

MEDIA RELEASE

DISCOVER THE HISTORY OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN VIDEO ART WITH NATIONAL GALLERY SINGAPORE'S SEE ME, SEE YOU: EARLY VIDEO INSTALLATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

A two-part series that explores a gap in the art history of Southeast Asia featuring video artworks from the 1980s and 1990s



Singapore, 2 May 2023 –The National Gallery Singapore is taking visitors on a journey back in time with an exciting new exhibition that explores the history of video installation art, following the successful *Nam June Paik: The Future is Now* exhibition. This free exhibition, titled "**See Me, See You: Early Video Installation of Southeast Asia**," is a two-part series offering a fascinating look at the pivotal moments when video installation first emerged in the 1980s and 1990s.

Bringing to the forefront are pioneering Southeast Asian artists from Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Singapore. The artists broke through conventional art forms of painting and sculpture that was prevalent at that time. Through experimentation, they combined installation, performance, audience participation together with video, leading to a new form of art as a result of their interdisciplinary approach.

To enable visitors to experience these works, the Gallery has commissioned the recreation of several of these artworks, many of which have been forgotten and have not been exhibited for decades. The exhibition also highlights the new challenge of preserving time-based media, ensuring that these pioneering video works are available for future generations to enjoy.

Dr. Eugene Tan, Director of National Gallery Singapore, says, “The Gallery is excited to present *See Me, See You: Early Video Installations of Southeast Asia*. As a dedicated museum to modern Southeast Asian art, we wanted to highlight the important contribution of video art pioneers and fill the gap in Southeast Asian art history. Video installation is commonly found in contemporary art and it's easy to forget that technology was not always as advanced as it is today. Through careful recreation and staging, these early video works are now available for visitors to experience. We hope that this exhibition will enable visitors to gain new perspectives on the evolution of modern art in Southeast Asia and better understand and appreciate the region's artistic history.”

See Me, See You: Early Video Installation of Southeast Asia Exhibition

Located at the Gallery's Ngee Ann Kongsi Concourse Gallery, the first edition of *See Me, See You* features five Southeast Asian artists with five video art installations.

Choose (1982) by Johnny Manahan may be the earliest surviving video artwork in Southeast Asia, and the artist is the first Filipino artist to experiment with video as a medium. The work highlights televisions' association with mass entertainment and the challenge to focus on multiple screens at once. It continues to be relevant today where multitasking and constant stimulation are the norm. It serves as a self-reflexive commentary on the medium of video and television through five video segments, showcasing the artist's deep understanding of the medium from his work in the entertainment industry.

How to Explain Art to a Bangkok Cock (1985) by Thai artist Apinan Poshyananda makes a return to the Gallery with a 2019 version of Apinan's early work that incorporates LCD screens showing digitised footage from the original video the artist had made. The artwork takes a satirical approach to the iconic *Mona Lisa*, with Apinan humorously explaining the painting's images to chicks, chickens and turkeys.

The artwork *See Me, See You (Revenge of the Giraffe)* (1986) by Jean Marie Syjuco from the Philippines will feature an interactive piece involving an abstracted giraffe sculpture. This sculpture allows visitors to open a lid on its back, look through its peep hole and talk to it. The work also captures visitors' interactions through the live feed of a video camera, which can be viewed through a TV located at the entrance of the museum. Such unique and engaging experiences are a highlight of the exhibition, which showcases the seamless fusion of art, playfulness, and technology.

The fourth video art installation by Malaysian artist Baharudin Mohd Arus was inspired by the ideas of media theorist Marshall McLuhan. Known as *Medium is the Message (After Marshall McLuhan)* (1989), the artwork involves a moving automaton equipped with a video camera which displays live feed on one of the two televisions it encircles. The other television shows a video montage of clips of circumambulation in nature and social customs as well as cyclical patterns of everyday life. Through his work, the artist contends technology's increasing proximity to life.

