

4-30-2019

Finding a place for art archives; Reflections on archiving Indonesian and Southeast Asian art

Farah Wardani
National Gallery Singapore, farah.wardani@nationalgallery.sg

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/wacana>



Part of the [Other Arts and Humanities Commons](#), and the [Other Languages, Societies, and Cultures Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Wardani, Farah (2019) "Finding a place for art archives; Reflections on archiving Indonesian and Southeast Asian art," *Wacana, Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia*: Vol. 20: No. 2, Article 2.
DOI: 10.17510/wacana.v20i2.736
Available at: <https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/wacana/vol20/iss2/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty of Humanities at UI Scholars Hub. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Wacana, Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia* by an authorized editor of UI Scholars Hub.

Finding a place for art archives

Reflections on archiving Indonesian and Southeast Asian art

FARAH WARDANI

ABSTRACT

This article is a collection of reflections of art archiving work in Indonesia and Southeast Asia, focusing on building an Indonesian art archive at Indonesian Visual Art Archive (IVAA), 2006-2015, and Southeast Asian art archives at National Gallery Singapore, from 2015 to the present. The article provides insights, learning points, and perspectives on the importance of art archives to support art historical research and the development of art history in Southeast Asia. It sheds light on the challenges, opportunities, and current developments in the field of building archives.

KEYWORDS

Modern art; art history; archives; museums; Southeast Asia; Indonesia; Singapore.

INTRODUCTION

The privileged position of history in art history is telling. This is reflected in one of art history's most respected tools, the archive. It can be said that what fieldwork is to anthropology, the archive is to art history. (Ernst van Alphen 2008: 65).

It all began in 2000 during my MA program at Goldsmiths, London, writing my thesis on Indonesian political art in 1980s-1990s. There was a fundamental problem: where can I find resources on Indonesian and Southeast Asian

FARAH WARDANI is the Assistant Director of Resource Centre (Library & Archives) at National Gallery Singapore, where she is now in the process of building both physical and digital infrastructure of the museum's Southeast Asian art history archives and reference collection. From 2007 until March 2015 she positioned as the executive director of Indonesian Visual Art Archive (IVAA) in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, with works include *Arsip IVAA*, <<http://archive.ivaa-online.org/>>. Her publications include *Indonesian women artists; The curtain opens* (with Carla Bianpoen and Wulan Dirgantoro, 2007), and *Arsipelago; Archival work & archiving art & culture in Indonesia* (with Yoshi Fajar Kresno Murti, 2014). Farah can be contacted at: farah.wardani@nationalgallery.sg.

art history? Even in the internet age today, finding resources in the field of Southeast Asian art history can be challenging. Art history as a field of study itself is a relatively underdeveloped territory in Indonesia and the Southeast Asian region at large. In the context of in-depth art historical research, resource materials are either scarce or difficult to access, and there is a lack of proper infrastructure.

At the vanguard of the world of libraries and archives are the great institutions of the West, such as the Bodleian in the United Kingdom and Library of Congress in the United States, institutions that continue the grand intellectual and bibliographic tradition started with the Library of Alexandria. All across the Western world there are specialized art archives (see Van Alphen 2008; Casid and D'Souza 2014). One can go to Smithsonian Archives of American Art (in Washington DC) to find the best resources of American artists or the Tate Archive for British artists since 300 years (in London), or The Netherlands Institute for Art History (Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, RKD, in The Hague) for the most complete references and archives on Dutch art history dated since the seventeenth century to the modern era. All of these institutions are either fully or partially state-supported, based on the national consciousness of the importance in preserving the history and legacy of national art.

This is not the case when it comes to Southeast Asian art history. National Archives of the region predominantly still serve to document the institutional archives of the State, namely post-independence government documents or to some extent, military and war history. This says something about how archives are perceived as protected records of governance and not necessarily to be made available for the public. The lack of comprehensive art historical documentation has meant that colonial and ethnographic archives have provided the key resources of art history.

Spending most of the last thirteen years working with archives, my attachment to the field of archiving can be said as having started by chance. Not in any way academically trained as a librarian or archivist, I began my career by multi-tasking: as a writer, curator, teacher, and art organizer. As I became more active in the art scene, the problem I faced during my MA became more acute. Because of the lack of proper art and cultural infrastructure, the difficulty of finding references and archival materials to learn more about Indonesian modern art was a problem for researchers like myself, let alone the general public

It was not until I joined the Cemeti Art Foundation in 2006 and transformed it into Indonesian Visual Art Archive (IVAA) in 2007 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, that I found my calling in the world of art archiving.¹ This work continues until the present as I am currently positioned as the head of National Gallery Singapore's Resource Centre, to develop the Gallery's collection of art archives and run its library and archives. This article is a collection of reflections of my

¹ For IVAA see <https://archive.ivaa-online.org>.

experiences in art archiving work in Indonesia and Southeast Asia, based on my experiences at IVAA and National Gallery Singapore, Singapore.

The roles, approaches, and methods of archiving in both places are different as I elaborate in this article. However, the starting point is the same, that is a shared belief that is the importance of art archiving and the centrality of art archiving to understanding the relations between art practice and the challenges of society in this region. My work straddles between two modes of approach: the guerrilla mode of archiving, that is Non-Institutional approach, as demonstrated at IVAA, and the Institutional mode, that is the Museum Archives approach, as demonstrated at National Gallery Singapore. My belief is that both are equally important and complement each other, creating a place that provides resources and spaces for debate, contributing to the development of art history and contemporary society in the region.

