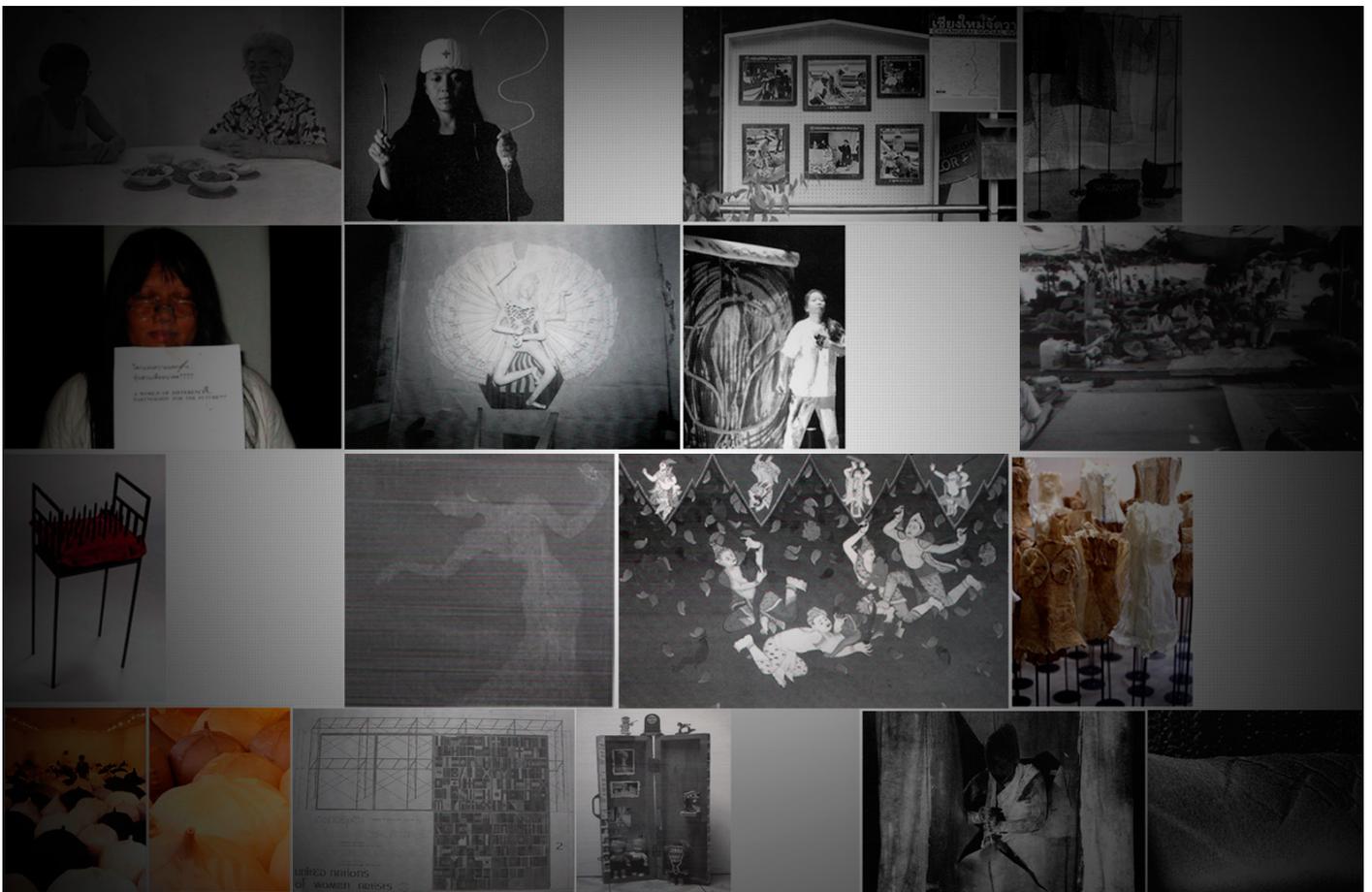


Gender in Southeast Asian Art Histories 2019

Art, Digitality and Canon-making?



