us that the project reaffirmed Axé's founding mission, and the organization has already invited some of the artists back to develop new projects. The project's legacy on the children is perhaps best expressed by a young woman of Modaxé. When asked about her experiences working with Neuenschwander, a Brazilian artist whose project focused on the everyday activity of washing clothes, and Tiravanija, a Thai artist based in New York whose project centered on food and the preparation of meals at Axé with dishes from his country, she replied that art is about looking at the everyday activities of your life. Defining art as a verb, she underscored its status as an agent of the transformation of consciousness. Many other children echoed this sentiment.

For all involved, the racism, poverty, and social injustice that we experienced gave us a new perspective on the reality of colonialism, postcolonialism, and globalism. Seeing this overwhelming truth has for some reaffirmed and for others changed how we live and how we work. We hope that everyone involved in the project—the children and their families, the educators, and the artists—have come to see themselves as citizens of the world who have embarked upon a journey of resistance and healing that will carry them forward into the future.

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Apinan Poshyananda

Positioning Contemporary Asian Art

The words "Asia," "the Orient," and "the East" are loaded terms conceived by the West. Through prefabricated constructs of the imagination, Asia has become one of the West's deepest and most recurring images of the Other. As a result, the geographical boundaries and regional divisions of Asia and the curatorial considerations in the visual arts that arise from them often comply with binary schemas such as East/West, yellow/white, and Asian values/Euro-American centricities.

In the Asia-Pacific region, some zones are privileged over others. For example, the Pacific Rim discourse divides the region into Northeast Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Australia, and the Pacific Island nations. But in the U.S. context, Asia is often perceived as Japan, China, and the Four Tigers or Little Dragons—Hong Kong, Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan—and the up-and-coming Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand.

The rise of these tigers and dragons during the past decade of economic miracle has shifted the balance of power in world politics and trade, as evidenced by the growth of such organizations as Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Consequently, certain key political and economic, as well as social and cultural, structures have changed. For instance, the position of Japan and the People's Republic of China as political and economic leaders in Asia has immense impact on art and culture in other nation-states, such as Indonesia, Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, and Vietnam. This is evident in art and cultural exchanges designed to promote international relationships

Yasumasa Morimora. *Blinded by the Light*, 1991. Color photograph mounted on canvas, ed. 3. 78¾ x 141¾ (200 x 360). Courtesy Luhring Augustine, New York. This work is based on Pieter Bruegel's *Parable of the Blind*.

through traveling art exhibitions, concerts, acrobatic shows, food festivals, and language programs.

Yet, the New World Order, free trade, and electronic media networks claiming to bring the world together as one happy global village have caused new tensions and cultural confinements. The dynamics of global trade and borderless communications have resulted in a demand among some groups for the restoration of indigenous identities. As a result, the trend among Asian elites toward "indigenization" and "de-Westernization" has gone against the tide of infatuation with Western cultures and habits among the masses. The elites tend to prefer cultural revivalism and indigenous values in reaction to globalization. At the same time, they accuse the masses of blindly accepting "poisonous" values such as consumer culture, fast food, and alternative music.

The desire for difference and identity has led to the following question: Is there an Asian identity? Such a generalized question makes it easy to ignore the flesh-and-blood reality by collapsing multiple Asian identities into a single construct. The complexities behind the regional characteristics of various Asian identities are constantly shifting according to time and place; and in the region, the conflict of cultures is highly evident through the spiritual divides in Buddhism, Confucianism, Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity. For example, the most recent episodes of religious and ethnic violence in Java and East

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Timor reveal that Chinese and East Timorians have been under vicious attacks by Muslim Indonesians. Such traumatic events have enormous consequences on ways of life, as well as artists' work. For instance, Dadang Christanto, Heri Dono, Tisna Sanjaya, Moelyono, and Arahmaiani have recently created a series of works directly related to riots, looting, and burning in Indonesia.

Some critics have suggested that we are presently experiencing the age of international curators. The emergence of curators with the power to persuade, control, and dictate taste within the art infrastructure has been phenomenal in the past few years. However, in relation to contemporary Asian art, it is necessary to rethink and relook at the authority of curatorial arbitrage in relation to curators' activities.

