

COURSE CONTENT

Course Code	DD2011
Course Title	Contemporary South-East Asian Art
Pre-requisites	Nil
No of AUs	3
Contact Hours	39 hours

Course Aims

In this course you will explore the development of contemporary art across Southeast Asia from the 1970s to the present, contextualised within the region's complex socio-political history. Covering Singapore and countries beyond, visual forms of all media, including installation, performance, and video are examined to understand how artists from economically and politically diverse regional societies have produced pieces revealing transregionally-connected expressive approaches specific to Southeast Asia. Through artwork analysis, in tandem with critical reading of assigned texts, you will develop visual literacy of regional contemporary art (particularly its themes and audience-engaging methods), and access to the art historical debates that distinguish Southeast Asian contemporary art in the global contemporary art arena.

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILO)

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

1. Describe the evolution of Southeast Asian contemporary art in relation to evolving social contexts.
2. Recognise and explain the aesthetic and art historical importance of key Singaporean and Southeast Asian contemporary artworks, core artists and artist groups.
3. Apply techniques of visual and contextual analysis and comparison, along with art historical research methods, to unfamiliar Southeast Asian artworks across a range of media and genres.
4. Contribute knowledgeably to class discussions, and respond to reading materials and peer presentations in a constructive manner.
5. Identify questions in Southeast Asian contemporary art history supported by artworks, towards developing a structured research paper written in a clear and cohesive manner.

Course Content

The Region of Southeast Asia

You will begin this course by locating contemporary Southeast Asian art in its geographic and historical setting. The region as a transnational frame for national art histories (Singapore, Indonesian, Malaysian, Thai and so on) is justified by Southeast Asian societies' shared experiences and regionally-comparable cultures.

From Modern to Contemporary

Next, the transition from modern mimetic painting to contemporary forms is covered through key examples, stressing linkages between social change and expressive developments—manifested by new critical perspectives and approaches to circulation and reception.

Major themes and expressive strategies of Southeast Asian contemporary art

Thematic lectures, illustrated by core works of the field, cover central topics such as: gender

politics and sexuality; history and memory; early artists' collectives such as The Artists Village; conceptual idioms emerging from local contexts; aspects of local tradition enlisted for critical purpose; urban/rural tensions; regional artists' networks, particularly for performance art, and others. Through topical lectures, students discover Southeast Asian art's combined aesthetic and conceptual tactics that are idiosyncratic to the region.

Transnational perspective

By deconstructing and comparing works made over decades and vast geographies, you will access a transnationally-shared story of Southeast Asian contemporary art that initially evolved outside institutional frameworks. While art histories are often national, this course has a transnational scope to illuminate how comparable conditions in nation-building and globalising Southeast Asia influenced artists' aesthetic, material, and audience-centric critical modes to constitute the region's contemporary art.

Class and course assignments:

The learning methodology is consistent across lectures: Southeast Asian art history is examined through topics that are fleshed out with interpretative field scholarship and familiarisation with core artworks, analysed visually and contextually. Emphasis is placed on definitions of key terms in the Southeast Asian context.

Readings:

Readings by art historians or critic/curators will be assigned for discussion in most classes, accessible in pdf form on a shared drive. Readings provide background for the lecture, signal discourse issues linked to the lecture, or argue alternate approaches to the topic covered in that day's lecture. Assigned texts will be discussed in class.

Written assignment:

At week 6, you will submit a written draft outline and topic of your semester paper (unmarked, but mandatory to obtain instructor feedback). Developed from this draft, you will write a short academic paper on artworks or an art historical issue relevant to Southeast Asian contemporary art (this can touch on exhibitions, art historical narratives, or other). You will apply the art historical knowledge and analytical tools developed during the course. Topics are self-generated in discussion with the instructor.

Oral presentations:

Week 1 you will form groups with peers to prepare a formal end-of-semester research presentation on a topic of your choice, in discussion with the instructor.

Tutorial-type oral group exercises:

Over the course period, to hone visual literacy and communication skills, in the last part of half-hour of class, you will work collectively with peers to analyse and locate artworks within a social context and historical discourse. The instructor will engage with students to evaluate progress, and groups will briefly present their appraisals orally to their class-mates. Conditions permitting, a field-trip to a Singapore artist's studio, a museum, or a gallery will be scheduled to put learned skills into practice with real artworks.

As you gain art historical understanding, through these assignments you will develop the ability to clearly communicate critical arguments supported by visual analysis, and be able to locate art a) in its social and cultural context b) within regional art history, applicable to oral presentations and writing formats such as exhibition reviews and academic papers.