GUERRILLA ARCHIVING: ARCHIVING AS CULTURAL ACTIVISM AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT AT IVAA

IVAA was originally established in 1995 initially under the name of Yayasan Seni Cemeti or Cemeti Art Foundation (hereafter CAF) by a Yogyakarta-based group of artists and cultural activists, namely Nindityo Adipurnomo, Mella Jaarsma, Agung Kurniawan, Yustina Neni, Raihul Fadjri, and Anggi Minarni. It was founded initially as a sister-institution to the art space that Adipurnomo and Jaarsma built, Cemeti Art House, to serve as an independent art project and cultural program organizer. One of their landmark programs during their time was "AWAS! Recent Art from Indonesia, 1999-2001", a travelling exhibition across Europe and Australia, participated by contemporary artists who are now regarded most prominent in Indonesian art scene such as Arahmaiani, Agus Suwage, and Tisna Sanjaya.

The location in Yogyakarta mainly factored for its affiliation with Cemeti Art House (hereafter will be called as Cemeti), a very prominent independent contemporary art space in Yogyakarta at that time (see Pictures 1 and 2). Despite its strong affiliation, organizationally Cemeti and CAF were two different institutions located in two different spaces in Yogyakarta. While Cemeti focused on being an exhibition-driven artist-run-space, CAF served as an "agent" which took on the role of project management and art community development.

Cemeti can be said as the first internationally renowned non-commercial artist-run-space (see Belting, Buddensieg, and Weibel 2013: 79), founded in 1988 – the era when Indonesian art scene was in the peak of stagnancy after decades-long oppression under the Suharto regime (1966-1998), generally known as the New Order era. At the time when political activism and freedom of expression in arts and media was restricted, and art making settled for mainly commercial-oriented painting shows in hotels, Cemeti became one of Indonesia's main space to accommodate artist's aspirations to develop works with contemporary aesthetics such as performance art and installation, and imbued it with socio-political content especially related to the late New Order

era zeitgeist with artists taking art as medium of political resistance as well as subversive tool (Turner 2005: 203).



Pictures 1 and 2. Archival photo of the opening of Cemeti Art House, Yogyakarta, 1988. (Courtesy of Cemeti Art House, digitized by Indonesian Visual Art Archive).

With its affiliation to Cemeti, the artists' community in CAF network expanded beyond Yogyakarta to other Indonesia's cultural hotspots, such as Jakarta and Bali. As a community-based arts organization that served to assist artists developing projects and portfolio, CAF has built its collection of archives mostly covering the activities of Indonesian contemporary artists from the 1980s to 1990s. It also built a properly catalogued library that can be accessed freely by the public. The library and documentation work were not initially the main program but started as a necessity, as back then in 1995, most artists were not privileged enough to have access of equipment, such as photography, camera, computers and even telecommunications. There was also a lack of awareness and skills to properly document their works. CAF then started to take on that work on behalf of the artists, in order to support the projects.

Over time, this documentation work became increasingly essential to the programs as there are more desires from the artist community for CAF to grow their archives by also contributing their own documentations of their work, and CAF developed more educational programs such as Dialog Seni Kita, a weekly artists talk program on radio. The late 1990s also marked with increased political tension leading to the fall of Suharto and the New Order that peaked in 1998 (the Reformasi),² as a result the art scene was bursting with art activism and politically-charged works, and CAF was heavily involved in documenting many of these activities (see Pictures 3 and 4).

² Reformasi is the name of the movement following the fall of Suharto and New Order in May 1998.



Pictures 3 and 4. Taring Padi artists' initiatives and students of Gadjah Mada University, performance art in a mass rally to bring down Suharto, Yogyakarta, 1998. (Courtesy of Indonesian Visual Art Archive).

Many of these art activities are recorded on analog-based audio-visual medium (cassette tapes, VHS video, photographs) by CAF, supported with an active archiving of media clippings and reference collection building. The archives of these documentations became the starting point of CAF archives which led to the founding of IVAA (see Picture 5).



Picture 5. IVAA storage of video archives, at Rumah IVAA, Yogyakarta. (Photo courtesy of Dwi Rahmanto).

By the mid-2000s, the Indonesian art scene had changed, with more artist initiatives, more galleries, and a growing market infrastructure. The art boom in Asia had come to Indonesia by late 1990s and took its peak in early 2000s leading to the new generation of collectors.³ As Jim Supangkat (2005: 218) describes: “The sudden increase of prices saw the number of art galleries in Indonesia explode from only a few in the 1970s and 1980s to hundreds in the 1990s”.

CAF founders felt the need to formally adapt to these changes. This is where I came on board in 2006, being involved with the founders to define the scope of the new role for CAF. The two major opportunities that we wanted to take advantage of: the growing digital/internet revolution, and the archives of CAF. I myself had been a CAF archive user since my early career in the art. As mentioned earlier, being an art historian and independent curator at that time, I’ve long been struggling with the scarcity and lack of resources in Indonesian art documentation in which CAF accommodated greatly in this specific need. What struck me as special about the CAF archives was not only that it provided good resources to develop historiography, but from the archives we can see the strong relation between the development of the art world and the society. It showed the dynamics interrelationship between art practice and the society in the 1990s. The archive reflected the ways in which artists related and challenged the social and political reality of its time.

This relation between art, artists, and society shaped the vision and aim of IVAA; it strives to provide resources for art history and the archive as an active medium to see the relevance between art history and the contemporary society, in anticipation of Indonesia’s rapidly growing digital population.

The founders elected me as a new director of the organization and based on consensus we decided to change the organization’s name to strongly clarify the directional change and the new role. CAF then officially change its name into IVAA in 2007 with a specific focus on art archiving, digital preservation, and online access. The goal of inspiring a maturing generation to consult, use, and contribute to the archives was the fundamental objective. Though it is not the main basis, the name change was also meant to distinguish between Cemeti and CAF for the new generation involved with IVAA, while the founders Jaarsma and Adipurnomo remained on IVAA’s board until the present, along with Kurniawan, Minarni, Yustina, and Fadjri.