A symposium at the University of Sydney
and exhibition at Cross Art Projects

Schedule

Friday, 18 October 2019

9:00 Registration and Morning Tea

9:30 **Welcome** from Assoc Prof Ann Elias, Chair of the Department of Art History and Film Studies, University of Sydney; opening remarks by Dr Yvonne Low, Co-Organiser

10:00 **Panel 1: Feminist strategies and Digital interventions**

Chair: Dr Catriona Moore, University of Sydney

The Absent Presence: Spatialising Gender in John Thomson's Photographs of the Siamese Court by Dr Clare Veal, LASALLE College of the Arts

On Writing about "Women Artists" Who Are Not Only "Women Artists": Notes from Recent Attempts at Writing De-Canonically by Dr Roger Nelson, National Gallery Singapore

Exclusionary Practices and Feminist Research in the Indonesian Contemporary Artworld by Greg Doyle, University of Sydney

11:30 Lunch

12:30 **Panel 2: Gender, Materiality and Virtuality in a Digital Age**

Chair: Dr Clare Veal, LASALLE College of the Arts

A Queer/Trans Critique of Gender in Southeast Asia: Two Cinematic Instances from the Philippines by Dr Jaya Jacobo, University of the Philippines

Indifferent Idols by Wong Bing Hao, Independent writer and researcher

Entangled Interventions: Migrants, Labour and Contemporary Art in Hong Kong by Michelle Wong, Asia Art Archive

2:00 Afternoon Tea

2:30 **Panel 3: The Archive and Women's work in a Digital environment**

Chair: Dr Wulan Dirgantoro, University of Melbourne

Gender and Indonesian art on the International Stage: (Re)viewing Indonesian art histories through digital repositories by Dr Siobhan Campbell, University of Sydney

Unmaking the Canon? "Indonesian women artists" in the Future (Archive) by Dr Yvonne Low, University of Sydney

Amidst fire, termites, and other factors of erasure - Womanifesto roots down in the digital world by Varsha Nair, Womanifesto

4:00 **Closing remarks by** Prof Mary Roberts, University of Sydney

4:15 Break

4:30 **Keynote Address**

Introduction by Professor Mark Ledbury, Director of the Power Institute

The Wind in the Trees: From Tradisexion to Womanifesto by Prof Flaudette May Datuin, University of the Philippines

6:00 End of Day

Saturday 19 October 2019

9:30 **Workshop:** *Art, Gender and Digitality in Southeast Asia* at the University of Sydney (for Participants only)

Respondent: Prof Adrian Vickers, Acting Head of School, School of Languages and Cultures, University of Sydney

1:00 **Roundtable:** *Womanifesto and the Women's Archive*, chaired by Professor Flaudette Datuin (separate registration required. Email powerinstitute.events@sydney.edu.au. Held at Cross Art Projects)

3:00 **Exhibition opening** at Cross Art Projects

ARCHIVING WOMANIFESTO: An International Art Exchange, 1990s – Present

In 1995 an informal gathering of women artists, writers and activists in Bangkok put together a feminist art exhibition, *Tradisexion*. Calling themselves *Womanifesto*, this collective went on to organize biennale events that aimed to increase women's visibility. It was the first feminist collective of its kind in the region, seeking to strengthen links between women artists regionally and internationally. Among its many projects include art residencies held in rural Thailand and online curations in cyberspace. *Archiving Womanifesto* presents this history, with issues raised to be discussed in an open symposium. The exhibition is curated by Varsha Nair, Phaptawan Suwannakudt and Nitaya Ueareeworakul.

