

**“KISS & Tell”:** Talks by the Knowledge & Inquiry in Singapore Studies Group (KISS), NTU 2009 present:

## **Geo-Cultural Designations in Art. Is being “Asian” important? (And what of the archipelago?)**

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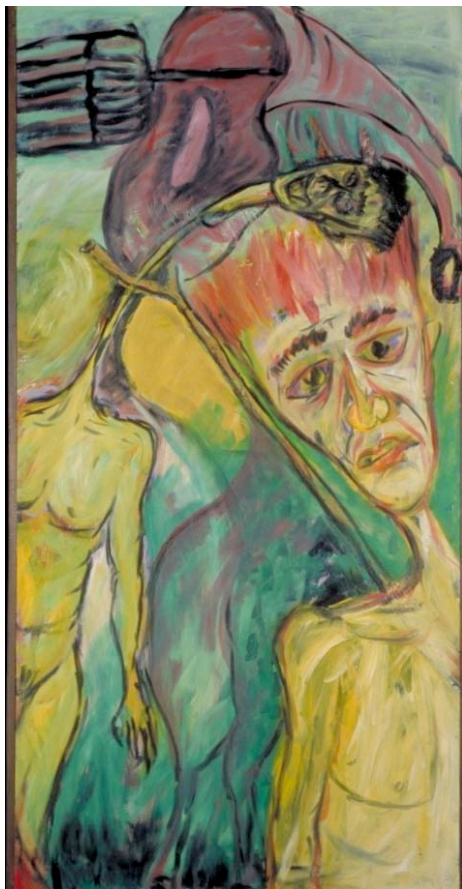
**Ahmad Mashadi**, Head of NUS Museum and **C. J. W.-L. Wee** Associate Professor English NIE will revisit the issue of geo-cultural frameworks for thinking, writing and curating modern and contemporary art in Singapore.

**Friday 17 April 4.30-6.30**

**Meeting Room at B1 (S32-B1) School of Humanities and Social Sciences\***

**Refreshments provided**

Blk S3.2, B2-04 Nanyang Technological University, Nanyang Avenue Singapore 639798  
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Vincent Leow *Two Men*, 1989.  
Oil on board.: 244 x 122 cm  
Singapore Art Museum

**Ahmad Mashadi** is currently the Head of NUS Museum, Singapore. Before joining the NUS Ahmad served as a Senior Curator and Senior Assistant Director at the Singapore Art Museum, National Heritage Board. Recent exhibitions he curated include *Seni: Art and the Contemporary* (2004), Singapore participation for Sao Paulo (2004) featuring Ho Tzu Nyen and *Telah Terbit (Out Now, 2006)*, that explored the emergence of contemporary practices in Southeast Asia during the 1970s and *Picturing Relations: Simryn Gill and Tino Djumini* (2007).

**C. J. W.-L. Wee** is an Associate Professor of English at the National Institute of Education, NTU. He has held visiting fellowships at the Humanities Research Centre, Australian National University, and the Society for the Humanities, Cornell University. Wee is the author of *Culture, Empire, and the Question of Being Modern* (2003) and *The Asian Modern: Culture, Capitalist Development, Singapore* (2007), and the editor of *Local Cultures and the 'New Asia': The State, Culture, and Capitalism in Southeast Asia* (2002). His present research interest is in the formation of modern/contemporary culture in Singapore and in the larger East Asia region. He is also currently co-editing a collection of essays that addresses the global development of cultural performance research in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, titled *Contesting Performance* (forthcoming).

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### **C. J. W.-L. Wee: Abstract: "We Asians"?: Modernity, Visual-Art Exhibitions and East Asia**

The 1980's-90's "East Asian Miracle" saw the revivification of the idea of "Asia." However, the "flying geese" model of development led not only to state-driven discourses on "Asian values" and "alternative" Asian modernities. "Asia" as an historical category resulting from an "emanation" model of World History - the entrenched binary opposition of the modern West counterpoised against traditional Asia - is challenged by the new, urban-industrial visions of a modern(ised) region.

One of the most visible sites of cultural interaction in which the ambiguous idea of New Asia has come into "being" is the visual arts scenes. The 1980s onwards saw increasing attempts by Japanese museums (and later museums in Australia, Korea and Singapore) to document the historical emergence of modernist and contemporary Asian art. They accompanied but crucially were not the same as the statist alternative Asian modernities discourses, being disaggregated enough to try to facilitate other flows of humanistic and artistic ideas. The "exhibitionary" imaginary, as it may be called, however, remained cognizant of problematic formations of a Greater East Asia associated with Japan's disastrous 19th and mid-20th century attempts to "leave" Asia and modernise. The current versions of the "new" are also haunted by the spectre of an earlier version of the new.

This presentation investigates these issues and examines two key moments in the exhibition of Asia: the Fukuoka Art Museum's inaugural exhibition, the two-part Asian Artists Exhibition (1979 & 1980). It investigated how we could think of the "arrival" of modernist art in the region. The Fukuoka events were preliminary and not as focused as they might have been, but crucially set the stage for what followed. The other exhibition is the Japan Foundation's 30th-anniversary exhibition co-organised with the Tokyo City Opera Art Gallery, *Under Construction: New*

*Dimensions of Asian Art* (2002). The exhibition tried to come to grips with the very idea of modern Asia now, rather than essentialised or exotic notions of Asia, which the Japan Foundation thought needed to be directly addressed after close to a decade of symposia and exhibitions on contemporary Asian art they had organised or co-organised.

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**\*Visitors coming from off campus** :Exit PIE from Pioneer North and turn into NTU. Make a left turn at the junction (facing the big plasma screen) and drive straight. Make a right turn immediately after passing the Chinese Heritage Centre which will be on the right (it's a Chinese temple-like red brick building) and make another right turn into carpark Q. The building **S3.2** (with glass tinted windows on the lower levels) is right next to the carpark. The meeting room is located at **Blk S3.2-B1**