The history of representation of contemporary Asian art is relatively new, both within and outside Asia. Here, the role of cultural arbiters, art promoters, and curators must be considered in relation to both local and international art scenes. That is to say, one must take into account the interpretation of contemporary Asian art as it is seen regionally in Asia, as well as how it is represented outside the region. In particular, it is essential to consider the relationship between museums, artists, and the public in Asia in order to understand both traditional practices and new ideas and ways of working.

When it comes to contemporary art, the curatorial considerations that arise in Asia are frequently dictated by the hierarchies of politics, economics, trade, and religion; and regional identities vary accordingly. For example, the ASEAN painting and photograph exhibitions that circulated among ASEAN countries during the 1980s aimed to create harmony, consensus, and friendship among the members (Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand; Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam joined in the 1990s). The mottos "unity in diversity" and "friendship and fraternity" were used as thematic subjects for artists to follow. This meant that to comply with nonintervention policy, curators were encouraged not to include works with racist, overtly political, or antireligious subjects. For biennials and art exhibitions outside Asia, the selection of artists and their works has been less restricted. Although curators and artists are still seen as representing their nation-states, the choice of subjects and contents is more varied and thought-provoking.

Indeed, the curatorial issues that one must consider when organizing exhibitions of Asian art for international audiences are very different. In 1996, I organized the exhibition *Traditions/Tensions: Contemporary Art in Asia*, which opened at the Asia Society in New York. The exhibition focused on art from India, Indonesia, Korea, Philippines, and Thailand. As guest curator, I sought to explore contemporary works with thematic sinews relating to multilayered Asian traditions and to challenge preconceived notions that only traditional, and not contemporary, art flourishes in Asia. The exhibition also raised questions about the role of art institutions and artists, authenticity and derivation, and high and low art.

For the XXIV Bienal de São Paulo (1998), for which the curator Paolo Herkenhoff served as artistic director, I organized the Asian section on the Bienal's theme of anthropophagy or cannibalism. It included works by Chen Chieh-Jen, Choi Jeong Hwa, Dadang Christanto, Elizabeth and Iftikhar Dadi,

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Ing K., Luo Brothers, and Nobuyoshi Araki. I explored the concept of fear and desire and Asia as an imaginative space of exoticism and seduction. Selected works revealed metaphors of colonization and domination as a devouring process that at times became acts of endo-cannibalism. In *Revolution in Soul and Body*, Chen Chieh-Jen depicted scenes of massacre and cannibalism in Taiwan and mainland China. In their installation, *Power of Love*, the Dadis created mixed layers of messages on the impact of the global electronic media and the intense love and hate between India and Pakistan. And in *Dangerous Relationship (Touch Me?)*, Choi Jeong Hwa reflected on Asian seduction and sadism. His gorgeous, plastic, vagina-like, man-eating flowers playfully devoured the viewers.

Although these exhibitions reached international audiences, it is essential that contemporary Asian art should also circulate within the region. Often, enthusiasm for internationalism has resulted in neglect for exchange within the Asian art network. Working on smaller-scale exhibitions of individual artists in Asia has allowed me to help fill in this gap. Through a series of one-person exhibitions of work by Zhang Peili (b. 1957, Hangzhou), Nobuyoshi Araki (b. 1940, Tokyo), and Yasumasa Morimura (b. 1951, Osaka) in Bangkok, works by these renowned artists have been shown for the first time in Southeast Asia. As a result, there has been critical debate on Asia's contribution to postmodern thinking through photography, video, and performance. In addition, issues related to nudity, homosexuality, and pornography were openly discussed.

Finally, in spite of the recent widespread interest in contemporary Asian art, it must be realized that the art infrastructure in Asia still needs improvement. Some art museums and institutions in the region are regarded primarily as vehicles to serve nationalist political agendas. For example, some museum curators are expected to address criteria such as national identity and indigenousness. In some cases, their positions are restricted to the role of behind-the-scene organizers, and in others they are closely attached to the government and even have to play the role of quasi-government officers. They work directly under chief curators or art directors, who in turn are obliged to pay close attention to the prevailing political climate. Several museums restrict subjects that might be sensitive or inflammatory to religious sects, national security, and ethnicity. Like it or not, these curators often have to deal with censorship in order to avoid public outcry or harsh reaction from those in power. In spite of the recent economic crisis and the urgent need to improve the art infrastructure, contemporary Asian art has been elevated far above the convenient and simplistic stereotype of alterity.

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