DAY 1: Tuesday, 13 April 2010

Morning 1 @ 9:30-10:30
@ Theatrette, Level 2

The Buddha Goes Global

Clare Harris

At the start of the twenty-first century artists and art works are increasingly mobile and dispersed within global networks and cultural flows. This paper considers the career of an artist, Gonkar Gyatso, who has travelled from his homeland in Tibet via a key centre for Tibetan exiles in India to his current location in London where he successfully sought asylum. In each of these physical domains he and his work have been reconfigured, inspiring new ways of depicting the land he vacated: Tibet. A new type of analysis is required in order to chart such transnational dimensions in contemporary art, one which acknowledges that artists are subject to influences well beyond the places they physically inhabit and which gives due prominence to imaginative territories. However, this case study also notes the persistence of ‘location’ as a determining factor in interpretation and reception.
This paper examines Peter Weir’s academy award winning 1982 film, The Year of Living Dangerously. Set in Djakarta in 1965 it follows the last days of the Sukarno government and is based on Christopher Koch’s novel of the same name. The film deals with a sensitive period in modern Indonesian history and the ban President Suharto placed on the film from its appearance, was not lifted until after his period of office. The story is about Australian and British nationals who provide information to their own governments and news agencies about the tumultuous events then taking place in Indonesia. But I want to focus instead on how the narrative throws light on the state of Australia’s relationship to the region at the time when it appeared. Points of comparison are made with other films of the period such as Far East, (1982) Turtle Beach (1992) and The Good Woman of Bangkok (1991). As the Hawke-Keating Governments encouraged citizens to participate more fully within their Asian neighborhood, refugees began arriving by boat on Australian shores. It is argued that these films provide evidence of the emergence of what might be called ‘white panic’ in relationship to the region. It is argued that all interrogate in different ways, Australia’s position as a neo-colonial power in the region, subtly re-asserting that power and that they clearly provide evidence for a renewed willingness to continue to ‘other’ the region, rather than identify more fully with it, which was the official line of the government of the day.

Krisna Murti (b.1957) is the pioneer of Indonesian video art. Internationally travelled and with an Islamic-Hindu background, Krisna questions essentialist notions of Asian/Indonesian identity and prefers to see and use video art as a cross-cultural visual language. His work is more than an exploration of identity issues, however. It is also meant as an investigation into and alternative to the main producer of images in contemporary Asia/Indonesia, the television industry. The work can be seen as a type of ‘televisual metadiscourse’, which provides insight into the commercial and ideological mechanisms behind the mass media industry; the specific cultural-technological features of various media; the historical dimensions of various genres of representation; the position of artists and their audiences in processes of mediation; and alternative forms of intermediality and interactivity. Beyond being a specific form of television critique, the work also presents an alternative vision of mixed environments where media and people harmoniously co-exist and interact with each other. I argue that this attempt at promoting pleasant, effective and sustainable communication environments could be seen as the media equivalent of ecology.
Chinese American actress Anna May Wong (1905-1961) has been a vexed subject for academics due to the difficulties in interpreting her life and her film roles. Yet, in many ways, Wong is the perfect subject of scholarly inquiry for she represents the most important markers of twentieth century modernity: sexuality, race, globalization, fame, beauty, the spectacle, the body. As an actress, she has the ability to transform, thus not inhabiting one racial meaning or signifier but she can be foreign, Chinese, European, American flapper, sometimes simultaneously. As a ‘long-distance cultural specialist,’ Wong’s career calls into question any notion of national and racial authenticity. Despite never having been to China until the mid-1930s, as a Chinese American Wong was frequently expected to play an “authentic” Chinese character in her film and theatrical roles. However, as a Hollywood and European-trained actress, Wong represented a complicated mix of American racial modernity to audiences around the globe. As part of the growing interest in Asian Australian studies, I will discuss my research on the critical markers of Anna May Wong’s imaging. To what degree was Wong understood as American, modern, Chinese, European-trained, or all of those categories? How did these categories mesh with Australian racialization and modernity?

The Academy Award nominated film Lagaan is a marvellous piece of troubling which, through a wily application of allegory, reflects upon power relations and identity politics across both colonial and postcolonial temporarities. Through the trope of cricket and the medium of popular Indian cinema, Ashutosh Gowariker’s engaging text is an accessible intervention into conventional understandings of the power dynamics inherent in globalisation. Popular culture can harbour surprising and radical politics; it is a contested field where conformity and resistance collide, where a constant struggle over meaning is waged between different social groups.

Indian popular cinema is an exemplar of the way that regional and local cultural dynamics can and do resist homogenising forces, and add their own inflection to global media flows. India has a massive film industry, which also services a worldwide South Asian diaspora. This vibrant cinematic cultural expression offers clear evidence that global media flows are not all one-directional, thus complicating conventional assumptions about western global media production and distribution. Interdisciplinary approaches are necessary to traverse within and between cultures. In this regard I will employ fields of Media and Cultural Studies, Postcolonialism and Subaltern Studies in order to articulate some of the cultural politics and poetics at play Lagaan specifically and Indian Cinema generally. The work of scholars such as Arjun Appadurai, Ashis Nandy, Homi Bhabha, Chandrima Chakraborty, and Wimal Dissanyake will enable me to open up uncertainties in the discourses which envelope interacting systems of oppression such as gender, race and colonialism.
Herbert Browne was a London-born performer who was 26 when he emigrated to Australia from England in 1921. Browne played lead roles in popular English musicals such as ‘The Mikado’ and ‘Chu-Chin-Chow’ which reproduced an imaginary Asia. With the opening up of trade with China and Japan, Victorian audiences became acquainted with Asia in a variety of new forms – photographs, exhibitions, performances as well as objects for private collection and domestic display. Musical theatre contributed to this nineteenth century re-imagining of Asia, influencing market tastes and popularising England’s geographic expansion abroad. In the mid-nineteenth century, developments in theatre were also closely linked to changes in museum methodologies and the opening of new galleries featuring human display. A descriptive and classificatory approach to material culture gained a foothold during this period forming the roots of modern museum displays. From the 1920s to the 1950s, as well as performing in Asian-inspired musical theatre roles, Herbert Browne was acquiring objects for his collections which are now held by the National Museum of Australia. These objects display a range of cultural influences, including Chinese, Japanese, middle-Eastern and Indigenous Australian. The blending of cultures evident in Browne’s collections parallels his ‘racial cross-dressing’ in musical theatre roles. Browne’s collection embodies a somewhat different view of culture from the classic museological view, one which is more in line with recent museum approaches which view objects as products of the social worlds in which they circulate and the meanings they acquire as they move across cultural boundaries.

