

S.E.A. Focus returns for its 7th edition from 18 to 26 Jan 2025. Stay tuned!



Portrait of Patrick Flores. Image courtesy of Patrick Flores.

**Patrick Flores: “The diplomatic impulse is a relational impulse and underlies much of artistic and curatorial work.”**

*On ‘Chances of Contact’ and observations on the curatorial work in Southeast Asia*

Patrick Flores is Deputy Director of Curatorial & Research at National Gallery Singapore and Professor of Art History and Criticism at the University of the Philippines. He also served as curator of the Taiwan Pavilion at the

Venice Biennale (2022), Artistic Director of Singapore Biennale (2019), and curator of the Philippine Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (2015).

We speak to Patrick on the occasion of 'Chances of Contact: Contemporary Prints from the Philippines and Singapore' at the Metropolitan Museum of Manila (The M). Co-organised by STPI – Creative Workshop & Gallery and The M in collaboration with the Singapore Embassy in Manila, the joint exhibition features artworks by 16 artists, eight from Singapore and eight from the Philippines, produced during their respective artist residencies at STPI. The show speaks to expanded visions of print and papermaking at the intersection of different time periods, mediums, and art forms.

In this interview, Patrick unpacks the key themes behind 'Chances of Contact' and shares his observations on the role of collaborations and exchanges in Southeast Asia.



'Chances of Contact: Contemporary Prints from the Philippines and Singapore', 2024, exhibition view at The M. Image courtesy of STPI – Creative Workshop & Gallery.

## Could you talk about how you decided on the three sections in the exhibition? What are the cross-cultural contexts and boundary-pushing elements in the artworks you hope to tease out?

The exhibition honours printmaking and rounds out its potential as an ever-present, contemporary, and future form. I wanted to tease out certain tendencies informing the works in the exhibition from the perspective of art history; the plastic possibilities of print as a medium; and the anticipation of expressions through and beyond print. The cross-cultural aspect comes by way of the comparison between two contexts of art production, the Philippines and Singapore. Boundaries are tested when traditional expectations of the medium are breached. In this situation, the print is probed but also released from its medium-specificity. It assumes integrity but also becomes something else through technology and discourse.

## Are there aspects of the exhibition design/layout inspired by the theme?

Contact is usually enabled or catalysed by relations and openness. The porosity of the scenography speaks to this possibility. The exhibition space leads to a lot of adjacencies so that viewers can take in the interplay between ink and imprint, wondrous paper and abstract impressions, experiments and playful figurations, intense technique and spirited speculation.



Manuel Ocampo, 'If All You Are Is A Nail Then Everything Looks Like A Hammer Version 2', 2019, installation view at 'Chances of Contact: Contemporary Prints from the Philippines and Singapore'. Image courtesy of STPI – Creative Workshop & Gallery.



Charles Lim Yi Yong's SEASTATE series at 'Chances of Contact: Contemporary Prints from the Philippines and Singapore'. Image courtesy of STPI – Creative Workshop & Gallery.

## In your curatorial essay, you noted the colonial origins of printmaking in Southeast Asia and how artists from the region have appropriated the medium in playful or subversive ways. How does the exhibition speak to this ethos in contemporary times?

It sustains this ethical interest in the attentiveness of the artists to the discourse of history and the political choices embedded in and emerging from everyday life. The medium of print does this by sharpening its democratic intuition and making itself strongly positioned to respond to a range of social stimuli, be it from memory or immediate reality or even fantasy.

I can point to the work of Manuel Ocampo who conjures a sensorium of images of political control, excess, and uniformity. This heady mix of signs resonates with the mingling as well of a gamut of printmaking methods from screenprint to etching, lithography to collagraphy. Charles Lim Yi Yong's series on the life of water keenly observes the state of the sea, a geopoetic condition that evokes large ecological and historical implications such as reclamation projects. The sustained forays of Amanda Heng and Pacita Abad in signifying the cogency of ornament, body, and fabric as media of a woman's experience and presence are conversations on the constraints of gender and the freedom to create.



Amanda Heng, 'Suraya Binte Mohd Yusof – Home – [www.stpi.com.sg/AH-weartheworldtheseareourstories2017/suraya-home.htm](http://www.stpi.com.sg/AH-weartheworldtheseareourstories2017/suraya-home.htm)', 2016. Image courtesy of STPI – Creative Workshop & Gallery.



Pacita Abad's works at 'Chances of Contact: Contemporary Prints from the Philippines and Singapore'. Image courtesy of STPI – Creative Workshop & Gallery.

## Could you talk about the role of collaborations (among artists, artisans and even organisations etc) in advancing artistic exchanges and technical know-how in Southeast Asia?

Collaborations enable diverse sympathies and intelligences to gather and transform each other. Exchanges are important because they involve intersections across contexts, technological and technical scenarios as well as political decisions. The 'Under Construction' curatorial project done in the early 2000s, organised by the Japan Foundation, was an elaborate programme of exchanges between curators and a series of exhibitions in different cities across Asia. This succeeded because there was an investment in the process of researches and seminars, alongside a modular exhibition format that simultaneously enabled local variations and an omnibus presentation.

And I remember there was an initiative called University Museums Network Southeast Asia (UMNet) around 2010, in which university museums in Southeast Asia gathered and discussed ways to collaborate through multi-site exhibitions and cross-cultural curatorial exchanges. There were two meetings, the first in Manila, and the second in Penang, and then it stopped. This is something to revisit and hopefully harness.



'Chances of Contact: Contemporary Prints from the Philippines and Singapore', 2024, exhibition view at The M. Image courtesy of STPI – Creative Workshop & Gallery.

**'Chances of Contact' is organised in conjunction with the 55th anniversary of bilateral relations between Singapore and the Philippines. In your opinion, how can art serve to foster diplomatic relations/understanding in Southeast Asia?**

Art is a creative force that inspires people to be curious about what other people are doing elsewhere or what new forms are going around. It brings people together in a way that state institutions sometimes fail to do. Diplomacy is tied to governments but the diplomatic impulse is a relational impulse and underlies much of artistic and curatorial work. So I am looking at diplomacy as an energy that distributes across every effort to reach out and create ties.



Constance See, Singapore Ambassador to the Philippines, at the Opening Preview of 'Chances of Contact: Contemporary Prints from the Philippines and Singapore'. Image courtesy of STPI – Creative Workshop & Gallery.

## What is one macro or micro trend you have observed around the evolution of curatorial practices in Southeast Asia?

There are several strains: a sensitive rethinking of the local and the global; a return to the provincial or rural that is legible to the international curatorium; more investment in horizontal collaborations; a belaboured critique of institutions to foreground idealised alternatives; and so on.

## What do you hope audiences will take away from 'Chances of Contact'?

It is mainly the joy and the inspiration that the medium of print brings and its ability to transcend even itself with the integrity of its rigour and the latitude of generosity gaining in potency as it opens up.

I am intrigued by the prospects of medium-reflexivity and medium-intersectionality to slacken an understandable investment in medium-specificity. I worry that the latter might lapse into an unnecessary formalism or the mannerism of an exclusive expertise.

---

*'Chances of Contact: Contemporary Prints from the Philippines and Singapore' runs from 23 August to 26 October 2024 at the Metropolitan Museum of Manila (The M). Check out their [website](#) for more information.*