

Panel 6

Reconfiguring Cultural Figures: Nezha, Sang Nila Utama, and Gu Shan

Interfacing the Region:

Intermedial Historiography in Ho Tzu Nyen's Moving Image Works

Jimin Lee

Nanyang Technological University

This paper explores how Singaporean artist Ho Tzu Nyen reconfigures Southeast Asia as an intermedial construct through his strategies in relation to the appropriation of image, sound, algorithm, and myth. Rather than treating the region as a fixed cultural or geopolitical entity, Ho's works, particularly his earliest work, *Utama: Every Name in History is I* and *The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia* (CDOSEA), transform Southeast Asia into a fluid interface where historical, sensory, and conceptual dimensions collide. In *Utama*, Ho appropriates the archival image of a historical figure and overlays it with dissonant sounds to disrupt anthropocentric readings of history. Sang Nila Utama becomes a symbol of misconstrued narratives, destabilizing singular authorship or linear meaning.

Meanwhile, CDOSEA unfolds as a nonlinear digital platform that algorithmically links keywords, visuals, and sonic cues across the region's diverse imaginaries. Viewers navigate not just an encyclopedic system, but a recursive labyrinth, generating meaning through sensorial and cognitive layering. Framed through theories of intermediality, postmodern historiography, and Hal Foster's anti-aesthetic, this paper positions Ho's work as a form of historiographical intervention, one that refuses fixity in favor of ambiguity, recursion, and open-ended knowledge production. Ho invites us not to interpret Southeast Asia, but to move with and through it as a dynamic epistemological space.

Biography

Jimin Lee is a PhD candidate in Southeast Asian Art History at Nanyang Technological University, where her research is supported by the Korean Government Scholarship. Her research focuses on intermediality and historiographical critique in contemporary Southeast Asian art, with a special focus on the work of Ho Tzu Nyen and regional approaches beyond Western paradigms.