes it goes (on), weeks or whatever until the deal is done. Therefore, I cannot give you (the figures) first of all, (because) I don't know. And secondly, I can't even give you the number of the entire turnover of the fair. The fair is also the place where you meet a gallery and you begin to discuss a deal. Or you see only something (an artwork) or meet the gallery people and afterwards you begin (discussion) because you also have to be clear, most galleries at art fairs, they have much higher (cost) prices there than outside the art fair. There are also collectors who go to an art fair only to have an overview. They know then exactly 'oh this artist, that work', and after the fair, they begin to deal. But it has still to do with the fair. It is very difficult to say what the turnover is.

Do you post any figures at all?

We don't, we can't. No, the only thing we do is we manage to serve

the sales, which are agreed by galleries and collectors to be mentioned. But that is not an overview or a realistic picture. There is much more of a certain direction and PR (public relations) to it.

An indication.

Yes.

Like in Malaysia, there is only one art fair, and they give remarkable figures.

Let me tell you something. First of all, there is no control what art fairs are doing. If you see the figures of art fairs, be careful. Mostly these figures are like “this”, and sometimes even pure PR. If I want to show how important I am, I tell you figures because you can never go and investigate it from sales. I’ll give you an example, like all these art fairs, they publish figures about visitors which are far from the reality. I’ll give you another wonderful example of an art fair in Jakarta, which publishes figures that are competitive to us. They publish figures which are incredible, you must be impressed, you say, ‘wow, great!’ but if you imagine what that means, that would mean, if these figures are right and you know how big the fair is, how big their eyes are, how not much space there is, that would mean that from the first minute to the last minute, you would have ten layers of people all over one or the other, one that would come to such figures, which is absurd. Be careful with a lot of all these figures.

But we still need to ask them, so it’s up to the respondent to say whatever figures, we are only reporting the figures. As you said, there are no means to verify it. We are aware that it’s for PR purpose and that you don’t really show the actual figures.

It is also logical for an art fair to do PR. They have to market themselves and all the best marketing of an art fair is successful. What does it mean by successful? They sell and everybody comes.

The goal is to attract more exhibitors for the next art fair.

Clear. And we have the same thing here in Singapore. Every year there are fairs that come to Singapore which try to take advantage of our fair and sometimes we only can smile. These fairs are more or less empty every day, but at the end they publish more visitors than we have. And the fair itself is empty and is only 10% the size of our fair. So, how can it do? But you see you have to be careful with many (of the) figures that go around in this art world.

Now, of course, we have read about how strongly the Singapore government has initiated and supported this fair.

This fair is not initiated by the government. The Singapore government since the Nineties (invited me) every year as a delegate. Every second year from one of the agencies, even when I was still in Basel to come to Singapore to do something. And after Shanghai, we decided to separate from the three partners. Like often a *ménage à trois* is not so easy, so two of us left. I decided to (start) my own company and do something in Singapore. At that time, it was our own decision. We took their contact and immediately (met) with the government and they helped us also to meet certain people but in the end that's it.

Secondly, we are not supported by the government. We are a private company that is totally independent, that means we have a financial situation and the economic background which has no penny of the government in it, zero. If we do special projects, then we work with certain agencies and often or sometimes they pay something, but never covering the costs. We pay for that and we (create) culture for the government, but we have here the government who tells everybody it's us. I'll give you a wonderful example. When we came here, there was nothing around here. There is the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) but that was on a mediocre level. And we have to do a special "side" event ourselves to really attract the people. That "side"

event was a totally non-commercial event. It was a big exhibition we did it together with SAM. We did it for SAM and it was great, but using our money. But that did not introduce the art fair. So, in other words, things like that happened and then more and more around the fair, you had events happen because the fair attracted people and more people or institutions saw the chance to profit from it, which is also right. And we began to do certain events like exhibitions, et cetera. And something grew organically and again that's how the local authority functions: they see that growing, they jump on it, they declare it as the Art Week and declared it as their initiative. The same thing happens everything. (Therefore), this is absolutely not true, we are totally independent. Let me tell you also, there is a reason behind it. I don't want to have the government, as a partner of this art fair, telling me what kind of decision, what kind of gallery (we) have to accept because if we really want to be independent and if we really want to be a fair of a serious quality, we have to have independence.

There is a widely held belief that the government gave you incentives like five years tax-free business status.

This is also not right. But what we have in Singapore is a system for every investor or company that opens here, you have a certain... (scheme) and that's legal for everybody. You have a certain reduction of taxes over a certain time but that has nothing to do with an art fair. If I open a restaurant it will have the same (condition), if I open another business it will have the same.

So, it's a general thing for everybody?

Absolutely.

And it was for five years?

Yes, it was for five years. But again, that is not in support of the art fair.

The question is, what is (it in) reality? And as I said, I can open here a pizzeria and have the same (incentives).

That answers the question because we were told that you got certain incentives, tax breaks, and so on.

Governments everywhere want to be the ones who did it. Another example, when we did the exhibition here in the first year I told you, and they asked me to do the fair. I said, 'Look I want to (work) with the museum' and so I did with SAM because it had to be a museum exhibition. It was probably the most successful exhibition they ever had in Singapore. You might remember it, it's *The Collectors' Show* with the top pieces by top collectors¹.

We had around 32 or 33 pieces in the show. This common cooperation was going in the following way. I brought 31 pieces and the Singapore Art Museum brought one. We had to hire a curator who was Eugene Tan at the time because SAM was not even able to handle it. And in the end, the government, we did the exhibition at SAM, that's how it works here. Fine, we have nothing against it, but let's be honest, in a certain way, we are partners, it's give and take and I give with pleasure the medal to you as long as you let me do what I want, but also to be clear there are a lot of rumours going around how much money we get from the government. Absolute bullshit.

What business lessons have you learnt about doing business in Singapore since 2011 and two years in Jakarta or in Indonesia?

They are two totally (different) environments, Jakarta and Singapore. (In Singapore), we have an environment where the state wants to control everything, especially culture and contemporary culture. They are also politically afraid that it goes in a subversive direction.

¹ Enrico, January 20, 2012. *The Collectors Show: Chimera at Singapore Art Museum*, <http://vernissage.tv/2012/01/20/the-collectors-show-chimera-at-singapore-art-museum/>

They are keen to control everything. Whilst in Jakarta, you have a totally (opposite) situation. There, you have a state that lets you do whatever you want. (But) like here, if you want to do a special project in a certain context, you cannot think that you get support or anything. In Singapore, there is a world, which for business is probably much easier to handle, it's very Westernised. It has certainty of structures, rules and it has certain legal security. Life in Jakarta is much more (like the) Wild West. Although, in Jakarta, there is much more enthusiasm, much more interest in the arts. Here (Singapore) it's in the interest of: 'Oh, we want to have something in Singapore'. As a result of it, it's the totally opposite approach, and as I said at the beginning, you have to adapt yourself. I cannot go everywhere and say, 'Look that's the way how it goes and you have to follow me'. I have to change. But as I said, there are a lot of things that are easy here but they are a pain in the *** in Jakarta. You (also) have a lot of things which are easy in Jakarta but are difficult here. But that's everywhere. That's everywhere in the world.

So, first and foremost, for you, is it solely a business entity and commercial considerations?

Yes, as I said, we are a private company and like every (other) private company, for example, the pizzeria, it has to function economically. And that means, we have to think like an entrepreneur. We are the owner of this company. This company, as I said, has not one penny of public money in it, zero. The same thing in Jakarta.

How much have you invested in Art Stage so far?

A couple of millions have been invested in it. More than two million euros. All in all, investment means not lost investment. We speak about investment, generally. If you see the entire fair, every year we have a budget of about a couple of million US dollars in

Singapore. Now I can count, eight or seven editions that means at least over US\$10 million, by far.

And the returns?

We are still here. No, it's surely not so easy. Sometimes, you also have to go new ways and it's surely not always the same thing as you do an event like that in the West. Another example, in the West, probably it's much easier to get sponsors than here in Singapore because and that again, coming back to what I said before, it's even easier to get sponsors in Jakarta than Singapore. Because in Singapore, every sponsor, whatever they sponsor, they sponsor only if the state says yes. Nobody is sponsoring without the okay of the state. In Jakarta, they sponsor if they have interest. So in other words, that means we have to find ways to finance all these projects. And on the other side, you have years where you say okay, you must have a business plan, you know where you have to go. This year maybe I invest a bit more, I'm willing to do an investment which can be a certain loss to bring it to the next level then to profit for a few. It's a classic entrepreneurial way on how you lead such a fair. It's a company.

How much have you invested in Jakarta?

In Jakarta, it's a bit less because Jakarta, at the moment, is small. The prices in Jakarta are also much lower. In Singapore, we are in a high price segment, which is absolutely clear. That means every service, whatever you need here, costs much more than Jakarta. Jakarta surely has the lower budget, although I must also say that Jakarta is growing much stronger than Singapore.

Would you say that you have invested US\$1 million in Jakarta?

In Jakarta, yes. More.

By more do you mean US\$2 million? US\$1 million a year?

I don't give you exact numbers but more than a million.

A year? Or to date?

Altogether it is much more than a million. But you see, (over) there you also have to be careful, it's not that we have a fair there and a fair here which are dependent. It's logical that you have a common business plan because (even with) the fair in Jakarta, we do (have to organise) from here a big part (of it) as well as (with) the fair in Singapore. We also have dealings in our Jakarta office. It's not that we have totally separate budgets which are exactly identical. It's logical wherever we can, we focus and try to concentrate our preparation of the fair as one entity.

Now, Art Stage Singapore is held in January. Why is Art Stage Jakarta held in August?

Why not?

It's so close, the Jakarta and Singapore dates.

If I open a fair in Jakarta, what is the date which is most far away from January?

But looking at it the other way, August to January is six months.

Yes, you can confirm both sides you have six months. As a result of it, we are not so much as cannibalising ourselves as we have half a year in between. If they were (too) close to each other, it's logical we would cannibalise ourselves.

But other people in the business don't look at it that way. They feel that it's competition with the other art fair.

Who?

Bazaar Art², right?

What is Bazaar Art?

It's an art fair plus interior decoration fair.

Oh yeah, I know.

They are saying that because they have a fair, that also draws the business away from Art Stage Singapore.

You were at this fair? Art Jakarta? When did you see it?

Yes, in 2016.

What was your impression? Do you really think this fair is taking away something from Singapore?

It's different. They have a different feel to it, definitely.

That means, no?

It's not really a business strategy to do Art Stage Jakarta?

It clearly is a business strategy to do Art Stage Jakarta, but this business strategy has nothing to do with Art Jakarta. If you want to know the business strategy, it's very simple. First of all, the biggest market in Southeast Asia is Indonesia. It's the same here, go to Orchard Road. Look at all the malls, they cannot work if the Indonesians are no more coming. We are in a similar situation that means we have to intensify our relations with Indonesia even more. That means we have to keep bringing Indonesia closer to us. Point number one.

Point number two, Indonesia is, by far, the strongest and biggest market in Southeast Asia and also Indonesia is moving. As a result

² Bazaar Art has been rebranded as Art Jakarta in 2017.
Johnni Wong, *Bazaar Art hits target*, September 9, 2016, <http://theedgegalerie.com/news/2016/09/bazaar-art-hits-target>

of it, it makes sense to do something there because the market is strong enough.

Thirdly, we were asked by the entire Indonesian art world, all the top artists, all the top collectors to do something in Indonesia because they have nothing serious there.

And fourth, if you are not doing something (there), you can be sure sooner or later somebody else will do it and then you have a problem. Okay, there you have four points.

You see until now, nothing is out of reach. These fairs are not competitive. But now it comes to one (entity), saying that I'm taking the decision to do something in Indonesia. Nothing was more logical than my first step was to go to Art Jakarta and say (to them) we have decided to do something in Indonesia. And we did that, not only because also all the big collectors asked us to do it. 'Let's do something together'. It makes no sense to have two fairs in Jakarta. We agree. We even agreed to do joint ventures, we even agreed with the shares (division). I went back to Singapore five minutes later, they tried to play their own game. And then I have to say, 'I'm sorry at this level, we cannot cooperate. We have to do our own thing.' And they have already started with certain preparation. That's the reason I said okay, we do our own thing.

In what way or how did they try to play their own game?

That I can't tell you the whole story. You know the owners. We offered them cooperation, we offered them a joint venture. Not even a cooperation but joint venture. And we even agreed to it but if somebody goes behind your back to play other games, the basis of a cooperation and joint venture is trust. And we have to say, 'Look, we have already begun to prepare certain things, we have no other choice.' And then what happened was, all the big collectors supported us. They helped us. That means probably also a lot of regard.

But I don't want to speak about other fairs. But you have to understand again, it's not always reality what everybody around tells you.

That's why it is important to ask directly from those sources. Anyway, will your plan include other cities that your Art Stage will be interested in doing?

Art Stage is surely a product, which is a Southeast Asian product. The goal of Art Stage is surely as I said before, to match-make Southeast Asia, to put Southeast Asia in a global context, to relate Southeast Asia with an international art world, to support Southeast Asian's growth and that means, maybe in the future if we see there's a place which makes sense we can consider it, but at the moment we have no plan.

Example, if there would be a place at the moment where we should think about is surely Manila, but they (already) have a fair, so why should we do something? And this fair is well done and functions, so why should we do something? There are surely other plans or projects in this art world that have nothing to do with the Art Stage (concept). Because Art Stage, as I said, has its roots here.

Another example, the problem is all these countries in Southeast Asia, many people and collectors, galleries; they always ask why are you not doing a fair in Manila, Bangkok, KL? Ten times people will ask. But it must make sense. My goal is not to build a McDonalds' system where we are everywhere.

Now, having so many years of experience in Southeast Asia, would you say that you are disappointed with the results in the sense of participation in fairs and the volume of the sales in Southeast Asia is not big enough to sustain that kind of fair that you imagine it to be: international, a lot of top galleries from Europe, the US? Then you've mentioned 75% of the exhibitors will be Asian and that, even the top Asian exhibitors, don't participate every year?

Yes. What is clear is that you still have a situation here in Asia where we don't have a lot of international collectors. I think your wonderful (Malaysian collector) Datuk (Noor) Azman is a unique guy.

The biggest part is they (the collectors) are still in their small national box. And that's a bit of a problem. We surely would wish that they open their minds much quicker. But this mentality here in Southeast Asia, and also this focusing on their own artists is much stronger than for example what you see in China.

But you also have to be clear, China has a long history. In China, today the big collectors are all young people, and (after) long period of communism and closing of this country, they are now eager to go out. We don't have (those factors) here and still among these countries you sometimes have this problem: Indonesians are mainly supporting their Indonesian artists.

Malaysia will do the same, as I said, Datuk Azman is an exception. It's much more the case like in Jakarta. So, if I'm an international gallery or if I am a big Asian gallery, it's not so easy to build them here but that is our role here: to educate and to match-make. And the only way to open Southeast Asia is to bring them together and what Asia has to understand and unfortunately, many still don't understand is you cannot think we want to be internationally successful because you're great but you're not interested in what happens internationally. It's a give and take (situation). It's not one way. And only if that happens in Southeast Asia.

Now, at the conclusion of Art Stage in Singapore in 2017, you mentioned that the format of the fair may have to change or adapt so what have you in mind?

This is mainly not to do with Southeast Asia, but mainly in Singapore.

What do you mean by that?

As I said at the beginning, when we were speaking about different countries, I said Singapore is something else. Singapore is not a country with a huge growing art scene. Singapore is a very young country, still searching for its identity. It doesn't have a cultural history, and the art (scene), it's small. That means, the art world is very small. And as I said before, it's totally controlled by the government. Most of the artists here, they live off the government, they live off grants. So, in other words, you don't have a growing interest and understanding in contemporary art here. You have here museums but if you go to the opening of (these) museums it's mainly kids and students. If you go to the opening of a gallery exhibition, you have the same.

As a result of it, we probably have to bring and to introduce art not in the academic way as we do in other places, even in Indonesia. That means we have to do it in a much more "lifestyle" way. Art is not only a (form of) cultural goods with an academic definition or whatever, but art offers much more (potential) as a lifestyle concept and that is what I mean by that. We have to change a bit, develop the fair in a direction that we can open it up to more people because there is a lot of money around here. There are a lot of people who are interested in lifestyle (pursuits) and art. But we have to build them a bridge and to come to art and to begin to understand art. They should not be frightened about something that they don't understand. That's the reason why I say we have to open the fair step by step also in a direction that we position art. Not only art in the classical sense of its definition, but also art in a certain lifestyle (notion) of today. That is exactly what I mean.

What do you mean by "lifestyle"?

In the classical term of the word. Art is part of our life just as design is,

for example. At the same time, we have also today a situation where contemporary creativity is no more limited with a clear definition.

Here, you have a drawer, which is art, architecture, and design. More and more of these things merge. And that's also a chance for the city and global city like Singapore. And at the same time, it also reflects much more of the mentality here. And don't forget, if we discuss art historically and if we see the history in Asia, there was never this distinction between all these different types of artists. Everything, which was crafted, produced, created with excellence were of a certain level of art (appreciation). If there was a pot, chair, calligraphy, painting, this definition of dividing all these sectors, that is European (in concept). That is a European way of thinking of the academics. The clear definition of supporting contemporary art is to open it up to a much more (inclusive level) to new audience and to grow the audience it so that they can understand and to get them to (appreciate) the art.

Give an example.

As I said before, you open the door to the applied arts.

In what way you're going to open it?

Very simple, for example, I open the door to top designers. Example, you know Zaha Hadid? What was she? An artist, a designer, an architect?

She was everything.

Exactly.

And you're having a component of antiques in your fair?

That's the other side. If we open (up) in this direction, why not also open in a certain historical direction? Because you also have

to understand there is another thing, again back to Singapore, also contemporary art, it's not happening like this. It's the logical consequence of a long history. But most people, not only here but anywhere in the world, who run today behind contemporary art, they have no clue about history. And that's also important to understand art, even contemporary art. The art, most artists they know exactly about the history. But all these people around here who run contemporary art (operations), this contemporary art is a logical development of many sources and these sources are in the end historical sources. That's the reason why I say why not also open step by step a certain historical dimension.

Would you think that this would be of concern to the gallerists who are into pure art, fine art?

Galleries, first of all, they want to sell. If these two parts bring you buyers, they (would) want to kiss you. If these two parts are not bringing you buyers, they (would) want to criticise you. The question is also how we can expand the market for them. An art fair, at the end is a marketplace, which means we have to think about an image that is clear, a brand that is clear, a concept but surely also how we can increase market. We are here in Singapore, surely in the situation that is very open where the market is growing in the same way as many countries around. We are in a place where we have more money here than in all other places, we have people who have the possibility to become buyers like nowhere else and that's how we conceptualise. Do it in a way that we also bring more of these people in and at the end, it's not only the fair that profits, the more we can bring, all these people to art, all these institutions also want profit. Logical.

Now we already see it happening with art auction houses like Salcedo and León Gallery in the Philippines. The sales are very life-

style-oriented with vintage cars, jewellery, watches, wine, and so on.

Clear. The sad thing is, art becomes lifestyle. Today, it is sexy to have (such a development) but that's not the main aim of the art but if that is the way, and such an interest can make you (become) interested in art then I'd do it, and bring you there. If not, you won't have a following. And don't forget we have here a stage and the place, again it's our history. You have cultural history, in Indonesia you have cultural history; in the Philippines you have cultural history, here not, you cannot blame them but you have to adapt yourself.

One last question, what would you like to highlight about your involvement in Art Stage? How has Art Stage progressed over the years?

It's up to you to (think). Since we started Art Stage, a lot of things have happened. Look at Singapore, since then we have the entire Art Week around Art Stage. We have a lot of galleries which came to Singapore. We have Gillman Barracks opening, I mean (although) some of them (galleries) already left. We have a centre of contemporary art opening, we have National Gallery opening, we have the Pinacothèque de Paris opening then closed again, fine. And that means, a lot of things happened but we also have to be clear when we started here, the economic situation was another (factor) one (needs) to relate. What we have here in Asia, and especially in Southeast Asia, is still quite different for example, to Europe. A big part of collecting art in Southeast Asia is still very much dominated by an investment scheme (motivation). And that means, if economics are not going in the best way, they hesitate.

The classical European collector is (more) fascinated by the art. And who cares (not much) about the economic situation, it's the art. As a result of it, we here in Asia and especially Southeast Asia

are much more dependent on the economic growth (level), or increase in (investment) value.

Singapore is totally dependent on the global economic situation and at the moment in Singapore, it surely has, let's say, quite a quiet situation. Also, we have to think about how we can in a certain way, accelerate this situation and again in a certain way, an economic reality. Therefore, an art fair is always in the end the mirror of the market, a society, a situation that means we had in this last 20 years, the market exploded somewhere. Now we are in a situation, which is again in a certain way, going down, which is nothing but normal. We have many galleries now which complain everywhere and don't know what to do. I'm sorry, it cannot always go up and up. And what happens as I said, the last 20 years was surely not normal. If you look where the art world was 20 years ago, and today, it was an explosion of some thousand per cent. That cannot continue like this.

The thing about contemporary art is that, you will never ask me such a question, you see, but it will be the same. Contemporary art has nothing to do with that and this understanding has to be developed. You see, at the end, if we can overcome this situation, then immediately you have here a region, which is quite strong because if you see what happens in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, et cetera. If we can combine that in a way, which has nothing to do with national backgrounds, then you see ahead the market and this scene is not really as small.

And looking from outside, we as Europeans, and I am not interested in Indonesian or Malay art. I have totally another way of understanding, I'm interested in certain artists who are really great, if they are here or here or here, that is for me. And surely they have their own roots, background but that's everywhere in the world. Also, an artist who comes from Canada, has his roots but he's not a Canadian artist in this sense. This is what we have to understand here, and

that means also infrastructure, et cetera. And that's the reason I said Datuk Azman is an exception. He thinks like that, but he was never looking only on this thing. Always the same thing that happens (for example) is the new museum (MACAN) in Jakarta, it should be much more open-minded. We have to move away from political thinking to really, a contemporary cultural (way of) thinking.

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* Huang did not want her photograph to be used

SEPARATING THE WHEAT FROM THE CHAFF

Prior to joining Bonhams in 2012, Victoria Huang was the assistant curator in the collections and curation department at the Singapore Art Museum. At the time, she was responsible for acquisitions and exhibitions and handled the donation of artefacts.

The Bonhams office in Singapore, which opened in 2014, is a representative office. There are also representative offices in Beijing and Taipei. The main salesroom in Asia is in Hong Kong, with another salesroom in Sydney.

In her art specialist role at Bonhams, Huang is primarily responsible for sourcing for works under the categories of Chinese Paintings and South-east Asian Art.

She would initially evaluate the sale potential of works based on appraisals of photographs and actual works in collaboration with a global team.

The property sourced would then be scheduled for biannual auctions in Hong Kong. Works are also assigned to San Francisco and Sydney for Asian art sales.

She also liaises with Bonhams senior management and other department teams for partnership procurement strategies as well as forges relationships with international clients from English and Mandarin-speaking backgrounds.

Her job scope includes writing, translating and editing auction catalogue text as well as conceptualising the layout and production of catalogues.

Huang also plans marketing and copywriting strategies for English-Chinese bilingual promotional materials.

As for auctions, she conducts telephone bidding in English and Chinese and handles all aspects of pre-sale, sale and post-sale activities including market research and tracking worldwide sales.

This interview took place on April 5 2017.

What types of works are sold by Bonhams under 'Indian, Himalayan and Southeast Asian art'?

Bonhams organises Indian, Himalayan and Southeast Asian art sales in New York twice a year during Asia Week, focusing on fine sculptures and paintings from India and the Himalayas, as well as early sculptures from Southeast Asia. Covering the wide region from Afghanistan to Indonesia, the department presents the diverse material culture of Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Islam, and secular life spanning three thousand years. Bonhams also offers such works of art in Hong Kong and San Francisco sales from time to time to provide an unparalleled multi-tiered opportunity for buyers and a comprehensive service to consignors.

What kinds of works are classified as 'Southeast Asian art' by Bonhams?

Southeast Asian art is a broad term that encompasses paintings, sculptures and works of various media from the region. Works are recommended for auction at different salesrooms based on factors such as artist, medium, estimate, potential market and sale date.

How does Bonhams categorise Southeast Asian fine art?

Bonhams accepts both paintings and sculptures. A fine art sale denotes works of a higher quality and value compared to those found in a decorative sale.

Has contemporary art, such as video recordings, installations and prints been featured in a Bonhams auction of Southeast Asian art?

Yes, Bonhams has incorporated selected pieces into various sales. For example, *A Realised Dream, Experiment #2*, an archival piezographic print in diasec, by Robert Zhao (Singaporean, b.1983) was

sold at the Fine Chinese Paintings and Contemporary Asian Art sale on Nov 23, 2014 (<http://www.bonhams.com/auctions/21941/lot/1238/>).

On November 23, 2013, we sold *Treasure (I)* and *Early Consumer*, an oil on canvas and a sculpture in an old TV (fibreglass, resin and polyurethane paint) by Ronald Ventura (Filipino, b.1973) at our Asian 20th Century and Contemporary Art sale ([/www.bonhams.com/auctions/21487/lot/893/](http://www.bonhams.com/auctions/21487/lot/893/)).

When did Bonhams start selling Southeast Asian art?

Bonhams has incorporated Southeast Asian art into various sales for more than a decade. For example, our San Francisco salesroom offered *A Young Girl with Fruit* by Fernando Cueto Amorsolo (Filipino, 1892-1972) in the Modern and Contemporary Art Sale on November 9, 2007 (<http://www.bonhams.com/auctions/15405/lot/1190/>) and Vietnamese prints in the SOMA Estate Sale as early as September 25, 2005 (<http://www.bonhams.com/auctions/13226/lot/1780/>).

Note: Since this interview, a dedicated Southeast Asian sale was held for the first time on March 29, 2018, in Hong Kong by Bonhams. Entitled, Ritual + Culture, the auction was a “newly conceived sale” of the arts in Southeast Asia. Coinciding with Art Basel in Hong Kong, the sale offered classical and pre-modern works of art with 20th and 21st century modern and contemporary art in a cross-category format. The sale was “jointly realised” by Edward Wilkinson, global head of the Indian, Himalayan, and Southeast Asian Art Department at Bonhams and Wang Zineng of the art advisory Art Agenda, S.E.A. located in Singapore and specialising in modern Asian art. (www.bonhams.com/auctions/24934/)

With regard to artworks sourced for a Bonhams auction, which countries does the term “Southeast Asian” encompass?

Bonhams has sold paintings, artefacts and sculptures from all 10 Asean countries, with Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam as the major players for modern paintings.

What is the frequency of Bonhams auctions of such works?

There is no standard frequency as much depends on the type of works sourced and the salesroom recommendation. Bonhams strives to incorporate Southeast Asian art into our biannual sales in various locations, for example, Hong Kong.

Typically, in a sale, how many lots are offered?

Typically, 5 to 10 works by Southeast Asian artists are incorporated into each related sale each season.

What is the total low estimate in such an auction on average?

Figures vary from sale to sale.

What was the total value in terms of sales achieved in the last auction of such works? When and where was the auction held?

At the Fine Chinese Paintings and Southeast Asian Art sale at Bonhams Hong Kong on May 29, 2016. The Southeast Asian component achieved HK\$3,511,000 of total hammer.

Concerning Bonhams auction catalogues, what sub-categories are artworks classified under? For example, Modern and Contemporary?

Works can be classified under categories such as:

- Fine Chinese Paintings
- Modern and Contemporary Art
- Fine Asian Paintings
- Asian Art

- Prints, Photographs and Works on Paper
- Asian Decorative Art

In the last few years, what type of artworks and from which country has generated the highest value in an auction?

High-quality, fresh-to-the-market works by established names with impeccable provenance usually generate the highest value at auctions. There is no set country for top performer. For example, *Album of Landscapes* by Wang Hui (1632-1717) hammered for HK\$35,960,000 at the Fine Chinese Paintings sale on May 31, 2015 (www.bonhams.com/auctions/22883/lot/122/) and *Balinese Girl* by Romualdo Locatelli (1905-1943) sold for HK\$7,240,000 at the Modern and Contemporary Art sale on October 3, 2015 (www.bonhams.com/auctions/22890/lot/5/). Both auctions took place at Bonhams Hong Kong and the hammer prices included buyer's premium.

What is Bonhams' policy on selecting the works of Southeast Asian artists for auction?

In addition to the factors already mentioned, Bonhams prefers to offer Southeast Asian works for which we have a ready buyer's base.

In terms of market demand and auction sales, who are the leading artists whose works are sourced by Bonhams?

In the area of Southeast Asian art, works by Chen Wen Hsi, Cheong Soo Pieng, Le Pho, Fernando Amorsolo and Lee Man Fong perform well.

Generally, in terms of auction value, artists from which country are perceived to be the top-grossers in a sale? In what ranking would you rate the artists from the following countries in terms of auction transactions?

- Indonesia: Lee Man Fong, Hendra Gunawan, Affandi, Masriadi and so on.

- Singapore: Cheong Soo Pieng, Georgette Chen, Chen Wen Hsi, Lim Tze Peng and so on.
- The Philippines: Juan Luna Y Novicio, Fernando Zobel De Ayala, Vicente Silva Manansala, Fernando Amorsolo, Alfonso Ossorio, Ang Kiukok, Anita Magsaysay, Hernando Ocampo, Napoleon V. Abueva, Victorio Edades, Diosdado Lorenzo, Vincente Rivera, Ronald Ventura, Geraldine Javier and so on.
- Vietnam: Bui Xuan Phai, Le Pho, Vu Cao Dam, Mai Trung Thu and Le Thi Luu.
- Thailand: Thawan Duchanee, Natee Utarit and so on.
- Malaysia: Datuk Ibrahim Hussein, Latiff Mohidin, Datuk Chuah Thean Teng and so on.
- Myanmar: U Lun Gywe, Min Wae Aung and so on.

It is difficult to rank artists in such a way as much depends on the specific artwork, provenance, and so on.

What are the biggest challenges in sourcing for Southeast Asian art for auction?

It is always difficult to source fresh-to-the-market property for sale and to convince the consignor to agree to conservative estimates. Other issues such as authenticity also add to the challenge.

On the average, what percentage in terms of auction sales do you reckon Southeast Asian art figure within the category of Asian art as far as Bonhams is concerned?

Currently about 5% to 10%.

Do you think the demand for Southeast Asian art is on the rise, in decline or has plateaued as far as auctions are concerned?

In my view, it has plateaued.

Which segment of Southeast Asian art do you feel has the greatest capacity to have a greater level of demand in the next five years?

Quality works of a substantial size with fine provenance by modern Southeast Asian painters will continue to be sought after in the next five years.

How do you view the major art fairs in Hong Kong, Singapore and Jakarta? Any impact on auctions of Southeast Asian art?

These major art fairs bring a cross-section of the art world – collectors, artists, museum directors, curators and art professionals under one roof. They serve as added platforms to the introduction of Southeast Asian art to the international audience.

What are the highest auction prices transacted by Bonhams for the works of:

- Singapore's Chen Wen Hsi
- Malaysia's Datuk Chuah Thean Teng
- Vietnam's Bui Xuan Phai
- Indonesia's Lee Man Fong and Adrien-Jean Le Mayeur de Merpres

Chen Wen Hsi: *Still Life* for HK\$375,000 including premium (www.bonhams.com/auctions/21487/lot/926/)

Chuah Thean Teng: *Untitled* for HK\$56,250 including premium (www.bonhams.com/auctions/21939/lot/665/)

Bui Xuan Phai: *Still Life* for HK\$137,500 including premium (www.bonhams.com/auctions/22890/lot/2/)

Lee Man Fong: *Horse and Groom* for HK\$596,000 including premium (www.bonhams.com/auctions/20310/lot/371/)

Adrien-Jean Le Mayeur de Merpres: *The Lotus Pond* for US\$302,500 including premium (www.bonhams.com/auctions/20982/lot/1299/)

What kind of demand among Southeast Asian art collectors is there for works by Chinese ink artists and calligraphers such as Chen Wen Hsi, Cheong Soo Pieng, Chen Chong Swee, Huang Yao, Pan Tianshou and Pan Shou?

Southeast Asian art collectors are more keen on ink works by Chen Wen Hsi, Cheong Soo Pieng and Pan Tianshou. Lesser-known names on the international auction scene would appeal to a more niche buyer's market.

What other aspects of Southeast Asian art have you observed lately? For example, is there enough market (specifically auction) interest for Chinese contemporary ink works?

Much depends on the artist and the calibre of the works. Bonhams' Fine Chinese Paintings auctions incorporate Chinese contemporary ink works by artists such as Liu Dan, Liu Guosong, Li Huayi, Li Jin and Ruyi. International collectors, many from the younger generation, appreciate how the age-old Chinese medium of ink is being both revered and reimagined by modern-day artists who are creating a new pictorial language.

Note: Just prior to the publication of this book, Victoria Huang joined another company.

A black and white portrait of a woman with short dark hair, wearing a dark sleeveless button-down shirt and light-colored pants. She has her hands clasped in front of her and is standing outdoors in front of a modern building with a glass facade. A semi-transparent black box is overlaid on the lower half of the image, containing her name and contact information.

Seah Tzi-Yan

Director
T.H.E.O. Arts Professionals
Singapore
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AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE GALLERY SCENE

Seah Tzi-Yan has been running T.H.E.O Arts Professional, an arts training company, for the past six years. She was also an art gallery director for 17 years, the co-founder of the Art Galleries Association (1996) and ARTSingapore (2000). She has also lectured on curatorial museum studies at the Nanyang Academy. "Having been on the art scene since 1988, I've seen a few changes through the years. I still work with some of those artists from my gallery days such as Aung Myint and San Minn from Myanmar," she says. "My work is spread out. I do curatorial work, which is the part I like best, and have run education programmes since 2015 like the Art Week Conversations commissioned by the National Arts Council (NAC). Hopefully, they'll still want us next year.

"Last year (2016) we produced the Singapore Art Show. These are ways to supplement the art scene. The gallery scene is how the commercial side works. But I'm also interested in lesser known artists who work in different ways. Artists such as Chng Seok Tin, a household name, although people have no idea of her earlier artworks, and Teo Eng Seng who's really important. His complaint is that, 'Everybody only knows my Net piece', which is a hanging sculpture, but little of anything else. Their works range from S\$500 to S\$120,000 (US\$370 to US\$90,000).

"We wanted to look at some of the earlier works of the older artists. We realised that at that time, they were young artists. So we did a small section on young Singapore artists as well. It gives us a wider perspective. As it was a sponsored show, we didn't have to worry about the sales. If it sells, it sells. If it doesn't sell, it's partly because the market is soft now. People go for brand names. But to me, it's still important to do alternative works."

The Edge: What are your views on the younger Singaporean artists like Jane Lee and Ruben Pang?

Seah Tzi-Yan: They have made it into the gallery scene. I do curatorial programmes for ION Art and Affordable Art Fair. People say the Affordable Art Fair is like a *pasar malam* (night market) but the art fairs have created an opening for the middle income bracket of people to buy art in a non-threatening way. This is the fifth year it has been supporting young talents and it is open to Southeast Asian artists. Last November we had Malaysian artist Chiang Lup Hong showing as well. He has now been picked up by one of the galleries to sell his work at Affordable Art. He's a young, cute guy who does paper cuttings. We also have a Young Talent Programme that gets us about 100 entries from around Southeast Asia. A committee makes the selection.

How do you publicise the events?

We publicise through Facebook and by emails to art schools. Artists who are our alumni help us spread the word as well. We haven't been able to get as much traction on the Malaysian scene yet. Perhaps we're not hitting the right channels. Every year, we do a media launch.

When did you get interested in Myanmar art?

I started getting interested in Myanmar art around 1996. Andrew Ranard, a journalist based in Myanmar, published a book on Myanmar art (*Burmese Painting: A Linear and Lateral History*). It was useful because it introduced the artists there. At that time, there was Art-2Gallery and we were at The Substation. We had an interest in Southeast Asian art so we started looking at artists such as Montien (Montien Boonma, Thailand), Tang Da Wu and Vincent Leow. We did a solo for Vincent and worked with the sculptor (Iskandar) Jalil.

We met a couple of Myanmar artists who were fascinating. There isn't even a taxi to take. If you get to the airport, you can't leave unless you know someone, so that was how it started. We did a first show at The Substation in 1996 called *New Paintings from Myanmar* (Aung Myint, San Minn, MPP Yei Myint and Min Wae Aung). At that time, we unearthed a group of modernists such as Aung Myint and San Minn who have been working since the 1970s so their work has developed quite a bit. The Singapore Art Museum and Fukuoka Asian Art Museum also had interest in them. We had a lot of discussions about the work which eventually went into the museums' collections. This was good otherwise the artists wouldn't have been able to sustain themselves if not for the museums and a handful of collectors.

You mean the museums bought the works?

Yes, some of the Burmese collections at the Fukuoka Art Museum and Singapore Art Museum have been sourced out to them. The artists are still working. I just did a solo for Aung Myint and San Minn in 2015.

What was the price range when you did the show in 1996?

It was really cheap. The price was so low because the artists were new, anything from S\$1,000 (US\$700) upwards. We really needed a take-up for them. Aung Myint's large four-panelled piece went for about S\$5,000 to S\$6,000 (US\$3,700 to US\$4,400), the most expensive piece. Of course, the prices have changed now because of the economy. The prices are pegged to the economy.

Min Wae Aung came after the show. I was going around Yangon and stumbled upon New Treasure Gallery. At that time it was called the Passageway. It had been raining and the streets were flooded. Word got out that I was working with the museum and the artists

were so excited. Min Wae took me aside and showed me his new series of paintings. Before that, he was doing landscape scenes, much more traditional, beautiful work. He's a good painter. We had a solo exhibition for him in Singapore that did very well. In a way, he helped open the market and art scene. Special collectors will buy the modernist, abstract paintings, but they are not to everyone's liking. Of course, artists like U Lun Gywe was popular at that time.

Lately, Min Wae's new series of monochrome monks and traders at ION didn't do so well.

I did that show. We hardly had any monks, but it was more about village people. It didn't do too well.

Was it because of the pricing?

There are a lot of perceptions. We sold many pieces in Yangon to Singaporeans at the same price. That was fine. But when the pieces came to Singapore and were hung beautifully at ION, people had the perception that they were expensive although the prices were the same.

Even here, the price is in US dollars. If they check, they would know it's the same price as in Yangon. But they have the perception that they should buy the art from Yangon. We did sell some pieces, but through Yangon. Lately, Min Wae has been selling in the UK.

How much was his work when it was exhibited at ION?

The big pieces 5 ft by 6 ft (150cm by 180cm) cost between US\$20,000 and US\$30,000.

After Min Wae Aung's show, what else did you get involved in?

I was doing some work with (Malaysian artist) Zulkifli Yusoff. We worked on a commission for the Singapore Biennale and with (Singaporean collector) Koh Seow Chuan to produce his book *Singapore*

Art Collector's Art Journey. It is sold at Helutrans because it's under the Helutrans Art Collectors Series.

What do you think of the problem of staff retention at auction houses?

Sometimes, I think the old family structures don't give way to a congenial working structure. Companies need to renew all the time. I felt working for the gallery didn't work for me so I set up T.H.E.O. And 222 Artspace offered me the space. You have to roll and keep trimming and changing the way art organisations work. The problem with the art gallery structures is that sometimes they work themselves into a very untenable situation.

What do you mean by 'untenable situation'?

If you don't own your properties, especially in big cities like Singapore or New York, it's the landlords who make money from you. Those lovely Swiss guys had a beautiful gallery three storeys high, but in the end, they left a huge pile of unpaid rent. I've done the gallery scene for 15 years. By the 12th and 13th year we were doing nice shows but I felt constrained. In a sense you always have to take care of the space and the staff – not that I don't like looking after people. But you have to make sure people are paid. When you've got too many people to look after, it's very hard to look after your artists and their interests because I'm thinking about what I need on my wall. How should my artists develop, what's next?

It was good when I stopped that because I could work with Zulkifli (Yusoff). I gave him suggestions about working with the Biennale (Singapore Biennale). We spoke to them and they gave us the space. That's how we came up with three-dimensional paintings. Zulkifli also developed a different way of working. Every now and then we get calls for his works which usually I don't have enough of.

Do you sell his work?

Yes, if I have work for him or when people want to sell from their collection, although I don't represent him now. The secondary market for his work is growing and I often get responses for that. There are quite a few Malaysian dealers and galleries, so his market is fairly healthy. The prices are not bad (on two unsold 'dome-like' works from his *Tun Razak Speech Series – The Green Book* (see pg xxix). It's too early to go on the market. That's the problem because it becomes speculation, 'I bought this, and now I hope to make double.' It underscores the market that it's not really worth keeping unless you can flip it. It's not something I support. People maintain status quo. At art fairs, if you see one artist's style doing well, even Jane Lee, it gets replicated for the next few years because it's a little scary to change too much.

What's your opinion on "seminars"?

We are doing the Art Week Conversations for the Singapore Art Week. We have been doing it in Singapore (every year), Malaysia, Myanmar, Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia. Last year we did the Philippines.

Were the conversations or exchanges documented or published?

No, they were not published. I did have some recordings, but I didn't have enough manpower to have them transcribed. Some of the conversations have been really good. For Indonesia, we had Daniel Komala (chief executive officer of Larasati, the auction house) as well as some artists so it was quite explosive, very nice. They all come from different points of view and that's important. When I ask them to speak, they'll ask, 'Who are the other speakers?' They may say, "But you know we may not agree". But the Filipinos are so friendly. 'Oh that's good, we're all friends.'

We usually do short summaries on Facebook, T.H.E.O or Art Week Conversations.

The one we saw was with art consultants Wang Zineng and Jimmy Chua.

Yes, that was interesting on Southeast Asia and we had (documentary filmmaker and writer) Patricia Chen moderating¹.

What are your views on art historian and critic TK Sabapathy and Singapore contemporary art?

I look for speakers all the time, but I try not to hit the usual suspects too much. We are also trying to get people who have a lot of knowledge, but are not used to speaking. So we arrange it as conversations which is safe for them. They only have to answer one question at a time. They don't have to present a paper and we get moderators to hold things together.

When you present a paper, it becomes too dry and academic. It can turn people off.

And it's not necessarily what is happening in the market because the academic is forced to come to an assumption and a conclusion. Sometimes we have no conclusion, it's ongoing, we're just spinning away.

Academics have their points of view so it's important to get an idea of what they think. Then you have business people who provide a counterpoint.

That's why we have Patricia Chen to give a balance. We never talk about prices in the art week conversations. We leave that for the auctions. We just talk about the mechanics and we've always been oversubscribed.

¹ <https://patchenlaw.wordpress.com/about-2/>

But the general public has no background knowledge of the artists or where they come from. Singaporean artist Ong Kim Seng achieved S\$130,000 (US\$97,000) in Sotheby's auction. Immediately it became news in *The Straits Times* daily in Singapore.

They did that when he hit S\$80,000 then he went into the doldrums. When he sold at his normal price, people thought it wasn't good enough.

And people are still talking about Singaporean artist Tan Swie Hi-an's multi-million dollar benchmark achieved at Poly Auction in 2014.

Exactly.

So price triggers the general public because people are curious as to why they sell so much. You can debate about the merits of the artist or artwork, but it's still price benchmarks that make people notice.

You have a point, but I'm not very good at talking about money.

We also want to gather a diverse range of views and not just prices. You have been on the art scene longer than many of the galleries.

But they're very savvy and know how to sell their artworks.

They're very savvy online. This new generation of online art entrepreneurs are also looking at the latest technology to sell art as opposed to the brick-and-mortar galleries.

You will see that change. Even Sundaram Tagore has reorganised their gallery shows. This time they appeared at Art Basel as a one-artist special (exclusively showcasing Jane Lee's artworks with an exhibition called *Meld*).

We are keen to check on young, up-and-coming artists that you think have a bright future.

From our Young Talent Programme, we shortlisted 8 out of 100.

From the eight, we shortlisted three to do a solo at ION. The eight got quickly picked up by other galleries for other projects. The ones that do solos fly high. Some of them have gone on to do group shows. Many of the art graduates in the past six to seven years have set up group studios to continue working as artists. They're very professional and go to work every day in their studio.

Hilmi Johandi's paintings have all been snapped up. He should have enough works to have a show. Artists such as Calvin Wing and a few others rent the studio space together so they have little pockets of studios. During Art Week, they did a studio 'walk around' of Paya Lebar, Eunos, the east side of the industrial area like all the artists in Group B. They had open house (events) so there was a hive of activity. What's exciting is that they are willing to do any work; they give lessons on art, paint murals in the garden, all kinds of things. They are unlike our esoteric artists from the 1980s and 1990s – pure artists who had to struggle such as Vincent Leow at one time.

What is your perception of Southeast Asian art and the market for it?

I have supported art from the region for some time now. Part of the magic of Southeast Asian art is that it is so different, so diverse. Each has its own history, politics and psychology. So much has happened in each nation that it is not simple to be unitarian in approach, or to have one market. Most of us have taken on the 'Asean' view of Southeast Asian art; that Southeast Asia is held together by the proximity of our nations and cultures. We want to trade with each other, but often keep each other at arm's length because we feel we should concentrate on our own.

The ideas of "Nanyang" and "Nusantara" remain as poetic and aesthetic ideals, useful for understanding the art, but not as a cultural ideal with shared values. Hence, there is little interchange by way of a real artistic communication between artists in Bangkok,

Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Jogjakarta. This happens only in the holy huddle of curated art projects, it's not as organic.

A Singapore artist in KL is still a foreigner, and vice-versa (there are exceptions). Hence the art market has little synergy. When HB Art (Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers) does an auction, it is seen mainly as an auction for Malaysia, and the Singaporeans snuck in to look for good buys. But if we are thinking of developing a more mature South-east Asian art market, we should be moving to sell between galleries, across Southeast Asian cities, from Singapore to Phnom Penh to Hanoi, and not only at the region's art fairs. Instead we are at the stage of running art sales on a one-way street. Few galleries, which are the primary place for selling/buying art, cross these boundaries. There are possibly just a handful including Richard Koh, Chan Hampe or Hori and Yavuz. The auction houses do their thing which is useful for the market, but not enough to catalyse a sustainable "one-market" for Southeast Asia.

What type of artworks do you generally track or monitor under the category of 'Southeast Asian art'?

Mostly modernists and contemporary.

At which auction houses do you track Southeast Asian art transactions and why?

Sotheby's, Christie's, Larasati, Henry Butcher, and sometimes Bonhams. We track sales to benchmark prices, compared to gallery prices, for specific artists, and for general information of what's happening.

Can you name the Southeast Asian artists whose prices you track or have an interest in?

Cheong Soo Pieng, Popo Iskandar, Tang Da Wu, Awang Damit, Zulkifli Yusoff, Chia Yu Chian and contemporaries. Malaysian and Singapore, the Philippines and Vietnamese artists – pioneers, modernists.

What type of Southeast Asian art are your clients generally interested in and which do you deal in?

Mainly modernists, and also significant artists like Tang Da Wu, etcetera.

In your analysis of auction prices, which sources of data do you regard as most reliable?

I check auction results online. Artnet and often the auction house itself.

In what ranking would you rate the artists from the following countries in terms of auction transactions?

I can only generalise. The accurate answer is from doing a survey. In descending order, they would be:

Indonesia, The Philippines, Singapore tied with Vietnam in third place, Thailand and Malaysia in fourth place and in fifth place, Myanmar.

Do you think the demand for Southeast Asian art is on the rise, in decline or has plateaued as far as auctions are concerned?

It has overall plateaued, but I think Singapore art has moved up a couple of notches for specific artists, for example Cheong Soo Pieng.

Do you think gallery or private sales fetch a higher price than auctions and why?

Across the board, gallery/private sales score higher prices.

Which segment of Southeast Asian art do you feel has the greatest capacity to attract a greater level of demand in the next five years and why?

Singapore has excellent and very contemporary art; some local support from collectors (who are starting to finally look inwards)

and museum support. For older artworks, there is a lot of ground not covered yet. Good works are available for collection from lesser known first and second-generation artists. Smart collectors will start looking for third-generation artists.

The Philippine and Thai markets have plenty of talents, and there is still room for galleries to grow. There is strong patriotic support and a good new art fair.

In Indonesia, there is room for new artists to be spotted as the old pool of pioneers and second-generation artists is drying up. The market needs to look forward now, not backwards.

How do you view the major art fairs in Hong Kong, Singapore and Jakarta? Is there any impact on auctions of Southeast Asian art and why?

The fairs are an important part of the market, just as auctions are. Although they must compete, they also perform complementary sales and informational functions.

Do art fairs boost the sales of participating galleries that sell Southeast Asian art? Or, in fact, bring in competition to such galleries with the availability of artworks from outside the region?

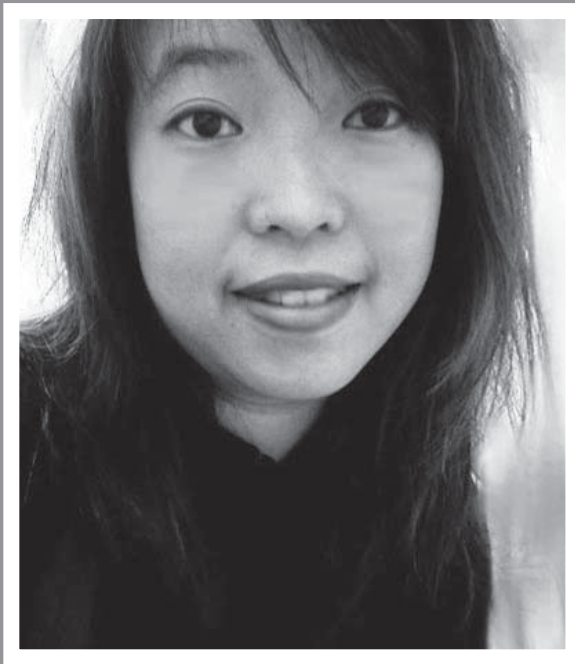
They boost sales. Galleries and artists get seen on a much broader and credible platform.

What level of demand among Southeast Asian art collectors is there for the works of Chinese ink artists and/or watercolourists and calligraphers? In Singapore, for example Chen Wen Hsi, Cheong Soo Pieng, Chen Chong Swee, Huang Yao, Pan Tianshou, Pan Shou and so forth.

That's always been a staple and I believe it will continue to be so in the near future.

What other aspects of Southeast Asian art have you observed lately?

The sale of more contemporary artworks including installations and new media works.



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COLLECTING & MANAGING DATA

Art consultant Lindy Poh is also a writer and lawyer specialising in copyrights, culture and heritage laws. Formerly a curator at the Singapore Art Museum (1996–2000) and adjunct senior curator at the National Gallery Singapore (2009–2011), she is currently a partner at art consultancy firm Silver Rue (founded in 1998). The company offers art collection management services, including appraisals and valuations for the purposes of “insurance, loans, donations and bequests, tax incentive schemes as well as asset management and declaration purposes”.

The Edge: What is your perception of Southeast Asian art and the market for it?

Lindy Poh: The market for Southeast Asian art is grossly uneven in terms of scholarship material as well as art market transactions. While collectors sometimes express an openness to Southeast Asian or ‘regional’ art, they also exhibit clear preferences, so some Southeast Asian countries have enjoyed a robust market while others have languished. Some significant collectors have a focus on their national artists or artists in their own countries and set up private museums showing these. There are also cycles of interest in particular countries. The Indonesian and Philippine art market are performing very well.

What type of artworks, for example ‘masters’, modernists and/or contemporary, do you generally track or monitor under the category of ‘Southeast Asian art’?

We look for all three categories you have mentioned as we work principally with corporate collections that have different objectives and emphases in building their collections. Our clients tend to want us to identify the ‘masters’, as you have put it, or the high

value (including cultural value) works in their collections to enable them to be displayed more appropriately or perhaps to be deployed in their corporate branding. They sometimes want to support the emerging artists if this accords with their corporate identity of supporting young creatives or young talent.

Which auction houses are you familiar with?

We have to familiarise ourselves with the international as well as smaller auction houses to build our own database or archives of prices. So, these are some of the auction houses we are familiar with, set out not in any order of priority:

Sotheby's, Christie's, Bonhams, Phillips, The Edge Auction, Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, KLAS, 33 Auction, Larasati Auctioneers, Masterpiece Auction, Sidharta Auctioneer, Borobudur Auction, Poly Auction, China Guardian, Gianguan Auctions, United Asian Auctioneers, Tiancheng International, Ravenel International Art Group, Kingsley, Zhong Cheng, Leon Gallery and Salcedo Auctions.

Which auction houses do you use to track Southeast Asian art transactions? Why?

We actually undertake rigorous 'tracking' across different auction houses rather than focusing only on a few, although we do highlight certain auction houses if they have a history of transactions for a particular artist's works. Why? To attempt a more systematic, more comprehensive and hopefully more sensitive way of valuing certain artworks. We take note of the differentials between market estimates and hammer prices across different auction houses, and these are recorded in our in-house database archives. We would then 'process' and analyse the information between ourselves – noting how a certain artist's works (and sometimes even the same

work) could be performing at different auction houses. You could say we are observing the behaviour of these transactions as well as the decisions of certain collectors.

Can you name the Southeast Asian artists whose prices you track or have an interest in? For example, from Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia and Singapore or others?

Because our work involves collection management and appraising our clients' existing art holdings, what we track is oftentimes linked to what they already have. Most of our clients do not position their collections as a Southeast Asian collection. A number prefer to be positioned as having collections from larger Asia or to have 'international' artworks. A number of our clients collect Chinese art. The list of works is too long to set out here but most of the artists we track are listed in my answers below.

What types of Southeast Asian art are your clients generally interested in and which do you deal in?

We are not art dealers, so we do not undertake sale transactions. As we offer services in valuations and appraisals, we also have clients that require us to declare any conflict of interest and prefer us NOT to deal in works that we are valuing, to avoid conflict of interests. In terms of Southeast Asian art, our corporate clients have strong holdings of Singaporean, Malaysian and Vietnamese art, ranging from the 1980s to the present. The private collectors have strong holdings of Indonesian, Philippine and Thai art. We rarely see older Myanmar, Cambodian or Laotian works and we have not really seen any works from Brunei.

For your analysis of auction prices, which sources of data do you regard as most reliable?

We have access to our clients' paid prices for an artwork in their

acquisitions records – so to us, this source is comparatively reliable, although we also factor in ‘special’ prices for when a client acquires a number of works from a single artist. This ‘special’ price could represent a one-off or exception to the artist’s general market prices.

We do not limit our information to any one source, for example, auction house or the communications of a dealer. This means we lock down a range of data on a single artist – auction estimates as well as hammer prices, retail prices from the gallery, verbal communications from the artists or their representatives, and shared information from people who have bought the works, and importantly, the confidential data from our clients’ records on how much they actually paid for a particular work.

We have also learnt how not to be swayed by speculative one-off prices at auctions, or to be vigilant about ‘false transaction prices’.

What do you think of the auction prices of Southeast Asian art transacted in the region? Generally reliable or not reliable?

Generally reliable, although we still scrutinise all ‘information’ and bear in mind that there are hammer prices and then failures to follow through with paying – which really means that the work remains unsold.

Generally, in terms of auction value, artists from which country are perceived to be the top-grossers in an auction sale? How would you rank the artists from the following countries in terms of auction transactions?

Indonesia: Lee Man Fong, Hendra Gunawan, Affandi and [I Nyo-man] Masriadi.

In addition to your listed artists, to add: Le Mayeur, Raden Saleh, Walter Spies, Ahmad Sadali, S. Sudjojono, Srihadi Soedarsono, Rudi Mantofani and Yunizar.

Singapore: Cheong Soo Pieng, Georgette Chen, Chen Wen Hsi, Lim Tze Peng, Fan Chang Tien, Chua Ek Kay, Chua Mia Tee, Tay Bak Koi and Tan Choh Tee.

Yes to the above and to add: Ong Kim Seng, Choo Keng Kwang, Tan Swie Hian and Thang Kiang How. And more recently, younger artists have been fetching significant prices at auction, for example, Jane Lee.

The Philippines: Juan Luna y Novicio, Fernando Zobel De Ayala, Vicente Silva Manansala, Fernando Amorsolo, Alfonso Ossorio, Ronald Ventura and Geraldine Javier. Others: Ang Kiukok, Anita Magsaysay, Hernando Ocampo, Napoleon V. Abueva, Victorio Edades, Diosdado Lorenzo and Vincente Rivera.

Yes to all the above you have listed and to add: Felix R. Hidalgo, Fabian de la Rosa, Carlos B. Francisco, Benedicto Cabrera (Ben Cab), Romeo Tabuena and Lao Lian Ben. And belonging to a younger band of artists – Alfredo Esquillo.

Vietnam: Bui Xuan Phai, Le Pho, Vu Cao Dam, Mai Trung Thu and Le Thi Luu.

Yes, agree to all in your list and to add on: Dang Xuan Hoa, Nguyen Phan Chanh and Nguyen Trung.

Thailand: Natee Utarit.

Yes to Natee and also to add: Thawan Duchanee and Damrong Wong-Uparaj at auctions. The Thai auction market lags behind its private market where private dealings in Thai art are much more active. There is robust interest from museums and private collectors in Manit Sriwanichpoom, Navin Rawanchaikul and Pinaree Sanpitak, and in older artists like the late Montien Boonma.

Malaysia: Datuk Ibrahim Hussein, Latiff Mohidin and Datuk Chuah Thean Teng.

Yes to your list and to add: Chang Fee Ming, Awang Damit Ahmad, Datuk Syed Ahmad Jamal, Yong Mun Sen and Ahmad Zakii Anwar.

Myanmar: U Lun Gywe and Min Wae Aung.

The auction market is not strong for Myanmar works but there is a growing private market outside the auctions for works by Bagyi Aung Soe and U Ngwe Naing, in addition to the ones you have named.

Works from Laos and Cambodia face similar conditions. For instance, there are high prices for the Cambodian artist Svay Ken set by private dealers but not at auction. There is also significant interest by museums and collectors in the works of Sopheap Pich [from Cambodia].

Do you think the demand for Southeast Asian art is on the rise, in decline or has plateaued as far as auctions are concerned?

It is on the rise and will continue to grow.

