

NATIONAL GALLERY SINGAPORE

# BETWEEN DECLARATIONS & DREAMS:

ART OF SOUTHEAST ASIA  
SINCE THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY



UOB SOUTHEAST ASIA GALLERY

LET *Art* SURPRISE YOU

# BETWEEN DECLARATIONS & DREAMS:

ART OF SOUTHEAST ASIA  
SINCE THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY



Pratuang Emjaroen. *Red Morning Glory and Rotten Gun*. 1976. Oil on canvas, 133 x 174 cm. This work of art has been adopted by Sheila Lim Siok Keng.

Housed in the former Supreme Court building, the UOB Southeast Asia Gallery presents over 300 artworks that trace the shared artistic impulses across Southeast Asia since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The exhibition navigates the art history of Southeast Asia, showing how the region's artists continuously engaged with global artistic concerns as they negotiated the meaning of art and sought to reinvent vernacular traditions. Displayed in a largely chronological sequence, the exhibition is punctuated by key turning points in artistic sensibilities, demonstrating that art is inseparably linked to the region's tumultuous social and political histories.

The title of the exhibition is derived from the writing of one of Indonesia's most cherished poets, Chairil Anwar. In his 1948 poem "Karawang-Bekasi," Anwar laments the massacre of villagers in West Java by Dutch colonial forces, giving vent to the desire for national independence at the time. His words could be said to encapsulate the experiences of many artists in the region, caught between declarations and dreams: between a recognition of the past and aspiration for the future.

## KARAWANG-BEKASI

BY CHAIRIL ANWAR

We who are lying, now, between Karawang-Bekasi  
We can no longer cry out "Freedom", no longer lift our rifles.

But who still cannot hear our moans?  
still see us marching forward, unafraid.  
We speak to you out of the evening's suspended silence  
When the chest feels empty, when clocks tick away time

We died young. All that remains of us: bones covered with dust.  
Remember, remember us.

We tried, all that we could  
But the job isn't finished, not yet  
account for the meaning of four thousand,  
five thousand lives.

We're only scattered bones  
But they belong to you  
And you'll decide the value of these scattered bones

Either we died for freedom, for victory, for hope  
or for nothing,  
We don't know, we can no longer say  
Only you can speak, now

We speak to you out of the evening's suspended silence  
When the chest feels empty, when clocks ticks away time

Remember, remember us  
Let our spirit live on  
Guarding Sukarno  
guarding Hatta  
guarding Sjahrir

We are now corpses  
Give us meaning  
Keep watch over the line between declarations and dreams

Remember, remember us  
who survive only in these dust covered bones  
Thousands of us, lying between Karawang-Bekasi

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Chairil Anwar, "Karawang-Bekasi," *The Voice of the Night: Complete Poetry and Prose of Chairil Anwar*, trans. Burton Raffel (Athens, OH: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1993), 123. This material is used with permission of Ohio University Press, [www.ohioswallow.com](http://www.ohioswallow.com).



Juan Luna. *España y Filipinas (Spain and the Philippines)*. 1884.  
Oil on canvas, 229.5 × 79.5 cm.

#### GALLERY 1 & 2

### **AUTHORITY & ANXIETY: 19<sup>TH</sup> TO EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

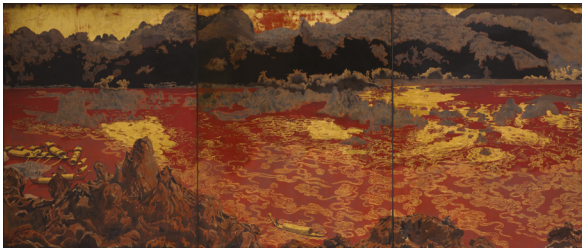
Drastic cultural and political changes swept through Southeast Asia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most significant was the spread of European colonial powers in the region, and the subsequent influence of Western art on local forms of visual expression.

Some artists and artisans began to use new tools, styles and genres of art, which signalled a break with tradition and marked the beginning of the modern.

This shift affected different areas of artistic production. The artworks in this section exemplify this range—from Western-style fine art like oil painting, to other forms of image-making such as prints, photographs, illustrations and maps.



Raden Saleh. *Wounded Lion*. 1839. Oil on canvas, 88 × 108.5 cm.