From the start, IVAA was very conscious of its position being an independent initiative, working outside the context of the state, namely not playing the role of being a national archiving institution. Thus, in its development it did not merely take the role of a passive archive collection centre but continuously makes the archives a fulcrum of cultural activism. IVAA saw archiving work and archives not just as a product, or a matter of collecting, storage, or preservation of art and cultural texts, but also as the

³ I am using the term “art boom” as coined by Jim Supangkat 2005. The term “Asian boom” is also used by Clare McAndrew in the conversation with Hans Belting (see Belting, Buddensieg, and Weibel 2013: 261-265).

breath of living spirit and kindling the works of individuals, communities and citizenry. At this time IVAA had the belief that art and cultural archiving work and archives are not only technical, bureaucratic, economical, or political, but building long-term cultural relations.

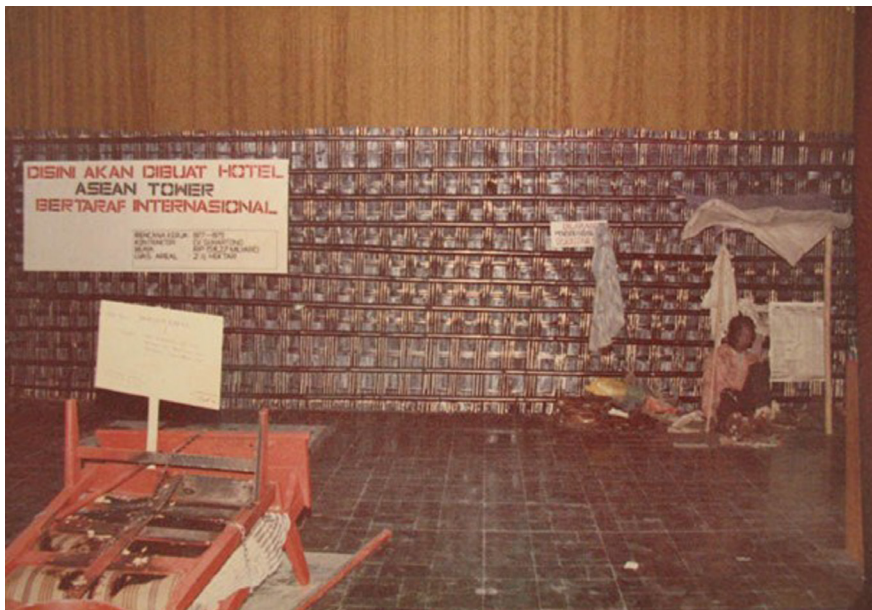
The digital medium and the growing internet in the mid-2000s was the main entry point of IVAA's initial program development, starting with the work of archival digitization and online platform building. The first step was the digitization of all CAF archives, which IVAA began in 2008, and the next step was to build an online public platform for accessibility of these archives. IVAA found its financial support from two funding bodies, Hivos (a Netherlands-based organization, which functions as a cultural agency and fundraiser), a long-term funder of CAF, and the American Ford Foundation, which at that time was launching its digital media program to support cultural development and activism in Indonesia. From here onwards, IVAA's main output is the IVAA Digital Archive, the first digital archive of contemporary art in the country. It is now a customized web-based platform where the low-resolution version of IVAA digital archive collection can be directly uploaded from the IVAA server.

In 2009, the IVAA Online Archive engine showcased its beta version at the National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta. The database consists of digitized photos, videos, audios, texts, and organized by agents, activities, and artworks. This online platform was impactful not only for the accessibility but also for IVAA to build up its collection. Although IVAA had grown out of the CAF archives, its collection had expanded from documentation and donations from researchers, organizations, artists and their families. In addition to being used by researchers globally, IVAA web archive also connected a network of users from around the world, many of whom subsequently came to Yogyakarta to conduct further research. These visiting scholars, in turn contributed lectures, materials and their expertise to the local community.

The content of IVAA archives presents the work of Indonesian artists reflecting various changes, from medium, ideas, thoughts, social formations, questions of existing aesthetics, and also shifting values within society. The archive is meant to show how visual art practice becomes one of the mediums to express responses towards Indonesian socio-political changes. IVAA does not have a strict collection criteria or policy but identifies an annual thematic focus of social issues relevant to Indonesia that it wants to address such as gender, environmental issues, and social justice. These focus themes become the basis of annual collecting and documentation priorities.

Category-wise, the extent of the collection is as follows:

1. Archives of Performance Art/Art in the Public Space: a collection of documentation of performance art and art practice that took place in the public space in Indonesia, mainly from late 1970s until the present. The major collection from the period of mid-1990s reflects the dynamics of politically-driven art activities before the fall of the New Order regime in 1998 (see Pictures 6 and 7).



Picture 6. Performance by Bonyong Munni Ardhi for the PIPA (Kepribadian Apa) Group as part of the Black December Movement, Jakarta, 1975. (Courtesy of the artist, digitized by Indonesian Visual Art Archive).



Picture 7. Semsar Siahaan, "Mass Grave", site-specific installation at the 1993 Jakarta Biennale. (Courtesy of Jakarta Arts Council, digitized by Indonesian Visual Art Archive).

2. Archives of Events and Collectives: IVAA is taking the role of digitizing the archives of some prominent events and collectives in Indonesia such as the Biennale Jogja archives, and leading art collectives and institutions

such as Cemeti Art House, Ruangrupa, and National Gallery of Indonesia. These archives are built as a result of partnerships with the related institutions through activities such as organizing retrospective exhibitions and database system building partnership.

3. Artists Folders: the collection of folders of Indonesian artists and portfolios of artist collectives started in 1995 until present.
4. Newspaper Clippings of Art and Cultural Reviews from the 1970s and onwards?
5. Scholars Archives: donations of academic theses and papers from Indonesian scholars from various art academies
6. Oral History Archives: collection of audio-video interviews with Indonesian artists dated from the late 1960s onwards.

