

Film Screening event

Animistic Medium: Contemporary Southeast Asian Artists Moving Image Practices
A film screening programme and talk

Introductory words

Please join us for a screening programme of short moving image works made by Southeast Asian contemporary artists with an introduction by CSEAS Visiting Scholar Dr May Adadol Ingawanij (Professor of Cinematic Arts, University of Westminster). The screening programme is based on Dr Ingawanij's research project, *Animistic Medium*, which explores the aesthetics and circulation of film and media arts practices by Southeast Asian artists, and conceptualises the relationship between contemporary artistic practice, the political, the regional, and agency.

Abstract

Since the 1990s the artworks, films and artistic practices of Southeast Asian artists have been gaining an unprecedented degree of visibility across global contemporary art and film exhibition circuits. Museums, galleries, film festivals and film cultural institutions in Japan have been playing an influential part in stimulating this global circulation and institutionalising the canon and discourse of Southeast Asian contemporary art. A case in point is the major exhibition *Sunshower: Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia 1980s to Now*, commemorating the 50th Anniversary of ASEAN. The prevalence of moving image works in this exhibition, and its canonisation of artists through curatorial rhetorics of political and social engagement, can be taken as emblematic of the constitution of the category of Southeast Asian contemporary art through the exhibition and discursive activities of powerful arts institutions. As this domain of artistic practice and exhibition network becomes more firmly established, catalysing a lively research field, some key research questions and agendas are being developed. Among the primary tasks for researchers at this point are to critically analyse and historicise the terms of constitution, canonisation and institutionalisation of Southeast Asian contemporary art; and to conceptualise the precise terms of entanglement between artistic practice and the political with sufficient historical and contextual attentiveness.

For this screening event and talk, we will watch a selection of short moving image works by artists Tanatchai Bandasak (*Recording of a Screening for a Spirit*, 2015, 3 minutes, Thailand), Riar Rizaldi (*Kasiterit*, 2019, 18 minutes, Indonesia), Tuan Andrew Nguyen (*The Boat People*,

2020, 20 minutes, Vietnam), and Apichatpong Weerasethakul (*Fireworks (Archives)*, 2014, 6 minutes, Thailand). Dr Ingawanij will introduce each artistic work while weaving in stories, insights and questions drawn from her research process. Her starting point is to observe a pattern whereby Southeast Asian contemporary artists are making moving image works that evoke animistic rituals, and that figure animistic beings, while engaging with historical and political legacies. A striking tendency among Southeast Asian artists moving image works is that their formal, sensorial, relational and enunciative features resonate with practices of communication, emplacement, and temporal orientation characteristic of what anthropologist Kaj Århem has recently theorised as Southeast Asian animism. How to make sense of this?

As a project, Animistic Medium tries to understand what has become of the avant-garde's aspiration to change life. It asks: What are the characteristics of contemporary Southeast Asian artists moving image? How are such artistic practices entangled with the failures and the aftermath of the region's historical vanguardism? This is where the conceptualisation of Southeast Asian artists moving image as the making of animistic medium comes in. The screening and talk draws on the book manuscript that Dr Ingawanij is writing while at CSEAS. Her book writing project analyses the connection between regional contemporary art, legacies of vanguardism, and heuristics of Southeast Asian animism, through interrelating four research methods: criticism, conjunctural analysis, curatorial thinking, and storytelling. It theorises the entanglement of historical vanguardism and contemporary art via the proposition that that Southeast Asian artists moving image are practices that make animistic medium within circuits of global contemporary art. And it thinks the contradictions and potentialities of artistic expression and enunciation by essaying the resonances between regional artistic agency and regional animism, defined as the praxis of agency of precarious beings in vast worlds of hierarchies and entanglements.

Bio-Note



May Adadol Ingawanij is Professor of Cinematic Arts at University of Westminster, UK. As a writer, theorist and curator she specialises in Southeast Asian artists moving image practices, contemporary art, and cinema. Her research and pedagogy intersect contemporary artistic and curatorial practice, film studies, art history, and area studies. Key themes include: de-centred histories and genealogies of cinematic arts in Southeast Asia; legacies of regional artistic and political vanguardism; forms of potentiality and future-making in contemporary artistic and curatorial practices; aesthetics and circulation of artists' moving image, art and independent films in and related to Southeast Asia.