Finally, the last artwork of the series features a multi-channel video installation, titled *Sin of Apathy* (1991), created by Singaporean artist Chng Nai Wee. First presented at the National Museum Art Gallery's *National Sculpture Exhibition* in 1991, the artwork consists of twelve



video channels and delivers a poignant commentary on societal apathy. Through intense and passionate depictions of figures who embody six forms of crisis in society: War, Disease, Poverty, Famine, Disaster and Refugee, the installation challenges viewers to confront their own indifference and take action. *Sin of Apathy* powerfully embodies the artist's belief in the transformative power of art and its ability to shape public discourse.

The first edition of *See Me, See You: Early Video Installation of Southeast Asia* will run from 5 May 2023 to 17 September 2023. The second edition will run from 13 October 2023 to 4 February 2024 and feature artists Heri Dono (Indonesia), Hasnul Saidon (Malaysia), Ray Langenbach (USA), Vincent Leow (Singapore) and Krisna Murti (Indonesia).

***See Me, See You: Early Video Installation of Southeast Asia* will be displayed Ngee Ann Kongsi Concourse Gallery, Concourse Level, City Hall Wing. Admission is Free.**

More information can be found in the following annex or visit nationalgallery.sg/seemeseeyou. Media assets may be found [here](#).

- *Annex A: See Me, See You Artwork Details and Artist Bio*
- *Annex B: See Me, See You Programmes*

National Gallery Singapore

Yvonne Lim

9647 0664

yvonne.lim@nationalgallery.sg

Ogilvy on behalf of National Gallery

Singapore

Ada Tong

9297 0748

ada.tong@ogilvy.com


About National Gallery Singapore

National Gallery Singapore is a leading visual arts institution, which oversees the world's largest public collection of Singapore and Southeast Asian modern art. Situated at the birthplace of modern Singapore, in the heart of the Civic District, the Gallery is housed in two national monuments—City Hall and former Supreme Court—that have been beautifully restored and transformed into this exciting 64,000 square metre venue. Reflecting Singapore's unique heritage and geographical location, the Gallery aims to be a progressive museum that creates dialogues between the art of Singapore, Southeast Asia and the world to foster and inspire a creative and inclusive society. This is reflected in our collaborative research, education, long-term and special exhibitions, and innovative programming. The Gallery also works with international museums such as Centre Pompidou, Musée d'Orsay, Tate Britain, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (MOMAT) and National Museum of Modern and

Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA), to jointly present Southeast Asian art in the global context, positioning Singapore as a key node in the global visual arts scene.

In 2020, the Gallery was the only museum in Southeast Asia that received a ranking in The Art Newspaper’s annual global survey of attendance at art museums, taking 20th place. It was the first museum in Asia to receive the Children in Museums Award by the European Museum Academy and Hands On! International Association of Children in Museums in 2018. The Gallery also won the awards for “Best Theme Attraction” at TTG Travel Awards 2017, “Best Attraction Experience”, “Breakthrough Contribution to Tourism” and “Best Customer Service (Attractions)” at the prestigious Singapore Tourism Awards in 2016 for its role in adding to the vibrancy of Singapore’s tourism landscape.

ANNEX A: ARTWORK HIGHLIGHTS AND ARTIST BIO

Artwork Highlights	Description
 <p>Johnny Manahan. <i>Choose</i>. 1982. U-matic converted to digital video exhibited in 2016 on a single monitor with another monitor off. Gift of the Manahan family. Collection of National Gallery Singapore. Image courtesy of Joseph Nair / Memphis West Pictures.</p>	<p><i>Choose</i> (1982) by Johnny Manahan</p> <p>Manahan suggests that while TV is known for entertaining many people at once, it also has a special ability to provide private enjoyment. The choice that the television affords—in where, when, and how a viewer can watch its content and what content they wish to consume—gives it a magnetic, even magical, appeal. This freedom of choice is shown in the set-up of the installation with each displaying different parts of the same video at different times. Viewers can pick which monitor and parts of the video they want to focus on.</p> <p>The video comprises five short video segments, each ranging between one to 11 minutes in length. Notably, <i>Choose</i> is the first video work in the region with documented multi-channel intent and the first to challenge the viewer’s capacity to give proper attention to multiple screens.</p> <p><i>Johnny Manahan</i> (b. 1947, Philippines) became a visual artist and a television director in the early 1970s in the Philippines after graduating with a degree in art history from the University of California Berkeley. He is the first Filipino artist to engage with video as a medium, having created his first video work in 1972. Besides the moving image, Manahan has worked in a variety of media, from abstract paintings to photography to sculptures using ready-made objects. He was recognised with the Thirteen Artists award by the Cultural Center of the Philippines in 1972 and works in Philippine entertainment.</p>



