

coinage in circulation in Siam during the reign of King Rama V.

It is perhaps surprising how few books have been published in English about Thai numismatics since Reginald Le May's classic 1932 work, *The Coinage of Siam*. This learned book certainly attempts to make up for that deficiency. It will probably appeal more to diehard numismatists as the writing style is serious and direct, and the weight and depth of information provided is overwhelming to the reader with little prior knowledge of the subject. As if the meticulous photos in the book are insufficient, the authors and publisher have also seen fit to enclose at the back of the book a DVD with more than one thousand high-resolution photographs of coins and other forms of money from the National Museum and private collections.

My main criticism of the book is that it could have used a good final edit, as typos and grammatical errors occur throughout. However, that is a minor quibble given the fine work of scholarship that the authors have produced on this important subject. The astounding wealth of information is sufficient that it is almost impossible to read this book at one attempt. It is certainly a reference book to which the reader can, and will, return repeatedly – whether to find new information on Siamese coins or related historical trivia.

Paul Bromberg

*Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Art: An Anthology* edited by Nora A. Taylor and Boreth Ly (Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2012). ISBN 978-0-87727-786-6 (hard) 978-0-87727-756-9 (soft)

Southeast Asian contemporary art still seems to be very much waiting in the wings, largely surpassed by art from China. It is still uncertain whether there is actually an eager audience for this medium. Looking back to the cultural history of the region, Southeast Asian contemporary and modern art practice has rarely been addressed collectively, largely due to the diverse and expansive expressions that have emerged over the past decades as a result of each nation's distinctive political and economic history. The first hand experiences of the essay contributors in this new volume offer intimate views on the complexities that identify their specific areas of expertise.

Though Southeast Asian contemporary art remains an under-explored and fertile field that deals critically with politics, materiality and aesthetics, this book offers different viewpoints of often deeply coded social and cultural messages. Given that the geography of Southeast Asia looms large, the chapters examine contemporary culture through works related to the individual, the community and the environments in which the writers have had their many forms of exchange. Simultaneously, the publication may be regarded as a cornerstone for the various academic and formalist narratives, with specific focus on current art practices of the region.

*Journal of the Siam Society*, Vol. 101, 2013

Art writing in past decades has been fixated on traditional art forms; this book might on one level redress that balance and situate Southeast Asian contemporary art practice at the centre of theoretical and critical art practices that are attempting to negotiate the global experiences of the 21st century and consider what Southeast Asian art practices might mean within this context. These issues form the broader remit of the book.

Opening with a luminous introduction by Nora Taylor linked by essays from a diverse group of scholars, the book brings to the fore the subtlety of Southeast Asia's hybrid artistic imagination and heterogeneous layers of discourse. Within this context, the analogical approach provides multiple and, at times, diffuse points of entry into the history of ideas and the dimension of experiences as they illuminate commentary on contemporary art.

The twelve essay contributors come from different vantage points, with some decidedly old school. This is not meant as a negative as the academic scrutiny of scholars such as John Clark, Kenneth M. George and Patrick D. Flores is highly regarded; they do come over as educational, though never overtly didactic. On the other hand, non-traditional voices such as Lee Weng Choy, Ashley Thompson and Việt Lê offer very different and a more contemporary approach to their subjects.

The book takes as its starting point John Clark's essay "The Southeast Asian Modern: Three Artists" that covers the emergence of modern painting practices in Thailand, Philippines and Indonesia. Clark examines the works of artists who embraced European tendencies and whose art has been a turning point in Modernist painting practices as he explores specific periods and the works of selected artists. Clark's emphasis on art practices during the 19th century is particularly relevant as his views illustrate the extent to which art developed along specific colonial connections.

On another level, the essay "Vietnamese Modern Art: An Unfinished Journey" by the late Boitran Huynh-Beattie repositions Vietnamese modern art practice within a more specific context, one that encompasses Vietnam's own self-conscious modern art practices and political legacies.

Clearly, Kenneth M. George is comfortable with Indonesian and knowledgeable about the influences of Islam on the aesthetics and art practices in the Malay Archipelago. The intimacy with which he addresses the nature of the Islamic faith through the complexities that have emerged as a result of the global resurgence of Islam in the 1980s and its impact on the contemporary Southeast Asian art scene may be attributed to his close academic relationship with some of Indonesia's most important artists. But just as he makes these artistic connections appear serendipitous, Clark's essay "The Cultural Politics of Modern and Contemporary Islamic Art in Southeast Asia" is open to further dialogue as he encompasses Southeast Asian Islamic art in a much more specific context: one that repositions Indonesia and Malaysia's own self conscious art practices and cultural nuances.

Thailand is the one country in Southeast Asia that was never directly impacted by colonialism; nevertheless the relationship between place and identity is deeply rooted. Sandra Cate's contribution "Thai Artists, Resisting the Age of Spectacle" examines shifts in material practice and art's relationship with form, material and political agency in Thai contemporary art practice over the past twenty years; and importantly, the relationship of art with democracy.

