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PANEL CONVENERS

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PANEL SOLICITING CONTRIBUTIONS TOPIC (90 minutes)

Reinventing Museums in Southeast Asia from the Colonial to the National, the Regional to the Global

PANEL ABSTRACT (250 words)

Characterized by their strategic location, colonial legacies, and newly industrialized and transnational economies, the mainland and maritime nations of Southeast Asia witnessed the emergence of museums in the 20th century, attesting to a robust if not profitable cultural infrastructure with tangible and intangible impact within and beyond the region. Inextricably linked to notions of progress, modern museums provided the necessary visibility, a projection of a decolonized, democratic, and developed nation. Yet the diverse ethnic, socio-economic, and political character of each nation challenged the narrative of nationalism, which, according to Benedict Anderson, “dreams of purities.” While state-sponsored museums unified discrepant material culture whose apotheosis was a distinct yet imagined national identity, recent curatorial and programmatic activities demonstrate the opposite to accommodate, integrate, and express multivalent citizenship, belonging, and meaning. Indeed, a greater cultural cooperation within and among nations has resulted in a dynamic exchange of ideas, objects, and labor. This panel seeks papers that explore the significant role of museums in Southeast Asia, considering their (trans)formation in a colonial, national, regional, and/or global context. Recognizing museums as (re)sources of power, we are interested in deepening our understanding of institutional policies and practices, such as acquisition, collection, preservation, exhibition, and education. Moreover, we wish to interrogate the contradictions inherent in this enterprise, as well as potential challenges and crises as contemporary art fairs and biennials take center stage.