My research argues that philately is a powerful and versatile means for governments to visually express identity-making as well as identity-seeking. Whilst stamps are postal receipts and a means of authenticating sovereignty, the philatelic imag(inary) is a global as much as local issue. The potential fiscal benefits from sales to collectors world-wide provides further stimulus for articulating, manipulating and promoting specific views of identity at particular historical moments. The political, social, cultural and economic processes which emerge from the appropriation, production and consumption of philatelic representations are sensitive to (re)interpretations by others. At all levels of society, individuals and groups as well as the nation and the state each contribute to the subtle nuances of identity(s).

For Asian regions emerging from the complexities of colonial encounters, an interesting problem lies in understanding if, how, why and in what ways the strengths and weaknesses of socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-economic values and beliefs attached to identity(s) are defended in and through philatelic symbolism. Here, I use Hong Kong philately to demonstrate the importance of interrogating the dialogic relationship between cultural politics and symbolic representation of the philatelic imag(inary). To expose the multiple contexts in which identity(s) may be ignored, embraced, asserted or reassessed, I develop the notion of cultural patina. Cultural patina is not simply that which appears on the surface. Rather than objectifying culture, it gives critical recognition to the layered, complex reactions to internal and external influences, to the chemistry of diverse public as well as private understandings and agendas.
As contemporary Chinese art becomes increasingly globalized, paintings may function as representations of China for a global audience, while the act of painting itself remains an intimate local practice. How does the representation and practice of Chinese ink painting in a contemporary context relate to such daily social experiences? This paper will examine the intersections between certain local painting practices and the varied networks within which the paintings and their producers circulate. While other contemporary art forms may garner more international attention, ink painting is thriving throughout Chinese society. As the social conventions of art worlds transform, both within China and abroad, contemporary painting practices have reconfigured conceptions of the roles of amateurs and professionals in unexpected ways. Practice may be guided by social conventions or innovations that in some settings may involve the emulation of perceived traditional behaviors, ritualized use of objects, and circulation within particular social networks. The roles of painters in different communities vary significantly based upon different forms of education, expressions or perceptions of talent, and the social obligations of each individual. These local systems of artistic and social knowledge are expressed through the daily experiences of making art that represent China in its most intimate forms.
This paper focuses on the sole Italian concession in China, which was located in the Hebei district of the modern municipality of Tianjin and constituted the only example of Italian colonialism in Asia. Through the historical investigation of the former Italian concession, from its acquisition to its socio-spatial reinvention as a ‘laboratory of modernity’ (Stoler, 1995), the paper examines the representation of the concession as an ‘aristocratic’ Italian-style ‘neighbourhood’.

After the 1896 devastating defeat during the first Italo-Ethiopian war, the dream of the newly created Italian nation to position itself on the world stage was projected on the Chinese space. Despite a slow and uncertain start, Tianjin’s Italian concession became the testing ground of a full-scale pedagogical project, aimed at asserting the long awaited equal treatment of Italy, on the same level of the other colonial powers. The uncanny Chinese site was annihilated (1902-04), the wetland was reclaimed (1905-06), and eventually the Italian authorities in Tianjin approved the new regulatory building code, the police code, and the code of hygiene (1908). This legislative effort legitimised the policy agendas of spatial appropriation, sanitisation, and modernisation, which dominated the Italian colonial discursive and regulatory practices in Tianjin. The outcome was a miniature Disneyland-style venue of ‘Italianness’, as demonstrated by the replica of Italian-style architecture both on the two main squares and the main roads. ‘Italianness’ became a super-sign, aimed at imposing equivalence between two worlds: the ‘real’ Italy and the Italy transposed (but also exposed and imposed) in China.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the mushrooming of art biennales all over Asia opened the floodgates for contemporary art, its institutions of production, intermediation and marketing; they sparked Asia’s interest in becoming a global player within the world market of art.

The paper examines the different roles and display strategies of biennales and museums in forming, representing and promoting the image of Asian contemporary art. Drawing upon the function of exhibitionary places and practices as agencies of cultural representation and translation, it looks at both, the new positioning of Asian art within the global art world and the remapping of Asian art within Asia.

The analysis will focus on the South Korean situation, its specific contribution to the making of Asian, respectively Korean contemporary art in the conflict zone between global and local art definitions and market interests. Two exhibitionary formats of different representational function are to be compared: 1. the art museum as local establishment of permanence and built entity (i.e. the Leeum and the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Seoul), and 2. the biennale as temporary international, national or local art event (i.e. Gwangju and Busan Biennale). This comparison will be based on a multi-focal analysis; it will look at the exhibited works, accompanying catalogue texts, curatorial statements and practices, the exhibition design and museum architecture. In combining art historical studies with museological, curatorial and architectural studies, the tensions and dynamics between national and transcultural identity formation, Koreanness, Asianness and Globalness in the image-making of contemporary Asian art will be explored.
The notion that landscape is perceived through the gaze, interpreted through perception and mediated by cultural understandings has been integral to the now widely accepted view that landscapes are anchored in human existence and individual activity. However, the relationship between creative practice and its function as a representation of human perception, thereby able to mediate cultural, historical and individual meaning, is much less clearly defined or accepted. This is especially so with regard to the creative practice of photography, which not only proposes but also partially realises our being in the world.

Through a trans-culturally based photographic study of the Vietnamese city of Vung Tau, this paper suggests that the morphology of place is not only understood in the context of spatially based cultural activity, but it also exists as a rich site of memory. Further, the view is taken that if the study of landscape is seen as a collection of practices that situate, produce, and reflect interactions between the individual, the spatial and the cultural; then photography has a key role to play in understanding and representing those practices, adding breadth and richness to currently understood notions of identity. This paper therefore positions creative representations of the landscape, mediated through memory, as a rich dimension for the study of the complex interactions between individual, collective, and historical events, and in the case of the city of Vung Tau, ultimately their relationship to nationalism.

A Korean born Australian curator will explore her own experience making an ‘in-between cultural product’ using the travelling exhibition, Earth, Spirit, Fire: Korean Masterpieces of the Choson Dynasty as a case study. This exhibition was co-curated by the Powerhouse Museum, the Queensland Art Gallery and the National Museum of Korea in 2000 and sought to introduce and reconceptualise Korean culture to Australian audiences.

The paper will examine the detailed procedure of the exhibition development including the selection of objects, display style and language, advocating the need for cross-cultural translation. The author questions both the native and host cultural perspectives, borrowing Homi K. Bhabha’s theory of ‘in-between’, to demonstrate that it is understood by an ‘interpretive community’ (i.e. one which comprises people other than that to which the curator belongs and who share interpretive strategies). At the same time, she also emphasises the importance of translation from the perspective of the Asian country to avoid the established cultural assumption that Asia is a static and exotic entity.

