

# Editorial

# ASEAN

# and the Future

# of Asian Art

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What role can the arts play in strengthening the ASEAN community? In this and future volumes we want to put a special focus on challenges and opportunities for the arts to become an engine for a sustainable cultural, social, and economic development in the ASEAN union. In this we intend to explore ways of fulfilling the aims set forth in the *Declaration on Asian Unity in Cultural Diversity: Towards Strengthening ASEAN Community*.

On the 17th of November 2011 the ministers responsible for Culture and Arts of the ASEAN Member States met in Bali, Indonesia on the occasion of the 19th ASEAN Summit. After stating a common will to “promote regional cooperation and partnership for wider ASEAN markets in the cultural industry” the ministers in one of the main resolutions express the need for “enhancement of cultural creativity and industry” (Chapter 3). As an important introduction to this agenda we refer our readers to the in depth comparative research study by the Dean of the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts - FAA, Chulalongkorn University in this and the previous volumes.

Opening a common market for cultural goods will however depend on adherence to the recommendation to “strengthen regional cooperation to ensure that commercial utilization does not impinge upon the integrity, dignity and rights of any ASEAN society.” (Chapter 2)

A main goal is to develop Small and Medium-sized Cultural Enterprises (SMCEs). As a major source for development the Member States intend to “optimize

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appropriate use of intangible and intangible cultural assets for economic growth and poverty alleviation.” For the fulfillment of this aim we see the necessity for cooperative research projects like the one recently carried out by Chulalongkorn’s University’s FAA on the mapping of Bangkok art and cultural resources as initiated and led by Associate Professor Bussakorn Binson. This major project along with others has led to the recognition Chulalongkorn’s University’s Music Research Unit as a center of excellence. (see report in vol 4 and recommendation in Chapter 5)

Another equally important decision is the will to “advocate the protection, promotion, and enforcement of intellectual property rights (IPR) and communal rights of cultural products, consistent with their respective obligations.” We regard this as a big step forward in an area that has been neglected for too long, especially in the field of implementing standards set by international conventions. (We refer to the paper by Saemund Fiskvik in vol. 4 for an in-depth discussion on this issue)

In the opening preamble “Promoting an ASEAN mindset” the Declaration sets the stage for a vast communal effort upon which the whole ASEAN Community agenda rests. “To achieve the goal of a truly ASEAN Community by 2015, ASEAN Member States will promote Think ASEAN as the framework for designing and crafting regional policies, programs, projects and promotional strategies in the area of culture. This framework is meant to promote a shared cultural discourse at the regional (ASEAN) level, towards the strengthening of the ASEAN Community.”

The Declaration emphatically underlines the necessity of building this major foundation upon which the whole integration project depends, using phrases like “bringing together ASEAN peoples to recognize their regional identity and relatedness,” and “forging a common identity.”

Tying up with the desire to strengthen cultural industries the Declaration sees “the potential of culture as an engine for economic growth, a building block for social cohesion and transformation, an asset for regional pride, and a vehicle for forging closer friendship and understanding.”

It is with great pride we look back on the concerted effort among other organizations in the region by the Urban Research Plaza - URP through more than a decade to focus on the realization of these aims. In urban settings the needs expressed by the Declaration of “building a caring and sharing society which is inclusive and harmonious” with the “primary goal of realizing an ASEAN Community that is people-centred and socially responsible” will continue to be guidelines for the work. This will for the URP’s Forum and JUCR include continued focus on “leverage on culture as an important component for rehabilitation in response to natural and man-made disasters and other crises situations impacting the ASEAN regions.” (Chapter 4)

A recommendation “Human Resource and Networking Development in the Cultural Context” then contains incentives and guidelines for further development of arts education in the whole region:

“ASEAN Member States will cooperate in human resources capacity building on preservation and protection of cultural heritage and achievements through documentation, workshops, seminars, trainings, exchange of experts, grass-root people-to-people exchanges, youth camps, cultural study tours, sharing of best practices for improving the level of knowledge and experience within ASEAN Member States.” (Chapter 5)

For arts education the Ministers then presented a vision that will mean a special upgrading of research-centered competence building in the whole region:

“ASEAN Member States will encourage the strengthening of the networks of centres of excellence for training on conservation and preservation of cultural heritage, both tangible, and intangible.”