Do you think gallery and private sales fetch a higher price than auctions? Why?

It is impossible to make a definitive statement on this – this varies across artists and also varies with the work (or series of works) we are referring to; it also depends on the scarcity (or abundance) of works ‘available’ or circulating in the market. For instance, a particular collector looking for a strong work from X artist may pay an extremely high price for it from a private dealer as he perceives that this work may not be coming into the auction platform.

There are other variables, including the positioning of seller and

collector and the circumstances of the sale (whether it is an urgent private sale, for instance) - all influence the momentum and prices achieved for an auction. So, for instance, in a complex estate sale, it could be that a particular artist has enjoyed strong private sales but the estate feels inclined to put all the works in a public auction rather than engage in private sales for transparency and accountability.

The 'discrepancies' in the prices between the public domain [of the auction] and the private sale are what make the market exciting for some.

Some private sales are guided by auction histories and use this in their price-setting and negotiations. They would use it to set either lower prices (to secure a quicker sale) or higher prices (differentiating their private sale piece as rare and much better than those available in auctions).

Can you cite the top 10 transactions of gallery sales (in whatever currency) that you have handled or know about?

My apologies, I am going to decline to elaborate or give details on this as we have signed confidentiality contracts with our clients. More generally, our clients tend to spend significantly on sculptures and who they consider 'blue-chip' artists. These range from spending over half a million to over two million dollars on a single painting (from auctions as well as private dealings) and several instances of spending more than S\$2 million for a single sculpture or for a few sculptures. These were not Southeast Asian works and have included ink paintings or works from Chinese artists and 'international' artists.

Which segment of Southeast Asian art do you feel has the greatest capacity to attract a greater level of demand in the next five years? Why?

The Philippines and Indonesia are likely to lead, from looking at recent momentum and buying activity. In the Philippines, for instance, its overall economy is doing very well – there are obvious spill over effects and there have been more art fairs organised. Similarly for Indonesia.

What are your views on the major art fairs in Hong Kong, Singapore and Jakarta? Any impact on auctions of Southeast Asian art? Why?

Yes, there is a significant impact because of the interconnectedness of these different platforms; all these different entities (art fairs, auctions, galleries, private dealers, and so on) form the ecology of the art market.

The impact doesn't flow one way but is a kind of dynamic circuitry – and one does not always dominate the other. 'Sought-after' artists will find their value (cultural as well as market value) being reinforced when he or she appears in multiple platforms. The artists' dealers and collectors are also responsive and many dealers are quite proactive in ensuring that their artists have a certain "airtime". They will engage scholars or museum curators to assess and respond to the artists' works, and also encourage certain collectors to release certain works at auctions, sometimes timed with the art fairs where they are also exhibiting works.

Do art fairs boost the sales of participating galleries that sell Southeast Asian art? Or, in fact, bring in competition to such galleries with the availability of artworks from outside the region?

There is always a risk of competition and one's own clients being wooed by more options; but I think most galleries weigh this in their decisions to join an art fair – and most go in believing that their own list would expand instead and that the exposure would be a positive thing for their stable of artists.

Among Southeast Asian art collectors, what is the level of demand for the works of Chinese ink artists and/or watercolourists and calligraphers? In Singapore: Chen Wen Hsi, Cheong Soo Pieng, Chen Chong Swee, Huang Yao, Pan Tianshou, Pan Shou, et cetera.

From our experience, there is significant interest in Chinese ink, calligraphy as well as works on paper (watercolours, pastels, prints, and so on). But these often fall under the radar of popular media coverage that tends to focus on modern and contemporary artworks. We know of collectors who are intensively and extensively collecting Chinese ink works, seals and calligraphy and who look to China and Taiwan as well as their home ground. They buy from Chinese, Hong Kong and Taipei auction houses and dealers; they tend to be discreet.

What other aspects of Southeast Asian art have you observed lately? For example, is there enough market interest (specifically, in auction sales) for Chinese contemporary ink works? Why?

There has always been a long-standing interest among the Chinese population in various Southeast Asian countries in Chinese ink works, although not necessarily 'contemporary ink'. In Singapore, this interest includes modern and classical ink as well and such interest is definitely not confined to Singapore ink artists.

Collectors in Singapore do collect local ink works of Chen Wen Hsi, Fan Chang Tien, Chua Ek Kay, Chen KeZhan, Tan Swie Hian, Lee Hock Moh, Tan Kian Por and Pan Shou (for calligraphy). In addition to the usual 'big names' of Xu Beihong or Qi Baishi, they express interest in and collect Zhao Shao-An, Li Keran, Wang Ge-yi, Wu Guanzhong, Walasse Ting, C.C. Wang and Zhou Shao-hua – to name just a sampling.

Is there auction demand for contemporary art such as video recordings, installations and prints of Southeast Asian art?

'Less conventional' forms and formats, including performance art, videos and installations, have increasingly appeared in various art platforms - at biennales and art fairs - more than at auctions.

There are a few instances at auctions but not too many of installations or videos – although there is no significant demand, there is, perhaps, more openness to these. For example, Navin Rawanchai-kul's (Thailand) *There is No Voice...* (see pg xxix) at Christie's and Simryn Gill's photographs at Sotheby's Australia.

The situation for prints is quite different from videos and installations – for example, STPI prints made by Southeast Asian artists such as Srihadi Soedarsono, Benedicto Reyes Cabrera and Ahmad Zakii Anwar have appeared at auctions. Prints are works on paper and I would differentiate these from videos and installations.

Why?

Videos and installations by Southeast Asian artists do not have a long history of being collected although this has been changing. Many are buying from the art fairs or from contemporary art galleries. Collectors are getting more comfortable with such forms and formats. Still, many collectors are not familiar with how to store or even display videos or installations – they are not as compact as 'regular' art objects and may require much more understanding and effort on the part of the collector to respect the integrity of an installation.

The platform of the auction house is also not always conducive to showcasing videos or complicated installations either – although this too is changing as more auctions are laying out their preview spaces in more inspiring ways.

From your own business undertaking, what have you learnt about selling art? What type of services do you offer?

Our firm does not sell art – we offer collection management services, which include computerising inventories and barcoding of works, advising on the proper display and storage of works, identifying works of high cultural value (not necessarily high market value) and helping clients display these suitably. We also update the values of existing works.

What do you specifically look for in an art market report?

Because one of our services is the updating of the values of artworks in our clients' collection for the purposes of insurance and asset management, we tend to look at auction estimates and prices – but not exclusively. We also take note of sale or retail prices of artworks or other sources that comprise the larger 'market' for art.

What kind of information is generally lacking in an art market report? How can such information be improved upon?

Most art market reports are limited by confidentiality and the overall secrecy that pervades many art transactions.

We understand and accept that art market reports can at best be incomplete and anyone accessing a report should bear this in mind. Private dealers or artists are under no obligation to reveal accurate sales figures or any sales figures; and others that do 'reveal' these figures may do so for strategic reasons – for instance, to flag up how phenomenally well an artist is doing to activate interest in that artist, be it genuine or speculative interest.

So to 'improve', an art market report needs to secure reliable information and to know how to sift the information and not be consistently manipulated or led by certain sources.

INDONESIA

DEVELOPMENT OF FINE ART IN INDONESIA

At the National Gallery of Indonesia in Jakarta, there's one artist who has the singular honour of having a separate hall dedicated to him. The name "Raden Saleh Sjarif Bustaman" adorns one wall and declares to all visitors the importance of this artist.

The establishment of the National Gallery of Indonesia can be traced to the 1960s with the proposal to build the National Art Hall or National Art Development Centre. The National Gallery was opened in 1999.¹

According to the wall text and images at the National Gallery documenting the accomplishments of Raden Saleh (1807-1880), he was an important "native" figure of Javanese descent. With the privilege of studying in Europe, he became a highly skilled artist in Western painting techniques.

Born in Terbaya in Semarang in 1807, Raden Saleh was, until he was seven, under the care of his uncle, Kanjeng (head of regency) Terbaya Bustam, who was the son-in-law of Prince Ario Mangkunegara I.

Raden Saleh became a student of G.A.G. Baron van der Capellen and was recommended to learn painting from A.A.J. Payen, a Belgian painter who was working at the Dutch Government Science and Arts Research Center in Bogor.

Raden Saleh stayed in Holland for 10 years from 1829-1839 to study and paint. He was appointed a painter at the Dutch palace by King Willem II.

He also lived in Dresden, Germany for five years between 1843 and 1848. Raden Saleh established himself as a painter of portraits, landscape and animal themes.

¹ Galeri Nasional Indonesia website: <http://galeri-nasional.or.id/en/halaman/039-profile>

After living in Europe for the second time, he returned to Java in 1851 and lived in a village in Bogor until his death on April 23, 1880.

Other descriptions at the National Gallery document the major art movements in Indonesia from the Mooi Indie period, the PER-SAGI Movement, the Japanese Occupation, Independence of Indonesia and the Studio period, the Visual Arts Academy era and the New Art Movement.

Mooi Indie Era: 1920-1938

After the death of Raden Saleh, the local art scene dimmed. It wasn't until some 20 years later, with the establishment in 1902 of the Bataviaasche Kunstkring (Batavia Art Circle or Group), that the art scene became more active.

With economic growth, the Indonesian middle class expanded. Social groups such as the Bataviaasche Kunstkring became active in organising exhibitions of works by European painters such as Pieter Ourborg, Jan Frank, Dolf Breetveit, Ernest Dezentje Locatelli and Charles Sayers. Their Dutch-Indies paintings depicting romantic and panoramic local landscapes influenced a number of local painters.

This era saw the emergence of talented local painters such as Pirngadi, Abdullah Suriosubrato, Surji Subanto, R. Basoeki Abdullah, Wakidi and Lee Man Fong who were skilled in using Western painting techniques. These painters also painted a lot of Indonesian scenes, especially Javanese and Sumatran landscapes.

As time passed and the country was gripped by a revolutionary zeal and conflicts arose due to the independence movement, these panoramic works were severely criticised by artist S. Sudjojono. He perceived such paintings as merely serving the tourism trade. Sudjojono's criticism marked the emergence of social awareness with political implications. The Mooi Indie works were deemed as ignoring the social reality of the poor and oppressed people.

PERSAGI Movement: 1938-1942

In 1938, the first local art association, Persatuan Ahli Gambar Indonesia (PERSAGI) was established in Jakarta.

PERSAGI was born between two pivotal events – the Japanese Occupation of Indonesia in 1942 and the end of the Dutch-Indies colonial government in 1949.²

Joined by painters such as Agus Djaja, Abdul Salam, Emiria Soenasa, Otto Djaja and led by Sudjojono, the association was driven by the desire for a new direction in Indonesian art.

Sudjojono stressed on the importance of creating works that focused on social-reality and the local community.

Japanese Occupation, Independence of Indonesia and birth of the Studio era: 1942-1949

The Japanese occupiers tried to gain support from artists and other local leaders to create political stability.

Japanese Occupation policies gave rise to the Cultural Centre or Keimin Bunka Shidoso on April 1, 1943. The Japanese military government set up the institution as an effort to “build the Eastern culture” to “advance the Great East Asia nation” by deploying artists and local leaders to “achieve final victory battle”.

At the same time, POETERA (Poesat Tenaga Rakyat) was established by Soekarno, Mohamad Hatta, Ki Hadjar Dewantara and Kiai Haji Mansjur, with a cultural group led by Sudjojono.

Some painters who played a role in this era were: Affandi, S. Sudjojono, Agus Djaja, Kartono Yudhakusumo, Henk Ngantung, Otto Djaja, Basuki Resobowo, Djajengasmoro, Subanto Surio Subandrio, Baharudin, Rusli, Barli, Mochtar Apin, Hendra Gunawan, Kusnadi, Trubus, Harijadi Sumodidjaja, Sudjana Kerton, Handrio

² Peter Church, 2017. *A Short History of Southeast Asia*. John Wiley & Sons Pte Ltd. Singapore. P. 56.

and Abas Alibasjah. During the short occupation, through the activities of Keimin Bunka Shidoso and POETERA, the artists managed to promote the spirit of nationalism and boost creativity.

By the end of 1944, it was clear to the Japanese that they were losing the Pacific War. They were determined to make it difficult for the Western powers to re-occupy their former colonies.

The Japanese promoted moves in Indonesia towards independence, encouraging nationalists to work out a desirable constitutional framework.

The Japanese Occupation came to an end in 1945 when atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9. On August 17 1945, at a simple flag-raising ceremony in Jakarta, the Indonesians declared their independence and the birth of the Republic of Indonesia.

But the Dutch rejected the declaration and began to re-occupy the country in the middle of 1946. And for the next four years, the Indonesians fought the Dutch and colonialism finally ended by December 1949.³

In 1946, due to the fight with the Dutch, the state capital was moved to Yogyakarta. The artists followed suit and moved to that city in droves. Studios serving as visual art classrooms began to be set up, for example Seniman Indonesia Muda (SIM) by Sudjojono and Sanggar Pelukis Rakyat by Hendra Gunawan.

Such studios also emerged in other cities, such as Himpunan Budaya Surakarta (HBS) in Solo and Sanggar Bambu in Yogyakarta. With political change in the air, certain artists in these studios got involved in politics.

With time, some studios showed their political leanings more openly such as Sanggar Bumi Tarung. This period witnessed much conflict that arose between art and politics.

³ Peter Church, 2017. *A Short History of Southeast Asia*. John Wiley & Sons Pte Ltd. Singapore. Pp. 55 & 56.

Overseas studies in the 1940s and 1950s

Even during the trying period in Indonesia in the 1940s and 1950s, a number of leading artists such as Lee Man Fong (1913-1988), Sudjana Kerton (1922-1994) and Affandi (1907-1990) studied art overseas.

In 1946, Lee received a Malino scholarship from the Dutch government to study painting in the Netherlands. He lived there for six years, focusing on observing nature and mastering the technique of depicting people.

Sudjana Kerton received a scholarship in 1950 and studied art for a year in Amsterdam, Holland, and then at Academie de Grande Chaumiere in Paris, France. From 1952 to 1955, he studied graphic art on another scholarship at the Art Students League in New York, the US. And from 1962 to 1963, the artist studied mural painting in Mexico.

Affandi obtained a scholarship from the Indian government to study in India from 1949-1951 and continued on to Europe where he held solo exhibitions in several cities.

Visual Arts Academy: 1947-now

The birth of art institutes was a milestone in the development of visual arts in Indonesia in terms of a new direction. Three cities played a significant role in formal art education: Yogyakarta, Bandung and Jakarta.

The importance of formal art education was promoted by artists of the studio system, especially in Yogyakarta. Among them was Hendra Gunawan, dubbed “Pelukis Rakyat” or the People’s Artist.

In 1950, Hendra Gunawan together with a number of prominent supporters established Akademi Seni Rupa Indonesia (ASRI) in Yogyakarta.

In 1968, ASRI became Sekolah Tinggi Seni Rupa Indonesia (STSR) and since 1984, it has evolved into Fakultas Seni Rupa, In-

stitut Seni Indonesia (FSR ISI) Yogyakarta.

In Bandung, fine art institutes had their early beginnings in 1947. One started as a drawing school under *Universitaire Leergang voor de Opleiding van Tekenleraren* that subsequently became *Balai Pendidikan Universiter Guru Gambar* which was part of *Fakultas Ilmu Teknik Universitas Indonesia*.

All of its teachers came from the Netherlands, including Simon Admiraal, Ries Mulder, Bernet Kempers and P. Pijper. In 1950, Sjafei Soemardja returned from his studies in the Netherlands and joined the institute and became the first local teacher.

Other local teachers were Ahmad Sadali, Sudjoko, Angkama Setjadipradja, Edit Kartasoebarna, Mochtar Apin, Srihadi Soedarsono and But Muchtar.

In 1961, fine art became a major course in higher education at *Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan (FKIP) Universitas Padjajaran*. The founding father who was also the first programme head was Barli Sasmitawinata, who was succeeded by Popo Iskandar, Wiyoso Yudoseputro and Oho Garha.

In 1963, FKIP in several state universities were merged with *Institut Pendidikan Guru* and became *Institut Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan (IKIP)* under *Departemen Pendidikan Republic Indonesia*.

In 1970, *Lembaga Pendidikan Kesenian Jakarta (LPKJ)* was established in Jakarta as an initiative of Jakarta governor Ali Sadikin.

Then *Akademi Seni Rupa* under LPKJ was established by artists such as Nashar, Oesman Efendi and Zaini who initially adopted the studio-style education system.

Later, artists with an academic background such as Popo Iskandar, G. Sidharta, Wiyoso Yudoseputro, Srihadi Soedarsono, Kusnadi, Hildawati Soemantri, Wagiono Sunarto, Dolorosa Sinaga and Iriantine Karnaya, participated in developing and improving the LPKJ education system.

Other artists and critics who also taught in FSR IKJ (Fakultas Seni Rupa, Institut Kesenian Jakarta) included Edit Ratna Siagian, Jim Supangkat and Sanento Yuliman.

The visual arts academy system continues to develop until today, influencing fine art in Indonesia.

Academics who are also artists played an important role in the development of fine art in Indonesia, by creating Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru, among other activities which was followed by the emergence of Komunitas Seni that has grown rapidly since the 1990s.

New Art Movement (GSRB): 1975

The Indonesian New Art Movement or Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia (GSRB) emerged in the middle of a political situation, particularly during the Malari Affair (Malapetaka 15 Januari) in 1974.

An incident was triggered at the *Indonesian Painting Exposition* organised by the Jakarta Art Council. The judges decided that the artworks by A. D. Pirous, Aming Prayitno, Widayat, Irsam and Abbas Alibasyah were the best works in the exhibition.

But a group of students rejected the decision and made a declaration known as Black December at Taman Ismail Marzuki in Jakarta. They cited a loss of creative freedom, narrow-minded aesthetics and the elimination of diversity in art which they declared was a “cultural erosion”.

The Black December declaration was moved by a group of students from STSRI “ASRI” such as Bonyong Munni Ardhi, F.X. Harsono, Siti Adiyati, Hardi and Ris Purwana. They were joined by Nanik Mima and Muryotohartoyo with a number of other art students who were known to lean towards a modern Western lifestyle. They were Jim Supangkat, Anyool Subroto, Bachtiar Zainoel and Pandu Suw who formed GSRB.

This development brought to a head two great Indonesian art movements in Yogyakarta and Bandung that seem to have been unbreakable. This momentum of change came from artists, by artists and for the artists themselves. GSRB was not only born out of the “crisis of art” but also out of the crisis of politics, from the old order to the new order, where the younger generation was alienated.

Art movements in Indonesia were born in the middle of a national crisis such as the Gelanggang (Arena) movement in 1947 and the declaration of the universal humanism movement in 1963 that rejected a narrow interpretation of nationalism, which then led to conflict, anger and confusion.

Then came the shift in the aesthetic sense of “nationalism” towards an aesthetic sense of “daily life” that came about. This was initiated by GSRB with the artistic credo, *Five Breakthroughs of Indonesian New Art Movement*, in 1979.

On August 1975, the first exhibition of GSRB was held in Taman Ismail Marzuki in Jakarta.

After the GSRB exhibition, several other exhibitions were staged and which essentially rejected art that was deemed narrow-minded, old-fashioned, outdated and bureaucratic and too officious in its creation. Such exhibitions included *Nusantara-Nusantara*, *Esensialisme Pop Art*, and then *Keperibadian Apa* or *PIPA* in Yogyakarta.

These exhibitions always ended with a suspension order or was forced to close by the police because the works were considered too extreme. One of the *PIPA* posters stated “gud bai kaum tuek” which means “goodbye the elderly”.

Meanwhile, the Bandung Institute of Technology art department ruled that only students who had graduated could exhibit their artworks and express their opinion to avoid any penalty.

Many of the student demonstrators from the Bandung Institute of Technology and Gajah Mada University were imprisoned.

GSRB held a *Concept Exhibition* at Balai Budaya Jakarta in 1976. Later, their next exhibitions were held at Taman Ismail Marzuki in Jakarta and also in Bandung until 1979. And always, there were new participants who included S. Prinka, Ronalf, Ronald Manulang, Satyograha, Nyoman Nuarta, Wagiono Sunarto and Dede Eri Supria. At the last exhibition, they published the book, *Indonesian New Art Movement*.

In 1987, the exhibition, *World Fantasy Kingdom Market – Project 1*, was held at Taman Ismail Marzuki. Apparently, the then Jakarta governor Ali Sadikin and sociologist Umar Kayam were instrumental in opening barriers to art.

Events around the New Art Movement (1970-1980)

There were other “movements”, like the exhibition entitled *Essentialism of Pop Art* (Tulus Warsito and Budy Sulisty) in Yogyakarta in August 1976. In the same year at Balai Budaya Jakarta, there was an exhibition of concepts. The second New Art Movement exhibition in February-March 1977 was held at Taman Ismail Marzuki. This exhibition attracted old and new artists such as S. Prinka, Ronald Manulang, Satyagraha, Nyoman Nuarta, Wagiana and Dede Eri Supria.

In September 1977, there was an art exhibition entitled *Keperibadian Apa (PIPA)* or *What kind of Personality* in Yogyakarta, which was joined by Dede Eri Supria, Gendut Riyanto, Wienardi, Tulus Warsito, Budi Sulisty, B. Munnie Ardhi, Haris Purnama, Slamet Riyadu, Redha Sarana and Ronald Manulang. The exhibition, which also featured musicians such as Sapto Raharjo and Jack Body, was banned by the police.

In 1974, Indonesia was rocked by a student-led protest against the “domination of foreign capital”, particularly of Japan. Led by University of Indonesia (UI) students, the protest, known as *Malapetaka 15 Januari* (Malari) or *The Misfortune of 15 January*, turned violent.

Shopping centres and public facilities were set on fire in Jakarta. Under the powers of the New Order regime, President Suharto clamped down on the demonstration and quelled it.

In terms of timing, the New Art Movement or GSRB was not just about “differences of artistic and aesthetic taste: of two different generations”. It was in response to the social, economic, political and cultural situation of Indonesia at the time.

Contemporary art

The National Gallery’s collection of contemporary art is said to represent “the precursors of the exhibition activities at the international forum”. The gallery text explains that the works are by “forerunners who have worked on the aesthetics and artistic aspects beyond the extent of modern art convention”. The works represent the aspirations of the exponents of the New Fine Art Movement and which are also linked to the influences of the “postmodernism discourse”.

The works by artists such as Heri Dono, Krisna Murti, Marida Nasution, Anusapati, Aloysius Nindityo, Adipurnomo, Iriantine Karnaya, Iwan “Suklu” Sujana and Mella Jaarsama focused on “political, economic, social and everyday life” issues. Such works were viewed as criticisms of those issues and highlighted the “sublimation of personal nature.”

Multimedia art

Multimedia art is said to have impacted contemporary art in Indonesia.

According to the text at the National Gallery, it’s no longer

enough for the artists to express their ideas through two- or three-dimensional medium. This kind of art requires other media such movement, light, scent, photography, film and animation that utilise information technology devices that have developed at a remarkable speed.

Private Art Museums

In recent years, a number of new private museums have surfaced in Jakarta, including Akili Museum of Art (AMA), Museum MACAN, The Wiyu Wahono Art Office and the Ciputra Artpreneur Museum.

Established in 2006, AMA was opened by entrepreneur Rudy Akili. His collection is said to bridge Indonesian modernist works of Affandi, Hendra Gunawan and Srihadi Soedarsono, and those of the new generation, including Eko Nugroho, Jompet Kuswidananto, Entang Wiharso, Christine Ay Tjoe, S. Teddy D and Wimo Ambala Bayang. AMA also showcases works of other Asian artists such as China's Chen Yifei and Zheng Yi and Japan's Hiraki Sawa as well as Ronald Ventura and Jose Legaspi from The Philippines. The museum is not usually open to the public. Prior approval is required to gain access.⁴

In 2017, the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Nusantara (MACAN) was established by businessman Haryanto Adikoesomo in Jakarta. It is the "first institution of its kind" in Indonesia, providing public access to a significant and growing collection of modern and contemporary art from Indonesia and around the world. The collection includes the works of Raden Saleh, Miguel Covarrubias, Mark Rothko, Trubus Soedarsono, Srihadi Soedarsono, S. Sudjojono, Dullah, Sudjana Kerton, Arahmaiani, Wang Guangyi, James Rosenquist and FX Harsono. The museum is open to the public for a fee.⁵

⁴ Akili Museum of Art, <http://www.akilimuseumofart.org/en/about>

⁵ Museum MACAN, <https://www.museummacan.org/collection>

Auction houses

Among the auction houses that sprung up was Borobudur Auction house. It was established in Jakarta in 2004 and another branch opened in Singapore in 2005. Its first auction was held on April 18, 2004, in Hotel Dharmawangsa, presenting 148 lots which generated IDR15 billion. However, Borobudur ceased operations in 2017. *(Please refer to pg 301 for the interview with founder-director John Andreas.)*

In 2005, Amir Sidharta established Sidharta Auctioneers which focuses on Indonesian art. There are three sections in their auction sales. The Fine Art category offers works by well-known artists while the *Artfordable* section features affordable works and the Collectible category includes antique furniture, folk art, decorative art, textiles, jewellery, books and prints.

Larasati Auctioneers had its first auction in 2000 in Jakarta. It offers works by artists from Indonesia, China, India, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam and the Philippines.

Masterpiece Fine Art Auction offers modern and contemporary works by Southeast Asian and Asian as well as European artists. Its first auction was held in 2003 in Jakarta. It has expanded its operations to include sales under the categories of Masterpiece, Heritage and Treasures.

33 Auction sells modern and contemporary Asian art. It holds three main auctions in Singapore and Jakarta.

Art fairs

Art Jakarta was inaugurated in 2009 as Bazaar Art Fair and the name changed in 2017 to its present form. As the first art fair in Indonesia, Art Jakarta embraces all stakeholders, from artists, galleries and collectors to art enthusiasts, and serves as a platform for the development

of Indonesia's art market. It is usually held at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel ballroom located in the Pacific Mall in Jakarta.

For its 2018 edition from August 2-5, the local exhibitors include Andrew Art & Gallery, Art Serpong, Art Exchange Gallery, Art:1, CG Artspace, Edwin Gallery, D Galerie, Gudang Gambar, Indo Seni, ISA Art Advisory, Kohesi Initiatives, Kawangwangi, Puri Art Gallery, Rachel Gallery, ROH Projects, Ruci Art Space, Semarang Gallery, UOB, World of Arts and Zola Zolu Gallery.

Other galleries include Art Agenda S.E.A., Art Futures Gallery, Artemis Art, Artredot, Big & Small Art Co, Blink, Blue rider Art, Chan + Hori Contemporary, Clear Gallery Tokyo, Columns, Ce Museo/Fernando Pradilla, Element Art Space, Gajah Gallery, Galerie Bruno Massa, Gallery Khankhalaev, Gallery Sun Contemporary, Gnani Art, IACO Gallery, Mazel Galerie, Mizuma Gallery, Mookji Art, Peaksart Co, Transwing Art Gallery, V Art Space, Wei-Ling, White Space Art Asia and Yeo Workshop.

Art Stage Jakarta was started in 2016. It has been marketed as Indonesia's "premium" art fair with an international format. Its two editions in 2016 and 2017 were held at the Sheraton Grand Jakarta Gandaria City Hotel. The three-day fair attracts art dealers and exhibitors as well as collectors to discover new works and artists from Southeast Asia. The 2017 fair saw the participation of the following galleries: Andi's Gallery, Ark Galerie, Art:1, Bale Project, Can's Gallery, CG Art Space, D Galerie, Edwin's Gallery, Fantastic Art Gallery, Gajah Gallery, Go Artspace, Isa Art Advisory, Lawangwangi, Linda Gallery, Nadi Gallery, Rachel Gallery, Redbase Art, Roh Projects, Ruci Art Space, Sangkring Art Space, Semarang Gallery and Srisasanti Gallery.

The others were; Arario Gallery, Art Agenda, S.E.A, Art Porters, Artinformal, Atelier Aki, Baik Art, Bruno Art Group, Chalk Horse, Christie's, Di Legno Gallery, Edouard Malingue Gallery, Fost

Gallery, Galerie Stephanie, Galerie Tamenaga, Gallery Exit, Gallery Khankhalaev, Johyun Gallery, LSD, Mizuma Gallery, NCA|Nichi-do Contemporary Art, OTA Fine Arts, Parkview Art Hong Kong, Pearl Lam Galleries, Puerta Roja, Richard Koh Fine Art, Schuebbe INC., Shugoarts and Sullivan + Strumph⁶

Art Stage Jakarta has announced that its 2018 edition, scheduled to be held in the Indonesian capital from September 7 to 9, has been cancelled. The fair organiser cited a number of factors including a clash of dates with the Asian Games in Jakarta and Palembang from August 18 to September 2, and also the country's presidential election in April 2019.

For the past 10 years, ArtJog or Art Yogyakarta has successfully offered a “different perspective” on exhibiting and selling art. The event is a platform for artists – local and foreign – to sell their works directly to collectors. But “gallery executives” are also included in the equation.

Participating artists have included Adam de Boer (the US), Ez-zam Rahman (Singapore), Hiromi Tango (Australia), Kexin Zhang (China), Marcel Schwittlick (Germany), Ronald Ventura (the Philippines), Bakudapan Food Story Group & Fajar Riyanto (Yogyakarta/Indonesia), Fajar Abadi (Bandung/Indonesia) and Agung Tato Suryanto (Surabaya/Indonesia) as well as Malaysians such as artist-gallery owner Yusof Majid, Jalaini Abu Hassan and others.

According to the South China Morning Post, in October 2018, the team behind ArtJog will try to replicate its success in Bali. The event is called, Art Bali.⁷

Meanwhile, plans are afoot to stage another art fair in Jakarta. Spearheaded by fair director Leo Silitonga, the Art Moments fair is

⁶ Art Stage Jakarta, <https://www.artstage.com/jakarta/pages/20/exhibitors>

⁷ Enid Tsui, July 26, 2018. *Singapore to get two new art fairs – can Art SG and SEA Focus succeed where others have failed?* Post Magazine. <https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/arts-music/article/2156748/singapore-get-two-new-art-fairs-can-art-sg-and>

scheduled for May 3-5, 2019.

It is touted to offer the cheapest booth rates at US\$320 per square metre, before discount. Comparatively Art Jakarta is a four-day event and its booth rental rate is offered at between US\$340-US\$360 per square metre. According to an exhibitor, after discount, it is US\$ 235 per square metre.

Art Moments intend to offer even lower than that figure. It is scheduled to be held at the Sheraton Grand Jakarta Gandaria City Hotel.

Other existing fairs in the region offer booth rental rates at between US\$280-US\$490 per square metre. It is usual for organisers to offer a typical discount of 20%-30% on the listed price.

Biennale

Biennale Jogja was held for the first time in 1998. And on August 23, 2010, Yayasan Biennale Yogyakarta was launched as the official institution to organise the biannual exhibition. The event represents the dynamic art scene in Yogyakarta and has become an attraction for art lovers in the region.

Jakarta Biennale is a contemporary art exhibition held biannually in Jakarta. It was first held in 1968 as the *Grand Exhibition of Indonesian Painting (Pameran Besar Seni Lukis Indonesia)* at the Jakarta Arts Center in Taman Ismail Marzuki. The event was then organised by the Jakarta Arts Council (JAC). In October 2014, the Jakarta Biennale Foundation was established and took over organising the Jakarta Biennale in 2015.

Of late, Indonesian contemporary artists have become proactive in foreign exchange programmes with the aim of exhibiting their works overseas. For example, a group of contemporary artists comprising Heri Dono, Nasirun, Entang Wiharso, Budi Ubrux, Agapetus A. Kristiandana, Agus “Baqul” Purnomo and Andy Wahono, and led by Dedi Setiyadi, initiated a joint exhibition in South Ko-

rea. The exhibition is entitled *Pathos of the Fringes, Contemporary Art between Jeollabuk-Do and Yogyakarta* and is on view at the Jeonshuk Museum of Art from July 3-September 9, 2018. The collaboration is with Korean counterparts, namely, Lee Joonghee, Hong Sunkil, Kim Byungchul, Kim Sungsoo and Lee Seunghee.

Bandung

In Bandung, art activities include the Selasar Sunaryo Art Space (SSAS) event from September 15 to 17 in 2018 billed as *IndoArt Now Bandung Trip* and targeted at foreign guests, especially Malaysian and Singaporean collectors. The maximum of 120 participants have confirmed.

SSAS was opened in 1998 by artist Sunaryo and in 2018, to celebrate its 20th anniversary, the gallery will showcase the founder's latest works and the art of the Bale Project collective. Other visits include Orbital Dago art gallery exhibiting the works of Andy Dewantoro, Erik Pauhrizi and Joko Avianto, CA3A Studio, Lawangwangi Creative Space, Zola Zolu Gallery, NuArt Sculpture Park, Serambi Pirous Studio as well as Wot Batu and Gormeteria art space.

Top 10

Based on auction benchmarks compiled and in chronological order, the top 10 artists of Indonesia are Raden Saleh (1814-1880), Walter Spies (1895-1942), Adrien, Johan Rudolf Bonnet (1895-1978), Affandi (1907-1990), Sindudarsono Sudjojono (1913-1986), Lee Man Fong (1913-1988), Hendra Gunawan (1918-1983), Sudjana Kerton (1922-1994) and Christine Ay Tjoe (1973).

AUCTION BENCHMARKS OF ARTISTS IN INDONESIA

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
1	Raden Saleh (1814–1880)	La Chasse au taureau sauvage (Banteng) 1855, Oil on canvas 110cm x 180cm Hammer price: US\$8,950,708 With premium (24%): US\$11,098,877 Auction House: Jack–Phillippe Ruellan S.A.R.L., Paris Date: 27 January 2018	In letzer Not 1842, Oil on canvas 154cm x 168.5cm Hammer price: US\$2,273,600 With premium (25%): US\$2,842,000 Auction House: J Van Ham Kunstauktionen, Cologne Date: 13 May 2011	The Deer Hunt 1846, Oil on canvas 183cm x 91cm Hammer price: US\$1,990,000 With premium: NA Auction House: Christie's Singapore Date: 31 March 1996
		Our Soldiers Led Under Prince Diponegoro 1979, Oil on canvas 100cm x 199.5cm Hammer price: US\$6,573,899 With premium (12.5%): US\$7,522,602 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 5 April 2014	New Down 1956 Oil on canvas 120cm x 240cm Hammer price: US\$1,160,099 With premium (20%): US\$1,384,384 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 4 October 2010	The Ruins and the Piano 1956 Oil on canvas 125.5cm x 200cm Hammer price: US\$965,250 With premium (20%): US\$1,162,398 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 27 May 2017
3	Lee Man Fong (1913–1988)	Bali Life Circa 1962–1964, Oil on masonite board 100cm x 243cm Hammer Price: US\$3,999,000 With Premium (12%): US\$4,638,840 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 23 November 2013	Fortune and Longevity Undated, Oil on wood 86cm x 260cm Hammer Price: US\$3,870,000 With Premium (12.5%): US\$4,419,540 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 7 October 2012	Bali Life 1974, Oil on canvas 82.5cm x 184cm Hammer Price: US\$3,735,200 With Premium (12.5%): US\$4,343,136 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 5 October 2014
		Ali Sadikin during the Independence Struggle 1978, Oil on canvas 200cm x 302cm Hammer price: US\$3,612,000 With premium (12.5%): US\$4,287,960 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 3 April 2016	The Dice Game from the Mahabharata Epic 1971, Oil on canvas 202cm x 386cm Hammer price: US\$2,838,000 With Premium (20%): US\$3,415,920 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 4 April 2015	Snake Dancer 1977, Oil on canvas 196cm x 136cm Hammer Price: US\$1,800,400 With Premium (20%): US\$2,101,324 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 4 April 2011
4	Hendra Gunawan (1918–1983)	Ali Sadikin during the Independence Struggle 1978, Oil on canvas 200cm x 302cm Hammer price: US\$3,612,000 With premium (12.5%): US\$4,287,960 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 3 April 2016	The Dice Game from the Mahabharata Epic 1971, Oil on canvas 202cm x 386cm Hammer price: US\$2,838,000 With Premium (20%): US\$3,415,920 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 4 April 2015	Snake Dancer 1977, Oil on canvas 196cm x 136cm Hammer Price: US\$1,800,400 With Premium (20%): US\$2,101,324 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 4 April 2011
		Ali Sadikin during the Independence Struggle 1978, Oil on canvas 200cm x 302cm Hammer price: US\$3,612,000 With premium (12.5%): US\$4,287,960 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 3 April 2016	The Dice Game from the Mahabharata Epic 1971, Oil on canvas 202cm x 386cm Hammer price: US\$2,838,000 With Premium (20%): US\$3,415,920 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 4 April 2015	Snake Dancer 1977, Oil on canvas 196cm x 136cm Hammer Price: US\$1,800,400 With Premium (20%): US\$2,101,324 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 4 April 2011

* The artists are ranked according to their auction records in the first column. The second and third columns show their second and third most expensive artworks sold in auctions.

** NA: not available

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
5	Walter Spies (1895–1942)	“Blick Von Der Höhe (A View from the Heights)” 1934, Oil on canvas 100.5cm x 82.5cm Hammer price: US\$3,483,000 With premium (12.5%): US\$4,060,920 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 5 October 2013	Berge und Teich (Mountains and Pond) (山脉與池塘) 1938, Oil on canvas 71.5cm x 59.5cm Hammer price: US\$2,676,072 With premium (20%): US\$3,226,578 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 31 March 2018	Balinesische legende 1929, Oil on canvas 81cm x 66cm Hammer price: US\$1,867,600 With premium (20%): US\$2,176,720 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 29 November 2010
6	Adrien Jean Le Mayeur de Mèrpes (1880–1958)	Women Around the Lotus Pond 1950/51, Oil on canvas 150cm x 200cm Hammer price: US\$3,348,800 With premium (12.5%): US\$ 3,910,368 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 30 May 2016	Dancers Undated, Oil on canvas 100cm x 119.5cm Hammer price: US\$2,193,000 With premium (20%): US\$2,641,920 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 4 April 2015	Women Around the Lotus Pond Undated, Oil on canvas 150cm x 200cm Hammer price: US\$1,917,000 With premium (20%): US\$2,187,936 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 27 May 2007
7	Johan Rudolf Bonnet (1895–1978)	Market Scene 1948, Oil on canvas 150cm x 400cm Hammer price: US\$2,838,000 With premium (12%): US\$3,338,520 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 28 November 2015	Market Scene 1948, Oil on canvas 150cm x 400cm Hammer price: US\$1,286,000 With premium (20%): US\$1,482,436 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 25 November 2007	Bali Life 1950, Pastel on paper 79cm x 147cm Hammer price: US\$650,244 With premium (22%): US\$793,297 Auction House: Borobudur Singapore Date: 12 January 2012
8	Sudjana Kerton (1922–1994):	Village Life 1981, Oil on canvas 150cm x 200.5cm Hammer price: US\$1,417,899 With premium (20%): US\$1,706,634 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 5 April 2014	Kaki Lima (Street Vendors) 1978, Oil on canvas 120cm x 150cm Hammer price: US\$644,000 With premium (20%): US\$777,952 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 5 October 2014	Keroncong Moritsku (Ukelele) 1989, Oil on canvas 110cm x 80.5cm Hammer price: US\$516,000 With premium (20%): US\$624,360 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 6 October 2013

AUCTION BENCHMARKS OF ARTISTS IN INDONESIA

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
9	Christine Ay Tjoe (1973)	Small Flies and Other Wings 2013, Oil on canvas 165cm x 150.5cm Hammer price: US\$1,244,510 With premium (20%): US\$1,503,676 Auction House: Phillips Hong Kong Date: 29 May 2017	Left Layer & Right Layer 2010, Oil on canvas 180cm x 200cm Hammer price: US\$764,591 With premium (20%): US\$932,801 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 31 March 2018	...to See the White Land 《為了看白色的土地》 Oil on canvas 150cm x 125cm Hammer price: US\$548,078 With premium (20%): US\$670,439 Auction House: Phillips Hong Kong Date: 27 May 2018
10	Affandi (1907–1990)	Borobudur and the Sun 1984, Oil on canvas 149.5cm x 195cm Hammer price: US\$1,044,089 With premium (20%): US\$1,263,218 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 2 October 2016	Food Stall under the Banyan Tree 1968, Oil on canvas 135cm x 122cm Hammer price: US\$935,160 With premium (22%): US\$1,140,895 Auction House: Borobudur Singapore Date: 9 June 2012	Affandi and Grandchildren 1959, Oil on canvas 119cm x 100.5cm Hammer price: US\$838,500 With premium (20%): US\$1,011,360 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 30 May 2015
11	I Nyoman Masriadi (1973)	The Man from Bantul (The Final Round) 2000, Mixed media on canvas 250cm x 435cm Hammer Price: US\$836,550 With Premium (20%): US\$1,006,434 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 6 October 2008	Masriadi Presents – Attack from Website 2008, Acrylic on canvas 200cm x 300cm Hammer Price: US\$772,800 With Premium (20%): US\$931,224 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 25 May 2013	Fatman 2000, Mixed media on canvas 145cm x 200cm Hammer Price: US\$618,640 With Premium (20%): US\$747,252 Auction House: Christie's Shanghai Date: 26 September 2013

* The artists are ranked according to their auction records in the first column. The second and third columns show their second and third most expensive artworks sold in auctions.

** NA: not available

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
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12	Theo Meier (1908–1982)	1948 1948, Oil on canvas 100cm x 113.5cm Hammer Price: US\$580,000 With Premium (20%): US\$701,760 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 23 November 2013	Purification of the Gods and Votive Offering by the Sea on Sanue Beach 1973, Oil on canvas 200cm x 140cm Hammer Price: US\$472,468 With Premium (22%): US\$576,410 Auction House: Borobudur Singapore Date: 25 January 2013	Women in the Garden 1977, Oil on canvas 192cm x 103cm Hammer Price: US\$334,100 With Premium (20%): US\$403,490 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 3 October 2011
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13	Ahmad Sadali (1924–1987)	Balok Bersisa Emas Dengan Latar Putih (Gold Remnants on a Beam against White Background) 1986, Oil on canvas 99cm x 135cm Hammer Price: US\$412,800 With Premium(20%): US\$505,680 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 4 April 2015	Abstract Composition 1968, Oil on canvas 88cm x 99cm Hammer Price: US\$336,481 With Premium(20%): US\$414,090 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 2 April 2017	Abstract Orange 1966, Oil on canvas 100cm x 100cm Hammer Price: US\$309,120 With Premium(20%): US\$373,520 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 2 April 2012
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14	Rudi Mantofani (1973)	Bayangan Merah (Red Shadow) 2009, Acrylic on canvas 200cm x 200cm Hammer Price: US\$387,000 With Premium(20%): US\$469,560 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 5 October 2013	Pohon–Pohon Langit (Sky Trees) 2005/07, Acrylic on canvas 180cm x 300cm Hammer Price: US\$321,750 With Premium(20%): US\$388,674 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 6 October 2008	Cakrawala Warna 2005/07, Acrylic on canvas 165cm x 250cm Hammer Price: US\$257,441 With Premium (20%): US\$293,713 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 8 April 2008
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15	Raden Basoeeki Abdullah (1915–1993)	The Beauty Of Nature 1965, Oil on canvas 135 x 300 Hammer Price: US\$381,753 With Premium (15%): US\$439,487 Auction House: 33 Auction, Singapore Date: 17 January 2014	Mediterranean Customs Undated, Oil on canvas 150 x 300 Hammer Price: US\$259,050 With Premium (15%): US\$301,911 Auction House: 33 Auction, Singapore Date: 1 September 2013	The Beauty of Nature (大自然之美) 1965, Oil on canvas 135 x 500 Hammer Price: US\$243,530 With Premium (15%): US\$280,059 Auction House: 33 Auction, Singapore Date: 22 January 2016
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AUCTION BENCHMARKS OF ARTISTS IN INDONESIA

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
16	Srihadi Soedarsono (1931)	Borobudur – Energy of Nature 2010, Oil on canvas 200cm x 350cm Hammer Price: US\$293,400 With Premium (15%): US\$337,410 Auction House: 33 Auction, Singapore Date: 24 January 2013	The Spirit of Bedoyo Ketawang 2005, Oil on canvas 150cm x 200cm Hammer Price: US\$206,400 With Premium (20%): US\$250,260 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 25 November 2015	Golden Harvest Undated, Oil on canvas 180cm x 225cm Hammer Price: US\$193,500 With Premium (25%): US\$237,360 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 6 October 2013
17	Arie Smit (1916–2016)	The Rice Fields 1962, Oil on canvas 93cm x 95cm Hammer Price: US\$193,349 With Premium (25%): US\$239,752 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 27 November 2016	Pura (Temple) Undated, Oil on canvas 101cm x 88cm Hammer Price: USD167,700 With Premium (20%): US\$206,400 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 31 May 2015	Balinese Village and Farm Lands 1991, Acrylic on canvas 78cm x 91cm Hammer Price: US\$133,075 With Premium (22%): US\$162,351 Auction House: Larasati Singapore Date: 12 March 2011
18	Gede Mahendrayasa (1967)	Origen's Gambit 2016–2017 Acrylic on canvas 250cm x 190cm Hammer Price: US\$179,284 With Premium (20%): US\$224,105 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 26 November 2017	After Paradise Lost 2014–2016 Acrylic on canvas 190cm x 250cm Hammer Price: US\$128,800 With Premium (25%): US\$159,712 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 29 May 2016	Seven Magnificent Masterpieces #1 & #2 2011–2013 Mixed media on canvas 200cm x 150cm Hammer Price: US\$92,807 With Premium (20%): US\$116,008 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 3 October 2016
19	Haji Widayat (1919–2002)	Adam and Eve 1971, Oil on canvas 130cm x 180cm Hammer Price: US\$167,050 With Premium (20%): US\$200,460 Auction House: United Asian Auctioneers, Hong Kong Date: 28 May 2011	Monkey Forest 1984, Oil on canvas 180cm x 200cm Hammer Price: US\$153,360 With Premium (25%): US\$184,032 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 27 May 2007	Brown Forest 1981, Oil on canvas 100.5cm x 140cm Hammer Price: US\$132,260 With Premium (20%): US\$158,712 Auction House: Sotheby's Singapore Date: 16 September 2007

* The artists are ranked according to their auction records in the first column. The second and third columns show their second and third most expensive artworks sold in auctions.

** NA: not available

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
20	Arin Dwihartanto Sunaryo (1978)	Cmyk 8 2011, Acrylic on resin/ canvas/panel (in 4 parts) 167.5cm x 169cm Hammer Price: US\$113,520 With Premium (20%): US\$141,384 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 6 October 2013	Cmyk Bucket Splash #3 2012, Mixed media 141cm x 187cm Hammer Price: US\$96,674 With Premium (25%): US\$120,842 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 6 April 2014	Cmyk Bucket Splash 2011, Mixed media 168cm x 169cm Hammer Price: US\$77,339 With Premium (25%): US\$96,673 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 6 October 2014
21	Yunizar (1971)	Kisah Merah (The Red Story) 2008, Acrylic on canvas 200cm x 250cm Hammer Price: US\$96,150 With Premium (25%): US\$116,341 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 24 May 2008	Under the Dark Clouds 2007, Acrylic on canvas 200cm x 300cm Hammer Price: US\$90,020 With Premium (25%): US\$108,988 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 25 November 2007	Surat Merah 2006, Acrylic on canvas 200cm x 150cm Hammer Price: US\$86,027 With Premium (25%): US\$101,113 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 8 April 2008
22	Mochtar Apin (1923–1995)	Memecah 1984, Oil on canvas 205cm x 135cm, triptych Hammer Price: US\$77,339 With Premium (25%): US\$96,673 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 3 October 2016	Dox Quixote 1961, Oil on canvas 100cm x 80cm Hammer Price: US\$33,488 With Premium (25%): US\$41,860 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 2 April 2012	Abstract 1966, Oil on canvas 130cm x 195cm Hammer Price: US\$28,380 With Premium (25%): US\$35,475 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 7 October 2012
23	M. Irfan (1972)	Jangan Pernah Lupakan Sejarah 2011, Acrylic on canvas 180cm x 300cm Hammer Price: US\$77,280 With Premium (25%): US\$95,312 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 27 May 2012	Everything is its Right Place 2009, Acrylic on canvas 200cm x 300cm Hammer Price: US\$45,080 With Premium (25%): US\$56,350 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 2 April 2012	Ora et Labora (Pray and Labour) 2010 Mixed media on canvas 175cm x 350cm Hammer Price: US\$41,280 With Premium (25%): US\$51,600 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 25 November 2012

ART AUCTIONS IN INDONESIA, 2010-2018

AUCTION HOUSE	YEAR	DATE	CITY	LOTS	TOTAL SALES IN IDR	TOTAL SALES IN US\$	SOLD BY LOT (%)
Larasati	2012	March 11	Bali	77	3,682,570,000	401,400	80.5
		Oct 21	Bali	73	3,273,870,000	340,482	97.2
	2013	March 3	Bali	88	3,042,680,000	313,396	93.1
		Sept 29	-	-	-	-	-
	2014	March 9	Bali	91	2,498,800,000	217,395	83.5
		July 20	Bali	83	1,914,000,000	164,604	90.4
		Nov 16	Jakarta	107	2,641,500,000	216,603	80.4
	2015	April 5	Jakarta	90	2,621,000,000	201,817	87.8
		Sept 6	Jakarta	101	1,616,500,000	113,155	77.2
	2016	Feb 28	Jakarta	81	3,188,500,000	239,137	85.2
		Aug 21	Jakarta	80	2,312,900,000	175,780	85
	2017	Feb 11	Jakarta	70	33,198,000,000	2,486,530	68.6
		Oct 8	Jakarta	80	54,711,800,000	4,048,673	76.3
	2018	Jan 21	Jakarta	80	2,750,434,000	206,557	81.3
		May 13	Jakarta	80	1,678,118,000	120,321	50
33 Auction	2016	Dec 3	Jakarta	150	8,840,730,000	657,750	27.2
	2017	March 19	Jakarta	95	12,530,620,000	939,796	61.1
		Aug 13	Jakarta	75	10,561,540,000	791,059	50.7
	2018	April 15	Jakarta	67	15,276,840,000	1,110,626	56.7
Sidharta	2016	Nov 20	Jakarta	132	1,875,384,000	139,153	53.4
		Dec 4	Jakarta	206	22,325,600,000	1,663,257	64.6
		Dec 11	Jakarta	111	1,438,380,000	106,296	47.7
	2017	March 25	Jakarta	164	17,175,400,000	1,291,590	60.9
		July 23	Jakarta	208	42,431,400,000	3,190,841	61.5
		Aug 26	Jakarta	180	634,278,000	47,504	39.8
		Dec 3	Jakarta	165	603,290,000	44,583	48.5
		Dec 10	Jakarta	161	2,707,546,000	200,087	52.2
	2018	May 27	Jakarta	168	2,519,800,000	178,401	47

AUCTION HOUSE	YEAR	DATE	CITY	LOTS	TOTAL SALES IN IDR	TOTAL SALES IN US\$	SOLD BY LOT (%)
Borobudur	2010	Feb 7	Jakarta	134	6,579,956,000	701,862	64.2
	2011	Jan 23	Jakarta	193	1,083,171,000	119,595	61.1
		March 27	Jakarta	163	921,483,000	105,699	34.7
		Oct 9	Jakarta	177	3,011,736,000	338,778	48.6
	2012	March 18	Jakarta	171	2,673,346,000	291,580	59.1
		Dec 2	Jakarta	140	2,711,316,000	282,576	60
	2013	June 23	Jakarta	153	2,502,215,000	252,005	69.9
		Dec 7	Jakarta	228	2,814,869,000	235,851	45.5
	2014	June 8	Jakarta	88	2,406,308,000	204,184	52.4

A black and white portrait of a middle-aged man with a shaved head, smiling at the camera. He is wearing a light-colored, short-sleeved button-down shirt with a dark, intricate pattern. A pair of glasses is tucked into the pocket of his shirt. He is seated, and his hands are resting on his lap. The background consists of vertical wooden slats, and a framed abstract painting is visible in the upper right corner.

John Andreas

Director
Borobudur Auction
Jakarta, Indonesia

TOUGH GOING IN THE ART BUSINESS

Borobudur Auction house, which takes its name from a Borobudur ancient temple in Magelang, Central Java, was established in Jakarta in 2004. Another branch opened in Singapore in 2005. Its first auction on April 18, 2004 in Hotel Dharmawangsa, Jakarta, was a success, presenting 148 lots, 80% of which were sold, generating IDR15 billion.

However, founder and CEO John Andreas, 49, reveals that he has put a temporary stop to auctions. His last auction was in May 2016 “because I don’t think I can get good paintings. It’s more and more difficult to get big names. I think my life was better before I did auctions. The auction business is tough”.

Andreas maintains that Borobudur Auction in Singapore features almost the same artists as Christie’s and Sotheby’s. “Whatever they have, we have. Five years ago, we had the same artists as Larasati, Masterpiece and 33 Auction. But recently they didn’t have many artists. At the 33 Auction, there was only one Hendra (Gunawan) (May 2017) and one Affandi for sale (January 2017).”

After more than a decade in the art auction business, he gives his views on the Southeast Asian market and the challenges of auction houses.

John Andreas: The Southeast Asian market for modern masters has matured, but the contemporary art market is still fluctuating. Today someone buys, tomorrow nobody buys. So sales are not guaranteed. Even the market for Chinese contemporary art is unstable.

I don’t follow contemporary art (developments) because I don’t like it. The artist is still alive so he can keep churning out art. It’s like printing money. I deal mostly with (Indonesian) old masters.

The Edge: Which auction houses do you track for Southeast Asian art transactions and why?

I track Christie's and Sotheby's as they have a wider and better selection of Indonesian masters and modernist art.

What do you look for in the results of these auction houses?

I look at the hammer price of the old masters, for example, Affandi and Lee Man Fong.

For your analysis of auction prices, which sources of data do you regard as most reliable?

Christie's and Sotheby's are more reliable than the rest. Some auction houses repeat the same painting three or four times a year and it's always sold. Do you know the cost of putting up a painting at an auction? Buying and selling cost you 30-40% (of commissions and charges). And you're doing that at every auction four times a year. It's more than the cost of the painting.

Do you think the demand for Southeast Asian art is on the rise, in decline or has plateaued as far as auctions are concerned?

The demand for masters' works is always there but the problem is that not enough good works are available. This is the difficulty of all auction houses. There are never enough good works. For the last two years, you can see the paintings at Christie's and Sotheby's are all recycled. It means that the paintings have been featured before. Why? Because they cannot get fresh works. And it's getting more and more difficult. A lot of people are still keen on buying.

Despite all the challenges of sourcing new works, do you think private sales fetch a lower price than auctions?

The problem with private sales is that the works are only seen by a

few people. How do you compare the customer-base of a gallery to that of an auction house?

Does the competition at an auction give you a better price?

A gallery hikes up the price of an artwork and a buyer bargains it down. An auction house sets a low price and you bid up the price. Auctions depend on luck.

Do you get information of any private sales going on? Like which gallery has sold an Affandi.

I seldom get information because in Jakarta, nobody sells old masters' works in galleries. Perhaps one or two pieces will appear at a gallery's anniversary or a new opening. But it's not on a regular basis.

What kind of seller's commission and buyer's premium do you charge at Borobudur auctions?

The seller's commission is 6% while the buyer takes 22%. If a Singaporean buys, he pays GST.

Do you charge the seller marketing and photography fees, et cetera?

Yes, we charge a basic rate of 6%. But for good works, we don't charge. Likewise with Christie's and Sotheby's.

Do you think that art fairs in Hong Kong, Singapore and Jakarta are more into contemporary art? Do they work hand in hand with the auction so if the art fair goes well then the auction market will follow?

Yes, or vice versa. Because if a certain artist in a gallery sells out at an art fair, everybody will ask for this artist. Then the auction house will be interested in him.

But can it also be engineered?

Everything is engineered. When you manipulate something, it

doesn't mean the work is good. Are the people who are engineering reliable? Do you have enough capability, enough money to engineer it? It's not cheap; it depends on how you convince the rich that there is value in the painting.

From your own business undertaking, what have you learnt about selling art? What type of services do you offer?

We only try to sell the best with no fakes. When there are rumours like counterfeit works circulating, we get curators to inspect the works. If they feel it's not right, we remove the art piece from the auction. We maintain certain standards.

Certain paintings come from Europe so we get the curators' verification of their authenticity. But certain auction houses still put up the painting despite the curators saying it's wrong. For a fake, you only earn 22% commission, but the problem is being sued later for the full amount. I don't have that kind of money so why should I take the risk?

What kind of information is generally lacking in an art market report? How can such information be improved upon?

I specifically look for the transacted price in a market report. However, there's a lack of transparency. Many auction houses are not transparent, especially in Southeast Asia: Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, maybe the Philippines. All these auction houses vary in price. Let's say you want a reserve price of US\$200,000 for a painting but you cannot sell it. You want something (that has been published or illustrated) in the book. You promise to publish that it's sold even if it's unsold. But it's a lie. Auction houses will do anything for their cover lot as long as they get a good painting.

What are your observations of the current art market situation?

Good work by good artists still command a good price. Sotheby's or Christie's usually have six or seven Affandi works for auction. Three or four remain unsold. One will be sold for a good price, while two will be sold for a 'so-so' price. Five years ago, every Affandi work would sell, even the 'bad' ones. But today, nobody buys the bad works.

'Bad' meaning not a good composition or not a genuine work?

It's genuine but not good aesthetically and stroke-wise.

On that basis, do you believe that the art market has matured somewhat?

Yes, (the market has) already matured. People are more knowledgeable. Ten years ago, everybody bought artworks based on what they heard. They have learnt from their mistakes.

Last time, an Ugo Untoro work would sell for at least IDR250 million (about US\$18,000) onwards. I had five or six Ugo works selling at that price. However, the sale price in subsequent auctions was about IDR15 million (about US\$1,000).

What were the factors for the lack of demand?