Aside from its digital platform and online building, IVAA runs a public library accessible for both members and the general public. Library and archive visitors may consult for suggestions on particular subjects with an in-house researcher, while high-resolution documents may be copied under several conditions. As IVAA moved to a permanent house in 2011, the library, designed as a small amphitheatre, can also take on the function of a mini auditorium. In this way the space functions as an open platform for the community to host discussions, workshops, and public events, all self-organized by the local communities. This social function of “Rumah IVAA” (IVAA House) is very important to maintain as part of the social contribution both to the neighbourhood and the local arts community (see Picture 8). We did not want IVAA to exist merely as an online presence.



Picture 8. Students discussion at Rumah IVAA, Yogyakarta, December 2018. (Photo courtesy of Dwi Rahmanto).

Many initiatives in society develop without the formal presence of the state, often even in opposition to the perspectives of the state or other public

institutions. Arts and culture, in the context of civic work, communities and individuals, is more meaningful when it exists as the practice of daily values by the local communities. From this position, the premise is that cultural products will always be born from interactive processes, collaboration, and the communication of values between people, which occur through space, intention, place, and time. Arts and cultural archives become part of the processes, which encourage the continuation of interaction, collaboration, and communication between peoples (see F.X. Harsono's performance in Picture 9).



Picture 9. FX Harsono, "Korban Destruksi", 1997, performance at Yogyakarta South Square. (Courtesy of Cemeti Art House, digitized by Indonesian Visual Art Archive).

A good example of IVAA outputs Hibah Karya program (2012-2014), in which artists, scholars, and activists are invited to use the archives to create new artworks, exhibitions, and cultural intervention. Another example is IVAA's anthology of arts and cultural archiving work, *Arsipelago; Archival work and archiving art & cultural in Indonesia* (Wardani and Murti 2014), which solicited contributions from independent archivists, activists, and scholars around Indonesia with the aim of raising awareness of Indonesia's cultural archives and their potential for social impact. The book also serves as a manifesto of IVAA's archiving as cultural activism, as described by Yoshi Fajar Kresno Murti in the introduction (Murti 2014: xvii):

Archival work and archiving is political work, claims, access and knowledge. Its primary basis are not cultural products, but cultural processes [...] part of the strategies, resistance and resilience of individuals, communities and citizen(ry) in the midst of the hegemony of (formal) institutional state and the penetration of oppressive markets.

IVAA continues to conceptualize art archiving as part of cultural activism, developing programs that emphasize the relation between art practice and

societal well-being, maintaining the documentation efforts and digital database work while also engaging directly with the art communities through the archives.

BUILDING THE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVE AT NATIONAL GALLERY SINGAPORE

Building an archive at National Gallery Singapore shows a different dynamic. If IVAA is the story of art movement became an archive, the National Gallery Singapore, existing art archive is an attempt to use existing archive to simulate new discourses.

Although modern art history in Southeast Asia dates back to the nineteenth century,⁴ the last fifteen years have seen the flourishing of museums, exhibitions, and, perhaps most significantly, the art market.⁵ Asia's booming economy has led to a booming art market, drawing global attention to China, and later on Southeast Asia (Belting, Buddensieg, and Weibel 2013: 151). Curators and art historians Hand Belting, Andrea Buddensieg, and Peter Weibel (2013) has written persuasively about the relations between internationalism of art history, the emerging markets, and how they constitute the contemporary "global art". As Belting (2013: 185) states:

Today art history faces a challenge of a different kind. The rise of new art worlds in many parts of the world demand a narrative that also takes into account the growing role of economics and the politics of art in describing art. [...] Art's complicity with contemporaneous social, religious, and cultural worlds was surely always given, but its complicity goes further since art today "has more to do with clarifying cultural identity than with aesthetic feeling" as Thomas McEvelley wrote in 1995. Art is not only produced "in an atmosphere of global dialogue", as he added, but serves the competition of conflicting politics of representation.

On the surface, this rise has proven positive as major international museums like Guggenheim, Tate Modern, Centre Pompidou, and Metropolitan are increasingly developing collections and exhibitions of contemporary Asian art (Guggenheim 2013). New museums in Asia with a specific focus of Southeast Asian art have opened, such as National Gallery Singapore in 2015, Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Nusantara (MACAN) in Jakarta in 2015, and the upcoming M+ in Hong Kong in 2020. International art fairs, such as Art Basel in Switzerland and Hong Kong, are also offering more colossal showcases of Asian galleries.

⁴ Nineteenth century as the start of modern art in SEA is still in perpetual debate, but the consensus somewhat agrees that the most vivid proof of SEA modern art starts when indigenous artists start mastering the Western modern art disciplines and producing works of their own, such as Raden Saleh from Indonesia and Juan Luna from Philippines. See Sabapathy 2018; Storer 2017.

⁵ The art market that I mention here is more related to the contemporary art market as in the relations between Galleries-Auctions-Dealers-Collectors-Artists/Estates. For a very comprehensive analysis and report of the global contemporary art market, see "Branding: New art market and their strategies" in Belting, Buddensieg, and Weibel 2013: 128-137.

This institutional growth and commercial success, however, has not developed in parallel with Southeast Asian art scholarship. The value of artworks or the arts in general in Southeast Asia has been determined by market speculation and divorced from art historical research or scholarship. For the case of Singapore, the government-initiated ambitious project of Singapore Global City of the Arts that started in 1995, has always been in a closer scrutiny by the public on how it can manifest successfully, mainly for it being a major long-term publicly funded plan. In this case, the role of Singapore playing the lead role in art scholarship development in this region has always been put into question (Ooi 2018; Hoe and Chong 2018), given the scarcity of literature on art history and art criticism found in publicly accessible platforms, and the lack of awareness and understanding on the importance of art history in education system (Sabapathy 2010).