5:00 End of Day

Abstracts

The Negative Presence: Spatialising Gender in John Thomson's Photographs of the Siamese Court

Dr Clare Veal, LASALLE College of the Arts

In September 1865, days after John Thomson arrived in Siam, King Mongkut (Rama IV, r. 1851–69) invited the Scottish itinerant photographer to his court to take his portrait. Despite the masculine nature of Mongkut's self-presentation in the images that resulted from this visit, the impact of Siamese and European concepts of gender on Thomson's photographs has not yet been addressed in scholarly literature. My paper examines this issue in light of the non-appearance of Mongkut's wives in Thomson's photographs. This omission is conspicuous considering the importance of these women as mediators of political power during the reification of Siam's 'geo-body' in the face of colonisation. As diplomatic gifts from regional leaders, Mongkut's wives resided in the inner palace. Cloistered off from the eyes of most outsiders, they nevertheless captured the imaginations of visiting Europeans, who invariably argued that the king's "harem" was an indication of his "despotism". The invisibility of these women within the Grand Palace thus conditioned the insecurity of the masculine geo-body that was emerging outside its walls.

This paper considers the negative presence of Mongkut's wives in Thomson's photographs by discussing how digital mapping tools might help us to glimpse the latent, gendered images within them. In linking this project with broader questions of 'recovery' within feminist art histories, I will discuss how reading at the edge of these images prompts a reconsideration of the gendered relationships between visibility and invisibility, which characterised the emerging Siamese geo-body as well as Thomson's colonialist photography.

Bio: Clare Veal is a lecturer in Asian Art Histories at LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore, where she teaches and researches on Southeast Asian photography, art and visual culture. She received her PhD from the Department of Art History and Film Studies at the University of Sydney for her thesis entitled, 'Thainess Framed: Photography and Thai identity, 1946-2010.' Her more recent work is informed by questions of sexual difference, subjectivity and agency. From 2015–16, Clare was a participant in the Power Institute's 'Ambitious Alignments: New Histories of Southeast Asian Art' research programme, funded by the Getty Foundation. Since 2016, she has been co-organiser for a series of events and publications related to gender and art history in Southeast Asian art, and she is currently a member of the editorial collective for *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*, a scholarly journal published by NUS press.

On Writing about "Women Artists" Who Are Not Only "Women Artists": Notes from Recent Attempts at Writing De-Canonically

Dr Roger Nelson, National Gallery Singapore

How to write about artists who are women, but who may also be instruments of coloniality? How to write in a way that gives prominence to artists who are women, but resists installing them into an emerging canon? How to write—for a general reader, as well as in academic and curatorial settings—in a way that strives to challenge and even undermine the formation of an institutionalised canon of the modern arts of Southeast Asia? In this paper, I attempt to think through these and related questions by critically reflecting on the practice of writing. I will discuss the lessons learned and unlearned when working on a recently published book written for a general reader, intended as an introduction to the modern arts of Southeast Asia. As part of my research for the writing of that book, I came across some rather perplexing and unsettling biographical information online, about the 19th century artist, Granada Cabezudo, yet only belatedly

considered how to make productive use also of the perplexing and unsettling stylistic qualities of her only known extant work. How to make productive use of the discomforts that arise when writing about such “women artists” who are never only “women artists”?

Bio: Roger Nelson is an art historian, and a curator at National Gallery Singapore. He was previously Postdoctoral Fellow at Nanyang Technological University. Roger is author of *Modern Art of Southeast Asia: Introductions from A to Z* (National Gallery Singapore, 2019) and translator of Suon Sorin’s 1961 Khmer novel, *A New Sun Rises Over the Old Land* (NUS Press, 2019). He is also co-founding co-editor of *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*, a journal published by NUS Press. Roger completed his PhD at the University of Melbourne, with a thesis titled ‘Modernity and Contemporaneity in “Cambodian Arts” After Independence.’

Exclusionary Practices and Feminist Research in the Indonesian Contemporary Artworld

Greg Doyle, University of Sydney

Feminist arguments (Dirgantoro, 2017) towards the essentially patriarchal character of the Indonesian artworld currently draw on: an assessment of the prevalence of women artists represented in art history; the perceptions of certain women artists and curators regarding the dynamics of the artworld; and, a normative assessment of the content of selected women’s art of artworld significance. The qualitative research that supports these claims is ethnographic in nature. While this research has resulted in very plausible arguments for the existence of a patriarchal art world, developments in mixed-methods sociological research offer the potential for a different kind of empiricism in analysing the potentially gendered dynamics of the Indonesian artworld.