I don't know. Contemporary art is very risky. We sold the most expensive Putu (Sutawijaya) work for S\$350,000 (about US\$262,000). After that, no Putu has reached S\$100,000 (about US\$75,000). During the boom, Chinese artist Zhang Xiaogang's 150cm by 150cm artwork (see pg xxviii) sold at US\$150,000¹. Now

¹ The highest price paid for Zhang Xiaogang's work at auction is HK\$94,200,000 (US\$12,142,378) (price including buyer's premium) at Sotheby's Modern and Contemporary Asian Art on April 5 2014. The artwork is entitled *Bloodline: Big Family No.3* (血缘: 大家庭3号), 1995, oil on canvas, 179cm by 229cm (estimate: HK\$65,000,000 (US\$8,378,499)-HK\$80,000,000 (US\$10,311,999)).

a 200cm by 200cm work fetches S\$20,000 (about US\$15,000). There are no buyers.

So, you believe in the staying power of old masters' works?

I think so. The old masters are deceased so there is no more production. The product is limited. People understand what is being painted. Aesthetically it is appealing to more people. Contemporary art only appeals to certain people. The artist is still alive and very productive. I might be wrong but that's my view.

Would you start a gallery?

No, because you don't really need to have a gallery to buy and sell artworks. You can hang the paintings on the wall. Having enough wall space in a small warehouse is good. And you can sell through other people's auction houses. You don't have to pay the costs. The cost of one auction on a half-year basis can easily set you back S\$300,000 to S\$400,000 (about US\$225,000-US\$300,000). If you don't sell anything, you're left with old catalogues which are worth nothing.

A painting that can be sold for the next two to three years at least has value. When you run an auction house, there's no value.

You mentioned that it's more difficult to source for artworks now but during the good days, how did you source for these artworks? Do you have a collector base?

Yes, I had a lot of collectors willing to sell. But now they are left with a few pieces that they want to keep and not sell. So there's no movement in the market.

How many serious collectors are there in Indonesia when it comes to the auctions in terms of competing for works?

It depends on the price range. For old masters' works, there are probably 10 to 20 collectors. Most of them don't want to put up

huge sums of money. They can get better works at cheaper prices. Why should they buy lower quality at a higher price unless they don't have that series?

Christie's and Sotheby's seem to be able to obtain masters' works from Indonesia. Even though you say that they are recycled, they appear at every auction.

I think the same artworks are appearing less frequently. But the situation is not getting better.

What works do you collect yourself?

I collect the works of Affandi (he points to a wall), Lee Man Fong and Hendra (Gunawan). I don't collect Singapore works.

In your typical auction, how many lots did you have?

I had 100 to 150 lots. It wouldn't be profitable to run an auction unless you had 40 to 50 good works.

Do you see any new younger buyers?

No. Three to four years ago there were rich young Indonesians from the mining business. They earned a lot of money when the coal price was good and they bought artworks. But when the coal prices dropped from US\$100 (per tonne) to US\$30, all these new buyers disappeared. But they still kept the artworks.

Where is the coal mining (business) located?

The coal mining is in Kalimantan. The coal price dropped a lot so mining became unprofitable. It didn't generate enough cash flow. So why buy unnecessary things?

You also sold jewellery at your auctions.

Yes, but it didn't work out. Our jewellery was too cheap for the

rich (we targeted the art market) and too expensive for the poor. So it didn't go anywhere. We don't have that kind of market like in Hong Kong.

There are many people in Hong Kong willing to buy watches and jewellery. It's a mature market over there. In Singapore, we tried watches but it didn't work out either. It seems that the Singapore crowd do not like to buy second-hand watches or jewellery.

That's odd because both markets are predominantly Chinese.

Singaporeans prefer to buy in Hong Kong than in Singapore. And probably the names of the auction houses also pull in the crowd.

Perhaps, there's a premium to such names. Any observations on art market reports and Art Stage Singapore and Jakarta?

Many paintings at art fairs have been pre-sold. Before these artworks are brought to Art Stage Singapore by an Indonesian gallery, they are already sold in Indonesia. So, they just display it in the Singapore exhibition. It's too risky to sell all paintings during the fair. If you have already pre-sold everything, why should you bring it to the art fair? Because an art fair is a marketplace.

Probably they want the image of being successful in the art fair so they have to pre-sell everything to give the illusion or rather the image of a successful fair.

Market reports are not transparent. The individual gallery after the art fair will claim it made enough to cover costs. Seldom will it say the art fair was excellent and it made a lot of money. And the newspaper will report, 'Fantastic opening, great sales'. Big galleries also exhibit free of charge or get bigger discounts than the smaller galleries.

Do you think the Jakarta market can have two art fairs? And is it good for the market?

Jakarta has Bazaar Art (now Art Jakarta) and Art Stage. The more the

merrier. Masterpiece used to have auctions twice a year. Everybody was so ambitious during the auction week. It was a time to meet old friends and make new contacts. But after Masterpiece held auctions once a week or every fortnight, people didn't want to go to auctions. They were bored.

Were they bored because the same works appeared?

When I receive certain catalogues, I just glance at them and throw them away. They feature the same paintings – in Singapore, Malaysia, Jakarta then back to Singapore.

How long can the market last with these kinds of sales?

They do it because once in a while there are uninformed people who raise their hands at auctions.



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DRIVING UP THE DEMAND

Edwin's Gallery, founded and established in 1984 by Edwin Rahardjo, 63, exhibits some of the country's notable contemporary artists. The gallery has also participated in international art events such as Art Basel Hong Kong.

The Edge: What is your perception of Southeast Asian art and the market for it?

Edwin Rahardjo: I promoted Chinese artists in Indonesia in 2003 because I believed that they would become big one day. In 1984-1985, they were selling paintings of scenery and rice fields which I found boring. I wanted to sell contemporary art. I realised that it would take years to establish a reputation. That's why I started promoting young artists. Some of these artists have become big now, including Rudi Mantofani, Entang Wiharso and Christine Ay Tjoe.

People remember them because I promoted them a long time ago. With the Chinese artists, I wanted to prove that they would become big one day and they did.

Which auction houses are you familiar with?

I know Larasati and Borobudur Auction. We work a lot with Sotheby's and Christie's where I buy and sell through them. I sell mainly older works of Sudjojono and Affandi, for example.

In your estimation, who are the top 10 contemporary artists in terms of their price level?

Heri Dono, Agus Suwage, [I Nyoman] Masriadi, Christine Ay Tjoe, Rudi Mantofani, Jumaldi Alfi and M. Irfan still produce works. In the future, the artworks may or may not be expensive. But people need to understand the system [in the art world].

Are you saying that basing art on price is not a reliable guide as to how important they're going to be?

No, what I'm saying is that expensive prices don't mean good artworks. Put it this way, if you make classical or pop music, which is going to sell more? Pop. Because the number of pop music fans is one million and the number of classical music enthusiasts is only 10. I'm not saying it's bad. It's different. But not many people understand that.

Are you familiar with other Southeast Asian artists?

I'm working with Japanese and Korean artists at the moment such as Ye Hwon Ki, Chu Xoong... I don't have many artists in Malaysia and Singapore whom I'm interested in although the Philippines is a possibility. I always concentrate on a few things at a time. Before, I was focusing on China, then Korea and Japan. It's too difficult to concentrate on everybody.

Does market demand trends drive your interest?

No. I think I drive up the demand. When I started selling Christine Ay Tjoe's works, nobody understood her art. When I first sold Masriadi's works, nobody was buying them. I was the first one to buy the works of Rudi Mantofani and Ugo Untoro in 1996 and Entang Wiharso in 1991. At that time, Ugo Untoro was in university. Nobody had heard of him.

There are some who say artworks of Ugo Untoro and Putu Sutawijaya are unstable because at one time, the prices were very high. When the prices dropped suddenly, they never really recovered to the same level. People don't think that it's a viable market and that it is subject to market manipulation.

For the price, US\$10,000 and above, people look at the painting's sustainability because of its value. Would you rather buy a

US\$100,000 Patek Philippe watch, or a Rado for the same price? You're paying for the brand.

People should understand that artists have a brand. Their biography, collectors, galleries, collaborators all add to the artists' reputation.

The Indonesian auction system also has a reputation for certain players bidding up the works of artists. Every now and then, you have new players who think that, 'Yeah, the artwork is worth buying. It's hot.'

New players always get to pay what you call, 'school fees'. When you join something, you have to pay 'school fees'. Some of these people are very rich and they play by their own rules. After they get beaten up, they blame everybody. It happens all the time. The richer they are, the more you cannot advise them. They think, 'Hey, I'm a rich man, what do you know about me?' Okay then, go ahead and buy.

As critics would say, the art world is still unregulated. It is not transparent. What's your opinion?

There should be a system, law and regulations. As [Indonesian collector] Pak Dedy Kusuma said, we have to create an institution to regulate the art world.

But you can't get everyone to agree to set up or even respect the institution. They will say, 'Oh so-and-so is involved. It's not trustworthy'. It's the same old problem everywhere.

Do you think the gallery or private sales fetch a higher price than auctions? Why?

It's not easy to say. You could offer an artwork to someone for IDR 1 million or US\$100,000, for example, and he bargains till the price drops to US\$50,000. If you put it up for auction, the price could be US\$200,000 because there's competition.

Auction houses like Christie's and Sotheby's are more spread out so they have a bigger audience. But it affects networking, especially in biennales. I wrote an essay on this 10 years ago. The biggest problem with biennales like Venice Biennale is contacting them [and] getting their catalogues. If I go to Art Basel Hong Kong, I can easily get their catalogues. So they can reach a wider audience through networking compared to the famous biennales.

Every gallery [business] is different. Like a restaurant. Some sell haute cuisine, some sell inexpensive food. I don't sell all modern art. If I sell a [Takashi] Murakami or a famous European artist, Fernando Botero for example, maybe buyers can go to the source like Spain to get it.

Things are happening that reduce the capacity of local Southeast Asian art galleries. Some Indonesian artists go with famous American galleries because they feel they have the network connection.

What is the average price range of your artworks?

We sell for US\$100,000 to US\$300,000. It depends on the period we're in. We are promoting young artists now, so their prices are not that high. The average price is a few hundred dollars but the big works go from US\$5,000 to US\$100,000.

We also have old collections, which I think is the secret of the trade, such as Affandi, Mochtar Apin and Christine Ay Tjoe. The reason why I opened a gallery is because I want to collect artworks. Galleries should keep their works. If you go to an antique shop, I'm sure the owner has a good collection of his own. If galleries sell to make a certain percentage of profit, I don't think they can make much money.

Which segment of Southeast Asian art has the greatest capacity to attract a greater level of demand in the next five years? Why?

When you say demand, you should understand the important role of economics. China is now the biggest economic power. It is a big

country with the largest population. Think about the potential. If there's a collector in every big city in China, you're talking about 5,000 collectors who don't know about each other but they have purchasing power.

If there are 20 collectors in Malaysia, you would know them all. But if you have 30 collectors in China, nobody knows them: one would be in Nanjing, one in Beijing, one in Shanghai and so on. That's why there was a boom of Chinese artists in 2005. I think a lot of galleries were shocked at the time, including all my friends in Hong Kong and Europe.

Chinese artists in China don't have enough works for all the collectors. What happens to famous artists in Asia? If they don't get the sponsors, they are not important, right?

So, you're saying that Southeast Asian artists are not able to compete with international artists?

Because the infrastructure is not there, we cannot compete even within the next five years. Are we ready? Is Malaysia ready? Perhaps, we can compete in the region but not worldwide.

However, Takashi Murakami became big with Louis Vuitton for their handbag designs and Indonesian artist Eko Nugroho collaborated with Louis Vuitton [too] on scarf designs.

Louis Vuitton is not a museum or art institution but adds to the prestige of the artist.

What are the art fairs that you have participated in as a gallery?

Art Basel Hong Kong, Art Stage Singapore in 2011 and 2013, and art fairs in Jakarta and Taipei. But I am concentrating more on Indonesia because there are many things that can be done in Indonesia.

I haven't gone to art fairs in Singapore in recent years because the market is too small.

Do you still participate in the Hong Kong art fair like the recent one?

I haven't participated for the past two years. The problem with Indonesia is the artists. Who are the artists whom you want to promote? You can't control them. Now you have artist A, next year he goes to gallery B.

Do you think the economic condition has impacted your gallery's sales?

I think it impacts everybody. I'm lucky because we have old and new customers. Some new collectors want to learn more about art, so we are working on educating them. They are mainly aged 35 to 50.

Do art fairs boost the sales of participating galleries that sell Southeast Asian art? Or, do they bring in competition with the availability of artworks from outside the region?

The problem in Southeast Asia is the agreement between the artists, the galleries and the collectors themselves. Some collectors want to have a show with the artists but the artists belong to galleries. Some people say, you should promote the artist. But whose job is it to promote the artist? Some Indonesian artists are good and know how to work with the gallery.

They understand the system, that is, the understanding between the gallery, the artist and the collector. Many times you promote an artist and the next day, the collector buys directly from the artist. So why should I promote the artist? This situation happens in Malaysia and China. This is the problem with Southeast Asia. With Japanese and Korean, it's different. We should be working together.

What would be an ideal situation for you? Would you let the galleries do the job of promoting while the collectors just collect?

APAGA (Asia-Pacific Art Gallery Alliance), comprising 11 art galleries from Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore,

started two to three years ago. We thought of promoting artists from Malaysia and Singapore as our artists. But it's not easy. It needs support from the government too. We really need to sit down and think about a good way to work together.

What other aspects of Southeast Asian art have you observed lately?

I'm a photographer but I don't collect that much photography. I always have one question, which is a legal issue. There was a big court case where somebody bought a used phone and had posted a personal video from the phone. Who's to blame? The person doing the video or the person who posted it?

If I buy a photo artwork and someone makes 10 prints. Who is responsible? Is our law strong enough to sue them? I don't think so. You can see it everywhere in Jakarta where people sell pirated videos. Copyright is a big issue. If you buy an artwork for US\$500 and make a copy, nobody cares. When you're talking about US\$10,000, who can guarantee my profit? The gallery should be responsible if the artist belongs to the gallery.

It's not easy for Southeast Asian artists to become big. If you want to become big, you should go to London or New York.

Many collectors collect Indonesian artworks. Everybody says Indonesian artists are good. But can you trust them? Their prices range from US\$2,000 to US\$10,000. If the price is US\$200,000, you need the collaboration of Indonesian museums with international museums and government support. That takes a lot of effort and time to make it happen.

What kind of information is generally lacking in an art market report? How can such information be improved upon?

I have made a complaint to an auction house. Say an artwork in 2000 was priced at US\$100,000. It went up to US\$400,000 and drove peo-

ple to buy it for investment. So my question is: 'If you auction off this painting, will it fetch the same price?' The demand makes the difference. People compete to bid for the painting at the auction. It pushes the price up, but it is not the real value of the painting. But pride and emotion take over in the bidding process. At the end of the day, the price is 10 times the original value. So auction prices are misleading.

You should be smart and know who is making the report and the reason behind it. You have to be smart in analysing it as well.

In Asia, the biggest issues are trust, brand name, reputation and history. Why do we prefer bigger auctions like Sotheby's and Christie's? Because in their minds, this is a 150-year-old company. Although they don't guarantee real or fake paintings in their agreements, you trust that they are not playing games.

You have a lot of contemporary art here. How is the market for that now?

When we opened the gallery in 1984, people asked why I was interested in contemporary art. I said, when the artist is alive, he will create something new. There are always new artworks, new styles. That's what is exciting to me. The older generation will do the same thing over and over again.

In 1991, I concentrated on contemporary artists like Entang Wiharso, Rudi Mantofani, and then later, Christine Ay Tjoe, who was my artist. They were new artists.

Do you introduce these artists through auctions?

No, I don't do that. In 2000, there was a boom in Jakarta and everybody was buying everything. We made an agreement with collectors – when you buy, you cannot sell for three years. Because what happens is we sell for IDR50,000 and they sell for IDR200,000 at an

auction. If I want to sell at auctions, I can go to the auction directly. I have to protect and create a system.

Do you still have that condition?

Maybe not now but we know who the people are. Most likely I won't sell to players.

Are most of your collectors Indonesian?

I have collectors from Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, London and, surprisingly, Saudi Arabia. Sometimes they buy foreign artworks. What I exhibit is good art. It could be Western, Indonesian or Chinese.

As a gallerist, do you do research based on art market reports?

No, I don't believe in reports. If an auction house is selling at an average price of US\$10,000 but they have two pieces at US\$1 million, the average becomes higher. The art market report is [basically] distorted information. There should be more specifics in the report. Sadly, many people read those reports and believe them.

But I'm sure you would also want to know what your local auction houses are selling, what they sold and how much they sold. Whether you believe the report or if it is reliable or not is a different matter. So in that sense, you do look at the report but you may have your own opinion.

An auction house may have sold 100% the next month. But I see the same artwork appearing again in the same auction. There is no law controlling them.

But most auction houses have claimed that it's difficult for them to source artworks.

Sure. If you have good artworks you can classify them as A, B and C. The A work will go to auction house A, B goes to auction B, C

goes to auction C. I guarantee you, nobody of importance will go to C. Expensive artwork will be affected in an inexpensive or unknown auction house. They are never going to get a good price for their artworks because nobody will go there. It's the same as selling Christian Dior or Armani in a cheap plaza. Who will want to go there? You have positioned it in the wrong place.



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NAVIGATING THE ART SCENE

Art dealers Christiana Gouw and Nancy Nan participated in Art Stage Jakarta (Sept 7 to 9, 2017) and spoke about their experiences as exhibitors. According to them, among the areas to improve on are educational programmes and their selection of “VIP clientele”.

Art Stage Jakarta 2017 also presented the inaugural Indonesian Award for Authenticity, Leadership, Excellence, Quality, Seriousness in Art, which was initiated by Indonesian art collector Alex Tedja. The 13 awards for Best Artist, Best Young Artist, Best Curator, Best Young Curator, Best Gallery, Best Young Gallery, Best Art Institution, Best Exhibition, Best Collector, Best Young Collector, Best Art Publication, Life Achievement Awards and the Bhinneka Award were presented at the fair’s Gala Award Ceremony. All winners received a trophy created by Indonesian artist Handiwirman Saputra.

The Edge: What did you think of the attendees at Art Stage Jakarta 2017?

Christiana Gouw (CG): I think the attendees were not new and young collectors only but more of the general public. Because Bazaar Art Jakarta has [value] for newcomers, they want people with money but don’t understand so much about art. But they should be educated. I think the management (Art Stage) has to concentrate more on that. To try and make the fair more public and educational, like invite more people to attend a seminar maybe, because they don’t have that. They concentrate on having a party. After partying every day [during the fair], it’s tiring, how can we go to the parties? We work from morning to night. Before [the fair], we have to prepare for a few days. For young people, it is okay but for me...

Why do you think they only invite a certain group of clientele?

CG: I don't understand too. That's why I think they have to concentrate more on members of the public. There aren't many VIP clients. Some but still not enough. They should invite more VIPs but more groups, not just certain groups. Because I feel those who come are just 'this group'. They don't have a variety of groups. They have to reach out to more people.

What were the positive aspects of Art Stage Jakarta?

CG: The artworks were of better quality than Bazaar Art's.

Nancy Nan (NN): I noticed it was better than Bazaar Art.

How was Art Stage Jakarta compared to Art Stage Singapore?

CG: Singapore is for sure better and bigger. The galleries here are not as big as the ones at Art Stage Singapore. We don't have Perrotin or White Cube. Maybe the space is not enough. The space is only a ballroom, so it's difficult.

NN: Jakarta offers more Indonesian works. I think they should concentrate on educating people instead of parties [or] gimmicks like the awards night.

CG: I feel that they are more into groups - they know each other.

NN: This is Jakarta, right?

CG: But you have to change. If you go up to a professional level, you cannot do that. There should not be any conflict of interest, so that everybody feels equal. We still find conflict of interests. You cannot stay like this forever. One or two years is fine but in the future?

NN: Even the party, the host, the few of them were friends.

Will you participate again in Art Stage Jakarta?

CG: I don't know, we'll see.

NN: I will because there are only two art fairs [in Jakarta]. Either this one or that one (Bazaar Art) so you have to choose one [to participate in].

CG: Yes, and in terms of [geographic location] it's closer, so we don't have to go all the way to Singapore or Hong Kong.

NN: Art Stage Singapore, I don't think it will survive for too long. Most of my friends come here because Jakarta is a busy city but after that they will go to Bali or Lombok for a holiday. Long distance travelling. A European gallery, for example, would do Bazaar Art and Art Stage Jakarta and in between, they go on a holiday. But Singapore is just a tiny little city. For Europeans to travel that far just for one fair...

The Europeans during this holiday time, they will not choose tiny Singapore as a travel location or holiday destination, so I see Art Stage Jakarta having a longer future than Singapore. And, of course, Indonesian artists are more interesting and the top contemporary artists in Southeast Asia. [Indonesia] could be the top country in the future.

Recent development

On May 18, 2018, Art Stage Jakarta announced its "postponement" of its third edition to return in 2019. Scheduled from 2 to 4 August 2019 at the Sheraton Grand Jakarta Gandaria City, the deferment is due to "the recent security incidents in Indonesia, and in coordi-

nation with the important players of the Indonesian and international art world". According to Art Stage Jakarta's press release, the postponed third edition promises "an internationally important art event that is more exciting, more vibrant and more unique than ever before".

A black and white photograph of Dr. Wiyu Wahono, a middle-aged man with short, graying hair and glasses. He is wearing a dark, long-sleeved button-down shirt and is standing in an art gallery. The background features large, white, sculptural forms that resemble stylized trees or abstract figures. A dark rectangular box is overlaid on the lower left of the image, containing his name and title in white text.

Dr Wiyu Wahono

Collector and Founder
The Wiyu Wahono Art Office
Jakarta, Indonesia

EYE FOR POST-MODERNISM AND NEW MEDIA ART

Dubbed “Indonesia’s most experimental and intellectual collector” by Singapore online art platform *The Artling*, Wiyu Wahono is certainly that and more.

This exhaustive interview was originally transcribed with over 15,000 words, which obviously had to be edited, a tad.

At 58, Wiyu still has the curiosity of an adventurous child, the acumen of an astute businessman and the unbridled passion of a mad scientist. He is constantly searching and probing the world at large for the most exciting artworks to pop up in the most unlikely of places and in the most unusual or bizarre of forms.

An ethnic Chinese, Wiyu was born in Jakarta and started collecting art in 1999. He has a PhD in plastics technology and before returning to Indonesia, he had lived in Berlin for 20 years. Previously, he was a lecturer at the Technical University Berlin and was also an industrial consultant. By profession, he is an entrepreneur.

For Wiyu, contemporary art often defies description in the conventional sense. His private collection, housed in an innocuous building in a seedy side of Jakarta, seems like a modern Aladdin’s Cave of magical and beguiling collectibles. Sure, there are large-size paintings by Indonesian artists that span at least one or two metres in height or width. But there are also plenty of installations equipped with technical gizmos that razzle-dazzle with streaks of light or project a mesmerising glow. A couple of them come complete with video, sound and haze effects. All engineered by the respective artists to excite and enthrall viewers with their own compelling statement.

To date, important works from his collection have been on loan and exhibited at various institutions in Indonesia and overseas such as the National Gallery Singapore, Hong Kong Arts Centre, SongEun Art Space Seoul, National Museum Lichtenstein and Asia Society Museum New

York. He is a sought-after speaker and juror in various regional art events including fairs and competitions.

Before one steps into his by-appointment-only art space that he calls The Wiyu Wahono Art Office, the energetic and effusive collector needs to turn on the myriad range of switches to enable his collection of primarily digital art to literally come alive electronically.

New media art

Straight off the bat, Wiyu points to his audio-visual installation, entitled *Modell5*, created by the media art duo, Granular-Synthesis, in 1996. The work is associated with “non-narrative environments and performances focusing on a specific approach to time, space and body.”

Says Wiyu, “The German and Austrian artists (Kurt Hentschlagel and Ulf Langheinrich) recorded the facial and verbal expressions of Japanese artist Akemi Takeya. The file was edited into a sequence of 0.5 second and repeated. Then, at 0.8 second and repeated. This is what we see and hear. The fascinating thing is, if you process digital files in the right way, you produce emotion.

“You feel exhausted. It’s frightening and violent at the same time. This work is a famous example of New Media Art. The artists, who represented the Austrian government, split up after they took part in the Venice Biennale. That is the reason why no commercial galleries were interested in representing them. But you will find their names in books on New Media Art. What I want to show in my collection is that with proper research, you can find strong artworks from all over the world. These artists, however, were not fortunate enough to be represented by Gagosian or White Cube. Their works are also not found in the market or in the international auction houses.”

Moving on to the next work, Wiyu fiddles with more switches.

Wiyu Wahono: This is the work of American artist Ernesto Klar, a professor at the Parson School of Design in New York. People only know of light artist James Turrell. But there are many fantastic artists in the world, not represented by commercial galleries. There is no market yet because most collectors still collect paintings and statues (sculptures). This artwork has won three international competitions including a nomination in Ars Electronica which is the mecca for new media art festivals in Linz, Austria. A haze machine produces haze in the room.

There are three editions of this work. I also collect sound art which used to be called visual art. Subconsciously, we think all art should be visual. In this post-modern era, art has no boundaries. In the last century, art was placed within strict boundaries. Nowadays, people can make art out of everything including sound. This work is by Bill Fontana from the US, a world-renowned sound artist. At his solo show in the Tate Modern, he exhibited a piece (Harmonic Bridge in the Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern in 2006). The sound you hear is the raindrops on the Millennium Bridge behind Tate Modern. You can listen to the real-time sound of the vibration of the bridge, generated by electronic sensors. In this way, sound art is collected.

The Edge: What's the duration of the sound piece?

It is a 30-minute loop. Sound is essential for human beings. If you are alone at night and need companionship, you switch on the radio. In a car, you turn on music while enjoying the scenery to combine the travel experience.

If you hear a sound in a darkened room, you feel threatened because you don't know where it is coming from. You don't want to see so you close your eyes. But you still can't stop listening. That's a sense of conductive listening. Human beings are designed to listen

all the time. This fact was fascinating that it got me thinking, ‘Human beings are visual; it’s easier to look at something than to listen.’ It is a challenge for a contemporary collector to appreciate and understand sound art since most of the time we only use one sense.

Excerpt from Bill Fontana’s website¹:

This sound sculpture explores the musicality of sounds hidden within the structure of the London Millennium Foot Bridge. This bridge is alive with vibrations caused by the bridge’s response to the collective energy of footsteps, load and wind. This sonic world is inaudible to the ear when walking over this bridge. It will be revealed by the use of the accelerometers (which are vibration sensors) that are listening to the inner dynamic motions of the bridge. Harmonic Bridge is realised by installing a network of live accelerometers on different parts of the Bridge in order to acoustically map in real time its hidden musical life. The live sonic mapping will be translated into an acoustic sculpture by carefully rendering sounds from this listening network into a spatial matrix of loudspeakers. This sculpture will not only render the natural acoustic movements of the bridge, but will tune the presence of this live sonic data to the characteristics and architecture of the two spaces in which the work is presented: the Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern, and the Main Concourse of Southwark Station of the London Underground. The presence of Harmonic Bridge in the Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern gives new meaning to this bridge being a metaphor for linking St. Paul’s and the Southwark side of the Thames. The low percussive tones of the bridge produced in response to wind and the loading of the large structural cables resonate with the acoustics and 100 hertz of the Turbine Hall, creating an immersive and sensual experience for visitors. The work enters the space as a slow moving wave, emerging from the ground tone of the background hum and then slowly decaying back into it.

¹ Bill Fontana, 2016. *Harmonic Bridge*. Tate Modern. http://resoundings.org/Pages/Harmonic_Bridge1.htm

This is a painting by a Jogjakarta artist of Galam Zulkifli his wife and son, using UV light. It shows the artist glowing in the dark with phosphorescent paint. It's fascinating. In the history of visual paintings, light was used to see the painting but never to create an image. But with this new generation of paint, you can create different images on canvas.

And this is by Balinese artist Gede Mahendra Yasa². He used the same style and strokes of de Kooning on paper with impasto. It's very thick. He took a photo of the painting and print and transferred (the image) from painting to photography. He painted the photo on a big canvas and included the shadows. For one month, he worked like a computer printer. If you step back, you will see the paint is really thick. The moment you come close, it's completely flat. This transformation is from painting to digital imaging and back to painting. The way he worked, over a month or two months depending on the painting, was like craftwork, which is the (way of) life in Bali. People would say, 'This is not a painting but craft.' But in the contemporary era, this definition of art doesn't exist anymore.

This is my first artwork by German photographer Walter Schels who shoots portraits of people before and after they had died³. He would go to the hospital to find terminally ill patients. (Pointing to a photograph) This man had a severe terminal lung problem. Schels took a photo of the patient while he was alive and shortly after his death. His artworks are always in a pair. The patient was prepared to die by suffocation. He had said, 'I won't be tortured until the last minute.' Instead, he died peacefully on a Sunday morning. People were angry with the artist because they said, 'You make artworks out of the dead which is unethical.' Schels replied, 'He wanted to contribute to the artwork even after his death.'

² Lucy Rees, May - June 2012. *Gede Mahendra Yasa: A painting universe*. <http://www.flashartonline.com/article/gede-mahendra-yasa/>

³ *Life Before Death*, April 1, 2008. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/gallery/2008/mar/31/lifebeforedeath>

The photographer made another artwork of a baby. She had a tumour which had progressed rapidly after an operation. The doctor said it was cancer and she would die. So, Schels took a photo. People were even angrier because the parents had signed a contract. They were Muslims and lived in Germany. The baby had a twin sister. Her mother prayed to Allah and asked, 'Why did you give me two daughters, only to take one child from me six months later?' She had asked for a miracle to keep both babies. She asked God, 'Am I selfish if I don't want to share my babies with you?'

These philosophical questions are part of the artwork. I always display this work at the entrance to show visitors that contemporary art doesn't just depict beauty. The 20th century dogma is the so-called formalism. The theory was so prevalent that many 20th century artists broke with the traditional idea that art has to please the eye, and that the message behind the artwork was not important. Judgement is made through the eyes. Suddenly, modernism is passé. And we are now post-modernism. We always see art in the same way. Don't expect to see a beautiful painting in a contemporary collection. This is a kind of disclaimer for my collection.

Everybody who comes here has to sign my guestbook. I'll take a photo of you so I will know you were here. This is New Media Art. When I bought this artwork, people thought that bigger art and photography were new media, but photography had been invented 200 to 250 years ago. Video was introduced in 1967 when Sony brought Portapak into the market⁴. Since video has been around for 50 years, it cannot be classified as new media. A computer-generated image, however, is new media.

⁴ The first portapak system, the Sony DV-2400 Video Rover, was introduced into the market in 1967. It was a two-piece set consisting of a black-and-white composite video camera and a separate record-only helical scan half inch video tape recorder (VTR) unit. It required a Sony CV series VTR (such as the CV-2000) to play back the video. Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portapak>

BioArt

Entang Wiharso's artwork series called *Melting Souls* shows the negative side of human nature. A good person only steals or robs because of the influence of friends and the people around him. That's why you see these headless people running around.

Heri Dono's work is about the corruption of employees in the Indonesian state offices. This BioArt was borrowed from the Liechtenstein National Museum. It is a genetically modified flower where the artist's DNA is mixed with the flower's DNA which explains the dark veins. This is the new art medium. I don't think that anyone in Asia collects BioArt. The first artwork I saw was this amazing piece of a rabbit whose DNA is mixed with jellyfish. And the rabbit, called Alba, glows in the dark. I was fascinated but then I thought, I cannot have a rabbit in my office. So, I chose the flower. But it's the same approach." (Eduardo Kac – *Plantimal #4* (from the Natural History of the Enigma series), 2009, 42cm by 42cm, Lambda print of diasec. (see pg xxiii))

How do you keep the artwork alive? Do you have to water it like a normal flower?

Yes, I use a spray bottle to water it every morning. But at Christmas time when there is nobody in the office, the flower dies. So I get seeds to plant again.

This is an Indonesian artist who saw people performing Tai chi in the morning and walking backwards.

This is Entang Wiharso's painting on a mirror. I collected Entang's work a long time ago before he became famous. Every time I asked my friends to buy his artwork, they would say, 'Oh, so scary!' His work has become expensive now; everybody wants to own an Entang. It shows that the appreciation of art depends 'strongly' on one's own eyes (the beholder). At least in Asia.

Relational aesthetics

This is an eight-channel video art by Tintin Wulia, an Indonesian artist who represented the country in the Indonesian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2017. It comprises two artworks interconnected via the internet between Venice and Jakarta. In *Nous ne notons pas les fleurs* (2009-2015), Tintin created an interactive installation made from Indonesian flowers and spices arranged into the form of a world map (see page xxiv). She invited about 10 to 20 expats in Jakarta to arrange the flowers across the map as they saw fit, thus transforming the world. For example, an American, who has lived in Russia, China, and now Indonesia, takes a flower and places it in those countries he has lived in. So his culture is a blend of different cultures. This artwork is called 'relational aesthetics' or 'participatory art' where the artist produces only the map, but the art comes after members of the audience participate in producing the aesthetics. Out of the five editions, I think I'm the only one with this private collection. The other editions are in the Singapore Art Museum, Museum de Lakenhal in Amsterdam and the Akili Museum in Jakarta. Rudy Akili is a private collector.

This artwork is by a Tibetan contemporary artist protesting against the Chinese oppression because many Tibetans have set themselves on fire in a wave of self-immolation.

Budi Wijaya is an Indonesian artist. Although he was born in Indonesia, he is now Singaporean. The keris has supernatural powers associated with the owner. Sukarno, our first president (from 1945 to 1967) visited Cuba in 1964 and met with Fidel Castro. In that meeting, Sukarno gave his keris to Castro. And unknowingly, he also gave his power away. Three years later, Sukarno was gone. He completely lost his power. The context is about looking at history through the media. You find a lot of information in the media and

on the internet but you don't know which is the truth.

This is another new media artwork which has won an international award. There is a camera capturing my face. In the flask, there is liquid with millions of bacteria - 464 in total. And the bacteria is following my movement. A lot of the bacteria has died by now. So, the contrast is too bright. I have to replace it with new bacteria and then, you will see my face. This is like a mirror. Actually, it has to be put in at six degrees (temperature level) to keep the bacteria alive for a long time but I can't do that.

This piece is by Handiwirman Saputra, another successful artist. He painted on a Samsung Galaxy 3 handphone. I have a video of him painting. He sent the completed image via Bluetooth to the printer. Using a gadget is a new way of creating artwork. Here's a Japanese paper installation by Takashi Kuribayashi and another one by Indonesian artist, Tisna Sanjaya, who etches on copperplate. I got the copperplate as a pair. This is a rare piece and looks good.

What do you think of Christine Ay Tjoe's work?

I have a lot of Ay Tjoe's works. I collected her paintings when nobody was interested in her. She started with a dry-point technique. Now her colourful canvas works sell for US\$600,000. This etching is made on copperplate. She scratched the copperplate with a steel needle in a darkened room lit with just a small light bulb to get the reflection on the surface. If she wanted it very dark, she would make a deep scratch on the copperplate. If she wanted it to be grey, she would scratch it lightly. You wouldn't be able to see the image yet. She would apply the ink then wipe off the excess. The remaining ink in the groove of the image is then transferred onto the copperplate and you will see the image of a man flanked by two pretty girls. You need to have a strong affinity with the artwork that she produces. That fascinated me at the time, so I collected a lot of Ay Tjoe's works. I don't think

anybody has more Ay Tjoe's than me in Indonesia.

In the past, I would keep promoting Ay Tjoe to everybody, but they would say 'Wiyu, it's so dark and scary. And now Ay Tjoe is becoming expensive. If I meet art collectors and ask, 'What do you like?' They would say, 'Oh, I love Ay Tjoe!' So, the money influences the judgement.

Angki Purbandono will be very successful because his medium is scenography. He scans a banana on the computer scanner and produces an image.

This is an award-winning Bandung contemporary work. It is the most prestigious award given in Bandung. I have been one of the jurors since its inception. The artist is mimicking Andy Warhol eating hamburger. Here, he uses sambal with Heinz ketchup.

Danish filmmaker Jørgen Leth captured Andy Warhol eating a hamburger from his film, *66 Scenes from America*, which was filmed in 1981.

How did he get the copyright to Andy Warhol's video?

This is exactly the reason why he won. This work has a copyright issue. He packed the CD into a hamburger made of wood which included the carton box for the hamburger. He wrote down the link for you to download yourself. The museum directors, who came here, would say, 'If I exhibit your artwork, I will infringe on the copyright law.' There is also an issue of originality because he is mimicking Andy Warhol.

People expect an artist to be brilliant, creative, unique and original. That was all in the spirit of modernist art in the 20th century. Nowadays, an artist doesn't need to invent something new because of internet resources. In contemporary art, originality is not important.

Padoean Soeara (Choir), 2012, is the work of another Indonesian artist, Natasha Abigail Koetin. The artist found this 19th century photograph in an archive in Netherlands. A Dutch photographer

visited a sugar cane plantation in Indonesia and took a photo of the workers. No one in Indonesia had seen a camera before. The camera was invented in about 1813⁵.

During colonial times, the subjects in the photos were treated like objects. They had to 'stand still' and not move but they didn't know why. The artist asked why a boy with a broom was included in the photo. So, that's why in this post-colonial era, she gave them another chance to lead, to sing actively in a choir. And the singer, the leader of the choir, is this boy. The juxtaposition of the marginalised who is now viewed as a leader. She created the song and she sings. This is a Javanese song with only five tones instead of seven. That's why it sounds incorrect.

This work is by the art collective, Tromarama, entitled *Ting*, 2008, a stop-motion animation work with a porcelain and ceramic tableware installation. Tromarama are famous video artists in Southeast Asia. For many of the young artists, I was their first collector. This video art is produced using photography. It's a stop-motion animation so the artists take photos and move the cups many times for months. Can you see how much work they have to do? I bought it for US\$200. There are only two copies acquired by my brother and me. My brother sold it at Sotheby's Hong Kong a couple of years ago for about US\$20,000⁶. Some of the pieces are definitely a good investment.

I wanted to buy this work which was priced at IDR4 million or US\$300 for eight editions. I told them that in Indonesia at the time,

⁵ The first camera was designed in 1685 by Johann Zahn. And the first photograph was clicked by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce in 1814. The first partially successful photograph of a camera image was made in about 1816 by Niépce. After his death in 1833, his partner Louis Daguerre continued to experiment and by 1837, he had created the first practical photographic process, which he named the daguerreotype which was publicly unveiled in 1839. The use of photographic film was pioneered by George Eastman, who started manufacturing paper film in 1885 before switching to celluloid in 1888-1889. His first camera, which he called the "Kodak," was first offered for sale in 1888.

⁶ Lot Sold. HK\$93,750 (US\$12,075, Hammer Price with Buyer's Premium). Estimate HK\$20,000-30,000. <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2012/sea-modern-ctmp-paintings-hk0383/lot.265.html>

nobody collects video art. Visual artist Jompet (Kuswidananto), is very famous now but he had to wait 15 years before his work was sold. I was his first collector. I was often invited to speak on art and kept on promoting him. Suddenly, Jompet became successful. Nobody want to buy the work until my brother came by and said, 'Wow, I want it!' So I told them to make two editions.

Do they have to sign a contract to say that there are only two editions?

Yes, always.

In the art world, some artists will go beyond whatever that is stated.

Mona Lisa has been reprinted millions of times in books, posters. If somebody wants to display the artwork anywhere in the world or upload it on YouTube, I would be very happy. If you buy a photographic work or a video, this new medium can be copied with the same quality as the original. This is the intrinsic characteristic of the medium which you have to accept, otherwise don't collect video or photographic works. If you want a unique piece, then collect paintings.

This colour photograph, *Atomic Love*, 1992, is by New York artist Sandy Skoglund. The image is of an area of 121.6cm by 159.7cm featuring walls, floor, sculpted figures and furniture coated with raisins produced in her studio. She spent one year sticking raisins on the artwork in her studio. Then she took one shot and it was over.

Is everyone covered in raisins?

Yes, everyone is covered in raisins. The artwork is mind-blowing. My friend, Indra Leonardi, the best photographer in Indonesia for portraits, introduced us. He said Sandy Skoglund is a legend! So I said, okay, I'll buy the work. Sandy, who is 89 now, wanted me to

get 20 copies! I asked her, 'Isn't it too much? She said, 'Wiyu, you know that I've been sitting here for one year sticking raisins on this artwork. If I only sell three, I'm not able to earn a living.' One year? It was so funny.

Ming Wong's Venice Biennale winning artwork from Singapore is also in my collection. I also collect Ryoji Ikeda (*data.tron*, 2007, single projection audio visual installation, dimensions variable, DLP projector, computer and speakers). I have a big room on the third floor to display Ryoji's digital art. Last September, a couple of pieces from my collection were exhibited in the Asia Society Museum, New York. In Lichtenstein, there are 30 pieces which have also been exhibited in Hong Kong.

This is an interesting piece of a bleeding brain. That's why it's flat and the blood is still flowing.

This fashion artwork was exhibited in New York in September. It comprises two thick books of mentally ill people on the streets with different creative fashion.

As Wiyu serves tea, he points out that, "This Yayoi Kusama teacup is for a girl (Sarah) and this is Anish Kapoor (for Johnni). This is Jeff Koons (for Wiyu). So I collect teacups everywhere I go. I collect artists' tableware when I have guests over for dinner.

"As a collector, I feel honoured when people come from far away to see my collection."

For paintings, for instance, anyone can refer to record prices transacted at auctions. How do you track the prices for digital media or media art. How would you put a value on it?

I don't track prices because I'm not making money in the art world. My journey in art collecting has taken 20 years. I try to share my understanding of collecting art, to have people appreciate their own

art and culture. If we, Indonesians, don't care about our own art and culture, we are the so-called barbarians. Most collectors in Asia only talk about money. In collecting art, the price will appreciate. After all, who wouldn't be happy if their artwork originally priced at US\$300 sells for US\$20,000? But it cannot be the main target. I don't sell my artworks, although I have sold a couple of pieces in emergencies. I recently sold a virtual reality art piece.

Does your business affect your acquisitions?

I sell plastic sheets to produce bottles. It's recycling so it doesn't have to do with art. Art for me is a sanctuary. If I have stress in the office I escape to my art. I don't track art prices because I'm not interested in the money issue. There isn't any market here for media art. In Indonesia, I think I'm the only art collector who has been reading art books for a long time. I try to understand the spirit of contemporary art.

In the 1970s, modern art was very strong and dominated the world: Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and their friends. Suddenly contemporary art which started small has now become the mainstream. You have to find out why some artists were so disturbed at that time that they created something new. If you find the answer, you will get the spirit of contemporary art. You come to an exhibition (gasps) and then you will see instantly (claps)! That's it!

No one talks in Asia about this topic because no collectors try to learn systematically. I run seminars to share my knowledge with young collectors and gallery owners. They hate me like crazy because I tell them paintings and sculptures are 20th century art. If you go to PS1 in New York, you will hardly see any paintings. But they tell everyone, 'Oh Wiyu is trying to corner the market' and 'he wants to open a gallery' and so on. If I want to start a gallery, I will not collect this kind of art that I will never be able to sell. I haven't

met anybody who collects BioArt. This is why price-tracking for me is not interesting. I do go online to see the auction bidding to understand it. For example, Sudjojono's bid of US\$7 million fascinates me. But it's not because of interest in my collection.

Which auctions do you track?

I track Sotheby's and Christie's Hong Kong auctions. I buy new media directly from the artists because they don't have galleries to represent them.

What work did you buy from Sotheby's?

I bought Iranian artist Shirin Neshat's work in New York, an Indian artist's piece in London and Zhang Huan's art in Hong Kong, so they are not necessarily Indonesian works.

Do you have a certain budget when you buy?

It depends. If I have more money, I will spend more on a good artwork. If business is down then I have to be careful with spending.

What is the most expensive work you have bought?

I paid US\$100,000 for Ryoji Ikeda's work. The projector itself cost US\$25,000 from the US. The special lens from France cost 6,000 euros and the speaker was imported from Japan. The artist is also a sound artist. It was the most complicated installation in my collection.

So the installation specifications were given by the artist?

Yes, and I had to pay a Japanese technician to come and install it. I paid the (flight) ticket and the cost of US\$1,500 for the installation. I wanted to change the projector because there was one with a better resolution. But the artist insisted on his choice so I had to go along with him. The artwork is now in the Lichtenstein museum. You can understand the fascination caused by the special effects.

What are your thoughts on the Japanese collective, teamLab?

TeamLab (see pg xxiv) fascinates me, but their digital installations which consist of flowers are too sweet and colourful. I prefer the one of the life-sized holograms in the dark room with the mirror effect exhibited at the Singapore Biennale 2013.⁷

I gave a talk at the Singapore Art Stage a couple of years ago about the joy and sorrows of young collectors. People don't realise that video art comes in a CD format. But in 10 years, it won't exist anymore. The technique will be obsolete. If I convert the CD into a USB, that's against the law. There is the so-called "Berne Convention" applied by Indonesia and all UN countries. You may not transfer the file from CD to USB. If I do that, all the artworks that you see here are counterfeit, by definition. I tried to get a certificate from the artist or from the gallery that would allow me legally to convert files, but the galleries didn't understand what I wanted.

Are the galleries in Europe or in Asia?

Both in Asia and Europe. They only sell artworks. For example, you collect Nam Jun Peik's work of an old tube television and discover that you can't get spare parts when it has broken down. If you're lucky you can buy the parts in East Europe or in Cuba. If you replace the television with an LCD or LED television, is it still Nam Jun Peik's work? This is a challenge for a collector like me. This is something new and people don't know the solution.

What's the definition of new media art?

New media art except photography and video uses computer technology, DNA, gene manipulation and laser. At the beginning of the 20th century, there were a couple of artists trying to redefine photography as

⁷ teamLab, 2013. *Peace can be Realized Even without Order*. Interactive Digital Installation. Endless, Sound: Hideaki Takahashi, Voices: Yutaka Fukuoka, Yumiko Tanaka. Exhibited at Singapore Biennale 2013: *If the World Changed*

fine art. If the medium is used for documentation then it is not fine art. Fine art does not have a purpose, but is only for aesthetics. Photography has been struggling to position itself as fine art, that's why Man Ray, László Moholy-Nagy from Bauhaus did fine art photography. It was really nice, artsy, old school photography. But many of them don't know about the history of photography. Now, the definition is open and general; you don't have to produce artsy photography anymore because it is considered legitimate 'contemporary art'.

Who are the Indonesian artists in this new media form of art that you can cite today?

Some of the best are Jompet Kuswidananto, Tintin Wulia, Angki Purbandono and Tromarama. They don't necessarily have a wide market appeal but they have artistic quality.

Do you see a difference in a fine art versus new media artist? Do you have to be a technician to produce this?

Not necessarily so. I still buy paintings and sculptures, but not paintings that depict beauty anymore. That was 20th century art. The constraint at the time was formalism. They call it the 'significant form' when you use your eyes to judge a painting. The significant form is a combination of line, colour, texture, space, composition, aesthetics and emotion. If you find significant form in a painting, then it's considered a "good" painting. I will never buy that kind of painting because it's old school art. I buy paintings that cross the boundaries of art and craft, perhaps a mixture of painting and soul. People ask, 'Is this still art?' That's sad because contemporary art emerged in the 1970s, but its understanding hasn't spread to Southeast Asia yet.

What's the name of the contemporary artist again who painted in fluorescent paint?

Galam Zulkifli is the artist. His painting which looks like a woodcut on the wall is a mirror reflection. He used his hands in a simultane-

ous movement. The context is about terrorism. In the painting you will see on one side George Bush who won the war against Osama bin Laden. On the other side, Osama won the war against George Bush. And the title is, *The Theatre of War*, because both of them justified the war at the time. And they said 'I am the beauty and you are the beast'. Actually we are the audience in a theatre watching them in a global war and we don't know who the good guy is. This kind of artwork fascinates me. It has a zeitgeist spirit of the time. The painting is like a carving which he completed in three months.

Did the museum approach you for the exhibition, *Beyond Boundaries: Globalisation and Identity*, Private contemporary art collection of Wiyu Wahono, Lichtenstein National Museum, Vaduz (February 9 – June 11, 2017)? How did the show come about?

Yes, I met the director Prof Rainer Vollkommer at Art Stage Singapore. We ended up talking for four hours about my collection and how I saw Indonesian art. He told me that he was interested in showing my collection. It was an honour to have the collection in the national museum in Lichtenstein.

So what are your views on Southeast Asian art?

There is a lot of misunderstanding of Southeast Asian art. I don't think that the collectors of so-called old Indonesian masters read art books. They like the paintings either for the price or because they were passionate about old masters such as Dr Oei Hong Djien.

Many people don't know about western hegemony or western dominance of the art world. Twentieth century modern art featured the male *bulé* (foreigner) with a long nose. If you wanted to be successful in the 20th century, you had to be a white male. That explains why no women artists were successful. Not because they were bad or worse than men, but because they were not Caucasian. Contemporary art was dictated by the *bulé*.

Art may not have tradition and culture because it has to be universal. Modern art was dictated by imperialism or cultural imperialism. We realised that it was wrong and we, the marginalised countries, have our own rights and our own understanding of 20th century art. We see it with different eyes. Expressionism and Impressionism and all the -isms are all Western art history. Big collectors always refer to Western art history as that's the only source they understand. This misunderstanding persists in contemporary art. They choose contemporary art with the eyes of modernists. It's (apparent) in all developing countries. This misunderstanding is very interesting to observe.

If you say that there's misconception, then what should be the right way of looking at 20th century art of the region?

The right way would be to look at Malaysian contemporary art through Malaysian art history not Western art history. Art history was westernised. It's seen through the eyes of the *bulé*. They dictated what was good or what was wrong. There was no necessity to write anything so we don't have art history on Indonesian artworks and contemporary art. Contemporary art was really about exploring our identity, culture and tradition, which was forbidden in the 20th century. Reading about Indonesian contemporary art using sociology, anthropology or cultural studies makes sense. This is the reason why more and more contemporary art exhibitions in the Western world take curators from Indonesia instead of curators in Western art history. The ZKM, Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe, Germany, has become THE institution for contemporary art in the world because they realised the way of reading contemporary art should be different. Prof Bunden Sigg and Hans Belke came up with the solution.

I always choose the wrong artworks. Information doesn't exist here on how people can choose art. The Southeast Asian market

is not critical enough in questioning how to read contemporary art. In the 2,000 years of art history in the Western world, Baroque never went back to Renaissance. And Impressionism never returned to Romanticism. The *zeitgeist* has evolved, the era has changed, the way you live has changed. You cannot say that contemporary art is *passé* and now we are back to modern art because of the market. In the market, artists vacillate between modern and contemporary.

If modern art becomes expensive, people say 'contemporary art is undervalued'. Then all of them buy contemporary art and the price increases. They think 'contemporary art is already priced US\$500,000 and the works of Affandi, Hendra Gunawan or Latiff Mohidin and Awang Damit are still so cheap so it cannot be true. People will buy old masters and the price will go up. That's the same way everywhere.

You cannot say that one is not sustainable because of the price. Using price as a benchmark to judge an artwork is wrong. If you buy an artwork, let's say, for US\$10,000 and there is demand for it, the price will go up to US\$100,000. How many times has the price fallen after that because it becomes too expensive? When the collectors stop buying, the price goes down, maybe in five years' time. Using price to validate your taste or your weight of collecting is wrong. The artist and artwork are the same, but the price is going down. You feel like you have failed as a collector. Indonesia has clear examples of this.

If you have bought Affandi works, you feel you are a successful collector. But you have to wait 50 years to see whether the collection is good or not.

As a collector, do you keep track of market transactions that include gallery price levels and auction records of Southeast Asian artists?

No. I don't take any artworks out of my collection to make money. I don't track the prices and I only sell in emergency cases.

What do price levels and auction records indicate to you?

They don't indicate quality as I had explained. It explains consumer interest. These include buyers and sellers, museums (institutions), corporate and private collectors and investors.

What is your perception of Southeast Asian art and the market for it?

The number of collectors is still very small. Southeast Asian art is underappreciated by the general public. In the West, people go to the museum and enjoy art but they are not collectors. I had dinner with the patrons of the museum where my collection was exhibited in Hong Kong. None of them were art collectors but they spent a lot of money to support the museum.

The number of mass affluent consumers has risen exponentially. They represent a segment of society who have disposable income to buy stock, gold for investment, go for fine dining, exotic holidays, send their kids to international schools, and so on. These people are consumers of art. However, the art market is still young so there's potential to grow.

What do you think about the current Indonesian art market?

It's very quiet. We are the sole agents in Southeast Asia for a German company selling machines to a plastic factory. Since business has slowed down, I have stopped buying artworks for the past two years.

On the local and regional auction scene, the top-tier collectors are after the same category of artists. What are your thoughts on this?

Herding is normal everywhere. I gave a talk in Jakarta about 'herding'. Galleries sell artworks to influential collectors such as Charles Saatchi and Eli and Edythe Broad at a 70 to 80 per cent discount. They know that if Saatchi bought the painting, everybody will buy. This herding is seen in the galleries in Southeast Asia. Some collectors can boost the market. Art galleries are interested in promoting the careers of their artists and make money at the same time. If you work with a gallery in New York or Milan and your artists do a show for the gallery, the artists can add that accomplishment on their biodata. And you can sell the artwork for a higher price.

That is the approach of the galleries representing the artists. But it's not done in Southeast Asia. In Europe, generations of the same family run galleries and they understand art management. In Southeast Asia, there is no university teaching art management except Singapore Sotheby's and that eventually closed because of lack of interest.

Which art auction houses are you familiar with?

Sotheby's, Christie's, Masterpiece and Borobudur.

Which auction houses do you track Southeast Asian art transactions?

I don't track the transactions. I will check out the websites of Christie's and Sotheby's because cornering the market of an artist at Sotheby's and Christie's is tough. The seller's commission is 10% and the buyer's premium is 25%, so if you want to corner the market, you'd have to spend one third of the price. If you sell Masriadi for, say US\$1million, then you'd have to spend US\$350,000 on each painting. With local auction houses, you can negotiate the price but not that much with big companies. That means there are fewer players in those auction houses. They still play around and corner the market like Gajah Gallery, to protect the price.

What do you mean by corner the market?

Cornering the market means manipulating the market. That is done in the auction houses but difficult to do it in Sotheby's and Christie's because of the premium and commission.

For your analysis of art prices, which sources of data do you regard as most reliable?

Christie's and Sotheby's.

What do you think of the auction prices of Southeast Asian art transacted in the following cities? Generally reliable or not reliable?

I cannot answer this because I don't follow the transactions.

Which Indonesian artists would you rank among the top 20 in market importance?

For old masters, I would rank Raden Saleh at the top followed by Sudjojono, Hendra Gunawan, Affandi, Lee Man Fong and Le Mayeur. Sudjojono is important in the history of Indonesian independence and art. But Hendra Gunawan pleases the eyes more that's why he is so successful in the market. Le Mayeur's paintings have nice colours too. The successful artists in the 20th century or modern periods had to be pioneers producing original artworks like Picasso and Georges Braque with Cubism. There was photorealism, expressionism, surrealism, Dadaism and so on. If you take this benchmark then Le Mayeur, a Westerner, should not be on this list. Belgian-born Le Mayeur was doing Impressionism in 1920/1930 but Impressionism started in the 1860s. That's 60 years late. His paintings are wonderful visually. But you cannot say he is a leading Impressionist. Mochtar Apin was the first Cubism artist in Indonesia in 1960s, but that's 50 years after Georges Braque. So you can consider him a historically important artist, but artistically 50 years too late.

Prof Robert Storr is a dean at Yale postgraduate school in New York and was the artistic director for Venice Biennale⁸. He is a revered and respected museum director. He said the biggest challenge to be a museum director is to remove the price tag from an artwork. If you bought a Mark Rothko for US\$80 million, the whole world talks about it. But the focus will be on the hefty price tag rather than the art.

Another art professor said, 'You go to a Sotheby's preview and see an artwork which you don't like.' The caption reads US\$5 million. 'What?' and you step back trying to understand it. And you conclude that it's a good piece. So, price definitely influences the way people appreciate art because the price is now so high beyond our imagination. That's why it's so fascinating.

8 Robert Storr, *Artist and Critic*, <http://art.yale.edu/RobertStorr>

Artist, critic, and curator Robert Storr received a B.A. from Swarthmore College in 1972 and an M.F.A. from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1978. He was curator and then senior curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, from 1990 to 2002, where he organised thematic exhibitions such as *Dislocations* and *Modern Art Despite Modernism* as well as monographic shows on Elizabeth Murray, Gerhard Richter, Max Beckmann, Tony Smith, and Robert Ryman. In addition, he coordinated the *Projects* series from 1990 to 2000, mounting exhibitions with Art Spiegelman, Ann Hamilton, and Franz West, among others.

In 2002, he was named the first Rosalie Solow Professor of Modern Art at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. Storr also taught at the CUNY graduate center and the Bard Center for Curatorial Studies as well as the Rhode Island School of Design, Tyler School of Art, New York Studio School, and Harvard University, and has been a frequent lecturer in this country and abroad. He has been a contributing editor at *Art in America* since 1981 and writes frequently for *Artforum*, *Parkett*, *Art Press* (Paris), *Frieze* (London), and *Corriere della Serra* (Milan). He has also written numerous catalogues, articles, and books, including *Philip Guston* (Abbeville, 1986), *Chuck Close* (with Lisa Lyons, Rizzoli, 1987), and the forthcoming "Intimate Geometries: The Work and Life of Louise Bourgeois."

Among his many honours, he has received a Penny McCall Foundation Grant for painting, a Norton Family Foundation Curator Grant, and honorary doctorates from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Maine College of Art, as well as awards from the American Chapter of the International Association of Art Critics, a special AICA award for Distinguished Contribution to the Field of Art Criticism, an ICI Agnes Gund Curatorial Award, and the Lawrence A. Fleischman Award for Scholarly Excellence in the Field of American Art History from the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art. In 2000 the French Ministry of Culture presented him with the medal of Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres and subsequently, awarded him the status of Officier in the same order. From 2005 to 2007, he was visual arts director of the Venice Biennale, the first American invited to assume that position. Mr Storr was appointed professor of painting/printmaking and dean of the School of Art in 2006 and was named the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Dean in 2014.

Which other Southeast Asian artists would you rank among the top in the region?