Apinan Poshyananda. *How to Explain Art to a Bangkok Cock*. 1985, remade 2019. Painted crates and LCD monitors; Video, 5 channels, each 3:4 format, colour and sound (mono), varying durations.

How to Explain Art to a Bangkok Cock (1985) by Thai artist Apinan Poshyananda

Embedded with playful motifs and a curious video of an unnamed ideologue explaining the Mona Lisa to live poultry, Apinan Poshyananda's ***How to Explain Art to a Bangkok Cock*** is a youthful, energised provocation about the city of Bangkok.

Viewers speculated that the different types of live poultry in the video symbolised different tiers of the art world in Bangkok. The artist's intent was to draw a parallel between his own position as a newly minted lecturer at Chulalongkorn University and the young and impressionable undergraduate students who, like chicks, were docile and eager to learn.

Apinan Poshyananda (b. 1956, Thailand) is a curator and arts administrator who works with contemporary art museums in Asia, Australia, Europe and the USA. His solo video installations have been exhibited at the Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art, Bangkok; Herbert Johnson Art Museum, New York and National Gallery of Art, Bangkok. He serves as the Chief Executive and Artistic Director of the Bangkok Art Biennale and is a Member of Art & Culture Development Committee, One Bangkok, and was previously Director-General to the Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, and Permanent Secretary and Acting Minister to the Ministry of Culture in Thailand. Apinan holds a Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts (Honours) in Fine Arts from Edinburgh University and a PhD in Art History from Cornell University.



Jean Marie Syjuco, *See Me, See You (Revenge of the Giraffe)*, 1986, paint on wood, lens, bulbs, sound box, buzzer, video camera, books, shelves, vinyl, cathode-ray tube (CRT) television. Collection of the artist. Image courtesy of Pinaglabanan Galleries.

See Me, See You (Revenge of the Giraffe) (1986) by Jean Marie Syjuco

Jean Marie Syjuco's interactive installation transforms viewers into both voyeurs and performers. By weaving in elements of fun and play, Syjuco invites viewers to explore and participate in the artwork. Surrounded by graphics of giraffes and acacia trees on the walls, viewers may interact in different ways with an abstracted, wooden female giraffe sculpture installed with a platform to stand on and read a selection of books and the artist's own handwritten notes on giraffes.

All the actions and reactions of the viewers are captured on a closed-circuit television (CCTV) camera and livestreamed on a television that is situated in a separate, physical space, for other people to observe from a distance. The combination of these components alludes to the title of the work.

Jean Marie Syjuco (b. 1952, Philippines) is a visual artist whose practice spans painting, performance, sculpture, installation and video. She is well known for performance art and the collaborative nature of

her works. She won the gold medal for Sculpture in the 1980 Art Association of the Philippines Annual Art Competition for her minimal nylon string installation titled *Traps: A Spatial Approach to Mass and Insinuation*. She is also a recipient of the 1990 Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) Thirteen Artists Award. She is the co-founder and chief curator of ART LAB: Atelier Cesare and Jean Marie Syjuco, a developmental art facility in Manila focused on multi-media art experimentation.



Baharudin Mohd Arus. *The Medium is the Message (After Marshall McLuhan)*. 1989. Installation view from Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), 1989. Collection of the artist. © Baharudin Arus

Medium is the Message (After Marshall McLuhan)
(1989) by Baharudin Mohd Arus

Baharudin Mohd Arus' artwork features a moving automaton equipped with a video camera which displays live feed on one of the two televisions it encircles.

Supporting the idea of media theorist Marshall McLuhan that "The Medium is the Message", Baharudin Mohd Arus believes that the viewer is not just a passive observer of artwork but becomes a part of it by appearing on the live video.