The paper asserts the importance of this balance in translation to produce a new form of ‘mutated culture’ (one which counterbalances native and host cultural perspectives) as it is applicable to the Earth, Spirit, Fire: Korean Masterpieces of the Choson Dynasty exhibition.
DAY 1: Tuesday, 13 April 2010

Afternoon 3 @ 4:00-4:30

Asia and Australia 2 @ Theatrette, Level 2

*Asia: in or out of inverted commas?*

Alison Broinowski

More than any other major region in the world, ‘Asia’ attracts hesitant quotation marks, because its characteristics - whether geographic, cultural, social, linguistic, political, religious, or economic – fail convincingly to define its extent, its nature, and its communality. For centuries, ‘Asia’ has been an imaginary construct, or evoked past glories: in the 21st century, some say, the revival will become a reality and Asia will achieve hegemony. (Mahbubani 2008) But even among societies inside Asia’s notional periphery, unanimity about it is rare.

If national leaders cannot agree about what is ‘Asia’, what do writers of fiction reveal? The presence of the Other always sharpens perceptions of the Self. So Australia, cruising around the region like a submarine, provides Asian Australian writers with a periscope through which to view the region. Some reject their Asian roots, some valorise Asia against Australia, others gaze upon Asia through a haze of nostalgia and loss, while others see Asia more clearly from an Australian distance, or from shifting platforms around the world. The paper considers twelve writers with Australian connections and the ‘Asia’ they present in their recent fiction: Brian Castro, Ouyang Yu, Hoa Pham, Adib Khan, Alice Pung, Nam Le, Aravind Adiga, Inez Baranay, Kim Cheng Boey, Michelle de Kretser, Patrick Allington, and Teo Hsu-ming.

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Curation/Exhibition 2 @ Seminar Room 1, Level 3

**Asia on the Move: Curatorial Discourses of Asian Art Now**

Thomas Berghuis

This paper explores the curatorial discourse of Asian Art now. It will examine the curatorial practices and writings by a group of curators whose work has influenced the international dissemination of contemporary Asian art; mainly through discourses of ‘cultural hybridity’, ‘third space’, ‘globalisation’, ‘identity’, ‘displacement’, ‘urbanism’, ‘consumerism’, ‘mobility’, and on the notion that Asian cultures are constantly ‘on the move’.

The paper will explore the curatorial discourses of curators who are located both in-, and beyond-Asia, and whose work has been significant in disseminating professional and popular understanding of Asian art in Australia, Europe, and the United States. Curators, whose work will be examined are: Jim Supangkat (Indonesia), Apinan Poshyananda (Thailand); and Hou Hanru (China/France).

Previous studies have either focused on examining the role of curatorial practices in the context of the development of discourses of contemporary art in Southeast Asia (Flores, 2008), or focused on collecting curatorial writings by global ‘star’ curators such as Hou Hanru. This paper aims to explore the role curators have played in developing stylistic approaches to contemporary Asian art, and as a result, have influenced the way contemporary Asian art is imagined, imaged, represented and transferred visually across the globe through curatorial practices.
Travel and tourism were central to the creation of a popular ‘image’ of Asia in the late twentieth century. In an era which saw significant proportion of Australians experience Asia as tourists themselves, the discourses surrounding travel were particularly influential. Since the 1950s, many representations of Asia have hinged on the authority of first hand experience, as tourists claimed to know Asia, because they had seen it for themselves. Yet, these tourist experiences were never direct and simple. As with all travel, they were influenced by rumours and preconceptions, coloured by the varying contexts of individual journeys, and mediated through specific tropes and forms of representation.

Taking Australian travellers on the ‘hippie trail’ of the 1960s and 1970s as a case study, I will examine the ways in which Australians’ experiences of Asia have been constructed by their preconceptions. I will then trace how travellers go on to represent their own experiences by investigating the clothing and conversation of Australians on the hippie trail, as well as the kind of advice they gave to aspiring travellers upon their return. In this way, I will chart the creation of a ‘myth’ of the hippie trail, which helped perpetuate a new image of Asia as a space for adventure, personal freedom and self-discovery. I argue that the verbal and visual culture of travel developed during the hippie trail era were integral in creating an image of Asia that continues to influence the way Australians perceive and experience Asia even today.

The exhibition “Indonesia: The Discovery of the Past” held in De Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam in the period from December 2005 until April 2006, was the result of co-operation on the project ‘Shared Cultural Heritage’ between the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde (RMV) in Leiden and the Museum Nasional of Indonesia (MNI) in Jakarta. The organizers insisted on the importance of the shared cultural heritage as a source of identity that has to be safeguarded, simultaneously anticipating that multiplicity of cultural forms of the colonial state will promote ideas of culture tolerance. Unlike the previous exhibitions on Indonesia in the Netherlands that focused primarily on the artistic or ethnographic value of the objects collected during the colonial times this exhibition offered a detailed explanation of the often violent context in which the objects were collected.

This paper is twofold. Firstly, by critically approaching the concepts of ‘discovery’, ‘cultural heritage’, ‘cultural tolerance’ and ‘past-present’ relationships it examines the motivations behind the inclusion of the context of collecting and the representation of the colonial state as successful ‘multicultural’ society seeking to elucidate potential ramifications this might have for the ongoing project of the Dutch nationhood. Secondly, it looks at the one of the possible receptions of the exhibition through the analyses of how and why Balinese migrants living in the Netherlands interpreted the exhibit welcomingly, smoothening away the violent context of collecting.
Representing Indonesia in Australia: collaboration, hybridity and exotica in intercultural musical and theatre performance

Aline Scott-Maxwell

The paper draws on and extends previous research into and writing on the history of Australia’s musical engagement with its Asia-Pacific region. This history spans over 150 years and comprises a kaleidoscope of representations, creative engagements and hybridizations, mediated presentations and direct musical encounters in multiple media and art forms. In the last few decades, these have been supplemented by yet another facet of this engagement in the form of community-based Asian musiccultures and scenes embedded in Australian urban environments. The focus of the paper is some recent Indonesia-themed hybrid performance projects that involve collaborations between Indonesian-Australians, Indonesians and Euro-Australians, and that can be positioned within the interrelated fields of Australian multicultural arts and world music. It explores what collaboration and hybridity might signify in the context of these performances and how Indonesia is translated for an Australian audience, including the role that visual media play in music performance. I argue that the boundaries between a truly intercultural and exoticised engagement with Asia through music and performance are blurred and that much intercultural hybrid work holds exotic appeal for the overwhelmingly Euro-Australian middle-class audiences that consume it—even trading on its difference.

The Politics of Representation in Contemporary Art from Taiwan

Sophie McIntyre

This paper discusses identity issues and the politics of representation in the exhibition of contemporary art from Taiwan. During the 1990s national identity issues were at the forefront of political as well as cultural debate in Taiwan and found expression in the visual arts. While this identity discourse, defined as ‘native consciousness’ (bentuhua), has become a focus of scholarly research over the past decade, to date few of these studies have addressed or critically analysed in any detail the visual arts and its contribution to this discourse. Fewer still have examined the roles of the art museum as a political and ideological apparatus in the representation, legitimization and advancement of these national identity issues.

Drawing upon museological theories relating to exhibitions and the politics of representation, this discussion focuses on two major exhibitions of contemporary art from Taiwan that were held during the mid-1990s. These exhibitions include Taiwan’s inaugural representation at the Venice Biennale in 1995; and ‘Quest for Identity’ that was curated and presented a year later at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum in 1996. By comparing and contrasting these two different exhibitions and their divergent curatorial approaches, this paper demonstrates how Taiwan as a geo-political and cultural identity was imagined, imaged and represented in curatorial and artistic practice in Taiwan in the mid-1990s.
In rural Guizhou province, there is a vibrant media world of locally produced, locally distributed, and locally consumed video recordings of ethnic festivals and competitions (namely bull-fighting, singing, and traditional dance). This paper will explore the popularity of these ethnic media products, which are typically made by semi-professional videographers for sale in regional markets. These “village videos” are both visual documents of ethnic festivals and re-imaginings of popular media representations of ethnic, cultural identities. As a form of non-state visual image production, I believe that village videos indicate new attempts at local levels to make sense of national narratives and transnational expectations of ethnic identity in contemporary China.

The analysis of village videos opens up a realm of research on how visual imagery can be utilized by ethnic actors to find one’s own foothold in the mainstream. Village videos are significant both in terms of the production of ethnic imagery (i.e. villagers recognize the desirability of visually recording their festivals for industries such as ethnic tourism) and the consumption of ethnic visual representations (i.e. when asked why the videos were popular, villagers said it was interesting to “watch oneself.”). The processes of cultural production and cultural consumption are complicated in the case of village videos, where rural, ethnic peoples and communities utilize visual media as a means for asserting agency and belonging in mainstream national and international networks. Thus, “village videos” are a crucial site for exploring shifting loci of power at work in visualizing, and imagining, ethnic identity.

Indochina had produced millions of refugees in the last three decades of the last century. The waves of refugees were produced within a period of intense political antagonism between the communist and the capitalist world. A majority of these refugees were Vietnamese who left Vietnam and took temporary asylum in Asian places before they settled in the West. A typical Vietnamese refugee story runs like this: leaving Vietnam in make-shift boat, staying in Hong Kong (or elsewhere in Asia), and resettling in America (or elsewhere in the West, including Australia). Most previous studies about the Vietnamese refugees have been produced in the West, and are about Vietnamese refugees who resettled in the West. Very little has been known about those who do not fit into this typical storyline. Indeed, a significant part of this refugee story – the Asian part – is still missing. This paper examines those who did not move on to the West, but have been ‘stuck’ in Hong Kong, a first asylum centre, and some of those who had been repatriated to Vietnam. The paper will explore Vietnamese settlement in Hong Kong and reflect on the desire for mobility among many young Vietnamese in communist Vietnam in the late 1980s.
Feature films are stories told with images. Ethnic images in Australian films are constructed with markers that make the images/characters ethnic as against Australian. The ethnic markers employed in Australian features films are often in the form of non-Australian accent, costumes, language and dialects and appearance of the actors.

This paper will focus on the representation of Chinese in Floating Life (Clara Law, 1996) and The Home Song Stories (Tony Ayres, 2007), two feature films about Chinese immigrants experience in Australia. It will discuss how ethnicity markers, such as costumes, non-English languages, Chinese-looking actors, and Chinese cultural icons and symbols are used to construct Chinese ethnicity, and examine how the representation of Chinese images is positioned in the Australian cinema as the Other both in terms of the social and cinematic contexts and how this positioning has contributed and undermined the construction of images of a multicultural Australia. By asking questions about how Chinese images are constructed and represented in contemporary Australian feature films, this paper examines what is expressed and repressed in the process of the construction, and how the constructed images are positioned to the construction of Australian national identity.

Contemporary cultural theory has alerted us to the ‘crisis in identity’, which has taken place through the transformation and disruption of traditional social relations in the course of modernization and colonization. For refugees, these disruptions of known social formations have severe implications for the question of identity so that being out-of-place enhances the sense of belonging to a defined group. In the case of the Tibetan diaspora, the strong affirmations to be part of a transnational community go hand in hand the formation of symbolic ‘borders’, such as the preservation of religion, the arts, language etc. Yet the focus on the past and tradition complicates the choices of ‘acceptable’ representations of Tibet. The process of selection is inextricably intertwined with the question of authenticity and the need to preserve a distinct Tibetanness in diaspora.

My paper thus wishes to present an analysis of Tibetan diasporic women’s autobiographies and their uneven and intricate relationships with those who create the discourse for the ‘authentic’ representation of the lost homeland. Through applying a postcolonial feminist mode of reading, I wish to show how Tibetan collective memory in diaspora is gendered and how women’s autobiographies in diaspora can sensitise us for the complex negotiations taking place in the diasporic representations of Tibet.
This paper emerges from my recent curatorial research on contemporary video practices in Southeast Asia. It proceeds from an analysis of some short, independently made video works from Thailand and Indonesia, dealing with minor (and/or obsolete) languages and marginal identities that have been suppressed in the monolithic constructions of modern, national histories. I will focus on the subtitle as the site of a subversive play that not only undermines the hegemony of official/national language, but might also destabilize the global circuits and structures of exhibition in which such moving image works increasingly circulate. With reference to pop cultural channels (such as karaoke), theories of mediation and Jacques Derrida’s notion of the parergon, I will highlight how tactical translation and mistranslation give rise to a double disjuncture – between word and image; and between text and voice – and consider its implications for regional video cultures.

During the nineteenth-century, mixed-race children were often treated with disgust because they were regarded as “hybrid offspring.” In Victorian literature, mixed-race characters were frequently portrayed as marginal, conflicted, and tragic figures. Victorians who were anxious about the survival of the “superior race” felt strongly about maintaining racial purity and regarded “half-breeds” as degenerate people who tended to inherit the worst qualities of both races. However, one popular Victorian children’s novel, William Dalton’s The Wolf Boy of China; or Incidents and Adventures in the Life of Lyu-Payo (1857), features a half-English, half-Miao hero named Lyu Payo (aka Herbert Richardson) who, contrary to possessing the worst qualities of his parent’s races, seems to have inherited the positive traits of both. Lyu utilises his mixed-race identity to overcome dangers and difficulties in different parts of the “Celestial Kingdom.” Dalton portrayal of ethnic minorities such as the Miao and the Si-fan present a complex image of China. In the book’s sequel, The Wasps of the Ocean; or, Little Waif and the Pirate of the Eastern Seas: A Romance of Travel and Adventure in China and Siam (1864), however, Lyu/Herbert is “whitened” and settles down to a typical English gentleman’s life in London at the end of the story. In this paper, I trace the changes in the image of this mixed-race hero and discuss the implications his transformation. I then comment on attitudes towards interracial marriage and miscegenation.
Modern Asian artists moved between art discourses, relativising those they found at home and those they found abroad when they moved, frequently for study. This paper addresses in an exploratory way differences between those who stayed and those who moved only to return later. It will establish the range of types of such artists, their relationship to art discourses and the effect of their movement or not on the constitution of those discourses. Whether there is a pattern of responses independent of the conditions of inter-cultural hybridity and translation of their times, and how this pattern changes understanding of the types of Asian modernities in art will also be addressed.
Since the 1990s, there have been several pan-Asian performances that vary greatly in their formation and intention. Realizing Rama (1998) was conceived in order to promote the common heritage of ASEAN countries. Condensing the Indian Ramayana epic into a 1½ hour contemporary dance-dance version created from the classical and modern styles of all the countries involved. Lear (1997) funded by the Japan Foundation and directed by Singaporean Ong Keng Sen, a Asian postcolonial response to Western cultural dominance in the region, was the first pan-Asian production of a Western classic drama launched on an international scale. Unlike the collaborative and democratic process that the Realizing Rama team had to wrangle with, the Lear's creation was clearly in the hands of the director, scriptwriter, and producer.

Smaller scale projects have engaged performers of Asian states to learn more about each others’ cultures, and find ways to overcome linguistic, religious and economic antagonisms to establish a common foundation for future artistic and cultural developments. Cry of Asia (1989-1997), The Big Wind Project (1994-1995), and The Asian Contemporary Theatre Collaboration (2003) have been Asian intercultural experiments forging new links between Asian artists to create theatre out of regional cultural affiliations. The projects put into practice what is easy to theorise but hard to realise: negotiating difference among Asians. They show the possibilities and challenges of belonging across national boundaries, of forging a Southeast Asian transnational self.

Although it is only recently people started to talk about the “transnational cinema”, Pan-Asian co-productions can be dated back to the Nanyang films produced in the 1950s. These early Pan-Asian films, as many have argued, dichotomize “East Asia” (e.g. Hong Kong, Mainland China and Japan) and “Southeast Asia” (e.g. Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines), and represent them as sets of contrasting concepts, intensifying the splits between city/countryside, modern/traditional, rich/poor, safe/dangerous, homely/unhomely, to reflect intercultural communication in Asia in the colonial days.

Over years of modernisation and globalisation, “Asia” has become all the more visible in global visual culture. Pan-Asian films have emerged as a growing force in world cinema. With in mind the large global market, “Asia” represented in these films are increasingly deterritorialized, with national specificities reduced to minimum. Increasingly are Asian countries represented in highly aestheticised and exoticised stereotype images. Yet, the dichotomized spatial representations of “East Asia” and “Southeast Asia” persist to be seen.

This paper discusses how an impulse to dichotomize “East Asia” and “Southeast Asia” should so persistently reassert itself in Pan-Asian films produced in both the colonial past and postcolonial present, and whether what the two regions signify have changed over time. This paper argues that despite the persistent dichotomization of East and Southeast Asia in contemporary Pan-Asian films, the two regions are both represented as exoticised spaces that alienate and disorientate viewers of different nationalities, leading them to exert an outsider’s gaze towards the aestheticised landscapes of the two regions.
Zao Wou-ki, as a ‘long-distance cultural specialist’ (Harris, 2006), gained renewed understanding of his native culture (China) by going through several artistic metamorphoses in his hosting culture (France). Trained to be a calligrapher as well as a realistic painter under the traditional and the Soviet art system in China, Zao went to Paris in 1948 and has resided there since. From 1948 to early 1950s, Zao was still making figurative and narrative paintings as he was doing back in China; meanwhile, Cezanne’s work had a growing impact on the young artist. After a trip to Switzerland from 1951-52 and encountering Klee’s work for the first time, Zao was deeply influenced by the Swiss master who himself was an enthusiast of oriental art and whose seemingly naïve paintings revealed to Zao a short cut to contemplating nature in a different way. Zao rediscovered his Chinese roots and started experimenting under the Klee style until he eventually found his own voice by adopting the language of abstraction. He has transformed his understanding of the Chinese space (vs. landscape, which to Zao, may be limited; whereas the space is more about nature in general) into a field of constant exploration of the deepest human emotion interacting and attempting to harmonize with the energy, spirit and forces in the cosmos. Among the formidable eruption of colors and the swift yet determined movements of the brush in his Zao’s oil paintings, one can detect an overall balance of the structure and the sometimes-embedded archaic symbols reminiscent of the mysterious carvings on ancient Chinese bronzes. Once said “Everyone is bound by a tradition--I, by two,” Zao is liberated from the East by the West, and at the same time saved from the West by the East. Between the two, he builds his world of the middle.

Examining computer games as transnational media and consumer products, we find the particular strength of Japanese games in Asian and Western markets. This paper explores how Japanese identity is represented and packaged in computer games which are equally popular at home in Japan as well as overseas in their localized, translated versions. Binary combat games in particular use stereotype and archetype to create immediately recognizable figures onscreen, but how are Japanese, Asian and Western figures constructed in these games? I contend that while Asian and Western figures are both packaged as the ‘Other’, the Japanese figure also becomes part of the mysterious East, exoticised for the enjoyment of foreign and Japanese players alike. This exoticisation plays on the Meiji period paradox of Japanese identity, with Japan trying to separate herself from mainland Asia while simultaneously drawing on Asian cultural heritage for a sense of non-Western ‘self’. Taking the Soul Calibur series as a case study, we see Japanese, Chinese, Ryukyuan, and Korean characters portrayed as having distinct cultural and historical characteristics, essentialised to the point of caricature, but also possessing a shared heritage from a timeless ‘Orient’ set up in direct opposition to the West. This combination of distinction and homogeneity illuminates the complex positioning of Japan vis-à-vis the wider idea of ‘Asia’ in consumer culture. By analysing computer games in terms of representation and identity, I hope to shed light on power dynamics of ‘Orient’ and ‘Occident’ that continue to operate in the so-called ‘soft power’ of contemporary media.
In 1925, the French colonial government opened the Indochina School of Fine Arts in Hanoi with the aim of training local artists using an academic model based on the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. While this period in Vietnamese art (1925-1945) is often discussed in terms of the transmission and adaptation of ‘Western’ aesthetics, this paper will explore how this process was nuanced by the ways that Vietnamese artists imagined an ‘Eastern’ identity through their artworks and critical writing. This ‘Eastern’ identity was broader than a local, nationalistic identity and can be connected to the discourses of Pan-Asianism that were arising elsewhere in Asia during this period. The imagining of the ‘Eastern’ was mediated by the colonial context in complex ways, relating to the local dynamics of culture in Vietnam, the international environment of competitive colonialism in which artists displayed and marketed their work and more generally to the ‘Western’ discourse of the exotic ‘East’. During the Japanese occupation of Vietnam (1940-1945), ‘Eastern’ identity came to have more direct political implications, and was actively fostered through cultural exchanges in the fine arts between Vietnam and Japan. That Vietnamese artists imagined an ‘Eastern’ identity in considered, strategic and dynamic ways implies a model of colonial agency that goes beyond the binary dynamics of reactivity to ‘the West’.

These papers examines and maps the interplay of local and global phenomena in the assemblages of networks produced by the interest in, and play of, Asian-made online digital games in the ‘West’, using a case study of Gunbound: World Champion (Softnyx, 2005) a free internet-based digital game made by a South Korean company. Using ethnographic data gathered during fieldwork in Melbourne, Australia, this paper focuses on examining the specific situated and networked contexts of the play of Gunbound. However, rather than approaching the game solely as an image or representation, the concern of the paper is to contextualize the aesthetics and experiences of play, in relation to how the game is insinuated into the everyday life of Mandarin and Cantonese speaking diasporic communities and used to create new, and maintain pre-existing, real-time social networks. In the game-space of Gunbound diasporic players are positioned in relation to both the local and situated, and the global – but virtual. Thus play involves negotiating with and navigating through these binaries to explore hybrid cultural identities.
DAY 2: Wednesday, 14 April 2010

Hybrid aesthetics/art/artefact @ Theatrette, Level 2

A Cabinet of Curiosity

Carol Cains and Matthew Martin

In 2004, the National Gallery of Victoria was gifted an early seventeenth-century cabinet decorated in a fashion which imitates Asian lacquer work. This cabinet appears to belong to a small but little understood group of early seventeenth century objects which represent the earliest known examples of imitation Asian lacquer ("japanned work") produced for European markets. A number of questions about this cabinet—and the larger group of objects of which it forms a part—have yet to be answered. The place of manufacture of the cabinet (Europe or Asia) remains in doubt, as do the sources and character of the cabinet’s scheme of painted decoration: connections may be drawn with European print sources, Chinese and Japanese lacquer and porcelain motifs, Indian textiles and ivory carving. These questions raise the larger issue of the place of hybrid Asian-European artistic productions in the Early Modern encounter between the two cultural spheres. Through an examination of this cabinet in the broader context of lacquer and furniture exported to Europe from Asia in the seventeenth century, we will explore the cultural space these hybrid works occupy and how they facilitate Early Modern European imaginings of Asia.

Popular culture @ Seminar Room1, Level 3

Images of Asian modernity: Malay modernity, Korean soaps and the complex urban imaginary

Md Azalanshah Md Syed

One of the platforms for articulating modernity in contemporary Malaysia is through flows of popular culture and the transnational images that they bring with them. This is especially the case with modern genres such as soap opera. The popularity in Malaysia of soaps from other parts of Asia confirms that images moving across and between locations provide an important focus for understanding ways of negotiating modernity and the development of modern identities. Korean soaps and soaps from elsewhere in the region are extremely popular amongst Malay women. Soaps can provide examples of both appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. Using the framework outlined by Michel de Certeau, this paper will investigate how Malay women develop special tactics for negotiating and imagining modern morality which must encompass traditional adat, Islam and Asian modernity, through the viewing of Korean soaps.
Photography is known in China as the art of regret.

In the rapidly changing city of Kunming, people must decide whether they want photography to be a medium of preservation and evidence, or of transformation and fantasy. While people value old photographs and the memories they preserve, they can also visit a computerized photo stall in a department store and be transformed into a film star. The old can be made young again, and everyone can become more beautiful. A big photographic studio uses their traditional wooden camera to make a family portrait and then retouches it in their computer lab. A man tells of photos lost in the Cultural Revolution. A digitally restored photo brings three generations of women together. One photographer regrets that a photograph must always contain something that is missing. Difficult choices about how to regard history, reality, and material culture face everyone in contemporary China.
DAY 3: Thursday, 15 April 2010

Morning 1 @ 9:00-9:30

Contemporary art 1 @ Theatrette, Level 2

**Coming home: how ‘re-entry’ shaped the work of contemporary women artists in Taiwan**

Natalie Seiz

The contemporary situation in Taiwan of those women artists returning to their ‘homeland’ after a period of study overseas, the influence this has had on the work produced, and the consequential associations made amongst women artists will be considered in this paper. Upon returning to Taiwan from being educated overseas in the 1980s and 1990s, women artists, particularly those aligned with a feminist politics that was burgeoning in Taiwan, inadvertently became marginalised. The attempt from that period until now has been to redress this situation; however whether this has been successful needs to be examined.

Although being educated overseas had virtually been mandatory for Taiwan artists during this period, the actual site of return, or what could be called ‘re-entry’ is sometimes circumvented. Upon re-entry the artist endures multiple ‘intervals’, which are neither place of origin nor place from which one has returned. The interval is reminiscent of a dual past – existent both locally and abroad, and simultaneously there is the realisation that one has returned to a familiar space that is at once also unsettling. As such, the site of re-entry can not be not simply positioned alongside issues consigned to nationalism, as it conceivably transcends this discourse. Moreover the notion of a ‘hybrid’ space is imprecise, as the hybrid space in modernity could be seen to diminish notions of ‘legitimacy’. The art to be discussed in this paper reflects how, upon re-entry, women artists needed to reconsider the artwork they were producing in not only a Taiwan, but a global context.

Asian Connections @ Seminar Room 1, Level 3

**Takeda Taijun’s Fragile Polyphony and the Longing for Contact with ‘Asia’**

Barbara Hartley

In 1935, a group of young men in Tokyo formed the Chûgoku bungaku kenkyûkai (The Chinese Literature Study Society) with the intention of circulating information about modern (post 4 May 1919) Chinese literature and literary practice among other scholars, writers and intellectuals in pre-war Japan. A key figure in this group was Takeda Taijun (1910-1976) who later became one of post-war Japan's most prominent writers and critics.

In 1935, however, Takeda was an unsettled twenty-five year old whose gaze was fixed steadily in the direction of the continent. Arrested for distributing anti-Imperial leaflets, Takeda dropped out of the Chinese Literature Department of the Imperial University where he found neither the fossilised teaching method nor the irrelevant course content to his liking. He then began to study contemporary China and contemporary Chinese at a language school in Tokyo. Here, extracts from modern Chinese literature were used as teaching material. Following the formation of the China Literature Society, Takeda dedicated himself to critiquing the activities of various literary groups in China and also to translating extracts from the work of contemporary Chinese writers. Takeda’s desire to engage with Asia in this way was a clear subversion of the hegemonic position of the Japanese authorities in that it effectively transversed and created a connection between the privileged metropolis of mainland Japan and its colonies and/or pseudo colonial holdings. However, it is arguable whether or not his textual production created the polyphonous space of authentic hybridity. This presentation will use Takeda’s work to demonstrate the fracture lines that mark the work of the ‘long-distance cultural specialist’ and the fragility of the text motivated by longing for contact with an “other” often little more than a simulacrum of an idealised self.
Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook is a Thai artist with an international reputation in printmaking, sculptural installation and video installation. Her work will be shown in 2010 Biennale of Sydney. Araya's work results from a number of significant cross-cultural experiences and their accompanying insights. She is well versed in Thai art and literature, and also with the Western art tradition through art studies and residencies in Germany and the US, and participation in the contemporary art world.

She gives expression to her multifaceted experience of being a woman - a woman with desires and conflicts; a woman artist in the largely male-dominated Thai art world; a recognised international contemporary artist; a Buddhist; a concerned Thai citizen. Her work resists the cultural essentialism favoured by the Thai state, revealing instead the confluence of insights derived from experiences in different locations, but more particularly from different cultures. I will argue that installation art is an art form well suited to the expression of contemporary, cosmopolitan experience. It is inherently hybrid through its ability to combine different and previously discrete artistic expressions. The inclusion of ideas and influences drawn from more than one culture represents a further layering of possibilities. The Russian theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin, argued that the literary form of the novel enabled the writer to set up dialogic exchanges which gave expression to different world views, or different approaches to the central issues of concern. Adopting a Bakhtinian approach, I will reveal in Araya's installations a complex artistic identity giving form to her experiential insights.

From October 1921 through to January 1922, Japanese scholar-artist Ōmura Seigai traveled in China for the first time, as part of his efforts to ‘revive’ literati painting between China and Japan. He met Chinese artists and collectors in Beijing, Shanghai and Hangzhou, with the specific intention of photographing and collecting works, for exhibition and publication in Japan. The positive response Ōmura received in China encouraged him to make four subsequent trips to China between 1922-1926, facilitating the establishment of a joint Sino-Japanese artists club, continued collection of historical and contemporary Chinese art works and texts, and the publication of Chinese art in Japan, using high quality printing technologies. These trips also allowed him to refine and conclude his overview work Oriental Art History, named after the course he helped to establish through the 1910s at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts.

What circumstances - personal and art historical - led Ōmura to decide on literati painting as a supra-national position suitable for the 1920s? How did his concept of bunjin (literati position) function beyond “China” and “Japan”? Omura framed literati art as the highest expression of tōyō Oriental culture, premised on shared intellectual history and assumed cultural amity. Yet, to what extent was Omura’s tōyō simply “Japan's Orient” (Tanaka), how may it have differed?
East Asian countries not only share some practices but also some problems in using Chinese characters or what we call kanji in Japan. This paper explores the current situation of the kanji culture in China, Japan and Taiwan and how these characters present particular challenges to typographic practices. The sheer number of these ‘visual’ characters also means that there is a diverse range of possibilities for incorporating them into art and design. Particularly in Japan, which combines three different scripts (kanji and two syllabaries, kana and katakana) to write, new kinds of typography are constantly being created. The Internet and mobile phones are especially the active sites where interesting new typographic developments are seen. Emoji (literally meaning ‘picture character/letter’), a kind of emoticon offering a wider range of characters not restricted to facial expressions, is one such example. Drawing on some recent examples, this paper examines the interaction between word/character and image in an increasingly digital era.
In 1926, the Czech poet Konstantin Biebl, following his childhood dream, took a train to Italy, where he boarded an ocean liner to Singapore and Java. He spent several months there. Images of the Southeast Asian tropical islands appear in many of his poems and prose texts, and have penetrated the imagination of other poets. A small number of other Czech travelled to and wrote about the distant tropical islands in the colonial period, and more make the trip now or read about and imagine the tropics. What does tropical jungle, the ocean, dark-skinned women and British and Dutch colonists mean in the Czech Republic, a small landlocked country which has never had a colony, from which one has to travel to France or Italy to see the sea and seagoing ships, and which politically and culturally was in some ways in the position of a colony in relation to its more powerful European neighbours?

What dreams, desires, perceptions, truths of poetic images, without fitting them into pre-existent colonial and postcolonial schemes of power and meaning – such as labelling them as colonial, anti-colonial, Czech, European, Orientalist, same or different – while at the same time reflecting on how they were and were not part of colonial and imperialist imagination, or what European colonialism, imperialism, or “Asia” meant for people in a small country on the periphery of colonial Europe? In reflecting on the question what have tropical islands, and especially Java and Sumatra, meant in Czech imagination, I suggest that they have to be seen from within their imaginative world, through the thickness of images, thoughts, and dreams of distant islands, foreignness, otherness, as well as their opposites, the self, the home, the everyday actuality. At the same time, I reflect on whether and how Java and Sumatra are special among these images of exotic islands. The paper takes Biebl’s texts as a starting point to reflect on these questions – especially by following him to “the border between dreaming and actuality,” where “actuality overflows into dreaming and vice versa,” and where Sumatra, for example is “half-reality and half-dream,” as he puts it – but looks also at other images of tropical islands and other exotic lands in Czech travel writing, paintings, films, and so on.
Made in Japan maps Takashi Murakami’s Theory of Superflat Art and his associated artistic practices and works in the context of globalising culture. As an important contemporary artist, Murakami’s Superflat work actively participates in, and expresses, the tensions of local, national and global cultural identity associated with contemporary globalization processes. Made in Japan interrogates Murakami’s art and the theory of Superflat art within the historical, social, and cultural contexts of their production-consumption in Japan, the United States and Europe.

Importantly, this paper demonstrates that Murakami strategically presents his work and Superflat art as an expression of Japanese identity which paradoxically also expresses the fluid imaginings of cultural identity and value available through contemporary global exchanges. This deliberate demarcation and multiplicity does not resolve the contentions emerging in globalization, but rather amplifies them, exposing the key debates on the formation of cultural identity as an oppositional expression and as a commodity in global markets. Murakami’s self-conscious activation of these global processes is the overriding framework in which to understand Superflat. Made in Japan contributes a valuable case study to the understanding of cultural production as a strategic negotiation and expression of the flows of capital and culture in globalization.

Pleeng luuk tung (Thai country music) is an example of fusion music that came into being during the 1950s. Indeed its influences date back further, to western dance music of the 1930s and even to military brass bands of the 19th century. This process of hybridization has continued through to today’s luuk tung, yet, somewhat ironically, during the last 15 years luuk tung has been increasingly adopted as a symbol of nation and national culture. It is now the most popular form of music in Thailand and its songwriters are regarded as master craftsmen, some receiving the honour of silabin haeng chaat (Artist of the Nation). Many luuk tung songwriters and performers come from Isan, the northeast of Thailand – traditionally the poorest and least developed region – and are of Lao-Isan ethnicity. Just as Isan political identity is threatening to overwhelm the established Thai power structures so Isan cultural identity has come to dominate the luuk tung scene. Isan songwriters and performers have used luuk tung to move from the margins of Thai society to the mainstream, and Isan culture has moved with them. This paper examines the ways Isan musicians have represented their ‘native culture’ in the Central Thai ‘host culture’, particularly the way songwriters have used mor lam (Lao-Isan folk music) and kantruem (Khmer Isan folk music) commercially to build awareness of Isan culture.
In this paper, I examine the ways in which the variously constituted Asian artistic diasporas in Australia have unravelled some of the spatial and temporal assumptions that underlie the conventional narratives of both Australian and Asian art. On the one hand, the very presence and work of ‘Asian’ artists in Australia represents an assertion of coevalness that not only challenges the categorical otherness imputed to Asia, and Asians in Australia, but also redefines the boundaries, content and orientation of Australian art, of which they are an increasingly significant and integral part. At the same time, as diasporic artists with transnational connections with the region we now know as ‘Asia’, they highlight the shifting contours and heterogeneity of this region, notwithstanding the emphasis on regional unity and coherence that continues to problematically inform the conventional histories and survey exhibitions of modern and contemporary Asian art.

I argue that the complex, cross-cultural work of ‘Asian’ artists in Australia foreground the multiple, overlapping as well as disjunctive temporalities and spatialities of both ‘Australia’ and ‘Asia’. In particular, I show how the critical and geographical trope of the ‘South’ – understood as both a mode of location and an epistemic category – offers a framework for understanding the constellation of differences and multiplicity that arises as a result of the linkages and ruptures within and across the mutually entangled histories of art in ‘Asia’ and ‘Australia’.

Cultural globalization is not just a political process. It is also a creative process in which cultures continuously interact and re-interpret the other. In the famous contention of Appadurai (1993), neither centrality nor peripherality of culture exists in our transnational era. Instead, disjuncture and fluidity within this very flow suggests the circulation of cultural forms in multiple directions, denying the artificially separated dichotomies of “local” and “global”, and perhaps even more radically for our world of binaries, of the West and non-West.

These vectors of cultural flow can be considered through an examination of Lolita style – a significant and now-internationalised Japanese fashion trend, which emerged in the late 1990s. In this paper, I pay particular attention to Nederveen Pieterse’s theory of “globalisation as hybridisation” (2004), and the theory of “format” and “product” articulated by Okamura (2003). Applying these theories, I illustrate how this particular case of youth fashion manifests the process of cultural “globalisation”, hybridisation and interaction through the deployment of historicising European Rococo and Romantic dress-styles in contemporary Japan. Furthermore, I explore how these fashions also signify the idea of the “reverse” flow of culture, and how this is interpreted differently in the West, a different cultural context. This grounded example of transnational cultural flow, I argue, might serve as an alternative to the somewhat monolithic idea of ‘local’ cultural values, norms and aesthetics.
DAY 3: Thursday, 15 April 2010

Afternoon 2 @ 2:30-3:00

Contemporary art 2 @ Theatrette, Level 2

Resisting and Embracing Ethnography: reflections on shifting identities in contemporary Asian art

Michelle Antoinette

Internationally-travelling artists are usually described as just that—‘international’ or ‘global’; their international travel is usually related to their global popularity. In turn, their art comes to be defined as ‘global’, ‘international’, or ‘world’ art. In the 1980s, critical postmodern conceptions of the world saw that these ‘international’ descriptions of the non-Western artist were merely masking their framing within a continuing Euro-American perspective. As a consequence, the specific origins of the Asian artist were seen as a necessary counter to the Western-centric discourses that stood for ‘international’ art. This political motivation was a major reason in the biographical turn in the practice and interpretation of non-Western art, including contemporary Asian art. Added to this were the influences of globalisation and more specifically, the new patterns of increased international movement that ‘Asian’ artists underwent for their art. This paper focuses on the cross-currents of local, regional, transnational and international identities that are imaged and imagined by contemporary Asian artists, exploring the tendency by artists to move across and between locations, both in the subject matter of their art and through their practice, as part of both regional and global post-colonial dynamics.

Hybridity & Fusion @ Seminar Room 1, Level 3

Agency, authenticity and cultural transformations in the art of bonsai

Thor Beowulf

From the late 19th century up until the late 20th century, the Japanese promoted the art of bonsai in the West as an iconic cultural marker, reflecting their unique perception of nature and art. They also developed a lexicon describing the aesthetics, techniques and styles of bonsai for Western consumption. It was this “packaged” culture which the West accepted as culturally authentic and representative of traditional Japanese bonsai. However, in the latter 20th century, a number of influential Japanese bonsai masters sought to re-define and transform bonsai into an international world-art-form, no longer exclusively dependent on Japanese authority for artistic or aesthetic validation. They encouraged the development of new hybridized bonsai styles, new forms and contexts of presentation and the use of tree species indigenous to local ecological environments outside Japan. While this initiative has been partly responsible for re-scripting and broadening the contextual and aesthetic boundaries of bonsai as an art form, this paper explores the issues this raises concerning the preservation of cultural meaning, identity and authenticity, the effects of cross-cultural influences on how bonsai is practiced in Japanese and non-Japanese contexts and the effects of Western hegemonic tendencies to define and control the Other within its own cultural and aesthetic paradigms.