Nyoman Masriadi, Christine Ay Tjoe, Eko Nugroho, Entang Wiharso, Agus Suwage, Handiwirman Saputra and Rudi Mantonfani.

What about Heri Dono?

Yes, Heri Dono is like Zhang Xiaogang. He was so successful with the painting *Mother and Child* and *Bloodline*. People realised that his old artworks were even better. His works at the beginning of his career fetched record prices. If the Indonesian art market hits a boom like Chinese art – I don't know whether it will happen or not – Heri Dono will be one of the sought-after artists. He started contemporary art early and is ranked number two in the world of artists participating in non-commercial art exhibitions. He has participated in all art biennales in the world, triennials and museum shows. But Indonesians will say of him, 'Ah so boring, he's so old already.'

But he is socially and politically important. His works represent the society in Indonesia. So who is number one?

Cai Guo-Qiang whose drawings were made by igniting gunpowder explosives laid on paper. It represented a new medium of artistic expression.

What about Ugo Untoro?

Ugo Untoro is wild in the way he painted. A lot of his paintings were not finished yet. I think that's not Ugo Untoro (works) because he didn't finish the paintings. He sold them because he needed the money. People thought that is Ugo Untoro's style. I have a couple of Ugo Untoro but I don't think he will be seen as a successful contemporary artist.

What about Putu Sutawijaya?

I think I was Putu Sutawijaya's first collector. That's why he wrote 'Thank you Wiyu Wahono' in his books. What fascinates me is that in 1413 the Italians invented the linear perspective (while drawing on a piece of paper). So, they made a visual space on the plain two-dimensional canvas. All artists were fascinated with this and depicted the three-dimensional effect in their paintings [because Leon Battista Alberti invented this]⁹. This technique dominated the painting world for almost 500 years. In modern times. Picasso and Paul Cezanne rebelled against that. That was the beginning of people not following the linear perspective. Putu's dancers didn't have the perspective. All the dancers are in the plain level. He never depicted the depth in the painting and didn't try to distort the art compared to Picasso who distorted art using Cubism. That fascinated me at the time. Every time I saw a painting with a linear perspective, I thought the art was going back 500 years. If the contemporary painter didn't follow the linear perspective, I would ask him: 'Do you think that contemporary, post-modern art is following the modern technique of distorting the linear perspective?' That is what I see in Putu's work. All his paintings after that period were so bad.

Putu was the first Indonesian contemporary artist who beat the record price in Sotheby's Singapore. You would only know the real price if you put it up for auction. I consigned my Putu (work) to Masterpiece, but I didn't (really) want to sell it. I bought the artwork for US\$1,000 and I placed a bid in Masterpiece for IDR250 million, roughly US\$20,000. I was willing to pay 20%-25% of the commission just to find out if my painting was worth US\$20,000.

⁹ Naomi Blumberg, March 17, 2016. *Linear Perspective*. Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/art/linear-perspective>

I couldn't sell it. But I'm not sad at all because I bought it not to make money.

Now he's doing landscapes, trying to break out of the doldrums.

This is actually good. An artist has to break through and not self-plagiarise. But if his breakthrough art is worse, then he is not a good artist.

Do you think the demand for Southeast Asian art is on the rise as far as auctions are concerned?

The demand has declined at the moment. It also has to do with Christie's in Indonesia which failed to find a good director. I mean it's tough to beat Jasmine Prasetyo from Sotheby's¹⁰. She's fantastic with a high-class personality and very knowledgeable. Edwin's son, Kevin Aditya Rahardjo, worked for Christie's and his parents came to the preview¹¹.

Do you think galleries or private sales fetch a higher price than auctions? Why?

Auction is still the vehicle, even more so in recent years. Auctions have become so powerful because of branding. Collectors feel proud to buy something from a 'branded' auction house. They don't say, 'Oh, I bought this work from an auction,' instead they say, 'I bought it from Sotheby's'.

Can you cite any top gallery sales that you know about?

In Indonesia, Nadi Gallery is number one and Canna Gallery is tops for contemporary art. The others were very successful in the past selling old masters and 20th century art. They should stick to selling

¹⁰ Sondang Grace Sirait, May 10, 2014. *Jasmine Prasetyo: Leading the team to deconstruct art valuation*. The Jakarta Post. <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2014/05/10/jasmine-prasetyo-leading-team-deconstruct-art-valuation.html>

¹¹ <http://he-socialite.blogspot.my/2011/03/mr-edwin-rahardjo-and-mr-kevin-rahardjo.html>

- *Through The Eyes Of Young Artists*, May 15, 2009, <http://jakartaglobe.id/archive/through-the-eyes-of-young-artists/>

those because they know all the old collectors and their tastes. Why move to contemporary art? Instead they tried to compete with young people in contemporary art. Gajah Gallery is good and ROH Projects does contemporary art well. Laksamana “Junior” Tirtadji from ROH Projects is very knowledgeable¹². He studied philosophy and has a good rapport with all the young artists. With a wealthy father, Junior doesn’t have any concerns with monthly expenses. He really invests in his gallery. He works together with Edouard Malingue Gallery in Hong Kong. Edouard Malingue’s father owns THE gallery in Paris selling Picasso. They have a gallery in a prestigious office tower in Hong Kong. You come into the gallery and it’s woaaahh, just like ROH Projects in Jakarta. Super luxury is how they created their brand name. And they choose good contemporary artists.

Which segment of Southeast Asian art do you feel has the greatest capacity to attract greater demand in the next five years?

I think contemporary art because modern art is too expensive already.

What is your opinion of art fairs such as those in Hong Kong, Singapore and Jakarta?

Art Basel Hong Kong is fascinating but it is a global battlefield with Gagosian and White Cube there. At Art Stage Singapore, the focus is Southeast Asian art. Southeast Asian art is under-represented in Hong Kong. You really have to find which gallery is from Southeast Asia. I think Lorenzo Rudolf made the right strategy to serve the global public with Southeast Asian art as a focus.

¹² Christina Chua, December 23, 2016. *An Interview with Founder of ROH Projects Laksamana “Junior” Tirtadji*. <https://theartling.com/en/artzine/2016/12/23/interview-roh-projects-laksamana-junior-tirtadji/>

But he has said that he may change the business model because it's not working well.

Yes, because he realised most of the buyers are Indonesian and that is not new. You have to meet Patricia Chen in Singapore. Patricia Chen did her master's in setting up the Southeast Asian art index like the Mei Moses Art Indices. She has the data of sales, growth and price by centimetre square of every artist in Southeast Asia. The data is invaluable for investors who track artworks like stock. Patricia Chen's research reveals that in the Southeast Asian art market, 70% is Indonesian art followed by Philippines at 7%. Lorenzo Rudolf must have realised this, hence, he created Art Stage Jakarta. Art Jog is amazing because of the concept.

Any impact on auctions of Southeast Asian art?

There's no impact from art fairs. It's the other way round. There will be more people coming to art fairs and developing a passion for art.

Do art fairs boost the sales of participating galleries that sell Southeast Asian art? Or, in fact, bring in competition to such galleries with the availability of artworks from outside the region?

A lot of galleries sell artworks through art fairs. There's no competition with other galleries because a lot of people come to the fair. Most Indonesians only collect Indonesian art. This is different from Singapore where Singaporeans collect art from everywhere.

Except their own?

(Laughs) You are right. I only collect Indonesian artworks. So if you only collect Indonesian art, you don't care about galleries from different countries.

What other aspects of Southeast Asian art have you observed lately? For example, is there a significant demand for contemporary art such as video recordings, installations and prints?

Photography is gaining more and more recognition and appreciation in Indonesia from younger collectors. They realise that in the art world, the predominant medium is photography in contemporary art. All these young collectors travel extensively. They see a lot of photography and we know that you love what you are used to. So photography is gaining more recognition. Video is very difficult. I have stopped buying video art already.

With video, there is a downside. When you enter to watch a video screening, it is usually not at the beginning. You watch it from the middle and feel like you missed the beginning. You don't have the time to watch the entire video. And then you have to move on. You feel frustrated that you haven't seen the artwork from beginning to the end.

How many video art works do you have in your collection?

About 100. Video will always be a captive market. It will not break through like other medium.

Why do you collect video art?

Video art gives the artist something that other medium can't, like time manipulation. He can cut the time and delete it or put it in reverse, manipulate or repeat the time. With photography you can only freeze and stop the time. I saw it as a possibility to art. I collect video art because of this. I was interviewed in *The Artling* where medium specificity was discussed¹³. 'Contemporary artworks do not need to be medium specific.' The topic of medium specificity is not discussed in Southeast Asian art.

¹³ Kim Tay, August 12, 2016. *An Interview with Wiyu Wahono, Indonesia's Most Cutting-Edge Collector*. <https://theartling.com/en/artzine/2016/08/12/interview-wiyu-wahono-indonesias-most-cutting-edge-collector/>

Do you have any criteria or a guide as to what you collect? For instance, some collectors like portraits or landscapes.

First of all, the medium is important because of medium specificity. If an artist asks me to buy his painting, my question is, 'Why still painting? Now you have the freedom to use everything as art. Why do you confine yourself in a straitjacket?' If he says his context can only be conveyed through painting, then I will accept his answer. I would still buy paintings and sculptures, but the artist would have to answer my question first.

The second point when choosing the artwork is the context. Arthur Danto, an influential post-modern philosopher from the US, created an imaginary Red Square exhibition. The artworks are red squares, each with a different meaning and history. A Russian painter would say the Red Square in Moscow has the Kremlin, the centre of Eastern Bloc power. The context or metaphor of the Eastern Bloc power is his red square. A French artist would say his red square is a homage to the Red Room (The Desert: Harmony in Red) by Henri Matisse. An Israeli would say his red square is Moses crossing the Red Sea. And an Indonesian artist would say, 'Under the Suharto regime, there was a massacre in Tanjung Priok where all the Muslims were killed by the soldiers in 1984. I saw a lot of blood on the streets; this is my red square.'

So what does it mean? There is no plagiarism issue in contemporary art; the context is the artwork. They still see the visual as the quality of an artwork.

What do you specifically look for in an art market report?

I don't really analyse it. I only see reports of Indonesian artists such as Masriadi or Christine Ay Tjoe. I have about 25 Ay Tjoe works in my collection, which I bought a long time ago.

The interesting part is if you collect blue-chip artworks, you have to be prepared to be a loser. If you buy a Mark Rothko for US\$40

million, you will always compare it to the Rothko in Tate Modern. If you bought a Jeff Koons piece for US\$8 million from Gagosian, you will compare it with Eli Broad's collection of Jeff Koons. You spend so much money but you have to be prepared to be the loser.

In Hong Kong Sotheby's and Christie's, you see works of Damien Hirst, Jeff Koons, Richard Prince and Andreas Gursky et cetera. So you ask, 'What is the difference between this collection and an auction preview? This is what I feel when I view a collection like that.

Like a trophy collection?

Yes, that is the downside. Don't tell them, they will be so sad that they spent so much money (laughs).

Are there any observations of the Indonesian or Southeast Asian art scene that you wish to highlight?

Yes, the context about medium-specificity is important to understand.

Do you meet other like-minded collectors?

Yes, I initiated the 'Art Lovers' Dinner'. The Indonesian art scene is very unique. In Singapore, collectors tend to treat other collectors as competitors. But in Indonesia, we do an 'art lovers' dinner' where we share pictures of exhibitions we've been to. Or if I finish reading an art theory book, I do a summary and share the topic such as medium specificity, content and so on. This is the problem, people take a course in art history and study the past. Contemporary art and the future of art is neglected or not even part of art history. People have to study contemporary art theory.

THE PHILIPPINES

ART DEVELOPMENT IN THE PHILIPPINES

Among the various national art galleries in Southeast Asia, the National Art Gallery, National Museum in Manila undoubtedly has the most impressive collection of artworks that span centuries.

When it comes to tracing the early development of fine art in that institution, the Gallery of Paintings of The Philippine Colonial Tradition of Portraiture reveals an astonishing level of excellence, unrivalled by the rest of the national art collections in Southeast Asia.

The Spanish arrived in the Philippines in 1521 and colonisation of the Philippines began in 1565, when Miguel Lopez de Legaspi formally established a Spanish presence in Cebu. In 1571, he moved the capital to Manila.¹

The Spanish in the Philippines were motivated by two factors: the religious zeal to spread the Christian faith and expanding trade with the establishment of new trading posts.²

According to the wall text and artwork captions at the National Art Gallery in Manila, the introduction of European painting to the Philippines, principally through religious art and with Mexican and Asian – particularly Chinese – influences had, after the passage of two centuries, led to the development of its own distinctive vocabulary and ways of articulation, such that a new idiom – portraiture – was introduced.

Those who were in a social and financial position to commission such works could readily conceive in their own imagination how a person should be depicted.

Local artists were allowed to paint without restrictions from the church, following an edict by Carlos III (King Carlos III Sebastiao

1 Ramon N. Villegas, (ed.), 2008. *Herencia, A Legacy of Art and Progress*. BPI Foundation, Makati City, Philippines. Pp. 21 & 22.

2 Peter Church, 2017. *A Short History of Southeast Asia*. John Wiley & Sons Pte Ltd, Singapore. P. 141.

of Spain, 1759-88) in 1785. This would have provided a wide range of prospects for artistic expression and for earning a better living.

In the past, Filipino artists were limited to work under church patronage, the secularisation of art created other avenues for artistic representation.

The Portrait Gallery features over 30 extraordinary works of portraiture from this era, and the known artists who are represented are from at least two generations. The first generation included Severino Flavio Pablo (1805-1975) and Justiniano Asuncion (1816-1896), who were both thought to have attended the private art school established by Damian Domingo (1798-1834) in 1821 – which later became the officially-sponsored Academia de Dibujo in 1823 which operated until Domingo's death. The later generation comprised Simon Flores y de la Rosa (1839-1904), Isidro Arceo (1840-1900), and Hilarion Asuncion y Eloriaga (c.1840-?) who also likely studied at the later, Academia de Dibujo y Pintura, established in 1850 with resident professors from Spain. Other artists such as Vicente Villaseñor (1825-?) bridged both generations.

Relatively few painters active in the mid- to late 19th century are known, they typically did not sign their works and records have not survived or are yet to be rediscovered. In many cases, the identities of the subjects of the portraits themselves are not known, as this knowledge was lost in the process of art dealers or private collectors dissociating from the respective families. More research is necessary if critical information that might enhance our knowledge of this significant era of Philippine art history is to be recovered.

Starting in the late 19th century with the generation of Juan Luna y Novicio (1857-1899) and Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo (1855-1913), who were among the first to study and undergo formal training in Europe as pensionados or government scholars, portraiture in the Philippines began to strongly reflect the Western mainstream taste,

moving in time from academic to impressionist and other later modernist styles.

This process of assimilation would have largely been completed by the early 1900s - particularly after the founding of the Escuela Superior de Pintura, Escultura y Grabado in 1891, which became the College of Fine Arts of the University of the Philippines in 1908, where a preponderance of Filipino from the 1820s to the end of the Spanish colonial era in 1898 represents a striking legacy of a process – that took place in many regions of the archipelago – of highly local and mostly endogenous artistic development that arose out of centuries of depicting saints and religious scenes, and from careful training and intergenerational transmission of knowledge and techniques within family workshops. There may be up to several hundred of such works that still exist, each of which is a rare treasure of the nation's artistic heritage.

20th Century

From 1899 to 1946, US colonial policy prioritised the establishment of a secular education system. The government-run University of the Philippines, initially called the American University of the Philippines, opened its first campus on Padre Faura Street in 1908.

In the same year, the Escuela de Pintura, Escultura y Grabado of the Spanish regime – which succeeded the original Academia founded in the early 19th century – was integrated into the new university as one of its first units.

It became known by its Anglicised name, the School of Fine Arts. The first director of the school was Jose Maria Asuncion, a turn-of-the-century master of still life paintings and costume designs, who came from a distinguished family of artists. He was followed by Fabian de la Rosa, the uncle of Fernando Amorsolo, who was already active even then, as he was responsible for gathering

signatories for the opening of the school.

Support system

The first initiative to establish a formal support system for the modernists was the opening of the Atelier of Modern Art in 1938 by Diosdado M. Lorenzo, Galo B. Ocampo and Victorio Edades at the Union College on 622 M.H. del Pilar Street in Ermita, Manila.

It was not long after its opening, however, that Edades resigned as its head citing the pressures of his work as founding director of the School of Architecture and Fine Arts of the University of Santo Tomas – the country’s oldest institution of higher education – established in 1611.

The atelier’s management was left to Galo B. Ocampo and Diosdado M. Lorenzo. The Atelier had been founded in order to provide a counterweight to the powerful academic establishment, and although it did not prosper, it paved the way for a more stable support system for the arts.

Soon, the original triumvirate consisting of Victorio Edades, Carlos B. Francisco and Galo B. Ocampo expanded into the Thirteen Moderns which included Diosdado Lorenzo, Vicente Manansala, Cesa Legaspi, Anita Magsaysay-Ho, Hernando R. Ocampo, Ricarte Puruganan, Demetrio Diego, Bonifacio Cristobal, Jose Pardo and Arsenio Capili.

Artistic development was interrupted by the Second World War and the Japanese Occupation of the Philippines in 1941.

The Second World War wrought havoc and the population suffered from starvation and military atrocities. Victorio Edades headed the cultural arm of the Kempeitai, which tried to stimulate artistic activity by organising painting and music competitions and persuading top artists to take part. It was only after the war that paintings portraying the horrors of the Japanese Occupation were

done by such artists as Diosdado Lorenzo, Demetrio Diego and Dominador Castaneda.

After the war, other prominent artists who studied overseas included Jose Joya (1913-1995). He was awarded a painting grant to study in Madrid from 1954 to 1955 by the Instituto de Cultura Hispanica of the Spanish government. A year later, he finished his master's degree in painting under a Fulbright Smith-Mundt grant. He also received a grant from the John D. Rockefeller III Fund and Ford Foundation to paint in New York, from 1967 to 1969.

Among the women artists, one of the most accomplished was Anita Magsaysay-Ho (1914-2012). She studied at the University of the Philippines (UP) School of Fine Arts under Fabian de la Rosa, Vicente Rivera y Mir, and Fernando and Pablo Amorsolo. She also studied at the School of Design under Victorio Edades and Enrique Ruiz. From there, she proceeded to the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan in the US. In 1949, while in the US, she was affiliated with the Art Students League in New York taking courses in oil painting, graphics and figure sketching.

Art Galleries and Art Fair

Among the earliest commercial art galleries was the Philippines Art Gallery (PAG), founded by Lyd Arguilla in 1951 in Manila.

After that, especially in the late 1990s, there was a proliferation of art galleries, many of which have since closed. For instance, even the Malaysian-owned Valentine Willie Fine Art Gallery opened in Manila in 2008 but closed in 2014.³

However, there is an enduring interest in collecting art among the upper-class and also the middle class that is supporting a number of active galleries. And this is seen in their participation in the local art fairs.

3 Art Radar, <http://artradarjournal.com/2012/10/09/southeast-asian-gallerist-valentine-willie-retires-from-commercial-world/>

In 2013, the first art fair was held at The Link car park building in Makati, attracting tremendous interest among local exhibitors. Art Fair Philippines is regarded as the premier platform for exhibiting and selling the best in modern and contemporary Philippine visual art.⁴

Art Fair Philippines 2018 had both local and foreign gallery participation. Local galleries that exhibited works were 1335 Mabini, Altro Mondo Arte Contemporanea, Archivo 1984, Art Lab: Atelier Cesare & Jean Marie Syjuco, Art Verite' Gallery, Art Underground, Artery Art Space, Artinformal, Asian Cultural Council / Leon Gallery, Avellana Art Gallery, Blanc, Boston Art Gallery, Canvas, Finale Art File, Galerie Anna, Galerie Stephanie, Galleria Duemila, J Studio, Kaida Contemporary, Paseo Art Gallery, MO Space, Pintô Art Museum, Salcedo Private View, Secret Fresh, Silverlens, The Crucible, The Drawing Room, Tin-aw, Underground Gallery, Vinyl on Vinyl, VIVA EXCO, West Gallery and Ysovel Art Gallery.

Foreign galleries that took part were Arndt Art Agency, Art Cube Gallery, Artemis Art, Cayón, Edouard Malingue Gallery, Fost Gallery, Gajah Gallery, Gallery Kogure Tokyo & NYC, Gallery Orange, Mind Set Art Center, Nunu Fine Art, Singapore Tyler Print Institute, Soka Art, Taksu, Yavuz Gallery and YOD Gallery.

Art Awards

Started in 1994, the Philippine Art Awards (PAA) is under the aegis of Philip Morris Philippines Manufacturing Inc. Despite the cancellation of the ASEAN Art Awards in 2005, Philip Morris opted to continue their sponsorship of the Philippine competition. Held every other year, the PAA is said to be among the most prestigious art events in the country.⁵

⁴ Art Fair Philippines, <https://artfairphilippines.com/2018/the-art-fair/>

⁵ Philippine Art Awards, <https://philippineartawards.org/through-the-years/>

Auctions

Established in 2010 in Manila, Salcedo Auctions, started with an auction of only 10 paintings. It is still the only formal auction house in the Philippines. Its sales include fine art, jewellery, decorative arts, collectibles and rare automobiles.

Also set up in 2010, Leon Gallery held its first auction in Manila in 2013. The gallery focuses on “museum-quality” and historical works. Its collections expanded from “old master” paintings by Juan Luna, Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo and Fernando Amorsolo to modernist works by Fernando Zobel, Diosado Lorenzo and Federico Aguilar.

The gallery touts itself as the purveyor of Philippine antiques, from the pre-Hispanic to the Hispanic era. The gallery’s “heirloom and estate pieces” include antique furniture, ivory, pottery, rugs and Orientalia.

Both Salcedo Auctions and Leon Gallery, each hold a staggering eight to nine local auctions a year. And each has had its fair share of breaking records in Philippine art.

Also, increasing sales of Philippine artworks in international auctions, particularly in Hong Kong, has also buoyed and boosted the confidence of local and foreign-based collectors.

Top 10

Based on auction benchmarks compiled and in chronological order, the top 10 artists of the Philippines are Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo (1855-1913), Juan Luna y Novicio (1857-1899), Romualdo Frederico Locatelli (1905-1943), Carlos V. Francisco Botong (1913-1968), Jose Joya (1913-1995), Anita Magsaysay-Ho (1914-2012), Fernando Zobel de Ayala (1924-1984), Ang Kiu Kok (1931-2005), Benedicto Reyes Cabrera (1942) and Ronald Ventura (1973).

AUCTION BENCHMARKS OF ARTISTS IN THE PHILIPPINES

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
1	Juan Luna Y Novicio (1857-1899)	España y Filipinas (Spain and Philippines) 1884, Oil on canvas 229.5cm x 79.5cm Hammer Price: US\$2,838,000 With Premium (12.9%): US\$3,338,520 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 5 October 2013	A Do... Va la Nave Oil on canvas 55cm x 104cm Hammer Price: US\$863,000 With Premium (16.8%): US\$1,008,684 Auction House: Salcedo Auctions, Manila Date: 19 September 2015	Parisian Life 1892, Oil on canvas 57cm x 79cm Hammer Price: US\$769,200 With Premium (20%): US\$855,619 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 27 October 2002
2	Jose Joya (1913-1995)	Space Transfiguration 1959, Oil on canvas 152cm x 178cm Hammer Price: US\$1,847,903 With Premium (16.8%): US\$2,158,350 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 3 March 2018	Homage to Turner 1965, Oil on canvas 90cm x 182cm Hammer Price: US\$580,049 With Premium (20%): US\$701,214 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 23 November 2014	Elysium 1960, Oil on canvas 132cm x 193cm Hammer Price: US\$538,860 With Premium (20%): US\$654,330 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 27 May 2017
3	Anita Magsaysay-Ho (1914-2012)	Nag-pilon Ng Dayami (Gleaners) 1975, Oil on canvas 85cm x 142.5cm Hammer Price: US\$1,482,349 With Premium (20%): US\$1,786,552 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 26 November 2016	Women with Baskets and Fruits 1958, Oil on canvas 77cm x 102cm Hammer Price: US\$1,280,200 With Premium (20%): US\$1,549,042 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 30 September 2017	Paguhuli Ng Mga Manok (Catching Chickens) 1962, Oil on canvas 102cm x 132cm Hammer Price: US\$1,030,400 With Premium (20%): US\$1,241,632 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 5 October 2014
4	Ang Kiu Kok (1931-2005)	Fishermen 1981, Oil on canvas 102cm x 202cm Hammer Price: US\$1,131,200 With Premium (16.8%): US\$1,321,241 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 10 June 2017	Fishermen 1992, Oil on canvas 94cm x 184cm Hammer Price: US\$399,900 With Premium (20%): US\$485,040 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 6 October 2013	Harvest 1990, Oil on canvas 63.5cm x 91.5cm Hammer Price: US\$344,000 With Premium (22%): US\$401,792 Auction House: Salcedo Auctions, Manila Date: 12 March 2016

* The artists are ranked according to their auction records in the first column. The second and third columns show their second and third most expensive artworks sold in auctions.

** NA: not available

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
5	Carlos V. Francisco Botong (1913–1968)	Muslim Betrothal 1958, Oil on canvas 109.5cm x 176cm Hammer Price: US\$1,096,500 With Premium (20%): US\$1,326,120 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 4 April 2015	Untitled 1960, Oil on canvas 51cm x 76cm Hammer Price: US\$565,240 With Premium (16.8%): US\$660,200 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 11 June 2016	Kalantiao at Lububan 1945, Oil on canvas 107cm x 70cm Hammer Price: US\$550,940 With Premium (16.8%): US\$643,497 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 10 September 2016
6	Ronald Ventura (1973)	Grayground 2011, Mixed media on canvas 152.5cm x 396cm Hammer Price: US\$900,200 With Premium (20%): US\$1,082,812 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 4 April 2011	Forest 2015, Oil on canvas 243.5cm x 365.5cm Hammer Price: US\$838,500 With Premium (20%): US\$1,016,520 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 3 April 2016	Halo 2013, Oil on canvas 235cm x 366cm Hammer Price: US\$838,500 With Premium (20%): US\$1,016,520 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 4 April 2015
7	Fernando Zobel de Ayala (1924–1984)	Hattecvm Undated, Oil on canvas 100cm x 149cm Hammer Price: US\$875,840 With Premium (20%): US\$1,056,160 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 6 April 2013	Aracili 1959, Oil on canvas 97cm x 146cm Hammer Price: US\$747,040 With Premium (20%): US\$900,312 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 25 May 2013	Garden Window with A Trumpet 1953, Oil on masonite 122cm x 61 cm Hammer Price: US\$635,880 With Premium (16.8%): US\$743,875 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 6 February 2015
8	Benedicto Reyes Cabrera (1942)	Sabel 2003, Oil on canvas 244cm x 183cm Hammer Price: US\$856,399 With Premium (16.8%): US\$1,000,274 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 12 September 2015	Isadora in Motion 1998, Acrylic on canvas 244cm x 198cm Hammer Price: US\$695,680 With Premium (16.8%): US\$812,554 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 11 June 2016	Tres Marias 2003, Acrylic on canvas 123cm x 175cm Hammer Price: US\$482,880 With Premium (16.8%): US\$564,003 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 3 December 2016

AUCTION BENCHMARKS OF ARTISTS IN THE PHILIPPINES

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
9	Romualdo Frederico Locatelli (1905–1943)	Balinese Girl 1939, Oil on canvas 155cm x 117.5cm Hammer Price: US\$774,000 With Premium (16.8%): US\$933,960 Auction House: Bonhams, Hong Kong Date: 3 October 2015	Portrait of A Nude 1940, Oil on canvas 136.5cm x 94cm Hammer Price: US\$747,619 With Premium (20%): US\$902,298 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 5 April 2014	Gambuh Dancer 1939, Oil on canvas 129cm x 89cm Hammer Price: US\$709,500 With Premium (20%): US\$853,980 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 7 October 2012
10	Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo (1855–1913)	La Inocencia 1901, Oil on canvas 117cm x 81cm Hammer Price: US\$704,200 With Premium (16.8%): US\$822,205 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 3 December 2016	Banks of The Pasig River, Manila 1876, Oil on canvas 35cm x 54.5cm Hammer Price: US\$589,295 With Premium (20%): US\$713,423 Auction House: Christie's, London Date: 15 December 2016	Banks of the Pasig River, Manila 1876, Oil on canvas 35cm x 54.5cm Hammer Price: US\$488,989 With Premium (20%): US\$593,055 Auction House: Christie's, London Date: 15 December 2016
11	Hernando Ruiz Ocampo (1911–1978)	Pagoda 1967, Oil on canvas 101.5cm x 76.2cm Hammer Price: US\$703,080 With Premium (16.8%): US\$821,197 Auction House: Salcedo Auctions, Manila Date: 7 March 2015	Playmates 1958, Oil on canvas 86cm x 126cm Hammer Price: US\$645,000 With Premium (20%): US\$779,160 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 28 November 2015	Passage 1971, Oil on canvas 91cm x 274cm Hammer Price: US\$423,800 With Premium (16.8%): US\$494,998 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 10 September 2016
12	Vicente Silva Manansala (1910–1981)	Tiange (Market Scene) 1977, Oil on canvas 111.5cm x 140cm Hammer Price: US\$619,401 With Premium (20%): US\$753,594 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 2 April 2017	Market Scene 1980, Oil on canvas 109cm x 152cm Hammer Price: US\$557,200 With Premium (16.8%): US\$650,809 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 2 December 2017	Pila sa Bigas 1979, Oil on canvas 91cm x 122cm Hammer Price: US\$525,200 With Premium (16.8%): US\$613,433 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 10 June 2017

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** NA: not available

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
13	Fabian de la Rosa (1869–1937)	Women Weaving Hats c.1930, Oil on canvas 91cm x 71cm Hammer Price: US\$525,200 With Premium (16.8%): US\$613,433 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 10 June 2017	Women Working in A Rice Field 1902, Oil on canvas 65cm x 96cm Hammer Price: US\$367,296 With Premium (11.5%): US\$409,621 Auction House: Christie's, Singapore Date: 1 October 2000	Fishermen's Houses, Tondo 1928, Oil on canvas 50cm x 70cm Hammer Price: US\$161,250 With Premium (16.8%): US\$188,340 Auction House: Salcedo Auctions, Manila Date: 12 March 2016
14	Arturo Luz (1926–1979)	Los Borrachos 1952–1954, Oil on canvas 71.5cm x 87cm Hammer Price: US\$490,200 With Premium (20%): US\$593,400 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 30 May 2015	Musicians Undated, Enamel on panel 71cm x 127cm Hammer Price: US\$381,420 With Premium (16.8%): US\$445,498 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 10 September 2016	Magbabanig 1952, Oil on wood 70cm x 39cm Hammer Price: US\$378,540 With Premium (16.8%): US\$440,873 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 20 February 2016
15	Alfonso Ossorio (1916–1990)	Sans titre Circa 1951 Oil and encre on toile 162cm x 130cm Hammer Price: US\$393,273 With Premium (20%): US\$474,584 Auction House: Christie's, Paris Date: 7 December 2016	The Skull Circa 1950, Oil on canvas 162cm x 130cm Hammer Price: US\$286,097 With Premium (20%): US\$345,182 Auction House: Christie's, Paris Date: 3 December 2014	Le guerrier, la colombe et la chouette Undated, Oil on canvas 256.5cm x 170cm Hammer Price: US\$242,827 With Premium (20%): US\$292,820 Auction House: Christie's, Paris Date: 31 May 2011
16	Fernando Amorsolo (1892–1972)	El Ciego 1929, Oil on board 73.5cm x 58.5cm Hammer Price: US\$446,109 With Premium (20%): US\$548,076 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 26 May 2018	Portrait of a Woman 1927, Oil on board 61cm x 46cm Hammer Price: US\$366,000 With Premium (14%): US\$424,800 Auction House: Michaan's Auctions, Alameda Date: 13 June 2016	Lavenderas 1923, Oil on canvas 58.5cm x 82.5cm Hammer Price: US\$359,519 With Premium (20%): US\$433,990 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 30 May 2010

AUCTION BENCHMARKS OF ARTISTS IN THE PHILIPPINES

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
17	Nena Saguil (1914–1994)	Barrio Mother and Child 1953, Oil on wood 76cm x 61cm Hammer Price: US\$260,880 With Premium (16.8%): US\$304,707 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 11 June 2016	Lanterns No.2 1952, Oil on masonite 51cm x 41cm Hammer Price: US\$127,855 With Premium (16.8%): US\$149,334 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 9 September 2017	Still Life 1950, Oil on canvas 56cm x 71cm Hammer Price: US\$68,680 With Premium (16.8%): US\$80,218 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 10 June 2017
18	Jose John Santos III (1970)	One Way 2005, Oil on canvas 122cm x 152cm Hammer Price: US\$256,880 With Premium (13.8%): US\$300,035 Auction House: Salcedo Auctions, Manila Date: 23 September 2017	Untitled 2001, Oil on canvas 91cm x 149cm Hammer Price: US\$189,270 With Premium (16.8%): US\$221,067 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 20 February 2016	The Discussion 2006, Oil on canvas 90cm x 122cm Hammer Price: US\$170,850 With Premium (16.8%): US\$199,552 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 13 September 2014
19	Cesa Legaspi (1917–1994)	Ginintuang Mayo (Golden Spring) 1985, Oil on canvas 110cm x 175.5cm Hammer Price: US\$231,840 With Premium (25%): US\$283,360 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 28 May 2016	Workers 1974, Mixed media on paper mounted on wood 103cm x 206cm Hammer Price: US\$154,800 With Premium (25%): US\$190,920 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 5 October 2013	Ritual 1951, Oil on canvas 82cm x 60cm Hammer Price: US\$124,630 With Premium (16.8%): US\$145,567 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 7 February 2015
20	Elmer Borlongan (1967)	Quiapo 2004, Oil on canvas 183cm x 244cm Hammer Price: US\$180,115 With Premium (16.8%): US\$210,374 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 10 September 2016	Vulcanizing Shop 2000, Oil on canvas 152cm x 91cm Hammer Price: US\$115,665 With Premium (16.8%): US\$135,096 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 20 February 2016	Waiting Shed 2008, Oil on canvas 214cm x 152.5cm Hammer Price: US\$103,119 With Premium (25%): US\$128,898 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 3 October 2016

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** NA : not available

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
21	Jorge Pineda (1879–1946)	Philippine Lanterns 1933, Oil on canvas 51cm x 73cm Hammer Price: US\$179,840 With Premium (13.8%): US\$210,053 Auction House: Salcedo Auctions, Manila Date: 20 September 2014	Sungkaan 1924, Oil on canvas 66cm x 51cm Hammer Price: US\$128,459 With Premium (16.8%): US\$150,145 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 12 September 2015	Las Buyerás 1904, Oil on canvas 180cm x 147cm Hammer Price: US\$115,550 With Premium (16.8%): US\$134,962 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 28 September 2013
22	Victorio Edades (1895–1985)	American Football Player 1926, Oil on canvas 58cm x 47.5cm Hammer Price: US\$167,569 With Premium (25%): US\$206,238 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 22 November 2014	Women Bathing by a Waterfall 1953, Oil on canvas 68cm x 102cm Hammer Price: US\$87,720 With Premium (25%): US\$109,650 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 28 November 2015	The Lady in Maria Clara 1971, Oil on masonite 140cm x 102cm Hammer Price: US\$77,044 With Premium (16.8%): US\$89,987 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 7 February 2015
23	Brian Uhing (1975)	In the Guerdoners Garden Undated, Oil on canvas 123cm x 84cm Hammer Price: US\$154,800 With Premium (25%): US\$193,500 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 5 October 2015	The Beekeeper Undated, Oil on canvas 122cm x 91.5cm Hammer Price: US\$116,009 With Premium (25%): US\$145,011 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 3 October 2016	Untitled Undated, Oil on canvas 72cm x 49cm Hammer Price: US\$26,976 With Premium (16.8%): US\$31,507 Auction House: Salcedo Auctions, Manila Date: 20 September 2014
24	Federico Aguilar Alcuaz (1932–2011)	Bodegon en Azul 1963, Oil on canvas 161cm x 129cm Hammer Price: US\$154,505 With Premium (16.8%): US\$175,554 Auction House: Salcedo Auctions, Manila Date: 9 March 2013	Cockfight 1968, Oil on canvas 98cm x 130cm Hammer Price: US\$113,520 With Premium (25%): US\$141,384 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 31 May 2015	Viento Sobre Viento 1964, Oil on canvas 177cm x 108cm Hammer Price: US\$93,882 With Premium (16.8%): US\$106,787 Auction House: Salcedo Auctions, Manila Date: 22 September 2012

AUCTION BENCHMARKS OF ARTISTS IN THE PHILIPPINES

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
25	Geraldine Javier (1970)	<p>Ella amo “apasionadamente y fue correspondida 2010, Mixed media 228.5cm x 160cm</p> <p>Hammer Price: US\$154,079 With Premium (25%): US\$187,462</p> <p>Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 30 May 2010</p>	<p>The Absurdity of Being 2007, Oil on canvas 152.5cm x 145cm</p> <p>Hammer Price: US\$103,119 With Premium (25%): US\$128,898</p> <p>Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 27 November 2016</p>	<p>Chopsticks on Saturday, Fun Machine Morning 2011, Mixed media on plexiglass box 196cm x 188cm</p> <p>Hammer Price: US\$96,450 With Premium (25%): US\$118,312</p> <p>Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 30 May 2011</p>
26	Danilo Dalena (1942)	<p>Alibangbang Series 1990, Oil on canvas 117cm x 169cm</p> <p>Hammer Price: US\$144,367 With Premium (16.8%): US\$168,620</p> <p>Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 3 March 2018</p>	<p>Opening (Jai-Ali Series) 1996, Oil on canvas 122cm x 91cm</p> <p>Hammer Price: US\$63,784 With Premium (16.8%): US\$74,499</p> <p>Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 13 September 2014</p>	<p>Bangungot 1983, Oil on canvas 74cm x 60cm</p> <p>Hammer Price: US\$63,784</p> <p>With Premium (16.8%): US\$74,499</p> <p>Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 13 September 2014</p>
27	Annie Cabigting (1971)	<p>Riders On A Beach, A Passing Grey Garden At Fundacion Bayeler Undated, Oil on canvas 122cm x 132cm</p> <p>Hammer Price: US\$140,866 With Premium (25%): US\$176,082</p> <p>Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 26 November 2017</p>	<p>Painting Photograph, Photograph Painted 2007, Oil on canvas 183cm x 122cm</p> <p>Hammer Price: US\$140,206 With Premium (25%): US\$175,257</p> <p>Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 27 May 2018</p>	<p>This Is My Painting If I Paint It. This Is Your Painting If You Paint It (After Reinhardt) 2010, Oil on canvas 244cm x 163cm</p> <p>Hammer Price: US\$139,300 With Premium (16.8%): US\$162,702</p> <p>Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 18 February 2017</p>

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** NA: not available

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
28	Mauro Malang Santos (1928–2017)	Tres Marias 1992, Oil on canvas 109cm x 109cm Hammer Price: US\$140,598 With Premium (13.8%): US\$164,218 Auction House: Salcedo Auction, Manila Date: 10 March 2018	Untitled (Barrio Scene) 1974, Oil on wood 81cm x 122cm Hammer Price: US\$138,320 With Premium (13.8%): US\$161,557 Auction House: Salcedo Auction, Manila Date: 23 September 2017	Red Sky 1972, Oil on canvas 61cm x 118cm Hammer Price: US\$123,380 With Premium (16.8%): US\$144,107 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 18 February 2017
29	Juvenal Sanso (1929)	Family Portrait 1956, Oil on canvas 97cm x 145cm Hammer Price: US\$136,680 With Premium (16.8%): US\$159,642 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 13 September 2014	Hues Of The Morning, Circa 1971, Acrylic on canvas 81cm x 117cm Hammer Price: US\$87,560 With Premium (16.8%): US\$102,270 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 2 December 2017	Untitled, Circa 1668, Oil on canvas 58cm x 98cm Hammer Price: US\$51,142 With Premium (16.8%): US\$59,733 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 9 September 2017
30	Lao Lian Ben (1948)	Prediction 12 1980, Mixed media 178cm x 191cm Hammer Price: US\$129,350 With Premium (16.8%): US\$151,080 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 2 December 2017	Substance 2008, Acrylic on canvas 183cm x 137cm Hammer Price: US\$125,190 With Premium (13.8%): US\$146,221 Auction House: Salcedo Auction, Manila Date: 10 March 2018	Under the Influence of Moonlight 1979, Acrylic on marine board 132cm x 122cm Hammer Price: US\$95,520 With Premium (16.8%): US\$111,567 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 18 February 2017

AUCTION BENCHMARKS OF ARTISTS IN THE PHILIPPINES

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
31	Jigger Cruz (1984)	<p>Blares of the Opposite 2013, Mixed media on canvas 165cm x 204cm</p> <p>Hammer Price: US\$122,417 With Premium (16.8%): US\$142,983</p> <p>Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 5 December 2015</p>	<p>Jazz in a Restless Landscapes of Silhouettes and Screeches 2014, Oil on canvas 175cm x 205cm</p> <p>Hammer Price: US\$116,100 With Premium (25%): US\$145,125</p> <p>Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 5 April 2015</p>	<p>Stranded Beyond the Scream of Symmetries 2013, Oil on canvas 152.5cm x 304.5cm, diptych</p> <p>Hammer Price: US\$96,674 With Premium (25%): US\$120,842</p> <p>Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 6 April 2014</p>
32	Romulo Olazo (1934–2015)	<p>Permutation Series II No. 118 1994, Acrylic on canvas 152cm x 214cm</p> <p>Hammer Price: US\$121,200 With Premium (16.8%): US\$141,561</p> <p>Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 10 June 2017</p>	<p>Diaphanous B–LXXVII 1982, Oil on canvas 274cm x 183cm</p> <p>Hammer Price: US\$106,450 With Premium (16.8%): US\$124,333</p> <p>Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 5 December 2015</p>	<p>Diaphanous 409 1983, Oil on canvas 86cm x 117cm</p> <p>Hammer Price: US\$83,580 With Premium (16.8%): US\$97,621</p> <p>Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 2 December 2017</p>
33	Nona Garcia (1978)	<p>Sitting Still 2013, Oil on canvas 213cm x 152.5cm</p> <p>Hammer Price: USD\$79,980 With Premium (25%): US\$99,975</p> <p>Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 5 October 2013</p>	<p>White Undated, Oil on canvas 220cm x 145cm</p> <p>Hammer Price: US\$70,895 With Premium (25%): US\$87,652</p> <p>Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 4 October 2010</p>	<p>Sitting Still II Undated, Oil on canvas 213cm x 150.5cm</p> <p>Hammer Price: US\$64,250 With Premium (25%): US\$79,670</p> <p>Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 3 October 2011</p>

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** NA: not available

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
34	Alfredo Esquillo (1972)	The Coming of the Plagues 2013, Mixed media 240cm x 120cm Hammer Price: US\$77,400 With Premium (25%): US\$96,750 Auction House: Christie's, Hong kong Date: 30 May 2015	Daang Ligid Krus 1996, Oil , saw dust on canvas 185cm x 165cm Hammer Price: US\$73,952 With Premium (16.8%): US\$85,955 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 28 September 2013	Ritwal 1995, Mixed media on rubber panel 120cm x 162cm Hammer Price: US\$71,590 With Premium (16.8%): US\$81,495 Auction House: Salcedo Auctions, Manila Date: 22 September 2012
35	Pacita Barsana Abad (1946–2004)	Orange Punch 2003, Mixed media on canvas 243cm x 180cm Hammer Price: US\$70,103 With Premium (25%): US\$87,628 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 27 May 2018	Biennale in Venice 2003, Mixed media on canvas 249cm x 150cm Hammer Price: US\$48,754 With Premium (25%): US\$60,942 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 28 May 2017	Burning Desire 2002, Mixed media on canvas 231cm x 180cm Hammer Price: US\$44,807 With Premium (25%): US\$56,008 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 1 October 2017
36	Manuel Ocampo (1965)	Flowers with Eyes 2013, Oil on canvas 183cm x 122cm Hammer Price: US\$32,114 With Premium (16.8%): US\$37,509 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 12 September 2015	The Compensatory Motif of the Libidinal Economy of a Painter's Bad Conscience 2011, Oil on canvas Size (cm): 196 x 236 Hammer Price: US\$24,519 With Premium (16.8%): US\$28,638 Auction House: Leon Gallery, Manila Date: 29 November 2014	La Ripaille – The Priest 1991, Oil and collage on canvas 146cm x 222cm Hammer Price: US\$17,000 With Premium (25%): US\$21,250 Auction House: Bonhams, New York Date: 2 May 2018

ART AUCTIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES 2010-2018

AUCTION HOUSE	YEAR	DATE	CITY	LOTS	TOTAL SALES IN P\$	TOTAL SALES IN US\$	SOLD BY LOT (%)
Salcedo	2010	July 15	Manila	10	3,749,280	80,909	70
		July 24	Manila	90	2,525,099	54,567	16
	2011	May 14	Manila	70	578,160	13,413	30
		June 25	Manila	125	715,400	16,518	28
		Sept 10	Manila	66	6,755,712	159,164	55
		Oct 7	Manila	6	740,000	16,909	67
		Nov 19	Manila	171	3,463,937	79,878	43
	2012	March 24	Manila	62	11,403,512	265,473	82
		June 2	Manila	125	2,011,996.80	46,296	69
		Sept 22	Manila	78	35,541,072	854,407	86
		Nov 24	Manila	191	11,721,464	285,769	60
	2013	March 9	Manila	60	59,384,624	1,456,110	95
		June 15	Manila	147	8,205,725	191,521	85
		June 29	Manila	66	13,197,232	301,160	95
		Sept 14	Manila	68	77,424,384	1,766,050	94
		Nov 16	Manila	260	15,064,280	345,725	77
	2014	March 8	Manila	86	70,502,816	1,591,953	91
		June 21	Manila	283	22,874,112	521,301	83
		Sept 20	Manila	68	194,431,120	4,357,201	96
	2015	March 7	Manila	129	163,759,440	3,696,050	88
		June 6	Manila	319	25,990,686	576,473	74
		Sept 19	Manila	133	197,713,200	4,456,455	90
		Nov 28	Manila	399	12,791,118	271,811	51
			Manila	79	24,478,944	518,953	56
	2016	March 12	Manila	118	137,474,440	2,958,449	92
		June 4	Manila	388	32,021,888	773,328	76
		Sept 24	Manila	163	158,796,608	3,325,200	89
		Nov 26	Manila	510	54,052,704	1,079,432	64

AUCTION HOUSE	YEAR	DATE	CITY	LOTS	TOTAL SALES IN ₱	TOTAL SALES IN US\$	SOLD BY LOT (%)
Salcedo	2017	March 11	Manila	135	159,211,248	3,168,303	94
		June 3	Manila	338	27,305,504	553,209	86
		July 29	Manila	77	5,754,736	113,828	91
		Sept 23	Manila	135	198,849,664	3,923,303	90
		Oct 21	Manila	260	7,855,968	152,405	65
		Nov 25	Manila	251	46,625,000	922,708	67
	2018	March 10	Manila	149	119,100,960	2,291,502	85
		May 5	Manila	219	18,566,878	357,591	82
Leon Gallery	2014	June 21	Manila	153	143,967,280	3,281,014	99.3
		Sept 13	Manila	164	223,987,360	5,095,712	99.3
		Nov 29	Manila	154	164,386,656	3,660,890	100
	2015	Feb 7	Manila	147	157,558,688	4,191,061	99.3
		July 26	Manila	180	365,278,920	8,025,177	99.4
	2016	Feb 20	Manila	206	237,489,430	4,980,153	99
		June 11	Manila	172	339,542,030	7,364,666	98.8
		July 30	Manila	177	20,084,080	422,857	97.2
		Sept 2	Manila	159	262,522,000	56,363,473	81.7
		Oct 22	Manila	240	21,594,116	446,998	76.3
		Dec 3	Manila	147	205,632,240	4,145,545	93.2
	2017	Feb 18	Manila	211	273,933,376	5,467,710	94.8
		June 10	Manila	145	308,714,380	6,226,769	91.7
		July 29	Manila	410	30,207,685	597,508	90.2
		Sept 9	Manila	147	328,564,240	6,453,001	94.1
		Dec 2	Manila	144	308,514,632	6,139,441	88.9
	2018	March 3	Manila	158	539,202,154	10,374,249	92.7
		June 9	Manila	160	324,096,280	6,077,129	93.8



Jaime L. Ponce de Leon

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THROUGH THICK & THIN

When it comes to the business of auctioning Philippine art, León Gallery principal Jaime L. Ponce de Leon, 38, is right in the thick of it.

Ambitious, resourceful and sharp-witted, Leon operates one of two highly competitive auction enterprises in Manila that deal not only in fine art but the decorative arts as well. His auction business commenced five years ago and operates under the name of León Gallery and offers some 1,600 lots annually.

"We started our auction in January 2013 because we were asked by an insurance company to dispose of their holdings of art. That's how we got started and have continued since then," says the boyish-looking Leon.

"We hold four big ones a year and four online sales. The pieces here are for the online sale (Leon Exchange: Online Auction 4 on July 29, 2017).

"We normally have 150 to 200 lots in each auction. So eight auctions total about 1,600 lots in a year. Our online auction includes almost 500 works. We also offer furniture in online and regular sales."

According to the company's website, León Gallery was established in 2010 and deals in "historically important and museum quality" Philippine art. At the "core of León Gallery's collection", adds the website, are "Old Master paintings" by Juan Luna, Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo, Fabian de la Rosa and Fernando Amorsolo.

"The gallery's holdings include modernist works of notable artists such as Fernando Zobel, Romeo Tabuena, Diosdado Lorenzo and Federico Aguilar Alcuaz."

Philippine antiques auctioned include those that "hark from the pre-Hispanic to the Hispanic era". The gallery's "heirloom and estate pieces" include furniture, ivory, orientalia, ceramics and rugs.

Leon is no stranger to the media and is regularly featured in glossy magazines like PeopleAsia's Men Who Matter 2017. Although he didn't

quite make the cover, Leon is described as an “art connoisseur” with an interesting background that harks back to his days in the provincial town of Dumaguete.

He studied business management at Silliman University but pursued his dreams of a career in interior design when he arrived in Manila in 2006. He enrolled at the Philippine School of Interior Design and four years later, he established León Gallery at the Corinthian Plaza in Makati City.

The ever vigilant Leon cites artprice.com as a “very good source” of information on León Gallery’s auction records, when shown a list of auction records of Philippine art.

“I think everything is accurate there,” says Leon, who confirms that his auction results are submitted to artprice.com.

The Edge: When it comes to selling art at auctions in the Philippines, do you have your own ideas on what sells and what doesn’t do well?

Jaime L. Ponce de Leon: The good ones always sell; pieces that represent the best period of the artists, and the finest quality of works always sell. Mediocre works are not sure sales. So, we always vie for the best pieces.

What do you mean by good works? Are there certain categories of artists?

On a case-by-case basis. Ang Kiukok’s work from the early 1980s would be considered his best. Paintings of fish, harvest scenes or fishermen are favourite subjects of the new market. Amorsolo’s art from the 1920s and 1930s is highly sought after by collectors. Jose Joya’s pieces from the late 1950s to early 1960s are also coveted.

Are your customers at auctions into the works of the older generation of artists or are they equally interested in contemporary art?

Ninety per cent of the clients at Salcedo, León Gallery, Christie's or Sotheby's are the same people. The remaining 10% choose auction houses either due to their proximity or happenstance.

What percentage of your art at auctions is made up of contemporary art?

We always try to have a good mix of different artists in every sale. It depends on what comes up and how we can incorporate them in our sale.

In our upcoming sale, there might be around 50% modern, 40% contemporary and 10% old masters¹.

Do you have any problem authenticating the works?²

We get the respective authorities to authenticate particular pieces. Sylvia Amorsolo-Lazo for Amorsolo³, Federico Alcuaz's son for his works and Don Rafael Perez-Madero for a Zobel piece.

Have you encountered any problems?

A question of authenticity happens every now and then. If the questions are valid, we take out the pieces like every other auction house. There is no exception.

Your thoughts on the success of your recent auction? (The Spectacular Mid-Year Auction 2017, June 10, 2017)

It was the highest price ever paid for Filipino art in the Philippines.

¹ Referring to the *Leon Exchange: Online Auction 4* on July 29, 2017

² Elizabeth Lolarga, December 9, 2012. *Why is art forgery on the rise again?*. Philippine Daily Inquirer, www.authenticationinart.org/pdf/artmarket/20121209-Why-is-art-forgery-on-the-rise-again-Inquirer-LifeStyle.pdf

³ Ramil Digal Gulle, September 27, 2008. *Getting real: Avoiding fake Amorsolos*. abs-cbnNEWS.com. <http://news.abs-cbn.com/features/09/27/08/getting-real-avoiding-fake-amorsolos>

The total sales for that auction was more than PHP300 million – about US\$6 million⁴.

On average, what is your sales turnover in an auction?

About PHP300 million or close. Sometimes PHP80 million to PHP90 million (about US\$1.5 million to US\$1.7 million). PHP300 million was good for this sale because we only had 144 lots. Normally, we would have 200 lots.

When you held your first few auctions, were you surprised with the response from the collectors?

We came in at the right time when the Philippine art market was vibrant and receptive. We are also enjoying good response from the international art market. I think it's a carryover [effect]. When London and New York do well, it spills over into Southeast Asia.

But 99% of your works are Filipino.

We try to specialise in Filipino art at the moment. But 1% of the works feature Indonesian, Spanish or American artists.

In your upcoming auction, there is only one Chinese artwork.

True. We specialise in Philippine art.

Is it because Filipino collectors don't really collect other categories of art?

It always starts that way. The time will come when the Filipino collector will become more mature and educated in art appreciation. That will be the time when Filipino collectors will venture into collecting foreign art. It's just a matter of time.

⁴ <https://leon-gallery.com/auction/the-spectacular-mid-year-auction-2017/>

Do you participate in art fairs?

We participate together with the Asian Cultural Council (ACC), supported by the Rockefeller Foundation. We participated at Art Fair Philippines, that's it.

Only in Manila? Do you venture into Hong Kong or Singapore?

No, not yet. There is [negative] response from the organisers, as we are known to be an auction house and not a gallery, hence, their opposition to our joining the art fairs. I don't know if it's valid because some auction houses also function as galleries, even Christie's and Sotheby's as they have their respective private sales. I don't see any reason why we should be exempt from these fairs because we do a lot of private sales.

Do you mean that you have applied to participate in Art Stage Singapore and other fairs?

I haven't applied yet but I heard such a response from organisers. We haven't been turned down because we haven't applied.

Your clientele is dominated by Filipinos?

Although largely Filipino, there are also expatriate buyers in Singapore and Hong Kong, or institutions that want to complete their collection, and need a particular work of an artist.

Do artists consign to you?

It's no problem because they do that in Christie's and Sotheby's.

How many serious collectors are there in Manila?

A collector is a contentious word. Selling his artwork will demote his standing as a collector. But, of course, every collector sells. Even museums sell to narrow down their collection. Let's put it this way,

people passionate about their collection number a dozen or two. They are not there to monetise their collection at any time.

Based on your observation, how has the Philippine art market performed since you started your auction in 2013. Your recent sale shows that the market is still very strong. What do you think?

The market will keep strong for as long as very good works are supplied to the market. But we also noticed that there is [a certain level of] discernment among our collectors. The last sale was very good, but it also had a number of unsold pieces, meaning the mediocre pieces did not sell. That tells you something about the [level of] discernment in the present Filipino market.

How many lots were unsold?

Probably about seven to nine pieces were not sold. They were good pieces so I was quite surprised. Most of them got sold eventually after the sale for the same starting prices. It could also signify that the Filipino collectors have matured.

Besides Christie's and Sotheby's in Hong Kong, are you aware of other auction houses in Southeast Asia?

I know auction houses in Southeast Asia because I have subscribed to the different auction databases. I get alerts from Masterpiece, 33 Auction and Larasati Auctioneers. I know the owner of Larasati. There's also K Auction which is Korean. I've bought something from Borobudur in the past, as a collector and a dealer.

Do you collect Southeast Asian works as well?

I try to concentrate on Filipino works. If there are works of Southeast Asian artists that I like such as Affandi or Natee Utarit, then I would buy. They are great artists.

While you subscribe to those databases, do you go by what's recorded as 100% true?

I go by whatever there is. Eventually word will come out whether something is accurate or not. But I don't go out of my way to find out about these things. What I know is within the Philippines. And normally everybody would know too. Paulino [Que, art collector] knows who won this or that.

What defines us as an auction house is integrity. The quality of pieces sold or presented in an auction reflects the trust of the collectors or the families who own these pieces in the auction house. You will see that we always highlight important families selling in our auction.

Do they allow you to use their names?

Absolutely, because I see the importance. Provenance plays a very important role especially in the selling of old masters' pieces. I think 99% of the authentication issues would be resolved with the provenance.

(In the Spectacular Mid-Year Auction 2017 Grand Independence Day Sale 10 June 2017 auction catalogue, examples of mentioned provenance were "Property of Dr and Mrs. Alejandro Roces Lagarda Collection"; "Property from the Collection of a Very Distinguished Family"; or "Property from the Collection of a Very Distinguished Lady".)

When you say 'old masters' pieces, how far do these works date?

It depends. Because we are a young country, old masters can fall within a certain period. Even some modernists could be classified as old masters. 'Modern' meaning artists active in the 1950s. But normally old masters would fall within the 19th to early 20th century – Juan Luna, Felix Hidalgo, Lorenzo Guerrero and Felix Martinez.

What's the brief history of Philippine art?

We were colonised in 1521. We have great art from then on till the 19th century. But we did not have a consumer class until the 19th century. So, even during the Galleon Trade, the best output of Philippine craftsmanship was exported.

During the Galleon Trade [period], nothing was left in the Philippines. Mexican museums and the Spanish anthropological museums housed the finest Philippine craftsmanship and art but there was nothing in the Philippines. Why? Because we did not have a consumer class.

What do you think of the other Southeast Asian art markets? Are you aware of them?

Yes, of course. Do you consider Hong Kong part of Southeast Asia?