Since the launch of the Global City of the Arts project, Singapore public institutions such as National Library Board (NLB) and museums managing the National Collection under National Heritage Board (NHB)⁶ have been making efforts to counteract the problems mentioned above, including National Gallery Singapore (hereafter the Gallery). The Gallery is a largely publicly-funded institution that aims to play a lead role in developing art scholarship in the region. One of the ways the Gallery tries to fill this gap in art history⁷ is to prioritize research-driven curatorial work and collection development. To support this, among others, is to have its own “Library & Archives”. The task of the Library & Archives department, which I joined in 2015, is to build its facilities of reference and archival collection management, adhering to the museum’s curatorial framework, artwork collection, and its vision to be a research-driven art institution, with a Southeast Asian focus. The modern art collection hosts over 8,600 artworks including paintings, sculptures, printmaking, photography and video from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Within the Gallery’s organizational structure, the Gallery’s Library & Archives work is placed under the Collection Development Division alongside a team facilitating acquisition of artwork, and work closely with the curatorial team. In practice, this organizational position clearly focuses on two art archiving activities (which are interrelated to one another): 1. archiving curatorial research materials and building the library collection; and 2. archiving of the artwork collection. We take inspirations from the practices of major museum libraries and archives practice such as Tate and Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), and also following from existing reference books such as *Art Museum Libraries and Librarianship* (Benedetti 2007).

⁶ Namely, Asian Civilisations Museum, National Museum of Singapore, The Peranakan Museum, Singapore Philatelic Museum, Indian Heritage Centre, National Gallery of Singapore, and Singapore Art Museum.

⁷ Other initiatives of National Gallery Singapore to mention in this context are its rigorous education and publication programs, as well as its collaboration with National University Singapore (NUS) for Minor in Art History.

Starting from what we have and build in the collection, the structure of the Gallery's Library & Archives Collection is as follows:

1. Southeast Asian Art References arranged by country, with expanded subjects such as Museum Studies, Art History, Southeast Asian studies, etcetera.
2. Artists Primary Archives: all items owned directly by the artists/estates (letters, sketches, manuscripts, photographs, etcetera), mostly in digital form as we develop digitization partnerships with the artists and estates.
2. Digitized ephemeras / collaterals / catalogues of Singapore and Southeast Asian art exhibitions / projects since the nineteenth century.
3. Digitized rare materials / nineteenth century-twentieth century publications
4. Building History Archives: research materials on the building history and architectural archives of the Gallery
5. Exhibition History Archives: The Gallery's curatorial archives, publications, and media/ press reviews of its exhibitions and programs.

The part concerning the archiving of the artwork collection is directly related to the Gallery's position as a collecting museum. In this respect, archiving is part of the research of the artwork collection development. This part of archiving focuses on the history of the artworks and historical value justification, which also relates to the process of artwork acquisition, with aspects addressing: Historical Accuracy: Timeline & Historiography building; Provenance & Authenticity; and determining Historical Value: significant social, cultural, and political contexts related to the artworks. Archiving in this case provides or creates a context or framework or references to validate the historical value of an object. In other words, the archive helps provide context or reference to validate the objects chosen by the curator.



Picture 10. Myanmar Art Reference Collection at the Gallery's Library & Archives. (Photo courtesy of Farah Wardani).

The primary activity is the collecting of curatorial research materials, which is an integral part of the art historical research conducted by the curators for every exhibition. This means that the materials discovered during the curatorial research process are being collected. So far, this activity has constituted the bulk of the work the Library & Archives team does (see Picture 10). The most straightforward and common practice is the building of Southeast Asian reference collection for the library.

The more challenging, yet intriguing part of this process is that there is no established supply centre of Southeast Asian art archives. In contrast to the market for the artworks (auctions, galleries, dealers), where there are visible supply and demand of the artworks, there is no supply centre of the art archives. Archival materials need even more efforts of investigations, much of the archives are collected and obtained by building relationships with artists' families and estates, archive collectors and institutions, exchanging resources, and preserving the materials while growing the collection. The method of obtaining these materials are mostly done in contributions with no monetary transactions and based on goodwill from the contributors (see Picture 11).



Picture 11. Archival photo of Georgette Chen, circa 1950s, from the artists' archives donated to National Gallery Singapore by the Estate. (Inventory number: RC-S16-GC1.1-26).

A majority of these materials are unique, obscure, and out of print. Further urgency is given to the task by the fact that much of these materials are in the custody of the artists' families – many of them are the second generation who are already senior citizens.⁸ In other words, if the materials are not

⁸ Many of the living artists and artists' estates are in their 80s and 90s. One case that I can share is the archives of Singapore artist Cheong Soo Pieng that we loaned to digitize from his

collected and archived now, it is possible that those materials will be lost forever, especially given the fact that much of them are already in a state of decay. This is where the digitization initiative provides a solution. The Gallery's digitization initiative started in 2015 and initially mainly served to digitally preserve the resource materials uncovered during curatorial research, especially the artists' primary archives. The digitized materials collected by the digitization initiative constitute a significant amount of Singapore and Southeast Asia digital resources and make up the biggest part of the consolidated Library & Archives collection (see Picture 12).



Picture 12. Scrapbook of Philippine modern art archives owned by Kalaw Ledesma Foundation, the Estate of Purita Kalaw-Ledesma, an art patron of Filipino Art. National Gallery Singapore partners with Kalaw-Ledesma Foundation since 2015, for digitization of the Kalaw-Ledesma archives. (Photo courtesy of Muhammad Faisal).

