



TIES OF HISTORY

Art in Southeast Asia



EXHIBITION STUDY GUIDE

Simultaneous exhibitions at
 Metropolitan Museum of Manila
 Yuchengco Museum
 Vargas Museum
 8 August - 6 October 2018



Metropolitan Museum of Manila Visitor Information

The Metropolitan Museum of Manila is located at BSP Complex, Roxas Boulevard, Manila. It is open for viewing from Mondays through Saturdays, 10:00 AM to 5:30 PM. Admission rates are as follows: PhP 100 – Adults and students, PhP 90 – Adults and students (minimum of 50 persons), and PhP 80 – Senior citizens and persons with disability. You may visit the museum’s website for more information about guided tours and exhibitions: <https://metmuseum.ph>. You also may send an email to info@metmuseum.ph for further inquiries or contact the Museum at (02) 708-7828.

About the Exhibit

Ties of History at the Metropolitan Museum of Manila is part of a three-venue exhibition that gathers artists across generations, genders, and nationalities in celebration of the 50th year of the founding of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The title is a phrase lifted from the Declaration of ASEAN in 1967, a document which gave birth to an organization of states in Southeast Asia that emphasizes links and common threads binding a region characterized by a diversity of peoples, cultures, languages, and religions. The exhibition surveys contemporary art practices in the ten ASEAN member states, each represented by an artist. Through a variety of materials, media, and techniques, the artists “represent specific moments of articulating history through thoughtful reflections on cosmology, gender, memory, migration, nature, war, and everyday life.”

Ties of History is on view at the Met until October 6.

About the Study Guide

This guide is designed to aid teachers and students to enhance and deepen the museum viewing experience and complement classroom discussions. It is intended for Senior High School students (Grades 11 and 12) in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) track as well as College students taking up Art Appreciation courses, Fine Arts, History, Humanities, and other related disciplines.

The guide is divided into *Pre-visit*, *Actual Visit*, and *Post-visit* sections. The teacher may modify or select specific parts to fit the requirements of the class.

The Pre-visit section prepares the students for the exhibition viewing and provides a background of the themes and subjects explored in the exhibition so they can have a more meaningful conversation with the works.

The Actual Visit section consists of guide questions and other cues on how students can approach or frame the works. The guide questions intend to illuminate ecology of material, responses to social reality, and reflections on history across the works.

The Post-visit section aims to expand the museum viewing experience by taking off from the exhibition materials and expanding its content through reflections, discussions, as well as art production.

At the end of the guide are suggested further readings and a glossary of terms.

PRE-VISIT

ASEAN Country Sketch

1. Watch documentaries or short clips that give a background or overview of the ASEAN countries. Suggested videos are as follows:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DdwPNUAIVIA>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5FI13bxwLdw>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v86liLm1okw>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFrLcRhMKnE>

Have a short discussion after watching the videos about each country.

2. A. Assign each ASEAN country represented in the exhibition to the students individually or in groups (depending on the class size).

B. Each student, pair, or group will do a library or online research about the following from the assigned countries:

- An important historical event
- The biggest current news or event
- A popular myth, legend, or folktale

C. The teacher may assign one, two, or all three of the topics above, depending on the time allotted for the pre-visit activity. If more than one topic is decided, try assigning different countries for each topic.

D. Have the students share their research to the class. They may use audio-visual and other creative ways in presenting what they have researched.

E. For a more interactive activity, explore incorporating a “guessing game” to this backgrounder session on ASEAN countries. Assign countries and topics discreetly to each student or group, and then have the others guess the country after each presentation.

ACTUAL VISIT

1. View the works in the exhibition and pay special attention to the following as you observe each work:

- The material used in each work. You may list down the various materials that you see throughout the exhibition for later reference.
- The country each artist represents (recall the pre-visit discussion on the **ASEAN** countries), and the individual background and experiences of each artist provided in the extended captions.
- The story being told in the work, or the story that inspired or behind the work.

2. Is there anything in the work that relates to the history, culture, or any other aspect of the country represented by the artist?

3. Think about how mythology and other narratives are incorporated or referenced in the works, like in the following instances:

- Precolonial mythology in Roberto Feleo’s works as well as references to narratives in the anti-colonial struggle.
- Myanmar’s history of military rule in relation to Min Thein Sung’s work.
- The making of Singapore as a nation in relation to Amanda Heng’s *Singirl* photographs.
- The narrative of **Ramayana** and its many retellings across Southeast Asia in the works of Savanhdyay Vongpoothorn.