Việt Lê, on the other hand applies a very different approach to his subject as he addresses the artistic practices of Sandrine Liouquet and Tiffany Chung (each being representative of diasporic Vietnamese and women artists) as examples of Vietnamese artists whose international profiles are closely linked to Vietnam's socio-political and cultural history through his contribution titled "Many Returns: Contemporary Vietnamese Diasporic Artists-Organizers in Ho Chi Minh City". Việt Lê's awareness of the relationship between art and politics is impressive.

Through his essay "Of Trans(national) Subjects and Translation: The Art and Body Language of Sopheap Pich", Boreth Ly seamlessly connects the contemporary works of Sopheap Pich - Cambodia's most profiled contemporary artist - with everyday objects and situations as he relates his personal encounters with the artist. Boreth Ly's contribution clearly presents self expression as a gesture important in its own right, as it becomes the background to his essay while informing on politically and socially charged fields of identity.

"Titik Pertama, Titik Utama—First Dot, Main Dot: Creating and Connecting in Modern/Indigenous Javanese/Global Batik Art" by Astri Wright is a lengthy but in-depth essay on the relationship between 'craft and art' through the collaborative art practice of Agus Ismoyo and Nia Filam. Wright addresses broad aspects of their art that initially employed the 'craft' of Batik as a component of their expression, which ultimately resulted in more universal inclusions, such as their collaborations with indigenous groups from Australia. For the reader interested in the real position of Batik within Indonesia's modern culture, Wright's essay is a case in point.

Patrick D. Flores is one of Southeast Asia's most esteemed art historians. Through his essay "Turns in Tropics: Artist-Curator", he traces the artistic paths of four of Southeast Asia's most important art luminaries. The artistic careers of Redza Piyadasa, Jim Supangat, Raymundo Albano and Apinan Poshyananda from the 1960s through the late 1980s have been at the forefront of contemporary Southeast Asian art practice, sequencing the foregrounding of context for the work of younger artists. Moving from creative art making to curatorial practices, their contributions have been significant to current structuralist means of perceiving and interpreting the creative process.

Lee Weng Choy is one of Singapore's non-traditional voices. Known for his association with The Substation, Singapore's first independent contemporary arts centre, Lee's presentation on the Singapore contemporary art scene clearly defines

the conditions of modernity, particularly with relationship to modern art. He has written about and organised exhibitions that deal with contemporary issues relevant not only to Singapore, but identify the cultural psyche of Southeast Asia as a region. “The Assumption of Love; Friendship and the Search for Discursive Density” is clearly one of the most interesting chapters of the book.

Flaudette May V. Datuin looks at the art of Thai artist Phaptawan Suwannakudt and of Filipina artists Rowena Seloterio and (California-based) Gina Osterloh. She examines through her essay “Uncommon Sense: ‘Empty the Visual from Eyes of Flesh’” their feminist art practices with a similar sensitivity that defines their art. Further, she seeks to define their art under conditions of modernity, particularly in relationship to emotions that often impact artistic practice.

Ashley Thompson, on the other hand deals with the situation of emotions in a totally different vein. “Mnemotechnical Politics: Rithy Panh’s Cinematic Archive and the Return of Cambodia’s Past” is at once an academic and poignant documentation of Cambodia’s recent political history.

The final chapter in the book is a transcript of an interview by Grant Kester of Jay Koh and Chu Yuan, who have initiated and developed a series of art and cultural initiatives in Myanmar and other locales. While this narrative differs greatly from the other chapters in the book, it does address the conditions within which professionals contend, in this instance Myanmar.

The book clearly straddles a variety of artistic experiences that have emerged in Southeast Asia’s contemporary and modern art history as it engages in dialogue that stresses the region’s artistic wealth and ambitions that cut a broad swath through the region. Borders can never be fully crossed; but understood and studied together, this anthology depicts Southeast Asia as socially and politically charged fields of artistic action, and illustrates how the reality of place and its cultural associations take on deeper meanings.

Shireen Naziree

*Creolization and Diaspora in the Portuguese Indies: The Social World of Ayutthaya, 1640-1720* by Stefan Halikowski Smith (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011). Hardbound: ISBN 978 90 04 19048 1

Compared to the other Europeans at Ayutthaya, the Portuguese are relatively understudied, especially in English-language works, and especially beyond their early presence in the 16th century. The Campos article on “Early Portuguese Accounts of Thailand” in the *JSS* seventy years ago is the only broad survey in English and limited to the 16th century. Pinto is the only travel memoir available in English translation. Suthachai Yimprasert, possibly the only Thai scholar who has learnt to read Old Portuguese, failed to concentrate his doctoral research on Siam or

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