It is important to address that in most cases the method of collecting the digital collection is by loaning the original archival materials from the owners to be digitized by the Gallery, and then return the originals when the digitization is done. In archiving, this is called “post-custodial” method.⁹ The ownership of the digitized materials is not claimed by the Gallery, instead the Gallery is acting as their steward. This is to distinguish it from the ownership

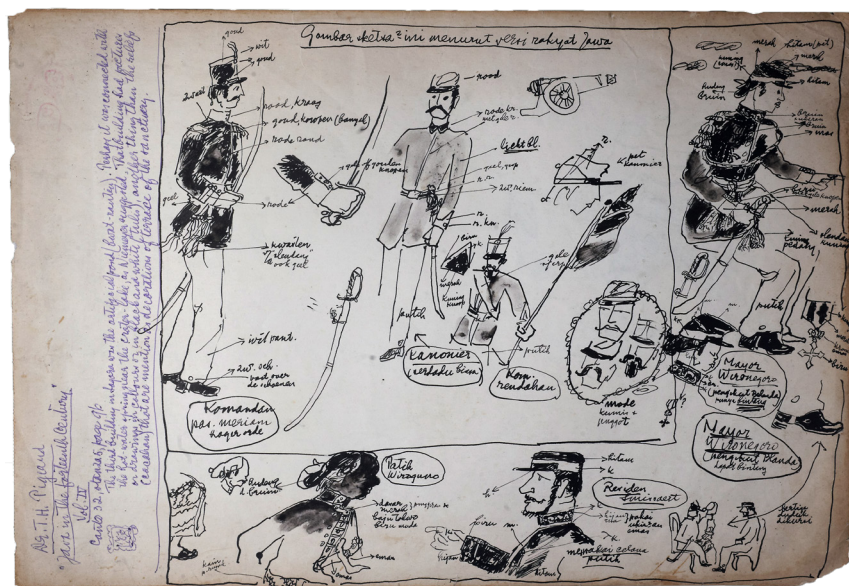
daughter Ms Cheong Leng Guat in 2017. Ms. Cheong Leng Guat passed away in 2018, not long after we completed the digitization. The archives remain to be in the family's custody until present, and the estate is passed on to her brother, Mr Cheong Wai Chi. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge Ms Cheong Leng Guat for her dedication to her father's legacy and taking the time to work with National Gallery Singapore to archive her father's work before her passing.

⁹ Definition of post-custodial: The post-custodial paradigm of archives re-positions archivists from institutional custodians of archival records to stewards of records in their places of creation or use (Kelleher 2017).

status of original artworks and archival materials. The following step is to develop the collection database, digital repository, and metadata to build the digital archive platform for searchability and accessibility (see Pictures 13-14).



Picture 13. National Gallery Singapore archivist Micaella Gonzales with Ireland-based Singapore artist Mak Kum Siew, who contributed his archives to the Gallery's Library & Archives in 2018. (Photo courtesy of Farah Wardani).



Picture 14. A sample of the study collection of Indonesian artist S. Sudjojono's, 1973. (Courtesy of Sudjojono Center, digitized by National Gallery Singapore; Inventory number: RC-II-SS1-133).

This leads us to the main questions that I receive, mainly from scholars who have been using the materials are: where to start? Whose archives to prioritize? To what end? The most obvious entrance is somehow still starting from the pillars of our Southeast Asian modern art collection. Those regarded as so-called national artists, pioneers, founding fathers and mothers? of modern art, and royal painters. The names such as Raden Saleh, S. Sudjojono (Indonesia), Liu Kang, Cheong Soo Pieng, Lim Hak Tai (Singapore), Reza Piyadasa, Latiff Mohidin (Malaysia), U Ba Nyan, Bagyi Aung Soe (Myanmar), Juan Luna, Fernando Amorsolo (Philippines) belong to such canons, to name just a few – the artworks of such artists are already represented in the Gallery’s collection custody or prioritized to be acquired (see Picture 15). The archives of these key artists mainly cover the period from 1930s-1960s. This is also the period of the birth of art academies in the region, where the first foundations of art historiography and aesthetical discourse was formed – mainly dealing with the shifts between what is regarded as “indigenous/traditional arts” and modern (see Sabapathy 2018; Poshyananda et al. 1997).



Picture 15. Exhibition curator Lisa Horikawa presenting the archival showcase of Lim Hak Tai, founder of Nanyang Academy of Arts Singapore, at the exhibition “(Re)Collect: The Making of Our Art Collection”, National Gallery Singapore, 11 May-19 August 2018. The Lim Hak Tai – Lim Yew Kuan family donated the archives in 2016. (Photo courtesy of Lim Shujuan).

The task of the Archives is also to bring forth the parts of art history overlooked by existing historical canons and the art market. This includes:

1. Southeast Asian lost artworks.

From the archives, we can see substantial records of certain artists’ works

that have been exhibited in various important exhibitions in the history of Singapore and Southeast Asian art, but are now lost. From the archives we are able to fill gaps of certain historical contexts and narratives. Sadly, due to unknown factors, these works are either forgotten, hidden, overlooked. Worst case scenario is that they are damaged or destroyed (see Picture 16).



Picture 16. S. Sudjojono, "Children & Cat", Pastel on canvas, 1938. Noted on record to be Sudjojono's first work to be exhibited at Batavia Kunstkring. Undiscovered until present. Image taken from the exhibition catalogue "Indische Bond Collectie", Batavia Kunstkring, 1938, collection of RKD (The Netherlands Institute For Art History, The Hague).

2. The historically obscured.

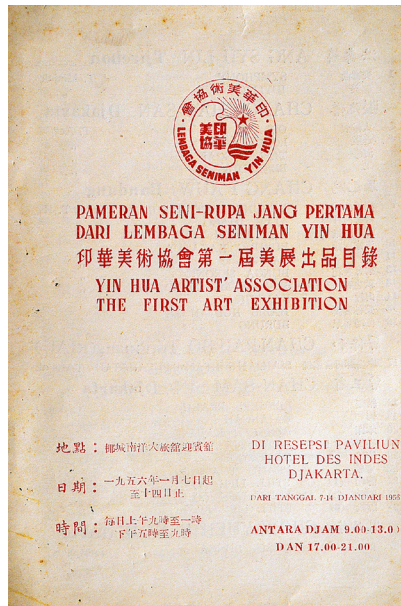
In lieu with the search for the lost artworks, the archives also show how certain artists, art movements, and societies have been obscured by mainstream history or in some cases, simply erased from historiography, mainly for political reasons. This black hole is very common in the timeline of Southeast Asian art history, a region that has undergone various turbulences especially in the post-war periods of its political landscapes (see Picture 17).



