

# **Responding to Troubling Times: The Urgency of Collaborations Between Academics and Artists**

*Roundtable Discussion*

## **Conveners:**

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## **Abstract**

Various parts of Southeast Asia are facing increasing constrictions to freedom of speech, the proliferation of fake news and hate speech, crackdown on opposition, extrajudicial killings, forcible displacements, and wars. Amid these troubling times, academics, especially those working on human rights, conflict, and peace, are faced with the challenge of how to better communicate their knowledge with all its nuances and complexities. There is the challenge of making their work accessible to audiences that do not have the patience nor time to delve into such nuances and complexities, and that of making their material available and comprehensible—in terms of the language and form—to a broader audience, across age groups. These challenges are particularly pressing for publicly engaged scholars who aim to forge understanding in the midst of polarizing and hate-filled discourses and attitudes. One way to do this is through more creative means of communicating their knowledge. Meanwhile, the work of artists such as photographers, visual artists, filmmakers, performance artists, and fiction writers have had the power to arouse people's curiosity and imagination while questioning and engaging the status quo. Time and again, different artistic works have been instrumental in elevating awareness and emotion in turbulent times. Therefore, artists and their works provide the initial invitation to look and to question, as their works can be widely accessible. These creative productions can be further enriched and informed by materials drawn from careful research and analyses—materials that academics can provide. There is thus big potential for reaching a broader audience and shaping public opinion and debate through collaborations and intersections between academics and artists, while keeping in mind that such collaborations are subject to similar problematics of representation and comprehension of context as any form of knowledge production. This roundtable discussion will therefore bring together artists and academics from various parts of Southeast Asia who have collaborated on certain pressing issues in their respective countries, to tackle the following questions: what are the advantages of such collaborations? What challenges did they face? What strategies did they employ to overcome these challenges? How has been the

public response to their collaborative work? And, what lessons can we glean from these experiences that other academics and artists may draw from for their own collaborations?

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