Social Network Analysis (SNA) is predicated on the assumption that social outcomes derive from the structure and content of complex social relationships. This content includes the value-laden discourse that structuralist and post-structuralist theories argue creates and reproduces (gendered) social structures. Using feminist concerns about representation as a starting point, SNA offers tools to conduct a nuanced investigation into the structural and discursive/ideological determinants of the specific social outcomes that feminism reads as essentially patriarchal. As a consequence, it offers an opportunity to empirically examine the patriarchy concept through uncovering the specific mechanisms of the artworld’s exclusionary practices. In the Indonesian artworld context, this approach potentially adds to the feminist conception of the patriarchy as subjective experience by additionally modelling the patriarchy’s parameters as a social fact. In other words, it draws out how the patriarchy (as exclusionary practice) is actually operationalised.

My paper describes a methodological approach to researching artworld dynamics that explores exclusionary outcomes through integrating ethnographic data collection with quantitative modelling and the graphic representation of resource flows relative to the ideological commitments of artworld actors. It uses control over resource flows (particularly information) as a proxy for power in the art world and examines the ideological commitments and demographic characteristics of the most powerful actors in the artworld in light of the patriarchy concept. This approach does not in any way diminish or question the contribution of feminist scholars. Rather, it offers these scholars new tools to dig deeper into exclusionary practices and to model some of the important discursive and other structures constituting the social reality they currently subsume under the concept of patriarchy. However, in doing so it still allows the possibility that the evaluative dynamics defining the artworld and its exclusionary practices may not be entirely gendered.

Bio: Greg Doyle is a PhD Candidate in the School of Languages and Cultures at the University of Sydney. Drawing primarily on sociological theory and combining ethnographic method with Social Network Analysis,

Greg's research examines the non-economic values and evaluative practices of the Indonesian contemporary art world with a particular focus on how those values have been represented in the Australian artworld. Greg previously lived in Southeast Asia for 15 years, including 7 years in Indonesia. He also holds a Bachelor's degree in English Literature (UNSW), an Honours Degree in Industrial Relations (Wollongong), and a Master's Degree in Development Studies (Sydney).

A Queer/Trans Critique of Gender in Southeast Asia: Two Cinematic Instances from the Philippines

Dr Jaya Jacobo, Ateneo de Manila University/University of the Philippines

What does the queer/trans question do to the notion of gender in Southeast Asia? How does the history of art respond to such pressure? Where can one draw the coordinates where a critique of cisheteropatriarchal models of writing about art can be instantiated? What does it mean for an estimation of gender in Southeast Art to allow the queer feminist/trans feminist to take place alongside the feminist? In this presentation, I seek to initiate a commentary on the current discourse in gender studies in the region through a comparison of the work of two digital filmmakers from the Philippines, Panx Solajes and Isabel Sandoval, as they navigate the cinematic as a queer person and a trans woman situated within and separated from the Philippine problematic. I read Solajes's queer aesthetic from an ecofeminist reading of their work on catastrophe in the post-colony; on the other hand, I approach Sandoval's affirmations through her commitment to connecting transness to the political economy of migrancy within the intimate contexts of empire. I further ask how the digital mode of production enables Solajes and Sandoval to pursue an erotics of queer/trans subjectivity by displaying aspects of queer/trans life beyond fetishes digitally construed by the cisheteropatriarchal gaze. In the end, Solajes and Sandoval are studied to open up a filmography of queer/trans in a region imbricated in residual vernacular genderqueer/transfeminine histories alongside the proliferation of a global idiom of trans/queer as a disavowal of gender itself.