Nguyen Van Ty. *Panorama of Cho Bo*. 1943. Lacquer on board, 100 × 231 cm.

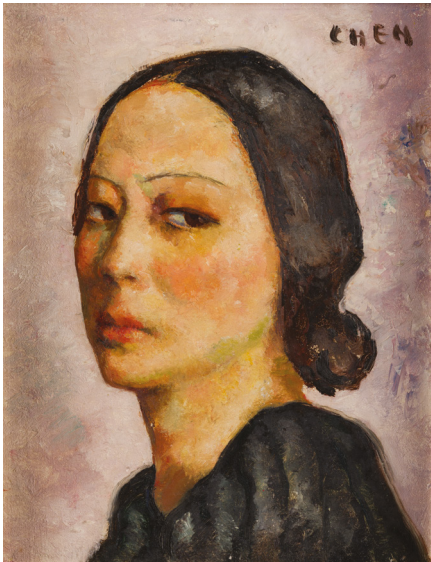
### GALLERY 3, 4 & 5

## IMAGINING COUNTRY & SELF: 1900s–1940s

By the 1920s, the consolidation of colonial rule was complete for most parts of Southeast Asia. As a result, paintings of picturesque landscapes became more popular. These showed the land uninterrupted by challenges to authority.

The growth of art schools and institutions led artists to develop a stronger sense of professional identity. A new visual language emerged from the synthesis of local and Western styles and techniques. Breaking new ground, two of the key innovations of this time were silk and lacquer paintings in Vietnam.

Concurrently, some artists began to react against academic convention by exploring “new” and “progressive” ways to represent their realities.



Georgette Chen. *Self Portrait*. c. 1934.  
Oil on canvas, 35 × 27 cm. Gift of Lee Foundation.

### GALLERY 6, 7, 8, 9 & 10

## MANIFESTING THE NATION: 1950s–1970s

A rapid succession of conflicts in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century—from the aftermath of World War II to the tensions of the Cold War—had far-reaching consequences in the region. Power dynamics shifted, the struggle for independence intensified and art became increasingly politicised.

A new generation of artists used their work as a rallying cry. They turned away from idealism to more realist depictions, drawing on this authenticity to incite patriotism and social change.

At the same time, many artists were eager to be a part of the international shift towards abstract art. They explored formal concerns such as colour, shape and composition, with some artists simultaneously turning to their own cultural roots for inspiration, investigating local traditions, materials and subject matter.



Itji Tarmizi. *Menyongsong Fajar (Watching the Sunrise)*. c. 1950s–1960s.  
Oil on canvas, 132.5 × 191.5 cm.



Edgar Talusan Fernandez  
*Ang Tao*  
1978, recreated 2019  
Plaster and canvas,  
202 × 90 × 102 cm

## RE:DEFINING ART: 1970s AND AFTER

Art entered a new era in the 1970s. Avant-garde experiments proliferated across the region, transforming the ways in which art was made, displayed and received.

Critical responses towards certain political regimes, the Cold War and Vietnam War, and consumer capitalism led artists to challenge dominant accounts of history. They started making art that offered bold alternative interpretations of the past as well as present-day conditions, and embraced interdisciplinary approaches to convey their complexities. This expanded the field beyond painting and sculpture to photography, video, performance and site-specific participatory events.



Montien Boonma. *The Pleasure of Being, Crying, Dying and Eating*. 1993, reconstructed 2015. Ceramic bowls, wooden tables, cloth and brass, dimensions variable. Collection of Singapore Art Museum.



Pinaree Sanpitak. *Smiling Body*. 1997. Acrylic and gold leaves on canvas, 221 x 190 cm. Collection of Singapore Art Museum.

# DALAM SOUTHEAST ASIA

DALAM SOUTHEAST ASIA IS LOCATED  
BESIDE UOB SOUTHEAST ASIA GALLERY 10.

Dalam Southeast Asia is an experimental project space that asks critical questions and explores lesser-known narratives in Southeast Asian art. Exhibitions showcased in Dalam Southeast Asia are refreshed periodically.



Sun Yee. *Storm*. 1959. Oil on canvas, 50 × 60 cm.