本會第一屆工作委員會合影·由左至右前排：許仲銘（外文文書）、張奕庭（聯絡·正）、周月芬（福副·正）、凌南隆（副主席）、李曼峯（主席）、梁貽燕（副主席）、蕭昌（研究·正）、葉昭生（研究·副）、曾三首（財政·正）、後排：蕭爾謙（聯絡·副）、高煥發（財政·副）、林奇獅（出版·正）、黃其（總務·副）、葉泰華（中文文書）、黎曼雄（總務·正）。

Panitia-pekerdja tahun pertama (1955) :

Dari kiri ke kanan (Barisan depan) : C. M. Hsu — Penulis bhs. Asing, Chang Ming-An — Kom. bg. Penghubung, Chow Yuch-Fen — Kom. bg. Kesedjahteraan, Ling Nan-Lung — Wk. Ketua, Lee Man-Fung — Ketua, Liang Ie-Yen — Wk. Ketua, Siaw Tjhiang — Kom. bg. Penjelid'kan, Yap Hok-Seng — Wk. bg. Penjelid'k, Chan Sam Sin — Bendahara.
(Barisan belakang) : Siaw Eri-Chian — Wk. bg. Penghubung, Kho Wan G'e — Wk. Bendahara, Lim Kie-Tjong — Kom. bg. Penerbitan, Oey Seng — Wk. Kom. umum, Yap Thay-Hwa — Penulis bhs. Tionghoa, Lay Man-Hong — Kom. umum.



Picture 17. Archives of Yin Hua Artists Association, an Indonesian-Chinese art group in the 1950s-60s, founded by artists Lee Man Fong and Wen Peor, disbanded in 1965, with several members of the group disappeared and exiled. Images are taken from the exhibition catalogues of Yin Hua Art Association, 1956 (above), and 1955 (below), from the collection of Dicti Art Lab Yogyakarta, digitized by National Gallery Singapore. Inventory nrs. RC-I13-MS1-14 (above), RC-I13-MS1-9 (below).

3. Women in Art History.

Currently at National Gallery Singapore, the curators have been conducting research on women artists in Indonesia and Southeast Asia, mainly to develop the museum collection and exhibitions, but most importantly, to improve the Southeast Asian art historiography by recognizing the previously marginalized contribution of women artists.¹⁰ The task remains to show how women have been contributing in art history, as well as reclaiming their position in the art world, raising questions about modernism, gender equality, social justice, humanity, and politics (see Pictures 18 and 19).



Picture 18. Emiria Sunassa, a pioneer artist originated from Eastern Indonesia, often overlooked in the history of Indonesian Modern Art, was one of the first members of Persagi (Persatuan Ahli Gambar Indonesia - Indonesian Painters Association) in 1938. (Photo digitized by Indonesian Visual Art Archive, from original issue of *Djawa Baroe Magazine* Edition No. 5 (1943): 9-10).

However, the focus is not about canonization of these artists or simply following art acquisition according to the collection remit. Rather, it is about documenting how the archives of these key artists reflect so clearly how modern art relates to nation building and to defining the identities of post-independence nations in Southeast Asia. This form of archiving is more about offering a deeper understanding of how modern art, as well as the idea of modernism itself, are constructed in post-independence Southeast Asia's formative years. Across the region there was a diverse range of conscious

¹⁰ The inclusion of women artists in the canon of SEA art history is a growing issue, as there are also a lack of women or gender studies in the art historical writing. See Bianpoen, Dirgantoro, and Wardani 2007; Tan 2011; Dirgantoro 2017.

attempts to express the new consciousness as being modern nations. I believe that to analyse this period is crucial not only for the development of art history, but also for the understanding contemporary Southeast Asia today – hybrid societies shaped by an endless fusion of ideologies, traditions and identities, an outcome of negotiations between colonialism and the so-called “East” and “West”.



Picture 19. Singapore-British artist Kim Lim during her study at Central Saint-Martins, London, 1959. (Digitized by National Gallery Singapore with permission from Kim Lim Estate; Inventory nr. RC-S49-KL001-1).

CONCLUSION

There are still gaps to be filled and the Southeast Asian art historiography remains an emerging field, full of discontinuities, and missing links. As, in my view, the task of the archive is to collect and discover as many sources as possible that can give evidence of various dimensions of Southeast Asian art history. Building archives from scratch for sure is a laborious task, whether it is at an independent archive like IVAA or a national museum archive like National Gallery Singapore. While building any archive, it is important to remember that it is impossible for one institution to cover everything, there will always be blind spots and we will always be engaged in an endless process of discovery, this is the reason why archiving at National Gallery Singapore is a research-driven curatorial process. The shared desire to expand the frontier of Southeast Asian art history has been the main drive of the development of the Gallery’s Library & Archives. Growing the collection and processing the archives privileged us with direct access to the owners and the knowledge obtained from working with the archives.

At this point, despite the differences of institutional background and

collecting methodology, the ideology of the Gallery's Library & Archives shares some similarities with IVAA: collecting art archives is not solely for the sake of ownership of preserved cultural products, but because of the belief of how the archives and archiving can stimulate the process of producing scholarship and building intellectual publics in this region. It therefore demands better public access and usage.

The development of the Gallery's Library & Archives is founded on the need to develop art historical resources and knowledge production in Singapore and Southeast Asia. Being an integral part of strengthening the Gallery's collection development and curatorial work, it also exists to facilitate a greater appreciation and understanding of art history and culture in the region. It is building the system of preserving, database building and opening up public accessibility of the resources, giving life to the reproduction of artworks, information and knowledge and alternative perspective in relation to the development of art history and also arts and humanities in a bigger picture. Not only on art history, but also on humanities and society.

The future seems to be positive. As we have been experiencing since the Gallery opened, there is a high demand for research materials on SEA modern art especially from external researchers who do not have access to such resources. Global interest in creating digital database platforms, online catalogues, and resources has grown, thereby facilitating sharing and exchange. More artists, curators, and scholars from different disciplines, are now using archives for research and the creative production of artworks and exhibitions.