Bio: Jaya Jacobo is Assistant Professor at the Department of Filipino in the School of Humanities of the Ateneo de Manila University where she teaches literature, theory, criticism, cinema, popular culture, and gender studies. At the University of the Philippines in Diliman, she is Postdoctoral Research Fellow of the international arts and community consortium GlobalGRACE Gender and Cultures of Equality. She holds the PhD in Comparative Literature and the MA in Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies from the State University of New York and the AB-MA in Filipino Literature from the Ateneo de Manila University. Jacobo is a Member of the Film Desk of the Young Critics Circle and a Founding Co-Editor of *Queer Southeast Asia: A Transgressive Journal of Literary Art*. Jaya has published poetry in three languages (Bikol, Filipino, English), essays and articles on the novel, tropology/tropicality, and Filipino philology, and a sustained critique of contemporary cinema in the Philippines. Her column "Both Sides Now" appears monthly on squeeze.ph.

Indifferent Idols

Wong Bing Hao, Independent writer and researcher

This presentation critically responds to the contemporary saturation of identity politics. Drawing from literary theorist Madhavi Menon's recent book, *Indifference to Difference: On Queer Universalism* (2015), I propose a sobering indifference to the recent unexamined and excessive idolisation of identity and cultural difference. Complicating and contextualising these popular cultural discussions through artistic practices, particularly those by gender non-conforming and trans people, I argue instead that these discourses have deterministically constricted the possibilities of the embodiment of difference. The presentation will pivot around two key projects. The first: an eponymous online publication (2018) that performs the porosities of non-binary and queer embodiment. The second: *Ex Nilalang* (2017), a recent video work by artists Bhenji Ra

and Justin Shoulder that, I argue, foregrounds digital technologies as queer diasporic method. Other contemporary cultural phenomena to be analysed include Kpop, notions of prettiness, Internet memes, and fashion modelling. I discuss the representational nuances afforded by digital technology, as it is utilised in artistic, publication, and pop cultural practice.

Bio: Wong Bing Hao is a writer and mediator based in Singapore. They research gender and sexuality in theory and art, and are invested in communicating their lived realities to diverse audiences. Currently, they are coordinating a series of online publications (Indifferent Idols, 2018, nominal bliss, forthcoming 2019) and accompanying public programs that develop new research directions around contemporary art practices concerned with gender and sexuality. They received a BA in History of Art from University College London in 2015, and an MA in Southeast Asian Studies from the National University of Singapore in 2019, where they wrote dissertations on queer diasporas and transgender in contemporary art. They write about art in Southeast and East Asia for Frieze and Leap.

Entangled Interventions: Migrants, Labour and Contemporary Art in Hong Kong

Michelle Wong, Asia Art Archive

This presentation considers contemporary art projects by artists and curators in Hong Kong or who were visiting Hong Kong, which pertain to migrant workers in the city who are often from countries in Southeast Asia, such as the Philippines and Indonesia. Projects this presentation looks at include the publication *Afterwork* (2016), developed by Parasite and KUNCI (2016). *Afterwork* consists of trilingual (English, Bahasa Indonesia and Tagalog) works of literature by canonised writers and migrant workers alike. *Happyland I: Princess* (2017) developed by Eisa Jocson during an artist residency at Parasite that explores the forced performance and belief of happiness and fantasy. The work continues to evolve through ongoing performances at different festivals and exhibitions. And Tintin Wulia's *Trade/Trance/Transit* (2014-2016), a multi-part project that found itself entangled in the economy of trading cardboard boxes that formed temporary shelters for Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) on their days off, but also with the market of contemporary art, the emblem of it being Art Basel Hong Kong. These projects may not have been explicitly interested in OFWs as women, but gender invariably became a key element of the projects' processes. These projects respond to different aspects of migrant labour and their repercussions, which in turn make visible how the Other—whether it is race, class, access to resources, mobility and technology—is being demarcated and perpetuated in different ways. By examining the performative interventional nature of these projects and the gendered bodies that so propelled them, this presentation reflects on the benefits and challenges of these projects, as well as their impact and implications on Hong Kong's contemporary conditions.