## FIGURING A SCENE

ON DISPLAY FROM 5 APR 2024–23 MAR 2025

This exhibition explores the creation of art in specific contexts, focusing on the transformation of nature or events into meaningful expressions. It delves into the process of "figuring," where the viewer's encounter with art becomes a way to make sense of the world.

It emphasises the significance of art as it comes to life in various settings, much like a scene in a story or drama, through 6 episodes: The shadow, the fruit, the tree, the air, the wax and the city.



Lim Yew Kuan. *After Fire*. 1966. Woodblock print on paper, 48.4 × 62.5 cm.

The UOB Southeast Asia Gallery spans three floors of the Supreme Court Wing (Levels 3–5). Look out for these artworks as you explore the exhibition.

**SUPREME COURT WING**

**LEVEL 3**

**UOB SOUTHEAST ASIA GALLERY**

**Special Exhibition:**

*Law of the Land: Highlights of Singapore's Constitutional Documents*

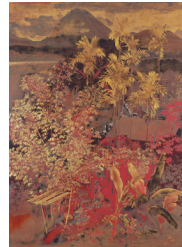
Edgar Talusan Fernandez  
*Ang Tao*



Itji Tarmizi  
*Menyongsong Fajar*  
(Watching the Sunrise)



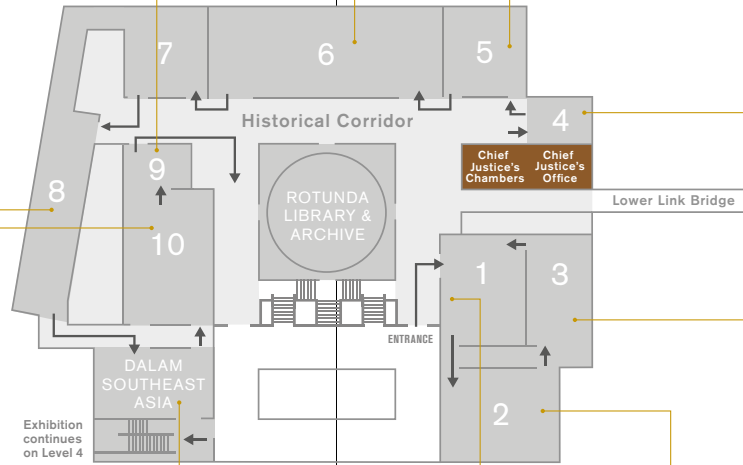
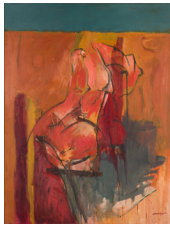
Nguyen Gia Tri  
*Landscape of Vietnam*



U Ba Nyan (attrib.)  
*At the Jetty*



Awang bin Sitali  
*Fragment*



Fernando Cueto Amorsolo  
*Fishpond in Malabon*  
© Fernando C. Amorsolo Art Foundation, Inc.



Pratuang Emjaroen  
*Red Morning Glory and Rotten Gun*



Lim Yew Kuan  
*After Fire*



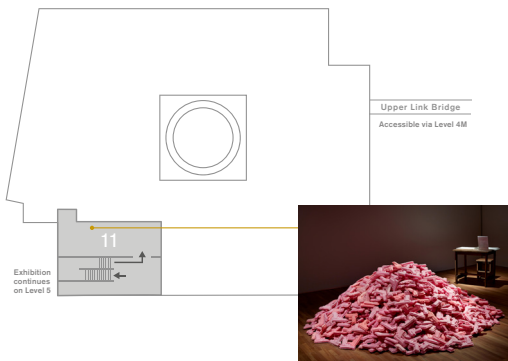
Phra Soraklikhit  
*Portrait of King Nangklao*



Raden Saleh  
*Boschbrand (Forest Fire)*

## LEVEL 4

### UOB SOUTHEAST ASIA GALLERY

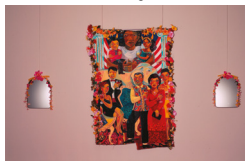


FX Harsono  
*What Would You Do If These Crackers Were Real Pistols?*

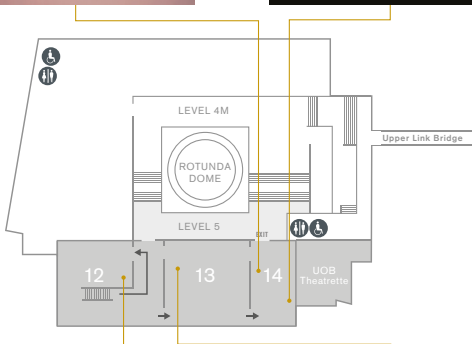
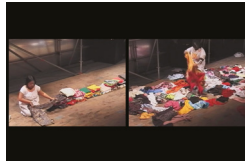
## LEVEL 5