I am fully aware that IVAA and National Gallery Singapore are not the only players in the Asian art archiving world. Prominent places such as Asia Art Archive in Hong Kong has been at the forefront of creating archiving standards and promoting research of Asian art, and the upcoming museum of Asian art museum M+ is also preparing its own Study Centre. While IVAA continues its work in Yogya, there are also independent initiatives such as the Myanmar Archives and Resource Centre of Art in Yangon, the Malaysia Design Archives in Kuala Lumpur, the Indian Memory Project in Mumbai to name a few. Not to mention a growing network of scholars and researchers from all over the world making creative use of these archives. If there is a moment for collaboration, creating links of shared resources and networks of art hubs, institutional and independent alike, now is the time.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alphen, Ernst van. 2008. "Archival obsessions and obsessive archives", in: Michael Ann Holly and Marguard Smith (eds), *What is research in the visual arts? Obsession, archive, encounter*, pp. 65-84. London/New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Belting, Hans. 2013. "From world art to global art: view on a new panorama", in: Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg, and Peter Weibel (eds), *The global contemporary and the rise of new art worlds*, pp. 178-185. Karlsruhe, Germany:

- ZKM – Center for Art and Media; Cambridge, MA/London, UK: The MIT Press.
- Belting, Hans, Andrea Buddensieg, and Peter Weibel. 2013. “Branding; New art market and their strategies”, in: Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg, and Peter Weibel (eds), *The global contemporary and the rise of new art worlds*, pp. 128-137. Karlsruhe, Germany: ZKM – Center for Art and Media; Cambridge, MA/London, UK: The MIT Press.
- Belting, Hans, Andrea Buddensieg, and Peter Weibel. 2013. “Trans_actions: The Accelerated Art World 1989-2011”, in: Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg, and Peter Weibel (eds), *The global contemporary and the rise of new art worlds*, pp. 146-152. Karlsruhe, Germany: ZKM – Center for Art and Media; Cambridge, MA/London, UK: The MIT Press.
- Benedetti, Joan M (ed.). 2007. *Art museum libraries and librarianship*. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, Inc.
- Bianpoen, Carla, Wulan Dirgantoro, and Farah Wardani. 2007. *Indonesian women artists; The curtain opens*. Jakarta: Yayasan Seni Rupa Indonesia.
- Casid, Jill H. and Aruna D’Souza. 2014. *Art history in the wake of the global turn*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Dirgantoro, Wulan. 2017. *Feminisms and contemporary art in Indonesia*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Fine arts. 1995. “Fine arts; Southeast Asia”, in: *Singapore; Global city for the arts*. Singapore: Singapore Tourism Board and Ministry of Information and the Arts.
- Guggenheim. 2013. *Guggenheim UBS Map Global Art Initiative. Volume I: South and Southeast Asia*. New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications.
- Hoe, Sue Fern and Terrence Chong. 2018. “Nurturing the cultural dessert; The role of museums in Singapore”, in: Terrence Chong (ed.), *The state of the arts in Singapore; Policies and institutions*, pp. 241-265. Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.
- Kelleher, Christian. 2017. “Archives without archives; (Re)Locating and (re) defining the archive through post-custodial praxis”, in: Michelle Caswell, Ricardo Punzalan, and T. Kay Sangwand (eds), *Critical archival studies*. [Special Issue, *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1 No. 2 (2017).]
- Murphy, Bernice L (ed). 2016. *Museums, ethics and cultural heritage*. New York: Routledge.
- Murti, Yoshi Fajar Kresno. 2014. “Recycling! Archival work and archiving art and culture in Indonesia”, in: Farah Wardani and Yoshi Fajar Kresno Murti (eds), *Arsipelago; Archival work & archiving art & culture in Indonesia*, pp. iv-xv. Yogyakarta: Indonesian Visual Art Archive.
- Ooi, Can-Seng. 2018. “Global city for the arts; Weaving tourism into cultural policy”, in: Terrence Chong (ed.), *The state of the arts in Singapore; Policies and institutions*, pp. 165-179. Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.
- Poshyananda, Apinan et al. 1997. *Contemporary art in Asia; Traditions, tensions*. New York: Asia Society.

- Sabapathy, TK. 2010. *Road to nowhere; The quick rise and the long fall of art history in Singapore*. Singapore: The Art Gallery at the National Institute of Education.
- Sabapathy, TK. 2018. *Writing the modern; Selected texts on Art History in Singapore, Malaya and Southeast Asia*. Edited by Ahmad Mashadi, Susie Lingham, Peter Schoppert, and Joyce Toh. Singapore: NUS Press.
- Supangkat, Jim. 2005. "Art and politics in Indonesia", in: Caroline Turner (ed.), *Art and social change; Contemporary art in Asia and the Pacific*, pp. 218-228. Canberra: The Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University.
- Storer, Russell (ed.). 2017. *Between worlds; Raden Saleh and Juan Luna*. Singapore: National Gallery Singapore. [Exhibition catalogue, National Gallery Singapore.]
- Tan, Briget Tracy. 2011. *Women artists in Singapore*. Singapore: Select Publishing.
- Taylor, Nora. 2010. *Painters in Hanoi; An ethnography of Vietnamese art*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Turner, Caroline (ed.). 2005. *Art and social change; Contemporary art in Asia and the Pacific*. Canberra: The Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University.
- Wardani, Farah and Yoshi Fajar Krisna Murti (eds). 2014. *Arsipelago; Archival work & archiving art & culture in Indonesia*. Yogyakarta: Indonesian Visual Art Archive.
- Yap, June. 2013. "No country; Contemporary art for South and Southeast Asia", in: Guggenheim, *UBS Map Global Art Initiative. Volume I: South and Southeast Asia*, pp. 26-30. New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications.