



# **SPAFACON2021**

**Papers from the SEAMEO SPAFA International Conference on  
SOUTHEAST ASIAN ARCHAEOLOGY AND FINE ARTS**

**13 - 17 December 2021**

**Editor: Noel Hidalgo Tan**

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# INTRODUCTION

This volume contains the extended abstracts from the papers presented at the SEAMEO SPAFA International Conference on Southeast Asian Archaeology and Fine Arts, which was held online from 13 to 17 December 2021. Also known as the SPAFACON2021, this conference was organised online due to the pandemic. Despite the disruption brought about by Covid-19 to our in-person events, training programmes and field research, it is heartening to see that archaeology and cultural heritage has continued under new modes of communication and collaboration.

This fourth iteration of the SPAFACON is also scheduled a year earlier than our usual triennial cycle to commemorate the 50th anniversary of SEAMEO initiating a centre dedicated towards archaeology and the fine arts. Over the past year, SPAFA has also been highlighting this legacy of international cooperation and capacity-building by sharing our photographic archives on our social media.

I am delighted by the high level of enthusiasm and intellectual curiosity brought by the participants to the conference. During our call for papers we received close to 90 submissions, but owing to the pressures of time and the online format, we were only able to accept 34 papers for the conference. The variety of papers present here, although a small set compared with our usual proceedings, reflects the breadth of the centre's ambit – covering not just archaeology, but also performing arts, visual arts, museum studies, and other aspects of Southeast Asian cultural heritage.

I would like to thank all the participants, without whom this conference would not be possible in its present form, in particular, our Governing Board members who represent every country in Southeast Asia, and to the Ministry of Culture, Thailand and the Ministry of Education, Thailand for their long-standing support of SEAMEO SPAFA and its activities.



Mrs Somlak Charoenpot

Centre Director

SEAMEO SPAFA



# The Factors of Market Success and Failure of Contemporary Artists from ASEAN countries

ปัจจัยทางการตลาดที่ทำให้ศิลปินร่วมสมัยจากประเทศอาเซียนประสบความสำเร็จ  
หรือล้มเหลว

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## Abstract

The market of contemporary art from Southeast Asia hasn't been explored in-depth, despite its rise in sales and notoriety over the last two decades at national and international levels. Our aim is to identify the factors of success and failure of contemporary artists from ASEAN countries in the global art market. To do so, we map the trajectories of those artists and evaluate the role of the other stakeholders of the art world. Our methodology relies on a multidisciplinary approach, balancing quantitative and qualitative data. The period of study focuses on the art market data since 2000.

## Keywords

ASEAN; Art Market; Contemporary Art; Emerging Market Economy; Southeast Asian Art

The 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Art Sales of Christie's Hong Kong on May 24, 2021 have confirmed the steady growth of Southeast Asian contemporary art. Breaking conjointly two record prices, Filipino artist Ronald Ventura and Indonesian artist Christine Ay Tjoe (both born in 1973) have seen their market price skyrocketing with two recent paintings: *Party Animal* (2017) sold for US\$2,504,868<sup>1</sup> and *Layers with More Circles* (2011) sold for US\$1,732,106<sup>2</sup> respectively.

Ventura and Ay Tjoe are not isolated cases, but representative of the two leading countries of the market of Southeast Asian contemporary art: Indonesia and the Philippines (Figure 1). In this regard, it's worth observing that the performances of the contemporary art market aren't indexed on the degree of economic advancement of the country of origin. The most successful contemporary artists in ASEAN are from countries ranked in the second third according to GDP per capita (Figure 2).

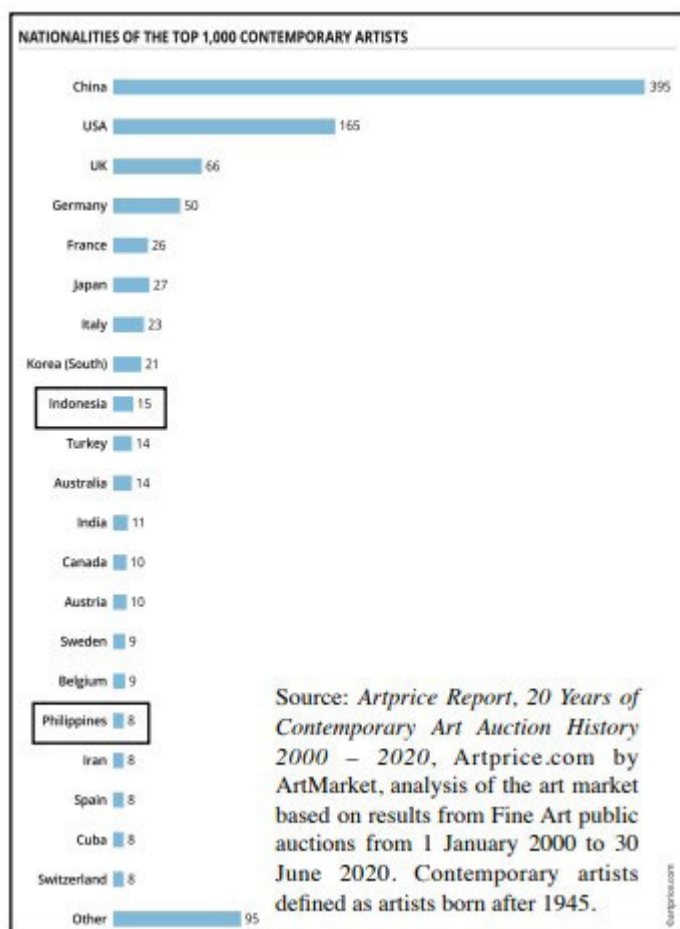


Figure 1

1 HKD 19,450,000 [Estimate HKD 800,000 - HKD 1,200,000] Live Auction 16897 - 20th and 21st Century Art Evening Sale.

2 HKD 13,450,000 [Estimate: HKD 5,500,000 - HKD 8,500,000] Live Auction 16897 - 20th and 21st Century Art Evening Sale, 'Property from and Important Asian Private Collection'.

#	Country	GDP per Capita (nominal, 2021, USD)
1	Singapore	\$62,113
2	Brunei Darussalam	\$26,274
3	Malaysia	\$11,378
4	Thailand	\$7,675
<b>5</b>	<b>Indonesia</b>	<b>\$4,287</b>
6	Vietnam	\$3,759
<b>7</b>	<b>Philippines</b>	<b>\$3,602</b>
8	Laos	\$2,614
9	Cambodia	\$1,680
10	Myanmar	\$1,441
Source: International Monetary Fund (IMF), 2021		

Figure 2

#	Artist Name	Nationality	Birth year	Record price at auction	Auction year	Title of the sold work	Media	Auction House
1	Ronald Ventura	Filipino	1973	2,504,868	2021	Party Animal, 2017	acrylic and oil on canvas	Christie's Hong Kong
2	Christine Ay Tjoe	Indonesian	1973	1,732,106	2021	Layers with More Circles, 2011	oil on canvas	Christie's Hong Kong
3	I Nyoman Masriadi	Indonesian	1973	1,006,434	2008	The Man From Bantul (The Final Round), 2000	mixed media on canvas	Sotheby's Hong Kong
4	Rudi Mantofani	Indonesian	1973	469,560	2013	Bayangan Merah (Red Shadow), 2009	acrylic on canvas	Sotheby's Hong Kong
5	Natee Utarit	Thai	1970	389,548	2021	The Baroque, 2007	oil on canvas	Sotheby's Hong Kong
6	Rodel Tapaya	Filipino	1980	380,779	2019	Cane of Kabunian, numbered but cannot be counted, 2010	acrylic on canvas	Salcedo Auctions Manila
7	Elmer Borlongan	Filipino	1967	361,911	2021	Untitled, 1999	oil on canvas	Salcedo Auctions Manila
8	Andres Barrioquinto	Filipino	1975	344,513	2019	Procession, 2019	oil on canvas	León Gallery Manila
9	Saputra Handiwirman	Indonesian	1975	325,156	2020	Weekend and Organic Projects from No Roots No Shoots #3, 2012	acrylic on canvas	Sotheby's Hong Kong
10	Lian Ben Lao	Filipino	1948	294,140	2021	Gestures, 1991	mixed media on canvas	León Gallery Manila
Sources: Christie's, Sotheby's, Salcedo Auctions, León Gallery, Artprice and MutualArt								

Figure 3

The rise is such that Southeast Asian contemporary artists are now competing at the top of the market. Taking into account the resilience of gender bias, the leading status of female artist Christine Ay Tjoe as the most expensive contemporary artist from Indonesia is unprecedented, while attesting the disruptive power and game-changing potential of the Southeast Asian art scene scene (Figures 3 and 4).

This leads us to the core question of our research project: what are the factors of market success and failure of contemporary artists from ASEAN countries? Obviously artistic talent is a sine qua non condition, but our aim is to further investigate from an interdisciplinary perspective, map the trajectories of those artists and evaluate the role of the stakeholders of the art world.

Our methodology relies on balancing quantitative data from the art market<sup>3</sup> with qualitative data, sourced from semi-directive interviews of stakeholders and the study of the artists' production. A particular attention is paid to the top 20 contemporary artists (born after 1945) of each country to get a substantial corpus and comparable samples. The period of study focuses on the art market data since 2000, which marks to the rise of Southeast Asian contemporary art in the global market. Although we haven't observed any major change in the trends so far, a possible impact of the pandemic will be considered.

We have identified four complementary levels of analysis to conduct our research: individual (I.), national (II.), regional (III.) and global (IV.). This outline enables us to reveal an underlying trend: a shift from external to internal factors in the development of the market of Southeast Asian contemporary art, empowered by the agency of private stakeholders and the ASEAN integration.

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3 Prices realised at auctions on the secondary market as well as other reliable data from the primary market (e.g. asking prices at online art fairs).

	Artist Name	Nationality	Birth year	Auction turnover (USD)	Lots sold	Rank
1	I Nyoman Masriadi	Indonesian	1973	39,799,622	227	78
2	Ronald Ventura	Filipino	1973	33,875,720	227	94
3	Christine Ay Tjoe	Indonesian	1973	16,827,893	193	168
4	Agus Suwage	Indonesian	1959	8,388,500	182	297
6	Rudi Mantofani	Indonesian	1973	6,714,296	111	350
7	Saputra Handiwirman	Indonesian	1975	5,745,368	79	391
5	Natee Utarit	Thai	1970	5,178,525	106	423
8	Putu Sutawijaya	Indonesian	1971	4,633,854	225	463
9	Andres Barrioquinto	Filipino	1975	3,617,526	78	551
10	Lian Ben Lao	Filipino	1948	3,424,370	121	569

*Source: Artprice Report, 20 Years of Contemporary Art Auction History 2000 – 2020*

Figure 4

### Individual Approach

The artistic practice and selection of media by each artist is at stake. In this regard, the affinity of Southeast Asian contemporary artist for painting can be seen as an asset, painting being the leading genre in the global art market. Many of them work on various media, but privilege oil or acrylic paint on canvas. In parallel, we can also notice the implementation of individual strategies by the artists themselves. It starts with their education, knowing that a diploma from a famous institution (either in their native country or abroad) remains an undeniable asset. Some artists also upgrade their studio to an independent production company. This adds to their agency and negotiation leverage towards the stakeholders of the art market and partly explains why there are so many young artists (born in the 1970s or later) at the top of the market. We can also observe that the cultural background of leading artists may exceed their official nationality: born and based in Bandung, Christine Ay Tjoe cultivates her Chinese cultural legacy as well. The roots of the Chinese diaspora are still sedimenting in Southeast Asian contemporary art. Interestingly, this tends to emancipate the art scene from the Eurocentric standards inherited from the colonial era.

### National Approach

The quality of the educational system is obviously paramount. The existence of renowned academies of art, celebrated not only for their prestigious alumni but also for the commitment of living artists in the curriculum, is the pathway for training the new generations of artists. Universities are also important to make sure that the knowledge about art history and national cultural heritage is not monopolised by international academia.

The rest of the institutional ecosystem is also very important, especially art museums and funding organisations, should they be governmental or not. We can actually notice that most of the ASEAN countries have relatively few museums of contemporary art. Leader among ASEAN countries in number and density of museums (Figure 5), Thailand hasn't got any national museum with a permanent collection of modern and/or contemporary art yet. Consequently, the most dynamic institutions in the region tend to emanate from private initiatives, which conditions the support to the will and taste of a restricted group of art patrons. The cultural heritage management and enhancement, both tangible and intangible, can also foster the blooming of a national art scene (Figure 6).

Country	Number of Museums	Population (millions)	Museums/ mil. inhab.
Thailand	1526	69,429	22
Malaysia	236	31,529	7.5
Philippines	192	106,652	1.8
Vietnam	170	95,54	1.8
Indonesia	163	267,663	0.6
Myanmar	104	53,708	1.9
Singapore	63	5,78	10.9
Cambodia	60	16,25	3.7
Laos	12	7,062	1.7
Brunei Darussalam	6	429	14
Timor-Leste	4	1,268	3.2
Total SEAMEO SPAFA	2074	667,393	3.1
Total Asia-Pacific	18,180	4255,4756	4.3
Total World	103,842	7535,5501	13.8

Source: UNESCO Museums around the world in the face of COVID-19, 2021

Figure 5

Country	UNESCO World Heritage Inscriptions				
	Tangible			Intangible	
	Cultural	Natural	Hybrid	National	Supra-national
Vietnam	5	2	1	12	1
Indonesia	5	4	0	10	1
Philippines	3	3	0	3	1
Malaysia	2	2	0	3	2
Cambodia	3	0	0	4	1
Thailand	3	3	0	2	0
Laos	3	0	0	0	0
Myanmar	2	0	0	0	0
Singapore	1	0	0	1	0
Brunei Darussalam	0	0	0	0	0
Timor-Leste	0	0	0	0	0
Total SEAMEO SPAFA	27	14	1	35	6
Total World	897	218	39	584	
Sources: <a href="http://whc.unesco.org">whc.unesco.org</a> & <a href="http://ich.unesco.org">ich.unesco.org</a>					

Figure 6

In addition, the legal framework, the art market taxes as well as the currencies exchange rate often play a pivotal role in the art trade. However, the national policies are rarely an incentive for investing in art. This lack of competitiveness explains the undisputed pole position of Hong Kong in the trade of Southeast Asian contemporary art.

Despite the lack of institutional support, we must highlight the key role of Southeast Asian curators<sup>4</sup>, who have contributed to promote the regional talents internationally. The selection of Ruangrupa, the Jakarta-based collective, for the curating of the upcoming documenta 15 in 2022 exemplifies this acknowledgement.

Eventually, the market forces are more active than the institutional bodies at the national level. In the primary market, the rise of a young generation of galleries has structured and professionalised the art market<sup>5</sup>. In the secondary art market, we can notice a similar rise of national auction houses<sup>6</sup>.

4 Grace Samboh, Aaron Seeto, Joselina Cruz, Patrick D. Flores, Gridthiya Gaweewong, Apinan Poshyananda, June Yap, Zoe Butt, among many others. We can also mention Adeline Ooi, Director of Art Basel Hong Kong since 2013 after a career as a curator.

5 Yavuz, Gajah, Roh Projects, STPI, Richard Koh Fine Art, Fost, Silverlens, Nadi, Artinformal, The Drawing Room, Nova Contemporary, Bangkok City City, among others.

6 Such as Larasati Auctioneers, Masterpiece Auction, and Sidharta Auctioneer in Indonesia. Regarding Salcedo Auctions and León Gallery, their development has been particularly outstanding. Both

## Regional Approach

The fundamental assessment lies in the economic and institutional integration of ASEAN. Regarding the market integration, the multiplication of art galleries branches and art fairs<sup>7</sup> is a key phenomenon. This is coupled with the same tendency among the regional auction houses through the opening of succursales or representation offices in the main cities of Southeast Asia. This market integration is highly synergetic. Singapore counts the greatest pool of U-HNWI (Ultra-High-Net-Worth-Individuals) in ASEAN with 3,732 of them<sup>8</sup> in 2020, followed by Thailand with less than 1000. Their rise in the Southeast Asian art market is attested by the congruent rankings of art collectors, which count an increasing number of personalities from Southeast Asia.

Regarding the institutional integration, the role of organisations such as SEAMEO SPAFA in structuring the art ecosystem at the regional level is undeniable. Other bodies such as the regional office of UNESCO in Bangkok have also contributed to foster transnational linkage. Yet, the most decisive contribution may come from flexible and temporary structures: Art Biennales. Those have spread in ASEAN with some outstanding successes such as the Bangkok Art Biennale, coming back for the third times in October 2022.

## Global Approach

The seminal role of Christie's and Sotheby's must be recalled. Anticipating the maturity of the market of Chinese contemporary art, the world's co-leaders of art auctions have identified Southeast Asia as an ideal growth driver about two decades ago. They have pro-actively developed the market since then. Christie's had brought relatively more Southeast Asian artists in the market through a strategy encompassing both top and middle markets, whereas Sotheby's has continuously focused on the top lots. Now, their strategy is converging towards the de-segmentation of contemporary art, with the organisation of boundary-breaking sales gathering artists from every continent.

In parallel, international art galleries have taken over by representing artists from ASEAN countries. Several of them count Southeast Asian talents in their line-up, such as Perrotin representing Ronald Ventura and White Cube representing Christine Ay Tjoe.

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created in 2010 and located in Makati City, the business district of Manilla, they have realised several price records for Filipino artists.

7 Such as Art Jakarta, Art Fair Philippines and Art SG, the new fair to be launched in Singapore in January 2022.

8 Source: Knight Frank, 2021. U-HNWI have grown by 37% in Singapore between 2015 and 2020.



Besides, Southeast Asian art stands at the crossing section of several cultural spheres: Indian, Chinese, Khmer, Western, Persian, Arabic, among others. From the perspective of the art buyers, this multi-layered art scene offers multiple entry points. This outstanding diversity is also grounded on a wide scope of spiritual references: besides Buddhism, Islam and Christianity, the three main religions, tribal, animist, shamanist and other vernacular ritual practices regularly show through the work of Southeast Asian artists. This ethno-cultural and spiritual heterogeneity operates as a centrifugal and creative impulse stimulating distinctive artistic expressions, whose uniqueness is likely to seduce overseas art collectors.

In addition, the potential of development of ASEAN economies increases the investment value of contemporary. Counting among the fastest growing economies and densely populated, contemporary art from the Southeast Asian subcontinent, appears as one of the most promising investments for the next decades. Once gentrified, the population will look back at the art from the 20th and 21st century with great interest. Some bi-national collectors, such as American-Vietnamese Dr Tuan Pham, have already been rewarded for their flair...

### **Tentative conclusion**

Once completed, the results of our research project will fill the gap of knowledge about the Southeast Asian art ecosystem and market. This scientific contribution will detail the set of factors explaining the high and low performances of contemporary artists as well as the discrepancies between ASEAN countries. From a practical perspective, our results will empower the potential of market growth of lesser-known Southeast Asian contemporary artist in a fast-moving environment.

### **Acknowledgement**

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