Bio: Michelle Wong is an Asia Art Archive Researcher based in Hong Kong, where her research focuses on histories of exchange and circulation through exhibitions and periodicals. She leads the Ha Bik Chuen Archive project, which catalogues and researches the collection of the late Hong Kong-based artist, Ha Bik Chuen, whose documentation of over 1,500 exhibitions in Hong Kong and elsewhere from the 1960s-2009 provides precious rare archival material for the development of art history in Hong Kong and the region. Other AAA projects include the undergraduate course developed in collaboration with Fine Arts Department, The University of Hong Kong, and London, Asia, with the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art. She was Assistant Curator of the 11th Edition of the Gwangju Biennale (2016). She is part of the collective project *Sightlines* with six other arts practitioners, which as a response to the Umbrella Movement in 2014, treats the mass protests of as a departure point to reflect on how creative practices can inform each other. Her writing has been published in *Ambitious Alignments: New Histories of Southeast Asian Art, 1945–1990* (2018) and *Oncurating*. She is a 2019 Pernod Ricard fellow at Villa Vassiliev & Bétonsalon, Paris.

Gender and Indonesian Art on the International Stage: (Re)viewing Indonesian Art Histories through Digital Repositories

Dr Siobhan Campbell, University of Sydney

This paper explores how digital repositories enable us to rethink Indonesian art histories in the formative years following international recognition of Indonesia's nationhood, a period that saw contemporary Indonesian art achieve a level of international visibility that, generally speaking, was unobtainable to modern Indonesian artists in subsequent decades. Yet discussion of these foundational years almost entirely centres on the activities of male artists, conveying the impression that the art scene of the early years of Indonesian independence was characterised by the almost complete absence of women artists. Furthermore, the art collection of first Indonesian president Sukarno, often taken as the key index of Indonesian art produced in this period, seemingly accentuates the negligible patronage of women artists while the first comprehensive account of Indonesian art produced in this period, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change* by Claire Holt (1967) similarly suggests there were no significant women artists.

In working through a range of digital archives, I question this impulse by looking at the contributions of key women who shaped the art world dynamics of these years. In addition to documenting the involvement of women artists in the internationalism of this period, I look at Samiati Alisjahbana (1930-1966), research assistant to Claire Holt and Herawati Diah (1917-2016), patron and collector, who deserve further attention for the new perspectives they offer on the cultural and political networks operating in this period. Their involvement in the art world is itself eventful and just one instance of how a focus on gender might alert us to new perspectives on modernity and allow us to circumvent the accepted historiography of this period.

Bio: Siobhan Campbell completed her PhD at the University of Sydney in 2013 investigating the painting tradition of Kamasan village in Bali and Balinese responses to museum collections. She continued to research collections of Balinese art as a fellow at the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) in the Netherlands in 2013 and undertook further fieldwork in Bali with a Postdoctoral Endeavour Fellowship in 2014. Siobhan is currently a lecturer in the Department of Indonesian Studies at Sydney University and is a research fellow on the ARC Discovery Project 'Shaping Indonesian Contemporary Art: the role of institutions'.

Unmaking the Canon? "Indonesian Women Artists" in the Future (Archive)

Dr Yvonne Low, University of Sydney

The rise of women-centred exhibitions and monographs emerging from the region Southeast Asia in the last two decades may be conceived as "recovery projects" that aim to revise male-centred/male-dominated narratives; they served as unapologetic attempts to interrogate the canon for a more inclusive art history of the region. Taking into consideration the discursive limitations of such projects, this proposal argues for the significance and relevance of using a digital platform to continue the feminist work.

In positing an expansive 'malleable' canon, this interdisciplinary project argues for the critical use of a digital application and platform in response to a range of feminist, art historical concerns: for example, the privileging of "white, male geniuses", the perpetuation of gender disparity in collections and exhibitions, and gender myopia in Eurocentric survey histories. The conceptualisation of an integrated application, which consolidates open-access information and crowd-sources new data on Southeast Asian women artists, will offer users an original web tool to submit queries and generate reports, whilst serving and performing as a dynamic and interactive digital archive. This paper describes the digital project and discusses its potential as a digital tool for analyzing large-scale corpora through processes such as querying, mining and mapping, using the example of *Indonesian Women Artists: When the Curtain Opens* (2007) as proof-of-concept.