I have noticed there is a softening of the market. I follow certain artists at auctions and if Indonesian artists precede Filipino artists, many artworks go unsold. I don't know if that is a reflection of the Indonesian art market.

What's the feedback on us from the foreign auction houses?

Your market is very insular and very Filipino.

Isn't it the same thing as the Indonesian market?

Based on your auction results, are you fine with only seven or eight lots remaining unsold? Is it negligible?

It's a high figure for us because we try to sell all either in a white-glove sale or one or two unsold pieces. We were excited and ecstatic about our September sale (The Magnificent September Auction 2016, Sept 10, 2016) because accompanying the sale was a major exhibition, the Philippines Art Gallery (PAG). There was a lady by the

name of Lyd Arguilla in the 1950s, who was the Peggy Guggenheim of the Philippines⁵.

She practically collected all works of modern artists from Anita Magsaysay–Ho, [Jose] Joya and [Vicente] Manansala to H.R. Ocampo. These were probably the best art that the Philippines had ever produced. We were able to get the consignment of the best artists from the States from an American who collected these pieces in the 1950s. These were shown prior to The Magnificent September Auction 2017. This was curated by Ramon N. Villegas and Lisa Guerrero Nakpil, two top Filipino curators.

In the catalogue, Leon writes: “Curators Ramon N. Villegas and Lisa Guerrero Nakpil conceptualised the show upon discovering the impressive material consigned by the estate of Anthony Stoner, which were all acquired from the PAG. Tony Stoner was an architect who arrived in Manila with his wife in the 1950s and stayed for the better part of 20 years.

Was it a single collector’s sale? How many lots were there?

A chunk of the pieces exhibited was from a single collector. Probably around seven pieces were displayed. These were the top of the particular artists’ works exhibited.

How do you compete with Sotheby’s and Christie’s in sourcing for artworks?

We don’t really compete; they are too big for us. But it is out of convenience that local collectors would prefer consigning to us. When collectors compare the outcome of prices, we, as a local auction house, surpass even the international auction houses. It may not be all the time but considering all the variables, it would be more

⁵ Carlomar Arcangel Daoana, August 28, 2017. *Revisiting the Glory Days of Philippine Art Gallery*. The Philippine Star. <https://www.pressreader.com/philippines/the-philippine-star/20170828/282492888827614>

advantageous for them to just consign locally. For the buyer's premium, we charge lower at 16.8% while they charge 25%. Bringing the works back is a headache, especially for a collector.

What's your seller's commission?

The seller's commission varies, as always. We only charge from 11.2%, which includes insurance, cataloguing and marketing fees. Other auction houses may have a fee but they add surcharges which end up costing significantly more.

Are you optimistic about the Filipino art market?

Very optimistic, so far. I haven't seen any softening of the market. People feel that certain artists have corrected the price but feed the market good works. It will contradict such [a notion].



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KEEPING TO THE STRAIGHT AND NARROW

Ramon E.S. Lerma, 45, proved the naysayers wrong when he and his wife Karen Kua-Lerma, 36, successfully pioneered the concept of auction houses in the country. Starting with an auction of only 10 paintings in their art gallery eight years ago, Salcedo Auctions has expanded beyond artworks. It is the only auction house in the Philippines to specialise in the sale of fine art, jewellery, decorative arts, collectibles and rare automobiles.

The Edge: When and why did you go into the art auction business?

Ramon E.S. Lerma: We started the business in 2010. Although we were based in Sydney, I still had my art collection in Manila. We had been to charity auctions in Manila so when we returned to the Philippines, we thought of doing auctions. At the time, nobody thought that it could happen. So we took the plunge and made it happen, essentially.

What was your background in art at that time?

I was the director of the Ateneo Art Gallery in Manila for 15 years. My background in art was an advantage and I was quite well-known on the art scene. It gave people confidence in me and they relied on my judgement on works of art.

I was not entrepreneurial in spirit but my wife was a diamond grader and knew about jewellery. So we started with jewellery auctions first. We financed the whole operation from concept to execution. Eight years later, our auction house offers jewellery, watches, cars and furniture.

Did you study art?

Yes, I did a Humanities degree and followed it up with a Master's degree in Arts Administration at the University of New South

Wales in Australia. I spent some time in Europe to learn art history. It has always been an interest.

So you started with jewellery auctions then moved to art?

We started going to jewellery auctions in Sydney such as Bonhams and enjoyed it. We wondered why there was nothing like this in the Philippines. There were a few auctions but nothing really formal. Christie's representatives would fly in and Sotheby's had an office here before it closed. Doing an auction in Manila was never on their radar. At the time, it was too early to attempt an auction in Manila.

So we got the ball rolling. Then Sotheby's and Christie's started sending their representatives over to our auctions, and they were not shy about it either. They came to our previews and introduced themselves. They tried to get our clients, you know the usual. Of course I derived a lot of satisfaction in that: 'Well now that we've started it here, you're back!' (laughs).

Do you remember what works you started your auctions with?

I'm proud of the fact that Salcedo Auctions started with 10 paintings by national artist Victorio Adades. It was a wonderful break for us since we were a newly established company. Rockwell, a luxury property company in the Philippines, was building a high-rise condominium building called Edades, named after the Philippine national artist. We were invited by Rockwell to do an all-Edades auction. That was our first auction. It just snowballed from there.

How many artworks did you sell?

Seven out of 10 artworks were sold at the time, which was good for something that had never been done before. When we started out, we had to reverse the mindset that in this part of the world, we bargain down, not price up. That was something new.

Generally, what do you think of auction house results?

The definition of an auction house in the Philippines is not as clearly defined as it is overseas. So, we don't look at other records of galleries purporting to do auctions. We have no way of ascertaining whether the results are real. It may sound like a biased opinion. But it stems from my knowledge of the business model of an auction house versus a gallery that has a financial stake in the pieces purportedly auctioned off.

I don't think the galleries are discerning. They don't take the time to investigate what is going on. They just accept the reports and don't go to the root of the matter.

I can respond to results from Christie's, Sotheby's and Salcedo but it's difficult to comment on other galleries.

What are your thoughts on Hernando Ruiz Ocampo's record price at Salcedo Auctions on March 7, 2015? There were claims that the sale price of US\$821,197 for the *Pagoda*, 1967 (101.5cm by 76.2cm) was untrue or that the sale did not happen.

Well, it's easy for people to say that. You can believe one or the other. Of course it was sold at the auction. It was a one-off sale. Without naming names, we can say it with confidence. If you are a pioneer and everybody is trying to follow your lead, you become an open target. People can say what they want but we know the truth.

Do you follow the results of Christie's and Sotheby's?

We do, on paper at least. That's what our sellers and buyers expect. Salcedo Auctions is more in line with international auction houses – working on a reserve, having strict reserves, publishing estimates, that sort of thing. You publish the low estimate for the sale. In the Philippines, there is no auction law to govern the process.

As opposed to a no bid price?

Yes, with a starting price, you don't know who you're bidding against because there is no low to high estimate. You have no idea what the reserve is, whether there is a bidder and if you stand a chance of getting the painting. I think that's something we have always emphasised. I know there are shill bidding laws in Australia, the US, New Zealand and the UK. (Shill bidding is when someone bids at auctions to artificially inflate prices.)

The English system of doing auctions is the way to conduct your auctions. I'd rather have a system that is recognised by clients all over the world because they know what we're doing. Rather than coming up with my own song and dance and calling it an auction.

What were you doing in Sydney professionally before coming back?

I used to work with the Sydney City Government at Customs House. Customs House is a heritage building and I was part of a team that ran the cultural programme for Customs House. The building itself is called Customs House because that is where the immigrants in the 18th – 19th century were processed, like Ellis Island in New York. I have dual citizenship.

You mean you have citizenship there? Is that possible in the Philippines?

Yes. Absolutely. That's the beauty of the Philippines. There are many emigrant Filipinos so they have enacted a law for both countries. Australia is also an immigrant country. There are people who have ties with their original countries of birth. So both countries offer dual citizenship. It has worked well for us because it allows us to be in both places to exercise our rights as citizens. My wife Karen, who is a Filipina-Chinese, also has dual nationality.

How many auctions did you hold in 2010?

From three auctions in 2010, we now run about nine. September is our big auction season where we hold four auctions over one weekend: Important Philippines Art; a Connoisseur Collection for décor, books, maps; Fine Jewellery and Timepieces; and Rare Automobiles. We are unique in that nobody else does rare automobiles. We hold two auctions in November and two in March.

Now we hold Salcedo auctions in March, June, September and November and Gavel & Block auctions (our new subsidiary) in July, October, February and May.

Is there enough supply in the fine art market to fuel all these auctions?

We needed to open a subsidiary to take in objects that fall under valuable collectibles. In art and design, we didn't even need to service it. There was no talk of consignments, for example. The consignments for the next Gavel & Block are closed already! We are a country of 110 million people!

Has it been a challenge when a rival comes in to source for artworks?

Not at all. Other companies such as Avant Auctions, Casa de Memoria (Spanish for House of Memories) and this other gallery started doing auctions before¹. They used to participate in Art Fair Philippines. In spite of all this, the volume is still the same. We used to run auctions for 70 lots for Important Philippines Art and they now number around 150. That's already tightly curated.

We had to open a new division with Gavel & Block for prints, editions, drawings. Of course, you have artists who wouldn't be clas-

¹ www.avantauctions.com
www.casadememoria.com
www.chuvaness.com/casa-de-memoria-meet-the-girls-behind-manilas-youngest-auction-house/#sthash.B1Y9w3Ht.dpbs

sified as national artists, but they have a following. Those also go into the other auctions. With an active art market, the awareness is growing. In a way we have opened a Pandora's Box. I just came back from a house where we were supposed to see about five paintings. The owner showed us the storage room where there were 50 works on the floor and by good artists too! And that's just one house.

How much is your seller's commission?

The seller's commission varies according to the relationship. That's true for all major auction houses. The published rate is 18%. Our sellers prefer to keep their rates confidential but competitive with Christie's or Sotheby's. The buyer's premium is set at 15% plus 12% VAT.

The trajectory is upwards for a lot of the 'blue-chip artists'. Market reputations are made by our auctions as well. In this case, we are unique. We do not accept consignments directly from artists for ethical and marketing reasons. It's one way to protect ourselves from being manipulated.

But if people want to manipulate, there are many ways to do that.

Absolutely. But as far as Salcedo Auctions is concerned, we do not knowingly accept consignments. We make it known that is not acceptable and they know our position is clear. I think people respect that. Salcedo Auctions is the only auction house in the Philippines that has all the institutional partnerships with international brands.

What do you mean by partnerships and with what brands?

The next auction is in September, and I'm quite excited about our partnership with The Peninsula, Manila. Salcedo Auctions has been invited by The Peninsula to transform the hotel into the 'Hong Kong Convention Centre' for one month. That includes the lobby,

fountain, gallery and ballroom. We are supported by Credit Suisse, Bank of Singapore, *Philippine Tatler* magazine and carmaker Lexus².

Out of these four main auctions you hold in a year, what is your total sales record?

I would say a quarter of a billion Philippine pesos during the auction weekend.

Are people more discerning than emotional when they bid?

I think people got caught up by the thrill of the bidding for a while. Until they started thinking: 'Wait a minute, what's going on at every auction?' People saw the effect in results and attendance level in certain places.

Records will continue to be set, but the prices of certain pieces are still within the realm of reason and reality. We are conservative in our estimates and people rely on that. We don't want the industry to implode because we are creating price bubbles. We have a certain responsibility to our clients to protect their interests. We don't give guarantees for these astronomical prices because they have been planted by people purporting to do auctions – just to show off these figures.

Is it difficult when the seller has certain astronomical figures in mind and you bring them back to earth?

Salcedo Auctions has all the star pieces. Why are people still consigning and agreeing to those prices? Because they have realised the reality of the prices. They would rather have a piece that sells than a piece that purports to sell but goes back to the seller and they have

² *The Well Appointed Life* 2017 auctions by Salcedo Auctions were held at The Peninsula Manila from 23-24 September 2017. The auctions consisted of four segments: *Important Philippine Art*, *Rare Automobiles*, *Fine Jewelry & Timepieces* and *Connoisseur Collection*. The previews were held at The Peninsula from 15- 23 September 2017.

a difficult time bringing it back into the market.

When it comes to documentation (consignment agreement) in the Philippines, there are no laws governing auctions. A lot of it is self-regulation.

Are you saying that not all auction records in the Philippines can be believed?

The artwork price is based on auction prices you submit. There's no checking. At the end of the day, you hear from the people who are in the market, who are friends with the collectors, who know whether their friends actually sold the work. Because you see the prices and wonder: 'How could it possibly get to that price?' People have to be circumspect because of price manipulation and price fixing in the art market. You're selling Ang Kiukok here for PHP80 million and another gallery is selling it for PHP50 million. Why are people still bringing their Ang Kiukok's work here? Why would they continue to do business with me?

If we compare Ang Kiukok's works in the records of Sotheby's and Salcedo Auctions, the prices are the same.

In an article published by the Philippine Daily Inquirer, the largest English language newspaper, they were trying to explain why a certain gallery doing auctions was publishing prices in a certain way. The gallery claimed it was a marketing strategy.

The only thing I'm concerned about is protecting this young industry. We welcome other players but we want other players to be proper in their dealings and to do things with a certain degree of responsibility. We focus on what we do and we make sure that anybody who deals with us is happy with their transaction.

Why do you normally fix your auctions on a Saturday?

It's a time when people are most free. Sundays usually are reserved

for families. It's a bit of a task for people to take the time to come to the auctions. The only time we have auctions on Sundays would be for the jewellery, watches and cars, which are growing markets.

They go in tandem with the art auctions because you draw the audience that is also looking at watches and jewellery. The main thing is the art, therefore the schedule for all the other categories still revolves around the art. The art scene in the Philippines is even more convoluted than the show business.

Do you participate in art fairs or attend any?

We used to go to Art Basel in Hong Kong because our clients are there. We don't really see the need to go to Basel in Switzerland because it's a different market altogether. We used to go, but after a while we kept seeing the same things so it got tiresome. We'd rather spend time with our children and go on holiday with them instead. But I attended the recent Art Stage Singapore.

VIETNAM

ART DEVELOPMENT IN VIETNAM

To chart the development of the arts in Vietnam, one has to go back to 1009 in the Ly Dynasty. Since then, the arts have included architecture, sculpture, stone and woodcarving, metalcraft, lacquercraft, furniture, ceramics, inlay work, woodblock printing and painting.¹

There is a distinct Chinese influence in the art and architecture of Vietnam. The Vietnamese were ruled by the Chinese, from the 2nd century BC until the 10th century AD. After winning their independence, the Vietnamese continued looking to China as their cultural model and their prime source of concepts of government, social organisation and the arts.²

The modern state of Vietnam was formalised in 1802 by King Gia Long, the founder of the Ngyuen Dynasty. He reigned from 1802 to 1819.³

In 1847, France invaded Vietnamese territory, and by 1885, a protectorate treaty signed between France and Indochina (Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia) had been ratified with Cochinchina (southern Vietnam) accorded the status of a full colony. French colonial authority in Vietnam ended in 1945 after 98 years.⁴

During the colonial rule in, an applied arts school, L'Ecole d'Art de Bien Hoa was founded in the South in 1903. But it was not until 1923 that it began to make progress towards a distinctive ceramic style capable of sustaining successful commercial enterprises.

In Saigon, the colonial authorities established the Gia Dinh School of Drawing (Ecole de Dessin) in 1913 and this was the country's sole junior high school until 1917. It was a member of the Central

1 Kerry Nguyen-Long, 2013. *Arts of Viet Nam, 1009 – 1945*. The Gioi Publishers. Hanoi. P. XI.

2 Peter Church, 2017. *A Short History of Southeast Asia*. John Wiley & Sons Pte Ltd, Singapore. P. 204.

3 Kerry Nguyen-Long, 2013. *Arts of Viet Nam, 1009–1945*. The Gioi Publishers. Hanoi. P. 1.

4 Ibid., p. 239.

Association of Paris Arts and Decoration, an association that provided a formal link with Western arts. In 1940 it was renamed Gia Dinh School of Applied Arts (Ecole des Arts Appliqués de Gia Dinh), the forerunner of the National Fine Arts College of Saigon and present-day Ho Chi Minh Fine Arts University.

In the north, l'École des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine (EBAI) was founded in 1925. It introduced the Western concept of fine arts and established a clear distinction between art and craft. The institute also offered a course of study that changed the status of the artisan or artist to that of a professional.⁵

Modern trend

The Vietnam National Museum of Fine Arts (Vien Bao tang My thuat Viet Nam) in Hanoi was founded on June 24, 1966. Its mission is to maintain an inventory as well as study, collect, preserve, repair, restore, display, educate, communicate and promote the value of materials and art exhibits typical of the country for the benefit of the public at home and abroad.

According to the wall text at the museum, at the end of the 19th century in the modern trend of art development, certain Vietnamese artists acquainted themselves with oil painting.

Their oil painting technique did not characterise their own colour scheme and was more or less influenced by European art. However, there was a certain level of delicacy in applying colours in painting Vietnamese scenes.

Since 1945, with new inspiration and changes to the local aesthetic sense, Vietnamese oil painting underwent “vigorous development” with a more diversified approach towards composition.

The young artists were influenced by the prevailing Western art movement at the time. And they adapted their techniques with an

⁵ Ibid., p. 236.

eagerness and desire to progress in their creativeness and were imbued with a “new sense of beauty”.

Reform policy

It is said that Vietnamese art in the modern era has been “transformed” since the declaration of the country’s Reform Policy in 1986. The policy created the impetus and “momentum for inspiration and democracy in art creation”.

In the last three decades, Vietnamese artists have become more active in the desire to be creative in terms of research and discovery. They are also said to be more concerned with social life in order to establish their own styles through an exploration of the diverse media and themes. They are also regarded by the state as being more confident in “integrating their art with developments in the region and the world”.

Artists have shown different levels of artistic accomplishment in various genres. In painting, artists whose works reflect “deep Asian cultural elements and traditional identity” include Trinh Ba Quat, Ding Thi Tham Poong and Nguyen Bach Dan, among others.

Artists who work in Realism include Nguyen Ngoc Dan and Pham Binh Chuong. The notable abstract artists are Do Minh Tam and Vinh Phoi while the Expressionists include Do Hoang Tuong and Ha Chi Hieu. The Abstract Expressionists are Vo Xuan Huy and Tran Thi Thu.

In the realm of sculpture, the artworks of Duong Dang Can, Phan Phuong Dong and Vuong Van Thao are notable.

The Vietnam National Museum of Fine Arts regards artists under the category of “Vietnamese Modern Arts” as having developed “strongly” and achieved a certain level of success.

The museum text adds that in the “limited available space”, the selected artworks displayed reflect “humanistic content and philo-

sophical depth” and are imbued with “hidden thoughts” that reflect “feelings or moods, internal emotions of the artists” with regard to issues of “contemporary society”.

(Please refer to pg 456 for the interview with Nguyen Hong Lam, secretary to the HR & External Relations Department director of the Vietnam National Museum of Fine Arts in Hanoi.)

Nam Son, Tardieu, Inguimberty and EBAI

In 1923, French artist Victor Tardieu (1870-1937) arrived in Vietnam from Paris as a recipient of the *Prix d'Indochine* presented by the Colonial Society of French Artists, a competition reserved for salons in Paris. During his stay, Tardieu was invited to paint several murals at the University of Indochina in Hanoi where he met Nguyen Van Tho (1890-1973) alias Nam Son, who was so keen to establish an arts school in the north that he had already drawn up tentative plans. He shared his aspirations with Tardieu who presented a proposal for such a school to French Indochina Governor-General Henri Merlin. The proposal was approved. Consequently in early 1925, Nam Son accompanied Tardieu to Paris to recruit teachers and buy materials.⁶

In 1925, l'École des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine (EBAI) was established by the French colonial administration under Merlin with Tardieu as founder and director, and Nam Son as co-founder.

Joseph Inguimberty (1896-1971), recruited from France at the school's inception, played a significant role in the promotion of lacquer. Like Tardieu he was passionate about the exploration of local craft materials and pushed for lacquer to be included in the curriculum.

Among the first students in EBAI's lacquer classes were Le Pho, Pham Hau, Nguyen Khang and Tran Quang Tran.⁷

⁶ Ibid., p. 250.

⁷ Ibid., p. 253.

Ho Chi Minh City Museum of Fine Arts

Constructed between 1929 and 1934, the building that houses the museum was originally the mansion of an ethnic Chinese resident named Hua during the Colonial era. The wealthiest man in Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) at the time, he also owned other grand buildings in the city such as the Majestic Hotel and Tu Du Hospital.

The museum building was repurposed in 1987, as a result of a decision by the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City, though it was not officially opened until 1991.⁸

First auction house

Ly Thi Auction opened on September 24 in 2016. It is the country's first auction house and is located in the Cau Giay district in Hanoi. Artists whose works were sold in the inaugural sale include Le Pho, Tran Dong Phuong, Le Van Luong and Indonesian modernist Afandi.⁹

Art galleries

Tudo Art Inc is a US-based branch of Tu Do (Liberty) Gallery, the first private fine art gallery to open in Ho Chi Minh City on June 24, 1989. The company focuses on the exhibition and acquisition of "quality, collectible contemporary and 20th century art" by established and emerging artists.^{10 11}

⁸ <https://www.vietnamonline.com/attraction/fine-arts-museum-ho-chi-minh-city.html>

⁹ <https://www.vietnambreakingnews.com/2016/09/vietnams-first-ever-art-auction-house-to-be-opened/>

¹⁰ <http://www.tudoart.com/AboutUs.html/>

¹¹ <http://artradarjournal.com/2014/08/01/25-years-of-freedom-a-look-at-south-vietnams-first-private-gallery/>

Contemporary art

Hanoi

Nhà Sàn Studio (NSS) was founded in 1998 by artists Nguyen Manh Duc and Tran Luong. It was the first and is, to date, the longest running non-profit experimental art space in Vietnam. The studio is said to have nurtured the first generation of Vietnamese avant-garde artists, namely Truong Tan, Tran Luong, Nguyen Van Cuong, Nguyen Minh Thanh, Nguyen Quang Huy, Ea Sola, Nguyen Manh Hung, Pham Ngoc Duong, Nguyen Minh Phuoc and Kim Ngoc. In 2011, the studio closed indefinitely due to pressure from the authorities. It currently operates out of a space donated by the Hanoi Creative City Building.¹²

Dong Phong Art Gallery was established in 2002 by Pho Duc Long. He is assisted by his niece Lai Thanh Mai. The gallery exhibits a collection of works by Vietnamese masters and emerging artists on the local scene.¹³

Art Vietnam gallery was established in 2012 by art director Suzanne Lecht. The “salon gallery”, hosts private parties, art consultations, poetry readings, music events as well as other cultural activities. It is open only by appointment.¹⁴

Ho Chi Minh City

Artist Quynh Pham opened Galerie Quynh in December 2003, and now serves as its director. It is recognised as Vietnam’s leading contemporary art gallery. It participates in international art fairs such as Art Basel Hong Kong, Art Stage Singapore and Art Brussels.¹⁵

¹² <http://www.nhasan.org/about>

¹³ dongphongartgallery.com

¹⁴ <http://www.artvietnamgallery.com/aboutus.html>

¹⁵ <http://galeriequynh.com/>

San Art (“san” means platform) was established in October 2007 in response to limited resources and negligible opportunities for contemporary art and culture in Vietnam. It is an artist-initiated, non-profit contemporary art organisation. Its founders are artists Dinh Q Le, Tuan Andrew Nguyen, Phunam and Tiffany Chung. In 2016, San Art closed its doors due to funding problems.¹⁶

The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre was established by artist Ti-A in 2016. It is said to be the first purpose-built space for contemporary art in Vietnam. Australian Zoe Butt is the current artistic director.¹⁷

Many art galleries have come and gone in Vietnam while among others, the once well-known Apricot Gallery that started in Hanoi in 1991 has evolved its business to include more decorative works.

Top 10

Based on auction benchmarks compiled and in chronological order, the top 10 artists of Vietnam are Nguyen Nam Son (1890-1973), Evariste Jonchere (1892-1956), Nguyen Phan Chanh (1892-1984), Alix Ayme (1894-1989), Joseph Ingumberty (1896-1971), Pham Hau (1903-1995), Mai Trung Thu (1906-1980), Le Pho (1907-2001), Nguyen Gia Tri (1908-1993) and Vu Cao Dam (1908-2000).

¹⁶ <http://san-art.org/about/>

¹⁷ <http://factoryartscentre.com/en/about/who-we-are/>

AUCTION BENCHMARKS OF ARTISTS IN VIETNAM

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
1	Le Pho (1907 – 2001)	Family Life Circa 1937–1939 Mixed media on silk 82cm x 66cm Hammer price: US\$966,621 With premium (20%): US\$1,170,258 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 2 April 2017	View from the Hilltop 1937, Oil on canvas 113cm x 192cm Hammer price: US\$696,059 With premium (20%): US\$840,426 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 22 November 2014	Le Concert 1938, Mixed media on silk 60cm x 50cm Hammer price: US\$538,860 With premium (20%): US\$654,330 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 27 May 2017
2	Joseph Ingiumberty (1896 – 1971)	Le Hamac (The Hammock) 1938, Oil on canvas 198.5cm x 301cm Hammer price: US\$799,441 With premium (20%): US\$969,642 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 2 April 2017	Femme Au Hamac (Woman In A Hammock) 1940 Oil on paper laid on board 189cm x 180cm Hammer price: US\$270,900 With premium (20%): US\$330,240 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 29 November 2015	Femmes Vietnamiennes 1935, Oil on canvas 198.5cm x 153.5cm Hammer price: US\$153,960 With premium (20%): US\$192,450 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 27 May 2017
3	Nguyen Phan Chanh (1892 – 1984)	Enfant à l'oiseau (Child with Bird) Undated Ink and gouache on silk 65cm x 50cm Hammer price: US\$701,030 With premium (20%): US\$853,982 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 27 May 2018	La Marchande de Ôc (The Snail Seller) 1929 Ink and gouache on silk 88cm x 65.5cm Hammer price: US\$484,347 With premium (20%): US\$593,962 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 26 May 2018	La Vendeuse De Bétel (The Betel Nut Seller) 1931, Mixed media on silk 67cm x 55cm Hammer price: US\$335,139 With premium (20%): US\$407,322 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 22 November 2014
4	Nguyen Gia Tri (1914 – 1987)	Provincial Village Circa 1940s Lacquer on wood 93.5cm x 201cm Hammer price: US\$537,684 With premium (20%): US\$658,022 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 1 October 2017	Paysage (Landscape) 1940, Lacquer on wood 97.5cm x 198cm Hammer price: US\$307,247 With premium (20%): US\$381,499 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 30 September 2017	Beaute eternelle 1955, Lacquer on wood 89cm x 61cm Hammer price: US\$257,600 With premium (20%): US\$314,272 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 30 May 2015

* The artists are ranked according to their auction records in the first column. The second and third columns show their second and third most expensive artworks sold in auctions.

** NA : not available

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
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5	Vu Cao Dam (1908 – 2000)	Le Repos Après le Bain (Rest After the Bath) (浴後小憩) Circa 1938–1939 Mixed media on silk 115cm x 75cm Hammer price: US\$509,727 With premium (25%): US\$626,964 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 31 March 2018	Conversation d'élégantes au jardin 1939, Mixed media on silk 85.5cm x 115.5cm Hammer price: US\$230,477 With premium (25%): US\$262,897 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 8 April 2008	Conversation Undated, Watercolour 60cm x 45cm Hammer price: US\$211,628 With premium (30%): US\$274,518 Auction House: Aguttes S.A.S. Paris Date: 26 March 2018
6	Mai Trung Thu (1906 – 1980)	Instant Musical 1946, Mixed media on silk 80.5cm x 63cm Hammer price: US\$286,320 With premium (30%): US\$369,825 Auction House: Aguttes S.A.S. Paris Date: 26 March 2018	Hunters 1978, Mixed media on silk 100cm x 70cm Hammer price: US\$244,720 With premium (20%): US\$298,816 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 29 May 2016	Procession musicale pour enfants (Children's Musical Procession) 1970, Mixed media on silk 92cm x 32cm Hammer price: US\$232,200 With premium (20%): US\$283,800 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 29 November 2015
7	Nguyen Nam Son (1890 – 1973)	Paysannes du Tonkin Circa 1935, Ink and colour on silk, 65cm x 52.5cm Hammer price: US\$255,198 With premium (30%): US\$330,114 Auction House: Aguttes S.A.S. Paris Date: 26 March 2018	Jeune femme agenouillée devant un bac se lavant les cheveux Undated, Ink and gouache on silk, 66.5cm x 51cm Hammer price: US\$103,586 With premium (14.4%): US\$128,363 Auction House: Drouot–Richelier, Paris Date: 9 December 2009	Untitled Undated, Ink and gouache on silk, 64cm x 47cm Hammer price: US\$51,559 With premium (25%): US\$64,448 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 27 November 2016
8	Pham Hau (1903 – 1995)	alentours du fleuve Rouge, Tonkin Undated, Lacquer on wood 124cm x 198cm Hammer price: US\$216,353 With premium (25%): US\$247,489 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 8 April 2008	Landscape of the Middle Region in the North of Vietnam Circa 1940–1945 Lacquer on wood 124.5cm x 264cm Hammer price: US\$206,400 With premium (25%): US\$258,000 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 3 April 2016	View of Thay's Pagoda Landscape in the North of Vietnam Circa 1939 Lacquer on wood 100cm x 200cm Hammer price: US\$206,400 With premium (25%): US\$252,840 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 29 April 2007

AUCTION BENCHMARKS OF ARTISTS IN VIETNAM

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
9	Le Thi Luu (1911 – 1988)	Children Picking Flowers 1966, Mixed media on silk 64.54cm x 54.5cm Hammer price: US\$165,661 With premium (25%): US\$207,076 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 1 April 2018	Mother and Child 1960, Oil on silk 39cm x 30.5cm Hammer price: US\$57,960 With premium (25%): US\$72,450 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 29 May 2016	Les premiers pas Circa 1960, Oil on canvas 92cm x 73cm Hammer price: US\$49,020 With premium (25%): US\$61,275 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 31 May 2015
		Ladies in a Garden 1942, Lacquer on wood 150cm x 293cm Hammer price: US\$140,175 With premium (25%): US\$175,218 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 1 April 2018	Rapid of Cho Bo on the Black River 1943, Lacquer on wood 95.5cm x 250cm Hammer price: US\$90,090 With premium (25%): US\$112,612 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 3 April 2017	Panorama de Cho Bo 1943, Lacquer on panel 100cm x 231cm Hammer price: US\$51,600 With premium (25%): US\$64,500 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 6 October 2009
		L'arrivée de la mariée avec son cortège 1944, Lacquer on panel 122.5cm x 240cm Hammer price: US\$131,980 With premium (% NA): US\$158,376 Auction House: Sotheby's Singapore Date: 29 April 2007	Les pecheurs au clair de lune (Fishing Under the Moonlight) 1945, Lacquer on wood with mother of pearl inlay 80cm x 181.5cm Hammer price: US\$77,339 With premium (25%): US\$96,673 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 6 April 2014	A Traditional Vietnamese Opera Actress Reading under Moonlight 1943, Lacquer on wood 70cm x 50cm Hammer price: US\$58,004 With premium (25%): US\$72,505 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 3 October 2016
		Late Afternoon Chimes 1940 Ink and gouache on silk 45.5cm x 58cm Hammer price: US\$122,550 With premium (25%): US\$152,220 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 28 November 2015	La rizière Undated, Oil on canvas 85cm x 135.5cm Hammer price: US\$77,302 With premium (30%): US\$98,560 Auction House: Aguttes S.A.S, Paris Date: 6 June 2016	Three Young Girls Undated, Goache on silk 38cm x 31cm Hammer price: US\$63,729 With premium (25%): US\$79,661 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 27 May 2018
10	Nguyen Van TY (1896 – 1962)			
11	Nguyen Khang (1912 – 1984)			
12	Luong Xuan Nhi (1913 – 2006)			

* The artists are ranked according to their auction records in the first column. The second and third columns show their second and third most expensive artworks sold in auctions.

** NA : not available

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
13	Bui Xuan Phai (1920 - 1988)	Chea Actors 1984, Lacquer on panel Hammer price: US\$106,571 With premium (25%): US\$124,225 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 8 April 2008	Portrait de M. Tran Tinh 1971, Oil on canvas 78.5cm x 56cm Hammer price: US\$64,841 With premium (25%): US\$78,001 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 8 April 2008	Rural Village Undated, Oil on canvas 37.5cm x 57cm Hammer price: US\$48,906 With premium (25%): US\$58,687 Auction House: United Asian Auctioneers, Hong Kong Date: 19 May 2012
14	Alix Ayme (1894 - 1989)	Paysage (Landscape) Undated, Lacquer on wood 100cm x 150cm Hammer price: US\$95,573 With premium (25%): US\$119,466 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 1 April 2018	Rêverie sous le cèdre argenté Undated Lacquer on polychrome 104cm x 157cm Hammer price: US\$35,699 With premium (22.2%): US\$43,624 Auction House: SGL Enchères France Date: 9 June 2013	Souvenir d'Indochine 1930, Lacquer on glass 77.5cm x 127.5cm Hammer price: US\$31,768 With premium (25%): US\$39,710 Auction House: Auctionata Germany Date: 21 June 2013
15	Dang Xuan Hoa (1959)	Life 2005, Acrylic on canvas 150cm x 300cm Hammer price: US\$71,903 With premium (25%): US\$85,705 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 8 April 2008	Circle of Life 2008, Oil on canvas 150cm x 300cm Hammer price: US\$65,574 With premium (25%): US\$78,688 Auction House: Borobudur, Singapore Date: 17 May 2008	Cycle of Life II 2008 Mixed media on canvas 150cm x 300cm Hammer price: US\$28,380 With premium (25%): US\$35,475 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 30 November 2008
16	Tran Binh Loc (1914 - 1941)	River Scene Undated Ink and goache on silk 40cm x 75.6cm Hammer price: US\$70,950 With premium (25%): US\$88,687 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 5 October 2015	Crepuscule dans le port de Hanoi (Sunset at the Port of Hanoi) 1933, Oil on silk 75cm x 50cm Hammer price: US\$49,020 With premium (25%): US\$61,275 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 31 May 2015	Le petit frère Undated Mixed media on silk 65cm x 50cm Hammer price: US\$44,297 With premium (25%): US\$54,889 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 8 April 2008

AUCTION BENCHMARKS OF ARTISTS IN VIETNAM

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
17	Le Quoc Loc (1918 – 1987)	Village animé dans une végétation luxuriante 2016 Lacquer on polychrome 120cm x 80cm Hammer price: US\$61,189 With premium (21%): US\$74,038 Auction House: Delorme Collin du Bocage (S.V.V), Paris Date: 15 June 2016	Vietnamese River Scene Undated, Lacquer on board 230cm x 22.5cm Hammer price: US\$45,150 With premium (25%): US\$56,437 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 25 May 2014	Harvesting 1958, Lacquer on wood 73.5cm x 120cm Hammer price: US\$36,091 With premium (25%): US\$45,113 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 3 October 2016
18	Nguyen Tu Nghiem (1922 – 2016)	Ancient Dance 1984, Lacquer on panel 55cm x 75cm Hammer price: US\$61,180 With premium (25%): US\$76,475 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 27 May 2018	Ancient Dance Undated, Lacquer on panel 60cm x 124cm Hammer price: US\$28,247 With premium (25%): US\$34,859 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 8 April 2008	Kieu and Kim Trong 1970, Lacquer on board 76cm x 56cm Hammer price: US\$20,608 With premium (25%): US\$25,760 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 29 May 2018
19	Le Yen (1913)	Woman and Childen in An Interior 1937 Ink and gouache on silk 42.5cm x 70cm Hammer price: US\$51,559 With premium (25%): US\$64,448 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 3 October 2016	NA	NA
20	Nguyen Trung (1940)	Ladies in the Peace Garden 2006, Lacquer on panel 120cm x 70cm Hammer price: US\$51,250 With premium (25%): US\$64,400 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 29 May 2016	Maternity and the Sea 1990, Oil on canvas 190cm x 130cm Hammer price: US\$28,314 With premium (25%): US\$35,392 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 3 April 2017	Repose in the Garden Of... 2012, Oil on canvas 100cm x 130cm Hammer price: US\$28,120 With premium (20%): US\$33,744 Auction House: Christie's Shanghai Date: 22 October 2016

* The artists are ranked according to their auction records in the first column. The second and third columns show their second and third most expensive artworks sold in auctions.

** NA : not available

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
21	Nguyen Sang (1923 - 1988)	Man with Rooster 1977, Lacquer on panel 50cm x 50cm Hammer price: US\$48,981 With premium (25%): US\$61,226 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 27 November 2016	Buffaloes 1980, Lacquer on panel 80cm x 100cm Hammer price: US\$41,216 With premium (25%): US\$351,520 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 29 May 2016	Two Cats 1979, Lacquer on panel 60cm x 18cm Hammer price: US\$30,912 With premium (25%): US\$38,640 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 29 May 2016
22	Evariste Jonchere (1892 - 1956)	Portrait of A Young Laotian Princess, Saramani 1935 Bronze on marble base 30cm x 20cm x 25cm Hammer price: US\$25,800 With premium (25%): US\$32,250 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 5 October 2015	Buste de tonkinoise se coiffant, Edition 1/8 Bronze 39cm x 33cm Hammer price: US\$16,384 With premium: NA Auction House: Schmitz & Laurent, France Date: 8 October 2006	Km 81 Undated, Bronze Hammer price: US\$15,554 With premium: NA Auction House: Schmitz & Laurent, France Date: 7 October 2007
23	Tran Phuc Duyen (1923 - 1993)	Landscape 1954, Lacquer on wood 96cm x 32.5cm Hammer price: US\$24,490 With premium (25%): US\$30,612 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 6 April 2014	Paysage lacustre 1954, Lacquer on panel 45cm x 57cm Hammer price: US\$11,225 With premium: NA Auction House: Azur Enchères Cannes Date: 16 June 2016	Deer in a Forest 1951, Lacquer on wood 43cm x 55cm Hammer price: US\$9,557 With premium (25%): US\$11,946 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 1 April 2018
24	Thai Van Ngon (1920)	Boat Quay Scene in Saigon Circa 1960 Lacquer on wood 120cm x 180cm Hammer price: US\$21,930 With premium (25%): US\$27,412 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 4 April 2016	Le fumeur d'opium 194, Oil on panel 52cm x 34cm Hammer price: US\$1,816 With premium: NA Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 24 June 2016	NA

AUCTION BENCHMARKS OF ARTISTS IN VIETNAM

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
25	Do Quang Em (1942)	Portrait of the Artist's Wife 1975, Oil on canvas 80cm x 64cm Hammer price: US\$20,591 With premium (25%): US\$25,740 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 6 October 2008	Amulet 2000, Oil on canvas 72cm x 84cm Hammer price: US\$19,350 With premium (25%): US\$24,187 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 24 Nov 2013	Portrait of My Wife 1987, Oil on canvas 100cm x 80cm Hammer price: US\$16,539 With premium (% NA): US\$19,019 Auction House: Sotheby's Singapore Date: 3 Oct 1999
26	Hoang Tich Chu (1912 – 2003)	Mother and Son 1960, Lacquer on board 50cm x 35cm Hammer price: US\$23,920 With premium (12%): US\$26,790 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 26 Nov 2017	Maiden at Rest 1981, Mixed media Hammer price: US\$8,922 With premium (25%): US\$11,152 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 27 May 2018	Lady with a Fan 1989, Lacquer on panel 90cm x 70cm Hammer price: US\$8,372 With premium (25%): US\$10,465 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 29 May 2016
27	Hong Viet Dung (1962)	Morning in Autumn 1999, Oil on canvas 153.5cm x 153.5cm Hammer price: US\$15,456 With premium (25%): US\$219,320 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 26 May 2013	Landscape No.1 2004, Oil on canvas 175cm x 200cm Hammer price: US\$14,190 With premium (25%): US\$17,737 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 25 May 2014	Hoan Kiem Lake, Hanoi 2014, Oil on canvas 110cm x 210cm Hammer price: US\$14,168 With premium (25%): US\$17,710 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 29 May 2016
28	Tran Luu Hau (1928)	Sapa Valley Undated, Acrylic on canvas 110cm x 134.5cm Hammer price: US\$9,016 With premium (25%): US\$11,270 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 29 May 2016	Cat Ba Seascape 2008, Oil on canvas 110cm x 135cm Hammer price: US\$7,740 With premium (25%): US\$9,675 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 24 May 2009	Temple 1988, Oil on canvas 111cm x 134.5cm Hammer price: US\$6,450 With premium (25%): US\$8,062 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 5 April 2015

* The artists are ranked according to their auction records in the first column. The second and third columns show their second and third most expensive artworks sold in auctions.

** NA : not available

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
29	Bui Huu Hung (1957)	Portrait of A Women Undated, Lacquer on wood 102cm x 102cm Hammer price: US\$2,919 With premium (20%): US\$3,498 Auction House: Maynards Fine Art, Vancouver Date: 9 December 2015	The Prince 2006, Lacquer on wood 120cm x 120cm Hammer price: US\$2,802 With premium (22%): US\$3,418 Auction House: Larasati Singapore Date: 24 August 2014	Mother and Children Undated, Lacquer on panel 122cm x 122cm Hammer price: US\$2,550 With premium (22%): US\$3,060 Auction House: 33 Auction Singapore Date: 24 June 2015
30	Dinh Quan (1964)	Fairy (仙子) 2011, Lacquer on board 120cm x 120cm Hammer price: US\$2,832 With premium (22%): US\$3,398 Auction House: 33 Auction Singapore Date: 21 November 2015	Painter and Model 1993, Lacquer on board 110cm x 100cm Hammer price: US\$2,548 With premium (29.6%): US\$3,302 Auction House: AAG Amsterdam Date: 23 May 2011	Mother and Her Child 1995, Lacquer on board 100cm x 110cm Hammer price: US\$2,407 With premium (29.6%): US\$3,119 Auction House: AAG Amsterdam Date: 23 May 2011



Photo courtesy of the respondent

Nguyen Thi Thu Suong

Gallery Owner
Ben Thanh Art & Frame
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Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
www.benthanhart.com

TRUST IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS

Ben Thanh Art & Frame Gallery, owned by feisty businesswoman Nguyen Thi Thu Suong, 42, offers an extensive range of contemporary art by up-and-coming Vietnamese artists. It also curates artworks and artefacts for several five-star hotels in the city.

The Edge: How did you get started in the art business?

Nguyen Thi Thu Suong: I started this business in 1999 when I was a 24-year-old student. I studied economics, nothing related to art at all.

How did you become interested in art?

If you wanted to go to university, you would have to earn money from a part-time job. So I worked at a laminate shop. At that time, in Vietnam, you couldn't buy artworks from overseas. I had a chance to see posters of Monet's works and that of others. The first picture I bought was a poster for US\$23. It was a lot of money at the time but I fell in love with it. The next one I bought was *Golden Autumn*, 1895, (see pg xxx) by Russian artist Isaac Ilyich Levitan. I saw people buying posters and laminating them.

I studied about the masters from books on Monet, Van Gogh, Renoir and Gauguin. That was how I started.

From those kind of prints, you moved on to paintings?

Yes, that's right. Later, I opened my own gallery selling paintings. I didn't like selling posters because you needed a licence to import them. At the time, the young artists were producing artworks that I could connect with. However, in the first two years, I lost a lot of money as the art market was very new.

When you started Ben Thanh Art & Frame, was it a frame shop as well?

When I started, we had a gallery and a frame shop. From 1999 to 2002, I set up a factory to make frames to export to Japan. I also had a furniture shop selling interior design products.

Did the frame factory provide you with your main source of income?

Yes, otherwise we couldn't have survived. As you can see in the gallery, people are buying art now. But in 1999, who would want to buy artworks?

What kind of works did you sell that year?

I sold works of Bui Huu Hung, Dinh Quan and Tran Luu Hau. At the time, they weren't famous yet. As long as you liked the work, you sold whatever you had.

How did you approach the artists at the time?

The artists found the gallery and consigned one or two pieces because they weren't earning any income yet. We have known what we wanted since 2003. I'm looking for top artists now. Of course in the beginning, I was too young to understand the market.

Do you deal in the secondary market?

No, because the artists, such as Luong Xuan Nhi (1914 – 2006), have passed away. So once they pass away, I keep the paintings in storage or in my house because they belong in my collection. In Vietnam, you don't really have the experts to double-check the quality or authenticity. A gallery owner has to ensure the authenticity of the artworks. It's bad for business if you sell fake artworks. Your reputation is at stake if you make one mistake. If people tell me a painting

is fake, I will call the artist immediately and the client can meet the artist personally.

For Le Pho and all the old masters who have passed away, I do follow the auctions. But we deal with famous auction houses like Sotheby's or Christie's. We used to work with Christie's but nowadays, we prefer Sotheby's.

From 2005 to 2015, Christie's didn't carry a lot of Vietnamese works. They had more Chinese and Indonesian artworks. I think Sotheby's does well in Vietnamese art. My clients were with Christie's for a year because the auction prices were cheaper. But now they bid with Sotheby's because of the quality of the artworks. I consign works to auction houses on behalf of my clients.

How do you check when the artists have passed away? For example, when clients want to consign a Le Pho to you.

I only buy for my clients and sell what they have bought from the auction houses. The other way is to consign a living artist's works. For example, Tran Luu Hau, Hong Viet Dung and Dang Xuan Hoa are artists that I consign.

So, are you aware of the Vietnamese works at auction?

When Sotheby's and Christie's hold auctions, they send their experts. They will inform us when they have private sales. Art Agenda S.E.A. and de Sarthe Gallery in Hong Kong ran an exhibition of contemporary and modern Vietnamese art last May¹. I bought a Le Pho work, *Two Ladies*. The Vietnamese don't buy artworks of deceased artists locally. They have to go to the Hong Kong auctions. I heard about the private sale from Eva Shiu, Art Agenda's art advisor. They had some works which had been sold before and some new works.

¹ www.artagendasea.org/departures-intersecting-vietnamese-modern-art-with-r-streitmattertran

What are your thoughts on Joseph Inguimberty?

French painter Victor Tardieu founded the art school École des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine in Hanoi. Then Joseph Inguimberty (1896-1971) came here as a teacher from 1926 to 1945. Le Pho spent most of his life in France. So, most of his paintings were collected by the French.

So, would you regard only those born in Vietnam as the top Vietnamese artists? How about those who were foreigners and spent part of their lives here?

Works by foreigners in Vietnam may be considered Vietnamese art but their prices never increase compared to the local artists. You would only see the paintings of Le Pho and Mai Trung Thu at auctions and a few others. Nguyen Sang is another good artist, but he doesn't have many paintings at the auctions.

Would you say the collector-base or the buyers of Vietnamese art are mainly Vietnamese collectors?

Yes, in the past two years. The collectors bought not only the works of deceased artists but also famous ones like Dang Xuan Hoa. They liked to buy works of artists who have been featured at Sotheby's and Christie's auctions.

But it would be easy for any gallery with connections to put up certain artists for auction even though they were not at the top end.

For Vietnamese artists, it's not easy to get in the auctions this way. I don't see the prices going up.

When there is no other support other than from the gallery, the price level won't go up.

Correct. But how do you sustain the interest? You should have clients who love your work. Perhaps the gallery can buy back the

painting the first time. But if it doesn't sell, the auction house would not put it up for auction again. That's why we prefer to buy from auction houses.

How would you rank the artists from Vietnam in terms of auction transactions?

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Le Pho | 9. Luong Xuan Nhi |
| 2. Nguyen Phan Chanh | 10. Nguyen Van Ty |
| 3. Nguyen Gia Tri | 11. Dang Xuan Hoa |
| 4. Mai Trung Thu | 12. Tran Binh Loc |
| 5. Vu Cao Dam | 13. Le Quoc Loc |
| 6. Nguyen Sang | 14. Thai Van Ngoc |
| 7. Pham Hau | 15. Do Quang Em |
| 8. Nguyen Khang | |

Do you think galleries and private sales fetch a higher price than auctions? Why?

It depends on which gallery, auction house and their clients.

What is the price range of your works that sell the best?

For Vietnamese works, there are two price levels – US\$50,000 to US\$100,000; and below US\$2,000. The gap is very big. Serious collectors will spend from US\$20,000 to US\$100,000. But people who buy decorative art spend below US\$2,000.

According to your estimate, how many serious collectors are there in Vietnam?

I only have one gallery, so I'm not aware of the numbers. I have collectors in Hanoi too. Some collectors in Vietnam have been collecting for a long time, so they are really serious art collectors. They buy old masters' works. I would say more than 20 serious collectors who

buy and sell, and fewer than 100 collectors who collect art but don't sell. About 20 to 30 of these collectors have become my friends. Some of them buy a few million dollars' worth of paintings.

How many serious art galleries are there in Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) and Hanoi combined?

In Saigon, it's us and Apricot Gallery. Apricot has a branch here but focuses more on Hanoi because the owner is based there. The other prominent gallery is Galerie Quynh, focusing on contemporary art. The only thing is that it can't make money because it is too contemporary and they are not in a good location. There is another gallery coming up called Craig Thomas Gallery². Most of the paintings are on a consignment basis. But they have talented young artists.

In Hanoi, there are a lot of galleries: Green Palm, Thang Long Art Gallery, Apricot Gallery and Art Vietnam Gallery. The last one was a big gallery. But it has closed down and its art director, Suzanne Lecht, has returned to her salon gallery in her house³. It's not easy to be a foreign owner of art galleries in Vietnam.

"Although Suzanne no longer runs her gallery space, she is still involved heavily in the arts in Hanoi, as she has been here for over 20 years," according to collector Adrian Jones, owner of the Witness Collection and who has one of the world's largest collections of Vietnamese art. See pg 447.

Is the business very difficult or is it not that competitive?

When you are doing this business, you have to love art. I treat the business like I'm singing a song or if I'm eating a meal. I do it every day, so it's quite easy for me. Meeting like-minded people who love artworks makes me happy.

² www.facebook.com/ctgsaigon/

³ www.artvietnamgallery.com/aboutus.html (Suzanne Lecht, info@artvietnamgallery.com)

We spotted some publications on hotel art collections in your gallery.

Yes, I've enjoyed doing art consultancy since 2003 although I never studied it. I became interested when I was awarded a contract to provide artworks for Park Hyatt Hotel Saigon. I have always been very thankful that I got that job. I didn't even know what art consultancy was at the time. They gave me the hotel layout and asked me to put the artworks there. So I said, 'Okay, let's try.'

How many artworks did you source for the hotel at the time?

More than 100. I also provided artefacts as well, so we sourced for beautiful old ceramics and antiques such as old books, vases, decorative items and accessories.

When you enter the lobby, you will see a cabinet at the reception with many antique ceramics. That was sourced by us. I got the artefacts at a good price. Now I do contemporary sculptures, so I work with young artists for sculptures and vases.

So you do everything - if somebody wants to buy a Le Pho, can you source it for them?

I provide a service where I help my clients buy at auctions. If I auction for them (as a consignor), sales proceeds go to them.

Do you advise them on the limit to pay for a work?

Yes. I am their consultant. I advise them on which works are good and at what price. I will advise them not to buy if it's too expensive. I also do consultancy work for hotels and have supplied artworks to Intercontinental, Sheraton and a few other five-star hotels. Of course, the main part of my work is the gallery.

Did you participate in art fairs in Hong Kong and elsewhere?

Yes, we did. But we only sell young artists' works. We don't carry works of top Vietnamese artists.

Which art fair did you participate in?

The Contemporary Art Fair in Singapore. We also hold art exhibitions every year in Singapore. I do solo shows for the artists, including at the Metro Fine Art gallery in KL in 2003, but it's closed now. In Indonesia, I do shows with corporate galleries. We also organise art auctions but for fun. We did one at the Tower Club in Singapore where we had a gala dinner.

When was the last time you had an auction?

We had an auction in 2015 but we hold exhibitions every year. The last one was in April. Every year, we have one charity auction.

Our gallery also organises events. I helped this French lady exhibit her works in our gallery. That was a long time ago. We did some shows at Park Hyatt hotel in 2007 for the gallery's 10th year anniversary where we had artists paint the portraits of the clients.

Don Lam is CEO and co-founder of VinaCapital, one of our biggest sponsors⁴. He initiated Nhịp Tim Việt Nam or VinaCapital Foundation. We raise money by selling the artworks at the charity auction. The funds are then given to homes for the poor, aged and orphanages.

One of our master artists is 92 and had his works sold at Sotheby's and Christie's. I gave an exhibition for him when he was 88 years old. I also have an art club for children where families can come to the gallery on weekends to paint.

Are there local auction houses that are strictly commercial?

Ly Thi and Lac Viet Auctions started this year⁵. Most auctions in

⁴ www.whartonhcmc08.com/bio-lam.html

⁵ Robert, December 18, 2016. *Vietnam's first commercial auction house launched in Ho Chi Minh City*. <https://www.vietnambreakingnews.com/2016/12/vietnams-first-commercial-auction-house-launched-in-ho-chi-minh-city/>
- *Vietnam's first commercial auction house opened in Ho Chi Minh City*, Tuoi Tre News, December 19, 2016 (under maintenance), https://www.facebook.com/lythiauction/?ref=py_c

- Toan Dao, May 20, 2016. *Collectors to cash in at Vietnam's first professional art auction*. <https://e.vnexpress.net/news/travel-life/culture-arts/collectors-to-cash-in-at-vietnam-s-first-professional-art-auction-3406186.html>

the country are charity-oriented. There are many online auctions but they are not really serious.

Is it because of the quality and selection of the artworks?

They don't have the time.

What do you owe your success as an art entrepreneur to?

Trust is important. If you are in this business and you are not trustworthy, you cannot be successful. I am where I am today because of people's trust in me. Most of my clients have been my friends for more than 15 years. Tomorrow, I will fly to Hanoi with one of my best friends. Fifteen years ago, she was my client.

I have some clients who don't buy anymore because their walls are filled with paintings. But they still introduce their friends from other countries to me. If you meet Danny Tan in Malaysia, he will tell you he loves my gallery. He says to me, 'Suong, every time I go to Vietnam, if I don't buy an artwork from your gallery, it means I didn't come to Vietnam.' If he is in Singapore, he will call me and say, 'Suong, come here and bring your iPad. Enjoy the artworks on the iPad' (laughs). So, I have good connections. Datuk Yahya, an art collector, is also a friend. There is also Changi airport CEO Lee Seow Hiang⁶. They have been supporting me since my child was three years old.

Are you the sole proprietor of this business?

Yes, working with partners will give you a headache.

⁶ <http://www.changiairport.com/corporate/about-us/our-leadership/lee-seow-hiang.html>



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FUELED BY OPTIMISM

Eight years ago, Belgian Celine Alexandre, 40, followed her husband to Ho Chi Minh City for a business venture and met Quynh Pham, founder and director of Galerie Quynh. She became a partner in the contemporary art gallery.

Representing about a dozen Vietnamese artists including rising star Tiffany Chung, the gallery showcases installation and conceptual art.

The business has been tough but things are looking up. "The most important thing is everything is booming right now," says Alexandre. "It's really an interesting phase of development. That's why, for us, it's pretty exciting to work in this field right now.

"We specialise in contemporary art. A few years ago, we were almost the only space proposing contemporary artists in Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City). Now there are The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre and Dia Projects HCMC. There are more art spaces, which shows that things are really happening. Right now, I have to confess that maybe 70% to 75% of our clients are based abroad. But, the Vietnamese collectors are increasing."

The Edge: How did the partnership come about?

"It's a private initiative. Quynh Pham was born in Danang. She left Vietnam after the Vietnam War and grew up in San Diego, California. She was educated at the University of California, San Diego, in art criticism and art history. She came back to Asia 15 years ago. She wanted to check out her home country and realised that the art scene here was a lot of things but there was no institution at all. So, she started an online gallery representing a few artists and then opened her first space in 2003," explains Alexandre.

"The online gallery was more to establish contacts, as she had a lot of contacts in the US. She thought it might be interesting to do that. It's more to offer visibility to the artists than to really make

online sales. It's pretty hard to sell online. We do some sales sometimes, but only because the collectors already know us. And generally, they know the artists we work with. For example, I have a collector in the US who is a big fan of a certain artist and I have some of his/her new works. I can send him some images via email and because he knows the artist, he may make the decision based solely on the images. But it's just an exchange of private emails, it's not really online transactions."

Alexandre, who studied history of art in Belgium, has a passion for contemporary art. When her husband went to Vietnam to open a factory to make leather goods, she followed to see what was happening on the contemporary art scene there.

"He said, 'I can open a factory here and come once a month or we can move here together'. He chose Vietnam because of the good labour skills. People here are very meticulous and he is doing high-end leather goods, more for the luxury business segment. And we have some friends here. We met some Vietnamese in Belgium actually ... a lot of Vietnamese ended up in Belgium after the [Vietnam] war. So we had some connections with Vietnam," she explains.

She decided to stay because of her passion for art and the vibrancy of the Vietnamese art scene. "Yes, it's passion. It is for sure. It's something I studied in Europe and I really enjoy the vibe in Asia, especially Vietnam. Things are not jaded yet. Things are very genuine. If you want to become an artist in Vietnam, it is because you really want to be an artist. You don't do it for money, you don't do it for ... you know what I mean? The fact that it's not already in auction, the market is not crazily expensive. In a way, that gives it a more human vibe. When I do openings here, I know the collectors well, they are really nice.

"I've been to some vernissage (preview) events and openings in Brussels or Paris, I don't know ... there are other things — other

than art — that people are talking about. In Vietnam, most of the business is in production and import-export, which is not my cup of tea. Here, I learn much more about people and art, of course.”

But galleries offering serious art rather than pretty paintings or decorative works were rather limited in Ho Chi Minh City. “At that time, the only places I could visit were Galerie Quynh and San Art, a non-profit and very important art organisation here in Saigon, created by a couple of artists. I got in touch with Quynh and started working with her five years ago.

“San Art still exists but it had to change its format a bit. It had a big sponsor from Australia that apparently stopped sponsoring at some point. Also, it got into trouble with the authorities over authorisation and censorship. Right now, it is more focused on having a very interesting library to offer artists — a lot of books and stuff that you cannot find here in Vietnam. And also, they are going to develop a tuition programme to create curators ... there are not many locally trained curators. It is called The Reading Room.

