

CALL FOR PANELS  
12<sup>th</sup> EUROSEAS—Paris, 2022

“A History of Presence: Decolonizing Discourse around Early Modern Southeast Asia”

**A History of Presence: Decolonizing Discourse around Early Modern Southeast Asia**

Convener: Dr. Leonor Veiga

Presenters: Dr. Leonor Veiga  
Dr. Pierpaolo di Giosa  
Dr. Tom Hoogervorst  
Dr. Wayan Jarrah Sastrawan  
Dr. Margarida Cheung Vieira  
Dr. Mariana Pereira  
Dr. Gustavo Portocarrero

Moderator: Dr. Kathryn Wellen

This panel investigates the origins, nature, extent and evolution of Portugal’s cultural legacy in Southeast Asia through a transdisciplinary conversation. By bringing together archival studies, history, philology, cultural anthropology, linguistics and art history, we intend to reconstruct forgotten connections (material and immaterial, tangible and intangible) and rehabilitate neglected agencies. These insights serve to generate points of departure for the decolonization of discourse regarding what Southeast Asia is and how it came to be, and infuse this important conversation with updated knowledge. By scrutinizing historical connectivities across early modern Southeast Asia—from the individual to the community; from oral to material evidence—we propose to trace the (in)tangible character—widely felt to this day—of Portuguese presence in the region. The afterlives of this presence manifest themselves, for example, in the 1999 handover of Macau and the maintenance of rule of law until 2049, and by Timor-Leste’s independence process between 1999 and 2012. Historically, both localities were integrated within Portuguese (in)formal networks stretching from East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean World.

Portugal’s territorial presence in Southeast Asia was largely displaced by other European powers at an early stage. As such, it does not precisely amount to colonial rule, yet it has brought about a contact situation deeply affecting transregional connections, linguistic change, religious ceremonies, and the hybridization of intangible culture—including food, music and performing arts. Many cultural practices born during this historical period have become indigenous to Southeast Asia. Drawing on the idea of an informal empire—symbolized by the mysterious “Etc.” that adorned the title of the King of Portugal—this panel aims to trace transfers of culture and recover acts of agency during the early modern period (1500s-1650s), adding historical depth to today’s intercultural dialogues and exchange processes born out of this non-formalized legacy. Through a broad, transdisciplinary vision, we advocate for the recovery and mapping of a “Presence” highly felt in the region, albeit fragmented, mysterious, and often downplayed by subsequent European powers. By foregrounding the creolized elements of Portugal’s legacy in the region, we hope to contribute to the decolonization of discourse—on the early modern period and its afterlives—in Southeast Asian Studies.

**Urgency of Topic**

This research aims to build upon contributions on the Portuguese presence in Southeast Asia that have come out over the past 20 years. Its multidisciplinary approach serves to connect and establish a network between different kinds of knowledge, in order to recover several aspects that have been—perhaps purposely—disregarded by European colonial powers since 1650 and have not yet taken much hold in the region’s national histories. As a result, the Southeast Asian and Portuguese publics

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and academics alike lack historical awareness of these early modern processes of cultural contact and their present-day legacies.

The connections examined in this panel come to the surface in local loanwords, foodways, religious practices and ritual and folk performances, which in turn form the basis among many creolized communities—which have become the custodians of this distinct cultural heritage—of claims for their right to citizenship within the nation. At the same time, many such traces of encounter and exchange are present in society at large. This makes it important to retrace, rebuild and reconnect lost links that can explain, on the one hand, the informal character of these legacies—as expressed in the “Etc.” of the monarch’s title—and, on the other, the formation of an intercultural identity across the region to which the Portuguese—alongside the Chinese, Arabs, Indians and subsequent European powers—have made important contributions.

Leonor Veiga, an art historian and curator, is currently associated with the University of Lisbon through the project “A History of Presence: a dialogue between Portuguese collections of material culture from Southeast Asia and Southeast Asian artists”. She holds Ph.D. from Leiden University (2018) with the dissertation entitled *The Third Avant-Garde: Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia Recalling Tradition* which was awarded the Humanities Best Dissertation Prize, by the [International Convention of Asian Scholars](#) (2019). The research, which analyzed contemporary art practices that reprocess elements of traditional culture, was supervised by Prof. Kitty Zijlmans and Prof. Dr. Pieter ter Keurs. Her writing on the arts (2010-21) has mainly focused on non-Western art. She was contributor for *Mix and Stir, New Outlooks on Contemporary Art from Global Perspectives* (Amsterdam, Valiz, 2021), *Handbook of Contemporary Timor-Leste* (London, Routledge, 2019) and *Indonesian Eye: Contemporary Art from Indonesia*, SKIRA Editore (Milano: SKIRA Editore, 2011). She was equally guest editor for the academic journal *CONVOCARTE 8* and *9*, with the theme “[Art and Time](#)” (Lisbon, CIEBA, 2020), and published in several academic journals, including: “[The Third Avant-garde: messages of discontent.](#)” in *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*, vol.1 – no.2 (NUS Press, October 2017); “[Movimentu Kultura in Timor-Leste: Maria Madeira’s Agency.](#)” in *Cadernos Arte e Antropologia* vol. 4 – n. 1 (2015). Veiga’s curatorial work (2006-21) includes various group exhibitions in Indonesia, Mozambique, London, Macau and Lisbon.