### UOB SOUTHEAST ASIA GALLERY

Wong Hoy Cheong  
*The Nouveau Riche, the Elephant, the Foreign Maid, or the Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*



Melati Suryodarmo  
*Der Sekundentrum*



Tran Trong Vu  
*Rainwater Even Though Salty is not Speechless*



Vann Nath  
*The Commandant*

## SUPPORT THE GALLERY



Latiff Mohidin  
*Pagoda II*  
1964  
Oil on canvas  
99.4 × 99.2 cm  
This work of art has been adopted by BinjaiTree in memory of Chia Yew Kay and Tan Kim Siew

**National Gallery Singapore** oversees the world's largest institutional collection of modern and contemporary art from Singapore and Southeast Asia. The collection began with a donation of over 110 artworks in 1960 by philanthropist Dato Loke Wan Tho. Since then, the collection has grown to over 8,600 artworks and forms the critical foundation for the Gallery's research and exhibitions.

### MAKE A GIFT OF ART

We accept donations of artworks that are aligned with our acquisitions policy and collections strategy. If you think your artwork will enhance and fit into our collection, you are invited to contact us at [collections@nationalgallery.sg](mailto:collections@nationalgallery.sg).

### [ADOPT NOW]

You can now own a piece of art from as little as \$50. Your contribution will create a legacy and help us to build a collection of Singapore and Southeast Asia art that tells our history for generations to come. All art adopters are acknowledged for their contributions.

To find out more, please scan the QR code.



### SUPPORT US

Your support enables more inspiring exhibitions and helps strengthen the depth and breadth of our collection. By becoming a donor, you can help us further our mission to make art accessible to all.

To find out more, please scan the QR code.



All donations will be acknowledged and eligible for tax deductions as stipulated by IRAS guidelines. For more information, please email [aaa.programme@nationalgallery.sg](mailto:aaa.programme@nationalgallery.sg). For information on ways of giving, please visit [nationalgallery.sg/join-give/support-the-gallery](http://nationalgallery.sg/join-give/support-the-gallery).



## THINGS TO DO

### Kids Audio Tour

Follow Sheera the Tiger as she escapes a forest fire and looks for her partner Sherman on a journey through artworks from different countries. This and other tours are available on the Gallery Explorer app.



SCAN TO DOWNLOAD  
GALLERY EXPLORER APP

## UOB SOUTHEAST ASIA GALLERY HIGHLIGHTS TOUR

English | Thu–Sun | 3.30pm

Mandarin | Sat–Sun | 3pm

To reserve a slot, register online or proceed to Visitor Services at Padang Atrium, Level 1 at least 30 minutes before the tour starts. Limited slots are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Tour participants should obtain or purchase admission tickets prior to joining a tour.

## GENERAL ADMISSION

Purchase your gallery passes and register for programmes and tours at [web.nationalgallery.sg/#/gallery-passes](http://web.nationalgallery.sg/#/gallery-passes)  
Note: Not applicable to Concession passes



SCAN TO GET PASSES

## BECOME A GALLERY MEMBER

Enjoy admission privileges, first dibs at selected programmes, as well as dining and retail discounts!



SCAN FOR MORE INFO

## OPENING HOURS

Daily 10am–7pm

General ticket sales end 30 minutes before closing time.

## CATALOGUE

An exhibition catalogue featuring rich illustrations and curatorial essays, as well as an album containing 100 highlights from the exhibition, is available for purchase at our museum store, City Hall Wing, Level 1.

The UOB Southeast Asia Gallery is made possible through a gift by UOB.

On cover: Raden Saleh. *Boschbrand* (Forest Fire). 1849. Oil on canvas, 300 × 396 cm. This work of art has been adopted by the Yong Hon Kong Foundation.

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