On other aspects of the Vietnamese art scene or artists she has observed, Alexandre says, “I only know the artists that I work with and I don’t feel comfortable to compare them because the ones that I know from abroad are the ones that we talk about. But it’s not that I’ve been there or visited their studios or met the artists. My perception is not always right on what exactly the art scene is like outside Vietnam. The only thing I notice in Vietnam is that the young generation is pretty audacious, they really try new media. They really want to be in the market.”

How does the gallery pick artists to represent?

“Right now, we don’t really try to pick more because we already have enough artists to represent. Most of the time it’s from recommenda-

tions from the artists we work with because the artist community is a real community. They know each other well.

“We work only with contemporary artists. I would say conceptual artists. Mainly Vietnamese. They can be local Vietnamese or from the Vietnamese diaspora. And they all have or will have an international profile. The oldest artist is probably fifty-something but most of them are between 20 and 40 years old.”

Galerie Quynh represents “about a dozen artists” but some of them have been “less active”, points out Alexandre. “It’s a very hard business because the collector base is mainly foreigners. You have to catch them either through art fairs or if they are passing through Saigon. There is a lot of work to do here in order to develop the local market. That’s not really a business I can do as a foreigner, so we need to have a local person to do that. It’s just a kind of slow process. There is a part of education in terms of the contemporary art scene that has to be done well, so it takes time. The good thing is that things are happening. Yes, it’s coming.”

When it comes to the price levels of artwork by Galerie Quynh’s artists, Alexandre says it is “hard to give because it, firstly, depends on the profile of the artist”. “We have some artists who are established, like Tiffany Chung or The Propeller Group. They were at the Venice Biennale two years ago. Tiffany was recently at the MoMA (The Museum of Modern Art) in New York. So, of course, a map from Tiffany would be US\$30,000 and an installation would be around US\$100,000. But if we talk about paintings, and if you compare mid-career artists, it’s between US\$5,000 and US\$20,000 for canvas works. But it’s really hard to give a range because it depends on whether you have an installation work. And it depends on the nature of the work and the profile of the artist. We can have some drawings for sale at US\$1,500, if it’s by a newcomer and if it is pretty small.”

“A video work can be around US\$20,000 to US\$50,000, depending on the artist and the number of editions. In Hanoi, there is an artist by the name of Le Kinh Tai, who is selling a large painting for US\$60,000. I am always surprised how those artists who have never been featured in a major biennale are pricier than artists who have participated in major international exhibitions,” she adds.

Tiffany Chung’s installation series, transacted for US\$100,000 each, was sold overseas recently. “She made a few installations actually,” points out Alexandre. “There were some that sold at that price. We sold to museums and some to private collectors.”

In terms of demographics, collectors of installation and video art tend to be “around 30 to 40” years of age, says Alexandre. “The ones I know who are really into videos and photos are quite focused on that. And they tend to be male.”

When it comes to tracking price trends, Alexandre’s primary source of data and “a kind of reference” are auction reports of Christie’s and Sotheby’s. She believes that Vietnamese artworks at auction sales fetch “definitely much higher” prices than those sold privately or at galleries.

Are there any Vietnamese contemporary artworks at auction?

“Not as far as I know. Not by the artists I work with anyway. But again, I don’t have a great knowledge about everything. I think it’s a bit too early for the works of contemporary artists to be at auction. There is no secondary market for contemporary art and those who buy such art are collectors who buy because they like them rather than for business investment. So, they don’t think about reselling.”

Is it because the medium – such as installation or conceptual art – isn’t easy to sell at auction?

“We have a lot of paintings as well. Here, at the gallery, we have

artists who work with video, photos, paintings, sculpture and installation. We have various media. So, I'm not sure if it's a question of medium. It's a question of the maturity of the market. And also, there are no auction houses here ... so maybe, that's why."

Why does she keep track of auction records then? "We look at them out of curiosity. And because we have Vietnamese collectors who are collecting both modern and contemporary art. It's always interesting to know but it's more out curiosity because it's not exactly the type of artists or artworks that we work with."

When asked whether she takes note of other Vietnamese contemporary artists and the prices their works are selling at, Alexandre says, "Yes, we track artists who work with Dia Projects or The Factory. But we also connect to form some kind of alignment."

How many contemporary art galleries are active in Ho Chi Minh City?

"There is a report in an almanac of ArtAsiaPacific magazine that cited a high number of galleries ... I was quite surprised. But I would say ... the ones with more conceptual artists, there are only three or four — The Factory, Dia Projects, Salon Saigon and Galerie Quynh.

"There was an art fair recently. It was a kind of art fair ... at the museum. It was nothing compared with Art Stage Singapore. It's a little difficult in Vietnam because all those art initiatives are not really supported by the government. Which is a big contrast with Singapore, where they have a lot of support from the government because it wants the city state to become the new art hub of Southeast Asia. Here, there is absolutely no support. Check out the museum, you will see what I mean. It's really dusty. No strong interest on the part of the government to support anything that is related to contemporary art, which makes the path a bit more difficult."

The gallery participates in overseas art fairs as well. "We par-

ticipated in the Hong Kong Art Fair before it became Art Basel. We did Hong Kong Art Fair in 2011 and 2012. But I wasn't there. We did Art Stage Singapore three years in a row — in 2015, 2016 and 2017. We did Art Brussels. We did a fair in Paris called Asia Now."

Participation "is always good" for her gallery business, she says. "I don't always see it as competition. Definitely, it reinforces what we do. It's good for our customers to see that we are participating in art fairs abroad. It's always good because it brings new collectors."

Her business model is more traditional. "We only receive people here in the gallery or at the art fairs. We have established particular relationships with collectors and things can go quickly, by sending them images of the art via email. But most of the sales are made face to face during openings or shows.

"[At the gallery,] we have [works in] storage. For example, right now, this French artist is into metal music. Personally, it's not my cup of tea. If we receive collectors here and I can feel that it's [metal music] not their stuff, then I can show them a lot of other works in storage. It [storage area] is roughly as large as the gallery — less than 100 square metres."

However, Alexandre says the gallery will be relocated as the building is going to be knocked down. "We haven't found our new space yet. But the idea is definitely to have a bigger space. This gallery used to be our secondary space. We had the first gallery near the fish market. We enjoyed the contrast, it looks a bit like Chelsea, New York. But we noticed that the Vietnamese didn't enjoy it so much. So we decided to open another space that is a bit more refined. Even you can see a bit of contrast between the entrance and the gallery. We were kicked out from the other place, so for about a year or so, this has been our only space. It's too small anyway. We have some ambitious programming and exhibitions that we want to

do. So, we are looking for 500 square metres, which includes storage and office as well as exhibition space.”

Gallery Quynh moved to a 600 square metre space in Dakao, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City in December 2017. According to the gallery's press release¹, the new space is “spread over four floors” and “the gallery will play an even more vital role in the cultural community with more ambitious programming to be realized.”

Is property rental an issue in Vietnam because of increased demand?

“It’s hard, for sure, to have a long lease. And as a contemporary art gallery, you always need to do a lot of renovations. You can’t be at a space just for a year or two. Then, you will lose your investment. Things are changing so quickly here. Real estate is pretty tough. If we wanted to be sure in terms of the lease and stuff, then maybe, it’s safer to go for a new location instead of renovating an old space that might be knocked down again. But on the other hand, all the new buildings do not really have the kind of vibe that we like. We don’t have to be as well located as we are here ... the Opera House is just over there. We don’t have to be that central because people come to us anyway. We don’t really work with walk-in guests.

“We don’t want to be too remote as well because we want to belong to a community and for people to [be able to] come to our openings. This street is crazily expensive, so we don’t have direct visibility. (Galerie Quynh was located on the second floor of an old commercial building.)

Is there enough business and what is your funding like?

“Right now, yes. It’s a tough business for sure. We don’t have other

¹ http://galeriequynh.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Alluvium-PR-_-EN_01-02-18.pdf

partners. It is just me, Qyunh and her husband, Rob. In the future, we may look for investors if there are people who are interested. But right now, we are privately funded and it's only the sales returns that are sustaining the gallery."

Alexandre adds that she has not invested any money in the gallery. "I am a share director. Some months are really good, some are less so."



Zoe Butt

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BUILDING ON THE ECOSYSTEM

The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, which opened its doors to the public in March 2016, is the first purpose-built space for contemporary art in Vietnam. The centre houses the country's largest exhibition space, arts library and workspace.

Artistic director Zoe Butt is regarded as one of the foremost authority on Vietnamese contemporary art. She is a member of the Asian Art Council of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and a Young Global Leader of the World Economic Forum.

The Australian-born curator and writer held key positions in the art industry abroad prior to living and working in Vietnam. She was assistant curator, Contemporary Asian Art at Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane, Australia, where she assisted in the development of the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, key acquisitions for the Contemporary Asian art collection, and other associated gallery programmes from 2001 to 2007. Between 2007 and 2009, she was director of the International Programs for Long March Project – a multi-platform, international artist organisation and ongoing art project based in Beijing, China. Butt was the executive director and curator of San Art (2009-2016), Vietnam's then most active independent contemporary art space and reading room in Ho Chi Minh City¹.

Butt has been selected by the Sharjah Art Foundation as one of three curators for the 14th edition of the Sharjah Biennial entitled Sharjah Biennial 14: Leaving the Echo Chamber in March 2019 in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates.

The Factory, to date, has showcased 18 exhibitions and innumerable educational programmes at the time of this interview. About 50 artists from Vietnam, Singapore and Hong Kong have exhibited their works including Phan Thao Nguyen, Bui Cong Khanh and Le Hoang Bich Phuong.

¹ <http://san-art.org/producer/zoe-butt/>

The Edge: Can you tell us more about the space?

Zoe Butt: The Factory is a private initiative founded by independent artist Ti-A. The whole property operates as a ‘social enterprise’, which means any profit on-site from the bar, café, restaurant and artwork sales goes into supporting the Arts Centre. She also runs one of the country’s most successful fashion houses, Thuy Design House. The fashion house is her main business and The Factory is a recent addition.

The Factory presented Phan Thao Nguyen’s works at an exhibition in April 2017, realised during her time participating in the Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative as a protégé in visual arts to acclaimed American performance and video artist Joan Jonas. What’s the price range of her works?

In this exhibition, the artworks range from US\$600 to US\$7,500. The highest price was for a two-channel film installation, titled *Tropical Siesta* (see pg xxx), which was recently acquired by the Kadist Art Foundation in Paris.

Many collectors today still only prefer paintings. From your perspective, do you think the number of local collectors collecting mixed media works like video and installations is growing?

In Vietnam, we have very few local collectors of contemporary Vietnamese art, which is largely due to a lack of cultural infrastructure and education. Most of the collectors of contemporary Vietnamese are foreigners. The general public’s understanding of contemporary art is limited because in Vietnam, there has been, until now, no space to show such work – The Factory is the country’s first purpose-built space for contemporary art.

Are the foreign collectors at The Factory only interested in Vietnamese contemporary art or do they also explore other regional or international contemporary artworks?

Local collectors have been supporting the works of my community for more than 10 years. A handful of these collectors have been living in Vietnam for many years. The Post Vidai Collection, for example, has been collecting contemporary Vietnamese art since 1993². You'll also find collectors in Vietnam who buy photography or portrait works, but for the most part, most of the buyers of Vietnamese contemporary art live abroad.

Generally, what is the age group of these local collectors?

Most are aged between 40 and 60. A few younger ones are popping up, but not that many.

Do you participate in art fairs?

No. We are a social enterprise, not a commercial gallery. Our focus is generating exhibitions and educational programmes to assist artists in learning mechanisms of display; and to encourage broader community awareness of the various roles artists have in society today. Officially, Vietnam has a conventional and conservative approach to understanding the visual arts. They often think it's two-dimensional with a frame on the wall. However, art today consists of multiple media and dimensions where its installation demands innovative and provocative methods of display.

Do you have a criteria for selecting the artists?

We focus on artists who are unique, experimenting with concept

² Post Vidai, established in 1994, is a unique collection that focuses on the development of Vietnamese contemporary art. 'Vidai' in Vietnamese means 'great' or 'monumental', which was used widely in propaganda slogans and posters. The use of this term is a playful way of collecting the art after the establishment of 'Doi Moi', Vietnam's 'great' economic reforms of the late 1980s. Source taken from <http://postvidai.com/>

and technique that go beyond their training – artists who are taking the tools of their time and utilising them in innovative ways to comment/reflect on contemporary life.

How have Vietnamese contemporary artists grown conceptually in producing their works compared to the 1970s?

In 1986, with the economic reforms of Doi Moi, there was an influx of foreign materials coming into the country – such as foreign philosophical text and video cameras. This economic advancement brought a lot of social change – differing relationship to time and space and purpose. It made many artists reassess their methods and intentions, eventually giving rise to an experimental wave of conceptual practice in the early 1990s (particularly in Hanoi). I've been here for nearly 10 years now (since 2009) and the national scene of contemporary art is becoming a lot better networked and sophisticated. But it's not due to the education system, which has regressed.

This progress has occurred due to independent artist activity. Artists who work together as a collective have pushed the parameters of what defines 'contemporary' art. Since the early 2000s, there has been quite a healthy level of independent artist activity across the country, most particularly in Saigon right now. Curators and collectors have increasingly been coming to Vietnam, providing opportunities for Vietnamese artists to travel, come back and innovate. These artists share what they've seen with the younger ones, like a domino effect. That's a simmering landscape, particularly over the last 10 years.

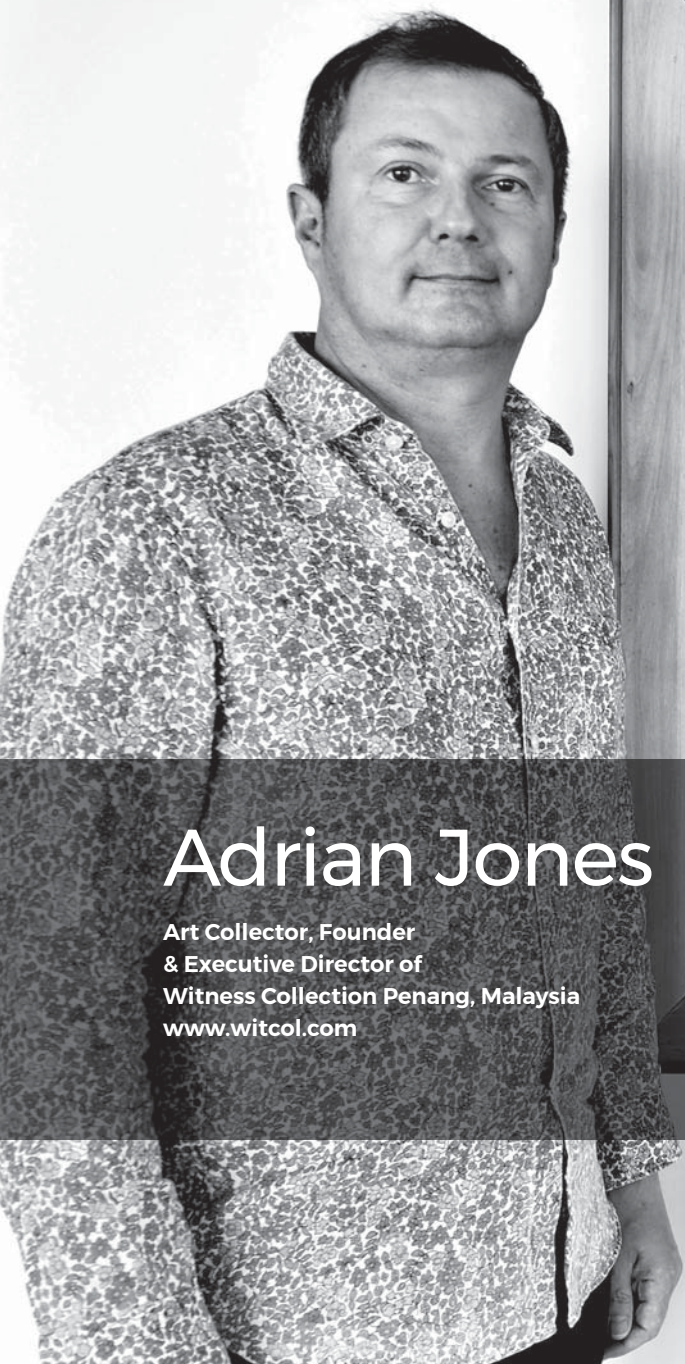
The artists who co-founded San Art are all big names in Vietnamese art (Dinh Q Le and Tuan Andrew Nguyen, Tiffany Chung, for example). They have significant global contacts in the industry, as I do, and we all endeavour to make this network relevant for Vietnam.

It's really important to have the whole ecosystem work together – curators, artists, writers...

Yes, absolutely. We work with a tiny pool of curators, but we are growing. We are in a better place than where we were 10 years ago. We don't have enough critical writers, unfortunately. So, at The Factory, we try to build this via specific educational programmes attached to our Reading Room.

Are there any significant developments in Vietnamese art, particularly at The Factory, within the past year that you would like to highlight?

Considering the capacity of The Factory, it has been great to be able to develop ambitious solo shows with Vietnamese artists – to a level previously impossible. For example, the chance to show two-screen video installations with surround sound, in addition to sculptural, photographic and painterly components (as evidenced in the solo shows of Phan Thao Nguyen and Tuan Andrew Nguyen). Or the ability to showcase the country's first 'public art' sculpture – 21 tonnes of steel – as one of the most ambitious projects independently realised by a single artist (Ly Hoang Ly's *Boat Home Boat* project, see pg xxx). These exhibition proposals demonstrate an ambition that has previously had next to no exposure within Vietnam. This ambition has been recognised by foreign interest, with artists like Phan Thao Nguyen being granted the Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative Award (mentored by American pioneer Joan Jonas).



Adrian Jones

Art Collector, Founder
& Executive Director of
Witness Collection Penang, Malaysia
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DOCUMENTING ART FROM THE VIETNAM WAR ERA

Penang-based British collector Adrian Jones of the Witness Collection shares insights into the origins of his passion for Vietnamese art and how Vietnamese institutions and collectors have influenced the art scene.

An interest in Vietnam's post-war history drew Adrian Jones to the region in 1986 to write a book and produce a documentary. He applied for a visa in 1984. After two years of more than 50 visits to the Vietnamese Embassy in London and six trips to Paris, he was finally given permission to enter the country. At the time, the Sixth Party Congress of the Communist party had implemented the policy of Doi Moi to open up the country to foreign visitors. (Doi Moi is the name given to the economic reforms initiated in Vietnam in 1986 with the goal of creating a "socialist-oriented market economy".)

His specific areas of interest were agriculture and health. "But the environment in Vietnam was extremely controlled so you couldn't go far without government guides. One of the few places that I could go to on my own was central Hanoi. That's when I discovered the Hanoi Fine Arts Association gallery. There were no foreigners apart from the diplomats. The artists used to gather there and drink coffee, smoke and talk. That generation was influenced by the French. I couldn't speak much Vietnamese but I could speak fluent French, so it was one of the few places to have contact with people who understood what was going on in their society. It began as a personal connection. Over the months, I formed relationships with artists and started buying a few artworks at the beginning of 1987."

The Edge: What's your background?

Adrian Jones: I have an unusual background because I designed videogames. I studied engineering at Cambridge University in England and wrote a book on videogames when I was young. I spent some time in Africa in 1984, and ended up writing about that.

I had an interest in journalism and made contact with some newspapers and broadcasters who were interested in Vietnam and Indochina which were basically closed to outsiders at the time. I ended up doing some of the first live radio reports from Saigon and Hanoi in early 1987 and filmed in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos from 1986-87. It started my fascination for Vietnam and with the arts in subsequent years. I kept going back to that country in the 1990s and purchased a few artworks for my home.

Many years later, I had accumulated a few hundred pieces. About 15 years ago, I figured out I had to do something interesting with the collection and set up Witness Collection in 2003. The idea was to focus on art as a social commentary of seeing the country through the eyes of the Vietnamese.

How did you put together the Witness Collection?

I spent a lot of time talking to people involved in Vietnamese art – museum directors, the university, artists, and ended up with about 40 advisors. From that, I was able to put together a list of artists to focus on. There was virtually no information about Vietnamese art. I had to put the collection together, research the artists, their periods and types of work.

I sent out my team on motorbikes to buy from the artists or their families. The collection today totals nearly 2,000 pieces.

Another important area to focus on was documentation because these artworks tell incredible stories. You need to know

the background of the pieces and that involves interviewing the artists and the people who knew the stories behind particular artworks.

For example, there was one artist who painted battlefield scenes, in particular the battle of Dien Bien Phu (a town in northwest Vietnam, the site of the French forces' defeat by the Vietminh Army in 1954, bringing to an end the French colonial rule of Indochina.) We took him back to the battleground at Dien Bien Phu with a filmmaker and documented it. We spent 15 years doing documentation.

The second area of focus was conservation. We recognised the historical works weren't in a good condition. They needed to be restored. We had to analyse what was causing the deterioration, so we started a collaborative project with Northumbria University in the UK in 2005. The results were picked up by the media including *Newsweek*. As a result, a conservation studio was set up in Kuala Lumpur in 2009. We work with the Getty Institute in Los Angeles now and have a number of works with the Heritage Conservation Centre in Singapore. We also helped with research on lacquer with the Victoria & Albert Museum (London).

We discovered that there is no training facility for art conservators in Southeast Asia. The conservators are from Australia, Europe, the US and maybe Northeast Asia such as Japan. But what we discovered is that many of the techniques they use don't apply to Southeast Asian art because the climate and pollutants are different here. There's no window glazing to prevent outdoor pollutants from entering.

The third part of our work was to assemble information for publications and exhibitions. We collaborated with the National Gallery in Singapore, National Museum of Contemporary Art in Korea and some institutions in Japan and other places.

Why choose Penang as your base?

My home is in Penang. I grew up in Bedfordshire but left the UK 24 years ago. I had an opportunity to work in the tech business in Silicon Valley, US, then Monaco where I lived for 12 years. And finally to Asia.

Although based between Ho Chi Minh City and KL, I spend more time in Penang than anywhere else. Penang is an arts and culture-friendly location offering quality of life. Previously, I commuted between Bangkok and Ho Chi Minh City. I wanted to display the collection in a suitable space. Of all the various factors I considered, Penang was the most suitable. I have collected the works of about 130 (Vietnamese) artists: first-generation artists who studied between 1925 and 1945 at the Fine Arts College in Hanoi; army artists from 1940s to 1979 and contemporary artists.

What are your thoughts on Vietnamese art and auctions based on the auction records of the artists?

One observation of the auction market is that the auction houses have a notoriously hard time sourcing artworks in Vietnam. They don't have the connections in most cases and have been very unreliable at sourcing, let's say, 'authentic works' because of the difficulty in verifying their authenticity. The big auction houses have focused more on Vietnamese artists who moved to France – Le Pho, Mai Trung Thu, Vu Cao Dam and Le Thi Luu. Le Pho and Mai Trung Thu are good artists but their high auction prices do not mean they are the best or leading artists in Vietnam.

To me, it is market misrepresentation. The reason their prices become so high is that they are well known in the West, the works are much easier to authenticate because they have been sold through places like Wally Finlay Galleries in New York, so there's more of a history there. Auction houses don't have the research or

the knowledge to be able to source the works in Vietnam. That distorts the auction market for Vietnam.

On the auction records of French artists active in Vietnam such as Joseph Ingiumberty and Alix Ayme, Jones regards their inclusion as equally valid, especially in the art history of Vietnam.

These are French artists who taught at the fine art colleges in Indochina. They are not Vietnamese but they produced works in Vietnam. They are an important part of the art history and are on your list because their works are easily available in France. There's good documentation of the history of those works.

Dismissing the suggestion that foreign-born artists like Ingiumberty should not be included in Vietnamese art auctions, Jones said that was "absolute nonsense". He pointed out that Ingiumberty was head of the painting department of the Indochina Fine Arts College from its inception to its closure over 20 years. He was instrumental in lacquer becoming an art form in Vietnam.

The list (see pg 412) is missing most of the great Vietnamese artists. The reason is that their works are so scarce that they don't normally come out at auctions. For example, Nam Son, the co-founding head of the Fine Arts College or To Ngoc Van. I could give you a list of 20 artists who are the most important, including Nguyen Tuong Lan, Tran Van Can, Nguyen Tu Nghiem, Duong Bich Lien and Le Van De. Nguyen Phan Chanh was an important pioneer in silk painting. Nguyen Gia Tri is probably the most important lacquer painter in Vietnam. Bui Xuan Phai has an issue with authenticity. The majority of Phai's works offered are fake, as are Nguyen Phan Chanh's.

To be fair, most of these (works) are actually sourced from French

collectors. Generally, a high proportion of works by Nguyen Phan Chanh, Nguyen Gia Tri, Bui Xuan Phai and Nguyen Sang will be fake.

The important artists are Nam Son, Ta Ty and, of course, Victor Tardieu, but you can't find his works. In Vietnam, you will hear that these works are not important because the works of Victor Tardieu and Joseph Ingumberty are not available. To the best of my knowledge, there is not one Ingumberty or Tardieu original artwork in Vietnam. I have never even seen one in the museums.

The three most important names related to the history of the university and the origins of modern art in Vietnam are Nam Son and Victor Tardieu as founders and Joseph Ingumberty as head of the painting department. And certainly, Evariste Jonchere, who's important but came long after Tardieu and Nam Son.

(Referring to the list) These are all important artists in Vietnam but I don't think these prices are reflective of who's the most important.

Then you have some weird situation like that of Nguyen Trung, whom I have known for many years. The works that sell at auctions are his portraits of ladies. But Nguyen Trung is a serious artist and makes extraordinary abstract works, but the market is very unsophisticated in Southeast Asia. They don't recognise that his serious works are those abstracts. He paints ladies in the garden just to make money because he knows that they sell.

[Then you have artists] like Hong Viet Dung, who started out as a very good artist, and Bui Huu Hung. These two are perfect examples of running factories. My favourite question to them would be, 'Did you sign that one yourself?' I don't even need to ask them if they painted it themselves. Their output is the same. They haven't changed the type of work for 20 years. To me, it's not very interesting at all. It's nice if you want decorative art.

What's interesting is that the works of Bui Huu Hung collected by National Gallery in Singapore were from his early years and show

incredible skill. He's a skilful lacquer painter and his early works are fantastic, but then he cottoned on to an emperor's daughter type of portraits and that's what sells. It's an utter waste of time.

Similarly with Dinh Quan, a good friend of mine, but I've seen his assistant making the painting at his studio. Interestingly, Dinh Quan does make some of his own works which are much more interesting but you will never see them at an auction. They are not as appealing to the mass market.

The auction market is not representational of the Vietnamese art scene because of the lack of access to good works and the relatively immature buyer's market that favours decorative over serious works. The works are sourced from outside the country because of the difficulty of sourcing them in Vietnam.

Jones believes that the art prices recorded at auctions could go even higher.

They will go higher because there's a rapidly increasing number of wealthy people in Vietnam. And they are all chasing after a very small supply of the best quality works. So, the best works are going to become increasingly valuable.

For the likes of Buu Hui Hung and Hong Viet Dung, I don't see their prices going up at all because there's continuous production. The prices of the old masters' works, those who have passed away, will continue to increase. However, what undermines them is the lack of skills of the auction houses in identifying works that are not authentic, either due to a lack of research or lack of technical capabilities, such as analytics of the works. There's also a significant continuing danger of fake works undermining the art market. You will see a lot of (Bui Xuan) Phai fakes sold at auctions. People who are more familiar with Phai won't bid but there will be people who will. And therefore you will see prices of 12, 15 and 20

thousand dollars. That's not the price of a real Phai, so it undermines the perceived value. Whereas, the best works that have a well-documented provenance will continue to sell at increasingly higher prices.

What's the art market scene in Cambodia like?

It's like Vietnam 10-plus years ago where 95% of the buyers were foreigners. They are either tourists, diplomats, business owners or business visitors. And, of course, a lot of UN officials. They have a budget, and time to get to know the market. These people have been the drivers of the art market. It is only recently that a significant number of Cambodians have started purchasing art. Anything from 50% of the artworks have been purchased by Cambodians. And there are certainly art dealers and galleries that are focused on the Cambodian market. I think that will grow increasingly.

Your views on Cambodian and Vietnamese artists...

You don't have any of the overseas names on your auction list. You have artists such as (Vietnamese-born American artist) Dinh Q. Lê and his works sell well. He sets himself high prices through the galleries. Artists, whose ethnicity is Vietnamese or Cambodian, grew up, for example in the American art system so they have access through the art schools, gallery and curator networks which are not available to most of the domestic artists. The most famous Cambodian artist is Sopheap Pich. He's brilliant, very talented, but his history is basically through the American system.

Sopheap speaks English like an American. If you read about his history, he was born in Cambodia but lived and studied in the US. He left the country as a refugee when he was seven years old. He only returned in 2002. He was a well-established artist in the US which put his name on the map.

I bet there are almost no Cambodian collectors of his work. He is collected primarily by wealthy New Yorkers and museums. What happened with the Khmer Rouge is that the art education system was destroyed and many of the artists died. So there are only one or two artists like Svay Ken. He only started his career as an artist when he was over 60 years old. He passed away in 2008.

There was never really a gallery system in place for someone like Svay Ken. The museums, biennales and triennials only exhibited his works recently. It's only with the museums' interest in South-east Asia that some of these artists are starting to become recognised.

Part of what an artist does is to comment on life. And that touches on the social and political issues. It's incredibly difficult for many Vietnamese artists to exhibit their most interesting works in the country. There's an underground art scene in Vietnam because you need a licence and the government has to approve all the artworks to be exhibited. That even applies to museums. We have cases where the Vietnam Fine Arts Museum has put on a show for an artist, but shortly before the show, people from the censorship department removed artworks from the wall. This has the effect of self-censorship in Vietnam and it means that a lot of the most interesting contemporary works are not seen publicly.

There's a small number of collectors who are very familiar with the art market. For example, in China, people were collecting behind the scenes. And it only became apparent, maybe 10 or 20 years later, that there were some serious works created that had never been seen.

Now in China, most artists can show whatever they have created. So, I think we are going to have some surprising moments in the years to come where spectacular works that have been collected have not been seen yet in public.

What's your ultimate aim of collecting, research and documentation of Vietnamese works?

It relates back to what I went to Vietnam 30 years ago for – to get the Vietnamese perspective of what they went through. The Witness Collection is about the artists' voices, sharing their commentary on what their country and the people have experienced. The objective is to document it. Once the artworks are ready, to conserve and exhibit them so people can see and experience them.

For the moment, we are going through museum loans and working on a touring exhibition to places that had significant impact on Vietnam such as the United States, France, Australia, Japan and Russia. And countries that identify with Vietnam such as Korea and Germany because of the divisions of the countries, and Spain because of the civil war.

Motivation

I set out 30-plus years ago to tell the story about Vietnam, and I found it much more complex than I'd imagined. I didn't get to complete what I started. The objective is to let the Vietnamese artists tell their own stories, to facilitate for it to happen. I don't deal in art or trade art. I have my other business interests that enable me to do all the things that I like to do.

I'm involved in different businesses and projects in technology; I have one business that was listed on the London Stock Exchange (recently). It's the world's largest operator in Escape Games which operates in 30 countries. These days, I'm not collecting so much because the focus has been on documentation and observation which is expensive to do.

A black and white portrait of a middle-aged man with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a light-colored button-down shirt. He is looking slightly upwards and to the right. The background features a wall with a decorative pattern and large, dark, leafy plants.

Nguyen Hong Lam

Vietnam Fine Arts Museum
Secretary to the Director
Department of HR & External Relations
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Vietnam
www.vnfam.vn

POINT OF REFERENCE

Vietnam Fine Arts Museum is housed in a colonial-era building built in 1937 as a boarding house for French school girls. The country's premier arts museum is the perfect place to appreciate the nation's artistic history, which focuses on lacquer works and war-time themes.

We spoke to Nguyen Hong Lam, 40, from the Department of Human Resources & External Relations about the museum.

The Edge: What category of art does the museum focus on? Which period or what type of artists does the museum highlight?

Nguyen Hong Lam: There are many artworks and we divide them into different periods. The museum houses Old Century art (ancient artefacts) and modern works up to the 20th Century and from the 20th Century to the present day. We had two wars in Vietnam, with France (First Indochina Wars, 1945 to 1954) and with the US (Second Indochina Wars or Vietnam War, 1955 to 1975). So, we focus on patriotism and military strategy. During the war, many artists left the country.

When you select these artworks for display, is there a policy to highlight the war effort, the American invaders and so on?

Yes, that's right. We have around 20,000 artworks but only 2,000 on display.

How often do you change the artwork display?

Every one or two years, we change the display of the museum. For example, on Independence Day, we open a room for visitors to view the artworks. It's to educate the public and remind them of the development of the country.

It's surprising that there are few of the top-selling artists especially from the L'École des Beaux-Arts du Việt Nam period (1925-1930), like Le Pho and Mai Trung Thu. We only saw one of Le Pho's works.

We have two in the museum. We keep them in the warehouse. But we are not sure how many we have.

Our museum is different from other art museums that I know of. For example, the MoMA (Museum of Modern Art) in New York is so different because it's for people to come, see and feel the artworks. When people come to our museum, they think about the war or the artworks. I don't know if our museum is different from a Malaysian museum.

Different countries have different historical events. Your museum is more about patriotism, for the people to feel love for the country, to learn about the war effort and what has happened in the past. Whereas the other countries in Southeast Asia didn't have such a war. So they have different objectives. They follow the Western model in museum displays to emphasise beauty, social development and culture.

Yes, you are right.

Do you loan the museum's collection to other museums?

Some museums also want to exchange artworks with our museum. They know about the war and the development in our economy. We loaned some paintings to the National Gallery Singapore (NGS) and Cambridge University in the UK in 2008. NGS borrowed an artwork in 2015 entitled *Dawn on the Farm* by Nguyen Duc Nung. I think you should see the artwork because it's about Vietnam after the war and how the economy developed. Some museums in the US want to borrow artworks about the war between Vietnam and the US. Vietnam's history is divided into two cultures, North and South. Artists from both sides

risked their lives to capture aspects and events of the war.

We also bring artworks to other countries like on Vietnam Cultural Day in Russia, Poland, Korea and Japan. We have contacts with Fukuoka Museum in Japan and have had some exchanges with museums in Leipzig and Dresden, Germany.

There are a number of Bui Xuan Phai paintings upstairs. Is that from the family or did the museum get that from the artist himself when he was alive?

The paintings belonged to the artist. Some artists would give us the works when they were alive. For those who are deceased, we get the artworks from the family.

I get many emails from collectors who are interested in the artworks. But the paintings are part of our history and belong in the museum. We also keep detailed records of the artworks including information about the artist, the painting and the donor. A department is dedicated to collecting the data and inventory.

You mentioned that your museum buys works at auctions.

We have a department that organises national exhibitions and we build up the artist's profile. The government provides funding to buy paintings, so we need to have clear documentation about that particular painting. Price is very important. But in Vietnam, some artists sell their artworks to the museum at a very low price. We cannot afford some artworks that are too expensive for us.

What's the maximum price your museum can afford?

Maybe US\$600,000. Although we follow the market, it's a big problem for us. We can't compete with collectors who can pay high prices for artworks. For example, Le Pho has many good artworks.

But your museum already has 20,000 artworks. So you would already have the works of well-known artists. They would have given the works to the museum or have sold at a low price.

The artists think they can sell to the museum at a very high price even if we already have many artworks. Our warehouse stores some of these highly priced paintings. We also receive many artworks for the museum, some of which are not good works.

What do you think of foreigners who buy important Vietnamese artworks? Do you see it as a problem?

Yes, it's a problem.

When was this museum set up?

It was set up in 1966 and I have been working here for three years. I worked 10 years in electronic arts for an animation company, Sparx (Sparx is a 3D CG and animation studio that creates feature films, TV shows and game cinematics) where we built console games. I studied art at Hue University in Vietnam and went to Ho Chi Minh City. The company sent me on a posting to Iowa, the US, for three years and two years in Vancouver.

We have compiled a list of Vietnamese artists whose works have been sold at auctions. Do you see familiar names or do you have similar artworks by the same artists in your museum?

The museum has works of Le Pho, Nguyen Phan Chanh, Nguyen Gia Tri, Mai Trung Thu, Vu Cao Dam and Le Thi Kim Bach as well¹.

When there was a particular auction in Hong Kong, I heard about some problems with some artists' works like Le Pho's. There was one famous Mai Trung Thu painting at the auction. Someone from France called us to verify the painting. He showed me the pho-

¹ Nguyen Gia Tri's *Beauté éternelle (Eternal Beauty)*, 1955, lacquer on board, 89cm by 61cm was sold at Christie's Hong Kong on May 29, 2016, for US\$314,272 including 20% buyer's premium, setting a record price for lacquer art.

to and it looked different from our Mai Trung Thu painting at the museum. So it was a fake.

Yes, there are problems even at the international level. They can't be 100% sure that the paintings are original.

We have documentation to prove the paintings in our museum are original. And if the artist has died, the family will show us evidence that the painting was done by the artist.

That's an important source. People write to the museum to get authentication. Do you inform them if the artwork is real?

No, I don't tell them if it's real or not. We just show them the evidence and documentation that the painting belongs to us.

But do international auction houses contact you when they have, say, a Mai Trung Thu or a Le Pho that they want to sell? Do they ask your opinion?

We don't hear from them. Some collectors, who are thinking of buying a painting of Mai Trung Thu or Le Pho, will email the museum to confirm if the painting is fake.

We have a website which needs updating. Perhaps next time we could set up a live chat room for people to ask us about an artist's work.



Pho Duc Long & Lai Thanh Mai

Directors

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BANKING ON THE FUTURE

The Dong Phong Art Gallery, located in the charming French quarter, showcases an impressive collection of artworks by Vietnamese masters and up-and-coming artists. With over 20 years of experience in the art business, its director Pho Duc Long, 57, has made it his mission to promote the talents of emerging, cutting-edge artists. He is assisted by his niece Lai Thanh Mai, 40, who manages the art space.

The Edge: How long have you been collecting?

Pho Duc Long (Long): I have been collecting for a very long time. The first painting I collected was [purchased] in 1995.

Do you remember the first painting you bought?

Lai Thanh Mai (Mai): It was Nguyen Tu Nghiem's small painting. My uncle (Long) still keeps it and it's not for sale.

When did you start the gallery?

Mai: He has been in the art industry for a long time. He worked in the first State gallery in 1992. Three years later, he collaborated with five other friends to open Dong Son Gallery. Dong Phong Art Gallery opened in 2002 when he separated from the other partners and started his own private gallery.

Are the others still in the art business?

Mai: No, they couldn't open another gallery. But they are still working in the arts but not professionally like Long.

How do you think the market is doing now compared to how it was when you started?

Long: When I started working at the gallery, the art buyers mostly con-

sisted of foreigners. But now, there are more Vietnamese collectors.

Mai: In the past, the rich Vietnamese would invest in real estate, but now they are paying more attention to art. Some even organise art auctions in Vietnam.

There are charity art auctions in Ho Chi Minh City. What about in Hanoi?

Mai: There are one or two auctions. But I haven't heard about charity auctions.

Long: Auctions for charity don't reflect the real price.

Do you follow Christie's or Sotheby's auctions?

Mai: Yes, we keep up with their auction results but we don't attend.

Looking at the artists who have made it to auction, do you recognise the last few names on the list?

Long: This list represents the first and second generation of Vietnamese artists, so they are old and famous. Most of them are from the Indochina College, but they have left Vietnam for France. In Vietnam, the masters are To Ngoc Van, Bui Xuan Phai and Nguyen Tu Nghiem. We know more about these artists than Le Pho. We only see Le Pho's works in books and online. But we haven't seen the works in real life.

At the Vietnam Museum of Fine Arts, we were told that there was only one Le Pho work there, but they have more in storage. They have about 20,000 artworks.

Long: Le Pho is only famous outside of Vietnam because he lived abroad and his collectors are not Vietnamese. In Vietnam, the most famous artists are Bui Xuan Phai, Nguyen Tu Nghiem and To Ngoc Van.

Vietnamese collectors are only now starting to buy from auctions.

Long: I don't know about the Vietnamese collectors who buy paintings of first-generation artists like Le Pho. But I hear, they go to auctions in Hong Kong to buy the works.

Mai: One artist friend who lives in Ho Chi Minh City bought two or three works from the Christie's auction.

Do you think the people who buy these expensive works are real collectors or buying for investment?

Long: Both, because they don't have experience in art. They are just rich and see the price. They have a lot of properties but not culture.

Isn't it good that Vietnamese are buying back the works rather than the French or other Europeans?

Mai: It's good news but perhaps in a few more years when they gain more knowledge in art, we'll be much happier.

But in a few more years, the works will not be available at this price.

Mai: Yes, so they'll buy not because they love the art, but because the art will be worth more a few years later.

Long: They have interest in art because it is overpriced.

Who are the artists whose works you have collected that are valuable now?

Long: Nguyen Tu Nghiem's works. Now I'm interested in the works of young artists.

Mai: I'll add Dang Xuan Hoa and Bui Xuan Phai.

Does the gallery participate in art fairs?

Mai: We just visit some but never participate. We went to Hong Kong Affordable Art and Art Stage Singapore in 2015. We saw other Vietnamese gallery owners there and we visited other galleries too.

Do you collect mainly paintings? Are you interested in installations et cetera?

Mai: My uncle is not interested in installations. Just some sculptures.

Long: In Vietnam, the first gallery was the State gallery in 1980. In the 1990s, there were only a few private art galleries. Now the Vietnamese have developed an interest in the arts and they have the capacity because they are rich. So, they set up new galleries like Cuc, The Factory. They invest in the arts and have plans to expand abroad. I only invest in art for myself because I love art.

What are the young, contemporary artists that you have?

Long: I just discovered there are many young artists but nobody knows about them. I love their works so much. They are just in their twenties. I hope they will be well known in the future. Artists such as Ly Hung Anh, Ha Manh Thang, Le Quy Tong, Do Trong Quy, Nguyen Dinh Son and Vu Duc Trung.

Have you ever consigned works at auctions? Or do you just sell privately?

Long: We sell privately only. Some young artists are very good but nobody knows about them, so their prices are really low. We organise group exhibitions and have introduced them to our clients.

What's the highest transaction you have made in your gallery?

Mai: My uncle said that the highest price obtained for a painting was over US\$20,000.

Long: Not a lot.

What's the art scene like in Hanoi? Are more young people collecting?

Mai: The art market in Hanoi is slower than before. But more Vietnamese collectors have started to collect paintings and they are young people as well. They are interested in the old masters, so they buy paintings from auctions. Perhaps, to boost the names of the artists. The younger collectors aged 35 to 40 buy contemporary works from among their friends.

Who are the famous contemporary artists?

Mai: Ly Hung Anh, Ha Manh Thang and Le Quy Tong.

Have you heard of the new Vincom Center for Contemporary Arts (VCCA)?

Mai: Yes, they organised a big art exhibition at Vincom Megamall Royal City in June 2017 to introduce their new art space¹. It aims to contribute to the development of contemporary art. Pham Nhat Vuong is the founder and chairman of Vingroup, one of Vietnam's largest conglomerates and the developer of the Megamall Royal City. He invested in real estate and has become very successful with Vingroup properties, shopping malls and marts. He just invested in art last year. Vingroup collects a lot of paintings and buys directly from the artists.

Many of the galleries, even the established ones, sell very decorative works.

Mai: We call them commercial art galleries. The value of artworks is not high and are used for decoration. Perhaps, the artists just paint in one style and are not able to improve. It's easier to sell the works because the price is cheaper.

¹ Vingroup launches VCCA – Vincom Center for Contemporary Art. www.vccavietnam.com/en/vingroup-ra-mat-trung-tam-nghe-thuat-duong-dai-vcca

Ten years ago, Bui Huu Hung's work was priced at US\$5,000. Today, it's still selling at US\$5,000.

Mai: US\$5,000 is still expensive for us.

Long: It's not my taste.

He has a painting at the Metropole Hotel in Hanoi, so that is important marketing to expose his works to the public. What about Phuong Quoc Tri?

Mai: Yes, the works of Phuong Quoc Tri and Pham Luan are everywhere. That is also the reason why Vietnamese art is very slow because many artists still paint like that. They think it's easier to sell. Even Dang Xuan Hoa's works are seen at several galleries.

The gallery owners come from Saigon to buy paintings from Dang Xuan Hoa in Hanoi. The artist also sells his paintings directly to customers. Last month, he brought his paintings to Singapore for an exhibition.

We notice some familiar sculptures here that we have seen at the Vietnam Museum of Fine Arts in Hanoi. Can you tell us about the artist?

Mai: Yes, the artist Vuong Van Thao created the *Living Fossils* sculpture series². He made small representations of the Hanoi Old Quarter and was invited to exhibit the 68-piece works at the Singapore Art Museum (SAM). SAM purchased the entire collection for its permanent collection. We sold a lot of small sculptures to private collectors in Singapore.

² Hanoi Grape Vine, October 17, 2013. *The Grapevine Selection Presents Artist Vuong Van Thao*. <https://hanoigrapvine.com/2013/10/the-grapevine-selection-presents-artist-vuong-van-thao/>



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FOCUSING ON SECOND AND THIRD-GENERATION ARTISTS

Ngan Pho Gallery features a selection of vibrant contemporary works of young and established artists. It has twice exhibited the works of reclusive modern artist Nguyen Tu Nghiem.

Its director Le Trung Thanh, 57, explains that he is not interested in the works of old masters such as Le Pho although he does check their international auction results.

His focus is on the second and third generation of artists. "In Vietnam, there are three groups of big names. The first group consists of Le Pho, Mai Trung Thu, Vu Cao Dam and Le Thi Luu. The second group comprises Nguyen Gia Tri, Tran Van Can, To Ngoc Van and Nguyen Tuong Lan. And Nguyen Tu Nghiem, Nguyen Sang, Duong Bich Lien and Bui Xuan Phai make up the third group.

"In the first generation, there is one female artist Le Thi Luu. But I prefer the second-generation. They developed Vietnamese art and are very different. Some artists didn't produce a lot of artworks except for Nguyen Gia Tri. Tran Van Can was not only an artist, but he was also the director of the Vietnam College of Fine Arts (1955–1964). He was the general secretary of the Vietnamese Fine Arts Association between 1958 and 1983, and in 1983, he became the president of the Vietnamese Association of Plastic Arts."

The Edge: Are the collectors of these artworks Vietnamese or foreigners?

Le Trung Thanh: Most Vietnamese paintings were sold to foreigners 10 years ago such as works by Bui Xuan Phai and Nguyen Tu Nghiem. In 2009, Vietnamese collectors started buying paintings. It's good for the Vietnamese art market.

What is the most expensive artwork that your gallery has sold?

My gallery does not have many paintings on display here. If I have artworks by many artists then I won't have a good log. I choose one senior artist. For example, for the third generation artists, I have works of Nguyen Tu Nghiem and Bui Xuan Phai. Nguyen is famous and the number one artist.

How much is his price now? For instance, this artwork from the museum.

The price is not the same for every painting. It also depends on the size. The prices vary based on the quality and the aesthetic value. In 2013, that painting was displayed in London and its insurance cost (including shipping cost from Hanoi to London for the exhibition) was US\$1,200,000. Perhaps the price of the artwork was higher.

There are not many of his works at auctions. Most Vietnamese paintings at Sotheby's and Christie's are by Bui Xuan Phai.

Based on artprice.com, Nguyen Tu Nghiem's work entitled Dancers (estimate HK\$180,000 to HK\$240,000) was not sold at Christie's Asian 20th Century Art Auction on Nov 27, 2016.

His highest auction record was for a lacquer painting on board entitled Kieu and Kim Trong (estimate HK\$80,000 to HK\$100,000), which was sold at Christie's Asian 20th Century Art on May 29, 2016, for HK\$200,000 including buyer's premium.

Why do you think people don't put up his works at auction?

The collectors who buy Nghiem's works are real collectors. They don't buy to sell. They love his artworks and prefer to keep them. The prices of artworks in Vietnam now are expensive compared to 10 years ago.

Many foreign collectors who have Vietnamese artworks wait for the prices to go up then sell to Vietnamese collectors.

So the new Vietnamese collectors are willing to buy the artworks at a high price?

Yes, there are many big collectors in Vietnam now.

Most Vietnamese collectors buy because they love art, but they will sell for a good return. However, they would have to wait a long time for the price to go up.

Do you think these works are mainly sold by foreigners or local Vietnamese?

They are sold by the Vietnamese. Most of the paintings on the list remain overseas. Collectors bought the artworks 30 to 50 years ago for investment. Now, not as many foreign collectors are buying the paintings because there are many more Vietnamese collectors. They are interested in works by Nguyen Tu Nghiem, Tran Van Can and Nguyen Sang, but there aren't enough in the market.

Nguyen Tu Nghiem's widow is very selective in who she deals with and not many collectors and galleries are able to contact her.

Are you in contact with Nghiem's wife?

Yes. But only with my gallery. She doesn't like to sell his works to other galleries. You don't see these paintings in Vietnam now but in Hong Kong or other countries.

Among the second-generation artists during the war, Tran Luu Hau¹ was the master (1946 to 1986).

Born in Hanoi, Tran was a student of Viet Bac Fine Arts School and the Surikov Fine Arts Academy in Moscow from 1956 to 1962. He taught at the

¹ <http://www.asiana-fineart.com/en/artists/tran-luu-hau/biography>

Hanoi School of Fine Arts. In 1993, he held solo Vietnamese contemporary art exhibitions in Paris. His work is included in the collections of Hanoi Museum of Fine Arts, the Asian Museum in Poland and the Asian Museum of former Soviet Union.²

Does your gallery participate in art fairs?

Seven years ago, we took part in Art Singapore from 2003 to 2010 and in the Contemporary Asian Art Fair.

Why did you stop exhibiting in art fairs?

Art Singapore was a good organiser. There were many galleries from Asia, the US and all over the world exhibiting in Art Singapore. But Art Singapore has been closed since 2009 because the art market was not good³.

The three-day Art Singapore Fair in 2008, which began on October 10, displayed works from 110 galleries based in 16 countries and territories, including the US, France, Japan, South Korea and Hong Kong.

Three Vietnamese galleries sent works to the event – Mai and Ngan Pho (Thousands of Streets) from Hanoi and Zen from Ho Chi Minh City. But they received poor response from visitors to the fair, which was crowded with pieces by more famous artists from around the world.

The Vietnamese works were given much less prominent displays than those from South Korea, China and Indonesia.

But there has been a new art fair, Art Stage Singapore, since 2011. Did you participate?

No, although I do exhibit in Australia, Japan and the US.

² <http://ravenel.com/artist.php?id=547&lan=en>

³ Robert, October 29, 2008. *The ugly duckling*, Vietnam Breaking News. <https://m.vietnambreakingnews.com/2008/10/the-ugly-duckling>

What's your plan as a gallery? Do you plan to participate in more art fairs in the future?

Art fairs are too troublesome for artists and art collectors.

Fifteen years ago, Vietnamese art thrived in Hong Kong. Many Americans working in Hong Kong came to buy Vietnamese art. Now, not many paintings are sold or shipped abroad but are sold locally to Vietnamese collectors.

Do you consign paintings to Sotheby's or Christie's?

No, I only display and sell in the gallery. I have many collectors, but not enough paintings to sell. I think I will put up paintings for auction. I'm waiting for a good time.

Do your collectors prefer the second and third-generation artists like you mentioned, or do they collect young artists who are still in their twenties?

First-generation artists are good for investment, but now the young artists are strong with good ideas. If they start their collection now, collectors should buy contemporary art because the works are not too highly priced. They will increase in price in future. They are of high quality and good for investment.

Younger Vietnamese are not very rich, so they can buy affordable young artists' works. I've seen paintings in Indonesia, Singapore, Japan, Hong Kong, India and Thailand, but I still prefer Vietnamese art.

What do you think of conceptual art like video and new media art?

In Vietnam, there is some video art, but I prefer paintings. Video art needs more time to grow and I don't like sculptures. The artists could be good but they are not promoted enough.

THAILAND

DEVELOPMENT OF THAI ART

According to text that accompanies artworks hung on the walls of the National Gallery in Bangkok, traditional paintings in Thailand came about during ancient times and were typically related to Buddhism and religious beliefs.

Subject-matter related to literature, folklore and daily life were also popular but it was not considered compatible with religious beliefs.

Basically, traditional Thai paintings were created as murals on the walls of monasteries; on textiles as banners; on paper as manuscripts; and cabinets and boxes used for storing Buddhist scriptures and books.

Traditional Thai paintings before 1932

The oldest traditional Thai paintings that have survived were created during the Ayutthaya and Bangkok periods, during the 16th to 20th centuries.

In the early periods, traditional Thai paintings presented the complete story in a single panel, in two dimensions, without perspective or realism using the tempera technique. The pigments used were a mixture of tempera and glue in monochrome such as red, yellow, black and white.

Later, a new scheme of painting was introduced from overseas, which led to an application of polychrome colours from the late Ayutthaya period.

Western arts were first introduced in Thailand during the period of King Rama III (r. 1824-1851) but began to have an impact on traditional Thai arts during the reign of King Rama IV (r. 1851-1868). Krua-In-Khong was the most important artisan of that era. His work can be seen in temple murals such as Wat Bowonniwet and

Wat Boromniwas (Wat Borom, formerly Wat Nok).

During the reign of King Rama V, Thai painting techniques evolved into a style that was more Western. In 1887, the king organised a painting competition for the decoration of the royal cremation ceremony at Pra Maru ground. Traditional literary subjects of the Bangkok period such as the *Ramayana*, *Inao*, *Pra Apaimanee* and *Sangthong* were depicted in Thai paintings but in new and modern ways. Prince Narissaranuwattiwong was a talented artist of the period who was adept in both Western and Thai art styles and combined both techniques.

While Western art in the realistic style became popular, traditional Thai art declined. To revive interest in traditional Thai art, King Rama VI (r. 1910-1925) founded the Fine Arts Department in 1912, aimed at encouraging greater involvement in Thai art and craft.

In 1913, the School of Arts and Crafts was founded, with the king overseeing it. The objective was to preserve the traditional arts.

During this period, Thai paintings developed into a new style as can be seen in the works of Prince Narissaranuwattiwong, both through his own creations and through cooperation with Italian artists such as Galileo Chini and Carlo Rigoli which, in turn, inspired the works of later Thai artists.

Paintings in the Western realistic style (1856-1937)

As traditional Thai paintings were further developed under the influence of the Western world, the realistic Western painting style or Realism was also introduced into Thailand.

From 1856, during the reign of King Rama IV, the portraits (both paintings and sculptures) of the king and the royal court were depicted in the Western style. Portraits made during the lifetime of the models had never been seen before in the country. In the reign of King Rama V (r. 1868-1910), Western influence was brought into

Thailand through objects; through the transfer of knowledge and concepts; and as a result of the royal visits to Europe (in 1897, 1906-07).

Artworks from the West were imported, and artists from European countries were employed such as Chini and Rigoli.

A royal artisan, Pra Soralaklikhit (Mui Chantaralak), was also given the opportunity to further his studies in Europe. As a result, working in the Western style became popular among artists in the country and from overseas during this period.

During the reign of King Rama VI (r. 1910-1925), traditional Thai art regained its vitality with the king's support. However, Western art continued to enjoy popularity. The most important Western-style artist of the period was Pra Soralaklikhit. He painted several portraits of the kings and members of the court as well as reproductions of European masterpieces such as *Venus* by the Italian artist, Titian.

In 1923, the Italian sculptor Corrado Feroci (who later changed his name to Silpa Bhirasri) was employed by the Fine Arts Department for creating statues of the king. As a result, the Fine Arts School was established in 1934 – and later upgraded to Silpakorn University in 1943 – to systematically develop Western art education. Western-style art advanced even further after that.

Royal patronage

Since ancient times, Thai arts have been under royal patronage. Beyond their interest in and support of art and the artisans, several Thai kings possessed artistic talent. Particularly in the Bangkok period, Thai kings expanded interest in several art forms such as painting, sculpture and craft.

King Vajiravudh or King Rama VI had interests in many segments of the arts. Accomplished in the performing arts and

literature, King Rama VI also enjoyed painting. The king enjoyed watercolour painting and drawing that included human figures, caricatures and illustrations. He also supported artistic activities by organising painting competitions, and participated in those events and contributed his paintings for publication in the *Dusitsamit* newspaper.

King Bhumibol Adlyadej or King Rama IX also had extraordinary artistic talent, including writing and performing music, painting and photography. He was active in painting between 1960 and 1967. During this period, through self-study and sharing experiences with distinguished Thai artists such as Hem Wechakorn, Chamran Kietkhong, Fua Haribhitak, Chalerm Nakeeruk, Pitoon Muangsomboon, Kien Yimsiri and Piriya Krileuk, the king developed his own style. His works are mainly oil paintings, both realistic and modern, with the influence of Expressionism, Surrealism and Abstraction.

Thai art after 1932

During the reign of King Rama VII (1925-1934), a major shift occurred in Thai art in the realistic style under the royal patronage of the king. The last masterpieces of the era were the statue of King Rama I; designed by Prince Narissaranuwattiwong and sculpted by Corrado Feroci, and murals in the Emerald Buddha Temple corridors by more than 100 artists to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Chakri royal family and Rattanakosin in April 1932.

After the change of government from absolute monarchy to democracy in June 1932, modern art prospered through the support of the government. Art created in the period of 1932 to 1945, was in a conservative style to advance the policies of the state including sculptures of soldiers, the Democracy Monument and the Victory Monument. There were also realistic works of sculptures of the human figure to reflect social realism of the period.

Western art came to its highest point of influence after the founding of Silpakorn University in 1943 as the first centre of fine art education in the nation.

Professor Silpa Bhirasri (Corrado Feroci) established the curriculum of the institution modelled after the academic programme of an European fine art university and arranged the first *National Exhibition of Art* in 1949.

Thai art that developed between 1949 and 1967 reflected the influence of Impressionism, Post-Impressionism and Abstraction.

During the period, traditional Thai art also regained its popularity. This had an impact on the art scene, bringing the country into the modern era of fine art.