Significantly, it has the potential to enable new qualitative and quantitative analysis by offering an alternative platform to collate and integrate digitalised sources and archives, aggregate materials across geographical locations, and use open-access collection and biographic data to generate new research questions. This paper will explore how this digital project enables new ways of mapping and visualising histories, problematizing relationships and improving our understanding of the practice of professional artists.

Bio: Yvonne Low specialises in the modern and contemporary arts of Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. Her research interests include colonial histories, cultural politics of art development, women artists and feminist art history, and digital art history. Yvonne has published in books, peer-reviewed journals and exhibition catalogues and is on the editorial committee of the journal, *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia* (NUS Press/University of Yale-NUS). She holds a PhD and MA from the University of Sydney, and teaches Asian Art at the University's Power Institute (2016-2019) where she co-convened the inaugural Gender in Southeast Asian art histories symposium in 2017.

Amidst Fire, Termites, and Other Factors of Erasure: Womanifesto Roots Down in the Digital World

Varsha Nair, artist and curator

Womanifesto is rarely acknowledged for what has been achieved in the diverse projects we have brought together over the years. We, as women artists, are regularly made aware of our position or lack of it by being left out of the discourse taking place in the art centres specifically in the region. Thus we are made invisible and in many ways our achievements erased from becoming points of reference to the present and future generation.

Recognising from early on the significance of marking our presence firmly in the context of feminist art history, and starting to pen a chapter for it from/of our part of the world, way back in 1999 I made my first foray into writing and published a text on Womanifesto II in *n paradoxa*, a feminist art journal from the UK. Prior to the internet entering our lives this was an attempt to make visible what we were doing and thus connect it with the wider discourse going on out there.

Writing, presenting talks, maintaining a virtual presence, and now, digitizing the archive for inclusion in AAA's research collection – all is to continue to firmly root down, and increase visibility and connectivity via embracing digital technology. The talk considers the significance of what the internet enables in terms of fostering our work, as well as the importance of maintaining our analog connections.

Bio: Varsha Nair was born in Kampala, Uganda, and studied at Faculty of Fine Arts, Maharaja Sayaji Rao University, Baroda, India. Inviting multidisciplinary collaborations her work encompasses various approaches and genres. Co-organizer of Womanifesto – an international art exchange in Thailand, she has also exhibited internationally including at Chulalongkorn University Art Centre (Bangkok), Khoj International Artists Association (New Delhi), Tate Modern (London), Haus Der Kulturen Der Welt (Berlin), Art in General (New York), Lodypop (Basel). She has published her writings in various art journals such as *n paradoxa*, *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*, *Art AsiaPacific*, *SPAFA Journal* and *Ctrl+P Journal of Contemporary Art* of which she is Editorial Board member. Nair is currently invited by Hochschule Luzern, Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, as guest lecturer for their Masters Dialogue programme and to mentor Masters students. She had lived in Bangkok since 1995 and has recently moved to reside in her hometown of Baroda in India.

Further information

Registrations can be made via Eventbrite.

Please visit bit.ly/2ldfDbW to register or scan the code below.



Please keep up to date with the latest program at

www.powerpublications.com.au

Day 1

Symposium 9:00am – 6:00pm

Friday 18 October 2019

New Law School Foyer ([Google Maps](#))

Eastern Avenue

University of Sydney Law School

Camperdown NSW 2006

Day 2

Workshop (participants only, at USyd)

9:30 – 11:30 am

Roundtable 1:00pm – 3:00pm

Exhibition opening 3:00pm – 5:00pm

Saturday 19 October 2019

Cross Art Projects ([Google Maps](#))

8 Llanckelly Pl, Potts Point NSW 2011



This symposium is supported by the Power Institute together with the School of Literature, Arts and Media and the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Sydney. The organisers gratefully acknowledge the partnership of Cross Art Projects for the exhibition Archiving Womanifesto, and the support of Asia Art Archive and John Cruthers and Professor Elaine Baker.