The viewer's participation in the live feed speaks to how video cameras, which became increasingly portable and affordable, enabled ordinary people to create videos and document their own lives through the moving image. In a time when televised content was largely determined by broadcast companies, corporations and the government, video cameras were a means for individuals to shape the media.

Baharudin Mohd Arus (b. 1951, Malaysia) is one of Malaysia's pioneering media artists. Interested in motors from a young age, Baharudin has been making robotic sculptures and kinetic artworks since 1989. He participated in the Balai Seni Visual Negara's Young Contemporary Art Exhibition in 1969, 1971, 1975 and 1981. Baharudin is a professor at Universiti Malaysia Sabah and has also written several papers on fine art, art education, the indigenous art of Malaysia, the art of Brunei and Islamic art history. He received his BFA and PhD from Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Malaysia and his MA from the University of Tulsa, USA. He is currently a lecturer in the Art and Design faculty at City University Malaysia.



Chng Nai Wee. *Sin of Apathy*. 1991. Installation view of the *National Sculpture Exhibition*, 1991. Image courtesy of Koh Nguang How.

Sin of Apathy (1991) by Chng Nai Wee

One of the earliest multi-channel video works made in Singapore, *Sin of Apathy* was conceptualised by Chng Nai Wee in response to an open call for artwork entries to the 1991 *National Sculpture Exhibition*.

Chng created *Sin of Apathy* to question the contemporary condition of Singaporean society and confront the problem of indifference.

Within this darkened space, the viewer is enveloped within a cacophonous field of both monochromatic and coloured screens. By enclosing the viewer with 12 television monitors, the artist prompts viewers to focus on their individual capacity to receive and process information. The artwork features six figures who embody six forms of crises in society: War, Disease, Poverty, Famine, Disaster and Refugee.

Chng Nai Wee (b. 1969, Singapore), a practising ophthalmic surgeon, is also an artist. Chng's works are multidisciplinary, often synthesising art, technology, and medicine, and made with a range of mediums and approaches, from mixed-media paintings to installations. He attended part-time classes at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, Singapore and graduated from the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland and National University of Singapore, and attended Yale University School of Architecture. He has received the Singapore Art Society Dr Tan Tze Chor Art Award, the National Art Council Young Artist Award, and Honorable Mentions at the Phillip Morris ASEAN Art Awards.

ANNEX B: PROGRAMMES

Talks and Panel Discussions	
<i>Curators and Artists in Conversation</i>	
Date and Time:	TBC
Venue:	City Hall Wing, Level B1, The Ngee Ann Kongsi Auditorium, National Gallery Singapore
Admission Fees:	Free, Registration required
Description:	Join us for a panel discussion featuring exhibition curators Clarissa Chikiamco and Cheng Jia Yun, as well as artists Dr Baharudin Mohd Arus, and Jean Marie Syjuci, as they delve into the curatorial narratives and the dynamic process of collaboration between curators and artists in the context of the exhibition

Artist Talk Chng Nai Wee	
Date and Time:	18 August, Saturday, 3pm
Venue:	Supreme CourtWing, Level 4M, Glass Room
Admission Fees:	Free, Registration required Link
Description:	Hear from artist Dr Chng Nai Wee as he delves into his artwork <i>Sin of Apathy</i> (1991) and the development of his artistic practice.
Family Programmes	
Date and Time:	30 June – 1 July, Friday – Saturday 2.30pm – 3.15pm 3.30pm – 4.15pm
Venue:	City Hall Wing, Level 1, Keppel Centre for Art Education
Admission Fees:	Free
Description:	Through guided discussions led by a facilitator, families will deepen their connections with selected artworks, as they discuss the artists' inspirations and themes addressed in the exhibition.

PUBLIC PROGRAMMES

Resonates with Residency – Zai Tang

Artist, composer and sound designer Zai Tang presents a multi-programme response to the exhibitions *See Me, See You* and *Between Declarations and Dreams*, for the *Resonates With Residency*. Inspired by the video installations in both shows, Zai will develop his own time-based interventions, reinterpreting the content and medium of the seminal works into various performances, workshops and activations.