Silpakorn University

Silpakorn University is presently under the supervision of the Office of the Higher Education Commission, the Ministry of Education and was originally established as the School of Fine Arts under the Fine Arts Department in 1933. Primarily, the school offered lessons in painting and sculpture and waived tuition fees for government officers. Its inception and development owed much to an almost lifetime devotion of Professor Silpa Bhirasri, who was commissioned during the reign of King Rama VI to work in the Fine Arts Department. He subsequently enlarged the classes to include more members of the public before setting up the School of Fine Arts. The school gradually developed and was officially accorded new status and named Silpakorn University, on October 12, 1943. In the early phase of its development, its inaugural faculty was the Faculty of Painting and Sculpture (presently the Faculty of Painting Sculpture and Graphic Arts). The Faculty of Thai Architecture was established (later renamed the Faculty of Architecture) in 1955 and two more faculties were consecutively established to accommodate the university's growing academic interests, namely the Faculty of

Archaeology and the Faculty of Decorative Arts in the following years.

Auction

Christie's opened an office in Bangkok in 1998. It currently remains as a representative office. No sales or auctions currently take place in the said office. All major auctions are in London, New York and Hong Kong, as stated in an e-mail reply from a listed contact – Benjawan Uraipraivan – on Christie's website.

Although there has been talk of local art auctions, there has been no confirmed action.

First art gallery

Sombat Permpoon Gallery is a modern and contemporary art gallery located in Bangkok. Founded in 1979, it boasts one of Thailand's most extensive collections of works by national artists, modern masters and emerging talents.

Thavibu Art Gallery started out as an online gallery in 1998, selling works from the collection of Jørn Middelborg. It operated for 18 years before closing down in 2016. Middleborg now focuses on advisory work via Thavibu Art Advisory, a continuation of Thavibu Gallery. *(Please refer to pg 490 for the interview with Jørn Middelborg.)*

Contemporary Art

In recent years, more art galleries have opened.

H Gallery was established in 2002. Owned by H. Ernest Lee, it specialises in contemporary art, including painting, photography and textiles. All exhibitions are curated by art writer, lecturer and freelance curator Brian Curtin.¹

¹ <https://www.hgallerybkk.com/>

The Queen's Gallery opened in 2003 and displays the works of emerging Thai artists and the work of senior local artists. The gallery is located in a renovated building that used to house the Phanfa Bridge branch of the Bangkok Bank and which formerly served as the bank's Musical Art Centre.

The gallery was named in honour of Queen Sirikit's initiative to create a permanent public space to exhibit and promote the works of both established and up-and-coming Thai artists.²

The Kathmandu Photo Gallery opened in 2006, and is owned by Thai photographer Manit Sriwanichpoom. His vision was to open a photo gallery that resembles a traditional photographic print shop, including quirky features such as vintage green walls.³

Since its inception in 2006, La Lanta Fine Art has become one of the most successful galleries in Thailand, with participation in art fairs in Singapore, Hong Kong, London, New York, Miami and Basel.⁴

Initiated in 1995, the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre (BACC) opened in 2008. The centre includes commercial art space, bookshops, craft shops, cafés and an art library. It is intended as a venue for cultural exchange, giving Bangkok an operational base on the international art scene.⁵

Numthong Gallery was founded in 1997 by art dealer Numthong Sae Tang. For over 15 years of its operation, it has maintained its reputation as one of the leading commercial galleries in Southeast Asia. The gallery focuses on showing Thai contemporary art but also promotes other art forms, including short films, photography and mixed media works. The gallery has exhibited works by leading artists such as Niti Wattuya, Montien Boonma, Chatchai Puipia,

² <https://www.tourismthailand.org/Attraction/The-Queen-s-Gallery--2025>

³ <http://www.kathmanduphotobkk.com/>

⁴ <http://www.lalanta.com/>

⁵ <http://www.bacc.or.th/>

Vasan Sitthiket, Kamin Lertchaiprasert, Jakapan Vilasineekul, At-tasit Aniwachon, Tawatchai Punsawad and Michael Shaowanasa.⁶

In 2010, the Tootyung Gallery opened in a large house. The gallery was designed by Udom Dansakchai and promotes Thai artists and hosts foreign artists to explore local culture and customs and produce works in collaboration with Chiang Mai craftsmen. It is directed by French curator Myrtille Tibayrenc.⁷

In 2012, the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Bangkok was opened by telecommunications tycoon Boonchai Bencharongkul and houses his private collection. According to the museum's brochure, many of the works on display are by Silpa Bhirasri and his students. There are also works by all the leading Thai artists such as Thawan Duchanee, Chatchai Puipia and Vasan Sitthiket.

In 2015, the Bangkok CityCity Gallery was set up by Akapol "Op" Sudasna and Supamas Phahulo, an art history graduate and former Curator of the Thailand Creative & Design Centre. The gallery's inaugural exhibition was a solo show by Thai cartoonist Wisut Ponnimit.⁸

In July 2016, the MAIAM Museum of Contemporary Art in Chiang Mai was opened by Jean Michel Beurdeley (collector and dealer of antiques), together with his son Eric Bunnag Booth. The museum houses the private collection of Beurdeley and his late wife Patsri Bunnag. Notable artists whose works have been shown at the museum were Montien Boonma, Ampanne Satoh, Navin Rawanchaikul, Sopheap Pich and Manit Sriwanichpoom.⁹

In June 2018, Kuala Lumpur-based Richard Koh Fine Art gallery

⁶ <http://gallerynumthong.com/>

⁷ <http://tootyunggallery.com/>

⁸ <http://bangkokcitycity.com/>

⁹ <http://www.maiam.com/about/>

opened an art space in Bangkok, named Richard Koh Projects. It commenced with a solo show by Thai contemporary artist Natee Utarit.¹⁰

Bangkok Biennale

The Bangkok Art Biennale is a new contemporary art festival that will be held from October 19, 2018 to February 3, 2019. According to its website (www.bkkartbiennale.com), the event is touted to mark Bangkok's first entry into the international biennale circuit. The event was announced on May 13, 2017 in Venice. Present at the announcement were Thai ambassador to Rome Tana Weskosith, Venice city hall councillor Simeone Venturini, Royal Thai honorary consulate of Venice Andrea Marcon, Tourism Authority of Thailand marketing manager in Rome Sandro Botticelli, Bangkok Art Biennale co-founder Thapana Sirivhadhanabhakdi and Bangkok Art Biennale artistic director Prof Dr Apinan Poshyananda.¹¹

Top 10

Based on auction benchmarks compiled and in chronological order, the top 10 artists of Thailand are Damrong Wong-Uparaj (1936-2002), Thawan Duchanee (1939-2014), Niti Wattuya (1944), Montien Boonma (1953-2000), Vasan Sitthiket (1957), Rirkrit Tiravanija (1961), Kamin Lertchaiprasert (1964), Natee Utarit (1970), Navin Rawanchaikul (1971) and Korakrit Arunanondchai (1986).

¹⁰ <http://rkfineart.com/exhibition/natee-utarit-view-from-the-tower/>

¹¹ <http://www.thaiembassy.it/index.php/en/about-the-embassy/honorary-consulates>

AUCTION BENCHMARKS OF ARTISTS IN THAILAND

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
1	Thawan Dachanee (1939 – 2014)	The Harvesters 1964, Oil on board 120cm x 245cm Hammer price: US\$489,819 With premium (20%): US\$592,938 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 23 November 2014	Thai Lanna Farmhouse Late 1950, Oil on board 100cm x 180cm Hammer price: US\$116,100 With premium (% NA): US\$145,125 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 4 April 2015	Thai Lanna Farmhouse Undated, Oil on board 81.5cm x 124.5cm Hammer price: US\$102,448 With premium (25%): US\$128,060 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 25 November 2017
2	Natee Utarit (1970)	Steamboat Overture 2008, Oil on linen 240cm x 200cm Hammer price: US\$180,600 With premium (20%): US\$221,880 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 28 November 2015	Comedy 2007, Oil on canvas 225cm x 195cm Hammer price: US\$141,680 With premium (25%): US\$175,168 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 28 May 2016	Propaganda Parakeet 2010, Oil on linen 160cm x 140cm Hammer price: US\$129,000 With premium (25%): US\$159,960 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 6 October 2013
3	Montien Boonma (1953 – 2000)	Untitled Undated, Sculpture 30cm x 93cm Hammer price: US\$141,900 With premium (25%): US\$177,375 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 4 April 2016	Mother and Child Undated, Acrylic on canvas 125cm x 87cm Hammer price: US\$9,052 With premium (20%): US\$10,636 Auction House: Christie's, Singapore Date: 30 September 2001	Untitled Undated, Oil on canvas 101cm x 76cm Hammer price: US\$7,500 With premium (25%): US\$9,375 Auction House: David Rago, New Jersey Date: 7 May 2015
4	Korakrit Arunanondchai (1986)	Untitled (History Painting) 2013 Burnt bleached denim and inkjet print on canvas 218cm x 162.5cm Hammer price: US\$120,588 With premium (20%): US\$148,570 Auction House: Christie's, London Date: 7 October 2015	Untitled (History Painting) 2012 Denim and inkjet on canvas 183cm x 122cm Hammer price: US\$91,419 With premium (20%): US\$114,270 Auction House: Sotheby's, London Date: 11 February 2015	Untitled (History Painting) 2013 Mixed media on canvas 145cm x 109cm Hammer price: US\$85,211 With premium (25%): US\$106,513 Auction House: Phillips, London Date: 10 March 2013

* The artists are ranked according to their auction records in the first column. The second and third columns show their second and third most expensive artworks sold in auctions.

** NA : not available

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
5	Damrong Wong-Uparaj (1936 – 2002)	Street Scene in Bangkok 1952, Oil on canvas 66.5cm x 53.5cm Hammer price: US\$96,750 With premium (25%): US\$120,937 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 25 May 2014	Jungle Scene with Small Boat/Portrait of A Thai Woman 1960, Oil on canvas 84cm x 60cm, 83cm x 62cm Hammer price: US\$96,674 With premium (25%): US\$120,842 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 23 November 2014	Going Home 1961, Oil on board 87.5cm x 124.5cm Hammer price: US\$89,222 With premium (25%): US\$111,527 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 27 May 2018
6	Rirkrit Tiravanija (1961)	Untitled (The Days of This Society is Numbered) 2012, Acrylic and newspaper on linen 224cm x 183cm Hammer price: US\$75,000 With premium (25%): US\$93,750 Auction House: Sotheby's, New York Date: 3 March 2016	Untitled 2009 Mixed media on linen 223.5cm x 183cm Hammer price: US\$65,000 With premium (25%): US\$81,250 Auction House: Sotheby's, New York Date: 13 May 2015	Untitled (Menos Petróleo Más Valor / 12 De Enero De 2011) 2011, Mixed media 191cm x 174cm Hammer price: US\$55,000 With premium (25%): US\$68,750 Auction House: Sotheby's, New York Date: 17 May 2018
7	Kamin Lertchaiprasert (1964)	ABC 1991, Oil stick on canvas 30.5cm x 30.5cm Hammer price: US\$48,981 With premium (25%): US\$61,226 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 4 October 2010	NA	NA
8	Navin Rawanchaikul (1971)	Lost Kingdom of Navin 2008, Acrylic on canvas 180cm x 340cm Hammer price: US\$48,456 With premium (25%): US\$60,166 Auction House: Christie's, London Date: 10 June 2009	There Is No Voice... 2010, Sculpture 70cm x 70cm x 146cm Hammer price: US\$23,220 With premium (25%): US\$29,025 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 25 March 2016	Navins of Bollywood 1 2007, Acrylic on canvas 120cm x 170cm Hammer price: US\$17,317 With premium (20%): US\$21,646 Auction House: Philips, London Date: 18 October 2008

AUCTION BENCHMARKS OF ARTISTS IN THAILAND

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
9	Vasan Sitthiket (1957)	Four Essence Born from the Earth 1995 Mixed media on wood 195cm x 107.5cm Hammer price: US\$24,358 With premium (25%): US\$30,191 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 24 May 2008	Foursome #2 2007 Mixed media on paper 380cm x 336cm Hammer price: US\$13,000 With premium (%NA): US\$16,250 Auction House: Philips de Pury & Company, New York Date: 14 November 2008	Inferno Series: Politicians 2000, Oil on canvas 200cm x 200cm Hammer price: US\$12,386 With premium (22%): US\$14,863 Auction House: Borobudur, Singapore Date: 17 May 2008
10	Niti Wattuya (1944)	Man in Gold #2 1998, Acrylic on canvas 220cm x 200cm Hammer price: US\$20,400 With premium (22%): US\$24,480 Auction House: Borobudur, Singapore Date: 17 May 2008	Prototype of Dark Age 1997, Acrylic on canvas 200cm x 170cm Hammer price: US\$17,948 With premium (25%): US\$22,435 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 24 May 2008	Man, Gold and River 2002, Acrylic on canvas 220cm x 166.5cm Hammer price: US\$16,643 With premium (% NA): US\$19,971 Auction House: Sotheby's, Singapore Date: 9 October 2005
11	Chatchai Puipia (1964)	Gaga 2007, Bronze 48cm x 43cm x 30cm Hammer price: US\$18,060 With premium (25%): US\$22,575 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 30 November 2009	Drowning Man 1997, Oil on canvas 198cm x 186cm Hammer price: US\$2,136 With premium (% NA): US\$2,456 Auction House: Christie's, Bangkok Date: 8 August 1999	Siamese Smile 1995, Oil on canvas 51cm x 41cm Hammer price: US\$1,530 With premium (% NA): US\$1,797 Auction House: Christie's, Bangkok Date: 30 July 2000
12	Lampu Kansanoh (1983)	A Flood of Tears from the Big Flooding 2010, Oil on canvas 250cm x 300cm Hammer price: US\$11,610 With premium (25%): US\$14,512 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 24 November 2013	The Summer 2010, Oil on canvas 250cm x 300cm Hammer price: US\$10,320 With premium (25%): US\$12,900 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 5 October 2015	Splash-Splatter 2011, Oil on canvas 200cm x 300cm Hammer price: US\$7,728 With premium (25%): US\$9,660 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 27 May 2012

* The artists are ranked according to their auction records in the first column. The second and third columns show their second and third most expensive artworks sold in auctions.

** NA : not available

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
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13	Thaweesak Srithongdee (1970)	Shark/Dolphin 2008, Acrylic on canvas 200cm x 150cm Hammer price: US\$10,328 With premium (25%): US\$12,910 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 5 April 2009	Yalol 2006, Acrylic on canvas 200cm x 150cm Hammer price: US\$5,371 With premium (22%): US\$6,552 Auction House: Borobudur, Singapore Date: 28 October 2007	Ira 2006 Acrylic on cotton fabric 110cm x 80cm Hammer price: US\$4,289 With premium (% NA): US\$5,146 Auction House: Sotheby's, Singapore Date: 29 April 2007
14	Jirapat Tatsanasomboon (1971)	Take Me, Please! 2012, Acrylic on canvas 129cm x 129cm Hammer price: US\$9,030 With premium (25%): US\$10,965 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 31 May 2015	Sucreep is Upset (Mondrian) 1996, Oil on canvas 118.5cm x 178.5cm Hammer price: US\$7,084 With premium (22%): US\$8,855 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 29 May 2016	Puff! (After A. Warhol) 1967, Oil on canvas 64cm x 104cm Hammer price: US\$6,444 With premium (25%): US\$8,055 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 27 Nov 2016
15	Yuree Kensaku (1979)	Love Pipe and Paradise Beach 2006, Mixed media 95cm x 120.5cm (painting), 63.5cm x 14.5cm x 49.5cm (sculpture) Hammer price: US\$9,030 With premium (25%): US\$11,287 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 30 November 2008	Baby Don't Cry Undated, Mixed media 190cm x 244cm Hammer price: US\$7,740 With premium (25%): US\$9,675 Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 5 October 2015	Truck Drivers Sweetheart 2006, Mixed media 85.5cm x 200cm (painting), 19cm x 3cm x 5cm (sculpture) Hammer price: US\$3,354 With premium (25%): US\$4,192 Auction House: Christie's, Hong Kong Date: 24 May 2009

AUCTION BENCHMARKS OF ARTISTS IN THAILAND

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
16	Thavorn Ko-Udomvit (1956)	<p>Please 2, Edition 7/7 Undated, Inkjet print on fine art paper 100cm x 150cm</p> <p>Hammer price: US\$4,102 With premium (25%): US\$5,127</p> <p>Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 24 May 2008</p>	<p>Ladder of Weaving 2006, Acrylic on canvas, wood and goldleaf 140cm x 35cm (painting), 117cm x 10cm x 8.5cm (sculpture)</p> <p>Hammer price: US\$3,323 With premium (25%): US\$3,987</p> <p>Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 27 May 2007</p>	<p>Seed No.1 2001, Charcoal on paper, 91.5cm x 400.5cm</p> <p>Hammer price: US\$22,587 With premium (% NA): US\$27,104</p> <p>Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 28 May 2006</p>
17	Manit Poo-Aree (1935)	<p>The Halo Undated, Pastel on paper 36.5cm x 57cm</p> <p>Hammer price: US\$3,204 With premium (% NA): US\$3,684</p> <p>Auction House: Christie's Bangkok Date: 8 August 1999</p>	<p>Three Friends 1957, Pencil on paper 38cm x 53cm</p> <p>Hammer price: US\$1,785 With premium (% NA): US\$2,097</p> <p>Auction House: Christie's Bangkok Date: 30 July 2000</p>	<p>Garlic 1959, Pencil on paper 40cm x 55cm</p> <p>Hammer price: US\$1,785 With premium (% NA): US\$2,097</p> <p>Auction House: Christie's Bangkok Date: 30 July 2000</p>
18	Pinaree Sanpitak (1961)	<p>Womanly Bodies, Edition 9/15 Undated, Lithograph 55.5cm x 48cm</p> <p>Hammer price: US\$1,935 With premium (25%): US\$2,418</p> <p>Auction House: Sotheby's, Hong Kong Date: 5 October 2015</p>	NA	NA

A black and white portrait of Jørn Middelborg, a middle-aged man with glasses and a mustache, wearing a light-colored button-down shirt. He is standing in front of a wall with large, abstract, textured art pieces. A semi-transparent dark grey box is overlaid on the lower left of the image, containing his name and contact information.

Jørn Middelborg

CEO
Thavibu Art Advisory
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FROM GALLERY TO ADVISORY

Thavibu Art Advisory specialises in paintings of established as well as young and up-and-coming artists from Thailand, Vietnam and Myanmar (Burma). “This is my private gallery and 90% of the artworks are from my collection,” said Norwegian-born Jørn Middelborg, 55.

“As an art advisor, I deal with museums, foundations, collectors and auction houses such as Christie’s, Sotheby’s and Phillips in Hong Kong. I help them source for works and assess them. I advise artists who wish to sell their works at international auctions. And in the gallery’s commitment to develop contemporary art in the country, I also publish art books and catalogues.”

The Edge: What is your view of Vietnamese art?

Jørn Middelborg: I was in Hong Kong last week for the Christie’s auction (*Contemporaries: Voices from East and West / Asian 20th Century & Contemporary Art (Evening Sale)* 27 May 2017, Hong Kong). Hong Kong is an international art centre. They don’t just focus on China, and the Chinese market. It’s not easy for Christie’s and Sotheby’s, which have to actively look for good works. The major focus at the Christie’s auction was on Vietnamese art, especially modern Vietnamese. But the market is rife with fakes. Even auction houses in France are selling questionable Vietnamese modern masters. The Vietnamese make copies and sell them through auctions in France because they think it makes the works more trustworthy and reliable.

They know Sotheby’s and Christie’s don’t want fakes, so they sell to France and Germany because they can’t verify the authenticity. The problem with Vietnamese works is the provenance. You can’t tell by looking at the artwork.

Joseph Inguimberty's artwork comes at a high price. Vietnamese dealers don't regard him highly because it's a foreign name.

I saw the painting in Hong Kong. It wasn't a very good painting, but people liked it because it's an old modern art. I don't consider it part of Vietnamese art because he was a teacher.

At the Christie's Asian 20th Century Art on May 27, 2017, a Nguyen Gia Tri artwork sold for about US\$150,000 at the evening auction. Another artist's artwork to be auctioned off at the day sale was estimated at only US\$40,000. But the price multiplied 10 times and the artwork was sold for US\$400,000. The artist was not as famous or as good as Nguyen Gia Tri. At auctions, the price can be driven by emotions. It doesn't mean the painting is very good. It just means two people are bidding against each other. As you know, the Chinese auction houses are not really reliable. They do fake bids to drive up prices.

What about art from Myanmar?

Burma (Myanmar) is a limited market and the art education level is very poor. The university has been closed for years. They only have the State School of Fine Art, so the quality is nothing like in Vietnam and Thailand. Education is very important. So now they learn from the art masters through apprenticeship and mentorship programmes. That's how they pass on the knowledge from one generation to the next. U Lun Gywe has been a mentor for many generations to young artists who studied with him.

Who would you consider at the top price range?

U Lun Gywe's works are top of the range. I've known him for more than 15 years and have published two books on him. Painting is their family business - U Lun Gywe is the master painter and his wife, son, daughter and daughter-in-law also paint. Of course, if you are

a good painter, it doesn't mean that your whole family will be good painters as well.

Are there any masters older than U Lun Gywe?

They haven't really come up yet. The older modern masters haven't come to the auctions much. Christie's and Sotheby's are focusing on Vietnamese art. There are few Thai artworks because Thailand wasn't colonised, so you don't really have European influence in Thailand.

Who are the artists who will be the future, equal to or even surpass U Lun Gywe because of their importance?

I can't think of any names. I bought Aung Kyaw Htet's 1965 painting from the Czech Republic ambassador to Myanmar. He was the ambassador in the 1960s. The artist U Chits Wae is deceased but he's not famous. The problem with Myanmar is there's not much research done on Myanmar artists.

What do you think of the Myanmar art market? Do you think that there is potential?

We have to look at domestic and international market. It's like in Malaysia where Malaysians buy Malaysian art. Indonesians like to buy Indonesian art. There are rich people in Myanmar who collect art. They may be army people or big corporations with unlimited supply of money. I heard of one collector, U Hla Win, who is building a private museum¹. He bought all the paintings he could find, which is a lot. I was looking for some old paintings and was told everything had been bought up. U Hla Win's personal collection has the most impressive assortment of Myanmar artwork and artefacts in the country.

¹ Curtis Fox. *The Best Private Art Collection in Myanmar*. www.afar.com/places/u-hla-wins-house-and-museum-thanlyin

I don't know about the international market. Myanmar has been a closed market politically and economically. Previously, foreigners like the French bought Vietnamese art. Now, the Vietnamese have started buying their own art. Asians, Europeans and Americans are buying Burmese art. It will take a long time before the Myanmarese start buying their own art at auctions. They have a long way to go.

The Indonesian market is also very slow. Prices for Arie Smit's 1985 - 1991 works at the Larasati auction were so low, about US\$2,500 for a work of 25cm by 35cm.

Indonesia also has a lot of fakes. Arie Smit's work is quite easy to fake.

The Neka Museum certifies its authenticity because Arie Smit stayed with Neka towards the end of his life.

Arie Smit's latest paintings are not so good. It's the same with Vietnamese artist Le Pho. His early paintings were on silk, but later on, he painted flowers which weren't so good. The artists go through peak periods – in their thirties, fifties.

U Lun Gywe peaked very late. He retired from the State School of Fine Art in 1979. During that time, he was teaching and didn't really have time to develop his art. After his sixties, he had more time and became much more fluid in his style. His peak years were from 65 to 75. Now, at 87, his latest works are not so good. Most painters don't get better over time. They go through cycles.

How did you get started in Southeast Asian art?

I came to Bangkok 23 years ago. I joined the UN and was a Unesco official for six years. I got involved in collecting art through travelling for work in the region. That was the time the internet was taking off. Since I had a small collection, I started a gallery website in 1998. I sold the first painting to the US that same year. Mine was

the first gallery with an online presence. We sold a lot of paintings to the US through the internet.

I thought this had potential. Since then, the internet has greatly developed and is an important medium for displaying and selling art. Now there is social media and the gallery system is changing as well. I have had a gallery for 18 years, focusing on Thai, Vietnamese and Burmese art. Vietnamese art was booming at the time.

The most famous gallery in Vietnam at the time was Apricot. They are still around but now sell decorative works.

Yes, exactly. When we focused on Myanmar, nobody knew anything about Burmese contemporary art. We were the first gallery that showed Burmese art internationally and have done shows for Burmese artists. That was before the gallery closed.

When did you close?

We closed a year ago. The market is divided into high-end and low-end art. People want either something exclusive and expensive of high quality or something affordable and cheap. The problem is the middle-of-the-range works. The gallery was working on works that were good, but not cheap or super expensive. But that section was not doing very well in the traditional gallery sense. My gallery manager who used to work for me has a space in the same building in Silom Road. She focuses more on affordable art.

Asian artists don't really seek out galleries. They sell from their studio, which undermines the galleries. So how can the galleries survive? We spend money not only on exhibitions but also for publications, art fairs, travel.

Showing his collection of artworks, Middelborg points out, "The Dinh Quan artwork is priced at US\$15,000, more expensive than Bui Huu

Hung's. Bui Huu Hung's prices haven't gone up. In 10 years, the US\$5,000 price tag on his artwork has not changed. Flipping through the art book on Aung Kyaw Htet - Myanmar Inspirations, he says, "Fifteen Vietnamese painters including Le Quang Ha, Bui Xuan Phai, Nguyen Trung are in this book," and adds, "Van Duong Thanh's private collection of Bui Xuan Phai's works is complete and genuine."



Panada Lerthattasin

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COLLECTING IS ALL ABOUT TASTE

Panada Lerthattasin, 36, is the managing director of Sombat Permpoon Gallery in Bangkok. The gallery, founded in 1979, has the most extensive collection of Thai art in the country, from emerging talents to modern masters.

We caught up with Panada, the daughter of the gallery's founder and namesake, in Bangkok for her insight into the Thai art landscape. A graduate of Pratt Institute in New York, the US, in arts and cultural management in 2006, Panada returned to Bangkok to manage her mother's gallery in 2008.

The Edge: Are the artworks in the gallery consigned pieces by the artists or Sombat's collection?

Panada Lerthattasin: We operate in the secondary market. Everything at the gallery was bought from the artists. We have decorative art which is less expensive (from THB1,200/US\$38 onwards), accessible and easy to sell. This section is popular with tourists, homeowners and corporate buyers looking for affordable pieces to buy. We also have more expensive artworks by famous artists. On the second floor is a consignment space where we invite younger artists to exhibit for a couple of months.

Do you track prices of artworks?

We do look at the prices at auctions, but Thai art is hardly represented. If there is a Thai artist at an auction, it would probably be Natee Utarit who is represented by Malaysian gallery Richard Koh Fine Art. Many Thai artists at the auction houses are not represented by any of us.

Another artist is the late Thawan Duchanee who was not represented by any gallery, but we worked with him directly and got the prices from him. Other artists' work would be priced piecemeal.

Thai artists don't appear at auctions as much. So, we can't really refer to auction house prices.

Thawan's artwork was sold in Hong Kong in the 1970s or 1980s. When auctions houses sell Thai artworks, we use that as a guideline.

Who usually buys the works of old Thai masters? Are they local or foreign collectors?

About 80% are local collectors. They know the artists and buy from established and well-known artists based on social status. A foreigner buys Thai artworks more for the quality than the name. They buy because it's Asian art.

The type of art we have is modern art. People's understanding of modern art is traditional art while contemporary art is more avant-garde and crazy. We have collections of Thawan Duchanee, Damrong Wong-Uparaj and Vasan Sitthiket. Damrong's works are getting expensive at auctions while Lampu Kansanoh is a young, popular artist. We don't have works of other artists represented by Western galleries.

Do you participate at auctions? Do you consign artworks to Christie's or Sotheby's?

No, we don't. Sotheby's and Christie's came to view our paintings, but they wanted something that hadn't been seen in public before. But art galleries like us show everything in public. As the secondary market, we invest in the artworks rather than the artists. We also act as a semi-art museum where we collect art and educate people about art. We have rare, hard-to-find pieces which are our selling-point to attract visitors. We have the largest collection of Thawan Duchanee art. We used to have over 20 paintings, some of which have been sold. Now we have 10 pieces left.

What about the prices of Thawan's works? Do you agree that the records are reflective of his market or selling price, or is it too expensive?

Thawan's *The Harvesters*, 1964, cost about THB2 million (about US\$593,000). For that year, it was priced too low, but the quality is good. His "Elephant" artwork in 2000 does not really reflect his best work. But the quality is good and the price is not bad.

How much would this work cost if you were to sell it?

This piece would sell for THB150 million (about US\$4.7 million). Thawan painted the complete anatomy of an elephant, although he doesn't usually paint elephants. He had explained that he used a combination of a fast and slow technique. So, it's really unique.

We sell mostly works of masters. A small artwork can sell for THB200,000 (about US\$6,300). For the same price, you can buy bigger artworks of emerging artists. If we go beyond that price, then it's too expensive. The young artists keep putting up their prices.

Natee has broken the international barrier but it's all about marketing in the West as well. Unfortunately, the prices are dictated by Western buyers because Southeast Asians except for Indonesians don't really pay that kind of prices. For THB150 million, what can you get in terms of international art and quality?

I keep telling people it sounds expensive, but you get the best the country has to offer for that price. Forget about THB150 million. For THB1 million to THB2 million (about US\$31,000-US\$63,000), you can get a masterpiece. We are all hopeful the art community in Thailand is developing.

Your mother Sombat started out in 1979 but at the time, there were few collectors except for foreigners living in Bangkok.

When my mother started collecting in the early 1990s, it was the

golden period of Thai art. Money was readily available and collectors were mainly from the finance industry. They really spent on the arts. When the financial crisis happened, everything changed.

Are you talking about the Thai collectors?

Yes. Thawan first became famous during the economic bubble and (period of) inflation in Thailand when the banking sector expanded rapidly. The bankers had so much money, they bought and bought art. Now the collectors are younger and in a variety of careers – manufacturers, doctors, anything. They used to be over 60 years old. Now, they are 35 years old and buy THB3 million worth of paintings. But their tastes are different as well. Some like contemporary art while others go for masterpieces.

It's like everywhere else in Asia. They are the third or fourth generation of Chinese merchants. They have money to spend and have an easier life than their parents did.

The common factor is that they are educated overseas and are influenced by art overseas. When they come back to Southeast Asia, they want to be a patron of the arts in some way.

They all want to own art galleries and so, we have so many art spaces these days.

Are there any art auctions in Bangkok and how many works do they typically sell?

There are some like the Bangkok Art Auction, but they are quite small, selling about 20 to 30 works. Artists here are easily accessible. It's hard to have an auction when you can just buy directly from the artists. I haven't heard from Bangkok Art Auction house for some time, so I'm not sure if they have stopped doing auctions.

Could it be that auctions are not popular because of the tax levied on artworks brought in and out of the country?

Yes, that's true. I don't know much about it because I have never participated. I'm not familiar with the Bangkok Art Auction house. Christie's sometimes has art auctions here at Peninsula Plaza.

What do you think of the auction records on the list that we compiled? Are the prices indicative of the market?

The names on the list are the active masters. The list may not be accurate if it doesn't cover all the masters in the country.

We work a lot with traditional collectors who don't really understand auctions or trust them especially in Thailand's small art community. But it's getting better.

Thai modern and contemporary art is not even 100 years old. Many of the masters, up until a couple of years ago, are still alive. So, there is no sense of urgency to think about masters in the Western context being hard to reach.

When Thawan Duchanee passed away in 2014, it was a wake-up call for the whole market: 'Hey, the artists could die and you wouldn't be able to find their works or their works could become expensive.' After the years pass by, and the works of masters start increasing in price, they could be inaccessible to ordinary people. Then auction houses would come into play. We will have to wait and see. I don't like the idea that Thai art cannot be bought by Thai collectors because it's too expensive. But the good thing is it elevates the whole market to be internationally priced.

How is the Thai art market? Have sales increased?

I can only speak for our gallery. Some months are hard. The King passed away in 2016, so it was really quiet. Then it picked up in 2017.

Such is the nature of gallery life. Buying art is not a necessity. They could stop buying art for any reason...the weather or traffic.

Does the gallery participate in any art fairs?

No, we haven't. My mom visited the Dubai Art Fair in the early 1990s. One reason is that we don't represent the artists so it's quite hard to organise an art fair. But we hope to participate in art fairs in the near future.

Do you advise collectors and sellers on selling their artworks?

We advise them in a casual manner rather than in an official capacity. We have established long relationships with the artist-client. It's all about conversation and developing a friendship along the way. They would usually express their intention to sell their works and would ask if we know any buyers.

Are there art fairs in Bangkok?

The Culture Ministry hosted an art fair once. There is also an art fair called Hotel Art Fair created by young people that has been held for the fourth consecutive year. They use hotel rooms as gallery space to promote affordable contemporary art. The response has been good because they make it hip and young.

Thai society has super-rich people but they are not buying art. They can afford Thawan's art at THB150 million but the interest is generally not there yet. It may take the next generation to be interested in art, but that could be too late.

Yes, that's true. It's all about taste, right?

A black and white photograph of two people in an art studio. On the left, an older man with a beard and glasses, wearing a patterned shirt, sits with his arms crossed. On the right, a younger woman with glasses and a dark t-shirt sits on a stool, smiling. The background shows art supplies, a ladder, and a large window.

Sai Wannaphon Chimbanchong

Director, Rebel Art Space

Vasan Sitthiket

Artist and art activist

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FOREVER THE REBEL

Rebel Art Space is the brainchild of social activists-cum-artists and partners Sai Wannaphon Chimbanchong, 38, and Vasan Sitthiket, 60. As its name indicates, Rebel Art Space serves as a platform for artists to exchange ideas and as a repository for Vasan's controversial socio-political artworks. His current works are based on anti-government demonstrations in Bangkok.

The Edge: Tell us about Rebel Art Space.

Sai Wannaphon Chimbanchong (Sai): We wanted to have a small space for a new generation of young artists and for Vasan and me to show our artworks, which are based on socio-political and environment issues.

Vasan has been an activist for 30 years. Now, we have more young artists joining us who support political protests and are concerned with issues that affect the lives of the people.

We used to exhibit our artworks at the BACC (Bangkok Art & Culture Centre) gallery or some art space in Bangkok. Then we thought, 'Why not have our own space?'

How many art shows have you had over three years?

Sai: We have had more than 10 art shows. The events can last from one to three months.

Are the artworks for sale at the shows?

Sai: Ours are not commercial works, but sometimes we do sell the artworks. We have some collectors who support us and other artists. We also offer residency programmes for artists.

Vasan Sitthiket (Vasan): We met a few Malaysian artists through Valentine Willie at a Wei-Ling gallery show in May 2017. Last November, we brought in a Korean artist to exhibit at the Wei-Ling gallery. We also had artists from China, India, Indonesia and Singapore.

What is your opinion of the art market in Thailand? Do you get a lot of support from collectors and do they only buy a certain type of work?

Sai: The art market in Thailand is very small and we know all the collectors. There are about 20 serious collectors. We get new and young artists all the time. Artists are born every day but collectors are never born (laughs).

Malaysian collectors only collect Malaysian artworks. But it is not only the Thais who collect Vasan's work. Even Indonesian and Singaporean collectors and museums buy his works. The prices reflect works of artists promoted overseas. They are a bit higher because of foreign buyers.

What are your thoughts on Thai national artists?

Sai: Korakrit Arunanondchai is only 29. His price is high because having studied in New York, he receives a lot of support from foreigners. Like Natee who is better known abroad. Montien Boonma's works are cheap but he is an important artist, more so than contemporary artist Thawan Duchanee. Collectors who buy Thawan's work like traditional styles or works of national artists.

Vasan: Thawan is famous. People go to Indonesia, Hong Kong and Singapore to get his works, which are priced at THB150 million (US\$4.7 million).

In Jakarta, I saw my first collection at a collector's house. He has

been buying my work for 17 years. I want to buy Chatchai Puipia's work but his price has gone up to US\$30,000-US\$50,000.

Based on the prices, do you think Thai national artists are undervalued in the auction market?

Vasan: Yes, they sell at a low value.

Sai: Vasan's work sells at double the price at the gallery compared to auctions. You cannot find Vasan's work in the market because we don't display his work in commercial galleries anymore. Sombat Permpoon Gallery is a commercial gallery. They have the works of all the artists, including Vasan's which they bought from us.

Vasan is not a young artist anymore. He has to focus on his shows and not think about sales. We would love to deal with other countries. In Thailand, we work with the Arts Centre (BACC) or museums. Vasan had a solo show at the National Theatre on June 14, 2017. In March (2018), he will show about 100 works at a retrospective show in BACC¹. Apinan Poshyananda, who writes about modern art in Thailand, is the curator. He will be organising the Bangkok Art Biennale in November².

What is the average price of Vasan's work?

Sai: A 150cm by 200cm piece can go for US\$20,000.

Do you keep track of the auction records?

Sai: I don't do it myself. Perhaps someone else collects the records. Some collectors hold auctions themselves.

Was there a Christie's auction in Bangkok?

¹ *Entitled, I Am You*, the solo exhibition by Vasan Sitthiket was held at the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre (BACC) from 23 March to 27 May 2018.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=PmKW6bmUrIE

www.nationmultimedia.com/detail/art/30342117

² www.bk.asia-city.com/events/news/bangkoks-first-art-biennale-set-2018

Vasan: Yes, many years ago, but we don't have auctions anymore. Thai collectors only know about art in Thailand. They don't know much about international art except for Picasso, Damien Hirst, or Takashi Murakami.

Do you think the art market in Thailand is a good place to buy artworks and support artists? Do collectors know what they are buying or do they buy based on word-of-mouth or famous names?

Sai: There are two groups of collectors. One group buys artworks for investment. If they think the price won't go high, they will sell the works. There are the serious collectors who buy for the artwork and not the name. Some of their houses are like national museums with interesting collections. And then there are collectors who only collect famous names.

Do the corporate people support the art scene?

Sai: We have some big companies like Chang Beer which support for the publicity. The Bangkok Art Biennale was co-founded by food and beverage mogul Thanapa Sirivadhanabhakdi³.

Is he a serious supporter?

Vasan: Yes, he wanted to create a biennale. He bought all the land in Thailand but his money comes from whisky. Poor people drink this cheap spirit every day. The government should impose a high tax levy.

Perhaps he is trying to gain respect from society by supporting the art scene. Many companies do that.

Vasan: I have known them for a very long time and they have never supported art before.

Sai: But they support BACC!

³ www.bkkartbiennale.com/news/3/Bangkok%20Art%20Biennale%202018%20Press%20Conference:%20The%20Official%20Launch

You are a social activist and artist. In the past you have been very vocal about social issues. Does it worry you that the rich and powerful may decide that they will not support you or will sabotage you?

Vasana: No, because I believe that art reflects the artist's thoughts.

Sai: Now, we have young collectors in Thailand. They are about 30 years old, successful, rich and are interested in art. They are also thinking about investment. Sometimes, it's a headache for Vasana.

Every day we ask ourselves, 'Hey, what do you think? Which one is good?'

In a way, this helps to expand the market. If they don't buy, we can't sell and artists can't survive.

Many artists can't survive without support. Thawan (Duchanee) comes from a rich family. Before he became famous in the 1960s, he never sold a single painting, but his family supported him. That's why he could do whatever he wanted regardless of whether or not he sold.

MYANMAR

MYANMAR'S EVOLVING ART WORLD

The origins of Myanmar art can be traced to the Buddhist wall murals of the Bagan period dating from the 11th to the early 14th century.

The first paintings on paper, dating from the early 19th century, were in the form of folding books called *parabeik*, made from paper folded in accordion pleats.¹

Introduction to Western art

In 1795, the British Crown emissary Michael Symes arrived in Inwa, the capital of Burma (as Myanmar was previously known) during the reign of King Bodawpaya (r. 1782 – 1819). Among the British delegation was an artist named Coleworthy Grant. He painted the King's white elephant, which pleased the monarch immensely. The king then commanded that the royal painters to learn this new form of art.

Since then, Buddhist wall paintings have shown a diverse approach to theme and composition. The use of perspective was first seen, and the concept of light and shade tentatively attempted. The subjects also changed from religious scenes to include the portrayal of secular life.

Meanwhile, the chief royal artist U Kyar Nyunt learnt from Italian artists, and his paintings began to show experimentation in perspective. In later paintings by his students, the use of both perspective and light and shade can be seen. (U or Oo, meaning “uncle” or “mister”, is an honorific title commonly ascribed to senior males in Myanmar society.)

By November 1885, the British had colonised the whole country and removed the last ruler, King Thibaw.²

¹ Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt, U Sein Myo Myint & Ma Thanegi (editors), 2006. *Myanmar Painting: From Worship to Self-Imaging*. Education Publishing House. Vietnam. Pp. 26-27.

² Ibid., pp. 38-42.

Pioneers of Western style painting

Local artists M.T. Hla and Ba Ohn, who both received personal instruction in Western painting, are the earliest pioneers of Western-style painting in Myanmar.

Ba Ohn's primary teacher in Western painting was another artist, B.H. Wiles, a mysterious figure who is mentioned in several Myanmar historical accounts, and whom Nyan Shein – art historian and painter, *On Burmese Painters, Sculptors and Architects* – and author Ah Mar (Ludu Daw Amar, 1915-2008) both describe as a “famous” Western painter.

U Hla Maung Gyi (1914-1984, painter) described Wiles as of “German-British mixed parentage”. But Nyan Shein said he was simply British. Wiles took at least one lengthy tour through Myanmar, doing works along the way, with Ba Ohn, who spoke English well, serving as his assistant and learning Western techniques from him.

Both M.T. Hla and Ba Ohn were born in the 1870s, and their Western-style works began to appear after 1910 or perhaps a little earlier. They were the axis from which Western painting in Myanmar radiated in the earliest years, and were the teachers of at least a dozen painters who were 10 to 20 years younger than them.

M.T. Hla (1874-1946), also known as U Tun Hla, is remembered in Myanmar for his Western-style works. More than two dozen of his paintings have surfaced, most of them watercolour, and their character is mixed.

It is “strongly believed” that M.T. Hla's western art teacher was Robert Talbot Kelly (1861-1934), a British painter who toured Myanmar and published, *Burma Painted and Described*, in 1905. After 1930, M.T. Hla apparently learnt opaque-watercolour, wash-style painting from U Ba Nyan, who was 20 years younger, and had returned from England after his art studies.³

³ Andrew Ranard, 2009. *Burmese Painting: A Linear and Lateral History*. Silkworm Books. Thailand. Pp. 53, 57 & 59.

The painters of the Western school who came after M.T. Hla and Ba Ohn were born in the 1890s, one or two decades later.

At 16, U Maung Maung Gyi (1890-1940) “ran away to England” to study art there. Later, he became an officer with the Department of Agriculture, a job he kept for 20 years. This gave him the opportunity to travel widely throughout Myanmar, painting landscapes.⁴

Burma Art Club

In 1913, one small group of British residents in Rangoon founded the Burma Art Club. In 1918, the club elected its first chairman, Martin Ward (1873-1927), a professor of physics at Rangoon University. The club gave art classes on Sundays, and although the original members were all British, Burmese were soon admitted.

Two other chairmen of the Burma Art Club in the 1920s have found a prominent place in Burmese art history – E.G.N. Kinch (1875-1952), principal of St. Matthews High School in Moulmein, later holding other education and government posts; and Martin Jones (1891-1931), a deputy minister in the railway department.

Of the three chairmen, apparently Ward had the most extensive background in art. He studied painting at the Yellow Door School in London under Frank Spenlove-Spenlove, a Scottish artist of some renown from the 1890s to the 1930s.

Jones is remembered in particular for introducing Burmese artists to cartoon drawing. He published his cartoons in English-language publications in Myanmar and taught this art at the Burma Art Club to its members.

And it does not seem to be an accident that many painters who found themselves attracted to cartoon art over the years – Ba Kyi, Kin Maung (Bank), Bagyi Aung Soe, and Paw Oo Thet – were also deeply interested in traditional painting. In any event, cartoon art

⁴ Ibid., pp. 63-64.

became so highly appreciated in Burma that one cartoonist, U Ba Gyan (1902-53), won the highest aesthetic award for an artist, the *Alinga Kyaw Saw*.⁵

Early followers of Western art

A number of other painters born in the 1890s and contemporary to Maung Maung Gyi became major and minor figures of Burmese painting. The four most prominent are U Ba Zaw, U San Lwin, U Ba Sein and U Ba Lon. One of these painters, Ba Lon, studied under M.T. Hla, while two others, Ba Zaw and Ba Sein, studied under Ba Ohn. All these artists began their careers before formal schools in Western-style painting were established, and in this respect, they might also be considered pioneer painters.

When oil paints were made accessible, local enthusiasts were eager to try the new medium. Some of the students of the early 20th century such as Ba Nyan excelled in portraying the shimmer of light and figures and buildings, especially after his study tours to Europe.⁶

First artists to study abroad

Ba Nyan is described as the “king of kings of Burmese painters” by author Andrew Ranard.

He studied at the Burma Art Club for several years, began to teach there, and in 1921, when he was 24, he received a scholarship to study at the Royal College of Art in London. But he had difficulty following the lectures in English. At this point, Ba Nyan transferred to Frank Spenlove-Spenlove’s private school, the Yellow Door.

In 1925, Ba Nyan’s scholarship ran out, and so the first of his two stints in England ended, and he returned to Myanmar with some

⁵ Ibid., pp. 91-93.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 65-66.

300 works.

Back home, he was now a painter of consequence. He held a solo exhibition of his paintings at the Burma Art Club, taught there and also took a position as an art teacher in Rangoon College.

But Ba Nyan was dissatisfied with his development and longed to return to England. He was soon back in England where he again contacted (Sir) Gerald Kelly (1879-1972, painter) and continued with his training under Spenlove, and also Frank Brangwyn. The main influence on U Ba Nyan's style during his second stay seems to have been Brangwyn (1867-1956).

In 1930, when Ba Nyan returned to Burma for the second and final time, his arrival was celebrated with fanfare; he was given a solo exhibition at the residence of the governor of Burma.⁷

Ba Zaw (1891-1942) spent almost 10 years in the Burma Art Club sessions, and in 1927 he was also sent to study at the Royal College of Art. His time in London overlapped with Ba Nyan's, and the two became friendly, but their training had taken different paths. Ba Zaw also returned to Burma in 1930, shortly after Ba Nyan, with a prestigious degree – associate of the Royal College of Art (ARCA).

The traditions and influences that Ba Nyan and Ba Zaw fell under in England were somewhat antithetical. Ba Nyan's training was not entirely British. After he left the Royal College, he landed with painters who had strong attachments to the continent. In opaque watercolour, he nuzzled up against modernism.

Ba Zaw, on the other hand, was very much of the old British School – not so interested in oil painting and drawn to the demanding tradition of purist transparent watercolour.

Thus, when the two painters returned to Myanmar, not only did they deal a devastating blow to the traditional school but they also

⁷ Ibid., pp. 94-101.

planted seeds of a separate camp within the Western School itself; a Ba Nyan group which began to work in opaque watercolour, and a Ba Zaw group which stuck to the transparent medium.

The lines of distinction were not always clear, but in general the Rangoon School became adept at oil, and sometimes the opaque medium, and the Mandalay School became boastful of its skills in transparent watercolour.⁸

Without the connection to join the British-dominated art society, local artists who wanted to learn the new Western techniques would usually apprentice themselves to a few masters such as Ba Nyan and Ba Zaw.⁹

Art academies

Increased interest in the arts came about with the opening of the State School of Art and Music in Rangoon in 1939. U San Win was chosen as the first principal. Due to the advance of World War II, the school closed down in 1942 to reopen only 10 years later.

By the time Myanmar regained her independence in 1948, traditional Myanmar art had almost disappeared. Education was available in its best sense only in the two cities: Yangon and Mandalay.

The Yangon University Fine Art Association was established in 1952.

Also in 1952, the State School of Fine Arts was reopened in Yangon and by 1956, in Mandalay, but they operated on meagre budgets.

The State Schools of Fine Arts still exist, but a higher level of art study has been available since 1993, namely the University of Culture. It offers a four-year bachelor degree programme with courses in painting, sculpture as well as various forms of music, dance, dra-

⁸ Ibid., pp. 101-102.

⁹ Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt, U Sein Myo Myint & Ma Thanegi (editors), 2006. *Myanmar Painting: From Worship to Self-Imaging*. Education Publishing House. Vietnam. Pp. 46-47.

ma and puppetry. Other subjects such as Myanmar and English languages, history, geography, physics, chemistry and biology are also part of their studies.¹⁰

Commercial galleries

In 1969, the Orient gallery was opened and it also served as the residence of artist Paw Oo Thett. It was managed by artist Shwe Oung Thame, but due to lack of funds, it closed after two years.

Founded in 1971, Lokanat Gallery is still one of the most respected galleries in Yangon. It was initially under the patronage of U Ba Than. Distinguished artists who operated the gallery include U Hla Shein, a traditional painter and retired high-ranking official, and modernists such as Win Pe and Paw Oo Thett.

Peacock Gallery was founded in 1973 by Paw Thame and sculptor Sonny Nyein. But the gallery closed in 1986, one year after Paw Thame emigrated to the US.

Opened in 1987, Golden Valley Art Centre (GV) was owned by U Myingt Lwin and Daw Khin Thinn Si Si. An early patron was U Thein Hain.

Inya Gallery was founded in 1989 by Aung Myint and San Min.

Opened in 1989, New Treasure Art Gallery is owned and operated by contemporary artist Min Wae Aung. The gallery's patron was U Thu Kha (1918-2007), an influential teacher of Yangon State School of Fine Arts.

In the late 1980s, Artist's House Gallery was opened by Soe Moe.

In 1990, Tin Win opened Beikthano Gallery, which displays mainly his own works as well as antiques and folk art items.

The Myanmar Gallery of Modern Art, which opened in 1995, was the first to be operated as an up-market art space.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 53-58.

Distinguished veteran artist U Lun Gywe was once a member of GV but left to open his own gallery called Artist Life Art Gallery (Shwepaukkan) in 1999.

River Gallery was opened in 2005 by expatriate Gill Pattison and offers an eclectic selection of works by Myanmar's established and upcoming artists.

Ivy Gallery of Yangon does not display paintings but arranges exhibitions. Some in the early 2000s remained important in recent art history, such as a solo show of Khin One and a group show of innovative modern artists.

Other small and successful Yangon-based galleries are the Orient run by artist Thant Zhin, Summit Art Collection owned by artist Myint Soe as well as Oasis, White Line, and Sunflower. Seven-Seven Gallery now renamed The Yangon Gallery is owned by Myint Myint Tin, who herself is a painter.

Mandalay galleries

In Mandalay, the Htan Yeik Nyo/Cool Shade of the Toddy Palm Contemporary Art Gallery opened in 1992, with company directors consisting only of artists. The initiator is Myo Khin, an artist who is highly successful commercially. In fact, his top auction price of US\$281,692 recorded at the Poly International Auction in Beijing in 2013 is a remarkable benchmark. Currently, his auction records supersede the benchmarks of the more revered artists in Myanmar art.

Also in Mandalay, artist Kyaw Moe Thar runs a small gallery and studio called Modern Art Development at his house, where artists could come and paint.

And at Yangon's Bogyoke Aung San Market lies the Traditional Artists and Artisans Association. Among the traditional painters who have participated in the many exhibitions at this venue include U Nyan Shein, Than Aung, Saw Hlaing, Maung

Kyaw, Hla Tin Htun, Maung Maung Thein and Aung Din.

But Bogyoke Aung San Market is considered to be the low end of the art market with plenty of decorative works and mass-produced imitations of paintings by U Ba Nyan, U Lun Gywe, Kyee Myint Saw and Min Wae Aung, to name but a few distinguished artists.

Modern art show

Organised privately, the first modern art show was held in December 1967 at the YMCA hall in Rangoon. The show was brought together by Paw Oo Thett.¹¹

Myanmar and Asean

One of the benefits of Myanmar joining the Asean organisation in 1997 was the chance for its artists to participate in the Asean Art Awards (started in 1994) sponsored by the Philip Morris Group of Companies.

The participation of Myanmar artists in the awards was spearheaded by artists U Thu Kha, Min Wae Aung, Soe Moe and Sein Myo Myint, photographer and co-author of the book, *Myanmar Painting: From Worship to Self-Imaging*.

In 1998 the artists were participating as guests and by 2001, five of the Myanmar participants were chosen as finalists with one artist winning the juror's award. All the artists, as well as the organisers, were invited to attend the ceremony held in Singapore. When Myanmar was refused participation in the 2003 Asean Art Awards, the leading private English language newspaper, *The Myanmar Times*, stepped in with the National Contemporary Art Awards of 2004.¹²

Due to the intense lobbying of anti-tobacco groups and strong opposition to the sponsorship of Philip Morris of the Asean Art

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 75-80.

¹² Ibid., p. 80.

Awards, the event eventually lapsed after the cancellation of the 2005 awards.

Overseas ventures

Since the late 1990s, many of the senior artists like Min Wae Aung and Tin Win, who are also gallery owners-operators have ventured abroad to broaden their horizon. They participate regularly in art shows and foster relationships with foreign galleries, art institutions and supporters. This is in view of the limited scope of the local art market.

For instance, Min Wae has been quite active in collaborating with various organisations in organising art programmes such as the *Turkey and Myanmar, Meet Love & Peace & Tolerance Mixed Art Exhibition* for the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Turkey and Myanmar in Ankara, Turkey, from July 18 to 25, 2018. And among other programmes, he is also promoting the Peaceful Golden Heritage 2019 First International Watercolour Festival Myanmar from January 29 to 31, 2019 at the Strand Hotel in Yangon.

Even smaller galleries like Summit Art operated by Myint Soe have participated in art fairs in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia aimed at budget-conscious art promoters.

Foreign-run operations like River Gallery and Myan/Art have also been quite active locally and occasionally abroad.

Of late, art consultants and gallery operators in other Southeast Asian cities have begun to take note of Myanmar artists and have organised shows featuring Myanmar art, such as in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur.

In 2015, The Edge Galerie in Kuala Lumpur organised a selling exhibition featuring the works of Zaw Win, Tin Win, Aung Thin Oo, Mon Thet, Soe Soe (Laputa), Pann Kyi, Moe Nyo, Tin Htay Aung, Zay Yar Aye, Khin Zaw Latt and Khin Maung Zaw.

In Singapore, at the Gillman Barracks art enclave, Yavuz Gallery presented “internationally acclaimed Burmese artist” Nge Lay’s first solo exhibition entitled *Flying in the Fragmentary*. The exhibition was held between June 23 and July 22, 2018. It featured a large-scale installation billed as, “the titular artwork transforming the gallery into an immersive, life-sized replica of a classroom in the remote village of Thuye’dan in Myanmar”.¹³

In terms of art activism, contemporary artists such as Htein Lin, Khin Zaw Latt and Nge Lay, have become more vocal and visible.

Biennale or expo?

Myanmar held its first Yangon Art Expo in November 2017 on the 21st floor of a high-rise office building and featured the works of 72 artists.

This event was originally planned as a “biennale” in Yangon but the concept was met with opposition from local artists-activists. Those opposed to the idea of a biennale included Htein Lin, Aye Ko, Nge Lay and Phyu Mon.

According to the July 13, 2017, edition of the *Frontier* magazine cover story, entitled *An Artist Revolt*, there were many angry voices. Written by Lillian Kalish, the article has the sub-title, *An Italian NGO’s proposal to stage a biennale in Yangon has the art community in uproar*.

Artist Khin Muang Zaw, who was collaborating with the Italian NGO Culture2All for the event, acknowledged “disquiet” about the use of the word “biennale”. Eventually, the organisers backed down and called it the Yangon Art Expo and held it at the Junction City Tower.

Artists whose works were featured in the event are Aung Aung Taik, Aung Htet Lwin, Aung Htoo, Aung Ko, Aung Kyaw Htet,

¹³ www.theedgegalerie.com/happening/flying-fragmentary

Aung Myint, Aung Sint, Aunt Thiha, Aye Min, Aye Nyein Myint, Bogie, Brang Li, Chit Htut, Christopher A. Tamalar, Chan Nyein Kyaw, Co Thiee, Han Kyaw Moe, Hein Thit, Hla Phone Aung, Htoo Aung Kyaw, Kay Moe Ko, Khin Maung Zaw, Ko Ko Maung, Ko Ko Naing, Kyaw Kyaw Lwin, Kyaw Nyo, Lu Htun, Mar Lar, Maw Thu Da Nu, Min Wae Aung, Min Zaw, Min Zayar Oo, Mon Thet, Mor Mor, Mpp Ye Myint, Myat Kyawt, Myat Tun Aung, Myint Naing, Myint San, Myo Pya, Nan Da, Nandar Maung, Nay Aung Shu, Ni Pou, Nyein Chan Su, Ohmmar, Pann Kyi, PKST, San Minn, San Naing, Sandar Khine, Satan, Saw Lin Aung, Saw Moe Zaw, Shwe Sin Aye, Shwe Thein, Soe Naing, Su Eaindra, Sue Htet Aung, Thant Zin, Thee Zar, Thit Nay Sann, Tin Aung Kyaw, Tin Htay Aung, Tin Maung Oo, U Lun Gywe, W Kyaw Kyaw, Yaw Naing Tun, Zaw Zaw Co, Zay Yar Aye, Zay Zay Htut and Zwe Yan Naing.

New art

In the meantime, the Myanmar art scene, for far too long preoccupied with paintings of golden pagodas, dancing girls and bull-ock-carts, will experience a surge of “new art” as savvy artists such as Htein Lin stage thought-provoking shows not necessarily aimed at collectors and other buyers.

For example, Htein Lin was the curator in the group exhibition *Seven Decades*, which features the works of 19 local artists. Besides himself, the other artists were San Minn, Dr. Sun Myint, Win Pe, Chaw Ei Thein, Sonny Nyein, Maung Di, Phyu Mon, San Oo, Chan Aye, Wah Nu, Pe Maung Same, Soe Naing, Aung Myint, Sandar Khine, MPP Ye Myint, Ma Thanegi, Aye Ko and Ngu Eain Htet Myet.