What narratives or historical references can you draw from the other works?

4. In the *Singirl* series of Amanda Heng, focus on the character the artist assumes in the video and photographs.



- How did this character come about? What was the inspiration? Why is she called *Singirl* and what does she represent?
- What places did *Singirl* visit in the photographs and the video? How do you interpret framing *Singirl* in each location or setting?
- In *Singirl Objects*, you see three pieces of clothing. What are these garments? How did the artist intervene with the garments and how do you interpret this intervention?

5. Pay attention to how the artists play with **scale** in their works:

- **Found objects** captured of course actual scales, such as that of Indian sandalwood trees in Anusapati's *Plantscape*, and pieces of clothing in Amanda Heng's *Singirl Objects*.
- Other works are blown up versions of what they represent, such as human faces in Lyno Vuth's *Thoamada I*, pages of a botanical book in Chris Chong Chan Fui's *Botanic*, and toy gun in Min Thein Sung's *Another Realm*.
- Contrasting scales would also occur in the works of a particular artist. Roberto Feleo created a miniature scene reminiscent of a **diorama**, while the rest are life-size renderings of human figures. Jetsada Tangtrakulwong recreated a huge tree falling in *Downfall*, while his other works show scaled-down images or silhouettes of a tree.
- Yasmin Jaidin's *Cotton Sculptures* and *A Collection of Personal Items* suggest small objects.
- Do Hong Tuong's *Untitled* (Landscape with bomb) reduces a bomb explosion into small scale.

How did these particular choices of scale affect your experience of the works? How do they relate to each work's theme?

6. Reflect on how artists respond to nature, environment, their natural processes of growth and decay, and how humans intervene in these processes:



- Roberto Feleo's use of wood and sawdust, a residue of from the cutting and preparation of wood as a material.
- Jetsada Tangtrakulwong's documentation of a tree's fall.
- Anusapati salvaging of cut-down sandalwood trees and silver-plating of leaves.
- Yasmin Jaidin's use of sugar and resin coating to defy the deterioration process of objects.

How does each artist in these interventions take part in the larger theme of the interaction between nature and humans? Aside from the examples, what other works and their details can you relate to this theme?

7. Observe Min Thein Sung's large-scale soft sculpture, *Another Realm*. Try to go around the work and look at it from different vantage points. Aside from a gun, what other forms can you imagine from the sculpture? What about Jetsada's Tangtrakulwong's *Downfall* and *Downfall Drawings*, and Yasmin Jaidin's *Cotton Sculptures* and *A Collection of Personal Items*? What forms can you make out of the silhouettes?

8. Each frame in landscape in Lyno Vuth's *Thoamada II* consists of two photographs. Compare and contrast the two photographs placed side by side within the frame. How are the two photographs related?

9.

- Identify the leaders portrayed in the works of Do Hoang Tuong. How do you interpret the flowers on the three portraits which conceal the identity of the subject?
- Look at the other works of the artist. What theme unites this set?

10. What works draw inspiration, whether in technique or material, from traditional crafts and art forms? What works incorporate other aspects of culture?

POST-VISIT

Discussions

1. Discuss the works seen in the exhibition to deepen the museum viewing experience. Specific works may be assigned to groups, and each group will lead the discussion. Instruct students to focus their discussion on the following questions:

- A. How does the work conform to or challenge your impression or expectation of the country represented by the artist?
- B. What things come to your mind when you

hear the material used in the work? How is this material commonly used? Does the work offer a sharp departure from its common usages or does it conform to them? How?

- C. How does the material used in the work relate to the story being told by the work or the story that inspired the work?

Activities

1.
 - Ask the class in groups to choose a myth from any ethno-linguistic group in the Philippines and other countries of the **ASEAN**. The class may use what they have presented in the pre-visit activity if mythology was a chosen topic.
 - Using found objects such as toys and souvenir items, students will create an assemblage narrating the myth or a specific scene from it. Other materials may be used to create the environment where the tale is happening or just to enhance and stylize the composition.