The show was staged in the historic Secretariat Building in Yangon from July 7 to 31, 2018. Also known as the Ministers’ Building, this was the place where British Crown Colony premier General

Aung San (father of current Myanmar de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi) was assassinated in 1947 together with six other government officials.

“Our country gained independence in 1948. The 70 years which passed since then have been filled with many momentous events, and much mundanity. That is why I asked artists who have lived through those post-independence years to reflect on those decades and present them through art,” states Htein Lin.

“This exhibition isn’t about looking at old art from past years. It’s about creating new art to recall past decades. These decades and the artists’ experiences of them are not just stories. This is their artistic conceptualization of the keys to their and our survival of those times.”

Top 10

Based on auction benchmarks compiled and in chronological order, the top 10 artists of Myanmar are Ngwe Gaing (1901-1967), U Ba Thet (1903-1972), San Win (1905-1981), U Lun Gywe (1930), Kyee Myintt Saw (1939), Min Kyi U (1940), Mg Kyaw Nyunt (1943), Myo Khin/Mo Ke (1949), Min Wae Aung (1960) and Aung Kyaw Htet (1965).

AUCTION BENCHMARKS OF ARTISTS IN MYANMAR

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
1	Myo Khin/Mo Ke (1949)	The Girl 2003, Oil on canvas 60cm x 45cm Hammer Price: US\$244,950 With Premium (15%): US\$281,692 Auction House: Poly International Auction, Beijing Date: 2 December 2013	Soul 2003, Oil on canvas 64cm x 45cm Hammer Price: US\$239,099 With Premium (15%): US\$274,963 Auction House: Poly International Auction, Beijing Date: 2 December 2013	Spring Blossom 2005, Oil on canvas 37cm x 50cm Hammer Price: US\$202,250 With Premium (15%): US\$232,587 Auction House: Hanhai Art Auction, Beijing Date: 1 June 2013
2	Ngwe Gaing (1901-1967)	Elephant and Trucks with Logs 1965, Oil on canvas 67cm x 91cm Hammer Price: US\$ 61,449 With Premium (25%): US\$76,811 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 1 October 2017	Racing Boats 1962, Oil on board 40cm x 73.5cm Hammer Price: US\$61,167 With Premium (25%): US\$76,458 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 1 April 2018	Flowers with Burmese Hintha Undated, Oil on board 44cm x 59cm Hammer Price: US\$35,688 With Premium (25%): US\$44,610 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 27 May 2018
3	San Win (1905-1981)	The Great Shwedagon 1960 Oil on canvas laid on board 62cm x 42cm Hammer Price: US\$40,778 With Premium (25%): US\$50,972 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 1 April 2018	Shwedagon 1962 Oil on canvas laid on board 40cm x 50.5cm Hammer Price: US\$28,035 With Premium (25%): US\$35,043 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 1 April 2018	Bagan 1979, Oil on canvas 40cm x 79cm Hammer Price: US\$24,323 With Premium (25%): US\$30,403 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 1 October 2017
4	U Ba Thet (1903-1972)	The Girl on the Tree Undated, Oil on board 65cm x 46cm Hammer Price: US\$40,228 With Premium (22%): US\$50,260 Auction House: Borobudur Singapore Date: 22 May 2011	Buffaloes at Work 1965, Oil on board 50cm x 81cm Hammer Price: US\$ 14,653 With Premium (25%): US\$18,316 Auction House: Bonhams Hong Kong Date: 29 March 2018	The Pagoda Undated, Oil on board 39.5cm x 30cm Hammer Price: US\$8,961 With Premium (25%): US\$ 11,201 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 1 October 2017

* The artists are ranked according to their auction records in the first column. The second and third columns show their second and third most expensive artworks sold in auctions.

** NA : not available

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
5	U Lun Gywe (1930)	In the Hallway of the Shwedagon Pagoda 2005, Oil on canvas 120cm x 180cm Hammer Price: US\$30,960 With Premium (25%): US\$38,700 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 29 November 2015	Burmese Dancer 1994, Oil on canvas 74cm x 58cm Hammer Price: US\$17,844 With Premium (25%): US\$22,305 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 27 May 2018	Floating Market at Mandalay 1999, Oil on cloth 61cm x 76.5cm Hammer Price: US\$12,106 With Premium (25%): US\$15,132 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 1 April 2018
6	Aung Kyaw Htet (1965)	A Walk in a Dream 2010, Oil on canvas Size (cm): Hammer Price: US\$15,633 With Premium (20%): US\$18,759 Auction House: 33 Auction Singapore Date: 11 May 2014	Three is Company 2008, Oil on canvas 182cm x 124cm Hammer Price: US\$7,426 With Premium (20%): US\$8,762 Auction House: 33 Auction Singapore Date: 3 May 2009	The Saffron Robe 2013, Oil on canvas 167cm x 116cm Hammer Price: US\$6,811 With Premium (20%): US\$8,173 Auction House: 33 Auction Singapore Date: 11 May 2014
7	Min Wae Aung (1960)	Dusty Journey 1994, Oil on canvas 62cm x 88cm Hammer Price: US\$9,559 With Premium (25%): US\$11,948 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 27 May 2018	The Golden Buddha 1997, Acrylic on canvas 121.5cm x 95cm Hammer Price: US\$8,283 With Premium (25%): US\$10,353 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 1 April 2018	Nuns Under the Rain 2008, Acrylic on canvas 94cm x 130cm Hammer Price: US\$7,419 With Premium (10%): US\$8,160 Auction House: The Edge Galerie, Kuala Lumpur Date: 20 March 2016
8	Kyee Myintt Saw (1939)	We are the Night 2014, Acrylic on canvas 91cm x 91cm Hammer Price: US\$8,992 With Premium (10%): US\$9,891 Auction House: The Edge Galerie, Kuala Lumpur Date: 10 May 2014	Nude and Orange 2006, Oil on canvas 146cm x 146cm Hammer Price: US\$4,620 With Premium (17%): US\$5,405 Auction House: Larasati Singapore Date: 30 April 2007	Yangon Night 2007, Oil on canvas 91cm x 91cm Hammer Price: US\$4,444 With Premium (17%): US\$5,199 Auction House: Larasati Singapore Date: 21 October 2007

AUCTION BENCHMARKS OF ARTISTS IN MYANMAR

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
9	Min Kyi U (1940)	Village Life (乡村生活) 1997, Oil on canvas 48cm x 96cm Hammer Price: US\$5,664 With Premium (20%): US\$6,796 Auction House: 33 Auction Singapore Date: 21 November 2015	Street Scene 1993, Oil on canvas 50cm x 110cm Hammer Price: US\$2,841 With Premium (20%): US\$3,409 Auction House: 33 Auction Singapore Date: 14 May 2017	NA
10	Mg Kyaw Nyunt (1943)	Firewood Seller on the Bank of Ayeyarwady River 2007, Oil on canvas 91cm x 122cm Hammer Price: US\$5,127 With Premium (17%): US\$5,998 Auction House: Larasati Singapore Date: 21 October 2007	Pot Seller Girl 2008, Acrylic on canvas 76cm x 92cm Hammer Price: US\$2,970 With Premium (20%): US\$3,564 Auction House: Larasati Singapore Date: 11 October 2008	Ayeyardawady Boys Undated, Oil on canvas 76cm x 91.5cm Hammer Price: US\$2,617 With Premium (18.3%): US\$3,096 Auction House: Larasati Singapore Date: 13 April 2008
11	Sai Myoe Myat (1941)	Shan Belle 2005, Oil on canvas 102cm x 76cm Hammer Price: US\$4,785 With Premium (17%): US\$5,598 Auction House: Larasati Singapore Date: 21 October 2007	NA	NA
12	Htet Aung Zaw (1970)	Crossing the Bamboo 2014, Oil on canvas 176cm x 102cm Hammer Price: US\$3,913 With Premium (10%): US\$4,304 Auction House: The Edge Galerie, Kuala Lumpur Date: 22 March 2015	NA	NA

* The artists are ranked according to their auction records in the first column. The second and third columns show their second and third most expensive artworks sold in auctions.

** NA : not available

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
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13	Nyein Chan Su (1973)	Landscape 7 Undated, Acrylic on canvas 91cm x 122cm Hammer Price: US\$3,822 With Premium (25%): US\$4,777 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 1 April 2018	Landscape 8 1992, Acrylic on canvas 91cm x 121cm Hammer Price: USD1,920 With Premium (22%): US\$2,400 Auction House: Sotheby's Hong Kong Date: 1 October 2017	U Pein Bridge 2004, Acrylic on canvas 59.5cm x 75cm Hammer Price: US\$1,911 With Premium (25%): US\$2,388 Auction House: Christie's Hong Kong Date: 27 May 2018
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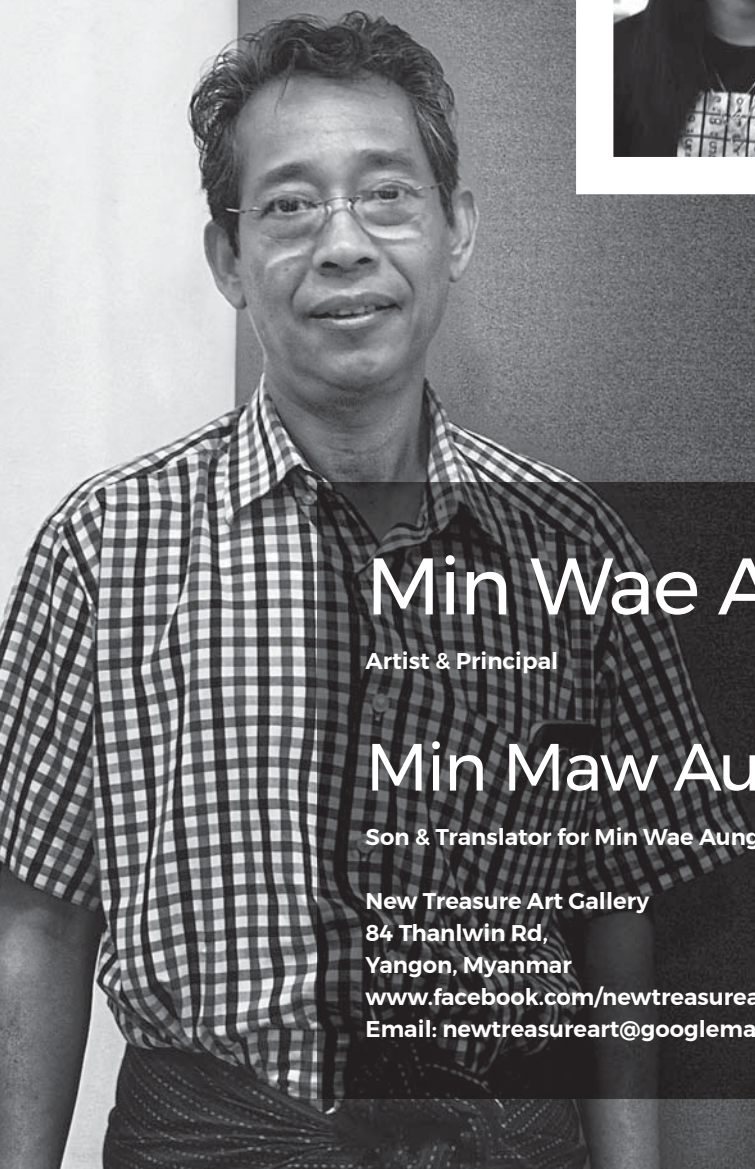
14	Min Lwin (1974)	Underneath the Plum Trees 2014, Acrylic on canvas 50cm x 60cm Hammer Price: US\$2,159 With Premium (10%): US\$2,374 Auction House: The Edge Galerie, Kuala Lumpur Date: 22 March 2015	NA	NA
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15	Kyaw Soe (1955)	Returning Home 2015, Acrylic on canvas 91cm x 91cm Hammer Price: US\$1,883 With Premium (20%): US\$2,259 Auction House: 33 Auction Singapore Date: 21 May 2016	NA	NA
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16	Maung Su Yatanabon (1903-1965)	Tribal portraits depicting Red Karen Man and Woman, Kami Man and Woman, and Chin Man and Woman Undated, Watercolour on paper 20cm x 14cm Hammer Price: US\$1,066 With Premium (21%): US\$1,289 Auction House: Byrne's Auctioneers, UK Date: 21 September 2016	NA	NA
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AUCTION BENCHMARKS OF ARTISTS IN MYANMAR

RANKING	ARTIST	ARTWORK 1	ARTWORK 2	ARTWORK 3
17	Myoe Win Aung (1972)	Early Morning at the Monastery 1995 Watercolour on paper 61cm x 51cm Hammer Price: US\$980 With Premium: NA Auction House: Bonhams-Glerum, Singapore Date: 29 September 1997	Feeding the Pigeons 1996 Watercolour on paper 38cm x 28cm Hammer Price: US\$523 With Premium: NA Auction House: Bonhams-Glerum, Singapore Date: 29 September 1997	The Royal Lake at Sunset 1966 Watercolour on paper 26cm x 36cm Hammer Price: US\$419 With Premium: NA Auction House: Glerum S.E.A. Singapore Date: 17 May 1998
18	Ba Khine (1960)	Popa View 2002, Oil on canvas 92cm x 122cm Hammer Price: US\$781 With Premium (22%): US\$976 Auction House: Borobudur, Singapore Date: 19 March 2011	NA	NA
19	Khin Mauw Zaw (1970)	Teaching the Novices 1995 Watercolour on paper 36cm x 51cm Hammer Price: US\$653 With Premium: NA Auction House: Bonhams-Glerum, Singapore Date: 29 September 1997	NA	NA
20	Myo Myint (1955)	Land of Peace 1995 Watercolour on paper 42cm x 52cm Hammer Price: US\$384 With Premium: NA Auction House: Glerum S.E.A. Singapore Date: 17 May 1998	NA	NA



Min Wae Aung

Artist & Principal

Min Maw Aung

Son & Translator for Min Wae Aung

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BREAKING BARRIERS

Myanmar contemporary artist Min Wae Aung, 57, is viewed with awe and respect among his peers and obviously, not without a tinge of envy among art dealers and other artist-gallerists.

His highly successful series of travelling monks painted on a stark background brought him fame and fortune in the late 1980s when the local art market was just beginning to stir. Currently, his canvas works sell from US\$30,000 to US\$60,000 or more, each. And his success has spawned a legion of imitators who copy his style right down to his signature ochre compositions.

His palatial home and gallery in an upscale neighbourhood in Yangon continue to attract local and foreign collectors eager to snap up the works of Myanmar's most successful artist to date. His multi-level New Treasure Art Gallery was built in the early 1990s.

With many successful solo exhibitions overseas, Min Wae has travelled far and wide over the past two decades. And he has also been active in promoting Myanmar art in group exchange programmes. The activist artist keeps a wary eye on the local art market and the latest developments. But he refrains from being involved in the Southeast Asian art auction scene.

These days, the soft-spoken artist is ably assisted by his 23-year-old son, Min Maw Aung, who returned home from the US in January 2017 after graduating with a studio art major from Clark University in Massachusetts.

Studying the list of auction records chalked up by Myanmar artists, Min Wae instantly recognises a statistical anomaly in the top spot. This was verified by another group of local artists comprising Tin Win, Khin Maung Zaw, Zay Yar Aye and Pann Kyi at another meeting. "A Chinese dealer is promoting Myo Khin by buying his works at a cheap price – US\$100 to US\$200. But he buys 200 to 1,000 paintings and brings them to China," points out Min Wae. He adds that the artist is prolific because

he paints quickly. He opened a gallery here and only paints abstract works.

Continuing with the list, Min Wae remarks that Aung Kyaw Htet copies his style and his record price seems to be “very high while my price is cheap”. Min Maw maintains that his father does not submit his works for auction. “Someone else puts in my work for auctions,” Min Wae concurs. Min Wae cites U Ba Thet, U Ngwe Gaing, U Lun Gywe and Kyee Myintt Saw as well as San Win, Nyein Chan Su and Maung Su Yatanabon as the important artists of Myanmar with auction records on the list.

The Edge: Why are local artworks expensive?

Min Wae Aung: It depends on who owns the work. Sometimes, the painting’s quality, size and subject matter will affect the price. Nyein Chan Su is a big name but his price is cheap. Another famous artist is Maung Su Yatanabon who is deceased.

Myoe Win Aung is a young artist [who is], good with watercolours, along with Khin Maung Zaw, another talented watercolour artist. Khin Maung Zaw is a member of the Myanmar Watercolour Society. His paintings cost about US\$1,000 on average. But in Myanmar, it is priced at about US\$650.

He is wary of art promoters who come to Myanmar looking for the next big thing and talking of grandiose projects overseas.

Min Wae: Several months ago, someone from Singapore came here to look for artworks to auction. She cited Christie’s and Sotheby’s. But later, she mentioned a different auction house. So I don’t know if she was making it up.

How do you link fellow local artists to the outside world?

Min Wae: Recently, we had a show in Bali with works from Myanmar, Thailand and Indonesia in an art exchange programme. And

last week [July 1 to 6, 2017], we had the Korea-Myanmar art exchange here. It was a commercial show but Myanmar art collectors are not interested in foreign artists. They only buy local art. Korean art is more contemporary.

Local collectors favour 'cheap prices' even for established artists. Certain senior artists or 'masters' prefer to sell to dealers in bulk. For example, US\$200 each for 100 paintings.

This means art prices in the local market cannot go up because some art collectors are not art-educated. They think that by buying in bulk at a cheaper price, the artworks will appreciate in another 20 to 30 years.

For example, the modern artist Khin Maung Yin (1938-2014) is a big name in Myanmar. When he was alive, collectors bought his paintings for US\$50 to US\$100. The artist said he didn't care about his price. With the money, he bought his materials, canvas and paint. When he passed away, his paintings were sold for US\$1,000 to US\$2,000 in the local market. So, Myanmar collectors think that if they buy for US\$50, the price will increase to US\$2,000 in future.

Which gallery sells Khin Maung Yin's works?

Min Wae: Myanmar Ink Art Gallery sells his works. The gallery owner is an artist and art dealer. He has money. He collects not only works of Myanmar artists, but also artists from abroad which he buys at a cheaper price.

What are your observations on the current Myanmar art market?

Min Wae: Myanmar art collectors and business people do buy and collect paintings, but not at a high price. Perhaps below US\$2,000 for an artwork and US\$50 to US\$100 each for watercolour paintings. For [well-known] deceased artists and national painters such

as U Ba Nyan and U Ngwe Gaing, their price level is different. Having studied in London, U Ba Nyan brought European art [technique and style] to Myanmar. These two are very famous in Myanmar and their prices are also much higher. Their average price depends on the size of the work, [and is] at least more than US\$30,000.

When it comes to learning about the early and distinguished artists of Myanmar, Min Wae recommends that collectors read Andrew Ranard's book, *Burmese Painting: A Linear and Lateral History*, published in 2009.

Min Wae: Andrew's father worked in Myanmar a long time ago. Later, Andrew worked in Singapore and met a Myanmar promoter there. He returned to Japan to teach English in a university and wrote about Myanmar art.

Min Wae cites U Ba Nyan's painting, Rangoon Port, illustrated in Ranard's book, as an example of an early masterpiece that could be worth US\$300,000 to US\$400,000 today. But no such price has been recorded in auctions of Southeast Asian art because the works are not available for sale for the time being.

Min Wae: Only rich Myanmar people have them and they don't normally sell.

Although you steer clear of auctions, have you participated in art fairs?

Min Wae: I took part some time ago in Singapore and Hong Kong. I had a solo exhibition in London where Karin Weber and Tanya Baxter represented me. But it wasn't with New Treasure Art Gallery. Perhaps my son will participate in the future. He is doing business and has better communication skills.

Are there more Myanmar collectors buying art now than foreigners?

Min Wae: Yes, 10 to 20 years ago, only foreigners such as diplomats bought art. Myanmar people couldn't afford it. Now, in the last five years, more of them are buying art. These days, diplomats can't afford to buy paintings because their salaries are not what they used to be 20 years ago. Besides, the price of a painting then was cheaper. Also, the Myanmar currency and exchange rate is different now.

How do you see the Myanmar art market in the next five years?

Min Wae: The art market is dependent on the country's political and business conditions. Every country is the same. When your country becomes rich, the prices of paintings will also increase. For example, many Chinese art collectors are millionaires and can afford to buy at a higher price. They control the artists' prices. Collectors from other countries cannot buy Myanmar art at a cheaper price.

Is it happening in Myanmar where certain 'collectors' control artworks to bring the price up?

Min Wae: Yes, some art collectors control the younger artists because they are 'hungry'. They need the money.

When did you start your art career and what year did you sell your first painting?

Min Wae: I started before 1988. At the time, my painting was shown in a group exhibition and was sold for US\$100.

Do you increase your price every year?

Min Wae: I increase the price every four to five years. For example, my 56cm by 76cm watercolour painting was initially priced at US\$100. Now, I sell it for US\$4,500. My 152cm by 183cm canvas work is US\$30,000. This price level is the same everywhere.

Where are your main ‘markets’ for people buying outside of Myanmar?

Min Wae: I have agents in Singapore, Hong Kong and London. But the buyers come from different countries.

Are you the highest-priced artist in Myanmar now?

Min Wae: I don’t know.

Min Maw Aung: You have the right to put whatever amount on your painting. You can price it at US\$1 million. But some artists sell for a lower price because nobody would buy it with the high markup. You can put up a high price but it depends whether people want it.

What is the highest transacted price for a Min Wae Aung work in the gallery that has been sold?

Min Maw: A year and a half ago, we sold a 152cm by 183cm figurative, realistic painting. My father was going to keep it for us. But one local buyer familiar with his work really wanted it. And he bought three works for US\$60,000 each. In future, my father would probably sell such works for US\$100,000. There was a 122cm by 183cm monk painting that my father didn’t want to sell. Another buyer really wanted it, so he sold it for US\$50,000.

Is there any other artist who sells a painting for US\$50,000 to US\$60,000 in Yangon?

Min Maw: My father doesn’t know, so he can’t really comment on that. It’s not good for the other party, so it’s better to ask around.

How did you start your gallery?

Min Wae: New Treasure Art Gallery was established in 1989 and the art space was relocated when I erected my own building and home. The original space was five and a half miles (8.8km) from the lake.

At the time, I rented the space, then I moved to another rented place in 1990. A year later, I bought a piece of land and built the art space.

When I started the gallery, there was no market for paintings, only commercial work like movie posters, comic illustrations and book covers. In 1993, I visited the US under an exchange programme. At the time, nobody knew about Myanmar. Later, when Myanmar was more open and particularly in 1997 when Myanmar became an Asean member, the art market changed with the open [door] policy.

How many serious collectors are there in Myanmar?

Min Wae: There are not more than six big collectors. They are rich and buy many works. They sell late artists' works for very high prices. But there are also many people buying small works.

Are there any corporations or institutions in Myanmar that support art and buy art?

Min Wae: No, we do exhibitions at our own expense with no sponsors. Now, we are looking for sponsors because in 2019, we will have an international watercolour art fair. One company is interested and will be sponsoring the event.

We have a small budget of US\$60,000 to US\$70,000 for the big show. In Myanmar, the rich support people in the entertainment and sports business while the government supports football and boxing events. All the money goes there. We have only one national museum, which is not really an art museum.

The quality of the building is not museum-quality. In 2018, we want to hold a 100-year anniversary exhibition for U Thu Kha, an influential art teacher. Many of his students respect him. We have been looking for an exhibition hall but there is none for art, only for wedding events. We also organise an annual exhibition in New Treasure Art Gallery every November.

What is the name of the institution where U Thu Kha taught?

Min Wae: It was formerly an art school called the State School of Fine Art. Now it is known as the Yangon High School.

Min Maw: We used to study only art in that school. But today, students have to take other subjects in addition to art, so they don't really want to go there.

Min Wae: In Yangon, there's one art school and one art university and another in Mandalay.



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AN EXPATRIATE'S VIEW ON SELLING MYANMAR ART

"You know how the art world works; people are reluctant to give specific information and so there is a conundrum," points out Gill Pattison, a dealer in Myanmar art for over a decade.

Pattison, 57, hails from New Zealand and has been in the Myanmar art business since 2006 when she established River Gallery at The Strand hotel in Yangon.

She adds: "It's great that you're doing such a study. I'm sure you had to do a lot of digging, triangulating and inferring because you won't get very precise and objective data. But if you ask around, you will get the picture."

Pattison has resided in Yangon since 2002 and her aim of establishing a gallery was "to showcase Myanmar's talented contemporary artists who were little known at the time. Life for an artist was difficult; they were almost completely isolated from the global art scene and they struggled under a heavy censorship regime. But I felt strongly that these talented individuals deserved better representation and exposure to a wider market".

In 2016, River Gallery was relocated from The Strand to another heritage building – Chindwin Chambers – at the back of the hotel on 38th Street with twice the space. The gallery now represents over 40 leading and emerging artists in Myanmar.

Today, according to Pattison, the Myanmar art scene is "blossoming" as artists enjoy "unprecedented freedom".

River Gallery is regarded as the leading art space in the country. Each year, it organises a series of shows abroad for its artists in partnership with overseas galleries for both group shows of Myanmar artists and solo exhibitions for distinguished talents.

In a nutshell, says Pattison, the majority of buyers in the art market are visitors to the country. That was true in the "old days" and it still is.

Gill Pattison: Over 90% of people who buy art in Myanmar are visitors. Now, that percentage is less but it's still the large majority. The art market depends on the quality and the quantity of visitors who come to the country.

We saw things in up-and-down cycles – the Asian financial crisis (1997) and then particular problems in Myanmar with cyclones and the Saffron Revolution (2007) – which kept the visitors away. (The Saffron Revolution refers to the colour of the robes worn by monks who played an important role in anti-government protests.) It has been an up-and-down kind of market because it is driven by visitors.

Now, we find that there are more visitors here, but fewer are interested in art. In the old days, the visitors were independent, wealthy travellers interested in art. Now, it's all kinds of tourists and visitors and only a small number are interested in art. But overall, the market is growing.

Local sales can be divided into two areas: the Myanmar local business and the expatriates who live here. The number of expats has expanded dramatically from about 1,000 in 2002 to about 8,000 to 10,000 today. There is a bigger market of expats, but they are looking for inexpensive Myanmar art.

There are a few more Myanmar collectors but you can count the number on two hands. There is, however, growing interest.

It's not like in Indonesia where it's cool to have contemporary art. There are many other asset classes that the locals are interested in. The art market is slowly growing and expanding, but it's by no means a robust growth. I would think a low, single-digit figure annually.

The Edge: Min Wae Aung (top-selling Myanmar contemporary artist) cited a figure of only six serious Myanmar collectors.

Yes, I always think of them as art addicts. They really can't help themselves, they have to buy art. There is interest within a few con-

glomerates and hotels; that's the overall market development.

Of course, on the supply side (the paintings and artists), the huge game-changing event was the dropping of censorship in 2012. That was very dramatic. Though the reaction of the artists was not so dramatic.

They all wanted to paint Aung San Suu Kyi (Myanmar's de facto leader). It took most of them some time before they experimented with their new-found freedom. In fact, many of them have not done anything different from what they did during the regime of censorship. Partly because they didn't trust that the changes were permanent, and also, they were so used to self-censorship and to think about potential controversies and incorporating them in their art.

There was a lot of performance art for a while after the censorship shackles came off, but that has died down due to a lack of funding. The art world here is completely within the private sector. There are no foundations, national museums, or galleries. Demand and supply are all generated by artists and private galleries. That's the trend I see.

Are the subject matters still Buddhist figures, market scenes and landscapes?

No, that is certainly changing. There is still a large number of Myanmar artists who paint what they see around them. But there is a contemporary or modern twist. That is the characteristic of Myanmar art.

Is there demand for new media art like digital or installation art?

There's demand from the artists, so they like to use other media.

How about interest from collectors?

Not so much interest from collectors. Previously, the installations

and sculptures were expensive to produce. Since the market was driven by visitors, it was also hard to transport the sculptures.

Now, there's some local demand for installations, sculptures and, of course, photography. Myanmar is such a photogenic country but selling photographs is a difficult matter. There is a specialist photographic print gallery called Myanmar Deitta¹ on 44th street. They make their business selling photographs and holding serious art photography exhibitions.

What are the names of the leading contemporary artists that you represent?

Zaw Win Pe is an important contemporary figure for us. One example of his work is semi-abstract, vibrant landscape. He is an important well-known figure. His prices have solidly appreciated since the time I have been representing him. He was with me when I started in 2006. He was the winner of the first national art competition that we organised in 2004². That was when he started doing semi-abstract work.

Aung Ko, who is in his mid-30s, is an important conceptual, cutting-edge artist. *The Golden Guys* (see pg xxvi) is one of his works. Most of his artworks have been shown abroad or at art fairs and biennales.

He is one of our most creative and interesting artists. Another is his wife, Nge Lay. She has also had considerable success in the museum and art biennale world. She is involved in multi-media, including photography, sculpture, painting and installation. She had a fabulous installation at the Singapore Biennale (2013) called *The Sick Classroom* (2013, see pg xxviii).

Another of my artists, who I'm sure is going to be in the art histo-

¹ www.deitta.org

² Myanmar Contemporary Art Awards 2004, www.rivergallerymyanmar.com/artists

ry books 100 years from now, is Htein Lin. You have probably come across him as he is quite famous on the global platform. He is very civic-minded, so he gets involved in all kinds of projects which have an art angle. He is connected and is often asked to organise festivals and fairs. We've got two of his installations aside from his paintings. I think his real love is performance as he enjoys to be in front of people. But he's extremely creative and works in many types of media.

He treats Yangon as his studio. Those two works on the wall of acrylic sheets are his. This series is called *Signs of the Times* (see pg xxvii). He's interested in technology that is making various things obsolete here. In the past, signs used to be constructed by carpenters, men with saws, cutting out letters from sheets of plywood, but now the job goes to the laser operator.

Another up-and-coming artist is Nann Nann. I am looking at this now (examining the artwork) which has just arrived. I'm thrilled because I haven't seen it before. She also does sculptures, installations as well as paintings. She has had some success in doing commissioned works for some corporations.

A few companies are thinking about starting an art collection or acquiring significant pieces of Myanmar art for their corporate headquarters. Or to show that they are a part of, or placing importance on, supporting the culture of Myanmar.

Are they mainly multinational companies or local companies?

It's both. For example, Kanbawza Bank Ltd (KBZ) is very interested – it is the biggest bank here and a family-run business. One of their daughters is in charge of the development of their art collection. Nann Nann has also been commissioned to do a sculpture for Co-operative Bank Ltd's (CB Bank) Naypyidaw headquarters, which is the other private bank.

Aung Myint is the grand old man of Myanmar art. You have

probably heard of him as he is quite wellknown. He was selected as one of two Myanmar artists for The Guggenheim two years ago called *No Country: Contemporary Art for South and Southeast Asia*. He is famous for his mother-and-child series. He was always at the forefront of the conceptual movement; pretty brave for doing edgy performances that sometimes got him into trouble. He was one of the first to have his own art gallery back in the 1970s when censorship was rife.

Chuu Wai Nyein is one of our most interesting emerging artists. But she is just starting out.

One reason Htein Lin became famous was due to his seven-year imprisonment. Since he came back to Myanmar in 2012, his career has gone from strength to strength. He is possibly one of our most commercially successful and recognised artists in the Myanmar art world. He has had some sales with museums in the region, including the Singapore Art Museum. He dealt directly with them.

The price of Htein Lin's large canvases (200cm by 200cm) ranges from US\$15,000 to US\$20,000. We are selling the sculptures for US\$9,500 to US\$10,000.

How about prices of those artists you mentioned?

Zaw Win Pe's large paintings that are five and a half feet by six feet (168cm by 183cm) cost US\$11,000 and those three feet by four feet (91cm by 122cm) sell for US\$6,500 in the gallery. There are two reference points here.

Aung Ko does all kinds of different things. These two large paintings (showing image), acrylic on canvas (183cm by 183cm), are priced at US\$15,000.

I don't know Nge Lay's price level because I don't have her works here. Although I know she sold *The Sick Classroom* to the Queens-

land Art Gallery and Museum of Modern Art in Brisbane³. And she got a very good price for that.

Khin Zaw Latt is an important artist here. We have an association with a gallery in the south of France and he's got a show there. He's taking leadership in the art world here. He's well-liked and respected among artists and customers. He has been very successful commercially as well.

How much do you sell his work for?

A five feet by four feet (152cm by 122cm) sells for US\$8,750 and for 137cm by 107cm, it is US\$7,500. Nann Nann's work here costs US\$12,000. Her paintings are extremely valuable in price and she gets a bigger price for her sculptures.

As Chuu Wai Nyein is just starting out, her prices are at entry-level. A 166cm by 46cm piece sells for US\$1,200. The Aung Myint 107cm by 107cm work is priced at US\$10,000.

These other artists are accomplished or they have solid market demand. But they are defined as more local than of broader international appeal. You'd probably know Soe Soe Labutta, Khin Zaw Latt's brother. He has also had commercial success. Win Pe, unfortunately, only came back a few years ago and he's very old now. He sells a 92cm by 122cm work for US\$2,500. His gallery works are of interest to auction houses. Though success in the art world depends on many factors.

You mentioned installations and sculptures. Do your clients buy them?

No. Whenever we have an opening, I never just have paintings. There's always a performance or the audience has to do something.

We have another exciting artist – Soe Yu Nwe, a young cerami-

³ www.blog.qagoma.qld.gov.au/apt8-highlight-nge-lay/

cist⁴. She has created this ceramic snake (see pg xxvii), which is an amazing artwork. She has just completed her degree at Rhode Island School of Design and is back here trying to find her way. She is definitely one to watch because she is talented and driven. It's a severed breast that was presented as an offering to the Buddha.

Why a severed breast to the Buddha?

The Buddha would have welcomed it. It's a mythological story of a Myanmar ogress. This ogress, who's a virgin, wanted to convert to Buddhism. As a show of her loyalty and commitment, she severed her own breast to present to the Buddha.

Auctions & Art Fairs

Pattison is aware of the general trend in the Southeast Asian art scene and buying habits. And she keeps an eye on Myanmar works in auctions.

"It's very similar everywhere you go. Myanmar is no exception though everything is on a smaller scale," she says, in reference to the list of auction records of Myanmar artists.

She wasn't surprised at the comparatively low level of auction records of Myanmar artists in general.

"The price of US\$15,000 doesn't surprise me," Pattison points out, referring to Aung Kyaw Htet's A Walk in a Dream (2010) sold at 33 Auction Singapore in 2011.

I have nothing to do with auctions. Any of my artists who have been to auction do so out at their own initiative. None of the auction houses want paintings from the gallery, so it's not an issue for me.

I remember years ago, Sotheby's and Christie's representatives told me they were short of Myanmar artists to show.

⁴ Lillian Kalish, October 1, 2016. *Ceramic artist finds her place*. <https://www.soeeyunwe.com/single-post/2016/09/30/Ceramic-artist-finds-her-place-Myanmar-Times>

They wanted critical mass so they could have Myanmar as a catalyst. They didn't just want one or two artists but five or six, so they weren't interested. I don't think many Myanmar artists' works have gone through or were auctioned by Sotheby's or Christie's.

Min Wae Aung certainly has his group of collectors and he is still achieving those kinds of prices, which is fabulous. I take my hat off to him. It's a style of painting that has served him very well for 25 years.

I don't know who Min Kyi U is.

Do you deal only in contemporary art?

Yes, all of it. From time to time, I have people approaching me wanting to sell old masters or are looking for them. But my view has been that it's not my business. I don't have sufficient expertise to understand the provenance and be confident of its authenticity.

Is there a problem in Myanmar about fake paintings?

Oh yes, I think so. I just heard the odd rumour, for example, of Bo U Thet. There was some talk in the market that there were fakes because he was so high-profiled and achieving certain prices.

Looking at the list of Myanmar auction records again, Pattison cites certain remarkable figures.

Myo Khin or Mo Ke has a history with Chinese customers, but not at those prices for paintings.

Obviously, U Lun Gwe is a towering figure on the Myanmar art scene. But I don't know much about him. I have never represented him. He has his own operations and is considered the Grand Old Man of Myanmar paintings. So, I have no knowledge of him except that in 2016, he participated in an art fair in Japan, where he had a successful sale with high-priced impressionistic style pieces.

The promoter, Yoichiro Kurata, is a Japanese businessman who is a collector and has an art auction⁵ house as well. He also has business interests here.

We represent Aung Kyaw Htet's work. He did well for years at Thavibu Art Gallery in Bangkok.

Pattison first participated in regional art fairs in 2006 but has reservations about such events.

Last April, we were at the Affordable Art Fair in Singapore. That was the first time we had ventured out in 10 years since our visit to Art Singapore in 2006. I thought, 'It's time to try it again because I heard more sales are through art fairs these days'.

But our experience was disappointing. The impression was that the majority of the exhibitors at the fair also felt it didn't meet their expectations.

What was the price range of your artworks?

Seventy-five per cent of the works have to be below S\$5,000. So, the artists that sell well in the gallery didn't do well at the fair.

I was impressed with the organisers before the fair. They were very responsive and well organised. But I didn't believe the information given afterwards about the number of sales.

It is a common notion that art fairs only give an estimate of the total transactions.

How are they allowed to do that? Is there no audit? Now that art fairs are such a big part of the landscape, there should be an auditing process as there are for publications. Your circulation figures and subscriptions have to be audited. There is a lot of very rubbery statistics in the art world.

5 Shinwa Art Auctions, www.shinwa-art.com/en/about.html

A black and white portrait of Nathalie Johnston, a woman with shoulder-length blonde hair, wearing a dark V-neck top and large, ornate earrings. She is standing with her arms crossed in front of a large, abstract black and white artwork that features bold, expressive lines and shapes, including what appears to be a stylized face or figure on the right side.

Nathalie Johnston

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FORGING AHEAD ON A SHOESTRING BUDGET

Art historian, curator and activist Nathalie Johnston, 33, started out as a gutsy student writing a blog on the Myanmar art scene in 2010 and embracing all the trials and tribulations that local artists were going through.

But this American's link to Myanmar goes back 20 years when she was a 13-year-old travelling there for the first time with her family. Her mother worked at Radio Free Asia in Washington DC. And she was aware of Aung San Suu Kyi and the country's struggle for democracy.

Today, she has emerged as a local authority on the contemporary art scene. Although working with young artists in Yangon on a shoestring budget, her outfit, Myanmar/art, is sought out by curators and fair organisers looking for the next big thing to emerge from Myanmar.

As a child, Johnston had lived in China and after university, she decided to move to Asia. In Singapore, she pursued a master's degree in South-east Asian contemporary art history run by the Sotheby's Institute. But that programme left out Myanmar in its curriculum. That omission spurred her to find out more about Myanmar art.

Nathalie Johnston: I have been living in Myanmar for five years but I've been working here for almost nine years. I first did research on performance art so I knew that there was an art world outside the existing painting world that was not getting a lot of attention.

So, when I came here, I interviewed some of the artists and got to know them. I thought I would start a blog. It was the only thing in my power to do at the time since I was a student. In 2010, I started writing about the artists in my blog called Myanmar/art.

Over the years, Johnston has worked for different art spaces and has done various projects.

I used to work for a gallery called TSr, which was located at the Yangon river jetty. But it was shut down by the city government.

Johnston has also curated some exhibitions for Goethe and the French institutes.

But I felt that I could do more. I was encouraged to open my own space. I thought it would take forever but I finally found this place. It was affordable and downtown.

The point of Myanmar/art was to join the art and gallery scene but to do it differently. We only represent Myanmar artists who are trying to say or do something in different styles but are still contemporary. Something that is relevant to them but where they don't feel like they have to sell. The galleries here – there are many of them – are all great. They do a lot to support painters but many of them carry the same artists. You see the same works over and over again in all the galleries.

Although many of the artists do well commercially, it's a self-perpetuating cycle. The gallery requires works that sell and the artists want to make works that sell. So they are not experimental. In many galleries, the artists have to pay per day to have an exhibition. What I say to the artists is, 'I don't want you to rent the space, I want to work with you'. So, we split everything 50-50. I share all the material costs with them. It means that we bear equal risk and work together. And then we split the sales 50-50. To be honest, it is hard to sell this kind of work here.

The tourist season is a bit better, but it's like waiting for that perfect storm. It's easy to find artists who are passionate about what they do. They have great ideas, cool execution and have a buzz around them. It's not difficult to fill the space, but it's difficult to get people enthusiastic about contemporary art in Myanmar. I have

a good regional network. I did my master's degree in Singapore at Sotheby's Institute and know a lot of the curators working in the region. They are all very supportive. But it's just waiting for something to click.

Myanmar art market

Johnston thinks there is just not enough information and not enough interested collectors. This is because people don't know much about Myanmar art.

A significant part of the art market here is manipulated by people who have money. It has been existing in isolation so the artworks are sold to other Myanmar collectors.

The prices are not validated, that is based on a global network or global market. It's just based in Myanmar. If you think about the last 50 years in Myanmar and the way that money has moved, everything is paid in cash, millions upon millions of dollars for a house in the middle of Yangon, which is definitely not worth that much money.

There is all this manipulation and I can imagine the prices collectors in Myanmar would pay. But if you're talking about the historical narrative within a market setting, it would probably not be worth that much. It is only worth something to the population that sells it.

From the list of auction prices charted by Myanmar artists in this publication, Johnston is surprised that there are more than a handful. Except for the record price of over US\$200,000 chalked up by Myo Khin/Mo Ke, the other artists' records of a few thousand dollars seem to be more of the norm.

Yes, these records are reasonable. Especially the dates.

U Lun Gywe is really affordable in Yangon. He still paints, so even artworks that were priced last year are quite low. I didn't

know that there were so many artists with works in auctions. I knew U Ba Thet's works had sold and U Lun Gywe's paintings had been in auction. And, of course, Min Wae Aung who is often considered the highest-selling Myanmar artist. It's only recently that such transactions have come in waves when people want to sell older works. Aside from the few museums like the National Gallery Singapore that's collecting, the artworks are mostly sold to Myanmar collectors.

Many of these artists are in the new book, *Myanmar Contemporary Art 1* by Aung Min, that we just translated. This is a really good guide. I wanted to read it when I was doing research and thought, 'Some day I will have this translated'. And I finally did. It's been very useful in terms of timeline and influential people.

It was first published in 2008 in Burmese, so we translated, re-designed and re-published it. This was just out two months ago (May 2017). It has all the established artists, including Kyee Myint Saw, Kyaw Soe, Ngwe Gaing and U Lun Gywe.

(The book was funded by the Kickstarter Art Basel campaign and other donors. It covers contemporary art in Myanmar from 1960-1990.)

When it comes to collaborating with art institutions in the country, Johnston quips that there are none of note. She is also the founder of Myanmar Art Resource Center and Archive (MARCA), which was established in 2013.

It was set up in response to the Mobile Library grant conceived by Asia Art Archive. Johnston, together with local artists Zon Sapal Phyu and Khin Zaw Latt, came up with the proposal to bring the Mobile Library, comprising 400-over contemporary art books and resource materials from all over Asia, to Myanmar.

There are no art institutions in Myanmar. I have done work with MARCA, a resource centre and library. We have worked previously

with the University of Art and Culture, which is run by the Ministry of Culture. But art institutions here are foreign: Alliance Française (Institut Français de Birmanie) or Goethe-Institut Myanmar. I have worked with other galleries, artists and spaces but their institution is a misnomer because there are none here.

We collaborated with the National Museum on My Yangon My Home Art & Heritage Festival. But we discovered that the National Museum is so under-staffed. The Ministry does not give them free rein or any kind of budget to do what they need to do. Even if we could work with the institution, I don't even know if the artists would want to.

In the 14 months since Johnston established her gallery space, she has staged 12 art events, including shows, talks and screenings (at the time of writing).

The Edge: What is the average price of artworks exhibited at Myanm/art gallery?

It depends on the size of the works and reputation of the artists, but it's anywhere from US\$50 to US\$15,000. US\$1,000 to US\$2,000 is perfectly reasonable for an artist who has a good reputation online, is wellknown on the art scene but is doing something a little bit alternative. So, we price the works a bit lower to build the buzz.

Would you say that your collector base now is mainly local or tourists and foreigners?

I have a few 're-pats', Burmese who have lived abroad but are back here. There are also expats who live in Myanmar, and tourists. Local Myanmar collectors tend to buy directly from the artists, and these are generally conservative works.

Are they works that you can find in any other gallery?

Pretty much. For example, in this book *Myanmar Contemporary Art 1*, you know which ones have the reputation. The collectors are not

interested in young people. This is across the board for the older generation of Myanmar collectors. Everything is changing now and they don't trust the change. So, they definitely don't trust the ones who are embracing change.

As a gallery, would you participate in art fairs or have you participated in any art fair regionally like in Singapore or Hong Kong?

I would never pay the kind of money they charge. I would rather spend it on the artists in Myanmar. I would never pay US\$20,000 for a booth in an art fair. No disrespect to those who participate. I know exactly how that world works but I never want to get to that point. The only reason why I exist here is because of the community that I'm allowed to be a part of. Joining the art fair world is so much about the numbers and that money is badly needed here. If I had 20 grand, I would build an institution here, not pay for a booth for three days.

But I did join Art Stage Singapore in 2017. We were asked to be a part of the curated exhibition to represent one artist. They tried to charge me and I said, 'Absolutely not. I'm not going to participate if you charge me'. I paid for my own flight but we got someone to pay for the artist's flight.

The artist was Emily Phyto who did a series of 365 photographs¹. So we went there and installed the photos in a small space. There was no institutional funding. It would be a waste for us to try to be welcomed into that world. But the irony is that those big galleries looked to us for recommendations for artists to sell in their booths. In some kind of satellite way, we would like to be at the art fairs because of the exposure and the people you meet. But that kind of money is just not possible right now.

¹ Nicola Anthony, January 13, 2017. *Art Stage: Artist's Insight*. www.artitute.com/2017/01/13/art-stage-artists-insight

In what way were you asked to pay to participate in Art Stage Singapore?

They emailed me some paperwork saying, 'Normally, we ask this but for you, we'll do a special discount'. I just said, no thanks. We had to pay an entry or participation fee.

After you agreed or before you agreed?

Before I agreed. They kept lowering the fee until they finally said, 'Okay you don't have to pay'.

Maybe you can do that at Art Basel. But you can't do that here and expect that these artists don't need support or that they are not living in a welfare state.

You can tell that some things need to change. There has to be more of a mixed model. It seems like the art fair model is not sustainable in the long term. This is a classic mistake of opening a luxury event. This is happening in Myanmar too. You don't get Louis Vuitton in Yangon, you fly to Paris and buy it if you can afford it.

How do you publicise your gallery and the artworks besides your blog and website, if you don't participate in art fairs?

Through social media and email. All my artists and my audience are young. I have a mailing list but Instagram and Facebook are useful tools. Facebook especially is the only social media website that really matters.

Have you ever transacted any sales through social media?

Yes, I have garnered interest through social media. People have come in because they saw something on social media.

Do you believe that there's a single Southeast Asian art market?

No, I realised that we're all working within regional boundaries in a way. But if you get all of us curators together, we have lots of things

to say about how different each place is and how they really can't be held to the same standard.

It's getting interesting now with Myanmar. Countries like India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are bringing Myanmar into the South Asian context rather than the Southeast Asian. That's a struggle I'm interested in. Myanmar is lucky in a way that it doesn't really fit into any particular mould. It straddles both and it doesn't really have a market yet. It's still undiscovered.

People don't know anything about the history and it's uncharted territory. It would be interesting to see in the next 20 years who wins that fight.

Myanmar Biennale

Was there a proposed Myanmar Biennale?

What a disaster! That was really upsetting for all of us because it had to do with an Italian NGO Culture2All. I encouraged (art writer) Lillian Kalish to write about this issue because it was really disconcerting. She's a trusted reviewer but doesn't live here anymore.

The NGO's founder came to Myanmar and was awestruck by the country. He started working with the artists and did a show in Italy. I had a 'connection' with them two years ago because they used my logo "Myanm/art" without permission. I had to write and tell them not to use my logo. But they said, 'Oh, it's only for this one show in Italy, it's no big deal'. After I complained to the Italian ambassador, they changed it.

Then they announced on Facebook their intention to hold a biennale, the Yangon Biennale Art Park Expo 2017 and started asking the artists to donate an artwork to support their NGO, and to participate in their biennale.

It was organised by an Italian curator who has never been to My-

anmar. The artists got together and said, 'That's not okay. We are not going to be embarrassed by some Italian curator who wants to hold a biennale in the parking lot of a shopping mall. We can't allow this to happen'. So, they wrote a letter to the Italian ambassador, and now apparently, it's not happening anymore.

The artists said they would support an exhibition, but don't call it a 'biennale'. Even if Myanmar is isolated, they see what's happening around the world. There are biennales, triennials, and summits. Things are popping up everywhere. If Yangon was going to do it, they should be the organisers. And they need another 5 to 10 years to even think about something like that.

A biennale is supposed to be a cooperation between institutions, city governments and artists. And these are just some Italians who are like, 'But we invented the word, here you go!'

I had a real problem with her being the curator quoting some French philosopher about the non-museum site. You can't just talk about a non-museum space if you don't even have a museum in the city to begin with. Nobody even knows what a proper museum is like, so why talk about the nonentity or the absence of it. Hopefully, they got the hint that the artists don't need this yet, which is kind of patronising.

The proposed biennale was changed to Yangon Art Expo that was held in November 2017 .

Perhaps, they were inspired by the Art Fair Philippines in Manila which was held in a multi-storey car park building?

They have no knowledge of what's happening in the Philippines. But I have heard of it and I agree, it could be a cool idea. But this parking lot is not a nice place; it's in Junction Square, a huge shopping mall on Pyay Road. Even the idea of a shopping mall is new here.

It has to be a different model for this part of the world. It's that

old idea of taking something and transplanting it, thinking it should grow. And if it doesn't grow, there must be something wrong with you. Or your soil, it's ridiculous.

Myanmar has its own market. The works have value to people here with money. The problem is, if it's not part of a global network, what are the prices? That's the biggest question mark. How does Myanmar not become Vietnam which experienced the collapse of an economic bubble?

I went to Art Basel Hong Kong for the first time, not to participate but just to be there. It made me realise how nice it is to be at the grass-root-level when you're not important to matter in these major scenes. It's very relaxing. You can watch all the other things happening. It's exciting if artists get to this level, of course. They deserve to make money. But unless it happens organically, I don't want it to happen. It's going to take some time for people to recognise Myanmar as a genuinely valuable place beyond its tourism and scandals.

Generally, when it comes to buying Myanmar art, what percentage of buyers are local in comparison with foreign buyers, expatriates or even tourists?

It depends on the gallery and its location. How easy is it to be accessed by tourists, who are the artists more appealing to foreigners? For the last 30 years, local collectors have hoarded artworks.

All those tycoons and cronies of the military collected a lot of works in the 1990s. They used to go to exhibitions and say, 'I'll buy every single painting, but I'll only pay US\$25 each for them'. The artists either risks selling one or two for the full price or all of them for a lower price. This is how local collectors operated and now some of them have huge collections which they are now selling to museums. Po Po, for example, is a famous Myanmar artist but a lot of his work was purchased by a collector like this. The collector has

sold to several museums on his behalf, but I don't think the artist gets anything out of it besides good PR.

And then you have tourists who mainly buy at Bogyoke market or at River Gallery. Gill Pattison (the gallery operator) and Pansodan have long-term collectors. The expat community in the last five years has grown exponentially and its influence hasn't diminished since the 1980s. In the 1970s and 1980s, it was the diplomats who were buying all the works. In the book *Myanmar Contemporary Art 1*, the artists have no idea where their artworks are because diplomats would buy the art then leave the country. My best guess would be 50% local collectors and 50% tourists and expats. But I could be wrong. Local collectors don't buy from galleries anymore.

Do they buy directly from the artists?

Yes, or if a famous artist has a show at Lokanat Gallery, the oldest gallery in Yangon, there will be someone who comes in. One of the banks recently went to an exhibition and did the same thing that people used to do 20-30 years ago, which is buy all the work at a discounted price.

This is horrible because it encourages the artist to think, 'Okay I don't need to try anything new. I can just keep making this style for the next 20 years and it will feed my family'. This may be fine but for a young artist, it doesn't really encourage him to do any experimentation. It shows that the richest people in the country are not interested in free-thinking, creative alternative work. It's the same girl in a *longyi* (sarong) with some *thanaka* (cosmetic paste) on her face, 2017. This is the battle that is happening and the collectors are still the same.

Is the bank KBZ?

Yes. They are the ones who bought all those paintings of a girl with *thanaka* on her face. I actually did an art tour for them and created an

advisory booklet on how banks around the region collect art. I was hired as a one-time consultant and they were really receptive to it.

In Myanmar, art is traditional, like traditional dance and music and a painting of an ethnic woman. Everyone's trying to fight back to show, 'Look we can do other stuff.' Myanmar culture is not just about bullock carts and cheroot-smoking. Even Gill (Pattison) now has installations in her gallery. Two years ago that was not the case.

Nawaday Tharlar Gallery is a classic example. Everyone loves this gallery, locals and foreigners alike, because it has thousands of paintings.

Can you recommend some artists whom you think will be significant in time to come?

After 1960, there was Po Po, Aung Myint and San Minn. Jimmy Chua (art consultant from Singapore and a respondent in this publication) has known Aung Myint for many years and San Minn's work is collected by National Gallery Singapore and many others. His work is currently being archived by the Fukuoka Museum.

There are others who are super important, but they don't have the same reputation like Phyu Mon and Ma Than Egi. These women artists are very important, but they don't have any work that is in existence from that time, so they won't get recognised the same way.

Women artists are highly neglected here. You have two generations of emerging artists, in their 30s and early 40s, who have been influenced by the older ones. They are showing in Singapore now: Tun Win Aung, Wah Nu, Nge Lay and Aung Ko, Min Thein Sur and Htein Lin. Then you have the younger ones like Emily Phyo, Soe Yu Nwe and Bart aka Kyaw Moe Khine.



Myint Soe

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VENTURING ABROAD FOR EXPOSURE

Although artist and art promoter Myint Soe, 64, has been in the art business for 42 years, he is still struggling to make it big.

Based in Yangon and ever hopeful and resourceful, he has in recent years been a regular participant in modest art fairs in Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong.

A chemistry graduate from the Rangoon Arts and Science University, Myint Soe is largely a self-taught artist. His father was a graphic artist and a printing workshop owner. "I graduated from university in 1977, but I started painting in 1975," says Myint Soe. "After graduation, I worked for the National Archives as an artist and artwork conservator."

His first career was in managing art exhibitions. Then in 1983, he opened an art gallery with one of his art masters. "Although he was my colleague, he was also a politician, artist and famous writer. His pen name was Yangon Basway. However, he passed away in 1987."

At the time, Myint Soe was working for the Myanmar government and was on a three-month scholarship to learn about conservation work at Arkib Negara Malaysia (National Archives of Malaysia) in Kuala Lumpur. "I graduated as a chemist and since I knew about the arts, Unicef provided me with a training scholarship in 1987," he recalls.

In 1995, he established his own gallery called Summit Art Collection. Apparently, the art market was "very good" because his gallery became established "very quickly".

"Within six months, my gallery was famous in Myanmar. After that, I started collecting paintings. In 2009, I participated in Art Expo Malaysia. One of my friends helped to register the company in Kuala Lumpur with the same name, Summit Art Collection.

The gallery is used for regional exhibitions. "When I participate in Art Expo Malaysia or some other art fairs in Singapore, I first send the paint-

ings to Summit Art Collection in KL. Then we select which paintings to be sent to Singapore or Hong Kong. All my business transactions and funds go through Malaysia”, says the enterprising artist.

The Edge: Do you operate a gallery or art space in Kuala Lumpur?

Myint Soe: No, we use my friend’s architectural company’s office space. They provide me with a meeting room and store room. People interested in Myanmar art can make an appointment to see the works.

When did you first start exhibiting or selling art outside of Myanmar?

Our art market was a little different because we depended on foreigners to buy art. There are collectors from 40 countries who buy my artworks. That’s why I have many international contacts. In 2003, I visited Switzerland, France and England. I showed artworks at Art Expo Malaysia from 2009 to 2015.

I participated in the Asia Hotel Art Fairs (AHAF) in Hong Kong in 2012 and in Singapore the following year. In 2014, I took part in the Bank Art Fair in Singapore and have also exhibited in other art fairs in South Korea and Japan.

Do you only sell your own works or others’ as well when you participate in art fairs?

No, I never just do my own artworks. I believe Myanmar artists have talent, but they have a low level of international exposure. So I help to introduce their artworks to international collectors.

Although all are famous artists, the artworks are limited to them. Sometimes we have about two to seven participating artists. Kyee Myint Saw is my close friend so we do special joint exhibitions. We have exhibited together in Hong Kong twice. Next month, I will go to Korea to participate in AHAF Seoul and will bring mixed works of famous artists like Tin Shwe Cho.

The international crowd at the art fairs has different tastes. It depends on the art market demand, whether it is in Korea or Hong Kong.

On average, I sell about five to six paintings. I would have sold out if I sold 10 paintings.

What do you think of the bigger art fairs like Art Basel Hong Kong or Art Stage Singapore and Art Stage Jakarta?

Art Stage, Affordable Art Fair and Art Basel have invited me to take part, but the big problem is expenditure. I have no supporters or sponsorship funds. I use my own money so it's limiting. I'm not rich, I'm just an artist. So, I only participate in small-scale art fairs like AHAF.

Do you track auction records to see how much Myanmar artworks fetch?

Yes, in my experience, Myanmar art prices are not too low or too high. The average price ranges from US\$2,500 to US\$5,000.

What auctions do you follow? Do you check Sotheby's or Christie's prices?

I do track Sotheby's and Christie's. They impose many examinations and qualifications for Myanmar art. And the artists should be deceased and famous because of the art market demand. We have artworks that qualify for some art auctions in Western countries. The problem is the reputation of our country does not qualify, so they reject our art. However, I do participate in auctions held by regional auction houses, including The Edge Auction and Larasati.

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We hope that readers will gain invaluable insights into Southeast Asian art, particularly how the art market has evolved into what it is today.

Topics discussed by our respondents will offer readers a better understanding of the realities of the market.

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