2.
 - Assign students to bring a personal object in class and then wrap it in paper, cloth or plastic to conceal the object, but in such a way that the object's form will still be visible despite being covered. The personal object should have an interesting story that they can share to the class.
 - Have students present the object while still wrapped and share the story behind it without naming the object. After each presentation, the class will try to guess the object, to be revealed later. Explore fun mechanics to conduct this guessing game.
3. Ask the students to choose one work from the exhibition and write a reflection paper about it. The reflection may revolve on the following themes:
 - The work that struck them or caught their attention the most
 - The work that they most identify with
 - The work that resonated the most with their interests or personal experiences
4.
 - Through digital photography, students will present two aspects of themselves. Assign each student to take pictures of themselves in two different contexts. One picture should show what they think most people know about them, and the other one should be about a part of them unknown to most people. Ask them to stage or art direct their portraits to capture the contrast between their two selves.
 - Photographs will be combined in a collage using mobile applications. Then ask the student to upload the combined photographs in either in their social media accounts with a creative title or short caption, or as a blog or online journal entry to be accompanied by a 200-300 word short essay. The teacher may require a screenshot of the post to be submitted.

5.
 - Assign students to do a research on traditional attire for women across Southeast Asia aside from the **kebaya**. Then ask them to look for advertisements (video or print) that make use of an image of a woman wearing this attire.
 - Ask them to write a critique of the advertisement. They may focus on the image of women being propagated and to be consumed through the advertisement.

Suggested Further Readings

- Beeson, Mark. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*. 2004. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- Kelogue, Fiona. *Arts of Southeast Asia*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2004.
- Guillermo, Alice. *Image to Meaning: Essays on Philippine Art*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2002.
- Osborne, Milton. *Southeast Asia: An Introductory History*. New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 2004.
- Singaravelu, S. *The Ramayana Tradition in Southeast Asia*. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 2004.

ARTISTS

Amanda Heng (Singapore)

A contemporary artist based in Singapore known for her collaborative and multidisciplinary approach to art, Amanda Heng (b. 1951) explores social issues in the context of Singapore's inter-cultural social milieu.

Roberto Feleo (Philippines)

Roberto Feleo (b. 1954) is a seminal Philippine artist whose works are sharp sociohistorical commentaries on Philippine myth and history and creative investigations into local materials and techniques.



Anusapati (Indonesia)

Known for his practice that includes the use of natural materials and traditional tools used in Indonesian craft, Anusapati (b. 1957) has inspired a younger generation of artists disposed to respond to craft, modernism, and the environment.

Savanhdary Vongpoothorn (Laos)

Savanhdary Vongpoothorn (b. 1971) was born in Laos and came to Australia in 1979. Her practice implicates Lao cultural references interwoven with Australian and other cultural mediations in a productive space of resettlement.

Chris Chong Chan Fui (Malaysia)

Working with photography and the moving image, Chris Chong Chan Fui (b. 1972) from Malaysia questions and redirects how humans work within such intersecting fields as economics and ecology.

Do Hoang Tuong (Vietnam)

Do Hoang Tuong (b. 1960) of Vietnam belongs to an influential generation of abstract painters in the South of Vietnam in the 1990s. From an academic perspective and within the narrative space of his paintings, he expresses the desire of a founding condition of a new subjectivity.

Jedsada Tangtrakulwong (Thailand)

Jedsada Tangtrakulwong (b. 1972) lives and works in Thailand. His practice is informed by Thai cultural sign systems and reflects on the delicacy of daily existence.

Min Thein Sung (Myanmar)

Min Thein Sung (b. 1978), born and based in Myanmar, works with and on motifs, media, and processes inspired by the everyday and his childhood.

Vuth Lyno (Cambodia)

Artist and curator Vuth Lyno (b. 1982) from Cambodia is the Co-founding Artistic Director of Sa Sa Art Projects, an artist-run space initiated by the Stiev Selapak collective in Phnom Penh. His artistic and curatorial practice is primarily participatory in nature, exploring collective learning and experimentation.

Yasmin Jaidin (Brunei)

Working with organic materials, Yasmin Jaidin (b. 1987), a contemporary artist from Brunei, interrogates how these elements are often overlooked in the context of contemporary life.

GLOSSARY

ASEAN - Stands for *Association of Southeast Asian Nations*, a regional organization of states in Southeast Asia.

Diorama - A three-dimensional representation of a scene common used as a didactic device in museums.

Found Object - An already existing object, whether natural or man-made, found by the artist and transformed into an artwork by presenting, altering, or modifying the object and other forms of interventions.

Kebaya - A traditional attire for women in many Southeast Asian countries made of materials such as cotton, silk, or brocade.

Ramayana - An ancient epic from India which tells the story of Rama as he rescues his wife Sita from the demon King Ravana. The epic would have a tremendous cultural influence across Southeast Asia, with many versions and retellings in different localities.

Scale - Refers to the size of an object in relation to another, such as in relation to another object, or in relation to the setting or environment.



Photo credits: Ties of History 2018 team and respective museums